



Handbook

 **Bailte Slachtmhara**
ag caomhnú ár dTimpeallacht

 **Tidy Towns[®]**
Caring for our environment

INTRODUCTION

The TidyTowns Handbook is published by the TidyTowns Unit of the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government for the use of community groups intending to participate in the National TidyTowns Competition. It aims to inform work activities in innovative and environmentally-sensitive ways.

It will also be useful to all community and voluntary groups working to manage and improve their local areas who wish to use the broad-based TidyTowns environmental programme to assist their efforts.

The Handbook is structured into four main sections

- *Getting Started*
- *Projects in Your Area*
- *The Project and Judging Categories*
- *Making Action Happen*

If you are planning to get a Group together or are aiming to build on your Group's achievements to date, The TidyTowns Unit of the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government will provide you with any additional information you require about the TidyTowns movement, its aims and objectives and the conditions for entry into the annual National TidyTowns Competition. This information is also available at www.tidytowns.ie which also includes archive videos and publications.

The Unit can be contacted at **01 888 3948** or **053 911 7347**
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TidyTowns Unit:

Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government
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Getting Started

Topics covered in this section:

Setting Up a TidyTown's Group

Why?
How?
Who?
Group Structure
Meetings
The Group and the Wider Community
Networking with Others

Looking at Your Local Area

Why Survey?
What to Bring
What to Look At
Additional Information Sources

Planning Group Actions

The Annual Plan
Identifying Objectives and Priorities
Linking in with Other Plans
Selecting Projects and Actions
Identifying Action Areas
Establishing a Timescale
Recording Your Progress

Entering the TidyTown's Competition

Filling Out the Entry Form
The Closing Date

Setting Up a TidyTowns Action Group

There are hundreds of TidyTowns Groups throughout Ireland participating in TidyTowns and similar initiatives. They come in all shapes and sizes and reflect the local circumstances of their creation – from Resident Associations, Development Associations, Tourist Groups, Business Chambers to specific TidyTowns Groups – all sharing the common objective of working to sustain and improve their own areas.

Ideally, the most effective Groups are the ones with the broadest representation from the community involving residents, businesses and public bodies. While the creation of such broad-based Groups is the ultimate TidyTowns' objective, it is by no means an absolute requirement to participate as the TidyTowns programme can itself be used to galvanise local interest and develop Group structures as time progresses. Getting started is the most important issue, and this can begin with a sub-group of an existing body or simply concerned individuals coming together with a common or shared purpose.

Why?

As shown throughout the country in towns, villages and neighbourhoods of all sizes, the actions of a local Group participating in TidyTowns and similar initiatives can greatly improve the sense of community, quality of people's lives and local environments.

And it is important to remember that environmental improvement is a vital part of economic regeneration. The area that looks good has a better chance to thrive – as well as being a nice place to live. The very act of environmental improvement creates jobs, raises property values

and stimulates the local economy.

A TidyTowns Group can also share information, ideas and experience, and, very importantly, spread the work-load so one or two individuals don't carry the entire burden. A Group can gain more credibility than individuals acting on their own, are able to network with other organisations and to share in their experience.

How?

Kick-starting interest in setting up a TidyTowns Group begins by holding a public meeting. The purpose of this meeting is to give people in the community a clear idea of what needs to be done and prepare the platform for future activities and broader participation. In planning the first meeting some of the ways to advertise include:

- Writing to the local paper
- Phoning your local radio station
- Advertising on notice boards in the local shops, school, library, community centre, sports clubs or on any locally-used web-sites
- Distributing leaflets in your area
- Asking friends or local people who may be interested.

At the first meeting about half-a-dozen people should be picked to get the Group going. Others will join in if they see that something interesting is happening.

Who?

Look for a range of talents and skills among those interested based on their commercial and professional activities, their training or interests and their passion for the idea. Try where possible to have members from different parts of the community and from different backgrounds and age groups.

In each subsequent year an effort should be made to attract some new members into the Group.

This will ensure that the same people are not expected to drive activities all the time and it also renews the energy and commitment of the participants as well as providing an opportunity to broaden representation where possible.

The Structure of the Group

Consideration should be given at an early stage as to whether formal structures are needed, particularly for legal reasons. There are typically three methods of organisation structure.

Ad-hoc structure – many small Groups are initially happy to have informal arrangements where activities are organised by agreement in a friendly co-operative atmosphere. While this may appear to suit in the early stages, as the Group becomes more and more successful at attracting investment and generating interest, its ad-hoc structure may not provide sufficient legal protection to members and not guarantee the transparency many members of the public will expect. It therefore may not be able to attract a high level of support from public or corporate bodies in the long term.

Constitutional Structure – writing a short constitution agreed by all members at a general meeting that outlines the objectives of the Group, the roles of members and the way in which it will keep its accounts provides a higher level of transparency and accountability. This structure offers some protection to individuals where they can show they act with common purpose. This is the option chosen by many community associations and may be sufficient to draw down grants and other forms of public funding and support.

Company Structure – the creation of a company limited by guarantee is the most credible structure as it creates a legal entity for the Group above and beyond the individuals involved. It also brings Group activities under legal controls with the requirement for audited accounts and other directorial responsibilities. Most charities in Ireland adopt this approach and there are potential tax benefits.

Legal advice on the appropriateness or otherwise of these and other options should be obtained.

Meetings

The structure chosen will to some extent direct how meetings are to be held and the need to elect officers such as a chairperson, secretary and treasurer. However even an ad-hoc Group should have a management committee with identified members taking on specific responsibilities. As well as the standard officers referred to above, these responsibilities should include liaising with the Local Authority and local schools, generating broad community support, fund-raising, setting up task forces or obtaining materials.

The most reliable method of reaching decisions is by consensus. If everyone has had their say and agreement is reached, it is more likely that everyone will do their share of the work. Consensus building is a process where participants work together to try to reach a result which has benefits for all - a win-win outcome.

However, consensus is not always possible or practicable, so agreement should be reached on whether a simple or a two-thirds majority is required to carry a decision.

The Group may wish to hold monthly meetings during the year. Holding meetings at a regular time and place makes it easier for people to remember to turn up.

In general it is helpful to divide the Tidy Towns year into two periods, particularly where the Group has entered the competition and wants to take account of adjudication between June and September.

- Meetings from **Spring to June** focussing on specific actions.
- Meetings from **October to February** for research, planning and consultation with other bodies and consolidation of work done during the year.

An **Autumn** meeting should also feature a review of and a discussion on the Tidy Towns adjudicator's report where the Group has entered the competition. This report is an external assessment of work done to date with tips on how to improve in the coming years and as such is a useful objective guide on how to plan future activities.

The Group and the Wider Community

Remember the Group should represent the local community. Determine the arrangements for reporting back to the community. Be sure that they are clear and agreed.

Contact your local Citizens Information Centre or Local Authority Community Liaison Officer to see what public organisations are operating in your area, such as LEADER or Partnership groups. Arrange a meeting to see how your activities dovetail with their objectives and seek to make use of their existing community networks. This will help with community development exercises to bring out a shared vision for the community.

Ownership of your plans by the local community will be one of the main ways to secure wide motivation for your efforts.

Networking with other Groups

It is a good idea to set up a network with other Tidy Towns Groups in the county. A network can exchange experiences, ideas and expertise, organise visits to successful schemes and plan joint projects and fundraising.

TOP TIP:

A number of Tidy Towns Groups throughout the country have successfully organised and co-ordinated county networks often with the support of their County Council, to facilitate information exchange and lobbying power. Contact your Local Authority or the Tidy Towns unit if your Group would like to take part or form a county network.

Looking at Your Local Area?

When a Group is formed, it is now possible to carry out a fairly comprehensive survey of your area.

Why Survey?

This survey will give a general overview of what needs to be done in the area and form the basis for planning activities to deal with particular

problems and bring about improvements.

TOP TIP:

If you are tackling a particular area – such as rejuvenating a derelict site to create a community garden - a survey of the site covering existing vegetation, drainage, sunny and shaded areas, views and eyesores, etc. will be invaluable. Make sure you record this with ‘before and after’ photos to show the progress you have made.

What to Bring

In order to carry out a survey, you will need to:

- Find out the actual **limits** of the town as this will also form the assessment area in future participation in the competition. Town limits are generally those within the welcome to the town signs, or in their absence, within the 50 kmph speed limit signs. In large urban areas the survey area should be a one kilometre radius from the centre of the area allowing for local boundaries with neighbouring areas.
- If necessary, source available background information on the local area. Google your area to see if it is of scientific interest. Check old maps and photographs of the area and research any archive material in the local library.
- **Note:** A wildlife or recreation area, such as a wood or lake that adjoins the town may be included provided it is generally understood by the townspeople to be part of their amenities and is generally used by them. It should be within easy distance of the town and be traditionally associated with the town.
- Consider the things you would like to look at and draw up a record sheet with space for the action to be taken and details of the problems that you discover, as well as the location and ownership of buildings or sites (an example is given as **Helpful Handout A**).
- Obtain a map of the area from the Ordnance Survey Office. A map at a scale of 1:2,500 is usually most useful.
- Bring a camera and take as many photographs as possible.

What to Look At

You should look at, and discuss, the overall environment of the area in terms of its layout and the quality of life it offers. This can be discussed by the Group in general or subject to a broader discussion or survey with the wider community.

Though these more general aspects are difficult to quantify, they are important. Often these will raise broader issues for the community and may give rise to the need for a complementary Development Association which can address these in parallel with the work of the Group.

Other areas and subjects covered by the survey should reflect the TidyTowns adjudication criteria as addressed in **Section 3**.

TOP TIP:

The boundaries of your action area are normally defined by the town or speed limits but you should indicate clearly on a map any other areas in which you are working to show local interests as well as TidyTowns adjudicators if participating in the TidyTowns competition.

The Overall Environment – things to discuss

- What is it that makes your area **special**?
- What features are **characteristic of the area** - what type of atmosphere is there?
- Does the overall layout and street pattern within the area reflect its **historical development**?
- What are the key **focal points** in the area? The entrances? A central space or building?
- Are there any **special considerations** which affect development pressures such as tourism or commuter housing?
- What are the places and features that are important to the history or **distinctiveness** of the area?
- Can you identify areas with a **particular layout or building style**, such as Georgian

or Victorian, which contribute to the distinctiveness or character of the area?

- What is the predominant type of building material used and is it of regional or local distinctiveness?
- What is the relationship between the surrounding countryside and the edge of the area, such as a sense of enclosure provided by groups of trees, or outward views?
- What is the relationship between the area and any **special landscape features**, such as woodlands, a river, lake, an estuary, the sea or a canal, or an ancient monument such as a castle or tower house?
- Are there local walks in the area?
- Does the settlement interact with or turn its backs to **rivers and watercourses**? How can these features be incorporated into the landscape of the area?
- Where are the **open space networks**? Is there the potential to link open spaces with footpaths, routes to school, and cycleways?
- Does **parking** cause a problem? How is this managed and can it be improved?
- What **street furniture** is there?
 - Seats
 - Litter bins and how often they are emptied
 - Lighting and the style of lighting columns
 - Planting and trees
 - What is there at present and what could be added?
- How important are **trees** within the town? Do trees frame important buildings or significant views, perhaps along the Main Street or area centre?
- What is the predominant type of natural landscaping in the surrounding area?
- What are the **facilities** like? Play areas, shops, clubs for young people, cafes, pubs, access for the disabled or baby buggies, recycling points etc.

- What impressions do **visitors** to the area form? What facilities are available to enable visitors to enjoy the area?
- Are there appropriate recycling area/centres and if so how well are they being maintained?

Approach Roads - things to consider

Look at the way in which your area is approached. Consider the following:

Crossroads and roundabouts:

- Are these a welcome point?
- How well are they maintained?
- Are lines of sight kept clear so that drivers have a clear view of approaching traffic?
- What is the condition of road signs and are there too many signs?

Road verges:

- Are they well maintained?
- Is there a clear definition between the road and the verge or could this be improved with kerbing?

Grass verges:

- Are those close to the road closely mown, with grass areas further back from the road managed for wildflowers and hedgerows?
- What condition are trees in? Are extra trees or shrubs required?

Nameplates:

- In what condition is the town name-sign?
- Are signs bi-lingual?
- Are lay-bys and picnic sites in good condition?
- Are rubbish bins in picnic sites properly located and is there a regular emptying service?

Walls, fences and hedges:

- What materials are they built from and what condition are they in?
- Could these be improved with painting, stone facing or simply the planting of a creeper?

Problem areas:

- Problem areas outside towns may include petrol stations, farmyards, haulage yards, Council depots and schools, each of which will need a different approach.

TOP TIP:

Any actions in relation to the approach roads should be fully discussed with the relevant sections of the local Council – typically the Planning and Roads Departments

The Central Area - things to consider

The Central Area includes the main retail, commercial and residential areas. In larger settlements a street-by-street approach may be worthwhile.

Architectural Character:

- Are there any listed or historical buildings and in what condition are they? **Note:** Check the Record of Protected Structures with the Planning Authority.
- Are traditional wooden sash windows and doors a feature of the area? Are these being replaced with PVC or aluminium?
- Are there any good, traditional shop fronts? On the other hand are there shop and pub fronts with an insensitive design, out of character with the rest of the street?
- Are there features of buildings of note, such as:
 - Building height
 - Materials used
 - Roof lines
 - Building details such as windows with glazing patterns, and doors. **Note:** record these using photographs or good sketches.

Maintenance of Private Properties:

- How well are properties maintained? The appearance of the upper storeys and the cartilage areas should also be considered. Are there particular houses or shops where insufficient attention has been given to their upkeep? **Note:** these may have been

mentioned in previous year's Adjudication reports.

- In what condition is the paintwork on individual buildings? Are there groups of houses that could be considered together perhaps for a common colour scheme?
- Do factories and businesses keep their premises tidy?

Derelict Sites and Other Problem Areas:

- Are there buildings or gap sites which are derelict or unused?
- Is vandalism a problem?
- Are there posters or graffiti on walls or buildings?
- Are particular areas used for fly-tipping (unauthorised dumping of rubbish)?

Private Gardens:

- What are the gardens and grounds around private buildings like - are they tidy or overgrown?

Streetscape and Furniture:

- Is the appearance of the street generally attractive or unattractive?
- Are there any other problems which are particularly conspicuous, such as overhead wires or advertisements?
- In what condition are the footpaths, road surfacing, walls and fences, lighting etc.?
- Are extra facilities such as litter bins or seats required?
- In what condition are the back roads and lanes?
- In what condition are street trees?
- Are there suitable spaces for more street trees where trees would not be in conflict with overhead wires or underground services?
- Is there space for other planting – shrubs or flowers?

Open Spaces & Recreational Areas - things to consider

These areas include greens, playgrounds and planted areas. They may be small or large, private or public - but all should be looked at.

Quality of the Space:

- If the open space is used for recreational purposes, is it adequately maintained?
- Is the space derelict or vacant?
- Is it utilised fully or over-used?
- Is it open to view or fenced off?
- Who is using the site at present - is it an impromptu playground, car park, or halting site?
- Are there any other problems which you notice, such as stray animals?

Features of the Space:

- What is the relationship of the open space to other facilities, such as houses, shops, schools and roads?
- Does it have potential for a play area or community garden?
- What is the condition of the fences and walls around the open spaces - would they benefit from better maintenance?
- Is there a stream or watercourse on the site - what condition is it in?

Green Areas:

- Are the grass areas mown regularly, and are the trees and other planting adequately looked after?
- **Street and paving condition.** What is access like - are paths and entrances properly surfaced?
- What is the condition of the surfacing, such as grass, paving, tarmac?

Litter Control:

- Are there adequate bins and are these properly located and maintained?
- Are there special bins for dog litter?
- Is litter a problem - has it been blown onto the site or has it been deliberately dropped?
- Has fly-tipping or dumping taken place?
- Is there rubble or larger items of rubbish on the site, requiring more work to clear it?

Improvements to the Space:

- Can schools be persuaded to include a garden or nature area on their grounds?
- Could the open spaces be linked together to form a network of open spaces or a walking route?
- Is there a children's playground?
- If so, in what condition is it?
- The Local Authority can arrange to have playground inspections carried out.

Additional Information Sources

You may also consider supplementing the survey with a questionnaire seeking people's views on the type of improvements they would like to see.

In order to involve young people in the TidyTowns process, you may ask the local school to carry out some aspect of the survey. Children have a different perception of spaces and may consider things such as:

- The quality of play spaces - inside and outside school grounds
- Safe routes to school and to shops and community facilities
- Environmental actions they learn about such as recycling, wildlife walks, etc

Their survey information can be presented in multimedia form as photographs, models, maps, a video, artwork and a report and this could be a first step in establishing a **Junior TidyTowns Group** or encouraging your school to become a **Green School**.

TOP TIP:

Look at '7 Steps to Becoming a Green School' on the An Taisce website (www.antaisce.org). It is a handy guide setting out what is involved in becoming a Green School

Planning Group Actions

Like any Group tackling a range of issues and tasks, your Group needs to establish what exactly it aims to achieve through its works and actions.

Planning a strategy for Group actions and an associated work programme is critical in

organising all the Group resources - both people and finances, as well as ensuring the necessary consents have been given before undertaking works. Also, it ensures that all members of the Group have a say in the type of jobs that the Group will tackle.

The Multi-Annual Plan

The cornerstone of the TidyTowns programme is the preparation of a multi-annual plans by Groups outlining their actions and intentions for the forthcoming number of years. The duration of the plan can vary but is normally a three-year or five-year plan depending on the size of the area and the complexity of the work involved. The Group's plan should represent a shared vision of what the TidyTowns programme can achieve for a town, village or urban area.

Note: The Entry Form to the competition is a basic plan structure in itself and can be expanded into a proper multi-annual plan.

The key principles behind the plan are:

- **Short**..... it need be no longer than 5 pages long;
- **Direct** it should outline how, why and when you are going to undertake jobs;
- **Realistic**.... All projects should be capable of being implemented - albeit often over a long timeframe. And most importantly.....
- **Yours**.... The Plan is the Group's work programme. It should therefore reflect the objectives and capabilities of the Group.

