

Tidy Towns Competition 2017

Adjudication Report

Centre: **Rathdowney** Ref: **789**
County: **Laois** Mark: **224**
Category: **C** Date(s): **30/06/2017**

	Maximum Mark	Mark Awarded 2017
Community Involvement & Planning	60	27
Built Environment and Streetscape	50	36
Landscaping and Open Spaces	50	29
Wildlife, Habitats and Natural Amenities	50	18
Sustainable Waste and Resource Management	50	7
Tidiness and Litter Control	90	50
Residential Streets & Housing Areas	50	30
Approach Roads, Streets & Lanes	50	27
TOTAL MARK	450	224

Community Involvement & Planning / Rannpháirtíocht an Phobail & Pleanáil:

Fáilte Rath Domhnaigh! Welcome back Rathdowney to the Super Valu 2017 National Tidy Towns Competition. We are delighted to see you back in the competition after an absence of ten years. There have been some changes to the competition over the ten intervening years. However the overall competition remains one which endeavours to make your place a better place to live for yourselves and also for people to visit. The community is the heart of any centre, and we are delighted to welcome the people of Rathdowney community back to the Tidy Towns 'family.'

We know that you are in the early stages of rejoining the competition. However we would suggest that you increase the number of meetings you hold each year from two upwards. Despite the fact that you have only three people on your committee at present you appear to have another seven who volunteer with you. The Fishing Club provide you with a member who works with you. Maybe during the coming year you may be able to find some more support from some other local clubs or societies. We are glad to know that you are being assisted by your local authority, an events committee, and the local businesses. You have an unusual fundraising method of providing money boxes in shops. We hope this is a successful venture.

You say that you communicate by social media. Perhaps you might tell us more about this next year. Social media appeals to a younger generation. However it is important also to consider also using more traditional methods such as local media, as such communication methods generally reach the older members of your community.

You say that you entered the competition for approximately 3 years in the past. So this is a big challenge now to come back and to re-enter your town. We applaud you for taking on this challenge, and we hope that we can be of help and encouragement to you in the future. You see the town as being cleaner and more colourful as a result of entering the competition. You say that there is good positive feedback from people in the town. You can work on this positive feedback hopefully to encourage more people to get involved.

So far you appear to have not gotten around to engaging with the youth/schools as you left this entry blank. We would strongly encourage making this connection as these are the volunteers of the future. We noted from seeing Green Flags that some of the schools are involved in the Green Flag programme. This will be of great assistance to you in various aspects of the competition. Youth have energy and also creative ideas. Youth groups or scout groups - or indeed youth sports groups are all potential valuable volunteers.

As it is your first year re-entering the competition we are not unduly surprised by the fact that you have not submitted a Tidy Towns plan. However 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 town 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!

Your map - although a good copy of good Ordnance Survey 6" sheet was a very small scale map for a town of your size. It makes it very difficult for an adjudicator if they have no street names to refer to - or approach road names - or estate names to refer to in referencing your report. It means the adjudicator has to look at every signpost and street name as they walk around, so that they can reference their report. So if there are any errors in relation to naming streets, approach roads or housing estate names you will understand why. Please refer to section 5 of the how to complete your Supervalu Tidy Towns entry form so that you will next year submit a map which is adequate for an adjudicator on visiting your town. The map should show street names, place names and prominent landmarks. It should also most importantly show projects to be adjudicated on for each year in accordance with section 3 and 5 of the entry form guidelines. Don't forget to name each approach road and to show and name each housing estate. Perhaps the local authority could help you with getting this map in order during the coming year. We recommend that you carefully study the guidelines to completing your entry form annually. 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.

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

This was this adjudicator's first-time to visit Rathdowney. We were very impressed with the town and its potential to improve its built heritage and its public spaces. Because the town has mostly not been destroyed by inappropriate development we consider that you have a very good case to make for a particular architectural/conservation architectural/landscape architectural town plan to be prepared for your town. We would urge you to seek funding and assistance for such a plan. This could be a project for you and guide you in future works. It would be a shame if development/works proceeded without good design advice in a piecemeal fashion. We think you have the basis for something worthwhile in the town at present. For instance The Square at present is a very open bare tarmac area - which is really in essence an uncontrolled car park .However its potential to be an excellent public open space with the imposing focal point of the Church of Ireland, and with most interesting lateral boundary buildings along the street side make for a possibility which could be exemplary. Because we were impressed with state of the built heritage of the town we go into some detail in this category.

