

Tidy Towns Competition 2017

Adjudication Report

Centre: **Geashill** Ref: **754**
County: **Offaly** Mark: **325**
Category: **B** Date(s): **20/06/2017**
26/07/2017

	Maximum Mark	Mark Awarded 2016	Mark Awarded 2017
Community Involvement & Planning	60	50	51
Built Environment and Streetscape	50	43	44
Landscaping and Open Spaces	50	44	44
Wildlife, Habitats and Natural Amenities	50	39	40
Sustainable Waste and Resource Management	50	20	21
Tidiness and Litter Control	90	50	50
Residential Streets & Housing Areas	50	35	36
Approach Roads, Streets & Lanes	50	39	39
TOTAL MARK	450	320	325

Community Involvement & Planning / Rannpháirtíocht an Phobail & Pleanáil:

Thank you for your application to the Supervalu Tidy Towns 2017 Competition, which was clearly laid out and well written. The map could be improved by just highlighting this year's projects and other key features and avoiding the temptation to include everything. Your adjudicator found it difficult to find their way around the map as there were so many items marked and the numbers didn't follow a sequence (on the map). The enclosed book on the architecture of Geashill is fascinating but it's not necessary to include such publications with your application. It is obvious from your application that the Tidy Towns group are well aware of the important architectural heritage of Geashill and this is to be applauded. The three-year plan is useful for strategic planning and you have a comprehensive plan. For future reference, a summary in tabular form would be helpful when reviewing the plan and assessing progress. Also it would be worth indicating potential partners for the projects (e.g. local authority, school etc.).

It is also clear that you have strong links with your community. You have a relatively big committee but you also liaise with many other groups in the area as well as the local authority, BirdWatch and the BSBI. The Heritage Week event was a great idea and it you might decide to run an event during this week every year. It's a good way to promote your area and local heritage. It was nice to see a photo of this and other events. You followed the advice of last year's adjudicator by not including too many photos and showing some 'before' and 'after' shots. Focussing on projects in which there is strong local interest is a good way to keep the community involved and enthusiastic. The strong sense of local pride comes through when visiting the village and from your application.

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

Geashill Tidy Towns are to be commended for their approach to this category as you seek advice and/or consult with the relevant bodies/ experts where required. Working with property owners to ensure the faithful restoration of heritage buildings is a good idea and the results are excellent. It is great to see old buildings being restored and occupied again. The reinstatement of an old entrance to the green with the 'refund' pillars appears to have worked very well and they now look as if they were always there. Repairs to the castle wall is a huge project but it is great that this is underway.

The school looked very well on adjudication day with the attractive planting blending the new part of the school with the old and the green flag flying. Byrnes shop and garage was well-presented. No litter was spotted and there were fresh planters with flowers. This is a busy shop and therefore keeping the forecourt tidy requires some effort, well done to those concerned. There is some heritage and historical information around the village but it is spread out. The shop or pub might be a suitable location for an information point for visitors on all aspects of heritage in the village (built, cultural and natural).

Landscaping and Open Spaces / Tírdhreachú agus Spásanna Oscailte:

Your adjudicator had driven through Geashill many times and was delighted to have the opportunity to stop and walk around. The village green with its mature trees is a delight. The landscaped sections around the green fit in well and add a gentle splash of colour. I wouldn't recommend any further planting around the green, though, as you don't want to detract from it. The native plants growing on the old stone walls (e.g. Ivy-leaved Toadflax) are very attractive. The Glebe Walk is a wonderful amenity. It might be an idea to indicate somewhere how long the walk is (distance in km) for visitors. One of the newly planted Beech trees appears to have died. The sensory and pollinator garden in the school looked stunning on adjudication day and the pencil gate adds a fun element. The vertical planter is a clever way to involve children. The St. Brigid Anemone Bed is a nice idea but it looks lost in the Picnic area. Would the sign would be better placed on the adjacent wall? I wonder if it would be better to plant Anemones in gardens in the village or in the area in front of the old school. Some of the picnic area is left unmown for pollinators. This area could be increased considerably, for the benefit of pollinators and to reduce your mowing costs. Remembering Robert Lloyd Praeger is the picnic area is a nice idea. Purging buckthorn isn't a rare tree but is one that isn't often planted despite being an attractive tree. Remember to remove labels from any newly planted trees (e.g. Sorbus). The native apple orchard in St. Oliver's Estate is a good idea as a 'community orchard'. I wonder about the planting location though as the trees are quite shaded by the adjacent wall and hedge. Reducing the number of barrel planters and the amount of annual bedding is a positive approach. It would be interesting to see a summary of the Landscape Plan referred to in your application.

