

Tidy Towns Competition 2022

Adjudication Report

Centre: Westport - Cathair na Mart	Ref: 366
County: Mayo	Mark: 362
Category: E	Date(s): 08/07/2022

	Maximum Mark	Mark Awarded 2021	Mark Awarded 2022
Community – Your Planning and Involvement	80	52	53
Streetscape & Public Places	80	48	50
Green Spaces and Landscaping	80	48	49
Nature and Biodiversity in your Locality	55	39	41
Sustainability – Doing more with less	55	24	26
Tidiness and Litter Control	90	62	63
Residential Streets & Housing Areas	55	33	34
Approach Roads, Streets & Lanes	55	45	46
TOTAL MARK	550	351	362

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... 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.

Westport have been participating in the Tidy Towns competition since 1958 and have an outstanding record of achievement in bringing three national wins to the town. Westport is widely regarded as an important 'gold standard' in many aspects of the competition and has inspired, educated, informed and assisted countless Tidy Towns groups throughout Ireland move towards greater heights of excellence. Despite the great tradition, Westport Tidy Towns (WTT) continues to compete and innovate and does not rest on past glories.

Your entry comprises 47 pages, down from 92 pages responding to last year's adjudicator's request. Over the eight categories there were a total of 71 projects listed in the application with 28 designated N (New). However, some projects did not have a specified designation (assumed M, Maintenance) and a number had both M and N designation together. This adjudicator would expect a project to be designated either M or N but not both.

The map is clear with 22 individually numbered projects covering the categories. The map numbering is difficult to read - suggestion include only new category N projects and use the same numbers as appear in the application. For example, Knockranny Woods Walk is numbered 8.4 in the application and numbered 12 on the map. It appears that the map was not entirely up to date with the latest Greenway connections apparently not included, which posed a certain navigation challenge. One additional request, include a key/legend to the colour codes and a formal North/South arrow. This year's entry form requested that you briefly identify ONE specific project where particular effort was applied since July 1st, 2021. The adjudicator was not able to identify this, perhaps it could be rectified next year - if the same request is made!

You continue to enhance your communication across the community in many ways. You use Facebook as a communications channel with 3018 followers. The Facebook pages gives a clear and excellent record of your activities.

You have an impressive list of 27 supporter groups which support WTT as well as 25 supporting residential areas - this is an extraordinary response.

Your core committee of 19 backed up by a host of volunteers who have given a whopping 7,300 hours of voluntary work. These numbers reflect the outstanding community support of WTT by a significant number of committed volunteers across the whole community.

Congratulations on being the first Irish accredited Cycling Friendly Destination - 'Cycling Friendly Clewboy', designated by the European Cycling Federation. This will surely focus the attention of millions of Continental European cyclists on Westport.

It was also nice to see the relevant references to the UN Sustainable Development Goals indicated for each of the individual BTT project categories. A suggestion, include the specific SDG relevant numbers with each individual project - this is a useful practical first step in learning the important goals (for Ireland and all humanity) as a start to Ireland's ambitious plan to achieve all 17 by 2030.

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

Westport overwhelms the senses with the many excellent aspects of Streetscape and Public Places. The historical advantages of a formally planned town have been expanded and developed in a systematically integrated and enviable manner. The North and South Mall, divided by the Carrowbeg River, forms the baseline for the street grid emanating from the South Mall, particularly James Street leading to The Octagon and Bridge Street leading to The Clock. These and adjacent streets, together with a myriad of interconnecting laneways give a unique charm to the town. The traditional Irish shopfronts has reached its zenith in Westport with individually sensitively crafted new frontages setting off the freshly painted and upgraded streetscape facades. The brighter colours now being used are vibrant but not gaudy. The trees lining the streets unobtrusively add to a perfect scene. The heavily trafficked streets are judiciously served by controlled street-side and lots of concealed off-street parking. The post Covid 'Best Foot Forward Campaign' addressed and co-ordinated most aspects of the public realm in a Design Guide. A minor quibble, the Design Guidance Leaflet was not attached to the application as per 2.1 in the Tidy Towns application! The new Westport Energy Master Plan has launched the transport related '15 Minute Westport', a vision to move cars out of more of the public realm and further promote healthier active travel. The Westport Accessibility Audit has produced a new user-friendly manual which will implement disability friendly measures in ongoing upgrades and repair works. Repaving the Mall, the 2022 Dereliction Study, the sensitive management of Outdoor Dining, the on-going conservation works on Westport House, the 150-year-old Holy Trinity Church are individual improvements. The completion of the Point Swimming Area for the hardy open water swimmers with steps, picnic benches, toilet and even a mobile sauna is another positive amenity, transforming a relatively remote area into a must-see destination.

Green Spaces and Landscaping / Spásanna Glasa agus Tírdhreachú:

The pollinator friendly aspect of planting is very evident, and one is drawn to the balanced colours of the Octagon and Clock and the river baskets on the bridges. A total number of 422 floral window boxes is reported. The measures to promote the Edible Landscape Project continue, aiming at all sectors with grafting workshops, seed ball making sessions, workshops to plant hundreds of native fruit and nut trees and the expansion of the Quay allotments for the local apartment residents.

The newly constructed waterfall on the Greenway at High Street Bridge is an imaginative way to solve a drainage problem by developing a wild pollinator garden bounded by stone walls and using recycled Lacken stone taken from the Mall upgrade works.

There is a pleasant quality aspect to landscaping and green spaces in Westport. The care and attention is obvious. For example, in Fr. Angelus Park opposite Rice College one can see eye catching pollinator friendly planting. Also, beside the off ramp from the Greenway at High Street Bridge, there is a beautiful mix of pollinator friendly flowers and plants. This was also seen behind the wall beside the railway platform at the Westport railway station.

