

# Tidy Towns Competition 2011

## Adjudication Report

Centre: **Ballinahown** Ref: **239**  
County: **Westmeath** Mark: **295**  
Category: **A** Date(s): **03/07/2011**

	<b>Maximum Mark</b>	<b>Mark Awarded 2010</b>	<b>Mark Awarded 2011</b>
Overall Development Approach	50	47	47
The Built Environment	50	37	37
Landscaping	50	41	41
Wildlife and Natural Amenities	50	27	27
Litter Control	50	39	39
Waste Minimisation	20	11	12
Tidiness	30	21	22
Residential Areas	40	25	26
Roads, Streets and Back Areas	50	36	35
General Impression	10	9	9
<b>TOTAL MARK</b>	<b>400</b>	<b>293</b>	<b>295</b>

### Overall Development Approach:

The adjudicator would like to welcome Ballinahown to the 2011 National TidyTowns Competition. Thank you for the comprehensively completed entry form which was very well structured and easy for the adjudicator to navigate. The inclusion of a summary of projects relating to this year's works would also be very useful. While submitting your entry via email is a resource friendly approach can you also attach a map with your submission? We are delighted to hear that you have maintained your dedicated committee members and have a subcommittee structure for focussed actions. You seem to also enjoy a good level of voluntary support at peak time. You are liaising well with a number of agencies and bodies and communicating well with the community via your web site. We also admired the schools excellent web site. You have an excellent working relationship with your schools through your subcommittee and 3 Green flags is a great achievement for them. The level and approach to fundraising is also admired and the works on the ground are a testament to the success of this. Perhaps with next year's application you could include some photographs of your Winter Festival which seems to have been a great success for you.

### The Built Environment:

This was the adjudicator's first visit to your village and we were very impressed at the range of buildings present. The most encouraging aspect of your village is the life that has been brought to these buildings and to see the community hall and tearooms inhabiting older structures in the village, but updated in such a sensitive way, is encouraging. It is good to see you reacting to previous year's reports and the planting to the Garda station was admired as was the water butt here, nice to see a buy in to this scheme from all sectors of the community. There were empty hanging baskets poles at the boundary to the car park which should be removed if hanging baskets are no longer part of your landscape strategy. Indeed in this location given the scale of the space and the church facade opposite, hanging baskets would perhaps only add visual clutter. We look forward to seeing progress in your next village development plan. Be sure to give the community

time to comment on this and perhaps a suggestion box could be installed in the shop to allow the views of all residents be taken on board.

### **Landscaping:**

The use of herbaceous perennials is to be encouraged and as you can see already in the village they provide a more interesting and subtle colour to an area and should require less maintenance. Thinking this way is a more sustainable approach to landscaping. In this context the bedding plants to the verge alongside the pump looked a little out of place. In this location self seeding plants or perennials that can withstand dry roadside conditions should be installed. Tie in colour schemes with the themes of your village colour plan for building finishes. As in many centres you have been impacted by the recent harsh winters. The hedge to the bog oak feature near the bring centre was badly hit. When replanting look to native and naturalised species and also consider the use of summer flowering shrubs, which again give year round interest. Would you consider planting a native hedge to the fence between the play area and adjoining field to improve the boundary here? Or perhaps an edible hedge of currants and other fruit bushes could be considered? Also on a sunny summers day there was a real demand for a picnic table here with park users using the platform of the aerial runway for a level picnic surface. Could perhaps one of the picnic tables near the millennium fountain be relocated here or one developed using the robust language of the existing bench seating?

