

Tidy Towns Competition 2015

Adjudication Report

Centre: **Ballymahon** Ref: **896**
County: **Longford** Mark: **232**
Category: **C** Date(s): **09/07/2015**

	Maximum Mark	Mark Awarded 2014	Mark Awarded 2015
Community Involvement & Planning	60	30	32
Built Environment and Streetscape	50	33	36
Landscaping and Open Spaces	50	33	35
Wildlife, Habitats and Natural Amenities	50	18	20
Sustainable Waste and Resource Management	50	9	11
Tidiness and Litter Control	90	44	44
Residential Streets & Housing Areas	50	27	27
Approach Roads, Streets & Lanes	50	27	27
TOTAL MARK	450	221	232

Community Involvement & Planning / Rannpháirtíocht an Phobail & Pleanáil:

Ta Fáilte romhat Baile Uí Mhatháin! Welcome Ballymahon to the Super Valu 2015 National Tidy Towns competition. We note that you meet monthly. You mention that you have 20 to 30 people involved on your committee. This seems like an unmanageable number for any committee - we assume you mean 20 to 30 people involved in your Tidy Towns group - with a lesser number on your committee. You enclose agendas for some of your meetings. It is obvious that you conduct focussed meetings. Your members also attend meetings with other bodies. Your list of agencies, bodies and businesses that have supported you in various ways is impressive. Your communication methods are traditional and modern. Thank you for your media coverage printouts. Not all have the dates clearly legible. Involving the library is a good idea. Using traditional and modern communication methods means that you engage with all age groups in your town. Your website and blog are informative. Thank you for the printed copies. We are delighted to know that you have established a Junior Tidy Towns committee, and we would like to hear more about this next year. Thank you for the colourful photographs of the volunteers for clean-up week in May. It is an excellent idea to have liaison officers in contact with the schools. Your fundraising events also have the effect of introducing new people to the group. Judging by your photographs of the American Tea Party you also enjoy these events! Thank you for your Tidy Towns Plan and for the map which you submitted. However numbers on the map relate to your buildings of interest architecturally. In the guidelines to the entry form we would refer you to the 'How to complete your super Valu Tidy Towns Entry Form (part 6) where you are asked to sequentially number each ('mappable') project undertaken for this year 2015 in the entry form itself and to carry this numbering system through to the village map. An exception to this was your map relating to the location of wildlife areas, biodiversity garden, community garden and Nally's Yard. Remember also to show and name all housing estates. Please remember to read the Guidelines for completing your entry form carefully before submitting next year's Entry Form and map. This is always required, but is especially important where there are as many projects involved as in your town. You have made a submission to the local authority in relation to the County Draft County Development Plan. This is a professional and good way to conduct your business, and keeps the local authority informed of your concerns and wish list. Your approach in relation to developing your community is professional. You have a voice at the table with many important groups. You submitted a lot of additional information. It would be useful if, in future, this could be perhaps limited, (see comments re Green Flag application form copy below) bound, and the pages numbered individually and referenced on the Table of Contents.

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

It is very good to see that you have an interest in your built environment and streetscape. After all this is the most noticeable aspect of any centre to the local and visitor alike. You have carried out a report on your built heritage and streetscape with your local authority. This is resulting in a three-year action plan. You will advise property owners in relation to conservation of their property. We assume that this advice will be professional advice from your local

authority's architectural conservation officer/architects department - and relayed by you to the owners/occupiers. We congratulate you on this initiative. We particularly admired the recorded series of images of front doorways. It is a pity that most people passing through your town will really never appreciate these doorways due to the necessity to concentrate on driving through the incessant traffic. Have you plans to communicate this reason to stop in Ballymahon to such persons? We visited each of your built environment projects. Such projects involved property upgrades, stone wall maintenance, historical signage, and street light lamp posts. Unfortunately Nally's Yard was closed on our visit, so we had to appreciate the project seen through the gates. You supported the Bog Lane Theatre exterior regeneration project. The best maintained premises competition which you began last year continues to help upgrade your environment. Well done to Duncan Butchers on their award for the best maintained premises in 2014. We particularly admired the traditional canopy at this premises. Across the road we noted the painted half door and the window with the painted cat. In this premises the plinth and the upper floor are in need of paint and detract from what you have tried to do at ground floor level. PJ Diffley's was very clean with a nice traditional door/gate at the shop windows. Some premises are in need of painting. Too much advertising on a number of shops - as well as projecting signs - and projecting sign holders without signs - take from your overall streetscape. Access to many parts of the country outside of County Longford and within County Longford involve passing through your town. On many approaches the first building in view is your water tower. Is there any chance that this could be improved visually through a painting programme?

