

Tidy Towns Competition 2019

Adjudication Report

Centre: **Athboy - Baile Átha Bui** Ref: **571**
County: **Meath** Mark: **326**
Category: **C** Date(s): **08/06/2019**

	Maximum Mark	Mark Awarded 2018	Mark Awarded 2019
Community – Your Planning and Involvement	60	47	48
Streetscape & Public Places	60	45	46
Green Spaces and Landscaping	60	43	44
Nature and Biodiversity in your Locality	50	35	38
Sustainability – Doing more with less	50	21	23
Tidiness and Litter Control	90	58	58
Residential Streets & Housing Areas	50	32	33
Approach Roads, Streets & Lanes	50	36	36
TOTAL MARK	470	317	326

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

Cuireann an moltóir seo fáilte roimh Athboy / Baile Átha Bui páirt a ghlacadh i gComórtas Náisiúnta SuperValu na mBailte Slachtmhara 2019.

Your work is strategic and effective and you have taken account of the limited number of volunteers to ensure your targets meet your capacity. This year your work plan was to focus on maintaining projects and hence allow for time for management planning and to catch up on policies and issues that a voluntary group has to address. You have got good advice and support from e.g. The Wheel (an invaluable resource body for voluntary groups). But you also achieved so much and your entry was full of details of many projects achieved and actions completed following complaints from the community (e.g. on derelict properties). You focused on two key projects this year – the reusable 'Athbags' and the development at CowPark with the €200,000 funding allocation available. Excellent work was in progress at Cow Park and it was wonderful to read and see on the ground actions to benefit wildlife, especially pollinators in the Athboy Community.

Building on your media profile and extensive communications should help raise awareness of your work and hopefully result in more assisting in discreet projects. By establishing a 'friends' group you have encouraged 18 more volunteers to help in specific projects.

You are commended for inviting all the election candidates to hear of your aims and concerns. You have also been invited to attend a session with Meath County Council to submit suggestions on actions for climate change and biodiversity. This highlights the importance of these issues across your community.

There are over 60 community groups in Athboy and if each took on board just one action from the 8 adjudication categories in your TidyTowns long-term plan much more will be quickly achieved. Maybe invite them to do to so?

Finally, thank you for your excellent entry form – a lovely balance of work with pictures and clear annotated maps meant it was easy to navigate Athboy.

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

Key buildings in Athboy are presented well individually. But together the premises on the main road and lime trees planted on the street form an attractive streetscape that would encourage the driver to pull over and spend some time in the town.

Your adjudicator enjoyed exploring the Heritage Gardens and learning of key sites and historically important events that happened in Athboy – 6000 of O'Neill's men marched down that tiny alley at the side of the old post office! Also, an exact replica of Aintree was built in Meath. Not a wonder you had Grand National winners. VR inscribed

post boxes were still in use. Since Queen Victoria died in 1901 that highlights how good you are at maintaining your heritage. You have identified further buildings that you would like to provide historical information on and patiently await permission of the owners which it is hoped will be quickly offered.

The GAA entrance gates to Clann nan Gael on Kell's Road looked well.

Your actions to improve derelict sites are commended (whilst not instantly resolved, do keep up the good work) and it is great that Foroige is to paint the hoarding beside the 'Fresh Today' shop. This was being used for advertising but did work in detracting from the dereliction behind. Do remove old bunting from Daly's B&B. The replacement wooden gates at the Credit Union entry looked well here.

Other buildings that caught the eye of your adjudicator included the Bank of Ireland, Brogan's butchers, McElhinney's Menswear and the sign writing at Coburns was notable – the restored sash windows here looked great.

The presentation and colour choice at Flood's Bar was very attractive.

Green Spaces and Landscaping / Spásanna Glasa agus Tírdhreachú:

The number and quality of street trees are an asset to Athboy. They appear to be well-managed and nurtured as would be expected as you have paid for them to be professionally trimmed and shaped – well worth it. Some of the tree-pits on the main streets could benefit with additional non-biodegradable mulch (e.g. Shingle) to prevent litter accumulating here. Considered planting made exploring the delightful Barrack Lane very enjoyable. The Fair Green is a great, and popular, amenity for Athboy. Allowing the grass to grow longer in discrete areas was noted and is a good measure for wildlife, and cost savings also. Planters were nicely positioned and limited to key areas where they can make an impact – of particular note are those in front of the community centre boundary wall.

