

Tidy Towns Competition 2022

Adjudication Report

Centre: **Union Hall - Bréantrá** Ref: **645**
County: **Cork(West)** Mark: **337**
Category: **B** Date(s): **13/06/2022**

	Maximum Mark	Mark Awarded 2021	Mark Awarded 2022
Community – Your Planning and Involvement	80	48	49
Streetscape & Public Places	80	46	47
Green Spaces and Landscaping	80	44	45
Nature and Biodiversity in your Locality	55	32	33
Sustainability – Doing more with less	55	21	22
Tidiness and Litter Control	90	68	69
Residential Streets & Housing Areas	55	35	36
Approach Roads, Streets & Lanes	55	35	36
TOTAL MARK	550	329	337

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

Fáilte chuig Comórtas Na mBailte Slachtmhara Super Valu don bhliain 2022. Táimid buíoch daoibh as ucht na hiontrála a chur chugainn, agus guimíd gach rath ar bhúr gcuid oibre amach anseo. Adh Mór.
Welcome to the Super Valu Tidy Towns Competition for 2022. We thank you for your entry, and wish you all the best in all your future work. Good luck.

- Union Hall, Bréantrá, a small village with a population of 334 people – has entered the competition for approx. 16 years and has a committee of 14 members with support of another 334! volunteers. It is noted that since summer 2020, Union Hall has not had the benefit of any CE rural workers, Tús workers or Council staff other than for the emptying of bins and that the maintenance of public areas and greens, all footpaths and the maintenance of approach roads is completely dependent on volunteers. Well done to all volunteers involved with this important work.
- The committee meets monthly plus meetings are held on site on Tuesday evenings with volunteers for weekly clean ups etc. You also arrange an annual Spring Meitheal concentrating on approach roads.
- Support is received from a wide range of different national and local agencies/businesses.
- Union Hall Facebook page is active and your WhatsApp Group, Weekly Parish Bulletin, notice boards in public areas and businesses, school e-mails and Union Hall Website all help to spread the word. You also use the Seen & Heard Section in the Southern Star newspaper and the West Cork People publication.
- There is strong engagement with local young people and schools. Although you do not have a Junior Tidy Towns, you do engage with young people through the local Foróige group. The 'Why Knot' initiative as part of 'Fishing for Litter' project involved a 2-minute pier clean-up with the Foróige group. You also had contact with the Community School in Skibbereen, to take 2 transition year students for their community week, who weeded and swept and got all the containers ready for planting. The poster campaign with the national school and play school was also very effective resulting in the catchy anti dog fouling signs. It is good to note that St. Bridgid's National School has embraced SuperValu's 'Save the Bees Program' and together with their Pollinator Pack, have created their own bee-friendly garden at the Blackfield Park recreation area.

The hand-drawn map provided with your Entry Form was very clear and easy to read. It is very good that you also provided a very simple and clear legend on the map showing the location and precise description of the items of interest in the village and projects completed.

The quality of the application form is very good and the photos provided on a separate document highlighting the projects carried out were informative. The adjudicator's assessment is based on a recent site visit and the contents of the application form which is suitably concise at 16 pages long - well done. The text inserted on the form was also easy to read.

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

- Union Hall is endowed with many fine residential and heritage buildings, which together provide a colourful streetscape of great character, charm and distinction. The prominence of well-built stone walls throughout the village and along the seafront complements the interesting streetscape pattern of the village, nestled in the surrounding rolling coastal landscape, and gives the entire village a very strong visual appeal.
- You mention a number of projects carried out under this category including improving historical signage in the village. Your adjudicator was interested to read about the construction of the Pollgorm Bridge and this sign is located at a very prominent viewing point overlooking the bay. Some of the blue seating in this area would benefit from touch up with paint.
- The Fáilte sign at the entrance to the Blackfield amenity area looks well. The concrete surface at the entrance to the amenity area has deteriorated and might now need to be re-laid. The adjudicator was impressed with the durable Whale and Dolphin sculpture and no doubt this looks very well at night when it is lit up. The tall pots planted with Agapanthus were a notable feature here.
- It is good to note that the prominent buildings in the village are being carefully restored by their owners and the traditional shopfronts are being preserved and repainted. This adds to the vibrancy and attractiveness and commercial viability of the village, which like many others has been seriously affected by the ravages of the Pandemic.
- St. Brigids Church, Parochial House and Marian Shrine were visited and were all presented to an excellent standard.

