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|  | **Maximum Mark** | **Mark Awarded 2017** | **Mark Awarded 2018** |
| Community Involvement & Planning | 60 | 49 | 50 |
| Built Environment & Streetscape | 50 | 42 | 42 |
| Landscaping & Open Spaces | 50 | 48 | 48 |
| Wildlife, Habitats & Natural Amenities | 50 | 40 | 40 |
| Sustainable Waste & Resource Management | 50 | 23 | 23 |
| Tidiness & Litter Control | 90 | 59 | 60 |
| Residential Streets & Housing Areas | 50 | 31 | 31 |
| Approach Roads, Streets and Lanes | 50 | 40 | 41 |
| **Total Mark** | **450** | **332** | **335** |

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

Cuireann an moltóir seo fáilte roimh Birdhill Cnocán an Éin Fhinn Comórtas na mBailte Slachtmhara SuperValu 2018 agus chuig Ceiliúradh 60 Bliain an Chomórtais. Congratulations on your wonderful success in the achieving the overall award in 2017. With 20 members it seems you have half the village on your committee and the other half volunteering from time to time to time as the need arises. You are dedicated to working every day of the year keep in Birdhill looking its best. Your reputation for having an active community and a welcoming place to live is justly deserved. Well done on the welcome pack to introduce people to the services in your area. With all the work to be done, it is surprising that you found time to have so many celebrations over the past year, culminating in the May visit by Uachtaráin na hEireann, Michael D. Higgins. Your application includes a section and education and you list the various activities such as workshops and seminars that are held throughout the year. You also have the support of young people from the local school. In reading last year's report, we noticed that the adjudicator came across Birdhill National School accidentally because it was not marked on the plan. We are surprised therefore that you did not include the school on your map within the tidy town boundaries. We feel that this is a pity because many of the children in your community are attending the school. We searched and found it on the Newport Road about 2.5km from the village, so we decided to visit there, and we were very pleased with what the many environmental activities that take place there. You have a busy work programme from planting flowers to resurfacing in the Pollagh Trail and activities such as a dog show, teddy bears picnic; all evidence of a strong social community. Tipperary County Council are you are supporting partners and assist you with getting grants from various sources. You are well supported by local business interests and are fortunate to have a community employment scheme for helping with work on the ground. For communications, you use an array of media such as Facebook, WhatsApp, emails, parish newsletter and local press. Your specific project for attention this year is the autism friendly play area in the community Park which we admired during our visit to the park. 27 years is a great record for participating in this competition; what is even better, you have progressed well over those years culminating in reaching the top award. Thank you for attaching maps of the area with pictures to help identify locations. That is an innovative idea but since there is the available space on the page, if the pictures larger we would be better able to see them. Thank you also for the map and legend of the projects. Well done on promoting the Irish language in the many signs throughout the village.

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

The Community Park is a wonderful facility and well done on its development and so it seems additional features which you have added over the years. Nowadays, no park would be complete without its Fairyland, so you are up to date and we noted that the fairies have a delightful home in Birdhill. Your most recent addition to the park is the Autism-Friendly Play Area which we admired and well done to the local Men's Shed for the hut. Some road and yards were resurfaced, and you are planning a sculptural seat on the Village Green as a permanent memorial to your success last year. We admired the tall stainless sculpture of the Éan Fionn on the green. It is good to see a new use for the Old Barracks and that existing bars and restaurants are continuing to do business following the village being bypassed with the M7 and a service station etc. at junction M27 a few kilometres away. The reputation of Birdhill is now attracting visitors, not those who were passing through. I agree with the comment in last year's report about the benefit of car parking areas to the rear of all premises. This is a unique feature of Birdhill as the buildings with their many floral displays are very landmarks. We visited the Railway Station which we found delightful. Noting the temporary buildings for servicing commuters, we wonder if there was ever a station building. The Railway Garden we found inviting where we read the poster/sign 'Say it with Flowers'. Sage represents 'Good Health and a Long Life' so perhaps you should plant more sage to convey that message to all. The Church of Our Lady of the Wayside is a little way out the Limerick Road with a large car park on the village side. It is a fine building of limestone and sandstone with the gable fronting the road. It is 137 years old, was refurbished in 1957, is in good condition and statues well-painted. We suggest its approach could be enhanced with a line of trees, perhaps birch or lime, fronting the car park which we read was opened in 1965. Trees would soften the hard appearance of the car park and look better than the thin steel bollards (even though they are painted in your county colours). You might also consider a boundary hedge in combination with the trees and demarcate an entrance and exit. The graveyard beside the church on the opposite side of the minor road (L6018) is in superb condition. Walls and gates look freshly painted and all graves are well-maintained. Flowers inside the entrance add to the charm of this important part of your community. You have done an excellent job with the Birdhill Cooperative building while its new owner is making plans for its redevelopment. Well done on this effort; we admired the murals in the window spaces with folklore and rural themes. We wondered why the plaque about the coop was positioned on the opposite side of the road, where it is difficult to read. We did not cross the road at that point. We admired the classic style triple fountain closer to the village set in a recess flanked with attractive stone walls, seating and lovely beds of Geraniums (Pelargoniums). The bus stop opposite looked well and the Hostas added delight. The old telephone box which now functions as an information hub with a seat alongside and a low stone wall enclosure is very welcoming. All areas were well-maintained.

