

# Tidy Towns Competition 2009

## *Adjudication Report*

Centre: **Banagher** Ref: **591**  
County: **Offaly** Mark: **259**  
Category: **C** Date(s): **08/07/2009**

	Maximum Mark	Mark Awarded 2009
Overall Development Approach	50	36
The Built Environment	50	38
Landscaping	50	36
Wildlife and Natural Amenities	50	25
Litter Control	50	31
Waste Minimisation	20	11
Tidiness	30	14
Residential Areas	40	28
Roads, Streets and Back Areas	50	33
General Impression	10	7
<b>TOTAL MARK</b>	<b>400</b>	<b>259</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 Banagher an ever improving place in which to live. Thank you for a carefully completed application form, and for Banagher Tidy Towns Development Plan 2009-2011. Did you consult widely with the community when you were drawing up this plan? It would have been good if you could have given us some detail of the process. It would also have been good also if you could have divided the works on an annual basis, as you have simply given 2009 projects, and gathered the rest in a group to be carried out for the period 2009-2011.

We are glad that local groups are helping you with your work.

We are also glad that you target schools. You work with many local agencies, and with Offaly County Council. We are glad that you have a good relationship with your local engineer, as this bodes well for cooperative action. You acknowledge the huge role FAS CE scheme plays for you in all your work, as well as Offaly Local Development Company, Offaly West Society Ltd. etc. Did you forget to mention Waterways Ireland or do you not have liaison with them, given their responsibilities at the river?

You obviously have a good PRO and you make use of local media channels, as well as using the tried and tested "word of mouth". Please make sure that your church newsletter goes to all denominational churches represented in your community

We wish you luck with the Sli na Slainte route.

St Patrick's Festival must enliven the town in off season, and bring in visitors.

## **The Built Environment:**

Banagher Main Street is a most wonderful collection of interesting buildings. It is a town which is lucky to still have so many of its vernacular buildings intact – if in need of some care in certain cases. Its streetscape is most interesting, and this is a great resource for the town to build upon. So many other towns would envy Banagher because of its architecture. Much of the architecture is associated with its position on the river Shannon – its Martello Tower, its bridge, and the buildings associated with the commerce which the river brought to the town. The rising ground, as one moves away from the bridge, adds interest to the streetscape with stepped levels.

One project that you might seek out – albeit a costly one – is to eventually underground the everpresent wirescape, as it interferes with the wonderful views uphill, and downhill, and with the great architecture.

Another aspect of the street that would make it look even better is, if the out-buildings, particularly those seen readily from the street, could be made clean.

The Church of Ireland is beautifully maintained with a weed-free wall and landscaped grounds. The church authorities are to be complemented, as the church was open late in the evening, and this is unusual and welcoming.

The Catholic Church is also very well maintained.

St Rynagh's Community College (Gairm Scoil) is very well landscaped, and has an Irish sign. Its Golden Jubilee sign needs maintenance or removal. Its wall needs painting.

St Rynagh's Primary School has well painted railings and was generally neat and tidy. It is nicely landscaped also, as is the house opposite on the corner.

St. Paul's Parish Hall and boundary wall looked fresh. The Fire Station gate needs its painting job completed.

The Garda Station is very tidy with lovely trees and a nice lamp. The Top Garage is well presented.

The bank is a very fine brick fronted building. The hotel looks very well and is well landscaped.

Charlotte's Way B&B is an early house with window replacements in a commanding position with mature tree backdrop.

The sculptures at the junction of the street and the Cloghan Road were admired, but they could benefit from interpretation. This adjudicator considers that the small flowerpots placed between them detract from their own elegant statement. Sufficient are the lovely semi-mature trees in the background. The Library building looked really well painted and clean, with the small simple shrubbery bed in front, and the floral baskets which were restrained.

This general "Square" area is undergoing some change, with a new corner building and already complete development in the form of Corrigan's very brightly painted two shopfronts, the former being the new Post Office.

Hunt shopfront is bright, cheerful and lovingly cared about, and presents a most welcoming face to traffic approaching from Cloghan.

Crank House stands out because of its projecting bow front, which spans both stories. This is a delightful building, and it is good to see that it provides community space. It has a fine doorcase. To the rear, through the carriage arch, are small businesses. The signage seen through this archway is not completely in keeping with the building. The old stone buildings to the rear have been converted. There is another bow fronted building on the other side of the street nearer the river, Royal Shannon. Original window glazing caught the adjudicator's eye here

Original timber sash windows and good doorcases have been replaced with inappropriate uPVC inserts in places. One example is at M and S Country Garden.

Encourage good conservation practice, and talk to the Architectural Conservation Officer in your local

authority about this and about what grant aid might be available. There are some lovely little alleyways at the side of buildings which could be brightened up – like that at the side of Hunt's with a little whitewash and simple planting.

Projecting signage in the street (as at Corrigan's Corner House) and plastic signage detracts from the otherwise clean lines of the street. Could you work with the businesses in town to review street signage? There is some wonderful original signage as at "Merchant Tailors" building

You have been diligent in repainting the Billard Hall as suggested by last year's adjudicator. It now looks very well, located as it is at a point where boating people first enter the street.

