

Tidy Towns Competition 2009

Adjudication Report

Centre: **Geashill** Ref: **754**
County: **Offaly** Mark: **286**
Category: **B** Date(s): **06/07/2009**
30/07/2009

	Maximum Mark	Mark Awarded 2009
Overall Development Approach	50	37
The Built Environment	50	41
Landscaping	50	40
Wildlife and Natural Amenities	50	26
Litter Control	50	36
Waste Minimisation	20	14
Tidiness	30	19
Residential Areas	40	27
Roads, Streets and Back Areas	50	37
General Impression	10	9
TOTAL MARK	400	286

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 Geashill an ever improving place in which to live and work, and to enjoy. 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 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.

Thank you for a carefully completed application form. Your map was helpful – if a little out of accuracy and scale! Your referencing accompanying the map was helpful.

You have a reasonably sized group, given the population of the village. You certainly meet regularly from May onwards, and this shows in the results you demonstrate on the ground. We are happy that that you have a FAS worker to help all your voluntary activity.

Offaly County Council, Tullamore Credit Union, Coillte, and Oak Partnership are amongst the agencies who are helping you. This is an impressive list of good will, and we are grateful for their input also!

You communicate well with your community. Remember to include news bulletins in other church newsletters. You only mention “Mass leaflets”! Shop advertising, and texting are also useful tools, as you demonstrate. Texting entices the younger members also, as it is a communication channel that they are comfortable with.

Well done on winning Offaly's Most Cherished Village last Autumn!

It is a great idea to set up a Junior TidyTowns. Young people have the same rights as citizens of our towns and villages. They also have a freshness of approach and innovative ideas – not to mention their ability technologically! Well done to Geashill National School on obtaining their second Green Flag Award recently and on winning the Tullamore Credit Union Tidiest Medium sized school Award! The letter which you enclose from the school principal of Scoil Na Croise Naofa is generous in his praise of the part that you play in their success. The young people are the future of our towns and villages, and it bodes well for the future of Geashill that they are being encouraged by such enthusiastic people. The school is lucky to have such a dynamic and generous committee, but you are also lucky to have an interested school principal and staff. Well done to all concerned!

You so rightly comment on how the TidyTowns Committee acts as a catalyst to get new people together, to get to know one another and to know existing residents. This is an often underestimated consequence of this national competition, and one which is more and more needed in the times in which we live. We are glad that you are aware of this great need sociologically.

You achieved a lot in getting 45 volunteers to bag at Tesco at Christmas in nearby Tullamore! It is not an easy time to get volunteers out and about!

Your village must have looked well for the 125th GAA centenary celebrations in May of this year.

The Built Environment:

There are some wonderful cottages in Geashill, which include those on the Ballinagar approach with interesting paned windows, which are obviously traditional to the area and were designed as part of the planned estate village. You mention the lovely Digby Cottages on the Ballinagar Road. These are indeed splendid, and we are glad to note in a little research on-line that the new list of Protected Structures for Offaly published in early 2009 lists many of the most interesting buildings of all genres in Geashill. We are glad that you are appreciating and encouraging the protection of your built heritage. This adjudicator later read with interest the information on your picnic site and Green information boards how the landlord Digby exhibited and won awards for his designs in the Paris exhibition! The cottage with the red reveals, red cills and gable bay window, and eaves bargeboard and gate is particularly attractive and intact. The stone wall is also very well maintained in front of the cottage. It is a credit to those who care for it, and a lovely building greeting the visitor arriving in this direction. We hope that the stone cottage for sale across the road will fall into the hands of equally good owners. The landscaping and foliage around this cottage are very much part of its character and should be retained as they are found. There is a classically simple single storey grey house in this area, also with sash windows and corrugated roof. It looks very well. Some gates and gate pillars along this road are well kept, and remember that all elements of such estate buildings are important for the building's integrity, therefore are in need of repair and paint, whilst others are beautifully maintained.