**Green Spaces and Landscaping / Spásanna Glasa agus Tírdhreachú:**

The Village Green is a delightful amenity with attractive features, including the well photographed granite seat with a list of your achievements, including winning a gold medal in Entente Florale in 2007. The bronze plaque is positioned nearby. It is quickly becoming a memorial site. Very few villages could boast to have a Community Park such as yours. It is a very busy place with something of interest every few steps. You have the freedom to be introduce anything you want to the park that is of interest and value for your community. There are gravel pathways and others with bark and all were clean and well maintained. We wonder if these loose surfaces have been a problem for people with wheelchairs. We liked the information signs about the history of Birdhill and the Twiss family, former landlords of the area. The tri-lingual names on the trees are a great educational tool but the writing was a little too small for us without spectacles. The plot of trees planted by local families in February 2004 is a great success, but now you have a problem because they trees are so close together and are growing into a forest. That means that you will not see the individual characteristics of each tree. The herb garden is well developed, there are many herbaceous perennials, places to sit and relax a roll of honour of the 114 sponsors and of course the very important playground. Birdhill is fortunate to have many mature trees which add important character to the village and you have planted more trees, especially in the Community Park. Part of the maintenance task with new trees is to remove the stakes and ties within two years of planting because they can damage the stem is left intact. In that regard, there are some birch trees on the boundary of the car park at the church which need attention. These trees are well established and do not need their supporting stakes any more. In fact, one stake has broken away and is lying on the ground beside the tree. The standard of seasonal colour provided everywhere is fantastic. That is the hallmark of your work, well planted and well maintained floral displays in beds or containers. We liked the beds of Astilbes on the Limerick Road, especially since the timber edges are barely visible. Such surrounds of flower beds which have become a habit with Tidy Towns Committees are unnecessary and actually restrict the shape of beds. In the past few decades, it seems that plant/flower beds cannot be done any other way. And yet, the traditional edge was just grass. If you remove the timber edges, you can make the beds into more interesting shapes. For example, with the advantage of the slope on this road margin you could mark out a sigmoid shaped bed running parallel with the road for a length of say 10 metres long with a varied width of 1 metre at the ends and 3 metres in the centre. This new bed if planted with a combination of shrubs, herbaceous perennials and some annuals in a few pockets could be another showpiece for Birdhill. The standard of maintenance of all features.

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

The biodiversity plan is evidence of your knowledge and awareness of what this criterion is about. The five habitat groups identified (freshwater, grassland and marsh, peatlands, woodland and hedgerows) are the focus of the five actions designed to protect and enhance biodiversity, to encourage awareness, knowledge and enjoyment of the environment. All this dictates y our actions to increase awareness, support insects, especially bees, manage invasive species to prevent them encroaching with native species and the organisation of surveys to learn more and games to attract the involvement of children. Your pollinator plan is only a year old and you have already implemented a range of measures such as creating wildflower beds and included pollinator-friendly flowers such as Alyssum, Verbena and Ageratum. These plants we have noted during our visit and we also admired the herb garden and the small 'bees nesting here' sign in the ground of the Community Park. Pollagh Trail is a wonderful opportunity to experience wildlife, especially marsh plants. The conversion of the former allotment site for bees and butterflies seems sensible; will it be monitored to determine how many species visit there? We wish you good progress with Kyle graveyard, another interesting possibility for the future. Well done for linking with Birdwatch Ireland on monitoring and recording bird species in Birdhill. We were very impressed with the boxes in the Community Park and at Pollagh with free leaflets. It was nice to be able to obtain a leaflet when you need it. Have you considered placing QR codes in both these locations where people can download digital copies of the leaflets?

