

Tidy Towns Competition 2023

Adjudication Report

Centre: **Cratloe - An Chreatlach** Ref: **2059**
County: **Clare** Mark: **270**
Category: **B** Date(s): **14/06/2023**

	Maximum Mark	Mark Awarded 2022	Mark Awarded 2023
Community – Your Planning and Involvement	80	34	36
Streetscape & Public Places	80	34	36
Green Spaces and Landscaping	80	32	34
Nature and Biodiversity in your Locality	55	30	33
Sustainability – Doing more with less	55	15	18
Tidiness and Litter Control	90	52	54
Residential Streets & Housing Areas	55	28	30
Approach Roads, Streets & Lanes	55	28	29
TOTAL MARK	550	253	270

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

Welcome to the 2023 SuperValu Tidy Towns competition. Thank you for your completed application form which included photos. You also forwarded a map, the Green School Plan 2022, and your 3 Year Plan 2021-2023. Hopefully most of these Actions have been completed and you are now preparing your new plan. We recommend putting a date on Actions as this will help focus your work programme. If any of the Actions in the existing plan are unfinished then put them into your new plan sometimes projects take longer than we think.

You are a small, but we see active, committee of 5 and have enlisted 12 volunteers who seem to regularly help you from the photos in your form. You list state and semi-state organisations and agencies, business, community groups and individuals who support your work financially or with advice and help. You are active on social media with a Facebook Page with over 980 followers, an Instagram account and a website. You also use the more traditional methods for those not on social media – a newsletter, parish bulletins and local newspapers. Welcome again, your third year, to the SuperValu Tidy Towns competition which has resulted in the improvement of the visual presentation of the village due to the projects undertaken for the competition. It has also led to a great sense of togetherness, pride and community spirit, which we are delighted to hear. Also well done on referencing the SDGs in your application form.

Please see Concluding Remarks for advice on filling out the Application Form and producing the map.

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

Your neat, tidy village gives a very good first impression to the visitor. We admired the beautiful sited, barn style, St John's RC church, with its freshly painted pebbledash walls, landscaped grounds and wrought-iron side gates. We loved the timber interiors of this church which are quite unusual. We walked up the steep hill to the grotto and stayed for a while admiring the stunning view over the surrounding countryside and Shannon estuary. The freshly painted white statues etc stand out well in the lush green surrounding landscape. Well done on your success in the Towns and Village Paint scheme – the results were evident in various locations around the village. Like many rural villages in Ireland, you have dereliction which detracts from the streetscape and we see that you are trying to resolve this problem. We note the renovation of the business premises and see that The Good Egg café has added to the social life of the village. In your 3-year plan you state 'Awareness of the built and natural heritage of an area adds greatly to the residents' sense of belonging and overall appreciation for their surroundings'. We agree.

Craughan graveyard is well maintained and we liked the water source just inside the gates. The portal tomb at the entrance (Ballinaphunta Dolmen), is very apt but remove the sign in front of it. Also remove the signs from the gates and put them on the wall (not piers) beside the gates if you feel they're needed. The signs are obtrusive and clutter the entrance. We loved the community playground in the recreational area aimed at various ages. The Meelick-Cratloe-Parteen plaque in the school grounds was noticed - a history lesson for the pupils.

Green Spaces and Landscaping / Spásanna Glasa agus Tírdhreachú:

Cratloe is fortunate to have a wealth of trees and hedgerows all around the village. That is very important because trees are long lasting and provide the main structure of the landscape. Items mentioned in your application include maintaining the parish field in the village and this you do very well, although we suggest that you change the mowing regime along the edges to allow more wildflowers to develop. We admired the row of Sorbus Aria at the church carpark defining the roadway from the parking bays. The work undertaken along the wall at the Community Hall is impressive. You have included photos of various beds and planting areas around the village which you maintain with spring and summer flowers – all looked lovely. The poppies, purple geraniums, lady's mantle, anthuriums etc were in full bloom when we visited. We noted that you trim a narrow margin along some green areas. This roadside frontage is a great example of how to effectively present a semi-wild habitat with its narrow strip of tidily mown grass along the outer edge to show that the wilderness behind is deliberate. The Fatima oaks were noted – trim a little around them to give them some space? There are some fine majestic trees in Cratloe – perhaps identify them and put a discrete sign beside them with their name to inform those passing by. In time a looped walk with the trees identified could be developed. Congratulations on the sickle mower – you will now be able to tackle irregular banks and keep them well trimmed.

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

This past year you have been focusing your attention on developing the priority projects of your Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) which you launched September 28th 2022. Management and control of invasive species being a priority. Congratulation on winning the Best Newcomer Award in the All-Ireland Pollinator Plan – Local Authority Pollinator Special Awards category in 2022. We visited the Community Woodland / Cratloe Forest Recreational Area and spotted the miner bee habitat. Is this still in use? You were invited to advise on creating pollinator friendly planting on school grounds and you also advised on providing cavity nesting bees habitats. We met David, the first-class teacher, who kindly showed us the work undertaken at the school – the green school noticeboard, the carved animals and birds, flower beds, the squirrels house, a water butt, and the new memorial. The tiled displays of little hand growing at the entrance to the school is quite beautiful. We look forward to the installation of the swift boxes.

