

# **Louth Looking Good 2017**

## **Blackrock – Overall Winner**

### **Adjudication Report**

#### **General Cleanliness**

Meticulous is the first word that springs to mind when trying to give a flavour of the high standard of cleanliness that prevails throughout all areas of Blackrock. Kerbside weed control was faultless everywhere and how you manage a litter free presentation in such a busy location is almost beyond belief with the only very minor blot being one incident of fresh dog fouling which one of our team managed to stand in but we won't hold that against you! The presentation of the Bring Bank site is remarkable – you have managed to create a thing of beauty from what is, after all, a basic utility but your aesthetically pleasing and very informative signage together with floral enhancement and total absence of litter ensures this area is extremely attractive and serves the dual purpose of disseminating information to site users on how to implement environmentally sustainable policies in their everyday lives.

#### **Landscaping Works and Floral Displays**

The Sundial area presents a postcard perfect picture with its striking bed of roses, summer planting of cascading petunia, timeless sculpture and paving in addition to the high quality public seating that provides the ideal setting to appreciate the wonderful seafront vista. The Bradáin sculpture is equally impressive and sits comfortably in the streetscape where it makes a very positive statement. Floral displays along the promenade wall were in full bloom adding interest to the surroundings and enriching the natural environment with their graduating colours of pink, purple and white beautifully echoing the hues of the mountains, sea and sky. The upgrading of the sea wall in the lower car park, to the same standard as the promenade wall, has transformed this area of the village and you are to be commended for your vision and diligence in completing this work to such a high standard. Similarly the recent upgrading of the Swimming Pool Walkway is a triumph for your committee, particularly as we are aware that you struggled with the presentation of this area in the past. The demolition of the high wall opens a wonderful view of the village while the wooden facing of the inner wall and the reproduction and installation of photographs of Blackrock in a bygone era in signage form effectively creates an outdoor art gallery which evokes fond memories of Blackrock through the ages. These recent works extend the beach area by linking the Main Street with the Priests Beach in a most effective and attractive manner. Radiant hanging baskets on freshly painted elegant lighting standards in the core village area are highly pleasing to the eye and your single colour rose planting throughout the wider community area is exemplary providing, as it does, a unified flow of colour that has compelling appeal. The visual impact of the shoreline is shown to maximum effect through your telescope which is set in a nicely paved area that is also home to a lovely stone

memorial seat and appropriately designed interpretative signage highlighting the ecology of Blackrock seashore, Dundalk Bay and the Cooley Peninsula. The dramatic display of signal red geraniums, in seaside themed planters, at Blackrock Flowers adds sparkle to this area of the village and we were also very taken with the Water Wasting Rascals sign which is clearly a project undertaken with the local schools. Your Leave only Footprints beach litter signs, newly erected at a few locations along the beach, are an ingenious, pertinent and beneficial addition that hopefully will inspire a positive response from beach users. The two large raised brick beds at Cahir Linn were presented in a totally weed free manner this year and glowed with warm colour from delightful rose and begonia planting. While Blackrock presents as a modern, bustling seaside village it certainly respects and promotes its heritage as is evidenced by your distinctive, stylish and dignified heritage plaques on sites of interest throughout the community. We also love your unique fingerpost signage which is without rival in the county in terms of design and quality. We paid a short visit to the grounds of the Golf Club whose impressive box hedging name sign, black ceramic pots of colourful petunia, tree lined avenue and rose planting impressed greatly although we were disappointed to see that kerbside weeds presented a significant problem once again this year. The renovations to the Church have produced excellent results with a newly lined, well organised car park, island beds exuding warmth from black eyed susie, geum and catmint as well as cheerful summer colour emanating from planting along the front of the Church. The Grotto was maintained in an appropriately dignified manner. Hamilton Marsh is, as always, a wonderful ecological site that is managed in the appropriate manner and we noted that addition of one of your many new Wild for Wildlife signs. We feel we must also comment on the new willow enclosed wildflower strip in the graveyard where comfrey, poppies, oxeye daisies and cornflowers grow in natural abandon creating delightful impact. The Community Centre car park was under redevelopment on adjudication day and will be a significant asset when complete providing ordered parking facilities and the potential for inviting landscaping in the geometric designed beds. Six large wooden planters of pretty petunia along the front of the Community Centre and at the entrance to Blackrock Park provide the first hint of the delights that lie ahead within the award winning park. The avenue of lime trees creates a strongly defined boundary for the atmospheric walkway around the park where the many gardens are striking with variety and interest. The orchard has been extended and redesigned with impressive results – pear, plum, apple, greengage and blackcurrants all thriving as are the remarkable pumpkins which have emerged from composting after the 2016 Pumpkin Festival – a truly extraordinary result! The pedestrian entrance to the Park from Sandy Lane was simply aglow with white roses leading to the signature bed of yellow roses highlighting the five beech trees. The adjudicators were simply enthralled by the various planting schemes each bringing its own uniqueness but combining with others to create a botanical paradise and kaleidoscope of visual treats. The nectar rich corridor that forms your biodiversity garden, the smiling sunflowers, the wonderful willow throne in the cottage garden, the composting demonstration site and the irresistibly fragrant sweetpea are but some of the delights we

encountered as we strolled around. The well maintained playground, Multi Use Games Amenity and adult exercise equipment cater for the needs of park users on an age friendly basis but it is the overwhelming beauty of the sublime sensory garden, on its elevated site, that is in our view without equal in the county in terms of landscaping. The tranquil and restful colour scheme of the seating and the landscaping contributes to the exquisite impact – white lace cap hydrangea, magnificent David Austin roses, ornamental grasses and lambs ear are but some of the many plants that appeal to the senses in this truly magnificent focal point in the Park. Finally, the Fane River Walk is a joyful facility and looked splendid on adjudication day with its safe walkway, attractive and informative signage, duck and swan paintings and, of course, the regal swans themselves enjoying “The Little River with the Big Punch”.

