

Tidy Towns Competition 2015

Adjudication Report

Centre: **Newtownforbes** Ref: **910**
County: **Longford** Mark: **266**
Category: **B** Date(s): **27/06/2015**

	Maximum Mark	Mark Awarded 2014	Mark Awarded 2015
Community Involvement & Planning	60	41	42
Built Environment and Streetscape	50	40	42
Landscaping and Open Spaces	50	35	36
Wildlife, Habitats and Natural Amenities	50	18	18
Sustainable Waste and Resource Management	50	12	13
Tidiness and Litter Control	90	51	52
Residential Streets & Housing Areas	50	30	31
Approach Roads, Streets & Lanes	50	31	32
TOTAL MARK	450	258	266

Community Involvement & Planning / Rannpháirtíocht an Phobail & Pleanáil:

Ta Fáilte romhat An Lios Breac! Welcome Newtownforbes to the Super Valu 2015 National Tidy Towns competition. You have 12 active members which is a very good representation from the community. You also get help from some others on certain projects. You meet very regularly during the summer season. You seem to get your work done in an organised fashion, as you seem to have a reasonable time limit on the meetings. During the winter season you hold your own meetings, but you also find time during this quieter period to meet with agencies such as the local authority in relation to projects on which you are cooperating. You are assisted by official and local agencies/bodies and businesses. You have developed a good working relationship with your local authority and this is beneficial to both of you. The range of expertise available at the local authority nowadays often surprises communities, and staff are only too eager to help you move forward in improving the county. Your local business community appear to be particularly helpful. Your communication methods are both modern and traditional. In this way you reach out to a broad age group in the community. We hope that you also circulate minority churches in your area. You have a person assigned to the Green Schools programme from your membership. It is a wonderful achievement for the school and for the village to be about to receive a fifth Green Flag. We are delighted to know that the community benefits through developing a sense of pride in the village through participating in their competition. We also admired your sense of developing a community and making people feel that they belong to the village and community. You see many tangible benefits, as well as employment benefits and the development of a 'can-do' attitude from entering the competition. These are all worthwhile outcomes. Well done!

The only criticism we would make of your entry and the backup material is that it was rather unwieldy and far too detailed. Can you summarise some of the support material next year? It would be also useful to bind support material separately to the entry form and attach a table of contents (which should be laid out under the various category headings). Your submission was loose and confusing to go through. Furthermore you submitted some material after the closing date. Any material which we need to adjudicate on should be contained only in the entry form and supporting material sent before the closing date. We received this later information, but do not need updating beyond the closing date, as we can only consider projects as they stand at the closing date and not beyond. We know you mean well in updating us beyond the closing date. But we would advise you against this in future.

Three plans were enclosed. One was your 'Action Plan'- which is in fact your Tidy Towns plan. This was set out under the various competition category headings and was very clear as a result. The second plan was the FÁS/TÚS action plan. Dates were not filled in in this plan. In any event it is not necessary for us to peruse this plan, as it should be integrated into your own plan - so there is no need to send it to us again next year. Finally a third plan called your Village Enhancement Plan 2014 to 2018 was also enclosed. The timescale for this was different to your

Action/Tidy Towns Plan, and it concentrates on a select number of projects. For the purposes of this competition you should integrate this plan into the important Tidy Towns plan itself - which you call your Action Plan. In fact the projects are common to both. Furthermore it is unnecessary for us to know about the detail of meetings with your local authority. Detailed drawings are also unnecessary in relation to any projects which you propose. Thank you however for your dated media cuttings. And we certainly don't need to have cognisance of your snag list for any projects! Thank you for the 'before' and 'after' photographs. These are very useful for the adjudicator. Thank you also for your clear map although it was rather difficult to relate map numbers to the entry form in places. The projects should be numbered sequentially through the form - not started again in different categories.

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

The new footpaths are located in places where there are important parts of your built heritage. Therefore they set off these parts of your built heritage to best advantage. The same is true of your work on the environs of the Catholic Church. Both these projects might be considered under Landscaping and the Roads categories were it not for their strategic location in relation to important parts of your built heritage. St. Mary's Catholic Church looked very well in its new hard and soft landscaped setting. We admired the stonework and particularly the carved heads around the door archway. We would like to have known more about their provenance.

