



An Taisce

**Annual
Report**

2011/2012



President's Report

By Professor John Sweeney



There is a football team I know that found themselves 3-0 down at halftime this year in a crucial game. The despair in the dressing room was palpable. The players were dejected, the manager was considering resignation, and the season looked to be over. But, from somewhere, the reserves were found to stage a remarkable recovery in the second half. The game was saved and the team went on to score major successes later on in the season. So it was this year with An Taisce. The Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government saw fit to remove most of the funding historically given to facilitate An Taisce exercising the statutory functions designated for it under planning legislation dating back to 1963. Sadly, this led to several redundancies and the loss of 3 highly regarded employees at Tailors' Hall in the weeks before Christmas. We were 3 nil down and for a time, the outlook for the organisation looked very bleak.

"A huge outpouring of support occurred from our membership as a result of the Christmas appeal. This was the spur for a fight back."

However, just like the football match, the unexpected happened. A huge outpouring of support occurred from our membership as a result of the Christmas appeal. This was the spur for a fight back. Special thanks must go to the efforts of the Board, especially Charles Stanley Smith and Attracta Ui Bhroin, who coordinated the life support operation so successfully that the patient is now in strong recovery mode. In addition, the fight for survival also rejuvenated the committee system which had lost some of its voluntary drive during the 'relatively good' years. It is now a pleasure to attend the various committees and see how Council Members are working together productively. We are blessed by having a superb set of Council Members and my admiration has grown for them enormously this year. Their collective experience and dedication is what makes the organisation what it is. This year has been particularly good in terms of new blood joining. We had two excellent candidates for the election of Chair, highly professional young candidates for several other positions, and generally the makings of a leaner and more dynamic organisation.

The Mahon Report highlighted the need for An Taisce to be a watchdog for the Irish environment and the well-received report by the Planning Unit on the excesses of local authorities during the past decade reminded the public that An Taisce was the body that got it right all along. We don't have the resources to win every battle, but increasingly I feel the public is becoming educated as to where culpability for Ireland's current crisis lies. Though not our style, perhaps, we are perfectly entitled to shout "We told you so" from the rooftops!

Once again the Education Unit has been a 'tour de force'. Apart from running 8 programmes ranging from Green Schools to the National Spring Clean, the Unit recently brought the world to Ireland to see best practice in action. The Foundation for Environmental Education recently celebrated its 30th anniversary and Pat Oliver was successful in luring the General Assembly to Dublin in June. While the recent report of the Planning Unit estimated An Taisce had saved the nation approximately €500M as a result of successful appeals that would otherwise have ended up as a taxpayer burden in NAMA, I wonder just how much the Education Unit has saved the nation in energy, water and EU fines, and just how much the nation would value the existence of Blue Flag beaches or Clean Coasts.

"The events of this year show that when the chips are down the An Taisce team will rally just as strongly today to ensure that the desired full time result occurs."

In summary, the year was challenging and the year ahead will remain so. Threats to our natural resources continue to mount and are mistakenly justified in today's phase of austerity on the basis of short term economic benefit. But the environmental heritage of Ireland is not for sale, merely in trust for the next generation. This was the vision which our founder Robert Lloyd Praeger had in 1948. The events of this year show that when the chips are down the An Taisce team will rally just as strongly today to ensure that the desired full time result occurs.

Chairman's Report

By John Harnett



It was the worst of times, it was the best of times. I was elected Chairperson at the Council meeting on the 11th of February this year. Forgive my rearranging of those opening lines from the original source, however it better describes how I feel the organisation is moving forward.

The latter part of 2011 was overshadowed by the financial crisis that An Taisce was concerned with. Our Government funding was severely curtailed and other funding sources slowed to a trickle. We had obligations, particularly in relation to staff members and these had sadly to be rationalised so that we could continue to meet our ongoing costs.

An emergency appeal to Members for donations was launched in December and a lot of people responded with singular generosity. To all you who did so – Thank You. You provided a desperately need infusion of funds to help us continue.

We are all custodians of this historical and unique environmental Trust so that it may be passed on in good shape to the next volunteers who will continue the work.

I must commend the Board, Volunteers and the two Chairpersons during this time who made a great effort and kept the ship above water. We are all custodians of this historical and unique environmental Trust so that it may be passed on in good shape to the next volunteers who will continue the work. The current Board and former Chairpersons, (who continue to serve), have achieved this. An Taisce is a strong organisation and, no matter what the crisis, it continues to make submissions, to influence, to point out where environmental damage is being done and to seek to have it rectified whether with local enforcement structures, (Environmental Protection Agency, County and City Councils etc.) or with Europe.

One has just to look at the response to the State of the Nation Report launched in April 2012. This report generated a huge response and indicated in a structured manner what everyone knew about the planning system but nevertheless needed to be stated in a qualitative manner. Looking forward from June 2011 it is clear that a substantial body of work has been completed by the three Committees, The Built Environment, The Natural Environment Committee and the Properties Committee. To mention but a

few more submissions and reports by the Committees;

The use of wetlands for flood attenuation report, (March 2012), Submissions to the Peatland Council, development and management of the IEN biodiversity policy project (WEB), submission to the UN on Rio +20 (October 2011), participations in major planning hearings, highlighting of excessive rezoning. In summary there is a lot of work done and more to do. I believe our major challenges for the coming year are to develop new funding routes. This means developing a considered approach to attract corporate donors and not just on a once of basis. This funding must be used to appoint a CEO for the organisation to ensure that structures and policies that are developed by Council and the Board are seen through to fruition and applied on a daily basis. When we have this achieved we may plan for other roles in the organisation.

One of the critical factors for An Taisce is to communicate to its Members, the Council, Government and the wider public what we do on a daily basis. To this end I intend that all our submissions, appeals and reports are available and easily found on our website. The body of work done in the last year is impressive, I have mentioned some of the highlights above, but many more exist. This is however being put on a formal basis with each Committee undertaking to publish 3 substantive pieces of work annually. This may be in the form of a detailed submission to a Government Body or detailed academic consideration of an area published by way of report or similar.

Historically the main Committees; Built environment, Natural Environment and Properties had a significant amount of academic or scientific members within their volunteer core. We are looking at returning to this approach and have and will continue to invite individuals with appropriate academic or practical experience to join the committees. The fight for the environment now requires that we have significant academic input in to our responses to Government and the various bodies therein.

While the threats to our environment are many and deadly serious it is nevertheless an exciting time. I never cease to be impressed and awed by volunteers in An Taisce and to be fair other environmental groups that for many years have put in countless hours to work in this most important area. I look forward over the coming year to working with my fellow custodians – will you be one too ?

Administration Report

By James Leahy



I joined the Board of An Taisce at the AGM in June 2012 and was allocated the role of Administration Chair by the Board and Council in December 2011.

That 2011 was a hard year for An Taisce has been outlined elsewhere in this report. In December An Taisce lost its office manager, Carol O'Connor; and planning administrator, Bina Shah. The administrative support they provided to the staff, volunteers and membership should be remembered with gratitude. This crisis created a significant challenge for the organisation: how to handle this loss of institutional knowledge, and continue to support the work that An Taisce does. My task was made much easier by the thorough handover and detailed documentation from Carol, Bina and Attracta Ui Broin, along with advice from Judy Osborne, a former Administration Chair.

The most urgent task was to reorganise the office. James Nix quickly recruited two interns, James Madden and Jane Pollock. Their dedication allowed us to answer the phones and open at Tailors' Hall for the core hours of ten to four, Monday to Friday. The post is received, sorted and distributed. For those not based in Tailors' Hall post is scanned and emailed, which is helping us get more help from volunteers from around the country. Justin Byrne also reviewed the phone and printing systems and checked they were in good working order.

The next job to tackle was the infamous membership database. An Taisce has been losing members in recent years. To reverse this trend and grow the membership a professional service must be provided. The challenge, with thousands of members, is to do this efficiently with voluntary resources. A full review of the issue was carried out with the help of Charles Stanley Smith's considerable IT knowledge. The problem appeared not to be the database system, but the poor quality of the data within the system. Having exported the data to spreadsheets, a long time was spent tidying it up. Each field was checked and sorted out. At then end, we had a clear picture of the membership; for example it is now possible to sort lists of members by surname, town or county, which was impossible before. Unfortunately, this review led to a delay in responding to membership queries, for which I apologise. The system is now in good working order. New membership cards were introduced which can be printed efficiently in Tailors'

Hall. Membership cards or renewal letters for 2012 membership have been sent out to all members by post. If you have not received one please contact me at membership@antaisce.org or write to Tailors' Hall.

By the summer we will have a good picture of whether membership is now falling or rising, which will help us decide the best way to recruit new members. Thanks to all the envelope stuffers.

In the spring we welcomed a new volunteer, John Harte from Fingal. He did excellent work in contacting local associations to check the membership of Council and the Local Association committees. John, James Madden and Judy Osborne then pulled together the different reports which make up this Annual Report. All of this leaves us in a good position to provide support to local associations and try to get new associations going in areas where we are not active at present.

