

## Final Report for Dumfries and Galloway LEADER Programme.

### The Walled Garden at Arkleton

Start of project: 10/01/18

End date of project: 30/06/19

Kate Knott created and developed this micro enterprise over the Summer of 2017, Kate applied for funding in the Autumn and the offer of a grant was made on the 18<sup>th</sup> December 2017.

The idea behind Arkleton Walled Garden was fundamentally to look at farm diversification and rural economy and tourism. A pick-your-own flower garden would utilize the existing buildings and assets of the farm but create a new a fresh business within the premises. It would help to develop a tourist industry in the area and create employment and volunteering opportunities.

The idea was developed through Kate's love of the outdoors and her desire to engage people with nature.

The project was match funded by John Higgs Farms who were kind to offer support of the project and as the project developed we created a network of local organisations, including Outpost Arts, the Langholm Initiative, Wild Eskdale and many others, who were all able to help and support each other with their endeavours over the period of the project and beyond.

The original aims and objectives of the project were to create a cut flower garden that would encourage people to interact with nature, to take away a sustainable product, and to conserve and transform a valuable piece of local history. Most importantly was the aim to create a sustainable business, one that could support and sustain itself into the future and sit appropriately in this traditional hill farming valley.

The initial funding was vital to getting the project off its feet, we looked at what was necessary to make the site safe and accessible for visitors as well as looking at labour costs. We didn't want to start with huge initial investment, it was important to test that the project worked and let it grow organically, this we felt, was vital to its sustainability as a business. With the larger costs going towards access, safety improvements, marketing and labour we were granted £30,130.92 of funding from LEADER.

LEADER	£30,130.41
John Higgs Farms	£30,130.92
Total Eligible costs:	£60,261.33

The majority of the work started right away and by the Summer of 2018 we were on target to open to the public which we did on the first Saturday in July 2018. We opened every Saturday over July and August and visitor numbers exceeded expectation. We also held our first wedding in June 2018.

As soon as we closed for the season we were able to assess the figures and projections and start to make plans for the following year. Bringing in more income would be vital to the future success and sustainability of the project so we created a schedule of events for the following 2019 Summer and decided to open 4 days a week. We were able to keep a part time position going throughout the period of the project and are delighted to have kept this going even after the finish date of the LEADER funded period.

Marketing plays a large part in developing a tourist/visitor attraction, and we started gently with the initial marketing so as to be able to control visitor numbers slightly to allow capacity to grow with the influx of visitors, we see this as an important long-term strategy. It is important to us that we keep the website up to date with information and what's on so that visitors are not irritated by mis-information. We chose 3 key organisations to join and promote ourselves through, these are; Flowers from the Farm, a nationwide flower growers group, Discover Scottish Gardens, a wonderful resource who create a yearly garden map for visitors and Dumfries and Galloway in Bloom, a great resource for a more local marketing.

We feel that the benefit to the local area has been great, there is a great buzz in and around town as a number of enthusiastic and like-minded people have set up new organisations, charities and enterprises and we are all working together to help promote Langholm and the surrounding area as a great place to visit and stay. We are so proud that we have managed to create an employment opportunity and our volunteering programme is going well. Visitors have been delighted by the garden with many returning for multiple visits over the two seasons, so much so that we will now be offering a membership scheme for the Summer 2020.

The funding was vitally important in getting the project off the ground but it has been imperative to us and unashamedly so, from the get go, that the business will sustain itself and eventually make a profit. It was uncharted territory when we first started and since then we have a much better idea of the value of our product and how to price accordingly. Summer 2019 was exponentially more profitable than 2018 and we hope to see a similar rise in the income taken in 2020. The project has very much stayed on course from the initial development stage but is now growing to incorporate further development of the area which will include more glamping facilities and the reinstatement of the Victorian Glasshouse.

The original budget was created to get the business off the ground, it was designed to help us get the garden open, it was imperative to us that the project would be self-supporting as quickly as possible. The original budget really just included the bare bones of what was necessary so we had a very frugal first 2 years and it was plain to see that had we had a better idea of how the business would develop we could have allocated more funds to areas such as marketing and salaries, however it has been a great learning curve and is really forcing us to focus our goals and develop the areas that do and will continue to provide a decent income.

