

Tidy Towns Competition 2019

Adjudication Report

Centre: Rathmullan - Ráth Maoláin	Ref: 906
County: Donegal	Mark: 271
Category: B	Date(s): 15/07/2019

	Maximum Mark	Mark Awarded 2018	Mark Awarded 2019
Community – Your Planning and Involvement	60	38	40
Streetscape & Public Places	60	37	38
Green Spaces and Landscaping	60	37	39
Nature and Biodiversity in your Locality	50	20	22
Sustainability – Doing more with less	50	13	15
Tidiness and Litter Control	90	51	53
Residential Streets & Housing Areas	50	30	31
Approach Roads, Streets & Lanes	50	30	33
TOTAL MARK	470	256	271

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

Cuireann an moltóir fáilte roimh Rathmullan (Rath Maolain) pairt a ghlacadh i gComórtas Náisiúnta Supervalu na mBailte Slachtmhara 2019. The level of community participation in Rathmullan is impressively high with up to 22 volunteers helping out your ambitious committee of 15 members. This is the significant level of involvement for a village of your size. We are also pleased to see that community groups are particularly active in Rathmullan with the Historical Society, the Sailing Club, Donegal Community Gardens, the Clean Coasts Group, the RA Radicals and a School Green Group all helping out with your projects. We note from the 2018 adjudicator's report that you had previously collaborated with the coastal Warriors from Letterkenny and we wondered if they were still involved? Why not approach sports clubs like the GAA and the active retired to see if they would be interested in assisting you? We were surprised to see that Donegal County Council are not referred to in your application form but we assume that they also provide you with support. Consider also approaching Tus / the Community Employment Scheme, DLDC and the Local Authorities Water and Communities Office (if you have not already done so) as they may be able to provide you with advice, funding and other resources. It is clear from your entry form that businesses in Rathmullan are firmly behind your efforts with the Beachcomber, Rathmullan House Hotel, An Bonnan Bui, Belles Kitchen, Eco-adventures, the White Hart and Pattan Butchers all making sponsorship and support available to you. The advice and resources provided by Irish Seed Savers, Donegal Changemakers, Alcorns Nursery and Ballaghderg Nursery are also acknowledged. Your communication strategy is noted and we are pleased to see that it is based on a good range of communication methods that does not include printed newsletters, leaflets and flyers – your high level of participation also demonstrates that it is working very well so we urge you to keep it up. You are commended on establishing good links with the School and for involving the schoolchildren on projects like beach cleanups and your awareness raising anti-litter poster competition. We are delighted to read that you intend to strengthen these links by developing joint projects with the schoolchildren and teachers over the next few years. It is strongly recommended that the school are invited to take part in some of your actions under the green space and landscaping, nature and biodiversity and sustainability categories. Many of these can make excellent school projects and the schools are normally willing to get involved as they as these areas form part of the Green Schools Curriculum. Thank you for your completed application form, photographs and map as they were useful during our visit. Could a scaled map be included next year? We were interested to read your tidy towns plan and it includes a good range of projects under the sustainability category. However, while all of these projects are commended, we encourage you to review the plan in partnership with the other community groups and the school in the coming year. The review should focus on including projects under each of the tidy towns categories to ensure that you take a balanced approach to the competition. You could ask each community group (as well as residents) and the schools to suggest projects for Rathmullan that they would like to see completed. This process could also be used to identify the priority projects that should be completed.

