

Tidy Towns Competition 2019

Adjudication Report

Centre: Birdhill - Cnocán an Éin Fhinn	Ref: 587
County: Tipperary(North)	Mark: 339
Category: A	Date(s): 09/06/2019 31/07/2019

	Maximum Mark	Mark Awarded 2018	Mark Awarded 2019
Community – Your Planning and Involvement	60	50	51
Streetscape & Public Places	60	42	43
Green Spaces and Landscaping	60	48	48
Nature and Biodiversity in your Locality	50	40	40
Sustainability – Doing more with less	50	23	24
Tidiness and Litter Control	90	60	61
Residential Streets & Housing Areas	50	31	31
Approach Roads, Streets & Lanes	50	41	41
TOTAL MARK	470	335	339

Community – Your Planning and Involvement / An Pobal - Pleanáil agus Rannpháirtíocht:

Cuireann an moltóir fáilte roimh Birdhill (Cnocán an Éin Fhinn) pairt a ghlacadh i gComórtas Náisiúnta na mBailte Slachtmhara 2019.

Given that you have a population of 40 and a broader community of 250 it is all the more impressive that Birdhill Tidy Village Committee has performed so well in the Supervalu Tidy Towns competition. Thank you for your comprehensive entry form. In last year's adjudicator's report, a suggestion was made that the writing was too small. Your response was "a visit to Specsavers". This adjudicator does not need spectacles and would make a request that the tiny print on maps be increased in size. Your entry form runs to 81 pages. This adjudicator found that size to be difficult to handle, particularly during rain.

Your committee of 21 is excellent considering the size of your population and adjacent community. The 25 volunteers are also applauded. The frequency of your meetings is productive. Your "Welcome Pack" for new residents is clearly a good initiative. Your sub-committees worked on a wide range of issues. Congratulations for being invited to participate in the Bloom Competition in Canada. Well done to all involved. Thank you for your comments on last year's report. Your Development Plan, list of things to do in Birdhill, etc. have been read. The agencies that support you include Tipperary County Council, Tony Ryan Fund, Leader, Iarnród Éireann, Mulcair Credit Union, Supervalu, Applegreen, Matt the Thresher, The Coopers, Barista Coffee Academy, The Coffee Roastery, PPN Tipperary, Church and school. Your channels of communication range from traditional print media to social media, Whatsapp, e-mail, parish newsletter, etc.

You engage well with your local school. Well done on setting up a Junior Tidy Towns Committee with elected officials. In identifying a specific project where particular effort was applied, you choose the autism friendly play area. It was included in last year's report. We note you also include the Commemoration Seat and the new sub-committee on IT. Birdhill Tidy Village Committee has been in this competition since 1991. This is our 61st competition. No doubt you will be competing in our competition for another 61 years. You summarise very well the contribution Tidy Towns is making to your community – "for the sake of the little village".

Streetscape & Public Places / Sráid-Dreach & Áiteanna Poiblí:

The new seat marking Birdhill's achievement in reaching National Winner of the Supervalu Tidy Towns competition in 2017 is eye-catching. As befits it, the new seat is in the centre of the village. It is very modern and provides a perfect link between what Birdhill provided based on the past and the projects it will develop to become a National Winner in the future. It has 2 additional pieces on the base beside it – a figure sweeping and another with buckets i.e. Tidy Towns volunteers/CES. It's QR code on the Arts/Architecture Trail is 25. Well done to Donnacha Cahill, sculptor and the committee that had confidence in him. QR codes were also seen on the Arts and Architecture Trail e.g. number 1 – 1916 sculpture, number 23 on old village pump.

Well done on getting a new footpath from the village to the Community Garden. The autism friendly play area was dealt with in last year's adjudicators report. The gardens are covered in the Green Spaces category. The Co-Op building looks well. Clearing the site is unfortunate that it could not be done during the winter. The new use for the Old Barracks was included in last year's report. The church and school were visited. The church is neat and tidy, and the car park was clean. There is no sign at the crossroads with its name. The school is well presented. Although the plaque says Birdhill National School 1891 it is very modern. It is nicely painted and has well filled flower boxes on its windowsills. Under its name it has a motto "soar like an eagle". It also has its name on a colourful arch on the pillars of the gate.

A green flag is flying but it has lots more than that your entry form tells us. The school received its 5th green flag last year. Instead of large flags, some schools now use smaller pennants or coloured plaques which are attached to the school wall beside the door. It also has an all-weather ball court, bird table and, not to be outdone by the new seat sculpture in the centre of the village, it has a modern sculpture of a hurler on a gate pillar. Well done to all in Birdhill National School – pupils and staff. The abandoned house with its rusty sheds is an unfortunate eyesore. Its gardens are very overgrown. The Birdhill achievement seat was admired as were the Tidy Towns and Entrante Florale plaques. The village pump in its attractive stone alcove has its QR code – 2. The fountain at the bus stop, its attractive flower beds and stonework were also admired.

