THE NATIONAL TRUST FOR IRELAND

ANNUAL REPORT 2006/2007



Words from the President

Environmental issues have certainly come to the fore in the last twelve months. Together with health it shares the top spot in this year's election campaign. Ordinary people are at last beginning to realise how important a clean safe environment is to them and how easily it can be lost. The 2007 water crisis in Galway city has been a wake-up call. It seems that being concerned about fish and water plant species is all very well but once there is the possibility that unsustainable practices could affect our own health then at last the message begins to strike home. Why does it always take a crisis for the message to get through?

Over the past year I have been continuing in my role as President which I see as one of promoting the image and work of our organisation. Each month over the past year I have addressed audiences on environmental issues and no matter what the occasion is I always ensure that "President of An Taisce" is among the mentions given as I am introduced. A brief synopsis of my diary for the past twelve months is as follows:

In June I visited eight primary schools to talk about the environment to the pupils. I spoke to the public at two Garden Shows and at an environmental prize-giving for Meath County Council. July saw two weeks of talking to primary school teachers on their annual summer education courses. There was also the Lanesboro Summer School and public environmental walks in counties Tipperary, Cork, Wicklow, Galway and St. Stephen's Green in Dublin. No let up in August - appearances at Farmleigh and The Royal Hospital in Dublin and summer schools in Kerry, Toormakeedy, together with another week of primary school teachers at the end of the month. An interesting gig in August was the invitation in my capacity as President to be part of the judging team in the Louth County Council's New Buildings award scheme.

September saw me judging Golden Miles in Meath and in Tipperary and giving two after-dinner speeches to hill walkers and golfers no less. The autumn continued in much the same vein, with openings of book festivals in Meath and Mayo, tree day events, Biodiversity occasions in Dublin and Limerick. I attended the Ellison Awards with our Meath branch and was the guest Speaker at Birdwatch Ireland's Christmas do. Visits to schools continued apace - both to talk to the pupils and teachers and on some occasions to raise their Green Flag. I even visited Arbour Hill Prison with the environmental message!

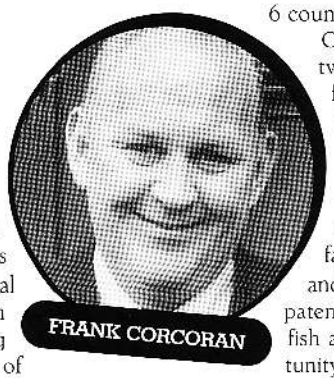
> "As an organisation we should now capitalise on the current upsurge of interest in environmental issues and recruit more members to the organisation."

There was some exposure too on the national media. The Farmer's Journal, the Farming Independent and the Irish Examiner all carried material on the work of An Taisce. The weekly radio programme continues where I keep the flag flying for the environment and recently I appeared as a guest on the Late Late Show where I was able to outline the dangers and hazards to our environmental quality caused by the lack of attention (to say the least) that is paid to the disposal of organic wastes. There certainly is a political dimension to all this - the attitude of the government to environmental issues has been in no small measure responsible for the present state of affairs and I took the opportunity to point this out.

As an organisation we should now capitalise on the current upsurge of interest in environmental issues and recruit more members to the organisation. If I hear one more time that An Taisce is some sort of Government organisation I'll.....! We need to get the message out that we are a membership, non-governmental organisation and our strength is in our widespread representation. Nil neart go cur le céile.

The Chairman's Report

By Frank Corcoran, Chairman.


FRANK CORCORAN

Each year brings new challenges for An Taisce. Because of the increased volume of development applications and the increased complexity of individual applications, the demands placed on an organisation like An Taisce are increasing steadily. We can only make effective use of the information sent to us in our prescribed role if we have the engagement of local communities in assessing the impacts. It is therefore incumbent upon us to make a special effort to reach out to local communities in order to explain to them what An Taisce does and invite them to participate in decision-making in relation to the future development of their locality. To this end we have embarked upon a Participate campaign pilot. Hopefully, if it is successful we will be in a position to roll it out across the country. We are sending a notice to each household inviting them to a public meeting in their locality where we will explain the new tools available to them in order to access information and participate in decision-making. If we get a good response we will be in a position to employ a Local Association Director who will support local communities in setting up a Local Association and strengthening existing Associations to more effectively protect their local environment and participate in the shape that developments will take. This will work more effectively with the support of our existing members. I propose to send members a Chairman's Appeal to support the Participate Campaign in any way you can and would hope that you will respond positively.

An Taisce continues to have the highest participation rate in the world in the Green Schools Programme. Currently two-thirds of all schools in Ireland, primary and secondary are involved.

Likewise the participation rate in the National Spring Clean is increasing each year. This year has been to most successful ever with over 300,000 people involved.

In 2006, An Taisce decided to support the GM-free Ireland campaign to prevent the release into the open environment of patented genetically modified seeds and crops. In April 2006, we helped mobilise 96 out of 97 submissions to the EPA opposing a proposed experiment by the world's largest chemicals company, to release 450,000 GMO potatoes in Co. Meath. As a result of the stringent conditions of the EPA consent the company has not proceeded with the release either last year or this year.

