

Tidy Towns Competition 2024

Adjudication Report

Centre: **Westport - Cathair na Mart** Ref: **366**
County: **Mayo** Mark: **385**
Category: **E** Date(s): **18/06/2024**
27/07/2024

	Maximum Mark	Mark Awarded 2023	Mark Awarded 2024
Community – Your Planning and Involvement	80	55	57
Streetscape & Public Places	80	52	54
Green Spaces and Landscaping	80	50	51
Nature and Biodiversity in your Locality	55	43	45
Sustainability – Doing more with less	55	27	28
Tidiness and Litter Control	90	64	65
Residential Streets & Housing Areas	55	35	36
Approach Roads, Streets & Lanes	55	48	49
TOTAL MARK	550	374	385

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

Fáilte Chuig Comórtas na mBailte Slachtmhara Super Valu 2024. Táimid buíoch daoibh as ucht na hiontrála a chur chugainn agus guimíd gach rath ar bhúr gcuid oibre amach anseo. Lean leis an dea-obair! Thank you for participating in Ireland's longest-running environmental project and helping to make Ireland a better place. We really do appreciate all the great work that you do and the effort you put in, year on year.

Thanks to all your team for the huge amount of work that so obviously went into your entry this year. We are aware that putting together a submission like this takes a lot of time and effort and this is acknowledged here. Just to get the first bit of critique out of the way, your entry is still very sizeable while we do note that it is a good deal shorter than some Westport entries of yore. Do please try and constrain this further. Our key rationale is that really significant work may be overlooked within the mass and not therefore get the credit it is due. Moving on...

This is a very well laid-out and presented piece of work although it is felt that your plan could be more detailed and specific to some of the projects you describe in your entry. Thank you for using colour-coding and numbering to help the reader keep track. Your entry is abundantly illustrated with photographs of your volunteers and partners hard at work for Westport. We extend our congratulations to Elsie on her award. You have given a great account of your projects and efforts across the year. It is really good to see that social inclusivity is so high on your agenda. Every community group must make what efforts they can to make sure that we include in our ideals and endeavours everyone who calls Ireland their home. You also ensure that young people are represented, with a seat on your committee and activities specifically for them, very good. Your communication is excellent and we are impressed by the level of organisation of your voluntary team. We acknowledge here the support given by so many organisations, including local businesses to the work of Westport Tidy Towns.

The specific project that you have identified for particular effort this year is the Ecosystem Recovery Project. This is surely an important and worthwhile initiative that will be long-term in nature and scope. We applaud the great achievements of this project to date, such as the very many trees planted and wish you well with the project as it progresses.

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

The convent site is a very substantial area and it is exciting to see that it will have a new lease of life soon. Westport will have a new civic centre and hub that will be of huge benefit to your community. It wasn't clear from your entry whether or how your group may have contributed to the Masterplan but doubtless you did. A new project for you this year is the upgrading of shopfronts and this is abundantly clear to any visitor. We saw evidence of

facelifts on a number of premises including Supervalu and Blousers. Indeed, most of your shopfronts were up to their unusual standard, which in Westport is knocking it out of the park! We can't list them all here but just some examples were McGing's, Moran's, The Bike Shop, An File, Wyatt's, Hoban's, O'Brien's and Howaya!

Your key buildings all looked good on the day. The Post Office have super long window-boxes and the ones on PTSB looked well too. It was nice to see the Pride flag flying here. The two churches looked as good as ever. The Garda Station was colourful and floral – surely one of the prettiest of all of the country's stations.

You also tell us in this category about conservation works that have been done on some of your core buildings. It's great to see sensitive improvements to these, some of which are of heritage significance. As you say, it is also great to see a resurgence in bright colours on facades.

The Mall trees will no doubt be happier without the lighting. The new Coastguard Station is a substantial development for the quay area. Nearby, we visited your newly decorated changing and showering facilities at The Point. These looked absolutely great on the day and two other visitors were commenting on how well the new design suits the location. Other projects carried out in Westport over the last year were a dereliction survey and anti-graffiti initiatives. We were particularly impressed with the efforts that went into planning the skate park murals. It's great that such consultation was carried out. You are also involved in ongoing work on Active Travel and accessibility.

