

Tidy Towns Competition 2006

Adjudication Report

Centre: **Monaghan** Ref: **611**
County: **Monaghan** Mark: **210**
Category: **E** Date(s): **15/07/2006**

| | Maximum Mark | Mark Awarded 2006 |
|--------------------------------|-----------------|----------------------|
| Overall Development Approach | 50 | 34 |
| The Built Environment | 50 | 30 |
| Landscaping | 50 | 25 |
| Wildlife and Natural Amenities | 50 | 19 |
| Litter Control | 50 | 22 |
| Waste Minimisation | 20 | 9 |
| Tidiness | 30 | 12 |
| Residential Areas | 40 | 24 |
| Roads, Streets and Back Areas | 50 | 28 |
| General Impression | 10 | 7 |
| TOTAL MARK | 400 | 210 |

Overall Development Approach:

Your Development Plan, 'Making the Next Step', is the first comprehensive survey to be received from the Monaghan Tidy Towns Committee. It has been very warmly welcomed, and also the support documentation enclosed with it. It has long been something of an embarrassment to the adjudicators that Monaghan has been consistently awarded the lowest marks of all participating county-towns: strategies to raise marking more significantly here and there have failed, for the adjudicators can only rely upon what they see on the visit, and marginally upon the information provided on the entry form. It now looks certain that within a period of three years, provided even a fair percentage of the proposals made in the Plan are translated into actions, that this situation will alter immeasurably. Monaghan is one of the most handsome towns in the State but it has not received the loving attention that Tidy Towns Committees and Local Authorities with less going for them elsewhere have been seen to lavish upon their streetscapes, suburban areas and natural surroundings. Not long after the Ulster Architectural Heritage Society's Report on Monaghan was published in 1970 some excellent physical renewals and improvements were put in place by the Council, but most of these have long been in need of upgrading, and your Development Plan, among other things, promises just that. The amount of work which has gone into the Development Plan deserves a lengthier response than usual; where remarks of a critical nature are expressed below they are about what was seen on the date of the visit and not about the measures which you intend to take in future. Incidentally, you state that it is frustrating how criticisms made in the past have been outside the control of the committee to act upon; it has never been the intention of the Competition that committees should undertake certain works themselves: the Tidy Towns Committees are regarded as informed bodies which will act as a sensitive conduit, passing on recommendations to official organisations, businesses and residents. Your seven sheets of maps were difficult to manage when walking through the town: please confine yourselves to one sheet next year; most committees use the Ordnance Survey town map on which they write in pen the sites which should be inspected; or the Tourist Office town map, which is also perfectly adequate once additional notes are written onto it.

The Built Environment:

This section deals more specifically with public buildings and buildings of architectural interest, the remainder being considered under 'Residential' (below), but in Monaghan (as in Westport or Kilkenny) there is much overlap because so many of the older residences are of architectural merit. As always, the churches were superbly presented, from McCarthy's magnificent Cathedral to the neat little chapel at Latlurcan. The County Hospital, a revolutionary structure in the 1930s, remains a fine landmark building. The former Railway Station, the best remaining in Ulster, was sadly neglected as a structure and its shrubbery - which should not conceal the handsome windows - was choked with weeds. The Market House, a notable example of dignified 18c urban architecture, was seen to be well maintained. The Court House was superbly presented on the date of the visit, its facade and external sculpture in first class condition, its forecourt tidy and adorned with pyramids of petunias. Church Square, from the Dawson Monument to the Diamond, and including the two sides of the Diamond that contain the AIB and the Westena Hotel, are as fine a sequence of urban spaces as you would find anywhere. The other sides of the Diamond were less well cared for, and Glaslough Street, Dublin Street, Market Street, Park Street and the town end of North Road, all of which contain some fine business premises and private homes, have, in the overall, deteriorated considerably over the past thirty years due to untidy signage, mass-produced advertising, inappropriate 'improvements', poles and wirescapes, and sheer neglect. On the positive side, in Park Street for example, new buildings such as the Council offices and Rock's shop fit in well to the original streetscape and are not blemished by over enthusiastic signs. It will be interesting to see what emerges on the commercial site being developed in the same street. The streets named above form the valuable historical core of the town; a concerted scheme of rehabilitation is needed, and the means of doing this are in your Development Plan.

Landscaping:

Much progress had been made under this heading. The Ulster Canal initiative was admired; eventually, it might be continued further in both directions; much maintenance of will be needed annually. The landscaping around St Peter's Lake looked very attractive at the time of the visit. Tubs, window boxes, hanging baskets and the pyramidal flower displays all helped to create colour and a sense of care in a number of salient spots. Some of the best landscaping projects were seen as adjuncts to residential estates, such as at the foot of Pound Hill, at Glencove Manor, at Manor Wood, at the entrances to Drumbear Wood and to Tully estate. Planting in the V of the Cootehill and Ballybay roads was admired, also in the triangle at Belgium Park and on the roadside at Coolshanagh. The children's playground was seen to have been provided with colourful and attractive equipment in well-kept surroundings. There will be challenging work to be done on roundabouts, intersections and bridges when the by-pass opens. One rather bleak space that calls out for a major landscaping project (somewhat like those on the outskirts of Carrickmacross, for instance) is at the confluence of the Monaghan, Newbliss and Clones roads at Cortolvin.

Wildlife and Natural Amenities:

Tree planting is traditionally considered under this heading. Young trees were seen to be flourishing in a number of places, those at Oriel Way being the most conspicuous. Clearly, the Ulster Canal and St Peter's Lake are as much Wild Life concerns as they are Landscaping; interesting interpretative signage was seen at the former; it was good to see a man fishing at the latter and ducks enjoying the safe waters.

Litter Control:

There was certainly a small improvement on last year. Congratulations to those volunteers who take part in clean-ups. A little disposable litter was seen in Glaslough Street near the Heating Centre, and at Swan Park, but over 100 pieces on the perimeter of the car-park at the bus station.

Waste Minimisation:

This mark is slightly above average in the first year of this new category - a category that will assume greater importance as time goes on. The bring banks were seen to be clean and tidy on the date of the visit. Your documentation shows that you are very much aware of the issues and co-operating with the Local Authority in matters of recycling and waste disposal.

Tidiness:

The bus station is the most depressing arrival point in any town in Ireland known to this adjudicator. Coming from Northern Ireland it looked as if one had entered a third-world country. The uncollected litter has been mentioned above; the poor condition of the adjacent former Railway Station, which not long ago was a well kept building converted to offices, added to the disagreeable scene. A fair attempt to alleviate the poor impression had been made in the planting on the opposite side of North Road. Walking to Glaslough street, the view towards the Diamond was an unsightly clutter of wires, poles and signs - no suggestion yet of a dignified county town. Beyond the spacious Diamond and Church Square, the neighbourhood of New Road/Broad Road/The Glen was quite unsightly, with dilapidated hoardings, stained boundary walls (the

Convent), unsightly 'backs' of buildings connected to St Joseph's, a dilapidated 'shack' and several untidy openings with unco-ordinated advertising and informational signage leading onto the well-kept Tesco/Court House carparks. Signage at an otherwise prepossessing fruit and vegetable shop was among the untiest seen. From your Development Plan, it is clear of course that you are aware of all this: the adjudicators simply report what they find. Further out of town, there were untidy commercial entrances and dilapidated buildings opposite the very tidy Latlurcan housing scheme. Some stone 'shacks' on the road by Drumbear should be demolished unless they are of historic interest, in which case they should be restored.

Residential Areas:

There is little in your Development Plan about the need to conserve a considerable number of fine town houses, ranging from the picturesque vista of Mill Street (where electricity poles nearly touch some upper windows!) to the splendid houses of Hill Street. Absence of civic pride was evident where inappropriate signage festooned the fine house and railings containing Curves and Mollys, and 'Aviemore' was seen to be needing attention, but otherwise this is still a prestigious residential area, as fine as the northern end of North Road where some splendid homes were presented with real taste and pride. One of the oldest and most attractive terraces in the town, Lake View, had a slightly dishevelled look; do encourage owners of older town houses to replace window frames in timber rather than in PVC. A new development called Latlurcan Glen (where is the glen?) looked very smart; it was encouraging to see young trees freshly planted here. Drumbear Wood impressed for its variety of house sizes within a well thought through overall design. Shrubs and trees were seen to be maturing nicely in The Corran; Oakridge had a prosperous air; houses in the the adjacent Beechgrove were all well kept, but one wondered why there was extensive kerbside weed in precinct. Estates such as these and others suggest a growing car culture, for not all are within an easy walk to schools and shops. At Tully a very few homes needed boundary walls and gables freshened up with paint. Imaginatively designed apartments were favourably noted at Glenmount. The rise in marking under this section is more an acknowledgement of the new estates than for the older homes which give Monaghan its real character and only some of which are maintained to the highest level.

Roads, Streets and Back Areas:

Substantial and impressive road works were seen at Coolshanagh, on the Old Armagh road and on the Dublin road. Oriel Way fulfills a useful link purpose. Surely there should also be a link between the Dublin, Ballybay, Cootehill and Clones roads to alleviate the acute traffic that converges on the town centre and then disperses in those directions? and surely, once the by-pass is open, it will only cater for Derry-Dublin traffic? has the Local Authority or the NRA considered making use of the dismantled railway from Coolshanagh to the Clones road, say near Cortolvin? Questions such as these do not seem to have been fully addressed in the Development Plan - and it is the relentless through traffic that inhibits the appreciation of the town centre as a place to enjoy town life. The ingenious road layout at Latlurcan should be praised, and the widening of The Glen without undue loss of trees and with the provision of attractive wooden fencing. Road surfaces were seen to be good in the town centre and pavements excellent there. Attractive lighting standards of older design were only seen in a very small area and these should be extended along the central streets.

General Impression:

There was much to admire in Monaghan, and quite an amount to disparage; but with your Development Plan you now have a blueprint for a radical and rapid sequence of improvements and the disparagement quotient will certainly evaporate. Congratulations on the new initiatives, some of which were already in place or about to be in place, and every good wish for future success.