

Tidy Towns Competition 2023

Adjudication Report

Centre: Villierstown - An Baile Nua	Ref: 240
County: Waterford	Mark: 333
Category: B	Date(s): 28/06/2023

	Maximum Mark	Mark Awarded 2022	Mark Awarded 2023
Community – Your Planning and Involvement	80	43	44
Streetscape & Public Places	80	42	44
Green Spaces and Landscaping	80	47	48
Nature and Biodiversity in your Locality	55	32	33
Sustainability – Doing more with less	55	15	16
Tidiness and Litter Control	90	67	68
Residential Streets & Housing Areas	55	37	38
Approach Roads, Streets & Lanes	55	42	42
TOTAL MARK	550	325	333

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 core committee of 8 is a good size for decision-making & being able to call on more than 30 volunteers speaks volumes about Villierstown's community focus & attitude. Working from home either full time or part time has certainly freed up significant time daily for the working population & many communities, like yourselves, are reaping the benefits as these community members wish to contribute in whatever way they can in the time available. It is fantastic to hear that you work collectively with 3 other local groups regarding fundraising etc. When a community at large see that funds raised go towards the common community good there is always a positive response. Based on the list you provided, the local business community, agencies & other local groups are all there to support your activities in whatever way they can. When a relationship is mutually beneficial, there is no better engagement as with your group & the local Flower Club. Well done to them on entering Bloom, not an easy endeavour. Your group is most fortunate to be a beneficiary of their expertise & output. Villierstown youth's involvement is to be applauded – working on establishing an Instagram presence, providing social media training, performing litter patrols on school journeys & assisting in community clean ups.

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

Villierstown is a charming estate village with many striking buildings, monuments, interesting items of street furniture, etc all of which combine to have an attractive impact on the visual appeal of the street scene. As indicated in the National Inventory of Architectural Heritage, much of the village is closely associated with the Mary Villiers Stuart & they spared no expense in ensuring that construction was of a very high quality & of artistic design. It may be an interesting project for one of your Transition Year students to update the pictures & details on www.buildingsofireland.ie as they are now 20 years old. Many of the buildings facades have changed dramatically as have their function.

One of those buildings is Crowes & what a transformation of a derelict property whilst retaining the façade & street line. The repurposing of the building for community activities, as a technology hub cum workspace & hospitality centre is such a boon for the local economy & community. It will be interesting to see how well the facility is used & we look forward to updates in next year's submission. Well done to all concerned, this was a mammoth task to see through from start to completion.

It was noted that the roof of the timber canopy over the freestanding cast-iron weighing mechanism is collapsing. It would be a shame to expose the mechanism to the elements given its artistic design quality. On adjudication day, there was significant works taking place at the entrance to the Church/Community Centre.

The design of a community's built environment impacts on people's lifestyle & health. The provision of safe

footpaths to all amenities supports physical activity & more regular use of public spaces, services and facilities. Therefore, it is fantastic that the housing estates are now connected to the village, school & outer limits – a fully connected walkable village. The traffic calming measures go hand in hand. The installation of solar lights along the Green will offer safety & an extension of a walking route in the darker months. One of the lighting standards appears to be tilting slightly. The plans to extend the solar lights beyond the Green would be of benefit to all. We will look forward to the erection of the new dry-stone wall at the crossroads. It should tie in nicely with the existing stone boundaries.

Green Spaces and Landscaping / Spásanna Glasa agus Tírdhreachú:

Villierstown has a significant number of green areas for a small location – the tree lined areas as one approaches Dromana Gates; the Commons & the Crossroads. The replacement of the diseased Cherry trees with upright Hornbeams & Mountain Ash/Rowan completes the avenue. As the trees grow do keep a close eye on both the stakes & ties to ensure they do not impede or constrict. One of the Rowans had blue baling twine wrapped around it, best to remove as soon as possible. The seating here provides one with a lovely opportunity to watch the world go by.

