

Tidy Towns Competition 2015

Adjudication Report

Centre: **Knockbridge** Ref: **497**
County: **Louth** Mark: **311**
Category: **B** Date(s): **23/06/2015**

	Maximum Mark	Mark Awarded 2014	Mark Awarded 2015
Community Involvement & Planning	60	53	53
Built Environment and Streetscape	50	46	46
Landscaping and Open Spaces	50	40	40
Wildlife, Habitats and Natural Amenities	50	42	42
Sustainable Waste and Resource Management	50	14	15
Tidiness and Litter Control	90	52	52
Residential Streets & Housing Areas	50	30	30
Approach Roads, Streets & Lanes	50	32	33
TOTAL MARK	450	309	311

Community Involvement & Planning / Rannpháirtíocht an Phobail & Pleanáil:

Thank you kindly for the very well prepared application/entry form, plus the supplementary material, including the Village Heritage and Tourism Strategy by New Ground Ltd, in support of the application.

Thanks also for the complimentary tokens to Stephenstown Pond Project which is an exceptional amenity and attraction adjacent to the village; unfortunately the website wasn't up to date as its homepage, when I opened it, referred to an event for Friday 6th June 2014!

Websites and other forms social media are wonderful tools of communication but need to be constantly up dated to be effective.

The volume of support material was rather large and to be honest, while one appreciates the effort put into preparing the full package, what was submitted in the actual application form was more than sufficient. Less is often more.

The adjudicator also noted that there was more than a "resemblance" in format with other Louth applicants! Similar layout different information.

Louth Tidy Towns Together has championed the cause of quite a number of the County's entrants has created a little local competitiveness – all healthy one presumes.

The adjudicator did the adjudication in a fair and impartial manner within the guidelines and tried to reflect this within a two page document which is the norm for final reports.

The map supplied this year was just sufficient for the purpose it was meant for that of identifying relevant places within the village but certainly not in the same category as the rest of the material supplied.

For instance the "jewel in the crown" and economic driver for the village and the tidy towns committee was not identified specifically on the map.

It would be worth considering producing a nice village stand alone graphic art type map with appropriate legends that would complement the Stephenstown promotional literature

The Knockbridge Tidy Towns Website is an attractive introduction medium and there must be Latin enthusiast amongst the committee as the adjudicator was impressed with the citation on the homepage.

The committee has succeeded admirably in building up a strong network of contacts of agencies and community organisations that have been supportive of its efforts to promote the village and to get actual work done where relevant.

Good to note that you have strong relationship with both young and older through the likes of Foroige and the local Men's Shed.

Well done on the link with the Ulster Scots Agency and the novel project that evolved from that connection.

Old and new methods of conveying the work and activities of Knockbridge Tidy Towns work well in tandem but do bear in mind as stated elsewhere that social media is only effective when micro managed.

Good to note that you have an excellent bond with the National School and this is to be commended as it will instil a pride of place that hopefully will stay with the school children right into adolescence and adulthood.

As regards the disappointment of losing silver medal status it isn't the place of this adjudicator to comment except to say that you are wished well in your quest to regain or improve on your medal standing.

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

The introductory statement in relation to the consideration given to your input or view on any future village developments is a very important one.

This adjudicator has seen too many inappropriate and unsuitably large housing developments in small villages that were within comparative easy reach of larger centres of population.

The adjudicator is glad to see that plans are afoot to upgrade McNamee's Pub which is in the most focal point of the Village.

Well done to the owners of the take away for upgrading their premises.

This is a very fine building and it would be great to see just revitalised keeping the original name sign in English agus as Gaeilge.

The other building that has a historical significance to the village The Wolfe Tone Hall has been enhanced with hanging baskets and the frontage has been tidied up since the adjudicator last visited.

The hall is now of practical use housing a local enterprise so well done to the person that has set this business.

Both the RC Church and Scoil Naisiunta Naomh Mhuire were presented to a very high standard and credit is due those responsible for their up whether it be volunteer workers or personnel engaged in a TUS or CE Scheme.

Similarly the adjoining graveyard was nice and tidy.

