

Tidy Towns Competition 2014

Adjudication Report

Centre: **Sligo** Ref: **731**
County: **Sligo** Mark: **263**
Category: **G** Date(s): **21/06/2014**

	Maximum Mark	Mark Awarded 2014
Community Involvement & Planning	60	43
Built Environment and Streetscape	50	40
Landscaping and Open Spaces	50	41
Wildlife, Habitats and Natural Amenities	50	26
Sustainable Waste and Resource Management	50	11
Tidiness and Litter Control	90	42
Residential Streets & Housing Areas	50	28
Approach Roads, Streets & Lanes	50	32
TOTAL MARK	450	263

Community Involvement & Planning / Rannpháirtíocht an Phobail & Pleanáil:

Sligo is most welcome to the 2014 Tidy Towns competition. Many thanks for your application. There was a tremendous sense of opportunity in Sligo that is given off by your application. The town has a tremendous amount to offer, not least it's natural surroundings which, in this adjudicator's view, are perhaps the best of any large town in Ireland. Your bound applications are clearly presented however for some reason the application was submitted twice. This is obviously unnecessary duplication so the small, ringbound version should be omitted for next year. The adjudicator wants most of all to assess what work has been completed since the last visit. In this regard you are urged to be more concise as to these descriptions and clearly distinguish any projects that are still in the planning stage or, for whatever reason, have run into delays. Finally the inclusion of tourist brochures etc is not relevant unless they directly pertain to a project recently completed. In short: know what you need to say and then say it in as concise fashion as possible. Your before and after photos are excellent at communicating the impacts of projects at a glance.

Last year the adjudicator made reference to unwieldy maps and you took note. What you have submitted is good however the adjudicator really needs a detachable map (tourist style preferably) that can be carried around during adjudication. On this should be marked the locations of principle projects which you particularly want the adjudicator to visit. A key to any numbering code should be on the sheet somewhere. It is acknowledged that in a large town with many projects this can be a challenge and while you should still include the maps as you have done this year, the problem with this is that they are not portable.

These issues are cosmetic and are in no way intended to cast a negative light on what is clearly is superbly organised and executed Tidy Towns machine. The underlying theme seems to have been to divide issues into manageable chunks and evidently this is working. You have a superb level of support across the board and it is wonderful that you are increasing engagement with businesses and schools. Engagement would be an ongoing challenge requiring a continuous improvement approach. In large towns where the local authority is a large stakeholder in the Tidy Towns it would be important to stress in the public mind the voluntary nature of involvement and your independence. This is essential to ensure that those in outlying areas feel encouraged to participate and do their best. As inclusivity is key always be thinking of how to include groups that may be traditionally marginalised, for example the elderly, it's those with special needs or immigrants. Sligo is a wonderful town and feel free to celebrate success so that no one can take it for granted.

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

You are highly commended for your analysis of last year's adjudication report and the way in which you have dealt with issues raised. The list of buildings painted and enhanced is long and impressive. Of particular note is the new

Yates mural which is visible from the main artery through the town. This association with Yates, and the recently held Yates Day celebrations, is excellent for engraining the identity of Sligo among residents and visitors alike. Don't forget that this category is also about how you bring your built heritage to life through interpretation and events. Your heritage tour booklet was admired, are the guided walks through the town? We are also looking at how you promote Irish during this interpretation. The treatment of derelict buildings, for example on Adelaide Street and along Barrack Street and Chapel Street, is excellent. The main civic buildings are looking very well for example the Courthouse & Garda station on Teeling Street. It would be nice to see flagpoles flying flags. 'Pure' was looking well with its new colour scheme. The Abbey is a wonderful heritage structure and is very well presented (and other flagpole with no flag). Many business premises were looking very well on adjudication day. Kate's Kitchen caught the eye as well as the Cat and the Moon next door. Market Street looks great but an opportunity for an open civic space is lost in favour of more car parking spaces. The trees work really well here while the 1798 statue creates an attractive point of focus. McHugh's on Grattan Street has greatly enhanced its alley with inviting seating and a trellis with climbing plants. Well done on this attractive innovation. Hardigon's Pub is always a delight. Johnson Court is an attractive mall and it is great to see this type of development in the town centre rather than 5 km out of town.

