

# Tidy Towns Competition 2017

## Adjudication Report

Centre: **Attanagh** Ref: **303**  
County: **Laois** Mark: **264**  
Category: **A** Date(s): **27/06/2017**

	<b>Maximum Mark</b>	<b>Mark Awarded 2016</b>	<b>Mark Awarded 2017</b>
Community Involvement & Planning	60	30	30
Built Environment and Streetscape	50	32	33
Landscaping and Open Spaces	50	35	36
Wildlife, Habitats and Natural Amenities	50	25	26
Sustainable Waste and Resource Management	50	13	14
Tidiness and Litter Control	90	58	58
Residential Streets & Housing Areas	50	31	32
Approach Roads, Streets & Lanes	50	34	35
<b>TOTAL MARK</b>	<b>450</b>	<b>258</b>	<b>264</b>

### Community Involvement & Planning / Rannpháirtíocht an Phobail & Pleanáil:

Fáilte Ath Tanaí! Welcome Attanagh to the Super Valu 2017 National Tidy Towns Competition. You have a very small committee of two members, but you also have seven others who volunteer. It does not appear that you have volunteers from outside your organisation although we note that the local ICA assists you with fundraising activities.

You hold Tidy Towns meetings three times per year. We are unsure as to whether these are public meetings or your own committee meetings. If the latter we wonder if three meetings per year is adequate or not? Those who have been working hard over the last 10 years certainly deserved to take a break, and we would hope that you can depend on the upcoming generation to 'take up the slack'. Well done to the individual member who looks after communal areas. You acknowledge the help of the Environment Section of your local authority and the researcher for your Biodiversity Plan.

You used to communicate through local newspaper notes, but do not do so now due to other workloads. Would it be possible at all to find some young person who is attending secondary school from the area to take on a social media project to help you with your communications? It is difficult when you have no school, club, or GAA attached your village to find new young members. You have been entering the competition since 1987 and this is a great achievement.

Last year's adjudicator said that a three or five-year village plan may be of great benefit to you. The adjudicator also explained that it would help you gain marks in this category. The plan need not be an elaborate plan, nor need it be prepared professionally. A simple document with a timescale for any projects you consider feasible and suitable over the three or five-year lifetime of the plan should be listed under the various category headings. This will help you to focus on what is good forward planning and also what is achievable given your limited resources. It can also help to attract outside funding or other help in achieving your goals. When people see that you have a plan available they will see that you are serious about your objectives. Do refer to the Tidy Towns Handbook for further advice. (And don't forget that submitting a plan will help to gain you extra marks in this category.). You should consult locally in preparing such a plan. You should tell us as to how you went about this consultation. You should also consider any statutory and non-statutory plans applicable to your village in drawing up your work programme. Perhaps it would be helpful to talk to some other groups of similar size who have prepared such a plan. Within the Tidy Towns family cooperation is paramount - despite the obvious competition as well! No doubt the local authority would also be available to advise you on such a plan preparation.

Your village map was a simple adequate sketch plan, and, whereas you numbered the projects on your sketch map with the name of each project attached, you did not number your projects throughout the entry form to correspond with the numbers on the map. Section 5 of the guidelines on completing your entry form asks that each new or

continuing project should be identified by number in your entry form (as per section 3 in the entry form guidelines) and these projects should also be shown with the same numbers on the key to the village map (where the projects are ones which can be mapped). We recommend that you carefully study the guidelines to completing your entry form annually. Do not leave it to one person or do not leave it until the last minute. Sometimes groups get so involved in working on the ground that they rush putting the entry form together. It is very helpful to an adjudicator to have a good clear map showing all the new and continuing projects which relate to the numbered list throughout the entry form.

### **Built Environment and Streetscape / An Timpeallacht Thógtha agus Sráid-dreacha:**

As you say - structurally the centre of the village has not changed much over the years and therefore is quite unique. We also understand that yours is a very ancient historic settlement from our own research.

The former schoolhouse is at a central focal point in the village, and it is good that it is being renovated and put into new appropriate usage. This is the essence of good architectural conservation - that a building is conserved but also finds a new and living use. You tell us that it is a Protected Structure - so we are happy that it is finding new life.

We are glad to hear that the vacant house opposite the Church of Ireland which had been derelict has now been renovated and it looked well.

The Church of Ireland is a very significant building in your village. You have improved its environs through keeping the graveyard maintained, and also weeding the pathway forming part of the foreground of views to the church. Its landscaped setting and elegant spire add great character to the village centre. Would there be any chance of getting the entrance splay walls painted? You tell us (under the Residential Streets and Housing Areas category) that the private owners of the former Church of Ireland and old mill allow you to maintain these two buildings cosmetically only. Perhaps one day the Mill will be conserved to its former glory and find a new use?

You list renovating the village pump as a project, although last year's adjudicator referred to this project as having been completed last year and just asked "if the coping could now be addressed to complete the set piece". The surround walls would benefit from another whitewash before next year - especially the two end parts of the wall facing the road. A broken flower pot beside the nicely planted half barrel detracted somewhat from the overall setting.