Since then, Counties Meath, Kildare, Roscommon and Westmeath - together with Bantry, Galway City, Letterkenny and Bray - declared themselves GMO-free zones, bringing the number of local authorities which prohibit the release of GM crops to 9 counties, one district and 9 town councils whose elected representatives represent over 1 million citizens. Local GM-free zone campaigns are currently underway in Counties Donegal, Galway, Longford, Mayo, and Wicklow. The Northern Ireland Assembly's new Minister Designate for Agriculture is expected to declare the 6 counties as a GMO-free zone later this year.

Our June 2006 AGM at Kilkenny Castle featured the two-day Green Ireland Conference on branding for food, farming and eco-tourism, with leading experts on GM food and farming. Delegates from America, Asia and Europe attending the event gave a strong warning that Ireland's world famous clean green image - which provides a competitive advantage for our food, farm, and tourism industries - will soon be lost if the Government fails to resist pressure from the World Trade Organisation and the European Commission to force the release of patented genetically modified animal feed, seeds, crops, trees, fish and livestock here. The conference provided an opportunity for policy makers and stakeholders to meet with key international experts to explore our democratic participation, legal rights and responsibilities for the future of food and farming - and Ireland's brand recognition in a globalising world. "The Future of Food" documentary by Deborah Koons Garcia, who spoke at the conference, was later shown at local community meetings around the country and broadcast by RTE, leading to increased media coverage.

We are now working with the Irish Cattle and Sheep-farmers Association (ICSA) and the Irish Creamery and Milk Suppliers Association (ICMSA) to help farmers and food exporters retain access to leading EU retail outlets which prohibit meat, poultry and dairy produce from Irish animals fed on imported GM soya and GM maize. The Irish Organic Farmers and Growers Association (IOFGA) has taken a leading role to inform consumers about the issue through farmers markets around the country. We are also working with the Restaurants Association of Ireland (RAI) to engage its 500 members to secure a 100% GM-free food chain.

At the EU level, our extensive lobbying of MEPs helped defeat a pro-GMO Biotech Resolution in European Parliament and a new EC Regulation that would have allowed routine unlabelled GMO contamination of organic food.

We hope to be in a position to publish the outcomes of our Green Ireland Conference shortly.

At this year's AGM in University College, Galway on 23rd June the afternoon session will be a conference open to the public. The theme will be Water Quality. We hope our speakers will be able to give some practical advice to local communities on protecting their local water quality. As citizens, we not only have a right to a healthy environment but a duty to protect it.

> It is therefore incumbent upon us to make a special effort to reach out to local communities in order to explain to them what An Taisce does and invite them to participate in decision-making in relation to the future development of their locality.

Secretary's Report

By Kevin Duff


KEVIN DUFF

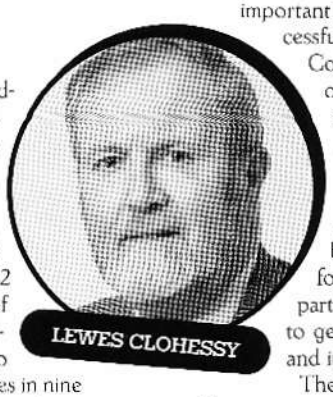
The Board has met more than once a month throughout the year, and occasionally extra meetings were held throughout the year in order to work on the Participate Campaign. We are still seeking somebody with fundraising expertise in particular and administrative expertise to take part in the Board.

The Legacy Programme brochures are now printed and will be distributed by the Chair to solicitors after presentations on the work of An Taisce and also to the public through the Participate Campaign.

Pat Oliver and the Education Unit continue to consolidate their success with the An Taisce projects - Green Schools, National Spring Clean, and a range of exciting new projects which are detailed in the Education Unit Director's report.

Report on An Taisce Properties

by Lewes Clohessy, Chair of the Property Management Committee


LEWES CLOHESSY

Because our organisation tends to create headlines for reasons unconnected with its property holdings, the Irish public will have little awareness that, as the National Trust for Ireland, we hold in trust a not insignificant portfolio of lands, waters and buildings. I am indebted to John Ducie, my predecessor as Property Management Chairperson, for summarising our holdings as "6,872 acres of nature reserves, along with 3,648 acres of navigation, seventeen acres of coastline and forty-three historic structures, including parts of two national parks and two proposed world heritage sites in nine counties". Incidentally, the historic structures comprise nineteen canal locks, eleven lock keeper's cottages, nine bridges, one castle, one guildhall, one market house and one courthouse.

Such a portfolio is, nonetheless, modest by the standards of the national trusts in our neighbour countries. In spite of this, An Taisce punches above its weight and is widely respected in international heritage circles as a genuine and active national trust. Indeed, the tireless work carried out by John Ducie and David Owen of An Taisce in helping to develop the European Network of National Heritage Organisations (ENNHO), which held its very successful 2006 gathering in Dublin, has now been recognised by John's elevation to the current Presidency of ENNHO.

> "In spite of its modest property portfolio, An Taisce punches above its weight and is widely respected in international heritage circles as a genuine and active national trust."

The international achievements of our members in relation to heritage properties emphasise how effective our property management could be if An Taisce had additional resources to apply to the care and development of its own portfolio. In particular, the appointment of a professional Property Manager would, in my view, transform our organisation's approach to the active management of its holdings.

