

Tidy Towns Competition 2014

Adjudication Report

Centre: **Whitegate** Ref: **1128**
County: **Clare** Mark: **240**
Category: **B** Date(s): **25/06/2014**

	Maximum Mark	Mark Awarded 2014
Community Involvement & Planning	60	32
Built Environment and Streetscape	50	31
Landscaping and Open Spaces	50	30
Wildlife, Habitats and Natural Amenities	50	30
Sustainable Waste and Resource Management	50	8
Tidiness and Litter Control	90	55
Residential Streets & Housing Areas	50	27
Approach Roads, Streets & Lanes	50	27
TOTAL MARK	450	240

Community Involvement & Planning / Rannpháirtíocht an Phobail & Pleanáil:

Ta Fáilte Romhat - An Geata Bán - to the Super Valu 2014 National Tidy Towns competition.

In Whitegate the Tidy Towns group is a subcommittee of the Community Council with 10 members. You say that you meet weekly. Is this all the year around or during the busy periods? Under the heading 'agencies, bodies and businesses that have supported your activities' you list the Community Council, the Wildlife Map Project and Birdwatch Ireland. We assume that you also receive assistance from Clare County Council. Do you receive sponsorship from local businesses?

You communicate through a parish newsletter. We hope that you circulate news items to any minority churches represented in your area also. You use the local media and texting. Have you considered using a website or a Facebook page?

You have a member on the Green School committee. You help to organise nature walks and assist in the school garden. You have been back in the competition now for four years and are making progress. You say that the competition causes great awareness to present the village at its best, and engenders a sense of pride in the community. We are glad to hear that.

Your Entry Form was filled in neatly. However, you seem to have confused some category headings. You very clearly marked and numbered projects sequentially through the Entry Form with corresponding numbering on your village map. We are very grateful for this and it makes for great clarity which helps the adjudicator. You have not submitted a Tidy Towns Plan. Yet in last year's adjudication the adjudicator referred to your three-year plan. Please remember that the adjudicator in any particular year only has the documents submitted in that year. You should submit your updated plan annually with appropriate revisions to include achieved projects and those still in the planning stage. It is essential to progress in the competition and to gain extra marks under this particular category that you submit such a plan in 2015. Had you submitted such a updated revised plan your marks would have increased much more in this category, as you have dealt with your entry form, map and other issues very well.

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

Under this category heading you list three projects. However two of these projects belong to different categories. The development of the amenity area belongs to Landscaping etc. And the estate signs belong to Residential etc.

You list cleaning of the stone bridge on the Mountshannon (Scariff) Road under Landscaping. However work to a bridge is work under the category of the Built Environment. In cleaning and repairing the stone bridge we hope that

you consulted with the County Architectural Conservation Officer. Cleaning stone on - what is likely to be a Protected Structure - should be done to best conservation practice.

The church is of unusual modern design, and is a lovely building in the centre of your village. However the old church and its surrounds look extremely poorly still, despite the fact that last year's adjudicator noted this situation also. The white wall facing the Portumna Road is presentable, as is the grey boundary wall. However the village side elevation is very poor. Its surrounds need weeding. We also note that another comment of last year's adjudicator in relation to the funeral home has not been acted upon. This was a suggestion that the boundaries be planted as the building looks quite bare.

We really liked the way in which you have presented your village pump. We think that the colour scheme – red and blue – we think are the local colours. It is simple, classical, and well maintained. The dry circular stone wall is very appropriate and tasteful.

Are you aware of a particular aspect of the built environment which you have, and which is quite unusual? That is the Saorstát Éireann post box, set in a lovely stone wall surrounded by vegetation - at the top of the village. This is, we hope, a Protected Structure, and a feature which you will guard jealously!

Some signage on Treacy's public house is faded. We admired the mural on the wall opposite. The post office is very neatly presented, as is the adjacent property and forecourt nearby. A neatly surfaced setback between the post office and the adjacent mushroom coloured house looked very well with stone wall raised bed containing lupin/roses/shrubs and hedging banking. A derelict cream colour two-storey house opposite detracted somewhat from the excellence of the older properties.

We would suggest that you consider painting all field gates within your village boundaries in a uniform colour. This will give a sense of unity to the village visually and upgrade poorly presented gates. We admired a fine tall traditional farm gate near the Nightingale public house which would benefit from painting.

Signage on the Half Barrel Pub frontage is too dominant in relation to its front elevation. With regard to the pink derelict roofless structure on the hill, the pink geraniums look good, but also draw attention to the pink wall which is peeling. This wall needs repainting. The cleaning up of derelict sites is an important but difficult task for any Tidy Towns group. Locating potted containers at derelict sites is a very temporary arrangement, but possibly all that can be done at a particular point in time. It is important however to liaise with your local authority on the issue of derelict sites, as they have legal powers if you fail at a local level to deal with the problem

Landscaping and Open Spaces / Tírdhreachú agus Spásanna Oscailte:

The green space in which the village pump is located is a beautiful setting for this piece of traditional street furniture. It really sets off the pump to best effect, because it is simple, uncomplicated, and well maintained.

