

Tidy Towns Competition 2008

Adjudication Report

Centre: **Swords** Ref: **160**
County: **Dublin(Fingal)** Mark: **244**
Category: **H** Date(s): **21/06/2008**

	Maximum Mark	Mark Awarded 2008
Overall Development Approach	50	35
The Built Environment	50	32
Landscaping	50	31
Wildlife and Natural Amenities	50	26
Litter Control	50	30
Waste Minimisation	20	11
Tidiness	30	15
Residential Areas	40	26
Roads, Streets and Back Areas	50	31
General Impression	10	7
TOTAL MARK	400	244

Overall Development Approach:

Welcome to the 2008 TidyTowns competition. Thank you for your entry form and your detailed maps which were of great use on the day of adjudication. It is noted that you are doing great work in working with the county council, local businesses and schools. However, we were a little disappointed that no three or five year strategic plan was enclosed with your entry. While a plan is certainly not essential to participate in TidyTowns, we would strongly suggest that to manage a growing town the size of Swords, a co-ordinated environmental strategy involving all the stakeholders in the towns, such as the chamber of commerce, local authority, resident groups, schools and other organisations in the area, is really needed to make substantial progress in the coming years. Swords has the potential to do really well in the competition and there is absolutely no reason why it can't go all the way and win outright, but the absence of a detailed multi-annual plan is holding you back. A plan would clearly demonstrate your overarching objectives, your specific targets and how you are meeting them, the level of involvement of other bodies and your resource capacity and how to increase it. Such a plan would also have potential benefits outside of TidyTowns as it would provide guidance on how to react to general issues arising in the community, such as planning applications, as well as creating an official transparent policy that could well broaden your support and even garner additional funding.

The Built Environment:

Swords main street looks as good as ever with its lines of historical buildings on either side leading up to its impressive castle. Most the businesses and shops were generally well presented on the day, although some signage could be improved to fit the style of the street. We are looking forward to day when the castle project is completed and the empty buildings at the end of the street and around into north street, which are looking increasingly drab, are finally addressed. One of the nicest features of the village area is its small laneways off the main street that one can explore at leisure and scan the impressive range of services on offer, particularly the shopping areas with their lovely courtyards leading onto Forester Way which offer a refuge from the hustle

and bustle of the main street. Street furniture is impressive and it's nice to be able to sit and admire the much complimented Fingal County Council offices. North Street is hampered by its flank of unused building, although it quickly improves as one walks further down to see a fine line of heritage buildings and the very impressive Carnegie Court Hotel. Bridge Street presents a lovely vista looking up towards the Rathbeale Road, which itself boasts a fine line of well kept houses. It is a pity that the old cottages that once lined the road were lost, although one has to accept modern requirements. We were wondering what is the future of the very prominent derelict cottage on the left of the road - a real reminder of past times. It would be nice to preserve it if at all possible. Walking up Church Road one is struck by the magnificent natural stone walls and stone buildings, not least the well presented church and grounds. At the other end of the village towards Dublin Road the restored schoolhouse looks very impressive as does new developments left and right. The link from the main thoroughfare through Penny's into the Pavilions Shopping Centre is lovely surprise to the visitor and the latter is setting in nicely along the Malahide Road now that the major building works appear complete. Overall the village area is real jewel although a more co-ordinated approach to shop fronts could really pay dividends, and this could form part of the suggested strategic plan.

Landscaping:

Landscaping along the main thoroughfares is appropriate with flower displays, hanging baskets and window boxes throughout providing real colour and variety. The aforementioned council offices are fronted by a lovely stand of mature trees. Swords also boasts some magnificent park lands, most obviously the Castle Town Park and the Ward Valley Park and also prominent open green areas in many of the estates. On a stroll through the Castle Park the attractive black gates matching the benches throughout and the well maintained flower beds were much admired. Other green areas are being used for sporting facilities, such as those along the Balheary Road, which looked very well maintained and, most importantly, being used on the day of adjudication - although some young people considered the wire fencing on the corner an obstruction and were in the process of flattening it! Well done on the provision of a skate board park in the vicinity - its urban art approach is very striking, and while some neighbours may not like the decor, it probably hits the right note of youthful rebellion for those using it. It was a little disappointing to see the unused potential of landscaping on the many roundabouts on the Swords Road as we are aware of your efforts to have them planted. With such potential throughout the whole Swords area there is great opportunity to develop a co-ordinated landscaping strategy, particularly in the village area and on approach roads, as part of your plan.

