

Britain In Bloom

Technical Information Note 05/2016

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This Technical Information Note is intended to provide information on the benefits of the Britain in Bloom campaign to Landscape Architects and Managers and those they work with. It is also intended to encourage participation in the campaign and facilitate links with other environmental projects and programmes.

1. Introduction

1.1 When Britain in Bloom is mentioned, for many people it conjures up an image of traditional annual bedding displays and people in panama hats with clipboards scrutinising begonias. While there may still be an element of this (and tradition still has a role to play in maintaining quality) the campaign is about much more than just the flowers. It reaches out to communities and gives people who may never have had any interest in gardening or landscape, the opportunity to get involved in making their particular corner of the land more green and pleasant in whichever way they feel best suits them and their fellow “bloomers”. The campaign is perhaps far more widespread and wide-reaching than many people realise and it can have significant impacts at various scales from small neighbourhoods to large, city-wide environments.

1.2 The RHS website (www.rhs.org.uk/communities) is a primary resource (including, by permission, for this Technical Note) and provides a range of information and guidance, from which the following is drawn:

“RHS Britain in Bloom is a nationwide community gardening campaign to transform cities, towns and villages. It’s been helping people to improve their local environment since 1964. It is one of Europe’s largest horticultural campaigns.

“More than 1,600 cities, towns, villages, urban communities and local groups take part each year to show off their achievements in environmental responsibility, community participation and, of course, horticultural achievement.

“The campaign runs year round and participating groups report a wide range of benefits such as cleaner, greener and safer surroundings, a growing sense of community pride, and increased commercial enterprise and tourism.

Communities of all sizes can take part, from small villages to large cities. The majority of groups are led by volunteers (just under 80%) while the remainder are run by local authorities or partnerships between local authorities and volunteer groups. Every summer participants are assessed for efforts in three key areas:

- Horticultural achievement
- Community participation
- Environmental responsibility

Activities are selected by each group to meet local needs, but examples include:

- Caring for local parks and squares
- Helping to establish school gardens, run wildlife projects and school food-growing initiatives

- Planting trees and bulbs and creating floral displays in community spaces
- Organising clean up events, repairing street benches and running anti-litter campaigns
- Regenerating unused areas with the involvement of local people
- Creating wildflower meadows and maintaining conservation areas
- Encouraging people to adopt environmentally-aware activities such as recycling, composting and water harvesting

Groups start by taking part in their Regional campaign. Those that do well at this level may then be selected to take part in the UK Finals, which are organised by the RHS.

From the 1,600 communities that take part in the regional campaigns, roughly 80 are selected to go into the annual UK Finals - RHS Britain in Bloom.”

- 1.4 The RHS document: “Britain in Bloom: transforming local communities” (2011) also highlights the benefits that participation brings:
<https://www.rhs.org.uk/communities/pdf/bloom/britain-in-bloom-impact-report>.

2.0 Bloom and its importance to Landscape Design and Management

2.1 When the activities that form Bloom are harnessed and co-ordinated well, they can have a significant impact on the landscape of villages, towns and cities and on the way people respond to and interact with their environment. The three pillars of Bloom offer guidance to participants on how and where to focus effort to achieve maximum benefit.

2.2 The following guidance is drawn from the Britain in Bloom Judging guidelines:

“HORTICULTURAL ACHIEVEMENT

The key areas to consider are:

- Impact
- Business areas and premises
- Green spaces
- Horticultural practice
- Residential and community gardening

Activities should be effective year round; In Bloom is not just a campaign for the summertime. Seasonal displays are an important element but must be proportionate to areas of sustainable planting and permanent landscaping within your entry. Seasonal floral displays are usually present in a number of locations but typically will be located in:

- Publicly owned areas including: parks; civic buildings; roadside and roundabouts;
- Housing and residential areas, residential homes, schools, allotments etc;
- Shopping areas, business/ commercial premises, public houses, hotels, garages, and transport terminals, such as bus and train stations;

Locations to consider for sustainable planting, in addition to those above, are:

- Woodlands, copse, shelterbelts, verges, parks, public open spaces;
- Business parks, industrial estates;
- Screen planting near factories/industrial areas, eyesores, vacant premises/plots etc.; and
- Amenity planting near residential areas, car parks, and shopping areas.

In addition, groups will strive to:

- Ensure best horticultural practice is in place in regard to choice, cultivation and maintenance of plants, sustainability, renewal/ replacement and new planting.
- Engage residential gardeners and those working in public spaces (e.g. retail areas, car parks, leisure centres, businesses parks, pubs, post offices, offices, civic gardens, communal gardens/ allotments etc.) in your campaign, ensuring that these areas are up to the standard of the rest of your community.
- Work to enhance green spaces such as verges, parks and public green spaces.