Well done to the Attanagh Fly Fishing and Shooting Museum which is indeed a traditional well-presented building. Unfortunately time did not permit us on our adjudication day to visit the museum, but it is on our 'bucket list' to return to as a visitor in the future. As you say the museum attracts life to the village, and also it kindly acts as a community meeting point. We highly commend its owners for the restrained nature of their advertising.

Although you talk about the stone walls and old farm buildings under 'Landscaping and Open Spaces,' we consider the stone walls to be a very important part of your built heritage also, and we credit your attention to their conservation under this category heading also. Well done on the repairs which you have carried out to the walls. Well done also on removing ivy from piers and along stone buildings in general.

The Plastics Factory was well presented - apart from the hard feature of the unscreened security fence along its lateral (village-side) boundary. Could this be planted?

Attanagh was a railway stop in past times, and we loved the Attanagh rail sign at the Durrow entrance. This is a part of your built heritage really worth looking after - well done! You have the sign so beautifully landscaped near what was the old station. The bed-edged grassed setting shows it off to perfection! The red brick building adjacent was obviously part of the station area also - now incorporated into a residential site, and nicely re-roofed. We also spotted a red brick structure (derelict) structure with red corrugated roof in a field nearby - which we assumed was part of the railway heritage also. Nearby was a stone arch in the same field. On the road side we noticed an old stone gate pier - which was probably part of a level crossing gate. And of course you have your very fine cut stone rail bridge on the Museum approach road. The incidental green space with its lovely tree on the village side sets this bridge off to great effect. Could you perhaps look into the possibility of looking for funding to put these railway history aspects 'on the map'?

### **Landscaping and Open Spaces / Tírdhreachú agus Spásanna Oscailte:**

The village is a much undisturbed natural environment and the main emphasis in landscaping in an area such as this is the maintenance of the status quo. Simple grass strips and verges set off the hedgerows and stone walls. You maintain these grass strips and verges, and you are conscious of the importance of mosses and lichens and the importance of stone walls as wildlife habitats.

It would have been nice to see a photograph of what you described as 'vast areas of daffodils in bloom each spring'. By summer these wonderful blooms have disappeared, so an adjudicator will never get to see their effect in your village on adjudication day. You are correct in reducing your annual planting as it is not sustainable from a labour point-of-view - as well as from water conservation point of view. Planting native trees, wildflower seed mixes, and perennial shrubbery where appropriate is far more beneficial for future generations. You are conscious of the need for landscaping that is wildlife friendly.

We saw some very good semi-mature tree planting and we admired the perennial beds on the Durrow approach.

### **Wildlife, Habitats and Natural Amenities / Fiadhúlra, Gnáthóga agus Taitneamhachtaí Nádúrtha:**

As we already said you are conscious of landscaping which is wildlife friendly. The wildlife garden area at the old pump house will in time be a lovely village feature. Be sure to source wildflower seed which consist solely of Irish wildflower seeds. You are lucky to have a tailored biodiversity management plan in place in your village since 2015. You appear to be professionally following this advice. Invasive species such as Japanese knot weed require professional treatment to rid the area of them. We trust that your local authority is helping you professionally in this regard.

Well done on your participation - which continues - in the bat monitoring scheme to assist Bat Conservation Ireland. Likewise you are collecting and submitting butterfly data to the National Biodiversity Data Centre. From such an unspoiled rural village this information will go on to be of great interest nationally. You are contributing to great projects. The drainage point for water run-off from the roads is credited also under the roads category of this adjudication. Well done to the farmers in the area allow access for bat monitoring purposes and for protecting the riverbank through the replacement of stock fences and retaining wells in place. You are committed to best practice. In time you will, we hope, be able to let the general public know about your findings - by putting them up on-line - or by erecting a simple well-located wildlife sign in the village.

We notice your (living) tree trunk bee 'hotel'.

One area that needs attention is compliance with the Wildlife Act 1976 and Wildlife Amendment Act 2006. We observed some hedge cutting of fairly recent origin on some approach roads. We would remind you that it is permissible to trim hedging along cultivated ground (e.g. gardens) throughout the year. However with regard to hedge trimming bordering non cultivated land - you are reminded that it is an offence under the Wildlife Act 1976 and Wildlife (Amendment) Act 2006 to cut vegetation in a hedge or ditch on lands not cultivated between 1st March and 31st August annually - this is for the protection of nesting birds. Before trimming any such hedges please consult with your local authority who will deal with this issue if there is a safety aspect involved. Birdwatch Ireland ([www.birdwatchireland.ie](http://www.birdwatchireland.ie)) has a very good website which gives lots of information on this issue.

Well done on providing pollinator areas on the Ballinakill Road.

