

# Tidy Towns Competition 2023

## Adjudication Report

Centre: **Belcarra - Baile na Cora** Ref: **508**  
County: **Mayo** Mark: **347**  
Category: **B** Date(s): **22/06/2023**

	Maximum Mark	Mark Awarded 2022	Mark Awarded 2023
Community – Your Planning and Involvement	80	48	50
Streetscape & Public Places	80	45	47
Green Spaces and Landscaping	80	48	49
Nature and Biodiversity in your Locality	55	39	41
Sustainability – Doing more with less	55	18	19
Tidiness and Litter Control	90	63	65
Residential Streets & Housing Areas	55	35	36
Approach Roads, Streets & Lanes	55	38	40
<b>TOTAL MARK</b>	<b>550</b>	<b>334</b>	<b>347</b>

### 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.

Belcarra - Baile na Cora, a mid-sized village with a population of 222 people – has entered the competition for 59 years and has a committee of 12 members with support of another 8 volunteers.

- Belcarra Tidy Towns Meetings are held monthly and weekly during the busier summer months. You hold coffee mornings at Cunningham's Costcutter outdoor seating area which provides a forum for locals, new residents and visitors to discuss issues in the area and seek support and advice. Clean ups take place every Monday and Tuesday evenings at various locations throughout the village.
- It is very heartening to note that prior to the arrival of Ukrainian refugees in your village, your community went into action and volunteered to clean the proposed accommodation at Ballinafad House and move furniture, dress beds, and ensure it was ready for their arrival. It was a great gesture for the local community to generously gather supplies to help the refugees settle in, including the supply of children's toys, games, bikes, and clothes. You clearly made every effort to ensure the refugees felt welcomed and supported in your community, given the desperate circumstances they found themselves in.
- You communicate with the public via several social media pages run within the community to reach a wider demographic: Belcarra Ireland Facebook and Instagram, Belcarra Tidy Towns Facebook and Belcarra Foróige Facebook. The public are notified regarding upcoming events through various channels, including the parish newsletter, door to door, social media, text/WhatsApp group, email, local press/radio, word of mouth, and posters. Your new look website has input from all committees and groups in the village. Many thanks are due to local young people who help with social media and online applications, especially given how important these tools have become in the modern world.
- To have two youth representatives on your Tidy Towns committee from the local Foróige club is very beneficial. You maintain close ties with Belcarra National School in relation to the holding of a school arts competition and in helping them achieve their Biodiversity and Amber Flags and establish a mini orchard.

The coloured map attached to your entry form is clear and of very good quality and well done to the local artist who drew up this map by hand. This made it easier for the adjudicator to navigate around the village and significantly aided the assessment process. It is acknowledged that the comments made in last year's report have been addressed by your committee.

The quality of the application form was good and the various photographs significantly enhanced the reading of the document. The use of bullet points on the text worked very well, but do try to minimise the amount of text and this

will add greater clarity to the Entry Form. The very comprehensive 3-year Tidy Towns plan has been noted and provides a very comprehensive blueprint for the future development of your village. It may be helpful to include some specific target dates on the plan in the future to improve its overall effectiveness and facilitate implementation. The adjudicator's assessment is based on a recent site visit and the contents of the application form, which for a village the size of Belcarra is very long at 64 pages – perhaps next year this can be reduced significantly. The size of the text used on the form was very easy to read.

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

- You have included a wide range of maintenance type projects under this category this year including the ongoing maintenance to Heneghan's Derelict building in the centre of the village, repainting of a two-storey derelict building on the Ballyglass Rd., continued maintenance of business shop fronts and outside areas. Other projects included the painting of the Belcarra crest at the Community Centre, maintenance of St Anne's Church, whitewashing of stone walls and painting of the water pump in the village centre, maintenance of the new and old graveyard at Elmhall and the ongoing maintenance of the eviction cottage and tigin. Many thanks are due to Tidy Towns member Jackie Biggins who for many years provided visitors with an educational tour of the cottage. Playground maintenance and ongoing water safety measures are also tasks completed by Belcarra Tidy Towns committee.
- The adjudicator stopped in Belcarra on a warm and sunny day in late June. On entering the village, we admired the beautifully presented Belcarra name sign and we were quite surprised to read that there is a second Belcarra located in Canada. The stone planters in this area planted with a range of perennial herbaceous plants, provided an attractive first impression as did the stone walls which are an important feature in the area.
- The Eviction Cottage was a must see and did not disappoint. On the way, the Marion shrine to the memory of Joe and Paddy Jordan also struck a positive note. The Cottage and the adjacent Tigin provided considerable interest on a sharp turn of the road. The expert work carried out as part of the restoration of these properties, particularly the quality of the roof thatch in each case, reminded one of the important traditional skills of former times. The door of the cottage was unfortunately locked and perhaps a key holder living in the area could provide access to the cottage on request and contact information might be provided on site for this purpose. The environs of the cottage were in tip top order with attractive roses in bloom and it was interesting to see the original 'battering ram' used to demolish properties of residents who couldn't pay their rent in days gone by.
- The Belcarra National School provided a splash of colour displaying their Green and Amber flags, some attractive window boxes and brightly coloured windows. The stonewall along the frontage and planting of the school grounds provided a neat and tidy aspect. The existing commercial premises located near the school i.e., Cuffe Car Sales and Survival Foods are visually prominent at this location. Both properties would benefit from the introduction of some landscape elements, such as fastigate tree planting along the road frontage. The car park opposite the school was well screened with an attractive stone wall along the road.
- The commercial and residential premises located in the village core provide a bright and colourful aspect and added to the quality of the streetscape. Particular highlights included Flukies Cosy Bar and Cara Kitchens as well as the Cunningham's Costcutter shop. The newer residential developments here have not detracted from the streetscape and the actions of your committee have ensured that unoccupied properties are prevented from falling into disrepair and dereliction.

