

Tidy Towns Competition 2014

Adjudication Report

Centre: **Thomastown** Ref: **908**
County: **Kilkenny** Mark: **261**
Category: **C** Date(s): **12/06/2014**

	Maximum Mark	Mark Awarded 2014
Community Involvement & Planning	60	40
Built Environment and Streetscape	50	36
Landscaping and Open Spaces	50	38
Wildlife, Habitats and Natural Amenities	50	27
Sustainable Waste and Resource Management	50	11
Tidiness and Litter Control	90	49
Residential Streets & Housing Areas	50	25
Approach Roads, Streets & Lanes	50	35
TOTAL MARK	450	261

Community Involvement & Planning / Rannpháirtíocht an Phobail & Pleanáil:

It was interesting to read in your submission that this is your seventh year of participation because this adjudicator recalls judging Thomastown many more years ago: maybe a former committee went into abeyance – certainly the present committee appear much more deeply involved locally than heretofore and much more concerned about the wider issues of the natural and man-made environment. The 2014-2017 Development Plan is immensely detailed, identifying what you believe needs to be achieved with year-by-year targets all collected under the headings used by the Tidy Towns competition. Opportunities for review are noted; do not be disappointed if not every project can be completed in the timescale allocated. It is appreciated that not all matters come within the capabilities of the committee – this is common to all centres – but what is important is that you use your influence to see that they are attended to by the proper authorities. Your Heritage map is fascinating and it happens that the adjudicator visited all the sites but one (admittedly more by accident than design); the laminated town maps were most helpful with their numerical and alphabetical identifications – certainly the most effective issued in the county this year. Thank you for drawing attention by means of photographs to small achievements that might be missed.

Built Environment and Streetscape / An Timpeallacht Thógtha agus Sráid-dreacha:

It will be very interesting to see the result of the Urban Renewal Project, now under consideration by the County Council. The gradual reconditioning of old street houses is slowly removing the sense of desuetude to what is in fact a very picturesque town centre; certainly there are social reasons why people do not wish to live in small homes in traffic-loud streets, but certainly you are creating a two-pronged approach which – who knows? with economic change – will encourage such neighbourhoods to be recolonized. This was most in evidence in Maudlin Street where there has been a delightful introduction of colour, much more subtle than that seen in West Cork, but since this adjudicator's last visit there have also been palpable improvements in Market Street and Low Street and surroundings. Much good use has been made of the surprising levels of the old town – Thomastown is all stonework and steps – and the town is fortunate that amidst the domestic streetscape there are individual buildings of historical and architectural interest covering several centuries. The former Church of Ireland church is spectacularly kept up by its present owner; the Sessions House is modest but significant; Grennan Mills college makes useful new use of ancient buildings; the Hospital – is it a former workhouse? – has a most distinguished frontage. The quaint CMSI is a handsome building in need of a little TLC. Among the business premises where frontages specially appealed were the Blackberry Café, Murphy's the butcher's, Heal's Pharmacy and McKay's millinery. The reinstatement of the old Fire Station is first rate. The Community Hall restoration has clearly been a real success. St Mary's National School is beautifully presented.

Landscaping and Open Spaces / Tírdhreachú agus Spásanna Oscailte:

Many projects were seen to have been accomplished with more in development. Thomastown lacks a Public Park in the usual sense of the term; this is made up for somewhat by the number of well planted precincts and by floral displays at car parks, in housing areas and at road junctions; the evergreens at Chapel Lane Corner make a nice change. The nearest the town gets to genuine landscaping is the really excellent grounds of the Hospital, from the gate up to the buildings. The growing of vegetables as part of the urban display is imaginative. It was very good to see the riverbank so well looked after (at one time it was a repository of rubbish) including at the back of Low Street. Seating here and in several other locations was seen to be well painted. The 'stone circles' create colourful interest as indeed do the 'tree circles' at Cloghabrody. The circular motif is continued with the raised beds at the Quay. In general, it should be said that tree specialists do not approve of flower or other planting round tree boles. It is salutary to read your appeals for volunteers to take on the watering of the many sites – presumably, from what is seen, you were successful. The Upper Paddock, as far as could be ascertained, will become a valuable amenity; the view is tremendous; so will the Lower Paddock; what is very good is making use of these unique urban levels. Careful tree planting at Newtown Terrace and Cloghabrody in particular should enhance those areas enormously in the course of time. In fact your record in tree planting is first class judging by the statistic quoted and the map showing the spread.

