

Tidy Towns Competition 2023

Adjudication Report

Centre: **Ennis - Inis** Ref: **68**
County: **Clare** Mark: **374**
Category: **H** Date(s): **13/06/2023**
26/07/2023

	Maximum Mark	Mark Awarded 2022	Mark Awarded 2023
Community – Your Planning and Involvement	80	53	54
Streetscape & Public Places	80	48	49
Green Spaces and Landscaping	80	51	52
Nature and Biodiversity in your Locality	55	41	43
Sustainability – Doing more with less	55	27	29
Tidiness and Litter Control	90	63	64
Residential Streets & Housing Areas	55	40	41
Approach Roads, Streets & Lanes	55	41	42
TOTAL MARK	550	364	374

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

Fáilte chuig Comórtas Na mBailte Slachtmhara Super Valu don bhliain 2023. 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 2023 SuperValu TidyTowns competition. Thank you for your comprehensive application form including photographs, a map with key buildings and areas marked and a link to various websites/pages including your 3 Year Plan. This Plan has 53 Actions and Projects listed under each category of the Tidy Towns competition which you hope to complete.

We noted your kind dedication page to one of your lost members of Ennis Tidy Towns – Michael Richards RIP. You have a committee of 17 whom you list by name, and within the group the skills are education, arts, community, heritage, biodiversity, project management and politics. What a great array of expertise! You also have over 100 volunteers whom you can call on when a project needs extra helpers and truthfully in a large urban centre you will need all those volunteers. You list numerous state, semi-state, voluntary groups, businesses and community organisations within the town who contribute and support you in various ways – financial, advice, resources, etc. You have a dedicated email address, a website, a Facebook Page and we also noted a Twitter account – well done on this active social media presence. In addition, you inform the community of your activities using the more traditional methods – parish newsletter, local radio and newspapers. etc. Within Ennis there are both National and Secondary schools and you engage with all of them and we are delighted that you also call upon the Scouts and Girl Guides in your SGD TikTok project. You have a great number of Community Involvement projects listed – the visit of President Michael D. Higgins to celebrate Ennis' success as National Award Winner 2021, Ennis Tidy Towns on Nationwide, receiving County Mayoral Award, commended for Safe Volunteering during Covid, sharing information with other TidyTowns groups, Social Inclusion, receiving the Meitheal Award 2022, etc. These are great events to be associated with and to lead. Entering the TidyTowns Competition for over 40 years has been a wonderful commitment of the community and has resulted in Ennis becoming a 'better place to LIVE, WORK and PLAY'.

Please see Concluding Remarks for advice on the application form and map.

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

Heading from Galway to Kilrush or from Limerick to Lahinch all roads used to go through the center of Ennis but now, with the Motorway and ring road, your town has been given back to the community resulting in Ennis being an enjoyable place to visit. The River Fergus meanders through the town adding extra interest. We can see how the town was once an island. The commercial heart of Ennis is very pleasant with narrow streets linked by lanes. Here we find two, three and four storey properties with businesses, residences, and retail outlets side by side ensuring that the town has a vitality all day long. There are some wonderful buildings and structures in Ennis – St Flannan's College, Sts. Peter and Paul Cathedral and its adjacent Presbytery, Ennis Courthouse, the various buildings which

go to make up the Old Ground Hotel to name a few. The buildings on Bindon Street, some with ornate fanlights over the entrance door, are quite beautiful and well maintained. There are a number of murals along the streetscape and the new Traditional Musicians have been added to the collection, which is quite beautiful. In addition, you have now begun to paint the utility boxes and these otherwise unattractive structures in the streetscape are now art works dotted around the town. We encourage you to continue with this. The Heraldic Banners at the station, reflecting the rich heritage in Ennis, are also an addition to the streetscape. Will you install more of these in key locations around the town? The benches, poles, bin, railings and the Harmony Bridge which have been painted as regular maintenance work looked well in the streetscape. They missed a few benches which we spotted... This maintenance work must be kept up to date and we encourage you to make a survey of areas which are more vulnerable and so need more maintenance. The Future Project of the new Civic Square will greatly improve the area in front of the cathedral and we look forward to visiting again and seeing it completed. We admired the very informative Historical Town signs. The GR post-box on O'Connell St. was admired.

