

Tidy Towns Competition 2006

Adjudication Report

Centre: **Dundalk** Ref: **494**
County: **Louth** Mark: **266**
Category: **H** Date(s): **05/06/2006**
10/08/2006

	Maximum Mark	Mark Awarded 2006
Overall Development Approach	50	45
The Built Environment	50	37
Landscaping	50	37
Wildlife and Natural Amenities	50	20
Litter Control	50	30
Waste Minimisation	20	15
Tidiness	30	13
Residential Areas	40	27
Roads, Streets and Back Areas	50	34
General Impression	10	8
TOTAL MARK	400	266

Overall Development Approach:

This adjudicator has had a passing relationship with Dundalk for over fifty years, but only recently as an adjudicator in the Tidy Towns competition. It has therefore been a real pleasure to observe the changes which have taken place, for instead of a drab town with a declining industrial base we now see a borough of leafy boulevards and bright new industrial installations. Your suggested route proved most helpful; it was followed by car, stopping for notes and photographs, and then a visit to the town centre on foot. The map was particularly useful for all salient sites are written-in and its size makes it easy to deal with on a blustery day. There was no need to reprint the entry-form as this only creates un-necessary additional documentation. Your attitude to development is very positive, with an underlying theme that there is nothing that can not be done to improve the town!

The Built Environment:

Dundalk's first skyscraper was nearing completion: its location ensures that it will not detract from other building stock; its completion will be looked forward to – as will the completion of the heartwarming conversion to another purpose of the old Greenore railway building. While Malin Station is immaculately presented, there are still extensive GNR sheds in the traditional brick which have fallen into decay or have been poorly repaired, seen by hundreds of travellers from Belfast daily and giving a very poor impression of Dundalk. Two modern business premises were very favourably noted, fitting into the 19c streetscape because of subtleties of proportion and scale: McKenna's and Weber's in Earl Street: these will be entered for the architectural award which is ultimately judged by the RIBA. The list of superbly maintained older public buildings – Court House, etc – will not be iterated again here but have not been ignored. The newcomer which impressed most is the Marsh Centre, which is well laid out, accessible to pedestrians and well as motorists, and which is expertly landscaped. There will certainly be criticism to the effect that its elements are pastiche of buildings from former eras – such as Country Mansion stables, Victorian municipal edifice, etc, but this adjudicator

found it imaginative and amusing in its visual impact, and cool and harmonious in its retail area. If the ugly factory opposite Penney's could be relocated, there would be space for an additional landmark building.

Landscaping:

The Marsh Centre referred to above has an exceptionally effective mix of hard and soft landscaping; when the trees grow up (in a surprisingly short time) the parking areas will be unusually leafy and shady. Another commercial development with excellent landscaping is the grounds of the Xerox factory. However, the Parks Department has also been doing good work: landscaping of verges and roundabouts on the two-mile-long relief road has much improved and there are now only a few scruffy stretches. Well kept playing fields were seen towards Blackrock and well-kept lawns proliferate in a large number of open spaces especially alongside and in housing estates such as Muirheivne and Ard Easmuinn; typical of the care of small sections of greenery is the long verge of O'Hanlon Park beside the railway. The Ice House park remains the showpiece and residents in the surrounding area are very lucky to have it. Congratulations to your Parks department for its good work.

Wildlife and Natural Amenities:

Tree-planting comes under this heading, and so you have done very well as this includes all the young trees in the borough including those in the Marsh Centre. Young trees were noted in other places too, such as at Ard Easmuinn. The particular Wild Life and Natural Amenities project which has now come into its own in the Nanny Nature Walk; it was good to see how much it is used by walkers and joggers. Interpretative signage is attractive and useful. Some of the plants, such as the heaths which do not normally enjoy placing on the top of a wall, did not look to this adjudicator as if they had much chance of survival and it will be interesting to learn if they do.

Litter Control:

It was interesting to read that you have placed additional bins. This may account for the generally litter-free appearance of most areas, and for this congratulations are offered, but the problem persists in spite of the educational and other measures taken. Black spots on the date of adjudication were Hoy's Lane, Ecco street and (surprisingly) the neighbourhood of the swimming pool. Black spots tend to move daily, of course. Have you instigated prosecutions? The shock of well publicised fines, whether to residents, traders or visitors, can have a positive effect.

