

Tidy Towns Competition 2009

Adjudication Report

Centre: **Askeaton** Ref: **442**
County: **Limerick** Mark: **266**
Category: **B** Date(s): **20/07/2009**

	Maximum Mark	Mark Awarded 2009
Overall Development Approach	50	40
The Built Environment	50	38
Landscaping	50	40
Wildlife and Natural Amenities	50	29
Litter Control	50	28
Waste Minimisation	20	8
Tidiness	30	14
Residential Areas	40	29
Roads, Streets and Back Areas	50	32
General Impression	10	8
TOTAL MARK	400	266

Overall Development Approach:

Welcome Askeaton to the 2009 National TidyTowns Competition. Thank you for your completed entry form on behalf of Askeaton Heritage and TidyTowns Committee and for your comprehensive Plan of Action 2009, which included a detailed map of the area. We also received the Ballyhoura Country Festivals & Events Guide 2009, and at the local Tourist Office we obtained a copy of 'Askeaton – a Heritage Town' brochure, which was helpful.

Askeaton with a population of less than 1,000 has benefited by the hard work of your committee of five people supplemented by members of the Community Council on occasion. It is positive to see that West Limerick Resources, FAS, Limerick County Council, and previously the ESB have supported your activities. Your attendance at the Shannon Development seminars on TidyTowns is also noted. The quarterly meetings of your committee and the monthly meetings of the Community Council which assists your committee are obviously proving very worthwhile.

Your Communications strategy is also positive and includes the use of parish newsletters and participation in the St. Patrick's Day Parade. As suggested in 2008 report, you might consider public meetings, if these do not already take place. It is good to note that you also link with the local national school and have a national teacher on your Community Council Committee. Well done also on your involvement in the setting up of the Community College Green Flag Committee.

We wish you well for the Contemporary Arts Festival being held in July. Well done also on the initiative of the Twohig's SuperValu Weekend of Fun held in June last. Best of luck with the ongoing funding work and well done on your involvement in the 2009 'Limerick in Bloom' competition.

Your comments are appreciated regarding the difficulty of getting additional voluntary workers, but please

remain positive and keep up the good effort.

The Built Environment:

Askeaton as a medieval village has some unique historic features and many excellent modern amenities. As such, it has advantages for participation in Tidy Towns Competitions and these indigenous strengths of the attractions of a medieval village need to be maximised. The various historical monuments need to be well presented and set up as visitor friendly and easily accessible for the visitor. Of the historical monuments, noteworthy were the Franciscan Friary, Desmond Castle and Banqueting Hall, and the medieval bridge. It was good to see that restoration work was taking place on the Desmond Castle, it is this adjudicator's understanding that the restoration will be a longer term project. If so, hopefully, it will not reduce the accessibility of the site to visitors. Other more modern impressive developments included the attractive Community Hall, with the colourful sponsors/community groups mural painted by local schoolchildren. The more recently painted mural of the two surfers on the river is also attractive and certainly colourful. In the foyer of the Hall, the caring nature of the community of Askeaton is illustrated by the memorial plaque to Diarmaid O'Riardain for his community work. The Swimming Pool & Leisure Complex is an excellent facility for the area. The adjoining river walk is attractive and inviting, but some of the landscaping there could be better maintained. The Tourist Office was well presented, their staff was very helpful. The area at the rear of the Tourist Office, with its unrestricted views of the Castle and bridge, offers an opportunity for a cafe or other visitor amenities. Nearby, the availability of a defibrillator on the wall again illustrates the caring nature of the community. Hopefully, it will have little use.

There are still several derelict sites throughout the village and every effort should continue to be made to find a solution. On a positive note, many premises were in excellent condition and were well presented. Those which impressed included the Bank of Ireland building, Cois Sionna Credit Union, the Belfry café, Deel Pharmacy and Abbotts Close Nursing Home, Shanahans newsagency with its lovely shopfront, T S Ó Móráin, and Brian Collins Bookmakers. Mary's Gifts and Florists. Kennedy's Bar, Ranahan's Bar and next door Cagney's Bar looked very well presented. The nameless pub in the square painted a yellowish colour was a most attractive building. Gráinne's Hair Salon was most attractive with the lovely shopfront sign and nice hanging baskets. Twohig's Supervalu complex is well cared for and generally clean. Kevin Davison Pharmacy looked well. The Askeaton AFC sporting complex is a wonderful facility for the town and wider area and is a credit to all concerned on this magnificent development. I would imagine it is the envy of many other football clubs, both amateur and professional. It was not possible to visit the GAA grounds, as these were closed on the day of our visit.

