

Tidy Towns Competition 2023

Adjudication Report

Centre: **Spancilhill Clooney - Cluain Aodha Cnoc FuarChoile** Ref: **2251**
County: **Clare** Mark: **258**
Category: **B** Date(s): **08/06/2023**

	Maximum Mark	Mark Awarded 2022	Mark Awarded 2023
Community – Your Planning and Involvement	80	38	39
Streetscape & Public Places	80	33	35
Green Spaces and Landscaping	80	28	30
Nature and Biodiversity in your Locality	55	27	28
Sustainability – Doing more with less	55	13	15
Tidiness and Litter Control	90	52	54
Residential Streets & Housing Areas	55	27	29
Approach Roads, Streets & Lanes	55	27	28
TOTAL MARK	550	245	258

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 and thank you for your application form including photos. You are very welcome for your fourth year entering the TidyTowns competition and we hope the comments in the reports have been useful to your community. Your committee is just one person – the chairperson. We find this to be very unusual as generally there are about six or seven on a committee who meet and make proposals for activities/projects based on suggestions by the wider community at an AGM. Having only one person is quite onerous as there is quite a lot of work involved. We recommend you examine the General Information Handbook on the TidyTowns website which has been written to advise new groups. www.tidytowns.ie/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/General-Information.pdf. Within the volunteers you have many differing sets of skills and experience - gardening, landscaping, woodwork, building and administration. All will be of great benefit to you. We see that you have a dedicated email address, a website and a Facebook Page (625 followers). Your website appears to be static with the last news item telling us of an event in 2021. Facebook has postings of the parish church newsletters but truthfully needs more. Photos of the area, photos of nature, local activities being undertaken by other community groups, information about litter pick-up days, etc. etc. Get a teenager to be your social media PRO – it'll look good on their C.V. He/she can also fill out the Tidy Towns application form putting the activities/projects into the correct categories. Please also see Concluding Remarks.

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

You are a very dispersed community – Clooney/Spancilhill/Maghera and we took a while to decipher the full extent of the area we were to visit (see Concluding Remarks). There are a number of key buildings in your area – Pope (Saint) John XXIII RC church, St Stephen's RC church at Maghera, Clooney National School and the old Maghera national school now converted to a residence. We admired the mural of the horse fair on Brohan's Spancilhill Inn. The picnic benches at Spancilhill Cross are well located behind the neatly trimmed hedge. There is a particularly beautiful set of wrought iron gates opposite the entrance to Clooney House. There are also some fine flatiron gates along the roads, some into fields and others pedestrian gates into small haggarts. We noted the VR postbox on one of the roads – it badly needs to be painted as this is an important social feature and should be conserved. It's wonderful that the piers to Clooney House have been restored (we assume lime mortar was used) – they looked good. The gates were also admired – but keep the weed growth around the piers and gates trimmed. Next you will undertake the restoration of the adjoining walls – take care when removing the ivy growth that damage /collapse

isn't the result. Here too lime mortar should be used.

Green Spaces and Landscaping / Spásanna Glasa agus Tírdhreachú:

We admired the Cross at Spancilhill and the area along the stream. This area could be left to rewild. Remove the tyre planters (totally inappropriate) and trim a narrow strip at the edge of the path allowing the area inside to grow and produce wildflowers and grasses. This form of grass cutting is a great example of how to effectively present a semi-wild habitat with a narrow strip of tidily mown grass along the outer edge to show that the wilderness behind is deliberate. There are three planters along the high wall at the R352/L8170 junction. We recommend these are removed and a permanent stone surround planting bed is built near to the road edge so that when it is planted with colourful flowers and tall grasses, it is visible to the passing motorists. On the opposite side are three concrete planters – a single large stone surround planting bed would be so much nicer. Indeed, we recommend the removal of all concrete pipe planters and replacing them with stone surround beds. The planting regime in all your planters was admired. The grounds of the Pope (Saint) John XXIII church looked good with the dolmen as a landscape feature. The trees here were admired. We note that you plant for Spring - daffodils, tulips, bluebells and snowdrops – which are enjoyed by the community and passing motorists along the R352. Next Spring take some photos and include them in your application form (and on your website and Facebook page). Seed and seedling swaps are great ideas and cut down on cost and on the waste associated with bought plants. Again, take photos of this event. Spancilhill Fair Green site was noted – unfortunately we weren't there when you had your annual Fair. (More photo opportunities for your website and Facebook page).

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

With the great number of stone walls, hedgerows, mature trees and the numerous rivers with their banks you have a great variety of habitats for insects and mammals. The hedge rows were very colourful with a variety of wildflowers in bloom and were buzzing with insect life. The aim of this category is to encourage people to recognise, engage and celebrate the biodiversity and richness of the wildlife habitats in their surroundings. Knowledge of your area and promoting this knowledge to the local population and passing visitors are the key components of this category. This could be done by installing information panels in some central location in the village – perhaps a poster on a community noticeboard. You have a walk in the grounds of Clooney House. Have you any information about the walk? Is there a map available with stops indicating trees, views, etc? Small name tags on the ground could be used to indicate some of the trees and landscape features that can be seen along this walk and indeed on other walks that you develop. The use of QR codes is now very common where additional information can be found.

