

Tidy Towns Competition 2009

Adjudication Report

Centre: **Clonbullogue** Ref: **618**
County: **Offaly** Mark: **289**
Category: **B** Date(s): **06/07/2009**
30/07/2009

	Maximum Mark	Mark Awarded 2009
Overall Development Approach	50	35
The Built Environment	50	40
Landscaping	50	40
Wildlife and Natural Amenities	50	28
Litter Control	50	43
Waste Minimisation	20	10
Tidiness	30	18
Residential Areas	40	30
Roads, Streets and Back Areas	50	36
General Impression	10	9
TOTAL MARK	400	289

Overall Development Approach:

Go raibh maith agaibh go leir! Thank you to all the voluntary workers who have gone to so much trouble this year and in previous years to make Clonbullogue an ever improving place in which to live. Thank you for a carefully completed application form. You are very successful in this competition annually, but to increase your marks it is very important to prepare a Tidy Towns Plan. A three or five year plan is recommended. A plan need not be prepared professionally. However, you should try to get the views of the community at large when preparing the plan and take into account other plans for the area such as Local Area Plans / County Development Plans / County Heritage Plans/Agenda 21 Plans etc. prepared by the Local Authority under the Planning and Development Act 2000. Unfortunately, not having such a plan automatically loses you marks in this section of the competition, as per the adjudication guidelines issued to each adjudicator.

You have a good membership for a small village, and there is certainly a pride in your place amongst the community. You assist your fund sponsors through street collections yourselves. You have sponsors in Europeat Power Station and Accelerated Drain Service and local traders – not an easy thing to achieve in recessionary times, but we are glad that you are being assisted as you deserve. Offaly County Council and Offaly Local Development (who grant aided you, as acknowledged in your application form for Rural Development Programme application form) help you also in many ways. You list your new works for 2009 in your entry form. However, it would be a good thing if you could supply a somewhat more accurate map, as the map does not encompass all your good works! You state that “judging is not sufficient “in relation to the competition. We would like you to elaborate on this, as it may help future adjudicators to understand what it is that you are unhappy with. You also state that the weather has an effect during preparation – do not worry about this - as all communities suffer from this problem, and you are not in the wettest part of the country!

We are glad that the school is applying for the Green Flag and that you have established a rapport with the school – perhaps, you could increase your visits there and share your enthusiasm?

Your clean up days are obviously showing dividends, and your village is a lovely environment for the upcoming Steam Threshing Day in August!

You submitted a copy of your enquiry form to Offaly Local Development Company for funding for various projects under the Rural Development Programme. We wish you every success with this. You propose to create an up-to-date streetscape. You state that this is coming from the ideas and suggestions of residents. This is good, and we hope that, as a first step, you are assisted professionally architecturally, (including conservation architecturally, and landscape architecturally) to draw up a good plan in consultation with the community, a plan which can then become the master plan for your village and which can be developed accordingly, as resources become available. You state that you are 37 years in the Tidy Towns Competition. What a record!

The Built Environment:

The village has a great advantage in having such a lovely village green and is unusual in that the buildings around the green are of a vernacular character. Most village greens in Ireland are designed and built in an English style and were laid out by the local landed estate, and are quite "English" in character. The green in Clonbullogue is different, and is special in its uniqueness, in its simplicity and architecture, and the community have respected this in dealing with its embellishment. It stands alone and is not in need of fancy extras. All the buildings facing the Green are a credit to their owners and occupiers. The pump is an attractive focus on the green and the simple flower container draws the eye towards it without overshadowing it. The Garda Station also looked well and forms part of the Green complex. The farm complex with its two storey shed and ladder directly beside the bridge, but still within the Green space, is a lovely example of traditional farmyard layout and building. A good farm gate was also observed in the riverside park.

The milestone on the Portarlington Road adjacent to the Parachute Club fingerpost sign is a lovely example of traditional vernacular street furniture and should be cherished. It is prominently located in a lovely setting of mown grass.

The millwheel restoration at the riverside park is another example of something associated with built heritage, and is of industrial, archaeological significance. Funding from the National Lottery is acknowledged. The Forge facing the Green is a lovely old stone building with brick arch, and it is very well looked after, and its red door and associated red gate look marvellous. Its setting against so much planting is also very pleasing.

St. Patrick's Bridge, rebuilt in 1932, is also an important part of your built heritage, and it is unfortunate that few people get to appreciate its value, given the rate of traffic across it – there is no time to stop and look - except for those who decide to stay awhile in your lovely riverside area. Perhaps, it might be a good idea to work with the Local Authority to provide suitable advance notice of the wayside/ riverside area with appropriately signage, so that people might stop awhile to admire your village and all its interesting features? The bridge is typical of its period and is well cared for by Local Authority and Community. Indeed, it is a tribute to the period of the County Surveyor, when it was erected.

