



## **Balla Community Nature Park and Biodiversity Meadow** **Incorporating Wildflower Alley and Contemplative Areas** **Balla Woodlands Park**

Balla won the National Pride of Place Award in 2018 and has gained 36 extra points in the National Tidy Towns Competition in the last 3 years. These successes have boosted confidence and has further increased motivation within our community. We are now looking at new development priorities and while we are very pleased with our progress in Tidy Towns there are a number of areas that need attention.

We have nine housing estates in Balla and the Tidy Town Group see the involvement and enhancement of the estates central to our success in the annual Tidy Town competition and we work very closely with all the residents. All the improvements and developments aim to create a more pleasant physical environment and make our community more inclusive and a great place to live and to visit.

The proposal is to develop the Balla Community Nature Park to include a Wildflower Alley, Biodiversity Meadows and Contemplative Park located in an existing area on the old Castlebar and Kiltimagh road adjacent to Woodlands estate. The development will include seating, picnic and outdoor meeting areas and improved study opportunities. The proposal is to install strategic, contemplative areas with seating in an area that is currently overgrown, unused, derelict and liable to fly tipping. This area would provide better access to the local schools and shops for cyclists and walkers and would be a more pleasant area that could be used by residents from adjacent housing estates.

We have developed a five year development plan with the help of Sharon Eastwood, Environmental Consultant, Woodrow Sustainable Solutions Ltd, as part of our Tidy Towns planning process and one of the recommendations is to erect an appropriate sculpture to commemorate and reflect our rich local history and heritage. This would be a very welcome addition to this project.

The Community has recently been accepted to the Sustainable Energy Communities Project (SEAI) and is currently drawing up a Sustainable Energy Communities Masterplan. The development of the Balla Community Nature Park is seen as a critical element of this plan. The objective of this proposal is to re-open public access and increase footfall to an existing area that is currently overgrown, derelict and dilapidated through an environmentally friendly, sustainable and attractive approach to the town. This will enhance accessibility and encourage walking and cycling which will also encourage all of the community to enjoy outdoor living.

This development will also improve connectivity with the existing and recently developed greenway, walking and cycling trails throughout Balla Woodlands. By providing pleasant Contemplative Areas in a strategically located public space that is currently an eyesore, we will facilitate local families to enjoy our natural resources and local heritage in an environmentally responsible and sensitive manner.

The objective of this proposal is to reopen public access and increase footfall to an existing area that is currently overgrown, derelict, and dilapidated through an environmentally friendly, sustainable, and attractive approach to the town. This will enhance accessibility and encourage walking and cycling which will also encourage all of the community to enjoy outdoor living. This development will also improve connectivity with the existing and recently developed greenway, walking, and cycling trails throughout Balla Woodlands.

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and walkers and would be a more attractive area that could be used by residents from the adjacent social housing. It will encourage people to leave cars at home, and travel by foot or bike, the relatively short distance to schools, shops and businesses and local amenities and facilities.

Creating additional amenities and facilities in a sustainable manner, appropriate to the existing natural landscape, encourages local collaboration, accessible to all, promotes rural development and anchors the community to the town,

Consultation locally and collaboration with local authority and other state bodies has resulted in the community being successful in acquiring funding to develop the Community Centre, playing pitches, playground, MUGA, pitches, and amenities in the town. This has proven to be a key driver for attracting people to settle in the town, with the local population increasing steadily, and both the national and secondary school number increasing also. When Balla won the National Tidy Towns Inclusive Communities Award our holistic, inclusive approach to development was seen as a critical factor.

Seating will be provided for outdoor eating, and information boards will be erected to which Artistic features can be added in the future to provide additional interest. Provision of attractive green spaces will encourage people to remain and locate to the area, thereby helping to retain existing community facilities.

We have recently been awarded a grant from the Community Foundation of Ireland - Environment and Nature Fund to create a biodiversity action plan for our community. This plan is currently being developed by ecologist Karina Dingerkus and a draft list of actions have been agreed by the community. This Nature Park, Biodiversity Meadow and Wildflower Alley will all contribute to our Biodiversity Action Plan.

