

Tidy Towns Competition 2013

Adjudication Report

Centre: **Mullingar** Ref: **206**
County: **Westmeath** Mark: **255**
Category: **G** Date(s): **11/07/2013**

	Maximum Mark	Mark Awarded 2012	Mark Awarded 2013
Overall Development Approach	50	34	35
The Built Environment	50	38	39
Landscaping	50	36	37
Wildlife and Natural Amenities	50	21	21
Litter Control	50	28	27
Sustainable Waste And Resource Management	20	9	8
Tidiness	30	17	18
Residential Areas	40	30	31
Roads, Streets and Back Areas	50	32	32
General Impression	10	7	7
TOTAL MARK	400	252	255

Overall Development Approach:

Mullingar is most welcome to the 2013 Tidy Towns competition. Many thanks for your typed application form and additional information including photographs newspaper clippings and maps. You have over doubled the size of your committee since last year and this is a wonderful achievement. In addition you have been successful in gaining a community employment worker to help with your group. It is excellent to read that you are utilising this new energy to formulate a three-year plan. We very much look forward to reviewing this in 2014. Your group is liaising with a long list of local and regional agencies including businesses and amenity groups. This is excellent and congratulations to all those groups who have helped out in their own way. Do seek ways in which this list can be expanded and always be trying to include marginalised groups in your activities such as immigrants, those with special needs or the elderly. You have a very active programme of communication and your many newspaper cuttings were admired. Communication is a vital component of sustainable success in the Tidy Towns contest and is a never ending task. You need to always be thinking about how you can better communicate your message i.e. the value of volunteerism, and how you can reach people who have heretofore been unaware of your activities. You are successfully liaising with local schools and congratulations to them on their poster competition, the winners of which were admired in your appendices. Do you ensure that your appendices are only used for supporting information. In other words make sure that all projects of note are listed in the main application and not hidden in the appendices for they may be missed by the adjudicator (for example photographs of people cleaning signs were noted and this activity was not listed in your main application). The map is an essential part of any application and is used by the adjudicator as he/she walks around the town and inspects the projects upon which you have been working. It would therefore be better if your map was detachable from the main application and the references were explained on the same sheet of paper.

The Built Environment:

Your project at the tranquillity garden will be assessed under the landscaping heading. Despite the fact that you have major infrastructure works under way this year there have nevertheless been some important enhancements to the built environment in Mullingar. In particular the re-use of the county infirmary, including its attractive and sensitive restoration, is an excellent new edition. Your competitions to encourage high standards of shop presentation during the Christmas and summer seasons are great ways to involve businesses and enhanced the general streetscape. The relatively new county buildings are looking well and are architecturally interesting. It was sad to see extensive damage to the bank of the small stream and the lack of general

landscaping to the rear. The sculpture however is nice. The nearby entrance to the arts centre is excellent although watch that flags do not get too tatty. Market House Square is an attractive and important public space. Some litter had gathered outside Canton Casey's however while the flagpoles on the tourist office lacked flags. The Main Street is looking very well although there are some derelict properties that need attention. The Greville Arms is superb, top marks here. Church Avenue is an important architectural and heritage enclave. The church itself is well presented while litter, graffiti and the storage of bins at the entrance otherwise detract from the appearance. The 1878 building (a Guild house of some sort?) Had a selection of items dumped at its entrance. Works were underway near the Austin Friars hotel and no doubt these will be completed to restore the aspect of the sculpture and planted surrounds. The entrance to the GAA grounds (does it have a name?) looks great with its cleanly painted walls and county bunting. The bust of Michael O'Hehir is an interesting inset. The cathedral dominates the town and there is something almost Spanish about its twin towers. Presentation was excellent although flags would be nice on the flagpoles. Galvin's For Men maintained its award-winning shop front while the lovely public space across the road is let down by litter, bins and stored traffic cones. The famine memorial is attractive and thought-provoking. The train station is very well presented.

Landscaping:

The plans at the tranquillity garden are obviously in progress but no doubt this will be a major addition to the town upon completion. The new entrance to the town park is a great improvement here. Great displays of flowers were admired through the town and luxurious collections of hanging baskets were most effective on lamp posts. Congratulations to all the businesses which made the extra effort to decorate their own facades, the standard throughout was very high. Phantasy and House of Flowers on Mount St deserve special praise. The entrance to the Annebrook hotel and town park look well and the 'stream spire' was an excellent installation on this sunny day. The area was let down slightly by an accumulation of litter, a graffitied electricity box and the storage of bins. The park itself was nicely maintained and free of litter. The pond is subject to algal blooms, a result of nutrients in the water, so go easy on fertiliser which may be one source. Trees are maturing nicely while furniture here is of a good order. The playground at the entrance lacks appeal and is graffitied. A major infestation of Japanese knotweed was noted along the stream near the GAA grounds. It looks like it is being treated and if so well done, do persevere as it can take up to 3 years to eradicate. The large beech tree is a great feature near Dunnes Stores (none of the streets were labelled at this crossroads). Planters outside Bank of Ireland were empty save for some rubbish. Overall landscaping was considered attractive if a little imbalanced in favour of flowers over perennials shrubs.

