

Tidy Towns Competition 2013

Adjudication Report

Centre: **Athleague** Ref: **269**
County: **Roscommon** Mark: **251**
Category: **B** Date(s): **08/06/2013**

	Maximum Mark	Mark Awarded 2012	Mark Awarded 2013
Overall Development Approach	50	36	37
The Built Environment	50	33	34
Landscaping	50	37	38
Wildlife and Natural Amenities	50	23	24
Litter Control	50	32	32
Sustainable Waste And Resource Management	20	10	10
Tidiness	30	14	15
Residential Areas	40	24	24
Roads, Streets and Back Areas	50	29	30
General Impression	10	7	7
TOTAL MARK	400	245	251

Overall Development Approach:

Your adjudicator would like to welcome back Athleague to the 2013 National Tidy Towns Competition. You have collated a very good submission with photos, maps and even DVDs of local events.

You are also working with many of the key personnel including your Heritage Officer with regard to the development of some of facilities and walkways to enhance access to local heritage. But, please note that it is not necessary to include copies of all e-mails and correspondence on such projects including details of your planning application numbers. Try to limit supporting materials that are of direct relevance for your adjudicator so they can focus their attention on the main project proposals.

For a small community, you have achieved a lot of work and have included a very comprehensive plan for your future work. You should be applauded for your sterling efforts and your adjudicator was particularly impressed to see that over €14,000 was raised at the community auction, partly towards the Community Centre's proposed extension.

The Built Environment:

The premises and homes along the main street of Athleague are very well presented with many showing window boxes or hanging baskets. The old bridge B&B and public house was being painted at the time of the visit and this western section of Athleague works very well. Healy's hardware and grocery store had a simple traditional sign which should be maintained. The old mill is a great structure and it was a delight to see it still with all the working mechanisms in place. It could be a wonderful amenity for the locality.

The building behind the car park on the main street (by the bottle bank) was very well presented with lovely hanging baskets and two unusual, stylist murals on the windows with poppies and faces.

There are some lovely wrought iron gates on the now-closed pub opposite the bottle bank. Your adjudicator notes that this building has been closed since the 2009 flooding and is delighted to read that the owner has agreed to paint the front of the building.

The grotto is a very striking building, appearing much other than its 1960s date. There are old metal poles here

that maybe could be removed to allow you to focus on the structure itself.

The traditional wrought iron gates and piers were great to see near the ring fort at this north end of the town also. There is a great stone barn and outhouse here also. The red corrugated iron roof of this building will look great if painted. Thank you to the local constabulary as the Garda Station presented well also.

The community centre/tea room/exhibition centre was closed at the time of the visit. There are a lot of signs directing to these facilities through the village – is it still operational? The front area has a wonderful landscaped bed and a lot of effort has gone in here but as it is behind the road-side wall many passers-by would not be able to enjoy this. Could some of this focus be directed the opposite direction towards the centre? The ramp looks very harsh and whilst necessary does not enhance this area – could the rails be painted a stately dark grey maybe to reflect the building that was once a Church? Your adjudicator has seen this work very well on other metal access ramps. Many of the planters here are empty and should be removed. There is box hedging planted to screen off the sewerage treatment system – it is suggested you plant some honey suckle or other climber here to better screen this off. .

The traditional style of Hartes butcher works well with the town though it was sad to see the adjacent shop now closed. Perhaps a little display could be placed in the windows here on the history of the village?

Town and Country is beautifully presented with the stately colours and the detailed window displays that attractive the eye. It was also good to see local notices on display here. The pub gates at Hamrock's bar make an impressive focus to this side entry. Waldrons pub looked well and the west facing mural was a lovely feature. The large, industrial KEPAK factory did present well also and your adjudicator liked the use of wooden posts on the old concrete posts. Perhaps the wood would be repainted at some stage?

Landscaping:

You have a 'flower committee' that oversees the choice and planting of baskets and planters. You state that you do not want to provide too many planters with the danger of applying too much of an urban effect in your village. Your adjudicator totally agrees. The competition is moving towards the provision of sustainable planting that provides year-round structure and that also saves money and enhances local wildlife. In such a wonderful rural setting that is Athleague, you should continue to play to these strengths. Thus, the use of trees in your landscaping is to be admired. Athleague has some majestic trees through the village, including a magnificent oak and copper beech. The new trees planted opposite the Texaco were noted. Likewise on the approach road by the GAA pitch there is a well-managed layby with the name stone of the village. Do ensure such new trees get plenty of water in the first formative years. The sustained planting of trees to potentially replace these large specimens in the longer term should be continued. You could work on a great community project getting local children to collect seeds from these trees. The acorns etc could be planted out in the polytunnel and then sold on to relatives to have a piece of Athleague growing in their own gardens. Other saplings could be planted out across the village.

The use of shrubs around the walls of the Church car park is a very clever way in which to mask the bare stone walls here.

