

## **Beautiful Scotland portfolio, Powis Residents Group 2025**

### **Introduction**

Powis/Bedford was the first Council estate built in Aberdeen, in the grounds of what was previously the private Powis Estate. It inherits a large amount of green space, many old trees, a walled growing area which is now allotments and a historic building which is now our community centre. There are around 300 households and over 1,000 residents on three streets of granite-built tenements. Green spaces include open-access public space and fenced areas for each tenement block.

The Powis Residents Group is a group of residents formed in 2012 to represent the community and improve the area.

### **Themes for 2024-25**

After the last judging round, we met with our judges for feedback. They suggested that we might be better to concentrate our energies more to avoid becoming burnt out and noted that at times we seemed to be working at cross-purposes to Council management of the area. As a result, we decided to focus on one large project that has been on the back burner for a while. This is the Woody Walk, a plan to join up many of the interesting areas in Powis into one circular walk, encouraging walking and opening up under-used areas of our greenspace. It is not about installing expensive paths but about branding, signage, waymarking and altering grass cutting regimes to make better use of what is already there. We held regular meetings with Council officers over the year to make sure that we were working in the same direction on this. The project is not finished but it is beginning to come together and the route will form the basis of this year's walkabout.



### **Horticultural achievement**

#### *Winter*

In winter, nature and gardeners are mostly asleep. Hibernating animals are given a helping hand from the hedgehog boxes, ponds, lacewing homes and other hibernacula scattered around the area. Some winter greenery is provided by planting carried out by residents over the years, including ivy on the estate wall and more recently pine and spruce planted as part of a tree planting project. The ivy also



provides nectar flow when there is little else available and the ivy flowers are literally buzzing with pollinators.

Food is grown on the estate in some gardens, in a public edible garden behind the community centre, on bushes and fruit trees scattered all over the estate and in the allotments, where one of the plots is a pioneering food forest or forest garden. In deep winter the food plants include a plethora of root crops, leeks, hardy greens like Barbarea and the cabbage-like flower of Japanese butterbur. There is also wild garlic, used variously as a herb, a salad or a spinach-like green. It was an exceptional year for wild garlic this year and large amounts were taken to the food share scheme in the community centre, which distributes free food from various sources.



In late winter early plants stir into life. Residents have planted many areas of bulbs over the years, particularly on steep banks which maximise their impact and provide a welcome to the



area along a path that forms one of the entrances to the estate. A succession of bulbs, from snowdrops and crocuses to bluebells, provides months of colour and interest rather than a one-off splash. This winter we planted new daffodils, using unsold bulbs from supermarkets, in front of the community centre. Planting was in scattered groups around trees which will thicken up over time. We also received muscari bulbs from Aberdeen City Council, which were used in public planters and to thicken up and diversify the planting on the banks.

We continued our programme of tree replacement and maintenance. Several large trees were removed by Aberdeen City Council over the course of the year due to disease problems, mostly Dutch elm disease. We planted a new oak tree, supplied through the Queen's Green Canopy initiative, in one of the spaces and replaced a few failed trees from previous years' plantings. Recently planted trees were pruned to encourage good form and/or fruiting in future years.

## Spring



In spring the stirrings become a flood as life kicks into top gear. Deciduous trees leaf up and the many plums and cherries we have planted around the estate bring forth masses of snowy white blossom.

Hedgehogs and other wildlife become active again, but they may not know that their every move is being watched. Powis has extensive wildlife monitoring, with a range of camera traps in strategic locations. We generally know what foxes and hedgehogs are in the area and how their offspring are doing. Images from camera traps are shared with our local groups and clubs to create knowledge and interest in looking after our wildlife from a very young age. This year our camera traps also caught a badger for the first time in Powis. A new swift's nest was identified. Monitoring these helps to avoid nests being boarded up by accident when building/ roof work is carried out.

Traditionally spring is known as the 'hungry gap' for food production, but the focus on perennials in the forest garden and edible community garden make it a time of abundance. Crops taken to the Food Share project included sorrel, oregano, mustard greens, rhubarb, spignel (dill substitute), lovage, sweet cicely, Korean celery, chives and a continuing supply of wild garlic. Shoots and flower shoots are generally the tenderest parts of a perennial vegetable and, since picking these stimulates the plant to produce more fresh growth, the more you pick the more you get! The number of perennial crops grown on the estate is too many to list, but information can be found at [foodforest.garden](http://foodforest.garden).

