

Tidy Towns Competition 2017

Adjudication Report

Centre: **Clonaslee** Ref: **410**
County: **Laois** Mark: **316**
Category: **B** Date(s): **08/07/2017**

| | Maximum Mark | Mark Awarded 2016 | Mark Awarded 2017 |
|---|-------------------------|------------------------------|------------------------------|
| Community Involvement & Planning | 60 | 50 | 49 |
| Built Environment and Streetscape | 50 | 40 | 40 |
| Landscaping and Open Spaces | 50 | 45 | 46 |
| Wildlife, Habitats and Natural Amenities | 50 | 35 | 36 |
| Sustainable Waste and Resource Management | 50 | 17 | 18 |
| Tidiness and Litter Control | 90 | 61 | 61 |
| Residential Streets & Housing Areas | 50 | 29 | 29 |
| Approach Roads, Streets & Lanes | 50 | 37 | 37 |
| TOTAL MARK | 450 | 314 | 316 |

Community Involvement & Planning / Rannpháirtíocht an Phobail & Pleanáil:

Fáilte Cluain na Slí! Welcome Clonaslee to the Super Valu 2017 National Tidy Towns Competition. You have a large committee for a small village. You also have additional volunteers and help from other local bodies. You name and acknowledge these. We think it is a good idea to hold your AGM after the national results are published. You then hold monthly meetings during the quieter season and meet regularly during the busy spring and summer season. You plan- but also review work at these meetings. You individually list a large number of agencies, bodies, and businesses that have supported your activities. You have an objective to provide a citizen science type training program. We wish you luck with this.

You use traditional and modern social media methods of communication. This is good as it appeals to all age groups. We hope that you circulate minority churches in your area as well as the communications via the parish newsletter.

Well done on regularly giving talks to the local two primary schools. We are delighted to know that the schools are supportive. You liaise with them also on the Green Flag programme. You are re energising your relationship with the college. It is a good idea to work closely with a Transition class.

Entering the competition for 45 years is an amazing achievement. We salute you on this continuous effort. You appreciate the enhancement work which the competition engenders, but also the community spirit it fosters.

Biodiversity awareness is important but we discuss your projects in the area of Biodiversity under the relevant category.

Your 2015 to 2020 action plan matrix is, we understand, just an indicator for your activities and subject to annual revision. It is a short succinct document. We assume that it is a summary of a longer document. Many issues are addressed within the action plan. However we see no reference whatsoever to the built environment, which after all is a most important aspect of the competition. Without a good built environment it is difficult to enhance your village. Areas such as Approach Road, Streets and Lanes plans and Residential Streets and Housing area plans are also somewhat short on detail in your matrix. Perhaps next year you might send us an expanded version of your five-year plan - which need not be lengthy - but should cover all categories of the competition, and perhaps you could elaborate on the timeframes and project achievements in your plan. It is also a good idea to lay a plan out under the various category headings of the competition. We realise that what you submitted is merely an indicator, but it is somewhat short on detail. If there are areas where you have not managed to achieve your goal with regard to projects it is also acceptable to include these. Not every project which you plan to achieve is feasible or achievable in the timeframe allotted. You should also let us know the consultation process involved in putting this

plan together. For instance did you hold specifically focused public meetings? Did you conduct any surveys of attitudes or ideas? Have you consulted the local County Development Plan or any other plan relevant to your village in drawing up your five-year Tidy Towns plan?

Your village map was a simple artistic sketch plan, and it was clear and pleasant to read and follow on adjudication day. Well done to the cartographer (who obviously is also an artist) involved! However it did not encompass the entire village. For instance some of the Killeigh/Tullamore approach road was noticeably lacking - although you named a housing estate on that road - but did not show it on the map.

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

Whereas you have enhanced the surroundings of the Community Centre, which we understand is a key building - yet most of the projects to which you refer in relation to the centre involve landscaping or wildlife/enhancing pollination planting around the building. All of these projects are worthy and are 'markable' under the relevant categories, so we discuss them under the categories to which they apply and credit/mark them likewise.

Outside of this project a number of the bulleted projects which you list under this category heading also involve other category projects. You do refer to maintaining public spaces and this is relevant under this category heading.

As we have referred already to the lack of specific Built Heritage category projects in your indicator plan, we would recommend that you revisit this category during the coming adjudication year. As well as projects involving buildings and public spaces we would remind you that increasing the general use of the Irish language and sustainability and access for all people regardless of age, size ability disability are considered under this category heading also. You have been very diligent in ensuring that housing estate names are in Irish on their name signs - as an example Clós Gairbhile. This is good. We also complement the butcher on his Irish signage and indeed his well presented property.

