

Tidy Towns Competition 2022

Adjudication Report

Centre: Thomastown - Baile Mhic Andáin	Ref: 908
County: Kilkenny	Mark: 303
Category: C	Date(s): 05/07/2022

	Maximum Mark	Mark Awarded 2022
Community – Your Planning and Involvement	80	43
Streetscape & Public Places	80	43
Green Spaces and Landscaping	80	42
Nature and Biodiversity in your Locality	55	32
Sustainability – Doing more with less	55	18
Tidiness and Litter Control	90	57
Residential Streets & Housing Areas	55	29
Approach Roads, Streets & Lanes	55	39
TOTAL MARK	550	303

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 2022 Tidy Towns Competition Thomastown. It was a pleasure to visit this small town entrant and the brief history of the town in your application form was welcome and the beautiful photo of the town from the bridge created a sense of anticipation as I prepared for Adjudication Day. Can I suggest for future applications you embed all your photos alongside the text as this makes our roles as adjudicators much easier. Also, feel free to delete the category introductory text as this will reduce your application even more. The UN SDGs have been a part of the application for a number of years now, I appreciate it can be difficult to see how they align with your projects but try and make an attempt as part of next year's submission. There are excellent resources online to aid you – look at www.tidytowns.ie for more information. Your committee and volunteers should be very proud of your town and the positive impact you bring to it. You engage with a range of other agencies (indeed I nearly got rumbled by two of your hardworking TUS workers managing the flowerbed near Deegans!) and your varied approach to communicating your message is no doubt reaping rewards. Happy 10th Anniversary on entering the competition – you have the ethos of Tidy Towns captured in your submission; it about motivation and ambition for your community and pride in ones place. With this outlook you have a successful future.

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

I have no doubt there is much excitement about the conversion of the Courthouse to an Arts Centre and this will be a wonderful addition to the town. The Concert Hall looked wonderful and you are a very lucky town to have had much of your cabling put underground – it is many a town or village who wish for such an intervention by their local authority – well done to you and Kilkenny County Council. Try not to worry about the derelict buildings, as adjudicators we are very aware of what is (and is not) within your power. You have demonstrated in your submission that you have tried to engage with both the owners and the local authority and this is all you can do – no points would ever be deducted for this reason. With regard to your 3 Year Plan – enhancements to the bridge are welcome but be mindful of lighting and how this can impact wildlife, especially bats like Daubentons Bat; all of which are protected under the Wildlife Act and EU Habitats Directive. Perhaps engage with your local Heritage Officer, NPWS Ranger or Bat Conservation Ireland before any lighting is used. Also, the bridge is a Protected Structure so any intervention should be discussed with your Conservation Officer. Not that this means nothing can be done, just be sure to engage with the right professionals in advance.

You have a beautiful streetscape and it is obvious many of your businesses take great pride in their shopfronts such as Jars of Clay ceramics, the Blackberry Café, Petals n Blooms, Murphy's Butcher, Treacy's Hardware and the

wonderful mural at Watties. The Men's Shed building is well presented and I popped in and overheard some great banter from the volunteers. The artwork on the library was beautiful as was the lovingly restored buildings opposite.

In the playground the ceramic sign (Timber Tumbles) needs replacing but overall it was very well maintained with lovely wooden elements – perhaps scope for a biodiversity/heritage sign here; educate younger people while they are having fun? The adjacent basketball court and sports area looked well and it was great to see so much outdoor seating.

Green Spaces and Landscaping / Spásanna Glasa agus Tírdhreachú:

It was lovely to see the lovely stone all exposed. No doubt the bulbs are a welcome sight in Spring. However, bramble is an important food and nesting source so always ensure it is only removed where there is a need. Sometimes a mixture of both can be accommodated. Similarly the newly resurfaced area – could a portion of this area be left grow wild (even allowing a buffer area of chippings between the grass and path) to help support local biodiversity? For new soils and existing grasslands always try and let them develop naturally – an annual cut and collect will reap natural rewards instead of using seedmix.

The landscaping at the Quayside Carpark is exceptional, wonderful to have this funded under the Regeneration Project. However, the planters opposite here need some freshening up. Instead of laurel, perhaps choose some native shrubbery or an ornamental option recommended by the All-Ireland Pollinator Plan.

Empty planters at the Scout Den need to be filled but otherwise it was immaculately presented. An amazing view awaited me as I reached the top of Chapel Lane – perhaps consider removing the conspicuous Palm Tree from in front of the interpretative area – it is a little unusual in this setting with limited biodiversity value. The church grounds were very well maintained with a commanding view over the town – is there a need for so many dog waste signs though?

