

Tidy Towns Competition 2021

Adjudication Report

Centre:	Westport - Cathair na Mart	Ref:	366
County:	Mayo	Mark:	351
Category:	E	Date(s):	14/08/2021 03/09/2021

	Maximum Mark	Mark Awarded 2021
Community – Your Planning and Involvement	60	52
Streetscape & Public Places	60	48
Green Spaces and Landscaping	60	48
Nature and Biodiversity in your Locality	50	39
Sustainability – Doing more with less	50	24
Tidiness and Litter Control	90	62
Residential Streets & Housing Areas	50	33
Approach Roads, Streets & Lanes	50	45
TOTAL MARK	470	351

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

Fáilte Chuig Comórtas na mBailte Slachtmhara SuperValu 2021. Táimid buíoch daoibh as ucht na hiontrála a chur chugainn. Go raibh maith agaibh as ucht bhur dtacaíocht le linn na paindéime. Lean leis an dea-obair.

Welcome to the 2021 SuperValu TidyTowns competition. Thank you for your entry and for your commitment to your place in these difficult times. Keep up the great work.

Thank you for your application which is very clear and well laid out and also includes lots of photographs to illustrate all the hard work that you are undertaking. Although the application is still quite long at 92 pages long, we understand that with the level of work that you carry out it is difficult to not mention all of these.

The value of the work that you do is evidenced by the impressive array of organisations, businesses, sports clubs etc that you enjoy the support of. Westport is one of the heavy hitters in the competition and the impressive list of awards that you mention in your application form is far too long to include here, with many more to come I'm sure. The fact that you feel that your involvement in the competition has contributed to Westport being a hugely popular tourist destination shows the power of what can be achieved when a community works together, and not only improves the visual appeal of a town but can also make a strong contribution to your economy and employment opportunities. It is also great to hear that you are conscious of the benefits of being inclusive to all of the residents in the town.

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

Westport is well known for its vibrant facades and colourful cafes and shops. The photographs you have supplied show how this tradition is being continued and that there are new and fresh facades coming on stream all the time. One thing to be cautious of is that there is a fine line between being vibrant and being gaudy, Westport is definitely on the right side of this, however it was noted previously by an adjudicator that there were some shops that had a lot of merchandise located outside the shop on the street, which may attract some buyers but can also be a hazard for those who may have mobility issues and also for prams and buggy's etc. and it not possible to tell if this is still an issue from a virtual visit, however it is noted that you are currently addressing this and working with West Mayo Municipal District to reduce the number of sandwich boards cluttering the town.

The work that you have accomplished on the Fair Green period dwelling is impressive and sensitively done and I am sure greatly enhance the visual amenity of the area as well as helping preserve our heritage. On the newer side of the spectrum, the upgrade and extension works on the Wyatt hotel have also been handled well and blend in seamlessly with the existing streetscape.

The restoration work to the stately Westport House is a major (and costly) project but one that will ensure that

Westport House stands tall and proud for many generations to come. Well done on your work on derelict buildings, unfortunately this is an issue that many towns and villages throughout the country have to deal with, and although ideally these would be completely refurbished and reoccupied you are doing great work in minimising the negative visual impact they can have on the town and it is good to hear that the number of derelict houses is being reduced. The work at Roman Island appears to be very well executed and is I am sure greatly appreciated by all the hardy sea swimmers, as well as those that decide to take life at a more leisurely pace and picnic instead, with a stunning vista of Croagh Patrick as a backdrop. You have some exciting new projects planned such as the proposed new Civic Offices as well as the Regional Coast Guard Station and we very much look forward to seeing these in the future.

Green Spaces and Landscaping / Spásanna Glasa agus Tírdhreachú:

Westport is a veritable feast for the eyes with its vibrant planting, flowers, hanging baskets and shrubs to be found throughout the town, and these are maintained to the highest of standards. You have mentioned in previous applications about your commitment to ensuring the use of pollinator friendly plants to attract and sustain our butterflies and bees and it is great to see that you continue to build on this to ensure biodiversity as well as a riot of colour. The planting at both key areas of the town, the Octagon and the the Clock are absolutely splendid and enhance the bustling streetscape. The Edible Landscape Project is a fantastic project to encourage the planting of edible trees, shrubs and perennials and to help create awareness of the impact of food miles and encourage people to grow their own food and buy local and make the connection between what they eat and the link to their carbon footprint, and well done to the students of Rice College and SHS School for the Food Security Workshop, and the grafting workshop to teach people how to graft and plant in their own garden. The Community Composter is also a great facility to transform their food waste into compost for their garden.

