

# Tidy Towns Competition 2023

## Adjudication Report

Centre: **Cong - Cunga Feicin** Ref: **558**  
County: **Mayo** Mark: **358**  
Category: **A** Date(s): **18/06/2023**

	Maximum Mark	Mark Awarded 2022	Mark Awarded 2023
Community – Your Planning and Involvement	80	44	46
Streetscape & Public Places	80	51	53
Green Spaces and Landscaping	80	51	54
Nature and Biodiversity in your Locality	55	39	40
Sustainability – Doing more with less	55	27	28
Tidiness and Litter Control	90	64	66
Residential Streets & Housing Areas	55	30	31
Approach Roads, Streets & Lanes	55	38	40
<b>TOTAL MARK</b>	<b>550</b>	<b>344</b>	<b>358</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.

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.

Cong - Cunga Feicin, a small village with a population of 145 people – has entered the competition for many years and has a committee of 12 members with support of another 30 volunteers.

- Your committee meets monthly in the Crossroads Community Centre.
- Support is received from Mayo County Council and a wide range of local and national agencies and businesses. Particular note is made of the ongoing financial and other support provided by McGraths Limestone Quarry Group, The Neale GAA club lotto, Ashford Castle, Cunga Magazine, Local Councillors, and other local businesses and residents. A special mention must be given hto the two food businesses in Cong who sponsored two nights out for the Tidy Towns volunteers -a very positive initiative and very well deserved by all.
- You communicate with the public via Facebook - Cong Village Tidy Towns (which has 2108 followers), Instagram - LoveCongVillage (with 1020 followers), a new website called DiscoverCong.com which was created with the aim of providing visitors with the best possible experience while visiting Cong, Cunga Magazine articles, Church newsletter, Local papers, etc.
- There is also a Cong history and Genealogy Facebook page (with over 1500 followers) – which highlights the many activities carried out by Cong Tidy Towns. There are also private postings on Facebook and Instagram and twitter by Tidy Town members e.g. fortheloveofcong on Instagram. Cong Tidy Towns activities are also highlighted in many postings made on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram by visitors who travel to see your historic village.
- You engage with Cong National School in relation to the planting of the school polytunnel. In addition, Tidy Towns members' families join in clean ups around the village and the Foróige Youth club also assist with this work. Young people are also involved in helping tidy towns volunteers to pick rubbish, water flowers and assist with the cleaning of the village.
- Your main project this year is the completion of the 'rising of the waters' development project which represents a major asset to the village.

The coloured map provided with your Entry Form showing the main features of the village and project locations was of excellent quality. The inclusion of individual road and street names on the map would however, be beneficial for next year. The quality of the map made it easy for the adjudicator to navigate around the village and significantly aided the assessment process - well done.

The quality of the application form was also excellent. The use of numbered bullet points under each category was

very beneficial and added to the clarity of the document. The photos included added important context to each of the projects carried out - only a small point, where possible it is desirable to try and have a uniformity in the size of the photos and these should always have a caption underneath, with a description of each photo. The Cong Tidy Towns (CTTs) – Short-term project list is very impressive and provides a clear blueprint for the sustainable development of the village into the future. It would be advantageous, where possible, to introduce some target dates for the completion of individual projects, which can provide a greater focus to your activities into the future. The adjudicator's assessment is based on a recent site visit and the contents of the application form, which is reasonably concise at 45 pages long – perhaps try and reduce the overall number of pages on the form for next year. The professional video showing Tidy Towns activities during the year was greatly enjoyed. The text inserted on the form was very easy to read and the use of bold text to highlight specific projects worked very well.