Hard work has gone into the Heritage Garden and Thornton's garden. Long-grasses and bee-friendly planting should make these areas not only attractive to residents of Athboy but also the wildlife of the area. The use of orange flowers growing underneath the famine pot evoked a fire warming the soup. Perhaps consider adding some orange or yellow bee-friendly flowers here also? Take care not to add any larger stones/information points of different styles as this area could become quite cluttered.

It looked as if yellow Corydalis plants were growing on the old bridge wall – these yellow non-native perennials looked very pretty too.

Cobble lock pavements had a lot of dandelions and other flowers growing here – if they have to be removed do try out your foam application here.

The limestone sculpture of the world entitled 'Making a World of Difference' is stunning but your adjudicator felt its location meant it was a little lost and maybe a more prominent location could be sought?

You have created a lovely suntrap on the main street where the boat is located – maybe a seat could be provided here too? The boat will need to be painted by the end of this season. A job for your handy Men's Shed group.

Street furniture and pumps looked good freshly painted. Cow Park was closed off whilst refurbishment was completed in June but your adjudicators look forward to exploring this area upon completion.

Plans to plant 100s of crocus bulbs in the autumn, and take cuttings and grow your own in the LMETB polytunnel are commendable also. Finally, your adjudicator would like to congratulate your efforts to plant more pollinator-friendly flowers in hanging baskets and contacted and you even have peat-free compost on sale in the local hardware shop.

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

This is an excellent submission for this category of the competition. Public walks, talks, information sharing, signage and seeking professional advice mean that you have achieved much in this category. You are highly commended for getting professional advice on the management of your fauna and flora. It was good to read that the town wildlife management plan is available for all to view in the library.

Of particular note is the support for your trial to not use chemical herbicides and pesticides. This should greatly enhance your population of pollinators. There is a lovely project that may be of interest to you - Flower-Insect Timed Counts (FIT Counts) whose aim is to measure insect visitation rates to flowers. Details can be found at www.biodiversity.ie It involves individuals/groups watching a 50x50cm patch of flowers for 10 minutes (April – Sept) and counting how many insects visit <https://pollinators.ie/record-pollinators/fit-count/> for more.

As well as alternative weed control, you have planted native hedges, woods, installed water butts and used peat-free compost.

The Boyne River is so important for wildlife that it has two European designations for the wildlife and habitats in the area (Special Area of Conservation SAC 2299) and Special Protection Area SPA 4232).

Your works are highly commended at Cow Park over the years. You have taken professional advice on how to enhance and develop this as appropriate for a SAC. You are aware of this and following advice from the main bodies involved especially the National Parks & Wildlife Services with input from the OPW. Hopefully, any conflicting advice will be soon sorted. The opening of the new trails will be enjoyed by many, not just the immediate residents of Athboy.

Your adjudicator is intrigued to learn of training on the use of augmented reality apps to deliver biodiversity messages and would like to learn more of this please in next year's application as we can spread the word.

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

Your 'Athbags' project started with just 4 volunteers making and selling cloth shopping locally. 130 bags later and many more have joined and recently 50 attended a workshop on recycling! Congratulations on your first Earth Hour – another action to help us consider how we use our resources.

As mentioned last year – your allotments are a great amenity in the community. The roses planted at the entrance help to screen the heavy metal fencing here. Perhaps a 'Welcome to Our Allotments' sign would be better at the gate explaining that entry is not allowed as opposed to the harsh 'No Entry' sign.

Installation of water butts near planting schemes will help to reduce water usage. Even your butchers have got on board encouraging the use of Tupperware containers. A visit by ATT volunteers to the Panda recycling depot highlighted the worrying fact that 38% of recycling is contaminated.

Well done on your activity here.

Tidiness and Litter Control / Slachtmhaireacht agus Rialú Bruscair:

Your 'gold medal' for your efforts against littering was on display in the centre of Athboy – well done! It is hoped that this sign should also encourage more to keep up your efforts. You have put a lot of effort into litter picking – what are your main types of litter? Have you specific actions to deter the various types of littering? One example provided was the residents of Turry meadow who have set up a dog trail to encourage dog owners to use and maintain, resulting in reduced dog waste in the residential area.

