

Tidy Towns Competition 2009

Adjudication Report

Centre: **Cloghan** Ref: **617**
County: **Offaly** Mark: **243**
Category: **B** Date(s): **05/07/2009**

	Maximum Mark	Mark Awarded 2009
Overall Development Approach	50	43
The Built Environment	50	29
Landscaping	50	37
Wildlife and Natural Amenities	50	29
Litter Control	50	27
Waste Minimisation	20	6
Tidiness	30	14
Residential Areas	40	24
Roads, Streets and Back Areas	50	27
General Impression	10	7
TOTAL MARK	400	243

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 Cloghan an ever improving place in which to live. Thank you for a carefully completed application form, and for your excellent TidyTowns Plan. We assume that the document has a Map, but we are only in receipt of the Map attached to the application form, which is a reasonable help for our purpose. It would also have been helpful if you had named approach roads on your map, as it is helpful not to have to read all the OS maps and signposts when adjudicating! You are a busy group of people as you represent all community and voluntary work in Cloghan, so well done! You meet monthly and you encourage all to participate in TidyTowns.

You have 12 members. This is probably not a lot of people as you are multi tasking – were it just doing the TidyTowns work, it would probably be quite good for a small village.

Offaly County Council, FAS CE Scheme, which you describe as “excellent” and Offaly Local Development Company all support your work. You also appear to have a good PRO as you use local radio, newspapers, posters and word of mouth. The IAP involvement and the resultant community planning newsletter was also a good idea. You are also involved with making submissions to the County Plan, and this is important. And, as you say, this strengthens relationships between you and your Local Authority. The Healthy Communities is an interesting project to be involved in.

You engage with the local schools, and this is very important. We commend your planning for the future. It helps a group to focus. We note that you find that the competition provides a template for your work plan and also an objective yardstick.

The Built Environment:

The school has nice treed grounds. However, the boundary wall painting recommended in last year's adjudicator's report does not appear to have been carried out.

"The Gables" Band B was very well presented. There is a magnificent red and white doorcase here. Unfortunately, uPVC windows have been inserted into the house in place of timber sash windows. As a community, you should endeavour to encourage conservation of your timber sash windows, as they really are a major part of what makes the traditional village architecture look well, and are an important part of your heritage. The plants outside the door looked well, but the containers were out of character with such a truly admirable piece of architecture. It stands on its own merits, and really does not need hanging baskets to set it off. The small disused shopfront in the same general building looked well also, and can take the window box to cheer up the space. It also retains original fenestration. Further along this building, the red and white paint really "sets off" the old black gate and also has a cheerful planter. The entire treatment of this building is very good - especially on an approach road.

You really have good streetscapes "radiating" from the roundabout. It is a pity that they cannot be enjoyed without the rush of traffic, past the viewing eye. There is another magnificent blue doorcase on the corner - at the roundabout - at the Tullamore/Banagher junction corner. This building is very bright and clean also, and has good windows and carriage entrance. Well done to the owners/occupiers, as it must be very difficult to keep a building in such a trafficked location looking so well.

Aine's shop has a lot of signage/advertising in the windows and this creates a fussy untidy look.

The Garda Station on the Tullamore Road looked well. Some weed removal - adjacent also to the house next door was required.

The Spar and Topshop are well maintained, with nice shrubs in the forecourt.

You mention the repair of footpaths under this heading. This more rightly sits under the Roads etc. heading, and is considered in that Section.

We are glad that you intend to use the Irish version of your place name on your new village signage (see "Landscaping" section also.) We also like that you have used Irish names in naming housing estates.

Your lovely replica and interpretation of the Gallen Cross at the excellently maintained church grounds was most interesting and unique. It is an inspiration and a lovely memory.

St Mary's Parochial House has a nice stone sign.

The Wheel Inn and the property on the town side of it could do with a repaint.

Cloghan has a good collection of interesting buildings. It is a village which is lucky to still have many of its vernacular buildings intact – if in need of some care in certain cases. Its streetscape is most interesting, and this is a great resource for the town to build upon. Original timber sash windows and good doorcases have been replaced with inappropriate uPVC inserts in places. Projecting signage in the street and plastic signage detracts from the otherwise clean lines of the street. Good luck with your derelict site plans. But do not confuse dereliction with a building, which although in bad repair is worth conserving – even if it takes a lot of time. You will not be faulted by this adjudicator, nor were you faulted by previous adjudicators for not being able, as a group, to restore and conserve such buildings all at once. This will happen in time. All we would ask is that you encourage the owners to weed and tidy around them. In the meantime, the Arts Section and Environment Section of Offaly County Council are coming to your assistance with a good project. We strongly recommend that any process involving the Built Environment involves the Architectural Conservation Officer and the Heritage Officer of your Local Authority also, if they are not already involved. This is because Cloghan has some fine buildings architecturally from a vernacular perspective, and also has historic interest.

We are glad that you have strengthened relations with the Local Authority through the Area Planning Project, and that this in time will lead to a better understanding of the Built Environment, and will help in its conservation and presentation, as well as provide advice in relation to proposed new developments.