ENVIRONMENTAL RESPONSIBILITY

The key areas to consider are:

- Conservation and biodiversity
- Local environmental quality
- Pride of place
- Resource management
- Local heritage

This section of the marking encompasses care for the built environment (e.g. litter, vandalism; street furniture etc.) as well as care for the natural environment.

While groups will be marked on the specific criteria above, please also bear in mind that environmental responsibility should underpin everything you do as part of your campaign. For example, if you have an impressive bedding display, the judges will want to know if you have achieved this with consideration for the environment: have you been able to grow your own plug plants; recycle the bedding; or reduce your resource/ maintenance requirements?

Local Bloom groups should either initiate or actively engage with environment-enhancing activities. These might include:

- Establishing nature conservation and wildlife areas
- Cleaning up polluted sites and appropriate treatment/screening of derelict properties or other eyesores
- Active policies to reduce the demand placed on natural resources (e.g. source of water used for plants, use of peat, use of hardwood timber etc.)
- Maintaining and conserving the natural habitat
- Minimal use of pesticides and nitrate fertilisers, reducing or eliminating harmful effects on the environment
- Interventions, management and development of local heritage (including natural heritage)

- Maintaining street furniture and signage, introducing art in the landscape, improving hard landscaping
- Reducing litter, graffiti, fly-posting, fly-tipping, dog fouling and raising public awareness about these.

COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION

The key areas to focus on are:

- Development and continuity
- Year-round involvement
- Funding and support
- Communication and education
- Community involvement

Community participation is crucial to the success of your local campaign and you should try to involve the community in all your Bloom activities. In addition to inviting support for planting activities, think about other ways you can connect with local people. For example, could you engage people in an information campaign to increase recycling, or run an activity to raise awareness of a local heritage site?

As Bloom is a community-driven campaign, it is expected that a diverse range of local people will be involved in your campaign and that there will be broad-based public awareness and support. Increasing the level of participation may require the involvement of your local authority and other organisations – think creatively about the partnerships you can build.

Finally, it is important to show how you intend to continue to develop your programme and what your plans are for the future.

Successful Bloom campaigns will:

- thoughtfully plan how to maintain and develop the improvements they make;
- have an effective communication and education programme resulting in high levels of awareness and understanding in the community. Groups might use tools such as informative signs and displays, press clippings and publicity materials to help them achieve this; and
- show a broad base of community involvement across all ages and backgrounds, with a particular effort to engage young people/schools/colleges, making effective use of the educational opportunities that exist.

Please note - Groups working with children and young people are responsible for ensuring that they do so in accordance with the law with regards to child protection and safety. For further information, please contact your national volunteering body: Volunteer England;

Volunteer Development Scotland; Wales Council for Voluntary Action; or the Volunteer Development Agency in Northern Ireland.

If you are struggling to engage with your local schools, why not encourage them to join the RHS Campaign for School Gardening and offer to mentor them through the process. The scheme provides schools with free advice and support.

Have a year-round programme of activity to keep the community engaged and the area looking its best throughout the year (not just in spring/summer).

Have secured funding/sponsorship and/or support-in-kind for their activities and the support of local government (e.g. local authority, parish/ community council, local MP etc.) and local businesses.”

2.3 Scoring of schemes is carried out as follows (from RHS Britain in Bloom Marking Sheet):

SECTION A – Horticultural Achievement		
Assessing year-round horticultural achievement including conservation and natural areas.		
	MAX	ACT.
Impact design, colours, appropriate choice of plants, special features, presentation, innovation	20	
Horticultural practice cultivation and maintenance, quality of plants, sustainability, new planting	20	
Residential and Community Gardening residential, communal areas, allotments, public buildings (grounds of churches, schools etc.), car parks	20	
Business Areas and Premises retail and shopping areas, leisure sites, transport terminals, car parks, farms, rural businesses, pubs, post offices, tourist areas/attractions, offices, estate agents etc.	20	
Green Spaces verges, parks and open public spaces	20	
TOTAL POINTS AWARDED FOR SECTION A	100	
50% of maximum points		
Areas of Achievement:		
Areas for Improvement:		
SECTION B – Environmental Responsibility		
Assessing year-round activities improving environmental responsibility.		
	MAX	ACT.
Conservation and biodiversity areas of natural habitat, wildlife and conservation sites	10	

