**Putting pedestrians at the heart of a busy village**

Overcoming adversity and challenges is often something that strengthens a Tidy Towns group and helps it to become successful.

In the case of Ballinahown, which last year won a gold medal in the national competition, that challenge was the fact that the busy national primary route – the N62 – splits the village. That, and its location on the border of Westmeath and Offaly, is what led to the establishment of Ballinahown Community Development over 30 years ago.

The community group has made many changes to the village over the years and always maintained the policy that whatever was put in place had to work for the people in the community before it worked for the Tidy Towns competition.

The lack of somewhere safe to walk due to the busy approach roads was one of the early challenges facing the community group. It led to the community installing two walking tracks in the village – one around Ballinahown Sports Park and the second one around the Biodiversity Park.

More recent changes to ensure the village is pedestrian-friendly include a new walkway, Slí na hAbhainn, linking the village hall to the national school and the sport spark; and the installation of traffic calming measures on both approaches to Ballinahown NS.

Both of these projects enjoyed support from Westmeath County Council and Acting District Manager of the Athlone-Moate Municipal District, Willie Ryan, said this week: “On the Clonmacnoise Road we’ve come up with a great solution for Ballinahown. Approaching from the Clonmacoise side you have a round top speed ramp to slow traffic and on the village side we have installed a flat top ramp, which doubles as a crossing point. We have put in place hard measures to influence speed reduction in a pedestrian-heavy area and it had immediate impact.”

“The beautiful thing about the Slí na hAbhainn link is its interconnectivity. People have complimentary use of all the car parks and they are connected to the walkways and the public paths and the whole area is well-lit,” he added.

Pedestrians are further catered for with the excellent public transport options serving the village. The Athlone-Limerick National Expressway Service stops in each direction three times a day and the Athlone-Roscrea TFI Local Link stops six times a day in each direction.

There are plans to enhance the bus stop outside the village hall with a bespoke shelter and the display of bus timetables in both Irish and English.

The community group is also hopeful it can link into a proposed a cycleway route, should this project come to fruition.

Dealing with cars and commuter traffic is the final piece of the puzzle for Ballinahown, with the local community hopeful that a solution can be found to reduce speed along the busy N62.

“We are working with TII (Transport Infrastructure Ireland) to find an appropriate solution on the N62 to tackle speed issues,” Willie Ryan explained this week. “The TII has confirmed it will support the correct solution.”

Explaining the transport hierarchy when designing plans, Mr Ryan said: “DMURS (the Design Manual for Urban Roads and Streets) is the bible for urban design. When it comes to design, the hierarchy in descending order is pedestrian infrastructure; cycling infrastructure; public transport; and commuter traffic. Any new infrastructure developments in Ballinahown will be fully compliant with DMURS.”

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