The Church of Ireland is an imposing elegant structure which is well maintained. The Richard Williams and Sons building - of which the Card Stand premises forms part - is a remnant of a past age, retaining its elegant shop front and sash windows at first-floor level (despite the wear and tear evident). It would be a shame if this building were not conserved due to its interesting features. Furthermore it forms an important part of The Square - an area of architectural interest. This shop front looks in extreme and urgent need of conservation before it is lost. The colourful and unique mosaic in the doorway is also a feature of the property very much worth conserving Do you have an Architectural Conservation Officer in your local authority? If so perhaps speak to them or if not - to your Architects' Department, or your Planning or Heritage officers. We investigated the Laois County Development Plan's list of Protected Structures and note that this is a Protected Structure. Between H.P. Perry and Sons and the Allied Irish Bank you have done well in screening the derelict site through the white fencing and the sculpture. Despite the fact that the fencing is used for advertising events, it is done in a neat fashion. We admired two buildings on the lower side of the Williams property, one with significant railings, a porch canopy and a carriageway entrance to attractive looking buildings - just visible through the ope. However it seems that this building has lost its traditional sash windows in favour of uPVC. The red brick and limestone significant entranceway - together with its Gate Lodge and interesting commemorative Perry waterspout/fountain are very unusual - and another one of the individual features of your townscape which is quite special to your town.

Corcoran's premise was neatly presented, as was the J.A O' Malley premises with its attractive red seating matching its name lettering colour. We applaud the use of Irish also on this premise. Is a pity that the original timber sash Windows have been replaced with uPVC inserts. On a strategic corner of The Square the Kirwin Bain premises was most elegant, and presented in an exceptionally good fashion, without fuss or ornamentation. Well done to those responsible! The Card Stand shop was very clean and freshly painted. We admired the Thomas Prior plaque. We wondered what the original use of the building now the Print House was.

Well done on your 1916 commemoration project. You have also replaced public seating. It would be useful if you had given us a few more details in relation to each of these projects. For instance how many public seats did you replace? Can you show their locations on your map? We found the 1916 site on our travels, and we assume that the seating to which you refer is the stone seat at that point and other adjacent seating.

The cemetery was very neat and well maintained. It has good cut stone gate pillars, and well painted gates. The splay wall appears to be cracked in places. Across the road a half built house has security railings around the site. These security railings are falling down, and this detracts from the good presentation of the graveyard. We wondered how people manage to park when the graveyard is busy as there did not appear to be any specific parking available.

Scoil Bhríde was well presented but there were three empty flagpoles on the property. We wondered if any of these were for a Green Flag?

The Garda station was very neat.

The filling station on the Templemore approach road was presented in a tidy fashion.

There are lovely glimpses to unspoiled countryside as one approaches The Square from the direction of the Catholic Church. Good terraces of housing line this approach. The prevalence of television areas and some satellite dishes on front elevations detracted a little from the general symmetry of the approach. It is a feature of modern day living that satellite dishes are in general use. However, they do look poorly on the front elevation of houses, and planning permission is required for their erection in such locations.

We particularly commend the fact that the new terraced housing in Moore St. has retained the existing street line. Moore Street is a lovely linear street with interesting changes in roof levels - despite the fact that the street is fairly level. We admired the Malone shop front - although it would benefit from a little cleaning of the walls. Fortunes is a very traditional shop front and its lettering and lack of gaudy advertising or intrusive projecting lighting is to be praised. The Convent National School gate is an interesting piece of street signage. Brewside Store is well conserved.

Mooreville Day Centre is situated in well landscaped grounds with mature trees. The nearby Health Centre was neat, but the boundary post and wire fencing nearby was somewhat untidy.

