

Tidy Towns Competition 2009

Adjudication Report

Centre: **Tullamore** Ref: **727**
County: **Offaly** Mark: **278**
Category: **F** Date(s): **07/07/2009**

	Maximum Mark	Mark Awarded 2009
Overall Development Approach	50	40
The Built Environment	50	42
Landscaping	50	42
Wildlife and Natural Amenities	50	25
Litter Control	50	27
Waste Minimisation	20	12
Tidiness	30	15
Residential Areas	40	32
Roads, Streets and Back Areas	50	35
General Impression	10	8
TOTAL MARK	400	278

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 Tullamore an ever improving place in which to live, work and to enjoy. Thank you for a carefully completed application form. Thank you most particularly for your good map. This was most helpful to the adjudicator, and was augmented with a map which the adjudicator found locally, which extended in less detail out beyond the boundaries shown on your map/plan. You are very successful in this competition annually, but to increase your marks it is very important to prepare a Tidy Towns 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 Town Plans/ 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 issued to each adjudicator.

We are delighted that you are in consultation with the Local Authority in relation to the preparation of a Public Realm Plan for the town. This is an extremely good idea, and will engage all interested parties under professional guidance.

You have a good membership, although I am sure that you could do with more help given the ever increasing workload. You obviously have a good cross sectoral representation on your committee. That is a good thing. You also have volunteers that help with clean-ups. You will certainly need to target both, the ever increasing spread of housing and the "lengthening" approach roads, and you obviously see this need in your "Tidy Estates", and new weekly clean up on approach roads endeavours.

Well done to the Credit Union in sponsoring your estates competition! Your list of agencies that support you is

impressive. You obviously have a good PR person on your committee. We hope that your notices go in all church bulletins, as you actually say "church bulletin," in order that all denominations are invited to be "tidy"!

What an achievement to have 10 schools registered in the "Green Flag" initiative, with seven successful schools involved! Well done to all involved in the Liaison Group between the schools, Offaly County Council, and your own association. Your entire programme of commitment to schools is laudable and must be time consuming, but bodes very well for the future of Tullamore in TidyTowns!

You obviously enjoy the "buzz" being involved in the community affords, and this is reflected in your attitudes to the competition, which are very positive and encouraging to us.

You have a number of major festivals annually, and this year is no exception. We are sure visitors to your town will be impressed with your work.

The Built Environment:

Tullamore is a very fine town architecturally and has some very good examples of Irish Georgian style architecture and also market town vernacular architecture. In recent times, Tullamore has gained recognition in the world of conservation architecture with the restoration of the Courthouse winning the Plan Expo Opus Architecture & Construction Awards 2007, and Tullamore has also gained recognition in the form of its new civic offices winning the R.I.A.I Best Public Building, RIAI 2003 (Royal Institute of Architects of Ireland). You really should allude to these successes in your application! They have made national news, and that is how we, outsiders, know about them! This, together with having a twentieth century Michael Scott designed hospital, and a Francis Johnson eighteenth century designed great house, Charleville, makes the town a particularly rich for its size architecturally. There is much to celebrate here, but the potential of this does not appear to be considered as yet in full in relation to "Built Environment". There are some good buildings in good condition in the town centre, such as the Bridge Hotel and the old Post Office. There are fewer traditional shopfronts than one might expect in such a big market town/service centre, but there are some fine buildings in use as, for example, Town Council offices, solicitors' offices etc.

The Town Hall building is a very fine structure, and the Town Council is to be complemented on its care and presentation in every way. The grounds are simple and well tended, and set off the lovely stone building very well. Even the choice of blinds is appropriate! It is a good example to give to the citizens of Tullamore.

Generically, there are some problems in the town in relation to streetscape, and these include the forest of overground power lines (such as seen when looking down High Street towards Bridge Street), and the existence of many projecting signs and external fascia lighting, which infringes on many shopfronts.

