

# **Guerrilla gardening restores pride in the community**

**This time last year, the site of the former Top Club in Newtongrange was a derelict wasteland, overgrown and gathering litter since the Main Street social club was demolished more than a decade ago.**

That is, until February 2023 when the Newtongrange Guerrilla Gardeners were granted permission to put the abandoned land to good use. Just one year on and the area is now completely unrecognisable. It is a beacon of sustainability, a hub of intergenerational activity, an award-winning example of what happens when locals take ownership and take pride in their local community. And it's all thanks to the vision and sheer hard graft of a team of dedicated local volunteers.

Volunteers of all ages, backgrounds and abilities have been tirelessly transforming the 1150 metre squared area into a community garden. Within just 12 months, they have dug, landscaped, planted and built a space which features a 20ft greenhouse, two gazebos, an orchard of apple and cherry trees, a willow den, a pond, a children's play area, beehives and wildlife homes for bats, hedgehogs and frogs. It has also played host to a number of successful events such as the King's Coronation celebrations and a Halloween pumpkin picking party.

The community garden was the brainchild of the Newtongrange Guerrilla Gardeners – a voluntary group formed in 2021

with a vision of brightening up the village, making it a greener and more welcoming place for all. Their aim is to provide an opportunity for locals to work together to transform public spaces and boost the well-being of all villagers.

In October 2022, the Newtongrange Guerrilla Gardeners took part in a community showcase organised by the Newtongrange Development Trust to gauge interest in the idea of creating a community garden. The feedback was overwhelmingly positive. Thanks to support from the Newtongrange Development Trust and local councillor, Douglas Bowen, the Newtongrange Guerrilla Gardeners were given the go-ahead to transform the area beside Newtongrange Leisure Centre. Detailed plans for the garden were drawn up, with careful attention paid to ensure all requests submitted at the community showcase and online were incorporated.

Within days of publishing the proposed garden design, the Newtongrange Guerrilla Gardeners were inundated with people wanting to help – either by donating spare garden tools, furniture, bulbs and plants, or by giving up their time to dig, weed, sow and grow.

Encouraged by the enthusiastic response of locals, the Newtongrange Guerrilla Gardeners applied for grants to fund the bigger aspects of the garden transformation which they envisaged completing within a timeframe of around five years. However, in just 12 short months they have already achieved their goals, and more!

Today, a team of up to 30 volunteers now tend to the garden on a twice-weekly basis, growing a wide range of fruit and vegetables which are distributed free of charge to the local community via The Pantry. Any waste is returned to the community garden to create compost. This sustainable circular economy is overseen by community garden designer and volunteer co-ordinator, Laura Joyce, whose efforts were recognised last

year with a Places for People Community Matters Award.

The community garden was also awarded an RHS School Gardening Award at Level 5 for its engagement with local children. The volunteers are keen to further relationships within the village and are currently in talks with Newtongrange Primary School and St Annes Sheltered Housing to ensure the garden is as inclusive as possible for all within the local community.

The volunteers are also eager to make an impact outwith their local community and are currently taking part in a learning share initiative with Granton community garden. Speaking about this initiative, Laura Joyce said; "By exchanging knowledge and experience with other more established community gardens, it's opened our eyes as to what is possible with further support and funding. Ideally, we would love to appoint an employed worker that could open the garden more often and coordinate group access so the garden could be utilised to the fullest."

Speaking ahead of the anniversary, volunteer Rebecca McCosh said; "It's just one year since we first broke ground here and what has been achieved already is astonishing. It's not just about the physical transformation of the land, but also the transformation of attitudes. People have been inspired and empowered by the fact they can make a real difference to their local area and to the environment. New relationships have been forged here, new skills have been acquired here, and new life has been breathed into a space that was hitherto abandoned. And this is just the beginning!"

















































