

# Tidy Towns Competition 2017

## Adjudication Report

Centre: **Cullohill**

Ref: **821**

County: **Laois**

Mark: **287**

Category: **A**

Date(s): **27/06/2017**

	<b>Maximum Mark</b>	<b>Mark Awarded 2016</b>	<b>Mark Awarded 2017</b>
Community Involvement & Planning	60	31	32
Built Environment and Streetscape	50	34	35
Landscaping and Open Spaces	50	39	42
Wildlife, Habitats and Natural Amenities	50	32	33
Sustainable Waste and Resource Management	50	15	17
Tidiness and Litter Control	90	52	57
Residential Streets & Housing Areas	50	31	33
Approach Roads, Streets & Lanes	50	36	38
<b>TOTAL MARK</b>	<b>450</b>	<b>270</b>	<b>287</b>

### **Community Involvement & Planning / Rannpháirtíocht an Phobail & Pleanáil:**

Fáilte Cúl Coile! Welcome Cullohill to the Super Valu 2017 National Tidy Towns Competition. You have a very large committee for a small village, and you also have a great number of volunteers. Other bodies - numbering 10 - help you with your work. This shows extraordinary interest in your community towards improving your village in every way.

You hold meetings every two weeks - which again is indicative of a hard-working group. You hold work sessions as well, but you are sensible enough to have a cup of tea and chat after these work sessions! Your membership spans gender and different age groups. We are delighted to note too that you have a good relationship with new residents.

You list an amazing number of agencies, bodies, and businesses that have supported your activities in various ways. You name each individual organisation and business involved, and acknowledge their help.

We hope that you circulate other minority churches in your area apart from the notices 'called out at Mass'. You use traditional and modern methods of communication and this is good. You visit the schools promoting litter control, and you organised a competition for naming the bug hotel. Local history plays an important role, and we can understand this in such a historic place as your village is. Two members of the board of management of the school are involved in Tidy Towns and this helps with cross communication. You say that lots of students helped during Clean Up Laois week. Well done to those students!

You have revived your entry to the competition over the last five years. You have made great progress in that time, and it is lovely to know that people have made new and lasting friendships through the work. The new sense of belonging applies to new and long-time residents and this is a great social good.

You certainly are helping your village 'to get back on the map' as you say yourselves. You have a mixture of skills in your membership and each contributes. Your fundraising Halloween Fancy Dress is an imaginative way to get together. (No doubt you use some recycled items for the outfits!) We are not at all surprised that you have won two awards in the Laois Tidy Towns contest recently. We wish you the best of luck with your engagement with the newly formed Community Council to put in an application for a long-term village plan. We encourage this idea, as we think you are a village which could become a model community involved in a village plan. Well done to your secretary who is now the chair of the Laois Federation of Tidy Towns!

Unfortunately we do not appear to have received any plan with this year's submission. It is very important to submit a Tidy Towns plan - as such a plan focuses your mind on your resources and ambitions. A three or five-year plan will focus your mind on the important issues facing you, and it will help you to prioritise your work. A plan should

contain at least a simple list of your aims and objectives and a clear timeline, and it need not be prepared professionally, but you should consult locally in preparing such a plan. You should tell us as to how you go about this consultation. You should also consider any statutory and non-statutory plans applicable to your village in drawing up your work programme. As 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. Good luck with this! Moreover - for you - in having such a plan - should help support your request for an overall village plan.

Thank you for your very clear map which was based on an Ordnance Survey map. Whereas you numbered your projects on your map for this year's adjudication purpose you did not number your projects in the entry form to correspond. Section 5 of the guidelines on completing your entry form asks that each new or continuing project should be identified by number in your entry form (as per section 3 in the entry form guidelines) and these projects should also be shown with the same numbers on the key to the village map (where the projects are ones which can be mapped). We recommend that you carefully study the guidelines to completing your entry form annually. Do not leave it to one person or do not leave it until the last minute. Sometimes groups get so involved in working on the ground that they rush putting the entry form together. It is very helpful to an adjudicator to have a good clear map showing all the new and continuing projects numbered and relating to the numbered list throughout the entry form. (We make some other comments about your entry form in our concluding remarks).

