

Strategic Plan

2020-2023



Creating a network of local food production in the Scottish Borders

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Section 1. Context & Purpose

Abundant Borders was created in 2016 to help those experiencing food insecurity in The Scottish Borders and it is clear that the need to address this issue has not diminished.

The Scottish Health Survey 2019 reported that 9% of people in Scotland are worried about running out of food.

In November 2019, the Trussell Trust reported that 8-10% of households were food insecure, with around 11% of children living in food insecure households. For those with long-term physical or mental health conditions, the number experiencing food insecurity rose to 18%.

As a result of Covid-19 these levels are now even higher level. By November 2020 Trussell Trust reported that its network of 1200 food banks gave out a food parcel every nine seconds.

Abundant Borders works to address household food insecurity by creating a network of local food production sites across the region.

These sites, which we call community food gardens:

- serve as training bases to teach the skills needed to grow food in a sustainable way
- act as hubs for those wishing to grow food who do not otherwise have access to growing space
- produce food for cooking courses; where people learn how to cook simple, inexpensive, healthy meals
- produce surplus food which can be donated to those in immediate need
- produce fresh food for community food initiatives, such as lunch clubs
- create a community asset by revitalising unused, neglected or under used land
- offer volunteering opportunities to those looking to gain new skills
- offer social settings within communities where people can meet together

We continue to see that the skills that allowed previous generations to make meals from seasonal, local, cheap ingredients are being lost and many households rely on fast food and ready meals. The need to teach people not only how to grow their own food but also how to cook has not diminished and must remain at the core of what we do.

In 2014 the Scottish Government set a new vision for Scotland: that by 2025 Scotland will be “a Good Food Nation, where people from every walk of life take pride and pleasure in, and benefit from, the food they produce, buy, cook, serve, and eat each day.” Indeed, the first piece of funding that Abundant Borders received was from the Good Food Nation Fund. Six years later and this remains a policy aspiration rather than a bill before parliament. Abundant Borders has engaged with the good food debate over the past few years and the period of this strategic plan will see us taking a more active campaigning and advocacy role as we support a Good Food Nation Agenda.

Learning and training has been, and will remain, a key component of what we do. Unemployment among 18-24 year olds in Scottish Borders remains above that of the rest of Scotland and over the coming years we will add vocational training courses that will help young people take a step into a career in horticulture.

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 household food insecurity in the Scottish Borders by creating a network of community food gardens and teaching people to grow food and cook healthy meals from fresh, locally produced ingredients.

Our Values

- **Growing Communities Together:**

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

- **Learning and Development:**

Abundant Borders affirms that we are all learners and is committed to 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 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.

- **Valuing All:**

Abundant Borders asserts 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.

Engagement

The organisation is governed by a Board of Trustees which meets regularly under Chair Mike Benson, supported by four further trustees, Ros McArthur (Treasurer), Terri Bearhope, Jenny Haines and Shane Straughan (Volunteer Representative). The Board of Trustees has ultimate responsibility for the professional running of the organisation.

Abundant Borders is currently managed by a team of two: Karen Birch and Anne Casey (Joint Chief Officers) who are the key personnel responsible for day-to-day decision-making at both operational and strategic levels. They are supported by Project Co-ordinator for East Berwickshire, Pete Saunders and Volunteer Co-ordinator for the Hawick Community Garden, Bill Corbett.

Over the period of the previous strategic plan, we have seen community engagement increase across all projects. This is seen in terms of the increased number of volunteers across all of the food growing and cooking projects, and in the increase in the number of communities contacting Abundant Borders seeking advice and support in creating gardens within their own communities.

Section 2. Background

In this, our second business plan, we will set out the strategy which builds upon the strong foundations laid since the organisation was founded in 2016. Before looking forward, it is valuable to look at what has been achieved so far and how the organisation has fulfilled the aims of the previous strategic plan.

