

Tidy Towns Competition 2016

Adjudication Report

Centre: **Mullingar** Ref: **206**
County: **Westmeath** Mark: **277**
Category: **G** Date(s): **30/06/2016**

	Maximum Mark	Mark Awarded 2015	Mark Awarded 2016
Community Involvement & Planning	60	38	40
Built Environment and Streetscape	50	41	42
Landscaping and Open Spaces	50	39	40
Wildlife, Habitats and Natural Amenities	50	23	24
Sustainable Waste and Resource Management	50	10	11
Tidiness and Litter Control	90	47	49
Residential Streets & Housing Areas	50	34	35
Approach Roads, Streets & Lanes	50	35	36
TOTAL MARK	450	267	277

Community Involvement & Planning / Rannpháirtíocht an Phobail & Pleanáil:

Welcome Mullingar to the 2016 tidy towns competition. Your hard-working committee of 11 members is applauded on the excellent work that it is doing for your town and we would strongly encourage you to go on a recruitment drive for new members as larger numbers would enable you to tackle a greater number and more ambitious projects. The many voluntary and interest groups throughout the town that you enjoy good links with could be a potential source of their members – as it can be assumed that all of these people would like to see and be part of improving their town. It is great that you enjoy excellent links with a whole host of voluntary bodies, organisations and interest groups. This is highly commendable. Can you get some of these groups to 'adopt' some of your projects? For example, would the GAA be interested in adopting a landscaping scheme or two and be responsible for its maintenance? A similar approach could be adopted with the Chamber of Commerce. Would individual traders or business owners be willing to 'adopt a patch' of the town centre and agree to sweep it in the morning and evening? If more people could be persuaded and come onboard, this would significantly lessen the workload of the committee and provide you with a sustainable working framework for the next few years. We were most impressed with your communication strategy and the fact that you have embraced traditional and digital means of communication. Your promotion of facts and events related to the tidy towns competition is excellent. We are pleased to read that you are actively engaged with the local schools through the green schools coordinator and that you assist the cubs and scouts in their endeavours. However, it is considered that more could be done. Why not collaborate with the schools by entering into joint projects with them. There are a host of potential wildlife, habitats and natural amenity projects that they could be involved in and you can be confident that they would be interested in participating as the completion of suitable projects would be of benefit to them in achieving their green flags. We note your intention to set up a Junior tidy towns committee, but in the interim, we urge you to enter into joint projects with the school children (perhaps some of the transition year students) with a view to giving a full responsibility for these projects. We are pleased to read that your work in the tidy towns competition has been of great benefit to the town of Mullingar and it is hoped that this positive experience will continue long into the future. Thank you for your comprehensive application form as it was most helpful during adjudication. However, we had difficulties reading the map submitted so we called into the tourist office and requested a copy of the town map during adjudication. Would it be possible to submit a copy of the tourist map in 2017? This is much clearer than the shrunken photocopied version that is included in your application. Thank you also for your tidy towns plan and it was read with interest. It is certainly an ambitious document and we wish you luck with it. It could be further improved by including specific actions under each of the identified tidy towns categories.

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

This is the first time that the adjudicator had the opportunity to explore the town of Mullingar in detail and it proved to be both an enjoyable and rewarding experience. We were delighted to find that there are so many high-quality