There are some wonderful terraces of houses (e.g. the terrace containing "Ivy House" in O' Moore Street) in varying degrees of repair and disrepair. Generally, Tullamore has retained many of the timber sash windows associated with such buildings, but there are unfortunate uPVC window replacements also, in a number of strategic locations from a Built Environment point-of-view. There is a tremendous unity to associated features such as railings, gate pillars and gates which should be treasured. In places throughout the town, some period gate posts are fallen or broken, some original railings and gates are rusting. These features are truly worthy of protection and conservation. It would be good to plan for their conservation before it is too late.

The house (?) beside the Masonic Lodge and with a gothic type doorway on this same street is in a very delicate state of repair, and needs conservation works urgently. The hoarding outside is broken, worn, and ugly. The Lodge building itself has been fitted with inappropriate uPVC windows. However it is well presented with fresh paint, with the Masonic symbol highlighted, and it has interesting ridge tiles. Some rainwater down pipes in this street are rusting and they give an untidy look to the buildings. The corner with High Street has some inappropriately designed buildings, but they are freshly painted. It was noted that some back lanes off the main streets were in need of cleaning and brightening up, as they are very visible in streets such as High Street and Bridge Street. It is good to see that you say the Town Council has started a programme of cleaning up and resurfacing back lanes in the older residential areas, but you and they might also try to look at the back lanes in the town centre.

The Adams Solicitors' and Tullamore House buildings both command a strategic position, and both are well maintained

Hoey Solicitors is a very fine classical style building, which is well presented with good signage. (probably an old bank?) Beside this lies the Ulster Bank; a modern, dramatic but pleasing contrast, respecting the proportions of the former.

The new Post Office is a very cheerful building and is in pristine condition. It has a reproduction shopfront with rather ugly projecting fascia lighting. What appeared to be brackets for hanging baskets were empty on the

adjudication date, but this is not an issue as the frontage is somewhat elegant in its simplicity. The Old Post Office in O' Connor Square is a good building with a very fine doorcase.

The Bridge House Bridge Street façade is a very fine and unusual building, and it has retained its charm, built as it was in the early 1900's. It is very well maintained, has no garish signs, just some bunting and a few hanging baskets.

The Victorian double brick coloured section of the Bank of Ireland facing O' Connor Square is a lovely building, which is being carefully looked after. Irish Nationwide has good stone arches and is well looked after. The signage, however, is garish. Permanent TSB is not the most beautiful building in the Square, and its hanging baskets of faded artificial flowers are very ugly.

There is a lovely doorcase in Hanlon's butcher's shop in Patrick Street, and this building is obviously much loved by its owners, with a riot of colourful baskets full of colourful flowers. Patrick Street is less formal, but has some nice buildings also and is colourful, as is Columcille Street. The banner on the "Academy of Music" building detracts from its integrity. It is a Williams house and important for that. Unfortunately, it has been fitted with uPVC windows. The Tullamore Distillery gate opposite is well maintained, is interesting from a local heritage point-of-view, and is set off by the slender tall tree on its axis inside the lane. One building in this street has signage festooned throughout all its windows. Is this really necessary?

There are some unusual bow frontages also in the town, which are worthy of care, such as that downhill of the "Tasty Takeaway" building.

The Garda Station looked extremely well with very clean building and boundary walls, and with shrubbery just behind the boundary wall.

The Fire Station in the Srah area is a very well kept and landscaped Local Authority building also. It was nice to see the memory tree to the 9/11 firemen.

The general use of the Irish language is relatively good in doubly named plates for many streets and residential areas. It would be good to see more native Irish names in use in naming new housing estates – names which have resonance with local heritage and that are meaningful in a local context.

The green and orange building (warehouse type) on Church Road looked well.

Many of the comments in relation to signage attached to buildings - under the "Tidiness" section - are relevant here also, as these signs detract from buildings of merit.

