

Tidy Towns Competition 2019

Adjudication Report

Centre: Letterkenny - Leitir Ceanainn	Ref: 704
County: Donegal	Mark: 337
Category: G	Date(s): 09/07/2019 03/08/2019

	Maximum Mark	Mark Awarded 2018	Mark Awarded 2019
Community – Your Planning and Involvement	60	48	49
Streetscape & Public Places	60	43	44
Green Spaces and Landscaping	60	50	51
Nature and Biodiversity in your Locality	50	41	42
Sustainability – Doing more with less	50	19	20
Tidiness and Litter Control	90	53	54
Residential Streets & Housing Areas	50	38	38
Approach Roads, Streets & Lanes	50	38	39
TOTAL MARK	470	330	337

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

Cuireann an moltóir fáilte roimh Letterkenny (Leitir Ceannainn) pairt a ghlacadh i gComórtas Náisiúnta Supervalu na mBailte Slachtmhara 2019. We were interested to read in your entry form that your committee of 19 members is arranged into six separate subcommittees. This appears to be a very organised and structured approach to the competition which no doubt allows your subcommittees to focus on specific tasks and areas. Your success in the competition and your high mark demonstrates that this approach is working well for you and we urge you to keep it up. We are pleased to read that you enjoy a good level of support with approximately 50 volunteers helping you out and it is great that you show your appreciation of them by organising different events like coffee mornings, bus trips and the Christmas party. Your connections with other community groups in the town like the Lions, Rotary club, the Athletic Club, the Heritage Society, Men's Shed, the Active Retirement Group, the Chamber of Commerce and Residents Associations are commended and we recommend that you maintain these links and build new ones where opportunities arise. For example, have all sports clubs (like the GAA, soccer and rugby) been contacted and asked if they would like to get involved? This would help to reduce the workload on your committee and boost participation. We are delighted to see that so many agencies and bodies support your work with a range of organisations like Donegal County Council, the Community Employment Scheme, Fáilte Ireland, Letterkenny Institute of Technology and the National Learning Network all assisting your committee. We are pleased to see that your comprehensive communication strategy avoids the use of flyers and leaflets (as they often result in excessive amounts of printed waste) and we look forward to the development of your website. Well done to your Youth Development Officer who works closely with the Schools, the Scouts and the Institute of Technology. We are also pleased to see that he provides a link between the Green Schools Programme and the schools. Don't forget that we strongly encourage collaborations between the schools and tidy towns committees so we urge you to identify joint projects that will benefit your committee and the schoolchildren. This is a great way of raising environmental awareness and further boosting local participation. Given that this is your 35th year in the competition, we agree with last year's adjudicator's description of you as tidy towns veterans. It is clear from reading your entry form that you have very clear goals (influencing mindset and action in the community and building linkages between local stakeholders and community groups, schools residents and businesses). We are also pleased to discover that you are continuously evolving and coming up with new projects for your lovely town – the future of Letterkenny is in safe hands! Thank you for your completed application form and map. We very much appreciate that you have followed the advice of the adjudicator in 2018 and submitted a precise document and map – this gives as much more time to explore your lovely town and spend less time reading! Can the map be provided at A3 size to make it more user-friendly? The tidy towns action plan was read with interest and this appears to be a very good document that identifies projects under each tidy towns category and sets priorities for the short-term. We note that your work programme is also informed by the Letterkenny Town Development Plan, Anne O'Leary's Plans 1 & 2 and the John Cronin Associates review.

