

Tidy Towns Competition 2009

Adjudication Report

Centre: **Carrickmacross** Ref: **586**
County: **Monaghan** Mark: **288**
Category: **D** Date(s): **23/06/2009**
26/07/2009

	Maximum Mark	Mark Awarded 2009
Overall Development Approach	50	46
The Built Environment	50	39
Landscaping	50	41
Wildlife and Natural Amenities	50	27
Litter Control	50	34
Waste Minimisation	20	11
Tidiness	30	15
Residential Areas	40	31
Roads, Streets and Back Areas	50	36
General Impression	10	8
TOTAL MARK	400	288

Overall Development Approach:

Thank you very much for the comprehensive application form and welcome to the Tidy Towns Competition 2009. The supplementary material, consisting of the very comprehensive 3 Year Plan and About Carrickmacross Town Guide, gives added support to your official application. Thank you also for the excellent descriptive hand drawn map, which was an invaluable asset in ensuring that all relevant areas were identified and visited. Due congratulations to Carrickmacross, through you, the committee and its citizens, for consistently maintaining such a high standard in the Competition over the years to achieve this type of success and to retain consistency of performance necessitates immense collaborative input from many sources. It is noted that the committee of 8 is supported by a total volunteer complement of 200. Harnessing the efforts of all for the betterment of the town is a rather daunting task and the main committee has handled this task with great professionalism. Credit to the business community of the town for committing €10k of financial sponsorship in support of your work plan. Ongoing interaction with other town organisations, voluntary groups, businesses and schools is the key to ensuring that the town will remain one of the high achievers in the competition in the years ahead. The support of Monaghan County Council, local Town Council and other agencies has to be recognized. These bodies are in a position to supply resources in terms of professional support and possible funding support to match your own inputs and fund raising activities.

The practical work undertaken in this category, especially the new 3 Year Plan, has earned you back the mark which was lost last year.

The Town, which is quite large, is in the middle of some disruptive infrastructural work and cognoscente has been taken of this. Building work aside, there are some other issues that need attention and these will be addressed under the relevant categories. The adjudicator visited the town early in the month, but did not have the time to complete a full examination, so a second visit was necessary, therefore the adjudication date is late June! Again, your comments on the categories, are noted but there are many centres in a similar position and its something that is outside the control of the adjudicator.

The Built Environment:

In this section, the adjudicator is trying to give an overall assessment of the state of the built environment throughout the town and its environs. Your input under this category is very detailed and shows the level of activity that is being undertaken in conjunction with other bodies, residents and the business community. To give in depth comment on the recent new developments alone would require a couple of pages in their own right, so one has to compromise and condense as best as possible. It has been some years since this adjudicator spent time in Carrickmacross and in that interim period the physical change that has taken place has been quite staggering. The Market Square, as you rightly point out, is the focal point of the Town and it is good to report that one of the central buildings in that area is now in very practical use as a 4 star hotel, so well done to the developers of the newly refurbished Shirley Arms Hotel. The Court House looked extremely well on the day of adjudication. The Workhouse and its grounds are part of the historical fabric of a past Carrickmacross and a must for any visitor to the town. The new Patrician High School building and its grounds on the Castelblayney/Ballybay road junction are architecturally designed to a very high standard. Inver College looked well on the day, but the surrounding area was a little untidy with litter strewn around, this will be commented upon in the relevant section.

The work being undertaken on Farney Street will give that whole area a new vibrancy and no doubt the business people will benefit as well. Just an observation, it might be an idea to approach the Town Council to give consideration to erecting suitable uniform street nameplates. I was a little confused to whether Sraid Bath was actually Farney Street and similarly with other streets that had no identification. St Johns Church and The Catholic Hall are fine examples of architecture from a different era. The following is a cross section of commercial premises that appealed to the adjudicator for different reasons; Tom Marron's on Parnell Street for its simplicity and its "mascot", who seemed to be on sentry duty, Deerys Lounge Bar and McArdles on Main Street, The Solicitors on Farney Street for its old style frontage, Cavallinos on the same street and Wards Butchers. Hand Footwear had a very simple and old style frontage, whilst Studio One and Creative Gifts were modern in design, but equally attractive. There were many more that were in pristine condition, but as stated those mentioned were personal choices. The main town area has benefited enormously from the provision of new footpaths, bollards, parking spaces and most importantly good road surfaces. Access to shops and other commercial buildings for the most part was acceptable and catered for the disabled and the aged. When the ongoing work on Farney Street and elsewhere will be completed, it will complement what is already in place. Carrickmacross is not without its problems, there are still too many plastic signs that look out of place, also a number of derelict premises were observed in both, the core area and on the outskirts. I am aware that Committee are addressing these issues as part of the 3 Year Plan. Overall, a very good standard and on par with last year's adjudication report.