The High Chaparral pub was bright and clean.

The red feature roofed arch gate with tall stone gateposts at Hamilton's pub looked very well also, the restrained hanging baskets.

The Green is architecturally pleasing, as well as pleasing from a landscape point-of-view, and is the distinctive feature of Geashill. It is important that the buildings around it are conserved in an appropriate fashion. The individual houses are well maintained, and the terraces all looked well. Some contain lovely bargeboards. It would be a pity to allow an intrusion of uPVC fenestration, as the timber sash windows are traditional and important to the character, not alone of each building, but also to the overall integrity of the Green. The Garda Barracks building has had such windows inserted. However, the building is otherwise looking well with cheerful window boxes. The school is a really lovely, old stone estate-built building with an extension, which does nothing for its architectural character. Perhaps, screening of this latter part of the building in views from the Green might be considered. The maintenance of the two buildings, the walls, grounds, (including gravel pathways) and gates are all a credit to the school staff, pupils, and Board of Management. The gateposts and gate are interestingly child-like in scale – an unusual feature, very much worth protecting. One of the lovely stone gateposts is in need of crack repair. Remember to use lime mortar instead of cement in such work, as it is traditional and correct from a conservation point-of-view.

Carruthers pub is a lovely building and is very well maintained, apart from the sign on the Tullamore Road side of the building. Hamilton's takes up the cheerful red theme again, and is beautifully maintained.

Well done on the restoration of your grotto this year. It is in a very strategic location. The blue railings stood out in contrast with the vivid red and blue floral display potted beside.

The terrace containing the Post Office has lost some of its architectural form at the Post Office end of the terrace (original dormer windows). However, a more recent retiling of the roofs has added a twentieth century unity to the terrace. The terrace is clean and tidy.

The Church of Ireland has lovely high stone walls along its boundary. The grounds are very well maintained and have many lovely mature trees. Behind the Church is a tall building which may have been the Rectory(?) which has a large uPVC window insertions in the gable, which are noticeable in views from the picnic site. Opposite the church entrance the PR Bryan and O Ceallaigh signage is neat. Work carried out to the O'Ceallaigh sign looks well. It is good to see the Irish sign, which may encourage other signage in Irish.

The pump is well looked after, and the Canon Burbage monument is another item of heritage in the Green area. There is an interesting "battered" wall to the cottage on the corner of Donnellan's Lane. This indicates that it is an old vernacular plan.

The thatched cottage on the Mountmellick Road is a lovely building of vernacular interest, and it is most beautifully cared for. It is a lovely piece of Built Environment to have on an approach road. Gates, hedging and landscaping all set it off to full effect. It also retains the traditional local window type.

Byrne's petrol pumps and shop on the Tullamore Road were neat.

The walls at the picnic area and at Ard Riada housing estate are in keeping with the village, as you point out. And the stone wall enclosing the water feature was also admired. We are sorry to hear that you are about to/have lost your Garda Station. We hope that the building finds a new and sympathetic owner, as we hope for the lovely Digby cottage on the Ballinagar Road, which is for sale. The Garda building looked well on adjudication day.

Landscaping:

The Green is your "jewel in the crown", although you also have many other landscaping successes. You have great regard for the landscaped environment, which you have inherited, and this is wonderful to see. The grass on the green itself and in the wide margins outside the stone wall edging was carefully cut. This is no mean feat, and must take a lot of man/woman hours. The magnificent specimen trees in the Green are wonderful. The stone wall edging on all sides of the Green is in very good condition. Your photographs helped the adjudicator see the good planting works at an earlier time of the year - in March and April, when your daffodils and tulips were in full bloom. Adjudication time has its own natural beautiful plant species, which were also admired.

Creeping/Trailing plants framing the windows in the grey house, (with yellow door) on the corner opposite Carruthers pub, looked very well.

The landscaping and planting along the final approach to the village from the Ballinagar side is splendid with lots of mature deciduous trees.