The lovely planted area with the horse and cart and old school bench was very well maintained. Perhaps consider turning the bench around to face this area as opposed to the main road and remove the bucket from the pump itself?

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

Your idea of the beehives and using them reflect your different nationalities is a wonderful, inclusive project. Have you a local beekeeper assisting you? It was a great idea to showcase a sample beehive to the public at the Concert Hall. It encourages discourse about the topic in advance of implementation. This project would benefit greatly from some wild grassland management around the hives – providing a source of food at their doorstep. See comment above with regard to the new chippings at this location. It was lovely to see your comment about local ducks being looked after. It would be worthwhile maybe putting in discrete signage about the proper food to feed them – some people disagree with feeding ducks but this adjudicator sees the positive environmental impact this can have, especially in fostering a sense protection for our wildlife in young children. There was a lovely wildflower area at the School of Food along with newly planted trees. Grennan College also had a great diversity of wildflowers on my visit. Planting the top of the pillars at the carpark opposite the library was a great idea and I really liked the pollinator surrounds.

There is invasive Buddleja in quite a few locations such as the Mall Road. This should be monitored. There is also some Himalayan Balsam and Montbretia along the wall near the Quayside Carpark as well as the highly problematic Japanese Knotweed in the raised area. On the upside there was an abundance of orchids nearby. Your wealth of old buildings must be a haven for swift and I am sure I heard their calls on my visit. A project worth considering? I also saw some sandmartin nests opposite the Quayside carpark.

Again, be careful about labelling projects as New when on reading they appear to be in development and not yet complete so probably best align to Future Projects e.g. barn owl boxes.

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

This can be a difficult category to develop projects and many committees struggle. Maybe for the coming year engage with your local Environmental Awareness Officer in Kilkenny County Council or put a callout on social media for volunteers in the locality to help with this specific area. Also look at other Tidy Towns adjudication reports as well as Special Award winners to get inspiration. In the meantime don't forget that many of your actions such as reduced mowing and the use of social media/Whatsapp as opposed to printing material are sustainability measures in themselves.

Tidiness and Litter Control / Slachtmhaireacht agus Rialú Bruscair:

Well done on your twice weekly litterpicks, no doubt you have many volunteers and those in the community who go out on other days also. On the day of adjudication the town was litter free! Wonderful to get the new energy and assistance from the local Beavers Scout Group. The phased tidying of overhead cables is to be welcomed. The new mural is beautiful – again more aligned to Streetscapes & Public Spaces where is contributed to your scoring here.

A few small items include:

- a redundant pole and stick in the flowerbed on Station Road (with the kayak)
- some signs are in need of cleaning such as the one-way directional signage near the church
- A bench in need of painting on the approach road to Columbas Hospital and upstream of Nicholas Mullins Bridge. The Biodiversity Picnic Area is missing a bench and the other bench outside the wall needs attention.
- Could the old gate by the Mens Shed be replaced?

- A dog waste bag dispenser on the Mullinvar Road is well hidden at the end of the wall. Could it be relocated?
- Clean the Famine Food Kitchen Memorial and freshen up the Old Town Wall sign

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

Ladyswell was well presented during my visit as was Maudlin Court. Indeed, it is obvious all of the residents are playing their part in supporting your work. Some houses are really going the extra mile and a huge shoutout to the owner of the cream house on the Dublin Road near the horse and cart display – an amazing garden. Also, some beautifully presented homes in the town centre such as on Lady's Well Street.

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

Considerable efforts have gone into shrubbery planting, well done. You have quite a few approach roads to contend with and you are doing your best in this regard – keep it up. Is there scope to make the restored 'Fountain' more accessible? It is a fantastic project but at a busy junction. Some directional signage was obscured such as that at the entrance to the Council Area Office. There was a great splash of colour from wildflowers at the R448 approach – whilst welcome, we are now discovering that it is best practice to change the mowing regime first before introducing seedmix. If you do use seedmix make sure it is collected in Ireland and not a continental mix.

Concluding Remarks:

I ended a thoroughly enjoyable visit to Thomastown in the Unwind Café on upcycled pallet seating (very sustainable!) watching the busy town centre. A very apt saying on the wall which you seem to have adopted: 'A beautiful day begins with a beautiful mindset'. Keep up the great work!