### **Green Spaces and Landscaping / Spásanna Glasa agus Tírdhreachú:**

- Under this category you have mentioned a total of 18 different work areas which your committee has attended to over the last year. These range from the maintenance of the stone raised beds on the Castlebar Road, to the implementation of park development works at Belcarra Recreational Park. The adjudicator is very impressed with the scope and extent of the maintenance work undertaken by your volunteers and you have taken on board sustainability and ecological principles in all your work activities.
- The so-called common area which was being grazed by horses, was a positive addition and the memorial signs to the signatories of the proclamation caught the eye here. The wall signs providing pictorial information on the history of Belcarra from 1916 to 2016 created an interesting stopping point for the visitor. These looked a little faded and perhaps could be repainted or renewed in the not-too-distant future. The butterfly garden and memorial area near Belcarra Community Center was in full bloom and brightened up this corner.
- The large area of open space beside the Church - Belcarra Recreational Park was visited and the range of facilities provided here for a village the size of Belcarra was very impressive. The adjudicator noted the high standard of maintenance of the children's playground (weeds controlled by physical weeding) and the nearby community pitch. On the day of adjudication, the footpaths near the playground were being cleared by one of your volunteers. Perhaps consider planting a native hedge along the timber post and wire fence which surrounds the playground, as this fence will deteriorate over time.
- The edible landscape community garden, community orchard and G.Y.I area displayed great promise in terms of the range cultivated crops and varieties of fruit to be harvested later in the year. The overgrown area to the rear of the community pitch is earmarked for a new MUGA will be developed soon and the local community are commended for their fundraising efforts in this regard. The common area enhancement project was visited and we noted the memorial tree planting and new woodland planting carried out, which is establishing very well.
- The pollinator bed located opposite the church car park was in full bloom and we admired the specimen variegated yucca plants growing nearby. In this area a large sycamore tree near the entrance to the riverside walk and Community Center is considered a landmark tree because of its size and location. The entrance to the Riverside walk was attractively presented and the signage providing information on the local flora and fauna and the biodiversity trail, was positively noted. The adjudicator wondered whether there is potential to extend the walk at the rear of the community center to link up with the road at the newly painted and decorated Bridge over the river. This newly painted bridge in a white and grey colour adorned with attractive floral displays was a very attractive feature in

this area.

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

- One of the most important natural features in Belcarra is the Manulla River and the riverside walkway is maintained in an environmentally friendly manner by your volunteers with support and advice from the National Parks & Wildlife Service. Keeping with the water theme it is great to read that a local lake in Belcarra, Walshpool Lough, has been designated a so called 'Blue Dot' lake due to its pristine water quality and a 'Blue Dot' trail is now being developed.
- A number of events have also been arranged dealing with local biodiversity by way of guided walks e.g wildflower identification, wild foraging walk and a bat walk and these were very successful. The protection of the Manulla River from encroachment by cattle has also been successfully tackled in consultation with local farmers.
- Your committee has taken a sustainable approach to weed control by using Irish Organic Weedkiller, which is a natural alternative to harmful chemicals. One wonders how effective it is compared to using a physical means of removal? The issue of invasive species remains high on your agenda and you are collaborating with Mayo County Council in this regard.
- Your committee has supported the installation of biodiversity information signage in Belcarra along the river and at the picnic area, describing the fauna and flora which can be found on the Riverside Walk and Biodiversity Trail. It is noted that the signage for the Butterfly Garden, Sensory Garden and Biodiversity Trail were hand painted by a young local artist. The sensory garden sign now needs to be refreshed. Biodiversity friendly mowing regimes at various locations have been undertaken and information signs for the public installed.
- Other projects undertaken by Belcarra Tidy Towns include the native wildflowers project: growing ox-eye daisies and encouraging wild areas to flourish, support for Belcarra NS who were awarded their 5th Green Flag for biodiversity, support for tree planting day Belcarra NS, pollinator-friendly initiatives and citizen science in Belcarra, support for local bee-keeping initiatives, hosting of dragonfly Ireland workshop, and the erection of swift boxes at the Community Centre.
- As outlined above, Belcarra Tidy Towns committee is making great strides under this category of the competition this year and the wide range of projects listed with a biodiversity, nature and environmental focus is very impressive.

