

Tidy Towns Competition 2017

Adjudication Report

Centre: **Spink** Ref: **419**
County: **Laois** Mark: **256**
Category: **A** Date(s): **15/06/2017**

	Maximum Mark	Mark Awarded 2016	Mark Awarded 2017
Community Involvement & Planning	60	38	36
Built Environment and Streetscape	50	31	32
Landscaping and Open Spaces	50	34	35
Wildlife, Habitats and Natural Amenities	50	27	27
Sustainable Waste and Resource Management	50	12	12
Tidiness and Litter Control	90	56	56
Residential Streets & Housing Areas	50	27	28
Approach Roads, Streets & Lanes	50	29	30
TOTAL MARK	450	254	256

Community Involvement & Planning / Rannpháirtíocht an Phobail & Pleanáil:

Fáilte Spinc! Welcome Spink to the Super Valu 2017 National Tidy Towns Competition.

Having 10 members involved in your committee is very good representation from a small village area. Furthermore you have another six people who volunteer. You hold a meeting every two months and have a major cleanup before big community events. Your residents assist you. Laois Partnership Company, Laois County Council, Glanbia and the local school and parish - together with the ICA are all supportive of your work.

You use text messaging, a newsletter and meetings to communicate. You don't tell us – but we have discovered ourselves that you have a community Facebook page by 'googling' "Spink". You must do yourselves more justice! These modern means of communication attract a younger cohort. We note that you already speak to local schoolchildren on recycling and littering. We understand from you that the school is involved in the Green Flag Programme. We hope that they will go on to achieve further levels of the Green Flags. We did not observe a Green Flag flying on adjudication day. You have been involved in the competition now for about 20 years. This shows commitment.

Last year's adjudicator stated "that to gain marks in this section a village plan should be prepared for three to five-year duration. This need not be professionally prepared but can be a simple list of your aims and objectives and a clear timeline." The adjudicator asked you to consider working on this over the year, as it would help focus your activities and also gain you additional marks in this category. The adjudicator went on to say that consulting the Tidy Towns Handbook would give you more advice. Have you endeavoured to do this? We reiterate this advice and hope that you can find your way to doing so during the next adjudication year. It is important to consult widely within your community in drawing up this plan. You should tell us as to how you went about this consultation. We look forward to receiving such a plan in 2018. Now is the time to start thinking about this. You should also consider any statutory and non-statutory plans applicable to your village in drawing up your work programme. It is difficult to advance in this category in the absence of such a plan. We would suggest that you layout your plan on the basis of the competition categories.

Your map was a little too simplistic - as it gave little evidence of the relative distances between the various projects you wanted us to look at. In such a linear village it would be helpful to have a map giving relative accurate distances between the various buildings and projects. Perhaps your local authority can come to your assistance on this issue. Section 5 of the guidelines on completing your entry form asks that each new or continuing project should be identified by number in your entry form (as per section 3 in the entry form guidelines) and these projects should also be shown with the same numbers on the key to the village map (where the projects are ones which can be mapped). In fact you have only shown numbers - or rather letters for three projects under the Built Environment and Streetscape category, and for the other projects under the remaining seven categories you have not shown any

numbers or letters on the map or in the entry form. We recommend that you carefully study the guidelines in completing your entry form annually. Do not leave it to one person or do not leave it until the last minute. Sometimes groups get so involved in working on the ground that they rush putting the entry form together. It is very helpful to an adjudicator to have a good clear map showing all the new and continuing projects which relate to the numbered list throughout the entry form.

So to gain marks in this category for 2018 remember to include a Tidy Towns Plan for your village and also an improved map showing individual numbered projects for the year in question corresponding with numbered projects in your entry form.

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

We are glad to hear that a professional archaeological report is being drawn up on the local wart stone. Have you been involved in proposals to conserve and manage this item of local heritage interest? You do not tell us who is conducting this research. In maintaining Dysart graveyard we hope that you have been advised by your local authority in relation to the archaeological requirements for such maintenance. You might fill us in more on this in 2018. The community Mass in the graveyard is a good community event, and we also note that the graveyard is on the route of a local Hill Walk. We visited the Dysartgallen old church. Could the post and concrete fence at the triangle opposite the cornfield en route to the church be fixed? Could the properties near the old church be encouraged to screen farmyard areas?

We admired the lovely stone bridge on the Timahoe Road which is maintained by local residents. We particularly admired the simple treatment of the grass edging between the roadside boundary and the local stone wall. We would encourage you to keep this simplicity of treatment and maintenance into the future. Do not be tempted to add any decoration - for example flower pots or lighting to this lovely rural bridge on an approach to your village. However at one abutment of the bridge there is a much damaged gate with a notice 'private property' attached thereto leading down a laneway. This detracts from the overall neat impression of the otherwise well-presented bridge.

Although you mention the facelift given to the Community Hall under the Residential category we credit it here under the Built Environment category.

