

Tidy Towns Competition 2009

Adjudication Report

Centre: **Mountmellick** Ref: **416**
County: **Laois** Mark: **241**
Category: **D** Date(s): **25/06/2009**

| | Maximum Mark | Mark Awarded 2009 |
|--------------------------------|-----------------|----------------------|
| Overall Development Approach | 50 | 43 |
| The Built Environment | 50 | 32 |
| Landscaping | 50 | 34 |
| Wildlife and Natural Amenities | 50 | 22 |
| Litter Control | 50 | 22 |
| Waste Minimisation | 20 | 14 |
| Tidiness | 30 | 15 |
| Residential Areas | 40 | 27 |
| Roads, Streets and Back Areas | 50 | 25 |
| General Impression | 10 | 7 |
| TOTAL MARK | 400 | 241 |

Overall Development Approach:

Mountmellick is such a distinctive town, with a number of unique features and a particularly interesting hinterland, both of the natural and man-made variety, that it is a real pity the written submission is lacking in the detail that would supply the adjudicators with the kind of background information which other committees do not seem to have any difficulty in providing. When an entry arrives two weeks after judging has started, and when it does not include a map, the inevitable reaction must be that this committee can not be serious about its work – but on reading the entries it becomes clear that that assumption would be quite wrong. You are invited, in Section 4 for example, to 'mark on your map any items you wish to ensure are seen by the adjudicators': you know the town, but you can not expect visitors to know it so well! We try to see everything, but without the simple expedient of a map it is always possible that some features or sites may escape our attention. As well as this, several housing estates do not have name signs and it is astonishing how many residents, when asked about a certain site, express no knowledge! It is more than likely that you are due a considerably higher mark and it is hoped that next year the situation will change, and that Mountmellick will take the higher place that we believe it merits. Your interaction with other voluntary groups and with official bodies, as described on the entry form, is exemplary, as is your involvement with the schools.

The Built Environment:

The dignified streets in the centre of the town are matched in quality by a number of individual public buildings, that have recently undergone rehabilitation or redecoration. Work on the Court House is most impressive. The green and cream façade of the Town Hall is cool and pleasing. The Gothic Methodist church next door, with its neatly kept forecourt, makes a charming contrast. Some attention is needed to the masonry of the Presbyterian church. Most of the important buildings, such as these, are modest in design and dimension, and fit into the streetscape so admirably; even the elegant Church of Ireland church is on a comparatively small scale. Industry, as exemplified in mills and maltings, are much grander, and social

change in the 19th century is powerfully demonstrated by the size and grandeur of the Roman Catholic church, so well maintained today. A renovation on the intersection of Emmet and O'Moore streets was appreciated. The Garda station is very much in traditional style and is well presented. Business premises in O'Connell Square and the main streets almost all respect the consistency of the original streetscape; the very smart 4-storey building containing Butler's Pharmacy – apartments or offices perhaps – demonstrates this point. It is wonderful to see so many of the original doorcases preserved. Outside the central core, the Crèche was admired as an imaginative piece of modern design; the fine old industrial buildings adjacent are admirably adapted to their new uses.

Landscaping:

The hard-landscaping of O'Connell Square, adorned with floral containers and hanging baskets, was attractive and appropriate to this important urban space. Tubs and hanging baskets were seen to create points of colour at St Joseph's church, the Community Arts Centre and in several other locations. Landscaping on approach roads was also eye-catching, none more so than at the railway arch which has been made into such an unforgettable feature some way outside the town; the 'Failte' planting near Manor Grove made a nice statement. Planting by the Convent Bridge was very favourably noted. A well maintained and interesting graveyard was seen off the Tullamore road. Do you plant bulbs for early spring showing? Daffodils can make a wonderful addition to roadside verges, bluebells to woodland. If you do, please mention it on your entry form.

Wildlife and Natural Amenities:

Tree planting comes properly under this heading; the tradition of tree planting over long years has made its mark. It was good to read that you assisted the Angling Club with the cleaning of the Owenass River: this background information is most useful and you should include more of the kind in future submissions. It took some research to find the Slí na Sláinte – obvious when found – in fact the neighbourhood of the town is rich in walking routes, with riverine and woodland destinations. Do you engage with wild-life projects in the schools?

Litter Control:

Smart new or comparatively new bins were seen. It is good to read that you have the use of a vacuum sweeper. You do not mention if you organise voluntary helpers in litter picking. Certainly, there was a better control than as reported last year. Two 'black spots' on the date of this year's visit were Pattison's estate and an unnamed estate near the Hospital.

Waste Minimisation:

This mark is well above average for any town and is largely contributed to by the fact that two schools (are there actually more than this?) have been awarded green flags: heartiest congratulations to Scoil Iosaif Naoimhta and the Community School, and also to the teachers and parents. You mention that you work 'in conjunction with the Mountmellick Environmental Group', but could you supply a little more information on this activity?; and on your map next year, please mark the Recycling Point(s).

Tidiness:

In spite of some minor dereliction, the town centre and housing estates were reasonably tidy on the date of the visit, though it goes without saying that the enormously prominent site on the Portlaoise road gives a poor impression of the first sight of the town, especially when coming from that direction. Some small unsightly points, that could be fixed without much difficulty, are the boundary wall of the Fire Station, which needs painting, the repair of a stone wall at the Business Park and a lengthy dilapidated and weed-infested post-and-wire fence on the Clonaslee road (at a section where there are superb trees).

Residential Areas:

The street houses, many of them also business premises, are the pride of Mountmellick and are what give the town its particular quality. Exceptionally attractive and well kept 19th century homes were seen on the outskirts, on and around the Portlaoise road. Early- and mid-20th century local authority housing on the Monasterevan road was seen to be remarkably well kept up. Five neat small town houses were favourable noted just off O'Connell Square, blending with the older surroundings. Pattison's estate and adjoining roads are very mixed – some homes are presented with real pride, while others less so; the central grassed space was well kept, but two side areas were unkempt, with poor quality fencing. An extensive, (unnamed) comparatively new town-centre scheme, distinguished by the use of brick and stone dressings, is imaginatively laid out; unfortunately there was considerable weed and planted areas were not well looked after. At Manor Grove, the look (and the scent!) of clover in the open spaces at the time of the visit impressed;

this is a pleasantly laid out scheme with a welcome variety of colour on the houses. Manor Court is very spruce with a charming type of modern house to a traditional pattern. Davitt Court benefits from preserved rural hedgerows. Tree planting will help Willow Grove to blend in. Wolfe Tone Court was the best kept suburban estate seen – landscaping, tree-planting, paving etc: perhaps, these are retirement homes? More information will be welcome.

Roads, Streets and Back Areas:

The town centre benefits enormously from the absence of wirescapes and ugly poles, and from the high quality lighting standards. The road level at Manor Grove should urgently be raised to the level of the manhole covers. The car park at the cemetery was very well maintained. Surfaces and paving are of variable quality, but mainly good. Inconsistencies in the maintenance of verges on approach roads were mentioned by last year's adjudicator. It was good to see a number of fine stone walls, old and new.

General Impression:

It was very interesting to have the opportunity of revisiting Mountmellick after a number of years and of seeing the many improvements that have taken place. There is a sense that the unique 18th and 19th century townscape is now more generally appreciated. If the committee were to provide more background information on the entry form, including a comprehensive map, it is certain that a higher mark could be awarded as a result.