

Tidy Towns Competition 2005

Adjudication Report

Centre: **Dundalk**

Ref: **258**

County: **Louth**

Mark: **241**

Category: **F**

Date: **09/08/2005**

	Maximum Mark	Mark Awarded 2005	Mark Awarded 2004
Overall Developmental Approach	50	43	42
The Built Environment	40	33	33
Landscaping	40	35	35
Wildlife and Natural Amenities	30	18	18
Litter Control	40	30	28
Tidiness	20	16	16
Residential Areas	30	25	24
Roads, Streets and Back Areas	40	33	33
General Impression	10	8	8
TOTAL MARK	300	241	237

Overall Developmental Approach:

The adjudicator would like to thank you for the detailed documentation submitted with the Entry For, together with the map of Dundalk. For next year it would be more convenient to have a smaller scale map of the general area, together with a larger scale map of the town core. The "Improve "Our Town" scheme is an interesting initiative that is a good way of broadening the appeal of Tidy Towns.

The adjudicator is aware of the difficulties of preparing a town the size of Dundalk for the competition, but the high level of local co-operation is essential in a town of this size. Your Action plan for Tidy Towns is a good document but it is important to allocate years to the various tasks. It is most useful also to indicate who or what agency will have lead responsibility for each of the tasks to be undertaken.

The Built Environment:

At the time of adjudication much work was under way on new road alignments and footpath development. Dundalk in terms of the built environment has a great mix of buildings that range from the really excellent to the less appealing. The Courthouse is a well presented building if a little stark and lacking in colour. Perhaps some additional shrubs and flowers here would help. The old Louth Hospital building is a fine building of brick and stone with an attractive white railing. However on Park Street it was disappointing to see that the building line was broken by at least two buildings. The pedestrian area of Earl Street was attractively presented with its brick paving. Vertigo was a

building that caught the eye here, though the outside tables and screens detracted a little from this interesting old shop-front. The James Deary & Co building at 32 Clanbrassil Street retains many of the interesting features of the front elevation but the box shutters are a little unfortunate. In that street the mature trees help to soften the impact of traffic in this busy street.

Projecting advertising signs were noted in a number of streets in the town centre and this needs attention. The issue is how many of these signs are really essential from a commercial point of view? A number of shop fronts are some what out of date and would benefit from replacement with more traditional materials. This indeed could bring commercial benefit for the premises involved. Some fine older buildings were noted that have been severely compromised by a less than satisfactory elevation at ground floor level.

Have you considered trying to encourage the use of the Irish language on some of your shop fronts? There is a special award in the Competition that includes the use of the Irish language.

The maturing trees at the Dundalk Retail Park are providing effective screening of the buildings from the main road nearby, and this area appeared to be quite neatly presented.

The Town Council is to be congratulated on the excellent progress made in the past 18 months in dealing with derelict properties, now reduced to less than 44. In the town centre another building that caught the eye was St. Patrick's Cathedral with the most unusual entrance area.

Landscaping:

The 2004 Tree Survey was a very worthwhile exercise and hopefully the findings are now being applied to future tree planting and the preservation of existing mature trees. The adjudicator would like to congratulate the two Schools that have achieved the An Taisce Green Flag Award, and hopefully the third School was successful in it's bid for similar glory and recognition. The adjudicator examined the Navy Bank Walkway at various points. There appeared to be few signs to the walkway and without the map the adjudicator would probably not have been aware of its existence. At the eastern end of the walkway the sides of the path were rather overgrown with weed and long grass. The interesting sculpture at the start of the walk looked a little lost with high grass and weeds surrounding it on three sides and no information plaque to explain the background to this interesting piece. The many hanging baskets and window boxes throughout the town added a lot of colour, but do make sure that this is not over done. These should be provided to help in highlighting various areas of the town. A number of well presented grass areas were noted including that at the junction of the Newry / Fair Green roads. The landscaping in many of the states was of a high calibre.

Wildlife and Natural Amenities:

In many towns and villages this is an aspect of the Tidy Towns Competition where there can be significant potential for development. All towns and villages have the presence of wildlife to some degree. It is important that your Tidy Towns Committee would examine further the wildlife potential, and see what you can achieve in terms of making your area even more wildlife friendly. The estuary area has significant potential.