The school was very well presented. The play school looked neat, but the boundary walls could be refreshed. Last year's adjudicator said that the low boundary wall "looked a little tired as seen beside the smart school and may be due for a clean up." Have you approached the relevant authorities on this? It is always a good idea to let the adjudicator know if you have tried and failed to get such work done - where it is out of your control. Ignoring the suggestion is not going to get you any extra marks! However if you can tell us that you have tried and failed we credit you with taking the recommendations on board.

The church and its boundary wall could be painted if possible. We admired the nice weed-free paths leading to the church, and the church grounds themselves were very well kept. The grotto was attractive and we noted toilets available attached to the church property.

We admired a nice traditional hooped farm gate near Headdon's. This farm gates needs conservation. Nearby (and opposite the former gate) we observed a double traditional farm gate with a good gate pillar - the other pillar of which was covered in ivy. These are vernacular aspects of your rural built environment worth caring for.

Promoting the use of Irish within your village attracts additional marks in this category. Perhaps you could come up with some ideas in this area. And also can you tell us anything about access for all abilities in your area?

Landscaping and Open Spaces / Tírdhreachú agus Spásanna Oscailte:

We had passed the picnic area and had to double back on our tracks due to the lack of clear signage for that lovely amenity. The picnic area requires a clear directional sign. This is a suggestion that was also made to you by last year's adjudicator i.e. that the adjudicator was a bit misdirected in finding the spot. The rusting sign on the opposite side of the road seemed to lead to another location. You maintain the grass neatly and replant the beds. Do tell us what trees you are going to plant here. They should be native trees and do take some advice from your local authority's Heritage Officer or Biodiversity Officer in relation to the species you are going to choose. In fact proposed plans like this should form part of your Tidy Towns plan rather than part of your entry form. The entry form should show only projects undertaken for the current adjudication year as well as on-going projects. The picnic area itself was very litter free and attractive, with nice views to the surrounding rolling countryside and low hills. The litter bin here was clean and its precincts litter free. Along the embankment - in the pull-in the area off the main road - there is a need for grass reseeding.

We visited the triangular area opposite the church cross. It was difficult to see exactly what wildlife characteristics mark this out as special. It appeared to be a simple grassed area surrounded by trees. Moreover it seemed to be very difficult to park anywhere near the site or indeed to walk safely to visit the site on the heavily trafficked fast road adjoining the site. Even crossing from the church road was difficult and seemed to be dangerous. There is just a tiny gap to access the site and we would possibly suggest that you signpost the site rather than removing part of the hedge - if you still feel after considering safety issues and our advice re wider countryside consideration that you want to pursue this project. However we would take advice on the safety issues involved in inviting and encouraging people to visit the site by car due to lack of parking or to visit it by foot due to lack of footpaths on the busy road.

What wildflowers have you planted here? Have you discussed this project with the Biodiversity Officer of the local authority?

Your community field is indeed a great local resource with its natural boundaries and is maintained well by the community. We observed some lovely honeysuckle and ox eye daisies in the hedging along the roadside.

You never told us - but we found out on your Facebook page that the community sports ground hosted the Laois Garden Festival recently. Once again adjudicators will not usually know this information unless you include it in your entry form. Adjudicators are not obliged to research beyond what is included on the entry form. So please do include the good things that are happening in your community.

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

You say that you continue to maintain your wildlife habitat at the aforementioned church cross site. We would like to know more details about the wildlife that you have observed here. Last year's adjudicator suggested that you have a wealth of habitats in the rural location generally. Perhaps you might expand your consideration to include the natural habitats and not confine your investigation to this triangular area. Other suggestions were made to you in relation to agencies that could help you in this area.

The location for the wildflower meadow at the church is a good location as it is close to the school and the community Hall. Again we would like more details with regard to the native wildflowers growing naturally or planted here. Could the schoolchildren get involved in a project to survey local plant variety? Last year's adjudicator suggested that a native hedge be planted at the picnic area to the post and wire fence boundary which would gain you extra marks in this habitat category.

Surveys of your natural habitats are the first thing to consider. Later you will be considering wildlife management plans and information sharing in signage or web based sharing. You might engage with the County Heritage Officer - and with the County Biodiversity Officer - if your County engages such an officer also - in exploring ways in which to further your knowledge and interpretation in this category. The Tidy Towns Handbook is also there as a relevant helpful publication. The Heritage Council's 'Wildlife in Towns and Villages' booklet is another useful resource. We notice that last year's adjudicator suggested that you contact the Heritage Officer of your local authority in this regard also. You have not given us any indication as to whether you did this or not.

There appeared to be some fairly recent hedge cutting on the Carlow approach. Remember that it is permissible to trim hedging along cultivated ground (e.g. gardens) throughout the year. However with regard to hedge trimming bordering non cultivated land - 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. Birdwatch Ireland (www.birdwatchireland.ie) has a very good website which gives lots of information on this issue.