In summary, it should be a simple and easily read document. If possible, the map should be to A4 format that is easier to handle and review. The location of the tasks should be shown on the map, either by notes or by numbers referring to the text of the plan.

Identifying Group Objectives & Priorities

The development of a Group 'Mission Statement' should take place at a meeting and should be debated and discussed to draw on the various opinions within the Group.

You should state your objectives and priorities at the beginning of the Group's multi-annual plan.

This will inform the local community, Tidy Towns Adjudicators and other agencies, of the Group's objectives over the life of the plan.

The overall aims might be to:

- Improve the quality of life for the residents and visitors to the town
- Maintain the heritage and character or distinctiveness of the town and develop the area for future generations
- Involve all of the community in the development of the town
- Improve the position of the town in the Tidy Towns competition

Linking in with Other Plans

Before embarking on the plan, the Group should examine other plans to make sure that it is not duplicating work already being undertaken by other bodies. Check with your Local Authority to see if Shopfront Design Guidelines are available. These can be useful in gaining the cooperation of property owners.

In a number of cases - including in settlements with a population in excess of 2,000 - a **Local Area Plan** will have been, or may be in the process of, being prepared. The Group should consider discussing the scope and extent of this strategy with the Local Authority, to see where some synergy between work programmes and actions can be realised.

Other plans which may be in operation for the area may include:

- Urban and Village Renewal Strategies
- Site Specific Masterplans
- Village Design Statements

The Group should nominate a member of the Group to contact the Local Authority and check if any of these are in place.

Selecting Projects and Actions

Having surveyed the local area, you are aware of problems that need to be tackled and ready to identify actions to address these.

You might consider the following sequence of events:

- Hold a public meeting to present the report of the survey in the form of an exhibition and to seek the views of the wider community.
- Discuss possible remedies as widely as you can.
- Visit successful Tidy Towns, meet their Groups and see how they have tackled similar problems, and don't think that your issues are unique.
- Prioritise actions in the multi-annual plan.
- Present a realistic list of actions to the Local Authority which can be carried out over a five-year period and which can be included in Council work programmes such as the Urban and Village Renewal Scheme.
- Contact private owners to encourage them to carry out improvements and refer them to expert help if necessary.
- Make arrangements for your own Group to do something, for example, cleaning-up and landscape treatment.
- Bring the problems to the attention of the press, local councillors and other Groups in the area.
- Suggest positive action; put forward practical solutions to the problems.

Photographs of the existing situation, together with an artist's impression of the finished project, can help in gaining support for the project.

In identifying projects and actions, the Group should be realistic as to their own capabilities. In all cases the projects or improvements should be:

- worthwhile,
- physically feasible,
- financially sound, and
- likely to be well received.

TOP TIP:

Don't forget that letter writing and lobbying are important parts of the Group's job. If these are required to get a project 'off the ground' they should appear as tasks on your list in the short-term timescale. "Thank you" notices in the local media to sponsors etc are a good idea.

Identifying Action Areas

In looking at action areas, look at the results of your survey and identify the areas where your Group's actions should be focussed.

For each of these action areas outline:

- why you are working there;
- what you are going to do - step-by-step;
- who the project involves (e.g. the County Council, ESB, Waterways Ireland, etc.).

It is a good idea to also present the projects in two separate categories of short and long term activities, perhaps as an appendix. It will help you to monitor the progress of your efforts over the period of the plan.

Projects will be most effective if they have a **long-term impact** on the town or village. For a large town or urban area, the work programme may be set out according to districts or parishes.

Establishing a Timescale

The Plan should set out the work that will be done for each year.

Be careful that not too much is taken on in the early years as it might mean that the work has to be re-scheduled in later years. Also be fair to yourselves and break jobs down into their constituent parts.

The timescale for the projects will be a matter for each Group to decide but it is useful to keep the following in mind:

- If you have entered the TidyTown competition or other similar local environmental initiatives, assessments normally start in June.
- The most appropriate time for tree planting is between late October and early March.
- Individual projects should be prioritised. In the short term, projects that can achieve immediate effect given the resources available, including labour and finance, should be given priority.
- Projects that need a more substantial input of resources or those that are likely to be on-going should be carried out in the medium term.

- Long-term projects are those needing very substantial resources, finance or assistance from another development agency including the Local Authority.

You should therefore be aware of other important areas of legislation with respect to the work of a TidyTown Group, which are summarised in **Helpful Handout C**.

Recording your Progress

You should update your TidyTown plan each year to keep a record of the projects undertaken and the results achieved.

This will form a useful background for assessing progress and can also be adapted for use as publicity material. This keeps morale and motivation levels high and promotes the Group as an important local resource.

Meet a number of times during the year - particularly coming up to the time when you submit your plan to the Department, and consider:

- What progress has been made?
- Have projects achieved what they set out to do?
- What have the participants learned from the project?
- Are there identified actions that must be taken to fast-track related projects, such as working with landowners, seeking other consents, or sourcing funding?

Experience has shown that the easiest methods of recording are keeping diaries and taking photographs; but drawings, models and written reports are also useful, especially in putting your ideas across to the Local Authority or other Groups.

TOP TIP:

Contact your Local Authority or the Ordnance Survey (www.osi.ie) to see what mapping is available for your area. Note: The copyright laws for maps are extremely strict so discuss your needs for maps with the OSI before buying to avoid any additional costs.

Trace Maps or Photos - Tracing over maps of photos is a really easy and simple way to show 'before' and 'after' images.

Photographs - These are useful in showing a problem as an example of something done elsewhere which you like or admire. Taking photographs of the project before you start, at regular intervals throughout and at the finish, will provide a good visual record which can be tied in with diaries and reports.

Photos can also be very effective in publicity and exhibitions. Make sure to record the date a photo was taken on the back of a hard copy or on a saved digital version.

TOP TIP:

Sketching over photographs and adding areas of proposed planting, etc. is a clear and effective way of explaining the impact and nature of proposed works such as tree planting.

Models - These are often easier to understand than plans, as they are three-dimensional and people easily identify the areas and landmarks. Models, however, can be time consuming and expensive. Models can be made using a polystyrene base and paper or card cut-outs for buildings. They can be professionally prepared but are expensive to commission.

TOP TIP:

Models are often prepared for large planning applications. If you know one was prepared for a scheme in your area perhaps approach the developer and see if your Group can use it after the planning process is complete. Alternatively see if a local school – particularly a secondary school, would like to create a local model as a Green School or Transition Year project.

Drawings - Simple sketches on maps or site plans can put ideas across very simply. (Maps at a scale of 1:1,000 are good for single sites, while most towns and villages require 1:2,500 scale maps.) Do not worry that drawings are not perfect. Once they are neat and simple you can put across

messages very clearly and effectively.

Circulate an Annual Report - A one-page annual report can simply list the jobs you have done as well as stating the Group's aims for the coming year. This can be posted to local businesses and residents to publicise the work of the Group. Preparing this can be a simple side-task when updating your plan.

Entering the TidyTowns Competition

The ultimate goal of the Group should be to enter the TidyTowns competition where its structure and ongoing assessment will not only help shape and focus your activities, but also provide a platform to attract greater interest from the community and assist participation in other local initiatives.

The basic entry requirement is simply filing in the entry form available on request from the TidyTowns Unit or for download at www.tidytowns.ie. As referred to above, a multi-annual plan is also encouraged and while not a requirement to enter the competition, a copy of this plan, if you have one should be included with your entry form.

The form provides an important opportunity for you to highlight the progress your Group has made throughout the year and to outline your future plans. As such the entry form acts as a 'tour guide' accompanying the TidyTowns Adjudicator through your area and can be used as a summary of your multi-annual plan, or indeed, as referred to previously, the basis for preparing your multi-annual plan.

Filling Out the Entry Form

The entry form is divided into 5 Sections and asks you questions about your Group, your work and the local area in order to give the visiting adjudicator an impression of the place and its community. It is designed to encourage the group to think through and plan its activities.

Consider allocating the task of completing the entry form to one member of the Group. The answers should be discussed and agreed first and then clearly outlined for the Adjudicator.

Remember! First impressions count so make sure your form presents your Group and your town in a good light.

Keep answers:

- Short
- To the point
- Neat

Section 1 deals with your Group details. In answering these questions tell the Adjudicator about your Group.

Questions asked include:

- Who is involved?
- When was the Group set up?
- How often do you meet?
- How do you communicate with the community?
- What other groups or agencies do you work with?
- What is your experience of the competition?

Section 2 deals with the main categories of the competition and is asking the group to tell the Adjudicator about the work you plan to do or have done in relation to each of the judging categories.

These categories are:

- Overall Development Approach
- The Built Environment
- Landscaping
- Wildlife and Natural Amenities
- Litter Control
- Tidiness
- Waste Minimisation
- Residential Areas
- Roads, Streets and Back Areas
- General Impression

TOP TIP:

Each of these categories is examined in detail in Chapter 3 of this Handbook with a guide to what the Tidy Towns Adjudicators look for.

Section 3 deals with individual aspects of your town or village which you may wish to nominate for a special award.

There is no obligation to nominate a feature of your local area but each year prizes are given for various project types including:

- Contemporary architecture
- Urban villages
- Projects dealing with the promotion of heritage
- Tree planting
- Biodiversity
- Maintenance of local bring banks
- Sustainable development
- Climate change

Remember! Even if the Group does not enter any Tidy Towns special competitions, an Adjudicator may nominate a project for a special award.

Section 4 provides space for you to draw a rough map of the town or village (a more detailed map sourced from Ordnance Survey Ireland may be included if you wish).

The map should clearly indicate local features and should help the Adjudicator to become familiar with your local area.

Features which should be included are:

- Rivers, lakes, coastline, etc
- Protected structures
- Heritage features or sites
- Graveyards
- Stone walls
- Wildlife areas
- Landscaped areas
- Community facilities including churches schools, etc

Remember! Use your map to show the Adjudicator the areas you have worked particularly hard on.

Section 5 outlines the terms and conditions of the competition including the criteria for all the prizes.

The Closing Date

Make sure you double-check the closing date for the competition each year.

Projects in Your Area

Topics covered in this section:

The Projects

On-Going Maintenance

Special Projects

- Clean-Up Campaigns
- Recycling
- Street Painting and Murals
- Use of Waste Land
- Enhancing Open Spaces
- Tree Planting
- School Grounds
- Restoration and Conservation

Steps in Each Project

Plan for the Resources Available

Consider the Final Outcome

Work with the Local Authority

Start the Big Clean-Up

Local Authority Actions

Duration of the Clean-Up

Publicity

Who to Involve

How to Carry Out the Work

Projects for Individuals

Creating Rewards

Addressing Difficulties

Projects for Larger Agencies

Local Authority Actions

Other Agencies' Actions

The Projects

Your survey will have provided you with pointers as to what to do next.

Your projects should consist of two types of projects - on-going maintenance and special projects.

On-Going Maintenance

This is the type of work you do to address problems such as:

- Litter, broken glass, fly-tipping
- Drab appearance of buildings
- Broken signs, seats and play equipment
- Un-mown grass, overgrown flower and shrub beds, untidy verges
- Dead and vandalised trees
- Broken fences, walls and derelict buildings
- Lack of edge definition to roads and paths
- Derelict land

or problems due to a lack of facilities such as:

- Play areas
- Footpaths
- Seating areas
- Public landscaped areas
- Litter bins
- Car parking space.

These deficiencies can be improved by specific actions as discussed below.

Special Projects

These are particular projects which the Committee will undertake to improve a particular area.

A major project can be of great value in promoting an awareness of TidyTowns. Whatever the project always bear in mind that it should both achieve something tangible to which the local community can easily relate, while also

giving a boost to the TidyTowns' campaign. The "feel good" factor which can be experienced in the successful implementation of a flagship project can act as a stimulus to attract new members and encourage greater community involvement.

Be aware however that many of these projects will take a long period of time as they will require permission (whether from a landowner, planning authority, other agency or all) and resources.

Over a 5-year period the Committee may only have the resources to undertake one or two special projects so be realistic about your capacity to deliver of these objectives.

Ideas for improving your town or village range from small-scale improvements which could be carried out by your Committee to larger-scale actions which can be we targeted with support from other Groups. Possible actions include:

Clean-up Campaigns

These are best made into events which involve people of all ages.

Few people will find the time nowadays for an afternoon of regular litter picking. Perhaps a weekly or twice-monthly hour-long work session is the best way for a Group to improve their area and also sustain enthusiasm!

When working as a Group it can be helpful to place a notice on the site advising the wider community of your activities. Also consider wearing 'high visibility' jackets marked 'TidyTowns' or 'Residents Association' (as appropriate) for safety and publicity reasons.

Carry out your weekly work session in a different part of town and announce in advance where you will be each week. In this way you will often get a few people who will be prepared to participate for a time.

Recycling

Cutting down on waste, re-using material and recycling, helps to reduce litter and the need for more landfill sites. If there is no recycling collection point, help to set one up with the Local Authority. Many Local Authorities now have recycling programmes in place as part of their waste management strategies.

A Group could help to draw up a directory of locations for recycling materials in the area and distribute it widely. They can also reduce their own waste generation by means of communal composting and segregation of waste collected during litter pick-ups.

Street Painting and Murals

Perhaps consider the maintenance of communal boundaries as well as decorative wall murals which are particularly attractive in school grounds but which may also be used to screen development sites.

Use of Waste-Land

Vacant sites may be used for play areas, community gardens and nature reserves or seating areas, even on a temporary basis. Such projects, however, need a high degree of commitment from the Group.

TOP TIP:

The Department of the Environment, Heritage & Local Government's National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) will be able to provide you with lots of helpful information and advice about wildlife, biodiversity and marine projects – check their website: www.npws.ie

Enhancing Open Spaces

Some Local Authorities have difficulty in finding the resources to maintain open spaces, flowerbeds and shrubberies in towns and villages. Community groups could help by coming to an agreement with the Area or Town Engineer, to take responsibility for an open space in return, for example, for the running expenses of a motor mower.

In a town, a local group, such as a horticultural club, could be responsible for a certain area, while residents or tenants associations could maintain open spaces within their estate. Young people should be involved with Green Schools potentially playing a very important role in this area.

Tree Planting

Consider if the streets and open spaces in housing estates would benefit from more tree planting.

School Grounds

The Tidy Towns competition lays great emphasis on involving the whole community and schools have a major part to play.

Many local schools create gardens, nature reserves and outdoor resource areas in school grounds, which are often very prominent within a town or village.

TOP TIP:

The Notice Nature website contains some very useful information about raising awareness of biodiversity. Their links section includes a list of many useful organisations which can provide advice and support to groups engaging in environmental work of any type (<http://www.noticenature.ie/links.html>)

An Taisce (www.antaisce.org) provides information through the Green Schools Programme www.greenschoolsireland.org on projects.

Restoration and Conservation

The restoration and preservation of buildings are highly technical exercises, but there is often scope for volunteers to join projects run by specialists. Voluntary groups, for example, have been responsible for restoring historic buildings and sites.

Proper expertise is essential and there is a legal requirement for permission for such works in certain cases from the Department of the Environment, Heritage & Local Government - National Monuments Service www.archaeology.gov.ie

[ie/en/](#) see also www.buildingsofireland.ie/.

The series of conservation leaflets produced by the Department of the Environment, Heritage & Local Government are particularly useful for building conservation.

In the countryside there is often scope for volunteers to help with the management of nature reserves. Contact your Local Authority or the Department of the Environment's National Parks and Wildlife Service at www.npws.ie/en/ and www.noticenature.ie to see what projects are in your area.

Additional project suggestions and ideas are set out in **Chapter 3** in relation to specific competition headings.

Steps in Each Project

The key elements of any project can typically include:

- Tracing the owner of the project site
- Preparing a report for the owner/Local Authority
- Obtaining the owner's permission
- Seeking planning permission
- Seeking building regulations approval
- Seeking permission from state agencies such as Waterways Ireland, The Department of the Environment, Heritage & Local Government, the OPW, etc.
- Obtaining insurance cover
- Recruiting manpower
- Obtaining tools and materials
- Seeking specialist advice
- Raising funds
- Applying for grants
- Obtaining transport

Plan for the Resources Available

This exercise of planning will provide you with a guide as to the feasibility of the project. The choice of project has to be tempered by the size of the Group and the time available.

If you choose to do something yourself, you are more likely to be successful if you bear these points in mind:

Be realistic about how much you can achieve, especially if your Group is newly formed. The

amount of time that you can afford to give to the project is especially important.

Gain experience through small schemes. Small clean-up campaigns, for example, will give you the knowledge and confidence to tackle a bigger task. Local Authorities are also more willing to help if you can show that you have already done some worthwhile work on your own initiative.

Most schemes will need maintenance and management after they have been established. Local Authorities are willing to help voluntary groups if they feel that the Group is well established and that it is capable of looking after the site in the long term.

Consider the Final Outcome

Try to achieve some visible changes in a short time. People's enthusiasm needs to be stimulated by some rapid success, however small. However, significant environmental improvements have occurred as a result of a major project being tackled by a vigorous and enthusiastic Group. By showing what could be done by generating community pride, such projects have stimulated other improvements in the locality. A yearly exhibition in the local library utilising "before and after" photographs of work done to date and an artist's impression of future projects is a good public relations exercise.

Work with the Local Authority

Only the Local Authority can undertake certain projects - an example might be the repair or renewal of public footpaths but they should be consulted and involved in most projects. They have a limited budget for environmental work each year so be realistic in the proposals that you put forward. It will be useful in terms of maintaining good relations, to prioritise the work in your plan and present a request to the Local Authority of no more than perhaps five improvements to be made by them each year. Foster a good working relationship with your area engineer.

Attend any meetings called by the Local Authority in connection with the community and its development. Appoint someone to check on current planning applications with a view to influencing the development at the design

stage. Local Authorities will welcome the views of residents in choosing and designing these schemes. Put forward your proposals.

Start the Big Clean-Up

Your survey may have identified litter and graffiti as two of the main environmental problems in your area. A clean-up campaign can improve the environment immediately, and can provide both an activity for people of all ages and an initial focus for any longer-term plans your Group may have in mind.