### **Appearance of approach Roads**

All approach roads to Blackrock, without exception, are presented to the highest possible standard providing an immediate positive introduction to the village. The visitor feels that they are being welcomed to the village as soon as it announces itself through the wonderful seaside themed entrance beds at all main approaches. Verges are appropriately managed to provide a neat appearance while accommodating the needs of wildlife and this approach is highlighted for the visitor by your roadside trimming of verges and your Wild for Wildlife signs.

### **Individual Contributions – Residential/ Business**

Where do we start? This is an area that improves with each passing year and it is so rewarding to see the pride that the business people and householders in the community demonstrate in the manner in which they present their properties. The Bayview Tavern, as usual, looked simply splendid with its stylish shop front enhanced beautifully by sculpted box trees in containers climbing upwards to meet the vibrant planting of the window boxes for dramatic impact. It is such a shame that signage lettering has not been replaced at The Stone House as this building has the potential to create great impact in the streetscape. The Credit Union building is very neatly presented and adorned with three window boxes – simplicity at its very best that delivers dignified impact. The Black Wok, Home Bakery, Mace, Mullen’s and the Neptune are notable properties in terms of making their marks in a positive manner. Exquisite is a word that springs to mind when faced with the wonderful window boxes at all levels and the Irish, European and Blackrock Flag flying high on The Brake. The Clermont challenges it for pride of place at this general location with its aesthetically pleasing facade adorned by alluring window boxes at both levels. Uncle Tom’s Cabin excelled this year with one of the best presentations we have seen in the County – conical box surrounded by petunia and bacopa in barrels and hanging baskets of multi coloured petunia, lobelia and bacopa providing unity between upper and lower levels and adding to the luxurious impact of the large wooden planters along the front of the building. Locavore Artisan Foods is an engaging new addition to the street with its classy shop front

enhanced by simply divine window boxes of pollinator friendly herbs including, oregano, rosemary, thyme, lemon balm and parsley with pockets of lobelia for colour – a real gem contributing so well to your efforts. The Crafty Rock is also a delight with its wonderful seat incorporating summer colour – charm personified! Sybil also enjoys a new location in the streetscape and makes a positive contribution. Sextons, while not in the village centre, is within the lower speed limits and judging area and provides a terrific first impression at this entrance to the village with its nicely painted building festooned with hanging baskets and window boxes for strong impact. St. Oliver’s School was extremely neat and tidy with the excellent upcycling of school satchels, bursting with colour from pansies and busy lizzies, being particularly admired. St. Francis N.S. also demonstrated great upcycling techniques in the landscaping programme which was a delightful blend of manicured perfection and quirkiness. The Garda Station and Legion of Mary Hall both presented in a very tasteful manner and we noted the rebranding of the former Vivo Shop, which exhibited minimal, but important, improvements in presentation. Blackrock Abbey Nursing Home enjoys a very peaceful setting and was appropriately enhanced with window boxes of miniature ivy and a series of warmly coloured hanging baskets to add to the tranquil appearance. Blackrock is home to many generations and styles of housing and is blessed with some residential areas that are simply a joy to behold while being faced with the challenge of encouraging and supporting others to demonstrate pride of place – your Beautiful Blackrock campaign is an ideal initiative to acknowledge and support residents to ensure a high standard of environmental presentation in their residential areas. The jewels in the crown, as always, were Elm Park, Rock Court and Ard na Mara with Sandfield Gardens also recording an excellent presentation this year. Cahir Linn, The Ferns, Clermont Manor, Fane View, Wallace’s Cove and Beech Park were all admired and are certainly contributing in a very positive way to the overall presentation of the area. Individual houses also contribute hugely with St. Gerard’s, on Sandy Lane, producing a riot of colour from fantastic garden planting while the yellow bungalow at the entrance to the Community Centre Car Park was equally spectacular. All residential properties on Main Street are nicely painted and many are charmingly adorned with floral enhancements.

## **Overall Impact**

Charming! Radiant! Captivating! Evocative! Stylish! We could go on and on but there are simply no superlatives to do adequate justice to the environmental presentation of Blackrock. The work of your Tidy Towns Committee, and enthusiastic group of volunteers, is of central importance to the continued economic prosperity of the village and you need and deserve the support of the commercial and residential sectors to assist you in your ambitious and meticulous work programme which has certainly put Blackrock on the map nationally. Onwards and upwards from here but in the meantime you continue to be a leading light in all things Tidy Towns and are deserving winners of Louth Looking Good 2017!