

Tidy Towns Competition 2017

Adjudication Report

Centre: **Clough** Ref: **411**
County: **Laois** Mark: **287**
Category: **A** Date(s): **29/06/2017**

	Maximum Mark	Mark Awarded 2016	Mark Awarded 2017
Community Involvement & Planning	60	36	36
Built Environment and Streetscape	50	36	38
Landscaping and Open Spaces	50	39	41
Wildlife, Habitats and Natural Amenities	50	20	21
Sustainable Waste and Resource Management	50	14	15
Tidiness and Litter Control	90	62	64
Residential Streets & Housing Areas	50	38	39
Approach Roads, Streets & Lanes	50	32	33
TOTAL MARK	450	277	287

Community Involvement & Planning / Rannpháirtíocht an Phobail & Pleanáil:

Fáilte An Chloch! Welcome Clough to the Super Valu 2017 National Tidy Towns Competition. Thank you for your entry form and your supporting material. Having 10 people on the committee in a small village shows great interest in keeping your village pristine and in aiming for success in the competition. You also have three people who volunteer. Despite the fact that you say you have no new residents since 2006 you are working steadily away. The new housing estate obviously brought new people into the village then.

We are delighted to see Supervalu in Porlaoise and Rathdowney both sponsor you - as well as other local businesses. Perhaps you could look to some public agencies as well as to your local authority for advice and assistance. You will get ideas in the Tidy Towns Handbook and the Community and Enterprise section of your local authority would also be helpful with ideas as where to turn for support - whether that be professional advice or funding.

You mention the church newsletter as the only method of communication. Thank you for the copy of the parish bulletin which had Tidy Towns content. Firstly we hope that you circulate any minority churches in your area also. Secondly we would strongly recommend that you consider using a website or a Facebook page or/and texting as a means of communication also. The young people relate well to such methods of communication, and you will attract them as volunteers more quickly with such. We are delighted to see that the children help in the Clean-Up Laois week and that the principal in the school is a member of your team. This gives great example to the children.

You have now been entering the competition for nine/ten years and this has brought about consciousness about litter you say - as well as interest in all aspects of the competition. We are not surprised to hear that you have been acknowledged as the cleanest village in your area. We admire your determination to continue thus.

Your sketch map was adequate for a small village. However if you read the guidelines for filling in your entry form carefully you will see that a little more is required. Section 5 of the guidelines on completing your entry form asks - inter alia - that you name - in your case approach roads - as you have no street names to worry about. 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. This leads to confusion and often leads to the omission of work carried out. It is very helpful to an adjudicator to have a good clear map showing all the new and continuing projects numbered and references as above.

Last year's adjudicator said that a simple three or five-year plan can be a great tool to help you set out and achieve goals for your committee. The adjudicator went on to say that "a simple list can be turned into time bound targets which can then show people in your community how you hope to proceed and can even help you gain sponsorship." "The plan is" the adjudicator said "in effect the groups work programme and it should reflect the objectives and capabilities of the group. This will in turn help you gain additional marks in this category." We would totally concur with this. However we do not appear to have received any such Tidy Towns programme plan this year either. It is very important to submit a plan for your Tidy Towns programme. A 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 (such as any references to your village applicable from the County Development Plan - which is at present being reviewed as noted from the local authority website). It is difficult to advance in this category in the absence of such a plan. Please 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.

Well done on your fundraising efforts at Easter through your Easter raffle. We think it is actually a great idea to hold such an event outside the Christmas period when there are so many other demands on peoples' funds. We hope that it was a success. We note that you are very generous in supporting your neighbours/competitors in Ballacolla through also including their jackpot results in your parish newsletter! You sent us a copy of the agenda and discussions at a Tidy Towns meeting last October and a copy of your AGM secretary's notes for February.

