

# Tidy Towns Competition 2006

## *Adjudication Report*

Centre: **Birr** Ref: **549**  
County: **Offaly** Mark: **223**  
Category: **D** Date(s): **22/07/2006**

	Maximum Mark	Mark Awarded 2006
Overall Development Approach	50	31
The Built Environment	50	34
Landscaping	50	34
Wildlife and Natural Amenities	50	20
Litter Control	50	28
Waste Minimisation	20	0
Tidiness	30	15
Residential Areas	40	26
Roads, Streets and Back Areas	50	28
General Impression	10	7
<b>TOTAL MARK</b>	<b>400</b>	<b>223</b>

### **Overall Development Approach:**

The adjudicator would like to welcome Birr to the 2006 Tidy Towns Competition. The scale of the map provided was far too small to identify the locations of all the projects that you nominated for awards. Perhaps for next year you could provide a more detailed map of Birr for the adjudicator. However all projects nominated by you for awards were visited on adjudication day. The successful Tidy Towns Committees are those that succeed in harnessing the goodwill, skills and experience of a number of different groups and Agencies that have something to contribute to the implementation of the 3 Year Tidy Towns Plan. These groups and Agencies include the following –

- GAA
- Local Development Association
- FAS
- County Council
- Chamber of Commerce
- Local SuperValu outlet
- LEADER Company
- The CLAR Programme (if you are in a CLAR designated area)
- Local schools
- Urban & Village Renewal Grant Scheme

The adjudicator notes that a Tidy Towns Work Programme or Plan for Birr was not submitted with the entry documentation, and tis was suggested also in the 2005 Report. All towns and villages are required to have a simple straight forward 3 Year Tidy Towns Plan for their area. This Plan is prepared by your Committee in consultation with the appropriate local organisations. It should be no more than seven to ten pages long. The purpose of the Plan is to guide the work of your Tidy Towns Committee and others for Birr over the short to

medium term. Your Plan should detail year by year the work that you intend to do each year. It is recommended that you do not have too many objectives each year – perhaps 4/5 key projects.

### **The Built Environment:**

The town of Birr is a busy one and the central Square area is the town focus from which the main streets radiate. Johns Mall is an attractively presented area and the central landscaped areas were very colourful and are being well maintained; the repainted iron chains here looked well and fit well with the landscaping. The under-grounding of cables for this area was noted though on adjudication day some cables remained. The William Street Graveyard was visited but unfortunately entry was not possible as the gates were chained and locked. These gates would benefit from some painting. Good work appears to have been done in the old graveyard but it is a pity that the public do not have access. The Marian Hall was attractively painted and the hanging baskets added to the overall presentation. In O'Connell Street / Main Street the presentation of retail premises was quite good. For example Kelly's Office Supplies has a good colour scheme and effective white lettering. Spinner's Bistro near Birr Castle is a well presented premises in an attractive stone building with red brick door and window detailing. The simple and appropriate lettering style used here is notable. The restoration of the old Convent building seemed to be nearly finished (externally) on adjudication day and the work here is commendable. In the Square some fine older three storey houses dominate an echo an earlier period in the history of Birr. There is some scope here for further tree planting as the Square appears to have more visual potential than presently realised.

### **Landscaping:**

The replanting at the bridge, church and weir looked well but it is a pity that so much litter was evident at the weir both in the water and along the bank. The presentation of the nearby Park was disappointing; this is an area with great potential but on adjudication day it was spoiled by very bad littering, roughly cut grass, seats that needed to be repainted and the damaged frame of a litter basket (container missing). In the centre of Birr the many hanging baskets and individual floral displays brought colour to the Main Street and other areas in an effective manner. The central landscaped areas in Johns Mall were extremely colourful and excellently presented.

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

The cleaning and tidying up and replanting of the riverbank area is noted. However on adjudication day a lot of litter was noted in the river especially at the weir area. In many towns and villages this is an aspect of the Tidy Towns Competition where there can be significant potential for development. All towns and villages have the presence of wildlife to some degree. It is important that your Tidy Towns Committee would examine further the wildlife potential of Birr, and see what you can achieve in terms of making your area even more wildlife friendly.

