

Tidy Towns Competition 2015

Adjudication Report

Centre: **Ballinamuck** Ref: **475**
County: **Longford** Mark: **243**
Category: **B** Date(s): **20/07/2015**

	Maximum Mark	Mark Awarded 2014	Mark Awarded 2015
Community Involvement & Planning	60	38	38
Built Environment and Streetscape	50	36	38
Landscaping and Open Spaces	50	33	34
Wildlife, Habitats and Natural Amenities	50	12	13
Sustainable Waste and Resource Management	50	8	10
Tidiness and Litter Control	90	53	54
Residential Streets & Housing Areas	50	28	31
Approach Roads, Streets & Lanes	50	26	25
TOTAL MARK	450	234	243

Community Involvement & Planning / Rannpháirtíocht an Phobail & Pleanáil:

Ta Fáilte Béal Átha na Muc! Welcome Ballinamuck to the Super Valu 2015 National Tidy Towns competition. You have 14 members on your committee. This is good representation from a small community. You hold monthly meetings and many fund raising events. You are assisted by the local authority, FÁS and An Taisce. You do not mention local businesses - but we assume that they support your fundraising. Perhaps you might look further to see what other agencies or bodies might give you a hand. Talk to some of your successful county entrants and see how they draw in support. Have a look at the Tidy Towns handbook also. Your communication methods include traditional and up-to-date methods. This is good as it means you are engaging with all age groups within the community. We hope that you circulate minority churches represented in your area also. Having a monthly public meeting is very good. This is not an easy thing to do, as a lot of preparation is involved. But we commend you on your willingness to communicate with everybody on an ongoing basis. You work very well with the local school. And the children do their own litter picks around the school. This is good practice for the future. We are delighted that the benefits include positive feedback which you richly deserve.

Thank you for your very clear and concise entry form. We would just say keep your planned projects to a separate plan, and do not include them on your entry form. Your maps were clear and helpful to the adjudicator. We do not appear to have received a Tidy Towns plan from you. Your planned projects appear to be contained in the entry form under each category heading but they should be presented in a separate ('purpose designed') document with reasonable timescales. We would encourage you to submit a Tidy Towns plan - 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 Ballinamuck 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. Your marks are already very high in this category, and submitting a plan will increase them. Conversely not submitting a plan can lose your marks in this category. For instance this year you gained marks in this category, but also lost some of this benefit by not having a plan.

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

This adjudicator had not been to your village before, and was very impressed with the quality of the buildings and streetscape. You are also blessed in being located in beautiful undulating countryside, which is a lovely setting for your interesting village. As one enters the village proper one is immediately impressed by the stonework in the lovely terrace of houses with their ascending roof levels, in harmony with the adjacent bridge. From this point one looks upwards into a very tidy and inviting village street. We were fascinated with the presentation of Oifig an Phoist and its most interesting window displays. We loved the old bicycle, weighing scales, and other memorabilia of the

former grocery use of the shop/ post office. This shows a creative and imaginative use of the building which no longer serves the function it used to serve. We consider that you are an imaginative and tasteful community, as evidenced by little details like this throughout the village. Well done to the stonemason and his friends who faced the bridge with stone. Beyond the Post Office - boundary walls, sheds, gates, roofs and other parts of the built environment of the village were presented neatly and cleanly. Your lighting standards were clean and well painted.

The immediate centre of the village contains the commemorative buildings for 1798. These are executed in a very appropriate fashion in scale with your village. The stonework draws all these elements together. The two-storey building which is the Heritage Centre is the very fine centrepiece. Although adjudicators do not adjudicate on the interiors of buildings, we would have loved to see this centre open during the summer period. We did notice your signage on the door inviting the visitor to phone for access, but, as we are anonymous visitors we decided to wait until we return as tourists! The only criticism we would make is that we do not think the plastic flower pots add anything to the lovely stone work and in-soil planting, and we would suggest that you remove them/ replace them with stone pots to match the stonework. We would say the same for the pump area. Whereas we loved the planting, we would prefer to see stone planters. The pump looked really well with its green paint. The clock is a lovely feature of the building, and we very much admired the well-designed Irish inscription around the clock. Once again the tastefulness of the people responsible is evident. We were a little amused to see that you had to go to Cork to get the clock! The canon was nicely sited on the raised stone plinth without 'fuss', and looked well against the grass and landscaped background.

