

# Tidy Towns Competition 2009

## **Adjudication Report**

Centre: **Ferbane** Ref: **621**  
County: **Offaly** Mark: **240**  
Category: **C** Date(s): **03/07/2009**

	Maximum Mark	Mark Awarded 2009
Overall Development Approach	50	37
The Built Environment	50	35
Landscaping	50	32
Wildlife and Natural Amenities	50	20
Litter Control	50	31
Waste Minimisation	20	10
Tidiness	30	13
Residential Areas	40	29
Roads, Streets and Back Areas	50	26
General Impression	10	7
<b>TOTAL MARK</b>	<b>400</b>	<b>240</b>

### **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 Ferbane an ever improving place in which to live, work and in which to spend leisure. Thank you for a carefully completed application form. You list six bodies and agencies that support you. This is impressive. You also have a good PRO, as you use several different channels of communication, including the local; website.

You have a huge membership of 19. Are all 19 actively participating in your works? Or is this 19 the full membership of the Ferbane Development Group, of which the TidyTowns is a sub group? To be part of the overall group is good from the point-of-view of exchange of ideas and help.

The visits by members of the group to the schools are helpful, and we are delighted to see that the Transition Year students are working towards Green School status.

We are happy that you are involved in the Ferbane Five Year Plan. However, to increase your marks it is very important to prepare a TidyTowns Plan. A three or five year plan is recommended. 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.. Unfortunately, not having such a plan automatically loses you marks in this section of the competition, as per the adjudication guidelines. In places, in your application form you refer to works 2009-2010, but this is only occasional.

Your map was pretty, but limited in its information. It is suitable for your information board, but a more detailed map is required by an adjudicator.

## **The Built Environment:**

The County Council Offices have been given a lovely new coat of paint, and the two storey part of this building is a lovely vernacular building, with a local history, see plaque to the side of the property, at the entrance to the town. The immediate curtilage of the building also looked neatly laid out.

Gallen Lodge on the Birr approach is a really lovely property, and is well maintained in keeping with its architectural character. Its doorcase is magnificent. Its grounds and good stone wall also set it off. The tourist office/ restaurant and two other buildings adjacent are nicely kept. All have hanging baskets. Keep in mind what last year's adjudicator said with regard to removing render and exposing stonework. In the Main Street, Serenity/Gerannes's also has exposed stonework.

St Mary's Parochial Hall appears to be undergoing restoration work. This is good, as the building is a good example of 1950's style of hall.

The church is an interesting building with a later extension. It would benefit from some site softening at the street side. However, the grounds are very well maintained. There is a house in a row opposite which has nice dormer bargeboards, although the window at ground floor level has been changed and is out-of-character with the building. The new buildings, including the small square in this street (Church Street) look very well, and maintain the building line. The small square adds interest. The garage building in this street is an interesting building and is noteworthy for the absence of advertising signage. It looks very well.

Perhaps, if you could get the owner of the disused property at the Bridge to paint the window boards, as recommended in the Tidy Towns Handbook, it would cheer the look of this two storey fine house.

The Library Building looked well and is gently screened with deciduous plantings. The nice limestone plaque in the stone wall, which is bilingual, was admired.

The lights on the bridge are in very poor condition, and indeed are not contributing anything to the (19th century/reconstructed 20th century) 1930's style of bridge architecture, as they are simply reproduction heritage style lighting. We would encourage you to discuss their replacement with the relevant authorities. Could lighting be provided from the road base rather than attachment to the bridge? There are several issues to be considered in lighting a protected structure such as this bridge. These include visual suitability, potential interference or damage to the structure, light pollution, traffic safety etc. We would recommend that you try to move forward on this issue, as in their current state they form a negative impact on arrival. Talk to the Architectural Conservation Officers in your Local Authority and to the Engineers and Heritage officer also with regard to lighting and its effects on - for instance - bat roosts in bridges.

Hanging baskets can create fuss and distraction and will take the eye away from all the architectural features of your street. If you must hang baskets, hang them away from your Main Street.

The Senior National School is well maintained.

Glennon's, opposite the Bridge at the first approach to Main Street, could do with painting and tidying. This building is on a most strategic corner visually. The large and repetitive signage should also be removed.

The large red property in Main Street was well painted and has a lovely doorcase, and "Draper's" sign. Such signs are rare nowadays and should be valued accordingly. Unfortunately, uPVC windows have replaced original sash timber windows here.

J. Hiney is nicely presented, and this building has excellent window mouldings, picked out by the red and yellow paint. The nice colour treatment extends into the adjacent side street.

Flemings is a perfect example of Irish vernacular town architecture, and looks really well.

At M&S Country Garden, signage detracts from the nice building, in which it is located. Some lanes are in need of brightening, and have some nice rear buildings which should also be cared for.

Hennessy's is an unusual pub front.

C O' hUigin (Main and side street frontages) needs an overhaul, and the building adjoining it is also in need of painting and glass replacement, although it has retained its sash windows, which are good. The Garda Station is well looked after.

