

Tidy Towns Competition 2021

Adjudication Report

Centre: Letterkenny - Leitir Ceanainn	Ref: 704
County: Donegal	Mark: 346
Category: G	Date(s): 06/09/2021

	Maximum Mark	Mark Awarded 2021
Community – Your Planning and Involvement	60	50
Streetscape & Public Places	60	45
Green Spaces and Landscaping	60	52
Nature and Biodiversity in your Locality	50	43
Sustainability – Doing more with less	50	21
Tidiness and Litter Control	90	55
Residential Streets & Housing Areas	50	39
Approach Roads, Streets & Lanes	50	41
TOTAL MARK	470	346

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

Fáilte Chuig Comórtas na mBailte Slachtmhara SuperValu 2021. Táimid buíoch daoibh as ucht na hiontrála a chur chugainn. Go raibh maith agaibh as ucht bhur dtacaíocht le linn na paindéime. Lean leis an dea-obair. Your application form demonstrates that an admirable level of work has been undertaken by your committee and volunteers for the 2021 competition in spite of the difficult conditions that we have found ourselves in due to the Pandemic. It is clear from the details that you have submitted that great efforts were required to move all of your meetings, communications and activities online and that you were equal to the challenge. We are also delighted to hear that your efforts were met with an exceptional response from the community in Letterkenny who continued to participate in your activities in large numbers. This is demonstrated by the high number of entries to your 2020 best garden competition and we wish you every success with the 2021 competition which is to retain its online format. The response to the 'keep it local, keep it beautiful' photography competition was similarly impressive and we applaud your work in the community to support those of us who are vulnerable to Covid. It is great to see that participation rates in Letterkenny remain high (with 20 committee members and 50 volunteers) and well done on continuing the strong links with other community groups that include the Letterkenny Lions and the Rotary Club, Letterkenny direct provision, the volunteer centre and the Letterkenny business community. Your links to the numerous community-based spiritual groups, sports and social clubs and arts and culture interests are similarly impressive. You are commended on maintaining partnerships with Letterkenny Municipal Authority, the Community Employment Scheme and Fáilte Ireland to name but a few. We understand that your communication strategy has undergone significant changes in the last two years with a much greater emphasis on email, text messaging platforms, your website, online blogs and social media to stay in touch with your volunteers and get your message out. Noting the high level of engagement that you have achieved during that time, this change has been successful. Notwithstanding these changes, it is recommended that the use of traditional media (such as newspapers, radio and noticeboards) should also be used to ensure that you continue to communicate with all Letterkenny residents. We are pleased to read that engagement with school children and youth groups has been a particular focus of your committee and we note that the appointment of a youth development officer has helped to build links with younger age groups (through initiatives such as the little warrior educational digital badge scheme) and facilitate project collaborations with the Scouts and Schools that include Errigal College, St Eunans College and the Loreto Convent. Thank you for your application form (which lists the projects) and the backup information volume (which describes the projects). However, we would appreciate if you would submit a single entry form document (that lists and describes the projects) next year rather than presenting the information in 2 separate documents. The length of the document is also significant as it runs to 93 pages and we recommend that a more concise application is prepared for 2022. Your new tidy towns action plan reads well. However, you should consider including additional actions which monitor your overall performance in the nature and biodiversity and sustainability categories. Thank you also for your kind words on the competition and we are delighted to read that it has helped

your community and volunteers to enable Letterkenny to reach a high standard of presentation on a regular basis. We are mindful however that these high standards would simply not have been possible without your hard work and your unrelenting commitment to improve your area.

