COP26 – Edible Estates promoting nature based solutions

This article has been provided by Edible Estates as part of our series of articles to be published around COP26, the UN conference on climate change which is being held in Glasgow from 31 October to 12 November 2021.

The Edinburgh Reporter posed a simple question to several individuals and organisations in the city: What are you doing to address climate change?

With all the world looking at Glasgow during COP26, and in the face of climate emergency, it is clear that the time to do something about climate change, no matter how small, is now.

Edible Estates is a partnership of several organisations which work together to promote community food growing projects in a variety of communities. Their approach is particularly well suited to social housing estates, and they use food growing as a tool for urban regeneration, promoting individual health and well-being, and community cohesion.

The Intergovernmental Panel of Climate Change (IPCC) report is

the biggest study on the climate since 2013, and outlines how human activity is damaging the climate severely, and that without a concerted global effort to massively reduce emissions and stabilise the Earth's rising temperatures within the next decade, we are faced with a greater increase in extreme weather events such as heatwaves and flooding.

Greenspace Scotland also recently partnered with COSLA, NatureScot and the Sustainable Scotland Network to publish a briefing, intended for elected officials, that aims to increase awareness of, and eagerness to implement more Nature-based Solutions (NbS) across the country.

NbS' importance are becoming more realised across sectors, and are therefore set to be a key focus of the 26th UN Climate Change Conference of the Parties (COP26), which, due to take place in Glasgow this year, will bring the climate focus to Scotland. NbS are defined by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature as actions to protect, sustainably manage, and restore natural or modified ecosystems that address societal challenges effectively and adaptively, simultaneously providing human well-being and biodiversity benefits.

When well-implemented, NbS are positive for the environment and people, helping to mitigate against both climate change and loss of biodiversity, as well as aiding in the establishment of resilient communities and reduction of health inequalities through the improvement of a population's wellbeing. Examples of NbS as outlined in the brief include; the effective management and development of green spaces, focusing on disadvantaged communities to reduce health inequalities caused by inadequate access to the outdoors, facilitating active travel and outdoor recreation in communities, delivering outdoor learning, and connecting local people with nature.

Some of the ways in which our community projects help tackle

climate change on a local level through NbS include:

Regenerating Existing Green Space

We consult and liaise with communities to ascertain their needs and vision for the regeneration of their local green spaces, creating a sense of ownership over and connection to those spaces. We then work to make those ambitions a reality.

Facilitating Self-Built, Sustainable Neighbourhood Gardens

With support from our staff, local people build and create their own neighbourhood gardens, further cementing a sense of stewardship over local green spaces. Additionally, by using timber as opposed to standard metal structures in the gardens, and in the proposed Murrayburn & Hailesland Adventure Park designs, we have worked to reduce the heat being trapped in the area and the potential development of an urban heat island.

Creating Greater Climate Consciousness

Through our Natural Play sessions and School Farm, we are hopeful that by educating children about the natural world through play, how they can positively impact their local green spaces, and supporting them in learning how to grow their own sustainable food, they will go on to be conscious of climate issues throughout their lives, and have a keen awareness of how they can do their part to mitigate them by respecting nature.

Reducing Carbon Emissions

Through the regeneration of local green spaces we've made great strides to reduce local carbon emissions, both by populating the space with a greater number of plants to soak up excess Co2, and also through ensuring that local people have the opportunity to grow their own sustainable fruit and vegetables, which in turn reduces their food miles. The use of poly tunnels in our gardens also allows gardeners to grow fruit and vegetables they may otherwise not have been able to in Scotland's climate, again aiding in the reduction of food miles. Furthermore, by situating the community garden in the heart of the communities, we have ensured that gardeners can travel there on foot or by bike and thereby promote active travel, thus reducing emissions from motorised vehicles. The use of a bike trailer to transport community meals reinforces this, and supports the community in a move towards the 20-minute neighbourhood model, that would ensure the daily necessities of local people, such as nutritious and sustainable food, are easily accessible.

Reducing Food Waste

Through our Community Picnics, and by dropping off regular boxes of produce to local food banks, we are helping to reduce food waste in the local area by using up harvested produce from the garden and School Farma. Eating and enjoying produce together that they have grown as a community also further increases a sense of empowerment and stewardship over the spaces for our gardeners.

Aiding Pollinators

By populating our garden with local, native plants, we are creating a space in which pollinators such as bees can thrive, and as a result are making food sources more secure and

sustainable for the future.

Growing Produce Organically

The organic growing process used in our gardens includes using homegrown compost, steering away from the use of pesticides, and growing our own comfrey to be used as liquid fertilisers. Each of these practises have evidently benefited our plants and produce given the very successful harvests our gardeners have experienced this year. Producing our own liquid feed and compost also means that we are not importing them from overseas, further reducing our carbon footprint. Additionally, it means less pollutants are released into the atmosphere, improving the area's air quality and subsequently the health of local people.


PHOTO courtesy of Edible Estates

Saving Water

A feature of our gardens is that we harvest and store our own rainwater. This means that our plants get what they prefer (rainwater is often better for plants than tap water), and it also means we do not have to use use mains water. It also mitigates the impact of increasingly dry summers, again contributing to sustainable food sources in the future.

Reducing Health & Wellbeing Inequalities Caused By Environmental Factors

Through increased access to green space, the health and well-being of local people is improved by greater physical activity in building and managing the gardens and their produce. Participating in our garden projects also reduces isolation

and fosters community-connectedness, subsequently helping to improve mental wellbeing.

The communities we work in are faced with the prospect of being adversely effected by the impacts of climate change, and so it is of great importance that we continue to implement changes that foster resilient communities, and mitigate those impacts.

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