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|  | **Maximum Mark** | **Mark Awarded 2009** |
| **Overall Development Approach** | 50 | 47 |
| **The Built Environment** | 50 | 37 |
| **Landscaping** | 50 | 44 |
| **Wildlife & Natural Amenities** | 50 | 30 |
| **Litter Control** | 50 | 38 |
| **Waste Minimisation** | 20 | 12 |
| **Tidiness** | 30 | 21 |
| **Residential Areas** | 40 | 27 |
| **Roads, Streets, Back Areas** | 50 | 37 |
| **General Impression** | 10 | 9 |
| **Total Mark** | **400** | **302** |

**Overall Development Approach:**

Birdhill is welcome to the 2009 TidyTowns competition. Thank you for the detailed map, that relating to the Pollagh Trail and also for a copy of your publication, reaching for the top, development plan 2004/2010. The detailed thinking applied to your programme; the depth of the analysis you bring to the various objectives and targets and the near clinical approach in response to the comments of the adjudicator and other feedback is reflected in the excellence apparent on the day of adjudication. The careful analysis of the tasks before you was both precise and appropriate. The reading of your plan also underscores the immense strength in-depth of the involvement among the individuals living in the community of Birdhill.

Clearly the delay in completing the road has had a knock on effect on your plans. The roundabout continues in its unadorned state. Enormous traffic volumes must be endured for some time yet. The signage for Ireland's Tidiest Village was noted. The treatment of the Bus Stop, fountain, planting, lay-by was ideal. There was a minor amount of spoil noted in this location. The area around the junction generally is presented superbly. The double-decker flower containers around the street lights being particularly noteworthy. We echo the comments of the adjudicator last year that the quality of your TidyTowns entry and submission could well suit appropriate as a training aid for other centres. The involvement of so many different people with so many different talents and, inevitably, varying constraints on their time is an enormous statement underscoring the strength of commitment to a common objective.

**The Built Environment:**

While the new roundabout will fittingly identify the start point on the northern approach because of the somewhat defused nature of the centre with almost two focal points, the Church being one and the Matt the Thrasher being the other, it has been encumbant on the committee to integrate these two. The establishment of a clear cut start point on the Limerick end would benefit from a similar “obvious” start point. The by now famous Matt the Thrasher's Pub once again was excellently presented as was the superb presentation of flowers at Copper's. Brown's Furniture also contributed to the overall sense of excellence. The small traffic sign to the village was well presented but the pole required to be wire brushed and repainted for best effect. The Railway stone arched bridge was a delight while the entrance gates to the railway itself and the approach to it were very well set out. The Church and Graveyard at Chapel Hill are set in an area of superb landscaping. The School and Hall almost back to back, maintain the same very high standard of presentation.

**Landscaping:**

Your poor adjudicator has run out of superlatives to appropriately describe your success under this category. The sheer volume of grass cutting, planting, shrubs and colourful flowers is almost overwhelming. The delightful verges and the banked grassed areas along the busy N7 are a superb achievement. The mixture of formal and informal arrangements, the clever use of fountains and water features the total integrated identity has been achieved by a masterful linkage of colour and movement, material and design. The use of the timber surround flowerbeds gave the definition without themselves intruding. The Fountain with the seat was a success despite the volume of traffic. The kerbs were kept clear of grass and one wonders how traffic continues to travel so fast without feeling the need themselves to slow down to enjoy this cornucopia of colours and images available for their pleasure. The Railway Avenue was cut suitable but not excessively, the planters were universally well presented with very fine roses and low level flowers. We admired the ground planting at the Ticket Office. The emphases on the role of children especially in the truly delightful Gairdín na bPáistí.

**Wildlife and Natural Amenities:**

The decision to incorporate water based amenities as a further development of the Community Park is welcomed. Equally we applaud your decision to incorporate the Irish language in your presentation. The little signs at the preserved area “Is Leatsa I” is a delight. The expansion of the Pollagh Trail is a major undertaking which has been tackled with your customary indeed expected energy and vigour. The marker poles which we presume are recycled telephone poles, struck just the right note. The signage giving details of other items of interest are excellent as availability of this information to the casual visitor add measurably to their enjoyment of the trail. The proposed loop route by the lake may be a bit longer than the casual visitor wishes to travel. Have you explored joining up the two existing arms of the trail? The pleasant treatment at the commencement to facilitate car parking without in any way being intrusive is very successful.

**Litter Control:**

Even along the very busy roadway, in the Church, Hall and School roads no litter was noted. Our visit to the delightful Railway Station was disappointing in this context. A plastic bottle was noted in the car park and a large amount of cigarette butts festooned the base of the passenger shelter on the platform. The litter bin in this location was an unsuitable office waste paper type basket. To compound matters the shelter itself hadn't been dusted for a very great time. This was the one disappointment on our visit to your delightful location.

**Waste Minimisation:**

The deliberations and conclusions of your waste minimisation sub committee make for impressive reading. The implementation of your draft waste minimisation action plan 2009 match exactly the ideas behind the minimisation programme. Your 12 point programme is again a model of “how to do it” which could with advantage be studied by many centres.

The presentation of the Recycling Unit in the grounds of Copper Ryan's was of a high order. We admired the four single tiered planters together with the two tier planter bring colour even to this element of your presentation.

**Tidiness:**

The ongoing construction work as part of the new motorway has had a knock on effect on the presentation of the roundabout. There is a delightful absence of spoil outside the kerbs as a general statement although small amounts were noted between the pathway and the road along the village street. The continuous effort required to present the village and its extensive grass areas in such a splendid manner is fully appreciated. Sadly we must return again to the presentation of the small shelter on the Railway platform. A sizeable number of Railway notices had been stuck to the perspex glass with sticky tape which with time had become unstuck. A more appropriate display location and or method is strongly recommended.