Green Spaces and Landscaping / Spásanna Glasa agus Tírdhreachú:

- The Blackfield Amenity area is maintained to a high standard and no doubt is a very important facility and recreational outlet for local residents.
- There are a number of small green spaces and planted areas located at road junctions and along roadsides in Union Hall, all of which are presented to a good standard. The adjudicator was surprised to see even a Phoenix palm, which is growing very well, opposite the Marine Monument. This is a testament to the milder Winters we are having in West Cork and perhaps the effects of global warming.
- In relation to the provision of hanging baskets along the causeway, the adjudicator is in two minds about this issue. The floral displays do enhance the area for the road user; however, they require significant maintenance inputs and are not therefore, environmentally sustainable. The metal support brackets for these baskets, which are attached to the stone walls are now beginning to deteriorate and the recommendation is not to replace these in a number of years when they have to be removed. The maintenance work carried out here would be better employed in relation to planting schemes at other more suitable locations in the village. Perhaps permanent planters could be provided at the Anchor Monument to replace the pots there?

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

- You have been involved with a number of projects under this category this year including the Myross Church of Ireland biodiversity project, Fishing for Litter initiative, Planting of wild flowers e.g., foxgloves and ox eye daisies at the Tobar na Capaill Well, Myross Rowing Club pollinators and growing your own plants from seed etc. All of these types of projects meet the requirements of this aspect of the competition - keep up the good work
- Your committee may be aware that the New All-Ireland Pollinator Plan (AIPP) 2021-2025 has now been launched and it is particularly concerning that one third of bee species in Ireland are now threatened with extinction. As well as this Plan useful guideline documents are now available to Tidy Towns committees to increase the numbers of pollinators in your local area, including guides which are specific to local communities, farmers, councils, transport corridors, sports clubs, businesses etc. Different 'How to Guides' are also available showing how to establish pollinator friendly planting schemes, pollinator friendly roundabouts, use of 'Managed for Wildlife' signage etc.
- This year the AIPP is focussed on gathering survey data to assess the impact of all the good work groups such as the Union Hall Tidy Towns are carrying out across the country e.g., at the rowing club etc. The National Biodiversity Data Centre has developed a new app to make this survey work easy for groups through the use of 'Fit Counts'. FIT stands for 'Flower-Insect Timed Count'.
- FIT Counts are very simple and are a very useful tool for TT groups to measure change in their local biodiversity, especially when they have taken action already for pollinators. By carrying out FIT Counts throughout the year and across future years, it will help track the impact of your actions on insect numbers and diversity as well as providing important data for the National Biodiversity Data Centre (biodiversityireland.ie). It would be good to get local schools involved in these counts. Please follow this link for further information [Flower-Insect Timed Count \(FIT Count\) - National Biodiversity Data Centre \(biodiversityireland.ie\)](http://biodiversityireland.ie) Flower-Insect Timed Count (FIT Count) - National Biodiversity Data Centre (biodiversityireland.ie)
- The sowing of wildflower seed has become very popular with some Tidy Towns committees in recent years. However, this may not be the best course of action as some of the 'wildflower' seed is imported and may contain invasive species. The preferred approach is the 'Don't Sow let it Grow' principle. In other words, where there is a bare patch of ground or grassed areas let the seed/plants occurring naturally in the soil/sward develop and mature as this will have the best ecologically sound result. The removal of clippings at the end of the season with appropriate machinery will impoverish the soil over time encouraging greater species diversity. More information on this and other items under this category can be found in the updated Tidy Towns Handbook.

