

Tidy Towns Competition 2023

Adjudication Report

Centre: Castlebar - Caisleán an Bharraigh	Ref: 512
County: Mayo	Mark: 364
Category: F	Date(s): 21/06/2023

	Maximum Mark	Mark Awarded 2022	Mark Awarded 2023
Community – Your Planning and Involvement	80	52	54
Streetscape & Public Places	80	48	49
Green Spaces and Landscaping	80	50	51
Nature and Biodiversity in your Locality	55	43	44
Sustainability – Doing more with less	55	26	28
Tidiness and Litter Control	90	58	60
Residential Streets & Housing Areas	55	37	38
Approach Roads, Streets & Lanes	55	38	40
TOTAL MARK	550	352	364

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 Super Valu Tidy Towns Competition for 2023. We thank you for your entry, and wish you all the best in all your future work. Good luck.

Castlebar - Caisleán an Bharraigh, a large town with a population of 12,318 people – has entered the competition for 29 years and has a committee of 5 members with support of another 60 volunteers.

- Your committee meets every month with representatives of Mayo County Council and local interested groups. Quarterly meetings are held with Mayo County Council on ongoing projects. Litter picks are carried out three times per week by volunteers in conjunction with local groups.
- A significant level of support is received from a wide range of local and national agencies and businesses which are too numerous to mention individually.
- You communicate with the public via local and regional newspapers – press releases and information updates, Facebook, CRCfm Community Radio Castlebar and MidWest Radio, Parish Newsletter, seminars and events and birthday parties for your volunteers – this is an excellent idea. Thank you for the many paper clippings and photos in your submission which indicate a very vibrant Tidy Towns organisation in Castlebar and very enthusiastic volunteers.
- You engage closely with local schools and secondary students joined your litter pick-ups as part of their Gaisce Award activities. In addition, youths from various clubs joined focussed litter picks on approach roads; including Castlebar Mitchells, Scoil Raifteirí, First Mayo Scouts, Foróige, Educate Together and Castlebar Tennis Club.
- The voluntary work undertaken by Castlebar Tidy Towns and the projects completed deliver clear benefits for the whole town. Additionally, the personal connections created provide the greatest benefits to the local community in Castlebar. A very strong aspect of your submission is the enthusiastic involvement of new residents in Castlebar with your projects and ongoing work programmes which creates an enriching experience for the whole community.

The coloured A4 maps provided with your Entry Form showing the main features of the town including road names were of excellent quality. The projects listed on the entry form were very well referenced to the maps which were clear and easy to read. This assisted the adjudication process greatly.

The quality of the application form was excellent with clear separation of categories and individual projects and extensive use of photos. The adjudicator was particularly pleased with the reference to the relevant UN sustainability goals under each category. The title page referencing the key projects shown using coloured disc

symbols, provided great clarity to the document.

The colour coded 3-year Tidy Towns plan has been noted outlining the key focus areas and activities completed, in progress or proposed for next year. It is sensible that you have built in some flexibility in your plans, as these often change allowing you to deal with emerging opportunities and requests.

The adjudicator's assessment is based on a recent site visit and the contents of the application form, which is at the upper level for a town the size of Castlebar - at 64 pages long. The text inserted on the form is also very easy to read. The project numbers and headings are shown in bold text and the associated photos, captions and map references make the document very easy to read and assisted the adjudicator in navigating around the town - well done.

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

There are a total of 6 different projects presented under this category ranging from enhancement works at Market Square to the installation of a History and Nature Mural in the vicinity of the Market Square Car Park.

- The first stop on the tour of Castlebar on a warm sunny day in mid-June, was the wonderful Market square area. This delightful paved public space located in the centre of the town created using high-quality granite paving on an elevated site, was adorned with attractive semi-mature hornbeam trees, which together with the surrounding buildings, provided a good sense of visual enclosure. An imposing piece of sculpture and the weather proof seating pods provide considerable visual interest here. The seating pods provide a very practical refuge in our sometimes very changeable climate. The stretched canopy over the nearby seating area also provided adequate shelter and shade and contributed to the generally restful ambience found in this part of the town. The quality of the shopfronts to various properties and commercial premises overlooking the Market Square was to a very high standard and property owners are to be commended for this. Perhaps further pedestrianisation and exclusion of cars in this area, where possible, could be considered for the future. The passing car traffic and noise still dominates this area impacting general walkability and creates a 'not so cycle or pedestrian friendly' environment. The newly planted flower beds added a welcome splash of colour to the stone tree surrounds and the tidy towns volunteers involved with this enhancement are to be commended for their work.

- The nearby Ellison Street and Market Street have also been upgraded as part of a previous street enhancement scheme and the adjudicator noted the use of high-quality materials such as natural granite paving on footpaths and pedestrian - friendly traffic calming ramps. The vertical lighting and stippled paving also enhanced the overall design and accessibility. The hornbeam street planting adds to the quality of the streetscape here. However, some of the trees seem to be deteriorating in condition perhaps due to lack of nutrients in the soil medium and may need to be replaced in the not-too-distant future.

