

Tidy Towns Competition 2009

Adjudication Report

Centre: **Ennis** Ref: **68**
County: **Clare** Mark: **304**
Category: **G** Date(s): **06/07/2009**
30/07/2009

	Maximum Mark	Mark Awarded 2009
Overall Development Approach	50	44
The Built Environment	50	40
Landscaping	50	45
Wildlife and Natural Amenities	50	32
Litter Control	50	36
Waste Minimisation	20	9
Tidiness	30	22
Residential Areas	40	31
Roads, Streets and Back Areas	50	36
General Impression	10	9
TOTAL MARK	400	304

Overall Development Approach:

We are delighted to welcome Ennis to the national Tidy Towns Competition for 2009 and would like to thank Ennis Tidy Towns Committee for the detailed entry submission including several maps and the Ennis Environmental Challenge DVD – all of which helped us to prepare for our visit. In relation to the documentation, it was good to see that planned projects were included but it is also recommended that an actual 3 Year Plan be prepared, giving proposed timeframe for projects and indicating the lead organisations involved.

We would like to start by congratulating Ennis on a superb performance in last year's competition – its selection as Ireland's Tidiest Large Urban Centre for the 2nd time, added to its numerous previous achievements, indicates that the community of Ennis is still as committed as ever to the ongoing enhancement of the town, well done to all.

It is very encouraging to note that Ennis Tidy Towns Committee has acquired several new members and that there are 23 people involved in regular meetings, undertaking Tidy Towns projects and organising a comprehensive range of Competitions to engage the wider community.

The key partners involved with your work are obviously the residents, businesses, schools and organisations in the town. However, the excellent progress that has been achieved would have been impossible without your very successful partnership with Ennis Town Council, Clare County Council, FÁS and Ennis Chamber of Commerce. By working together it is possible to achieve maximum return for effort and Ennis is living proof of that concept, congratulations.

We commend your encouragement of local schools with designated Educational Liaison Officers within your Committee - this is an appropriate way to ensure that children become environmentally aware from an early

age and to give them a sense of pride in their town.

The size of Ennis could make communication with the wider community difficult therefore your interaction via local press and radio; articles in the Parish Newsletters and particularly the new Tidy Towns website (www.ennistidytowns.com) are very appropriate and commendable means of reaching everyone.

Festivals and events offer great opportunities for people to work together and foster a good community spirit so the residents of Ennis are lucky to have so many festivals and events to enjoy. We hope that everyone will get a chance to support them.

The Built Environment:

Access to Ennis has been greatly improved by the wonderful new access roads and associated roundabouts which have been completed.

Ennis consists of a splendid mix of historic sites, ecclesiastical buildings, civic amenities, modern businesses and a large range of well designed residential developments. Particularly noteworthy were St Flannan's College, set in extensive and well maintained grounds; the imposing Courthouse; Cathedral of Saints Peter and Paul with the evocative Hands of Co-operation sculpture celebrating the town's national success in Tidy Towns; Ennis Abbey; the Franciscan Friary; St Columba's Church and the excellent Riches of Clare Museum and Tourist Office.

More recent additions to the built environment which impressed during our visit included the new County Council Offices and nearby Fire Station; Ennis Health Centre; Glór theatre and the unusual Cois na hAbhna Centre. The Information Age Park (Shannon Development initiative) holds great potential for further investment and job creation in the town.

Ennis is blessed with some excellent sports facilities including the Leisure Centre, Cusack Park GAA grounds; new facilities at Coote Parke and the magnificent Lees Road Sports and Amenities Park. The latter, in particular, has huge potential for the entire community and great credit is due to all involved in putting such amenities in place.

The town has a comprehensive range of accommodation including the lovely ivy clad Old Ground, the Temple Gate, Ashford Court, the Auburn Lodge, Queen's, West County and Woodstock. In addition to the lovely business premises praised in last year's report we admired Essentials, Alexander Knox & Co, Ennis Book Shop, Hughes & Hughes, AIB, Bank of Ireland, The Library Bar, P Lucas and Champion Meats Ltd (Donie O'Keefe). It would be impossible to comment on all the superbly presented businesses which ensure that Ennis retains its appeal, but we were very impressed by the standards attained.

While we did observe small pockets of dereliction, your action in carrying out audits and reporting to the Town Council is the best way to progress. On a more positive note, the overall standard of presentation in the town was very high and there were many fine examples of regeneration including the excellent housing development at Still Point/Old Barrack Street and the renovation of The Cloister.