We loved the collage of photographs of the built aspects and landscaping aspects of the village. This would make a lovely poster, and perhaps you could consider using it for a calendar or Christmas card for local people and for people who have left the village to live in other places. This could contribute to your fundraising efforts as well.

Well done to the school, staff and children on obtaining a Green Flag which was proudly and cleanly displayed on adjudication day. No doubt they will go on to gain additional flags!

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

The fact that you have no new buildings since 2006 should not cause any problems under this category heading. What we want you to do is to present and maintain the buildings which you have well.

We approached the village from a minor road and at the village junction we observed a very nice example of a traditional stone built type two-storey farm building with external stairs. It also had a single-storey section. Examples of this traditional style of farm building are becoming rare in the countryside.

The pub is well presented. However it would be great if the recessed area containing the recycling bins on the school side of the pub could be surfaced. One hanging basket bracket was empty on the front elevation -but it probably was just 'gone' to be replanted! The bed-and-breakfast premise was also well presented, but the signage is damaged and needs renewal.

The church at the far end of the village is set in beautifully treed surroundings. The grotto has had a new lease of life. We also noticed the reintroduction of a stone stile on the adjoining new house property. A most amazing feature in the splay to that house property was an old 'P agus T' post box which obviously had been bought at auction - as the price was still to be seen at the top of the box. In all this adjudicator's travels around the country over many years, we have only seen one another example of this type and particular design of post box. Whereas we would prefer to see this in its original location or in a museum, we are glad that somebody had the good taste to recognise its uniqueness and save it from loss.

The school looked really well, but we would suggest that perhaps the gates and railings might be painted to complement the standard of the presentation otherwise. We admired the artwork including the Friesian cow on a building surrounded by the carefully mown lawn.

We understand that your village is an agricultural rural village, but we would respectfully suggest that perhaps a little tidying and screening - especially of the rusting oil tank on the site across the road from the school might be considered by the owners - if it is within their power to do so. The house and garden curtilage attached was presented in an excellent fashion.

Your tradition of local dry stonewalling should be protected and promoted as it adds a lovely character to the village area.

The wonderful thatched 'High Nelly' cottage is a great example of a traditional thatched house which has been conserved extremely well. We do not seem to be able to find out from the County Development Plan or the National Inventory of Architectural Heritage as to whether this structure is a Protected Structure or not. However the owners appear to have great sensitivity to its importance architecturally, its maintenance, and its presentation. We particularly also admired the wonderful hooped traditional farm gates at the side of the cottage and also the stone outbuildings. Perhaps the boundary walls to the roadside would benefit from repainting before next year's competition. But it would be churlish to complain as this building is a terrific feature of the built environment for your village to have retained! The modern single-storey house with its associated farm buildings which form the opposite corner at this entry to the village was gleaming!

The Limekiln is interesting and we read your plaque with interest and photographed it to reread at a later date.

Whereas we knew about some of the uses of the products of a limekiln, we never knew that its product was also used as a slug repellent! The wall where the plaque is attached could do with repainting, as could the small substation adjacent do with cleaning by the relevant utility company - or as last year's adjudicator suggested - some wall shrubs planting to the wall?

The bright blue village pump is a lovely piece of metal work and the stone surrounds looked well. However the adjacent grassed areas need tidying- as does the area in front of the channel.

Remember also that additional marks are to be gained in this category in relation to the use of Irish in your village and in relation to sustainability and access for all people regardless of age, size, ability or disability. One issue you could address with regard to access is to ensure that there is no on-footpath car parking in your village as was noticed on adjudication day. Whereas this was not widespread it was observed. Another issue which we would draw your attention to is that we are not in favour of the projecting stone flower beds which jut out into the footpath. There are unnecessary and would likely create an obstruction for wheelchair or buggy users. Perhaps you could consider removing these? In fact a car which was parked on the footpath was parked directly beside one of these outshot planting stone beds - leaving approximately a foot in width of the footpath for anyone to negotiate on adjudication day.

