

Tidy Towns Competition 2017

Adjudication Report

Centre: **Ashford** Ref: **902**
County: **Wicklow** Mark: **285**
Category: **C** Date(s):

	Maximum Mark	Mark Awarded 2016	Mark Awarded 2017
Community Involvement & Planning	60	41	42
Built Environment and Streetscape	50	43	43
Landscaping and Open Spaces	50	43	44
Wildlife, Habitats and Natural Amenities	50	26	27
Sustainable Waste and Resource Management	50	15	19
Tidiness and Litter Control	90	50	51
Residential Streets & Housing Areas	50	29	30
Approach Roads, Streets & Lanes	50	28	29
TOTAL MARK	450	275	285

Community Involvement & Planning / Rannpháirtíocht an Phobail & Pleanáil:

You are very welcome to the SuperValu Tidy Towns Competition 2017. Well done to your Committee for all the work undertaken by Ashford Tidy Towns over the last year, as set out in your Submission and Application form. Thank you for your very clear and comprehensive Entry submission. It is noted that there is a total of 8 Committee Members active on the Committee meeting at least once/month with a further 20 No. Volunteers available for specific tasks. The range of sub-committees assigned to different work areas under the auspices of the Main committee is particularly impressive and really does allow priority to be given to targeted work areas such as schools liaison, 3-5 year planning etc. It is good to see you have established links to other bodies such as the Men's Shed, GAA, ICA, Ashford Beekeepers etc. However, as indicated in last year's report, the submission of a good map of the town with the identification of specific projects undertaken during the current adjudication period is very important. All local landmarks, features, road names, housing estates etc. should be indicated on the map to facilitate inspection by the Adjudicator of the various projects referred to in the Entry Submission. The input of your Volunteers in keeping Ashford Tidy and carrying out regular litter picks is recognised. You are particularly fortunate to have 'The Hub' which provides meeting facilities and is a real 'community builder' in Ashford. It is good that you continue to liaise with local schools, County Council and County Wicklow Partnership and local clubs etc. which expands your reach across the entire Community. Congratulations to the local businesses and Wicklow County Council who provide much needed sponsorship and funding for your activities. Your Communication methods using on-line platforms, e-mail, texting, Newsletter and Local Networking service etc. are very comprehensive and are particularly appropriate for the types of activities you promote and are engaged in.

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

Ashford is very fortunate to have the famous Mount Usher Gardens located on the edge of the town which attracts large numbers of tourists and visitors to the Town. The success of the Gardens could possibly be used more effectively as a catalyst for the further improvements to the streetscape of the Town itself, with a strong emphasis on horticultural/landscape excellence, without excessive use of hanging baskets. The completion of unfinished developments and rejuvenation of empty/disused business premises would also have a significant impact on the overall presentation of the Town. The frontage along the National School, Scoil na Coroine Mhuire, is very neat and tidy and provides a safe location and drop-off point for children. The grounds of the Church of the Most Holy Rosary were visited and were found to be very well tended. It was noted that the Church is celebrating its 100 year Anniversary this year, having been established in 1917. The Rhododendrons growing in the Church Grounds no doubt provide a great display when in full flower during Springtime. The Ashford Community and Heritage Centre, a building of considerable architectural quality was admired as was The Café Latté premises. The Irish Times canopy at Boland's Shop has deteriorated in condition and is due for replacement. The surfacing of the car park and the upgrading of the low wall facing the public road would help to improve the appearance of the environs of the Main

