

GroundsWell

Community Magazine

Autumn 2023

FREE

HOW CAN WE IMPROVE URBAN OUTDOOR SPACES FOR ALL?

INCLUDING ARTICLES ON:

Wild Swimming • The Green Battle of Linlithgow • Queer By Nature
Sustainable Architecture • Circles of Action • Fountainbridge and Union Canal
Wildflowers • Creating Citizen Science with Lego • What's On... and so much more!

Our city's green & blue spaces matter.



They allow us to engage in a range of activities, like exercise, socialising and relaxing.



They contribute to positive health and wellbeing.



They bring communities together in shared spaces.



However, not all outdoor spaces are of the same quality, and not everyone has access to outdoor spaces in our city.

With your help, **GroundsWell** can identify the benefits and shortcomings of the outdoor spaces in your local area, and support you in improving them.



Scan the QR code to find out more, or visit www.groundswelluk.org



GroundsWell
Transforming our cities from the ground up



LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

Welcome to the GroundsWell community magazine.

The lush greens and blues used through the magazine are a tribute to the many outdoors spaces in and around Edinburgh – its parks, rivers, community gardens, lochs.

These snatches of green and blue transform the urban environment and have been shown to have multiple benefits for people's health and wellbeing.

This magazine has been produced by a collective of different people all of whom are interested in making our outdoor spaces more accessible to all. This includes people from all backgrounds who completed community reporter training, as well as researchers, activists, academics and community groups.

The theme running through the articles featured is what can be done to make our green and blue spaces more inclusive – how can everybody get to experience the joy and reap the rewards of being outdoors? How can we transform our cities from the ground up?

Other than that we created a space for people to write what they wanted in relation to this question. And the diversity of the articles in this magazine reflects both the diversity of perspectives and the complexity of this topic.

We hope you enjoy reading it as much as we enjoyed making it.

Yours sincerely

Rhiannon J Davies

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The GroundsWell project is an interdisciplinary consortium led by Queen's University Belfast, University of Edinburgh and University of Liverpool and as well as the University of Exeter, also includes the universities of Glasgow, Cranfield, Liverpool John Moore's University, and Lancaster.

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Scottish Collaboration for
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With photos from Open Eye CIC



Edinburgh OUTDOOR SPACES Quiz

1

What iconic park is located at the heart of Edinburgh and offers stunning views of the castle?

- a) Princes Street Gardens b) Holyrood Park
- c) The Meadows d) Calton Hill

2

Which river runs through Edinburgh, providing picturesque walks and green areas?

- a) River Tweed b) River Forth
- c) Water of Leith d) River Tay

3

In Edinburgh, where can you find the Royal Botanic Garden, known for its diverse plant collections and tranquil atmosphere?

- a) Holyrood Park b) Arthur's Seat
- c) Calton Hill d) Inverleith Park

4

This historic hill is a popular spot for panoramic views of the city and is often climbed by visitors during the Edinburgh Festival fireworks.

- a) Calton Hill b) Corstorphine Hill
- c) Blackford Hill d) Braid Hills

5

Which famous park in Edinburgh features a large meadow, is home to various festivals, and provides a recreational space for residents and visitors?

- a) Holyrood Park b) The Meadows
- c) Princes Street Gardens d) Inverleith Park

6

What is the name of the iconic street that offers a scenic route from the city center to Holyrood Palace and the Scottish Parliament?

- a) Royal Mile b) Princes Street
- c) George Street d) Grassmarket

7

The Hermitage of Braid and Blackford Hill Local Nature Reserve is a serene green space that offers woodland walks and bird-watching opportunities. What type of habitat does it primarily protect?

- a) Coastal dunes b) Moorland
- c) Ancient forest d) Wetlands

8

The Water of Leith Walkway is a picturesque route that follows the course of the Water of Leith river. How long is this walking trail?

- a) 5 miles b) 10 miles
- c) 13 miles d) 20 miles

9

What coastal area of Edinburgh offers stunning sea views, a sandy beach, and opportunities for leisurely strolls by the water?

- a) Portobello b) Cramond
- c) Leith d) Granton Harbour

10

This natural landmark is an extinct volcano that offers an excellent hiking opportunity and panoramic views of the city.

- a) Arthur's Seat b) Castle Rock
- c) Salisbury Crags d) Blackford Hill

Answers:
1. a) Princes Street Gardens / 2. c) Water of Leith / 3. d) Inverleith Park / 4. a) Calton Hill / 5. b) The Meadows / 6. a) Royal Mile / 7. c) Ancient forest / 8. c) 13 miles / 9. a) Portobello / 10. a) Arthur's Seat

News in Brief

Leith Shore finalist in Great Neighbourhood category of Urbanism Awards 2023

Edinburgh's port neighbourhood, which has a great mix of independent restaurants, pubs and shops, and is soon to have a new tram connection to the city has been shortlisted for an Academy of Urbanism award. The awards are the Academy's primary platform for recognising the best, most enduring or most improved urban environments, providing an opportunity for its members to contribute and gain expertise, perspective, and ideas. The award was won in 2022 by Govanhill in Glasgow.



Edinburgh grows together with Edible Estates

In 2021, The City of Edinburgh Council contracted Edible Estates to deliver community gardening support services to council estates across the city. Edible Estates is a not for profit organisation which has been building and managing community gardens across the city for many years.

In 2022, Edible Estates carried out a survey of all forty six community growing projects on council housing land – from small ones with a couple of raised beds to large 'neighbourhood gardens'. While many gardens were doing well, the survey found some which would benefit from support. The survey also identified a number of estates that didn't currently have community gardens but which could support one.

The findings provided the basis for a multi-year programme to support existing gardens and develop new ones which is now underway.



Help map Scotland's Common Good assets

Common Good assets are unique to Scotland and are collectively worth an estimated £860m. They include everything from painted portraits to farms, shops, libraries, parks and theatres. In Edinburgh, they include outdoor greenspaces such as Calton Hill, the Meadows, Portobello Garden, Cramond Walled Garden, Roseburn Park and Campbell Park.

However, there have been claims that some Common Good funds, created to benefit local communities, are being mismanaged. The team at investigative journalism cooperative, The Ferret, have launched a new website creating the first national database of common good assets.

They're seeking help to add to the data they have already collected and update it over time. Check out commongood.scot for more information on how you can get involved.

University of Edinburgh seeks public views on carbon capture project

The university is asking the public for their thoughts on plans to expand and restore forests and peatlands in Stirlingshire.

The 431-hectare site in Drumbrae, Stirling, is a part of a long-term commitment the institution has made to become carbon neutral by 2040. The university will increase biodiversity on the site by planting woodland which will capture and store carbon to help offset unavoidable emissions caused by its activities.

Over an initial period of 50 years, by investing in the restoration of ecosystems in Scotland, the university expects to remove around 1 million tonnes of carbon dioxide from the atmosphere. The land at Drumbrae will remain an outdoor recreational area for visitors to continue to enjoy its trails for walking and cycling.

An online consultation will take place until Friday 29 September.

Consultation open on developments in west Edinburgh

Edinburgh has a population of over 525,000 which is growing and predicted to reach 560,000 by 2030. Writing about this growth, council leader Cammy Day said: "We need to make sure this growth is clean, green and fair for all of our residents going forward and everyone needs to be able to get around more easily for work and leisure."

City of Edinburgh Council are seeking residents' views on developments in west Edinburgh including on a new development to the north of the A8. To learn more and have your say, visit: consultationhub.edinburgh.gov.uk

Apply for funding to improve local paths

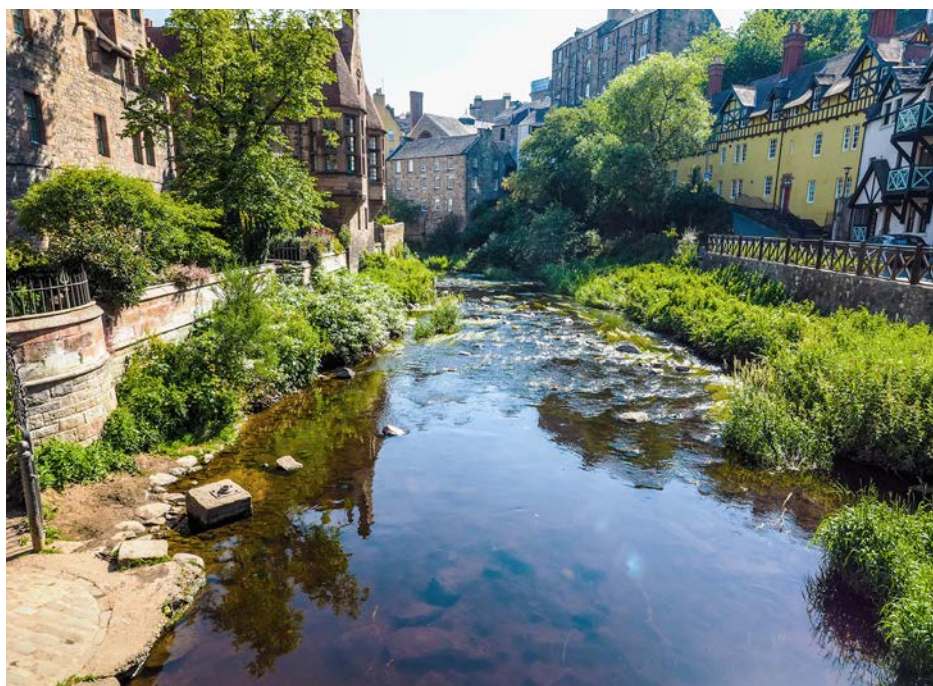
The Ian Findlay Path Fund was launched a year ago, and named after Paths For All's late Chief Officer, Ian Findlay CBE, who passed away in March 2021. In the past year, 24 successful projects from 15 local authority areas were allocated funding, totalling £1,293,153.

Speaking about the fund, Kevin Lafferty, Chief Executive Officer at Paths For All said: "It's wonderful that Ian's legacy and passion for active travel is carried on within communities and their efforts to encourage walking, wheeling, and cycling. We are looking forward to seeing progress on all the other projects already being supported by the fund and are excited to see what comes next from this year's new applicants."

The Ian Findlay Path Fund is accepting applications for the second round of funding from now until the 1st March 2024. Community groups looking to improve their local path networks are encouraged to contact the team to discuss their ideas.



Photo by Pauline E



Concerns over pollution in Water of Leith

Concerns have arisen over the scale of sewage pollution in Edinburgh's Water of Leith, with experts suggesting that the extent of the issue might be underestimated. An FOI request showed that members of the public have reported 73 waste discharges into the Water of Leith in Edinburgh since 2018. The revelations underscore the urgency of addressing sewage-related problems in order to protect the environment and aquatic life. This situation calls for increased awareness and action to ensure the river's health and the preservation of its ecosystems.

