

Tidy Towns Competition 2014

Adjudication Report

Centre: **Swords** Ref: **160**
County: **Dublin** Mark: **275**
Category: **H** Date(s): **07/07/2014**

	Maximum Mark	Mark Awarded 2014
Community Involvement & Planning	60	45
Built Environment and Streetscape	50	38
Landscaping and Open Spaces	50	35
Wildlife, Habitats and Natural Amenities	50	29
Sustainable Waste and Resource Management	50	12
Tidiness and Litter Control	90	52
Residential Streets & Housing Areas	50	30
Approach Roads, Streets & Lanes	50	34
TOTAL MARK	450	275

Community Involvement & Planning / Rannpháirtíocht an Phobail & Pleanáil:

We would like to welcome Swords to the 2014 tidy towns competition and we heartily commend you on your brave decision to continue with your participation despite the sad loss of a key member of your committee. Your participation is greatly appreciated at this time of transition for your committee and our forbearance is assured. We are pleased to read that there is a great community spirit in Swords with a large core committee of 25 and 51 volunteers to help you out. The flexible approach that you take to the competition by allowing members and volunteers to involve themselves on a project by project basis is commendable and we are pleased to report that it appears to be working as the appearance of your town is continually improving. Well done on forming and maintaining strong links with Fingal County Council and we wondered if the assistance of Fas had been sought? We are pleased to see that you can rely on the support of a number of local organisations and businesses such as the Dublin Airport Authority, Morton & Flanagan auctioneers, JC's supermarket, Supervalu, the Pavilion, Wrights and your local Chamber of Commerce. It is great to see that there are so many active residents associations in Swords who get involved in your work and it is especially pleasing to see that your committee is a model of inclusivity with many nationalities represented. While some voluntary organisations have been listed as the development partners (such as the residents associations), we wondered if any sports or social clubs in Swords have been approached and requested to get involved? Your communication strategy appears comprehensive with an excellent use of traditional media and social media also. Why not set up your own tidy towns webpage to promote your events and publish photos of your projects? Your engagement with the schools, Youthreach and the Scouts and Guides is heartily commended and we are pleased to see that they have helped you on your cleanup days. Why not consider delegating some projects to them – perhaps projects from the landscaping, waste minimisation or wildlife category that would be of mutual benefit to both of you? Thank you for your comprehensive entry form and supporting documentation as it was helpful during adjudication. The positive comments on your participation in the competition are also appreciated and we are delighted that your involvement has been such a positive experience. We note you have included your rather unconventional 3 year plan which seems to include strategic objectives rather than specific actions under each tidy towns category. Why not include both strategic objectives and specific projects under each tidy towns category? This can be a very effective way of identifying and scheduling key projects and ensuring a balanced approach to the competition. It is also an effective way of earning extra marks under this category.

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

The built environment and streetscape of Swords is comprised of a wonderful mix of modern and traditional buildings – the majority of which looked very well on adjudication day. A number of buildings dominate – such as the Pavillion on the main approach road into the town centre with its starkly modern design and finishes, the historic St Columbas Church which overlooks the town and wonderful Castle Structure in its central location. The modern

Council Buildings also impressed. Swords town centre looked particularly well during adjudication due to its carefully maintained streets, which appeared litter and weed free while the colourful landscaped planters provided at key locations also helped to enhance its appearance. We would like to commend local shops and businesses for their contribution to this category as it was clear to the adjudicator that a major effort was made to ensure that their properties looked their best on adjudication day. While the majority achieved a very good standard of presentation, a number stood out and they included; Taylors Bar, Mastersons, Gilsenans Pharmacy, the Bank of Ireland and the Cock Tavern. The starkly modern Peter Mark premises with its extensive glazed elements also drew attention, while the Lord Mayors Pub with its thatched roof is a very distinctive building. The modern credit union building was admired and it is a shame to see that the attractive redbrick and natural stone building beside the Des Kelly property is not an active use. The Carnegie Library building was admired while the Jade wine bar looked very well. A number of the school buildings were also observed during adjudication and we are pleased to say that they appear carefully maintained. Loreto College (with its attractive grounds) was admired in River Valley while St Cronans on Brackenstown Road achieved a very good standard of presentation. We were delighted to see that the committee has been very busy over the past year with a range of projects under the built environment and streetscape category for 2014 and they included the maintenance of street furniture on Main Street – which looked very well during adjudication. Well done also on getting Forester Way resurfaced and for removing unauthorised signage – the end effect was a much cleaner and tidier Main Street. Well done also on cleaning the riverwalk (and riverbed) as this is a lovely amenity for your town while the playground and the Multi Use Games Area (MUGA) in Ward River Valley Park were both proving popular on adjudication day. We are pleased to see that a new footpath has been provided in Ward River Valley (as part of the looped fitness trail), 85 Dublin Street has been refurbished and that new signage has been erected. It is also pleasing to see that the renovation of Swords Castle is continuing.

Landscaping and Open Spaces / Tírdhreachú agus Spásanna Oscailte:

The standard of landscaping displays in Swords was generally high with some imaginative schemes observed during adjudication. The efforts of the Tidy Towns Committee on the roundabouts on the key approaches to the town are to be commended with the red roses beneath the signage at the Estuary roundabout, the Seatown roundabout and the Pinnock Hill roundabout were observed. A number of these rose beds were in full bloom and they looked very well providing lovely summer colour and creating a positive first impression for the visitor. The clean and tidy signage was also observed. The large planters at the entrance to Main Street (close to the Old Boro Public House) looked well and added lovely summer colours while the impact of the many baskets and window boxes of individual businesses was very positive – the Morton and Flanagan premises and Mastersons deserve a special mention for their efforts as their hanging baskets were a riot of colour. Some small incidental schemes in the town centre were admired. We liked the raised natural stone landscape bed adjacent to the Lord Mayors Pub while the colourful planting at the freshly painted pump opposite was also admired. We were pleased to read that 175 trees were planted in Swords – the benefits of your treeplanting programme will be felt for years to come and by future generations. The planting of grasses on the roundabout on the brackenstown road was also observed and this provided a variation on the colour scheme of seasonal flowering plants that dominated many of the other schemes. Your initiative representing the roundabout on the Swords Bypass as wildflower meadows was observed and your verge maintenance programme was noted. We heartily commend the committee on your decision to include planting in the schemes on the Main Street to provide for year round affect. Don't forget that the perennials may also enhance biodiversity by providing a food source for wild life during the winter months as well as improving the appearance of planters that can look rather bare without seasonal flowering plants. The weeping silver lime tree which was planted to commemorate your colleague is also acknowledged. Some improvements can also be made. The planting beneath the R836 sign (on Seatown West) was very untidy looking and in need of weeding while the large and diverse bed at the junction of seatown road and seatown terrace was in need of maintenance.

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

It is noted that the Ward River is a key project under this category and that your committee has engaged in River cleaning over the last two years. We are pleased to see that you have sought professional advice from Fingal County Council and that the cleaning process reflected the sensitive nature of this riparian ecosystem. It is noted with pleasure that the river appears healthy and it is a breeding ground for trout as well as a healthy number of herons. Further to the suggestion of the adjudicator in 2013, we wondered if any progress had been made in getting a wildlife survey of your river / riverwalk done? This could be a collaboration between your committee, the Schools, the Scouts and the ecologist in Fingal County Council. Collaborations between voluntary groups and statutory bodies are strongly encouraged in the tidy towns competition. Furthermore, we would also like to see the school involved as this is an excellent way of spreading the workload and raising environmental awareness of biodiversity at a local level. Don't forget that the findings of the survey can also be used for interpretive signage that could be placed along the River walk and enjoyed by people who use it. We would appreciate a progress report on a survey of the wildlife walk in 2015. Your continuing work to improve access to the Ward River Valley linear park is also highly commended.

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

It is recommended that this category should become a priority for your tidy towns committee as the marks available have increased significantly from 20 marks in 2013 to 50 marks in 2014. It is good to see that you have undertaken a number of projects for this year's competition, including the use of coffee grounds as compost. Well done also on promoting the reuse of second-hand household goods and clothing and your collaborative work with Fingal County Council on gum litter awareness is noted. The maintenance of the Bring Centre is acknowledged and we are pleased to read that you have an effective communication strategy that emphasizes waste minimisation. The provision of wildflowers on the roundabouts is an excellent idea as there seems little doubt that maintenance of

seasonal summer plants (which require waters and weeding) could be difficult due to the high traffic volumes that are experienced on this road. The work of your local schools in the green schools programme is appreciated and we would strongly encourage you to try and identify joint projects of mutual benefit to yourselves and the schools under this and other categories in the tidy towns competition. We will also like to hear of any other events that have been organised locally to promote sustainable waste and environmental resource management. For example, have any composting or waste minimisation workshops and seminars been held locally? We will also suggest that the group should undertake a survey in order to examine what local businesses are doing to minimise waste and manage your resources sustainably. Why not consider undertaking a survey of local businesses in 2015 and households in 2016? The results of the survey would help you to pinpoint what needs to be done in order to change behaviour and improve the performance of the town under this category. Well done on following the 2013 adjudicators advice and printing your entry form on double sided paper.

Tidiness and Litter Control / Slachtmhaireacht agus Rialú Bruscair:

We are delighted to see that the hard work of the committee in recent years on litter control in the town has been acknowledged by IBAL (Irish business against litter), who concluded in September 2013 that Swords was cleaner than the European norm. This is an excellent result and testament to the fact that the difficult battle against litter is being won in Swords. On adjudication day, the standard of litter control was generally good, with the vast majority of areas inspected appearing litter free. The performance of the town centre was particularly good and it appears that incidents of litter are confined to main approach roads to the town centre. The litter seen in the untidy verge on Forest road was noticeable and it appeared that this overgrown and untidy verge was an effective litter trap – this verge should perhaps be the focus of your spring clean in 2015. Some litter was also spotted close to the Pinnock Hill roundabout and on Church Road along the vacant (and very untidy) site opposite the nicely presented schoolhouse bar. We note that a number of projects have been undertaken in order to improve tidiness. These include extensive weeding of kerbs and the bases of walls throughout Swords and graffiti removal. The removal of unauthorised posters and advertisements is also noted and we would like to assure your committee that these actions are having the desired effect as the vast majority of areas are appearing neatly wept with no litter or weed to be seen. You are commended on the 'adopt a patch initiative' with the scout groups and this seems like an excellent project so we would encourage you to explore the possibility of doing something similar for schools or maybe even along the Main Street. Perhaps the local businesses would be interested in maintaining the area in front of their shop (we're sure that many already do but an adopt a patch scheme would place further emphasis on it). Well done also on working to remove ESB and Eircom wires and other paraphernalia from the streetscape and we wish you success with this project in the future. Improvements are possible in the area of signage and graffiti. A considerable number of signs were seen in quite poor condition and they include signs at the junction of Windmill Lands and Brackenstown Road, while some untidy signage could also be seen on the Rathbeale Road. Perhaps a signage audit should be completed, whereby all signs are inspected and signs that need to be washed, repainted or replaced are identified. Graffiti persists and it can be found close to the town centre, particularly on the vacant sites that are surrounded by hoarding. Perhaps additional surveillance by CCTV could be considered to combat this? A very untidy gate was also spotted immediately adjacent to the landscaping bed beside the Lord Mayors Pub.

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

We are delighted to hear that River Valley and Rathingle residents associations took part in the national spring clean in their areas and that they were assisted by your committee. Congratulations to Swords for their strong showing in the Fingal County Council cleaner community awards in 2013. It is not surprising to read of their success as the standard of presentation of individual estates was generally good. A number however, stood out as a result of their high quality landscaping or maintenance. They include; St Columbas Rise which looked particularly well with its attractive namestone and colourful landscaping at the entrance. Hilltown caught our eye with its well maintained amenity space, mature trees and imaginative landscaping schemes at the entrance. Highfield impressed with its impressively maintained grass verges, semi mature trees and well presented houses and gardens. River Valley generally looked well and an attractive landscaping scheme was observed at the roundabout at the Rathingle Road and the Forest Boulevard. Baroimhe was nicely maintained but much of the landscaping in communal spaces was comprised of one variety and a greater diversity for future planting and landscaping schemes is recommended for biodiversity and appearance purposes. Rathbeale looked well but Rathbeale Crescent adjacent to it could be significantly improved.

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

According to your entry form, a number of new projects were undertaken under this category and they included the new signage on the airport approach road, road surface repairs on the Balheary and Rathbeale roads, replacing the signage on the Swords bypass roundabouts, all green verges on the Swords bypass were trimmed, new footpath are put in place in Ward River Valley while road surface repairs took place on Main Street and Bridge Street. All of these projects had a positive impact on the approach roads into Swords and the approaches generally looked well on adjudication day as the routes looked neat and tidy with well maintained verges and cleanly swept roadsides. The landscaping on the roundabouts also helped to enhance these entrances to the town and create a positive first impression for the visitor.