Some of the problems to be tackled under this heading include not only rubbish in streets, but also litter on waste ground and in streams, canals and woodlands. Graffiti, derelict buildings and derelict churchyards may also be tackled. Here are a few suggestions to get you started.

Local Authority Actions

You may be able to influence the Local Authority policy in relation to litter.

Under the Litter Pollution Acts, 1997 to 2009, Local Authorities are required to adopt a litter management plan for their area. The plan should include specifying objectives to prevent and control litter, measures to encourage public awareness of the damage caused by litter pollution and the measures needed to carry out the plan. The Local Authority is required to consult with local groups about what is proposed in the plan and to seek their participation in meeting its objectives. With the plan as a basis, a Tidy Towns Group can work together with the Local Authority and the wider community to ensure that their area remains litter-free.

Aspects of the plan would include:

- Anti-litter awareness,
- The provision of litter bins in the right places,
- The frequency of emptying and
- The provision of a facility for the removal of larger household items.

Ideally, the plan would tie in with the Council's waste management strategy which would include recycling and the collection and disposal of municipal wastes.

The Government issued a national Litter Action Plan in February 2001. Details of the plan are available on the Department of the Environment's website at www.environ.ie/en/Environment/Waste/LitterPollution/LitterActionPlan/.

Duration of the Clean-up

It is probably best to carry out a clean-up campaign over a fairly short period - perhaps one or two weeks. A short, sharp, campaign is better than a long drawn-out one. A programme of events should be organised. The campaign should be launched on a particular day and could tie in with An Taisce's 'National Spring Clean' perhaps through an organised community clean-up day - see www.nationalspringclean.org/ - or in conjunction with your Local Authority.

Publicity

As many people as possible should be aware of the campaign, preferably during the week before the campaign starts - put up posters in shop windows for example. Notification of the campaign should be given to the local press, radio and churches, and the media should be invited to attend specific events.

Who to Involve

Local schools should be involved where possible. This can be achieved either through project work or through getting children involved in the work of cleaning up e.g. around their own school. The An Taisce Green Schools project may be able to help.

Youth groups (Scouts, Guides, etc.), should be asked to do their bit in the campaign - they can either set up their own project or provide volunteers for projects organised by your Group.

Local traders can be encouraged to help out by putting notices in shop windows, disposing of their own rubbish more thoughtfully, contributing to the cost of providing more litter bins, and sponsoring projects involving their goods or services, such as murals or street painting schemes.

How to Carry out the Work

Contact the cleansing department or the area engineer in your Local Authority for information on waste disposal sites and their availability to the public, arrangements for the collection and disposal of household junk, old appliances and abandoned vehicles and details of any proposed clean-up work by the Local Authority. Arrange to have available the right tools - wheelbarrows, rakes, shovels and gloves - and to have the rubbish cleared away after you have collected it. The Local Authority may be prepared to supply you with plastic sacks or a skip. If not, skips can be hired from waste disposal contractors, but obtain three quotations before you commit yourself.

If you can separate waste paper, glass or metal during collection, some charities may take the materials from you if you can deliver it to them.

Take great care if you are tidying up anything but man-made litter. Rotting wood, leaves, and bramble and nettle patches can be important wildlife habitats, especially for butterflies. There is a great danger, that wildlife habitats may be harmed by an initial enthusiasm to over-clear an area.

When clearing a particular site, try to link any tidying up operation to some later positive use of the land. Otherwise the litter may be just as bad in a few weeks time. The problem of indiscriminate dumping can only be overcome by constant vigilance and the willingness to pursue prosecution under the Litter and Waste Management Acts. In some towns, business associations have sponsored litter bins within 'litter-free zones'.

Additional tips in relation to litter and tidiness are set out in **Chapter 3**.

Projects for Individuals

Individuals can play an enormous part in the enhancement of the local environment.

Be aware that sometimes people will not want to commit to becoming involved in meetings and organised clean-ups but will happily maintain their own spaces and areas in line with the Committee's overall objectives.

At the smallest scale, individuals can improve their areas in many ways by attending to the outside of their homes or premises and by becoming more aware of the impacts that we have on the environment:

- Keeping the building exteriors in good repair
- Repairing fences, walls and gates
- Installing window boxes or plant containers
- Planting shrubs and small trees in private gardens and screening unattractive premises with trees
- Removing derelict structures and rubbish
- By keeping an eye on the public areas in the area
- Collecting litter, recycling waste material and composting kitchen wastes
- Reporting the need for maintenance to the Council
- Sweeping the path or cutting the grass verge outside the home.

Creating Rewards

Garden competitions and other local initiatives can be a very effective way of rewarding local actions.

This creates a fun sense of competition and encourages others to become involved.

Residents could pay a small entry fee and comply with a set of criteria to enter. Marks could be awarded for:

- Colourful planting and flowers
- Use of native plants and shrubs - particularly berried species which are great for feeding birds
- Use of bird feeders and tables in gardens
- Use of composters for organic waste.

Small awards can be given. Perhaps ask a local landscaping or plant shop to sponsor these.

Addressing Difficulties

Sometimes a lack of resources can be a problem whereby an individual property owner would undertake work but cannot afford to. Your Local Authority can sometimes assist with these issues with some authorities providing grants for 'low cost high impact' projects such as paying for exterior paint (not labour) for repainting of housing schemes.

On the other end of the spectrum, where an individual is contributing to a particular difficulty - e.g. where an individual property is consistently being pointed out by the Planning Authority as being problematic, the Committee may diplomatically wish to bring these comments to the individual's attention and ask for help.

Sometimes the Committee will simply have no choice but to involve the Planning Authority - as may be the case where planning enforcement is a problem.

Projects for Larger Agencies

Arguably, one of the Committee's largest challenges is working with other agencies and bodies on the management of local areas.

Local Authority Actions

Some large-scale public improvements can only be carried out by Local Authority.

These include:

- Repair of road and footpath surfaces
- Provision of new footpaths
- Major tree and shrub planting
- Replacement of vandalised street furniture
- Provision of litter bins.

TOP TIP:

Committees should work closely with officials and staff from their Local Authority e.g. key contacts such as your Local Authority Area Engineer.

Other Agencies' Actions

There are other items which are the responsibility of public authorities and which impact on the amenity of our towns and villages.

Areas which typically involve other agencies include:

Streetscape Quality - typical issues often relate to the provision of services by agencies including - but not limited to, Local Authorities.

Road Edges and Margins - typical concerns include:

- a lack of definition between the road and the hard or soft shoulder as indicated by areas of mud, litter, dumps of gravel and overgrown grass
- broken fences, damaged walls or other poorly managed boundaries
- absence of kerbstones along road edges within the 30 mph area, thus giving adjoining owners the opportunity to keep up the good appearances of these areas
- poor maintenance of grass verges.

Waterside Areas - typical concerns around neglected river or canal banks include:

- poor access or absence of a right of way
- overgrown vegetation
- illegal dumping and rubbish dumping
- absence of paths, lighting, litter bins, seats, etc

Overhead Wires - one action which would dramatically improve the appearance of our towns and villages would be the removal of criss-crossing wires and un-used poles. Attaching street lighting directly on to buildings might be considered. Where overhead wires radiate in several directions from one pole it may be possible to have these re-routed and redundant poles removed.

Possible solutions in relation to these are detailed in **Chapter 3** below.

These works typically require the co-ordinated action of the service provider - the ESB, and the Local Authority. Discuss these works with your Area Engineer and seek support from your politicians for these works. Bear in mind that these works are often complex and expensive and may have to be carried out on a phased basis.

Consider therefore the areas you would prioritise for under-grounding works.

This should avoid:

- Placing poles in highly prominent positions where they will detract from a view
- Poles from which wires radiate in several directions
- Wires crossing the street diagonally.

A Group can help to get such improvements carried out by putting forward to the Local Authority a report outlining the various improvements required, with arguments, plans and photographs to back their case, preferably with the support of local councillors.

The Project and Judging Categories

Topics covered in this section:

The Competition Structure and Categories Overall Development Approach

What the Adjudicator looks at

Areas to Consider

The Built Environment

What the Adjudicator looks at

Areas to Consider

- Architectural Character
- Colour and Buildings
- Building Materials
- Condition of Upper Storeys
- Shopfronts
- Paving
- Derelict Sites and Paving
- Derelict Graveyards

Landscaping

What the Adjudicator looks at

Areas to Consider

- Landscape Treatment
- The Landscape Setting
- The Planting Plan
- Planting Design and Management
- Planting Annual Wildflowers
- Maintaining Grass Areas
- Community Gardens
- Creating Safe Play Areas
- Picnic Sites and Amenity Areas
- References

Wildlife and Natural Amenities

What the Adjudicator looks at

Areas to Consider

- Wildlife and Your Plan
- Carrying out a Habitat Survey
- Developing a Management Plan
- Some Basic Pointers
- Access and Community Involvement
- Creating a Wildlife Area
- Interpretation
- References

Litter Control

What the Adjudicator looks at

Areas to Consider

- Identify Problem Areas
- Managing Litter
- Working with Partners in the Area

Tidiness

What the Adjudicator looks at

Areas to Consider

- Excessive or Inappropriate Signage
- Overhead Wires
- Graffiti
- Traffic Issues
- Weed and Plant Control

Waste Minimisation

What the Adjudicator looks at

Areas to Consider

- Leading by Example
- Providing Information
- Encourage Best Practice in Others
- Provide Local Recycling Points
- Reporting Problems

Residential Areas

What the Adjudicator looks at

Areas to Consider

- Working with Residents' Associations
- Providing Guidance
- Gardens as Local Features
- Improvements to Individual Buildings
- Landscaped Spaces
- Other Improvements

Roads, Streets and Back Areas

What the Adjudicator looks at

Areas to Consider

- Roads, Verges and Fences
- Streets
- Back Areas
- Car parks

General Impression

What the Adjudicator looks at

Areas to Consider

The Competition Structure & Judging Categories

The competition is marked as follows:

This is the type of work you do to address problems such as:

Overall Development Approach	50 marks
The Built Environment	50 marks
Landscaping	50 marks
Wildlife & Natural Amenities	50 marks
Litter Control	50 marks
Tidiness	30 marks
Waste Minimisation	20 marks
Residential Areas	40 marks
Roads, Streets and Back Areas	50 marks
General Impression	10 marks
Total	400 marks

In this chapter we set out what the adjudicator is looking at in your area and provide some guidance on the areas and projects you may wish to look at.

Overall Development Approach

This is a broad and general topic which simply relates to the structure of committee works and actions.

What the Adjudicator Looks At

The adjudicator is directed to consider the following issues under this category:

Structure of committee activities

- Meeting
- Fundraising
- Planning projects
- Communications
- Links with other groups and agencies.

The Plan

- Specific projects
- The map

AREAS TO CONSIDER

The adjudicator is interested in how your committee organises their work programme and actions. The questions on the application form are asking you to describe how you achieve this. In particular the adjudicator is interested in how you work with others – both in the broader community and agencies operating in the area.

In terms of the Plan the adjudicator is interested in the variety of projects you are taking on. They will be considering whether you have a variety of project types – e.g. a balance between landscaping, management of built environment, etc.

The adjudicator will consider the jobs you have completed and also ones you propose to work on. They will look at the way you break down the tasks and identify partners – such as a Local Authority, who will play a part.

The availability of funding is important for your own plans and also as an indicator to the adjudicator of how you can resource projects. Where you have previously sourced - or now propose to source - funding from an agency such as a Local Authority, LEADER, or the Heritage Council, for example, you should mention it.

Built Environment

Each town and village has its own history and traditions, which together with the local landscape create a unique character and 'sense of place'.

By understanding, recognising and respecting the quality of your area's public open spaces, streets, squares and buildings and the craftsmanship which made them - you can ensure that they are appropriately maintained and improved.

Changes in the built environment can have both positive and negative impacts. The re-

development of derelict sites can have an extremely positive impact on a local area. Conversely, developments that erode the local sense of place can come about due to large-scale developments and, incrementally, from the smaller, insensitive activities of property owners. For example, the replacement of wooden sash windows with PVC or aluminium or the replacement of a traditional shopfront with plastic signs, can fundamentally alter the character of an area.

What the Adjudicator Looks At

- Buildings
 - Public and Private
 - Modern and Old
- Monuments
- Streets
- Derelict Sites
- Public Sites
- Signs
- Boundary Treatments

ISSUES TO CONSIDER

Architectural Character

The 'character' of a village or street is determined by the architectural quality, style and details of its buildings, paving and street furniture. It is this character which makes one place different from another and gives it a distinctive identity. It is also what we try to preserve and protect and wish to enhance in the development of our town or village.

Some of the components which help to determine this character will have been noted at the survey stage. They can be listed as desirable items for preservation in a development plan, for protection during renovation, or for retention when a building is being altered.

The style and details of new or infill development should take the nature of local features into account. 'Taking into account' does not mean slavishly copying an older style. Some examples of existing features which may be reflected in new buildings include:

- The style of the buildings – such as mediaeval, Georgian, Victorian
- Details of doors, door cases and fanlights,

windows and glazing patterns

- Facades and the materials and patterns of construction, including external plastering, which may reveal the historical development of the building
- Paving materials and paving patterns
- Styles and patterns of railings, steps, lamp posts, benches and monuments
- Styles of shop fronts and their lettering
- The colours of buildings, in terms of paint, render or materials.

Colour and Buildings

An increasing number of our towns and villages are improving their appearance and the quality of their environment by the use of colour. While colours may be used to good effect on windows, doors and fascias, the broader use of colour on walls can play a dramatic part in the creation of an attractive urban scene. With the wide choice of materials and finishes now available, there is great scope for the imaginative use of colour.

No matter how well an individual building is painted, neighbouring buildings which are not well maintained will detract from its appearance. One neglected, unpainted building may mar the appearance of an otherwise attractive street scene.

Community groups who wish to improve the appearance of their locality may initiate or encourage a combined effort to ensure that a group of buildings (a terrace or a side of a street) is suitably decorated and well maintained. Some Local Authorities will offer advice on terrace or street painting schemes. Others may fund 'low cost, high impact' schemes where the capital cost of paint – but not labour, is funded, to improve the appearance of an area.

In built-up areas it is particularly important that those responsible for the maintenance of properties pay due attention to the outside appearance of their buildings and co-operate with their neighbours in creating attractive surroundings. Some local competitions offer a prize for best-kept terrace, street or even best three or four consecutive houses on a street.

The use of carefully selected colours can greatly enhance a street. Seek advice from an architect or other specialist designer in choosing a suitable

colour scheme and in deciding which surfaces should be painted.

Factors to consider are:

- The extent to which the colours of the natural materials should influence the area
- The amount of diversity which can be allowed within a particular scheme
- Tone and colour
- Elements to be emphasised or suppressed
- The treatment of details such as string courses, fascias, reveals, door and window cases.
- Rear facades of buildings

The restoration of heritage buildings is frequently tackled by local development or conservation groups and makes a fine flagship project for the renovation of an area. Expert advice and access to considerable resources of money and materials are needed.

Shopfronts

The simple, classical shop front is a characteristic feature of Ireland's towns and villages. In many towns they are a source of pride and much effort is spent on their maintenance. In some cases, however, traditional shop fronts have been replaced with plastic fascias and projecting signage.

Some typical problems and their solutions are set out below.

Problems:

- Signs clutter building elevations and the streetscape
- Proliferation of name and advertising signs that are unrelated to building function and appearance
- Uncharacteristic materials used on signs
- Window, door, signs etc. do not complement the design of the rest of the facade
- Security lighting shining into oncoming traffic.
- The condition of the upper storeys

Solutions:

- Your Local Authority may have Shopfront Design Guidelines
- Signage above the ground floor level should be removed
- Signboard should be placed over the shop

windows and doors

- Signboard should be placed so that its top is below the sills of the windows on the first floor
- Entire area under the signboard should be differentiated by colour and/or materials from the rest of the façade
- Lighting should be realigned.
- Rear facades of buildings which can be seen from public areas need to be considered in the colour scheme and maintenance of an area.

Paving

The condition and type of road and pavement surfacing, and the presence of kerbing are important to the appearance and character of a town. Loose gravel at the side of the road reduces the visual appeal of a street. The type of stone used in footpaths in a town, such as limestone and granite flagstones, stone sets and cobble drainage channels give an insight into the economic activities of the past, the geology of the area and traditional methods of construction. These add to the local sense of place, unlike tarmac or concrete.

The restoration and upkeep of traditional materials, combined with their use in conservation schemes, can create employment in the countryside and can revive traditional construction skills. Recording local materials and patterns of paving, by means of photos, can be an important aspect of the initial survey.

Improvement work to roads and paving can only be carried out by the Local Authority either as part of routine maintenance and upgrading or as part of an Urban and Village Renewal Scheme. A good survey and presentation by a Tidy Towns Group can assist the Local Authority in drawing up an improvement project.

Improvements to paving can be combined with the under-grounding of overhead cables and the development of a 'safe route to school' project with traffic calming measures and cycle lanes. Many town squares and other hard landscaped areas can be transformed with the reorganisation of car parking layout, kerbing, lighting and paving and appropriate tree planting.

Try to avoid the use of red paving bricks in villages as it gives too urban an appearance as

does the over-use of cast iron bollards, although they may be used in a canal, railway or seaside setting. Coloured paving should also be avoided in historical areas as strong colours and patterns in paving tend to detract from the buildings and often mar the appearance of the street. Concrete paving units are generally more appropriate.

Materials and styles that are characteristic of the area should be used in preference to modern materials. For example, drainage channels beside footpaths were often crafted from cobbles set into cement. This introduces texture and character to the appearance of the street yet they are often covered over with tarmac as part of street 'improvements'. Slightly different materials can be used most appropriately to delineate pedestrian crossings or a change in the use of the paved area, such as from pedestrian to vehicle use.

The needs of the visually impaired should always be kept in mind in paving schemes. The use of paviers with raised patterns at pedestrian crossings and other junctions is to be highly recommended.

A common problem ruining many well-designed schemes is utility companies who replace paving setts with tarmac after they have dug up a pavement. Close consultation and liaison between the Local Authority and these agencies is critical in ensuring that such disruptions are avoided.

