

Tidy Towns Competition 2017

Adjudication Report

Centre: **Birdhill** Ref: **587**
County: **Tipperary(North)** Mark: **332**
Category: **A** Date(s): **25/06/2017**
06/08/2017

	Maximum Mark	Mark Awarded 2016	Mark Awarded 2017
Community Involvement & Planning	60	48	49
Built Environment and Streetscape	50	41	42
Landscaping and Open Spaces	50	47	48
Wildlife, Habitats and Natural Amenities	50	39	40
Sustainable Waste and Resource Management	50	22	23
Tidiness and Litter Control	90	59	59
Residential Streets & Housing Areas	50	31	31
Approach Roads, Streets & Lanes	50	39	40
TOTAL MARK	450	326	332

Community Involvement & Planning / Rannpháirtíocht an Phobail & Pleanáil:

Thank you, Birdhill, for your completed application form and for the additional information you supplied. The form was extremely clear and we loved that you showed the TidyTowns Boundaries with referenced photos and also the Birdhill Focal Points with referenced photos. Including the three maps – Greater Birdhill Area, Village Centre and Community Park – with numbers referencing the projects undertaken by you was excellent and made it easy to negotiate our way around your very beautiful village. Supplying information clearly and legibly facilitates the process of the adjudication. You are very welcome to the 2017 SuperValu TidyTowns competition.

We see that the population of the village is quite small – 45 – so your description as ‘a small rural village’ is very accurate! So, it is good to read that the hinterland has a population of 300.

We note that Birdhill Tidy Village Committee has increased its membership from last year and now boasts a committee of 17. It is excellent that your work is attracting new members and this together with the 30 volunteers whom you call on is wonderful as it is always advantageous to get as many as possible to volunteer, even if only for a small project which takes a short time to complete.

Being involved with the Men’s Sheds, GAA and other groups is also positive and any involvement with other groups helps to keep them up to date with your activities and you with theirs. All win!

We loved that your Monday work evenings end with a cup of tea and a chat – this social interaction is all part of the TidyTowns ethos. You have approached this competition very logically and your various meetings which target numerous topics result in great work being carried out in a planned and methodical way with no time or effort wasted. Your ‘Gatherings’ – to celebrate, to discuss, for Christmas, for Wellness, for Fundraising and finally for Fun are well documented. And it’s good to see that you are very aware TidyTowns is not all about ‘work’!

Your links with local businesses and their generous assistance to you shows they are committed to helping you advance your work and your communication networks with your community are admirable. The inclusion of your youth in your activities will pay dividends and we loved the ‘Bee Aware’ outfits – what fun!

Your involvement with the TidyTowns competition since 1991 is to be congratulated and we are pleased to read that you have found it worthwhile and that Birdhill’s community spirit and pride has benefited.

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

As you mentioned in your Entry Form your village population is 45 and so in turn your Built Environment is small. The business premises on both sides of the road in the heart of the village are stunning and the owners must be complemented on the way they have presented them. Immaculately painted in colours which complement each other and the well maintained planting troughs and hanging baskets were ablaze with colour and full of butterflies and bees on the day of our visit. The subtle use of signs and lighting are suitable for these buildings which are strong architectural elements in the village. We also liked that parking is off-road and so the presentation of the buildings to the passerby is not obstructed by parked trucks and cars. We loved the gable-fronted Church of Our

Lady of the Wayside with its belfry. The limestone and sandstone detailing is quite beautiful and the interior is stunning. The church with its low walls and grass surround sits perfectly in the rural landscape and adds greatly to the architectural merits of Birdhill. We also much admired the Old Barracks with its beautiful sandstone walls and were very happy to hear that it is being reused again; buildings such as these fall into disrepair quite quickly when not in use. The Co-Op building will hopefully get a new lease of life too, in addition to the Old Post Office building, now that both have been recently sold. But in the meantime, we compliment you on your presentation of these buildings showing that Birdhill Co-op Creamery was 'A key economic & social focal point of the community during the 20th century.' Recording the social history of an area is to be highly commended. This notice, along with the beautifully executed murals, showing a cow being milked and a lady making butter in the kitchen while being watched by a cat, are wonderful records of social history. Dating the Co-op and the presence of the churns outside the building add to the social record.

The Art and Architecture Trail with its 22 entries is informative and highlights aspects of Birdhill which the visitor could easily miss. This is a wonderful initiative and the visitor gets to experience the fine architecture of the village while meandering through the area. Keeva O'Shea's illustrations are beautiful and very accurately observed for a 10-year-old. Well done Keeva.

