

Tidy Towns Competition 2009

Adjudication Report

Centre: **Abbeyleix** Ref: **302**
County: **Laois** Mark: **288**
Category: **C** Date(s): **22/06/2009**
30/07/2009

	Maximum Mark	Mark Awarded 2009
Overall Development Approach	50	46
The Built Environment	50	37
Landscaping	50	41
Wildlife and Natural Amenities	50	27
Litter Control	50	33
Waste Minimisation	20	11
Tidiness	30	17
Residential Areas	40	28
Roads, Streets and Back Areas	50	39
General Impression	10	9
TOTAL MARK	400	288

Overall Development Approach:

Abbeyleix is moving towards the very top of the centres in the competition due to the vision and hard work of the committee, supported by residents and business people, and by the official bodies. Thank you for your impressive Work Plan 2009-12. It might also include target years for starting/continuing/completing each project, so as not to overtax human and other resources by attempting to accomplish all projects simultaneously. Your map would be more useful if more comprehensive – for example, all housing estates should be marked and named; we try not to miss anything, but it is possible that we do if guidance is lacking. It is understandable that comments such as those you quote about 'rusty sheds' can cause irritation, but the judges are bound to mention what they see and last year's adjudicator certainly saw rusty sheds. Such observations are only intended for passing on to property owners if the committee thinks its appropriate.

The Built Environment:

Congratulations to those who have taken the initiative in applying to the Heritage Council to have an architectural conservation area created. The Market House has come through its controversies and alterations superbly well and richly deserves its recent award. Partly as a result of this renovation and partly because of other physical improvements in the town centre Abbeyleix has become a first rate example of what can be done to rehabilitate effectively the early-19th century estate town, of which there are all too few left in good condition. An important corner site was seen under scaffolding on the east side of the Main Street nearby and its renovation will be eagerly looked forward to. Scoil Muire looked as if it was about to be extended. The new Fire Station is on an appropriately accessible site where it does not conflict with the existing streetscape. The District Hospital in its pleasant grounds was admired. The sports ground Pavilion and its surroundings were very well presented; the Parish Hall nearby could do with freshening up with paint before next year. A factory building (the name of which is something like 'Ireland Spur?') in the industrial estate impressed. The two

churches, superb variants of the Gothic style, were well maintained and presented, as always. Congratulation on a number of initiatives such as the salvaging of the iron gates for Father Breen Park and the gas lamp standards for the exterior of the Library.

Landscaping:

Information on Landscaping was omitted from your entry form, but a considerable amount of excellent work was seen. Pride of place must surely go to the Sensory Gardens, which this adjudicator had never seen because it was closed on previous visits – the layout of the various elements of garden design in a comparatively small space, and the selection of plants for these mutually dependent areas, is quite remarkable. The planting and arrangement of sculpture at the Heritage House creates a fine visual marker at an important division of roads. The park next the Citizens Advice Bureau makes a pleasing addition to this attractive street. A pleasant run of roadside planting on the Carlow road, most of it probably undertaken by residents, makes an attractive first taste of Abbeyleix coming from that direction. Several housing estates make a fine contribution, especially the entrance to an estate on the Ballyroad Road and internal landscaping at an estate on the Carlow Road. Tubs, hanging baskets and other floral containers provide attractive punctuation marks throughout the town and suburbs.

Wildlife and Natural Amenities:

The project for Kilnamuck raised bog is impressive and will take considerable time and expertise to develop. The proposed nature trail on the former Great Southern railway (which this adjudicator recalls travelling on by train!) will be of immense scientific and environmental interest to townspeople and visitors alike – and simply as a pleasant track for walkers. It is good to read of your community workshops under the aegis of the LCC environmental officer. Thank you for drawing attention to the native saplings planted at The Park. Your tree-planting programme has always been admired and the involvement of children is exemplary.

Litter Control:

It is hoped that the fines, which you secured for littering, were well publicised and will help to deter other dumpers. It is a disagreeable action, but one that has to be done. Well done on your regular litter-picks and also for involving school children in the same.

Waste Minimisation:

You say that the Green School status of Scoil Muire 'has transformed the thinking of the children and their parents'; this is readily understandable. The re-usable lunch-box scheme is something one would like to see introduced throughout the country. It is good that you are persisting with your efforts to involve the business community. The recycling point was visited and seen to be accessible and clean.

Tidiness:

The town was relatively tidy on the date of first adjudication. The field below the Industrial Estate gives a poor impression on arrival in Abbeyleix from Mountrath, but it is outside the area of adjudication and is only mentioned here in passing.

Residential Areas:

The street houses – many of them business premises - are what give Abbeyleix its genuine flavour and they are almost all well presented. Some superbly maintained 19th century homes were seen on the Ballycolla road. A charming lodge near the hospital was in need of attention. A unnamed road to the NE of the town, containing a variety of mainly small houses, has a pleasant informality. Some properties, on the otherwise well kept Knocknamie Lane, should have their boundary walls repainted before next year; this was also the case at a housing estate on the Carlow Road and at Abbey Crescent. Vesey Close: for those who relish suburban neatness, this is it par excellence. An unnamed estate on the Mountrath road, with excellent timber fencing throughout, will need some time to blend with its surroundings in the way its neighbour Balladine Drive has already done – time for planting to grow up. A double estate on the Ballyroan Road, which appears to be unnamed was admired for the variation in house types, materials and textures; the basic design of dormers, gables and bargeboards is most attractive; this neighbourhood with its spacious lawns is ideal for children; much the same may be said of the adjacent Ashbrook. Rathmoyle Crescent was seen to be a neatly kept small estate, as was an apparently unnamed estate on the byroad by the Manor Hotel.

Roads, Streets and Back Areas:

Road surfaces and paving are generally good, except for the by-road near the Manor Hotel and Laburnum Close looked as if it was about to have much needed resurfacing. Street furniture, particularly in the town

centre, is of a very high standard – including signposts, bollards, railings, seats and lamps. The new bus shelter was seen to be in a more convenient situation. Parking bays were well delineated. Many traffic-calming measures were favourably noted. The high-walled lanes, such as that leading to Father Breen Park, are full of character; it is good to see stone walls introduced in some new housing areas and old stone walls repaired; it was good to have the stone wall at Casserly's Pharmacy pointed out, where the cheaper option would have been cement blocks. We will be greatly interested to hear what the effect of the opening of the motorway will have on the life of the town.

General Impression:

Abbeyleix continues to delight the visitor in proportion, as the townspeople improve their man-made and natural environment, and press the official bodies to support their new initiatives. Every good wish for the continuation of this highly concentrated and creditable work.

Second Round Adjudication:

Abbeyleix has always been admired by this adjudicator, though generally when driving through on the way to Cork. It has one of the finest collections of shop and pub fronts that I have seen. The busy Cork-Dublin traffic makes it quite a noisy place and the opening of the bypass in the coming years will no doubt transform the town's atmosphere. The restored Market House more than deserves its recent prize and creates a wonderful focal point for the town. It is a great example of how architecture can enhance the lives of ordinary people. The 'Abbey Gate' pub is the 'fly in the ointment' here, but could well be screened through painting the hoardings. The town looked exceptionally well on the day of 2nd adjudication and, although small amounts of litter were spotted, there was generally a high standard maintained. While the focus seems to be on planting trees for year-round effect – and this is great – the few hanging baskets that were in place were a bit worn out by the end of July.

The range of small businesses, cafés etc. lends a strong community atmosphere that augments the built heritage of the town. Congratulations and keep up the good work
!