The old Station House, a private residence, is a credit to its caring owners, and is well maintained and set out with colourful hanging baskets and planted containers. Almost like a scene from the 'Quiet Man' and pleasant memories of a bygone era. The entrance area and the buildings at Aerobord Ltd looked well and nicely presented.

The large, modern Coláiste Mhuire was in excellent condition and well presented. The very welcome bench underneath the magnificent Beech tree was a lovely spot to spend a restful few minutes. This beautiful Beech served almost as a link between the past and the present, between the historic Knights Templar Tower over the wall and the modern Colaiste Mhuire. The lovely ash tree planted and the town twinning plaque of Askeaton and Montbron illustrates an opportunity for Askeaton to develop the link further for the benefit of the residents, and maybe in particular for the benefit of the secondary school children. Of course this link may already be underway. The School Bus was neat and tidy in its parking space.

The National School, painted cream and brown, was neatly maintained, as was the Health Centre.

Landscaping:

The main approaches from the bypass continue to be well presented generally with some securely staked young trees and well cut grass margins. The town itself had some attractive floral displays. The area near the Community Centre was attractively presented with some nice shrubbery, hanging baskets, flower beds and trees planted along the riverside path. The shrubbery at the stone steps was in need of some maintenance, however. The colourful floral display of hanging baskets, containers, at the lovely stone entrance to St Mary's Church was most attractive. The plaque to the poet and author Aubrey de Vere is nicely presented. The nice bench painted red and black set off the area. But the FAS sign took somewhat from the scene. The stone bed of flowers at the sign to Church View was also colourful. The hanging baskets on the Bridge and the window boxes, and containers at the Tourist Office were very colourful. The Green beside the swimming pool was beautifully presented with lovely wooden arches, seating and healthy shrubs.

The landscaped park area opposite the Belfry Cafe and near the Credit Union building offers much potential. However, this area seems in need of some maintenance, the shrubs look a bit crowded and the antique

garden equipment seems lost in the plants. Also the stone circular bed is broken and should be repaired before further damage is done. The flower containers in the centre of the square opposite the Bank of Ireland fitted in well, the bilingual signs were well maintained and attractive.

The Driving Routes Information Board in the Square was informative, with painted seats and hanging baskets and containers nearby were attractive. The Grotto at St Francis Avenue on the Church Road was a lovely presentation, with mature shrubs, round planted containers, timber fencing and a litter bin. There was an attractive shrubbery in the car park beside the GAA grounds, however, a large amount of litter in the area spoilt the effect. The memorial plaque to the work of the late Paddy Gallagher on the Information Board for Askeaton is a nice tribute.

The horseshoe shaped planting area at the Forge Cross is attractive and well maintained.

The visits of President McAleese to Askeaton in February 2005 and January 2008 are rightly well documented.

Wildlife and Natural Amenities:

As stated in your submission, the wildflower developments are positive initiatives. These two areas are located near the bridge overlooking the Abbey and the second on the Western Approach Road. The maintenance of the downstream riverside walk and development of the upstream walk are also excellent initiatives, which should pay major dividends in the future. The information signs are an excellent way to help visitors to appreciate the resident wildlife and wildflower species.

It was lovely to see the family of ducks swimming and feeding on the river near the medieval bridge, a pleasant sight.

Litter Control:

Litter bins around the town were handling the volume of litter, however, the litter bins themselves needed to be checked, as we spotted a couple of rusty specimens, one near the Credit Union building. Some of the litter bins were in need of emptying.

At the wall, by the GAA entrance at the Arena Car Park, there was much litter in evidence in the shrubbery area. It's obvious that litter is being dumped at the Recycling Centre nearby and this is the source of this litter in the general area. This is such a pity, as the stone walls and the nice shrubbery blend to make this, potentially, a very attractive area.