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

It is fantastic see that you are working in partnership with the Leave No Trace Ireland and are working with them on several projects.

The Rosbeg Estuary Project is a lovely project and it is great to hear that the nature talks were so well attended and that there was such interest in these. Thanks for extending your pollinator policy to your residential housing estates and by continuing this work by planting wild flower areas.

There are so many projects that you are working on in this category that it is impossible to name them all, but they include the Hotel Westport Bee friendly garden, the Westport Quay no mow policy as well as the 200 Oak Trees project which I thought particularly charming and hopefully will result in an additional 200 Oak trees in the future, it would be great to have some updates on how these are doing. Other initiatives include the Clew Bay Wildlife Festival, the wildflower meadow at Upper Quay, zero carbon grass cutting using a traditional scythe where feasible.

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

The Smarter Travel National Pilot, to link residential areas with greenways (70% to date) to encourage people to cycle and walk rather than take the car is a great way to make sure this can be done in a safe and sustainable manner

Best of luck with your plans to reconnect the existing water pumps for people to use and well done to those businesses that are doing their bit to reduce the number of plastic single use bottles by offering free water refills for those with reusable bottles, and also with your Leave No Trace Programme on educating dog walkers on safety and dog fouling. It is fantastic to see your business community embracing sustainability so wholeheartedly which includes hotels, restaurants, as well as your local post office. The use of the Railway Hotel as a way to embrace different festivals such as Halloween and Christmas is a nice way to turn what could be an eyesore into a visual feast and centre of attention.

Other projects include the Westport Eco-Congregation, their linking Earth Hour with a guided meditation sounds like a very special event and a nice way for people to disconnect from the business of our lives and reconnect with nature and our environment. Congratulations to all your schools on their Green Flag achievements and given the work done in this area by so many schools it is a nice idea to highlight one particular school Rice College which has so many initiatives, too many to mention here, but I particularly like the "One Tree per student" idea, and the plan to develop a pond on the grounds of the college to capture carbon and use as a teaching tool.

Tidiness and Litter Control / Slachtmhaireacht agus Rialú Bruscair:

You take litter very seriously in Westport, with an excess of 7500 volunteer hours in total dedicated to the town it is no wonder that visitors have commented on how clean your streets are, which definitely gives a great impression to the many visitors that you get to your lovely town. It appears to be "all hands on deck", not only during the busy summer months, but 52 weeks of the year with volunteers from sports clubs and regular street sweeping and cleaning by West Mayo Municipal District, as well as monitoring by traffic wardens of litter bins to ensure that these are not overflowing. Other initiatives include your new solar bins, the work done by your local Men's Shed group in refurbishing street furniture, as well as educational campaign to reduce the incidence of dog fouling and cigarette butts, assisting businesses to paint their premises and tackling illegal signage, well done on all the work you do in this area.

It is a lovely idea to make a bit of a social occasion of the Christmas clean-up by having a cup of tea and mince pies sponsored by SuperValu once all the hard work is done. The photographs that you have included in your application show that this cleaning also includes the river with some intrepid CE workers litter picking in waders, fair play to you

and these workers and also all involved with the coastal clean up.

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

The Residential Areas Competition is a great way to generate a bit of healthy competition between your 25 residential areas and ensure each neighbourhood is looking its best, as well as to raise awareness of new initiatives and new ways of thinking such as the move away from overly manicured lawns and gardens to a 'wilder' approach such as wild flower meadows in order to encourage biodiversity and attract the bees and butterflies. To this end you have introduced a 'Best Pollinator Garden' and 'Wildlife Pond' category.

