

Tidy Towns Competition 2012

Adjudication Report

Centre: **Ballymote** Ref: **746**
County: **Sligo** Mark: **244**
Category: **C** Date(s): **29/06/2012**

	Maximum Mark	Mark Awarded 2011	Mark Awarded 2012
Overall Development Approach	50	39	39
The Built Environment	50	42	43
Landscaping	50	40	41
Wildlife and Natural Amenities	50	25	26
Litter Control	50	21	21
Tidiness	30	11	12
Waste Minimisation	20	10	11
Residential Areas	40	26	26
Roads, Streets and Back Areas	50	17	18
General Impression	10	7	7
TOTAL MARK	400	238	244

Overall Development Approach:

Welcome Ballymote to the 2012 TidyTowns competition. According to your entry form, you have eight active members of the committee and you recruit through the local press parish newsletter and that you are registered with the Sligo volunteer centre. Well done as it is great to see that you now have your own website. Be sure to encourage members of the public to get involved on a project by project basis. Even though many people cannot get involved with TidyTowns on a regular basis, there are normally plenty who would be willing to help out for a few hours on a specific project such as the annual cleanup or landscaping an approach road. It is not clear from your entry form whether other voluntary organisations in Ballymote have taken part in your TidyTowns projects. Have you contacted local sporting and social clubs? Other voluntary groups can be an excellent source of support for the TidyTowns movement. It is great to see that you enjoy good links with many of the statutory agencies including Fas, Sligo county council and the Sligo volunteer centre. Have leader been approached about the possibility of grant aid funding? Well done also on involving local businesses in your efforts as they can be expected to have a strong interest in improving the appearance of the town. Your engagement with the local schools is to be commended and given that there are several, some consideration should be given to appointing a liaison officer between the TidyTowns and all of the schools in order to coordinate joint initiatives and projects. The adjudicator was amazed at the number of events and festivals that are held in the town throughout the year with June and July appearing to be particularly busy months.

Thank you for your development plan for 2011 and 2012 as it was read with interest. It is a good piece of work as it is comprehensive and it follows the TidyTowns categories as presented in the entry form. However, it is suggested that the plan should be completed for a 3 to 5 year period with projects identified for each of the years in the plan. This will enable you to be realistic about timeframes to deal with large projects (such the Cornmill Project) on a phased basis. A quick reference table, comprising of a single page or two pages, listing all of the projects under each category for each year can be a useful addition to the plan. We know from the 2011 adjudicator's report that you recently have had a ten-year plan and we echo the concerns

raised that this timeframe may be too long and give rise to confusion as to which projects are completed on an annual basis. Thank you also for your map as it was helpful during adjudication. However, be sure to mark all features of interest on this map for 2013 as some things were not marked in and were difficult to find (such as the bring bank).

The Built Environment:

This was the first time that the adjudicator had visited Ballymote and it was considered to be a genuinely interesting town. There are a range of features of the town which are attractive to the visitor. The castle is perhaps the most obvious attraction as it is the fine example of a mediaeval defensive structure. This part of the town accommodates a cluster of interesting buildings. Following an interesting walk around the castle grounds, which are very impressive with their peaceful seating benches and well maintained grassed areas, the adjudicator used the linking tunnel to access the railway station car park. The railway bridge and station were also admired as they are in good condition and complement the majestic church on the adjoining site. The town park also has its features of interest as the adjudicator had no idea prior to his visit to Ballymote that the founder of Celtic football club was a native of the town. The rails of the miniature railway (an excellent initiative) were also observed. The town itself proved just as interesting in terms of the buildings that could be seen. The adjudicator was most impressed with the refurbished Art Deco Cinema building and well done to all concerned as this is a fantastic amenity for the town and it is heartening to see a building of such obvious architectural significance being refurbished and put back into productive use. The Courthouse and Mediation Centre was also admired and it provides a lovely contrast to the more modern architecture such as the fire station and the art deco cinema. Many commercial premises in the town centre were presented to a high standard. Examples that caught the attention of the adjudicator included Brehenys (on the Gurteen Road), Patrick Rodgers Hardware, Doddys, and McGettricks on O'Connell Street - The adjudicator also liked the modern design of the Garda station in this part of the town as it provided an interesting variation on the traditional style of the two-storey structures which dominate the streetscape. On Lord Edward Street, Gallaghers, Kieltys, Ulster Bank, Supervalu, Haydens, Cassidys and Currids Pharmacy looked very well. On Teeling Street, Johnson & Johnson Solicitors, McPartlans Optician and Donagh Tighes Bar all achieved a good standard of presentation. Regrettably, the Post Office does not appear to have been painted since last year and we would concur with the previous years adjudicator regarding the clutter on the front elevation of Tighes shop as it does not appear to improve the appearance of the building.

