

Tidy Towns Competition 2015

Adjudication Report

Centre: **Clonegal** Ref: **37**
County: **Carlow** Mark: **322**
Category: **B** Date(s): **14/07/2015**

	Maximum Mark	Mark Awarded 2014	Mark Awarded 2015
Community Involvement & Planning	60	48	49
Built Environment and Streetscape	50	40	40
Landscaping and Open Spaces	50	45	46
Wildlife, Habitats and Natural Amenities	50	36	36
Sustainable Waste and Resource Management	50	20	20
Tidiness and Litter Control	90	64	65
Residential Streets & Housing Areas	50	32	32
Approach Roads, Streets & Lanes	50	34	34
TOTAL MARK	450	319	322

Community Involvement & Planning / Rannpháirtíocht an Phobail & Pleanáil:

Many thanks for your entry in this year's Tidy Towns Competition. Thank you for a most beautiful submission of which the authors should be justifiably proud. It's clear that you have taken on board some of the comments of last year's adjudicator in this regard. We do acknowledge that this competition has become more demanding and wide-ranging in its expectations and scope. This is most apparent at the upper echelons of the competition where towns, villages and now cities are vying for recognition for a huge number and diversity of projects. It is thus difficult to constrain entry material and feel that you have done your home and volunteer group justice for their year's work. Nonetheless, you have managed it this year with a super little submission that is concise but colourful and informative. The colour coding, layout and illustrations made this a pleasure to read. The maps were prepared and finished for the job at hand and nearly perfect. The adjudicator would have described the village map with grid as perfect had it only had a key to go with those clever little coloured and numbered markers. The adjudicator hereby apologises for removing the map from its binder and for the notes that were made on it. Unfortunately this was a necessary act of vandalism in order to avoid carrying your entire entry on a long walk. It's not mere laziness as we must also take into account that it often rains and then your whole entry could be ruined.

From the off, you address my colleague's concerns over the rationale for your efforts and the maintenance of the integrity of a rural village such as this as a living space, not an outdoor museum. Your point is taken, thank you. Your committee and active volunteers comprise a goodly proportion of the population and their work is demonstrably effective. Communication is largely via traditional means but you've put much effort into a most attractive website. The adjudicator took a little time to view your online gallery which tells a great story. Your acknowledgment of the role of the national school in your work and in your future is appreciated.

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

You have had some minor pavement works completed, the adjudicator believes. You mention road markings in need of redoing and indeed several areas were seen where this is so. The diligent stonework around your flower beds, sign and trees was noted at the Watch House. While this is admired for the quality of workmanship, the adjudicator advises not to have stone surrounds at the base of a developing tree. This can adversely affect the tree's roots and hinder proper growth. The adjudicator wasn't certain which of the railings at the riverside area were new as all were in very good condition. Well done on your positive progress on building enhancement and improvement.

Siopa Uí Dhuine is a beautiful old shopfront with the Gaeilge to the fore. The nearby petrol pump is in need of a little touch up. The Weighhouse was spotless. Sha-Roe is a lovely premises which does its host building justice. Good quality paintwork and colourful window-boxes make Osborne's most pleasant to the eye. Hickey's is gainfully

employed as your trophy cabinet and really looks the part. The old schoolhouse has had a somewhat inglorious end or could something be done to celebrate its former incarnation? If the windows were repaired and the area around it clearer, it would be a help. The old grainstore - now foodstore and hardware shop looks very well with bright, clean and well-cared-for windows and doorway. The plaque on the gable end of the old estate house was admired. The Weaver's Cottages look fantastic, not overly done and the 'before' pictures on your website put the work on them in context. A huge investment in bedding plants made Sean O'Dúinn's pub really impressive to behold. The takeaway was clean, bright and with several planters. PJ Dunne's was scrupulously painted and contained your many awards in the window.

The old national school was well-painted although it's a shame that the original windows are gone. The new school building looked really great complete with Green Flag and plants for pollinators. St Brigid's Church and grotto had restrained planting.

