

Tidy Towns Competition 2017

Adjudication Report

Centre: **Mountrath** Ref: **284**
County: **Laois** Mark: **275**
Category: **C** Date(s): **16/06/2017**

	Maximum Mark	Mark Awarded 2016	Mark Awarded 2017
Community Involvement & Planning	60	35	36
Built Environment and Streetscape	50	32	33
Landscaping and Open Spaces	50	39	41
Wildlife, Habitats and Natural Amenities	50	38	39
Sustainable Waste and Resource Management	50	13	14
Tidiness and Litter Control	90	52	50
Residential Streets & Housing Areas	50	33	33
Approach Roads, Streets & Lanes	50	30	29
TOTAL MARK	450	272	275

Community Involvement & Planning / Rannpháirtíocht an Phobail & Pleanáil:

Fáilte Maighean Rátha! Welcome Mountrath to the Super Valu 2017 National Tidy Towns Competition. Your committee has six regular members which occasionally increases to 8 during busy periods. You have an additional 2 to 4 volunteers. A small committee sometimes can be easier to manage, but we feel that you need extra volunteers. However you do list a number of bodies locally who work with you, so in reality we suppose these are also additional volunteers for certain works – apart from the 2 to 4 whom you specifically mention. You have a long list of agencies who support your work, and we are delighted to hear that the local authority provide “tremendous” support. In particular it is good that you have a good working relationship with your local officer from the local authority to help you with particular issues such as the reduction of unnecessary signage. Local businesses seem to be involved in helping you also.

You communicate well through traditional and modern communication methods. Your communication embraces all age groups from schoolchildren to “Golden Years.”

You are engaging with the crèche and local primary schools on various issues under the category headings. We look forward to hearing more about your engagement with the Youth Theatre on creating awareness on the importance of biodiversity and waste reduction through the creative arts. This is an imaginative approach. We note that last year’s adjudicator mentioned that you hoped to have a junior Tidy Towns committee member in 2017. Did you have any luck with that?

You have been entering the competition now for 10 years. You list the benefits which the competition brings to the town. You say that creating a sense of pride of place and a sense of community, together with enhancing the town - and persistence in this enhancement - are all effects of being a participant in the competition. You see that your group contributes to the development of the community in many ways.

Thank you for your one-page three-year Tidy Towns plan. However we would like this to be a little expanded and perhaps laid out under the various category headings for next year. We would like to see a more even distribution of proposed future projects over the entire category headings. We would also like to see next year as to whether each planned project was completed or not. Checking your plan annually helps you to readjust where necessary and to re-concentrate where necessary. It is not always feasible for various reasons to carry out a planned project, and this is acceptable. Perhaps it can be deferred or revisited. But a review is good. The plan need not be an elaborate plan, nor need it be prepared professionally. A simple document with a timescale for any projects you consider feasible and suitable over the lifetime of the plan should be listed under the various category headings. Do refer to the Tidy Towns Handbook for further advice. You should consider any statutory and non-statutory plans applicable to your village in drawing up your work programme. And you should tell us about your consultation process in drawing up

your Tidy Towns plan.

Thank you for your map with this year's projects shown and a key to the project numbers shown separately. This was helpful. Unfortunately the map did not show the full extent of the town - nor all key public buildings and landmarks - nor show and name all housing estates nor name each approach road. Some streets were 'truncated' It is important to show the entire town right to the boundaries of your working area on your map. Moreover you did not number the projects for this year throughout the entry form. Section 3 of the guidelines on completing your entry form asks that each new or continuing project for the current year should be identified by number in your entry form under the correct category 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.

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

Many of the projects which you list here for the 2016/2017 adjudication period have not actually been undertaken, and should form part of your Tidy Towns plan.

The wall on the river walk has been completed with stone facing. Thank you for the photographs of this work which we observed on adjudication day. Furthermore you have successfully secured the building of what you describe as "a more aesthetically pleasing stone wall bridge."

Well done on your cooperation with Mountrath Community Forum to have three properties in the town painted during the past year. Furthermore you had the seats at the roundabout painted. (We read your comments in relation to the seating in answer to last year's adjudicator's suggestion about removing the seats).

The front of the old cinema has been painted (you actually mention this under approach roads)

The modern community school on a side road off the Castletown road was nicely landscaped. We admired the Irish lettering Pobal Scoil Mhaighean Átha. However the prefabricated building along the front boundary looked poorly and detracted from the overall impression.

The graveyard near the community school was neatly maintained with clean well painted boundary walls.

Satellite dishes are a phenomenon of modern day living, and can be acceptable visually if placed strategically. However we noticed a number of satellite dishes on the front elevations of houses – such as terraces leading into town on the Castletown approach road. Such siting of satellite dishes detracts hugely from streetscapes. It is also necessary to receive planning permission to attach satellite dish to the front elevation of the property.