The adjudicator particularly liked the Ballymote community enterprise centre building as it appears to be a very good example of vernacular architecture. It may however need a dash of paint, especially on the plinths and above the sign in time for 2013. The terrace of dwellings directly opposite this building (from the Corner house to the Hotel) were also admired as a standard of presentation of each one was exceptionally high. Further down, the mart site and the adjacent derelict building appeared in poor condition and one hopes that they can be remedied soon. The adjudicator was also impressed with Scoileanna Muire and what appears to be a convent directly behind it. The murals on the wall of Scoileanna Muire were also admired and it is no exaggeration to say that the school is one of the best presented buildings in the town. It was noted during the adjudication that there appears to be problems with both vacant and some derelict buildings and is strongly recommended that your group should raise this matter with Sligo county council who have powers to deal with this issue. It is further recommended that the sites and buildings that occupy the most prominent and visible positions should be dealt with first and as a matter of urgency. It is further noted that you have commenced the development of the Cornmill, and this sounds like an excellent project and that you intend to have a monument erected to Paddy Killoran.

Landscaping:

According to your entry form, your projects for 2012 included the planting of flowers and weeding of planted areas. It is also noted from your plan that the wishing well, planters and shrub beds around the town have all received attention in 2012. The landscaping of the wishing wells on the approach roads to the town were all observed during the adjudication and there is no doubt that they add nice colour to the towns approaches. For the adjudicator, a couple of projects stood out. Firstly, the large landscaping bed (and seating area) in front of the Courthouse and Mediation Centre was admired as it enhanced the appearance of this lovely building and helped to provide a lovely focus for this part of the town. The second project which was most attractive was the planting close to the triangular area at the junction of the Templehouse Road and the Sligo. This large bed (which also appears to accommodate a monument or memorial?) had a range of species on view and it represents an excellent use for what would otherwise be an incidental space. Some attractive landscaping was also observed in the grounds of Corran College and also at the entrance to what appears to be a convent or school from Marren Park. The landscaping at the Park adjacent to the railway station was also observed but the large bed on the bank with the railway station was comprised of plastic weed blocker (and no bark or soil). Is this a work in progress? The landscaping beds at the car park of the railway station and around the perimeter of the Church were very weedy and untidy looking. This was a disappointment as it noted that this area was singled out for praise by the adjudicator in 2011.

Wildlife and Natural Amenities:

It stated in your entry form that areas for wildlife and natural amenity will be designated in the community Park following September. The TidyTowns committee are also to be commended for working with the heritage officer in Sligo county council and for your support of third level research into wildlife amenities in Ballymote. This is an excellent initiative and one can see the benefits for all parties concerned. It is suggested that a short summary of preliminary findings of the research should be submitted for 2013 TidyTowns competition if they are available. The research should also provide the basis for new information signage on wildlife in Ballymote and remember, it should also inform your landscaping schemes as species that provide a source of food and shelter for local wildlife should be selected for planting. Well done on your attendance of a composting and biodiversity workshop organised by the Irish Peatland Conservation Council as these talks are very helpful for both practical ideas and directions for undertaking wildlife projects in sensitive manner. The 2011 adjudicator refers to the organic garden in Scoileanna Mhuire with composting, wood land and the Orchard. However, it is noted that there is no reference to this in your entry form or in your development plan? Corran College also had three green flags – please let us know in 2013 about what they are doing in the area of wildlife and biodiversity.

Litter Control:

It is noted that you have regular litter patrols on a Thursday evening and a major cleanup once a month with a focus on individual areas and the approach roads. There seems little doubt that the approach roads require extra attention as litter was noted on the Gurteen Road (small amounts in the verges) and also on the Sligo Road, where quite a lot of litter was observed along the footpath adjacent to the industrial units (especially in front of Cawley & Scanlan). Litter was also evident at the 50 kmph signs close to the entrance of Colaiste Mhuire. However, the park area (adjacent to the railway station) appears to have improved since 2011 as no litter was spotted here. The support received from the council and the community employment scheme is also noted. Well done on organising a mural with Scoil Muire Gan Smal as part of the anti-litter awareness campaign. The murals on Scoileanna Muire were observed during adjudication and they looked very well.