Green Spaces and Landscaping / Spásanna Glasa agus Tírdhreachú:

You replaced faded roses with alternatives. If each Tidy Towns entrant did the same and wanted this to be accepted as a new project instead of maintenance the competition would go into chaos. Project 10 will take years, you tell us. A project must be completed before it can be adjudicated. This adjudicator was looking forward to seeing and photographing the attractions that have made the Community Garden a "must see" occasion. A plaque tells me that it was opened in 2003. Last year's adjudicator welcomed last year's project – the Autism Friendly Village. Added to it was another painting to mark the pollinator area. It was done by the pupils in Birdhill National School. There is great creativity in the park. A "lean-to" with murals sets the tone at the entrance.

Other attractions include Twiss's Corner, 2 composters, the Fairy Avenue was colourful with gifts on trees for the fairies, wildflower area, Creepy Crawly Cottage and a large information board. Intermittent showers kept numbers down. The Community Orchard is thriving. Although well outside the boundary for Tidy Towns, it was adjudicated because it is at the same junction as the school. The orchard is in line with the size of Birdhill – compact.

In this category item 5 has an (M). On page 30 in the Sustainability category it has an (N). This is not the only example of the same item being used twice. The apples are from Irish apple trees e.g. from Sligo it is Irish Peach, Longford – Brown Crofton. Some trees had small apples.

Nature and Biodiversity in your Locality / An Dúlra agus an Bhithéagsúlacht i do cheantar:

You planned to complete an Eco Trail in the Pollaghs in May. This adjudicator did take a brochure and walked the Pollaghs as far as point 15 and a gate across the trail. There was no sign of an eco-trail. Due to rain there were few others using it. Please include this project in next year's entry form. Projects are adjudicated only when they are completed. Both of your plans were read – Appendix 6 – Biodiversity and Appendix 7 – Pollinator Plan. You mention you will be planting according to Action 1 of the All Ireland Pollinator Plan 2015-2020 and also Action 4 and 12 of that plan. A more up to date plan is the Pollinator Friendly Planting Code. It gives lists of plants but also location types – dry, shady, damp, etc. and seasonality. It is available on www.pollinators.ie.

This adjudicator thought that this category would be the one in which to refer to the trimming of roadside hedges. In Approach Roads you mention that "roadside hedges trimmed and maintained". On page 70 Birdhill Tidy Towns Pollinator Plan you say, "most hedges were cut last winter and will be cut again in 3 years' time". Your Action Plan (page 53) lists under annual tasks "trim hedges on road adjacent to house".

In next year's entry form perhaps, you would clarify your position on trimming hedges. You mention that the school children carried out a bird survey. What was its outcome? Perhaps you would give details in next year's entry form. Was the survey carried out starting on 1st June 2018 and ending in 31st May 2019 or was it done in this year? Your entry form says "this year" i.e. calendar year or Tidy Towns year? Well done to those who carried out the Bumble Bee Survey. It made interesting reading. By coincidence, we can add to the survey methodology. A new pollination monitoring scheme has been launched called Flower Insect Timed Counts (FIT counts). Its aim is to measure insect visitation rates to flowers. It involves individual/group watching a 50*50cm patch of flowers for 10 minutes (April – Sept) and counting how many insects visit – www.pollinators.ie/record-pollinators/fit-count.

This will be useful for those who have already done pollinator friendly planting and want to know which is the most friendly. Your members lost 1 beehive. Other Tidy Towns groups have had beehives stolen – bees and the hive. Keep them out of sight. You mention Albert Nolan giving 2 talks in this category. He also gave one in the next category – Project 24. Invasive species are the province of invasivespeciesireland.ie. No doubt you have their blessing to be eradicating your Japanese Knotweed. No doubt Albert Nolan dealt with both topics in this category to everyone's satisfaction.

Noted that you let some light on to the pond. Well done on removing daffodils in favour of wildflowers. It seems unusual to have a garden competition that asks for a photo of some place else. Clipping trees, switching flowers and substituting an image of bog cotton for a garden are not projects. Two of the above are maintenance.

Sustainability – Doing more with less / Inmharthanacht - Mórán ar an mbeagán:

Your entry form tells us about your use of coffee grounds, compostable cups, reducing single use plastic, etc. This adjudicator will take this opportunity to gently remind Birdhill Tidy Village Committee that this category has evolved in keeping with current waste prevention and best practice guidelines. Prevention of waste is still at the top of the

pyramid of priorities for this category. Energy projects are important, and we encourage your Tidy Village Committee to continue with the Energy Communities Tipperary Co-operative and wish you success in your applications to the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland. However, the overall priority of this category is waste prevention, not alone of energy, but of food, water transport, etc. Please supply quantities of the food that you produce and how much waste is prevented.

