

Tidy Towns Competition 2023

Adjudication Report

Centre: **Ballinrobe - Baile an Róba** Ref: **887**
County: **Mayo** Mark: **327**
Category: **D** Date(s): **05/07/2023**

	Maximum Mark	Mark Awarded 2022	Mark Awarded 2023
Community – Your Planning and Involvement	80	46	47
Streetscape & Public Places	80	47	48
Green Spaces and Landscaping	80	39	41
Nature and Biodiversity in your Locality	55	39	40
Sustainability – Doing more with less	55	23	24
Tidiness and Litter Control	90	54	56
Residential Streets & Housing Areas	55	32	33
Approach Roads, Streets & Lanes	55	36	38
TOTAL MARK	550	316	327

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

Fáilte chuig Comórtas Na mBailte Slachtmhara Super Valu don bhliain 2023. Táimid buíoch daoibh as ucht na hiontrála a chur chugainn, agus guimíd gach rath ar bhúr gcuid oibre amach anseo. Adh Mór.

Welcome to the Super Valu Tidy Towns Competition for 2023. We thank you for your entry, and wish you all the best in all your future work. Good luck.

Ballinrobe - Baile an Róba, a small town with a population of 2,786 people – re-entered the competition after BTT was revived in 2007 and has entered the competition ever since. Ballinrobe Tidy Towns has a committee of 8-10 members with support of another 10 approx. volunteers.

- The committee holds a formal meeting every three to four weeks or as required. Lunch or coffee meet-ups (open to all members) are arranged about once a month. Your AGM is held in April or May of each year. Minutes of meetings are taken and circulated afterwards to members. You hold weekly litter-picks on Sunday mornings year-round and undertake outdoor work weekly on Wednesday evenings (called Work on Wednesdays) during the months from May to September or as required. You organise community clean-ups twice or three times per year. You make every effort to welcome and integrate new residents in your work programmes. Well done on being designated a Gaeltacht Service Town, in recognition of your promotion of the Irish Language.

- Support is received from a total of 17 different local and national agencies and businesses.

- You communicate with the public via word of mouth, social media, newspapers, parish newsletter, WhatsApp messages, Notice boards, Visibility to the public through attending seminars and events and on site with distinctive BTT work clothing.

- You seeks to involve the local schools and youth clubs in as many initiatives as possible. You aim to get the students engaged in practical tasks as an opportunity to educate them on the general issue of litter, plastic and the impact on marine life, cigarette butts, the importance of bees and biodiversity, the importance of growing food locally. Transition Year students in Ballinrobe Community School assist with special projects, such as litter pickups and sketching murals.

- The voluntary work undertaken by Ballinrobe Tidy Towns and entering the competition each year has provided a focus for the community to make improvements year on year. It is pleasing to read that without the Tidy Towns competition, there would be a lot more litter on the streets of Ballinrobe and there would not be as many benches, bins, flowers, shrubs to enhance its overall appeal.

The hand drawn map provided with your Entry Form showing the main landmarks in the town was of good quality. For future years it would be good to show greater detail in relation to the centre of the town. The adjudicator notes your committee provided an updated 3-year Tidy Towns plan for the development of Ballinrobe. Unfortunately, it was not possible to open the link to the document included in the entry form, and a follow up search using google to access the document online was also unsuccessful.

The quality of the application form was very good. The photos were very helpful in highlighting the projects carried out by your committee and volunteers under each category.

The adjudicator's assessment is based on a recent site visit and the contents of the application form, which at 42 pages long including photographs is suitably concise for a town the size of Ballinrobe. The use of clear bold type headings and bullet points and the blue text under each category, made the document easy to read and navigate.

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

- Ballinrobe has thankfully seen some improvements to the built fabric of the town in recent years and the introduction of building renovation and new grant schemes. The concerted action by the Ballinrobe Tidy Towns in conjunction with Mayo County Council, has also resulted in the initiation of CPO Procedures to provide for the future restoration/redevelopment of derelict and vacant sites. The acquisition of the Valkenburg premises and redevelopment of the Courthouse are projects currently being progressed on site. In relation to public spaces, you have arranged for improved seating in the town, improvements to the new walkway and the green area and you are planning to erect historic information signage at prominent heritage properties around the town.

- We commenced our visit to Ballinrobe on a rather wet day in early July. Despite the weather we were able to explore the centre of the town and its environs on foot largely due to the good interconnectedness of streets and laneways in this area. A pedestrian friendly centre is a positive aspect of Ballinrobe.