Pennies looks very fresh although the nearby gable wall of Broderick's needs to be addressed. The post office is a fine feature as is the traditional frontage of Henry Lyons next door. The mural and screening of derelict sites at the junction of Emmet Place is excellent. Well done to the artist, more murals please! Commercial murals for Gary's cycles and the pet discount store work well in these locations. The Glasshouse is a wonderful insertion to the town centre. Some litter had gathered under the footbridge and perhaps this could be dealt with. Presentation at the Ulster Bank with Yates statue is excellent and provides a real landmark for the central area. The riverbanks provide the best civic space in Sligo and apart from some litter in the river this area is presented to a very high standard. The retention of the mill wheel at the Garavogue pub and some riverside trees add so much to the character of this area. The Italian quarter adds great charm to this area. The Cobblelock needs to be swept of cigarette ends and gum removed. The Green Forest might reconsider its rather intrusive stickers that cover the windows and which are not in keeping with other artisan enterprises in the area. You are commended for enhancing the status of PA McHugh at City Hall.

Landscaping and Open Spaces / Tírdhreachú agus Spásanna Oscailte:

Your plans for the Stephen Street car park were admired and you are wished every success in what will no doubt be an attractive civic space. Your range of hard and soft landscaping projects were also noted. The numerous flower baskets throughout the centre were admired for their colour and profusion. The car park across from the Abbey is spotless but a dead tree needs to be replaced. Multi-tiered displays were looking well at the junction of O'Connell Street and Grattan Street. However this would have been the perfect place for a street tree. The committee should be looking for opportunities for more established planting for year-round benefit. The beautiful tree across from the post office show the transformative impact a tree can have. The display of hydrangeas and trees on entry to the Johnson Court car park is very effective in this location. Trees however need to be pruned back to encourage more balanced growth (they may be limited by the size of the containers). Larger wooden planters with trees and luxuriant displays of colour look great near Lower Quay Street. More of these were admired on the dock road. The famine family is rather grim but nevertheless a fine memorial. This location overlooking the river could be a fine civic space but is sadly given over entirely to car parking.

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

Sligo has a natural heritage of international value and which is second to none. Few if any large towns have such a combination of coastal, upland and lakes which are subject to EU Habitats Directive designations and, of course, of such tremendous landscape appeal. Raising awareness of these areas and why they are important is essential to their long-term protection. Your new bird identification panels are excellent and you are commended for abandoning the notion of importing ducks. Well done to the Venture Scouts and schools for their handiwork in building bat boxes, we would love to see some follow-on projects to raise awareness of the bats and their use of the new accommodation. So-called wildflower meadows should be approached with caution. They are frequently high maintenance and from seeds of unknown provenance. They are pretty and do attract pollinators but should be confined to areas of garden or amenity grassland. The swift boxes are another great initiative. How can you use these to highlight with people the incredible story of the swift, which spends most of its life in the air and embarks on continent spanning migrations? The lichen survey and Garravogue blueway plan were also admired. In the round this is an excellent presentation under this category and your growing appreciation of the natural world will no doubt yield rewards for young and old alike. Japanese knotweed appears to be present in a number of locations, for example on the riverfront at the unoccupied apartments on Fishermans Wharf. Is there a plan to deal with this?