'The past year has been all about stabilising the organisation. The challenge for the next year is how to grow it again. The key is to use modern information technology to engage and support volunteers across the country.'

These systems are important, but ultimately only support the core work which An Taisce does in Properties, the Built Environment, the Natural Environment and the Environmental Education Unit. A special thanks should go to John Ducie, Ian Lumley and Camilla Keane at Tailors' Hall and all the staff at the Environmental Education Unit for coping well with the disruption while An Taisce reorganised itself, and for contributing to that reorganisation. The past year has been all about stabilising the organisation. The challenge for the next year is how to grow it again. The key is to use modern information technology to engage and support volunteers across the country. The e-zine magazines produced by Judy Osborne and Charles Stanley Smith are a good example of this. Potential projects include

- an online membership database system,
- an An Taisce internal internet or intranet where documents can be stored and shared online.

- cataloging An Taisce's significant archives and publishing any interesting documents online where the membership can easily access them.

While doing this we must be mindful of the danger of having a 'digital divide' within the organisation. We will continue to correspond by post with the members who

have supported An Taisce down the years. If we can do all this we will have a good platform to support a new generation of members and volunteers to continue the unique work that An Taisce has done for the last sixty years. Membership forms are available at www.antaisce.org/membership where you can also join or renew online.

Communications Report

By Charles Stanley-Smith



We published our annual full colour magazine, which was sent to all members, available on line and sold through Easons. As ever this was a very well received and a credit to An Taisce.

Previously we would produce 4 quarterly magazines but now we produce monthly eZines. These are emailed to our members with email addresses (if you want to be put on the list please email your email address

to membership@antaisce.org). Should you have an article for the eZine please email it to ezine@antaisce.org.

We also made good use of Facebook (1400 friends) & Twitter (440 followers) for short informative articles and to promote the eZine. We also emailed quarterly energy eZine aimed at the energy industry as well as our members.

Our website uses an advanced (and free) Content Management System. This allows members of staff and volunteers to update it. It is being continually updated and scored a very respectable 6.2/10 when independently assessed across accessibility, content, quality and searchability. The site includes archive material back to 2000 and our appeals over the last number of years.

We issued 21 (up from 14) general press releases and provided comment for journalists on 19 other stories. We cannot afford full media monitoring but the use of Google Alerts shows 50-100 mentions of An Taisce in printed media every month- which is very respectable.

Built Environment Report

By Ian Lumley



How did it happen that the Irish planning system zoned enough greenfield land to nearly double the population?

It represents a failure of regulation as great as that of the failure of the banking system. The competence of members of the Irish Planning Institute and Royal Town Planning Institute involved, as much as the role of councilors and management, and lax central government, must be addressed.

On top of this the Mahon Tribunal has found the system to have been systemically corrupt, and its recommendations, while limited, are to be welcomed, in particular the concept of a planning regulator.

“Since 2000 An Taisce took over 2000 appeals to An Bord Pleanála. In over 80% of cases decisions were overturned or significantly varied because the local authority ignored national policy and it’s own development plan.”

The cost of decades of bad planning needs to be quantified and remedied as much as the banking collapse. It has left us with a legacy of poorly integrated communities, car based sprawl, classrooms in temporary huts, the retail base of urban and village centers undermined, and some of our most sensitive landscapes ribboned with houses.

This is going to place an un-quantified cost burden for the future in water, waste water provision, transport and provision of services, particularly for older people.

Since 2000 An Taisce took over 2000 appeals to An Bord Pleanála. In over 80% of cases decisions were overturned or significantly varied because the local authority ignored national policy and it's own development plan. Had An Taisce not taken these appeals, which included a large number of poorly located hotels, business park and warehouse complexes the NAMA and Irish bank debt burden would have been greater by a level of a half a billion euro.

The fact that so many An Taisce appeals to An Bord Pleanála have exposed a systemic disregard by local authorities in complying with national policy and their own development plans should be regarded as much a scandal, and as damaging to the public interest, as the bribery and corruption exposed by the Flood and Mahon Tribunals.

This was the subject of complaint dossiers by An Taisce to the previous government on Dublin City Council, and Meath, Galway and Cork Councils. It exposed the fact that the generation of commercial rates revenue, which is not a legally permissible consideration in deliberating on planning applications, nullified the legal requirement to serve the interest of the common good under the Planning Acts, most strikingly in a number of cases involving major developments in Meath. Independent investigation on the An Taisce, and other, complaints made to the Department of Environment Community and Local Government, is required, since the competence of senior management and planners in a number of local authorities is in question.

An Taisce made representations on most of the Oral hearings for road projects during the boom years with particular concern on the increase in car and road freight dependence and further undermining of the railways. The reduction of inter regional road travel times against rail travel times needs to be addressed by supporting rail investment and reversing the ill advised increase in motorway speeds to 120 kph. The running down of rail freight in Ireland is going to make the EU target of transporting 50% of freight volume by rail in 2050 difficult to achieve.

Real reform of the planning system must now be a priority to ensure transparency and that zoning and individual planning consents consent to be subject to a range of standards, including strengthening the resilience of communities, ensuring walk-able access to local services, protecting biodiversity and areas of landscape and other heritage sensitive (issues) and meeting legally binding climate emission targets.

Challenges for the Future

Resource management on a finite planet will define our future. The coming years present major overlapping challenges in reducing greenhouse gas emissions, resource consumption and land use change, with the global cost and supply of food and energy and climate change impacts being unpredictable.

The preoccupation of Irish politics and media with the debt crises and obsessive belief in export led growth, is ignoring the planetary constraint in resource extraction and greenhouse gas and other emissions. Ireland is meeting its Kyoto target only because of the combination of the slump and our allocation of a 13% increase on 1990 emission levels.

“Current Irish policies for trade and development disregard these impacts and will significantly increase emissions from aviation and shipping, undermining initiatives taken within the EU to reduce emissions.”

It is the per capita impact, both in greenhouse gas emission and resource consumption, generated both domestically and globally, which matters. The 2010 Living Planet report put Ireland among the world top ten countries in unsustainable use of global resources. Measuring Irish global footprint it would take three planets if the level of per capita consumption of Ireland were to be replicated globally. This includes the impact of household goods, plastics, cheap clothes, fertilizer production sourced from Asia. Current Irish policies for trade and development disregard these impacts and will significantly increase emissions from aviation and shipping, undermining initiatives taken within the EU to reduce emissions.

Agriculture and Marine

The Irish agricultural and aquaculture sectors are adopting or prompting increased production targets without regard to the carrying capacity of the host environment, and impact on greenhouse gas emissions and biodiversity. In 2011 new regulations were introduced to subject land reclamation and drainage to planning control and Environmental Impact Assessment following an adverse European Court Judgment in 2009. While an information leaflet has been circulated to all Irish farmers there must be concern that the combination of increased production targets and lax local authority enforcement will continue the incremental drainage of wetlands, loss of biodiversity and historic field boundaries.

Coillte-the State Forestry Board

Any consideration of the sale of the Coillte plantation stock would inevitably result in loss of control to a multi-national investment fund, of a publicly owned biomass and carbon resource which will have much greater value in the future. This would undermine our future capacity to maximise carbon sequestration, and use cut timber in the most resourceful efferent way. It would prevent the biodiversity, amenity and recreational enhancement which our state forests need and undermine local employment potential.

Water Resource Management

The widening of the variation of rainfall patterns between the east and west of Ireland, and increasing climate unpredictability, is being used as an additional argument for creating a new Shannon water supply to the Greater Dublin Area. Before considering such a massively costly capital intensive project, and the long term energy required in its maintenance, a strategy of water conservation and the increased harvesting of untreated or grey water should be given priority.

Energy and Climate

The peaking of oil production from the major established global suppliers, combined with new drilling technologies is creating a new wave of exploration. This is reflected in the current test drilling proposal 5km east of Dalkey Island and gas industry interest in fracking in County Clare and Upper Shannon basin area. Opening up Ireland to oil and gas extraction creates a multiplicity of environmental risks on top of increasing global climate emissions. The extraction and burning off of existing global oil, gas and coal fields will bring the global climate and marine acidification levels beyond the tipping point of maintaining a living planet. Oil and gas drilling is attracting enormous opposition in the areas in which it is being proposed, but this is largely a not in my backyard (NIMBY) reaction. The real issue is the continuing global impact of fossil fuel exploration and extraction whether from Nigeria, the Canadian tar sands or new deep sea areas. It is hypocritical of Councilors to pass motions against fracking while promoting more car based sprawl in their counties.

The national and local response to climate and drilling impact should be to leave oil and gas in the ground, and move to a low carbon energy future. At local level communities have the potential to take control of their own energy use in the establishment of co-operative structures to reduce energy demand, insulate houses, develop a range of alternatives including wind and biomass,

appropriate to different areas.

The first priority in addressing climate emissions and energy use is demand reduction through insulation and efficiency, with investment in renewables developed in tandem. The planning of renewable energy needs a strategic approach to ensure the optimum location of wind turbines and avoid the increasing opposition by local communities and adverse impact on areas of biodiversity.

