



Canterbury in Bloom

because we **love** our city

Judges notes June 2015

Introduction

Canterbury has entered the Bloom competition twice in recent years: 2012 when we were awarded Silver, and 2013 when we achieved Silver Gilt. In 2014 we decided not to enter as a city as Canterbury City partnership (CCP) which had led the previous campaigns, had a clear focus on achieving Business Improvement District (BID) status. However, Whitefriars Shopping Centre entered the competition and did really well to be awarded Gold.

The BID was successful at ballot in July, Canterbury Connected Business Improvement District was launched in October 2014 and the BID is leading the city's entry in the Bloom this year.

Our goal in entering the Bloom competition has always been to develop relationships across the city between the wide variety of groups engaged in supporting their community in a number of ways associated with horticulture, biodiversity and the environment. While making improvements to the city we also forge partnerships that enable all of us to work together better on a wide range of other issues that help our businesses, our residents, our students and enable visitors to enjoy the city.

This year the only primary school in the city centre, St Peters Methodist Primary, is entering Blooming Schools for the third year running as a result of the city wide Bloom campaign in 2013 and in future we hope to encourage more local organisations to enter their own category of the South & South East in Bloom in addition to participating in the city entry for Canterbury.



In 2013, our Judges made the following comments:

Horticultural achievement:

"To get a rationale between differing standards involved in providing good horticultural practice in public spaces."

- Since the Grounds Contract re-negotiation in 2013 standards in the city's formal parks, Dane John Gardens and the Westgate Parks have improved significantly.
- The Westgate Parks Heritage Lottery Fund project is now coming to fruition and the formal planting around Tower House, which is also being renovated and extended to accommodate events and social use, is of particular importance for the project.
- The Cathedral have themselves been awarded HLF funding for a major renovation programme, The Canterbury Journey, which includes a step change in the visitor experience and engagement with the local community. This will encompass major changes to the grounds which are very much part of the city's heritage landscape.

Environmental Responsibility:

"More areas for water harvesting and sustainable planting"

- Whitefriars now has rainwater harvesting and this is used to water their floral displays.
- The city's Bloom theme this year is 'water' and again, Whitefriars has published a book, The Young Person's Guide to Water World which encourages water conservation while also exploring the enormous range of uses and facets of this vital resource.
- Finally, Whitefriars has also commissioned a Water Clock, which has been designed by a local school, Simon Langton Boys Grammar School and built in the shopping centre for the summer. This will highlight the importance of water and its uses.

Community participation:

"The challenge is to convince local businesses to brighten their areas"

- The city's businesses voted for a BID in July 2014 and the BID team has led the Bloom campaign for 2015, co-ordinating over ten different groups to engage in the city's entry (see page 16).
- Part of the BID's Business Plan is the installation of nearly 245 hanging baskets across the city which has had a major impact in what can otherwise be a relatively bare street scene.
- The BID also carries out deep steam cleaning of the paved areas of the city overnight on four days a week as part of the Business Plan supported by the businesses at ballot and graffiti is the next project to be undertaken.
- The Canterbury Society regularly organise a Community Litter Pick in different parts of the city and also conducts a river clean annually in June. One of their members, the Chair of the St Mildreds Area Community Society (SMACS), has also taken 'ownership' of the Franciscan Pathway in the city with cleaning and care of the planting there.
- Finally, partnership working across the city on community based environmental projects has been enhanced by the development of a 'Friends of...' approach to involvement and consultation. The HLF Westgate Parks project was the first to establish this principle with Friends of the Westgate Parks and this has been successfully applied to two other areas, Friends of the Kingsmead Field to work on the future of that space now that it will no longer be part of the Council's property disposal plans and Friends of the Riverside where a new strategy is being developed and consulted upon.

We believe that while there is still much to do, our Judges in 2015 will see clear evidence that we have made progress in all these areas.



