

Tidy Towns Competition 2023

Adjudication Report

Centre: Westport - Cathair na Mart	Ref: 366
County: Mayo	Mark: 374
Category: E	Date(s): 19/06/2023 23/07/2023

	Maximum Mark	Mark Awarded 2022	Mark Awarded 2023
Community – Your Planning and Involvement	80	53	55
Streetscape & Public Places	80	50	52
Green Spaces and Landscaping	80	49	50
Nature and Biodiversity in your Locality	55	41	43
Sustainability – Doing more with less	55	26	27
Tidiness and Litter Control	90	63	64
Residential Streets & Housing Areas	55	34	35
Approach Roads, Streets & Lanes	55	46	48
TOTAL MARK	550	362	374

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.

- Westport, Cathair na Mart, a large town with a population of 5,725 people, has entered the competition since 1958 and has an active committee of 20 members with support of another 195 volunteers directly involved, an amazing achievement.
- The committee meets regularly and organises weekly meetings with CE and TÚS supervisors. Fortnightly meetings are held with local sustainability groups and meetings are also held monthly with key officials from Mayo County Council.
- The adjudicator is particularly impressed with the very wide range and scope of voluntary and community involvement in Westport, which involves a commitment in excess of 7500 work hours carrying out physical improvement works on site and attendance at meetings across all sectors of the community, including with local businesses.
- Support is also received from a wide range of different national and local agencies and organisations. This year considerable emphasis has been placed on sustainability. Your vision of a "ONE WESTPORT" suitably encompasses the idea of building a united and interconnected Westport community, that is working effectively towards your common sustainability goals.
- You communicate using social media, e.g., Facebook (to share updates, events, etc.), email, newsletters, public meetings, collaborations with local groups and organisations in joint events. Included is the initiation of 'One Westport', WhatsApp, weekly clean-ups which are an important social occasion with a meeting for coffee afterwards. Also, the Tidy Towns corner in Mayo News, with weekly articles highlighting all tidy towns activities and a range of lectures & workshops.
- There is strong engagement of your committee with local schools and young children with a dedicated schools' liaison coordinator in place and a junior tidy towns voice present on the committee. Significant progress is being made with local schools as part of the Green Flags Programme. It is great to read that local schools are also heavily involved in a range of tidy towns on-site work activities in Westport.
- It is noted positively that the comments of the adjudicator in relation to the 2022 application form information, have been fully responded to. The specific project last year was 'cycle friendly Westport' and this year's project is 'tackling the graffiti'. Your awareness raising activities and engagement with young people on the issue of graffiti and replacement art features are very practical and commendable.

- Westport has performed excellently in the Tidy Towns Competition over many years. This has also helped to bring success in other competitions and has resulted in a significant economic benefit to the town. The list of medals and awards which Westport has secured since 2001 is indeed very impressive and is a worthy testament to the very strong community spirit which clearly exists in Westport and of which you can all be very proud.
- The serious attention given to social inclusivity by Westport Tidy Towns is fully noted. Your open-door policy, encouraging people to simply work together to improve the town and the welcoming of all members of the local community, regardless of ability, age or background is highly commended. The Grandparents Chat - Ár dTuras Anuas project is a very worthwhile scheme and we await the publication of a booklet with interest.
- Your committee continues to make a significant impact in relation to the running of the St. Patrick's Day Parade in Westport and congratulations to all involved with this event.
- Congratulations are also due to your long serving volunteer Ms. Bridie Moran who has been a driving force behind Westport Tidy Towns for many years and the adjudicator notes very positively the introduction of a 'volunteer recognition programme'. Such a programme may well be taken on by other Tidy Towns committees around the country.

The quality of the application form is excellent and the photos highlighting those projects completed throughout the document were very informative. The inclusion of the relevant UN Sustainable Development Goals under each project heading, as suggested by last year's adjudicator, was also positively noted.