The people's park and the stone park were very well presented. The TidyTown signs were much in evidence in the former. There appeared to be a giant deck chair on its side here? The stone park has a great willow horse sculpture and the bug hotel was noted. This whole area of the stone park would be a great wildlife area on a normal Irish day (the hot weather meant it was completely dry!). There were some structures here but your adjudicator was unsure what they were meant to represent.

Your adjudicator took time out to find the looped walk indicated on the map and this is a delight – having been to Athleague before it was surprising that this is not more noticeable. It was a treat to explore these back pathways.

You have done some lovely landscaping work throughout Athleague and the new rose beds at the Mill and bridge were admired. But your adjudicator felt that in a small number of planters had been positioned with not as much consideration as you put into other aspects of your work. On the main street, opposite the auctioneers two plastic planters with hostas sit randomly under the beautiful tree. These, for example, may sit better beside the benches here. It is suggested that you remove the plastic planter at the grotto. There is another lovely setting en route to the school by the pump with a green ceramic planter placed here also which does not enhance this area, which is otherwise perfect as it is.

There appears to be a large, expensive tree planter sitting empty at the Co-operative, perhaps you can negotiate if this can be used and planted up with a large tree?

Wildlife and Natural Amenities:

Well done on the bat walks, and bird boxes and other such activities that you are doing that raise awareness and enhance local biodiversity.

It was sad to read of the failure of your wildflowers –this very often happens as they only do well on very nutrient poor soils/substrates. Old, rocky hard shoulders at the edge of roads are ideal for sowing wildflower seeds and the flowers should be strimmed after seeding and all cuttings removed to prevent build-up of nutrients.

The presence of *Gunnera* is an awful invasive species that out competes all native wildlife and is causing a lot of wildlife problems in particular areas of Ireland such as Achill Island. It is great that you have identified this and you are treating this appropriately. Further details can be found at the www.invasivespeciesireland.com.

It was good to read of your concern regarding possible illegal dumping within Clooneen Bog. Your adjudicator hopes that your fears are allayed. Perhaps you can carry out some wildlife walks around the peatlands here to highlight the importance of these habitats?

Natural hedging could be planted on the GAA road to mask the wire fencing and provide natural cover for wildlife.

The yew trees in the old graveyard were noted – these were traditionally grown in graveyards as they are poisonous to animals but provide a great hard, straight wood often used for making arrows!

Litter Control:

Well done on your sustained litter patrols and your work with the litter warden. Bins were clean and in use. On the day, there was some fresh litter at the river's swimming area but no doubt your patrols would get this. Unfortunately also on the date of adjudication, a number of large black bags had been left on top of the bottle banks.

Sustainable Waste And Resource Management:

It is noted that you run, in conjunction with Tommy Kelly Electrical, a quarterly WEEE recycling day and this is to be commended. The installation of a rain water harvesting system would be of great benefit at the new community centre and reduce water charges also.

There are more ideas of activities at www.tidytowns.ie that would help you gain marks in this category of the competition.

Tidiness:

The new village gates were admired – well done on this great achievement. Your work on illegal signage has also had good results as none was seen on adjudication day. Ironically your adjudicator would not promote signage but it was felt that the small stone plaque at the GAA pitch was not sufficient to inform what was behind the well-presented blue and white wall!

It was a pity that the life buoys at the swimming area were not wall mounted, or placed at the side of this area as they are very obstructive and detract from the view here.

Some of the signs at the Community Centre/ refurbished Church are broken and need to be removed/replaced.

Residential Areas:

You have many wonderfully presented homes, as well as business premises, throughout Athleague. For example, there is a beautiful green and cream house with a carriage arch that has been converted into a workshop. Nearby another pale blue home, with dark blue window surrounds looked well. The modern styled private residence opposite Town & Country presented well with the clever use of a cluster of planters used to good effect.

It is great that you work closely with the three estates in the community. Is there a representative from each on the TidyTown's committee? The very large sign should be removed from The Paddocks.

Roads, Streets and Back Areas:

The main street of Athleague with its wide pavements and trees has a lovely feel to it. The work you are completing on unearthing the stone walls is paying dividends as this looks very well.

It is a shame for the need of the very utilitarian bollards on the pavement in front of the church which were quite different from those on the other side of the road.

The concrete front of the Co-operative is broken up badly and there were some weeds here. The Roscommon branded 'welcome to Athleague' sign on the Four Roads approach to the village is very far out – can this be moved to the limits of the town?

Coming into Athleague from the GAA pitch there is a long expanse of bare concrete wall with many of its capping stones missing and even parts of the wall missing. You would be tempted here to stop and admire the River Suck but this detracts from the lovely vista here. Perhaps this forms part of your long-term strategy?

General Impression:

Athleague is a lovely village that is forging ahead with great efforts in the national TidyTown's Competition. It is hoped that enhancement projects may encourage others to join in and build on the great work of the community to date. It is very obvious that there is great community spirit across your village which is being channelled effectively to enhance the wonderful built and natural heritage of Athleague.

