



BEAUTIFUL SCOTLAND PORTFOLIO 2024



Introduction

Earlston has a friendly and growing community. The village is steeped in local history, with a built heritage and High Street hardly changed over the years. It is set in a beautiful landscape overlooked by the Black Hill, with the Leader Water skirting the edge of the village: the surrounding countryside has many well-maintained walks through woodland and rolling hills.

Farming has played a major role in village life for centuries; timber and sawmilling were once major employers. In the mid-1800s Earlston was economically important as a main supplier of gingham cloth. Mills powered by the Leader Water made linen and wool products. Cloth manufacturing and processing continued into the late 1960s but only a few buildings and names such as “Mill Road” and “Tenters” remind us of a thriving industry.

Residents, old and new, are proud of their community. Our heritage and history are kept alive by Auld Earlston and The Friends of Thomas the Rhymer: to enjoy. Civic Week is held each year in July and throughout the year other organisations provide numerous sports and activities for all ages. Earlston Paths Group maintain a network of routes for the enjoyment of residents and visitors alike, walking opportunities are promoted through its publications.

The community continues to develop and grow with two major construction projects nearing completion, a housing development and primary school/community hub. Earlston in Bloom and the wider community have received tangible Community Benefits from both companies.



Earlston in Bloom

A key output from a community consultation in 2018 identified a desire for Earlston to be “An attractive, safe and welcoming place to live in and visit” and Earlston in Bloom was born from this with a remit to brighten up the High Street and make it more colourful.

The group started work in 2019 putting out the first planters and tackling a large overgrown area owned by a Housing Association, adjacent to the Church. Initial enthusiasm and good progress were then halted by the Covid 19 pandemic. Despite restrictions volunteers managed to carry out badly needed weeding, working in socially distanced taped off areas that met the lockdown regulations, thus demonstrating our commitment to making effective change within the community.

During the summer of 2021, with schools closed and only four volunteers able to work at any given time, a very small group from Bloom carried out a complete and challenging renovation of the High School Garden that was funded by a National Lottery grant. The physically demanding project was also supported by volunteers from Earlston Paths Group, Jog Earlston, teaching staff and even the Fire Service. The renovated garden is now a useful outdoor classroom.

Major change to the look and feel of the High Street has also been achieved with over twenty planters made from recycled plastic installed. The planting is refreshed twice a year and supplement by numerous “self-watering” hanging baskets in summer. Additional volunteers are recruited to help water from June to September using Dolly the Trolley and Betty Bowser.



When Scottish Borders Council (SBC) ceased providing bedding planting across the region which unfortunately include The Green in Earlston, Bloom stepped in and took over the existing borders, agreed a new layout and planting scheme for that area.

The Green remains the responsibility of SBC with a locally agreed grass cutting regime however all the beds and borders are now maintained and planted by Bloom volunteers using a rich variety including two lavender beds, perennials, small shrubs and bedding. Two focal points are the Community Council's armillary sundial and Lermontov bust installed by Friends of Thomas the Rhymer Group who promote the legend and history of the Rhymer.

On a smaller scale an agreement with the owner of an unattractive and neglected area of ground beside the A68 main trunk road enabled us to clear waist high weeds and lay tons of bark over membrane where nothing would grow. The space is now open and tidy with a redundant watering trolley and tubs planted to brighten the corner and make it more attractive for people to see.

Moving forward the volunteers have transformed the High Street and neglected spaces, engaging and involving our community, schools and businesses.

Fundraising is well supported; gardening sessions, litter picks and meetings are open to everyone but like many small community groups maintaining volunteer numbers is always a challenge.

Horticultural Achievement

Late Summer/ Autumn 2023

- Reviewed borders and invested in 30+ permanent plants including heuchera, sedum, berberis, spirea, potentilla, leucothoe, buddleia: reduce workload and better for nature.
- Judged and presented prizes to the winners of our sunflower growing competition.
- Attended Earlston Horticultural Show with information display and presented the prizes.
- Continued volunteer watering rota for beds, baskets and The Green before clearing summer bedding and sending waste to SBC green recycling.
- Refilled planters with spring bulbs and winter pansies.
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- Planted daffodil clumps from Church Brae beside trunk roads and around The Green.
- Strimmed the A6015 outside the High School entrance and planted daffodils.
- Planted tulips donated by residents, “free” from a local garden centre.
- Ensured War Memorial Garden weeded etc before Remembrance Sunday.
- Bought gardening tools to store centrally for Bloomers use at The Green.

Winter

- Cleared down and securely stored all summer equipment.
- Awarded Its Your Neighbourhood Level 5 recognition by Beautiful Scotland.
- Finished planting spring bulbs around the village.
- Sourced foliage including variegated hollies, then held 3 workshops with Primary Schools to make up nearly a hundred bunches of festive foliage for lampposts.
- Celebrated Bloom success and hard work with a shop window display of Awards and photographs as well as on social media and in local newspapers.