Landscaping:

What really impressed us during our visit was the care and thought which had been exercised in achieving all the magnificent displays throughout the town. Many towns spend considerable amounts of money on their hanging baskets and flowerbeds but do not manage to achieve the same impact. The key to the Ennis displays is co-ordination of colour and texture in the planting and they are superb. Hanging baskets at the various bridges were eye catching and the cascading tiered displays at the Parnell Street Car Park and elsewhere were outstanding – commendations to the local businesses who sponsored some of the displays. Flowerbeds at junctions and some pavements in the town further enhanced the appealing streetscape.

Some lovely trees and green areas were admired at various locations around the town including St Flannan's College grounds, the Ennis Town Council and the Courthouse. The Manse Garden was a magical hideaway which could easily be overlooked but was well worth seeking out. We admired the little walled garden/seating area at the junction leading to the Miltown Malbay Road.

Landscaping at numerous residential developments (both older and new estates) throughout the town was of a very high standard and being well maintained by the proud residents.

The hard landscaping throughout the town, in the form of commissioned sculptures, was exceptional in terms

of quality of the pieces and the amazing range of work displayed, congratulations on this innovative and highly effective initiative.

The planned projects mentioned in your submission will certainly add to the presentation of the town, particularly the landscaping of roundabouts on the access roads. Hopefully the NRA will allow some exciting landscaping projects, possibly incorporating further commissioned sculptures or some rock/stone features.

Wildlife and Natural Amenities:

Ennis is blessed with several excellent areas offering great potential for the encouragement and protection of native wildlife. The new Lees Road Sports and Amenity Park is a wonderful area with its forest walks offering ideal opportunities to appreciate the resident wildlife. The information signage and code of behaviour are excellent ways to ensure that visitors not only enjoy but also respect the natural habitats.

Across the river from the Parnell Car Park we saw a fine selection of swans and ducks in residence despite the major structural works going on nearby. In fact, some ducks were quite happy to stroll along the wall at the car park oblivious to the disruption.

Ballyalla Lake and environs continue to attract wildlife as well as human visitors and the lovely mix of lake, woodland and landscaping provide some very suitable habitats. By the way, congratulations to the transition year students at Rice College on their currach's successful maiden voyage on the lake.

Litter Control:

We congratulate Ennis on recently achieving 2nd place out of 60 towns surveyed in the Irish Business Against Litter report, this was an excellent performance.

During our visit the town continued to impress with only a few isolated items of litter viewed in the town centre. There was a very good supply of litter bins and they were coping well within their capacity. Access roads were very clean and litter free and residential estates visited throughout the town continued the high level of cleanliness.

It was obvious that the co-operation between the TidyTowns Committee, Ennis Town Council and businesses in the town has been achieving excellent results. Congratulations to the litter patrols on their successful work in monitoring illegal dumping.

The schools Art Competition and Best Kept School Competition are excellent projects to stimulate the interest of the young people in Ennis, well done.

Waste Minimisation:

Congratulations on winning the Mid West Recycle Initiative Award under the TidyTowns Competition last year – your 'Map of Recycle Locations' is a very useful leaflet for the community.

We were very impressed with the projects undertaken by the schools which featured in the 'Ennis Environmental Challenge' DVD. Scoil Chríost Rí scholars are obviously seasoned veterans in the campaign – heading for their 3rd Green Flag, great work. CBS Primary School have done extremely well in reducing their waste by 50% - many businesses could learn a lesson from that performance. Well done Ennis National School on the replacement of your rubbish skips by recycling bins and a composting programme.

We would also like to congratulate the new recipients of Green Flag status – Holy Family Junior and Senior Schools and Coláiste Muire, hopefully leading the way for others to follow. A lot of hard work must take place before a Green Flag is awarded so the commitment of these pupils and teachers is encouraging for the future environment of the town, keep up the good work.

Your initiatives for helping businesses to reduce waste, particularly the innovative mentoring service, are commendable and should produce good results.

Ennis has several very good recycling areas, all of which were very clean and tidy during our visits. The Recycling Centre at the Gort Road Business Park is an excellent facility and workers were maintaining the site while we were there. The recycling area at Ennis Leisure Centre was being used while during our visit and it was great to see people were carefully putting their items into the bins – nothing lying around, well done.

We loved the idea of your 'Travel Mugs' and hope that the project takes off and results in a major reduction in the disposable variety.

Tidiness:

It was a pleasure to travel along the new access roads and see the excellent pavements which were immaculately clean during our visit. The town centre was generally very tidy, assisted by the absence of overhead wires and the neatness of the various businesses. In one or two locations there was considerable amount of stock displayed outside the premises – it would be important to ensure that this practice does not spread as it could result in considerable difficulties for pedestrians and an untidy appearance in the area. The roundabout at the Market Square seemed to be missing its centre-piece, hopefully this was just a temporary absence.

