

Tidy Towns Competition 2005

Adjudication Report

Centre: **Swords**

Ref: **669**

County: **Dublin**

Mark: **212**

Category: **F**

Date: **01/07/2005**

| | Maximum Mark | Mark Awarded 2005 | Mark Awarded 2004 |
|--------------------------------|--------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| Overall Developmental Approach | 50 | 33 | |
| The Built Environment | 40 | 28 | |
| Landscaping | 40 | 28 | |
| Wildlife and Natural Amenities | 30 | 21 | |
| Litter Control | 40 | 28 | |
| Tidiness | 20 | 13 | |
| Residential Areas | 30 | 24 | |
| Roads, Streets and Back Areas | 40 | 30 | |
| General Impression | 10 | 7 | |
| TOTAL MARK | 300 | 212 | |

Overall Developmental Approach:

Swords is welcome back into the National Tidy Towns Competition this year as a new entry. It is several years since you participated (1997) and we note that the committee has only been set up since February of this year. We wish you well for the future. It is important to decide upon the limits and boundaries of Swords and feature nameplates at all entrances. No doubt your goal will be to preserve the character and heritage of Swords whilst embracing and serving the needs of a rapidly growing twenty first century population. One of the first things that will need to be achieved is to identify your heritage and look for opportunities to promote this in the form of a heritage trail and other awareness initiatives. The historical society will be of help here. You will also need to ensure that the recreation amenity facilities of Swords are adequate for its growing population and of course the improvement of the visual amenity of the town is important, whilst at the same time identifying and protecting wildlife. A good place to start would be to do a thorough survey of the built and natural environment of the town in consultation with various community groups, particularly new residents. It is important to identify their needs and incorporate them into the plan. You will then be in a position to take the plan to statutory bodies and agencies for assistance in implementation. You are referred to your Tidy Towns Handbook which will give guidance and generate ideas on how to approach your task. It is good to note that you already participate in the Pride of Place Competition and host a festival in September.

The Built Environment:

Swords town centre has a long history as is evidenced by your most important heritage feature Swords Castle which dates back to the twelfth century and takes pride of place in your Main Street to serve the needs of your rapidly growing population. This wonderful heritage feature is complemented by the twenty first century development across the road which accommodates Fingal County Council offices. Your Main Street features many attractive shopfronts, wide footpaths gracefully lined by maturing trees, street furniture that is being maintained to a good standard and is wirescape free. There are of course a number of dated signs on shopfronts; no doubt you will encourage property owners to replace them with more appropriate signage. Dublin Street is presented less well in that it appears to be a work in process, its wirescape is visually obtrusive and street furniture is less attractive. However the completion of development works here should bring this important street to the same standard as your Main Street. Side and rear areas off the Main Street are attractive and the entrance and the interior of the Swords Shopping Centre was admired. North Street is perhaps the least well presented of your town centre streets in terms of attractiveness; a number of vacant buildings which are probably due for redevelopment soon were noted, however this street hosts some fine buildings, both heritage and modern, which were admired. Church Road is charming with its high old natural stone walls and its narrowness; stone premises here are attractive also, e.g. The Vicarage. Part of your survey will include identifying buildings within the town which need improvement and approaching property owners with a view to the necessary refurbishments or improvements being carried out.

Landscaping:

The magnificent stand of mature trees at the Fingal County Council offices are a wonderful feature to have within the town centre. Semi-mature trees lining your wide footpaths are gracious. Swords Castle Town Park is a fine development with handsome visitor entrances and was much in demand at the time of adjudication. Flower displays throughout the town in tubs, hanging baskets, window boxes and other containers were both colourful and profuse, well done to those involved. Perhaps you could approach the ESB in respect of landscaping the perimeter fencing to their sub-station for visual attractiveness and to provide greater enclosure. Cognisance has been taken of your intention to approach the County Council to landscape all the roundabouts on the bypass road. It is good to note that new developments are being finished to a high standard in terms of landscaping and one hopes that they will be maintained into the future. The Tidy Towns Committee will have an important role to play in this respect.

Wildlife and Natural Amenities:

Swords town has some wonderful amenity features, the most important of which are the Ward River Valley Park and Broad Meadow Estuary. We note from your submission that you intend to work with Birdwatch Ireland and with The Wildlife Trust regarding wildlife on the estuary. The goal of course will be to identify wildlife habitats at as many locations as possible in Swords to heighten public awareness and to put in place protective measures as may be necessary in order to protect wildlife in the event of future development. Interpretative / information panels at various locations throughout the town with details of walks and other amenities together with fingerpost signage should be considered. We note other amenities such as golf courses, sports grounds, sailing club, sea and country walks. As already suggested information on these should be readily available in the main shopping areas.

Litter Control:

Litter control was excellent on the day of adjudication, congratulations on a substantial improvement since last year and on your performance under the IBAL Litter Survey. A big improvement was noted in many of the areas identified here. It was a pleasure to note the cigarette end disposal facilities on service poles along the Main Street which are being effective as very few cigarette ends were noted on the footpath. In next year's submission include details of your regular litter control activities together with your overall litter management strategy as these can be a source of extra marks.

Tidiness:

Derelict premises were noted in North Street, one anticipates that they are for redevelopment soon. Derelict premises and sites elsewhere within the town are no doubt earmarked for redevelopment. Weedy kerbs, wire and post fencing and the base of walls are a problem under this heading. Again we urge you to let us have details of your activities in respect of this.

Residential Areas:

New residential development areas are generally well presented, they have been newly landscaped and to date are being well maintained; hopefully this will continue into the future. The role of the Tidy Towns Committee here will be to integrate people into the social life of the community and try to get them involved in the Tidy Towns effort. We note from your submission that you run a number of Tidy Estate competitions, perhaps similar initiatives will be extended to apartment blocks and shopping complexes also. All new developments should be signposted from the town centre and from various entrances into Swords. Continue to encourage people to pay attention to their boundary walls and roadside areas to boundary walls also and generally take responsibility for their own areas. Older estates continue to be presented to a high standard.

Roads, Streets and Back Areas:

The Ashbourne approach road and entrance to Swords was spoiled by overgrown, weedy verges. Entrances from the N1 looked quite well. Along Brackenstown Avenue a poor wire and post fencing to an undeveloped site was problematic. Could this be planted with hedgerow if the site is not for redevelopment soon? Street furniture is generally of a good order and maintenance and on-street car parking was orderly, however in the opinion of this adjudicator the visual amenity of the main thoroughfare would be enhanced with side to kerb parking rather than rear or front to kerb parking. Designated car parks are in quite good condition.

General Impression:

The overall appearance of Swords is one of attractiveness, however it can be a bit daunting to the visitor to negotiate as your amenities and various residential areas are not well signposted. We look forward to charting your progress in the competition.