

Tidy Towns 1997

"Caring for our environment"

Centre : **BALTINGLASS**
County : **WICKLOW**
Category : **C**

Results

Date of Adjudication : 14-07-97

	Maximum Mark	Mark Awarded 1997	Mark Awarded 1996
Overall Developmental Approach	50	26	--
The Built Environment	40	21	--
Landscaping	40	21	--
Wildlife and Natural Amenities	30	16	--
Litter Control	40	22	--
Tidiness	20	11	--
Residential Areas	30	17	--
Roads, Streets and Back Areas	40	22	--
General Impression	10	4	--
TOTAL MARK	300	160	--

Baltinglass, County Wicklow

OVERALL DEVELOPMENTAL APPROACH

Thank you for your detailed questionnaire and map which was helpful during the course of adjudication. Welcome back to the competition. You will note that there is a new emphasis in the Tidy Towns Competition since last year and additional information is provided by the guidance notes. The new emphasis incorporates greater emphasis on wildlife and natural amenities; litter control and tidiness; evidence of bilingualism and accessibility for both the disabled and elderly. Baltinglass is a town with a rich heritage resource and unique town plan and layout complemented by the River Slaney and an important built environment. The adjudicators look forward to the submission of your detailed five year plan. This plan should be simple and realistic, covering 3 - 5 pages, together with a map outlining areas for improvement or particular problem areas. Try to get greater input from your local authority, business community, residents and schools. Try to give it time, it is not going to happen over night, but by working on one project at a time, it will make a difference. Ensure that any project completed allows for ongoing maintenance. In this regard, try to involve the community with Adopt-a-Spot. Also, is there any significance in the name of Baltinglass, in i.e. Irish?

THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT

The built environment in Baltinglass is very varied, taking in both modern and heritage buildings, and both good and bad. While most of the large public buildings, such as the hospital, all the main schools and Teagasc offices were very well presented, there is room for improvement in certain areas. Both the Catholic church and Church of Ireland were very well presented, as was the area within Baltinglass Abbey. At Waders, this area was much improved, well done in this regard as litter was a problem in the past. Other premises that looked well at time of adjudication included Kinsella Estates; A.J. Flynn; Pattersons (shop front area); Murphy Auctioneers and T.J. Keogh. Areas that could be improved are Murrays; Quinns shop on the corner was a very bad presentation and was in need of a painting at time of adjudication; Sue Ryder Shop could be improved and Baltinglass Mart needs to be considerably improved. An overall development plan for screening of this area is needed; hedging or tree planting is needed - small trees and shrubs were noted, which was good to see but try to replace the signage for Quinns. The new Credit Union was also noted, well done. Try to also plan for street improvements in the square. In the long term, cobble locking and the provision of street furniture could help immensely improve the visual appearance of this area and also careful consideration of selected tree species might be provided in this area as they have a tremendous soothing effect against buildings. It is important to remember that every town in Ireland is different - each has its own unique history, topography, buildings and even use of building

materials - but the most important town in Ireland is your own. Much of the overall impression of any town is dictated by its buildings. Each building is unique in its own way and collectively these buildings contribute to the unique character of the town. In considering the main aspects of buildings, there are two factors to keep in mind, one is the quality of the individual structure, i.e., its presentation and materials used and secondly is the building in its overall context. Insensitive changes to individual buildings can destroy the overall character of the street. Buildings on corners, or at the end of streets assume greater civic design importance because of their location. Where such buildings are modified insensitively, or allowed to fall into disrepair, it can have serious visual implications, an example of this is Quinns shop on the corner.

LANDSCAPING

There are some excellent examples of landscaping throughout Baltinglass this year; however, there is considerable room for improvement, particularly, on the approach roads. One area that would be singled out as an excellent presentation is the Lawlor Centre and the Church grounds adjacent to it. In front of the abbey is somewhat disappointing at the turning area with mounds of stones - this is one of your premier visitor sites and due care and consideration should be given to this area. It is important to remember that the appearance, maintenance and presentation of public spaces, including amenity areas, open spaces, footpaths and streets etc. are a vital aspect of civic design quality. Poor presentation of public areas can take away from a high standard achieved by individual properties. Appropriate selection and siting of trees, shrubs and flowers for all year round effect is important. Also, considered under this category is the presentation of flower beds; tree planting; street furniture and the removal of weeds.