Scoil Clochar Brégde seems to have got a little run down since last year, and is in need of painting, as are its boundary gates.

Wallis Street and Shannon Street were neat, but for the prevalence of satellite dishes on the front elevations of property – especially on new apartments and houses. Could the sides of the recessed wall at the ESB substation be finished in stone? A faded furniture hoarding opposite St Fintan's Terrace should be renewed/removed.

Some properties along Patrick Street are obviously closed and in need of new owners and brightening up. Like so many Irish towns you will have suffered the loss of business during the downturn. A site selling tyres near the bridge at the bottom of Patrick Street would benefit from screening, as on approaching the bridge from the Market Square this site detracts from the views to the bridge. There were containers of (fire?)wood and other bags of materials located on the footpath outside this site. The picnic area fingerpost sign nearby was dirty.

The three-storey building (former bank) between the chemist's and the library is in need of upgrading. This is a fine building, and we understand from our perusal of your County Development Plan that this is a Protected Structure and is at a significant location in the town. Do you have any policy on Protected Structures under threat in your town? Does your county have an Architectural Conservation Officer that might be able to help?

Further out that road there is a building with a lot of poles and wires, a dirty white splayed entrance, a gate with a lot of notices and a large advertising hoarding which is empty. A nice stone wall runs along this street beside a very weed free footpath. There is a huge container inside green fencing nearby. Can anything be done to improve this area?

We found the centre of the Market Square area to be visually very cluttered with signage, fencing, planting in pots etc. There was also fly posting on the directional sign post for Portlaoise and Dublin. In the square you have done your best to deal with the single-storey disused building beside the Laois TV services property. The number of satellite dishes on the gable of the latter property looked extremely unattractive as seen from the Market Square. Around the square some properties with a lot of projecting lights detract from the streetscape. We also saw a Christmas star over what was otherwise a nice old red shop front (which was obviously disused). Some overhead wires remain in the square area. Whereas the square does not have any buildings of architectural significance in general the properties are reasonably well maintained.

Main Street is an attractive street without any overhead wires and with a nice continuous streetscape with varying

roof levels. Miller's shop front on a corner looked well, but the white building (old cinema?) in a large tarmac area adjacent to Main Street would benefit from some on-site landscaping. The Bank of Ireland is a very fine building with original first and second floor windows. It also has a good front door fanlight. What a pity the ground floor fenestration was not retained. The property containing Behan's bargain shop has retained its timber sash windows and Gallaher's property next door is a fine three-storey building.

The Church of Ireland is on a very significant junction within the town. It was presented very well with its lovely stone walls, good gates, and shrubbery.

Across the road the blue building/bar has a good clean front elevation. However the gable and extended side elevation facing the Church of Ireland requires repainting.

As part of your street furniture the circular green post box was actually extremely dirty, and the notice for collection times was faded and old. This was a pity as such boxes are becoming rarer in the Irish towns and villages nowadays and you have something worth minding here. Talk to An Post.

In the Amenity Park we very much admired the interesting limestone sculpture. It is a pity that the credits are illegible at this stage beside this interesting piece of public art.

Well done on your use of Irish on the bright Slí na bPáistí signage in the playground and on the 'Bird Life of the Park' signage. The green railed bridge crossing the river at the Amenity Park was admired.

The Catholic Church was well presented. In views to the church from the riverbank beside the playground/Amenity Park the dirty white post and wire fencing detracts.

The public toilets near the amenity Park are well presented, although painting the hand railings would brighten up the small building.

Landscaping and Open Spaces / Tírdhreachú agus Spásanna Oscailte:

Whereas you mention the playground under this category heading - we deal with it in more detail under the category heading where playgrounds are specifically considered i.e. Residential Streets and Housing Areas.

Well done on your continued perennial planting scheme. We are sure that the bluebells looked well. Perhaps it would be a good idea to let us have some photographs of spring plantings (which have disappeared by adjudication day) in next year's submission.

The native trees along the riverbank will mature and form a nice landscape feature. You have moved towards the planting of perennial plants in the floral plantings throughout the town. You maintain the wildlife area to the rear of the playground and Amenity Park. This is a very worthwhile project. The orbital walking route will bring people through formal and informal landscaped areas. You have completed this with the assistance of the local authority.

We noted some rough cutting of an evergreen boundary opposite the Community School.

We very much admired the hedged Fáilte sign on the raised stone/gravelled embankment. The perennial planting here with its somewhat vertical emphasis looked well.

The commemorative peace garden opened in the centenary of 1916 near the playground is unusual and attractive. Perhaps plastering the block wall behind or planting climbing plants/shrubs against that wall would make the space even more attractive. We admired the semi mature trees and shrubbery on the well looked after grass area

The Mountrath Wildlife Amenity Park is very picturesque, and your signage is very attractive. The steppingstones across the River are supplemented by a pedestrian bridge for those who are too young - or old (!) to risk falling into the river!