The smaller stone bridge at the riverside end of the main road bridge is very attractive and easily visible from the picnic area.

The "Saorstát Éireann" postbox is a very unusual item of street furniture for a community to have and to have cared for through the years. Do not let anybody remove it!

Your signage including the map and sun feature explaining the derivation of your village name is most interesting and useful. The mural depicting the Clonbullogue legend is also interesting and informative.

The old school (Playschool and Health Centre) is in very good condition. It is a pity that PVC windows were inserted, as it takes from the character of the building. Endeavour to retain whatever traditional timber sash windows remaining in the village.

The Church of Ireland looks well, apart from the wire netting on the windows, an unfortunate security device. The grounds looked well, but the capping of the boundary wall needs repainting. There is an unusual traditional gate at the church leading in from the recessed space. Maintain and keep this nice gate!

St. Broughan's Hall with its 1928 / renovated 1978 plaque looked well and is very well kept. Try to increase the use of the Irish language, although you already have some work done in this area. The bell and support to the Catholic Church have indeed been painted, as recommended by last year's adjudicator.

Kileen's Gala Stores / Post Office is neat and clean.

The blue bollards on the footpath at the bridge end are very colourful. It is also preferable to use non black street furniture, as you have done here, as black is the most difficult colour for the visually impaired to see.

Landscaping:

The Green is magnificent with its neatly mowed grass and its lovely deciduous tree planting. The shrubbery on the mural side is classically simple and effective. The picnic area by the Figile river is a most wonderful asset for the villagers and visitors alike.

The terraced housing beyond the Gala Stores/P.O. has bright floral displays surrounding mature trees. This landscaping provides very good screening to the car parking alongside, but off the main road.

There is lovely wall planting on the two storey house on the square which is neatly trained.

Paving in the Green area is weed free. Flower containers also on the footpath leading from the square area are effective. Ensure always to leave a width acceptable for mobility impaired users and buggy pushers in this type of situation.

The double hanging baskets on the bridge are colourful in themselves, but really an architectural gem like this bridge needs no embellishment and should stand alone. However, the riot of shrubbery leading up to the bridge from the village side is absolutely delightful. Perhaps, this could be expanded on other sides and the baskets used perhaps in one of the housing estates? The creeper overhanging the warning stripes is also effective in "framing" the bridge.

Your Local Authority Village Plan (as read by this adjudicator on-line) states:

"New development should ensure the protection of mature trees, hedgerows and the conservation of existing stone walls, and their integration into new development. Where the provisions of new boundaries are required, these should comprise native hedgerow planting, or stone walls which use stone found in the locality etc." This policy will serve you well.

The conservation and integration into new development of existing stone walls, trees and native hedgerows, and the promotion of similar materials for new boundaries is part of what your village plan promotes".

Your riverside area is a most restful place and a green oasis. The mature trees and shrubs were admired. You even have your own "autograph tree"! Hopefully, this will be one tree only! The riverside walk is very inviting and was being used on the day, with its lovely dappled effects of light and shade and good stone pillars defining the path entrance.

Wildlife and Natural Amenities:

The Figile River area is an oasis for wildlife on the edge of the village, where people can go and observe nature in peace. Birds, trees, and fish are identified in the existing sign and the Irish names - for example "coot" are listed. This is a simple, but effective interpretation which in time might be built upon.

Clonbullogue, with its deciduous tree cover, stream world and remoteness from polluting atmospheres and human disturbance is wildlife Paradise. You should build on this and maximise your efforts in order to progress in this area.

Perhaps, your local school could help you with this? Do you have a young person studying Environmental Science in a 3rd level institution from the area who might require a thesis topic? The provision of a wildlife survey and management plan contributes to the marks in this section. Remember to endeavour to do this for 2010! Findings can subsequently be made public on information panels. This more detailed information would add to the enjoyment of your village for locals and visitors alike, and would serve good educational purposes. Perhaps, the Heritage Section of your Local Authority could help you in this regard also. Biodiversity describes the variety of life on earth. There is now a special competition, you will have noted in your information pack "Notice Nature Award". You could enter any one of the project types mentioned.

It would appear that some of the hedge cutting on the Daingean Road took place quite recently and you are reminded that it is an offence under the Wildlife Act 1976 and Wildlife(Amendment)Act 2000 to cut vegetation in a hedge or ditch, or on lands not cultivated between the 1st March and 31st of August annually. This is for the protection of nesting birds.