Old paving materials should, where possible, be reused or recycled. For large informal areas of hard surfacing, such as overflow car parks, alternatives to tarmac include rolled gravel or hollow paviers through which grass can be grown.

Derelict Sites and Buildings

Many towns and villages have derelict buildings, sometimes in prominent places on a main street. The improvement of such sites can be carried out by the Local Authority in two main ways. Each planning authority is required to make a development plan for its functional area and to include an objective for the development and renewal of areas in need of regeneration.

Under the Derelict Sites Act 1990, a Local Authority can serve a notice on the owner of a

derelict site or building, inviting him to carry out work to prevent the site continuing to be derelict. If an offer is made but the work is not carried out, the Local Authority can carry out the work itself and recover the cost from the owner. In cases of non-compliance and as a last resort compulsory purchase may be used.

It may sometimes be possible to temporarily improve a derelict building by giving it a coat of whitewash or painting a mural on the front. Murals can also be painted on hoardings around a site.

Towns on rivers or canals often have derelict warehouses that may lend themselves to renovation for a new use. Such renovation has often provided the focus for the regeneration of a whole neighbourhood.

Small sites can be cleared, surfaced with gravel and planted with trees, shrubs or flowers in containers with perhaps a bench. Larger sites are typically used as car parks, but attention should be paid to the condition and appearance of surrounding walls and buildings. Overgrown sites may be designated as 'nature reserves'. The issue of dereliction is a complex one and should be tackled as part of a long-term planning strategy for the area and **always in consultation with the Local Authority.**

Derelict Graveyards

Graveyards are a familiar feature of our landscape but we often take them for granted, whether they are deep in the countryside or tucked away in towns.

However, old graveyards are very important features and must be treated with great sensitivity. They often occupy sites of pre-Norman churches or monasteries and much archaeological information can lie beneath the uneven surface. Remains of early crosses, slabs and holy wells sometimes survive. The gravestones are documents recording the history of the community and may be the only source for the study of local and family history.

A graveyard can also provide a specialised habitat in a landscape much altered by man's activities, where grasses, wildflowers, butterflies, lichens and mosses can flourish undisturbed.

The character of each site should be understood before radical improvement works are carried out. The aim must be to retain the distinctive character of the graveyard and conserve its irreplaceable resources.

One of the first tasks often tackled by community groups is to 'clean-up' an old graveyard.

As many graveyards are listed in the Record of Monuments, it is essential that permission is obtained from the National Monuments Service of the Department of the Environment before any work is done. Their experts may be able to provide valuable information and even inspect the site.

When caring for graveyards:

- Don't damage the graveyard by levelling or filling in hollows
- Clear rank growth with hand tools only
- Keep growth in check by hand cutting twice a year
- Keep paths and steps in good repair
- Don't uproot trees or bushes or pull ivy; this causes damage. Cut ivy stems if necessary and allow it to die slowly
- Don't burn rubbish close to gravestones
- Keep broken stones together, record inscriptions and don't move gravestones.

In dealing with more modern graveyards, families should be encouraged to take care of their own plots. Taste will change from place to place and from country to country. A common denominator seems to be flowers – and in many continental countries and increasingly in towns in Ireland there is evidence of flowers and shrubs being planted on graves.

Landscaping

The 'landscape' refers to the prevailing shapes (hills, valleys, field patterns) and land-cover (trees, grass, hedges, water) of the area which surrounds the town. 'Landscaping' also refers to the planting of trees, shrubs and flowers within the settlement. This is sometimes known as soft landscaping as opposed to hard landscaping which generally consists of paving and kerbing.

Your committee's objectives for landscaping projects may be to identify the most important features of the surrounding landscape and then to establish a programme of planting and paving

that will enhance the local landscape. In planning such projects you should:

- Consider the way that the town or village fits into the landscape
- Identify views and prospects from inside the town or village outwards to the surrounding landscape and the main views of the town from its approaches

What the Adjudicator Looks At

- Trees
- Shrubs
- Flowers
- Maintenance of planted areas
- Management of open spaces

AREAS TO CONSIDER

Landscape Treatment

The landscape treatment of a town or village is of fundamental importance to the appearance and general well-being of the town as well as to its success in the TidyTowns competition.

Under the adjudication, criteria points are awarded for the appropriate selection and siting of trees, shrubs and flowers for year-round effect, the maintenance of planted areas and trees, and the management of open spaces.

While great improvements have been made over the last few years in the use of summer planting, such as hanging baskets and window boxes, a more structured, long-term approach to planting is required to achieve a good year-round effect which can only be achieved through tree and shrub planting. Choose native species where possible.

Only a general outline can be given here and TidyTowns Groups are referred to more detailed references available from agencies including the Heritage Council and NPWS (see **Helpful Handout D**).

The Landscape Setting

The landscape is the interface between the rural and the urban, the built and the natural and the cultural and aesthetic aspects of a settlement. Every town and village is related to its landscape

through history, folklore, recreation and a wide variety of cultural activities. Though essentially a town and village-based movement, Tidy Towns Committees should pay great attention to this broader understanding of landscape. It is an important part of peoples' lives – giving individuals and communities a sense of identity and belonging and bestowing a sense of place on our surroundings.

The landscape treatment that you propose for the town or village will be determined by its landscape setting. Whether the town is by the sea, a lake or river, within a hedgerow farming landscape or a wooded valley, will influence the landscape treatment proposed.

Your overall plan may be to enhance the local character by opening up a riverside walk or be a part of a more ambitious project in urban renewal. This local character will be formed from the history and development of the settlement, the local geology giving traditional building materials and styles, the shape and form of the surrounding landscape, soil types and depth, and the degree of exposure or shelter, many of which will influence the types of trees and shrubs grown and their locations. For example, the character of an estate village in a deep sheltered valley is quite different to that of a coastal village.

Our appreciation of our towns is influenced by the diversity of the shapes and groups of buildings, spaces and trees within them. Not only views within the town or village should be considered, but also those from the village to the surrounding countryside. Views of the village itself, especially from approaching roads and nearby vantage points are also important and should not be blocked by poorly located tree planting.

Mature trees are very important to the character of a town or village and should be protected in any local plan. Trees can frame views, especially along a riverside walk, or a building such as a church or courthouse, they can provide a sense of enclosure by closing a view at the end of a street or act as a visual 'pivot' when growing on a corner. They can also screen unsightly views, perhaps of a quarry or a landfill site.

Simply, a great deal more thought should go into tree planting to enhance the character of a settlement than merely lines of trees along

approach roads. Carrying out a local tree survey can help to determine the types of trees to plant and where. Some mature trees may be old and may need to be replaced and your survey can help here too.

The Planting Plan

While your plan must take into account the landscape setting of the town or village, your planting plan will, of course, also be determined by:

- the land that is available for planting
- the amount of aftercare and the long-term maintenance available
- the degree of vandalism experienced
- the location of the planting - whether riverside, seaside, on roundabouts or approach roads.

The Landscape Officer in your Local Authority can be an important resource. The planting plan should be an integral part of the five-year Tidy Towns plan either with a different location selected for planting each year, or a priority-based plan depending on which areas are most in need of planting, for example to screen the backs of properties from a new relief road.

The plan should distinguish between areas where trees will be planted as individuals, groups or lines (as in gardens, open spaces and along roads) and those areas where trees may be planted in say larger blocks of new woodland or shelter belts.

Shrub planting should be of tough, low maintenance species and varieties, as hedges or in more urban spaces in 'pocket parks', car parks, shopping areas and roadsides.

Your final planting plan may consist of a map of the town or village showing the locations of different types of planting and their priority for the purposes of inclusion within the five-year Tidy Towns plan. At the more detailed level for individual sites the plan, or plans, should clearly show at an appropriate scale, the layout of trees and shrubs, their names and the numbers of each species or variety to be planted. Such a plan is essential both to cost the planting and to lay out the plants on site.

Plant Selection is done on the basis of 'what, why and where'.

- **What...** are the most appropriate species for the site in terms of soils and other factors?

Selecting the most appropriate plants for the site is fundamentally important, especially for trees, to ensure that the plants thrive and to reduce maintenance.

The basic selection will be according to soil type - whether the soil is gravel, clay or loam and its base status whether acid (low pH around 4-5) or alkaline (high pH around 7-8). The pH of the soil is usually determined by the underlying geology and can be determined by a simple garden soil testing kit.

Most plants thrive on a neutral pH of 6.5. **Acid soils** particularly support heathers, rhododendrons and birch are found over granite, sandstone and on peaty soils. **Alkaline or base rich soils** that support ash, hawthorn and roses are found over limestone in the midlands and glacial clay deposits such as are found down the east coast.

The trees and shrubs growing naturally in the area will provide a good indication of what will thrive in the locality. Examine these during your survey.

Plant to provide a good variety of trees and shrubs to maintain year-round interest.

Native Irish trees such as oak, birch and ash are more beneficial for wildlife than more ornamental and introduced trees.

We have few truly native trees but we are able to grow almost any tree in the temperate world and it would be a shame to ignore this rich palette of plant diversity. Arbutus is the only tree native to Ireland alone. Native trees are of greatest value as they provide habitat for many times more species of insects and other organisms vital to the food chain.

A compromise is to grow the native trees on the outskirts and approaches to the town, with more ornamental or introduced trees in the centre of town and in gardens.

- **Why...** is the planting being considered - in other words what functions do you want the planting for?

The purpose of the planting will influence the species and varieties chosen - whether for a windbreak, noise barrier, visual screen, roadside avenue, street planting in an urban centre, ground cover, planting around a play area, seasonal flowers, roses or autumn colour, fruit, or for wildlife, such as birds, butterflies and bees. For example many trees, such as lime, sycamore, horse chestnut and willow provide excellent bee forage.

- **Where...** what location is being selected where you propose planting?

Where you want to plant will be an important factor in species selection, the size of plants used and the type of planting. The amount of exposure to a wind or to sea spray will also influence the types of plants to be grown.

For example:

- Few species, can tolerate exposure to salt-laden **sea winds**. Shrubs, which can tolerate sea winds, however, are often highly ornamental, such as Olearia, Hebe, Senecio, Cordyline, Rosa rugosa and Phormium - which can be suitable for public areas.
- **Road junctions** will need plants which are below one metre high, such as heathers and ground cover plants, so as not to obscure views of approaching traffic.
- **Roundabouts** on the outskirts of towns and villages should have similarly low plants and ground cover though "in town" roundabouts may have higher plants and shrubs.
- Willows and Alder would be suitable for **riversides and canals**. However, before planting near any watercourse, it is recommended that you consult with a local wildlife expert to ensure that your plans are suitable.
- Birch and Sycamore are suited to **upland areas**,
- Beech, Oak and Lime are suited to **farming areas** on good, deep soils.
- **Native trees** such as ash and hawthorn should be planted on the outskirts of the town or village, while more ornamental trees may be suitable for streets and gardens. Ornamental trees must never be planted in natural amenity areas such as river banks and

lakesides. Be aware of the danger of invasion by the Rhododendron or cherry laurel.

- Non-native trees should never be grown in areas of wildlife value. Some introduced trees, especially sycamore and Norway maple, produce prodigious quantities of seed and can eventually 'take over' a wooded area.
- Unless it can be kept trimmed as a low hedge, Leylandii should be avoided as it is out of keeping with native hedgerows and very rapidly grows to a large size and is a frequent cause of dispute between neighbours.
- The sea buckthorn *Hippophae rhamnoides* should not be planted on sand dunes as its vigorous suckers can reduce species-rich dunes to an impenetrable thorny thicket.

Trees should not be planted where they will outgrow their allotted space and so need pruning. For this reason, forest trees, such as oak, beech and ash, are not suitable as street trees and ornamental cherries when mature have roots which push up paving slabs. You should consider therefore using the variety of small to medium sized trees suitable for street tree planting and consider the following in locating them on any existing street. In some instances, it may be possible to source cultivars of trees in the surrounding countryside:

- Only Local Authorities are authorised to plant trees on public footpaths and without the express permission of the Local Authority no works should ever be undertaken on public footpaths.
- Not every footpath is suitable for tree planting for a variety of reasons which could include:
- Lack of width
- The presence of underground cables or other facilities
- The presence of directional or other signs

TOP TIP:

The routes of underground services can roughly be worked out by locating manhole covers for the different services.

- It is rarely necessary to prune trees but if tree work is needed it should be done by an expert. The lopping of trees should be avoided as the practice creates more problems than it solves, both for the tree and its owner. If the tree is too big for the space it occupies, then it may be removed and replaced with a tree more fitting for the space.
- Trees could be planted in front gardens if there are problems with vandalism or a lack of space.

Generally, small nursery stock, such as transplants, are easier to establish than larger trees which need more aftercare; although a balance has to be reached between the cost, the risk of vandalism and the degree of aftercare available.

Woodland planting will use forestry transplants about 600mm high and three years old. Where long grass may be a problem, 'whips' one metre high can be used and these do not need staking.

For most public planting, trees around 2-3 m in height and between 10-16 cm girth are suitable. These trees will require staking. Trees for street planting will need a clear stem free of branches for 2 metres.

Planting Design and Management

You must consider the amount of time and resources that can be given to looking after the planted area. Shrub areas will need weeding, pruning and the clearance of litter. It cannot be assumed that the Local Authority has the staff available for this work.

A good visual effect can be achieved when shrubs, including roses and perennials are planted in single species groups, with contrasts of leaf and flower colour, foliage texture and overall shape. This has a lower maintenance requirement than seasonal flowering plants.

A very fine impact can be achieved if the same plant colour and flower type is used on all plant containers in a street or square.

Shrub beds near to shops and takeaways are notorious litter traps. If shrub planting is needed in such areas it should be as raised planters, but these need to be large to have any impact. Generally planters need a lot of maintenance.

In order to reduce the maintenance effort and to create a more harmonious appearance, it may be worthwhile looking at the town or village as a whole. There could be a progression of increasingly ornamental landscape effects from well-maintained natural planting on the approach roads (trees, hedges, mown grass and wildflower banks) through shrubs and more ornamental trees at road junctions and prominent spots, to street trees, paving and window boxes in the centre of town.

Planting on approach roads should be as large groups of the same colour and texture as more intricate effects cannot be appreciated when travelling at speed. More detailed planting effects may be used at junctions and in the centre of town where travel is slower.

Maintenance will be reduced if shrubs are planted into clean soil where all perennial weeds have been removed.

The main cause of damage to trees is not vandalism, but poor planting and lack of maintenance. Trees should ideally be planted in the autumn when the soil is still warm and the tree can make new root growth before the winter. Such trees are far more tolerant of a dry summer than spring planted trees. However, trees may be planted at any time between October and February inclusive. All trees will need copious watering during the first summer, even if the season is wet. Grass competes strongly with trees for soil moisture and grass around the base of a tree is the major cause of stunted growth and tree death. The use of strimmers to cut grass at the base of trees also damages the bark and causes infection to enter the tree.

An area of a metre diameter at the base of the tree should be kept bare of grass and mulched with grass clippings, crushed bark or gravel. The planting of flowers around the base of trees does not always give an attractive result and they may also compete for soil moisture in summer. Consideration could be given to planting of native understorey trees such as holly and elder. This will greatly improve the area as a wildlife habitat.

Newly planted trees will need regular watering during the summer for at least two years.

Planting Annual Wildflowers

The direct sowing of native annuals in large drifts on waste or derelict land, school grounds, the surroundings of industrial parks, vacant plots, new road verges, and an under-sowing to new woodland planting on bare soil, can be a cost-effective and attractive way of improving a particular site – whether at the small or large scale. This use of annuals has environmental benefits and offers the potential for real community involvement in the landscape.

The technique can have a number of benefits:

- Exciting, bold and dramatic colours can be achieved. Whether annuals are used in mixtures of different species or blocks of the same species it is possible to create beautiful landscape plantings. Colour mixes can be bright or subtle depending on the mixtures used.
- “Natural” results are achieved with direct sowing as this produces meadow-like areas.
- Sowings can be extensive, resulting in large-scale colour effects.
- Economically feasible results at a cost of less than €1 per m² – less than the cost of regularly mown grassland.
- Sowings encourage community involvement, offering children in particular an opportunity to get involved in sowing and harvesting.
- The use of native annuals enables their conservation in new habitats. Many of the most dramatic annuals suited to direct sowing were ‘cornfield weeds’. Such plantings are highly attractive to insects and have a high level of interaction with the local wildlife.

Establishing a meadow of annual wildflowers is an excellent Tidy Towns landscaping and wildlife project. As many of the species used were formerly weeds in arable fields these are suited to normally fertile soils such as playing fields and road verges. These can be easier to create than wildflower meadows which need poorer soil.

Sowing is carried out in April with seeds sown at 2-4 g per square metre.

Though substantial regeneration of annuals can occur into the second year without additional cultivation of the soil, some disturbance of the soil is recommended after the first year to

ensure full displays are achieved. This can be simple harrowing or raking followed by over-sowing in the spring or autumn at a reduced rate. Alternatively, biennials and quick-to-flower perennials can be included in the mix.

Compared with the traditional wildflower meadows there are no grasses in the mix but there are no hard and fast rules on this.

Suitable species include:

Annuals

- yellow corn marigold *Chrysanthemum segetum*
- blue cornflower *centaurea cyanus*
- flax *Linum grandiflorum* 'rubrum'
- coreopsis *drummondii*
- the poppies *papaver rhoeas* and *p. somniferum*
- marigold *calendula officinalis*
- anthesis *arvensis*
- love-in-a-mist *nigella damascena*
- poached egg plant *limnathes douglasii*
- corncockle *agrostemma githago*.

Biennials

- verbascum,
- honesty *lunaria*,
- foxglove *digitalis*,
- evening primrose *oenothera*.

Maintaining Grass Areas

This section includes advice on maintaining grass areas in the most appropriate manner, depending on the use of the grassland and the effect that you want to create.

It is not necessary to keep all of the grass areas closely mown and you should consider the role of grasslands in the context of the wildlife conservation criteria in the Tidy Towns adjudication. The information presented in this section is intended to provide some general guidelines only.

Lists of suitable species are included to give a general indication of the types of grasses which may be suitable. Seed merchants supply pre-mixed grasses suitable for various uses, soils etc.

