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# Britain in Bloom transforming local communities

A photograph showing four people engaged in gardening. In the foreground, a young child with blonde hair, wearing a white polka-dot shirt and pink pants and boots, is kneeling and looking at the soil. Behind the child, a woman with short grey hair and glasses, wearing a white polka-dot shirt and blue jeans, is also kneeling and smiling. In the background, an older woman with white hair, wearing a blue jacket and black pants, is bent over and working with a garden tool. To the right, a man in a blue jacket and khaki pants is standing and holding a long-handled tool. They are in a garden with various plants, including sunflowers, and a wooden fence is visible in the background.

**Social, economic,  
environmental, transformational:  
the far-reaching impacts of  
Britain's biggest community  
horticulture movement**



City of London in Bloom; Front cover; Johnny Boylan



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# RHS BRITAIN IN BLOOM

# Foreword

## Transforming Communities

There is no doubt that Britain in Bloom and It's Your Neighbourhood truly capture the enormous power of volunteers, people who are totally committed to their community giving their time generously and selflessly and often bringing about a life-changing and far-reaching transformation of their local area.

This report includes many inspiring stories of incredible achievement, in some instances whole cities brought back to life through gardening.

There are so many examples worthy of mention, but for me, a few that stand out include the people of Moss Side, Manchester, where neighbours who had never spoken to each other before, became firm friends over the hanging baskets; in Cumbernauld Community Park, Glasgow, where swallows and wildflowers have returned; and Brightlingsea, Essex where a small group of residents came together to transform their town and increase local pride, attracting more and more people who care passionately about the environment. All of these significant changes have been brought about by people who believe in community gardening.

These changes are truly transformational, from fostering strong communities and building civic pride, to making the local area a better place to live by reducing crime, helping

local businesses, creating investment and employment, along with improvements to social needs such as training the long-term unemployed. But it's also about creating beautiful spaces and improving the wider environment through attracting more wildlife and, of course, having fun.

As this report concludes, Britain in Bloom and It's Your Neighbourhood are making a major difference in the UK today, perhaps best summed up in the words of a member of an It's Your Neighbourhood group who said that 'since becoming involved we have an area that is looking far better than it did three to four years ago, and it's got people talking as to how we can improve our area further. It's your Neighbourhood and 'in Bloom' is the best thing that has happened to our area'.

I am very proud of every one of the people, across the UK, that make Britain in Bloom and It's Your Neighbourhood what they are today. I hope you can find time to read this report, it's truly inspirational to see why gardening matters so much to our communities



Sue Biggs  
Director General  
Royal Horticultural Society



Jon Enoch



John Barratt

# Introduction

**In 2001 the Royal Horticultural Society began a new investment in community horticulture by taking responsibility for organising Britain in Bloom.**



RHS

*Volunteers give over 4.4 million hours each year to improving their surroundings through gardening: equivalent to £155 million of labour at the national minimum wage.*

The campaign contains two elements: Britain in Bloom (“in Bloom”) and It’s Your Neighbourhood (IYN), both aimed at supporting communities to improve their quality of life through gardening.

Britain in Bloom is a nation-wide competition between communities across a range of categories. For many it is a tool for building their community and tackling local issues.

IYN is a non-competitive scheme for community groups who want to ‘green up’ local areas, offering advice and awarding certificates of achievement.

Approximately 2,100 communities take part each year, from small street-level groups to villages, towns and cities, from the Channel Islands to the north of Scotland, giving reasons from building community spirit to improving their environment and boosting the local economy.

In our report on how Britain in Bloom and IYN are working, we found the programmes are having a significant social, economic, environmental and transformational impact on the spaces, places and people involved.

## The Survey

More than 230 “in Bloom” and IYN groups from all over the country responded to our survey about their participation in the campaign and the impact of the programmes in their area.

We also spoke in more depth to 11 case study communities, including local authorities, police, community

and businesses, representing diverse areas from urban Manchester to the rural town of Holyhead.

## Far-reaching benefits

Communities believe Britain in Bloom and IYN help them improve their environment for a number of reasons:

- they create goals to work towards with a sense of satisfaction in achieving them
- they provide a framework for action through the structure and assessment criteria
- judges give support and advice, helping communities improve year on year
- models of delivery are flexible, allowing communities of very different sizes and needs to decide how to participate
- the ‘healthy competition’ of Britain in Bloom helps motivate participants.

## Harnessing volunteer power

- The campaign engages from 96,000 to more than 200,000 volunteers across the UK
- volunteers range from toddlers to people in their 80s and older; just under a third of volunteers are over 64
- communities involved in Britain in Bloom and IYN plant an average 115,000 trees, 352,000 shrubs and 21.6 million plants and bulbs each year
- on average each group looks after 6 hectares (15 acres) of green space.

# How Britain in Bloom is changing the landscape of the UK

The impact of the work of “in Bloom” and It’s Your Neighbourhood groups is felt in many different ways, and the report found the campaigns are transforming every aspect of community life for the better.

## Social impact

- building community by working towards a common goal, creating opportunities for increasing understanding and neighbourliness
- encouraging individuals to invest in their neighbourhood, contributing to its development by volunteering
- reducing crime and anti-social behaviour by fostering a greater respect for and sense of ownership of local spaces
- improved health and well-being through growing fruit and vegetables, and by creating a safe, pleasant space to exercise.

## Economic impact

- encouraging inward investment by making areas better places to be, so locals stay and visitors are attracted to spend time there
- attracting business support: an improved environment brings more customers and revenues, and less graffiti and vandalism
- helping volunteers develop a wide range of skills and helping those at risk of social exclusion back into the labour market
- saving local authorities money in volunteer hours, green space management, street furniture maintenance and litter collection.

