



**RHS Britain in Bloom  
UK Finals Marking Sheet 2023**

<b>Name of entry:</b> Churchtown in Bloom	<b>Judging Date:</b> 1 <sup>st</sup> August 2023
<b>Category:</b> Village	<b>Judges:</b> Ian Beaney & Nick Jones

<b>Horticultural Achievement (40%)</b>	Gold
<b>Environmental Responsibility (30%)</b>	Gold
<b>Community Participation (30%)</b>	Gold
<b>Overall</b>	Gold

**Introduction and Overall Impression**

The beautiful village of Churchtown is located adjacent to the A586 to the north and the River Wyre to the south. It is one of the oldest villages in Wyre and has links to the larger villages of Garstang, Nateby and Great Eccleston.

Churchtown feels like the epitome of an English village with the church and pub providing the focus for the local community which has embraced the culture of 'Bloom' to great effect, making it an important part of community life. Starting in 2019 the village entered North West in Bloom and gained a gold award, a standard continued through 2021 and 2022. The entry of Churchtown into the national competition is well deserved and the judges enjoyed a unique tour of the village in a horse drawn carriage which added greatly to the atmosphere on judging day.

The presentation in the hall of St Helen's Church introduced the theme 'Together in Community Spirit' and the judges observed this in abundance as we toured the village. Many organisations had helped the group in their In Bloom journey. Churchtown had partnered with previous Britain in Bloom entrants, Garstang, who had assisted the village in its preparations for the national finals. Also included was Community Payback, Wyre Borough Council, the Rotary Club, local businesses, and the flood action group.

The group worked on the principles 'Raising Awareness, Getting Noticed, Getting Supported'. The idea of posting a small pack of flower seeds through all the resident's letter boxes and asking for a small donation proved very successful.

The idea of 'Gloom to Bloom', the concept of 'informally formal' and the aim of 'enjoying the company of others', was easy to see in Churchtown and it is a well-deserved joint category winner due to the combined efforts of the community.

The strength of the Bloom team bodes well for the future of this charming village. The judges would like to thank the Bloom group and the community in Churchtown for the courtesy and hospitality extended to them during their visit.

## **SECTION A – Horticulture**

### **Areas of achievement**

The village displayed a significant level of high-quality permanent planting mixed with seasonal bedding throughout. Tubs and planters appeared at every turn, all appropriately scaled to suit the backdrop of their locations. The plants utilised had been selected not only for their form and colour but for their attractiveness to pollinators.

The house frontages, which form the main growing spaces in Church Street were of very high quality, with many displaying horticultural architecture to match that of the houses themselves. Of note was Churchgate House complete with its cobbled frontage and the “Bloom HQ’ with containers and boxes in every available space. Due to the proximity of the residences to the road, hanging baskets made a significant contribution to the floral landscape. The cool colours of blue and the warmer reds and yellows provided a great display from healthy plants. Lavender Cottage was also very attractive as were the gardens on Fylde Road.

The baskets and planters at the village cross (actually a sundial) were at their full potential and it was pleasing to note the use of alpine plants in the stone troughs at this location. It was also gratifying to observe the presence of Ivy-Leaved Toadflax at the sundial. This can often be removed in an attempt to ‘tidy up’ a location but here it was perfectly suited to its surroundings.

The planting at the Jollie Postie was quaint as was the postie’s bicycle decorated with plants both front and back. This had been designed as a tribute to a previous postman of the village.

It was a delight to meet Libby and Martha, Churchtown’s ‘Mini Bloomers’ who joined us for the rest of the tour pointing out planting that they had undertaken along the way.

The approach displays at the village entrance at Anspool Lane were of high quality and the presence of a boat and life ring acknowledged the flood risk present in the village.

Private gardens at St Helen’s Close were well maintained and were a contrast to the planting in the village centre.

The Ukrainian displays at the Millennium Mosaic were excellent and acknowledged recent events in Ukraine. The topiary hedgehogs will look striking as they develop, and the permanent planting was of high quality. The well-designed green at the Horns Country Inn made a striking entrance feature to the village. Laid out with floral work, flowerbeds and a recently acquired cart it made a welcome statement at this location.

### **Considerations for development**

Whilst the judges were aware of the challenges posed by the inclement weather in the weeks leading up to judging, consideration could be given to a mixed plant choice that might mitigate this issue.

Some of the container planting was weaker than others leading to different levels of quality in this element.

The flowerbeds at the green at the Horns Country Inn were a little thin and tighter spacing would improve the overall effect, as well as reducing the need for weeding.

