

Tidy Towns Competition 2022

Adjudication Report

Centre: Skibbereen - An Sciobairín	Ref: 693
County: Cork(West)	Mark: 351
Category: D	Date(s): 13/06/2022

	Maximum Mark	Mark Awarded 2021	Mark Awarded 2022
Community – Your Planning and Involvement	80	49	50
Streetscape & Public Places	80	47	48
Green Spaces and Landscaping	80	45	46
Nature and Biodiversity in your Locality	55	40	42
Sustainability – Doing more with less	55	23	25
Tidiness and Litter Control	90	62	63
Residential Streets & Housing Areas	55	34	35
Approach Roads, Streets & Lanes	55	40	42
TOTAL MARK	550	340	351

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.

- Skibbereen An Sciobairín, a town with a population of 2,778 people – has entered the competition for 61 years and has a committee of 7 members with support of another 3 volunteers.
- The committee meets on a regular basis as and when required plus meetings are held with other local organisations, sometimes on a weekly basis.
- Support is received from a total of approx. 70 different national and local agencies.
- For communication with the public, a twice-yearly newsletter is normally distributed to all Facebook and Twitter followers (1500+). This is currently paused, and it is planned to resume with renewed focus for the 2022/23 season. There are regular project updates and photos on Facebook and Twitter. Occasional blog posts are also distributed to Facebook and Twitter followers (1500+). There is a fortnightly news item in the local newspaper, the Southern Star during winter months and weekly during spring/summer months. There are occasional pieces in West Cork publications including West Cork People and the Opinion. You support WestCorkCommunity.ie a new web directory and podcast service for community groups in West Cork.
- There is strong engagement of the Tidy Towns committee with local children and young people in the Skibbereen area, including local schools. In 2020-21 you invited the local primary schools to engage in a 'Global Goalkeeper' initiative and this is planned again for 2022-23. All young people, accompanied by an adult, are welcomed to your clean-up initiatives. You engage with local sports clubs such as West Cork Kayaking Club and O'Donovan Rossa GAA club. You work closely with the teachers of the ASD classes at Skibbereen Community School and engage them in suitable projects. You support the work of intellectual disability service users in Skibbereen through litter picks and environmental awareness programmes.

The coloured map provided with your Entry Form is of very good quality. It is indeed a great idea, where the space is not available on the map, to include a separate sheet with a numbered legend of all the items and projects of interest, which are identified on the map. It was also good to group the items in the legend under the various categories of the competition - this is very helpful to the adjudicator in making the assessment of your town – well done.

The quality of the application form is also very good and the photos and images which are grouped in the Appendix, with an alphabetical listing under each competition category and highlighting the projects undertaken, were very informative. The adjudicator's assessment is based on a recent site visit and the contents of the application form. The form which extends to 61 pages including photos, could be a little more concise for a town the size of

Skibbereen. It is good to note that you have included a volunteer recruitment drive as part of your Three-Year Plan as the current number of volunteers at 3, is considered quite low for a town the size of Skibbereen. The tables provided indicating the projects carried out under each category with map references, relevant UN SDG's and start/completion dates, are very clear and the text inserted on the form is also well-sized and very easy to read.

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

- The adjudicator notes that you have a total of 6 different projects under this category ranging from improvement works to the Town Hall to the upgrading of footpaths on the Cork Road and at Townshend Street. The links provided were very useful and the adjudicator was pleased to read about the heritage signage and maintenance work undertaken at the historic Chapel Lane Graveyard and the Photo Focal photographic exhibition.
- The adjudicator was impressed with the works currently underway at the Town Hall and adjoining paved area and the new extension is very much in keeping with the character and quality of the adjoining streetscape. It will be good to see these improvement works completed and no doubt the main part of the building will also receive a facelift with some additional external maintenance and upgrading work.
- The wall murals were positively noted and these add a great sense of vibrancy in the centre of the Town. However, the concrete flood protection walls are quite intrusive here and one wonders how the impact of these can be mitigated. Perhaps a suitable stone cladding might be considered, particularly where unsightly discolouration of the concrete detracts from the surroundings?
- A number of buildings stood out for positive mention including the Bridge House Restaurant, the offices of the Cork Civil Defence, the offices of the Permanent TSB and the old post office building. The new paving scheme including granite kerbing and tree planting along Bridge Street was particularly admired.
- There are a number of items which could help to improve the streetscape in Skibbereen into the future. These include the undergrounding of the remaining power lines in the centre of the town. It would also be good to look at ways to reduce/restrict the amount of traffic passing through the centre of the town as on the day of adjudication, it was noticed that some very large HGV trucks passed through the centre, which was very noisy and did not seem very pedestrian friendly.
- It would be good to try and increase the number of properties in the centre of the town brought into residential use. This adds greater vibrancy to the town centre. Can more properties above commercial premises be converted into apartments? During a housing shortage there may be funding opportunities here?

