



# THE Mayo News

## Sentinel standing proud

### Westport sculpture wins prestigious national architecture award

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WESTPORT added to its list of national accolades last week, when the town's 'Sentinel' sculpture and the surrounding public realm space was named winner of the People's Choice Award in The Royal Institute of the Architects of Ireland (RIAI) Irish Architecture Awards 2016. The success was announced on Tuesday last, much to the delight of Achill-based sculptor Ronan Halpin and Simon Wall, Mayo County Council's architect with responsibility for Westport and the Sentinel project.

How fitting that The Sentinel - originally commissioned to celebrate Westport winning The Irish Times competition for the Best Place to Live in Ireland - has now won a national award of its own.

The finished public artwork was unveiled last year by American Ambassador to Ireland, His Excellency Mr Kevin O'Malley, whose grandparents were from Westport.

A gala RIAI awards evening took place in Kilmainham in Dublin on Friday last, at which Westport and Mayo were well represented.

The Sentinel was among 50 plus projects shortlisted for this year's RIAI People's Choice Awards. Now in its ninth year, the popular award gives the public the opportunity to have their say by voting for their favourite shortlisted project.

This year's awards received 180 entries - the highest in five years - across 17 categories, with 52 shortlisted in Best Commercial, Best Educational and Best Health Building, Best House, Best Housing and Best House Extension,

Best Public Building, Best Cultural Project, Best Leisure, Best Public Space/Urban Design, Best International Project, Best Sustainable Project, Best Conservation and Best Universal Design.

The Sentinel won by just a couple of hundred votes, out of over 14,000 votes cast

#### DELIGHTED

SPEAKING after he was notified of the success, Simon Wall said he was delighted that the project had received such backing, adding that the win is testament to the talents of sculptor Ronan Halpin and the hard work of the many people involved in the project.

Cathaoirleach of the West Mayo Municipal District, Cllr Brendan Mulroy, congratulated his colleagues on the council and the management team, who backed the project since day one, and said that it was fantastic to start his first week in the job with such positive news.

Chief Executive of Mayo County Council Peter Hynes welcomed the news of The Sentinel's success. "This is a fantastic achievement for all involved and marks the culmination of 20 years of careful architectural management of the built fabric of Westport," he said.

"The Sentinel and its surrounding public-realm space was up against significant competition from outstanding architectural projects across the entire country, and I would like to commend the work of Ronan Halpin, Simon Wall and all the Mayo County Council team, and the many community representatives, who were involved in bringing this complex project to such a successful conclusion."

#### FEATURE

THE winning project is unusual in that it is a collaboration

between the sculptor, Halpin, and Westport's Town Architect, Wall, who designed the surrounding public realm space to celebrate the piece of sculpture.

"The new public space resolves what was a very triangular space left over at the junction of two very steep streets," Wall explained.

"In essence it's a new triangular public space that now rises out of the ground like the fore deck of a boat, and Ronan's sculpture soars like the boat's figure head rising five metres high and looking down on the town's main civic space, the Octagon.

"It's a very small project but it makes a significant contemporary cultural statement as to the continued relevance and vibrancy of rural Irish towns and their important contribution to the health of our nation. The investment and support of Mayo County Council and the RIAI in their provision of architectural resources, and the value that they have given to architecture and design, as major driving components for the survival and endorsement of rural Irish towns," he added, also thanking everyone who had voted in the awards.

Tom Gilligan, Director of Services in the West Mayo region, acknowledged 'this prestigious award' and said he would like to commend all the staff and elected members involved in progressing the project to its successful conclusion.

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## BACKGROUND

The Sentinel was first mooted during the lifetime of the now abolished Westport Town Council. Though it was backed by the nine councillors, there was some uproar outside the Chamber when then town councillor Ollie Gannon suggested that the statue of St Patrick should be removed from the top of the Octagon monument in the town and replaced with the Sentinel. It was the beginning of much debate about the sculpture and its surrounding public realm space.



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- Mr Simon Wall



▲ **AWARD WINNER** Westport's 'The Sentinel' was named winner of the People's Choice Award in The Royal Institute of the Architects of Ireland (RIA) Irish Architecture Awards 2016.