The RNLI will be teaching free Swim Safe sessions at Portobello Beach

RNLI lifeguards will be delivering free Swim Safe sessions at Portobello Beach on Saturday 9 September, after the charity revealed that children account for more than a third of RNLI beach lifeguard rescues during the summer.

Since Swim Safe was established in 2013, more than 160,000 children have been taught vital water safety skills.

Swim Safe is a free, fun outdoor swimming session that teaches young people how to be safe in and around open water. Young people aged 7-14 are invited to take part in a practical session to improve their swimming ability and help them feel more confident in the water. The hour-long sessions are designed for young people who can already swim 25 metres in a pool.

RNLI Lifeguard Supervisor, Iona Hamilton said: "The free Swim Safe sessions are a great opportunity for children to learn about keeping safe in and around the water during the summer holidays. By educating them about water safety from a young age, together we can reduce the number of incidents involving open water."

38 green spaces in Edinburgh win Green Flag Awards

Edinburgh's parks and green spaces have been given the highest number of Green Flag Awards from Keep Scotland Beautiful. This recognition highlights the city's commitment to maintaining high-quality outdoor areas for residents and visitors. The awards celebrate spaces like Princes Street Gardens and the Royal Botanic Garden for their well-kept and sustainable environments. Winners include parks managed by local authorities as well as by community groups, universities and other organisations.

WORKING WITH COMMUNITIES TO MAKE POSITIVE CHANGE



A Q&A with Emma Carroll-Monteil,
Community Engagement and Co-production
Researcher for GroundsWell

Emma joined GroundsWell last year as a Science Communicator and Research Impact Officer, before moving into her current role in June. She holds an undergraduate degree in psychology and a masters' in outdoor environmental and sustainability education. Her previous work includes delivering outdoor therapy, working on sustainability initiatives and teaching mindfulness and yoga. I caught up with her to learn more about the project.

Can you just start by explaining what the GroundsWell project is in a way that is easy for people to understand.

Yeah, good question, as it's quite a complicated project. Essentially it's a project across different universities trying to bring together decision makers – and people impacted by decisions – in developing urban outdoor spaces in a way that can help reduce inequality, especially for those who are already most disproportionately impacted. It's such a big beast of a project, it's always hard to explain!

What does it look like on the ground so far?

There are eight work packages all exploring different areas. The one that I work on looks at community engagement and co-production. That means working with different stakeholders such as organisations, groups, community members, and policymakers to help them create different interventions for their local areas that can help either introduce – or improve – things that will make a positive impact on health.

That can mean working with groups such as the Cyrenians homeless charity to help evaluate the new

garden development that's used for people experiencing homelessness. It provides them with a green space that they can use for sessions, so that they can spend time in a safe outdoor space and get different wellbeing benefits.

We're also developing a new program called Walks for Wellbeing, which is funded by Paths For All, where we're developing different walks for community groups, particularly those who might be experiencing isolation or loneliness. This provides them with a social cohesion health benefit, helping to get people outside, moving and connecting them with nature and with the local community.

“I think it's highlighted the importance of the value of different kinds of knowledge”

We also do work to research and measure what limitations there are to active travel and how we can remove those barriers. So understanding, for example, the experiences of people from ethnic minority backgrounds when it comes to safety and why they might not feel comfortable in certain areas. Is it the lighting? Is it past experience? What kind of things can we better understand and what tangible things can we actually improve?

My previous role was in science communication and research impact, so trying to communicate our findings to communities. This has developed into my new role of community engagement and co-production

researcher. This means approaching communities in the first instance – understanding what they want to get out of different projects and supporting them to create the changes they want to see in their local area.

That was pretty comprehensive, so tell me about how this magazine came about.

Community engagement is really important to each of the main hubs for GroundsWell – Edinburgh, Belfast and Liverpool. But when the project was originally set up, it was also planned that there should be a creative component for each hub.

In Belfast, it's a community podcast and in Liverpool, it's the community blogger. In Edinburgh, we wanted to explore community journalism. The idea was that there will be someone that is embedded within communities bringing information both ways, working to tell their stories of GroundsWell and their community.

The original idea was to hire someone for this role, but the more we thought about it, the more we realised, that we didn't know much about community journalism, and we felt that it would be more meaningful in the first instance to provide an upskilling course to provide a range of people with these skills and to introduce them to media so that they can tell stories which matter to them.

That's how we discovered Greater Govanhill, who do a fantastic job of that.



So we approached with the idea to create a range of stories. It's been a really great experience so far.

What have you learned from the whole process, both on the community reporter side of things but also being involved with the GroundsWell project more generally? What has it meant to you?

I think it's highlighted the importance of the value of different kinds of knowledge. We often talk about scientific knowledge and collecting data and particular quantitative data, but both GroundsWell and this project have emphasised the importance of all the other kinds of information and also local information.

Something I particularly find with working in citizen science and engaging with different groups, is that all these other tiers of knowledge aren't always collected. And if they are, they're not always given the same platform to be shared. But doing so provides so much more knowledge about local areas and processes that shape them.

What's next? And what are your hopes for the next phase of the project?

So we're two years in, and have three more to go. And we are now getting definitely better with the different relationships we have with community groups. So that's something that my role is particularly tasked with – working to facilitate better relationships, but also to create a foundation for a few of our other programs.

We have also been setting up a new community innovation fund, where community groups can apply for funding to run their own projects around urban outdoor areas and health. It's really exciting and feels quite novel for universities. It's not a common practice, so it's been quite a learning experience for us on how to set it up.

We're also setting up community conversations where we're going to have more of an open platform for researchers and community members to really explore different GroundsWell topics in an accessible way. And we're going to do some bigger evaluation projects as well with other groups and organisations.

I'm just excited to really get going now!

To find out more, get in touch with Emma at ecarrol4@ed.ac.uk



Photo by Cameron MacKay

WHY COMMUNITY JOURNALISM MATTERS

By Rhiannon J Davies

Community media can mean different things to different people.

To me it means media that is created by, with, and for the community it serves. It's an alternative to legacy or traditional media which is often done to – or about – a community, but doesn't always provide space for the voices at the heart of a story.

Community journalism is an opportunity for different people to make their voices heard about the things that matter to them, in contrast to more mainstream media which can be led by an agenda, traditional news values, or commercial imperatives.

'If it bleeds, it leads' is a rather gruesome refrain relating to how so much of the media is dominated by negative stories. Research has shown how more and more people are actively avoiding news because of the negative impact it can have on their mental health. While other research has also shown how constructive journalism can make a positive impact on people encouraging them to be more active and engaged citizens.

I'm also a big proponent of constructive journalism, which can include reporting on solutions (not just problems), embracing nuance (rather than painting things as black and white), and promoting democratic dialogue (rather than sowing division). I think values-driven journalism can break down barriers, bring people together and inspire change.

When Emma first got in touch about the idea of this magazine, I was really interested to learn about the GroundsWell project and the similarities in the approach in terms of informing, engaging and equipping local people to make positive changes in their local area. And I was excited to co-create journalism on such an important topic.

Eighteen participants of all different ages, backgrounds, nationalities and genders signed up to the community reporter training. Our first couple of sessions covered broader topics around what makes the news and why, and what should make the news. We explored how the media could more effectively meet our information needs. We also talked about how community journalism could be used to better understand – and shift – power, and how we can strengthen our communities through knowledge.

Subsequently over the next two and a half months, we looked at skills including interviewing, article structures, sub-editing, fact checking, photography, video and audio storytelling. In our very final session we got together to talk about the magazine design and how we wanted to make people feel.

We're really proud of the magazine that you hold in your hands that captures the voices and perspectives of those who went through the community reporter training and others who are connected to the GroundsWell project in different ways.

We'd love to hear your feedback. If you have thoughts to share, you can email rhiannon@scottishbeacon.com

Why we should welcome the

DANDELIONS

By Maria Antonia Jaime • Photos by Nahuel Jaime



Before moving to Scotland three years ago, I lived for 30 years in Canada where it seemed like wildflowers were persecuted. And in some cases, so were the owners of properties who dared to let them grow.

Unlike in other parts of the country, in the city where I lived, there were no specific bylaws allowing municipalities to fine people who let dandelions grow. But still, once when I had an accident and was not able to mow my grass for a wee while, a neighbour warned me about a petition collecting signatures complaining about the flowers blooming in my garden.

I came to Scotland for the first time on a holiday, eleven years ago. And I was astonished to see how the Scottish people enjoyed – and were connected with – nature.

This is a wonderful place to live and where not only I feel blessed, respected and valued as a human being but I also think that even the persecuted and disregarded dandelions, are respected and valued too.

I spoke to Professor Andrew Hudson, from the Institute of Molecular Plant Science at the University of Edinburgh, who said:

"I think we should consider dandelions for their positive contribution and appreciate their role in nature but within limits. I think there are places that are not appropriate to have dandelions. For example, in fruit cultures: they flower at the same time as the fruits and they attract pollinators away from the fruits, so it will reduce fruit production.

In agriculture, generally, weeds are a problem because they compete with crops. My view is that land that is used for growing crops should be used to grow the maximum amount of crops. There are two hundred million people that are malnourished."

But, if we consider their role in normal gardens, he said: "Wildflowers or dandelions have a positive contribution to nature as they flower quite early and are a very good source of nectar to pollinators that can feed very early in the season."

"Graham Stone is a specialist in the subject and is working on green spaces with pollinators. He's involved with planting wildflower's meadows and last year started a community project re-wilding the habitat; they sowed a mixture of wildflowers, native grasses and they planted hedges of native species. The plan is to add plants to that mix to grow the plants to small size and to transplant those wild species into it. These are native seeds from the UK. They also have trees that they planted from UK native seeds donated from The Woodland Trust.

"We are lucky that The University of Edinburgh is allowing us to do this...

There was opposition to it in the past. In the past, the university discouraged this because they wanted the gardens to look neat and tidy. The person in charge of the gardens at the university said to me 'if we allow native species to grow, they look like weeds and it looks as if we are not doing our job of removing the weeds'.

"This changed over the last few years. I saw in Germany 20 years ago where they were planting natural habitat and it looked really good. If it's done well, I think it looks as good as a more formal planting and it has much more value."

I found community by volunteering at The Meadows Community Garden.

