



COMMUNITY FOOD GROWING REPORT

2024/2025



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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 4 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 formerly met online every quarter, with monthly newsletters sharing case studies, events, funding opportunities and relevant growing information.

During 2024/25 we have:

- Hosted 4 Scottish Borders Community Food Growers Network Meetings (3 in person, 1 online)
- Published 12 Community Food Growing Newsletters

We have seen an increase to our Grow Borders Network with an additional **6** people joining during 2024/25 taking our membership figure up to **64**. We have also expanded our Community Food Growing newsletter mailing list by **7** and currently have **75** people on our mailing list.

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

Listening to our Network Members

More Free Compost

After the popular provision of free compost for Community Food Growing Groups in 2023/4, 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 15 Community Food Growing groups who received over 60 tonnes of compost between them.

Greener Peebles compost delivery





Burnfoot Community Futures compost delivery



Grow Borders 'in person' meetings

Originally, all Grow Borders Network meetings were held on either Zoom or Teams as a requirement of being able to host meetings during Covid. However, as time has moved on Network members requested an 'in person' meeting instead. After the success of the first in person meeting hosted at Burnfoot Community Hub, we have hosted three of our four meetings during 2024/5 as in person meetings.

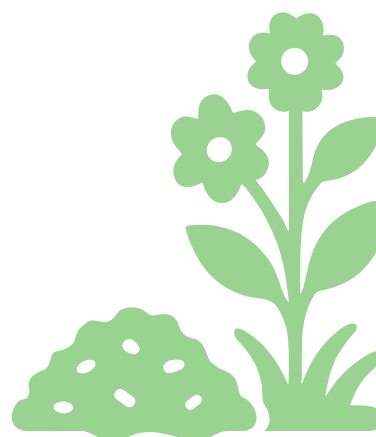
Our Grow Borders members have enjoyed visits to Tweedbank Community Allotments, Wilton Lodge Park Walled Garden, and Drygrange Community Garden. All meetings involve approximately an hour of discussion on relevant themes, with guest speakers and representatives from SBC.

This was followed by a tour of the garden being visited, which members have found useful and insightful, often taking inspiration from the garden they were visiting to explore in their own gardens/project.

Members are keen to keep up the in person meetings, the next one is scheduled for June 2025, and will be hosted in Eyemouth.



Wilton Lodge Park Community Garden

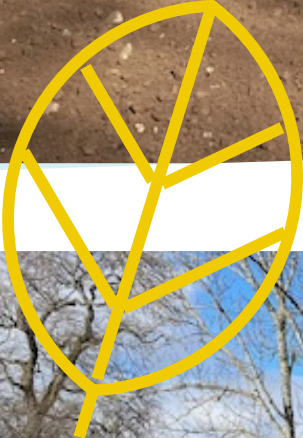




Drygrange Community Garden



Tweedbank Community Allotments



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.

During 2024/25 we have:



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.



Enabling Community Food Growing on Scottish Borders Council owned land

Brighter Selkirk (COPS) New Orchard

In 2023 SBC gave permission for Brighter Selkirk to plant a small community orchard on SBC owned land. Since then we have granted permission for two further orchards to be planted on SBC owned land.

"COPS is a subgroup of Brighter Selkirk, part of the Selkirk Community Council, who have, since 2023, been promoting biodiversity on council green spaces by planting mini orchards.

Having successfully planted two orchards, one in Bannerfield in 2023 and one on The Green in February 2024, on Saturday 22nd March of this year we planted our third at the Glebe, a total of 19 trees our biggest enterprise so far. Local residents met over planting materials and chatted with tea and biscuits over their endeavours. The weather remained clement and it didn't rain!

Community orchards provide many benefits to the local community and the environment. These include: the bringing together of volunteers and neighbours through canvassing and then again through the planting itself and planned maintenance, by increasing biodiversity for birds, bees and other insects through blossom and then their fruits in what would otherwise remain an area of monoculture, by the provision of fresh free fruit for local residents, and eventually through carbon capture.

We would like to thank the Borders Forest Trust this time for the grant funding to buy the trees, stakes and ties for this most recent planting and for the Community Council for compost obtained from the Recycling Centre at the Pavilion in Galashiels." Sue Bremner, Brighter Selkirk.



These two photos are of a Grey Benvie pear tree from the site of our second orchard which we planted on The Green in Selkirk, March 2024, currently in April 2025 it is absolutely brimming with blossom!



In all, we planted 8 fruit trees, many of them heritage varieties, sourced from South of Scotland Heritage Fruit Trees. They have all done well, apart from a Victoria plum, which never really grew. I think that the graft did not take.

The tree has been replaced, just recently, with another bare-rooted Victoria in a slightly different location.