Green Spaces and Landscaping / Spásanna Glasa agus Tírdhreachú:

Thank you for your update on the green areas at the Fair Green. We would echo last year's adjudicator's thoughts here. Could we suggest a Clover Lawn? It might be easy on the maintenance as well as on the eye. The LEVERS project is a fascinating initiative and a long-term commitment, it appears. We do note that you are still at the planning stage of this but we would be interested to know some of the 'basics' of this project such as what kind of surface area will be devoted to food production, who owns or manages this land at present, where the food forests are to be located and crucially, what kinds of food are to be produced. Do keep us updated on this potentially very significant project.

Thank you for the information on your unmown and managed for biodiversity areas. It's great to have such statistics. You also provide us with updates on your floral displays, at ground level and in window-boxes. The community allotments at the quay are going gang-busters it would seem. It's fantastic that so many people are learning these useful skills. These will fit in well with your other ongoing initiatives.

On every visit to Westport, this adjudicator looks forward to viewing the planting at the Octagon. This year did not disappoint. It looked as good as always, really gorgeous landscape planting that featured Astilbes, Red-hot Pokers and Dahlias. Super planting was also noted on some of the approaches including the Castlebar Road. As good as ever too were the tasteful baskets on the bridges on the Mall.

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

Thank you for an excellent entry in this category which included a handy colour-coded map. As stated above, your Key Project relates to ecosystem restoration and this would cut across a variety of the other projects. These include a community woodland (we're not sure if this is a new project or not), a horticulture course (which is new) and a number of ongoing projects. These include a pond for biodiversity at Rice's College, plug-planting of native pollinator-friendly species and ongoing rewilding efforts. It was great to see a number of these areas 'popping up' as we explored Westport this year. Another new project for you this year is solitary bee recording. This is a fascinating area that does seem to capture lots of interest from the public. Do try and involve as many volunteers as you can on this. Finally, we are delighted to read that you are hoping to establish a biodiversity trail. As this report was being written, it did occur that this would be a great initiative for you, given the various places of ecological interest that you have. Good luck with the funding application!

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

This is another very strong category for you and you describe a wide range of new projects. The One Westport network is an exemplary umbrella group of like-minded organisations for sustainability initiatives. It would be great to see other communities following your lead. Among your new projects is a cargo bike promotion. We agree that these should be made use of more often, especially for short urban runs. Still on the bike theme, you tell us about a bicycle buffet which was joined on its inaugural run by a very well-known cyclist. You also describe a sewing workshop in a wine bar, why not? With plastic waste in your sights you continue to improve the ways we use water with new water stations, very good. You have also hosted a circular economy showcase of late. Thank you for the info on growing crops in small areas. We applaud your reuse of the wooden medal holders, very innovative! The Lime Bikes were new to this adjudicator and great to see on the streets and lots down on the Quay. We also noted one of your new 'wee-free' libraries at the Fairgreen.

Tidiness and Litter Control / Slachtmhaireacht agus Rialú Bruscair:

We were very impressed – as is usually the case with Westport – with the level of organisation that goes into your anti-litter efforts. Thank you for listing all this out. We have no doubts about your volunteer workforce as many of your team were out picking, sweeping and weeding when we were exploring Westport. Well done everyone. Litter was indeed thin on the ground when we visited. Westport was effectively litter-free. This included long stretches of approach roads that we visited. This is a remarkable achievement. Well done to you all. Your bottle banks were

spotless on adjudication day. It was noted that lampposts have recently been painted and looked very sharp. Watch out for information signs that need cleaning (e.g. the tree sign on the Mall).

You have added to your tally of clean-up hours with a new Saturday morning shift. Fair play everyone. Well done to the Castlebar Road hotels on adopting this stretch. It's back to basics for you on the anti-gum litter battlefield, not easy on the knees. Have you ever considered banning or restricting its sale, as with plastic straws..? We do realise how difficult this might be for some businesses to swallow. When was the coastal clean-up? It wasn't clear from your entry whether this is a regular or once-off event. You have invested in a new cigarette butt vacuum, we hope that this saves on the back-bending and kneeling that often goes into tackling this pernicious item of litter. Indeed, some cigarette butt litter was noted in front of the PTSB premises and adjacent hostelry. It's good to read that you have a rotating cast of other groups and organisations that help on the anti-litter front.