- Starting at Church Lane, we noted the wonderful stone walls fronting the roadway and admired the well-presented properties such as Fiacloir Ballinrobe Dental and Devour Bakery. A tiered floral display provided colour to the roadside junction. The grounds of the town library were visited and the repurposing of this former church building provides a unique setting to the library, with wonderful grounds, perimeter trees and historic burial places. The paint work on the library looked fresh and enhanced the overall presentation of this amenity. The book sculptor is an appropriate and fun addition to the site. A suggestion here, watch for the cable ties on some of the young oak trees planted on the perimeter, which are beginning to tighten on the bark and restrict growth.

- There were many well-presented commercial premises throughout the town, including Ken Murphy, Petals 'n' Buds, Wavelengths, Ballinrobe Country Market, the bank buildings, D. Biggins boutique, Credit Union House, Picture of Health, Flowers 4 U, Rosie's takeaway, Siobhain Costello and Piece of Cake. This list is certainly not exhaustive.

- The floral baskets along Main Street provided wonderful colour. St Mary's Church and grounds were visited and found to be well presented with a stand of mature trees, stone walls and rose beds. The Harry Clarke-stained glass windows and monumental sculptor features were also admired. The Church grounds are well linked to the town with many amenities on site, including the community garden.

- The Valkenburg premises on the corner of Main Street and Chapel Lane was noted and it will be a positive development for the town centre when the planned restoration works are completed. The colourful residential and commercial properties on New Street were admired. There are several vacant and derelict properties on Bridge Street. We are aware that you are liaising with Mayo COCO on the future development of these properties.

- The Ballinrobe Community School and St Joseph's Primary School were visited. The presentation of both school properties is commendable. The primary school provided a striking colourful façade with attractive stone walls to the front and tree planting on the school grounds. The adjudicator specially admired the hedge panting provided in the drop off area, which minimises the visual impact of parked cars in this area.

- The Cornmarket area was noted for its attractive floral displays and John King memorial, sculpture features and tree planting. However, visual clutter is an issue which needs to be addressed given the prevalence of bollards, signage, flagpoles, planters, and an existing business premises - all of which take are situated on this relatively small civic space. Perhaps a redesign or revamp of this area could be considered with a view to improving its accessibility to the public. Wall planting could be used to enhance the appearance of the building at the centre of the Cornmarket paved area.

Green Spaces and Landscaping / Spásanna Glasa agus Tírdhreachú:

- Your committee is engaged in many landscape maintenance and planting projects in the town including the mound at High Street, Felix Waitkus memorial, shoe corner, the library grounds, and various grass verges and floral displays.

- The Ballinrobe Town Park or Green as it is known locally is a superb amenity. On the day of our visit the weather was likely to have affected visitor numbers, as we are sure it is a most popular recreational area in the town. The parking area at the Bower was maintained to an excellent standard and we noted the newly installed picnic benches along the river the access path. The entrance to the park from the Main Street is adorned with attractive signage and a window display highlighting the activities of Ballinrobe Tidy Towns. The historic stone walls in this area are a wonderful feature. A short section of wall has collapsed and will need to be repaired as soon as possible.

- The Bower walk along the Robe River was well surfaced in tarmac and bounded by an old stone wall which provided ideal habitat for wild plants to flourish. The nearby recreational facilities and sporting complex used by Lake District AC, Ballinrobe AFC and Ballinrobe RC pitches were very impressive including, grass and all-weather pitches and athletics track. The new concrete post and rail fencing erected around the grass pitches could be enhanced with native hedge planting, to soften the visual impact of this boundary treatment. The adjoining children's playground area and well-ordered dressing room facilities, are a credit to all involved with their development.

- Reducing Ballinrobe Tidy Town's overall use of seasonal bedding plants for your floral displays is an initiative that your committee might consider under this category for the future. Colourful and permanent perennial and pollinator friendly planting e.g., using plants such as *Alstroemeria* spp. can provide a good alternative to the flamboyant but labour/water/feed and energy intensive annuals such as *Lobelias*, *Begonias*, and *Petunias* etc.

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

- It is noted that Ballinrobe Tidy Towns are currently in the process of preparing a River Robe biodiversity plan which will no doubt provide a comprehensive blueprint for the future protection and improvement of this important local amenity. Other projects considered worthy of positive comment under this category include the holding of talks locally on biodiversity and soils/composting, the erection of an information board at the Bowers, native wildflower seeds project, willow weaving, swift project, planting of wildflower beds, bat walk, and the Green Sod Ireland Project. It is good to note that you have a Ballinrobe Biodiversity and Wildlife Facebook page encouraging followers to manage their properties in the interest of biodiversity.

