

## **Public Parks**

### **Bob Brown**

Public parks have become a millstone hung round the necks of local councils – places to be avoided with mown grass (which is a cheap way to control plant growth), grassed-over flower beds and brightly coloured playground equipment part funded by grants. It's refreshing, nay, uplifting therefore to visit a town which takes its public spaces seriously and further aims to enhance every lamp post and roundabout. There aren't many left.

Leamington Spa is the best town locally. The plantings consist of traditional bedded-out annuals and tender half-hardy plants to which have been added inspired plantings of perennials – bold plantings that sit comfortably with their surroundings that have been planned by people who know what they are doing. Plant combinations are repeated and colours thoughtfully planned to be seen amongst the confused streetscape or from moving vehicles. Lesser towns often try, but end up with confusing flower mixes which only ever look scrappy viewed from a car at 50m and closing.

Successful towns do annual bedding really well combining tender dot plants with perennial anchor plants. The alternative which is permanently planted perennials and shrubs require skilled maintenance. Such skills are rare and expensive and it's probably cheaper and more effective to rip out bedding once or twice a year and redo the whole lot. Added to which I reckon that borders and shrubberies often get neglected, maybe vandalised and end up as the resting place of discarded crisp bags and hamburger cartons. They never have the freshness of annual bedding.

OK, I'm a gardener and I notice local authority plantings, but, I believe that any visitor is likely to be unconsciously uplifted by them raising not only their spirits but also helping local businesses prosper. Other towns that have impressed me are Bath, Harrogate, and Canterbury. Do you detect any link here? I reckon they're tourist towns catering for their visitors, trying to continue to attract their present visitors and improve their environment for new custom. If so, the old adage that you need to spend money to make money applies. There's spin-off too because the locals probably enjoy it all too.