



SuperValu 

Tidy Towns

Caring for our environment

**Community –
Your Planning &
Involvement**




Supporting the Sustainable Development Goals

Handbook

Brought to you by the Department of Rural & Community Development



Riailtas na hÉireann
Government of Ireland

SuperValu

The SuperValu TidyTowns competition commenced in 1958 and has since become Ireland’s best-known sustainable and environmental initiative. The competition is administered by the Department of Rural and Community Development and has been proudly sponsored by SuperValu since 1991.

The competition is independently adjudicated under eight categories, these are;

Community- Your Planning & Involvement	Streetscape & Public Places
Green Spaces & Landscaping	Nature & Biodiversity in your Locality
Sustainability – Doing more with less	Tidiness & Litter Control
Residential Streets & Housing Areas	Approach Roads, Streets & Lanes

This Handbook, which has been prepared with input from the national panel of TidyTowns Adjudicators, is divided into sections, each category is covered individually, however, the entrant is advised not to read each section in isolation from the others. Landscaping has an important role to play in the adjudication of Streetscapes and Public Places, Residential Streets and Housing Areas and Approach Roads, Streets and Lanes, Tidiness and Litter control, likewise will be looked at in a number of categories. We would encourage you therefore to refer to all categories regardless of the project or initiative being undertaken.

Please refer to the General Information section also which contains valuable information for all TidyTowns groups.

In this section, we look at “Community – Your Planning & Involvement” please refer to the scoring sheet to see the marks for this category. The entry form contains the following text to assist the entrant in completing this section of their entry form;

Marks are awarded for the overall quality of the Entry Form, town/village map and appropriateness of backup material submitted with your entry. Other key issues are the participation of the local community, businesses, schools and youth in general; working partnerships with local civic agencies; works carried out and appropriate projects completed; existence of an achievable updated TidyTowns Plan. Consideration will be given to social inclusion, whole of community approach, the role of volunteers and new residents in activities.

A set of questions then follow to give the Adjudicator a better sense of the planning and involvement that the group undertake in the community.

In September 2015, 193 UN Member States adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development “Transforming our World”. The centrepiece of this Agenda are the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) which reflect economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development. Throughout the entry form, you will see where many of these goals are aligned to the different TidyTowns categories. Please identify, if applicable, under each category where your projects or initiatives aim to address one or more of the sustainable goals. You will see that the “Community – Your Planning & Involvement” category aligns to all 17 of the Sustainable Development Goals.



Note: TidyTowns groups and volunteers are reminded that their safety and welfare must always take priority. In order to ensure the safety of volunteers, TidyTowns groups are encouraged to seek the advice of An Garda Síochána or any other relevant authority prior to undertaking projects on roads, roadsides and road verges etc.





COMMUNITY – YOUR PLANNING AND INVOLVEMENT

The group and the wider community

The group should act on behalf of the local community and it should decide on the best methods of getting its message and activity updates relayed to all local residents.

Social media is now a popular and accepted medium of getting one's message out to the public but parish notices, local papers, local radio and word of mouth are still very effective communication tools.

Contact your Local Authority Environmental Awareness Officer and local elected council representatives to advise you on public organisations that operate in your locality. Use other state services and Local Development Companies to get the message of your work activities promoted.

Arrange a meeting to see how your activities dovetail with theirs and seek to make use of existing community networks. Getting one's local community to buy into your plans is a sure way to generate additional support for your work actions

What your Adjudicator considers

1. What is it that makes your area special?
2. What features are characteristic of the area – what type of atmosphere is there?
3. Are there any special considerations which affect development pressures such as tourism or commuter housing?
4. What are the places and features that are important to the history or distinctiveness of the area?
5. What are the facilities like? Are there facilities such as play areas, shops, clubs for young people, cafes, pubs, access for the disabled or baby buggies, recycling points etc?
6. How do visitors to the area perceive it and what facilities are available to enable visitors enjoy the area?



NETWORKING WITH OTHER TIDYTOWNS GROUPS

LOOKING AT THE LOCAL AREA

Networking with other Tidy Towns groups in your area can help exchange experiences, ideas and expertise; this can be done by visits to other groups and inviting speakers from other groups to visit in return.

A number of Tidy Towns Groups throughout the country have successfully organised and coordinated county networks, often with the support of their Local Authority, to facilitate information exchange and collective lobbying of local public representatives

Contact your Local Authority or the Tidy Towns Unit if your Group would like to take part or form a county network.

