

# Tidy Towns Competition 2022

## Adjudication Report

Centre: <b>Blessington - Baile Coimín</b>	Ref: <b>713</b>
County: <b>Wicklow</b>	Mark: <b>334</b>
Category: <b>E</b>	Date(s): <b>22/07/2022</b>

	Maximum Mark	Mark Awarded 2021	Mark Awarded 2022
Community – Your Planning and Involvement	80	46	48
Streetscape & Public Places	80	40	42
Green Spaces and Landscaping	80	39	41
Nature and Biodiversity in your Locality	55	33	35
Sustainability – Doing more with less	55	27	29
Tidiness and Litter Control	90	60	62
Residential Streets & Housing Areas	55	39	41
Approach Roads, Streets & Lanes	55	34	36
<b>TOTAL MARK</b>	<b>550</b>	<b>318</b>	<b>334</b>

### 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.

Firstly, congratulations on scooping eight awards at the Wicklow County Council Environmental ceremony, a fantastic result for all the hard work expended in 2021. Well done to your chairperson, Jason on being recognized nationally for his volunteering work. He is living & breathing the adage - actions speak louder than words.

It is clear from the roll call of your committee that you are all well connected with many other community groups. This level of involvement allows you to reach a wide audience & call on many potential volunteers. It is this mutual co-operation that creates a livable town. Your core group is sizeable & the volunteer base numbers are amazing. When a group has such a reach, it is a bonus to be able to tap into a rich talent pool when skills, knowledge & resources are required.

It is good to see that as a group you are availing of relevant training & online events provided by various agencies. It is rare that during these events one does not glean additional information or make new connections that assist in existing or new projects. Ongoing & open engagement with the various relevant sections of the council is essential & good to hear you nurture that relationship.

You are fortunate that you have the support of local businesses & agreed, it is important that it is a two-way relationship. So, well done on your commitment to shop local. Many community groups have had to be innovative re funding streams for their annual work & your partnership with your local cycling club is obviously well supported by the community.

It appears you have all communication channels covered & your social media presence is clearly having an impact based on your follower numbers. An annual event hosted by yourselves gives the community an opportunity to see what has been achieved in the past 12 months, share in the awards, hear what is planned for the next year & receive an update from the council on any relevant developments within their sphere of responsibility.

Engagement with all schools is imperative & the Green Schools Programme offers an ideal crossover between the Tidy Towns categories & the school based curriculum. It is great to see the table charting the primary schools progress in the programme. Well done to all the schools & in particular St Mary's Junior School on their Art installation (looking vibrant on the visit) & Global Citizenship flag. Your position as an official Gaisce Challenge

Partner is mutually beneficial. The youth groups of scouts, brownies & guides have at their core a similar ethos to the Tidy Towns – being a responsible world citizen that starts first in their own locality.

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

Blessington is a beautiful tree lined, linear town & it is fantastic to see so many of the 19th century buildings so well preserved & some almost in their original condition. You are fortunate to have impressive monuments in the town – Boyle Monument, Credit Union Market House, St. Mary's Church of Ireland, Ulster Bank etc. It is indicative of the historical value of the buildings that many are listed in the National Inventory of Architectural Heritage. How lovely too to see the retention of architectural gems like the Horseshoe Arch & the tram marker. Do update us next year on the Downshire building if you have any details about its intended transformation into a nursing home as planning was granted over two years ago now. The impending closure of the Ulster Bank is another building with an uncertain future. They are both such prominent buildings in the town centre.

The town square regeneration has created an impressive community space complete with plenty of seating that was in constant use during the visit. Well done on choosing accessible seating & a space for eating. The pedestrian entrance through the retained gate piers & leading to a tree-lined walkway softens the vast array of hard surfaces.

It is great to see you keep accessibility to the town, for all, at the core of your work & the new age friendly & disability access spaces could not be mistaken for general parking bays. Your adjudicator is curious to know if this approach has deterred able-bodied drivers from parking in these bays as one could not be unaware of their function.

It is great to see buy in from the business community & many facades & boundaries were presented to a very high standard. Circle K with their long road frontage have a wonderful opportunity to work with you on maximizing the two beds between the entrance & exit routes as well as fire assembly point area with seating. Presently, it is a lost opportunity for the Main Street. It is obvious the Best Presented Business Award has many strong contenders. Do Wicklow County Council have a shopfront design guide? It was not possible to locate it on their website. A uniform approach to business signage in order to protect traditional & original shopfronts would be good to see. The tendency by some establishments towards window decals for advertising obscures the interior of shops from the street view & detracts from the street visually. At the new centre, there are quite a number of temporary advertising banners that add unnecessary clutter to the general area.

