

Tidy Towns Competition 2008

Adjudication Report

Centre: **Kildare** Ref: **100**
County: **Kildare** Mark: **223**
Category: **E** Date(s): **09/07/2008**

	Maximum Mark	Mark Awarded 2008
Overall Development Approach	50	34
The Built Environment	50	30
Landscaping	50	35
Wildlife and Natural Amenities	50	17
Litter Control	50	25
Waste Minimisation	20	7
Tidiness	30	16
Residential Areas	40	27
Roads, Streets and Back Areas	50	25
General Impression	10	7
TOTAL MARK	400	223

Overall Development Approach:

Go raibh maith agaibh go leir! Thank you to Kildare TidyTowns and to the community you represent for having given selflessly of your time in working towards entering Kildare in this 50th anniversary year of the TidyTowns Competition!

Kildare is a town with lots of potential, and a familiar place in most Irish peoples minds, due to its patron saint's associations. You have a good number of people involved on your TidyTowns committee Committee. You have a busy work schedule with weekly meetings that last an hour. You obviously have a good chairperson. It is important to keep your meetings short if you are meeting weekly.

You draw in the resources of other bodies, agencies and local businesses, including your local authority to your assistance.

Thank you for submitting your Kildare TidyTowns Plan 2008-2011. This is an attractive looking document, which on immediate investigation gives a nice overview of the town itself through its pictorial content. However, it is much more comprehensive than that! It is a pity however that you did not tell us about general public consultation held to assist you in preparing this document.

You use local media and local radio to get your message across about your AGM and your Clean up days. Thank you for the newspaper cuttings. You plan to liaise with all the school authorities, and so far this has resulted in a practical analysis of signage in the town carried out by the students. This is an imaginative approach, as sometimes schools just get to do the less interesting tasks of litter picking!

You were pleased with your success in going forward in the competition in 2007. You have the potential and the will to go a lot further! We wish you the best!

Thank you for supplying an O.S. based map of the town centre. However the adjudicator would need a magnifying glass to read the street names! None of the new housing estates were named on the same map. Nor were any of the approach roads named. It would also be a good idea for the future to submit a map extending to include all the approach road areas themselves – and there are many!

The Built Environment:

Kildare has a long history of being a centre of importance from early times. Your many historic remains give testament to this. And the Built Environment of your town is as important today as it has always been. Your built heritage is interesting, and is a source of educational, amenity, and tourism potential. We know that you appreciate this aspect of your built heritage and you justifiably say that “it is a source of enormous pride”. Because we agree, and because we feel that there are many areas where you can improve, we are detailing under this Section. Not alone are you aware of your major heritage in this area, but you are also aware of the minutiae, which are so interesting and unique to Kildare. Well Done! Some of these which you mention are the old plaster signage, and pub gate. Do seek the advice which you require in this area as you propose on page 6 of your plan. You have a great resource in this area of the Built Environment. The adjudicator looking at the Kildare Town Plan notes that you have 59 Protected Structures!

The town centre has a good close knit form, typical of a compact Irish vernacular market town centred on the Square, which is a lovely space. Rising above the town is The Cathedral and its enclosure with its distinctive Round Tower. The Cathedral is set off to good effect by virtue of its being a lovely building in a strategic location. The same is true of the Round Tower. The high stone walls are also attractive, and the rampart effect on the Station side is interesting, and this view reminds one of the Rock of Cashel. However, it is a pity that the on-site corrugated shed is not painted. It is so conspicuous! It is not a structure one would choose to have at this location, but given your arguments for its retention, it should be at least painted. We note that you intended to have this done “during the summer months” July is a high tourist season summer month, and is also a likely month for Tidy Town adjudication! There is a problem with projecting lighting (spotlighting) and associated power lines on many town buildings.

The yellow road markings in front of the Cathedral gate detract from the Cathedral precincts. Could a more imaginative way of stopping the gateway being blocked off by traffic be thought out?