The adjudicator's assessment is based on a recent site visit and the contents of the Application Form, which for Westport is reasonably concise at 56 pages long. The text inserted on the form is also clear and easy to read and the adjudicator was particularly happy to see the different colour text highlighting the separate project headings. The number of projects mentioned under each category is generally appropriate averaging 11 in total with 26 designated as new, but do try to avoid listing very large numbers of projects within categories, as due to time constraints it may not always be possible for the adjudicator to fully assess or see all of these on site. The inclusion of a comprehensive time based WTT 3-year Action Plan, Biodiversity Planting and Wildlife Log and Biodiversity Map provide powerful information for your committee and were also very helpful to the overall assessment process. In relation to the Town map, the issues raised by the adjudicator in last year's report have been addressed and the colour-coded map proved very useful during the walk around the town - well done.

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

- There are a total of 17 different projects presented under this category ranging from future plans for the re-development of the Convent site in the town to the erection of a stone plaque at 'the Rockies', a former Workhouse mass burial ground.
- The efforts of Westport Tidy Towns in conjunction with Mayo County Council, in completing a vacancy and dereliction survey in the town has been noted positively and the proactive step to contact owners of vacant properties in the town, encouraging them to paint and refurbish their sites has proven rewarding. This includes five vacant properties on the Fairgreen, which have been completely refurbished and are now occupied – a great success all round.
- Other new projects this year worthy of positive comment under this category include the development of 50 A-rated social houses, new GAA pitches and pavilion on the golf course road, development of Shambles Lane commercial infill scheme and pedestrian link and a project involving window painting by students from Sacred Heart School to improve the streetscape of the town.
- It is indeed a very long time since this adjudicator visited Westport and the first impression on the return visit, confirms that the town has fully retained its traditional charm and in fact has continued to implement many significant improvements in the intervening period. This year's visit to Westport took place on a sunny but showery day in mid-June. The wonderfully intricate streetscape pattern with well preserved and maintained shopfronts, provide the visitor with splendid vistas at every turn and it is no wonder that the town is so loved by the local community and tourists alike.
- For this adjudicator, the most important and enduring feature of the town, which is fronted by the North and South Malls is the central Carrowbeg river with its weirs, wonderfully wide tree lined thoroughfares, perimeter stone walls and arched stone bridges with floral decorations and lighting. All of this makes for a very restful atmosphere within this linear space which is a joy to experience.
- The new natural granite paving and limestone kerbing has greatly improved this area enhancing the wide pavements. The nicely finished gravel tree surrounds, including plenty of seating and litter bins, optimises the towns pedestrian friendliness. The quality of the residential and commercial properties facing both the North and South Malls are outstanding and of particular note is the colourful and modern Garda station building, which has a well presented and maintained garden to the front. There are some trees along the riverside which are now dead or perhaps in a poor condition and these will need to be replaced in the short to medium term. The beautiful stone arched bridges crossing the river which are adorned with stunning floral displays are perhaps the most pleasing feature in this part of the town.
- The other streets in the core of the town were also visited and the adjudicator was particularly impressed with the outdoor seating areas, provided during the era of the pandemic. The guidelines issued for the design of these has worked very well. In general, they are well enclosed with attractive timber fencing and hedging together with suitably designed canopies, which do not detract from the overall quality of streetscape.
- The adjudicator was very impressed with that part of the town in the vicinity of The Octagon and the presentation of this public space is outstanding. The properties fronting this circular paved plaza and monument are maintained to an excellent standard, without exception. The SuperValu premises and car park are also beautifully presented.
- The pedestrian crossings formed using ramps constructed of granite paving work well but one has the feeling that the center of the town could be made more pedestrian and cycle friendly particularly for older people and young children. The adjudicator is aware that Westport tidy towns members are engaged with local committees

and projects to look at how the town can be made more friendly for pedestrians and cyclists. There is no doubt that improvements in this regard can be made as one is struck by the apparent dominance of through traffic in the central part of the town.

- The adjudicator called to the site of the new GAA pitch and Pavilion under construction on the Golf Course Road and noted that works are in full swing at this location, providing additional much needed sporting facilities for the town in the future. The site nearby being developed for 50 units of A-rated social housing was also visited and it was noted that this development is well screened from the adjoining road by extensive perimeter planting. Views from the site are also enhanced by the backdrop of extensive woodland which exists in this area.
- The car park located on the southern side of Mill Street was visited and the adjudicator noted the existing recycling facility located adjacent to the tidy town's storage facility was very neat and tidy. This car park could be enhanced with some additional tree planting provided in islands in between the car parking spaces. Additional improvement works could include suitable planting of the steep slopes and replacement of timber fencing. The resurfacing and remarking of the car park, the surface of which has deteriorated in places, is also suggested.
- The adjudicator called to Shambles Lane and noted the very attractive and sensitive redevelopment of this area, with new businesses attracted to the area such as Teach Scoile, Sea Salt Cornwall, and a coffee and juice bar. It was pleasing to see this historic lane brought back to life, invigorated by attractive artworks produced by local Westport artists.

Green Spaces and Landscaping / Spásanna Glasa agus Tírdhreachú:

- There are a total of 11 different projects mentioned under this category ranging from the planting and maintenance of open spaces, provision of floral displays including 428 window boxes and river baskets to the ongoing Railway Station project, including a water feature on the greenway and pollinator garden.
- Well done to all involved with the 'Edible Landscape – Climate Education Programme' which aims to educate students on climate change and food sustainability – a very important and positive, solution-based approach to this important issue.
- In relation to the planting of public spaces, the biodiversity (pollinator friendly) planted areas at the Octagon Plaza, were some of the best quality plantings this adjudicator has seen all year. Congratulations to your committee and Mayo County Council, whose staff were out mulching and maintaining these planting beds on the day of adjudication. The biodiversity plantings provided at the pedestrian crossing and junction in the vicinity of Bridge Street/High Street near the Clock Tower, were of a similar standard and greatly enhanced this area.
- The existing open space at the Fair Green was noted and perhaps your committee might consider, in conjunction with Mayo County Council, planting the steep grass slopes here (which are difficult to maintain) with suitable Biodiversity planting – this will significantly enhance the appearance of the central Mall and Fair Green areas.
- As part of your Pollinator Policy, you have a 'Don't mow let it grow' approach. This is very praiseworthy and your biodiversity officer is very active in promoting this approach. As a general guideline a 2/3m width of closely mown grass should be retained close to roads and footpaths and the remaining area cut once/twice per year, including the removal of the grass clippings. This reduces nutrient levels in the soil over time and promotes the establishment of species and wildflower rich swards.
- Colourful perennial and pollinator friendly plants e.g., *Alstroemeria* spp. can be used in your floral displays 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:

- A total of 18 different projects presented by Westport Tidy Towns under this category ranged from the planting of 60 commemorative native cherry trees in the town to aid pollinators to the installation of living pollinator wall planters throughout the town using wall pallets. It is heartening to read that your priority is to encourage greater biodiversity in the local area and to this end you are working on the development of a Westport Biodiversity Plan - well done.
- You have commenced the re-wilding of suitable areas in the town as part of the Rewilding & Miyawaki Pocket Forest project by planting native and genetically unique species, the planting of a range of bulbs in school grounds and the recording of solitary bees to aid their protection and notification to the National Biodiversity Data Centre is commendable.
- As well as native tree planting to establish re-wilding areas, it is often beneficial for biodiversity to develop new areas of species rich grasslands and meadows. The sowing of wildflower seed for this purpose has become very popular with Tidy Towns committees in recent years. However, as may have been explained in the talk given at your AGM by Mr Sean Keane, this may not be the best course of action as some of the 'wildflower' seed is imported and may contain invasive species. The preferred approach is the 'Don't Sow let it Grow' principle. In other words, where there is a bare patch of ground or grassed areas let the seed/plants occurring naturally in the soil/sward develop and mature as this will have the best ecologically sound result. Removal of clippings at the end of the season with appropriate machinery will impoverish the soil over time encouraging greater species diversity. More information on this and other items under this category can be found in the updated Tidy Towns Handbook.

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

- A total of 22 different projects were presented under this category for 2023, ranging from the One Westport Initiative i.e., meeting with like-minded Environmental Groups in Westport to the commencement of a survey of household packaging in the town.
- Westport is leading the way when it comes to this category. The range of very worthwhile projects are too

numerous to comment on individually in any specific detail. They show a great awareness amongst your committee of the need to engage fully across society on sustainability and environmental matters. The influence of Westport Tidy Towns in promoting sustainability issues in local schools, businesses and in the wider community is clear and is making a major impact.

