**Volunteerism alive and well in Ballinahown**

Any community group is only as strong as its volunteers and Ballinahown has always been fortunate in this regard.

While Ballinahown has a population of just 75 within the immediate village, it is really home to hundreds of people who live within 5-10km of the village, and it has achieved much over the years thanks to the efforts of its volunteers. The development of facilities such as its sports park and walkways, sculpture trail, fairy forest, community amphitheatre, apiary and Ballinahown Biodiversity Park wouldn’t have happened if it hadn’t been for the volunteers who gave their time and expertise.

Chairperson of Ballinahown Community Development, Helen Conneely, said: “We are so grateful to our volunteers who give selflessly of their time. Some people have helped us with one-off projects and others assist on an ongoing basis with things such as planting, weeding and watering our plants and flowers in the village.

“We have always maintained that people should work in areas that interest them and we are so grateful to anyone who can give their time to help in any way. It is what has made Ballinahown the success that it is, allowing us to build a sustainable village that truly meets the needs of the community,” she added.

This year, more than most, Ballinahown has relied on its volunteers as it prepares to participate in Entente Florale Europe. This prestigious Europe-wide competition aims to promote the sustainable development of European towns, cities and villages and enhance the quality of life of their citizens. The international jury will be visiting the village for adjudication on Saturday, July 13th.

In the lead-up to the jury visit, volunteers have been working hard to ensure the village is presented to the highest possible standard. There are still opportunities for volunteers to get involved in the days leading up to adjudication and on the day itself and anyone interested is asked to contact the committee.

The group operates a volunteer WhatsApp group, which has over 40 members, and anyone wishing to be added to this can contact the committee.

Vice-chairperson of Ballinahown Community Development, Cllr John Dolan, added: “It is great to see the many people in our community who give so willingly of their time. The momentum of Entente Florale has seen an increase in volunteer activity this year and we hope that this continues in the years ahead. We would urge anyone interested in getting involved in the many tasks around the village to get in touch and we would particularly appeal to our younger generation to get involved.

“We like to play to people’s strengths and where people are interested in certain areas we are happy for them to concentrate their efforts where they feel they are best suited,” he added.

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