Landscaping:

The Millenium Park is a true oasis in a heavily trafficked village. It is a credit to all concerned, and the sound of the running water is most tranquil and lovely. It is a resting place and meeting place also for the elderly shopper and for the buggy - pushing parent. We really like its focal point location, and it is immaculately kept! The raised beds with their plants, and the lovely trees were all admired. Signage here looks well.

We note your plan to continue the upkeep of the Millenium Park. (You mention this under "Built Environment", but it is a Landscaping (hard and soft landscaping) project. Your bi-annual flower planting in the roundabout is noted. Shrubs have been planted here also. This is probably a preferable choice, as they need less maintenance, and look more rural, given that yours is a rural village. It is also inconceivable how you could be risking life and limb regularly accessing floral beds on this roundabout through streams of traffic, unless you do it in the dead of night! Maybe you should stick to the shrubs which require less maintenance! Your maintenance at Cloghan Church was also admired. You also continue support for Killourney Cemetery. You plan to continue all this good work, and also to plant indigenous hedging on approach roads, which planting is beginning to look well, where in place. Be careful with the stone name plaques. So often they can look like tombstones! We recommend that you choose a natural boulder from the locality, and simply inscribe the name on a single smooth polished small area of the stone.

Your semi mature trees on Castle St./Shannonbridge Road would be better off without the small floral planters around them, which look fussy under the natural foliage. You would be well advised to provide tree supports/protection, instead of the low white surrounds. Flowers planted at the base of trees take valuable nutrients from the soil that the tree needs.

Wildlife and Natural Amenities:

A Bird box was noted at the school.

You are supporting the work at Lough Clochan, and maintaining the trees planted at Castle Street in 2007 - which are chosen to attract bees.

The additional development and maintenance of Loch Clochan, part of the Lough Boora Parklands, some 2km outside the village, is ambitious. The existing signage is informative, but can be added to. You will be guided in your work here by the relevant authorities. The area is a very specific type of Habitat. Is there a need to expand the lake size, and if so why?

The Cloghan K walk is a marvellous idea and is accessible on foot from the village. You have time now to research the habitats of these different areas in advance of the completion of stages of the footpath. You do not actually refer to whether or not you are planning to do this. However, we assume you are as you include plans for the footpath under this heading.

Perhaps, your local school could 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 locals 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. Be consistent in having such new street furniture designed in an innovative and appropriate fashion. Note also that black street furniture is the most difficult colour for people who are visually impaired to see. And you should also ensure that the Irish names for all species are included.

Perhaps, the Heritage Section of your local authority could help you in this regard also. Biodiversity describes the variety of life on earth. There is now a special competition, you will have noted in your information pack "Notice Nature Award".

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 one plastic bottle and one drinks can thrown on the ground in the Millenium Park. There was some litter on the Tullamore Road approach, and some in the nice new Local Authority estate on the Belmont Road. Otherwise, the village was litter free.

The weekly litter patrol may need to be stepped up during the summer season. The Foroige Club appear to be a great resource for you to call upon. We are glad that you are cooperating with the litter warden. We look forward to hearing more about your school's involvement with the Tidy School's Initiative.

You might tell us more about your litter promotion efforts for the future.

Waste Minimisation:

Your additional recycling facilities are welcome. Well done to Spar to accommodate these. Segregation is also laudable. We are glad that you are encouraging businesses to recycle also. However, waste minimisation is about more than having recycling and segregation. It involves the prevention of litter 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 might refer to the Race Against Waste booklet available from the TidyTowns Unit of the Department of the Environment, Heritage, and Local Government. Consider organising or attending a Waste Minimisation Workshop with your Local Authority. In your local school, there will be opportunities to involve the students in an effort to work towards this end. You could increase your marks considerably in this section by so doing. 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 mosaic in their local park. You can gain marks by doing some of these things for 2010.

Tidiness:

The major clean-up days, which you advertised, obviously were a good success. The involvement of the school, we are sure happened.

We look forward to seeing more new litter bins. Please take architectural and engineering advice on their selection; the first to ensure that they are suitable for your lovely streetscape, and secondly to make sure that they are sturdy and easily maintained, and emptied. And remember the issue of black street furniture, as discussed above.

We are glad that you have accessed new signage. You must have sympathetic local and roads engineers! Mind you this would not appear to be the case on the approach roads, so we are assuming that you are working from the inside out, and this is the correct approach.

Your weeding programme obviously paid dividends.

Be sure to take advice from the Heritage Section of your Local Authority in relation to maintenance of the natural environment at the graveyard, and remember that graveyards are great places for wildflowers and wildlife.

The Spring Clean with your local Area Engineer was good. We hope that you had a tree surgeons report on the "dangerous trees", before they were removed.

Thank you for the poster copy.

The seat near the newer trees in Castle St. needs painting. Kennedy Window premises opposite Topshop (which is clean and tidy) needs new screening or a new boundary. The garage beside this has old advertising signs, which need cleaning and rationalisation.

The recycling white (clear glass) container is dingy, but the centre is clean otherwise.

