

Tidy Towns Competition 2023

Adjudication Report

Centre: **Swords - Sord** Ref: **160**
County: **Dublin** Mark: **355**
Category: **H** Date(s): **11/06/2023**

	Maximum Mark	Mark Awarded 2022	Mark Awarded 2023
Community – Your Planning and Involvement	80	51	53
Streetscape & Public Places	80	45	46
Green Spaces and Landscaping	80	45	48
Nature and Biodiversity in your Locality	55	38	41
Sustainability – Doing more with less	55	25	28
Tidiness and Litter Control	90	61	62
Residential Streets & Housing Areas	55	36	39
Approach Roads, Streets & Lanes	55	38	38
TOTAL MARK	550	339	355

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.

Congratulations on having a strong social media presence. For example 4,000 followers on Facebook means you have the ability to reach out and engage with many in your community. Telling others about your work is important so it was great to see so many pictures on-line of your volunteers in action, or seeing signs in Swords with your name at key projects such as at the butterfly mural.

You have a good committee structure with sub-committees to work on themes. If they have not seen it – the TidyTowns handbook is downloadable with chapters now for each separate adjudication theme. It is a handy refresher: <https://www.tidytowns.ie/competition/handbook/>

You have so many activities in which the community can get involved such as archaeological digs, heritage awareness projects, sustainability workshops, parades and all the various activities with schools in Swords. Indeed we are impressed that you can promote and have volunteers at so many of these events. It was lovely to read your entry form outlining your work over the past 12 months as it was just packed full of inspiring projects and activities.

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

We would like to applaud all those involved with the ongoing conservation work of Swords Castle. At the top of the Main Street it is a striking structure. The lovely interpretation boards and surrounding street furniture, are of a modern design that worked well with the medieval building.

Throughout Swords, many other prominent premises looked well such as 'The Lord Mayor's with its thatched roof or 'The Old Borough'. The Swords Youth Service building looked attractive and would entice people to enter down here. Other empty properties were under your guardianship and had windows painted to enhance their appearance.

The window displays of certain shops were very attractive and really caught the eye such as at 'Colour Trend' on the Main Street or 'Cupcakes and Counting' with flowers both indoors and out, matching the external paint. Some commercial premises have used full stickers to block out windows completely and this is not to be encouraged. Outside of opening hours it's important to be able to view window displays which all helps give a sense of place at all times, day or night. As such, Monza Menswear had lovely window displays where we could enjoy window-shopping after hours. Another shop that caught the eye was Hennessy Perozzie LLP.

In contrast, some of the premises closed on a Sunday had external shutters pulled down. While this is not in your remit where possible we would encourage coloured shutters with bright images or internal shutters.

A number of shops and commercial premises on the Main Street had their rubbish bins in front of their premises. It's wondered if commercial bins which are permanently stored at the front of the buildings could be screened discreetly behind some wooden fencing?

Despite it being closed the pedestrian entrance to River Valley Community National School was very enticing with its multicoloured flags planting and cycle parking available.

Green Spaces and Landscaping / Spásanna Glasa agus Tírdhreachú:

There was a high standard of landscaping in Swords. Many well-positioned planters provided wonderful bursts of colour. They were nicely positioned in areas where both pedestrians, and vehicles stopped near traffic lights, could appreciate them. We particularly liked those positioned on top of pedestrian safety railings. Do the people of Swords know that you grow most of these yourselves?

The trees lining the main street of Swords really gives a strong sense of place and frame the views up to the Castle. The nicely painted utility boxes on the main street caught the eye. The rainwater collection butts and the planting on the corner opposite the garda station looked well.

The landscaped flower bed outside Colaiste Choilm was very attractive and were nicely established. Packed with pollinator-friendly flowers and shrubs, many could enjoy this due to its prominent location on The Dublin Road, by the bus-stop. You had corporate help from Kuehne and Nagel, who released staff to work on this landscaping. Perhaps you can share details of the flowers chosen here so others can replicate this elsewhere? Behind the fence, in the school grounds, we noticed that parts of the grass areas being left to grow long. This will again benefit pollinators. Their polytunnel appeared to be used also and hope this has helped educate core message of sustainability such as food miles and grow-it-yourself.