Green Spaces and Landscaping / Spásanna Glasa agus Tírdhreachú:

- You have listed a total of 9 very worthwhile and interesting projects in tabular form under this category ranging from the installation of picnic benches at O'Donovan Rossa Memorial Park to the resurfacing and the installation of an age friendly and accessible outdoor table tennis table at the Cork Road Playground.
- The playground site was inspected and was found to be well presented and maintained. It would be good to consider allowing the grass to grow in order to establish a wildflower meadow under the perimeter trees in the park where grass cutting is more difficult. The boundary wall could be improved by painting the concrete capping on the stone wall surround here. The adjudicator was pleased to note the extensive riverside vegetation and wildflower meadows retained outside the pitch area at the River Ilen Park.
- The barrel feature roundabout looks very well and is a very good addition on the approach to the town. The O'Donovan Rossa garden/park was visited and it was good to note the new recycled plastic seating now in place. However, the garden would benefit from more routine maintenance work e.g., to remove weeds from planting beds and paving and implement a more appropriate grass maintenance regime. A 2m strip of neat closely mown grass close to boundaries and footpath edges is all that is needed to indicate that the park is being managed to encourage wildlife and is not being neglected. It is recommended also that the white pebble under the trees could be replaced here with bark mulch.
- In relation to the trees in the town, consideration should also be given to improving the appearance of the existing lime trees on North Street, which have been severely pruned back in the past. Perhaps these trees could be tidied up further and re-shaped to ensure they present a more attractive feature on the approach to the town. The floral schemes provided throughout Skibbereen were very positively noted.
- The High Street sloped bank adjacent to the Garda station was visited and it was good to note that the natural vegetation on this bank is being encouraged. There are some flower boxes attached to the railing around the car park adjacent to the Garda station and these could be removed.
- The open space area known locally as 'The Rock' was visited and the adjudicator was very impressed, despite the limited access available, with the extensive natural vegetation present and wonderful views across the town and adjoining landscape which are available from this elevated site. You are wished well with the implementation of the future plans for the improvement of this area.

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

- It is wonderful to read that a draft Pollinator Plan for Skibbereen has now been prepared and you are in the process of commenting on the plan, with a view to working collaboratively on its future implementation. This will act as an important guide for all your future activities in this area. You are making good strides under this category with a total of 11 very worthwhile beneficial projects, which really will make a difference to the biodiversity status and community engagement in the town.
- The Mardyke Pollinator Park was visited and the adjudicator was impressed with the management regime employed here, which aims to encourage pollinators whilst at the same time present the garden as a space which is very well cared for. Well done to all involved with this project. Because of its size the complete re-wilding of the area would not be considered appropriate.
- The committee is 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. It will be great to see the Skibbereen Pollinator Plan implemented in due course. As well as this Plan, you are aware that 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 Skibbereen Tidy Towns are carrying out across the country e.g., at the Mardyke Pollinator Park, River Ilen Park and the Rock Park 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 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)
- 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:

- You have a number of ongoing projects under this category such as the Cycle Sense, Re-Love Paint, Community Orchard, Seed Saving Project, all of which are very complimentary to your own Tidy Town activities. The re-love paint is a particularly useful resource. It is wonderful to see you are collaborating with outside organizations to address the major problem of food waste through organizing food waste awareness events.
- The adjudicator is also delighted to note that Skibbereen has been successful in securing funding from the SEAI for the 'Net Zero Skibbereen' project. A lot more can be done to reduce our energy and fossil fuel usage and the target of 2040 for a zero carbon Skibbereen is a suitably ambitious goal. The successful implementation of any future planned programme of works will be critical and this will make a significant change to the energy status and quality of life in the town in the coming years, particularly in the area of transportation. You are wished well with all future developments in this regard.
- Other areas worthy of future consideration by Skibbereen Tidy Towns Committee and the Net Zero Skibbereen group under this category, which is in keeping with the 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 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.
- You might look at the overall availability of public e-car charge points and bicycle parking facilities in the town 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. Flash flooding has been an issue in Skibbereen in the past and it would be good for the committee to be aware of the nature-based solutions to the management of rainwater/floodwater and surface water run-off in town areas, water sensitive town 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 Skibbereen Town Centre area was generally found to be clean on the day of adjudication. There was some litter noted in the vicinity of the Heritage Centre and the Rock but this appears to have been associated with very recent activities in these areas.
- The Bring Centre was found to be very clean and well maintained and overall, there were no major tidiness issues in the Town. The lack of street name signage seems to be an issue in some parts of Skibbereen Town. Perhaps a scheme to improve street name signage can be initiated, in consultation with Cork County Council. It was however, great to note the interesting name signage in place in some of the very small streets and lanes in the Town.

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

- The idea of appointing area ambassadors and junior area ambassadors to encourage greater pride in the community and improved presentation of residential areas is a very positive and worthwhile initiative. One wonders whether, to support the ambassadors, if there are any local resident's associations which might assist them in their work. An annual 'Best Kept Estate' competition is also always a good way to enhance the overall presentation of estates.
- The adjudicator called to the Inse Áilainn housing estate which has attractive stone walls at the entrance and a range of smaller open spaces. The open spaces are planted with fine trees, although there was evidence of

some ash dieback in this area.

- The Riverdale Estate was also visited and it would be good to only cut a 2m strip of grass 2m wide along the edges of roads and footpaths in the estate, the remaining areas can be retained as a wildflower meadow to be cut once/twice per year. Also perhaps consider planting a low hedge along the concrete post and rail fence here, which is somewhat visually intrusive.
- Blackthorn Drive estate was visited and it was good to note the longer grass and spring flowers flourishing at the entrance. The 'Children at Play' sign would benefit from cleaning. Also consider removing the Griselinia hedge on the boundary of the estate facing the riverside open space, to provide greater visual connection between the estate and the attractive riverside landscape beyond. It should be possible to achieve this, whilst ensuring the continued safety of local residents and children.

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

- The presentation of roundabouts on the approaches to towns is extremely important as it can create a lasting first impression for visitors and tourists alike. It is good that you have been successful with your 'roundabout adoption scheme' in conjunction with West Cork Distillers.
- The adjudicator notes that approach roads to Skibbereen including the N71, along with smaller roads, streets and lanes are maintained manually by volunteers and CE scheme members and well done to all those who undertake this work.
- The issue of weed control in the absence of chemical usage is sometimes an emotive one. It is good to note that you are dealing with weeds in a pollinator-friendly manner. It is recommended that along approach roads in a rural context, a closely mown 2 -3 m strip can be retained along the road margin directly adjacent to the road, in the interest of safety and to ensure the presentation of a tidy road/edge interface. The remainder of the margin can be retained as a species-rich wildflower meadow, except where traffic sight lines are an issue.
- The Baltimore approach to the town is characterised by attractive stone walls and good quality road markings and surfaces. Consider planting a native hedge along the concrete post and rail fence, which is intrusive along this approach.
- The old Regal Service Station detracts from the Castletownsend approach to the town – perhaps this site is earmarked for future development? Additional tree planting would be desirable in the vicinity of the commercial premises located close to the roundabout here.
- The Cork approach road has well maintained grass margins and a roundabout which enhances the overall visual experience for road users. The number of temporary commercial signs on margins could be reduced here. It would be desirable to plant a native hedge along the timber fence, situated on the roadside boundary on this approach.

Concluding Remarks:

The visit to Skibbereen this Summer was a very enjoyable experience. The Town has great potential to progress further in the competition and the implementation of your rolling 3 Year Plan will be very important in this regard. Some further consideration of the adjudicator's comments and recommendations should enable you to make the most of your significant streetscape assets and natural features. You are wished well for the future.