Green Spaces and Landscaping / Spásanna Glasa agus Tírdhreachú:

With large community parks, communal spaces in housing estates, small pocket parks, green spaces associated with business and sporting facilities – GAA, golf, athletic facilities etc you have quite a number of large green spaces dotted throughout Ennis. Some of these have beautiful mature trees associated with them – e.g Tim Smyth Park, Monastery Park, Kincora Park and Nature Park. We felt that there was a slight dearth of town trees. In a town the size of Ennis trees are vital in the landscape and streetscape. We recommend that you undertake a survey of the main streets (including car parks) in Ennis and see where town trees can be introduced. The main structural elements in the landscape and one of the main structural elements in a streetscape are trees. Trees are known to have a positive impact on mental health and wellbeing. By planting and caring for trees, you help reduce pollution, improve your surroundings, improve the appearance of your community and increase the value of your property. In addition, they provide shade for humans, food for insects and food, roosting sites and nesting sites for birds. We were delighted to read that the Banner GAA have received trees from you. The Deer Monument is quite beautiful. Is this a project that could continue in other key locations? The small Wellness Garden in the Clare Co Co New Road site is very pleasant. While the tiered planting pots give great impact in a streetscape it's always disappointing that the structural element is so visible (as your photo shows). We suggest that in addition to the pollinator flowers and plants that you also install trailing plants to help disguise the pots. Throughout Ennis, and on approach roads, we were greeted with stone surround flower beds with great displays of colourful pollinator friendly flowers which were very welcoming and quite beautiful ... the beds near the Maid of Erin spring to mind. Remove the tree saplings which are growing in the grotto beside the courthouse as these will be difficult to remove when they get better established. The nearby Entente Florale plaque is virtually illegible – paint the letters.

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

A great variety of natural habitats existing in Ennis, parks, trees stone walls, the River and Fergus River and their banks, etc etc and we see that you celebrate these habitats on your website. We loved the Activity Sheets (22 in number) that you have created about Ennis which can be downloaded from your website. Lough Girroga looks interesting – is there any knowledge of the habitats associated with this area which is so close to Ennis? We see you have an Ennis Biodiversity Plan 2017-2019 with 18 projects/events/activities listed. This Plan should be updated and hopefully you will see an improvement in Biodiversity in Ennis when you complete this. We look forward to seeing the St Flannan's Biodiversity Plan completed – the Actions by local your ecologist and BSBI member, Donncha O'Cathain, are very positive and we particularly like the 'Edible Hedgerow'. Well done on being chosen to be filmed for the Citizens Assembly to highlight Biodiversity Loss and show what can be done to alleviate this. We note herons, water hens and mallard ducks in the River near the Maid of Erin memorial.

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

You list a number of new projects under this category all of which are impressive. We admire that you are engaging with the local scouts and producing a series of TikToks centered on the SDGs – we tried but we failed to open them. Your reusable cups are now back being used at community events, having been banned during Covid. It's always positive to share information and attending the Climate Clever Communities Summit you met groups from across Ireland, both North and South - the three workshops looked interesting. You are very involved in the local schools who place a strong emphasis on raising awareness on environmental issues and who participate in An Taisce's Green School's Programme, many having been awarded flags under various categories. We encourage you to continue with your involvement. We see that you also engage with a few large businesses in terms of their sustainability programme. Are you in contact with Clare Co Co what is their approach? We question do you arrange any talks or seminars under this category where you invite adults to attend? There are various workshops which would be suitable. Check the Tidy Towns website where ideas for actions under this category can be found in the Tidy Town's handbook, Sustainability – Doing More with Less.