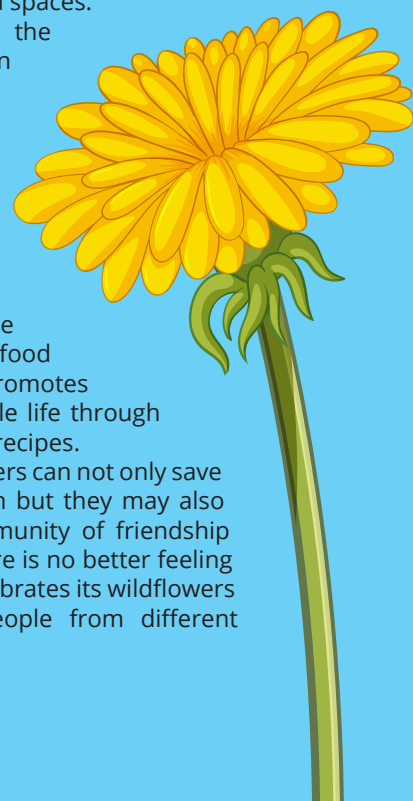
Sarah Tolley is a coordinator there, part of the Greening Our Street initiative. She said: "We let our spring flowers grow to benefit early insect life. We can also use dandelions to make tea, wine, salad, pesto etc.

Insects are rapidly disappearing and bird life too. We are living in an age when deadly poisons are still being sold, turning gardens into dead spaces.

"The wildflower plot of the community garden started in 2016 – and the garden in 2018. We now have about 20 core volunteers and loads of supporters."

As one of its volunteers, I witnessed that what started as a plot of wildflowers, today has grown to include a tool library, a seed library. There are trees, medicinal herbs, a food garden and a blog which promotes ways to live a more sustainable life through gardening tips and vegetarian recipes.

It seems to me that wildflowers can not only save our pollinators from extinction but they may also contribute to creating a community of friendship and collaboration. For me, there is no better feeling than living in a place which celebrates its wildflowers as much as it welcomes people from different countries.



Por qué los "DIENTES DE LEÓN" debe ser motivo de celebración

Texto de Maria Antonia Jaime • Fotos de Nahuel Jaime



Antes de mudarme a Escocia hace tres años, viví durante 30 años, en un lugar donde se perseguía a las flores silvestres. Y, en algunos casos, también a los dueños de las propiedades que se atrevieron a dejarlas crecer.

Afortunadamente, a diferencia de otras partes de ese país, en la ciudad donde yo vivía no había reglamentos que permitieran a los municipios multar a las personas dejaban crecer dientes de león en sus jardines. Pero aun así, una vez que a causa de un accidente no pude cortar el césped durante un tiempo, un vecino me advirtió acerca de una colecta de firmas que se estaba llevando a cabo con el objeto de quejarse al municipio sobre las flores silvestres que habían crecido en mi jardín.

Cuando hace once años vine a Escocia, por primera vez, de vacaciones. Quedé asombrada al ver cómo los escoceses disfrutaban - y estaban conectados - con la naturaleza.

Este es un lugar maravilloso para vivir y donde no solo me siento bendecida, respetada y valorada como ser humano, sino que incluso las flores silvestres perseguidas y despreciadas en otros lados del mundo, también son respetadas y valoradas, especialmente los dientes de león.

En una entrevista con el profesor Andrew Hudson, del Instituto de Ciencias Moleculares de Plantas de la Universidad de Edimburgo, éste dijo:

"Creo que deberíamos considerar los dientes de león por su contribución positiva y apreciar su papel en la naturaleza pero dentro de unos límites. Creo que hay lugares que no son apropiados para tener dientes de león. Por ejemplo, en cultivos de frutas: florecen al mismo tiempo que las frutas y atraen a los polinizadores, alejándose de las flores frutales, por lo que, consecuentemente, si no se toman precauciones, se reduciría la producción de frutos.

En la agricultura, por lo general, las malas hierbas son un problema porque compiten con los cultivos. Mi punto de vista es que la tierra que se usa para cultivos debe usarse para cultivar la cantidad máxima de cultivos ya que en el planeta hay doscientos millones de personas que están desnutridas".

Pero, si consideramos su papel en los jardines normales, dijo: "Las flores silvestres o los dientes de león tienen una contribución positiva a la naturaleza, ya que florecen bastante temprano y son una muy buena fuente de néctar para los polinizadores que pueden alimentarse muy temprano en la temporada".

El Profesor Hudson destacó el trabajo del ecologista comunitario, el Dr. Graham Stone, quien es especialista en el tema, y se encuentra trabajando en espacios verdes con polinizadores. Está involucrado en la plantación de prados de flores silvestres y el año pasado comenzó un proyecto

comunitario de reconstrucción. Sembraron una mezcla de flores silvestres y pastos nativos y plantaron setos de especies nativas. Usan semillas originarias del Reino Unido, así como árboles cultivados a partir de semillas nativas del Reino Unido donadas por The Woodland Trust.

Hablando al respecto, él [Andrew Hudson] dijo: "Tenemos suerte de que la Universidad de Edimburgo nos permita hacer esto. Hubo oposición en el pasado. En el pasado, la Universidad desalentaba esto porque querían que los jardines se vieran limpios y ordenados. El responsable de los jardines de la Universidad me dijo 'si dejamos que crezcan especies autóctonas, parecen malas hierbas y eso hace parecer como que no estamos haciendo nuestro trabajo de quitar las malas hierbas'.

"Esto cambió en los últimos años. Vi en Alemania hace 20 años donde estaban plantando un hábitat natural y se veía muy bien. Si se hace bien, creo que se ve tan bien como una plantación más formal y tiene mucho más valor".

El Jardín Comunitario de los Meadows tiene una parcela de flores silvestres que comenzó en 2016. Tienen un equipo de aproximadamente 20 voluntarios principales y muchos colaboradores.

Sarah Tolley, de los Meadows Community Garden, dijo: "Dejamos que nuestras flores de primavera crezcan para beneficiar la vida temprana de los insectos. También podemos usar dientes de león para hacer té, vino, ensalada, pesto, etc. Los insectos están desapareciendo rápidamente y las aves también.

Vivimos en una era en la que todavía se venden venenos mortales, convirtiendo los jardines en espacios mortales".

Como una de las trabajadoras voluntarias de dicho jardín, soy testigo [quien escribe esta nota] que lo que comenzó como un jardín de flores silvestres, hoy tiene una biblioteca de herramientas, una biblioteca de semillas, se han plantado árboles silvestres, hierbas medicinales, un jardín de alimentos e inclusive desde un blog se promueve una forma de vida más sostenible a través de consejos de jardinería y recetas vegetarianas.

En conclusión: las flores silvestres no solo pueden salvar a nuestros polinizadores de la extinción, sino que también pueden contribuir a crear una comunidad de amistad y colaboración. Para mí, no hay mejor sentimiento que vivir en un lugar que celebra tanto la vida de sus flores silvestres como así mismo el acoger a personas de diferentes países.



The Wild Swimming Effect

By Rhiannon J Davies and Kelly Gallacher

Photo by Scott Salt

Wild swimming has seen an explosion in popularity in recent years, fuelled in part by the pandemic, and the need to find new ways to exercise outdoors. Promoted by various influencers, celebrities and books extolling the benefits, it has caused many people to become quite evangelical about the associated health benefits.

In Edinburgh and across Scotland, we are lucky to have a wealth of blue spaces – officially defined as ‘outdoor environments – either natural or manmade – that prominently feature water and are accessible to people’. This can mean lochs, rivers, seas, waterfalls, ponds and streams. And with so much natural beauty in this country, it’s perhaps no wonder that it’s really taken off.

Jojo Fraser is an Edinburgh-based motivational writer, speaker and presenter who has worked in wellness and mental health research. Speaking about the impact that wild swimming has had on her, she said:

“Wild swimming has had a massive positive impact on my mental health. It helps to wash away any anxiety. I see it as not only great fun but such a wonderful spiritual practice. I often meditate and embrace the feeling of the sun shining down on my face. I feel at one with nature. I also love the buzz of the cold water, it wakes me up and gives me a super mojo injection.”

Besides mental health, other conditions that people use it to treat symptoms of include migraines, arthritis, diabetes, hypertension, fibromyalgia, post traumatic stress disorder, long covid, menopause and Alzheimers. For many it’s also the sense of community and the connection to nature that makes it so appealing.

But it is also being taken seriously by health professionals. Earlier this year, Dr Mark Harper, a consultant anaesthetist and expert

in the therapeutic uses of cold-water adaptation and open-water swimming, told the Scottish Parliament that cold water swimming should be adopted as a public health measure and made more accessible through better infrastructure. He also spoke about how it could be prescribed as an alternative option to depression medication and highlighted how an introductory outdoor swimming course costs around £100 but could save the NHS millions in reduced costs for mental health conditions.

Body of Water is a documentary which follows wild swimmer Gilly McArthur on her mental and physical journey to seek out remote, icy waters in Scotland and the Lake District. It highlights the meditative and empowering impact of connecting to the natural world in such an all absorbing way.

Co-director Scott Salt told us what he learned about wild swimming from the process: “The thing that I took away from it, in terms of Gilly speaking about it in the first instance, was just that focus that she describes as being in a flow state – where you literally can’t think about anything else that’s happening in your life. You are thinking about that one exact moment.”

Like many, following his exposure to wild swimming, he too has found himself taking to the water on a regular basis: “I’m not quite sure I get the same endorphin high as other people. But the act of getting in is quite interesting because it is very much a mind over matter thing. I copied Gilly’s style of getting in very slowly – up to my knees and then up to my waist. And then, finally, you’ve got to dip the rest of your body and shoulders under. And that’s obviously the bit that takes your breath away. You have to really concentrate for the first 30 seconds on just breathing through that initial shock. It’s a very delicate process that you’ve got to think about quite a lot. And that lends itself to what Gilly

was saying about just being incredibly present in that moment.”

There are also risks attached with wild swimming. It can lead to ill health or even fatality when not practised safely. And there are increasing concerns about the cleanliness of our waters, as we hear reports of water companies pumping raw sewage into wild swimming spots up and down the country.

We asked Jojo for her advice for anyone thinking about trying it. She said: “Start slow and build it up. A great time to try is towards the end of the summer when the ocean and reservoirs, lochs and lakes are warmer. Listen to your body, don’t stay in too long. Always go with someone. Boots and gloves are important in the colder months and a hot flask for when you get out. The more consistent you are with the practice, the more you will get out of it. It’s an incredible way to raise your energy and your vibration. Like anything, sometimes you just need to push through the pain. You never regret it and the buzz is just amazing.”

If you’re looking for a group to join, the Outdoor Swimming Society website lists a number of different wild swimming groups in and around Edinburgh including: Chilly Dippers (Portobello Beach), The Wild Ones (various locations), and the Gullane Guillemots (Gullane). The Mental Health Swims website also lists the details of groups at Wardie Bay, South Queensferry and Musselburgh. Wild Swim Scotland offers group and private outdoor swimming lessons if you’re looking for more guidance.

Body of Water can be watched at: www.waterbear.com/watch/body-of-water



From Belfast to Cornwall

In May, researchers from the GroundsWell project team in Queen's University, Belfast had the opportunity to travel to Cornwall to visit the Eden Project and to explore some of the accessible and inclusive beaches that the sunny south-west county has to offer .