## Environmental impact

- improving surroundings through planting, clean-up and maintenance

- encouraging horticulture, from hanging baskets to community gardens
- bringing in environmentally-conscious practices such as composting, recycling and biodiversity projects
- promoting an interest in the environment, particularly in schools.

## Transformational impact

- transforming disused space both through changing the way the land is used, and in the community spirit it brings
- tackling problematic spaces blighted by crime or fly-tipping by turning areas which are drab into something more uplifting
- regenerating places by improving their physical appearance, changing the way people feel about where they live and breathing new life into an area.

*“Taking part in this competition over the years has given us a fabulous community spirit and pride – in our town and our efforts to make it a great place to live or visit.”*  
(Small Town)



John Barratt

## Social impact

Those who took part in the survey report that the social impact of their work through the Britain in Bloom programmes shows itself in many ways, from community building to reductions in crime and anti-social behaviour and improved health and well-being.

*“The group consists of mainly young boys and after an hour of work, they would like a game of football. This initially was a bit of an intolerance to the elderly members – but when they came out of their houses and saw the children’s handiwork they started to welcome the children openly. We are all now friends.”*  
(IYN group)

*“Both campaigns have provided excellent platforms to improve our area and engage with the public. This has led to a huge increase in civic pride and a feeling that Cleethorpes has drastically improved over the last few years.”*  
(Coastal Town)



### Building community

Nearly all – 90 % – of the groups who took part in the survey said the highest impact of their campaign was on community development. In many areas, working on a community horticulture project was the first time individuals had come together, and in some cases the first time they had met at all.

The gardens become social hubs and are often the focus for community events including family growing days, fun days and skills development workshops.

Because people from different parts of the community spend more time together, either directly, through gardening activities, or indirectly, as a result of the improved environment and spaces available to them, better understanding and trust is built between generations, faiths and ethnicities.

79 % of survey respondents said that increased civic pride was a benefit of their participation in the campaign.

Interviewees also talked about how because pride has been built and people have seen changes, their aspirations for their area increased.

### Encouraging investment in community

“in Bloom” and IYN groups are good at working with other groups to get the most out of their work, from the Rotary Club or Women’s Institute to local faith groups.

The kinds of activity they undertook jointly included fundraising, planting days, specific landscaping and facilities development projects and local events.

65 % of groups worked with local schools in the area, building school gardens from scratch, holding teaching sessions with pupils or working on skills development for teachers and parents.

The achievements reached through “in Bloom” and IYN activities encourage confidence and bring increased investment from other groups and local authorities.



### Crime and anti-social behaviour

Over half of survey respondents said participation had reduced anti-social behaviour, with 40% reporting their campaigns produced a safer environment.

They give a number of reasons for this. One is increased neighbourliness: because people get to know one another, they are more aware when there are strangers in the neighbourhood.

Another is engagement of the community. People who play a role in creating something which improves their environment are less likely to behave in ways that would undermine those improvements.

A quarter of survey respondents involved individuals referred to them through the Community Payback scheme, used by the courts to punish offending behaviour without individuals serving a prison sentence.

Offenders undertake between 40 and 300 hours of challenging, unpaid work supervised by the community. About 13% of individuals referred through Community Payback chose to come back to the project once their sentence was complete.

In Brightlingsea, a coastal town in Essex, the teamwork between young men referred through the justice system and the volunteers

was so successful for all parties that there is a plaque in the garden they helped construct commemorating their contribution.

### Health and well-being

Participants and their communities said they experienced a series of boosts to health and well-being by taking part.

The first is a healthier diet. When people (particularly children) grow their own fruit and vegetables they gain access to a ready, affordable supply and have a more knowledgeable relationship with their food, so fresh produce becomes a greater part of their diet.

The creation of new spaces in which people felt safe and enjoyed exercising was also a factor. Groups looking after parks have seen substantial increases in park visitors: in Newcastle-under-Lyme, Staffordshire, weekly visitor numbers quadrupled.

Community growing also brings well-being, particularly for older people, who form approximately a third of all volunteers. Older participants become less isolated and enjoy a greater sense of purpose. For most participants gardening together, improving their environment and feeling safer led to an increased sense of well-being.

*“Early on in the project there was a little trouble with vandalism to the site, but through continued inclusion of local people this has stopped. This is a project well loved by all.”*  
(IYN group)



Walthamstow in Bloom

*“Our residents are aged 66–96 and being involved created excitement because there was a goal to be aimed for. Residents created and planned, which was invigorating and we also had a handsome garden to show for everyone’s efforts.”*  
(IYN group)

Category: City

Leadership: Local Authority

Size of community: 484,000

Number of volunteers: 12,267

Total volunteer hours: 47,640  
plus 12,784 undertaken by  
the Unpaid Work Unit

Years as an “in Bloom”  
participant: 12



Photographs: Manchester In Bloom

■ Community gardening activities including the creation of allotments and orchards above and top have brought a sense of purpose and pride, thanks to the efforts of IYN communities in Manchester

## Case study: Manchester

### A city-wide, local level approach to changing communities

#### Background

Manchester is a diverse city, with areas of both intense deprivation and relative wealth. It is also ethnically diverse: in one ward of only 11,000 people 42 languages are spoken.

The city’s approach to community horticulture is equally diverse, being composed of a patchwork of It’s Your Neighbourhood groups combined with the city council’s own “in Bloom” campaign delivered through the Environmental Services Team.

Participation in Britain in Bloom at a community level was sparked by one group’s efforts to improve their area through gardening. Very quickly other communities noticed the difference they were making and wanted to repeat this in their own area, so started their own community horticulture projects.