All groups should join their local authority PPN (Public Participation Network) as this will ensure that they will be eligible to apply for grants when available. The PPN will also keep them updated on all relevant information.

Once a group is formed it is now feasible for it to carry out a needs assessment survey which would identify what improvements the community would like to see achieved in the area and the best way to achieve these in a successful manner. It would also complement traditional methods of data gathering with useful information on the perception of a community so as to inform managers and policy makers.



BENEFITS OF CONDUCTING A NEEDS ASSESSMENT SURVEY

A Needs Assessment is carried out to make sure that the real needs of communities are addressed by development programmes and projects. It involves research and consultation with community stakeholders and beneficiaries. It ensures getting the facts as well as the opinions of a representative number of the community to make sure that their concerns are heard and incorporated into project and policy formation. It also provides decision makers and communities with facts and data to help them make the correct decisions

This survey will give a general overview of what needs to be done in the area and form the basis for planning activities to deal with particular problems and bring about improvements. In carrying out a survey, broad consultation is often the best method as this guarantees that everyone in the community is included and asked the same questions. The questions asked should be clear and simple and answers should come from a broad age range and gender mix.

If you are tackling a particular area – such as rejuvenating a derelict site to create a community garden – a survey of the site covering existing vegetation, drainage, sunny and shaded areas, views and eyesores, etc. would be invaluable. Make sure you record this with ‘before and after’ photos to show the progress you have made.

IN ORDER TO CARRY OUT A SURVEY, YOU WILL NEED TO:

- Find out the actual limits of the town or village as this will also form the assessment area in future participation in the competition.
- Town/village limits are generally those within the welcome or Fáilte signs, or in their absence, within the speed limit signs.
- In large urban areas the survey area should be a one kilometre radius from the centre of the area allowing for local boundaries with neighbouring areas.

- If necessary, source available background information on the local area, check old maps and photographs of the area and research any archived material in the local library. (Note: A wildlife or recreation area, such as a wood or lake that adjoins the town may be included, provided it is generally understood by the townspeople to be part of their amenities and is generally used by them.)
- Consider the things you would like to look at and draw up a record sheet with space for the action to be taken and details of the problems that you discover, as well as the location and ownership of buildings or sites.
- Obtain a map of the area from the Ordnance Survey Office, a map of scale of 1:2,500 is usually the most useful.
- Bring a camera or mobile phone and take as many photographs as possible.
- If you have a large and well-resourced group then you can manage a large number of projects! If you do not have a large and well-resourced group, then only focus on a small number of important things! The success of achieving your selected projects will ultimately lead to more people being interested in joining!

What to Look At

You should look at and discuss the overall environment of the area in terms of its layout and the quality of life it offers. This can be discussed by the Group in general or subject to a broader discussion or survey within the wider community and may lead to the formation of a Community Development Association to deal with issues and developments that fall outside the remit of a Tidy Towns Group. In many towns and villages the Tidy Towns Groups often operate as part of a Community Development Association. You should indicate clearly on your map any other areas outside of these areas that you are working on as part of your overall plan.

Additional Information Sources

You may also consider supplementing the survey with a questionnaire seeking people's views on the type of improvements they would like to see. In order to involve young people in the TidyTowns process, you could consider asking the local school/schools via the Principal to carry out some aspect of the survey. Children have a different perception of spaces and should be encouraged to think about the following:

- The quality of play spaces inside and outside school grounds.
- Safe routes to school and to shops and community facilities.
- The relevance of environmental and biodiversity related school assignments that they may be involved in such as recycling, wildlife and nature walks.

Schools survey information can be presented in multimedia form as photographs, models, maps, video and artwork. Such information could be a first step in establishing a Junior TidyTowns Group or encouraging your school to become a Green School.

Look at "Steps to Becoming a Green School" on the An Taisce website <https://greenschoolsireland.org/about/> It is a handy and informative guide setting out what is needed to achieve Green School status.

PLANNING GROUP ACTIONS

Like any Group tackling a range of issues and tasks, your Group needs to establish what exactly it aims to achieve through its works and actions. Planning a strategy for an agreed work programme requires the integration of all the resources available to the Group. These resources are wide and varied and include people, various skill sets and available finances. All members of the Group should have a say in the planning of the strategy and the type of jobs that the Group will tackle.