By Claire Cleland, Niamh O'Kane, Roisin Corr

We touched down in Newquay on a Thursday in May and were met with clear skies and sunny weather, a far cry from our usual weather in Belfast. From Newquay, we headed south, stopping in the seaside town of Perranporth. Perranporth, like so many other towns in Cornwall, boasts a bustling strip and a golden beach, revered by families, surfers, and holiday makers. After refuelling, we went on our way and followed the coastline south to reach our base in St Ives, where we were immediately taken aback by the town's beauty and charm. It offers spectacular views, as well as crystal clear and inviting sea water, pristine beaches and a quaint town with meandering side streets.

At this point I'm guessing you are asking yourself what does this have to do with research?

Well, as we all know, access to green and blue space has been evidenced to improve not only our physical health but it can also enhance our mental health and wellbeing. However, through our work we have found that not everyone has equal access to green and blue spaces and the potential to gain the benefits. When this occurs, health inequalities and other inequalities are further exacerbated.



At Queen's University, a key aim of our work is to ensure that both green and blue spaces are accessible, enabling everyone to use them, to use them how they wish and to reap the health benefits.

So, we took the opportunity to carry out a site visit to Cornwall – home of some of the best beaches in the UK, and according to the Environment Agency, some of the highest quality bathing water in the UK. It is also home to the world famous Eden Project.

The Eden Project opened in 2001, a visitor attraction built within a reclaimed clay pit into which they brought a huge diversity of plants and life. A symbol of regeneration, Eden's mission is to deepen our collective understanding of the interconnections between all living things, to inspire citizenship and to care for our planet amidst the current planetary crisis.

Our base in St Ives overlooked Porthminster beach, a blue flag beach with a range of facilities. But as we walked along the sandy shores, we began to discuss and debate (as researchers do) what facilities are needed and for who? What facilities have to be present for a beach to be considered accessible, what has to be present for a beach to be considered inclusive? What features can a beach have or not have (like toilets, changing rooms, ramps, seating, beach wheelchairs, and adapted equipment such as surf and paddle boards)?

We then started to observe the landscape and ask ourselves 'is it possible for all beaches to be accessible?' The questions kept coming, and we kept thinking of the ways that we could answer them to inform the evidence base on our return to Queen's.

After our tour of some of Cornwall's beaches, we turned our focus from blue to green, and visited the Eden Project, which brought with it luscious greens and an afternoon of

learning. A few hours wasn't enough time for a spectacle like Eden; we rambled through the gardens, explored the indoor biomes, and climbed the rainforest canopy walkway.

It offered more than just plants, it offered us a wealth of education – from displays on the origins of our earth, to climate change, to learning about different cultures. We witnessed people of all ages enjoying the space, in pairs, groups and school parties. We ate our lunch under the cool cover of the biomes, surrounded by many of the birds who call Eden home – we were even joined at our table by a friendly little robin. We learned that there are plans for branch-out Eden Projects in other areas in the UK, including Lancashire, Dundee, and Derry-Londonderry, as well as globally, including China, Costa Rica, and New Zealand.

Our short trip to Cornwall showed us what is possible when people and place are connected – beautiful accessible beaches, clear blue water, and the wonderful Eden project. We left, bringing lots of inspiration (and vitamin D) back across the Irish Sea and excited to put our learning into action and to help shape the future of accessible green and blue spaces.

Claire Cleland is a research fellow on GroundsWell, based in Queen's University Belfast. Niamh O'Kane is a science communication and research impact officer on GroundsWell, based in Queen's University Belfast. Roisin Corr is the project administrator of the SPACE project (Queen's University Belfast).



Hearing the birds sing again

How urban environment can affect your mood

By Min Leng

In my previous life, I had never thought about the fact that I could have long term anxiety.

But symptoms emerged around six months ago. I sometimes felt that a stone was pressed on my heart and I could not breathe smoothly. My heart beat very fast. I was confused where these strange feelings came from – I was healthy and enjoying my life.

It was my partner who said to me: 'It's probably anxiety'. Anxiety?! He continued: "I've been experiencing these feelings for years, even when I was a kid, but I only started to recognise it when we went into lockdown. I could not go out and I felt trapped."

So, what causes this crushing feeling? The first thought that flashed into my mind is that it's the anxiety of a city where you are overwhelmed by so much industry and noise. And the space afforded to you is small although the city is big. This contrast between big and small can engender a feeling of weakness and hopelessness.

At least, this is how I feel living in a city.

My partner grew up in an urban town. Cars, residential blocks, non-stop development sites were common environments for him. He thinks all these had an impact on his anxiety. Urban noises were normalised from his childhood through to his adulthood.

How many people in the city can recognise this feeling of anxiety? Everyone is so busy with their work and when they are off, they are busy again to look for something exciting to compensate for the time spent in their jobs. I suddenly realised I needed to understand my own feelings rather than to ignore them.

I started to see the significance of the balance between my body and my soul. This balance once existed in me when I was in my village in China. I started to trace the elements of my village into my current life in Wester Hailes.

I paid attention to the birdsong which had been shut out of my hearing frequency for a while. I remember I got up with the chirping of birds and crowing of cockerels when I was a kid. After a simple breakfast, I went to my primary school by foot. The journey connected my primary school and my home was a path paved by soil and dirt with grass along both sides. There were no tarmac roads around my home at that time.

Although the journey was short for an adult, it was a long and sometimes terrifying distance for a child. Luckily, I found fun along the journey. In the early morning, I could smell the freshness of the grass and saw the beads of dew on the leaves of trees. As I walked by one village after another, people would greet me when they were washing clothes by ponds or heading to the fields.

I also had two companions along the journey. They were classmates who lived two villages away from mine. I was not a good student, and I could not finish my homework. So, we made an agreement that we would meet at the intersection of the roads to copy each other's. Sometimes, I was late for the little meeting. So they would hide their homework under a bush by the electric pole for me to copy and collect for them. It was an anxious start to the morning. But it was also funny.

After school, the journey was more relaxing for us. We ran into the fields and we jumped into the creek beside the path to enjoy a moment of the cool of the water. The journey was especially interesting when the mulberry trees became ripe. Every year around the end of May, the trees in the field near the journey would be full of beautiful and delicious fruit. We couldn't wait for the last minute of school. When the bell rang, we rushed out of the classroom and sprinted to mulberry trees.

We packed our mouths with mulberries and let the juice spill out our mouth till our lips were dyed with dark purple. After the fruit feast, we continued running after each other and played along the journey. We weren't scared of cars because we couldn't see any cars.

Sometimes, one or two trucks sped by and rolled up a puff of dust. We tried to avoid the dirt but we all felt that there was nothing that could stop us from chasing each other. In Wester Hailes, I seldom see kids running along the road. It is very risky to do so when cars and buses are queuing and moving along tarmac roads.

So, the road is dangerous now and I need to be careful when I walk along my journey. I also cannot hear birds chirping clearly in the morning because I am always awoken by the construction noises outside of my window. Should I give up? No! I keep on looking for the tranquillity in the Hailes Quarry Park to relieve my anxiety. I walk inside the forest in the midst of the park. I walk along the little trails. I enjoy the sense of security surrounded by trees. However, I still can hear the traffic noises from the busy roads in the distance.

I just learned that, one century ago, Wester Hailes was only a farm with fields. Now one hundred years later, it is dotted with residential buildings and the park is the only space that people can escape the urban environment. I look back to my hometown. The place, the village I am longing for, is it still there? No, it has transformed as well. The villages are disappearing. The railway divides the new burgeoning urban and country villages. I imagine sooner or later, the two sides of the railway will eventually unite into one urban area.

The journey I have walked thousands of times will fade away and be alive in my memory only.



*“I paid
attention
to the birdsong
which had
been shut out
of my hearing
frequency for
a while.”*

Get Involved with the Canalside Greenspace Group

By Susanne Mueller • Photos by Susanne Mueller and Fiona Lough

There are several amazing urban green spaces in Edinburgh right next to the Union Canal, which sit inside the Fountainbridge Canalside Community Trust (FCCT) community benefit area.

The trust supports local people to come together to improve urban green spaces, increasing their benefits for people and nature.

What is it?

The Canalside Greenspace Group explores the local green spaces and together identifies improvement opportunities in Fountainbridge Green and Harrison Park.

As a group we consider what kind of small improvements could be made. This might mean planting, decorating or adding a feature. And we explore how to make them possible.

Together, we shape different small urban green spaces at Fountainbridge Green and Harrison Park for the benefit of the people and nature.

FCCT's vision is: 'Making Fountainbridge a better place to live, work, visit and do business'.

Local greenspace development and improvement is one of the four key activity themes of FCCT helping to achieve the vision.

This means working together with people and community-based organisations as well as the the City of Edinburgh Council's Parks and Greenspace team to ensure the urban green spaces and the canal benefit the local community is an important part of what we do.

What have we done so far?

We pruned apple trees at the community orchard at Harrison Park. This orchard was created thanks to the The Grove community garden who have existed for over 10 years and are simply brilliant. We got so much done together, while also learning all the tips and tricks about summer pruning. This is what it is all about. People sharing their gifts with others and learning and doing together.

Another time we visited the community herb patch. A local person that knows the patch well shared all the herb patch history with us. We weeded, did some bay tree TLC, painted signs and made fresh herb tea infusions on the spot. Tasting the delicious peppermint and lemon balm was a treat.

And we always make time for a chat. We talk and think about urban greenspaces more generally. We had a conversation about commons and what it means to us as a group in the context of the greenspaces we spend time in. We also consider how we can bring people in to benefit from the greenspaces.

Why join the Canalside Greenspace Group?

There are so many good reasons to get involved. These including:

- Meeting other people who are also interested in making our local greenspaces even better both for people of all ages and for the nature that exists here.
- Connecting with your local community and local, natural places and spaces.
- Explore our local greenspaces and really get to know them – seeing them with fresh perspectives
- Imagining improvements and making them happen!
- In a more general sense, being together in green spaces in our community is good for both physical and mental wellbeing. And of course, there will be cake and time for a blether.

The group started on Tuesday 1 August 2023 and meets regularly on Tuesdays at 10.30am.





we are looking for you!



JOIN OUR CANALSIDE GREENSPACE GROUP

**Explore and improve
our local green spaces**

e.g Fountainbridge Green and Harrison
Park, for the benefit of people and
nature.



**You are invited to join
a new group to connect
with others in these
greenspaces and learn
and share practical
skills. All equipment
and training provided.**



Contact and more information:

07706580147

fiona@fcct.scot or susanne@fcct.scot

www.fcct.scot/canalside-greenspace-group/

A charity registered in Scotland: SC035342, a registered company number: 265866



Queer By Nature

Creating a Safe Space for Connection

‘Nature abhors a vacuum’, so goes the famous quote from Aristotle.

And that’s what it felt like according to Ella Duncan. There was a space that needed filling in the queer community in Edinburgh for an organisation which brings people together to celebrate nature and feel safe outdoors.

