

Tidy Towns Competition 2013

Adjudication Report

Centre: **Athenry** Ref: **189**
County: **Galway** Mark: **265**
Category: **D** Date(s): **18/06/2013**

	Maximum Mark	Mark Awarded 2012	Mark Awarded 2013
Overall Development Approach	50	43	44
The Built Environment	50	36	38
Landscaping	50	38	39
Wildlife and Natural Amenities	50	27	28
Litter Control	50	25	25
Sustainable Waste And Resource Management	20	11	12
Tidiness	30	13	14
Residential Areas	40	31	32
Roads, Streets and Back Areas	50	27	26
General Impression	10	7	7
TOTAL MARK	400	258	265

Overall Development Approach:

Welcome Athenry to the 2013 Tidy Towns Competition. It is great to see that the participation rate on the tidy towns projects is high in your town with a committee of 11 people and over 30 others who help out. This is clearly an acknowledgement at a local level of the good work that the tidy towns committee is undertaking on a regular basis. It is also heartening to see that you have built such strong links with the voluntary sector in Athenry and that they have provided further assistance to you, particularly in the formulation of the three-year biodiversity plan. We note the attention that is currently being given to the proposal to develop a 1916 Museum in the town and we would suggest that this is best included in the built environment category rather than the overall development approach category. This is an excellent and exciting idea and we wish you every success with it. It is clear from your entry form that you also enjoy good links with the local business community and this is a clear reflection of the importance of your work at a local level and well done also on the good working relationship that that you have built up with Galway County Council, Galway Rural Development, Fas and the Environmental Network. Your communication strategy is very good with an emphasis noted on web-based communication as well as more traditional methods. We were very pleased to read that there are high levels of interaction between the committee and the local schools and that you have undertaken many joint projects in partnership with them. Thank you for your comprehensive application form and supporting documentation. It was most informative and helpful to the adjudicator during the visit to the town. Your five-year action plan is a good practical document as it lists projects for all of the tidy towns categories but further improvements are possible by identifying what assistance is required for each project (as well as by whom). In addition, the larger projects should be broken down into phases in order to improve their implementation.

The Built Environment:

Athenry has many features that appealed to the adjudicator. The range of historical buildings is exceptional with interesting buildings and structures located throughout the town. The Castle is a most impressive example of Medieval defensive architecture, while the Abbey was also admired and we were delighted to see the excellent repair work that was undertaken to the town walls as part of the walls conservation project. Many other good buildings in the town caught the eye of the adjudicator and they included the lovely natural stone railway station buildings and the excellent building that accommodates the Galway Vocational Education Committee opposite. St Marys Church was also admired with its bold post modern design and well maintained grounds, while the Garda station opposite stands out. The narrow winding streets such as Davis Street, North Gate Street and the

Market add further charm while the mix of modern and historical buildings that can be found in the town centre are mostly presented to a high standard. A number of commercial premises stood out and they included; the Nook, the Olive Café, Bradys, the Shopping Basket and the Skillet Inn, while Madigans and Dowlings looked very well. The Heritage Centre and the Square at the end of Burkes Lane were also very impressive. The tidy towns committee is to be commended on the projects that they have undertaken under this category for 2013, such as the provision of the bicycle rack at the station, the highly original wrought iron seat at the Castle, the eye catching Donnacha Cahill seat on Cross Street and the improvements to millennium corner. The improvements to the road and pavements on the Dublin Road and station road were also observed and we admired the new stone wall that runs from Prospect to Pound (with its built in landscaping!). Well done also on finally securing the new bottle bank and car park at Swan gate. It is also noted that the litter bins in the town have been replaced and that Irish rail have undertaken improvement works to the road and parking area adjacent to the station in Athenry. The mural and playground refurbishment are also excellent projects that benefit the people of the town, while the repair of down pipes is a positive intervention in abandoned buildings.

Landscaping:

A number of good planting projects were on display in Athenry on adjudication day. We were most impressed with the high quality landscaping scheme that could be seen at the Boys National School and the provision of landscaping in the top of the new natural stone wall on Prospect brings nice colour to this feature – while the circular seat built into the wall provides for a pleasant urban space. Attractive landscaping and public art was also observed in the small park opposite the water tower. The planted bed adjacent to the railway building caught the eye of the adjudicator while the landscaping at St Marys Church car park and the raised planted baskets on the green poles looked particularly well. The colourful planting at the Millennium Corner was admired as this enhances what would otherwise be an incidental urban space. The large number of projects undertaken by the tidy towns committee was also observed. Well done on the planting of 9100 trees in March as future generations will see the benefits of this excellent project. You are commended also for the emphasis given to planting for year round effect with spring bulbs sown in road verges and winter displays provided in all the planters and walls around the town. The maintenance of existing planting schemes on the Tuam road roundabout and at the Presentation College were also noted, while the verges on the Caheroyan Road looked well and one hopes that the yellow bollards are effective and that they prevent unauthorised parking.

