



RHS It's Your Neighbourhood Participants' Guidance Notes

The Core Pillars

The core pillars of It's Your Neighbourhood identify its main values and main areas on which groups should focus their efforts and activities. The core pillars are:

- Community Participation (40%)
- Environmental Responsibility (30%)
- Gardening Achievement (30%)

The percentage given after each pillar refers to how much each area accounts for when assessing a group/project's benchmarking level.

Introduction

The suggestions that follow are examples of things that MAY be present in an 'It's Your Neighbourhood' entry – they are NOT a list of things to be done or to be achieved!

When you form an 'It's Your Neighbourhood' group and begin work you should set your own goals which should be suited to your local needs - what follows below are ideas to help illustrate activities relevant to each pillar, not rules to be followed nor to-do lists to be ticked off.

When deciding your goals you should consider whether these are realistic and manageable and whether the work is relevant to the core pillars. If you are a newly formed group, your first set of goals may relate to things such as forming a group, deciding on a project, consulting with the wider community and so on. Then as the work of the group progresses so should the goals with the focus being increasingly on getting jobs done that move the project from initial ideas and planning to actual delivery and results. The examples below are just suggestions and assessors will also consider where your group started, the challenges that you faced and how far you have come.

As an It's Your Neighbourhood group you have access to a variety of resources to support you and we strongly recommend you make use of those resources. Some of those resources are provided by the Royal Horticultural Society (RHS) and can be accessed on line by visiting: <https://www.rhs.org.uk/get-involved/its-your-neighbourhood>.

In addition, you also have access to the RHS's team of gardening experts; simply send an e-mail with your question to advice@rhs.org.uk but please ensure you put BiBNA in the subject line as this is a service normally reserved for RHS members. In addition to the support provided through the RHS, there is also your Region (Thames & Chilterns in Bloom) and there may also be a Bloom group in your area which could offer you advice and support (your regional co-ordinator would have details of Bloom groups).

It's Your Neighbourhood is part of the wider Britain in Bloom with the RHS initiative but it is not competitive; benchmarking levels are used to recognise and applaud the achievements of the participants as well as to provide them with some feedback and guidance for the future. The assessors are there as mentors and friends – not as judges – and you should take advantage of their visit to get constructive feedback. The assessors benchmark your achievements in the areas of the core pillars by considering how much the you have already done and how much more you could do given your unique circumstances.

Community Participation

40% – 40 out of 100 total marks

Community participation is about working together for the benefit of the local area and it may or may not involve participants in the physical work; community participation can also include fundraising, moral support, provision of facilities and resources, publicising activities and many other activities.

There are no size limits – a group is more than one! Larger groups may sub-divide into smaller groups with particular objectives (i.e. involving children/young people; developing community gardening activities; providing refreshments, making leaflets/posters etc). A group may not have large numbers of active workers or “official” members but they may be engaging others in their various projects and activities on a casual, drop-in/drop-out basis. In other words, groups will come in many sizes and have as many different structures; the key is that even if there are only one or two key players driving the project they are already engaging with other members of the community in some way or seeking ways in which to do so in the future.

Examples of community participation are things such as:

Being inclusive –the group is a part of the community and has an openness which enables any other member of the community to support, contribute to or have say in their work if they wish. A group may have a specific “membership” (i.e. a young person’s group) and still be inclusive.

Being representative – the people involved with the group’s projects and activities are representative of the diversity of the people in their area.

Local ownership and direction – the decisions about what needs doing and how things are undertaken are taken by the community and the group at local level.

Making a difference to local people – it is clear that what is happening has the support of local people and is improving aspects of daily life in that area.

Partnership working – the group may also be working with any one or more of the following: Area Panels, Parish Councils, Neighbourhood Watch groups, Wildlife Watch groups, police/community support officers, residents’ associations, etc. as relevant.

Getting support – the group has succeeded in or is working towards getting the support of their local council or councillor and businesses in the community, finding sponsors or sponsorship-in-kind, securing grants or other funding, etc.

Evidence of planning for the future – the group has shown they are thinking about and planning for ways to maintain the work they have already done and/or make even more improvements.

Retaining local control – local people are involved with the planning and decision-making.

Communities in areas where there are issues with anti-social behaviour or similar problems may develop partnerships with local police and community support officers.

In communities where the issues may relate to the lack of routine interaction between people, your group should consider how you can use It's Your Neighbourhood to create opportunities for interaction and to create a sense of community.

It does not matter what type of community participation takes place – only that it is positive and involves local people in the process of improving their area.

Environmental Responsibility

30% – 30 out of 100 total marks

Environmental responsibility is about care for your local area and where possible minimising adverse impacts on the environment. It may encompass aspects such as cleanliness of the streets and pavements or reducing use of natural resources. It is about the direct effects that people working at local level can achieve, and not about factors such as waste collection by the local authority.

Examples of environmental responsibility are things such as:

Efforts to promote responsible dog-ownership and reduce dog-fouling.

Efforts to reduce littering, graffiti, fly-posting and fly-tipping and efforts to clean up areas degraded by such activities.

Promotion of: use of peat-free compost, composting of green waste in community composting schemes, separation of waste in the local cemetery, minimising water wastage in plant containers, etc.

Development of community green spaces, including the increased use of the spaces and developing the skills and involvement of users.

Conservation activities which may include promotion of wildlife through installation of bird boxes, bat boxes, planting of wildlife friendly plants, etc. where relevant/applicable.

Efforts to encourage a sense of local heritage through education and heritage-related projects/activities (i.e. tree trails, history leaflets, signage/interpretation boards etc.)

Gardening Achievement

30% – 30 out of 100 total marks

The contents of this section will be completely dependent on the nature of your local area and should always be relevant and appropriate to your needs and to the wishes of the community. At all stages

there should be consideration given to good gardening practices that suit local needs. The gardening should enhance the locality for the community and should be within your ability to develop and manage over the medium to long term.

Examples of good gardening practices are things such as:

Good plant choices for the climate or soil, or which suit the heritage and local environment; balance of shrubs, perennials and annuals

Appropriate quality of maintenance – good pruning, mulching, lack of weeds, etc.

Creativity –the planting used for the area shows originality and local flavour.

Development of community gardening activities – developing areas in partnership with village halls, church groups, allotment societies, residents' associations, etc. and/or undertaking group planting events for window boxes, hanging baskets, bulbs, wildflower areas, etc.

Taking on the maintenance of neglected areas such as barren verges or waste ground.

Assessment

There is a total number of marks allocated to each section and the sections correspond to the 3 core pillars of It's Your Neighbourhood. There are no sub-sections with allocated scores; the assessor evaluates the section as a whole.

The items listed within each section are simply suggestions of things that you could/should be doing for that core pillar; you do not have to be doing all or even most of them to earn a top mark for the section. The assessor needs to gauge how much has already been done against how much could be done by your group and under the conditions present. The assessor will also consider if, in relation to the core pillar, you seem to be just starting out (Establishing) or if you have achieved something truly outstanding (Outstanding), or if you are somewhere on the spectrum in between (e.g. Improving, Advancing, Thriving).

Levels of achievement – overall marks:

Level	Description	Points
Level 1	Establishing	0-35
Level 2	Improving	36-52
Level 3	Advancing	53-68
Level 4	Thriving	69-85
Level 5	Outstanding	86-100