- The Bridge Lane improvement scheme was excellent. The use of materials and colour scheme and overall finish is exemplary. This has created a wonderful sheltered meeting space in the centre of the town, which no doubt will attract further development and commercial activity to the area. Substantial provision for cycle parking has been made, reflecting its connectivity to the local greenway and the provision of sustainable access. The side wall of the Elvery's premises which overlooks this space, is quite prominent and perhaps this can be ameliorated with the use of suitable climbing plants or vertical green wall planting.

- The lower Charles Street enhancement scheme was visited and the adjudicator admired the improvements carried out here to make the area safer for pedestrians with the installation of pedestrian friendly traffic calming ramps, road re-surfacing, new limestone kerbing and cycle stands. The flower planting in the raised beds beneath the Sorbus trees greatly enhanced this area.

- The nearby link road skirting the military barracks site has also been extensively upgraded and improved. This section of roadway is characterized by attractive stone walls, well finished footpaths, cycle tracks and road surfaces. It may be necessary in the future to remove the heavy growth of ivy on the existing stonewalls facing the road, as these walls may deteriorate over time. The large car park at the Castlebar Social Services CLG could be enhanced by the introduction of tree planting, where space is available.

- The recently introduced floral display by Castlebar Tidy Towns at the junction of Castle Street greatly enhanced this area. The existing hornbeam trees are an important feature along the roadside here and add greatly to the quality of the streetscape.

- The presentation of the frontage of Castlebar Garda Station, Green Bay B&B premises and the nearby Public Library were particularly admired and well done to all those who have been involved with the maintenance and presentation of these premises.

- As noted in last year's report it would be good to progress further the issue of derelict or empty properties in the town and perhaps there is a vacant property register to follow up. There are significant grants available at present for renovation works and shopfront improvements and perhaps these can be availed of by property owners to provide much needed improvements and accommodation. Further consultation with Mayo County Council on this matter is advised. The power washing of paved areas in the Spring each year along the main thoroughfares in the centre of the town, could considerably improve the presentation of these areas, in advance of the busy summer months.

Green Spaces and Landscaping / Spásanna Glasa agus Tírdhreachú:

- There are a total of 5 different projects presented under this category ranging from engagement and

partnership with your new Ukrainian friends to carrying out various planting works to the community clean-up of Humbert Way.

- The adjudicator called to the large open space known as The Mall and noted positively the hanging baskets attached to the lighting poles installed by Castlebar Tidy Towns. The herbaceous perennial planting schemes carried out at the 1798 and 1916 memorials and at the Manannan Mac Lír sculpture were in full bloom and made a significant impact here. The mature trees growing around the perimeter of this open space provide a strong sense of visual enclosure and on the sunny afternoon, the expanse of green space provides a welcome respite from the hustle and bustle of the town centre.
- Castlebar has another extensive parkland area available to the public at the Town Park. The adjudicator admired the wide range of facilities available here including two children's playgrounds, a MUGA, various fitness structures and extensive grassland and wildflower meadows. It is good to know that the Urban Forest planting scheme carried out by Castlebar Tidy Towns is establishing well and hopefully this will create a dense woodland area in due course. In view of the regular maintenance inputs in this park, it would be beneficial to consider creating more wildflower meadows around the park's perimeter, which can be managed in the interest of biodiversity and reduce maintenance costs.
- It was good to stroll along the linear open space located in the vicinity of the Castlebar river, close to Marsh house. The wonderful stands of mature trees and the extensive natural aquatic vegetation along the river provided significant interest here. The many nest boxes attached to the wall overlooking the river adjacent to the Dunnes Stores premises were also positively noted. Perhaps consider providing information signage along this route in the future, highlighting local biodiversity and flora and fauna. Studies on the wildlife present along this river corridor might also be carried out. The planting of a screen of trees along the river to the rear of the Dunnes Stores premises, would improve the overall presentation and wildlife value of this linear walkway.
- The Lough Lannagh enhancement works undertaken by the Community Clean Up volunteers were to the fore, and this much-loved part of Castlebar was greatly enjoyed. The lakeside footpath from the car park to the pedestrian bridge was in pristine condition and the views to the lake and wider landscape were outstanding. The adjudicator noted the erection of nest boxes on some of the trees adjoining the route. The mature Scot's pine trees in the vicinity of the main car park impressed, one of which is surrounded by a circular stone wall with floral display, installed by the Castlebar Tidy Towns committee.
- It was noted during the visit that much of the floral displays provided in Castlebar included Begonias and other annual bedding plants. Reducing your use of these seasonal bedding plants for such displays is an important initiative for your committee to consider for the future. Colourful perennial and pollinator friendly plants e.g., *Alstroemeria* spp. can be used to very good effect as an alternative to the flamboyant but labour/water/energy-intensive annual bedding plants such as Begonias and Petunias.

