

# Tidy Towns Competition 2014

## Adjudication Report

Centre: **Newmarket-on-Fergus** Ref: **83**  
County: **Clare** Mark: **288**  
Category: **C** Date(s): **02/07/2014**

	<b>Maximum Mark</b>	<b>Mark Awarded 2014</b>
Community Involvement & Planning	60	39
Built Environment and Streetscape	50	42
Landscaping and Open Spaces	50	44
Wildlife, Habitats and Natural Amenities	50	29
Sustainable Waste and Resource Management	50	15
Tidiness and Litter Control	90	56
Residential Streets & Housing Areas	50	30
Approach Roads, Streets & Lanes	50	33
<b>TOTAL MARK</b>	<b>450</b>	<b>288</b>

### Community Involvement & Planning / Rannpháirtíocht an Phobail & Pleanáil:

Ta Fáilte Romhat Newmarket-on Fergus - Welcome Newmarket-on-Fergus to the Super Valu 2014 National Tidy Towns competition. You re launched your Tidy Towns group in 2011. Your recruitment drive earlier this year increased the overall volunteer membership to 40. This is a very good outcome. You are fortunate to have a range of skills, but you are also perceptive in seeing that these skills can contribute hugely to your work. You meetings average once a month. It is important that general meetings are - as yours are - open to all in the community.

You list a large number of bodies, agencies, and businesses that have supported your activities. These range from public bodies to sports groups, the business community and schools. You also have the support of your local councillor. This gives an insight into how well regarded your group and work is within the town.

We are delighted to see that you have a range of traditional and modern communication methods in place. Modern methods are instant, sustainable and also appeal to the youth. You are one of the few groups that we have encountered to extend this to Twitter and you follow the national organisation on Facebook and Twitter also. The work signage program is a good idea, and you even extend your PR work to the annual carnival!

You have a schools liaison officer who relates to the school on projects such as littering and biodiversity. It is excellent that the four schools have engaged in the Green Flag programme. You are correct in saying that the community benefits from this. The 'best and worst of your town' Photography Competition must have brought in some interesting results. This is imaginative - as very often children can see things that adults are so accustomed to seeing - that they pass an adult by.

It is good to know that involvement in the competition has positively impacted on the community of Newmarket-on-Fergus.

Your map was reasonably useful. However it did not name all streets, approach roads and most housing estates. We note that last year's adjudicator also stated that they would prefer a more detailed map of the town. Nonetheless it was useful to the adjudicator because all your projects for this year were shown numbered on the map - sequentially in relation to how they appeared on your Entry Form. Your Entry Form was most clear and easily read. However, we noticed that often throughout the form you included proposed projects under various category headings. Please note that the Entry Form should ONLY contain projects for this adjudication year (and relevant phases of phased projects. We would ask you to keep planned projects for inclusion only in your Tidy Towns Plan.

You should, we think compile a shorter term Tidy Towns Plan. The Matrix Plan contained in the Environmental

Improvement Strategy is quite ambitious, and, in any event it has a very long-term time scale due to its comprehensive nature. Given current economic circumstances it is likely that some of the objectives will be long term. A three year plan would focus your mind on what exactly you can hope to achieve. A plan need not be prepared professionally, but you should consult locally in preparing such a plan. You should also consider any recent statutory and non-statutory plans applicable to the town in drawing up your work programme.

### **Built Environment and Streetscape / An Timpeallacht Thógtha agus Sráid-dreacha:**

Your primary project here is the enhancement of the Fairgreen. We appreciate the fact that you have looked at this in a professional manner, and will have the correct approach in carrying out the work on-the-ground. We look forward to hearing the outcome of your grant application for this project under the Public Area Enhancement Scheme 2014. We suspect that the funding available will in no way cover the cost of the entire scheme. We therefore suggest that you do not try to stretch this funding too far, but concentrate on developing the project on an phased incremental basis using high-quality materials – both hard landscaping materials and soft landscaping materials. We look forward to hearing more about this in 2015. Meanwhile we agree with the authors of the Tidy Towns and Environmental Improvement Strategy that there is a good building stock bordering the Fairgreen. This together with the church and existing landscaping gives you a very good 'raw material' to work upon. We particularly admired the stone wall to the rear of the Fairgreen with its brightly coloured yellow entrance gate and well-kept grounds inside.