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

The picturesque village of Rathmullan looked exceptionally well on a sunny July afternoon. It was not surprising to see so many people either on or heading for the beach during our visit. While the neatly maintained coastal areas, magnificent beach and pier were key attractions, the shops, bars, hotels and restaurants were also in demand. We are pleased to see that commercial premises looked particularly well and many appear to be exceptionally well maintained and in good condition. A number stood out and they include; the White Hart with its gleaming white paint, An Bonnan Bui nearby and the Pharmacy while the modern eye-catching design of Belles Kitchen and the mural at Peadar Macs drew positive attention. The Beachcomber deserves praise for its neat appearance as does the Post Office, Big Paddys and Pattens. The An Stad Café / Restaurant looked bright and fresh and this appears to be a good reuse of what appears to be a former garage. The Waters Edge Restaurant and Bar was spotted at the entrance to Rathmullan and we wondered if there are any plans to reopen this? Your village is fortunate to have retained so many of its original buildings and it is great to see that they receive regular care and maintenance. St Josephs Church looked smart and it could be further improved by painting and repairing its cast-iron pedestrian gates. The St Columbs Church of Ireland appeared to have just been painted for the occasion and we admired the natural stone Presbyterian Church on Pier Road. Rathmullan House stands out and we are pleased to see that the large house at the entrance from Chapel Road was under repair with scaffolding visible. The coastguard station (with its Garda crest) was also admired. It was a pleasure to visit the wonderful Abbey and we are pleased to hear that phase 2 of its restoration project has funding in place and we look forward to seeing this completed in the years ahead. Praise is also due to everyone involved in the maintenance of community and public buildings with the St Josephs National School looking particularly well with its marine themed murals visible. The Rathmullan District resource centre and the Ozanam social activity centre (which includes the St Vincent DePaul thrift shop) both looked well maintained. The HSE clinic on Pier road was in reasonable condition but its entrance gate was in need of fresh paint. Elsewhere, what appears to be the pump house (on Pound Street) is in need of some freshening up. Well done on completing an advent window display at Christmas and we note that local residents all decorated their windows during the Advent period. It is further noted that it is proposed to paint the derelict Kerrs Bay Cottages and the Pound Street house. The improvement works that have been undertaken to public spaces are also appreciated. The signage to improve wayfinding and local points of interest was appreciated and we enjoyed reading the information boards on local flora, fauna, heritage sites and general information on Rathmullan. The Flight of Earls sign that was visible from the car park of the Waters Edge Restaurant and bar was particularly informative. A metal lecturn was spotted on the green area outside the resource centre but no sign was included in it. Is this a work in progress? It is further noted that some projects are proposed for public spaces and they include; the planting of a memorial tree for Mally Stanford and a plaque to highlight the house where Cathal McGarbhagh was born.

Green Spaces and Landscaping / Spásanna Glasa agus Tírdhreachú:

A range of attractive floral displays were visible in Rathmullan during adjudication. The landscaped bed at the base of the Rathmullan name sign on the Letterkenny approach road looks nice and the planted red boat with its summer flowering plants could also be seen here. The colourful gravel-based planted bed at the picnic area opposite Pattens butchers looked really well and the raised natural stone planters outside the resource centre looked bright and colourful. We were surprised to see that a permanent bed on a raised bank opposite Kerrs cottages seemed to have no landscaping in it and we wondered if this project has just been started? We also wondered if this was the battery flowerbed? We are pleased to see that your committee have been engaging in treeplanting with some new trees spotted on the road verge outside the Resource Centre. We are most impressed with the high quality planting schemes that were visible in the grounds of St Josephs National School and also at St Josephs Church. It is great to see that your planting schemes for 2019 have a strong emphasis on pollinator friendly varieties. The provision of flowerbeds at the Resource Centre with pollinator friendly summer flowering plants is applauded and we recommend that you identify additional locations for pollinator friendly plants. The landscaping of the red boat, village sign and battery flowerbeds is also acknowledged while the raised planted beds with seasonal flowering plants at Maolin Park were appreciated. Why not talk to the holiday home residents who maintain the Maolin Park beds to plant a mix of seasonal and pollination friendly plant varieties? We are pleased to see that your committee is engaging in pollinator planting by selecting 4 areas to sow with locally sourced seed and seed from Irish Seed Savers. We were interested to read about your proposed pollinator project that involves providing donated herb boxes throughout Rathmullan (with donated compost and herbs) and while it is considered to be good initiative, we wondered if permanent beds could be provided for this purpose as they tend to require less maintenance? You are commended on identifying future pollinator projects that involves selecting suitable areas to improve as a habitat for pollinators. We look forward to hearing further details on this in the years ahead.

