

Tidy Towns Competition 2017

Adjudication Report

Centre: **Strokestown** Ref: **715**
County: **Roscommon** Mark: **264**
Category: **B** Date(s): **15/06/2017**

	Maximum Mark	Mark Awarded 2016	Mark Awarded 2017
Community Involvement & Planning	60	35	36
Built Environment and Streetscape	50	36	37
Landscaping and Open Spaces	50	33	34
Wildlife, Habitats and Natural Amenities	50	25	27
Sustainable Waste and Resource Management	50	17	17
Tidiness and Litter Control	90	44	48
Residential Streets & Housing Areas	50	31	32
Approach Roads, Streets & Lanes	50	32	33
TOTAL MARK	450	253	264

Community Involvement & Planning / Rannpháirtíocht an Phobail & Pleanáil:

Welcome to the SuperValu Tidy Towns Competition 2017 and we note that your committee has been engaging with the community for 25 years. We are pleased that you have found it useful in the improvement of your community. Your committee of four people have another six once a week and five more from the men's sheds, GAA etc. The monthly meetings are a great way of keeping your group together. You are in contact with Roscommon County Council and have support from the Community Development Association, Eurospar, Ivy Rose and Sheehans Chemists. Communication systems that you use include Facebook, public meetings, newspaper articles, local notes and the parish church bulletin. The local Foróige club have been involved in clean-ups and painting mornings. Your application form includes several sequences of numbers in each category and on the map. May we suggest that you decide on an overall numbering system that relates to the map and put a legend on the map that would make it easier for the Adjudicator. We suggest that the detail on the two maps be combined into one and make it simpler to follow. Please consider that the adjudicator may not be familiar with Strokestown and the more detail there is on the map, the easier it will be for them. We also suggest that a legend be placed on the map indicating what the numbers represent rather than the adjudicator having to go over and back to the application form. Also, since some estates do not have names, we suggest they be marked on your map. Thank you for including the report on developing a heritage trail but that level of detail is not required by us and will not be assessed. Well done to St. Patrick's Boy's National School for achieving three green flags and we note the submission for their 4th green flag. This is also documentation that we do not need as it is not part of our assessment. The 3-year plan (2016-2019) is a list of various projects under each criterion because it is not possible to achieve everything in one year and we suggest that you now insert targets for achieving these over the next few years.

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

Relevant items listed under this heading include the community playground, picnic tables and seating around the Square, more seating in Church Street and new seating in the Grotto, revamping the area around the weighing scales in Church Street. The other items mentioned will be considered under the relevant criteria below. St. Mary's Primary School looked very well against a background of mature trees and we noted the green flag proudly flying. Beside it, the former church functions as a Heritage & Genealogy Centre and is itself an important part of your heritage. We saw a tree stump near there and suggest it could be made into an interesting art feature. School Mhuire is a lovely new building but the grounds are lacking in tree planting and there is plenty of space for them so we hope it is planned for this winter. The Sports Centre is a large building that needs softening with trees inside the wall and climbing plants outside and they could also be planted at the side of the building by making some pits (if necessary). The water tank nearby is too big to screen with trees; instead, it is another opportunity to do some art feature. The GAA building is nice but the car park needs surfacing and the concrete walls need softening with a

hedge or climbing plants. There is another opportunity to plant trees here and the same comment applies to the soccer club site; the clothes bank is rusty. In Church St. there is some untidiness with an existing business that is not suited for this urban location and in the same area there are problems of dereliction of which you are no doubt aware. To improve matters in this part of the town will be a major challenge and we wish you luck in that regard. Something that could be done in the meantime would be to relocate the recycling banks to a less conspicuous location. Now that the public are familiar with their usage, they no longer need to be so exposed. We suggest you seek another location for them and the associated activities taking place around them. We liked the traditional shopfronts in Elphin Street; it is good that they are surviving even though some shops, such as the old post office are no longer trading. The heritage plaques are well done. At the cemetery, we admired the stone wall boundary; most graves were well maintained. The grounds of Strokestown House and the house itself are a great asset for the town. Percy French Hotel looked very well and is further enhanced with hanging baskets. The Bank of Ireland and the building beside it are two very important structures which greatly enhance Church Street. Our compliments to these and to other traders who do a good job in maintaining their premises. These include J. Beirnes Lounge and Grocery, Hanly's Eurospar, Kennedy's Hay Loft Bar, Cyril McHugh, Dockery Meats, Donal's Hardware and Lounge, Connolly Furniture, the Health Food shop, Jazel Haircare, W. MacAuliffe Pharmacy, Sheehan's Chemist, Mannion's Insurance. Well done on your efforts to improve uninhabited buildings, often times with an artistic flair. We were very impressed with the historical murals on a hoarding around a vacant site on Elphin Street. The artistic work done on the old Magnet Ballroom building is exceptional; we spent considerable time admiring this work which has turned a negative into a positive. We also admired the painted windows on the gables of the 'Treats' building.