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

Your links with BirdWatch Ireland and collaboration on projects, such as the Common Swift project, is great. As you point out, a Dusk Chorus walk is much more accessible for people than a Dawn Chorus walk and a good idea. The Birds on Coogan's Pond poster is a clever and inexpensive way to raise awareness of local bird populations. Ponds tend to support a wealth of wildlife and this initiative highlights their value. The Árd Ríadha estate is well-landscaped including some pollinator planting. The Wildflower Area is an ambitious project. These areas can look great for this first year but can be hard to manage in the longer-term. You have sought advice though and hopefully this wildflower area will have a long lifespan. Inviting the Irish Wildlife Trust Badger Club is one of many initiatives to involve young people in Geashill. It's great you now have local Bumblebee and Butterfly recorders. Your efforts to encourage young people will ensure you have more recorders in the future. You might consider a bird watching event or a bat walk for your next Heritage week event.

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

It's great to see that a change towards more wildlife-friendly planting has resulted in a reduction in your costs and a more environmental approach. The financial benefits should be highlighted to inspire others in their own gardens. Providing free compost to gardeners is a great idea. Have you monitored if people are taking advantage of this wonderful resource? Do you use it in your planting schemes? Upcycling of Halloween costumes is an innovative idea that may inspire some of the participants to extend this to other similar events and activities. The mobile rainwater cart is another clever idea from one of your Junior Tidy Towns members. The member of the Geashill Wildlife Gardening Group generously offered the use of her polytunnel which you made great use of. This kind of partnership has great benefits for the local community and the environment. The reflective Christmas decorations is another creative idea but be careful how they are attached to trees. Nails or pins can damage trunks and introduce disease. Last year's adjudicator made several suggestions in relation to this category. Have you tried to implement some of them? Greening of the Muc Fair as proposed is a good way to green the festival but also to raise awareness.

Tidiness and Litter Control / Slachtmhaireacht agus Rialú Bruscair:

Geashill was very tidy on adjudication day. Very little litter was spotted and no dog fouling was encountered. Monitoring the source of litter and location of litter black spots has helped improve your approach to keeping the area clean. Likewise the monitoring of the use of Mutt Mits is a good idea to see if this approach is working, which it seems to be. Co-operating with the local authority on sites such as the Water Treatment Plan is a good approach. The involvement of young people in litter picks is essential to change attitudes. Keep up the excellent work in this important area.

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

Geashill has many attractive buildings and housing areas. St. Oliver's estate is well-presented and maintained. The addition of a perennial flower bed or flowering shrubs would add more colour to this area. Árd Ríadha is also well presented and landscaped. New partnerships with the residents association here is a positive step. The mowing regime at Ballydown appears to be working well. It looks maintained but contains a large wildlife-friendly grassland. A large Mallow shrub at the entrance was in full bloom on adjudication day providing a burst of colour. The planters on the railings at the crossroads look a bit fussy in the opinion of this adjudicator. The overall impression of housing areas in the village is excellent.

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

The approach roads look very well with the mix of hedging and tree planting. Most of the trees look in good condition. Signs are clearly visible and well maintained. The planting at the Geashill sign on the Ballinagar road looks great. The approach from the Portarlinton and Tullamore roads also looks very well maintained and attractive. There is a particularly nice flower bed with perennials on the Tullamore road before the garage. You might leave more grassy verges areas unmown for longer along suitable sections of the approach roads in order to provide habitat for pollinators.

Concluding Remarks:

Geashill is deservedly at a high level in the Tidy Towns competition. The village is presented to a very high standard but more importantly it appears that there is strong community involvement and pride.

Second Round Adjudication:

For this first time visitor, some notable features of Geashill made themselves present fairly quickly. Coming in along the Portarlinton road (R420) the large green drumlins stood out. Along the roadsides we noticed how the ash trees dominate in many places, bearing strong testament to the hurling prowess of the Faithful County. Further evidence of that emerged at the Raheen GAA grounds. The green carpet of the pitch looks so fresh in the summer sunshine. A fine sight.

At many points we came across the sturdy stone buildings that also serve to form local identity and character. The roadside wall at St Mary's Church is a beautiful feature. We particularly admired the agricultural buildings and the roadside forge. Well done to those who maintain them.

The Tullamore road has benefited greatly from the relief road, by-passing the housing. That has provided an opportunity for local enhancement and it is being availed of. The area was really free of clutter. Amongst the commendable initiatives in housing was the wildflower propagation at Ard Riadha, as well as another within the school grounds.

We got more appreciation of the local architecture from reading the fine guide you sent in. We admired the pairs of semi-detached old estate cottages, some adorned by beautiful diamond gate piers.

For a rural area such as Geashill there will be challenges from unwelcome plants such as ragwort and we saw quite a bit of it. Also, a lot of purple loosestrife.

The Glebe walk really impressed us. It is narrow and linear but it includes a remarkable variety of mature and immature trees. Many of them, such as the oaks, holly and Scots pine, will support a wide range of wildlife (both birds and insects).

There were a few discarded items of litter at the upper end of the walk where the benches are. We saw how some of the fallen tree trunks have been left to feed insects and fungi, all helping the biodiversity. A real bonus for us was coming across a pair of bullfinches, up close. Well done.