

Tidy Towns Competition 2015

Adjudication Report

Centre: **Newtowncashel** Ref: **485**
County: **Longford** Mark: **314**
Category: **A** Date(s): **19/07/2015**

	Maximum Mark	Mark Awarded 2014	Mark Awarded 2015
Community Involvement & Planning	60	47	45
Built Environment and Streetscape	50	40	41
Landscaping and Open Spaces	50	44	45
Wildlife, Habitats and Natural Amenities	50	33	34
Sustainable Waste and Resource Management	50	15	15
Tidiness and Litter Control	90	62	61
Residential Streets & Housing Areas	50	29	31
Approach Roads, Streets & Lanes	50	41	42
TOTAL MARK	450	311	314

Community Involvement & Planning / Rannpháirtíocht an Phobail & Pleanáil:

Fáilte Baile Nua an Chaisil! Welcome Newtowncashel to the Super Valu 2015 National Tidy Towns competition. You tell us that 10 committee members meet monthly and on an ad hoc basis if required. Referring to your 2013 results the Longford Leader newspaper article (which you enclosed) referred to 19 members. Have you lost some? Last year's adjudicator's report refers to 12. Which is correct? Let us know how many you have in 2016. Committee members can also gather 25 to 30 volunteers around them for clean up evenings. That is impressive and gives you extra man/womanpower for the tasks in hand - as well as psychological support. Your list of agencies, bodies and businesses that support your activities is encouraging. Your communication methods are traditional and modern. This means that they will reach a broad audience of younger and older people. We hope that you include minority local churches in your circulation list. The fact of having the local school principal as a committee member provides a great opportunity for liaison between the Tidy Towns group and youth. Student work complements the work of your own committee. You do not appear to mention the fact that the school has a Green Flag we noticed the flag flying on adjudication day. 38 years of entering the competition shows commitment - and indeed you achieved national recognition during that time. We are delighted to hear that the Tidy Towns concept has proven to be a driving force in highlighting your community's sense of pride of place. Spin-offs of attracting tourists to the area are observed. On this note it appears to be the case that the Heritage Centre is not regularly open. Perhaps next year you can tell us a little more about its opening hours. You list many points as to how you see your work contributing to the development of your community - all of great merit. It would be helpful if you dated each newspaper cutting which you enclose.

We are surprised not to find a Tidy Towns Plan with your entry. Indeed we are not sure if you submitted a plan last year or not. In fact we searched a number of times for a plan throughout the folder as we truly expected to find one. Otherwise your entry pack is varied and focused. It was very neatly presented and easily followed - although perhaps a table of contents would be useful with numbered pages.

There is no reference to a plan in last year's report. Unfortunately this is an important omission. Please ensure that a plan is available for adjudication next year. 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 Newtowncashel in drawing up your work programme. You already have considered the County Development Plan in your sectoral plan under Wildlife. Please refer to the Tidy Towns Handbook for advice in relation to the preparation of a plan. It is essential to progress beyond your current marks level in this particular category that you submit such a plan in 2016.

Thank you for your beautifully illustrated and yet carefully annotated map which complied with the Guidelines for entry to the competition, and in so doing makes the job of the adjudicator easy in relation to locating all the projects

An accurate and informative map is a really important aspect of any entry. This map is indeed a work of art but is also of practical use.

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

The village is a very unspoilt vernacular Irish village with church, community hall, shop, and traditional houses. However, we are delighted to see that it also has the benefit of good modern and appropriate architectural input. We refer in particular to the delightful conversion of the old shop on entry to the village from Longford. The hand of the same talented architect we suspect is to be seen in a modern two-storey house on the same approach near the village (beside the Heritage Centre). That particular house design was remarked upon by this adjudicator a few years ago on a second round adjudication visit. Another rural house not far from the village appears to be the work of the same designer. Indeed you have submitted a photograph of this house 'before' and 'after.' The old shop was in a risky state of potential decay on this adjudicator's last visit to your village. We were happy to see the photographs of the conservation work in your folder. We were delighted when we saw the results of the ground. This is a great introduction from the built environment point of view to your village and excellent example for the future. We also saw your new lighting for the first time on this visit although you do not claim it as a 'this year' project. And we know it is not new this year. We congratulate you nonetheless on your brave choice of the colour blue for the lighting poles. This is distinctive and also is an easier colour than black for people with visual impairment to see. The beautiful blue colour is echoed in other areas of the village - such as in some gates and in the seating at the quarry. This gives a nice unifying touch to the public realm.

