

# Tidy Towns Competition 2019

## ***Adjudication Report***

Centre: <b>Aughrim - Eachroim</b>	Ref: <b>257</b>		
County: <b>Wicklow</b>	Mark: <b>334</b>		
Category: <b>C</b>	Date(s): <b>08/07/2019</b>		
	<b>25/07/2019</b>		
	<b>Maximum Mark</b>	<b>Mark Awarded 2018</b>	<b>Mark Awarded 2019</b>
Community – Your Planning and Involvement	60	45	46
Streetscape & Public Places	60	44	45
Green Spaces and Landscaping	60	46	47
Nature and Biodiversity in your Locality	50	31	32
Sustainability – Doing more with less	50	21	22
Tidiness and Litter Control	90	67	68
Residential Streets & Housing Areas	50	34	34
Approach Roads, Streets & Lanes	50	39	40
<b>TOTAL MARK</b>	<b>470</b>	<b>327</b>	<b>334</b>

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

Cuireann an moltóir seo fáilte roimh Aughrim - Eachroim páirt a ghlaicadh i gComórtas Náisiúnta SuperValu na mBailte Slachtmhara 2019. Your long experience at a high level in this completion and indeed your history as champions of 2007 are evident in your organisation and involvement within the larger Aughrim community. This was clear on the ground on adjudication day with evidence right through the village of past and current TidyTowns projects. Well done on all your hard work through the last year and indeed all that of your predecessors going back many years. Your concise submission is appreciated but let me make a small suggestion: it would be helpful in future submissions for the sake of clarity if you change the font or perhaps italicise your answers/responses in the form – this will make your words (and therefore your work) stand out to the adjudicator. We often have to read your forms in difficult situations – in cars, out in the rain etc. so clarity is always great from the adjudicators' perspective – with all your hard work, we don't want to miss any details. Again for the sake of clarity, it would be most helpful if all your mapping information was contained on just one page. I understand you need space to write the legend so perhaps in future print your map on an A3 size sheet. Your liaising with the schools both the local National School in Aughrim and with the local secondary school in Arklow on the new mural is to be congratulated. Working with the school's Green Flag committee is of terrific benefit to both Aughrim TidyTowns and the N.S. alike. Well done in particular to the 'Saturday Sack Fillers' – we hope you are really proud of yourselves for doing such wonderful work to protect the environment of your beautiful home place in Aughrim.

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

Aughrim is beautiful and distinctive – its moniker of 'The Granite Village' is well-earned and clearly demonstrated throughout from its bridges to walls to fencing to kerbstones not to mention many of its charming buildings. On adjudication day, one prominent business in the village centre was being painted while another sadly needed a lick of paint to highlight its many Irish vernacular architectural features. Perhaps it might be worth approaching Wicklow County Council about reviving some of the old paint funding schemes for revitalising town and village centres? Aughrim is such a pretty village but with a small enough central area that it would be worth pursuing sprucing it up where possible. All your public spaces were very well presented with many small areas of interest to stimulate the walker and visitor. It is obvious that these areas are being well cared for and maintained over the years – a great achievement in itself without even thinking of new projects! The NDAF was being very well used by lots of people on adjudication day making good use of the new benches and picnic table.

### **Green Spaces and Landscaping / Spásanna Glasá agus Tírdhreachú:**

You have a lot of green spaces to look after in Aughrim with a wonderful 'green corridor' flowing right through with the river and its banks. You have made the most of this with a series of green spaces along the river from the Sean

