

Tidy Towns Competition 2015

Adjudication Report

Centre: **Castleblayney** Ref: **709**
County: **Monaghan** Mark: **285**
Category: **D** Date(s): **22/07/2015**

| | Maximum Mark | Mark Awarded 2014 | Mark Awarded 2015 |
|---|-------------------------|------------------------------|------------------------------|
| Community Involvement & Planning | 60 | 42 | 42 |
| Built Environment and Streetscape | 50 | 38 | 39 |
| Landscaping and Open Spaces | 50 | 33 | 35 |
| Wildlife, Habitats and Natural Amenities | 50 | 34 | 35 |
| Sustainable Waste and Resource Management | 50 | 18 | 19 |
| Tidiness and Litter Control | 90 | 50 | 52 |
| Residential Streets & Housing Areas | 50 | 28 | 29 |
| Approach Roads, Streets & Lanes | 50 | 32 | 34 |
| TOTAL MARK | 450 | 275 | 285 |

Community Involvement & Planning / Rannpháirtíocht an Phobail & Pleanáil:

Welcome Castleblayney to the 2015 Tidy Towns competition and it is great to see that you have such a large core membership of 30 on your management committee. Like the adjudicator in 2014, we are impressed with your level of organisation and the manner in which you work to engage other voluntary groups and clubs in your activities in Castleblayney. Be sure to maintain your strong working relationship with Monaghan County Council and Fas as they have provided you with commendable resources and support to date. We are also pleased to read that you work closely with the business community in your town and that they have sponsored and supported many of your projects. We are delighted to see that your committee has embraced all methods of communication and that you are monitoring the number of people who follow your activities on social media. Perhaps a dedicated website for your group is the next logical step? You are commended on involving the national schools and the secondary schools in Castleblayney and we were particularly pleased to see that you have collaborated with the Youth Cafe, Youth Reach, Scouts, Rehab and Football Clubs. We read with interest that there is a junior tidy towns group in Castleblayney and we wondered if any projects (other than the clean-ups) had been delegated to them. This is an excellent means of sharing your work load and for fostering a sense of ownership of projects at a local level. Perhaps some of your projects could be undertaken as part of your excellent eco summer clubs? Thank you for your entry form, map, action plan and report on Hope Castle. The map is very good but it would be more useful if all completed projects were indicated on it. The entry form was also quite helpful but it could be further improved. Don't forget that the waste minimisation is a theme of the competition so we like to see submissions printed on both sides of the paper. Try and also avoid an unnecessary use of paper. For example, a full page of your submission should not be used to accommodate a single heading. For next year, please use the Tidy Towns application form to list all the projects you have completed. Details of your proposed projects, pictures and commentaries should be included as a concise supplementary submission. It is noted that your action plan is area based (rather than set out using the tidy towns categories) but we are reluctant to ask the committee to change this format if it is working well for you.

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

The adjudicator very much enjoyed what was the first opportunity to explore the town of Castleblayney. Although, we had passed through your town on a number of occasions, it was great to finally experience at first hand all that your town has to offer. We were delighted to find that there are so many historical properties – the vast majority of which are in good condition and in productive use. Examples included the lovely red brick almshouses on the Dublin road and the magnificent terrace of natural stone dwellings on Church Road. The adjacent Church of Ireland building is also particularly impressive and it is great to see that it is maintained to a high standard. The jewel in the Crown in Castleblayney is perhaps Hope Castle and whilst it is a shame to see it vacant and in poor condition, it is hoped that the current legal action will secure its future. The courthouse in the centre of the town was also admired and whilst we acknowledge that it is a very challenging task to maintain and preserve this building, your efforts could

eventually lead to the building being refurbished and occupied in the future. In the interim, its new coat of paint has improved its appearance. The standard of presentation of the vast majority of businesses and shops in the town was first class. Whilst it is difficult to pick some examples, a number stood out in the town centre with Vincent Taveys, Leahys Pharmacy, the Royal Jade, Byrnes Butchers and the Credit Union all looking very well. The Bank of Ireland Building and the Post Office are very impressive buildings and the Old Coach Inn on York Street was also admired. The committee is commended for completing many fine projects under this category for 2015. The decorative stone and bamboo at the base of the trees on West Street looked well and it provides for a less cluttered appearance than the old tree surrounds. We liked the murals that have been provided at Bramley house (off McGrath Road) and at the car park on the lower commons road and there's no doubt that these colourful pieces of art brighten up what would otherwise be rather drab walls or hoarding. We are pleased to read that the committee is so proactive in getting derelict or poorly presented properties dealt with and we wish you luck with your efforts with respect to improving the vacant cottage on the Keady Road. Don't forget that Monaghan County Council has powers under the Derelict Sites Act to compel a property owner to take action so their assistance should be sought where necessary. Well done also on undertaking improvements such as new seats in Muckno Park.

