

THE CHAIRMAN'S NEWSLETTER SEPTEMBER 2006

National Achievements

2006 has been a milestone year for Northumbria in Bloom. Not least because of the great momentum that was carried forward from our achievements in the national competitions in 2005.

At the Britain in Bloom presentations last year Durham achieved a Gold medal and best in category for Large Town/Small City. In addition, Andrew Jackson, the Durham in Bloom organiser, received a Britain in Bloom Commendation which is awarded to an individual who has dedicated so much of their time to the Britain in Bloom cause.

Hexham won Silver Gilt and best in the Town category. Incidentally Hexham also won the Best Market Town accolade awarded by Country Life magazine, which more than added the icing to an already full cake.

Warkworth received a well-deserved Silver Gilt medal and Rowlands Gill and Saltburn won equally deserved Silver medals. .

This year Stockton on Tees, Whickham, Warkworth, Rowlands Gill and Saltburn are our entries to the national competition.

New Award System

This year Northumbria in Bloom introduced a new award system, which rewards entries with Gold, Silver Gilt, Silver and Bronze medals. I hope recognising the efforts of all entries in this way will encourage them to aim even higher in future, building on Britain in Bloom's four pillars, horticulture, environment, sustainability and community.

Encouragement for no award

The communities I want to encourage most are those who have not received an award this year. We are lucky in Northumbria to live in what I consider to be the best bit of England (and I speak as a Scot). By that I don't mean pretty pretty. There is history of the strongest kind here – industrial, maritime and agricultural – and that hasn't always left the easiest aesthetic legacy.

But these days anything is possible. And I believe that more and more communities are realising that where they live can be improved, no matter what the landscape or environment. Anywhere is capable of looking attractive, eye-catching and dynamic. It just takes imagination, and the desire of a community to work together and build up their sense of pride.

That to me is what this competition is all about. So please don't be disheartened if this year you do not have a result. The judges are here to help, and if you want to get your community looking good by working together, then you will receive all the support you want from us. You just need to ask.

Praise for achievements

To those who have achieved your medals I say well done. None of this comes without hard work and commitment, particularly in a spring and summer such as we have just experienced, and I hope you will feel that your efforts have been rewarded justly.

Neighbourhood Awards

This year, to expand the competition, Britain in Bloom has introduced a new category of award – the Neighbourhood Award. This is a non-competitive assessment of an area that might be starting from scratch or sustaining their contribution to the wider community. For instance it might be a group of like-minded people who work together to improve their neighbourhood, or there may be a residential enclave where the community effort is on a small scale that's not yet part of the bigger entry to Northumbria in Bloom. We have been very encouraged by the variety of our first 19 entries to the Neighbourhood Award scheme. They get their first certificates at this year's presentation.

Northumbria in Bloom Website

Most of you here will have websites for your town or community. Well, here is a bit a news. From this afternoon, so will Northumbria in Bloom. The website has been designed and set up by David Goodchild and Marian Foster, to whom we owe a debt of gratitude. When you log in today you will find not only the up to date list of award winners from today's presentation, but also a wide range of details about Northumbria in Bloom. The address is www.northumbriainbloom.co.uk.

October Launch for 2007

The launch of Northumbria in Bloom 2007 will take place earlier than normal, in six weeks' time at the end of October. We hope this will encourage more councils and communities to become involved in the competition, and will give you all more time to plan your schemes, your campaigns and your funding. You can download the entry packs from the new website.

Sponsors

We would like to thank our sponsors this year, whose support helps us to achieve our aims. If anyone is interested in sponsoring Northumbria in Bloom we would be very glad to hear from you. The competition is a vital part of building communities in the north east and if your remit can support our competition please let us know.

The Alnwick Garden

I cannot tell you how much pleasure it gives us to be holding the Northumbria in Bloom presentations in The Alnwick Garden. It is very appropriate that we in Northumbria in Bloom, whose aim is to enhance communities horticulturally, are guests of The Alnwick Garden, which may be described as one of the best horticultural enhancements of the 21st century.

Thanks

Our thanks go to The Duchess of Northumberland, Ian August and Kate Bindeman and their team here for providing us with such a fabulous venue for our presentation this year with the glorious backdrop of the Alnwick fountains and gardens.

My thanks also go to Ann Harper, PA to the chairman of Alnwick District Council, for her invaluable help in arranging the presentation.

**EILEEN BURN
CHAIRMAN**