The Rathdowney shopping centre appears to be 'coming back to life' with the opening of the new store. However we would recommend that this store consider limiting their very bright yellow advertising signage, as too much of the same signage jars the eye in various places around the town. We were impressed by the number of wheelchair parking spaces at this centre.

We would suggest that the long length of security fencing at the Modern Iron works be landscaped.

Coláiste Fhearghail Naofa is a fine school, but the 'exit only' sign needs cleaning. The sign is also slightly bent. We would have liked to know what the three empty flagpoles normally contain. The very long boundary wall could be repainted.

Breslin's Supervalu grounds/car park, were extremely well cared for. Supervalu is extremely well presented, but we would like to see advertising in windows removed as it covers the glazing and detracts from the look of the entire property which is otherwise excellent. The elongated property beside Supervalu was equally well presented. A similar situation re covering of window glazing with advertising was noted at a pharmacy.

P. Ryan and Co. is a fine building which is well presented. Two rubbish bins in the arched entrance might be stored inside the gate on days that are not collection days. As we saw no other bins out for collection on adjudication day - we assumed that we were not in town on collection day. The heraldic crest on this building was interesting. It looked a little like the Cork City crest. Perhaps it is the Ryan crest? The Commercial Inn was gleaming - although it seems that the upper floors are unoccupied - indeed the entire building may be so. The elegant fanlight over the carriageway entrance was unusual. Carriageway entrances do not normally have fanlights.

The CYMS building was in pristine condition, and is interesting with its crest and wall decoration. Its roadside sign was also tasteful and restrained.

Well done to the school on the Ballacolla approach for the amazingly bright paintwork and for their 2 Green Flags flying proudly! The stone wall and surrounds were weed free, and we admired the stone building adjacent at right angles to the road. The colourful mosaics in the school yard are excellent examples of the schoolchildren's work.

Tuohy's Bar is a very good example of Irish vernacular architecture, and we commend its owners for the retention of the timber sash windows, for its good shop front and appropriate lettering. Your shop fronts are not festooned with signage or projecting lights and this is excellent. Even the TV shop was restrained in its name sign and lack of advertising.

A professional office with a blue door and green sign on the street leading out of The Square would benefit from the tidying up of its small front garden behind a boundary wall.

The Library looked poorly and in need of upgrading. The handrails were badly in need of repainting and the brickwork and walls generally looked in need of cleaning/painting (building and ramp and adjacent wall at gate) need repainting.

The Health Board offices are located in what was a large residential house. The site is neat, but needs taller/more vertical - i.e. tree - landscaping. And the exterior boundary wall requires painting. The Fire Station looked well.

The Catholic Church is a large church with good railings and is well maintained.

We thought that the cream coloured presentation of the pump at the Templemore end of town was unusual - and it must be difficult to keep clean - but it was gleaming.

Like all Irish towns in rural areas you have suffered from the downturn in business, with the resultant abandonment and neglect of some premises. There are a few examples here and there in your town. Do keep

approaching the owners/occupiers and also the local authority to help you in this regard. However, by contrast there are some sparkling well-maintained properties also.

Landscaping and Open Spaces / Tírdhreachú agus Spásanna Oscailte:

You have planted flower beds in the square

The flower boxes and grass strips which you have on approach roads are credited here and also under the approach roads category

The wildflower bed on an approach road should be shown on your map so that the adjudicator does not have to search each approach road for the wildflower bed!

Landscaping at the Supervalu car park was good.

Tree planting in the Square looked well generally. Remember to undo tree ties when the trunk has outgrown the ties - or the ties will damage the tree.

The cream village pump planters were devoid of plants at adjudication time.

Landscaping around the river as it runs through Mill St. is natural and the parallel tree stand looks elegant. The paving and grass edging are classically simple and this area looked well. The dry stone wall banks are important features of the river. We admired the imaginative blue and white swan/bird etchings. Seating at the Moore Street junction was in good condition. The 1916 seating addition here was also admired and it fits in well with the stone river bed edges. The pink planters were cheerful.

The colourful pots under the road sign near Brewside Store looked well. This is an appropriate location for planters. We are glad that you have not festooned the streets with pots! Your streets are enough in themselves and do not need additional items. Just keep the properties looking well!