Landscaping and Open Spaces / Tírdhreachú agus Spásanna Oscailte:

Your committee normally delivers a strong performance in this category and we were pleased to find that 2015 is no exception. We were delighted to find that the committee has not only developed good quality landscaping schemes but the diversity of projects which involves planting hedgerows, trees, shrubs and seasonal flowering plants was very much appreciated by the adjudicator. We were pleased to read that the hedgerows planted in 2014 on approach roads in the town are thriving and full credit is due to your committee for continuing to maintain them. We were interested to read that 150 saplings were removed and replanted on White Island and we wondered about the reason why? Is there more space for trees on White Island? In any case, it is an excellent project and we always encourage committees to engage in tree planting where possible. It is great to see that the Committee is actively delegating projects to other interested voluntary groups and while we were too late to see the daffodils planted by An Gaisce students, we observed the landscaping and maintenance work of the fitness for life group in Mindszenty Park and it looked very well indeed and it greatly enhanced this lovely amenity. The landscaping work of the committee on the approach road to the town is considered to be very worthwhile with an impressive planting display on the Carrickmacross road and lovely nice wild flower planting on the Shercock Road. A personal highlight was the Monaghan road with attractive landscaping observed at the Lidl, on the banks of the approach road (particularly the planted bank opposite the entrance to Drumillard) and the wonderful summer planting to be seen at the junction of the Ballybay road where painted agricultural machinery and the pony trap added further interest. The colourful bed on Muckno Street opposite the sub aqua club was admired and we loved the rose bed at the fire station. We were delighted to see that the committee is continuing to improve the park at Lough Muckno. This is one of the best parks in the County and the continued improvements (such as public art installations and pleasant seating areas) enhance it further. In terms of improvements, has any landscaped planters been considered for the car park and bring centre to the rear of the Glenarm hotel?

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

Castleblayney has an embarrassment of riches when it comes to this category with amenities of the highest quality to be found at Lough Muckno (and its lakeside park), White and Black Island and Mindszenty Park. It is heartening to see that your committee is taking advantage of these wonderful amenities. You have listed a number of projects for 2015 and they include the provision of a nature trail in Lough Muckno but not many details are provided. Is there a map of the route? Was this developed with the help of the schools or other voluntary groups? Is interpretative signage being placed along it? We note the reference of the 2014 adjudicator with respect to the proposed planting of hundreds of native trees on Windy Island (which could not be located on your map) and we wondered how this project was progressing. Similarly, we would love to know if a habitat study is planned. Please keep us up to date in 2016. If a habitat study of the town is not possible, why not ask the schools to help and undertake a habitat study of a smaller area - such as Mindszenty Park? The Muckno Community Partnership is commended on their excellent work at Lough Muckno on bio security, control of invasive species and angling classes. The site report of Hope Castle was also read with interest and it includes some good recommendations on how to proceed with the gradual development of the grounds.

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

It is good to see that the committee acknowledges the importance of this category and that you have undertaken a number of worthwhile projects for 2015. We are particularly pleased to read that the committee is working with the school and the sports clubs in encouraging recycling by collecting plastic bottles. However, don't forget that the emphasis in this category is on reducing and eliminating waste so it would be better if the clubs could be encouraged to get reusable bottles as this would mean that no waste is being generated at all. Could the reusable bottles that were dispersed at the triathlon be distributed to the sports clubs? It is great that the committee are involved in summer camps and we urge you to involve the participants in your waste management projects as children in schools across the country have come up with very innovative ways of reducing and eliminating waste. Consider undertaking a survey of waste management behavior in Castleblayney to see how many households are actively trying to minimise their resource use and waste generation. Why not ask the children on the summer camp to design a questionnaire and then get them to ask their parents to complete it? The survey results should pin point what needs to be done to minimise and eliminate waste generation in your town. Well done also on your continued operation of the allotments with the community gardens and allotments group.

Tidiness and Litter Control / Slachtmhaireacht agus Rialú Bruscair:

The standard of litter control during adjudication was generally considered to be good with the town centre looking very well and virtually litter free. Small amounts however could be found in isolated locations such as the Shercock approach road, at the playground in Drumilland and at the bring bank in the parking area off McGrath road. Well done on organizing a litter pick earlier in the year and we were delighted to read that it was a great success. Local businesses are also commended on their generous sponsorship of 60 litter pickers – this is a great initiative. The committee will be pleased to hear that a high standard of tidiness was achieved with road verges neatly trimmed, road sides and kerbs appearing weed free and pavements swept clean. Improvements are still possible though. The entrance (and small car park) to Mindszenty park is a little untidy looking due to its poor surfacing and the practice of storing discarded pallets and rubble heaps on its edges. Two headless sign poles were spotted on the Shercock road close to the junction with the road leading to Crescent Hill. An untidy site was also spotted adjacent to the vet surgery on Muckno Street and also adjacent to the bring centre car park on McGrath Street. Are there any plans for these?

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

We were delighted to read that the committee provides support to residents associations and this support is paying off as we were generally impressed with the standard of presentation achieved by the residential areas in Castleblayney during adjudication. While it is not possible to refer to them all here, a small number stood out. Judging by the adjudicators report in 2014, Drumilland has undergone a significant improvement in the space of a year. We were most impressed with its central green space, mature trees, lovely playground and grotto as all looked very well during adjudication. The community gardens to the rear of the estate were also admired. The Crescent (off the Shercock road) achieved a similar standard with its neatly trimmed grass, pleasant seating areas and attractive black planters with colourful summer bedding plants. Crescent Hill (adjacent) also looked well. A number of residential areas were viewed close to the Kingspan complex with Thorndale standing out and the Willows standing out. The entrance planters at Milldaragh were also admired. Connabury Hill off the Dublin Road was also quite nice with nicely maintained green areas and an attractive name stone.

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

The standard of the approach roads into Castleblayney was generally good with the Monaghan approach road (including the junction of the Ballybay road) looking particularly impressive with neatly trimmed grass banks, attractive signage (with landscaping beneath) and litter and weed free roadsides. The approach from Carrickmacross was similarly impressive with nice landscaping observed on the roundabout. Whilst the Shercock and Keady approach roads were a little more understated, they also looked well. We admired the dramatic new artwork on the N2 towards Monaghan and the resurfacing of the entrance to Killycard is definitely an improvement.

Concluding Remarks:

We would like to congratulate Castleblayney on an excellent performance in the tidy towns completion in 2015 and we look forward to seeing further progress in 2016.