

Tidy Towns Competition 2023

Adjudication Report

Centre: **The Neale - An Eill** Ref: **796**
County: **Mayo** Mark: **316**
Category: **B** Date(s): **13/07/2023**

	Maximum Mark	Mark Awarded 2022	Mark Awarded 2023
Community – Your Planning and Involvement	80	45	47
Streetscape & Public Places	80	40	41
Green Spaces and Landscaping	80	46	48
Nature and Biodiversity in your Locality	55	15	16
Sustainability – Doing more with less	55	16	17
Tidiness and Litter Control	90	67	69
Residential Streets & Housing Areas	55	35	36
Approach Roads, Streets & Lanes	55	40	42
TOTAL MARK	550	304	316

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

Fáilte chuig Comórtas Na mBailte Slachtmhara Super Valú 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 Valú Tidy Towns Competition for 2023. We thank you for your entry, and wish you all the best in all your future work. Good luck.

The Neale - An Eill, a mid-sized village with a population of less than 1000 people – has entered the competition for over 20 years and has a committee of 4 members with support of another 10 volunteers.

- You hold meetings every 3 months with updates on plans/progress issued at each. The Neale Heritage & Development Association assists the local community in any events taking place. New residents to the village are welcomed by committee members and informed of all updates.
- Support is received from Mellottes, MJ Conroy, Hughes Landscapes, Neale Fresh Foods
- You communicate with the public via Facebook / WhatsApp group. Also, via local Church newsletter and Mayo News local notes.
- You have a good standing relationship with the local primary school and this year ran a half day course on planting and bird box building using pallets (5th & 6th class). In addition, students took part in planting flowers.
- The key benefit brought about by the voluntary work undertaken by The Neale Heritage & Development Association in preparation for the Tidy Towns competition is that your community strives to maintain the village to a high standard, as you look to create something new year on year.

The coloured map provided with your Entry Form showing the main features of the village was of very good quality. This made it easier for the adjudicator to navigate around the village and helped the assessment process.

The quality of the application form was good and the photos included as part of the heritage gallery were very informative. The adjudicator has noted positively the Neale Factsheet 3-5 years and we wish you well with the implementation of the agreed landscape plan for the village.

The adjudicator's assessment is based on a recent site visit and the contents of the application form, which is suitably concise at 11 pages long - well done. The text inserted on the form was also easy to read.

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

- You continue to maintain all pathways/walls to a high standard via manual scuffing and collection. It is noted that this year you reduced spraying applications and did not spray herbicide on paths, opting instead to increase the frequency of maintenance. It may be worthwhile for your committee to consider investing in a Weedex or similar type wire brush machine which is used to physically remove weeds from kerbsides, footpaths and along walls etc. and is more efficient than hand weeding.

- We called to The Neale village on a mid-July day. We were struck by the neat and tidy presentation of the village, complete with stone planters with floral displays provided at each lamp standard. Road surfaces and markings throughout the village were to a high standard. Mature trees and wonderful stonewalls along roadside boundaries, also added to the visual appearance and attractiveness of the village.
- The Church of St John the Baptist, was beautifully presented with an impressive grotto feature, complete with karst limestone structure and pebble mosaics - one of the best this adjudicator has seen in many years. The grounds of the Church are well maintained with nicely clipped grassed area, tidy and well-marked car park, and attractive timber seating. A residence beside the Church was noted for its mature tree planting.
- The former Mellotte's premises appears to be unoccupied, and is beginning to be overgrown with ivy. It is suggested that a review of this property be undertaken to identify future uses and restoration possibilities. The advice of Mayo County Council should be sought. In the interim the ivy could be removed and a painting refresh of the building undertaken.
- We noted the property at the junction of the Kilmaine Road, painted to portray traditional village life, had official notices attached. It would be a positive step to see this property brought back into use. There are a wide range of incentives and funding schemes available at present to facilitate this. The site to the rear of this property is enhanced with attractive mature trees and stonewalls and could be suitable for the development of a Neale Village Park. It is suggested that this could be considered as part of your future plans for the area.
- The Neale NS was visited and we noted the very attractive stonewalls, neat and orderly parking area and freshly painted façade of the school building. The covered cycle parking facilities located at the front of the school were positively noted. The playschool adjacent is also presented to a very high standard.
- The two thatched cottages, one opposite Fr. John O' Malley Park and the other Gibbons Pub were beautifully presented and add significantly to the streetscape of the village. The stone fronted ball-alley is also a feature worthy of positive mention. We called to the Neale Cemetery and admired its overall maintenance and presentation. It is suggested that an information sign providing details of the history of the Church ruins on this site would be beneficial.

