

## Benefits of Developing a Golden Mile

When a group decide to enter the Golden Mile competition, their action can have several beneficial effects at local community level:

### Working together

Communities begin to plan and work together for a common goal. People who may have lived in the area for a long time get to meet with more recent residents. New community bonds are created between young and old as different generations work together and share knowledge. A new community spirit begins to grow.

### Pride of place

All along the Mile, plans are discussed and individuals contribute their skills to enhance and make improvements to their local landscape. Hedges may be trimmed, new plants may be sown, research on local history and heritage is carried out and a huge buzz is created. Very often this activity leads to plans emerging for other community projects and the energy begins to spread. A civic pride begins to emerge.

### Education

The following is the basics from a primary schools perspective:

The Golden Mile Competition provides an integrated and holistic approach to learning subjects such as history, local history, geography, science, English writing, oral language, Irish and maths. From a local history perspective it helps to show continuity and change overtime and allows the student gain a greater insight and appreciation for their local area.

### Sense of achievement

By the time judging day comes along, each member of the community has gained a better understanding and knowledge of the place in which they live. Links have been created and forged within the community between young and old. As well as all of this, an interesting, safe, well interpreted amenity walk has been created for use by all members of the community, friends and visitors to the area.

### Recognition

Each community is rewarded for their efforts by being included in the highly popular Golden Mile of Galway calendar. Their Mile is highlighted with a written description and an array of high-quality photographs. All entrants of the competition receive a certificate of participation and if lucky enough they may win one of the many sought after category awards!



## A Community's Perspective by Frances Holohan Representing Abbeville Golden Mile, Abbey - Overall Winner 2011

Following our involvement in the 'Communities Working Together for Nature' project, we prepared a Biodiversity Action Plan. One of the actions was to develop a nature walk and this led us to investigate the Golden Mile competition.

Through our Parish Newsletter we invited everyone to a public meeting where suggestions for possible Golden Mile walks were discussed. We agreed on the Abbeville walk and contacted the landowners and householders along the route, who were not represented at the meeting, to explain what we were about and to look for their support. We got full co-operation for our venture.

So how did the local community benefit from this project? Firstly, it created great interest and enthusiasm and involved local people who were not previously engaged in our biodiversity project.

Secondly, it created a certain curiosity and highlighted the competition locally as we were constantly being asked 'What's this Golden Mile about?' Thirdly, it confirmed the value of having a diverse group of people as everyone had something to offer and we discovered hidden skills that were of benefit to the project.

We 'picked the brains' of older people about the heritage of the area – much of which was new to many of those who grew up in the locality – for example the site of the old hedge school and the roads marking the division between the three landed estates that existed in the area. We saw initiative coming to the fore when several individuals came up with suggestions for making the walk more interesting such as the creation of a viewing platform and refurbishment of an old forge gate. A young art student volunteered to make temporary signage to guide the walker. We had a 'mini meitheal' of volunteers who ensured that the route was litter free and verges and ditches were trimmed to allow space and visibility for walker safety where necessary.

There was an educational aspect to the project as we discovered our rich natural heritage and benefited from the expert input and advice of the Heritage Officer, Marie Mannion and the Biodiversity Project Manager, Elaine O'Riordan. The social aspect was evident when we met in the Community Centre for planning and progress meetings and had time to enjoy a 'cuppa' and to acknowledge the work that was being done.

After all this community benefit, it was an added and totally unexpected bonus when we won the Golden Mile Competition in 2011!



## Planning and Organising a Golden Mile

If you are thinking about entering the Galway County Golden Mile competition - read on. We're here to help.

### Selecting the route:

- If you have entered your chosen Mile in the Golden Mile of Galway competition previously you must wait for a 5 year period before you can re-enter that Mile in the competition
- Have a good look around your local area
- Identify sites of heritage interest e.g. buildings, archaeological sites, diverse hedgerows, trees, waterways, bogs, etc. Are there any local stories, traditions, customs, placenames associated with the area?
- Look for a safe, quiet route where people can stroll or cycle at their leisure and observe interesting aspects of the local heritage