Landscaping:

The Lloyd Town Park, a very worthy award winner last year, is another project Tullamore should be very proud of, and grateful to a far-sighted local authority for implementing in such a professional fashion. On adjudication, day it was being used extensively, and it was wonderful to see so many people getting so much pleasure out of "rus in urbe". It was being well watched over by Local Authority staff that were friendly and welcoming to the visitors. It is such a good idea to have this watchful eye in place, and it is also prudent to close the park in the evening time, given the unfortunate current lack of appreciation of delivered amenities in certain cases.

The public open spaces throughout the town, both hard and soft landscaped areas, were well maintained generally. The planters in Market Square and O'Connor Square are being well maintained by you. The tiered planters will mature nicely, giving a more natural effect when flowing and trailing than a single planter gives. However, it is good to use the planters in other areas and recycle the efforts! You are continuing to expand your responsibilities in relation to taking over responsibility for further works, for example the Portarlinton Road roundabouts, and the Henry Street area. We are sure that all these will benefit from your endeavours. The IDA industrial estate between the Clara Road and Srah was much admired. It is a credit to the IDA and to each enterprise therein. You probably should give it specific mention in your submission, as it would be a pity that anybody would ever visit the town and not see the landscaping therein. It could act as a model for other large industrial areas in other parts of the country. There is a large, well kept seating area also there - where workers can meet and chat, or quietly admire nature in their work breaks and picnic in clement weather.

You have undertaken a number of landscaping projects on the roundabouts, and these are successful. There is also good landscaping at Dunnes Stores/Tullamore shopping Centre on Church Road. The area between Church Road and Tanyard Lane has many mature deciduous trees, which add to the area.

Hedging outside McDonald's on Church Road was admired.

The trees and trailing plants and, wallcreepers upriver of the bridge in Bridge Street look very well and are set off in juxtaposition with the modern cantilevered building to one side.

The flowering tiered planters were in full bloom outside Smyth's Bar and in other places in Patrick Street, and in Market Square.

The Canal banks were generally left in a natural state, which looks well, and the grassed area was being mown carefully on adjudication day

With regard to "hard landscaping", O Connor Square could be a lovely space, if only parking could even be rationalised to show off the good buildings surrounding the Square. The overhead wires have been removed and it is quite a pleasant and accessible space in a focal point. The same is even truer of Market Square, where an even greater effort has been made to reclaim the space at a human scale. Even the sitting-out area islands in Market Square do not have yellow lines to deter parking from practically on top of those using the seating! But neither will succeed in becoming any kind of civic space that one can comfortably linger in, unless the car stops being "king" in even just these two small areas. The commemorative obelisk in O'Connor Square is well landscaped and maintained. Indeed all the street furniture in this Square is well maintained – paving, signage, tree protectors and grilles etc.

Market Square is particularly good in its essence, with lovely views towards the church and in its proximity to the canal. The view back towards Church Street "ends" with a fine small building, which is in need of some care. The planting is excellent and the sculpture is interesting. What does it represent? An explanatory note someplace would be helpful! The buildings enclosing this square are well presented generally, apart from the shed with two "no parking" signs, and a vacant site beside "Hair Flair", both of which have a proliferation of signage. Fergie's is also full of fussy and indiscriminate signage, which takes much from the atmosphere of this lovely civic space.

There is good, clean stainless steel street furniture at the Church Road Dunnes Stores area.

Wildlife and Natural Amenities:

The in-town waterways are wonderful corridors for wildlife, where people can go and observe nature in peace. You have inherited a mature environment full of interest from a biodiversity point-of-view. 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 also consider entering this competition in the future.

You are maintaining your wildlife habitats well. However, there is much much more that you can do in this regard to increase the enjoyment and educational value of these areas. You are aware of this yourselves, and you plan to erect wildlife/fauna/flora information boards at the canal, and in the Town Park in consultation with Waterways Ireland, the Heritage Officer Offaly County Council and Tullamore Town Council. Have you obtained research carried out to date? There must be some good academic material available on the habitats of the Tullamore area, as in such a large town there must have been these reports, projects etc. researched. Be sure to carry out good desk research in this area, so you will not be reinventing the wheel! You will be well advised by the agencies mentioned. 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 architecturally 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 do not mention the Tullamore river and Charleville estate in your proposals. We assume that you will look at these also, as they will offer somewhat different habitats.

