

Tidy Towns Competition 2022

Adjudication Report

Centre: Newcastle West - Caisleán Nua Thiar	Ref: 465
County: Limerick	Mark: 336
Category: E	Date(s): 11/06/2022

	Maximum Mark	Mark Awarded 2021	Mark Awarded 2022
Community – Your Planning and Involvement	80	49	51
Streetscape & Public Places	80	45	47
Green Spaces and Landscaping	80	46	46
Nature and Biodiversity in your Locality	55	39	40
Sustainability – Doing more with less	55	18	19
Tidiness and Litter Control	90	51	54
Residential Streets & Housing Areas	55	36	37
Approach Roads, Streets & Lanes	55	41	42
TOTAL MARK	550	325	336

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

Fáilte Chuig Comórtas na mBailte Slachtmhara Super Valu 2022. Táimid buíoch daoibh as ucht na hiontrála a chur chugainn. Go raibh maith agaibh as ucht bhur dtacaíocht le linn na paindéime. Lean leis an dea-obair.

Welcome to the 2022 SuperValu TidyTowns competition. Thank you for your entry and for your commitment to your place in these difficult times. Keep up the great work.

Your committee of 9 members are supported by another 35 volunteers and we note you are back to holding meetings again after the Covid pandemic. We have noted the many groups which work with you – including the Men's Shed soon to be followed by the Women's Shed group. Well done for supporting refugees from Ukraine and we read of the various agencies which support your projects and aims.

For communications, you use local newspapers (Weekly Observer, Limerick Leader, Limerick Post) email, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Limerick.ie. and good luck with the venture of the unused shop. That sounds like a great idea and we wish you good luck for the future. Congratulations on being in the competition since it started in 1958 – that is a great record.

Many thanks for your map which is very clear and the legend on the same page is a big help. Some streets are named but it would help if the names of other streets were included as well as some residential estates.

Your application was well prepared, and we appreciate your brief descriptions of projects and a reasonable number of pages.

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

Desmond Castle is a major feature in the town centre, and we note the works done on the courtyard and its use for a farmer's market. Many thanks for information on the improvements to buildings in Church Street – they look very well. The opening of Limerick Greenway in 2021 is no doubt a major addition to your infrastructure. It is great to see a modern use of the old railway line. Buildings which we noted looking well were the Longcourt Hotel, the Catholic Church and several fine buildings around the Square. It is great to see a buzz of commercial premises here as well as in other adjacent streets. In common with other urban centres in Ireland, you have some premises which need attention and hopefully as the economy picks up, these will get attention.

The Square is an important central open space and is all the more elegant because of the two lines of lime trees. We were surprised to note that they are growing in raised square pits and wonder if these were added in recent years or if the trees were planted into them. Some of the trees are without leaders which may be due to pruning practice – intentional or otherwise. We suggest that advice be sought from an arborist to examine the growth pattern of these trees and to suggest measure that would encourage them to grow more upright and in scale with the buildings.

It was great to see the new development at the Market Yard which is essentially a car park include hornbeam trees

which help to soften the hard landscape. However, it appears that these trees have not been maintained since they were planted. Thankfully, they have established but are now in desperate need of attention. The tree guards which are no longer required should be removed – some are pressing against the tree stem and lower branches (suckers) should be removed. They would also benefit from more space at ground level and possibly some feeding. We suggest that an arborist be engaged to advise on their treatment. It was great to see public toilets (French style) being available in the Market Yard.

At the Community Centre, we noted the improvements to the tennis courts and the car park, and we were pleased to use the facilities of the Community Centre. The parklets we noted in the square and elsewhere but wonder about their value – they appear to add unnecessary clutter to a space that doesn't need more such items. Improvement of the pathways within the demesne with tarmacadam will make their usage more popular. Painting public lighting poles black was noted as was the art work on service boxes. Several monuments and art features in the town provide added interest. In particular, the 36 feet high IRA monument opposite the Catholic Church is an iconic feature of the town since its erection in 1955. We note it includes granite and marble from the four provinces and the marble figures were cut in Italy. We admired the terrace of houses beside Newcastle West Fuels caught our eye. Some premises were enhanced with well-planted hanging baskets.

Green Spaces and Landscaping / Spásanna Glasa agus Tírdhreachú:

Projects mentioned under this heading include a major tree planting programme with support from Easy Treesie in association with Crann – Trees for Ireland, The Tree Council, PSE Power and a private donor. This project started with the planting of 41 silver birch trees. Spring flowering bulbs such as daffodils and bluebells are also noted here. We walked along the section of the Arra River where you are developing a People's Park and note that you have done much work in clearing away 'overgrowth' and have planted trees, shrubs and two beds. While we admire your efforts in improving this space, we suggest that some of the things you have done are not necessary or even appropriate. In that regard, we observed newly planted trees (including apple trees) in positions of shade within a metre of an established tree stem. None of these new trees have any hope of surviving to any reasonable size because they are too shaded and will not be able to compete with the existing mature trees such as horse chestnuts which will take any nutrients or moisture that is available. We suggest that all of these newly planted trees that survive, be transplanted to an open site away from existing trees next winter. The best approach to managing this little park would be to remove low branches and allow light into the area and encourage wildflowers to develop. In regard to the square beds made with timber, they look out of place in a riverside area. We suggest they be removed and just encourage wildflowers to grow. The simplest approach to this area is the best approach.

