



# THE ALNWICK GARDEN **TRUST**

## SOCIAL IMPACT REPORT

APRIL 2020 - MARCH 2021



“Your Garden.....For Everyone.....Always.....”

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# Welcome

The 2020/21 year has challenged our team at The Alnwick Garden like never before. In order to succeed in a time of crisis, organisations have to innovate, adapt and respond quickly to a rapidly changing environment.



Such traits have emerged from all areas of the organisation including the Community and Education team. Despite the frustration of being locked down and furloughed for long periods, the team tried their utmost to provide support and keep in regular contact with our beneficiaries and partners.

While The Trust's usual set of measures and outputs were curtailed due to the pandemic, we used every means possible to have a positive impact on the community we serve. Whether this was delivering our beautiful tulips to NHS workers, or providing a free community night at our Christmas Light Trail, we hope we provided some comfort and support.

Looking ahead we have emerged from the pandemic in a strong position, thanks in large part to the support we received from the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme. We have been able to protect jobs and retain the capacity and capability to re-engage our great community work. Our programmes will be needed, more than ever, as the nation emerges from the grips of the pandemic.

I hope you enjoy this year's Social Impact Report.

Mark Brassell

## Awards and Accolades

2021:	NewcastleGateshead Family Magazine Visitor Welcome Gold Accolade Quality Food and Drink	Best Family Day Out VisitEngland VisitEngland VisitEngland	Nominated Nominated Nominated
2020:	Large Visitor Attraction of The Year Experience of the Year Hall of Fame – 5 Years of Excellence Award of Excellence Loo of the Year 100 Best Gardens Great Place to Eat	North East Tourism Awards North East Tourism Awards Trip Advisor Trip Advisor Loo of the Year Garden News Heritage Awards	Silver Bronze  Platinum Winner Winner

Previous year's awards have included;  
Welcome Accolade  
Best Community Initiative Finalist  
  
Outstanding Social Enterprise Awards  
Tourist and Visitor Attractions and County Estates

VisitEngland  
Horticulture Weekly  
Custodian Awards  
North East Charity Awards  
Northumbria in Bloom



# *Executive Summary*

The brainchild of The Duchess of Northumberland, The Alwick Garden is an award-winning visitor attraction in Alwick, Northumberland. The 12 acres of magnificent gardens are home to the world's largest Taihaku Cherry Orchard, a Grand Cascade comprising 120 water jets and the world's largest Treehouse. Through a combination of water features, beautiful plants and ornate spaces, it is a tranquil haven for horticulturalists, families and tourists alike. The Alwick Garden welcomes over 350,000 visitors per year.

The Alwick Garden Trust became a registered charity in 2003. Any surplus from running The Garden is re-invested into improving and developing The Alwick Garden and for making positive social impacts through one of The Garden's award winning charity programmes.





## FACT

During 2020 and the COVID-19 restrictions The Alnwick Garden managed to welcome 170,871 visitors safely.

### *Who do The Alnwick Garden Trust aim to reach?*

The Alnwick Garden is a garden for the community, with a wide and far-reaching impact. It nurtures a sense of belonging and inclusivity for all. The Alnwick Garden Trust seeks to give back to communities, engage all walks of life and provide both familiar and new experiences and opportunities.

The Trust's Elderberries Programme works to address loneliness and isolation for people aged 55 and over living in Northumberland, offering local people access to projects, events, services and opportunities. It aims to promote a healthy fulfilled quality of life.

The Elderberries Programme includes 'Health and Self' which offers weekly exercise classes, a walking group and toenail cutting as well as health talks which bring people together to build new friendships. There are also seasonal parties, tea dances, Singing For The Brain (in partnership with the Alzheimer's Society), dance classes and monthly movies.

The 'Gentlemen's Garden' is a group specifically for men over 55 who enjoy gardening and crafts. 'Blooming Well' are twice weekly sessions aimed at people with early onset dementia and their carers. This project focuses on keeping people active, connected and supported while living well with dementia.

The 'Drop In Centre' is a free facility open every Thursday, Friday and Sunday for those who wish to make new friends and enjoy the company of others. Run by volunteers the service has become a pillar of support for the community since it opened in 2017.

The Trust's Educational Programmes encourage young people and their families to consider their lifestyles and empower them with the knowledge on how to lead a healthier lifestyle and make positive choices that can improve wellbeing.

# About The Alnwick Garden Trust.....

## Mission

The Alnwick Garden cultivates communities and raises aspirations in a place of beauty. Fearlessly inspiring and connecting people in an inclusive garden environment that creates learning opportunities and enriches lives.

## Promote Skills and Lifelong Learning

Provide opportunities for people of all abilities to learn and grow. Empower individuals in raising aspirations to reach their potential through building skills, knowledge and confidence.