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

This is a category where many communities struggle but truthfully it is just about being aware of how we use the resources of the planet and tackle the growing waste mountain that is creating problems of pollution, unwanted land use, and the use of dwindling resources. It is a global and also a local problem. When groups are starting out, we recommend that they look at how they conduct their own business to try and prevent the generation of waste when carrying out their day-to-day activities. Get the basics right and focus on simple but effective measures. For example, you could make your own compost for use in your landscaping schemes as this avoids all of the associated packaging and other waste that comes with shop bought fertilisers. Consider harvesting rainwater in order to avoid using treated water when maintaining your planters. Using waste or surplus products (like timber) to make planters are other items like bird boxes and seating benches is also encouraged. Avoiding chemically based pesticides in favour of weeding by hand or naturally based alternatives should also be considered. Undertaking all of these actions will enable you to avoid generating waste in the first place and allow you to lead by example in your community. We admired the Community Library – it's always good to see books being read and passing them from one person to another is perfect! A 12ft metal Christmas tree must be quite a sight at Christmas time and a joy for all who pass. We admired that you now have a seed and plant swap of pollinator friendly plants and flowers in addition to vegetable plants. You intend this to become an annual event which is excellent as this will avoid the waste associated with shop bought plants.

Tidiness and Litter Control / Slachtmhaireacht agus Rialú Bruscair:

You have a very large area to cover in terms of litter control and you take part in the An Taisce Annual Spring Clean-up event which we admire as it focuses all on the need to be vigilant regarding litter and fly tipping. The area was virtually litter free so your team of volunteers are doing a great job – compliments to all. Unfortunately, we noted that chemicals have been used at the communal area at the Cross of Spancilhill to control weed growth at the grass margin, along the path and on both sides of the stream. Please advise your weed control team against this as tracts of dead grass are very unattractive. Just trim a narrow grass margin as advised under Landscaping. Use a spade in the spring at pathway edges and this will keep them tidy for most of the summer. Spray the gravel areas with organic weed killer or a mix of vinegar, salt and washing up liquid. Use strimmers (or clipping shears) around sign posts and inside the fence at the edge of the stream if you feel it's needed. We appreciate this is more time-consuming, but the area will be so much more attractive as a result. The surround to the sign, telling us of Spancil Hill Fair and of the song based on the poem by Michael Considine, needs to be painted. Remove the ivy that's growing through the church (Maghera) boundary wall – here we allow the use of chemicals as ivy is very difficult to remove in a situation such as you have here. While ivy is a wonderful habitat for insect life it should be removed from ALL natural stone walls, bridges, etc as the roots cause damage to these structures, finally leading to their collapse. Natural stone constructions are in themselves great habitats for insect life and also very beautiful in the streetscape. The walls of church belltower are in need of cleaning.

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

Farmhouses surrounded by farm yards, rural single and two-storey vernacular houses and modern single and two-storey or dormer houses, located in their own sites make up your residential properties. The standard of presentation of farmhouses and yards, and individual houses within the village environs and along the surrounding roads that make up your community was generally very good and we applaud the owners who clearly take pride in their property. Many had been recently painted along with boundary walls and gates and gardens had neatly tended grass and hedges and flowers were abundant in some properties. One had a great display of gladioli along the boundary wall and sunflowers adorned the garden. Don't forget to encourage the residents to grow pollinator-friendly flowers from now on. Have a look at the website <https://pollinators.ie/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/Garden-Pollinator-Guidelines-2022-WEB.pdf> for ideas for the garden.

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

As a dispersed community you are located along many approach roads and so we will concentrate on a few aspects under this category. The busy R352 passes through Clooney and although there are speed signs of 50km we noticed quite a number of motorists driving in excess of this. Unfortunately, the speed activated display signs didn't encourage all of them to slow down. Does the road need speed hazard sections/table tops of a different colour on the road? Maybe something to discuss with your area engineer/TII traffic. The footpath extending to Clooney House from the church will make the Clooney House and estate walk safer as walkers can park in the church car park where there are plenty of safe parking spaces. The pedestrian crossing was noted and we have no doubt it makes the road safer for pedestrians. Village name signage is clear and the planting under them is suitable – we loved the lupins at the Cross of Spancilhill sign. Road markings on some of the side roads were very poor/almost non-existent and need to be repainted.

Concluding Remarks:

This was our first visit to your community Clooney/ Spancilhill/ Maghera and we enjoyed driving along the roads looking at the area with critical eyes. You mentioned that the map hadn't changed since 2022 but please note that every year new adjudicators visit and so a map MUST be submitted EVERY year. We also need to see where the projects New and Maintained are located. 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 a 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. This is to help the adjudicators to negotiate their way around your village/area and see the various projects or locations of projects. We wish to state that 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. We would appreciate it if these points could be taken into consideration when preparing your 2024 application.

We also recommend that you contact other Tidy Towns groups of a similar size to discuss projects/activities/community talks etc.

Thank you for entering the SuperValu Tidy Towns 2023 competition.