

Tidy Towns Competition 2018

Adjudication Report

Centre: **Rathdowney** Ref: **789**
County: **Laois** Mark: **226**
Category: **C** Date(s):

| | Maximum Mark | Mark Awarded 2017 | Mark Awarded 2018 |
|---|-----------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| Community – Your Planning and Involvement | 60 | 27 | 27 |
| Streetscape & Public Places | 50 | 36 | 37 |
| Green Spaces and Landscaping | 50 | 29 | 30 |
| Nature and Biodiversity in your Locality | 50 | 18 | 18 |
| Sustainability – Doing more with less | 50 | 7 | 7 |
| Tidiness and Litter Control | 90 | 50 | 50 |
| Residential Streets & Housing Areas | 50 | 30 | 30 |
| Approach Roads, Streets & Lanes | 50 | 27 | 27 |
| TOTAL MARK | 450 | 224 | 226 |

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

Cuireann an moltóir seo fáilte roimh Rathdowney (Rath Domhnaigh) chuig Comórtas na mBailte Slachtmhara SuperValu 2018 agus chuig Ceiliúradh 60 Bliain an Chomórtais.

Unfortunately upon entering Rathdowney we were at a bit uncertain as to where to start. The map provided did not show any projects or main areas. Four of the eight sections were left totally blank of any projects. We realise that last year you re-entered the competition after an absence of 10 years and that it takes time to build up to more active participation. We were disappointed that very few of the many insights from last year's adjudicator were not taken on board. For next year maybe concentrate on one section or just one small thing in each section. Tidy Towns encourages areas to do a three year plan. This might seem like a daunting task but the purpose is to give areas a sense of direction. An A4 Sheet with a few bullet points under each year 2019, 2020, and 2021 for next year is all that is needed. Don't forget that you don't need to carry out the work within your own Tidy Towns group. You can reflect the work that is done within the wider community such as by school groups, residents associations and special interest groups for example.

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

Your main square is certainly one to be proud of. The Church of Ireland building provides an impressive imposing focal point. There were many seating areas which makes this a very liveable space. We were surprised not to see more people here on the day of adjudication. On the continent the mature trees provide shade from the hot mid-day sun for people to meet up. Although this summer had better weather than most we are sure that these trees would be an excellent meeting place for residents and provide shade from the odd shower.

The lovely black lamps add to the character although they along with the litter bins could do with being cleaned.

On the commercial side it was lovely to see the Veterinary centre and the Print House still making use of one of your older buildings.

The main street like many similar in Ireland is suffering from the effects of the out of town shopping. While there were plenty of places to park (and we didn't see anywhere to pay for this parking so we presume it was free?), the narrow streets allowing parking on both sides made it difficult to at times to navigate. Maybe consider having parking on only one side of the street.

You can see architecturally the beautiful structure that is there. Are there any plans for rejuvenation for this area?

While we do realise the limitations to the amount a volunteer group can achieve working with the local authority and other local groups can be effective. In the meantime using the shopfronts to maybe showcase the other work being carried out within the community such as works from the local schools would help brighten up this area. There are some shops that did impress such as John Cahill's butchers.

Connectively seems to be an issue within your town. Walking from the river area up to the main square there is no continuous path. We would recommend that you consult the Department of the Environment, Community and Local

Government Design Manual for Urban Roads and Streets which incorporates good planning and design practice to support and encourage more sustainable travel patterns in urban areas.

St. Fergal's College has very impressive grounds.

We would love to know what the buildings beside the Rathdowny National School are used for. Their bright green doors beside the old stonework give the impression that they are currently in use. It is wonderful to see old structures being used even it is not the original use.

Scoile Bride national school was bright and colourful. The boundary wall could do with a sprucing up paint sooner rather than later but in general this was a very well presented building. The flags were clean and well presented on the poles.

The use and promotion of the Irish Language is included in this section. We were delighted to see Teach an Chúinne at the bottom of the main square. Your children's playground Gort-na-NOg, Cholasite Naomh Fergahl, St. Fergals college. A bright "Cead Míle Fáilte" on Rathdowney national school notice. Their bright colourful artwork proudly displayed in the school grounds

Green Spaces and Landscaping / Spásanna Glasa agus Tírdhreachú:

The GAA building looked well and brightly maintained. What was really impressed was the old stone wall around this.