More communities wanted the same benefits in their neighbourhoods but were worried that they were not at competition level. The launch of the non-competitive RHS It’s Your Neighbourhood programme in 2006 helped to overcome this and by 2011 Manchester City Council had supported the foundation of 112 IYN groups across the city.

IYN has been used by Manchester City Council and volunteers across the city as a tool for tackling deprivation and poor quality living environments and building communities.

#### Activities

- In Blackley, residents were fed up with a row of disused garages that were being used as a dumping ground, full of rubbish and weeds. They got together to build a community garden, and the site is now a thriving oasis of ornamental and productive plants used by the whole community.
- In one street in Newton Heath 50 properties backed onto a four-way passageway. The Manchester Neighbourhood Services team helped residents gate off the alleyways and turn them into a garden packed with plants. The alleyways are now a safe green space for children to play and for the community to spend time.
- In Hulme, crime – particularly burglaries – had hit a level unbearably high for those that lived there. The group filled 75 large planters with shrubs that would act as a deterrent to burglars: combined with other measures, it’s meant burglaries are now a thing of the past for residents who can enjoy their greener, safer surroundings.
- There are now approximately 40 community orchards across Manchester: many are already so productive that the city council has purchased a fruit press to enable the communities to produce their own fruit juice.

#### Impact

There are very clear correlations between reductions in crime and the work of IYN groups in Manchester. What were once access routes used by criminals are now oases of green used by residents. Improved communication between neighbours and with the police contribute to more positive perceptions of safety in IYN communities.

The city council says well-being benefits have been particularly felt in sheltered accommodation centres where community gardening activities bring a sense of purpose and pride previously lacking. Similarly, community horticulture projects helped older people by helping them to feel productive, share their skills and build social networks.

IYN communities in Manchester also report feeling healthier as a result of their gardening activities. With so many communities growing fruit and vegetables, coupled with the education provided by schools and volunteers about cooking and eating, community-grown produce is helping to improve diets, particularly among children.

Some of the most vulnerable people in Manchester have benefited. Homeless people at The Booth Centre designed and built a garden, complete with benches, planters and a



■ Manchester's Derbyshire Road left and Mirfield Road below are benefiting from an increased sense of neighbourliness, as residents work together to green up their streets



water feature, which went on to win a Manchester in Bloom garden competition in 2003. About 20 people involved in the project have gone on to take up landscaping work.

The increased sense of neighbourliness is keenly felt, and sharing celebrations on the day of the "in Bloom" judges' visit or when achieving an IYN award builds community pride. When Monaco Drive, a cul-de-sac of 40 houses, first got involved with a hanging basket day, residents had never spoken to each other. Their floral displays and conversations led to a street barbecue – and 10 years later, they have become good friends.

IYN activities have also helped resolve community differences and bring diverse communities together. In West Didsbury tension was building between users of the Burton Road Mosque and local residents over parking at prayer time. Mosque users made up hundreds of hanging baskets for the residents and invited them to a barbecue. This simple gesture opened a dialogue between the two communities and they resolved the issue.

### What next?

Manchester in Bloom is now a significant and important part of the fabric of life in the city. Each year the number of communities participating continues to grow.

This means that the work of the two Manchester City Council staff has to be used more strategically and sparingly for each community. However, as the IYN groups mature they become more self-sustaining and council support is less necessary.

*"They feel a part of the community, particularly important in the city centre where they often feel on the edge of it. It has also helped build their pride and self-esteem, as they have created something the whole community appreciates."*  
(Staff at the Booth Centre)



RHS



Johnny Boylan



Johnny Boylan

*“It adds value to what is already being undertaken by the local authority. The ‘Bloom’ aims to boost the local economy by providing a pleasant attractive place to visit, thus increasing spend in local shops and in turn providing employment.”*  
(City)

## Economic impact

**Many groups talked of how the economic well-being of their area had been improved as a result of their work through Britain in Bloom and It’s Your Neighbourhood. They help attract funds, encourage investment and attract visitors, and encourage locals to invest too, through business engagement, sponsorship and community fundraising.**

### Valuing campaigns

Respondents to the survey raised on average £6,044 per group per year, suggesting that funds raised by the campaigns at a local level could be as high as £13 million.

In addition there is the contribution that volunteer time makes: if we assume that a minimum of 4.4million hours are given each year by volunteers through the campaigns, this is the equivalent of £155 million of work undertaken at the UK national minimum wage.

Survey participants were also asked to put a value on the in-kind support they had received. On average this was £1,584, with a few groups receiving in-kind support to the value of tens of thousands of pounds.

### Business support

Business support for “in Bloom” and IYN groups is common, with 63% of groups receiving some sort of support from local businesses, motivated by corporate social responsibility and the belief that an improved environment enhances their own trade and the future economic prospects for the area.

Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council has led the town’s “in Bloom” efforts for more than 20 years. Their head of operational services spoke of how people from

outside the area make the journey to Newcastle-under-Lyme because of the attractive environment the town offers, and how the plants contribute to a café culture that encourages people to stay for longer, bringing more money to the area.

Also community ownership of an area encourages locals to shop within, rather than travel outside, their own area. Because businesses see the benefits brought about through “in Bloom” activities they choose to reinvest in the scheme, creating a virtuous circle of investment and improvement.

### Encouraging investment

Improvements made to the physical environment, and the way that people feel about places as a result of these changes, helps develop local economies.

By creating places, particularly high streets and tourist destinations, that people want to be, inward investment is attracted. This may be at the personal level, people choosing to visit or shop in an area, or at a business level, where businesses choose to open or expand.

In some cases community and business investment stimulates local authority investment to help accelerate developments.