Tidiness:

According to your entry form, the biodiversity issues raised in 2011 have been taken into consideration and you are working with the area engineer to address other matters referred to in the 2011 adjudicators report. It is further noted that Scoil Mhuire Gan Smal have improved the wall fencing and their improvements were clear to see during adjudication as the building looked very well and achieved a very high standard of present. Well done also on working with property owners to try to improve their premises for this years competition. This approach has been effective as the vast majority of premises in the town looked very well and were a credit to Ballymote. The committee are also to be commended on their approach to weed control as Teeling Street, Lord Edward Street, O'Connell Street, Emmett Street and Grattan Street (up as far as the Mart) were in very good condition and displayed a high standard of tidiness.

Notwithstanding the above, improvements are possible. It is strongly recommended that a signage audit is undertaken in conjunction with the area engineer in order to identify the signs that need to be washed or replaced and the sign poles that need to be painted as a considerable number of the signs observed during adjudication looked untidy and where in need of attention. Problems were also noted with landscaping beds as a number appeared to be in poor condition, overgrown with weeds and lacking in maintenance. Perhaps, you could meet with your work partners in the agencies and agree which beds are maintained and by whom? A similar approach should be taken to weed control as a number of the streets (outside the central area) had noticeable amounts of weed at kerbs and on road verges. There also appears to be difficulties with boundary treatments, especially on the approach roads. In a number of cases, a range of boundary treatments are used (e.g. wooden fencing, wire fencing with concrete posts, steel fencing) and often, the boundaries are in poor condition. This also contributes to an untidy appearance.

Waste Minimisation:

It is noted from your development plan that your projects for 2012 include the scrap metal collection programme (to provide funding for voluntary groups), the silage wrap collection at the mart as well as the electrical item collection. Your work with the schools and the business community in raising awareness of the issue is also to be commended. These projects are excellent and we would encourage you to continue with them. However, remember that the focus of this TidyTowns category is to minimise or even avoid the production of waste in the first place, so we would love to see examples from your work as a TidyTowns group that achieves these aims. Have you considered using recycled items in your landscaping projects, such as timber? Another example would be sourcing paint for your improvement projects from the recycling centres. Why not make your own compost and grow your own plants? Perhaps a good starting point would be to complete an audit of your own activities on an annual basis and see where and how waste is generated. Then, you could devise actions on how to reduce the production of this waste. Other ideas for actions under this category can be found in the TidyTowns Handbook.

Residential Areas:

It is great to hear that the residents associations continue to undertake maintenance and improvement work to their Estates and residential areas. Well done also on sharing resources and materials, particularly now that outside funding is scarce. Your work on raising awareness of the availability of grant aid funding from Sligo county council is also to be commended. A number of the residential areas in Ballymote were visited during adjudication and it was observed that their standard of presentation was mixed with some achieving a good standard of maintenance and presentation while others did not achieve such high standards. It is noted from the adjudicators report in 2011 that a tidy estate competition should be held in Ballymote and this is considered to be an excellent idea. Perhaps a local hardware store could provide a sponsored prize? This could help to generate some participation by the residents associations and it could feed into improvements in the appearance of individual estates. It was also apparent from adjudication that there are a number of estates with a considerable proportion of vacant and in some cases unfinished houses, and while this represents a challenge, it should be noted that Sligo County Council have access to a fund to allow for remedial works to such estates in certain instances. Therefore, you are strongly encouraged to bring these areas to the attention of the Council to ascertain whether funding for improvements is available.

Roads, Streets and Back Areas:

It is noted that the planters were moved closer to the town in order to reduce the amount of grass cutting required. According to your plan, efforts are underway to improve the footpaths on approach roads and while many other improvements have been identified, scarce resources have prevented further action. This is understandable. It is great to see the TidyTowns group have taken note of all the suggestions made by the adjudicator 2011 and raised them with the various agencies that have responsibilities in these areas. Given the number of improvements required and constraints that exist, it is recommended that priorities are agreed for each year over the next 3 to 5 years, with the most urgent improvements taking place now. This should help to make the projects more manageable in terms of the resources they require. The standard of approach roads in Ballymote was reasonable, but improvements are possible – particularly by dealing with untidy verges and badly maintained signage. The signs with wooden planters (and colourful summer plants) on approach roads were attractive and helped to create a positive impression for the visitor.

General Impression:

The adjudicator was most impressed with the town of Ballymote and the work of the TidyTowns Group to date. While some challenges were noted and discussed in this report, the majority of these are relatively minor and cosmetic in nature and we have no doubt that they will be put right in the coming years. Keep up the good work and best of luck for 2013!