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

Letterkenny is always a wonderful place to visit and 2019 proved no exception. The range of attractions is quite remarkable with its fascinating historic buildings, exciting modern structures, interesting urban spaces, well maintained parks and a big range of shops, restaurants, bars and other services. A significant number of high quality historical buildings are located around the magnificent Cathedral including Trinity Hall, Scoil Colmcille national school and Conwal Parish Church. St Eunans College is a most impressive structure while the County Museum and St Conals Hospital also stood out. On Main Street, we particularly liked the Trinity Presbyterian Church, the Bank of Ireland building and the Post Office. We were particularly interested to read about the Cathedral Quarter campaign in which funding is made available for repairing buildings in the Church Lane area. This is an excellent initiative and we were pleased to note from the information sign that the scheme will transform Church Lane from a road to a street in which the original terrace buildings are conserved and new café's, restaurants, craft and office uses will be located alongside dwellings thereby creating a new and dynamic urban street. We were also pleased to see that the project is not just about the buildings themselves but on raising awareness of built heritage and fostering a sense of appreciation among residents. We also encountered the Old Courthouse Building which looked well and your committee are commended on your advocacy work for this important structure. We note that you are working to keep this building in public use and now that the building has transferred into the ownership of the Council, we would hope that this option will be seriously considered. Our exploration of your town also revealed that there are many high quality modern buildings to be seen. The new courthouse is particularly impressive with its bold contemporary style while McGettigan's hotel, Dillons Hotel, Loughreys and the Court apartments also stood out. Elsewhere, the modern designs of the public services building (with its sedum roof), the tourist office and Forte Lynne House in the Retail Park drew positive attention. The modern complex of buildings in Letterkenny Institute of Technology also looked well. We would like to commend shop and business owners throughout your town as the overall standard of presentation of commercial premises was generally high –this no doubt reflects the results of your excellent painted the town initiative. Regrettably, it is not possible to list all good quality business premises here but a number of examples stood out. They include the magnificent Ernest Speers shop and the adjacent Goldsmiths. Praise is also due to the Central Bar, Insomnia, Wholegreen, the Wee Bar, the AIB, County Seat, McGee's pharmacy, Amelia's, the Honeypot, the Orchard Bar, McCaffertys, the Yellow Pepper and Macs Deli. The treatment and maintenance of your distinctive urban spaces like the Market Square also made a positive contribution to the appearance of your town. Like last year's adjudicator, we were most impressed by the new projects that are being pursued by your committee. You are commended on continuing to identify problem buildings and engaging with the property owners and authorities in order to secure their improvement. We are pleased to hear that the majority of the buildings in poor condition and back in private ownership and it is hoped that improvements will follow. We appreciate this can be a long process but we would also recommend that you liaise with Donegal County Council on this matter as they have powers to take action under the Derelict Sites Act. It was clear during adjudication that a small number of vacant sites persist – particularly along port road and opposite railway house. It is recommended that all of these sites are identified and brought to the attention of Donegal County Council as they may wish to include them on the vacant site register. Some improvements are possible. The Old Market Wall opposite McCaffertys was in very poor condition and 2 old Eircom phone boxes stood out for the wrong reasons. We are pleased to see that the guidelines for traditional shopfronts and vernacular signage are now available and they are likely to prove to be a valuable document for the council, building owners and members of the public. We are most interested to read that Donegal County Council has a dedicated open spaces team and this is considered to be a great initiative. The new crafted pieces of public seating in place around the town on the Main Street, Tadhg Culbert car park and the famine graveyard demonstrate that the partnership approach of the open spaces team and your committee is working very well and enhancing the public realm of Letterkenny.

Green Spaces and Landscaping / Spásanna Glasa agus Tírdhreachú:

The scale of the landscaping efforts that have been undertaken in Letterkenny for this year's competition is made clear by the sowing of 17,325 spring plants and 30,557 summer plants – this is by any measure, a monumental task. We are also delighted to see that the plants are grown by the committee themselves (under supervision) as this helps to avoid the waste associated with shop bought plants. In our view, all of this effort has been well worth it as some magnificent schemes could be seen during our visit. This seems little doubt that many of these plants have found their way onto the many high quality landscaping schemes on view in the town's roundabouts. The combinations of trimmed grass, summer bedding plants, shrubs and trees were particularly successful on the Station Roundabout, the Hospital Roundabout and the Dunnes Stores roundabout. The colourful flowering plants at the Inver Garage roundabout also impressed. The use of large planters and flower boxes on the bridge approaching the Polestar Roundabout also looked well. Impressive schemes bursting with bright summer colours were also spotted in an elevated position on Market Square (behind the bandstand), Lower Art O'Donnell Road and at Wolfe Tone Park. You are also commended on the positioning of large timber planters as they proved to be very effective at enhancing a range of open spaces and seating areas throughout the town. The wonderful parks in Letterkenny have become a major attraction of your town. We spent an enjoyable time visiting all of these parks and we were particularly impressed by the standard of presentation of each one. Ballyboe Park with its trimmed grass, mature trees and network of pathways to surrounding residential areas looked particularly well and we wondered if the clumps of mature hedgerows and meadow length grass (which could be found close to the Glencar Inn boundary) were intentional to encourage pollination? Perhaps some signs could be positioned on them to indicate this and help raise awareness? The Town Park is a delight with its medicinal herb garden, sweet factory play area, Bowling Green and event space providing attractions for all ages. The standard of maintenance of this amenity is first class and it looked exceptionally well with its carefully mown lawns, modern facilities (such as the toilets) and decorative wrought iron gates. The linear park on the Ballyraine road was also in great condition and it is clearly subject to