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

Thank you for your description of the Plougastel project. A super collaboration that we are sure the residents are grateful for. It's great to read that new A-rated social housing will be made available on Golf Course Road. The fact that this is to be linked to a Greenway is fantastic for the future residents. Your ongoing residential areas competition is an excellent initiative. You have carried out a survey of residents and collected useful information on their preferences, very good. Now you know where you can push for pollinators! It was surprising to read how many ponds are extant. The Forest Food project is an excellent use of green space in a residential area. We would love for this initiative to be more widespread.

It was noted that several of the townhouses of Westport have been painted recently. The standard of upkeep on the windows and rainwater goods is high. Around your estates there was once more a consistently good standard of presentation.

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

You give useful responses to the comments of last year's adjudicator, which we do appreciate. On the subject, the author absolutely concurs with these with regard to the Mill Street car park. This area is showing wear and tear which is inevitable but not very appealing. The surface here is very poor at this stage and the boundaries of the area nowhere near the standard of the surrounding town. There is a ramp which is all but invisible and several cars fell foul of this. On the plus side, the bottle banks here were in perfect order. We didn't see replacement trees on the Mall. Perhaps this has been postponed until winter.

We certainly did see your new town signage. It looks great. Not at all gaudy, it echoes an older style of sign and fits in very well with your leafy approaches. We applaud your watchful eye on the laneway signage. Your little laneways and alleys are a particularly pleasant feature of Westport so it is great that these are well cared-for. Less is often more when it comes to signage and small thoroughfares. On similar theme, it's good to see that the weekly design clinics are back. Simple suggestions and interventions at an early stage can save many a headache down the line. Our approach to use of outdoor spaces has changed since 2020 so it's important that these are now taken into account in such a setting.

Further good news is that your Greenway is getting another extension. The reduction in speed limit on the N59 is also a welcome bit of news. This is such a lovely approach to Westport from Castlebar, the planting always looking so good here. Not far from your new sign is an older finger signpost which is in need of attention. Indeed, one of the fingers was pointing at the ground on day of visit. Further in the road, some artwork has been done on the wall since this adjudicator's last visit.

The visit was mostly completed by bicycle (with quite a bit of walking!) and although traffic was quite heavy, it was noted how bike-aware motorists are in Westport. As ever, your Greenway was blissful to cycle. It was amusing that a well-known mapping app informed us that it was a 7 minute drive to the Quay or an 8 minute cycle. If only every town could be like this! The Quay has been transformed over the time that this adjudicator has been in this role. It is now bright, vibrant and busy. Especially busy on the day as there was a circus in town! There were lots of people on foot, locals and tourists alike. It was noted that signage in this area has been well contained. The Point looked great with its new facilities (as noted above). However, the water information sign was empty of information and was damaged.

The outdoor seating areas that have sprung up are a really welcome addition to both your streets and the Quay. Those at La Bella Vita and the Tucker Bag looked so well.

Concluding Remarks:

It was such a pleasure to be back in Westport again. As ever, this adjudicator was highly impressed with the imagination, planning and sheer hard work of Westport Tidy Towns. Your measures toward addressing our biodiversity crisis are particularly noteworthy. However, your overall contribution to Tidy Towns is as ever outstanding.

Second Round Adjudication:

Westport. 27-07-2024

We were delighted that our visit to Westport for the purpose of a 2nd round adjudication took place on a hot sunny day in late July and so we took our time meandering around your streets and back lanes seeking out your projects. Westport nestles below Ireland's Holy Mountain of Croagh Patrick and beside the scenic Clew Bay with its islands. Our entry to Westport was from the north along the busy N59. We love, however, the N5 by-pass which must have made a huge improvement to through traffic for you. You list the many awards which you have won over the past 14 years and we commend you for all of these – your hard work has been justly rewarded.

Your application form, we have no doubt, took a considerable amount of time to prepare. We agree with the first-round adjudicators that it is quite long. In some case bullet points would have been better than some long lengths of text. We read your 3-Year Plan. Generally, we think it's better to make a 5-Year Plan and also to add partners/collaborators. Many projects and actions take longer than three years to complete and very often you will need help from state and semi-state organisations and other local community groups. You can then update the plan annually, putting a tick on the completed action/project when submitting it to this competition and we can then see your progression through the plan.

