

Tidy Towns Competition 2015

Adjudication Report

Centre: **Blackrock** Ref: **460**
County: **Louth** Mark: **312**
Category: **D** Date(s): **24/06/2015**

	Maximum Mark	Mark Awarded 2014	Mark Awarded 2015
Community Involvement & Planning	60	53	53
Built Environment and Streetscape	50	35	36
Landscaping and Open Spaces	50	44	45
Wildlife, Habitats and Natural Amenities	50	38	38
Sustainable Waste and Resource Management	50	16	17
Tidiness and Litter Control	90	61	61
Residential Streets & Housing Areas	50	30	31
Approach Roads, Streets & Lanes	50	31	31
TOTAL MARK	450	308	312

Community Involvement & Planning / Rannpháirtíocht an Phobail & Pleanáil:

Blackrock Na Creagacha Dubha is welcomed to the 2015 Supervalu Tidy Towns Competition.

Thank you for the comprehensively completed entry form and the supplementary material that supported your application.

This support material included a copy of the actual 2012 – 2015 Tidy Towns Plan, Evaluation Report September 2014 and a 2015 update working document based on the original 3 year plan.

It would have been sufficient just to include the 2015 update with your actual entry form.

Often less is more and all that this adjudicator required was an update on progress since last year.

That said the adjudication was done in a fair and impartial manner.

Thank you also for the very detailed map which included all the relevant places to be visited and this made the task of the adjudicator that little bit less onerous.

Your comments under “Response to Tidy Towns Adjudication 2014” have been noted and will be dealt with, where relevant, under sections mentioned.

The adjudicator would like to point out at this juncture that it is not his remit to comment on issues such as “when compared to other towns and villages in County Louth” maybe it could be dealt with via the Louth Tidy Towns Together forum.

Given that Louth Tidy Towns Together has a strong involvement with many centres in the county it’s inevitable that different villages and towns know what the other is doing!

Quite a lot of the entry forms have a “cloned” same template format – with different inputs for each centre.

The committee structure is ideal for a centre like Blackrock and it’s very obvious that the main committee has been able to mobilise the resources available to them in a very effective manner.

While the legal requirements for maintaining a limited company can be quite demanding it does give you an advantage when it comes to seeking certain forms of financial support and other resources.

Just wondering if the position of executive manager is a paid one or part of a TUS scheme?

The vast majority of tidy towns committees would probably not have this type of structure so well done in being able to operate under this mechanism

Louth County Council would naturally be supportive of you given that the village/town would be considered the premier seaside town in the County.

Both TUS and CE Scheme provide ongoing resources to carry out ongoing maintenance and other duties and you have very much recognised this in your application.

No village or town would progress without the support of the greater local community and both businesses and private residents have given you their backing.

The methods of communication outlined are on par with other high performance centres in the competition.

The Village has an excellent website but it needs to be updated at least every second day.

The adjudicator was very impressed with your hands on involvement with the local school and it is noted that you

often get support from the 3rd level institutions in Dundalk.

Well done on the production of the Visitor Information Leaflet and also for the very innovative Voluntary Pledge Programme.

Overall a very good performance in this category and on par with last year.

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

The adjudicator has taken on board your comments re cross referencing with projects that have been undertaken under Landscaping and Open Spaces.

Many of the tasks under this category are tabulated clearly in the work plan of 2015 with committee members assigned to each task.

In a few instances it doesn't hold back as to what the owners of issue related properties need to do!

First off congratulations to the owners of the new MACE shop on main street it shows that there is more than a little confidence coming back to local communities and one wishes them well for the future.

It also eliminated one less headache for the committee.

There are many old buildings of historical significance and one of these was of particular interest to this adjudicator because of link to the past. The AOH Hall on Cockle Hill Road seems to be the subject of a civil dispute which is a pity as it could be a resource for the community.