There are some absolutely wonderful doorcases in the street as the one at the lounge towards the river end of the street (opposite Royal Shannon.)

There are some wonderful elements of older houses such as railings, foot scrapers etc. to be found throughout this marvellous street.

In the Queen Street area Inland Coastal and Marine Systems premises was neat and tidy with a good wall. The Banagher Enterprise Centre needs screening, including the security fence adjacent. Further out this road the Wastewater Treatment Plant stone splay walls were nice, but one side of the access splay needed weeding.

The Liffey Mill area is dirty including the signage.

The bilingual signage throughout the town was admired.

Good luck with your derelict site plans. But do not confuse dereliction with a building which although in bad repair is worth conserving – even if it takes a lot of time. Do note the very same comments made by last year's adjudicator please!

### **Landscaping:**

You are blessed with so much natural tree cover in the general area. You are sensible in utilising this given, and not making your village look like an urban settlement with fussy planters and inappropriate inserts. Replicate what nature has given you – lots of tree and native shrub planting.

A wonderful bank of oxeye daisies caught the eye of the adjudicator in a meticulously maintained garden hedge and meticulously maintained garden opposite the Church of Ireland wall.

Some semi-mature trees in the street and on the "Square" could be augmented. Creeper at Houghs made it difficult to see what lay behind, but it is a feature building. Perhaps a little trimming back might be good for the building fabric.

The playground at the Marina is a lovely bright and much-used amenity. It was great to see it in full use late in the evening – not locked as other playgrounds might be.

The entire Marina open space is a credit to you and to Waterways Ireland and your local authority. The grass at the Marina was neatly cut and cared for. Most of the seating is in good condition apart from the stone seating area under the bridge area.

Hopefully at some time the Barracks area will be restored, both architecturally, and landscape-wise.

We are very unsure about your plan to erect 90 hanging baskets. Quite simply – don't. You will ruin your beautiful streetscape if you hang them – apart from the damage you could potentially do to Protected Structures. They will create fuss and distraction and will take the eye away from all the wonderful architectural features. If you must hang baskets hang them away from your Main Street.

Last year's adjudicator asked you also not to rely too heavily on hanging baskets as a means of developing

landscape. Please re read that report also!

Instead of planting flowering containers, plant native trees and shrubs where you can. A few containers - provided they are not plastic, half barrels or of concrete, can look well in certain hard landscapes. Try natural stone or real terracotta.

The planting at Barrack Square is good, but you will have to wait to complete it until the area is complete itself.

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

Some hedge cutting outside the speed limit sign on the Birr approach may be recent. You are reminded that it is an offence under the Wildlife Act 1976 and Wildlife(Amendment)Act 2000 to cut vegetation in a hedge or ditch or on lands not cultivated between the 1st March and 31st of August annually This is for the protection of nesting birds.

You live in an area which is of much importance from a habitats point-of-view. Could you be more specific about your work with Birdwatch Ireland? To say you liaise with them is good, but we would like to know what way this works, and how you help them.

You have huge potential to progress in this area

Banagher, with its deciduous tree cover, river world and remoteness from polluting atmospheres and human disturbance is 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 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. With such a good architectural environment in the town, be consistent in having such new street furniture designed in an innovative and appropriate fashion. Note also that black street furniture is the most difficult colour for people who are visually impaired to see. And you should also ensure that the Irish names for all species are included.

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

You could increase your overall marks considerably by spending time on progressing this section, but do not rush this, as it is worth doing well!

### **Litter Control:**

Unfortunately however there was quite an amount of litter, tin cans etc. around the stone seating area out under the bridge area on the Marina side. There was further litter on the other side of the bridge in the lovely green space area to the south west of the bridge - in the area fronting the closed Boathouse Restaurant. Two old rusty bicycles were thrown against the wall of the restaurant also (probably dredged up from the river). Sadly, there was a lot of graffiti on the lovely old stone bridge face at this side also. Weeding is also necessary in this general area. It is not as "used" as the north east Marina, but it should not be overlooked or forgotten, as it is a quiet spot where people who wish to experience the calm of the river, away from the boaters might go.

As in 2008 graffiti was noted on the "Welcome to Offaly" sign near the bridge and Marina entrance.

There was a little litter at the approach from Birr near a nice stone entrance way. There was a small amount of litter on the ground at Pairc Naomh Ragnagh. A plastic bottle was thrown on the ground on the Water Tower road

Your clean ups throughout the spring and summer are necessary, and probably need to be daily in the high tourist season. The Sunday litter sweep is not enough evidently, as by mid week this adjudicator found the litter referred to above.

Well done to Offaly County Council to give you a staff member to conduct litter clean ups and emptying bins.

We look forward to seeing more new litter bins. Please take architectural and engineering advice on their selection; the first to ensure that they are suitable for your lovely streetscape, and secondly to make sure that they are sturdy and easily maintained, and emptied.

