

Tidy Towns Competition 2021

Adjudication Report

Centre: **Tullamore - Tullach Mhór** Ref: **727**
County: **Offaly** Mark: **343**
Category: **F** Date(s): **17/08/2021**

	Maximum Mark	Mark Awarded 2021
Community – Your Planning and Involvement	60	54
Streetscape & Public Places	60	49
Green Spaces and Landscaping	60	47
Nature and Biodiversity in your Locality	50	35
Sustainability – Doing more with less	50	22
Tidiness and Litter Control	90	50
Residential Streets & Housing Areas	50	43
Approach Roads, Streets & Lanes	50	43
TOTAL MARK	470	343

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

Fáilte Chuig Comórtas na mBailte Slachtmhara SuperValu 2021. Táimid buíoch daoibh as ucht na hiontrála a chur chugainn. Go raibh maith agaibh as ucht bhur dtacaíocht le linn na paindéime. Lean leis an dea-obair. Welcome to the 2021 SuperValu Tidy Towns competition. Thank you for your entry and for your commitment to your place in these difficult times. Keep up the great work.

This is a very professional application & you are fortunate to have the resources to present your entry to this high standard. The photography contained within is stunning and the weather was certainly obliging. The number of those volunteering with you is remarkable & the collaborative working relationships you have fostered with Offaly County Council, Tullamore & District Chamber of Commerce, Waterways Ireland, 16 local schools, Offaly Local Development Company, other agencies & community groups is commendable. Your engagement with other Tidy Towns groups under the umbrella of the Offaly Tidy Towns Network is such a worthwhile relationship to nurture. The ability to funnel the energies of many within a community to accomplish projects for the community takes a lot of work & dedication. It is encouraging to hear that your involvement in the Tidy Towns competition & your success to date has enticed more people to partake. As American author Edward Hale said, "Coming together is a beginning; keeping together is progress; working together is success". The outcome of your final plan later this year will be interesting. The value of providing information that is accessible & relevant, through workshops & events, to the community is often underestimated. Is there anything more conducive to garnering engagement than a sense of competitiveness, the Garden Competition certainly fit that bill! You truly are walking the walk with your engagement with local youth & indeed learning through fun is a proven pedagogical approach. Their involvement with projects at this stage of their lives will stand the community in good stead for the future. There is hardly a communication channel you are not availing of in your efforts to keep everyone informed, fantastic effort. The evolution of newer social media channels may provide an opportunity for youth input in their development. What an interesting concept – a potential competition for your new logo & additionally another great way to highlight your forthcoming Tidy Towns Plan Review. You certainly have taken to heart through your communications the idea that there can be no community without communication.

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

Congratulations on the implementation of the Tullamore Town Enhancement Plan. There was no better year to showcase the improvements than one in which we needed outdoor communal spaces like the main town square. From the photo supplied, there is plenty of evidence of its popularity with local residents. Your plans for the next 3 years will expand the area for community activity & provide a useable centre for the town. We look forward to an update on the Regeneration Framework Plan next year. Tullamore is wealthy in historical buildings and the anticipated completion of the Acres Folly enhancements will be eagerly awaited. The availability of the Heritage Trail booklet is a great resource. The work on the railings at the Castle & Gaol will enhance the entrances as can already

be viewed in one of the photos included. Well done to the eagle eyed observer of the old benchmark found in situ. The planned survey of these “crow’s feet” will provide some intriguing stories; indeed you may start a new type of geocaching! The collage of photos showing business premises is a stunning visual presentation of the high standard to which they are maintained. The physical remnants of previous downturns, sites and/ buildings, & their idleness present a significant headache for many towns & villages. Your strategy of continued engagement with the owners is admirable. The prospect of potential movement on both the “Texas” & Coens sites is cause for hope & will take time. The twin provisions of grant assistance & guidance on shop fronts & signs have worked well in tandem. The town must be eagerly anticipating the opening of the Arts Centre next year. This will be an exciting chapter for the town & an incredible resource for both the community & community groups. Your fortune in having within the town a Town Park is immeasurable. Rather than view it as a fixed amenity, it is sensible to convert underutilized areas for more regular use by the community. The Park’s amenities – trails, outdoor gym, playground, skate board park & basketball court - were no doubt well used, when possible, during 2020 & to date throughout the rolling lockdowns. A green public space offers such a haven for young & old alike. The photos provided of the park show a well-maintained public space and the plans for refurbishment of the water feature & additional pollinator friendly planting will enhance the park.