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

You list four new projects under this category heading. However in reality the refreshing of the nature walks signage is the only one of the four which should be rightly considered under this category heading. We consider and credit the other three projects - namely the moving of the community garden, the erection of the poly tunnel and discussions in relation to the resurfacing of the footpath under the relevant categories which are Landscaping, and Approach Roads Streets and Lanes.

Well done on the good new signage for the nature walk. Even though you mention other signage for different features in the village under the Landscaping project we credit it here also.

(Although you mention it under Approach Roads) you mention the painting of the phone exchange. However last year's adjudicator said that the telephone exchange was neatly painted. So did you paint it again this year? We are unsure as how to credit you on this account. The old exchange is located close to the village centre on the school road. The fascia board would benefit from a painting also.

However your maintenance and presentation of your existing built heritage is very good indeed.

The Topaz garage was very neat with forecourt planting.

Scoil na Cúl Coile which is the Community Centre was presented in a very neat fashion with window boxes, a water butt, and a 1916 plaque.

Dry stone walls throughout the village are a wonderful feature of your village and form an important part of your built heritage. We also liked the stone stiles - a number of which we noted throughout the village. We encourage you to maintain the tradition of dry stone walling into the future in any new development. Some new stone walls have been mortared. This does not fit in with your tradition.

The primary school is a very fine school indeed. It was presented well. We admired the colourful play area.

The Town and Country Shop looked really well, neat and resplendent in its blue/grey white paintwork. This is a large premises/site, and it is a credit to the owners/occupiers. The Post Office is in a discreet location opposite the Town and Country Shop.

Your castle is a most impressive part of your built heritage. It is impressive when viewed from all angles and from all adjacent roads and lanes - standing as it does within its bawn walls on a slightly raised eminence. The plaque is informative and we were intrigued with its history. What protection does this castle have - archaeologically or architecturally? To our eyes it appeared to be in a somewhat perilous state and needs intervention. Have you been involved in any discussions about its future?

Views from the Castle to the medieval church ruin are inviting and the combined complex is a lovely feature of your village. The Lime Kiln is another feature which you do not mention, but we also read its plaque with interest, as we did with the church plaque. Well done on these informative plaques which whet the appetite for more knowledge about your history - but they do not overload the visitor with detailed facts! All the plaques were clean and well cared-for. (As an aside we felt that the signpost beyond the church with 'Lime Kiln and Nature Walk' inscribed appeared to point to the same direction for each. This might be a bit misleading - as they are in fact located in opposite directions!) We admired an adjacent traditional field gate and the semi-mature trees planted nearby. Have you talked to the County Heritage Officer about this wonderful complex of historic buildings?

You have dealt very well with the roofless house opposite the Community Centre. This is at a strategic location - as it is at the junction leading to/from the Castle. Is there any hope that it could be 'rescued' as it is a lovely vernacular house - although roofless! One small improvement could be made - that is the projecting grey walls facing oncoming traffic need painting.

The village pump is in a most unusual location on the school road and has a traffic bollard to stop it being 'run-down'! Have you any plans to save it from being 'scuttled' by passing traffic?!

The Catholic Church and adjoining presbytery are an unusual attached combination. The setting is most pastoral with its lovely landscaped setting of specimen trees. It is very well cared-for and a credit to its parishioners and clergy,

Well done on your use of Irish in the Parknahown stone boulder which is simply set against the wall at the park.

Your main street in both its business and private dwelling properties is well presented. But it is difficult for travellers to appreciate this with the rush of traffic passing through! All we can say is that the rushing traffic along your main street - on the still heavily trafficked Cork to Dublin road have no idea of the beauty of your village and do not know what they are missing!