Horticultural Achievement

The city has a number of examples of horticultural practice that we have been developing since 2013:

Canterbury Christ Church University (CCCU) Bioversity project

During academic year 2014-15 CCCU has established a Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP), which is now guiding all activity on site. It is based on 5 key priorities:

- Protection and active management of the estate to enhance ecosystems services, including provisioning services through our 'edible campus' initiative
- Enhanced cultural ecosystems services including development of outdoor spaces for enjoyment and wellbeing for students and staff
- Enhanced opportunities of education related to sustainability
- Volunteering opportunities and an increased sense of ownership of the estate by students and staff
- Enhancing the University's image as a sustainable organisation, locally and nationally

The BAP articulates three policy aims:

1. To protect and enhance biodiversity across the estate
2. To raise awareness of the importance of biodiversity amongst students and staff, and the wider community
3. To ensure a consistent approach to biodiversity management that takes into account best practice as well as the legislative context which requires all public bodies to have regard to biodiversity conservation.

Heritage seed library

CCCU is a member of the heritage seed library, which is a collection of heirloom fruit and vegetable varieties. Seed guardianship is an extra step whereby they volunteer to raise super-endangered varieties that are at risk from becoming extinct. The plants are raised for seed on allotment holder's plots, which is then sent back to the library. There are strict guidelines which have to be adhered to in relation to growing in order to ensure varietal purity.



Bread, Beer & Honey

This year CCCU has embarked on a new heritage related project, which links directly to the monastic heritage of the site and the remains of the monastery Brew-Bake house wall. Beer, bread and honey would have been part of the staple diet of those within the monastery. Wild hops already grow on the site but specific local varieties have now been added and will be harvested to make a CCCU ale in partnership with the Canterbury Brewers. Two bee hives have been placed within the Johnson garden, which will be used as an educational resource, as well as supporting local pollination and providing honey for CCCU. It is hoped that links with the Faculty of Health and Wellbeing will develop research into the use of honey for the treatment of open wounds. Connections with the School of Human and Life Sciences has resulted in the development of student research projects, which will isolate yeast from the site for use in both beer and bread making. In the autumn a Blitz activity will build a traditional clay bread oven, which can be transported around the site and used for community 'bake and take' events.

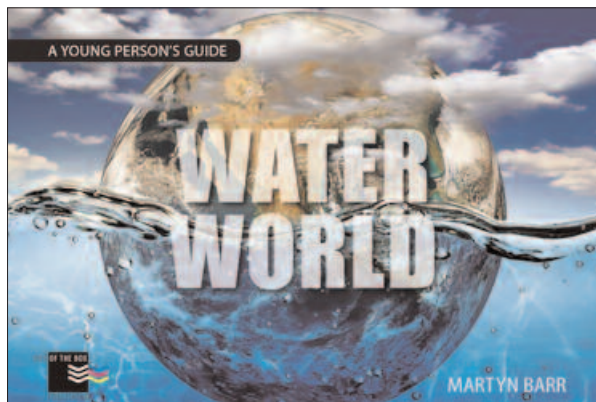


Whitefriars Shopping Centre

Whitefriars was awarded a Gold in the Bloom campaign in 2014 when the wider city was engaged in the ballot for the Business Improvement District (BID). With some 80 hanging baskets, floral displays in Whitefriars Square and Marlowe Arcade and a central 'gazebo' with a floral theme, Whitefriars in Bloom has become an established part of the city's summer.



Whitefriars partnership with Fifth Trust, a charity working with adults with learning difficulties locally, has also been of mutual benefit with service users involved in the delivery of the gazebo and planting.



Whitefriars has commissioned educational books with a horticultural theme in the last few years. In 2012 it was 'To Be a Bee', which coincided with the installation of a teaching apiary on the roof of the centre; in 2013 it was 'The Young Persons Guide to Garden Science'. In 2015 the book is 'The Young Person's Guide to Water World'



Westgate Parks

Having been awarded £770k Heritage Lottery Funding in 2013, the Parks project is fully underway in 2015.

Canterbury City Council's Heritage Lottery Funded 'Parks for People' project aims to enhance and promote the currently hidden value of the Westgate Parks in order to develop a sense of place for locals and visitors alike. Although only a year into the project many improvements have already taken place including the development of a new children's play area, a new wildflower meadow and pond and a new events and volunteering programme.