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

A range of interesting projects are presented under this category for this year's competition. The 'Flight of the Bee' street art walking trail (with its 5 murals) is a particularly innovative way to raise awareness of pollination and biodiversity and it also helps to provide colour and vibrancy to the places where the murals are located. The proposed interactive app which will contain multiple Letterkenny trails also sounds interesting and we wish you every success with its development and rollout. It is noted that the regeneration project for Letterkenny town centre has been launched and that it provides for exciting new elements that include further enhancements (such as a stained-glass mural) of the Cathedral Quarter and Church Lane (including a reimagined market square), the re-purposing of the courthouse and strategic land assembly on Lower Main Street to promote regeneration. It is pleasing to see that the town initiative (providing advice to business owners who wish to decorate their buildings) is ongoing and we expect this scheme to improve the appearance of commercial buildings in the town centre. It is great to see that some historic properties in Church Lane have been refurbished and their return to productive use is now anticipated. While it is disappointing to read that the number of derelict and unoccupied buildings and vacant sites in Letterkenny has persisted, your efforts to contact and work with their owners to improve their appearance are commended. It is noted that the 2019 adjudicator's report included some suggestions on how to progress this such as requesting that Donegal county council include derelict buildings on the derelict sites register and vacant sites on the vacant site register. Has this been done? If so, there are a range of measures that the Council can take which include; requiring property owners to undertake the necessary remedial works, imposing a fine on the property owners for as long as the buildings / sites remain derelict (which is calculated as a percentage of the properties value) or acquiring the properties themselves. It is important to remember that the measures that have been made available to the Councils to deal with urban dereliction and vacancy have been designed to offer remedies to the problem. In our view, it is necessary for them to be applied in Letterkenny to address what is clearly a long-standing issue in your town. We would appreciate an update on this project in 2022.

Green Spaces and Landscaping / Spásanna Glasa agus Tírdhreachú:

The planting programme undertaken in Letterkenny each year is particularly ambitious with approximately 55,000 plants (17,000 in Spring and 38,000 in Summer) being placed along main thoroughfares, roundabouts and town entrances as well as in hanging baskets and window boxes. There is no doubt that these plants make up colourful and interesting floral displays throughout Letterkenny and they provide features of interest for residents and visitors alike. The committee and volunteers are also commended on the 2020 tree planting programme and we look forward to its resumption next year. Given the important role of trees in enhancing visual amenity, providing habitats and regulating climate change, we encourage the committee to consider switching the strong emphasis in your approach from annual landscaping to tree planting. A useful starting point would be to identify areas around your town that would be suitable for native tree planting. This could then inform a more ambitious tree planting programme that could be completed in manageable phases. The Letterkenny community garden provides a good opportunity to demonstrate gardening techniques to residents and we are pleased to see that talks and demonstrations on biodiversity have been hosted here. Why not consider growing pollinator friendly plants here too? These resulting plants could then be made available to homeowners to plant in their own gardens. This has proved to be an effective way of increasing the number of pollination sources in other tidy town centres. The green connect project (for cycling and walking linkages) sounds like an excellent idea and we wondered if it will create opportunities for tree planting and establishing pollination zones along its route? The Swilly Greenway project is a similarly exciting initiative and it is hoped that progress can be made on it over the next few years. The runaway success of the greenways in Waterford and Westport should convince all parties that greenways are a great idea. It is great to see that the town allotments are proving popular and it is hoped that additional allotments can be made available in the future. Thank you for including the lovely pictures of the parks and roundabouts in Letterkenny in your application. As always, they looked fabulous and demonstrated the hard work that has been undertaken by your committee, volunteers and others. Hopefully, we can return to Letterkenny as soon as possible and see these areas at first hand.

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

The number of good nature and biodiversity projects that have been undertaken for this year's competition is impressive. The work of your committee on awareness raising is notable and we were pleased to read that biodiversity related initiatives are regularly promoted by your committee on social media. The 'Our Town' environmental art project is an example of a very effective way to raise environmental awareness among younger age groups. The wildlife garden project photo competition and the wildlife colouring sheet project also appear to have captured the imagination of the public and helped to get the biodiversity message out. The collaborative projects that you have undertaken and planned with schools (and the scouts) in Letterkenny are notable and they include the proposed polytunnel and wild flower planting programme that has been planned with St Eunan's College. The collaboration with the Scouts 'Bee Prepared' project is also impressive and we urge you to maintain your collaborative approach to the competition through your youth development officer. We are pleased to read that a number of initiatives are underway to raise awareness and promote pollinator friendly planting in Letterkenny such as the BEEcoming pollinator friendly Letterkenny booklet and the grow your own pollinators programme (which involves growing plants for the creation of a number of Bee hotels). Perhaps pollinator friendly plants can also be grown here for your own landscaping schemes? These are important small steps towards establishing more effective pollination areas in your town. However (and as noted in the 2019 adjudicator's report), we urge you