The Church of Ireland, St Catherine's has very well painted railings. We admired the metal fretwork on the roof ridge. There is a lovely terrace of three properties beside Inny Court. These include the Welcome second-hand shop and the computer shop. It is a pity that uPVC Windows have been inserted at first-floor level whilst the downstairs areas still retain their traditional timber windows. O' Hanlon's Pharmacy was nicely painted, but had too many notices on the door and on one of its two windows. Notices pinned to the wall and windows at the terrace beside Inny Court also detracted somewhat from the overall good effect in these properties. Flannagan's Food Hall and Midland Trophies were clean, but the latter being shuttered looked a little defensive. Is it possible to place the shutters behind the window displays? The Mill apartments buildings were extremely well maintained. Cooney's Hotel was freshly painted. The Bank of Ireland is a fine building, but the projecting floodlights are not discreet. Unused flagpoles/banner/poles should be removed carefully from this (possibly Protected Structure) as they are unused. The three small parking signs on the black bank gate looked untidy. We admired the Irish lettering MacCormac's premises. The eave panelling on the same premises and on Skellys across the road was also admired. This feature was also noted on a cream house on the Cavan road junction side of Skellys. Skellys shop front is traditional and well maintained, but would benefit from less signage/external lighting. Oifig an Phoist Baile Uí Mhatháin/The Post Office looked very well. It was classically simply presented in traditional colours. However the projecting external down lighting at eaves level detracted from the overall effect. The Vocational School was very nicely painted. We admired the adjacent good red gate and the old red gate opposite, but a broken ochre coloured wall detracts on one side. The National School was well painted and proudly displayed three Green Flags on clean flag poles. One bollard at the entrance on the town side was bent. The old school looked well despite adjacent road works. The library was well presented. A nice roofscape presents on approaching the town from the Catholic Church direction. At Lovell Brothers painting of the gable facing the town would be an improvement. The Credit Union building was neat, but there were too many windows posters which created a cluttered look. Have you any plans to rescue the Masonic Hall from total dereliction?

Good Luck with your work on derelict sites survey etc. Under this category heading you have included some projects which more rightly belong to the Landscaping and Tidiness categories where we credit them separately.

Landscaping and Open Spaces / Tírdhreachú agus Spásanna Oscailte:

We look forward with anticipation to hearing more about the feasibility study on the walkway from Ballymahon Bridge to Newcastle Bridge along the Inny. You have completed the first phase which is the landscaping of the riverbank at the town. You also continue to enhance the Royal Canal Bridge picnic area and Brannigan Harbour area. There is a certain amount of evergreen planting at the former location. Perhaps in time it may be possible to replace the evergreen plantings with deciduous plantings - which are more attractive to wildlife. Directional signs are useful to such amenities and well done on their installation. We liked the fact that you used a single pole for the signage and the ring boy. This helps to lessen signage clutter. The lovely landscaped areas to the Mill apartments were maintained extremely well and complimented your riverside area.

Well done on your planting schemes in public and school areas. The Community Garden is an important resource. Thank you for the photographs of the tree planting volunteers. We liked the good trees in grilles on the street and in the large in-scale planter boxes. Because of the amount of parking along the paths it is difficult to appreciate these trees until dusk when there is less traffic and less parking! You have installed separated planted beds at the foot of streetscape trees along Main Street. We are still doubtful as to the advisability of this - as the flowers still take sustenance from the earth/ground around the trees. An example of this was noted under the trees at Skellys. Visually also - good trees can stand alone and do not need floral embellishment.

