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|   | Maximum Mark | Mark Awarded 2012 | Mark Awarded 2013 |
| Overall Development Approach | 50 | 46 | 47 |
| The Built Environment | 50 | 38 | 39 |
| Landscaping | 50 | 44 | 45 |
| Wildlife & Natural Amenities | 50 | 38 | 37 |
| Litter Control | 50 | 35 | 37 |
| Sustainable Waste & Resource Management | 20 | 15 | 16 |
| Tidiness | 30 | 22 | 19 |
| Residential Areas | 40 | 27 | 27 |
| Roads, Streets and Back Areas | 50 | 37 | 37 |
| General Impression | 10 | 8 | 9 |
| **Total Mark** | **400** | **310** | **313** |

**Overall Development Approach:**

You are very welcome Birdhill to the 2013 National SuperValu Tidy Towns competition. Firstly we would like to congratulate you on achieving a Gold Medal and the Tipperary North Riding County Award status in the 2012 National SuperValu Tidy Towns Competition! The effort involved does not seem to have left you exhausted - nor does your success seem to have made you complacent. You are approaching your work in a most thorough and professional manner yet again!

This adjudicator would like to make something quite clear from the start. That is, that the village of Birdhill as adjudicated is that area on the map you submitted with the village boundaries as defined by yourselves. We realise that this is what you want us to adjudicate upon, and not just to adjudicate upon the very village centre.

Because Birdhill in such a successful community in the National Tidy Towns annual competition, and because it is an interesting place, this adjudicator read a little about the background to the village. In particular the adjudicator noted the following statement taken from the Birdhill Village Design Statement 2010.

“The Community have strongly highlighted by way of submissions during the public consultation phase, that

Birdhill is more than its village core. Therefore, while the document will generally focus on the natural and

physical environment of the village, the document also recognises that Birdhill is a rural community, with many of

its local residents living in its wider hinterland.”

We consider that this is an important matter in relation to our adjudication.

You are, as you say a rural community, and you value all your residents equally throughout the extended village boundary. It would be very easy for you to solely enter the village core and immediate surrounds, which are in impeccable order, but you have taken on the challenge of including areas outside this, which in turn offer you another challenge because of the extent of the boundary, and the fact that the outer areas still have to catch up on the ‘inner sanctum’ with regard to categories adjudicated in the Tidy Towns competition. We hope that this is appreciated fully by all who live outside of the village core within your own defined boundary, and that they fully

commit to your mission statement as quoted in last year's adjudication report. This inclusiveness speaks volumes for your community. We also note that you explain how you come to this wider linear spatial view of your village on page 39 of entry Part 4 of the framework of the ‘New Era – New Challenges Birdhill Tidy Village Development Plan 2010 to 2014’. Your approach to work including your focus groups, taskforces, work crews, and youth is impressive. Your list of bodies and agencies that have supported you fills a full-page in your entry form. The mixture of public and private agencies and businesses is impressive.

Your communication methods range across the more traditional and the more modern, and you correctly infer that this approach reaches out to all age groups. We eagerly read your website and Facebook page. We wishyou luck in your LivCom entry, and look forward to hearing more about that in due course. We would just like to mention that we hope that your parish newsletter is circulated to any other denominational churches present in your area.

Your engagement with the local school has many aspects. And we congratulate you, the staff, and most especially the children for their interest in so many projects, and especially for their success with their award of a third Green Flag. We saw the lovely photographs of the raising of the flag on your website. On-the-ground we were delighted with the children's work at the Park.

We are happy that you find so many positive things to say about your involvement in the competition

Thank you for your New Era – New Challenges Birdhill Tidy Village Development Plan 2010 to 2014. This is concise, clear and focused. You approach the plan with a two-pronged framework - temporal and spatial. Your temporal plan is clearly charted. Thank you for your village map and for the varied photographs of happy people doing a good job and of the outcome of such work. Your collages of photographs are interesting and informative.

We appreciate the clear way in which in your Entry Form you segregate the projects for the current year from those which are ongoing in an honest fashion. This clarity makes the work of an adjudicator much easier.

**The Built Environment**

A few of the projects which you mention under this category heading have more to do with ‘Landscaping,’ and we consider those projects under that category heading.

Well done on your work to the old Co-op creamery building, as this is a lovely rural vernacular building - of a type which is fast disappearing nationally through neglect and lack of a new use. It would be nice if you could find an appropriate new use for the building, which might guarantee its future, and save you the cost of time and money in annually maintaining it. We see that the building is currently for sale. We admired the old churns outside, a reminder of past times, and a reminder to visitors that this is a rural village. The murals in the window areas were delightful and extremely clean/well presented. We congratulate you on your assistance with work to the old post office. This shows true community care.

