

Tidy Towns Competition 2015

Adjudication Report

Centre: **Abbeylara** Ref: **472**
County: **Longford** Mark: **257**
Category: **B** Date(s): **15/07/2015**

	Maximum Mark	Mark Awarded 2014	Mark Awarded 2015
Community Involvement & Planning	60	43	40
Built Environment and Streetscape	50	34	35
Landscaping and Open Spaces	50	35	37
Wildlife, Habitats and Natural Amenities	50	25	26
Sustainable Waste and Resource Management	50	11	12
Tidiness and Litter Control	90	48	51
Residential Streets & Housing Areas	50	24	26
Approach Roads, Streets & Lanes	50	30	30
TOTAL MARK	450	250	257

Community Involvement & Planning / Rannpháirtíocht an Phobail & Pleanáil:

Ta Fáilte Romhat Mainistir Leathrátha! Welcome Abbeylara to the Super Valu 2015 National Tidy Towns competition. You have a small committee. We hope that you get additional help other than your six committee members for your work. We remember our adjudication visit in 2007 - when you had 14 members. Do you receive any support from local business? You mention Longford County Council, TÚS, FÁS and LCRL only as assisting you. Well done on your varied communication methods. It would be good if the Green School committee would, as planned set up a Junior Tidy Towns. We look forward to hearing more about this in 2016. Very well done to the school on working on the fourth Green Flag. You have a long tradition of entering the competition - since 1958. You list some issues which you wish to attend to - in summarising how you see your groups work contributing to the development of the community. We would like to hear about how you generally perceive the competition has benefited you as a community to date. We do not appear to have received a Tidy Towns plan from you. You did have one in 2007. A three or five-year plan will focus your mind on what you can hope to achieve - no matter how simple a plan it is. A plan need not be prepared professionally, but you should consult locally in preparing such a plan. You should also consider any statutory and non-statutory plans applicable to Abbeylara in drawing up your work programme. Please refer to the Tidy Towns Handbook for advice in relation to the preparation of a plan. It is essential to progress in the competition and to gain extra marks under this particular category that you submit such a plan in 2016. Last year's adjudicator said that they would like to see a hand drawn map of the village indicating the projects you would like the adjudicator to see included with your entry. This year you have submitted a blurred photograph of the village with arrows indicating five projects. In 2007 we complimented you on your map! We would refer you to the 'How to complete your Super Valu Tidy Towns Entry Form. In the guidelines you are asked to sequentially number each ('mappable') project undertaken for this year 2015 in the entry form and to carry this numbering system through to the village map. Please remember to read the Guidelines carefully before submitting next year's Entry Form and map. Not having a plan and not including an appropriate map leads to loss of marks in this category.

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

We are delighted to see that you have protected the good characteristics of a vernacular Irish village over the last several years. Well done on this vigilance. The buildings are still small in scale and traditional in character. The buildings are well presented. Upgrading of premises is obvious. You now present the Cistercian monastery as a most important part of your built heritage in an excellent fashion. It would be helpful if the upper reaches of the ball alley could be faced with stone as the lower level is. The block walls detract from the overall built environment of the village. The GAA complex is quite a large block, and it would benefit from some screening/landscaping. Likewise the community centre could do with the breaking up of the surfaced area by some judicious landscaping. Do you remember the adjudicators report in 2007 which said "Please do not create a sea of macadam here, even if you

have to acquire further adjacent lands to extend parking” Otherwise this building is excellently presented especially around its perimeters, and its car parking markings are very clear and clean. The school proudly displayed three Green Flags, and it was also beautifully maintained. The general area around the housing estate on the Church road approach looked well, although an adjacent grey cottage roof could be improved. Nonetheless the older and new plantings assimilate.

McCormack premises and the long cottage style buildings adjacent looked well. Its aluminum windows are still out of character with the style of building, and perhaps in the future the owner may be encouraged to replace the original timber sash windows in the structure. The area around the adjacent petrol pumps could be a little upgraded. We compliment you on your use of Irish on your signage for the monastery and wildlife signage.

Landscaping and Open Spaces / Tírdhreachú agus Spásanna Oscailte:

The small stream running through the village has become a major landscape feature, surrounded by most well cared-for green spaces and associated planting. The whole effect is a delight visually. The picnic tables were inviting and the signage bright and shining. The monastery attractive sign and the wildlife signs are bright, cheerful and very clean. Well done on this. The plastic flower pots outside the GAA premises, at the entrance to the Cistercian monastery, and adjacent to the Abbeylara village interpretive sign do not look particularly well in the otherwise good landscaping of the village. Can you replace them with perhaps some limestone or other natural stone containers? The wishing well looked well. We credit it here rather than under Built Environment - where you listed it – as it is part of your landscaping.

We visited the lake which is a very good distance from the village. We observed the Bunahowna walkway sign. We were very impressed with the excellent example of a crannóg in the lake. We also admired orchids and a nice stone bridge over the river en route to the lake.