committee to be more ambitious in the actions that you undertake to implement the national pollination plan in Letterkenny. You are reminded that your own landscaping schemes are an excellent opportunity to increase pollinator friendly planting. You have pointed out that more than 50,000+ plants are used in your landscaping schemes each year and (as in 2019), we wondered what percentage of these plants are pollinator friendly? We searched your application for an answer to this important question (which was also posed in the 2019 report) but unfortunately, it could be found. Have we missed it? We will need this information to be provided in 2022 and we would appreciate if a schedule of the plants used in the landscaping schemes is provided with your entry form next year. It is great that a 'don't mow, let it grow' approach has been taken to areas such as Ballymacool Park to enable food sources like dandelions and buttercups to grow and provide food sources for pollinators. However, we also recommend that details are provided on the areas of the park and in other parts of the town that are being left uncut to enable an assessment of the effectiveness of these areas for pollination purposes. Well done also on creating a biodiversity map, a register of biodiversity areas of interest and a series of areas to support biodiversity such as the 200 m² wildflower garden and the project to promote wildflower plots in housing areas. It would be great to find out how effective these areas are as functioning habitats. Can comprehensive surveys (that list the habitats as well as flora and fauna that can be found in these areas) be carried out? Perhaps this could be undertaken as a collaborative project with one of the schools? It is strongly recommended that the suggested actions included under this category are incorporated into your tidy towns action plan.

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

We are pleased to read that your committee and volunteers continue to undertake projects that are designed to achieve sustainable outcomes for Letterkenny. The completion of the walk ability audit with primary schools is one such project and we were delighted to read that the project included a survey of the transport behaviour of the schoolchildren. It is noted that a very high proportion (62%) are driven to school while the smallest number (17%) walk or cycle. However, no mention was made of the numbers of pupils who live within walking distance or cycling distance. This information would enable you to work out what are realistic targets for achieving transport behaviour change (i.e. if the vast majority live within a short distance of the primary schools, then a high target could be set for getting the schoolchildren to walk or cycle). Noting that you intend to repeat the survey in 2022 / 23, it is recommended that this information is gathered at that stage. We liked the paperless communication strategy as its a great way of avoiding the paper waste generated by flyers and posters. You are also commended on promoting the use of charity shops, the free book exchange, avoiding food waste, the usage of recycling banks and for encouraging people to shop locally. It is great to see that businesses are rolling in behind your efforts with the whole green health food store and café promoting its zero waste strategy and the café's around town accepting reusable coffee cups. It is notable that all of your projects have widespread support and that a large number of stakeholders that include residents associations, community and sports groups, businesses and schools in Letterkenny all participate. The collaborations between your community and the Rotary club (Bikes for Africa), the Letterkenny lions (food bank) and Mens Shed (flower baskets) also deserve praise. The collaborative project with Errigal College involving the use of a renovated polytunnel as an education centre is an excellent idea. It is also heartening to see that LYIT have initiated several green campus initiatives such as the free water bottle initiative and we recommend that possible collaborations for projects under this category between your committee and LYIT should be explored by your youth development officer. All of the projects presented for this year's competition under this category represent small steps to achieving the behaviour change needed to deliver sustainable outcomes with respect to waste avoidance and energy use. However, it is particularly important for your committee to ascertain which of these projects and actions are most effective. As noted in the 2019 report, a survey (which could be done online) that looks at the behaviour of residents and businesses would enable you to identify and design projects that result in behaviour change and make a significant contribution to minimising waste generation and resource use.

Tidiness and Litter Control / Slachtmhaireacht agus Rialú Bruscair:

Our experience of Letterkenny has demonstrated that close attention is always paid to litter control and we are heartened to read that 2021 is no exception. It is great to see that your litter control teams (managed by the litter coordinator) are working well and that you have a significant pool of volunteers (52) who participate. The high level of involvement of residents associations, community groups and sports clubs in the spring clean and community clean ups is very impressive. The hard work of the community employment scheme workers (on litter collection and landscaping maintenance) and the town gardener (planting and weed control) is also acknowledged. We applaud the efforts of the committee and volunteers in raising awareness among younger age groups and schoolchildren of the need to control litter in your town – with the awarding of senior litter warrior and Little Warrior digital badges considered to be an innovative and eye-catching scheme. Your work on promoting responsible dog ownership and addressing unauthorised signage is also appreciated. Keep up the good work!