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:

Your biggest problem in this area lies outside the town centre, on approach roads and in some housing estates. Very little litter was seen in the town centre, apart from a few individual pieces like the drinks cup and straw in the bookshop doorway, a cigarette packet in the area of the Bridge Hotel car park, an abandoned umbrella on the canal bank and a few papers on the non-town side of Clara Road bridge (Cox Bridge) canal bank. This is relatively minimal on a busy weekday in a large town. This is actually an unusual situation, as town centres are usually much more littered than their environs in many other towns and villages. You also had more or less the same situation last year according to last year's adjudicator, who found approach roads to be somewhat littered. However, as that adjudicator did not mention the residential areas being littered, it would appear that you have an incremental problem in this regard in 2009. It would appear that your weekly clean up of approach roads will have to be stepped up to - as often as you can manage to do this clean up, as an adjudicator can visit on any day! And under the "Tidy Tullamore" initiative, local residents' groups will have to tackle a growing problem, and engage with the newly appointed Litter Warden to assist a planned offensive on litter, as it is costing you valuable marks.

Bottles, tin cans, and a discarded election poster were visible in a wide off street weedy space, between two premises fronted by a white rusting gate in High Street. There were papers blowing around in front of the post office, and this adjudicator was about to photograph these, when a lady walking in front of the adjudicator along the path, bent down and collected each offending item! The photograph now shows a committed citizen who, through her action, has certainly regained a mark or two for you all. Perhaps, you can identify her from the photograph and present her with an award! You are lucky to have people who care, and generally this shows in Tullamore town centre.

There was quite an amount of scattered pieces of litter in the main approach artery to Chancery Lane. In the planted open space, there was quite a collection of litter in one corner. Cloncollig Estate near the Leisure Centre had some litter on the general approach road and also a small amount of litter in the open space. There was also some more litter in the newer open space beside the hard surface play area, near the Leisure Centre.

There were some papers blowing around the roundabout area on the Church Avenue side of the roundabout, at the top of Church Avenue.

There were a few litter bins which were quite full in the middle of the day on a weekday, and could hold little more rubbish. An example of one of these was outside Dunnes Stores on Church Road.

Waste Minimisation:

It is good that Offaly County Council is providing subsidised composting bins. It is good that you segregate litter in clean ups. 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 are organising a Seminar on Energy and Waste with your Environmental Liaison Officer in the autumn. After this event, follow up actions can be undertaken. You can also refer to the Race Against Waste booklet available from the TidyTowns Unit of the Department of the Environment, Heritage, and Local Government. You mention the introduction of "Eco Points" recycling system in Colaiste Choilm. It would be good if you could have elaborated a little more on this.

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 mosaic a local park. You can gain marks by doing some of these things for 2010.

Tidiness:

The overall impression with regard to tidiness in the main thoroughfares is quite good, apart from wirescape in places. However, as one goes away from the main centre to the less important shopping streets, the impression pales a little.

Probably the most strident memory in relation to tidiness in Tullamore is the grubby state of the “crash barrier” railing in the most important area of the Heritage Centre along Bury Quay. It is an unfortunate omission in your efforts, as it is in the most strategically important part of the town from a visitor point-of-view. The pedestrian bridge over the Canal, near the Mercy Convent, is badly in need of treatment, as it is rusting. This is a pity, as the area of the Canal is in general very attractive and is well kept. Convent Road area is particularly so, with a requirement for some trimming in the more “touristed” end that is Bury Quay.

Some business premises are inundated with signage, which gives an untidy cluttered look. An example would be Loughrey’s in High Street. This is despite the fact that the building itself is well presented with fresh paint and is obviously cared for in every other way.

