

Tidy Towns Competition 2023

Adjudication Report

Centre: **Doon - Dun Bleisce** Ref: **717**
County: **Limerick** Mark: **327**
Category: **B** Date(s): **05/06/2023**

	Maximum Mark	Mark Awarded 2022	Mark Awarded 2023
Community – Your Planning and Involvement	80	45	46
Streetscape & Public Places	80	44	46
Green Spaces and Landscaping	80	39	40
Nature and Biodiversity in your Locality	55	38	40
Sustainability – Doing more with less	55	17	18
Tidiness and Litter Control	90	60	61
Residential Streets & Housing Areas	55	37	38
Approach Roads, Streets & Lanes	55	37	38
TOTAL MARK	550	317	327

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.

The community of Doon is to be commended on the fact that 13% of you are involved in the Tidy Towns work. Your close & strong ties with other local community groups, local agencies & businesses are indicative of a spirit of cooperation & a focus on common goals. It appears you focus primarily on traditional communication mediums. We note your Facebook page last saw activity in 2022. Today, it is important to avail of social media platforms as those of a younger generation receive their news feeds through these mediums. Perhaps a good way to involve more youth in the organization – ask them to establish or assist in the establishment of an Instagram account & the updating of your Facebook page. The future of Doon requires the younger generation to be involved in all facets of village life & for them to feel they have an input & contribution to make there. Your involvement as a group in the Green Flag programmes at the schools is a great way to build on a common purpose.

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

Many a Tidy Towns group is dealing with a similar problem in relation to the number of derelict properties & sites within their locality that blight the village centre. The two-pronged approach of the Vacant Property Refurbishment grants & the Derelict Site levy seem to be gaining interest amongst both property owners & potential buyers. Limerick is fortunate to have a local council who is proactive in their approach & is actively compulsorily acquiring derelict properties. We note one on Main Street has been added to their list. It is a problem that is not straightforward for many Tidy Towns groups however some Tidy Towns groups are liaising with the local Council on the appropriate course of action. It is a shame that these properties detract from the visual panorama of the village centre. However, well done on your successes to date, the difference a power washing makes is noticeable on the streetscape.

The historic & new educational establishments make their presence felt in the village both from their architectural merit & campus size. The former convent retains much of its substantial & imposing form that helps conserve its original character. It is heartening to see planning permission obtained for conversion of the convent building into a supported living development of 23 apartments for community members wishing to live in a more sheltered environment & the former secondary school into residential accommodation for young mothers in advanced recovery phase. The additional amenities of a restaurant, crèche & pre-school with community access are a fantastic way to embed the new residents & allow the fostering of local interactions. The existing services on site appear to be going from strength to strength judging from their social media presence & available courses. The Social Farm with once weekly Community Café & Mens Shed is a thriving space, well done to all involved. Doon has some excellent examples of how former commercial properties have been converted into residences & alternatives uses e.g. former Garda station into a private residence; former library (one of the most innovative

spaces for a defibrillator – is it a former ATM?) into the pastoral centre, former bank into a pharmacy & residence, etc. Well done to the new owners on having an innovative approach. The survival of the old cast-iron railings outside the old AIB building adds greatly to the streetscape. There may be heritage funding to assist with their repair & maintenance under the small works grant scheme as was availed of in Mallow Street, Limerick.

There are some lovely shopfronts in Doon that have retained elegant render details, fascia with raised lettering & detailed cornicing. In view of the number of shopfronts retaining this style of signage, a coordinated approach to business signage would greatly enhance the streetscape. With the large windows of a number of unoccupied premises, would it be possible to ask permission to use these for local photographs of past scenes, children's art, local crafts, wildlife posters from the All-Ireland Pollinator Plan (AIPP) etc? It seems a lost opportunity to see vacant windows where something useful & attractive could be placed. Some county councils have commenced offering painting grants to both residential & commercial property owners in location specific areas. It would be worth talking to Limerick City & County Council to see if this is in their plans as it might provide the means for some owners to undertake a property facelift. It is remarkable the transformation of the building on the corner of Church Street in a 12 month period!

Scoil na Tríonóide Naofa is a sizeable school & from what could be seen through the locked gates, a well landscaped & maintained campus. The Christian Brothers Primary School is presented well with freshly painted entrance, attractive murals & lots of activity areas. It would be lovely to see the surface play areas repainted, as they are very faded. We note the long term plans for the former St. Fintans CBS.