Tidiness and Litter Control / Slachtmhaireacht agus Rialú Bruscair:

With a large population, over 25,000, it is difficult to keep the area litter and weed free but when we visited, we found that any litter we saw in the centre of the town had been freshly deposited and we know it would be removed by volunteers within a matter of hours. Unfortunately, we cannot say the same with regards weed growth – this is something to be tackled by your clean-up teams. We admire that volunteers register the area that they are going to clean and that these are listed on your website. We suggest that you put this list on the Tidy Towns noticeboard in the local SuperValu shop and possibly more volunteers will make themselves know to you. As you say in your Biodiversity Plan - 'Litter is unsightly, bad for the environment and dangerous for wildlife.' We read that you ranked 9th in the IBAL results in 2022 but now see that you have risen to 5th place in the 2023 results – you will be very

happy with that result! You tackle graffiti as soon as it is reported and truthfully this is the only way to contend with this form of litter. Is there any area in Ennis where the youth can engage in their 'art' form e.g a skateboard park or an area near the river which has walls/ containers etc? We have seen this in other towns and the artists are delighted to have such an area (we spoke to them) and are happy to limit their artistic expressions to this area alone. We loved the pictures of your volunteers all decked in their hi vis jackets heading out to complete their litter pick but don't forget to ask them to bring a hoe with them and to remove weed growth too. And please commend the Sub Aqua Club for the litter pick in and along the banks of the Rivers. We felt there was a distinct lack of litter bins as we walked around and we encourage you to undertake a survey of blackspot areas and ask that litter bins be installed. The Garden of Remembrance had pavements missing and the general area (including the carpark) had a considerable amount of litter and weed growth. This was also the situation we found in the park with the Hurling Sculpture – also trim the trees so that we can see the sculpture! Around the town we noted various 'art' works/sculptural pieces which were quite dirty which was a pity. The Riverside Walk plaque is almost illegible – paint the lettering.

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

There are a number of streets in the centre of Ennis where residences are interspersed with retail and business premises. Close by we find small tightly packed housing estates with little or no front garden and laneways to the rear to accommodate rear entrance to the terraced housing. Town centre residences and those estates close to the town centre have the benefit of easy convenience to all the town's services. The newer estates are more spacious with larger front gardens and communal green spaces which are an asset to those living there. We visited quite a number of estates (Ballymacaula View, Riverdale, Dun na Hinse, Dromard, Rosanore etc) and found that, in general, residents cared for their properties and had clean or freshly painted boundary walls, neatly tended garden with arrays of colourful flowers. We admired large specimen trees in some gardens which gave an air of opulence to the estate. We love that Best Kept Garden and Community Green Area are part of annual local awards – we looked for plaques in the estates but didn't see any. Are these temporary notices which move from garden to garden and green area to green area? You list 9 award categories which we have no doubt are well coveted. The photos of the Awards Ceremony were delightful – we liked the paintings of the robin which were presented.

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

The grass margins on all of the approach roads were neatly trimmed and hedgerows had been cut back to give good visibility. Having been by-passed by the M18 and with N85 Ringroad, the centre of Ennis is now a more pleasant town to visit. We admired that footpaths extend along most of the access roads making it safe for the community to access the town on foot. We love the narrow streets in the centre of the town and wonder if any of these will be pedestrianised or at least only accessible to traffic in the evening? We see that like many towns and villages cobblelock paving was installed which needs ongoing maintenance to remove growth between the units. Your Weedhex machine is certainly well needed in Ennis! We see that this paving system has been used in the new walkway of Westby's Lane ... more work for your Weedhex! We suggest that you ask Clare Co Co to use a different material in the future – a concrete path with narrow expansion joints is preferable and needs very little maintenance. We noted quite a number of new footpaths with dipped tactile kerbs which makes easier accessibility for those pushing buggies, children on bicycles or mobility scooters and wheelchairs. Compliments to CBS for their Traffic Management booklet where they highlight park and stride locations. We hope this alleviated the problems they were having with parents/guardians dropping and collecting children. Perhaps encourage the other schools to do likewise? As mentioned earlier, the deer sculptures on the roundabout are lovely- compliments to the Mens' Shed. Is it your plan to extend this to other roundabouts? They are a beautiful feature and eye-catching. We particularly liked the stag; perhaps because it was more visible. We found some roads and pavements in the central area and on approach roads in a poor state of repair where maintenance which occurred in the past is now ravelling. Make contact with the Area Engineer about these and also about road markings which need repainting.