- **Lawn areas** consist of fine, closely cut grass. It is useful for creating a highly maintained, tidy,

formal appearance, such as a village green or along streets in housing areas. Closely mown grass also provides an important transition between informal features, such as meadows, and highly structured man-made features such as buildings, roads, etc.

Typical Species

- *Agrostis* and *Festuca* species
- Fine leaved bents and fescues
- *Poa pratensis* Smooth stalked meadow grass
- *Cynosurus cristatus* Crested dogs tail
- *Phleum nodosum* Timothy grass
- *Lolium perenne* Perennial rye grass: for areas of continual heavy use only

Maintenance

- Mowing 25-30 times per year to maintain a height of 20-25mm.
- Annual feeding - in spring.

Winter Playing Fields require a slightly tougher mixture of grass species than for lawn to withstand intense usage through winter months. Grass is kept short, but is coarser than lawn grass.

Typical Species

- *Agrostis* and *Festuca* species
- *Lolium perenne*
- *Cynosurus cristatus*
- *Poa* species
- *Phleum nodosum*

Maintenance

Surface aeration is needed during the winter season. About 15 cuts per year to maintain the height of the grass at approximately 40 mm. This height should be slightly increased towards the end of the summer.

Rough Turf – these low maintenance areas can be established where a high degree of formality is not required.

This is suited to many areas of open space such as, road verges, embankments, edging zones and may be used in some cases to form part of a more gradual transition between formal lawns, buildings etc., and informal or rural surroundings.

These areas remain in good condition all year round and accommodate more diverse flora than lawn. Species should be selected carefully as the seeding of some flora species restricted by cutting

Typical Species

- Lolium perenne
- Festuca rubra
- Poa Pratensis
- Cynosurus cristatus

Other plants which may be included:

- Trifolium repens – white clover
- Trifolium pratense – red clover

Maintenance

Should be maintained at about 100-125 mm, requiring 4-6 cuts per season.

Grassland & Wildflower Meadows are an effective low maintenance method of dealing with areas that do not require treatment. Meadows are one of the most endangered grassland habitats but are ecologically diverse and therefore an excellent choice for open areas.

With careful management, wild meadow flowers will eventually colonise the site and add colour and interest.

To avoid these areas appearing unkempt, litter should be controlled. A late autumn cut can reduce an untidy appearance in winter. Grass cutting is hard work however – as it is effectively hay making.

In contrast to annuals, wildflower grass mixes are most effectively sown on areas of gravel, fine rubble or poor land. Some of the best wildflower displays can be seen on new road cuttings on gravelly verges.

Adapting Existing Grassland: When adapting existing grassland to a meadow, it may be necessary to deter or remove rampant grass species, such as Dactylis, Cocksfoot, and Holcus, Fog, from existing grassland. This can be achieved by mowing 4-6 times per year for 2-3 years. Tussock grasses can be dug out.

After this time either of the two cutting regimes outlined above may be used. At first, one may have only buttercups, dandelions, clover and yarrow, but other wildflowers may be introduced.

The best way of doing this is not to sow seeds directly into the grass but to sow them in seed trays and then plant them out in groups where the grass has been dug over. Spring bulbs can

be added such as daffodils, snowdrops, crocus, aconite, fritillary and bluebells, which will flower and seed before July. While you may collect seed from local plants, never dig up plants from the wild.

Sowing a New Meadow: For genetic and ecological reasons, only use seed that you have collected locally or obtained from a supplier who uses seed sourced in Ireland.

It is also preferable if you send a record of your planting to the National Botanic Gardens at Glasnevin. Expert advice should be sought before introducing such seed to rural or semi-rural areas.

Sowing a new wildflower meadow is much the same as sowing a new lawn but with an important difference. Wildflowers will not thrive where the soil is too fertile, so don't use fertilisers and you may even have to remove some topsoil.

Perennial weeds such as docks, thistle and scutch grass must be removed. With large areas a glyphosate-based weed killer may be the only practical solution. Leave the ground for three or four weeks to give weed seeds a chance to germinate and then spray again.

The ground should then be raked. Early autumn is the best time to sow, followed by mid spring (April). Your choice of seed mixture will depend on the soil type, an acid or limey soil, and whether you want a spring or late summer meadow. Your seed supplier should provide you with a list of alternative species. Grasses will grow in most soil types but avoid ryegrass in the mix.

After about four weeks take the first cut with a very sharp mower, never cutting lower than 50mm (2 inches). Take off the grass and roll in any loose seedlings.

Many of the wildflowers will not germinate until the spring and for the first season there will not be many flowers so cut the grass in the usual way which will encourage the grasses and wildflowers to make a good root system.

In the second season, mow according to your chosen regime (see below) and enjoy the flowers.

Maintenance:

The choice of mowing regime will depend on the wildflowers already present. Knowledgeable local people may know what wildflowers grow where, or get a local botanist to carry out a site survey.

Spring Meadow: Leave the grass uncut from early spring through the summer to July to let the early summer flowers bloom and seed. Some of the wildflowers you may expect to see include cowslips (still to be found on banks and old meadows), Lady's smock or cuckoo flower (a food plant for butterflies), meadow buttercup, yellow rattle (a semi-parasitic plant on grasses), oxeye daisy, vetches, clovers and grasses.

Summer Meadow: Mow the grass regularly through the spring - not too short, and then leave it uncut from midsummer to the autumn when a final cut is made. The taller wildflowers such as field scabious and greater knapweed will encourage lots of butterflies. Damp meadows will contain yellow flag irises, meadowsweet, and loosestrife.

Cut with a scythe or strimmer and leave the hay to dry for a few days which leaves the seeds time to fall out. In both cases the cut grass must be removed from the site as it is important that the grassland does not become too fertile and encourage coarser grass which would shade out the wildflowers.

Community Gardens

Community gardens are 'parks' created out of smaller pockets of unused or even derelict land by and for local people. They can range from a small area of paving on a corner with a tree and a bench, to a large park with gardens, allotments, community orchards for rare local varieties of fruit, trees, benches, play areas, and a community centre with a crèche, cafe or craft workshops.

Creating a community garden can help to bring a community together like no other kind of project because everyone can help with ideas and action. A community garden can fill many kinds of needs from the provision of somewhere for children to play, to the provision of places for old people to sit and enjoy the sun.

A community garden is much cheaper to provide and run than a Council-owned park because

so many of the resources are available locally. Because young people can be closely involved in the creation of a community garden, vandalism in the area can be greatly reduced.

Some Points to Consider:

- Gardens are best created on a busy pedestrian route where they will be well-used and can be kept under observation,
- Temporary sites can be transformed by planting annual flowers. Butterflies can be attracted into the garden with nectar-bearing flowers and shrubs, such as buddleja,
- Seating and playing areas should be sited in the sunniest positions, though offering the possibility of shade,
- Windowless gable-end walls can be covered with a mural or with self-clinging plants such as ivy, virginia creeper, or climbing hydrangea. Other climbers, such as roses, will need the support of a trellis,
- Structures such as seats, fences and raised flower beds can be made from re-cycled timbers.

Creating Safe Play Areas

Play is essential for the proper development of the child, and play areas are important features of the local environment.

There are two main types of play area - those with fixed equipment such as swings and slides, and play areas with little or no equipment, such as a small piece of land with slopes, tree trunks and boulders, sand, water and natural vegetation where children can use their own imagination.

A children's playground can be created by any well-motivated community group in partnership with the Local Authority, but a play area will only be used if it provides a more attractive play environment than other open spaces.

The maintenance of equipped play areas would usually be taken over by the Local Authority for insurance reasons, but this may be less critical for non-equipped play areas.

Things to consider when planning a play area as follows:

- Think about the children first. How many children is the play area likely to serve? What ages are they?

- Different equipment will be needed for younger children. Where do they play at the moment?
- Check the location of the proposed site in relation to schools, houses, shops, bus stops and pedestrian links. Children will only use a site where they can feel safe and where they can see and be seen.
- The site must have easy and safe access for children. No one should have to cross a busy road to reach it.
- Choose a site that is pleasant to play in, sheltered and sunny, and at least partially enclosed.
- Get the children involved. They may know of a site which they would like help to turn into a play area.
- A site that has humps, dips and some vegetation is more interesting to children than a flat, open site.
- The design of the play area should be based on childrens' need for security and scope for imagination.

Playground design requires imagination and technical knowledge, so it is worthwhile to call in a landscape architect for advice as he/she will be aware of the latest safety standards in playground equipment and surfacing. They can typically prepare drawings required to get development consent (whether from the Local Authority, landowner, or both) and prepare cost estimates necessary for grant assistance.

Picnic Sites and Amenity Areas

It may be helpful to discuss the issue of picnic sites with the Local Authority. They will be aware that:

- Picnic sites should be as natural as possible. Visitors like to settle down close to an edge, such as hedge bank, stone wall, woodland or a group of trees and facing a view or open space. Most people like to be within sight of their car. Large open areas tend to be used for games rather than picnicking. Provide a range of different picnic spots. Some people prefer a bench, some a table, or others a dry bank to sit on.
- The picnic bench is more than a piece of furniture; it is a sign announcing that people are welcome.
- The design of picnic furniture should be simple and robust, blending with the surrounding. Avoid rustic designs but sawn timber, without varnish is suitable. Furniture should be securely fixed to the ground. Litter bins should be provided but not beside tables - no one wants to sit beside a smelly, wasp attracting bin. Make sure that the bins are emptied as required particularly during the visitor season. An information board may also be provided on local attractions and walks.

References

There is a wide range of books on landscaping – many of which will be available from your local library. These will list trees, shrubs, ground cover plants, climbers and herbaceous perennials suitable for a wide range of conditions and situations and help you to choose the right plant for the right situation.

Practical guides are also available from agencies such as the Heritage Council.

Wildlife and Natural Amenities

Wildlife in towns and their environs can be surprisingly rich, especially where there are undisturbed areas. Particularly valuable areas include hedgerows, woodland, river banks, reed-marsh and churchyards. It is very important to protect wildlife and to raise public awareness.

Wildlife is not restricted to the countryside; it's all around us. Many people in towns get a great deal of pleasure from the birds, butterflies and wildflowers around them. For the town dweller, familiarity with urban wildlife helps create an awareness of wider environmental issues.

Consider how these natural areas can be enhanced through the erection of bird or bat boxes, planting native shrubs to attract birds and butterflies, mowing grass at different times of the year to encourage spring or summer wildflowers, or incorporating wildlife areas into the network of open spaces throughout the town, or perhaps how they can be used as an educational nature trail.

We should work with nature whenever possible and create new habitats for wildlife. Waste and unused land in towns and villages often provide an opportunity for enhancing or creating nature areas both for wildlife and for the enjoyment of local people. However, attempts to tidy up seemingly waste ground can destroy its wildlife value, so care is needed.

This section provides guidelines on how such a project should be tackled, although detailed advice should always be obtained from a landscape or wildlife specialist.

What the Adjudicator Looks At

- Wildlife and natural amenities
- Conservation of natural amenities and wildlife areas
- Interactions with wildlife
- Amenity walks
- Nature trails

AREAS TO CONSIDER

Wildlife and Your Plan

Your five-year plan should include a section on wildlife. This plan can be done in a step-by-step manner as set out below.

You should identify projects that:

- Identify wildlife habitats
- Conserve these areas as important features in the area
- Improve access to, and understanding of, the local wildlife by means of information boards, signage, nature trails, etc,
- Enhance the quality of these places as areas of amenity and wildlife
- Involve a range of age groups.

Carrying Out a Habitat Survey

A survey will help you to identify suitable sites but before any practical work begins, seek advice from the relevant environmental organisations.

You may also wish to consult, *A Guide to Habitats in Ireland*, by Julie A Fossitt, published by The Heritage Council, October 2000 or contact the National Parks and Wildlife Service of the Department of the Environment, Heritage & Local Government (www.noticenature.ie).

There are many books to help you with plant and animal identification, or you could enlist the help of your local naturalist's club or a wildlife expert. A wildlife survey can also be a good way of involving schools in the survey process. This can produce a map of the town or village showing areas of wildlife importance that should be protected and those areas which may be important for future projects, such as derelict sites, school gardens and grounds, etc.

The survey should include the main habitats in and around the town or village, such as a pond, marsh, scrub, etc., followed by a more detailed examination of the plants and animals present. Each habitat will generally have a particular group of plants and animals. Trees which are particularly rich in wildlife, such as oak, birch, alder, willow and hawthorn should also be identified.

The main habitats you may have are:

- Urban habitats - gardens, waste ground, walls, graveyards, hedges
- Wetland habitats - rivers, ponds, lakes, canals, reed marshes, bogs
- Woodland habitats - forests, hedgerows, plantations, parks
- Grassland habitats - roadside verges, parks, wet meadows, dry grasslands
- Coastal habitats - cliffs, marshes, dunes, mudflats.

Make a note of how much sunshine and shade there is, and the diversity or variety of habitats (the places where animals and plants live and grow), i.e. walls, particularly old stone walls or rocks, long grass, scrub, groups of trees or woodland, wet areas or ponds.

Make a list of all the birds, animals, plants and insects seen during different times of the year – a species list. This will take some time, as a record will need to be kept over the whole year as the plant and bird life changes with the seasons.

TOP TIP:

Perhaps consider undertaking the survey during a number of different times of the year. Remember! A site visited in early spring can have a totally different aspect in mid-summer.

A species list will indicate a number of things. It will show you the amount of biodiversity, or variety of species, in your area, of which you may not have been aware. It will also provide baseline data of conditions as they are now and the species present at the moment, from which you can calculate the rise or decline of certain species and any changes in background conditions, such as water quality.

A rise in the number of species will indicate how successful your environmental programme has been. Finally, indicator species will provide you with information on the health of the habitat. Examples might be: the presence of an otter or an owl will indicate that there is sufficient food and shelter to support that animal as well as other creatures on which it depends for food; the types of lichens present on stone walls or trees can reveal the amount of air pollution present; the types of invertebrates in streams and rivers can indicate the degree of water pollution.

Certain plants may also indicate that a woodland or meadow has been undisturbed for centuries.

Developing a Management Plan

As you gather the baseline information, a plan of action will begin to become apparent. This will enable you to put together the Wildlife and Natural Amenities Plan section of your overall three to five-year plan.

This should detail the aims and objectives and the actions to be taken by specific dates. Input from the community as a whole as well as other interested groups, will be needed to carry out these actions.

A management plan describes the habitats within the area and sets out the actions needed to enhance desirable communities and keep out unwanted species. A plan helps you to think out your objectives and how to achieve them, and ensures continuity. The plan should include a statement of the habitats you wish to have on the site ultimately, and explain why, e.g., wild flowers for butterflies.

Describe the actions necessary to achieve your objectives and list them in order of priority. Only create habitats which you can look after properly. It will be vital to carry out certain operations

at the right time of year, for example, cutting grass in late July and removing the cuttings to encourage the spread of meadow flowers. In terms of making acceptable what may appear to many people to be an untidy area, it is desirable that the grass on the edges of paths or roads should be mown regularly, to give the impression that the design is intentional and that someone cares for it.

As a general rule, in managing any habitat for wildlife, you should encourage food-producing or attracting plants, which are the basis for the 'food web', the many interdependent links among plants and animals in nature. Wildlife conservation involves protecting all life, plant, insect and animal. Flowers and insects are the basis of many food webs and are vital for the survival of larger, more obvious plants and animals. Therefore, you will need to provide suitable food plants for birds and insects, safe nesting opportunities, security and a minimum of disturbance.

Some Basic Pointers

Environmental work is a balance between development needs and wildlife requirements. The conflict between the two can be resolved by creative consultation and informed common sense.

Preserving countryside landscape is an important part of wildlife conservation. Hedgerows are corridors for the movement of wildlife, provide nesting areas and seed banks; stone walls are important for insects, mosses and lichens (as are old gravestones); old farm buildings, ruins and bridges provide food and shelter sites for many animals and birds.

Native plants are usually more important for wildlife than introduced ones and should be encouraged. There are some cases, however, where non-native plants are also suitable for wildlife and have heritage value, for example, old trees in parks and cemeteries. Other non-native species, such as Rhododendron, giant hogweed and Japanese knotweed are highly invasive and should be removed.

Habitat management should be a low-impact activity and should be continued year-round. As a rule you should endeavour to minimise the use

of pesticides and herbicides and not use them at all in any wildlife area. Their once-off use may be justified in some cases when creating a new woodland or wildflower meadow.

A lot of pleasure can be had from research, planning and working together on conservation projects. Many towns and villages have already made the first step with the help of the Local Authority and the NPWS and are now finding out how rewarding a wildlife project can be.

A wildlife project is a good way of involving the wider community, as required under the adjudication criteria, especially schools and youth groups. Many activities, such as school field trips and bird surveys contribute to the fund of local knowledge, as do old maps and interviews with older people.

Access and Community Involvement

Both wildlife and people will benefit from the development of a site as a nature area. This means that the needs of the local community should be looked at. An area which is well used by local people, perhaps for short cuts, will be more valued and has more chance of success. Vandalism and misuse occur when people feel no involvement with a place. Facilities which people require, such as seats or clear 'sight lines' along footpaths through a wood, should be incorporated into the plan wherever possible. Explain the benefit of your ideas to the local community.

Privately-owned land with high conservation potential may already be designated as a National Heritage Area or a Special Area for Conservation. The County Planning Office will have details of these designations. Such areas may be included within your Tidy Towns plan if work is needed on litter clearance or the repair of boundary walls or fences.

Public access may not be desirable to prevent disturbance to wildlife, but if the improvement of public access is being discussed on private land, then the insurance implications must also be considered.

Creating a Wildlife Area

In addition to conserving existing wildlife areas, part of your plan may involve the creation of wildlife areas - especially on derelict land or within school grounds.

A wildlife area can be created to either protect plants and animals that already live in an area, or to produce a 'reserve' from scratch on a site where little exists at present. It is wiser and cheaper to enhance sites which have existing vegetation, rather than to create a wildlife area from a bare site.

Either way, established areas of wildlife habitat need positive and sensitive management, and this must be recognised at the outset.