Perhaps your Community Centre has universal access already? But there are other parts of the village that would benefit from improvements in this area.

In relation to the fountain project which you mention under Landscaping - but is also a public space project - which you hope to carry out during the coming year - we would strongly advise you to access professional architectural/landscape architectural advice in relation to this suggestion - and if you go ahead with the project - professional advice in relation to its design. Does your local authority have an Architects' Department? If not, perhaps the Planning Department or the Heritage Officer could access such professional advice for you.

The Health Centre was presented in an excellent fashion - but parking on the footpath outside detracted from its overall presentation. Despite the fact that The Swan is for sale - it is in generally in good order - apart from the fact that the walls/gable facing the Birr approach require painting.

The Garda Station was neat, but we noticed a redundant pole outside the site. The hanging basket brackets might also be removed as they did not appear to be in use. The nearby pump was 'lost' in a sea of gravelled background, with two vehicles parked in the way. And a nearby shed would benefit from repainting.

Not all building gables were as well presented as last year and some repainting is an order.

Could the metal gate at Moran's be painted and the cars for sale removed from the street? We noted the defibrillator on the wall at this premises. That part of the wall would benefit from repainting i.e. between the defibrillator and the gate.

The 1813 Catholic Church is impressive in its setting back from the roadway with good stone entrance walls and gates. We noted an interesting date plaque over the entrance door - the date preceding Catholic Emancipation. Was it taken from an earlier construction or is part of this church part of the original 1813 foundation? It was very well maintained apart from some downpipes which needed repainting. We would strongly suggest that you remove the Christmas lighting from the church after Christmas as it looks very foolish in July. Whereas we understand the cost and work involved in doing such - it creates an untidy and neglected impression on an otherwise beautiful building. The entire grounds were immaculately maintained, and we understand that the grotto was missing its statue for repainting work. Nonetheless it looked delightful! The school nearby was also extremely well presented. We noted the memorial to a parish priest, and, even more intriguingly the grave slabs protected by a lovely dry stone overhanging beehive-type structure. We wonder where these grave slabs were originally located, and what archaeological advice was sought in transferring them to this location. Some screening around the security fencing at the toilets area would be good. Perhaps this is one location where you can transfer some of your superfluous potted plants which we later discuss under Landscaping. We noted the wheelchair ramp and wheelchair parking spaces at the rear of church. An empty pot was located beside the stone encased passageway in the wall through to the adjacent site. The 1912 Bell Tower is not enhanced by the plastic flower pot underneath. We would suggest removing it. Whereas an adjudicator does not normally enter into premises, the temptation to look inside a church always appeals. We were delighted to see a notice on the double notice board saying 'keep Clonaslee litter free.' We also admired the lovely original gallery and pillars, unusual ceiling and plasterwork, the modern limestone seat and two interesting stained-glass windows on either side of the altar.

The Hickey public house is an excellent example of vernacular architecture and has been treated in a restrained fashion and presented extremely well. Congratulations to the owner/occupier on maintaining the original name sign

and for not attaching any gaudy signage or lighting. The wooden fret work on the gable and the red painting thereon was echoed by the bright red parasol outside on adjudication day. The public space nearby with the wheelbarrow/man/sculpture was admired. Likewise the signage for the Swan was restrained.

The Tír na nÓg premises was very well presented with lovely trees and natural hedging.

On the Mountmellick approach the VEC building is a very fine building – but very badly in need of conservation. Its site curtilage is also unattractive. Do you have an Architectural Conservation Officer in your local authority? This building is a typical example of a VEC building of its period - and such is becoming rarer in the Irish built heritage. It would be good if it could be conserved and find a new use. This would also solve your other issues in its regard.

Coláiste Chluain na Slí had three empty flagpoles. The brown front gables need repainting. A shed (gym?) with toilets to the rear of the college needs a little attention.

Like all villages and towns you too have some structures which are not cared for. You are aware of these yourselves. Just keep encouraging those responsible.

The street in your village is beautifully laid out - with the old Church of Ireland/ now Heritage Centre- as its focal point at a rise in the ground. Properties are generally very well maintained along the street. With regard to the church which is now your Heritage Centre - we feel that the low hedging and red railings are excellent, but they have been somewhat spoiled by the amount of additional 'fuss' in the form of hanging baskets and plastic flower pots located around its site boundary. These are excellent railings and need no embellishment. What you are doing in keeping them painted and maintained is adequate. We see that last year's adjudicator also suggested that "the baskets attached to the old railing detracted somewhat from its architectural setting and might be better placed elsewhere. "The flower beds and chain link fencing look well.