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

Rathmullan has a wealth of habitats and important natural heritage areas. With the wildlife reserve on the Letterkenny road, your coastal and marine environment and the most impressive bat walk – your village seems to have it all. We note that information boards on flora and fauna have been provided in Rathmullan but we were unable to locate them. Can you provide directions to them next year? While the sign stand was in place outside the Resource Centre, the sign was not present. It is a work in progress? We are very pleased to read in your entry form that your committee continues to do excellent work on implementing the All Ireland Pollinator Plan in Rathmullan. Well done on joining the All Ireland Pollinator Group and for logging your activities on the website. We note that several actions to benefit pollinators are now underway in your village and we would be interested to hear the results of these projects to date. Why not ask the schoolchildren to undertake a survey of an area where pollinator planting has taken place? This could involve carrying out simple exercises like bee and butterfly counts on a regular basis. Full directions on the correct way to do this can be found on the www.pollinators.ie website. Be sure to get them to record the results as this will enable you to compare findings from month to month or year to year. You are

also encouraged to map your pollinator projects as this will help you to ascertain whether the pollination 'patches' are concentrated or suitably dispersed. You should also try and think of ways to link these pollination zones. This can be achieved by allowing grassed strips along road margins to go uncut and the resulting wildflowers, dandelions and buttercups provide rich sources of food for pollinators. Don't forget that quite simple actions can deliver considerable benefits. The six-week meadow (where grasses are allowed to grow for a period of six weeks) should be considered for sections of green spaces and amenity areas. Well done on identifying earth banks and dry stone walls that are being used for solitary bee nesting and using signage to indicate these. Providing sandbanks and drilling small holes in wooden fence posts will also encourage bees to nest. We were pleased to see that there are plenty of pollinator areas throughout the town and we would encourage you to place 'managed for wildlife' signs on them as a way of raising awareness. You are also commended on the numerous awareness raising events that you have run. Noting the suggestion of the adjudicator in 2018, we wondered if any thought has been given to providing a community noticeboard that could be used to advertise these events? It is great to see that you are encouraging residents in Rathmullan to avoid using pesticides as they can be harmful to pollinators and other wildlife. Well done on participating in world Curlew day and for raising the issue of marine plastic pollution. We note with interest that 3 members of your committee are participating in a bee, bird and spring flower monitoring exercise with the National biodiversity centre and we would like to hear more details on this in 2020. We were particularly interested to read about your proposal to provide a protected walkway within the dunes along the coastline of your village and we would welcome further details on this next year. Perhaps the Regional Officer for the Local Authorities and Water Communities Office (LAWCO) could help you with this project?

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

Your entry form and your 3 to 5 year plan demonstrate that you have given considerable thought to projects under this category and we are delighted to see that many of these are now underway. We were interested to see that you are engaged in a broad range of projects from promoting the local thrift shop, to avoiding plastic packaging in school lunches and promoting sustainable transport (by providing a bike rack in the school). We applaud all of these efforts and it is very likely that they are making a positive difference and that they are helping your community to prevent waste and sustainably use resources. However, we are particularly interested in finding out what difference they are making so we would appreciate if your focus in this category could switch to monitoring the effects of the projects that you have implemented. In other words, we would like to know how effective these projects are in Rathmullan. This could be achieved by recording the results of your different initiatives. For example, could the school work out what percentage of pupils avoid single use plastic in their lunch boxes? Now that the bike racks are in place, what percentage of students are cycling to school? What percentage of students are walking to school or taking the journey by bus? The answers to these questions will help you to work out if your laudable projects are leading to behaviour change. We note from your plan that your committee is engaging in actions to prevent the amount of waste that it generates by making your own compost and using donated plants for your landscaping schemes (such as the herb boxes). These are particularly good projects and we urge you to keep them up. Why not set targets for your committee to avoid the need for shop bought fertilisers in favour of your own home-made compost? Similarly, aim to only use harvested rainwater in your plant maintenance schemes. Once again, adhering to these targets will lead to the adoption of sustainable practices in Rathmullan. Your future projects in this category are also commended – they include providing a local library from donated books, installing a beach toy library in the summer and researching the development of a clothes swap network and a community composting area. We would appreciate updates on these projects in 2020.