The church is presented in an exemplary fashion, as is the adjacent parochial house. Two empty flagpoles at the church looked a little 'sad'. The church sign is very attractive and informative. The school looked really well with its delightful landscaping, although the school gates might be painted. The community Hall was also well cared for, with interesting practical information and tourist information on display. We are somewhat unsure as to exactly what work is continuing on the Thomas Ashe Hall purchased in 2013, as you do not describe such works to us. We hope that you have had discussions with the County Architectural Conservation Officer in relation to any works proposed for this building. You might bring us up to date on further plans in 2016. This coming year is of course going to be marked by you in relation to the hall. A change of ownership to a centre village house and the new residential use for the Garda Station contribute to the general built environment upgrading. A major uplift has been given to the built environment of the village through the reopening of the local pub which was closed up for some time. On adjudication day it seemed to bring new life to the village, as people were meeting and greeting outside the pub. The bird sculptures have become synonymous with your village, and even before this adjudicator's first visit some years ago we were aware of these sculptures – they are almost your logo. Although you mention flash flooding under this category heading we consider this issue under the Landscaping and Roads sections. Likewise the issue of LED lighting in the village mentioned under this Built Environment category rightly belongs to the Sustainable Waste Management and Resource Management category, and we credit it there.

It is not just the bird sculptures but also the other sculptures throughout the village that lend interest to the built environment. The setting of these sculptures is classically simple and appropriate. Your interpretation of local mythology as well as local wildlife is expressed through these sculptures. We also commend your care and attention to the excellent stone walls in the village. You are lucky to have people who are skilled with stonework in your midst as evidenced by the photographs you submitted. The Heber Donn sculpture is a very fine piece of limestone carving. It has - what a lot of public art work lacks - a great sense of scale and presence. The delightful bird sculpture in the wall behind is greatly enhanced by the climbing roses display.

With regard to the theft of the sculpture in the quarry - it is amazing what attracts a thief or a vandal! Had the fact that this year is the 150th anniversary of Yeats anything to do with the fact that this statue/sculpture was located beside a plaque containing this text of The Stolen Child? The newspaper cutting does not have a date, so we are unsure as to when this happened. But you have replaced it in any event. The best way to deal with this type of vandalism is to repair the damage/ replace the item as soon as possible. This you have done successfully. With regard to the replacement of the house at the apex of the GAA site as one approaches from the village - we do not consider that the Lotto signs look better than the pre-existing house and trees. Please see our comments under the Tidiness section.

Well done on your lovely Christmas card etching of the Built Environment of Newtowncashel sponsored by Tidy Towns. With regard to the 'stones in the village' we very much like the acknowledgement and sense of continuity which they display. Is there any public access to the interesting gravestone in the field on the school approach? Without the benefit of binoculars or a zoom lens it would be difficult for the visitor to see the inscription thereon. Have you plans to make it accessible - or 'interpret' it in a public area nearby?

We felt that a few little improvements could be made around the shop area. Overall it is most well cared for but a few minor issues exist. These consist of the possible upgrading of, the white petrol pump, perhaps accumulating the items such as chairs, signage, litter bin, etc. outside the elongated shop closer together - there is sufficient space. The notices in the door create a cluttered look and perhaps could be transferred to a notice board. Conversely the black petrol pump with its floral display attracted the eye.

We would like to see increased use of Irish in the village environment.

Landscaping and Open Spaces / Tírdhreachú agus Spásanna Oscailte:

The quarry is the jewel in the crown both from a landscaping and wildlife point of view. Well done on your re planting

of the hazels at the quarry road frontage. The new planting around the arboretum and other improvements was visited and is commended. We are sure that you are looking forward to the new hazel hedging at the Quarry Park becoming mature. The summer wild flowers were in full bloom on adjudication day, but you also remembered to let us have a photograph of the spring display of bluebells. It was obvious from the various photographs of young and older children visiting the quarry that this is a much appreciated recreation and education area. It is also good to see such landscaping enjoyed for such events as barbecues. The attractive picnic tables were painted in the same lovely blue as your street lights and some gates. This, as we have already said is an imaginative and unifying idea. The planting of nasturtium at the Health Centre has worked very well and looked attractive on adjudication day. You also planted alder at the park. Perhaps it might be good to let us have photographs of your other spring planting (as well as the bluebells) - which includes snowdrops and daffodils, as these are well 'gone' by adjudication time. It would be nice to see a picture of the spring village. The butterfly garden is visually delightful as well as being attractive for butterflies. Well done on additional plantings here.

