

Tidy Towns Competition 2024

Adjudication Report

Centre: **Skerries - Na Sceiri** Ref: **178**
County: **Dublin** Mark: **381**
Category: **F** Date(s): **04/07/2024**
24/07/2024

	Maximum Mark	Mark Awarded 2023	Mark Awarded 2024
Community – Your Planning and Involvement	80	55	57
Streetscape & Public Places	80	46	48
Green Spaces and Landscaping	80	49	51
Nature and Biodiversity in your Locality	55	48	50
Sustainability – Doing more with less	55	29	31
Tidiness and Litter Control	90	66	67
Residential Streets & Housing Areas	55	36	38
Approach Roads, Streets & Lanes	55	38	39
TOTAL MARK	550	367	381

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

“Fáilte chuig Comórtas Na mBailte Slachtmhara SuperValu don bhliain 2024. Táimid buíoch daoibh as ucht na hiontrála a chur chugainn, agus guimíd gach rath ar bhúr gcuid oibre amach anseo. Adh Mór...”

Welcome to your 65th Tidy Towns competition and thank you for your detailed, informative and project packed entry form, together with a clear and easy to follow map, comprehensive three-year plan and your letter with feedback on last year's report.

The 2030 agenda for sustainable development “Transforming our World” has as its centrepiece the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) which reflect economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development. Many of these goals are aligned to the different Tidy Towns categories. Thank you for noting the specific goals that align to the projects in your entry form. It is important for Tidy Towns committees to have a clear vision of the aims of their projects in the context of the SDG's and clear that Skerries Tidy Towns have grasped the concept and clearly understood the need for the SDG's.

Your hardworking committee of 13 is supported by many volunteers and appears to be as inclusive as it possibly can. Congratulations on being noted as the top town in the country with a population of 10,000 for volunteering. This is testament to the excellent co-ordination and organisational requirements that you have in place and which take time and dedication to manage.

There can be no agency, business or resident unaware of the Tidy Towns and the work that they do and clearly you have earned their support. Well done for engaging with experts in every field within your community – this undoubtedly helps to ensure you manage your projects using the best possible advice and expertise.

Your communication methods cover the usual range including email, WhatsApp, local newspaper, email bulletins and social media. The Facebook page is informative and updated very regularly which is refreshing to see.

Engagement with schools and youth groups is also comprehensive and the resulting projects and work collaboration are excellent. It would be good to know a little more about the environmental projects the schools undertake on your behalf as well as any projects undertaken by the schools themselves which cross over with the aims of the Tidy Towns group.

Your key project this year was the development of a Biodiversity Corridor and this will be addressed under the relevant category.

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

Having not visited Skerries for a few years, this adjudicator spent quite some time walking the streets, admiring the improvements, changes, projects and developments that have taken place in the intervening years and suffice to say, it was a wonderful, uplifting experience. Skerries has taken huge strides in every way and is now a town with a wealth of sustainable and biodiverse rich projects in place that can only serve to improve and enhance the quality of life for the community and for nature in general.

There were so many lovely shop fronts that impressed it is almost unfair to single out any in particular but nevertheless some particularly spectacular were Art Angel, Storm in a Teacup, The Bubble Room, Olive Café and Deli, Shankey for Men and LA Bakery.

Your annual competition for best visual display, business etc is possibly a contributory factor to the overall presentation of the buildings in Skerries but credit must go to the owners who have put their best forward. The results were a delight.

The streetscapes throughout were so pleasing with well-kept commercial buildings, beautifully maintained residential houses with spectacular floral displays and without doubt one of the best presented Garda stations this adjudicator has come across.

The variety of signposts were a puzzle – some yellow (Weldon's Lane), some blue (Little Strand Street), some traditional. Perhaps there is a reason for the variety but if so, it would be good to know what this is. Your survey of street and lane nameplates in need of refurbishment may clarify in due course.

The redevelopment of the library will be a wonderful focal point in Skerries and the work was in full swing on adjudication day.

St. Patrick's Church of Ireland church was visited and found to be very well kept but one wonders if some of the grass could be left uncut to attract wildlife and increase biodiversity value here. The single most effective and low cost action to support a vital biodiversity eco-system service is to reduce mowing of grass and cutting of hedgerows.

Green Spaces and Landscaping / Spásanna Glasa agus Tírdhreachú:

This is a category that has been expanding and developing in Skerries for a number of years and you are beginning to see the fruits of your labour. There are many areas that have been planted with pollinator friendly plants, new trees and native hedgerows and the treatment of these is excellent and contributes very favourably to a rich biodiverse environment.

