

Strategic Plan

2024-2027



Creating a network of local food production in the Scottish Borders

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Section 1 Context and Purpose

Abundant Borders was formed in 2016 with the core aim of helping those experiencing food security in the Scottish Borders by teaching cooking and food growing skills. While the need to address this issue remains, particularly in light of the ongoing cost of living crisis, other imperatives have arisen in the past six years, including

- an increased demand for, and skills gap, in horticulture
- an increased awareness of the challenges that the climate crisis places on food growing and food supply chains
- the need to respond to the Scottish Government Good Food Nation Act
- an increase in social isolation fuelled by the slow recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic and exacerbated by the rise in the number of people experiencing poor mental health.

We continue to see that the skills that allowed previous generations to make meals from seasonal, local, cheap ingredients have been lost, leading to many households becoming reliant on fast food and ready meals, a problem which has worsened as the rising cost of energy has made it increasingly expensive to cook meals from scratch. While Covid changed the training landscape, with more courses moving on-line, face to face cooking and practical garden sessions remain important.

As a nation, we are starting to see the impact that global warming has on food production and on global supply chains, resulting in empty supermarket shelves as high temperatures, fire and drought affect European growers. Teaching people to grow their own food in an environmentally friendly way, and encouraging them to seek out locally produced food, will be vital in local and national responses to the climate crisis. Currently the UK imports 84% of fruit and 45% of vegetables consumed, yet a 2022 study found that if gardens, parks, and other overlooked open spaces were used for food growing that area alone would be enough to grow 40% of the UK's fruit and vegetables. Supporting the reintroduction of varieties that grow well under local conditions and sharing seeds to allow others to do the same, will be an important aspect of food growing in the community gardens.

In 2023 the Scottish Government passed the Good Food Nation Bill which aims to ensure that people in Scotland have access to healthy, nutritious food and that businesses and public kitchens commit to producing, selling and serving good food. The Bill also aims to create links between policy at the national and local levels, and to establish an independent Food Commission. Abundant Borders has been part of the Scottish Food Coalition campaigning to make sure that the bill delivers on its potential to transform the food system. We will continue to take a leading role in bringing together partnerships and to foster collaboration across the Scottish Borders to ensure that the National Food Plan is delivered at a local level for the benefit of local people.

Community gardens remain important in initiatives to tackle social isolation. Over the past year a range of non-gardening events have been held in the gardens and connections made with groups and individuals who can enjoy the benefits of being outdoors and in the natural environment but who may not be able to engage with the physical demands of gardening. We will continue to create and sustain community spaces where people can grow and meet.

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 put GOOD FOOD at the heart of communities

We will fulfil our mission by:

- creating a network of local food production through community gardens
- teaching people the skills to grow their own food and encourage them to seek out locally produced food
- teaching people the skills to cook healthy, affordable meals
- leading the response to the climate crisis with respect to the food system in the Scottish Borders
- supporting the transition to a fair and sustainable food system in the Scottish Borders

Our Values

- **Growing Communities Together**
Abundant Borders is committed to working with trainees, volunteers, partners and communities so that together we can work to create and maintain community spaces where people can meet and flourish
- **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
- **Learning and Development**
Abundant Borders affirms that we are all learners and is committed to encouraging the development of skills, knowledge and self-confidence
- **Earth Care**
Abundant Borders is committed to care for the environment in line with the principles of permaculture, 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

Section 2 Background

In this, our third strategic plan, we set out a strategy that builds upon the successes and learnings from the past eight years. Before looking forward it is valuable to consider how the organisation delivered the aims of the 2020-2023 plan.

Increase community food growing through community gardens.

During the period of the last strategic plan the number of community garden spaces rose from four to six, with the addition of Foulden and Kelso Community gardens. In addition, the area of land at Ayton increased and we have moved to a new, much larger site in Eyemouth. We have supported Cockburnspath Community Garden and advised on the establishment of several others.

Encourage people to cook healthy meals from ingredients that they can grow.