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

Following the launch of the Cratloe Development Plan you set up a Sustainability committee who will implement Actions under this category. This is a very positive step and we wish them every success. We are delighted to see that you are registered as a Sustainable Energy Community and that you have completed the initial survey – now the actions need to be undertaken. Please tell us about this in next years application. The Actions in the Cratloe Green Schools under the six topics were noted – please commend the team who lead this with the pupils of the different classes.

You have produced two Ton bags of compost in your composting area beside the Parish Field since last year which you will use on new and existing beds. We trust the composting tutorial with the sixth class engaged the pupils and maybe encouraged them to create a composting area in their own homes. Check if any of them did this? We wonder how successful were people in identifying 'How long does your rubbish last?' in the table quiz. When installing the water harvesting facility at the community centre make sure that it is suitable capacity for your needs and not just a domestic water butt.

Tidiness and Litter Control / Slachtmhaireacht agus Rialú Bruscair:

Like many community groups in Clare, you took part in National Spring Clean Day in April. You undertake a twice-weekly litter pick up around the village and we read that you have designated ambassadors who take responsibility for areas or roads. This is commendable and ensures that all areas are cleaned. Fly-tipping is a problem in most communities – all you can do is report it as soon as it's spotted so that the area doesn't develop as an acceptable place to leave rubbish. Sometimes barriers/gates (if they can be installed) deter the culprits. The wall bordering the school grounds was cleared of dead ivy by your volunteers in 2022. The Woodpecker week is a great idea and evidently is very successful – well done. We're delighted to see that you have also surveyed signage and have recommended the removal of redundant /damaged signs. A survey of redundant /empty poles could also be carried out and ask Clare Co Co to have them removed. We spotted some fly tipping at the sign in the recreational area which was a pity but we guess it was removed quickly. The ivy around the curved seating area needs to be trimmed. The raised bank near the Good Egg café had a considerable amount of weeds. Some ground cover plants would be the best to plant here. While we appreciate that weed growth will be impossible to remove from the rock face along the paths to the grotto, we recommend that they are removed from where the rocks meet the concrete paths. Then it will appear the area is managed. The large chain and posts need painting. Remove the ivy which is encroaching on the stone walls around the grotto as while it is acceptable to have ivy on a block/rendered wall it is not acceptable on a stone wall as the roots penetrate the wall making it unstable.

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

Single and two storey traditional and modern houses are the mix in Cratloe. Houses are located on individual sites with neatly tended gardens with well-kept grass areas and flower beds full of colourful flowers. Some had specimen trees for a special effect while others had beautiful displays of neatly trimmed box hedging. Many residents had freshly painted facades and boundary walls which presented well. We visited a few housing areas/estates – Gallow's Hill Road, Asling Court, Wood Road, Cratloe Wood, Well Road, etc. We admired the semi-wild and yet, well maintained, entrance to Cratloe Wood. There are beautiful views across the Shannon from this estate. The communal green area of Aisling Court was well maintained and we admired the trees along the roadside boundary.

The wide roadside margin could, we agree, be left to grow and a margin along the road cut to show that the area is managed and allowed to grow for biodiversity. Have you a Best Kept Garden competition? This is something that residents enjoy as its healthy competition. The award (a certificate) to be presented at a social event where the press and local elected representatives are invited.

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

The entrance road from the north, with its great vista across the countryside, has neatly trimmed grass margins and we loved that the footpath extends beyond the 50km sign making it safe for pedestrians to access the village along this busy road. The name sign with two evergreen bushes and a small planting bed greets the visitor. From the east we enter through woodland under a beautiful canopy of trees – trim back some branches so that the village name sign is seen. The pathway at the Good Egg café is in a very poor state of repair, as is a section of the boundary wall. These detract from the streetscape. We noted some new paving in various locations around the village, with dipped kerbs and rumble strips. Arrange to have the road crossing at these points a different surface to assist those crossing. It would be good to see the large area to the right of the railway bridge being developed as a 'gateway' to the village – hopefully you will be successful. We were delighted to read, and see, that roadside areas are being maintained with biodiversity in mind.

Concluding Remarks:

We thoroughly enjoyed our visit to your village – our first.

In terms of your Tidy Town's application form we request that applicants number their projects as, new projects (N), or improved/maintained projects (M) and all 'future projects' should only be included in your 3/5-Year Plan and NOT in the Application Form. 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 a map – N1, N2, N3 etc and M1, M2, M3 etc. We know that all new and maintained projects will not be transferred and that's fine. The numbering system in your form and map is confusing e.g. you have an M15 and N15 but only show the location of one. Your map, while fine on a large screen of a computer, is quite indistinct when printed on an A4 page and so should be redrawn/upgraded so that the adjudicators can find the projects when they visit. We liked that you included a north point, as this orientates us when we visit. 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 2023 competition.