Well done on your nesting box initiative this year. And we note the Plan with the relevant agency to clean the river in 2010.

Litter Control:

The recycling area had 1 mineral bottle, two pieces of paper and a crayon in its vicinity. The green had one crisp (not a paper, a crisp) on the path. Clonmel Lane had two drinks bottles in the laneway margins. That is all the litter Clonbullogue could produce! Well Done! Your daily litter pick up is rewarding you in this category, and should be an encouragement to keep up the good work. You might tell us a little more about how you promote your litter awareness so successfully.

Waste Minimisation:

It is good that you segregate litter. You propose to create a recycle reuse initiative, but you do not give a time scale or detail the initiatives that you have in mind. Waste minimisation is about more than not having litter in your street. It involves the prevention of litter accumulation in the first case. It is really what it says – to minimise on waste production before we, as a community, private or public create it in the first case. You might refer to the Race Against Waste booklet available from the Tidy Towns Unit of the Department of the Environment, Heritage, and Local Government. Consider organising or attending a Waste Minimisation Workshop with your Local Authority. In your local school, there will be opportunities to involve the students in an effort to work towards this end. You could increase your marks considerably in this section by so doing. Perhaps, you might prepare a flyer/newsletter on this subject? As a local community, you could look at some innovative and simple ideas such as organising a “Bring and Take Day”. This would involve using a local hall / Community Centre for instance for a day - where everybody brings items they have no further use for, but which other people might want (and which under normal circumstances they might get rid of as waste), and puts them on display. The corollary is that somebody else needs these items. No monies change hands. Website versions of this idea have been set up in places also. Another group collected all broken crockery, and made a mosaic in their local park. You can gain marks by doing some of these things for 2010.

Tidiness:

The Green area was impeccable. The yellow and black stripes on the approach to the bridge looked bright and clean, and maintained. The large wall, where the mural depicting the Clonbullogue Legend is located, is very well maintained for such a large, but important expanse of wall. The mural itself is clean and cared for. However, as a minor comment, the frame around the actual plaque explaining the legend needs some care. On the non Village Green elevation (Rathangan Road elevation), the menu holder/notice board and general plinth area surrounding the door of the lounge bar could be cleaned a little. Shoney's take away is discreet in its location and signage. The car park, planting and painted shed adjacent are very well presented.

Finger post signage in the Green is in good condition.

The grey shed walls and associated red corrugated roofs along the street frontage to the P.O. are very well maintained. One footpath in this area is cracked. This is probably from off street parking, which you stated last year was a problem. This adjudicator did not observe any on- footpath parking on the day. It is expected that the tubs are a deterrent.

The auctioneering signage is low key and in keeping with its surrounds.

The gable beside the recycling area needs a coat of paint.

The shed and associated fencing at the entrance from the Rathangan side to the Green requires general tidying, as also referred to in Roads, Streets and Back Areas below.

Your efforts with regard to weeding have been successful in their effects.

Residential Areas:

The residential properties all through the village were excellently presented, in general. The Village Green was particularly noted for having no defaulter.

Figile Manor has a lovely landscaped entrance. Figile Manor has only one tree in a large open space. It requires landscaping. Cut grass needs to be removed to a composting area, such as that at the Riverside walk area. An enclave of leftover builders' materials and machinery at the end of the estate needs to be at least better screened or – preferably – removed. The footpaths in the estate require weeding in places, especially in the kerbing opposite the houses. The name sign is in stone surrounded by brick.

Woodlawn Estate is very trim with very neat grass areas and edging. It has a lovely water feature. Practically, all the houses are very well kept. Only one gable top needs repainting. It has lovely trees, flowers, and shrubs in its open space, and there were a few weeds in the corner of the circular area. Just a few boundary walls require some painting. There is very nice fencing to the newer houses area (opposite houses) and a nice planted bank. We note your efforts in this regard, as detailed in your application form. A litter bin in the area could be renewed. The garage opposite this estate is closed, but is colourful. A flowerbed and lovely roses, and seat in this area look well.

Roads, Streets and Back Areas:

Entrance roads are generally good. The approach from Portarlinton is through lovely pastoral, country with neatly trimmed grass margins, trees, mature hedges, and new hedging. All walls are clean on approach to the village, and the final curve in the road lends interest and an element of nice surprise on reaching what is one of Offaly's treasures.

On the Daingean approach, the "No heavy vehicle" sign needs repainting at least, and the Clonbullogue sign is a bit battered. The Grand Canal area needs resurfacing and a seat change. There are nice footpaths and hedges on the right hand side as one approaches the village and there is a wealth of mature trees of deciduous variety and mature hedging on this approach also, especially on the left hand side. The Canal Bridge area needs weeding.

