

"Caring for our environment"

Centre : **ABBEYLEIX**
County : **LAOIS**
Category : **C**

Results

Date of Adjudication : 17-06-96

	Maximum Mark	Mark Awarded
Overall Developmental Approach	50	33
Wildlife and Natural Amenities	30	14
Landscaping	40	28
The Built Environment	40	29
Litter Control	40	29
Tidiness	20	13
Residential Areas	30	20
Roads, Streets and Back Areas	40	30
General Impression	10	6
TOTAL MARK	300	202

Adjudicator's Comments

OVERALL DEVELOPMENTAL APPROACH

This adjudicator has been through Abbeyleix very many times over very many years and has always admired it, but had not been assigned to adjudicate until this year. The favourite overall impression becomes slightly less favourable when details are looked at more closely. It is surprising that there are a number of discrepancies in what has been designated a "Heritage Town". Excellent maintenance stands cheek-by-jowl with poorly kept sites; one moves, from the trim to the shabby and back to the trim, quite frequently in a walk through the town. It is disappointing to read the remarks in the questionnaire about lack of sponsorship (why is this?) but by contrast it is wonderful to have such support from the Community Employment Project, from the Parish Employment Committee and from FAS - and all this is well deserved and will undoubtedly show fine results over a period of time. When supplying your map next year, please identify the recent improvements and the sites to be particularly inspected. It is unlikely that they will be missed, but one wants to be sure. (For example, a "1" may mean the Sculpture Garden or Knocknamoe House or both and the "1" was looked at - but please write in the name).

WILDLIFE AND NATURAL AMENITIES

This is the ideal town for amenity walks and nature trails, but there seem to be few. The lane past the Sports Park is inviting, but on adjudication day was badly littered. Natural features do not appear to be signposted but perhaps this will be done when the Heritage Centre has been completed. Existing sidewalks on the roads to the south west certainly provide really charming views and plenty of interest in the older dwellings all around.

LANDSCAPING

The work being undertaken at the Heritage Centre is ongoing and will surely provide excellent results. The Sculpture Park is one of the most attractively designed and maintained town-centre greens seen this year. Tree planting in the street appears to be continuous over the years, annuals were doing well at their bases on adjudication day. The planting in the car park at the Catholic Church was admired as was the well-mowed triangular green on the Ballinakill road. The avenue of limes leading to the Church of Ireland is exceptionally handsome and this whole precinct is beautifully kept and truly appropriate to a Heritage Town.

THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT

Buildings as diverse as the two churches, the Garda Station, the old Railway Station, the Hospital (with its pleasant grounds) and First Ireland Spirits are well looked after and make their particular kinds of impact. Abbeyleix Motors is an undistinguished building painted in bright red with a surprisingly successful result - an imaginative touch. Knocknamoe House was praised by last year's adjudicator and has retained its pristine look. The creeper-covered Preston House has real quality. The business premises proposed for the national competition are very spruce but unfortunately not unique enough to compete with a hundred or so very special entries. Two conspicuous derelict sites will presumably be attended to in the fullness of time - one at the central cross roads, the other near the Church of Ireland. A number of business premises have poor quality facias and signage and therefore are at loggerheads with those which have been carefully decorated.

LITTER CONTROL

There was very little litter in the main streets on adjudication day but the lane leading to the sports ground was badly littered. (It would take half a dozen members of a sports club only ten minutes to clear it).

TIDINESS

Litter was not a major contributor to untidiness. Kerbside weed, especially on the Mountrath road, was

very noticeable. Unattractive signage has been referred to above. The poles and wirescapes are very obtrusive. These have been removed from some town centres, especially in Heritage Towns and the result is immensely successful. It is, however, an extremely expensive undertaking for the authorities involved. Weeds were growing on the monument.

RESIDENTIAL AREAS

Most of Abbeyleix is residential. In the older areas the Victorian cottage-orne style (the best example is the school teacher's house near the Church of Ireland) and the plainer Georgian predominate; householders seem to take great pride in these properties. (Some of the latter have inappropriate PVC glazing bars and these are definitely to be discouraged in a Heritage Town). Street terraces are generally well looked after - there is a good example on the Mounthraught road. Newer estates, such as Balladine and those on the Ballinakill road, make excellent use of wide and well-trimmed lawns. It is very encouraging to see stone gate-piers being re-erected at a house on the Rathdowney road. Many private homes have charming front gardens.

ROADS, STREETS AND BACK AREAS

Surfaces and paving vary from the excellent - opposite the Heritage Centre - to the very poor. Lighting standards look well at the Heritage Centre and outside the Church of Ireland. The approach roads vary considerably; from Portlaoise it is first class, from Durrow good, from Ballinakill fair. The approach from Mounthraught is inconsistent - some well trimmed verges and well kept frontages alongside the not so good. This is even more marked on the approach from Ballyroan. The lane to the sports ground has been referred to above, as have the poles and wires.

GENERAL IMPRESSION

A town of much character, gradually moving towards achieving its potential.