Other projects which you carried out under this category heading for this year included work to the fountain area, which we admired, and painting at the playground. Be careful with power washing. It is acceptable to power wash certain buildings/structures, but the fabric of any old stone work or protected structures can be damaged through power washing. Well done on your updated signage. The triptych type sign of Rebellion/the Battle of Ballinamuck /Defeat is a striking example of good interpretive signage which is also well located. The map shows how you are on the General Humbert route, but this is not evident other than near the 98 pub.. Perhaps signage for this route needs more consideration in your village.

The playground is very well equipped and 'tucked away' off the car park. We know that your residents are fully aware of it, but it may be an idea to signpost it for visitors.

Well done to the owner of the old shed for donating it to you. Whereas you include this as a 'planned' project we would say that it looks resplendent already. Once again the careful display of the poster about the upcoming Ballinamuck Old Fair – framed as it is on the external wall - shows your attention to detail and your ingenuity in presentation. We loved this carefulness. Redundant hanging brackets on the 98 bar should be removed carefully. Its paintwork would benefit from refreshing, and the roof of the corrugated shed and corrugated gate adjacent likewise.

The school at the crossroads was presented extremely well. We loved the window boxes with their delightful primary colours. They would cheer anybody up on a dull day! We admired the roadside planting, and noticed the excellent ramp. Perhaps where the grassed edges meet the road edge could be weeded/tidied on either side of the pull-in. The only other improvement that we might recommend is repainting of the road markings in front of the school. However, we would like to commend the teachers, the pupils and the board of management on such a nice school. The church in the village looked extremely well also. Projecting lighting over the new shop fronts looked a little intrusive, although the shop fronts were clean and well maintained. Recessed down/ flush lighting looks better on shop fronts. Dillon's bar and bistro was well maintained, but we consider that there were too many objects along its frontage - such as hanging baskets, seating, signage – and the picnic table obstructive of the footpath - whilst the other objects limited access along the path in front also. Some landscaping at the gable side would hide the many pipes on the gable.

Landscaping and Open Spaces / Tírdhreachú agus Spásanna Oscailte:

Landscaping in your village is excellent. You have many elements to this. Firstly there is the rich rural hedging on the approach from the crossroads, full of honeysuckle plants which looked delightful on adjudication day. Then you have your village gardens. You have made huge efforts to landscape your village centre in a classical fashion, with delightful rose beds of uniform colour and sloped grassed surrounds. The Garden of Remembrance is a delightful quiet area off the village street. We visited the garden and admired the sculpture. There is no need for additional pots in this landscaped area. In fact we would suggest that you do not add any more sculptures or other items to it - or it will begin to be cluttered. The fountain area has been redesigned, and it is presented in a most neat fashion. There is no necessity to attach hanging baskets to light standards, and in fact it may not be safe practice. You have wonderful in-soil plantings in your village these are the most appropriate. Well done on the planting of new native trees and hedging.

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

The bug hotels will attract attention from the schoolchildren as they visit the playground. We look forward to further developments on this and the herb garden. What species of bird used your nesting box this year? You live in a most rich habitat and we would like to see if you can look into the possibility of conducting some surveys with a view to sharing this habitat and information about it with the visitor as well as with yourselves. We saw a delightful lane twisting away from the main road through the village which might certainly become an area for nature walks. Do look at the Tidy Towns Handbook which is a most helpful publication to guide you in developing projects under this category heading. The Heritage Council's 'Wildlife in Towns and Villages' booklet is also a very useful resource. We

observed some hedge cutting on the approach roads. 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.

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

Well done to the national school for their battery collection and old clothes recycling. Remember that recycling is just part of sustainable waste and resource management. The children will understand this well due to their participation in the Green Flag programme. Perhaps they could organise an evening to share their knowledge with you. You could also make contact with the County Environmental Awareness Officer with a view to organising a sustainable waste and resource management workshop. We notice your efforts to conserve water and electricity by reducing the scale of the water feature. 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 raised awareness, and also 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. We noticed your solar powered school sign.

Tidiness and Litter Control / Slachtmhaireacht agus Rialú Bruscair:

Well done on taking part in the An Taisce Spring Clean. You say that you regularly collect litter from the crossroads to the 98 bar. We are interested to know what you mean by 'regularly'. Obviously this is effective - as on adjudication day there was no litter in evidence in the village. You have a lovely traditional signpost with old Irish lettering on the road into the village from the crossroads. This is the 'An Gunnadóir Mac Aodha' sign. But it is in very poor condition, rusting, and very much worth salvaging before it is too late. This particular type of sign is now a rarity and you should value it. Its surroundings are also a little neglected with the blank empty sign and a very high wooden pole. We wonder about access to this site. Is it at all times open to the public and can it be made more inviting looking? However the green field gate was well painted here.