Resource management recycling, minimising demand placed on natural resources and any harmful impact on the environment	10	
Local heritage management and development of local heritage and/or identity, inclusive of natural heritage	10	
Local environmental quality management of vacant premises and plots, litter, graffiti, fly-posting, dog fouling etc.	10	
Pride of place management of street furniture, signage, art in the landscape and hard landscaping	10	
TOTAL POINTS AWARDED FOR SECTION B 25% of maximum points	50	
Areas of Achievement:		
Areas for Improvement:		
SECTION C – Community Participation		
Assessing year-round community participation		
	MAX	ACT.
Development and continuity - Development and sustainability of the local Bloom initiative and evidence of ongoing projects	10	
Communication and education community awareness and understanding, engagement with schools and young people and/or other community groups, press coverage, publicity materials	10	
Community participation engaging a wide range of people across all areas of the community	10	
Year-round involvement schedules of events and supporting evidence of year-round activity (primary evidence to be presented in 15 minute presentation)	10	
Funding and Support initiatives to secure ongoing support for the local Bloom campaign including local business support	10	
TOTAL POINTS AWARDED FOR SECTION C 25% of maximum points	50	
Areas of Achievement:		
Areas for Improvement:		
GRAND TOTAL POINTS AWARDED	200 (max.)	
MEDAL AWARDED		

- 2.4 Successful Bloom campaigns result in significantly improving a sense of place and identity of participating areas, and foster shared ownership of, responsibility for and pride in settlements. Bloom communities are more aware of environmental issues and tend to have well-developed capacity for creating strategies to sustain and improve their neighbourhoods, often involving a range of public, private and voluntary sector partners and volunteers.
- 2.5 This model is one which can be (and often is) applied to other landscape and townscape projects or strategies, or could be run in parallel with such initiatives to engage with communities and ensure buy-in and ongoing involvement.

3.0 Sponsorship and Other Funding

- 3.1 Many Bloom participants have developed funding and income strategies to assist in achieving sustainability of their projects, whether that be for annual bedding displays, wildlife and conservation areas, heritage features or other opportunities.
- 3.2 With ever decreasing local authority budgets, which used to be the mainstay of many town centre and parks displays, Bloom participants are devising innovative approaches to ensure attractive environments can be maintained and some examples now follow:
- 3.3 **Invest to Save Initiatives:**
Replacement of annual bedding with permanent sustainable planting schemes – one off cost of new planting is offset by ongoing annual savings to revenue budgets from bedding plants and maintenance costs.
- 3.4 **Pledge Schemes:**
Plants donated by local garden centres/nurseries and planted/maintained by schools/volunteers under a pledge.
- 3.5 **Grow Your Own:**
Groups grow plants in polytunnels or greenhouses and plant/maintain them in neighbourhood locations.
- 3.6 **Asset Transfer:**
Groups adopt/take on leases of local spaces (free or at peppercorn rents) and maintain them voluntarily.
- 3.7 **Recycled Materials/Energy Efficiency:**
Use of tree arisings and food waste as compost/mulch/soil improver/weed suppressant, grey water collected in water butts and SuDS, solar lighting, salvaged materials re-used, plastic bottles used to make greenhouses.
- 3.8 **Grant Funding:**
A wide range of small, medium and large grants are available to constituted community groups and charities and support is often available to assist in making applications.
- 3.9 **Sponsorship:**
Many businesses recognise the benefit of an attractive, cared for environment in attracting footfall and spend to town centres and retail parks. There are many opportunities for businesses to sponsor Bloom campaigns either individually or to better effect, collectively (as can be seen with many BIDs). These include the traditional roundabout and hanging basket sponsorship, but can be expanded to other areas like public art installations, ground art and subway art, hoardings around development sites, signs on central reservations, in parks and on litter bins, and through sponsorship of Bloom competitions for local communities. Investing in a sales and marketing expert to secure sponsorship can also be self-funding and where successful, can generate surpluses for reinvestment in projects.

4.0 Other considerations

Themed Campaigns:

- 4.1 The RHS select themes to guide the Britain in Bloom campaign towards areas where participants can make a difference to their localities. The current theme is “Greening Grey Britain” which encourages people to transform neglected spaces which are perhaps covered in crumbling concrete or tarmac into vibrant, green areas for the community to enjoy. Other themes have included “Plants for Pollinators” to encourage the recovery of the declining bee population in the UK.
- 4.2 Participating groups often link their campaigns to the RHS theme, or choose their own theme which is local and perhaps unique to them. This can relate to local history, heritage or cultural traditions, or be linked to national events like the Queen’s Diamond Jubilee, the Olympic Games or the anniversary of significant historic events. It can be a fun and enjoyable way to engage with and involve a more diverse range of people in the campaign, and bring non-horticultural skills into the group.
- 4.3 The RHS also run a number of other initiatives which people can get involved in including It’s Your Neighbourhood (a non-competitive campaign for small projects and groups who may just be starting out), Campaign for School Gardening , Wild About Gardening and Horticulture Matters – information on all of these is on the RHS website under Get Involved.

