

Tidy Towns Competition 2017

Adjudication Report

Centre: **Birr** Ref: **549**
County: **Offaly** Mark: **303**
Category: **D** Date(s): **11/06/2017**

	Maximum Mark	Mark Awarded 2016	Mark Awarded 2017
Community Involvement & Planning	60	47	48
Built Environment and Streetscape	50	47	48
Landscaping and Open Spaces	50	44	44
Wildlife, Habitats and Natural Amenities	50	34	35
Sustainable Waste and Resource Management	50	16	16
Tidiness and Litter Control	90	45	46
Residential Streets & Housing Areas	50	34	34
Approach Roads, Streets & Lanes	50	32	32
TOTAL MARK	450	299	303

Community Involvement & Planning / Rannpháirtíocht an Phobail & Pleanáil:

Thank you for the exceptionally well put together application form and Birr is welcomed to the 2017 Supervalu Tidy Towns Competition.

It has been more than a few years since this adjudicator has taken time out to traverse the town and in that interim period the changes for that have taken place have been major.

Your submission is to say the least encompassing in detail so it would be impossible for the adjudicator to do justice to everything you have outlined in a 3 page report covering 8 categories.

Be assured that the adjudication was done in a fair and impartial manner and in accordance with adjudication guidelines.

The application was supported with supplementary material which was both informative and most importantly relevant.

The adjudicator was most appreciative of the extra copy of the map as it allowed for a little notation as one walked the adjudication route.

The 3 year plan is practical in that it does address basic issues that need immediate or longer term attention but as was stated in last year's report it might be a bit short on ambition.

You have immense support from the business community and a large number of local organisations as per the exhaustive list that you have included.

Birr 20/20 is an interesting concept acting as an umbrella group for organisations and groups within the town.

Does it have a limited company status? and is it seen as a replacement for Birr Town Council?

One would have thought that Birr Municipal District would be obvious replacement for Birr Town Council.

Good to note that inclusivity is very much key to your success in later years so well done in involving schools, local organisation, resident associations and also welcoming of residents of different nationalities and cultures to join the Birr Tidy Towns movement.

Methods of communication are varied and effective and the adjudicator did notice that you mentioned the most traditional method of "Personal contact –being out and about"

It is still so relevant in this era of Whats App, Instagram and Messenger.

Also you deserve credit for recognising the volunteering spirit that prevails in the town.

Overall this was an excellent input in this category and deserving of an increase in marks.

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

First off your explanation, of on foot of last year's adjudicator comment on the "statueless" column in Emmett Square was explained to me a good number of years by a local resident now unfortunately deceased.

It is good to note that you have a committed subcommittee that incorporates members of the local historical society and the Birr Chapter of the Irish Georgian Society.

Birr has some of the finest examples of Georgian Buildings, some in poor condition, in the Island of Ireland. No doubt these buildings are being audited and monitored on an ongoing basis. Some of the projects that you have included under this section have certainly enhanced the town as a whole and many have come on board since 2016.

The Notables Trail is an excellent addition for both locals and tourists to enjoy and the design and quality of wall plaques is top class.

A few very interesting individuals noted including Kate Dunne Murder Victim in 1886.

It should be a strong contender for this year's Heritage award.

The adjudicator visited all the projects that you have listed and was impressed with the new Pedestrian Bridge, Hoarding promoting pollinator awareness and the lane murals which are something akin what one sees in Belfast City Centre.

Well done to the creative people that came up with these ideas.

The following are a cross section of observations that engaged this adjudicator on the walk about.

Emmet Square has been revitalised by the new development that has taken place over the last few years.

It is far easier to access by foot and the traffic flow has improved immeasurably as a result of the new system.

The newly painted link chain railing at Johns Place/Emmet Square Junction enhances that particular historic area of the town.

The only criticism here is the myriad of signs on both poles takes away a little from the overall appeal.

The appealing street name signs make it easy for visitors to traverse the town in comfort.

Road surfaces are very good in the core area of the town which is a big plus.

The following shop fronts appealed to the adjudicator for their impact and attractiveness.

John Grimes Bar on Connaught Street, The Chestnut on junction of the Green and Rosse Row, Kellys in the same area, The Fighting Cocks on Townsend Street, P Guinans and Jerros on Main Street.

Birr has, like many other busy towns in the country, quite a number of service stations and these were presented to a high standard.

