

# Tidy Towns Competition 2006

## Adjudication Report

Centre: **Letterkenny** Ref: **704**  
County: **Donegal** Mark: **287**  
Category: **G** Date(s): **15/06/2006**  
**25/08/2006**

	Maximum Mark	Mark Awarded 2006
Overall Development Approach	50	47
The Built Environment	50	38
Landscaping	50	41
Wildlife and Natural Amenities	50	30
Litter Control	50	35
Waste Minimisation	20	10
Tidiness	30	14
Residential Areas	40	28
Roads, Streets and Back Areas	50	36
General Impression	10	8
<b>TOTAL MARK</b>	<b>400</b>	<b>287</b>

### Overall Development Approach:

This has been a very good entry. Letterkenny has done remarkably well especially under Buildings, Landscaping, Wild Life and Natural Amenities and Litter Control. The approach to the work and the effort involved – in co-operation with the official bodies, the business community and the householders – can be fairly said to be in the first rank. This year, when a new category has been added and an updated marking system, the entire competition has been reviewed and we are bearing in mind the title: Tidy Towns. If the title were 'Most Progressive' or 'Most Enterprising' Letterkenny would surely be in line for the national award; but considering carefully the overall appearance of the town it is really not exceptionally tidy and this is due in the main to two factors: the first is of long-standing but is the more easily rectified, and that is the mass of commercial signage especially in the main streets; the second springs from rapid development in the matter of commercial expansion and concerns mainly the lower part of the town where visual inconsistency has become a difficulty. Some comments are made on this below. Your support documentation impresses in its diversity and thoroughness. On a minor point, please differentiate in your entry-form replies between what has been completed or achieved over the past year and what is planned for the future. Your map highlighted in orange several sites which had not been completed or even developed (such as the new Town Park) and on inspection these were found to be future projects. Of course the documents enclosed explained, but confusion was caused in the early stage of walking the town. (Incidentally, this map showed the now well-established Neil T Blayney road as a dotted line, and did not show the one-way system elsewhere: what is needed is a simple map like that produced by the Tourist Office, with important additional sites marked and named by hand.) The sites and localities mentioned below represent some of the most outstanding (and a few of the least); it may be taken that the enormous number of buildings not cited in this large and prosperous town are good or above average.

### The Built Environment:

Some buildings which this adjudicator had not commented upon before (or had not seen because they are very recent) and which impressed were the Toyota and Honda sales centres: cool contemporary structures suited to their purpose and situated where they did not obtrude upon buildings in an earlier style. Gallagher's Hotel with its pristine glazed frontage and signature logo could be said to render some buildings in the same street shabby by comparison. The 'Station Lighthouse' shop near the bus station was noted as a sensitive and attractive rehabilitation. The glazed extension to the bus station must make that busy building better equipped to deal with the increase in passengers but one wonders if this very congested neighbourhood is the right place for the principal transport hub. Some of the worst examples of unattractive shop frontages face the bus station; others appear as you walk up the hill past An Grianan; and even more as you descend towards the lower end of Main Street. Those that are smart with well-kept upper storeys, gables and stacks are somewhat overwhelmed by the majority. Examples of fine new and traditional shopfronts are A-Line and Speer's respectively. Some interesting new and very large building projects were favourably noted between Main Street and the lower part of the town. As always, the ecclesiastical and scholastic buildings were well maintained; the two landmark churches benefited considerably from environmental works almost completed, and the campus of the Institute of Technology was conspicuously well maintained.

### **Landscaping:**

The award-winning Town Park with its fragrant medicinal garden and well supervised children's playground leads onto the majestically landscaped De Valera Road. It is this spacious and unfussy type of landscaping that gives a real sense of distinction to any town and reveals generous thinking: one wishes that more space of this kind had been allocated at an early planning stage to Pearse Road, Neil T Blayney Road and that neighbourhood to provide a gracious boulevard effect with industrial and commercial units screened by planting, rather than the clutter that prevails: this was a major lost opportunity. The largest roundabouts and their approaches were most tastefully planted on the date of the visit, the undulating grassed spaces at Port Bridge and the most imaginative and knowledgeable choice of plants at Ballyraine catching the attention particularly: gracious is certainly the word. Touches such as the flowering tubs on the bridge, and the widespread and successful contribution of householders (such the windowboxes as in Ballymacool) show real pride in the native place.

### **Wildlife and Natural Amenities:**

The Hedgerows survey and the Flora and Fauna map with its illustrated guide to walks are first class. Those involved in their preparation are to be heartily congratulated. It is also excellent, judging from your documents, that schools are so greatly involved. Congratulations too to the staff and pupils of schools which were awarded Green Flag status. It was interesting to see how well looked after were the school grounds themselves, with tree and shrub planting wherever there was suitable space. The monitoring of the golden eagles is fascinating.

### **Litter Control:**

Litter control was good on the date of the visit. A higher mark would have been awarded had not considerable disposable litter been seen in Market Square at the bandstand, at Tara Court and in the Glenwood estate. It is appreciated that these may have been temporary outbreaks, but naturally one wishes that they were not there at all, especially as you and other organisations take such immense and continuous measures to prevent littering.

### **Waste Minimisation:**

This is an above-average mark in this new category – a category which will assume greater importance as time goes on. You have already taken several initiatives such as doorstep recycling. The bring banks were well supervised at the time of the visit. It might be a useful step to visit the Recycling Centre at Dundalk which is exemplary of its kind and consider if measures taken there would suit the Letterkenny situation.