Although you listed the development of the amenity area in the village under Built Environment, it considered under this Landscaping heading. The white gate within one of your landscaped areas is a literal landscaped interpretation of your village name. This is imaginative – if not obvious immediately to the visitor. We admired its Irish message, and the colourful raised stone floral bed on which the gate is located. Across the road the new hard landscaped area with the large Wildlife Map and illustrations is neat, clean and informative. We would desist from adding any more model cottages or details to this area, as it is small in scale. 'As it stands' it is in keeping with your village.

You have replanted the raised bed in front of the church. You have replaced shrubs on the approach roads and increased grass verges there also. We credit the latter under Approach Roads also.

You have made additions to the farm machinery collection green area display. We would encourage you perhaps not to add any more items to this display. Clutter can emerge from trying to accommodate too many items in any display. As it is the display looks well spaced and attractive.

We admired your planted boat on the Scariff approach road grassed area. This area looked well with its nicely mown grass and with its neat footpath and stone wall boundary on the opposite side. There was a great display of oxeye daisies and lavender at the Scariff Road/post office junction but an adjacent concrete container did not look as well. In this vicinity also a nice hedge with yellow/pink shrubs looked very attractive (with a small gap requiring infill planting.)

The raised stone bed with floral displays and dry stone walls behind the village pump is excellent, and there is a beautiful colourful raised bed opposite.

We admired the old bicycle across from the Old Barrel Pub, but its general surrounds could be upgraded, especially the wall and the red barrel flower-container beside. It would also be helpful if the area was not used for car parking. Well done on taking the advice of last year's adjudicator into consideration in relation to the promotion of sustainable in-soil planting- rather than additional container/hanging baskets planting. It was noticeable that the former is 'winning' in Whitegate.

Wildlife, Habitats and Natural Amenities / Fiadhúlra, Gnáthóga agus Taitneamhachtaí Nádurtha:

You have erected a wildlife map / local wildlife walking routes and local wildlife illustrations in a newly hard landscaped area in the village. This very large and impressive board invites the visitor to linger in your village and surrounds, and to learn more about and enjoy all the wonderful habitats. You acknowledge Birdwatch Ireland's assistance, and also the donation of relevant wildlife photographs by many people. It is a pity that you did not include the Irish names of the various species.

We are sure that the Dawn Chorus event was most enjoyable and educational. You also organise nature walks with the local national school. An annual nature walk is part of your May weekend festival.

We observed what appeared to be fairly recent excessive hedge trimming along the Portumna approach road. This was not just the side of the hedges trimming, but also the hedge tops. 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. Before trimming any such hedges please consult with your local authority who will deal with this issue if there is a safety aspect involved.

At places we observed- what appear to be the use of chemical weed killer- such as on the Scariff approach road. We would suggest that you endeavour to use nonchemical methods of weed killing. You could perhaps speak to your County Heritage Officer about alternative methods. Any weeds/grass which has been killed should be removed in any event and disposed of in the correct fashion.

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

Your recycling centre is located 8 miles away in Scariff. However, you have bottle banks in Whitegate.

We are sorry to hear that the association of Whitegate with historic landfill still attracts people to dump along your quiet country roads. We acknowledge your efforts to discourage this type of dumping and your efforts to promote the use of facilities at Scariff. On adjudication day we witnessed two people in a Dublin registered car piling a carload of scrapped plate glass into your recycle bins. These looked like removed window glass. We actually approached the two people and suggested to them that these were bottle banks, and not suitable for the materials they were depositing in the bins. We recommended also that they took their material to the appropriate centre. Unfortunately they ignored our comment and continued. So we thoroughly understand the problem you have in people's attitude to using Whitegate as a dumping ground.

You encourage the use of Clare rural bus service.

You compost your grass cuttings locally for re-use. Perhaps you would indicate next year where your composting area is located.

Well done on collecting rainwater from the local church to water your plant containers.

Remember that sustainable waste and resource management begins with endeavouring to reduce the production of waste in the first case. 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 may even host 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. Last year's adjudicator encouraged you to be creative and effective in the prevention of waste. We hope that in 2015 we will hear about your efforts to progress further in this area.

Tidiness and Litter Control / Slachtmhaireacht agus Rialú Bruscair:

The church, as we have already said is very well presented, however the area just outside its Scariff approach boundary needs tidying and the relocation of the water(?) tank. Attention to the grassed/surfaced area fronting this boundary wall will provide a setting for the nice planted stone bed along this boundary.