Landscaping and Open Spaces / Tírdhreachú agus Spásanna Oscailte:

Your village is set in undulating rich countryside. Approach roads are attractive with good rural views. Well done on ensuring that you applied for and obtained trees during Tree Week. You look after these trees well. It is nice to see that the local authority acknowledge the contribution made by you through your participation in this annual event through the copy of the certificate you sent to us.

We note from the copy of your October meeting that you decided to try and carry out last year's adjudicators suggestions regarding planting shrubs for long lasting effect. Perhaps next year you can augment this work and send us details of the species, numbers and locations. You also decided at your AGM to purchase lavender and clear the rockery at the Limekiln. Have you had any luck with your application for funding to purchase a lawnmower and strimmer?

Like last year's adjudicator we appreciated seeing the photographs of the daffodils in bloom. However the date on the back of one of the photographs was March 2014. As daffodils are perennial we assume they raised their beautiful heads again this year! However if you are submitting photographs please ensure they are dated correctly. It was good to see so many young people in the photographs you submitted to us helping to plant last autumn and again in May of this year.

The delightful gravelled rockery with perennial shrubs and large boulders is a most beautiful introduction to your village as one approaches from the school end, and, as we remark later the area has been lovingly tended. Just beyond this point the riot of yellow planting dazzled and looked superb on the stone and wall embankment edging. The rockery in front of the school was equally well presented and beautifully designed. Would there be any hope of organising with the relevant authority to relocate the wooden power pole in this area away from the rockery?

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

You are in the heart of a rich rural hinterland brimming with wildlife! You have endless resources in this area. You say that all birds listed on the handwritten list - which you enclosed - are common to your area. We would be anxious to find out about how these species were surveyed, recorded, and noted in your area in particular. The National Biodiversity Data Centre based in Waterford is a great source of help - helping communities with such data collection and research - as is Birdwatch Ireland. Such data when collected in the agreed fashion can be inputted to national data. Well done on providing and maintaining your bird boxes. You are very lucky that a local resident is very interested in this aspect of the competition, and we would encourage you to sponsor that person to attend any seminars, talks, or other opportunities to engage with public bodies involved in the protection of wildlife nationally such as the NPWS. We note that last year's adjudicator suggested inviting an expert from Birdwatch Ireland to lead a nature walk in the village. Have you looked into this possibility? It is always good to let each year's adjudicator know if you have followed up on suggestions made in the previous year. Even if you have been unable to organise something like this, it is good if you can let us know why. Sometimes there is a waiting list for such events - as there is such high demand throughout the country from committees like yours. Can you seek to involve the school 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. We liked the simple restrained sign for the wild garden on the timber fencing.

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

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

We noted your compost area behind the Limekiln. The composting area has a nice restrained timber sign on the external fencing. Like last year's adjudicator we commend you on the clarity of composting information contained on your sign within the site.

Your polytunnel was also noted and we are glad to hear that both composter and polytunnel are used extensively locally. We noticed your water container beside the poly tunnel and wonder if this is connected as a water butt elsewhere normally? We also noted solar powered school lighting. However we do not appear to have received any details of any new projects this year so we can only credit you for on-going composting.

Have you considered registering with the Green Home programme? Perhaps look at the possibility of holding talks on 'stop food waste' as this is one area where reductions can be made." Have you made contact with the Environmental Awareness Officer in your local authority? This person we are sure would be delighted to help you move forward in this 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. Remember that this issue is about reducing waste before it is produced - not just about recycling. . It is important to remember that the primary objective is to reduce waste before it even occurs where possible.

Tidiness and Litter Control / Slachtmhaireacht agus Rialú Bruscair:

You refer to the painting of fences under the Landscaping and Open spaces category. However we credit that painting here under Tidiness.