The departure of An Taisce's Director, Gavin Harte, who partly filled the role of Property Manager by acting as a highly effective convenor of the Property Management Committee, has left the management of An Taisce properties in the hands of voluntary members. While major assistance has been provided to the Committee by Anja Murray and Ian Lumley in relation to particular properties, these staff members have priorities and heavy work loads in their own functional areas. Our current lack of a professional property specialist is particularly regrettable at a time when a new organisation, the Irish Heritage Trust, has been formed to undertake the ownership and management of heritage properties. Significantly, the first action of the new organisation, even before a single property was acquired, was to appoint a professional manager.

It is crucial that initiatives in property management within An Taisce, which had flourished during Gavin's period of office, should not be allowed to lapse. With the best will in the world, it is not always possible for a group of volunteers, geographically spread, to provide the level and quality of management which most of our properties require. Some local associations of An Taisce have an excellent record of providing massive voluntary inputs into property management and others can certainly monitor and supervise properties in their areas but, without central professional control, standards of supervision will inevitably be variable and are likely to decline over time.

Major and immediate challenges lie ahead for some of our key properties. For example, the Meath County Manager has recently announced that a €30 million development programme is being considered for the Boyne Canal. As owners of the navigation, An Taisce has clearly a major role to play in continuing and expanding its partnership with the Council, the Inland Waterways Assocation of Ireland and other interested parties to secure the full and appropriate conservation of this important part of our heritage. In regard to another important property, Booterstown Marsh Nature Reserve, important linkages are being developed, following a highly successful public forum, with Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council and a local action group, the Friends of Booterstown, to ensure the continuing management of the property in accordance with the highest standards of nature conservation.

The management of our headquarters, Tailors' Hall, presents a unique challenge. This "landmark" property has a dual status: on the one hand, the building provides administrative space and facilities for An Taisce itself; on the other, the building is a key part of An Taisce's conservation brief, with the potential to generate income to cover the upkeep of the building and its curtilage.

The recent resolution of the Council of An Taisce that all revenue generated from the letting of Tailors' Hall, in the first instance, is to be "ring-fenced" for application to the upkeep of the Hall will undoubtedly be helpful to the conservation objective. It is acknowledged that the hiring of the Hall to outside parties is carried out by the administrative staff and that a degree of supervision is provided by the staff when events are held in the building. It is therefore appropriate that a portion of the revenue earned from lettings should be applied to the costs of administration and supervision. The balance must, however, be retained for the conservation of the Hall, in accordance with the wishes of Council.

In my view, the conservation of the Hall cannot be put on a secure footing until a professional member of staff has been appointed as Properties Officer. The use of part of the "ring-fenced" funds to pay for this Officer would be appropriate, as the person appointed would have major responsibility for safeguarding the fabric of Tailors' Hall, for marketing the Hall as a venue for events appropriate to its heritage status and for overall control of its use by outside hirers. On a longer term basis, the Properties Officer would have responsibility for preparing and progressing a plan for the upgrading of the Hall (including energy conservation measures), its extension into the curtilage and the reorientation of the frontage on to High Street.

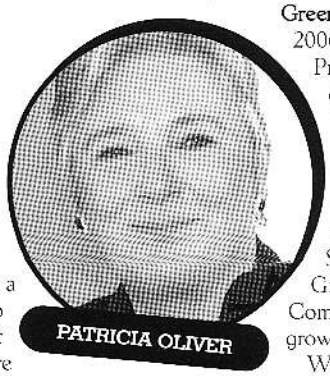
As I have stated earlier, in the light of current and forthcoming developments in relation to our properties, the management role of the Properties Officer would not be confined to Tailors' Hall. All of our properties, to varying extents, require management and interpretation. The Officer would therefore be involved in the preparation and implementation of appropriate management plans for individual properties, for providing advice and guidance to local associations and for encouraging and applying research in relation to specific sites in association with other conservation bodies and third-level institutions.

As in the case of the Natural Environment Officer, substantial grant aid is available and the Properties Officer post should be, at least, part-funded from this source and, in time, could indeed be fully funded in this way.

I am aware of the current financial constraints on the organisation. However, in view of the centrality of Tailors' Hall to the image, finances and existence of An Taisce, to the need for professional management and to the "ring-fencing" of funds to support the conservation of the property, I propose that a Properties Officer should be appointed at the earliest opportunity.

Education Unit's Continued Success

Report by Patricia Oliver Director - An Taisce Education


PATRICIA OLIVER

An Taisce's Education Programmes are Making a Difference. Looking back at 2006 it is good to see that our Education programmes have not only continued to grow, but are showing that they are really making a difference. Blue Flag, National Spring Clean and Green Schools are more widely recognised than ever, but our newer programmes such as Clean Coast and Green Home are getting great support too. Indicators on all fronts are showing that at last "green" issues are more and more important to the general public and we are right there on the front line in offering action-based programmes that change lives.

Green Schools. The core staff working on Green Schools continue to find themselves stretched to the limit as the numbers of schools registering continues to rise. At the end of 2006 the number of schools had risen to 2,535 and the number of flags awarded stood at 886. During the year, 234 new flags were awarded and 162 schools renewed their flags, in some cases for the fourth time. Two schools in Donegal, which were the first ever schools to receive the Green Flag in Ireland, were awarded the Repak/An Taisce Recycling Schools of the Year Award for their commitment to the programme over ten years.

