

Tidy Towns Competition 2017

Adjudication Report

Centre: **Borris-in-Ossory** Ref: **408**
County: **Laois** Mark: **286**
Category: **B** Date(s): **01/07/2017**

	Maximum Mark	Mark Awarded 2016	Mark Awarded 2017
Community Involvement & Planning	60	46	45
Built Environment and Streetscape	50	32	31
Landscaping and Open Spaces	50	43	44
Wildlife, Habitats and Natural Amenities	50	18	19
Sustainable Waste and Resource Management	50	16	17
Tidiness and Litter Control	90	64	62
Residential Streets & Housing Areas	50	28	29
Approach Roads, Streets & Lanes	50	38	39
TOTAL MARK	450	285	286

Community Involvement & Planning / Rannpháirtíocht an Phobail & Pleanáil:

Fáilte Buiríos Mír Osraí ! Welcome Borris-in-Ossory to the Super Valu 2017 National Tidy Towns Competition. A committee of 20 people must be a little bit unwieldy at times. You have 10 other people who volunteer with your work. You name some clubs in the village who help you. You also list a number of agencies, bodies and businesses that have supported your activities.

Six meetings per year does not seem like a lot of meetings for the amount of work that you are doing, so therefore you must have very focused and businesslike meetings when you do hold those meetings.

We see that you use modern and traditional methods of communication. This is good as it reaches to a large audience. We hope that you circulate minority churches in your area as well as communicating through the 'parish newsletter'.

Your school students have got involved in composting, bug hotels, and dog fouling issues.

You have been entering the competition now for 17 years. You have stated that there is more pride in the village and determination to increase your marks each year as a result of entering the competition. When you say that the group have held a number of meetings this year: this seems to imply that you have held more than the usual six meetings. Well done on making an application to Laois Partnership for your five-year plan 2017 to 2022. You attached a flyer about the five-year strategic development plan public meeting. We hope that the meeting at the end of April was well attended. You say that you completed a needs assessment for the community. It would have been interesting to see a copy of that survey document. We are assuming that the strategic plan is to be a general development plan for the village - which includes Tidy Towns rather than a specific Tidy Towns plan. It is important however to have a specific Tidy Towns plan which can of course form part of your overall plan. Whether you obtain funding or not we would ask you to submit a specific three or five-year Tidy Towns plan in next year's entry. 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 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 consider any statutory and non-statutory plans applicable to your village in drawing up your work programme. Last series adjudicator also said "to help you progress in the competition we would encourage you to develop a town plan based on a 3 to five-year framework".

Thank you for your clear map based on the Ordnance Survey map. You did not number the projects for this year throughout the entry form and you did not show all your projects for this year's adjudication on the village 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 town 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 numbered and relating to the numbered list throughout the entry form.

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

You simply stated "public spaces" and "derelict sites" under this category heading. It is very unclear as to what work you have carried out in this category. Flower planters which you mentioned here also are dealt with under the relevant category – Landscaping - and the fact that the hotel and pub were sold/auctioned is not a project in itself. You say that you are under discussion with the County Council in relation to the remaining derelict building - we assume you mean derelict buildings. It is important to let us know what this discussion involves. Can you submit copies of letters or minutes of meetings which you have had with the local authority on this issue? Like many Irish towns and villages in rural areas you too have suffered from the downturn in business, with the resultant abandonment and neglect of some premises. There are a few examples these along your village street and you are aware of this. There has also been the issue of the new motorway for your village – although judging by the amount of traffic passing through your village we feel that a lot of traffic is still using the old Dublin to Limerick main road. Do keep approaching the owners/occupiers and also the local authority to help you in your negotiations. However, by contrast there are some sparkling well-maintained properties also.

We were somewhat shocked at the state of the Courthouse which is a Protected Structure. It does not seem that long ago since this building was in use and looked presentable. What has happened and who is responsible? It is a very strategic part of your built heritage, and is located on a most important site which is a focal point in the village. We urge you to give this your urgent attention and do whatever is in your power to move the conservation of this building forward. The original railings at the courthouse are good cast iron railings in keeping with the building but the additional tubular railings are very ugly in this location.

The village pump in the street looked resplendent with its black and red striped appearance and its gleaming white pedestal. A long stretch of walling - forming part of your street elevation - just behind the pump needs repainting. This is where one of your dog fouling notices is located. The village pump on the Erril approach was nicely landscaped, but the wall behind the pump is not in keeping with its rural surrounds.