We would encourage you to use native perennial trees and plants and pollinator friendly plant species into the future. Talk to your County biodiversity and heritage officer's to obtain advice on this matter. We would also encourage you to consider spring planting throughout the town. If you carry out such planting perhaps you might send us a photograph of the planting with next year's entry form. The reason is that the planting will have well disappeared by the time of adjudication and we would like to see how it looked.

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

Brewery Pond. You have reintroduced some river fowl and fish to this area. With regard to reintroducing wildlife it is good to obtain professional advice in advance. We feel you have done this through your association with the Fishing Club. We saw the swans on the Brewery Pond. This and the associated river is a lovely amenity right in the centre of your town and we are sure that you can research the wildlife associated with the river and the Brewery Pond in due course. Engaging with the schools on - even elementary nature study surveys – can lead in time to 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. You could also consider engaging with some national agencies at local level such as Birdwatch Ireland, in relation to birdlife life around your town.

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.

Have you attended any relevant workshops? Perhaps you could also visit some other centres in the County that your Biodiversity Officer or Heritage Officer may recommend you have carried out projects this category. We are sure that your fellow county entrants would be happy to help.

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

If you refer to section 3 of the guidelines to completing your entry form you will see that we ask you not to leave any category blank but just to state "no work for this year."

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. We would strongly 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. We appreciate that for a new entrant after 10 years this can be confusing category initially. But once you have some knowledge of the myriad of projects which can contribute to sustainable waste and resource management we are sure that you will forge ahead with enthusiasm. Try to attend some relevant workshops/seminars.

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:

Despite the fact that The Square is a rather bland space at present we compliment you on the cleanliness of the area and the planting that you have carried out around the perimeter of the square. We also noticed that it is almost completely free of inappropriate advertising. Neither did we see a weed throughout the entire square! Well done on all of this - a good impression on arriving in the town in a significant area. Only 2 pieces of litter - a plastic bottle and a take-away plastic carton were noted in the entire square. It seems as though you have a litter literate population! There were a few pieces of litter just inside The Square entrance to Supervalu (near the red sign). The lantern near the fountain/waterspout was tilted. A gable wall halfway up the square near the hair salon would benefit from repainting.

You have had a weekly weeding programme. You do not tell us whether this weeding is manual, organic or chemical weeding. We hope that it is manual or organic.

You have been picking litter, but again you do not give us any details as regards the way in which you have gone about this work or the frequency of litter picks. What areas to cover? Who helps you? Whatever approach you take it seems to be working well for you.

The surroundings to the entrance to Quigley Park could be improved by tidying up the security railings/gate, and by plastering the block wall and landscaping the security railings. We noticed an old circus fly post nearby.

The rubbish bin outside the tidy well landscaped car park containing the grotto had a rough notice regarding a request not to dump household waste in the bin. Whereas this is a good idea the notice itself looked untidy. A vertical barrier stanchion here should be painted or removed.

We hope that the Supervalu fly posts for weekend offers were a once-off event and were removed after our visit

A litter bin outside the CYMS Hall needs replacement as it is battered.

The large redundant advertising sign at Rathdowney Motors should be removed.

The recycling area was in need of the removal of a large black rubbish bag and a few loose items (beside the blue clothes bank). The recycling bins were very grubby, and there was some litter between the green and white banks. Behind the clothing bank at the separate clothes recycling at the new shopping centre there was a very bad scattering of old clothes and bags.

A derelict site at the far end of Moore Street would benefit from screening and adjacent walls on either side would benefit from painting. A nearby disused garage site would equally benefit from cleaning / painting. Too many advertising signs were noted on a hardware premises gable facing oncoming traffic toward the town on the same street

There is a very poor temporary fence between two properties on Moore St. almost opposite the Brewery Pond. Can anything be done about this? What appears to be an old An Roinn Leasa Socialta sign which is more or less illegible should be removed from Moore St.

Do you take part in Laois Clean up week? Do remember to credit yourself with this participation if it is in order.

