

Tidy Towns Competition 2006

Adjudication Report

Centre: **Donegal** Ref: **607**
County: **Donegal** Mark: **235**
Category: **D** Date(s): **12/06/2006**

	Maximum Mark	Mark Awarded 2006
Overall Development Approach	50	28
The Built Environment	50	37
Landscaping	50	29
Wildlife and Natural Amenities	50	13
Litter Control	50	32
Waste Minimisation	20	8
Tidiness	30	12
Residential Areas	40	28
Roads, Streets and Back Areas	50	41
General Impression	10	7
TOTAL MARK	400	235

Overall Development Approach:

Donegal is much more plentifully endowed with natural scenic attractions and with architectural manifestations of the distant past that most other towns in its category and so it has been disappointing to note that until very recent years the marking has been comparatively low. Your present Enhancement Plan shows that this is changing and that genuine action is being taken. Two points should be made here in response to comments made in your excellent documentation: (1) It has never been the case that a Tidy Towns committee is "held responsible" for any aspect of the appearance of a town; committees are seen as a potent guiding force in the community, and as an informed conduit through which suggestions for improvements may be passed to the official bodies, to businesses, and to residents; (2) marks under "Overall Development" are given less for the research and writing of plans and more for the visible implementation of such plans - though of course the former does have a bearing. Thank you for your clear and informative maps which make judging more efficient and dispense with the need for time-consuming enquiries about the location of sites to be visited.

The Built Environment:

The religious and secular buildings inherited from earlier times are, as usual, well maintained and form an impressive core of visual interest in the town; they will not be listed here again, beyond mentioning how one is reminded of the good taste shown by the people of the Hiberno-Romanesque revival period in having the church of the Four Masters commissioned; it has in fact become more of an ikon for the town than the splendid castle. The Public Services Centre is a commanding gateway building that, because of its peripheral situation, does not detract from the older building stock - which the Ocean FM unfortunately does, though it is a fine structure. This adjudicator had not previously seen the Mill Park Hotel - a new building which enhances its surroundings. The Volkswagen sales centre impressed for its cool contemporary design. The College on the Ballyshannon road gives a positive impression when arriving in Donegal from that side. The St John Bosco Centre's frontage was well presented at the time of judging, though its rear gables needed freshening

up with paint. The old Railway Station, with its brick with stone rustication, is a splendid rehabilitation and a very worthy project. It is hoped that what will obviously be a very major addition to the Central Hotel will also be a major addition to the appearance of the town. Most of the business premises in the Diamond are well presented; in adjoining streets there is still far too much shop signage of an inferior nature which gives an untidy effect - one can not expect the precise neatness that old photographs show us, but one should expect less of a visual clutter.

Landscaping:

The landscaping that impressed most was the discreet arrangement of planting and floral decorations at the Craft Village; the design of the hanging baskets in the delightful courtyard must surely be the envy of all other basket-hangers throughout the country! Of larger projects, the sculpture park and picnic area at the roundabout on the Ballybofey road, in its use of the topography of the site, was also impressive. Landscaping at Drumrooske enhanced the area considerably. Pleasant landscaping, sometimes of a minimal nature but all the more attractive for that, was seen in the grounds of, among others, Eircom, Rockfield House and the Vocational School.

Wildlife and Natural Amenities:

No striking innovations were seen. Your documentation suggests good relationships with schools which is of extreme importance. The Bank Walk was beautifully maintained among its splendid beeches, sycamores, chestnuts and oaks - some fencing needed minor repair on the date of the visit. The upgrading of the Blue Stack Walk to Sli na Slainte standard is welcomed; signs of improvements at the riverside at Clarendon Drive could not be seen; it is a peaceful place of much charm and the idea of a nature walk alongside the Eske is one which should be appreciated throughout the community. (Have you considered illustrative boards showing the flora and fauna of the neighbourhood? - these cause real interest in other places.) The small increase in marking is in recognition of your intentions.

Litter Control:

Control of litter was much improved upon last year. Congratulations to the local authority and to volunteer workers. A small amount of disposable litter was seen in one of the stone circles at the Diamond, and litter is continually dropped where the bus stops outside the Abbey Hotel but was twice seen to be immediately removed. Education, as your committee is aware better than anyone else, is of course the nub: if no litter were dropped there would be no need of wardens.

Waste Minimisation:

This is an average mark given in the first year of this category, which is one that will increase in importance as time goes on. It appears that the bring bank is inadequate to the needs of the population: it is in fact illegal to leave rubbish at a bring bank, but if the local Authority does not provide sufficient space it is understandable that people should leave their waste here. It is encouraging to read that the Tidy Towns Committee provides skips where needed - this is a very commendable initiative.

Tidiness:

Backs of premises in Main Street as seen from Water Street, and backs of the Diamond as seen from the bridge, are visually unappetising. An untidy yard opposite Cassidy's catches the eye, as does the rusty corrugated iron roof by Corrigan's. The surroundings of a filling station looked as if it had been neglected for some time - widespread poisoning of weeds can leave dead material that look as bad as the weeds themselves! and is not to be encouraged. The streets in the neighbourhood of the Railway Station contain a number of neglected 'corners'. In comparison, the Diamond is a showpiece against which other less prepossessing areas can be measured.

Residential Areas:

It was easy to see why Drumrooske estate won an award - the homes are presented with such pride. St Mary's Park was also neatly presented. This adjudicator was much taken by Ardeskin Heights, with its approach of spacious lawns and well selected planting. Orchard Drive was looking smart at the time of the visit, with excellent wooden palings in places. An un-named estate on a height with wonderful views over the bay and also with excellent palings was most favourably noted. Individual homes in Clarendon Drive were admired - this is an area with exceptionally colourful small front gardens; unfortunately there is an unsightly area between the houses and the river. An estate without a name plate above Drumrooske needed much kerbside weeding - a task that would take each resident no more than a few minutes each month. There was seen to be space in almost all estates for additional tree planting.

Roads, Streets and Back Areas:

The ring road is a tremendous asset, both from the point of view of traffic easement in the town and the

maintenance of its surfaces and adjoining banks; fencing, bridges and roundabouts were well looked after. The stone wall boundaries of streets beside the river were admired; the temporary repair to the wall at the Methodist church is of minimal visual impact. Extensive works were continuing at the pier. Road markings were good at the time of adjudication. The direction signs on the traffic island which the authors of the Development Plan recommended for removal were still in place. The removal of unsightly poles and wires on the Diamond and part of Main Street have been favourably commented upon before; if this can be extended to adjoining streets, so much the better. The layout of the car park and environmental improvements to the back of the castle set for this year were not seen to be in train: this is one of the major proposals in the document and should improve the precinct enormously when undertaken.

General Impression:

Provided the recommendations made in the Enhancement Plan are followed there will be substantial increases in marking commensurate with the progress of the work. This may take more time than at first envisaged. Certainly up to 2004 the annual improvements in Donegal did not match those that were ongoing in towns of similar size such as Cavan or Carrickmacross where, it has to be said, there is not the same high degree of natural beauty or sites of comparable historic interest. It is hoped that the improvements now gaining momentum will continue and that Donegal will take the place it deserves before very long. Every good wish for the continued initiatives.