You tell us that you have a very strict litter control program. This involves litter picking on a daily basis. You have transcended the interruptions of road works and water works well. We are glad to hear now that you are back to full litter picking which includes gum, cigarette butts etc. The evidence was clearly visible to the adjudicator on adjudication day - that this is a priority for you. Under Approach Roads etc you tell us that you partake in Clean Laois Week. Thank you for the copy certificates enclosed commending your involvement.

In October at a meeting you decided to paint the school wall, the Hall and the graveyard walls, together with the fence at Byrnes. However on approaching the graveyard from the school end of the village - the side boundary wall of the graveyard - facing oncoming traffic is still in need of painting. Otherwise the front wall of the graveyard looked repainted and well, as did the attractive gates and lovely traditional stile.

The recycling banks were clean and neat and recessed into a low stone-wall hedged and treed area. We particularly liked the raised gravelled bed resting on the stonewall along the lateral side of the recycling bins. We admired the stone wooden seat recessed into the opposite side of this recessed space.

At the Limekiln area we would like to see the railings along the front boundary painted. We would respectfully suggest to you that you attach your 'dog poo' signage to other than a power line pole - as this might encourage other fly posting.

The area around the polytunnel and composting area was mown and neat. It would take magnifying glass to find a weed along any footpath in the village!

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

There are 18 residences you tell us in all in your village. Each and every one is very well kept. Well done to all your residents! The housing estate is presented in a most pristine manner. The old schoolhouse found a new use and the old school plaque has been retained. We loved the cascade of flowers at the Penny Farthing bicycle. The gardens of this - the 'High Nelly' cottage - and the house across the road are resplendent with colour. The estate is exemplary. Has the estate entered any county tidy estates competitions?

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

You mention under the Built Environment category that you look after the flower planters at the village entrances. We credit this under this category.

You mention two approach roads, but we would say that there are actually four. You have mentioned the two important ones, but we also looked at the minor approaches as follows. You are anxious about the effect that the recent road works had on your village, but on adjudication day these looked to be reinstated.

We would strongly suggest that you consider asking landowners to paint all farm gates on approaches to the village. For example as one approaches the Limekiln estate there is a recessed farm entrance with double tubular modern farm gates This is very close to the village and would benefit from a brightening up. At the 50 K pH speed limit signage we admired the well tended name sign planter. The 50 K pH speed limit signs here were a little turned and one was slightly damaged. The double turn in the road on this approach gives a sense of anticipation and

expectation on arriving at the village. This anticipation is justly rewarded in the beautiful village itself. We noted some recent pothole fillings on this double bend. Dry stone walls looked really well. The farmhouse already mentioned with the traditional fine out-building has delightful shrubbery planted in its higher-level garden behind the stone wall right at the entrance to the village.

We noticed some cracking of the footpath in the area adjacent to the school on the opposite side of the road. This presumably has occurred due to on-footpath parking during school delivery/collection hours. Try to encourage people not to park on the footpaths. Otherwise the footpaths were in very good condition.

On the approach by the 'High Nelly' cottage a 'Stop' Sign was leaning and the metal post was dirty.

Concluding Remarks:

We thought your village was a delightful unspoilt rural Irish village. We expect that a lot of people travelling in the area would miss the pleasure of visiting your village due to lack of local signposting for the village. We would suggest that signposting to your village should be somewhat more extensive from outside your village area. Perhaps you could discuss this with your local authority. The location map which you submitted included directional details on a Google extract as one approached from Dublin. This adjudicator is not from Dublin and was not approaching Clough from Dublin! Even if the adjudicator were to be Dublin-based the adjudicator is in your area during adjudication time and can approach your village or town from any direction - from their last town or village adjudication place.

As with all successful centres an adjudicator very often finds ongoing work on adjudication day. Well done to the Limekiln estate resident gentleman who was tending to the rockery area at the entrance to the Limekiln estate during our visit. The community of Clough is achieving a lot and we hope that you are enjoying the process. We wish you continued success this year and into the future. Go n-éirí libh i rith na blianta atá romhainn!