The Future of Irish Peatlands

The Government established Peatlands Council has been mandated to address the immediate issue of the conservation of the mainly midlands SAC designated bogs where cutting has been restricted and designated raised bogs where cutting must cease after 2013. The immediate priority must be (to) reverse the damage done to what are internally important areas of biodiversity with properly resourced conservation plans.

Recognition of the importance of maintaining global peatlands as a carbon sink is growing. Both the UK and Dutch governments are putting forward policies for the phasing out of domestic and commercial horticultural peat use. Lack of local authority and EPA enforcement has resulted in an unquantified level of unregulated commercial horticultural extraction in the midland counties, putting Ireland in large-scale breach of the EIA and IPPC Directives, as well as generating unquantified greenhouse gas emissions, and posing risk to drinking water supplies. The wider brief of the Peatland Council is for a national Peatlands Strategy for the 20% of the Irish land area with different types of peat cover. The research and scientific basis for this has been provided in the major multi disciplinary "Boglands" report published by the EPA in 2011. Future international and EU climate emissions agreements will require restriction (on) peat cutting and put heavy carbon taxes on extraction. Rather than wait for this the planning needs to start now in adopting a timetable for the phasing out and cessation of all categories of peat extraction. Particular support is required to empower rural communities currently dependent on damaging and inefficient peat sod burning, with house insulation and development alternative energy sources that will create local employment and be low carbon in emissions.

Architectural Heritage

Much of the focus of the property collapse has been on the "ghost estates". The level of architecturally significant buildings now empty and deteriorating with the collapse of development schemes is not getting enough attention with

the practical actions needed to address that situation. An Taisce has compiled a database showing the level and range of places affected. These include major buildings in Dublin like the 18th century Aldborough House and country estates like Carriglass Manor in County Longford. The planning system is ineffective in dealing with failed companies, liquidators and administrators. The key concept which An Taisce is promoting is the need to ensure essential building maintenance and temporary, community low rent and partial uses, until long term resolution of the property can be secured.

Projects Decided or with An Bord Pleanála

Despite the dramatic collapse in construction, some of the most problematic applications ever lodged in the State have passed through different stages of the system over the last year. In all these cases An Taisce has taken a lead role in arguing for the proper management of resources and protection of areas of ecological or other sensitivity.

The 16 storey Children's Hospital project at the Mater Hospital in Eccles Street Dublin was defined as Strategic Infrastructure and directly lodged with An Bord Pleanála. The refusal was one of the most significant in the Board's history representing a vindication of good planning. The Board emphatically stated that the project, because of its scale and impact, contravened the Dublin City Development Plan. This raised the question as to how 43 million euro came to be expended on a project where independent scrutiny of the planning issues surrounding site suitability was so obvious.

The An Bord Pleanála refusal of the high level bridge between Slane and the Boyne World Heritage Site was also one of the most significant in its history. With the M1 and M3 running to the east and west of Slane respectively the Board raised concern at the lack of alternatives and traffic management, including restriction of HGVs running through Slane. Effective action is now required by the Dept of Transport, NRA and Meath County Council to ban HGVs through Slane, and introduce road pricing measures to curtail toll evasion.

These two decisions have done much to change the longstanding perception of An Bord Pleanála as a rubber stamping agency for State projects.

An Bord Pleanála overturned its inspectors report in granting permission of the racecourse, casino, hotel and White House replica part of the Tipperary Venue project 10 km from Thurles off the M8, but refusing the 15,000 person capacity multi-purpose arena. A subsequent Government decision not to introduce legislation to allow an

international resort scale Las Vegas type casino in Ireland means that the project is now not viable.

Three major appeals are before An Bord Pleanála in which An Taisce has raised overlapping sustainability issues. The China Hub Trading centre outside Athlone is conceived as a shopping centre for chain store operators from the European and North American markets, to source goods as an alternative to going to China. The proposal fundamentally disregards the impact of additional resource consumption and greenhouse gases both generated globally and in Ireland.

A decision on Europe's largest artificial ski slope on a partly reclaimed inter tidal wetland area beside Dundalk Bay Special Protection Area (SPA) is awaited. This is more like a project from boom time Dubai, the proposal is a legacy of the Irish bubble.

Earlier this year Dublin City Councils decision to allow the demolition of Liberty Hall to accommodate a substantially bigger and bulkier replacement was appealed by An Taisce and others. Apart from the Children's Hospital decision An Bord Pleanála has found Dublin City Council to be in breach of its own development plan in granting over scaled developments in over 20 cases in recent years.

The first applications seeking leave for substitute consent for unauthorised quarries are coming before An Bord Pleanála. This follows the introduction of new legislation to address the failure of the registration process introduced under section 261 of the 2000 Planning Act. This proved to be a fraudsters charter with an unquantified number of new significantly extended quarries claiming "pre 1963" planning status.

Ireland was found by the European Court to have been in breach of the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Directive in allowing post development EIA in a case involving the Derrybrien wind farm in County Galway. Giving backdoor consent to quarries developed in breach of the EIA Directive undermines the viability of legitimate and complaint quarry operators and will expose Ireland to new legal action from the European Commission.

The number of appeals taken by An Taisce to An Bord Pleanála is a fraction of what it was during the boom years with weekly planning and application lists dominated by domestic extensions. However the trend of repeat one off house applications on sites previously refused is continuing, including environmentally sensitive areas in counties Cork, Galway and Wicklow.

Local councilors frequently disparage what are called "serial objectors" and thereby the rights of public participation enshrined in Irish planning law and the Aarhus convention.

At the same time serial appellants are encouraged to reapply even on sites where there have been multiple refusals.

This exposes another bewildering feature of the Irish planning system namely the disregard of local councils of previous An Bord Pleanála refusals when repeat

applications are lodged. Despite legal provision in the Planning Acts, An Bord Pleanála continues to refuse to award recovery of expenses to An Taisce and other appellants when refusals on repeat appeals arise. In one case on an inlet of Galway Bay An Bord Pleanála has refused four successive appeals

Natural Environment Committee

By Declan Murphy



The natural environment committee (NEC) underwent a transformation during the year from which it has emerged - like the country itself - bruised, reduced, refocused and reinvigorated. In September last Anja Murray - our Natural Environment officer since 2002-resigned her post to take up a new position.

Following a recruitment process Caoimhe Muldoon was appointed, and she had proven to be a wonderful talent and colleague when the financial crisis engulfed An Taisce. She and two other staff members were made redundant. As the recently elected chair of the committee it was very disappointing and a difficult time for all of us. However Camilla Keane - our Natural Environment Case Work and Research Officer - was able to provide the continuity that allowed the NE office to continue its prodigious output. She has been outstanding in attempting to do the job of two full time professional natural environment staff members, aided by a part-time intern.

The committee is enthusiastic, knowledgeable and supportive and the members have helped to steer me on an exciting learning curve. Our meetings take place on Saturday mornings prior to council. We maintain close email contact and hope to develop a more vibrant electronic communication network with members who cannot or do not wish to attend meetings in Dublin.

“The NE office made numerous submissions including the Rio+20 consultation, the Providence Resources application for a foreshore licence for exploration off Dalkey, Water Sector Reform, the National Landscape Strategy for Ireland, the EC (EIA) Agriculture regulation, and many others.”

The discussions have been informed by the range of expertise among group members. The variety of agenda items is vast, including forestry, marine, aquaculture, climate change, biodiversity, sustainability, water quality, public events run by the NE office, and research projects. A major issue for the committee and An Taisce will be the reform of the Common Agriculture Policy and the government Harvest 2020' plan.

The NE office made numerous submissions including the Rio+20 consultation, the Providence Resources application for a foreshore licence for exploration off Dalkey, Water Sector Reform, the National Landscape Strategy for Ireland, the EC (EIA) Agriculture regulations, and many others.

A major study commissioned by An Taisce on 'The use of wetlands for flood attenuation' was launched at a public event in Tailors Hall in March. Two further booklets in the 'Natures Way' series were produced, and a fourth is now planned. These are very widely circulated among schools and heritage groups, are colourful and very engaging. An informative project currently being carried out is an assessment of cumulative development impacts on two Special Areas of Conservation (SACs). Cumulative impacts can arise when permissions are given separately to developments and other plans such as afforestation but the combined impact of the different developments and land use changes are not assessed and therefore can be damaging to the SAC / SPA. An audit of the recently introduced 'appropriate assessment' procedure required for forestry projects that could impact on SACs is planned, as it is prudent to have an independent study to ensure that the assessments are credible and rigorous. Camilla sits on a number of other bodies - including the Peatland Council, the IEN steering group for WEB (Working and Educating for Biodiversity) management group, the Aquaculture Appeals Board, and many others. Almost all reports and output from the office are available on line on the An Taisce

website - on the home page click the 'Natural Environment' tab and on the next screen expand the menu list of items.