The Final spend figures are as follows:

John Higgs Farms Match funding:	£30,130.92
LEADER grant:	£29,868.43
Final Spend:	£59,999.35

We are delighted that the project has managed to achieve its goals of fitting with the LEADER local development strategy. We have managed to maintain a paid position year round and we have created a volunteering programme which has been slow to start but will hopefully pick up post

lockdown. This will continue to expand and a further paid employment position is in the pipeline for 2021.

In regards to tourism in the area, The Walled Garden has worked well as a destination. We have had visitors from as far afield as the USA and Australia, we help to promote other local landmarks and likewise they recommend the Garden as a place to visit. Having joined up with Discover Scottish Gardens, the Walled Garden at Arkleton is on the map of Scottish Gardens which is a nationwide publication. We proposed to focus on Arts and Crafts as well as the gardening and we have put our heart and soul in to developing this part of the business, we have been holding workshops and courses and encouraging interaction in the garden for all ages and all levels of creatives. We even offered free tea for those coming to sketch in the garden and held a photography competition over the Summer.

The project has very much stayed on course from the initial development stage but is now growing to incorporate further development of the area which will include more glamping facilities and the reinstatement of the Victorian Glasshouse as an events space. We hope that the project will become fully sustainable by the end of 2020 and will then continue to grow year on year with reinvestment into the business.

#### Targets:

Jobs created: 1, We were able to offer 2 days a week and split the days between two employees, Andrew Johnstone and Pete Brown. Pete Brown has remained with us and is now employed 2 days a week year round.

New Businesses created: 1, The Walled Garden is a social enterprise with a great future ahead.

No of businesses supported to grow: 1-3, The funding has supported The Walled Garden at Arkleton business to grow and in turn we have been able to offer support and help businesses such as Euphorbia Floral Design and Border Flowers to grow their client base and expand their business.

No. of individuals involved in delivery of LEADER funded projects: 2, alongside Kate has been Pete Brown who has been fundamental in the development of the project.

No. of people reporting an improvement of health and well-being: 1, 'You've changed my life, I used to get so down living in Langholm, nothing for miles but now I have a new purpose and you've inspired me to get back into gardening' This was a comment made under an Instagram post on the Walled Garden page. While I did not manage to get around to before and after questionnaires, feedback like this confirms that the Garden is having the impact that we set out to have.

No of projects developing urban/rural relationships: 1, We have made huge efforts to ensure that we support and are seen with the local urban area of Langholm, we have taken our workshops into town encouraged people out into our rural idyll.

No of projects promoting an environmentally and resource efficient economy: 1, We have a very strong list of aims and objectives that focus on the sustainability of business and land and we take our role of stewards of the land very seriously. We promote locally sourced and hand-crafted produce and have a strong policy on the use of plastics.

No of projects promoting volunteering opportunities: 1, we have always made it clear that volunteers are welcome and we are developing a more structured volunteering scheme that we plan to roll out in the next few months.

No of projects supporting nature-based tourism activities: 1, We consider the Walled Garden at Arkleton to be leading the way in nature-based tourism locally, we have had visitors from as far as Australia and America visit the Garden. We also work with Wild Eskdale, a local charity who organize wildlife tours on the nearby moor, we have co hosted the John Muir awards with them at the Garden.

No of projects supporting the development of environmental, nature based, cultural, activity and experiential tourism: 1, The Walled Garden at Arkleton offers all of the previous statements, people can come and pick flowers, it is a creative, therapeutic and nature-based activity. The history of the Garden is also very important to us and with so many people locally having had some link to the garden we have been collating all the stories and sharing them on social media and when people visit the garden.

No of projects supporting the development of the arts and culture sector: 1, We have held some fantastic workshops at the Garden, traditional signwriting, blacksmithing, wreath making, floral crown making, cyanotype printing among just a few. It is very important to us that the Garden is a creative space for the development of creative minds and artistic practice, we even offer free tea for those who visit with sketchbooks.

No of businesses supporting the development of tourism businesses across the region: 1, part of our goal is to promote the local area as a tourist destination, working with Wild Eskdale and Outpost Arts to show that there are great things going on in our region. On a larger scale we are part of Discovering Scottish Gardens and Flowers from the Farm whose members all work together to promote their businesses to a far wider audience.

No of projects that: Enhance these environments, support the sustainable use of any of these environments, demonstrate the value of these environments to the lives of the people of Dumfries and Galloway: 1, These are the focus of our goals, each of these points is at the heart of what we are doing here.

Percentage of rural population covered by local development strategies: 100% Locally we have been very well supported and the signage at the bottom of the road has ensured that all of the local population is aware of the project.