Landscaping:

The town possesses many fine examples of mixed landscaping arrangements and the balance achieved is very good. Even though it was June, there was a vibrancy of colour to be seen in the main area and at the outskirts. Good to see the standard annuals such as petunias, alyssum, begonias, impatiens and nasturtiums being used to good effect, in combination with perennials and long life shrubs. The entrances to the town were enhanced by excellent shrub planting, particularly at the main roundabouts, this is where one sees the practical support by the business community, who have sponsored the planting arrangements. As mentioned in your submission, the Crann Nua residential area is an award winning project and does live up to that reputation. To maintain this standard of presentation, it requires a lot of effort and resources as well as patience, so well done to the local council team and the volunteers entrusted with this work. This adjudicator was impressed with the extent of floral combinations that prevailed in private planting arrangements, most notably the gardens in the small terrace of houses on the Castleblayney Road end of the town. Trees are the most important plants in any urban landscape, yet relatively few towns and villages have enough of them. Carrickmacross is an exception to the rule and one was impressed with management of new saplings that have been planted over the last few years.

Last year's second round adjudication report suggested that the main street might benefit from the planting of trees, but that is a matter of opinion. You are wished well with your efforts to acquire land for the continuation of the Lisanisk Walk and of course this will be a huge benefit to the community. It will also further enhance the standard of landscaping and contribute to the preservation of wildlife in that immediate area.

Wildlife and Natural Amenities:

Some centres struggle with this category, as they feel that they may not possess basic natural habitats from which projects can be developed, but that is not the case with Carrickmacross. The committee has been responsible for a large body of work that is being done in this category and you have responded in a positive manner to the call for additional information, as per last year's report.

Lisanisk Lakeside Park was visited and is a haven of tranquillity which, as you rightly point out, has been kept in its natural state. One did not have the time to examine in detail all the work that was being undertaken under

wildlife and natural amenities, but it was noticeable in your submission that there was no mention of schools being involved under this category heading. It would be a worthwhile exercise, as part of the ongoing liaison programme with the local schools, to examine the possibility of a specific school related wildlife project. The Local County Council Wildlife Ranger or equivalent could also be approached to offer advice and guidance.

Litter Control:

It is important to put in place little programmes that will ensure that both locals and visitors are aware that Carrickmacross wishes to be a litter free zone, if possible. The work being done with the schools, especially the Wrigley's Chewing Gum initiative, is very laudable and practical. I am aware that you have organised regular litter picks and that the Town Council has a Litter Warden in place, but the standard of litter control on adjudication was average for a Town of Carrickmacross standing. Pockets of litter were to be seen at the following locations: Inver College and further in the Castleblayney road entrance, at the steps leading down to the Sports Centre and Car Park, and on Main Street, and Farney Street. Some litter was also noted on parts of Horse Hill, particularly at the old Health Centre. One appreciates what you are doing to counteract this problem, some people will never conform, but do keep up the good work. Because of the initiatives that you have put in place since last year the mark remains the same.

Waste Minimisation:

The committee has certainly embraced the concept of Waste Minimisation judging by the cross section of projects that you have become involved in. Good to note that some schools have achieved and retained Green flag and others are working towards achieving that objective. School children are very innovative and enthusiastic when given encouragement and praise, and make meaningful contributions to schemes like this. The Race Against Waste booklet and the updated website have many other idea generators under selected headings and no doubt a Committee member has been assigned to filter this information back to the main group. The three recycling facilities were visited and were well maintained, and more importantly well managed. Keep up the excellent work which is reflected in an increase in marks from last year.

Tidiness:

There has been a lot of work done by the Committee by way of encouragement to make the town an even tidier place. The Business Community have responded by ensuring that, where possible, shop fronts are clutter free. The elimination of most overhead wires has made a big difference to the street scape and the addition of new footpaths has also helped in that it is easier to traverse the town. Note has been taken of the fact that there are areas that are being affected by ongoing sewage works and street developments, as in the case of Farney Street. A few broken down fences in prominent locations, most notably the one at the Kingscourt Road Junction, were observed during a walkabout. The old Heath Centre on Horse Hill up by Emmett Terrace is fast falling into a very untidy spectacle and needs to be at least tidied up in the near future. The area that houses the signs for the Ardee Derry exits is a little untidy, in stark contrast to other parts of the town; it is in a central location and maybe could be spruced up a little.

Residential Areas:

The standard in this category was very good and it is obvious that most of the residents of Carrickmacross and its environs have a sense of pride of place. Again, it would be impossible to do justice to each area visited in this short report, but the ones seen by the adjudicator bore out what you have stated in your application submission. The established Ardross Avenue and its immediate area were exceptionally well maintained and had many fine individual premises, some with exceptional gardens. The Terrace of red bricked houses a little further in on the Castleblayney road was very eye catching, these were well maintained with brick work and wrought iron railings clean and gardens nicely presented. The small established St Josephs Terrace was very well presented, while the houses and frontages on large estate Emmett Road were, with a few exceptions, very pleasant. The Crann Nua area lives up to its reputation with the communal green areas and shrub beds in immaculate condition. Other newer areas visited included Highfield, the pleasantly located Drummond Radhairc and the small Sean Carrig estate; these also attained the high standard of presentation that was evident in other areas. Very good performance overall and credit is due to individual householders and residents associations for their ongoing work.