Street R772/R764 Junction. The Ashford Academy of Music sign could be improved and the seating area overlooking the River Vartry adjacent to No. 4 Ashford House has become a little forlorn and would benefit from more intensive care and maintenance. The view from the bridge overlooking the Vartry river was admired as was the stone sculpture features on the bridge parapets. It was good to see the electronic car charge -point located outside the GAA club. The recycling facility is located along the Main Street - perhaps this could be moved to a less prominent location in the Town? The floral displays outside the Chester Beatty Inn were admired. The presentation of the Pizza Palace and Adriano's Takeaway shopfronts and the Ashford Fair Service Station premises could be reviewed in terms of how their impact on the streetscape might be improved. Unfinished housing development and derelict sites are an ongoing issue in relation to the presentation of the Town, but hopefully this matter can be resolved in the short to medium term. The tapered road junction with narrowing grass margin opposite the new housing development on the approach to Mount Usher Gardens has a number of old signs and poles which generally detract from this area. It is understood you are considering upgrading this margin as part of your 3-5 year plan. The frontage of Mount Usher Gardens was greatly admired and the signage and timber and rope fencing here were appropriate and the roadside margins were all presented to a high standard. It is noted that you have ongoing contacts with local businesses regarding shopfront design and presentation and you run a Best Kept Business Competition and congratulations to the 2017 Winners, Chester Beatty's, Classic Cuts and The Woodpecker. Some further work is needed in relation to the overall presentation of the built environment in Ashford however, much of this appears to fall outside the remit of the Committee.

Landscaping and Open Spaces / Tírdhreachú agus Spásanna Oscailte:

Apart from the renowned Mount Usher Gardens, the highlight for Ashford under this category is without doubt the Ashford Community Park, which this adjudicator visited for the first time. This is an outstanding recreational open space located in the Centre of the town and is a haven for a variety of bird and wildlife species. The exquisitely designed and maintained children's playground is a striking feature here, set in an impressive woodland habitat with nearby stream. The adult exercise equipment provided in the Park is of a very high quality. The meandering path, sculpture and the timber seats suggest a restful atmosphere, complemented by the gentle sound of the nearby waterfall/weir. The 'Wee Library' was greatly admired and a little boy was exchanging books during our visit. Timber was extensively and creatively used throughout the park – of particular note was the vertical signage providing a wealth of information on the biodiversity in the park. The adjudicator was also happy to note a total absence of litter here. The extensive planting scheme along the frontage of Ashford Community Park and the plant containers on the traffic islands, all looked well and greatly enhanced the approach to Ashford. The planters and hanging baskets along the Main Street were also noted positively.

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

Your overall objectives under this category are commendable i.e. Conservation and protection of existing natural amenities and habitats, access improvements including walks and trails and the Vartry Weir restoration. It is noted that you have made representations regarding the repair of the weir on the Vartry, previously damaged during storms in December 2015 – we wish you success with securing the funding and restoring the weir at an early date and the extension of further walkways along the river, where this is feasible. Hearty thanks to Kyle Spratt for donating a Bug Hotel for installation in the Community Park, as part of a school upcycle project. Some other work under this category would include an audit of trees and wildlife in the Community Park, maintenance along the Vartry River and Killougher Graveyard. The Wildflower Zone Designation signs are very useful as a habitat protection measure and were noted positively.

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

Thank you for consulting the Tidy Towns guidelines document under this category and for attending the National Tidy Towns Conference in Westport. The printing of your application form double-sided and the fact that you used social media extensively, thereby reducing the amount of leaflets to be printed has been noted. As you are aware, there is plenty of potential for gaining extra marks under this category, if the right approach is adopted. It is noted that you have concentrated on 'upcycling' this year and have organised 'Upcycling Competitions' in both schools with great success. The photographs of the various competition entries impressed greatly- well done to all the participants. The activities at the Hub Charity Shop in the re-use of goods and organising events are well within the scope of this category. It is great that you have expertise on Sustainable Energy directly available to your Committee – this will enable you to push forward with projects in this emerging area for the benefit of the local Community. The re-use of waste coffee from local coffee shops to provide an organic fertile mulch for plantings in the Town is commended. Other important actions noted in Ashford under this category include Cycle/Walk to school initiatives, bicycle parking facilities, provision of an electrical car-charging point, 'Buy Local' Campaign, Re-use of school books and clothes, Business Energy Audit, Solar Lighting and Wind Turbines at Ballyhenry Farm/Ashford Studios, Community Composting Facility at Ashford Community Park and Low Energy Street Lighting on Main Street. You have clearly achieved a great deal under this category this year and you are to be congratulated for this. For next year you might consider further initiatives under this category such as encouraging the use of zero carbon electric vehicles, extending e-car charge point(s) in the Town, extending cycle parking facilities, the development of Greenway trails and cycle routes in the area, encouraging the development of small solar farms on appropriate sites, the greater use of solar panels on roofs, heat exchange units to reduce energy consumption by households/businesses, greater use of water butts for watering gardens and village planters, organising stop food waste awareness seminars etc. Grant funding may be available to provide energy efficiency upgrades for community and commercial facilities.

