

Tidy Towns Competition 2015

Adjudication Report

Centre: **Ballyvaughan** Ref: **60**
County: **Clare** Mark: **306**
Category: **B** Date(s): **26/07/2015**

	Maximum Mark	Mark Awarded 2014	Mark Awarded 2015
Community Involvement & Planning	60	45	46
Built Environment and Streetscape	50	45	46
Landscaping and Open Spaces	50	42	43
Wildlife, Habitats and Natural Amenities	50	33	34
Sustainable Waste and Resource Management	50	10	11
Tidiness and Litter Control	90	66	66
Residential Streets & Housing Areas	50	31	31
Approach Roads, Streets & Lanes	50	28	29
TOTAL MARK	450	300	306

Community Involvement & Planning / Rannpháirtíocht an Phobail & Pleanáil:

Thank you Ballyvaughan Community Development Group for your entry to the 2015 National Tidy Towns competition. The photographs included show many smiling and enthusiastic faces – well done. You are a small community that enjoys, but also has to manage, an influx of seasonal visitors to your locality. So the work of your 30 core volunteers, young and old, is important throughout the year especially as in the quieter times you prepare for the busier tourist period. Your new committee structure appears to be working well and has cleverly overcome the reluctance of many to sit on a steering group. The concept of asking specific community groups to lead on one just one action within your plan, appears to be working well. Indeed a number of committees in Connacht have also taken this approach to the benefit of their community.

You engage with a good number of statutory bodies and other stakeholders. Your multi-annual plan was examined and it is an excellent example of how to involve the community via public meetings with the ‘around the houses’ conversations. Importantly you have also had discussions with stakeholder bodies on the goals for the community.

The map was useful but if possible can you add street names, and a legend for the project numbers as it was tricky opening out the report and cross-referencing all whilst trying to be discreet during adjudication!

The development of a Village Design Statement in 2016 for Ballyvaughan with Clare County Council will be of benefit with the community. This is where your own multi-annual plan will help direct policies.

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

The streetscapes of Ballyvaughan work very well as individual buildings and premises are excellently presented – indeed there is no need to name individual buildings as they all look well. The community has to be commended for their work to maintain the external appearance of unoccupied premises too. For example, the two cottages on school road looked well and the attention to detail on the two-story home next to Spar, painted grey and cream, made a great enhancement to this aspect of the street. Your adjudicator particularly loved the floral murals dotted along this street, and at the entrances to alleyways, including fuchsia and orchids.

The modern design of the visitor centre was admired and suited the landscape. There was no sign to this from the Main Road so it was nearly overlooked. It was felt that the neither the wicker hanging basket on this building, nor the ornate planters on the entrance ramp, were in keeping with the modern stone of the building.

Unfortunately there were a large number of signs, in capital letters indicating shouting, in this car park warning visitor not to park for long or they would be clamped. Your adjudicator counted 7 of these signs and felt they did not

reflect the appropriate tone for a tourist town. Perhaps they could be reworded in a more friendly tone, and written in lower case?

In the home just adjacent to the water memorial, your adjudicator liked the use of a dark purple colour around the windows, door and even side gates of a period two-storey property on pier road.

You have acted upon many of the comments in last year's adjudicator's report and the space between O'Loughlin's and JM Mooneys was now nicely presented. Though there was not yet any sign on the weigh-bridge house it was freshly painted and looked excellent. Both of these premises were also excellently presented and appeared freshly painted also.

Landscaping and Open Spaces / Tírdhreachú agus Spásanna Oscailte:

Open spaces were all well-considered and presented very appropriately – not too manicured but in a manner fitting of one of the jewel towns in the Burren. Every flower bed consisted of a lovely array of perennials that looked natural. They were bright, attractive and worked well. The floral beds at the entrance to St Joseph's Road were wonderful. Hanging baskets and planters everywhere were festooned with flowers that didn't look regimented and felt very natural. Your adjudicator loved it.

The Water Memorial was wonderful – and it was great that the water still flowed from the mouth of the lion! Local limestone pavement and troughs all added to the fitting look of this memorial.

The entrance to the Medical Centre was excellently executed and very appropriately managed – grass mown but not too tightly at the edges.

Your adjudicator was delighted to read of the road-side verge projects where you are allowing the natural habitat to develop. There are fewer natural grassland habitats in Ireland and by simply changing the mowing regime of road-side verges you can greatly enhance the habitats, allowing grasses and orchids etc to flower and in turn supporting our national pollinators which are suffering serious declines nationally. Your adjudicator wishes you good luck with the long-term plans for the community playground.

Adjudication day was on a Sunday so the Craft Market was open and attracting many. The unique, hand-made road-side signs looked well at the market – but maybe the poles on which they are erected could be straightened?

Your wildlife plan states that you should not be spraying the base of walls with chemicals. This is to be wholeheartedly endorsed and well done to Ballyvaughan for embracing this.

The long-term plans to re-instate the aqueduct are ambitious and wonderful. Volunteers will be enthused when they see the different the first programme of work makes – the clearing of vegetation this Autumn. The aqueduct can be seen at many points as you progress through the village so these plans will be great once progressed and will provide opportunities to share details on local wildlife as you progress through Ballyvaughan.

Everyone and everywhere appeared to have put in extra special effort in this competition this year. Your adjudicator felt that there were just two areas that need to be worked upon, in order for Ballyvaughan to be a possible national winner: the EMO garage; and the entrance to the Enterprise Centre opposite. The canopy over the petrol dispensers urgently needs to be addressed. The masts and aerials are also a problem in this area. Near to here there were some lovely floral beds and wrought iron gates newly installed that raised the standard of this area.

The limestone seats installed at the piers were very in keeping with the locality and provide lovely aspects to the stunning surroundings of Ballyvaughan.

