

Tidy Towns Competition 2022

Adjudication Report

Centre: Laragh&Glendalough-An Laithreach & Gleann Da Loch	Ref: 260
County: Wicklow	Mark: 310
Category: B	Date(s): 20/07/2022

	Maximum Mark	Mark Awarded 2021	Mark Awarded 2022
Community – Your Planning and Involvement	80	37	38
Streetscape & Public Places	80	43	44
Green Spaces and Landscaping	80	43	46
Nature and Biodiversity in your Locality	55	33	34
Sustainability – Doing more with less	55	15	16
Tidiness and Litter Control	90	65	66
Residential Streets & Housing Areas	55	32	33
Approach Roads, Streets & Lanes	55	33	33
TOTAL MARK	550	301	310

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

Fáilte chuig Comórtas Na mBailte Slachtmhara SuperValu 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 SuperValu TidyTowns competition. Thank you for your entry and keep up the great work.

You are to be congratulated that 10% of the village's population is represented on your committee or core volunteer base, quite an achievement. Based on your extensive list of local businesses & other community groups you are well embedded in all community activities & events. Your local businesses who provide refreshments after your clean ups obviously recognize the important work you all do & how it benefits their future too. Who could refuse a sweet treat & a chat after a few hours of hard work! For every Tidy Towns group there is a boost when new residents join the group & your Ukrainian visitors, like many in other towns, are very willing to get their sleeves rolled up & participate. Delighted to see you are receiving support, advice & funding from the relevant agencies.

Communication is key in getting the Tidy Towns message out to all the community & well done on using every possible medium at your disposal.

It is great news to hear you have established a Junior Tidy Towns Group. It is so important that the younger generations have the opportunity to partake in projects within their community & gain an understanding of their social & environmental responsibilities. Your Gaisce volunteer, Loughlin is to be commended for all the work he completed in the village while earning his award in 2022.

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

On walking through the village of Laragh, there is no doubting the village is a tourist hub with the number of establishments servicing the influx of visitors. It is great to have so much of the village accessible via pathways. The local businesses take pride in their appearances with well-maintained facades, exterior spaces & boundaries as were seen on adjudication day. Who would have believed how well we Irish would have taken to al fresco dining & this was very much in evidence during the visit. The dining area is a nicer use of space outside Lynham's Hotel than the previous car parking. It creates a lovely ambience within the village. You are very fortunate to have well maintained stonewalls & hedge boundaries in the main within the village as well as the single span granite & stone bridge over the Glenamacnass River. A river is a wonderful amenity to have within a village.

The Brockagh Resource Centre was a hive of activity on adjudication day & the playground in constant use. The list

of activities & events held at the centre is remarkable & an excellent amenity for the community. There is definitely merit in creating better signage for the centre. In fact the signage at that road entrance on the right hand side was totally obscured by vegetation.

Scoil Chaoimhín Naofa across the road is an excellent architectural mix of old & new. As they appear to be involved in the Green Schools programme it would be good to get an update annually on which flag they are working towards & the activities they have completed. The pedestrian walkway to access the school would benefit from some permanent fencing to replace the current pallet as well as the removal of the bike lock from the gate.

St Kevin's Parish Church & The Hermitage are set in such picturesque settings & the grounds are stunning. The standard of maintenance is exceptional.

It would be most interesting to receive a synopsis of the Laragh Glendalough Masterplan that was completed this year in next year's submission.

The new free car park on the Green Road is an excellent idea in order to relieve congestion in the village at peak times. Well done on working with local landowners to establish, in time, an access path between the free car park & the Ballard Trail. It will take time. It was very clear parking in the village is an issue given the number of establishments emphatically stating on signage that parking spaces were for customers use solely.

It will be of interest to see what the council's plans are for the traffic calming measures in addition to the cycle lane – do keep us updated in each year's submission.

Green Spaces and Landscaping / Spásanna Glasa agus Tírdhreachú:

The village green with its mature trees, stone wall perimeter, curved pathway & mature shrub beds presents such an idyllic picture & how fortunate to have that as your daily view. The other green on the R755 road is a magnet for visitors with the food outlet & has some lovely seating that was fully occupied during the visit. One of the hedgerows had a stunning linear bed of oxeye daisies & purple loosestrife.

The landscaped area on the left hand side at the entrance to Brockagh & Church was looking resplendent with its fresh surfacing of bark mulch & healthy shrubs. Do ensure the temporary signage is removed when the road surfaced is deemed finished. There is significant maintenance work involved in keeping the graveled area to the front weed free.

You are fortunate to be within walking distance of the Wicklow Mountains National Park & you are to be commended for creating linked walking trails to the park in conjunction with Coillte. The Brockagh Trails were a delight & the information board at the entrance a mine of information. Its accessibility from the village is a bonus. Your adjudicator enjoyed traversing a section of the walk. The Ballard Trails through the forest & along by the Avonmore River are so peaceful & were very quiet on adjudication day. Well done on completing these new recreational trails, a wonderful legacy for locals & visitors alike.

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

Laragh's school children are fortunate to have the opportunity to participate in a Forest School & gain an appreciation & deeper connection for nature. This is an excellent opportunity for them to get involved in the surveys run by the National Biodiversity Data Centre. <https://biodiversityireland.ie/> These surveys range from Garden Butterflies, Flower Insect Timed (FIT) Count, Spring Flowers project, etc. Delighted to hear you are commencing a project with LAWPRO on their Citizen Science project. The monitoring & protecting of local water ecosystems is vital work & interesting for the local school children.

St Kevin's Parish Church & The Hermitage are the epitome of how faith communities can create havens for wildlife whilst still operating for other functions. The wildflower meadows with paths mown through & verges edged under the mature trees all create an oasis of calm. What a perfect meditative garden.

