

Tidy Towns Competition 2017

Adjudication Report

Centre: **Castletown** Ref: **409**
County: **Laois** Mark: **319**
Category: **B** Date(s): **16/06/2017**

	Maximum Mark	Mark Awarded 2016	Mark Awarded 2017
Community Involvement & Planning	60	48	50
Built Environment and Streetscape	50	40	41
Landscaping and Open Spaces	50	48	48
Wildlife, Habitats and Natural Amenities	50	31	32
Sustainable Waste and Resource Management	50	16	17
Tidiness and Litter Control	90	60	58
Residential Streets & Housing Areas	50	32	33
Approach Roads, Streets & Lanes	50	41	40
TOTAL MARK	450	316	319

Community Involvement & Planning / Rannpháirtíocht an Phobail & Pleanáil:

Fáilte Baile An Chaisleáin! Welcome Castletown to the Super Valu 2017 National Tidy Towns Competition. We are delighted to know that you have a core membership of 12 upwards and a further 12 active volunteers. This is excellent representation from a small village. Furthermore you tell us that a third generation of some families is still involved in the competition. This shows your longevity and perseverance in the Tidy Towns competition nationally.

Ten other bodies locally work with you. Furthermore you have a good relationship with the Community Centre committee. Obviously all appreciate your diligence and commitment. We note that you have established a new Tidy Towns committee in 2014. It is wonderful that more people - including junior volunteers are now joining in numbers and that you have a bigger pool of skills to call on. Have you considered setting up a Junior Tidy Towns committee? We are also glad to hear that you have some residents from Europe now living in your village who are actively involved with your organisation.

You hold monthly meetings throughout the year and weekly informal gatherings during the busy working season.

We have no doubt but that the work of Castletown Tidy Towns is primarily achieved by - as you say - "very considerable volunteer input with comparatively limited financial resources." With fewer external supports. You rightly say that this encourages greater ownership and appreciation of the work which you do. However, we would suggest that this has become a more common phenomenon in recent years - especially since the dissolution of town councils. Nonetheless you list a number of agencies and local businesses who help you in various ways. You are particularly grateful you say for the very positive partnership you have with the local Community Employment Scheme. You very specifically acknowledge the generous sponsorship of funding, prizes and materials received from over 50 local individual and business interests for your - now annual - Family Fun day in August. We applaud you for the appreciation you showed these people in sending a lovely Castletown Winter scene Christmas card to thank all those people. Thank you for the photo!

You use many communication methods both traditional and modern. We looked at your Facebook page.

Well done to the children in your national school who received their first Green Flag in 2016 (before last year's adjudicator's visit). Well done also to their teachers! Having two of your members on The Green School committee provides for a great two-way exchange of knowledge and ideas.

Castletown has been entering the competition now for 25 years, and throughout this period you have gone from strength to strength as a community and as a place to live, work and recreate in. Much of this is due to your participation in the competition. We particularly liked your observation that within the community, neighbours

voluntarily provide assistance to older and less able bodied members of the community with the upkeep of their private property frontages. This is admirable. No doubt some of these people were participants in your first generation projects. An interesting comment which you also make is that the contact you have with other communities through the competition has forged new ideas and new contacts. We liked your photograph 'having the chat' - an essential part of any community activity!

The Family Fun Day is - as you say - a major community development initiative and has become established now in your annual calendar. The duck race must have been fun! Obviously the event necessitated a very significant community volunteer input beyond those regularly engaged in Tidy Towns activities. Therefore the publicity obtained from this will probably bring in further volunteers.

Thank you for your very carefully put together entry form. However, we would make one small suggestion- and that is that perhaps next year you might provide a written entry form and a separate folder of photographs relating to that entry form. The reason for this is that your submission was quite bulky and heavy due to the number of photographs - which made for many extra pages in the document. It is difficult for the adjudicator to carry such a document around on adjudication day. There may be some photographs which you would like to include in the written statement, but perhaps keep these to a minimum and reference the rest of the photographs to the relevant categories in a separate document.

We give you 'full marks' for the clear way in which referenced this year's projects within your entry form and correspondingly on your village plan. It was quite obvious that you read the guidelines for filling in the entry form carefully. It is equally obvious that you do not rush filling in your entry form, but see it as an important part of your entry. We are impressed with this!

Your 2017 to 2019 Tidy Towns plan was very well thought out and laid out. It was easy to read and to understand. We look forward to hearing about the successful completion of the various projects you hope to achieve over the next three years.

