

Tidy Towns Competition 2017

Adjudication Report

Centre: **Ballacolla** Ref: **407**
County: **Laois** Mark: **318**
Category: **A** Date(s): **30/06/2017**

	Maximum Mark	Mark Awarded 2016	Mark Awarded 2017
Community Involvement & Planning	60	48	48
Built Environment and Streetscape	50	39	40
Landscaping and Open Spaces	50	45	46
Wildlife, Habitats and Natural Amenities	50	35	36
Sustainable Waste and Resource Management	50	16	17
Tidiness and Litter Control	90	62	62
Residential Streets & Housing Areas	50	31	31
Approach Roads, Streets & Lanes	50	39	38
TOTAL MARK	450	315	318

Community Involvement & Planning / Rannpháirtíocht an Phobail & Pleanáil:

Fáilte Baile Chialaidh! Welcome Ballacolla to the Super Valu 2017 National Tidy Towns Competition. You have a long record of entering the competition since 1980, and your village has been improving its presentation year after year. Having a committee of 12 for a population of 190 people shows great representative interest in participation in the competition.

We are glad to see that you list both national and local agencies, bodies, and businesses that support your activities. This bodes well for the future. They obviously appreciate your work. We note that you use local newspapers and public meetings to communicate. You also use a parish newsletter. We hope that you also circulate minority churches represented in your area. You do not appear to mention social media - but we suspected that you might have such. We found your Facebook page and enjoyed reading it! These latter modern methods of communication appeal to the younger generation, and also are saving of time and paper. Can you tell us a little bit more about your public meetings next year? When do you hold these public meetings? And how do you go about organising them?

We are delighted to know that the school is active in the betterment of the village. We are also happy to know that the competition has created great interest in the area, and that you try to do projects every year. You acknowledge the help of the community who support your Lotto, without which funding you would not be able to carry out projects.

Your Tidy Towns plan (in your red coloured supporting document) is a little confusing. You call it your Tidy Towns three-year plan, and you say you completed that in 2015. You have then listed 15 projects which you "hope to carry out over the following three years." You do not name these three years, but we assume them to be 2016, 2017 and 2018. Some of these projects you have completed, and some are not yet complete. It would be very useful and helpful to the adjudicator if you could provide a simple timeline for each project, indicate completed projects, indicate ongoing projects and indicate projects to be completed in the coming adjudication year(s). You will obviously be submitting a three or five-year plan with next year's entry. The plan need not be prepared professionally, but you should consult widely 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. Do refer to the Tidy Towns Handbook for advice in relation to the preparation of a three or five-year plan. We would suggest that you layout your plan on the basis of the competition categories, and provide a clear timeline for each project, whether that be an annual once-off project - or a phased project.

Last year's adjudicator suggested that you perhaps limit the number of photographs to be included in your entry as they tended to make your submission bulky and difficult for the adjudicator to handle while walking around the village. We concur with this suggestion - because the support document submitted with your entry form this year

was also very heavy and cumbersome - and still contained a lot of hardcopy photographs - which in themselves are heavy. Printing photographs into a report makes for lighter material - and the photographs need not be so large in most cases. A lot of photographs are often superfluous material. A 'before' and 'after' photo of a project site can be pertinent. A photo of spring bulb perennial flowers can be useful - as the adjudicator is not there to see them. These are just some examples of useful photography. Whereas the large red folder was neat and very carefully produced - it was heavy and cumbersome. We think that you need to expand your entry form and include the pertinent items that were 'hiding' in your support document. There then should be no need for a lengthy support document. The adjudicator had to 'search' for the important parts of the red document in marking your entry. You can print off the entry form and lengthen any section by adding extra lines or pages where your adjudication projects do not fit on the hard copy.

Your village map was a clear good copy of the Ordnance survey 25" sheet Thank you for providing a numbered list of projects to accompany the village map in your red support folder. However 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:

It is good that the businesses are aware of the effort you put into the competition and that both Hayes and Hawthorn have painted their premises for this year. We would however respectfully suggest that the latter premises removes the Christmas lighting (candles) before next year's adjudication. It is understandable from an expense and convenience point of view when Christmas lighting can be left in place year-round. However it looks rather foolish and untidy at the end of June.

