

Thames and Chilterns in Bloom

Planning your Judging Tour Guidance

Entering Britain in Bloom is a year-round project. All those involved, from volunteers to staff, will have invested hundreds of hours planning, implementing and promoting their entry, but all that effort can go to waste if the judging visit isn't well-planned and executed.

Preparing for the judges visit

The tour is your opportunity to show off your incredible hard work. However, before considering a tour, it is important to understand what the judges will be looking for, so prepare carefully, even if you have been entering the competition for many years.

Planning and preparation are key. It is a good idea to practise the tour and to time each section before the day, so you know what to expect. You may also want to share a tour plan with each person involved, listing key times and locations. Remember to ensure that everyone has an up-to-date copy on the day.

We ask that each entrant sends to the judges, a week before the judging date, an A4 paper handout containing a brief summary or itinerary of the judging route and the names of key people and places. This will act as a useful memory aid for the judges when writing their reports (and for taking notes).

Portfolio

Portfolios are not a compulsory requirement but are highly recommended as a way to support your entry, providing you with a great opportunity to showcase your campaign's year-round effort and the activities that you can't include on your tour, such as spring planting, winter fundraising events etc. Portfolios are not judged and must not be more than 30 sides (or 15 sheets) of paper and should, ideally, be presented electronically in advance. Alternatively, a folder containing photographs handed to the judges on the day, would be equally acceptable. It is probably a good idea not to give the judges anything that you wish to be returned.

On the Day

Here is some expert guidance to help you make your Bloom judging day run smoothly.

Presentation

Each bloom entrant has the opportunity to give a presentation lasting a maximum of 15 minutes on judging day. Again, this is not compulsory. This should take place at the start of your tour to set the scene, provide background information and highlight key achievements. Presentations should provide focused content complementing, rather than duplicating, your tour or portfolio. The presentation is not judged, however, the information presented will be taken into consideration.

The Tour

Plan the route carefully and ensure that you include as many highlights as possible. You should consider the following points when planning the route:

- Make sure you plan the route and supporting activity with the marking allocation in mind. This is as follows:
40% allocated to horticulture
30% allocated to the environment
30% allocated to community
- Noting the criteria above, and using the marking sheet which provides more detail, it is crucial that the judges see a range of initiatives representing all these areas. Organise the tour to reflect how the marks are allocated. Avoid taking the judges to places that do not provide evidence of at least one aspect of the judging criteria. Show a variety of features and remember that anything that cannot be fitted into the tour itself can be included in your portfolio/presentation, for example, demonstrating work within a local school.
- If you decide to include a school visit within the tour, remember that all aspects of the above criteria can be included as part of your evidence.
- The judges will need to be accompanied throughout the tour; please keep this to a maximum of two people (+ driver if needed), both of whom should be able to answer all questions. Decide in advance who your representatives will be and have at least one person in reserve in case of emergency. We love to meet all the people involved but they can be met at appropriate points during the tour. You can waste an awful lot of time getting lots of people in and out of vehicles!
- It is important that you adhere to the time allocation. We would suggest that one of the team acts as a time-watcher. The judges also need to be kept on schedule.
- If transport is required, make the necessary arrangements well in advance. Vehicles should allow the judges fairly unrestricted views. We would suggest the driver is an additional person who can deal with the parking etc.
- Remember, the entire route is subject to judging – this includes what the judges see on the way from one feature stop to another, as well as what they see at all the stops, e.g. litter, graffiti, weeds.
- The judges will expect that the entrant’s campaign has considered the entire community and not just the high street or the village square.
- Make the most of every opportunity. For example, have display boards with photos at the starting/finishing points and place volunteers who have worked on special features at those places to greet judges. This helps to illustrate the level of community participation and support.
- Allow time within your tour for comfort breaks. You can “stop the clock” in order to manage this and plan it within your itinerary.
- It’s also worth looking at the previous year’s feedback from judges (if available) to address any areas raised. You do not have to carry out all the judges’ suggestions although it is helpful to explain that you have considered them, if asked.
- Plan for all weather conditions. The weather has been extremely variable over the last few years ranging from very wet and windy to boiling hot. In hot weather, cool drinks are greatly appreciated. Again, you can plan to “stop the clock” if a break is needed.
- Ensure that there is a photo opportunity for the press if they have been invited. The judges are generally happy to answer questions and be photographed but try to keep this to one location. An additional 15 minutes is allocated for a press call.

- Please let the judges know if you want to be put forward for a specific regional award. The judges can put you forward anyway, but it helps if we know that you are aiming for a particular award.
- The judges like to make some notes as soon as possible after the tour. If you are able to provide a quiet spot for them to do this, it is very helpful, but not essential.