Waste Minimisation:

Several bring banks were seen, such as at Long Walk and at Ard Easmuinn where there was also a clothing facility. The recycling centre was most impressive, with its tidy entrance, landscaping, well managed traffic visiting the variously designated bays where a multiplicity of materials is received. Compost from some of these is even handed out to visitors! This impressive facility will be entered for the National Award in its category. This may be the place to remark on the energy supplied by the elegant windcharger at Dundalk I.T. – there surely must be an important implication for the future here, embracing the whole country.

Tidiness:

The damaged street furniture mentioned by last year's adjudicator seems to have been replaced. An abandoned Jet filling station, an unsightly open space and a derelict furniture store all at the west end of Long Avenue combine to create an untidy precinct. The same can be said for a more extensive area between the port and the military barracks, where there is considerable dereliction. Both localities are ripe for sensitive redevelopment. On a much more minor issue, ugly overhead cables affect the frontages of the handsome buildings next the Town Hall. Unfortunately there was some graffiti in the Ice House park. These items having been pointed out, the fact is that Dundalk generally enjoyed had a very tidy appearance on the date of adjudication.

Residential Areas:

Extensive older street housing – such as Castle Street – was seen to be the residential core of Dundalk and as such was maintained with pride by residents. It was good to see that many former vacant sites on approach roads, such as the N1 from Drogheda, had been filled with new houses. Several clusters of very charming older dwellings parallel to the river downstream were admired – Coast Guard, perhaps, or Military, in origin? The layout of courts and closes at Hoey's Lane impressed. Of the many large estates, Muirthemhne Park is well kept, yet the uniform grey of the homes is somewhat dispiriting. Seacrest is promising: there is ample space for the planting of young trees; at The Meadows, young trees were already in place. In general, Dundalk's residential housing stock is superior to that in many comparable large towns.

Roads, Streets and Back Areas:

It is assumed that the M1 has alleviated the traffic problem in the town, though on the date of the visit Park

Street and Francis Street were very congested and movement was deplorably slow. The old Dublin road, with its smart street furniture, neat verges and cycle lane was seen to be superior to the same road on the Belfast side, through there are fewer opportunities for improvements at the latter. Road surfaces are good in the town centre, with excellent paving; in some outlying areas this is not the case.

General Impression:

Dundalk, one might hazard, is on a roll: if this is indeed the case, a succession of further improvements may be expected over the next two or three years. It would be important therefore not to ignore the redevelopment of the two small near-destitute areas near the Military Barracks and at the western end of Long Avenue adjacent to the N1. This was a vastly interesting and informative visit, and your future success is eagerly anticipated.

Second Round Adjudication:

The 2nd round adjudicator had not visited Dundalk for a little while and on arrival was immediately taken by the vibrancy of the town. This new forward looking approach was perhaps signalled on the Dublin approach by the tall dignified wind power generation station at the Dundalk Institute of Technology. The central core area of the town at Market Square continues to be well presented as a focal point in Dundalk. The Courthouse is a beautiful building set in an attractive landscaped area. The combination of hard and soft landscaping in the Market Square area is visually effective. However the adjudicator is of the view that the area by the water feature and the Arts Centre needs to be refurbished. The water in the water feature was green and litter was evident here. Some of the trees at the Arts Centre building were in need of trimming and lettering at the Centre needed replacement. The Earl Street pedestrian area is an attractive landscaped area with the interesting sculpture but it was noted that some of the surfaces in this area appear to be sinking a little and some of the paving needs replacement. For next year the black iron supports for the hanging baskets will need to be repainted. At the Castle Road and Market Street junction an attractive stone house caught the eye just across from the stone church tower. There are some poor shorefronts in Dundalk that need to be replaced with more sympathetic materials, but this is in part compensated for by some very attractive older retail frontages such as Boylans Shoes that has attractive ironwork and plaster detailing. In Roden Place the County Museum and Tourist Information Office building is a most attractive conversion of an old mill or warehouse building. The bilingual street signage in blue and white is commended and it is great to see that the Irish language has not been forgotten. The presence of shuttering on many retail premises in the centre of Dundalk is regrettable and the practice should be discouraged on new developments. For such a large town as Dundalk only isolated evidence of litter was noted in the town centre early in the morning and this is commendable. The 2nd round adjudicator would like to wish you well with your Tidy Towns initiatives for 2007.