Plaza village was freshly painted and had raised planters located here providing a nice edge to the seating area. Perhaps some cleverly positioned water butts could capture rainwater in some of the gutter down-pipes here so you can easily keep these planters watered? Elsewhere old equipment and bicycles have been repurposed for planters. Take care if using tyres as they can leach chemicals and micro-plastics. Can the trees at the entrance to the LIDL store in Swords have the support straps removed to prevent the straps actually damaging the growing trees?

There is a lovely landscape bed on River Valley Road opposite the junction to River Valley Park which makes the most of this bright white, side-facing wall.

What a great amenity you have at The Ward recreational hub with many different pitches and sports amenities and lovely planting. The car park here is eco-friendly with porous hard standing that facilitates cars parking whilst allowing rainwater to percolate down into the soil. This helps prevent flash flooding and blocked drains.

Your work for this category is excellent. You are ever positive, even when contractors have ruined planting schemes - well done on keeping a watchful eye on this and ensuring they support the restoration of your work.

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

Well done on making a submission to the County Biodiversity Action Plan and the focus on two projects for Swords which include the Ward River and Broadmeadow Estuary. Actions to support populations of salmon, otter, kingfisher, dipper, bats and badger in the park are applauded. Perhaps you can run an awareness campaign alongside this – ask people to submit any pictures they take locally of these species for sharing on your social media? You have your own Local Biodiversity Action Plan (LBAP), and we look forward to seeing the posters made by primary school children about Climate Change and Biodiversity.

Your wildlife mural around the Garda Station looked lovely. Well done on getting this funded by the Dublin Airport Authority. We noted the many leaf cages carefully positioned around Swords to store fallen leaves from which you can make mulch for landscaping. We also admired a posh bug-hotel at the top of the Dublin Road. Insect towers are very good as educational tools but actually what you're doing in the surrounding area with light management and leaving logs and leaves in a corner is really beneficial for insects.

In the car park on Foster Lane there was a nicely painted red brick utility building which could be ideal for putting up some nest boxes such as boxes for house martens.

On the main River Valley Road as you drive up to the Community Centre, we passed many houses and estates with large communal greens. It was lovely to see that a lot of these grass area greens had been allowed to grow longer to benefit wildlife. #NoMowMay.

Scouts have helped Swords Woodland Association with planting 100+ trees this year in Swords. That's impressive.

Overall you are doing great work to raise awareness of the biodiversity of Swords. Finally we loved your multi-functioning poly-tunnel, which is used for planting, painting and even partying!

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

This category is about promoting the circular economy, so it was great to see you host regular swap-shops of clothes and other items. You also have a 'Repair Event' so people in Swords can bring their bikes or clothes for repair. Do you run classes to teach sewing repair skills?

It was still great to see frequent bus services throughout Swords with real-time information provided on the different routes. Do you have good early-morning or late-evening services?

There was a cycle rack near the Garda station, but this was full as were the other bike stands nearby. It is suggested that more cycle parking is provided in the centre of Swords near the Garda Station as it provides a sense of security for bike owners. We really like the separation of the cycle lane all along the River Valley Road and we hope that this encourages more people to cycle, especially to the secondary schools. Have you or the Sports Partnership organized cycling proficiency classes? This would give people young and old the confidence to cycle and promote understanding of the rules of the road?

We loved seeing that the Lidl store in Swords is solar powered and there are EV charging points available. Do many of the community venues in Swords have PV generated power or other energy saving schemes such as the installation of extra insulation or storm porches? Perhaps some initiatives are in development as part of your SEAI Sustainable Energy Community – do let us know.

Overall this was another strong entry, and we cannot mention all of the projects here, but you are commended for the efforts of people in Swords to advance sustainability.

Tidiness and Litter Control / Slachtmhaireacht agus Rialú Bruscair:

You have a lot of litter picking volunteers that follow specific routes. Well done to all for their efforts. Six telephone boxes were noted very close to each other on the Main Street, and they looked old, dilapidated and were attracting graffiti. Whilst these are still in place, they need a very good clean. Overall the Tidy Towns unit endorses your efforts that these should be either removed or at least replaced.

