

Tidy Towns Competition 2012

Adjudication Report

Centre: **Easkey** Ref: **788**
County: **Sligo** Mark: **241**
Category: **A** Date(s): **19/07/2012**

	Maximum Mark	Mark Awarded 2011	Mark Awarded 2012
Overall Development Approach	50	35	35
The Built Environment	50	32	32
Landscaping	50	33	34
Wildlife and Natural Amenities	50	19	21
Litter Control	50	27	27
Tidiness	30	15	16
Waste Minimisation	20	11	11
Residential Areas	40	27	28
Roads, Streets and Back Areas	50	30	30
General Impression	10	7	7
TOTAL MARK	400	236	241

Overall Development Approach:

Welcome Easkey to the 2012 TidyTowns Competition and we are delighted to see that so many are involved in your committee as 18 members is an excellent level of participation in a small village – this clearly reflects a strong community spirit in Easkey. There is no reference to other community or voluntary groups in your entry form and we would encourage you to build links with other voluntary groups or sports clubs in the village if possible, as this will raise the level of public awareness of the work that you undertaking and it should also help to broaden your support base. You are commended on your links with Sligo County Council, Fas, the Sligo Leader Partnership and the Rural Social Scheme as the support of all of these agencies and bodies is most important in undertaking environmental and other improvements at a local level. It is pleasing to read that you have regular contact with the schools and that you involve them in some of your projects including litter control. This is to be encouraged and we recommend that joint projects with the school are considered in projects in some of the other TidyTowns categories such as landscaping, waste minimisation and wildlife. Thank you for your completed entry form and map as they were helpful during adjudication. Your plan is also included and while it provides some guidance on your future projects, it could be improved by listing individual projects under the TidyTowns categories and by including short, medium and long term projects. Remember that the plan is an opportunity to include projects that are not simply maintenance of existing schemes as it allows your group to plan for the future. As stated by the adjudicator in 2011, it is recommended that the TidyTowns Handbook is consulted as it provides guidance on how to prepare a TidyTowns Action Plan.

The Built Environment:

The adjudicator enjoyed the visit to Easkey with its beautiful coastal setting, its picturesque location at the mouth of the Easkey river, its notable historical features such as the Castle and its attractive village core. The adjudicator particularly liked the natural stone walls that could be found throughout Easkey as these are a

lovely distinctive element of the village. A number of very attractive buildings were observed and they include the Court House (and it is understood that the community are currently trying to acquire this building), St Annes Church and its wonderful grounds, the Lodge and the Heritage Centre Building, which appears to have been refurbished to a high standard. It was also observed that refurbishment is planned for Easkey Bridge House and it is hoped that this can take place in the near future. A number of very attractive commercial premises were spotted, each of which makes a positive contribution to the appearance of the village. They include; the Coast Cafe, the Fishermans Weir and the Village Store. We concur with the adjudicator in 2011 that the shopfronts of R MacGabhann and Sean MacGiollarnat deserve a special mention for the high standard of presentation achieved by their premises and their use of An Gaeilge in their signage. The historical structures in the village are particularly interesting. The entrance to the river walk from the access point at the post office provides an excellent vantage point of the Castle, as well as the old Abbey and the bridge. Would it be possible to provide information plaques at each of these sites? This would make a valuable contribution to the users experience of the river walk, which is an excellent amenity. It is noted that you have listed a number of projects under this category for 2012 in your entry form, which include the meals on wheels kitchen and new exercise gym in the community centre and the heritage cottage will be opening up for the summer season.

Landscaping:

The landscaping schemes observed in Easkey on adjudication day were quite impressive. The planting observed at the river walk was most attractive and complemented the river side setting. A reasonable diversity was also achieved and we would be interested to hear if the plants selected for this location were chosen for their wildlife contribution? The planter barrels provided along the Main Street were very impressive and added interesting colours and interest to the streetscape. Landscape beds on the perimeter of the car park (off the Main Street) and also at the car park of the Catholic Church were admired as they achieved a good diversity of species and looked well on adjudication day. Some incidental schemes made a valuable contribution such as the small linear bed between the sculpture and the entrance to the Old Abbey. Well done also on your work maintaining the cemeteries and churches.

Wildlife and Natural Amenities:

There is a wealth of opportunities for wildlife projects in Easkey. With its coastal, river and woodland habitats, it seems likely that the village is a hotbed for biodiversity. We were delighted to experience the river walk and this is considered to be a lovely amenity for the village that is of interest to visitors and residents alike. You are commended on undertaking this excellent project as it not only provides a lovely amenity but it also takes in a number of very important and interesting habitats. Have you considered undertaking a survey? This would indicate what wildlife and plant species can be found in your village. The survey could also be used to provide an information board and / or interpretive signage along the river walk and this could add to its amenity value. As mentioned earlier, wildlife information panels could be supplemented by information plaques on the historical features such as the old Church and the Castle. Don't forget that the plants that you select for your landscaping schemes can also make a positive contribution to biodiversity if plants that provide a source of food and shelter for native wildlife are used. It is also noted that you intend to add more bird boxes to the nature walk beside the Courthouse.

