

Tidy Towns Competition 2013

Adjudication Report

Centre: **Blessington** Ref: **713**
County: **Wicklow** Mark: **227**
Category: **E** Date(s): **09/06/2013**

	Maximum Mark	Mark Awarded 2012	Mark Awarded 2013
Overall Development Approach	50	29	30
The Built Environment	50	30	31
Landscaping	50	25	26
Wildlife and Natural Amenities	50	18	19
Litter Control	50	32	34
Sustainable Waste And Resource Management	20	8	10
Tidiness	30	15	15
Residential Areas	40	30	31
Roads, Streets and Back Areas	50	25	25
General Impression	10	6	6
TOTAL MARK	400	218	227

Overall Development Approach:

Thank you for your participation in the SuperValu Tidy Towns Competition 2013. We have noted that your committee of 11 plus other volunteers hold monthly meetings from June to November and twice that from February to May and have clean-up days as well. You receive support from the local authority, Partnership, FAS, and private commercial firms. Promotional media include Facebook, Parish Newsletter and website, magazines and newspapers. You have organised slogan and poster competitions with local schools. Thank you for the map, pictures, additional information and the 5 year plan. Please note that the type on the plan document was too small for this adjudicator to read. While the map was clear it was simply too small for a town of your size and it was difficult to locate some projects. For example, St. Patrick's Well was not in the location indicated. We enquired from locals in shops and they did not know about it. Luckily we came across the information sign with a perspective image of the town centre and on which the well was indicated. We suggest that you attach a copy of that map for next year's adjudicator. Some signage there is required. We are pleased to learn that this competition has encouraged greater community spirit.

The Built Environment:

We were pleased to see the busy town centre in these recessionary times. Some of the buildings have a loud colour scheme; it would be good to achieve better harmony in that regard and also in regard to signage, some of which is causing clutter. The paving here is in reasonable condition. Some fine buildings such as the Church of Ireland, Downshire, Credit Union and the Ulster Bank add character to this area as well as the Hillsborough Monument. The church is undergoing improvement/repairs – we admired the Columbine in flower behind the railings. The more recent Blessington Town Centre shopping complex is impressive and has good quality paving with stainless steel bollards to prevent parking on these new pavements. We also noted the attractive stainless steel tree guards linked with tree grids. Bealin's Pub and car park looked well; the adjacent former bookstore takes from the impact. The Health Centre with its trees and no litter looked fine; a timber door in a stone wall opposite needs painting. The Further Education Centre looks well; trees and signage are generally very good. Burgage is well kept and the Avon Rí Leisure complex is very impressive. The cemetery is well maintained as is the Community College and we admired the green flag at Gael Scoil na Lochana. The Aldi premises on the Dublin Road looks well and the grounds are appropriately landscaped. The playground at Oak Drive near the school entrance is a nice feature. The Fire Station is neat and tidy and the bank opposite was recently improved. The Aran Centre looks well but there is excess signage here. We noted the new safety railings at St. Patrick's

Well the street furniture looked well

Landscaping:

The Main Street is fortunate to have so many mature trees that have a positive impact on the streetscape. However, some are old and were badly pruned in the past; it is time to plan for replacements with suitable specimens such as Tilia (Lime) that will enhance the streetscape. This can be done in the southern end of the street with a design that would help to reduce the impact of parked cars and implemented on the northern section on a phased basis. The base beneath existing trees would best be left in hard surface instead of planting flowers that will compete for water, nutrients and light and therefore require more time and effort to maintain. We note that you have received an Arborist's report on the quality of the street trees and if you or Wicklow County Council will put a programme in place to implement the recommendations. We liked the planting scheme at the tercentenary but suggest that a few taller plants there would add impact. Nearby, the area behind the railings at Ulster Bank while being clean looks a little sterile. The planting of hedge/shrubs would help to soften the building. The grassed strip in the Blessington Town Centre shopping complex is an ideal location for planting a line of trees to soften the expansive area. An unplanted edge indicates an opportunity for some hedge planting that would reduce the impact of parked cars. Some trees planted in the school near Oak Drive are very poor specimens and make little impact. The main structural elements in a landscape are trees and it is best to use a single species in this situation, on a road or street for uniformity. Also, it is important to ensure that the base of new trees is maintained free of weeds and grass to ensure early establishment. When trees are established it is important to remove the stakes as the stems can get damaged from the ties or stake. The concrete block wall here would benefit from softening with climbing plants such as ivy planted in the strip at the base of the wall. The use of native trees in estates and schools is appropriate