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

Again we refer you to section 3 of the guidelines to completing your entry form - you will see that we ask you not to leave any category blank but just to state "no work for this year"

The standard of residential bungalow gardens on the Templemore approach is excellent, and we congratulate the owners and occupiers. The houses opposite the Catholic Church were resplendent, and we particularly admired the white railings and gates as well as the red field gate to the rear at one of these houses.

Clarney Hall estate was leafy and well presented.

At the senior citizens estate beside the church we would suggest the erection of a nameplate. This estate was presented in a magnificent fashion, and all the residents are to be commended highly. The lovely perennial shrubs on the lateral access way were admired. In particular we noted the abundant and beautiful roses at numbers 12 and 13.

The estate opposite the Modern Iron Works was a well-kept estate. However a nameplate for this estate on the ground would be useful.

The Slieve Bloom Heights estate has good landscaped treed areas and was well maintained. We also visited Mooreville estate and found it to be well presented - as was the general housing area nearby.

Knockiel Drive is a tidy well presented estate. The road boundary walls at O' Daly Terrace / Ascaill Úi Dhalaiagh needs painting. Otherwise the terrace looked well. A lovely terrace of houses on Cascade Street was noted.

Gort na nÓg Rath Domhnaigh is a nice playground with good stonewalling and hedging.

A two storey house on the Square beside a flat roofed structure looked well with its taupe walls and white window reveals, and we admired a stone cottage with red brick door and window surrounds near the Fire Station

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

Well done on the mowing of grass on your approach roads and the maintenance of hedges.

On the Templemore approach we were very impressed with the amazingly weed-free footpaths. On this approach we noticed two advertising hoardings one for Ossory Showgrounds at the Boris-in-Ossory/Templemore junction. We admired the bright pink flowers at the same junction.

The junction sign opposite Scoil Bhríde was faded.

The black and white Rathdowney sign (on a temporary stand) on the Boris-in-Ossory approach was nice and simple. We admired the new path and good timber fencing along this road near the graveyard, but unfortunately the footpath stops short of the graveyard, so access from the town by footpath is restricted. This is probably due to the road width?

Some road markings in the town need repainting. An example would be some of the markings at the lower end of the square. Another would be the yellow markings outside The Square entrance to SuperValu. The disabled spaces at the SuperValu car park need repainting.

On the Templetuohy Road approach the road markings and surfacing needed attention, and some signage needed encroaching vegetation removed. The advertisement for the golf club might be formalised into a fingerpost sign. There are very nice views inwards towards the town and towards the spire of the Church of Ireland from this approach.

The road surface at Cascade Street is very poor. Other surfaces in the town are in need of renewal also. One example would be the one way street leading out of The Square at the Kirwin Bain corner. The surface of the road near the Fire Station is particularly poor.

The Ballacolla approach is a nice treed approach to your town. We noted a circus fly post. At the Castletown junction we noted a large faded hoarding, and a 'headless' road traffic pole. Nearer the town we admired the clean line of terraced housing.

You planted flower beds on approach roads. We would suggest that you consider asking local landowners to consider painting field gates on approaches to the town in a uniform colour. This gives a sense of arrival to town and creates a neat impression.

On some streets we observed on-footpath parking. This is damaging to pavements and also causes serious obstruction to people with reduced mobility and to buggy users. Perhaps you could campaign to 'outlaw' this practice.

Concluding Remarks:

As this adjudicator photographed Brewside Store a local man greeted the adjudicator and told me all about how he used to buy his sweets in Brewside Store there on his way to the old cinema - which is no more. (Without asking me any questions as to who I was or what I was doing!) He went on to tell me lots of other interesting things about Rathdowney. We think that you have people in your town who are really proud of your town and want to share it with visitors. We hope that you can tap into that enthusiasm. As we said already we were impressed with Rathdowney, and would love to see it getting help to progress into the future. So we are very glad that you have 'come back to the fold!'

Note: You tell us that your population is 1.300. In your adjudication report of 2007 the adjudicator referred to a population of 2,500 +

Has your population fallen to that extent - that is almost one half in 10 years? If so this is difficult for you.