

Tidy Towns Competition 2019

Adjudication Report

Centre: **Wicklow - Cill Mhantáin** Ref: **244**
County: **Wicklow** Mark: **336**
Category: **E** Date(s): **16/06/2019**
26/07/2019

	Maximum Mark	Mark Awarded 2018	Mark Awarded 2019
Community – Your Planning and Involvement	60	46	49
Streetscape & Public Places	60	47	48
Green Spaces and Landscaping	60	44	45
Nature and Biodiversity in your Locality	50	35	37
Sustainability – Doing more with less	50	19	21
Tidiness and Litter Control	90	60	62
Residential Streets & Housing Areas	50	37	38
Approach Roads, Streets & Lanes	50	35	36
TOTAL MARK	470	323	336

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

Cuireann an moltóir seo fáilte roimh Wicklow – Cill Mhantáin páirt a ghlacadh i gComórtas Náisiúnta SuperValu na mBailte Slachtmhara 2019. Wonderful news to see how some of Wicklow's newest residents have joined Wicklow TidyTown's ranks. There are benefits all round as the group gains more volunteers and Wicklow's asylum seekers are getting to know their new neighbours and locality. Similarly, your 'adopt-a-patch' project is a great idea for keeping local involvement even for people who don't have the time to commit weekly - well done on this initiative. Your liaising with Sunbeam House is also commended as another great idea. TidyTown's is all about communities working together to improve the quality of life for both residents and visitors alike and Wicklow TidyTown's are clearly doing a great job at that! Your work is also clearly appreciated by all the local businesses as can be seen by the extensive list who have financially contributed this year. The donation of 5000 crocus bulbs is great to see as not only will their colourful display give joy to the human population of Wicklow, these pollinator-friendly bulbs will also benefit Wicklow's all-important pollinator species. Liaising with schools is getting harder and harder as the school calendar is so full that the teachers don't have enough time to devote to local community projects. This is a shame, so keep up your communications with the local schools and hopefully more projects will come to fruition in the future.

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

The mural project in the SuperValu car park is fantastic! It is educational, informative and an attractive splash of colour in what could be a drab carpark. The working-together of different groups to bring this project to life is a great example of strong community life at its best. My only qualm about the mural is that when the car park is busy the paintings can't be properly seen! That said, though, the mural's presence in this busy SuperValu car park means that the mural is visible to a large amount of visitors and residents and that can only be good! Unfortunately, derelict house and shop buildings are problematic in many, many Irish towns and villages at the moment. Wicklow TidyTown's work to improve the look of several of them here is great and makes a huge difference to the streetscape. Also well done on your ESB pole work - it looks like the work you have done has stirred up the ESB to carry out the maintenance that is needed with your seaside location. The archaeological study of Black Castle is fascinating. It is wonderful that you have recognised as a group that the presence of such monuments is a characteristic to be valued as a 'U.S.P.' - a unique selling point for Wicklow amongst all its other attractions! Make sure to make the most of this archaeological study – ensure it gets disseminated for Wicklow's residents and visitors. It is something that will capture the imagination of many children in particular giving them an exciting connection with the past history of their native town. A visit was made to the Greenhills viewing point and the views are absolutely breath-taking. Is there an opportunity here for a future notice board project – naming the features of the view perhaps? The split levels of The Mall is a beautiful characteristic of Wicklow town's main street and it is beautifully kept with the lovely granite stonework and the black and gold painted metal fencing. Some

improvements, however, could be made with the planting along here adding to both its colour and biodiversity value - see the section on nature and biodiversity below for guidance. We are aware of your public stance on election posters and this would appear to have been very successful. You are part of a much larger group of people across the country who highlighted the issue during this year's election – TidyTowns leading the way again!

Green Spaces and Landscaping / Spásanna Glasa agus Tírdhreachú:

Your orchard garden project is to be commended. With all the pollinator-friendly species you are making the most of an area that was completely unusable prior to this. Its location beside the pedestrian bridge in the middle of the town is ideal. Projects such as these can be used to further educate the public about the importance of biodiversity in our everyday lives. Your flower beds and planters all around the town were noted. Most feature perennial plants which is great as they cut down on labour, costs and watering compared to many annuals. However, it is a shame that many of the perennials either don't flower or have short flowering season such as the sedges and grasses in front of the Dominican Convent and at Barrow Green. In towns especially, these planted areas represent an opportunity to provide food for our beleaguered pollinator species who are dying due to a lack of food (pollen) and a lack of diversity of pollen types. Hybrid annuals such as Pelargoniums and big double-flowered plants such as Begonias are not of any use to pollinators as they either don't have any pollen or the bees and hoverflies can't physically access the pollen through all the petals! Therefore, plants such as herbaceous perennials provide food in the form of pollen-rich, long lasting flowers such as Astrantias, perennial geraniums, perennial daisies etc. Take a look at the Pollinator Planting Code freely available at: www.pollinators.ie/resources and use it to inform your planting decisions into the future and maximize the benefit both for the passing human and the passing pollinator.