You have been very busy planting in 2009. Some of your committee must have very green fingers! Your list of hedge, bulb, and basket/tub planting is impressive, and it was all admired. Your planned projects include a proposed wild flower area. Ensure you obtain genuine Irish wildflower mixes, as there are some mixes on the market which are not specifically Irish. Fuchsia and honeysuckle on the Daingean Rd. hedge will add visual and olfactory aspects to this area. The seat around the Green tree will be an asset. Be careful with the design and materials! The arch entrance at the beginning and end of the Glebe walk is a nice idea. We note that you have already put the baskets on the castle wall. These are colourful, but please be careful when dealing with the curtilage of a historic building – you need to be sure that you do not damage a historic fabric. Do check with the Architectural Conservation Officer in your Local Authority.

Perhaps, you might "go easy" on the more decorative proposals such as your proposed pony and trap display and the painted small farm implements! Your village is a classic village green type planned settlement, and it would be a pity to destroy this with fuss and inappropriate additions. This adjudicator considers that you should maintain what you have and concentrate on natural local indigenous plantings without embellishments. As the entire Green area is part of, what may in time be designated, an Architectural Conservation Area, you would also need to discuss these ideas with the Architectural Conservation Officer. Your architecture needs a plain canvas, as it stands out alone. If you distract the eye with farm machinery, ponies and traps and such like, this adjudicator thinks that you will spoil a lot of what you have which is unique, and needs no embellishment.

Planters throughout the village were particularly colourful and cheerful. But do not overdo these add-ons, as it would take from the integrity of your planned village centre. The flower bed at the Carruthers side of the Green close to the pedestrian crossing is very vibrant in its yellow/orange colours, and it is a good idea in such

bedding areas to keep the colours to one or two simple shades. The small hedge on the school side of the Grotto was an example of horticultural precision!

The traffic islands on the Castle end of the Green are beautifully landscaped. The hanging baskets in a pyramidal shape add interest where used, but again do not add too many to your natural surrounds.

The hedging in the curtilage of the thatched cottage on the Mountmellick approach is very attractive, and very well maintained.

The picnic area is a great development under the Urban and Village Renewal Programme. It is pristine, and has been opened since 2007. The site is located within a background of unspoilt rural fields. The information board there contains just enough information to whet the visitors' appetite for more knowledge about this interesting village. Opposite the picnic area is a lovely farm frontage with brightly painted gate and with a beautiful row of semi mature trees along the road, and carefully tended road edges. There is a good stone wall also on this approach reaching in to match up with the village walls.

The Glebe Walk is a treed paradise for walkers, and indeed, even though it was raining heavily at that point of the adjudicator's visit, there were still walkers availing of the shelter it provides to get their daily constitutional! The new hedge along the Portarlinton pathway was well admired.

Wildlife and Natural Amenities:

Your wildlife pond is new and novel. But passers by would find it hard to find, if they did not know it was there! It is also in a rather dangerous position, given the flow of traffic, but perhaps it is best left undisturbed, as its main purpose is to attract butterflies, frogs, and ladybirds as you state. The log piles in the lovely mature Glebe Walk, which is so accessible from the village, will indeed attract hedgehogs and other "lesser" fauna. The bat boxes and bird boxes are a great addition to the Walk. You really are making the most of this lovely area in all its manifestations. And the leaf compressing is good too. All your green areas and many treed areas are a haven for nature, and you respect and augment this.

You are maintaining your wildlife habitats well. However, there is 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 work on nature trails with the National School. This is promising, as your work with the school to date has born much fruit.

You will be well advised by the agencies, with whom you have good relationships, for example The Heritage Section of Offaly County Council and by Coillte. 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.

Your proposal for rainwater collection is a good idea. How do you propose to use this water? You are very lucky to have the Offaly County Council "Wildlife and Environment Officer" recently join your committee. You may well have jealous neighbouring villages!