Queer By Nature is a new community initiative set up by members of the Edinburgh queer community to fill this space. It is entirely volunteer run and the aim is to bring the healing power of nature to LGBTQ+ people in Edinburgh.

Ella first got involved after attending a queer climate justice event run by the LGBT Health and Wellbeing charity. At the event, Andrew Marks, a PhD candidate at the University of Edinburgh whose thesis is based around queer ecology, spoke about the idea. And Ella was immediately interested in getting involved.

Speaking about why it’s needed, Ella says: “We’re aware that at the moment a lot of public spaces don’t feel safe for people in the LGBTQ+ community. And our aim is basically to encourage queer people to engage with outdoor spaces in a safe environment that is supportive and accessible – through a series of free events.”

So far events have included a picnic, a foraging walk, and a mini festival at the Leith Community Croft with crafting, yoga, seed workshops, face painting, and live music. There was vegan Caribbean food on offer and the event was free or by donation for those who were in a place to do so. All the events are sober and family friendly.

“Nature can be so inspirational and so abundant,” says Ella. “There has been some really interesting research on how the roots of things like mycology relate to queer theory. But also just on a more base level – people feel good in nature. And we want to encourage more and more queer people to explore that part of themselves.”

Dr. Patricia Kaishian has written extensively about ‘queer mycology’. An abstract for their article entitled *The Science Underground: Mycology as a Queer Discipline*, published in *Catalyst: feminism, theory, technoscience* states:

“...We argue that mycology relies upon queer methodologies for knowledge acquisition given both the nonbinary, cryptic, and subversive biological nature of fungi as well as society’s determination that fungi are perverse and unworthy of formal investigation...”

Queer ecology is a growing discipline which people define in different ways. “My understanding of queer ecology is that everything in nature is intrinsically linked”, Ella explains. “There are the mycelium networks underground and everything is interconnected. I think it’s that interconnectedness that really inspires and engages queer people.

“There’s something about being outside; you feel abundantly connected – or rather I feel abundantly connected when I’m outside. And there’s something about the queer community that when we come together, that connection, that positivity, that inherent understanding of each other, it’s like an unspoken, underground mycelium network. It’s about love, joy and positivity against the continual torrent of abuse and assault that the queer community gets on a daily basis.”

“And it’s similar to what’s happening to nature. We are, unfortunately, in a climate crisis and anything that we can do as a community to encourage the appreciation of nature – the beauty and the necessity of nature – reminds us we need to look after this.”

But Ella makes it clear that while the group does support climate activism, this is not the focus of Queer By Nature: “Because there is so much climate anxiety at the moment, we want to enjoy what we have and therefore highlight how important it is to people. There’s so much fear and pain and upset in the queer community at the moment, we just want something to celebrate.

And we just want to be able to provide a safe space for celebration – and connection.”

For more information on the group, check out @queer_by_nature_ed on Instagram



JUST WHAT THE DOCTOR ORDERED

Socially prescribing time outdoors

By Rhiannon J Davies



Parks and gardens are something this country does well. Often described as the green lungs of a city, they help to breathe oxygen into a place. But beyond their aesthetic attraction, there is so much more to be gained from our urban green spaces

The medical professions are increasingly recognising the benefits of taking an alternative approach to treating different conditions. The term 'social prescribing' describes the process which allows GPs, nurses and other healthcare workers to signpost patients towards support outside of health services, through community organisations, local support groups and holistic hubs. This can involve things like arts and crafts, befriending, cookery or music. But increasingly it also involves prescribing time outdoors, or green social prescribing.

In a case study for the NHS Lothian Charity, one young student who had spent time in hospital following a medical emergency described how the hospital garden made a difference to her health:

"At first I wasn't keen on the idea because everyone in the ward was so busy, and I initially required a ventilator and nursing staff to help me... But the garden was such a different environment. I was able to relax and switch off.

"Even just even feeling the air, and the warmth of the sun, brought me

back to myself and reminded me that I was not just a sick patient. and that there was a world outside of the hospital."

The NHS Lothian Charity operates a Green Health Programme, linking up the local health board with its community green spaces. Their pilot project, the Green Health Prescribing Project promotes health and wellbeing, while addressing health inequalities for people who may find accessing the outdoors difficult for different reasons. Green health prescriptions that the project have issued range from 'suggesting a stroll in the park, to pointing the patient in the direction of local walking and gardening groups, to a referral to a formal therapeutic programme'.

Public health nurse, Tracy McLeod said: "There are also gardening opportunities, outdoor cooking, mindfulness, an opportunity to spend time in open spaces, walks and cycle paths in Midlothian. This increases general knowledge about the outdoors, improving confidence and gaining skills. It could be one-on-one, or in group activity."

The project is all about prevention," said Tracy. "I am hoping more people will keep well within their communities and need less medicine and less engagement with health and social care services."

Yet some critics have highlighted how social prescribing does not address the social determinants

of health inequalities, such as income, employment, education, food security, housing stability, and experiences of discrimination. They highlight how the scheme provides targeted and temporary interventions, and therefore cannot meaningfully reduce health inequalities.

Yet even without addressing health inequalities at their root, investing in our green spaces is still worthwhile. An evaluation by the City of Edinburgh Council found that for every £1 invested in its parks and greenspaces, around £12 of social, economic and environmental benefits are delivered. And a report by the Wildlife Trust highlighted how the NHS could save more than £635 million a year by signing some patients up to nature-based health and wellbeing programmes.

If you're interested in how spending time outdoors could support your own wellbeing or that of someone you know, the Thrive Physical Activity & Greenspaces Collective partners are a group of organisations – Edinburgh and Lothian Greenspace Trust, the Scottish Association for Mental Health and Cyrenians – that support people experiencing poor mental health. For more information on their walking groups, fitness groups, gardening groups and conservation groups visit: www.elgt.org.uk

THE FUTURE OF SUSTAINABILITY IN ARCHITECTURE

By Yasmin Ali

How can architecture be more inclusive? What can be done to ensure sustainability in our built environment? How can we meaningfully transform our city from the ground up? Architectural and urban designer, Yasmin Ali explores this topic and delves into three boundary-pushing designs by up-and-coming architects.

Edinburgh School of Architecture and Landscape Architecture (ESALA) hosts Friday lunchtime events with a range of guest speakers, which are open to the public. This is a welcome opportunity to democratise understanding of architecture, an industry that can often be seen as exclusionary.

It takes a minimum of seven years, typically two architecture degrees, and a rigorous professional practice-based exam, to become a chartered architect in the UK. The title of Architect is protected by law and by royal charter. Architects are known to have one of the longest vocational training paths of many professions, and forty is considered a tender age.

This can explain why it may be perceived as elitist – reserved for those with the luxury of time to be able to afford the long training. However, thankfully in recent times there have been movements to increase inclusivity within the field and in the way architectural concepts are communicated to the public.

The Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA), the professional membership body for excellence in architecture, has extensive initiatives dedicated to increasing equity, diversity and inclusion both within the sector and in educational outreach.

Representation extends to gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, religion, disability, and all the other characteristics protected by The Equality Act, as well as seeking parity in pay across the gender



pay gap for professionals of the same seniority.

RIBA also champions excellence in all levels of architecture, including student awards with its prestigious President's Medals scheme, awarded annually to the most outstanding entries in architectural education.

Earlier this year, I attended a lecture led by three recent student prize winners of the RIBA Sustainability Award and was impressed by their respective projects. All are recent graduates of the Edinburgh College of Art's undergraduate degree in architecture, and are continuing their architecture training in prestigious architecture offices. Their projects deal with a mix of sustainability concerns in innovative ways.



THE LAST STRAW

by Gergana Negovanska

Gergana Negovanska's project, The Last Straw, redesigns and configures the existing shed structure of Ratho Community Centre, just south of Edinburgh airport, which is under threat of demolition. The project prolongs its lifespan, offering consideration for future proofing.

Like Sonakshi Pandit's project, this proposal reimagines the interface of a

wall as a feature, in this case a habitat wall, also described as a cabinet, which is made of straw bales and home to biodiversity on the site. This reinforces the site's rich ecology, and the rest of the construction and material choices aim to minimise disruption to the site and its wildlife, with the installation of elevated lightweight structures that protect existing trees.

COMMON GROUND: LEITH

by Inka Eismar

Common Ground: Leith, by Inka Eismar considers the setting of Newkirkgate in a sensitive reinvention of civic space around an existing housing estate. Seeking an urban intervention to unite the disjointed parts of Leith, both in social and physical terms, the positioning of a new town hall, transforms the existing underused territory around Kirkgate into a thriving and celebrated civic space.

The building is designed as a system of layers, which may be reconfigured or dismantled throughout the building's lifespan. An external, load-bearing stone envelope forms the most permanent layer, designed to outlive the building itself, continually framing external gathering grounds. Eismar's drawings carefully document a phased renewal of the site throughout its extended lifespan.



URBAN CAR[T]YLSER

by Sonakshi Pandit

This project, reimagines a future scenario where car-dominance has subsided, and repurposes existing structures projecting them a longer lifecycle.

It takes Edinburgh's Craighleith Retail Park as a testbed for its strategy that seeks to divert low-value materials and to upcycle them into architectural components, in novel ways. The project upcycles close to a thousand shopping carts found there into self-termed 'gabion-carts'. (Gabion is a term used in construction meaning a basket or cage filled with earth or rocks.) These can be used to construct transformable multi-purposed walls, reimagined as spaces for climbing, sitting, storage and play. They can be grown with rubble coming from demolition works. According to Pandit, this promotes the diversion of low-value material streams, encouraging reuse and upcycling as methodologies for urban renewal.

All three projects are site-specific responses which challenge – and seek to constructively disrupt – the general linear model of resource use. They are designed for a circular economy in the built environment.

They question and redefine how architects might transform notions of preservation, permanence and appropriateness in response to climate change. They bring to the fore the intrinsic value of a building or material, its history, and its embodied energy, with the sustainability value held above economic value or perceived status.

They also go beyond sustainable initiatives of using local, renewable and biodegradable materials and consider wider scales and supply chains. They all use the wall as a device for reimagining future site proposals and uses.

These proposals show how architectural design can be used to mitigate the climate emergency, work towards sustainability across all scalar levels, and increase societal inclusion in public space within urban environments.



THE GREEN BATTLE OF LINLITHGOW

How one community are fighting to protect their green space



There are three prongs of an attack being made on the site of a bloody 16th century battle* – which has become a valuable greenspace for a West Lothian town – and the Our Outdoors app is at the centre of it.

The Battle of Linlithgow Bridge was fought on the edge of the town in 1526 and afterwards, the site that stretches down to the banks of the River Avon, was largely used for farming until Cemex began quarrying for sand in 1992.

