

**Burgh Beautiful Linlithgow – winner of the 2017 Beautiful Scotland  
RHS Scotland Discretionary Award for Overcoming Adversity for the “Bye Bye” Campaign**

As you are probably aware, Linlithgow’s main claim to fame is that it was the birthplace of Mary, Queen of Scots. Within West Lothian, the town is sometimes referred to as the “Jewel in the Crown”. You can imagine how we felt when, in September 2015, West Lothian Council announced that it would no longer be planting or maintaining floral displays. For us, this meant that some 27 flower tubs were to be removed; even worse, 16 flower beds were to be grassed over.

It was felt by the members of Burgh Beautiful Linlithgow that to allow this to happen would seriously damage the overall look of our town which we had strived for more than a decade to improve. Our local paper and our local community magazine, a copy of which is delivered to every household in the area, publicised our plight but there were concerns that, while the good people of the burgh were being told what was happening, it was not registering – they did not, in the main, realise what impact it would have on the appearance of the town. Various options were considered to hit this home, such as allowing one of the main floral features in the town “the serpentine bed”, which contains some 2,500 flowers, to be grassed over as a way of showing how the Council cuts would affect Linlithgow. This was considered a bit drastic as the first step but it was agreed that something more “in their face” was needed to highlight the impact of what was going to happen! Hence the “Bye Bye” campaign came into being.

The campaign was not “high-tech” – it had to be simple, but something to get the message across. A4 signs were made with 4” headings saying either “Bye Bye” or “Help” – designed to catch the eye and then below was an explanation of what was going to happen. These signs were then put in every tub and flower bed at risk, throughout the town, and it did work as people stopped to see what the signs were about, and began to realise the full impact of the cuts on the appearance of their town.

Burgh Beautiful did have one other advantage – the group is well known locally, having been established for over 10 years and we did not have to introduce ourselves! Probably half the town thought we did all the beds and tubs, and the other half assumed they were done by the council but the “Bye Bye” signs made the position clear to one and all.

After a couple of weeks, the situation was reviewed. To keep up the momentum and to keep the public awareness, those tubs and beds that had been adopted by interested townfolk had the “Bye Bye” sign removed and replaced by one saying “Lucky Me”. Those still needing adoption had a sign put in saying “I’m So Sad”. We were in effect targeting folk who thought they may like to help but had fallen into the usual trap of assuming that somebody else would take it on – we were shouting to them to say we needed more help!

The overall result of the campaign was that the town responded fantastically - we more than doubled the number of Burgh Beautiful volunteers to over 90 and the sponsorship for the hanging baskets, planters and flower beds also doubled. In addition, the public donated in excess of £3,000 – volunteers working in flower beds were being approached, even being given cash and were generally encouraged in their endeavours by members of the public. Fortunately, we did not have to resort to the tactic of grassing over the “Serpentine Bed”!

Since then, we have also been fortunate in that the level of volunteers has remained high and the sponsorship level continues. We had concerns that, while people may have sponsored a floral display for the first year, they would not continue - but this has proved to be unfounded, thankfully.

The initial high level of donations, we knew, would not continue so we had to look to other avenues to supplement our income and eventually we looked at the possibility of becoming a charity. After much debate, it was decided that Burgh Beautiful would become part of a new 'SCIO' (Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation) called the Linlithgow Burgh Trust. We are still coming to terms with the various implications but the main attraction of the charitable status is that we can attract pledges of 'Gift Aid' from tax-paying individuals and, so far this year, around £1,200 has come into our coffers from this source. Also, large retailers such as Tesco and Sainsbury, and organisations giving grant assistance, are more likely to assist with fund raising if you are a charity.

The fantastic response from the good people of Linlithgow shows that they really do appreciate our efforts in keeping the place looking good (maintaining Gold standard is difficult!) and they often compliment the volunteers out on the job. However, we do not take them for granted and continually strive to get our message across. To this end, various projects are on-going, particularly with schools and youth groups who hopefully will be the Burgh Beautiful members of the future. We have also to be thankful to the Linlithgow Gazette, the Black Bitch community magazine and the Linlithgow Burgh Trust newsletter for featuring various articles on our endeavours.

We still have some issues to resolve – for example, our relationship with the Linlithgow Town Centre BID (Business Improvement District) is not as close as it might be and there is an increasing problem with weeds in the streets. Although we have introduced a fair degree of permanent planting to minimise revenue costs, we do realise that the basis of our support in the town is for colour and impact, mainly delivered through the planting of annual bedding in all the most strategic locations. We have also had to find the funds for grass cutting to provide an appropriate setting for our flower beds, so poor is the standard of council grass maintenance these days.

Anyway, the message of "overcoming adversity" has to be:

- Make people aware of the implications of any council cutbacks
- Show what will happen if nothing is done
- Welcome all help, voluntary or financial, large or small
- Let people know how they can volunteer - sometimes people are shy; others like to work in groups, so make it clear that they can work singly or together to maintain particular floral displays. For larger tasks, form "hit squads" and get a decent number of members to turn up on a specific date to undertake a specific task
- Make it easy to sponsor or donate.

Burgh Beautiful was delighted to receive the Beautiful Scotland 'RHS Scotland Discretionary Award for Overcoming Adversity' but if our story gives you ideas on how to get your message across then that is an even bigger bonus. If you have any questions, please do get in touch with us (contact details at the bottom of this [page](#)).