Re-modelling the formal Gardens around Tower House to create more open spaces and an adjacent herb garden have been significant changes to the planting and structure of the space. The creation of a wild flower garden and pond have also contributed significantly to the horticultural importance of the parks and to biodiversity. All of this has been supported by the appointment of a Westgate Parks Ranger who has co-ordinated and organised a wide range of community activities.



Before (below) and after playground construction in 2014 (same view)



Preparing the ground and the results of the wildflower meadow in 2014.



City Parks

Canterbury has a number of green spaces within and adjacent to the city centre. Following the re-contracting of the Parks & Gardens contract in 2013 and the HLF funded work in Westgate Parks, significant improvement in standards has been achieved:



Westgate Parks formal planting



Westgate Parks formal planting



Greyfriars



Westgate Park Physic Garden established in 2015 by pupils from Simon Langton Girls School; and the new paved terrace to accommodate events in the building adjacent to Tower House in the parks.



Dane John Gardens

Residents maintain their gardens adjacent to the park to the same high standard set by the formal planting there.



Dane John Gardens



Dane John Gardens



Greyfriars wildflower garden in early June and the riverside within the gardens



Greyfriars Garden

Eastbridge Hospital, established in 1190 following the murder of Thomas Becket and the need to accommodate pilgrims to his shrine, maintains grounds formerly used by the Greyfriars within the city as gardens open 10 – 4 in the summer. These spaces next to the river have become a tranquil refuge from the busy city and the informal nature of the space and the proliferation of wildflowers there has established an excellent natural environment.



Canterbury Cathedral

The Cathedral grounds are open to local residents using their Residents Pass throughout the year and the Cathedral has established a high level of horticultural achievement. The Cathedral's popular Open Gardens weekend is an annual event which has been held for over 10 years in connection with the National Garden Scheme (NGS). The two day event unlocks several private and secret gardens within the Cathedral grounds; and in the process, raises money for charity.

The Cathedral has recently been awarded a substantial grant from the HLF and while the bulk of this is to be used for restoration of the fabric of the building, a significant proportion will be used to enhance the visitor experience and engagement with the local community.



Environmental Responsibility

The Environment Agency (EA) and The River Stour

The health of the river

Chalk rivers such as the Stour are characterised by clear, shallow water, an abundance of river gravels, a good variety of plant life and relatively stable water flows.

Over recent decades many of our chalk rivers have been damaged by nutrient enrichment.

Despite the issue with phosphates, the River Stour through Canterbury is a generally healthy river supporting a wide range of wildlife. It is in 'Moderate' status under the WFD classification system. Further measures are planned that should see the river improve to 'Good' status in the future.

The 'In Bloom' process helps achieve this ambition by bringing communities together to take action and improve pride in the river.

Health of the people

EA are working closely with Canterbury City Council and others to put the river at the heart of activity in the city - creating healthy and sustainable places and communities, and recognising the connection between a quality environment and better public health.

The River Stour is a key linear route into and through the city, much of it away from roads. By contributing to the Riverside Strategy EA are supporting works to improve access to high quality and attractive areas along the river.

Today, the river is more accessible than ever before and has become a cherished feature of the city. The riverside footpath system passes through attractive and well-cared for parks and gardens: popular with locals and visitors alike.



River Stour at Westgate Gardens

Abbots Mill Project

Abbot's Mill is an educational project based purposefully in the heart of Canterbury, with the aim of becoming an urban hub for sustainability and social justice, powered by non-centralised renewable energy. The project has two elements and is located on two adjacent sites;

The reinstatement of a water wheel in the nearby former mill race to generate sustainable energy; the next phase will be the education and research centre which will include a vegan community cafe and woodland/wildlife garden on adjacent land by the river.

Habitat Restoration

The first stage of a major habitat restoration programme to make the Abbot's Mill Project site better for wildlife is now underway. This has involved the removal of some of the invasive, non-native Sycamore trees that covered the site.