The trees are starting to spring into life again this year, with the Grey Benvie leading the charge. Benvie is a farm area west of Invergowrie, the region this pear originated from.

The trees are still quite small but doing well and we expect them to 'take off' this year, like the trees in our first Selkirk orchard, in Bannerfield, did last year.

Recently we have weeded round the trees and refitted them with brown cardboard circles to keep the weeds down. We plan to do this for another couple of years to give the trees a head start growing without competition from grass and dandelions etc."

Margret Newman, Brighter Selkirk.



Lowood Estate, Abundant Borders and Borders Seed Collective

Lowood Estate is owned by SBC and is being developed for a multitude of purposes. There is a walled garden within the estate which was previously a fruit and vegetable garden for the main estate house. After public consultations were carried out, it was decided that it would be beneficial for the community to take stewardship of the garden and create a community-focussed garden. The Greenspace Programme Officer worked with three local community food projects to help secure the lease for the walled garden which is now being used as a seed collective.



"Until recently, every gardener in the world saved their own seed. They saved the seed of the plants that did best for them, and which they liked most. Although simple, this was efficient. Each gardener was maintaining a slightly different strain of each vegetable. This created a huge living gene bank that was very resilient against disease or climate change. If things changed so that your cabbages didn't do well, someone down the road probably had a slightly different one that would cope. Every year, without even thinking about it, millions of people added to the achievements of their ancestors to maintain and improve the previous years' varieties. This has worked very well for the past 11,000 years. However, in the past 40 years, almost all these adaptable local strains have been lost. The way to protect ourselves from the adverse effects of climate change and globalisation of the food system is to build local resilience by seed saving and seed sharing.

At Lowood, the focus is on Landrace Seed Saving. Landrace seed saving is important because it helps preserve genetically diverse, locally adapted crop varieties that have evolved over generations in response to specific climates, soils, and cultural practices.

These seeds are more resilient to pests, diseases, and changing weather conditions than many commercial hybrids, making them a vital resource for sustainable agriculture and food security. By saving and sharing landrace seeds, we aim to help our communities maintain sovereignty over their food systems, protect traditional knowledge, and foster crops that support ecological balance and local culinary heritage.” Karen Birch, Abundant Border Chief Officer.



Orchard Park, Kelso

In late 2023 the Greenspace Programme Officer put in a funding bid to the Shared Prosperity Fund to develop a community garden on a former SBC playpark site. The playpark had been removed and the land left was enclosed by houses, making it an ideal location to form a community food growing site for local residents to use.

The funding bid was successful, and a partnership agreement with Abundant Borders, Eildon Housing, Scottish Borders Housing Association and Waverley Housing was drawn up to take the project forward.

A community consultation with all partners, SBC elected Members and the public took place to identify and agree the needs of local people.

Following this, the garden was designed and planters, a shed, benches and a mud kitchen were installed by the SBC Criminal Justice Team.

Abundant Borders took stewardship of leading weekly volunteer sessions for local people to attend, as well as the RSL's using the space for team building days and tenants meetings. There has been an art mural installed, as well as signage made by Kelso Men's Shed.

During the year-long project from April 2024 to April 2025:

488m² of unutilised green space has been improved and repurposed

4 trees planted to improve biodiversity and enhance green space

24 volunteering opportunities have been created for individuals and groups because of the creation of the garden. These opportunities have provided skills development and social inclusion for local people

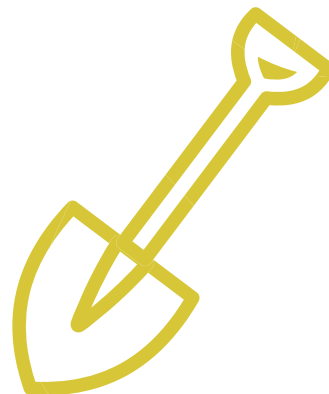
42 local people have been engaged through workshop/consultation activities creation of the garden

Quotes from beneficiaries:

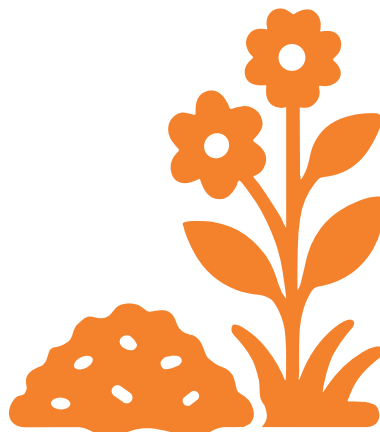
"The Orchard Park Community Garden has been a fantastic chance to meet up with all residents from the local area, not only our Waverley tenants, both through the early-stage promotions when we visited residents on their doorsteps, and later at our consultation day"

"This is a first-rate project turning a redundant, disused play park into a vibrant garden for all to enjoy. I hope it will provide hours of purpose, opportunity and fulfilment for the local community."