Concluding Remarks:

We thoroughly enjoyed visiting Ennis – a town we know quite well. You have had many wins over the past years in this competition – all well deserved. This culminated in Winning Ireland's Tidiest Town 2021 which is the most coveted and prestigious award of them all; so well done to your committee, volunteers and Clare Co Co etc. There is no longer a need to put the Future Projects in the Application Form. We revised this some years back and we now require communities to only tell us about the New (N) and Maintained (M) projects. We will read about all Future Projects in the Tidy Towns Plan which communities provide. We tried to click on various links which you gave us in the application form but kept getting '404. That's an error. The requested URL was not found on this server'. Check that the links work before submitting next year's application. Thank you for entering the SuperValu Tidy Towns 2023 competition.

Second Round Adjudication:

Your second round adjudicator was delighted to have the opportunity to visit Ennis and to see the many projects completed by your hard working committee and volunteers at first hand. We would like to begin by thanking you for your thoughtful and excellently prepared entry form – which managed to strike a great balance between photos, texts and other non text based illustrations. Well done on keeping the document concise as it makes the entry form much clearer and easy to follow. The excellent cross referencing between the map supplied and the entry form also ensured that the projects you identified were easy to locate during our visit. We applaud your decision to share your submission with other tidy towns groups as there is every chance that this will help to raise the standard of entry

form submissions to the competition. We would also like to congratulate your committee on a highly successful 2022 which saw your town deservedly win the tidy towns larger urban centre award and for being crowned Ireland's friendliest place. Noting these achievements, it is fitting that your town has been selected to represent Ireland in the 2023 Communities in Bloom Competition and we wish you every success for the July visit. We were also heartened to read that your inclusive community based approach to the competition is going from strength to strength (with the diversity and skill levels of your committee and volunteers increasing all the time) and that the junior tidy towns group are back in action!

As always, Ennis town centre looked great during the second round adjudication. The notable high standard of presentation of heritage structures, public buildings as well as shops and businesses has become a consistent and welcome feature of your town. Our attention was drawn to the cluster of heritage buildings at Bank Place (such as Bank of Ireland and the Post Office) and we loved Bindon Street with its intact terraces of four storey period brick buildings. We also enjoyed visiting St Peter's and Paul's Cathedral which is the striking centre piece of a cluster of high quality community buildings that include Cathedral House and the Maria Assumpta Hall while the impressive HSE primary care centre nearby provides an interesting variation to the streetscape with its modern design. To name but a few of the many (other) fabulous buildings in Ennis, we would like to compliment the eye catching County Hall (with its contemporary finish and wonderful grounds), the magnificent Abbey and Friary buildings, the County Museum (and its lovely setting with artwork and landscaping) and we look forward to seeing the completion of the new library building (under construction on a site adjacent to attractive Glor building) in the near future. It would be remiss of us not to mention the excellent work of owners / operators of local shops and business which (as usual) looked amazing. Notable examples included Donie O'Keeffe's Butchers, Collins Jewellers, Nozomi, Seoidin, Murphys Menswear, Everest Kitchen, the Ennis Bookshop, A. Honans, the Monks Society, Ciarans Bar, St Francis Credit Union, O'Connors and 'Grettals Petals'. Like the first round adjudicator, we enjoyed seeing the banners at the train station and we noted that additional banners advertising Communities in Bloom were in place along Arthurs Row. The works undertaken to the public realm were greatly appreciated so well done to Clare County Council for sprucing up seating benches, poles, bins and railings and we loved the new street mural of traditional musicians at Abbey Street. The painted junction boxes (visible at the Club Bridge) also added interest and colour.