If you have not already done so, the starting point is to have a habitat survey carried out of the wildlife in your area. Suggested habitats to be considered include the following –

- Urban habitats – gardens, waste ground, walls, graveyards, hedges
- Wetland habitats – rivers, ponds, lakes, canals, reed marsh, bogs
- Woodland habitats – forests, hedgerows, plantations, parks
- Grassland habitats – roadside verges, parks, wet meadows, dry grasslands

The survey should produce a species list for each of the habitats relevant to the Birr area. This need not be an expensive survey. Perhaps there is a knowledgeable person locally who might undertake this task for you. Basically the survey would identify the animals, plants, birds, fish that inhabit your area and their associated habitats. It should be remembered that to carry out the survey properly that it will probably take a year so that all habitats can be assessed at different times of the year. Using the results of the wildlife survey your next step should be to draft a straight forward Plan for Birr to preserve the identified habitats in your area, and investigate the possibility of new ones. It is most important to try and involve your local school children in this project, and in many Schools there is probably a teacher who may have an interest in this area who would be willing to get involved. As part of the actions to be undertaken in your Wildlife Plan you might like to consider the provision of some weather proof display panels, illustrating and explaining the wildlife in your area. This has been done very successfully in many towns and villages in Ireland.

### **Litter Control:**

The involvement of children in your litter control programme is commended. However on adjudication day the litter control position in Birr was quite poor. At the Bring Centre the litter here was very bad. As this car park is

close to the Castle and is used by visitors the litter situation is especially disappointing. Bags of rubbish were dumped by the various containers and the area did little to enhance the reputation of the fine town of Birr. In the centre of the town much casual litter was noted blowing in the wind. Another area with a litter problem on adjudication day was Chapel Lane past the Technical Centre. The Park by the river was badly littered in a number of locations.

### **Waste Minimisation:**

This is a new category in the Tidy Towns Competition introduced in 2006. The purpose of this new category is to encourage Tidy Towns Committees and the community that they support to get involved in projects that will reduce waste and encourage recycling. Marks can be gained by Birr for the promotion of best practice. This can include community guidance on methods of reducing waste, segregating litter during clean up events. You could also consider a partnership with local firms and businesses to encourage them to reduce unnecessary waste.

### **Tidiness:**

Many signs were noted on the Tullamore approach road and these created quite an untidy appearance. The adjudicator is not in favour of the display of retail goods on the pavement as was noted here. Apart from looking rather untidy such displays can cause major difficulties for people in wheelchairs or the visually disabled. The damaged railing on the Castle grounds near the Spinners Bistro needs to be repainted and repainted.

### **Residential Areas:**

The Avondale estate was well presented but there is scope here for some tree planting. The cottages in Pound Street generally used colour well but a few of the properties were in need of painting. Very attractive and interesting old cottages were noted near the Emo Garage on the Banagher road. The small circular windows here are an interesting architectural feature. At the cottages further out on this road some of the timber fencing was in need of painting. Very good private house presentation is a feature of William Street; the Maltings has made great use of old buildings for housing purposes. At the cottages near the Technical Centre with the corrugated iron roofs interesting panels over the doorways are an unusual feature that should be preserved. In a town the size of Birr it is not possible in one paragraph to sum up all estates in the town in terms of overall presentation. However the following recommendations are offered by the adjudicator who suggests that the Tidy Towns Committee bring these points to the attention of all estates in Birr.

- Road boundary walls will probably need to be painted twice each year especially on busy roads.
- Gable end walls though sometimes difficult to paint should be painted when the rest of the house is being painted.
- Timber fencing will require treatment at least twice per year.
- All estates should be encouraged to provide entrance name signs and directional signage within the estate.
- Green open space grass areas will need to be cut frequently if a quality presentation is to be achieved. Remember that grass will probably have to be cut back from the top of kerbing by hand. The provision of a few well chosen trees can often transform an open space.
- Areas to the back of estates can sometimes become dumping areas for cut grass and other materials.
- Simple landscaping at individual houses can often be very effective if the proper trees and shrubs are planted.
- By their nature estates can sometimes have litter control problems and this must be addressed by each individual estate in the town.

If you do not already run a Tidy estates Competition involving the estates in your town then now might be the time to consider doing so. It is likely that you will be able to find a local sponsor or sponsors who would be prepared to fund the prize fund. The prizes should ideally be in the form of vouchers for estate maintenance equipment or for landscaping.

### **Roads, Streets and Back Areas:**

On the Tullamore approach the verges on the right opposite the turn to the Football Club need attention. The

verge on the left with the fine young trees and older mature trees was well presented. The issue of the many advertising signs on this road has been mentioned elsewhere in this Report. On the Banagher approach to Birr the fine stone walls on the right are a fine feature and these together with the fine tall trees creates a fine approach to the town. Further out verges needed more work. Watch out for narrow back lanes that can quickly become untidy. One such lane was noted opposite the entrance to the Park on Chapel Lane. A lot of weed and grass growth was noted along this laneway.

**General Impression:**

Birr is an interesting town that attracts many visitors because of the Castle. The litter control problem requires your most urgent attention and that of the Local Authority. Good luck with your 2007 projects.