

# Tidy Towns Competition 2008

## *Adjudication Report*

Centre: **Thomastown** Ref: **908**  
County: **Kilkenny** Mark: **219**  
Category: **D** Date(s): **19/06/2008**

	Maximum Mark	Mark Awarded 2008
Overall Development Approach	50	27
The Built Environment	50	30
Landscaping	50	30
Wildlife and Natural Amenities	50	18
Litter Control	50	30
Waste Minimisation	20	7
Tidiness	30	16
Residential Areas	40	23
Roads, Streets and Back Areas	50	31
General Impression	10	7
<b>TOTAL MARK</b>	<b>400</b>	<b>219</b>

### **Overall Development Approach:**

Your submission has been very encouraging to read. Some years ago Thomastown dropped out of the competition, for no reason that we could discover, when it was doing reasonably well. Had it continued it would probably by now be in the upper bracket of the county, but much has been allowed to slide, organisationally and indeed environmentally. Standards are rising everywhere and it will take a lot of determination, planning, and the exercise of good taste to gain the position to which it is felt Thomastown should rightly aspire; after all, the town has everything going for it in its beautiful situation, its lush natural surroundings, its historical buildings and its picturesque streetscape. It would be well worth your while making a visit, before gardens die back, to last year's winning town, Aughrim, Co Wicklow (other committees in Kilkenny have already done so), not to copy but to see what can be achieved; Aughrim started 20 years ago with very little going for it – an unappealing small town – and its vibrant committee made it what it is. An examination of your documentation demonstrates that all this is within your grasp, and much of it already on the way. Mention of sites and features in the following paragraphs signify that these are exceptionally good or that they are not quite up to standard. (Incidentally, while the amount of documentation is necessary for your own organisation and planning, we do not need to see so much: Kilkenny supplies about a quarter of the papers that you do, and one map is sufficient for such a large city; on your single map next year please mark all sites and features that should be visited, and name all streets and estates clearly.)

### **The Built Environment:**

It is the old mills, warehouses, tower house and town wall, castle, bridge and the church with its adjacent ruined nave and arches, that primarily give Thomastown its unique visual flavour where buildings are concerned, and secondly the lay-out of its streets. Some of the former have been superbly conserved/adapted and it can not be expected, for reasons of financing, that this can happen throughout; but owners of such properties should be encouraged at least to tidy up such buildings and their curtilages and make them safe.

The former Church of Ireland is a case where a new purpose has been found and it looks very well following a period of neglect; this year attention should be given to removing weed growth from the tower. The Roman Catholic church with its unusual belfry spire was well presented, and also the nearby schools and Grennan's College. The Library was admired, as was the very fine Railway Station. Some of the business premises were well presented; it was a pity to see the quite pleasant SuperValu shop in Marsh's street closed, because it could deteriorate into dereliction: let us hope it will find a new owner – a local person remarked that it is 'sadly missed'. The Blackberry Cafe appears to have its original joinery and glazing bars; it was most attractively painted; if all other shops could aspire to this standard you would have a truly spectacular town centre

### **Landscaping:**

There is no major landscaping initiative as yet in Thomastown, though there are ample spaces. You should look at the west bank of the river at Inistioge and the same at Loughlinbridge where the excellent and extensive landscaping has been created on formerly vacant ground. Obvious places would be the approach roads but especially the riverbank by the bridge which at present is astonishingly tacky looking. By contrast, the landscaping at the Ollie Walsh memorial is very tasteful indeed. Planting at the Castle View lookout point and the cemetery is attractive, and there were pleasant small incidents of colour in the town, including tubs, window boxes and hanging baskets.

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

Trees are properly considered under this heading. Twenty young oaks planted in one year is an achievement. The bumblebee shelter and the hedgehog house are projects that also helped to increase marking – neither were seen but it is sufficient to know that they are there and perhaps an energetic enough search was not made. Do remember when noting Wild Life projects on your next entry form to say exactly where they may be found. The Barn-owl project with Birdwatch Ireland should prove fascinating and hopefully will help to stem the decline of these wonderful birds.

### **Litter Control:**

In spite of the good work reported – and it is especially good to read that school children are involved – in litter control, there were some very obvious outbreaks, such as by the Noreside walk and along the boundary of the Carlow road opposite SuperValu. The latter is a tacky area anyway and probably members of the public do not care what is dropped there. A light scattering was seen on two of the greens in housing estates: it should be the responsibility of residents to keep these areas litter-free; if each householder picked up any litter they happened to find every day it would only take two minutes of their time, and perhaps no time at all. Better still, do not drop it. Clearly tourists can not be blamed in these neighbourhoods.

### **Waste Minimisation:**

The new location of the Bring Bank is much more suitable than heretofore. Congratulations on this initiative, and also on the tidiness of the recycling area. The idea of a Champion to oversee this and other categories is first class. It is probably that you have taken note of suggestions in the Race Against Waste booklet since last year.

### **Tidiness:**

What was disappointing is that while so many properties are well kept, some of them extremely well, yet here and there sites can be seen that are ill looked after, and some that are derelict. There is an inconsistency in most streets that needs to be addressed – and indeed, judging by comments in your Development Plan, are being addressed. To give just one example, the Concert Hall and the house next to it are out of place in a street where the other buildings are kept in good order; these two buildings are eminently improvable for they are basically attractive. A considerable amount of kerbside weed was seen, and several unkempt roadside verges within the town area. A very bad example on the date of the visit was the overgrown verges of the road to the Railway Station, the station forecourt and the east side of the tracks. The side road to the left as you leave the town for Waterford was a good example of the mixture of tidiness and the real kind of untidiness referred to above.

### **Residential Areas:**

The older town houses are what give the centre of Thomastown its distinctive charm. Some houses – many of them incorporating a business on the ground floor – were seen to be in need of freshening up with paint. It will, hopefully, be easier to renovate houses when there is less traffic passing by after the opening of the motorway, but that date is still some way off. One example of a truly lovely home is the pink Georgian house on the curve leading up Ladywell which was being painted on the date of the visit. More of this would be welcome. Many well presented cottages were seen on the Mount Juliet Road. Most individual suburban houses on the approach roads are maintained with true pride, with fine gardens enhancing the general scene. Berkeley Lawns has a pleasant mature feeling. Lady's Well is a bright, neat development. Mall Field has excellent green spaces and well spaced and presented homes with parking bays, but the access road was

surprisingly scruffy at the time of the visit. Houses at Dunan are imaginatively grouped; more tree planting would improve this estate tremendously. The Greens could also do with more tree and shrub planting to soften the site (and incidentally to increase marking under Wild Life); this estate is somewhat remote from the town and is of the type that forces residents to make use of the car when, for example, leaving children to school or doing domestic messages. Estates sited in this way should be discouraged, and it is alarming that so many (in other centres) receive planning permission.

**Roads, Streets and Back Areas:**

Surfaces are variable. Some paving in the town is very good indeed. The car park off Marsh's street is an example of how excellent such a facility can be with good initial planning and subsequent maintenance: easy access, well marked spaces, attractive planting and well kept boundaries. Do persist in requests for underground cabling – attractive lamp standards without overhead wires throughout the business streets would make a huge difference to the townscape.

**General Impression:**

If you proceed along the lines outlined in your very impressive documentation you should begin to see a substantial rise in marks awarded from next year. You have all the ingredients for a first class product to hand. Every good wish in your enterprise.