

Tidy Towns Competition 2017

Adjudication Report

Centre: **Durrow**

Ref: **412**

County: **Laois**

Mark: **309**

Category: **B**

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

	Maximum Mark	Mark Awarded 2016	Mark Awarded 2017
Community Involvement & Planning	60	48	46
Built Environment and Streetscape	50	44	46
Landscaping and Open Spaces	50	45	46
Wildlife, Habitats and Natural Amenities	50	32	33
Sustainable Waste and Resource Management	50	16	17
Tidiness and Litter Control	90	54	55
Residential Streets & Housing Areas	50	33	33
Approach Roads, Streets & Lanes	50	34	33
TOTAL MARK	450	306	309

Community Involvement & Planning / Rannpháirtíocht an Phobail & Pleanáil:

Fáilte Darú! Welcome Durrow to the Super Valu 2017 National Tidy Towns Competition. Thank you for your clearly filled-in entry form. We are amazed that you have 18 people on your committee. Is this perhaps a slightly unwieldy number? We are even more amazed that you have 40 to 60 people who volunteer. All in all this shows a terrific commitment from the town to the work that you do. We realise that you are now a subcommittee of the Durrow Development Forum, so perhaps that explains the high numbers involved. You also get great help it appears from local businesses, which you list and credit. The number of agencies and bodies that support your activities is also impressive. You yourself say that the support that you get from businesses is amazing. You name these groups which includes the local authority and several local business premises in the town.

You hold regular meetings throughout the year, but increase the number of meetings during the busy summer period.

You use both traditional and modern communication methods, and this is good as each appeals to different readerships - with the social media sites appealing to the younger generation. We note that you have regular updates in the local parish newsletter. We hope that you also circulate minority churches in your village and area.

We are delighted to hear that the primary school is extremely supportive of your work. You meet regularly and also meet with the crèche and community playschool. We look forward greatly to hearing about the Junior Tidy Towns committee which you are in the process of organising a present. You do not tell us as to whether the school is involved in the Green Flag programme or not. We think that they have actually achieved a Green Flag from a comment made by last year's adjudicator.

Your support grows incrementally. You say that the competition has many attributes for you. These include the attractiveness of the village to passing visitors - and bringing people together locally who might not otherwise get to know one another.

Thank you for your overview of Durrow. However, we do not appear to have received a Tidy Towns plan from you. We simply received a list of projects planned and ongoing for 2017 – 2018. This amounted to one and a half pages. We understand that you do have a 2016 to 2019 plan in place because last year's adjudicator said "Thank you for including your 2016 – 2019 town plan and this should be a valuable tool for you." It is a little unclear to this adjudicator as to whether this is a specific Tidy Towns plan, but we assume that it is. In each individual year the adjudicator only receives the documentation which is submitted in that particular year. Therefore this adjudicator has no access to your full three-year town plan. We advise you to submit this plan annually, and to do what last year's adjudicator suggested i.e. "List specific projects under each category with a timescale so that during the life of the plan you can review it annually and see how many of your aims are being met. And if not why not."

One of your maps is a copy of an older 25" Ordnance sheet and you have shown the major landmarks and numbered them. You have not named approach roads on this map nor on the smaller scale map which extends further to the village boundaries in places, nor have you shown nor named all housing estates. You do not appear to have shown Our Lady's Meadow Primary School which you acknowledge in your community involvement category. You have not numbered your projects throughout the entry form as required by the entry form guidelines. Neither were any current project numbers for adjudication in this current year shown on your map. Section 5 of the guidelines on completing your entry form asks that each new or continuing project should be identified by number in your entry form (as per section 3 in the entry form guidelines) and these projects should also be shown with the same numbers on the key to the town map (where the projects are ones which can be mapped). We recommend that you carefully study the guidelines to completing your entry form annually. Do not leave it to one person or do not leave it until the last minute. Sometimes groups get so involved in working on the ground that they rush putting the entry form together. It is very helpful to an adjudicator to have a good clear map showing all the new and continuing projects numbered and relating to the numbered list throughout the entry form. We found the confusion throughout the entry form between projects for the current adjudication year and for next year to be common. We have referred to this under the affected categories - but it has to do with filling in your entry form accurately and carefully which concerns this category.

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

Durrow is 'blessed' with good buildings of high architectural value. This you appear to appreciate. The buildings surrounding The Square form an integral part of the beauty of that central space in your village. The terraces of houses in Patrick Street - on the approach from the Cork Road 'tipping down' into the village looked well. Old Chapel Street and Carrigan Street, together with Mary Street also form good vernacular streetscapes. No unsuitable intrusions have been inserted into any of these streetscapes.

