

Tidy Towns Competition 2026

Adjudication Report

Centre: **Balla - Balla Alainn** Ref: **894**
County: **Mayo** Mark: **390**
Category: **C** Date(s): **15/07/2026**

	Maximum Mark	Mark Awarded 2025	Mark Awarded 2026
Community – Your Planning and Involvement	80	53	55
Streetscape & Public Places	80	52	54
Green Spaces and Landscaping	80	55	57
Nature and Biodiversity in your Locality	80	42	44
Sustainability – Doing more with less	80	31	32
Tidiness and Litter Control	90	65	67
Residential Streets & Housing Areas	55	39	41
Approach Roads, Streets & Lanes	55	39	40
TOTAL MARK	600	376	390

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

Fáilte go Comórtas Bailte Slachtmhara SuperValu 2026. Go raibh maith agaibh as bhur n-iarratas a chur isteach. Maith sibh as an obair atá déanta agaibh in bhur gceantar go dtí seo - guíonn muid gach rath oraibh in bhur dtionscadail amach anseo. Ádh mór.

Great to receive your application this year which had plenty to relay to us of all your recent successes and accolades. They tell of a consistent whole community approach and a focus on social inclusivity and environmental improvements. You have also impressed us with your embedded principles on sustainability – well done. You indicate that your committee can rely on a large core of 65 volunteers that swells to 200 for big community engagements. You have a wide reach when it comes to collaboration including local community groups, businesses and schools. You also network with state bodies and environmental organisations. Communication is through print and social media. Your links with your young community include a Junior TT and active participation with schools and Foroige. You certainly are wisely activating a succession plan for future years. For your special project you selected your Community Day which celebrates the culture of new communities through music and food, which you say follows a sequence of initiative you have carried out to increase social inclusion in your town. Great to read that your participation in the competition extends over half a century and you have benefited greatly from this both socially and environmentally.

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

Balla still retains the strong character of a linear market town with terraced streetscape substantially intact. It has its share of derelict /vacant properties, but these do not dominate the experience of the town as the majority of buildings reflect good care and conservation of key vernacular architectural features. There are some lovely shopfronts which give charm to the main street including Mannion's, The Shebeen The Rendezvous and the nicely adapted Cosmos Coffee space. The outdoor seating at some premises adds animation and community interaction opportunities. The square area which has had the benefit of renewal is anchored by the monument and functions as a nice public realm space where there is seating, town information, bespoke bin and car parking – it would benefit from less car dominance though. Notwithstanding this your planting was lovely and the rainbow seating bringing joy. It operates as a good spot for interaction having the lively MiniMi's and the Community Resource Centre flanking one side and attractive residential development on the other. The vacant Durkan Stores if painted would embellish it further. We were delighted to visit the round tower and graveyard site which gives historic drama to the square and wonderful having your blessed well, grotto and linked trails so accessible also. You tell us of a range of projects that are in train such as the Town Centre Programme, the EU Horizon Blueprint Project and the Heritage e-trail which are to commence shortly, let us know next year of the specific outputs from these. You tell us that you are actively involved in monitoring derelict sites and in the promotion of the various grants available for refurbishment. Well done and we did notice a lot of for sale signs which is encouraging if successful. St. Cronan's Church was well

maintained, and we liked the wedge of grass set aside for wildlife near the presbytery – good views too from the cemetery and we were awed by the large bell – a legacy of previous church maybe on the grounds.? Good to hear from you that you have a town history book to be published soon. Congratulations to the author.

Green Spaces and Landscaping / Spásanna Glasa agus Tírdhreachú:

You are certainly blessed with an extensive green network and have put a lot of thought and investment into the varied green spaces. The Community Park with the MUGA, tennis court and playground were busy on the day of the visit. Liked the train planter here too and in excellent condition you tell us of the upkeep. A visit to the sensory garden was a delight too with all the interactive features, willow and animal sculptures and nature ground plaque inserts, lovely pollinator friendly planting here. Nice to see some dedications to valued town folk on the new trees planted nearby. We also appreciated the age friendly seating facing the green. The Community (Biodiversity ?) Park is a lovely space for nature, but it does need some more attention to give it identity, as last years adjudicator indicated. We noted your additional seats and signage here so that is a good beginning. We liked the accessible and visible nature of the community garden and orchard, nicely co-located with your Foróige Smiles project. The Town Park adds a great deal to your green space hosting both active and recreational uses. Amazing to have this facility with GAA pitch and the Golf Course co-located and also close to the secondary school where it can support their environmental curriculum. We meandered along the Dawn Oak loop and a portion of Tochar Phadraig. We then visited the Community Woodlands briefly as time was challenging. What great amenity assets you have in the town, the envy of many others we'd say. We are delighted that you are getting recognition for all your tree planting and nature enhancement in the woodlands. Loved your generous bedding at the corner of the Community Park and all the planters elsewhere. Where attention is needed though is replacement of the planters (or contents) on the road junction opposite the park. More colour is needed, perhaps bigger planters too for this prominent location. In contrast the bedding at the bottle recycling area looked good and very complimentary to what is a functional area.

