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|  | **Maximum Mark** | **Mark Awarded 2014** | **Mark Awarded 2015** |
| Community Involvement & Planning | 60 | 47 | 47 |
| Built Environment & Streetscape | 50 | 40 | 41 |
| Landscaping & Open Spaces | 50 | 46 | 47 |
| Wildlife, Habitats & Natural Amenities | 50 | 38 | 38 |
| Sustainable Waste & Resource Management | 50 | 20 | 21 |
| Tidiness & Litter Control | 90 | 57 | 57 |
| Residential Streets & Housing Areas | 50 | 30 | 31 |
| Approach Roads, Streets and Lanes | 50 | 37 | 38 |
| **Total Mark** | **450** | **315** | **321** |

**Community Involvement & Planning / Rannpháirtíocht an Phobail & Pleanáil:**

Welcome Birdhill to the 2015 tidy towns competition as your participation is much appreciated. Given the level at which your village is at in the competition, it is not surprising to read that your committee is very well organised with experts in the areas of community involvement, landscaping and sustainability included in its 19 members. We were sad to hear of the loss of a key member of your tidy towns committee of the past year and no doubt her legacy will continue to be seen in the work and the progress of your village. It is pleasing to see that you continue to maintain your strong links with a variety of agencies, bodies and businesses at local and county level and that they are very supportive of your efforts. We were amazed to read of the many activities that take place in the village each year which include the Craft Fair, Santa in the Park, the Christmas table quiz, St Patrick's Day parade, the stations of the Cross and Easter event and the community weekend - these confirm how active the community in Birdhill is. Your communication strategy was considered and in the view of this adjudicator, it seems to provide an excellent benchmark for other groups to follow as it includes all digital and traditional means of communication. However, we are anxious to encourage a commitment to waste minimisation in the competition and we would appreciate if you ensure that the more wasteful forms of communication (such as printed newsletters) are only provided to those who have no access to digital versions. We were delighted to read that there is a tidy towns subcommittee and that it has evolved into the youth club! Well done also on delegating projects to the youth tidy towns group and for working closely with the school. Thank you the kind words on the competition itself and we are pleased to hear that it has played such a positive role in the development of your community and your village. Your concise and comprehensive application form is also appreciated and it was most helpful during adjudication.

**Built Environment and Streetscape / An Timpeallacht Thógtha agus Sráid-dreacha:**

The adjudicator had not visited Birdhill in a number of years and it was great (but not surprising) to see that your village has continued to progress and improve in the intervening years. There is no doubt that your committee, residents and property owners are all determined to present your village in the best possible light. We are pleased to find that Matt the Threshers Pub and Coopers Pub continue to emulate one other in the high standards of presentation that they achieve. The furniture store is also a lovely building and whilst we were disappointed to hear that is now vacant, your committee has ensured that its appearance has not suffered as a result. Although it is located a distance outside of the 50 kmph zone, the lovely sandstone Church was visited and it was observed to be in excellent condition with neatly maintained grounds. We also liked the numerous monuments and other features that could be found throughout the village. The new commemorative plaque for the creamery was admired and it looked particularly well in its gravel bed and we thought that the novel use of the lovely old phone box as an information kiosk was an imaginative way to retain this structure while giving it a practical use and given the wet July weather that we have just experienced, we're sure that many visitors to your village would agree! We liked the new park entrance that has been provided from the N7. This significantly improves accessibility to the park and it also makes the park much more convenient from the literary walk. The painted agricultural machinery on the Bird Hill roundabout at the entrance to the village is particularly eye catching and it clearly reflects the past (and current) importance of farming and agriculture to the village and the surrounding area. One possible improvement relates to the view of the service area to the rear of Matt the Threshers. This can clearly be seen from the Bring Bank and some consideration should be given to providing some screening (perhaps in wood?) as this ensure that service area to the rear does not detract from the appearance of the rest of the Pub - which is excellent.