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

After a faltering start you seem to have made great inroads this year. The Sligo Tidy Towns information evening in March was a wonderful initiative, is this planned to be an annual event? What is really required here is a change of mindset to turn around our disposable culture which is proving to be so destructive to our environment. Businesses and homeowners are beginning to feel the pressure in their pockets and more so with the introduction of water charges. The event with the Sligo Chamber is really good and businesses have a range of tools to lead the way in waste minimisation (for example ISO14001). Make no mistake, the aim for our society should be nothing short of zero waste. More sustainable forms of transport would be a key challenge but also an opportunity. The towns of the 21st-century will be for those on two wheels and two feet and will be quieter, less stressed and healthier places for us. Sligo can be an exemplar in sustainable travel with the right leadership and vision. Your reduce-reuse-recycle initiative to turn waste streams to resources is excellent. Well done to the Ursuline College from reducing their water

usage by 50%, a wonderful achievement and one which we were delighted to see is not stopping at the school gates! For helpful tips and case studies from other Tidy Towns entrants please take a look at <http://localprevention.ie/tidy-towns/>

Tidiness and Litter Control / Slachtmhaireacht agus Rialú Bruscair:

Your systematic approach to litter control is an exemplar for a town of this size. The vast volumes of litter that continues to be collected suggests however that additional awareness raising is required to stop the stuff being dropped in the first place. There are also fines that can be imposed upon those who drop litter and this deterrent needs to be deployed as appropriate. Ideally every premises and building owner should be responsible for checking their own patch on a daily basis and perhaps this should be encouraged. Well done on your strong performance in the IBAL litter league. Signage through the centre is generally of a good order and clean. Attractive heritage finger signposts were especially admired. Watch out for fly-posting which should be removed immediately and any unused or vacant poles. Look particularly at first floor level and see if dilapidated or unnecessary protrusions can be removed. The tatty phone boxes of Wine Street, leading to Johnson court should be removed or at least washed in the short-term. Four very large metal poles serving no function on the intersection of the main N15 at the bridge and the Dock Rd. would be best removed. Small amounts of litter had gathered in the river, drinking bottles and glasses mostly, an unfortunate sight. Overall it was found that the town centre is very tidy and you are addressing the main issues in a concerted manner. Litter control on adjudication day was to a very high standard and well done on this wonderful achievement.

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

Once again a systematic approach to engaging with residential areas is paying off. It was wonderful to read that the committee assists the various estates and those without a residents association are not forgotten. Your new estate competition was noted and make sure all estates are supported and encouraged to enter. Homes and estates that were visited during adjudication were all presented to a very high standard. Those homes in the town centre were especially admired for retaining their character through attractive colour schemes and colourful displays of flowers. It is hoped unoccupied blocks of apartments will not remain so for long.

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

You are working on enhancing and consolidating signage is acknowledged. Upgrade works at Wine Street, Bridge Street, Flynn's Terrace and Quay Street all provide material enhancements in these areas. The adjudicator drove through Sligo a number of times through the adjudication process and was impressed with the quality of approach roads including landscaping and roadside maintenance. The town has a bit to go before cycling could be considered on a par with driving in terms of infrastructure. Do also be vigilant for unauthorised signage and low-cost advertising hoarding on the main approaches. Businesses should be contacted about this as a level playing field is needed for all. A free for all will benefit no one. Road marking in many areas in the town centre needs to be repainted to give a fresher appearance while parking zones don't seem to be marked out. It would be great to see footpaths broadened on Castle Street as pedestrians can feel squeezed onto the little space that is given to them (although these are in good order).

The principal issue in terms of appearance facing Sligo, in this adjudicator's view, is the poor quality of road and footpaths surfacing. Among most stretches paths seem to be broken and narrow and roads uneven. This is combined with the dominance of cars throughout, either through traffic, or the space given to them for parking. The riverside shows the opposite side of this coin and how removing cars encourages people to slow down, linger and maybe take a coffee. While eliminating traffic may not be a practical option there should be greater balance between the needs of pedestrians and the supposed needs of motorists. Your proposal for the car park at Stephen Street will hopefully see the beginning of this re-claiming of public spaces for people. As a compact town blessed with built and natural heritage you have all the elements to make Sligo the best town in Ireland in which to live and work.