- Bought more watering retaining hanging baskets for environment and to lessen workload.
- Received soil improver and decorative bark donated by Cruden Construction.
- Enjoyed the famous Christmas Lights and a social get together.
- Met informally until first open meeting in February, when 2024 planning started in earnest.
- Enjoyed early season, donated snowdrops and planted even more for next year.
- Made successful Magic Grants application, meaning 2 barrier planters could be bought.



Spring

- Reviewed the siting of hundreds of daffodils lifted and replanted to surround The Green.
- Added two final planters to Station Road, part of Construction Community Benefits.
- Set up Planning team to focus on Beautiful Scotland and SBC Gateway judging.
- Started growing flower seeds donated by family of late resident who loved gardening.
- Reviewed success and failures of spring bulbs with future planting in mind.
- Advertised and restarted gardening and litter pick sessions, often halted by rain.
- Weeded, dug, raked, fed over all our beds and borders.



- Donated sunflower seeds for all nursery and primary pupils.
- Spread NatureScot mixed seeds at The Haugh.
- Introduced permanent Earlston in Bloom “planted and maintained by” signs into borders.
- Tidied area and provided shelter for Paths Group event on The Green.

Summer

- Increased number of formal and ad hoc work sessions to catch up.
- Worked with Earlston Rugby club to protect The Green during annual tournament.
- Reviewed, moved, replanted at all public spaces e.g. moving primulas out for the summer.
- Emptied and refilled planters, installed hanging baskets, all funded by donations.
- Introduced themed planters with Earlston's colours, supporting Civic Week.
- Welcomed new members who have recently moved to Earlston.
- Planned and started 3-day summer watering rota plan and regular feeding.
- Prepared (fingers crossed) for Beautiful Scotland and SBC Gateway Awards judges.



Environmental Responsibility

Late Summer/ Autumn 2023

- Explored potential sites for composting.
- Cleared baskets, planters, public spaces with green waste to the SBC Recycling Centre.
- Added to our pollinators by planting new varieties including euphorbia, berberis, sedum, buddleia, grape hyacinth, potentilla, spiraea.
- Repeated research on accessible sites for collection of rainwater, down pipes.
- Removed and saved items from planters to use permanently at Church Brae.
- Replaced summer bedding in planters with mix of bulbs and winter pansies.
- Added pavement stencil to our SBC posters, encouraging positive dog ownership.
- Two major sets of building works continued, lack of school space hindering joint working.



Winter

- Received and shared Certificate of Recognition Nature Scot Pollinator Friendly Award.
- Used donated plant material to create lamppost decorations, kept reusable ties for 2025.
- Completed purchase of self-watering baskets to reduce water usage.
- Gave perennials and shrubs a light tidy but left for winter nourishment.
- Renovated donated wheelbarrow that would have been thrown away.
- Used new sets of litter picking equipment donated from Construction Community Benefits.



Spring

- Agreed alongside Community Council to take part in SBC Grass Cutting Pilot Scheme, moving from rigid 10- or 20-day cutting cycles on their land to a more flexible approach and with agreed spaces set aside for biodiversity with others receiving increased cuts.
- Sowed NatureScot Pollen and Nectar seed mix in The Haugh.
- Organised annual Spring Clean Scotland Event including our D of E litter pickers.
- Placed bird, bat boxes bought from Lauder Community Shed with help from local business.
- Held litter picks with nursery and primary school pupils.



Summer

- Protect the No Mow biodiversity areas where plants like Red Campion, Yarrow, Field Geranium, Purple Vetch and Cow Parsley grow, great for pollinators, seeds for birds.
- Extend the current biodiversity areas in the riverside Haugh/park.
- Deal with challenges of Grass Cutting Pilot as SBC not adhering to the plan with unhappy residents and mixed feedback. Taken forward with support from Ward Councillors.

- Use new wand flame weeder to supplement our pavement weeding with hand tools, SBC use a contractor to spray once a year.
- Feed our plants and public spaces with natural Fish, Blood and Bone not chemicals.
- Spread 30 bags of soil improver onto beds at Kidgate and The Green.
- Begin summer watering, using solar powered batteries and watering pump on trolleys.
- Work with Morrison Construction, Cruden Construction and SBC Unpaid Work Team to move and rake bags of bark to suppress weeds at Church Brae and Huntshaw Triangle.