Residential Areas:

The house with the pale yellow paint, just on the town side of the school (Castle St.) and on the opposite side of the road, has really effective corner landscaping to the front, which frames the house beautifully.

There are good trees fronting the Local Authority estate on the left hand side approaching the village from Tullamore, but the wall could do with a trim inside the boundary. The grass needs trimming in the rear cul-de-sac area and vehicles were parked on the grass here also.

Cluain na Spideoige is quite unfinished. What is occupied looks well, especially the cul-de-sac with turning circle which is like an "oasis in the desert". Machinery, fencing, scrap and weeds need attention, removal, screening or other effective clean-up. The trees are good along the boundary, but the situation, where at present the end houses have clothes lines facing the main road, does not look well.

The fencing to the rear of the Spideoige estate could be better.

The entrance to "Breachach" on the Birr Road needs weeding of the footpath and gravel at the entrance. There is a good new hedge here.

Whitefields estate on the Tullamore Road has a nice entrance sign and maintained timber fencing.

The chipped dry dash wall (with railing) of the housing estate, on the left hand side of the Birr Road approaching the village, needs cleaning.

Hill Road estate looked well with nice neat hedging on the town side. Your effort to enthuse the local residents to maintain their houses and gardens etc. is bearing fruit. The new Residents' Association has resulted in traffic calming in the estate, and has encouraged the group to further work. The developing relationships between all the groups and officers are good. Your support for the new residents' association is good.

The Local Authority estate on the Belmont Road is in need of grass cutting around the trees and sculpture in particular. The tidying of this estate was also mentioned in last year's adjudication also. There were weeds in the gutters of the associated houses fronting the final approach to the square.

Roads, Streets and Back Areas:

The “baby dolmen” is not necessary at the namesign on the Shannonbridge approach, and the flower display is weak. Many gates require painting on this approach. Would you consider an overall gate painting colour theme for future years? It gives a unity to a village and also helps maintain gates that are getting neglected.

The tractor garage needs screening. The houses and buildings along this approach are well maintained. Despite your new signage programme, the signage on this approach is bent and rusting. The site opposite the school needs boundary treatment - a hedge instead of the barbed wire fencing. This will hopefully be part of your hedging proposals.

Some screening at the County Council yard at the entrance to the village would also be beneficial. Of its nature, it cannot be fully landscaped, but it can be screened. The adjacent Health Centre building could do with incorporation into this boundary/perimeter screening. The Health Centre itself looked neat, but the notices in the windows and doors gave an untidy impression. Can these be collected into a notice board, perhaps on the wall? The final approach along Castle Street is very neat and tidy with existing and recently planted trees.

The Tullamore exit sign on the roundabout needs a pole straightened, and grass cut around it. The Tullamore Road approach has a nice village sign which is well maintained. Some trimming is required at the outer side of the approach road, and a disused entrance needs tidying up. Again, despite your signage project, the 50kph signs here need straightening and painting.

The Birr road approach needs trimming. The private houses' hedging is good. The trees along here and in towards the town are again surrounded by flower circles. Please refer to earlier comments under “Landscaping”.

There is a lovely red gate, which contrasts with the drab water treatment plant. The final approach to join the Banagher Road is good.

The Banagher Road has a large road sign with missing letters. The Clochan sign needs cleaning. The left hand side on the approach is generally poor, including a poor gate; the right hand side is better. Mid West Assessors looked dwell. Two properties on the Birr side of the Millennium Park need painting of at least the boundary walls, and also the gate beside the Park.

The Athlone Road has a derelict property with an adjacent dirty projecting wall. There is a lovely stone wall and four arches on the right hand side, which forms the rear boundary of the local authority estate here, near two neat semi-detached cottages.

The Belmont approach contains the front of the estate, just mentioned, which is nicely designed and landscaped

You mention the repair of footpaths under “Built Environment” heading. This more rightly sits under this heading, and is considered in this Section. The footpath audit is a useful tool, and you can see how work can be programmed according to available budgets, as already commenced this year.

Some of the paving at the perimeter of the roundabout was damaged and had come loose on adjudication day.

Traffic calming is necessary from a safety point of view, and also to give some sense of place back to the village. However, unfortunately Irish traffic calming measures more or less ignore the visual aspect of the ensuing signage, design, and setting, and we urge you to try to have some landscaping included.

You are encouraging approach road residents to plant indigenous hedging.

The slipway restoration is a good thing for local heritage.

General Impression:

Cloghan is a village that means to work hard at improving its environment. You appear to be planning well and relating well together and with agencies. You are not alone in the fact that you have not got control over the issues you mention. But this is the situation everywhere, and you are not alone or unique. Each village faces these issues, and has to deal with them. We see your traffic issue as a difficult one for you, but this appears to be the lot of many villages at the cross roads of Ireland! (and indeed elsewhere). You are being helped by your Local Authority in a big way. They too have - and now more than ever - budgetary constraints, but they will always be able to give you professional advice. You have done a lot of planning. You need to concentrate on the village core and work on the things over which you do have control.