

Tidy Towns Competition 2018

Adjudication Report

Centre: **Athy** Ref: **354**
County: **Kildare** Mark: **285**
Category: **E** Date(s): **11/07/2018**

	Maximum Mark	Mark Awarded 2017	Mark Awarded 2018
Community – Your Planning and Involvement	60	45	45
Streetscape & Public Places	50	40	41
Green Spaces and Landscaping	50	37	38
Nature and Biodiversity in your Locality	50	30	31
Sustainability – Doing more with less	50	17	17
Tidiness and Litter Control	90	46	47
Residential Streets & Housing Areas	50	32	33
Approach Roads, Streets & Lanes	50	32	33
TOTAL MARK	450	279	285

Community – Your Planning and Involvement / An Pobal - Pleanáil agus Rannpháirtíocht:

Cuireann an moltóir seo fáilte roimh Athy Baile Atha I chuig Comórtas na mBailte Slachtmhara SuperValu 2018 agus chuig Ceiliúradh 60 Bliain an Chomórtais. Athy Tidy Towns Committee is very welcome to the SuperValu Tidy Towns Competition 2018, your 20th year entering the competition. Thank you for your very comprehensive application and submission prepared for this year's entry, including the many photographs of your activities, newspaper clippings and the Athy Tidy Towns Plan 2015-2019. The base map included with your submission was rather small and a larger A3 size map providing more detail on the project locations would be preferable for a Town the size of Athy. It is noted that some documents and supplementary material referred to in last year's report have been re-submitted this year. You have a Committee of 12 Members and organise at least 20 meetings per year and you can call on 15 volunteers to undertake various tasks on your behalf. To further your aims, Athy Tidy Towns Committee has links with a range of local organisations including Kildare County Council, Athy Municipal District, the Local Community Men's Shed, Birdwatch Ireland, Waterways Ireland, Civil Defence and Coca Cola Concentrate, Athy. One wonders has Athy Tidy Towns been able to develop any formal links over the years with local business groupings in the area? This can be very important as Tidy Towns activities can have a significant impact on the development of local business and Tourism and vice versa. Communication with the general public is through Social Media, Newsletters, Public Meetings, Radio and contacts with Residents Associations. Your Committee's engagement with local youth is through the Green School Committees, Youth Café, Scouts and Skate and Public Parks. It is evident that Athy Tidy Towns main aim is to encourage local residents to get involved with their Community and is working hard to enhance the social and economic standing of the Town. With a strong Tidy Towns presence, the future looks brighter for Athy to become a more pleasant place in which to live, work, and to visit.

Streetscape & Public Places / Sráid-Dreach & Áiteanna Poiblí:

The streetscape of Athy follows the pattern of the typical Irish Market Town. However, the Town is uniquely endowed with many very notable built and natural heritage assets. The quality of the heritage buildings and public spaces in the central part of the town is superb. Add to this the wonderful River Barrow and Grand Canal waterways and you have a perfect combination to ensure that with careful planning, the future is very bright for the development of your town. Ultimately, the presentation of the built heritage in a Town like Athy is extremely important and the Tidy Towns Committee has a pivotal role to play in ensuring the Town is presented to the general public and tourists alike to the highest possible standard. In general, the presentation of shopfronts and facades of business premises in Athy was found to be of a good standard. The presentation of Clancy's licenced premises and the Nag's Head public house were particularly admired. Quite a number of unoccupied business premises were noted along Leinster Street. Are there any plans to renovate these properties as part of the Government's 'Repair and Lease Scheme' or 'Shopfront Improvement Grant Scheme'? Significant grant funding is available for

