

Tidy Towns Competition 2025

Adjudication Report

Centre: **Balla - Balla Alainn** Ref: **894**
County: **Mayo** Mark: **376**
Category: **C** Date(s): **15/06/2025**

	Maximum Mark	Mark Awarded 2024	Mark Awarded 2025
Community – Your Planning and Involvement	80	51	53
Streetscape & Public Places	80	50	52
Green Spaces and Landscaping	80	52	55
Nature and Biodiversity in your Locality	55	40	42
Sustainability – Doing more with less	55	30	31
Tidiness and Litter Control	90	64	65
Residential Streets & Housing Areas	55	37	39
Approach Roads, Streets & Lanes	55	38	39
TOTAL MARK	550	362	376

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

Fáilte chuig Comórtas Bailte Slachtmhara SuperValu 2025. Go raibh maith agaibh as d'iontráil a sheoladh chugainn. Maith sibh as an obair atá déanta i bhur cheantar go dtí seo - guímid gach rath oraibh i bhúr thionscadail amach anseo. Ádh mór.

Thank you for your completed application form which included photos, a map and various additional documents relating to great future plans for Balla. We're delighted to see that your Facebook Page with 925 followers is regularly updated. We can't say the same for the website www.balla.ie which we visited. Quite a number of the documents relating to Tidy Towns are dated 2021 – it's time to update them so as to keep the interest of the community. You are a committee of 12 with 65 regular volunteers and then when a project needs additional hands you have as many as 200 helping. This is a wonderful declaration of how the community view you and your work. While we opened your YouTube of Balla 2021 we wonder why it wasn't updated. We also looked at the Tractor Run but truthfully, we don't have time to open and look at YouTube and video links. The adjudication time and report writing times are quite tight. You have participated in the Tidy Towns competition for over 50 years which is wonderful, and this commitment has seen a physical improvement in the town in addition to a cohesion of the community – the true spirit of Tidy Towns.

See Concluding Remarks for advice on filling out the application form and producing a map.

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

While the streetscape is primarily two storey vernacular structures, due to their form, massing, details and varying heights, Balla's streetscape has great character. You also have some wonderful strong structures - St Cronan's RC Church, the Garda Barracks, Athavallie House and the water tower, which add to the architectural interest and merit of the town. Add to these the interesting archaeological structures including the round tower for a very interesting and historic town. What a lovely mural of the squirrel. Compliments to the artist. Compliments also to the businesses on the main street for the presentation of their properties – e.g. Mannions etc. We noted a few water pumps at the sides of the road which we were delighted to see. These are part of your industrial and social heritage and should be maintained and all painted regularly in the same colour for uniformity. Along the entrance roads we noticed some flat iron gates which again are part of your heritage. Remove the weed growth and repaint them. You have quite a few areas around your town where picnic benches and seats are located. We admired this as it encourages people to stop and sit and have conversations. It's good to see some of these are also located along your walking routes. Is the church bell in the church grounds in use? We hope this is the one that's rung for services so that children can appreciate it. We admired the stone wall around the green at the junction of the N60 and L1705 (Main Street) – we probably would have capped the wall differently and more in keeping with historic capping. We are very happy to see shop names (and complete shop fronts) being retained when a commercial

premises is converted to a residence. We encourage you to impress on those undertaking these conversions of the social importance of the shop names etc. and the need to retain them. Well done on the Balla Inclusive Hub and Sensory Room opened in 2023 – good to see a space such as this in a Community Centre. The Foróige wall is great – please thank them for their contribution to their town. Keep the growth around it cut back.

Green Spaces and Landscaping / Spásanna Glasa agus Tírdhreachú:

You have a great number of green spaces in the town and in the surrounding area where the community can visit and relax or exercise. The Community Nature Park is beautiful but needs attention. Remove the grass that's encroaching on the paths and also trim a narrow margin at the edges of the grass areas to show that the wilderness behind is intentional. The green space surrounding the church is beautiful. We loved the neatly trimmed grass at the kerbs, the mature trees along the railings and the beautifully maintained planting beds on both sides of the forecourt. We admired the mature trees in the green space at the junction of the N60 and Main Street. Here too you have a small neatly kept planting bed with a wonderful variety of low and tall plants which, with the wind blowing slightly on the day of our visit, gave great movement in the streetscape. Great to see the tennis court being used by youths when we visited and its location is excellent. Do you need to add an additional court? The planting bed at the GAA building was wonderful; full of a variety of pollinator friendly plants which were buzzing with bees and other insects and we also noted numerous butterflies visiting. The tree sculpture inside the timber railing looked good. Are you planning to do more of these? Some in the biodiversity garden might be appropriate. The Blessed Well Area is very beautiful – the pathway needed attention but we have no doubt this was done by your volunteers. The evergreens in the planters in the square looked good but remember the best plant containers are those which are concealed by the plants. Next year please add trailing plants to these containers.

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

You have a great number of areas where nature can thrive - stone walls, hedgerows, great areas of mature trees and woodlands, the little and beautiful Rodney River and of course your two Turloughs one of which is an ACA with purple-moor grass, sedges etc being present. It would be good to see you involved with the local National and Secondary schools to celebrate these habitats and particularly your SAC. Perhaps poster competitions, essay competitions or even site visits? Your sensory biodiversity garden was visited and we admire the work you were undertaking here. We loved the willow arched walk – very calming. The teepee is a great bit of fun for the children. Is it your intention to repair the willow hut? We hope so. We might suggest that you use less gravel and more grass here (easier to maintain and better for biodiversity). As with the Nature Park above, trim a narrow margin at the edges of the grass areas to show that the wilderness behind is intentional. Have you had any visitors to your bird boxes? It sometimes takes time for them to be used let us know about this next year. Great to read that the swift boxes on the Community Centre are a success and there are also house martins nesting locally. We were happy to read that your Junior Tidy Towns group, supported by Balla Foróige, also helps you.

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

Good to see the Trade School offering such a variety of courses to the community. Are they day or evening courses? Do they have a qualification (Level 5, 6?) at the end? Let us know next year of the its success. The Community Digital Hub and Remote Working Space is wonderful and gives individuals the opportunity and facility of sharing equipment and indeed knowledge. Good to see that you have registered with Refill Ireland for the Community Centre. We noted the new bus shelters on the main street which we have no doubt are well used by those using public transport to Castlebar, Claremorris etc. We noted from the photos in your application form that you purchase a lot of the plants you use. We suggest that you take a more sustainable approach from now on. Growing your own pollinator friendly plants, harvesting your own seeds or sourcing donations of plants from keen local gardeners is recommended as this avoids the waste associated with shop bought varieties. Perhaps it's time for you to have a polytunnel and undertake this activity. If you've a Men's Shed locally ask them to make raised planting beds for you? You mention quite a number of activities where you are engaging with collaborators which is wonderful and we look forward to hearing about them. But there are many small activities which you can organise without the need for collaborators – e.g. have you every organised a foraging walk with the community? The local children and adults could learn about the food that nature provides for free along your hedgerows and in your fields - elderflowers, elderberries, mushrooms, strawberries, damsons, crab apples etc. It's a wonderful way to engage with nature and you have so many wonderful walks in your area we have doubt this would be very successful.

Tidiness and Litter Control / Slachtmhaireacht agus Rialú Bruscair:

Being located on the busy N60 with motorists passing through from Tuam and Roscommon to Castlebar can only be a challenge for you but we are delighted to report that the town was extremely clean and virtually litter free when we visited. Compliments to your volunteers who work hard to present it in this fashion. We noted weed growth along the base of some walls, gravel paths and also on the cobble lock paving, so ask the litter pick volunteers to bring a hoe and stiff brush with them and to also remove weeds. Some of the street poles with wayfinding signage were leaning and need to be straightened as they give an unkempt feel to the streetscape. We love to read that students are key contributors 'joining cleanups, planting days, promoting awareness at home, and building lifelong environmental values'. We wonder if you're in line to have your services put underground these would greatly improve the streetscape – we see some have been completed giving an uninterrupted vista of the streetscape. The stone sign for Dawn Oak Ball Town Park needs to be cleaned – a brush and soapy water will be sufficient. That of Bothár an Stáisiúin also needs cleaning and the name carefully repainted in white. As in other villages and towns we noted ivy on some of your stone walls. While ivy is a wonderful for insect life and is acceptable/good on rendered (plastered) walls it is not acceptable on stone structures as the roots penetrate between the joints in the stones, making the walls unstable and leading to their collapse. Natural stone constructions are in themselves great habitats