Just one little negative there a water gully in the middle of the car park of the school/community hall that just needs to be repaired as one could trip over which happened to this adjudicator who may not have been watching where he was going.

The information in the Community Notice board was a little out of date (2013 Tidy Towns Report and 2010 Louth Awards photos) and a bit untidy.

A couple of nice features that appealed to this adjudicator were The Ballybarack Ogham Stone and the remnant depictions of the village forge both in central areas of the village.

The old St Bride Clubhouse in the centre of the village looks as if it has been repainted in the last year and looked very well and obviously is used as a private dwelling or for community activities.

Pairc An Chuinnigh was in top class condition and juvenile training was in full flow, well done to the members of St Brides GAA Club

The adjudicator is very much aware that you have been involved in helping to get other complementary initiatives done within the village proper under this section but there were some basics that need to be improved upon, some of which have already been alluded to.

Given that Knockbridge has already attained a high mark in this category the mark will remain the same as last year.

Landscaping and Open Spaces / Tírdhreachú agus Spásanna Oscailte:

The standard of landscaping and planting arrangements both public, within private gardens and at the front of commercial premises was very good

Replacing of trees where necessary, upgrading shrub beds that have become over crowded, planting for all season effectiveness, maintenance of green areas and annual beds is what good landscape management is about.

It takes effort and more than a little knowledge to achieve the good standard that was observed by the adjudicator and within your committee you must have people with the knowledge and interest to carry out this work.

The seasonal propagation programme that you engage in provides you with healthy stock for ongoing work and indeed in the long term this is very much a cost saver.

Some very nice public arrangements were noted in the village proper particularly at the established Lisheen Park where the mix of lavender, eunymous and what looked like campanula coupled with the back drop of mature trees. Some very nice touches at various parts of the village were noted including the wildflower patch at the unoccupied house on the Dundalk exit.

As you rightly state there were some very high impact planting arrangements to be seen at the various entrances into the village and these gave an inviting welcome to Knockbridge.

There are a few negatives to report on as well and these need to be addressed just to keep in line with what is already in place.

The small stone beds as one enters Cloonanna needed to be refreshed and filled with low maintenance colourful annuals.

The area at Drummond Gates is a little bereft of colour and this is an impactful part of the village.

The Back Lane into Lisheen Park could probably benefit from a few colourful or mixed half barrels.

The tubs on the bridge as one enters from Louth Village are ideally placed and are very colourful but further in the foliage on the stone wall has been damaged by something or other as it looks in a very burned state.

The shrub bed on the right hand side in the same area looks as if has also been damaged as well, as the existing shrubs seemed to have died.

The adjudicator has taken into account all the positives that are listed in your entry form under this category including the new sensory garden in Stephenstown Pond!

The areas referred to in the previous sentences are part of the village boundary and do need attention prior to next year's competition.

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

Practical measures as you outlined in your entry form are the key to good promotion and preservation of various species of wildlife.

You're very fortunate to have Stephenstown Pond within reasonable distance of the Village as it gives you an ideal location to engage in so many wildlife, flora and fauna projects.

The majority of centres in the country would not have an amenity of such standing available to them and credit to the Mid Louth Employment Scheme, to whom you have given due recognition to for managing this facility so well. As stated in a previous section the amenity, which also has an indigenous enterprise and conference centre, is the economic driver for the community hence any new measures would be seen as added attractions for day visitors and school tours.

St Marys National School is wished well in its quest to add to its green flag.

One of the two storey insect hotels was visited.

Maybe prior to next years competition the school in conjunction with the committee and the Louth County Wildlife Ranger might provide an information document of what all the materials that make up the insect hotel do for the various forms of insect and larvae that live within.

With the proliferation of such hotels around the country this adjudicator has only once encountered (in County Westmeath) a full explanation of the benefits of an insect hotel.

Also prior to next year's competition the Committee might add a small project in this category that isn't based in Stephenstown Pond.

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

This category is about waste prevention and entrants should be encouraged to move beyond recycling and to take steps to reduce the amount of waste being produced by the community in the first place thus reducing the environmental impact of the waste created.