Large hoardings do not look well in any environment, but they are particularly unwelcome in a town centre, when their scale and intrusiveness detract hugely from the urban fabric. An example would be that above the Tasty Take Away premises. The fact that the advertising structure itself is in good condition remedies the situation somewhat, but does not take away from the fact that this is an inappropriate location.

Some premises festoon the building with signage and add free standing signs, and further signage visible from the street through open rear curtilages. An example would be the electric retailers “Expert” in High Street. The same street elevation requires repainting, and the premises also has a projecting “for sale or rent” double sided sign in site. The free standing signs on the footpaths are both untidy and also create an obstacle for the less mobile or for buggy users. Many examples can be seen in the town centre. The premises beside the “Brewery Tap” is very run down, and is in stark contrast to the cheerfulness of the latter, which, although having a plethora of signage, hanging baskets, tables, and lanterns, nonetheless looks well cared for and clean. However, less fuss on its narrow frontage would further improve its presentation. In a laneway, leading out of O’Connor Square back to Bridge Street, there are too many large signs, despite the fact that the lane is tidy – Jetprint., Bedding Direct etc. There are a lot of signs on the “Blue Sky” building on the corner of Bridge Street and Patrick Street – a very visible and strategic corner. There was a lot of signage on either side of Meath Lane off High Street, both free standing and projecting. A sign for “Antiques” on the far side of the street - beside a gracious old entrance gate area - is old and dirty.

A wall along Church Road needs repainting, and there was graffiti in this area also. The area at Motor Trek Campers needs improvement. A disused business premises “Bathroom Village” on this road near the bridge is in need of cleaning – both the building and the sign “Colortiles”, which faces oncoming traffic. The area near Mangans is very poor and needs weeding at least. Ragwort, a noxious weed is in evidence here. Coen’s yard (now disused) needs (at least) a good weeding also. The splay access to Coens has nice planting on one side and weeds on the other. Are the major town centre improvements (“C” for this area on your map) going to take place in these recessionary times? In the meantime, these areas need to be respected and maintained at even a basic level in any event.

The bridge over the Tullamore River area is also uninviting in this location (end of Church Road) and there were - what appeared to be - many polystyrene pallets actually in the river upstream of the bridge. The river did not look unpolluted either, and smelt somewhat. However, this latter comment is purely based on visual and olfactory response! The Midland Leisure and Camping Sign, which is prominently seen at the bridge, is rusting.

The area adjacent to the bridge over the river in Bridge Street is better cared for, given its strategic location. However, on adjudication day, there was litter in the river at this point. The lock gate weir at the Clara Road bridge area (Cox Bridge) was in need of slime removal.

The planters/tourist sign/seating in O Connor Square look well. However, the nicely designed seating is looking a little worn and in need of upgrading through staining/painting. All this street furniture is black cast iron. It was noted that part of this project was a Junior Chamber sponsored project in 1980. Perhaps, then it is understandable that it is aging a little in condition. It is a point worth remembering that black is the most difficult colour for the visually impaired to see. Perhaps, you might consider this in discussions about new street furniture.

The Water Lane area, adjacent to the turn to the Bridge Centre could do with an overhaul with tilting summer camp sign and tilting “no parking” sign, and with some black wall surfacing needing repainting. The old stone building with the “Dunnes”, “Bridge”, and parking instruction signage is in need of resuscitation. The bright

(Main Street) new row of shops/restaurants/hotel beyond stood out from this drabness. The small sign on the parking lot for Bridge House had graffiti. Generally, this area was tidy, a credit to Bridge House, Bridge Centre, and Dunnes. Graffiti was also noticed on an ESB installation between High Street and O'Moore Street, and on the lovely new sculpture in Market Square. Further graffiti was noted on a pillar beside, an otherwise beautifully painted, blue gate in the Clara Road bridge (Cox Bridge) area.