Perhaps for next year you could also look at village accessibility issues which are part of this category.

### **Landscaping and Open Spaces / Tírdhreachú agus Spásanna Oscailte:**

You have undertaken numerous projects in this category during this adjudication year. Firstly there is the ongoing maintenance of the Fairgreen area, and the Millennium Garden. There is also ongoing work in the garden at Paircnahabhainn. We admired the stone seat on the grass edge by the roadside here with its overhanging tree. And we admired the traditional stile adjacent. You have also planted flowers in various places. Your proposal to plant trees in the centre of the village is a proposal which should be contained in your plan rather than in your entry form - as it is a future project. Likewise it appears that the construction of additional picnic tables from (similar to the Castle table) further recycled material is also to be carried out later this year.

We are glad to hear that you are moving away from sowing of decorative flowers and more towards permanent plantings that will provide for pollination, and have more long-term benefit. We are sure you learned a lot about this at the workshop which you attended. We would also suggest that you perhaps reconsider the suggested species of trees to be planted in the centre of the village, and ensure rather that they are native Irish trees. Planting native trees and native perennial shrubbery which is pollinator friendly is more sustainable than annual bedding. It is also less labour-intensive and conservative of water.

Although you do not list your spring bulb planting you do attach a photograph of the lovely row of daffodils along your hedging. Sending a photograph of spring planting is a good idea - as when the adjudicator visits in the summer this planting is long since gone.

Although you mention the planting of birch trees on the Cork Road under Approach Roads we also credit this here. You sowed 50 birch trees on the Cork Road and these looked splendid. Well done also on the replanting of the beech hedging. You planted flowers in planters along walls in the village. These flower boxes on the block wall of the field fronting the main street near the Community Centre looked well and helped ameliorate the bland block wall front field boundary.

We admired the semi mature trees which were planted opposite the Topaz garage on a grassy verge. Perhaps it is better not to 'break up' this nice grassy row of trees with new beds. And remember that flowers planted under trees 'eat into' the sustenance that trees require. Along the road to the national school we admired ash and other semi mature trees.

The community garden has been relocated. The poly tunnels will provide you with material to be planted.

We very much admired the stone lavender beds and associated hedging near the recycling area.

We visited the Millennium Garden near the Church - and found it to be a most peaceful place, sheltered from the wind and restful. The naming of local families in a tasteful series of wall plaques on the enclosing high stone walls was tasteful. Simple directional signage to the garden was tasteful also. Seating was provided and the entire space was maintained to the highest standard. Perhaps the - what we assumed to be a water feature was an exception - although it was clean - it was dry and a little 'dead' looking. We would strongly recommend that you remove the barrier-end post encircling (and soon to damage) the mature tree at the entrance to the church grounds. The barrier itself is raw metal, and does not meet the standards of its general surrounds either. Given your good taste generally we are sure that you will come up with an idea to perform the same function in a better manner.

The milk churn piece of public art at the Ballynevin grassed junction area is a very nice piece of incidental art and appropriate to the rural location. The natural stone boulder and seating here was good also. This is another example of good taste evident in your village and shows an understanding of your rich rural environment which does not need the addition of urban formal park-like interventions in landscaping.

But 'the jewel' in the crown of your landscaping is the way in which you are presenting the Castle, Church and Lime Kiln parts of your built heritage in an exceptionally good way with a delightfully maintained grassed area - which is uncomplicated, well signposted and restful. We loved your recycled picnic bench in its treed location, and wished we had had time to linger longer there! The adjacent litter bin was clean and tidy. The village directional and cycle route signage was gleaming! All is set off by wonderful dry stone walls and you are to be congratulated for your taste in keeping this area in such a 'rurally' natural state and not attempting to 'prettify' it in any way. Well done!

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

Well done on putting up the new access gates to the nature walk by the old church.