Landscaping and Open Spaces / Tírdhreachú agus Spásanna Oscailte:

It's great to read that all were involved with the new landscaping project at the school. The replacement of the poplars was big undertaking but this is an example of how communities and local authorities can and should work together. It is suggested that you could intersperse the beech with hawthorn on the roadside as well as planting a staggered row of hawthorn on the field side. Your various tree-planting initiatives are acknowledged here. If any organisations assisted or sponsored you in these (e.g. Coillte or the Tree Council) then these should be listed. It's great that the Tullow Men's Shed are helping out and making planters for groups such as yours. The national exposure of Nationwide is the least your community deserves for some of the great gardening and landscaping work.

Across the river, the evergreen planting in the corner planters on the hard curtilage in front of the farm buildings was noted. The T-shaped hanging basket holder is unusual but adds little. There has been beautiful work done at the watch House area. The planting has been carried out here with meticulous care. There is a really gorgeous array of colours at the green area at your new Tidy Towns sign. However, it is recommended that you do not plant at the base of trees. The Watch House stone plaque is partially obscured by the laurel here. This should be cut back a little. Are the three wooden tubs with the New Zealand flax needed or could you plant in the ground here? The two areas opposite at the corner have had lots of great work done. On the southern corner the hanging basket stand could be removed so that it better matches its opposite number. Perhaps move it to the area in front of the farm on the other side of the birch tree.

The area near the bridge is a wonderful piece of work and imagination and was drawing many admirers on the day. The pump is beautifully painted blue and there is a little explosion of colour here. There was a great hum of bees among the Napeta and roses in front of the flat-roofed house. The Wicklow Way Park is one of your gems and the adjudicator could have spent much longer here. The Mágh dhá Chon monument was admired. The information board here is a great piece of work and the area here is wonderfully planted. The Entente Florale area is superb. The historical features here and the more modern walkways - way-marked way and Slí na Sláinte give a feeling of being at a real hub. Across the way, there has been great work done of planting atop a low stone wall. Cranesbills are the only flower at the grotto and this fits the area well.

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

The Derry River is probably your most significant habitat and it is beautiful. The water crowfoot fairly shone in the sunlight and the adjudicator saw both trout and salmon in the stream. Swifts are one of the noisier residents of the village and along with the grey wagtails, this area was pleasantly clamorous on day of visit. The adjudicator admired the heritage information at the river and nearby a large family was enjoying a picnic at one of the benches. The wildlife painting here was noted but it will be in need of some repairs this year. Who was the artist? You could perhaps add a title as well as credits when it's repaired. It was great to see mosses and lichens being allowed to grow unmolested on your 1798 /1998 interpretation board.

Well done on your creation of a wildlife garden within the community garden. The adjudicator confesses that the pond wasn't observed at time of visit. That said, the visit wasn't exhaustive and by their nature, wildlife-friendly ponds tend to have lots of cover. Very many plants of great benefit to pollinating insects were noted though, as well as organic piles, a bug 'hotel' and composters - another 'constructed habitat'. The rustic bird boxes were admired on the shed gables. Are there any hirundine bird boxes? The village is popular with swifts!

The establishment of a new woodland is a very worthwhile project and you are to be congratulated for this. Please note that the rearing and release of non-native birds does not attract any points in this category although the creation and maintenance of their optimal habitat here might well.

Your awareness of the problem of Himalayan balsam and your following of best practice guidelines for its removal and control are noted. You have taken advice and had a habitat and biodiversity survey completed, well done. This is a very important step and will 'spring-board' you to further projects. You don't say who carried out the Q-Value assessments of the River Derry or if this is part of another ongoing project. The loss of the swans' nest is part of the natural order of things. Mallard numbers should also regulate themselves according to resources available.

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

Well done on an excellent submission in this category, perhaps the most challenging in the competition. Your entry

lists rainwater collectors, polytunnels and composting. The composting area in the Community Garden is indeed an excellent waste management tool. However, the adjudicator noted that the sign on it had been altered to state that it was only for Community Garden waste - effectively making this a community garden composter rather than a community composter. If you'll pardon my apparent hair-splitting, there is a difference. So, do the households have no access to this and if not, are they encouraged to compost at home?

