

Tidy Towns Competition 2025

Adjudication Report

Centre: **Cong - Cunga Feicin** Ref: **558**
County: **Mayo** Mark: **386**
Category: **B** Date(s): **14/06/2025**

	Maximum Mark	Mark Awarded 2024	Mark Awarded 2025
Community – Your Planning and Involvement	80	48	50
Streetscape & Public Places	80	55	58
Green Spaces and Landscaping	80	56	59
Nature and Biodiversity in your Locality	55	42	43
Sustainability – Doing more with less	55	31	32
Tidiness and Litter Control	90	67	69
Residential Streets & Housing Areas	55	32	34
Approach Roads, Streets & Lanes	55	40	41
TOTAL MARK	550	371	386

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

Fáilte chuig Comórtas Bailte Slachtmhara SuperValu 2025. Go raibh maith agaibh as d'iontráil a sheoladh chugainn. Maith sibh as an obair atá déanta i bhur cheantar go dtí seo - guímid gach rath oraibh i bhúr thionscadail amach anseo. Ádh mór.

Thank you for your completed Application Form which included photos of some of your projects, also for your legend and map with projects marked, and for your Short, Medium and Long Term Plan. (see Concluding Remarks below for advice on all of these). We visited the Cong website which is very informative – well done. We also opened your Facebook page (2.3K followers) and see that you post regularly which we were delighted to see. Your Instagram account was also examined. It is vital to keep up the interest of the community on your social media platforms. We love to see photos showing the projects and the volunteers involved in doing work. We tried to open the links to the videos of Cong Tidy Towns 2025 and Dr. Kathleen Lynn Garden but neither were videos – just images. Your committee is joined by 30+ volunteers, including children, who help when there are jobs to be done. This is a wonderful number of volunteers for a village of 366 people. State, semi-state, voluntary clubs, and businesses support you with advice or financially which is perfect, as many projects need collaborators to see them being advanced/ completed. Good to see that your village has three RSS staff assigned to carry out maintenance work. You've participated in the Tidy Towns competition for over thirty years which has enhanced the village and strengthened the community spirit.

See Concluding Remarks for additional advice on filling out the application form and producing a map(s).

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

The streetscape of Cong, with its narrow one-way street system, boasts single and two storey vernacular residences and businesses sitting comfortably side by side. Add to these, the historic buildings and structures associated with the Augustinian Abbey, the ruins of the Cofl Cong Church, the modern St Mary of the Rosary RC Church, the disused canal walls, the forge, and your many bridges to complete the architectural merit of the village. In addition, there is the wonderful Ashford Castle and all the structures associated with it, right on your doorstep. Please commend the many business and residential owners and occupiers for adding to the beauty of the village with freshly painted façades and wonderful floral displays. We felt some of the businesses had unnecessary signage on their properties (one premises had four signs with the same information); maybe ask them to remove them to improve the streetscape. The public realm area at the road junction with the simple, well designed, stone seating area against a backdrop of mature trees is excellent – compliment to Mayo Co Co. The Crossroads Community Centre was well presented; we admired the seating with the large stones as back supports. The timber in the seats needs attention – some wood preservative to stop the decay. We admired the new slipway at Lislaughtera and it was good to see the picnic benches close by. We admired the many flat iron gates we saw both

in the village and on approach roads, most of which were well maintained. Interesting to see the Film Trail sign; we didn't know an Atlantic Film Trail existed! You have a small amount of unoccupancy/ dereliction which detracts from the streetscape. We noted the two-storey house (we're assuming the subject of the planning permission) with long grass in the garden – just trim the edges of the grass to show that it is being maintained. Dr. Kathleen Lynn's beautiful garden is a wonderful asset to this area of your streetscape – well done to all concerned in its creation.

Green Spaces and Landscaping / Spásanna Glasa agus Tírdhreachú:

