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## Edinburgh in Bloom

# Making the city greener and cleaner

Edinburgh has taken its commitment to being a green city to the next level. By mobilising support and coordinating action, Edinburgh in Bloom is setting a new standard for conserving and enhancing historic and natural environments in imaginative and sustainable ways.

The quality and quantity of Edinburgh's public parks and green spaces are impressive - and important. They make up 17% of the urban environment and play a big part in the city's popularity as a place to live, work, invest and visit. The 1.26m tourists drawn each year by its landscapes generate over €1.2 billion. Its finance sector is able to attract highly qualified workers with high expectations of their environment. While the council's active management of Edinburgh's natural assets has helped it become the UK's favourite city, there was an opportunity to achieve even more through wider participation and longer term thinking.

The council conceived Edinburgh in Bloom as a way of expanding the scale and impact of its improvement work by harnessing the ideas and resources of groups working in isolation on horticultural and environmental projects across the city. Adopting a more coordinated approach meant everyone would be working towards common objectives and activities could be prioritised to align with city plans, including the Sustainable Edinburgh 2020 strategy. Three overlapping objectives were established for the campaign: horticultural and ecological excellence, community participation and environmentally sustainable practices.

## Making things happen

Coordinating the campaign is a central committee made up of civic decision makers, land managers, community groups, charities and external organisations such as the Botanic Gardens and Edinburgh University. Tasked with getting the whole city involved in environmental improvements, the committee works with local groups, organisations, businesses and residents to stimulate interest in looking after their city, develop and support ideas, facilitate partnerships and help make things happen.



The partnership model has captured what was already happening across the city and enabled it to happen in a more coordinated and focused manner, realising far greater benefits to citizens and visitors than the sum of its parts.



*David Jamieson, chair, Edinburgh in Bloom*

cities in action

November 2015

where: Edinburgh, UK  
what: environment  
when: 2010+

A comprehensive portfolio of initiatives is testament to the campaign's impact to date and the city's ongoing progress towards its sustainability goals. At city level, there are extensive annual planting schemes involving 500,000 flowers and 300,000 spring bulbs as well as projects to clean up the city and create more allotments. In communities, nurseries have been set up for training apprentices and school competitions have encouraged children to grow their own vegetables. There are projects for individual residents too, including one where those unable to manage their own gardens are matched with volunteers who want space to grow food and flowers.



## Planning for the future

By introducing a longer term vision into the city's green agenda, the campaign has also generated some novel sustainability-focused ideas. These include Edinburgh Living Landscapes which is highlighting the value of naturalising the environment and increasing biodiversity and reducing maintenance by turning standard grassland spaces into wildlife meadows. There are already over 70 of these. Challenges caused by public funding cuts have also led to visionary ideas like MyParkScotland, which enables communities to make the most of their local parks and crowdsource funding for improvement projects.

Activities like these have not only resulted in a more attractive, sustainable and community-led urban environment. They have also led to Edinburgh in Bloom winning the top prize out of thousands of entries in three major horticultural competitions: Beautiful Scotland, Britain in Bloom and the international Entente Florale. The awarding judges for all these awards cited the city manages the conservation and interaction of the natural and built environments as an outstanding feature of its work and a significant factor in its success.

## Continuing to flourish

The Edinburgh in Bloom team believes the campaign's success also owes much to very active and politicised citizens who have, for example, set up over 50 Friends of Parks volunteer groups to care for local parks and woodlands. Its partnership model is also seen

as critical. This has enabled the pooling of limited resources by project partners at a time of severe public service budget cuts as well as the sharing of specialist expertise. This has meant for example that Edinburgh World Heritage and Historic Scotland could advise on planting schemes, ensuring they balance historic authenticity with horticultural attractiveness.

Edinburgh in Bloom will continue to evolve and grow. There is not only a desire among partner organisations, community networks and volunteer activists for this to happen. There are also approaches and structures now embedded in city life that will make it possible. Training and development partnerships established within campaign are flourishing for instance and will carry on for the long term, building future capacity. The campaign concept is likely to spread to other cities too: its partnership model is easily replicated and high-impact projects like MyParkScotland are already gaining interest from other areas.

The project won the EURO CITIES award for participation in November 2015.



When we were developing our garden and realised that the lower section along the river bank had a community aspect, we created a shared garden as a haven to bring individuals, friends, colleagues and families together with nature for work, rest, play and contemplation.

**Anna Guest, garden owner and Edinburgh in Bloom participant**

