

# Tidy Towns Competition 2015

## Adjudication Report

Centre: **Ardagh** Ref: **474**  
County: **Longford** Mark: **297**  
Category: **A** Date(s): **21/07/2015**

	<b>Maximum Mark</b>	<b>Mark Awarded 2014</b>	<b>Mark Awarded 2015</b>
Community Involvement & Planning	60	43	42
Built Environment and Streetscape	50	44	45
Landscaping and Open Spaces	50	42	43
Wildlife, Habitats and Natural Amenities	50	28	28
Sustainable Waste and Resource Management	50	14	14
Tidiness and Litter Control	90	54	54
Residential Streets & Housing Areas	50	32	32
Approach Roads, Streets & Lanes	50	39	39
<b>TOTAL MARK</b>	<b>450</b>	<b>296</b>	<b>297</b>

### **Community Involvement & Planning / Rannpháirtíocht an Phobail & Pleanáil:**

Ta Fáilte Romhat Ardachadh! Welcome Ardagh to the Super Valu 2015 National Tidy Towns competition. You have a large committee with 20 people. You hold monthly meetings. You are assisted by a number of official bodies. Do you have any sponsorship from local businesses? You hold public meetings and use local media. Have you considered using modern communication methods such as texting or Facebook? These would appeal to a younger audience and might encourage new members. You attend the school to give talks to the students. You are a veteran of the competition having been involved since its inception - and indeed a national winner in the past. You credit the overall appearance of your village entirely to the efforts of all your volunteers.

Last year's adjudicator said that you should "press ahead and put together a three-year plan to help you regain your place at the top". However we do not appear to have received any plan from you this year either. We would encourage you to submit a Tidy Towns plan which will focus your mind on what you can hope to achieve - no matter how simple a plan it is. A plan need not be prepared professionally, but you should consult locally in preparing such a plan. You should also consider any statutory and non-statutory plans applicable to Ardagh in drawing up your work programme. Please refer to the Tidy Towns Handbook for advice in relation to the preparation of a plan. It is essential to progress in the competition and to gain extra marks under this particular category that you submit such a plan in 2016. Additionally not submitting a plan causes loss of marks in this category. Thank you for your map. We would refer you to the 'How to complete your super Valu Tidy Towns Entry Form (part 6)'. In the entry guidelines for the competition you are asked to sequentially number each ('mappable') project undertaken for this year 2015 and to carry this numbering system through to the village map. You have not numbered your projects on either the entry form or the map. Please remember to read the Guidelines carefully before submitting next year's Entry Form and map.

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

Ardagh is blessed with having a magnificent built environment – the result of being a planned village. Both you and your local authority have ensured that this integrity of architectural design has been respected, and has not been destroyed in any way. For this year you have been finishing the stone walls around St Patrick's Church of Ireland, as well as continuous restoration of boundary walls around the village. We trust that you are taking professional advice in relation to your work in the graveyard. We feel generally that you could make more of your built heritage in relation to its presentation to the public. Some information is available on the County Longford generic village sign. However an architectural trail brochure could be considered. In this we are sure that you would have the help and advice of your local authority, and in particular that of your County Architectural Conservation Officer. Although you did not mention the Longford tourism app we discovered it ourselves, and this is useful for the visitor. We understand that the Heritage Centre is closed except for organised tours/school tours and for meeting purposes. We

discovered this on-site. This is rather a pity. However we understand that through flow was inadequate to maintain the centre open on an ongoing basis. Hence it is not available to present information in relation to your architectural heritage on a daily basis to any visitors. The Post Office (Lyons) is an excellent example of good conservation and is a delightful shop front. Nevertheless we thought that the number of notices on the Post Office side of the window looked somewhat cluttered. Would a simple notice board be an alternative? Lyons public house looked extremely well also, although we would prefer to see the timber sash windows retained. We admired its bright red uncluttered and well presented shop front. We admired many traditional forged gates and cast iron railings around the village. Some of these require maintenance - such the beautiful white gates and railings along the entrance to the old estate/former convent on the Heritage Centre approach road and the white gate near the entrance to the Church of Ireland, but leading into the former old estate/former convent.

Both churches are very well presented. The Catholic Church is a most fine building with some interesting stained glass. We noted the restoration/reroofing of the stone shed. We are also delighted to see that the school is increasing student numbers, and that you are building on extra classrooms. Have you considered a Junior Tidy Towns group formation? The site where the school is located can easily absorb additional development given its good landscaping. The completion of the track way around the perimeter of the GAA grounds was mentioned by last year's adjudicator. However it would appear that you completed this project this year. The Heritage Centre looked well, although we would question the 'sugar stick' decorations along the front elevation! Three flagpoles were empty along the front boundary. The landscaping within the site and around the site boundaries sets off this old school very well. Its blue gates to the side needed repainting, and the large map board on-site needs renewal as it is faded and the metal surrounds are rusting. The non timer white part of the seating within the grounds requires repainting. A heritage type light needs cleaning. On the road into the village from the Heritage Centre we noticed an old 'P agus T' marker along the side of the road. This is almost a heritage item at this stage! The Clock Tower looked resplendent. The village pump and its lovely stone surrounds were set off by the manicured green and simple but effective red flower display beds. We would like to see an increased use of Irish within the village environment.

### **Landscaping and Open Spaces / Tírdhreachú agus Spásanna Oscailte:**

As well as having a ready-made good built environment you have been gifted with a mature landscape. However all vegetation has a lifespan and we were therefore interested in knowing what proposals you have to provide for the future landscaping of the village when the mature trees eventually die away. You have mentioned under this category heading that you have finished landscaping around St Bridget's church and parochial house. You have also planted new chestnut trees in this area. It was delightful to see the new semi-mature trees behind the church building. The grounds of this church are a pleasure to walk through. They almost function as the village park, and must be a delightful safe place for older people, people with challenged mobility, and buggy pushers to walk around. Perhaps it might be timely to consider an overall phased landscape renewal plan in consultation with a landscape architect for the village in its entirety. In the meantime it is good to continue to provide new native trees and shrubs, but it is best to do this to a guided plan. The maintenance of all the landscaped areas is superb and a credit to you. We are also glad to see that you are concentrating on maintaining simple sustainable in-soil planting, and not creating fussiness through hanging baskets, potted plants in-container planting within the village proper. The village itself has no need of additional enhancement from an out-of-soil planting point of view.. In-soil planting is sustainable, easily maintained and conservative of water resources. We walked through the Neighbourhood Park and enjoyed our stroll, although we felt it was a little neglected by comparison with our last visit. For instance the woodland paths would benefit from a little sweeping. We saw one piece of paper litter. An old flag/bunting was still hanging on a tree. And the directional sign for the Park on the roadside needed new wood surrounds, as the wood was deteriorating. We agree with last year's adjudicator in wondering as to whether the containers along the walk from the Heritage Centre are having any impact on the village landscaping. We certainly do not think that they are. They are, we believe, unnecessary - as the treed landscape is more than adequate. They are also an obstruction on the footpath, and because of the limited sunlight filtering through the trees, they are difficult to make interesting. Certainly on adjudication day they looked generally dull and old. We think that as two adjudicators having questioned the necessity of these planted pots - you may well decide to save yourself the hassle and remove them.

### **Wildlife, Habitats and Natural Amenities / Fíadhúlra, Gnáthóga agus Taitneamhachtaí Nádurtha:**

Under this category heading you list 'the neighbourhood Park/recycling areas / Ardara Heritage Centre garden' as projects undertaken for this year. You give us no further information on exactly what work you have carried out to raise understanding and awareness of the natural amenities, nor have you not mentioned cooperation with expert groups and relevant authorities. It would be good if you could again survey some new aspects of your rich natural environment and share the findings with us the public. You certainly provide access to a wildlife habitat in the Neighbourhood Park, but it would be interesting to hear more about what new projects - if any - you have carried out recently. We suggest you speak to the County Heritage Officer who will give you advice and encouragement on all aspects of wildlife and natural amenities. You should also read the Tidy Towns Handbook which is quite detailed on this category. The Heritage Council's 'Wildlife in Towns and Villages' booklet is also a useful resource. Engaging with the schools on even elementary nature study surveys can lead in time to the further analysis and interpretation/presentation of the findings. As you live in such a rich environmental area you have the potential to enjoy it and learn more about it as well as increasing your marks in this category very readily.

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

You say that you continue to use water from the village pump to help moisten flowers and hanging baskets and containers around the village. You have obviously been doing this before - as you allude to the fact that you 'continue to use,' and it is therefore not a new project for this year. Have you looked at the Tidy Towns publication in

relation to Sustainable Waste and Resource Management - the updated version sent to you as updated Handbook extract. We strongly suggest that you choose some simple starting point from the project examples given in that publication, and let us have details for 2016 as to how you have raised awareness, and also as to how you have completed any practical steps to prevent or reduce waste produced across your community. Perhaps endeavour to involve the schoolchildren in this effort. Do not be afraid of this category - although much of it may be new to you, there is a lot of help available to move forward in endeavoring to eliminate waste and to manage resources well in the community. We strongly suggest that you contact your County Environmental Awareness Officer to ask for help and advice. It is also a category within which you can increase your marks.

### **Tidiness and Litter Control / Slachtmhaireacht agus Rialú Bruscair:**

Well done to the local Brownies group who assist you with litter picking. Their efforts are successful as the village was litter free. This standard of tidiness is generally at first glance excellent in the village. However there is some slippage in relation to the ageing/lack of maintenance of a number of items within the village - and particularly in the historic areas. The generic County Longford village information board on the Oldtown road is faded - as indeed are its counterparts in other centres throughout county. It would be good if these could be renewed. Perhaps it would be better to relocate this information board (when renewed) in the village itself. The information area/point around the village generic information board looked rather faded and neglected - especially the grey wall beside.

The directional sign for Ardagh Courtyard on the Heritage Centre approach road was almost completely covered by vegetation. Between the church and the village a wooden sign on the footpath (set against the stone wall) was blank with deteriorating wood. The brown directional St Mel's Cathedral sign appeared to be facing in the wrong direction. It also had moss growing on it, and was quite dirty. The gate leading into the old St Mel's Cathedral site needs renewal as it is rusting. At that end of the Church of Ireland graveyard a most substandard information sign was totally illegible due to water ingress, and its surrounds were rusting. This looks very poorly in an important archaeological/historical location. The wood in the seating on the grass bank beside the old Cathedral site was in very poor condition also. Furthermore the seat's surrounds were rough - with a rough concrete base and burnt grass - evidence of weed killer usage. The pathway inside the white gate near the Church of Ireland entrance leading into the former estate/convent area has poor railings along its edges, and also an untended pathway. The upright pole of the directional sign for Edgeworthstown/Longford/Goldsmith on the village green was rusty. In the parking area off the Mullingar road the weighing scales surrounds looked a little neglected with weeds growing nearby. The bring banks were neat and tidy but rather cheerless. Exiting from this site appeared to be somewhat dangerous, as the visibility is quite blind in both directions and one is exiting across a footpath.

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

Since our last visit there have been quite a number of new houses built on the approaches to the village. These houses are well presented with attractive gardens. The standard of house presentation within the village remains excellent. Both buildings and gardens are tended with care. This overall approach lends itself to a very attractive village environment. This is important - as much of your village buildings are residential by nature, and therefore contribute largely to the overall impression experienced.

Whereas you mention the resurfacing of the car park at the Community Centre completion under the Residential Streets and Housing Areas, we credit it under the following category heading where the project more rightly belongs. (Likewise with the reroofing of the stone shed and the building of the new classrooms which you also mention under this category heading - we credit them under the Built Environment category above).

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

Whereas you mention the completion of a new track around the perimeter of the GAA pitch as being a great local facility under this category heading, we credit it under the public spaces aspect of the Built Environment and Streetscape category above where it correctly belongs. In this event you appear not to have completed any new project on approach roads this year. But you continue to maintain the approaches. Your current marks in this category reflect this. On the Edgeworthstown road approach we consider that the heritage town sign is a long way out from the village. However, this may be to alert passing traffic to your heritage town. We observed a dirty left-hand junction sign just before the 50 K pH speed limit. A 'headless'/signless traffic sign pole was noted just in front of the 50 K pH speed limit sign on the right-hand side. On the Mullingar road an old vent pipe would benefit from painting. A 'caution children' sign was dirty and bent. Last year's adjudicator said that all field gates should be painted in a uniform colour. We would agree that this would provide a great sense of unity throughout the village and its approaches and will also look very well.

### **Concluding Remarks:**

Ardagh is a lovely village, and we enjoyed our visit there. We noticed a large number of young people using the seating on the village green for a chat and get-together on our visit - and we thought how nice it was to see them using the space - in a very traditional way in which village greens were used - for meeting and socialising. These are your future committees, and we hope that they will carry on the long traditions of village enhancement which you have set out for them.