There were some buildings which stood out. One of these was the cafe named Bowe's on the East side of The Square. We admired its gleaming blue colour and contrasting white window frame treatment. It also appears that in the smaller section of the building the lovely original sash windows have been retained. The simple lettering and the lack of gaudy advertising or projecting lighting made the premises very inviting - in fact irresistible! The use of the walled rear garden area was very attractive as an outdoor eating space. So often the rear curtilages of small towns and villages have been neglected - largely because they are out of view or are out of use. As adjudicators we rarely see rear curtilages. But it was good to see the care and attention which was lavished on this rear curtilage. We would also credit this establishment with full marks for accessibility. It is a pity that a wheelchair space has not been designated close to the door so that a person with restricted mobility does not have to cross a busy street from an adjacent wheelchair space at The Square.

The Bank of Ireland presents a very clean and uncluttered image also to The Square and looked resplendent in its white and blue colours. Durrow House is a marvellous example of a very fine early nineteenth century town house which has been well maintained. Its neighbouring fine three-storey properties all form a unit and a delightful counterpoint to the open landscape that is the square itself. The iron railings fronting some of these properties add to the interest and attractiveness of this side of the square. We congratulate the owners of all these houses on the care they take of important heritage. Whereas Daybreak shop was well presented, we felt that the window displays were cluttered due to the number of advertising signs - which detracted from its presentation.

The presentation of the Church of Ireland is a credit to the congregation and to their clergy. This is a most important building in relation to the landscaped square and draws the eye to the delightful background of mature trees nearby. (We read with interest your note about the unique organ). The Tudor Revival Gate Lodge to Durrow Castle also forms part of your square's built environment and contributes to the variety of buildings.

Whereas the properties along the southern side of The Square are less dramatic in their architecture, they are nonetheless well presented and complimentary to the remainder of the public space. The Castle Arms Hotel looked well.

You say that the regeneration of The Square has been completed. (We do not quite understand how this then is described as phase 1. We would have assumed there would have been more than one phase when you have a description of phasing). Well done on the ramps and disabled parking spaces. Your project for next year in relation to the new plantings should form part of your Tidy Towns plan. Completion of the undergrounding of power lines provided the opportunity to enjoy the great visual qualities of The Square (Clarity is necessary in describing your projects particularly where phasing is involved).

We felt that the seating on The Square required repainting or at least cleaning. Likewise the litter bins required a little cleaning, as they appeared to be a bit dusty, although new and appropriate. The bus stop was clean and presentable.

The Topline property on the junction of Cork Street and old Chapel Street is quite a large property to maintain well. Its colour scheme of grey and green was unusual and effective. We would again suggest that perhaps some window advertising might be reduced to benefit the overall appearance of the premises.

Some weeding was required in the gutter area of the Courthouse. We would suggest that some planting inside the railings (rather than the attachment of hanging baskets to the railings) would be more appropriate to its architectural integrity. We particularly liked the courthouse Cultural Centre signage - which is modern and effective - and being

transparent did not detract from architectural features of the building. We understand that the Courthouse is a great community resource. But what projects have you carried out here at the Courthouse this year which are relevant to this category? It appears that you are referring to its usage rather than to its built environment aspect.

Dec's Bar was being painted on adjudication day - although it seemed perfectly well presented without any additional attention! We commend the Post Office for its presentation which was classically simple and for the lack of gaudy signage. It would be good if the gable facing the Courthouse could be planted or painted. The row of houses between the Post Office and the Tae Lane area were gleaming. On-footpath parking detracted from properties on this street.

You are clear in relation to the ongoing project at the ICA Hall. Well done on painting the exterior and good luck with the remaining work. As this is a Protected Structure we wondered what architectural conservation advice you had requested/received on the work to the building.

We were delighted to see that the Fire Brigade building had been painted as suggested by last year's adjudicator. Well done to the Fire Brigade staff –it seems that they were the ones who carried out this work - above and beyond the call of duty!

The completion of the Canoe and Kayak club premises work is commended.

The Studio M and associated two storey building on Mary St. was pristine. Durrow Pharmacy shop front was classically simple and elegant. The elongated horizontal green backing in Sheppard's elongated shop front took from its vertical fenestration. P. Hennessy was again extremely well presented. Less window advertising in the window of the Gala premises would be better. Once again on-footpath parking on this street took from the overall impression. Please see our comments elsewhere about such parking.