The Ulster Bank is a lovely building, apart from its inappropriate dormer glazing.

Close Shave and Supermacs were tidy, and Phibbs needs paint. Brosna Print near the church looked cheerful.

The building containing Ferbane Community Offices beside the church also has unfortunate PVC replacement windows.

The Heritage Centre and Playground are wonderful resources and amenities in a lovely green area. It was great to see the play area being used so much. It is a very nice design with wooden "noughts and crosses" and other different items.

Well done on your work with the Ferbane Development Group, which you say under this heading ensures that the environment and other related issues are included in the Plan. However, you do not state what specific issues in relation to the Built Environment are considered.

We think that your encouragement to property owners and businesses to work with the 2001 Colour scheme is interesting and worthwhile.

We are delighted that you have assembled a working group to work with the Per Cent for Art Scheme. We are very glad that your Local Authority has applied for this in advance of works, as occasionally the funding is lost to Local Authorities because it is not applied for at all or is applied for too late. We look forward to seeing the chosen work in due course – if the choice is a permanent piece. Of course, it does not have to be such.

We note that you intend to conduct an audit of derelict sites. Remember 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. Many of these buildings are, believe us, an asset, and will in time become obviously so. The streetscape which you have inherited is a lovely vernacular streetscape, and you also have some fine structures, like the bridge and the bank. Remember to engage with the Architectural Conservation Officer of your Local Authority in looking at existing or potential work to or near protected structures, or other buildings of vernacular value.

We look forward in the future to the bilingual signage

### **Landscaping:**

The river looked magnificent upstream and downstream of the bridge, but there are few places that this can be admired in safety from. The new pedestrian bridge hopefully will help here on the downstream side.

The gardens of the convent beside the bridge look well in a prominent location.

You have been maintaining your existing planted/landscaped areas well. With regard to hanging baskets, we suggest that you limit these in the Main Street area, as the street is a lovely vernacular streetscape and does not need adornment. It would be better to perhaps plant some trees, if possible, in areas adjacent to Main Street. We understand that the street is quite narrow, and we suspect you will not be able to lessen its width at any time given the continuous flow of traffic, using the street. We also look forward to your work with Offaly County Council in relation to tree planting at the new private sites development on the Athlone Road, and your identification of suitable sites for Tree Planting 2009-2022

### **Wildlife and Natural Amenities:**

The Brosna River is a fantastic amenity to have in your town, and the Grand Canal is not far away along the Birr Road.

You plan to undertake a wildlife audit of the town and develop a Strategic Plan to preserve and promote wildlife habitats. We assume that your consultation with the Irish Heart Foundation and the HSE will also encompass the Habitats aspects of walks proposed, although you do not say this. Your exploration with the Lough Boora Parklands group for future developments in cutaway bogs is interesting. You mention Noggus Bog, but do not say where this is. We know that it is near Ferbane, but it would have been interesting if you could have given us more information.

There is much more that you can do in this regard to increase the enjoyment and educational value of your varied local habitats.

Perhaps, your local school 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 town 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 and have such new street furniture designed in an innovative and appropriate fashion. Remember when choosing street furniture that black is the most difficult colour for the visually impaired to see.

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 little graffiti in Gallen Priory Lawn.

There was some small amount of litter at the recycling area.

A tin can was spotted on the roadside in the grass near the County Council local office.

You have a very active and thorough litter schedule which shows on-the -ground.

You are assisted by O'Callaghan's Centra Supermarket in continuing the Awareness Programme in primary schools.

You create community awareness through the Offaly Independent.

You continue to create awareness around litter, and build on the Ferbane Business Litter Code 2001 that featured local enterprises signing up to a published code of practice.

The partnership between Offaly County Council and the local community is chaired by the local Area Engineer, and also includes Council officials, members, local school representatives, and local business people and last but not least, your own members.

The continued support of Foroige for the "Litter Busters Campaign" is great.

Finally, the organised community clean-ups are working well.

You plan on continuing maintaining the momentum.

### **Waste Minimisation:**

You have been building on the Litter Code to include more recycling, and Gallen School have commenced the process of applying for a Green Flag.

We are glad that you are encouraging businesses to recycle. However, waste minimisation is about more than this. 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:**

There is a rash of signage at the Business Park entrance. At the Business Park, Wilton Timber Products site is beautifully landscaped in front. However, to the rear and visible - Diversey Lever trailer, piping, wooden pallets need screening. The dead trees on the boundary with Hardware Tool Hire premises also need attention. This is the boundary to the rear of the estate with the adjacent property. There is a nice grass area in the area of Wilton, with trees and landscaping, but there is an untamed, undeveloped grass area opposite with weeds and stones.

Foley's shop could do with general weeding etc. And there is an untidy space beyond Barney's - old sheds, weeds, and a rusty old vent pole.

On the road to the side of the Business Park, a business premises near the road junction with the Ballycumber Road needs tidying and screening. The area around the old landfill needs its security fence planted. The site opposite with caravans etc. is also in need of screening.

The Fire Station forecourt needs upgrading.

