

Tidy Towns Competition 2016

Adjudication Report

Centre: **Rathowen** Ref: **205**
County: **Westmeath** Mark: **271**
Category: **B** Date(s): **30/06/2016**

	Maximum Mark	Mark Awarded 2015	Mark Awarded 2016
Community Involvement & Planning	60	35	37
Built Environment and Streetscape	50	34	37
Landscaping and Open Spaces	50	39	41
Wildlife, Habitats and Natural Amenities	50	25	27
Sustainable Waste and Resource Management	50	12	14
Tidiness and Litter Control	90	50	52
Residential Streets & Housing Areas	50	31	32
Approach Roads, Streets & Lanes	50	29	31
TOTAL MARK	450	255	271

Community Involvement & Planning / Rannpháirtíocht an Phobail & Pleanáil:

We would like to welcome Rathowen to the 2016 tidy towns competition as your participation is appreciated. It is great to see that the level of community participation in your village is high as 12 members on the tidy towns committee for a village that is the size of Rathowen is an impressive achievement. We were pleased to read that you have developed good links with organisations like Westmeath County Council, the Rathowen Community Development Group, the Graveyard Committee, Windtown Residents and Fas / Solas. You are also commended on gaining the support of businesses such as Klassman International as this demonstrates that both local people and businesses appreciate your hard work on improving your village. Your communication strategy appears comprehensive and it is noted that you are happy to explore new means of communication by your use of social media. Well done on involving nine young people in your projects and we are pleased to read that they help with cleaning, planting and watering. Would this group be interested in forming a junior tidy towns committee? By doing so, they could identify their own projects (in consultation with the parent committee) and be responsible for implementing and maintaining them. Perhaps you could update us on this in 2017. Thank you for your completed application form and attachment of photos, village location map and details of your Rathowen Remembers event. It is noted that the adjudicators report in 2015 made a number of suggestions regarding the layout and content of your application and we are delighted to report that this year your application was spot on. It was easy to read and understand and all categories were addressed. This made adjudication a great deal easier and we are happy to say that we will be restoring your lost mark from last year and adding another one! However, a small improvement is still possible. Please be sure to include all projects on your map of your village (your 1916 Commemoration project was not included). This is most important as it is not possible for adjudicator to assess, comment and award marks for your projects if he or she can't find them!

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

Rathowen is an interesting mix of modern and traditional design buildings. St Mary's Church on the Mullingar approach road is most impressive historical building with very well maintained grounds and attractive mature trees. The streetscape of the village is attractive as some of the original buildings appear to form a terrace beginning at the boundary of St Thomas Hall. The community buildings looked particularly well on adjudication day with the School and the Community Centre looking smart in their fresh coats of paint. The commercial premises generally looked well with Feericks Hotel achieving a particularly good standard of presentation. St Thomas' church was also admired. The 'Rathowen remembers 1916' proclamation plaque, flagpole and seven trees is deservedly your major project for 2016. This is a lovely project and a fitting commemoration of the hugely significant events of 100 years ago and it looked particularly well on adjudication day. Well done also on your sterling work that involves the improvement of the derelict houses. This is also an excellent project and it makes a very positive difference to the appearance of your village.

Landscaping and Open Spaces / Tírdhreachú agus Spásanna Oscailte:

The committee is congratulated on their work in presenting an impressive number and range of landscaping schemes in your village for the 2016 tidy towns competition. We very much enjoyed being welcomed into the village by the 'minion' planters which are comprised of colourful old tyres. This clever and innovative project serves as a reminder that the youngest members of the community have some great ideas and they should be encouraged to get involved in tidy towns committee in order to implement them. The cup shaped planters were also considered to be a very clever and eye-catching use for old tyres and other waste materials. However, if the minion planters are reseeded next year, it is recommended that native plant species are used. A number of other good landscaping schemes were observed and they included the large colourful beds at the entrance to School Lane and the lovely diverse planting bed at the 1916 Commemoration Plaque. The wonderful planting in the school garden was observed and we wondered if the school children could be encouraged (under supervision) to plant and maintain some of the landscaping schemes in the rest of the village? We were particularly impressed with the large planting scheme located just up from the entrance from School Lane and close to the pedestrian crossing. This mature bed was comprised of an excellent range of perennials, evergreens and other plants and it looked particularly well on adjudication day. Attractive and colourful planting beds were also observed in the car park of the Community Centre, along the entrance to the small housing estate beside Rathowen Stores and in front of Feericks Hotel. The contribution of individual businesses and houses is acknowledged as many had provided colourful windowboxes and hanging baskets in time for adjudication day. However, a small point relates to the high proportion of seasonal flowering plants that can be found in some of your planted beds. It is recommended that consideration should be given to providing a mix of planting, with equal proportions of perennials, evergreens and seasonal flowering plants used. This will help to provide for an improved variety of planting and better year-round colour. We note from your application form that changes have been made to the flower beds on the Mullingar side and that new trees were planted in the green area (although the green area has not been included on your map – it is assumed to be the area that accommodates the 1916 monument). The provision of a new school garden at the national school and outside classroom is also noted.