Twenty two award ceremonies were held during February and May and we would like to record our thanks to the following who presented the awards for us: Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government Dick Roche TD; Minister of State Batt O'Keeffe TD; Minister for Education and Science, Mary Hanafin TD; Mr. Enda Kenny, TD Leader of Fine Gael; Mr. Trevor Sargent TD Leader of the Green Party; Ms. Olwyn Enright TD Fine Gael spokesperson on the Environment; Mr. Pat The Cope Gallagher TD; Mr. John Gormley TD, Green Party; Ms. Sile de Valera TD; Ms. Mairead McGuinness. MEP; Senator Mary O'Rourke, Leader of the Senate; Senator Michael D. Higgins, Labour Party President; Senator David Norris; Ms. Sile de Valera T.D.; Mr. Duncan Stewart; Ms. Kathryn McKiernan; Mr. Paul Cunningham; Mr. Richard Collins. Our congratulations to all our wonderful schools and our very best thanks to our even more wonderful Green Schools teachers. Well done also to our own staff: Cathy Joyce, Green Schools Manager, Dr. Michael-John O'Mahoney, Green Schools Development Manager and Green Schools Officers Liam Condon, David O'Leary and Joanne Power and good wishes to Jane Helps who has left for pastures new.

> "National Spring Clean continues to confound those who say that Irish people won't volunteer and that we don't care about having a clean country."

Green Schools Transport. While the core Green Schools staff were struggling to keep up with the numbers, the new Green Schools Transport Team were continuing their ground breaking work with the pilot schools on Transport which began the year before. Twenty-nine schools were involved up to the end of 2006 with c. 10,400 students and 545 teachers. This new initiative, which is funded by the Dublin Transportation Office, is very timely and hugely significant as the aim is to reduce the number of car journeys to and from schools and encourage walking, cycling, car pooling and park-n-stride. From initial worries that this theme would prove very difficult, the indications are already that it is not only extremely positive but also great FUN. Events such as WOW Days (Walk on Wednesdays) where some schools arranged breakfast in the school for the walkers with food sponsored by local shops, are proving very popular. A huge thank-you to our Transport schools. Well done to Jane Hackett, Arlene Finn and Ally Menary our Green Schools Transport Team.

Green Home is a new programme, which began in 2006 with a pilot sponsored by the Environmental Protection Agency, and which was the result of a demand from parents of Green Schools students. We began with a Householder Survey in six "test" areas and evening focus meetings followed. The surveys showed a big interest in participation in an environmental programme by parents. Areas most highlighted were Energy Saving in the Home; Renewable Energy and Greener Home Grants; Healthy Eating, Composting and Recycling. Green Home looks set to grow in 2007.

Well done to Eileen Costigan new member of staff, who has spearheaded this new initiative.

National Spring Clean continues to confound those who say that Irish people won't volunteer and that we don't care about having a clean country. April 2006 saw 341,005 volunteers clean up 3340 tonnes of litter at 3594 events nationwide. The aims of the campaign are always the same - to clean-up; to recycle and to highlight the litter issue. Of course, what is needed is to change the behaviour of those who don't care and our hope is that Green Schools, by starting as young as it does, will change the culture and the behaviour for the future. We are immensely grateful to all our volunteers especially our own An Taisce members, great Tidy Towns groups, Residents Associations, Guides, Scouts, schools, youth groups and individuals. Congratulations to Lisa Fitzgerald, our former National Spring Clean Manager and welcome to Emlyn Cullen who joined us towards the end of the year.

The Blue Flag for Beaches and Marinas 2006 awards were presented on a beautiful hot and sunny day in early June at Salthill, generously hosted by Galway County Council. Minister for Environment, Heritage and Local Government Dick Roche watched the arrival of the RNLI lifeboat from Lough Derg Station, Dromineer, Co. Tipperary and presented them with the Blue Flag Pennant. The individual Blue Flag for boat-owners rewards the efforts of boat-owners with a pennant for protecting coastal waters and inland waterways. The RNLI has made this commitment and will proudly fly the Blue Flag at two lifeboat stations. A total of 84 Blue Flags for beaches and 3 for marinas were presented by the Minister, an increase of 2 flags over the previous year. Well done to Oonagh Duggan our former Blue Flag Manager and welcome to Lucy Hunt who took over at end 2006.

Clean Coasts. This Interreg-funded programme carried out in partnership with Keep Wales Tidy had another successful year. The number of Irish Coastcare Groups rose to 48 and ten Green Coast Awards were presented on a lovely day at Skerries courtesy of Fingal County Council. Mr. Jim Glennon T.D. presented the awards, which are for coastal areas where local communities work closely with Local Authorities in caring for the coast. We were also joined on the day by Joan Maher, Cathaoirleach of Fingal County Council and Councillor May McKeon as well as Council staff. We very much appreciate the work of volunteers in Coastcare Groups from the five counties in the Interreg Region and the support of the Local Authorities. In all, 114 events, clean-ups, school visits, conferences and festivals took place. Congratulations to Aidan Gray and welcome to Jimmy McVeigh who joined Aidan on the Clean Coast programme in 2006.