The Catholic Church is 'the jewel in your crown' architecturally. It received its Europa Nostra Architectural Award in 1975. It is a pity that some detail about its architectural design is not available in the church itself, other than the plaque announcing its award. Whereas we do not judge interiors the temptation to revisit this architectural beauty was irresistible! Particularly for the times when it was built it was a brave decision to commission such a modern place of worship. We are delighted that its setting will be enhanced by the work to the Fairgreen. We also hope that any interpretive signage will fully include relevant architectural information in relation to the church. Your Tidy Towns and Environmental Improvement Strategy mentioned that there was only one Protected Structure in the town centre. If this is not the church we feel strongly that it should be included as representative of the 20th century's best Irish church architecture. As an aside we noted that you had a notice on the notice board in the church in relation to the redevelopment of the green!

McMahon's funeral home was pristine in white paint. We commend the owners hugely for the care of this building, and also for not attaching unnecessary signage. The signage is discreet and classical. Conversely the Credit Union property, although well painted, looked untidy due to the number of external and projecting signs and lights. We would say the same about the Tradalee premises.

Well done on your efforts to deal with the unfinished house on the Limerick Road, the house on the Ballycar Road, and the bungalow on Main Street – which all benefited from your makeover. Work to the infill site on Main Street improves the streetscape. Your three murals were admired. We notice that the bungalow on Main Street, where you have carried out remedial work is now for sale. We hope that a new owner will look after the house shortly.

We noted the work to the service station on the Limerick Road.

You have attended to the repainting of various boundary walls – such as that of the Parochial House, the Garda Station, the Community Centre, and the plinth of the GAA premises. Despite your work to the GAA wall, we still feel that the entire wall will need repainting before next year.

We particularly liked the treatment which you gave to the house on The Square.

We concur with the Tidy Towns and Environmental Improvement Strategy statement that 'it is not always necessary' - in fact we would say it is undesirable – 'that historic towns must use 'traditional style' street furniture'. We also applaud you for your perception in dealing with traditional stone walls insofar as you are applying to source a stone mason for such work.

Reale Family Butcher's gable sign is faded and detracts from the Fairgreen/church area. We admired some good sash windows on a cream two-storey house opposite the church - between an ochre coloured house and a single-storey cream house which required painting. Whereas the Weaver's premises was clean, we felt there was too much external signage attached. A cream colour apartment block (?) setback from Main Street fits in well with the general streetscape. Its entrance gates and splay area were well presented. The Post Office and an ochre coloured building along the Limerick side of the riverbank would benefit from a repaint before 2015.

### **Landscaping and Open Spaces / Tírdhreachú agus Spásanna Oscailte:**

You have submitted the O' Regan Park renewal project under the Wildlife category heading. However this is primarily a major landscaping project. Reopening took place last October. It is a most wonderful amenity for the town, and we hope the residents appreciate what a lovely area this is. This adjudicator had travelled through your town many times, but was not aware of this park. Obviously it was nothing like it is now, then. The adjudicator as a traveller on the main road had diverted to view the architecturally excellent church heretofore, but had not been aware of this park. We would suggest that you endeavour to make this Park known in some acceptable way at the outskirts of the town. Otherwise travellers will continue to drive past unaware of a stop which will break a journey in

a most enjoyable fashion. However, it will be necessary to provide directions to a parking area (at the far end/GAA of the Park?). At present it is impossible to find a safe and legal parking space entering the park from the Limerick Road. The main park sign here is attractive, but detracted from by the smaller white signs. Could the 4 smaller signs be designed attractively in one amalgamated sign? We particularly liked the use of strong and attractive timber in the park, and noted that the timber in the seating was recycled. Everything looked well – and the litter bins were in keeping. On adjudication day the park was in use but respected – and we saw no litter there. Two flagpoles at the bridge entrance would look better with flags attached. There was one 'headless' black and white striped road sign pole near the entrance to the park.

The Fairgreen project also has a large landscaping aspect. You have retained the services of a landscape architect to advise you in this regard. The same comments apply as we have made already - in relation to phasing the works in order to draw down funds for quality works. Meanwhile we admired the existing good stock of mature trees around the Fairgreen and the pale pink rose bed edging the Fairgreen. We noted that the Cora Caitlín fountain was not playing on adjudication day.

The small landscaping project adjacent at the disused garage on the Limerick Road with timber backing looked well. Your maintenance of the priests' old graveyard is considered under this category heading.

We would urge you to desist from adding to your stock of floral baskets and window boxes. Sustainable planting in the soil - where at all possible - is a more environmentally sensitive way of landscaping your town. Such planting is also more appropriate visually for a rural town. Flower baskets and window boxes can certainly brighten up a dismal area – for instance a dark lane. Moreover water conservation aspects are relevant. Even though you discuss moving to self-watering flower baskets – this also involves water usage. Maintenance and time spent watering are also issues. Water damage can be caused to timber window frames, and this is particularly important in an architectural conservation area such as you have.