Whilst in this particular area memento should be made of KAM Stores, probably outside the adjudication boundary, but the place was well presented and the staff very helpful.

Two very fine Victorian houses were noted on the Cockle Hill exit? These were getting a little worse for wear with the low sized boundary wall that houses the wrought iron railing in bad need of repair.

I'm sure that the committee has audited the number of stressed properties in the village and will approach the owners to see if any remedial action can be taken.

Dereliction is no bigger problem in Blackrock than any other similar sized busy village; the positive here is that the problem is being monitored vigilantly.

Since last year quite an amount of basic maintenance has taken place in the village and the adjudicator observed this on his adjudication walk about.

A traditional coat of paint more than often suffices and its transformational effect can be striking.

The Following commercial premises appealed for a variety of reasons The Clermont Arms a striking premises in the centre of Blackrock which seems to have been recently painted, Harrisons Lounge Bar which looks like as if it has changed hands, Blackrock Wok a very well maintained frontage complete with colourful window boxes, The Bayview Tavern, The Accua Cafe, BHK Credit Union and Belles Tearooms who serve a nice lunch.

Thank you for the note on the Sundial and just a comment to say that all this area was extremely well maintained and both the Blackrock Tidy Towns Flag/Symbol and Van were in situated in prominent positions.

The Louth Field Name Project has stirred communities into action and the gate silhouettes in Blackrock were novel. All the heritage and directional signage was clean and clearly visible.

You are wished well in your quest to campaign for retention of Louth Wall Banks which are unique to Louth.

Unfortunately the adjudicator did not get to Hagerstown Graveyard but well done on winning the top award in its category in Louth Looking Good Competition.

Landscaping and Open Spaces / Tírdhreachú agus Spásanna Oscailte:

There were 18 action items listed in this category in your entry form some were of ongoing maintenance which would be standard to any other centre.

Where Blackrock does well is that it ensures that the work earmarked for ongoing maintenance gets done.

It is important that this is one of the key elements of good landscaping policy ie being able to maintain what you have in place to a good level of presentation.

There are quite a number of very fine short term and long term planting arrangements in the village core area and on the outskirts most were extremely well looked after.

On the day in question some watering of hardy annuals was being done by one individual.

Well done to the committee for leveraging the resources either through the County Council or Social employment Scheme.

Ongoing work was taking place in Blackrock Park on the day of adjudication.

€3,000 is hefty enough to provide a sensory garden which was in the throes of completion.

Not many other communities would be able to fund such an undertaking.

The combination of wall boxes with colourful geraniums on the pier wall, extremely well maintained permanent stone beds, stone signs such as AN Ghaoth Anoir Bionn si Tirim and street furniture all gave a wonderful effect in the centre of the village.

The Blackrock in Bloom summer programme has had the desired effect as the adjudicator heard some Northern visitors commenting on the wonderful colour in the village

Another novel and excellent idea was the rucksack bags filled with greenery and colour at the excellent Scoil Naisiunta.

Another landscaping feature that took this adjudicator's eye was the permanent bed at the Failte stone near McGuigans Rock.

It would be remiss to leave this section without mentioning the variety and quality of private homestead gardens in the outskirts of the village.

Overall the standard was very good and it merits an increase of one mark to add to the already high mark received last year.

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

Well done on jointly hosting the Louth Clean Coast as it is very important that everything is done to bring to light issues such as the deposition of algae that affect the beaches and the quality of experience for the summer visitor. You are to be complemented also on the upgrading of the River Fane estuary walk another practical example of improving and making accessible natural amenities in your area.

Getting schools involved in the joint Beach Activity Day in conjunction with Louth County Council is right on track with education element of this category as young pupils will be made aware of the ecology of the sea and the foreshore.

Who knows it might trigger off an idea in some group of young students to come up with a related project for next year's competition.

Last year both the Hamilton Marshes and the Oscar Merne Bird Hide were mentioned in the adjudicator's report and your involvement is noted.