Irish Business Against Litter (IBAL) again commissioned An Taisce to carry out monitoring of towns and cities throughout Ireland for the All-Ireland Anti-Litter League. In 2006 the format changed with two of the four surveys being carried out in the Greater Dublin Area alone and a separate league established. The two nationwide surveys monitored 50 towns and 4 cities and IBAL's Chairman Tom

Cavanagh announced at the year end that the cleanliness levels throughout the country had risen significantly. The league had been very successful in highlighting litter problems and IBAL achieved significant media coverage during the year when it announced the results. While initially a bad result can upset local people, the effect can later trigger a concerted effort to address the problem with many towns making rapid growth up the cleanliness table. IBAL also announced that An Taisce had been commissioned to carry out a European Litter League in 2007. Well done to Adele O'Connor and all of our IBAL assessors.

LEAF (Learning About Forests) and YRE (Young Reporters for the Environment). Both of these are excellent programmes but pressure of other work within the Unit meant that we did not focus on them in 2006. We really need to secure extra resources to give these programmes the staff time they require.

In the Education Unit we have been working with Coca Cola and The Wrigley Company Ltd., to research and carry out measures designed to find long-term solutions to the litter problem. Their support over many years of the Green Schools and National Spring Clean campaigns has been crucial. The support of Repak, and TV3 in National Spring Clean is also gratefully acknowledged. The Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government has also given us huge support with Green Schools, Blue Flag Awards, National Spring Clean and the IBAL Anti-Litter League. All Local Authorities throughout the country have been totally supportive with all of our programmes. Our new Green Schools Transport partners, the DTO, have been extraordinarily helpful in getting us started on the transport theme as have the Environmental Protection Agency with Green Home. We were delighted in 2004 to add Greenstar as new lead sponsors to the Green Schools programme. Their support continued in 2006 not only with very valuable funding but also with advice and business expertise. We would like to take this opportunity of thanking all of them for their support.

On my own behalf, I want to say a very sincere "thank you" to the staff of the Education Unit who are a brilliant team. I would also wish to acknowledge the commitment of Education Committee Chairman Charles Stanley-Smith and the members of An Taisce's Education Committee who are so supportive of our efforts.

Heritage Officer's Report

by Ian Lumley



IAN LUMLEY

While Ireland continues to hold itself up at a world model of economic development using GNP, housing construction, employment creation and other indicators, a sustainability analysis using the 1992 UN Rio Declaration on Environment and Development indicators presents a different analysis.

The most significant fact about contemporary Ireland is that it is one of the most polluting per capita in greenhouse gas generation in the world, and over double the 13% Kyoto limit above 1990 levels. Most startlingly, transport emissions run at over 160% over 1990 levels, with a decline and the deliberate rundown of the rail freight sector in the same period from 3,300,000 tonnes in 1990 to 823,000 tonnes last year (from International Union of Railways (UIC) statistics), while road freight has more than tripled in volume during the same period.. External costs also include the international impact of Ireland's high imports of fertiliser using natural gas from India, heavy industrial manufactured goods, particularly cars, tropical hardwood

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mainly from Brazil and Indonesia, clothing using high water consuming cotton production, and cheap disposable consumer goods produced from high emission energy sources mainly from China. The abandonment of the indigenous sugar beet industry means that adverse environmental impacts are now externalised on Brazil while air and shipping miles generated by the importation of fruit, vegetables and flowers to Ireland are among the most unsustainable in the world.

Recent months have seen the publication of the first two stages of the 2007 UN International Panel on Climate Change reports which upgrade scientific consensus on the human or anthropogenic cause of global climate change through greenhouse gas emissions. The Stern Report strikingly describes climate change as the greatest ever market failure and quantifies the damage which is already happening in some of the most vulnerable parts of the world. This makes the resolution of new agreements to proceed well beyond Kyoto an international imperative to reduce emissions to a level to maintain global temperatures below that of 2° above pre-industrial levels. The onus is on the most developed countries, including Ireland, to do this. Instead, the range of objectives contained in National Climate Change Strategy Ireland 2000 were either abandoned, (like the phasing out of coal burning at Moneypoint), ignored, (like the key policy to promote a better modal share between public and private transport) or long-fingered past the re-election date of the current Government to 2008, (in the case of taxation measures to discourage larger, more inefficient road vehicles). There is no evidence that the renewed range of measures contained in the 2007 Climate Change Strategy will be linked to any effective or targered implementation. While the Government White Paper on Energy has now set a target for renewable energy of 33% by 2020, this does not address the continued increase in energy generation projected and consequent net increase in imported fossil fuel and consequent emissions.

Fingal and Dun Laoghaire Councils must therefore be given particular credit for setting improved energy standards beyond the deficient national ones.

THE NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN

While the National Development Plan 2007-2013 (NDP) is welcome in its increased public transport investment particularly in and around Dublin and suburban rail for Cork and Galway, the associated policies for achieving better spatial planning are ineffective. The NDP was launched without any of the public or cross-sectoral consultation principles adopted in conjunction with the UN Rio Declaration on Environment and Development in 1992 and in particular Agenda 21 on "Strengthening the Role of Non-Governmental Organisations: Partners for Sustainable Development". The NDP, which is a plan or programme for specific investments such as the expansion of regional airports, also fails to comply with the EU Strategic Environmental Assessment Directive 2001/42/EC.