Face to face cooking courses resumed, with a focus on basic cooking skills and energy efficient cooking methods. The number of healthy recipes on-line has increased to over 100 and a dedicated social media channel established to disseminate recipes and ideas.

Work with national and local agencies to increase access to healthy, local, affordable food

Links have been maintained and new ones established with community larders and food banks to share surplus fresh produce from the community gardens. Work to create a Borders Good Food Partnership has started, to further foster collaboration and partnership throughout the food system from supplier through to consumer.

Support communities in creating social food events

A notable success was the LunchPlus collaboration with BHABefriend, with social lunches taking place in community venues across Berwickshire and East Borders. Abundant Borders ran these events and then trained local volunteers so that they could continue to run beyond the scope of the programme.

Develop additional learning opportunities, including the introduction of SVQ level training

Training opportunities have increased, with a wide range of workshops across all of the gardens. In Duns we have established a partnership with Berwickshire High School taking children who are disengaged from mainstream teaching methods through NPA qualifications in Horticulture.

Increase the social enterprise opportunities for the organisation

We are a registered REHIS Training Centre and offer fully accredited courses in Food Hygiene and Cooking Skills, which are offered to third sector and commercial organisations. Additionally, we are increasingly being paid for providing support and advice to community gardens and food growing groups.

Seek land on which to build a polytunnel to maximise food growing and training opportunities

The move to the new community garden in Eyemouth allowed for the installation of a polycarbonate tunnel, which is the centre of the plant propagation and the site of winter training courses and workshops.

Seek land on which to site new offices as a base from which the organisation can grow

The new site at Eyemouth provides the potential to create an office and training base. Discussions with SBC and SOSE will continue as the needs of the organisation grows and changes. The move to office space in the Harbour Buildings in Eyemouth has allowed medium to long-term and succession planning.

Investigate the potential to create direct job opportunities for those gaining qualifications

This is an ongoing project and while we have had volunteers transitioning to paid consultancy work, we can do more to create opportunities and to provide qualifications into employment.

Section 3 Strategic Aims



Summary

- Encourage learning by providing training opportunities through workshops, training courses, skill sharing and knowledge exchange
- Provide opportunities for communities to come together, through volunteering and events to support individual wellbeing and foster community resilience
- Promote community food growing by creating and maintaining a network of community food gardens and supporting other communities, groups, organisations and individuals to develop food growing initiatives
- Encourage healthy eating by teaching the skills needed to cook healthy, affordable meals from seasonal, local ingredients
- Advocate for Food System Change by collaborating with partners to support a just transition to a sustainable food system within the Net Zero Framework
- Collaborate to build a Borders Good Food Partnership and for The Borders to become a Sustainable Food Place

Section 3 Strategic Aims, detail

Over the next three years, Abundant Borders will actively be:

ENCOURAGING LEARNING	
Training for healthy eating	• 30 people each year to be trained in Basic Cooking Skills • Increase on-line Healthy Recipes by 20 per year • Deliver four healthy food workshops per year • Create an on-line Learning Zone
Training for sustainable growing	• Deliver one Permaculture Foundation Course per year for up to 10 people • Work with High Schools to deliver NPA Horticulture Qualifications • Work with a school/youth group per year towards Little Robins Certificates • Deliver eight food growing workshops per year • Create an on-line Learning Zone
Gardens for Wellbeing	• Deliver four physic garden workshops per year
Training for Food Hygiene	• Work with Borders Community Action to integrate Food Hygiene qualifications into the regional training programme • Maintain REHIS Accreditation • Deliver four Introduction to Food Hygiene Course per year
Transition to NetZero	• Create an on-line learning zone