### **Sustainable Waste and Resource Management / Bainistiú Acmhainní agus Dramhaíola Inbhuanaíthe:**

Household waste is collected privately. Under the 'Tidiness' category you let us know that this waste is segregated. You encourage farming enterprises to comply with good waste management practice. Although you referred to issues with litter under this category heading we deal with it under the 'Litter' category

The harvesting of rainwater for gardens and local individual residences is good practice. It is also good to see that you have organised a tank in the graveyard so that rainwater can be used to tend to graveside flowers. Within the graveyard sometimes you feel you have to use chemical weed killer, but you are aware of the fact that manually weed killing is preferable. Have you discovered organic weed killing methods? Perhaps your local Biodiversity Officer or Heritage Officer could discuss this with you.

This adjudication category has been expanded and updated with a new advice sheet prepared for communities in 2014. You may find this information sheet on the Tidy Towns website or you may request a copy of this advice sheet if it is not already in your possession (from the Tidy Towns unit HQ). This will help you also to understand and move forward in relation to sustainable waste and resource management.

Would you consider joining the Green Homes scheme? We would recommend that you contact the Environmental Awareness Officer of your local authority whom we are sure would be very happy to advise you as to how to advance in this work/category.

The Tidy Towns Handbook will also help you to come up with ideas. There is also a local waste prevention website - which you can link to from the Tidy Towns website.

### **Tidiness and Litter Control / Slachtmhaireacht agus Rialú Bruscair:**

Although you mention the issue of litter under 'Sustainable Waste etc. category heading we deal with it under the Tidiness and Litter Control' category. We are sorry to hear that passers-by through your village throw litter from their cars. You are to be congratulated on your monitoring of litter/dumping which you clean up as soon as possible. We just saw a few pieces of litter on the Durrow approach - nothing significant. No litter was seen in the village. Another problem you face is plastics falling from farm vehicles - which you also clean up. We salute the two residents who did excellent work on litter patrols over the last 5 to 7 years. They have done more than their share, and we applaud the person who has taken on this work since.

You say that you are lucky that the village is not prone to graffiti or fly posting. However we did see one fly post just outside the Plastics Factory. It was ragged and somewhat illegible - but may have been for an old circus event. You clean the footpath, sweep and hoe it for weeds. You also help to maintain the grave areas.

The recycling centre at the post office is regularly used. It was neat - but could the adjacent field gate and gate pier be painted - to brighten up the site? The planted wheelbarrow would also benefit from painting (beside the clothes

bank). The surfacing around the clothes bank itself would profit from hard surfacing. Perhaps your local council would oblige and extend the hard stand on which the bins are located? The wall behind the clothes bank also needs painting. It is good that a small village as actually has a recycling centre; sometimes small villages miss out on this facility.

### **Residential Streets & Housing Areas / Sráideanna Cónaithe & Ceantair Tithíochta:**

You are delighted that the former schoolhouse is under new ownership, and is being renovated to good conservation standards. Hopefully the new owners will join your group - or at least volunteer to help you on occasions. Well done to all your residents who voluntarily look after and maintain their own properties. The village houses and those on the approaches were well maintained.

### **Approach Roads, Streets & Lanes / Bóithre Isteach, Sráideanna & Lánaí:**

We admired the village name sign with the simple dry stone raised floral bed on the Durrow approach. However a little dead grass /vegetation in its surrounds needed removal. On this approach the 50kph speed limit sign was partially covered by vegetation on the left hand side of the road. . The 'Please Drive Slowly through the village' sign would benefit from washing, as would the adjacent 'bend' road sign. The b/w striped upright pole at the church junction needs renewal or repainting (Laois Heritage Trail) Its surrounds could also be surfaced. We agree that some village signposts need replacing, and we understand that you have brought this to the attention of your local authority.

Well done also to FÁS(Durrow) who provide great assistance in maintaining the long linear grass verges on approach roads from Durrow and Ballinakill. We can understand how frustrating it must be when agricultural traffic encroaches on the grass verges where the road narrows. We note that you let these areas centre reseed and recover naturally where possible. You deliberately reduce cutting on the Ballinakill approach in to allow for mini habitats to flourish.

The maintenance of your green footpaths i.e. your grass verges, was admired. You monitor litter on approach roads. On derelict or unoccupied properties approaching the village you have carried out small repairs. Could you perhaps encourage landowners to paint field gate s on the immediate approaches to the village? This defines a 'sense of place' on arrival in any village.

We would desist from placing half barrel planters on footpaths - like the one observed between the recycling area and the village - and on the footpath opposite the church. This causes an obstruction to people with reduced mobility and to buggy users.

A 50 kph speed limit sign had some encroaching vegetation on the approach from the railway bridge (right hand side)

Well done on addressing water 'pooling' on roads.

### **Concluding Remarks:**

Attanagh is a very unspoiled village with a lot of history. It has been lovingly cared for by a very busy group of people over many years. We hope that these people who have given so much of their time will be joined by new volunteers into the future. You will have, we hope the wisdom of the experienced people – and hopefully the enthusiasm of new members. Your village is on the extremity geographically of the local authority area, and sometimes this can be a problem for any centre as you are further removed from the local authority central offices and staff geographically. However we are glad to see that you are being helped nonetheless by the local authority. You are a great community to be able to do so much with a small but dedicated group of volunteers. We wish you continued success this year and into the future. Go n-eiri libh i rith na blianta atá romhainn