

Tidy Towns Competition 2018

Adjudication Report

Centre: **Portlaoise** Ref: **313**
County: **Laois** Mark: **309**
Category: **G** Date(s): **28/06/2018**

	Maximum Mark	Mark Awarded 2017	Mark Awarded 2018
Community – Your Planning and Involvement	60	45	46
Streetscape & Public Places	50	45	45
Green Spaces and Landscaping	50	46	47
Nature and Biodiversity in your Locality	50	26	27
Sustainability – Doing more with less	50	18	19
Tidiness and Litter Control	90	54	55
Residential Streets & Housing Areas	50	35	35
Approach Roads, Streets & Lanes	50	35	35
TOTAL MARK	450	304	309

Community – Your Planning and Involvement / An Pobal - Pleanáil agus Rannpháirtíocht:

Cuireann an moltóir seo fáilte roimh Portlaoise (Port Laoise) chuig Comórtas na mBailte Slachtmhara SuperValu 2018 agus chuig Ceiliúradh 60 Bliain an Chomórtais.

Welcome back to this year competition. Congratulations on maintaining your Silver Medal status in 2017.

Teamwork appears to be the basis of your success. In addition to the almost 50 volunteers (between those on the committee and those that volunteer regularly) the amount of bodies and agencies that you work with listed in your submission and who feature throughout it is extensive. You also inform the wider community of their assistance through your Facebook page thanking them for their work. In a town of your size keeping up with the workload does require a sizeable amount of people to be involved. Well done on this.

We note that last year adjudicator requested that you number the projects of the current year and use the same key on your map. You did that this year and that certainly assisted adjudication. What would improve this further for next year would be to have an increase in the information on the map. More street names, and the distance between the projects, especially those further out of the town is needed. An improved legend of your map to include the category would help.

While performing our adjudications having one item really assists. Thank you for very helpfully laminating the detached map.

To try and cut down on the amount of the time that the submission form takes, feel free to use photos. You used this to great effect on your project 14. Your “before” and “after” pictures highlighted this successfully. A picture says a thousand words! Those two photos highlighted in an instant the amazing work that has been done in this area.

While acknowledging that this was not a new project for this year, your maintenance work here is noted and still served to impress for this adjudication.

Streetscape & Public Places / Sráid-Dreach & Áiteanna Poiblí:

Following on from your current successful (and still on-going) project of the restoration of Old St Peter's Graveyard, your future projects of; the lighting inside of St. Peter's Cemetery, lighting under the bridge, and the placing of the Boer War Cannon, are great to see. Portlaoise has a lot of history and it is wonderful to see this being brought more to the fore. There was a colourful sign left from the Old Fort Quarter Portlaoise Festival, held in June last year, stuck on a pole with a cable tie. More permanent signs of this nature around your town might be considered.

There were many colourful blue and white colours of Laois on view as bunting exhibiting community pride in your county. In addition other colourful bunting was clean and bright and enhanced the Main Street. The street itself had the verges clean with very little weeds despite the large area covered. The footpaths were in general clutter free.

The Hibernian Hotel was an example of one of the well-kept buildings on your Main Street. The Welcome Inn was amongst one of the most colourful buildings. One of the most striking premises was Gerry Browne Jewellers, complete with lavender baskets on the bicycle parked outside it. The Celtic sign writing on Ryan's added to this

shopfront.

Unfortunately there is a lot of plastic signage on the street. Simple changes to signage can help lift a whole street. Hinds Square was a little gem we found ourselves on. Some fine cut stone preserved here.

Did you consider extending your Tidy Estates competition to include a small section for commercial premises?

The market square with the Mary Immaculate Statue looks well. There was a good seating area here amidst colourful planting but is it used? It is at a very busy junction. Donoghue along with Casey & Son commercial premises impressed amongst others here.

The new school complex of three schools has some bright modern buildings. We are sure that these schools in addition to improving the facilities for the children are creating a more pleasant teaching environment for the teachers. However these appear to have left a legacy of older convent school buildings in your town that are not currently in use. These are substantial size. Are there any plans for these? It would be unfortunate for these to fall into a greater state of dereliction.

