



COMMUNITY FOOD GROWING REPORT

2022/2023



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Scottish Borders Council launched 'Cultivating Communities', the region's first ever Community Food Growing Strategy, in March 2021. The Strategy covers a 5 year period - 2021-2026 - a timescale set by the legislative requirements of Part 9 of the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015. This is an update on Year 2 of the Strategy.

In recognition of the importance of supporting community food growing as part of sustainable, resilient communities, Scottish Borders Council appointed a Greenspace Programme Officer in September 2021, with a specific remit of supporting the delivery of the Community Food Growing Strategy. The post was established to support the creation of a network of Community Food Growers in the Scottish Borders, supporting and facilitating community growing in all its guises by providing guidance and resources for anyone who is interested in starting, or already running, a community food growing project.

This year we have:



Grow Borders Network

The Network was founded in May 2021 as a direct response to the consultation feedback received during the creation of the Food Growing Strategy. There was a need for community growing projects to feel more connected, have a place to come together to share best practice and to discuss the wider needs of community growing. The Grow Borders Network currently meets online every quarter, with monthly newsletters sharing case studies, events, funding opportunities and relevant growing information.

The Network is also supported via a dedicated online forum, managed by the Greenspace Programme Officer, to share resources throughout the year.

During 2022/23 we have:

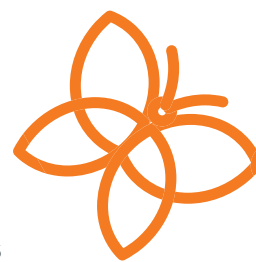


Currently, we have **40** members of the Grow Borders Network and **52** people signed up to the Community Food Growing newsletter mailing list.

The Network is growing monthly, with new community growing projects requesting to join or requesting to be added to the newsletter mailing list



Listening to our Network Members



Free Compost

After the popular provision of free compost for Community Food Growing Groups acquired in 2022 we successfully secured another round of free compost this year to be distributed to members of the network and wider community food growing community.

The compost was utilised by **13** Community Food Growing groups who received over **53** tonnes of compost between them.



Network name change

The original name of the Network was 'Scottish Borders Community Food Growers Network' and the members decided they wanted a more concise name without the need for acronyms. The name of the group was discussed during a Network meeting and the new name of 'Grow Border's was agreed. We are currently working with the Council's graphics team to create a logo for the Network which will be approved by the members.



Community food growing support and site visits

Site visits to community growing projects, meeting with groups who have an idea for a growing project, and meeting individuals who want to discuss a growing project are all key elements of delivering a successful community food growing strategy. Since the adoption of 'Cultivating Communities' we have had many requests for information, advice and site visits.



Advice requests range extensively and include advice on plants, planting containers, where to source community garden insurance, how to apply for funding, how to apply for planning permission, how to hold community consultations and much more.

Celebrating Success – Cultivating Communities Award

In 2022 the new 'Greener Gateway Community Awards' were launched which replaced the previous Floral Gateway Competition. The new awards celebrate and recognise community achievements in an additional two new categories, which are the 'Cultivating Communities' Award (for community food growing) and the 'Sustainability' Award. The Council invited entries for the Awards from community groups, individual projects, schools and other organisations. The event was launched in April with a deadline for submissions in August. Submissions were judged and gold, silver and bronze awards were presented accordingly (ensuring it was not a competitive format, celebrating success rather than pitting groups against each other).

An awards evening for the entrants was held in September at the Council Chambers which was well attended. There were three submissions for the Cultivating Communities Award and feedback was positive. Entries for the 2023 Greener Gateway Community Awards are now open.



Burnfoot Community Futures, Gold award winner and Best in Show, Cultivating Communities



Greener Peebles, Gold award winner, Cultivating Communities



Chirnside Allotments, Gold award winner, Cultivating Communities



Case Study

Bannerfield Community Orchard, Selkirk, written by Sue Bremner

On Saturday 1st April 2023, Selkirk proudly launched its pilot Community Orchard in Bannerfield. Invitees included local residents, members of the Community Council, the local primary school and teachers, friends and volunteers. It was a light hearted bustling affair opened by Bannerfields' very own junior fiddle group 'The Bannerfield Buskers' and with light refreshments, live music and activities for the children throughout the event, including learning how to plant seeds. Bannerfield shop kindly donated refreshments, Kindergarden demonstrated apple pressing with apples donated by Down to Earth fruit and veg shop. Philiphaugh Estate donated apple juice, Office Specialities provided Easter chocolate bags, The Waterwheel donated a delicious apple cake, The Three Hills Café donated some shortbread, friends brought home bakes and each child or adult was given their very own Tree Cops badge. Even better, the rain stayed away.