### **Tidiness:**

While the majority of the neighbourhoods in Letterkenny are tidy – some of them very tidy – it is unfortunately the minority that catch the eye. Mass-produced and excessive signage, especially on retail outlets in the shopping streets, have already been mentioned. There are a surprising number of untidy 'corners' – such as near the Mount Errigal Hotel, in the upper part of Market Square, on Castle Street and opposite the end of Iona Road – which seem to be taking a long time to be dealt with; some of those mentioned by last year's adjudicator like the area of the Old Bridge are still in evidence. The 'backs' of commercial premises such as Tesco and Dunne's are unprepossessing. Inconsistency of frontages in the industrial and commercial area at the foot of the town and on some approach roads (such as from Glenties) creates an unpleasing overall effect; many of the individual premises are well presented – some of them exceptionally well – but there is a disappointing lack of what has been described above as 'generous' landscaping, whether hard or soft, and screening. A disturbingly scruffy area between Oldtown and the Stranorlar road, where there is an uneasy conflict between the urban and the rural, was seen. This is outside the town therefore did not enter the

marking, but it bodes ill for the future because development is clearly on the way.

### **Residential Areas:**

There is now a much greater diversity in the matter of housing than heretofore, with fewer people living 'over the shop'. Ballyraine student campus looked promising. Do you involve residents of developments like Burnside Park apartments and Fontwell apartments in the Tidy Estates Competition? The former has a nice sense of enclosure but little space for the tree-planting that one would like to see. Suburban areas on and adjacent to the Ramelton road, and on and adjacent to College Road and Circular Road, were presented with real pride. At The Croft a 'wild' area of grass and clover caught the attention very favourably but is possibly due for housing development. The upgrading of the Glenwood estate was admired, especially the imaginative blues and greens of the houses on one side contrasting with the warmer colours opposite; traffic calming measures were also favourably noted here.

### **Roads, Streets and Back Areas:**

Resurfacing and new paving in a number of central streets was very favourably noted, and also at Tara Court, Ramelton Road and Thorndale. Sturdy wooden fencing seems to be a coming feature and is to be encouraged; it makes for consistency of property boundaries and where money is short is much less expensive than new stone walls – though several of those were also seen. Discourage cement block walls and post-and-rail fences. The excellent roundabouts have been referred to above. (Traffic control was generally poor, however, in the centre of the town.)

### **General Impression:**

It is very heartening to read the submission for an entry in which such a positive stance is taken, and then to find such impressive action taken in the physical aspects. Some of the many first rate initiatives seen have been praised above, and you will also undoubtedly take account of less favourable comments made under Tidiness, which also refer in the main to the built environment. Every good wish for the analysis which you undertake every year and for the improvements that will undoubtedly result.

### **Second Round Adjudication:**

The second round adjudicator spent a few days in Letterkenny earlier in the year and on that occasion was impressed by the sense of busy progressive activity about the town. On the return visit for second round adjudication purposes this first impression of Letterkenny was confirmed. The structure of Letterkenny is very interesting as the earlier town would appear to have developed in the Lower Main Street in the general area of the Market of 1852 and the higher ground now occupied by St. Eunan's Cathedral. This area and the Upper Main Street pre-date the development of Pearse Road. The amount of recent development and planned development along the Neil T. Blarney Road is highly impressive. The landscaped roundabouts especially the roundabouts at the N14 / N 13 junction, opposite the Bus Station and especially the Port Bridge Roundabout were highly impressive. Congratulations on the recent installation of the superb 'Polestar' sculpture at the Port Bridge Roundabout. For the visitor the superbly presented landscaped area and Tourist Information Office building provides a great introduction to Letterkenny. The interesting Tidy Towns Panel here about the 2003 Letterkenny Tree Survey was noted together with information of a historic nature on the town and area. Some areas of very poor signage detract from the built environment and these include the area opposite McDonalds and opposite the Bus Station. Co-ordinated retail signage at these locations would make a really big visual difference to the town. For this adjudicator some buildings in the built environment highly impressed. These included the Central Library and Arts Centre painted in a good colour scheme that works well with the brick detailing. The colours chosen for the four buildings opposite Church Lane work very well together and one of these buildings still has surviving older windows above the ground floor. Good colour schemes have also been utilized by both of the main Banks in Letterkenny. Some of the modern buildings adopt a progressive approach in design terms and in this context the Gallagher's Hotel premises comes to mind where glass has been used extensively as a design element. Some older buildings also stand out and these include the very well presented Ernest Speer property. However the large building across the road (Market Centre) from Market Square has been reduced in visual interest by the many advertising signs. While the need for advertising signage is accepted a co-ordinated approach here would probably benefit the individual retail premises and enhance the front elevation of the Market Centre building. The landscaping in and around Letterkenny is highly impressive and the many hanging baskets and window boxes are effective. The scale of the town and its streetscape is large enough to take quite a number of hanging baskets and window boxes. Congratulations on the presentation of the Town Park, a really beautiful place to spend a little time. The landscaping at the Cathedral car park and by the information panel was beautifully presented and highly colourful; the plants here contrasted appropriately with the stone of the Cathedral. Litter was noted on the N 13 approach road but in the town centre litter control was good on the day of adjudication. As noted by the first round adjudicator excessive advertising signage is a problem; on the main N 14 approach road the many advertising signs create a poor first impression of Letterkenny when approaching from that direction. Congratulations on your achievements to date and good luck with your various Tidy Towns projects for 2007.