Despite the disruption caused by the Covid-19 pandemic Abundant Borders was able to provide learning, training and volunteering opportunities, as set out in the 2017-20 strategic plan:

- Over 150 people have completed the Food Growing course, on-line or in person
- The number of garden volunteers has increased across all community garden sites
- 26 people have received REHIS Elementary Cooking Skills Certificates
- Eight Good Food Volunteers, able to support Social Food Activities, have been recruited
- New community gardens and growing projects have been established across the region
- New Social Food Groups and workshops have been established

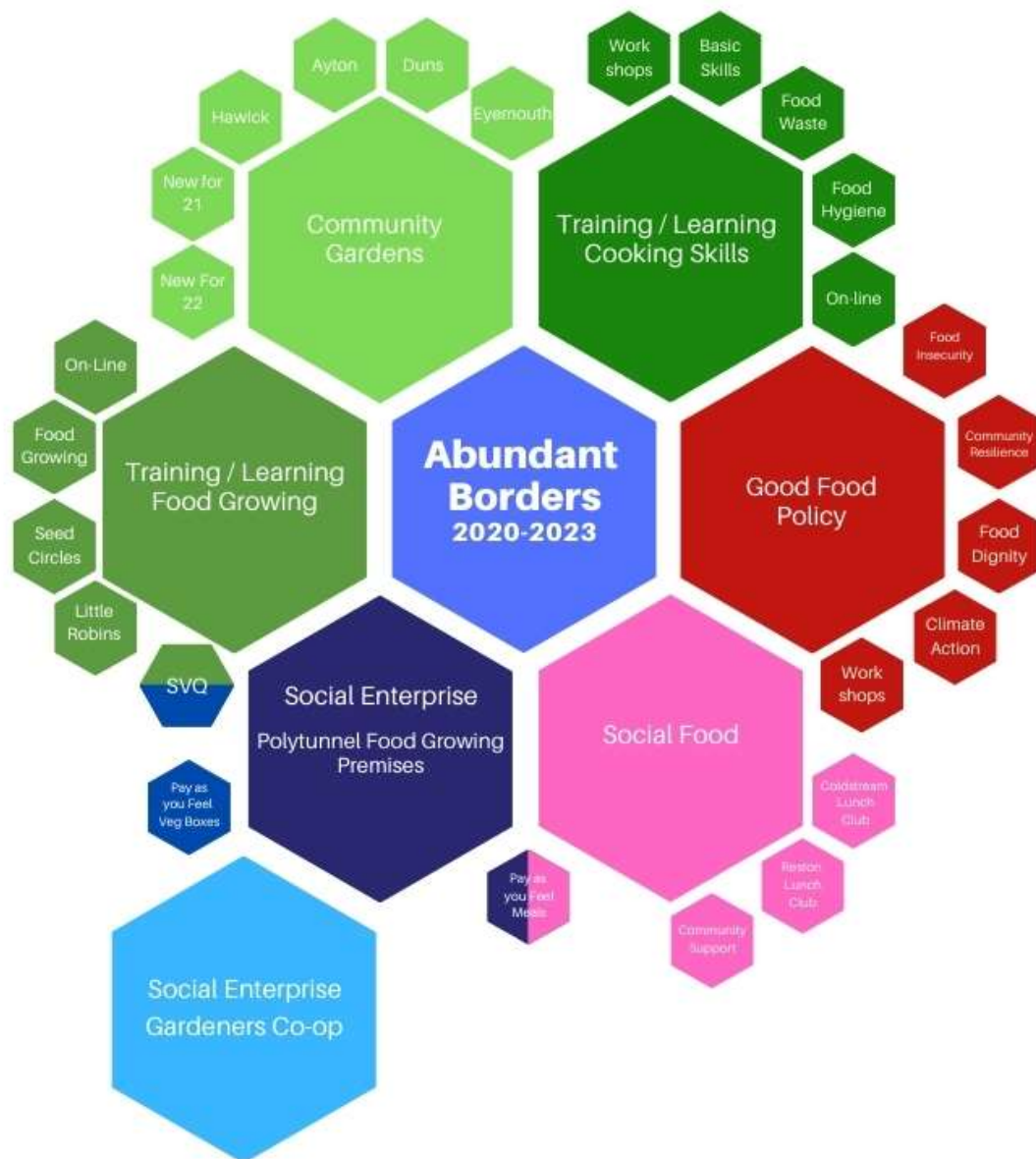
In addition, significant progress was made towards achieving previous strategic objectives:

- The Board of Trustees has been strengthened and skills gaps closed
- In order to hold property, enter into contracts and employ people in its own name, the charity became a SCIO in 2019
- Core funding was agreed with National Lottery Community Fund and The Robertson Trust, which has been augmented by project specific funding from a wide range of sources
- Four part-time staff members were recruited to support day to day operations
- Strong and stable partnerships have been established with organisations across The Borders
- Abundant Borders is viewed as a trusted, energetic and robust good food advocate
- The organisation has an active and relevant social media presence and growing engagement

The Scottish Borders is a rural area with many small, isolated villages and poor transport links. For many people, particularly for those experiencing financial hardship or suffering poor mental health, social isolation is a real and growing problem. Over the past years we have taken activities to the heart of communities; by using village halls and community centres for social food initiatives and cooking courses, by creating accessible community gardens and by helping to integrate school growing projects into communities. While the focus of the organisation will remain training and education in food growing and cooking as a means to tackle household food insecurity, we will continue to actively support those within our communities experiencing disadvantage through isolation.

The fulfilment of the aims and objectives outlined above, means that Abundant Borders now has an enviable reputation for professionalism, innovation and relationship building. This foundation forms the platform from which the organisation will grow and develop over the next three years, and gives the organisation the confidence that this new, ambitious strategic plan can be delivered.

Section 3. Strategic Aims



Summary

- Increase community food growing through community gardens
- Encourage people to cook healthy meals from ingredients that they can grow
- Work with national and local agencies to increase access to healthy, local, affordable food
- Support communities in creating social food events, e.g., lunch clubs
- Develop additional learning opportunities, including the introduction of SVQ level training
- Increase the social enterprise opportunities for the organisation
- Seek land on which to site new offices as a base from which the organisation can grow. A move to permanent office space will allow long-term and succession planning
- Seek land on which to build a polytunnel to maximise food growing and training opportunities
- Investigate the potential to create direct job opportunities within Abundant Borders for those gaining qualifications and training, e.g., a gardener's co-operative.

Section 3. Strategic Aims, detail

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

PROVIDE LEARNING AND TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES	
Train people in healthy eating	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 30 people to be trained each year in Basic Cooking Skills, of which 20 to be trained to REHIS Elementary Cooking Skills level • Undertake four food workshops per year • Increase on-line Cook Fresh videos by 12 per year • Increase the Healthy Recipes on-line by 20 per year • Introduce on-line, live stream cooking classes
Train people in sustainable growing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ten people to be trained to SVQ level 1 Horticulture each academic year • Ten people to complete Permaculture Foundation Course • Ten people to be supported to achieve Royal Horticultural Society Grow and Learn Award each year • Work with two schools/youth groups to award Abundant Borders "Little Robins" certificates • Undertake four food growing workshops per year • Increase food growing worksheets on-line by 20 per year
Train people in food hygiene	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ten people to be supported to complete Food Hygiene Certificate on-line each year

PROVIDE VOLUNTEERING AND ENGAGEMENT OPPORTUNITIES	
Support volunteering in the existing Community Gardens	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ayton Garden 5-10 volunteers • Hawick Garden 10-15 volunteers • Eyemouth Garden 3-5 volunteers • Duns Garden 10-15 volunteers
Support volunteering in Social Food settings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Three volunteering opportunities created at each Social Lunch Club
Good Food Volunteers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • support five people to gain the skills to become Good Food Volunteers
Promote the use of outdoor space for health and wellbeing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • offer at least one supported volunteer session per week in each community garden to support people experiencing disadvantage due to disability and poor physical or mental health
Increase partner working	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ensure that each project is developed in association with, or with support from, partner organisations

BUILD A NETWORK OF COMMUNITY GARDENS	
Continue to develop existing Community Food Gardens and food growing projects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Eyemouth, two sites, Ayton, Hawick, Duns and Reston
Create new food production sites	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • introduce a new supported community garden each year • identify a site as a base for an office/small training venue and polytunnel
Support communities in the development of community growing spaces	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • offer support to other food growing groups, social enterprises, community groups and agencies.

