

# Tidy Towns Competition 2023

## Adjudication Report

Centre: **Oola - Ubhla**

Ref: **1822**

County: **Limerick**

Mark: **255**

Category: **B**

Date(s): **05/06/2023**

	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	35	38
Nature and Biodiversity in your Locality	55	20	22
Sustainability – Doing more with less	55	13	15
Tidiness and Litter Control	90	41	42
Residential Streets & Housing Areas	55	28	29
Approach Roads, Streets & Lanes	55	34	35
<b>TOTAL MARK</b>	<b>550</b>	<b>242</b>	<b>255</b>

### 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.

A committee of 14 is significant & a cohort of 38 volunteers is indicative of a strong community spirit. In conjunction with other local community groups, you all have a clear focus on what needs to be achieved to ensure the future viability of Oola. Teamwork, perseverance & determination will lead you to attain your goals over time. As you have discovered, a flexible working arrangement suits many people's lifestyle. In some communities, they have a designated one-hour blitz in which specific tasks are tackled & this has brought on board a lot more volunteers. People want to contribute however time can be the constraint. The assistance of two Community Employment workers cannot be underestimated & they are invaluable in breaking the back of the regular To Do List & new projects. As a group, you are very well supported by local community organizations, local agencies & businesses. It is great to see you avail of expert advice through online & in person workshops in addition to support from volunteer led environmental groups. There is no doubt you have covered the traditional communication mediums & your plans for a website & virtual notice board are sensible. However, social media platforms are essential today in reaching the younger cohort within the community, as this is how they glean their news. We note your Facebook page has been inactive since last year. Well done on actively engaging with your youth in particular the National School & youth club. The latter have the skills to assist you in relation to establishing & keeping active social media platforms – meet them where their interests lie & you will get greater engagement.

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

Derelict properties & sites detract from the visual panorama of the village centres & have blighted many villages & towns to date. This is not easily managed by Tidy Towns groups however many Tidy Towns groups, like yourselves, are completing an audit of derelict & vacant properties & then liaising with the local Council on proposals for returning them to residential or commercial use. Limerick is fortunate to have a local council who is proactive in their approach & is actively compulsorily acquiring derelict properties. We note they have recently CPO'd a dwelling & lands at Gortakilleen. Your joint strategy with Oola Community Council is paying dividends. It would be envisaged that the twin pronged Derelict Site levy & Vacant Home Improvement grants would propel more property owners to make decisions on long abandoned premises. Some buildings in government agency ownership are being transformed into Remote Working Hubs, perhaps an option for the vacant Garda Station. The station building is well maintained, as are the gated entrance & boundary walls. Are there any known plans for Oola Cooperative site? Your considerable work here is evident in the before & after pictures & during the on site visit.

The Church & National School occupy prominent positions within the village & were well presented on adjudication day. The business premises facades are generally kept to a good standard. The Community Centre is a sizeable building with a large hard surface surrounding the parking area. It is fantastic to now have it in community

ownership. The façade would benefit from a fresh coat of paint. There is an excellent publication on how car parks can be managed to help pollinators. <https://pollinators.ie/how-car-parks-can-help-pollinators/>  
The retention of the freestanding cast iron pump is important, as it would have played an important functional & social role in the village. The detailing adds artistic interest to this piece of street furniture. The War of Independence monument is a focal point at this end of the village.  
It would be beneficial to the village if businesses would consider using window decals of local scenes or photos from the past instead of signs that detract rather than add to Oola's streetscape. Similarly, a cohesive signage scheme would enhance the village.  
We look forward to seeing the new mural in place for next year's adjudication.