The trimming, which has been carried out recently on Ballydonnelan Lane and on the Tullamore Road, is to best practice, cutting outer edges and allowing taller grasses to remain near the hedge as a wildlife corridor.

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:

Litter picks take place, and this is obvious as not a cigarette butt was in sight in the main village area. However, there was a considerable amount of litter in St. Oliver's Estate – a little litter in a lot of places throughout the estate. Your school has an anti-litter committee. The signs re dog litter were noted. We are not sure that you should add to the "Keep Geashill Litter Free" signs though, as too many signs can lead to an untidy impression in themselves, and give a cluttered effect.

You are also blessed with having another resident – an Offaly County Council Litter Warden. We see that you plan to provide extra litter bins. Try to access some nice bins, and remember that black is the most difficult colour for the visually impaired to see when you are choosing such street furniture. And we note that Coillte are helping you in your endeavours. We are also happy to see that you are involved in the Gum Litter Task Force.

Waste Minimisation:

Well done on hosting the 2009 Composting Workshop for Irish Peat. We hope that everybody is using the community composter successfully. The school has its own composter. The clothing bank will be an addition to your recycling efforts, when it becomes available.

However, waste minimisation is about more than segregation and composting. 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 can refer to the Race Against Waste booklet available from the Tidy Towns Unit of the Department of the Environment, Heritage, and Local Government.

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 in a local park. (Not the Green!) You can gain marks by doing something like this for 2010.

Tidiness:

The footpaths are weed free along the Ballinagar approach, with lovely stone walls setting the approach off to full effect. Indeed, the footpaths throughout the village were very weed free in their entirety. The "major junction" sign on the approach to the junction at the top of the Ballinagar Road needs renewal. In general, road signs are grubby here.

Barrier railings at the pedestrian crossing on the Green were bent, and detracted from the overall neatness of this corner of the Green. It is an unfortunate fact that such untidiness stands out all the more in the midst of semi-perfection. The same type of barrier railings on the Tullamore Road were also bent, opposite Byrne's shop.

The fascia board of the Eircom building requires paint, near the Garda Barracks building.

The entrance splay, beside the picnic area on Portarlinton side, needs weeding and the two gates there need painting. The perfection of the picnic site makes this area look more untidy than if it stood alone.

You enclosed a copy of your sign "No election posters beyond this point" Did this work for you? We noted your new footpaths. Is your early spraying environmentally friendly?

Well done to the GAA for repainting the stand and clubhouse (and for solar panels as well).

It will be timely to resurface St. Oliver's Estate.

The recycling finger signpost in the Green area is clean and maintained.

The recycling area was very clean on adjudication day. However, you really could think about new bins, as they are a little shoddy and worn. The corrugated roadside wall of a shed on the nearby lane could do with a new coat of black paint.

Residential Areas:

The Ard Riada estate is an example of good design and landscaping in a rural village. We hope that others who see it will learn from it. And we trust that you will endeavour to keep this standard up, should there be further housing development in your village. Care has been taken to make use of the existing undulating site contours in siting the houses, and in using existing vegetation well. Exceptional care has been taken to landscape the site, including undeveloped sites. All houses have gardens, which are beautifully cared for with good indigenous and classical plant selection.

You have been busy planting as we already said. However, your "Residential Areas" Section, as filled in in the application form, does not specifically address residential areas. You talk about the picnic site and also the GAA. You mention Ard Riada, but simply state that it is in keeping with the village, and this is true. You also mention that you have liaised with a well known historic garden expert, but you do not say how that relates to your residential areas. Neither does your "projects planned" under this section give any indication of specifically targeted residential area projects.

St. Oliver's Estate is nicely landscaped along the road frontage, with a nice name sign. It has two poor gables in the rear area facing the estate road.

The entrance to the proposed new, as yet unbuilt, estate could be tidied .

Roads, Streets and Back Areas:

You have been busy landscaping approach roads, and you propose to improve the approach roads further with new hedging and grouping planters.