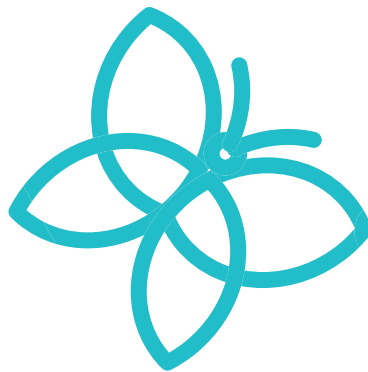
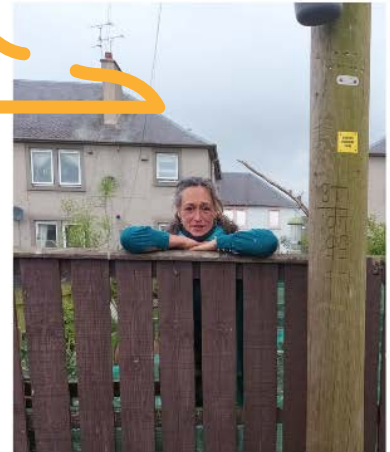
Orchard Park Kelso Community Garden - 'Shovel Day' - 10.04.24



Orchard Park Kelso Community Garden - 'Opening Day' - 26.04.24



Orchard Park Kelso Community Garden - 'Opening Day' - 10.04.24



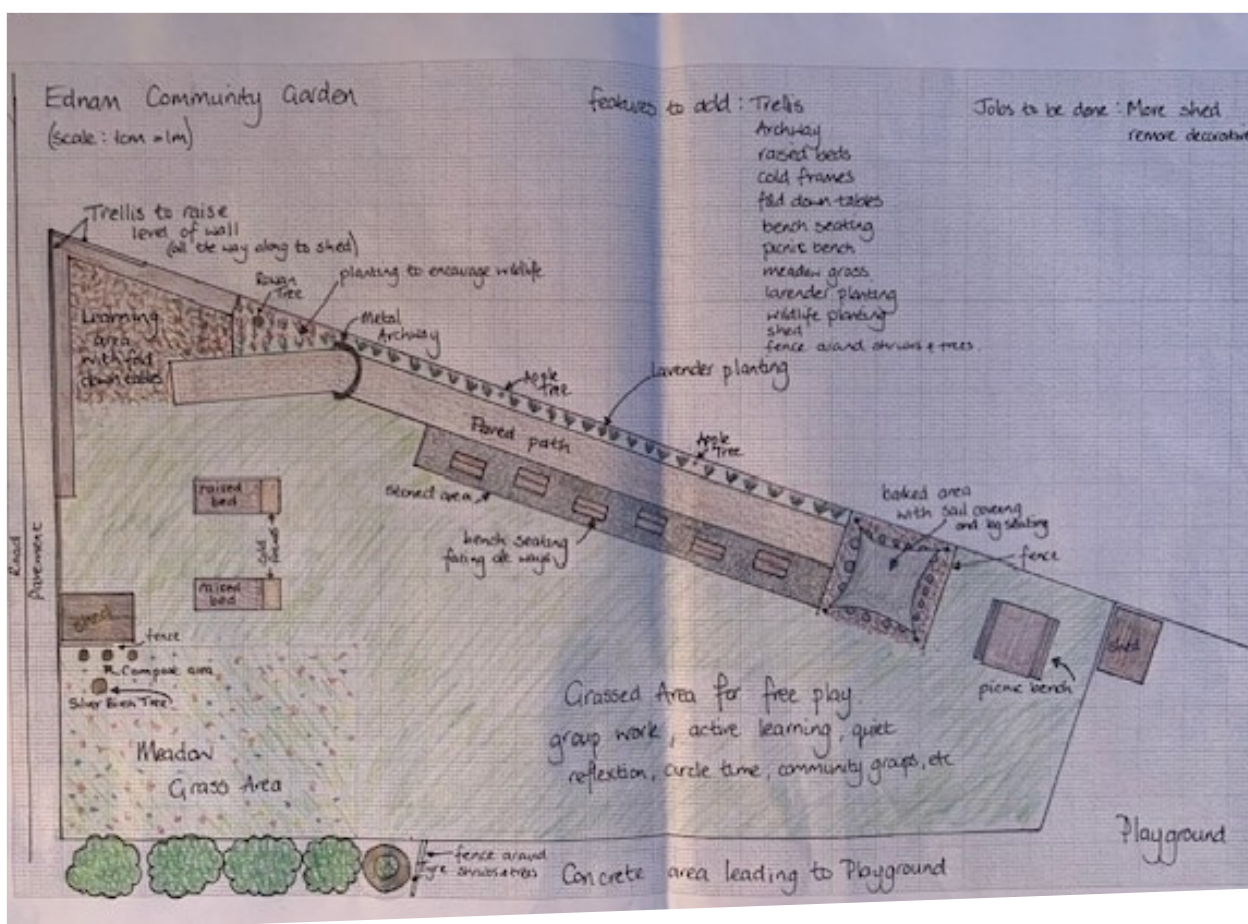


Working with Schools

'Cultivating Communities' acknowledges the vital role that schools can play with helping children to foster an interest in food growing and its relationship to healthy eating and improved mental health. With this in mind, we have developed the 'Schools Award' for Primary and Secondary students as part of the Greener Gateway Community Awards to celebrate schools' successes, as well as working with three schools this year to help develop their community food growing projects.

The Greenspace Programme Officer visited Coldstream Primary School, Earlston Primary School and Ednam Primary School offering advice, helping with community consultations, and meeting with potential funders as requested by the schools.

Ednam Primary School



A site visit from the Greenspace Programme Officer to look at the garden design and discuss options was warmly received by the Principal Teacher who was taking ownership of moving the garden forward. Recommendations for charitable organisations who could help with funding, as well as being added to the SBC Community Benefit Programme were suggested. The school has made use of these resources, including accessing the free compost available via our Community Benefits scheme.

Coldstream Primary School

Coldstream Primary School host the Coldstream Community Larder within the school grounds. The Larder have their own community garden which the children from the school can access under supervision. The Primary School were keen to set up their own community garden on the site and, with support of Coldstream Community Larder, Abundant Borders and the Greenspace Programme Officer, have secured funding to be able to do this.

"The Greenspace Programme Officer was invaluable in advising The Larder and Friends of Coldstream Primary School as we planned an exciting new project to provide an outdoor classroom and some raised beds for the school children and the community. The project is now being delivered and is already impressive.

The Officer attended our first public meeting on 2nd Dec 2024 and gave some helpful advice on the outdoor classroom and the raised beds from her knowledge of a similar project at Cockburnspath Primary School and other projects. She has provided us with access to free compost through the Community Benefits scheme and wrote us a very robust letter of support to be included in our successful grant application to Destination Tweed. We are very grateful indeed for her contribution to our project." Treasurer, Friends of Coldstream Primary School.



Celebrating Success – Cultivating Communities and Schools 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.