One of this year's projects is the painting of a block wall in the village and you show this on your map. This is a project we consider under this heading rather than on your Residential Streets and Housing areas where you have it mentioned. You have also renewed the East Clare map at the post office.

The public house across the road from Tracey's is for sale. It needs attention, cleaning and painting if possible. The Gables of Lucas lounge bar are directly behind one of your village centre landscaped areas (Wildlife Area) as one approaches from Scariff. Whereas these gables are not particularly dirty, there is still room for improvement – including the walls and fascia boards. Because these gables are in so prominent a location, it is very necessary to keep them in pristine condition. The site between the same new hard landscaped area and the same bar would benefit from grassing or planting. You have also renewed the East Clare map at the post office.

Some boundary walls along the approach from the national school (as one approaches the village centre) require repainting in certain cases.

Outside the GAA we observed piles of stone chippings, and further occurrences of stone chippings along the

boundary wall edge. On reading last year's adjudication report we read, and we quote

'The adjudicator was most surprised that the strong reference to unacceptable gravel storage on the porch on the road had not been heeded.'

From this we understand that this is an annually ongoing problem, and it is affecting your potential marks increase in this category. It also creates a poor impression on an approach road, and we consider it under that category also. Perhaps you can rectify the situation before next year's adjudication. If this problem persists it is absolutely necessary that you indicate what you have done to try to rectify it and indicate the reasons why you have failed – which hopefully you will not have the stop

You conducted a major cleanup in April on all approach roads. All litter is segregated and brought to the recycling centre in Scariff. You also arrange for a skip to be made available during this week.

You have a weekly 'tidy up' of the village and housing estates. The schoolchildren get involved in 'tidy ups' and are helping with the school garden and the Green Flag committee. A 'litter free' sign in the vicinity of the Scariff road/post office area was faded. Litter bins are provided at both shops in the village. No evidence of litter was obvious in the village on adjudication day. So to increase your marks with regard to litter we suggest that you continue with the good work, but also include a litter management plan in your Tidy Towns plan. You can dovetail this plan with the County Litter Management plan. Your County Environmental Awareness Officer will be able to advise you in this regard.

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

The standard of house presentation in the village is, in general very good.

Well done on the new signage at the two housing estates.

You mention 'stonework on approach roads' here but we consider it in the following category. Planting has taken place at Cregg estate. Adjacent to Cregg View Road/ L 4040 junction we observed very well presented gardens and flower containers. The house opposite the entrance to the estate also looked really well-presented with its stone wall boundary. A garage door paint would improve this good area. We noticed some on-footpath car parking in the vicinity. This is both obstructive to footpath users and looks untidy. The red door and lamp at number three was admired.

Both sides of the entrance to Lakyle Park, including the village pump surrounds and the lovely raised bed opposite looked well.

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

You listed the replacing of shrubs and increasing grass verges on the approach roads as a landscaping project – which indeed it is, but is also significant under this category heading. You regularly trim roadside verges and have looked after the grass verge on the Scariff approach road.

You have repaired stonework on approach roads.

We again acknowledge your April cleanup on approach roads.

On the approach from the Scariff side the village name sign is a nice simple black and white name sign. However the concrete container containing flowers - which is located under the sign - is not particularly attractive as a container. We would suggest that you plant in the soil in such a location for sustainability and visual purposes. Could the 'slow through village' sign be incorporated at the same location to avoid proliferation of signage? We noted some hedge cutting along this approach to the sides of the hedges. Please refer to our earlier comments in this regard.

On the Portumna approach Road we noticed some dead wood not removed inside a boundary. We also noticed some hedge trimming as already referred to along this approach. A property to the right - off the Portumna Road - needs tidying/finishing at its access area. Dead vegetation should be removed from this location and the access road should be surfaced. There are very rough road edges on both sides of this approach road, and as already referred to under the Tidiness category outside the GAA we observed piles of stone chippings. The white entrance splay walls to the club needs repainting. Within the GAA site itself the gable of an old building and the extension facing the car park needs tidying/painting.

A red corrugated shed opposite the GAA/hurling club is badly in need of paint.

There is another approach to the village by the Water Tower road. This is a laneway, but is a public road and it has speed limit signs which have very rusty poles. The water tower itself would benefit from painting, as indeed would the gates to the water tower site (just outside the speed limit.) Is this tower redundant? As one nears the village we observed containers behind a pub. These should be screened from public view. In this vicinity also we noticed what appeared to be a sewage treatment works, which had fencing which looked temporary. This fencing should be improved.

Footpaths in the centre of the village are new in many cases and well maintained. However, this is not universally the case and there is room for further improvement. Improvements are particularly needed as one rises towards the right angled junction at the top of the village approaching from Scariff. In particular kerbing in this area needs attention, as do road surfaces in this vicinity. Between the village and the national school also need attention.