

Tidy Towns Competition 2009

Adjudication Report

Centre: **Ballycumber** Ref: **616**
County: **Offaly** Mark: **271**
Category: **B** Date(s):

	Maximum Mark	Mark Awarded 2009
Overall Development Approach	50	43
The Built Environment	50	36
Landscaping	50	37
Wildlife and Natural Amenities	50	22
Litter Control	50	34
Waste Minimisation	20	13
Tidiness	30	17
Residential Areas	40	27
Roads, Streets and Back Areas	50	34
General Impression	10	8
TOTAL MARK	400	271

Overall Development Approach:

The overall development approach is excellent, as the group are part of a larger umbrella community group, and so have access and influence beyond their own remit and area of operation. The entire planned approach is very professional and well researched, and the Tidy Towns Plan 2009 for Ballycumber is a most comprehensive document, particularly for a stranger to the village to read, and to get "a handle" on what Ballycumber is about; past, present, and future. If any criticism can be made, it is that the map provided in no way matches the standard of the rest of the publication. The map is very basic. It is suggested the Plan should really provide for a 3 year window of opportunity, whereas it concentrates on recent, past achievements and projects for this year. It does consider the future certainly as reference is made to the way in which the community have been involved in consultation with the local authority in relation to the recently published Count Development Plan 2009 – 2014. But this projection might be teased out a little in relation to specific Tidy Towns headings. Some projects, such as the proposed Town Park, fit into this longer term plan, but a few pages with specific Tidy Towns remit planning for 3 to 5 years would make the plan better. These are small criticisms in order that you may advance your entries in the future under this heading. You always follow up on issues which raise concern and your copy letter to the area engineer re issues raised in the competition was noted as an example of this. We hope that your engineer has not got as many active groups in his area, as he will not have a budget to match in the near future!

It is typical of your endeavour mentality that your village has its own newsletter/newspaper, and of course you are using its media potential to full advantage. We liked your front page coverage of April 2009. It is a snappy caption and eye catching. It also promotes Tidy Towns work, as being attractive to the youth of the village and area.

You are blessed with having a wonderful award winning Foroige club, led by an obviously committed local priest. The members are great! They are the future of your county and country, and you should be very proud

of them. Of course they could not do this without the leading and shining example of your chairman and committee. But you also involve the older generation, and we really applaud this. These are the people who have the history of their place to share, and memories that are in need of passing on. Working together engenders this process. The youth are so lucky to be able to hear and learn from the older generation.

Well done to Boher National School on achieving its second Green Flag award!

You acknowledge the financial assistance of Offaly County Council and West Offaly Partnership for their funding. You also give due praise and thanks to FAS workers CE scheme, West Offaly Partnership, LEADER, and last, but by no means least, to BLC Development Ltd.

The Built Environment:

The Mealiff Inn is a lovely building and is vernacular in style.

Egan's yard area and external walls have been rewashed/painted to excellent effect, and the old yard complex looks terrific. Its piece-de resistance is its lovely old traditional gate, which is set off to really good effect now against the bright background. The floral displays add a dash of colour. Egans's shop itself was neat, but had too many notices in the windows/doors, which give an untidy impression. Its door probably could also do with replacement. The calor gas items and advertisements outside could also do with rationalisation. The wheeled calor loader was rusty.

There is another very well presented white house in the village beside Egan's pub, though unfortunately yet again the timber sash windows have been replaced. There is a lovely traditional cottage (despite window replacement again) beside this house, and the adjudicator was disappointed to see a planning application for its removal and replacement. Such traditional features form very much part of the remaining streetscape here - as in other Irish villages, and they should be treasured.

Gussie's pub was clean. It is a pity that parking obscures the building line, and it must be quite awkward to reverse out on the street.

The Corner House gable was bright with its blue edges, and its floral displays were cheerful. Its front elevation, "Gavin's", is really very well presented also. It is a pity, however as said before, that the original windows have been replaced. You appear to have lost almost your entire stock of fenestration heritage in Ballycumber.

The commemorative stone at the corner, to the United Irishmen, was admired. However, the raised cement mortar on the wall behind is the incorrect method for such stonework from an architectural conservation point of view. Lime mortar is the correct method of repairing / renewing an old stone wall. There are no mark losses for this, but please bear it in mind in future conservation works, and be guided by your local authority Architectural Conservation Officer when working on older buildings and walls.

The statue of St. Kieran is a really lovely piece of sculpture, and it would be nice to know who executed the sculpture. Its surrounds, though clean and tidy, dwarf the statue because they are fussy and concrete in places, whereas the statue itself is of granite. Could the bollards be removed? Are they really essential at this location?

