

Tidy Towns Competition 2017

Adjudication Report

Centre: **Ballincollig** Ref: **661**
County: **Cork(South)** Mark: **327**
Category: **G** Date(s): **27/06/2017**
30/07/2017

	Maximum Mark	Mark Awarded 2016	Mark Awarded 2017
Community Involvement & Planning	60	50	49
Built Environment and Streetscape	50	44	45
Landscaping and Open Spaces	50	48	48
Wildlife, Habitats and Natural Amenities	50	30	31
Sustainable Waste and Resource Management	50	18	20
Tidiness and Litter Control	90	61	62
Residential Streets & Housing Areas	50	36	38
Approach Roads, Streets & Lanes	50	34	34
TOTAL MARK	450	321	327

Community Involvement & Planning / Rannpháirtíocht an Phobail & Pleanáil:

We are pleased to welcome your hard-working committee of 16 members to the 2017 tidy towns competition as it is a pleasure to visit your lovely town. We are delighted to see that your committee is enthusiastically supported by the wider community with up to 50 volunteers helping out with your projects. It is an excellent and sensible approach to continually seek new members in order to draw in fresh ideas and spread the work load. We note from your application form that strong links have been built up with your committee and the business community in your town and that these links are maintained and strengthened by your business liaison officer. Given the excellent work that you do, it is not surprising to see that they support your work with funding, the streetscape painting scheme and participation in specific tidy towns projects. The contribution of specific businesses to the tidy towns work is also noted with the Oriel house hotel, both Supervalu stores and the Business Association all deserving of special mention. The partnership approach that you have adopted to your projects with Cork County Council is tremendously impressive and we are interested to read that the relationship is described as an exemplar. There seems little doubt that your strong partnership with the Council and your links with the community employment scheme and SECAD is one of the key ingredients of your continued success and progress in the competition. It is also clear from your application that you enjoy an excellent working relationship with other voluntary groups and societies such as Ballincollig GAA, the Parish Council and the numerous residents associations. As you are continually seeking new members and ideas and given the current size of your town (with a population of almost 19,000 people), we wondered if there are other community and voluntary groups who might like to get involved. Other sports clubs like rugby, soccer and athletics should be approached and bear in mind that historical societies and active retirement associations are traditionally a good source of new members. We are pleased to see that you have been proactive in building up relationships with the schools through your dedicated schools liaison officer and that there are numerous collaborations between your committee and the schoolchildren - particularly for projects under the wildlife and sustainable waste categories. It is great that 4 transition year students will be joining you in September 2017 as this provides a good demonstration of how the schools and the tidy towns committee are working closely together. It is also noted that there are no plans to form a junior tidy towns group but we recommend that you keep this matter under review as delegating projects to junior tidy towns committees and allowing them to develop their own ideas for projects is proven to be a very effective way of boosting participation, fostering a sense of ownership of projects among young people and for developing new and innovative ideas. We are delighted to read that your involvement in the competition has brought great benefits to your town and long may this continue! Thank you for your comprehensive application form and for addressing points made in the 2016 adjudication report – although we confused by the statement that you submitted the biodiversity action plan last year and it states clearly in it that it was not completed until March 2017. Your map was helpful but not user friendly. Can a legend (as a separate A4 page) be included which explains each of the entries included on it? This would help your adjudicator to avoid thumbing through your 60 page application to find the description of each map entry when out and about. Your action plan was read with interest and the addition of a quick reference table with columns that sets out the

projects for each category as well as time frames would improve this document. While we appreciate that significant effort has gone into preparing it, the submission has become very long with a 60 page application (and even longer appendices) so some slimming down is needed. We note that your existing mark under this category is very high at 50 (out of 60), but regrettably and for the above reasons, such a high mark is not warranted this year under this category.

Built Environment and Streetscape / An Timpeallacht Thógtha agus Sráid-dreacha:

The transformation of Ballincollig from small village to large town in such a remarkably short space of time is a fascinating story. As noted by your committee in the commentary submitted, this story is told through the many different building styles that can be seen in the town today. In our view, this wonderful mix of traditional and contemporary architectural styles is an attraction by itself. The Main Street provides an excellent example of this with its blend of older structures such as the East Gate and Healys Bar with its traditional design standing side by side with the contemporary designs of the buildings that accommodate Aldi, Republic Restaurant and Boyle Sports. A factor in the successful appearance of the streetscape is the high standard of presentation achieved by virtually all buildings – no doubt influenced by the implementation of your ‘streetscape paint scheme’. While all of the buildings impressed, a number stand out. The Trade House Central (with its new outdoor dining area and bright landscaping) and Castlewest Shopping Centre (complete with new signage) looked very well. The traditional style two storey and single storey buildings that included Kellehers Pharmacy, Mary O’Connells, Derek Dorgans and the Tudor Rose Florist also deserve praise. Further out, the Oriel Hotel, the White Horse Pub and Quishes Supervalu drew positive attention. We were pleased to read that a number of vacant properties have found productive new uses (JD’s Bar and Republic Restaurant) and that there are firm plans to improve and occupy the West Park complex. Well done also on the provision of bilingual signs and it is great to see that Ros Nua (a new housing estate) has been completed to a high standard. We note that developments are continuing on the Inniscarra road and we look forward to seeing them complete in 2018.

Landscaping and Open Spaces / Tírdhreachú agus Spásanna Oscailte:

Your committee has been certainly busy with a huge range of projects undertaken for this category this year. It perhaps not surprising that the Regional Park has been the focus of your attention and due to your (and others) excellent endeavours, this has become a first class amenity. We are delighted to see that your committee does not restrict its efforts to planting and other issues relating to the appearance of the park. Your work improving accessibility (such as the Inniscarra road pedestrian bridge entrance), amenities (surfaced walkways and cycleways) and other facilities (such as the playground) are the principal reasons for its popularity. We experienced the pressure on car parking during our visit and we understand the need for additional spaces. As you correctly predicted the wildflower areas beside the car park entrance (with its red and orange flowers in abundance) and the long linear meadow (with many white coloured flowers) beside the MUGA’s and the playground were in rude health and looked exceptionally well. The walkway through the park is a fantastic amenity and the combination of heritage signage on the gunpowder mills and the wildlife adds further interest. Your idea to extend this is an exciting one! Your new fairy trail along the Beech walk was also proving popular. Small cosmetic improvements are possible – some of the information signage (especially on the gunpowder mills and trails) needs washing and perhaps painting while the fence around the stream needs refreshing. However, these are minor matters and do not detract from this wonderful space. It is noted that your committee has also put considerable effort into landscaping projects – with new schemes and the maintenance of old ones. While it is not possible to review them all here, you can be confident that the overall effect is impressive. The landscaping in the town centre is most impressive with a wonderful floral display at the entrance to the car park adjacent to Kellehers Pharmacy. The trees and colourful landscaping schemes that line the main street looked exceptionally well and they help to enhance the large footpaths and well maintained buildings further. The landscaping undertaken along the N22 on both the Cork and the Macroom approaches is bright and colourful and it is most effective in creating a good impression. High quality schemes were also observed on Greenfields Road and Station Road while the flowers on the Link Road were admired. We liked the planting scheme at the rugby club and we wondered if they would be interested in taking responsibility of it and maintaining it for you? You are commended on your work to the allotments and we note that there are plans to plant additional trees here. In addition to these projects, is acknowledged that your work programme includes maintenance to the military graveyard and a large number of flower beds around the town and that the committee is working closely with the Council to identify and treat the incidence of Japanese knotweed. We are aware that you already have a very high mark in this category it should be noted that maintaining this level of performance is a major achievement.

Wildlife, Habitats and Natural Amenities / Fiadhúlra, Gnáthóga agus Taitneamhachtaí Nádúrtha:

The completion of the wildlife survey \ biodiversity action plan is acknowledged and we would like to thank you for the submission of this document which was read with interest. We note that the plan is comprehensive and that it is based on a year long survey (completed between March 2016 and March 2017) and that it confirms that Ballincollig possesses some very high quality habitats and amenity areas of which the river Lee, Woodlands and Fen habitats (Classes Fen and Cloisters Fen) are considered the most important. With respect to the river Lee, it is heartening to read that otter, kingfisher and dipper (among others) are present as these species thrive in clean water. The abundance and diversity of wildflowers in the park is also positive as attracts bees, butterflies and insects. It is great that you are now busy implementing the recommendations of this action plan and we are pleased to see that dealing with the 13 outbreaks of Japanese knotweed and Himalayan Balsam have been identified as a priority and that your committee (in partnership with Cork County Council) are currently in year two of the eradication programme. Well done on providing the bird nesting and bat boxes. Given that a number of breeding pairs of swifts (an amber listed bird of conservation concern) have been identified, correct siting and continuous monitoring of the