The gates on St. Peter and Paul's cemetery are starting to rust so maybe consider this for a future project. The railings on the way in were well maintained. The railings just off the entrance are in need of repainting, we appreciate that this would be a large job.

The nice seating areas in this restful place look well, as do the overall grounds. The planter boxes enhance the area with colourful planting. Consider some shrub planting here with more perennials to reduce cost and maintenance.

The Church of Ireland St. Peters is in general well-maintained although the red gate would benefit from being

Green Spaces and Landscaping / Spásanna Glasa agus Tírdhreachú:

Your Public Park is a site to behold. This is a wonderful serene restful place and yet so full of life. The park falls under so many of the Tidy Town categories. As a greenspace this four hectare park boasts an outdoor gymnasium, an outdoor classroom, natural play features, a woodland walk consisting of bird and bat boxes and a fairy trail, an orienteering trail and a bilingual tree trail. Footpaths around the park were providing more than 1km of pathways for walkers and joggers. Investing in parks is a great investment in a community providing social, environmental and health benefits.

We noticed a Green Park Flag on a flagpole here near the playground. We would welcome some more information on this. From our own research it was one of only 22 flags awarded in a new scheme that rewards open spaces that balance sustainability with human activity.

We note from the Laois County Council website that are looking at ways to re-establish the prominence of Market Square and Lower Square as more people friendly spaces with the purpose of book ending Main Street.

We also notice from our research that plans have been proposed to transform Fitzmaurice place from a generally unused area to a green public park with a public viewing area inside the old Fort. Are you having any input into these plans?

The War Memorial Park /Burial Ridge area is very well maintained and also dealt with under Bio Diversity.

While the seats were in use outside of the Church of Ireland St. Peters, they are in need of some maintenance. The planting looked well. Even though the planters were large, the footpath here overlooking the top of Main Street was wide enough to take them.

Nature and Biodiversity in your Locality / An Dúlra agus an Bhithéagsúlacht i do cheantar:

You make reference to a Portlaoise biodiversity plan. We would welcome some more information on this in next year's submission. You seem to have started taking it from a plan and putting it into action.

The new bird nesting boxes were spotted at the Bridge Street area, which from your Facebook page we noted were not only made in the Men's Shed but also hung by some of their members.

We would welcome more details of your River Walk in your Public Park. This area appears to be a treasure trove of wildlife. The bright red information signs at the front give indications on what to look for on a casual day.

Another great innovation by your committee is where in lieu of plaques, your annual Tidy Towns Estate competition winners won Bee hotels, Bug hotels, and nesting boxes. How were these received?

Sustainability – Doing more with less / Inmharthanacht - Mórán ar an mbeagán:

You mention that the schools have their Green Flags. Obviously these flags are only achieved after a great amount of work. To ensure extra marks in the sustainability section ensure you give more details from each school of these projects and results. Short bullet points would be sufficient. We are not trying to create extra work for your committee. Maybe a small group of the children from older classes could get involved here as part of your Junior Tidy Town committee? Getting involved does not always have to be about litter pick-ups. If you have a TY student in transition year looking for a project to get involved in, they might be able to co-ordinate the short reports from all of the schools involved in getting a Green Flag.

The benefits Scoil Bhríde describe on their website of their school garden (on which they credit your Tidy Towns teams help) demonstrate their awareness of the wider effects of this project. "School gardens are a wonderful way to use the schoolyard as a classroom, reconnect students with the natural world and the true source of their food, and teach them valuable gardening and agriculture concepts and skills that integrate with several subjects, such as math, science, art, health and physical education, and social studies, as well as several educational goals, including personal and social responsibility."

You mention that you actively promote "carpooling, walking, cycling and use of local transport for school or work trips." Is this working successfully? Have you noticed a difference? More details here of the savings would be impressive.

You mention you liaise with Laois County Council for bike lanes. Do you find the bike racks are being used in schools?