SPATIAL STRATEGY & HOUSING

The National Spatial Strategy Ireland 2002 and Regional Planning Guidelines have failed in their basic objectives to ensure sustainable land use and transport planning across the country.

The number of housing units constructed in 2005 was over 86,000 and surged by 15% to a record figure of 93,419 in 2006.

Depressingly, the majority were non-architect designed and the majority of owner occupied and family houses are in non public transport accessible suburban sprawl locations, whether urban or rural fringe or scattered across the countryside. One major development which is a cause for optimism is the quality of integrated planning which has been put into Adamstown at which the new railway station on the Kildare line has already opened.

The increase in apartment development around urban areas is mainly for the short-term rental market. The majority of owner-occupied houses continue to be in poorly designed housing estates in commuter belts with poor public transport access and high car dependency. The bulk of one-offs are being built for speculation - one has only got to see the astonishing proliferation of sites and houses for sale in the area around Galway and into south Mayo to understand this. This car-based suburban sprawl housing is merging in ribbon development formations along roads which become more dangerous and less attractive for walking and cycling. As the trend accelerates, it reinforces and accelerates car dependence. According to the Central Statistics Office, one in five of the 497,000 housing units built since 1991 were individual one-off houses in rural areas (i.e. detached buildings with individual septic tanks).

> Local Authorities continue to ignore EU law, national law and national policy, and in many cases their own development plans

Paradoxically, although there is now much development occurring in Irish villages, it is mainly for commuter starter homes or rental with the actual local housing need for the village area being spilled into one-offs for miles around the countryside. This is one of the reasons why villages are losing post offices and their social and economic base. This overall trend of individualism and suburbanisation is following patterns which have been long established in the US and about which there is mounting data to show not just the adverse environmental impacts of car dependence, unsustainable land use, sprawl and emissions, but also the health effects of obesity in a car-dependent population. On top of this are a whole series of challenges in maintaining and creating sustainable communities.

There is a systemic failure by most local authorities to properly inspect and sufficiently test rural application sites for waste water disposal suitability and the uncritical acceptance of data submitted by the applicants' paid consultant. The most recent Central Statistics Office figures show that over 28.6% of housing units or 418,000 are dependent on individual septic tanks, for which there is no proper monitoring and inspection. The saturation of inappropriately located septic tanks in high water table or flood affected areas around Lough Corrib is being attributed as a factor causing the Cryptosporidium, as well as over-loaded and deficient public sewage systems in towns and villages such as Headford.

> There are now a range of internationally accepted principles of sustainable development which if still adopted in Ireland could significantly turn around a range of current adverse trends.

Despite the revelations of the tribunals, local elected council involvement in planning continues to be discredited through rezoning proposals over the last year. This is not just an issue of the Greater Dublin Area but in the surrounding counties such as Laois and Monaghan where unsustainable rezonings of villages for car-based commuter housing estate development were approved by councillors. It can only be hoped that the intervention of the Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local Government using Section 31 of the Planning Act in these cases will be more systemically exercised in the future.

ROADS

The inter-regional motorway dual carriageway schemes between Dublin and Belfast, Galway, Limerick, Cork, Waterford and Wexford are now at various stages of construction and completion. While these were pushed through the planning system under the National Development Plan 1999-2006, the members of the various professional institutes (who produced the Environmental Impact Statements, conducted the An Bord Pleanala oral hearings and approved the legal consents under which the schemes have been constructed) cannot evade liability for the systemic failure to comply with the 1985 EIA Directive as amended in 1997. This requires that these bodies identify, describe, assess and mitigate the "direct and indirect effects" and to ensure that the developer provides information "to avoid, reduce and if possible, remedy significant adverse effects". While these roads were justified in reducing regional travel times and 'peripherality', no mitigation measures were either considered or attached to the consents to control climate emissions by means of regulating use or curtailing the unsustainable and ultimately self-defeating congestion generation of longer distance urban sprawl in the wider catchment areas.

EU DIRECTIVES ON BIRDS AND HABITATS

Notwithstanding the range of measures now in place through EU Directives on Birds and Habitats and international conventions and legislation on archaeology and architectural heritage, local authorities continue systemically to ignore EU law, national law and national policy and in many cases their own development plans. The number of major planning application decisions appealed by An Taisce and overturned by An Bord Pleanala, affecting various categories of heritage sites, is startling. These range from the eight storey hotel which would have loomed over the courtyard of Cahir Castle to four major projects in Co Galway, affecting SACs or priority habitats including the Corrib ferry, the Connemara electricity project, wind development and a land-based fish farm. Even in cases such as Lough Key in Co Roscommon where the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government as well as An Taisce were appellants, An Taisce was the subject of attack by councillors, merely for submitting that Ireland should comply with EU Treaty obligations and local authorities to comply with their own development plans.

As a development with the single worst impact on an internationally important site, the Co Meath M3 motorway clearly takes the lead with its routing through archaeologically rich Skrene Valley to the east of the Hill of Tara. The summary manner in which An Taisce seeking leave to challenge the NRA tolled motorway order amending the land CPO by Meath County Council (on the basis of clear *prima facie* statutory failure on behalf of the NRA to have the required strategic plan in place), provides another major instance highlighting the hostility of the Irish courts to environmental litigants.