The new village information board draws attention to the built heritage of your village. Raising awareness of this heritage will lead to more public awareness and hopefully concern for the buildings and streetscape. Your heritage walk on an annual basis is another way of encouraging interest in your built environment. The same is true of the open afternoons at your Church of Ireland, St. Paul's church. We note that you do not take credit for this latter open afternoon project but you support it by providing photographic assistance. St. Paul's Church of Ireland was very well presented. It has excellent railings. We note your preparatory work in relation to the cemetery. We are glad that you are taking professional advice on all aspects of work there. The red two-storey premises across the road with the huge gable hoarding is in need of some attention. Some litter bins in this area need repainting. We thought that the entrance to the estate looked well on adjudication day, and we admired the estate houses with their traditional railings on the Dublin side of the estate entrance. The school was well presented with good railings. The signage on the Irish Organic Farmers shop front should be repainted. We admired the beautifully presented white single-storey house with the lovely yellow door at the Dublin road end of Main Street. An unusual gate beside a cream and green single story house across the road with a 'no parking' sign attached was admired. The village pump near Clonguish Court was resplendent with a simple cleanly painted surrounding wall and a lovely floral display in a container which matched the wall extremely well.

Landscaping and Open Spaces / Tírdhreachú agus Spásanna Oscailte:

We admired the new shrub and flower bed at St Mary's. The planters at the door of the church were colourful and welcoming. Likewise we note your work at the entrance to the demesne. The planting of 70 trees at the GAA complex is to be commended but we feel that there is more to be done here. Please see our comments under Approach Roads. We commend you for your care of the trees on Main Street. The loss of two small evergreen trees is a minor issue - particularly as evergreen trees are not particularly wildlife - friendly. You carry out much maintenance work on the flower beds, and containers. Well done on removing the flowers which compete with the trees for sustenance. Flower troughs on the Sligo road have been repainted. In general you have taken on board many of last year's adjudicator's recommendations under this category heading. You have a continual programme of maintenance throughout the already landscaped areas. You have also added additional planting which you show on your map, and which we noted on our visit. Well done on all this time-consuming work. Each area you plant involves further maintenance and vigilance, but contributes to your overall good effect. With regard to hanging baskets - we would say that they are high maintenance; the time involved in watering them being better spent dealing with sustainable planting and landscaping. They also are not conservative of water.

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

The biodiversity fifth Green Flag gained knowledge which the school has acquired will be useful to you - the Tidy Towns group. The children were involved in surveys in relation to birdlife in your village. We hope that this information can be expanded and built upon and eventually that it can be presented to the community. The farm manager at Castleforbes estate keeps you posted with regard to wildlife on the estate. It is good news indeed that the red squirrel is back in abundance. We are glad to hear that the demesne is home to whooper swans. We are not so sure about the mink.

We look forward to hearing about your work with the NPWS wildlife ranger during the coming year. Together with the County Heritage Officer this person could be of great encouragement and advice to you in relation to investigating your habitats and advising you professionally as to how to go about surveying, analysing and presenting data discovered in a professional fashion. You might also 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.

Is public access available to Lough Forbes? Having a Special Area of Conservation so close to the village is certainly an asset. Your bog area is also of great importance. You have many resources on which to draw in relation to moving forward in this category heading. We noticed an amount of weed killer use along near the entrance to the sewage works. With regard to chemical weed killing - which you tell us you use under the Tidiness category - we would encourage you to desist as much as possible from weed spraying. Given the linear size of your village - manual weeding is probably difficult, but there are non chemical methods of weed control which we are sure your

County Heritage Officer could discuss with you. Try to keep the chemical spraying to a minimum as it is injurious to the environment. We observed some hedge trimming on 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. We noted a bird feeder at the school and the four Green Flags.

