

Tidy Towns Competition 2023

Adjudication Report

Centre: Newcastle - An Caislean Nua	Ref: 1037
County: Wicklow	Mark: 336
Category: B	Date(s): 17/06/2023

	Maximum Mark	Mark Awarded 2022	Mark Awarded 2023
Community – Your Planning and Involvement	80	45	46
Streetscape & Public Places	80	39	40
Green Spaces and Landscaping	80	40	42
Nature and Biodiversity in your Locality	55	39	41
Sustainability – Doing more with less	55	21	22
Tidiness and Litter Control	90	64	65
Residential Streets & Housing Areas	55	39	40
Approach Roads, Streets & Lanes	55	39	40
TOTAL MARK	550	326	336

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 oraibh i mbliana. Welcome to the 2023 SuperValu TidyTowns competition. Thank you for your entry and for your endeavours and commitment to your improving your community. Best wishes in this year's competition.

Newcastle has developed a community forum structure to discuss the future direction of the village. You have a small but dedicated committee of five helped by around nine volunteers and connect with everyone using both traditional and modern communication methods. You have great support from the village when you have bigger projects to complete, and it is heartening to see that people turn out in strength as needed.

The 68 new houses at Chancel Way in the village are nearing completion and these will help to rejuvenate and re-energise the village by bringing new residents, new families to participate in the everyday life of Newcastle, which like many small rural towns and villages has been suffering some decline over the years.

Your group has not only developed strong links with the local authority and many other agencies and organisations locally and nationally, but you regularly collaborate with the local school and the sports and socials clubs in the area. This year you have planned to work with the transition students from the secondary schools.

In common with many other community organisations, your group had to find new ways to communicate to keep local people engaged with your activities; you embraced several social media platforms, newsletters, the traditional local press and even the village noticeboard to keep your message and activities to the fore in the locality – well done!

Even though you have many projects for the future outlined in your submission and in the three years' plan, do look at the latest TidyTowns handbook and regular newsletters on the website to see the range of activities and ideas that could be carried out in Newcastle, some with sizable results for easily executed actions.

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

Newcastle has a good mixture of older buildings and more modern buildings; many of the buildings in the village are very well maintained and there are some attractive business premises in the village. The roads and footpaths are in generally good condition through the village, although there are a few places requiring attention. The ruins of the Royal Castle watch over the road into the village with a fine bed of wildflowers along the outside of the castle wall.

The nearby Church of Ireland and adjoining cemetery were found in very good condition, as was St. Francis school. The community playground was in use and was tidy and it is noted that you are fundraising to purchase new sensory and inclusive play equipment. You are also looking to upgrade the tennis facilities to allow for the formation of a tennis club, providing yet another facility for local residents.

The black village pump set in a natural stone surround is contrasted with perennial pink planting at the base and red

roses at the sides. The nearby concrete and timber benches and the mini library were looking well also. Vacant properties are a fact of life in many towns now and your group certainly make every effort to disguise these by cleaning the exteriors and placing planted containers in front of the buildings.

Green Spaces and Landscaping / Spásanna Glasa agus Tírdhreachú:

The river running through Newcastle was clean and tidy. Newcastle is adopting pollinator-friendly practices in common with many other groups and these will have benefits in the present and for many years into the future; some local residents are now following suit in their own gardens. There are some nicely planted areas around the village and the use of raised planters should generally only be used where plants can't be grown directly in the ground – reduces water consumption and labour.

There are some recently planted trees (including fruit trees) in the margins along the road and at various locations and these appear to be establishing well. Do check on the fruit trees at the Oratory as some may be loose from the stakes – remember to remove the stakes as soon as the trees are established on their own root system.

New trees have been planted in the Racefield estate and over 700 trees have been planted by a local resident on private ground adjoining Main Street. Bulbs and wildflower meadows have also been sown for seasonal colour and biodiversity enhancement. The pictures shown would suggest that the bulbs may have been mainly daffodils; unfortunately, while they provide a great splash of colour, they are not favoured by pollinators unless they have nothing else – muscari, crocus and alliums are much preferred by pollinators.