And of course the grass begins to grow! This has been a big change in the area over recent years. Council policy has changed to allow more long grass, saving money and helping wildlife, but sharp cuts to maintenance budgets and machinery failures can

also mean that grass growth gets out of hand in unintended ways and places, sometimes leading to friction. Residents have been actively involved in trying to maximise the positives and minimise the negatives of this situation, with a number of petrol and electric strimmers and lawnmowers. We strimmed and mowed a network of paths through long grass areas, creating more interest and making walking easier. The mix of different lengths of grass created by this is ideal for wildlife.



We have an area of long established perennial wildflower meadow in which yellow rattle keeps the grass in check and helps flowers such as yellow hawkweed, fox-and-cubs, yarrow and oxeye daisy to flourish. This provides a seed source that we are sowing to make the more recently unmown areas more interesting. Plants which produce rank, tussocky growth, such as nettles and cocksfoot, are selectively mown out. Docks are cut out for the same reason in some areas, but allowed to grow on and provide seed for birds in less visible areas. Some residents have taken to cutting their own grass, either to make it more or less shorn than Council standard. Council workers try to be accommodating to this and in some cases signs help communication. This year our meetings with Council officers about the Woody Walk led to better co-ordination between Council and volunteers over mowing the paths.



### *Summer*

In summer the rush of growth slows and summer blooms are at their best, as will be visible on the tour. Most individual gardens now have some form of planting, tended by the residents of each block, and we will visit some new ones. Perennial plants such as elecampane, montbretia, mint and aster which are robust, colourful and easy to reproduce are passed from neighbour to neighbour.

Much community life moves outside in summer, with swimming pools and trampolines appearing in gardens, while communal facilities installed in previous years, such as the football pitch and play equipment, are extremely well used. The abundant fruit around the estate is picked by all ages. Local produce going to the Food Share project in summer has included lettuce, courgettes, rhubarb and plums.

Volunteers carried out work to remove litter, maintain the edible garden, maintain benches and tables around the estate, weed flower beds and planters and waymark the route of the Woody Walk. In late summer (including last year), we mow the wildflower meadow to create a space for the Powis Gala, which takes place in and around the community centre in August.



### *Autumn*

Autumn concludes the fruit season and brings out fall leaf colours in our plantings. Last autumn produce such as potatoes from allotments and the edible garden was harvested and taken to the community centre and maintenance of communal areas continued. Some young hedgehogs which had not put on enough weight for the winter were taken to a rescue centre.

### **Environmental responsibility**

Local food production, sharing and composting help to reduce the environment impact of food. Areas of long grass, herbaceous perennials, shrubs and trees all provide wildlife habitat, enhanced by bird boxes, ponds and hibernacula. Wildlife monitoring helps us to be

aware of issues and sometimes to rescue wildlife that needs some extra help, such as underweight hedgehogs at the end of the year or the swift nests that can be affected by building work.



**Copper underwing butterfly - new record for the area**

The use, for the most part, of perennials in both public and individual planting uses far less resources than annual bedding. Pollinators are helped by the succession of nectar sources, including ivy, bulbs, meadow plants, trees and garden flowers. Planting of fruit and flowers along pathways reduces the need for spraying. Where safe and appropriate, large tree trunks from dead and fallen trees have been left to provide dead wood habitat (and the occasional bench!) We have tried to keep on top of invasive non native plants, battling against the persistent himalayan balsam and the recent appearance of giant hogweed in the neighbourhood.

### **Community involvement and working with partners**

Community involvement is mostly grassroots and ad hoc rather than formal and organised, with people contributing in their own time and according to their interests and abilities, in both public and tenement areas. Co-ordination is by word of mouth and Facebook. The exception is the work parties organised this summer. Children's groups meeting at the Community Centre have carried out litter picks and waymarked the Woody Walk and a local church group helped with maintenance of the edible garden. We have been trying in particular to build bridges with the large secondary school on the edge of the estate as school pupils can have a major impact on the area in term times. This has resulted in an agreement to close a gate at the back of the school, funneling pupils away from a less overlooked area where a lot of vandalism was taking place.

We held regular meetings with Aberdeen City Council at all levels to progress the Woody Walk and make sure that community and Council work complement each other.



### **Finance**

Most of what we do is free or shoestring and self-financed. We also apply for grants where appropriate.

## **Future plans**

We have obtained funding for exercise equipment, which will be installed near the football pitch and climbing frame. We have consulted with the Friends of Sunnybank Park, who run a nearby community park, over what would be popular and complement their equipment. A group of local children went to a park in another part of the city where some equipment was installed to get a better idea of the options.

We will install signage at key points on the Woody Walk path and reinstate a sitting area along the path.

We will continue to maintain the trees, grass, beds, benches and other features on the estate.