The big challenge for the future is to prioritize the work done by one-person in a two-person role. We plan to use outside experts to undertake specific tasks on a consultancy fee basis, when needed and if finance allows it. We realise

that in the long term a more sustainable funding arrangement is essential to allow the NE office to fulfill its vital role in providing independent oversight of our natural environment heritage. The input from this committee is more important than ever and we welcome new members from the wider An Taisce membership.

Natural Environment Office

By Camilla Keane



Over the last year, there have been a number of people who have been part of the Natural Environment Team and whose contributions have been invaluable. Anja Murray, the Natural Environment Officer with An Taisce for six and a half years, left half way through last year to join BirdWatch Ireland's Policy team. She was replaced by Dr. Caoimhe Muldoon, who in her short time with An Taisce made a number of important contributions to the office's output. Currently, the Natural Environment Team is made up of Camilla Keane, and Stephen Hyland an invaluable part time volunteer. Camilla takes care of natural environment policy issues and consultations, advocacy work, projects, communications, and where possible the casework, including forestry and aquaculture licensing, input to relevant planning applications, and other alerts of site specific issues. Stephen is currently working on a specific research project that is looking the cumulative impacts on two Special Areas of Conservation but also helped with public consultation and policy research as the need arises. Two other interns have been part of the Natural Environment Team over the past year. Jennifer Ennis carried out work for the research project Stephen has been conducting. She moved on in September to start her Masters in England. Barry Walsh also joined the team for a short period and carried out research to inform An Taisce's submissions to public consultations.

Nature's Way

Two more 'Nature's Way' booklets were produced in 2011. One booklet entitled 'The Wonder of Peatlands' looked at the origins & history of peatlands, the plant, animal and bird life on bogs; as well as exploring the main threats to peatlands, their interaction with Climate Change and what can be done to protect them. The other booklet looked at Pollinator Species in Ireland and through fun illustrations explains what pollination is, who Ireland's pollinators are, why we need them and what threats they are facing.

These booklets were kindly co-funded by the Irish Environmental Network (IEN) and the Department of Arts, Heritage and Gaeltacht fund to promote the United Nations Decade on Biodiversity.

Consultations'

An Taisce complied a detailed response to the Department of the Environment Heritage and Local Government (DoEHLG) *National Action Plan on Green Public Procurement Draft for Public Consultation*. Globally green public procurement has been developing rapidly in the last decade, and many 'environmentally motivated' economies have formal policies in place to stimulate 'Green Procurement Policy' (GPP). An Taisce's submission drew together GPP research and best practice examples of GPP in other countries, making recommendations with regard to GPP policy formation in Ireland

"An Taisce supports the European Landscape Convention in its aims to increase awareness of the value of landscapes; to improve training and education about the landscape"

An Taisce composed a very comprehensive submission in response to the consultation on the *Strategy Issues Paper for the National Landscape Strategy for Ireland*. An Taisce supports the European Landscape Convention in its aims to increase awareness of the value of landscapes; to improve training and education about the landscape; and to provide a procedure of landscape identification, assessment, protection and quality objectives. However, it was highlighted that in Ireland there is a need for an integrated and comprehensive study to characterise, analyse and document the physical and historic landscape and seascape, to ensure a national consistency in characterisation and valuing of the landscape. It was also

highlighted throughout the submission the importance of recognising the value of ecosystem services set in the natural landscape. Overall, it was felt the paper was deficient in addressing the multiplicity of challenges affecting the achievement of 'landscape quality objective' standards, 'landscape protection' and 'landscape management' as required by the Landscape Convention. These challenges were highlighted within the report and included issues such as rural housing, agricultural development, forestry, quarries and peat extraction to name a few. A submission was also made to the UN on **Rio +20** in October of 2011. The submission highlighted that since the adoption of the 1992 Rio Declaration, Ireland had the fastest population increase in the EU. The unprecedented physical and infrastructural investment which occurred between the mid 1990's and 2007 failed to address the principles of the Rio Declaration. Development was instead underpinned by a flawed economic growth based model disregarding resource consumption, climate emissions and debt accumulation. There was significant lack of initiative in protecting Ireland's most internationally significant Habitats and accordingly breaking the biodiversity convention. This particularly applies to the introduction of a ten year derogation to accommodate continued mechanised peat cutting in Special Area of Conservation designated raised bogs. Other issues highlighted from a natural environment perspective included the potential impacts of the 'Food Harvest 2020' strategy, which appears to have been developed in the absence of any evaluation on what an increase of 50% in milk production will have on climate emissions, biodiversity, fertilizer and energy use. Ireland's failure to adopt an integrated sustainable development model over the last 20 years has created unquantifiable, social, environmental and economic costs for the future. A number of biodiversity protection recommendations were made throughout the submission.

The Forest Service finally developed an Appropriate Assessment Procedure, as required for all plans and projects, under Article 6 of the Habitat Directive, that are likely to have a significant effect, either alone or in combination, on a Natura 2000 site. Over the years, the Natural Environment office has met with the Forest Service, and the Forest Service engaged directly with this department when the procedure was in draft form even before it went out for public consultation input. Thus, we were able to have significant input into the development of their procedure.

'Research Project'

Stephen Hyland, with input from Jennifer Ennis, has been carrying out a research project on **the management of**

Special Areas of Conservation and how various agencies ensure that sites are not damaged through various activities. The report looks at how 'Appropriate Assessment' (under Article 6 of the habitats Directive) of development in Natura 2000 sites is assessed and examines how administrative functions of various state departments allow for appropriate assessments and in particular how assessments of cumulative impacts on protected habitats and species are done. We have had considerable difficulties in accessing the relevant information from the Forest Service and as a result have had to send a complaint to the Office of the Information Commissioner. We are awaiting a reply. However, in the mean time, we have used the correspondence for the Forest Service to highlight to the European Commission to highlight cumulative impacts on Natura 2000 sites are not being adequately assessed.

Case Work

Last year we were still actively pursuing improvements in Irish forest management and regulation, responding to afforestation licences referred to us, appealing consents that are likely to damage sensitive habitats and species or degrade water quality; completing a comprehensive review of the Irish forestry licencing system; Anja continued to be active in the **Forest Policy Review Group**, as a nominated representative of the Environmental Pillar of Social Partnership.

In our role as a statutory consultee under Environmental Impact Assessment (Amendment) Regulations An Taisce is referred hundreds of private **afforestation applications** from the Forest Service each year. We responded to 150 applications in 2011 and appealed 3. Our concerns often include requesting ecological surveys to be carried out, especially in areas which support annexed habitats both within and outside of designated SACs and SPAs. We have been pushing for Appropriate Assessments under Article 6 of the Habitats Directive on afforestation applications within Natura 2000 sites for many years, and as mentioned earlier the Forest Service finally developed an Appropriate Assessment Procedure; the impacts of which we will continue to monitor and assess. In addition, we raise water quality concerns and often request increased aquatic buffers, reduced fertiliser application or a change in the species to be planted.

Other areas where we have been particularly active includes commenting on proposed developments where they are likely to impact on protected habitats and species and on water quality, including very many upland wind farm developments through 2010. There has been considerable collaboration between the An Taisce Planning, Energy and

Natural Environment departments to address the issues associated with extensive wind energy development. From an ecological point of view, our concerns often highlighted the direct conflict with the EU Habitat and Bird Directives as well as Ireland's responsibilities to conserve Biodiversity as a signatory of the Convention on Biological Diversity. Many of the wind farm applications An Taisce submitted observations on and appealed, were located in designated areas such as Special Protection Areas, Special Areas of Conservation, and (proposed) Natural Heritage Areas. In addition, An Taisce's concerns related to peat stability, peatland loss and degradation, impacts on water quality as well as disturbance and loss of habitat and prey for bird species such as the protected Hen Harrier. An Taisce continue to be referred aquaculture licences however, currently fewer applications are being referred to us and only eleven submission were made in 2011. Currently, due to legal action taken against Ireland for failure to consider nature conservation interests in protected sites, licences are not being granted. However, in 2011 An Taisce commented on two Appropriate Assessments and Fisheries Management Plan. These were for Castlemaine Harbour and Dundalk Bay. We found the surveys conducted for the Appropriate Assessments to be inadequate in both cases.

Aquaculture Licence Appeals Board

Camilla submitted her CV to Minister Coveney and has been elected onto the Aquaculture Licence Appeals Board. Very few Aquaculture licences have been approved in recent years so the Board has been inactive. However, it is predicted licences will start to be approved, and as there is a huge backlog, this may mean the Board will be extremely active and may meet as regularly as once a month.