We noted that the concrete posts (with A.V., H., and S.V.) were painted blue and yellow and we question this decision – items such as these should fade into the background and not be drawn to one's attention so we suggest that green or grey is more suitable. The Local Authority etc. are likely to have these located on their mapping system and so don't need them to stand out.

Landscaping and Open Spaces / Tírdhreachú agus Spásanna Oscailte:

While outside your map area we feel we must comment on Birdhill National School. It was an absolute pleasure to walk around the school and see the great work being done to educate the children – we loved it all! The welcoming entrance gate with its colourful archway, flags flying proudly, including the Green Flag, the colourful exercise yard, the numerous containers with plants, flowers and vegetables, the water butt, the bugs and beetles' area and the bird watch camouflage area. And let's not forget the sculpture of the hurler made from recycled materials proudly standing on the pier near the entrance! And so, when we entered the village and saw the work in Páirc an Éin Fhinn we were very happy to see that the village and surrounding communities also benefited from the work carried out by the local school children. The surrounding communities also benefit as while we were in the Park we met families from the nearby towns of Ballina and Killaloe.

The small display of begonias at the entrance to the Park from the Ballinahinch road were striking - the red flowers against the green leaf – very beautiful. The 'Beeliever' sign and bee made from recycled materials is very clever and will raise awareness of the plight of our bee population. What a stunning Community Park; you have a jewel in your town! There was so much to see in this Community Park that we can understand why you have visitors from the surrounding towns – the Time Capsule installed in November 2016, the large mural, the stunning mosaic of the eagle by Anne Barry and the Youth Club, the colourful nest box (bird house) trail, the map of the park with the names of trees, various information boards (in suitable locations and sized appropriately), the herb garden and herb bags with scissors - 'Herbs for flavour, Help Yourself', the wildflower area, bug hotels, Twiss Corner and Gate celebrating a local family, Gáirdín na bPáistí, the Ogham Garden, the pond, Fairyland, Creepy Crawley Cottage etc. etc. etc. A treasure area for children and adults. We also admired the Fun Trail for Children with various questions/treasure hunts that make for an interactive visit for children to the park – 20 things to see and do and then email the answers to your committee, birdhilltidytowns@gmail.com.

We loved the various trails which you have and you maintain and we agree that these require ongoing attention – but it's worth the work as they are all special. We walked the Woodland Path and Literary Trail and loved the quotes which you selected – they are very suitable for the woodland setting. We admired the notice 'Say it with Flowers' in the relaxing Railway Station garden. The garden was alive with bees and insects and was extremely peaceful.

We also visited one of the Pollagh Trails and see that you have created a variety of walking routes varying in distance from 3kms to 20kms. These are a wonderful initiative as, while locals will know the routes, tourists can now enjoy short or long walks when they visit the area without getting lost!

You have a variety of planting beds in your village – all beautiful. We loved the strong carpet bedding of the astilbes on the beds opposite the Co-Op. We also admired the area around the pump in the centre of the village. The Moon Garden, Harp floral display, Failte display and the beds near the fountain were also greatly admired. The 'picture frame' with a view over the surrounding countryside is a bit of fun – we loved it.

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

We have already spoken of the Community Park but it is necessary to revisit it in this category due to its abundance of habitats in such a small area. The woodland, the pond and the wild grass / flower areas all are special habitats. The information boards in the town park are very very good – particularly the one near the pond with its detailed information with photos. We also much admired the various wildflower areas around your village and butterflies and bees were abundant in every area we saw. The Pollagh Trail with its low-lying meadowland has a great variety of trees along its paths and the birdsong we heard was wonderful. We heard the shrill sounds of a willow warbler or was it a chiffchaff?

We encourage your involvement in the All-Ireland Pollinator Plan and wish you well in the projects you are undertaking. The focus on pollinator friendly flowers and shrubs will be wonderful for the bee population. Single flower tops such as daisies and marigolds are easy for the bees to access pollen. Also, large areas (carpet bedding) of one plant are more attractive to bees so keep this in mind when planting large flowerbeds and large troughs.

Your Biodiversity Plan with its 4 key objectives is a great initiative. We see that you have clearly written and illustrated information panels on the wildflowers, birds, trees and mammals of the Pollaghs – which is a must for

visitors to understand this unique local area. While we walked along the Pollagh Trail we noticed the information panel on Fish of the Kilmastalla River which was also extremely clearly written and illustrated. We see that this area is an SAC – perhaps some information on this could be produced? What makes it an SAC? The Heritage Officer in Tipperary County Council will be able to assist in this.

