

Tidy Towns Competition 2019

Adjudication Report

Centre: **Swords - Sord** Ref: **160**
County: **Dublin** Mark: **323**
Category: **H** Date(s): **01/07/2019**

	Maximum Mark	Mark Awarded 2018	Mark Awarded 2019
Community – Your Planning and Involvement	60	52	51
Streetscape & Public Places	60	41	42
Green Spaces and Landscaping	60	41	42
Nature and Biodiversity in your Locality	50	36	36
Sustainability – Doing more with less	50	21	21
Tidiness and Litter Control	90	57	59
Residential Streets & Housing Areas	50	33	35
Approach Roads, Streets & Lanes	50	36	37
TOTAL MARK	470	317	323

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

Cuireann an moltóir seo fáilte roimh Swords (Sord) chuig comórtas Náisiúnta na mBailte Slachtmhara SuperValu 2019. Thank you for your detailed entry form with photographs and supporting material. The key map, and then the town divided into four sections, was of benefit in negotiating our way around your town and helped locating various projects. The numbering system however could be improved - see Concluding Remarks. Your committee of ten has the help of between 20-30 core group of volunteers and we see that you 'actively encourage diversity and inclusiveness' within the group. You are supported by local businesses, state and semi-state organisations as well as a large number of local voluntary groups. You actively engage with each local business which is commendable. Communication is vital for any TidyTowns group and your use social media – website, Facebook, Twitter etc - in addition your use of the local press, information booths, participation in the St. Patrick's Day Parade etc. ensures that the whole community have access to your news. We were delighted to read that you focus considerable time involving young people with Swords TidyTowns. We congratulate you on the many award you have won in 2018 which you list in your application form. This is your 14th year entering the TidyTowns competition and you feel that Swords has 'vastly improved' and that residents and businesses are proud of their town.

We make the following comments on your application form. Please bear in mind that the adjudicators visit several dozen entries in the competition each summer which entails reading the application form and trying to visit the most important sites. For that purpose, it greatly helps if the application form is not too long. You had 39 new projects, 27 maintained projects and 9 future projects listed and truthfully it would be impossible for the adjudicator to visit all of these. Your application of 113 plus pages is too much to read and the amount of detail for most of the items is unnecessary. We compliment you on your insertion of the occasional pictures within the pages and also on the binding. However, in future, we ask you to significantly reduce the size of the application. This is not a criticism of your hard work but a criticism of the application form and map(s). Please also see in Concluding Remarks our advice on numbering the projects and noting these on the map(s).

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

The town of Swords, to the west of the busy M1, consist of the village core with residential estates located primarily to the west of this central core. To the east of the village core Business Parks and Commercial Centres have developed. There is therefore a great mix of streetscapes. In the village core there are a variety of single, two and three storey vernacular buildings interspersed with large modern buildings; it all works well and gives an interesting streetscape to your town. We loved that some of these premises had a private space surrounded by railings in front of them, e.g. June Ruthland hair salon. Needless to say, the stunning Swords Castle at the end of Main Street with its well-maintained grounds adds great architectural merit to your town. We look forward to seeing the Civic and Cultural Quarter being implemented which will change the traffic in the town and make it a more pedestrian orientated town. Other structures of interest are Swords Round Tower, the Carnegie Library, Swords Courthouse,

the Cofl St. Columba's Church, the RC St Colmcille's Church and of course FCC Offices. In addition to the main architectural structures we also noted the ER post-box set in the wall, the old pumps and we loved the area around St. Colmcille's well. Some business deserved special mention for their addition to the streetscape – The School House, M.R. Taylor, etc. While there are a number of seats located along Main Street all were occupied when we visited and we wonder if more are needed. The Smart benches were also noted. We admired the art work on the traffic control boxes particularly the one of the magpies. We were delighted to come across some flat iron gates ... albeit some in a poor state of repair. The new Fáilte sculpture at the junction of North Street and Seatown Road was admired and here too the seating was occupied. While we do not wish to name individual premises, we saw quite an amount of signage clutter on business premises along the Main Street which detracted from the street's beauty. We also noted that quite a few premises have stickers attached to their windows rather than having a window display. This is a pity as window shopping is always a treat on an evening's stroll in any town. We suggest you do a walk along the shopping areas and make a note of premises which have an inordinate amount of signage and/or stickers attached and approach them with a view to removing some. There were quite a few people waiting on busses (at the bus stop near FCC offices) and we noted that seating there is minimal. We suggest that additional seating be placed along the stone wall adjacent to the Smart bench. You have some dereliction and also some premises which are poorly maintained – let us know how you will tackle these issues.