The Square has been renewed, and Kildare town has been lucky with being selected for funding for renewal works. The paving, and particularly the mature tree retention, and the semi mature tree planting all help to set off - what is really a great urban space, full of interesting buildings, Celtic connectivity, and history. Would it ever be possible that the car might exit, or even retreat? The artistic elements of the statue of St. Brigid, the newer eternal flame sculpture, and the bust of Lord Edward Fitzgerald are all interesting and appropriate. They supply 20th and 21st century additions to the setting of the Market House. The Celtic cross in remembrance of 1798 was also admired. The trough, presentation of the town well, tourism signs, (general and Gordon Bennett) are all in very good condition.

The square has many fine buildings. The restored Market House is centre stage. The two storey stone house with brick framed opes adjacent to the Cathedral gates, and its adjacent similar neighbour “Tikka House” are lovely buildings, with only one minus, and that is the insertion of PVC windows. However, in time it may be possible to reinsert the traditional timber sash windows in such buildings. If you can at all as a group, please encourage the conservation of the sash window where appropriate.

Fitzpatricks on the west side of the Square is in poor condition, but is for sale with full planning permission for a banking hall according to the sign. We trust that its architectural character will be respected. Flanagan Solicitors and Chan Kitchen building were neat and tidy with good floral displays. The red building adjacent was also admired. The Vatican pub is in need of some care. The external spotlights take from its simple lines. An interesting logo at 1st floor level (old cycle club?) was noted. The Red Boutique adjacent has a very good doorcase and good sash and paned windows at first floor level. These window cills contain window boxes, the watering of which may cause local dampness which may contribute to the demise of the traditional windows. This is a sample case where it might be better not to use window boxes, despite their pretty colour. At fascia board level there are a lot of obtrusive wires about, and the pediments and fascia boards are in poor condition. Conservation would be desirable.

On the southern side of the Square, the Bank of Ireland is a fine red bricked 3 storey building, with a sensitive location of the ATM in a recessed brick arch. There is however a clutter of signage, parking meters, and litter bin at this point. Cawley's groceries, although well presented looks out of place with its flat roof. Boyles Bar and Bolands next door have good first floor windows, and Connolly's pharmacy on the corner of Claregate Street looked well. The Luletia /Akrakababra/Pound Tower House forms a cluttered presence with wires, signs and damaged fascia at the Eastern end of the southern side of the Square. Grace's with its ochre coloured walls was well presented, but its windows need attention.

Despite claims that the Courthouse has been maintained; to this adjudicator it looked dilapidated. The Courthouse is in need of maintenance, especially in relation to the maintenance of its windows. It is an important building in a strategic location. Likewise, the Castle, although hidden from general view is a very important town structure. Unsuitable window insertions should be avoided.

The railway station, which is a fine building, is typical of its period, but its surrounds are overshadowed by car parking. A landscaping plan might be considered for this area. We are glad that you are going to work in this area in screening the ugly concrete wall, but perhaps an overall plan might be worked out between the different agencies and bodies involved.

We note that there are already websites of heritage trails in Kildare town, but you are planning to make these more available off-web. Rather than cluttering your historic core with signage, perhaps you might consider a trail which is downloadable to ipod, and brochure/maps made readily available in the town centre?

In relation to street furniture, do, in the future consider colours other than black, as black is the most difficult colour for somebody with visual impairment to see. You can also introduce street furniture that is modern, provided that it is well designed. The help of your local authority's architects department might be available here. Your TidyTowns Kildare sign on the grass verge approaches, with its attractive St. Brigid's cross was admired.

We loved the An Goban Saor sign and the building (pub) called the same name, and hope that perhaps you will assist its owner to have this interesting well known Irish tale explained for tourists and locals alike! Something like this is a lovely surprise feature. The "Five Jockeys" adjacent is also an interesting building with its original date plate/circle. The ground floor windows are good.

The Irish stone sign at the Carmelite church is excellent. We noted the Irish at St. Joseph's Academy also. The "Oifig Failte" sign at the Square is appropriate. We look forward to your advancing the use of Irish in Kildare town.