Thank you for your clear village map which included useful information such as is requested in the entry guidelines. Thank you for naming the housing estates and for naming approach roads. As we said already having such a clear map indicating projects for consideration by the adjudicator for the current adjudication year was very helpful.

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

The ongoing conservation of the old mill is a very worthy project. Such a major project needs to be phased, and you are doing this with success. Just one stretch of (opposite the 50kph speed limit) whitewashed wall fronting the road needs refreshing. The door murals will require freshening shortly also. The golf club, as the owner of the mill, is supporting you in your 2 to 3 year project to replace and renew the louvers of the main external windows. We assume that you have received / receive architectural conservation advice in relation to this Protected Structure and any works thereon. Does your local authority have an Architectural Conservation Officer? Last year's adjudicator also asked what professional advice you have received in relation to the mill.

The stone arched bridge is a wonderful part of your built heritage, and can be appreciated by all on the riverbank amenity area.

The community centre has been brightened up through the painting of the exterior. You are grateful to Crown Paints Ireland for their donation of a substantial amount of paint for this project. The surplus paint was used to paint a derelict building opposite the side entrance to the local primary school.

With regard to the playground installation in 2016 of a new story-telling chair and wooden seating posts in the playground - you have not indicated if this project was pre or post June 2016. So we are unsure as to whether it was a project for this year or for last year's adjudication. As this category also suggests and assesses the usability and suitability of new structures for all people regardless of age, size and ability or disability - we would suggest that perhaps you look at the provision of some wheelchair-friendly addition to the playground in the future - such as a wheelchair friendly swing. You also provide continuous maintenance of the playground.

The artistic mural on the school wall was a cooperative project between the children and a lead artist. However this appears to have been a project for last year's adjudication, as last year's adjudicator said "The new mural and of course recently earned Green Flag were prominently displayed at the neat school" The back of the school shed - which rises above the high stone wall entrance road to Elderfield Drive - would benefit from painting before next year. Although the school looked well, we thought that the unsurfaced area and the number of cars parked in its foreground 'took from' its overall presentation.

Guilfoyle's Funeral Home was well presented. Opposite a single-storey low building (which appeared to have been an AnCo community building) has redundant hanging baskets attached to its front elevation. The bright blue/white Castle Inn looked very well, and the Village Store across the road echoed the blue colour in its shop front surround.

The church looked well with resplendent gleaming railings. The Grotto looked well - but could you see if you can get people not to park in front of it? We admired a double gate and a pedestrian gate to a cream bungalow between The Green and the school. This more modern iron work continues a long local tradition of ironwork (railings and gates) in evidence around The Green.

Well done on your programme of maintaining and painting sign poles, seats and gates at entrances to public areas. We noted the work underway on the old village water pump. Next year's adjudicator will see the final presentation.

Parking on the footpath along The Green / Main Street was noted. This looks both visually unattractive in the streetscape and is damaging to the footpath. Furthermore and importantly it is very unhelpful to wheelchair users or people with buggies because of the obstruction it causes. Under this category heading we look to involve access for all.

We admired the old Irish lettering on Árdá Phairc an Teampaill. Well done on your use of Irish such as at the mill plaques / An Muileann Coirce .

Landscaping and Open Spaces / Tírdhreachú agus Spásanna Oscailte:

We are delighted to see that you have an ongoing programme to expand the use of perennial plants as well as pollinator plants. Your continuous work in renewing seasonal floral displays and maintaining planted areas was in evidence on adjudication day when we noted a lady working on the central median planting area - just as your photographs in this category shows a person working on the same area. Well done to this volunteer and indeed to all the volunteers! The planting of this central median planting with perennial planting for this year is praiseworthy. Well done on the small beds to the front of the community centre. The work displayed in the photograph of the young person and adults working on the raised stone bed planter near the school has come to fruition, and the bed looked well on adjudication day. The natural valerian covered dry high stone walls at the village side of the bridge looked very unspoilt and appropriate. We admired the tiered grassed terraces along the river with the brightly painted blue and mauve seating.

The Green is a magnificent landscape. And it is to your credit that you have maintained its unity, and not carved it up with flowerbeds or other intrusive elements.

The landscaping between the Grotto and playground was very attractive.

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

You have been working hard on the issue of pollination. Your talk from the local beekeeper has led to his kindly agreeing to act in an advisory capacity to your activities on an ongoing basis. Well done to the beekeeper involved! The commencement of a planting programme which is beneficial to butterflies and bees, from 2014 onwards, is an ongoing project. The Community Orchard and other pollinator friendly plantings are going ahead apace. As mentioned under the Landscaping category we commend your recent median planting on the Main Street planted with new pollination friendly plants.