Linking in with Other Plans

Before embarking on the plan, the Group should examine other plans to make sure that it is not duplicating work already being undertaken by other bodies. A Local Area Plan may be in place and it's worthwhile to engage with your Local Authority to see how this will impact on your plans. The Group should consider discussing the scope and extent of this plan with the Local Authority, to see where some synergy between work programmes and actions can be realised.

Other plans that may be in operation for the area may include:

- Urban and Village Renewal Strategies.
- Site Specific Master Plan.
- Village Design Statements.

In a similar context it is also useful to check with the Local Authority to see if there are Shopfront Design Guidelines available as these can be useful when engaging with property and business owners. The Group should appoint a designated committee member to engage with the Local Authority on these matters as this approach generates continuity and builds trust between both parties.

Selecting Projects and Actions

Having surveyed the local area and identified what needs to be addressed and acted upon the group might consider the following set of actions:

- Hold a public meeting to present the report of the survey in the form of an exhibition and to seek the views of the wider community.
- Discuss possible remedies as widely as you can.
- Visit successful TidyTowns, meet their Groups and see how they have tackled similar problems, and don't think that your issues are unique.
- Prioritise actions in the multi-annual plan.
- Present a realistic list of actions to the Local Authority which can be carried out over a five-

year period and which can be included in the Local Authority work programmes such as the Urban and Village Renewal Scheme

- Contact private owners to encourage them to carry out improvements and refer them to expert help if necessary.
- Make arrangements for your own Group to do something extra like regular clean ups, litter picks and landscape treatment.
- Bring public problematic issues to the attention of the press, local councillors and other Groups in the area.
- Suggest positive action and put forward practical solutions that will serve to address and eventually solve these problems.

Photographs of the existing situation, together with an artist's impression of the finished project, can help in gaining support for the project. In identifying projects and actions, the Group should be realistic as to their own capabilities.

In all cases the projects or improvements should be:

- Worthwhile.
- Physically feasible.
- Financially sound and achievable within the constraints of a given budget.

It is very important to be confident that your work actions will be well received by all stakeholders.

Don't forget that letter writing and lobbying are important parts of the Group's job. If these are required to get a project 'off the ground' they should appear as immediate tasks on your to do list. Putting "Thank you" notices in the various forms of the local media is a very good way of acknowledging both patron and sponsor inputs and supports.

THE 3 TO 5-YEAR PLAN

The cornerstone of the TidyTowns programme is the preparation of a plan by Groups outlining their actions and intentions for the forthcoming number of years. The duration of the plan can vary but is normally a three-year or five-year plan depending on the size of the area and the complexity of the work involved. The Group's plan should represent a shared vision of what the TidyTowns programme can achieve for a town, village or urban area.

(Note: The Entry Form to the competition is a basic plan structure in itself and can be expanded into a proper multi-annual plan)

The key principles when preparing the plan are:

- Short, it need be no longer than 5 pages.
- Direct, it should outline how, where, and when you are going to undertake jobs.
- Realistic, all projects should be capable of being implemented – albeit often over a long timeframe.
- Most importantly as the Plan is the Group's work programme it should therefore reflect the objectives and capabilities of the Group.
- In summary, it should be a simple and easily read document.

IDENTIFYING GROUP OBJECTIVES & PRIORITIES

The development of a Group 'Mission Statement' should take place at a meeting and should be debated and discussed to draw on the various opinions within the Group. You should state your objectives and priorities at the beginning of the Group's annual plan. This will inform the local community, TidyTowns Adjudicators and other agencies, of the Group's objectives over the life of the plan.

The overall aims might be to:

- Improve the quality of life for the residents of the town or village.
- Make the town or village more attractive and inviting for any visitors.
- Maintain the heritage and character and distinctiveness of the town or village.
- Help to develop the area for future generations.
- Involve all of the community in the development of the town or village.
- Improve the position of the town or village in the TidyTowns competition.

IDENTIFYING ACTION AREAS

In looking at action areas look at the results of your survey and identify those areas where your Group's actions should be focussed upon.

For each of these action areas outline:

- Why you are working there;
- What you are going to do - step-by-step
- Who the project involves (e.g. the Local Authority, ESB, Waterways Ireland, etc.).