**Residential Areas:**

Although limited the housing stock helped to establish and reinforce the fine, Birdhill ethos. Each house, individual in itself shares a common high level presentation in respect of the building itself and its surrounding gardens. Compliments and appreciation to the respective house owners for their dedication.

**Roads, Streets and Back Areas:**

Once again we echo our surprise that more motorists are not encouraged to even slow down to sample and enjoy the superb presentation of your transit roads. The range of planter on the Main Road, the individual items, trees and fountains collectively ought to have many more stopping to admire the view. The smaller side roads bring a different character, the road from O'Brien's Bridge with its enclosing trees and the small road from Ballinahinch passing the Graveyard and Church all contribute something different to the over all experience. The Newport Road was well laid out. As you would expect all traffic signs were neat and orderly.

Past the Pollagh Trail on the O'Brien Bridge Road it is desirable to establish a clear cut arrival point to the village identifying the division between it and the surrounding, rural countryside.

**General Impression:**

Congratulation to all involved in this presentation of Birdhill. It is the product of the masterful combination of many talents, enormous energy and community wide engagement in the presentation of the centre. Please maintain your efforts as we all look forward to the completion of the motorway leading to a more relaxed environment of this very special location.

**Second Round Adjudication:**

I approached Birdhill from the Limerick side and as I neared the Church of Our Lady of the Wayside, the magnificent white statue of St Joseph with the arms raised gave me the impression that it was trying to attract my attention. I stopped in the beautifully appointed car park and everything about this place is special, such as the church itself, the flowers on the T standards and the arrangement of flowers at the entrance to the car park in a stone enclosed flower bed and of course the statues that had neat floral touches at the base, plus the stone for still born babies. I strolled up the road to the graveyard and it is maintained in magnificent condition and straight away a high standard of perfection was admired in the Birdhill area. Well done to all connected with the church and the graveyard.

On leaving the church car park I had to turn right for the village and this was no easy task with the huge amount of fast moving traffic. Down the road I saw in the distance great landscaping. I crossed the road to have a closer look at the first flower bed and I noticed a replica of a bird, is it a grey heron?, and also the wildflower area. This was a great introduction to magnificent arrangements of flowers, but crossing the road is dangerous.

I was forewarned about the dangerous road on reading page 7 of Reaching for the Top, where you point out that the high volume and often excessive speed of traffic impacts negatively on the quality of life and the absence of traffic calming measures, and the lack of adequate footpaths are a cause of ongoing concern.

In the neatly trimmed grassy bank, I admired the few rowan trees. The old creamery building is very well presented, it is a reminder of a bygone day, and the churns outside, plus the murals on the walls of cows grazing in the field and the lady making butter explain the function of the traditional creamery. (A picture tells more than a thousand words). Outside the creamery, the eyes are constantly drawn to the beautiful landscaping on the other side of the road, but somehow as I moved up along its quality improved in my view, (if this is possible) at the junction for Newport where flowers are present, but now a good mixture of permanent shrubs are seen. Then there is the traditional water pump with a picturesque background of manicured grass, young trees and a backdrop of mature trees in the small amenity area.

Landscaping out the Dublin road is again supreme where the colour schemes change with the introduction of the different types of permanent shrubs and I felt that some of them were of a rare variety, and here I loved the Birdhill flower bed. Then one comes to the new roundabout and I get the impression from Reaching for the Top page 17 that you are waiting patiently to get working on the roundabout, and I agree a permanent sculpture with an agricultural theme could be most appropriate. It is disappointing to find that you are getting little co-operation from Bóthar Hibernian. Since you have such a distinguished history and aspiration (page 10 rftt) for keeping it simple without loosing attention to detail, I would expect more co-operation.

But Birdhill is not all about landscaping and I visited the extended area taking in the school and hall, and both of these buildings are very well presented, it was great to find the green flag proudly flying outside the school, and this tells us straight away that the children, parents and teachers are now engaging in a real way in waste minimisation, composting, energy conservation etc. The sub- committee have really tackled the waste minimisation situation, and the swop shop is a great idea.

A stroll around the community park is very relaxing and gets us away from the busy road and on entering the beautiful well designed gate we witness careful planning from the start. I note you intend to further develop this haven with the introduction of water-based amenities. I admired the new Pergola.

The traditional stone walls in the area are great, especially at the railway bridge. I visited the Pollagh trail and read over the new information boards on the fauna and flora of the area. It is great to see all those trees so well described in the brochure, The Pollagh Trail. You may be interested in two books, firstly OUR TREES ISBN 0-9518612-5-5 and you will soon be propagating your own trees, and the second one, Paddy Madden’s book The School Garden – What to do and when to do it, and the latter could be given to the school under your focus 2009 as a way of extending your relations with the local primary school. But you probably have those books already.

Behind the scenes, so to speak, there is a huge amount of things being worked on in Birdhill, such as the planting of trees, the work in the Pollaghs – lake etc. The first adjudicator has given a comprehensive report to you under the different headings and it was a pleasure for me to spend a few hours in this special area walking in the footprints of an imaginative and enthusiastic people where energy and leadership have brought all the locals together to present Birdhill so beautifully. I did not see any signposts for the school, community hall and graveyard.

Yes, the completion of M7/N7 at Birdhill will significantly improve the quality of life for the residents of the area and make it a more attractive area for visitors –I’ll be back. Well done for including 'cúpla focal Gaeilge, go raibh maith agat, bhain muid taitneamh as ár gcuairt'.

Congratulations on a superb effort.