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

- You have listed a total of 25 different very impressive project areas under the category relating to buildings and public spaces and it is not possible for the adjudicator to comment individually on all of these. Suffice to say your committee is doing trojan work under this category and the high standard of presentation of the village is a testament to your committee's leadership and the great efforts of all your volunteers.
- The adjudicator called to Cong on a pleasant evening in mid-June. It was the first time to visit Cong and the village surpassed all expectations. Cong is a very charming small settlement characterized by a wonderful built and natural heritage, former ecclesiastical buildings, beautiful karst stone walls and an unspoilt riverside landscape. The intricate street pattern containing many fine traditional style properties with wonderful facades and shop fronts, all of which are maintained and presented to a very high standard, impressed greatly. The overall setting of the village is unique, surrounded as it is by the Cong River and one never escapes the beautiful sound of lapping water, which is to be experienced at every turn within the village core.
- The Walkabout through Cong commenced at a large village car park located on an extensive site which is sunken well below the level of the main access road into the village. This helps to screen the large expanse of tarmac and parked cars from public view. The presentation of the car park is very good with a considerable amount of tree and shrub planting which adds to the overall lush presentation of the area. The relining of the car park would no doubt improve its overall presentation and will help with the further regulation of car parking activities. The creation of a greater visual connection between the car park and the adjoining riverside landscape, should also be considered. Perhaps a number of viewing areas might be created to improve the leisure and the amenity value of this important part of the village. The car parking area at the rear of Ryan's Hotel is quite prominent when viewed from across the river and it is suggested that some additional low screen planting could be considered here. There is an area located between the end of the car park and the road containing large blocks of stone and access gate to a tunnel under the road and one wonders whether there are any plans to provide additional recreational facilities for the village here? At present its condition does not enhance the overall appearance of the surrounding area.
- The premises and residential properties situated along the main street in Cong were beautifully presented and it is clear that local residents and business owners are diligent in maintaining their properties to the highest possible standard. Pat Cohan's Bar, the Sarsfield and Danagher's hotel premises were particular highlights. An existing Bus Éireann pole has seen better days and could be replaced in the not-too-distant future. The window display at the Irish History Bookshop was particularly noteworthy and added great interest to the streetscape. The wonderful façade of the local Garda Station building, would be enhanced by a re-fresh with paint.
- The Spar supermarket and Top Garage premises both looked well and the adjudicator enjoyed the wooden 'duck' sculpture in this area and the wildlife signage was also presented to a very good standard. Consideration should be given to creating a riverside walkway at this location as the views across the river here are outstanding.
- The 'rising of the waters' project was visited and the scheme implemented here is superb. The extensive use of high-quality limestone paving, natural stone seating and cappings, together with granite kerbs and bollards added to the quality finish of this public space. The herbaceous pollinator friendly planting also enhanced the overall presentation of the area. One point - consider removing some of the shrubbery along the riverside to provide a greater visual connection between the new paved area and the adjoining river. The ornamental pear tree planting is establishing well - keep an eye on the tree ties to ensure they do not restrict tree growth or establishment in the future.
- Lydon's Bar looked resplendent with a bright splash of yellow and an attractive outdoor seating area. There are a number of green concrete planters opposite the 'rising of the waters' project which are in need of ongoing maintenance and could be replanted and tidied up.
- The newer St Mary's Church was visited and the adjudicator noted the beautiful use of natural materials and strong architectural quality of this building, which fits in well into this very historic part in the village. The Harry Clark-stained glass windows particularly impressed here. Consider re-painting the overhead barriers at the Church car park as these do not enhance the presentation of this part of the village.
- The wooden sculpture entitled 'hands of fame' located on a small paved corner of the village was admired. The concept here to recognise people who have helped to improve the profile of Ireland around the world is laudable. The standard of presentation of the nearby tourist office, site of the old courthouse, with an attractive garden along the frontage is exemplary. The small car park area adjacent to Saint Mary's Abbey is well planted and presented. The specimen variegated Norway Maple tree planted here is losing some of its variegated foliage and any branches reverting to green leaves should be removed, if at all possible.

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

- A total of 16 different projects carried out or supported by Cong Tidy Towns are listed under this category, ranging from the provision of floral displays around the village to the upgrading of signage in consultation with Mayo County Council. The many hanging baskets and window boxes provided around the village offered a very attractive and colourful display at many locations and these considerably enhanced the overall appeal of the streetscape.

- The adjudicator particularly admired the Foróige planters installed on the fencing along the walkway from the car park to the village centre. The inclusion of names on each of these relating to the young people who were involved in this project was particularly admired.
- The Cong Abbey complex and associated grounds adjoining the Cong River was visited and the adjudicator was overwhelmed with the outstanding beauty of this part of the village. It is pleasing to note that the OPW are carrying out works to parts of the Abbey structure and hopefully the scaffolding can be removed before long. The historical information provided at the entrance to the Abbey was of considerable interest and no doubt the location of the former Augustinian monastery had much to do with the site's defensive attributes and availability of a ready supply of fish from the adjoining Cong River.
- Reducing your use of seasonal bedding plants further for your floral displays is an important initiative for your committee to consider in 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 annuals such as Begonias and Petunias.