**Landscaping and Open Spaces / Tírdhreachú agus Spásanna Oscailte:**

This category has traditionally been a very strong one for Birdhill and 2015 was no exception. A host of attractive, original and tasteful landscaping schemes were on view during adjudication and the standard seemed to increase with each successive one. While it is not possible to review them all in this short report, we would like to present our thoughts on a number of those seen. The simple and effective planting at the roundabout (is this lavender?) helped to enhance the bright and colourful painted machinery, while the landscaping that could be seen in the colourful planters and gravel beds on the approach road into the village was fresh and welcoming. The approach road from Limerick was similarly impressive. The contribution by Matt the Threshers and Coopers to this category cannot be overlooked as both provided hanging baskets and planting schemes that were bursting with bright summer colours. The committee is commended on its use of good quality landscaping to highlight many of the distinctive and original features of the village such as the freshly painted pump (with its new native hedgerow) and the lovely seat that listed all of the achievements of the tidy towns committee. We also loved the landscaping at the bus stop at the foot of the bank as it helps to transform what could otherwise be a rather functional or mundane area into a very pleasant one. The maintenance of the bank along the N7 deserves particular praise as this area looked exceptionally well with its neatly trimmed grass, semi mature trees and interesting mix of plants. There is no doubt that this quite steeply sloping bank would be difficult to maintain, but its clearly not a problem for Birdhill tidy towns. However, the attempts to fill a gap in the hedgerow were observed and it was noted that the replaced section did not appear to be thriving - perhaps more mature hedging plants would fare better? The open spaces in the village are all first class and there is an impressive variety for a small village. The village park is a tremendous resource that serves as a wonderful amenity space for residents (and visitors) as well as being a diverse habitat. The railway garden was also admired and this is a wonderfully secluded and pleasant space with impressive landscaping .We were most interested to read about the unique apple orchard project that is located at the school and which will accommodate an apple tree from each county in Ireland. This is another excellent project and we look forward to seeing it mature in the years ahead. The reference to the 'green walk' was also observed and like the adjudicator in 2014, we wondered about its start and end point. Does this begin in the village and make its way to the school and community hall? Please let us know in 2016. The additional information boards highlighting archaeological finds in the area are also commended.

**Wildlife, Habitats and Natural Amenities / Fiadhúlra, Gnáthóga agus Taitneamhachtaí Nádúrtha:**

Well done on completing some very good projects under this category. The provision of a school birdfeeder (with camera) was observed but we would also like to think that your planting schemes are being designed as food sources for wild birds. The nesting boxes are also a good idea and you are encouraged (as are the school children) to record sightings of birds with bird watch Ireland as part of their bird track initiative. Thank you for following the suggestion of the 2014 adjudicator and providing a photo of the bat boxes and we hope their new locations are to the satisfaction of the bats. Once again, we would encourage you to monitor them and batconservationireland.org would be interested in hearing from you. Sunrise mass in the open air sounds like a lovely idea and no doubt is effective at raising awareness of the diversity of wild life and bird life in your village. The Committee is commended on the hard work that it has undertaken on providing access to natural amenities along the Pollagh Trail - and while the leaflets and signage are very helpful, we wondered if a smart phone app is available to get this information as a means of reducing waste and potential litter? Your hard work on maintaining these lovely amenities is also acknowledged and appreciated.

**Sustainable Waste and Resource Management / Bainistiú Acmhainní agus Dramhaíola Inbhuanaithe:**

While some groups struggle with what is required under this category, that definitely cannot be said about Birdhill. It is great to read that community has been very busy with sustainable waste and resource management projects and the details of the community energy project to minimize energy usage were read with interest. Be sure to continue to monitor the effectiveness of each of your improvements in terms of energy efficiencies as the results would be of interest to communities in every town and village. We are pleased to read that the allotments are going from strength to strength in terms of their popularity and facilities. The community plants and seeds sale and exchange is a great initiative and the other projects presented under this category (such as composting, rainwater harvesting and placing waste management tips on your website) are impressive and make a positive difference. We note that you have made contact with the ESB regarding water use and their response is acknowledged. Nonetheless, we would encourage to try to minimise water use in your scheme by choosing plant varieties that require less water and keeping the number of standalone planters and hanging baskets to sustainable levels. In terms of transport, it was noted that Birdhill is quite dispersed with the school and community centre located a noticeable distance from the village. The Church is also a short distance away. Has any consideration been given to providing a green link or greenway (perhaps in an off road location for safety purposes) to connect each part of the village and encourage walking and cycling?