This site, formerly a children's play park, is owned by Scottish Borders Council. The concept of 'COPS' (Community Orchard Planting Selkirk) is the brainchild of Community Councillor Sue Bremner and Maggie Norman of 'Gardens for the Future', a subgroup of 'Greener Melrose'. With grant funding from the Neighbourhood Support Fund, under the umbrella of the Community Council and with the relevant permissions, the duo were able to procure the 10 heritage fruit trees, several fruit bushes and 2 park benches planned for the site. A separate application was made for compost derived from green waste through the Council's free scheme to supply compost to community growing ventures.

The compost was delivered to a nearby council car park and divided into manageable bags for use by COPS and local gardening projects including the 'Gardens for the Future' Selkirk group.

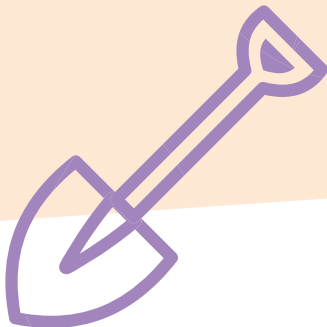
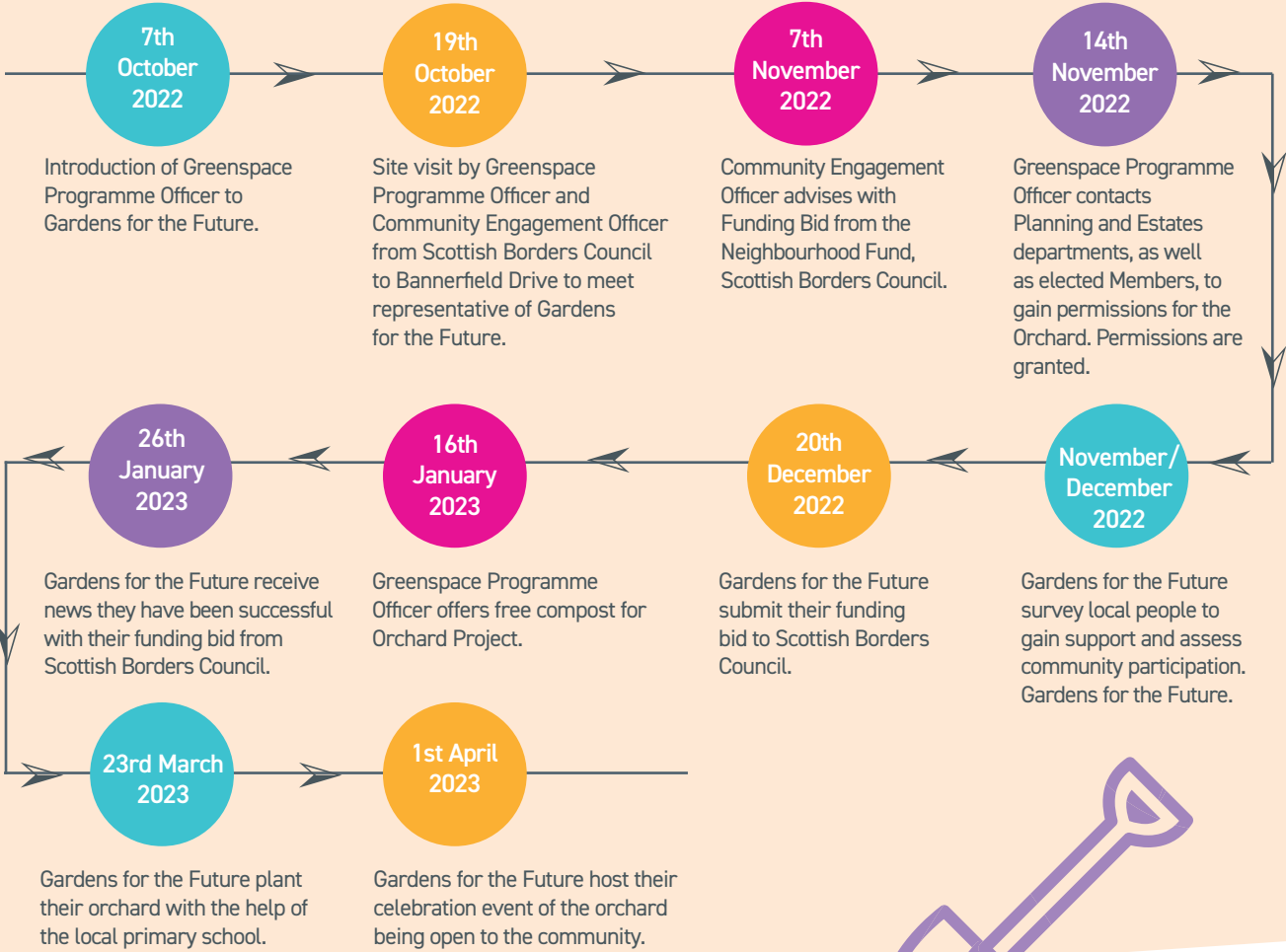
When it came to planting, Maggie had decided upon a no dig strategy which is based upon the Charles Dowding method. This involves a layering system which suppresses weeds, keeps the soil moist and, at the same time, enriches the soil through worm activity and encouraging the growth of a mycelliar network. The layering would involve the original soil put back, a layer of upside down turf, brown cardboard with all tape removed and then a two inch layer of the compost and, lastly, a layer of donated woodchips added to a depth of an inch or so.