Your approach will depend on what you are trying to achieve and the resources you have available. You may wish to create a school nature reserve for study purposes, a natural trail along a river bank, or a butterfly garden on wasteland. You may have a particular site in mind, or you may choose a project first and survey your area for a suitable site. Whichever you choose, the first step in any nature conservation project is to find out what already exists, and try to safeguard that.

Wasteland is only seen as being so if it has no use. Sites with some buddleja, brambles, valerian, ivy and nettles, which may not be suitable as a community garden or whose ownership is unknown, may be simply 'developed' by removing man-made rubbish and putting up a sign saying 'Community Nature Reserve' and perhaps an information board. If a site has a label, it is seen as having a use. Check with the Local Authority before erecting signage however.

Larger areas with a variety of trees, shrubs or other habitats merely require rubbish clearance and some path laying and interpretation to transform them from 'wasteland' into well-used natural open spaces. They are often waiting to be discovered, having been allowed to develop naturally for many years.

Design - If the survey and consultation have been properly completed the final design should not be too difficult:

- Retain as much existing vegetation as possible, especially patches of brambles and

nettles, which are valuable wildlife food plants.

- Aim for a range of habitats, taking heed of site conditions such as wet hollows or dry banks, and plant accordingly.
- Areas of human activity, such as places with seats, should be located away from more sensitive, natural areas. If possible, wilderness areas (for nesting, etc.) should be away from human disturbance.
- Paths should be routed in the directions local people want to take.
- Plant only trees and shrubs native to Ireland, and sow wild flowers gathered from seed in the area.
- Bollards, railway sleepers, or large rocks can prevent on-site parking.
- Fallen logs and dead wood and piles of stones provide important wildlife habitats.
- Most wildflowers only grow on poor soils where there is no competition from coarse growth. The use of topsoil, therefore, is not necessary, as it produces too rich a soil and introduces seeds of coarse grasses that smother the more attractive wildflowers.
- Most trees and shrubs will grow quite happily in brick or stone rubble.
- Time and resources will be needed for clearing rubbish, fencing, planting and making paths.

Types of Wildlife Areas

The most important points when creating new habitats are set out below. There may also be existing wildlife areas, such as hedgerows, which can be made more favourable for wildlife.

Hedgerows are the most common 'wildlife area' and these provide the main 'woodland' habitat in our rural landscapes.

Many hedges are overgrown and neglected but could be improved with a little care. Being cut hard back to encourage new growth can regenerate sparse and patchy hedges.

Other management approaches are:

- Cut the hedge every third year only since regular trimming prevents flowering and berry production in most species and so reduces food sources for birds and insects
- Trim the hedge only at the appropriate time of year when such activity is allowed– the

Department of Agriculture and Food can be contacted to clarify this and your Local Authority will also be able to confirm the times of year when hedge cutting is allowed.

- Tag individual trees to be avoided by the hedge cutter operator
- Retain dead wood that is not dangerous as it is an important habitat
- Ensure that pesticides and fertilisers are kept out of the hedge bottom. Allow tall growth of cow parsley to shade out more troublesome weeds such as scotch grass
- Never use a flail cutter as this causes long-term damage to the hedge
- Sometimes ivy can be removed from specimen trees and trees lining streets and entrances to improve their shape. However by and large, ivy does no harm to trees and is a valuable wildlife habitat and food source for many creatures including the honeybees.
- Support for hedge management, especially on farm boundaries is provided under the Rural Environment Protection Scheme (REPS).

Meadows: The most colourful meadow flowers grow in poor soils

Points to note:

- Always remove grass clippings
- Do not use chemicals
- Establish a regular pattern of mowing. Allow for two areas of longer grass - one cut in July to encourage spring flowers, and the other in September to encourage tall, late-summer flowers
- Mow edges and paths regularly to give a neat appearance.

Woodlands

- Plant native species, such as oak, hawthorn, willow and birch, which attract a wide variety of insects
- Develop several layers of trees, shrubs and flowers: a high canopy of trees is good for song birds, shrubs provide shelter and nest sites, and insects and small mammals live among the plants on the woodland floor
- Encourage decay: dead wood is essential for many insects and fungi
- Increase nesting sites by putting up bird boxes and even bat boxes.

Ponds

- Keep overhanging trees away from the southern side of the pond
- Give the pond shallow, shelving edges, but if possible provide one spot at least one metre (3 ft) deep
- Establish water plants before introducing animal life
- Introduce wildlife by taking a bucket of mud from another pond.

Bird Gardens can be established by the planting of a range of berry-bearing trees and shrubs, such as rowan, hawthorn, crabapple, elder and cotoneaster to give food throughout the autumn and winter, and herbs such as teasels will attract seed-eating finches.

Thick-growing bushes provide shelter and nest sites, and a pond provides water for drinking and bathing. Insect eaters may find food among rotting logs. Brambles and ivy are also important late food sources for many birds.

Butterfly and Wildflower Gardens can be simply developed on long-term wasteland sites with permission.

The site should contain plants that provide food sources for insects through leaves, nectar, seeds and fruit. It should be designed to provide cover and shelter for butterflies and to attract them through colour and scent. Ponds or wet places are also valuable.

Even quite a small site can quickly be transformed through proper planting. You must provide the food plants for the caterpillars, such as nettles, ladies smock and garlic mustard, as well as nectar-bearing plants to attract butterflies such as buddleja, golden rod or aster, which are often found on urban wastelands.

Sowing the seeds of wild flowers collected locally can allow the natural flora to develop to attract a wider variety of insects. Never dig up plants growing in the wild.

Carrying Out the Work

The work that has been outlined in the management plan should be done over a period of time. From developing a woodland or riverside walk to bird and bat boxes made in local schools,

the type and scale of work varies greatly from area to area. Although enjoyable, environmental conservation takes time and depends on the season, availability of workers and cost. It is important to remember that 'tidiness' is not always beneficial to wildlife.

The location of wildlife areas should however at all times be litter free. Though the town or village needs to be kept tidy, some area of decay and overgrowth may be retained or created without being unsightly - brambles and nettles are essential breeding and feeding plants for many butterflies, for example.

Interpretation

Erect a notice board on wildlife sites, stating that it is a nature reserve and indicating the plants and animals to be seen. This should also state why the site is important and what you are trying to achieve there. It can transform people's awareness and appreciation of a piece of 'wasteland'.

If the site is large enough, a nature trail can help to inform and, at the same time, guide people away from the more sensitive areas. Someone could be appointed as a warden, to co-ordinate management tasks and to show school and other groups around the site. Personal interpretation succeeds in bringing the site to life for many people who have previously passed it by.

Get local schools and youth groups involved in simple surveys and studies so that the value of the site is appreciated.

References

Wildlife advice is again available from published books (check out your library) as well as from groups such as The National Parks and Wildlife Service of the Department of the Environment, Heritage & Local Government, the Irish Wildlife Trust, Birdwatch Ireland, and the Heritage Council.

Litter Control

Litter control is a key principle of the competition. This is an increasingly problematic area with many committees reporting higher numbers of offences in dumping in local areas.

Notwithstanding this, Local Authorities play an increasingly active role in litter control and management through the appointment of Litter Wardens and the issuing of litter fines.

What the Adjudicator Looks At

- Absence of litter and dumping
- Litter patrols
- A 'Spring Clean'
- The role of schools
- Anti-Litter campaigns
- Advertising hoardings

AREAS TO CONSIDER

Identifying Problem Areas

The committee may consider undertaking a litter survey to identify particular problem areas.

This is a critical first step in litter minimisation in your area. The findings of this survey can then be discussed with the Local Authority with additional resources – such as the need for additional litter bins, litter patrols and possibly the installation of CCTV equipment discussed.

Managing Litter

Litter can be managed with regular clean-ups and patrols.

An annual spring clean is a good opportunity to spread the message about litter.

On-going cleaning regimes – in tandem with Local Authority actions – will ensure that litter is minimised throughout the year.

A special push to 'clean up' can again be launched coming up to adjudication in early June. Pick-ups should take place throughout the year though as experience shows that litter is less likely to be dropped in a clean area rather than an unclean one.

Litter patrols are often an effective way of undertaking this. Divide the area up between various Committee members or other volunteers. Patrols can take place regularly with individuals committing shorter amounts of time and therefore more likely to remain committed.

The committee should provide gloves, litter pickers and bags to volunteers.

You should also contact the Local Authority to see if arrangements can be made to provide the committee with a dedicated wheelie bin. This may, by arrangement, be emptied with the cost paid by the authority.

Chewing gum can be a particular problem – particularly outside shops, at bus stops, etc. Many recently repaved footpaths (very often with expensive and attractive materials) have become marked by this careless habit. It is possible to clean these stains with a special machine though it is very expensive. The best cure is in prevention!

Large scale advertisement hoardings in small villages can be intrusive.

Working with Partners in the Area

Schools, businesses, residents' associations and other groups should be involved in litter minimisation and cleaning.

Contact your local school and sports club to ask for help in a spring clean.

Discuss with school officials litter control projects for inside – and outside – school grounds.

Contact the environment section of your Local Authority and see what help and support is available. Perhaps meet with the Litter Warden and discuss particular problem areas where action should be taken.

Contact your Local Authority regarding the availability of Shopfront Design Guidelines.

Tidiness

Many Groups do not fully understand the meaning of this category – particularly as litter is considered separately. Most simply, it deals with other features of the area that can contribute to its tidiness – or untidiness – as the case may be.

What the Adjudicator Looks At

- Lack of clutter
 - Signs
 - Poles
 - Overhead wires
- Graffiti
- Traffic management
- Weed and plant growth

AREAS TO CONSIDER

Excessive or Inappropriate Signage

Signs are a common nuisance to committees. Notwithstanding the importance of safe, visible and secure road and speed control signs, bare poles are often left behind after signs are removed. Also, there are commonly simply too many signs provided in town and village centres.

Where this is a problem, you should consider compiling a photographic inventory of signs with these marked on a map. Discuss these with representatives of the County Council and see if any unnecessary signs can be removed.

Private operators – particularly shops and estate agents – often contribute to clutter due to their cumulative impact. While a single sign may not cause a problem five single-signs does.

Often this problem is mentioned by TidyTowns adjudicators. You should make local businesses aware of the negative impact they are having – and indeed point out that this is costing your committee marks in the competition.

Perhaps suggest the removal of individual signs and their replacement with sponsored grouped signs – such as an information board. This board could provide a map of the area with the location of sponsoring premises indicated along with small ads for those premises.

Overhead Wires

Overhead wires and cables are another problem area for many committees. Under-grounding of cables and removal of all poles provides the most visually desirable solution. However, it should be borne in mind that under-grounding is a costly procedure. The two stages involved in this are the provision of service ducts in the pavement – typically a Local Authority responsibility; and the placing of the cables in those ducts – typically an ESB responsibility.

While the opportunity sometimes arises for cables to be placed underground when a street is opened up for major works, such as laying a main sewer, these works are expensive and should be considered long-term, albeit important goals, of the committee.

As an interim measure, the attachment of cables to buildings, in conjunction with the relevant authorities, together with careful installation and maintenance, are recommended in order to minimise detrimental impacts on the amenity value of our towns and villages.

Consult with your Local Authority about the possibility of attaching street lighting to buildings.

Graffiti

Graffiti too is a complex problem. The disfiguring of walls, doors and parapets by felt-tip pens and spray paint is a serious problem. The traditional method of stone cleaning is by sandblasting which, although very effective, removes the top layer of stone and is not suitable for many surfaces. The incidence of graffiti may be reduced if walls are covered with a strongly textured render, murals, climbing plants, such as ivy or Virginia creeper, or decorative timber slats.

Traffic Issues

With regard to traffic, adjudicators appreciate that this is a complex area requiring action by Local Authorities. Notwithstanding this, traffic can impact on the quality of your local environment – not just due to congestion but also due to improper parking arrangements, illegal parking, etc. You should again discuss these with your local Council and local businesses. In many towns and villages, the TidyTowns Committee has played an important role in lobbying for the introduction of bye-laws regulating parking so consider the important role you may play.

Weed and Plant Control

Weed and plant growth is connected to the committee's on-going tasks in relation to landscape maintenance. Add an extra dimension to litter patrols and ask volunteers to report or remove overhanging plants and growth at the base of walls. Remember, as always, to obtain the permission of land owners. Regular maintenance can reduce the need for weed-killer though this may be required in very exceptional circumstances.

Waste Minimisation

One of the central considerations for any Group, this category was introduced in 2006 as a way of rewarding committees for their extremely innovative and clever methods of minimising waste generation.

Undoubtedly this section of the competition is focussed on implementing the principles of the waste management hierarchy of:

- reduce
- re-use
- recycle

More than that though, it links with other extremely important local initiatives – most importantly the Green Schools Initiative.

As a relatively new competition category, this is an area where committees can score highly – and where there is scope for special awards, as well as real improvements in your environment.

What the Adjudicator Looks At

- Promotion of best practice
- Facilities
- School and educational initiatives
- Segregation of litter
- Composting
- Working with businesses and agencies
- Community Waste Audit

Areas to Consider

TidyTowns Committees play a key role in the promotion of best practice in their local areas and the competition recognises the area of waste minimisation is of prime importance.

Given your ‘environmentally friendly’ mandate your committee should focus on a number of tasks in this area. Consider:

- Does your committee work to reduce its own waste?
- Can you raise awareness of waste issues and change peoples’ behaviour at home and at work to reduce the amount of waste being produced?
- Can you give your local community ideas on how they can reuse items?

- Can you work with the Local Authority on providing and maintaining recycling facilities in your area?

TOP TIP:

Can you segregate the waste you collect on your litter pick-ups so you can maximise the amount of recycled material? Could you talk to local businesses and establish a ‘good practice’ charter for waste minimisation?

Leading by Example

As a first measure you should make sure your committee does things in the best way possible first. Minimise the number of leaflet drops you do. Segregate your own litter. Compost material such as grass clipping and plant cuttings.

Contact the Environmental Awareness Officer in your local Council and see what help and assistance they can provide. For example some Groups are provided with free composters and green bins reserved for TidyTowns waste.

Providing Information

Play a role in informing your community through local schools and community centres or hosting information sessions. Often a local garden centre or member of staff will oblige by running short seminars on how to compost.

Encourage Best Practice in Others

Work with your local chamber of commerce and business premises in this area. Contact businesses that regularly distribute ‘junk mail’. See if you can encourage them to place ads in local papers in favour of regular leaflet drops. There is a large amount of waste minimisation information available from the Department of the Environment, see the waste section of their website www.environ.ie/en/Environment/Waste/

Provide Local Recycling Points

Ideally, every local centre, whatever the size, should have some level of recycling facilities. If your area does not, contact your local Council

and see if some provision can be made. Where you have recycling facilities ensure that these are located in a central location where they are well overlooked and observed. This is important in reducing the incidence of illegal dumping. Ensure that the Council, or the appointed contractor, empties these regularly. If this is not the case, lobby for improved services.

Reporting Problems

Report any incidents of dumping or backyard burning. Where these occur at a recycling centre, consider working with the Council and Gardaí in the provision of CCTV monitoring equipment and the issuing of litter and dumping fines.

In the first instance, it is a matter for each individual Local Authority to deal with any instances of illegal disposal of waste in their area and take the appropriate enforcement action. Many Local Authorities have 'dumping hotlines' that you can ring to report incidences; check their website for details.

The "Dump the Dumpers" service was designed to encourage reporting of illegal dumping of waste or of abandoned illegal dumps via a 24 hour call save telephone number - **1850 365 121**. This information is followed up and checked by the enforcement authorities - Local Authorities, the Environmental Protection Agency's Office of Environmental Enforcement and the Gardaí - through the Environmental Enforcement Network.

The "Dump the Dumpers" phone line is staffed on a 24-hour basis so callers get to speak to a trained operator who elicits all necessary details to enable the matter to be investigated. While information can be provided anonymously, callers are encouraged to leave contact details so that clarification can be sought if necessary and so that feedback can be provided to the caller if requested.

Further details can be found on www.epa.ie

Residential Areas

Residential areas are found at significantly different scales in all settlements. These are particularly complex areas for the committee to manage as they require co-operation between

the committee and agencies such as the Local Authority as well as individuals within the community.

What the Adjudicator Looks At

- Maintenance of boundary walls, fences, gardens
- Communal open spaces
- Planting
- Estate signage
- Links to town centre and facilities

Areas to Consider

The range of issues faced by any committee in the management of their residential areas clearly depends on the scale of the areas involved. There are, however, some common issues that continue to arise in these areas and guidance is provided in relation to these here.

Working with Residents' Associations

At the outset it is critical to state that the role of Residents' Associations is key. Associations work as important partners with the committee in the management of their area. Ideally, the Association should act in parallel with the Tidy Towns Committee carrying out maintenance and landscaping with the support of the committee.

Where there are no Residents' Associations the committee should approach key residents and encourage the creation of one as this ensures the responsibility for that area will rest with the local residents rather than the committee who will undoubtedly be busy working away elsewhere.

It is important that individuals are encouraged to take responsibility for the presentation of areas immediately outside their boundaries.

Providing Guidance - Checklists

In establishing a 'check-list' for a Resident's Association, you should pose the following questions and potential solutions:

Checklist for Signage

- There is a sign?
- It is clean, well maintained and attractive?
- It is visible from outside the estate?
- (Ideally) is it bi-lingual?

Ideas for Signage:

- Look at other estates and see what you like.
- Contact the local Council to discuss and also, if relevant, arrange to meet with the Area Engineer if there are any road safety issues.

Checklist for Walls, Fences, Boundaries

- Could these be improved with painting, stone facing or simply the planting of a creeper?
- As an environmentally friendly alternative, could you plant a native creeper to enhance these areas? Consider planting:
 - Honeysuckle
 - Jasmine
 - Clematis
 - or Ivy

Ideas for Walls, Fences, Boundaries

- Get permission from owner / Local Authority Buildings
- Are there particular houses or shops where insufficient attention has been given to their upkeep?
- Were any particular properties mentioned in a year's Adjudication reports?
- Approach owners individually and ask for co-operation.
- Consider a leaflet drop a month or so before judging begins (June) urging residents to partake in the general efforts.

