

# Tidy Towns Competition 2008

## *Adjudication Report*

Centre: **Kilkenny** Ref: **398**  
County: **Kilkenny** Mark: **299**  
Category: **G** Date(s): **16/06/2008**  
**24/07/2008**

	Maximum Mark	Mark Awarded 2008
Overall Development Approach	50	48
The Built Environment	50	42
Landscaping	50	42
Wildlife and Natural Amenities	50	31
Litter Control	50	33
Waste Minimisation	20	10
Tidiness	30	17
Residential Areas	40	30
Roads, Streets and Back Areas	50	37
General Impression	10	9
<b>TOTAL MARK</b>	<b>400</b>	<b>299</b>

### **Overall Development Approach:**

It is quite astonishing how Kilkenny succeeds in increasing its marking at the very top of the range of towns and cities where additional marks are so hard to come by; it is clear that this is due to first-class urban management and a general attitude of openness towards innovation. This year the judging was spread over four days, with quarters of the city walked through at different times of day in order to obtain the broadest possible view and flavour. In regard to negative responses, note was taken of the remark by last year's second adjudicator to the effect that adjudicators can only report on what they see, not what they would wish to see; however there was very little negativity. In the following comments it may be taken that features and sites are mentioned due to their exceptional merit or because they do not quite come up to standard; features and sites not mentioned may be taken as satisfactory. Thank you for your very helpful answers to the questions on the entry form. (Some entries were given under the wrong headings, such as landscaping improvements under Built Environment, but this is trifling and easily rearranged.) It is good to read of the support provided by the official bodies, by businesses and by volunteers. The involvement of school pupils is admirable. It is salutary to note that you exchange visits with other towns in the competition – adjudicators have encouraged this but this is the first year we have actually heard of groups visiting one another. It is even more salutary to note that you are a signatory of the Aalborg charter.

### **The Built Environment:**

It is probably unnecessary to list the superb buildings from all periods which are so well presented – you are naturally familiar with them – but perhaps it would be an injustice not to praise the maintenance of the Castle and its stable yard, St Canice's cathedral, the Rothe House, the Black Abbey, St John's church, the Shee Alashouse, the frontispiece of Switzer's Asylum, the Tholsel, the former Kilkenny College, the numerous 19th century schools, ecclesiastical buildings and churches, including St Mary's cathedral: and so on. No one ever seems to mention the very fine Barracks. This year one's breath was quite taken away by the renovation of

the former Bishop's Palace and its sensitive conversion as HQ of the Heritage Council. Another extremely impressive renovation/adaptation has been the former Workhouse and its surrounding buildings (photographed and entered for an appropriate award) as part of the McDonagh Junction shopping complex: this is most impressive, as is the glazing that creates a delightful seating and cafe area – even if the shopping mall itself is little different to hundreds of others. A decision appears not to have been made about the future of the canopy of the old Railway Station. The change in use of the former Bank of Ireland is successful, as was previously that of the Hibernian Bank. Of business and industrial premises, the units at the Kilkenny Business Park are invariably well presented. The Ulster Bank opposite the Club House is a coarse intrusion into the grace and dignity of Kilkenny's 18th-19th century townscape; it is also the kind of building that will become dated very quickly. There is a place for everything: Michael Ling Motors and the new Leisure Centre suit the neighbourhoods in which they are placed, and indeed enhance them. Two city-centre buildings, so different in function, that were seen to be remarkably well presented, are the Franciscan Friary and the Watergate Theatre. Among the shop fronts that attracted the attention favourably were Hackett's Bookmakers, JMK Goldsmiths, St Canice's Credit Union and the charming and simple McGrath's; these and others were photographed and entered for awards. The rebuilding of the Talbot Tower is a wonderfully imaginative project.

### **Landscaping:**

The major landscaping along the new section of the ring road is impressive and will show its worth in a very few years. Planting at roundabouts and junctions in and around the city was, as usual, most effective. The riverside at Noonan's Folly, with its discreet planting, fine walls and railings, neat paths and steps, was photographed and entered for an award. The flower barges caught the attention favourably. (The ball alley is Graffitiville and the swimming pool one of the least prepossessing ever seen, but they manage to retreat into the background!) The selection of plants in the Rothe House gardens, and their means of laying out, has never been seen by this adjudicator to so scientific as well as attractive an extent in Ireland before: it recalls the best mediaeval gardens in England and Germany. By way of contrast, the sheer spaciousness of the Castle gardens and grounds exhilarates. Greens and small spaces of planting, especially in the western half of the city, create very pleasing 'lungs' and give a sensation of a community that enjoys its local walks and seating areas. It is very good to learn from your photographs that you plant bulbs extensively for spring showing.

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

The ongoing work at Bishop's Meadows will be a first-class amenity when completed; do leave space for the wild flowers – they were looking wonderful towards the end of June. Newpark marsh was looking suitably untouched – it was interesting to read that you have completed a feeding area. Lakeside was also visited. Trees are properly considered under this heading (though of course the heading overlaps with Landscaping): you say you distributed 50 trees to residential areas; certainly it seemed that you had done a much greater number. The tree planting along the new section of the ring-road has already been favourably mentioned. In regard to the older section of the ring road, a bonus has been the way in which the vegetation alongside has proliferated and must surely provide shelter and resources for bird and animal life – perhaps this is one of the places you refer to as the haunt of birds of prey. A much admired sector is the course of the Bregagh river, including the Kenny' Well area, the grassed spaces at the bridge and roundabout (also considered under Landscaping) and the wilder area as it disappears behind buildings. It is good to read that you have undertaken a survey of trees that should be preserved. Your interpretative panels are exemplary.