The Church & Parochial house makes a positive contribution to Doon's architectural heritage. The surrounding gardens soften the hard surfacing & the freshly painted railings, gates & cleaned walls enhance the entrance. Are there any plans for the small outbuilding across from the car park? It is an excellent example of vernacular architecture with the gable end port window visible.

The location of the Community Centre, GAA grounds & the playground is fortuitous – all alongside each other & accessible by footpath from the village. The murals soften all the hard surfacing & present great pops of colour. Christ Church occupies a stunning sylvan setting & the old stonewalls surrounding the site & further on that road are well maintained & should be preserved as they add greatly to Doon's attractiveness.

Well done on securing public seating around the village. It is so important to make our village centres pleasant & accessible for all residents irrespective of age or mobility in order to create inclusive communities.

Green Spaces and Landscaping / Spásanna Glasa agus Tírdhreachú:

Kilmoylan Woods is a fantastic amenity to have within walking distance of the village centre. The walk is a most enjoyable walk past oak trees & through conifer woods. The informative wildlife information boards provide an insight into the wide variety of wildlife that make the woods their home at various points throughout the year. It is great that the local schools avail of the walk as part of the curriculum.

The raised bed across from the entrance to Kilmoylan Woods had a show of colour from the flowering shrubs. The old whitewashed house with the ivy clad walls adds to the panorama.

The Church grounds offer you a wonderful space for further planting. The existing native hedging was blooming with whitethorn blossoms however do keep an eye for those rogue sycamore saplings & remove before they become established. The bank between the car park & the Church entrance has great potential for further planting of pollinator friendly perennial shrubs. The violas/pansies at the outer threshold of the Church porch are a lovely sight, no doubt not planned but nature taking a decision on landscaping a spare gap! We would question the need for the two conical containers at the Church gates given the size of the planted raised bed to the left – they seem surplus to requirements. The lawns here are cut very tightly with little scope for clover, self heal etc to flower. Have you thought about mowing less frequently to allow a short meadow to develop?

The Grotto's green & copper natural backdrop is stunning. Once again, are the containers necessary if you were to introduce plants that like nooks & crannies within the Grotto wall e.g. fleabane, candytuft, creeping thyme etc? One would have thought that native plants would have found a home here e.g. ferns etc.

St Fintans Graveyard is very well maintained & lovely to see the healthy yew trees & some small sections of clover in the green areas. In the new section, are there plans to screen the concrete fencing with hedging or climbers? The National Biodiversity Data Centre has an excellent guide with 24 practical actions any faith community can take to assist biodiversity, well worth reading. <https://pollinators.ie/faith-communities/> As you have plans for landscaping in the new graveyard car park please do consult the recent publication by the All Ireland Pollinator Plan on how car parks can assist pollinators. <https://pollinators.ie/how-car-parks-can-help-pollinators/>

The linear entrance to Scoil na Tríonóide Naofa presents a fantastic opportunity for tree planting, as do areas around the playing pitches. It would be good to give some thought to planting climbers to screen the long grey concrete fencing & block walls. Easy Treesie, a volunteer led organization, <https://easytreesie.com/> is working with schools to plant native saplings in their locality.

It was evident you are moving away from annuals towards pollinator friendly perennials. Also consider whether plants in containers can be placed in the ground, as container planting is resource demanding from both your time & watering to maintain them well.

Sometimes instead of focusing on planting wildflowers it is enough to leave an area wild & see what nature provides. Many verges left unmown have had displays of wild orchids, cowslips, etc.

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

You are very fortunate in Doon to be surrounded by nature. There is no better way to appreciate the nature you have on your doorstep than join an organized Nature Walk with knowledgeable folk. The more we know, the more we can appreciate & protect what we have in order to leave it for the next generation.

Well done to Scoil na Tríonóide Naofa for creating a biodiversity trail complete with in-house created insect hotels, a mini forest (An Choill Bheag), erecting a polytunnel, leaving some lawns to transform into wild meadows, creation of seed bombs, biodiversity information boards in the school building, creation of a biodiversity calendar & planting

