

Tidy Towns Competition 2003

Adjudication Report

Centre: **Birr**

Ref: **418**

County: **Offaly**

Mark: **223**

Category: **D**

Date: **04/07/2003**

	Maximum Mark	Mark Awarded 2003	Mark Awarded 2002
Overall Developmental Approach	50	32	31
The Built Environment	40	34	34
Landscaping	40	33	32
Wildlife and Natural Amenities	30	19	19
Litter Control	40	28	28
Tidiness	20	16	15
Residential Areas	30	26	25
Roads, Streets and Back Areas	40	28	27
General Impression	10	7	7
TOTAL MARK	300	223	218

Overall Developmental Approach:

Birr has some wonderful features including Birr Castle and Gardens, Oxmantown Hall, the National Science Centre and, of course, it has official Georgian Heritage Town status. Therefore, Birr has a lot to live up to needs the care and involvement of all its residents to ensure its wellbeing. The aims and objectives as set out by the new Birr Tidy Towns Committee, elected in April last, are very worthwhile and commendable and we wish you well in all your endeavours in the future. The documentation received, which included an excellent map, was very helpful on the day of adjudication.

The Built Environment:

Many business premises were well presented including the AIB Bank, the County Arms and Dooly's Hotels, the new Birr Technology Centre, the Thatch Pub in Crinkill and Birr Credit Union to mention but a few. However, the Birr Fitness Centre in the grounds of the County Arms Hotel could do with repainting. The Roman Catholic and Church of Ireland churches were well maintained, with the doors and windows of the latter being painted on the day of adjudication. Some premises in Birr have some unusual plaster work features - one of these being Birr Meat Processing. Other features such as this in the town should also be preserved. The buildings and planting at the Maltings complex were well maintained except for the waste disposal area which will be mentioned later.

It was noted that some good stone walls were in the process of being built on the approach roads to Birr.

Landscaping:

There are many areas of planting throughout Birr and most of these were looking well and beautifying the town, including the contribution of the hanging baskets overflowing with colour. We note that the new Committee will be directing its efforts strongly in this category and your plan to give more character to the approach roads by planting more native species of trees is welcomed. These will leave a legacy for future residents in Birr, just as those who planted the avenue of chestnut trees near Oxmantown Hall left a legacy for the present generation. The grass at the picnic area on the Banagher road had been cut but unfortunately, the chain link fence here was broken and should be repaired or removed. So that visitors may use the picnic facilities here, we would suggest that some of this green area be made into a safe space where a car could park.

Wildlife and Natural Amenities:

We noted your work in connection with the creation of wildlife ponds in two areas under this category. The planting undertaken throughout also contributes and the future sowing of berried shrubs and trees to assist wildlife would be recommended.

Litter Control:

Unfortunately, a fair sprinkling of litter was to be seen, mostly on the outskirts of the town and especially on the Banagher road. Ongoing clean-ups and awareness should alleviate this problem.

Tidiness:

The town was mostly neat and tidy and the adjudicator was impressed with the maintenance of side streets, especially the one where Birr Chamber of Commerce are involved in the provision of free car parking and nicely landscaped houses for the elderly are situated. However, some painting of back gates in these areas would be recommended. At the end of Main St., ESB poles and wiring are obtrusive and long term planning to deal with these should be put in place. The paths near the new visitor entrance to Birr Castle were unsightly as plastic had been put down and covered with gravel but large wedges of the plastic could still be seen. At the Maltings complex, the area with bins, etc. is still an eyesore. We would suggest that some design be put in place to screen this section off as it is spoiling the rest of this well landscaped business and residential area.

Residential Areas:

Private houses, both individual and in housing estates, are obviously committed to the Tidy Towns effort. However, the green areas outside some housing estates needed to be mown. There is an attractive mix of private housing in Birr, mostly appropriate to the character of the town. The adjudicator felt that these could be enhanced through the judicious use of more colour.

Roads, Streets and Back Areas:

The welcome signs around the town were noted – now including details of birrnet.com. These are a good idea, but must, of course, be well maintained at all times – the welcome sign on the Banagher road was in need of attention. In fact most of the signage throughout the town – directional and otherwise needed some refurbishment.

General Impression:

We look forward to seeing Birr progress further in the Competition in the years ahead and would again wish you well in your work.