There is not a lot of dereliction. However, there is one property which looks very poorly in a prominent location – beside Tullamore Electric Diesel Ltd. This property is quite intact and has a good carriage arch and doorcase. The upper part of the aforementioned business also needs repainting. Something needs to be done here before next year's competition, if at all possible. In any event, you will be expected to give evidence of an effort to ameliorate this situation with the owners/occupiers. The small classical church beside looks well - although tilting temporary holiday club banner advertising on its good railings is unfortunate. This row of buildings faces an entrant to the town centre, as one approaches from many routes to the East.

Traffic management is an issue which is also discussed also under "general impression". It simply appears that vehicles take precedence everywhere, and when you get a bye-pass this will give you a whole new canvas in which to operate. You certainly appear to have good parking facilities. But perhaps, that is an outsider's view as seen at one point in time?

Some litter bins are in a poor state despite the fact that some have been renewed.

Some signage is neat and tidy like that at the Dunnes Stores complex on Church Road. These signs are further set off by judicious planting, including planting on the small relevant roundabout.

Large banner signage on the Tullamore Court Hotel detracts from the unity of the building at a main approach to the town, and sets a precedent for further out of scale banner signage.

There is a "headless" sign at the top (roundabout) end of Church Avenue. There are some rusting upright poles on signs along the Birr approach road and also along the Dublin Road approach. Some street signage is rusting, such as the upright pole on the "no parking" sign uphill of the Red Shop. There is also some good signage – such as that striped painted or plastic sleeved sign outside Loughrey's pub gable. (Stop sign). The Hospital car park sign is rusty on a most used road and directing to a most used area. Some signage is bent, such as two signs on the fingerpost sign at the top of High Street, close to the Town Hall. A roundabout sign outside "Roxxy" on Patrick Street was also bent. The ringbuoy post at the Clara Road Bridge (Cox Bridge) over the canal was very rusty. The Heritage Sign on the inner end of the Portarlinton approach needs cleaning.

There are some very poor power line metal poles – again rusting - such as that close to the nice stone building uphill of Expert Electrical.

Offaly County Council Library Headquarters signage in the Square is missing part of its text (left hand side) and looks untidy, located, as it is in a tidy square, on a prominent entrance.

A railing near Zanini in the IDA estate requires repainting. This is a minor comment, but given the standard of the estate presentation in general, a little untidiness shows up all the more!

The footpaths in many housing estates needed weeding. The footpaths in the Chancery Lane/Chancery need weeding, and an undeveloped individual two sites en route to Chancery Close would need trimming and edging cutting, as they take from their tidier neighbours' efforts. Ragwort or buachalán buí, a noxious weed is amongst the weeds growing here, and a large open space area is growing wild, with a lot of weeds. There is also a good open space.

It would be a good thing, particularly for the night time ambience of the town if shutters, (needed for security) might not be the full metal coverage as at the jewellers in High Street (which shutters were closed fully in the daytime also on adjudication date/perhaps closed?). Most larger towns and cities encourage shutters with a less dense presentation where shutters are considered necessary.

Residential Areas:

A number of buildings in the town centre are residential and these in general were very well presented. The same comments apply here as apply to the Built Environment detail in the previous section in relation to these residential areas and units.

The housing estates were noticeable in their necessity for litter management and weeding in certain cases, and have lost you some marks in those sections. This is a particular issue which requires attention, as the presentation of the houses, green spaces and footpaths is good in general.

Although, the road signs on adjudication day indicated that Chancery Lane was closed, this in fact was not the case. This and other name signs in Irish were noted. Chancery Park has a good stone sign. The open space in Cloncollig Estate beyond the Leisure Centre has a large green space, which was neat with semi mature trees, but there were two boarded up houses towards the end of the crescent, which took from the general good look of the area. Two large planters in this area had nothing of worth growing in them, and there was quite an amount of scattered litter nearby. Remarks under the litter and tidiness section are also of note here relation to these estates.

Hop Hill estate is exemplary with uniform nice stone signs, The Grove, The Vale etc. This uniformity gives a tidy and classic effect. It has many planters and cascading flower containers, and also has a nice sculpture.

Church Avenue is a residential older area with good tree planting, with just one overgrown vacant site. Charleville National School within the Avenue is very neat. There are tubs planted with small trees and a gravel base, which are attractive.