The graveyard on the Mountmellick road was well maintained, and the gates were attractive. However the boundary wall would benefit from repainting if possible.

Landscaping and Open Spaces / Tírdhreachú agus Spásanna Oscailte:

We feel that you have tried very hard to add landscaping to your village. Realistically this is not necessary as you live in a most beautiful rich countryside - 'fingers' of which reach into the village such as the river area. We felt that the number of planters on approach roads and elsewhere was 'overpowering' and unnecessary. Whether you plant native, perennial or pollination species in these planting boxes - they still require additional water resources. That is not to say that there is not a place for planting boxes or pots, but we would respectfully suggest that you limit this type of planting to areas that are needy. We do not think many areas in your village are needy in this regard. We would especially recommend that you restrict the number of planters on the approach roads.

On the positive side the use of planters for traffic management as you have done is good. Also where there is a lot of hard surfacing without the potential to plant in the soil (such as near the concrete wall area at the GAA Park) the use of planters can be good. We commend you on the wall planting, but suggest that you continue the planting around the corner of the said wall.

The butterfly gardens in both the Playschool and green area at the Park are commended. As you say you hope that members of the public will make this link themselves and include such planting in their own residential gardens.

The bog garden is indeed a miniature garden. But it is an interesting concept. It will have its own mini flora and fauna occupants. Well done on following the recommendation of last year's adjudicator in planting pyracantha climbers at the Clodiagh Way housing development.

You should include projects which you hope to carry out over the course of the coming year in your plan rather than in your entry form. Projects you mention here involve installing a fountain, hosting a hedge laying workshop, sustainable wildflower seeds collection workshop and mass planting of spring bulbs. We cannot credit these projects as part of this category adjudication now - as they should form part of your plan and should not be part of your entry form.

Landscaping at the green area was superb and not overdone or intruded upon by artificial planting. We liked your shrub beds and rose beds. In fact the scent of roses was noticeable here and also at the beds across from the Heritage Centre. Well done!

We admired the new hedging at the Coláiste and the wildflower garden on the approaches. The landscaping in the church grounds was restrained and included a lovely bed of ox eye daisies

The entire area of the riverside seating, grassed, and treed area near the Tullamore road junction is a delightful public space, and you have left it in its natural state, but maintain it really well. We noticed your bird boxes also in this area. A broken pipe at the bridge abutment might be rectified.

One particular 'overkill' in landscaping was noted on the bridge where the Irish name for the bridge was completely obscured by annual bedding planting in the stone trough. Whereas the annual bedding planting looked delightfully colourful, it was not appropriately sited.

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

You are indeed fortunate - as you say - that your village is surrounded by mature wood lands which are accessible to the public. Looped walks provide access to the woodlands and to Brittas Lake. We are delighted that the majority of your planting choices this year have been made with a view to provide habitats for pollination. Well done on taking part in National Tree planting Week. 1,500 native Irish trees were planted at the rear of the Community Centre! In time presumably these would need to be transplanted elsewhere to allow for space to grow. You did not name the species planted, but no doubt as your work was well advised, they are highly suitable. You also planted pollinator friendly hedging on the boundary between the college and the Community Centre and wildlife hedging to the front of the centre. The additions to the Community Orchard should provide great interest and good example. The green plant food fertiliser plans are also an interesting idea. . The wildflower garden at the community centre was a project in 2015. However you continue to augment the garden. When you are being 'gifted with wildflowers' - be sure that these are Irish wildflower seeds. However as you have been involved with the Irish Wildlife Trust in their grant application for equipment for sustainable harvesting of wildflower seed - we assume that such advice is unnecessary for your group!

We applaud you on reducing the use of chemical weed killing methods. We are glad to hear that this option is a 'last resort'. Manual weeding takes time, but is worthwhile especially in a smaller centre where it is more easily achievable. Organic weeding methods are also available to you. Perhaps you can discuss these with your County Biodiversity or Heritage officers. We did observe some chemical weed killing around the 80 K pH speed limit on the Mountmellick approach.

You have registered with the National Biodiversity Data Centre pollination map. This is a great help to the national work on this issue. The swift boxes and swift cam are another worthwhile project, and we hope your replacement swift cam will soon be in your possession. We look forward to hearing the results of your recordings in 2018.

This year you have committed to reducing grass mowing to a monthly occurrence.