You also ensured that the church gate was painted as suggested by last year's adjudicator. The adjudicator also suggested that the church Bell Tower might be added to your list of planned projects to be refreshed for this year. Unfortunately this does not seem to have happened. We look forward to seeing a painted bell tower in 2018.

You have also repainted the derelict houses.

The large sports hall adjacent to the Bring Bank site would benefit from painting of the walls below the corrugated walling section. Conversely the gleaming white painted bungalow section /community building at right angles to the hall was by comparison very well presented.

The school looked very neat with some very nice shrubbery inside the gates.

Have you considered the use of Irish in your village or the issue of sustainability and access for all people regardless of age, size, ability or disability? These aspects of this category are important also.

We are sorry that you have 'lost' your shop, Post Office, and Garda Station. Well done to the people who have painted the Garda Station and are looking after its maintenance.

The new wooden gate at the Wildlife Park is very attractive and leads to the new wildlife interpretive signage. Your finger posting signage to the Hawthorn community building/St Fergal's graveyard/parish community sports field and GAA club/wildlife Park and picnic area/recycling centre is comprehensive, clean and, attractive. However, we are unsure as to how visible this sign is as one approaches the village (rather than on leaving the village).

An interesting gateway with which probably led to an old estate (Balacolla House?) was noted opposite the entrance to the recycling/wildlife/sports area. It appears that part of this gateway has been restored in wrought iron as against the original cast iron. It would be better conservation practice to have restored it in the original material. The temporary yellow sports signage detracted from the gateway pillars.

The village pump looked really attractive with its lovely blue paint - echoed in the raised bedding plants on the raised stone semicircular enclosure. We would be disinclined to hang the hanging basket from the structure (as is the case) for two reasons. Number one the weight of this could damage the pump, and secondly the pump itself needs no more embellishment other than that already existing all-around. The raised stone enclosure with the replica stone model of the local Aghaboe Abbey is a lovely feature.

A gable on the property facing the Abbeyleix approach would benefit from repainting before next year.

All your directional signage is clean, neat, and informative. We noticed an old jostle stone with a new litter bin

probably too close to it for safety. This is located near the dished path and green picnic table.

The Glanbia site was very well screened and tidy.

The old school looked extremely well and is lovely to see this building in use. We particularly admired the retained fenestration and lovely green gates, stone walls and stone wall boundary.

We admired your fine green circular post box. This is a good piece of street furniture to retain and treasure - as post boxes like this are becoming rarer throughout the country.

Landscaping and Open Spaces / Tírdhreachú agus Spásanna Oscailte:

Well done to the school who have their own polytunnel.

You told us that you took part in National Tree Week and that you planted apple trees at the Community Garden at the old school, and at the Cemetery. It would have been interesting to get more details about all the species and numbers of trees that you received and planted during National Tree week. Furthermore last year's adjudicator suggested that it would be advisable to develop a long-term tree planting plan for the village. Have you made any progress in this area?

Well done on the planting of shrubs at the community garden, and on the planting of roses in the flower bed in the street. The stone wall filled flower bed along the footpath in front of the Glanbia site looked well, and across the road the raised rose bed was in full bloom and the lovely scent of roses filled the air.

There are some lovely mature trees around the sports hall and recycling area. We also admired the good shrub planting in this area. We liked the raised stone bed with lupins beside the wildlife park fingerpost sign at the corner of the graveyard.

The small arched flower beds within a property front boundary and splay entrance on the Rathdowney approach road were well planted with summer bedding.

On the Rathdowney approach - just at the village - the treed hard landscaped plaza area is verdant, but possibly a little cluttered with too many planters. It would be difficult for somebody with mobility issues to negotiate the space.

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

We look forward to the maturing of the 300 whitethorn plants along the railing in the Wildlife Park. We wish you good luck with your wildflower meadow. This is a phased project, the cleaning of the site you have undertaken for this adjudication year. Next year you will include the planting-up of the site as a project. Ensure that your wildflower seeds are sourced from a reliable source which only includes Irish wildflower seeds.

Well done on your notice board for the Wildlife Park which we were delighted to see in place on adjudication day. You could tell us more about your work with the local beekeeper, and how you are spreading the word about the importance of pollination. We noticed the pollinator signage and the attractive bug hotel in the area of the bring banks a located under a mature tree.

