

Tidy Towns Competition 2017

Adjudication Report

Centre: **Emo** Ref: **413**
County: **Laois** Mark: **311**
Category: **A** Date(s): **14/06/2017**

	Maximum Mark	Mark Awarded 2016	Mark Awarded 2017
Community Involvement & Planning	60	41	42
Built Environment and Streetscape	50	39	41
Landscaping and Open Spaces	50	42	43
Wildlife, Habitats and Natural Amenities	50	35	37
Sustainable Waste and Resource Management	50	17	18
Tidiness and Litter Control	90	63	64
Residential Streets & Housing Areas	50	31	32
Approach Roads, Streets & Lanes	50	35	34
TOTAL MARK	450	303	311

Community Involvement & Planning / Rannpháirtíocht an Phobail & Pleanáil:

Fáilte ioma! Welcome Emo to the Super Valu 2017 National Tidy Towns Competition. You must be struggling with only two people on your committee we are sure, but we are glad to know that you also have six other volunteers. Despite the fact that your volunteering level is very limited you have achieved extremely well in the competition with marks in excess of 300 in recent years. Well done on this! You must be working very hard as individuals. On adjudication day - well beyond normal working hours we met a young man - one of your volunteers with his wheelbarrow - busy about the village. We were amazed to hear from your plan summary that a lot of your members are OAPs. Obviously when you say that you have a very active retirement group - this is very true. And we were sorry to hear that you have not had scheme work from TÚS or a Community Employment Scheme for three years. We hope that you can inveigle other new residents to join your ranks - just as you have been joined by - you tell us - a very enthusiastic new resident recently. Well done on attending all the local authority meetings that relate to Tidy Towns. You bring back news and advice from these meetings to your own six meetings annually.

You list a good number of national and local agencies, businesses and bodies that assist you. This shows that you are held in good regard. It is good to know that the area roads engineer is also helping you. You also referred to the very helpful litter warden in your area and to your helpful roads manager. These are important people to have a good relationship with in relation to Tidy Towns. Obviously you help them also in their work

You have many communication methods which include weekly church notes. You do not say as to whether these notes are distributed to all churches in your area - be they majority or minority churches. We hope that this is the case. You use the local papers, e-mailing and text messaging as well as notices in the local shop. You did not tell us but we found a web page for Emo Tidy Towns. It was short - but informative. We also found a u-Tube video about Emo Tidy Towns in our own research! We see that you attended a Tidy Towns Seminar.

You work with the schools in Emo and with the youth club. You say that your work with the youth leaders is very positive and that the young people take part in litter cleanups every year. Last year's adjudicator asked if you had considered establishing a junior Tidy Towns committee. Has any progress being made on this?

Well done on your 16 years of unbroken participation in the competition. We are glad that the residents make an extra effort on your behalf, and that you are respected locally because of the high standards which the competition engenders. We liked your statement that "Tidy Towns is nonpolitical/welcomes every one of all ages". This is a good concise description of important aspects of the competition. We are delighted to know that visitors to Emo Court and associated forest walks praise your area and your hard work.

Thank you for - what you call - your five-year plan. However the dates on the top of the pages of the plan are from

2017 to 2020. So we assume that this is a three-year plan, Perhaps there is a little confusion between your entry form and your plan. Projects for the current adjudication year and phased projects being worked on during the current adjudication year should be entered in your entry form and future projects only should be part of your plan - whether these are once-off /one-year projects or phases of an ongoing project. Sometimes your plan makes more general policy statements rather than specific statements about projects. It is important that the plan is project- led. It is good to have an overarching policy, but it is important also to be specific about specific projects and to give a timeframe over the years of the plan for their implementation. This will focus your mind on the practicality of achieving each project in the timeframe allotted. It will also make you consider the resources necessary to achieve each project's completion, and make you stop to consider whether you have these resources or not. The plan should be practical rather than aspirational. It would also be very useful and helpful to the adjudicator if you could provide a simple timeline for each project, indicate completed projects during the course of the plan, indicate ongoing projects and indicate projects to be completed in the coming adjudication year(s). 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. Do refer to the Tidy Towns Handbook for advice. Perhaps for next year you could revisit the plan and consider the suggestions we are making in updating your plan. We note that last year's adjudicator also remarked on the fact that it was difficult to see where projects were being planned and suggested the use of bullet points.