The Ballinagar Road contains a beautifully simple and elegant green space with a few semi mature trees and shrubs. Keep it like that and don't add clutter. It is located just before the bend in the road that "invites" one into the village. However, there is a cracked, though clean ochre wall adjacent. The "Warren" sign, just on the Ballinagar side of this space, is in need of cleaning. The village name sign could also do with (at least) cleaning. The flowers at its base were admired. The 50kph sign's stripes need painting or alternatively a plastic striped sleeve could be used, which would be maintenance free. Is it essential at this stage to have such a large sign at the entrance to Ard Riada?

The Portarlinton Road approach is a broad sweep of lovely, unspoilt countryside with a nice vista inwards to the village leading right into it by the Castle walls. The picnic site described under "Landscaping" above is a great asset to this approach, and the road also has nice "Slan leat" signs.

General Impression:

You yourselves are happy with the involvement in the 2009 competition and this is a credit to your obviously infectious enthusiasm. You have been entering the competition consecutively since 1970 – almost 40 years and the results are showing. You are the lucky inhabitants of a carefully planned estate village, which is naturally full of charm and interest. But you are worthy occupiers, as you appreciate your inheritance, and you are enthusiastically sharing this love of place with all newcomers. It would be difficult to see how they could resist your invitation to continue to carry the mantle. The involvement of the youth is a strong feature, which stands out in your work.

Second Round Adjudication:

Three features of your submission particularly impressed this adjudicator. Firstly, the photos submitted illustrate your commitment to all year round colour. Landscaping is not just for the June adjudicator, but is a colour scheme for the enjoyment of Geashill dwellers and visitors throughout the year. Secondly, the letter of the school principal shows the close working relationship between yourselves and the school authorities and pupils, a relationship that is mutually beneficial and a relationship that implies a great deal of trust on both sides. Thirdly, in your comments on your experience in the competition you mention the positive impact of the community involvement. Surely, the neighbourliness created by the involvement of new residents is a primary purpose of the Tidy Towns Competition.

The feature of Geashill that stands out for this adjudicator is the attention given to landscaping. On all of the approach roads, every opportunity afforded by road widening has been grasped, so that one's senses are stimulated by the surroundings: hedging and ground cover here; manicured road verges there; wilderness in another place. On into town and barrels of summer colour adorn a building; beds reflecting the summer sunshine enhance a corner or a stretch. Tree planting has been continuous for many years and has often been embarked upon as a result of road widening. Your amenity area is a special joy, a wonderful facility, the benches and picnic tables inviting one to take a break, litter bins ensuring that one is not tempted to drop carelessly, spacious parking affording the motorist a chance to take forty winks.

Geashill presents itself as a beautifully settled village, visually dominated by the walled village green surrounded by buildings from 1837 onwards. If one had not read on one of your information boards that the original buildings were thatched one would be tempted to believe that many of the original buildings still stand, as one is sure is the case. The settled, mature appearance of the village centre creates a sense of security. This sense of security is reinforced by the high level of maintenance throughout. The strong colours on windows and doors are a delight. The various styles of wall building reflect the various eras of wall building. The heavy traffic through the village on the N80 seems to be well managed and calmed by the various traffic management strategies. The many inevitable road markings are well maintained and need to be so. Faded markings would detract from the surroundings. The signage exhorting the motorist to keep the village tidy alert us to our responsibilities, while passing through your village. Such exhortation is having the desired effect. One wonders about the treatment of parts of the approach road from Tullamore. One is confused as to what the desired outcome of your work is in places. One would have liked to have visited the castle ruins, but did not know if such a visit might be seen as trespass.

It is not a platitude to say that Geashill is a unique experience. One rarely comes upon a nineteenth century planned village that has managed to retain much of the character of former times into this modern millennium. Geashill has managed to retain that character, while adapting to the opportunities and challenges of a much different lifestyle. Well done.