Wildlife and Natural Amenities:

You have been doing some work in researching the natural infrastructure in and around your town and this is the perfect way to approach this category. You are urged to resist interventions such as the construction of bug hotels, or so-called wildflower meadows in favour of those actions which promote a better understanding of natural heritage. Your meetings with the National Parks and wildlife service and Irish wildlife trust have no doubt alerted you to the amazing potential that exists. You state that proposals are being incorporated into your three-year plan but these proposals are not shared with us and so cannot be appraised. The Royal Canal which runs through the town is a fantastic asset for people and wildlife and you also have the River Brosna. Why not incorporate an annual event in your calendar to highlight these areas through guided walks by experts during biodiversity week in May or heritage week in August. Do make sure you get the schools involved here as it is a rich area for research and art projects. Don't forget that wildlife is all around us not just in designated areas. People are brought closer to wildlife when they can experience it at close quarters e.g. in their gardens or parks that they use.

Litter Control:

Congratulations on holding a successful national spring clean campaign. In this category the adjudicator is looking for a strategy whereby you are addressing this most important issue. This normally involves a number of strands. One of these would be regular litter patrols and while the local authority no doubt has a cleansing unit there will probably be a need for a voluntary inspections to augment this. You will also need to be continually alert to the problems of illegal dumping and you must work with the council on pursuing offenders in the courts. While these actions would address litter that has already fallen it is imperative that in parallel with this you raise awareness to prevent the generation of litter in the first place. To do this you will need to think about the type of litter that is generated, who is generating it, and when it is generated. Targeted campaigns can then be initiated with a good chance of success. Litter control in the main commercial areas of the town was quite good on adjudication day. Cigarette ends are a problem outside pubs however so some extra action is needed here. A bin at Eason's was overflowing and cigarette ends were strewn around its entrance. A lot of litter had gathered in the canal and although this is not easy to resolve an extra effort should be made in this important amenity area. In general it was felt that extra effort is required to meet the high standards that are looked for in this category.

Sustainable Waste And Resource Management:

In this category the adjudicator is looking at how you are addressing the ongoing problem of unsustainable resource use. This includes not only materials but water and energy as well. To do this you will need a sector by sector approach. Liaise with businesses, for which waste is a significant cost, to see how they can be more efficient in their use of energy and water and cut down on packaging for instance. How does the town as a whole encourage and prioritise walking and cycling over individual car use? You could work with residential areas to promote home composting and highlighting the importance of smart shopping to cut down on food waste. You do not list your schools achievements in the green flag program here and this is an important mission. Schools

across Ireland have been addressing the issue of resource management for a number of years now and will have implemented a number of projects that could be applied across the whole town. Next year list each school in the town and how they are getting on with their green flags. Take a look at your own activities, particularly under the landscaping heading, and see how resources could be used more efficiently. For example minimising areas of lawn that need mowing, cutting down on the use of fertilisers and herbicides, using native perennial plants over annual flowers and harvesting rainwater for watering displays of summer planting are all activities where you can lead by example.

Tidiness:

The town is generally very tidy and you have done a good job of presentation here. Signage is restrained and appropriate while a lack of overhead wire clutter enhances the skyline. In some instances footpaths, which are generally well constructed, need to be washed. Lamp standards are attractive but watch out for fly posting and cable ties. In some cases signage poles needed to be painted as these can look untidy at eye level.

Residential Areas:

Congratulations on initiating your best estate competition. This can be a great incentive to local groups but do ensure that the same areas are not winning every year. Encouraging broad engagement perhaps through holding landscaping workshops with local garden centres. You could include best new entry or most improved category that would ensure that the effort is evenly spread across the town. A very nice residential area was admired on Bishop's Gate Street. The redbrick works really well with the whitebeam trees. The shrubs in tubs may serve to deter parking and that's fine but they do need maintenance as most are half dead. Market Point, along the canal, is a very attractively designed high-density development that is very well landscaped. The nearby Ennel view Terrace is of a different era but also attractive with its freshly painted facades.

Roads, Streets and Back Areas:

The approach from Ballymahon, across the Royal Canal and through the extensive areas of industrial units is not bad. A number of very attractively landscaped roundabouts were admired but this adjudicator found the signposting for zones A, B, C etc (and nothing for the town centre) confusing. That said premises were maintaining a good standard of presentation.

General Impression:

This is another great entry from Mullingar the town is looking great and a good number of worthwhile projects are underway. Attention is needed to deal with the litter situation as this will obscure your other good works. Best of luck.