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**RHS Britain in Bloom**

**UK Finals Marking Sheet 2019**

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| **Name of entry: Norton-in-Hales** | **Judging Date: 5 August 2019** |
| **Category: Village** | **Judges: Brendan Mowforth and Ruth Growney** |

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| **Horticultural Achievement (40%)** | Gold |
| **Environmental Responsibility (30%)** | Silver Gilt |
| **Community Participation (30%)** | Gold |
| **Overall** | **Gold** |

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| **Introduction and Overall Impression**Norton-in-Hales is a picturesque, small village with a long history of taking part in competitions, shown by the number of brass plaques on the ‘Best Kept Village’ sign. Community is at the heart of the village and this strength is evident throughout the entry. The judges were impressed by the wide range of events taking place throughout the year and the numbers of local people taking part – encompassing every aspect of Britain in Bloom.  |

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| **SECTION A – Horticulture** |
| The judges were impressed that so many of the village’s floral displays are looked after by individuals, as well as those being maintained by the group itself. There was a good mix of sustainable and seasonal planting throughout. There were lots of well-kept and colourful front gardens in evidence on the tour – of particular note were those at Ashville and Yew Tree House, and the frontage of The Hinds Head pub. Good photographic evidence of year-round planting, including spring plantings and blossom, together with the crocuses supplied by the Rotary Club and planted by local schoolchildren. The cherry tree in the Jeff Hartley bed was showing some signs of distress, as was the large cherry tree beside the Brassington bed on the main road, which contained a lot of dead wood. The edges of the Norton Forge bed in the churchyard could have been more densely planted, but the piece of iron in the centre of the bed had been covered by foliage – the judges suggest that perhaps you could rethink the planting design to further highlight the historical connection and add some signage.Additional street furniture in many of the flowerbeds is a little unfortunate, i.e. signposts, hydrant signs, and the grit box in the flowerbed next to the plough, as your eye is drawn to the street furniture and not to the plants. The lawns and flowerbeds at the school were well maintained and mulched, as were the borders at the cricket pavilion. |

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| **SECTION B – Environment** |
| Admirable efforts have been made by the Bloom group to repair and reinstate the steppingstones in the river at Parton’s Pool. This spring-fed pool was suffering from an excess of blanket weed and algae at the time of the judges’ visit. The area is managed by the group for wildlife and includes beehives, but it is recommended by the judges that further guidance is sought on conservation management to improve water quality and increase the biodiversity of the area. Bird, owl and bat boxes were in evidence throughout the village. The introduction of a bat walk followed by a barbecue had proved popular with the community. The judges suggest that perhaps the results of surveying the success and inhabitants of the birdboxes, and which bats are present in the village could be the subject of a future entry in *The Bradling Stone*.The judges suggest that you could try to find a location where you can celebrate the rich and fascinating history and heritage of the village and share it with local people and visitors alike – perhaps at the bus shelter if there is sufficient room? The redundant telephone box turned information point is a novel idea but perhaps the location is not ideal. There is sufficient space at the cricket pavilion to increase the number of water butts for further rainwater capture, similar to the successful project carried out at The Hinds Head pub. Also perhaps investigate investing in hanging baskets that have reservoirs to reduce the use of water.Inconsistency in cutting of hedges – those at the cricket club had been left but the church hedges had been cut. It is advisable to leave the cutting of hedges until all birds have fledged (Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981), although it is noted that people were asked by Norton in Bloom to cut their hedges for the Britain in Bloom judging. It would have been better to have left the hedges and tell the judges why you have done so. Church grounds – there were lots of partially hidden graves underfoot that if uncovered could enhance the history and heritage of the churchyard and village. The village was very clean, with no evidence of litter, graffiti or dog fouling. Rubbish, recycling and green waste are collected by the council on a two- week cycle.  |

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| **SECTION C – Community**  |
| It is abundantly clear that the community works together to improve their local environment with everyone doing their “bit” for Norton in Hales, and it works very well. There was good evidence of a wide range of year round activities and fundraising, e.g. Christmas Fair, Easter Egg Hunt – a new initiative to get children involved (sponsored by Morrisons) duck race, plant sale, village festival, plus sales of greetings cards and Christmas cards. Regular work parties are held every Monday, with other projects taking place on an ad-hoc basis, i.e. those at Parton’s Pool. Committee and planning meetings are held monthly.  The Bloom group has re-introduced a Village Produce Show, and also holds a Front Garden and Best Front Door Step competition.The group has a regular section in the new monthly village magazine *The Bradling Stone* and posts on the Norton-in-Hales Facebook page.In addition to £800-£1,000 in funding, the Parish Council also funds the annual celebration evening. There is also sponsorship by local business and donations in-kind.  |