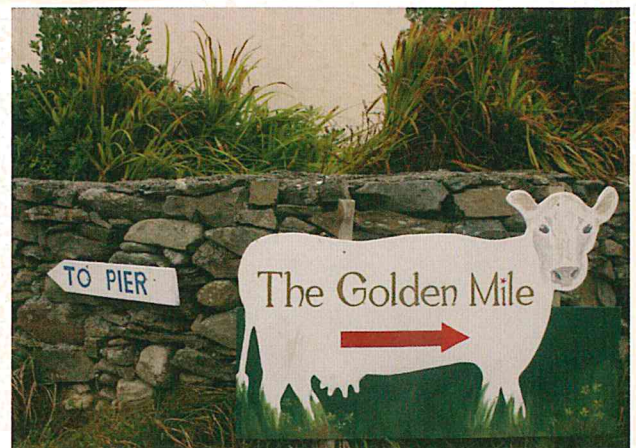
### Involving the community:

When you have selected a mile (or a number of possibilities)

- Talk to the people who live along the route, the local community organisations, schools etc. and let everyone, of all ages in your community, know what you are planning
- Ask them to get involved
- Fill out and submit the application form

### Enhancing the mile and creating awareness:

- Research the heritage aspects of your selected mile
- Write up descriptions of what can be seen on and from the route
- Encourage your local school to become involved
- Organise clean-ups along the Mile
- Carry out minor maintenance work if required e.g. painting gates, verge trimming, hedgerow management



## Completing your application:

- List actions you are going to undertake in relation to preparing and tidying your Mile
- Describe any assistance requested or received from outside organisations
- Describe the Mile and the features of interest you would especially like the judges to note
- Include a detailed Ordnance Survey (OS) map clearly showing your Golden Mile route and the start and finish points. You can get maps from the OS office and in bookshops. Remember the judges have to be able to find it!
- Include a simple sketch map indicating aspects of the mile including landmarks, stone walls, traditional gates, piers, stiles, wildlife areas, old buildings, field names and any other features
- Include photographs (minimum of 6) showing various elements of your Mile

## HINTS AND TIPS

The Mile must be located outside the 50km speed limit of towns and villages.

The route must be a mile in distance, but it doesn't have to be a straight route!

Mark the start and finish of the Mile with signs.

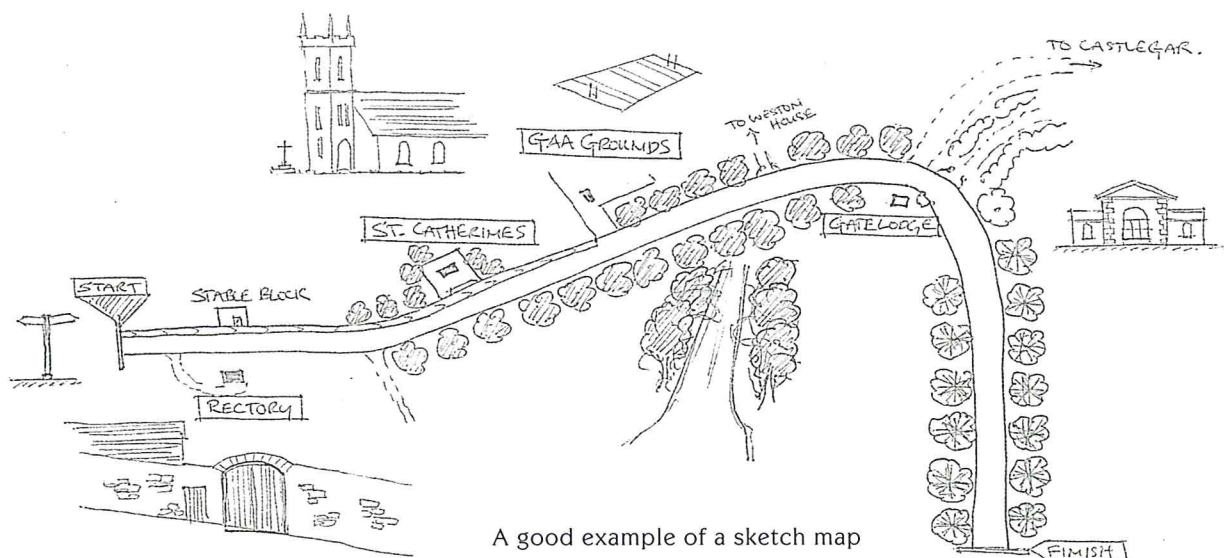
Walk your chosen Mile checking your written description of the features of interest. Make sure the features you describe are visible. The judges have to be able to see them from the route.

Walk the Mile in both directions – check out the views! Consider both close-up and distant views. Select the direction of the route using the best views.

If you say in the application form that you are going to carry out certain actions to enhance the Mile, make sure you do it.