bird boxes is required in order to ascertain if the swift population grows. We read that just 3 swift boxes had been provided out of a total of 24 and we wondered why such a low proportion is being used? It is being supplemented by the use of swift nest bricks? Please let us know in 2018. Given that spraying has been identified as a threat in your wildlife plan, we are pleased to see that it is being minimized in 5 estates and other locations in your town. A useful school project would be to undertake a survey of flora in an estate that does not engage in spraying and compare it to a similar one that does. We note that you have requested Cork County Council to avoid spray but why not go a step further and identify (and agree) 'no spray zones'? Well done on the continuation of your native hedge and tree planting programme. Your commitment to pollinator friendly planting is also applauded and it is a great idea to map all pollinator friendly areas in the town – these areas could provide a useful reference point for 'no spray zones'. Your work on raising awareness of wildlife and biodiversity in Ballincollig through information signage and engagement with the schools and residential estates is appreciated. We note the recommendation in Tony Kenneally's report to develop a biodiversity plan for the national school and we concur with this idea. It is great that wildlife projects are blossoming in the residential estates and some thought should be given to how the recommendations of the action plan could be implemented in the residential areas. Given the importance of links between natural areas, perhaps green infrastructure routes between the park and the residential estates to the north of the town should be considered? We would appreciate updates on all of your ongoing projects under this category in 2018.

Sustainable Waste and Resource Management / Bainistiú Acmhainní agus Dramhaíola Inbhuanaithe:

The range of good quality actions presented under this category for 2017 is amazing! The work of your committee in bringing these actions together is applauded while the efforts of employers like VMware and Dell EMC are setting high standards. Supervalu, the Sports Clubs, the residential estates and community organisations are also deserving of praise – so well done to all concerned and keep up the good work! You are highly commended on the local business sustainability survey – this is an excellent piece of work as it sets out where the workforce in Ballincollig is at present with respect to waste generation and sustainable resource management and points out the direction it needs to go in. The plan to repeat this survey in 2 – 3 years is an excellent one and we would encourage you to 'drill down' a little more on topics like transport mode to work, waste reducing actions and energy and resource efficiencies in the next survey. The results of this years survey poses questions for us like how can more people be encouraged to walk or cycle to work and how can the numbers who participate in the SMILE initiative be increased? By developing targeted actions now, you can ensure that the results of the next survey will be more positive. We would also like to commend you on your decision to appoint a schools liaison officer as this change (combined with the work of the schools liaison officer himself) seems to have been very successful. The schools themselves deserve high praise for their hard work in achieving a total of 18 flags – this is excellent progress and it clear that Scoil Eoin is setting the standard with 7 flags. Don't forget that schools are a hot bed of new ideas and we would encourage the committee (through your liaison officer) to monitor the projects undertaken in schools in order to see if any of them would work in the wider community. The 'brat glas beag' scheme is a great way of involving pre school kids and we look forward to hearing about it next year. We read the schools survey with interest and while this lists all of laudable actions that have been undertaken, there is a weakness in it as unlike the employers survey, there is no record given of the effect of the actions. For example, what percentage of students participated in the walk to school day and what number avail of the school book rental scheme? Recording the results of the surveys will enable you (the committee) and the schools to monitor their performance and then improve on it on a gradual basis. Remember that the purpose of these actions is to bring about behaviour change with respect to minimising waste generation and sustainable resource management so we need effective monitoring of how successful (or not) the individual actions are at achieving this. We were also very impressed with the efforts of the tidy towns group in its many waste minimisation actions like composting, water harvesting and recycling.

Tidiness and Litter Control / Slachtmhaireacht agus Rialú Bruscair:

We were most impressed with the very high standard of litter control that was seen in Ballincollig during adjudication day. You will be pleased to hear that with the exception of a small amount of litter in Innismore and the Inniscarra road, virtually every street, road and residential area in the town appeared to be litter free and this is considered to an exceptional performance by your committee, volunteers and everyone else who contributed to this result. However, it was not a surprise to the adjudicator and as the number of awards that you have won demonstrates, Ballincollig has developed very high standards in this category in recent years. In addition, we witnessed the committee hard at work weeding, cleaning and brushing in the Time Square area and car park during our visit. Needless to say, the area achieved a very high standard of presentation when you had finished. The statistics provided in your entry form also demonstrate a major commitment on your part to combat litter – with more than 200 litter picks taking place involving the total of 1846 voluntary hours, your committee of volunteers could not be expected to do much more. However, it is heartening to read that is becoming less a problem with a reduction of almost 60% in bags of litter collected between 2017 and 2012. Whilst we accept that the challenge continues, we agree that your anti litter message appears to be getting through. We recommend that you continue to work closely with the schools, the community, local businesses and building contractors and involve them in your litter picks and cleanups were possible. Have you given any consideration to conducting a litter survey? We would be interested to know where the majority of the litter is collected (and its origin) as this may help you to devise some targeted actions to reduce it? The standard of tidiness is also particularly high with the hard work of the committee on graffiti removal, signage cleaning, grass cutting, removal of cable ties from lamp standards, kerb edging and weed removal evident during adjudication with the town centre in particular looking as clean as a new pin. As always, some improvements are possible. We note that signage is washed regularly but we were surprised to see that some sign poles in a number of locations appeared dusty and in need of attention. Are the poles included in your maintenance programmes? Remember that they are just as visible as the sign itself. The entrance to the vehicular entrance of the Regional Park could be improved with a fresh coat of paint and weed was starting to emerge here during