We did notice on the stone wall near Brewery Pond that some of the section that needed to be replaced was done so with modern materials. Wherever possible our native stone walls should be replaced using traditional materials as they are a very important part of our heritage (as well as providing habitats for wildlife).

Down by the stream it was a wonderful idea to have a seating area beside your 1916 commemoration plaque.

The stone flower beds on your main square contain a lot of lavender plants which are very pollinator friendly interspersed with others to add colour.

The shrubbery just inside the school wall of Scoile Bride national school, with perennials was a good example of low maintenance yet highly colourful area.

St. Fergal's College walking track. There was a sea of butter cups here. Is this used often?

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

This area is increasing in importance. One third of our bee species are threatened with extinction from Ireland. This is because we have drastically reduced the amount of food (flowers) and safe nesting sites in our landscapes.

Everyone can play their part in small simple ways. The All-Ireland Pollinator Plan gives guidance to all, from farmers to local authorities, to schools, gardeners and businesses, to come together to try to create an Ireland where pollinators can survive and thrive.<http://pollinators.ie/communities/>

Pollinator friendly perennials have the added benefit of generally being more cost effective. They have a potential life span of 10-12 years is properly maintained. Small amount of annual replacement to supplement as well are complement. For assistance in this category you can also check out <http://www.biodiversityireland.ie>

Alongside the wall of the Catholic Church there is lovely lavender planting. This is a great pollinator plant as well as looking well against the wall.

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

This is an area that many groups struggle with. You might get some handy tips on <http://www.epa.ie/begreen/> and on the Tidy Towns website.

Being environmentally friendly doesn't have to always be a cost for businesses....it can be a help in driving revenue, reducing costs or a mix of both. Many are moving to more energy saving plans as a result. They also might be involved with Repak.

Scoile Bride has a green flag. This doesn't happen by accident! We would love to know the types of projects that they are involved in. There were cones on the school pedestrian crossing with the indicators that "Walk Starts Here". Is there an effort within the school to encourage children to walk to school? This would certainly come under this category.

There was an impressive recycling bin in the Children's playground Gort na Nog for the various wastes.

There are bike racks in the grounds of St. Fergal's college. Details of their use would be interesting. Rathdowney seems like town very suited to cycling.

Remember that the emphasis is now on the reduction of waste in the first place. Avoidance is the foremost concern, followed by recycling and re-use. You can get more up to date information from the Environmental Officer of your County Council

Tidiness and Litter Control / Slachtmhaireacht agus Rialú Bruscair:

Your weekly weeding and litter picking programme is definitely paying dividends. There was a minimal amount of litter noted. Major congratulations on this. It would be helpful to say approx. how many people take part.

Did you take part in the Laois Clean –Up?

While the main square had only 1 item of litter, the weeds had being burned back but were left.

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

Your children's playground Gort na NÓg is one of the most impressive playgrounds that this adjudicator has ever seen. There is something here to suit all children. The fact that this is a free children's playground is a huge asset to your community. Well done to all who were involved in getting this amazing amenity.

The detached houses on the way out to Erill are very well maintained. We especially liked the lovely house that had the natural tress bark as an edging for the flower beds on the roadside. It looked very well.

Directly opposite the church there were two hardworking individuals spotted preparing the white house wall for painting. With the effort they were putting into their labours this job will certainly look impressive when finished. The row of house just coming down from the GAA pitch are a hidden gem.

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

The Rathdowney signs are bright clean and welcoming. The verges were cut back well on all approaches. Your bright blue planter boxes on the outskirts of your town are very distinctive well-kept and cheerful. Please consider more sustainable planting here in the future.

The 50km signs on the Castletown signs were in need of a clean.

Ensure you keep an eye on the amount of advertising signage on the approach roads.

Concluding Remarks:

You are a town that is just restarting its' Tidy Towns journey. Remember that help is at hand from your County Council, Local Tidy Towns groups and the Tidy Towns website itself. You just need to ask. We wish you well in your continued endeavours