You are going to see if Offaly County Council can move the recycling centre from outside the Arts and Heritage Centre. Until this happens the following comments apply:-

The recycling area bins are worn. The signage is clean, and the site itself is in a well screened area, and should look better. It needs boundary screening/backdrop behind the bins, and a complete bin replacement.

There are a lot of signs on the Post Office frontage which look untidy. The "litreacha" sign, however, was admired.

The ESB substation near the Council Offices needs weeding and cleaning on its inner side (Stone wall faces roadside). The turquoise bollards beyond the Council Offices require repainting. A large red gate needs repainting also in this area.

Ferbane Development Group is negotiating re Traffic Management in the town with Offaly County Council. We hope that you are successful in this, as the Main street is really busy – uncomfortably so - with constant traffic passing through the heart of the town.

The design for the Interpretative Display is now complete and will inform visitors

The temporary roadworks sign at the Council Offices location looked ugly, as it was damaged and rooted in a big slab of concrete.

Seats and bins on the inner approach from Birr need renewal.

### **Residential Areas:**

This adjudicator was impressed with the man who was mowing the open space at 18.15 on a Friday evening at Gallen Priory – obviously after his hard day's work. This is the true spirit of the competition in action. Gallen Priory has a lovely green bank bounding the main road approach. The well maintained central space could do with more trees.

You list the residential areas with which you have established a special working relationship – 7 in all. This is good. As well as these groups, the Gallen Group are actively involved in particular in implementing an Environmental Plan. You plan to continue with these projects.

An estate with no name (furthest out on Birr approach) has a nice stone entrance. Some of the estate grass

looked well, with its clover smelling sweetly. Some longer grass areas were in need of cutting. Trees were planted in the vicinity of a few new houses.

The Mill Race estate is very clean, with clean temporary fencing. It is a pity that the grass is not trimmed fully. There is tree planting, but the grass is choking the trees!

The estate on the Athlone Road is kept very well.

The houses at Knockaulin Drive practically all look well. There are nice views across the countryside from this area. Ballyvora Grove has an unkempt site and half built house at the entrance.

Ard Glas has nice open plan gardens with clover filled spaces. A gate at end of a cul-de-sac needs paint. The boundary wall of an end house facing the countryside requires paint.

St. Cynoc's Green and Terrace were very well presented.

The estate fronting the river looked well. It Irish name sign was admired. We hope that the oil tank will be screened.

### **Roads, Streets and Back Areas:**

The approach road from Birr was generally neat and tidy, with lots of hedging. Larger signage such as the Sewerage Sign, hopefully will be removed at the termination of the project and the Supermac's sign detracts from, an otherwise, good approach. This approach is weed free towards its outer limit. However, the raised path in the vicinity of the nursing home and in the lead up to the path requires weeding. The very large, roughly surfaced space beyond the Council Offices needs surfacing and landscaping.

You are maintaining planted areas on approach roads. You have had the Brosna Bridge power washed and have had the columns repainted. You would need to take advice on powerwashing older structures, as this can damage the fabric of the structures. We really look forward to seeing the very necessary footbridge, and we hope that it will be of an innovative design.

The Ballycumber Road speed limit signs at the 60kph needs cleaning, as do signs at the Business Park. There are some rough edges to the houses set backs on this approach. There is one cottage garden looking well – if a little cluttered. And a site with a planning sign is overgrown at a junction (near old gate/stone wall with an adjacent rusty field gate). There are two untidy house curtilages in this area also. The frontage of the GAA needs roadside screening and surfacing. You plan to develop this area outside the GAA. The gravel bank is probably the advance sign of this.

The Athlone Road is very residential, with some stone walls and clean weeded footpaths. Londis supermarket forecourt is cluttered. On the Athlone Road, there are two houses close to one another – one on a junction being built and the red brick house on its town side. Both are in need of their gardens being finished. The Pitch and Putt looked well.

The school is very neat.

The signage and general works at the Bridge will, we know, be completed soon, so it will give a new facelift to this part of town.

You plan to complete the road boundary at Gallen United.

The Gallen Community School boundary wall capping needs painting, as does the fascia board. The grounds look lovely. The Gallen Community School (town side) needs gate and walls, and capping here also need painting. The basketball upright poles are rusty. We note proposed works here.

The car park in the middle of the town has a very poor road works sign at its edge. There is an untidy area at the car park side of the Medical Hall. Boards are missing from the gate and from the fence in the car park at its rear boundary.

**General Impression:**

Ferbane is quite a busy town, with lots of new residents. You are an active group who are making steady progress in improving your town, and you are to be complemented for that. You have engaged with a lot of people in so doing, and your approach is focussed.

You are happy that work on the sewerage and water schemes is complete. And we note that there will be some further construction work on Gallen Community School. We also note your welcome for these projects – and rightly so. We understand how difficult it can be during such construction works. However, allowances are made always for these type of works in progress in relation to tidiness etc.

You refer to the Business and Technology Park – what an asset for a small town to possess.

We have already discussed Derelict Sites.

We wish you well in all your endeavours.