Westport, on the day we visited in late July, was busy with the local community and visitors rubbing shoulders along your main streets. All were in high spirits as the day was one of those beautiful sunny warm days when people stop and chat with friends and sit and drink a coffee in one of your many outdoor seating areas. The streetscape was, as always, beautifully maintained and presented well. Your neat, tidy streets give a very good first impression to the visitor. Your commercial premises and residential street premises certainly assist by painting their properties to present beautiful fresh facades, and add colour and vibrancy with great floral window boxes, hanging baskets and planters. Please commend them for their efforts in support of your work.

For a town busy with tourists, we are delighted to report that there was only a small amount of freshly dropped litter on the streets when we visited – we commend the litter pick-up team. Much of the litter was cigarette butts which seems a pity when we noticed so many cigarette butt holders along the street. We have no doubt that when the evening came your litter pick-up team would be out and the litter removed. It will be great to see the utility boxes getting murals – we're assuming that they will relate to local historical personalities, nature themes etc. We have seen in other communities where their Olympians, musicians etc are also honoured. Using old bicycle tubes as tree ties was a great idea as they will expand slightly with the wind and can be replaced easily if needed.

We have always admired the little housing estate on Distillery Road and were delighted to visit it and see it with the freshly painted facades and great floral displays. Please commend all who were involved with this project. Well done on the survey of the residential areas. We commend you for this survey as it's great to get residents actively involved in their estates – they might also become involved in their residents' associations committees or perhaps as volunteers. If you are going to embark on a six-week mowing regime in the communal areas, make sure you trim spaces for children to play and also trim a narrow grass margin around the edge. This type of communal space presentation is a great example of how to effectively present a semi-wild habitat with its narrow strip of tidily mown grass along the outer edge to show that the wilderness behind is deliberate. We admire that you have residential estate competitions nothing like a bit of friendly rivalry! We assume that the winners are announced at an annual event attended by local politicians, Mayo Co Co officials and the local press? Always seek publicity for your various projects and activities where possible.

Your new, simply, town name signage was admired and see that Westport was voted as the 'Best Place to Live in Ireland' – well done. There are so many wonder planting beds in Westport but perhaps the ones that are imposing and so make such a great impact are the perfectly located planting beds at the Clock and the Octagon. They are a wonderful display of colour and movement and we loved the variety of low, medium and tall plants selected. Well done all involved including the landscape and maintenance sections of Mayo Co Co.

We are delighted to see that you have met with Mayo Co Co regarding creating a long-term approach for your entrance roads as this design solution, all-encompassing, is the correct way forward rather than doing it piecemeal. We visited Roman Island and sat for a while admiring the view to Croagh Patrick and out towards Clare Island. We admired the works carried out by Mayo Co Co to this area – the covered seats, the low sea washed stones as a barrier to the fall from the quay and the steps leading down to the sea floor.

Your main focus of work this year, was the Eco System Recovery Project which is aimed at the restoration of native species which you list. When Tidy Town's committees ask the adjudicators for advice on tree or plant selection, we always tell them to plant what they see around them as they are the species that will grow and flourish best. So, we are delighted to see your very worthwhile eco-recovery project to restore your native species and we look forward in a few years to seeing the fruits of this activity.

We have a few suggestions regarding your Application/Entry Form and Map. We admired that you colour coded the various categories and your Project Key showed the locations. We're not sure about the 'maintained' and 'ongoing' ... are they not the same? Maybe not.... We request that all Future Projects – either by you or others are put in your 5-Year Plan. You can very briefly mention them but don't elaborate. In time these will be NEW projects and then they can be put into the Application Form. We also suggest that you make a second map with the centre of Westport enlarged. We know Westport very well but for those who don't, finding some of the projects identified on the small-scale map would have been difficult. This will also help to reduce the number of pages in your application as requested by the first judges. We wish to state that this is not a criticism of your work but to explain to you that as adjudicators we rely on a clear application form and clear map – we don't want to miss out on a project.

We thoroughly enjoyed our visit to your town, which we visit annual as a tourist, but this time, with more discerning and critical eyes, we are delighted to say that we were equally impressed. Keep up the good work and you are wished continued success as you make Westport the 'Best Place to Live in Ireland'.