Peatland Council

Anja Murray, along with Ian Lumley and James Nix have attended a number of peatland council meetings and made a number of submissions. The Peatlands Council met 6 times between its formation in April 2011 and April 2012 (the time of writing) and often the meetings were called at the very last moment. The Council was made up of members from the Irish Peatland Conservation Council, the Irish Farmers Association, the Irish Environmental Network, the Irish Rural Link, Bord na Móna and National Parks and Wildlife Service. An Taisce represented the Irish Environmental Network and Ian Lumley was the representative, assisted by either Anja Murray or James Nix. The Council has not been successful to date in stopping all turf cutting on 53 protected bogs. Arguably, it has stopped

cutting on some bogs. Both An Taisce and Friends of the Irish Environment took a very critical stance on advice given by the Chair of the Council, Conor Skehan, suggesting to turf-cutters that there might be some re-drawing of boundaries of the protected bogs. In reality, boundaries can only be changed on foot on natural change - and cutting is not natural change. An Taisce argued that this message was giving false hope and would lead to frustration borne of dashed expectations. This appears to have been borne out, as indicated by cutting in April. The European Commission has completely ruled out the redrawing of any site boundaries at the current time. It awaits a comprehensive submission from Ireland on how the bogs will be managed. Also, at the time of writing, it remains to be seen whether - and to what extent - any of the law-breaking which is taking place in 2012 will be tackled.

A final disappointment is the lack of progress on renewable / alternative energy. Despite the approval of the ENGO proposal in September 2011, when all council members wholeheartedly endorsed the alternative energy blueprint, there has been no apparent progress since, not even the announcement of a pilot programme.

IEN (Irish Environmental Network)

The IEN **biodiversity policy project (WEB)** which An Taisce has been a lead party in developing and managing continued throughout 2011, and continues in 2012, with delivery and communication of several policy recommendations and much progress on marine related policy research. The key aim of the WEB project is to ensure biodiversity policy integration into sectoral policies through the development of practical recommendations by Environmental Non Governmental Organisations (ENGOS) to relevant government authorities and key industry stakeholders. The project works towards the correct interpretation and implementation of EU environmental policies in Ireland, which is of great importance in order to halt the loss of biodiversity, and is an agreed ambition of the Irish government.

The project has now entered its third year, during which the focus is on delivering the policy recommendations to the policy makers at government and stakeholder level.

The WEB has produced a series of deliverables, including authoring of a detailed policy document representing the views of 10 IEN member NGOs on the environmental implications and shortcomings of the proposed CAP reforms. This document will be used as a basis for upcoming advocacy to government and other key stakeholders in meetings and submission of hard copies.

An Taisce staff, as a member of the steering committee have attending regular steering group meetings and

directed the WEB project. This has been carried out by Anja Murray, Caoimhe Muldoon and Camilla Keane over the past year. Anja also worked on the WEB Policy Briefing Papers on Forestry Policy and Biodiversity. Camilla Keane was also instrumental in delivering An Taisce's policy input to the CAP reform document and in reviewing the overall document.

Camilla has been active with the Environmental Pillar Marine Working Group, attending meetings, inputting to consultations, attending and helping to organise meetings. The knowledge of the Marine Group has also been very beneficial to An Taisce in our statutory consultee role, where we referred aquaculture licences.

Howth Walk

IEN also provided the funding for us to carry out a nature walk around Howth Head more unknown areas. This was lead by Caoimhe Muldoon and was a huge success. On the foot of the encouraging feedback, we applied through the Local Agenda 21 funding avenue for the opportunity to carry out more walks and talks. 3 information events will be carried out at Booterstown Marsh and 2 guided walks along the Boyne navigation in 2012.

Flooding: The role of wetlands for flood attenuation

The Natural Environment Office secured the funding, from The Community Foundation, to carry out a major research project on **the role of wetlands for flood attenuation** as part of catchment based flood management strategies. Due to illness and change over in jobs, this project was delayed somewhat throughout 2011. However, it was finished at the end of 2011 and launched, presented and printed in March of 2012.

Shannon CFRAMS

Camilla attended the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) Scoping Workshop held in October 2011. The workshop was the second of a two-part series of SEA Scoping Workshops for the Shannon CFRAM Study. The workshop was designed to provide an introduction to the Shannon CFRAM Study and SEA process, and to gather early inputs on the draft SEA Environmental Issues Paper from a wide range of environmental stakeholders and Local Authority representatives. The day consisted of a number of short introductory presentations followed by group discussions on each of the nine environmental topics. It was an important opportunity to raise awareness regarding a number of ecosystem and biodiversity environmental issues. As a result of the workshop the consultants carrying out the work requested a copy of the wetland and flood attenuation report we commissioned.

Hand Over

Considerable resources were spent on recruiting the new Natural Environment Officer and in preparing everything for a smooth handover of natural environment duties.

Communications about some of the key challenges and issues facing Ireland's natural environment issues is a crucial function of the Natural Environment Office. Toward this end we have pursued coverage of newsworthy stories and given more than a dozen public talks and seminars throughout the year to university and professional groupings and at public events.

An Taisce is often contacted by members of the public in relation to environmentally damaging activities and unauthorised works. We continue to offer advice and where necessary get involve in writing a submission or letter.

Properties Annual Report 2012

By John Ducie



As recession bites deeper the value and importance of An Taisce long term conservation of Ireland's heritage in our property portfolio is under lined all the more. Our role as custodians "for the benefit of all the people" means that our properties are in position to add that vital part of people's lives by providing them with a place to go and be useful to their community when the paid job is either not keeping them busy or providing them with the outlet for

their talents they desire.

We are in a prime position to provide venues for all kinds of caretaking, conservation and community activities as well as providing important experiences to help lifelong learning for individuals which can lead to improved job prospects. This is evident in our Tailors Hall property where an increasing number of interns and volunteers are being

housed as result of our long term commitment to conserve and manage the building and as a result of our successful re launch of the building as a licensed events venue.

“We are in a prime position to provide venues for all kinds of caretaking, conservation and community activities as well as providing important experiences to help lifelong learning for individuals which can lead to improved job prospects”

This is also taking place at our Howth Courthouse Property which has a central role in its community as a resource for FAS and various voluntary bodies and to an increasing extent around the country at all our sites in one way or another. Add this to the value of our properties in providing sites for tourists to visit and giving communities important assets to reinforce a sense of place and attract inward investment by doing so.

The Tailors Hall has been fitted out with a service bar and modern kitchen following the appointment of catering and alcohol service providers. A programme of redecoration and acquisition of suitable furniture and fittings is underway and the events business is showing a healthy number of bookings this year and into 2013. In late 2011 history was made when in the Great Hall a venue for marriages since 1770 and recently accustomed to civil marriages, witnessed its first Civil Partnership Ceremony when two women exchanged rings and vows in front of the Civil Registrar.

The Howth Courthouse has been fully freshly painted and continues to be full of activity of all kinds under the wise management of Rosalie Andrews

The Grove Morehampton Road D4 continues its role of explaining the importance of urban wildlife gardening and is a popular venue for walkers to visit which can be arranged for a small donation to management costs thanks to Andrew Clinch and Jimmy Kinahan.

Boooterstown Marsh Nature Reserve, Co Dublin A busy year of events took place with large numbers attending clean ups, heritage walks and bird watching sessions. These ongoing events are organised by a committed group of local volunteers from the Dunlaoghaire Association. NAMA took control of the adjoining lands at the Merrion Gates end and this now has “Sale Agreed” signs on it. We continue to follow this storey with interest as this area is in reality part of the reserve habitat and is an important buffer to the adjoining buildings at that end.

Killaha West, Co Kerry Management plans continue to

progress for this our newest acquisition with Grant Aid being promised from the Heritage Council for a habitat survey to underpin the process.

Mongan Bog, Co Offaly Researchers are studying the invertebrates including the rare funnel spiders.

The Boyne Navigation, Co Meath The restoration of the sea lock by the IWAJ Boyne Branch is almost complete and plans are under way to move up stream to restore further locks. The drawing up of a new management plan for the Bru Na Boinne WHS which includes parts of the river and navigation continues.

Browne Clayton Monument, Co Wexford Works to repair the lighting conductor ensure security and maintain the landscape is underway in conjunction with Wexford County Council who jointly owns this property with us.

Potential Acquisitions No less than seven properties are on offer to us at the moment as gifts ranging from a loaned collection of artefacts for display in Tailors Hall, to thousands of hectares of blanket bog straddling the border with Northern Ireland (on offer to the National Trusts on both sides of the border), to a medieval castle, a Rath and vernacular buildings. All these offers are subject to a rigorous assessment which examines economic viability, heritage significance, conservation needs and management costs before being recommended for acceptance by the properties committee of An Taisce. - We will want to look after them forever for everyone and we must be sure we can do so **before acquiring them.**

International John Ducie continues to represent An Taisce on the Executive Committee of the International National Trusts Organisation. In that capacity he attended the 14th ICNT in Victoria British Columbia where he presented a paper, chaired a session and signed the Victoria Declaration on Cultural Heritage and Climate Change on behalf of An Taisce. The INTO Reciprocal Rights Program of which John is on the committee continues to grow with 60 countries around the world becoming members of INTO and potentially participating. John has also been nominated for election to the Council of Europa Nostra for election in June in Lisbon to replace Consuela O’Connor who stood down after 30 years representing An Taisce on the council. In 2011 Consuela was made an Hon Life Member of An Taisce in recognition of her long service and contributions to the conservation of cultural and natural heritage.

A heartfelt thank you to all those who give up your free time to work on An Taisce properties around the country or donate money or resources, without your help nothing could happen.



