

 Standard Marking Sheet	Name of Entry: Congleton in Bloom									
	Judges: Bernard Sheridan / Bernard Pendleton									
	Date of Assessment: 1 st August 2023									
Category: Large Town										
MAXIMUM OF 10 POINTS PER SUB SECTION									Total marks awarded in sections A, B & C	Medal level awarded in sections A, B & C
A Horticulture 40%	A1	10	A2	9.5	A3	10	A4	9	38.5	Gold
B Environment 30%	B1	10	B2	9.5	B3	9			28.5	Gold
C Community 30%	C1	10	C2	9	C3	10			29	Gold
Total Score out of 100: 96						Overall Medal Awarded: Gold				
Medal Guide: Gold, Excellent 85-100 Points; Silver Gilt, Very Good 75-84 Points; Silver, Good 60-74 Points; Bronze, Satisfactory 50-59 Points. 49 Points and below – certificate of participation.										
Introduction and Overall Impression: Congleton in Bloom are a “Jewel in the Northwest in Bloom Gold Crown,” this year the judges consisted of the two Bernards, one had judged the town and its wonderful neighbourhood the previous year, the other was judging for the first time, A comprehensive portfolio had been received. The judges were warmly welcomed by representatives from the Congleton in Bloom team, this set the scene for the day, but most importantly it reminded the judges of the wonderful achievements and external recognition that Congleton in Bloom have achieved over the years. Congleton takes pride in its town, and regularly looks to how it can improve. All identified actions and previous recommendations had been signed off. Another outstanding year for the Congleton in Bloom partnership, with a full range of further improvements from last year. The town is rich in heritage, and this was clearly promoted and celebrated throughout the tour. During the tour all the areas visited were largely litter and graffiti-free and the town’s street furniture and infrastructure are exemplary. There was little weed in the town and Council is moving to using reduced weedkiller. The judges were particularly impressed with the outstanding community involvement and support, it was a delight to meet so many individuals and hear about their passion for volunteering. The partnership with Streetscene, the Council, Business groups, Residents, Volunteer groups and community representatives is excellent. It was a delight to meet the Mayor and for him to accompany us for part of the tour, this was an example of his wonderful support for everything in Congleton, but particularly In Bloom. The Gold pillar box was a learning opportunity and something rightly to be proud off. The group are always moving forward, their records on tree planting, orchard development and engaging with new groups and volunteers is first class. This continues to be an exceptionally strong entry, in all areas, from an outstanding and committed core team. Their presence on social media is excellent, the consultation work they undertake with their community is one of the best examples in the North West, Thank you for your continued support for RHS North West in Bloom you deserve your accolades, well done to everyone.										

Judges Feedback Section A – Horticulture: *(Please expand space as required to fit judging comments).*

The judges were very impressed with the excellent Horticultural achievements from this entry. The visit to the Physic Garden was brilliant, a wonderful heritage site. The tour of the hotel garden was excellent and the planting at the rear garden was very good indeed, maybe consider planting shrubs in groups of 3 or 5, this may improve the impact. The park was a delight to visit, and the team have created and managed a huge range of horticultural displays and features, and the park is truly an excellent example of how to have outstanding bedding displays, but also increase the herbaceous perennials and suitable shrubs, an excellent small herb and vegetable area was seen on the raised beds along the path. You may wish to consider further improvements to some of the perimeter beds in the park, in order to bring them in line with herbaceous borders surrounding the brilliant formal areas, The bee garden is another fantastic feature. The judges had a wonderful cycle chariot round the park, The town centre has a large number of barrier planters, hanging baskets, containers and various beds and borders on green spaces and roundabouts. These were of a very high standard- the quality of plants, colour choice and maintenance were exceptional, and provided excellent colour and vibrancy to the town. The use of naturalistic mixed herbaceous, bulb and shrub planting throughout the town was clearly very successful and well thought-out, amongst others, at Elizabeth's Garden, the roundabouts, the Cenotaph and the Community Garden. Much of this work was carried out by enthusiastic and skilled volunteers. There was a great deal of fine horticultural practice, especially in the fruit and veg class, on display at Vale Allotments and Congleton Park has retained much of its superb heritage seasonal bedding displays whilst switching some beds to naturalistic sustainable planting which has been very successful. The Just Bee Garden has been a brilliant introduction this year and the wildflower plantings have provided a good display and pollinator foraging opportunities where there was previously only amenity grass. The Community Gardening Festival in the polytunnel at The Park showed how the group is engaging with young people to promote horticultural skills and knowledge, with a high standard being achieved. This was a real asset to the tour and a delight to meet so many representatives from the community. The group has also arranged a considerable amount of tree planting for the Platinum Jubilee and community orchards which involved children, young people and other volunteers. The horticultural features initiatives in this town are exemplar.

