

GLENFINART WALLED GARDEN GROUP VISITS BUTE



• Community Trust members at Rothesay Community Garden

ON Wednesday September 8 Ardentiny Community Trust directors made a self-funded visit to Bute Produce, Rothesay's community garden.

There, project manager, Billy Miller, and horticultural co-ordinator, Chris Helm, took them on a tour of the garden, explaining how the project had evolved. They then kindly hosted a question and answer session with a view to sharing their invaluable experience.

The Bute Produce project is based on the guiding principles of health, education, social values and social inclusion, environment, employment and affordability.

The site is a six-acre field, which was provided under licence by the Mount Stuart Trust, and the project is currently funded by the Scottish government. GRAB Trust, Mount Stuart, HIE, LEADER, Community Energy Scotland, Fyne

Futures Ltd, European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development and Natural Scotland, together with its various and growing income streams.

The project had not planned to earn an income for the first three years but Billy and Chris were happy to report that in this, their first year, they have made £15,000.

This has been due to their sale of fresh, organic produce at affordable prices direct from the community

garden and their popular Green Box scheme, where boxes of mixed vegetables are delivered to households on a weekly basis.

The Bute project recognised the value in growing and selling strawberries from the outset, with Billy citing a potential revenue of £6,000 from a polytunnel of strawberries grown on wires.

However, selling healthy, affordable produce is not the sole aim. They are committed to all their guiding principles. They are heavily into re-cycling, supported by the Grab Trust, who have donated a composter called the Rocket, and they collect and compost the waste from the nearby school and college campus, preventing it from going to landfill.

Horticulturalist Chris is passionate about the educational aspects and ensures that the vegetables they grow are not only tasty and nutritious but colourful, thus encouraging children to pick, eat, and eventually grow their own. He has designed areas

of the garden for children with special needs and, indeed, the overall design of the garden allows for the less able of all ages to visit and participate as much as possible.

The addition of a Proven Energy wind turbine, affectionately named 'Jenny' the generator, provides the garden's energy needs plus an annual income of £5,000 from the grid. Their use of biodiesel for the project's vehicles is another contributor to lowering costs and greenhouse gases.

With regards to education and employment, the project also makes a significant contribution. It has integrated with many of the Bute link projects to ensure the social inclusion of all members of the public.

Eighty per cent of their trainees in the first year were later successfully employed within organisations and businesses on Bute. This coming year they aim to train and support an additional 15 trainees on-site based on a 13-week

work plan schedule. There is also a small income from this activity, averaging at £2,000 per trainee.

Examples of other revenue streams are Friends of Bute Produce, who hold fund raising social events, and the Ferry Berry club, aimed at three to nine-year-olds, who receive a membership pack, newsletter and dedicated workshops to educate and inform about food miles and the benefits of growing locally.

This year there are plans to progress to the remaining three acres of the site and plant an apple orchard with the help of a John Muir Award.

Other parts of the site will be used to help trainees to experience agricultural training as opposed to market gardening.

While no two community gardens are the same, the experience of visiting and learning from the Bute Produce Project has undoubtedly been a valuable one.

Photo and report courtesy of www.ardentiny.org