Wildlife and Natural Amenities:

We have noted from your application the following actions under this section: The Blessington Greenway Trail between Blessington and Russborough and that a Heritage Trail is being considered. The insect hotels and butterfly gardens in schools, bird and bat boxes all of which contribute towards raising awareness and interest. When the Habitat and Biodiversity survey becomes available it will be a further source of information for promotion. The bird survey with Birdwatch Ireland is noted and we presume that you will be monitoring and reviewing this in years to come. The large embankment bank at the N81 approach is well on the way to be a wildlife area.

Litter Control:

We have noted your high level of activity with local media and posters to promote litter awareness and the weekly litter clean-up on Thursdays with volunteers also on Sundays and your participation in the National Spring Clean Week. Further actions such the removal of posters from poles and the anti-dog litter posters seem to be working. All of these efforts and others you have mentioned are obviously making an impact on your community. There were small amount of litter here and there in Blessington Town Centre.

Sustainable Waste And Resource Management:

You have provided an impressive list of action within this section including your work with local business in providing them with information. In particular we note that hanging baskets are not part of your programme to reduce water usage. If you decide to use some hanging baskets at a future stage a suitable approach would be to use water from the local lake and by that means you would not be taking it from the mains supply. Your member's work with local schools is commendable and we note that St. Mary's Junior School was Ireland's Green School Transport Module Winner. Other commendable actions include using social media instead of flyers and double sided and multiple sheets to save paper when practical.

Tidiness:

We note that you have identified a number of actions for this section and commend you for the progress made to date. The campaign to clean road signs and the removal of weeds from kerbs is particularly appropriate as is the control of illegal advertising, signage and cable ties from poles especially after elections. Other actions such as the removal of overhead cables and improving car parking are longer term projects. Considering the work you have done on the Dublin Road approach it is a pity that the commercial enterprises immediately before that point are so cluttered with signage. The site beside the County Council offices is awaiting development and the site beside Maxol is untidy. The rusted roof of a building at the entrance to the Montessori school spoils the appearance of this area. Weeds on some roofs in the town centre need attention and we noted some empty buildings. The wall promoting West Wicklow House in the Blessington Town Centre is not a good advertisement for that enterprise. We suggest a repainting and also some attention be given to the adjoining boundaries. The Bring Centre at SuperValu was a bit untidy. The general store hardware with 'Open to the Public' in very large print conveys an untidy appearance. Other premises such as Ryanstone and Farm Feeds in this area are also untidy.

Residential Areas:

You are proactive in providing checklists for estates and participation in National Tree Week Entrance improvements are very important as the first impact and then internal signage. We note the mention of Ashton estate in your application. The open space at Oak Drive estate is well maintained and there is scope for tree

planting as has been done in the western section of this estate. However we would advise using a different species such as Tilia (Lime) or Acer (Maple). The Tramway estate is well planted and maintained but it is time to remove the stakes from trees before they damage the stems. One estate with many names such as Mountain View, Rocky Park is marked with a large stone at the entrance with the names imprinted on the face. The trees and signage were good but on leaving we noted that the Yield sign is faded. Burgage Manor estate has a remarkable line of beech (*Fagus sylvatica*) trees which were once part of an avenue that was broken to accommodate the housing estate. These are major assets that should be conserved for the future. Elsewhere in the estate we advise that dead trees be removed and supporting stakes that are no longer required. Blessington Abbey estate is in very good condition; the large open space can accommodate more tree planting. Other estates which we wish to compliment for their appearance include Blessington Orchard, Glenview Court and Westpark estate and St. Joseph's Hill.

Roads, Streets and Back Areas:

You have correctly identified appropriate actions under this section such as promoting bilingual signs and maintaining roadside fences as well as trimming grassed margins where appropriate.

The Welcome sign on the Dublin Road was very impressive and you have made a great effort here.

General Impression:

Well done on your continued participation in the competition and we wish you continued success. We hope that this report will provide guidance for further improvements and look forward to your entry again in 2014.