The Church of Ireland is a feature building in your village and was well presented. Its roundtower-like bell tower could be the logo for your village as it is a distinctive landmark which people remember from passing through your village.

The closed up petrol station requires some attention. The walls require painting. The old sign (which is lying up against a wall) needs to be removed, and the gates and upright metal was also painted.

The lovely primary coloured gates to the school with the Green Flag flying were admired.

The Catholic Church was well presented and provided for a lot of parking as was observed at Saturday evening Mass time. The modern tower in its own way echoes the tower at the church of Ireland. The tree border here was attractive. There were some empty flagpoles in the church grounds. Both churches in the village are a credit to their parishioners and their clergy in each case.

There are some fine buildings in your village including the AD1882 stone structure which appears to be an old Market House now in use as a machine parts sales outlet. Well done to the proprietors for conserving its character. We think it needs no ornamentation as in the line of planted boxes on the footpath outside its front elevation, as it is attractive enough in itself and architecturally elegant. Some other fine buildings of two or three stories retained their carriage entrances - and happily - some of them also have their traditional timber sash windows.

The old convent building itself requires painting.

Some gable ends of properties would benefit from attention especially those facing approach roads.

We felt that there was too much storage and advertising on the footpath outside the Daybreak premises - which detracted from its otherwise clean appearance. In other places we noted advertising such as sandwich boards on the footpath. Such can cause obstruction to people with mobility issues and buggy users, and can also lead to an untidy street line appearance.

The Garda Station looks abandoned. However it has its architectural features intact such as its good doorway and fanlight and also its timber sash windows. Are there any plans to conserve this building and find new use in the community for the building?

Remember too that this category considers the use of Irish within the town and also accessibility issues for people regardless of age, size, ability or disability. Could the housing estates be given an Irish translation of their names on-the-ground? And could the use of traditional local Irish names be considered for any future developments?

Landscaping and Open Spaces / Tírdhreachú agus Spásanna Oscailte:

The tree-lined street adds to the attractiveness of your lovely vernacular street. The Laois Heritage Trail signage on the green area near the Courthouse looked well, as did the bright red and black seating nearby. The shrub beds along the wall beside the Church of Ireland and across from the green area were well maintained and attractive. Last year's adjudicator suggested developing a programme of tree planting in the village.

The whitethorn and trees planted near the roundabout on the approach from Roscrea looked well.

On the Mountrath approach you have planted climbing plants on a long stretch of wall.

11 flower planters were placed throughout the village. Whereas we think that planters can be successfully located in areas which are in need of brightening up, we think there are places which can stand alone and do not need additional 'ornamentation'. One such place was outside the old school on the Mountrath approach. There is a lovely stone wall here, and the building is extremely well presented. The 'lonely' individual box planter on the path outside does little to enhance this site. For a wide street of your scale with many 3 storey buildings we feel that planters -if used should be larger - and contain plantings with vertical emphasis and height - native trees and tall shrubs.

The vegetable patch near the Courthouse was cleared and the youth club are going to look after this.

On the way back to the village from St. Canice's Terrace - we admired the roses near the junction. We admired the good planted shrub beds opposite the Courthouse and near the Church of Ireland at this junction also.

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

You have installed two bug hotels and bumblebee boxes. You have also provided bird boxes. One of your housing estates is installing beehives and bird boxes also. We feel that you should look to the existing attributes of your location in relation to wildlife habitats. You are in the midst of rich countryside, and native species of plants birds and animals are to be found on all sides of the village and within the village itself. Have you conducted any surveys on the native habitats? Have you considered asking the schoolchildren to get involved? Have you attended any relevant workshops? Or perhaps you may have a student at third level student studying Environmental Science who might help you out. Have you sought any expert advice in this area? You live amidst rich undulating countryside. There is a natural world awaiting discovery. 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. Last year's adjudicator also suggested that to progress in this category you should gain support to carry out a survey of habitats in the area.

The wildflower area on the Erril approach was resplendent and we admired the ox eye daisies, but the sign for the wildflower was overgrown and almost invisible.

There appeared to be some fairly recent hedge cutting on some approach roads. 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 also has the informative signage which deals with this issue.

We would encourage you not to use weed management of a chemical nature. Manual weeding is preferable from an environmental point of view. You should investigate chemically free organic methods which are now available. Your local County Heritage Officer and/or your County Biodiversity Officer would be a help to advise you in this regard.