The Scout Den is in a lovely character-full building and is maintained very well.

The five arch bridge is now a place apart - off the heavily trafficked village street. Its use as a footbridge is pleasant. The old telephone kiosk at Bob's Bar is an interesting piece of street furniture - now rarely seen in situ.

Well done to those responsible for the Garda Station on improvements recommended in last year's adjudication. The station was exemplary in its presentation on this adjudication day - both building and boundary wall.

The Catholic Church is maintained in an excellent fashion, with good planting and stonewalling. On the Cork approach we wondered about the building - which appeared to be an old school (with wooden fretwork) which needed some care and attention. We noted the Durrow Tri centenary sign as one exits opposite the playground. Repainting would be advantageous.

We particularly liked the old Irish script which was used in the plaque was erected in 1975. Likewise we admired the Irish Street sign for Sráid an tSeipéil.

We note from our own research that you have a significant number of Protected Structures in your town. Your streetscape has remained reasonably intact - free from bad insertions. What are your views on the Designate Architectural Conservation Area for your village contained in County Laois Draft Development Plan 2017 - 2023? Have you attended - or will you attend consultation meetings about the County Development Plan? (We are unsure as to when they were/are scheduled). You have not mentioned this aspect of your built heritage. We researched your local authority web page in this regard.

We understand this situation arising with regard to derelict properties and well done on offering support. Have you discussed this issue with the local authority in relation to their powers under the Derelict Sites acts?

Some terraces of houses have satellite dishes on their front elevations. Such dishes detract from the symmetry of the terraces visually. It is a modern phenomenon. Planning permission is required for the erection of a satellite dish on the front elevation of any premises.

Some projects which you list under this category heading - in places - really belong to other categories where we credit them.

Landscaping and Open Spaces / Tírdhreachú agus Spásanna Oscailte:

Yours as a planned village has the delightful public open space that forms The Square.

You mention planting of new large planters on The Square which is described as a project for next year. However we saw a few large planter boxes opposite the Daybreak property - and on both sides of the exit from the square to Durrow Castle. They appeared to have flowers and an evergreen tree planted. Are these to be replaced by larger boxes or are they the large planters which are described as a project for next year? We are slightly confused. Native deciduous tall trees are what we thought you meant - so perhaps these are a temporary measure. We are unsure as to whether The Square needs any further embellishment - and on a personal level we would be disinclined to plant boxes but rather take up on the suggestion made by last year's adjudicator to plant trees in the soil to replace any mature trees with like species that may have been lost during the works which have been carried out on The Square. Have you considered last year's adjudicator's comments in relation to the replacement of lost mature trees

in the square? We do not see a mention of this on your planned projects page. There are other parts of the village that would benefit more from the planter boxes.

Well done on your spring landscape planting. It was lovely to see the photographs, as obviously on adjudication day spring had well past! We recommend that you consider planting in the soil as far as possible as against pot planting. This is more sustainable as it reduces water consumption and has other attributes. For instance watering of window boxes and hanging baskets on Protected Structures can lead to dampness and water ingress. Furthermore attaching hanging baskets to such structures can damage the fabric of the structure.

Whereas we admired the oval flower beds on The Square, we would encourage you to desist from breaking up the lovely grassed landscape entity that is The Square into any further subdivisions. We think that uncluttered grass landscaping and native trees complements the entire unit - both the natural and built environment of The Square best. We would also respectfully suggest that flower pots be removed from this space also as they are unnecessary and distract the eye from the visual unity of The Square.

The Tae Lane green space was much admired. The trees and roses impressed. We saw the small sign message between the red painted wheelbarrow and the 'about to be planted' bed which said "Muggle manifestation of mandrake Madness Sssssss." We are still intrigued! But we suspect a Harry Potter fan! What a delight the raised stone bed with lavender planting all around your village pump was! This was a lovely tasteful setting for this part of your built heritage. The paved area surrounding it was clean and well presented, but the pump plinth required repainting and the removal of a few weeds and 3 loose stones.

The Mill Road area is very well located giving a first impression of your village. We read the associated plaque with interest, and we commend you for being the first centre where we saw a Heritage Officer - or indeed any Planner, Architectural Conservation Officer etc. named in any project! The 'For Sale/ To Let' building opposite the amenity area was clean and bright and so did not detract from the area. That is not always the way with a property in transition. The poplar trees at the Ballacolla/Dublin Road junction have been a landmark in Durrow for a long time.

Your comments about approach roads are dealt with under the Approach Roads etc. category. Likewise your comments about biodiversity are dealt with under the Wildlife category. The proposal to plant perennials into new planters under construction should be part of your Tidy Towns plan.