In this regard also remember that black is a most difficult colour for those with visual impairment to see, so avoid it in any future street furniture.

The Brosna Villa house name and stone wall were admired.

There is an excellent white gate close to the speed limit sign in the entrance to an old house in mature grounds. It is beautifully presented. On the turn beyond is a simple newer farm gate in green, but it stands out because of its good bright and clean painting.

Just off the Ferbane Road, there is an old traditional two storey pub (Flynn's) which has a newer single storey extension, with a rather brash plastic sign. This is a good building which retains its traditional appearance, despite the new window inserts. The general area of the pub needs cleaning up, but it was noticed that a planning application was in progress for a beer garden etc., so hopefully this will result in the building and surrounds general upgrade.

In the same area there is a very well presented cottage (although it has uPVC window inserts) in the triangle between the side road and connecting road to the Athlone Road. The same is true of the lovely white house, framed so well by judicious planting on the main junction area. It must be difficult to keep the paint looking so fresh with all the passing traffic.

It is good to see the name signs at the entrance to the village in Irish. The indirect translation given, indicates the presence of three rivers which is interesting for the visitor. The Baile an Chomair name sign was in an unusual place (house curtilage) on the Athlone Road!

Last, but not least, the BLC precincts are a great example to follow with regard to cleanliness and neatness.

Landscaping:

The green space at the Ferbane Road approach to the village is beautifully landscaped and planted on all sides. All the grass was well cut on the adjudication day. The Offaly Heritage Map is very well enclosed and framed by foliage, which is cut back from obscuring the interesting information. The stone planters and seating area are well landscaped.

This adjudicator would suggest that you plant native shrubs on the green spaces, e.g. Ferbane Road entrance to the town, instead of putting more tubs in these spaces for three reasons. Firstly, yours is a rural village and you should try to keep urban effect planting to a minimum, especially on the outskirts. Secondly, you have plenty space to plant shrubs in this area, and finally shrubs are far more maintenance friendly - especially during the summer months, when tubs have to be constantly watered. This applies to a lot of other potential landscaping projects which you have in mind. The same is true of the tubs under the high road sign, also at this location. Some natural shrub planting at the sign area would be preferable and save you watering and tub maintenance. The same is true of hanging baskets especially in out-of-village locations – you will also save on pole maintenance. The red roses on the stone wall opposite the Corner House gable were looking very well, again at an immediate entrance to the main street.

We wish you well with the Town Park. We hope that you will be able to encourage the local authority to engage the services of a competent Landscape Architect to design this park to best effect, so that it will reflect the landscape locally and be easily maintained by you all.

Wildlife and Natural Amenities:

You are maintaining your wildlife habitats well. However, there is much more that you can do in this regard to increase the enjoyment and educational value of these areas. You are aware of these yourselves, and you plan to work at the river bank.

You planned a project which has to be postponed due to other workloads with Foroige and a Wildlife Range and Inland Waterways. Remember also to include wildflower meadow / wildlife habitat in any new park.

Perhaps, your local schools could also help you with this? Do you have a young person studying Environmental Science in a 3rd level institution from the area who might require a thesis topic? The provision of a wildlife survey and management plan contributes to the marks in this section. Remember to endeavour to do this for 2010! Findings can subsequently be made public on information panels. This more detailed information would add to the enjoyment of your village for local and visitors alike, and would serve good educational purposes. In relation to this, please be sure to put design research into the proposed notice boards themselves. With such a good record in the town, be consistent in having such new street furniture designed in an innovative and appropriate fashion. And you should also ensure that the Irish names for all species are included.

You could increase your overall marks considerably by spending time on progressing this section, but do not rush this, as it is worth doing well!

Litter Control:

There was a fair amount of litter on the green space seating area on the Ferbane approach – mostly under the

seats, tin cans, papers, plastic etc. The "Don't be a lout" sign was noted at the Ferbane junction area and the similar sign on the Athlone approach, and was admired for its colour and art. But do not erect too many such signs, as they in themselves can eventually lead to clutter and ensuing untidiness.

There was a little litter in Sycamore Drive area. There was a plastic bottle under the seating at St. Kieran's statue. Your clean ups are extensive and you engage the entire parish and beyond. Seventy bags of rubbish in one day is an extraordinary haul! Well done
!

Waste Minimisation:

Recycling and Green Flag involvement is taking place, and your Herculean efforts to recycle print were successful. The mulch lawnmower will help with composting arrangements.