The Clew Bay Garden Trail is a wonderful idea, and even the names that you have listed in the trail sound so intriguing, such as the Orchard Cottage, Western Herbs and Veg, and Speckled Meadow, and surely entices locals and visitors alike to take a look. The Tober Hill social housing scheme looks very smart, and it is great that it is linked to the urban greenway network, and well done to those involved in obtaining a LAMA award

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

The new Greenway link through Horkans Hill with a new natural stone wall looks very smart as well as being very sympathetic to its setting. Also, the upgrade works at the Sandy Hill - Leenane Road link are very attractive and would give a very good impression to those passing by. The new forest walk at Westport House sounds delightful, and the plans to develop the woods at Knockranny into a 'NeighbourWood' in partnership with Coillte sounds like it will bring a new lease of life to an under utilised amenity. We look forward to seeing your proposed work at Market Land and Brewery Lane which includes the repainting of buildings, many of which are vacant as well as resurfacing the lane.

Concluding Remarks:

It is always a pleasure to visit Westport, albeit virtually this time. You are doing fantastic work and it looks as though the whole town is united in working together for the good of your community, and although there is a huge amount of work being done, you also know how to have fun and make a lot of your cleaning and tidying into a social occasion which must surely help contribute to the successes you have had in the competition to date, long may it continue.

Second Round Adjudication:

It is always a pleasure to visit Westport and given the prolonged lockdowns and travel restrictions of the past 18 months, we were particularly pleased with the opportunity to return to your lovely town and see the wonderful work of your committee, volunteers and others once again. You'll be delighted to hear that Westport looked exceptionally well during our visit on a bright September day.

Westport is fortunate to have a wonderful range of built environment heritage features and buildings and it is great to see that the appreciation for this is demonstrated in the strong conservation focus of your work over the last two years. We loved to see Grove House on the Fair Green being given a new lease of life and it is heartening to see that the works included the restoration of the interior as well as the exterior of this wonderful building. The extension and refurbishment of the Hyatt Hotel is warmly welcomed as it provides a very positive contribution to the centre of your lovely town. The ongoing restoration of the exterior of the Holy Trinity Church is appreciated and it is not surprising to see that excitement surrounds the restoration works of the magnificent Westport House. Noting that this is a five year project, we look forward to following the progress of these works in the years ahead. We also intend to keep an eye on the development of the new Civic Offices and housing scheme for senior citizens at the old convent site – as this future project is another exciting scheme focused on regeneration and heritage. Well done for concentrating on derelict buildings by repainting and revamping them and we applaud the work of local businesses who despite enduring the toughest of years, have worked exceptionally hard (with your committees help) to ensure that their (normal) high standards of presentation have been maintained. While it is not possible to mention all of the good examples that we seen during our visit, a number were particularly eye catching. Wyatts looked fabulous and the Pantry and Corkscrew, Hobans, Kellys and An File around the Octagon all stood out. Nearby, the traditional designs of Blousers and Westport Travel were appreciated while McGloughlins and Irish Apothecary were similarly impressive. Elsewhere, the Post Office is a very well presented historical building while Tobys on Mill Street drew positive attention. We would like to compliment the many business owners for developing appealing outdoor seating areas as they add a great vibrancy to your town centre. While they are many good examples of this, the seating areas at the Octogan and the Clock caught our eye and we loved the outdoor hospitality spaces provided at the Tucker Bag Café (on James Street), Krems and Cians (of Bridge Street). We were also delighted to see that there have been some high quality additions to your town over the past two years such as the new Westport United football grounds and clubhouse and the Tober Hill mixed use scheme.

Strong praise is warranted for your committee and the West Mayo municipal district council gardeners for embracing the all Ireland pollinator plan in your planting and maintenance programmes. This is demonstrated by your review of the species used in your permanent beds, planters and baskets to ensure that both perennials and pollinator friendly planting schemes are used extensively. We are pleased to report that your revamped schemes looked exceptionally well. The schemes at the Octogan central monument looked fabulous with their abundant colours and diversity of plant species. The eye catching beds at the entrance to Horkans Hill also impressed while the smaller scheme on Bridge Street was appreciated. The use of the areas adjacent to the greenway for pollinator and tree planting is applauded and we urge you to keep this up. Noting your emphasis on pollinator friendly varieties, we would be most interested to see a list of the main plant species used in your schemes next year. An estimate of the proportion of pollinator friendly plants that you have used would also be welcome. We are very pleased to see that you have made a decision to reduce the number of areas where grass is regularly trimmed and we would like to hear what

proportion of the 45 acres will be left uncut. The edible landscape project is a fantastic initiative to encourage large-scale landowners to practice edible landscape principles and while we are enthused to find out that progress is being made, could you tell us how many large landowners are participating? We enjoyed a stroll along the forest walk in the grounds of Westport House - this is a lovely amenity so close to the town centre. Noting the amount of trimmed grass here, we wondered if a 'don't mow, let it grow approach' could also be considered on a portion of the grounds?