When that stopped in 2000, the land was planted with trees and it became a popular bio-diverse natural amenity. A lagoon was created which is now a popular spot for open water swimmers and local people use the 14 hectares for recreation – from walking to running, cycling to picnics.

But now much of the area is under the threat of being built upon, if new owners Breedon manage to sell it to property developers in the coming months.

Unlike the swords, guns and cannons of the 16th century, this time the 'Green Battle of Linlithgow' is being fought with apps, emails and wildlife monitoring.

Breedon want to sell their land and local residents are concerned a valuable greenspace will be lost. Cemex had claimed the impact will be minimal and access to greenspace will be maintained, but many are unconvinced.

Helen Morrison, who lives nearby, said: "This area is invaluable to many Linlithgow residents and others from around the area who come here to walk, run, cycle and enjoy open water swimming. The benefits to both physical and mental health are huge and to replace that with Tarmac, bricks and mortar is unjustifiable.

"A few of us have come up with a cunning plan, as Baldrick might have said, if Blackadder had ever found himself near the River Avon."

The campaign, involving the use of the Our Outdoors app, is a citizen science project which aims to find out more about how we enjoy public spaces. It was developed by researchers in the Scottish Collaboration of Public Health Research and Practice (SCPGRP) at the University of Edinburgh in partnership with Sustrans.

Professor Ruth Jepson, Personal Chair of Public Health in Social Science at (SCPGRP), said: "If enough people post photos and opinions about the site of the Battle of Linlithgow Bridge, we will declare it a 'hotspot' and carry out research on the wildlife, plants and open space to determine how beneficial it is to the public. That includes physical health but places like this are increasingly being seen as vital to improve mental health and general wellbeing."

Helen said: "If we can get enough residents taking a photo for the app and recording how much the greenspace is valued, it will show how much support there really is. And with the subsequent university research it will help us campaign to have the area declared a Local Nature Reserve, or similar designation to protect it for everyone."

Another front in the new battle is planning as Helen explained: "It's a bit complicated to go through the intricacies of the whole planning process but if Cemex manage to sell the land before October, any developer would only have to wait two weeks before a planning committee considered their application to build up to 210 homes, rather than the usual 12 weeks which interested parties would have to object.

"Therefore, we need to be ready and be able to act fast. As we could only have two weeks to put in an objection; we are getting ready – and it has a steep learning curve."

There is also the possibility of a community buy-out but that is a very long-term project at the moment, according to Helen, who said: "To lose this greenspace would be a disaster for Linlithgow and affect many, many people – we might not be using guns and ammunition but we will fight to retain a brilliant community asset."

**The Battle of Linlithgow Bridge was fought between John Stewart, 3rd Earl of Lennox and James Hamilton, 1st Earl of Arran on 4 September 1526. Lennox was marching from Edinburgh with around 10,000 men to free the 14-year-old King James V from the control of Archibald Douglas, 5th Earl of Angus when he encountered an army of some 2,000 men under Arran at Linlithgow Bridge. Despite the numbers Lennox's forces were routed and he was killed by Arran's men when they were reinforced.*



To download the app, use the QR code or follow this link:
www.spotteron.app/apps/our-outdoors

You can follow the campaign on on social media:
Twitter: [greenbattlelin](#)
Facebook: [Green Battle Linlithgow](#)

Circles of Action for Human and Planetary Wellbeing

A researcher's reflection on the community's battle to save the Linlithgow green space

By Clare Cullen

The patter of raindrops sent delicate ripples across the mossy puddles around my feet. A twittering of early spring's first birdsong added to the utter serenity of this woodland. I could have sat on this log-crafted bench in the misty March rain for hours, completely content with watching the comings and goings of the more-than-human life stirring around me.

Kettil'stoun Mains is an emerald jewel on Linlithgow's south-western edge, bedecked with open meadow and native woods. Flowing along its north-western boundary, the River Avon is a stone's-throw away from the magnificent Avon Lagoon, which is home to swimmers of the fish, fowl and human varieties.

This place is one of Linlithgow's few remaining informal green spaces. Used and loved by many in the community, it is the site of everyday wonders: a walker's laugh at their dog with the zoomies, children's joy in the creative magic of nature-play, a wren building his nest, the entwined trunks of trees scaffolding each other.

Kettil'stoun Mains is more than an urban green/blue space (UGBS): it is a home and a refuge whose value transcends the 'functions' it serves for the community. And it is an ecological tome upon which Linlithgow's human and environmental stories have been written. Despite this, however, plans to develop the land for a housing estate jeopardise its future, and with it, the wellbeing of all those who have come to cherish and depend on it.

I found myself at the Mains on that chilly March morning to meet Helen, a Linlithgow resident whose passion to protect the woodland has catalysed a grassroots movement in the community: Green Battle Linlithgow. Helen had reached out to GroundsWell, a research consortium which strives to evidence the role of UGBS within social, economic, political and health systems.

At the time, I was shadowing the Edinburgh-based GroundsWell team as part of a four-week placement for my MSc in Outdoor Environmental and Sustainability Education. As a nature-based educator and forest bathing guide, I had approached GroundsWell about my placement because I was eager to deepen my insights into the ways being in nature impacts human health and wellbeing.

Although Indigenous cultures and Eastern practices have revered the benefits of nature connection for generations, Western science has only recently begun to generate data to support these claims, and already the evidence is incontrovertible: time spent in nature benefits physical, psychological and emotional wellbeing in (im)measurable ways, and, when shared with others, can also nurture positive social wellbeing.

It was data about these wellbeing benefits that Helen was hoping to capture from users of Kettil'stoun Mains in order to build a case to defend the woodland from 'development' to perhaps even have it designated as a local nature reserve. And this is where GroundsWell could help.

Helen arrived, wearing wellies, waterproofs and a welcoming smile which made clear her true delight at being among the trees in the gentle rain. I had met a kindred spirit. She was eager to show me around the Mains, to share the ways its stories intertwine with hers and to let the woods reveal its magic for itself.

As we walk-slid – it was incredibly muddy – the conversation turned to GroundsWell's work, particularly the OurOutdoors app they had recently launched. The app is designed to capture real-time data about how users are feeling in UGBS. I explained how it worked: after creating a profile, which can be an avatar, you can take a photo while in an UGBS and answer a few simple questions about what you see around you and how you feel about being there.

The app then geolocates your post to create a pin on an interactive map, indicating where you are and sharing your photo and responses with other users. Helen was eager to get members of her community using the app so that she could consolidate data to demonstrate the health and wellbeing benefits provided by the Mains; from walkers to wild swimmers, this UGBS brings Linlithgow's residents into the outdoors to connect with themselves, others and the natural world.

Despite being fantastic community recreational assets, not all UGBS are of equal quality and not all groups in society avail of these spaces, either because they cannot

"Urban green and blue spaces are not human spaces alone; we share them with a vast array of complex life"

access them easily or because they simply do not feel safe or welcome there. Some members of society may not have the luxury of leisure time or the ability to travel to UGBS without some form of vehicular transport, which may be prohibitively expensive.

Some feel that certain aspects of their identity, such as race, religion, nationality, sexuality or gender, will provoke hostility from others. UGBS are just as much affected by systemic inequalities as education, healthcare and employment opportunities.

In seeking solutions to this state of affairs, Leah Thomas' intersectional environmentalism (IE) resonates. In *Intersectional Environmentalist: How to Dismantle Systems of Oppression to Protect People and Planet*, she describes it as:

'an inclusive approach to environmentalism... [IE] advocates for the protection of both people and the planet... arguing] that social and environmental justice are intertwined and that environmental advocacy that disregards this connection is harmful and incomplete. IE focuses on.... amplifying historically excluded voices and approaching environmental education, policy and activism with equity, inclusion and restorative justice in mind.

What I love most about IE is the way it considers justice and equality for humans and our more-than-human kin. It encourages us to step out of our anthropocentric tunnel vision, and engage with the world more holistically.

Walking around Kettil'stoun Mains with Helen revealed her unbridled love for the place itself, a love that transcends all that she gets through spending time there. She has come to know the trees, to cherish and care for them through learning their stories. Helen honours the right of its more-than-human residents to safety and life, embodying what Vandana Shiva, in *Earth Democracy: Justice, Sustainability and Peace* termed 'Earth Democracy', whereby "[a]ll species, peoples and cultures have intrinsic worth.... [and] a natural right to sustenance'.

This aspect of Helen's approach to protecting the Mains catalysed in me a subtle paradigm shift that reverberated throughout my time with GroundsWell: UGBS are not human spaces alone; we share them with a vast array of complex life, each member of which we owe due moral consideration.

Achieving IE ambitions in our communities will take time. As Barbadian Prime Minister Mia Mottley recently stressed in BBC the Climate Question, addressing environmental injustices: "Is not a [snaps her fingers] beam-me-up Star Trek moment. It is going to be a long hard slog and, in a world that recognises instant gratification, ... the temptation is there to believe that it can be solved like that [snaps her fingers]."

There are many paths on this long walk to justice: policy change, grassroots community initiative, individual action. I believe that doing something, anything, that you are able to create a more inclusive environment for others is meaningful, and your 'circles of action' will oscillate

"Urban green and blue spaces... remind us that the wellbeing of people and the natural world are not mutually exclusive"

between being close to home, impacting your wider community and maybe even influencing the world.

UGBS are a wonderful place to start because they remind us that the wellbeing of people and the natural world are not mutually exclusive; not only can we have both together, but they are actually more interdependent than we tend to appreciate. So, whether it's accompanying a nervous friend on their first sojourn to the local park, installing an insect hotel or volunteering with a local conservation or social action charity, you are being an intersectional environmentalist by considering the wellbeing of (human and more-than-human) others. And perhaps from there, like Helen, your circles of action might ripple out to protect an entire ecosystem to benefit human and planetary wellbeing.



THE WORLD AT THEIR FINGERTIPS

Using Lego in citizen science

Edinburgh Science Festival at the Museum of Scotland



By Diana Grunberg MBBChBAO, MPH

In April, team members from the Scottish Collaboration of Public Health Research and Practice headed down to the Museum of Scotland for the Edinburgh Science Festival. We were there to engage with the key players (citizens!) of our citizen science project, GroundsWell, and to promote its accompanying OurOutdoors app.

Our target population had no age limits, as we enticed both parents and children alike with our comprehensive Lego 'create-your-own outdoor space' section – including a competition for the most impressive design, and an interactive map of urban blue and green spaces throughout the region.

We encouraged keen festival-goers to physically jot down and post their thoughts and feelings about the varying spaces on the map, which understandably sparked fervent conversations about people's favourite outdoor areas and those that were less inspiring or were considered to require some much-needed TLC.

While it is obvious that the success of our project and app depends on citizen-user engagement, it is more important than ever to tangibly include the public in science research and development. At the end of day, research – especially social science and public health research – is conducted for public benefit. And if we are not meeting the basic needs of our target populations (as identified and described by the population itself), then we must ask if our research is fundamentally fulfilling what it set out to do.