Checklist for Open Spaces

- Are there any other problems which you notice, such as stray animals?
- Does the space have potential for a play area or community garden?
- Are the grass areas mown regularly, and are the trees and other planting adequately

looked after?

- Are there adequate bins and are these properly located and maintained?
- Are there special bins for dog litter?
- Is litter a problem - has it been blown onto the site or has it been deliberately dropped?
- Can schools be persuaded to include a garden or nature area on their grounds?
Contact the local Council in relation to:
 - Play facilities
 - Litter bins
 - Dumping problems

Ideas for Open Spaces

- Consider planting additional trees and shrubs, with permission. Make sure not to reduce the amenity of the area for kids. Plant trees and shrubs in corners.
- Plant shrubs with berries as birds can eat these. Consider:
 - Cotoneaster
 - Japponica
 - Berberis
 - Holly
 - Rowan
 - Hawthorn
 - Pyracantha
 - Stranvaesia and
 - Viburnum

Gardens as Local Features

Most housing estates are generally in a good state of repair. Problems usually arise from the condition of boundaries, gardens and outhouses. How the private garden adds to the appearance of the public space is important.

The importance of well-kept individual front gardens cannot be overstressed as a contributor to the enhancement of the street or terrace.

A Tidy Garden Competition can have a significant effect over time on the appearance of a neighbourhood. Improvements usually include the trimming of hedges, the repair of stone walls, replacing chainlink fences with timber post and rail, walls or hedges, removing weeds from the base of walls, painting metal fences, trimming grass verges and tree planting.

Improvements to Individual Buildings

In some cases the condition of individual buildings detracts from the appearance of a residential area. Representatives from a Resident's Association can approach individual owners and discuss.

Where painting of a number of buildings is required, you should approach the local Council and / or LEADER company and ask for funding for paint (not labour) under a 'High Impact, Low Cost' scheme whereby materials are funded for works that will have an important impact on the local area.

Landscaped Spaces

Tips in relation to open spaces and landscaping are outlined in the Landscaping section above. Be careful though not to place planting in an existing open space where it interferes with pedestrian paths or childrens' play. Simply, the plants will lose!

Other Improvements

The regional style of stone walling should be followed in any repair or construction work. When pointing up the joints of walls, a raised mortar finish - giving the appearance of 'varicose veins', should be avoided. Stone faced walls, rather than brickwork, are preferable along the road frontage of new houses on the approaches to towns and villages. The planting of trees and improving the surfacing of the footpaths can be done within a traffic calming scheme. Bollards can prevent vehicles from driving over grass areas.

Many Local Authorities are bringing in local area management to their housing schemes which is resulting in a big improvement to the appearance of public housing areas. Private estates can also benefit from residents' groups maintaining communal areas themselves or through a maintenance contract with a landscape contractor.

ROADS, STREETS AND BACK AREAS

What the Adjudicator Looks At

Presentation of:

- approach roads
- streets
- connecting roads
- laneways
- bridges

Areas to Consider

To identify surfaces and boundaries in need of attention and to develop a programme of action that involves the community, individual owners, the Local Authority and other agencies responsible for the physical environment.

In many towns there are lanes that make a less than good impression. A special effort should be made in conjunction with the owners of the premises on these lanes and with the Local Authority to bring about major improvements.

Road Verges and Fences

A visitor's impression of a town or village is often formed from the condition of the approach roads. Groups could improve road verges by clearing litter, repairing fences and stone walls, cutting the grass, and planting trees. Not all of the grass must be cut short - consider the wildlife implications.

Streets

Streets should be well maintained and presented. Street names should be clearly visible. Paths should be clear and safe for all users. Clutter should be minimised.

Back Areas

The development of new inner relief roads and car parks to the rear of shopping streets has opened up new dimensions to towns and the presentation of side streets and back areas has become an important aspect in the TidyTowns adjudication.

Common problems are:

- Dilapidated buildings and sheds
- Walls in poor condition
- Dumping of material and views of the backs of buildings.

New roads should be properly landscaped with mass planting of trees and shrubs, and well designed walls and paving.

Consider an attractive screen, or screen planting, to hide rear yards and service areas which are typically unattractive. Possible actions may include tree and shrub planting to screen the backs of buildings, demolition of derelict walls and buildings (possibly under the Derelict Sites Act), the construction of new walls and fences (avoiding fencing styles and materials which are out of keeping with the locality), planter boxes and the lime washing of walls. Old walls supporting a typical wall flora of valerian, ferns, pennywort, lichens and mosses should not be disturbed.

Car parks

Car parks should be well signposted, surfaced with tarmac, rolled chippings or Ballylusk grit, and delineated with stone walling, timber rails or bollards. There should be adequate lighting. Shade tree planting is welcome in car parks, such as lime, sycamore or plane, but should be protected from damage by vehicles with kerbs or bollards. In choosing tree types one should also be aware of possible damage to cars by droppings from roosting birds.

General Impression

Simply, this is a mark that reflects the culmination of the adjudicator's impression of your area.

What the Adjudicator Looks At

The presentation of the town or village as an integrated centre including evidence of exceptional effort to overcome a particularly difficult problem.

What to Consider

Under this category the adjudicator can recognise your committee's work in the context of local issues.

The information you have provided to date is a critical part of this. Consider how the adjudicator could possibly know that the building work causing disruption is welcomed by the committee as it represents the re-development of a long derelict site? Consider too mentioning issues such as vandalism – particularly where you feel the particular impact of a project has been negatively affected by this.



Making Action Happen

Topics covered in this section:

Getting permission

Identifying the Owner of a Site
Seeking Permission
Types of Agreement

Protecting Yourself

Insurance
Health and Safety
Legal Responsibilities

Gathering Resources

Generating Publicity
Campaigning
Volunteers
Working with Young People
FÁS
Support and Supervision
Materials and Equipment
Finance

- Creating Rewards
- Sourcing Assistance and Funding

Advice and Information

Dealing with Problems

Objectors
Vandalism

- Planting to Address Vandalism

Getting Permission

Permission is typically required from the landowner and / or the Local Authority or other state agency.

Identifying the Owner of a site

Before you can do anything on the site which you have chosen, you will have to ask permission from the owners and reach some form of agreement.

The title of a piece of land may be registered. Details can be sought from the Property Registration Authority. A fee is charged for this service.

TOP TIP:

The website of the Property Registration Authority (www.landregistry.ie) gives contact details for each region in the country.

Free information may also be sought from a number of alternative sources:

- Check with the Council's Planning Department where details of land ownership may be shown on planning application documents.
- Also, if it is public land the Council may own the site themselves or they may be able to tell you who does from their rates records. Apart from the Council or private owners, the land may be owned by CIE, the ESB or some other state body.
- Alternatively, try asking other local people and the Gardaí.
- If there is an estate agent's sign, ring the firm and enquire about the site.

Where there is no owner - or where land ownership is questioned - the Local Authority can obtain the site with a 'clean title' by acquiring the site under the Derelict Sites Act or by compulsory

purchase. Contact your local Council for additional details.

Seeking Permission

Before approaching any owner with your ideas for the site, prepare a report outlining the items below - which should be a part of your overall five-year plan:

- The reasons you want to do something with the property
- The benefits the project will bring to the owner
- How you intend to maintain the scheme when it is finished
- What you hope to do - enclose plans and sketches
- Your willingness to move from the site when it is required by the owner (this is very important if you are dealing with a site awaiting development and you must confirm your willingness to move in writing).

And ask:

- Is the land available and, if so, for how long?
- Are there any restrictions or problems on the land?

Planning permission will be needed if you intend to:

- Make a material change in the way the building or land is used
- Do any building work, including walls and entrances onto a public road. There may be exemptions but it is always safer to consult the planning authority

Your application to the Local Authority planning department requires careful and detailed preparation. The specific requirements in terms of maps, drawings and other data are set out in the Planning and Development Regulations, 2007. These Regulations can be inspected in your Local Authority and in any event most authorities will

give you an application form, which incorporates the requirements of the Regulations.

An applicant for permission must pay a fee to the planning authority. The fee will vary according to the type, extent and nature of the application. Leaflets on planning are produced by the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government and are available for free at your local Council.

It should be noted that a person is not entitled solely by reason of a permission under Section 34 of the 2000 Planning Act to carry out any development. There may be further procedures to be carried out or permissions to be secured as, for example, under the National Monuments Acts.

Where you require Planning Permission to carry out works there will be a requirement for drawings and other documents. Contact your Local Authority and discuss this before engaging any professional services or committing to any fees.

Types of Agreement

Before entering into any agreement, the committee should seek legal advice, even informally. The general observations set out below may prove useful.

The agreement between your committee and the owner of the property will need to cover:

- A description of the property
- The proposed use
- Payment to the owner
- The period for which you are taking the site and the starting date
- The period of notice to leave
- Insurance

Rent must be agreed to make the contract valid, but try to obtain a peppercorn rent of €1 a year. The agreement can take the form of an informal agreement, a licence or a lease. Only a lease gives you protection under the landlord and tenant legislation. Licences are more usual for short-term occupation.

PROTECTING YOURSELF

Insurance

You will have to arrange insurance for all voluntary workers. This will depend on the type of work you are doing but a public liability policy and personal accident insurance will do for most projects. You will need to cover:

- The people working on the site
- Visitors
- The equipment - whether hired or owned by Group members
- The site (you will be liable for any damage to underground services such as electricity cables and water pipes).

A number of Insurance Companies offer a Public Liability Insurance Scheme exclusively for Tidy Towns Committees and it is strongly recommended that committees avail of this important insurance protection.

Quotations for Employer's Liability cover in respect of other workers are also available.

Health and Safety

Make sure that you take precautions to avoid accidents and have safety procedures sorted out before you start. People should be aware of the correct way to lift weights, handle power tools and even simple hand tools, such as sledgehammers and pickaxes. Hard hats and steel toe-capped boots will be needed for all construction work and when heavy materials are handled.

You should:

- Make one person responsible for first aid, preferably trained, and have a first-aid kit available on site. Know the location of the nearest doctor and casualty hospital. Have someone on site with a mobile phone to quickly summon emergency aid if needed.
- Major construction and landscaping work, such as building restoration, is now covered by the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work (Construction) Regulations, 1995.
- Designers of major schemes are required to produce a safety statement on the construction process. Guidelines to the

regulations are available from the Health and Safety Authority.

Legal Responsibilities

If you are running a large scheme you should consider your legal responsibilities, especially if you are recruiting volunteers or employing people under a youth employment scheme, or handling large amounts of money or taking responsibility for premises. Your citizen's advice centre may be able to help you on these matters.

Gathering the Resources

This section deals with the resources needed to carry out the projects and gives some ideas about obtaining them. An important point to be borne in mind: people first, materials second and money last. Get as much publicity as possible on your successes - this will help you to get resources in future. Take future maintenance into account in planning and costing, especially with long-term projects.

Generating Publicity

Publicity is essential because it educates people about the issues with which you are concerned, helps to get support, money and materials and puts pressure on decision makers. The different types of publicity you might consider include:

- Newspaper, radio or television coverage, by means of a press release or interview
- Mounting exhibitions or public meetings
- Issuing newsletters, leaflets, stickers, badges and T-shirts
- Public lectures

Before you enter into any kind of publicity, it is important to be clear why you want to inform the public about yourselves. Gain agreement in the Group as to the exact message you want to put across. You may decide to have one person responsible for publicity activities, or to have a spokesperson for different occasions.

You may be able to use the resources of a local school or college to make publicity material. Perhaps you can put up a poster where you are working, so that passers-by can see who you are and what you are doing.

The timing of any publicity campaign is also crucial. Avail of the opportunities afforded by national publicity campaigns. Try to give these campaigns a 'local flavour.' Avoid days on which important national or local events - sports, politics etc - are taking place.

There are several ways to put across your news and achievements, including:

- **A Press Release:** This is the easiest because you have control over what you say. Always type it, double-spaced and on one side of the paper only. Keep it short and include who, when, what, where and why. End with the phone number or fax of a contact which the reporter can follow up.
- **Talking to a Reporter:** As a rule it is worth establishing informal contact with local reporters who may be interested in your work.
- **Local Radio:** Local radio is a very effective way of getting your message across and providing publicity about forthcoming events. You may find one willing to help you make your own programme. Get in touch with the main programme researchers who may be looking for new projects.

Campaigning

With most practical projects you will need to gain public support and influence decision makers. A number of principles for successful action should be followed:

- Be clear and realistic about your aims. Decide on your target, the methods you want to use, your time-scale and budget.
- Practise what you preach.
- Fight for something, rather than against something.
- Don't give up. It may take a long time to achieve your aims but try to make a few smaller changes on the way, which help to keep up morale.
- Don't be distracted by arguing among yourselves or with other Groups. Join forces and don't let the other side waste your energy by setting you against others. A successful campaign demands hard work, attention to detail and careful planning.

- Appoint a committee member to check on current planning applications with a view to influencing the development at the design stage.
- Research is vital. Try to have your answers at your fingertips and understand the problem. If you are well briefed, you can respond quickly to requests from the media and other Groups.

Use your local library. If they have not got a reference in stock, they can order it for you. The reference sections of university or regional college libraries may also be used. The reference library of ENFO is now online - www.enfo.ie - and is one of the best environmental sources in the country. You may also find helpful publications on www.askaboutireland.ie. Contact details are provided in Helpful Handout D.

Volunteers

The guiding principle is one of self-help, using one's own skills and resources. As well as the skills available within the Group, you will find that labour and materials are available within the community, whether a neighbourhood, school or youth club. But you must be clear about what you want before you begin recruiting or collecting.

It is often easier to attract volunteer labour if you can begin with an easily managed task and then work up to more elaborate schemes. Parent groups, residents' associations or youth groups will usually use their own labour on a scheme. A well-drawn plan or a model is very useful at this stage to motivate peoples' interest by showing them just what could be achieved.

An alternative approach is to ask people to join "work parties" and to rotate those called upon to help so that the same people are not being called upon all the time.

One member of the Group should be responsible for getting together a list of volunteers, with their addresses and telephone numbers, and the tools, machinery or transport vehicles that they may have available. Each volunteer should also state when he or she is available to help. Volunteers should then be informed that work is to start on a definite day and time and will continue regularly, say between 10 am and 1 pm on each Sunday morning for a month.

People should be informed at least two weeks in advance that work is to start and they should also be contacted by phone the day before each work session. Be prepared to pick them up and take them to the site if they have no transport. The work should be fun, in order to maintain interest and to encourage others to join.

If you are ready to tackle a more ambitious project, you may be able to persuade the local Council or local firms through the Chamber of Commerce to 'lend' you an expert to give specialist advice - an engineer, or an accountant to help you set up a book-keeping system. You may also like to consider using the community employment schemes run by FÁS.

The National College of Ireland run occasional training courses for voluntary services.

Working with Young People

Many young people today are environmentally conscious - particularly due to the emergence of the Green Schools Initiative. However, their awareness of and interest in environmental issues is, by and large, an untapped resource.

If caring for our environment is to translate from an aspiration to a meaningful goal, then a critical aspect of our efforts must be the involvement of young people.

There are many ways in which the energy and interest of young people can be harnessed and local TidyTown committees might like to consider the following:

- Provide your local schools with literature in relation to the Green Schools programme
- Appoint an Education Officer to liaise with schools and youth groups in the area to encourage involvement within the schools and the community
- Establish a Junior TidyTown Committee, guided by the Education Officer
- Arrange for speakers to visit local schools to talk on environmental issues
- Involve second-level school students participating in Gaisce (The President's Award), which requires a community involvement challenge on a continuous basis.
- Involve school ECO clubs that promote a wide

- range of environmental projects
- Find out if school programmes, such as Transition Year, Leaving Cert Vocational Programme, Leaving Cert Applied Programme, or Civic, Social and Political Education are offered in your local school. Schools operating these are open to suggestions which would promote community involvement.
- Seek involvement from Youth Organisations such as Foroige, Macra, Scouts, Youth Clubs etc., many of which encourage service to the community as one of their objectives.

FÁS

FÁS can assist with advice and funding to help tackle heritage and environmental issues in your area while providing locally unemployed people with work or training. This can be done through:

- Temporary employment schemes such as Community Employment which operates for one year.
- Advice, training and grants towards community-based ventures such as community training programmes.
- Local research projects to identify valuable information on local history, environmental surveys, and social development through the Community Enterprise scheme.
- Community groups taking advantage of training programmes, grants, advice and assistance available for the development of community enterprise groups.

Through sponsoring community employment, local groups are providing services and developing their local area, often within the context of Local Development Plans produced with the assistance of Area Partnership Companies. A good project will have a plan of action, with specific outcomes, and a specific period by which these will be achieved. Projects may last for one year or up to three years.

Contact your local FÁS office for further information on support available to Tidy Towns Groups.

Support & Supervision

Whether you are a member of a local action group or a member of a school project, you need to provide support for your Group as individuals

and for the work you are doing. You can support each other by holding regular meetings and discussing how the operation is progressing and what the problems are. You will find that you gain confidence and strength as a Group by using this method. If you are leading a group of volunteers or young people on an employment scheme you should bear in mind the following points:

- Ensure that they are aware of why they are doing the work.
- Spend time involving them in decisions.
- Delegate some responsibility and authority to them.
- Define the objectives of the project with their active participation.
- “Thank you” notices in the local media are an effective way to encourage sponsors, property owners and volunteers.

On large or complex schemes no more than six people should be assigned to any one task. During the life of a project these teams should be moved about so that everyone learns a range of skills and has a go at the more interesting tasks.

Materials and Equipment

You will find that you already have access to most of the tools needed for the simpler kinds of project. On larger schemes you may need a rubbish skip or dumper; and some jobs can be tackled more effectively by a JCB than by a gang of people with wheelbarrows.

Local Authorities and local firms may be able to make equipment available and are often more willing to do this than to give money. Before you contact the Council’s Area Engineer or a local firm, you should have a good idea of the number of hours for which you will need the equipment and an operator. You should have all your labour assembled on site, ready to start work as soon as the equipment arrives.

If you are hiring equipment, ask the hire firm about protective clothing, as it may have this available. Make sure that people know how to use properly even the simplest tools, such as axes, and that anyone using power tools or machinery, especially chain saws, has had proper training and wears the appropriate protective clothing.