We look forward to hearing more about your public art proposal, and we would recommend that you seek the assistance of the County Arts Officer in this regard if you have not already done so.

The railway station is a credit to you, and we are delighted with the work you did there during summer 2012. We admired the lovely old signal box, the shelter by the platform, and the pristine seating and the litter bins, the 2010 commemorative stone plaque, together with the lovely stone walls and planters. The access way to the station is very well looked after. However, we would question the necessity for planters lining the driveway here, as the natural tree cover and vegetation really can stand alone. The lovely double gates are conserved and used.

At the centre of the village we very much admired the three main business premises. We commend the furniture outlet for retaining the character of the building in which it is located. The two public houses looked well. The sculpture at the centre of the village has a beautiful plinth carved in stone with the story in folklore of Birdhill engraved upon it.

We are also delighted with the cúpla focal Gaeilge which you have been using. We would encourage you to use the Irish names for flora and fauna when you are renewing any nature notice boards. We liked the sign “Preserved Area Do not disturb. Is leatsa!” This is an example of where a message can be conveyed in a very positive fashion through the medium of Irish without being ‘instructional!’

We noted some nice iron gates, such as the gate near the central green area/sculpture.

With regard to work carried out at the church - it is not considered to be good practice to power-wash historic stone structures, as it a damages the fabric of the stone. We would recommend that in undertaking work on a building of historic architectural importance you seek professional architectural conservation advice. We would remove the poles and brackets from the church grounds (which appear to have been put there to hold hanging baskets but were empty on adjudication day). This is a rural area and the wonderful fields/trees and hedging are quite a sufficient setting for the church itself. The new flower bed was admired and the information board was read with interest.We noted the primary school extension. A vast unsurfaced rather untidy precinct area detracts

from the Old School building.

**Landscaping**

We are considering the boulder inscription completion (on the Nenagh Road), flower beds, and the Literary Trail under this category, as they more rightly belong here. (You entered these under ‘Built Environment’ on your entry form.)

Firstly we were hugely impressed with your Literary Trail. This is a most imaginative development and includes historical figures as well as literary figures. It makes your woodland path stand out from other woodland paths. It will also encourage people with an interest in literary matters to visit and thereby be exposed to landscape and wildlife and amenity matters - in which they may not already have an interest. We note the local connotations of many of the quotes in the railway garden. Walking through the woodland on adjudication day sunlight dappled through the overhead tree canopy. The wooden bridge is simple and suitable for its environment. The railway garden is an oasis of peace, and we noted that it is a wildlife conservation area with “Meas ar an Dúlra”. The Birdhill railway station environmental project plaque in the garden is very informative.

Páirc an Éin Fhinn /Birdhill Community Park is a delight to visit. Items that we particularly admired included the new semi-circular stone and wood ‘Suiochán an Tóstail erected for the Year of the Gathering. Its design is classically simple and flowing – very suitable for your naturally landscaped park. The very effective use of the stone gabled shed for your landscape plan, together with trellises and climbing plants was visually very pleasing and informative in its detail. The other side of the shed acknowledges the names of all the children who were involved in work at the park. The wooden pergola and picnic area looked most inviting. The grassed walk with

climbing roses is also a lovely feature, as is the herb garden, and we note that many plants were donated by the community. You include some local Twiss family history from landlord days, including the railway crossing gate. We noted the composting area at the boundary of the park. But the piece de resistance for this adjudicator was the Ogham garden with the Irish tree alphabet! In many years adjudicating this adjudicator has not come across such an imaginative park as this entire complex is!

Your landscaping schemes for this year included National Tree Week planting, Spring bulb planting, and summer bedding - ‘Birdhill in Bloom’ planting. Your variety of spring bulb planting sounds delightful and we would have liked to have been there in spring to witness this great display.

We note that you say you carry out hedge trimming during the winter months rather than during the nesting season. This is true generally of your village. Nonetheless we did notice evidence of more recent hedge trimming on the road joining the school road with the N7 (Old School Road), and on the Limerick approach. Your regular maintenance of the roadside verges, mowing of parkland area, and pruning of rose beds shows how diligently you maintain your landscaping projects. We admired the new interpretive sign at the Moon Garden. We loved the white and blue plants chosen for the Moon garden, together with the explanatory poetic circular plaque. The white foxglove and white poppies were resplendent on adjudication day.