for insect life and also very beautiful in the streetscape. Cut the ivy at the base and then when it has died remove it carefully. Get advice on the roots which have penetrated the wall as these need special attention. There's a lot of signage on your Community Centre we feel not all are necessary and should be removed or at least group them all together. Remember signage is clutter which detracts from a streetscape and should only be used when absolutely necessary.

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

Along the entrance roads there is some very fine houses set on individual sites surrounded by mature gardens and many had been recently painted and presented well. Equally the houses along the main streets were well presented and here too many had been repainted. These large two storey houses have entrances directly from the paths and some have rear access either through archways or side gates. We loved the architectural detailing of these houses – wide plaster bands, quoins, rendered doorcases etc. A few had planters or window boxes which gave additional interest to the streetscape. We loved that the name signs to the estates – Ardcranon, Churchview, Oak Mill, Ashling Manor etc. were extremely legible. A simple sign at the entrance to each is perfect. Generally, the houses presented well although some boundary walls needed attention. Some had wonderful colourful floral displays which gave great movement and were full of insect life. We noted that some of the trees in the communal spaces and along entrance roads to the estates need to have suckers removed, and ties and stakes checked. We recommend that trees be planted in the communal areas and large communal open spaces which are not required for ballplay. Trees are known to have a positive impact on mental health and wellbeing. By planting and caring for trees, you help reduce pollution, improve your surroundings, improve the appearance of your community and increase the value of your property. In addition, they provide shade for humans, food for insects and food roosting sites and nesting sites for birds.

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

We see that you have a number of looped walks but unfortunately, we didn't get time to do any. We note they vary in length and we liked that their signage, while discrete, is clearly visible. Your map of Balla Town Park is extremely clear and we loved that the Croagh Patrick Trail is also indicated on it. Cut back the growth which encroaches on the town name signs at the entrance to the town. These should always be visible for the oncoming motorist to inform them that they are entering a settlement and so need to reduce speed. We love that a pathway goes from the town out to the Golf Club and GA grounds. Trim the hedgerow along this path as it is encroaching slightly on the path at present. Elsewhere we also noted pathways extending beyond the core of the town which is excellent for pedestrian safety. The road through the town is quite wide with perpendicular parking. We wonder if you are in line for a redesign of your town so that footpaths could be made wider which would make for an increase in pedestrian enjoyment of the town. Perhaps some outdoor seating at shops/cafes/public houses? In addition, trees should be planted in build-outs between the car parking spaces which would add extra interest and beauty to your town. Some of the road markings in the town are quite worn. One disabled parking bay is barely noticeable. The Square was extremely pleasant but here too we'd suggest some tree planting to break up the carparking and make the area more pleasant.

Concluding Remarks:

We thoroughly enjoyed visiting your town ... but we have a few suggestions for 2026.

- In the Application Form please number the projects New (N1, N2, N3 etc) and M (M1, M2, M3 etc). This same numbering system to be used to indicate the locations of these projects on a map – N1, N2, N3 etc and M1, M2, M3 etc. If you wish you can colour code the various categories to make it even clearer. This is to help the adjudicators to negotiate their way around your town and see the various projects or locations of projects.
- All Future Projects should only be in your plan and NOT in your Application Form. When they have been completed then, and only then, will they be in your Application Form – as a NEW project.
- The map needs to be updated and your Balla Town Park noted.
- We see you have put a star after the various activities/project in your 3 Year Rolling Plan but we'd suggest only put a star after them when they've been completed. We'd also suggest that you allocate a member of your committee to take the lead for implementing/advancing the activities/projects and also add the names of collaborators as you'll need help with many of the projects

We wish to state that this is not a criticism of your work but to explain to you that as adjudicators we rely on a clear application form and accompanying map to inform us of your projects and make our visit rewarding. Thank you for entering the SuperValu Tidy Towns 2025 competition. It was a pleasure to adjudicate Balla.