

Belper.

Gold 172 points

Judged 6th July

Judges: Jo Tarrant & Jeff Bates

Judges Award: the recreation of the World War 1 Memorial in the Market Place

The tour of the busy, thriving and historic town in the Derwent Valley showed off the enormous contribution of the volunteers and partner organisations that work within the Belper in Bloom brand. We were shown the involvement of both local authorities, the Wildlife Trust, Friends Groups, Transition Belper and so many others as part of a well-considered tour. From the welcoming voices of Rough Truffle and the Chevin Singers at St John's Chapel at the start of the tour, to the chance to meet so many of the staff and volunteers at the buffet lunch which concluded the tour, it was, as ever, a pleasure to visit.

Areas of Achievement

Section A: Horticultural Achievement

The Memorial Gardens were looking at their very best when we visited, with high-quality Begonia bedding, well-maintained mixed borders, community vegetable gardens and raised beds all set off by well-managed lawns. Floral features were also prominent at Field Lane corner, adjacent to the Flying Geese roundabout and at Belper triangle. Colour schemes of the sponsored baskets and containers used by the Town Council are bright, cheerful and consistent, with all being quite well forward given the difficult growing season.

The effectiveness of the contribution of residential gardens was very high: notable are all the length of John o'Gaunt, but especially the gorgeous colour and cottage garden feel of Wyver Lane. The impact of the Belper Gardening Club is noticeable in several areas, with the triangle and Meadow Court worth special mention. We appreciated the enthusiastic contribution of the children from Herbert Strutt Primary School, and also seeing the continued development of the garden area at Belper High School, as well as seeing the new work taking place at Whitemoor Centre and meeting staff and users at this important site. Transition Belper have extended their excellent work at the Railway Station, with the mixed borders being in very good condition and the wildlife borders establishing well. Almost every pub and shop had baskets or containers in view, and almost all were in blooming health. The Greenhouse, the Greyhound and the Talbot Hotel deserve particular mention. We also found the grounds and frontage of Vaillant to be of a very high standard.

Belper Parks was explained in detail by Sharon Sutton; this is an important green space in the town, with significant visual impact and high levels of foot traffic. The more traditional Whitemoor Park is also an important green space. Whilst not visited, the visual contribution of the Cemetery should also be mentioned, prominently in view from Wyver Lane.

Section B: Environmental Responsibility

There are many strengths here, with the peaceful Wyver Lane nature reserve (described for us by one of the volunteers), Belper Parks, Belper High School and the wild bank at the station all important for habitat and wildlife enhancement.

Belper Goes Green is a splendid new initiative in the town, bringing together many groups but more significantly raising the profile of resource use minimisation and recycling; we were pleased to note high levels of composting, good water harvesting at the High School and especially the 'Blooming Junk' project which seemed to be everywhere.

As ever, history and heritage abound in the town. The remarkable, poignant new feature, installed to align with the Centenary of the Battle of the Somme, is the recreation of the Memorial in the Market Place. This was explained effectively by use of photographs and interpretation on site, and for us the added benefit of the contribution of Adrian Famer's explanation. In the River Gardens we were very impressed by the plans of the Friends Group (explained by Trevor Griffin) to bring into full view the remarkable Pulhamite walk.

Throughout the tour we saw very little prominent litter, and a complete absence of fly-posting, graffiti and dog-fouling. Street furniture was good in the town, with most seats clearly suitable for use, signs clean etc. We also noted good permanent art in the landscape (the refurbished Scouts mosaic, improved Flying Geese roundabout) as well as the seasonal Blooming Junk and the 'Bridge' bedding.

Section C: Community Participation

Belper in Bloom has been a long-term project and continues to have energy for the future; we particularly commend the work to use the Bloom Committee as a coordinating body, engaging with the statutory partners and so many other groups. The presentation, by Ann Pocklington, showed the involvement of all these groups and that it was a year-long commitment, bringing together so many areas that ensure the town continues to thrive.

Sponsorship – in kind, in time and financial – is excellent; it is this complete involvement that has allowed the town to retain a community feel, with little suggestion of corporate anonymity anywhere.

As already mentioned, groups of all ages and abilities were well-represented during the tour; although we did not actually get to meet the local radio team, we did hear an announcement that a feature would be on air during the afternoon.

Areas for Development

Section A: Horticultural Achievement

Amongst much high quality horticulture on display, there were some areas that were less good. The containers on the wall at De Bradelei were poor, appearing to have been very recently planted. The baskets under the bandstand in the River Gardens were also well below the standards seen elsewhere in the town. We were pleased to see the improvement in the River Gardens in terms of the reduction in damage caused by water fowl, but also noted that the bedding in the Gardens was late and thin. For all of these aspects, perhaps an earlier planting should be considered (or bringing these areas into the same management as the other areas seen?)

Belper Parks is a lovely green space, but we did feel that the heavy infestation of docks, all of which have gone to seed, should be a management priority next year, perhaps by a well-timed 'pulling' programme.

The work of Transition Belper at the station is splendid; perhaps contact Network Rail to get the weedy platforms up to the same standard?

Section B: Environmental Responsibility

This is a very strong section of the tour, as the marks would suggest. There is scope to improve the detail of street cleaning on King Street, where cigarette ends are caught amongst many of the tree grilles.

Street furniture is generally very clean, but the seats in the River Gardens are distinctly unappealing, and efforts should be made to scrub and repaint those along the riverside in particular.

The dead tree at The Butts should be removed; it is not in an area where it has environmental benefits, so this should be replaced at the first opportunity with another suitable specimen.

Section C: Community Participation

We fully support the intention to get the Pulhamite walk in the River Gardens restored (and also, of course, the Tea Rooms) and look forward to seeing this come to fruition.

Continue to develop the links with all the diverse groups that love the town – the benefits of your partnership working are wonderfully evident.

Consider a section of your portfolio to show your future plans over the next 1-5 years, so that there is a clear goal or aspiration for your excellent work

A: 83 B: 45 C: 44