The children of Philiphaugh Primary School were then invited to plant the trees, following these instructions on handy wall charts, along with teachers and volunteers. The children then went on to have their own in-school competition to design the best posters and flyers to advertise the event and the rest is history.

So why an orchard one may indeed ask. During recent years, with climate and environmental concerns, the trend is changing and green spaces, or 'green deserts' as they have come to be known, offer up the chance for development into something really rather special. Communities with the right support and guidance now have the chance to do their bit to increase biodiversity, to aid carbon capture, to educate themselves and their children about nature, the growing process, maintenance and pruning, sustainability.... and, of course, the bonus of free food. The Bannerfield site, once matured, will offer apples of many different varieties, plums, blackcurrants and red gooseberries.

The long term aim is to create more mini orchards and planting spaces and to drive community involvement throughout Selkirk with publicity about each new site as it emerges. Maggie and Sue are currently planning their next two sites. So, if any local residents would like to get involved and become one of Selkirk's 'Tree COPS', please do get in touch through the Selkirk Community Council.

Timeline from start to finish of Bannerfield Community Orchard – less than 6 months from conception to completion.





Wilton Lodge Park Walled Garden

The Scottish Borders Council managed Community Garden (Wilton Lodge Park Walled Garden) has continued to thrive during 2022/2023, receiving awards from the Green Flag Awards Programme recognising the outstanding work achieved by both the dedicated team of volunteers and the Community Greenspace Officer who manages the Walled Garden.



The community garden is a space for volunteers from across the Scottish Borders to attend weekly sessions, leading the way for 'no dig' and organic gardening. There is a mix of accessible raised beds, ground beds, fruit bushes and fruit trees, alongside areas of wildflowers and herbaceous borders, creating a sustainable, biodiverse and extremely productive garden for the community and visitors to enjoy.



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Our Community Greenspace Officer also shares advice and expertise with other community food growing projects across the Scottish Borders and welcomes them to visit the Walled Garden for tours. Volunteer sessions are tailored around the volunteers' needs and ambitions, with a sociable element to celebrate the day's achievements and take a well-earned rest and cup of tea. This year, the Walled Garden has worked with 27 volunteers over 680 volunteering days totalling 2,720 volunteer hours.

Volunteers are encouraged to take produce they have grown in the garden away with them during the harvest season, which encourages people to use and enjoy local, seasonal produce that they may not be able to source elsewhere. The volunteers are extremely positive about their volunteer roles at the Walled Garden, evidenced by the quotes below.

Volunteer 1.

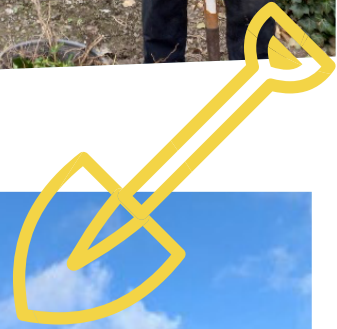
'I enjoy volunteering at the walled garden. It's a great opportunity to meet and work with other people as well as learning more about gardening and contributing to the local community'.

Volunteer 2

'I come over on the bus from Galashiels every Wednesday to volunteer at the garden. It gets me out and I love being part of a group that's really welcoming and friendly. We get to take the veggies and fruit home which is an additional bonus. We always have a laugh and I enjoy the tea, biscuits and chat at the end'.



During the 2023/24 season we will be focusing on adding more varieties of fruit trees to the two new fan trees that are being trained along an expanse of wall, and harnessing the propagating adventure given by the addition of the new glasshouse.





Next steps – Looking ahead to 2023/24

- Continue to expand and develop the Grow Borders network
- Provide more outreach work to upcoming community food growing projects
- Develop partnerships with SBC managed care homes across the Scottish Borders to provide infrastructure and support for Community Food Growing projects
- Map greenspaces that could be used for potential food growing sites
- Explore the creation of 'Growing Ambassadors', as part of the #yourpart Corporate Programme



