

Tidy Towns Competition 2017

Adjudication Report

Centre: **Blessington** Ref: **713**
County: **Wicklow** Mark: **276**
Category: **D** Date(s): **03/07/2017**

	Maximum Mark	Mark Awarded 2016	Mark Awarded 2017
Community Involvement & Planning	60	37	38
Built Environment and Streetscape	50	35	36
Landscaping and Open Spaces	50	32	33
Wildlife, Habitats and Natural Amenities	50	27	28
Sustainable Waste and Resource Management	50	18	21
Tidiness and Litter Control	90	53	55
Residential Streets & Housing Areas	50	34	35
Approach Roads, Streets & Lanes	50	29	30
TOTAL MARK	450	265	276

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 Blessington 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 – The Application Form is well presented and the 2017 Summary Planner is particularly impressive and really does highlight how active and well organised your Committee is and the range of activities you have undertaken throughout the year. However, in future years it would be good to supply an overall Tidy Towns map of the Town including housing estates with key projects marked and a numbered legend including project completion dates and suggested judging route. This would be very helpful to the Adjudicator in identifying the various projects completed in the current judging year on site, and providing the potential for extra marks. Congratulations on your success in the Wicklow County Council Environmental Awards 2017. It is noted that you have 8 Committee Members drawn from across the entire community in Blessington and you have representation on a wide range of local bodies and Associations. Your regular clean ups on Thursday evenings and Sunday mornings attended by a group consisting of 75% Volunteers together with your monthly meetings during the Winter, ensure there is good communication amongst Volunteers and Committee Members. This activity also allows you to formulate and implement your plans in a very organised and strategic manner. Blessington Tidy Towns is clearly very pro-active in making good use of Community and other Employment Schemes and potential sources of funding as they become available. It is recognised that the availability of Leader Funding in recent years has been crucial for your Committee in implementing a number of projects such as the completion of a Biodiversity Report and Habitat Management Plan. The range of communication methods employed by your Committee both by way of Social Media, electronic and otherwise to communicate with residents in Blessington is very impressive and no doubt will encourage a wider involvement of local residents with the work of Tidy Towns into the future. Your engagement with young people through Local Schools, Scouts, Cubs and Beavers groups is extremely important in spreading the ideals of Tidy Towns across all age groups. We wish you well in progressing your future plans such as the extension of the Greenway Trail, Pure Mile Walk, the development of Town Square and Main Street, Town Renewal Scheme and seeking Heritage Town Status for the Town. There is no doubt that your enthusiastic and strategic approach to progressing these plans will yield success, and will ensure the further sustainable and economic development of Blessington Town as well as fostering an even greater sense of pride within your community.

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

It is noted that you have continued to work on the upgrading of derelict vacant premises in the Town through consultation with the owners or through enforcement procedures. Further improvements have been achieved by way of the 'Best Presented Business Awards' and congratulations to Murphy's Bar and Crimmins Butchers, the 2016 Winners and great thanks are due to the competition sponsors Qualitas Property Partners. Your Community

Clean - up day in May is successful and you continue to maintain Burgage Cemetery and have carried out a Graves Survey here. New Bi-Lingual signs have been erected at St. Patricks Well and Old Naas Road and bicycle stands provided on Main Street- Blessington has become a Mecca for cyclists in recent years! Work by your Committee on the maintenance of the Park at Old Naas Road/Dempseys Lane and the Blessington Heritage Trail and Pure Mile are ongoing. The Topaz garage was neat and tidy and well presented as was the grounds of the Church of Our Lady on the day of adjudication. The mature trees in Blessington, a mixture of Limes, Horse Chestnut, Oak, Norway Maple and London Plane are very important and add significantly to the charm and character to the Main Street. The Recycling Centre close to Dunnes Stores was visited and was generally found to be tidy, although there were some cardboard boxes and car baby chair discarded here. The Credit Union building was noted positively as was the nearby Downshire Monument and Saint Mary's Church of Ireland Church - all of these premises added significantly to the historic character of this part of the Town. The stone arch and entrance in the shape of a horseshoe beside the Centra shop was a particularly attractive feature. However, the shopfront at Method Physio could be looked at in relation to the appropriateness of its shop signage. Premises noted positively were Miley's of Blessington, the Blessington Garda Station, Crimin's Family Butchers. Others requiring further attention in the relation to the choice of shop signage would include Upper Cut Barbers, Blessington Computers(sign), Lucky Inn Chinese and Macari Takeaway. The front façade of the Downshire Hotel was admired but this charming building now appears to be closed up? Permanent planting schemes in front of the Lemon Tree restaurant were noted positively and these were maintained to a high standard. The frontage of the West Wicklow House and W.Twyfords premises(disused) were admired, as were Harvest Fare Health-food Shop and the Blessington Bookstore. The frontage of Mick Reid's Lounge could be reviewed in terms of its overall presentation. The very interesting Floral displays at Blessington Barbers, using shoes and jeans as flower planters were greatly admired. The extent of the signage at Blessington Dry Cleaners could be looked at and may need to be toned down somewhat. It was good to see the colourful Floral Displays at Kenny's Kitchen, SuperValu, Murphy's Lounge and Wonca's Sweet Shop. Saint Mary's Junior School was visited and the presentation of the school grounds was good. Some of the markings in the school yard may need to be renewed. The permanent planting scheme near the entrance to the Church of Our Lady caught the eye. The parish office and Coimín Centre was delightfully presented with very good planting schemes and the disabled parking bays in front of the building were very well marked. The work undertaken on the unoccupied and disused buildings beside Saint Mary's National School and Linda's Euro Village was noted positively. This included cleaning and painting and installation of flower boxes, which certainly has improved the appearance of these buildings from the Main Street. Scott's Jewellers which had shutters placed inside the window display was noted positively. The Ulster bank and the AIB buildings were well presented. Saint Patrick's Well was visited and the bilingual directional sign here was noted. The good presentation of this feature with painted handrail and gate makes it suitably visitor friendly. Perhaps the walkway down to the Well could be improved with greater weed clearance etc. The Maxol Service Station and Texaco Station were well maintained and presented on the day of adjudication.

Landscaping and Open Spaces / Tírdhreachú agus Spásanna Oscailte:

It is noted that as a Committee you have decided to concentrate your resources on sustainable year-round perennial planting schemes instead of annual bedding schemes, in the interest of biodiversity. This policy has been put into effect in schemes at Blessington Square, the Hollows, Old Library Area under the 'Welcome to Blessington' signage on approach roads. The site of Saint Mary's School garden and the playful and colourful painted hubcaps and Minion planters were greatly admired. Also noted here were the soft-fruit bushes which were laden with blackcurrants. How pleasant it is to have a School garden overlooking the Blessington Lakes with such stunning views across the landscape? The Bumblebee Roundabout and well - established wildflowers were fully in bloom on the day of adjudication- this is a great feature in the Town and is great for wildlife as well. It might be a good idea to keep a strip of say 1.5 m at the edge of the roundabout cut short, to improve sight lines and enhance its overall presentation and appearance. Also keep an eye out for invasive noxious weeds here, such as Ragwort and Dock which can be removed manually. The perennial planting scheme and 1916 Commemorative Feature at Peter Finnegan Park beside the Men's Shed building was noted positively. The Old Naas Road open space with its majestic mature trees and secluded walkway was also noted. One wonders what is the future status the plot of land situated between the R410 Naas Road, N81 and the Old Ballymore Road and whether all or part of this land could in the future be used for the development of a Town Park for Blessington? The Wicklow County Council Civic offices were presented to a very high standard with colourful floral displays prominent.

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

It is noted that you have added new interpretative panels at the Blessington Greenway trail - a walk from Blessington to Russborough. The Blessington Heritage Trail booklet has been re-published and Blessington has been chosen by Wicklow County Council to participate in their Wicklow Biodiversity Project, involving workshops and Biodiversity Action Plan. A copy of the Local Biodiversity Plan for Blessington 2017-2020 published in May 2017, was included with your Application. This is a wonderful resource with some great proposals for Biodiversity enhancements at various sites around the Town. You have continued your Garden Bird Survey with results published on your website. Nature Walks have been organised since May 2016 at Russborough House in conjunction with Native Woodland Trust. The installation of bird and bat boxes has been undertaken as part of the creation of wildlife habitats at local schools and Church grounds. The Bumblebee Roundabout continues to flourish providing a habitat for a range of pollinator species, as is your Beehaven project on the Old Naas Road open space. You are actively participating in the All- Ireland Pollinator Plan 2015-2020 with your 'Lets Bee Friendly' Brochure, workshops and meetings. The Blessington Lakeside Photo Competition with the theme 'biodiversity' is a great project with some terrific photos to be used in a SuperValu Calendar to raise awareness of local natural amenities and Biodiversity. The presence of the wonderful Blessington Lakes amenity so close to the edge of town is not readily apparent to the casual visitor to the Town's Main Street. Perhaps greater sense of connectivity between the

Main Street and the lakes could be developed through improved lake access, signage and cycle/pedestrian connectivity.

