

Tidy Towns Competition 2009

Adjudication Report

Centre: **Stradbally** Ref: **420**
County: **Laois** Mark: **268**
Category: **C** Date(s): **21/06/2009**

	Maximum Mark	Mark Awarded 2009
Overall Development Approach	50	42
The Built Environment	50	35
Landscaping	50	38
Wildlife and Natural Amenities	50	25
Litter Control	50	36
Waste Minimisation	20	11
Tidiness	30	13
Residential Areas	40	29
Roads, Streets and Back Areas	50	31
General Impression	10	8
TOTAL MARK	400	268

Overall Development Approach:

Stradbally is one of the longest established towns in the competition and has done consistently well. Standards are rising everywhere and it is good to see this happening in Stradbally too, with new initiatives continually being introduced. Thank you for an exceptionally well set out and effective map – would that other centres provided similar. (Not part of the competition, but it is worth mentioning that a smart new restaurant is always an indicator of progress and prosperity in a town!)

The Built Environment:

We will be much interested to hear the result of the tender for the Court House: it is probably the most distinguished building in the town and it has never really been presented to its ultimate potential. It was very sad to see part of the Convent standing derelict, and also its charming little Gothic chapel. Against this, the mill renovation appears to have been a success – this adjudicator has not been in Stradbally since the year it was opened as apartments and it looks very well. Last year's adjudicator mentioned that the Church of Ireland railings needed painting, and this had been done. The sculptural panels at McKeone's always impress. Most shops fronts and business premises are well maintained – it is believed that there are now fewer mass-produced and plastic signs. The new shopping precinct impressed: the main building may be just a little bit heavy in appearance for the rather graceful street buildings adjacent but it is very smartly presented in its various sections. The GAA premises were seen to be well maintained.

Landscaping:

Courthouse Square with its trees, shrubs and sculpture is a most elegant urban space, very well kept up. The new (to this adjudicator) water feature was admired. The playground was seen to be clean and colourful, and well patronised. Some thought needs to be given to the trees and shrubs on Church Avenue – some need a bit of TLC and others need replacement. Very sophisticated planting – trees and shrubs – was seen at the top of the town where the main roads converge; something to this order would be an immense improvement in Church Avenue. The rockery on the corner of the Carlow road is particularly welcome because it is out of the ordinary. Planters, tubs, hanging baskets and window boxes were seen at salient points and there were charming floral adornments on the WC (making up somewhat for the fact that it was closed).

Wildlife and Natural Amenities:

It is clear from your submission that this subject is taken very seriously. It was interesting to read that you are conducting a Health & Safety audit of Stradbally Lake – we would be glad to learn the outcome of this. The continuing development of the lake and its surroundings is continuing to create a natural amenity that is discreetly enhanced for public use with fishing stands and pathways. There must be a dilemma of how 'wild' to keep the approach and neighbourhood; how 'untidy' should it be? For example, should the builder's sand heaps and rubble be concealed or not? It is not a 'park' in the accepted sense. The double stand of ancient trees leading to the lake is superb; presumably you are thinking of replacements where necessary. (Though this is not a formal park, the gateway would be visually enhanced on the street side if the plaster surfaces between the stone pillars were painted in a strong colour – like the façade of the Portlaoise court house.) Ducks were seen enjoying the river in the town centre.

Litter Control:

It is good to read that you have entered the LCC Litter League and that all residents' groups are involved in weekly litter picks. Some disposable litter was seen at Church Avenue and on the approach to the lake.

Waste Minimisation:

Heartiest congratulations to the pupils of all three schools for their green flags – and to the teachers and parents too. This is a superb achievement. It is good to learn of your composting endeavours. The Recycling Point at the SuperValu car park, including the clothes bank, was noted as being accessible but not too prominent from a visual point of view.

Tidiness:

Improvement of derelict sites near the playground were favourably noted. As mentioned above, it is a great pity to see dereliction at the Convent; one assumes that every effort is being made to find a new occupant or occupants. A pity that the advertising sign on the pristine gable of the Credit Union is so obtrusive. On the date of the visit there was an inordinate amount of posterage and advertising on the street corner at SuperValu giving a very scruffy look to what is actually one of the neatest parts of the town. What is going to happen at the demolition site next to Kylebeg?

Residential Areas:

Many beautifully maintained traditional houses on Main Street and Court House Square were admired; it is these that give Stradbally its real sense of character – far more than even the best kept housing estate. Oak Glen has very well kept lawns; some boundary walls were in need of painting at the time adjudication. Wood View, as its name implies, benefits from its background of mature trees; there is good hard and soft landscaping here. The homes of Kyle Beg are well presented; this estate is notable for its trim hedges. Cill Beg Manor is promising; good to see trees and hedges already planted. Brockley Park was seen to be as neat a suburban estate could possibly be. This adjudicator recalls several years ago a controversy in which it was proposed to demolish the stone cottages at the Carlow end of the town; mercifully that did not happen, and so we have a most attractive terrace of quaint nineteenth-century dwellings brought up to date with modern conveniences.

Roads, Streets and Back Areas:

Most surfaces and paving are of reasonably good standard. The new parking bays at SuperValu were smooth, spic and span. It was good to see traffic lights and also traffic calming measures. There are still ugly poles and wires in Main Street – a example needs to be taken from Court House Square or, indeed, from other main streets such as in Abbeyleix and Mountmellick. This kind of renovation may now be considered to be too expensive. It is appreciated that a great deal of energy goes in to keeping weeds at bay.

General Impression:

Stradbally is a most attractive old town in really delightful countryside. It is tremendous the way in which the Tidy Towns Committee, with the support of official and voluntary bodies, and especially the residents and business people of the town. Keep it that bit ahead of the rising standards throughout the country.