The two main benefits of this work are that it will allow the remaining trees to grow more healthily in an un-crowded setting whilst also allowing more light to reach the ground to help a greater variety of under-storey plants to grow.

Many young trees, such as Hawthorn, Beech, Willow and Yew have also been planted; as these develop and mature they will provide a more varied habitat which will encourage a greater diversity of wildlife to return to the area.

Give nature a home:

An enthusiastic group of people of all ages joined our Director of Biodiversity, Jonathan Barnard, on site in March, to learn about ways in which we can all give our native wildlife a helping hand. We learned about the Abbot's Mill Project's habitat restoration programme and how we are gradually improving the site for biodiversity. We also made our own bug houses and bird boxes from recycled materials.



The Save The Kingsmead Field Campaign

One of the most significant development in the city in recent years has been the campaign to save a public open space, Kingsmead Field, from sale by the City Council for housing.

Kingsmead Field provides a remnant of the lush water meadows which were famous for centuries for the magnificent views which they provided of Canterbury cathedral and the river Stour.

In 2011, the city council decided that Kingsmead Field should be sold for residential development. Local residents rallied together and formed the Save Kingsmead Field campaign. The campaign rapidly gained support from hundreds of local people who wrote letters, signed petitions and attended Council meetings in an attempt to persuade the Council to change its mind.

The campaign group also initiated a series of events to enhance the field and promote its use as a community space. These included the planting of daffodils and primroses on the riverbank, the creation of family wildflower patches at the back of the field and the holding of a sunflower competition against the spiked steel fence which had been erected across the former riverside footpath. The group also installed its own bench and rubbish bin, and organised frequent litter picks to keep the field and the river clean.

In the autumn of 2014, the Save Kingsmead Field campaign succeeded in securing a commitment from the Council to protect 80% of the field as public open space. A new community group, the Friends of Kingsmead Field, was created to take over from the campaign group. This group is now working with the Council in drawing up a management plan for the field. Members of the group have installed three new benches on the riverbank and planted 1000 snowdrops. The group hopes to be able to create an extensive wildflower meadow in 2016. A major consultation on the enhancement of the protected part of the field will be held this autumn.



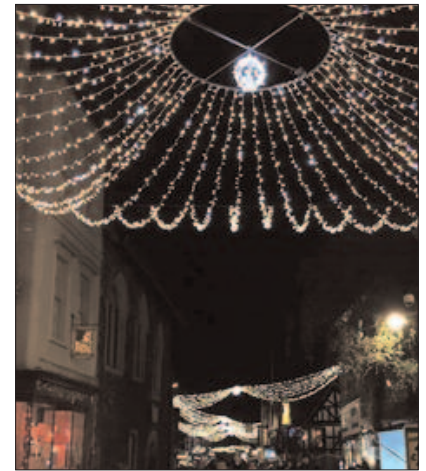
Save the Kingsmead Field Campaign



The Business Improvement District

In July 2014, 379 businesses (54%) in the city centre voted on whether the city centre should become a Business Improvement District (BID). With 242 (64%) voting in favour, the BID was established in October 2014 and since then has delivered a range of environmental improvements to the city centre, from Christmas lights (absent due to funding issues in 2013) and steam cleaning to the provision of a team of uniformed Ambassadors to support local businesses and welcome visitors.

In addition the BID has provided 245 hanging baskets from early June to late September free of charge to city businesses. The baskets are made up of purple Surfinia, blue bacopa, orange calibrochoa, fuchsia marinka, verbena tapien, salvia Victoria and Scaevola. These plants were selected to not only produce an abundance of flowers throughout the season but also to provide a source of nectar for bees and other pollinating insects. The aim is to maximise the length of time between watering to minimise water usage and the use of other scarce resources.



Christmas decorations



Street cleaners



BID Ambassadors



Kent Reptile and Amphibian Group

This group are active across the county and have worked with a number of local community groups to support the creation and maintenance of habitat in the city, notably the Friends of the Westgate Parks, the Friends of the Kingsmead Field and Friends of the Riverside groups. In spring the group organised a Toad March in the city to highlight the danger to toads of crossing roads during their breeding season.