Green Spaces and Landscaping / Spásanna Glasa agus Tírdhreachú:

As there are many more areas designated for pollinators in Tullamore & more in the planning, you do indeed want to let people know the reason the land is being managed for wildlife. The “Manage for Wildlife” signs are a great way to create awareness & encourage action. Too many times the value of roundabouts & verges as green spaces are overlooked however it is wonderful to see that Tullamore are maximizing their potential with spring bulb planting & wild flower meadows. The adoption of the “Let it grow – don’t mow” policy is good to hear. In some areas where this policy has been in place a number of years, wild orchids have flourished. It would be interesting in time to assess the species diversity. The Golf Club maintains the Ballard Roundabout immaculately. Street planters & hanging baskets have brought great colour and attractiveness to the streetscape as seen in the photos provided. There is a significant volume of work involved in their maintenance & your focus on flower selection based on hardiness, water demands & pollinator friendly is to be encouraged. Tullamore is fortunate to have the amenities of the Grand Canal, Tullamore River, Charleville Estate & Lloyd Town Park. 2020 & 2021 have provided us all with a greater appreciation for these green spaces in our localities.

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

Not alone are you surrounded by green pastures in Tullamore but the natural resources within the urban area are a potential treasure trove for flora, fauna & humans. The Tullamore Living River project has the potential for significant ecological benefits & the provision of increased amenities. Open & continuous communication with the community is key & the planned workshops by relevant agencies will help meet that requirement. The trail cam survey & otter study may dovetail nicely with your plans for live Facebook feeds. The otter sightings are a good indicator of a functioning ecosystem & a good way to connect people to the conservation of their river. We look forward to seeing the river’s water quality & biodiversity improve in time as the wetlands & other river enhancement measures bed in. Greenways have enjoyed many more visitors since staycationing became the norm & it is no surprise to hear that the section of the Grand Canal Greenway in Tullamore has experienced increased use. It would seem the strategies employed by yourselves, Waterways Ireland & Offaly County Council are facilitating the return & increase in riparian wildlife & this is key as the less disturbance to their habitat the better. Therefore good to hear the grass management strategy “Let it grow – don’t mow” has been extended to the banks of the Grand Canal & river. To experience the sight & smells of a bluebell & wild garlic carpeted woodland is an evocative memory for this adjudicator & the community is fortunate that the owners of Charleville Demesne allow unfettered access. It is uplifting to hear that the bat populations are varied & thriving in addition to birds, insects & mammals. A green lung like this proves that nature & biodiversity thrives when we are respectful. Your collaborative relationships with Inland Fisheries, Bat Conservation Ireland, Waterways Ireland & BirdWatch Ireland provide a wealth of knowledge & a great resource for schools as is evident from their ongoing monitoring projects. The establishment of appropriate tree cover in urban areas is to be encouraged. The initiative “Trees on the Land” www.treesontheland.com has been used by many Tidy Towns groups & residents associations to great effect. The visual impact, in time, of your tree planting will be impressive. The hedging scheme at Kilcruttin is exemplary. Your dedication to the creation of Tullamore as a biodiversity haven is manifest in the photos provided, from wildflower roundabouts, wildflower Greenway verges, etc. The support of local businesses in adopting similar planting schemes is encouraging. The future plans are equally valuable – signage is a simple way to educate people & provide context for your “inaction” in specific areas, explain don’t preach; add winter flowering shrubs; replacing annuals in hanging baskets & donating fruit trees. Over time it will be compelling to survey the effects of these initiatives on the biodiversity within Tullamore. Finally, the activities with youth incorporating the use of pollinator friendly planting, nature walks in local green spaces, fairy garden creations & much more are the key to engendering a love of & a respect for nature.

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

The creation of a Sustainable Energy Community (SEC) is a worthwhile project especially now in light of the most recent IPCC report. This is a significant undertaking however it will allow the community, both householders & businesses, to become educated, see what changes they can make in the short, medium & long terms, avail of financial incentives & transition towards reducing their emissions. Your planned collaboration with the local Chamber to take a representative company from each of 4 groups & use them as case studies is an effective way to showcase the transition to reduced energy use, resultant savings, the “How To” of the process & planning for the future. The progress updates of the project will be eagerly awaited. In time, a Tullamore business may take home a SEAI Energy Award! The Green Hospitality Programme has great ambition & its adoption by the hospitality sector is

to be encouraged as demonstrated by Tullamore Court Hotel. Commercial sustainable energy projects are to be welcomed where there is a tie in with and accessibility by the local community. The fact that 16 local schools covering the gambit from early learning to leaving certificate incorporating all levels of ability are actively involved in An Taisce's Green Schools programme is to be celebrated. Compliments to the staff at every school as this is additional work for all involved. The fact that Scoil Mhuire are working towards their 7th Green Flag provides a template for others & an exemplary model considering the number of initiatives they have kindled. When focusing on the 3 Rs, we need to remind ourselves that Reduce & Reuse come before Recycling. Ideas like your food waste workshops, no junk mail stickers, plastic straw free town & conscious cup campaign concentrate the message on reducing waste at the outset. Perhaps there is a place for Reuse initiatives such as MyWaste's annual Upcycling Challenge, other County Councils run similar challenges each year & CRNI have a wealth of ideas www.crni.ie There is no doubting the need for recycling & having a local company, KMK Metals facilitate this with open days is accommodating. Water as a finite resource is only brought home to us when we have a heatwave or supplies are temporarily halted. Good work on the water fountain. Domestic water harvesting was common in the past & worth cultivating a renewal of the practice especially for garden use or car washing. Similarly, composting was undertaken by many rural householders & through the provision of suitable receptacles & demonstrations people can be enticed to commence this practice. The plan to upgrade the Town Park composting facility may tie in nicely with such an initiative. The planned transportation study will reveal fascinating facts, some expected, more that will prove thought provoking & may lead to further projects. Infrastructural projects that encourage people to walk or cycle are the future such as the schools' Walk on Wednesdays & other initiatives; upgraded footpaths, pedestrian bridges, cycle networks. The new hybrid model of working will have an impact on transportation needs & it will be interesting to see the impact in Tullamore.