### **Wildlife and Natural Amenities:**

The focus your group has put in to this category and your obvious long term commitment to this issue is seen by the works on the ground. The level of involvement you enjoy from the local school is also to be applauded as getting the younger generation involved is the key to success. A key in this category is to follow through on your habitat initiatives and continually assess their successes. To do this your proposed yearly updates and audits are a great idea. As part of this process you could encourage local people to take part in some nationally organised online surveys including Bird watch Irelands online surveys, the annual National Bat count or the hop to it Irish frog survey. Keeping track of all these result will let you see how your habitats are responding to your interventions. We look forward to the development of the community walking track. We thought that selective clearings could be made to the bank side vegetation along the riverside walk to open up views to the water a little here without compromising the waterside habitat value. Unfortunately as hedgecutting was being carried out within the period of the nesting season additional points have not been given here this year.

### **Litter Control:**

As ever the standard here was high with very little litter evident in the village core area so well done to all involved in the rota system for litter collection. There was some litter noted to the planting bed between the play area and the roadside which has been caught up in the branches of the understory growth here. Also some recent litter was noted in the river alongside the path here, a difficult spot for your patrols to access. This may need a more focused work session to address this area.

### **Waste Minimisation:**

Continuous improvement built on sustainability is a fine motto for you. The re use of material around the village was also noted with the water butts made from old barrels. This is such a practical method of implementing the ethos of this category. The sulo underground bins are such a great addition and turn what could be an essential but unattractive village service area into a pleasant spot. The notice boards here were yet to be completed. You have a very proactive approach to organising workshops and outside speakers to come to the village. The emphasis on eco tourism being advanced by the tearooms is also great and we noted that local produce including Westmeath porridge was for sale here. A dedicated display area for local produce is a great way to address sustainability. Have you also considered holding a seed or plant swap as part of some of your village's activity days? If the use of self seeding or spreading perennials is being proposed in the village common areas then cuttings of these could be taken and sold on to villagers or visitors for use in their private garden areas, and help raise funds for you. Remember that gardens areas are a really important wildlife resource and an important source of food and nectar.

### **Tidiness:**

The village, its landscaped areas and its built environment were all presented to such a high standard. As you note in your submission there is a little work to be done to manage signage, parking and safe access to the play area and amenity walk. With such a busy road junction a safe crossing with pedestrian priority is essential here. Keep in mind the principles of access for all to include for level access. Have you considered including a bike parking area here also? We wish you luck in progressing this with Westmeath County Council. As mentioned last year the crossing and dropped kerb at the entrance to the sports field also needs to be addressed and could be improved. Try to ensure all footpaths and access gates are kept clear of obstructions and unauthorised parking, as in addition to making areas look untidy, they are a hazard for pedestrians. The information signs in the play area need to be cleaned regularly especially where there are

overhanging trees.

**Residential Areas:**

As ever the residential properties in the village were presented to a high standard so well done to all your residents. The new name stone in the democratically named Woodlands Avenue was noted and the verge areas here were well presented with planted tubs. Keep in mind that the role of a plant container is to provide a location for plants that otherwise should be planted in the ground. Therefore, the use of plant containers in grassed areas for example is not appropriate and should be discouraged. Perhaps scented shrubs could be planted around the seat here to improve its setting.

**Roads, Streets and Back Areas:**

Well done on the appropriate maintenance of the verges on the approaches to the village. However, unfortunately on adjudication day, the hedges on the approach to the village on the N62 from Ferbane were being trimmed. As I am sure you are aware it is illegal to cut, grub, burn or otherwise destroy any vegetation growing in any hedge or ditch during the period from the 1st of March to the end of August. Even when works are being done to roadside hedges please try to ensure that, as best practice, no hedge cutting is done during the nesting season. This should have been covered in your training as part of your village pruning project. The issue of parking and safe crossing for the play area needs attention and we wish you luck with progressing this.

**General Impression:**

Ballinahowen has an idyllic rural charm in spite of the fact that it is dissected by a busy road, and the emphasis you have put into addressing issues in a sustainable manner is commendable. You have managed to carry out works that complement your rural setting without overpowering or detracting from it. Well done on this. Also the level of community involvement you enjoy is wonderful and this common approach to improving your community is very evident to the visitor. All involved with this year's entry are warmly thanked and congratulated for their efforts and wished well in 2012.