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

With a great legacy of green spaces and semi natural habitats on your doorstep your area is rich in biodiversity. You tell also of your appreciation of having natura SAC turlough nearby which the NPWS deem of high ecological quality and another turlough which afford good bird watching with your recent hide installed. We saw your swift notice at the CRC, it is an achievement to secure swift nesting here and good to hear of sightings of sand martins at the Secondary School too. You tell us your approach to planting now includes predominantly pollinator-friendly plants and shrubs that support wildlife. You also indicate that your grass cutting regime is in line with biodiversity promotion. That is a great investment in nature. We saw quite a number of your notices encouraging your community to follow this practice. We also saw a number of notices that discourage the use of chemical weedkiller. You tell us that you are currently experimenting with a 'Foamstream Machine,' (had to look up what that was) to deal with weeds. You recognise that an especially important aspect of management for biodiversity is to raise the awareness of the people living in the vicinity and also of visitors to that area. We agree that it is most important for the community of Balla to be encouraged to feel ownership of the town's rich natural heritage as this creates a certain enthusiasm for protection and enhancement. You are pursuing this approach through a lot of your work including dissemination of information and especially through encouraging the school community to participate in biodiversity actions. These you tell include increasing awareness of the value of the local Rodney River. It will be wonderful to see the fruits of the S.S. planting on the embankment next year. Maybe add some other spring species that are pollinator friendly like crocuses or grape hyacinths as daffodils are not the best for pollinators. Remember to take photographs of the flowers for next year's application.

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

You seem to appreciate that sustainable actions show how we try to minimise our use of all resources within the community so that we reduce our environmental impact. As you know it can relate to a number of areas such as waste recycling, water conservation, reducing energy use, encouraging active transport, food and 'food miles' and even equipment, and reusable items. In this regard you referenced some ongoing projects, and we saw some other initiatives throughout the town that are sustainable. You mention the transformation of the old courthouse into a Community Digital Hub and Remote Workspace which allows for remote working and the consequential saving on carbon emissions through a reduction in car travel. We see you have a good rural link service and recently erected a bus shelter. We tried opening your book exchange but maybe it was locked or stuck ? You have also told us of reduced mowing and your increased use of perennial pollinators – all more efficient as well as biodiversity friendly. Do you collect seeds or propagate plants, or receive donations of same from the community? You tell us you harvest water for planting and promote water refill stations. We did notice your recycled seating in the Community Park and timber sculptures in the Town Park - presumably from fallen trees. You referenced also that you use wood chip from storm damaged trees for mulch in garden and beds in the park. You harvest some herbs and food from the garden kitchen in the town. We noticed quite a lot of blackberry bushes on our looped walk in the Town Park – it would be good to see the harvest from these being used locally. The local MSLETB hosts courses on organic gardening and dry-stone walling – have you any feedback on how that has influenced sustainable actions.? Good that you collaborate with others too on sustainable initiatives, do you use your Facebook page to upload weekly tips on sustainability – wonderful way of raising awareness on practical actions.

Tidiness and Litter Control / Slachtmhaireacht agus Rialú Bruscair:

It is great that you can encourage such a high turnout for your Spring Clean up of up to 200. Your photos show your young community helping out on litter picks too, a fantastic way to influence behaviour. You also have a weekly litter and cleaning regime great to read that waste collected is carefully segregated. You are tackling misuse of town bins and use education campaigns to address this too, that is welcome. What is important to spread the load is

initiating your “adopt a spot” approach. Good as you tell us to have an audit of areas needing attention and to remove redundant street fixtures and signage. The impact of all this work is an exceptionally clean town. Please convey this to your RSS workers and all your volunteers. There were a few areas we did spot litter, near the playground, some rubble – tyres dumped at the Biodiversity Park, and some rubbish left at the recycling bin at the NS. The Golf Course fingerpost sign needs repair and redirection, a lamp standard in the square needs to be straightened and repainted. These were exceptions though and in general your environment was clean and tidy.

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

You have many attractive housing developments on the edge of the town. Church View has a lovely entrance area with neat lawned garden areas and well-kept housing. Ardchronin too was presented well with a lovely tree lined entry and open space area with grass not mown too tightly and surrounded by trees also. Noticed a composting area here presumable for grass clippings, well done. Moat estate looked well and advantaged with a strong boundary of trees to the rear and nice stone signage. There is a lovely intact terrace of housing opposite the Community Park, all painted up well and some with nice window boxes and as we could see from the walk to the Town Park lovely rear gardens too. Further towards the town housing maintained this standard too with a particularly nice dwelling full of flowers and a rainbow seat outside. It will be good to see what impact Balla Vision has on residential communities and also what the impact the Community Energy Management Plan will have on sustainable energy uptake

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

We are delighted that the re-alignment of the N60 has helped reduce vehicular traffic movements through the town and given you more opportunities for future active travel options. The town streets still have a good flow of through traffic but not of the scale to intimidate pedestrian movements which occurs in other towns on national primary routes. You also have the gift of lots of amenity linking routes within the town with the benefit of good surfaces and a high-quality natural environment context. You have an attractive treed approach from Castlebar which will benefit from your recent planting embankment enhancement inspiring – take a photo for next year's application. Your verges reflected a reduced mowing regime. You show layout plans of potential redevelopment under the Town Centre First initiative, and you reference potential outcomes from the EU project - please include a timeline next year for outputs from these plans.

Concluding Remarks:

Balla is an interesting town full of built and natural heritage. You are suitably proud and your community are working hard to maintain a high standard and improve the liveability and vibrancy of their location. Well done to all involved.