

Tidy Towns Competition 2015

Adjudication Report

Centre: **Blessington** Ref: **713**
County: **Wicklow** Mark: **254**
Category: **D** Date(s): **18/07/2015**

	Maximum Mark	Mark Awarded 2014	Mark Awarded 2015
Community Involvement & Planning	60	32	35
Built Environment and Streetscape	50	33	34
Landscaping and Open Spaces	50	30	31
Wildlife, Habitats and Natural Amenities	50	21	25
Sustainable Waste and Resource Management	50	13	15
Tidiness and Litter Control	90	51	52
Residential Streets & Housing Areas	50	32	34
Approach Roads, Streets & Lanes	50	28	28
TOTAL MARK	450	240	254

Community Involvement & Planning / Rannpháirtíocht an Phobail & Pleanáil:

The adjudicator welcomes Blessington to the 2015 Tidy Towns competition and thank you for your submission. You have an active core committee of 9. But we can see from your submission that you have been successful in harnessing the support of an impressive list of local associations and business in aiding your works. In particular you seem to be successful in liaising with a number of residents groups in the town. This is great to see and gives you and the competition a real link to the town's residents both for support and to advertise your projects. The most successful tidy towns groups tend to be those that are able to harness the skills and support for their work from as wide a range of disciplines and agencies as possible, both at county and National level. We are glad to hear that participating in the competition has helped build links in the community and helps develop a sense of pride in your locality. Your laminated annotated map giving a general indication of points of interest in the town was useful on adjudication. You liaise well with the local schools and seem to visit them regularly. Your 12 members of the junior tidy towns committee are also thanks for their commitments and we hope you can really expand your influence on the towns' progress over the coming years. Continued good luck with your web page and we liked the idea of having a dedicated page for the town's children. The use of new technology will help you advance your connections with the younger generation and those less likely to attend your meetings, but who may wish for an avenue to get their views aired. We are glad to see that your estates competitions have been such a success for you. Committees often find that competitions are a good method of engaging with people in the community and fostering a sense of ownership over the shared environment.

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

St Joseph's Hall was very well presented but the number of bollards to the street frontage here could be reviewed to reduce street clutter. The Spire of the St Marys Church of Ireland is a great landmark for the town and indeed was a useful navigation tool for the visitor. The railings and frontage were well tended and the red roses created a lovely impact. A number of premises especially stood out on adjudication day. The historical premises of the Ulster Bank with its smartly painted façade and the neat façade of the Grangecon cafe were very well presented. The Blessington book store was a deserved winner of the best presented premises in your 2014 awards and was admired. The boxing club was also nicely presented with its tree of hope and new granite seat. Lighting had yet to be reinstated to the front of the Downshire Arms hotel but considering it is no longer trading it was well presented. Good luck with progressing this project later in the summer. The men's shed beside the animal hospital was visited and the road frontage here could be tidied up a little and any sycamore seedlings to the entrance removed. But it is good to see that this previously deteriorated council premise is being given a new lease of life. The Primary care facility site was under construction so good luck with progress on this and the council offices here were kept bright and cheerful with annual planting to its frontage.

Landscaping and Open Spaces / Tírdhreachú agus Spásanna Oscailte:

The works done to the sponsored roundabouts have been a great success and the planting here is maturing nicely. We wondered if a sign should be added to the wildflower roundabout at the Naas junction to explain its alternative management as at first glance it looks less tended. The raised beds at the town centre were looking well with a nice mix of shrubs and annuals. Were the weeping trees the right choice for here? The heavy pruning to the street trees on the main street is obviously due to the overhead wires but is severely impacting on their long term form. Could any room be found for more trees to the opposite side of the road to ensure the long term presence of street trees to the main street? In the meantime is there any option to underground the overhead wires in discussion with the esb?. This would greatly improve the town as the trees properly mature over the next 15-10 years and would show your commitment to long term structure planting. Ensure a comprehensive watering regime is put in place for the first few years as street trees especially can suffer drought, indeed some of the new trees at Aldi were showing signs of stress. The grounds to the Coimin Centre were very well maintained with lovely lavender here. Remove tree ties from all newly planted trees in the town as those over 2 years old generally do not need to be staked. In fact the longer the ties are in place the greater damage they do as rubbing ties can cause wounds to the bark. Good luck with progressing the community park project off the inner relief road. We hope to see progress in this over the coming years. The skate park and play ground were visited and the bench sponsored by the brownies was well used on adjudication day. The pure mile signs were noted to the tree guards at Kilbride Road and this seems to have been a successful project for you.