When the adjudicator last took time to walk the town there seemed to be a greater proliferation of garish plastic signs this has dramatically reduced and now signage for the most part has become more attractive and in keeping with the street scape.

The Castle is the big feature of the town and there are some very attractive buildings in its vicinity.

Public, school and ecclesiastical buildings were presented very well and credit to those entrusted with their up keep. Oxmantown National School is an example of a very unique stone building which is still used as an educational establishment.

Derelict properties are known to the committee and some are in the process of being either re furnished or camouflaged.

Overall the standard of presentation and upkeep merits an increase in marks.

Landscaping and Open Spaces / Tírdhreachú agus Spásanna Oscailte:

This category is one the strong points in your application and the works outlined under summary of projects are of an outstanding nature but you also have been helped by the myriad of superb private gardens as well as communal planting arrangements that were seen during the walkabout.

Of course as was stated in last year report Birr is privileged to have the compliment of stately trees that are to be seen in the town especially in areas like Oxmanstown Mall.

The Fairy Island at the Mill Island Town Park is an exceptional piece of collaborative work and so effective

The quality of public planting arrangements at the entrances to the town and at the core areas in the centre was very good.

These for the most part all were well maintained and it looked like many had been recently revitalised.

Grass areas were well maintained and cut in accordance with good practice and well done to you the committee for recognising the work of the Town Gardener in your application.

Individual hanging baskets and window boxes like those on the sills of cottages in Newbridge Street added to the overall colour effect that one encounters on traversing the town and its environs.

The new stone bed at Pair View Terrace populated with ubiquitous annuals such as marigolds and alyssum was admired.

The Quakers Graveyard is an exceptional place and very tranquil.

Congratulations to those involved in this major project as it adds to the towns attractions and recognises the association that Birr had with the Quaker Community.

Note has been taken of the enhancement plan that has been drawn up for Riverside Walk and well done on putting the emphasis on pollinator plants.

Riverside Walk is a haven for all forms of wildlife and on its banks one can view some excellent and colourful back gardens – private one presumes.

Just a few negatives in relation to one or two shrub beds that were little over populated and needed to be thinned and replenished.

Also the adjudicator was a little disappointed with the green area at John Farrell's Field opposite Tesco.

Maybe there are plans within the 3 year plan to upgrade this area and if I missed them apologies.

There was a nice linear bed of low growing roses with attractive contrasting bright stones as a base in front of the well maintained Oliver Douglas Hardware on the Roscrea Road.

Overall the standard was on par with last year.

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

An immense amount of additional work has been undertaken in this category since last year and this has been documented clearly in your submission.

Yes indeed you are fortunate to have such expert people as Dr John Feehan and Fiona Devery on your sub group as it is very important to have proper guidance in this most important of categories. The town environs have so many natural habitats for wildlife preservation and you have exploited these to the fullest by the initiatives that you have put in place. Supporting the National Pollinator plan is the key to good biodiversity management. Interesting initiative at the Costcutters Shop, which the adjudicator visited, shows that wild life habitats are many and varied. Some of the bug hotels were identified during a walk in Camcor and Mill Island Parks and these have become part and parcel of tidy town's submissions over the last number of years. They have become a good way to raise awareness especially amongst the younger generation, You are one of the few tidy towns groups to have a public awareness sub section included in the application so well done on that. Well done also on the ongoing monitoring and recording of specific forms of fauna and flora. Just as an aside it is not quite clear from your application whether you have ongoing wildlife programmes with the schools of the town. You are very fortunate that for a town of the size of Birr you have only a small number invasive species sites and its good to report that growth of Japanese knotweed has reduced after a period of treatment. Overall an increase in marks is merited for the work undertaken since last year.

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

The core of this category is to promote by various ways the need to reduce the production of unnecessary waste at source. Simple but hard concept for many centres to get to grips with. Birr has embraced the category with a certain practicality that the adjudicator has not experienced in other centres given the number of projects submitted. It would not be possible to comment on all the projects that you have outlined but suffice to say they were all noted and their impact acknowledged. Many are replicated in other centre but you have acted on the recommendations of last year's adjudicator by doing the audit suggested. More than a few Junk Kutoure events have been encountered by this adjudicator in other counties over the last few years. But the objective of getting the younger generation involved in whole area of recycling and reusing is what this is all about and for that alone it deserves the recognition it gets. Well done to the those secondary students that achieved success in the Helix Centre and also the adjudicator noted that there is much work being done in schools in this category under the Green Schools programme. A word of caution managing a diverse amount of projects such as you have listed can be laborious, make sure that you have the resources available to you that can sustain everything on an even basis ! You have obtained a high mark in this category over the last few years and this level of achievement has been sustained. Additional information for product ideas can be found on www.localprevention.ie www.greenhomes.ie and www.sustainableprocessing.ie

