

"Caring for our environment"

Centre : **LARAGH**
County : **WICKLOW**
Category : **A**

Results

Date of Adjudication : 08-07-97

	Maximum Mark	Mark Awarded 1997	Mark Awarded 1996
Overall Developmental Approach	50	30	26
The Built Environment	40	23	23
Landscaping	40	24	23
Wildlife and Natural Amenities	30	22	19
Litter Control	40	27	26
Tidiness	20	11	11
Residential Areas	30	18	18
Roads, Streets and Back Areas	40	22	22
General Impression	10	5	5
TOTAL MARK	300	182	173

Laragh, County Wicklow

OVERALL DEVELOPMENTAL APPROACH

Welcome to the 1997 Tidy Towns Competition. Thank you for your detailed action/development plan. You have some very interesting proposals for development and the adjudicators look forward to seeing these coming to fruition in the future, for example, the development of the old water mills; river walk; the signs and logo are an innovative suggestion; it would also be welcoming to see the school wood developed here. Try to incorporate bilingualism where possible and try to incorporate the culture of the village into your efforts. The adjudicators recognise the overall problems with signage and lack of public buildings. In relation to signage, why not look at an innovative approach to this whole area; is there scope to develop attractive wooden-based signage throughout the village which might be more attractive and would be in-keeping with the general area of the Wicklow hills and Laragh? The adjudicators wish the committee and the people of Laragh the best of luck in implementing their development plan.

THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT

Every town in Ireland is different - each has its own unique history, topography, buildings and even use of building materials - but the most important town in Ireland is your own. Much of the overall impression of any town is dictated by its buildings. Each building is unique in its own way and collectively these buildings contribute to the unique character of the town. The best approach is a good mix of residential and commercial buildings enhanced by sympathetic landscaping and appropriate use of building materials, and open spaces. The adjudicators recognise that there is a lack of public buildings in Laragh, but this places greater importance on commercial premises to create a good impression for visitors passing through the village, as well as for the local residents. In looking at buildings, there are two main aspects; one is the quality of the individual structure, presentation, colour, materials used and secondly is the building in its overall context - insensitive changes to individual buildings can change the overall character of a street. Buildings on corners, or at the end of streets assume greater civic design/importance because of their location. Where such buildings are modified insensitively are allowed to fall into disrepair, this can have serious implications. In Laragh this year, the Post Office and B&B next to it were well presented, well done. It was noted that there was an overuse of stickers in the windows of McCoys and a new shop unit has been noticed adjacent to McCoys. It is good to see that the car park at the Wicklow Heather Restaurant has been improved. There is a need to improve the exterior outside the boundary wall outside Lilac B&B. The B&B, Tudor Lodge on the Rathdrum road was noted as being very nice. The national school was very neat and tidy, as was the presentation of the church. In relation to your development plan you mentioned the need for car parking, perhaps the area to the left of the Post Office could be developed as a lay-by with information plaques and details on the history of

Laragh etc. - this might be a long-term project.

LANDSCAPING

The appearance, maintenance and presentation of the public spaces (including amenity areas, open spaces, footpaths and streets etc.) are a vital aspect of civic design quality. Poor presentation of public areas can take away from high standards achieved by individual properties. In this regard Laragh performs well by ensuring that there is maintenance of the open spaces in the village, particularly, the triangle by the Sally Gap road and the open space opposite Lynhams but why not replace the plastic seating with attractive wooden seating? The church grounds were very well maintained. Could additional attractive street furniture be put in place that reflects the tradition of the village of Laragh. Similarly, seating, containers, signage etc. might reflect this objective and link in with your plans for the development of a logo/theme for the village.