We are glad to know that you actively engaged with Inland Fisheries in the public consultation process with regard to the fish pass. We are sorry to hear that there are some issues beginning to emerge. You have described these to us and we wish you the best in ongoing endeavours to see what can be done to solve this issue. We are sure that you will have a good hearing, as you have been participative from the start of the project.

We note that the Gun Club have helped you with the restoration of the wildlife duck pond. Have you taken some biodiversity advice on this issue, as the introduction of new species can have a 'ripple effect' which is not always positive to other areas of biodiversity in the local environment?

Well done on the new wildlife sign and to the volunteer who gave of their time in creating this sign. Well done on also using the Irish names for the species named on the sign.

You regularly cut grass and maintain the access path along the riverside/woodland walk. You have planted a wildflower area beside the school vegetable garden and are - in association with the local GAA - redeveloping the wildlife garden at the rear of the community centre. In doing so you are looking at the control of aggressive plant species and expanding the range of wildlife friendly plants.

You are maintaining and monitoring the usage of bird nesting boxes on The Green and in the school grounds with the local school children. 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, work, 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 asked about the possibility of a habitat survey of the village? Have you made any progress on this? This is an important suggestion.

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

The solar powered water pump at the 'under construction' renewed village pump site will be of interest. The new school vegetable garden will stimulate the children's interest in food production locally, which in turn will reduce the need for vegetables which could be grown locally to be transported to the village. The fencing is of recycled pallets. We noted the Grow it Yourself workshop events.

You support the local school in their Green Schools programme. Under Agenda 21 your group organised for the

purchase of an organic material composter for composting of school lunchtime food waste. This in turn can be used in the vegetable garden. The ongoing unused nappy project is another ongoing project, as is the composting of leaves at the Community Centre. Last year's adjudicator asked if you compost arising from village open space maintenance.

Well done on your ongoing rainwater harvesting and water conservation work. You say that you monitored your use of harvesters which confirmed that your watering requirements are met by this one butt. Mulching grass is another of your projects. Your ongoing use of energy-efficient Christmas lighting is noted. The ongoing management of the community orchard is another of your projects.

You say that weeds are regularly removed and sprayed. We would very much encourage you to use manual weed removal methods - although this is labour-intensive. There are also organic methods of weed removal which you could discuss with your County Biodiversity and County Heritage Officer. Would you consider joining The Green Homes scheme as suggested by last year's adjudicator?

We would suggest 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:

You carry out regular daily litter patrols. Targeted litter picking at the riverside amenity area each evening during warm weather is a commitment but a worthwhile one. You organise an anti litter competition in the local primary school. Perhaps you might tell us a little more about this next year. Is an art competition? The daily maintenance of the playground is also a further example of how committed you are to keeping your village litter free in all areas. Your bring bank is another project which you continually upkeep and enhance. Weeds are removed regularly. You say that fly posting is not tolerated and that any such items are promptly removed.

You have allocated an area near the composting enclosure for the sorting of litter and waste into recyclable and non recyclable.

We would suggest that the red gate on the road leading to the graveyard would be repainted before next year. We noted that part of the boundary wall at the old graveyard is in a state of collapse. Perhaps a meeting with an archaeologist and stone mason would be in order. A slat in the wooden fence leading to the graveyard needs fixing.

A dirty junction sign and a 'dog poo' sign were noted at the village Green area.

The double sided Slieve Bloom Environment map information notice at the village side of the bridge is faded, worn, and needs replacement. The glass in the lanterns on the bridge was quite dirty. The yellow/black bridge road painted road marks were also faded.

Seating on The Green might be repainted for next year.

We were somewhat disappointed with some issues at the riverside amenity area. We agree with last year's adjudicator who said that the concrete litter bins at the river amenity are an 'ugly item.' On our visit one bin was completely surrounded by high nettles and many other weeds; the other was also surrounded by vegetation. A bare area of grass needing reseeding was noted beside the latter litter bin. The old surrounds of the new Castletown Wildlife sign do not do it justice. The good Salmon Leap boulder was encroached on by vegetation - almost 'blocking out' its Irish name. Walking to the bypass bridge underpass we were disappointed to see that an almost completely illegible and very run-down 'Duck Pond Nature Walk' map was in situ - with a graffiti scrawl also. The frame was very old and disintegrating and the entire effect was poor. A lifebuoy was missing from its yellow holder (this adjudicator alerted the Water Safety Authority by phone immediately to this fact - so we hope that it was replaced since). The chequered walls need repainting in preferably a plain colour, as they are very grubby and contain graffiti. You say that you paint over any graffiti which you find under the bridge. Another visit is warranted. We also noted that you have not succeeded yet in having the railings on the overhead bridge painted. Perhaps the local authority might be able to do this during the coming year. Last year's adjudicator recommended that they be painted. They do form part of the river area vista.

