**17/07/2019**

**PRESS RELEASE**

**The 2019 Green Flag Awards wereAnnounced Today at Maynooth University**

**International Accreditation for Park Excellence in Ireland has now expanded to our Historic Cemeteries and University Campuses.**

**Today saw a huge turnout of over 250 park and garden staff, volunteers, and enthusiasts, convergingwithin the Maynooth University Aula Maxima Hall to witness the 2019 Green Flag Awards for Parks.**

Numbers of International Green Flag Award Sites have surged in Ireland this year. New sites to be accredited by teams of trained judges this year include new applicant sites from Counties Limerick and Wicklow, and also Galway and Limerick City.

Only awarded for exceeding tough environmental standards in green space management, and excellence of visitor attractions – **the Green Flag Award for Parks** is the mark of a quality park or green space and is recognised throughout the world.

Today, **An Taisce Environment Education** revealed the parks and green spaces that have been awarded a prestigious Green Flag Award for 2019.

A new entrant, and winner for the first time in 2019, it is Maynooth University/Saint Patrick’s College in Maynooth, County Kildare that provided this year’s venueto celebrate the **60 IrishParks and Gardens**from across the Republic of Irelandwho are receiving their2019Green Flags.

From among 17 countries whose parks met the standard this year there were more Green Flag Awards secured by Irish Parks and Gardens than by any country, other than the UK where the scheme originated in 1996.

This year participating countries included;

Australia, Belgium, England, Finland, Germany, Mexico, The Netherlands, New Zealand, Northern Ireland, Portugal, Republic of Ireland, Scotland, Spain, Sweden, Turkey, United Arab Emirates and Wales.

The2019 awards wereavailable topublic town parks, country parks, gardens, cemeteries, and green spaces from across the whole country.

This year has also seen the expansion of the **Green Flag Community Award Scheme** in Ireland with additional sites in Counties Galway and Meath being acknowledged for the excellence of their volunteer run community green spaces. TheGreen Flag Community Award extends the Scheme to include community initiatives such as; Community Gardens, Community Parks, and Tidy Towns Projects. By providing our community green spaces with access to Green Flag Award best practice we will empower community groups to improve their local community and environment.In Ireland the coordination of the Green Flag Community Award Scheme is made possible by the support of the **Department of Rural and Community Development**.

The **Minister for Rural and Community Development; Michael Ring**commented that “the Green Flag Community Award is a very welcome addition to the Green Flag Family, and I am happy that my Department supports this element of the Green Flag Award Scheme. The award recognises the effort of communities and volunteers and that is what makes it so special. As my Department promotes rural and community development; supporting community level projects like community gardensimproves the facilities and attractiveness of these communities. We are facilitating people totake positive control on how their communities develop. This Green Flag Community Award and other initiatives in my Department, like TidyTowns, are valuablein improving the quality of life for people living in rural areas. They also serve to make these communities more attractive to visitors, and in so doing help boost tourism.”

The Green Flag Awards are judged every year by a peer jury of green space experts, who volunteer their time to visit applicant sites and assess them against eight strict criteria, including horticultural standards, cleanliness, sustainability, and community involvement.In Ireland the Green Flag Award for Parks Scheme has been enthusiastically received by park management as it delivers major wins for the delivery of quality green spaces by respective parks and park departments. These include:

• The promotion and reward for best practice management

• Creation of a plan for improvements and future works

• The building of a collaborative network of park management nationally

• The implementation of environmental sustainability within park management

*“In terms of urban renewal, and rural and community development, the Green Flag Award for Parks is a logical and sensible step towards supporting community engagement with green space improvement, and helps increase quality of life within our communities.”*said Robert Moss, the Green Flag Award for Parks Manager for the Republic of Ireland.

Robert Moss also noted that the Green Flag Community Award is supported by the Department of Rural and Community Development because “it builds a very constructive conduit for information, knowledge and skill share between the professional and voluntary green space management sectors within our society”.

Four of the 2019 Green Flag Award winning parks were also identified by the National Biodiversity Data Centre for an additional**Pollinator Project Award.** This award is specifically for those Green Flag Parks or Gardens that have made an effort to support the local pollinating insect populations, or to promote their importance. The Pollinator ProjectAward is jointly run with An Taisce Environmental Education to support the **All Ireland Pollinator Plan**, and is kindly sponsored by Young’s Nurseries. While there are pollinator project awards across different park categories it was**Malahide Castle Demesne,operated by Fingal County Council**,that was the overall winner. This site features not only pollinator friendly planting and gardening, but also makes a great effort to educate the public and to promote these efforts through its website and social media.

If you are interested in finding out further information about the Green Flag Award or other programmes run by An Taisce Environmental Education please e-mail us at rmoss@eeu.antaisce.org or telephone: 01 4002212 or 086 3579663