Your village map was a simple adequate sketch plan and whereas you numbered the projects from 1 to 13 on your sketch map with the name of each project attached, you did not number your projects throughout the entry form to correspond with the numbers on the 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 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 which relate to the numbered list throughout the entry form.

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

Well done on your new wheelchair friendly footpath accessing the sports fields from the village. Your work on the village pump appears to be ongoing - as traffic bollards and materials surrounded it on adjudication day. The 'shed' opposite the church is a most unique structure. This adjudicator has not come across this type of 'parking-lot' for horses etc. at an earlier time at any other church visited throughout competition adjudication. So we are delighted that you are aware of this uniqueness and that you maintain it so well. The shed erected in 1918 "for all time for people attending the church" is a most unusual feature of your village and should be treasured. We wonder if this is a Protected Structure or not? We do not know the name of the townland within which it is located, so it is difficult to check the entry in the absence of knowing the townland name but we noted only three entries for 'Emo' in the County Development Plan list of Protected Structures, and these are relevant to Emo House and estate. On the National Inventory of Architectural Heritage we only found one entry for the village and this was ' St. Paul's Roman Catholic Church.' We are somewhat surprised that such an interesting if simple structure is not protected. So it appears that you - the community are the custodians! You are keeping the gutters clean and painting here - two very important jobs to secure a building's future. We read with interest the relevant Emo Tidy Towns community projects plaque which is restrained and classic. Well done on the restoration which you carried out in 2012 with the support of Laois Partnership and the local parish priest. We would be inclined to remove the plastic flower container from beneath the plaque - as it is unnecessary, not in keeping with the building or the plaque, and is actually a hindrance/obstruction to a person reading the plaque.

The new school is in a lovely landscaped setting and looked very well. The location of the school beside the GAA and soccer sports ground adjacent is good sustainable use of resources. Signage for the school on a directional sign post is good and clean, as is the name signage in blue.

There are lovely views to the church in views as one approaches from the GAA side of the village. The church is presented in a pristine fashion, and we commend both the community and the clergy for same. The splay walled access area, gate piers and the attractive stone stile and entire curtilage looked really well. The splay walls and gate piers on the parochial house entrance also looked well. The excellent cast iron railing on the platform above the stone steps leading to the front door was admired. In time - would it be possible to replace the modern access handrails with safe and suitable cast iron handrails to match the existing railings? The tubular handrails show some sign of rusting at present. Opposite the church the simple (but attractive in its simplicity) is the blue and white grotto which is restrained and unusual.

The gate leading to the ICA garden and bicycle shed nearby is a lovely piece of metal work and is in very good condition. The stone pillars at the graveyard and the associated gate looked well, and the graveyard was well maintained. A good double gate requiring some care was observed at the entrance to the site the subject of planning permission beside the ICA garden. These gates are worth retaining and conserving. Another attractive gate was noted between two wooden poles opposite the shop in the manicured hedging.

Your litter bins are modern and looked well. The planter beside the litter bin near the graveyard corner matched the litter bin in colour and scale.

The M. Ní Floinn property is boarded up. The name sign deserves to be protected and retained in any future

development - as such name signs are rare examples of Irish vernacular street name signage and lettering. The fact that it is in Irish adds an extra dimension. We hope that the new development here will respect the vernacular architecture of the boarded-up premises. The Gatehouse public house and associated restaurant were well presented, as was the shop nearby.

Another use of Irish of a more modern nature was observed at the Fáilte to Coill Ime housing estate stone name sign. The lovely stone shed with red corrugated roof at the entrance to the estate, together with its lateral planting and neat grass boundary looked very attractive. We admired the old school plaque 'as Gaeilge'.

Some conservation work to the railings and the stonework at the entrance to Emo Court is necessary. Talk to the local authority's Architectural Conservation Officer or to the Heritage Officer if the authority does not engage an Architectural Conservation Officer. These gates and railings are important parts of your built heritage and deserve to be conserved.

