Tidy Towns Competition 2026

Adjudication Report

Centre:	**Birr - Biorra**	Ref:	**549**
County:	**Offaly**	Mark:	**403**
Category:	**D**	Date(s):	**18/06/2026**

	Maximum Mark	Mark Awarded 2025	Mark Awarded 2026
Community – Your Planning and Involvement	80	58	59
Streetscape & Public Places	80	58	60
Green Spaces and Landscaping	80	55	57
Nature and Biodiversity in your Locality	80	48	50
Sustainability – Doing more with less	80	29	31
Tidiness and Litter Control	90	60	62
Residential Streets & Housing Areas	55	42	44
Approach Roads, Streets & Lanes	55	39	40
TOTAL MARK	**600**	**389**	**403**

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

Fáilte go Comórtas Bailte Slachtmhara SuperValu 2026. Go raibh maith agaibh as bhur n-iarratas a chur isteach. Maith sibh as an obair atá déanta agaibh in bhur gceantar go dtí seo - guíonn muid gach rath oraibh in bhur dtionscadail amach anseo.
Welcome to the SuperValu Tidy Towns 2026 competition and thank you for your application form, interspersed with photographs, and for your map and Three-Year Plan. We liked the simplicity of your logo – compliments to the artist. We tried to open your website but was told 'This site cannot be reached'. We did however open your Facebook page and see that you have 3K followers. We are delighted to see that you follow 225 and we assumed that some of these are other TidyTowns groups, where you share information and ideas. We also saw that you have an Instagram account with 818 followers. Birr is a large town and your map, while very basic, was perfect. We found your projects with ease and that's the function of the map. Just to update your population – in the 2022 Census your population was 4,726 and by the end of this year, it is expected to be over 5,000 which will put you into the next category 'E'. This should be a welcomed category for Birr as there are a smaller number of voluntary groups in this category. Your committee of 10 is assisted by 20+ volunteers, including a very strong Junior Tidy Towns Group. We were delighted to read that you have subcommittees who take responsibility for different aspects of the work to be undertaken. This is very suitable for a town as big as Birr. You are part of Birr 20:20 which includes other voluntary groups in the town and which was formed when Birr Town Council was abolished. You list a large number of state and semi-state agencies, in addition to business and community groups who support you and recognise your hard work. Your communication methods are excellent. The variety - social media, newspaper articles, radio etc - ensures that all ages are aware of your activities. And here we must mention your new van with your logo, which ensures that the community regularly see your active. You have been involved with SuperValu Tidy Towns since 1984 which is an enormous commitment from you and we are delighted to read that you are recognised as the voluntary group whose presence is very visible in the town with the various events which you organise throughout the year. We hope that our reports have been helpful to you over the years and that your town is somewhere that all the residents are proud to call home.

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

Generally we comment on vernacular single and two-storey buildings in the towns we visit but in your town, we must talk about the enormous amount of Georgian architecture that exists. There are streets in your town where have one stunning Georgian structure after another. Needless to say the most dominant structure in your town is Birr Castle and its various structures that are dotted throughout the demesne. In addition to this, you have many other dominant architectural structures – the Cumberland Column, the dominant Saint Brendan's CofI church, Oxmantown Hall, Saint Brendan's RC church, the Maid of Erin Monument, the old convent of Mercy school, Birr Library and LA offices, a five-storey stone warehouse, post boxes, etc etc. You are a town of enormous architectural, artistic,

industrial and social importance. We read of the sub-committees of Birr Tidy Towns and see that one of them is Built Heritage. We noted the various activities undertaken in this category – thank you for the photos. It is interesting that this group begins every year with a walk around the town taking notes on neglect, shop fronts, overhead wires, footpaths, bins etc. We are delighted to see this, as truthfully this is how a town needs to be managed. Like many villages and towns in Ireland you have your share of dereliction. We read that all derelict sites and properties have received their first letter from the LA to address the property. It's important that you follow up on this as it is easy for this to become inactive. We noted quite a number of overhead service cables. These diminish the visual amenity of the streetscape especially where they feature several cables radiating from a single pole; the local engineer should be approached regarding a possible date for ducting starting with the most unsightly poles first. We admired the poetry trail … we saw quite a few as we travelled around.