We are continually amazed by the range and quality of public spaces in Ennis with delightful seating areas, sculptures, thoughtful memorials and planted schemes seemingly around every corner. Well done to all involved in the design and planting of the wellness garden to the rear of the Clare County Council as it looks very well. The Covid memorial name stone and gravel based landscaped to the front of the building is also very nice. The community garden in Kevin Barry Avenue is considered to be a great way of improving amenities and raising awareness of biodiversity. Other notable public spaces were admired. The seating area (with landscaping) to the front of the HSE building was lovely and we also enjoyed visiting the grounds of the Maria Assumpta Hall and taking advantage of the seating area to the front of the Cathedral while we admired the tiered planters. We enjoyed visiting other spaces such as the area to the front of the library (with its landscaping, trimmed grass and mature trees), the Knoxs Bridge Amenity Scheme, the 1916 memorial at the Club Bridge and the seating areas along the Causeway (leading to Glor). The spaces beside Station Court and on the Tulla Road (beside made in Brazil) were also quite nice but both were in need of maintenance. The walk along the river Fergus is also considered to be a lovely amenity. We were particularly impressed by the memorials in Ennis and carefully maintained settings on Friars Walk. The World War II memorial is a striking feature with its central feature, perimeter box hedging and information board while the World War I memorial (with its seating areas and explanatory sign) is a lovely reflective space. The immaculately maintained grassed areas and weeping willows provide the perfect setting for these monuments. Well done also on assisting in the maintenance of the lovely Irish Kidney Association Memorial with its decorative gravel and shrubs.

Like our predecessor in June, we enjoyed visiting a number of your parks, communal spaces, green spaces and pocket parks in Ennis and we heartily agree that they are a wonderful resource for the people of Ennis. The number and variety of high quality landscaping schemes in Ennis was quite remarkable and it is a challenging task to restrict ourselves to only refer to a small number to meet the requirements of this report – particularly as so many fine examples could be seen. The planted beds on Harmony Row were most impressive and we marvelled at the variety of pollinator friendly species to be seen here and which included; sage, cranes bill, black-eyed Susan's, lobelia, toad flax, lupine, common daisy the wonderfully colourful Indian Blanket. The planted beds on Causeway (with hydrangea, buddleia and shrubs) looked great while praise is also due to the landscaped schemes to the found in the beds in front of Cathedral House and the Parish Centre (that accommodated sage, black-eyed Susan's, catnip, toad flax and orpine). The planting at Arthurs Row (to the front of the County Museum) was a highlight as the colourful and eye catching semi circular bed is used very effectively to enhance the lovely Celtic Rest sculpture. The timber box planters that lined Arthurs Row also looked very well. The addition of tiered planters with cascading floral displays to the entrance of the Cathedral, to O'Connell Square, at the sculptures at Wood Quay and on Francis Street (near to the GAA grounds) is acknowledged and there is no doubt that they add lovely colour to these locations. It is also pleasing to see that sourcing and using pollinator friendly plant varieties is a priority for your committee and we would be interested to hear if there are any plans to further limit (or perhaps) phase out entirely the use of decorative seasonals?

We were delighted to read that your tree planting programme is continuing with native trees being added to the grounds of banner GAA and Eire Og. Like the first round adjudicator, we are strongly supportive of new tree planting due to their important role in capturing carbon emissions as well as their other very positive environmental, social and other benefits. We would also encourage you to find new planting locations for trees both inside your town and on its outskirts. We note from the first round adjudicators report that your Biodiversity plan 2017 – 2019 is up for review and we recommend that you ensure that the 18 projects identified in it are fully assessed to see if they have

been fully implemented and most importantly, to see if they are having the desired effects and benefiting biodiversity. This information should influence the reviewed plan. Be sure also to include monitoring measures in your reviewed plan – as they will enable you to work out if these projects are effective. Its great to see the strong focus on pollinator planting in your landscaping schemes and that you encourage participants in your best garden competition to do the same. Why not set a target of getting all participants in the competition to have planting species that are recommended in the All Ireland Pollinator Plan? This could enable you to create large clusters of pollination zones and increase biodiversity benefits. Its great that 'don't mow, let it grow' approaches are becoming more firmly embedded in the management of lawns and grassed areas in your town. To help you to measure this, we would encourage you to map the areas where it is followed. Consider also carrying out regular FIT surveys with the help of the schools to see if the number of pollinators is increasing.