Don't forget the maps showing the location of your Mile and the start and finish points.

When including photographs, use before and after images to show work undertaken.



A good example of a sketch map

## Community Involvement

Community involvement is essential to the success of a Golden Mile. This can be done by arranging a meeting or by contacting each household and landowner individually to explain what the Golden Mile is about and invite them to become involved.

### Getting People Involved:

- Arrange a walk along the proposed Mile at a time suitable to as many residents and landowners as possible. Let everyone know the time and date
- Invite residents to share their personal memories and knowledge of life along the Mile. Include some of the most interesting aspects in your application
- Encourage discussion and interaction between all the generations living along the Mile

### Actions:

- Draw up a work plan, as you will find that there are lots of small jobs to be undertaken
- Assign volunteers to undertake tasks such as painting gates and pumps, cleaning up, making signs, etc
- Use simple, unobtrusive locally made markers of wood, stone or slate to indicate points of interest along the Mile. These can be very attractive and add interest to the Mile
- Identify the various aspects of heritage on the Mile
- Involve children in the Mile. Get them involved in making the signs for the Mile and to draw and write about what they have seen and learnt. This may be done with the assistance of the local schools or can be undertaken by a number of parents coming together to work with the children
- Take photographs of those walking and working along the Mile



### HINTS AND TIPS

You should show evidence that everyone along the Golden Mile is involved as far as possible.

Seek advice from your Local Area Office of Galway County Council before undertaking works.

Be sure to get permission from the owner before undertaking any work on private property.

Expensive professionally made signs are not encouraged as they do not reflect the ethos of the competition.

Show evidence of engagement with all generations of the community.

When taking photographs which involves children, you must have consent from their parents/guardians.

## Litter Management & Road Safety

Litter spoils the appearance of the countryside and is bad for the environment. Long term litter which has been dumped on the Mile should be dealt with. Clean-ups should be photographed. This kind of community effort is scored highly by the judges. Short term litter can be dealt with through regular pick ups.

### Planning and executing the work:

- Discuss your Golden Mile plans with your local Community Warden and/or Local Area Engineer. Seek their advice on how to tidy up the Mile and make sure it is safe to walk
- Arrange a communal clean-up. Get all of the community involved. Turn it into a fun event to add more interest
- Invite the local school to become involved. They may wish to undertake a project for the Green Flag Award. They may also like to run an anti-litter campaign or perhaps a poster competition
- Be aware of the health and safety issues of both volunteers and road users before undertaking any work
- Be aware that volunteers need to be safe and wear appropriate clothing and gloves for the clean-up work
- Be safe, be seen as you undertake work on the public road
- Place signs where they do not create a hazard
- Judges like to see that a Mile is clean and free from long term litter and that a management campaign has been put in place



### HINTS AND TIPS

Take plenty of photographs of the Mile before, during and after the clean-up. These should be included with your application form so that the judges can appreciate the work undertaken.

Encourage local people who walk the Mile to pick up any litter and take it home to their own bins.

Put up start and finish signs early on to raise awareness of the Mile and encourage people to keep it clean and tidy.

Encourage farmers who own land along the Mile to tidy up farm yards where necessary.

If possible, choose a Mile with a location where it is safe to park.

“Organise a Spring Clean” (see Sources of Assistance leaflets).

Recycle litter where possible.

## What is Natural Heritage?

It is all the elements that naturally make up the landscape around you. It is the rocks, soils, lakes, rivers, streams, woods, bogs, hedgerows, seashore and all the plants and animals that live in these and other different places.

## What are the Golden Mile Competition judges looking for?

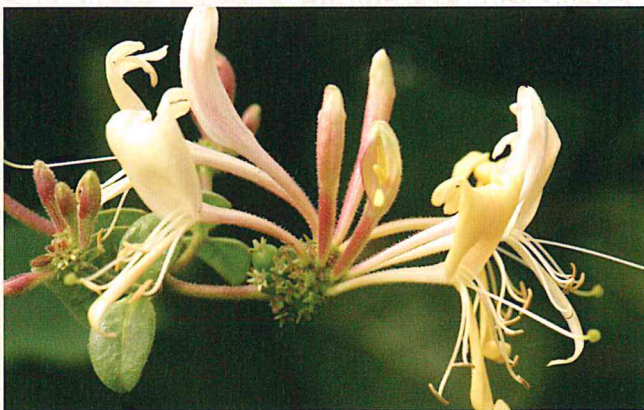
- A mix of different habitat types along the mile and in the surrounding landscape e.g. hedgerows, grass verges, woodland, fields, freshwater, coast, bog etc. So try to find a route with lots of diversity!
- Evidence that you understand your local natural heritage. The judges will assess this through how you present your Mile and the descriptions you provide along the route and in the application form. These could be written descriptions/drawings on small signs along the route and/or descriptions/drawings sent in with the application form
- Works which have been completed by your group to manage / enhance your mile e.g. trimming hedgerows so that they benefit wildlife – see tips for management in the next section

