

Tidy Towns Competition 2007

Adjudication Report

Centre: **Carlow** Ref: **36**
County: **Carlow** Mark: **275**
Category: **G** Date(s): **24/07/2007**
08/08/2007

	Maximum Mark	Mark Awarded 2007
Overall Development Approach	50	45
The Built Environment	50	40
Landscaping	50	41
Wildlife and Natural Amenities	50	26
Litter Control	50	30
Waste Minimisation	20	7
Tidiness	30	15
Residential Areas	40	28
Roads, Streets and Back Areas	50	35
General Impression	10	8
TOTAL MARK	400	275

Overall Development Approach:

Welcome Carlow to Tidy Towns 2007. We note once again your well presented and comprehensive documentation that accompanied it. We note also the long list of agencies and resident's associations with which you deal and we wish to acknowledge that co-ordinating and administering that must be an enormous challenge to the committee. Well done also on your school involvement and we compliment you on your proposals.

As you know, Carlow is a town situated on the River Barrow. We admired the old Barrow Bridge. We also liked its castle, and were especially impressed by the park on the west side of the river. Also admired was the fine Millennium foot bridge forming a link between the bank and the river side development on the city side. Carlow is a fast growing town with new development in the centre and also on the outskirts, good bad and ugly, which was encouraged by the new by-pass.

We admired the large pedestrianised centre with its paving and landscaping including Dublin and Tullow Streets.

We were also impressed by the classical styled courthouse in the town.

The Built Environment:

The town in the centre which is largely pedestrianised is very attractive in general with lots of nooks and crannies with links down to the river. The centre is attractive and well maintained with good bi-lingual signage and landscaping.

The Town Hall restoration was admired. It was clean, painted and landscaped with a public square in front. The car park and extension at the rear however needs upgrading with work done to the car park entrance and wall between the Town Hall and new River Dell House. We understand that the Town Hall has been nominated for promotion of Heritage Award which due to its incompleteness, in our opinion would be better in years to come.

There are two other significant contemporary style buildings, namely the Castlegate Development, which are apartments arranged around a central stone faced tower, and the other is a lovely development called the Italian Connection Restaurant with modern contemporary style facing a tributary stream of the river Dell. It is approached by a new pedestrian bridge. The Castle Gate Development is included in the Architectural Award and the Italian Connection Restaurant for the Waterside Award.

We were particularly impressed by the Italian Connection Restaurant and its riverside facilities.

Two good shop fronts were noted also which fall into different categories of the shop front awards namely The Piggy's Shoe and Teach Dolmen Lounge both in Tullow Street. Contemporary design is continuing to make its mark in the town and seems to be improving.

There are a number of important derelict sites still requiring conservation and careful development, particularly at the river end of Montgomery Street on the main town side and old stone mills on the Laois side of the river but within the town boundaries. There is also a derelict site at the bring bank on the Laois side at the new park as mentioned in earlier reports and needs resurfacing. Further down the river on that side is an old derelict lock gate and lock keeper's houses. Also an old mile stone in the ground marked "St Mullins, 31 miles" This lock is on the Barrow Walk and needs conservation and careful development and could be a fine asset to Carlow.

Within the town are excellent civic amenities with several landscaped buildings and the magnificent Public Park and footbridge over the river.

Dual language signs are widespread.

Landscaping:

Standards are high on both sides of the river. In particular we would like to draw attention to the new park which we think is worthy of a landscaping prize. We wish you well in this endeavour. There is good landscaping around most important spaces in the shopping area of the town, including the beautiful square in front of the Town Hall. Also we note on the Portlaoise approach, there was a beautifully arranged park at the war memorial and grotto with very elegant railings.

Black spots for landscaping were ruined buildings as mentioned before under built environment. These all provide good challenges for integration of landscape into built environment.

The landscaped signs on the approach are effective and colourful. They are dual language in content. The flower pots produce good colour.

Wildlife and Natural Amenities:

Well done on the area around the Rowing Club which concentrates on this subject with two attractive boards displaying information on the surrounding wildlife environment. The presence of an island nearby is very good for wild life habitat. The new park is also bristling with wildlife. The Barrow walk on the Laois side is very attractive up stream but is very uninviting on the downstream side because of rubbish on the day of inspection at the Lock Gates. As mentioned under the 'Built Environment' section this whole area requires sensitive conservation, development and landscaping. We welcome the idea of the construction of the mooring jetties. We enjoyed very much the visit to Oak Park, Forest Park. We are pleased that it has been entered for the 'Sustainable Development' award. The place is a credit to Teagasc and to Carlow County Council and their great imagination and purchasing, developing and managing the project with distinction. We wish you well in your submission.