We commend you in not putting hanging baskets on your lovely stone railway bridge. You are aware of the conservation issues involved.

At the centre of the village is your green space, containing your modern sculpture, tiered stone seating areas, flagpoles, grass, and your village pump, together with notice boards containing maps for Tipperary North and Birdhill. In this general hard landscaped/paved area we noticed some flower containers made of composite/artificial materials which we feel do an injustice to this area. They are hardly necessary at this point given the amount of greenery and planting existing otherwise. We would suggest that you might donate them to other more needy part of your village.

**Wildlife and Natural Amenities**

You have completed quite a number of significant projects under this category heading in the last year. Well done on your progress here. Your biodiversity plan is brief and informative. We hope it will be a great help to you from here on in, dealing as it does with the various habitat groups within your village boundaries. You also have had some relevant talks from expert speakers earlier this year, and you plan to hold some more in the next two years. We note your Best Practice sheet which relates to best practice ‘across the board’, but also specifically addresses the issue of wildlife and amenities where relevant, under the four headings included. The butterfly bed, scented corner, Cuan na n-Éan and food-rich trees projects are all new. Under the ‘Landscaping’ category

you also describe these new beds installed in the community park specifically to attract butterflies and insects. Well done on this considered planting scheme.

But you have not neglected earlier projects and have replanted the wildflower area and maintained the woodland path and Pollagh trail. We would have loved to have been present on Dawn Chorus Day which has become quite an annual national event.

On our visit to the Pollagh trail we picked up three brochures in the nice metal box which included the ‘Spot the Birds’ brochure. This adjudicator was agreeably surprised to find that this box was in top condition, and nobody had vandalised its contents. Furthermore somebody had taken care to make sure that the brochures were neatly arranged and all available inside the box. So often one finds the reverse situation in such instances. We were delighted with these brochures and will treasure them. The signage here is informative and allows people to discern what route they wish to undertake. The second information board visually indicates what wildlife one might expect to find on the route. Within the route itself tree species are identified individually. On entering the Pollagh trail we observed ongoing ground works being carried out on a site to the left of the trail, and we wondered what this work involved. We hope this will be sympathetic to the general character of the area.

The nest box WebCam charting the thrush is such a wonderful way to get close to nature, and can be enjoyed by people with mobility and other issues which prevent them from being present outdoors as they might wish. We were amazed at the universal nature and number of hits you had in this regard. You write lyrically about the various seasonal delights of nature. With this enthusiasm and hard graft work on the issues considered under this category we are certain that you have a great future environmentally. Chemical weeding is injurious to the environment and we observed some evidence of this on the road joining the school road to the N7. We would recommend that you use nonchemical treatments for weed treatment which you might discuss with your County Heritage Officer.

**Litter Control**

We are surprised that cyclists seem to be a major problem with regard to litter, as one would imagine that cyclists would be very aware of the environment they travel through. Litter thrown out of car windows is a national problem, and we sympathise with you that you appear to suffer from these litter louts despite the fact that the M7 has taken away some of your traffic. We are impressed with your daily patrol during the summer period and your rota arrangements. Well done on your Spring Clean - both residents and schoolchildren. Unauthorised fly posting and signage is very annoying when you are doing your best to keep the village free of such intrusion. Your awareness-creating will hopefully have long-term effect, although we suspect a lot of the culprits are not local.

Your ‘bring a bag for a walk’ is a simple good idea.

Your marks in this category are already high. To increase your markings in this category we suggest that you prepare a litter management plan for the village. The County Litter Management Plan will give you ideas, and you can dovetail your village projects into the broader County projects. The Environmental Awareness Officer of North Tipperary County Council would, we are sure, be delighted to help you in preparing such a plan.

We saw very little litter in the village. We noticed some odd pieces of litter mixed with some dead leaves between 2 bins at the Bring Bank. In the Pollagh trail we observed an abandoned shoe on the roadway, and near the Old School side of the new school we saw a cigarette box, a plastic bottle in a gateway and a (very) few pieces of paper litter and some paper cups on the Old School Road.

**Tidiness**

The core of the village is presented generally in a very tidy fashion. However one issue that we considered detracted from the tidiness was the number of cars parked behind your village centre green space i.e. in the area behind the sculpture and seating area. As we were in Birdhill for a number of hours we noted that later in the evening these cars had disappeared. We suspect -perhaps incorrectly - but possibly correctly that this area is used for commuters to gather and car pool. This is unfortunate, as it detracts from your lovely central village core landscape. If this is the case - and this is a regular feature of this area - we would ask you to see how you might

encourage people to park in a more appropriate location. We also refer to another car parking issue under ‘Roads etc.’ below.