## Encourage Healthy Living and Well-being

Provide innovative and creative ways for the community to engage in experiences that promote positive well-being and healthy lifestyles. Tackle barriers to reduce social and rural isolation.

## Create and Nurture Community Partnerships

Complement other organisations services whilst working towards a strategic vision for support in communities. Be a pioneer for new initiatives, incorporating partners expertise and sharing good practice. Solidify our charitable presence locally, regionally and nationally.

The Alnwick Garden Trust believe that everyone has an innate need to be connected to others; to reduce isolation, to find a purpose and to get out and about. An essential role that The Trust can play in addressing disadvantage is to build confidence, self and collective expression and encourage big dreaming through role modelling, opportunity, excitement and exposure.



The Trust aims to be a leader and influencer in promoting arts, culture and heritage, visibly celebrating partnership and collective impact on communities and priorities through supporting positive mental health and ensuring everyone leaves with a spring in their step, regardless of the purpose for their visit, ensuring we are an all-encompassing and accessible place for all. The Trust seeks to promote interaction, where people walk through and chat to each other with experiences for whole communities to be part of.

Arts and culture is an experience that all gain from, regardless of age and background. The Trust reflect and celebrate diversity, showcase skills, provide opportunities, promote inclusion and interest. Not only does The Trust seek to reach out to be part of family life to those who visit our site, but also into schools and community groups to support our next generation, adding quality and value that is tangible and excites young people and children.



The Trust has a responsibility to engage children and young people in mentoring, coaching, education and volunteering – to become knowing adults, with aspirations, and feeling ownership to change the view of the world and themselves. Through exploiting our setting and lifting every day curriculum into a whole new world to explore the unfamiliar and increase positive life chances, we hope to inspire the next generation. We have a responsibility to our elderly to give them a voice in their community, to share their stories and never stop learning and belonging, revisiting memories and making new ones.

## *Community and Education Provision 2020/21*

The beauty of The Alwick Garden has a positive impact on a person's wellbeing however this is further enhanced by the community programmes which deliver targeted, varied and valuable provision to local communities. Each programme has a specific need to address, ensuring that all participants benefit as they wish, whilst forming solid support networks and friendships.





## FACT

The Alnwick Garden Trust supports over 500 Elderberries.

# Elderberries

The Elderberries is the longest-running and most established programme at The Alnwick Garden. The programme works with people aged over 55 to combat isolation, provide stimulating and mind provoking activities, as well as increase physical exercise and promote mental wellbeing. The Trust ensures that every activity and group follow at least one of the NHS 5 Steps to Wellbeing, which are:

- ★ Connect with other people
- ★ Be physically active
- ★ Learn new skills
- ★ Give to others
- ★ Mindfulness

The Trust supports over **500** Elderberries through its numerous activities and facilities. These include the Free Drop in Centre, 'Blooming Well' and 'Singing for the Brain' – specifically for those with early onset dementia and carers, 'Health and Self' and 'Tea and Tech'. Our Roots and Shoots Garden also plays host to our Gentlemen's Garden initiative where a group of gentlemen meet weekly tending to their own dedicated plots.

With the majority of Elderberries being in the vulnerable category, face to face contact was impossible so our team had to consider other ways to provide support through the year. Much of this was done through keeping in contact with phone calls and other electronic communication.

Research from Age UK has shown that there has been an overall decrease in daily activity, an increased sense of isolation along with a loss of connection within this age group as people have been encouraged to stay at home. During the pandemic the team used their available work time to have greatest impact where possible while adhering carefully to the government guidance.

In the short September window when restrictions were eased, we were able to invite beneficiaries of our Gentlemen's Garden to attend over two weeks in small groups to work on their plots and gather their harvest. This enabled the Gentlemen to connect with each other and to have the reassurance that their garden plots were still being well looked after in their absence and offer an opportunity to collect some of their harvest to eat well at home.



During this time the Community and Education team had the opportunity to work with our Deputy Head Gardener to harvest the Roots and Shoots plots and distribute vegetable hampers to beneficiaries from The Elderberries Programme. We focussed on supporting some of our more vulnerable members, such as people living with dementia and their carers, and people that were shielding.

The team distributed **58** fresh vegetable hampers, including **15** which were offered to Leading Links for families experiencing food poverty. This also provided us with a great networking opportunity as their staff supported us with digging up the harvest. Five hampers were also donated to Alnwick Mutual Aid.

## Christmas

Christmas is usually an incredibly busy time in The Elderberries Calendar, inviting people in Northumberland over 55 to join in several different large events to celebrate, when they may not get an opportunity to do so due to their personal and environmental circumstances. We did not want 2020 to pass us by without offering some Christmas wishes to those very people who were experiencing more acute social isolation under the COVID restrictions.