However, waste minimisation is about more than segregation. It involves the prevention of waste accumulation in the first case. It is really what it says – to minimise on waste production before we, as a community, private or public create it in the first case. You can also refer to the Race Against Waste booklet available from the Tidy Towns Unit of the Department of the Environment, Heritage, and Local Government.

You could increase your marks considerably in this section. Perhaps, you might prepare a flyer/newsletter on this subject? As a local community you could look at some innovative and simple ideas such as organising a "Bring and Take Day". This would involve using a local hall / community centre for instance for a day - where everybody brings items they have no further use for, but which other people might want (and which under normal circumstances they might get rid of as waste) and puts them on display. The corollary is that somebody else needs these items. No monies change hands. Website versions of this idea have been set up in places also. Another group collected all broken crockery, and made a local park mosaic. You can gain marks by doing some of these things for 2010.

Tidiness:

The timber slats in the seats in the seating area at the Ferbane approach needs replacing, as the seats are really quite shoddy at this stage. The same is true of seating further in towards the town on the grass margin on this approach also, and also seating in the main village area. The picnic table is in the same condition and is even more noticeable, as it is free standing. The nice stone plaque acknowledging funding at this point is crudely attached in cement beside a nice stone wall. Can this be improved upon? The signage is clean, but do not add any more embellishments to it, as it is has enough as it is. In this location, there is a fair amount of clutter, despite the general tidiness, as there are power poles, road signs and the Urban and Village Renewal project items, all contained within a small area. The Ferbane /Tullamore sign on the green area in the middle of the road was slightly bent.

A pole carrying a hanging basket required repainting near the seating closer to town.

Hector's petrol pump forecourt and shop beside Gussie's pub are somewhat cluttered looking, with signage projecting and otherwise. There were cars and vans parked on the footpath in this general area, though not outside the shop itself.

A wooden gate to a house in the village could do with treatment/repainting. A car was parked on the footpath outside the cottage with the planning application. Such on-footpath parking is ugly, and inconsiderate of those with special mobility needs. A redundant high metal sign beyond the Corner House gable needs removal.

The Sli Mhor/Clonmacnoise sign near the St.Kieran sculpture needs cleaning. Overall, the River Walk is exemplary, both in its design and in its maintenance. Perhaps, it should be flagged in the village more obviously, as people may not know it is there. The walls at Healy's unoccupied pub on the Kilbeggan Road need painting. Some of the signage (dog fouling) on the Athlone Road needs cleaning.

Residential Areas:

The properties which are residential have been complemented already under "Built Environment" Section. There were hardly any defaulters. The property on the Ferbane road, which is for sale, will hopefully next year have a new attentive owner. Near this was a nearly completed two storey house, which has an overgrown

site. Hopefully, in 2010 this will be completed. You really are getting your enthusiasm through to one and all.

The housing estate on the Athlone Road is really well landscaped with neat stone walls at the edge, and good private hedging. The rock areas, which have been planted with low shrubbery, are very attractive and are suitable for the rural village environment.

Sycamore Drive's hanging baskets were noted. Some poles need painting. One crashed car was noted. There were good trees planted at the turning circle area on the way up to the good tree grove.

Roads, Streets and Back Areas:

The road surface in the area of Flynn's pub exiting on to the Ferbane road could do with resurfacing. This is an important short stretch of road, as it is highly visible from the information point and green area on the adjacent "main" road. The road from Ferbane leads in along a straight stretch, from which one can admire the mature trees at the heart of the village. Many of the Landscaping comments above are equally applicable here and you are credited for them also.

Bracken's on the Clara/ Kilbeggan approach would benefit from some screening/landscaping at this approach to the town. There is also too much signage which dominates one's first impression of the village. This was commented upon in last year's adjudicator's report. The approach over the lovely stone bridge is neat and clean, but this area could do with a footpath or a pedestrian bridge so that people could access the river park in safety.

On the Clara/Kilbeggan approach, Healy's closed premises beside is a large uninviting sea of tarmac. Can some screening be introduced? This was also mentioned in last year's adjudicator's report. The Athlone Road approach is landscaped by leafy mature trees and along by a lovely old stone wall, with a great grass border.

General Impression:

Ballycumber is a most active and successful community group, and to a large extent this is due to the planned approach, which the community have to their work, which totally complements the actual hard work the community engages in on a daily basis. It is not at all surprising that they won the County Endeavour Award in 2008. If the approach taken and the enthusiasm shown keep fresh and active, other villages, who have been successful in the county in general in recent years, had better watch out as they have a competitor emerging from the wings!