

Business Plan

2017 -2020



Creating a network of local food production in the Scottish Borders

visit www.abundantborders.org.uk contact robin@abundantborders.org.uk

Section 1. Context & Purpose

Abundant Borders was created to help those experiencing food insecurity in The Scottish Borders by creating a network of local food production sites across the region.

These sites:

- serve as training bases to teach the skills needed to grow food in small areas
- act as hubs for those wishing to grow food who do not otherwise have access to growing space
- will produce food which can be donated to those in immediate need
- return unused/neglected or under used sites to create a community asset
- offer volunteering opportunities to those looking to gain new skills

In April 2017, The Trussell Trust reported that its 428 foodbanks gave out 1.2million emergency three-day food parcels in the previous year. Over 78% of households were categorised as “severely food insecure”, meaning that they had skipped meals, gone without eating or had gone days without eating in the past 12 months because they lacked enough money to buy food. And this is not a one-off occurrence but is a chronic experience, occurring at least once a month in the past year.

Households using foodbanks face extreme financial vulnerability, with unsteady and unpredictable incomes experienced by those in work and those in receipt of benefits. Among those using foodbanks are groups that have been most affected by welfare reforms: people with disabilities, lone parent families and large families, all of whom have seen reductions in entitlements since April 2017. Research also indicates that many households experience food insecurity for long periods of time before they visit a food bank, suggesting that there are many households which are suffering food insecurity that do not visit/ have not yet visited food banks.

Research has also indicated that there is a lack of knowledge about how to cook healthy, nutritious, inexpensive meals. The skills that allowed previous generations to make meals from seasonal, local, cheap ingredients are being lost as many households rely on fast food and ready meals. As well as teaching what can be grown here in The Scottish Borders and how to grow it, Abundant Borders aims to teach people how to use those ingredients to produce delicious meals.

This soil to plate approach is unique among third sector organisations in this region and being able to offer this holistic approach to food production and healthy eating has given Abundant Borders significant advantage over other charities offering, for example, allotment or community orchard projects.

Our Vision

Our vision is a world where everyone, regardless of personal circumstances, has access to healthy, nutritious food.

Our Mission

Our mission is to alleviate food poverty in the Scottish Borders by creating a network of local food production and encouraging people to seek out locally produced food.

Our Values

- **Growing Communities Together:**

Abundant Borders is committed to working with trainees, volunteers, partners and communities so that together we can work to eliminate food insecurity in the Scottish Borders.

- **Learning and Development:**

Abundant Borders affirms that we are all learners and is committed to encouraging the development of skills, knowledge and self-confidence.

- **Opportunities for All:**

Abundant Borders recognises that there is inequality in access to food and the land on which to grow food, which contributes to food insecurity and is fully committed to ensuring that everyone, regardless of background, has access to healthy, nutritious food.

- **Earth Care:**

Abundant Borders is committed to care for the environment in line with the principles of permaculture; the provision for all life systems to continue and multiply, because without a healthy earth, humans cannot flourish.

- **Valuing All:**

Abundant Borders assert that we will work to bring people together from diverse backgrounds and provide a courteous and non-discriminatory service by working to ensure that trustees, management team, trainees and volunteers treat each other, and are treated, with respect.

The organisation is governed by a Board of Trustees which meets regularly under Chair Steve Allen and, supported by two further trustees, Brin Mcallister and Jean Gray and has ultimate responsibility for the professional running of the organisation. Abundant Borders is currently managed by a team of two: Karen Birch (Chief Officer) and Anne Casey (Treasurer) who are the key personnel responsible for day-to-day decision-making at both operational and strategic levels.

Section 2. Background

Abundant Borders was incorporated as a charity in November 2016. In our first year of operation we:

- received funding from Scottish Government Good Food Nation, which allowed us to run courses and purchase plants and equipment
- provided formal training to 12 people, who each completed a 10-week foundation course in permaculture and sustainable growing
- provided formal training in healthy cooking, with eight people completing a six-week practical cookery course and going on to gain a recognised certificate (REHIS) in food hygiene. Because they had received food hygiene certificates, two of the course graduates were able to help at the Eyemouth well-being week, by preparing food for a tea dance for older people
- co-created a community garden on land provided by Berwickshire Housing Association (BHA) in Ayton. Eight members of the local community work there on a regular basis and the site also attracts visitors and occasional volunteers from the community. Good links have been established with the neighbouring primary school and Eyemouth High School. Participants from the sustainable growing course, which was based from this site, continue to be involved in monthly volunteering days
- designed and built raised beds at Linkim Court, a sheltered housing complex in Eyemouth to give residents access to herbs and salads as well as creating a pleasant seating area.
- provided ongoing support and volunteering opportunities to course participants
- built an effective network of local partners, including public bodies, schools, agencies, third sector organisations and individuals
- built an engaging and effective web site and social media presence
- obtained land-owner permission to work on land behind the Community Store, Hawick

It has become clear that while our central aim is to tackle household food insecurity, those experiencing such deprivation often have other issues to contend with. Course participants had a variety of additional issues including mental health problems, addiction issues, were unemployed, experienced social isolation and exclusion, had low confidence and self-esteem and had difficulties with traditional learning methods. Permaculture methodology puts people care to the fore and the Foundation Course supported participants in allowing them to start to think differently about their lives and lifestyles. A notable outcome was the self-generated Facebook support group that participants created and which they continue to use to communicate with, and support, each other.