The Planning and Development (Strategic Infrastructure) Act 2006 is now in force. It is in absolute contravention of the revised EIA Directive, which has been in force since 25th June 2005, particularly on public and environmental NGO consultation and the failure to provide for a review that is "fair, equitable, timely and not prohibitively expensive". The Act reflects the pervading official attitude that Planning and Environment Impact Assessment Laws are nothing more than a rubber stamping procedure for the National Development Plan and other state supported projects.

However, there must remain major cause for optimism. There are now a range of internationally accepted principles of sustainable development and models for reducing carbon footprint car-dependence, achieving sustainable land-use and energy management which if still adopted in Ireland could significantly turn around a range of current adverse trends. It will be An Taisce's prime role to continue to press for these principles and to expose the self interest of the vested interests who continue to oppose them.

2006 Annual Report of the Natural Environment Committee

Biodiversity

Through 2006 we continued concerted efforts towards the full implementation An Taisce's Biodiversity Strategy, updated at the beginning of 2006. One of our overall objectives is to assist Ireland to halt the decline of biodiversity by 2010. The global challenge to achieve the same target is unfortunately beyond our current capacity, though this is considered where possible.

2006 saw the continuation An Taisce's leading role in the network of ENGOs working together on biodiversity policy. We completed the 'Coordinated ENGO input to the next National Biodiversity Plan, 2007 - 2010' which is being prepared by government this year (2007). Our report makes detailed recommendations toward strengthening the objectives and actions of the next Irish National Biodiversity Plan, in light of research of the international and European context of Biodiversity Policy, and through an examination of successes and shortfalls of the last plan with a view to the successful realisation of important actions in the term of the next plan.

The National Biodiversity Forum was established in 2006, under the auspices of Comhar - the National Sustainable Development Partnership. An Taisce has been pressing for this Forum for several years, and took an active role in its formation. Anja Murray is representing An Taisce and the ENGO Biodiversity Network on the forum, and chairs the agricultural working group of the Forum.

We organised a Natura 2000 financing workshop in the Autumn in partnership with WWF Europe and the National Parks and Wildlife Service. This workshop provided an introduction and training for the new 'integrated financing' approach for Natura 2000, the European Network of ecologically important sites designated under the Habitats Directive.

Work on designated sites, appeals on designations, and boundary changes, has continued through the year. We have also been active in the protection of protected sites throughout the country through the planning system, and have assisted local groups and individuals in many instances of illegal damage to valuable protected sites and species.

Forestry

An Taisce's aim in this area is to promote and contribute to the sustainable development of the Forestry sector through monitoring, education & awareness, contribution to local and national plans and policies.

Towards this end, monitoring of private applications to the Forest Service for afforestation approval has continued as part of our prescribed role under the afforestation licencing legislation, albeit at a lesser rate than previously achieved.. We have been submitting comments where there is reason for concern over the impacts on protected habitats and rare species, negative landscape impacts, and water quality concerns. The impact of our submissions on decisions taken is not clear, as the Forest Service have been very poor at notifying decisions to An Taisce on a routine basis, despite persistent requests for the same.

An Taisce made a submission to the current Review of the Forestry Acts, highlighting the need to make new legislation compliant with the EIA Directives; to amend the current replanting requirement (which causes much conifer reforestation in inappropriate locations damaging landscape, water, and natural habitats); incorporation of the Forest Service Guidelines to a legal basis; felling license penalties; and review of section 12 of the 1988 Forestry Act which gives Coillte a purely commercial basis and limiting the extent to which they can carry out their mandate in a sustainable manner.

We reviewed a paper commissioned by Comhar toward the National Development Plan 2007 - 2013 and presented a piece on forestry at Comhar's conference in Autumn. The presentation included the environmental performance of the Forestry sector, including bix and water quality; economic sustainability; global footprint, and future challenges of the sector.

We made a submission to Soil Association / Woodmark (FSC certifiers for Coillte) about the Cypermethrin derogation application from Coillte, objecting to the granting of this derogation. We made detailed comments on the draft guidelines for the Freshwater Pearl mussel Guidelines for Forestry, and appeared on 'Ear to the Ground' television programme on this same topic.