We are glad to note that you have included the issue of pollination as part of the entry criteria to be judged in the competitions which you are organising.

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

The composter at the side of the Courthouse is being used by the youth club. And we noted the water butts which last year's adjudication report drew our attention to, but you have not mentioned this year.

The National School participated in a 'grow your own' project. This will lead then to an understanding of the issue of energy-saving in transport costs. Hopefully residents will take up on this good example and consider growing their own vegetables and fruit which will in turn save on the energy costs of transporting them to the village.

Remember that this category is about reducing waste before it is produced. Would you consider joining the Green Homes scheme? We would strongly 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. 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. 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:

Well done on your weekly sweep up. Picking litter on a daily basis is a big commitment and we commend you for this. The results showed as the village was almost litter free apart from the recycling area. There were some pieces of litter on the way down to the GAA grounds. There were a few bits of litter on the stretch of road between the roundabout and the village on the Roscrea approach. We note that the local authority empty your litter bins weekly.

A dog walking campaign took place in mid-March to highlight dog fouling. From your photographs it appears that you got a nice sunny day/evening for this venture. Your dog fouling posters/jackets looked professional.

We are glad to hear that your involvement in Clean Up Laois week was so successful. The fact that the schoolchildren and adults all got involved is good. The number of rubbish bags assembled – as seen in your photograph shows what an enormous amount of rubbish was collected.

.On arrival at the village from the Camross direction near the Courthouse we noted a seat on gravel (at an angle). This seat does not appear to be securely sited. An old Water Works sign was thrown in the green space. The large space beside the manicured green space is very roughly surfaced and looks unattractive.

The collection hours on the post office box are faded.

And oil tank beside the grotto at the old convent requires painting.

The field gate near the pump on the Erril approach - and near the wildflower area should be painted to complement this good area.

The entire recycling area needs urgent attention. The vast expanse of unsurfaced greyness, together with very grubby bins and an equally grubby sign, as well as scattered litter around the bins and between the bins creates a bad impression. The amount of litter beside the red receptacle was quite substantial, and the litter had scattered around beyond the immediate precincts of the bins themselves. An illegible warning sign was noticed in the growth nearby.

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

You tell us that hanging baskets and window boxes are displayed on houses on the Main Street. Be careful not to damage any Protected Structure's fabric with the insertion of brackets. Sustainable in-soil planting is preferable to hanging baskets and window boxes - which use valuable water resources and manpower time. We encourage you to look to providing additional tree stands along the street on possible out-shots. You have attractive vernacular streetscape which does not need a lot of additional embellishment. Planters and hanging baskets can be very useful in brightening up a dull or unattractive area however where in-soil planting is not possible.

In housing development grass is cut on a weekly basis. You do not tell us who carries this work out.

Slieve Bloom View estate won two local authority awards in 2016 in the 'get involved' competition and for the best container floral display.

You tell us that you are currently holding a best hanging basket/window box and best estate competition. However we note that your form also includes a best garden competition. We are glad to note that you have included the issue of pollination in both front and back gardens as part of the entry criteria to be judged. You have also included pollination as an issue in the best estate competition.

We noted a nicely landscaped single-storey house on the right-hand side approaching from the Mountrath direction just before the 80 K pH speed limit sign. The four bay two-storey house beside Geoghegan's was well maintained. The terrace of houses near the Church of Ireland was well presented.

St Canice's Terrace was edged by verdant planting in the garden of the adjacent house with virginia creeper. There is a lovely access way (on the right-hand side) to this estate with mature shrub beds. On the left-hand side the situation is somewhat different. This presents a poor image in contrast to the lovely shrub bed. The concrete post and wire fence displays a few hanging baskets, whereas sustainable planting in the soil to screen the fence would be preferable. Some planting appears to have taken place inside the fence, but does not appear to be thriving. St Canice's Terrace is a nice enclave of housing with good gardens. However we observed parking on the footpath in the estate. Please refer to our comments under Approach Roads on this issue. On adjudication day a man was trimming the edge of a field adjoining this housing estate. New semi mature trees were observed planted along the far boundary. The estate itself had very good weed free footpaths.

Mountain View and Royal Court estates were well maintained.

Mill Court looked well with its attractive trees and hedges. However there were a lot of rubbish bins around the houses. Can some central enclosure be provided for these bins which are screened from the street?