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

The Parish Abbey Grounds are a beautiful oasis in the centre of the town - how lucky Wicklow is to have them! Despite many, many previous visits to Wicklow Town by this adjudicator, we are sorry to say we have never visited the grounds before - not realising they were there. There is tremendous potential here for outdoor classrooms and community biodiversity events such as: bat walks; wildflower walks and butterfly hunts - all sorts! There is definitely scope here for leaving some areas unmown in order to let wildflower meadows develop naturally while mowing paths through to entice and invite the walker. There's also room for a few picnic tables or just benches to sit and enjoy the peace of this lovely place. We were delighted to see lots of patches of nettles left to grow – these are the food plant for five different Irish butterfly species. There is also plenty of potential here to provide biodiversity education for the visitor. Take a look at www.pollinators.ie/resources for lots of ideas including informative posters. What about the possibility of a Community Orchard in here? Lots of potential community projects while still maintaining the site's peaceful oasis function in the centre of a busy town. The planting of crocuses in the grass along Bachelors Walk is a wonderful addition. With the right management, these crocuses will last for a very long time. Did you know that the crocus lawn in nearby Kilmacurragh Gardens is 300 years old?! It is great that you got to attend the Conference in Trim in February 2019 and clearly you learnt a lot there. Nowadays there is a huge amount of information freely available so make sure to use it. In Ireland, www.pollinators.ie is a fantastic website featuring really helpful resources aimed at community groups such as yourselves. Most especially, make sure to download a copy of the Pollinator Planting Code which contains very helpful information for Wicklow in particular on plants that can withstand salty breezes. With the hilly nature of Wicklow town, I noticed that there are several sloped grassy areas, many of these would be ideal pollinator habitats whether that be leaving grassy edges at the base of walls or hedges or another beneficial habitat for solitary and miner bees is to scrape away a small area of vegetation on a sunny bank and leave the soil bare for these hard-working pollinators to make their nests. The planting in the small flower beds in the New Orchard area is wonderful with lovely seaside plants such as thrift and sea holly - really well suited to this spot. The additional planting of different herbs at the bases of the fruit trees is a lovely touch. As mentioned above, there is terrific potential to create a 'wildlife corridor' of sorts along the main street at The Mall. You have made a start here already with the long bed at the base of the Lime and Plane trees but it is not very diverse and needs more species and more colours to be of extra benefit to pollinators. The above mentioned Pollinator Planting Code will have lots of suggestions for this bed which is slightly shaded. On another positive note: is Wicklow town 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 or a hard copy can be requested from the Wicklow Heritage Officer at 0404 20100.

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

Your persistence and determination on the sustainable energy community project is very admirable. Well done on keeping this up and keeping the project in the public eye. We very much look forward to seeing the fruits of this group's labour on into the future. No doubt it will be of huge benefit to both residents and visitors alike. The summer of 2018 was very challenging for all groups around the country when it came to watering. Good to see that you have not been using treated water, hopefully your water containers installed in 2017 will provide enough water most of the time. This is where planting comes into its own as the long established perennial plants are better able to withstand drought than the annuals - so this is another argument to use pollinator friendly perennials wherever you can. Perhaps there is scope to extend your water container project - maybe it would be worth approaching some of the larger businesses in town who have lots of gutters and would be willing to install some water butts to harvest the rainwater? Keep up your good work on reducing the number of single use plastic bags and spread the word - this is great example for others. It is good to see that you acknowledge the plant pot problem – another reason to use perennials! Your work on recycling daffodil bulbs is very innovative, a great idea worth spreading to others. Your acknowledgement of daffodils as not being pollinator-friendly is noted. Their beauty and cheeriness in

early spring cannot be denied but unfortunately they don't produce enough pollen food for our hungry pollinators – snowdrops, muscari and crocus, however, are great pollen producers so turn to them for future projects. Your use of recycled topsoil is interesting - perhaps its fertility can be augmented through use of your own compost or perhaps with your seaside location some seaweed fertilizer? Comfrey and nettle are also plants which make excellent cheap concentrated plant food.

Tidiness and Litter Control / Slachtmhaireacht agus Rialú Bruscair:

Your work with regard to the bottle banks in the town is highly commendable. This sort of problem is occurring all over Ireland and is very disappointing - keep up the pressure on the authorities as it is the only way forward. You have been doing ongoing fantastic work in cleaning up of litter as your pictures amply demonstrate. This kind of work can be very demoralizing but be safe in the knowledge that you are making a huge difference!