Be very careful not to power wash protected structures. This can damage the fabric. With good advice, cooperation from owners, and some finance, you are well placed to score remarkably well in this category in the future. You have retained a wealth of your older buildings. They may need some care and resuscitation, but you still have them to redeem in full.

Landscaping:

You already have a resource of mature landscaping in your town. We note from looking at the Kildare town plan on the web that you have tree protection orders on several stands of trees. This is excellent and a credit to your local authority.

The landscaping of the town area, especially in the Square is good. We are particularly impressed that you are not overusing the more urban landscape forms of baskets and tubs. A good and restrained example of a hanging basket was observed near the Cathedral gate – a simple conical holder with a splash of red in flowers, contrasting well with the stonework.

There are some good landscaped areas, older and newer which we refer to in more detail under Roads etc. section in your many approaches. We of course consider these here in the marking of this category also. The timbered walkway through the "grey abbey" allows pedestrians to appreciate some of this landscaping at close range.

The public park area at the foot of Cathedral Hill, near the playground is very attractive, both in layout and in maintenance. We note your plans for augmentation. The weighbridge area is going to look better.

When you refer to maintenance of landscaped areas in your plan you say that they are "extensive". This is true! And some, like your lovely St. Brigid's cross takes careful and skilful maintenance. Your emphasis on planting at roundabouts is very good, and these can be a great introduction to the town. Roundabouts can be very urban and impersonal, and you have your fair share in Kildare for a small town. We are glad that you are being helped in this by your local authority. It is very good also to use tree planting as a traffic calming mechanism as you are doing at the school area. The "adoption" scheme should work well for you. We are assuming that proposed 2008 plantings (as per your plan) not carried out in the spring (e.g. Bride Street) are awaiting the later year planting season.

You are lucky to have the advice of a Parks Department in your local authority.

Wildlife and Natural Amenities:

You have many areas in the town, such as the church grounds, (old and newer) including graveyard areas - a

rich habitat - in which wildlife can thrive. The Square with its trees is also a habitat. You do not have a river or wetland habitat. But you are encircled by countryside, and the Curragh is so close. You have shown two nos. 17 (both sites off map) on your town map. We assume that the southern no. 17 refers to the Council site which you intend to develop as an eco-park. You do not list any projects specifically undertaken under this heading in your 2007 list in your plan.

We look forward to seeing lots of bird boxes and tables, and perhaps bat boxes also in the future, and to the planting of many berried trees. Well done on your habitat awareness in relation to stone walls.

Before you start to lay out a nature trail you should survey what you have. A logical place to start would be to carry out a very basic survey of wild flora and fauna in the area. Perhaps your local school could help you with this? You mention in your plan that you will encourage the children to compile information on the local environment. Do you have a young person studying Environmental Science in a 3rd level institution from the area who might require a thesis topic? The provision of a survey and management plan contributes to the marks in this section. Findings made public on information panels would add to the enjoyment of your town for local and visitors alike, and would serve good educational purposes. You discuss approaching the Heritage Council for funding, but you can start locally yourselves. Rural dwellers often have a great knowledge of the wildflowers and birdlife. Take advice with regard to interpretation in its signage aspects, as it would be a shame to destroy the visual aspects through inappropriate signage. Do not rush this process. Take advice also from your area engineer with regard to maintenance etc. You could also seek the assistance of your local authority's Heritage Officer.

Litter Control:

Litter control on adjudication day was generally quite good. However your recycling centre was a little disappointing. It is a fine centre (although this adjudicator would have issues with its location in the foreground of cathedral views and beside a protected structure). There was one large black sack, one plastic bag full of rubbish deposited beside the bins. There was also a large cardboard box deposited beside the bins. The official county council sign with recycling details is a good sign, but it was bent on top. One bin looked as though it may have had a burning incident (melted) on top. There was also a welcoming TidyTown sign, and close by was a parking explanatory sign. Could this signage be rationalised into one?