One thing that surprised us was the number of public phone booths around the town – in other areas these seem to be a disappearing breed. What was really encouraging was the fact that they were generally in good condition.

The projects in relation to gum litter, graffiti and prevention of illegal flyposting are important in the constant struggle to maintain the tidiness of the town. Well done Ennis National School on the innovative Walking Bus initiative, this will have wonderful benefits for the health of the students and will reduce pollution in the environment. Congratulations on a super project.

Traffic management and parking are always difficult problems in a town the size of Ennis so it was good to note your initiative to encourage schools to open car parks for weekend parking. Businesses who are subsidising parking charges for customers are to be commended.

Residential Areas:

The residential stock within the town of Ennis is of a high standard with some wonderful older homes including lovely terraces in Bindon Street and opposite the Queen's Hotel. There were some well maintained homes in Summerhill and in the Turnpike Road area, where we also admired the lovely open space, sculpture and beautiful bedding plants at the junction.

The Tulla Road area has experienced a considerable expansion in residential developments with several very attractive estates including Bridge View and Derrymor – although the latter estate was still under construction, the landscaping was of a very high standard and a credit to the developers.

Congratulations to the College Green residents on achieving the Overall Winner Award in the 2008 Green Areas Competition. Well done also to all the other category winners in the competitions. The fact that two members of the TidyTowns Committee have responsibility for linking with the various Residents Associations is definitely influencing the performance of estates and producing very positive results.

We were impressed by the design of the Westbourne estate and the fact that solar panels have been incorporated into some properties. On the Kilrush Road we admired the Old Military Barracks Housing Scheme, a very attractive small mixed development with neatly cut grass verge and suitable tree planting.

Other homes which were admired in the town included Westfields with its magnificent 'Failte' flowerbed and other displays; St Flannan's Terrace and nearby Castlepark and Hazelwood estates. Greendale with its fine open green areas also impressed us. Several estates had good landscaping and attractive Shrine features including the Hermitage, St Michael's Terrace and Inis Grove.

Well done to everyone on the excellent care and pride which has been lavished on the homes of Ennis – the success of your effort is clearly visible for all to appreciate in the wonderful character and appeal of the town.

Roads, Streets and Back Areas:

The residents of Ennis must have had to cope with major disruption during the construction stage of the new access roads and pavements but we believe the end results justify the temporary stress, the roads and pavements are excellent. Back lanes and car parks that we viewed (Town Centre, Abbey Street and Parnell Street) were generally litter free and clean.

Signage throughout the town was appropriate and in good condition. 'The Heart of Ennis' sign on the Gort Road was a little swamped by the vegetation beneath but other signs were generally clearly visible.

The bicycle parking stands in the town were getting some use on the day of our visit, a worthwhile project. It

was good to see the new pedestrian crossings which will provide improved safety for the community.

General Impression:

Ennis is a wonderful town to visit with very appealing, meandering streets offering visitors an excellent range of retail outlets and visitor attractions in a clean environment. It was lovely to spend several hours appreciating the charms of the town.

The overall presentation of Ennis is a credit to all the agencies and the wider community who have worked well together. We would like to commend all involved on the standard of work completed so far and to wish you further success in the future. Hopefully we will get many more opportunities to enjoy the character and charm of Ennis.

Second Round Adjudication:

The bypass of the town enables residents of Ennis and tourists alike to go about their business in an orderly fashion in this busy capital of County Clare, and it was pleasant to drive on the old Limerick road, for example, that once resembled a car park where frustrated drivers drove their cars bumper to bumper at walking pace.

Leading off the dual carriageway brings us in contact with a number of new roundabouts, that have grass centres and we look forward to the development of these to the standards of the older roundabouts in the town such as the one on Golf Links road, at Roslevin and the Lahinch road roundabout.

Some great new housing estates have attractive modern houses and great landscaping. But the older estates are not left behind like Gordon Drive with a fine facility for the young people with an all weather pitch that is securely fenced off. Davitt Terrace has a fine children's playground. Marian Avenue (early sixties I guess) has a great open space with a nice Marian Statue. I stopped off at the entrance to Kincora Park (1970,s ?) and admired the houses and the timber sculpture there in a setting of trees, shrubs and lawns.

There are a lot of sculptures at different locations around the town, some in timber and others in stone such as the one of the hounds and bugler on the Cloghleigh road and I agree they do add even more character to the town. Green flags stood proudly outside the lovely Scoil Crist R (1978), the large and indeed well maintained CBS and Holy Family schools, and a drive around the famous St Flannan's College reveals wonderful landscaped areas and the spectacular College itself with a beautiful entrance and traditional stone wall perimeter.

