



PRESS RELEASE

What: It's Gold for Wokingham in Bloom

Where: Thames and Chiltern in Bloom Awards, Woodley

When: Wednesday 28th September

The hard work and commitment paid off as the team behind Wokingham in Bloom was awarded Gold in the category for 'Large Town' last Thursday, as well as overall Regional Winner in the Thames and Chiltern in Bloom Awards, part of the Royal Horticultural Society's Britain in Bloom.

The awards didn't stop there! Several the projects that made up the Wokingham in Bloom entry received awards of their own with high praise from the judges.

Judges awarded:

Overall entry:

- Gold - Large Town Category
- Regional Winners (Oxfordshire, Buckinghamshire, Berkshire)

It's your neighbourhood category:

- Langborough Wildlife Garden – Outstanding / Level 5
- The Link to Nature Project – Outstanding / Level 5
- Cockpit Path Community Garden – Thriving / Level 4
- Library – Thriving / Level 4
- Garden share – Thriving / Level 4
- Howard Palmer Gardens – Advancing / Level 3
- The Community Fire Station – Advancing / Level 3

Parks Category:

- Holt Copse & Joel Park – Gold
- Elms Field – Silver Gilt

Within the Regional Winners Award, Wokingham in Bloom also received the Pride of Place Award and additionally the Community Involvement Award.

Wokingham in Bloom works in several areas around the town and has supported the development of many projects within the community, from transforming unloved green spaces, enhancing the town through flower beds, and hanging baskets, creating wildlife stepping - stones and corridors to community gardens plus mental health and wellbeing initiatives.

Quote: Councillor Morag Malvern, Chair of Wokingham in Bloom committee; ‘This is an outstanding achievement for all involved in Wokingham in Bloom. Whilst financed and run by the Town Council, in addition to sponsorship from local companies, donations in cash and kind, Wokingham in Bloom is really a testament to community spirit and involvement. Our local volunteers, which include individuals, community groups, businesses and charities have developed and created new projects over the last 10 years, all of which make a positive difference to the town we live in, not just visually but in prioritising pollinators and other wildlife and creating beautiful spaces for residents.’

Councillor Malvern added; ‘It has always been important to support mental and physical health and wellbeing, even more so since Covid. Wokingham in Bloom, through its various projects has managed to create spaces where residents can get involved or use for relaxation and enjoyment.’

There are currently 122 volunteers who’ve clocked up 5,932 hours between them this year alone. The oldest, Keith, is 83 years old. Keith has been a driver in improving Howard Palmer Gardens and shows that there is no age limit to getting involved.

‘New volunteers are always welcome however much or little time they have, **Councillor Malvern continued.** We can always find a project for new volunteers or help develop one. Contact: bloom@wokingham-tc.gov.uk. Plans are already afoot for next year so do come and join us!’

Quote: Wokingham Horticultural Association commented: ‘WHA are delighted to be part of Wokingham in Bloom. We have enjoyed working with other Bloom groups, sharing plants and advice, and developing innovative ideas to improve our local environment and benefit the community. We are delighted with the result; it reflects years of consistent effort by many people.’

Thames and Chiltern in Bloom judges said:

‘All the hard work instigated by Wokingham in Bloom over the last few years, as the town has been re-developed, has finally come to fruition. The support of the Town Council has been critical in ensuring this happens, based on their four principles of sustainability, distinctiveness, inclusivity, and service. There may be several individual projects, but the ethos associated with a united team comes across strongly. The benefits of this approach, with its investment in time and people, are clear to see; the outcome includes a high level of support for both the local community, environment, and wildlife. Careful consideration has been given to every action and how it will support the In Bloom

agenda. The exciting thing is that there are more ideas and plans in the pipeline. Congratulations to all concerned and we look forward to seeing how you progress even further.'

'The Award for **Community Involvement** goes to Wokingham Thames and Chilterns in Bloom Regional Awards 2022 due to the wide outreach across the Town, Groups include The Link to Nature scheme, which has used plants and gardening to help the vulnerable overcome loneliness and isolation, especially during the pandemic; the Wokingham Horticultural Association along with other community volunteers have become "plug plant foster parents" in order to bring about the growing, sharing and distribution of plants; the promptings of a local resident have brought about major change to a run-down, "no-go" area in the middle of Wokingham – now a garden where people can sit, eat their lunch in peace or participate in Park Yoga.'

'**Pride of Place:** It was not just that Wokingham looked extremely clean and cared for, it is the value that is placed on investing in time and people, thereby demonstrating the pride that the In Bloom team, encouraged by the local Council, has in the town. The local community, the environment and wildlife, all benefit from this approach. A large mural map of Wokingham has been painted on a wall that previously attracted graffiti. The Wokingham Civic Society oversees local history with blue plaques identifying places of interest. '

A THANK YOU to the volunteers

Wokingham in Bloom would like to thank the many volunteers who have helped make the gold award possible and thank the organisations and charities who have donated funds, volunteers and/or resources to the many projects across the town.

- Blooming Station Approach Group
- Cockpit Path Community Garden
- Cross Street and Rose Street Working Group
- Friends of Elms Field
- Friends of Howard Palmer Gardens
- Friends of Wokingham Library
- Graffiti Heros
- Holt Copse Conservation Volunteers
- Langborough Wildlife Garden
- Link to Nature
- Maya Refillables
- Newbury Building Society
- Plug Plant Foster Parents
- Share Wokingham
- Tesco
- Tivoli
- Urbaser
- WADE
- Wokingham 41 Club
- Wokingham Borough Council
- Wokingham Community Fire Station
- Wokingham Garden Share

- Wokingham Horticultural Association
- Wokingham Lions
- Wokingham Rotary Club

Projects in this years Wokingham in Bloom Submission:

Langborough Wildlife Garden

The Wildlife Garden was created in 2019 in an unloved space by the playground at Langborough Recreation Ground

The garden has created a calming beautiful space for people to enjoy, which has encouraged wildlife, reduced anti-social behaviour, connected people and other community projects together, and encouraged children, the next generation of gardeners, to play and explore nature.

