

Tidy Towns Competition 2009

Adjudication Report

Centre: **Robertstown** Ref: **981**
County: **Kildare** Mark: **198**
Category: **B** Date(s): **19/06/2009**

	Maximum Mark	Mark Awarded 2009
Overall Development Approach	50	26
The Built Environment	50	27
Landscaping	50	29
Wildlife and Natural Amenities	50	15
Litter Control	50	28
Waste Minimisation	20	7
Tidiness	30	17
Residential Areas	40	23
Roads, Streets and Back Areas	50	20
General Impression	10	6
TOTAL MARK	400	198

Overall Development Approach:

Welcome back Robertstown to the TidyTowns Competition after a five year break. Thank you for your submission together with your clearly drawn and annotated map which was very useful on adjudication day. You have a small committee with a limited number of meetings but well done on all your efforts to date. You seem to have come back to the competition with a clear idea as to the issues you wish to address in your community. We would encourage your group to prepare a three to five year plan with both short term and long term tasks identified. This need not be professionally prepared but should set out clear aims and goals for your area. Your annotated map can be a basis for the plan with a table accompanying it identifying the timescales, action, who is responsible and perhaps outside help which may be needed to achieve the task. It will be a very useful tool to help focus your group's efforts and allow you to reach achievable goals in realistic time frames. In addition this can also help you target sponsorship and build on successful sponsorship achieved to date. You mention your support from local business but have you approached Kildare County Council for additional support or investigated sources of funding for local projects? Have you considered approaching other agencies for support? The successful TidyTowns Committees are those that have succeeded in harnessing the support and skills of a number of different agencies such as the local GAA, Waterways Ireland, Leader+, the CLAR programme (if you are in a designated area), The Heritage Council and the Urban and Village Renewal Grant Scheme.

The Built Environment:

Robertstown is a small picturesque village situated on the banks of the Grand Canal and bordering the Bog of Allen. The village is dominated by the Canal and one of the most prominent buildings in the village is the old Grand Canal Hotel. We understand that up until relatively recently the building was used as a restaurant, educational, tourist and community centre. We hope that this wonderful building can again become a functioning part of the community. Many of the new buildings in the village have made use of the delightful

environment with a number of new developments facing the canal. The run of townhouses and the Garda Station with its gable end decorative plaque depicting a tug horse are a nice addition to the town and in scale with their surroundings. The run of bollards to the footpath here could do with a new coat of paint. We hope the stone clad apartment building will soon find residents as it is in such a prominent corner site. Mullanys pub and shop was looking well although a gate should be fitted to its rear yard. The Post Office is a lovely old building and the traditional frontage of Charlie Weld's pub was admired with its eclectic pub window display and period lighting. The empty pub beside the take away needs to be maintained by its owners to ensure it does not become an eyesore as it is in such a prominent position in the village centre. A charming stone and thatched cottage was perfectly located on the far banks of the canal as viewed from the main street. Its neighbouring house should paint its boundary wall. The Holidays Cottages were neat and tidy and while the planters looked well here perhaps bigger pots could be introduced to break up the hard surfacing. The school with its new extension was beautifully presented as were the school grounds. Good luck with your proposed clean up at the ruined cottage.

Landscaping:

Robertstown is blessed with an enviable canal side setting, which creates unique opportunities for you. Generally the canal side was well presented but the area by the picnic tables could benefit from more frequent mowing. Your submission lists a future project as the erection of fencing to block off the unguarded bank of the canal. Any works of the canal would need to be done in conjunction with the relevant historic/conservation authorities in such a sensitive location. Ensure the relevant experts are consulted before carrying out any interventions here. We wish you luck with the landscape works proposed to the roadside verge at Annsborough Court as this was overgrown on adjudication day. Tree planting and verge cutting here would create a nice approach to the village. Although replacement tree planting seems to have been carried out to the verge within the estate. We would encourage you to identify open spaces and locations in your village where additional tree planting could take place, such as the entrance area at Father Murphy Park. The planting could be done as part of Tree Week organised by the Tree Council of Ireland. Your school may already be involved in this programme and if so you should include any details with next year's submission. Try to plant predominately native species and those appropriate for their surroundings.

Wildlife and Natural Amenities:

Robertstown has a number of rich habitats within its confines including the wetland habitats of the canal and the light woodland area past the bring centre at the Hotel. You should build on these resources in order to gain marks in this category. A logical place would be to carry out a very basic survey of flora and fauna in the area. Perhaps your local school could help with this? This plan can be a simple colour coded map showing the various habitat types in Robertstown: - woodland, hedges, gardens, open spaces, canal and banks etc. This information can then be used to decide how best to enhance the biodiversity of your area by, for example, new native planting, installing bird/bat boxes. The provision of a survey and management plan contributes to the marks in this section. Be sure to ensure any new signposts are sensitively located and in scale with their surroundings.