Last year's adjudicator said that they looked forward to progress on your wildlife walk. Perhaps you could map that walk on next year's map. Take advice on lighting the walkway - if its primary purpose is to encourage wildlife - or do you want a secure lit walking area? It is difficult to provide both successfully we think. Keep talking to Laois/Offaly Wildlife Trust.

On the Durrow approach we noticed some recent hedge cutting on both sides. Remember 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) has a very good website which gives lots of information on this issue.

You are implementing aspects of the 2014 Biodiversity Plan. Can you seek to involve the schools in local nature surveys? You might engage with the County Heritage Officer - and with the County Biodiversity Officer - if your County engages such an officer also - in exploring ways in which to further your knowledge and interpretation in this category. The Tidy Towns Handbook is also there as a relevant helpful publication. The Heritage Council's 'Wildlife in Towns and Villages' booklet is another useful resource.

Sustainable Waste and Resource Management / Bainistiú Acmhainní agus Dramhaíola Inbhuanaithe:

We visited your community garden at the old school. What a delightful spot in which to have a community garden. It is both sustainable and very attractive visually. It is planted in a very visually attractive fashion. It is an ongoing programme. (We noticed your 1916 commemoration plaque on this site also) Although you mention the planting of vegetables under Landscaping and Open Spaces - we credit it here as it is a project more in keeping with the ethos of this category, as we assume that these vegetables are for local consumption - which saves such products having

to be transported to the village. Likewise the new raised bed with herbs will be a sustainable produce area.

We noticed your efforts in relation to tin can collections and the recycling of same involving the children. You also encourage people to use the bottle banks and clothes banks. However both of these projects are recycling projects - and whereas they are good the emphasis of this category now is on prevention of waste production with recycling as the bottom of the pyramid in relation to sustainable waste and resource management. Last year's adjudicator also made a similar comment when they said that the purpose of this category is to encourage towns and villages to move beyond just collecting and recycling waste and to take steps to actually reduce the production of waste in the community in the first place.

You told us that you carried out a household survey with your Old Folks' club on their knowledge attitude to waste. Last year's adjudicator referred to the fact that you carried out a waste awareness survey to see how the community regards this category. Were the old folks excluded from that survey or why did you decide to survey them in particular this year? Or was it all the same survey that you described last year and this year? This is a little confusing. However you did not give us any follow-up as to what ensued from the survey of your senior citizens other than sending us the completed questionnaires in your red support document. Were you able to use the results to promote better practice?

Well done on your water butts in the school and in the hall (old school) and on your composter. The hall butt was in place last year according to the adjudicator - so it is an ongoing project. You use this water for your plantings. Well done on your Christmas low-energy lighting. Last year's adjudicator will be happy to know - as they asked if the lights for your Christmas tree were low-energy or not. The adjudicator also asked if your compost the tree afterwards. We still do not know!

Remember that sustainable waste and resource management is primarily about endeavouring to prevent the production of waste before it even becomes necessary to recycle it. 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.

We did not notice any Green Flag at the school on adjudication day. Does the school participate in the Green Flag programme?

Tidiness and Litter Control / Slachtmhaireacht agus Rialú Bruscair:

Well done on taking part in Clean Up Laois week. We noted the photographs of the ensuing collected rubbish. A two-mile stretch of road was a lot to clear. It would be helpful if you indicated where this two-mile stretch was. Was it a quarter of a mile on each approach road - or was at all on the same road for instance.

The cigarette butt beer mats campaign appears to have been successful, as we did not notice any problem with cigarette butts on our visit. Well done!

It is good that the children are learning that dealing with litter after it has been scattered is not an easy job. They helped you pick litter in the hurling field and at the Wildlife Park. We are glad that you got publicity from the paper in relation to your high standards in relation to litter.

Doing a litter pick every day is a huge commitment. We are very sorry that additional traffic going through your village has greatly increased your work in this area. However you are keeping up with the problem, as we did not observe litter on our visit - so well done. Hopefully more people will notice your brown and white 'please keep our village litter free' notice.