Landscaping and Open Spaces / Tírdhreachú agus Spásanna Oscailte:

This section deals with the design and maintenance of trees, shrubs, hedges, perennials and annuals in open spaces and other areas. The main structural elements in the landscape are trees and you have many good examples in the town and fantastic examples in the grounds of Strokestown House. It is surprising therefore that none of the items listed in your application include trees. Perhaps this is because you feel that you are well served with trees and instead need to focus on flowers. We are very impressed with the lime trees on Church Street and Bawn Street. They add great character to the streetscape that will enhance it even more with each passing year. Very few Irish towns have streets that are wide enough for trees and it is great that someone in the past had the foresight to plant these trees when they did. They contribute aesthetically and environmentally to the town and they help to regulate traffic and car parking. In that regard, we suggest that the footpath beside the trees in part of Church Street be continued for the rest of Church Street and Bawn Street with the necessary access points for cars built into the design. This would provide greater protection for the trees and relieve the need to have the circular flower bed around the tree base. In any case, it is not advisable to plant flowers underneath trees where they compete for light, water and nutrients. It would also help to link the attractive street lights which are a highlight with no overhead wires. Elsewhere, we referred to the need for tree planting to enhance buildings or soften an existing hard effect. We admired the work done on the roundabout in the town centre; it adds colour and interest. We liked the well-maintained small park with the grotto opposite a disused commercial building on Bridge Street (N5). Some plant containers are placed on grass and we wonder why when the flowers can be planted directly into the ground where they will require less watering.

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

Well done to the teachers and pupils of St. Patrick's BNS for achieving their 4th green flag and well done to your committee for working with them on increasing awareness of flora and fauna. You are fortunate to have access to the grounds of Strokestown House to explore the range of wildlife habitats. This is a rich natural area in your community and it is important to promote an awareness of its many traits and to map the habitats. Appreciating your local wildlife resources is vital in order to achieve under this category. In this regard researching and raising awareness is more important than 'doing' at the early stages. Biodiversity is under threat globally and sadly Ireland is a part of this trend. Habitats of value include specimen trees, hedgerows, treelines, streams, woodlands and wetlands. List the plants and animals to be found in your natural environment and recognise their significance (native, protected, or alien invasive?). This would be a very useful project for schools. We liked the wildflowers growing on the earth bank near the soccer club site and the river bank. It will be interesting to learn if the bat boxes you placed on the Old Magnet Ballroom will have tenants.

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

Items you listed under this heading include recycling used and unwanted electrical parts, having your own compost bin, acquiring your plants from local sources as much as possible, harvesting rainwater from the school and a private residence, using old pallets in the sensory garden and buying planters, seats and signage that is made from recycled plastic. These are very appropriate actions and our commendations to you in this regard. Other measures that your town can take include the following..... Contact your waste contractors and try to find out what is being thrown away and armed with this information you can start to think about how waste can be reduced. Examine the waste pyramid and note the recycling is only the fourth most preferred option after avoidance, reducing and re-using. One third of our waste is organic in nature, such as grass clippings. You can avoid collecting mown grass by more frequent cutting and using mulching mowers which shred the clippings and facilitate faster decomposition. In regard to water usage, self-watering hanging baskets are a help in reducing the amount of water used and also the task of watering. Other waste minimisation projects might include working with retailers to cut down on packaging, reminding people to re-use shopping bags, discouraging junk mail, encouraging the re-use of water bottles and coffee mugs at school and at work. In response to an over use of chemicals for weed control, many useful products of the past are no longer available and therefore communities are encouraged to use other means such as hoeing to maintain weeds. In some cases, allowing wildflowers to develop is an acceptable alternative.

These activities will highlight the fact that you are focussing on this category and when you develop more projects in the future your marks will increase.

Tidiness and Litter Control / Slachtmhaireacht agus Rialú Bruscair:

The impact of your daily clean-up is quite plain to see as Strokestown has very little litter. The Sli Na Slainte sign outside the Heritage & Genealogy building needs replacing, it is faded. The untidiest part of the town is the area at the recycling banks and we suggested above that they be relocated elsewhere. The single clothes bank at the soccer club looks out of place and it needs painting. Can it be moved closer to some building? The absence of overhead wires in the streetscape is a significant aesthetic improvement. The uncompleted grounds around buildings such as the soccer club look untidy and landscape treatment is the solution. An old pallet was seen lying in the wildflowers there.

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

The Maples estate is getting a new road surface. It looks very well. We saw plenty of trees on the open space and in the gardens. Grass on the open space needed mowing at the time of our visit. The entrance is well planted but the name stone is hidden so some pruning is suggested. Across the road, a newer estate is less well developed. An unnamed estate nearby has a fine open space with some trees. Caslin Way is a nice scheme with some interesting plants. The 'premier' Kildalogue Heights estate has a track record for achievement for various works done; the sign states they were overall winners in the Tidy Estates Competition in 2009, 2013 and 2014. We liked the trees at the entrance and in the background. There is now a need to plant trees on the large open space to replace the existing mature trees at some future date. Many gardens were well planted. Opposite this estate there are four trees which were badly pruned. Shevlin Court is a small estate with a nice entrance. The scheme opposite is well planted. The large entrance of stone piers and railings needs cleaning. The Crescent is a small scheme where some gardens are very well planted but trees would greatly improve the open space. Forge Hill is another small estate- some gardens look well and there is scope for shrubs/hedges to add enhancement. Some weeds at kerbs were noted.

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

We Liked the approach from Tusk. It was very clean, the stone boundary walls looked well and the various properties were well presented. Opposite the stone walls there are timber post and rail fences against which perhaps it is intended to plant a hedge. If that is not the case then we so recommend. We observed plant containers in grass on another approach, something which is unnecessary when planting directly into the ground is possible. Some road sign needs cleaning. The proliferation and arrangement of signs on Elphin Road near Kildalogue Heights estate appears quite cluttered.

Concluding Remarks:

You have achieved a great deal against strong challenges. We admire your commitment and wish you well. We hope that this report provides some useful advice for your future projects.