Having someone local who is an expert on nature is a huge asset and will be of enormous benefit to the group is furthering the Biodiversity and Pollinator Plans.

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

Your comments regarding the Bring Bank at the rear of Coopers were noted and we are very happy to see that you have carried out works which will make them easier to maintain and as a result more presentable and we agree that they are impressive. The concrete base will make it easier to clean and the low timber fence will contain any rubbish which may be left there from time to time. The sign is very clear and we liked that you also informed the public that further recycling facilities are available in Nenagh, Mungret and Scarriff.

Well done on the upgrade of the public lighting system to LED's and also to the installation of the solar lights in the Park, which were admired. The Community Energy Project has certainly been active and presenting your 'Road Show' to other local communities is to be commended. We wish you the best with your presentation at the Environmental Conference in the RDS in September. Feedback to SEAI, EPA etc. on your success and hurdles will assist these government organisations in their future policies.

We see that the Community Allotments are now a Wild Area as part of your pollinator plan and that residents grow their vegetables in their own gardens. We loved the idea of the barter system at the Harvest Celebration! Many communities have now undertaken to provide a Community Composter and we are happy to see that you too are successful and that the local community are involved in this.

Your involvement with Love Food Hate Waste is admirable as too is your commitment to reduce water consumption by the installation of water butts and the use of mulch and grow grids in your flower planters and beds. The idea of perennial shrubs and flowers is excellent but we caution you on alchemilla it tends to spread and take over.

We loved your book exchange in the old telephone box. And also the Hitching Post.... we hope it's successful as it's a great idea. Car sharing is something we should encourage in rural Ireland where busses are quite infrequent.

Tidiness and Litter Control / Slachtmhaireacht agus Rialú Bruscair:

We noted your Litter Management Plan and see also that your Spring Clean Week in April was effective where you focused on a different area each day. Getting residents and businesses on board with the litter patrols and clean-up is excellent and will prove to be very successful. We were absolutely thrilled to hear that you have a 'no posters in Birdhill' policy as they are a blight in so many towns and villages. We suggest that should you wish to contain poster displays, a community notice board, painted black, (say 2.4M x 1.2M) be erected on the main entrances to the village where events can be advertised and removed when they are finished, permitting local clubs and organisers only to advertise on these display boards. The benefit of these is that information is disseminated and litter is prevented ... just an idea for discussion amongst your committee. We have seen these erected in other towns by the local authority. Tipperary County Council area engineer or environmental department might advise on the possibility of this.

The village was extremely tidy when we visited and while it is no longer on the main Dublin Limerick road, there is still traffic driving through the village and passing traffic is not always as litter conscious as we would like. Are there plans for the Community Garden at the back of the Old Barracks? This area was locked so we couldn't get in but truthfully it seems to be very neglected. There was some dog fouling near the community library – unfortunately some dog owners ignore their responsibility to clean up after their pets. We didn't see any dog waste bins or bag dispensers – are there any? Your flower and shrub beds were weed free which takes a lot of work but the results are worth it with the flowers and shrub beds displayed to perfection.

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

We agree – roads surfaces are poor in some locations and we note that you have made representation to the County Council regarding repairs. Hopefully you will have success as edge break up and indeed potholes are unpleasant for any community.

We loved the way the Youth Club members painted the bees, butterflies and flowers on the brown timber fence near the Community Park entrance. The boundary fence of the house is now a bit of fun and the artwork apt for the location. There are some wonderfully maintained houses and gardens in Birdhill. Many houses were freshly painted and boundary walls and gates in good repair. Gardens were packed with colourful shrubs and flowers and here, as in the public flower and shrub beds, bees and other insects were to be seen and heard. The topography of some of the gardens added to their displays and the owners took full advantage with carefully placed rockeries, paths and steps. Your expansion of the Resident's Garden Competition to include a photography of a garden feature is interesting and will, we are sure, be a success. We look forward to seeing the outcome in next year's TidyTowns entry.