The large Church Hill estate is mixed. At Church Hill, there is some nice laurel hedging and semi mature trees. There is a need to weed the planted corner opposite Mews 2 signage, and also some other planted areas. On the unfinished side of the estate (facing Church Avenue), there are lots of weeds in the footpaths and along the "Unicorn Homes" fencing.

One of the best landscaped estates seen by this adjudicator in recent times is the Carraig Cluain estate off the Clara Road. The planting is superb, and especially the garden variety of the wild plant monbretia. There are lovely curves and planted vistas with many trees. The estate was also litter free.

Esker Meadows roundabout is planted. The approach to the estate internally (houses on one side) is fringed by a field of ragwort or buachalán buí, growing through the fence. The planting is good in the estate.

Marian Place entrance looked delightful, especially as it faces a somewhat run down corner. The planting had been sponsored – well done to the sponsor - and is a riot of colour and freshness. The estate itself also looked well.

Small efforts would reap big dividends under this heading, but you will have to try to get the residents on board on a regular basis, as you cannot possibly be all things to all people in a large town.

Roads, Streets and Back Areas:

These encompass all streets and approach roads and public lanes, and squares. We note that the town streets have been improved under the footpath restoration programme. Generally, roundabouts are made to look welcoming. The clean up of back lanes is quite necessary, so it is good to see that it is on-going. Lanes can become inviting pathways and interesting features in themselves, but have tended in Ireland to remain quite neglected in many towns.

The approach roads are very important, as this is the first impression the visitor gets of a place, and that impression can colour a future judgement or memory. In many ways, Tullamore is at the crossroads of Ireland, and many people pass through on their way to some more distant destination. An enticement to return or not do so can be created very quickly. Equally in Tullamore, all traffic appears to pass through the exact centre of the town, and there is very little relief from the constant pounding of traffic, something which at present is only ameliorated by the immediate pleasant environs of the streets and road where such pleasant environs exist. In fact, in Tullamore, there appears to be no place that one cannot take a car! This, in the long term, will need consideration, if the ambience of the town is to lend itself to further progression to a winning place in the competition.

The Portarlington approach is probably the busiest and most developed approach to Tullamore. Unfortunately, there was an amount of scattered pieces of litter along this approach, as there were on all approaches, except the Dublin approach. As one approaches the speed limit, there is a nice distant prospect of the Church of Ireland on the hill. The approach is unspoilt and rural (probably thanks to zoning and NRA requirements).

Advertising signage is a problem, as it is prolific in places, for example at Heatwise. The Leisure Centre is nicely landscaped, although there was litter in this general area, both close to, and on the town side of the Centre.

Signage on the general approach is in need of rationalisation. Even "official" signage is in need of minimisation/collection into one generic sign. There are signs for Tullamore Gateway, Aura Leisure Centre, Retail Park, Aldi, Tesco and so on. The Tidy Towns Bronze medal sign for 2007 was noted amongst this forest of signage. Your bronze medal 2008 accolade has not yet been added, so please do not duplicate the sign. Add it to the existing or locate side-by-side!

By next year, the major roadworks in the area should be complete, which will make it easier for you to tackle this outer approach. Please remember that allowances are made for any issues which detract because of roadworks, and you are not penalised in any way for same.

Byrnes Gala store was neat, but has again, too much signage. The canopy at the petrol pump is damaged. Its planter boxes with heather etc. along the road frontage set in gardening gravel were admired. They are still immature, and perhaps could do with augmentation. A drinks bottle was sighted in the planter – a minor transgression!

On the opposite side of the road are two derelict houses. However, these may be ready for removal with roadworks?

The 50 kph speed limit sign is tilting here.

There is nice hedging in front of Tesco, and Tullamore Retail Park, and there is a clean well maintained bus pull-in this area. This area is neat inside. The roundabout at Tesco has been planted, and is currently as you point out, the responsibility of the developers.