adjudication. A black and yellow sign opposite also needed attention. We were surprised to see that a sign pole (with no sign) could be seen coming up to the junction of the Old Fort Road opposite McDonalds and the area to the front of the fire station was quite untidy looking and we wondered if this is being revamped? An untidy 50 kmph sign on the Inniscarra road at Westcourt also needs an upgrade.

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

This is a strong category for Ballincollig and it is clear that a concerted effort is made by the tidy towns committee and various residents associations throughout your town to ensure that all estates looked very well on adjudication day. The result of this work was clear to see during our visit and the overall standard of presentation was very high. Although it is not possible to visit each of the 111 estates due to time constraints, attention was paid to the details included in your application and our visit was planned accordingly. It was an enjoyable experience and we loved the diversity of residential areas from mature and established housing schemes (Castle Park) and newer housing estates (Ros Nua) to the varied housing formats (the Maltings Station road) and the mixed used high density schemes such as the Quadrants – Ballincollig certainly has something for everyone. A consistent feature of the residential was the careful attention that has been paid to presentation of buildings, gardens and public areas with weed free kerbs, neatly swept paths and trimmed grass areas and margins. While the overall standard was high, a number of estates stood out. Coolroe Heights looked exceptionally well while Rosewood and Aylesbury impressed. The entrance landscaping at Lisheen Fields was particularly eye catching and Woodberry deserves praise. A small number did not quite reach these high standards. Some additional landscaping would improve Castle Court, while an overgrown bed at the entrance to Fr Sexton Park needs a trim. The ongoing improvements to Innishmore (including its impressive sporting heroes mural) are appreciated and it is recommended that the green fence around the amenity area is power washed. You are also commended on your sensible approach of incorporating wildflower meadow sections into estates as this reduces the maintenance required and encourages biodiversity.

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

The approach roads into Ballincollig were generally impressive during adjudication with the approaches on the N22 from Cork and Macroom achieving a particularly high standard. On the approach from Cork, the combination of diverse and colourful landscaping on the entrance roundabout, the carefully tended grass margins, weed free roadsides and attractive entrance signage all combined to create a very positive first impression for the visitor. The approach from Macroom is no less impressive with signs of regular maintenance, clean and visible signage and diverse and colourful landscaping to be seen here. The work that you have undertaken by planting 550 hydrangeas on the Blarney road is considered to be very worthwhile as they help to lift this important approach. The Inniscarra road has different characteristics and while it generally looked well some untidy road signs (and sign poles) and some weed appearing at the base of the natural stone caught our eye. The Main Street through the town deserves the highest praise and it is clear that it both demands (and receives) considerable attention by the Committee and others. Be assured that the effort is worthwhile as it looked particularly well on adjudication day. Your projects under this category were also observed with interest. The completion of an accessibility survey is a good idea and we encourage you to explore this. We also liked the proposal to develop the Coolroe Meadows loop walk and be sure to give some consideration to how these walks will link up with other walks in the area. Do you plan to provide an information map of the walk routes? Please keep us up to date in 2018.

Concluding Remarks:

We very much enjoyed our visit to Ballincollig and seeing the work of the Tidy Towns Committee at first hand. It is clear that you have had a major influence in the transformation of Ballincollig into a very desirable place to live and visit and there seems little doubt that we are speaking for everyone by saying that we hope you continue this excellent work into the future. Well done again and we look forward to returning again in 2018.