The Elderberries team worked with a host of local businesses to develop and make Christmas hampers for **150** individuals all around Northumberland. We received referrals for the hampers from health and social care, neighbours and family, and third sector organisations that were aware of people in their community experiencing difficulties. The hampers included Christmas cards and messages from local school children, handmade Christmas decorations from The Alnwick Garden volunteers and staff, an activity booklet, and a signed photograph from The Duchess of Northumberland, as well as a selection of local produce and gifts.

This was a great success for all the community and local businesses under difficult circumstances and offered some comfort and optimism during the long winter at home.

Some of the feedback included:

“Thank you for the lovely gift it was a blessing to know someone was thinking of us at this time. A wonderful surprise such a special treasure chest of gifts, beautiful xxx”

“My days are long and dull at the moment you added a sparkle, thank you it was a lovely surprise to receive this lovely gift.”

“Appreciative tears were forming in my eyes while reading the children’s Christmas Card. This was my first hamper and a beauty at that. Thank you”

# Grow Into Work

Grow Into Work is an employment support programme part funded by The Mercers Company, to help people in North Northumberland to gain the skills, knowledge and confidence to secure sustainable employment. The six-week programme is a mix of work experience and classroom-based sessions where beneficiaries develop CV writing skills, application form completion and interview and presentation skills. Support continues once beneficiaries have completed the programme with telephone, face to face and email support. Support may continue until the beneficiary gains employment, and beyond if required.

Since its inception **80%** of participants of the Grow Into Work programme have moved into paid employment with **15%** moving into further education or additional training. In the 2020/21 year emphasis was placed on planning for the recruitment of the next group of participants when The Garden emerged from lockdown.

Outcomes: To increase:

- Confidence
- Reliability
- Communication skills
- Work ethic
- Teamwork skills
- Use of initiative
- Job searching skills

## Roots and Shoots Healthy Living Programme

Working in partnership with the NHS and funded by The Shears Foundation, the Roots and Shoots programme supports schools across Northumberland to tackle childhood obesity and promote healthy living in children and young people. The Trust works with **10** schools per year, each with approximately **20** children per season. Throughout the growing season, each school has their own plot where they prepare the soil, plant produce and harvest the vegetables. The practical sessions are coupled with classroom education around healthy eating, living well and the importance of exercise. The children can then take this learning home and help transform their own garden and prepare tasty meals with the produce they've grown.



Outcomes: To increase knowledge around healthy eating and lifestyles  
To embed learning and make positive changes as a result

With schools being unable to do daytrips, schools signed up for 2020 agreed to postpone their participation until the 2021 year. Fortunately, our Deputy Head Gardener planted the plots in preparation of the programme and tended to them himself through the season. This meant there was a bumper harvest of vegetables available to the Community and Education team to distribute to those in need.

# Young Gardeners

Young Gardeners is a horticultural programme specifically for children with learning differences and specific needs and their families. The programme offers an inclusive learning experience with support from The Trust team. Each family has their own plot for the growing season with each session resulting in a sense of great achievement through seeing their own produce grow.

Outcomes: Learning together as a family  
Increase knowledge around healthy eating  
Increase knowledge about looking after our environment

This year, due to the curtailment of the usual programme, we invited all the participating families to the Christmas Light Trail in December. This provided an end of year fun family event after what must have been a difficult year for the families.

## Drugs Education

The Alnwick Garden launched its Drugs Education programme in July 2019 to tackle the lack of drugs prevention support in Northumberland for children and young people. Provision consists of innovative and engaging workshops and programmes to teach the dangers of substance misuse and also build young people's self-esteem and resilience to give them the confidence to make informed and positive choices around friendship groups, lifestyle options and engaging in positive activities. The programme dovetails with the Poison Garden within The Alnwick Garden which encompasses fascinating insight into poisonous plants to educate people on the dangers that can be found in our own gardens.



The overall aim of the Drugs Education programme is to prevent young people and children from engaging in substance abuse and longer-term measurables include decrease in anti-social behaviour levels, decrease in arrests of young people linked to substance misuse and a decrease in young people accessing crisis services.

Close ties have been made with Northumberland County Council PHSE Lead and the NHS. Provision will be expanded through CPD delivery to teaching staff and Educators. A partnership has also been formed with Northumbria University in securing funding to make story boards and deliver further workshops on Chromatography and Drugs Analysis, which will be embedded within the programme.