We admired the maintenance of the permanent rose beds and shrubbery.

### **Wildlife, Habitats and Natural Amenities / Fia dhúlra, Gnáthóga agus Taitneamhachtaí Nádúrtha:**

We are very impressed with your re-developed Park. We note your engagement with the Biodiversity Officer of the local authority and with Inland Fisheries Ireland. You might tell us more about what developed from this consultation in more detail in 2015. We are delighted that you have secured an Agenda 21 grant. You appear to be concentrating this on promoting biodiversity in the stream. But there are a lot of other opportunities down the line to develop this park to further enhance your wildlife habitat and natural amenities. This will involve surveying, analysis and presentation of results and management.

You are aware that the Lough Gash area is a Special Area of Conservation – the lake being classified as a turlough. As you correctly say it is also an area of importance historically, recreationally, and landscape-wise. We note your proposals to develop a woodland walk and your proposals to join up all your amenity areas to have a permeable environment for walkers and cyclists. We are sure that you will apply your usual professional approach to carrying out future works in this area.

The creation of a wildflower garden has already been mentioned. Because of its location and function this project contributes to three categories.

Well done on your participation in National Tree week. You haven't given us a lot of information about your tree survey. Perhaps you would next year.

You developed a wildflower garden on the infill site in Main Street.

It appears that weed killer had been used in places (even in the park) and on approach roads. This is not good for the environment. We would encourage you to consider nonchemical methods of weed control. If you speak to your County Heritage Officer and County Biodiversity Officer we are sure that you would be well advised in this matter.

We observed hedge trimming (location referred to under Approach Roads category) Remember that it is permissible to trim hedging along cultivated ground (e.g. gardens) throughout the year. However with regard to hedge trimming, you are reminded that it is an offence under the Wildlife Act 1976 and Wildlife (Amendment) Act 2006 to cut vegetation in a hedge or ditch on lands not cultivated between 1st March and 31st August annually - this is for the protection of nesting birds.

### **Sustainable Waste and Resource Management / Bainistiú Acmhainní agus Dramhaíola Inbhuanaithe:**

We note your projects which include the second time round market, the recycling of timber, the bring bank awareness campaign, the segregation of waste, and the greater use of e-mail to obviate the necessity for paper waste. Most of your efforts under this category heading have involved recycling. Remember that sustainable waste and resource management begins with endeavouring to reduce the production of waste in the first case. We note

that you considered the recycling of timber pallets as a step towards waste reduction. It is part of the waste pyramid to recycle, but it is low on the waste minimisation scale. This is a very worthy project, but we would like you to concentrate now on looking at ways in which to stop the production of waste in the first case. You have a large number of businesses in the town. Could you suggest an audit of these businesses – to see where they possibly can cut back on producing waste in the first case? You do say that you wish to develop a waste management strategy incorporating businesses as well as households. Having produced waste it is best that it is recycled. But it is even better if it is not produced at all! We would recommend that you consider attending or organising a Sustainable Waste and Resource Management seminar. Perhaps your County Environmental Awareness Officer might be able to suggest where you might attend such an event. You could increase your marks in this category as a community by taking on board some of the suggested projects in the leaflet distributed with the Entry Form in 2013. The Tidy Towns Handbook is also a good source of information in this regard. We hope that in 2015 we will hear about your efforts to progress further in this area. We were going to suggest that you involve the schools here, but you have already considered this. As you have four schools involved in the Green Flag project perhaps you might organise a community event where the children can demonstrate their knowledge in this area. We are not sure as to which Flag each school is working on. Schools with four or five flags will obviously have additional skills.

### **Tidiness and Litter Control / Slachtmhaireacht agus Rialú Bruscair:**

Signage at the Bring Banks is faded and poor. The location of the banks themselves – behind the Library must cause traffic problems, as the adjudicator had to reverse out of this space onto the public road due to narrowness of the access. There was no rubbish at the bins, but they were featureless and unadorned.

Although the small landscaping project adjacent to the disused garage on the Limerick Road with timber backing looked well, nonetheless there is a particularly bad gable noticeable here - as one exits the town, and a rough space where the old petrol pumps (which are now painted) are located. Behind this there is another property which you have endeavoured to upgrade. However with its wire enclosure, and its obvious abandonment, it looks rather 'sad'. All in all these other negatives unfortunately distract the eye away from your improvements. Across the road and closer to the town the block walled structure with blue doors still looks 'grey' and the grille entrance beside adds to this effect. Some corrugated roofs on the opposite side would benefit from repainting. Another corrugated roof on the far side of the village near the library junction also needs re painting.