WILDLIFE AND NATURAL AMENITIES

There is a good initial impression on the approaches to Laragh in relation to wildlife and natural amenities. The open space opposite the school grounds needs to be tackled, as this could be a particularly attractive nature area. The river is a very attractive amenity to have, and it was nice to see over-hanging trees around this area which, obviously, supports a strong wildlife community. Hedgerows could be somewhat tidied up and a better approach taken in this regard, for example, a strip of verges without devastating a hedgerow is possible in order to support both a wildlife habitat, yet at the same time appear neat and tidy on the approaches to the village. Conserving nature is a new venture for many towns and can appear daunting at first. The adjudicators recognise that environmental programmes can take time to get up and running and even longer to assess their success. This section of the report requires an involvement of all groups, including schools in the village. The emphasis is on the conservation and enhancement of wildlife habitats and the environment. Woodlands, rivers, ponds, hedgerows, open spaces, graveyards and walls are important habitats. With the National Park on your door step, you have a unique opportunity to build a reputation and a theme for Laragh. Try to get the support of the Wicklow Mountains National Park staff in helping you achieve this objective. The committee needs to identify the habitats in their area and then determine the appropriate actions to conserve and enhance these habitats. Guidelines in the Tidy Towns book offers other suggestions as to the type of initiatives you might undertake. Is there a local wildlife expert, or a member of the community with experience in this area, that your committee can draw on? Laragh has, potentially, a number of unique wildlife habitats having the river running through the village - it was nice to see that this was litter free. The next step is to identify what habitats are in your area - are these woodlands, wetlands, grasslands or other habitats such as cemeteries, walls etc. Prepare a survey and map, showing the areas of wildlife importance and areas of potential importance. Other steps involved in the preparation of the environmental programme for

Laragh would include identification of species list of the flora and fauna in the area; preparation of a wildlife management plan as part of the area development plan; work to be carried out including conservation projects, wildlife gardens, areas of conservation, access, tree planting, information areas etc. This must be carried out in sympathy with the local landscape and must not be overwhelming visually, or environmentally.

LITTER CONTROL

This section considers the presence/absence of litter; litter control plans; facilities provided on a year-round basis to tackle litter; the number of/and siting of litter bins and the type of litter bins. In relation to this category, Laragh performed well this year. Towns in county Wicklow appear to be beginning to tackle and get control of this problem, well done in this regard, but it requires an on-going vigilant effort. The school grounds are very neat and tidy, which perhaps is an indication of the fact that the children are involved here, even though it was during the school holidays. You might consider replacing the litter bin by the kiosk, also what recycling plans are in place? In relation to litter, you might consider approaching the local authority and ask them what their plans are for the Action Against Litter Campaign.

TIDINESS

Presentation, colour, screening and signage, including bilingualism and recycling facilities, absence of fly posting graffiti, control of weed growth at kerbs and at base of buildings etc. are all areas that are looked at under this section. Gravel at kerbing, the visual tidiness of the village including its buildings, approach roads and provision of appropriate signage are all important considerations also. Leaving margins partly wild, yet tidy to encourage wild flowers is recommended; this can be achieved by cutting a strip of grass on the approach roads and keeping this area neat, while at the same time allowing for wildlife habitats. The problem with signs is going to have to be tackled; it is good to see you have recognised this in your plan, but aspirations will not achieve marks. Overall, there was a tidy appearance in Laragh this year, however, there are areas that could be improved, for example, the provision of foot paths and kerbing in certain areas, particularly along approaches.

RESIDENTIAL AREAS

At the residential park on the Rathdrum road, there is a need to put up a name plate sign; try to include bilingualism here. Within this park, the entrance was quite good, but within it there was a broken seat and the grass had not been cut which created a very negative impression. It is good to see the new development which has taken place, having due regard to landscaping as planting had already taken place. There are some good individual efforts. Outside this park and the other park within the centre of the village, both are well maintained. There is also some evidence of good individual effort throughout the village.

ROADS, STREETS AND BACK AREAS

The general impression created with the adjudicators was that the

verges need to be neater to create a tidier appearance on the approach roads, yet allowing for wildlife conservation. On the approach road from Annamoe, there was a good initial impression helped by the maintenance of the triangular green as one comes into the village. On the approach from Rathdrum, the walls need to be reinstated here, perhaps advance warning signs could be put in place with adequate notice for the bridge. The grass had not been cut on this approach road, which was quite bad and grass and weeds were also noted growing out of the walls - this area needs to be tackled. Two poles were noted further in with no signs on them on either side of the road. Approaching Laragh from Glendalough, the Wicklow Mountains National Park Office has a nice stone boundary wall - the pole and monument sign need to be replaced; a path is really needed, long term, along this area, due to the high volume of walkers. This is an area where you could do well under accessibility criteria. You might also allow for the provision of pedestrian signage to warn motorists due to the volume of traffic. Within the village itself, is relatively neat and tidy, so well done in this regard.

GENERAL IMPRESSION

The overall impression of the integrated presentation of the village of Laragh this year was quite good. The adjudicators look forward to improvements in your plan, and if these can be achieved, it should bring about significant improvements for both the residents and visitors to the village. Try to work on the signage as this does take from the overall appearance. Colour schemes can help also to help in the presentation of buildings. The adjudicators look forward to their visit in 1998.