regular maintenance. Ballymacool Park is similarly impressive where the planting and seating areas in the mystery garden and natures valley garden (both named by local schoolchildren) were admired. We also enjoyed seeing the ruin of Ballymacool House and reading about it (and the Boyd family) here. As noted by the adjudicator in 2018, the approach road roundabouts in Letterkenny have become 'must see' creations that have managed to blend major public art features with eye-catching landscaping. This is often achieved with dramatic effect as the Dry Arch Roundabout with its tin men at a natural stone arch and the wonderful Polestar Wooden Sculpture both demonstrate. In our opinion, the emphasis placed on the roundabouts is entirely justified as they create a wonderful first impression of Letterkenny and they serve as an excellent introduction to the attractions that await in your town centre. It is noted that the recently constructed Kilty roundabout has been landscaped and the new public art feature that is planned for this location is eagerly anticipated.

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

The threat to biodiversity due to climate and land-use change has been well documented in recent years and this means that conserving and enhancing habitats and biodiversity must become a priority. We are pleased to see that your committee and volunteers are busy developing projects that will retain and improve habitats and encourage biodiversity in your Letterkenny. Well done on embracing the all Ireland pollinator plan by creating plots for pollinators throughout your town. However, we would like to ensure that your tidy towns committees are leading by example in this area. For example, what proportion of the 50,000+ plants sown this year are pollinator friendly species (that are included in the all Ireland pollinator plan)? This is an excellent opportunity for you to create major 'pollination zones' across Letterkenny by using your landscaping schemes. In order to drive this initiative, we encourage you to provide us with details of what percentage of the plant species that you plant next year that are pollinator friendly. It is also recommended that you set a target to increase the number of pollinator friendly species each year and reduce the number of less desirable plant varieties. We note that bulbs are planted around the town (and in St Conal's hospital graveyard) for spring but we also encourage you to ensure that there are varied spring sources of food for pollinators available (in addition to the snowdrops and crocuses). This can also be achieved by leaving some grassed areas uncut and allowing dandelions to flourish. The planning and plotting for pollinators project for schools is also commended. We admired the gardening for wildlife initiative to make gardens more wildlife friendly and form a vital patchwork between urban areas and the wider countryside. This is a great initiative and we wondered if any monitoring has taken place on this? We note that an award is made and we wondered if the wildlife friendly gardens are mapped during the assessment process? This will enable you to spot wildlife 'hotspots' and wildlife 'deserts' – allowing you to engage in targeted actions to improve these. We are pleased to read that the butterfly garden has been overhauled and that it is proving successful in attracting a range of different butterflies. Well done on your work monitoring and reporting outbreaks of invasive species like Himalaya Balsam and Japanese Knotweed and we urge you to maintain your vigilance on this. The wildlife survey is a great initiative and it is hoped that sightings of animal and plant life are regularly made by residents. However, we wondered if it would be possible to have a more user-friendly reporting system? Given that students at the Letterkenny Institute of Technology are involved, why not ask them to set up an online database which people can access and update on a smart phone? We are pleased to see that tree planting forms part of your activities each year and while we applaud the location of new trees in the town's schools, you are also encouraged to find other suitable locations for tree planting. The 'life on the verges' programme is considered to be another excellent project that has the potential to provide effective links between pollination zones in Letterkenny. We urge you to adopt a planned approach to this by allowing verges (or strips of verges) to remain uncut on all key roads and connect your identified pollination patches. The 'bee prepared' initiative with Letterkenny Scouts is also commended and we would like some details of the locations of these bee shelters in next years application.