Roads, Streets and Back Areas:

The upheaval caused by the sewage works has been noted, but that aside the standard in this category was good. The entrance in from the Castleblayney/Ballybay junction is particularly attractive, helped in no small measure by the planting arrangements in place at that junction. The Shercock entrance was quite good, as

was the busy Dundalk entrance and the Crossmaglen road, alluded to in last year's report, has maintained its high standard. Within the town, the link by roads such as the Magheraboy, Magheraross and Mullinary were acceptable, although some boundary walls were a little tatty. The entrance from Ardee is also well presented, except that previously mentioned little diamond at the Castle Street junction, this needs to be upgraded and the signs cleaned. Given that, the town has been severely affected by ongoing infrastructural work, thus it would be unfair to deduct points in this section, so we have settled for retention of the same mark as last year.

General Impression:

Carrickmacross is a very welcoming town with a rich history that is well documented both, on information boards and on a few publications that one can avail of. You are a proactive committee dedicated to making sure that no stone is left unturned, to have it looking its best and as a result the town has attained a consistent high standard in the TidyTowns Competition over many years. The developments and improvements that are in place are very sustainable and certainly will be a legacy for future generations. You are wished well in future years in the competition.

Second Round Adjudication:

The TidyTowns movement in Carrickmacross seems to play a central role in the development and appearance of the town. Twenty years of TidyTowns Committees is an impressive achievement and the assistance of 200 volunteers helps explain the carefully coordinated colour scheme of the mainstreet, the dashes of colourful landscaping throughout the town, the preservation of the wonderful heritage buildings of Carrickmacross, the boulders carefully sited throughout the town announcing estate names and inscribed with various Celtic patterns, the delightful finger posting throughout the town, the Gaeilge on signposts, the well maintained and interesting information boards. The Carrickmacross appearance is not a Rome built in a day, but the result of many years of planning and endeavour. The presentation of the Carrickmacross submission, the helpful maps, the photos which give a flavour of the town before one arrives, the content of that submission, which shows the level of support in the community, help explain how the appearance of Carrickmacross has benefitted from the recent upgrading of the N2 and the development of the Celtic Tiger years. Active and meaningful engagement with the various agencies have helped you shape your town into its present form, on the one hand retaining its rich heritage, but also positioning itself to harness the possibilities that the future may hold. One notes your acknowledgement that Carrickmacross is 'a work in progress' because of all of the work that is in progress. This is surely a healthy sign that your committee is not resting on its laurels, but always facing the challenges that arise with time. One reads in your submission that you have been making efforts "to restore some semblance of the market town status to Carrickmacross"; a most commendable ambition. The adjudicator's big regret was that he could not visit on either a Thursday or Saturday to flavour that atmosphere. But even on non market days, the appearance of the main street still echoes of the traditional market town. It is clear that you have been working on the state of unoccupied buildings, as the Town Centre presents itself colourfully and confidently. The highlight of the most enjoyable visit was the experience of the sweep into town from the Ardross Avenue, along Monaghan Street to be brought to a halt by the Shirley Arms Hotel, the delightful Market Square and the quaint Toll House. A look in the mirror and there was the Courthouse, older and newer buildings sitting side by side and enhancing the appearance of one another. Other delights were the appearance of the small estate at Chestnut Grove, dominated by the giant chestnut, the Gaeilge on the fingerposts and one wondered at the derivation of the word 'smachtlan', Bath Street and the Weymouth Cottages, the Páirc Uisce in the middle of an estate. What an achievement for a community to have been able to preserve and conserve the Workhouse and the Fever Hospital, symbols of hardship and heartache so often bulldozed in other towns in order to erase the memories associated with them, but now beautifully presented as integral and meaningful elements of the Carrickmacross heritage. One felt that the Mass House plaque from circa 1775 might be improved upon, the place is more remembered than honoured. Your submission frequently mentions the work done and the ongoing plans for the beautiful Lisanisk. The possibilities that Lisanisk offers for the town are limitless. The possibilities it offers for advancement in this competition are worthwhile also. One felt that there was too much flyposting to be seen around the town, most of which related to events in other towns. Carrickmacross has benefitted from the years of the Celtic Tiger, but that tiger has left challenges in its wake also for the town. One is confident that your concerned committee will tackle any such challenges with the success that has brought Carrickmacross to be present, delightful experience that it now is.