## Managing your natural heritage

### Grass Verges

If cutting is required it is best done in late February and/or in September to encourage the growth of wild flowers. Leaving a 10m strip uncut every 100m will create safe havens for wildlife.

Avoid spraying verges along your Mile with herbicide as it restricts the growth and variety of plants and so there is less food for invertebrates and in turn for birds.



### Hedgerows

Remember when you are cutting, that ivy is an important source of food and shelter to many species of insect and bird and to avoid cutting during the bird nesting season, March 1st to August 31st. (The Wildlife Act prevents cutting of vegetation during this season unless it is in the interest of public safety).

If you want your hedgerows to be wildlife friendly, cut them in a triangular shape, sloping up from a wide base. Tall and wide with dense growth is good. This gives plenty of nesting space and cover for birds and more fruit and berries can be produced for wildlife to feed on. Allow some hedgerow trees to grow to their full height.

If there are gaps in your hedgerow, fill them! Look at the rest of the hedgerow and the surrounding landscape. Identify what types of native shrubs and trees are already growing in your area and plant these same types in the gaps. Garden shrubs don't belong in the natural hedgerow.

## Presenting your Natural Heritage

Through leaflets and signage along the route you have an opportunity to tell the judges about the wonderful natural heritage of your locality. Provide written descriptions/drawings describing the plants, animals, habitats, views that can be seen along the route and in the immediate surrounding landscape.

You may want to focus in on certain features and show your understanding and awareness of their importance. For example, the grass verge may contain different wildflowers at various times of the year; there may be local folklore attached to certain trees, bogs, turloughs etc. along the route or there may be a designated conservation area with special flora and fauna.

If your route includes old stone field walls, these are likely to reflect the local geology. They may demonstrate local traditional patterns of wall construction. Don't forget certain animals and plants also inhabit the wall.

You may wish to present these descriptions/drawings in temporary information signs and/or within your application form.



## HINTS AND TIPS

Keep your descriptions simple. There is no need for long lists of Latin plant names.

Only include plants and animals that live along the Mile – don't give general lists.

Older people in the community often have valuable knowledge about the local landscape - involve them and find out more.

Tree stumps and fallen trunks are important wildlife habitats.

A child's view of their local place is often different from adults. Let all views be expressed!

If erecting bat/bird boxes and information signs on trees, please do not use screws or nails as they harm the trees.

(If planting, use native species of provenance that already exist in the area).



## What is Built Heritage?

Built Heritage includes buildings and architectural features such as churches, houses, schools, bridges, forges, stone walls, gates, piers and archaeological monuments such as megalithic tombs, standing stones, ringforts, castles, medieval churches, children's burial grounds, mass rocks, holy wells, mass paths etc.

## What are the Golden Mile competition judges looking for?

- The judges wish to see that the community recognises and has interpreted each aspect of built heritage on the Mile
- Each feature should be identified on a simple map and ideally linked to numbered signs along the route
- Sometimes archaeological monuments may be discovered that have not been previously recorded - give details of these in the application form

## Identifying your Built Heritage

Identify the features that survive in the landscape and provide a brief description of them. Place-names and field names are important and can provide very useful information about former land use.

Research and include in your application special places of cultural interest such as famine burial sites. Also note sites where there are stories of ghost, fairies or where the banshee was heard. Include other items of interest such as lone bushes, eviction sites, traveller campsites and hedge schools.





## Managing your Built Heritage

You are encouraged to seek the co-operation of local landowners and householders in identifying built heritage along the Mile.

Encourage people to clean and paint old farm gates, iron stiles, water pumps, iron railings etc. along the Mile.

Encourage farmers along the Mile to clean up their farmyards and paint sheds, gates and other farm features where practical. The adjudicators acknowledge that these are working farms, and allow for this when judging the Mile.

Simple, locally made signs are preferred for indicating features in the landscape such as archaeological monuments and other structures.