Johnny Boylan

### Skills development

For some people participation in the “in Bloom” and IYN projects enables them to build up skills and self-confidence which help them back into the labour market.

This is particularly true for people at risk of social exclusion, for reasons such as homelessness, long-term unemployment and offending behaviour. The sense of achievement arising from contributing to a community gardening project is very powerful: people enjoy the nurturing process, and watching their planting mature. They also enjoy the feeling that they have put something back into the community and that they are a part of it as a consequence.

Skills developed through participation have included communication, team work, organisation, fundraising and of course horticultural skills. The acquisition of these skills has helped a number of participants begin their return to the labour market.

On Central Estate in Dukinfield, Greater Manchester, for example, the hub of IYN activities is a community compound for sowing, growing and learning. Here, volunteers can work towards an NVQ Level 2 qualification in horticulture, paid for and supported by the housing trust that runs the estate.

### Cost savings for local authorities

The survey found that local authorities provide on average over a third of the funding of “in Bloom” groups and nearly a quarter for IYN groups.

Most interviewees also talked of in-kind contributions from local authorities including clearance and maintenance (eg grass cutting) of spaces looked after by the community, support in submitting fundraising bids, help negotiating challenges, skills training and provision of plants and growing media.

Despite these contributions, local authorities described the cost savings they believed were generated as a result of local participation in Britain in Bloom and It’s Your Neighbourhood.

For example, Manchester City Council spent £67,000 on “in Bloom” activities in 2010, but council officials estimate that the value to the council of work undertaken by volunteers was £2.6million.

Cost savings are made in green space management, street furniture maintenance, litter collection, graffiti removal and managing anti-social behaviour. There are also benefits that do not necessarily reflect areas of spend for local authorities, but which have a value, such as improved community cohesion, enhanced landscape, revenue generation through successful high street businesses and new community-maintained facilities.

*“We are proud that a group of teenagers who are regarded as having social problems have worked together to design and build a thriving allotment space in a former brownfield site. It creates beauty in the area and makes all participants feel valued and proud whilst learning practical skills.”  
(IYN group)*



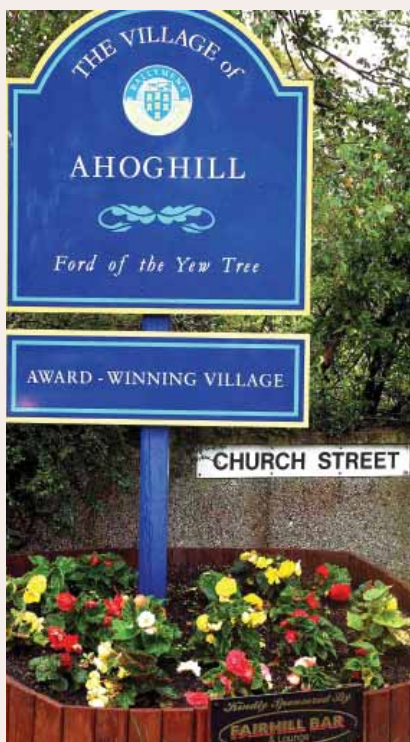
RHS



Johnny Boylan

*“‘In Bloom’ has drastically enhanced the village and encouraged new businesses to the area, for the first time in many years.”  
(Jim Dempsey, Ahoghill in Bloom)*

Category: **Small Town**  
 Leadership: **Volunteer**  
 Size of community: **4,000**  
 Number of volunteers: **15**  
 Average volunteer hours per volunteer: **100 p/a**  
 Years as an “in Bloom” participant: **4**



*“Ahoghill in Bloom have done a tremendous job bringing a great change to the village. I have never seen it looking so good: it’s bringing enthusiasm, business and employment.”*  
 (Local Councillor Roy Gillespie)



## Case study:

### Ahoghill, Northern Ireland

#### A tool for economic development

#### Background

Ahoghill is a large rural village in County Antrim, Northern Ireland. The village originally served the local farming community, but nowadays many residents commute to Belfast.

Local traders were concerned about the village’s gradual decline. Roughly eight business premises were vacant and the air of dilapidation was affecting business. They formed a voluntary association to regenerate the commercial heart of the village: among their first steps towards regenerating their environment was taking part in Ulster in Bloom in 2007.

#### Activities

- Wooden planters and hanging baskets were built with locally-sourced materials and craftsmanship and placed around the village, sponsored by local businesses.
- In celebration of its farming heritage Ahoghill asked local farmers to donate antique agricultural ploughs and potato pickers for use in planting schemes.
- A community garden is being created in the village centre, built with seating and raised beds to take into account the village’s relatively large elderly population.

#### Impact

The visual impact achieved through Ahoghill in Bloom is striking: the village now brims with colour all year round. Once a place people would drive through, now they choose to stop, bringing in important trade for the village businesses.

Since Ahoghill in Bloom began in 2007, two new businesses have opened and an additional two have expanded operations, indicating renewed business confidence.

Community cohesion and crime rates have improved, with many shopkeepers now feeling secure enough to leave shutters up overnight so the village looks and feels safer.

#### What next?

Ahoghill has now won a series of accolades for their achievements, including Best Small Town in Ulster in Bloom three years in a row.

The innovative thinking of Ahoghill in Bloom has won the interest and support of Ballymena Borough Council, which is working with the village to help it develop further. It’s hoped such steps will make Ahoghill a visitor destination, and a better place to live.