Linehan Walk to the Rathdrum road bridge, the Mason's Well and on down to the Aughrim River itself. The work at the entrance area to the Sean Linehan Walk is well done with a great emphasis on the lovely granite stone. There was also great stonework to be seen at the Church of Ireland church boundary walls – well done on this project -such an important part of Aughrim's heritage. The small Masons Well park opposite the school is a little treasure. This adjudicator was delighted to see both a Kingfisher and two trout at the river an adjudication day! It struck me that there is potential to have a lovely sloping wildflower meadow here cutting down on some of your extensive grass mowing work! There is no need for sowing seeds, just alter your grass mowing regime: the grass here could be managed as a hay meadow would be, getting its first cut in late June/early July and then a second final cut in September. A couple of paths could then be regularly mown through the meadow to entice the walker or encourage some hide and seek for younger visitors! In this way no wildflowers would need to be sown, they will appear of their own accord and the beauty of swaying grass seedheads could be admired too. Aughrim features lots of small planted, landscaped areas as well as many planters. It was disappointing to see that many areas and planters featured plants with no pollinator value. Many of Ireland's pollinator species (bumble bees, solitary bees, hoverflies etc.) populations are in crisis. According to National Biodiversity Data Centre figures our bumblebee numbers have dropped by 17% since 2012 alone. Some of the reasons appear to be a lack of food (i.e. pollen) and lack of nesting habitat (grassy areas at the bases of hedges or walls) as well as indirect poisoning through widespread herbicide use. We in TidyTowns can do a huge amount to help all across Ireland by making a few changes to our gardening and landscaping habits. Firstly, we need to plant a range of plants that will provide lots of different types of pollen thus providing a healthy varied diet for the pollinators. Unfortunately, few of the annual plants (e.g. Petunias, Lobelias or Pelargoniums) do this because either they have been hybridised to a state of little pollen or their double flowers mean the insects cannot physically access the pollen. However, many, many herbaceous and shrubby perennials have lots of good pollen and the NBDC have produced an excellent really helpful guide on what plants to pick for where in their 'Pollinator Planting Code' which is freely available at [www.pollinators.ie/resources](http://www.pollinators.ie/resources) Many of the plants used in planters and baskets around Aughrim this year were annuals of limited value to pollinators. At this high level of the competition, Aughrim needs to be working on having as many pollinator-friendly plants as possible in its public planting schemes and the above mentioned Planting Code will have lots of guidance for you. The other thing all of us can do is to make sure to leave grassy margins at the bases of walls and hedges. You are doing lots of this in Aughrim which is great and TidyTowns committees can use this knowledge to inform businesses and residents to do the same in their gardens and premises. This is why we encourage communities who have grassy strips at the base of hedgerows on access roads to leave an unmown strip next to the hedge or wall. This was seen to lovely effect particularly on the Rathdrum road into Aughrim on adjudication day. It doesn't take much to be rewarded with the hum of happy pollinators which this adjudicator noted on the lawn all around the Sacred Heart Church which was covered in wildflowers - several bumble and honey bees were noted to be very appreciative! Not mowing too frequently is another good practice as this lets the small wildflowers bloom and most importantly set seed. Aughrim already has a terrific bowling green but the rest of the grassy lawn areas don't need to be cut as short. The 'Don't mow, let it grow' slogan has caught on all over Ireland. It is especially notable in spring when the dandelions are left to flower in lawns – they are a hugely important food source for queen bees emerging from their winter hibernation often providing their only food source when no other flowers are yet in bloom.

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

You are blessed in Aughrim with your two beautiful walks called after two great friends of Aughrim: Jim's Way and Sean Linehan Walk. Both of these walks are steeped in biodiversity providing peaceful refuge for both resident and visitor alike. It's wonderful to hear how the Sean Linehan walk is used as an outdoor classroom by Aughrim N.S.'s pupils. As mentioned above this adjudicator saw both the elusive kingfisher and two trout in the river across the road from the school – both signature species of a healthy river ecosystem. Well done to Aughrim N.S. pupils and teachers who have a long list of various scientific events, many with a biodiversity slant. The pupils must be so knowledgeable and it sounds like they regularly get to enjoy and appreciate their beautiful surroundings. The Bug hotel competition is a great way of highlighting biodiversity and nature in your locality and the various different examples of bug hotels were noted around the village – they could nearly form their own new trail around Aughrim! It's also great to hear how Aughrim's youngest little pupils in the Montessori school are learning about their environment too – lots of future Aughrim TidyTowns members in the making! A lovely bank of wildflowers was noted to the left of the steps going down to the angling lake. Following the old hay meadow mowing regime of first cut in July and second, final cut in September is a great way to manage sloping areas of grass that are hard to mow. There is no need to sow seed or disturb the soil – the wildflowers will come in of their own accord, giving beautiful, worthwhile results for very little effort. This is also applicable at the entrance to the Sean Linehan walk – follow the same hay meadow management regime and there is no need to worry about sowing wildflower seeds here – there more than enough wildflowers in the area to send in their seed of their own accord! On another positive note: is Aughrim aware that it is one of only 11 towns in the county that hosts nesting Swifts? These beautiful birds are sadly in decline but we can do lots to help them. Birdwatch Ireland and the Heritage Office of Wicklow County Council are working together and would love input from your community. They are providing a most informative booklet 'Saving Swifts' which can be downloaded at [www.wicklow.ie](http://www.wicklow.ie) or a hard copy can be requested from the Wicklow Heritage Officer at 0404 20100. Please note for future projects that more marks are obtainable in this category in the future with a focus on pollinator-friendly planting throughout the village to compliment and support the native biodiversity of this beautiful part of Wicklow.

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

You have achieved a great amount in this category with your ongoing work on the Thrift shop. This must be a great hub for your group. Unfortunately, it was closed on adjudication day but we had a peek in the window! Delighted to hear of your active Town and Country Market – these markets are at the heart of rural Ireland and deserve our fulsome support – they were the original, local and sustainable producers after all! Well done on your initiative to

write to all the local businesses. Creating awareness in your locality is an important function for TidyTowns groups. For a village Aughrim has impressive recycling facilities which bigger population centres than yourselves would do well to follow suit. Details of the Easter art camp were very interesting – I never saw old milk cartons looking so good! Last summer highlighted to all of us in Ireland how precious a resource our water is, so well done on your several water saving initiatives. This is another reason for pushing the pollinator-friendly, herbaceous perennials as they don't need as much watering as the thirsty annual plants – this is something to think about for your future summer basket and pot planting schemes.