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

Well done to Knock school on the retention of their Green Flag. Perhaps now they can move on to achieving additional flags. Just as you visit the school and highlight issues to them, as they move forward with their different Flag endeavours they will also be able to highlight issues which will be of use to you.

Have you considered last year's suggestion that you consider taking part in the Green Homes initiative which is run by An Taisce? To increase your marks in this category it is essential that you make progress with some project or projects which contribute to good sustainable waste and resource management. We would recommend that you contact your local authority's Environmental Awareness Officer and ask for guidance. Perhaps they can organise an information evening for the community to guide you in moving forward in this area. The Tidy Towns Handbook will also help you to come up with ideas. This adjudication category has been expanded and updated with a new advice sheet prepared for communities in 2014. You may find this information sheet on the Tidy Towns website or you may request a copy of this advice sheet - if it is not already in your possession - (from the Tidy Towns unit HQ). This will help you also to understand and move forward in relation to sustainable waste and resource management. Remember that this issue is about reducing waste before it is produced - not just about recycling.

Tidiness and Litter Control / Slachtmhaireacht agus Rialú Bruscair:

We are glad that you highlight the issue of litter awareness with the schoolchildren.

We fully understand and sympathise with you on the issue of littering from passing traffic along a busy road through your village. And because of the speed of traffic on the road volunteer litter picks must be almost impossible to organise for safety reasons. It is not as if you live in a nuclear village where there are speed limits. We are sure that the local authority will help you to deal with this issue just as they help you - and you help them - with the cleanup week each year in April. It is good to know that the RSS is working with you also on this, and you help them when it comes to main events. To be truthful on adjudication day we were impressed with the lack of litter even along a busy road. Well done on this! The general impression of being in your village was one of a tidy community.

One exception was the recycling bins and clothes banks which looked poorly in their presentation. The local authority's signage was dirty. The clothes banks were rusty and weeds were growing around the base of the

recycling bins and the clothes banks. The surfacing was rough in the area and the overall impression was of neglect, despite the fact that there was not any litter in evidence. Perhaps you could make this a priority project for next year.

Another exception was the old circus fly posting opposite the school. These appear to be the same older faded circus flyers which last year's adjudicator observed. We also observed some fly posting in relation to wind turbines.

You mention under the Residential category that you have encouraged Glanbia to look at painting their sheds. However we consider this here under the Tidiness category. You hoped that this would be done. Unfortunately this is the third exception. There appears to be no progress on this issue. The site is still somewhat untidy. Surfacing needs to be carried out between the road edge and the site. The security railings need painting. The planting of the far end of the security railings needs to be augmented all along the site frontage with taller vegetation. The roof of the corrugated sheds requires repainting. We note that last year's adjudicator said that the frontage of this property was looking untidy. The adjudicator made some suggestions in relation to upgrading this property frontage.

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

You say that this year you have encouraged all residents to improve the appearance of their houses and gardens. This obviously has had good effect, and we salute you for this.

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

Well done on keeping the grass verges trimmed both on the roadside boundary and on the Coopers Hill walk. Your interest in bridges is to be commended, and we particularly admired the bridge on the approach road from Timahoe which is maintained as you say to very high standards.

On the approach to the village from the Carlow direction, the first sign for Spink was partly obscured by a rubbish bin which was awaiting collection outside a private property. Could this bin be located so as not to cause obstruction to passing motorists in seeing the introduction to your village?

Below this we noted some hedge cutting of fairly recent origin. Please refer to our comments under Wildlife in this regard. A post and wire fence leading up to the black Spink sign needs tidying. The black and white the Spink sign was attractive and very clean.

The 'stop' sign as one approached from a minor road beside Headon's towards the main from the new two-storey house side was a little hidden by vegetation. We would recommend that you paint field gates throughout the village to give a sense of identity to your linear village.

The road leading to the old church was newly surfaced

Concluding Remarks:

Spink is a lovely traditional linear rural settlement. You have great opportunities to maximise your potential for appreciating and enjoying your environment. We think you need to access advice and encouragement from agencies with professional knowledge and perhaps some funding. We are a bit disappointed that you did not take on board many of last year's adjudicator's suggestions. There may be a very good reason for this. However it is disappointing to find that you have not given us any reason why you have not addressed or try to address many of the suggestions or issues raised. Perhaps it has been a difficult year for you as a community. Even when you cannot achieve progress in suggestions made to you in the adjudication report - you should at least indicate that you have taken on board the suggestions and have even tried to work on the - even if your efforts have been unsuccessful for whatever reason. Please address the suggestions made in last year's and this year's reports and draw in the experience and help of your local authority. We like you, would like to see you make progress on maximising your potential on-the-ground and in the competition. We wish you continued success this year and into the future. Go n-eírii libh i rith na blianta ata romhainn!