# Case study:

## Brightlingsea, Essex

### From beleaguered battleground to tourism hotspot

#### Background

Brightlingsea is a small town on the Essex coast. By the mid-1990s the town had become “stuck in a 1950s time warp”, community gardens were in disrepair and there were 15 vacant shops in the high street. Then a fierce battle over live animal exports meant it was fast becoming known as a no-go area. Frustrated by the negative atmosphere, a group of residents established Brightlingsea in Bloom and embarked on a tentative planting exercise, quickly attracting support from businesses and the local horticultural society.

#### Activities

- Volunteers created a commemorative garden at the entrance to the town’s waterside areas, transforming a dull, disused space into a focal point.
- An area outside the community centre, once only grass, is now planted with shrubs, trees and grasses and an exemplary dry garden, maintained with no watering at all.
- Promenade Way, leading to the sea, now runs through a millennium garden, turning it from a poorly-maintained road into an attractive walk from town to waterside.

#### Impact

Brightlingsea in Bloom has helped make the town a tourist destination. There are no longer any empty shops and businesses are capitalising on increased visitor numbers.

The town has also seen a reduction in petty crime, vandalism and graffiti as civic pride has been boosted and more people are involved in efforts to care for their environment.

Brightlingsea is now an increasingly popular place to live. New residents have told Bloom volunteers that their reason for relocating to the town is “because of the flowers”.

#### What next?

Although not participating in the competitive element of Britain in Bloom in 2011 Brightlingsea in Bloom intend to continue to maintain all the gardens and green spaces they have created.

They are also hoping to work with other organisations in the town to raise funds to purchase a site that will be home to a fishing lake, community orchard and much in demand additional allotments for the town.



Photographs: Brightlingsea in Bloom

Category: Coastal Town

Leadership: Volunteer

Size of community: 8,900

Number of volunteers: 70

Average volunteer hours per volunteer: 100s p/a

Years as an “in Bloom” participant: 16



■ Brightlingsea in Bloom has helped make the town a tourist destination with colourful flower beds top and left and extensive new tree planting schemes above

*“We have seen the difference plants and flowers have made. The town now looks clean, looks good and looks thriving and that’s why virtually everyone takes part in one way or another.”*  
(Des Rowson, Chair, Brightlingsea Business Association)



*“There is no doubt that the floral displays that are created throughout the town have not only transformed the town’s appearance, but it has also led to a much cleaner and better cared for environment.”*  
(Coastal Town)

## Environmental impact

**Britain in Bloom and It’s Your Neighbourhood groups look after a significant amount of space across the UK. In doing this they both improve the quality of the environment for the human population, and bring positive benefits for the local ecology.**

Nearly half of survey respondents look after significant green space, on average about 15 acres. Nearly 80 % of local authority led groups looked after significant green space, compared to just over 40 % of volunteer led groups.

A large proportion – 86 % – of respondents listed cleaner and greener surroundings as a benefit of their participation and it was ranked the second most valued benefit after community development.

### Quality of environment

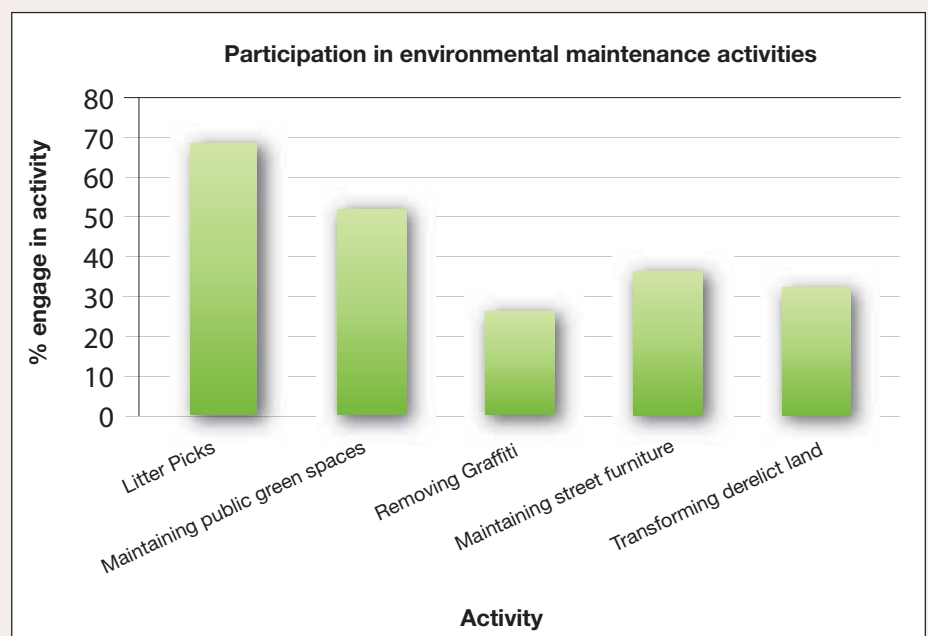
“in Bloom” and IYN groups work to improve the quality of their environment through planting and maintenance activities. Nearly 70 % of groups undertake litter picks, more than a third maintain street furniture and a quarter remove graffiti.

A third of survey respondents said that they transformed derelict land,

and nearly all interviewees talked about renovating neglected spaces. Just under half of survey respondents listed transformation of disused space as a benefit of participation.

Communities undertake a range of planting activities, with each responsible for planting an average of 53 trees, 162 shrubs and 9,921 plants and bulbs per year – that’s around 115,000 trees, 352,000 shrubs and 21.6 million plants and bulbs planted across the UK each year by participating communities.

Changes to the physical environment brought about by the groups is sometimes incremental and sometimes dramatic, but all interviewees talked about how they had transformed the look and feel of their area. The planting, whether a few barrier baskets or an entirely new park, had brought colour and life to places previously described as neglected, dull and grey.