The Quaker Burial Ground is a lovely landscape feature in the centre of your town. It is a peaceful oasis - despite its proximity to a busy junction. We admired the trees and the dappled light in the graveyard. The planting along the perimeter looked well but an off-white building adjacent which needs repainting detracted a little bit from the enclosing stone wall and perimeter planting.

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

We look forward to hearing more about your engagement with the Youth Theatre on creating awareness on the importance of biodiversity and waste reduction through the creative arts. This is an imaginative approach!

The Friends' Graveyard/Quaker Burial Ground is indeed a wonderful natural amenity, and you have changed your mowing regime here to encourage biodiversity as recommended in your biodiversity plan. We noted this on adjudication day. Likewise you have changed your mowing regime along the White Horse River Walk. Strimming follows the same pattern.

We particularly congratulate you on all your employment of manual weeding. This is most important for the environment. We appreciate however how much extra work is involved. We did observe just one small instance of

what appeared to be chemical weeding opposite New Line Close along the footpath.

The Dunamase Bee Club must be very busy - because they seem to be helping every Tidy Towns group in the county! We are sure that they are delighted with the interest shown in something that has obviously been a passion of theirs for a long time! Well done on encouraging businesses and residents in creating pollination areas, and also for your own bee friendly plantings at various locations. We hope that the bug hotel proves a popular interest and attraction especially for the children.

We note from your correspondence that you are working with the local authority Waters and Communities office in developing a plan for the White Horse River.

Well done to the primary schools who hold a Green Flag. The sunflower project is a simple but effective one.

We commend you for leaving the riverbank in its natural state and not trying to 'prettify' it. It is also more attractive to wildlife in its rural state.

Last year's adjudicator suggested that you perhaps survey and audit every few years in relation to your habitats. Did you have any luck with doing this? Apart from the bird life have you surveyed other habitat users? What does your Biodiversity plan say about this? Have you sought any expert advice in this area? 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 have installed water butts at the public toilet opposite the playground and at a house beside the entrance to the church.

Again we look forward to hearing more about your engagement with the youth Theatre on creating awareness on the importance of waste reduction through the creative arts. Perhaps a conversation between the Green Flag participants and the Arts Groups about this topic might bring up some novel ideas.

You encourage people to take their clothes for recycling to a charity shop as you felt that the clothing bins were being abused. However it is important to remember that this category is about more than recycling - worthy though recycling is. It is about reducing waste before it is produced. 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 involvement in the Clean Up Laois week. We also commend you for your weekly litter pick which includes the playground. The Community Employment Scheme litter pick from Monday to Friday. We note that you 'hand out' dog bags - as dog fouling is a serious problem. The local authority sweep pathways on a weekly basis and collect litter once a week

There were quite a few incidents of flyposting throughout the town. There were two fly posts on a pole along the Coote Terrace side of St. Peters Church. We saw further fly posting nearby - between a black litter bin and beside the three brown fingerpost signs for the Slieve Bloom Drive etc. and a small grey substation. More fly posting was noted at the square, as we have mentioned already, and there was another fly post outside the grey building on the corner of the square. Further fly posting was noticed on approach roads.

The lovely bright blue informative Quaker Burial Ground plaque looked really well on the stone wall. Unfortunately somebody had scrawled a name on the top left-hand side.

The public toilets in the public car park were temporarily closed. This looks poorly in midsummer when you can expect to have tourists around. We wondered what timescale 'temporarily' referred to. The large gate with a 'no parking' sign beside the toilet needs repainting.

You tell us that the bottle banks are going to be removed and replaced with new banks at a 24-hour garage. The existing recycling centre certainly was not impressive. The signage was a little grubby. However the white bins were very grubby. The red bins and the green bins were not much better. The 'cans only' bins were overflowing, and there were cans thrown on the ground beside. There were two black sacks of rubbish thrown in front of the white bins. Further cans were thrown on the ground to the left of the white bins. This is an area that obviously needs attention before next year, and it is a pity because the car park with its good high stonewalling could look well. Something that would improve this car parking area would be some landscaping. Also the red shed adjacent would benefit from painting - as indeed would the very poor red gate nearby.

Litter was not an issue in the town (apart from the recycle area mentioned already) but there was a little litter in the playground and on the Castletown Road approach.

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

The overall standard reached in this regard is for the most part being maintained in the towns' streets, in the estates, and on approaches to the town. You commend residents in various housing estates for their well maintained areas. The Kiln Lane estate is a representative in the 'Pride of Place' competition. We wish them luck!

Opposite the derelict shop and house on the Castle town approach we admired two very pristine bungalows and well painted terraced houses.

St. Fintan's Terrace has a lovely leafy approach road.