### **Litter Control:**

You take tremendous trouble over litter prevention and are more successful than most centres (of any size) and therefore it is somewhat galling to have to note that dumping of litter was seen at Kilcrene and also near the children's playground (but clearly not connected with the playground) at Newpark. There was a light scattering of disposable litter on lawns at Bishop Birch Place. The Bregagh contained considerable litter at the bridge mentioned in the previous paragraph. There were broken bottles in the basement area of the Rothe House: this is obviously a wonderful target. These incidences are only mentioned because they happened to be seen while walking – your record is in fact very good indeed. It is excellent that you should object to extended opening hours of takeaways.

### **Waste Minimisation:**

Congratulations to the pupils and staff of the schools that have been awarded Green Flag status. Those recycling centres that were seen were all well looked after. It is good that the city sponsors hazardous waste collections. It is obvious that you are on top of the waste minimisation issue – one which will take on greater and greater importance over the years.

### **Tidiness:**

Kilkenny is in fact a very well kept city. Any major 'untidiness' was of the inevitable kind due to ongoing developmental works. This year it was the Parade, where visitors to this splendid urban space did not have

the opportunity of enjoying it on account of the extensive improvements being undertaken. The same may be said, though to a considerably lesser degree, of the entrance to Tom Moore's Walk at John's Bridge, and the surroundings of the Court House. Kilcrene was mentioned by last year's adjudicator as a relatively untidy area: can this be on account of planning blight? In other words, has the area been reserved for a continuation of the ring road, or some other long-awaited project? Certainly the scruffy nature of the terrain between the Callan Road roundabout and the small hospital suggests this. It would be good to see action taken. Some of the roadsides and verges in the area between the new ring road, Newpark Marsh and some un-named housing estates were far from tidy. A small cluster of ramshackle buildings, which may be of historical importance, were seen at the back of St John's Church.

### **Residential Areas:**

The inherited housing stock is clearly valued greatly – a change from what this adjudicator remembers forty years ago. Old terraces are well maintained, and neighbourhoods of smaller houses and cottages very well kept – a case in point is the area between the disused railway arches and the Nore: neat, unpretentious well-loved homes. Other rows of cottages and small houses were very favourably noted in the large older housing enclaves in the vicinity of St Mary's cathedral. Of exceptionally well presented estates built fairly recently, Talbot's Grove and The Grange might be mentioned, but there are so many – Weir View is another large estate that is beautiful presented and an ideal traffic-free zone for children. Everything seems to have been done by the authorities to keep the neighbourhood of Hebron Park and Bishop Birch Place in good order – the estates are pleasantly planned, the houses are enriched by contrasting colours and there are plenty of open spaces – but a few householders do not seem capable of maintaining their homes and it was sad to see some nice houses boarded up. In the overall picture, this is a relatively small discrepancy.

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

A higher increase in marks would have been preferred here, especially on account of the new ring road, but the poor quality of surfaces and paving of some of the roads in the eastern suburbs has prevented this. The high quality of surfacing, paving and street furniture in the city centre was once again admired. The number and quality of pedestrian crossings and traffic-calming bumps was remarked. Directional signage was seen to be effective and clear. The ugly overhead wires and poles in John Street, Abbey View, etc, would not be tolerated in a small cathedral city on the continent, such as Regensburg or Chartres or Pecs; in urban terms this is like the dark ages. Some streets and estates do not appear to have name plates, and in some cases local people did not know their names! One would like to learn how great has been the effect statistically of the new section of the ring road on decreasing traffic in the city centre; to the outside observer it seemed to be little better than before; it may be that a complete continuation of the ring would be preferable to another cross-city route with a new bridge. It would be interesting to learn from your first-class documentation next year what the real answers to such conundrums may be.

### **General Impression:**

It is not possible in a short report to cover all the excellences of this entry, but the contents of your submission have been eagerly studied and digested. To the visitor, the presence of unending traffic in the main streets is perhaps the most pressing barrier to the enjoyment of this splendid city, but it is clearly understood that there are a hundred other issues that are being systematically and satisfactorily addressed from day to day throughout the year by the local authority, by business and cultural organisations, by residents' associations and by individual householders - and not least by the Keep Kilkenny Beautiful committee. You are certainly living up to your name.

### **Second Round Adjudication:**

The first impression of Kilkenny is the magnificent roundabout at the Dublin, Bennetsbrigde and Boharnatowlish roads, which are presented to the highest standard. Pristine cycle lanes and footpaths were admired in many areas. Ongoing roadworks were noted at the Castle and Canal Square. Incidental planters and hanging baskets were brightened a number of locations and those at St. Johns Church was particularly commended. The waterbourne floral display at the bridge is vibrant and an innovative. The new Leisure Centre is nearing completion and we look forward to this in next years competition. Among the many well-presented businesses in Kilkenny are Butler House, Rustiq, Bambricks, Hotel Kilkenny, The Courthouse, Left Bank, Christy's Bar and Brennan's Bottling Store. Similarly, a high standard is enjoyed throughout the many residential areas including St. Francis Terrace, Corcorans Terrace, Beechlawn, De Loughrey Place, Dukesmeadow and Springmount. The landscaping at the entrance to Rose Hill was quite spectacular. Kilkenny excels in the neatness of side streets and alleys including Mary's Lane, Chapel Avenue and Friary Street. Litter control was very good with an odd outbreak being noted in the city outskirts.

Finally, your committee, supporting agencies and businesses are congratulated on the continued success of Kilkenny in the TidyTowns Competition. Well done!