Tidiness and Litter Control / Slachtmhaireacht agus Rialú Bruscair:

The National Spring Clean & local initiatives like "Adopt a Patch", dedicated litter patrols & organized cleanups spread the message wider each time & draw more people to engage on an individual & collective basis. The use of existing legislation to compel correct domestic waste disposal methods once the afflicted area is cleaned up is a well thought out strategy & evidently has resulted in a positive outcome. Well done. A number of communities are reporting positives from the use of the EPA's "See it? Say it?" App. This in conjunction with CCTV & follow up prosecutions can inhibit the most ardent of litterbugs! The involvement of transition year students in completing surveys on the most common littered items found after a cleanup or the National Spring Clean provides context & encourages a solution driven focus. The results of these surveys can provide evidence for the introduction of refill water stations, locations of bins etc. Local council workers & other agencies like the Inland Waterways are often the unsung heroes in the battle against litter. There is no argument on the need for street bins as access is key to prevent littering. The management of weeds alongside buildings & kerbs is a time consuming task however once completed the results are most noticeable. It is wonderful to hear & see local sporting organizations, Tullamore Canoe Club & Shannonside Sub Aqua Club, have been involved in deep cleans & litter removal. The perennial problem of dog fouling requires a pincer approach as you have planned – remind, educate, provide bags & bins on frequent used dog walking routes & finally financial penalties. A handful of uninformed dog owners can diminish the pleasure of tracks & trails for all users. Your ongoing approach to dealing with derelict sites & buildings is the best method & perseverance does pay off eventually. Engaging with the local Area Engineer on road signage & with local building owners on commercial signage will enable you to put forward your concerns & in time come to a solution.

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

The Garden Competition in a period of lockdown was an inspired idea to get residents of small & large spaces out in the fresh air & working on their green spaces. The collage of pictures provided of the many residential streets & estates demonstrates the pride Tullamore residents take in their locality. Stunning displays of spring bulbs, tree lined avenues, perennial planting & stately entrances. Creating a little bit of rivalry between the estates can only raise the standard for all & what estate would decline both an award & publicity. The All Ireland Pollinator's Pledge Your Garden for wildlife may find a receptive audience in Tullamore. The coordination of the approach to engaging with residents in their homes through the "Tidy Tullamore" initiative is an excellent umbrella movement & provides a forum to both deliver relevant information & obtain feedback. It would be hoped that the combination of the increased demand for houses & the hybrid-working model may find willing developers for the remaining unfinished housing estates. The resultant occupation of these estates can only be in Tullamore's favour. With the move to satellite housing estates, many times it is forgotten that residents reside in our town centres. It is good to see you are also focused on these areas through the "Tidy Tullamore" project. The "Street Colour Scheme" adoption will, in time, provide an impressive panorama. The results of the government's pilot Town Centre Living project may offer further incentives for locals to consider town centre living.

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

First impressions count & it is on the approach roads to towns & villages that visitors & locals formulate their perceptions of a location, be they positive or negative. The photos provided of the approach roads show well-maintained verges, recommended verge maintenance, clear road markings and swept roadsides. It is fantastic to see such pride in the presentation of the roundabouts on the approach roads. The plan to reassess the signage on the approach roads with the local County Council is prudent. Signage in town centres sometimes requires the eye of the outsider as familiarity blinkers our objectivity. Accessibility for all through town streets & lanes is a necessity. While much of this infrastructure is hard, the softening of the edges with trees, planters, green spaces & flora is a welcome relief for all users. The access route of a Greenway or river path is an attractive alternative to a road & both walkers & cyclists are generally happier to avail of this travel channel. Safe routes encourage parents to

allow their older children to independently travel to school confident in the fact that routes are either devoid of traffic or have safely managed intersections. Yes all these plans take time but you are headed firmly in the right direction.

Concluding Remarks:

Your report was a pleasure to peruse, from the presentation of the submission to the structured layout of the existing, new & planned projects. The collective efforts by all to enhance the environs & town centre of Tullamore are praiseworthy. You are proof that having a driving force with a consolidated strategy, collaborative approach & detailed plans creates energy for positive action.