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

Newcastle has plenty green spaces in and around the village and these spaces are of great benefit of biodiversity and nature in the area, while the rural hinterland nearby offers a range of habitats for wildlife and insects. The mowing regime at various locations around the village has been adjusted to allow some longer grasses and wildflowers to grow around the boundaries, leaving shelter and corridors for wildlife to move through safely.

The local schoolchildren are not falling behind either with raised beds, wildflowers, bird feeders, and some good planting in the grounds – a few chickens were seen also at the school.

Have you been monitoring the swift and robin nesting boxes to assess if they are being used? Did you decide on more locations since the entry was submitted?

Have you made any progress in establishing the plant nursery? Growing your own plants and your move towards more sustainable planting is a comparatively simple but valuable method to increase biodiversity and sustainability – planting longer lasting plants that require less water, less composts, and reduced management saves time and energy that can be focused on other projects. This will definitely be a big advantage in future years, and you should be in a position to give plants to the residents and other organisations locally as well.

The pollinator friendly planting at various places in the village, including the community centre and the raised bed near the service station, will benefit nature and biodiversity locally. As there appears to be quite a bit of space around the GAA grounds and they already have a bug hotel, perhaps they might be encouraged to look at planting some wildflowers on the areas where they have to trim or spray to maintain at present.

Do include some information on the Biodiversity and River Habitat survey in next year's entry.

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

Sustainability can appear to be a huge challenge but in reality, it can be very much about small gestures and some of your actions are relatively simple but very effective in improving your sustainability – harvesting rainwater at the community centre, composting green waste, growing herbs, salads, fruit and vegetables in the raised beds, reduction in the amount of grass cutting, and changing from annual bedding plants to perennials and shrubs (reducing peat usage and reducing costs each season). Well done on setting up your community composting facility with clear and easy to follow signage – lots of information on composting available at www.cre.ie

The school children are actively looking at ways of improving sustainable at school and hopefully this will yield continued savings in the future. Many small parts can build up to a substantial improvement in sustainability.

Tidiness and Litter Control / Slachtmhaireacht agus Rialú Bruscair:

During the visit, Newcastle was found to be quite tidy with little sign of litter around the village; this included the playground which was practically litter-free. The 'Adopt an Area' litter picking is working very well, and it is great to see that you get great support from the residents for this right through the year. From the adjudicator's visit, very little sign of fouling was found so perhaps efforts to minimise this issue are beginning to work.

Weeds at vacant properties and along some kerbs and at the base of some walls, It appears that some weed control is by applying herbicides in some areas at least so perhaps this might be something to consider for the future – it is a tricky balancing act but 'herbicide-free' will require a change of mindset in the community as you may find small weeds here and there in the village, despite your best efforts.

The recycling banks at the community centre car park were clean and not overflowing yet someone had dumped empty drinks cardboard boxes between the end bin and the block wall – at least the boxes remained in the shelter and were not blowing around the car park or road.

The heritage signs and the village notice board were clean and in good condition.

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

The residential streets and housing areas around the village were tidy and well-maintained. It's heartening to see that most of the residents and businesses of Newcastle take great pride in their properties and gardens which were very well-presented; this is a great help to you as a committee in your endeavours to improve the appearance of the village. Many of the housing areas have adopted or are in the process of adopting more biodiversity friendly

initiatives.

Hopefully, new uses will be found for the vacant shops, especially as many more people will be residing in Newcastle in the near future. Next year's adjudicator will see the housing development at Chancel Way will be completed to a high standard to the benefit of the residents and the village itself. Best wishes with the competition for the tidy estates; if you have not already done so, do talk to other groups already holding similar competitions – no point in reinventing the wheel if you don't have to!

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

The approach roads to Newcastle are appropriately maintained and tidy, but not overly maintained. The lanes and streets were tidy and some of the footpaths appear to have been repaired recently. There are still some opportunities to reduce the amount of regular mowing in favour of wildflowers and less regular mowing, with appropriate signage to inform residents and visitors that you are working to improve the habitats for wildlife and insects.

Concluding Remarks:

The Newcastle group are very active in the TidyTowns competition and sincere congratulations to the committee and individual volunteers for their hard work. Your three years' plan has plenty of interesting projects for the future and adjudicators will enjoy visiting these projects as they are completed. We look forward to seeing your progress in the 2024 TidyTowns entry!