You do not refer in your entry form to the news item which you included in relation to the restoration of White Bridge on the River Inny at Newcastle. Despite the fact that this area is well outside the town we visited it, as we understand that this area is used by townspeople for walking and recreational purposes. Even on a dull evening there were anglers and walkers around. We can understand how you are endeavouring to make up for any loss that may be affected by the Central Parks development. The event to discuss this issue happened just after your entry form was submitted, so we will await next year's entry to follow developments.

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

You have done preparatory work on wildlife habitats survey of Ballymahon and surrounds. Well done to the local wildlife experts - you do not name them - who helped you. We suggest that you contact your County Heritage Officer - if you have not done so already - in relation to assistance with this proposal. You might consult 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.

The new wildlife sanctuaries are welcomed. We were a little confused at the Royal Canal amenity site where a wildlife sanctuary sign was attached to the same sign as a Green Belt Ltd. sign. Have you an arrangement with the company or owners of the land?

We note that you are about to recommence bat surveys and bat monitoring. The new signs were noted, as was the signage at the River Park wildlife garden. Anglers will be interested in your research into the reintroduction of the mayfly. We will follow developments at the new Biodiversity Garden at the Vocational School eagerly. Thank you for the photograph of the Youth Club members preparing this site. We noticed some incidences of chemical weed killing - such as close to the new fence near the Garda Station. We would suggest to you that you endeavour to weed manually - which is more environmentally friendly. Your County Heritage Officer would also be able to advise you in relation to environmentally friendly nonchemical methods of weed control. We noticed the wildlife corridor from the Kayak club to Thomond Lodge.

The community wildflower area at the river was admired and particularly the poppies. There were some dead branches near the white fence at the back of this area. We loved your photograph of the spring primroses and early cowslips.

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

Well done on replacing your street lighting with low-energy alternatives. You have given us the calculations of the savings resulting. Work is ongoing at the biodiversity garden at the Vocational School in relation to sustainability. We note the development of a new composting site at this location. We look forward to hearing how this garden contributes to this category heading during the coming year. You can learn a lot from schools involved in the Green Flag programme. Your work in relation to an energy Co-op is innovative, and we wish you success with that. Perhaps next year you can let us have some fact sheets relevant to findings and proposals. There is no need to submit copies of the Green Flag application from the schools. Suffice it that we know they are applying, and you can fill us in annually on progress in relation to all involved schools.

Tidiness and Litter Control / Slachtmhaireacht agus Rialú Bruscair:

At the riverbank one picnic table was bent and the steel parts of the picnic tables need treatment in some cases due to rust. We observed the dog fouling detailed notice. Unfortunately there was a fairly extensive area of littering at the riverbank on adjudication day. This is unfortunate, as it was probably the result of one or a few recent people eating at the area.

Well done on painting the benches along the main street. These looked very well. We note that you supplied a hoarding to the fire gutted hall. You have addressed the overgrowth of trees. You conduct two litter picks each week. This appears to be effective - although we would have expected that you would need a more regular litter pick - with so much passing traffic. You have provided each business with litter pickers, so perhaps the businesses are extending their area of work to other than immediately outside their premises. Litter bins are being replaced incrementally, and you are conducting an awareness campaign in relation to their usage. This adjudicator considered the design of the bins aesthetically to be more suitable to a rural or village centre in their wooden construction. But this is a matter of personal opinion. In any event they are clean and new - and hopefully will weather well and be treated with respect. You communicate issues re dumping and illegal tipping on local radio. You mention the upgrading of the old post and rail fence near the Garda barracks under Landscaping however we credit it here.

The roofless cream-coloured buildings near the Catholic Church looks extremely poorly as viewed from the town side in particular. Have you any plans in relation to this property? Perhaps you can tell us next year what you have done to try at least to deal with this. O' Mearas Auctioneers lettering needs repainting and a solicitor's name sign was also missing some letters. The rear of the Market House area needs repainting, as does the boundary wall at the corner. There were a lot of weeds along the lateral limestone kerb edging between the Library and the adjacent garage. The rough surface of the area inside the footpath between Greener Homes/ the garage and the Library needs surfacing.