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

- Cong has a very rich biodiversity and the details contained in your entry form confirm that your committee and the wider community have a great appreciation of the nature on your doorstep and you are making great strides to ensure its continued protection and enhancement. You mention a total of 36 different projects relating to this category this year from the use of pollinator friendly planting in the village to the identification of local heritage trees. It is not possible to comment on all of these individually or visit them on site but the adjudicator fully acknowledges the importance this category of the competition has for your committee and the the people of Cong.

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

- The wide range of projects listed under this category which amount to 27 in total, indicates that Cong Tidy Towns, supported by the local community and businesses, is making great strides in this aspect of the competition. It is pleasing to note that a new solar panels with battery storage, a car fast charger has now been provided at the Crossroads Community Centre. The savings to the Community Centre and the resultant reduction in CO2 emitted is significant. Well done to all concerned with this project. This type of scheme is exemplary and could be replicated at many other similar facilities and public buildings around the country.
- It is noted that a new walkway has been constructed around the two Local GAA pitches in Cong and lights were installed to enhance public access in this area – a great facility which will enhance the health and well-being of the local community for years to come.
- The collection of coffee grinds and tea bags for composting by one of the local businesses is an important initiative which could be extended to other outlets. You might in the future consider installing a community composter in the village. These are useful and provide a quantity of mulch to use on your planted areas, which will ensure rapid establishment and facilitate maintenance of the plantings.
- Other areas worthy of consideration by Cong Tidy Towns for the future under this category, which is in keeping with the Sustainable Development Goals, include the development of further small electric microgeneration schemes for Wind, Solar and Hydro in partnership with the Local Authority - these may also attract suitable SEAI or Leader funding.
- You might look at the provision of additional public e-car charge points and bicycle parking facilities in the village core, and where there are deficiencies, suggest suitable locations where these could be provided in the short term.
- The Committee might also consider in the future initiating membership of the Sustainable Energy Communities programme run by the SEAI which includes engaging in learning networks, preparation of energy masterplans and local energy action plans etc. The following are useful links in this regard.  
<https://www.seai.ie/community-energy/sustainable-energy-communities/><https://www.codema.ie/sec>

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

- Your committee is heavily engaged in a wide range of important cleaning and maintenance works throughout Cong village, to ensure the village and surrounds are kept in a pristine condition at all times. On entering the village, the tidy towns team were noted picking litter and working diligently to maintain a high standard of presentation and litter control.
- On the day of adjudication, the village area and all approach roads were found to be pristine and litter free – congratulations to all your volunteers. Some discarded litter was however, noted in the vicinity of the bottle banks located in the village car park.

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

- The beautifully presented residential properties along the main street add to the unique charm of Cong village core. Private gardens were also very well-presented, particularly the garden of the single storey house located opposite Lydon's Bar. Street signage is absent in places - this is important in helping to ensure everything is easily identifiable for visitors within the village environs.
- The existing laneway and residential street at Riverview was visited and the adjudicator was pleased to note the traditional quality of the terraced residences in this area. A number of the properties appeared to be unoccupied and in dis-repair and perhaps grant aid can be secured by the owners to have these returned to residential use at an early date. The advice of Mayo County Council could be sought on this.
- The community playground was visited and was presented to a very good standard with attractive stands of young trees and wonderful views across the adjoining riverside landscape

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

- The approaches to Cong village were generally presented and maintained to an excellent standard.
- The Headford Road R346 is characterized by neatly clipped grass margins and wonderful high stone walls along the boundary of Ashford Castle. Road surfaces and markings and kerbing here were in a very good condition.
- Cong National School was visited and it enjoys attractive boundary walls and tree planting along the road. The entrance gates and railings have deteriorated somewhat in condition in recent years and will need to be attended to in the not-too-distant future.
- The adjudicator admired the planting of purple Japanese Maples and the beds of pollinator-friendly planting on the roadside margin adjoining The Neale road.
- On the Clonbur Road R345 from the village to Priests Crossroads, the roadside environment is characterized by beautifully constructed stonewalls and lush natural vegetation adjoining the road. Road surfaces and markings are to a high standard. The 'Welcome to Cong' sign and sculpture with associated planted area is an attractive well-designed feature at the entrance to the village.

### **Concluding Remarks:**

It was a great pleasure for the adjudicator to visit Cong for the first time this year. The village has an idyllic setting surrounded by the Cong River, extensive heritage features and woodland areas. The traditional streetscape and character in the village has been well preserved and is enhanced by the actions of your committee, together with the great support of Mayo County Council, local businesses and property owners. You are progressing very well in the competition. We hope you find the comments in the report helpful and wish you well with your future projects.