This year the team have been busy creating and installing new educational signs to inspire visitors, a sensory garden for people with autism or other additional needs, and a crevice bed has been developed in an area of very thin, dry, low nutrient soil, focusing on the concept of right plant, right place.

Link to Nature Project

The Link to Nature program is a way of improving the well-being of mainly elderly people, sometimes with physical setbacks and or dementia. There is a wealth of research about how reconnecting with nature benefits mental health by reducing anxiety, stress, and depression. Gardening and other nature related activities also encourage mobility, improve physical health, and create friendships with likeminded people who can enjoy growing flowers, fruit and vegetables together. Activities have included

- Sunflower and tomato plant growing
- Wreath making
- Nature talks
- Garden visits

Photos are shared amongst the group and talks, and visits are videoed to ensure everyone can access and enjoy all activities.

Cockpit Path Community Garden

The Cockpit Community Garden has been transformed over the years from a desolate space into a welcoming community garden and haven for birds and insects. The current goal is to be more sustainable and drought tolerant, so volunteers have been introducing bark chips and shredding from local Arborists to reduce the need for too much water.

Volunteers love it when members of the community stop by to chat, ask questions, say how much they enjoy the garden. Depending on what is in season, volunteers offer fresh herbs, fruit, or veg to residents. Volunteers have found that for many children who stop to chat, it's their first time seeing where food comes from.

Town Centre (Rose Street, Cross Street, Market Place, Peach Place)

Even before Covid struck, the town centre looked vibrant with hanging baskets, flower boxes, and streets such as Rose Street adorned with gorgeous roses of all colours. After the regeneration and during covid, as residents found comfort in the open-air communal spaces, Wokingham in Bloom, residents and businesses worked to enhance the environment adding pollinator friendly plantings, herbs and trees and committed to water and nurture the plants to ensure the town continued to be a welcoming space for all to enjoy.

Holt Copse Conservation Volunteers

The Holt Copse Conservation Volunteers (HCCV) work with Wokingham in Bloom and the Town Council to look after the ancient, semi-natural woodland near Joel Park. This year they have been working non-stop planting a variety of new trees, coppicing, restoring hedges, monitoring bird boxes, and installing new nature signs. We have a wonderful partnership with the volunteers. They not only maintain the natural environment but improve access and enjoyment for residents too.

Elms Field

The plan for Elms Field was not only to create a fantastic natural play park for children, but an environment where residents can relax, and nature can thrive. Wildflower borders and flowers beds were added as the park was developed to bring insects and wild birds back to the area. As our wildflower borders have grown this year, they have not only brought beautiful oxeye daisies, cornflowers, red campions, and cow parsley to the park but new birds and pollinating insects including bees, butterflies and hoverflies. Look out for blue tits, nesting goldfinches and house sparrows too!

Friends of Howard Palmer Gardens

Drive and determination have made Howard Palmer Gardens a haven for all. This urban park has gone through an extraordinary transformation over the last few years. Thanks to bloom volunteer Keith Warwick (age 83) and his partner in planting Jane Scholey, large overbearing hedges have come down, borders have been re-developed, pollinator planting introduced, and park furniture revamped. Keith and Jane have formed a 'Friends of Howard Palmer Gardens' group and thanks to them all, we now have a beautiful haven and pollinator paradise that everyone can enjoy. It's a lovely place to sit and think, meet friends, have lunch or enjoy Park Yoga on a Sunday in the summer.

Station Approach

The project was started to not only add vibrancy to the area but to give a warm welcome to our commuters. The area is now home to many large planters and hanging baskets as well as flower beds. To increase the biodiversity of the area, wildflower verges have been added alongside new trees and pollinator friendly shrubs.

Wokingham Community Fire Station

Wokingham in Bloom volunteers have been working with local firefighters over the summer to create a natural, green space where firefighters can relax and unwind.

Together the team has recycled, reused, and repurposed items to create flower and vegetable beds, a water feature, a trellis for climbing plants and lovely deck with seating. It's amazing what you can do with an old beer barrel, ladder, old recycling boxes, lockers, and bits of wood!

By adding bird feeders, butterfly 'safe houses', bee homes and plenty of pollinator plants, herbs and vegetables, the previously sparse concrete yard has been transformed into a haven for firefighters and wildlife.

We're looking forward to seeing the fruits of their labour as the tomatoes, lettuce, chilli peppers, beans, strawberries, fennel, chamomile, sage, thyme, basil, and parsley grow. Enough for quite a feast we think!

Wokingham Garden Share

Wokingham in Bloom has been working with Wokingham Garden Share and the businesses who support them to continue their voluntary work in the local community.

The aim of the scheme is to help and support residents to grow vegetables in their gardens and share the excess with residents who live nearby.

The benefits of the scheme are endless- providing knowledge to households to help them grow their own, develop skills amongst volunteers, promote healthy eating, and keep unruly gardens in check.

Wokingham Library

With lavender, heather and grasses, the team has created a meandering river of knowledge to reflect the role of the library. Hydrangeas, wooden planters and hanging baskets have been added into the scheme to bring welcoming colour to the main entrance.

Wokingham Allotments

The 7 allotment sites across the town are little havens for beginner and established gardeners. Every site is blooming with well-kept, ecologically managed plots with people happy to share their knowledge and expertise. Allotment services work closely with the Wokingham Horticultural Society who run an onsite trading store at one of the sites, run activities and have members with a wealth of knowledge.

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