Around the town and on the approach roads a small amount of litter was noted at the Eastern side of the Market House, and at the approach to the railway bridge from the Loughminane side. And Lord Edward Fitzgerald had been treated to an empty coke bottle on his plinth!

We note that you are establishing a litter patrol this year. We are also happy that you engage in the Spring Clean.

If you are buying new bins, consider an innovative artistic design. Such may be expensive, but if you gradually replace your stock, this will be possible. To have a Junior TidyTown Committee is a very good idea in conjunction with your Green schools. Perhaps you could organise a Litter Seminar with the Litter Warden of your local authority. We recommend that you publicise your plan about your work in this area. Well done on your clean up day this year and on the publicity you received. We read the newspaper cutting with interest.

Waste Minimisation:

We are glad to see that you segregate waste in your pick-up days. We would like to hear more about your composting scheme. Your two Green Schools and your potential three extra Green schools should be able to help you achieve more in this category, through project work and implementation. Can you involve all your business community here?

Waste minimisation is about more than not having litter in your street or indeed recycling. It involves the prevention of litter accumulation in the first case. It is really what it says – to minimise on waste production before we, as a community, private or public create it in the first case. You might refer to the Race Against Waste booklet available from the TidyTown Unit of the Department of the Environment, Heritage, and Local Government. Consider organising or attending a Waste Minimisation Workshop with your local authority. In your local school there will be opportunities to involve the students in an effort to work towards this end.

Perhaps you might prepare a flyer/newsletter on this subject? As a local community you could look at some innovative and simple ideas such as organising a "Bring and Take Day". This would involve using a local hall / community centre for instance for a day - where everybody brings items they have no further use for, but which other people might want (and which under normal circumstances they might get rid of as waste) and puts them on display. The corollary is that somebody else needs these items. No monies change hands. Website versions of this idea have been set up in places also. Another group collected all broken crockery, and made a mosaic in their local area. You can gain marks by doing some of these things for 2009.

Tidiness:

Probably two of the most unkempt areas are to be found as one enters the town from the south approaching from the Athy / Monasterevin approach road and from the north ; the first at the Mahon Premises, the second at the Army entrance, and the nearby amusements/restaurant/cartridges retail block. The Mahon building and boundary walls are very poor. This is a pity, as the building is reasonable, and has really nice gates. It has a very poor entrance area, and is generally in need of major cleaning and refurbishment. But a coat of paint would go a long way towards helping its public image. The footpath opposite this is was also in need of weeding on adjudication day.

The area along the South of the Cathedral boundary between Castle Lane and the Cathedral gates is quite poor for such a strategic area. The weeds growing in profusion at the base of the wall need removal. A roof in very poor repair with dangling slates presented a neglected image of the area, and there is poor signage here also. All this takes from what could potentially be a lovely area.

The Square is generally very tidy, with only some wiring on buildings, and signage, together with repainting needs taking from the overall good effect.

An interesting rubbish bin in Claregate Street with a St. Brigid's cross emblem thereon was very run down and dirty.

There is a field across from the Carmelite church which has poor post and wire fencing, and weeds outside the boundary. The barriers at the lovely church carpark detract a little from the landscaped carpark as they are rather crude. The Education Centre is pristine. And the houses around that area are very well maintained with ice stone walls, a lovely enclave. At the bottom of Whiteabbey Street there is some dereliction which has not been addressed. Remember what whitewash and painted plywood can temporarily achieve. A building at the bottom of the street also needs cleaning. There is a school road sign at the Cleamore Road junction (opposite Whiteabbey street) which needs replacement . The security fencing outside the De La Salle school is inappropriate and ugly in a historic town contest. There is an unsurfaced entrance on the left as one descends this road.

