

Tidy Towns Competition 2009

Adjudication Report

Centre: **Portarlinton** Ref: **312**
County: **Laois** Mark: **208**
Category: **E** Date(s): **25/06/2009**

	Maximum Mark	Mark Awarded 2009
Overall Development Approach	50	27
The Built Environment	50	27
Landscaping	50	32
Wildlife and Natural Amenities	50	19
Litter Control	50	24
Waste Minimisation	20	9
Tidiness	30	8
Residential Areas	40	28
Roads, Streets and Back Areas	50	28
General Impression	10	6
TOTAL MARK	400	208

Overall Development Approach:

It is most disappointing to have to place Portarlinton so low in the list of marks awarded to centres in Laois this year – as, indeed, was the case last year. The town has a remarkable history from which many fine reminders are to be seen in the architecture and streetscape, and the town is pleasantly situated in an area of natural and scientific interest. The fact is, it has been the most inconsistently presented town seen this year, changing within a few hundred yards from well kept to near dereliction; to give one tiny random example, the handsome railings in front of the Fire Station and the bedraggled fence alongside it. Your committee is very small indeed at four members; undeniably the task – Portarlinton is the second largest town in the county – may be too great for so few persons. Have you thought of co-opting new members, and especially new residents? This has been done with immense success elsewhere. Last year's adjudicator asked for a more helpful map with, as the Entry Form requests, 'street and place names(...)' and any items you wish to ensure are seen by the adjudicators' marked on it; this has not been done – a map of Portarlinton, without the Square or any of the public buildings and housing estates marked, is virtually useless: we have tried to find as much as possible in our walks through the town, but it is inevitable that some features may have been missed.

The Built Environment:

The Roman Catholic church on the Tullamore road with its attractive floral displays was much admired. St Paul's Church of Ireland church with its interesting graveyard is also well kept. As always, the Railway Station must be one of the best presented in the country. Of the impressive modern public buildings, the Leisure Centre is beautifully kept, as is the Fire Station. The extension under construction at the Community Centre looks promising and when completed the older part of the building should be repainted. Of private business premises, those which impressed the most were McLaughlin's store and The Pharmacy, both first class. The attractively curved and busy Main Street is a lively thoroughfare; unfortunately, the larger proportion of shops

have over-enthusiastic mass-produced and plastic signs, unworthy of the handsome facades. The Square is visually disreputable and so different from the way it looks in old photographs, where it is a refined and gracious urban space. This is clearly a major problem area.

Landscaping:

The riverside Park is pleasantly set out and was much patronised by young people on the date of the visit. The playground is clean and colourful. It was good to read that it was your committee who purchased the shrubs for St Joseph's Terrace and planted the pampas grass at the town name signs. The very well kept cemetery on the Mountmellick road was admired. Hanging baskets and floral tubs provided welcome points of colour throughout the town, but not all seemed to be well maintained.

Wildlife and Natural Amenities:

The mark has been left at the same level as last year because you have not given any information of activities under this heading on the entry form. Are you not engaging with the schools in nature study projects or supervising rambles in the very interesting local terrain? You probably are, but you need to let us know so as these or other initiatives can be properly acknowledged. It was good to see a public walk signposted to the north of the town. Tree planting comes under this heading: if you have planted young trees in the last year this also should be noted on the entry form and additional marks commensurate will be gladly given.

Litter Control:

You report your activities in the schools and with the business community, which very adequately come under this heading. The pictures enclosed show very successful clean-ups: have you been able to identify the source of most of the litter? does it come from passing motorists? Well publicised fines can be a deterrent. There was considerable disposable litter at Castlegate (? – this name may not correct and it does not appear on your map) and at an unnamed housing estate to the north of the town. Certainly, there was an improvement on last year – congratulations.

Waste Minimisation:

The term 'Waste Minimisation' is not used here to signify litter collection but rather the segregation of the various forms of waste, for example, vegetable material for composting, batteries and electrical good for removal to appropriate disposal zones etc. The school children must be very much aware of this because of the green flag status of Coláiste Iosagáin and a National School; congratulations to the pupils, their teachers and parents.

Tidiness:

The term 'Tidiness' is not used here to denote litter (which is accounted for above) but for weeds, graffiti, unsightly poles and wires, broken walls etc., as listed on the entry form. Unfortunately, a number of these elements, especially weeds, graffiti and poor road surfacing, all appear at an unnamed housing areas on the Edenderry road. The derelict mansion at a prominent town-centre location gives an exceptionally poor impression. Ugly poles and wires are still to be seen in some of the main streets. Some of the industrial buildings do not impress by their visual presentation – though others are quite the opposite, such as a fine development on the Edenderry road. The unkempt nature of some of the buildings in The Square has already been mentioned. There is inconsistency of upkeep throughout the town between what is good and what is not so good.

Residential Areas:

Residential areas are also quite mixed, varying from the impressively supervised Kilnacourt Woods and adjoining areas, where the houses are very smartly presented and the preservation of ancient limes beeches and chestnuts, with the intervening grassed spaces, is most attractive; to the unnamed estate previously mentioned, where less care is taken. A promising estate of apartments and houses was seen on the Mountmellick road, which would be even more attractive if there was variation in the choice of house colour. Canal Court was notable for its unusual landscaping; the apartments in course of construction will need a lot of planting to remove the bleakness from the site. More mature estates nearer the Railway Station have blended in well as foliage has grown up and private gardens have been charmingly developed. Kilmalogue Park is another estate that will continue to improve as the trees grow. The mid- to late-20th century estates like Marian Hill and St Michael's Park have endured very well, many of the houses kept with real pride, though in a few cases the boundary walls needed freshening up with paint. Avondale's wooded roadside was admired. Botley Court looked very spruce indeed; the exterior of the nearby industrial area detracted somewhat from the exclusive touch, which would be expected of a residential area of this quality. This is what strikes one throughout Portarlinton, the inconsistencies of planning and development. Many of the older town houses, that give the town its genuine sense of character, are very lovingly looked after, though, it has to be

added, some are not.

Roads, Streets and Back Areas:

Surfaces of the main roads are mainly good, with the exception of a few stretches on the roads to the north of the town. Committees are encouraged to visit other towns, not to imitate what they see, but to observe how problems have been and can be overcome. For example, in Abbeyleix and Portlaoise new lamp-standards have disposed of ugly poles and wires in the town centre. A initiative such as these is badly needed in Portarlinton. The level of the roads on the estate on the Mountmellick road should be raised urgently, as the manhole covers could be quite dangerous. The very large parking and landscaping development near the Railway Station was well under way on the date of the visit and its completion will be eagerly looked forward to next year.

General Impression:

It is hoped that an expanded committee or some other co-operative mechanism will result in the impetus needed to transform, what is at present a rather disfigured – but once handsome and potentially delightful – historic town. Portarlinton has all the attributes possessed by other centres, that at present are doing better in the competition. What is needed is vision and determination. Every good wish for this challenge.