Wildlife and Natural Amenities:

According to your entry form, your committee have been busy with projects under this category with a local biodiversity plan completed as well as a number of projects on the ground that include treeplanting (as part of a ten-year programme) of native species, the provision of bird and bat boxes in the Castle Park and Raheen and running nature awareness courses in the local school. It is also noted that planting is taking place to encourage bees and butterflies. These are all excellent initiatives and we are delighted to see that the schools are closely involved in all of them. We were also interested to see that river walks and heritage trails (with interpretive signage) were to be developed between 2011 and 2013 (as listed in your submitted nature and wildlife plan) and we wondered if some detail could be provided of these for 2014. Is there a map available of the routes? The proposal to develop a flora and fauna data base is also an excellent idea.

Litter Control:

The standard of litter control was generally good in Athenry with many parts of the town appearing litter free. Despite this good performance, litter was spotted in a number of locations that include; on the road outside Caheroyan Drive, on Prospect, on the Galway Road, on Ladys Well Road and at the small car park in front of the Castle. However, the central part of town was very clean with no litter spotted. We were delighted to read that transition year students take part in your litter patrols and it is very likely that this is having a positive influence on their future behaviour. It is further noted that assistance is obtained from Fas and one hopes that this could be expanded and will continue in the future.

Sustainable Waste And Resource Management:

It is recommended that your projects under this category are comprised of a mix of actions undertaken by the committee to minimise and eliminate waste and raising awareness of waste minimisation in the community. With this in mind, we were delighted to read that the committee organized a waste minimisation course with a representative of Galway City Corporation. Well done also on your litter segregation program and the swapping of old drinks cans for trees! It is also great to see that all the heavy materials collected during your cleanups are reused by the Council in their work projects. You are also commended on the waste minimisation actions undertaken by the group which include, using a projector for presentations (to save painting materials), laminating posters and reusing flowerpots. We were also pleased to hear that a water harvesting system is being set up and well done on securing a bottle bank for the town after a 5 year absence. Other improvements that could be considered include; making your own compost for your landscaping projects from grass and other plant waste, or a waste survey to try and identify what waste is being generated and by whom and what actions are necessary to minimise and eliminate it.

Tidiness:

The work of the committee with respect to pavement and roadside maintenance as well as weed control was noted during adjudication, with the majority of areas in the town (particularly in the town centre) appearing weed free and well maintained. Thank you for your explanatory entry form that details the challenges that you face

under this category. We are pleased to see that you have undertaken a survey of the signage in Athenry and that you are liaising with the Council to remove damaged poles and repaint existing poles. Examples of untidy signs and headless sign poles were observed at the entrance to Cluain Crescent and the railway bridge, on Bridge Street, at the Cluain River Bridge (close to Prospect) and on Ladys Well Road. Your continuing efforts to move wires underground and cleanup the swan gate\prospect area are also noted and it is acknowledged that can be a lengthy and somewhat frustrating process. We also read about the significant efforts to improve the town's footpaths and problems encountered with weed growth and grass verges. Why not consider an 'adopt a road or road section' with other voluntary groups or interest groups (such as residents associations) in the town?

Residential Areas:

The issues surrounding the Glade estate are noted, particularly those involving the broken walls. However, we were delighted to read that your 'low cost' planting of flower beds has been a big success and that further improvements are planned later in the year. You will be delighted to know that the Glade estate looked tremendously well on adjudication day with its excellent landscaping and rather elaborate central space with a water feature. Was this designed to achieve sustainable urban drainage? It is pleasing to see that other Associations are now interested and why not consider 'sweat equity' whereby help is provided to a group of volunteers in the estate – this will help to train the residents in undertaking landscaping schemes. Other impressive residential estates viewed on adjudication day included; Ard Aobhinn and Caislain Ri. Ciarrai Ban was also quite nice.

Roads, Streets and Back Areas:

The area around the Baunmore roundabout looked quite well and the work to the new walls was observed. The approach road from Monivea was reasonable, but the grass and vegetation growth in the roadside verges was becoming quite long and untidy looking. The Ladys Well road was quite nice with trimmed road verges and clean signs. However, this approach was also a little untidy looking at the speed limit signs. Poor road surfacing was spotted in a number of locations in Athenry such as the junction with Bridge View Road and Caheroyan Road, at the small car park in front of the Castle and at the road layby in front of the GAA grounds.

General Impression:

The Tidy Towns Committee is commended on an excellent performance in the 2013 Tidy Towns Competition in which improvements were achieved in a range of categories, despite the challenges that the committee faced throughout the year. Well done and we look forward to returning to Athenry in 2014.