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

Your submission shows you have a real understanding of the types of habitats surrounding the town. The completion of your biodiversity and habitat management plan and its subsequent distribution to relevant bodies in the town, has gained you marks in this category. Use your wildlife plan to see how your habitats link with each other. As you are aware networks of wildlife sites are more ecologically valuable than isolated wildlife areas. You are lucky to have the ear of a local beekeeper and we liked your many initiatives to ensure Blessington is a haven for bees and insects. Ensure your bird boxes are maintained and consider an audit to see which ones are placed to attract birds and which may need to be repositioned in and around your local churches and community lands. Through the NWT you have held a number of events in the town to advance this category and we hope they were well attended and enjoyed by all.

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

The Green School programme has been a great success for you and are very impressed that over 400 households in the town have signed up for the Green Homes programme too. The bring centres visited were well looked after and we hope your repair cafe was a great success and helped gain revenue for your works. As you state in your form a good place to address this category is to look at sustainable practices many residents already adhere to and build on this. Do you know if many residents or businesses took part in the Earth Hour or cycle to school/work week? The new bike stands on the main street were noted, and placed in a good position beside the bus stop. Very partial measures have been carried out over the year and the seemingly minor task of changing your Christmas lights to LED are all steps in the right direction. Well done on all of the work done this year to get your head around this category and we have awarded you additional marks to reflect this.

Tidiness and Litter Control / Slachtmhaireacht agus Rialú Bruscair:

You have dedicated teams devoted to litter control in many areas of the town so special thanks to the Sunday morning litter patrols, the Thursday evening clean up teams and the Blessington Gun Club for the attention they pay to the Lakes areas with your team. The evidence of all this work was seen with very clean streets on adjudication day. The old forge lanes off the main street are a lovely feature in the town and well looked after. As in many other centres you have some empty premises in the town and unoccupied properties, which you note in your submission, and we appreciate the work carried out to address these sites. The temporary fencing to the plot facing the car park beside the West Wicklow House is very unsightly. Can hoarding be installed even for the short term with perhaps simple graphics relating to Blessington until the plot is redeveloped or improved? Lovely window box display was seen at Murphys Pub with a neat frontage here.

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

Individual houses throughout the town were well maintained with some very nice planting beds on show in many locations including the entrance to Ashton and Westpark. Others visited which deserve a mention include Beech dale, and the communal areas at Glenview. In all residential estates remove any old tree ties from trees more than 2 years in the ground and cut back stakes if they are impacting on the trees growth or causing damage by rubbing the bark. Remind all residents that all types of land uses can become more pollinator friendly. Whether you own a large garden or a window box on a balcony, everyone can play a role in making Blessington a place where pollinators can survive and thrive. Together these patches can become a network of pollinator habitats. Pollinators need places with flowers to feed and suitable habitat to complete their lifecycles. They also need to be protected from chemicals that are toxic to them so discourage residents from using chemical sprays where possible. We wish all residents group the best of luck in your revised pride in my estate competition.

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

The town signage was general clean and easily read. There was some litter noted to the bus stops at the entrance to the town from the Lakes. In some bus stop locations a bench could also be provided if room allows. It is a pity that

the broad pedestrian route from the new shopping area was not continued all the way to Main Street to give the pedestrian priority here. Bins were generally clean although some had some graffiti to their exteriors which should be removed. Utility boxes were other items which seem to be a magnet for graffiti as well. The central stone memorial at the centre of the main street is a landmark but with the fountain not functioning the basins of standing water below the lions head were accumulation cigarette butts and needed attention. The Dublin bus stop beneath the trees on the main street needed a clean. The Blessington town sign along with the Greenway signage with their use of consistent black colour frames were also well positioned to the boundary wall of St Marys Church of Ireland.

Concluding Remarks:

After a busy weekend the town was beautifully presented for this adjudicators visit. A number of projects are being planned for the town which will only improve its setting for residents and visitors alike. We thank all of the numerous stakeholders involved in the works which make up this year's submission and continued good luck for all your planned work in 2016.