WILDLIFE AND NATURAL AMENITIES

Conserving nature is a new venture for many towns and can appear daunting at first. The adjudicators recognise that environmental programmes can take time to get up and running and even longer to assess their success. This section of the report requires an involvement of all groups, including schools in the town. The emphasis is on the conservation and enhancement of wildlife habitats and the environment. Woodlands, rivers, ponds, hedgerows, open spaces, graveyards and walls are important habitats. The committee needs to identify the habitats in their area and then determine the appropriate actions to conserve and enhance these habitats. Guidelines in the Tidy Towns book offers other suggestions as to the type of initiatives you might undertake. Is there a local wildlife expert, or a member of the community with experience in this area, that your committee can draw on? In preparing an environmental programme for the village, there should be a year-round participation in environmental protection and promotion involving all members of the community and providing access for all. The next step is to identify what habitats are in your area - are these woodlands, wetlands, grasslands, or other habitats such as cemeteries, walls etc. Prepare a survey and map, showing the areas of wildlife

importance and areas of potential importance. Other steps involved in the preparation of the environmental programme for Baltinglass would include identification of species list of the flora and fauna in the area; preparation of a wildlife management plan as part of the area development plan; work to be carried out including conservation projects, wildlife gardens, areas of conservation, access, tree planting, information areas etc. This must be carried out in sympathy with the local landscape and must not be overwhelming visually, or environmentally. In this regard, the river is one area that offers an important wildlife and natural amenity. Considerable improvements have been noted here, and are ongoing and the adjudicators look forward to the completion of this project. Try to incorporate environmental and wildlife features into the overall design and landscape.

LITTER CONTROL

This category examines the absence of litter and dumping, the management and prevention and control of litter; measures to promote anti litter awareness in the community; provision of litter bins at sensitive spots e.g. outside bus stops, shops etc. The presentation of Baltinglass under this category was varied, for example, litter was evident on the approach road from Kiltegan; bins were over-flowing opposite Quinns/Mart and by Quinns on the Corner. Litter control was quite good in the centre of the town around the Town Hall, Weavers Square and Main Street. There is room for improvement in this regard. Enquire with your local authority as to what their plans are in relation to the recently announced action against litter for Baltinglass.

TIDINESS

The overall tidy appearance is detracted by a number of items in Baltinglass including the presentation of buildings, e.g. Baltinglass Mart; inadequate surfacing (opposite Baltinglass Mart); lack of maintenance of landscaped areas, e.g. approach roads; and by the presence of weeds, for example, these are noted by the kerbs going up to the industrial area. Try to clean the finger post signs and also paint up areas that are in need of painting, for example, a corrugated gate behind the seat and bin on the Blessington road badly needed to be painted. Try to look at the town yourself and see where improvements can be made; in this regard it will require the support from the community, commercial sector and the local authority.

RESIDENTIAL AREAS

While there is evidence of very good individual effort throughout the town of Baltinglass this year, there is room for improvement in all areas. In the main Parkmore Estate, the presentation varied enormously. At the entrance closest to the town was the best presentation, well done in this regard. At the second entrance, further out, litter was noted and weeds were very bad by the kerbs, as was the case by the third entrance. At the furthest entrance from the town, there are some very good examples of individual effort e.g. No. 45 to name but one. St. Kevins B&B was very well presented and overall, other individual premises made a good individual effort. Some premises would benefit from

painting.

ROADS, STREETS AND BACK AREAS

Approaching from Kiltegan, grass verges had only been given a rough cut, for example, long grass was noted at the Baltinglass wooden sign. The white sign needs to be replaced. New surface and footpath was noted on the right hand side approach further out with fencing being put in place. Try to watch the grass growing out under the fencing, this takes from the overall appearance and just requires a simple strimming - avoid the use of any weed killers. A very attractive stone wall was noted near the school. The approach to Baltinglass from the south, was quite bad. Considerable open spaces had only received a rough cut, while long grass was noted growing around the seating (not very inviting to sit down). The use of illegal signs detracts from the overall appearance, as do weeds along kerbs. Closer in was much better, helped no doubt by individual residential efforts. On the approach road from Blessington, again, grass verges were not neat, resurfacing is also needed as it takes from the overall appearance. Broken kerbing further in is quite dangerous. Approaching Baltinglass from Ballitore, good efforts were noted at the seat on the left hand side but these are not helped by weeds along the kerb on the right hand side. A considerable effort is needed here, as first impressions last.

GENERAL IMPRESSION

The adjudicators recognise that Baltinglass is a large town with limited local authority resources, however, other towns throughout Ireland have taken up the challenge and shown that they can succeed by working together. The adjudicators recognise the town is a Heritage Town and look forward to the development of this theme, bringing with it the need to attract visitors into the town. One aspect that will detract significantly from a visitors enjoyment is a negative visual appearance created by some of the items listed in this report. However, please recognise that you have potentially a fantastic and appealing town, needing significant improvements. Good luck in the competition. Give it time and it will make a difference.