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

The village is set in very beautiful and environmentally rich countryside. You are conducting ongoing community surveys associated with different habitats, and you are guided in this survey work professionally. We read with interest the various category heading suggestions - and practically speaking - you are also being advised on potential funding sources. This survey commenced 2013/2014 and you have updated us with the 2014/2015 report. The surveys involve local people and students who have a vested interest in their own place. At the moment you appear to be concentrating on hedgerows, and this is appropriate given the magnificent hedgerows all around the village and its environs. You are also investigating trees and the local lake Lough Slawn. Well done on your nature walk which also raises funds for you. Your approach is professional - insofar as you also engaged the services of a Bórd na Móna ecologist to accompany the walk with a talk. You also rightly point out that the area is protected under the County Development Plan. We note the inclusion of news of the event in the parish newsletter. This, as well as your walk at Easter, are good rallying points in advance of the busiest season. Thank you for submitting the newspaper cuttings and the actual copy of the sponsorship cards.

We observed a small amount of hedge cutting beyond the bridge (beyond the blue village sign) on the Longford approach road. An effort was made not to cut the tops of the hedge. However 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 trimming any such hedges please consult with your local authority who will deal with this issue if there is a safety aspect involved. We also observed recent hedge trimming on the other main village approach.

The birdsong at the Quarry was amazing. The Quarry is indeed a unique bio diverse area. You are justifiably proud of your rare species of newts. Apart from its habitat interest the Quarry is a peaceful place .On approach roads we consider that perhaps you should be leaving a little width at the hedge side as a wildlife corridor and not mowing to the base of the hedges.

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

The list of projects which you have completed this year under this category heading involves - to a large extent continuing phases of existing projects and this is good and indicates that they are successful. However a number of these projects involve recycling and segregation. Probably the most important item listed was the talk by the environmentalist on how to reduce to zero waste. What sort of attendance did you have at this event? This is basically what this category is trying to achieve. Segregation and recycling are further down the waste minimisation pyramid. The idea is generally to seriously lessen the amount of waste we as a community produce. Your marks are already very high in this category and evidence of practical steps taken to prevent or reduce waste by householders, businesses, or schools should be provided next year. Water harvesting is good practice. Thank you for the photographs of the neatly sited water butts. The clothes bank at the GAA centre is mentioned under Tidiness and Litter but in fact it is a recycling program.

Have you looked at the Tidy Towns publication in relation to Sustainable Waste and Resource management - the updated version sent to you as an updated Handbook extract? We strongly suggest that you choose some ideas 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 seriously reduce waste produced across your community. You could as a community - for example - get involved in the Green Homes Programme. And the Green Schools programme is an asset to any village. Your committee member who is attending the biodiversity course organised by the Environmental section of Longford County Council will probably pick up some hints under this heading of sustainable waste and resource management in the biodiversity programme.

Tidiness and Litter Control / Slachtmhairéacht agus Rialú Bruscair:

If there is one project which we would respectfully suggest that you concentrate upon for 2016 it is the upgrading of the GAA property – building and pitch area from a visual amenity point of view. The entire site - seen as a whole - looks quite untidy, and this is unfortunate given its very strategic location at a hugely important junction visible on all sides. As already stated we do not necessarily think the removal of the house and landscaping of the site has in any way increased the visual value of this village corner at present. Admittedly the trees that were removed were evergreen and not deciduous and therefore not particularly valuable from a wildlife point of view. Was it necessary

to take them all away? The Lotto signage is unsightly and strident. The clubhouse itself requires repainting. The back of the stands - which are very visible on the school approach road - also are in need of repainting. As one approaches the pitch area from the village one is struck by the number of lighting poles and other poles which look incongruous and untidy given the lovely rural undulating landscape backdrop. We would suggest a complete review of this site from a visual amenity point of view. Opposite the GAA pitch there is a tumbledown red barn with rusty green railings fronting its site.