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

- Well done on your transition to a chemical free weed control regime in Union Hall village - this is a great achievement and no doubt required a considerable amount of hard work and effort. The use of salt, vinegar and washing up liquid to control weeds on footpaths and kerbing has clearly proven to be effective for you and it would be good for you to impart the knowledge and experience gained to other groups in the area.
- The use of seaweed and Christmas tree mulch on all your flower beds and planting containers is a worthy initiative. This type of organic matter is essential for good plant growth and will provide for abundant floral displays.
- It is noted that the Little Haven Playschool and St Bridgid's National School have received Green Flags and are actively promoting cycling & walking to school including the popular 'WOW' day - (Walk to School on Wednesdays). The school has a no plastic policy and it is good that this is filtering through in the wider community.
- Other areas worthy of future consideration by Union Hall Tidy Towns Committee under this category, which is in keeping with the UN Sustainable Development Goals, include the securing of funding for local sustainable energy projects using Community Energy Grants, the Warmer Homes Scheme, Better Energy Homes, Renewable Energy Support Scheme etc. – funding is available from the SEAI.
- It is also worth considering the development of small electric microgeneration schemes for Wind, Solar and Hydro perhaps in partnership with the Cork County Council and these may also attract suitable SEAI or Leader funding. Perhaps the tidal outlet from the Lagoon to the bay could provide a mini hydro scheme for the village?
- You might look at the overall availability of public e-car charge points and cycle parking in the village and where there are deficiencies, suggest suitable locations where these could be provided in the short term.
- The ongoing management of rainwater and floodwater in urban areas in the context of climate change is an important topic under this category. Tidal and coastal flooding may have affected Union Hall in the recent past, during stormy weather and it would be good for the committee to be aware of the nature-based solutions to the management of floodwater and surface water run-off, water sensitive design, best practice etc. A recent publication by the Dept. of Housing Local Government and Heritage is available and provides important guidance in this regard.

Tidiness and Litter Control / Slachtmhaireacht agus Rialú Bruscair:

- The allocation of zones for litter control within the village, which become the responsibility for individual Tidy Town members, is a good approach as a clearly defined job is more easily managed by volunteers. The system is clearly working as the village area was found to be clean on the day of adjudication with a complete absence of litter in the main village area.
- The Bring Centre at the Blackfield recreational area was found to be clean and well maintained and there were no litter or tidiness issues of note on the outskirts of the village. In terms of streetscape tidiness, it would be good to push for the future undergrounding of the remaining overhead power lines, which are visually intrusive in some parts of the village.

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

- It is noted that the Union Hall playground, which is an important local amenity in the area, is due to have €35,000 worth of improvement works carried out by Cork County Council in the near future.
- The adjudicator called to the Church Road Estate housing development and noted the generally good presentation of common areas, stone walls, trees etc. There was a prevalence of weeds growing along kerbs in this estate and perhaps the salt, vinegar and soap mix used elsewhere could be effective here too.

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

- The approaches to Union Hall from Glandore, along the Church Road and from Skibbereen are characterised by a very attractive roadside landscape consisting of stonewalls, natural vegetation with a mixture of trees, bracken ferns, wild flowers etc. This adjudicator would be reluctant to recommend any strimming of these approach roads by Tidy Towns volunteers, apart from where there are sight line issues, because of obvious access problems and the loss of habitats and biodiversity.
- Well done for designating a zoning for litter control on all approach roads into the village and of the village itself. That every area has a responsible person who can identify and report any incidents of littering/dumping, would indeed help to make the control of any problems which arise in the future, much easier to respond to and manage.
- The adjudicator did not notice any significant problems with the condition of footpaths in the village area but it is good to note that you are in constant contact with the Cork County Council on the matter and in 2021 the footpath from the old post office to Nolan's corner was repaired.

Concluding Remarks:

There is great potential to further enhance and improve the appearance and existing amenities and features in Union Hall, for the benefit of local residents and visitors alike. Well done on the work completed to date and we wish you well with your future endeavours in the competition.