Litter Control:

The standard of litter control observed in Easkey during adjudication was reasonable but it could be improved. Litter was observed in a number of locations that included the Main Street (outside the Fishermans Weir Pub), at the wooden gate on Main Street beside the post office, on the access point to the river walk (opposite the post office), on the approach road from Ballina, in Woodlands Crescent and considerable amounts in the car park of the Castle and also on the access road to the Castle. Small amounts were also spotted at the bring bank and at the statue on Main Street. However, it should be noted that it was clear to the adjudicator the litter patrols were taking place and that the majority of this litter had only been dropped recently. However, it is recommended that more frequent litter patrols are considered, particularly during the summer months. It is also recommended that the patrols target areas that are vulnerable (such as those listed above). Well done on your work in raising litter awareness in the schools.

Tidiness:

It was noted from your entry form that the Committee have undertaken work in a number of areas such as weed control and verge and footpath maintenance. During adjudication, it was observed that the Main Street of the village in particular was in very good condition with all kerbs appearing weed free and footpath and roadsides cleanly swept. A number of other areas were also in good condition such as the post office road (leading to River bank) and the bridge. However, weed was noticeable on a section of the Ballina Road between the speed limit signage and the village while untidy verges could also be found in this location. Well done on your work improving signage and the improvements were observed during adjudication. As ever,

more improvements are possible. Some untidy signs remain in the village and they should be addressed as a matter of urgency. The Easkey sign on the Sligo approach road is untidy looking due to temporary signage being attached to the sign pole and stickers on the sign itself. It is noted that this matter was also referred to by the adjudicator in 2011. The pump and the trough on the Sligo approach road are very untidy looking and would benefit from a facelift. The slow through village sign outside the family resource centre was in exceptionally poor condition while the grounds of the family resource centre (especially to the back) were very untidy due to debris and other items being stored. The grounds of the Community Hall detract significantly from what is otherwise a reasonably attractive building with poor surfacing, untidy block perimeter walls and various items such as timber, metal poles and spoil heaps been stored on its edges. The gates of the Community Hall are also in very poor condition and in need of paint. It was noted from the adjudicator's report in 2011 that the coastal area was in need of attention and it is disappointing to note that very little appears to have happened to this area as many of the problems referred to in the report in 2011 persist with the toilet block remaining in very poor condition. It is regrettable that this major attraction of your village is not reaching its full potential and it is not clear to the adjudicator's as to why this is the case. It is recommended that this area is given priority in the years ahead.

Waste Minimisation:

According to your entry form, there is an increase in the usage of the bottle banks in Easkey. Have you undertaken a survey? If so, we would be very interested in hearing the results. While your promotion of the bottle bank is laudable, the focus of this category is to minimise and eliminate waste. TidyTowns groups are encouraged to think of innovative ways to reduce and eliminate waste when undertaking their TidyTowns projects. For example, do you make your own compost from grass cuttings and plant clippings? Do you grow your own plants? Other actions that are possible under this category include harvesting rainwater for watering planters and avoiding the use of chemical weed killer and fertiliser. You're also encouraged to try to raise awareness of waste minimisation. This can be achieved by organising a waste minimisation seminar with the environmental awareness officer of Sligo County Council.

Residential Areas:

A number of residential areas were observed during adjudication and they included the Riverbank, which is located to the rear of the post office. This is an attractive estate with green areas that are maintained to a high standard. However, it is considered that it would also benefit from some landscaping. Radharc na Mara was observed on the approach road to the sea and although, it looked quite well, no landscaping could be seen. Woodlands Crescent was reasonable, while Wood Drive (?) opposite the family resource centre was a little untidy looking with its broken name signage and overlong grassed areas.

Roads, Streets and Back Areas:

The approach roads into Easkey were a little disappointing. The approach road from Sligo could be improved as the verges were overlong and obscured the attractive natural stone walls while one of the 50 kmph signs was leaning and the sign for Easkey was untidy looking. The approach from Ballina could also be improved. Although the landscaping bed at the base of the Easkey sign was quite attractive, the verges were overlong and did not appear to have been recently maintained while weed was evident at the kerb of the footpath. The untidy broken wooden sign for tourism (referred to in the 2011 report) also appears to be still in place. The approach road from the direction of the lodge house was similar with untidy verges and some litter evident.

General Impression:

The village of Easkey has considerable potential with its coastal location, its setting on the mouth of the River Easkey and its many features of historical and natural interest. It is recommended that the TidyTowns groups should give priority to projects that significantly improve the coastal part of the village in the years ahead. Best of luck for 2013!