refurbishment works undertaken as part of these schemes. Some shopfront designs unfortunately fall below the standard required in a traditional streetscape setting, such as at the Euro Zone shop, Carmen's Barber Shop, Deelish Deli, Paddy Power and Boylesports among others. Overhead power lines are also an issue here in relation to visual intrusion on the streetscape. The presentation of the Bay Tree Restaurant on Stanhope Street was greatly admired. St. Michael's Church was visited and the interesting heritage signs erected by Athy Town Council were noted here. On a very hot sunny day the shade provided by the London Plane Trees on Emily Square was very much appreciated. This is splendid public space which is enhanced by the beautiful 1798 Memorial. Unfortunately, the fountain no longer appears to be working. The tourist information signage here is also a little dirty and faded and needs to be renewed. Seating in the square requires to be refurbished. It is the adjudicator's view that there is too much car domination in the Square and perhaps it is time to reduce the number of car parking spaces provided here and introduce pedestrian friendly designed landscape elements. The Courthouse building is very striking. Are there any short-term plans for White's Castle in terms of possible tourism development or public access? The plaques on the side of the Castle erected by Athy Town Council were positively noted. Could a sign be erected here providing a more extensive explanation to visitors of the history and development of this important landmark in the Town? Through Traffic is a major issue in Athy Town and it was wondered are there plans for an Inner By Pass or Relief Road to remove the negative impacts of heavy traffic on the walkability of the Town Centre. The Pay Phones at Duke Street detract from the streetscape here and are probably unnecessary with the advent of the mobile phone? The Crom a Boo Bridge is a wonderful element in the built heritage of Athy Town. The railings on bridge however, would benefit from painting. The Edmund Rice Square was visited and surfaces here could be improved and it would be good to introduce tree planting to enhance the overall presentation of the car-park. Repaving and cable undergrounding works would enhance the streetscape along Duke Street. The Gillen Jewellers and McManus Solicitors premises on Duke Street were well presented with good quality window displays and flower boxes. The area around Augustus Bridge on the Canal was admired and in particular the Car Park area. The signs attached to the wall of a building facing the car park were noteworthy and these provided extensive information on the Maltings, the Grand Canal and the River Barrow. The conversion and refurbishment of the Dominican Church to create a modern Library Building for the Town has been wonderfully executed and this landmark building located in a sylvan setting on the banks of the river Barrow was a joy to behold - congratulations to all concerned with the delivery of this project. The presentation of 'A and A' Pharmacy on Woodstock Street was greatly admired. The wooden flower barrels really enhanced this area. The residential property owners in Woodstock Street are to be commended for the wonderful presentation of their houses. The frontages of the Ladbrokes Betting Premises and Miran's Pet and Grooming store could be examined in terms of appropriateness and impact of their shopfronts on the streetscape. The new apartment development on Nelson Street enhances the streetscape of the town as does the Methodist Church which was also presented to a high standard. The Athy Scouts premises was visited and from what was visible from the road, the Scouts Group appear to be very active and the grounds behind the railings were very well looked after.

Green Spaces and Landscaping / Spásanna Glasa agus Tírdhreachú:

The People's Park was visited and the wonderful sylvan setting and extensive range of mature specimen trees situated here was a delight to behold. The children's playground is a splendid facility and was a hive of activity providing joy and entertainment for many local families. The planters on the central stone wall at Church Road from Railway Bridge to Leinster Street were greatly admired and these provided a welcoming feature for visitors to the Town. Additional flower barrels have been installed this year at Meeting Lane car park, on the Dublin Road, Carlow Road and Kilkenny Road. These planting schemes help to create a good first impression when one enters the Town - well done. You have also installed flower filled boats on the Carlow Road, Monasterevin Road and on the Stradbally Road. The use of herbaceous perennial type planting schemes at suitable prominent locations in the town with associated bulb plantings for Spring displays, is always recommended. This type of planting scheme has good visual impact but is permanent and therefore, minimises maintenance inputs. The use of perennials in the concrete flower planters near the Courthouse was positively noted. The lavender planting outside the Doctor's surgery at Convent lane was a superb feature here and was buzzing with bees foraging in the sunshine.

Nature and Biodiversity in your Locality / An Dúlra agus an Bhithéagsúlacht i do cheantar:

You are very lucky to have the river Barrow and the Grand Canal passing through your Town. The Barrow Walk is a wonderful amenity and both the canal and the river provide important habitats sustaining a wide range of wildlife species. The waterways also provide significant recreational possibilities and it was great to see the Athy Boat Tour's boat the 'Freedom of the Water' in operation on the river during the visit. The tourist potential for Athy in relation to the future development of these waterways is very significant. It is noted that you have undertaken a Swift Survey and a Bat Survey and you propose to carry out Flora and Fauna surveys on the river in the future. It is heartening to note that Athy is a stronghold for the wonderful airborne Swift and that you were able to locate a total of 121 nests in the Town. A walk and talk on the Swift was also held in conjunction with Wild Kildare, as part of Biodiversity Week in May of this year. Wildflowers to encourage pollinators have also been established on a site St. John's Lane in conjunction with the Athy Scouts Group. Well done to Scoil Phádraig Naofa for securing five Green Flags and for carrying out the student biodiversity survey.