You rightly acknowledge the significant role that Carlow County Council plays in dealing with your waste. Especially the non-recyclable waste. Very good. Last year's adjudicator suggested that you were moving toward 'zero-waste'. Perhaps not yet but you might just be closer to this target than anywhere else in Ireland. So, it is suggested that you see how close you are. The County Council will keep accurate figures on the waste taken from your village. This, along with some representatives from the Green Homes project will certainly give you a better idea. In the meantime, you are doing an excellent job and giving great example and inspiration to those other communities who are watching your successes build. You very astutely list human resources in your submission as well as the use of equipment. There was no talk of transport however, a key resource in a rural setting. No national school WOW or COW days for example? Again, the Green Homes project will help you to examine transport trends too.

Tidiness and Litter Control / Slachtmhaireacht agus Rialú Bruscair:

It's great that you acknowledge the contribution of the retired and the school-goers as a priority in your entry. For those in-between, the Green Dog Walkers is an excellent initiative. The level of organisation - as well as community-wide involvement - that goes into your May clean-up day is acknowledged here.

The adjudicator was amazed, when going through the notes taken on the day - at how few examples of untidiness there were. Your bottle bank now resembles a garden feature rather than a religious one. It looks really great. A traffic cone marks the spot of a loose cable at the little cottage where you display your old photos. However, this may be part of ongoing works. The photos here will need to be replaced soon. Could the monumental works near the bridge be improved? This site is a working area, it is acknowledged but could look better, it is felt. Litter was just about non-existent on the day. Well done. The adjudicator is aware how much effort this takes and you are to be congratulated.

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

The landscape planting at Valleyview and St Brigid's Terrace are to be applauded. Radharc Na Doirí have quite appropriately planted native trees. The 'rota' of volunteer neighbours to tend to the gardens of empty properties is a great initiative. Well done. The herb garden in Watch House Village is another lovely measure. Well done for acknowledging Ballintemple Nursery for their contribution of name stone materials.

There are so many truly lovely gardens to be seen on a walk around Clonegal. It seems everyone has risen to the challenge for the appearance and feel of your village. Probably the largest residence - the castle - wasn't visited owing to constraints on the adjudicator's time. However, many buildings of different eras - right up to recent decades were viewed. Almost all were pleasing to the eye.

A new house is under construction behind the corrugated roofed cottage and it will not impact on the streetscape. Some lovely old original details were admired on 2-storey semi-detached and semi-hip-roofed dwellings. The more contemporary houses near the Moyacomb estate have very impressive gardens. The stepped effect with paving stones on one was particularly admired. Some estate name signs are a little on the small side. They might be hard for a motorist to read, although they are very pleasant close up. The Moyacomb sign is in need of a little repainting. The estate itself is very neat with some lovely landscape planting at the front.

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

As an important river-crossing, it's no surprise that so many roads lead to Clonegal. Your new name signs with your Tidy Towns achievements listed were admired. There is a little space for further accolades, too! The contribution of local farmers to safe and wildlife-friendly hedgerow maintenance is acknowledged.

The bridge is surely your most iconic feature in terms of roads and walkways. Ivy, ivy-leaved toad flax and ferns were all seen growing unmolested, although the ivy has been trimmed back. Just right! The Watch House serves as a lovely 'front gate' for your village from this end. Could the wall behind the sign here be repaired with stonework?

It was noted that side areas - lanes and little streets, such as the area beside the old garage, the castle entrance were spotless. A farmyard was seen to be swept meticulously. Directional signage might be improved upon. Why not ask an out of townner if he or she can easily see which way to where? During the visit, the adjudicator saw two cyclists heading the wrong way and having to turn about. The footpaths are generally in very good repair and the walk up past the community garden is so pleasant with all of the planting to be enjoyed here.

Concluding Remarks: