

Tidy Towns Competition 2017

Adjudication Report

Centre: **Sligo** Ref: **731**
County: **Sligo** Mark: **301**
Category: **G** Date(s): **16/06/2017**

	Maximum Mark	Mark Awarded 2016	Mark Awarded 2017
Community Involvement & Planning	60	47	49
Built Environment and Streetscape	50	42	44
Landscaping and Open Spaces	50	43	45
Wildlife, Habitats and Natural Amenities	50	30	32
Sustainable Waste and Resource Management	50	15	18
Tidiness and Litter Control	90	45	47
Residential Streets & Housing Areas	50	30	31
Approach Roads, Streets & Lanes	50	33	35
TOTAL MARK	450	285	301

Community Involvement & Planning / Rannpháirtíocht an Phobail & Pleanáil:

Congratulations to the Partnership for a remarkably well produced and informative application. Ultimately the entry form can only be as good as the city or town it introduces; in Sligo's case this year has seen remarkable improvements and also first class maintenance of existing features and structures. The current adjudicator has been visiting Sligo since a Yeats Summer School in 1962 when the city, which at that time turned its back on the river, presented itself in a somewhat apologetic manner: that has totally changed, especially in very recent years; in terms of this competition the city has now broken the 300-mark barrier and the way is clear to proceed to a much higher plane. The relationship with the Local Authority appears to be unusually productive: this will help enormously. It is very encouraging to read that you have a Junior TT; the Mercy Convent's involvement, and no doubt that of other schools, as well as the Scouts, and your excellent range of volunteers, assures, as well as current tasks undertaken, the all-important matter of succession. It is also good to read that you encourage new residents to the city. Thank you for the fold-out copy of the map which was so useful on the walkabout, though not so helpful further out of town where significant areas such as Cleveragh Business Park, Markiewicz Park sports centre and the Famine Graveyard, to name but a few, are not marked. This is a minor matter compared with the assertion, with which this adjudicator can not fail to be in agreement, that your committee is 'the most powerful force for good over many years in Sligo': clearly you succeed in bringing together so many business, residential, social, artistic, educational and touristic interests to mutual advantage. Your action plan is comprehensive, concise, and is regulated by annual targets.

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

Some plain 19th century terrace buildings in the central streets are in need of sensitive repair as they form the core of what is really characteristic of Sligo. You have done very well in either disguising or upgrading some of these, in quite imaginative ways that are indeed a pleasure to observe, but that is really only part of the problem and a concerted and expensive long-term (rather than piecemeal) renovation scheme on the part of the Local Authority and other bodies is needed, as well as private investment. On the positive side it was good to see how busy the shops of the main streets are, so perhaps not too much business has been lured away by commercial developments on the outskirts. Cleveragh Retail Park should be mentioned as one of these because it is well kept in spite of its brazen signage. It was good to see a handsome limestone warehouse reconditioned (HMV sound). Some remarks relevant to streetscape are made under 'Residential' below. Sligo does very well in its landmark buildings, including churches. This adjudicator was much taken by the spiky Gothic church on The Mall, by the Venetian-inspired Court House, by the serene Ursuline College in its almost rural setting, by the remains of the Abbey, its curtilages so well kept, by St John's church with its attractive graveyard containing headstones of distinguished names. Interiors are not included in the competition but one can not fail to exclaim in admiration within the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception, the Model Art Gallery and the City Hall. Markiewicz House and

its ancillary building was seen to be well presented (though well nigh impossible for the stranger to find access to!) Much affirmative reconstruction was in evidence at the Institute of Technology and the Hospital, two complexes of a somewhat scattered nature. The former Psychiatric Hospital is of splendid, if a trifle sombre, Victorian design but this is softened by the pleasant landscaping done by the hotel which has replaced it. Áras an Chontae is imposing, backed by the well preserved stone wall of the gaol. The new plaques system demonstrates a real understanding of the city's past and its associations – for example the long-forgotten Theatre and Linen Hall. The 1916-23 sculptural memorial is affecting in its simplicity. The replaced Yeats mural impressed, as did the 'You Are Here' map. Details of this kind (from the Local Pride Department) enhance the cityscape no end; more dramatic enhancements such as the spectacularly designed blue building on Bridge Street, which manages to respect the scale of the street, remain positively in the memory long after the visit. Well presented units at the IDA Business Park were admired; the Abbvie industrial premises with its tree-lined approach impressed tremendously.

Landscaping and Open Spaces / Tírdhreachú agus Spásanna Oscailte:

The local authority's Parks Department must be praised for its work and for its influence on planting throughout the city. Well done to Blooming Sligo for the immense effort put into the huge number of containers and tubs that create a great sense of care and colour. Well done too to the contribution of the Junior Tidy Towns under this heading. Thank you for the pictures of the crocus initiative and the daffodils which we would not otherwise be aware of. The Salmon People's Park captures the attention in a place that was formerly of little visual importance. The Remembrance Garden creates the right sense of dignity in its prominent position. The Yeats' Secret Garden is delightfully haphazard with its mix of shrubs and perennials, exactly what one would expect in a hideaway; it draws the attention away from the bleak carpark adjacent. The playground opposite Cleveragh Retail Park was noted enthusiastically. Passers-by were not sure what was meant by 'Reflective Garden' when asked for directions ("a pool?") but when found this was seen to be a charming paved space with seating and perennials – for mental rather than physical reflection. Reilig an Ghorta Mór with its evocative sculpture is another place for reflection; so is Reilig na Leanaí – but plastic flowers? Surely not. The cemetery with its beautiful tomb sculpture including obelisks and urns impressed. The picturesque Holy Well and its surroundings at Tubbernalt is a project of Carraroe Tidy Towns as well: is this a joint effort? It is good to read of your interest in the astonishing necropolis at Carrowmore; what can you undertake here? Is it not in the care of Heritage Ireland? It is very encouraging to observe the way in which committees throughout the country are sensitively reaching out beyond town boundaries. The facilities for children and young people in the spacious Mitchell Curley park were admired. The GAA Centre of Excellence towards Strandhill was favourably noted. Due to an error you were awarded one mark last year when it should have been two: that mark has been restored here.

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

The Garavogue above (and indeed below) the town is rich in natural habitats; it is commendable that a representative of BirdWatch Ireland has led walks along the river, identifying the species. Similarly, a bat enthusiast masterminded a detector walk. We read that swifts and moths have also been the subject of study. The participation of the schools in various forms of nature study that you report is so admirable. It will be interesting to learn next year what birds came to feed at the secondary schools – it is assumed that an inventory will be kept by the students. Congratulations on the republication of 'Birds of Sligo Town'. (Your solitary heron picture is formidable!) It is encouraging to read – and also to see photographic evidence – that trees that fall in storms are left in some places to create natural homes for insects. The Bee Garden was seen in the grounds of the Regional Sports Centre; this is a highly significant project; the lavender boundary was noted. It was good to learn that you attended the All Ireland Pollinator Plan conference. This Centre gains much from its location next to the splendidly undisturbed woodland surroundings. You are recommended to read 'Whittled Away: Ireland's Vanishing Nature' by Padraic Fogarty, Collins Press 2007, which is less pessimistic than the title suggests.

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

The Green Fleadh seems to have been the progenitor of several important measures. The Green Aware campaign appears to have been eminently successful. Your approach to this subject is both scientific and practical. A number of well kept bring banks were noticed in salient locations, some of them backed by attractive palings, other adorned with planting: there can be no excuse for any resident being unaware of their nearest! Thank you, again, for your descriptions of projects of which the judges could not otherwise be aware, such as the No Junk Mail research initiatives with its astonishing yet highly believable result and implications. The Greening of Sligo awareness event is most impressive. It was noted that you ran a pilot Brown Bin scheme with its results tabulated in easily comprehended graphics: very well done to the initiators and organisers. Charity Shops were seen. Most impressively, all schools but two have been awarded green flags and those two are registered but have not yet had their results. Curiously, only two green flags were seen flying – though St Ursula's School was appropriately painted bright Green! – so your information is much appreciated; it would appear from your report that in the region of thirty GFs have been awarded. We have found elsewhere that the GF programme has resulted, more than any other initiative, in the sustainable waste and resource management message being introduced to households and businesses, and embraced by them, by pupils and former pupils. Heartiest congratulations to the students and teachers in the Sligo schools, and best wishes to those who have applied to take part.

Tidiness and Litter Control / Slachtmhaireacht agus Rialú Bruscair:

Well done on the elimination of several minor eyesores mentioned last year, such as the fence on Custom House Quay and the Duck Street boundary wall. The declining presence of overhead cables is greatly welcomed. Structures around the parking area adjacent to Tesco are a hotch-potch of smart and tawdry: it will take a huge effort of planning, cooperation and construction to eliminate the latter. An unpleasing site on the corner of Holborn

Street and Connaughton Road needs attention. The poorly maintained building adjacent to Bórd Sláinte detracts. Vacant sites were seen to be for sale near Beechlaw Court: it is hoped that purchasers will be found before long. The restoration of the Fair Green gates has improved that whole vista; another gateway that gives a sense of opulence to its immediate surroundings is that of the Race Course. The extensive IDA Business Park is very tidy indeed. When one mentions that 'litter in Sligo is not a problem' it simply means that volunteers have been out working along with the staff of the City Council. Accounts of the Garavogie clean-up, the IT 'Raise and Give Week', the Good Friday Clean-up and sensitive initiatives such as your meeting with the waste disposal company, impress enormously. Have you done, or if not have thought of doing, the kind of survey you accomplished with the Junk Mail? One way or another it would be good to know where litter mainly originates and perhaps learn what additional steps may be taken to eliminate the problem: considerable steps, since Sligo is already deemed to be 'Clean to European Norms' on the IBAL scale. The background of constant toil is never mentioned: in an ideal society those who clean up after less civic-minded citizens would have their energy diverted to more creative, and pleasanter, pursuits.

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

Many handsome old terrace houses in the city centre and nearby are bravely surviving; those – and there are many – that have been freshened up with colour exude a sense of pride and indeed optimism. Apartments on Lr Quay Street were quite stained in contrast to (probably more recently constructed) apartments at Finiskin. This is a perennial difficulty if you insist on painting your block white! – as on a corner site at Hyde Bridge. However, the white apartments on Connaughton Street were visibly well maintained. Handsome apartments were seen at JFK Parade. The Yeats Village has undoubted charm though less so as you go up hill where there are several stained boundaries and some unclad or unpainted cement block walls. Mid 20th century housing survives remarkably well in the Barrack Street-Holborn area, and splendidly so in the Doorley Park area, where residents are fortunate in their wonderful riverine view. Lark Hill Court is a good example of a well-kept suburban enclave. The well presented homes in Kestral Road and Barn Owl Road are hugely enhanced by fine old timber and by the planting of young trees: a true understanding of the need to replace as well as enhance. Mature and well kept estates such as those west of Markiewicz Park and those on the peninsula that include Seaview, Cartron and Sunset Drive give a sense of well being; all are lucky to have fine natural amenities/views. There is an attractive, neighbourly, kind of feel to the unpretentious area of Magheraboy; the Community Centre was seen to be in process of rebuilding. It would be interesting to learn which estates did well in your Best Kept competition. If there are any 'ghost' estates they were not seen.

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

It was good to see so many city streets free of overhead cables. Traffic flow was really appalling! It is conceded that extensive roadworks were in place in the city centre (in the tourist season) and also in an eastern suburb. One walks the town centre, but inevitably must drive out at some point, when paucity of directional signage is inhibiting – for example, driving up O'Connell Street there is no advance notice to tell the stranger you can not turn right so you might as well not be there! and one-way streets are not indicated on the map. The principal approaches from Cooloney and Bundoran are first class – except where they intersect with city streets in a close series of controls that are frustrating to the through motorist and cause a kind of mid-town barrier to circulation. Is there a case for a high-level bridge as in Waterford or a tunnel as in Limerick? Surfaces, paving and lanes throughout were generally of good quality, and especially good in most of the Finiskin area, especially in road markings. Markiewicz Road appeared to be much improved by means of paving and bus shelters. The roundabouts are well presented. The approaches from Dromahaire and Manorhamilton give a good first impression of arrival in the city; so does that from Strandhill.

Concluding Remarks:

The amount of planning and sheer hard work, not to speak of money, that is expended by the Local Authority and voluntary organisations in a city of the size of Sligo does not pass unnoticed. This adjudicator was enormously impressed by the ongoing improvements, positive developments far outweighing the negative. Congratulations to all those who show their love for their city in such a practical way.