The change in the marking system last year was to encourage centres to develop more of an awareness of prevention and to submit projects of scale accordingly.

Prior to next year the committee should consider projects that address the need for waste prevention as a contributor to the reduction of the national waste mountain.

www.localprevention.ie for idea generation and the EPA to get an up to date status on the National Strategy for Waste Management are two websites that offer information in the area of waste prevention.

Well done on taking the main role in organising your own Christmas Decoration Competition in conjunction with the school and this is the type of project that is needed encourage and educate children on the aspects of prevention and reuse.

Congratulations to the young student that won the overall Louth County Council School Environmentalist of the year.

The other projects that were submitted were within the ethos of the newly constituted category, some were very simple but innovative.

An increase in marks is warranted primarily because of the education element due to your involvement with Scoil Naisiunta Naomh Mhuire.

Tidiness and Litter Control / Slachtmhaireacht agus Rialú Bruscair:

These two categories have been merged as part of the rationalisation of the Competition for the years ahead and in essence it's only a natural progression.

Congratulations on retaining your gold medal in the County Litter League in 2014 and the initiatives that you have been involved have all helped to create a greater awareness of the negative effect that litter has on a local environment that said there will be always people who don't conform.

Unfortunately as was the case last year there were a few areas that need to be monitored as they could become unnoticed litter spots

The Village Forge had more than a few pieces of litter; also two ice cream tubs were literally discarded outside Daybreak Shop.

The Back lane into Lisheen Park as well as having one or two plastic bottles had weed growth at the wall verge.

The continuous wildflower border on the Dundalk Road had discarded wrappers and one or two plastic bottles.

It might serve a purpose in this part of the village if there was an additional bin provided in the Church Car Park Area or probably better still a strong deterrent sign.

The Louth Doggie Ambassador scheme is a new one on this adjudicator but if its effect in its objective well it's worthwhile

The village was free from clutter and quite tidy.

Some verge weed growth and residue from farm related activities were noted in the outskirts and in one or two places in the village but this is to be expected in a heavily farm related activity area

The signs were all clean and very visible and not distractive to drivers.

Good to report that the committee is very much in tune with the local school in promoting, through competitions, in promoting the concept of both litter control and tidiness to the younger generation.

There are a few vacant properties that could fall into a further state of neglect but I'm sure the committee is well aware of these.

Ballinlough Cottage which is a very attractive property looks as if its vacant hence the area around it has become over grown.

The illegal signage at the hoarding of the Industrial Estate seems to be an annual hoary chestnut but it seems that dialogue has produced some positive responses.

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

The standard in this category was very good and it is obvious the residents of Knockbridge and its environs have a sense of pride of place.

The adjudicator has taken note of the work that has been done in all estates since last year, most of which is standard maintenance coupled with some improvements and it's what one would expect. Lisheen Park, Cloonanna, Lisroland, Newtown Heights, Knocatavey, and Knockattinn Estate were all visited and have benefitted in different ways from your involvement with the residents. On a personal note my favourite would be Knockattin Heights with its superbly maintained green area, well tended shrub beds and the surrounding kerbs painted since last year. One cannot leave this section without commenting on the standard and quality of presentation of some individual homesteads in the village itself, on the out skirts and within the housing areas just mentioned. As an add on to what last year's adjudicator stated it's important that everyone keeps boundary walls and back areas clean and tidy.

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

The work undertaken since last year has been significant, particularly the new names stones and the traffic calming measures on the very busy and "fast" Dundalk entrance. The entrance from Louth Village has been somewhat affected by the already mentioned burnt looking foliage on the banks. Stephenstown is also a very nice entrance with verges cut accordingly and road surface in good condition. The Forkhill Road is also in an acceptable standard. The main junction of the village can get quite busy and the measure put in place should make the movement of traffic far less frenetic.

Concluding Remarks:

It was very pleasant to revisit Knockbridge again and witness the work being done by the Committee and experience the local hospitality. As a committee you have been one of the most consistent high end performers in the competition both in County Louth and the Region. You are wished well in the future.