The Commons is a fantastic amenity given the size of its space, the mature trees & hedging. The entrance via the “gate” in the beech hedge provides a stunning initial vista. The looped woodland walk that takes one past The Commons & down the most enchanting tree lined avenue is a feast for the senses. Well done on maintaining it all to a high standard.

Your collaboration with the local flower club is quite unique & not one this adjudicator has come across previously. The large green containers lining the street make quite a statement & were in full bloom on adjudication day as were those at the crossroads, Dromana Gate, the pump, Memorial etc. With the warmer summers & different rainfall patterns we are experiencing, it may be time to consider whether there are opportunities for planting in the ground, where possible, and retire some of the containers in the future. Locations where this might be possible e.g. at the crossroads, a mounded area could be planted with plants. The Monument is such a striking focal point in itself that the addition of planters here seems unnecessary.

The Crossroads has a lot packed in & the Millennium Stone with the family names is a wonderful installation & certainly was an excellent idea to mark a momentous occasion. Again, are containers required here with all there is to see? The commemorative Hornbeam tree requires a little pruning at the base in order to ensure the plaque is visible. In order to reduce work, have you considered placing climbers on the surrounding wall to negate having to paint it? Dog rose or honeysuckle should do well in a shaded area & would provide nectar for pollinators & a lovely scent for humans.

As you will know from the All-Ireland Pollinator Plan (AIPP) a greater focus on perennial planting & nectar rich plants is essential. It was delightful to see snapdragons, bacopa, nasturtiums, etc in some containers. The lavender on either side of the entrance to the old Church/Community Centre was in full bloom & the inclusion of additional plants to fill the gaps will complete the perfect picture. There was a stunning display of oxeye daisies, geum, osteospermum & more on a mounded area beside a stonewall just at the back of the tree lined green area. The small front gardens of the remote working centre have great potential for some innovative landscaping.

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

Your location in the Blackwater Valley Special Area of Conservation (SAC) affords you a wonderful opportunity to be immersed in a unique landscape. It is Villierstown's good fortune to be surrounded by a considerable amount of woodland. There are some trees that are specimens & perhaps tree protection orders could be considered. The declaration of the village as a wildlife sanctuary by the local Game Preservation Society is a coup & this should ensure that there are increased sightings of both pheasants and ducks as it does not take them long to determine areas of safety. It would seem an ideal opportunity to get the whole community involved in the Irish Garden Bird Survey that commences in December annually. www.birdwatchireland.ie Families & children enjoy the fun & engaging Flower Insect Timed (FIT) count & an ideal activity in spring, summer & autumn.

www.biodiversityireland.ie There is a wealth of information on the National Biodiversity Data Centre website. The areas left for wildlife are thriving with grasses & some wildflowers & there was plenty of insect life. Well done to you on expanding these areas where you have the opportunity as in the Commons, a perfect location given its proximity to mature trees, woodland, short meadows etc. During the visit a pair of swallows were availing of the insect bounty. A tree at the crossroads, perhaps a Linden tree, was awash with scented white blossoms & buzzing with a vast number of garden bumblebees – a wonderful sight & sound.

Your plans to work with Bat Conservation Ireland on taking a baseline survey of the Common Pipistrelle Bats nesting in Villierstown Church will provide you with a fantastic insight into the local population. Many communities have found additional bat species during their work. It will be interesting to note in the future the annual changes in populations as your wildlife areas mature & your planting schemes include more nectar rich plants. We will await, with anticipation, the results in next year's report.

Villierstown Quay is a hidden gem with a low impact business there & minimal parking. Well done on reorganising your work there to take account of the local otter population. It would be wonderful, if the opportunity arises, to have photos included in next year's submission. There is presently a National Otter Survey 2023-24 taking place & they would be delighted to have you log sightings on their website www.biodiversityireland.ie The last survey was in 2010-11 so it is important to assess their distribution & population status. If you do submit otter records let us know in this section next year. Like many other communities visited, Himalayan Balsam has taken up residence at the quay. As you no doubt know, it is invasive & fast spreading & complete eradication from a site can take several years. Please do ensure it is reported to the local council & keep in touch with them re its control.