Litter Control:

We understand well that in a fast growing town with many new residents and visitors that litter control can be an extreme challenge for any Town Council and Tidy Towns committee. On the day of our adjudication we found a 'mixed bag' of litter problems. It was not possible to inspect a whole town and approach roads. Bypass roads and housing areas appear generally litter free. Some fire brigade operations at this stage seem to be required.

Bring banks areas on the Laois side and at the Town Hall car park area are each attracting piles of

miscellaneous rubbish which are not related to the type of banks.

The river needs to be protected from dumping rubbish as witnessed on the day of our visit along the walk at the Lock gates near Old Leighlin road.

We inspected the Carlow town council facility at Kearnstown, which is listed for a medal under recycling facilities. This had a wide range of methods for recycling and appeared tidy. It was however security fenced and locked with 8.00am to 6.00pm opening hours. This is very bad policy as it encourages people to dump elsewhere.

On the day of our visit we met one road sweeper on a road near the new park. Well done to both Carlow Councils on their educative Anti-Litter road shows to schools. We note also the green flag status of at least one school. Well done also on your litter awareness campaign.

Waste Minimisation:

We note since the last visit the extra recycling centre at Kearnstown which was locked. It is unclear for what activities are included. It seems that security and distance from town might discourage use.

To perform to a high standard under this heading it is necessary to encourage all sectors of the community to survey the amount of waste generated by themselves and to formulate strategies to minimise the amount produced, as opposed to simply collecting waste for recycling. We anticipate a performance of excellence under this heading in the years to come given your track record to date in every other respect. The race against waste booklet included in this year's Tidy Towns pack contains a number of good ideas on this.

Tidiness:

Signage in many instances is overdone and confusing. The councils should ensure that they are maintained in all cases. There is a multiplicity of ESB and Eircom poles throughout the town and suburbs with the exception of the new development. There was graffiti noticed. Traffic management is poor and roads are busy particularly in the centre and on the by pass.

Residential Areas:

A lovely terrace of artisan stone houses on one side of the Tullow road was well landscaped. St Lazerien's terrace on the Laois side is an older local authority development of houses which are generally well maintained with excellent green spaces. Dwellings were generally clean and tidy, both within the town core and in the "suburban" developments.

Roads, Streets and Back Areas:

Most approach roads were neat and presentable with good landscaping. This included the bypass which was very well landscaped. Many new developments along side this road were mostly unfinished building sites of poor quality factory or commercial buildings. The new footbridge over the river will form an important link serving both sides of the town.

The riverside walks and access to the river is also a special feature with swans nesting on the island opposite the boat club. The challenge remaining on that front is to complete all walkways and make them attractive in the tow path area too.

The fine old bridge comes as a great surprise in having seven arches when approached along the new water front from the new park.

General Impression:

The town still has its own heart with the bridge and castle wall. Its centre is still traditional in atmosphere with better contemporary building which fit in well. You are to be congratulated on the quality of recent projects and work undertaken while dealing with difficult issues such as rapid expansion which is a challenge on many fronts.

Second Round Adjudication:

A great deal of thought and decisive action has been given to the major improvements in Carlow over the last few years, as manifested by the spacious boulevard-like approaches from the Laois direction, the development of the waterside, the parks and green spaces, the conservation of several very fine old buildings - some imaginatively adapted for new uses - and the construction of a number of smart new buildings, mostly factories or commercial premises on the outskirts. All of these catch the eye in a very positive way. (One recalls how the fine stone barracks was demolished several years ago to make way for the dull and

undistinguished college - something which clearly could not happen now, for adaptation would be part of the brief.) The marking proposed by the first adjudicator shows how well the town is doing in the categories of Developmental Approach, Buildings, Landscaping and Roads, but less well under some of the other headings. In other words, large-scale projects have been given generous attention, leaving some of the less obviously showy categories some way behind, comparatively speaking. Certainly the town has not done well on Tidiness; the comments of the first adjudicator should be studied - and indeed added to these would be the amount of mass-produced signage and over-enthusiastic advertising still seen in many of the central streets: while the majority of business premises are well presented, a look down the length of the principal thoroughfares discloses much visual clutter in the overall. Some end-of-terrace gables are unpainted or stained, while the frontages are bright and clean: it is the gables which are most obtrusive when looking along a street. On the matter of Litter Control, this is well known to be a variable from day to day and so the substantial reduction in marks over 2006 given by the first adjudicator has been lessened by the second, but it is still a reduction. Surroundings of the many well-sited bring-banks were not always tidy. This adjudicator visited the recycling station at Kearnstown and found it spotless, with staff on hand to help; but a good point has been made by the first adjudicator to the effect that the opening hours are rather restricted and this may be a reason for dumping elsewhere. These points having been made, in the overview Carlow remains a handsome and well kept town, and it is clear from your notes that you are taking every opportunity to deal with the seemingly intractable and irritating details that have to be addressed.