Landscaping and Open Spaces / Tírdhreachú agus Spásanna Oscailte:

The village centre is maintained in pristine condition through your hard work. You also maintain approach roads. You paint and plant the flower containers twice yearly, and you are now concentrating on flowers and colours that attract bees. Well done on upgrading the more distant roundabouts with new planting. We commend the local farmer who volunteers to mow the picnic area. This is a lovely introduction to the village at a distance from the village. The picnic area and surrounding green space with its lovely backdrop of estate walling and mature trees looked very well and well-cared for as a result. The wooden bollards edging the smaller green space here were very appropriate.

The planting on the wall between the GAA centre and the village is attractive. We noted the honeysuckle in full bloom. Empty flagpoles and a very large sign for the facility detracted a little. Whereas we understand that some notice board is desirable for practical purposes - we wonder if it needs to be this big and intrusive.

We admired the garden adjacent to the church shelter which was redesigned by the ICA with the support of Laois Partnership. The shrubbery and the simple bicycle shed - which resonates with the shelter building opposite the church - is in very good taste.

Respectfully we would suggest that you remove the plastic flower pots from the approaches to Emo Court estate gates. The estate is a classical estate as are the entrance gates. Plastic flower pots look out-of-place and are not at all in character with this area of the village in particular. You have enough natural landscaping with your estate trees, hedging, shrub planting etc. which is much more suitable and appropriate landscaping for a village of your character. There may be some place else in the village that is rundown or some gardener who would welcome some plastic flower pots for their patio. We hope that this does not hurt your feelings in any way but it is our honest opinion! It will also save you some annual bedding work and watering!

We saw an advertisement on behalf of Coillte for the sale of 0.25 ha of trees, close to the entrance gates to Emo Court. We wondered what plans there are for this parcel of land.

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

You are moving ahead with great enthusiasm in this category. Congratulations on your Biodiversity prize!

Well done on your grass margin management on approach roads which is friendly to wildlife. We noted the wildflower sign/area near the picnic area - and as you say it will be a natural progression as you are going to harvest the seeds this autumn. Should you be purchasing seeds ensure that they are sourced from sources which only deal in seed varieties of Irish wildflowers.

The butterfly identification workshop last July must have been most interesting! We hope that the day was well attended. You do not actually give us any idea of the numbers of people who availed of this great opportunity. However you do say that people from surrounding counties attended. Well done on inviting the competition! It was a lovely mixture of an indoor workshop and an afternoon trip to Emo forest.

The school children will enjoy their new bird boxes and bug hotel. The bat box is - we are sure - a source of intrigue. You are lucky to have the Kildare branch of Bat Conservation Ireland to monitor the occupancy of the bat box. Furthermore additional bat boxes are to be facilitated at the GAA premises. As recently as May 2017 further potential sites for bat boxes have been identified. We were amused by your remark that farmers and sportsmen appreciate the midge-devouring appetites of the bats!

Bumblebee identification workshops are planned for this July and next year's adjudicator will be privileged to hear how this workshop worked. We are delighted to see that you are facilitated in this by the National Biodiversity Data Centre. Well done to your committee members who attended a Pollinator Plan workshop organised by your local authority in April.

We visited the area of wildlife meadow on the perimeter of the GAA fiend - although we found it a little difficult to locate at first. Please mark it more accurately on your map next year! You are being advised by the Laois Offaly Wildlife group on the best action to develop a wildlife meadow in this area. You have removed invasive plants,

planted native trees, catalogued and photographed to assist with plant identification. The soil has been prepared for nesting mining bees.

Your interest in this category is exceptional and praiseworthy.

Wildlife certainly has 'got the message' that they are welcome in your village, and this adjudicator has to confess that some time was spent watching rabbits in Killimy housing estate open space (at the end of the estate). It is a credit to the people there that these rabbits are confident enough to be so near the houses. The sound of birdsong in this housing estate was also remarkable.

We saw a little evidence of what appeared to be chemical weed killing on the short approach from the village to the Emo court estate gates - resulting in bare patches of grass - mostly behind the low bollards. Do try to weed manually - as you say you normally do - also here.