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

Your Green Flag students are busily working on sustainable waste and resource management. Have you tried to organise any event where they can present their new-found knowledge to the broader community? They have carried out a small survey on how the community deals with waste and water conservation. We hope that the edible eatery box will be a success, and that you can expand on this in years to come. We see that you have referred to the Tidy Towns publication in relation to Sustainable Waste and Resource Management - perhaps the community might like to get involved in something like the 'Food Waste Challenge'. You could get some of the community to survey how much food they waste in a week! Check out the www.foodwaste.ie for guidance. Have you invited the County Environmental Awareness Officer to visit your community, and perhaps organise an information day on sustainable waste and resource management? How do you communicate good practice in this area to the community? Have your businesses come on-board with any particular input in relation to this category? Have you considered conducting any audit of the businesses in relation to even basic waste prevention?

Tidiness and Litter Control / Slachtmhaireacht agus Rialú Bruscair:

We noted the paint work on the front wall of the vacant bungalow at the upper end of Main Street. It looked well. The survey of dumping along the bog road and the bog track was timely as you found that there was a lot of old domestic rubbish and other litter in this area. Well done on putting together 100 photographs of your findings for the local authority. We note that you have invited the litter warden to attend the site. The local authority acted very quickly in relation to other reports of illegal dumping on the Ballinalee road. The message will get around that you are vigilant in relation to illegal dumping, and perhaps people will be less inclined to destroy your environment. Well done to the FÁS employee who carries out the daily litter picks. The TÚS workers carry out a weekly pick on the Sligo road. This is a difficult task on such a busy main road. Do they get assistance from the local authority? We were happy that there were few weeds on adjudication day. We are glad to hear that you use manual weed removal methods during the summer work period. Please note our comments under Wildlife.

You are doing your best to keep the bring banks clean and presentable, and we know how difficult that can be when people leave rubbish behind. However on adjudication day we noticed that the signage was bent. The immediate area is fairly featureless, and there is no pull -in except on the narrow hard shoulder. There are no directional signs for the bring bank at the junction leading to the site. The only sign at this point was for the physiotherapy clinic. Other work which you have completed under this category included the removal of fallen trees and the removal of some bollards, washing of street furniture and signs, road sweeping and the removal of fly posting. Thank you for the photographs of the recent painting projects. You certainly have been busy keeping your village tidy and litter free during the past year. We wondered if you took part in the national Spring Clean day. There were two large advertising hoardings just around the corner from the school on the left-hand side as one approached the village (just before the N4 green sign) Circus fly posting was observed near Castle Crescent on a wooden pole.

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

Many of your estates have their own residents associations and you keep in touch with them. Local authority estates such as receive funding from the local authority.

The beech hedge which you planted at the Castle Crescent apartment block is another good project carried out this year. You are concerned about vandalism. We note your pruning of trees at Lisbrack Close (you mention this pruning under Landscaping) but we also mention it here - as is relevant to both. The boulder sign in the lovely shrub bed at this estate was much admired

Corry Park was well presented except for a few boundary walls. We admired the display of lupins at number 23. It is a pity that so many satellite dishes were in evidence - some being rusty. Castle Court and Mahon Avenue were sylvan and a credit to the owners. These estates have been well absorbed into the natural landscaping which has been augmented by estate landscaping. Corryline Close and Castle Court cul-de-sac were neat, the former a green oasis benefiting from the lovely estate boundary wall in stone and the magnificent backdrop of mature trees. Nonetheless the property owners along here have done their bit to add excellent planting. Meadow Court was also verdant. Some white fencing at either end of the estate needs attention, but the estate is treed and secluded from the adjacent busy road.

Asked Caislean Breac despite the abandoned building residents are to be can graduated on the upkeep of the estate Although you mention your proposals in relation to the wall at Caislean Breac under Built Environment we credit it here under the appropriate category. We note that some progress has been made here. Castle Park has established shrubbery at the entrance which looked very well. The estate is very neat, but perhaps could benefit from more planting on the open space.