DEVELOP THE ORGANISATION	
Premises	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • identify a site for an office/training base
Social Enterprise	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • identify a site and funding for purchase and installation of a polytunnel to maximise food production for donation/sale • investigate potential for “pay as you feel” model within social food projects • investigate the potential for a “Garden Maintenance Co-operative”
Succession Planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to ensure that the organisation continues to flourish when the current management team retires/leaves
Strengthen Advocacy Role	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • through involvement with national and UK wide initiatives e.g. Nourish, Veg Advocates and Good Food Ambassadors • through promotion of dignity in food initiatives • by continuing to lobby for a Good Food Nation Bill in Scotland

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 nearby Primary School
Duns Community Garden	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • support two ½ day per week volunteering sessions • support additional volunteer recruitment • strengthen links with Berwickshire High School • strengthen links with community groups • develop annual events calendar
Hawick Community Garden	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • support two ½ days per week volunteering sessions • support additional volunteer recruitment • strengthen links with Jedburgh and Hawick High Schools • develop annual events calendar • strengthen links with community groups
Eyemouth Community Garden	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • support ½ day per week volunteering sessions • support additional volunteer recruitment • strengthen links with Eyemouth High School • build on existing links with community groups • develop annual events calendar
On-line Information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • maintain the website and social media presence • keep information sheets and on-line courses up to date and relevant • ensure that material is accessible and widely available
Social Food	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • maintain the Social Lunch in Coldstream for 15-30 people • launch the Reston Social Lunch for 10-20 people • support social lunch at Gavinton

4. Strategic Objectives

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	
Maintain robust policies and procedures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> through regular reviews in line with OSCR guidelines
Embed evaluation in all projects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> continue to develop best practice in line with Evaluation Scotland guidelines benchmark Abundant Borders against similar organisations
Maintain accurate records	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ensure accuracy and transparency in reporting in line with OSCR and GDPR guidelines
Managing risk	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a Risk Register in place; reviewed annually by the Board of Trustees

TO SECURE A SUSTAINABLE FINANCIAL FUTURE	
Maintain a robust process to assess new projects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> monitor the resource impact of current and future projects ensure that the ambition of the organisation does not cause organisation to be stretched too thinly
Maintain a robust funding strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> identify local and national funders/funding strands ensure good relations with funding/project managers
Develop alternative income streams	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> identify potential sponsors for projects increase opportunities to engage with donors investigate social enterprise opportunities

TO SUPPORT AND BUILD AN EXECUTIVE TEAM	
Skills analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> undertake regular review to ensure that the organisation has access to the necessary skills for its successful operation
Support network	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify/quantify the support needs of management and trustees regularly Investigate/encourage skill share opportunities with other charities, agencies and social enterprises

TO BUILD THE COMMUNITY	
Build partnerships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> consolidate existing partnerships ensure good relationships with key contacts develop partnerships with organisation that support volunteering investigate joint funding opportunities for new projects
Community resilience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> maintain Abundant Borders as a valued member of community groups continue to work with trusted partners to build resilience in Scottish Borders

4. Strategic Objectives (con.)

CHAMPIONING THE CAUSE	
Communications	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• maintain a robust, multi-platform communications plan• ensure messages are audience specific and accessible• support trustees and volunteers as champions
Supporter network	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• increase the number of members• work to maximise member benefit and inclusion• ensure that the organisation develops in line with the needs of the membership and wider beneficiaries
Good Food Policy	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• ensure that the organisation works to increase awareness of:<ul style="list-style-type: none">- household food insecurity- food and climate challenge issues- food in health and well being- food waste