In our world of increasing awareness around equity and equality, it is about time that seemingly impenetrable institutions, like that of science with its strict methodologies and jargon, start thinking deeply about the ways in which these principles can be materially incorporated into our work. This is precisely what we are setting out to do in the GroundsWell project and the OurOutdoors app.

So where do we begin?

Well, Lego is a good place to start! Using Lego as a means of science communication for all ages is a budding strategy that is increasingly becoming a studied academic discipline due to its promising application across many fields like pharmacology, geology, robotics, environmental research and policy, and of course public health.

“Using Lego as a means of science communication for all ages is a budding strategy that is increasingly becoming a studied academic discipline”

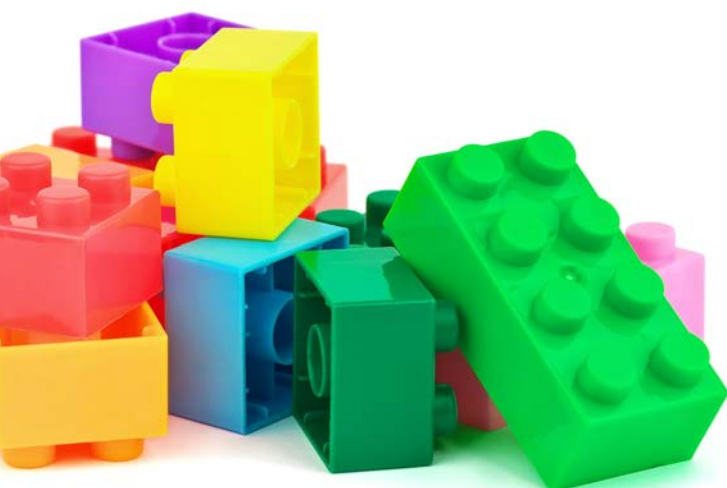
There are numerous benefits and exciting potentials in using Lego to engage the public, as outlined by Flack and colleagues at the University of Wisconsin-Madison: they are fun, colourful, emphasise visual and tactile interactions, facilitate group discussion, structures can be readily digitised, and are easy to acquire worldwide.

Indeed, our team was amazed to see just how many outdoor and environmental Lego kits and pieces exist, which offered children at the event both the freedom and necessary creative licence to design the park or outdoor environment of their dreams. Truly, the world was at their fingertips!

Interestingly, Flack's group employed Lego pieces in their 'What colour is ____?' project to offer a unique survey experience for families to 'colour' code their answers to questions about themselves and their community.

There is great potential for the GroundsWell team to both adopt and adapt this type of surveying method in future events, especially as we are interested in understanding how different spaces invoke a sense of wellbeing or not – an abstract and emotional question that may be better captured by tapping into the senses through Lego creative expression. This approach may also appeal to different types of learners – such as visual or tactile – reflecting our goal of inclusivity in scientific communication.

Naturally when we think of Lego, we think of children; and as the saying goes, 'children are the future', which





“it is more important than ever to tangibly include the public in science research and development”

is also what they say about science. Yet since the shift of science communication from a linear diffusion model (think speeches, television broadcasts) to a dialogic model (focusing on talks or seminars from scientists to non-scientists), children have been precluded from these conversations, despite being one of the main target groups for science communication, according to Merzagora and Jenkins.

Importantly, the authors point out in their comment in the *Journal of Science Communication* that listening to children and empowering them is not just a choice, but a responsibility for all nations that have signed the UN convention on the rights of the child. Indeed, Article 12 declares we “shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child”.

Practically speaking, how do we implement these lofty goals into not only science, but the world at large? For some inspiration, we can look to some truly remarkable examples: the Reggio school in Madrid that was pupil and architect co-designed; student-led biodiversity efforts at the museum National d’Histoire Naturel de Paris; teenage journalists in Sardinia who conduct their own interviews/ research and are the decision-makers in defining the relevance of their scientific content.

When considering the GroundsWell project, it is exciting to think about the possibilities of including children in a meaningful way to co-create

new, imaginative outdoor spaces that are purpose-built with children’s wellbeing in mind.

Whilst the priorities of the children at the event related to selecting the perfect Lego additions to their creations and bargaining for pieces with their peers, the adults had their minds elsewhere: they wanted to know how they could use the OurOutdoors app to change their communities and influence policy.

While their questions challenged both the limits and application of the app for real world change, it was exciting to relay that the larger GroundsWell project and OurOutdoors app were designed with these exact questions in mind, and with the capacity for high level change built-in from inception. We had many enthusiastic festival-goers download the app on the spot, while keeping one eye on their children who were eagerly diving into buckets of Lego.

Overall, what did we learn from this event? Well, firstly, that people of all ages love Lego, and secondly, that citizens want an active way to collect, collate, and report data to local government for community green/blue space improvement.

It is motivating to think about how we can implement more streamlined pathways for citizens to access the data collected in the OurOutdoors app to be used for positive change – and how we can expand our science communication methods to be more inclusive of children and minority groups... I feel we’re going to need a lot more Lego!



The Health Advantages of Outdoor Exercise

By Sandra Garcia

Over time, our society's perspective on exercise has undergone significant transformations. From the earliest gyms in Ancient Greece to the modern fitness centres we're familiar with today, the concept of physical activity has evolved remarkably. In the 19th century, influential figures like Dr. Kellogg helped raise awareness about the importance of exercise for a healthy life, pushing us toward a more conscious approach to wellbeing.

Our body is composed of three distinct types of muscles: cardiac, skeletal, and plain muscles (including veins, arteries, and the digestive tract). Engaging in exercise positively influences the presence of beneficial bacteria in our bodies. Intestinal bacteria contribute to hormone production and generate serotonin, a crucial neurotransmitter. The interconnectedness of the heart, brain, and intestine through the vagus nerve further emphasises the significance of maintaining overall health.

Surprisingly, the intestine contains a quantity of neurons comparable to the spinal cord. This is the foundation of the "second brain," suggesting that the development of the brain occurred after the advent of fire and cooked food, which reduced bacteria exposure.

While veins carry carbon dioxide and arteries carry oxygen, exercise plays a role in optimising vascular health and resilience. In the realm of oncology, exercise can mitigate the toxicity of treatments and even prevent certain types of cancer, such as colorectal cancer (with a 20-40% risk reduction). Physical activity stimulates the release of adrenaline, activating the natural killer cells that combat threats to our immune system. Moreover, exercise contributes to the formation of new blood vessels, potentially enhancing the distribution of medication during chemotherapy.

In 2000, researchers discovered that skeletal muscles release substances known as myokines during exercise. These myokines can interact with other cells, creating a system of communication termed 'exerkines'. This natural mechanism acts as a remarkable polypill with no adverse reactions or side effects. However, it's important to note that while moderate physical activity provides numerous health benefits, extreme exertion, such as in high-performance sports, can lead to complications and stress-related issues.

The ideal form of exercise involves planned physical activity, such as jogging or cycling, as opposed to sporadic exertion like running for the bus. Engaging in workplace physical activity is generally less beneficial and could elevate inflammatory factors in the blood. It's also important to differentiate between exercise and sports, where the competitive nature of the latter can lead to negative consequences in the long term, such as injuries, osteoarthritis, and arrhythmias.

Twenty years ago, the discovery of chemical substances, including hormones, generated by skeletal musculature brought about profound insights into exercise science. These benefits even extend to influencing genetics and epigenetics, highlighting the symbiotic relationship between our bodies and the environment. Embracing outdoor exercise not only promotes physical health but also fosters a deeper connection with the natural world, ultimately contributing to holistic wellbeing.

Top Ten Easy Exercises for you to try outdoors

1. **WALKING:** A simple yet effective exercise, brisk walking can improve cardiovascular health and boost your mood.
2. **JOGGING OR RUNNING:** Increase your heart rate and burn calories by jogging or running at a comfortable pace in a park or on a trail.
3. **CYCLING:** Hop on a bike for a low-impact workout that strengthens your leg muscles and provides a fun way to explore your surroundings.
4. **STAR JUMPS:** This classic exercise engages your entire body and gets your heart pumping. Do a set in an open area for an energising workout.
5. **BODYWEIGHT EXERCISES:** Perform exercises like squats, lunges, push-ups, and planks to work multiple muscle groups without the need for equipment.
6. **YOGA:** Find a peaceful spot outdoors to practice yoga poses, improve flexibility, and promote relaxation.
7. **STAIR CLIMBING:** Seek out a set of stairs, like those in a park or stadium, for a great cardiovascular workout that also tones your leg muscles.
8. **HIKING:** Explore nature trails or hills in your area for a full-body workout that combines cardio with the beauty of the outdoors.
9. **SKIPPING ROPE:** Grab a jump rope and skip for a fun and effective way to improve coordination, endurance, and cardiovascular fitness.
10. **PARK BENCH WORKOUTS:** Use a park bench for step-ups, tricep dips, incline push-ups, and more. It's a versatile way to exercise outdoors.

Remember to warm up before starting your workout and cool down afterwards. Stay hydrated, wear appropriate clothing and footwear, and listen to your body to avoid overexertion. If you have any medical conditions or concerns, consult a healthcare professional before beginning a new exercise routine.



ENHANCING COMMUNITY WELLBEING through the GroundsWell Project

By Emma Carroll-Monteil

Access to urban green and blue spaces (UGBS) has a significant impact on the health and wellbeing of communities. However, optimising the benefits of these spaces requires collaborative efforts. This is where the GroundsWell project comes in.

GroundsWell brings together researchers, community members, implementers, and policymakers to create positive change and improve the quality of life for communities through UGBS. It does this in a number of ways:

UNDERSTANDING THE IMPACT OF URBAN GREEN AND BLUE SPACES

GroundsWell recognizes that UGBS play a crucial role in social, economic, cultural, environmental, and health systems. By collecting evidence and conducting research, the project aims to understand how UGBS can enhance people's lives and address issues such as social and environmental inequalities. The goal is to gather data that can inform policies and practices, ultimately leading to better community outcomes.

COLLABORATIVE DECISION-MAKING AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

At the heart of GroundsWell's work is a commitment to democratic and inclusive decision-making processes. The project values the voices of individuals and communities, actively involving them in research design, implementation, and evaluation. By partnering with community and policy stakeholders, GroundsWell ensures that all perspectives are considered and that solutions are co-developed to address the complex urban environment in which communities live.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES OF GROUNDSWELL

GroundsWell operates based on four guiding principles:

- **Health and Inequalities:** GroundsWell focuses on understanding and addressing the impact of UGBS on health and wellbeing, with a particular emphasis on reducing inequalities in access and outcomes.
- **Creating a Virtuous Cycle:** GroundsWell aims to establish a cycle of research, policy development, implementation, and active citizenship, where each element reinforces the others to achieve positive change.