The bring banks are in a nice sylvan setting. A bag of drink cans was observed between the grey and red bin - probably because the red relevant bin was full to almost overflowing. Some branches were encroaching on the overhead signage. The white (glass) bins were very grubby. The large hard surfaced area in the area of the bins would benefit from surfacing. The separate pink and blue clothes banks were in good order. The tubular green farm gate at the fingerpost sign (opposite the two separate clothes banks) would benefit from painting before next year.

We noted your sign near the wildlife park fingerpost sign for the attention of dog owners.

The splay entrance and hedging to both the school and the sports complex area was very neat and clean. However the road surface in this area was poor.

The fading yellow car wash sign on the white wall should be removed as it was already advertised in a new red, yellow, and blue additional sign attached to the same wall. The raised bed here looked a little bit sad on adjudication day and needed replanting.

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

It is obvious that all your residents take pride in their houses. On one of the derelict houses the slates looked quite insecure. The hanging baskets found a very apt and appropriate location on the wall of a derelict house. At the St. Feargal estate we really liked the lovely stone planted bank along the entire access road. Road surfaces were good here, and we complement the residents on the weed-free footpaths. As last year's adjudicator mentioned - the estate is a little bare. Could you perhaps provide some trees for the gardens during Tree Week next year? The end

wall would benefit from cleaning. You should also encourage residents not to park on the footpaths - as this looks untidy, and is also an obstruction to people with mobility issues and to buggy users. We note the sewerage works listed in your supplemental material.

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

You endeavour to provide high maintenance standards along each approach road. We note that you are understandably looking for footpaths on the Rathdowney road. We note that you applied for inclusion in the Town and Village Renewal Scheme for these footpaths - as well as for footpaths on the Abbeyleix road. You maintain the Durrow approach road as far as the old pump.

On the approach from the motorway/Rathdowney road we noted the bronze Tidy Towns medal 2012 sign. Perhaps you could update your Tidy Towns sign - as you have won awards since 2012. We noticed the stone signs which you erected in 1999. The signage on the Borris-In-Ossary approach was updated to 2014. What about last year? Whereas we understand that the Lotto is of importance to you financially - we are not in favour of advertising signage on the approaches to the village. It is unlikely that strangers will partake in the Lotto - especially as you now do not have a local shop - so we think your advertising should be focused on those people who live nearby rather than those travelling the roads. Perhaps you could confine your publicity to a suitable well-designed notice in the village itself or/and to local newspapers/newsletters. On the same approach road there were two schools signs, one was solar powered; the second had vegetation encroaching on it. We wonder are two schools signs necessary? Would one be adequate? On the Abbeyleix/ Borris-In-Ossory /Durrow signage (nearer the village) there was encroaching vegetation, as there was also on a junction sign adjacent.

On the Borris-In-Ossory approach we observed a site with dead tree branches. We wondered how somebody could safely access the seating area - as there appeared to be no footpaths and no pull-in for a car to park nearby. (This applied also to the Durrow approach road seating). We noticed your Pollinator area on the Borris-In-Ossory approach, and admired the roses.

On the Durrow approach we noticed some recent hedge cutting on both sides. Please refer to our Wildlife section above in this regard. We admired a lovely row of mature trees.

Would it be possible to paint field gates on approach roads? We would recommend that you see if you can get landowners to agree to paint field gates on the approaches to the village in a uniform colour. This provides a sense of tidiness on approaches and a sense of arrival in the village and help in delineating your boundaries.

On the Abbeyleix approach the letter 'd' was missing from the dangerous junction ahead sign twice! More importantly the very large directional sign on the village side of the latter for Borris-in-Ossory- etc. was quite obscured with tree branches - as was the higher of two road signs on a black and white road signage pole ahead. Road markings were good generally.

As already mentioned the road surface at the entrance to the sports complex was poor.

Concluding Remarks:

Ballacolla is a very well-cared for village and you are to be congratulated for your continued interest in ensuring that its inhabitants and visitors have a lovely environment in which to live and recreate and that visitors can likewise enjoy all its good qualities. You have not let the closure of the three local support services get you down and you are forging ahead with new amenities and interests for your people. We think you could possibly access some additional advice and help from your local authority and other local and national agencies. This comes at no financial cost. We encourage you to keep the youth involved in all aspects of the competition. Perhaps a class could adopt a category to research? We wish you continued success this year and into the future. Go n-eiri libh i rith na blianta ata romhainn