Your work on maintaining the facades of unoccupied or derelict buildings makes such an immediate & positive impact on the Main Street. It must be a relief to have the premises with the red door & lovely window murals gone sale agreed. The use of Twyford's window to display historical photos is a great use of an unoccupied space & one would not know it was unoccupied after the façade facelift you completed. The Vincent de Paul's new colourful façade bookends that street block with its professional frontage.

### **Green Spaces and Landscaping / Spásanna Glasa agus Tírdhreachú:**

The large raised stone fronted planted beds at the town square had great colour on show from the perennial shrubs & delighted to see many were pollinator friendly. The cobbled seating area in the centre of the two beds is a lovely space that would be enhanced further with a maintenance programme for the weeding of the cobbles. This entails a significant amount of work however the results are immediately apparent & strikingly positive.

The new dark coloured planters on the square act as a good contrast to the bright paving. The planting schema with pollinator friendly perennial planting was a delight to see. A uniform planting theme will work best. It is great to see that spaces along the Main Street between the road & footpaths are utilized for planting rather than concrete infills. The planted area in front of the Coimín Centre & Our Lady's Church had wonderful blooming rose beds & great to see lavender planted out front. The access road by the side of Vincent de Paul shop is a great example of laneway landscaping with a great display of flowering hypericum. You have quite a number of planters to maintain throughout the town, all are beautifully & appropriately planted. However, they bring with them a significant maintenance programme & water usage. There may be merit, where appropriate, to consider placing the plants in mounded areas or ground beds.

What an undertaking, the planting of 3,000 spring & summer bulbs & thankfully you had great assistance from a TY group. Thank you for the pictures, a stunning vista. Over time, once they receive the right light conditions the bulbs will gently multiply thus leaving a lasting legacy.

The newly planted beds at Dempsey's Lane corner & the Naas Road corner were a riot of colour. The variety of pollinator friendly plants was amazing. The backdrop of the meadow field & the bank of loosestrife with the sunflower painted utility box presented a stunning panorama. It is clear you have a planting schema in mind that is taking shape & once the plants mature you will be able to infill with cuttings etc & this will ensure a reduced maintenance regime. Well done on taking on two large areas & transforming them. On Dempsey's Lane under the mature trees, there may not be a need for any flower planting if the area was left as a wildflower meadow with paths mown through for access & the verges kept mown for a tidy appearance.

You really can see the changes in your overall landscaping plan with the move to pollinator friendly perennial planting. There is so much more texture, colour palettes & interest in the various planted beds & containers. The stone fronted beds also add to the visual impact.

The playground, skate park & outdoor exercise area off Oak Drive is so attractive with the undulating grassy

landscaping, mature trees & hedging for screening. The facelift performed on the skate park is astonishing. The complimentary large blue planter in front offers a great pop of colour & the shrubs on the wall opposite lighten the wall's long grey façade. This linear area could be an opportunity for an edible hedge, pollinator climbers, mini orchard or even indeed a creative outlet for your "street artists" to divert their talents to community use. Plenty of food for thought there.

The Blessington e-Greenway, building on its existing offering, will indeed be a wonderful amenity as a looped route. According to Fáilte Ireland, greenways are one of the biggest success stories of Irish tourism & have brought transformative benefits to local communities.

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

The Guardian of Blessington is an innovative project & a unique interactive trail highlighting the wildlife of Blessington. This is an excellent way to engage children & adults through an alternative medium while educating them along the way. Your adjudicator did not manage to locate all 13 despite numerous turns of Main Street & beyond, next time. The crafted pieces have such detail, they are mesmerising. The addition of the QR code is an added bonus. How do you publicise it in Blessington as a passing pedestrian does not easily see them? This is a noteworthy project & if you have not sent in a feature on this for the Tidy Towns newsletter then you should. Your adjudicator cannot recall seeing an article on it to date.