### **Waste Minimisation:**

Segregation of litter is important, as is recycling and composting. You say you are working in 2009 and will do so in until 2011 with the Environmental Section of the local authority, as well as with local businesses with regard to waste minimisation and waste minimisation awareness. But you do not give any detail / evidence of what actually has progressed here as a result of this liaison. Waste minimisation is about more than recycling, composting and segregating. 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. Perhaps, you might prepare a flyer/newsletter on this subject? As a local community you could look at some innovative and simple ideas such as organising a “Bring and Take Day”. This would involve using a local hall / community centre for instance for a day - where everybody brings items they have no further use for, but which other people might want (and which under normal circumstances they might get rid of as waste) and puts them on display. The corollary is that somebody else needs these items. No monies change hands. Website versions of this idea have been set up in places also. Another group collected all broken crockery, and made a mosaic in their local park. You can gain marks by doing some of these things for 2010.

### **Tidiness:**

The overall impression at first glance is of a neat town. But off centre this is not always the case. Comments in relation to approach roads should be remembered here also

The Barnes McCormac monument is surrounded by a railing which, if to remain, should be painted. However, the rail adds nothing to the monument. Would it be possible to remove the railing? The monument area requires weeding.

Keane's shop has a lot of clutter outside including bins, seaside goods, briquettes, coal and flowers. Not only does this look untidy, but it makes it difficult for people with special mobility needs to negotiate their way around these obstacles. The shop also had an awful lot of signage, which causes a cluttered look.

There is a lot of directional signage at the Cloghan turn at the “Square”, but it is well set off with paving and a floral container. It is in good condition and is functional directional signage.

A “headless” sign and a gate needing renewal at the street end of Portavolla were noted.

Some of the buildings need gutter weeding and repainting, but from an overall perspective the town is relatively tidy.

Mostly weed-free roads are a good sign that your liaison with Offaly County Council is paying good dividends in this regard.

### **Residential Areas:**

The estate (name stone yet to be engraved) on the Birr approach is tidy. Also, off the Birr approach, Kylebeg, The Hill and Chestnut Avenue estates were really very well presented without exception. The mature trees overlooked by Chestnut Avenue are absolutely magnificent. Its walls were sparkling, and semi-mature trees have been planted to continue the tree inheritance that is so great in this area.

The estate opposite this on the approach had (by comparison) no trees. Below this, a lovely row of cottages on the main approach (left hand side) were well maintained. The grey two storey house opposite the church, beside the Credit Union, could do with repainting.

There are two very well presented houses opposite the Barnes McCormac monument, one of which has just got a new roof; and was being painted on adjudication day. The enclave of 6 houses, beside Keane's, could profit from having climbing plants planted against its high walls.

Cuba Avenue junction has a rusty pole and the Cuba Avenue/ St Rynagh's Rd. junction needs trimming.

Ard Abhainn (a nice name with local meaning) needs trees planted in the open spaces.. The hedging leading to the houses is very trim.

Parc Naomh Ragnagh had a newly planted bank and at Cluain Alainn very nice hedge facing the entrance was admired.

The residential enclave opposite the rear buildings on Crank House are neat, but sit in a sea of tarmac. A landscaping plan is needed here. Portavolla is a clean in-village Close with some nice landscaping.

Name plate signage planning is good. Continue your bilingual policy here too.

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

The approach road from Birr is by way of the relief road. There are two huge signs re Relief Road and re Broadband here, which really give an urban feel to the approach, which is not an accurate impression of the town. Hopefully, this signage will eventually be redundant. The multi-lingual welcome sign was unusual. It also includes our native "Failte". There is a lovely mature tree backdrop to the speed limit signs. The junction was well landscaped, but had a few weeds along the kerbing. The boat full of flowers is pretty, but somewhat dwarfed by the signage and the junction. However, it is a reminder to the travellers that the town one is approaching is a river town.

The Texaco garage is neat. A gate opposite the housing estate near the garage needs paint. The surfaces in front of the houses on the left hand side approaching the town need surfacing. There are good trim hedges approaching the Church of Ireland on the hill.

The Five Roads Cross Road along the side of the Church of Ireland boundary was neat also with well maintained cottages, with good boundary walls and hedging.

The Cemetery Road off this approach road had a nice grey wall opposite the Water Tower, but the water tower boundary wall is stained and the white wall opposite needs paint. There is a "headless" pole, and another wall needing painting nearer the junction opposite "Charlotte's Way B&B. Harbour Road was neat, but needs a little weeding in one spot.

The Galway approach is quite rural with little development, opening out to the bridge view across the Shannon.

### **General Impression:**

Banagher has been blessed with location and built heritage, with landscaping and with habitat variety. With these blessings, come great responsibilities and challenges, but we think that as a group you are tackling this quite well, but that you may need some specialist guidance in certain areas. Do remember that a more detailed specific plan will serve you well, will focus your minds, and will help you to prioritise. We think that you should also avail of the professional advice services of your Architectural Conservation Officer and the Heritage Officer, all within your local authority in helping you detail your plans. A plan need not be prepared professionally. However, you should also try to get the views of the community at large when preparing a more detailed / specific plan, and take into account other plans for the area such as Local Area Plans / County Development Plans / County Heritage Plans / etc., prepared by the Local Authority under the Planning and Development Act 2000, as well as Agenda 21 Plans etc.

