

## LARGE TOWN

**Belper in Bloom**

**Gold Award - 172 points**

### **Discretionary Award – Best New Permanent Landscape – Memorial Gardens ‘The Sacrifice’**

Judged on 12<sup>th</sup> July 2019

Judges: Sharon Sutton and Joyce Slater

**Judges Award:** St. Peters Church Community Garden group for their dedication and hard work.

**Introduction:** The judges were welcomed with a song from “Rough Truffles” outside St John’s Chapel before a short presentation about the route. A well organised tour took us around town and included the market place, town centre, parks, Strutts Centre, wildlife reserve, the railway station and St Peter’s Church before refreshments back in St. John’s Chapel. The Bloom tour coincided with visitors from Belper’s American twin town Pawtucket, Rhode Island and it was a pleasure to meet them and discuss their In Bloom initiative, Blackstone in Bloom, back home in America.

#### **Areas of Achievement**

##### Section A

Throughout the town the quality of your planting was exceptional and a credit to your outdoor team and local residents. The new designs and beds in the Memorial Garden were very impressive and you also chose the planting around the new sculpture very appropriately. It was good to see more sustainable perennial planting in several areas. Growing vegetables in a small space in a prime park area was inspiring for local residents and the quality of plants was good. We liked the demonstration rain garden at the Strutts Centre and its planting revisions in the light of experience; also, the perennial bed using donated / spare plants from the community giving interest in a dark corner. It was good to see details of the allotments in the portfolio as well as meeting a Hunter Road allotmenteer in the park explaining about the wildflower bed being created. The new St. Peter’s community edibles garden, though new, was a great success and inviting people to help themselves (akin to incredible edibles) is good for the community. The high level of take-up of hanging baskets by local businesses (nearly 200 full baskets and 36 half baskets) made a difference and they were very colourful. In the Market Place, the arrangements around the memorial cross in jam jars, replicating history, were a nice touch. The gardening club are to be commended for their dry garden planting to make Calder’s corner more attractive.

##### Section B

The Wyver Lane Wildlife Reserve managed by Derbyshire Wildlife Trust is a fabulous asset for the town, providing unique habitats and a wide range of activities to engage with the public. It was good to hear about their development plans. On a much smaller scale the “blue heart campaign” rewinding of parts of the closed churchyard of St Peter’s Church is a great idea and much has been done already to create diverse habitats as evidenced by the wildlife observed and recorded. We noted that it was an inclusive project. At the railway station we also saw pollinator-friendly planting in a challenging bed adjacent to a working platform amidst a successful station gardening project that was well supported. Located in the Derwent Valley World Heritage site Belper has a strong sense of identity and pride in its history is evident throughout the town, with nails and bobbin symbols everywhere. The recent WW1 project has resulted in an amazing new sculpture encapsulating the pride in the town and a respect for its history. We appreciated all the historical explanations from Adrian around the tour and it was good to see that knowledge was widely shared. The town is very active and almost every week there is an event in the town which attracts locals and large numbers of visitors. Considering there had been a food festival the previous weekend the park was very clean. We also liked the poetry trail around the town. The links to the twinning is reinforced with the Mr Potato head imagery.

##### Section C

The Bloom initiative is clearly very active and well supported by a very wide range of volunteer groups and it was good to meet so many of them in the park adjacent to the well dressings. Their displays were very helpful in showing their year round activities in a timely manner. Please thank all who contributed as there is only a limited time available on a tour to talk to so many interesting people about their projects. We also appreciated meeting the representative from Accessible Belper. It was clear there is considerable engagement with schools and young people and it was nice to see the Guiding movement contributing, as well as residents of a Care home involved in one of the well dressing tableaux. We liked the way individual projects were inclusive and St Peter’s Community Garden was a good example given their mix of regular support and ad hoc support from home educated young people, local tree surgeons, community payback, local residents and pupils from Holbrook School for Autism.

We felt the Belper in Bloom project worked well alongside other local initiatives such as Belper Open Gardens.

## **Areas for Development**

### Section A

Where you grow vegetables to demonstrate to the public the ease of growing edibles in a small space it might be helpful to include some signage showing cultivation information to enable residents to be more confident about growing edibles themselves. Vegetable growing can also be decorative and you may want to continue this theme by growing them in a design or inter-planted amongst floral features.

### Section B

It would be good for St Peter's Church rewilding project to take part in more of the national wildlife surveys (Wildlife Watch for example) to highlight what they have achieved and to set the outcomes of their rewilding project in context.

Street furniture refurbishment will always be an issue in heavily-used public spaces and we would have liked to hear about the refurbishment plans/ programme. With so many visitors in town all the time the focus on cleaning needs to be high as we saw some evidence of litter, dog fouling and graffiti, albeit only small amounts.

Around the town there was some evidence of composting and with so many green spaces to manage we would like to see or hear about greater use made of local compost & peat free compost, recycling and minimisation of demand. A focus on water management and irrigation would also be good to ensure optimisation of this resource.

In the parks and community gardens you could consider installing more bird and bat boxes to encourage wildlife.

### Section C

In your portfolio we would have liked to see more evidence of your year-round planting. It is good to see that a major refurbishment of the Tea House in the River Gardens is about to start: unfortunately, the Gardens are closed so it would have been helpful to hear about it in the portfolio or presentation.

Belper in Bloom is currently well supported: however, it would have been very helpful to hear about your future plans, projects and funding in your presentation and portfolio to show the sustainability of the Bloom initiative.

In the presentation you told us about our route, which is contained in the information you gave us. The presentation and portfolio are your opportunity to tell us about year-round involvement and whilst we gleaned much information during our visit we may not be as well informed as we could be.

Belper remains to be a strong Bloom entry - well done.

**A: 92 B: 40 C: 40 Total: 172 GOLD**