There are quite a number of wonderful green spaces in and around Cong where the community can walk. Ashford Castle's 140 hectare estate offers a wonderful walking experience in the formal gardens and wooded areas. In addition, the Neale GAA Club/St Feicin's Park is located close by. The tree lined roadway at Lisloughrey Cemetery was admired. Remove the sign that presently exists on the left-hand pier of the cemetery. Piers and gates are important architectural elements and signs should only be attached to the wall beside them. The planters looked good – a few trailing plants next year would add to their impact. You have quite a number of stone surround planting beds in the village and on your approach roads which were very well maintained – compliments to those who are involved in this work. We particularly admired the ones at the bend of Abbey Street. Here there was a great mix of perennial pollinator friendly shrubs and plants. We also admired the bog oak sculpture. Is the 'Make a Wish Well' still needed as a fundraiser? If not remove it and add a second bog oak sculpture which is more in keeping with your area. The hanging baskets were admired and particularly those along Abbey Street which brightened up the high dark stone wall. Cong Community Playground was wonderful – we loved the carved seat under the trees. Thank you for the photos of the construction of Dr. Kathleen Lynn's beautiful garden. This is a wonderful celebration of this remarkable lady and her research work into medicinal plants. Good to see the English and Irish on the sign. We admired the different coloured stone paths with concrete borders and the raised beds with a wonderful array of pollinator friendly plants in addition to medicinal plants. We read that plants were donated by the National Botanic Gardens and by St. Anne's Park Clontarf. We liked that you had added the names of the plants as often, those visiting wouldn't know them.

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

Your location in the centre of mature forests, beside Lough Corrib, and with a large number of stone walls around the village provides habitats, food sources and cover for mammals, birds and insects. With the number of large stone buildings we assume that there are quite a few where swifts nest annually. It would be good to do a survey of the various buildings, including houses on approach roads, and see all the nesting sites you have. Dusk is the best time and you'll see the swifts circling around and then entering under the eaves. Trim the edges of grass margins in locations such as the Community Centre, so that it is seen that you are maintaining the area and that the long grass behind is being let grow intentionally for biodiversity. There's no need for signage it will be obvious. We advise this approach to other areas of grass cutting. The flower beds beside the Tourist Office had a great number of bees and butterflies visiting which was nice to see. We noted bird boxes and bat boxes as we walked around. Have you had success with these? The duck house in Cong River was quite busy. We counted twelve ducks in and around it. The salmon hatchery was noted as was a heron on the river bank. The walk to Kelly's Cave brought us through a pleasant woodland area. We noted on your Facebook page that you had a talk 'Exploring the Woodlands of Cong'. We hope it was well attended. Include a photo of the event in next year's Application Form. We read that research was carried out on the Cong River but what has happened to the river as a result of the research? The bug hotel at the entrance to Cong carpark was noted – congratulations to the National School children who were involved in this project.

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

The polytunnel and raised beds in the National School were noted. Do you help here? Very often TidyTowns committees are involved in planting vegetables and flowers with one class (say 5th) and in this way every child leaving National School will have had experience of seeing seeds planted and vegetables and flowers growing. Maybe something for you to undertake? We looked for the Community Herb Garden but didn't see it. You tell us it's a NEW project but we wonder if it's still in the conception stage? Nice to read about Ashford Castle's bee hives. We're assuming that the honey will be used in-house? Or is it the intention to make it available for sale in the village? Interesting to read that you use alpaca manure in your tubs and flowerbeds. Where are the alpacas or is the manure bought by the garden centre? Do you know what the businesses are doing in terms of sustainability? We read that you use the coffee shops' waste coffee grains for compost. Have any of the shops changed from using plastic bags to using paper ones? A simple but effective measures for you to suggest and we have no doubt that the idea will be positively received. Good to hear that the GAA recycles clothes and gives sports gear, which has become too small for some members, free of charge to those who need it. Delighted to read, and see photos of Ashford Castle's organic gardens. Have you thought about having a Community Garden? These are very popular with those who have no space to grow vegetables and indeed those who would like advice as well as company while working in their garden.

Tidiness and Litter Control / Slachtmhaireacht agus Rialú Bruscair:

Your village was almost litter-free when we visited which is wonderful for a village that had quite a number of tourists visiting. We noticed some weed growth along the base of wall which gave a slightly unkempt feel. Ask you volunteers to bring a hoe/spade and stiff brush with them to remove weed growth. It won't take long and the result will be wonderful. Some of the Heritage Trail signs were a little battered – check and repair/replace those in need. We noticed quite a number signs directing us to various commercial premises. These are clutter and unpleasant and detract from the streetscape. It would be great if these were removed. We recommend that you do a survey of empty poles and ask Mayo Area Office to remove them. In addition, survey the street lighting poles as some of

these are in need painting. We noted ivy on some of your beautiful stone walls. While ivy is a wonderful for insect life and is acceptable/good on rendered (plastered) walls it is not acceptable on stone structures as the roots penetrate between the joints in the stones, making the walls unstable, which finally leads to their collapse. Natural stone constructions are in themselves great habitats for insect life and also very beautiful in the streetscape. Cut the ivy at the roots and carefully removed the dead stems when they turn brown. The large, colourful, historic Cong sign in the centre of the village is torn. Remove it or replace it. Some road directional signs were dirty; these need to be washed on a regular basis to remove moss growth in areas where there are a lot of trees. We read you're looking at additional signage for the village. Truthfully, we advise against unnecessary signage as it is clutter on the streetscape and detracts from it. Be VERY selective in signage design and location.