- **Co-production:** Collaboration is key in GroundsWell's approach. By involving community members, policy stakeholders, and researchers in all stages of the project, GroundsWell ensures that diverse expertise and perspectives contribute to meaningful and effective solutions.
- **Acknowledging Complexity:** GroundsWell recognizes the intricate nature of urban environments and the diverse ways in which communities interact with UGBS. By considering this complexity, the project aims to identify and address the specific challenges and opportunities within each community.

RESEARCH IN BELFAST, EDINBURGH, AND LIVERPOOL

GroundsWell's main research is centred in three cities: Belfast, Edinburgh, and Liverpool. These cities offer similarities in terms of diverse low-income communities, yet they also possess unique geographic and cultural characteristics. This diversity makes them ideal laboratories to gather data on the impact of UGBS on health and wellbeing.

GroundsWell takes a holistic systems approach, considering the multiple components that shape the presence, location, character, and use of UGBS. By combining theoretical frameworks, data science, health economics, and policy analysis, GroundsWell aims to co-create solutions with the communities involved. The project engages in meaningful community engagement, citizen science, and co-production to understand the system, identify areas for improvement, and implement interventions to enhance the use and management of UGBS.

The GroundsWell project fosters collaboration and research-driven efforts to enhance community wellbeing through urban green and blue spaces. By valuing community engagement, data collection, and policy development, GroundsWell aims to create a virtuous cycle of positive change. Through their work in Belfast, Edinburgh, and Liverpool, GroundsWell strives to optimise UGBS and contribute to the overall health and wellbeing of individuals and communities.



WHAT'S ON

Summer may be over, but you can still get outdoors with these events happening in or around Edinburgh this autumn. Full details including booking information for most events can be found on [evenbrite.co.uk](https://www.evenbrite.co.uk)

Canal Greenspace Group

Date: Usually Tuesdays at 10:30

Location: Edinburgh Union Canal

Regular Canalside Greenspace activities with the Fountainbridge Canalside Community Trust. Meet other people who are also interested in making local greenspaces even better for people and nature.

Cost: Free, to sign up email fiona@fcct.scot or call 07706580147

Dads in the Wood

Date: Saturdays in September

Location: Craigmillar Play Park, Old Dalkeith Road, Edinburgh, EH16 4TB

Join Dad's Rock and other families to discover bugs, do some digging, take part in some art, storytelling, maybe do some fire lighting and more.

Cost: Free, but booking required

Gardening for Wellbeing – 10 week course

Date: Starts 5 September

Location: Dalkeith Community Garden, Dalkeith Country Park Via Town Gate, Dalkeith EH22 1ST

Over 10 weeks help to restore and maintain the beautiful community garden at Dalkeith Country Park. There will be an opportunity to achieve a Grow and Learn in Nature (GLiN) award.

Cost: Free, but booking required

Deluge Walking Workshop I with Dana Olărescu and Camille Azaïs Oboudaram

Date: 8 September

Location: Aberlady Bay Local Nature Reserve, EH32 0QB

Socially engaged artist Dana Olărescu and visual artist and activist Camille Aboudaram lead a pair of workshops to connect salt marshes, the climate crisis and advertisement.

Cost: Free, but booking required

Afloat Film Night: Outdoor Screening at Portobello Promenade

Date: 9 September

Location: Portobello Promenade, Nr Pipe Street, Promenade, Portobello, Edinburgh, EH15 1BR

A series of artist short films screened at Portobello Promenade, that explore local/global connections around environments, perceptions of change, beauty and livelihoods.

Cost: Donation

International Forest Bathing Day: Free Forest Bathing Session

Date: 10 September

Location: Midmar Drive, Hermitage Drive, Edinburgh, EH10 6BX

Join people around the world on Sunday 10th September, 2023 to enjoy a Forest Bathing walk led by Certified Forest Bathing Guide. Celebrate your connection to nature and appreciate the beauty of the natural world.

Cost: Free, but booking required

GBBC MSPs and Public Beach Clean Cramond

Date: 20 September

Location: Cramond Beach, Edinburgh, EH4 6NU

Join for a beach clean and litter survey to help the Marine Conservation Society gather vital data to keep pushing for the reduction of marine litter.

Cost: Free

Wild Women of Edinburgh tours

Date: Thu/Fri/Sat from 21 September – 12 October

Location: Queen's Gallery, Canongate Royal Mile, Edinburgh, EH8 8DX

Description: Come to hear the stories of the women who broke through the hedges to make an impact on the gardens of Edinburgh and further afield.

Cost: £18

Aye Breathe: A Day in the Pentlands

Date: 23 September

Location: The Pentlands

Experience a day of rejuvenation and connection to nature with Aye Breathe, as you immerse yourself in the beauty of the Pentlands through a range of activities and mindful practices including walking, wild swimming, foraging, green woodworking skills and more!

Cost: Pay what you can

Arthur's Amble – guided walk

Date: 23 September

Location: Holyrood Park Information Centre, Horse Wynd, Edinburgh, EH8 8AZ

Join a ranger on a free, gentle guided walk to learn about Holyrood Park's geology, wildlife, and its rich heritage of archaeology and history.

Cost: Free, but booking required

Cyrenians Communities Information Day

Date: 29 September

Location: Out of the Blue Drill Hall, Dalmeny Street, Edinburgh, EH6 8RG

Hosted by Cyrenians Residential Communities, come to Out Of The Blue to learn more about who they are, what they do, and the opportunities they can offer. Cyrenians have five thriving communities around Edinburgh supporting different groups.

Cost: Free

Wellness Walks at Queen Margaret University

Date: 29 September – 6 December

Location: Sport Centre Bench, Queen Margaret Drive, Musselburgh, EH21 6UD

Open to all students and starting from the bench outside the sport centre. Engage with nature, Explore the area, Space to talk. Walks occur every two weeks, alternating between Wednesday afternoons and Friday mornings.

Cost: Free but booking required

Bushcraft Skills Day

Date: 30 September

Location: 12 Humble Holdings, Kirknewton, Edinburgh, EH27 8DS

Enjoy a full days tuition in bush-craft and wilderness living skills with a qualified instructor. You'll receive a comprehensive introduction to the key skills needed to live comfortably in a woodland setting through hands-on learning and practical tasks.

Cost: £85

Free 30-Minute Outdoor Workout for Women

Date: 3 October

Location: Lauriston Castle, 2 Cramond Road, South Edinburgh, EH4 6AD

Keep things fresh, get that extra oxygen burst inside you, build up better immunity and clear your head with this fun, fast-paced bodyweight workout! Suitable for all levels.

Cost: Free taster

An Introduction to Coastal Foraging with Coeur Sauvage at Gullane Bents

Date: 8 October

Location: Gullane Bents Car Park, Gullane, EH31 2BE

These short-form courses are a great introduction to some of the plant species found at the foreshore and the edible seaweeds you can find along Scotland's coastlines.

Cost: £40

Water Quality Monitoring Training

Date: 8 October

Location: Roslin Glen Country Park car park, 78 Crusader Drive, Roslin, EH25 9PX

Join staff from the FRT to learn how to carry out water quality testing, as part of a citizen science approach to improving the River Esk.

Cost: Free, but booking required

Midlothian Outdoor Festival 2023

Date: 12 – 16 October

Location: Various

Explore the great outdoors and with guided walks, talks, wildlife watching or downhill snow sports through the villages, towns and countryside. The Outdoor Festival is organised by Midlothian Ranger Service.

Cost: Most events are free

Woodland Bryophytes Workshop

Date: 13 October

Location: Vogrie House, Vogrie Country Park, Near Gorebridge, EH23 4NU

Join The Wildlife Information Centre for a 1-day workshop on an introduction to woodland bryophytes (mosses, liverworts and hornworts) in SE and central Scotland.

Cost: Free but booking required

Dementia Friendly Garden Social

Date: 1 November

Location: Edinburgh Botanical Garden, Edinburgh, EH3 5NZ

Free sessions in the Botanic Cottage on the first Friday every month with refreshments and activities. Inspired by the garden, for people living with dementia accompanied by a family member or carer.

Cost: Free, but booking required

Through the Lens

Using photography to tell the whole story

By Becky Duncan, Founder of Open Aye CIC

Open Aye community interest company facilitated a participatory photography session for the community reporters involved with producing this magazine. The session covered a range of topics and discussions relevant to those who wished to consider what photography could be used to accompany editorial pieces.

Open Aye was created to provide a platform for those who are often unheard in public communications campaigns, through collaborative approaches for the co-creation of images and messages.

We believe that equal and inclusive representation matters, and we aim to provide photography services and outputs for social and environmental change. We engage with communities of diversity, difference, disability and disadvantage. At the heart of Open Aye lies our ability to provide accurate and positive portrayals of people, places and communities through visual imagery whilst also working collaboratively and sensitively with those who feature in our work.

What makes a good photo is obviously subjective, but the group discussed aesthetics, composition, lighting, framing, angle of view, storytelling, content, message and emotion, in relation to a selection of inspirational photos from New Internationalist images. The session included some practical hands-on activities where the group took photos of tiny plants in different lighting and background set ups.

We also discussed best practice with regards to ethical photo sharing and storage, as well as permissions and GDPR compliance. The Dignified Storytelling Handbook and Photo Ethics.org provided some guidelines around concepts of responsibility, power and representation. Finally, we looked at what makes a good photo story and had the chance to order and reorder several examples of classic and modern photo essays.



How to get involved with Our Outdoors



Rating the quality of outdoor spaces in my neighbourhood: the our outdoors mobile app

Outdoor spaces such as parks allow us to engage in a range of activities such as exercise, socialising and relaxing - meaning parks and outdoors spaces can be good for our health!

However, not all outdoor spaces are of the same quality, and some need to be improved so people can benefit from them. We would like your help in identifying the good and not-so-good outdoor spaces in your local area.

How can you help?

We have developed a mobile app called Our Outdoors that lets people rate the quality of their local outdoor spaces, and how those spaces affect their wellbeing.

We would like you to try the app, and give us feedback on your experience: what you liked about it, and anything we can do to improve it.



What will this involve?

You can download the app from the google or apple stores, or access it using the QR code. Go and try the app in your local area.

If you would like to give us some feedback, please contact Stephen Malden, the researcher leading the study, at Stephen.malden@ed.ac.uk to arrange a time to do a short phone or teams interview. During the interview, the researcher will ask you about what you thought of the app, as well as some questions about how you typically travel in your local area.



COMMUNITY WELLBEING
HEALTH GREEN SPACE
URBAN WILD SWIMMING
ENVIRONMENT ACTION
INCLUSION BLUE SPACE
WILD FLOWERS
SOLUTIONS IMPACT
ECOLOGY INEQUALITIES
DIVERSITY OUTDOORS
SUSTAINABLE SYSTEMS
POWER COLLABORATION



GroundsWell
Transforming our cities from the ground up