Avoid attaching signs to architectural features or archaeological monuments.



## Sources of information

To check for a recorded monument, search by townland name or monument classification on the Record of Monuments and Places (RMP) or online at [www.archaeology.ie](http://www.archaeology.ie). The RMP can be viewed at most local branch libraries or at your local County Council office. For further advice contact Marie Mannion, Heritage Officer, Tel: (091) 509198.

You can check if a feature is listed on the Record of Protected Structures (RPS) at [www.galway.ie](http://www.galway.ie). For further advice or information on the care and management of protected structures contact Máirín Doddy, Architectural Conservation Officer, Tel: (091) 509197.

## HINTS AND TIPS

Remember that all archaeological monuments are protected under the National Monuments Act so they should not be cleaned or changed in any way without written consent from the National Monuments Service.

Be aware that many structures including houses, gate lodges and their associated gates, follies, old schools, modern churches, graveyards, milestones etc. may be included in the Record of Protected Structures (RPS), and have statutory protection under the Planning and Development Act, 2000.

Involve older members of the community who will know about fieldnames and other aspects of built and cultural heritage in the local area.

## Advice and Support

### Natural Heritage

Elaine O'Riordan,  
Galway County Biodiversity Project Manager,  
Applied Ecology Unit,  
Centre for Environmental Science,  
National University of Ireland, Galway.  
Tel: (091) 495921,  
Email: elaine.oriordan@nuigalway.ie

Heritage Council, Tel: (056) 7770777,  
[www.heritagecouncil.ie](http://www.heritagecouncil.ie)

National Parks & Wildlife Service,  
[www.npws.ie](http://www.npws.ie)

Galway West. Tel: (095) 41054,  
Rest of Galway County. Tel: (091) 539284

Birdwatch Ireland. Tel: (01) 2819878,  
[www.birdwatchireland.ie](http://www.birdwatchireland.ie)

Coillte, [www.coillte.ie](http://www.coillte.ie)

Mountbellew Tel: (0909) 679067

Oranmore Tel: (091) 787520

Portumna Tel: (0909) 741683

Irish Wildlife Trust, Tel: (01) 8602839,  
[www.iwt.ie](http://www.iwt.ie)

Tree Council of Ireland, Tel: (01) 4931313,  
[www.treecouncil.ie](http://www.treecouncil.ie)

### Built Heritage

Marie Mannion, Heritage Officer,  
Galway County Council, Prospect Hill, Galway.  
Tel: (091) 509198,  
Email: [mmannion@galwaycoco.ie](mailto:mmannion@galwaycoco.ie)

Máirín Doddy,  
Architectural Conservation Officer,  
Galway County Council, Prospect Hill, Galway.  
Tel: (091) 509197,  
Email: [mdoddy@galwaycoco.ie](mailto:mdoddy@galwaycoco.ie)

National Monuments Service,  
Tel: (01) 8883922, [www.archaeology.ie](http://www.archaeology.ie)

Heritage Council, Tel: (056) 7770777,  
[www.heritagecouncil.ie](http://www.heritagecouncil.ie)

### Maintenance Works

Sean Broderick,  
Rural Social Scheme and TÚS Co-Ordinator,  
Galway Rural Development Co. Ltd,  
Mellows Campus, Athenry, Co. Galway.  
Tel: 091 844335,  
Email: [seanbroderick@grd.ie](mailto:seanbroderick@grd.ie)

Geraldine Kelly,  
Rural Social Scheme and TÚS Co-Ordinator,  
FORUM Connemara Ltd, Letterfrack,  
Connemara, Co. Galway. Tel: (095) 41064,  
Email: [g.kelly@forumconnemara.ie](mailto:g.kelly@forumconnemara.ie)

### Schools

An Taisce, Environmental Education Unit,  
Tailor's Hall, Back Lane, Dublin 8.  
Tel: (01) 4541786, Email: [info@antaisce.org](mailto:info@antaisce.org),  
[www.antaisce.org](http://www.antaisce.org)

Heritage in Schools,  
Heritage Council, Bishops Palace, Kilkenny.  
Tel: (056) 7770777, [www.heritagecouncil.ie](http://www.heritagecouncil.ie)

### Litter Management and Road Safety

The Environment Unit Galway County Council  
Environment Unit, 2nd Floor, Centre Point,  
Liosbaun Business Park, Galway.  
Tel: (091) 476402,  
Email: [environment@galwaycoco.ie](mailto:environment@galwaycoco.ie)