The Britain in Bloom Awards:

- 4.4 The UK is divided into 17 regions for the Bloom campaign and each holds its own judging during July each year, followed by a regional awards ceremony. Each region can nominate a number of entrants for the National Britain in Bloom Finals each year, which are judged during August by the RHS judges. The results are announced at the awards ceremony each year in autumn with each entrant invited to attend and awarded a certificate according to the level they have achieved (bronze, silver, silver gilt, gold). Category winners are announced from across the UK, and the coveted overall winner (Champion of Champions) trophy is presented.
- 4.5 Awards are also held in the 17 regions for It’s Your Neighbourhood to recognise the achievements of local groups, and many areas also host local competitions for gardens, allotments, school projects and community projects.

Sources of Further Information:

- 4.6 Further information can be found on the RHS website www.rhs.org.uk/communities and by contacting your local region (contacts provided on RHS website)

5.0 Case Study

Newcastle-under-Lyme

Newcastle-under-Lyme has been participating in Britain in Bloom for 26 years and has represented the Heart of England in the National finals on 4 occasions. Newcastle was overall winner of the Heart of England in Bloom in 2016 and will represent the region in the small city category in the National finals in 2017. It has been awarded a Gold Medal for the last 15 consecutive years.

The Newcastle-under-Lyme approach can be distilled into 4 broad themes: planning, resourcing, delivering and sustaining.

Planning

- Set a long term vision and landscape/townscape strategy which will be incrementally implemented – Bloom is not just about looking good on judging day, it is about achieving lasting, year-round improvements to your area.
- Focus on your “shop windows” – the areas most visitors and residents will see and form their perceptions of the area on e.g. main arterial traffic/transport routes and hubs, town centres/retail areas, major parks, educational sites, visitor attractions.
- Select your judging route to show off your best areas and demonstrate how you have responded to the Bloom judging criteria.
- Engage with partners, businesses, schools, colleges and community groups to co-ordinate efforts and achieve buy in to a common goal. Set up a working group of key partners to drive the campaign and provide support to others

Resourcing

- Make the best use of what you have e.g. prioritise existing budgets into your high profile areas, schedule your current maintenance operations for particular areas to coincide with and complement other activities, and consider invest to save initiatives such as replacing annual bedding with permanent planting
- Share resources with other partners e.g. joint working with highways teams on cleansing operations, housing departments on estate management and waste teams on recycling initiatives
- Engage with your local community and support participation in environmental projects. Volunteer groups can provide a huge resource and deliver significant projects if they are motivated and supported. It is well worth investing staff resources in developing community participation as the payback is mutually beneficial.
- Seek out sponsorship and grant funding. If you can successfully engage local businesses in the campaign (many businesses recognise the value of an attractive trading environment) and offer a range of options for promotion e.g. signs, artwork, competitions, awards ceremonies, significant funding can be generated. Similarly, with good community engagement, grant funding opportunities for particular projects can be

accessed. Investing in a marketing/sales specialist can often be self-financing if they are successful in achieving income targets

Delivering

- Prepare a delivery plan and timescale, setting out key milestones and action owners. Review the plan at each working group meeting and delegate tasks clearly. Escalate issues in good time to allow the opportunity to recover
- Build in contingency plans. Unforeseen events such as weather, roadworks or personnel issues can all impact on your campaign. Try to have a plan B in place where possible and rehearse it so that you can switch smoothly if required
- Practice makes perfect – rehearse your judging route with all of the people and groups involved. Get your timings right and make sure people are on cue to meet the judges and say the relevant things. Time can be tight so you need to make best use of it. Manage the judges as well as the participants – politely intervene where necessary to move things along
- Teamwork – build up a good team spirit and get everyone on board in seeking to achieve the common goal. Keep everyone focused and involved, and of course share any success and celebrate together

Sustaining

- Success breeds success – people enjoy a sense of achievement (often regardless of the colour of the medal) and want to replicate it. Motivated people can often inspire (or coerce!) others to get involved and campaigns often snowball from modest beginnings into wide-reaching and inclusive initiatives, linking into other economic regeneration and social development programmes
- Promote the benefits – political support can be crucial to campaigns, and that support is much easier to secure when local residents and businesses (the electorate!) are fully engaged and supportive of the Bloom ethos.
- Embrace change – don't rest on your laurels, the political, social and economic climate can change very quickly and you have to be ready to adapt if necessary. Look for new opportunities, constantly review your approaches and don't be afraid to try new and different things.
- Build capacity – often community groups and volunteers are extremely capable of sustaining themselves and just need some initial support to get set up. Try to encourage self-management wherever possible and redeploy resources into supporting new groups where existing ones have "flown the nest". There will be a natural churn of volunteer groups but don't be downhearted by this – another one will form and take you off in a new direction! That's the beauty of Bloom.

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