On larger schemes, you may need a lock-up shelter for tea breaks and to store tools, and you may also need a Portaloo. You should take hand tools home with you at the end of each day's work.

If you can arrange to collect materials yourself, local firms may be willing to let you have various items. For example, broken paving slabs or split cement bags may be obtained from builders providers, and bricks and timber may be salvaged cheaply from demolition sites.

Finance

Money must be carefully managed and accounts kept. Before you begin any fund raising activity, decide what you need the money for, how much, and how you are going to raise it. You must have a system of accounts to handle the money that you raise. There are two main methods of fund-raising:

- **Raising money** from the local community, through jumble sales, sponsored events, draws and services. These events have to be organised, and one person should be detailed for co-ordinating their organisation.
- **Grant aid and sponsorship.** Local authorities and some firms and trusts have funds available for voluntary groups. Contact An Taisce, the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government or your Local Authority for details of schemes currently available.

The challenge is in convincing them that what you want to do is what they want to fund. Local Authorities have discretionary powers to provide grant-aid under various Acts and schemes and there is a range of awards within the Tidy Towns competition itself.

Sourcing Assistance and Funding

The availability of assistance and sources of funding may change from year to year. A number of sources currently available are:

The Local Authority

Before going ahead with your plan, check if you are eligible for assistance from your Local Authority. Assistance can be financial or can take the form of

providing materials, services, staff or facilities.

Under various pieces of legislation, Local Authorities can become involved in a wide variety of relevant projects such as:

- development of playgrounds, open spaces, parks and allotments
- provision of prizes or other incentives for the maintenance of houses, gardens, open spaces or amenities - as, say, the 'Tidy Gardens' or 'Tidy District' competitions - and these could be used by residents' associations to improve community spirit and participation.

Department of Environment

The Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government operates a number of grant schemes to assist local community groups either directly or through the Local Authorities. Some grants have the purpose of assisting environmental awareness projects at local level, which involve partnerships between Local Authorities and local community groups, in the spirit of Local Agenda 21. Projects which identify the contribution which individuals and communities can make in solving environmental problems will be preferred. Activities might include environmental projects for housing estates, schools, community or youth groups, newsletters and other educational activities, including creating or maintaining special areas for wildlife, projects for beaches and places of public amenity, recycling, preventing pollution and energy saving schemes. In particular, projects which educate local communities on more environmentally sustainable practices are preferred. A call for proposals is made each year.

Details are available from the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, Environmental Awareness Section.

Heritage Grants Scheme

The Heritage Council allocates grants on an annual basis for heritage projects which promote interest, education and knowledge of Ireland's heritage. Each project must demonstrate its long-term sustainability and make a contribution to the local community. Specific grant schemes for community projects are also run from time to time and are advertised in the national press.

The Urban Woodland and Amenity Woodland Grants Schemes

The scheme most suited to the needs of TidyTowns committees is the Neighbourwood, administered by the Forest Service.

The Neighbourwood scheme covers:

- The establishment of new woodlands in and around cities, towns and villages
- The maintenance of existing woodlands, and
- The installation of recreational facilities.

The scheme favours maximum co-operation between Local Authorities and voluntary bodies. Sites over 0.1 ha in area and with an average width greater than 30m are eligible for grant aid. Smaller and narrower sites may also be considered, if the site is essential to the overall planting or represents part of a wider Neighbourhood strategy for the particular locality. Your applications should focus on the following points:

- High quality projects which maximise the potential for public access, recreation and enjoyment
- Projects with a high broadleaf content
- Projects which demonstrate a clear commitment to long-term maintenance and management
- Projects which incorporate a high degree of local participation in planning and management

Full details on conditions for applications, amounts of grant aid etc are available from the Forest Service, Department of the Marine and Natural Resources.

Esso Schools Wildlife Challenge

Organised in association with BirdWatch Ireland and the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB), the competition encourages primary school children to explore their local environment and to take an active role in its improvement.

This Competition is advertised in the national press so watch out for contact details.

Other Organisations

The prizes offered in the TidyTowns competition also provide an incentive for local improvements. Firms and businesses may be persuaded to offer materials and equipment, or sponsor prizes for particular efforts.

Some of the larger companies have special committees to handle requests for assistance.

Requests should usually be made in the autumn for consideration for the next financial year's budget. When you are making an application, be brief and clear, and try to keep your submission brief and to the point.

You should explain:

- What the Group does
- Why it needs funds now
- What you have already received, and from whom
- Whether you are approaching others
- What the donor may get out of it (publicity)
- What relevance it has for that organisation

The Institute of Public Administration Yearbook is a useful source of names and addresses of national organisations, companies, and local and central government departments.

Creating Rewards

Voluntary groups can influence their own Local Authority to sponsor a 'Tidy Gardens' scheme, with categories for private gardens, schools, business and industrial premises and housing estates. There are an increasing number of award schemes. Details of award schemes and criteria are outlined on the ENFO website - www.enfo.ie.

Advice and Information

Information is a resource which, if well used, will save you time and effort. The same consideration applies as with other resources - decide what you want and why you want it before you start collecting it.

The best information is the sort you get through personal contacts, drawing upon their direct experience - for example, Local Authority personnel in your area. Information can be gleaned from visiting other projects to see how

similar problems were tackled, visiting this year's Tidy Towns winners, for example. Written information can also be useful. Start with a good basic guide, begin work and collect the rest as you go along.

Typical sources of information and advice include:

- **The Tidy Towns Unit**, Department of Environment Heritage & Local Government - as the co-ordinating unit for the competition, the Unit is a useful source of information - see www.tidytowns.ie
- **The Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government** - The Department has produced a series of conservation guidelines on aspects of building conservation, which are available free of charge from the Department and also at your local Council.
- **Regional Tourism Authorities** - a representative from the Regional Tourism Authorities will be pleased to attend meetings, discuss problems and give advice.
- **Local Authorities** - this is the main point of contact for each committee. The Local Authority is responsible for a range of environmental services and activities in towns and villages. In view of the links between these activities and the work of Tidy Towns committees, Local Authorities and committees should seek to work as closely as possible together.

Particular ways in which Local Authorities could assist in the work of committees might include guidance in the preparation of work programmes and plans, guidance and assistance on the presentation of buildings, landscape treatment, wildlife areas, litter control, general tidiness and presentation of roads, streets and public areas. Assistance with materials, advice and the provision of trees and shrubs is also possible.

- **ENFO** - this is a public information service on the environment set up by the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government and operated by An Comhairle Leabharlanna. ENFO provides online information, leaflets, exhibitions through local libraries and an online reference library, including an extensive environmental database. The leaflets are available from libraries and Council offices and also from the ENFO website at www.enfo.ie.

DEALING WITH PROBLEMS & ISSUES:

Objectors

In each community there are always a few people who do not want to know about Tidy Towns. The only way to ensure the cooperation of such people is persistence.

From experience most people can be won over with patience and persistence. Consider the following approach:

- Informally meet the objector to hear his or her views.
- Be specific about the problem in relation to which co-operation is sought.
- Only when they have had their full say should possible remedies be suggested. Be inventive and helpful.
- If you secure the objector's agreement to do something, it is vital to agree a date by which it will be done.

Within a few days of the visit write to express appreciation for the objector's co-operation and restate your understanding of the agreement that has been reached, including the date by which it will be completed. A separate letter of thanks from the Chairperson can be a useful re-enforcer of the agreement.

Vandalism

The causes of vandalism are complex. Most acts of vandalism tend to be directed at man-made objects. Signs, especially if negatively worded, and buildings are often popular targets. A lot of vandalism arises simply because there are no facilities for young people, with nothing for them to do and nowhere to go. They are often told to 'move on' without there being anywhere for them to move on to and the resulting resentment is expressed as vandalism. Experience in the UK has shown that where purpose-designed seats and shelters have been provided for older children and young teenagers, in places where they can meet and see what is going on, and be seen, the incidence of vandalism and complaints to police has dropped. In certain locations vandalism may be expected but much can be done to reduce the

severity of the attacks.

- Design new facilities, such as picnic sites, playgrounds and open spaces, with the participation of the wider community and young people, especially those who live nearby and respond positively to any concerns raised.
- Make sure that new facilities are located in the public view or on well-used public routes, not in areas that are tucked away in places people seldom go to.
- Consider relocating existing vandal-prone facilities to more public sites. Share the problem with the community, with schools, voluntary youth organisations, etc.
- Encourage children and the wider community to 'adopt' and look after vandal-prone areas, encouraging them to clean and beautify sites and plant trees.
- Clear away evidence of vandalism immediately, such as litter, graffiti and broken trees, as signs of vandalism seem to attract further attacks, as do areas that are poorly maintained which give the impression that no-one cares.
- Use simple, robust designs for equipment.
- Plant trees within shrub areas, rather than in grass or where they can be used as goal posts, use shorter tree stakes and either plant larger 'heavy standard' trees or a mass of smaller 'whips'.

Planting to Address Vandalism

Places vulnerable to casual damage or vandalism will need plants which, if broken, will grow again, such as willow, alder, shrub roses and elder. Larger and stronger nursery stock, such as 'large standard' trees above 14-16 cms. girth are less easy to damage, although they are more expensive and need more aftercare. Trees are less easy to break if low tree stakes less than one metre high are used.

Vandalism can be guaranteed if a row of small trees with tall tree stakes is planted alongside a footpath or when trees are planted in an open space where they can be used as goal posts. Ideally trees should be planted within an area of shrub planting rather than in grass. Vandalism is less obvious when trees are planted en masse, as in woodland planting as any damage is not so apparent. Any plants damaged by vandalism should be replaced immediately. High standards

of maintenance also discourage vandalism.

One of the most effective ways of reducing vandalism is through community participation in the selection of planting sites and species and in the actual planting, especially with young people, and to have local people to act as 'tree wardens' to look after the trees through watering them in dry weather, weeding and checking tree ties.

Helpful Handout A: Example of Record Sheet for Survey

Village / Town:			
Date:			
Attending:		Checklist:	Camera
			Map
			Markers / Pens

Map Ref.	Description of Area	Notes	Proposed improvements
example			
1	Grounds of Catholic church	Looks bare Attractive graveyard Need to talk to PP	Meet graveyard committee and discuss planting of boundary walls Ask school teachers to do rubbings of gravestones with school kids Provide extra planting in front of Church
2	Riverbanks	Muddy pathway Wall collapsing Badly lit	Discuss development of boardwalk and lighting with Area Engineer Meet private landowner re, repair of collapsed wall Provide bird feeders in trees Plant berried shrubs inside wall

Helpful Handout B: Interactions with the Planning System

Your committee will interact with the Planning system in a number of ways:

- getting involved in plans for your local area, County and possibly Region
- seeking permission to carry out work
- making submissions in relation to someone else's application to carry out work

This guide, though not a substitute for the relevant legislation is a helpful summary and reference to how you can go about tackling these issues. In all cases your committee should contact the Planning Authority for extra information and assistance.

HELPFUL WEB ADDRESSES

www.environ.ie – website of the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government includes regular updates on planning issues and also links to County and City Council websites.

www.irishstatutebook.ie – website of the Irish Statute Book which has all Acts and Regulations including the current Planning Acts and Regulations.

Getting Involved in Plan Preparation

Members of the public can make submissions in relation to all planning policy documents – including Development Plans, Local Area Plans and Regional Planning Guidelines.

Plans set out the overall strategy for the proper planning and sustainable development of an area. They typically consist of text statements supported by maps and illustrations providing objectives for the provision of physical, infrastructural facilities and for the conservation and enhancement of the environment.

The interactions of third parties in these cases is as set out under the Planning Acts (primarily the Planning and Development Act, 2000 – as amended) which allows you to:

- Inspect background papers and Draft Plans
- Put forward suggestions and submissions for inclusion in the Council's Plan
- Attend public meetings called by the Planning Authority as part of the preparation of the new Plan

More detailed information on the various parts of the planning system are found in the series of leaflets published by the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, which are available from your planning authority and from ENFO – www.enfo.ie.

Seeking Permission to Carry Out Work

This is discussed in **Chapter 3** above.

Making Submissions in Relation to an Application to Carry Out Work

- A TidyTown's Committee may wish to comment on planning applications that have been received by the Planning Authority.
- These comments must be:
 - Made in writing
 - Within a period of five weeks from the date of receipt of the application by the authority; and
 - Must be accompanied by the appropriate fee
 - The committee may wish to make an appeal or references to An Bord Pleanála
 - An appeal made to the Bord must be within the period of 4 weeks beginning on the date of the decision of the Planning Authority
 - Only those who made a submission and paid the appropriate fee paid at the application stage are eligible to make an appeal (the applicant for the permission is of course eligible to appeal to the Bord)
 - The appeal must be accompanied by the appropriate fee

Helpful advice in relation to all submissions is available on County and City Council websites and also on the website of An Bord Pleanála (www.pleanala.ie).

Helpful Handout C: Summary of Legislation Commonly Relating to Tidy Towns Committee Activities

This is a brief guide outlining the main areas of specific Acts which are of relevance to committees. This is not a substitute for the relevant legislation but merely intended as a guide. Acts and Regulations are available from the Government Publications Office or on-line at www.irishstatuebook.ie – the website of the Irish Statute Book.

Act	Key Areas of Relevance to Committee
Planning and Development Act 2000 (as amended)	<p>Sections 9 – 20: deal with the Council's requirement to prepare and adopt County Development Plans and Local Areas Plans. This sets out the required content of plans, the public consultation process and how the Councillors formally adopt or vary a plan.</p> <p>Sections 52 – 92: deal with Architectural Heritage. Under this Part, the Planning Authority must adopt a Record of Protected Structures to protect all structures or parts of structures which are of special architectural, historical, archaeological, artistic, cultural, scientific, social or technical interest. The Council can also designate architectural conservation areas for the preservation of the character of the place or group of structures or townscape. City councils and certain towns can designate areas of special planning control to preserve and enhance areas of special importance to the civic life or the architectural, historical, cultural, or social character of the city or town.</p> <p>Sections 151 – 164: deal with planning enforcement. The Committee can liaise with the planning authority in relation to the serving of an enforcement notice on someone who has carried out work either without planning permission or in a way that does not comply with permission.</p>
The Derelict Sites Act, 1990	<p>A derelict site is land which detracts, or is likely to detract to a material degree, from the amenity, character or appearance of land in the neighbourhood of the land in question, including an Architectural Conservation Area.</p> <p>The Local Authority has a number of ways open to it to prevent the land from becoming or continuing to be derelict.</p> <p>If the Tidy Towns committee feels that something should be done under this legislation, it should contact the Authority.</p>
National Monuments Acts 1930 - 1994	<p>Many elements of town and village centres, churchyards etc will be classified as a monument and therefore great care should be taken not to proceed with any works without first consulting Dúchas at the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government.</p> <p>Under the National Monuments Act 1994, Permission is required from Dúchas for any works being carried out on or around archaeological remains or in an area of archaeological interest. The Record of Monuments and Places, established under the same Act, contains 130,000 records across the country. An index is available at the offices of every Planning Authority.</p> <p>The National Inventory of Architectural Heritage is compiled under the Architectural Heritage (National Inventory) and Historic Properties (Miscellaneous Provisions) Acts, 1999. The inventory, which is a systematic recording of the architectural heritage of the State, was begun in 1990.</p>

Continued over

Act	Key Areas of Relevance to Committee
<p>The Litter Pollution Act, 1997 (as amended)</p>	<p>Occupiers of land that is visible from a public place have an obligation to keep that land free of litter. Local authorities are obliged to provide litter receptacles and to empty them regularly and may provide advisory and educational services in relation to litter prevention.</p> <p>A Local Authority must also prepare a Litter Management Plan outlining existing anti-litter measures and the action it intends to take on litter control, including awareness programmes, and may consult with voluntary bodies who may have a role to play in implementing the plan.</p> <p>Provisions under the Act enable the Local Authority to deal with litter generated from retail and fast food outlets, major events, flyposting, graffiti and dog fouling. Further information relating to litter and legislation can be obtained from Local Authorities.</p>

Helpful Handout D: Essential Reading

There are many books dealing with the areas you will be working with. The best guides are however available for free and should be consulted and read as invaluable guides to the work of your committee. These are categorised here under the agency that produces them with contact details provided.

The Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government www.environ.ie – The Custom House, Dublin 1. Telephone 1890 20 20 21 or (01) 8882000

- A Guide to Protected Buildings
- Architectural Heritage Protection – A Guide for Planning Authorities
- Conservation Guidelines
- Conservation of a Protected Structure
- Report on the Present and Future Protection of Thatched Structures in Ireland
- Planning Leaflets

An Taisce www.antaisce.org – Tailor’s Hall, Dublin 8. Telephone – (01) 4541786

- General information is available on the An Taisce Website including a helpful document entitled: 7-steps to the Green Schools Programme

ENFO – www.enfo.ie or www.askaboutireland.ie (01) 6761167

- Built Environment
- Litter Pollution Guides
- Sustainable Gardening
- Waste Management Guides
- Water Pollution - Measurement of River Water Quality
- Wildlife Guides

Heritage Council www.heritagecouncil.com – Áras na hOidhreachta, Church Lane, Kilkenny. Telephone (056) 777 0777

- Archaeology and Development : Guidelines for Good Practice
- Archaeology and Forestry in Ireland
- Protected Structures - A Guide
- Conserving and Enhancing Wildlife in Towns and Villages: A Guide for Local Community Groups
- A Guide to Habitats in Ireland
- Conserving Hedgerows

Climate Change

Climate Change is the biggest challenge currently facing humanity. Unchecked, Climate Change threatens not only our environment but also our economic development and the quality of life we enjoy. It is the challenge that will define this generation. We will be remembered by how we respond to this challenge.

2009 saw the introduction of a special award for climate change into the National Tidy Towns Competition.

Visit www.change.ie to find out more, including a carbon calculator for individuals, groups and businesses.

Call **01 888 3948**,
or **053 911 7347**,
email: **tidytowns@environ.ie**
or check out **www.tidytowns.ie**

Tidy Towns Unit

Department of the Environment,
Heritage and Local Government
Wexford