Waste Minimisation:

The four Clothes Recycling Bins at the Arena were clean. However, while the seven Recycling Bins at the Arena Car Park were themselves clean, and while these were surrounded by a nice wooden fence, this fence only served to hide an ongoing litter problem that was certainly highlighted in the 2008 report. That 2008 report is worth repeating and stated "The Recycling Centre located at the Arena car park was suffering from considerable litter and was in need of attention. It is good that you have the services of the Community Employment Scheme to assist in this area, but everyone in the community must share the responsibility and dispose of their litter and waste correctly. Perhaps, your best opportunity to achieve improvements in litter and dumping would be through the education of the younger generation of the town and the fact that Colaiste Mhuire has a Green Flag Committee is a good starting point. Suitable articles raising litter/waste issues could be prepared and circulated through Parish Newsletters. Another project, which might be considered, would be the possibility of hosting a waste minimisation workshop with the assistance of the County Council – it could be run in conjunction with a Tidy Towns Meeting or general Community Meeting." Also last year, it was mentioned that the use of a mulcher mower was worthwhile to reduce grass waste. However, the evidence of grass waste on the approach road green area suggests the mower is not being used frequently enough

Tidiness:

There was excellent use of bilingual signs throughout the town, both directional and residential name signs were particularly attractive. There was much grass cutting being done by the excellent workmen at the graveyard in St Mary's Church. However, while this job may be a work in progress, much of the graveyard looked in need of maintenance. The presence of overhead cables on many streets look cluttered and untidy, their removal underground should be a longer term project, it is suggested. The derelict Granary building on the Quayside looks to have potential, but in these economic times this is unlikely to happen in the near future. The metal seats on the flower beds opposite looked well, but the river railing could do with a coat of paint.

Likewise the rocky wild area behind the small stone wall, at the sign for Askeaton and near the 50Km/h sign, is in need of attention. The car park area at the Community Centre and Health Centre is neat and tidy. I liked the look of the store building (formally a forge?) near the Community Centre, very neat and well painted. The Riverside Park on the other side of the river opposite the Leisure Centre was impressive, nice neat grassed area with stone seats and stone park tables. The linear shrubbery looked a bit untidy. The Library building looked well, it's a pity about the unsightly electricity pole directly outside the premises and the two rusty supports remaining on the front wall from the old sign. There is a very untidy weeded ramp area at the river near the Castle needing attention. The old water pump painted black looks attractive.

Residential Areas:

The town has some very attractive individual properties and good residential developments. Houses in St Mary's Terrace were generally well presented and the new developments, with good landscaping at Abbotts Close, have enhanced the area. Friary Court and the Deel Manor development were appealing. There were some well landscaped detached properties on the Foynes Road and Station Road. We noticed some attractive hanging baskets and planted containers in all residential areas, including Plunkett Road. Ballindeel House was impressive with its high stone wall. Church View development near the Community College continues to mature nicely. The Grotto landscaped area at the entrance to St Francis Terrace was a lovely feature. The Terrace is well maintained and has some attractive houses. I liked the garden with the signs for Australia, Columbia and Ballysteen, and the donkey and cart to get there! The new housing development, with the excellent stone sign at the entrance, named Lismakeera, looks an excellent development. It's completely finished and well laid out with the stone house numbers on each house; a nice feature. Well done. The two lovely stone residences with the red entrance doors, near the Aerobord Ltd premises are most attractive.

Well done to all the housing estates residents and to the residents of the individual houses who make such an effort to have their homes looking well and in good condition.

Roads, Streets and Back Areas:

Approach roads to the town from the bypass were generally in good condition and most signage was clearly visible. The timber cut out of the 'out of focus' house on the grassed area left me wondering as to its meaning? The same grassed area was recently cut, but it resembled a hay meadow waiting to dry in the sunshine. More frequent cutting should be a target. The lovely stone boundary walls around the entrance to Ballindeel House and that general area were most attractive.

The Limerick/Foynes/Kildimo milestone on the street side was an attractive feature and well painted. The base of the stone wall on the approach road near the Community Centre had weed growth and needed attention. The car park at the Catholic Church was well maintained with nice flower containers. The grounds of Eenglish Naomh Mhuire looked tidy and well maintained.

General Impression:

I enjoyed my visit to Askeaton, the first time in many years that I've had reason to visit your lovely town. And in a way, that's the dilemma for your TidyTowns Committee, to merge the task of increasing the number of visitors to this medieval town and to also make the town a better place to live and work and indeed spend more leisure time. This requires an ongoing Three Year Action Plan that will always change to take account of different and now more difficult economic times. The Plan will help guide your Committee. Well done on all the hard and time consuming work, often thankless, and please be patient. If possible, try to visit other TidyTowns in the region and aim for the best projects. Askeaton has a historical and now a modern infrastructure to help as a model for future projects. Keep the young people involved. Aim for achievable targets in the short to medium term. The more difficult tasks will take longer to achieve. Congratulations and Keep up the good work, and best of luck in future TidyTowns Competitions.