PROMOTING COMMUNITY FOOD GROWING	
Maintain the network of Community Gardens	• Ayton, Duns, Eyemouth, Kelso, Hawick and Foulden
Create local food growing projects	• Create four small scale projects eg raised beds in community settings
Support the creation of new Community Growing Spaces	• Provide support & advice to communities wishing to create community gardens and community food growing projects • Remaining active members of Grow Borders, Scottish Borders Food Community Growing Network
Supporting Community Orchards	• Ensure that all community gardens have fruit trees/orchards • Support the growth of community orchards through advice • Establish a fruit tree nursery in Eyemouth • Deliver two pruning and grafting workshops per year
Transition to NetZero	• Encourage local food production to shorten supply chains and reduce carbon footprint

BUILDING COMMUNITY	
Provide volunteering opportunities in existing Community Gardens	• Ayton 5-10 volunteers • Hawick 5-10 volunteers • Eyemouth 5-15 volunteers • Duns 5-15 volunteers • Foulden 5–15 volunteers • Kelso 5-15 volunteers
Create Lead Volunteers	• Support volunteers in each community garden to gain the skills and confidence needed to manage the gardens as community managed projects
Create Good Food volunteers	• Offer volunteering opportunities at cooking courses and social food activities to allow people to gain the skills needed to volunteer in their community • Provide support & advice to communities wishing to create social food projects eg community cafes
Support Communities with Social Food Initiatives	• Provide Food Hygiene training to Community Larders • Provide Food Hygiene training to Community Cafes
Promote the use of outdoor spaces for health and wellbeing	• Provide at least one staffed volunteer session per week to support people who need additional support to engage with their community • Deliver two Open Days per year per community garden to widen engagement • Develop physic garden spaces in Duns, Kelso and Eyemouth
Maintain Effective Partner Working	• Ensure that each project is developed in association with, or with support from, partner organisations
Integrate with Localities Planning	• Ensure that the activities of community gardens are developed in line with Borders Localities Planning and Placemaking initiatives.
Transition to NetZero	• Support communities and individuals with the information needed to make carbon friendly food and dietary choices

SUPPORTING HEALTHY EATING	
Encourage a Soil to Plate approach	• Ensure that the fresh food grown in the community gardens is used by volunteers • Ensure that surplus fresh food is shared directly with communities or via community larders • Ensure that food grown in the gardens is used for social food projects eg community cafes
Maintain Healthy Cooking Courses	• Ensure that course focus on fresh, local and seasonal ingredients • Use produce from the community gardens to embed soil to plate message • Encourage a low-meat diet • Encourage fuel efficient cooking methods • Encourage low food waste practices
Transition to NetZero	• Encourage eating seasonally to reduce the carbon cost of food production eg heated greenhouses • Encourage to seek out local food ingredients to reduce the carbon cost of food transportation • Encourage the adoption of dietary standards as if our diets met dietary standards green house gas emissions from our food would fall by 17%

ADVOCATING FOR CHANGE	
Fair Food Systems	• Advocate for Food as a Human Right • Advocate for good quality food to improve physical and mental health • Assert that food provision should be culturally appropriate
Sustainable Food Systems	• Contribute to mitigation of climate change • Reverse the loss of biodiversity • Improve animal welfare • Encourage resilient (local) supply chains
Fair Land Use	• Advocate for more land to be used for non-animal food production (currently less than 1% of agricultural land in Scotland is used for growing vegetables) • Advocate for farming practice to become more sustainable by eg promoting better soil health • Advocate for more Community Supported Agriculture projects • Advocate for agroforestry and planting of natural woodlands
Transition to NetZero	• Support a just transition to NetZero

BUILDING A GOOD FOOD PARTNERSHIP	
Build Partnerships with Food Producers	• Involve farmers as they transition from the current high chemical input model to more climate friendly production methods • Involve small scale producers and supporting initiatives to scale up food production • Involve community food growers to raise their profile within communities
Build Partnerships with Food Buyers & Retailers	• Increase awareness of local suppliers • Encourage the development of local markets
Build Partnerships with Consumers	• Give consumers a voice and opportunity to connect with retailers and producers
Build Partnerships with Local Authorities	• Create a mechanism to engage with the food system for eg procurement • Provide support to SBC and NHS in creating a Regional Food Plan in line with Good Food Nation Act
Mapping & Gapping	• Facilitate conversations with key stakeholders
Build a Communication Network	• Create a Podcast • Build a Website • Foster Collaborations • Deliver Workshops and events
Transition to NetZero	• Ensure that Food System Change remains a key theme for the Climate Action Hub • Ensure that Food System Change is recognised in South of Scotland Regional Land Use Project

