



**RHS Britain in Bloom
UK Finals Marking Sheet 2022**

Name of entry: Congleton in Bloom	Judging Date: 2 August 2022
Category: Large Town	Judges: Ann Holland and Geraldine King

Horticultural Achievement (40%)	Gold
Environmental Responsibility (30%)	Gold
Community Participation (30%)	Gold
Overall	Gold

Introduction and overall impression

A beautiful and charming Anglo-Saxon historic town in Cheshire that provides a warm welcome for all visitors. Very informative introduction to the town provided by the Bloom Group at Astbury Mere Country Park Visitor Centre. Lovely to meet many of the volunteers, trustees and see how you are supported throughout the year from the presentation and information provided. Great horticultural displays throughout the tour including high impact barrier baskets and roundabouts landscaping which was all special, including the Two Bears Roundabout!

Congleton has amazing historical charm from the buildings and well maintained open spaces demonstrating a town steeped in history. What was evident from our tour was the pride and involvement of the community from all backgrounds and ages as well as the dedication of the Congleton in Bloom group. It's clear to see how much they all love and value their town. Quaint does not do this town justice! It oozes pride! A massive well done to all in the community from wildlife surveys, rickshaw rides, new emerging garden designers, to 750 unique flag makers, A Celebration of Flowers in St Peters Church, the support of local businesses along with an amazing history. Congratulations on your well-earned Gold across all three categories! Please do continue to grow and thank you all for sharing your beautiful town with the BIB judges.

SECTION A – Horticulture

Overall impression and maintenance of planted areas

Maintenance throughout the tour was to a high standard, Barrier baskets, town centre tubs and 265 hanging baskets were colorful and full of mixed bedding. Each roundabout had its own character from the Two Bears Roundabout at one end of the town to the Tesco roundabout at the other. Good evidence of businesses support with the Lion and Key Hotel. Sustainable planting to Morrisons wall displays and West Street Wall were very good examples of maintenance along with St Peter's Church entrance planting. Good CIB

maintenance of Elizabeth's Garden, the cenotaph, Bridge Street, High Street, Congleton Park and Community Gardens of Reflection.

Consider mulching in Elizabeth Gardens, Congleton Park and the Gardens of Reflection to reduce watering and maintain moisture. Continue reducing bedding plants and moving towards drought tolerant, and more sustainable long term displays in planters.

Plant selection

A diverse selection of maintenance to woodlands, meadows and habitats at Astbury Mere Country Park. Nice range of tender perennials and herbs at Elizabeth's Garden. Good choice of plants, bedding and shrubs in town centre displays, roundabouts and across the open spaces including Congleton Park, particularly the new Just Bee Garden. Consider right plant, right place and minimal maintenance for future climate change with tubs, Garden of reflection and roundabout displays plus future projects. Lovely plant choice in the Physic Garden; appropriate and the plants tell the medicinal story.

Plant quality

All plant displays were to a very good standard, with healthy foliage and free of pest and disease in general. Excellent hanging baskets displays and barrier baskets.

SECTION B – Environment

Local identity and pride of place

The pride shown from the team was outstanding in supporting your rich cultural and historical heritage! Quite rightly showcased and to be proud of! The statue in the town dedicated to the forerunner for suffragettes Elizabeth Wolstenholme Elmy including Elizabeth's garden is a wonderful testament. The St Peter's Church Flower Festival with tributes to HM the Queen's Platinum Jubilee was an amazing display of artistic floral and paper mache work from the local church group. The fantastic trail of bears throughout the tour gave a real community vibe to the town linking the importance of bear fighting traditionally in the town and added fun to the town for young and old to appreciate. Thank you for our bears! The wheel barrow competition was exciting and pulled all walks of the community together. The icing on the cake was indeed recognition of Congleton's 750 year charter. The flags, town crier and future planned events really do demonstrate how proud you are.

Natural environment

Very good strategies produced and ideal forward thinking for all green spaces. Documentation with clear goals provided in draft biodiversity plans for Congleton Green Spaces, Bromley Farm Green Spaces, Buglawton Green Spaces, Lower Heath Green Spaces, Central Green Spaces, West Heath Green Spaces and Mossley Area Green Spaces. Plans include aims and potential for biodiversity enhancements which are focused on proposals for each unique character to each open space.

Do continue to explore this with the local community and develop habitat surveys to grow the evidence for future proposals. It would be good to establish flora and fauna goals for the future for each area with potential local community champions taking a lead. There is potential to provide data for wildlife and fauna in each open space to inform the community. The Just Bee Garden and orchard planting projects are strong initiatives that will grow with the community. Excellent to see pollinator friendly planting being used in the barrier baskets.

An extremely good tour of Astbury Mere Country Park demonstrating biodiversity, conservation and woodland management. Wildflowers areas were evident and thank you to Mark for highlighting the activity of birds and management of the park.

Environmental management

The forming of the Congleton Green Working Group to tackle climate change is very proactive. Congratulations on being awarded 'Plastic Free Community Status' by Surfers against Sewage in June 2022. A number of groups participate in engaging the community with environmental management including: waste reduction volunteers, Food4Free plant swapping and gardening for wildlife. Consider bio security when using tools in different gardens or carrying out plant swaps. The appendix of surveys for locations on the tour demonstrating environmental and sustainable thinking is a wonderful tool to record and monitor progress along with figures for tonnage of waste and recycling.

SECTION C – Community

Year round activity and future commitment

Clear evidence provided of the commitment of CIB throughout the year, through the introductory talk, portfolio and evident on the tour through discussions with various groups, staff and volunteers. The Community Garden of Reflection to recognize those who have been lost in service along with the Young Peoples' Garden and the New Just Bee Garden in Congleton Park demonstrate inclusion from all parts of the community. The Bear Necessities magazine is an outstanding reflection of what you are achieving as a community and what is planned for the next few months. With over 5K hours of volunteering throughout the parks and community gardens to being recognized with IYN and Green Flag Status as well as success at regional and national level with Britain in Bloom, the future is growing.

Communication, education and awareness

Very good use of social media as a platform for spreading the word of the work that you do. 5.4K followers on Facebook with regular community posts. Informative historic trails provided including: Congleton Charter Year Heritage and Heraldry Trail, Elizabeth Trail, Congleton Town Centre Heritage provided by the museum reflecting important buildings, historic origins of the town and the coat of arms. Really good to see promotion of Love your Park Week along with recognition from Green Flag and Heritage Parks Awards for Astbury Mere Country Park, Congleton Park and several It's Your Neighbourhood (IYN) spaces throughout the tour. The Bear Necessities Magazine is informative for demonstrating your successes and highlighting community events for locals and visitors to participate in. The dates for your diary for the next few months is a great addition. Consider telling the story of the medicinal purposes behind the plants in the Physic Garden to improve interpretation.

Support and funding

Congleton in Bloom is a successful and established in Bloom Group. The partnership with h to fund schools to improve outdoor activities, trees to local groups, £1600 to plant the link road roundabout benefits the community and the environment and supports the Queen Green Canopy scheme. Funding from 9 separate groups for the Just Bee Garden of over £5000 has provided a wonderful addition to Congleton Park.