Woodies boundary wall is well planted with a good hedge. Opposite this, Heatwise has far too many signs, despite the nice yellow hypericum shrubbery. There was further ragwort in this general area and cars were parked on the footpath locally. Property "to let" adjacent was also in need of tidying.

A prime example of good planting/screening and landscaping, and also of good signage is Capital Cars. It should prove that such a property is so attractive that it sells itself without gaudy signage or exposed forecourt. It was one of the best car sales units seen by this adjudicator in a number of years. Even its flags were pristine - despite the inclement weather of recent days close to inspection day!

The entrance to C and Q.E.M.S. /Church Road Motors etc. is weedy, and the general prospect inwards along this access is untidy. In the same general area, the grey/orange building for lease is neat, but the signage is very large in scale also.

The Leisure Centre curtilage is neatly planted, and the building has good wooden finishes, good timber fencing, and semi mature deciduous trees. The car park is also well landscaped. But banners re membership and swimming lessons attached to the frontage along the main roadside were hanging untidily, and needed readjustment.

Church Road Motors requires landscaping/softening. There are lovely mature trees at this point of approach. But there were some weeds in the footpath, taking from the overall effect. The gate of the Church of Ireland needs painting. There are some further weeding issues at the pedestrian crossing approaching the roundabout.

There is sometimes a lack of directional signage, despite the amount of possibly less necessary signage. For instance, a visitor to Tullamore might be confused emerging from Church Avenue, as only local amenity signs are present.

The Dublin Road is also very busy and is also undergoing roadworks. The Condron concrete plant requires screening. Again, there is a plethora of signs and we recommend that you look at this issue on all approach roads, but especially on this and the Portarlinton Road before next year. The Mart might be screened more effectively. The GAA grounds and road frontage are well maintained. There are weeds opposite Centra around the fingerposts signs. Weeding in general is desirable along this general approach. The occurrence of litter was not as prevalent as on other approaches.

The Clara Road is a very residential approach to town, and the properties are all well maintained. One of the accesses to the IDA estate is discreetly located off this road. Railings opposite the entrance to the Cluain Carraig estate were rusty. At the Clara Road approach, just beyond Cox Bridge, weeding is needed at the ochre house gable facing on-coming traffic. The Ford garage adjacent to the same bridge could benefit from some screening.

The Birr Road is leafy with the lovely Charleville estate wall running along its north western boundary. Despite the many major roadworks on this approach, it retains its rural feel. Again, these roadworks will hopefully be

complete before next year, which will make it easier for you to deal with consequent issues. The new stone walls, which are probably replacing the higher estate walls in stone, are being attractively developed, and will afford views across the great estate. However, it is important to retain the original walls where possible. The splayed entrance to the estate nearer the town is in need of resurfacing and signage reduction. Weeding along the estate wall roadside pathway is required. There was an amount of litter in individual pieces along this approach. Nearer the town, the splendid Courthouse, County Council Offices, Town Park and Town Hall buildings lead one in to the centre majestically.

General Impression:

Tullamore is a town which is much appreciated by most of its inhabitants, and is a thriving market and service centre, and a worthy member of the Midland Gateway triumvirate.

It has a very substantial built environment which is respected, but possibly nonetheless undervalued. The town has grown a lot and it will be necessary to engage with the new residents and employers/employees in order to progress environmental works. The local authorities have set very good examples, and are a great resource for you, as you are for them. It is, we know, very difficult to engage all citizens in progressing the town's cause in a town the size of Tullamore. This adjudicator had passed through Tullamore before on many occasions, and attended meetings/conferences there, but, not having "lingered", was unaware of its wealth of interest. However, if you can do any one thing in the near future (and hopefully the new roadworks will assist) do try to make some parts of your town car free! The attractiveness of the town should attract further investment inwards.

Your realisation, as stated in this section of your submission that it is so important to "maintain the sense of place and community within a rapidly changing economic and environmental landscape" gives us great hope and is so well expressed! You understand what you are about! Go n-eiri libh!