The Monuments and Antiquities Report

By Dr Mark Clinton



The outcome of the An Bord Pleanála hearing on the proposed Slane By-Pass was very satisfactory from the Monuments and Antiquities Committee's point of view. The protection of the World Heritage Site of Brú na Bóinne is in every citizen's interest not least the people of Slane. The banning of all HGVs from the village (facilitated by an agreeable tolling arrangement on the M1) would address the very real safety concerns of the local population. That resolution would also enable an eventual expansion westwards of the World Heritage Site to logically (both historically and archaeologically) include the related Hill of Slane.

The positive outcome of the court case in County Kerry regarding the destruction of a late 1st Millennium A.D. ringfort at Clashmealon, Causeway established a useful precedence. We have been in constant communication with the Commissioner's Office of An Garda Síochána regarding the alleged destruction of two ringforts in one day by the one individual at Knockacareigh, Kilmurphy in County Cork. The official responses from the Commissioner's office have made it clear that the relevant file has now been sitting on the desk of the DPP since early 2011. This is a totally unjustifiable delay. Hopefully in the wake of the successful resolution of the court case in County Kerry matters will now be expedited. An updated response from An Garda Síochána is awaited.

The ongoing watching brief on the Bremore – Gormanston Passage Tomb Complex on the North Dublin/Meath border (see <http://www.antaisce.org/builtenvironment/Appeals/HighlightedAppeals/BremorePort.aspx>), initiated in the autumn of 2009, has been actively maintained. An alarming recent development was the beneath-the-radar decision to contract the area of SPA N°4158 in Gormanston, County Meath. The original SPA had serendipitously afforded some protection to the coastal area of the Prehistoric landscape containing the surviving Gormanston tombs. In response to a recent Dáil PQ (N°139) kindly placed by Ms. Maureen O'Sullivan T.D, the Minister of Arts and Heritage, Mr. Jimmy Deenihan T.D. replied that the reduction of the SPA was in response to an appeal by (as yet) unidentified individuals. Efforts to gain further clarity are ongoing. The construction of a Government facilitated/Chinese funded commercial port on the Prehistoric landscape at Bremore-Gormanston is beginning to appear to be the end-game. A proposed development in the midlands may not be unconnected.

Rumoured reports of a forthcoming upgrade of the N5 in the vicinity of Tulsk in Co. Roscommon would have serious implications for Rathcroghan (Cruachain), the diffused royal site of the Kings of Connacht. This complex of sites is of major historical and archaeological importance, nationally and internationally. Its cultural integrity must be safeguarded.



Supporting education and educators

By Patricia Oliver

An Taisce Environmental Education Unit



All of the programmes of An Taisce's Environmental Education Unit (EEU) are about Education in one form or another. Some are about working directly with schools and we have been very aware during the past year of the stresses on teachers and school principals as budget cuts bite harder. Our reaction has been to realise more than ever the huge debt we owe to Irish teachers who have made the Green Schools programme the phenomenal success it is and to focus all of our efforts to support them in every way we can.

Like all other voluntary organisations we have felt the cold winds of recession and slashed budgets but this has only made us leaner and more focused. It has reinforced our belief in the world class programmes we offer and this has been mirrored in the continued support of our funders and sponsors. Despite the really difficult economic conditions in 2011, all of our programmes continued to grow and to achieve formidable targets.

All staff worked hard in 2011 to deliver outstanding results and I would like to take this opportunity to thank my Assistant Dr. Michael-John O'Mahony, our Business Manager Dawn Parkinson and all 53 Education Unit staff for their outstanding work. They are all professionals in the very best sense. This is a view shared by the members of the Education Committee: Margaret Sweeney, Vice Chairperson, Norman Campion, Kathleen Vandenberghe, Valerie Bond, Eileen Collins, Charles Stanley Smith and Alison Carter under the Chairmanship of Bernard Ryan. Their support throughout the year was invaluable.

Our Partners

The Environmental Education Unit operated 8 international and national programmes in 2011 in partnership with a number of Government Departments & Agencies (Department of Transport, Department of Environment, Community & Local Government, Environmental Protection Agency, National Transport Authority, funding agencies and development companies (South & East Cork Area Development), commercial sponsors (Repak, ESBIE Electric Ireland, Coca-Cola Bottlers Ireland, The Wrigley Company) and Local Authorities with additional support for National Spring Clean from Killeen Household Products and Alupro

Ireland (who funded the "Love Where you Live" photography competition.

National Spring Clean (www.nationalspringclean.org)

Over 530,000 volunteers took part in over 5,439 events in National Spring Clean throughout the month of April in 2011, the highest number ever. The campaign was launched by Minister for the Environment, Community & Local Government Phil Hogan T.D. and the campaign slogan was "Working Together – For the Community". Volunteers joined National Spring Clean staff in manning the phones during March and April but the big change was the number of people who registered online, a total of 29% of all registrations. The campaign generated huge publicity nationwide. National Spring Clean just keeps on growing.

Green-Schools & Green-Schools Travel (www.greenschoolsireland.org)

The Green-Schools phenomenon continues for its 15th year. There were 3600 schools participating in the programme by the end of 2011 with over 2000 having been awarded the Green Flag. The pilot on the theme of Biodiversity was a great success and was then rolled out nationally to 200 schools. The current themes include Litter & Waste, Energy, Water, Travel and Biodiversity. Two further themes Climate Change and Global Citizenship are currently in pilot.

Over 840 schools are now participating in Green-Schools Travel. In the year under review Green-Schools Travel Officers undertook 2116 visits to schools; the number of children walking or cycling to school increased by 10% and an enthusiastic 32,876 students took part in "National Walk on Wednesday", which was 12,876 more than the target. The net result of all this work is double digit growth in sustainable travel modes to school (walking, cycling,) with a high uptake in park & stride.

Green Campus & Eco-Centres (www.greencampuisireland.org)

This is one of the fastest growing programmes within the

education unit since UCC won the first Green Campus Flag in 2010. On 11th April 2011 An Taoiseach Enda Kenny TD raised the Green Flag at GMIT Castlebar. This was the first Institute of Technology to be awarded a Green Flag. The programme demands a huge commitment to achieve Green Flag status. A further 11 third levels are currently in the process and include: Waterford IT; Trinity College Dublin; Sligo IT; University of Limerick; Dundalk IT; the Garda Training College, Templemore; Liberties College, Dublin; St. Patrick's Training College, Drumcondra; NUI Galway; Senior College, Dun Laoghaire; GMIT Letterfrack. The Green Flag has also been adapted for eco-centres. The first centre to be awarded the flag was the Lifetime Lab, Cork in 2010. Other centres on the way towards the flag include Fota Wildlife Park; Gurtbrack Organic Centre, Kerry; Delphi Adventure Centre, Mayo and Tanagh Outdoor Education Centre, Monaghan.

Blue Flag & Clean Coasts Programme (www.beachawards.ie; www.cleancoastproject.org)

The international Blue Flag continues to be one of the most recognised eco-labels in the world with 80 Irish beaches and 2 marinas awarded in 2011 at a ceremony at Curracloe in Co. Wexford by Minister Phil Hogan T.D.

The Clean Coasts programme continues to grow with 58 Green Coast Awards and over 200 Coastcare Groups in 2011. June saw the second year of the Clean Coasts Week with a highlight being the even more successful Clean Coast Photography Competition with a staggering 1000 entries of a high standard. The theme was "I Love My Coast" and the winning photographs went on exhibition in the Irish Times building in Dublin and then travelled around the country. The exhibition was also on show in the arrivals area of Dublin airport during summer 2011.

Green-Home (www.greenhome.ie)

A new development in the Green Home programme in 2011 was the registration of 91 tidy Towns groups. These joined the 10,000 households already participating in the programme which is funded by the Environmental Protection Agency and facilitates and acknowledges sustainable behaviour in the home. The programme can be hubbed through schools or community groups or free to air through the Green home website. In 2011 the programme was identified as a preferred action under the criteria of Waste Minimisation in the Tidy Towns Competition. This rewards Tidy Towns Groups that successfully promote the Green Home programme within their community. Emly Tidy Towns in Tipperary successfully piloted this aspect of the programme in 2010.

Green Communities (www.greencommunitiesproject.org)

The Green Communities Programme funded by a grant from the European Regional Development Fund Interreg 4A Ireland Wales Programme and operated jointly by the An Taisce in Ireland and Keep Wales Tidy. This Interreg funding ended in September 2011. Because of its success, however, the Environmental Education Unit plans to continue and develop it. The programme works with volunteer community groups in Ireland to actively enhance local biodiversity while also minimising the carbon footprint of group activities. There were 85 groups working on the programme in 2011 in Ireland, undertaking actions such as dealing with invasive species, biodiversity enhancement, training, community gardening and Coastcare.

Greening Communities

In essence the Irish Greening Communities programme aims are twofold; firstly enhance coordination and collaboration between the public, private, non-governmental and voluntary sector organisations in the area of environmental sustainability in Ireland; and secondly provide support and help to empower individuals, communities, businesses and institutions to adopt more environmentally sustainable habits and behaviours, in the most economically efficient manner possible. In short a synchronous top-down, bottom up approach.