Section 4 Strategic Objectives

To fulfil our Strategic Aims and to continue to develop as a sustainable, dynamic organisation we will follow five broad strategic objectives:

MAINTAINING GOOD GOVERNANCE	
Maintain robust policies and procedures	• Through regular reviews in line with OSCR guidelines
Embed evaluation in all projects	• Continue to develop best practice in line with Evaluation Scotland Guidelines • Maintain active benchmarking against similar organisations • Ensure that staff are trained and confident in project appropriate evaluation methods
Maintain accurate records	• Ensure accuracy and transparency in record keeping and reporting
Managing risk	• Keeping a Risk Register to be reviewed annually by Trustees

SECURING A SUSTAINABLE FINANCIAL FUTURE	
Maintain a robust process to assess new projects	• Monitor the resource impact of current and future projects • Ensure that the ambition of the organisation does not lead to resources being overstretched
Maintain a robust funding strategy	• Identify local and national funds • Maintain good realtions with fund managers • Ensure that executive and staff teams have the skills, training and resources to complete funding applications
Develop alternative income streams	• Maximise social enterprise opportunities • Maximise opportunities to generate income from advisory/consultancy activities • Increase opportunities to engage with potential donors • Identify opportunities for sponsorship of projects

BUILDING A STRONG TEAM	
Effective Voice	• Ensure that staff are valued and heard • Undertake regular team meetings • Remain responsive to new ideas from the team
Fair Work	• Ensure that pay levels are consistent with Living Wage and other relevant government policies and best practice • Conduct annual audit of fair work principles to assess progress
Skills Analysis	• Undertake regular reviews to ensure that the organisation has the necessary skills for effective operation • Address any skill gaps by training and recruitment
Support Network	• Regularly review the support needs of management and trustees • Encourage skill share opportunities with other charities, social enterprises

SUPPORTING COMMUNITY CAPACITY BUILDING	
Maintain Openess and Transparency	• Ensure that the voice of volunteers, participants and clients is valued
Maintain Partnerships	• Consolidate existing partnerships and establish new ones • Ensure good relationships with key contacts • Develop partnerships with organisations that support volunteering and engagement opportunities • Investigate joint funding opportunities when considering community projects • Continue to work with trusted partners to offer a cohesive solution to local issues, eg Berwickshire Alliance
Foster Community Resilience	• Consolidate Abundant Borders position as a valued member of community groups • Engage with community initiatives, eg Place Making • Develop community gardens into community spaces for wider community use • Support volunteers in gaining skills and confidence to take an active role in their communities

CHAMPIONING THE CAUSE OF GOOD FOOD	
Maintain Effective Communications	• Maintain a robust communications plan • Ensure that messages are accessible • Support trustees, staff, members and volunteers to feel confident in spreading the message
Build the Network	• Increase the number of members • Work to maximise member involvement • Ensure that the organisation develops in line with the needs of the membership and wider beneficiaries
Ensure that the organisation works to increase general awareness of Good Food Policy	• Household food insecurity • Food production in relation to climate crisis • The importance of local food and the fragility of the global supply chain • What constitutes good food and a healthy diet • The need to reduce food waste • Food in relation to a just transition to NetZero
Remain a strong Local, Regional and National Voice	• Ensure that the organisation is recognised as having expertise across issues affecting the food system at local, regional and national level • Ensure that the organisation represents members, volunteers and the wider population on groups and bodies which make decisions/affect decision making on food related issues