Throughout the town and approaches there is a problem with signage. This you have recognised, and will endeavour to work on. Are two signs necessary on the nice Cathedral gates? An out-of-date Lisbon Treaty political poster was observed also - between the recycling area and adjacent park. Apart from the immediate Square area, there is an issue with wirescape. Some windows, but especially the betting office in Claregate street (at the Square end) Boylans, were festooned with posters. This takes from the integrity of the streetscape. The SPAR sign is out of scale and character with this street. A large for sale sign on Fitzpatricks in the Square is invasive of this precinct. The pole of the aircoach stop sign is in a very bad state in an otherwise good area.

The grounds of the Franciscan Friary are a delight.

Most of the road traffic signs are good and a credit to your local authority.

The remarks about untidiness on approach roads as described in "Roads" etc. section are relevant here also. The paths and verges within the town were generally well weeded.

Residential Areas:

Well done on your Residents' Association Checklist. It is a useful and practical guide for your towns people.

Kildare has many more residential properties each year, due to its expansion. The older stock of housing within the street pattern and on approach roads - both individual and grouped - is generally well looked after, and has mature gardens befitting the scale of the town as was. Good plantings were noted in Cleamore Street gardens.

Note: Some of the residential properties on the approach roads are described in the section under Roads etc. below. In dealing with the estate development , roughly the same directional approach is taken as in dealing with the Roads etc, as described below. The Curragh Beag estate road frontage walls require repainting. Loughgarrett Estate has good young plantings. It is however difficult to read the estate stone sign. It has good entrance shrubbery. The green areas are well maintained. Drumcree Court has good semi mature trees and a lovely clover filled green space. The Curragh Finn estate looked well.

The Loughminane Estate was well cared for in general within the estate, but the road verges and footpaths, especially those between the second and last access points were poor.

The sign at Ramberg Manor might now be removed. Its entrance area had good planting.

Rowanville and Lourdesville estates have good houses and nice gardens. One vacant site's security fencing looked poorly. The wall opposite was also in need of attention. We look forward to seeing the completed enhancement at Rowanville.

Well done on the fixing of railings at Assumpta Villas entrance. Just like approach roads, entrances set the tone for what is to follow. 2009 will see your enhancement of the stepped areas close to this housing area also.

Roads, Streets and Back Areas:

You have our sympathy and admiration when it comes to approach roads. You have more than your fair share. This adjudicator also visited a village with two approach roads only quite recently. Don't you wish! However you should look on these as potential scorers also, as what nicer approach than the approach by the Friary?

The following is an adjudication of the approach roads starting with the Milltown approach in an anti clockwise direction.

The approach from Milltown extends inward from the Curragh area to a treed approach. On the right hand side of this approach is a car sale premises – reasonably screened; on the other side are old farm buildings with overflowing cars parked. The Kildare name sign is slightly dented and is dirty. Beyond the sign are an old house and two untidy gates. Generally the kerbed left hand side of this approach needs weeding and trimming. The site inside needs screening, and the gates need painting. Opposite Drumcree Court are lovely stands of very mature copper beech and chestnut trees. This approach leads on to the lovely old stone wall approach/single carriageway over the railway.

The Monasterevin approach has the Whitesland West Business Centre which is very well screened and planted inside, and is also very tidy. Well done to all those responsible! The verges outside are also very well trimmed. On the opposite side, and from here in towards the town, the concrete post and wire area needs trimming. The hedge over the path on the left also needs trimming, and possibly widening of the path. There was flooding in places due to the surfacing needing renewal. As one approaches the traffic lights at this point there are too many signs which look untidy. The Tourist Office sign was partially obscured by vegetation on adjudication day. There is very good green banking on the left side approaching the junction fronting the houses there. On the right hand side is a well maintained Victorian style house with a brick outbuilding. The property is nicely landscaped. The junction itself looks very green, given the trees, and shrubbery. This is nice, but requires cutting back in places.