Woodbrook estate on the Abbeyleix Road was neat.

Moanbaun Close needed trimming under the perimeter fencing, but had a nice triangular 'meadowlike' space at the access.

Father O' Connor Crescent has a nice tree-lined access with potted flowers. The paths here were weed-free. We observed a roofless house nearby. Another open space in front of a nameless housing estate on the Shannon Road appeared to have only two trees. Stakes for 'disappeared' trees existed. We observed a substandard fence in this area.

New Line Close was well presented.

We admired a well maintained terrace of houses on the bridge approach.

Your amenity Park/playground is exceptional. However, we would suggest that the very large sign on the green gate (about the restriction of dogs) might be reduced in size and made freestanding- as it detracts from the entrance to the playground. Inside a much more restrained notice gives the playground rules. The playground is beautifully landscaped with mature trees and shrubs. Had we anyone to compete with we would have been tempted to try the table tennis on a nice fine evening! Some seating needs repainting and we noted just a small amount of litter around one litter bin and picnic table. A roll of toilet paper was also noted on the ground on the approach to the exit! The Birdlife of the Park signage is beginning to wear a little. The water pump in the sand pit area is imaginative - as this is either an original or a replica of a typical village pump. We were interested in reading about your handball champion and about Mountrath itself. Perhaps it would be a good idea to place a map beside the Mountrath sign which names the examples of fine architecture in the town so that visitors can find them more easily.

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

The new mowing regime applies to approach roads. You have worked with the local authority to reduce signage at the roundabout and at the Fáilte sign on the Dublin road. An old auctioneering sign has been removed from beside the Friends' graveyard

On the Castletown Road approach the surrounds of the black and white town sign (just outside the 60 K pH speed limit sign) need trimming. Trimming has taken place on the right-hand side near the 60 K pH but not on the left-hand side. We noticed a complex here including a filling station which would benefit from screening and a reduction in signage. We also noted that part of the complex appeared to be for sale/to let and we noted unoccupied units. The filling station itself was well presented. We noted a tilted yellow bollard on the footpath (near the school children's lights road sign). We noted some litter and bingo fly posting on this approach road. Despite the fact that the traffic was extremely heavy on this approach road we found the footpaths to be weed free - which must be difficult for you to maintain given the traffic. We commend you on this especially as you use manual chemical free weeding methods. The 'Welcome to County Laois' sign was partially obscured by vegetation. The road surface on the side road to the Community School was poor. As this road also services the graveyard it would appear to be an important road to look after. Road markings outside the Garda station need renewal. There were a number of derelict properties on this approach road. Firstly near the pedestrian crossing we noted a derelict site with a low grey building. Just beyond that there was a derelict shop and house. And nearer the town again there was a blocked up six-bay property with a shop on the ground floor. On-footpath parking was noted extensively on this approach. Such parking is detrimental to people with mobility issues and to buggy users. It is also very damaging to pavements. Could you try to dissuade your town generally from such a practice as we noted the same issue in other parts of the town?

On the Abbeyleix Road the EPS premises (just before the 50 K pH speed limit sign) was well landscaped. The forecourt of another commercial/office property (Turbo Ireland?) looked untidy, but we noted that it was for sale. The rose display and lettering at Seamus Burke's was admired. Approaching the town from the Shannon Road we admired the nice views inwards towards the church spire. The road by the Fire Station needs resurfacing.

On the New Line Road we observed two Green Flags proudly flying at the local school. The surface of the road here could be improved. The 'caution children at play' sign was overhung by some vegetation - as was the lights school sign.

The Portlaoise road was well trimmed with a wildlife corridor remaining.

On the Mountmellick Road there was some fine housing. We observed a bingo poster and parking on the footpath yet again. The town sign is located here in a nice shrub area.

On the Kinnity Road we admired the Dr. Delaney bridge. Would it be possible to screen the large bus complex and the Mountrath Co-op livestock site along this approach? The condition of the gates fronting the Mart site was particularly poor. The road surface was poor on this approach road. The Mountrath town sign was located in a rather overgrown margin along this approach.

Your approach roads are generally very weed-free and this is a credit to you. On all approach roads we would suggest that you encourage landowners to paint field gates in a uniform colour. This gives a cared-for appearance to approaches and a sense of arrival in a centre.

Street road markings in town looked well, but those on the approaches were not so good.

The 'x' from Abbeyleix on the junction sign your St Peters Church was missing.
The traffic bollard near the entrance to the public car park is damaged and dirty.

Concluding Remarks:

Mountrath is a busy town with a lot of through traffic – which must make things a bit difficult for you. But you are rising to the challenge. Moreover the town – like so many others would have suffered economically in the recession. As a result some properties have no current function and are not being maintained. You are providing good quiet and green areas for the residents to enjoy – away from the hustle and bustle of the main thoroughfare.

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