There is an abundance of fine traditional stone walls around the town, especially outside Westburn, on the Tulla road and in other locations making attractive bridges.

Ennis has, in my view, developed in a very orderly fashion where new developments blend in well with the older buildings of the town and the shopping area at Shields garage is an example of this, but there are many other examples such as new shopping centres.

Landscaping throughout the town is sustained in many areas to a very high degree of workmanship with the raised flower beds in splendid stone built containers with different colour schemes of flowers. There are arrays of mature and semi-mature trees along the side of the roads in many areas especially on the approach roads.

I took a drive into the industrial estate on the Gort road where workers cars filled up the car parks making it a busy industrial hub. I came across a well appointed recycling centre in at the back of the estate where materials were being recycled in an orderly and responsible manner.

Going out the Gort road I admired the splendid courthouse and the imposing statue of Eamon De Valera. I turned off for Ballyalla where I encountered unexpected delights of scenery, walking paths, manicured grass, shrubs and mature plus young trees, and a group of ducks gave me an introduction to the wildlife of the area. This is a beautiful area for a picnic with seating and sturdy modern litter bins help to keep the area clean. On the theme of wild life and natural amenities I was delighted with the walking paths in Lees Park and I got the impression that I could walk here through the trees in harmony with the fauna and flora of the area for about an hour. The park is still being developed with great sports facilities and car parking areas and I admired the running track, all weather pitches and skate board facility etc. This area looks to me to have sprung up from the Celtic Tiger affluence, and we often hear that lots of money was squandered in that period, but the money, where ever it came from, is well spent in this area.

On the Tulla road I noticed that cyclists are catered for with cycle lanes – excellent. The walkway under the railway bridge near Costcutter is a lovely feature built into the bridge and better still it is a great safety device for walking along this area.

Landscaping at Knox's bridge is supreme with great displays of flowers on the railings there and there are some lovely private houses on the nearby Clonmore road with wonderful displays of shrubs, flowers and trees as if in competition with the magnificent Tidy Towns efforts. In the distance outside Dunnes Stores we see large open spaced with well manicured lawns.

A beautiful stone bridge over the railway line takes us on to the Quinn road. The large Clare Marts is well secluded. I drove into the retail centre on the Quinn road where the standard of presentation varies a bit with some great landscaping while other parts are in need of attention.

Back in the town centre Daniel O'Connell is looking down over the town from the high up statue. I next went down to the fine old red-brick post office building and resting on the lovely bridge I saw the flood relief work is

progressing very well and the finished wall along by the side of the Fergus is wonderful. The Hughes and Hughes and Carraig Donn modern shops have nice apartments over the ground floor that fit in well with the established buildings of that area. Further down we come to Bindon Street with a fine array of Georgian houses. St Columba's Church of Ireland is a great stone structure and it nestles peacefully at the corner. The Library buildings are well appointed with supreme landscaping. The Club Bridge has its own particular charm with splendid landscaping nearby, and it was great to see people fishing in the Fergus which tells us that this river running through such a large busy town is not polluted and well done to all concerned. I came across an old post box outside the Friary and I felt it could do with a freshening up of the paintwork.

Ennis Friary is visually striking and well worth a visit. There are wonderful shops in Abbey Street, in the Market area and other adjoining streets and they all sported beautiful hanging baskets of flowers making for special displays of freshness and colour. But somehow, if possible, the standard heightened again in O'Connell Street where the shop fronts seemed to be in a competition for best display. Here Brogans, Maurers, Kelly's newspapers, Mulqueens florist, Heaslips and Anthony Daly catches the eye, but perhaps it is unfair to single out some above other supreme shops. Up further we come across Ennis Cathedral which was really beautiful and I loved the sculpture of the hands, and down the side road the famous Old Ground Hotel was as elegant and imposing as ever.

Returning to my car I observed in a side street Ciarán's bar and the owners have certainly thrown their hat in the ring for the shop front competition. Into my car? no not yet! as I noticed where most of an old building had been knocked and is rebuilt, I was told as a Hostel. It looked splendid and there is a great new bridge over the river to access it from the car park as well as the old entry from near the Club Bridge, and this new work adds to the splendour of the older Ennis.

While travelling around Ennis for a few hours I was most impressed with the tidiness and litter control plus all the beautifully manicured grassed open spaces, and shrubberies, and I reflected on the legitimate excuses from other TidyTowns entrants about the lack of funding, but no excuses from Ennis "where the town does the talking".

The first adjudicator has given you a most comprehensive report under the different headings and I am delighted to confirm these findings.

Hearty congratulations to the committee, supporters and great workers.