Sinéad Ní Mhainnín, Tel: (091) 476488,  
[snimhain@galwaycoco.ie](mailto:snimhain@galwaycoco.ie)

Mark Molloy, Tel: (091) 476485,  
[mkmolloy@galwaycoco.ie](mailto:mkmolloy@galwaycoco.ie)

Your local Community Warden,  
[www.galway.ie](http://www.galway.ie)

Area Offices Galway County Council,  
Tel: (091) 509000  
[www.galway.ie/en/about/contactdetails/areaoffices](http://www.galway.ie/en/about/contactdetails/areaoffices)

An Taisce,  
Tailor's Hall, Back Lane, Dublin 8.  
Tel: (01) 4541786,  
Email: [info@antaisce.org](mailto:info@antaisce.org),  
[www.antaisce.org](http://www.antaisce.org)

### Financial Support

Galway County Council Community Support  
Schemes.

The purpose of the support scheme is to encourage and promote community and voluntary groups to take an active part in the development of their communities and to improve the Economic, Social, Heritage and Cultural aspects of their surrounding areas. There are limited resources available under these schemes therefore the majority of financial awards will be of a small scale.

[www.galway.ie/en/Services/CommunityEnterpriseEconomicDevelopment/FinancialSupports/](http://www.galway.ie/en/Services/CommunityEnterpriseEconomicDevelopment/FinancialSupports/)

#### Local Agenda 21 Funding

Local Agenda 21 (LA21) Environment Partnership Fund is a small grant scheme offered by the Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government each year to support non-profit initiatives aiming to increase awareness of environmental issues at local level, which complement national environmental policies such as those on Waste, Biodiversity, Water Conservation and Climate Change.

[www.galway.ie/en/Services/Environment/EnvironmentalAwareness/CommunityInitiatives/LocalAgenda21](http://www.galway.ie/en/Services/Environment/EnvironmentalAwareness/CommunityInitiatives/LocalAgenda21)

#### The Wheel

The Wheel is Ireland's support and representative umbrella network for community, voluntary and charitable organisations. [www.wheel.ie/](http://www.wheel.ie/)

### Main Contacts

Frank Keane,  
Enterprise Office,  
Galway Rural Development Co. Ltd.,  
Mellows Campus, Athenry, Co. Galway.  
Tel: 091 844335.  
Email: [fkeane@grd.ie](mailto:fkeane@grd.ie)

Marie Mannion,  
Heritage Officer,  
Galway County Council,  
Prospect Hill, Galway.  
Tel: (091) 509198.  
Email: [mmannion@galwaycoco.ie](mailto:mmannion@galwaycoco.ie)



## Check List

- Is your selected route 1 mile in distance? .....
- Is it outside the 50km speed limit? .....
- Is it safe for walkers? .....
- Have you placed a 'start' and 'finish' sign on the Mile? .....
- Make sure that your chosen mile has not been entered into .....   
the competition over the previous 5 years?

## Have you included in your application form?

- The name of your group (create an informal name if you do not have an existing group) .....   
contact name, address and phone number?
- A description of the work you have undertaken or plan to undertake .....   
to enhance the heritage features of interest along the mile and work  
undertaken to clean litter spots along the mile?
- Details of help or contact you have had with local, regional or national organisations e.g. Coillte, .....   
National Parks and Wildlife Service, County Council, RSS, TÚS, CE Scheme etc.
- A detailed description of the Mile and the features of interest you would especially like .....   
the judges to note i.e. features of natural, built and cultural heritage interest.
- An Ordnance Survey (OS) map clearly showing your Golden Mile route .....   
and the start and finish points.
- A simple sketch map indicating heritage features of the Mile. ....
- Photographs (minimum of 6) showing various elements of your Mile. ....

Send completed application form to:

Marie Mannion, Heritage Office, Galway County Council by the third week in August

### General Award Categories

- Overall Golden Mile of Galway Award
- Best Natural Heritage Mile
- Best Built Heritage Mile
- Community Effort and Litter Management  
(Tony Dervan RIP Award)
- (Other award categories may be added at the  
judges discretion)

### The Mile is judged using the following marking system:

- Natural Heritage ..... 25 %
- Built Heritage ..... 25 %
- Community Effort & Litter Management ..... 25 %
- Road Safety ..... 20 %
- Filling out the application form ..... 5 %
- Total.....100 %