The bring banks are located to the rear of one of the public houses in a car park area. They were clean, but the surface of the corner in which they are located is somewhat rough. We commend the fact that you have an attractive general instructional sign and a sign informing people what to do if they found that the banks were full.

However, the general surrounds of the area in which the bring banks are located is not particularly attractive. This is understandable to a point as the area works as a rear storage area for the adjacent public house. However the block wall / corrugated roof might be improved or the storage area screened from viewing from the bring banks – if this is at all possible.

We were very impressed with the tidy nature of the bus stop on the Limerick road. Every aspect of this space including the bus stop itself, the seating, litter bin, and the post box were extraordinarily clean and tidy. However, this is not the case in other parts of the village, such as in the general area of the new roundabout/ school and Old School. On the road leading to the school there is a site which has been provided with some timber screening. However this timber screening looks intrusive visually as seen set against lovely views out towards the lake. At the school we noticed that one Green Flag was frayed. Some properties in the vicinity of the

school/roundabout would benefit from upgrading, as well as verge trimming outside their roadside boundaries. Such properties include an old shed with rusty galvanised cladding directly at the entrance to the primary school (beside the old national school.) We would strongly suggest that you would concentrate on this general area under this category heading for next year's entry. There are unsurfaced weedy areas near the Old School building, gates with vegetation growing through them, very rough road surfaces, signs requiring cleaning, and cut grass requiring removal (adjacent to the roundabout). Even the village pump in this location requires some

tidying of its surface. The locating of planters does not attract the eye away from unnecessary basic improvements here. We also saw some evidence of chemical weeding which we have already referred to under ‘wildlife’ above. This is an area that must take example from areas already so well presented. As this is basically a rural part of your village we do not expect the perfection of the village core. But we would expect a greater effort at upgrading/tidying generally here.

Some farm gates would benefit from painting. An example of one of these would be the field gate on the Limerick side of the old Co-op building, and another in front of the coral coloured house on the other side of the Co-op building. Another example is a metal farm gate fronting a corrugated roofed small shed on the road to the railway. Choosing a uniform colour for field gate painting within the village is recommended.

Would it be possible to screen the raw grey security fencing around the Telecom substation near the station? The planters outside are simply not effective enough over this length of fencing.

On the Pollagh Trail the local gun club sign might be relocated from a tree and erected tidily on a freestanding wooden pole.

We noted some weeds/unremoved cut grass at the Nenagh road roundabout. Just beyond (on the Northern side of the roundabout) we observed a business lorry which appears to be abandoned and left as an advertisement for the same firm. We also noted a very large advertising sign on the back of a large roadside sign near the roundabout on the Ballina/Killaloe Road. The wildflower area (green) sign on the Limerick approach requires washing/cleaning.

**Sustainable Waste and Resource Management**

You have been introducing events such as the swap shop, composting workshops, and a waste minimisation information evening over the last few years. You have obviously read carefully the new Guidelines sent to you with this year's entry form in relation to this category. Well done on your new food (and drinks) can at the bring bank. Your water butt deserved the exposure it got on the Tidy Towns website news blog.

Whereas we do not normally admire the use of tyres as decorative features, we make an exception for the Tipperary coloured tyres in the screened area of the Park. We would generally not encourage their use in other locations. Some manufacturers make outdoor doormats/scrapers from redundant tyres. You might look into this as the method of recycling any other tyres you find dumped in your territory. Hopefully this dumping will not be an issue in the future, and if it is we would encourage you to enlist the aid of the local authority in providing cameras at the favoured dumping locations.

We loved the really vibrantly colourful mosaic in the community Park which the children had made from bottle tops. We are glad to see also that you avoid the use of paper in communications. You have in recent years implemented and are now adding to several other projects which you list under this heading which are all praiseworthy, and we know that the school's involvement in the Green Flag will also help you to continue with these ongoing projects and instigate more. Asking the assistance/advice of the County Environmental

Awareness Officer would be a great help to you in relation to moving forward quickly in this category.

**Residential Areas**

Residential properties are single detached units. You do not suffer from the malaise of unfinished estates. Generally the standard of residential property presentation is good. However not all properties on the road leading from the Old School to the N7 were well presented. You advise householders in relation to improving the presentation of their properties. You have helped with the provision of shingle and gravel for entrances.