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

We are glad that you consider wildlife in your plantings. To this adjudicator parts of the village narrow stream looked a little overgrown along a small stretch, but perhaps you have a wildlife reason for this non-clearance of the channel. If this is the case please let us know. We are delighted to hear that the school has a biodiversity garden. We observed some serious hedge cutting along the approach from the garden centre to the village. There was also hedge cutting on the church approach road and on the approach road via McCormack's. 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 considering trimming any such hedges please consult with your local authority who will deal with this issue if there is a safety aspect involved. Perhaps you could get the schoolchildren involved in some focussed wildlife research project. You might read the Tidy Towns Handbook which is quite detailed on this category. The Heritage Council's 'Wildlife in Towns and Villages' booklet is also a useful resource.

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

We note that you are involved in composting. We look forward to hearing about your future waste minimisation workshop and the talk on waste minimisation re packaging. Please tell us about attendances etc. in 2016. Well done to the schoolchildren on their input in using lunch boxes. Have you looked at the Tidy Towns publication in relation to Sustainable Waste and Resource management - the updated version sent to you as updated handbook extract. We strongly suggest that you choose some simple starting point from the project examples given in that publication, and let us have details for 2016 as to how you have completed any practical steps to prevent or reduce waste produced across your community. You could- for example - get some of the community to survey how much food they waste in a week! Check out the 'Food Waste Challenge' on www.foodwaste.ie for guidance Promoting waste prevention ideas and initiatives are a big part of the Tidy Towns Groups' role in this category. Perhaps you could organise a visit from your County Environmental Awareness to one of your meetings.

Tidiness and Litter Control / Slachtmhaireacht agus Rialú Bruscair:

The overall impression of Abbeylara is one of neatness and tidiness. The bring banks looked very clean, but due to the immediate location of the wall behind - some items -such as tin cans have lodged between the wall and bins. Wire fencing and the wire fence gate on the adjacent perimeter to the GAA sports centre is in need of renewal. A wooden pole here appears to be redundant after the insertion of a metal pole. The gable of the white cottage facing the GAA recessed area/bring bank area could do with a refresh of paintwork before 2016. The Abbeylara generic County Longford village information board is in need of renewal as - like the other village information boards throughout the County - is ageing. These information boards are interesting, but an upgrade would be timely. The pole to which the brown directional sign for the monastery is attached is rusting. A small substation just inside the wall on the housing estate is also rusting. A very small amount of paper litter was seen in the stream. Otherwise the village was litter free. Well done to the committee members, children, local authority and to the TUS and FÁS

workers. It is indeed a joint effort!

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

Houses in the village were generally presented well. The housing estate looked very well and was very well maintained. Despite the fact that we observed a boarded-up house in the middle of the estate - this did not have too detrimental an effect due to the meticulous maintenance of the rest of the buildings and the grounds around. There appears to be no name on the ground - nor indeed on your map - for this housing estate, although you refer to Abbey Court in your entry form. We assume that is the name for this estate. Perhaps you can rectify this before next year. Well done to the County Council for their paint supplies.

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

The approach to Abbeylara via the garden centre road has a nice blue village sign set against hedging with good floral display. However not too far away a second more traditional black and white Abbeylara sign is located by the side of the hedge in a stone boxed bed - also with flowers. Is it necessary to have two introductory signs to the village? The same applies to the approach to the village via McCormack's. Is this also going to be the situation with the new signage? We admired the lovely stone sign there, but the eye was distracted again by the equally nice -e but repetitive blue sign. This creates a certain amount of visual clutter. Just as one enters the village there is quite an untidy overgrown site on the right-hand side with a shed with an old lotto sign. Can this be screened? On this approach we also noticed some serious hedge cutting.

A gable with ivy on a two story gable of a property which has a dark grey-fronted unused shop front - facing the approach - the approach road via Farrell's shop (as you have named no approach roads on your map it is difficult for us to name such roads) needs paint. On this approach road also part of the stone walling needs repair. A house on the edge of the village with three planning permission signs on the door has an overgrown garden.

On the approach road via the church the footpath was neat and weed-free and the grass verges were trimmed. There are some good property boundaries, but also some poor property boundaries on this approach. The parochial house (?) looked resplendent with its rockery and excellent landscaping.

On the approach by McCormack's there is a lovely footpath and there are excellent trees. Remember to leave a wildlife corridor inside trimmed grass directly beside the wall/edging. We admired the FÁS picnic area with lovely semi mature trees and climbing roses on this approach road. Perhaps the grooming parlour sign could be simplified to a directional sign?

Last year's adjudicator stated that some field gates are in need of painting. We would agree with this again, and encourage you to consider painting all the field gates on the approaches in a uniform colour to give identity to the village and to create a good first impression.

Concluding Remarks:

Abbeylara shows all the hallmarks of a community caring about their village. It was a delight to walk around the green area and to read your informative and easily absorbed local information. You can improve annually both on-the-ground – and in the competition with that dedication and interest. Go n-éirí libh!