Feedback from participants both during and after the course was very positive and included “Have really enjoyed it” “Great information, enjoyed inclusive feeling in group, (I’m) sad it has come to an end” “It’s been much more than just growing, it’s been about people too” “Now (have) deeper understanding of how things grow.”

We also sought feedback from the agencies who, again, were very positive. For example, Jo Highet, (Borders Navigator Wellness-in-Mind) commented, “I have referred several clients to Abundant Borders. I have observed a big difference mainly in their confidence, positivity and interest in the outdoors. I use a room next to the cooking area and have been struck by the amount of laughter from next door. There is a great willingness from participants to maintain their involvement with Abundant Borders- a real buy in to the aims of the programme. They are also keen to stay in touch with each other, the culture of support which has been fostered during the programme has been very apparent. The knowledge shared and skills gained has been commented on a lot too. For several on the programme Abundant Borders is a focus for their week and for others it is the only thing they do. There is a real enthusiasm amongst participants to volunteer to keep the work going and others are looking for ways to use their new skills in the future.”

While the past experiences have been largely positive, there are improvements that can be made, for example, in ensuring smooth transition from the bare sites that are taken on by Abundant Borders as training bases to become productive community gardens. The community growers at Ayton were slow to take ownership of the garden as they hadn’t a clear understanding of what was required of them.

While the feedback on the healthy cooking course was largely positive, successful delivery put a large burden on the organisation and future courses need to have a much smaller impact on Abundant Borders personnel.

Section 3. Strategic Aims

Over the next three years, Abundant Borders will work to:

Provide learning, training and volunteering opportunities	
Train 60 people in healthy eating	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • funding secured to train 15 people in Hawick 2018 • deliver further course 2018-19 (15 people) • deliver 2 courses 2019-2020 (30 people)
Train 60 people in sustainable growing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • funding secured to train 15 people in Hawick 2018 • deliver further course 2018-19 (15 people) • deliver 2 courses 2019-2020 (30 people)
Volunteering opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • increase volunteer numbers in Ayton to 10-15 • increase volunteer numbers at Linkim Court to 5-10 • recruit volunteers in Hawick, 15 – 20 • recruit volunteers in Eyemouth, 5-10 • work with partners to create a volunteer pool in Eyemouth

Build a network of local food production sites

Existing sites	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Eyemouth, 2 sites • Ayton • Hawick
Identify and begin to develop two new sites	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify 2 new sites between Eyemouth and Hawick • agree site 5 in 2018-2019 • agree site 6 in 2019-2020 • ensure that there is a robust process in place to evaluate the impact and benefits of any new site. • future growth is contingent upon being properly resourced in terms of personnel, volunteers, finance and capital equipment.

Consolidate existing projects

Ayton Community Garden	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • support ½ day per month volunteer days • support additional volunteer recruitment • strengthen links with local community • strengthen links with Eyemouth High School • strengthen links with nearby Primary School
Linkim Court	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • support ½ day per month volunteer days • encourage additional volunteer recruitment • strengthen links with Eyemouth High School
BAVS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • agree development plan • secure financial support for plants and materials • recruit volunteers • clear ground • agree planting • agree support plan for long term sustainability
Community Store, Hawick	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • agree development plan • recruit volunteers • clear ground • agree planting • agree support plan for long term sustainability • strengthen links with community groups

4. Strategic Objectives

We believe that the model we have developed using under-used, neglected or un-used land on which to base training courses and create a network of local food production sites, can be replicated across the Scottish Borders. To fulfil its ongoing purpose, and to develop as a sustainable, dynamic organisation, Abundant Borders has five broad strategic objectives with defined actions for the coming period:

TO ENSURE GOOD GOVERNANCE		
ROBUST POLICIES & PROCEDURES	EMBEDDING EVALUATION	ACCURATE RECORD KEEPING
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review/rewrite current constitution Develop policies for HR, Risk and Reserves Hold Annual Strategic Planning meeting for Trustees and Management Introduce induction training for new trustees, volunteers, staff Continue to review current policies and procedures in line with OSCR and best practice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review current data collection methods and practices Ensure that users are happy to give feedback Monitor any changes to evaluation methods required by funding bodies Continue to work with Evaluation Scotland Benchmark Abundant Borders against similar organisations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review current reporting and record keeping systems to ensure accuracy and transparency Appoint an accountant Review internal project planning/project management systems