The Athy road approach (back from the shopping outlet) is planted well and the commercial premises opposite are good. The roundabout here is planted well and the wild roses looked most attractive. There is a lovely approach from here back to the Monasterevin junction but it perhaps has too much signage beside the beautiful box hedged St. Brigid's Cross. There is also a welcome sign from the Tidy Towns between the shopping outlet and the Monasterevin junction and on the bank on the town side of the same junction is there need for duplication on the same approach? The same area holds the Twinning signage and Corps NUDS. Across from this, but slightly near the junction is a car sales area with untidy splay area. There is a nice view of the Round Tower on this, as on other approaches. This is a great focal point, landmark and "logo" for the town.

The old Kildare RFC grounds, site and walls looked untidy. Beyond that there is good hedging and trees on both sides of the final approach.

The Loughminane approach has very poor verge cutting in the vicinity of the speed limit in front of the estate of the same name. The road needs resurfacing in places. Parts of the approach on the town side of the estate are very tidy on the opposite side of the road. On this approach there are some broken gates. There are some good stone walls. The funeral home is well kept. There are lovely views of the church spire and nice grass banks. The approach to the railway bridge is poor on both sides with wires, weeds, litter and broken road signs.

The Nursey (road 415) approach contains the Franciscan Abbey. Well done on 2007 tree planting in the vicinity of this approach. This area apart from the roadbridge just before one reaches the Friary, which needs weeding, is beautifully tidy with planting opposite the Friary site. On the town side of the Friary, a wall and rails on the left in the vicinity of the school need painting. The right hand side is well maintained with planting as one approaches Bride Street.

There is too much signage on the right hand side, but good trees, including old sycamores on the final approach.

The Japanese Gardens/ National Stud approach is uncluttered and tidy with excellent landscaping on the approach to the town. However the building opposite the National Stud entrance has broken windows. This is an example of good and bad on a most important road. The sign providing information about town parking was obliterated partly by trees on adjudication day. The footpath is good, but needs weeding, and general removal of ragwort on both sides in the vicinity of the roadbridge.

The Newbridge approach (S) R445 is reasonably well presented.

The Newbridge road (N) R413 has an amount of signage clutter. The RACE area is very good. The tyre operation opposite is untidy. A Victorian style house on the Newbridge side of Maxol looked well. The Maxol garage has very good floral displays, and it was tidy on adjudication day. The Volvo garage is neat, and the final approach of stone walls and trees is good. The amusements/ cartridges/ restaurant and the army entrance area are both very poor for such a strategic town approach. The Derby Hotel is reasonably well presented, but a house on the town side needs wall repair and paint as does the green uphill of this with its blue chipped paint.

The streets in general within the town are well kept and laid out. However the area around the station requires a makeover generally. The car park at the Carmelite church is very attractive with its landscaping and cleanliness. It is a pity to see it being used as a "rat run" – even slowly! The back areas, particularly the likes of Castle Lane (mid), and Whiteabbey road are not quite so. The surface of Cleamore Road is poor and in need of renewal. This is probably due to construction traffic movements.

We really feel that you need to focus much more on improving the approach roads. We are aware that you intend to do this. Whereas other planned actions impinge on some of the approaches, you need to focus more on this category. Remember first impressions are created by somebody coming to your town for the first time, and they do not all travel the main highway!

General Impression:

Kildare has a great natural advantage of history and tradition. We know that you are aware of this richness. The Plan is your blueprint. However a lot of what is proposed is as yet aspirational, as the plan only starts in 2008. Good luck with all your ventures! You are approaching the tasks ahead in an organised manner. We also feel that there is a good community spirit to build upon, and a lot of what makes for success is on-the-ground work. We also feel that you are involving the youth, which is so important for the future. We like your optimism, as expressed in your application form /General Impression, "Kildare will change dramatically over the next five to ten years. Kildare TidyTown's look forward to being a part of these exciting times for Kildare"

We would encourage you to continue to seek the excellent advice which is available to you from your local authority on many issues – be it Conservation, Heritage, Environmental, Engineering, Parks and other issues. You will also have the new residents to help you, and to bring new ideas and manpower to your ranks. We appreciate the problems you have to face for the common good especially with regard to water and sewerage works, but you are not complainers, and you work with gusto!