Section 5 SWOT Analysis

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
• Experienced trustees, executive and staff team • Robust, relevant local partnerships • Soil to plate approach to training • Track record in attracting project funding • Excellent reputation • Lead role in regional and national food networks and partnerships	• Small pool of trustees to call upon if/when trustees retire • Over-reliance on grant funding • Insufficient core funding to support management and admin functions • Failure to secure a full time food worker for cooking and food hygiene
OPPORTUNITIES	THREATS
• Increased interest in local food growing • Recent strengthening of Government strategies around Land Use and community asset transfer should lead to more land becoming available for food growing • Increased interest in fuel efficient/climate friendly cooking methods • Increased interest in environmental issues • Increased interest in sustainable food production • Opportunities to take lead role in Borders-wide food-partnerships • Opportunities to take a lead role in developing the community response to regional food planning • Opportunities to take a prominent role in Borders Climate Action Network • The focus on locality and place making in the Scottish Borders should lead to community capacity building opportunities • Skills/Land Use SOSREP development plan should lead to opportunities for sustainable food production and public green spaces	• Difficult to attract senior personnel to Scottish Borders • Local authority budgets under pressure • Scottish Borders funding increasingly locality based, meaning some Abundant Border's projects are competing with each other for funding • Three-year funding ends in early 2025

Section 6 PESTEL Analysis

Political
The Scottish Borders has a Conservative and Unionist MSP and MP. It is not anticipated that changes in personnel or parties locally would have a negative impact on the organization. The organization has improving links with the Conservative-Independent administration at Scottish Borders Council. With The Good Food Nation Act requiring local councils and health boards to produce local food plans, good relationships will be essential if we are to influence these plans.
Economic
Funding for projects which address food insecurity directly is decreasing, being replaced by support for projects that address wellbeing, particularly mental health. Funding is increasing for projects that address climate change, which should provide opportunities for the organization to highlight the positive environmental impacts of permaculture methodologies. In the short term, funding for projects like ours which support development of a just transition to a fair, healthy, and sustainable food system should increase. Project funding, largely distributed by Scottish Borders Council, is being directed through locally-focussed project planning, which may impact negatively on organisations with activities spread across a wide geographic area.
Social
The recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic has been slower than anticipated, with some people still reluctant to re-engage with communities. And there are continuing impacts on mental health. These factors have had a negative impact on volunteering for many organisations, including Abundant Borders. The use of food banks has continued to grow, augmented by a growing network of community larders, and it is expected that the reliance on emergency food aid and the need to support those struggling with their mental health, will continue over the coming years. The role of Abundant Borders in tackling food insecurity and social isolation will remain important.
Technological
Abundant Borders makes use of social media, primarily Facebook, in disseminating information to clients, volunteers and the public. While such platforms are coming under increased pressure to ensure the spaces are safe, any changes introduced are unlikely to impact on Abundant Borders. New platforms appear regularly, and the popularity of existing platforms fluctuates. While we will monitor these changes it is not expected that our primary communication method, via Facebook, will change in the short to medium term. We have invested in Microsoft365 to streamline communications within the organization. While implementation has not been without issues, it is expected that the package will deliver improved efficiency in the next one to three years.
Environmental
The world faces a climate crisis, a fact previously championed by the scientific and activist community, but one now acknowledged by much of the population. Abundant Borders, being based firmly on permaculture methodologies with positive environmental impact, is ideally placed to lead the response to climate change, particularly in relation to food system transformation. The establishment of a Scottish Government supported Borders Community Climate Action Network, where Abundant Borders is part of the steering group, will be pivotal in coordinating an effective response and in building strong partnerships.
Legal
Abundant Borders is a SCIO and does not anticipate any changes in legal structure. The organization is fully compliant with OSCR requirements and does not anticipate changes to the legal landscape in the short to medium term

Strategic Plan 2024-2027

Prepared by: Karen Birch, Chief Officer
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Approved by: Board of Trustees
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Adopted by: Annual General Meeting
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