It is a good idea to also present the projects in two separate categories of short and long term activities, perhaps as an appendix as it will help you to monitor the progress of your efforts over the period of the plan. Projects will be most effective if they have a long term impact on the town or village. For a large town or urban area, the work programme may be set out according to districts or parishes.

ESTABLISHING A TIMESCALE:

The Plan should set out the work that will be done for each year but be careful not to take on too much in the early years as it might mean that the work has to be re-scheduled in later years. Be fair to yourselves and break jobs down into parts.

The timescale for the projects will be a matter for each Group to decide but it is useful to keep the following in mind:

- If you have entered the TidyTowns competition or other similar local environmental initiatives, assessments and adjudications normally start in June.
- The most appropriate time for tree planting is between late October and early March.
- Individual projects should be prioritised.
- In the short term projects that can achieve immediate effect should be given priority in terms of available resources such as finance and labour.
- Projects that need a more substantial input of resources or those that are likely to be on-going should be carried out in the medium term.
- Long-term projects are those needing very substantial resources, finance or assistance from another development agency including the Local Authority.
- The Group should also be aware of other important areas of legislation with respect to the work of a TidyTowns Group.

RECORDING YOUR PROGRESS

You should update your Tidy Towns plan each year to keep a record of the projects undertaken and the results achieved. This will form a useful background for assessing progress and can also be adapted for use as publicity material and it also keeps morale and motivation levels high and promotes the Group as an important local resource.

Meet a number of times during the year, particularly coming up to the time when you submit your plan along with your Tidy Towns entry form to the Department, and consider:

- What progress has been made?
- Have projects achieved what they set out to do?
- What have the participants learned from the project?
- Are there identified actions that must be taken to fast-track related projects, such as working with landowners, seeking other consents, or sourcing funding?

Experience has shown that the easiest methods of recording are keeping diaries and taking photographs; but drawings, models and written reports are also useful, especially in putting your ideas across to the Local Authority or other groups. Contact your Local Authority or the Ordnance Survey (www.osi.ie) to see what mapping is available for your area.

Please note that the copyright laws for maps are extremely strict so discuss your needs with the OSI before buying to avoid any additional costs.

Trace Maps - Tracing over maps of photos is a really easy and simple way to show 'before' and 'after' images.

Photographs - These are useful in showing a problem as an example of something done elsewhere which you like or admire.

Taking photographs of the project before you start, at regular intervals throughout and at the finish, will provide a good visual record which can be tied in with diaries and reports.

Photographs can also be very effective for publicity purposes and at exhibitions but make sure to record the date a photograph was taken on the back of a hard copy. Sketching over photographs and adding areas of proposed planting, etc. is a clear and effective way of explaining the impact and nature of the proposed works.

Scale models can also be used and are often easier to understand than plans, as they are three dimensional and people easily identify areas and landmarks. These can be made using a polystyrene base and paper or card cut-outs but are costly if produced professionally. Models are also often prepared for large planning applications and if you know of one that was done for a particular scheme in your area perhaps approach the developer and see if your Group can use it after the planning process is complete. Alternatively see if a local school would like to create a local model as a Green School or Transition Year project.

Drawings - Simple sketches on maps or site plans can put ideas across very simply.

(Maps at a scale of 1:1,000 are good for single sites, while most towns and villages require 1:2,500 scale maps.)

Drawings do not need to be perfect as once they are neat and simple and can put across messages very clearly and effectively that is all that is required.

A simple one page annual report listing the jobs you have done as well as stating the Group's aims for the coming year should be made available to the wider community, including all businesses, to publicise the work of the group and gain additional support for your efforts. Preparing this can be a simple additional task when updating your work plan.

ENTERING THE TIDYTOWNS COMPETITION:

The ultimate goal of the Group should be to enter the SuperValu TidyTowns competition where its structure and ongoing assessment will not only help shape and focus your activities, but also provide a platform to attract greater interest from the community and assist participation in other local initiatives. The basic entry requirement involves simply filing in the entry form available at www.tidytowns.ie

When entering the competition you should include with your entry form, a copy of your 3–5 year plan and your TidyTowns Map. The entry form provides an important opportunity for you to highlight the progress your Group has made throughout the year and to outline your future plans. The entry form of course is an essential document for the Adjudicator as it outlines under the category headings what work has been undertaken during the period for adjudication.

Please complete all sections of the form and pay close attention to the closing date, make sure to submit your entry on time. Good Luck.

NOTES

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