You do not say how often your dawn litter patrol operates. We quite understand how day tripping visitors can create casual litter and this gives you extra work. Certainly on adjudication day no litter was in evidence. The ban on litter producing foods and drinks in the school is commendable. We wholeheartedly concur with you in relation to not erecting anti litter signage as this can create village clutter, and has not been proven to be utterly effective. The paving stones on your village pump at the Longford approach end of the village require resetting as they are loose in places. We admired the stone setting of the green pump on the Quarry Road. We refer below to the possible painting of field gates on approach roads, but this is even more important within the village itself.

Like you, we would wish to pay tribute to the FAS coordinator, the FAS workers, and schoolchildren who make a very special effort, together with your residents to keep the village tidy and clean. You use the Ashe Hall at present for work equipment storage.

The large generic County Longford village interpretive sign, located in the parking area opposite the pub and church is somewhat faded, as all these generic signs throughout the County are. They are very informative and attractive, but require reprinting/upgrading. We admired the elongated lovely shrub bed. However in the same area the wooden sign board with the GAA notice looked poorly and needs attention. The bring banks were clean and tidy but lacked signage. The terracotta coloured pot on the adjacent seat looked somewhat out of place. Paths were weed free. The floodlights at the sculpture Heber Donn is rusting. The stone breaker machine is rusting – and in its present setting looks somewhat incongruous. A gap in the hedge on the rising laneway from the Quarry is untidily filled.

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

The properties both within the village and on the approach roads look extremely well - even a 'for sale' property. We have already commented on the addition to the built environment that the three new architecturally designed houses contribute. Beside the restored shop front/house on the Longford approach some improvement to the adjacent property – perhaps screening of the farm yard area would be beneficial. You mention acknowledging residents work in keeping the grounds looking well under Tidiness and Litter control, but we credit it here under the residential category. A change of ownership to a centre village house and the new residential use for the Garda station contribute to the general built environment upgrading. You have no housing estates. We particularly admired the well presented house and garden on the left-hand side as one approaches the junction from the school.

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

The Longford approach road is particularly attractive with its lovely mature trees and hedging. It gives a great first impression of the village. Your Tidy Towns sign is simply and appropriately located on this approach. The blue village sign on the Longford approach road is very nicely set between a hedge, timber fence, and simple stone surrounded flower bed. The wooden railings on this approach road - which last year's adjudicator said were in need of repair - have been repaired. We observed a small amount of hedge cutting beyond the bridge (beyond the blue village sign) on this approach road.

Well done to Longford County Council on surfacing the approach road from the Longford side. We note your bullet point in relation to splayed traffic signs on the minor approach road. The road sweeper continues to do a good job.

On a minor side road we admired the old junction sign 'bothar ar chlé.' Well done on conserving this 'road furniture' item. The directional cemetery sign was slightly covered with branches. It would be good if you could paint this directional sign upright pole in the traditional black and white colours. Remember that black and white sleeving can be obtained to save maintenance. The flowers including marigolds at the base of this sign in the stone bed looked really well. We note that your biodiversity/horticultural/landscape adviser suggested that you place the elliptical village sign behind the vegetation in the shrub area.

The remedial works to prevent flash flooding on the Quarry approach/Ballyreevagh Road have caused you quite an amount of temporary displacement and additional work. However in the longer term you will probably be happy with the outcome. It will take time to get this area back to its mature self. But you have already commenced work eagerly on its rehabilitation. Thank you for the photographs of the works and of the work being carried out. However by next year's adjudication hopefully things will settle back to normal. We do not deduct any marks for necessary temporary disruption during roadworks.

We would strongly suggest that you consider painting field gates within the village and on approach roads in a uniform colour - perhaps the blue already in use within the village. Another suggestion to improve the approaches would be to paint all the upright poles of the traffic signs like the sign for the left junction sign - the 50 K pH on the Longford approach. The 50 K pH was turned the wrong way on the road leading in from the left to the Longford Road adjacent to the sculpture.

Road markings at the school need renewal. On the Quarry road approach we still notice graffiti inside the ruined house beside a well presented house and gardens. This is quite visible to the visitor approaching from the Ballyreevagh side. Surfacing of some setbacks as well as some trimming and weeding on the approach to the 50 K pH on the same approach road would be desirable. The speed limit signs here also would benefit from painting - particularly with the striped black and white effect used elsewhere. The community alert sign here is in need of cleaning. Is there a plan to paint the new crash barrier in appropriate traffic safety colours?

Concluding Remarks:

Newtowncashel has, over the years, greatly achieved in this competition. We enjoyed our visit to your lovely village and we look forward to following your progress in the years to come. Go n-éirí libh!