historical buildings that in active use for civic purposes. The excellent market house in the centre of the town is a case in point (which accommodates the tourist office), while Aras an Chontae (county buildings) at the base of Mount Street comprises a wonderful complex of structures that provide excellent examples of historical and contemporary architecture. We loved the modern adaptations and extensions to the original structures on this site and it is great to see that such determined and imaginative efforts are made to ensure that these historical buildings remain in active use. We were delighted to find that a similar approach was undertaken at the nearby Annesbrook hotel complex and we look forward to the seeing the refurbishment of the Courts Building - which is another excellent heritage structure. Whilst we expected to find good historical buildings in Mullingar, we were taken aback by the large number of them – the magnificent Cathedral, St Lomans Hospital, St Marys Centre, St Mary's College, all Saints Church, the Masonic Hall – the list goes on and on and we were somewhat disappointed that there is no town heritage trail (with description plaques on each building) which would enable visitors or interested persons to read about them. Have the committee considered setting up the town heritage trail with information signs? Given the large number of heritage buildings, it is sorely needed and it would represent a valuable additional attraction to your town. We were also impressed with the standard of commercial buildings that could be seen. As pointed out in your application, a major strength of Mullingar is that retail core is both intact and compact and it is great to see that the vast majority of businesses work hard to present their premises to a high standard. It is clear to the adjudicator that the good standard we observed is influenced in part by your excellent shop front competition. Whilst it is not possible to identify all good examples in this short report, a number of traditional design shopfronts stood out and they include; Walshes Jewellers, Miller and Cook, Swarbriggs, Wallaces Bar, MJ Sullivans and Hutchisons. There are also many examples of more modern shopfronts there were just as impressive and they included; Bia Blasta, Easons, Chambers Bar the Chimera Gallery and Café and the 2210 Patisserie. It is noted that the committee has presented a number of excellent projects for 2016. We would like to particularly commend you on your work (along with Westmeath County Council) in getting derelict and vacant buildings done up. It is clear from the before and after photos that were provided that each one of these projects has made a tremendous difference to the appearance of the town. The mural on Dominic Street has also brightened up and added interest to this vacant site. Perhaps some of the larger vacant sites such as railway terrace buildings and the derelict and vacant buildings opposite St. Lomans Hospital can be tackled with the assistance of the County Council next. The other projects under this category, such as streetscape, pavement and street furniture improvements are also acknowledged.

Landscaping and Open Spaces / Tírdhreachú agus Spásanna Oscailte:

Many good quality landscaping schemes could be seen in Mullingar on adjudication day. In the town centre, large circular planters filled with seasonal flowering plants can be found on pavements and on the approach to roundabouts on the Main Street and close to the Fairgreen. The floral displays on Main Street provide a lovely summer colours to the centre of the town. The efforts of individual businesses to this category must not be overlooked with the Tourist Office, Canton Caseys, the Druids Chair and the Greenville Arms Hotel all standing out. Planters were also observed at the entrance of the Harbour Shopping Centre, but weed was starting to creep into them. It was clear during adjudication that considerable effort has been put into the landscaping of roundabouts on the approach roads and central areas of the town. The roundabout at the Fairgreen with its colourful pink roses in full bloom was impressive and the roundabout (at Galvins) between Dominic Street and Oliver Plunkett Street looked well. Attractive planting schemes comprising very colourful seasonal flowering plants could also be observed at the Lakepoint roundabout (close to St Lomans) , the Irishtown roundabout (outside the Hospital), the Lynn roundabout and the Robinstown roundabout. The planting at the Grange South roundabout looked very well and it gives a very positive first impression at the entrance to the Mullingar Business Park. Nice planting and well maintained grounds were could be seen at the Community College, at the Bellevue Clinic and we loved the mature trees in the grounds of the Cathedral. The planting at the bank outside the Council Offices was quite nice but it had a somewhat untidy appearance as weed blocker was showing. Well done also on your planting of the Green and Carey bridges at the canal. We were most impressed by the quality of open spaces and parks in Mullingar with the first-class amenities of the Tranquillity Park and the Town Park standing out. The Tranquillity Park outside the Council officers is a very pleasant and very well maintained open-space with wonderful mature trees, seating areas and colourful landscaping. This space could be further improved with additional access and we wondered if the gate connecting it to the Council Offices and grounds is to be opened? The town Park is an excellent amenity to rival any in the county (and country!). This fantastic area has great range of attractions with the Playground, Skate park, lake and sports facilities (including a swimming pool) for residents and visitors alike. The wonderful mature trees, planted beds and seating areas are also maintained to a very high standard. We loved the many tree sculptures and public art pieces as they helped to further enhance this wonderful open space. We were also pleased to read that there are plans to enhance the open space at the Fair Green and we look forward to seeing these works completed in the next few years.

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

We are delighted to see that your projects for 2016 included a focus on the Royal Canal which included a clean up of its banks. We were also pleased to read that Waterways Ireland have undertaken improvements to the natural stone walls and this has further enhanced this wonderful amenity. During our walk around the town, we stumbled upon the mass path which connects the Cathedral to the Canal. Given that this path is also connected to a number of schools, it represents an excellent opportunity for a nature walk that takes in the area along the mass path and along the canal. Perhaps a survey could be undertaken by some of the schools of the wildlife and biodiversity that could be found in these rich and diverse woodland and aquatic habitats? If a survey is undertaken, the findings could be used to prepare wildlife information boards along this nature trail and also for monitoring what is happening to biodiversity over time. We were delighted to read that Mullingar is now the focal point of Greenways in County Westmeath with three high quality off road cycle / walk routes – the Royal Canal Greenway, the old Rail Trail Greenway and the Ennel to Owel Greenway (which is also due to be extended). Given that these areas have now

been opened up and are fully accessible, we wondered if there were any wildlife projects proposed for them – particularly given the blue way status of the Royal Canal and the recognition that its banks are home to all forms of wildlife that include birds, bees, butterflies and insects. We were very interested to read about the River Brosna wildlife corridor and its designation in the Westmeath County Biodiversity Plan. We look forward to seeing the new information signs being installed in the coming years and we recommend that birdlife or wildlife talks are hosted along the Corridor as a means of raising local awareness of biodiversity.