Floraville is a fantastic space that was very much in use by families when viewed. It is safe and beautifully designed. The planting at the back might need a little upgrading and this may be part of the overall plan when the library development is complete.

The new planting schemes in the medians of The Mill with the replaced trees looked very well. Everywhere one looked, there was a suitable planting scheme: a boat at Moorings cove with perennial planting; in corners at the railway station; planting in general at The Mill and so many more that contribute enormously to overall visual effectiveness.

The continued identification of sites and planting of fruit trees for Open Orchards is excellent. With 10 locations and 163 trees planted, have you considered the suggestion of a previous adjudicator to have a harvest festival or jam-making workshops?

Cut outs of birds were spied in the trees on Strand Street. Perhaps a previous project but one wonders. A couple of trees on Strand Street have succumbed and should now be replaced.

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

Your main project this year has been the development of a Biodiversity Corridor linking all the areas of the town to provide safe passage for wildlife. The value of the creation of such corridors, once a given in rural Ireland and small towns, cannot be overestimated as they help to create pollinator-friendly corridors, foraging pitstops and safe shelter areas for all pollinators. Corridors are the key to the conservation of our natural world. Connected, protected, and conserved areas are stronger, and corridors are a major component in successfully fighting fragmentation and strengthening biodiversity.

Whilst originally developed to support the Large Carder Bee, your distribution of hundreds of plants to many households in targeted areas of Skerries will help to support all wildlife and provide greater chances of survival for many species. Well done for your continued work in this area and we hope that you will continue to develop the plan throughout all areas in the town.

Given your myriad projects in this category and the many sightings of swifts, bees, bats and other wildlife, have you considered carrying out a complete habitat survey? Habitat mapping can help inform decision making in a number of areas including planning, climate change mitigation and conservation of nature and as such is an important first step in understanding the habitat around us and what we need to protect them and to identify any gaps in linkages of habitat. The Heritage Council provide excellent information in their Conserving and Enhancing Wildlife in Towns and Villages. Local school children might be interested in getting involved to make this a project that all residents can contribute to.

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

This category is a strong one for Skerries and the Sustainable Skerries group, one of your sister committees, is already working very hard to raise awareness, encourage sustainable habits and practices both on an individual level and as a community. The many initiatives undertaken are highly commendable and too numerous to mention individually.

Given your vast amount of work already in place in this category, it would be important to try and quantify the successes and results of your initiatives. Could you carry out some research and publish the results to raise awareness in the community? The first step would be to put some figures in terms of saving, diversion from general waste streams and increased recycling figures as a result of your projects. Once some base figures are established, then the aim would be to increase the amount of reductions, reduce the general waste and estimate the savings in terms of costs, labour and environmental damage.

It is often recommended that this category should be divided into the four headings of waste, water, energy and food to help Tidy Towns Committees to break down the projects and methods already in use that are sustainable. This

you have done to some degree but more delineated headings would be useful at this standard. You already know that 98% of participants in a recent survey are frustrated with the quantity of plastic waste entering their homes. How can this be reduced? Can you encourage the community to avoid buying any goods wrapped in plastic, to leave the plastic behind when shopping if possible and track subsequent reductions? You might also consider carrying out a more detailed household survey, perhaps with the help of your TY volunteers. Ask how many households use a home composter; a keep cup; dispose of batteries in the correct way; turn off the tap when brushing teeth; take a shower instead of a bath; water the garden with grey water from the kitchen; keep a jug of cold water in the fridge instead of running the tap unnecessarily; use a water butt; what fuel they use for home heating; turn down thermostats etc. The results might help to focus on the areas that residents most need support in.

The Circular Economy is a comprehensive change from the take-make-waste way toward reducing, reusing, and recycling everything involved in our lifestyles. These small steps will all contribute towards bringing society back to living well within Earth's carrying capacity.

Tidiness and Litter Control / Slachtmhaireacht agus Rialú Bruscair:

In this category, your teamwork amongst all the various clubs, associations and groups has clearly proven effective in every area. The town was looking resplendent, litter was not seen and more importantly, there was an air of tidiness and care that comes only with consistent attention to detail. Some very minor areas were noted on adjudication day.

Some streets signs, particularly the older ones were in need of a refresh. Brookville Lane was one such sign. Your recent survey submitted to Fingal County Council will no doubt have highlighted this.

At the end of Brookville Lane is a redundant wooden notice board against the wall which is out of place. It should be used for some purpose or removed.

