

Tidy Towns Competition 2005

Adjudication Report

Centre: **Athenry**

Ref: **213**

County: **Galway**

Mark: **235**

Category: **D**

Date: **08/08/2005**

	Maximum Mark	Mark Awarded 2005	Mark Awarded 2004
Overall Developmental Approach	50	42	41
The Built Environment	40	34	34
Landscaping	40	34	32
Wildlife and Natural Amenities	30	23	23
Litter Control	40	26	27
Tidiness	20	15	15
Residential Areas	30	26	26
Roads, Streets and Back Areas	40	27	26
General Impression	10	8	9
TOTAL MARK	300	235	233

Overall Developmental Approach:

Your new 3-Year Plan has been read with interest and its objectives welcomed. (What you have not provided is a year-by-year list of projects to be introduced/completed to cover the three-year period, in fact only the current year was mentioned, and it would be good to know the extent of your entire planning.) It is very good to learn that a Junior Tidy Towns Committee has been established - it has been found in some other centres that work has slowed down due to committees not recruiting new members. Your map is out of date and does not show the later 20th century housing developments. In your submission you state that Athenry is "a busy town with narrow mediaeval streets" and this very adequately sums up what the visitor finds. Because of its busyness, the streets are inclined to be clogged with traffic, and this detracts from the appreciation of Athenry's distinctive qualities. In the long-term - and perhaps your forward planning will incorporate this - through traffic should ideally be removed from the streets, and the mediaeval street-pattern more graphically revealed.

The Built Environment:

Among the well maintained buildings of the distant past the Castle is outstanding, so handsomely preserved and welcoming to the public. The remains of the Dominican Abbey are also conveniently accessed. St Mary's church is important not only for its history but for its fine steeple which provides a handsome landmark from a considerable distance; it was good to see young people visiting its Heritage Centre where interesting exhibits from earlier times were mixed in lively fashion with recent interpretative features; has an inventory been made of the very fine headstones and, if not,

might this be a school project? The Railway Station is one of the most attractive buildings in the town with its fine brickwork, iron and glass canopies and floral displays; the stained buildings opposite do it no favours. The bulky Church is well maintained within its pleasantly-planted grounds. Among the many school buildings, the one which most impressed was Gairmscoil Mhuire. It was extraordinary to find a Post Office in a Heritage Town built in such an unsympathetic scale to its surroundings.

Landscaping:

Planted areas, such as beside the church, at the V junction on the Galway road, and especially at the railway embankment, all contributed to the sense of care; the pleasant park at the Castle with its lively children's playground and waterside features (not identified on your map) as well as the well maintained green (also not marked) between the large car park and the schools create a pleasing sense of space in proximity to the ancient buildings. However, the finest piece of landscaping seen was at Lady's Well outside the town. Here tastefully laid out shrubberies and flowerbeds, sculpture both ancient and modern, well kept paths, neat lawns and relics of the past, create a wonderful sense of both enjoyment and peace. This is a feature which really lives up to the designation of Heritage Town, and if presentation under the other headings (Tidiness, Litter Control, Streets, etc etc) were up to this standard Athenry would achieve its true potential.

Wildlife and Natural Amenities:

The wild flower garden and the riverside were favourably noted. You may have been perennially under-marked here - more information on your activities under this heading would be helpful in this regard.

Litter Control:

In spite of your litter control programme involving the County Council and the Junior Committee as described in your documentation, there was light litter in many areas on the day of adjudication, including outside the Library, in the graveyard of the Abbey, on North Street, David Street and Bridge Street. What was most disappointing was considerable disposable litter immediately outside the Castle entrance, in the Castle Park and in the Children's playground, where a number of adults were seen who, one would have thought, would have discouraged the dropping of litter and might even have picked up what was already there and placed it in the bins provided. This was one of the worst-littered towns seen this year.

Tidiness:

The proliferation of mass-produced commercial signs, advertising on handsome buildings, untidy poles and wires, all contributed to an unexpectedly untidy effect. Some dereliction was seen, such as the fine house on the corner of Abbey and Bridge streets, and some scruffy sites, such as next door to the Styles Ahead shop and the closed-down filling station at Prospect. There is enormous potential for Athenry to be an outstanding tidy town because all the materials are already in place - fine buildings, quaint streets and excellent planting.

Residential Areas:

Many traditional town homes are presented with real pride - they are the houses which give Athenry its character. It was most encouraging to see how the design of some new homes in Abbey Street have taken their inspiration from an older (now abandoned) house adjacent. Among the promising new estates seen were Abbey Glen and Sli an Chlairin. A very large development near the Athlone Co-Operative Society's premises, which may be a mix of housing and shops, looked exceptionally promising, and its completion will be eagerly looked forward to with the expectation of additional marking under this heading.

Roads, Streets and Back Areas:

Surfaces were generally good on the approach roads and in the town centre. Poles and overhead wires should be gradually removed, and lamp standards of the kind seen in other Heritage Towns installed throughout. Car parks near the North Gate, at the Railway Station, at the Church and at Lady's Well were all well surfaced and well marked. Traffic destroys the enjoyment of much of the town centre - for example, the Market Square would look superb if all traffic and parking were removed, attractive paving laid, seating provided and trees planted. This should not be as impossible as it may at first seem, as will be seen by visiting other old towns where radical steps have been taken to improve the environment.

General Impression:

This is a historic town of immense charm, with a huge potential for sensitive development. The approach as documented is indeed impressive, but there seems to have been a falling off between planning and execution. Your landscaping is of a very high standard, but other categories at present are mainly no more than average, and litter control disappointing.

Second Round Adjudication:

It is a number of years since this adjudicator had the pleasure of visiting Athenry and it has always been felt that it is a town that has the potential to perform extremely well in the competition. It is always a pleasure to visit, as it is a town of great interest and historical and architectural significance. Traffic control can be a major problem on the narrow streets (as commented upon by the First Round Adjudicator) and perhaps a new traffic flow and / or parking system can be considered, in the short term, in order to alleviate this issue? Flyposting is a practise, which should be actively discouraged. Litter control was, unfortunately, still an issue on Second Adjudication Day. A few papers were noted along approach roads and the main streets of the town, and in the children's playground. Some of the town litter bins appear to be rather old and should at least be repainted in order to freshen them up. Weed control was a problem to kerbs on the Loughrea side of the town. A very flaky newsagents shop in the centre of the town should be repainted before next year's competition. Do ensure that outbuildings are not neglected when considering overall presentation, as these are just as important as other buildings in the town. The Newpark Hotel sported some attractive window boxes. The car park area opposite the Maxol Filling Station is ripe for a landscaping project in order to soften its somewhat harsh appearance. The new children's playground area was being well used on the day. A derelict building opposite looked unfortunate on the day.