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

Cong is a tightly planned village with one and two storey vernacular residences with architectural details and ornamentation giving variety along the streets. The residents along the streets have contributed positively to making the village extremely pleasant with freshly painted facades, windows and doors. Many had window boxes or hanging baskets which gave additional colour to the street. Along the entrance roads were houses in individual sites surrounded by well kept gardens. In the immediate vicinity of the village, we also noted some farm houses with well-kept farmyards. Some had beautiful dry-stone walls as roadside boundaries while others had neatly trimmed boundary hedges giving good visibility to the motorist. We visited Beal na Colle on the R345, where houses are sited in individual sites with well-maintained mature gardens surrounding them. Ashford Pines is a new estate of two storey houses yet to be completed. We noticed that some commercial premises had been converted to residential use in the centre of the village and were delighted to see that the name of the shop had been retained by the new owners/occupants. The shop fascias and shop/businesses names are part of your architectural, artistic and social heritage so we were very happy to see this in Cong and ask that you would advise developers to retain these in all future conversions.

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

Your approach roads were neatly presented with trimmed grass margins and well-maintained trees. Good to see a planting bed under the sign at the R334/R345 junction. Suggest to Mayo Co Co that next year they add some taller shrubs for more impact – or maybe you could do this? It's great to see footpaths extending into the countryside from your village making a safe route for those who want to walk and enjoy the fresh air and views across the fields. What brilliant large lake rocks form part of your stone walls; they are sculptural in form and quite wonderful. We were delighted to see so many along the entrance roads and in the village itself. Some edge break up was noticed on some roads and also road markings were worn in a few places. Are you in line for repairs and repainting? Nice to see the various trail routes markers. Unfortunately, we didn't have time to do any maybe next time. The large carpark beside the roundabout is quite wasteful in terms of marked carparking spaces. It would be good to see this area correctly marked out as a carpark and perhaps some trees could be planted at the end of parking rows. The Galway/Mayo bridge colours, showing your dual location, were admired.

Concluding Remarks:

We thoroughly enjoyed visiting your village ... but we have a few additional suggestions for 2026.

- Rather than telling us where you maintain just put an X on the approach road at the limits of the area. We suggest you provide us with two maps. One showing the overall area with the projects on the approach roads marked and the other, enlarged, of the centre of Cong. It would make the map less cluttered and easier for adjudicators to explore your area. You can also show key building, etc on these or if you wish show them on a separate map. We all have Google so can find key buildings/areas quite easily.
- Your Application Form is confusing. You use N and M but also use numbers without an N or M. We request applicants number their projects as, new projects (N), or improved/ maintained projects (M). You are to give each action/ project a number as New (N1, N2, N3 etc.) or Maintained (M1, M2, M3 etc). This same numbering system to be used to indicate the locations of these projects on your map(s) – N1, N2, N3 etc and M1, M2, M3 etc. If you wish you could colour code the various categories to make it even clearer. This is to help the adjudicators negotiate their way around your town and see the various projects or locations of projects.
- Rather than listing short, medium and long term projects we suggest you make a 5-Year Plan. List actions/projects which you hope to undertake under each category of the Tidy Towns Application Form. We recommend that you add the name of one committee member after each action/project who will lead/advance it so as to divide the work load. Also add the names of collaborators as many of the actions/projects will need the help of others to accomplish them. Then every year put a tick in a box after the project if it has been undertaken or completed. We advise that the plan is written as an Excel document rather than a Word document as it needs columns.
- All Future projects will be in your plan, and ONLY in your Plan. When they have been completed, then and ONLY THEN, will you add them to your Application Form as a NEW project.

We wish to state that this is not a criticism of your work but to explain to you that as adjudicators we rely on a clear application form and accompanying map to inform us of your projects and make our visit rewarding. Thank you for entering the SuperValu Tidy Towns 2025 competition. It was a pleasure to adjudicate Cong – a village we hadn't visited for a few years, so it was good to see the improvements you've made. Keep up the good work which is reaping its just rewards.

