

Tidy Towns Competition 2017

Adjudication Report

Centre: **Arklow** Ref: **264**
County: **Wicklow** Mark: **309**
Category: **F** Date(s): **23/06/2017**

	Maximum Mark	Mark Awarded 2016	Mark Awarded 2017
Community Involvement & Planning	60	45	46
Built Environment and Streetscape	50	37	38
Landscaping and Open Spaces	50	44	45
Wildlife, Habitats and Natural Amenities	50	32	33
Sustainable Waste and Resource Management	50	17	18
Tidiness and Litter Control	90	56	56
Residential Streets & Housing Areas	50	36	36
Approach Roads, Streets & Lanes	50	36	37
TOTAL MARK	450	303	309

Community Involvement & Planning / Rannpháirtíocht an Phobail & Pleanáil:

Well done on all the work undertaken by Arklow Tidy Towns (ATT) over the last year, as set out in your application form. Thank you also for your very comprehensive and detailed Entry submission and you are very welcome to the SuperValu Tidy Towns Competition 2017. The map submitted with your application form was very useful, and with the map numbering system and suggested judging route, this assisted greatly in the adjudication of your Town. However, it may prove beneficial in the future to consider (given the range of activities undertaken by the Tidy Towns Committee), placing the Appendices information including newspaper clippings, event information etc. at the end of document instead of within each Category section on the Application Form. This would assist the Adjudicator in ensuring that all relevant information is easily accessible and not missed. It is noted that you have 8 Committee Members on the main Committee with a Junior Tidy Towns Committee based in the Gael Choláiste na Mara and at least a further 10 local residents who volunteer to carry out your works programme on an ongoing basis. It is great to see your Committee placing so much emphasis on youth and cross community involvement, organisation, scheduling and multi-annual planning. Your recent review of the existing Three-Year Plan with Task Progress updates and colour coding system together with the development of a new 5-Year Plan commencing in 2018 is very commendable. It is great to see that your Committee has visited and engaged with the 2016 Winner - Skerries and you are also engaging with other nearby Tidy Towns Committees, The Arklow Town Team, Arklow Social Inclusion Network amongst others and have made an input into the Arklow Local Area Plan 2017-23. It is noted that the public image of the Tidy Towns Committee in Arklow remains very positive and that the Committee has fostered strong links with and is supported by a wide range of local businesses and agencies. The information gathering and communication aspect of Tidy Towns is crucial and you continue to make great strides here such as the use of your Facebook Page, Newspaper publicity, Window Display at Bridge Street and your involvement with the Local Expo etc. The before and after photographs submitted were very useful in identifying clearly the works undertaken by the Tidy Towns Committee during the year and show the very important impact which these projects have on the ongoing improvement and overall presentation of the Town of Arklow.

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

The attention which Arklow Tidy Towns has given to improving the appearance of derelict buildings within the Town, as identified in last year's Adjudication report, is worthy of great praise. It is good to see that buildings needing attention have been painted or power-washed e.g the Courthouse, Fun Works Arklow etc. and unsightly graffiti removed. The provision of new street furniture such as litter bins and standardized bi-lingual and Heritage signage such as that at the Tourist Office/Bank of Ireland indicating local walks is also a welcome development. The upgrading of the 19 Arches Bridge was noted the finish of surfaces and street lighting here was to a high standard. Having walked the Town Centre it was striking to note how lively the place was, which is always good for local business. The rejuvenation of the Town particularly along Main Street with the opening of new shops and business

premises is great to see – long may it continue. The architectural quality of business premises and shopfronts in the Centre of the Town was generally very good. The area in the vicinity of the Courthouse, St. Mary's and St. Peter's Church, Tourist Office and Father Redmond Monument is very well presented with appropriate floral displays and adds considerably to the pleasing and historic character of this part of the Town. The removal of the unsightly phone boxes on Main Street together with the repainting of walls has also made a great improvement. The opportunity was taken to visit the Abbey Graveyard but unfortunately the gates were locked. Having looked in through the gates, it would appear that some additional weeding, litter control and maintenance is required here. This is a very interesting Heritage Property and it would be great to have public access provided – although security may be an issue. It is noted that there are quite a number of sponsored seats dotted around the town which is a very positive initiative. However, the advertising inset panels on some of these are quite large and strongly coloured and could be more tastefully designed. Perhaps these adverts could be reduced in size or toned down somewhat in colour – in this regard the Tarrant and Tarrant Solicitors sponsored seat close to the roundabout on the Wexford Road looked rather well. St. Mary's Park was visited and was found to be a very pleasant and well maintained public space. The provision of some historical information in relation to the original graveyard and gravestones (which once existed here) on the Noticeboard in the Park would be a good idea and would be of interest to Park visitors. The overflowing and colourful Lavender and Geranium planting along the frontage of St. Mary's Park facing Main Street really was a stunning feature in this part of the Town. The placing of Advertising Signs on Gable Walls in Town Centres requires some sensitivity as these can become very prominent and intrusive features e.g. the large gable sign facing Main Street for Moran's Avoca Ltd. /Apache Pizza/Far East Oriental Food – the re-design of this sign could be considered in consultation with the businesses concerned. The Fáilte sign/mosaic and plantings at the Train Station were admired - this feature was presented with a great artistic flair and really does provide a good first impression for visitors on the train arriving at Arklow Town.