In 2011 a number of Demonstration Projects were organised. The pilots were (1) Wexford Opera Festival – looking at ways to green such an event and engage the wider community in the process (2) Docklands, Dublin – looking at ways to green a large scale business administration hub (3) Frenchpark, Co. Roscommon – getting best practice and lessons learnt from an already green community (4) Communo-Gardening in Co. Wicklow – developing a model for better systems of community gardening. Greening Communities is funded by the Environmental Protection Agency and is co-ordinated by An Taisce in partnership with the EPA, and the Department of Environment, Community & Local Government.

Further Information is available on the programmes websites as well as Facebook, Twitter and Flickr.

South County Dublin Association

By David Rowe

The 29th AGM was held on 8th November 2011. Dr Sylvia Dockeray had succeeded Maire MhicGiobúin as chair the previous January. Maire had served the association well, in that capacity, for the previous three years. It was followed by a talk on "Why we should Pay for Water", by Professor Frank Convery, Senior Fellow UCD Earth Institute, and past National Chairperson of An Taisce.

Our Membership service organised by Eileen Collins held four evenings of illustrated talks, spaced monthly, with attendance ranging from 30 to 60. A winter concert was held in St Enda's Museum, Rathfarnham, with outstanding vocal contributions from James Nelson and Anna Brady. Outings included an April visit to Kilmacurragh Arboretum, Co Wicklow; and a May visit to Carlingford historical village, and Monasterboice. A garden party was held in the Dower House, Rossanagh, near Ashford, home of Patricia Butler, book author on artistic matters. Two newsletters were issued to members.

As everywhere, planning activity was minimal.

Nevertheless the planning committee dealt with the following:

Sent to us for comment as a prescribed body	87
Further files considered	58
Objections or comments lodged	91
Appeals or observations on appeals	19

Following up what the committee regarded as weaknesses in planning enforcement took a great deal of time and discussion. "Sketches in South Dublin". The Association sponsored David Rowe's book of this name, to the extent of €1,000, as an An Taisce publication. (This venture yielded a return of €1,385.70 in the subsequent account year).

"What's in a Name" Exhibition. The Environmental Committee concentrated on the production of some 30 beautifully designed panels, illustrating local place names. The exhibition opened in Dean's Grange Library in November, and subsequently went on shop window display in the Stillorgan Shopping Centre.

Kilkenny Local Association

By Declan Murphy

Kilkenny Local Association has a relatively small membership but fortunately a very enthusiastic committee. We have developed a strong presence on various local authority bodies including the Kilkenny Heritage Forum, Leader, and the County Development Board (as Environmental Pillar representatives). We have excellent links and cross membership with other local heritage organisations including Kilkenny Archaeological Society and Birdwatch. Nevertheless we find ourselves opposed to a number of on-going developments by the local authority, especially the very controversial Central Access Scheme which has finally received the necessary permission from An Bord Pleanála.

There are many positive developments also. The restoration of part of the medieval city walls and Talbots Tower is almost completed and will be opened to the public this year. The purchase by the county council of the 13th century St. Mary's Church and graveyard in the heart of Kilkenny city has huge possibilities, and a distinguished architectural and urban design firm has been commissioned to produce a design plan for its use as a museum. The restoration of the magnificent 18/19th century grounds

and gardens at Woodstock near Inistiogue that began in 1999 has now been completed.

We try to make constructive observations to development proposals, an example of which was revised plans for the location and design for wheelchair and disability access at Duiske Abbey (a national monument) from a damaging proposal at the front entrance to a much more restrained but more appropriate solution at an alternative side entrance.

Two of our most influential members passed away during the year. Melosina Lenox Conyngham was our treasurer, a well-known author, essayist, enthusiast and critic. Emma Devine was an archaeologist who in her short professional career in Kilkenny left a legacy that will last as long as Kilkenny. Her death in her mid 30s was a profound loss to all of us, and we grieved with her husband Cólín Ó Drisceoil and their toddler daughter Bea.

Within the past year there was an enormously important development in the city - the announcement by Diageo to vacate its huge site around the 13th century St. Francis Abbey. Together with the demise of the company behind

the proposed CityMart site (opposite Diageo on the other side of the river) a wonderful opportunity presents itself to harness all the talents at a meeting of all stakeholders - especially the citizens of Kilkenny - in fresh thinking about the possibilities. The combined area of 30 acres represents about one-third of the urban area. Mayor David Fitzgerald

has similar thoughts, and we plan to hold a major public symposium in May. It could be the beginning of something very special and we in An Taisce will not be shy about demanding excellence in the planning, cultural and environmental proposals for the space.

The Clare Association of An Taisce

By Anny Wise

This year has been a quiet year and even our Annual Bat meeting was not so well attended as before because of a publicity misinformation by the local paper. We are working more often on e-mail which includes people in Clare writing the reports and sending them through to me before they go to the planning office, The volume of referrals has declined even by last years rate, but we have had a few larger and more complicated applications such as Ennis

Flood Risk Protection schemes, one of which saw us attend an Oral Hearing by An Bord Pleanala and the revised Local Area and County Plans due to including the "Habitat Directive" aspects and the Regional Housing Strategy which was formulated by County and City Limerick as well as Clare because the Regional Plan population figures were based on pre-recession information. We are due to have our AGM on Wednesday 9th May and start a new year.

Wexford Local Association Report

By Tim Ryan

The Wexford Branch Committee has continued to meet regularly every month and to run through a list of activities which this last year has been dominated by the Community action against the NRA's M11 routing to which Wexford An Taisce has provided no less than four of its Committee members who have been heavily involved in the local committees and in providing informed opinion with regard to the deleterious effects the routings would have. The outcome has been an indefinite delay on the project.

We have been lucky in having one of our Committee members, Brian Rickwood, elected to the Main An Taisce Committee at Head Office and he has been able to give us first hand reports of the state of the organisation and the prospects while at the same time providing experienced opinion to try to help in the current situation. He has been encouraged by some of the turns of events but regrets (as we all do) the downsizing and, since he also performs

duties for An Taisce locally, is clearly putting a lot of effort into the organisation.

Our local duties have included making observations on a series of Planning Issues which range from quarries to massive "holiday / golf resort" plans from a developer who has been knocked back twice already and the last time by Bord Pleanala, to resisting (successfully and using our own funds) an inappropriate house in a protected coastal area, to preventing the virtual destruction of the rebuilt (1772) Trinity Hospital first endowed in 1630 (Application withdrawn and totally revised), to attending and speaking at the Oral Hearing on pipeline routes for Bord Gais that we regard as irresponsible and badly thought out, to commenting on Biodiversity Plans and whenever possible organising outings : this last year to Woodville House and garden where we were shown around on a lovely sunny day by the owner and with a trip coming up in May to Inistioge and Woodstock.



Kerry Association of An Taisce

By Catherine McMullin

We are represented on a number of Committees, including the Economic Planning and Development SPC of Kerry County Council, the Lough Leane Working Group and Killarney National Park Liaison Committee. These are all very informative and give us an opportunity to put forward An Taisce's views.

Despite the reduction in planning applications, our workload remains high. Renewable energy projects, mainly wind farms, are time consuming to assess. Local authority projects, such as roads and effluent treatment plants, are also referred to us for comment.

All the town and county development plans were revised

recently to include a 'core strategy', designed to prevent over-zoning in the future. We have made a submission to the Dingle local area plan, which is under review at present. Gorse fires are a major problem at this time of year and are causing immense damage to habitats and wildlife.

We are glad to see the Emergency Services are now training farmers how to burn scrub safely and to keep fires under control.

We hold our meetings at 8.00 pm on the first Thursday of the month at Maeve O'Donnell's house, 16 Denny St., Tralee. All members are welcome to attend.

Donegal Association

By May McIntock

The Donegal Association continues to be active locally, with representatives sitting on a number of committees.

These include Una Cronin who is a Pillar representative on the County development board, Noel Foley holds a role of PRO representative on the Green Economy forum, while the Association is also represented on the Environmental Pillar Donegal heritage network.

This year has seen the expansion of the Butterfly Garden in Letterkenny with the addition of a bug hotel, the

Association remains highly involved with the Green Schools programme and has had a strong influence in the creation of allotments in Letterkenny. Work has also taken place on our property on Rough Island Mulroy Bay with the clearing of the property and scattering of conifer seeds.

As always our Craft Fair in November and Calendar sales were successful and remain vital to the association.

Our AGM will take place on 8th May.

Dun Laoghaire Association

By Mairead Mehigan

The Dun Laoghaire Association is very fortunate to have a very active group of committed members who diligently work away in various committees to ensure the key objectives and principle of An Taisce are effectively incorporated into local decision making in relation to natural & built heritage, environment and sustainable

planning and development.

Each of these committees liaises closely with the main Dun Laoghaire Association Committee.

I attach a brief note on the work of each of the three committees remit in recent times.

