

Tidy Towns Competition 2012

Adjudication Report

Centre: **Monaghan** Ref: **611**
County: **Monaghan** Mark: **269**
Category: **E** Date(s): **05/06/2012**

	Maximum Mark	Mark Awarded 2011	Mark Awarded 2012
Overall Development Approach	50	42	43
The Built Environment	50	40	42
Landscaping	50	29	31
Wildlife and Natural Amenities	50	22	27
Litter Control	50	25	28
Tidiness	30	15	15
Waste Minimisation	20	11	12
Residential Areas	40	26	30
Roads, Streets and Back Areas	50	30	33
General Impression	10	8	8
TOTAL MARK	400	248	269

Overall Development Approach:

Progress may seem slow to those working in the voluntary Tidy Towns area but to this adjudicator who has not been assigned to Monaghan for 6 or 7 years the improvements are striking – both what is seen 'on the ground' and in the documentation presented with this application in 5 easily assimilated and detailed sections resulting from surveys and other research (mentioned under headings below). It is interesting to read that you are now completing your second 3-Year Development Plan: it is clear that these plans have paid off in practical terms. The maps of the town centre are informative but in order to assist the visitor to see all relevant sites please do in future include suburban areas – an adjudicator unfamiliar with the town would have difficulty in finding, e.g. Cortolvin, Coolshanagh, etc and passers-by are amazingly lacking in local knowledge! Not long ago Monaghan was one of the lowest marked towns in its category but that is now hopefully a thing of the past.

The Built Environment:

The systematic reinstatement of the main streets and squares which was starting with Glaslough Street 6 years ago has now been completed by the Local Authority with superb results. The neglected core of the Plantation Town that was featured in the Ulster Architectural Heritage Society booklet 'Monaghan Town' in 1970 but largely ignored has now been sensitively revealed and refurbished with, it is hoped, parallel commercial advantage. A list of individual buildings that are well maintained in public or private ownership is perhaps unnecessary here, yet for the record the following impressed tremendously: St Macartan's Cathedral, St Patrick's Church, the Presbyterian Church, the Court House, the Market House (Arts Centre) which is perhaps the most distinguished of all, the former Royal Bank now the public office of the Town Council, Latlurcan chapel (not on map), the comparatively new Public Library, the bright and welcoming new Leisure Centre (unfortunately and disagreeably its Tourist Office defunct). The immaculate interior spaces of the Shopping Mall should be praised and the whiter-than-white exterior of Dunne's Stores. The unique to

Monaghan curved corners of several 19c town-centre business premises are happily still in existence though the roof-line of one was tampered with some years ago with unfortunate visual results. Your efforts to save the Railway Station are applauded; it is extraordinary that during the years of prosperity its formidably lengthy façade was not recognised for its worth and deterioration put a stop to; your temporary improvements are commendable; ultimately it is hoped you will be entirely successful.

Landscaping:

Both hard and soft landscaping were admired, the former in the Diamond, Church Square and Old Cross Square. The presence of flowering tubs and hanging baskets in these areas add considerably to their charm. The town is fortunate in having Peter's Lake at its centre where artificially provided decorative planting such as the colourful boat complements the natural. The same largely applies to the planting along the town section of the former Ulster Canal, which is an oasis of colour; the historical information here is interesting, as indeed it is elsewhere. The judiciously selected shrubs, perennials and annuals at the nearby intersection also lifts the profile of this otherwise drab area. Shrubs alongside Oriel Way were admired, as was the bog oak sculpture nearby. Trees are more properly considered under Natural Amenities (below). It is good to have information about e.g. bulb planting which otherwise we would be unaware of.

Wildlife and Natural Amenities:

Much recent tree-planting was seen along roadsides and in housing estates adding to the considerable stock of native species. This is an excellent continuing initiative. The Management Plan for Tom Young's Wood is a fascinating scientific document; the inventory of plant species and the Habitat Survey make for absorbing reading. The former canal basin appears to be an important wild-life corridor which must be conserved. The Town Tree Survey with its copious illustrations is equally interesting, not to say eye-opening. The Bird Survey is remarkable in its revelation that the highest bird species population is in the town centre rather than the outskirts, because of the presence of aquatic birds at Peter's Lake. A pity that the stone tower pigeon-house at Aviemore mentioned by Sir Charles Brett in 'Monaghan Town' has not been preserved. The completion of the biodiversity trail is looked forward to. The surveys will be of extreme use to planners and administrators over the coming years, but it is also hoped that you will make them available to other Tidy Towns committees and to the general public through the library, and also to the schools where they could all form the basis of separate studies by pupils.

Litter Control:

No significant area of littering was seen. Littering is of course a variable day by day. Some small outbreaks were noticed, for example at Devin O'Reilly Terrace, in some entries off Dubin Street and near the somewhat nondescript Bus Station. Congratulations for being included in the IBAL 'sustained excellence' category, and 'well done' to those who voluntarily pick up litter dropped by their irresponsible fellow citizens. Is there any way in which litter-droppers can be identified? Prosecutions some years back elsewhere were temporarily effective. The work of Junior Tidy Towns is especially commendable.

Tidiness:

The undergrounding of cables in recent years in the town centre has had a hugely positive effect – Old Cross Square is just one example. The 'Paint & Window' scheme for derelict properties is applauded. Several houses 'dead' due to planning blight were seen at Cortolvin Way but by agreement these and similar are not being considered in the marking prior to decisions as to their future at national level. The neighbourhood south of the shopping centre is an unfortunate mix of bleak car-parking, industrial sites, blank hoardings and unprepossessing housing: really the only part of the town that needs radical and expensive re-planning, giving a poor impression to visitors arriving in the town centre from Northern Ireland and Dublin. An unfortunate ruinous site at Drumbear mars an otherwise hyper-tidy approach to the town. The colourful playground near Oriel Way was slightly marred by graffiti at the time of judging. The painting of ugly 'backs' facing onto Peter's Lake Park has made a great improvement.

Waste Minimisation:

The updated Draft Biodiversity Plan is a kind of progenitor of the other surveys undertaken recently and has relevance under his heading. Your Waste Prevention Survey has disclosed interesting attitudes and generally a willingness to participate. The out-of-town recycling centre appeared to be well organised and it was good to see that the bring banks in the town were accessibly situated and also kept tidy. It is splendid that 4 primary schools have achieved Green Flag status – hearty congratulations to pupils and also to the guidance of teachers and parents. Thank you for including information on your entry form that we would not otherwise know about, such as the environmental workshops held at Teach na Daoine.

Residential Areas:

This heading includes all residences, such as street houses and terraces, not only housing estates. The older houses, whether large or small, in the town centre are what gives Monaghan its special character and most

are well presented; the most significant are on Hill Street and North Road. Many of the new estates are so far removed from the town facilities that they create and support an undesirable car culture. Mullaghmatt (not on map) is very well kept, could do with additional tree planting; Cathedral Walk is most attractively laid out with excellent planting; the somewhat older estates in the Pound Hill neighbourhood were seen to be well maintained, their spacious public lawns admired; smart cottages were noted at Ard Aobhain; tree and shrub planting at Glenview Heights were seen to be particularly successful and also at Drumbear Woods where the extensive public lawns again impressed – dead or ailing trees should be replaced here; the sylvan nature of Oakwood and Manor Crest was admired; nearby Tully did not impress as much partly because of poles and wirescapes and some boundary walls that needed repainting. More than half the estates visited are not marked on the map. Belgian Park is of unique design and its sense of period well sustained.

Roads, Streets and Back Areas:

The hard landscaping of the town centre is mentioned again because of the new and much more logical traffic layout especially in the Diamond and Old Cross Square. Really excellent bilingual street and estate signs were seen with some surprising omissions. It is interesting to see that a by-pass is shown as completed from Cortolvin to Coolshanagh when there is no sign of one even being started, and Oriel Way is also shown as extending to the Cootehill Road! on Ordnance Survey Discovery Map 28. Attractive stout wooden fencing in some housing states and particularly along the Ballybay and Cootehill approach roads gives a feeling of cohesion. Main road surfaces, and surfaces throughout all estates visited, were good. Traffic calming measures were ubiquitous and effective. Elegant lamp standards and other street furniture are now the rule rather than the exception. Best wishes for the Gavan Duffy memorial: do be sure to get the best artistic advice on a suitable sculptor.

General Impression:

This adjudicator has noticed a very appreciable sense of improved planning, architectural and environmental awareness since his last visit, and also significant improvements in all categories since last year, judging by the 2011 report. A substantial increase in marking may be expected and undoubtedly this will be repeated if the energy and initiative is maintained. Congratulations to the Committee, to the Local Authority and to the business people and residents of the town – and particularly the Junior Tidy Towns members whose involvement is clearly exemplary.