One area that needs attention is compliance with the Wildlife Act 1976 and Wildlife Amendment Act 2006 – although you are aware of its requirements in relation to the Killimy housing estate. However we observed some hedge cutting of fairly recent origin on some approach roads. 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:

Your bin recycling project is expanding through the future delivery of larger bins. Your litter clean-up presumably segregated litter. You also recycled clothing. Another recycling project involved a book sale organised by the schoolchildren. However these projects are recycling projects - and whereas they are good - the emphasis of this category now is on prevention of waste production with recycling as the bottom of the pyramid in relation to sustainable waste and resource management. The idea is to encourage towns and villages to move beyond just collecting and recycling waste and to take steps to actually reduce the production of waste in the community in the first place.

Well done on your composter purchasing under Agenda 21 funding. So now eighteen households will be involved in composting. You also distributed green cleaning and green gardening booklets and you discourage junk mail.

A water butt has been provided at the Gate Lodge to replace the stolen water butt! You use this water for your landscaping projects. Another butt is being provided at the old school. Conscious of water wastage to leakage in the area - you draw attention to this to the relevant authorities.

Remember that sustainable waste and resource management is primarily about endeavouring to prevent the production of waste before it even becomes necessary to recycle it. 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.

Well done to the schoolchildren on Green Flag participation.

We observed your solar powered school sign.

Tidiness and Litter Control / Slachtmhaireacht agus Rialú Bruscair:

Well done on taking part in Laois Clean Up Week. We commend your litter picks along each approach road. We would like you to tell us the frequency of these litter picks. Doing a litter pick regularly is a huge commitment. We are sorry that traffic going through your village increases your work in this area. However you are keeping up with the problem, as we did not observe litter on our visit - so well done.

You remove fly posting throughout the area and you regularly maintain the bottle bank area. We did however notice fly posting re dog grooming on the approach to the village from the Old Cork Road side. Another fly posting for an old circus event was noted on the approach to the village near the Killimy housing estate entrance.

We note that you collect leaves, branches and twigs in the memorial garden to provide cover for wildlife and for tidiness purposes.

We are glad to see that the local authority collects all black bags from your litter picks, and you try to spread the word about anti littering through newspaper and church notes - as well as reporting offences around the village environs.

We see that you also wash the road signs when needed. This also shows - as they were clean!

The 'out' directional sign at the picnic area on the approach to the village needs renewal. The Farmers' Market sign and the large auctioneering sign on the site where planning permission has been applied for (beside the ICA garden) detract somewhat from the entrance to the village. Could that Farmers' Market and the

craft fair signage be combined and designed to be a freestanding well-designed sign elsewhere? We assume that the site for sale sign will be removed in the not too distant future.

Some overhanging branches along the footpath between the entrance to Emo Court and the church end of the village need trimming as they were overhanging the footpath on adjudication day.

The wooden supports to Emo Court Forest Park map and wildlife signage need renewal and the signage is becoming a little faded. We feel that the freestanding Farmers' Market notice and other notices attached to fencing just inside the entrance to Emo Court could be rationalised into a more attractive single sign. There is a metal box on a wooden pole called the 'document box' which is rusty and appears to be redundant (beside the Farmers' Market sign and near the recycling area. This should be restored to its original use and condition or removed.

The recycling centre was pristine on adjudication day. Well done for this. There was no litter to be seen - despite the fact that you say your bins are of inadequate size and you are awaiting delivery of larger bins. The setting of course is beautiful amongst the trees.

A planning notice dated late 2016 in front of the planting on the sports ground wall (approaching the village) may be obsolete at this stage, and if so should be removed. If the application is still current obviously the notice should remain. We noticed a site notice for outline permission for two detached dwelling houses to the side of the ICA garden. We are unsure as to its stage of progress. The date on the sign was August 2016. If the application is still current the sign should remain. If the application has been dealt with the sign should be removed. We trust that you have been looking at the proposed developments in the village through the planning register. It would be good to have this site tidied up as presently it is rough and contains a ruinous building.

The bus sign outside the old school could be repainted

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

It is obvious that all your residents take pride in their houses.