You are very fortunate to have part of the former demesne as a public park. It is a fabulous resource and we greatly admired the excellent specimens of trees as we walked through the comfortable pathways. We spotted an ash tree that was planted by former president Mary McAleese on the 16th February 1999 for National Tree Week. Sadly, this tree is dying because of ash dieback disease which has killed many thousands of ash trees all over Ireland. We noted information signs in the park but they were difficult to read because they needed cleaning and in some cases there was graffiti. At one edge of the park, we came across a very large water tower which would be an excellent opportunity for some artist to convert into an art form.

Elsewhere in the town we were pleased to see established trees enhancing the buildings.

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

Activities mentioned under this heading include the distribution of the updated Newcastle West Biodiversity 2020 publication by Geoff Hunt, nature walks and visits to schools and participation in online courses and webinars. Tree planting and wildflower meadows are also relevant activities. Well done on the initiative to develop a biodiversity action plan for Assumpta park and for similar activity at Desmond complex where we note red squirrels are present. Installation of bird and bat boxes is noted.

More information on this criterion and suitable projects is available on the following link which is the revised handbook. <https://www.tidytowns.ie/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Nature-and-Biodiversity-in-your-locality.pdf>

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

Projects mentioned under this criterion include the Food Cloud Hub at Desmond Complex assisting needy and helping to minimize waste. We note that herbs and salads grown at the Complex are used for Meals on Wheels and dinners for Day Service users. The refill station installed in 2021 adjacent to the children's playground is a great facility that will encourage people to bring drinking containers with them when using the playground and the park. Rainwater harvesting activities are noted as are charity shops and repair shops. Several public transports services are listed. The various education courses that committee members have taken are noted.

Other measures that your town can take in regard to sustainability is to assess the success of recycling through waste contractors and even more important, waste reduction. Other waste minimisation projects might include working with retailers to cut down on packaging, reminding people to re-use shopping bags, discouraging junk mail. In response to an overuse of chemicals for weed control, many useful products of the past are no longer available and therefore communities are encouraged to use other means such as hoeing to maintain weeds. In some cases, allowing wildflowers to develop is an acceptable alternative. These activities will highlight the fact that you are focussing on this category and when you develop more projects in the future your marks will increase.

For more helpful tips and case studies from other Tidy Towns entrants please take a look at <http://localprevention.ie/tidy-towns/>. We also advise that you check the revised handbook for more information on this criterion – at the following link

<https://www.tidytowns.ie/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Sustainability-Doing-More-with-less.pdf>

Tidiness and Litter Control / Slachtmhaireacht agus Rialú Bruscair:

You actively participate in An Taisce Spring Clean, Team Limerick Clean Up; and hold regular litter picking events and we note that Arra Development play a vital role in litter control throughout the town as well as the Picker Pal Schools. The evidence of your work is in the many bags of material collected during these events. Can you advise if this material is segregated into recyclables and non-recyclables before disposal. You are anxious to have more litter bins, some especially for pizza boxes. Would the pizza sellers help in that regard?

With a reduction in the use of chemicals for weed control, it means that manual means are more time consuming. In general, we were pleased to see very little litter during our visit so congratulations on work well done. One matter that we did see was that road channels beside footpaths needed sweeping. Is that something that is usually done by your volunteers?

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

At Assumpta park, we walked the large open spaces and noted the pedestrian link to Lower Maiden Street. It is a rich open space for the biodiversity study. At Hawthorn Drive, we admired the established maple trees and noted that there are also small trees in some front gardens. The houses looked well. Some kerbside weeds were present. The open space is well-maintained and there is scope for more trees there and perhaps a section could be left unown to encourage wildflowers to develop. Not far from here on Killeline Road, we noted the best example of climbing plants covering a main house (and a side house as well). Well done to the occupants for taking such good care of the plants – that high standard could not be achieved without such commitment. Arra View estate is relatively new but has established trees on the central open space. Essentially what would have been front gardens is the driveway, although we noted that some residents have found space for planting. Beechwood estate has a fine avenue of trees on the entrance which is also shared with a nursing home. The rest of the estate is more typical with walled front gardens and a mix of trees in roadside margins. The open space would benefit from tree planting.

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

The approach to Newcastle West is very pleasant and the Old Pike Roundabout serves a great purpose in letting you know you have arrived. We liked the tree planting there and note that they are clipped. We also liked the Arra Roundabout although it is smaller and is planted with several trees. One large tree in the centre of this roundabout would probably be sufficient. We wondered why one side of the stone wall surrounding is lower than the other – perhaps it is due to sightlines. Stone walls are always attractive, and you have some that are very nice and appropriate for the area – although we note a problem of controlling weeds at the base. It is great to see established trees on many sections of approach roads and within the town.

The attractive floral mural on the gable of a house on Bridewell Row is very impressive. The use of pollinator friendly species on approach roads is noted.

Concluding Remarks:

Newcastle West is very impressive. While having often driven through the town, this was our first time to visit the Square and adjacent streets. It was a pleasant experience. We hope that this report is helpful in your efforts to improve the environment of Newcastle West. Please contact Limerick County Council and ask them to have an arborist complete a survey of the trees, especially in the Square and the Market Yard. Keep up the good work and we look forward to your application in 2023.