The placing of beehives at the end of the nature walk near the bug hotel adds to this area's interests. The beehives are extremely colourful and looked very well located against the fine dry stone wall and hedging. We walked along the walk by the old church and found to be a most beautiful peaceful area - added to by the archaeological interest and visual amenity that is the old church itself, and the sound of birdsong and bees humming on a bright summer day. Well done to those members doing the beekeepers' course and also to your organic farmers who are very knowledgeable in relation to habitats and sensitive areas.

We are unsure as to where the biodiversity area to which you refer to as "being near the Robert Homestead" was located, as it was not marked on the map to the best of our knowledge. But perhaps you refer to the area on the way to the old church which had the Managed for Nature / All Ireland Pollinator Plan signage? We observed the Pollinator Wildlife area at the school. Have you registered with the National Biodiversity Data Centre pollination map? Are the schoolchildren involved in any habitat study surveys?

We note that you are hoping to do bat surveys at the castle. Again this is a future project which should be included in your plan rather than in your entry form. Due to the seemingly perilous condition of the castle structurally we advise care and professional advice before carrying out this work from a safety point of view.

Well done on promoting your walkways and organising a charity aspect of this also.

We noticed some incidences of what appear to be fairly recent hedge cutting on some approach roads and near Parknahown along a field boundary. We 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](http://www.birdwatchireland.ie)) has a very good website which gives lots of information on this issue.

We would encourage you to weed manually or through organic means. We observed a long narrow strip of grass edged weeding on the approach to the castle, which appeared to have been weeded chemically. Talk to your Biodiversity Officer or Heritage Officer about organic weeding methods.

Surveys of your natural habitats are the first thing to consider. Later you will be considering wildlife management plans and information sharing in signage or web based sharing. You might engage with the County Heritage Officer - and with the County Biodiversity Officer - if your County engages such an officer also - in exploring ways in which to further your knowledge and interpretation in this category. The Tidy Towns Handbook is also there as a relevant helpful publication. The Heritage Council's 'Wildlife in Towns and Villages' booklet is another useful resource.

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

You are developing further rainwater harvesting at the Community Centre and this water is in full use at the sports facilities there. You also use additional water butts to water window boxes. Water for the community garden and tunnel is also provided. Furthermore you plan to do a survey re-water use and wastage with the local water scheme group. However yet again this latter project should form part of your future three or five-year plan and not part of your entry form - as it is proposed rather than existing. The same situation relates to the composting station. However the fact that your member attended a master composting course run by the local authority is considered under this category heading as this is a project which has taken place.

The 'bring your bike for repair' evening is a good idea. Likewise the promotion of the idea of walking or cycling has environmental as well as health benefits. Is the school involved in the Green Flag programme? Support for energy saving projects like this are part of the programme.

You emphasise the importance of segregating litter. Although you mention it under Residential - you tell us that flower boxes were made by your members from timber being discarded by a local business. These are recycling projects. Remember that this category is about reducing waste before it is produced - not just about recycling. Recycling is the bottom of the pyramid in relation to sustainable waste and resource management. Would you consider joining the Green Homes scheme? We would recommend that you contact the Environmental Awareness Officer of your local authority whom we are sure would be very happy to advise you as to how to advance in this work/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:**

The overall impression of your village was one of exceptional neatness and freedom from litter, graffiti and weeds.

Perhaps you can tell us more about how you achieve this standard next year. We wonder how your committee members got on with the ESB in June about the overhead cables. Undergrounding cables is an expensive project. Perhaps some funding under an Urban and Village Renewal scheme might be forthcoming in the future.

Well done to those who remove posters/fly posting. It might be better to locate your 'dog poo' poster somewhere besides on a pole - as this might encourage/legitimise flyposting. A free standing notice elsewhere would be preferable.

You are trying to encourage businesses to look after their own areas and improve their image. We enjoyed your comment that "it is hard to beat regular sessions of sweeping and shovelling!" You say that you have numerous cleanup evenings. Perhaps it would be a good idea next year to let us know roughly how often these happen.