Planning Committee

- Monitoring weekly planning applications.
- Continue to focus in detail on planning proposal effecting Protected Structures and making submission / representations as appropriate.
- Actively pursuing property owners and the council in a number of Protected Structures under treat.
- Monitoring Dun Laoghaire and Blackrock- Draft Local Area Plans
- Seeking greater protection and definition of the Curtilage of all Protected Structures within the Cherrywood Strategic Development Zone (Draft Planning Scheme 2012)
- Keep in contact with Dun Laoghaire Harbour Company in relation to its rich marine and built heritage. Made a detailed submission against Providence exploration proposals next to Dalkey Island.
- Plan to prepare a special report for submission to Dun Laoghaire Rathdown County Council in June 2012, concerning the growing number of derelict sites across the County.

Trees, Events & Environment Committee

- Plan and organise events for the local association.
- Promote Environment issues and tree planting initiatives.
- Actively promote heritage week.
- Promote and work closely with Booterstown Marsh Advisory Committee on information events and Clean-Ups.
- Organised a special tree planting event to mark National Tree Week 2012 at the Scouting Irelands National Camp Site , Larch Hill, Tibbradden in memory of Mr. L the late husband of Mrs. Avril Larmour
- Organised a talk by Dr. Conor Lucy, architectural historian, on the work of the renowned stuccodore Michael Stapleton.
- Organising Open Days for visits to special places of interest for members and associates, i.e. House and Gardens.

Booterstown Management Advisory Committee

- Safeguard the complex eco-system at the Marsh.
- Ensure that the Natura site is protected.
- Oversee and advise the Association about the Marsh & Wildlife Reserve.
- Actively pursued a campaign for both Dublin City Council and Dun Laoghaire Rathdown County Council to acquire the Ashcastle site next to the Marsh in order the inappropriate development would not commence on the site to the detriment of the Marsh and Nature Reserve.
- Liaise closely with Dun Laoghaire Rathdown council on issues affecting the Marsh.
- Works closely with other interested groups on promoting the Marsh.
- Promoting the wildlife, flora and fauna of the Marsh and Wildlife Sanctuary.

The work of these committees could not have taken place without the enormous effort and commitment of our dedicated committee members, despite many setbacks they continue to believe and promote the principles of An Taisce; we owe them all very big thanks.

In conclusion, it would be remiss of me not to mention two challenges facing us locally, in Dun Laoghaire. I am sure both are relevant across the country too.

Derelict sites – We remain concerned about the growing number of abandoned and derelict sites as a result of the property crash and current economic downturn in the economy. Where these sites are under the control of NAMA we would ask that a social dividend to locally communities is pursued.

Trees – Sadly we witness the destruction and removal of many fine trees within the Curtilage of Moran Park, Dun Laoghaire during National Tree Week! Despite outcries from the public and An Taisce members, Dun Laoghaire Rathdown County Council refuse to relent. The protection of trees and gardens within the Curtilage of Protected Structures needs to be one of our top priorities over the coming years.

Membership

Finally, I would encourage all members to promote the work and membership of An Taisce amongst your friends and neighbors. As advocates for a better environment we need the support of local communities and active citizens. Please join us in this important work, you'll make some good friend along the way too.

OFFICERS OF THE COUNCIL

*** PRESIDENT**

Prof John Sweeney
Éanna Ní Lamhna (immediate past-president)

*** CHAIRS**

Charles Stanley Smith (resigned December 2011)
Atracta Uí Bhroin (Acting Chair, December 2011 - February 2012)
John Harnett (from February 2012)

*** VICE CHAIRS**

Atracta Uí Bhroin

*** SECRETARIES**

James Nix (resigned)
James Leahy (from April 2012)

*** TREASURERS**

Darren Connolly (resigned)
Henry O'Reilly (from April 2012)

LOCAL ASSOCIATION DELEGATES

Alan Price	Carlow
Anny Wise	Clare
Kevin Hurley	Cork
Ann McGowan	Donegal North West
Maire Mhic Giobuin	Dublin South County
Mairead Mehigan	Dun Laoghaire
Derrick Hambleton	Galway
Catherine McMullin	Kerry
Ann Gibbons	Kilkenny
Beryl Kinsella	Meath
Alan Moran	Sligo, Leitrim, Roscommon
Mide Gerrard	Tipperary North
Peter Hennessy	Tipperary South
George Kavanagh	Waterford
John Harnett	Westmeath
Brian Rickwood	Wexford

NATIONALLY ELECTED MEMBERS

Justin Byrne (elected 2011)
Mark Clinton (elected 2010)
Eileen Collins (elected 2010)
Eric Conroy (elected 2010)
Frank Corcoran (elected 2011)
Gerry Crilly (elected 2010)
Gavin Daly (elected 2011)
Richard Darby (elected 2011, resigned)
Bernard Goggin (elected 2010)
James Leahy (elected 2011)
Declan Murphy (elected 2010)
James Nix (elected 2011)
Judy Osborne (elected 2011)
Jack O'Sullivan (elected 2010)
Bernard Ryan (elected 2010)
Charles Stanley-Smith (elected 2010)
Kathleen van den Berghe (elected 2010)
Jeff Young (elected 2009, resigned)

CO-OPTED MEMBERS

Atracta Uí Bhrion
Anna O'Malley Dunlop (resigned)
John Corcoran
Eamonn Moore
Darren Connolly (resigned)
Garry Mannering (resigned)

BOARD OF MANAGEMENT 2011/12

Chairs

Charles Stanley Smith, Atracta Uí Bhroin (Acting Chair),
John Harnett

Vice Chairs

Atracta Uí Bhrion

Hon. Secretaries

James Nix and James Leahy

Hon. Treasurers

Darren Connolly and Henry O'Reilly

Natural Environment Committee Chair

Declan Murphy

Properties Committee Chair

Mairead Mehigan

Education Unit Committee Chair

Bernard Ryan (resigned)
Charles Stanley-Smith

Communications Committee Chair

Charles Stanley Smith

Administration Committee Chair

James Leahy

Strategy

Brain Rickwood

NON-BOARD SUB-COMMITTEES

Heritage Gardens and Landscapes Subcommittee

John Ducie

Sites and Monuments Subcommittee

Dr. Mark Clinton

REPRESENTATIVES ON NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEES

EPA Advisory Committee on GMO Regulations

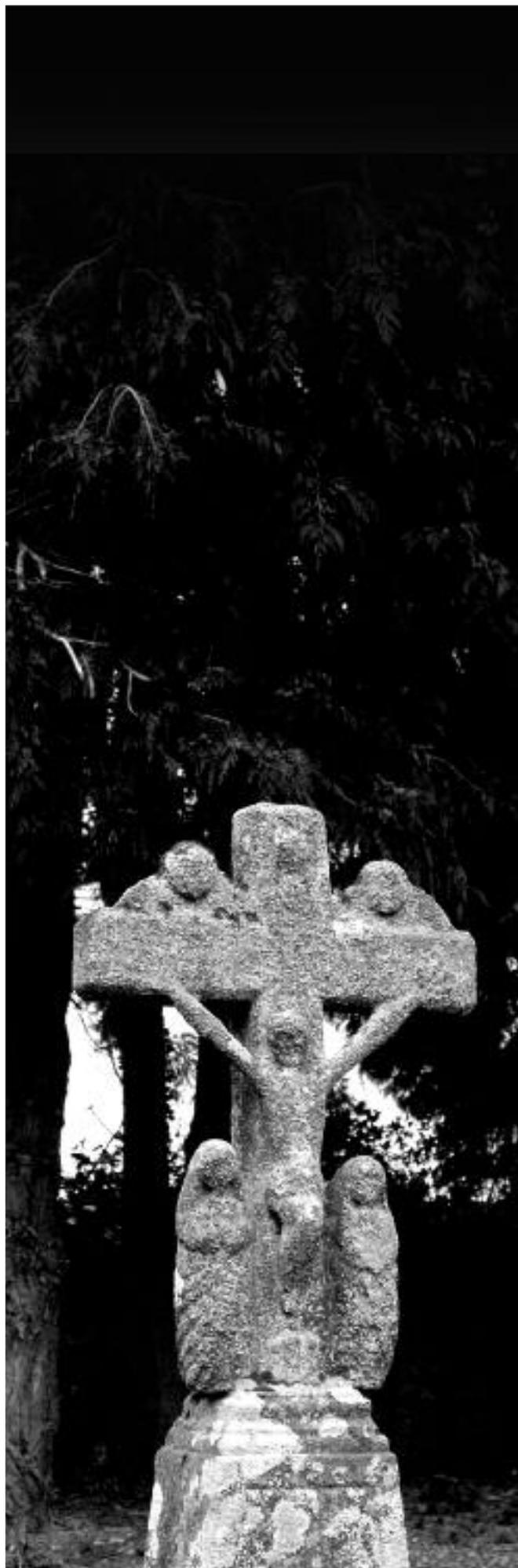
Eanna Ni Lamhna

European Environmental Bureau

Frank Corcoran

EENHO

John Ducie



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