### **Tidiness and Litter Control / Slachtmhairéacht agus Rialú Bruscair:**

Aughrim was lovely and tidy on adjudication day. Well done here on your ongoing maintenance work in keeping your village tidy as your beautiful old and distinctive village welcome signs say (great to see these being so well looked after too). Congratulations on your Spring Clean and the wonderful Saturday Sack Fillers – hopefully their hard work will inspire others to volunteer with you and others to stop littering in the first place!

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

Aughrim features several small housing estates. All are very well kept and maintained. Your support of the various residents associations is invaluable and no doubt further fostering more great Aughrim community spirit and hopefully more willing volunteers to help with all your hard work through the years.

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

The new mural is terrific, making a striking entrance to the village and hinting at the highlights ahead for the visitor. Well done on this project brightening up this gateway to Aughrim. The Rathdrum road also features lovely, grass verges with a neat, mown, road-side edge and wildflower rich banks behind. While the colourful flowers on the Tinnakilly Bridge were pretty, unfortunately these annual begonias and lobelias are of no use to pollinators and will need replacing every year. It would be great for next year's competition to see perennial, pollinator friendly plants colouring up the bridge adding colour for the human visitors and food for our beleaguered pollinators. See the Pollinator Planting Code mentioned above for lots of inspiration.

### **Concluding Remarks:**

A visit to Aughrim is always a pleasure and it is great to see the TidyTowns group here going from strength to strength fostering and harnessing the clearly strong community spirit.

### **Second Round Adjudication:**

It was lovely to once again have the privilege of adjudicating Aughrim in the Second Round of a competition in which Aughrim has led the field. Congratulations on another amazing year of Tidy Towns activity in lovely Aughrim. Arriving in from the Arklow direction, the adjudicator was delighted to see so much of the streetscape exactly as it was last seen and indeed as seen so many times hitherto. On that note, it is worth considering that as amazing an achievement as it is to win the competition, it is no less remarkable to be able to maintain this standard for well over a decade thereafter. On the ground, Aughrim is proof that this can be done and done so well that it was difficult indeed to find flaws with the presentation of this most lovely of Wicklow's towns.

Some of the projects that you report in your entry are truly extraordinary. It is one of the great joys of adjudicating in this competition that every year, without fail, an entrant will put forward a project that you could never have thought of and indeed, that perhaps no one else has! The ongoing communication of the national school with the R.V. Polarstern is one such. Fantastic stuff and it has given the author some renewed hope for the future. Your entry describes a number of initiatives that benefit not only the immediate environment of Aughrim but also your community as a whole and also visitors to your town. It was good to read of the benefits to newcomers to your community and cementing their place in your ongoing work.

On the ground, Aughrim was a pleasure to assess. Just about every space was filled with decorative planting. The First Round Adjudicator's comments are seconded here. The planting - while lovely - is of little or no use to the pollinators which we wish to conserve. The first round suggestions are good ones. Brown trout were also seen on this visit, adjacent the 'ogham' stone to the memory of the Herr teachers. This last hadn't been seen before by this adjudicator and it was lovely to see, here opposite the old Schoolhouse. The national school looked as good as ever with its ceramic plaques. The Church was very neat but the adjudicator couldn't help but feel that the grounds here are a missed opportunity in terms of plants for pollinators under a regime as described above.

All of the commercial premises looked well on the day. Both of the Byrne's shops were really well kept and presented. Both Lawless' and The Meath Arms looked great, although the adjudicator (in earlier years knew the latter as Phelan's). On the opposite corner to the last, there is an unoccupied premises - was this also a Phelan's premises in bygone times? On another opposite corner, Pescegrande must be one of the best-kept outlets of its kind in the country. On the evening of adjudication, it was popular with (it appeared) both visitor and resident alike. Congratulations to Anne's launderette for an excellent presentation.

There are a few items for your attention. The signage at the library is getting faded and should be replaced soon. There might be two dead trees at the front of Croghan View estate (opposite Byrne's). Watch out for faded signage on bins. The car-park at Lawless' should be kept free of cut vegetation, while it is acknowledged that this may only be temporary storage.

The First Round Adjudicator's suggestions on wildlife-friendly management of the grassland at your riverside areas are reinforced here - there is ample space for this. One of the two benches near the Herr memorial is in need of a touch up. Upstream, at the other green area, the removal of a kerbing stone would make the access to the side of this little park much easier. Your way-marked walks are a great addition but there are enough signs at the start of the Sean Linehan Walk, if not too many. Is the 'Deep Water' sign necessary here? This adjudicator wasn't sure of how the fallow grassland field was being managed for wildlife. There was a remarkably high standard of presentation of cottage, house and housing estate. Well done to all.

In summary it was so good to be back in Aughrim. The efforts that you go to in order to keep the town looking this good are acknowledged here. The comments and marks of the First Round Adjudicator are endorsed here.