## Enhancing the natural environment

Nearly three-quarters of survey respondents said that they had seen environmental benefits as a result of their participation. Groups are now assessed on their environmental credentials as part of the judging process and many take this seriously.

In some areas, the focus on planting to attract insects and birdlife has brought about some remarkable results: peregrine falcons have been seen in Manchester and swallows in Cumbernauld Community Park, for example.

A number of projects have included wildflower meadows and borders specifically designed to attract butterflies, with corresponding increases in butterfly populations.

The new and improved green spaces cared for by “in Bloom” and IYN groups also provide valuable ecosystem services (services provided to the human population by the environment). These include health and well-being benefits, floodwater management and the provision of shelter from trees and other planting.

## Environmental practices

Well over half of groups undertake some form of sustainable planting, and on average just under half of all

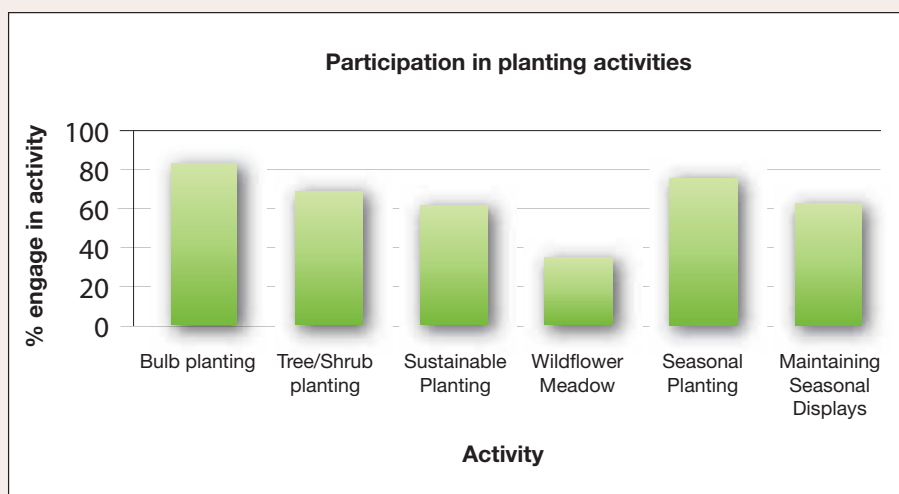
planting is sustainable. Communities also undertake many environmentally-focused activities: about half practise composting and more than 60 % recycle. Others are involved in conservation and biodiversity projects and environmental clean-ups, such as removal of invasive non-native species.

Interviewees described other activities they had undertaken to improve their environmental footprint, such as using peat-free growing media and self-watering hanging baskets, and carefully planned planting to promote biodiversity.

This has helped to reduce water consumption, reduce estimated carbon emissions and boost wildlife populations. Interviewees also discussed how their work had helped to encourage environmental awareness and positive behaviours in other people. A number of groups include interpretive boards with their planting, such as in Brightlingsea at the site of the dry garden and nature reserve.

The close relationship with schools is also cited as a means of promoting environmental behaviours: children learn on site, either in their own school garden or in the green spaces cared for by the “in Bloom” and IYN groups and become enthused and keen to contribute.

*“Schemes such as Britain in Bloom, Beautiful Scotland, and It’s Your Neighbourhood have raised environmental awareness in the general population and show that people can make a difference in their local areas as well as in the wider society.”*  
(Town)



*“There has been a marked increase in the planting of trees and shrubs and more interest in the environment.”*  
(IYN Group)

Category: **It's Your Neighbourhood**

Leadership: **Volunteer**

Size of community: **12,000 in immediate area; 55,000 total area**

Number of volunteers: **12 with many more throughout the year**

Average volunteer hours per volunteer: **1,250 p/a**

Years as an It's Your Neighbourhood group: **3**

*"The benefits to our children and young people, many of whom are wheelchair users, has been superb. We now have a very rare but extremely welcome DDA [Disability Discrimination Act] compliant cycle and walk way. It's absolutely essential that everyone has equal access to the benefits of the outdoors."*  
(Andy Wynd, Chief Executive, Scottish Spina Bifida Association)

## Case study:

### Cumbernauld Community Park, Glasgow

#### Creating an environmental resource from disused farmland

#### Background

Cumbernauld Community Park is an 84-hectare site in the middle of Cumbernauld, on the outskirts of Glasgow. Originally farmland, the park lay empty and unused for 20 years, so inaccessible that local residents would drive around it rather than walk through it.

The Friends of Cumbernauld Community Park set out to transform the site into a community asset, and joined Britain in Bloom as an It's Your Neighbourhood group. The park is now a haven for local residents and an invaluable habitat for a wide range of plants and animals.

#### Activities

- More than 1,000 trees provided by the RHS and the Woodland Trust have been planted by the local community to create the Airdriehead Community Woodland.
- Working with British Trust for Conservation Volunteers the Friends created a 15-acre wildflower meadow, providing a source of food to attract insects and therefore birds.
- An area in the park has been set aside to become an outdoor classroom where young people will learn bushcraft and get their hands dirty planting and gardening.

#### Impact

New wildlife habitats and food sources have been created through meadow and woodland planting which will also, over time, provide shelter and floodwater management.

People are now better able to get close to, experience and understand the nature around them, potentially leading to positive environmental choices throughout their lives.

Biodiversity has already risen. Surveys found numbers and species of plants, insects and birds are increasing, such as swallows and campion and ragged robin wild flowers.

#### What next?

Plans for the future include a natural play park, extensions to the wildflower meadow and woodland planting, and the creation of a wetland area including a 1,300 square metre pond. Additional paths will open up areas of the park that are not yet easy to reach.

A major Cumbernauld-wide consultation about the future of the park is also under way, allowing the Friends to work with local people to build community ownership for the future.



