

Centre: Balla – 894 - County: Mayo Category: B = 10 th June 2019	Marks in 2016, 2017, 2018 & 2019 % of max achieved						Winner Cat B
	MAX	2016	2017	2018	2019	%	
Community – Planning and Involvement	60	41	42	45	45	75%	50
Streetscape & Public Places	60	39	41	41	43	72%	47
Green Spaces and Landscaping	60	39	40	41	43	72%	48
Nature and Biodiversity in your Locality	50	26	28	30	32	64%	33
Sustainability – Doing more with less	50	15	17	21	23	46%	22
Tidiness and Litter Control	90	56	57	60	61	68%	69
Residential Streets & Housing Areas	50	30	31	32	32	64%	38
Approach Roads, Streets & Lanes	50	31	32	32	33	66%	39
TOTAL	470	277	288	302	312	66 (av)	346

Community – Your Planning and Involvement (+0)

Thank you very much for your entry into this year's Tidy Towns Competition and for providing a map as well as your 3 year plan, and thanks for taking on board the comments of last year's adjudicator. With 10 people on your committee and a further 60 people who volunteer you have a fantastic number of people involved with the work that you carry out. You work with a wide range of organisations including Mayo County Council, South West Mayo Leader, Foróige, Balla GAA Club, and many other businesses. You communicate widely including through Facebook 'Balla Times' the Community Notice Board and your web page. Congratulations on winning the National Pride of Place Award last year, and it is fantastic to hear the role that Balla Tidy Towns played and that there was more than 150 people involved on the day which is testament to the value of the work that you do, and the community spirit in the village.

Streetscape & Public Places (+2)

You have done a lot in the past year in relation to this category to further enhance your streetscapes and public places. The streetscape and colour scheme plans is a great way to harmonize the look of the town, but also to decide where to add a splash of colour, and there are some really nice examples of this throughout the town. There were some vibrant planters to be seen throughout the town, a purple one with coordinating flowers in it was particularly attractive, and there were some splendid window boxes to be spotted throughout the town. The school was very cheerful and colourful. The Community Resource Centre looked very fresh and neat with a smart blue and cream colour palate. The Shebeen pub also looked very eye catching with a lovely red, white and black façade, as did Sorrento's Café, as did Balla florists and Mannion's Bar.

The information boards illustrating the history of Balla and local walks are excellent, and the Patrick William Nally Memorial looked neat and was enhanced by some subtle but effective planters placed here and the hard landscaping at this area is of very high quality. There are some issues with dereliction but you are doing your best to tackle this issue including painting empty premises to improve their appearance. The GAA grounds were very well maintained and the rockery at the entrance was admired. Other areas of interest include the Blessed Well, the Round Tower, and the old churchyard, and the Heritage and Conservation Plan which you are planning to complete will help you greatly with making the best of these historic assets. The Interpretive Display at the Community Resource Centre is excellent, and well done on the development of the new greenway.

Green Spaces and Landscaping (+2)

Balla has some lovely landscaping and green areas with nice mature trees, hedging and planting. The biodiversity and community gardens boast wonderful planting, including perennial plants that provide all year round colour and focal points. There are containers with superb planting that brings colour and interest to various spots around the town. The 'Fairy Village' is charming, and I'm sure much loved by the children of Balla, multi coloured chairs near the picnic area added a lovely splash of colour to this area, as did the 'Balla Express' train planter at the playground.

Nature and Biodiversity in your Locality (+2)

Balla is blessed with an abundance of nature and flora and fauna with the beautiful Town Parks, Woodland, as well as the biodiversity garden. The Wildflower Alley and Garden @ Woodlands will enhance these even more. Your 'Don't

Mow Yet' signs were spotted, and as well as ensuring that these areas are left intact, they can also work to motivate other people to perhaps keep part of their own gardens 'wild' to encourage biodiversity and help our bees, bugs and butterflies. You are also working to reduce the use of weed killers and using pollinator friendly plants. The Neighbourhood Community Walks are a great way to make people more aware of the environment that surrounds them, and you deserve credit for the 3 new walks that you have developed this year, along with the new Greenway and riverside walk.

Sustainability – Doing more with less (+2)

The workshop you held in relation to Sustainability with the Environmental Officer from Mayo County Council was mentioned by a number of other Tidy Towns committees who attended so it appears as though this was a very successful event, so congratulations to all involved. The Garden Vegetable Growing Course sounds very interesting, and even more so as you are putting this into practice through leasing a garden.

Some of the other initiatives you are carrying out in this category include rainwater harvesting to water the flowers in the village, a household waste survey, the use of 'keep cups' with the 'Use your Mug for Mayo' initiative, a new water butt as well as the use of pollinator friendly perennials in flower beds and planters. In addition, you have registered with the Refill Ireland initiative, and encouraged the use of bio degradable straws, and have also created art from recycled waste to raise awareness and created a sculpture of St. Patrick, well done on all your work.

Tidiness and Litter Control (+1)

On the day I visited Balla looked very clean with very little litter to be seen. You work very hard on making sure that the village is kept free of litter. Well done on taking part in the An Taisce National Spring Clean campaign, and for working with local schools and clubs in your community so that so many different sectors of the community were involved. It is fantastic to see so much involvement and support from your local business community such as the Life Pharmacy's renovation of the bus stop and contribution towards a new loop walk. You have done a lot of other work to improve the cleanliness and tidiness of Balla. These initiatives include printing anti-litter stickers, solar smart bins, removing unsightly poles and also temporary signs and posters and painted rusty pipes and removed cable ties from poles, a lot of relatively small projects that can make a big difference. Well done also on your anti dog fouling campaign.

Residential Streets & Housing Areas (+0)

There were some very attractive houses to be seen in Balla, many with lovely planting, window boxes and hanging baskets. The verges and paths around the village all looked very neat and well cared for. It is very impressive to read from your application that all the residential estates have taken on new projects to improve their environment. Churchview Estate looked extremely smart, with neat grass, some lovely trees, as well as a nice planter to offset the stone wall. Churchfield Estate was also maintained and presented to an extremely high standard. The other estates visited also looked well maintained and it is clear that the residents of Balla take a pride in where they live. You take a very collaborative and inclusive approach in order to ensure that the whole community feels involved in your endeavours. This is also demonstrated by the fact that some residential associations contribute financially towards the Tidy Towns, and also that your committee help the associations and help them apply for funding under the GMA Scheme.

Approach Roads, Streets & Lanes (+1)

The Welcome to Balla/Fáilte go Balla Álainn is very attractive with clear, easy to read lettering in black and white and nicely positioned with a nice backdrop of the stone wall and trees. The roads were in good condition with neat grass verges. The landscaping on the N60 approach from Castlebar was beautifully done and the addition of the footpath and cycle path to enable a walk through the forest trails will greatly enhance the accessibility of this area and the Fairy Village. The painting that you carried out on the old water pumps and fences was noted. It is also good to hear that you are trying to reduce the amount of visual clutter caused by excess signage and are in talks with local businesses. The new signage at the square is excellent and should attract both residents and visitors to the village equally.

Concluding Remarks:

Balla is doing a lot of great work and you have a lot of interesting project in the pipeline, we wish you the best of luck with your entry this year and look forward to revisiting in the future.