On the Edenderry approach, the school looked well. The GAA gates are in need of repair, and its parking area could do with surfacing, and some overall softening of the area/ planting would also be advised. The Community Development Association property also looked well. Some weeding could be carried out in front of the white house, beyond the school. There is nice hedging on the right hand side of the road, as one leaves for Edenderry, but the left hand side could do with a little trimming. A boundary wall on the left hand side could also do with repainting. Church Farm looked well. The Community Alert sign, in a cul de sac off this approach, could do with renewal.

The Church of Ireland is a good feature on this approach and looks well, apart from the wire netting on the windows, and unfortunate security device. The grounds looked well, but the capping of the wall might be repainted.

The Rathangan approach is a short area of development. There is an ochre coloured shed on this approach, fronted by various types of fencing, the galvanised roof of which requires painting. The curtilage could also do with a little tidying. The old school here looked well.

Clonmel Lane is a leafy lane with new houses. It has a poor road surface. Weeding is required in house frontages in general, and gateways. All gates need attention. The property on the bend, near the junction with the main road and beside the recycling bins, needs painting, but it is understandable that the paintwork might need repainting due to the traffic to the recycling area and also the poorer surface on the lane.

General Impression:

The general impression one gets from the village is that, it is a much cherished and understood place. You have an awareness of your specifically Irish heritage and you value, and promote this amongst the community. The village suffers from a heavy flow of traffic. This is unfortunate, but you have still managed to keep its rural ambience alive. We note that you have applied for a pedestrian crossing. Thank you for supplying back up evidence of the proposal by your Local Authority in response to your asking to take the investigation of this need on board. You have a local authority with a listening ear. The new housing estate is not dominant and is not creating suburbanisation effect centrally, which has occurred in other towns and villages. And even though you think that you have a problem with an unfinished estate in Figile Manor, and you are correct, it pales into insignificance by comparison with unfinished estates in other Irish towns!

Clonbullogue is a memorable place, with a wealth of built and natural heritage. It is a quintessential Irish village. Thank you for sharing it with your adjudicator!

Second Round Adjudication:

One is immediately impressed that "the ideas and suggestions" for your refurbishment of the street scape are based on the suggestions of the residents. It suggests that the image that Clonbullogue wishes to portray is coming from within the community and not being forced upon the community. It appears that the TidyTowns movement in Clonbullogue has the support of the general community. The efforts over the past 37 years are appreciated by that community. The appearance of the village is a credit to the dedication of the many people, who have involved themselves in its enhancement and ongoing development over those years.

All of the approach roads suggest to the traveller that there is a special treat in store, when one reaches the upcoming village. The milestone is like an ogham stone standing proudly erect, as if proud of its directional role over the years and gives one a sense of Clonbullogue's location in the wider order of things. The road verges are neatly trimmed. Tree planting is ongoing. Hedges are controlled. The bridge is immaculately maintained. Then the village green greets one. The surrounding buildings bid one welcome. One imagines this triangle being the hub of village activity for many generations. Now, the buildings round the green bask in a grand parent role, enjoying their surroundings while the buzz of activity has been shifted to the younger generation of buildings, up the street. The stone bridge on the Daingean Road marks the beginning of the Clonbullogue experience on another side of town, a fine pathway linking with the Riverside Walk. One feels privileged to be in this village so affectionately maintained and presented. The proprietors of the garage deserve special mention for the colourful maintenance of their premises, despite changing fortunes. All of the surroundings of Woodlawn Estate typify the attitude of the people of Clonbullogue to their village. The new parking spaces may be occupying traditional green space, but the needs of a modern estate are being met by providing the parking space without impacting on the beautifully landscaped visual surroundings.

A visit to Clonbullogue is not complete without taking the Riverside Walk. This walk is a joy not just because it gives access to the countryside and to the river, not just because it affords a clear view of the invaders from the sky, but also because of its maintenance, the delightful footbridges, the sharp, manicured corners. One feels that the walk should be promoted as a looped walk or as a Slí na Sláinte because the footpath at the stone bridge guides the walker safely back to the village. The information board gives ready access to the riches of the area, all the better that it is dhá theangach.

One wishes the school the very best in their pursuit of Green Flag Status, a status that will impact positively on the work of your committee. The tone of your reaction to your experience of the TidyTowns Competition is a cause of concern to this adjudicator. A succession of hard working committees deserves satisfying 'judging' from all adjudicators. Having read the first adjudicator's report, one is confident that you will not be despondent in 2009.