Cumbernauld IYN

■ Cumbernauld Community Park right has been transformed by local residents into a haven for wildlife

# Case study:

## Garrowhill Garden Estate, Glasgow

### Changing a local landscape

#### Background

Garrowhill Garden Estate is a 1930s development in the east of Glasgow. Garrowhill Garden Estate Community Group began as one man's desire to tidy up a scrappy junction near the main parade of shops, but quickly became a community effort to green their estate.

Only three years into the project volunteers have drastically improved the local environment through planting and litter picking.

#### Activities

- The junction has been transformed from an untidy, litter-strewn mess into a colourful floral display, with local children getting involved with the planting.
- Having achieved an 'improving' award from the It's Your Neighbourhood programme the volunteers expanded to take on more neglected areas.
- The group now work with the local primary school, developing a new school garden and growing fruit and vegetables in raised beds.

#### Impact

New flower beds, planters and hanging baskets around the estate are not only bringing colour and interest, but they also make the area look clean, tidy and well cared for.

They have also prompted local residents to take greater care of their own surroundings. Less litter is dropped and more is picked up, and there is a growing interest in gardening.

Other community groups in Glasgow have seen the impact of the projects and want the same thing for their communities: several have visited Garrowhill to learn how they did it.

#### What next?

Now that the group is making a noticeable difference to Garrowhill and has received an It's Your Neighbourhood Thriving Award (level four of five), they are keen to enter the UK Britain in Bloom competition as a further motivation for them and the community to continue to care for and improve their environment.



Photographs: Garrowhill TYN

Category: **It's Your Neighbourhood**

Leadership: **Volunteer**

Size of community: **3,000 houses**

Number of volunteers: **12 regular plus volunteers from local schools**

Average volunteer hours per volunteer: **120 p/a**

Years as an It's Your Neighbourhood group: **3**

*"The changes have raised people's expectations of what they should have around them, and made them think about what they can contribute to making Garrowhill a better place to live."*

(Katrina Kirkpatrick, local resident and Garrowhill Community Council member)



■ A community effort to green up Glasgow's Garrowhill Garden Estate has transformed neglected flower beds top and below into colourful floral displays left and above



*“We have entered the competition for 23 years, commencing in 1988. When the judges first visited we did not take them along the marine parade – it was just too derelict and run down. The area is now outstanding, and we are very proud of all the work being carried out.”*

(Coastal Town)



Johnny Boylan

*“Ours is an area with a fair bit of deprivation. Its background is coal, iron, chemicals, railways. We are determined to rebuild our communities and bring back a sense of pride. We want to become a green, sustainable area.”*

(Large Town)

## Transformational impact

**Transformation was a word used by both survey respondents and interviewees, and the sense that a place had been significantly changed through their work was described by many of the groups. Transformation included the aesthetic improvements, changes to land use, community spirit and the “feel” of places.**

### Transformation of derelict or unused spaces

About a third of groups said that they transformed derelict land, and nearly half described the transformation of disused space as a benefit of their participation.

Groups proved flexible and resourceful in finding spaces to renovate. They included a whole host of traffic-related areas such as junctions, car parks, roundabouts, verges and disused garages; alleyways, fields, derelict parks and gardens; and unkempt grass patches surrounding houses and businesses.

Often the reason groups tackled these spaces was because they had become problematic, often unused because of crime or fear of crime, or a focus for fly-tipping and litter. Many spaces were described as an eyesore, giving the area a run-down feel. Other groups just wanted to turn drab areas into something more uplifting for their community.

Interviewees described how the transformation had given their area a new lease of life and how it was building the sense of community and encouraging investment by community members, businesses and other agencies. A number said their local authority seemed to be showing a greater interest and thinking about the area differently.

### Community horticulture as a tool for regeneration

Britain in Bloom and It’s Your Neighbourhood programmes are used by some areas to drive and contribute to regeneration. Housing associations, voluntary organisations and local authorities recognise the breadth of benefits contributed by both schemes and are using them to transform the fortunes of their area.

Improving the visual appearance of an area through community action not only enhances the environment but also boosts community ownership and pride. This helps the community to feel more positive about its outlook and contribute to further improvements.

These benefits of increased civic pride, community confidence and how a place feels can be intangible concepts that are hard to measure, but interviewees all described how important they were to the people who lived there.

Economic opportunities can be created for individual participants and for the area as a whole. The combination of skills development and environmental improvements helps boost the economy, keeping people and revenues in the area.

## Case study:

### Central Estate, Dukinfield, Greater Manchester

#### Changing the fortunes of an entire estate

#### Background

When Central Estate residents began their It's Your Neighbourhood group, their estate was known for crime and anti-social behaviour, and up to 60% of properties stood vacant. There was very little sense of community and it was not a place people wanted to live.

Strongly supported by new landlords, the New Charter Housing Trust (NCHT), Central Bloomers began changing the look and feel of their estate. The visual impact has been impressive, but even more notable is the change in the community and residents' quality of life.

#### Activities

- Barrier baskets were planted up by volunteers and hung on balconies across the estate. They were quickly followed by additional baskets and tubs built by residents.
- A growing compound established in the estate has become the hub of community horticulture and learning: volunteers gain an NVQ Level 2 qualification in horticulture.
- A new, safe community garden includes natural play features, seating, picnic areas and sensory planting: a space for the whole community to interact.

#### Impact

Because residents now feel it is 'their home, their land, their community' they take greater care of their surroundings, resulting in less litter and fly-tipping.

The Primary Care Trust now points service users with high levels of obesity, smoking and long-term conditions towards gardening activities to help them manage health issues.