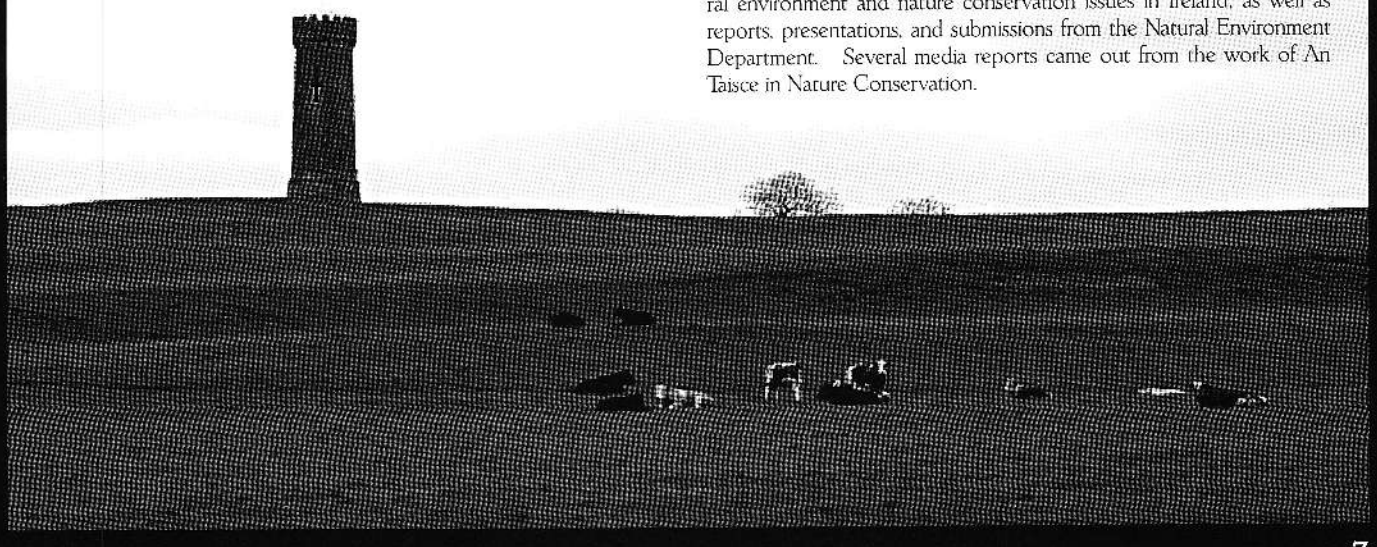
An Taisce are active on the Steering Committee of the Irish Forestry Certification Initiative, seeking to reach agreement on a standard against which forestry in Ireland can be certified for sustainability performance. We are on the Woodlands of Ireland Steering Group and the Millennium Forests steering group.

Water

We have continued active participation in the implementation of the Water Framework Directive in Ireland, and have been working towards this end with SWAN - the Sustainable Water Network. Several An Taisce / SWAN representatives are now on the WFD Advisory Councils in the South-Eastern Eastern River Basin District, the Eastern River Basin District, and the Western River Basin District. We have also integrated water quality considerations, including water dependant aquatic habitats, in much of our forestry, aquaculture, and planning work. Appeals were taken against the granting of waste licenses for several landfill sites adjacent to Natura 2000 nature conservation sites where there was significant risk of habitat destruction through aquatic contamination. We have been monitoring the licensing of aquaculture applications in Natura 2000 nature conservation sites through our prescribed role in the aquaculture licensing system.

Communications

Materials for the new website have been compiled detailing many natural environment and nature conservation issues in Ireland, as well as reports, presentations, and submissions from the Natural Environment Department. Several media reports came out from the work of An Taisce in Nature Conservation.



Personnel for 2006/2007

Officers of the Council 2006–2007

- Eanna Ni Lamhna (President)
- Frank Corcoran (Chairman)
- Peter Hennessy (Vice-Chairman)
- Kevin Duff (Secretary)
- Eric Conroy (Hon Treasurer)

Local Association delegates to council

Philip Sharkey	Carlow
Oliver Moylan	Clare
Kevin Hurley	Cork
Ann McGowan	Donegal
Kevin Duff	Dublin
Maire Mhic Giobuin	Dublin South
Mairead Mehigan	Dun Laoghaire
Derrick Hambleton	Galway
Kate Carmody	Kerry
Sean English	Kildare North
Frank Taffee	Kildare South
Declan Murphy	Kilkenny
Daniel K Sullivan	Limerick
Colin Anderson	Meath
Paddy Mackey	Tipperary N.
Nicholas Prins	Sligo
George Kavanagh	Waterford
Jack O'Sullivan	Westmeath
Senan O'Reilly	Wexford

Nationally elected members

Colin Anderson
Michael Barry
Lewis Clohessy
Frank Corcoran
Gerry Crilly
John Ducie
Kevin Duff
Bob Galvin
Mide Gerrard
Ann Gibbons
Bernard Goggin
Derrick Hambleton
Brian Hamilton
Peter Hennessy
George Kavanagh
Sean McCarthy
Anne McGowan
Catherine McMullin
Mairead Mehigan
Eanna Ni Lamhna
Judy Osborne
Jack O'Sullivan
Bernard Ryan
Charles Stanley-Smith
Kathleen Vandenberghe

Board of Management 2005/06

Chairman
Frank Corcoran
Vice Chair
Peter Hennessy
Hon. Secretary
Kevin Duff
Hon. Treasurer
Eric Conroy
Natural Environment Committee Chair
Mide Gerrard
Properties Committee Chair
Lewes Clohessy
Fergal McLoughlin
Education Unit/Communications Committee Chair **Charles Stanley-Smith**
Membership Committee **Bob Galvin**
Fund Raising Committee **vacant**
Administrative Committee **vacant**

Non-board sub-committees

* Heritage Cardens and Landscapes subcommittee
John Ducie
* Waste subcommittee
Jack O'Sullivan
* Sites and monuments subcommittee
Mark Clinton

Representatives on national and international bodies

* EPA Advisory Committee on GMO Regulations
Eanna Ni Lamhna
* Wicklow Uplands Council
David Rowe
* Irish Sea Forum
Jack O'Sullivan
* European Environmental Bureau
Frank Corcoran
* Building Regulations Advisory Board
Ian Lumley
* EENHO
John Ducie

