

# Tidy Towns Competition 2012

## Adjudication Report

Centre: **Ballon** Ref: **526**  
County: **Carlow** Mark: **265**  
Category: **B** Date(s): **09/06/2012**

|                                | Maximum<br>Mark | Mark<br>Awarded<br>2011 | Mark<br>Awarded<br>2012 |
|--------------------------------|-----------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|
| Overall Development Approach   | 50              | 41                      | 43                      |
| The Built Environment          | 50              | 34                      | 34                      |
| Landscaping                    | 50              | 34                      | 34                      |
| Wildlife and Natural Amenities | 50              | 26                      | 26                      |
| Litter Control                 | 50              | 35                      | 36                      |
| Tidiness                       | 30              | 15                      | 15                      |
| Waste Minimisation             | 20              | 10                      | 12                      |
| Residential Areas              | 40              | 26                      | 26                      |
| Roads, Streets and Back Areas  | 50              | 31                      | 31                      |
| General Impression             | 10              | 8                       | 8                       |
| <b>TOTAL MARK</b>              | <b>400</b>      | <b>260</b>              | <b>265</b>              |

### Overall Development Approach:

The adjudicator would like to welcome Ballon to the 2012 National TidyTowns Competition. Thank you for the comprehensively completed entry form which was very well structured and easy for the adjudicator to navigate. It was a delight to read all of the proposals you have outlined in your Ballon Village Landscape Plan. This type of structured thinking and forward planning allows you direct your resources clearly and positively. By first looking at the village in its overall context you can then begin to formalise local plans and individual schemes which ensure a long term appropriate landscape setting for the village. Well done in taking this approach and we hope other villages will take your lead in this. This has gained you additional marks in this category. We look forward to seeing your projects progress in conjunction with Carlow County Council. Ensure you do yearly reviews to make sure you keep on track and look to your action plan for guidance. We are delighted to hear that you have maintained your dedicated core volunteers and well done on all the works progressed through the Ballon Improvements Group. You seem to also enjoy a good level of voluntary support at peak time and are liaising well with a number of agencies and bodies. Have you considered adding a comments section to the community web site to allow residents contribute new ideas or comment on village activities? You have an excellent working relationship with your schools and 4 Green flags is a great achievement for them. Well done to all involved.

### The Built Environment:

This was the adjudicator's first visit to your village and we were very impressed at the range of buildings present and the standard of their upkeep. The use of the old petrol station as the Siopa Glas is such an exciting initiative. How great to see a positive use for what could have become an eyesore at the very core of your village. The complex of credit unions, old village school and community centre is a nice resource for you although the Peter and Paul path linking this area with the church seems to be a problem area with many of the older lanterns broken here. You should talk to the area engineer about perhaps getting more robust

lighting installed here if vandalism is an issue in this out of the way but important village link path. We look forward to seeing the school finished for the next visit. The garda station is an interesting old building and would benefit from inclusion in any proposed history trail as this visitor in particular would love to have know more of its history.

### **Landscaping:**

The emphasis on establishing a strong landscape structure in the village as laid out in your plan is to be commended and we await progress on implementing the excellent strategies contained in this document over the coming years. The use of herbaceous perennials is to be encouraged and as you can see already in the village they provide a more interesting and subtle colour to an area and should require less maintenance. Thinking this way is a more sustainable approach to landscaping.

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

The focus your group has put in to this category and your obvious long term commitment to this issue is seen from your submission and we can see you gaining marks in this category in the years to come as your planned projects come to fruition. The level of involvement you enjoy from the local community is also to be applauded as getting the younger generation involved is the key to success as seen in your successful bilingual nature camp. A key in this category is to follow through on your habitat initiatives and continually assess their successes. To do this we would encourage you to do yearly updates and audits to see for example are your bird, bee and bat habitats being used and if not why not – they may need to be relocated or maintained more regularly. As part of this process you could encourage local people to take part in some nationally organised online surveys including Bird Watch Ireland's online surveys, the annual National Bat count or the hop to it Irish frog survey. Keeping track of all these result will let you see how your habitats are responding to your interventions. We thought that grass areas around your wildlife area at the Garda station and around the bee hive could be allowed to grow and go to seed to create a more enriched habitat. Mown grass is not the best solution here to encourage diversity. The wildflower seeds along the road margins were looking well as they had developed into banks of daisy's that were just perfect for your rural setting.

### **Litter Control:**

As ever the standard here was high with very little litter evident in the village core area so well done to all involved in the litter collections. We enjoyed seeing the pictures of your volunteers on the village web site doing their musical pick up – a novel approach indeed. Keep up your high standards here.

### **Tidiness:**

The village, its landscaped areas and its built environment were all presented to a high standard and well done in all the hard work to achieve this. There is some temporary fencing along the main street and on Ballon Hill which should be addressed. If development projects are no longer a short term realistic prospect try to work with landowners to replace harris fencing with more appropriate timber post and rail fences. One note of warning. While the anti dog fouling posters are good to see be careful on the use of signage in the village. Too many signs can detract from the village setting and be sure to remove any that become worn or faded. An old faded Ballon village sign near the petrol station should be removed. We are sure you will be referring to the excellent advice in your Landscape plan as you advance a signage strategy for the village.

### **Waste Minimisation:**

The opening of the Siopa Glas is a triumph for you and hearty congratulations to all involved in bringing this venture to life. This is such a practical method of implementing the ethos of this category. Unfortunately it was not open during the visit. Do you also have a dedicated display area for local produce, another great way to address sustainability? Have you considered holding a seed or plant swap as part of some of your village's activity days or through the shop? You have a very proactive approach to organising workshops, continue with this as the most successful tidy towns groups tend to be those who garner advice from as wide a range of opinions and experts as possible. The re use of material around the village was also noted and you could build on this with perhaps for example water butts made from old barrels. Consider solar lighting when looking to replace the lights on the Peter and Paul walk, again talk to your Area Engineer about this.

### **Residential Areas:**

As ever the residential properties in the village were presented to a high standard so well done to all your residents. The old stone walls and neat gardens of the older properties along the Fenagh Road add real character to the village and the neat facades of the homes on Main Street were also admired. Once again the Forge Meadows development was beautifully presented and the boundary wall is a lovely feature here. The open space and individual gardens within Maple Lawns were admired but again this adjudicator wondered at the empty pole in the grass area! Ensure all tree ties are removed from trees planting in Mullanmore as trees only need the support for the first two seasons after planting. Well done in joining forces with the residences

committee here and we wish you all the best in working together for the benefit of the village and the common areas within this lovely housing estate.

**Roads, Streets and Back Areas:**

Well done on the appropriate maintenance of the verges on the approaches to the village. We also look forward to development of the village entrance strategy as outlined in your plan to provide a coherent and well detailed entrance to the village. We thought that the extent of signage to the front of the school detracted somewhat from its appearance to passers by's. The repetition of signage tends to clutter the frontage here and perhaps repeated signs can be removed. The rear boundaries of the properties within the Oaks present a very abrupt boundary to the adjoining fields. Could perhaps a native hedge be planted to the boundary here to have a more appropriate transition from rural to village edge and also break up the extent of boundary visibly from this approach to the village? A section fronting the road is proposed in your plan but this could be extended to the field boundaries as well.

**General Impression:**

Ballon has a lovely rural charm in spite of the fact that it is dissected by a busy road, and the emphasis you have put into addressing issues in a sustainable manner is commendable. You have managed to carry out works that complement your rural setting without overpowering or detracting from it. Well done on this. All involved with this year's entry are warmly thanked and congratulated for their efforts and we have no doubt that you will only continue to progress in the competition through your planned works for 2013.