

Tidy Towns Competition 2009

Adjudication Report

Centre: **Horseleap** Ref: **295**
County: **Offaly** Mark: **232**
Category: **A** Date(s): **03/07/2009**

	Maximum Mark	Mark Awarded 2009
Overall Development Approach	50	27
The Built Environment	50	36
Landscaping	50	36
Wildlife and Natural Amenities	50	15
Litter Control	50	35
Waste Minimisation	20	6
Tidiness	30	18
Residential Areas	40	26
Roads, Streets and Back Areas	50	27
General Impression	10	6
TOTAL MARK	400	232

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 Horseleap an ever improving place in which to live. To increase your marks in this section, 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 / County Heritage Plans/Agenda 21 Plans etc. prepared by the Local Authority under the Planning and Development Act 2000. Unfortunately, not having such a plan automatically loses you marks in this section of the competition, as per adjudication guidelines.

Horseleap is a very small village which has now regained its space from the thundering lorries and general traffic on the Dublin to Galway Road. You have submitted a copied /edited version of the application form. It would be preferable if you actually kept exactly to the headings in the actual printed version, even if you transcribe them to a printed sheet. You have ten members, only 5 of whom are active. Even in a small village, this is a small number of people. You only have 4 meetings per year. This is really not enough to carry out work in an effective fashion. You feel that your situation between two counties is unhelpful. But we have, as adjudicators, seen this situation before, and it has been overcome in a satisfactory fashion. It just means you will have to spend more time approaching more people, so you need more assistance from the other members of the community. Have you actually received no support from agencies and bodies? It would be helpful if you could reference this in your application form, or are you referring to support simply as funding – which appears to be likely from your answer to “Agencies and Bodies supporting” section of the application form. It is good that you are engaging with your local school, as surely from this the interest in your work will grow amongst pupils and, by default at least, amongst their parents.

Well done to your local pub and garden centre that support you. We are sure that they will also do so into the

future.

The Built Environment:

There is a very nice two storey 5 bay house on the approach from Athlone. It requires renewed lime render, and hopefully, it and its associated timber sash windows and gates, etc. will be conserved.

The Church of Ireland is probably in Co. Westmeath, but is nonetheless part of the Built Heritage of the village. There is a nice stone bridge on the road back to the village from here.

On the Clara road, there is a most interesting plaque on a lovingly tended cottage. It commemorates a local Vicar, and is most unusual, Rev. GL Gresson 1822. There are two old pointed stone gateposts, which are attractive between this cottage and the village, although the gate between is broken and poor.

The school is very well maintained. The site is well planted with trees. But the roadside fencing could be planted on the inside. It has retained its characteristic windows only on the road frontage. Try to maintain these. There is a very neat cottage opposite the school which was admired.

The Catholic church is a lovely, relatively modern church and is neat. When you come to resurface the parking area you should organise a landscaping plan for the car park, and break up this sea of hard surfacing that it is at present. The entrance/exit also needs to be confined. The church is attractive and a landmark for many through recent years on the midland trail West to East. The church belfry needs repair/treatment. The copper (?) roof is coloured with time, but this is really a patina of age and not a visual problem. The house on the village side of the church is well presented.

The village is a lovely vernacular streetscape which has been retained intact. The Post Office (much photographed throughout the years) is a marvellous building which, although not in use any more as a post office, retains all its charms. This adjudicator took the liberty of peeping in through its windows and was delighted to see that the interiors are so well protected in the post office are – timber shelving etc. This is a treasure for any village to have, and you will no doubt guard its conservation zealously. On the other side are most of the buildings making up the “street”. These have also retained their vernacular form, and are well kept and have cheerful floral arrangements; Ryan’s pub is well kept, as are the private houses, both single and two storey. The private house with all the old advertising signs is a veritable outdoor museum, and really engaged this adjudicator’s attention. The riot of beautiful flowers in the stone troughs and Morrisson machinery looked stunning. There is no doubting which county this premises is in, with its discreet “Up Offaly” sign! And the well painted pumps also are sporting the county colours.

The equestrian statue surrounded by the stone “chevaux de frise” is a lovely piece of public art, which now can be admired without constant passing traffic danger.

Landscaping:

Approach road planting and hedging is detailed as being good in the Roads etc. section below. The low semi – mature trees planted in the grass margin on the downhill approach to the village, from the Dublin side in the vicinity of the church, were much admired. There is excellent landscaping in the corner of the church grounds, at the village end of the site.

The new house curtilages opposite the school are really well landscaped.

The lovely grass banking - as well as the copper beech hedging on the garden frontage, along the Clara Road approach, was admired.

The house beside the garage on the Mullingar approach has good tree planting.