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

We concur with the comments of the adjudicator in 2018 noting the importance of waste prevention in this category and that all projects must reflect its priority above reduce, reuse and recycle. We are pleased to see that these comments have been fully taken on board by your tidy towns committee and that you are promoting the principles of waste prevention and elimination ahead of other waste minimising initiatives. This is demonstrated by your 'paperless' communication strategy and the work that you have done raising awareness on preventing food waste. We were particularly interested to see that your committee and the schools and colleges of Letterkenny are embracing the prevent fuel consumption principle by engaging in sustainable transport behaviour. However, and much like the nature and biodiversity category, we strongly encourage your committee to ascertain what percentage of students in Letterkenny use sustainable transport forms (i.e. walking and cycling)? Why not talk to Letterkenny Institute of Technology and the schools in order to find this out? As Letterkenny Institute of Technology have a green campus programme, it is likely that they would be interested in finding this information out for themselves. Once the current figures are known, achievable targets can be set to make further improvements. This data will also enable you to work out if your awareness campaigns are working and if behaviour is changing. We applaud many other initiatives such as promoting charity shops, encouraging the use of junk mail stickers, offering community allotments and gardens and providing promotional material on preventing waste and we encourage you to continue with these projects. It is also noted that home composting and recycling of glass and cans is promoted and we wondered if a survey had been undertaken to assess what percentage of people are engaging in these activities? The survey could also include questions that are designed to identify the barriers to effective waste prevention and recycling. Once again, this will allow you to work out if your promotional campaigns are having the desired effect or not. In addition, it may enable you to identify targeted actions which can overcome the identified barriers. The green homes scheme is a good initiative and you are encouraged to record the numbers who are taking part with a view to growing the number of participants each year. The actions undertaken by businesses and schools under this category are also acknowledged. We would appreciate updates on these projects next year.

Tidiness and Litter Control / Slachtmhaireacht agus Rialú Bruscair:

It is noted from your entry form that spring cleans get underway in Letterkenny every April and we are pleased to see that community cleanups with residents and community groups also take place. Like the adjudicator in 2018, we would like to know how much litter is collected (number of bags etc) as a means of monitoring trends and assessing if we are going in the right direction in your area. Perhaps this information could be provided in 2020? It is also noted that litter picks are coordinated with volunteers through your website platform and take place every day (except Saturday) in your town. This organised approach is clearly working as the standard of litter control that could be observed in Letterkenny was exceptionally high for a town of its size. The vast majority of approach roads, streets and residential areas were entirely litter free. Small isolated amounts were visible outside the County Museum, on New Line Road, in the car park off Main Street (opposite the Chiropracist Clinic) and to the front of An Grianan. However, it was clear that these small amounts of litter had been dropped in the short period of time since the last litter pick! The actions taken to stop dog fouling is noted and they include providing free poop scoops, releasing anti-dog fouling messages and making dog waste bins available. The contribution of the Community Employment Scheme to this category is appreciated as they undertake litter picks and times when the Council cannot. The work of Donegal County Council in reducing gum litter and enforcing litter laws also appear to be making a positive difference in this category. The standard of tidiness was considered to be high with the vast majority of areas appearing weed free and neatly swept. Small improvements are possible. We were surprised to see an untidy boundary wall and a broken soil vent in front of Scoil Mhuire Gan Smal. In addition, the roadside bollards at the set down area here needed to be power washed. The bollards in the set down area outside Errigal College were also in poor condition. Signage and sign poles at a number of locations on College road (particularly at the roundabout at St Eunans College) and Art O'Donnell road needed attention as they did not appear to have been maintained in quite some time. A small number of untidy areas persist. The car park off Main Street (opposite the chiropracist) looked untidy due to weedy beds and some sections of the natural stone walls where in poor condition. An untidy area was also spotted at the junction of New Line Road. The response to the query of last year's adjudicator relating to unauthorised signage is noted and in our view, this problem has significantly improved as few temporary signs were spotted on the approach roads in your town.

