

Tidy Towns Competition 2009

Adjudication Report

Centre: **Belmont** Ref: **522**
County: **Offaly** Mark: **255**
Category: **B** Date(s): **05/07/2009**

	Maximum Mark	Mark Awarded 2009
Overall Development Approach	50	37
The Built Environment	50	35
Landscaping	50	36
Wildlife and Natural Amenities	50	23
Litter Control	50	34
Waste Minimisation	20	13
Tidiness	30	13
Residential Areas	40	27
Roads, Streets and Back Areas	50	29
General Impression	10	8
TOTAL MARK	400	255

Overall Development Approach:

Go raibh maith agaibh go leir! Thank you to all the voluntary workers who have gone to so much trouble this year and in previous years to make Belmont an ever improving place in which to live. Thank you for a carefully completed application form. It is good to see that you are following an Environmental Action Plan 2008-2010. However this soon needs updating as next year is 2010! We would advise a 3 to 5 year plan. A plan need not be prepared professionally. However, you should try to get the views of the community at large when preparing the plan and take into account other plans for the area such as Local Area Plans / County Development Plans prepared by the Local Authority under the Planning and Development Act 2000/ County Heritage Plans/ Agenda 21 Plans etc. You do say that the community came together to consult with and produce a Development Plan for Belmont. Keep that up into the future.

You have a very good membership for a small village, and there is certainly a pride in your place amongst the community. You meet regularly and also call on-board extra support for clean ups, environmental enhancement and fundraising. You keep your community busy!

We are glad to see that you feel that you have excellent financial and technical support from Belmont Community Employment Scheme, Offaly County Council and Offaly Local Development Company, Waterways Ireland, West Offaly Partnership and Offaly Leader. What an impressive array of supporters!

It would be a very good thing if you could supply a somewhat more extensive and detailed map, as the map supplied is extremely poor and uninformative, and was of no assistance to the adjudicator. It is difficult to imagine drawing a plan together without a map. Perhaps, you forgot to enclose the map that accompanies your plan?

Your communications channels are comprehensive.

We are glad that there is an Environmental Education Programme at the school. We are delighted that the school is going to apply for the Green Flag

We are also glad that you find the competition has been beneficial for the community in focusing minds. The background information you supplied about the Community Development Group is interesting and well done on all your awards – especially that received since last year's competition i.e. Offaly County Council Chairman's Award to commemorate participation in the Pride of Place Competition. Through outreach within the B.C.D. Group you reach many different people in your village.

The Built Environment:

The old stone railway bridge (?) on the Cloghan approach is a lovely introduction to the village of Belmont, only to be improved upon reaching shortly the buildings by the Canal. The Robinson's buildings just around the corner are also very vernacular in their architecture. As with last year's adjudicator, this adjudicator wonders can they be restored into use. A planning site notice for a house immediately adjacent, makes one hopes such design respects the traditional value of this group of buildings adjacent.

The mill on the Grand Canal and its associated buildings are a wonderful architectural asset for the village. It would be a pity to see any of the non main buildings fall into disrepair. It would also be a pity to see no more non timber sash windows, appearing in any of these historic buildings, which deserve proper conservation to best practice. The entire complex is a unit, with the mill, stone wall boundaries framing pathways, canal side sheds etc. On the other side of the lovely old stone bridge is the lock itself and two good stone cottages in pristine order, although unfortunately again, the timber sash windows have been replaced. There is a good wide, white clean gate beside these cottages. What was probably the lockkeeper's cottage has, been fitted with new window insertions, which are also out of scale with the original. Otherwise, the cottage looks very well, and is beautifully maintained.

The bridge is a wonderful piece of nineteenth century bridge design and construction, and the quay areas, bridge and lock gates themselves are in "showcase" condition!

There is also a good traditional two storey house just beyond the bridge.

Nearer the village, the river bridge - and indeed the canal bridge - could do with having the yellow road marks thereon renewed. This was also referred to in last year's adjudication. The Belmont Mill has been restored and is in use both by the community and by visitors alike. This is good.

What a shame, and the adjudicator was somewhat surprised that it had not been removed. Lovely stone walls line the approach from the Brosna bridge in to the village proper.

The core of the village is a tight knit small group of attractive houses, and businesses. Kelly's is a well kept pub (and house) and two good new houses continue the street line on from Kelly's outwards. The bog oak sculpture of the Good Samaritan is an unusual and interesting choice of subject. It is an appropriate one for a wayside crossroads. The whitewashed farm building just outside the centre and the building opposite containing the letterbox were admired.

The use of the old name on the sign at An Cnoc is lauded.

Include the built environment in your proposed circular walks information also, as you have a distinct advantage here with all the industrial heritage buildings you have inside a small area.