The entire area of the village centre feature area is extremely well landscaped and shows off the sculpture and the pump, which are very well maintained. The trees look so well, but perhaps the hanging baskets complicate the sculpture at this point. The red roses were particularly admired.

The hanging baskets on the poles near the church look spindly and it would be preferable to provide hedging inside the boundary wall as a landscaping effort.

The garden centre has a lovely edging of simple flowers planted right outside on the footpath.

Wildlife and Natural Amenities:

You state that you leave nature alone, and this non intervention is good in itself. But there are things you can do to help nature conservation along and to encourage species.

Horseleap, with its adjacent deciduous tree cover, and now rescued from polluting emissions and human disturbance, could be a wildlife Paradise. You should build on this and maximise your efforts in order to progress in this area.

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 local and visitors alike, and would serve good educational purposes. 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 enter any one of the project types mentioned.

Litter Control:

Litter was not a problem in Horseleap on adjudication day. A weekly litter patrol is good, but perhaps you would consider stepping this up a little particularly in the summer months. How do you propose "to keep in contact with the community to encourage them to keep the village tidy"? How do you propose to promote anti-litter awareness? This section requires you to show how you plan for the future also with regard to litter.

Waste Minimisation:

You are trying to get local businesses, school to help by removing their own litter and recycling where possible. How are you advising them in this regard?

We are glad that you are going to organise "Clean Up" days, and most glad that you are going to encourage the school to take part in the Green Flag project.

Waste minimisation is about more than not having litter in your street. 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 Tidy Towns 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:

On the Clara Road, the Clara sign needs cleaning, and it would be good if a coordinated colour could be chosen, which all gates in the vicinity of the village could be painted in.

The speed limit sign on this road is partially obscured with vegetation.

Cars are still parking on the footpath across from the interesting house with all the signage. You state that you are trying to negotiate a removal of these cars and we think you are being successful in part, as there are no vintage items there any more which you refer to in your application form. A van was also parked on the footpath opposite the old post office on adjudication day.

A concrete and brick wall on the Athlone Road approach across from the two storey house could do with plastering. And the rusting gate could be treated/painted. There is a cattle crush and gate beside this wall.

The garage on the Athlone approach appears to be closed in part. The access area to the Mullingar Road from this forecourt requires repair in the footpath area. The walls require painting, as do the barriers. The "For

Sale" sign on the garage had two banners hanging off it, which looked untidy. The Gala forecourt beside the garage is clean and tidy.

We assume that the building materials stored in the site just on the village side of the school are a temporary arrangements.

The large hoarding on the Dublin approach is out of scale and character with the village.

Residential Areas:

Again, asking all resident to maintain their own patch is a good idea. The properties in the village and on the approach roads were almost all well maintained and presented. You have no dereliction, and no major problems to deal with in relation to such properties. And you so far have not got any new housing estates to deal with. Comments made in previous sections such as Built Environment and Landscaping all are relevant here, and your standard is quite good in this area.

Roads, Streets and Back Areas:

There are lovely views on the approach road from Athlone (old Galway to Dublin main road as one approaches Horseleap, with views of the lovely Church of Ireland in the distance). It is quite a pastoral scene. There is good rolling countryside to the left, and the village is beautifully located. But there is a plethora of road signs on the final approach to the village from each main direction. Some of these are a residue from the main road going through the village. Are they all really necessary now? Perhaps, you could discuss with the relevant local authorities to see if the signage could be rationalised in any way. On the Athlone Road, there is a good hedge planted on the left, with good hedging in the property with the barn to the right, and good stone walling on the right hand side as one approaches the speed signage. There is a good footpath with trimmed grass inwards from here. The tree planting along the Dublin approach has also been alluded to already, and is good.

The left junction sign approaching from Athlone towards Mullingar needs replacing (Gageborough turn). Here also the upright on the Ceannanus sign is rusting and the sign itself is in poor condition.

The Mullingar Road approach is very rural and twisting, and looks well. However, the Horseleap name sign is bent. The Clara approach is also rural, with good planting and a nice final broadening out of the approach into the parking area, and landscaped centre.

The grass verges are cut and the village is weed free for the most part.

General Impression:

The general impression is that you underestimate the value of your village and appear to be a little negative, and despondent. Your increased marks this year should encourage you, and this we hope will continue apace. You should talk to all the expert people in the local authorities who will be only too happy to help you with professional advice, even though their budgets may be slender or non-existent for the near future. Perhaps, you might talk to another village who has gradually reached high marks, and learn from their approach, and their painstaking hard work. Remember Rome was not built in a day, and you have a lovely village, which we can all now appreciate so much better in calm conditions.