Tidiness and Litter Control / Slachtmhaireacht agus Rialú Bruscair:

Some small quantities of litter were noted in Ashford on the day of adjudication, primarily in the vicinity of the seat located near the water pump. There were also tidiness issues to be addressed in relation to road signage, primarily at the junction on the approach to Mount Usher Gardens, as referred to previously under the Built Environment Category. It is noted that you have established 8 Objectives under Litter Control measures within this category and have undertaken a village walk-around with the Area Engineer, Wicklow County Council. Ashford Tidy Towns has requested a review of Road signage requirements on the approach to the Town, to be carried out by Wicklow County Council and the NRA. With regard to the undergrounding of cables along the Main Street, you have sought to have an application for funding made by Wicklow County Council for this work. You are also dealing with issues relating to Universal Access measures on Main Street, car-parking issues in the vicinity of Mount Usher Gardens and you liaise closely with Tús workers regarding graffiti removal, removal of fly posters, weed control etc. Regular Litter picks are carried out twice/per week during Summer Months and you have Business Liaison Officer and a Schools Liaison Officers to address litter issues with local businesses and Schools. The continued expansion of your 'Pure Mile' initiatives along approach roads is commended.

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

You have undertaken a worthwhile exercise in reviewing last year's adjudication report and reports from other high scoring centres and have re-affirmed that the key to success in this category is Community 'buy in', support and participation. A reward scheme for housing estates - the Residents Area Award /Competition 2017 has therefore, been re-introduced with judging in August each year– this is a good development and will foster a sense of pride in the estates amongst local residents. Regular maintenance of open spaces in estates including grass cutting and litter control is organised with the help of Tús workers, Wicklow County Council and Tidy Towns volunteers. Ashford Downs housing estate was visited and the presentation and maintenance of the estate was found to be of a high standard. Grangelea Estate on the whole looked well, although further attention is needed here in relation to weed growth along kerbs, which in this and many other areas detracts from the presentation of estates.

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

The 'Welcome to Ashford' signs positioned at each end of the town were greatly admired. Road signage was generally clean and well-presented, although it was noted that some tree branches were slightly obscuring Official road signs in the vicinity of the entrance to Mount Usher Gardens. With heavy growth of trees and other vegetation during the summer months, it is a good idea to carry out regular inspection checks, so that any offending vegetation found to be blocking signs can be removed as soon as possible. Road surfaces on the R772 approaches to Ashford were generally found to be in good condition. However, the renewal of road markings at a number of locations along this stretch, could be considered. The roadside margins along the R772 were generally litter free and well-tended which together with natural vegetation along roadside boundaries, provided for a very attractive approach to the Town and a good driver experience. Roundabouts were well maintained and enhanced the environs of the Town. The timber stakes on the narrow grass margin on the Town side of the Mount Usher Gardens entrance could be considered for replacement in the near future. Following on from your previous successes, we wish you well with the expansion of PURE Mile initiative to other parts of Ashford, such as Ballymacahara.

Concluding Remarks:

Ashford Tidy Towns has again this year put a great effort into the Competition and has responded very positively and in a planned way to the comments made in last year's adjudication report. The report this year includes some recommendations which we hope you find helpful. Ashford is making improvements across a number of categories and has great potential to progress well in the competition and it is felt that further strengthening of links with local businesses and the Mount Usher Gardens will yield benefits in terms of the overall presentation of the Town. Improving accessibility from the Main Street to the Vartry River as per your 3-5 year plan is also worth pursuing vigorously. We wish you well with your endeavours over the coming year and the Committee can be justly proud of all your achievements this year.