One area that could do with some work is Holmpatrick Graveyard. This was slightly disappointing in that there were areas of rubbish dumped, mounds of prunings at the side of the graveyard and various other detritus strewn. The notice board in the Church of Ireland church could be put to good use and tidied up a little.

A green litter bin at the exit of the Red Island car park was also looking the worse for wear.

On the inside pillar of the entrance to The Mill, a redundant metal container is ugly looking and should be removed from the pillar.

Recycling bins and bring banks were in good order, clean and tidy. The train station was looking spic and span and public toilets were open and clean.

The stream water was remarkably clean and devoid of litter which is quite a feat for a busy, windy town. Your awareness campaign regarding vape recycling is a timely and important initiative and will hopefully encourage users to think before dumping.

In general, everything just looked to be in good condition and well cared for. The benches along the sea front were clean, and the little bears on the armrest were very sweet. Bollards, litter bins, lampposts, all were visibly clean and fresh and it made such a difference to the visual appeal of the town.

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

As previously mentioned, the annual competitions you hold must be taken very seriously, competition is high and there must be quite a few very dedicated plantspersons in the community if the standard of planting and planters is anything to go by. At every turn was another lovely garden and the patios of every front of house were decorated in an appealing manner with co-ordinated colours and plants chosen for their pollination value as well as their suitability for the location. The support and encouragement of the Tidy Towns group no doubt helps to consolidate these efforts so well done to all.

Housing areas visited included Sherlock Park whose long grass was alive with insects, Churchfield Close with wonderful planting at the entrance, and a lovely seating area, Barnageeragh with lots of new planting in place, Mourne View to see their award-winning greenspaces and Skerries Rock and Seacrest both of which were looking splendid. Without exception all the housing developments and individual residences were extremely well presented. One could argue that there is still opportunity to allow more green areas to grow wild to increase biodiversity value. Could you involve residents in the design of areas of wildflower meadows on amenity grasslands? Sections can be left to grow in the middle of amenity grassland, or everything left to grow with a path mown through it which often gives children a great sense of fun of adventure when running through them.

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

The village signs and planting at the North Strand approach is very effective and well planted. The children crossing sign here is very faded.

Arrival from the R127 one arrives at a very lovely roundabout well planted with appropriate seaside shrubs and trees. The yellow carpet roses at the edge of the road were in full flower and looking lovely.

Your many projects in this category include the resurfacing of pedestrian paths and roads, extra parking spaces at Strand Street and additional hire bicycles at various locations. All help to contribute to a well-maintained town. It is great news to see that a beach wheelchair is now available for access to the beach and would be good for this information to be shared widely.

The new extended footpath around the hockey pitch is an added amenity and will no doubt get a lot of use as will the new benches installed around the pitch.

The work of the residents in the housing developments has helped to improve the footpaths around each area and the treatment of the grass verges and hedgerows on the approach roads is entirely appropriate.

Concluding Remarks:

Skerries was a delight to visit and it is heartening to see the sympathetic and informed work that has been carried out in the interests of aiding biodiversity and improving the town for residents and visitors year on year. It is no doubt a great place to live and you are wished well in the Tidy Towns competition and in the future.

Second Round Adjudication:

It was a treat to visit Skerries, a place I know since my childhood. Having the opportunity to take a close look at your numerous successful endeavours across the eight categories provides an impressive picture of restoration and reinvention. What I fondly remember as a holiday location with a reliance on horticultural production has become a beautiful place to live, with all the benefits of a stunning seaside location and access to great local services, shops and amenities. There is great community pride in evidence and your high rankings in the Tidy Towns Competition is well deserved. To avoid duplication, I will restrict my comments to a few additional observations offered for your consideration.

There is great granularity in your 3-year plan well grouped under the 8 categories. Many items are “ongoing”, and some are “achieved”. Would you consider assigning new and ongoing projects to a committee member and/or a group of volunteers with suggested completion and reporting dates? It may help you to maintain focus on your ambitious plans. You could also differentiate those projects that require the collaboration or leadership of another organisation. The Kybe Pond is referenced in your cover letter and again in the main body of your application. I was delighted to hear about the engagement of a local ecologist. The pond is a unique habitat, and it was a pleasure to investigate it up close. Keep a close eye on invasives such as Himalayan Balsam. It has found its way to your pond which is unsurprising as it is growing rampantly across the country and close to many rivers. The pink flowers are deceptively attractive, but it is fast to colonise water courses and riverbanks. It will shade out all other plants in its vicinity.