Judges Feedback Section B – Environment: *(Please expand space as required to fit judging comments).*

The In Bloom group and their numerous partners continue to embrace their environmental responsibility. They are very committed to celebrating and promoting the town's wonderful identity, sense of place, and its outstanding heritage. The judge visiting the hidden gem of the Bath House and Physic Garden was blown away. What a wonderful resource managed so well by the volunteers. The historic town centre buildings, art features and green spaces, the bears, the heraldic flags, suffragette statue etc. are all celebrated and promoted, interpreted, and included a series of leaflets, heritage walks and in the museum. The volunteer we met outside the Town Hall was a fountain of knowledge and a pleasure to meet. The town centre was graffiti, litter and weed-free. The street furniture (including recycling bins) and infrastructure were of a very high standard, and the new Cenotaph is well-designed and constructed for full accessibility. The town council publishes its recycling data and rates, and they are commendable. The partnership's commitment to biodiversity is clearly evident in fully valuing nature sites such as Astbury Mere CP, where the biodiversity is regularly surveyed and monitored. The Council set up a Green Group in 2019, and had, in 2010, established Congleton Sustainability Group which collects unwanted apples for juicing, and the juice is of excellent quality. This has developed with a programme of converting to more sustainable naturalistic planting and creating wildflower strips for displays which are better for pollinators. S106 funding has allowed 14 sites to be planted with wildflower meadows, and No-Mow May and Blue Heart campaign have all contributed to more pollinator-friendly practices. No-Mow May sites have been surveyed, and Vale allotments have carried out a biodiversity audit of the site. We hope that this will allow monitoring of the progress of the changes in improving biodiversity over time.

A large number of trees have been planted, including the work of Trees for Congleton, as community orchards, hedgerow and Queen's Platinum Jubilee Canopy. There is an ambition to plant 30k trees over 5 years, and this group will achieve this.

The judges recommend continuing current level of achievement and practice, whilst benchmarking against other entrants and top performing sites to gain additional expertise and ideas, especially with establishing best practice design and management techniques for pollinators and wildlife.

Judges Feedback Section C – Community: *(Please expand space as required to fit judging comments).*

The judges continue to be impressed with Congleton in Blooms impressive 150+ separate groups and organisations who are very active and work collectively to make this entry how outstanding. The impact of their community participation is phenomenal and has been transformative and one can easily see how this contributes to the success at regional and national level. The community volunteers work so well with the streetscene manager and all the council staff, the business group, the schools and nurseries, together with residential homes, friends' groups, and they really make a difference. It was a pleasure to meet volunteers on our judging tour and for so many to attend for wonderful refreshments in the park at the end of the tour.

Over the years Trees for Congleton have created 20 community orchard sites, planting 150+ trees

The Friends group at Congleton Park, along with park staff and local primary schools have carried out many parks' improvements including wildflower p
The Community Garden Festival based in the polytunnel at the park involved many schools and volunteer groups and was a wonderful addition to the park during the summer and visitors were impressed, so many groups were involved, credit must go to the guides and school groups.

The group work hard to raise funds and many local businesses support the campaign, as well as the William Dean Trust which has funded substantial projects. The rotary and many other partners continue to support Congleton in Bloom. Everyone involved should be congratulated on their wonderful achievements. Thank you all for your efforts for Congleton in Bloom and North West in Boom it is very much appreciated.

We recommend that the group continues its wonderful work and continues to try to involve all sections of the community, including marginalised groups, in pursuing its aims and ambitions, we look forward to visiting next year.