Sustainability – Doing more with less / Inmharthanacht - Mórán ar an mbeagán:

The environmental problems associated with the disposal of plastic and the contamination of the world's oceans with plastic waste is well known and campaigns to create awareness of the need to reduce the amount of plastic packaging on products sold to consumers are very worthwhile. It is good to see that Athy Tidy Towns has engaged with this initiative this year and it is noted the a 'Free from Plastic Day' was held in April. The 'upcycling' of old bicycles by the Athy Men's Shed to create attractive floral displays fits well under this category as does the re-use of

canoes to provide bespoke floral planters on approach roads. The whole area of usage of energy, fossil fuels, transport, CO2 emission reduction and Climate Change are also important considerations under this category. Therefore, other initiatives for next year for Athy Tidy Towns Committee to consider might include promoting the use of low carbon vehicles and pursuing the installation of additional electric car charge point(s) in the Town. The possible development of a greenways/blueways along the River Barrow/Grand Canal and other cycle routes and parking facilities in the area could be investigated, where feasible. The further promotion of grant aid for the installation of wall and attic insulation on older building stock in the Town, the greater use of solar panels on roofs on public buildings and heat exchange units to reduce energy consumption by households/businesses are worthy projects to consider. Significant grants are now available for these works. The Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland website has good information in relation to the development of Better Energy Communities.

Tidiness and Litter Control / Slachtmhaireacht agus Rialú Bruscair:

It is great to know that Athy Tidy Towns Committee undertakes litter patrols and clean ups every Friday night throughout the year -well done. It is important that this work, carried out by fellow townspeople, is very visible to the general public so that people are discouraged from littering and defacing their town. Two staff members were noted collecting litter during the day in the Town and a large number of plastic bags full of litter were left in the car park beside Augustus Bridge for later collection. Despite this there was some litter noted on footpaths in the Town Centre. However, the 'Please put your litter in the bin ' signs were dotted around the Town, confirming your ongoing commitment to tackling this problem. The Recycling facility at Edmund Rice Square was found to be neat and tidy with good clean signage and an attractive stone wall surround. It is good to see you have taken steps to remove one of the phone boxes at Edmund Rice Square.

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

Athy Tidy Towns Committee liaises closely with local Residents Associations regarding the maintenance and upkeep of their areas. The 'Best Kept Estates' Competition and Awards Night are great ways to encourage residents to maintain and improve the presentation of their estates over time and residents do take great pride in their areas as a result. It is clear that things are improving in Athy and well done to those estates who were successful in the Pride of Place Awards this year. Branswood Estate was visited and was presented to a good standard. However, more tree planting on roadside margins and on open spaces would enhance this area. At Carbury Park which is located beside Woodstock Castle, there is a good line of Turkish Hazel trees and tree and shrub planting along the wall. However, some repair works on the stone wall are needed here. At Carrington Court there is algal staining on walls at the entrance to the estate which needs painting or chemical treatment. White Castle Lawns estate has well landscaped open spaces which enhance this area. However, the wooden flower tubs are now in poor condition and could be replaced.

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

Thanks are due to Athy Concentrates for their assistance to you in installing recycled canoe planters on the approaches to the Town. It is good to note that you have also been active in removing excessive signage on approach roads. The presentation of Church Road with mature trees, good footpaths and road surfaces was particularly admired. Road surfaces and markings in the centre of the Town require improvement at a number of locations. The black and white street name signs and fingerpost signs significantly enhance the townscape. The approach to the Town from Kilkenny has good markings and surfaces. On the access road to Minch Malt there is an impressive avenue of trees, although it would be good to rationalise the existing signage located at the entrance here. The approach to the Town from Stradbally has generally poor road surfaces and markings. The signage at the Plant Hire premises along this road may need to be examined in relation to the visual impact on the Town approach. The Monasterevin approach is very pleasing with wonderful views across the river. The suckering growth of the roadside trees here would need to be controlled to ensure the views towards the river are not obscured. The Aldi premises here were very well presented and road surfaces and markings were also to a good standard. The Grotto area is very striking combining a strong blue and white colour scheme. The Carlow approach to Athy is very attractive with well-appointed stone walls and boundary tree planting and road surfaces and markings are to a good standard. On the Dublin approach to the Town, the plentiful advertising signage predominates. Otherwise the many historic properties here add to the high quality of this entrance to the Town. The roundabout with Canal lock feature was well presented and this highlights the Town's historic connection with the development of the Canal. The Kilkenny approach to the Town Centre is dominated by large unsightly concrete industrial premises. It would be worthwhile to try and introduce some tall fastigate tree planting on the road side of these premises, to ameliorate the severe visual impact of these buildings on the Town. Athy Train Station is a striking building of significant character with a complex facade and exquisite fenestration details and this was particularly admired.

Concluding Remarks:

Athy has much to offer the visitor and has significant potential to progress well in the competition and to further develop as a Heritage Town. A strong Tidy Towns voice and ongoing commitment to the incremental improvement of the Town over time, will foster greater community spirit and will help guide future initiatives in a sustainable and considered way. You are wished well with your future endeavours.