If you have not already done so, the starting point is to have a habitat Survey carried out of the wildlife in your area. Suggested habitats to be considered include the following –

- Urban habitats – gardens, waste ground, walls, graveyards, hedges
- Wetland habitats – rivers, ponds, lakes, canals, reed marsh, bogs
- Woodland habitats – forests, hedgerows, plantations, parks
- Grassland habitats – roadside verges, parks, wet meadows, dry grasslands

The Survey should produce a species list for each of the habitats relevant to your area

This need not be an expensive Survey. Perhaps there is a knowledgeable person in one of your

Schools who might undertake this task for you. Basically the Survey would identify the animals, plants, birds, fish that inhabit your area and their associated habitats. It should be remembered that to carry out the Survey properly that it will probably take a year so that all habitats can be assessed at different time of the year.

Using the results of the Wildlife Survey your next step should be do draft a straight forward Plan to preserve the identified habitats in your area, and investigate the possibility of new ones. For example perhaps there is an old Pond in your area that is disused, but with a little work could be an important area for wildfowl.

It is most important to try and involve your local school children in this project, and in many Schools there is probably a teacher who may have an interest in this area who would be willing to get involved.

As part of the actions to be undertaken in your Wildlife Plan you might like to consider the provision of some weather proof and vandal proof display panels, illustrating and explaining the wildlife in your area. This has been done very successfully in many towns and villages in Ireland.

Litter Control:

The formation of the Litter Action Team is a welcome development as was the provision of an additional 30 litter bins at various locations. Litter control in the town centre was reasonable on adjudication day but on the approach roads the situation was rather different. A lot of litter was noted on the Newry approach road at the various landscaped areas on the left hand side before the Civic Amenity Centre. Indeed these landscaped areas looked rather tired with compacted earth and much litter under the shrubs. Litter was obvious again on Fair Green Road and Moorland Road. The water landscaped area near the Arts Information building is an attractive area but litter was noted floating on the water here. Quantities of litter were noted in some of the small narrow openings off Clanbrassil Street.

Tidiness:

The Civic Amenity area was well presented and the layout here appears to have been very well thought out. In Earl Street the town information signs has been damaged and knocked out of shape, and at the water feature area near the Arts Information building some of the steps have been broken and damaged. On various approach roads small untidy open areas were noted. Just cutting the grass from time to time would make a great difference to the overall appearance of some of these areas. Some of the seats appeared to have been recently replaced at various locations around Dundalk, but others need repairs and repainting.

Residential Areas:

Many of the estates and other residential areas make a great contribution to the overall presentation of Dundalk, and their role is of vital importance. Excellent presentation was noted at Suil na Mara. The landscaping here was of a very high standard. The fine trees and grass areas at Windmill Court reflected a high standard of overall maintenance as did the colourful landscaping at Laurel Brook Gardens. Some fine mature trees at Ard Easmuinn are a very attractive feature of that estate.

It is important that your committee would discuss with the Local Authority to issue of an acceptable level of landscaping for all new housing estate developments in Dundalk. This can probably best be handled through Planning Permission Conditions.

Roads, Streets and Back Areas:

Generally the appearance of approach roads was open to improvement, and in general terms little

on-going landscaping or maintenance of verges and banks was noted. There were of course exceptions and fine grass areas were noted on the Ardee approach road. Footpath refurbishments were noted as was some resurfacing works. The overall presentation of all approach roads is of critical importance. It is this that gives the first impression of your town. Attractive well presented approach roads give a great first impression of a town.

Can you make a rule for yourselves and your helpers that all cut grass must be taken away on the day that it is cut. Do remember also that verges will need to be cut on quite a regular basis if you are to achieve a lush green well kept appearance of banks and roadside verges. A tractor and mower will not give the neat well kept appearance that can be achieved by a motor mower.

General Impression:

Dundalk is a large town from a Tidy Towns point of view but the Dundalk Town Council Environmental Municipal Policy Committee are to be congratulated on the progress that they with the community have made to date.

Second Round Adjudication:

Dundalk looked well on the day of second adjudication especially in the area of litter control which was strong and for which there has been an increase in marks however important lapses were noted at the Conyards and EM Coogan premises on the entrance from the Newry road, no litter bins were noted at either location; tidiness was good overall with the strange exception of a substantial (a large black plastic sack-full) amount of bread which had been dumped at the foreshore area of the Navy Walk. The Civic Amenity Facility is particularly noteworthy in respect of its roadside boundary treatment.

Buildings are generally well presented and two shopfronts are being considered for the Shopfront Award, The Windsor and McGeoughs; keep up the effort to eliminate dated signage from business premises.

Bedding plants were in full bloom for second adjudication and were admired; a good balance has been achieved between permanent planting and seasonal bedding plants. Criticisms made by the first adjudicator in relation to the Navy Walk were still pertinent the second time around, this valuable amenity really should be maintained to a higher standard.

It was a pleasure to note the wirescape free status of much of the town centre together with well presented street furniture.

The entrance to the town from the R178 was overgrown and underdeveloped.