		10-9	8	7-6	5
A1	<u>Overall Impression</u> Taking account of all relevant factors, how strong is the impact of the entry in creating a memorable impression? Are designs and materials used appropriate to their locations? Emphasis here is on coordination and overall quality.	High impact with excellent attention to detail delivering the desired results in an appropriate and consistent manner.	Most areas are high impact with very good attention to detail although some inconsistencies.	Good overall impact although not always balanced. Some areas make an impact but others need to be more vibrant with better design.	Although generally satisfactory , more attention to detail is required in order to increase impact and improve consistency of design.
A2	<u>Maintenance of Planted Areas</u> Are the areas within the entry maintained to an appropriate standard, including cultivation, weeding, feeding, pruning,	Excellent standards of cultivation. Very consistent throughout. Horticultural maintenance and	Standards are very good with few exceptions. Horticultural maintenance is managed consistently.	Standards of horticultural maintenance are good and fairly consistent. A few exceptions where	Standards are generally satisfactory . However, the horticultural maintenance programme requires

	grass maintenance, tree management and maintenance? (See B3 for maintenance techniques)	general care is outstanding.		further attention is required.	further attention to detail in some areas.
A3	<u>Plant Selection</u> Are the plants or trees, used in the planting schemes, suited to their growing conditions, locations and purposes? Is there a diverse range of plant-species to attract a variety of insects and wildlife? Is there year-round interest, where appropriate?	Excellent plant selection with extensive year-round interest, and almost no exceptions.	Plant selection is very good overall with only a few exceptions and ample year-round interest.	Plant selection is generally good , but there is room for improvement in some areas in order to extend year-round interest.	Plant selection is generally satisfactory , however it requires further consideration in order to extend the season and maintain interest.
A4	<u>Plant Quality</u> Are the plants or trees vibrant and grown to their full potential? Are they generally free of pests and diseases?	Plant quality is excellent , plants are very healthy, vigorous and grown to their full potential.	Plant quality is very good , plants are mostly healthy and vigorous, with only a few exceptions.	Plant quality and health is generally good , but not always consistent. Lack of vigour in some areas.	Plant quality and health is generally satisfactory , but could be improved.
		10-9	8	7-6	5
B1	<u>Local Identity & Pride of Place</u> Is there a sense of place, with appropriate acknowledgement of local heritage (including biodiversity) and its relevance for the community; e.g. art in the landscape, signage, interpretation, etc. Consider the pride taken in hard landscape (including streets), open spaces (including grass areas, wild areas and beaches if appropriate), street furniture maintenance, etc. To include cleanliness, absence of litter, graffiti vandalism, flyposting/temporary	Extensive evidence of efforts to highlight/enhance local identity. An excellent impression made about what makes the area unique. Street furniture including litter bins and seating is in excellent condition.	Considerable evidence of efforts to highlight/enhance local identity. A very good impression made about what makes the area unique. Street furniture including litter bins and seating is in very good condition.	Some evidence of efforts to highlight/enhance local identity. A good impression made about what makes the area unique. Street furniture including litter bins and seating is in good condition.	Little evidence of efforts to highlight/enhance local identity. A satisfactory impression made about what makes the area unique. Street furniture including litter bins and seating is in variable condition.

	signage, chewing gum, and effective dog fouling control measures.				
B2	<u>Natural Environment</u> Is there an understanding of what biodiversity means locally? Have efforts been made to create, restore or maintain appropriate habitats to support wildlife? What has been done to assess the effectiveness of any interventions? E.g. through surveys. Is nature being considered in all activities, rather than just restricting wildlife-friendly practices to a specific project or area?	The natural environment is managed to an excellent standard supporting an extensive range of flora and fauna, with little improvement required. Extensive effort to assess the impact of interventions. Nature is considered across all activities.	The natural environment is managed to a very good standard across the whole entry, supporting a considerable range of flora and fauna. Considerable effort to assess the impact of interventions. Nature is considered across most activities. Very little effort would lift it to excellent.	The natural environment is managed to a good standard supporting a range of flora and fauna. Some effort to assess the impact of interventions. Nature is considered across some activities. Requires further work to improve it in places.	The natural environment is managed to a generally satisfactory standard supporting some flora and fauna. Little effort to assess the impact of interventions. Nature is considered across very few activities. Needs significant improvement in places.
B3	<u>Environmental Management</u> Have steps been taken to employ sustainable or ecological gardening practices? E.g. Avoiding chemicals like pesticides and using other biological and physical controls like hand weeding or companion planting. Eliminating the use of peat, implementing solutions like composting, reducing the use of plastics and recycling those used. Taking measures to minimise the use of water. Where local environmental issues have been identified, have plants or greening solutions been considered, e.g. as rain gardens, green roofs/walls, or as barriers for pollution?	Excellent evidence of sustainable gardening practices, including the conservation of resources and minimising negative impacts. Extensive use of plants or greening solutions to address local environmental issues.	Very good evidence of sustainable gardening practices, including the conservation of resources and minimising negative impacts. Considerable use of plants or greening solutions to address local environmental issues.	Good evidence of sustainable gardening practices, including the conservation of resources and minimising negative impacts. Some use of plants or greening solutions to address local environmental issues.	Satisfactory evidence of effort to garden sustainably, conserve resource and minimise negative impacts. Little use of plants or greening solutions to address local environmental issues.