It was good to read of your 'terracycle' project and your adjudicator would like more details of this project to recycle crisp packets.

On adjudication day cigarette butts were an issue outside premises on Lower Bridge Street so it is recommended they invest in a 'butt bin' and encourage its use. Watch where small pockets of dried leaves accumulate in corners of buildings on the main streets. One directional sign pointing off the main street to the car park advertising a café was very low – ideally positioned for impacting an unsuspecting head!

You may not notice but overhead wiring and ugly connection posts do take away from the centre of Athboy. As such, lobbying for them to be placed underground – as in many other communities – should be an action in your long-term plan.

Your bring and bottle banks were clean and presented well by the school. A bag of clothes had recently been left beside the clothes bank – as this was fresh you are not penalised for this but perhaps contact the clothing bank company to increase the frequency/number of pick-ups from here? The clothing banks by the library did need a good clean though. There were commercial bins in this car-park and it is recommended that this area is screened off.

Sunday service parking on pavements should be watched as there was room in the rear car parks and pavements were blocked. Maybe some nicely positioned planters could deter this?

You are recommended to review all signs in the town annually. For example, the faded 'no dumping' sign could be removed from the playground as it is a duplicate and detracts from here. A number of cable ties were left behind on telegraph poles in the town. Do watch bunting that can quickly become tired and Christmas lights are not appropriate outside of the festive season – even if erected in some more difficult to access areas.

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

Communal gardens and grassed areas of residential areas of Athboy seem to have adopted actions of benefit to pollinators. Priority Gate, for example, which used to tightly mow its grass (see older images on Google Maps) had longer grass with paths mown for access and enjoyment. This is one of the recommendations in the All-Ireland Pollination Plan. If you do decide to run an estates competition, it is recommended that you provide prizes pertinent to the adjudication categories of the national competition. For example, the most wildlife-friendly estate!

The quaint communal garden in 'Windy Arbour' caught the eye – a lovely little spot here. There is potential along the inside of the boundary wall of Church View to plant pollinator-friendly flowers. One idea is to have younger residents plant sunflowers with a prize for the tallest maybe?

Discourage some estates from under-planting trees as this can disturb roots and shouldn't be encouraged.

Homes in Cloran Court were nice and it was good to see in Butterfield Court many mature trees also. St Jarlath's Terrace has some lovely metal railings along the property front boundaries. The recently constructed Connaught Grove will be great once the landscaping gets a chance to mature – the south-facing solar panels will help reduce their energy bills and will help you gain marks in the Sustainability category!

Millview was one area that has great potential. Perhaps residents and landlords could get together to address falling peddle-dash, faded signs and old leaf-litter for example.

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

Three separate entrance signs highlight your arrival into Athboy. Perhaps the twinning signs can be merged with the welcome signs in the future? Elder was in full flower on approach roads – a lovely indication of Summer but do keep a watchful eye on foliage that can grow rapidly and partially obscure these signs. Best to have them cut back around name signs in the winter in anticipation of this where possible.

Barrack Lane was gorgeous to explore – the large galvanised gates at the end of this lane could maybe be painted to tone in with the heritage colours of this area?

Cloran Road Business Park had a nicely landscaped entrance – good effort! Maybe the entrance gate could be enhanced here in the future? Where young trees have been planted, maybe assign volunteers to nurture these and provide water and mulch in the formative early years.

Concluding Remarks:

Athboy is a vibrant town with many merits, good presentation of buildings (old and new) and lovely public green areas across the town. Your adjudicator was also struck by the greenness of Athboy – trees everywhere and birdsong and flowers added to the enjoyment of the Eco-Walk.

Your volunteers are hungry for knowledge, giving up their time to attend talks, seminars and get the best advice for the management of the natural and built heritage of Athboy. You hope that Athboy is Ireland's first Chemical free town – a great aspiration in your aim to protect local wildlife and ecosystems. Hopefully sharing details of your efforts will encourage more volunteers to help and highlight that Tidy Towns is much more than just litter and tidiness! Your entry is full of energy and so much has been achieved so do congratulate yourselves.