Well done on your participation in Clean Up Laois week. We are delighted to know that you got a great response and we note that you collected 35 full refuse banks of rubbish. Well done to the Scout leader / canoeist who partakes in an innovative way of cleaning the river. The village was litter free. Only two pieces of litter were noticed - one plastic bottle on The Green near a seat and one piece of litter at the river area.

The recycling banks at the school area were neat and clean.

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

Communal grass areas are regularly mowed and hedges trimmed in accordance with the Wildlife Act provisions. You encourage householders to maintain their properties, and you give advice to newer residential development residents. We note the impact of the 1916 commemorative tree planting, having yielded increased cooperation between the local residents' committees in that area and your own committee.

It is to the credit of all residents facing The Green as to how well their properties are presented. This includes the larger residence of the De La Salle community also. Well done to all. Elsewhere we admired 'Cosán Chorr' and neighbouring properties - all well maintained and cared-for.

At Churchfield Court the 'stop' sign at the exit onto the road is turned. The b/w metal upright of the 'stop' sign at the exit onto the road needs repainting. We noted a lot of satellite dishes in this area which detract from the front elevational appearances of houses. This estate has good native hedging. However we noticed some parking on footpaths in this estate. This causes obstruction to people with mobility issues and also to people using buggies - as well as damaging the footpaths. Can you encourage people to desist from this practice?

We admired the nice stone boulder at St. Patrick's Terrace. The estate itself is very neat and a credit to all the owners and occupiers. A wall at the side of St Patrick's Terrace - on the way to Árd Edmund needs antifungal treatment and painting, as do the splay areas to Árd Edmund. Árd Edmund seems to be an unfinished estate, but has been well dealt with the trimming of the site growth nearer the road. There is a good shrub bed at the entrance to the estate. A steel barrier nearby would benefit from painting.

Churchfield Heights is a neat estate with good open space. We noted the memorial and planting for 1916 on the approach to the graveyard.

Gash Court is a very well cared-for estate. At the boulder sign triangular gravelled area we would be inclined to remove the 3 small corner planters - as we think they are not necessary and look a little 'fussy.' The long planter in front of the boulder looked well.

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

Your regularly mow and edge all roadside margins. Kerb lines are regularly swept and kept weed free. Hedges are trimmed on all approach roads during the appropriate season. We noticed a 50 K pH speed limit sign which was obscured by vegetation on the immediate approach to the village from the Mountrath 'feeder' road by the old Cornmill. Signs are periodically washed and poles painted. Nevertheless we did see one very rusty 'caution children crossing' sign. And the white metal pole containing the Pastoral Centre/Nursery and Golf Club fingerpost signage at the Mountrath junction is rusty and needs replacement or repainting. The Pastoral Centre fingerpost is also in need of replacement. You repair stone walls damaged on the Mountrath access road. Approach roads are targeted for litter picking during cleanups and each week in April. We would suggest that you update your brown Tidy Towns village sign on the Mountrath approach to include your successes since 2014. The approach to the village along this route is most attractive with the topiary 'Fáilte' sign, lovely stands of trees, dry stone walls and trimmed margins. We noticed that the 50/80 speed limit sign was being encroached upon by hedging.

We would suggest that you consider asking local landowners to consider painting field gates on this and other approaches to the village in a uniform colour. This gives a sense of arrival to a village and creates a neat impression.

A 'headless' road sign was noted on the bridge end corner of The Green near a 'Stop' sign that had graffiti on its red hexagonal area (opposite the old school/playschool). Some road markings need repainting, as do the wheelchair parking spaces in blue. Old yellow sluice valve signs vary in presentation. One near the mill looked well, but one on The Green needed repainting for instance.

Some parts of the village road surfaces need renewal.

Concluding Remarks:

Castletown is a lovely village on the river Nore with much history. You have made quite a name for yourselves in Tidy Towns circles especially since winning the competition some years ago. You have a very vibrant community, and you have renewed your approaches to the competition with the new committee a few years ago. You also have the wisdom of the more experienced residents who nurtured the village along through many years of the competition. This is a good combination. You are at a high level in the competition. We wish you continued success this year and into the future. Go n-eiri libh i rith na blianta atá romhainn!