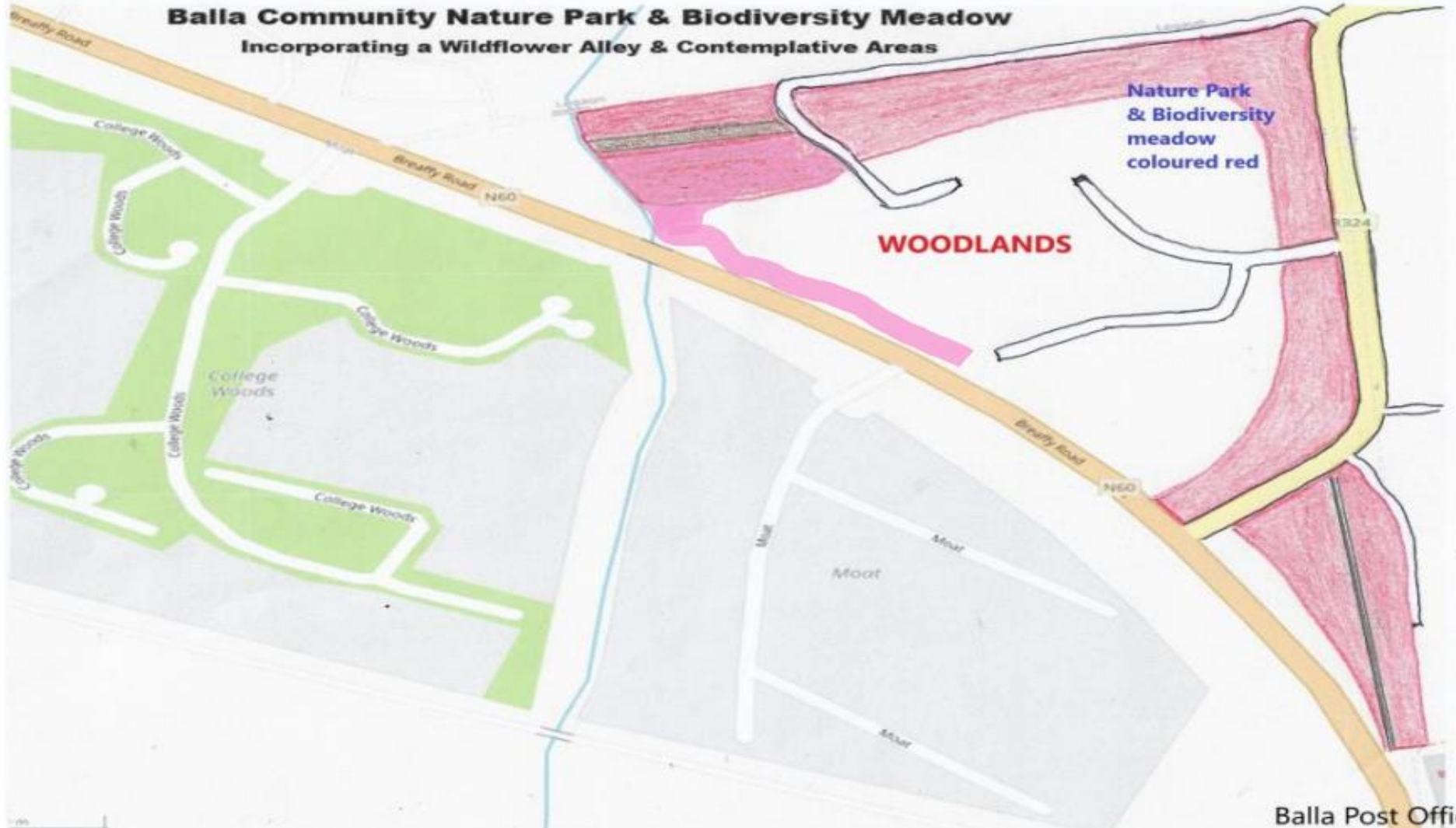
The paths will provide a space for young cyclists to learn cycling skills, with training provided by Mayo County Council Road Safety Officer, in conjunction with policy of Mayo County Council to encourage cycling. The park will include a quiet contemplative area for visitors to the adjacent church among others, to rest and meet with others outdoors, particularly following our experience with Covid-19 lockdowns.