Your move to pollinator friendly planting & your existing green corridors makes Blessington an ideal partner for the Irish Bee Conservation project. The erection of 6 nesting boxes in addition to smaller solitary bee boxes will provide a fascinating insight into how the bees survive. Your TY & BT Young Scientist students may have some interesting material for potential projects. It is indeed providential that you have a resident entomologist who can educate the community through talks, conducting local surveys & identifying actions to be taken by the community. Your engagement with the Bee Sanctuary of Ireland through live podcasts works well in tandem. The results of your Citizen Science bee surveys are interesting – 40/101 bee species detected locally. Your actions in relation to delayed grass cutting & encouraging residents & businesses to follow suit, participating in the "Bulbs for Bees" project, using alternative weed management processes, planting pollinator friendly flowers including sunflowers are all important for your local bee population's future survival. You are to be commended for taking a holistic approach.

It is heartening to see your local Credit Union sign up to plant native trees & hedgerows annually under the auspices of the Native Woodland Trust. It is a great example to set & perhaps more businesses may be encouraged to establish what their carbon footprint is & look to offset it locally.

Sunflowers this year have had an added significance as many have sown them in solidarity with Ukraine. It seems to your adjudicator that there were sunflowers stretching skywards at every turn in Blessington. Looking forward to keeping an eye on your social media pages to see them in full flower. The competition for the tallest sunflower keeps the fun to the fore. There will be no shortage of food for the birds come autumn.

It would be interesting to receive an update on the occupancy levels of your swift nest boxes especially as you add additional ones. Are your group now "Swift Champions" in Blessington or did others take on the role?

Your work in this area is commendable & having the younger generations involved is critical. Well done to Blessington Library on organizing a junior explorer walk with a biodiversity expert. The accompanying kit is a great resource. Your plan to create another woodland area near Carrig Glen Estate is welcome news & we wish you well in your negotiations with the council & in sourcing funding for the project.

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

Congratulations on completing your Energy Master Plan as it is a significant body of work. We did search for it, as advised, on the provided link however it appears that it has not yet been published. Your plans for a mid summer Energy Awareness event will, in light of substantial price hikes, have a very receptive audience. The inclusion of installers, providers & residences & businesses that have completed energy upgrades is the best strategy for relaying information & encouraging action. The feedback attained from the participants will be enlightening for your SEC.

Your adjudicator has not seen as many water butts installed in any one location. Obviously when you have them in 7 different locations, it makes watering a lot less manual. However, more importantly, it is a great example for the community & demonstrates how easily they are installed. The Men's Shed is a perfect example for demonstration. The mobile watering unit is a practical solution.

The demonstration of composting is the key to dispelling myths & if your plan to develop composting stations within residential estates is achieved, your composting workshop will have been worthwhile. The creation of 4 leaf cages & 1 pallet composter by yourselves offers you the opportunity to run courses.

Sustainability in the area of transport has seen renewed focus with fuel prices having increased by over 40% in 12 months. Unfortunately, the ESB EV charging stations were still awaiting activation on the day of the visit. At least the infrastructure is in place! With your Greenway, bike ownership seems essential. Well done on using Bike Week in tandem with Wicklow Local Sports Partnership to endorse cycling & provide maintenance skills.

Food insecurity is an area where most Tidy Towns groups can have an impact. Your new polytunnel is being put to

great use growing fruit & vegetables for a local charity as well as growing more than three quarters of your plants & shrubs. Its location on the Educate Together school site creates a wonderful learning facility in addition to the newly created willow outdoor classroom. This obviously is an area of importance for Blessington as we see the campaign for allotments continues .

Your initiatives in the area of recycling – collection of electrical items from estates, upcycling competitions, tree log planters, no waste charity event, upcycled planters & segregation of waste collected – are remarkable. Many of these are the types of projects many communities could undertake & have a similar positive impact.

### **Tidiness and Litter Control / Slachtmhaireacht agus Rialú Bruscair:**

Sometimes the community just needs to be asked to help. Your call to action with the litter awareness posters appeared to have had the desired effect – more residents taking responsibility for litter collection within their area & more helping out generally. The statistics are interesting on the social media campaign. What school children do not want a break from indoor teaching & an opportunity to get out around town for the purpose of litter picking was no doubt attractive. A group of 30 competitive children can accomplish quite a lot when litter picking in town. Lovely to see people share their litter picks on social media under the Litter Warriors tag.

“Plawking” is a new word for your adjudicator - a new trend in litter collection. The reward of refreshments at the end will always help entice a few more volunteers & an additional 33 volunteers to the Litter Warriors group is a great result. Your weekly litter groups are very organized & an allotted time period on a weekly basis encourages people to partake as many already have busy schedules.