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

We are pleased to report that the residential streets and in areas that were seen in Letterkenny during adjudication looked very well. This indicates that residents take great pride in the appearance of their properties and work hard to present them to the highest possible standard. It is highly likely that the Cleaner Community Campaign with its awards across 16 different categories is having a positive effect. The Letterkenny Municipal Authorities estate competition is also likely to be making a difference. We were surprised to see that your submitted map did not appear to include locations and names of individual residential areas. Be sure to include the competition award category winners and the locations of them on your map next year so that we can observe them during adjudication. A number of residential areas stood out during our visit with the mature areas of Art O'Donnell road (with its eye catching landscaping) and Wolfe Tone Place (with its manicured green area, trees, attractive name stone and entrance planting) looking particularly well. Woodlawn beside Ballyroe Park sets high standards with its carefully maintained road margins, green areas and pleasant planting schemes. Further out, the Grange is similarly impressive. Well done to your committee for supporting planting in different housing areas around Letterkenny that include; Ballyraine Park, Glencar Park, Beechwood Road, Wolf Tone place and Orchard Grove. Well done also on organising awareness raising and social events for residents throughout the year - this is an excellent way of expressing your appreciation for the fine work that they do.

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

The emphasis placed on landscaping on the approach roads and key roundabouts in Letterkenny has been referred to elsewhere in this report and it is considered to be an excellent way of creating a positive first impression for the visitor. The overall standard of approach roads is generally good with the key approach to your town on the Dublin / Lifford road looking exceptionally well. The approach from Glenties (which took us past Ballymacool Park) was similarly impressive with its neat grass margins, trees and clean signage. The landscaping on the roundabout here also drew positive attention. It is clear from your entry form that a wide range of road improvements have been undertaken in your town in 2019 and this has contributed to its neat and orderly appearance. The regeneration of Church Lane is perhaps best included in the residential streets and housing areas category – nonetheless, it's an excellent project and it looked particularly well during our visit. The combined effort of Donegal County Council and your tidy towns committee on the adopt a road scheme are commended as the middle road, Ballyraine was neat and tidy throughout during our visit. The continuing works to the new Joe Bonner road and ongoing maintenance of approach roads by the tidy towns committee and volunteers are appreciated. It is also noted that works involving the road network by Irish water will also be taking place throughout 2019. These works were in full swing during adjudication and some diversions were in place. We look forward to seeing these works complete when we return next year.

Concluding Remarks:

We would like to congratulate your committee and volunteers on another excellent performance in the competition. Keep up the good work and we anticipate seeing further improvements when we visit next year.

Second Round Adjudication:

Despite it being a grey dull day when I visited Letterkenny, the town centre was a hive of activity, and was full of vibrant colour and attractive shopfronts, many shops going for a more traditional style with lovely font and no plastic

or gaudy signs. There were some beautifully decorated premises from teashops to pubs to public buildings, all showing the pride of place they obviously share, and many with very attractive hanging baskets or planters outside their premises.

The Cathedral Corner is a lovely place of calm away from the hustle and bustle of the high street and shops. There is a lovely sense of history and heritage here and the mural at Church Lane is very striking, and it is great to see the work that is being done in this area under the Historic Towns Initiative to repair and rejuvenate the area.

The Market Square is also a charming place to take a rest and even wet with rain it looked very smart and clean with the colourful chairs adding a splash of colour and fun. There was some good information on historic walks around Letterkenny, and I really liked the sculpture commemorating the first Donegal person to reach the summit of Mount Everest.

The Town Park is a fabulous amenity and looked immaculate on the day that I visited, with a spotless picnic area and bins, wonderful landscaping, and its charming herb garden. The nearby Famine Graveyard is well maintained and neat and tidy.

Your Tidy Towns Action plan shows that you are taking a strategic and holistic approach to the competition and the improvement of your town in all areas, from streetscapes to sustainability, as well as engagement with organisations across a wide and diverse agenda.

No matter what road you approach Letterkenny from, there is some point of interest, from floral displays to sculptures such as the 'Dry Arch', and you can feel the sense of place and pride as you arrive into the town. The national roads are in good condition and the roundabouts all have lovely landscaping, planting or flowers and add a sense of drama. The

It has been some years since I was last in Letterkenny and was very impressed with not only how the town looked on the day, but the sheer amount of work and effort that is being done by the Tidy Towns committee in conjunction with Mayo County Council and other organisations. Well done on all you have achieved to date and we wish you continued success for all your future projects.