Community Participation

Late Summer/ Autumn 2023

- Took part in the Earlston Horticultural Show by sharing our work and presented the prizes.
- Negotiated, with Community Council, to receive Community Benefits from the two major construction companies building a housing development and primary school campus.
- Welcomed Duke of Edinburgh Award volunteers who began weekly litter picks.
- Improved community communication with the public utilising two new noticeboards, donated through the Community Benefits scheme.
- Recommended supplier Ballantyne's nursery to Lauder in Bloom, who have now used them.
- Asked residents for donations of tulip bulbs from free garden centre promotion.
- Organised contractors to renovate and paint the War Memorial Garden railings and all others surrounding The Green, another Community Benefit, much appreciated by residents



Winter

- Awarded and shared our Certificate of Recognition for Growing Communities Award
- Introduced dedicated, active Facebook page, moving away from Community Council one.
- Held social event, a Christmas get together and Bloom Celebration.
- Attended SBC's Greener Gateway networking event, meeting and learning from groups.
- Held workshops with primary school, making High Street Christmas decorations.



- Received £80 donation from community pub quiz night.
- Joined and took part in a new Earlston Primary School community participation group.
- Encouraged community support for primary pupil to win NFU Christmas Card Competition.
- Completed a successful Magic Grant application for £500 to buy planters.
- Planted more donated snowdrops for the community's enjoyment in future years.

Spring

- Started up 2024 gardening and tidy up sessions.
- Shared our entering Beautiful Scotland SBC Community Gateway Awards competitions.
- Supported Keep Duns Blooming and Galashiels Inner Wheel after learning about their renovation of the Leader Valley School Garden.
- Ran well supported, first ever, competition to Spot the Easter Chicks in High Street windows.
- Donated and distributed sunflower seeds for the third year to all local primary and nursery age children, encouraging them to grow at home with the family.



- Held annual fundraising exercise with flyers to homes, business visits, posters, social media.
- Arranged for SBC Unpaid Work Team to repair and stain seats, paint posts and plant our Bloom signage, clean and paint bus shelter, stain wooden edges at Church Brae and the Kidgate along with the information shelter.
- Arranged for SBC Roads to repair and improve street furniture e.g. bollards.
- Supported Earlston Paths Group at Booklet and Postcard launch event.
- Worked with Rugby Club to “protect” armillary sundial and flower beds on tournament day.
- Appreciated helpful visit from Beautiful Scotland mentor, Liz Stewart.

Summer

- Advertised for community volunteers again, welcomed families recently moved here.
- Part financed two self-watering barrier planters, at The Green and outside East Green Nursery with aim of working together on future gardening initiatives.
- Displayed new sunflower ceramic and wire dragonflies, created by Bloomer, in public space.
- Engaged with Beyond Earlston charity to create something “arty” for Bloom to display.
- Planned August sunflower growing competition judging.
- Accepted Earlston in Bloom bunting, originally made for window shop display during Covid.
- Worked with SBC to arrange infrastructure improvements for the community.
- Met new High School Head to discuss a working partnership for the future, hopefully seeing the Horticulture Course return in 2025/6 having carried out major renovations at the garden.



- Arranged shed for primary school campus, donated by Morrison Construction.
- Planted out donated flower seeds, a gift of remembrance.
- Accepted £275 donation from bucket collection at a Rugby Club Car Boot Sale.
- Attended end of year celebrations at Leader Valley and Earlston Primary schools.
- Encouraged local High Street businesses and residents to have planters, baskets outside.
- Welcomed Earlston Rhymers Youth FC to take part in a fun watering session.



Finance and Support

We raise money by holding a well supported annual fundraising exercise. The amount raised and number of donations, however large or small, from our community and businesses underpin our work. Additionally, some businesses also support us during the year, helping with more physical tasks that we just can't manage. Earlston in Bloom is a Community Council sub group which helps absorb our administration costs and at times gives access to SBC Ward Councillors and Officers.

We benefit from partnerships that deliver local improvements through "in kind donations" rather than impacting on our limited funds e.g. new bike repair station and stands, bollard painting and replacement, all the the work being undertaken by Unpaid Work Team. The Community Benefits from the construction projects have also helped Earlston in Bloom.

Financial Year ending March 2023/4

Opening Balance: £2599.58

Closing Balance: £3277.34

Income:

Fundraising £3420

Small Magic Grant £500

Expenditure:

Equipment £1730.92

Plants and bulbs £1347.10

Compost and fertilizer £133.21

Misc £31.01

The Future

- Retain current members and expand volunteer base if possible, younger volunteers.
- Review our practices and the way forward after receiving feedback from Beautiful Scotland.
- Continue planting, maintaining our spaces with emphasis on nature and pollinators.
- Introduce more sustainable planting, reducing but not abandoning seasonal bedding.
- Continue to explore natural feeds and compost where possible.
- Extend our work and partnerships with schools and nurseries.
- Continue to promote our work to as wide an audience and as often as possible.
- Work with other community groups to promote history, heritage, nature, tourism by exploring funding and resources e.g. interpretation boards about Earlston.
- Look to source more funds through our own initiatives e.g. quizzes, plant sales.
- Continue working with SBC to meet local needs whenever possible.
- Have a dedicated and secure space on the new Community Campus from later this year.