Tidiness and Litter Control / Slachtmhaireacht agus Rialú Bruscair:

The committee has an immense amount of work going on in this category and it seems to be paying off well. This year's adjudication was done on a week end day and it has to be said that the standard of litter control was very acceptable in the core area of the town. Pockets of litter were observed on Newbridge Street, Moorpak Street High Street Junction and particularly on stretches of the Riverside walk from the lower end of Newbridge Street. The work of Council staff is to be lauded as it takes time and effort to clear the town of week end litter each day. Of course if the message of litter control was getting through to swathes of week end revellers the problem would not be so acute. Despite the extensive anti litter campaigns across the country much of the overall message goes unheeded. The committee would want t to be careful in using forms of social media to highlight misdemeanours of individuals. General shots of dog fouling and indiscriminate littering are fine but keep individuals out of the picture literally! Generally the main streets were free from clutter and obstructive street board signs. The section of the Public Realm plan of 2008 where it addresses the blight of unnecessary signage is now having the desired effect as commented upon elsewhere. Dereliction and unoccupied buildings has been addressed in the Built section but of course impact on the overall tidiness of a village or town. There are a few standout examples of fine Georgian premises that have fallen into disrepair and restoration or part restoration of these could be a costly exercise. Any source of relevant funding should be sourced to give impetus to make improvements to these buildings. The committee is to be lauded for its uses of an unoccupied shop front to publicise its message to the public. Some messy back and side lanes including a few on the Riverside Walk were observed but one is assured that that the owners will be diplomatically approached to make even moderate improvements to their premises. For your endeavours in this category the mark lost last year is restored.

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

The Best Kept Estates competition is the main driver in this category and this can be seen in the practical

improvements since its inception early in 2016.

Birr has a large number of established and newer estates and most were visited during the adjudication process and for the most part all were presented to high standard

The adjudicator was very impressed with the Millbrook Traveller Estate on the N52 in from Roscrea unfortunately one inadvertently missed visiting the site on the Croghan Road which no doubt was up to a high standard of presentation.

Well done the residents having such pride of place mentality an example to all.

Fairview Estate off Pound Street has been enhanced by the excellent stone rockery which has been mentioned in the Landscaping and Open Spaces Section.

Pound Street itself, quite a long road, has some very well maintained long established houses some with pristine gardens, there are a few dissenters who don't have the civic spirit of their neighbours.

These are to be found in every town and village.

As stated in last year's report McCauley Drive is one large area with massive communal green area.

The suggested summer meadow option suggested last year is a viable one if properly planned

Plans are in place to further enhance this estate in 2018.

The standard this year was very much on par with last and plans are in place for further improvements in 2018.

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

The Tullamore Athlone entrance is very well maintained and presented and creates a very favourable impression for any first time visitor to Birr.

One negative is the condition of the unoccupied parcel of land just above the caravan park.

On an adjudication day quite lot of litter was observed inside the wire fencing.

The number of ad hoc signs has been reduced since last year and this is a good development.

The landscape features out near Lidl are unique to Birr and it's good to note that the lime trees have been professional pruned earlier this year.

The Roscrea entrance in by the turn off for Crinkle whilst not as engaging as the aforementioned is also well presented with grass verges maintained to a good standard and new trees beginning to mature.

The majority of both commercial properties such as the busy Applegreen Service Station were well presented and organised.

The roundabout at Tesco Express makes entrance in from Borrisokane and Riverstown more manageable than before as the traffic flow to the town and on to the Roscrea road is accommodated better than before.

The Banagher entrance was also very well presented to a very high standard.

As was mentioned in a previous section the overall quality of road surfaces was very good and the improvement in sections of footpaths in different parts of the town was noted by the adjudicator during the walkabout.

Concluding Remarks:

The revisiting of Birr by this adjudicator was a very pleasant experience and it only encourages one to return for a leisure visit sooner rather than later.

Continue with the good work and as a committee you are wished well for the future years ahead.