- The adjudicator is very taken with Westport Tidy Towns involvement in several exciting new sustainability projects under this category this year. These include the 'growing crops in small areas' project, the dune restoration project at Bertra, formation of a school uniform bank, a vape recycling initiative, recycling of wooden award stands, seagrass surveys, recycling of coffee grounds, re-usable greeting cards and the organization of a Westport Tidy Towns family day.
- Project 5.1 ONE WESTPORT initiative - the adjudicator is very impressed with this important project, involving promoting sustainable practices in the local community and building on successful co-operation with local groups which has developed over the years.
- The projects 2.2 'Westport Energy Masterplan' and 2.3 '15 Minute Westport' incorporating Westport's Active Travel Plan which are mentioned under the Streetscape and Public Places category are great initiatives which will significantly enhance the quality of life and sustainability of the town into the future. For that reason, it may be more appropriate to list these projects under section 5.0 - Sustainability: Doing More with Less. Westport is an ideal location for the smarter travel options and reducing reliance on the car as a means of transport in favour of more healthy alternatives such as walking and cycling. This has been very successful over the years in your town.
- You might look at the overall availability of bicycle parking facilities and public e-car charge points in the town and where there are deficiencies, suggest suitable locations where these could be provided in the short term.
- The ongoing management of rainwater in urban areas in the context of climate change is an important topic under this category. Are the committee aware of the nature-based solutions to the management of rainwater and surface water run-off and flooding risks in town areas, water sensitive town design, best practice etc? A recent publication on Sustainable Urban Development (SUDs) by the Dept. of Housing Local Government and Heritage is available and provides important guidance in this regard.

Tidiness and Litter Control / Slachtmhaireacht agus Rialú Bruscair:

- Westport Tidy Towns is to be congratulated for spearheading the involvement of so many volunteers and local clubs/groups/school children who carry out weekly clean ups and power-washing operations throughout the town. Despite the number of events which take place during the year and the large number of visitors (sometimes up to 10,000 additional people) the area is kept very clean, neat, and tidy. The great work of the committee and volunteers ensures a high standard of presentation is always maintained. This is vital to enhancing the overall attractiveness and economic success of the town as a tourist destination.
- On the day of adjudication, no issues regarding littering or the general tidiness in the town were noted. The town was very busy on adjudication day and footpaths and public spaces were in a pristine condition.

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

- The Westport Estates Garden competition encompassing 27 residential areas has enhanced the presentation of housing estates in Westport, including new works carried out at the new residential area Glenlara. Consistent street and road signage is encouraged and it is good to note that bilingual housing estate signage is a feature of estates in the Westport area.
- All residential properties located within the central core of the town were found to be maintained to a very high standard. The adjudicator is aware that following representations by the tidy towns committee, some residential properties have recently been brought back into use for example at the Fairgreen. The adjudicator called to several individual housing estates including Saint Mary's Crescent, Pierce Park, Kings Hill, and Westlands Estate. The overall standard of presentation was very good. It is noted that a number of these estates are taking part in the residential area's competition organised by Westport Tidy Towns.
- It will be interesting to read the findings of the Residential area survey carried out this year and in particular the attitude of residents towards proposed changes to grass mowing regimes to encourage wildflowers and pollinators. Regarding low frequency mowing regimes, it is important to maintain all edges to meadow areas to a high standard and a 2/3 m grass strip along roads and footpaths should be mown on a regular basis.
- The perimeter walls around Westport House constructed in natural stone provide an attractive feature at the Quay area.

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

- o It is noted that in late 2022 the construction of a new road entrance to Westport from the Castlebar and Newport Road was commenced and this work has recently been completed. Two new roundabouts mark the entrance to Westport on the two main approach roads. This road is now fully open to traffic and it has a very pleasing horizontal and vertical alignment, providing very attractive views across the adjoining landscape. Some consideration should be given to carrying out a comprehensive landscape and planting scheme along the road using native style planting to soften the impact of roadside boundaries and other structures whilst maintaining scenic views from the road. This would include the provision for feature planting on the main roundabouts, bearing in mind the need to encourage biodiversity.
- o The main roads into Westport are very well presented, the roadside margins are generally very neat and tidy with good tree planting and an absence of clutter or inappropriate signage.