Glenall estate on the Camross Road includes some property which has not yet been sold - hence the advertising sign. The open space needs landscaping. We noted a bench which appeared to be located in the middle of the footpath causing obstruction to footpath users. Some of the gardens in unoccupied houses were overgrown.

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

Well done on the weekly grass cutting on approach roads. We note that you have applied under the Town and Village Renewal scheme for new footpaths and lighting. You planted flower beds on approach roads.

On the Mountrath approach we admired some semi mature trees on the right-hand side. This route is heavily trafficked. We noted an advertising sign for a premise in the town. Advertising signs detract from approach roads. We also noted a GAA Lotto sign on a nice stone wall. There was a planted box with no colour at the 80 K pH speed limit sign. A second box needs painting/levelling or being got rid of. There were nicer perennials on the right-hand side near the village beyond the semi mature trees. We observed some hedge cutting of fairly recent origin to a field on this approach also. We refer back to our comments on this issue under the Wildlife category. At the GAA grounds we observed another hoarding in relation to insulation. And nearer the village again we saw a dog show and deli fly posting. The yellow hard shoulder lines need renewal. The Fáilte sign for the town looked well. There was also a large sign for the Health Centre. We accept that it must be difficult to keep the HSE sign clean given the amount of traffic passing by, but it could do with repainting. Could some of the road and official signage be amalgamated? The trees on the right-hand side were admired. The Esso hoarding was a bit worn. The Borris-in-Ossory stone sign was a little hard to read. There were nice shrub beds and further trees on the right-hand side at and around the 50 K pH speed limit sign.

On the Roscrea approach we admired a grove of trees on the left-hand side. One tree appeared to be dead. Another row of trees on both sides of the road looked well. The perennial shrubs were admired and the edges of the road were trimmed inwards from the 60 K pH. We saw an advertising sign for the Rathdowney show near a large road sign 'do not pass' and another larger Ossory show sign was attached to the other side. The 60 K pH speed limit sign on the left-hand side was bent. We noted the town sign with the use of Irish. We observed a Laois Walks Festival sign attached to a road sign. A sign with two high rusty poles was located in a hedge row. A plethora of road signs were observed. A GAA pitch development advertising sign was also seen. Beyond that point there is a lovely landscaped entrance with mature trees as far as the village. Beyond the landscaped pump the edges along the fencing might be trimmed.

A 50 K pH speed limit sign on the left-hand side on the way out of St Canice's estate was partially obscured by vegetation

On the Erril approach road inwards from the roundabout (via the old bridge) we thought that the roundabout was very overgrown - as are the immediately surrounding areas. Young trees are being choked by high grass. Attractive wooden bollards and semi-mature trees lead inwards to a stone bridge. This area does not need the addition of potted plants as it looks well in its natural rural state. We admired a very good hedge and trimmed verges with further semi-mature trees. These are enough in themselves do not require embellishment. The plain black and white Borris-in-Ossory sign was simple and classical. We were glad to see no repetition of village signs on this approach. One village sign on any approach is enough.

On the Camross approach near the village there are some sheds which would benefit from repainting. We observed some hedge cutting of recent origin near the Glenall estate. The EIR building needs painting and removal of the derelict notice.

The approach from the Rathdowney road is rather spoilt by the large and ugly recycling area. There are some lovely views however to the mountains in the distance -and some nice semi-mature trees. We observed what appears to be some chemical weeding at the 80 K pH speed limit sign. Please refer to our comments on this under Wildlife

Could landowners along each approach road be encourage to paint their field gates in a uniform colour for the village? This gives a feeling of arrival to a centre and helps to delineate your boundaries.

Concluding Remarks:

Borris-in-Ossory is a very fine village with some excellent vernacular architecture and a number of Protected Structures. And you as a community are endeavouring to improve it in every way. However we consider that you have two fairly important issues to deal with. The first of these is the deteriorating condition of the Courthouse and the second is the very poor presentation and littered condition of the recycling area. Both of these form two very different but major challenges for you in your village, and we hope that we will see some progress on each in 2018.

We also feel that you should consider last year's and this series adjudicators' suggestions in relation to obtaining advice on various ways in which you can progress in the Wildlife category and also in the Sustainable Waste

Management category. Remember that your local authority is a great source of excellent professional advice at all levels and in all aspects of the competition.

We wish you continued success this year and into the future. Go n-éirí libh i rith na blianta atá romhainn!