Green Spaces and Landscaping / Spásanna Glasa agus Tírdhreachú:

It is wonderful that you have two large parks, Camcor Park and Mill Island which are maintained by your town gardener. We assume this is one of your volunteers and not someone employed by the local authority? We read that you are replacing your wooden flower planters with recycled plastic planters made by a local company. It's good to support local businesses. Instead of using temporary planters it is always better to build a permanent planting bed where possible. This will provide year-round colour and particularly early spring flowers for our early pollinators. The work undertaken by the residents of Eden Road was admired – painting the rear wall was a very good idea as it brightens the area. We suggest that some climbers could be put on the other blank walls which will create biodiversity corridors. Ivy, pyracantha, wistaria, honeysuckle, clematis etc. are suggested. In addition, they will add colour to the streetscape and eliminate the need to paint the walls. We are delighted to see that you are organising your planting schemes and creating uniform banks of colourful pollinator-friendly flowers/shrubs in your permanent planting beds. You manage a large number of flowerbeds, hanging baskets and planters around Birr, which when we visited were in wonderful condition and added greatly to the streetscape. We admired the use of nepeta in your planting beds. Nowadays, due to climate change and large volumes of water in winter, rain gardens are the way forward and we suggest that you examine this possibility for areas along your streetscape in conjunction with your local authority.

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

There are great habitats for our insects, birds and wildlife in Birr. You have wonderful mature trees, hedgerows, many great stonewalls and stone structures, grasslands, the wonderful Birr Castle Demesne, and the two rivers – the Little Brosna and Camcor. Your planting beds were alive with insects, particularly butterflies and bees, when we visited. It is wonderful that you have an environmentalist advising you as this will ensure that your work will enhance your natural environment. We also see that you are in contact with local authority staff and with other semi state organizations – this is commendable. We read that additional trees have been planted in Birr. With global warming addition trees will be necessary our towns and cities as they help to reduce the temperature. Tree canopies keep the surface temperature of the ground up to 12°C cooler than areas where there are no trees. We read of the many activities which you undertook – site visits, schools competition, attendance at a summer school etc. Congratulations on being commended in the 2025 Pollinator Award. We admired the meadow at Birr Workhouse Buriel Ground. As you are undertaking a cut and lift regime this meadow will, in a few years, have a wonderful variety of native wildflowers. Starving the ground of nutrients is beneficial for wildflower growth. Remember to harvest some seeds for use elsewhere. You are keeping a watchful eye on your nature and biodiversity, but you haven't mentioned that you have undertaken a Biodiversity Action Plan. You are already aware of some of what's around you, but it would be worthwhile having a formal BAP with a Plan of Action for you to undertake so that you are enhancing your natural habitats. We encourage your faith communities to sign up for 'Havens for Nature' introduced this year by the Heritage Council. Check he Heritage Council website and encourage them all to support biodiversity in Faith Grounds.

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

Unfortunately, quite a few communities still struggle with this category, and really it is just about you as a voluntary group 'doing more with less' and encouraging the community to do likewise. Reusing items which we would otherwise discard it what we must do. We are delighted to read that as a community Birr Tidy Towns is committed, along with other voluntary groups and businesses, to make Birr a sustainable, low carbon town. We are delighted that you have a number of businesses in the town who are supporting this drive – cafés, vegetable shops, a printer, and hopefully more will become involved. We read that the schools, primary and secondary, are involved in school book rental schemes or have second-hand school book sales days. Perhaps they could be encouraged to also have a school uniform swap day. Many uniforms, including sports equipment, is sometimes barely used. We are delighted to read that they all take part in the Green Schools programme. We thank the teachers for their involvement and for their work. Good to see that there are local educational courses in Horticulture and Environmental Education. Perhaps some of the graduates or indeed, the students would become volunteers with you. It would look good on their CV. It will be good to see Birr Castle Demesne being recognised as a Fáilte Ireland Sustainable Tourism Member. You have a number of cafés, restaurants, public houses and hotels in Birr all of whom serve coffee. Do you know what they do with their waste coffee grinds? Many of your gardeners would be happy to get these as they are wonderful for acid-loving and nitrogen-hungry plants such as blueberries, hydrangeas, azaleas and roses. Spread a thin layer of coffee grinds around these plants and then rake it into the soil – this provides a gentle nitrogen boost, and also helps maintain the soils acidity. They can also be added to compost – but this must be left for a year before use. We visited your Community Garden … lots of busy volunteers. It will be good to get Refill stations – the old water pump back again!

Tidiness and Litter Control / Slachtmhaireacht agus Rialú Bruscair:

The N52 route goes through Birr and brings with it large volumes of traffic, which is a challenge for you in terms of litter. In addition you have Birr Castle and Demesne which attracts a large number of visitors all year round. We are delighted to report that for a town busy with tourists there was only a small amount of litter on the streets when we visited – we commend the litter pick-up team who are doing a very good job for you. Some weed growth was noted, but truthfully, it didn't detract too much from the streetscape. Just keep on top of this as weeds too need to be removed. The chains and bollards at John's Place had been recently painted by St. Brendan's Environment Group which in addition to looking good, gave an air of grandeur to this area. We also read that this CE group litter pick in the town Monday to Friday and that the LA clean the streets every weekend. It is wonderful that you have such support. It's good to see that transition year students from the community school we're involved in some of your afternoon cleanups; we assume this was part of their Gaisce award. It would be good if they could be encouraged to help on a regular basis which would give them an appreciation of the correct disposal of litter. We are not in favour of signage, unless it is absolutely necessary, as it causes clutter on the streetscape and in the landscape. We recommend that you remove the 'Dog Poo Signs' which we noticed in a number of areas. We suggest that you paint 'Cean up after your Dog' on the footpaths where dog fouling is a problem. We have seen this in other communities and have been told it works better than signage on poles and fences. We noticed a worn painted sign on on one of your pavements. It would be good to install some Big Belly solar activated bins – do you know if you are in line for these? We saw very little graffiti so we assume that either you or OCC remove it as soon as it is noticed. The seats at John Farrell's Field need to be repainted/re-stained. The wall at the sign for mother Catherine McAuley was extremely dirty and had quite a lot of weed growth. A wash with a light powerhouse is all that's needed. Some of the signs in Camcor Park need to be washed or replaced if this isn't sufficient. The only place where we saw quite a lot of litter which had been freshly left was in Camcor Park. Perhaps some additional bins near the seating could be installed, which might alleviate this.

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

You have a large number of residential streets full of wonderful Georgian houses with stunning door cases with fanlights over – Oxmanstown Mall, John's Place, Emmet Street etc. There are also some other terraced houses of interest – Rosse Row, Crompton Row, etc and also those which incorporate a commercial premises – Connaught Street, those surrounding the Maid of Erin Statue etc. The residential properties in the centre of Birr are a mix of single, two and three-storey giving the streetscapes an interesting mix of heights. Many had been recently painted, and some of those on the street had window boxes or planters with colourful flowers which added to the beauty of the streetscape. Some of these town houses had small gardens set behind boundary walls with railings. Some of these gardens had small patches of neatly trimmed grass, shrubs and hedges. Ornamental trees added interest to the streetscape and where noted in a few. We admired the wisteria that we saw growing on the walls of one. We visited some of your housing estates – those accessed along Burke's Hill, Melsop Street, Eden Road and Hillside. Here the majority of the residents presented their properties well. some had been recently painted, including their boundary walls, piers and gates. A few properties were in need of painting and detracted a little from the estates. We saw a number of gardens which had great displays of pollinator-friendly flowers – these were buzzing with the sound of insects. Good to read that there are competitions for your housing estates – nothing like a bit of friendly rivalry.

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

You are correct when you say that Approach Roads are important as they colour the expectations of the motorist of what they are about to see. Untidy, overgrown hedges, dirty signs, and poorly maintained road surfaces on entrance roads give a bad first impression. We entered from the north along the N52 and noted that the box hedging which separated the cycle/pedestrian routes from the motorists had been removed (it was there when we last visited). We see that a decision has yet to be made regarding this area. Would you consider planting 'rosa flower carpet'? This carpet rose needs little maintenance and is known for attracting bees. The Birr Gateway Sculpture 'Looking to the Future' was noted and admired. Your before, and after photographs of the Market Square shows what good design and well-chosen hard and soft landscaping can achieve. Good to see site designated cycle lanes on your roads. We know some are too narrow, and here unfortunately, the cyclist here must share the space with the motorists. The fence painting by the students along the newly resurfaced riverwalk looked well. As you are a busy town with large volumes of traffic, the safety of pedestrians must be a priority. We read that a new pedestrian crossing has been on Orchard Lane in addition to Pencil Bollards at the Mercy Primary School and Boy's National School. We suggest that you examine your streets and roads and see other any other areas where pedestrian crossings are required. The EV charge point designated locations are worn and need to be repainted. Some road surfaces were quite poor – edge break up, potholes and unravelling of previously repaired work. Bring these to the attention of the area office.

Concluding Remarks:

We were delighted to visit Birr but we have some recommendation for your 2027 application.

- Your Plan is missing the year 2028 … we hope that you will enter that year? We also recommend that two extra columns are added. One which will show your collaborators as you will need help with many of your projects and the other with the name of the committee member who will lead/ advance the project. We also suggest that you only put an X after the activity when it has been completed.
- Quite a number of your projects which you described as New (N) are in fact, Future Projects. (FP). These projects are the ones that you put in your Five-Year Plan. The only activities/ projects which should be included in the application form are those which have been completed and so are New (N), or those that are being Maintained

(M). Don’t worry if you don’t have a long list. We don’t expect any group to have lots and lots of projects. After all you are volunteers working for the benefit of you community and we appreciate this.

- While you use Bullet Points unfortunately you also add long texts in each bullet point…. this is unnecessary and must be reduced. We requested a maximum of 500 words per category; PLEASE do as we ask. Select the projects/activities which are MOST important and only include these along with brief texts. You can put all the others on your social media platforms for the community to see.

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. We would appreciate if these points could be taken into consideration when preparing your 2027 application. Thank you for entering the 2026 SuperValu Tidy Towns competition.