## **SECTION B – Environment**

### **Areas of achievement**

The quality of the overall village environment was of a high standard throughout and no litter or other elements detracting from the cleanliness of the entry were noted. Churchtown is obviously proud of its heritage and its landscape, as well as its environment and people.

The biodiversity signage, drawn in POSCA chalk pens, at this location, the Church Street turning circle and at 'Owd Will's Woods' was very good and has the advantage of being easily updated as the seasons change. Other traditional signage was also of high quality.

The presence of traditional street cobbles in Church Street added to the attractiveness of the village. The judges were pleased to note that these had not been aggressively maintained by persistent chemical methods. The judges were also impressed by the Bloom group's home-made weed control spray utilising vinegar and salt. This had been distributed to residents and its effectiveness was being monitored.

It was interesting to see new building work in the village as this will hopefully bring new members to the Bloom group. Building work can be intrusive and the use of the Churchtown In Bloom banner was a resourceful way to address this issue. The conversion of the telephone box to hold the defibrillator is also good example of repurposing.

The treescape of the village was of high quality with the surrounds of St Helen's church and the 'Owd Will's Woods' being noteworthy. Some of the trees in 'Owd Will's Woods' were Ash and were exhibiting significant evidence of ash die back, now widespread across the British Isles. It was therefore good to meet the tree officer from Lancashire County Council who was completing a tree risk assessment at this location and was able to explain the prudent management of trees utilising the principle of risk-based inspections. Due to the ongoing use of this area by the community, the completed tree survey will provide reassurance for the future. This wood is used by the children as a woodland den, enhanced by the presence of deadwood, log piles and interpretative signs. It has also benefitted from the planting of hedge and tree saplings to provide sustainability for the future.

The presence of the River Wyre adds to the biodiversity potential of the village.

At the church hall it was interesting to hear about the survey of wildlife in the village. You are undertaking many enhancements to promote biodiversity.

It was gratifying to see the 'Progress and Pledges' for the environment, from all sections of the village including the local school. These pledges aim to improve sustainability across the different elements of your work. Commitment to water harvesting, composting and peat-free use was observed throughout the tour.

The work of Neal collecting cans in the locality is commendable. The proceeds of this work are donated to Orbis – The Flying Eye hospital and its work to eliminate trachoma across the poorer areas of the globe.

### **Considerations for development**

The wild planting at the church could perhaps be slightly better and experimenting with different mixes could provide a better result.

We did notice the high populations of the very invasive Himalayan Balsam along the banks of the River Wyre and in the adjacent fields. While it is accepted that this is a very widespread problem throughout the British Isles, advice could be sought from the local Wildlife Trust on

controlling its spread in your locality which will not only benefit Churchtown but other communities further downstream.

It was good to see the work being done on biodiversity and the enhancements for its promotion. Consideration could be given as to how to measure the effectiveness of these to inform plans for the further management of biodiversity.

### **SECTION C – Community**

#### **Areas of achievement**

Churchtown knows what 'community' is and it knows how to celebrate its many achievements. The range of events includes coffee mornings, gatherings at Christmas and Easter, and Halloween activities. The wooden rabbit figures from the 'Bunny Trail' event have been incorporated in the floral displays as have some elements of the coronation celebrations. The reception at close of judging demonstrated just how much Bloom has impacted on village life.

Not only do these events fund your Bloom activities but it is significant that you donate funds to a broad spectrum of other good causes. The level of fundraising of £40,000 in three years by Mr & Mrs Myerscough on behalf of Rosemere Cancer Foundation, by selling plants and cut flowers, is outstanding and displays the power of plants in a different way.

The video from Kirkland's school was most impressive demonstrating the work that is undertaken with the children.

The church hall has been revitalised as a centre for the whole community and it is good to see it so full of vibrant people of all ages.

The exceptional level of support for the Bloom initiative from all ages, all organisations, businesses, and residents alike and other in Bloom groups from the surrounding districts demonstrates that Churchtown is a special place that others want to be part of.

We left Churchtown fully understanding what makes you such a vibrant village. We encountered enthusiasm in all aspects and in all age groups and it was a privilege to be part of your celebration of your Bloom accomplishments. We wish you well in the future.

#### **Considerations for development**

Whilst we are aware of the difficulty of visiting schools at this time of year the entry would have benefitted from an additional stop to observe the work on the ground and perhaps being able to engage with some pupils/young people or teaching staff would be advantageous.