Green Spaces and Landscaping / Spásanna Glasa agus Tírdhreachú:

You have quite a few communal green areas, some of which are quite large particularly along the Ward River. The Town Park with its rose garden and paths along the Ward River was particularly pleasant. The trees along the path are maturing nicely giving a lovely canopy for pedestrians and roosting sites for birds. We were delighted to see that the piers and gates into the park were devoid of signage except for the very discrete signs under the capping stones. Signage should NEVER be attached to entrance piers or gates as it detracts from the beauty of the entrance - well done FCC parks department for this. The stone walls, and recently painted railings looked very well and were a suitable boundary to the park. Another park we visited was on Balheary Road where the Skate Park is located. A bank of trees separates this park from the busy R132. In addition to these parks the large green area in Sword Castle is also available to the public. There are fine trees on both sides of Main Street which give shelter to both humans and wildlife as well as being roosting sites for birds. Some of these had roots which have broken through the tarmacadam – these need attention. You have a number of colourful planting beds in strategic locations which catch the eye of the visitor. We personally don't find hanging baskets unpleasant as long as they are in moderation and add rather than take away from the streetscape. We admired the seats along the pavement with planters on each side. These seats were well used when we visited. The 1916 memorial was noted and we suggest that here too permanent planting beds be installed on both sides rather than the four temporary planters that exist at present. Elsewhere there were a few locations where temporary planters were placed where we felt permanent planting beds might be more appropriate. We suggest you do an audit of locations where permanent planting beds would be suitable and approach FCC with your suggestions. We noted, and welcomed, the new permanent planting bed at the base of the Fáilte sculpture. The green space at FCC offices is very pleasant and the sculptures here are very suited to the location. We suggest that large areas of grass be left unmown in main green open spaces – including in residential estates – to provide additional areas for biodiversity. These can be located in areas away from ball play / picnic benches etc.

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

With the many parks and open green spaces located around the town in addition to the river and the mature trees, you have an excellent environment for nature and biodiversity. It is admirable to read that you are organising events to inform the community of the nature and biodiversity of your area. Following on from your February talk you encouraged the youth to make small bug hotels from disused crates, pine cones and straw. We loved the photo showing the result of their work. Invasive species is something that all councils are battling against and they rely on individuals and groups to report locations – so keep up this vital work. We noted the new stone walls around the town and while they may not be as open as the traditionally built stone walls, they still provide a habitat for insect life. We asked numerous people and employees in the Pavillion Shopping centre if they knew anything about the bee hive there finally we met a security girl, Courtney, who told us about them. Perhaps take a few photos of the hives and put them on view so that shoppers are aware of their presence. Have you undertaken any projects with the local school children based on this category? School children are always open to becoming involved in site visits, field trips, poster competitions etc. The Green Flag Programme for schools encourages this activity and most schools, including yours, are very involved in this. We noted that FCC has planted areas of pictorial meadow at various locations which are excellent for our pollinators.

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

This category involves activities which reduce our usage of the planet resources. Instead of throwing away items - how can we reuse them. We read with interest about the site at Main Street /R106 road junction where you displayed your upcycling projects. The water butts in this little garden were noted. The planter is superfluous – put the flowers directly into the ground and remove the planter.

We were delighted to read that you grew all of the summer/autumn and winter/spring bedding plants at your polytunnel in North Street. Many communities are involved in allotments and we see that Broadmeadow Community Garden is successful and has composting facilities available there. We noted the phone repair shop, dressmaker and shoe repair shops; are there others who repair items? We suggest that you do an audit of those who repair things – bicycle repairs, furniture restorers, lawn mower repairs and servicing, dressmakers, electrical repairs, etc. – the list is endless. Put their details on your website as this is invaluable information for new residents to your town and indeed existing residents will also be grateful. Do any of the local business accept packaging?

Have many residents got water butts? These are audits which you should undertake. We know of one community who buy water butts from a wholesaler and then sell them to residents making a small profit which adds to their annual finances. We are delighted to know that the number of coffee shops promoting Conscious Cup Campaign has increased. Also find out if the retail outlets and public houses have stopped using plastic straws.