Outdoor activity is receiving greater emphasis in today's world. Education and the classroom curriculum can be achieved in a welcoming green outdoor space. The national school and secondary school are within 5 minutes' walk of the park, and children will derive benefits of a sensory garden and can undertake curriculum environment projects in the outdoor classroom. It will be an outdoor place that the children can access safely where they can relax and enjoy the mental and physical well-being which is a proven outcome of outdoors activity. Studies have indicated a tripling of mental health issues emerging from pandemic and the promotion of "gardening on prescription" is gaining momentum. Gardening therapy and outside activity has been proven to relieve depression and stress, and the residents in Woodlands Estate have requested an allotment area, which is included in this project.

The park will become a focal point, will promote community collaboration and togetherness, since it will be a meeting point for neighbours to talk, walk, sit, share and create links between the different community groups. In conjunction with the additional project of creating a Community & Enterprise Hub in the Community Centre, the project as a whole, will attract more people to locate and work in the community.

When Balla won the prestigious Pride of Place Award the adjudicators said: "It is rarely that the judges visit a place where virtually everybody encountered is on cue regarding sustained co-operative effort and what it takes to maintain a sustainable community. Undoubtedly this is one such place. Everyone can and does feel valued and supported. On the day of their visit the judges were extremely impressed that this spirit was backed up by a business like focus in ensuring that all projects were properly managed – a truly inspiring place".

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Balla Post Office

This project aims to reinvigorate and enhance the Woodlands area and make it a more attractive place to live and to recreate. Everything we in Balla Tidy Towns do in association with Balla CRD, Mayo County Council, Balla Community Council, Balla Town Parks, Local Businesses, SWMDC, MSLETB, Local Schools and other relevant organisations, focuses on attracting people and investment in order to ensure our long term sustainability. Priorities in this project are the result of community feedback during the process of renewing our Community Futures Plan, LEADER Community Workshops and in the development of the Balla CRD Strategic Plan.

Balla Tidy Towns are always proactive in the manner which we react to worthwhile suggestions made in recent Tidy Towns Adjudicators Reports and we recently developed a 5 Year Development Plan for Balla with the help of Woodrow Sustainable Solutions.

This proposal was drawn up after consultation with Mayo County Council; Woodlands Residents, Balla CRD and Balla Tidy Towns. The main elements include the following:

1. Create Wildflower Alley on closed section of the old Castlebar road – inside large concrete blocks (see map).
2. Develop Wildflower Garden on left of road from northern Woodlands entrance to the river fence.
3. Reinstate, repair and enhance footpaths throughout Woodlands
4. Enhance the green areas in and around Woodlands
5. Complete House Front Study, compile report and draft coordinated Paint Scheme for all houses in Woodlands in consultation with the residents with the support of Albany Claremorris
6. Paint large concrete blocks in bright colours which has been recommended in a number of Tidy Towns Adjudicator reports for Balla
7. Install vehicle control barriers at entrances to Woodlands Estate

# Planting Proposal

Prepared by Moran Agri Services

To remove established  
grassland from selected areas  
Cultivate the soil  
Sow annual and perennial  
wildflower seeds as agreed

## Annuals – Colour Boost 1





It's important to note that wildflowers thrive on low fertility soil. The Colour Boost range will last from Spring right through to the first frosts. They can then be cut before re-sowing the following Spring

Removal of the dead toppings is important, as they will naturally fertilise the ground and may inhibit regrowth the following year

Maintenance costs are much lower than traditional grass covered areas which require cutting the areas several times throughout the year, while also offering vital pollinators for our 99 bee species



## Colour Boost 3 – Perennial Mix

- 100% Wildflowers
- 90% Perennial mix, 10% Annual
- 17 different flower species
- Return every year, with perennial flowers really establishing in the second year
- Application Rate: 5grams / square metre
- Cost: €220/kg