The provision of the information leaflet which amongst other things contains a piece on the importance of the Blackrock Seashore is a welcome addition for both locals and visitors alike.

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

Continuation of the Green Home programme is welcome and it's good to note that there has been an increase albeit modest to the present number of 107 participants.

Quite a number of projects listed are a continuation of what was in place in 2014 and some are more related to waste management/minimisation rather than prevention.

To be honest Fix Factories and Tyre Health Checks have become fairly prevalent over the last few years.

Any of us that drive cars should be aware of the need for regular tyre checks to ensure tyre longevity, road safety and fuel consumption savings.

The adjudicator was more supportive of the Better Energy initiative and the need for participation in the County Energy Efficiency Initiative.

When promoting Sustainable Living in Blackrock do encourage prevention of waste as much as waste minimisation. The EPA website espouses that waste prevention be preferred to any waste management/minimisation option.

For instance the packaging industry under the auspices of Repak has a prevent and save programme and its worth visiting that site to get an idea on the concept of waste prevention.

This category has caused confusion in its past format and was revamped accordingly to reflect the importance of the production of less waste.

The Committee has actively been involved in projects that while not specifically waste prevention driven at least contributes greatly to the management of waste.

Tidiness and Litter Control / Slachtmhaireacht agus Rialú Bruscair:

The village got a comparatively high mark last year and this year the overall standard of litter control and tidiness was very good.

A continuation of what you are doing as a committee has led to this.

A few pockets of litter were observed during the adjudication walk about but nothing as to cause alarm

The installation of six new litter bins at well appointed areas helped in this respect and the message of good litter control is constantly with you as you traverse the village.

Like every seaside village or town there's bound to be times when bins are full and litter is scattered but overall the message that Blackrock does not tolerate litter is to the forefront.

You are also fortunate to have the support of local businesses via the Pledge Programme and Louth County Council give priority treatment when it comes to litter collection in Blackrock.

Dog fouling has become an issue in most places but again you have tackled it as best as one can and the positive results will follow on

The standard of tidiness in the core area of the village was very good; no clutter on footpaths which is unusual for seaside resorts and the adjudicator took an elongated photograph of the main street as evidence.

On the outskirts the shop area on Sandy Lane up to the national school was a little messy and untidy by Blackrock standards.

Both directional and finger post signs were visible well appointed and clean and all the various biodiversity and historical information panels were readable and well looked after.

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

All the residential areas in the Coast Road, Cockle Hill, Sandy Lane Rock Road and Wallace Road catchment were visited and the vast majority of homesteads were presented to very high standard.

There are many stand alone rather expensive looking properties on Wallace's Road and many had some fine mature gardens.

St Furseys Terrace is a credit to its residences and the new road surface helped immeasurably, the green area was maintained well but the name sign at the entrance was slightly obscured by a shrub.

Clermont Manor, Carrig Aird, The Cottages, Rockville and Sandfield Gardens were other residential areas that took the eye of the adjudicator.

One must not forget the individual private homesteads that were splendidly looked after within the village itself.

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

The adjudicator is not being nitpicky but when you state "we cut all the grass verges" who actually does the cutting? This I would have thought is standard maintenance provided by Louth County Council at least where I reside the public space grass cutting is done by the local council.

It may be better to state that you liaised with Louth County Council on the grass cutting requirements if that is what took place.

Similarly with the installation of kerbing at a public junction of Seafield Road and Rock Roa, one would assume that this would be the responsibility of the Council also.

If this is not the case I stand corrected and am suitably chastened.

Overall the standard was good and on par with last year with a few blemishes like messy back areas and broken fencing on the outskirts.

Concluding Remarks:

It's been a few years since the adjudicator visited Blackrock and one could not but be impressed with the positive changes that have taken place in the interim. You have a very strong committee structure, possibly the envy of other centres, and your work to date has paid dividends.