Second Round Adjudication:

Ballincollig is a delightful town to visit, to marvel at its history and see some of that thread being retained in the modern townscape with its traditional shop fronts across the road from the new shopping centres. How fortunate you are to have both new and old beside each other rather than the new centres built outside the town as has happened in many other parts of Ireland. The retention of elements of the former Murphy Barracks, such as large gateways of stone piers/walls and the wonderful Barrack Square with its trees and perennials are well done. It is good to see the former Coach House now operating with a new tenant. Well done for your hand drawn A3 map which has everything of interest on it. However, there is some confusion regarding two sets of numbers and numbers not being in a sequence as well as some numbers being almost the same colour as the roads. Please work on improving that for next year and include a legend stating what the numbers represent. Please also include the page numbers of the application to save time in going over and back through the documents. The legend can be a separate page attached to the map. We also advise that you work on reducing the size of next year's application (in terms of pages) to save time. With 111 residential estates in Ballincollig, it is no wonder you are one of Ireland's fastest growing communities. We liked the houses in Main Street opposite Tesco. They look very well without boundary walls; a small strip divides front gardens from public margin where fine street trees are growing. We were most impressed with the many trees and high standard flowerbeds in Coolroe heights and Avenue where many gardens have Griselinia hedges. The small woodland at the entrance is no longer suitable for the flowerbeds which are lost under the shade. We suggest that the name stones be moved to the edge of the open space where they can be more easily seen. Supporting stakes on trees are not needed here and should be removed before they cause damage to the stems. With most residential estates, good quality name stones are well positioned and add greatly to the ambience of your community. What is most striking is the large number of excellent specimens of

trees in these residential estates, on approach roads and in the town centre. The avenue of lime trees on Coolroe Meadows is developing into what will be one of the finest avenues in Ireland. The large open spaces here are well maintained and we commend you for the successful establishment of ivy growing on the screen walls. Have you considered leaving some areas uncut to encourage wildflowers and reduce your maintenance costs? The roundabout with colourful roses looks very well. There are well established hornbeams, lime trees, maple and some ornamental pear trees which greatly enhance your streetscape. However, you should plan to remove the flowering cherry trees on Main Street. These are short lived and usually disrupt pavements. The trees in large (damaged) containers on Main Street are in serious decline and we suggest they be removed with a view to planting directly into the ground. If underground services are preventing trees being planted into the ground, then consider low hedges; they can be quite attractive. The hedges and trees in the car park beside Times Square do a great job in reducing the visual impact of parked cars. It was there that we admired the lovely traditional shopfront of O'Crualaoi, in Irish (Buisteir) and English (Butcher) and window boxes with red Petunias over the sign. It is time to remove the ornamental grasses under the established hornbeam trees in Times Square as there is too much competition from the roots of the trees and possibly also people pressure. We suggest additional paving to reduce the surface area beneath the trees. We were most impressed with the high quality floral displays everywhere on railings, poles, window boxes and hanging baskets. The entire community supports your efforts, even though some may discard litter on a Saturday night; we saw your teams out on Sunday morning getting it clean again. You all deserved the cuppa afterwards in the Oriel. There is one problem however, and that is, weeds are establishing where there is no footfall, for example under the stone seats and along the side of vacant shops and doorways and around the base of poles. St. Mary and St. John's Church and Scoil Eoin make an interesting complex with the cemetery at the rear of the church. All are well maintained and we were pleased to note that ivy which established on the tall yew trees had been cut at the base and has since died. The next stage is to remove the dead ivy branches and allow new growths to sprout on the yew trees. We noticed an over use of weed killer around the graves in the church lawn and a concrete wall opposite the church gate could be softened by planting climbing plants such as ivy at the base. We admired several green flags proudly flying at Scoil Eoin. The Regional Park is a wonderful asset for Ballincollig and we note it is well used. The car park is very well done but space is restricted because of the mill races. There is a good variety of trees here and we liked the labels with the species names. It is a pity that some are broken; we hope you will replace them with more durable ones. In many cases supporting stakes on trees are no longer needed and should be removed; this also applies to the new line of trees near the tennis courts. We noted the evergreen oaks beside the skate park have died and wonder if you plan to replace them. Meanwhile, we suggest the dead trees be removed. Recycling banks are conspicuous as the car park is entered and obviously this is intended to make them accessible. About two decades ago when these banks were being introduced, the idea was to get people to use them. Now that their use is happening, they don't need to be in such prominent places, so we suggest that a location elsewhere would improve the visual appearance of the car park and help to reduce traffic. The green steel containers are not unsightly but they could be made more interesting with an artist touch. There are too many signs of different sizes and types all around the entrance to the park and to our disappointment, all needed cleaning. One sign about scrambling bikes was nailed high up to a tree, visible only when leaving the park. This visual clutter needs to be urgently addressed with the aim of simplifying the message and reducing the number of signs. The mill race had some litter. Wild flowers here are exceptional, perhaps the best we have ever seen, so well done on the fantastic display on both sides of the car park. We took pictures and so too did many others.