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

You are commended on your collaboration with the Rathowen Gun Club (even though it seems like an odd partner for a conservation project!) and we would like to hear more about the joint project that you are undertaking with them. The plan to restore the wasteground (that this located beside the green area, adjacent to the monument) as a wildflower garden is an excellent project and we are delighted to read that this project has been advanced with Westmeath County Council and that you have plans to involve all the clubs in the village as well as the School. This is a highly effective way to approach the project as it will spread the workload and raise awareness of biodiversity at a local level. We note that you intend to attract bees and other flora and fauna to the wildlife area so we would encourage you to consider undertaking a survey at different stages of the project in order to help you to monitor how successful (or otherwise) that the new area is as a wildlife habitat when it is complete. Well done also on cleaning up the bog walk and we note that it has been provided with bee, bird and bat boxes. Once again, consider undertaking a survey of this area to see if these new boxes are having the desired effect. A survey could also enable you to produce information boards that could be placed along the walk and used to raise environmental awareness. Also, be sure to indicate the bog walk on your map for 2017. We note from the adjudicators report in 2015 that a report on the wildlife using the integrated wetlands was expected and we wondered if this has been prepared? This sounds like an excellent initiative and we would be grateful if you could provide us with an update in 2017.

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

We are pleased to read that the tidy towns group is 'up skilling' in this area by attending events on biodiversity and composting that have been held by Westmeath County Council. No doubt these workshops were useful and they will help you to identify suitable projects in your village that will result in a reduction in the amount of waste generated and sustainable use of resources such as energy and water. We are particularly interested to read about the integrated wetlands project by Green farm foods and we would welcome some further details on this. We applaud your committee for minimising waste generation by using waste products (such as tyres, sleepers) in your landscaping projects and we wondered whether you were capturing rainwater for watering your landscaping schemes or growing / propagating your own plants and harvesting your own seeds? Please let us know in 2017. We note that you are liaising with the Council in order to identify a suitable site for composting and we would encourage you to proceed with this project as soon as possible - making your own compost is a very effective way of reducing green waste and avoiding the use of shop bought fertiliser. It is great to see that the school is making such great progress in obtaining green flags and we would encourage the tidy towns group to collaborate with them on suitable projects that minimise waste and use resources sustainably.

Tidiness and Litter Control / Slachtmhaireacht agus Rialú Bruscair:

The standard of litter control observed in Rathowen on adjudication day was very good and aside from some isolated incidents of litter (such as a carelessly discarded plastic drinks bottle or crisp packet) to be seen, the village was virtually litter free. This is an excellent achievement as the levels of traffic that pass through Rathowen are very significant. This excellent performance demonstrates that your regular litter patrols (which have widespread support and participation from young and old) are proving very effective and we urge you to keep them up. It is disappointing to read that dumping has been a problem on the bog road and we recommend that you seek the assistance of Westmeath County Council on this as it may be necessary for their litter wardens to intervene and investigate. The committee is also commended on the standard of tidiness that was observed during adjudication as the majority of

public areas and roadsides were weed free and neatly swept. The bottle bank to the rear of the hotel was also clean and tidy during adjudication. Nonetheless, some improvements remain possible. The car park of the Hotel was a little weedy and somewhat cluttered, particularly around its perimeter and in the corners and this gave rise to a rather untidy appearance. Could items such as edging stones and hardcore gravel be fenced off into a small and tidy enclosure in a corner of the car park? This will ensure that these items will no longer remain in full public view. It is noted that this car park area was mentioned for similar reasons in 2015 and we wondered if it should be included in your general cleanup day.

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

Individual dwellings and gardens in Rathowen generally look well, with the majority of achieving a good standard of presentation. The majority of dwellings in School Lane (immediately to the rear of the 2016 Commemoration monument) looked well. This is quite an attractive estate with neatly trimmed green areas and verges and a very impressive landscaping bed on its access road (which also leads to the school). Windtown Park also looked quite well but further improvements in appearance are possible. The planted beds that could be seen here were weedy and weed block was visible and this gave them an untidy appearance. In addition, the area around the sewage-treatment plant in the corner of the estate looked untidy due to dead grass surrounding the fencing and some discarded items and litter which had been thrown inside the fencing. It is noted that talks are ongoing between your Committee and Eircom about maintaining their building on Church Lane.

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

The approach roads into Rathowen generally looked very well. The Mullingar approach was considered to be excellent with lovely mature trees on the left-hand side, neatly trimmed grass verges with no weed and highly visible and clean signage. The landscaping at the base of the village name sign is also very attractive while the planters made from recycled and painted tyres add further interest. The approach from the L5926 could be improved by trimming the verges. The approach from Sligo was generally good, with neatly maintained verges, clear signage and attractive and colourful planters.

Concluding Remarks:

Well done to the tidy towns committee in Rathowen for a very good performance in the 2016 tidy towns competition. It is great to see that you are continuing to make significant strides each year and we look forward to seeing you back again in 2017.