The Kent Reptile and Amphibian Group



Community involvement

Canterbury Community in Bloom (CCiB) is the original group that maintained an interest in horticulture and gardens in the city and has been an integral part of the city's re-entry to the South & South East in Bloom competition in recent years. CCiB runs a front garden competition and a schools competition and has established a very high standard for many years:

Canterbury Community in Bloom Schools Competition.

CCiB work with a number of primary schools across the city. In 2014 school children were tasked with constructing a miniature garden in a tray provided by CCiB with topic work in different media to accompany their planting up. This year's theme is 'Metamorphosis' linking in with the ever popular themes of Nature and Growth in the Natural world, frogs and spawn, caterpillars and butterflies, seeds and flowers etc and CCiB shall be judging the entries at the end of June. All receive a mounted certificate to celebrate their contribution, while the winner receives a fine trophy to keep for the year, and a supporting Certificate. In addition all schools receive a token to put towards more purchases of plants and flowers. The local press is present and the Lord Mayor, resplendent in his/her Chain of Office, attends to present the prizes.



Parkside School

Canterbury Community in Bloom, Summer Competition.

CCiB's other big commitment to the welfare of the city has been the involvement of up to sixty volunteers in a three-stage judging of all the visible front gardens and containers in the old city of Canterbury which make a contribution to the appearance of the street scape. However, this year, CCiB are asking gardeners to enter their own garden, and have mounted a big campaign to involve the citizens in this. The competition includes categories for small, medium and large gardens, hanging baskets and private and commercial containers. We also include Community gardens, as in residential homes. This is taking place as usual in the first three weeks of July, and consists of the Standardisation and a week later the two Final judges visit the finalists, and choose the winners for first, second and third prizes. Presentation takes place in September when the Lord Mayor of Canterbury presents cups and certificates to all the runners up, and the local press is present to take photographs and write reports.

Both competitions are run by volunteers, with sponsorship from the City Council, Serco, and local garden centres.





Community gardening

The Canterbury Society co-ordinates a range of community activities, including an annual river clean of the Stour in the city and also supporting one of their member organisations, the St Mildred's Area Community Society (SMACS) to manage a public space, the Franciscan Pathway to a very high standard.

Another local community area association, Oaten Hill & District, has undertaken a number of projects in recent years, notably establishing a garden on a piece of derelict land next to the Odeon Cinema and another one by the Fire Station next to the city Ring Road. While both of these projects have been included in previous Bloom applications, the significant element in this one is the maintenance of these gardens to a high standard subsequently.



The Franciscan Pathway



St Georges Garden, formerly derelict ground



Annual community river clean



And finally...

Canterbury in Bloom is a campaign that captures existing activity from a wide range of groups whose purpose is to make the city better in their area, with their community and following their enthusiasms, be that in Canterbury's parks and gardens, in the heart of the city centre, in the residential areas around the city or on the riverside. If the city decided not to enter the Bloom, all of this activity would continue unabated and this is the true meaning of the over-used phrase 'sustainable'.

This is not to say that Bloom is seen as unimportant, exactly the opposite. It is a benchmark and a chance to celebrate what everyone achieves, to punctuate our work each year with a standstill of 'where we are now' and we are committed to promoting more entries in all categories across the city in future years.

In 2015, the following groups have contributed to our application and Canterbury BID would like to thank all of them for their commitment, hard work and enthusiasm:

Canterbury City Council

Serco

Canterbury Community in Bloom

Friends of Kingsmead Field

Friends of Westgate Parks

Friends of the Riverside

The Canterbury Society

The St Mildreds Area Community Society (SMACS)

The Oaten Hill and District Society

Abbots Mill Project

Canterbury Cathedral

Whiteriars Shopping Centre

Kentish Stour Countryside Partnership

The Environment Agency

Kent Reptile and Amphibian Group (KRAG)

St Peters Methodist Primary School

Canterbury Christ Church University (CCCU)

Rough Old Wife Cider Company



Thank you to Canterbury City Council for their sponsorship of this year's South & South East in Bloom entry.





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