Concluding Remarks:

The commitment and enthusiasm of Westport Tidy Towns and volunteers is clear from your comprehensive

submission for 2023 and the many impressive projects which have been viewed on site. We wish you well in the competition this year. All involved can take pride in your achievements, as Westport Town continues to develop and evolve in an environmentally sustainable and historically sensitive manner.

Second Round Adjudication:

I was delighted to be asked to do the 2nd round adjudication for Westport. My last visit was on a short break a couple of years ago, which I thoroughly enjoyed. The only problem with Westport is, where to start?! Your application was well presented, complete with a Contents page. I understand you have reduced your application in recent times, but the report was still 65 pages long. I acknowledge the last 9 pages of this contained your 3-Year Plan and much of the main report included small photos and not too much text. I would agree that you might edit down the number of projects as it can be quite overwhelming to absorb everything.

It is very clear that Tidy Towns is a core part of the fabric of Westport. Your consistent drive to keep maintaining and improving the town year on year is so impressive. Having the support of the Municipal District, local businesses, schools and residents combined is a key part of what makes your town so great. The dedication to streamlining the streetscape via signage, shopfronts and outdoor dining is apparent and projects are careful to complement the town's heritage features, while introducing space for nature. I am a big fan of the brightly coloured buildings – they add character and vitality to a place. I am impressed by the number of members and volunteers involved, plus the 1000s of hours they put in. Initiatives such as the 'Grandparents' Chat', 'Volunteer Recognition Programme' and 'Tackling the Graffiti' all demonstrate you are serious about the 'One Westport' theme. Involving the schools in the graffiti project and encouraging artistic flair with murals is a great initiative.

The Convent site Masterplan will enhance the town greatly and I look forward to seeing it completed. There are too many handsomely presented buildings to mention in Westport! There were just a handful of vacant/derelict properties in the town, on James Street and Castlebar Road, though dereliction is present countrywide and you are aware of the issue locally. The tasteful refurbishment of heritage properties on the Malls and on the Fairgreen, is wonderful. While immaculate, the sloped banks at the Fairgreen might benefit from planting, as the first adjudicator suggested. The revamped Shambles Lane looks fantastic and includes artistic nods to its history. The Octagon, Clock Tower and Mall/River areas look beautiful. I would second the opinion that Westport could be transformed if the town centre was pedestrianised. The constant traffic detracts from the feelings of enjoyment and safety while walking around. I hope your promising '15 Minute Westport' and Active Travel Plans help you to progress soon in this area.

I admired the pollinator-friendly planting schemes throughout the town, notably at the Octagon, Clock Tower, the bridges/river and at Westport House. I noted the introduction of bee-friendly varieties in the hanging baskets/window boxes and encourage this pattern to continue. You have several inspiring biodiversity projects on the go – the planting of native pocket forests, the Edible Landscapes and The Quay Community Allotments were some highlights for me. Well done for making the video on growing from seed and plug plants, as suggested by last year's adjudicator. The Living Wall Planters look wonderful in the Bridge Street Car Park and provide 'pit stops' for pollinators. The planting of trees and some resurfacing would benefit this space, as with Mill Street car park too. Your dedication to becoming more sustainable is clear, with numerous local sustainability groups and talks, 'Westport Energy Masterplan', and Active Travel Plans. The willingness of businesses and schools to become greener is impressive. In terms of litter, the streets and roadsides were incredibly tidy, which is testament to your ongoing hard work. I did note substantial litter near the bins at The Quay on a Monday morning, but I think it was gone by the time I left. Residents in and around Westport deserve credit for maintaining their properties and estates so neatly. Houses along St John's Terrace and High Street were well presented, as were St Mary's Crescent, Pearse Park, Westlands and King's Hill. The new Glenlara Estate was tidy and was enhanced by the little garden. In some estates, the addition of trees would be welcome. Approach roads were nicely maintained with good welcome signage, though be aware of one or two that are fading. Abbie deserves a mention for attractive landscaping and presentation on the Castlebar Road. The new Castlebar Road approach is now finished to a high standard, though I agree that some tasteful landscaping would enhance the verges and help the hard surfacing to link in with the striking natural views in the distance. Overall, I was inspired by my visit to Westport and can't wait to visit again! Well done and best of luck in the competition.