

Enhancing Biodiversity at Rowe Street Church

Text:

Recommendations for the Church of the Immaculate Conception and St John the Baptist
Prepared by Dominic Berridge for Wexford County Council & Care for the Earth Group
2025

Speaker Notes:

“This project focuses on Rowe Street Church, one of Wexford’s historic ‘Twin Churches’. It forms part of a parish-wide biodiversity initiative inspired by *Laudato Si’*. Our aim is to balance heritage, ecology, and economic realities while creating a greener, more sustainable space. This report outlines practical steps to achieve that vision.”

SLIDE 1



- **Introduction and Context**

- **Text:**

- Part of a parish-wide biodiversity initiative inspired by *Laudato Si'*
- Goal: Dedicate one-third of church grounds to biodiversity
- Rowe Street Church (1858, Richard Pierce) – one of Wexford’s “Twin Churches”
- Current challenge: 165 car spaces generate 60% of parish income
- Approach: Incremental, realistic measures compatible with heritage and parking needs
- **Speaker Notes:**
“The church grounds were once a Victorian garden but are now dominated by car parking, which provides vital income. Large-scale rewilding isn’t feasible, so we propose incremental measures that respect heritage and economic needs. These steps will enhance biodiversity without compromising the parish’s financial stability.”



- **Managing Church Grounds Responsibly**

- **Text:**

- **Safety:** Maintain trees and structures to prevent hazards

- **Law:** Comply with Wildlife Acts and heritage regulations

- **Amenity:** Preserve aesthetics and public enjoyment

- **Nature Conservation:** Promote biodiversity even in urban settings

- Note: Some ‘untidiness’ supports life—avoid over-manicuring

- **Speaker Notes:**

“Managing church grounds means balancing safety, legal compliance, amenity, and nature conservation. Over-manicuring can harm biodiversity, so we need to allow some natural growth. These principles guide all recommendations in the report.”





Key Biodiversity Recommendations

Text:

Invasive Species: Remove Three-cornered leek; replant with native shrubs

Deodar Cedar: Fence roots, monitor health, consider permeable mesh for parking

Flowering Cherries: Replace gradually with Strawberry tree or hawthorn

Boundary Trees: Monitor maples and sycamores; replace with native oaks or rowan

Birds & Bats: Bird baths and boxes possible; swift boxes require heritage consent

Town Wall: Manage vegetation under expert supervision (Recorded Monument)

Speaker Notes:

“The main biodiversity actions include controlling invasive species and protecting the iconic Deodar cedar. We also recommend replacing ornamental cherries with native species and monitoring boundary trees. Wildlife features like bird baths and boxes will be added where feasible, and all work near the medieval town wall will follow strict heritage guidelines.”





Environmental and Educational Initiatives

Text:

Lighting: Dark Sky standards—shielded warm LEDs, timers, no upward glare

Climate Education: Use porch benchmark to illustrate Ice Age lake levels

Heritage Features: Restore historic weathercock; install public drinking water tap

SUDS: Incorporate rainwater infiltration in future resurfacing

Speaker Notes:

“Beyond biodiversity, we propose eco-friendly lighting to protect nocturnal species and reduce energy use. Educational features like a climate-history marker will engage visitors. Heritage elements such as restoring the weathercock and adding a public water tap will enhance community value. Future resurfacing should include sustainable drainage.”



- **Heritage and Flora Highlights**
- **Text:**
- Over 60 plant species recorded—native and ornamental
- Invasive species flagged: *Allium triquetum*, wall valerian
- Peregrine falcons roost on towers; prey analysis shows rich harbour ecology
- Historic Victorian garden (1867) featured exotic conifers and gravel walks
- Deodar cedar: cultural and biblical significance—symbol of faith and resilience
- **Speaker Notes:**
“The site hosts over 60 plant species, including natives and ornamentals, but also invasives that need control. Peregrine falcons roost here, highlighting its ecological importance. Historically, the grounds were a Victorian pinetum, and the Deodar cedar remains a living link to that heritage and a spiritual symbol worth preserving.”

- **Conclusions and Vision**

- **Text:**

- Biodiversity revival is feasible with modest, well-managed measures
- Protect heritage while enhancing ecology—weed control, tree care, eco-lighting
- Engage community and partners for long-term stewardship
- Transform a car-dominated site into a model of parish-led biodiversity restoration

Vision: Faith-based environmental leadership in Wexford’s historic core

- **Speaker Notes:**

“Our vision is clear: modest, practical steps can restore biodiversity without harming parish finances. Protecting heritage and ecology together is key. With community engagement and partnerships, Rowe Street can become a flagship for faith-based environmental leadership in Wexford.”