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

Your application form indicates that your committee is making progress in this category with a number of good projects listed. They include making information on waste minimisation and sustainable resource use available on your website, working with Mens Shed to get window boxes and flower display units made and using river water for your landscaping schemes. However, it is considered that more could be done. Many practical and simple actions could be undertaken by your committee to reduce waste and sustainable use resources in your day to day activities. For example, you could make your own compost for your landscaping schemes (and avoid the use of fertilizer), you could grow your own plants or use donated plants from residents in the town and your could ensure that recycled or waste materials should be used in your projects (e.g. using waste timber in bat or bird boxes or planters). We would also like to know what you are doing to raise awareness of the need to minimise and avoid the generation of waste in the wider community. Have you organized a stop food waste seminar? Events such as this are a very effective way of getting the message across. We are pleased to see that so many schools are now active in the Green Schools Programme and that they are engaging in many worthwhile projects. It is recommended that the committee should meet with the schools and identify any projects that you could collaborate on. We are also interested to know if transport behaviour is changing in Mullingar as a result of the much improved cycle and walking links. Perhaps a simple survey to analyse this could be organized through the schools? Please keep us up to date in 2017.

Tidiness and Litter Control / Slachtmhaireacht agus Rialú Bruscair:

The standard of litter control in Mullingar was good on adjudication day for a town of its size. We were most impressed to see that the major roads and streets in the town were very clean and tidy with no litter. This is very impressive and it is clear that your approach (involving spring clean events, identifying litter black spots and taking action on dog fouling (including audio devices)) to litter control is working very well and that residents in the town are taking it very seriously. A small number of isolated areas outside the town centre had some litter to be seen and they included; the Lynn roundabout, at the business park, at railway terrace, at Ardleigh Vale and at a parking area close to a Doctors Surgery in Willowbrook. These incidents however were isolated and they did not detract from your good overall performance. The standard of tidiness was also very high with excellent weed control observed on pavements and kerbs and the majority of public areas appearing clean and tidy. Some improvements are possible. Some of the information and other signage that could be found on the canal bank at the entrance to the mass path was in very poor condition indeed and given the importance of this area, it should perhaps be given a priority in the coming years. The pedestrian gate from the Tranquillity Park that leads to the front of the Council area (and which is locked) and the area beneath it is quite untidy looking and this detracts from what was otherwise a very attractive public open-space. A most untidy post box could be seen at the Lynn roundabout and a small amount of verges and property boundaries in the Business Park were in poor condition

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

The majority of residential estates in Mullingar looked very well on adjudication day. We particularly liked Lakepoint Park with its very nicely maintained green areas and attractive landscaping. Many of the estate off the ring road such as Ardilaun Green, Rathgowan Park, Greenpark Meadows and Ardleigh Crescent looked quite well with trimmed green areas, clean and visible name signage and trees. Ardleigh Vale could be improved by weeding and removing litter. We particularly liked some of the mature residential areas such as Belvedere Terrace, Millmount Terrace and Sundays Well road where individual houses and gardens were presented to a high standard. It is acknowledged that most of the estates have name stones that are in English only. It is noted also that there is a best estate competition and we would love to hear who your winner was in 2015. We are pleased to hear that all Residents Association are notified of the An Taisce Spring Clean and National tree week and we wondered about how many take part in these events?

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

The standard of approach roads into Mullingar was generally good. The combination of litter free and neatly tended verges, clean and tidy signage and mature and semi mature trees on most approach roads created a positive first impression for the visitor. The presence of colourful and attractive landscaping schemes on key roundabouts also helped to enhance the appearance and serve as an important introduction to Mullingar. We were also pleased to see that many of the approach roads now include cycle lanes.

Concluding Remarks:

Well done Mullingar on a very good performance in this years competition. Be sure to take account of the adjudicators comments when preparing your plans for 2017 and we look forward to returning next year.