Section 5. SWOT Analysis

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Experienced trustees and executive • Robust, relevant local partnerships • Excellent local & national reputation • Holistic soil to plate approach to food growing and cooking training • Proven track record in attracting external funding • Good and growing community food garden network across Scotland • Experienced and skilled staff 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Finances: charity remains grant dependent • Incomplete strategy for donations and non-grant support • Incomplete succession planning in place for retirement of key members of staff during current strategy • Insufficient number of people qualified as trainers • Lack of a base for the organisation, which will be more of an issue as the organisation grows
OPPORTUNITIES	THREATS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased interest in local food growing • Increased funds available for grassroots organisation as a result of Covid-19 • Involvement with organisations promoting the Good Food Nation agenda • Partnership work to promote resilience in communities in relation to household food insecurity • Development of horticulture training to bring in national certification opportunities for young people • Opportunities for income generation from new South of Scotland Enterprise Agency • Increased awareness of climate change should result in an increased interest in local food production 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The lack of progress on the part of the Scottish Government in relation to Good Food Nation agenda • Local authority budget difficulties increased as a result of Covid-19 • Funding opportunities specifically identified as recovery from Covid-19 might not be accessible to AB • Impact of Brexit still unclear • three-year funding comes to an end early 2022.

Section 6. PESTEL Analysis

Political

The Scottish Borders has a Conservative and Unionist Council MSP and MP. There will be local, Scottish and UK elections during the period of this strategic plan but it is not expected that a change in personnel or party would have a negative impact on the organisation. Continuation of an SNP led government in Holyrood should see the continuation of government support for good food initiatives and may lead to the introduction of a Good Food Nation Bill. Covid-19 has resulted in increased focus on food provision, for example, free school meals and the use of food banks, which we expect to remain as an important issue for government over the coming years.

Economic

The fiscal response to Covid-19 will continue to put a huge strain on local, national and UK government budgets. This may make funding from these statutory bodies more difficult to access in the immediate and mid-term future. Conversely, as the focus remains on post-Covid recovery, funding may be more readily available for projects, like ours, which address those suffering from disadvantage and inequality. Either way, it is expected that the competition for funding will increase as many more organisations look to access these, and other, funding sources. It is unclear how Brexit will impact on food production in Scotland or what strains will be placed on global supply chains. It is unlikely that Brexit will impact positively in either regard.

Social

Many people who have not previously experienced financial difficulty have experienced hardships as a direct result of Covid-19 restrictions. It is unclear how quickly, or if, the job market will recover completely, and so it is expected that the number of people experiencing food insecurity will remain high. Lockdowns have had a negative impact on people's mental health and it is expected that many more will need support over the coming years. The social aspect of food growing and access to garden spaces will be increasingly important.

Technological

Abundant Borders has made investments in new technology, made great strides in getting training courses and information on-line and embraced new methods of communicating with members, volunteers and the wider audience. Much of the information is disseminated via social media, primarily Facebook. These platforms are coming under increased scrutiny and pressure to change their procedures and governance to make their spaces safe and the information posted more reliable. It is not expected that any changes will impact on Abundant Borders use of the platform, but this will be closely monitored.

Environmental

The world faces a climate challenge, with Scottish Borders Council declaring a Climate Emergency in late 2020. It is not clear how the council intends to address the emergency but it is likely that the issue will remain on their agenda in the coming months. The run up to, and legacy of, COP climate talks in Glasgow 2021, will affect public perception and it is expected that there will be increased interest in projects, such as Abundant Borders, where systems and methodologies have a positive impact on the environment.

Legal

Abundant Borders converted to a SCIO in 2019 and does not anticipate any further changes to legal structure. The organisation is fully compliant with OSCR requirements and does not expect any major changes in the legal landscape in the short to medium term.



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