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

This is an area where Villierstown must be hiding their talents. You have a community led eco tourism enterprise. Let us know each year, in a short synopsis, whether occupancy of the Eco Pods is up or down on the previous year, whether the Backwater River tours are booked out for the season etc. You have walking trails locally, are you seeing an increase in visitors? All of this is sustainable tourism.

Now with the Remote Working Hub can you harvest rainwater for your containers rather than using treated water? Perhaps you are doing this already.

With the expertise of the local Flower Club, it would be wonderful to have them, if willing, to share tips & tricks for novice gardeners at a workshop. You are fortunate to have a wonderful bakery in the village & based on your adjudicator's experience, they have the knowhow to showcase how to create delicious meals & reduce food waste. Well done on removing pesticides entirely from your weed control arsenal & kudos to the work of your Fás workers as the cobblelock in the village core was like new.

This is an area where you are underselling yourselves. Over the winter, take time to read the Tidy Towns Handbook on this area for inspiration & solace. <https://www.tidytowns.ie/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Sustainability-Doing-More-with-less.pdf>

Tidiness and Litter Control / Slachtmhaireacht agus Rialú Bruscair:

It is a delight to hear the clutter of electric cables on the village vista will be a thing of the past later this year. The difference it makes is remarkable & well worth the dust & discommode.

Your Monday litter patrols are paying dividends, as the village was spotless. It is heartening to hear that over a decade you have seen the time taken to complete the litter patrols drop by 50% & the amount of litter collected decrease by almost 85%. It is evidence that your message has connected with the vast majority, well done. The National School students are to be commended for their contribution to these litter patrols. No one better than a child to admonish an adult for irresponsible behaviour!

Dog fouling is the bane of many a community & as many posters indicate the canines are not the issue it's their irresponsible owners. Some communities have used the dog fouling stencils in areas where the problem is persistent & have seen good results.

An annual audit of street furniture is a good strategy as in every community there are items like redundant poles, obsolete signage, discarded safety equipment items, seating requiring painting etc that need attention. The list can then be discussed locally & if needed, raised with the local council for action.

The crossroads requires some attention as the cobblelock there was not quite to the standard elsewhere & bags had been left at the clothes bank although it did not appear to be full.

Information signage was well presented & legible. Those signs outside the old Villierstown Church are showing some wear & perhaps their upgrade is part of the planned works being undertaken here.

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

There is no doubting the pride that Villierstown residents take in their abodes & gardens. It was a delight to walk through the village & local estates & admire all. There were some lovely cottage gardens with sweet peas, lupins & nasturtiums.

One of the houses has a strip left for wild flowers bordering the path & green area. It must have been lovely when in bloom & once the thistles & ragwort have blossomed it would be best to cut back immediately to prevent them reseeding elsewhere.

Riverview & Woodview residents are so fortunate to have good-sized green areas. They may be interested in the work of Pocket Forests <https://www.pocketforests.ie/> & Easy Treesie <https://easytreesie.com/> These organizations work with communities to create mini forests & have completed many projects in conjunction with residents, schools & Tidy Towns groups. As they help with funding, this can be a more positive approach for some groups.

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

From most directions into Villierstown, the hedgerows are vibrant, the road surfaces well maintained & markings in place where possible. As one heads out of the village towards Dromana Woods a lot of trees have been cut on the right hand side. Is it known if the landowner intends to replace these with saplings or a hedge? It is important to remind all landowners that the 6 month period from September to end of February is the time for hedge cutting & clearance of vegetation when our wild bird species are not nesting.

Concluding Remarks:

This was your adjudicator's first visit to Villierstown & a most enjoyable experience. You are very fortunate with the strong community spirit & you are all to be commended for what you have achieved collectively to date. The creation of a presence on social media will assist you in conveying your work to a larger & younger audience & you never know what assistance may be forthcoming as a result. We wish you the very best in your endeavours.