Wildlife, Habitats and Natural Amenities / Fiadhúlra, Gnáthóga agus Taitneamhachtaí Nádúrtha:

It is good to see that you are inspired by Zoe Devlin's Facebook page on wild flowers and that you have participated in a Dawn Chorus Walk. The Upper Paddock has already been mentioned – it should be added that the completion of the sensory garden and biodiversity area will be eagerly looked forward to. The bird, bat and bug residences were not seen so it was good to have the photographs; let us know what species make use of these homes. The Watergarden is impressive and the garden centre a most enviable commercial enterprise; it is good to read that a member of your committee organises a nature trail for children here.

As you are situated in a Special Area of Conservation and adjacent to another you are in a good position to make use of this in your development: are the schools involved in, for example, nature study walks outside the town area, identifying the richness that is before them?

Sustainable Waste and Resource Management / Bainistiú Acmhainní agus Dramhaíola Inbhuanaithe:

Well done to St Mary's and Grennan College for their industry in the Green Flag sector; perhaps other schools in the neighbourhood are involved too. The stages of the St Mary's action plan under the heading of Water make interesting study: best wishes for success in achieving yet another flag, and best wishes to Grennan College in achieving a flag for waste management. It is good to see that you took part in the WEEE recycling day and that you are continuously urging dog walkers to do what they have to do. Your practical work under this heading has been noted, such as running the Thrift Workshop, the Christmas Decoration Swap, the circulation of tips on how to cut down on household waste, etc: your notes are valuable because these activities are invisible to the adjudicators. It was especially interesting to read that of the five businesses that took part in your survey of waste management, all returned positive reactions and that you will be enlarging the scope of the survey next year. The bring banks were seen to be clean and neat.

Tidiness and Litter Control / Slachtmhaireacht agus Rialú Bruscair:

In spite of the work praised above there are still quite a number of derelict or unoccupied sites, though it is appreciated that you are doing everything possible to obviate this. In the town centre there is still too much mass-produced advertising signage: this would not be countenanced, for instance, in a historic town in the US or Germany. It was surprising to see considerable kerbside weed at Dunan and Castle Avenue. Elsewhere weed control was good. The fact that townspeople were seen removing weeds, butts and general litter from the main streets on adjudication day caused a (silent) round of applause from this adjudicator. The turn out of volunteers for the National Clean-up shows a real appreciation of the wish to keep Thomastown tidy. Where does all this litter come from? Have you any way of discovering? In some major centres well publicised prosecutions have helped. It is splendid the way volunteers take part in regular litter picks. Your 'litterbuggy' should be patented.

Residential Streets & Housing Areas / Sráideanna Cónaithe & Ceantair Tithíochta:

The 'Tower House' on Low Street was admired; so was a beautiful Georgian house, covered in Virginia creeper, across the bridge. There are many individual homes that are presented with pride both in the town and on surrounding roads. An unnamed group of newish houses on the Waterford road, of imaginative design and making use of solar energy, is particularly praiseworthy. Also on the outskirts, at The Greens, there is over-emphasis on what might be termed the wild-flower meadow; verges require trimming and timber fencing needs repair; each householder should heed the well-known motto 'Look after your own patch!' – this should also be taken into consideration at Dunan and Castle Avenue to include the short stretch of kerb in front of each house which should be so easily dealt with in a couple of minutes each month. It is good to learn that steps are in progress for grassing the open spaces and removing tar from the old playground. Ladyswell is smart and urbane. It is good to learn that you have at least two active Residents Associations. The various sections of Maudlin Court are well supplied with a fine selection of trees. In several well kept housing areas there are a number of boundary walls that need freshening up with paint to match the good appearance of the houses to which they belong.

Approach Roads, Streets & Lanes / Bóithre Isteach, Sráideanna & Lánaí:

It would be interesting to learn if the M9 has affected the town either by decreased traffic or by decreased business or both. Traffic management seems to be much improved by the ne-way system. The roundabout on the Kilkenny road is very well presented. The trim verges on the approach roads leave space for wild life. Young roadside trees

are conspicuous by their number and variety. Street surfaces are mainly good except for the approach to Cloghabrody and Dunan. The first class municipal car park by the Quay is enhanced by the planting, by the wild roses, the valerian, and the rock face background; the car park on the level above is enhanced by the wonderful view over the Nore. Stone wall restorations on approach roads and indeed elsewhere are excellent. A number of well maintained and interesting interpretative boards were seen. Attractive street name signs were seen, though not everywhere.