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

WTT have put effort into this category over the last number of years. Your Tidy Towns biodiversity officer is also acting as a Tree Guardian. The 60 cherry trees planted to mark the 60th anniversary of Tidy Towns are thriving and blossomed in the Spring as per a supplied photo. The Carrowbeg river is a major biodiversity asset and moor hens and a new damselfly 'Banded Demoiselle' were recorded for the first time. The Friends of Carrowbeg River Biodiversity Group are looking at nature-based solutions to reduce flooding and increase water flow. It was great to see a wildflower patch in gravel islands on the river along the Mall. The new wildflower garden on the Newport Road was admired as was the pollinator friendly Library Garden at the water's edge.

WTT commendably collect seed from the wildflowers at the appropriate time and use it to grow plug plants sustainably to allow more secure planting of new and existing areas. WTT might consider ways of spreading their learning in this area perhaps by a short video.

Your new Pollinator Friendly Garden and Wildlife Competition is set to build on your strong support from residential areas. As a scythe owner, I was delighted to see your start with Zero Carbon Cutting initially cutting 40 sq m by hand. WTT have highlighted the importance of the usually overlooked Wall Ecology and its contribution to biodiversity.

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

You report on 11 measures in your application of which 2 are New. The first involves meeting eleven like-minded Westport environmental groups to better co-ordinate and develop partnerships. The second relates to the '15 minute Westport campaign', an output from the recent Sustainable Energy Community Energy Master Plan. This focusses on moving cars out of town centre streets and making it more pedestrian and cycle friendly. This might be a blueprint for other communities to think about the currently 'unthinkable' aspects of blocking certain streets to traffic.

The 9 Maintenance projects include eliminating plastic water bottles, the Westport based 'Leave no Trace' national initiative, Smarter Travel Pilot Town, Sustainable Business. Particularly impressive is the improving Green Flag status of the 8 Westport schools and the monthly meeting of the Westport Eco-Congregation as a reflective response to 'Care of Creation'. The Maintenance projects were rounded off by Zero Waste FreeCycle Mayo which is a Facebook page offering free items for recycle or up-cycle, as well as the continuing role of the five charity shops in Westport who also assisted in the Ukraine appeal.

For additional ideas, have a look at the Top Tips in page 8 of the Sustainability section of the Tidy Towns Handbook, available on line at the Tidy Towns website <https://www.tidytowns.ie/competition/handbook/>

Tidiness and Litter Control / Slachtmhaireacht agus Rialú Bruscair:

The town was litter free on adjudication day. Congratulations on keeping busy streets litter free despite the large daily traffic and tourist flow. No dog fouling was observed.

Any bottle banks/recycling centres visited were pristine, clean and neat. The Greenway was travelled extensively and was also commendably litter free.

In the town centre several cigarette ends were observed particularly outside busy pubs. Does anyone anywhere have a solution to this despicable behaviour and habit?

The river along the Mall was also totally free of litter, even the river bank vegetation did not harbour any stray plastic bottles or other debris! The cleanliness of many of the laneways also indicated the benefits of power washing.

You report that more than 7,300 hours of voluntary work is dedicated to keeping Westport clean and litter free. The results speak for themselves and are a testament to the relentless work done by the many volunteers and community groups who together with Mayo Co. Council carry out day-to-day actions.

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

You report 27 residential areas who work closely with WTT and participate in the annual competition which now features the best pollinator garden and the best wildlife pond.

The Clew Bay Garden Trail Summer 2022 is continued post Covid and provides a stimulus to all who visit as well as contributing to local charities.

The repaving and rejuvenation of the Mall was seen to be well underway and the Quay entrance to Westport house with the restored wall and newly planted bed was visited. The Soldier wood carving is a striking public sculpture and now has as a backdrop the vista of scaffold free Westport House.

Westlands's estate was visited with its twin arches on approach and it was obvious that the residents were committed supporters to pollinator planting and promoting the Westport ideals in their private gardens.

The townhouses and apartments along Westport Quay show that it is possible to revitalise a warehouse type property with vibrant businesses at ground level and unobtrusive car parking, contributing to an interesting and bustling quayside experience.

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

The approach roads were well surfaced with good signage and verges trimmed appropriately.

Approaching on the Louisburgh Road (R355) on the segregated cycle lane, the stone walls marked the rolling countryside. The hilly aspect of Westport was very obvious from this approach. Native Irish tree planting along the road crash barrier mirrored a neatly trimmed beech hedge along the cycle path.

The Ballinrobe approach along the R330 showed that advertising hoardings and poster display have been well managed. Suggestion, consider repainting the old railway bridge on the town side of the railway station at the beginning of the Greenway - it is long overdue a refurb and detracts from the railway approach. The old semi derelict convent is well disguised and does not detract from the excitement of approaching the town centre.

The new Knockranny Woods trail just off the Greenway and developed by Coillte (who use the name Colonel's Wood) is a major new amenity, with a 2km riverside walk and an 850m native woodland walk. Note that some stands of the invasive Gunnera plants were observed on the Greenway embankment near Rice College sports ground.

In the town, the busy streets were free of advertising sandwich boards which have hindered mobility in the past.

The very interesting network of laneways have revitalised previously hidden areas and give excellent connectivity to unobtrusive car parks.

Concluding Remarks:

Westport is an outstanding town and a great and interesting tourist destination. The results of many years of hard work are apparent.

I valued my time to explore Westport on foot and by bike and certainly look forward visiting again in the future.