

Creating a community garden in Beith from derelict, litter strewn area to a thriving, colourful space

The community garden in Mitchell Street in Beith, North Ayrshire was a derelict site for many years and had become a dumping ground for all sorts of rubbish. Effectively situated at the end of the Main Street it did nothing to enhance the area and we, Beith Orr Park Neighbourhood Watch, decided it would be great to do something with the site to improve the appearance of this corner of the town. We approached the owner who gave us permission to use the site for a community garden, until such time as he wants to use it.



We also contacted several companies and individuals to see whether they could help in any way and have had fantastic help and support with plants and materials to help make it a place to be proud of.

The John Muir Trust initially helped with the layout of the site after it had been cleared by Gordon McLeod Plant Hire. The Criminal Justice team assist with a lot of the heavy work, as and when required.

We generally rely on all types of donations from various sources. We have no set rules and only a very small group of volunteers who routinely look after the garden. Beith Christian Action Group (Thrift Shop), North Ayrshire Council and Beith Development Trust have given us funding towards some of the costs involved. However, we pretty well rely on donations.

It was our initial intention to clear the area and have a few benches and flower tubs, however with time it has developed into a place where people can relax and enjoy the peaceful ambience of the garden. As well as having flowers and shrubs planted, there are now some fruit, vegetable and herb planters plus a bench and planter installed in memory of local people.

This year (2018) we are re-styling the garden and received a load of top soil from Farrans which is currently working on the Dalry bypass. Following the delivery of the top soil the Criminal Justice team helped to spread the soil and compost on the site and assisted with the creation of more planters for vegetables. So far the vegetables include two kinds of potato and two kinds of cabbage. However, we also have rhubarb, strawberries, two apple trees and assorted herbs.

We have installed five bird boxes, three of which have been used this year.

The Rainbows recently visited the garden and installed lovely wee foam butterflies in the tubs. They have also been given ownership of a tub to plant up as they wish. On 14 June, a class from Beith Primary School are coming down to plant some Russian Giant sunflowers, also other sunflowers which are nearly ready for planting. On July 23, we are having a visit from John MacLennan, our 'It's Your Neighbourhood assessor', part of Keep Scotland Beautiful. John will assess the garden and offer further guidance and help.

We work closely with the Keep Scotland Beautiful team who offer great assistance in letting the garden be known to a wider audience. Also, as we are part of Neighbourhood Watch Scotland, and receive a lot of varied help and support from them. We believe that a Neighbourhood Watch group should not only report problems but should integrate with all other groups and individuals in the area to make the place a better one in which to live, work and play.

We recently installed an 8ft tall chainsaw carved memorial bear, carved from Western Red Cedar by Pete Bowsher. This is situated at the top of the Strand close to where the dancing bear performed in the early 19th century. There is a black marble memorial plaque ready for installation, and we have still to design and install the information board which will be situated on the wall beside the bear.

On September 8 a major Chainsaw Carving event will be held in the Manse Field (where the annual cattle show is held). On the day we hope to attract more than 2,000 visitors to the town. The intention is to have 10 carvers demonstrating their skills and producing beautiful carvings from a log in only four hours. These carvings will be auctioned at the end of the afternoon. There will also be many other associated stalls and demonstrations, some with a hands-on theme, to make this a memorable day out for all the family.

We sincerely thank all those who have assisted in any way to help make the town a better place.