Your committee is active in growing and exchanging but we need to know what result these activities have on waste entering the village and the community i.e. prevent waste in the first place rather than have recipients for use of the surplus. The use of water butts is encouraged. It was good to read that you had a workshop on reducing food waste and single use plastic. The photo that you included on Albert Nolan giving that talk shows only 14 people, one of which may have been Albert Nolan. Is that the usual turnout to his talks? He gave 2 other talks under the Nature and Biodiversity category.

Tidiness and Litter Control / Slachtmhaireacht agus Rialú Bruscair:

There are no new projects in this category. Your Litter Management Plan has been read. We note that you have changed your Annual Spring Clean to a Spring Clean Week. It would be helpful if you would tell us the outcome of your Spring Clean and litter patrols i.e. quantify the amounts collected. Other Tidy Towns entrants tell us if amounts collected are increasing/decreasing.

An Taisce's National Spring Clean is taken by many as the start of the Tidy Towns season. New this year is a "Leave no trace Tidy Towns award" by Leave no Trace Ireland. We note that your litter patrols increase to daily from May to October from twice weekly for the rest of the year. A colourful poster promotes the use of Birdhill Bring Bank and the need to recycle. The area is enclosed by a neat, clean wooden fence. Six plastic bottle bins and 1 metal clothes container are also clean. The cement environs of the enclosure are spotless. Well filled flower containers add to the Birdhill Bring Bank. Well done to all users.

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

You have no new projects in this category. The May newsletter on your website was noted and your recommendations to householders were noted. The photo competition among residents, mentioned in your entry form, is a good initiative. In the village, and in the wider community, efforts are made to project residences at their best. The road problems belong in another category.

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

On the approach on the Dublin Road the Birdhill roundabout makes a good impact. The sign is clean, the grass is neatly cut, old agricultural machinery has been freshly painted in red and the road has been swept. Closer to the village is a large brown and white sign with all of Birdhill's achievements in the Supervalu Tidy Towns competition on it. Also, on the wide verge is a large harp which is very simply, but effectively, made. It lies on a gravel bed. A nice touch. The Birdhill roundabout has the same impact on those coming from Killaloe.

The road from Newport is narrow with a standard black and white bi-lingual sign. However, it stands in high grass and is only partially legible. The O'Brien's Bridge approach is narrow and lumpy. The black and white bi-lingual village sign is clean, and it stands in a wooden raised flowerbed. The bed could have been planted more generously. The entry form has projects in this category which belong in others.

Concluding Remarks:

It was a pleasure adjudicating Birdhill. We look forward to receiving your entry form next year.

Second Round Adjudication:

I was delighted to visit Birdhill again as I hadn't visited in many years. It was a real pleasure to explore your village. I concur with the positive comments and feedback of the first adjudicator. I just have some suggestions that I hope will help your work going forward. I agree that the map could be improved by increasing the size (my eyesight is excellent!). Rather than including the landmarks and boundaries maps, you could include a larger map of the 'greater Birdhill Area' with current projects marked and a closer-in version of the village centre. I would recommend trying to be more concise in the application next year, some sections were way too long e.g. 'the gatherings'.

The autism-friendly zone in the park is a great idea. Did you get advice from an autism-specialist or someone with autism when designing this area? I wondered what informed your design. The Park is a really lovely amenity for the community and was being used by a family when I visited. I would encourage you to avoid any further signage in the Park as it appeared a little cluttered to me e.g. you only need one sign saying 'managed for wildlife'. Also please avoid nailing signs to trees as this can damage the tree. I noted that most of the bird boxes weren't nailed to the trees (well done!) but the ties need to be loosened as the trees expand in girth. A few trees were being strangled. The pruned beech trees near the pond don't look too happy but hopefully they will recover.

The floral displays in the village centre (along the main road, near the bus stop, on approach roads etc.) are very colourful and striking. You might consider updating your planting schemes by reducing the reliance on summer bedding (in baskets, planters and beds) and increasing the amount of permanent planting with flowering perennials and shrubs, preferably including some pollinator-friendly plants. It might also be an idea to come up with a colour-palette for the village to avoid clashing colours. I really liked the stone planters at the church and the mix of plants. There is a huge amount of maintenance work in the Green Spaces and Landscaping category and more permanent planting would be more sustainable in the long run.

I don't recommend 'guerrilla gardening' spreading seed of 'wildflowers' along the approach roads! It would be better to adopt a 'don't mow let it grow' approach as recommended in the pollinator plan guidance for local communities, which will enable to existing, native wildflowers to thrive. The approach roads to the village are very well-maintained

but you could expand the area of grass that is unmown as a habitat for pollinators. As a community, you have made huge progress in the Sustainability category, well done to all.