Perseverance pay off as you now have your Bill Belly bins located on the Main Street & at the skate park. It is all the factors that add up to solve a problem & putting those in place takes time. The recycling of cigarette butts collected by business owners is a novel idea & well done on establishing it whilst also supporting a start up Irish company.

A little competitive spirit between estates is to be promoted as who does not want to live in the estate the features prominently in the “Local Estates Competition”. As the proverb goes “you can catch more flies with honey than vinegar”. Well done on a positive approach.

The presentation of street furniture is often seen as a secondary issue. Your strategy of planting beneath tree guards alleviates the need for weeding & provides both colour & pollen. However, do take care to ensure the trees are well established & also continue to ensure the guards are not impinging on the trees growth. The replacement of the reflective strips on bollards is quite the task however once damaged ones are replaced & all old reflective strips are exchanged it certainly improves the visual appearance.

Based on the significant percentage of litter collected containing plastic bottles, a reverse vending machine would be a great initiative. Carrickmacross Tidy Towns have demonstrated the success of their pilot over the past 2 years. If this was combined with a drinks can option, between 70% & 85% of litter collected in some communities would not exist! You have shown from your records that in 12 months, you recycled in excess of 12,500 drink receptacles from the litter collected, remarkable diversion from landfill.

We will await with interest the feedback on the council's foam stream unit for dealing with weeds. Your experience with trialing the weed brush technology was revealing, as it did not work well in all areas.

The whole community of Blessington is to be congratulated for the cleanliness of the town. There was minimal litter sighted on the day of adjudication, evidence of the whole community effort involved.

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

The residents of St Joseph's Road in the town are fortunate to have such a green frontage with mature trees & some green boundaries with neatly maintained through pathways. They certainly have space to leave some area of the green as wildflower meadows if they were so inclined. The linear strip between their road boundary & the path has potential. It appears it may have recently been uprooted for some infrastructure maintenance.

The visit to Burgage Manor was inspiring. It was wonderful to see such large areas left for wildflower & grasses. The additional planting of trees & monthly grass cutting shows what can be done where there is a collective will. Blessington Manor's entrance & neatly cut verges on paths presents a lovely vista & the green boundaries between houses soften the built environment. Westpark's green frontage with its stone signage, perennial planting & mature trees present an attractive entrance. Ashton Estate has taken biodiversity to their heart with some green areas left unmown & the creation of “homes” for wildlife. We look forward to seeing the outcome of their biodiversity & habitat plan. Blessington Manor has clearly put a lot of work into presenting their estate as the standard was excellent. Carrig Glen were getting ready for their Fun Day & the estate was looking pristine. The planted tree stump is a fresh idea & very colourful with trailing plants.

Well done to those estates putting in significant work to present their areas in the best possible light.

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

The approach road from Baltinglass was well presented with mature hedging & trees & verges maintained while allowing growth in the margins. The painted & planted bicycles certainly add a great pop of colour to the pipe

sculpture on the roundabout.

There were road works & maintenance taking place on the N81 road to Dublin on the day of the visit. The planted area under the welcome sign on the N81 from Dublin looks well on this green triangle with the trees in the background. The provision of footpaths this distance from town is remarkable & great to see. Again the maintenance of verges for wild grasses is encouraging.

The Naas Road has a lovely exit from town with the wildflower & perennial planting. The work at the junction near the Community College is very well finished. Is it envisaged that more planting will take place within the bark-mulched beds? These are large beds to maintain. The pedestrian access to town from all the estates is once again great to see. The wide green margins with mature trees & green residential boundaries present a lovely vista on this straight road. The landscaping on the roundabout here is eye catching.

The standard of maintenance of the approach roads on adjudication day was very high. There are significant distances to cover with all the approach roads & you are to be commended for your work

### **Concluding Remarks:**

It was your adjudicator's first visit to Blessington & it was a delight. There is a great sense of the community coming together to make Blessington a desirable place to live for all. The projects you have undertaken & the maintenance programmes you have in place are each contributing to achieving this goal.

Your concept of a Mini Tidy Towns Conference for groups in Wicklow & Kildare is an excellent idea. There are so many creative ideas & projects that have taken place or are in project mode in Wicklow that need to be shared & discussed in addition to the networking element. As Amy Poehler said "Find a group of people who challenge & inspire you, spend a lot of time with them, and it will change your life forever".

We look forward to seeing your new 3 year plan next year & wish you the best with all your endeavours.