spring bulbs including pollinator friendly ones, like alliums. The linking in with other schools also involved in the Green Schools Programme is an ideal way in which to experience what projects other schools are undertaking & create collaborative relationships. Well done too on inviting the local primary school children to participate actively in the Biodiversity Trail with a questionnaire to complete. While your adjudicator could not actually access the campus to see the projects, the social media platform provided pictures of the events & construction activities. The teachers & involved pupils are to be lauded on the extensive work carried out in this area, remarkable progress in a year. The woodland area & wildflower area at the entrance gate on the riot was blooming with dog rose & oxeye daisies. The Boys CBS Primary School are active too in this area taking advantage of the nature & biodiversity on offer at Kilmoylan Woods & the Social Farm to learn in the company of Albert Nolan. Their visit to Cabra Wetlands with hands on experiences will have opened their eyes to the biodiversity on location. On adjudication day, it was great to see the planted vegetable trugs with rooster potatoes & well done to the Mens Shed for making & supplying them. It was a delight to see the boundary wall at the Social Farm bursting with blooms of wall bellflower. It was a pleasure to watch the many swallows taking up summer residence at the church. It would be interesting to conduct a baseline survey in order to determine if the visiting population is increasing, decreasing or remaining stable. Once again, with the woodlands & older buildings you probably have a resident bat population. Bat Conservation Ireland, a volunteer led group, work with communities to hold walks & talks & will assist with local surveys. <https://www.batconservationireland.org/irish-bats> Do you take part in the Irish Garden Bird survey undertaken each year in December by Birdwatch Ireland? It is a fun & engaging activity for households in particular families. <https://birdwatchireland.ie/our-work/surveys-research/research-surveys/irish-garden-bird-survey/> There are many resources in this area on the National Biodiversity Data Centre & it would be wonderful to get involved in surveys & encourage community members to become citizen scientists. <https://biodiversityireland.ie/monitoring/> Your engagement as planned with an ecologist will inform your decisions.

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

You can take heart that this category is one where many communities as you say, “struggle a bit for new ideas”. This is why your adjudicator would recommend reading this section of the Tidy Towns Handbook, as there are lots of examples on offer. <https://www.tidytowns.ie/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Sustainability-Doing-More-with-less.pdf> The platform, ChangeX, is a fantastic location for ideas & more importantly, some associated funding. Check both of these out for inspiration. <https://www.changex.org/>

Scoil na Tríonóide Naofa & CBS Primary School are well linked to the village by both pedestrian & cycling routes providing some parents & students with the option of leaving the car at home. It would be interesting to know what percentage of children walk or cycle to school. Well done to the senior classes at the CBS Primary School for cycling to school once a week. The decision to move all cars collecting school children to the bus car park allows the children a short walk & reducing idling cars outside the school gates. Holding a Creative School Week with a focus on reusing, upcycling & nature provides young children with an opportunity to view their surroundings & what they have on hand in a different light. The teachers are sustainable role models too with an emphasis on reducing waste – double sided printing; collective breaks; shredded papers diverted to canine bedding etc.

Scoil na Tríonóide Naofa initiative of holding a pop up climate café during Science Week focusing on lowering carbon footprints is the type of action we need. We would be interested to know if there were any outcomes & actions from this initiative.

As a community, you are ensuring items like scrap metal, bottles & cans & unwanted clothing are recycled or are gathered for charity. The focus needs to move towards the first 3 R's – refuse, reduce & reuse. The mulching of the cut grass is a reuse & the creation of a gardener's library at the Social Farm with books focused on all aspects of gardening is a further example of reuse. There are many volunteer groups & agencies with information you can share with the community through social media or in more traditional forms. For example, high energy bills this year have created anxiety for many households. A campaign sharing energy saving tips would help community members while also reducing energy use. Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI) has a Reduce Your Use at Home section. <https://www.seai.ie/reduceyouruse/consumer/> If you have a local Sustainable Energy Community (SEC) in your area, you might invite them to provide an Information Evening for the local community e.g. Oola Community Council. Also the secondary school students Environmental Committee could be asked to put together a social media campaign to use on your Facebook page.

Your community members may already be engaged in sustainable ways of living & working e.g. car pooling to sports events for children or to work; home energy upgrades; rainwater harvesting; reducing food waste etc. The possibilities are endless.

Tidiness and Litter Control / Slachtmhaireacht agus Rialú Bruscair:

The TLC8 is a remarkable countywide initiative & well done on continuing to get involved each year. You reference collecting 130 bags during this clean up, is that figure up or down on last year's figure? Well done on your regular weekly village litter picks. Have you been able to ascertain where the plastic cups & containers you gather originated from? For example, if there are regular coffee cups from a local establishment, ask them to consider going the Conscious Cup campaign. <https://consciouscup.ie/> There is an excellent volunteer initiative first started in Wicklow, The Pure Mile Project, encourages community members to adopt a mile of road & keep this area free of rubbish. <https://www.pureproject.ie/the-pure-mile/> The main thoroughfare of the village was spotless on adjudication day & the kerbs weed free.