Tidiness and Litter Control / Slachtmhaireacht agus Rialú Bruscair:

Despite the large numbers of people who were visiting your village and beach during adjudication, we were delighted to find that litter remained scarce and aside from isolated items like empty drinks bottles, cans and cigarette packs to be seen in the vicinity of the beach, your village was particularly clean. This is a very good result and it leads us to believe that your determined approach to eliminate litter is working. It is great to see that your cleanups extend beyond the village and to the beach. Well done also to the Coastal Warriors from Letterkenny who provide volunteers for this purpose. Your approach of posting before and after photos of your cleanups is commended and it seems clear that this is having a positive effect on reducing litter. Consider also counting the amount of bags collected as a means of monitoring whether the amount of litter is rising or falling over time. If the number of bags is declining, then your approach is working and behaviour is changing with people dropping less litter. However, if the number of bags is rising then a new approach may be needed to halt this negative trend. It was obvious that considerable attention has been paid to weed control along paths and roadsides as most areas appeared very neat and tidy. The standard of presentation of signage was also high. A small number of improvements are possible. The Stop sign pole just up from the Post Office was in poor condition and headless sign poles could be spotted at the Church of Ireland, opposite the derelict houses at Kerrs Cottages and just up from the entrance to the Ozanam Centre. A very untidy litter bin and car park barrier looked out of place in the Church grounds and an old water pump on the shore front needed attention. Predictably (given the hot weather), the bring bank was becoming overwhelmed with some of the glass bins overflowing and boxes of glass bottles been left to its side. Can more regular collections be organised with the bring bank operator for the summer months? Your entry form indicates that you have also been busy with projects under this category for this year. The provision of two large bins at the pier for fishing boats is commended and the continuation of the school litter poster competition on marine litter is acknowledged. It is noted that plastic only bins are provided on busy days in the car park but we were unable to spot them given the large numbers of people and cars. The projects that are proposed under this category are acknowledged. The provision of a compactor bin at the playground is welcomed and we wondered if it will be solar powered?

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

This is a strong category for your committee as many of your traditional style terraces of buildings (such as Kerrs cottages) looked particularly well and residential areas like Maolin Park impressed with the entrance landscaping and neat green areas. Cosan na nIarlai to the rear of the Ozanam centre also looked well with its trees and clipped amenity areas. The work that is undertaken by the Community Employment Scheme on public green spaces to achieve these high standards is appreciated. We were pleased to read that you propose to reduce mowing and strimming in a number of locations and we would welcome further details on this next year. As stated in the nature and biodiversity section, it is recommended that temporary meadows should be provided to support or to link the existing pollination 'zones' in your village. Perhaps some of the extensive areas at Clearwaters could be considered for that purpose? Well done to local volunteers for maintaining the children's playground as it looked clean and tidy during our visit (as well as very busy!). The siting of 33 bilingual town and stones in and around Rathmullan was appreciated as they are an interesting and attractive addition to your village. We agree heartily with your statement that residents take great pride in the appearance of their houses and gardens as this was clearly demonstrated during adjudication. Well done and keep up the good work!

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

The standard of approach roads is generally good with good quality road surfacing, neat signage and tended grass margins to be seen on the entrance from Letterkenny. The entrance from Kerrykeel was similarly impressive but the black and white village name sign close to the Ozanam centre is in need of attention. We are pleased to report that unauthorised signage was not visible. Your decision to concentrate all event signage in the village in a single location is applauded. This is an excellent idea and it should (one would think) keep both traders and residents happy. We would welcome feedback on this project next year as it may be a workable and effective option for other tidy towns centres that have to deal with unauthorised and temporary signage. Like the adjudicator in 2018, we heartily approve of providing a beach wheelchair at the White Hart. The resurfacing of the main approach roads in the last 12 months has also improved the appearance of your village. We note from your entry form that funding is now being sought to resurface footpaths and provide new lighting and we wish you every success with this.

Concluding Remarks:

The work undertaken by your committee for this year's competition is most impressive and all of these fine projects are significantly improving Rathmullan as a place to live and visit. Keep up the good work and we look forward to returning in 2020 and seeing further progress.