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

We see that you are aware of the importance of your surrounding countryside as it relates to your village. It was good to see the references to the SAC area nearby. This provides opportunities for you and also challenges. However it is important to look to the village itself and to its wildlife.

Durrow and District Anglers have been dealing with the invasive sycamores mentioned by last year's adjudicator. The river is maintained by the fishing club at the bridge area. Perhaps they might engage with you on some survey or research into river life?

Perhaps you can tell us more about your involvement in the Looped Walks next year. Please show the Looped walks and the parking area which you are currently improving on your village map(s) next year. Are the walks used by the schoolchildren to observe/survey wildlife? The bug hotels in the Woods are "to cater for all bugs"! Engaging with the schools on - even elementary nature study surveys - can lead in time to the further analysis and interpretation/presentation of the findings of work carried out in order to appreciate and present your natural surroundings in a fit fashion. We note (although you mention this under the Sustainable Waste category) that the children from Our Lady's Meadow Primary and Happy Days' crèche and the community playgroup have embarked on projects including a bird table and a craft box for wild creatures. Well done to the school on their Biodiversity workshops

You live amidst rich undulating countryside. You have a river and treed parkland in the village. 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 especially in the village itself. 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 commend you for the use of manual weeding methods which you mention under the Approach Roads category. Well done also on the weeding by hand in particular of the beds in the green and along the beech hedging (which you refer to under Approach Roads).

The fact that Durrow Gun and Game Protection Club are going to help you with bat boxes/squirrels should be in your plan and that Biodiversity signs are going to be erected in 'hot spots' should be in your plan - not in your list of projects for this adjudication year. Likewise your bee pollinator work is for August - again this is a project to be judged next year.

More details as to who led the various nature walks; when the walks were held during the last year; and how many participated would be helpful information to assess this category's success. We note from the photographic page that the bluebell walk was held on 14th April.

We observed some hedge cutting which appear to be of a relatively recent nature on the Kilkenny approach. We would 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:

The water butt project appears to be future project and should be included in your Tidy Towns Plan.

Well done on the replacement of the Christmas lights with led lights and timer switches.

We are glad to see that the good people of the Meals on Wheels group are composting waste. We noticed that you are endeavouring to reduce the use of paper waste. We commend your social media advice notes. However it would be helpful to know some statistics in relation to the success rate of any of these projects.

You do not mention as to whether the school participates in the Green Flag programme. Nonetheless they are active on projects that highlight recycling, environment, and nature. Regular clothes recycling events take place. The energy-efficient washing and drying facility is noted. The green activities during the annual scarecrow Festival involve recycling. Whereas you give us a copy of your recycling survey, you do not give us any results. Once again this is a survey concerning recycling rather than efforts in relation to the prevention of waste ab initio. 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:

Well done on your litter collection nights. You are currently engaging in setting up a Junior litter warden programme. This will be a project to be adjudicated upon in 2018 as it is to commence in September 2017. Nonetheless it is clear that the children from Our Lady's Meadow's school have already been helping you in litter picking as seen from your photographs. You issued a flyer to businesses reminding them to look after their own premises. Well done on your participation in the spring clean up in April. We also note your efforts to deal with dog poo. Litter was not a problem on adjudication day. Well done on this improvement!

The estate walls along the Cork approach were weed-free. However a small substation requires repainting by the appropriate utility company - near a lighting pole. Footpaths throughout the town were weed-free and clean. On adjudication day a cement base was being laid under the picnic table near the Fire Station.

A weedy box planter outside the Sheppard's premises facing The Square should be removed or planted. On the other side of the same entrance door (and on the same premises) the railing area was nicely planted

The recycling area at the garage was free of litter, but the bins are very grubby and worn, and the site is quite sterile visually.

An old circus flyer was noted at the corner of the Boy Scouts site on a metal light pole. Another flyer was noted near the playground.

There were a few incidental pieces of litter in the vicinity of the playground.

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

The standard of residential users in the village and on approaches is very good.

It is great that the local Community Scheme has organised teams to assist in housing estate maintenance. The Community Work Scheme give support to each residents' group. You say that you have included a prize for the best estate in this year Scarecrow Festival. This appears to be a project for next year also. In any event it is a good idea

Derrywood estate has a maintenance plan in place. This estate is beautifully landscaped. We admired the Fáilte sign in elegant shrubbery.