At the Killimy estate you ensure that hedge trimming is carried out within the correct season. Litter is picked regularly and plant containers looked after at the entrance to the same estate. It is a good arrangement that the residents association is a subcommittee of your own Tidy Towns group, which encourages cooperation and exchange of knowledge. We would suggest that the plant containers near the access to this estate are unnecessary and we suggest that you should encourage the residents to concentrate on maintaining and managing the linear open space and hedging which is natural and beautiful. We admired the bird table. We also admired roses at a cottage opposite this housing estate.

You noted that some new small-scale development is to take place in the village centre. We assume that you have looked at very relevant planning applications and made your input if you felt that this was appropriate.

You 'step in' where needs be in the village in areas not managed by householders.

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

You organise grass cutting on all approach roads - and as we said already you manage this maintenance to promote wildlife advantage. You generally control weeds manually and wash signs as well as removing graffiti. You keep an eye on signage is in need of repair or repainting. The area outside the GAA pitch has safer parking and wheelchair access now also. The county council replaced a broken barrier at the pedestrian crossing outside the church. We noted the Emo Tidy Towns welcome to Emo sign erected in 2000 on the approach road from the roundabout.

The metal pole holding the Slí na Sláinte sign at the corner leading to Emo Court Gateway requires repainting. The signage otherwise on this metal pole is in very good condition. The 'stop' sign at this junction is being encroached on by hedging. Nearby the Emo garden centres sandwich board sign is located on a footpath corner. A nearby sign for a restaurant was located right in the middle of the footpath and further along the footpath an ice cream cone sign was also obstructive on the footpath. Together with the flowerpots adjacent this is a hazard for people with mobility issues or people using buggies. We noted parking on the footpath between the village and the entrance gates to Emo Court. This is not acceptable from the point of view of mobility issues and also looks poorly in the sweeping views inwards towards the estate entrance. Footpath parking was also noted on the far side of the shop in front of a dwelling. The road surface leading to the entrance to Emo Court is very poor. We realise that the avenue to the great house is a public road, so we would encourage you to talk to your local engineer with a view to repairing this stretch of road between the village and the gate. The edges of the road/stonework/bollards are broken in places also along this approach.

The picnic area on the approach from the Old Cork Road looked well, but some planted tubs on a weedy verge on the opposite side of the road need attention. We admired your black and white Fáilte sign. However we noted some hedge cutting of recent origin along a field boundary near the 50 K pH speed limit sign. Please refer to our comments under Wildlife etc. above in this regard. The footpath was weed free and the approach was neat - downhill to the village. The short series of pots in front of houses on the left-hand side look fussy and take up space on the hard shoulder. We would encourage you to request the land owners to paint farm gates on approaches to the village - particularly within the speed limits area. This gives a feeling of a sense of arrival at your village and conveys

a neat and tidy impression on entering the village.

On the approach road which leads to the village by the GAA sites and church site we also noticed some hedge cutting. Here we admired the Slán Abhaile roadside sign. On this approach road well outside the speed limit we noticed a large hoarding being erected on adjudication day for Festival Francais at another town. There was also a sign advertising a tractor run. We noticed a headless metal road sign on the approach towards the junction for the GAA on this approach road.

On the approach to the village from the housing estate there appeared to be only one speed limit sign on one side of the road. The road surface was poor. Satellite dishes on the front elevation of the Killimey houses facing the main road detracted from the appearance of the houses. The footpaths along this approach were very weed-free. Some gable painting, pier repair and boundary wall capping could be improved.

The yellow signs on the pedestrian crossing near the church need renewal, and the bollards painted.

A speed limit sign had some encroaching vegetation.

Concluding Remarks:

Emo is a lovely village. The adjudicator had only visited once before - as a 'tourist' – not an adjudicator - when the bluebells were in profusion at Emo forest. What a memorable sight that was - as no doubt it still is in Spring! The adjudicator also remembered photographing the M. O' Fhloinn property – which the adjudicator thinks was a pub then - because it was such a lovely example of vernacular Irish architecture. You are a great community to be able to do so much with a small but dedicated group of volunteers. We wish you continued success this year and into the future. Go n-eiri libh i rith na blianta atá romhainn!