

# Tidy Towns Competition 2009

## *Adjudication Report*

Centre: **Castletown** Ref: **409**  
County: **Laois** Mark: **298**  
Category: **B** Date(s): **23/06/2009**  
**30/07/2009**

	Maximum Mark	Mark Awarded 2009
Overall Development Approach	50	45
The Built Environment	50	36
Landscaping	50	42
Wildlife and Natural Amenities	50	29
Litter Control	50	40
Waste Minimisation	20	10
Tidiness	30	20
Residential Areas	40	27
Roads, Streets and Back Areas	50	40
General Impression	10	9
<b>TOTAL MARK</b>	<b>400</b>	<b>298</b>

### **Overall Development Approach:**

A reading of your Overview and Development Plan gives pause for considerable satisfaction, but not complacency; the four precepts expressed under 'Objectives' are most heartening. This adjudicator has not been in Castletown since the awarding of the national Tidy Towns prize and it is good to see that the core of the village, in the meantime has undergone little radical change, except in improvements of detailing.

### **The Built Environment:**

It is noted that you do not include any information on the entry form in regard to Buildings – is this because there is nothing significant to be added since last year? The physical core of the village was looking superbly well on the date of the visit. The Corn Mill, the stone terraces that build up to the castle remains, and the pristine quality of the buildings around the green such as the Convent, are as wonderfully striking as recalled from some years back. The two schools are nicely kept. Serious excavation work was ongoing at the Corn Mill, perhaps a reinstatement of the mill race. The ancient stone bridge on the Nore is a splendid example of the architecture and engineering of a particularly enterprising era – some have sadly vanished – and now enhanced by elegant lamp standards. The schools were nicely presented. The shops and business premises were all bright and engaging.

### **Landscaping:**

A concern has always been that the spacious greens might at some time be prettified by several dainty flowerbeds, but this intrusion has never happened, except for one which is placed in a position where it enhances the area. Good taste has always prevailed. The triangular stone bed near the school was clearly being given some attention. A number of excellent floral displays was seen in containers. The maintenance of the green spaces, of roadside areas and especially of the wonderful lime, beech and sycamore approach from the Mountrath side, is exemplary. The box hedging 'Failte' sign, one of many now in the country, contrives to

supersede others in design and maintenance. The numerous judiciously placed sculptures were very favourably noted. The proposed rockery will be looked forward to.

### **Wildlife and Natural Amenities:**

It is very good to read that you have cleaned the salmon weir and also the duck pond – the ducks were not in attendance on this particular date. Tree planting over the years, including in new estates, appears to have been unceasing. The oak tree plantation is an especially fine and poignant initiative. The Noreside nature trail is a first class amenity for local people and visitors alike; the planting is subtle and blends with existing. Churchfield Lane, probably at its most intensely satisfying in spring and autumn, is an amenity that could easily be missed were it not for your first class directions.

### **Litter Control:**

It is interesting to read that you organise daily patrols, clearly very effectively. Has it ever been ascertained who drops the litter that needs such constant monitoring? Is it passing motorists? Certainly the voluntary helpers might be involved in more creative tasks if the cause of littering could be stopped at source. Well publicised fines have been known to act as a deterrent elsewhere. Your anti-litter Art Competition will be looked forward to.

### **Waste Minimisation:**

It is clear from your notes that this topic is taken very seriously. The Recycling Point was seen to be well organised and clean. Does it have to be in such an eye-catching position? Of course being beside the school is an advantage in making children conscious of the concept of waste minimisation, but one wonders if a less visually sensitive location could be found near by. It is really the LCC signage, which is so intrusive on the village scene.

### **Tidiness:**

Weed control is obviously one of your top priorities. It was good to read that you had cleaned graffiti from under the bridge. The comment on the location of bins might be appropriate here too. The post-and-wire fencing on the road leading to Churchfield Heights was weed-infested – the timber paling opposite is much more successful as a boundary. Nonetheless, Castletown remains a very tidy village.

### **Residential Areas:**

Roughly speaking, the residential areas can be divided into four categories: the early 19th century houses that form the core of the village, 20th century Local Authority housing, newer estates, and individual homes such as those on the road up hill from the school, where their frontages and gardens contribute so much to the pleasure of a walk through Castletown. Of the first category, it is these houses that create Castletown's unique appearance; it is unfortunate that many have lost their timber-framed windows, though from a distance it has to be conceded that the PVC glazing bars look like the real thing. The second category, mainly at the Limerick end of the village, are kept with real pride. In the third category, some staining was seen on boundary walls of the estate, above the school; it is good that there is now variety of colour, where these homes originally looked somewhat drab. Churchfield Court is a well kept suburban estate with significant tree planting. Churchfield Heights at present seems somewhat isolated, as building has not taken place on both sides of the approach road; the houses were seen to be spic and span with imaginative use of colour and benefiting from the splendid background of hardwoods; more recent planting is somewhat perfunctory. Ard Edmond (surely it should be Ard Eamonn or Edmond Heights?) remains to be seen.

### **Roads, Streets and Back Areas:**

The approaches to Castletown have been praised above. It was read that the crash barriers on the main road are to be repainted; the railings of the bridge on the same road also need painting. (Is this the responsibility of the LCC?) Surfaces and paving within the village were reasonable good; roadside hedges were well trim.

### **General Impression:**

In spite of some minor adverse comments above, on small matters of detail, Castletown remains the outstandingly well presented centre in the county and one of the best in the country. Much could be learned by other villages from your sense of vision, good taste and sheer hard work.

### **Second Round Adjudication:**

The approach to Castletown from Mountrath looks really well, with its lines of lime and sycamore trees. The

river Nore is a fantastic wildlife and amenity feature, and is part of a Special Area of Conservation (SAC). This means that it is among the top tier of conservation sites in Ireland. It is lovely to see the old-fashioned black & white road signs still intact – in so many places these have been lost.

The beautiful green spaces, with lines of mature trees and rose displays, are immaculately presented and, overall, the town looked great on the day of 2nd adjudication. Some traffic cones on the main green should be removed, if no longer needed. The rows of older houses along the Main St. are all so well maintained and presented, with the occasional rose bush providing a striking contrast against the pale greys and creams of the well-painted facades. The Castletown Inn looks great beside the imposing, but also immaculately presented convent. Phelan's shop front could, perhaps, do with a make-over, as an excess of plastic advertising, broken wooden boxes and a traffic cone on the petrol pump create an untidy appearance that ill-fits the otherwise well ordered Main Street.

While the Main St. was litter free, there was a problem around the Bring Centre where a bin was overflowing and some dumping had occurred. The Elderfield Drive estate is gorgeous. Well done on your efforts this year.