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

The helping hands initiative (whereby one of your subcommittees provides a team of helpers to residents associations) is considered to be a very good idea and we look forward to hearing further updates on its work in the years ahead. Be sure to continue to take note of the residents associations that are provided with assistance and the projects that are completed. The excellent work undertaken by your community on Castle Street and Church Lane (involving painting, cleaning and repairing damage to building facades as well as providing planters) and Ard O'Donnell (cleaning up the lane ways) is commended and the improvements to New Line Road, Glencar Park and the Long Lane area were admired. We note from elsewhere in your application that committee and volunteers have been working hard to raise awareness of the need to engage in pollinator friendly planting and to encourage biodiversity. Consider following up these projects by getting the helping hands subcommittee to encourage the residents associations that they assist to engage in actions such as 'don't mow, let it grow' and using pollinator

friendly plants in their landscaping schemes. This would enable you to create a network of pollination zones throughout your town and make a significant and meaningful contribution to biodiversity. An award could also be included in your successful cleaner community campaign competition to acknowledge best practice examples.

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

We have come to expect a high standard of presentation on approach roads into Letterkenny and it is great to see that your committee, volunteers and others are continuing to work hard to meet these expectations. It is clear from your application form that the high standards are achieved by consistent monitoring (to spot dumping, illegal signs and graffiti) combined with continuous maintenance (of median strips, verges) and carrying out upgrades and improvements where necessary. The Donegal County Council 'adopt a road' scheme (involving four community cleanups from the Polestar roundabout to the Kilty Road) seems to be playing its part and we wondered if any consideration is being given to expanding this scheme to other locations? Congratulations on the completion of the new Joe Bonner relief road and the upgrade of footpaths in the town centre. We look forward to seeing both of these projects when we return to Letterkenny in the near future.

Concluding Remarks:

The committee and volunteers are commended on the good work they have completed for the 2021 competition. As always, plenty of impressive projects have been presented that achieve the high standard that we have come to expect in Letterkenny. As a top performer in the competition, you have succeeded in raising expectations over the years and we acknowledge that it presents a challenge to continuously improve and set an example for other tidy town centres and the residents of your town. The key to meeting this challenge is monitoring the effects of the actions that you have taken - particularly in the landscaping, nature and biodiversity and sustainability categories. This will enable you to identify the most effective measures that you can take as a community group to meet your overall objectives. A review of your action plan would also enable you to begin this process immediately. Keep up the good work and we look forward to returning to Letterkenny in 2022.

Second Round Adjudication:

Having read the considerable volume of material that was submitted as part of your 2021 Application - Backup Material, it was a pleasure to have the opportunity to visit the town and observe the recently completed schemes under the various category headings. Streetscape improvements at Church Lane are a considerable visual enhancement and a fine achievement under the Historic Towns Initiative scheme and were effectively illustrated by your 'before' and 'after' photographs. Providing professional advice to business owners on colour schemes is innovative and should in time create some effective results. The historic murals by Ciaran Dunleavy are a nice reminder of our past and changing building patterns, materials and traditions. On Lower Main Street, the Street Art - 'Flight of the Bees' by Karl Porter, continue your enhancement programme whilst highlighting a very important and urgent environmental issue. Plans for hard and soft landscape developments at the Cathedral Quarter look exciting and we very much look forward to developments here in the years ahead.

There is a well considered contrast in scale between some of your high quality sculptures. This is particularly illustrated by the evocative 'The Hirelings' at the central Market Square and the gateway 'Pole Star' sculpture. The 'Pole Star' is an attractive announcement feature on arrival at the town. The outer relief roads are now beginning to mature nicely in many areas but could be visually enhanced by increased deciduous tree and hedgerow planting, to create more enclosure in places. Roundabouts have a somewhat uneven range of presentations but on the well presented De Valera Road, the Hospital Roundabout was a highlight and its presentation sets a very high standard. Some rationalisation of advertising signage should now be considered, as in a number of locations they have a cluttered, distracting and somewhat unsightly appearance.

Over the years the development partnership of Donegal County Council, Local Business, Schools, Community Residents and Organisations have combined impressively to take an informed and structured approach to the development of your built and natural environment. This careful and well considered agenda has been a major contributor to the high ranking now achieved by Letterkenny in the Tidy Towns Competition. The first round adjudicator has given a very comprehensive report under each category heading. I fully concur with this report. Many thanks and congratulations to all involved.