Landscaping and Open Spaces / Tírdhreachú agus Spásanna Oscailte:

All those involved in the creation of the Community/Urban Garden beside the Council Offices at Castle Park are to be congratulated for their hard work and effort on this project. We were enthralled with the high standard of design and workmanship employed here, the use of recycled materials, the provision for wildlife and biodiversity and the healthy vigorous growth of all the edible plantings. The transformation of the site, as evidenced by the before and after photos, is very impressive and we were also impressed with the standard of maintenance on judging day - you should be so proud of this little gem. The new Sponsorship Scheme for roundabouts in the Town is a particularly important development. Well designed and maintained roundabout planting schemes really do enhance the experience of visitors to your town. Your adjudicator admired the presentation of the Bridgewater Roundabout which was well designed/planted and was also maintained to a high standard. Some of the roundabouts on the Wexford approach road could be considered for further landscape treatment and maintenance. Keeping grass to a minimum on small roundabouts is a good idea as it reduces the need for regular and costly maintenance. The small roundabout at the junction of Wexford Road and Upper Main Street could possibly be enlarged to provide a central feature here, subject to traffic considerations. The flower basket initiative run by the Arklow Town Team has worked well and flower baskets have enhanced many of the business premises in the Town Centre. The exterior planting at the Blue Café and window boxes on the dwelling house adjoining the 'She Boutique' were particularly noteworthy. The ongoing annual planting of hardwood trees by Servier (6000 no. to date) represents a really great commitment by this company to Arklow Town and the environment generally and we wish them well with their endeavours. The upgrading of the children's playground at South Green was another successful project – the perimeter wall was particularly well constructed. The plantings provided to the front of the disused Ormond Cinema building were admired. The planted beds at the entrance to Fernhill Estate enhance the surrounding area and were well maintained. The Dispensary Garden was visited and we admired the Lady's Mantle in full bloom. However, the garden overall looks a little jaded and would benefit from some additional planting, maintenance, weed and litter control. The striking pink coloured plant containers placed throughout the Town were greatly admired, especially those containing colourful Cosmos plants and associated perennial plantings.

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

It is noted that a significant number of projects under this category have been undertaken by Arklow Tidy Towns this year. It is great that a Biodiversity Workshop and Biodiversity Plan for the Town of Arklow have now been completed and the recommended actions/projects contained in the Plan will no doubt ensure the long-term protection and enhancement of valuable wildlife and conservation assets such as the Arklow Town Marsh, Sand Dunes and Arklow Rock- Askintinny pNHA's etc. The culling of invasive species along the Riverwalk by students of the Gael Choláiste is laudable and this problem should be kept under constant review. The elevated parkland adjacent to the Sea Road (Webb's River Biodiversity Area) was visited and the extensive areas of dense thicket and natural vegetation (ideal for nesting birds) and stunning sea views were noted. There was a small issue with littering here and the seats could now do with a lick of paint. Perhaps in time a more defined boundary treatment should be provided along the road frontage. The new Pollinator Bed in progress at the Main Street car park was reviewed and it is great to see the Men's Shed bug hotel installed here and at other locations in the town. Your 'Save Our Wildlife', colouring and photographic competitions under this category were noted positively for their Wildlife awareness raising potential. The delayed Mowing of open spaces in the Town is a good initiative to encourage wildflower meadows and habitat creation -the public will respond well to this approach as long as they know that it is part of a planned management regime. The information provided on the Duck Pond Nature Reserve sign is extensive and very well presented and will add to the public's enjoyment of this important saline aquatic habitat.

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

The engagement and commitment of Arklow Tidy Towns to all aspects of sustainable waste and resource

management is very evident in the projects undertaken this year. Initiatives such as The Plastic Bag survey and Hotel B&B water reduction stickers and Great Bulb Exchange are very worthwhile in creating public awareness of waste issues. It is great to see local businesses making efforts to become Carbon Neutral i.e. Servier, Sigma Aldrich and Arc – they are to be commended and hopefully others will follow their lead. The use of perennial planting instead of annual bedding schemes for floral displays in the Town was evident on adjudication day- this will significantly reduce ongoing water, energy and other inputs and future costs for the Tidy Towns Committee. The use of edible planting at various locations in the Town was also noted as was the use of recycled materials in the Community Garden at Castle Park. The support of Arklow Tidy Towns of the schools Green Flag Initiative, Junk Koiture Competition, Bike Week and 'Green your Festival' programme is also worthy of note. It was great to see the large bank of Solar Panels on the roof of the Coral Leisure Sports Centre building – perhaps this could be looked at with a view to providing solar panels on other buildings in the Town or possibly developing solar farm projects on suitable public or private land in the area – this could even generate much needed funds for Tidy Towns!

