

Saintfield Regeneration

Village Pride

Shaping a place of history for the future

Enter Saintfield from any direction and you can't fail to notice that this is a place of historic interest. Five eye-catching gateway signs are among the features put in place as part of a village renewal and development project.

The small town of Saintfield, population around 3,000, is set in the heart of the rolling hills of Co Down halfway between Belfast and Downpatrick.

But, like so many lovely places, it was hiding its light under a bushel. "It was time something was done to regenerate Saintfield," says Gerry Lowe OBE, chairman of Saintfield Regeneration Committee.

As Gerry explains: "The plan was to get a co-ordinated strategy to improve and regenerate Saintfield. We wanted visitors to the village to recognise that it was an historic place, a place to stop, to take in the sights, enjoy a cup of coffee and walk around the antique shops and not just a place to pass through on the way to Downpatrick."

Five decorative gateway signs were installed, one at each of the arterial routes into Saintfield. "When those signs went in it generated a notion in the residents that something is actually happening in Saintfield, that things are going to improve."

Attractive benches and planters have been installed in the centre close to the picturesque Parish Church of 1776. Display boards showing places of interest are on show around the village and a handy complimentary "Walk About Saintfield" guide is available from the local library and village shops.

The **Village Renewal and Development** element of the Rural Development Programme 2007-2013 provides support for integrated village initiatives that promote community development and regeneration. This includes the preparation of an action plan that defines the role of the village and it helps to develop the potential of the rural area.

"We received considerable financial help," says Gerry. "We couldn't have thought of doing this on our own."

Urging other such groups to follow their lead, he adds: "The whole scheme has brought a sense of civic pride to Saintfield and enhanced the lives of residents and visitors alike."

The Promoting Pride in Our Rural Villages initiative was part-funded by Down District Council, the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development and the EU Interreg Programme.



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