		10-9	8	7-6	5
C1	<u>Year Round Activity and Future Commitment</u> Evidence of forward planning and year-round activities, initiatives or events, highlighting where they are adding value and demonstrating the strengths or uniqueness of the entry.	Excellent evidence of activities taking place throughout the year and of advanced planning. The annual programme of activities is exceptional.	Very good evidence of activities taking place throughout the year and of advanced planning.	Good evidence of activities taking place throughout the year and of advanced planning.	Satisfactory evidence of activities taking place throughout the year and of advanced planning but some areas of improvement needed.
C2	<u>Communication, Education, and Awareness</u> Use of suitable interpretation, enabling learning and a greater understanding of purpose, and environmental importance. Engagement with schools, young people or other groups. Promotion within the immediate area through local and regional communications. Appropriate communications and media involvement evidenced.	Excellent use of signage and interpretation, and evidence of involvement in public awareness and educational programmes. Communications and appropriate media involvement are extremely well evidenced.	Very good use of signage and interpretation, and evidence of involvement in public awareness and educational programmes. Communications and appropriate media involvement are very well evidenced.	Good use of signage and interpretation, and evidence of involvement in public awareness and educational programmes. Communications and appropriate media involvement are well evidenced. A few missed opportunities.	Satisfactory use of signage and interpretation, and evidence of involvement in public awareness and educational programmes. Communications and appropriate media involvement are evidenced but limited and there is room for improvement.
C3	<u>Support and Funding</u> Has the entry made every effort to be inclusive, and engage the support of a wide variety of local groups and organisations? Participation should be representative of the local community. Evidence of fundraising and on-going support from a range of businesses and organisations appropriate to the size of the entry, making it viable and able to continue moving forward.	The range of groups and organisations engaged are an excellent representation of the wider community. Excellent levels of funding to ensure the viability of the entry. Support in all areas is sustainable and outstanding.	The range of groups and organisations engaged are a very good representation of the wider community. Very good levels of funding to ensure the viability of the entry. Support in all areas is very good and will be sustainable over time.	The range of groups and organisations engaged are a good representation of the wider community. Good levels of funding to ensure the viability of the entry. Support in all areas is good and, with effort, will be sustainable over time.	The range of groups and organisations engaged are a satisfactory representation of the wider community. Satisfactory levels of funding to ensure the viability of the entry. Support in all areas is satisfactory and fairly sustainable over time.

Judges/Entrants notes:

- The form has expandable sections under overall impression and judges' feedback allowing the judges to provide comprehensive and meaningful comments as much as they deem necessary.
- **Maintenance of Planted Areas:** The maintenance schedule should take account of biodiversity needs through the seasons; these will vary depending upon setting and location. Examples could include avoiding hedge trimming in nesting season or leaving some grass longer at certain times of year etc.
- **Plant Selection:** Prioritising perennial or pollinator-friendly plants is encouraged where appropriate. If annual bedding is used, groups should carefully consider the provenance and buy from local nurseries that do not use peat, or, if possible, to grow their own.
- **Natural Environment:**
 - The use of sustainable practices and materials should be encouraged wherever possible.
 - When creating, restoring or maintaining habitats to support wildlife, any features should be appropriate to the particular place. They could be as varied as ponds, 'dead' hedges, or the connection of several habitats to make 'pollinator pathways'. When used inappropriately something as simple as a bug hotel can become a bird feeder.
 - Assessing the effectiveness of interventions is incredibly important and all groups should be encouraged to measure their impact. This can be through a simple survey, or through contributing to a broader citizen science project or national monitoring scheme.
- **Environmental Management:**
 - Groups should minimise their use of plastic, choosing alternative materials where possible, and where unavoidable switching to better plastics such as recycled, recyclable or compostable products. Groups should repeatedly re-use items like plant pots and trays.
 - Groups are encouraged to identify local environmental issues, and tackle them, using plants. These can be very simple or low-cost interventions, e.g. adding a green roof to a bin store, or planting a hedge to reduce pollution near a main road.