**Tidiness and Litter Control / Slachtmhaireacht agus Rialú Bruscair:**

We were interested to read that your litter management plan was amended and updated in 2015 and that three spring clean events took place in April. Your litter control strategy appears comprehensive (with twice-weekly pick ups on approach roads and rotas for residents in different parts of the village) and you'll be pleased to hear that it is working well with just 2 pieces of litter spotted in the whole village - one piece at the gate of the old shed structure at the junction of the Broadford road and the N7 and a second in the front garden area of the former furniture shop. Aside from these two instances, Birdhill was completely litter free. Well done also on involving the school children in your anti-litter activities. The standard of tidiness observed is also very high and this is no doubt a reflection of your programme of weeding, washing, repairing, painting, maintaining road margins and curbside areas, sweeping paths and grass trimming. A small number of improvements are still possible. The blue litter bins at both ends of the lovely literary walk were untidy looking while the gate of the front yard of the old shed structure on the Broadford Road / N7 had some weed growth and was in need of a sweep. The gate here and the green bollards will also need to be repainted in time for 2016. In the park, we were surprised to find a number of old fence posts thrown carelessly on the beds near to the creepy crawly cottage. Some consideration should also be given to the area adjacent to the new entrance to the park - it is used for composting and materials storage and its appearance could be improved as it carries a risk of creating a poor first impression for visitors who use the new entrance. Whilst we acknowledge that these issues are very minor, they are not consistent with the very high standards that your Committee sets itself and that your leading position in the competition requires.

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

We are delighted to see that there is a garden competition that commenced in the village last year has been a success and it is perhaps one of the few remaining ways to increase an already high standard of presentation. The results of the competition speak for themselves with many fantastic private houses and gardens to be seen and it is clear that the residents take great pride in showing off their lawns and plants. Well done and keep up the good work.

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

This category has also been a traditionally strong one for Birdhill and we are delighted to report that all of the issues that are within the control of the committee and include; road verges, landscaping and appearance of signage (including name stone) are admirably dealt with and look exceptionally well - particularly on the Limerick and Nenagh approach roads. The Broadford and Newport approaches are much narrower and restrict opportunities for planting and other adornments - but nonetheless, also look well. We note that one of your projects in 2015 included a road survey that highlighted all issues in relation to your village roads and we hope that further improvements (particularly for pedestrian and cyclists) can be agreed (and implemented) in the years ahead.

**Concluding Remarks:**

We would like to thank Birdhill for their participation in the competition and affording us the opportunity for visiting your lovely village. It is inspiring to see that Birdhill continues to make noticeable improvements and we look forward to next year when no doubt, more progress will be made.

**Second Round Adjudication:**

As with all serious contenders in the Tidy Town contest is it the attention given to sectors extending out to the margins that sets them apart. So it is with Birdhill where landmarks such as the church and the railway station are on the outskirts. The same high standard is applied throughout. It may well be that this extraordinary outcome has been made possible by the very extensive participation rate of the local residents (19), well above some centres with larger population. Well done to those concerned.

Birdhill can be proud of its outdoor dimension. All of the open spaces were admired and we found the community park a quiet delight, with its diversity of attractions and colours. Some of the open spaces make great use of the sloping aspect that marks them out. In both the public and private sites we found the abundance of flowers at their best, adding a lot to our impression of the place.

The Railway Garden is a delightful tranquil place where we saw a young fox gamboling in the sunshine. The oak trees and sustainable planting and the nearby skew bridge are lovely features.

The telephone box is certainly a novelty and a surprise being used as an information centre. The recycling area was one of the best landscaped centres we have encountered in all our years of adjudication. Well done to all involved.