You took part in the National Spring Clean campaign. You continue your 'no poster' policy. Although you list the 'no poster' policy under the Built Environment category, we accredit it here under this category heading. At junction L3202 there were three large poster size advertising signs inside the road railings on the open space corner.

You attend to weed growth.

Your litter patrols are bi-weekly but you wisely also operate an evening patrol during the busy season. You have further projects in mind – such as an anti dog fouling project

The forecourt of the Spar shop at the Fairgreen has a lot of external goods displayed. This looks a little untidy, even though timber fencing has been erected to camouflage some of the storage. A public litter bin at the Spar corner of the Fairgreen was in need of repainting, and was also full on adjudication day. The lower part of the green-painted building - adjacent to the Spar premises - needed repainting.

The sign for the Weavers pub/restaurant on the bridge looks inappropriate. Could this be replaced with finger post signing?

### **Residential Streets & Housing Areas / Sráideanna Cónaithe & Ceantair Tithíochta:**

The two-storey houses opposite side (wheelchair) access to the church were impeccable in presentation and sparkling white paint. They each have very neat gardens and their general appearance complemented the excellent architecture of the church. This is a very strategic area, and we greatly complement the owners in this case for their united effort.

On the town side of the GAA we admired very well presented houses on the right-hand side on entering the town - in particular a white and turquoise painted house.

Gleann Cora partnered with you in National Tree Week. This estate is well presented.

Killnasoolagh and Lisduff Residents Associations were re launched with your help. Killnasoolagh is a huge estate. The open space looked well. Houses were in mixed condition. Some had gables which required paint, but generally the estate was well presented. You have cleaned up an illegal dump with Lisduff residents. And you are also working on the cleaning up of another illegal dump with Killnasoolagh Park residents and Clare County Council.

We greatly admire your attention to persons unable for valid reasons to attend to their own property. We notice this reference twice throughout your entry.

We also refer to our comments about the 6 good house gardens on the Dromoland approach road under that category heading.

## **Approach Roads, Streets & Lanes / Bóithre Isteach, Sráideanna & Lánaí:**

The approach by Dromoland Castle wall has good clean footpaths with lovely trees, and, of course the estate stone wall. We admired some beautiful gardens to six single-storey houses (three rows of two terraced houses). These form a very good impression on entering your village, and we congratulate the owners on this. We noticed some weeds and what appeared to be some evidence of chemical weed killing in one recessed entrance on the right-hand side. We admired the lovely grass margin with older semi mature trees on the nearer approach to the village.

The Sixmilebridge road has excellent rose beds. The visitor is prepared for this by the designation of the town as the 'rose village' on the County Clare generic village sign. This is set on a good stone raised gravelled bed with nice shrubs and overhanging trees. There are two village signs - one the town side of the GAA. Double signing can be considered excessive. We admired good stone boundary walls. There were cars parked on the footpath on this approach towards the town end of the road. This is both obstructive to footpath users and also looks untidy.

On the Drumline road we would recommend the painting of gates. We observed a lovely wide grass area with trees. Some litter including a large cardboard box and a small scattering of litter was noticed here. We also observed some evidence of chemical weeding killing.

At the Carrigoran/Knocksaggart road junction tall grass at the yield sign would have benefited from strimming. A weedy footpath from here up to the roundabout was noted, and verge trimming at this point was also needed. The blue Newmarket-on-Fergus village sign with additional signs need rationalisation. There was a cracked green plastic rubbish bin on the green space. Lovely stone walls, trees and neat grass verges greeted the visitor in this area. A property on the right-hand side painted white could be refreshed. We noticed some evidence of fairly recent hedge cutting here - please refer to our comments under Wildlife.

Although you mention the resurfacing of a section of the Limerick road under Built Environment it is accredited under this category heading. We note your continual lobbying in relation to the resurfacing of Main Street/Ballycar Road. We fully concur with you that the road surface is poor in this area. Last year's adjudicator also agreed. Road lining/markings here is also poor.

You power wash signage on approach roads. Litter picks during Spring Clean time concentrated on the approach roads on one particular day – collecting 640 kg of rubbish!

You continue stone wall repair.

You maintain the existing Fair Green car parking.

You keep a check on public lighting.