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

Your work with the Hill View estate over the last year is exactly what Tidy Towns is all about: getting people to work together for the benefit of all. A visit to the Hill View estate left me struck by how grey the top half of the estate appears in contrast to the lower half of the estate which has a nice green area with a thriving hedgerow. Perhaps there is scope for a community planting project here as we all subconsciously know that more green in our everyday lives improves the quality of life for all. A lot of work has been done on litter pick ups in the area, perhaps a planting project might foster more community involvement and help with these.

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

This adjudicator visits Wicklow town regularly and several times has noted extensive, unnecessary use of herbicide at the edges of the town on the Dunbur road, near the small car park at the Wicklow Golf Club and also across the road at the edge of a housing estate. We realise this is not the action of Wicklow Tidy Towns but it is a negative thing for your town on several fronts – most noticeably making an ugly entrance to your beautiful town from this side but most importantly it is incompatible with all the wonderful efforts you are making in behalf of biodiversity and especially pollinator species as herbicides are poisonous to other forms of life – not just 'weeds'. Overuse of herbicide is an acknowledged cause of the loss of many pollinators. In a town such as Wicklow its use is only necessary for the occasional patches of Japanese Knotweed and this must only be done by professionals. Grass verges are very important nesting habitats for many of our Bumble bee species – the queens need north-facing verges to hibernate in over the winter and south-facing to make their nests in in the summer. Whilst this is not an action of Wicklow Tidy Towns perhaps it is an example of where the Wicklow Tidy Towns group can use their knowledge of biodiversity and pollinators to inform those who have used the spray and hopefully this unnecessary use won't happen again – please let next year's adjudicator know how you got on with this matter. It is noted how proactive you are in keeping up communications with Wicklow County Council when it comes to the condition of your approach roads. Well done on this, it's not easy with all the changes taking place due to the increase in building activity.

Concluding Remarks:

Wicklow town is beautifully situated between the sea and the hills with a wealth of wonderful vernacular Irish architecture spanning several centuries and a proud marine heritage. All of these riches are well complimented by a strong community spirit with many volunteers giving back to the place they love and enhancing it for all. Keep up your great work, this adjudicator looks forward to many return visits to Wicklow in the future.

Second Round Adjudication:

It has been a while but the adjudicator was delighted to have the opportunity to visit Wicklow Town for the second round of the Tidy Towns Competition. Many congratulations to Wicklow Tidy Towns for their submission this year. This was a significant piece of work and effort that you put into this and it is acknowledged here. A particular mention of the background information - on both Wicklow town and Wicklow's Tidy Towns group - is warranted. This gave some very interesting and useful context for the rest of the adjudication; so thank you. Most significantly, your entry made it clear that you have formed solid contacts within your community, from businesses to the newest residents of Wicklow Town. The Town Team is a really useful model for progressing the development of communities.

On the ground, various pieces of work that your entry had described and illustrated were easy to find. Thank you for the great map, by the way. As did the First Round Adjudicator, the author will begin with the beautiful and informative mural in the Supervalu Car-park - wow! Well done to all involved with this. Perhaps this adjudicator's favourite area though, is Bachelor's Walk. The gorgeous and thoughtfully planted beds here - along with the natural beauty of the river - were a highlight of the visit. This delightful thoroughfare is book-ended by bridges that have also benefited from your care. A little further and there is the splendidly presented tavern, adjacent a beautifully painted bookshop and the fine streetscape beyond. Some bold paintwork was a stand-out memory of the visit, from Hopkins' splendid contribution to the streetscape to the Brass Fox and even the nearby Hearty Hut.

A really enjoyable bike-ride took in the very clean pier and its murals, the South Quay that featured some Banksy-esque graffiti and an early-doors gym. Going out the approach roads, there was an opportunity to see your Tidy Towns signage, roadside planting and roses. Wicklow wasn't litter-free on the day and indeed there was a little blackspot that has been overlooked at the front of the Gaelscoil. Not all the lampposts have benefited from your attentions and bus-stop poles also cry out for help. In front of your Municipal District office, the information board

was mystifyingly askew and devoid of any information. The building itself though was splendidly bedecked with flowers. Nearby, a bollard has been clipped off and another lamppost is badly rusted. A number of items at the top of Castle Street need attention too. The wonderful garden adjacent the Gaol was a splendid consolation for these drawbacks. Indeed these were quickly forgotten on visiting the castle grounds and the neat and litter-free parkland here. Dog litter scoops were on offer in a spotless dispenser.

Great work done so far, Wicklow Tidy Towns, and your ambitions will take you even further. This adjudicator is happy to endorse the increase in points recommended in the first round. You may yet need that sign extension.