Wildlife and Natural Amenities:

The wildfowl reserve is certainly a great project and we look forward to seeing progress in future years - well done. This is a category that Swords could really score well in. With all the green open spaces available there is no shortage of areas that could be taken on as a dedicated wildlife project, perhaps by one of the many schools in the area. The Ward River Valley park in particular is a wonderful amenity to have next door to an urban area and it would be perfect for the development of a nature trail, perhaps as a Sli na Slainte walk, through here. There are many programmes that fund the development of such projects so it would be a very fruitful approach to take.

Litter Control:

We understand that this category is major focus of the committee's activities and it's really paying off. Congratulations to the committee, the council and all those who helped make Swords village virtually a litter free zone on the day of adjudication. And well done on the removal of the tree grates that acted as magnet for so many cigarette butts the last time this adjudicator was in town. With the number of pubs and restaurants in the village area, no doubt this is an ongoing challenge and a visit later in the evening could tell a different story. But the good news is that whatever is being deposited is being removed and local businesses appear to be doing their bit cleaning their curtilage areas. Well done on your clean up notices and for highlighting that all it takes is 15 minutes contribution to make a big difference. A word of warning however would be back areas not easily visible from the main streets which can easily accumulate litter and the park areas where cleaning is more difficult. For instance, the Ward Valley entry off the Highland Estate contained quite a bit of litter on the way down through the trees - this is obviously an area that is used after hours and we're sure there are a few other similar sites in such a large urban area.

Waste Minimisation:

Swords has scored quite highly in this category compared to other centres and it was great to see the Green Flag flying at St Cronan's National School. Well done to the council for rolling out both green and brown bins services in many estates which should divert many tonnes of waste away from landfill. The really excellent recycling centre was also noted. With such a large commercial sector in Swords we would look forward to the committee looking strategically at the issue as there is plenty of scope to garner additional marks.

Tidiness:

Swords village has the essence of a tidy town with its attractive wide streets and pavements and lack of

wirescape. It has certainly come a long way since it was briefly featured as a model 'commuter town' in the video Our Tidy Towns back in 1978 (see www.tidytowns.ie/history/videos). It is only on closer examination that some issues arise. We understand you have done quite a bit of work in tackling graffiti, the curse of modern Ireland, and you are no doubt aware that the challenge continues so we won't labour the point. Hopefully you were able to participate in the anti-graffiti scheme detailed in this year's TidyTowns pack. We note that a disc parking scheme was introduced in the village to deter long term parking - a laudable effort although it doesn't seem to have much of an affect as parking places still seemed to be in high demand. To us the main issue here is that cars have to reverse back onto the main road to exit their parking spot, thereby causing ongoing disruption to traffic flow. It would be best if parking was seriously reduced along the street and facilities provided elsewhere. Obviously there is a very high demand for parking in such a popular town so the long term solution seems to be more off-road car parks until at least until other transport alternatives are available. A co-ordinated shop sign policy would also give a more coherent affect as suggested above.

Residential Areas:

Your local competition for residential area is a great idea and hopefully this will pay dividends in the future. In fact if it really takes off it could create a platform to launch other similar initiatives such as Best Shop Front, Best Maintained Commercial Area etc. There appears to be a very good standard to build on throughout with well presented houses and attractive gardens in both the old and new developments. While its not possible to go through all the estates reviewed a few which caught our eye near the Ward Park were Carlton Court, Highfield (with the exception of its entrance to the park) and St Columbas Rise. A previous award winner, Applewood Village was also very appealing in its traditional village style setting, although there was a some litter outside the shops on the right. The best of luck with your competition.

Roads, Streets and Back Areas:

The roads in Swords are all generally kept to a high standard and very few weeds were noted. Along the main street we were pleased to see that the old broken speed bumps have been removed and replaced with more attractive smoother ramps, and particularly on the Seatown Road where the original sharp inclines must have been the terror of motorists. Paths are well kept throughout. Main approach roads are also in good condition and the absence of roadworks of some shape or form (however brief) was welcome. Back areas are a potential problem as outlined above.

General Impression:

As stated, Swords has terrific potential to make great strides in TidyTowns. The work of the committee has already paid large dividends since re-entering the competition a few years ago, particularly in dealing with the then extensive litter problem. We would strongly suggest that you now take the next step and develop a strategic plan to garner substantially more marks under each of the categories. But whatever you decide, congratulations on everything you have achieved to date and the very best of luck with your endeavours.