Green Spaces and Landscaping / Spásanna Glasa agus Tírdhreachú:

- It is noted that on the green area opposite Mellotte's bar, you raised the height of flower beds using stone salvaged locally. Your flower beds remain your key feature throughout the village in 2023. It is also pleasing to read that this year the planting mix was changed to include species which are beneficial for pollinators. In addition, you invited school children to a planting evening and held a tea & refreshments afterwards in the local community hall. Also attending (and helping) with this event were the new family from the Ukraine.
- The floral schemes provided throughout The Neale, together with neatly clipped roadside margins are a standout feature of your village providing colour and vibrancy - congratulations to all involved in this work.
- We called to the Fr. John O' Malley Park at the Fair Green. This is an important feature in your village. The area is presented to a good standard with floral displays inserted in the perimeter stone walls. It is suggested that a maintenance programme for this area could be put in place to include, improvements to timber benches, seating, flag poles and access paths.
- To further reduce your use of seasonal bedding plants for your floral displays is an initiative for your committee to consider in future years. 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 Lobelia, Begonias and Petunias.

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

- It is noted that to enrich the soil for your planting this year, you made use of an existing compost heap in the village created using old grass clippings. This meant there was no requirement to use imported peat and you intend to continue to use compost created locally for your planting beds - well done.
- It is pleasing to read that you have minimised the use of herbicides in the maintenance of the village and environs. Your committee has opted for more frequent manual-based scuffing of paths/walkways, which has prevented up to 5/6 sprayer loads of herbicide entering the local environment - well done. As mentioned before the use of a Weedex or similar steel brush type machine and mechanical edge cutter will assist in weed control along kerbs, walls, and footpaths, without the need to use any herbicide or excessive manual labour.
- We note that in your application that a significant project for your community was the organised workshops for the making of bird boxes and planters. It is likely that these are located in the school grounds, but the adjudicator was unable to view them anywhere in the village on the day of adjudication.

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

- Under this category it is pleasing to note that you have installed a rainwater harvest tank at the Church, which has been used throughout the warm summer period (late May/early June) to water the beds in the village center. You are also in the process of creating a composting area using recycled pallets and your intention is to be self-sufficient in locally produced compost for use on your planted beds into the future.
- We note you have a recycling Bring Centre nicely nestled into an area of trees beside the local shop and this was found to be in pristine condition on the day.
- When considering new projects under this category it is worthwhile first of all considering how the proposed project will align with the UN Sustainable Development Goals. The information provided in the Tidy Towns newsletters and handbook is very informative in this regard.
- Other areas worthy of consideration by The Neale Heritage & Development Association for the future under this category, which is in keeping with the Sustainable Development Goals, include the development of 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 public e-car charge points and additional bicycle parking facilities in the village, 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:

- The Neale Heritage & Development Association has this year started activities under this category, with a clean-up that extended past the usual village boundaries - taking in 2km on each entry road (Cross, Cong, Ballinrobe). Passing traffic can be a major source of litter and your regular village rubbish pickup continues every two weeks, with volunteers working to a scheduled rota. It is also good to note that in addition, many non-members of your association work on the outskirts of the village and are keeping the incoming roads litter free.
- On the day of adjudication, the village area was found to be neat, tidy and litter free- congratulations to all involved, this is a wonderful achievement particularly in light of the volume of passing traffic.

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

- Residential properties within the centre of the village and on the outskirts are generally presented to a very high standard, adding to the overall attractiveness of The Neale.

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

- You are diligent in ensuring that signs around the village are kept clean throughout the year, particularly before winter and early in the new year. In addition, in conjunction with Mayo County Council, you have secured funding for footpath upgrade works and your group has worked for a number of weeks, spreading surfacing materials on the village walkway, a project which will be completed later in the year. You mention that all entry roads are given a scuff and clean at the beginning of your annual work campaign and at the end of year (Oct) a final clean-up is carried out.
- The adjudicator travelled the approach roads into the Neale, from Headford, Ballinrobe and Kilmaine. On the Ballinrobe approach we noticed the historic 'pyramid folly' and it is suggested that The Neale could highlight to a greater extent, the importance of this uncommon feature which is unique to your locality. The stone cottages visually prominent on the Headford Road, would benefit from a refresh of paint.
- All the approaches to the village are maintained to an excellent standard with attractive stonewall boundaries, natural vegetation, nicely clipped roadside margins, clean road signs and village name signs with floral displays. As mentioned in last year's report you might consider introducing some additional tree planting along approaches. For the wide grass margins there is capacity to provide additional areas of wildflower meadow. In doing so, it is important that all edges to roads and footpaths are cut on a regular basis, to confirm to the public that the areas are not neglected and are being positively managed in the interests of biodiversity.

Concluding Remarks:

The adjudicator enjoyed the walkabout in The Neale village and the positive impact of your committees' activities was evident throughout. The village has unique features and history, with very good potential to progress well in the competition. We wish you well with your future endeavours and hope you found the comments in this report helpful.