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

- A major focus of your committee under this category is water conservation and you have taken steps to reduce water consumption locally by promotional activities and practical measures. Your planting arrangements have also taken into account sustainability requirements such as arrangements to grow your own plants in the polytunnel, use of more perennial planting etc.
- Energy conservation is also an important theme and you have supported the use of LED lighting schemes at various locations in the village.
- Belcarra National School has also been to the forefront of various local sustainability initiatives including the establishment of a book rental scheme, no idle zone etc.
- Belcarra Community Centre and the Sports Centre promote environmental sustainability by utilizing ceramic cups, delph, and cutlery for all events held in both centres. Recycling and waste reduction techniques were also the fore at a recycling workshop held in the village earlier this year.
- It is noted that your future plans include the construction of a community composter in the village at Cois na hAbhainn. These are a useful resource providing a quantity of mulch to use on your planted areas and will ensure rapid establishment of the plantings.
- Other areas worthy of consideration by Belcarra Tidy Towns for the future under this category, which is in keeping with the Sustainable Development Goals, include 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 look at installing public e-car charge points and additional bicycle parking and off-road cycling facilities in the village and perhaps progress further your plans to develop the riverside walk as a cycle greenway.
- Your future plans also include initiating membership of the Sustainable Energy Communities programme run by the SEAI. This involves engaging in learning networks, preparation of energy masterplans and local energy action plans etc. The following are useful links in this regard. <https://www.seai.ie/community-energy/sustainable-energy-communities/><https://www.codema.ie/sec>

### **Tidiness and Litter Control / Slachtmhaireacht agus Rialú Bruscair:**

- The before and after photos provided in this section really demonstrate the importance of tidy towns volunteer targeted works, as the impact has been transformational. It is good to note that approach roads are closely monitored and picked on a regular basis. Your 'Picker Pals' initiative and the local commitment to the National Spring Clean is very impressive and congratulations to all concerned with these ventures.
- The Bring Centre and recycling facility at the Church car park was in very good order when visited and the car park itself was well-lined and maintained with attractive upright growing conifers, significantly enhancing the boundaries of the car-park.
- The removal of unsightly overhead wires from the Ballyglass road with the help of Eir has resulted in a major improvement to the roadside landscape as evidenced in the before and after photos.
- On the day of adjudication, the village area was found to be completely litter free - well done.

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

- The adjudicator called to the Cois na hAbhainn estate and admired the small picnic area located on the

open space area. There is an opportunity to provide a secure viewing area here over the Manulla River? At the Cois Baile estate the adjudicator admired the presentation of the stone faced two storey houses with well-kept gardens and open space areas, with flower tubs installed along the road.

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

- It is noted that the footpaths and the pedestrian crossing installed by Mayo County Council as part of the Village Renewal Scheme have been a great success, helping to create links between all core areas of the village. Traffic calming measures introduced on the 3 approach roads into the village, as part of the Village Renewal Scheme, have helped to increase safety and reduce traffic speeds through the village.
- The ongoing maintenance of roadside verges on all approach roads are carried out by local residents on a voluntary basis, some areas on a six-week rotation.
- The roadside junctions on the approach to the village from the Ballyglass direction are enhanced with a variety of shrubs and herbaceous planting. It was also good to note the areas retained for the development of wildfire meadows along the stone walls in this area. Some of the sycamore trees planted to the rear of the roadside boundary on this approach have failed to establish and will need to be replaced. In addition, an Ash tree is showing signs of Ash die back disease, requiring remedial treatment. The PJ Nestor site is prominent when entering from this direction and additional tree planting could be considered along this frontage.
- On the approach to the village from Castlebar, the former dancehall premises looks well maintained and is visually prominent on this approach. The car park located between the building and the public road would benefit from some tree planting around the perimeter to soften the impact of extensive hard surfaces here. The stone planters and stone boundary walls on the roadside margins, significantly enhance this approach.
- On the approach to the village from the Balla direction the main feature along the road is a line of birch trees which have been harshly/incorrectly pruned in the past. Despite this they have significant amenity value and enhance this approach to the village.

### **Concluding Remarks:**

Belcarra is intrinsically a very attractive and vibrant village with significant recreational amenities available to the community and you continue to maintain it's important features to a very good standard throughout. Keep up the good work.