A sign was missing under the Convent House four signs 'hoarding' (under the Youth Reach name sign). There are very decrepit railings along the road to the convent - on the left hand side opposite Youth Reach. The concrete walls of the convent house site require painting or power washing. The gates need painting also.

The bus stop pole outside Daybreak was bent. A redundant sign holder on Creations should be removed. The same premises had four redundant hanging basket brackets. The Greener Home store sign detracts from the Market House on the Longford approach. Despite new lighting some poles and wires remain on the bridge side of Market House.

The bring banks had no signage but were clean despite only receiving a visit by the adjudicator late in the evening. Work was ongoing at the bridge on adjudication day involving storage of plant adjacent and other disturbance. However we do not detract any marks for such necessary temporary road/service works.

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

Whereas you say that you have a list of all local estates you have not shown these on your map. You work with local estates as required and you encourage them to take part in the local authority best estate awards.

At Creevaghbeg we admired the nice stone walls and hedging - as well as the good semi-mature trees. This estate was generally well presented, although some boundary walls with iron oxide staining need power washing or painting. The house number plate directional sign inside the entrance to the estate needs renewal. Lighting was admired, but satellite dishes on the front of properties detract.

A nameless estate on the Newcastle Wood Road was weedy and also showed evidence of chemical weed killer. Some cut grass was not removed. The hedges between the houses looked well. Protruding manhole covers and a weedy unfinished hammerhead area (with a broken traffic cone) at the end of the estate looked poorly. There was also an untidy entrance area just inside the main entrance. The estate has some nice tree planting. There was an unfinished/unsurfaced set back area outside the footpath in front of the estate.

At Hawthorn Meadows we observed a little litter in the open space along the side of the estate. The open spaces could do with a few trees. The grass was neatly cut. Some lateral house boundaries have iron oxide staining. The road surface was not very good. The Longford County Council 'no dumping' sign at the edge of this estate needs renewal. The landscaping at the entrance area was very good. The back lands development including OPD development opposite the River Inn needs landscaping, removal of graffiti and the painting of boundary walls, as well as the surfacing of the roadway. The estate behind the convent/Youth Reach was neatly presented, but we would suggest that the excavated area with the old field gate should be screened.

At St. Matthews Park there was a nice flower bed at the entrance and we saw no litter. Parkside Gardens sign was admired. Slí na Móna has good semi mature trees and has a very nicely landscaped name sign in gravel. The floral displays at Marion Terrace are excellent. On the Athlone approach Cluain Rí was unfinished at the front, and had a weedy service road. The only name identification was found on the ESB substation. Manholes were protruding from the roads and the estate would benefit from additional planting. An estate with no name is located beside the GAA pitch.

Houses in the town and on approach roads were generally well presented.

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

On the Athlone approach the factory sign and the Ballymahon Community Alert sign were a little damaged. Whereas you said that you have painted field gates on all approach roads we noted a lovely old farm gate on the left-hand side of this approach which had not been recently painted - as well as other field gates closer to the factory and beyond - towards the town. The factory itself was nicely landscaped with good fencing. Screening is needed inside the black fencing to the large car park area (not the grassed area but the Ballymahon-side entrance). The factory elevation facing Athlone needs paint freshening. A barrier could also be painted. The office elevation with its planted walls was admired. We admired the semi mature trees on the external road margin. The flagpoles at the factory were empty. You have restored some dry stone walling on this approach in conjunction with the Men's Shed group. However there are parts of the stone walls here still needing further repair. Some verge trimming is required closer to the town. There is a weedy field area in front of single story semi-detached houses on the right-hand side as one approaches the town. The Maxol service station is under reconstruction, and this is probably why there are so many cars parked neatly in a space on the left-hand side of this approach. Some boundary walls in this area would benefit from paint freshening.

On the Mullingar approach the Water Tower is a fairly strident and rather dirty landmark. The road surface at the edges needs attention. Newly laid pipes obviously led to the two different road surfaces which look poorly on this approach to the town. Along the new footpath there was an overhang of some vegetation. An advertising sign was falling, and we observed a traffic sign pole without a sign. We admired good red gates.