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

Millennium Park supports quite a number of facilities – bus shelter, War of Independence memorial, seating & accessible footpaths. It was noted that several of the trees here are in decline. It would be best to make plans for their replacement. The shrubbery would benefit from some pruning & again removal of dead plants. There is a lovely mix of colour foliage in the bed & a few more pollinator friendly varieties would be beneficial. As the area marked Managed for Wildlife has a wooden fence that will deteriorate over time, it might be a good idea to consider planting an edible hedge here to replace the fence in time & screen the area.  
The Battery is a remarkable space carved out on the side of a very busy thoroughfare. As a community you have worked hard here to provide a green lung in the village. The short meadows here backed by mature & maturing trees & varied hedgerows presents a wonderful space for enjoyment. It is heartening to see the involvement of the youth club & know that the National School make use of the facility.  
The creation of the Sensory Garden at the National School represents a transformation of an unused space & an inclusive amenity for all students attending the school. The vegetable trugs with the reused hoops upon which to drape the netting is an excellent example of reuse & their accessibility is so important. There certainly is a lot for children to experience here & it will be great to see more added in time. Are there plans to add more murals to the block wall? Are there plans to screen the fencing with climbers like honeysuckle or clematis? Well done on an excellent collaborative project.  
The front garden of the Garda Barracks presents a wonderful opportunity to add colour to the streetscape similar to the garden beside the church with oxeye daisies, foxgloves & more summer blooms. The ESB substation would be another ideal place for a mural & the small green area there has potential.  
The location of the GAA grounds is very accessible to the village. Well done to them on sourcing funding for the creation of a walking track around the perimeter. On adjudication day, it was noted that they have great potential for adding trees or edible/native hedging to the concrete post & rail perimeter in addition to the block walls. Clearly your planter survey is providing you with a framework for your planting scheme & we are intrigued to see your planned QR codes in place in the planters next year. Thank you for providing a snapshot of the spring blooms of bluebells, very popular with early spring insects. It was lovely to see pollinator friendly perennials planted – snap dragons, osteospermums, lavender, etc.  
Last year's adjudicator provided some salient advice on the containers placed on the footpaths & your adjudicator this year is in agreement.

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

You have taken a very proactive approach in this category. It is interesting how you are seeing the community take notice of your endeavours & change their behaviour e.g. greater interest in educational information on local nature & move from herbicide use to natural weed control. Another 8-week gardening course this year is quite the commitment having completed one last year. However it seems to have provided you with additional skills & knowledge that you are now putting to good use in the village.  
Well done on promoting with some intensity the Now Mow May initiative. Many will make the change once they understand the reasoning as you have outlined in your messages, posters & as seen at the Battery. Similarly, not removing nettles & demonstrating the need for them as a food source for the Red Admiral larva is another learning for the community.  
Clearly your work to date at Millennium Park is assisting the bat population as you can observe the use of the bat boxes. Have you determined what bat species are resident in Oola? The native hedge with lots of edibles is no doubt an attraction for insects & as a consequence bats. Regular unobserved scrutiny of bird boxes will determine their usage & your strategy to remove those unoccupied presently to other areas is the best move. Birdwatch Ireland Limerick branch are a very active volunteer group & would be happy to provide you with advice. <https://birdwatchireland.ie/>  
Indeed, your village stream is easily past unnoticed at the Tipperary end of the village due to the vegetation on both banks but is very visible at the far end. However, well done on recognizing its importance & continuing to work with Mulkear River EIP. We will be interested to hear, next year, the results of your own survey on the stream. The health of our waterways is so important & we need renewed focus in this area.  
The Irish Bee Conservation project is an incredible volunteer led initiative & it is great you are working with them to install more solitary bee boxes. The next step would be to conduct a survey to determine what bee species you have in Oola.  
As mentioned in the next section, the GAA Green Toolkit has a section on biodiversity so do engage with the GAA & see how they can assist you in helping Oola's insect & birdlife thrive.

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

Your continued focus on sustainable gardening practices is laudable – rainwater harvesting receptacles; multiple composting bays; shredder; no purchased compost for planters; plant splitting & seed saving; reduced mowing

regime, etc.