It is wonderful to hear about your time spent in Guichen, Brittany. While it is not located on the coast it has a similar population and much to admire. Sharing lessons and finding inspiration for new initiatives is a powerful way to further enhance Skerries. And I am sure that fun was had, and your motivational batteries were recharged. Your collaboration extends from local level to Fingal to national and international – a sure fast way to benchmark and excel at the highest levels.

Local school children appear to be highly engaged across all areas of sustainability with numerous initiatives; walking, busing, cycling, scooting, recycling, water bottles, using washable hand towels from home, etc. St Patrick's now have their 10th Green Flag and it suggests that new nature-friendly attitudes are becoming embedded in the community. When it is easy to lose hope on climate change and biodiversity support every positive action that empowers young people to take some control and make a difference builds confidence and determination to 'be the change' that is required. It is great to read about the progress on the Fingal Coastal Way and the planned LAWPRO project. Extreme weather events such as heavy rainfalls are particularly damaging for coastal communities such as yours as the negative impact on sea water quality can be immediate and life-threatening. This project could be very instructive with lessons that can be shared with similar communities around the country.

The new surfacing and planting at the Mills car park are impressive. It is good to see the move away from a blight-ridden Buxus hedging to Euonymus hedging. The maintenance of formal planting schemes such as these will be challenging in this environment, but it looks very sharp in its infancy. Your list of biodiversity support actions is very impressive. Most interesting is the level of specialisation and in depth learning about different species e.g. the three species of bats, Pipistrelle, Soprano Pipistrelle and Leisler. These include our largest species and our two smallest species. Similarly, the focus on the Carder bee and the constantly changing wildflower species growing at the tennis court. This level of identification and understanding stimulates greater interest and care, making it easier to rationalise the lifestyle changes that are necessary to sustain life on the planet. Likewise, the gifting of pollinator friendly plants to residents along your pollinator corridor is sure to inspire them to be more mindful of all their interactions with gardens and green spaces – use of chemical sprays, peat-free growing media, water conservation, etc. The Household Recycling Bin Survey and the data on compostable and recyclable cups make for grim reading. Evidently, we still have a long way to go before we fully get to grips with packaging waste reduction and segregation. Your wide-ranging approach and action plans are excellent. The first round adjudicator provided a number of suggestions on measurement of your success which I will not repeat

Regarding litter and tidiness, this adjudicator had a similar experience to the first adjudicator. Skerries was spotlessly clean on the day of my visit. Congratulations to the many groups for their diligence. It is a repetitive and thankless job. It really is a credit to you all. Other than a small shipping container in the train station that needs a coat of paint there were no eyesores nor obviously neglected buildings to cause offence. I also commend you on your commitment to hand weeding kerbs. In some places where weeds were reaching two feet high (in old money) it appeared that rapid summer growth was making it hard for volunteers to keep on top. A mechanical solution would assist in some locations.

Skerries Mills is a great visit with interesting artefacts, a well curated retail offering and an excellent restaurant buzzing with activity. The Cathaoirleach's plaque dating back to 1999 is a little weather-worn and the Perspex screens are showing their age. That said, these small issues do not in any way detract from the excellent restoration job and the colourful community garden. I really enjoyed the information on bees, willow, the Murphys and the bug ball is great fun.

I have little to add on residential areas and approach roads other than praise for all the work. Your competitions are working well and Barnageeragh is indeed a delight with its American style open plan front gardens. The Hollyhocks at Mourne View are lovely. The newly planted trees in the estate behind Realt na Mara are a good addition, Sherlock Terrace has lovely cottages and gardens. The tall ugly wall at the entrance to Mill Hill Park could be addressed, Shenick has great trees, but the entrance sign needs attention. Your roundabout with the stacked stones is one of my favourites in the country. It must be a challenge to maintain but well worth the effort. It creates

high expectations that are met with aplomb.

Concluding remarks

I really enjoyed my visit to Skerries. It brought back fond memories of fishing for mackerel with my late father on the pier in the 1960s. It was a joy to spend time out on Red Island, vehicular access and egress is superbly controlled, and the sculptural pieces are fabulous. The tactile Braille handrail is very special. I left there humming the Percy French classic. I look forward to a future visit to see the Red Barn with its rain garden landscape. The Carnegie Library is a stunning cut limestone building and the new paving to the front appears to be top end; yet another reason to visit. You have achieved so much over the 65 years, and you have exciting plans to do a lot more. Best of luck in all your endeavours and well done on your excellent entry in 2024.