On the Longford approach we noticed two signs for Ballymahon - one the blue town sign and the other thing new twinning sign. These signs are very close to one another - which creates a cluttered appearance. Are both necessary? Furthermore there were nettles growing over the wall adjacent to this sign. On this approach you do seem to have painted the gates in a bright red colour. This looked well. A red galvanised shed opposite the Hyundai garage needs screening or renewal. Some weeds were observed along a wire fence along this road approach. A County council 'no dumping' sign was dirty. We admired the lovely planting outside the garage, but on the bridge side of the adjacent junction to the garages the road side was overgrown and wild. We noted a 'headless' traffic pole at this location near the canal. Views across the canal to the block wall finish on the far side would be greatly improved by the plastering/planting of the said block wall. The red gates and yellow flowers in this general area looked well.

On the Newcastle Wood road the 50 K pH speed limit sign was totally obscured by vegetation. A ruinous house just outside the speed limit and a double type of field gate nearby need attention. Yet again we do not observe the general painting of gates on this approach either although some are painted red. There are lovely views of the spire

of the Church of Ireland as one approaches the town. Would it be possible to screen the mobile home? As one approaches the town inwards from the nameless housing estate we admired the nice stone walls/trees/hedging. This area is very neat until you reach an excavated site on the right-hand side with two temporary (?) sheds. This site has a broken stone wall and a rough timber fence in part. The old T junction sign was in a very poor condition. We would recommend the use of traditional lime mortar on stone walls requiring mortaring rather than cement mortar - as has been used on this final approach. Graffiti on a pillar at the gable of the terraced housing on the right-hand side as one reaches the junction looked untidy.

Is public access allowed via the Mill complex to the river bank area for people with mobility problems, as the steps from the bridge are non-negotiable for such visitors?

Signs such as twinning and 'no litter' signs have been erected on approach roads. We observed the flower beds on the Athlone road approach. However we would encourage you to perhaps lessen the number of decorative flower beds on simple grass strips. Interference with these long strips visually may not be attractive, and maintenance of the grassed area then becomes a more complicated issue. The elongated grass strips should also have a rough area left in the inner verge for wildlife movement.

On the Shrulue road the 50 K pH speed limit sign was obscured by vegetation, and there were nettles growing over the nice stone wall. The sludge removal site had a very poor gate and faded dirty signage. A very derelict shed and recessed weedy area with very dirty boundary walls contributed to a poor approach road in this case. There was very bad graffiti all over an old shed/pavilion with a broken roof. The piece of land between this road and the housing estate on the Longford/ Lanesborough road was very weedy. The black and white sign for Ballymahon was ugly with graffiti.

On the Cavan approach road the GAA had good hedging along its perimeter wall. The area between the hedge and the footpath would benefit from improved surfacing. We much admired the lovely white/red paint at the GAA grounds. We hope that the hedging on the exposed block wall will be extended to cover the bare block wall area remaining.

The Top garage was neat and we admired the planter at the sign. At the offices building and 'unit to let' as one approaches the town - the external area needs tidying or screening and one side elevation facing the town is poor. The rest of the buildings at this location are very clean and well painted. The Mart is a poor introduction to the town with its vast unsurfaced frontage. There is no screening/no planting and the wall needs paint. The 'children not allowed in the yard' sign needs lettering restored. Murtaghs Garden Centre has a lovely white gate but a poor sign.

Some road surfacing edges to Main Street were poor. The wider footpaths were parked on in places. We are not sure what exact arrangements are in place with regard to this aspect of traffic management.

Concluding Remarks:

We were sorry to hear that you were 'hit' by vandals last summer. But you have not let that deter you! For a community with only 4 years of entry to the competition behind you, you are doing very well. You appear to have a good all-around approach to all categories of the competition, and we particularly commend your attention to the Built Category. One issue which you do not mention is the issue of the incessant traffic through your town. Has the possibility of a by pass been considered? Let us know next year.