The creation of a Sustainable Energy Committee (SEC) in Oola is a great first step & your past involvement in the Sustainable Energy Forum provides you with an excellent understanding of what is involved initially & in the future. The existence of local residences with solar installations provides a reference point for other community members & a knowledge base should you hold an Energy Information Evening.

The provision of an appropriate bus stop with both seating & shelter is an excellent & necessary addition to the village. It would be hoped that the amenity coupled with an appropriate timetable would encourage greater usage of the service. You might let us know next year if this has been the result. This is an example of sustainable transport.

The GAA launched the Green Club Toolkit late last year to support clubs in implementing simple & effective sustainable actions. It would be worth bringing to the attention of the club <https://learning.gaa.ie/greenclub> & it would tie in nicely with your plans too.

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

The TLC8 is a fantastic countywide initiative & a great way to engage the whole community in a very focused way. It would be hoped that this regular annual event would make the community more mindful of litter while they are out & about. Your walkers are to be congratulated on their daily litter picks in addition to the scheduled weekly one.

Well done on liaising with the local council on areas where fly tipping is an issue. If those involved can be identified by the council & sanctioned, it would be hoped the problem would cease.

It was noted that the signage throughout the village was clean & legible. It was a delight to see no posters. An annual audit of street furniture is a good strategy e.g., redundant poles, obsolete signage, neglected lighting standards, blocked gulleys, discarded safety equipment etc., as they add to the clutter & detract from the vista. The signage for the Community Text Alert area would benefit from being reduced in size. Your adjudicator has seen many that are a fraction of the size & still visible to all. The footpaths are in a good state of repair as is the street furniture. Well done as this takes a significant amount of work & diligence.

Unfortunately, the end of the right hand footpath on the way over to the Community Centre had a lot of gathered litter in the vegetation & there was glass along by the bridge wall. It was noticeable how clean the main thoroughfare was & this is no easy task given the volume of traffic passing through Oola.

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

Castle Laurel is a small estate with a wonderful pastoral backdrop & well-maintained abodes with some cherry trees in the communal green.

Vale Drive & Arbourvale Estates have well tended entrances, residences & gardens. It would be lovely to see coordinated bilingual signage on all the village estates. Some of the road markings could do with being reapplied as they are quite faded.

The Block has a wonderful screen of nature from the N24 & the addition of the new planting is welcome.

There are some volunteer led groups working with communities, residential associations & schools on planting more trees & creating mini forests – Trees on the Land <https://www.treesontheland.com/> Easy Treesie

<https://easytreesie.com/> National Tree Week is an excellent opportunity, in conjunction with Limerick City & County Council, to avail of free trees & offer them to estates to plant. Perhaps plan this over a number of years in order to coordinate the planting & maybe a tree for each child in the village.

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

The N24 approach from Tipperary town has added interest with the detached four-bay single storey thatched house & garden adding a positive contribution to the roadside. The owner is to be commended for keeping the thatch in excellent condition. A cottage garden would be a stunning addition to the frontage. Are there any plans by the local council to screen off their yard on the left hand side? A line of trees or hedging would soften the vista significantly. Arriving into Oola from the Cullen side, one is immediately captivated by the whitewashed house on the bend. The verdant hedgerows, mature trees & well maintained residences & gardens present a wonderful entrance to the village.

The N24 approach from Limerick has maintained verges & hedges. Closer to the village the mature & maturing trees & low stone walls softens the expanse of the railway boundary fencing. Your work here on restoring the stone walls with local stone looks seamless.

The Welcome to Oola signs have a striking design & frame & great visibility.

### **Concluding Remarks:**

Thank you for a well presented application that was easy to read & lovely to see the before & after photos included. The Oola logo is a lovely artistic piece. It was a pleasure to stop & explore Oola rather than drive through to another destination. You have completed quite a body of work to date & you have ambitious plans for the future regarding the playground & SEC. We wish you well in your endeavours.