You have attempted to provide for the movement of bins where they are in underuse to areas where there are more needed. More specific information about this would have been useful as you were following up on last year's adjudication report suggestion - but this adjudicator did not see where last year's bins were located!

Your power washing of all footpaths and walls in the village really relates to this category and we credit it here rather than here where you inserted the project in another category. We are unsure as to which walls you refer to. Power washing dry stone walls is not a good idea. It is best to leave the traditional walls with their patina of age. Power washing walls can disturb habitat.s

Some gravel needed to be swept off the connecting road behind the recycling centre on both sides of the road. The bring banks were looking well - located in an attractive area. As with most good centres work is often ongoing on adjudication day. Cullohill was no exception. Work was ongoing at the area near the recycling centres!

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

Residential properties in the village and on approach roads were well presented. You look to seasonal planting which will give colour all year round in your residential areas. We particularly admired and commend the owners of the farmhouse located just beyond the church/nature trail signage area on the approach to the village (before descending to the village). This farm complex was immaculately maintained and is an excellent example of a traditional farmstead of the South-Eastern part of Ireland in great condition. What a lovely introduction to your village as one approaches from the Castle side! The farm buildings at an angle to the roadway are fronted by good raised dry stone planters with suitable, colourful and very attractive shrub bedding.

Not having major housing developments has saved you additional work, and thankfully above all you have been spared the worry of unfinished estates.

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

It must be difficult for you to have an ongoing effort to keep approach roads litter free and weeds due to the amount of traffic on the main through road. The school wall was power washed. You clean stone walls on the Chapel Road as well as stonewalls at Parknahown. (Remember to clean judiciously as the stone walls are important wildlife habitats). We hope that you have success in having the footpath from the school to the phone exchange joined up.

Well done on painting and washing the old entrances on the Dublin side of the village and washing the brick paving under the big traffic signs on the Dublin road.

Future projects in relation to speed indicator signs and reconsideration of the speed limit sign locations are projects for the future and should be included in your plan.

You sowed 50 birch trees on the Cork Road and these looked splendid. Well done also on the planting of village signs on the Dublin and Cork roads. You re planted the village signs surrounds on both main approaches to the village. On the Cork Road/Johnstown approach the yellow flowers at the black and white village sign were admired. Some fresh cuttings on the village side of the sign needed removal. We noted hedge cutting on this approach of a fairly recent origin. Please refer to our comments under Wildlife etc. above. The 'do not pass sign' needs renewal. There are lovely views across the fields to the castle and the old church.

You replaced some of the beech hedging that had failed in your previous planting campaigns and levelled the verge on the Durrow side of the village.

We would recommend that you suggest to local landowners that the paint field gates on the approaches to the village. This gives a great sense of arrival at a village and also helps to delineate your boundaries. You could always choose a colour that belongs to the local team, but it is best to stick to a uniform colour throughout.

We admired the copper beech and stone walls at the approach near Parknahown. Some of the stop signs need repainting at the junction of the minor and main roads. Road traffic signs generally were in good condition. Road markings were likewise clean and bright. You obviously have a good relationship with your local engineer!

**Concluding Remarks:**

If you feel that the adjudicator was impressed with your village - you are correct. It was refreshing to visit a place which has such good taste and such a sense of appropriate intervention in design and landscaping. We think that you do not do yourselves justice at all with your entry form. There was no sense in reading the entry form before our visit of the lovely aspects of the village which we saw on arrival. Neither is there any hint to the passing motorist of what lies North West and South East of the main thoroughfare. Would some simple advance signage be appropriate - say perhaps just using symbols for the amenities present? You must draw attention to all aspects of your village - especially as your village is spread out over 4 roads. We feel that you have the potential to progress in this competition if you continue to work along the same lines as you have to date. And even more importantly - you will have a village that is even a greater place in which to live and to visit.

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