The Recycling Centre unfortunately had items left in front & there was litter strewn about on the footpath & close to the seating area.

An annual audit of street furniture is a sensible strategy e.g. redundant poles, obscured signage, obsolete signage, discarded safety equipment, bollards or poles needing maintenance or replacement, etc. On completion, you can then decide what you need the local Council to assist with & what you can accomplish yourselves. The removal, replacement or attention to such items removes clutter & presents items to the best possible standard.

Well done to CBS Primary School for their active focus on litter & engagement with the Picker Pals Programme – another fantastic initiative. We loved the photographs included, very happy children busy litter picking. As a school, we have no doubt that through your activities & focus you will attain your Global Citizenship Litter & Waste Green Flag soon. The delegation of responsibility to the students, with clear guidelines, for litter within the school grounds is an excellent life lesson & will ensure they contribute positively to Doon now & in the future. You reference a problem with graffiti at the GAA grounds. As you do not state whether this was internally or externally on the boundary walls, we can only suggest looking at murals for the internal walls & planting climbers for the external walls.

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

The residences within the village environs are, in the main, maintained to a high standard & it is great to see such pride amongst owners.

Assumption Terrace has one of the best entrances this adjudicator has seen with its own hillside park complete with maturing maple trees, pollinator friendly perennial flowerbeds, seating & memorial. The perimeter wall was in the throes of receiving a facelift during our visit.

The entrance from the R505 into The Forts would benefit from climbers to soften all the hard surfacing. There are a number of green areas that are well maintained if somewhat stark. They have some perfect opportunities to plant trees or native/edible hedging on the boundaries. Unfortunately, there was quite a bit of litter as one entered the road to the estate.

St Fintan's Terrace is maintained well & there are clearly some very green fingered residents with lovely gardens on show.

Hillview Grove is fortunate to have an incredible front communal space with lovely maturing trees, shrubs & a lovely linear flowerbed that was awash with colour on adjudication day. Their bilingual signage is well placed, amongst the short meadow of clover, buttercups & self heal. There is great potential for some of the area to be set aside for long meadows with path cut through for childrens' play & walks.

Glasha Talainn Estate is attractive with its crescent shape, green area bounded by flowering shrubs at the boundary stonewall. The large bus park needs more planting & refer again to the earlier referenced AIPP publication on planting in car parks.

It was noted that many of the housing estates have a surplus of green spaces. There are a number of volunteer led organizations focused on increasing the tree canopy in Ireland & many work with communities, Tidy Towns groups & schools supplying trees free of charge. Some of these include Trees on the Land

<https://www.treesontheland.com/> & as referenced previously, Easy Treesie. Each year during National Tree Week, Limerick City & County Council provide trees, free of charge, to interested community groups. These options may provide an opportunity for you to work with the residents to establish micro forests by adding trees to existing solo trees to form groves.

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

The heritage bilingual maroon signage located on the approaches to Doon is elegant & the height is ideal to allow planting underneath not obstruct its legibility.

The approach from Oola presents one with a large mowed green area on the left hand side backed by hedging & mature trees. Have you considered mowing the edges here & leaving some of the area in long meadows for biodiversity? The journey in to the village has well maintained stonewalls & hedges. The forge building & banding stone is an interesting enclave here & well done on your continued maintenance with the information board providing a historical context. On adjudication day, there was a significant water leak on this road near the village that hopefully was resolved.

The R505 with the long stretch of old stone wall boundaries on the right & residential properties with footpaths out to Buckley's Cross offers an interesting approach to Doon. The limestone piers & flanking pedestrian entrances of Kilmoylan House form a striking roadside feature. Some of the footpaths closer to the village require some attention in parts. There is an interesting detailed railing at the bridge that, if uncovered, would add interest to this approach. It was lovely to see healthy hedgerows, no hedge cutting & only a narrow strip cut on the verges.

Concluding Remarks:

It was your adjudicator's first visit to Doon & a most enjoyable one. The amenities on offer for the community are impressive & the existing plans in place will assure Doon of a bright future. The map you supplied was easy to follow, thank you. The inclusion of your Five Year Plan 2020 – 2025 needs to be synopsized in order to break down your plans for each year & determine what you are going to take on, when & the completion date. This will allow you to focus & identify important tasks. Well done on your work to date.