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

- A key project carried out this year under this category was the creation of an "Urban Forest" in the Town Park. Well done to all those involved including Aurivo, 1st Mayo Scout Troop, the International Protection applicants and your regular volunteers. The planting of hundreds of native trees, over four weeks, at a location which is susceptible to flooding has the effect of improving biodiversity, carbon sequestration and hopefully will create a nature-based flood protection system.
- Other very important projects carried out this year includes the town river clean up, installation of urban bird boxes made by the men's shed, testing of Lough Lannagh water quality, creation of a 'Bee Way' with a focus on pollinator friendly planting and the organising of ATU Biodiversity Events, including a talk on swift conservation.

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

- A major project for your committee over the past year under this category has been the setting up of the Castlebar Sustainable Energy Community and it is noted that you have been awarded a grant of €20k by the SEAI - very well done. Your next step will be the completion of an Energy Master Plan for Castlebar which is now in progress. Your role in assisting in the creation of a baseline model of energy usage in the town and undertaking a community-wide survey and engagement with the community and providing a roadmap for sustainable energy usage will be crucial. You are wished well in your ongoing endeavors in this regard
- Another very interesting project this year was your partnership with The Habit Store in Market Square who provided a sustainable alternative to Easter eggs with plastic free-free/trade Easter eggs. It was heartening to note that these innovative products were in demand and sold out proving that there is a very strong 'appetite' amongst the public for the plastic free alternatives.
- The idea of holding Small Business Energy Clinics is a very good way to encourage local businesses to become more aware of sustainability and the support of the Chamber of Commerce is acknowledged in this regard.
- The adjudicator is pleased to note that Sustainable Transport is high on the agenda for Castlebar Tidy Towns with the introduction of e-car charge points, local link services and the Lime Bike Pilot Scheme. Maximizing the use of non-polluting and non-fossil fuel based and healthy/active transport systems, will be the stand out factor for Castlebar under this category into the future.

Tidiness and Litter Control / Slachtmhaireacht agus Rialú Bruscair:

- You are fortunate that Castlebar generally does not have a major litter problem. Your clean-up activities involving young people such as Foróige and the Scouts around McHale Road, Moneen, Springfield and Town Park areas have been a success. It is beneficial to involve people in practical tasks where they can see the positive impact of their work on their local environment. You have also designated target areas which require ongoing attention and festivals such as Christmas and St.Patrick's Day are important in this regard.
- The open space at Marion Row was visited and the adjudicator noted the wonderful work carried out by the

Tidy Towns committee to clean the stream, which was in a pristine condition on the day of adjudication. Some discarding of green waste was however, noted in the vicinity of the nearby conifer trees.

- On the day of adjudication, the Town area was found to be largely litter free - well done.

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

- The main focus of your activities under this category included undertaking clean ups and estate enhancement works at various housing estate locations in the town including St. Bridget's Crescent, Blackfort Manor, John Moore Road, Lower Charles Street, Marian Row and Rathbawn Road river clean ups. You have also engaged with An Garda Síochána to improve the marking and security of expensive tools at Fortlands Estate, an initiative which could be extended across the town. Thank you for the before and after photos showing the work carried out and the significant improvements achieved.
- The adjudicator called to a number of housing estates in Castlebar including Rathbawn Drive, Knights Park, Heather Vale, Victoria Park and generally the maintenance of the estates was to a good standard. It would be beneficial to organise a tidy estate's competition in the town, to provide consistent standards of presentation and an incentive for resident's groups to enhance the appearance of their areas. The presentation of the roadside junction at Garyduff Park was particularly admired.

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

- It is noted that a significant amount of your time and resources under this category is devoted to dealing with litter on the main access roads into Castlebar. Hearty congratulations are due to all the Tidy Towns volunteers who care deeply about their environment and who are happy to work together to help remove large quantities of litter from the N5, Westport Road, Old Cemetery, Newport Road, Breaffy Road and on the various roundabouts at the entrances to the town. There is no doubt that without this work and the dedication of your volunteers the presentation of Castlebar would be greatly diminished.
- The adjudicator visited a number of important main roads on the approaches and on the outskirts of the town, including the Westport Road, Lannagh Road, Humbert Way, Spencer Park, Lawn Road, Dublin Road(N5), Rathbawn Road and Pound Road. In all cases the road environs were presented to an excellent standard with extensive landscaping and tree planting adjoining the roads. The condition of footpaths, cycle tracks and road surfaces and markings was very good and for the most part road signage was clear and not obscured by vegetation. A number of roundabouts need further maintenance and attention and perhaps a redesign of these will reduce maintenance requirements in the future. The roundabout on the Westport approach and at the Lawn Road junction were particularly attractive, despite requiring minimal maintenance.

Concluding Remarks:

The visit to Castlebar was indeed a very pleasant experience and it is clear that as a group you have strived for continuous improvement and development of the town and surrounding areas. Your collaborative approach, involving the entire community including new residents, towards driving further progress is paying dividends and you are wished well with all your future endeavours.