The paths in Erkindale have been resurfaced. The grotto at Erkindale looked freshly painted, but the seating needs attention. These houses with arched entrances fronting the main approach to the village from Kilkenny looked well. Erskindale Drive is well planted and has a lovely green open space.

Seandoire estate (and it was interesting to read in your overview document about the oak tree connection) estate is well presented and presents a pleasant image on the Cork Road approach. We admired a good tree and grass margin opposite Seandoire. On the Cork approach we admired bright yellow gates and seat in a garden on the right hand side of this approach, near a delightfully presented cream two storey six bay house.

Mulch in the playground was replaced this year and the playground was nominated in the top 50 playgrounds in Ireland. The playground was being well used on the location of our visit. Would it be possible to provide some wheelchair accessible playground equipment such as a swing for wheelchair users in the play area?

We particularly admired the excellent presentation of the house with the O' Carragain plaque. It is a pity that on-street parking on the footpath at this point detracted from its overall appearance. The plaque itself was interesting in its commemoration of a great ecclesiastical historian.

We admired a grey house with unusual fenestration on Carrigan Street (with maroon door and garage door)

On the Kilkenny approach a terrace of houses with estate type porches was admired.

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

The old Cork main road through Durrow is still very heavily trafficked. On the Cork approach we noted the stone name sign. We also noted the sign for Darú Durrow and the webpage reference. There is a sweeping entrance to the village from this approach. We admired the stone wall, hedges, copper beech and other trees. Some metal and wood redundant signage was observed just before the Lions/AFC signage. Texaco was neat but a bit bare. Could some planted tree boxes be provided? Opposite Texaco we noted further redundant signage. A poorly surfaced hard shoulder exists in this area also and some boundary walls could benefit from refreshing.

Although you say that the The Canoe and Kayak club will plant perennials plants at the bridge area - again there is confusion as this is listed under projects undertaken this year. Once again you say that perennial beds are to be added on approach roads - again this is confusing as it is future tense. We assume you filled in your form in late May - so it would appear that this project should not be included for this year's adjudication but for next year's adjudication. It should form part of your Plan.

You mention the maintenance and enhancement of signage in relation to the amenities in the area which have been developed by the Durrow Development Forum. More details of which signage you refer to would be appreciated.

We would ask that you consider asking local landowners to consider painting field gates on all approaches to the village. This gives a sense of introduction to arriving at a centre and looks neat. A local team colour could be chosen

Some road signage needs to be repainted. An example would be the 'stop' sign on the road surface as one exits onto the main road near the Castle Arms Hotel. In this area also we noticed some broken kerbing. Road markings at the Ballacolla junction also need repainting.

Parking on street footpaths appears to be a problem in the village. This both obstructs pedestrians - and particularly those of with mobility issues, but also damages the footpaths. Perhaps you can start a campaign to reduce this bad practice. To a point is understandable given the amount of traffic 'tearing' through your village at all times!

A tyre sale fly post was noted on the Dublin approach road.

The Boris-in-Ossory approach road is very leafy. The Harps GAA ground presentation/hedging looked well. We thought that parking at the Fire station/Kayak Club premises was congested and access/exit so close to the Ballacolla junction difficult.

The Kilkenny approach is leafy and undulating. However we observed some older advertising signage just before the speed limit signs on this approach. It is a very clean approach but we observed some hedge cutting of a relatively recent nature on the right-hand side approaching the village. The stone sign with simple red bedding flowers looked very well. The Cullohill approach/cycle road and Lalor's road appeared to have no speed limit signage.

Concluding Remarks:

Durrow is a very fine village and a lovely place to visit. You have not let the Motorway by-pass thwart your enthusiasm. It is a pity that so much heavy traffic trundles through your Square and Chapel Street.

A general suggestion would be to ensure that you separate projects to be considered for this year from those which are about to start or are to be formulated as projects for 2018 adjudication year. We remind you that the adjudication year is e.g. from 1 June.2016 to 31st May in the year of adjudication. Scattering projects which are not yet underway throughout your entry form is confusing to an adjudicator. The Tidy Towns plan should contain future

plans whether they are annual plans or ongoing plans which are phased. Another suggestion we would make to you is that you ensure that you insert projects correctly under each category heading. It is difficult for an adjudicator to be jumping backwards and forwards between category headings to ensure that each project is considered - even though it may not be inserted in the correct category. These are just issues that would be helpful to an adjudicator annually, but also are required if you read the entry form guidelines carefully.

We think you have much potential in your built and natural heritage advantages. We wish you continued success this year and into the future. Go n-éirí libh i rith na blianta atá romhainn!