Litter Control:

Some litter was noted in the village near the shops and in the lane by the Garda Station. In addition there was a lot of litter around the bridge, canal banks and in the water. This is obviously a problem area for you. You do not mention in your submission if you have any organised litter patrols. Although we saw your Tidy Towns Clean Up notice on the school notice board. Establishing a regular litter patrol is the most effective way of addressing litter. You should identify Committee members who can take responsibility for particular areas and who can commit to doing small-scale pick ups a few times a week – perhaps while walking the dog or while out for an evening walk. You may need more focussed efforts to manage the litter actually in the water.

Does your committee take part in the An Taisce National Spring Clean, Ireland's largest and most popular anti-litter initiative? National Spring Clean packs with posters and tabards are available from An Taisce. This can be done in conjunction with the local school. Good luck with your initiatives in this area and please include any notices of your litter patrols with future submissions.

Your bring centre and its environs were well kept and free of blown litter. The unusual litter bins were admired. This is certainly a novel way of involving the local school children in the provision of bins and promoting litter awareness.

Waste Minimisation:

The green flag was flying proudly outside your school, well done to all involved with this. Is the school working towards its second flag? We hope your recycling centre will continue to be a well used resource and good luck with your plans to expand bins here to include clothes collection. Waste minimisation is about more than litter control. It involves the prevention of litter accumulation in the first place.

Are any of your local businesses involved in the Repak scheme which aims to facilitate and grow packaging recycling? If not perhaps they could be encouraged to look into this scheme? How many residents compost? Kildare County Council supply compost bins at a reasonable rate so all residents should be encouraged to compost. These are all initiatives which may already be happening in Robertstown which you can include as part of future submissions. Consider running a waste minimization workshop in partnership with the local authority as part of a public Tidy Towns meeting. You could increase your marks considerable in this area by looking at new initiatives here.

Tidiness:

Robertstown is a lovely village and the main village areas have a neat appearance in spite of a number of unused buildings and shops in the core area. The grass areas along the canal in the village centre, especially at the car park and picnic area, should be kept mown for a neat appearance although outside the village only the path area should be maintained to allow full habitat diversity. The tables outside the Gala shop looked a little out of place in the middle of the parked cars and perhaps a proper café banner/windbreak for the seating area should be installed. There was some graffiti noted on the walls of the lane alongside the Garda Station. The wheelie bins outside the Old Barge Inn should be stored off street or removed once they have been collected. The pumps in the village at St Brigids Terrace and near the canal bridge were neat and tidy. The empty site at the end of Robertstown Hill near the village core is a bit of an eyesore. Can it be tidied up or the boundary improved?

Residential Areas:

The residential areas in the village are well presented with some of the individual houses past the bridge on the Lowtown Road especially well looked after. Well done to residents here. The open space at St Brigids Terrace was looking colourful and neat and we note you intend more planting here. Remove the dead birch tree near the bench and replant with a similar tree. Try to ensure as many seed and berry bearing plants are used to increase biodiversity. There was no entrance/estate sign for the Grove heights or Father Murphy Park area. Some bags of green waste and plant cuttings were discarded in the open space at Grove Heights. The communal areas at the Moorings and the Crescent were well looked after but again there was no entrance sign for the Crescent. It was good to see that the hedge was retained between the two developments and protected during the construction stage. Ensure that all new canal side developments have appropriate planting and boundaries, a new house site being developed along the canal past the bridge should be planted up due to its sensitive canal side location. Mow the area around the entrance stone/sign at Annesborough as the sign was difficult to read on adjudication day.

Roads, Streets and Back Areas:

Try to ensure all grass verges on the approach to the village are cut from within the speed limit signs. We look forward to seeing new village signs but in the interim ensure all the older signs are washed and cleaned. Good luck with the extension of the footpaths in the village. It is important to develop safe routes to the school from all housing areas.

General Impression:

Welcome back Robertstown to the competition and we hope this is the start of another fruitful involvement for you. You should view the competition as a programme or structure under which you can achieve and document improvements for your area. You have a beautiful village and we can see you going from strength to strength in the competition. We would encourage you to seek the excellent advice which is available from the Local Authority on many issues be it Conservation, Heritage or environmental issues. Well done to all involved in your committee and we wish you well for your plans for 2010.