Tidiness and Litter Control / Slachtmhaireacht agus Rialú Bruscair:

We see that you have a designated Tidiness and Litter Control Officer in your committee who has the task of examining the town and seeing areas for improvement. For a town of its size Swords was virtually litter free and any litter we saw had been recently dropped. In addition to being a busy town you also have a number of festivals which brings with them litter and untidiness – so your Tidiness and Litter Control Officer is kept busy. Getting the support of the Community College on your annual Spring Clean is excellent as it will encourage your youth to be pro active in terms of a clean environment. We note your Billy Goat and wish you well with your purchase. We see that you pay attention to new graffiti reporting it to FCC who act quickly to have it removed. Rivers are often a source where litter gets washed down from other areas and we see that you organised a clean up of a section of the river from the Schoolhouse and through the Town Park. Street signs and poles in a number of locations were quite dirty and needed washing and some poles need repainting. Could the litter bin in the centre of the pedestrian area beside the Fáilte sculpture be moved to one side? It detracts from what is a very pleasant area. There is a lot of clutter on the pavements along the main streets which must make this difficult for someone visually impaired and also for anyone using a buggy. Some business premises had inordinate amounts of signage which is clutter and untidy. Perhaps approach these and see if you can come to some solution to remove/redesign the signs. We noted quite a few bikes chained to railings along Main Street and we feel that additional bike racks are needed here.

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

You have a few residential streets in your town and these consist primarily of detached or semi-detached houses, some with front gardens, which were well kept. Along Main Street there are a few single storey houses and we loved the terrace of two storey house with pebble dash and brick window and door surrounds. We see that you have a Tidy Estates Competition which is sponsored. We are delighted that you were pleased with the results and commitment for the estates who entered. Getting fifteen estates to enter in the first year is excellent and we are guessing that more have entered this year in May. Within the residential estates we found that most householders took good care of their property and, generally, had well maintained gardens with an array of colourful flowers, shrubs and trees. We admired Highfields, Glen Ellan, Carlton Court, Ridgewood, Ballintrane Woods to name but a few but truthfully the residents of all estates we visited are working hard to make their areas presentable. In some gardens we found some specimen trees which gave addition drama to the garden. The open spaces within the estates were also well maintained with neatly trimmed grass and healthy trees and shrubs. Some of the floral arrangements in the communal open spaces were stunning and the resident associations are working hard to keep up this high standard. Unfortunately, some residents had used chemicals to control weed growth which was a pity. When we visited, we came upon a group of residents in one estate who were weeding shrub beds and trimming the edges of the open space.

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

The entrance road to Swords from Dublin (R132) has footpaths on both sides separated by grass margins making it a safe place for the pedestrian. We admired the high standard of planting of FCC on the roundabouts and areas around the roundabout on this road. We particularly loved the grasses which swayed gently in the breeze. The new DAA sponsored area with its railway sleepers with messages – respect, diversity, pride, inclusiveness etc. – is very pleasant and we loved the planting behind which will in time mature nicely. We were happy to see that you did not plant in front of these uprights/sleepers. Road surfaces on Main Street have been neatly repaired on many occasions and, although not very pretty to look at, the surface was acceptable. Road marking were worn /non-existent in some parts of the street. We were delighted to see that footpaths were wide as when we visited the Main Street was extremely busy with workers and shoppers busily going about their business. There are quite a few laneways connecting the back lands to the Main Street which are shared spaces – we congratulate FCC on this approach. We mentioned before the tree roots breaking through the footpaths – this is something FCC will have to address shortly. The Pinnock Hill sculpture is also quite stunning and we noted that an Oak tree had been planted in the centre of this roundabout.

Concluding Remarks:

It was interesting to revisit Swords as nowadays we all bypass your community unless we have business to attend to in the town.

A suggestion on filling up the form and producing the map(s). In the application form, please number the projects as, New N1, N2, N3.... Maintained M1, M2, M3 and Future Projects FP1, FP2, FP3 and please number yours projects consecutively in the application form. These numbers can then be transferred onto the map(s) so that the adjudicators can locate the projects and see your hard work. Needless to say, attendance at seminars etc will not be transferred onto your map(s).

Thank you for entering the SuperValu TidyTowns 2019 competition and we commend you on your work to date.