**Roads, Streets and Back Areas**

The approach from Limerick - the N7 - is a delightful introduction to your village. We admired the correctly trimmed edges with verges left for wildlife corridors, and the mature existing hedges, together with the more recently planted semi-mature trees leading up to your village sign, which lists Birdhill’s success in Tidy Towns and in the Entente Florale competitions. The floral bed at the sign was neat. Further in nearer the village we saw the similarly displayed black and white village sign. Perhaps it might be possible to amalgamate these signs? Too many signs can become a cluttering issue. The lovely grassy banks on the right-hand side near the 50 kph speed limit looked resplendent with their good semi-mature tree planting, and we stopped to walk over to the wildflower area. The water feature here is attractive. The cream colour bollards and planters on the Limerick side of the old Co-op were very neatly presented against the backdrop of hedging and mature trees. Looking back towards Limerick we admired the lovely sweep of roadway on that exit from the village. Further in towards the village we admired the neat grass border edging leading to the railway station junction, as well as the harder landscaped area with its playing fountain and formal plants, bedding, seating and neat litter bin. The formality of this space is softened by the deciduous tree cover which forms its backdrop.

You have carried out remedial work on the Pollagh road and have cleaned and reinstated street furniture and planters, installing new features at a number of locations, maintained and cut verges correctly along approach roads, and numerous other projects which involved roads streets and back areas such as litter patrols, fact-finding surveys, repairs to stonewalls etc.

You mention under ‘residential areas’ that you realise that the Killaloe Road is badly in need of resurfacing. You state that the related but deferred Shannon crossing is in jeopardy because of potential danger to local snails and swans. We would add that the road surface is quite poor on both roads joining the upper road on which the school is located back to the N7. One of these roads emerges on the N7 at the church, and the other at a picnic area. On the same roads we noticed some poor boundaries and recessed areas which needed tidying.

The O’ Brien's Bridge approach is a lovely leafy rural road. The Birdhill sign is neatly presented in a uniform format - common on other approach roads. Close to the village there is a wide gravelled path fronting a number of individual houses. On adjudication day many cars were parked on this gravelled footpath. We are unsure as to what your attitude to this is. Generally on-footpath parking looks untidy and can create a hazard for people with mobility issues. Certainly this would be the case for those accessing the station along this road.

The approach from the Nenagh direction along tree-lined grassy banks looked very well. We noted the lettered planting on gravel, but particularly we admired the beautiful newly engraved boulder with your name and emblem, which we later discovered is part of your new logo on your website. Once again we might suggest that repeated village signage could be amalgamated where appropriate. And again we would suggest that planters are not required as there is sufficient natural planting in this area. Planting in the soil is much more sustainable and environmentally friendly in any event. There are exceptions always and we would suggest that the lovely

tangerine coloured (blank) wall of a building on this approach with its planters and hanging baskets could take this addition of planters, as it does add to the scene in this case The line of mature trees leading one into the village looked very well.

Your approach-road signage is a credit to yourselves and your local engineer, as it is all resplendently clean.

**General Impression**

You speak about the new momentum that the new residents in the area bring to your work. You also referred to the bringing together of a ‘scattered community’ which Tidy Towns work promotes. Your problems range from the growing number of unattended, buildings to increasing litter on approach roads. We are heartened by your statement “But challenges also present opportunities”. This is the ethos of your group which has kept you at the frontline of the Tidy Towns movement for many years.

This adjudicator was very much looking forward to adjudicating in your village, as it had been a number of years since visiting. This was the first time that this adjudicator adjudicated in your village. We were not disappointed with what we found, despite the fact that our expectations were high. We feel that we will be hearing more about Birdhill in this competition in the future! We wish you every success! Go n-eírí libh!

**Second Round Adjudication**

The unusual and charming traditional haystack was admired on the Birdhill roundabout on second adjudication day. Grass verges were well trimmed and floral displays in tubs, planters, hanging baskets and window boxes abounded throughout the village. The sandstone Catholic church was admired with its limestone trims and well presented grounds. The poles and brackets mentioned by the first adjudicator were still evident on the day. The commercial premises of Matt the Threshers, and the Coopers were reasonably fresh and well maintained on the day but will need freshening before next year's competition. Landscaped features throughout were as well

maintained and neat as ever. The Birdhill Co-op was fresh, with attractive murals displayed. The failte sign on the Dublin side of the village was admired. The recycling area behind The Coppers sported some colourful tubs to soften this area. The cemetery entrance area was freshly painted. Birdhill continues to perform at the highest levels in the competition and this year was no exception