Tidiness and Litter Control / Slachtmhaireacht agus Rialú Bruscair:

The work the Tidy Towns Committee has carried out to unused and sometimes derelict buildings in the Town such as cleaning windows, painting etc. has been very significant in relation to the overall presentation of the Town's streetscape. Litter is an ongoing challenge within a Town the size of Arklow and can be very difficult to control due to the wide range of sources such as passing traffic etc. Your regular Litter Patrols and Collections are definitely having a significant impact and overall the Litter situation in the Centre of the Town, including the Main Street/Bridge Street area, was very good on the day of adjudication. Sadly, some of the outlying areas in the town within in estates etc. including some open spaces were found to be moderately littered. However, great thanks are due to the regular litter pickers, Patricia Nugent, Theresa Earls, Bernie Breen, Martina Dunne, Ger Doyle, Peter Keogh, and Shelly Kavanagh for their great efforts in this regard. It is good to plan an anti-litter campaign and your regular litter collection schedule for the different parts of the Town is testament to this. The involvement of Harbour Court Residents in the National Spring Clean of their estate and the Cleaning of Glenart Forest by CBS Students were significant local improvement projects under this category. We passed your Dog Fouling warning device at the Duck Pond and were pleasantly surprised to receive the audio notice and hopefully this will lead to behaviour change amongst dog owners in relation to this ongoing issue. Thank you for painting the benches in the Harbour area – these little touches can make a big difference. The quality and presentation of signage throughout the Town was generally found to be very good- however keep an eye on temporary illegal signage popping up which is a problem in many towns in Ireland.

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

Arklow has a very good complement of residential heritage buildings of significant note and the houses along Saint Mary's Terrace were particularly admired. At Avalon estate it was noted that front gardens roadside margins and roadside trees were all presented to a very high standard. The open spaces and Avalon estate were generally well maintained and the fairy doors on the trees fronting the main open space were a wonderful feature here. Meadow Vale estate was visited and the public areas and open spaces were well maintained. However, the large expansive open spaces here would benefit from additional tree planting and consideration should also be given to providing hedge planting to screen perimeter walls from public view. The Respond Housing Area (Willow Grove) was visited and was very neat and tidy- the residents are to be congratulated for their efforts here. Perhaps for next year, consider the possibility of screening with hedging/ landscaping those ESB kiosks, junction boxes and other over-ground utility cabinets which are situated on open spaces in Willow Grove and elsewhere in the Town. Small utility cabinets can also be transformed with artistic treatment reflecting local issues or features. It is good that you have re-launched the 'Garden and Estate Competition' which includes all estates in the town- this friendly rivalry will encourage local residents to improve their areas. We visited the 'George Campbell Plaque' feature and welcome the recognition of this local writer and artist with strong connections to Spain.

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

Road surfaces were generally good throughout Arklow, although road markings in places were in need of renewal. The uncluttered approaches to Arklow Town (largely free from Commercial signage) were noted positively. The finish to roadside grass margins and adjoining hedgerows on approaches was very neat and tidy, whilst at the same time you have provided appropriate strips of long grass to encourage wildlife. All the roadside approaches to the Town were found to be litter free. You have progressed with the strong Maritime Theme for feature plantings etc. as recommended in last year's Adjudication Report and the sloped margin on the Dublin approach road with the 'angled boat' feature was particularly striking. The frontage of the privately-owned site in the vicinity of and to the northeast of the 19 Arches Bridge would benefit from a tidy up to improve its appearance from the road. The narrow, neat and tidy laneways in the Centre of the Town excited considerable curiosity but unfortunately due to time constraints it wasn't possible to explore them all. Well done on all the progress made with regard to this category.

Concluding Remarks:

It has been many years since your adjudicator visited Arklow and it was a great pleasure to see your lovely Town again. In a broader context, it would be good to see further development of the Harbour area together with provision of greater pedestrian/cycle connectivity between the Harbour and Town Centre and eastwards along the riverside walkway. Perhaps an 'Arklow Bike Scheme' might work in the Town for visitors and those wishing to make short journeys. The further development of public access along the North Quays and possible further extension of public access inland along the Northern Bank of the Avoca River, should also be considered in the future, if this has not been done already. You are clearly continuing to make good progress across a number of categories and your Committee, volunteers and the people of Arklow, can be justly proud of all your achievements this year.

Congratulations to all involved.