In the 2020 year the team had to be creative on how to keep the Poison Garden open to visitors while remaining within the government's COVID rules. Usually our Poison Garden Guides would impart the information to visitors in small groups but with social distancing this was not possible. The team therefore turned to technology to solve the problem. The gates to the Poison Garden were opened to allow a steady stream of visitors to flow through the area. Innovative QR codes were printed on signs that opened soundbites of information when a smartphone was pointed at them. The Drugs Education message was included in the soundbites with over **73,000** visitors participating.

# Other Community Impacts

## COVID Testing Site

As the pandemic took hold in April 2020 The Garden was contacted by the regional COVID response team with a request to use the main car park as a testing site. This was agreed to without hesitation and was operational for the entire year. The site became the area's main testing location and was invaluable in providing a mechanism to understand infection rates and assist those who needed to be tested.

## Tulip Drop Off

In April, potted tulips grown in The Garden's nursery came into bloom. Cultivated to sell in our shop, it quickly became apparent that the shop would not be able to open and therefore the tulips were delivered to NHS staff and key workers in the Alnwick area. After delivering over **200** plants there were still over **140** remaining and these were delivered to care homes and to residents of Alnwick. It was a wonderful experience to see the positive impact of a small gesture.



## Christmas Light Trail – Community Night

Following the November lockdown we really wanted to do something to lift the spirits of the most vulnerable groups in the North East. We therefore allocated an evening of the Christmas Light Trail to local charities and community groups. These groups would usually struggle to attend such an event and we wished to provide some joy and positivity to end a difficult year.



# Economic Impact

Beyond the impact of these Community Programmes, The Alnwick Garden contributes significantly from an economic and social perspective to the wider region. Based on research conducted independently, it is estimated that The Garden has contributed over **£315 million** to the local economy over the last 20 years, **40%** of which is spent with local suppliers. Annually there are **123** full-time equivalent employees, whilst The Trust's economic activity has supported **2,900** jobs regionally since opening.



This year our economic impact took on an even greater significance due to the slowdown of national economic activity due to the lockdown. We saw the opportunity to create an uplifting festive season offer that would drive visitors to the Alnwick area when it was desperately needed. The Cultural Recovery Fund provided £90k that allowed us to extend the run of the Christmas Light Trail and extend the illuminations through to the Alnwick Town Centre which supported local retailers. A staggering **32,000** tickets were sold with visitors providing outstanding reviews.

We also took the decision to support local street food vendors who had been hit particularly hard by the lockdowns. Three companies were allowed to open within The Garden providing them with the opportunity to generate cash flow at a crucial time. The three traders generated over £90k in turnover through the Light Trail run. Here is some of their feedback:

### **Street Food Northeast**

“The Alnwick Garden and the people who work there have had a massive impact on my business and with their help and support we have gone from a business that was left closed and devastated due to the pandemic wiping out the entire events industry to a company that is now thriving (even though our events are still closed). Because of our contract at The Alnwick Garden, we have been able to employ **11** people from the Alnwick area to work in our ice cream and retail operations at The Garden. Personally, I love being a part of The Alnwick Garden, it is such a positive place and has a unique culture, unlike any other that I have worked in.”

### **The Waffle Co**

“In a year where all events were cancelled for us, we were really worried about cash coming into the business. If it had not been for the Light Trail, 2021 would have been even more of a challenge, even though we didn't really have any idea how successful it was going to be! The Light Trail was a welcome distraction for us and the visitors to The Garden as many, many people were saying really positive things about it. From the business side it was a huge success for us bringing in a much needed cash injection, which we are truly grateful for!”

### **Redbox Bars – Pimm's Van**

“Getting back out there for the Christmas Light Trail was exactly what was needed, not only for our staff's morale but the customers as well. We had a lot of positive feedback from the customers during this time; they were all so happy to be out and doing something after almost a whole year of doing nothing. This event was the perfect for us to come back to 'semi-normal' life and have hospitality back open again.”



# THE ALNWICK GARDEN

The Alnwick Garden  
Gardeners Cottage  
Greenwell Road  
Alnwick  
Northumberland  
NE66 1HB

Tel: 01665 511350 | Email: [info@alnwickgarden.com](mailto:info@alnwickgarden.com)  
[www.alnwickgarden.com](http://www.alnwickgarden.com)  
Registered charity number: 1095435

*Thank You!*

Thank you to our funders and partners who have supported our provision.

**Cultural Recovery Fund – Through the Arts Council  
Job Retention Scheme  
Northumberland Cultural Fund  
The Mercers Company  
The Shears Foundation  
NHS  
Police Crime Commissioner**

Everyone who has donated through our sponsorship appeals.  
All those who have donated to drug awareness through our Poison  
Garden coffin.  
The Alnwick Garden Volunteers  
Visitors who have donated through the Gift Aid Scheme.