Clonguish Court had a nice sign and planting at the entrance. We saw some litter here on the green area and in the parking lots in front. We admired the trees - and the clover and daisies on the open space. Some small amount of graffiti on a pole at the end, together with a broken fence and further graffiti on the ESB substation, as well as some weedy footpaths - and manholes protruding from an unfinished road surface generally took from the estate. Such unfinished development here is of concern to you.

There was a bland boundary wall at Woodview. There were a good number of planters and hanging basket brackets empty. The empty hanging basket brackets should be removed but the planters should be planted.

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

The Longford/Dublin road is a very fast stretch of road and we realise that it must be very difficult for you to carry out any work on this road due to the amount of heavy traffic and fast traffic using it. The speed limit signs at 60 and 50 KPH have the village name included. The blue village sign itself is nicely landscaped.

On the school road approach there is a lovely sign showing a squirrel as one leaves the village saying 'Slán'. There is a large 'slimming world' sign banner on a fence which is somewhat out of place in this rural approach.. On this site there is an extremely large house which appears to include a physiotherapy function. Although just outside the speed limit Nolan Motors was very well landscaped and also had a very neatly laid out parking area. This gives a very good first impression on arriving at Newtownforbes. Less so was the shared sign we saw in the town for the business. Could a directional sign be provided on a traffic pole instead? We noticed some hedge trimming on the approach to the speed limit on this approach road. Please see our comments above under Wildlife. A junction sign near an old stone splayed access was partly obscured by vegetation and was also dirty. We noticed a lot of laurel/evergreen planting on private property. We would encourage you to spread the information that deciduous/native planting is friendlier to wildlife. In the hedges we admired the seasonal wild roses and honeysuckle which looked very well. In general this is a lovely treed approach to the village. We noticed a planning notice pinned to a tree which is poor practice. Field gates should be painted along all approach roads preferably in a uniform colour. A very amateurish large advertising sign for a family day opposite the GAA entrance looked poorly. The GAA site is very lacking in any landscaping or screening from the public road and looks very bare. The metal GAA sign needs paint and the site itself would benefit from surfacing/landscaping/markings out of the car park. Whereas we appreciate your tree planting here - more trees should be planted inside the boundary. The second entrance to the GAA pitch has two rusty barriers.

The Sligo approach has beautiful parkland and immediate entry to good countryside. The approach provides views inwards towards the 'eye-catcher' tower of the old convent. We admired the lovely red field gate beside the village sign. There was a very clean boundary wall to a single-storey bungalow on the left-hand side despite the heavy traffic passing this boundary. Signage in this area was very clean and the approaches were well trimmed. We loved the planted area along the Sligo road just before the right-hand turn into the village. The red seating here in the landscaped green areas with semi mature trees looked very well. At very large advertising notice just beyond this point competed with another lovely raised stone bed shrubbery for attention. However, we wondered who would risk the heavy traffic to come to sit in this area as there appeared to be no footpath leading to the seating area.

On the approach by Castlepark we admired an old field gate painted in red. Once again there was a nice 'slán' sign here - and a little further out a beautiful unspoilt railway bridge and surrounding unspoilt area - together with some lovely meadowsweet in the hedge. Some hedge trimming was observed. The surface of the road at the pedestrian traffic light is very poor

At the cemetery road /Railway Court approach - again we would recommend the painting of field gates. We noticed a sign for cemetery Sunday on 27th June. A lot of hedge trimming had taken place on this approach - probably due to this event. There was only one 60 KPH speed limit sign on this approach. We admired a red painted gate and some nice shrubbery. Grass needed cutting around the railway bridge and a farm complex needed screening. A garage door on the building on the town side would benefit from painting. Hedges were cut by the side of the footpath along this approach, but the footpath had not yet been swept. We observed another unusual gate and a leaning lamp post. There is a very poor surface on this connecting road. The site at the entry to Cluain Dara might be screened and the grass margin weeded.

Some at least of your traffic management plan proposals were taken on board by the local authority. Although you mention this under Built Environment we credit it here.

Concluding Remarks:

Newtownforbes is an interesting village with a hardworking and diligent community. We enjoyed our visit to your village and would like to be there to see the estate and the Lough at another time. We wish you well for the future. Go n-eirí libh!