Slightly outside your boundary is a large National Development Plan (NDP) notice for the Swords QBC extension. The statutory display time for this NDP notice has long past and therefore this sign should be removed and recycled so please ask the Council or TII to action this.

The solar powered litter bins looked well and were in use and it was great to see these in place in Swords. On the Dublin Road the post box was a little rusty and the display signage showing collection times etc was quite dirty and smudged and needs to be replaced

Watch out for festive lights remaining on premises all year-round as this is not really appropriate outside of the Christmas season.

On the Dublin Road outside a pizza takeaway premises, commercial bins were stored in a haphazard manner on the pavement and were overflowing and had bags of rubbish on top. If these cannot be stored at the rear of the premises, can they not be stored behind some wooden fencing? They are possibly meant to be stored down an adjacent alley but sadly this was in awful state. It was so bad we asked the shop adjacent who said it was not their alleyway. There was a lot of visible debris on this alleyway and underneath other bins located here. This is an item you should bring up in your regular meetings with the Council's Litter Control Officer. They could liaise with the establishment in question.

The sign outlining how to use the bottle-banks beside the Credit Union needs to be replaced. The bins here were clean but there was litter around this area, and some had been there for a while. It is recommended that this area becomes part of your regular litter picking route and the Council liaises with the recycling company so that when the bins are lifted for emptying, the area can be brushed at the same time. Perhaps you can also place a second clothes bank here because two people approached this area with bags of clothes during your adjudication and took the bags away as the clothing bank was full.

Overall you have strategies to deal with various aspects of litter and untidiness and your photos submitted with your entry clearly demonstrate the great effort you put into this.

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

There was a high presentation of homes in Swords, and we applaud your estate competition which started up again after the Covid stoppage. Do you give prizes for the most wildlife-friendly gardens? Spot prizes could include clip-on bike lights or bird tables. You are proactively reaching out to involve young, disadvantaged and new communities in your work in estates and again this is applauded.

It was lovely to see many homes being renovated and upgraded such as the freshly painted white semi-detached with attractive yellow door at 6 Milton Terrace. Near the centre of the town, Cherry Blossom Cottage was another lovely private home with lovely flowers and hanging baskets.

Bilingual name signs at the entrance to Carlton Court were clean and made for a nice welcome into this street. The raised stone beds at the entrance to Carlton Court were very nicely planted. Well done to the residents here

working together. Homes in Ballinrane Wood looked well and also in Highfield Green. Another lovely bungalow caught the eye freshly painted with nice decorations directly across from the commercial block of shops on Forest Road.

In the longer term, bilingual signage would be good for all residential estates so can this be added to your long-term plan and discussed with the Local Authority.

It is noted that some homes had small fairy lights wrapped around trees - it's important to make sure that these are loosened as trees grow to prevent damage to the trees.

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

Arriving from the M1, it has been many years since your adjudicator was in Swords Village. Since then there has been a lot of development with the shopping complex and ring road, all of which have been nicely integrated around the traditional village core. The Oak sculpture at the head of the Dublin Road looked well with some lovely planting of drought tolerant plants around it. The commercial properties on Forest Road were very neatly presented including the car garage and The Dublin Meat Company.

Pinnock Hill roundabout was being managed for biodiversity. However it is important at the end of the season to remove the long grasses to prevent nutrient build-up. The growth of docks here indicated the roundabout was quite rich in nutrients. On adjudication day the ox-eye daisies looked well, and it might be good to put up a simple sign with an image of a bee to indicate that you are managing this area for wildlife.

Arriving on the R125 from the East there is a lovely welcome sign in a lovely black and gold, with bee-friendly planting here. This makes for a lovely welcome into Swords.

Concluding Remarks:

We would like to applaud the businesses and people of Swords for their hard work advancing the projects of Tidy Towns for the past 12 months. You have done excellent work and submitted a packed entry form with a great programme of works completed – Congratulations.