The front of the Burren Coast Hotel looked good – and it was great that the community endeavoured to maintain this space until the hotel was recently bought over – good luck to the new managers.

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

Thanks to the support of the GeoPark, you conducted in 2014 a survey of the habitats and natural amenities of Ballyvaughan – this is an important step in directing action to benefit your biodiversity. You get extra points for the seminar that you ran in January 2015 where the findings of this survey were shared with the community. The location of the flower 'Cardamine impatiens' in Ballyvaughan, one of only two locations in Ireland, helps raise awareness of the very special habitats you have in the community.

Building on this should allow you to obtain your goals of a 'sustainable, nature-filled environment'. Grazing of the shoreline at the old pier by donkeys helps to maintain the biodiversity in the area. Your multi-annual plans includes wintertime education talks for your volunteers. This is an excellent way in which to raise awareness of the heritage across your community.

Perhaps the stays/straps on the silver birch trees at the water memorial, and on the Kinvarra Road, could be removed or loosed so they do not rub the bark of the trees here?

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

You have taken a lot of advice in this category of the competition with seminars and talks from the Environmental

Awareness Officer at Clare County Council and consultant Lorraine power, all of which is commendable. What concrete actions have you taken from these seminars? What activities have you done? The school survey should provide some interesting results and it is recommended that you include these in next year's entry form. From this you plan to host a number of public information evenings of how everyone can save money and resources across Ballyvaughan.

Your adjudicator was interested in your 'Bay Hop' project where you ring tourists across the Bay from Galway (and vice versa) by boat. It would be very interesting to read the details on fuel efficiency and CO2 emissions.

Tidiness and Litter Control / Slachtmhaireacht agus Rialú Bruscair:

Well done on your weekly litter patrols. Are these volunteers encouraged to pick weeds also?

You have identified parking as an issue and it is hoped that the development of the village enhancement plan will help in this regard. Indeed on a Sunday parking, and passing through Ballyvaughan, was disappointing. Despite police traffic cones, pavements were blocked by cars resulting in pedestrians weaving by tourist buses, and pavements were cracked from impact from cars. This really detracts from the wonderful centre of Ballyvaughan and urgent action, even if traffic management on market days, should be addressed.

You have been lobbying for your electricity wires to be placed underground. This has been deferred to coincide with major developments such as footpath installations. Do keep this in mind and it would be worth including this in your long-term action plan.

Litter was an issue at the side steps into the Visitor Centre where it has not been swept for some time. The ESB box here could possibly be painted also. Throughout the town, there were scatterings of cigarette butts and this appears to be your biggest littering issue. The Butt Bins at Hyland's Burren Hotel needed to be emptied as they were overflowing which was a pity as this was an excellently presented property and a great focal point as you arrive from the South.

It was also disappointing to see Christmas lights in situ on the Community Centre, The Church and Spar/The Village Shop. It is felt strongly that it is not appropriate to have these erected throughout the year, even if they are not turned on.

Parking outside of the Church was orderly and the entrance to the medical centre was admired, as mentioned under landscaping.

At the Old Pier there was a bright, temporary side for the Monks Seafood restaurant. This was a lovely restaurant so it is considered that a more in keeping sign should be erected here.

Your adjudicator was surprised that the recycled centre was positioned so far from the centre of the village – it was clean and well-presented – but does it get used in this position?

Minor tidiness details - at the Old Pier there was a lamppost littered in cable ties. Also at the Water Memorial there was an old concrete block on top of a drain.

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

It was great to read of the strong community spirit in Ballyvaughan. It is hoped that your first street party went well in June this year. Your adjudicator was amazed to read that the small estate on the Kinvarra road has no name as they cannot think of one!! This sounds like a great community competition and a fun way to engage these residents. Most homes, and houses were very nicely presented such as the Ballyvaughan B&B. Holiday homes in Domlen Village, with the half-doors, looked well each with their individual style. For example number 7 had numerous planters festooned with flowers on adjudication day.

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

Approaching from Kinvara, the Town Name stone looked very well and in keeping with the stone walls as you enter Ballyvaughan. It was also good to see the ivy on situ on the walls. Ivy provides nectar late in the season and also provides shelter for wildlife. Just at the 50km signpost on the Kinvara Road there is a farm entrance gate that has been crashed or battered. The planted layby by Domlen Village looked well with the stone features.

You have worked hard to ensure strategically buildings look well. For example, at the T-Junction the white-washed cottage with the yellow framed windows, and gates, really caught the eye. Even the hanging baskets were colour co-ordinated here! Side lanes throughout Ballyvaughan were a delight to explore. Yellow loose-strife and nasturtium lined many lanes and enticed you to explore them. Many felt that they had naturally evolved despite the hand of some green fingers. Between the Village Shop and the newly painted two-storey house there is a side alley to the back of a house. Your adjudicator loved the way that behind the wrought iron gate here, a raised bed had been planted up with sweet peas and beans and other vegetables. It was a lovely focal point so you could not see beyond the lane. (Actually – this is on the front page of your entry form!).

The new pavements at the "T-junction" looked great and well done. This highlighted the poor pavements in other places, such as outside the 'Soda Parlour'.

The Old pier was very neatly maintained despite being a working pier. The grass was allowed to grow here and this is of benefit to wildlife and in particular our pollinators.

Concluding Remarks:

Well done on your efforts throughout the year in Ballyvaughan. You have cleverly engaged the different interest groups across Ballyvaughan to lead on specific actions in your Tidy Towns plan. This all works together to present a community that respects its locality and is proud of its heritage. Ballyvaughan respects and integrates the natural beauty of its surroundings into the townscape that works very well. Finally, your adjudicator would like to highly commend your ethos which is a fitting conclusion to this report 'Developing the community – cherishing our place'.