We are glad that there is a clear emphasis on promoting sustainability themes in the projects that you have completed under the sustainability category – through tiktok videos, engaging in the stories of change exhibit, promoting a healthier and greener Christmas campaign and participating in a voice Ireland digital media campaign. This work is tremendously important as it can drive the behaviour change that is required to adapt our lifestyle to address the climate crisis. Why not take stock of your sustainability projects and see if the promotional work has had the desired effects and led to behaviour change – particularly in areas such as transport usage and waste generation? This would enable you to work out which projects are proving to be most effective and which need to be tweaked or reworked entirely. Well done also on sharing your experience with others through conferences and collaborations. Noting that Ennis is now an exemplar in this area, we would also like to see a one page list or table of the sustainability projects that are being undertaken in your town which have demonstrated successful outcomes in waste avoidance, efficient resource use and energy conservation.

A high standard of litter control could be seen in the town centre with all areas appearing neat and tidy. This illustrates your excellent commitment to litter control and that your great initiatives are working. Small improvements are possible. The bus park and car park beside the rail station had litter present and we were surprised to see untidy and forgotten ecar charging spaces here. Be aware also that an accumulation of litter was building up on the grounds of Colaiste Mhuire (between the natural stone wall onto Newbridge Road and the green fence to the sports court). A high standard of tidiness was seen but as always, some small areas need closer attention. The barriers into Pairc Chiosog Inis were in very poor condition and the gable wall adjacent to the front of St Peter & Pauls Cathedral needed to be power washed. As noted by the first round adjudicator, some signs (and sign poles) need freshening up. They include the children about sign outside Scoil an Teaghlaigh Naofa and the yield signs at the Francis Street / Tulla Road. A sign pole on a parking sign outside the Munster Group premises on Bindon St / Bank Place was also in very poor condition and the large black and white directional sign on Clare Road (beside the Corrib Oil Garage) was obscured by vegetation. It is disappointing to note that graffiti persists in your town and the efforts that you are making to address this issue are appreciated.

The work undertaken on maintaining residential areas is acknowledged. The local awards for gardens, estates and approach roads is a great initiative and it is clear that it is promoting greater engagement and driving up standards. We agree heartily with the positive comments of the first round adjudicator and we would like to compliment everyone who contributed to the impressive levels of maintenance seen. Praise is also due to the residents of An Sean Dun for the excellent work they have undertaken. However, the wet July weather ensured that the weeds are back in Greendale so the Weedhex will be required here once again! The projects carried out under the roads, streets and lanes category were appreciated and we are in agreement with the first round adjudicator with respect to the good standard of presentation of your roads. Our trip to see the revamped Westby Lane (it looked great) led us to exploring many of the other laneways (or bows) in your town. We applaud your determination to ensure that these pedestrian laneways are regularly maintained as they make a very positive contribution to the character of your town but they also ensure that the town centre is walkable, permeable and accessible. These are all vital requirements for encouraging residents and visitors to use active travel modes such as walking and cycling and also for Ennis to realise its ambition as an active travel town. We note the results of your survey which revealed that almost three quarters of residents are in favour of some form of pedestrianisation and we urge you to follow this up by ensuring that the new regeneration proposals reflect residents wishes and result in more road space in your town being allocated to active transport modes.

We would like to congratulate you on the many fine projects that you have completed for this year and for your continued participation in the competition. Noting that more improvements will happen as part of the regeneration programme, it is clear that these are exciting times in Ennis. Keep up the good work and we look forward to returning again in 2024.