The range and quality of the nature and biodiversity projects in your application form is second to none and your appointment of a biodiversity officer seems to be paying dividends. While it is not possible to review all of the projects presented under this short section of the report, a number stood out. The analysis undertaken on large insect hotels is illuminating and its findings (i.e. that they are not helpful to pollinators) are of interest to all tidy towns groups. Keep doing the research and reflecting on your approach as we need to find the most effective ways of enhancing biodiversity! The sustainable hanging baskets initiative is also commended and we look forward to seeing what number will be rolled out in the years ahead. Don't forget to include details of the watering requirements of the plants that you use in them. The collaborations with volunteers to undertake a range of nature and biodiversity projects such as creating pollinator beds along the Greenway, a pollinator friendly library garden and a wildflower garden along the Newport Road are applauded. The importance of these projects is underlined by the findings of your survey of the Newport road wildflower garden which demonstrated that this area has a high amenity value and that it makes a significant contribution to biodiversity. The pollinator garden competition is similarly impressive. A logical next step would be to map your population areas to spot gaps which you could focus on. The potential of developing either a series of pollination zones or a continuous pollination corridor along the Greenway could also be explored. The Rice college wildlife pond deserves praise and we urge them to complete a survey of it once it is established. The awareness raising activities such as the bat walk and the Rosbeg estuary project are both considered to be great initiatives.

Your application form reveals that the drive to make Westport a more sustainable town and community is gathering pace! We very much enjoyed our spin on the Greenway during our visit and it is no surprise to learn that it is changing transport behaviour in your town. We are interested to read that 70% of residential areas are now connected to greenways and we wondered if a survey has been done to see how transport behaviour has been affected by these extensive connections? Is one planned? The commitment of local businesses to this category is striking and we were delighted to see that they are engaged in so many good initiatives. The schools also deserve praise for their work on projects under this category and it is heartening to read that their efforts have earned them green flags in the Green Schools programme. The strategy for decarbonising Westport by 2030 is similarly impressive and we are looking forward to seeing its implementation in the years ahead so be sure to keep us fully informed. We enjoyed visiting the community composter (which is made up of old pallets) at the Quay community centre and we were pleased to see that so many members of the local community subscribe to it – it is also considered to be a great location for this facility.

The results of your comprehensive litter patrols and cleanups in the town centre and on approach roads could clearly be seen during our visit as a high standard of litter control was visible. This appears to be aided by your organised approach (by using rotas and allocating areas) that encourages participation from volunteers, residents and schoolchildren. You are commended on continuing to take action to ensure that sandwich boards are not blocking or impeding footpaths in your town. Given the expansion of outdoor seating areas and the need for additional space for pedestrians (to comply with social distancing requirements), your urban space needs to be used very effectively - this means that the use of sandwich boards on pavements is highly questionable. While the standard of tidiness was considered to be high, a small number of improvements are possible. The harbour area is a lovely spot but the seating, bins (both for litter and dog waste) and signage around the Quay will need some attention in time for the 2022 competition.

Like the first round adjudicator, we think that the residential areas competition for pollinators is a great idea of raising awareness and encouraging communities to take action. Thank you for the results and we would love to know what percentage (of the total number of residential areas) are participating in it? We were not surprised to see that the new social housing scheme at Tober Hill has won a range of awards. This is a lovely mixed use scheme with its contemporary design, urban density, mix of dwelling types (houses and apartments) and a very clever use of the levels of the site. The new landscaped beds, signage, natural stone boundary wall and pavement on Horkans Hill looked exceptionally well and well done also on the improvements to the Leenane Road. The addition of an attractive new amenity area (with seating) at Roman Island is warmly welcomed. The future projects under this category are acknowledged and we look forward to seeing these get underway in the years ahead.

There is a lot of appreciation for the excellent work that the committee, volunteers, residents, businesses and a host of others have undertaken in Westport since 2019. Notwithstanding the high standards that you set yourselves from year to year, we were delighted to find that you continued to work hard and make progress despite the very difficult circumstances created by the Pandemic. Well done again and we look forward to returning to your lovely town in 2022.