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

It was good that you formed a sub-group of four members to devise projects to be undertaken under this heading this year - some Tidy Towns Committees find it difficult to address the requirements of this category of the competition. However, you seem to have a very good handle on what is required and congratulations to those members who have put together some very interesting projects to improve the environmental performance of your town. One of your projects was arranging a visit of the Wicklow County Council Environmental Awareness Officer to local schools to talk to Students about Composting and Food Waste Management. You minimize paper waste by maximizing the use of Social Media for notification of events, and always print double -sided. Continued support is given to 'Swap Night' in St. Kevin's Community Centre held in March each year and you promote energy heat and electricity saving topics on Facebook and Twitter. You are committed to Waste Minimisation and Recycling and the Town has a collection service for recyclables and now a free brown bin collection service. You are engaging with local Festival organisers in relation to the Greening of Festivals - the local Hillbilly, Knockanstockan Festivals are involved here. The use of Charity Shops including the St. Vincents Shop is encouraged as a way of re-using pre-owned goods and minimizing waste going to landfill. Your scheme to collect directly from households to enable the Recycling of electrical items is a great project and it is noted that a home collection by RecycleIT in March yielded 2038 Kg of recyclables. Blessington Men's Shed engages in upcycling and furniture repair activities and the making of Bird nest boxes. You are to be commended for your no poster policy and restriction of unsightly advertising in the Town. Your Waste Minimisation Treasure Trail involving local businesses is a terrific fun idea helping to spread awareness of waste management and recycling amongst schoolchildren and their families – well done to all concerned here.

Tidiness and Litter Control / Slachtmhaireacht agus Rialú Bruscair:

Blessington was litter free on the day of adjudication- congratulations to all Committee members and volunteers who get involved with weekly litter picks and patrols on Thursday evenings and Sunday mornings. You are absolutely correct to say that awareness is the key to minimising litter at source and your anti-litter awareness poster and media campaign is to be commended. Sunday morning litter picks are ideal to tackle litter generated in the Town on Saturday nights and it is noted that you segregate all collected waste for recycling. That you have 48 local residents on the litter rota for Sunday mornings is testament to the very strong Commitment locally to present Blessington to the highest standard possible. No graffiti was noted in the Town on the day of adjudication and you have worked well to deal with this problem including the removal of graffiti from signage- the before and after photos were helpful in this regard. You promote National Spring Clean day and have your Community Clean-up day in May each year. Edging of footpaths and removal of weeds from kerbs is a constant battle and you have tackled this issue well. Blessington was not noted for any significant problems with illegal signage in the Town or on approaches on adjudication day although we assume you remain ever vigilant in tackling this issue which is very prevalent around the country. We wish you well with the roll out of the Green Dog Walker Scheme under this category.

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

Saint Joseph's Road estate off Main Street was visited and was well presented with good front gardens and boundaries. Trees planted on this open space located near the Main Street provided good visual relief. Lakeside Downs estate looked well and the sign at the entrance to the estate was noted positively. Beachdale estate was noted for the extensive use of pollinator friendly Lupin plantings. Westpark estate and Glen View Court were excellently presented. At Ashton estate harsh pruning of Norway Maple street trees was noted? Otherwise this estate presented well. At Haywood estate - the two large beech trees at the entrance were admired as was the estate generally. Pipers Stones estate looked well but ensure footpaths are clean and remove debris near roadside kerbs. Deerpark Estate was well presented and the mature trees on the open space at Deerpark Drive were particularly admired. At Downshire Park a good standard of maintenance was noted. At Woodleigh estate consider planting a hedge along the block wall facing the open space. Burgage Manor housing estate was noted for its wonderful entrance detail with purple Japanese maples underplanted with box - a lovely entrance feature. The mature Beech trees on the internal open spaces were admired. Perhaps plant some hedging where walls face onto open spaces. Miltown gate – this new development looked well and it was great to see solar panels used on the houses here.

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

One of the highlights of this adjudicator's visit to Blessington was to see the Minion planters using recycled tyres on the main approach roads. The road surface quality on the main street and approaches to Blessington is generally quite good. The roundabout at the Number One school and the GAA grounds looked well. Roadside margins along all approach roads to the Town are neat and tidy and well-tended. Concrete post and rail fencing on the Dublin approach is broken in places and could be repaired/planted with a hedge. The Road safety fencing at the Naas Road junction with the N81 is collapsed in places. The Chain link fencing along the approach road leading to Blessington GAA grounds is collapsing in places and extensive use of herbicide was noted here.

Concluding Remarks:

Blessington Tidy Towns has achieved a huge amount this year and you clearly have a very dedicated team with magnificent Community Support. You are communicating your message well to all stakeholders encouraging 'pride of place' and good citizenship amongst the Community and you are making a great difference to the presentation of

your town and promoting it as an excellent place for residents and visitors alike. It was a great pleasure to adjudicate Blessington this year and you have great potential to progress much further in the Competition. We wish you well with your future endeavours in this regard.