Is there willingness by the residents at the Village Green to have some of the green area as a wildflower meadow with paths mown through & the verges cut? It would present a wonderful wildlife habitat as well as a stunning panorama. It appears from the recent grass cutting that Cluain Bán estate have allocated some of their green as a meadow.

Daffodils appear to be very popular in Laragh. Unfortunately, they provide very little nectar for pollinators. Next spring, determine where you have spaces in your spring planting scheme & over time, introduce spring bulbs like muscari, snowdrops, alliums, bluebells etc, as they will provide pollen for early waking pollinators. It is heartening to see you are moving to pollinator friendly perennial plants in your planting schemes. The sowing of sunflower seeds through the island of Ireland this year has been a wonderful way to connect with our Ukrainian visitors & lend our support in a small way.

Where residences can facilitate it, it would be fantastic to have green boundaries of native hedging as these provide wildlife corridors & are critical for our pollinators. Additionally, it creates a uniform panorama for the village.

Your plans for further native hedging & tree planting is great news. How amazing that you are growing trees from native trees & they appear to be coming on nicely in the community garden bed.

We will be interested to hear how the Barn Owl Restoration project progresses in next year's submission. When one considers 85% of owlets this year will not see Christmas, then any work in this area is crucial.

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

In order to get people out of their cars, pedestrian access & good street lighting are essential. It is important to keep this on your agenda for the county council in relation to access from the village to the GAA field. Allied to reduced car usage is the facility on offer weekly at the resource centre, the Brockagh Digital Hub. With the increased move to working from home & increased fuel costs, this must be a lifeline for many local people. Do many locals avail of the facility? Laragh is fortunate to have a local link bus especially for residents without private transport & even now for motorists given rising costs.

It is fantastic you have an established SEC who are holding talks & providing advice on solar energy. A social media campaign offering advice & tips on various energy saving measures would work well in tandem. Wicklow Libraries' home energy kit is also worth promoting to the community.

The Community Garden was not all that easy to locate. It is a sizeable space & the mown paths allow easy access to parts of the garden. At the time of adjudication the polytunnels & ground area appeared to be lightly used with a handful of planted beds. The fruit trees & fruit bushes were producing well. Your plan to introduce more water butts is necessary as it is unlikely the one located at the open shed would meet your present needs. How many active members of the community make use of the garden? Perhaps the establishment of a GIY group might be considered. www.giy.ie

As you have several tourism businesses in the community, it may be worth bringing the Green Hospitality programme to their attention with its focus on environmental sustainability. <https://greenhospitality.ie/>

Tidiness and Litter Control / Slachtmhaireacht agus Rialú Bruscair:

Footpaths & kerbsides were well maintained generally with a few requiring a little additional weeding. The village was free of litter & that is quite an achievement in a tourist area. Bins had plenty of capacity. Well done on having six Pure Mile locations now. Are the groups noticing any reduction in littering?

As referenced earlier, the provision of light refreshments to volunteers after an evening's work is a generous gift from local businesses & a great chance to chat & catch up. We all need a little encouragement to get out litter picking.

Dog fouling is a problem created by a few irresponsible dog owners & blights many pedestrian routes. The best approach is to place reminders on well used walking routes coupled with a social media campaign, humorous & pointed.

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

Cluain Bán estate has a lovely green frontage & judging from our visit they will be enjoying a bounty of apples from the mini orchard. The beech hedge screening the estate is flourishing. As there is no shortage of space, would there be less maintenance & water usage involved if the flowers & plants in the containers were placed in linear beds? It appears that a section of the green has been used while road works took place, hopefully in time it may be reseeded.

The houses facing the village green have lovely enclosed gardens. We note the efforts you have made in relation to the derelict property there.

Beechwood estate has large greens & a good range of mature trees. The mini wildflower meadow was doing well & they appear to have adopted a low mow regime as many short wildflowers were on display. Are there residents associations in each estate? There is a very good publication on setting one up that is worth sharing. https://www.dlrcoco.ie/sites/default/files/atoms/files/setting_up_a_residents_association.pdf

All of the estates have potential for further tree planting, edible hedges, wildflower meadows or mini orchards. There are so many projects now where it is possible to source additional native trees e.g. Easy Treesie www.easytreesie.com; Reforest Nation www.reforestnation.ie; NeighbourWood Scheme run by the Forest Service. Although as your own cultivated trees thrive, you will have no need to source trees from external sources. "DC for Bees" is an initiative to create mini orchards in communities. <https://www.hostinireland.com/dc-s-for-bees>

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

The R755 approach road with its pedestrian access from Trooperstown Wood is well presented with residential green boundaries, mature beech trees & native hedging. The plan for the Woollen Mills road frontage to be planted with native hedging will complete the vista.

The R755 approach road from Rathdrum will benefit from the provision of the free car park located between the Woollen Mills & GAA grounds. This combined with the free weekend & Bank Holiday shuttle service is a good workaround to traffic congestion.

The pollinator friendly planting in front of the village signage stones was looking well on adjudication day.

Concluding Remarks:

Well done to you all in Laragh on building on its natural resources with the addition of more recreational walks, greater focus on biodiversity with native tree planting, plans for river monitoring & a move to pollinator friendly planting. The outcome of your Masterplan coupled with the council's settlement & tourism plan will provide you with a framework for the future & no shortage of projects.

Thank you for a well drawn map, an essential guide in making an adjudicator's visit a breeze. It was a pleasure to visit Laragh & with all the additional trails the next visit will not be far away. The very best of luck with all your endeavours.