Your 'mass planting' on the Tullamore Road and Birr road is a future project, and is a project to be credited for next year's adjudication. Do remember to submit some photographs of the mass spring plantings, because on adjudication day these will not be visible.

The small bog garden was planted with butterflies and hoverflies in mind. The second bog garden is a project to be considered for next year.

We have already commented on the planting at Father Kehoe Park. Again we commend you for choosing wildlife friendly pollinating species.

Although you mention this under landscaping we are glad to know that you have become involved in the campaign to only cut hedges within the legally allowable time period.. However we observed some hedge trimming to uncultivated land on the Mountmellick side of the Slieve Bloom housing estate.

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

Well done on your attendance at a master compost course and on facilitating its practical application in your village. You are making full use of its produce. The planting of the comfrey is a project which you have completed for this year, but the harvesting of the comfrey is a project again for your plan rather than your entry form. Your associated intention to use environmentally sound cleaning products is commendable.

Have you carried out any survey on the practical results of the attendance at the food waste programme in 2015? This would be an interesting project for the coming year. If you find your way to doing this - perhaps you would let us have some data/statistics for 2018. Have you considered joining the Green Homes scheme? Well done on your continuing use of the water butts. . You have recycled pallets as planters. Remember that this category is about reducing waste before it is produced in the first case where possible. 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. 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:

Although you mention it under Sustainable Waste and Resource Management - the enhancement of the recycling area is credited under this category. The recycling centre was neat insofar as there was no rubbish or litter around. However the bins were very grubby and the site was very bare despite the 'enhancement' - by which you probably meant the fencing. This is an area where you could usefully use several of your planted pots which we consider unnecessary in some other locations..

You are lucky to have a Community Enterprise Scheme, and they carry out many tasks in relation to litter picking, weeding, sweeping paths, strimming, etc. together with some local volunteer input. Well done on taking part in Clean Up Laois week. We are glad to see that the children are involved in litter picking along a safe section of the loop walk, and we understand that your litter picking in the area of the Lake is presently on hold because of ongoing works.

You say that you continue to monitor fly posting and enforce a 'no poster policy' within the 50 K pH speed limits.

Well done on meeting with the Communities and Water officer. We look forward to hearing about your rivers and water awareness day which you plan to hold during the coming year.

Although you mention it under Residential Streets and Housing areas we note that you mention the antisocial behaviour and graffiti at the old vocational school site. Well done on planting shrubs to reduce access. With graffiti - if it can be removed immediately and re painted this will discourage eventually future 'artists'! We see how important an issue this is to you, and we wish you luck in your negotiations with the local authority with regard to related health and safety issues.

We noticed a little litter in the Killeigh approach area.

There was a small amount of broken glass beside the Post Office/Flynn's.

Some weeding would be desirable in the circular area around the circular stone raised flower bed in front of the GAA boundary wall. A protruding pipe and slightly damaged kerb were noted near the edge of this pebbled area also.

Parking on footpaths was prevalent throughout the village and particularly on the Tullamore approach. Such a practice is seriously injurious to the visual amenities of the lovely streetscape that greets one on entry to the village on this approach. We discuss issues in relation to on-footpath parking also in the Road section.

Could the block wall area around the Credit Union sign/premises be painted and also adjacent cream-coloured walls bounding the road? Likewise the boundary wall of the GAA pitch site facing this approach road - as well as the boundary wall with the gate bounding the pebbled landscaped area also needs repainting. The Scoil Bhride directional fingerpost on the same pole as the GAA signpost needs renewal, as it is bent and grubby. A litter bin on this approach road also needed renewal.

Towards the top of the green area near a farm building and laneway a sewer vent pipe might be repainted. A cigarette butt poster on a light standard in the village is missing some lettering or rather figures.

Beside the Heritage Centre (under the children crossing sign) the Slieve Bloom Environment Park map is faded and needs renewal. You might try to discourage the storage of goods and positioning of sandwich boards on footpaths for visual amenity and accessibility issues. We would suggest that your post box needs a repaint.

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

Street houses and on approaches were generally well presented. The row of houses along the Tullamore approach was very attractive and well maintained. It was nice to see the old boys' school plaque retained on one of these properties.

We are delighted to hear that you commenced work with some of the residents in the new housing development. We hope that all the residents will in time become involved with your commitment to the village.

You continue to maintain green areas of footpaths in the residential areas (as well as in the village). The playground and green areas at the Community Centre are largely managed by the CE participants. They are doing a great job

As in all centres there are properties which do not meet your exacting standards. Continue to encourage people. That is all you can do

The estate on the Killeigh road had no name sign on-the-ground. However it was presented in a neat fashion. We observed one dead tree and one leaning tree in the open space there. These need to be attended to. The Bealach na Clóidí estate is a neat housing development.