In 2024, the Council again invited entries for the Awards from community groups, individual projects, and other organisations. The event was launched in April with a deadline for submissions in August. Submissions were assessed and gold, silver and bronze certificate awards were presented accordingly.

In 2024 we added the 'Schools Award' to our portfolio, recognising the important projects that schools provide relating to biodiversity, sustainability, food growing and intergenerational working. We received 14 entries to the Schools Award.

An awards evening for the entrants was held in September at the Inspire Learning Academy, Tweedbank which was well attended with good feedback from those who took part.

Burnfoot Community Futures, Gold Award Winner, Cultivating Communities



Gold Award Winners, School Award



Wilton Lodge Park Walled Garden, Hawick

The Scottish Borders Council-managed Community Garden (Wilton Lodge Park Walled Garden) has continued to thrive during 2024/2025 and plays a key part in ensuring that the Park retained its Green Flag Award Status, recognising the outstanding work achieved by both the dedicated team of volunteers and the Community Greenspace Officer who manages the 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.



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 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 Community Garden worked with 32 volunteers over 220 volunteering days totalling 4,800 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. Organisations who are referring volunteers to the Community Garden are:

- NHS Community Mental Health South Team
- Social Work
- Local Area Co-ordinators, SBC Adult Services
- Workplus
- Job Centre Plus
- Borders College
- Borders Community Action
- Wellbeing Worker, Criminal Justice Team
- Ark Housing
- Cornerstone Charity
- Macmillan Move More



During the 2024/25 season Rupert Norris (Head Gardener) and Reis McNaughton (Gardener) from Mertoun Estate Gardens were invited to the Garden to give a demonstration for the Community Greenspace Officer and volunteers of the pruning of fan fruit trees and standard fruit trees. This was warmly received and a great experience for all involved.



Next Steps

In planning Year 5 of the Strategy, these actions are programmed;

- 1 Undertake a review of the Strategy in preparation for the next 5 year phase (2026 - 2031).
- 2 Continue to support communities to take on leases and projects to create community food growing opportunities on SBC-owned land.
- 3 Work with partner organisations to develop new community food growing projects.
- 4 Engage with more of our schools to promote the Greener Gateway Community Awards 'Schools Award' programme, whilst offering practical food growing support.
- 5 Increase opportunities for in-person skills sharing and networking within the Grow Borders Network, maximising impact for Network members.