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

- The advancement of your 8 R'S sustainability principles and concept of the "Circular Economy" are the key objectives of BTT. You are making great strides in this aspect of the competition. A wide range of specific projects are in hand ranging from the collection of used bottle caps to make a mural of the Robe River to the organizing of talks on soil health. Your projects are generally focused on the 'Circular Economy'. However, the adjudicator is also very pleased to read that Ballinrobe has now become a Sustainable Energy Community.
- As part of your designation as a Sustainable Energy Community, you might consider for the future the development of small electric microgeneration schemes for Wind, Solar and Hydro in partnership with the Local Authority - these may also attract suitable SEAI or Leader funding.
- You might also look at the provision of additional public e-car charge points and additional bicycle parking/off road cycle track facilities in the town, and where there are deficiencies, suggest suitable locations where these could be provided in the short term. It is noted that Ballinrobe Urban Greenway plans are underway linking the convent road and the Bulkan River and we wish you well with this development.
- The Community Garden was visited and found to be an excellent facility. The commitment to its success is evident. Name plates denoting the allocation of the various beds in the garden is an encouraging addition, creating a greater sense of ownership. Is there a community composter and rainwater harvesting unit installed? These are useful and provide a quantity of mulch and non-potable water to use on your planted areas, which will ensure rapid establishment of the plantings.
- The use of green roofs and green walls on buildings or structures e.g., bus shelters are also important features to consider in the interest of water conservation, water management and biodiversity.

Tidiness and Litter Control / Slachtmhaireacht agus Rialú Bruscair:

- You are fortunate to have considerable community buy in in relation to your regular litter picks on Sundays and Wednesdays and the larger yearly events and community clean ups are also very well attended.
- On the day of adjudication, the core town area was found to be tidy and litter free - well done. The Town Park area was pristine. Your campaign to raise awareness among dog owners and promote cleaning-up of dog fouling was noted. Some signage was found to need ongoing maintenance and cleaning. This may be an audit to consider implementing for the future.

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

- It is pleasing to read those vacant properties and the shortage of suitable accommodation is now being addressed and that Ballinrobe has been chosen to be one of the six towns participating in the pilot project scheme for Town Centre First policy, to be achieved via the Ballinrobe Public Realm Plan. You are having some success in directly contacting owners of unused properties in the town. The establishment of community orchards in housing estates by the planting of 195 fruit trees is also commended.
- The adjudicator called to the following estates, Lecka Grove, Lake Lawn Estate, Military Close, Rathkelly Close, Hawthorne Place, and Cornaroya Manor. The general standard of maintenance and presentation of these housing estates was very good. The adjudicator admired the common use of attractive name stones and stone wall entrances, meadow areas reserved for wildlife habitats and seating areas. Tidy Estates competitions are a useful way to ensure a consistent standard of presentation between individual estates in the town can be achieved.

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

- On the Castlebar Road the Mc Hale premises are prominent and this site is bounded by an attractive stone wall and colourful banner flagpoles. The attractive entrance and boundary to Ballinrobe Racecourse was also particularly admired. The line of trees on both sides of the road, neatly clipped wide grass margins and rose planting at the entrance to the old RC Church created an attractive roadside landscape to the town. The attractive name sign with stone planter and floral displays were also admired.
- The Creagh Road approach is enhanced by the entrance to the Bower Walk, where the predominance of stone walls characterise the roadside landscape. Attractive residential properties and gardens and a line of Sorbus tree planting enhance this approach.
- On the Neale Road approach the adjudicator admired the construction of new stone walls to match the existing. Signage here needs some ongoing maintenance. The gravel areas and floral displays were admired. Additional tree planting could also be considered on this approach.
- On the Convent Road natural hedge rows on both sides, with mature trees and stone walls predominate. The Ballinrobe welcome sign and stone planters on the margins here look very well.
- The Abbey Road and High Street approach was characterised by wonderful stone walls and natural hedge row boundaries. The Ballinrobe name welcome sign was blocked by the extensive growth of planting in this area. The Kilmaine approach with wonderful lines of mature trees would benefit from judicious pruning works, to prevent further obscuring of road signage. The planting opposite the retail premises on the Claremorris Road created a

visually impactful welcome feature here.

- Overall, the approach roads to Ballinrobe were presented to an excellent standard- well done.

Concluding Remarks:

It was a great pleasure to visit your vibrant town this summer. Ballinrobe is certainly buzzing. The Tidy Towns competition creates a unity of purpose and focus for your committee and your community. You are making a difference and your committee are committed to improving the community and the overall appearance and environs of your town – keep up the good work.