It would be a brave weed indeed that would appear in your village. Full marks to your weed- free footpaths!

The bring banks did not appear to have any directional signage, and in relation to the rest of the village their siting and surrounds seemed a bit dull, with moss growing on the surface of the car park nearby. We think you could do better with the landscaping of the bring bank area. The area around was tidy apart from one small circular box left in front of the bins, some wood (the function of which was unclear -perhaps it was the beginnings of an insect hotel /raw material therefor) to the right of the bins, and a small amount of litter lodged between the back of the bins and the playground fencing. Along the top of the car park in your biodiversity beds, some of the wooden identification/quotation markers were a little faded, and the earth a little bare. We wondered if you might talk to your local authority about landscaping around the sewage(?) treatment plant which is visible on entry to the village across the fields from the 98 bar approach.

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

Your residents do you proud in the way that the present their homes and your encouragement is paying dividends .The impression one has of the village is one where people take huge pride in contributing to the community by making every effort to have their houses looking well and having their gardens presented delightfully. We admired a delightful single story mushroom coloured house with a blue and a green door on the way in from Gaigue cross. The boundary walls were resplendent with traditional gate piers. We also loved the white gleaming house across from the church with its blue door and delightful landscaping.

The boulder at Cuirt Seanmullagh looked well, and the small estate contributes to the overall good appearance of the interpretive historic area due to its proximity thereto. We loved the house number signs with the tiny pikes. Once again little details such as this picked up throughout the village add to its interest and good presentation. Clos Naomh Pdraig was also presented beautifully. The shrubbery in the gravel bed in front of the lovely boulder was admired.

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

Whereas we understand that some improvements have taken place at Gaigue Cross (from reading your entry form), we still feel there is a lot more to be done. The area around Gaigue Cross really gives no impression of what a nice village the visitor is going to arrive at. Improvement certainly can be made here. Road markings are fading. There is an empty metal sign holder inside the ditch on the village side. The grass edges are ragged, and there is a plethora of signage which possibly could be rationalised. There was a black plastic container on the ground beside the village battle sign. The property on this corner could be improved through landscaping, and screening of its rear curtilage. This rear curtilage needs surfacing and removal or upgrading of the seemingly redundant petrol pump and 'open' signage There was a lot of fly posting on a wooden pole near the white single storey building here, and some plastic containers in the recessed area. The planting bed was dreary and neglected looking with coniferous shrubs. The pink clothes bank was rusting. This is completely at odds with what awaits the visitor in the village proper itself.

It is not an area that would entice a passerby on the main road to detour to your village. Conversely the school here looked magnificent. The untidiness does not finish at the crossroads, because as one continues to approach the village there was fly posting on both poles on either side of the blue village sign, and an old redundant advertising hoarding is located near the gable of a house (which had a satellite dish on the gable).

As one approaches the village one sees the twinning sign which is nicely located against hedging with a floral bed. We also noted the nice floral bed near the 50 K pH speed limit sign. However along this stretch we noticed some fairly recent evidence of hedge cutting. Please refer to our remarks under Wildlife.

On the approach from the 98 pub (incidentally you might mark approach names on your map next year) the area around the Ballinamuck sign could be a lot tidier, and we would recommend planting in the soil if you feel you need anything other than well trimmed grass here. The area around the wooden seating also needs tidying/trimming/reseeding. Quite an untidy area with signage for bed-and-breakfast/fair day advertising/bare block wall section/rough road edge needs- across from the 98 bar near the junction - needs looking after before 2016. Rough road surfaces in this area also detract from this approach. . There is a plethora of signage and poles – including the Slí Humbert sign - at this junction - which detracts from the lovely mature tree and your village sign. Can this be rationalised in any way? Nearer the junction to the cemetery one of the lake signs on the directional sign is bent. There are three empty flagpoles - which look rather 'sad' - near the 98 bar. Road markings outside the new shops near the church need relining. Well done on the planting of the new whitethorn hedge.

Concluding Remarks:

We are not at all surprised that you won the County Endeavour Award last year! We very much enjoyed our visit, and we wondered if you ever considered twinning with some of the towns in County Wexford who share a common history - Wexford town itself - Enniscorthy or New Ross? This might bring 'staycation' tourists to your area. We wish you the best for the future. Go n-éirí libh!