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

As mentioned above some of the approach roads are in poor condition however the R494 link road to the M7 is in excellent condition as too is the R445 through the village. As Birdhill has been bypassed we were able to go back and forth across the 'main' road, something we couldn't do the last time we visited due to the enormous amount of fast flowing traffic using the road, so it was a pleasure seeing your village in these new circumstances. The wide margins – a relic of when it was the N7 – now give great width to your village and we greatly admired your use of them, with the neatly mown grass, trees and the variety of planting beds with carefully selected bedding plants and shrubs. Your signage, displaying your TidyTowns and Entente Florale Europe accolades are very suitable. Your

2007 win of a Gold Medal in Entente Florale Europe was a wonderful achievement for your village. We loved the granite seat which displays some of your awards you'll have to add 2016! The use of vintage agricultural machinery on the Birdhill Roundabout is very apt as it reflects the rural tradition of the area. The road markings in the centre of the village on the main road and side roads are beginning to fade, so this might also be a job for the Local Authority when they are repairing the roads. The absence of overhead street wiring was noticeable and advantageous to the aesthetics of the village and approaches. While you are a small village we see that your boundaries are quite large and compliment you on your efforts in maintaining these approach roads to your village.

Concluding Remarks:

Birdhill is a very special place and it was extremely enjoyable visiting your village and seeing the various projects which you undertook this year. Supplying information clearly and legibly facilitates the process of the adjudication and your well completed form with maps, photos, and succinct text made it a pleasure to adjudicate your village. We also enjoyed listening to the harpist when we popped into one of the public houses/restaurants. You have a wonderful vibrant community and we look forward to a return visit in the years ahead to see its progress. Thank you for entering the SuperValu Tidy Towns 2017 competition.

Second Round Adjudication:

Having regularly driven through Birdhill in pre-bypass days, this was our first time to stop and truly sample the many delights that your stunning village has to offer. It was obvious from our walkabout as well as from entry form that years of hard work and forward thinking have brought Birdhill to where it is today. It is not surprising that Tidy Towns is at the centre of life in Birdhill. We would like to congratulate Birdhill Tidy Village on your many recent achievements and for reaching the top level in this competition.

Our first impressions of the village were excellent - a sign of what was to come. We approached from the Nenagh road. Displays of farm machinery often don't work in our opinion but here it looks fresh and inviting. Neat narrow grass verges give a cared-for impression, while leaving back verges uncut gives the impression that you are biodiversity-conscious. The village was immaculate with no litter observed during our visit of the village and approach roads. A good balance of trees, hedge planting, flowers and shrubs makes for a visually pleasing landscape. The fresh murals at the old creamery co-op make for an attractive feature. Perhaps two nearby black gates could be painted to align to your high standard? Well done to the proprietors of both Cooper's and Matt the Threshers for such a high standard of presentation. The attractive colour schemes are complimented by vibrant flower displays. It is welcoming to hear that the adjacent historical building is being used to some extent. It looks well. Is the 'Community Garden' a work in progress? Landscaping is used to excellent effect such as at the green area near Coopers. We admired the unusual bird sculpture here, to tie in with the symbol on the impressive 'Welcome' stone on approach. We enjoyed a walk along the inspiring Literary Trail, which is also a haven for birds and other wildlife. The Railway Station is presented to an excellent standard as is the lovely Railway Garden. You have put a lot of effort into developing and promoting local walks such as the Pollagh Trail. We were delighted to see that there were leaflets readily available in the boxes and an informative sign to give us our bearings. The Limerick Road is very impressive with high banks, clearly delineated wildflower area and water feature - all leading to the simple but elegant church. Here we observed attractive stone flower beds to give year round colour and interest.

One of the highlights was our visit to the outstanding Community Park, which has something of interest for all ages. It was wonderful to see that it is so interactive and child-friendly, based on the fantastic input from the pupils of Birdhill N.S. The scissors along with cooking suggestions and storage envelope was a particular favourite! Well done to all involved.

The bottle banks were in excellent order with good information signage provided. We loved the novel 'hitching post' and would be very interested to hear of any uptake on this. Either way it is a fantastic way to raise awareness of the need to car pool and cut down on carbon emissions. Other initiatives under the SWRM category are also commended. The phone box works very well as an information kiosk and book exchange. We noted the new photo 'frame' - our first time seeing something like this outdoors so curious as to what the interest will be. The school and community centre at the far end of the community are well maintained. We feel it would be worth clearly highlighting these sites on your map for inclusion in your adjudication area as they are an integral part of the community and give your application more scope. It is not necessary to include the area between here and Cleary's Cross unless you wish to do so. We noticed the worthwhile Orchard project opposite the school. Homes were presented to a high standard with some impressive garden displays and roadside flower displays.

You continue your excellent work with enthusiasm and an organised approach. It is wonderful to see the whole community rowing in behind you to make Birdhill the beautiful village it is today. Well done Birdhill - you are an excellent role model across all categories. We wish you well with future projects.