Landscaping:

The redevelopment of the canal bank is looking well. Good luck with the Moystown /High Street Church planting and flood relief.

There is a lovely cascade of roses beside the corrugated building on the right as one approaches the centre of the village from the Cloghan side. The lovely terrace of houses on the final approach to the cross roads from the canal has good shrubbery.

The grass could be weeded around the bog oak sculpture at the village centre. It was noted that this was an Urban and Village Renewal Programme. The Endeavour Award achieved by Belmont in 1998 is also acknowledged here. This area contains very good shrubbery, which looks natural and cared for.

The landscaping at Kilcummin, Mullaghature and at Fitz Road looks well. Hedging on properties in the village core was neat and appropriate.

The mini park, commented upon under Residential Areas category below, at Beechgrove is looking very well.

We note that between now and 2010 you are going to provide for tree planting. Do ensure that this consists of indigenous varieties.

Wildlife and Natural Amenities:

You appear to be about to commence a wildlife habitat enhancement programme following the education programme delivered at the school. You also plan to maintain wildlife habitats along the canal banks with Waterways Ireland.

Some hedge cutting seems to have taken place recently on the Cloghan side. Remember, it is an offence under the Wildlife (Amendment) Act 2000 to cut vegetation in a hedge or ditch, or on lands not cultivated between the 1st March and 31st of August. These sections of the Wildlife Acts are for the protection of nesting birds.

You hope to develop a nesting/feeding area in the school grounds, and your association with Birdwatch Ireland will help you here. You will also be well advised by the agencies, with whom you have good relationships, for example The Heritage Section of Offaly County Council, and Waterways Ireland. 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 architecturally in the village, 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.

Litter Control:

Generally, the village was litter free. There was litter in the area of the housing estate, off the Cloghan approach. Your clean ups are good and you involve people from all groupings within the community.

You will continue clean-ups and community awareness campaigns .

Waste Minimisation:

Well done on your distribution of composting containers and your training in The ORGANIC Centre. Your recycled dinosaur is a very example of waste minimisation.

Waste minimisation 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 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 other places also.

Tidiness:

The information sign at the village centre near the bog oak contains good information, but it needs cleaning and renewal of script. The long grasses and weeds in the immediate vicinity took from the display on adjudication day.

The edges of the footpaths in the cross roads area in the village require weeding. Two new houses in this general area have nice grounds and have trees planted.

Cahill's shop had a well painted bay window, but the shop had too many signs in the windows, which gives an untidy effect.

The ESB Fisheries Complex forecourt needs surfacing, and machinery and vehicles should be kept within the yard complex. It could also do with screening around the security fencing.

There were nice, neat hanging baskets on the fence opposite the intriguing model village, which is well screened from view along the road.

The recycling area on the Athlone Road is in need of renewed signage.

The prefab buildings along the canal bank are particularly ugly, given the location and the high standard of all surrounding. The Grand Canal Walkway passes this area, and it would be a shame if these structures remained in place. If they are not removed before next year's competition, please try to ensure that they are at least cleaned and painted.

The old garage on the Cloghan side of the river had an offensive large graffiti painted on its roadside elevation. This is quite unacceptable on any public road, and especially on an approach road from such a beautiful area as the canal area is.

Some weeding is necessary along the roadside stone wall approach on the Cloghan side, beyond Lisderry House

Residential Areas:

Generally, all the residential individual houses are well kept. Comments under other sections such as "Tidiness" and "Roads etc.", which apply to residential properties are also considered relevant here. The estate on the Cloghan approach (Beechgrove), of single storey houses, is attractively mature with lovely landscaping at its entrance. Its kerbing and open space need trimming and weeding (especially kerbside weeding).

Roads, Streets and Back Areas:

The Belmont "An Lios Dearg" sign on the Cloghan approach road near the old (railway?) bridge requires cleaning or repainting. The sign's uprights protrude above the sign itself, which does not look very well. The approach by the canal and river is very picturesque, but it really necessary to walk this area, if one wants to appreciate the surrounds, as it is twisting with hugely deficient vertical alignment due to bridge height and sightseeing would be lethal from a driver's point-of-view.

The Shannonbridge approach has a nicely set sign for Belmont, but it also needs cleaning. It is a lovely trim entrance to the village and is green and rural. Apart from some rough surfacing in front of a few houses on the right hand side, this is also a nice gentle approach. The path edges need weeding in places. There is a good green edging with trees planted.

On the Ferbane approach, the name sign was admired in the area of circular beds and long green space.

General Impression:

The overall impression is of a very busy and imaginative group of people, who are intent on progressing every aspect of their unusual village. Perhaps, you should concentrate on certain areas where you still need to correct or improve before launching too many new projects. Do not be impatient. It takes time to progress incrementally.