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

The Energy Communities Tipperary Co-operative (ETCG) is now in its sixth year of a road show promoting energy conservation measures. The figures of 200 homes having implemented energy saving measures, 6 community buildings retrofitted, and €172,000 annual savings are very interesting. You are conserving water through mulching, using harvested rainfall where possible (we saw the water butt at the school) and using nettles and comfrey solutions for feeding the plants. The composting facility in the Community Park, has two separate bays, one for grass and one for twigs. It is advisable to have a mix of brown (twigs) and green (grass) to get an even mix of nitrogen and to allow more air to get into the compost pile. The pictures in the application form show how you mix the grass with leaves. Well done on the list of many actions that are relevant to this criterion. Some of these include the prevention of food waste, shredded Christmas trees, a book exchange and many other activities mentioned in the application form. The use of old tyres for plant containers or art is becoming a feature of Tidy Towns groups in recent years, influenced no doubt by the disposal problem of old tyres. We caution against using old tyres for this purpose unless they are done in such a way that changes their identity. Otherwise, they do not fit into the landscape and in any case will not solve the waste problem.

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

A Litter Management Plan completed in 2016 is your guide for litter control and from our observations either the plan is a good one or whatever your members are doing is very effective. Having cooperation from runners, walkers, joggers and dog walkers in picking up litter during their exercise is great support. The daily litter patrols must be very necessary because there is still a substantial volume of traffic passing through the village and no doubt, litter is discarded from some vehicles. Well done on getting the support of Applegreen to deploy a staff member to help collect litter on the Link Road one day a week. Birdhill is very clean and tidy. We did not see any litter or weeds during our visit and everywhere was clean and tidy. The recycling bring banks are located to the rear of Coopers. They were clean and tidy and we liked the low timber fence enclosure with floral displays to add further enhancement.

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

Well done on running a garden competition for the past three years. It is a terrific way of encouraging residents to implement improvements. We were pleased to see a high standard in the presentation of houses and gardens in Birdhill. Many boundary walls and gates are in good repair.

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

The roundabout on the Link Road and the old Nenagh to Limerick Road looks splendid. It is a suitable site on which to display old agricultural machinery, part of times past, and it is nice to see the machinery well-painted and not rusting. Thank you for listing the name of the blue flowers, Nepeta 'Six Hills Giant', it looked very well. You do a wonderful job in maintaining the approaches and for adding floral schemes, especially on the road from the roundabout to the village where you have the 'Failte' sign. The planting scheme opposite is excellent and adds colour in a more permanent way that makes the seating area more inviting. We noted it was being used by cyclists. Before that, the boulder featuring the white bird with 'Cnocán an Éin Fhinn' written on its left side and Failte beneath is very well done. However, going forward, our advice is to reduce the number of displays in containers to save your maintenance workload, especially in planting, watering and feeding. You might also consider grouping some containers together for better impact that placing them in a line.

**Concluding Remarks:**

It was our pleasure to visit Birdhill on this occasion following your great win last year. Well done on all your achievements. We wish you well in your future plans.

**Second Round Adjudication:**

It is several years since I was last assigned to judge Birdhill. At that time all the talk was that the M7 would discourage business and destroy the village. I didn't think so: I felt that what was destroying Birdhill was the endless stream of traffic. Now, visiting Birdhill after its sensational rise to Best Village and then Ireland's Tidiest Town, I find I had been right. The place can now be enjoyed in full, not only in the parks and woodlands. Visual proof of increased popularity was the large number of visitors at the Coffee Centre, Matt the Thrasher's and Cooper' on the date of this visit. I have to confess that there is very little to add to the comprehensive report of the first adjudicator; it is a pleasure to endorse his or her proposed increase in marking to an extent that is unusual following a national award. It really only remains to emphasise a few points: the importance and centrality of the school, with its elected committee, to this competition; and also to the sense of pride engendered there (even though the school is some distance away); and the obvious dedication of the committee, residents and business-people. This combines to result in what we find today, particularly in the well-laid-out parks, roadside gardens and nature trails, and the sheer had work that goes into them annually. The floral decorations are what immediately catch the eye; it is the planning and the detail that impresses. The Community Garden is idea for children, there is so much to explore in a comparatively small space, based on folklore, history and the varying interests and needs of young people. The few prominent buildings - mainly hostelries - are well presented and those that are not in use are well kept up. (A pity the pretty church, like the school, is some distance away, but that is often the case). If I were asked for a personal preference - not to do with the marking - I think I would name the Literary Trail and the Railway Garden probably because they are so carefully thought-out and appropriate to their topics; yet the compelling image that I took away with me I did not even witness: the Easter Sunday Mass mingled with the dawn chorus of the birds of Cnocán an Ein Fhinn.