Crime has fallen, and incidents of anti-social behaviour halved between 2005 and 2011. There's now a waiting list of people wanting to move in.

#### What next?

New projects include developing the play area and community garden, with construction on the site of a demolished building to include allotments for residents.

Delighted with what has been achieved on Central Estate, NCHT are seeking to extend the success of community horticulture across the 18,000 homes under their management.

Category: **It's Your Neighbourhood**

Leadership: **Volunteer in partnership with Housing Association**

Size of community: **1,100**

Number of volunteers: **24+ with additional volunteers for specific projects**

Total volunteer hours: **Unknown, but at least 900 three-hour sessions per year at the garden compound**

Years as an It's Your Neighbourhood group: **5**

*"Not only is gardening a great way to increase physical activity it can also help with mental illness such as depression. It is a good way to get to know other members of your community and help you feel less isolated."*  
(Health Trainer at New Charter Housing Trust)

■ Bed planting schemes below left and barrier baskets below have improved the visual impact, sense of community and the residents' quality of life in Dukinfield's Central Estate



Photographs: Central Estate IYN

Community Bloom  
category: **Town**

Leadership: **NGO  
(regeneration charity Plas Cybi)  
and community partnership**

Size of community: **c11,500**

Number of volunteers: **45**

Total volunteer hours:  
**c1,800 each year**

Years as an "in Bloom"  
participant: **2**



Photographs: Plas Cybi Partnership

■ In Holyhead, community horticulture is being used to boost morale and the economy. The Holyhead in Bloom team supported by the regeneration charity Plas Cybi have cleared areas of derelict land to install polytunnels and growing spaces, held hanging basket planting days and sold baskets to raise funds above and right

## Case study:

### Holyhead, North-West Wales

#### Britain in Bloom as a tool for regeneration

##### Background

Designated by the Welsh Assembly Government as an area in need of major regeneration, Holyhead is using community horticulture to boost morale and the economy.

Although in the early stages of their work, significant changes have been made to the aesthetics and atmosphere of the town. Holyhead in Bloom has already brought improvements, and the town won Wales in Bloom 2010, its first year of participation. They have high aspirations for what can be achieved in years to come.

##### Activities

- Simple, fun events, such as hanging basket days and herb and potato planting days, engage members of the community and get them interested in growing.
- Volunteers raise funds by selling hanging baskets, planted up by dozens of people from toddlers to pensioners, to local businesses and residents.
- The 10 Holyhead primary schools now have school gardens, with allotments and polytunnels. Pupils at the high school helped raise funds for their own garden, too.

##### Impact

Improved community spirit and the new look of the town is creating a more positive atmosphere, believed to be contributing to reductions in crime and anti-social behaviour.

Because young people are involved with the planting they have respect for their environment and there is less vandalism – previously a problem for the town.

Holyhead in Bloom gave gardening and grounds maintenance related training to young people, giving them valuable new skills and preparing them for the workplace.

##### What next?

Holyhead in Bloom wants to bring a wide variety of community organisations across the town into the campaign. It is hoped this will build community ownership of Holyhead in Bloom, something which has been challenging in some areas of the community to date.

Holyhead in Bloom is also seeking to win grounds maintenance and horticultural contracts from Holyhead Council and Anglesey County Council and through doing so create employment opportunities for local people.





*“I have lived in Holyhead for many years now and I have never seen the town looking so good. All in all, our town richly deserves the title of Winner of Wales in Bloom.”*  
 (Bill Hart, Holyhead in Bloom volunteer)



■ Designated by the Welsh Assembly Government as an area in need of major regeneration, Holyhead previously featured very little and very tired planting above right.

■ Improvements to the town included sustainable planting using grasses and shrubs in the beach area right and vibrantly coloured bedding displays top, making a very significant positive impact on the appearance of the area and people’s pride in their community



RHS

## Conclusion

**Our research found that Britain in Bloom and It's Your Neighbourhood are making a major impact on the physical and social landscape of the UK.**

Millions of volunteer hours are given each year to improve, care for and often transform the living environments of small and large communities, enhancing them in a number of ways.

- **Stronger communities:** improving communication, breaking down barriers and increasing neighbourliness creates a virtuous circle where individuals invest more in the place where they live as they feel better about living there.
- **Reductions in crime and anti-social behaviour:** people who feel better about where they live and their community are less likely to cause it harm. Building relationships between people also helps them work together to prevent crime.
- **Improved health and well-being:** participants enjoy the physical exercise of gardening and improve their diets by growing fresh fruit and vegetables, while the vulnerable or isolated gain self-esteem through a positive and rewarding activity.

- **Development of skills and confidence:** campaigns give participants skills including communication, teamwork and horticulture, helping those at risk of social exclusion, such as the long-term unemployed or homeless, to rejoin the labour market
- **Stronger local economies:** creating places where people want to be brings investment, either through people choosing to visit or when businesses choose to open or expand.
- **Improved physical surroundings:** as a result of participation in Britain in Bloom or It's Your Neighbourhood, places look better and have less litter. When local people are more satisfied with their environment they take greater care of it.
- **Enhanced natural environments:** planting and maintenance of green spaces provides a varied habitat supporting a range of biodiversity. Groups also take environmentally sensitive measures to plant sustainably, reduce water consumption and use peat-free growing media.

*“Since we have become involved with It's Your Neighbourhood and “in Bloom” we have an area that is looking far better than it did three to four years ago. And it's got people talking as to how we can improve our area further. It's Your Neighbourhood and “in Bloom” is the best thing that has happened to our area.”*  
(IYN group)



Britain in Bloom



Photographs: Johnny Boylan



# RHS BRITAIN IN BLOOM

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