We admired the picnic table and boulder sign on the Mountmellick approach road at the entrance to Slieve Bloom Park. We also admired good shrubbery at this point.

We noticed parking on footpaths at the Hillside View estate. This is both obstructive to pedestrians and damages the footpaths. It is particularly difficult for wheelchair or buggy users. Perhaps you could encourage the residents to restrain from this habit. Some walling near the road junction needs repair.

With regard to the playground we wondered how accessible the playground is to any child with mobility issues. There appeared to be no wheelchair access nor wheelchair specific swings/picnic tables etc., and the slopes around the site seemed quite unsuitable for anyone with mobility issues. There was a gate to the area from the adjoining country road, but this was fully blocked up and did not serve the playground.

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

You endeavour at all times to make the approach roads more attractive. Once again you referred to projects which you hope to implement later this year and into 2018. This involves the spring planting. Once again we cannot credit this as a project for this year. Well done on selecting pollinator rich plans for approach roads also.

As we mentioned under already you can only encourage and help to support property owners along approach roads.

On the Killeigh approach we noticed a car parked in front of the Fáilte to Cluain na Sí sign. We observed the litter sign. It was hard to see the 50 K pH speed limit sign due to some vegetation growth. The new housing estate on this approach had no name on the ground, nor did your map did extend to include this estate. The footpath needed sweeping and fixing near the sluice valve sign at the entrance to the estate. We observed some on-footpath parking on this approach and also a litter bin which required renewal. We would suggest that the barrier and decorative railings outside the single story houses be painted. We noticed a stop sign at an entrance to be almost illegible. On this approach on the right-hand side there is a dirty post and wire concrete fence and inside this a number of vehicles and machinery were parked in a field. This looks untidy. Can these be grouped and screened? And can you endeavour to have the post and wire fence painted or at least power washed?

It was good to see parking bays and good surfacing together with wheelchair spaces at the Fr. Kehoe Park and church grounds.

The Birr approach road is neat and is leafy. We admired the lovely dry stone walls and mature landscaping. A row of four young trees require more than bamboo stakes to keep them in place over windy periods. We noted the pollinator sign outside the 60 K pH and also the verges trimmed. The 50 K pH sign on the right-hand side was partially obscured by encroaching vegetation. The footpaths were very weed free along this long length of footpath approach. Road markings could be renewed along the approach to the village. We also noted a headless road sign. We noted the mass path sign on this approach also. A community event poster for 9th July was noted. We admired the nice Fáilte wooden sign on the Birr and Mountmellick approaches to the village. Could the garden centre sandwich board be incorporated into a directional sign?

We would suggest that you encourage property owners and in particular farm holders to paint the field gates and other gates on approaches to the village. This creates a sense of delineation and arrival.

We consider that the Brittas wood approach is a natural leafy beautiful stone wall/treed approach to the village as it is, and we would suggest the removal of all suburban hanging baskets on brackets on this approach. You may not agree with this suggestion and that is your prerogative. But it is our genuine opinion. It is a lovely natural area with a beautiful river and the sound of water all along its approach to the village. It needs no embellishment! We think that at the entrance to the loop walk area some of the signage could be amalgamated into one location.

On the Mountmellick approach the large unsurfaced area outside the residential houses opposite the VEC building would benefit from surfacing.

We would encourage you to campaign to have the practice of on-footpath car parking curtailed and removed from your village where possible. Some footpaths have been damaged by the obvious parking of cars thereon. Some road markings such as the pedestrian crossing near the bridge needs repainting.

As already mentioned we found the numbers of hanging baskets and plastic potted plantings along the approach roads to be superfluous. We have already referred to the Brittas Lake approach, but this is also true of the Tullamore approach which is also riverside. The stone wall along this approach road is excellent and we liked the incidental stiles/seating accommodated therein.

The pedestrian crossing sign at the Tullamore village junction was largely hidden by vegetation. The Mountmellick fingerpost sign near the bridge on a pole containing a lot of other directional signage needs replacement - as some of the lettering was missing.

Concluding Remarks:

One of the most interesting displays we have seen in any shop window was the display beside the barber's shop of all your community endeavours in relation to Tidy Towns etc. This is a terrific assemblage of your achievements! Congratulations on each and every one, and well done to the premises owner who provided this display space. Not alone do you do display your winnings but you also display some very valuable information in poster form about your village and its surrounds. May you go from strength to strength and need more windows space very shortly!

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