We would welcome hearing more in your next submission, about the upcycle shop on Peppers Lane that restores old furniture. We would be especially interested in the classes where people can learn how to revamp and upcycle items. This is nearer the top of the pyramid in terms of waste reduction, reusing old items. (Refuse, Reduce, Reuse, Recycle).

There was a number of charity shops noted. This is a great way for householders to recycle household items, while benefitting a worthy charity.

An example of how everyone wins when we start doing more with less can be demonstrated from some of your business community projects, where by participating in waste reduction they are at the same time enriching the lives of those less fortunate; donating surplus food to the homeless shelters and bringing glasses back to the local optician to be reused in the developing world were some of your examples.

While it is admirable for Costa Coffee to be selling the reusable mugs we look forward to hearing next year about more outlets selling these. What would be even better would be to find out approximately what percentage of people are using these daily? As a nation we have gone from using multi disposable plastic bags per shop to using reusable bags. We hope we are moving in the same direction with beverage cups.

Tidiness and Litter Control / Slachtmhaireacht agus Rialú Bruscair:

Having your town in the top 10 of IBAL cleanest towns in Ireland is a great feat. It is all the more impressive considering you was 41st in 2013. You credit the Council for their "wonderful" support. This is another great example of you highlighting your teamwork effort.

On day of adjudication there were small bits of litter spotted in the War Memorial Park and some items along the Main Street and in the carpark of the public park. In general there are no major problems in any of the main areas visited.

Well done on your very innovative way of reaching out to new members of your community by sending out multi-lingual text messages. It is heartening that this has now lead to you having active members from Poland, Slovenian and some African communities. Following on from this we can only wish you well in setting up your Junior Tidy Towns.

We echo your congratulations to Ann Fingleton and her team at Fingleton & White Engineers, for their work in voluntarily cleaning a stretch of the Triogue River which was looking very well on day of adjudication.

In a town as large as Portlaoise keeping it clean and tidy will only be achieved by teamwork. The Tidy Town committee by itself cannot be expected to keep an area that large clean and tidy. Well done on reaching out to the larger community.

We noticed the "Big Belly" solar compactor litter bins on your Main Street. We would welcome some feedback on these in next year's report.

The signs for the train station and multi storey carpark beside the Garda Station were hidden amongst the branches of the trees. These should be cut back.

Whilst the bring bank area itself was well maintained the sign behind needed cleaning

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

Your "Adopt a Street" approach and Tidy Estates competition are paying dividends. With over 70 estates in Portlaoise it is the most effective way in covering this area. It is heartening to note that residents have remarked on the great social aspect of meeting and getting to know their neighbours as well as doing good work for the town.

There were a number of well-maintained estates noted. Cherrygath on the Abbeyleix road with the colourful planting highlighting the well-kept stone gives a good impression of Portlaoise. The shrubbery area on the green area here surrounded by mature trees is great to see.

The children's play area in the public park, Parc na Gréine is very imaginative and well maintained, as well as very happily utilised. It is great to have another playground near the leisure centre.

The houses on Market square are very well maintained. The houses here on the right of the square with its traditional sash windows was one example.

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

The welcome signs are in good order. The approach road as you travel in from Abbeyleix looked a bit overgrown, especially near the roundabout. The planter box needed a bit of extra tending. This summer more than most has highlighted the need to move towards more self-sufficient boxes. Getting water out to these areas is time and resource intensive. Consider more sustainable planting.

Your Facebook page shows your big clean-up in April of the Approach Roads from the Motorway which you say continue to be a problem. It must be a huge frustration to you. As you asked, "what can we do??" Considering the traffic here your efforts were well noted by this adjudication.

Concluding Remarks:

Portlaoise "Love where you Live" is a great rallying cry and you are using it to get effect to get your town working together for the betterment of all.

In your submission you highlighted that your work would not be complete in 2018 without acknowledging the great work of your late Chairman (of 20 years) Cllr. Jerry Lodge, whose "work and fingerprints are still all over our work and this application form". On behalf of Tidy Towns we salute his efforts and his legacy.

Ar dheis Dé go raibh a anam dílis.