TO SECURE A SUSTAINABLE FINANCIAL FUTURE		
ROBUST PROCESS TO ASSESS NEW PROJECTS	DEVELOP A FUNDING STRATEGY	DEVELOP ALTERNATIVE INCOME STREAMS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review/monitor resource impact of current projects Determine minimum resource requirements of new projects 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify potential funding strands and funders on a national level Identify local sources of funding 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Investigate potential (Corporate) Sponsors Investigate opportunities to engage with donors

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure that ambition does not cause organisation to be stretched too thinly 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Secure funding for revenue needs • Secure funding for posts; CEO and Volunteer Development 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to be aware of social enterprise opportunities • Ensure projects are supported financially (to some extent) by landowners
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TO SUPPORT AND BUILD AN EXECUTIVE TEAM

SKILLS ANALYSIS	VOLUNTEER PROGRAMME	SUPPORT NETWORK
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Undertake a comprehensive Skills Gap analysis • Develop a plan to address skills gap identified 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Design a volunteer programme • Seek out best practice • Establish volunteer pools around each project • Work with other volunteer groups to pool/share volunteers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify training and support for Exec Team re: funding bids • Identify/quantify the support needs of management and trustees • Investigate/encourage skill share opportunities with other charities, agencies and social enterprises

TO BUILD THE COMMUNITY

PARTNERSHIP BUILDING	COMMUNITY CAPACITY BUILDING	PARTNER WORKING
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify Key Contacts within local and national agencies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify key sectoral working groups 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify partners for joint funding bids

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify partners to support volunteering opportunities • Consolidate existing partnerships in the east of the region • Develop partnerships in the west of the region 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish Abundant Borders as valued members of working groups • Continue to support existing groups, eg Eyemouth Good Food Partnership and Vision for Eyemouth 	
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CHAMPIONING THE CAUSE

DEVELOP A COMMUNICATIONS PLAN	BUILD A SUPPORTERS NETWORK	ENSURE EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATIONS	BROADENING THE MESSAGE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify and categorise our audiences • Develop audience specific messages • Develop audience specific methods 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support trustees as champions • Ensure consistent messaging • Establish regular and targeted messaging 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build the brand with consistent imagery across all platforms • Maintain and develop the website • Maintain and develop social media channels • Develop other promotional items; leaflets, business cards etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work to increase awareness of; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Food poverty - Permaculture - Social Exclusion - Food Miles - Healthy Eating

Section 5. Charting and Managing Risk

Abundant Borders does not currently maintain a Risk Register and this will be established as an important component in delivering this strategic plan. Risks, especially those associated with the development and operation of Abundant Borders as a sustainable organisation, will be identified and mitigations agreed with the Board of Trustees. Currently perceived risks relate primarily to staffing and funding.

Section 6. SWOT ANALYSIS

<p>STRENGTHS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Experienced trustees and executive • Solid Local partnerships • Excellent local and national reputation • Good support from local volunteers • Holistic soil to plate approach to training • Bid success • Good & growing network across Scotland 	<p>WEAKNESSES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Finances: grant dependent & little opportunity for income generation • Skills gaps • Under-resourced for sustainability • Dependent on volunteering effort of post holders; Chief Officer and Treasurer • Pool of trainers not in place, especially for cooking • No strategy for donations/financial support
<p>OPPORTUNITIES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chance to build good food hub • Able to follow best practice, e.g. Forth Environment Link • Able to consider partner/joint bids for larger projects • Forthcoming Good Food Nation Bill • Scottish Food Coalition: build policy with partners. • Public interest in food insecurity • Opportunities to build with commercial partners • Money available for projects tackling food issues 	<p>THREATS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Challenges facing social sector may impact on what we are called upon to do/mission creep • Local funding challenges/diminished (public funding) • Uncertainty over BREXIT/austerity agenda • Scottish Government may change their priorities re Good Food Nation initiative

Section 7. Conclusions

- Abundant Borders is a young charity with a big vision and the potential to become an effective charity working in the health and wellbeing sector, with focus on food insecurity
- Abundant Borders has had a positive impact in the community and is actively involved in community initiatives, mainly in the eastern part of the Scottish Borders region
- There is ample evidence of existing and continued need for the services Abundant Borders seeks to provide
- Abundant Borders has an experienced Board of Trustees and Senior Management team, and recognises the need for an ongoing review of its numbers and skills mix to maximise all future opportunities. Funding for creation of an executive team is paramount
- Abundant Borders has an excellent reputation within partner organisations, which will be developed as part of this strategic plan
- Abundant Borders will continue to depend upon grant funding and will seek to attract additional income from other sources.

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