

Beautiful Scotland : Non Judged Visit - Observations

Name of group: Carmunnock Community Gardening Group

Date of visit: July 2nd 2025

Name of volunteer assessor/mentor: John MacLennan

Introduction

The Carmunnock Gardening Group continue their excellent work within Glasgow's last village in which the areas they maintain include the grounds surrounding the historic parish church, the colour splashes at the Clason Hall, and, their highlight, the plantings around Low Green. The Gardening Group is one of many community groups within the village and it is interesting to hear how although each one is standalone there is a generic working together that cover all the criteria within the three pillars of Beautiful Scotland.

Pillar A – Community Participation

Perhaps the highlight of this group is the time for coffee/tea which refreshes the fifteen or so volunteers who have been busy weeding, scraping edges, cutting back vegetation when needed, and deheading. This refreshment time is a key part of the group as it gives a time to talk and listen. Although the core volunteers have lived in the village for numerous years, new folk are always being welcomed. Being a skilled gardener is not an essential requirement but knowledge plus expertise is openly shared - perhaps the word *inclusive* sums that up. By using a WhatsApp group, this ensures everyone is kept fully informed and involved, and this involvement includes telling everyone about social get togethers including lunches. They join the Clarkston and Busby Horticultural Society at the 'herti' monthly meetings plus coach trips such as to Scone Garden Fair.

The dovetailing of the local groups in their approaches has benefits. For example, several of the key members have involvement at the historic church which has strong links to the Scottish Covenanters, with the added benefit that the lack of grass maintenance by GCC in the graveyard can be highlighted via numerous channels! (but remembering to use different email accounts!)

Christmas is always a Carmunnock highlight, with the woody perennials at Low Green and at the village centre being dressed with baubles and lights, and the metal reindeers with festive lights being another excellent community contribution.

An annual plant sale is held, which provides some necessary funds to maintain the village halls, both of which require renovation. How many similar garden groups raise just short of £5,000 for donating to their community and not keeping it to increase their bank balances ?

As can be noted above, the Group is not exclusive or suffers from any superiority notions, and are happy working beside those at the Gala where they were in their element with a children's stall and tombola. The responsibility for grass maintenance and care of the tree canopies is with Glasgow City Council, but it was noted that with changes in staffing this level of care requires discussion within GCC & the Community.

Two major Carmunnock events need to be highlighted, with the first being the Annual Flower Show with a range of classes catering for all, while those within the group play a major role in the Glasgow Open Doors

showcasing the church, its grounds which they maintain, the Doo Well, and plantings at Low Green, Gallowhill and their planters which are extending into more corners within the village.

Pillar B – Environmental Responsibility

GCC service the litter bins, which are in good condition and not overflowing. The collection of larger quantities of green waste likewise is the Council's responsibility. But the method of hiding the composting bins around the village is innovative and I was not aware of them. How many other groups have their compost bins fully visible and eyesores, and could learn from the Carmunnock folk!?

There is an annual litter pick up, as part of Clean Up Scotland, although in 2025 not much was actually collected thus proving that the Group and their partners have helped to deliver a litter free village.

The links to the group based at Linn called W.I.L.D. Woodland Inspired Learning and Development (C.I.C) resulted in several members harvesting Salix spp at the Carmunnock Coppice and learning the skills of basket making. Developing this link will be very beneficial for the future, and would provide yet another community driven arm in Carmunnock.

As noted above, the heritage of the village is of vital importance with the various wells such as the Doo, and one at Low Green, and it is reckoned the village dates from pre-Christian origins but land ownership also with the Morays of Bothwell, the Earls of Douglas and of course the Marquesses and Dukes of Hamilton until 1700 when it passed to the Stuarts of Castlemilk. This link with Castlemilk continues in 2025, with the village hall being named accordingly and the parish now in union or linkage with Castlemilk.

Although part of the City, it is a rural village with avian life that mirrors that; however, while talking to residents about wild foxes, not the urban mutation, these are an issue, especially if you have fowl.

Beehives produce local honey and although a pseudo commercial apiarist has hives locally, it is the village hives that produce that extra quality honey!

Pillar C – Gardening Achievement

The Carmunnock Gardeners certainly are diligent in their approaches, and their village has numerous pockets of gardening excellence. One 'new' introduction for 2025 was that the group had purchased several large fibreglass planters which have a life span of over hundred years (*OK how many of the existing group will be gardening here in 2125?!).* They were obtained to replace wooden planters, the life span of which is less than ten years, and with these latter ones being supplied via GCC Community Payback, give places for instant colour. In the planters are a wide range of plants - hardy annuals, half-hardy annuals, herbs, dwarf shrubs and herbaceous perennials. Around the Clason Hall are beds with wildflowers, although it is suggested a better emphasis could be made to incorporate hardy annuals which are short in height such as Clarkia, Calendula, or Cosmos (*and those are just the Cs!*). Low Green perhaps is the plantsman's paradise, with a palette which includes evening primrose, Lynchis, poppies++, and a backdrop of Prunus, most of which are mature. The memorial tree to *John* is flourishing and fits into the space clearly. The issues at Gallow Hill still continue with soil erosion but, with trial and error, success will come.

Although the beds are in excellent condition, always think about adding green recycled waste, preferably obtained free of charge or discounted. By incorporating green waste/organic matter the water holding capacity plus drainage will improve as well as developing a medium which will retain nutrients.

Propagation, at home within members' greenhouses, is another feature. Clumps are split and offsets/divided portions are taken 'home' to repot, ensuring there is a range of interesting herbaceous perennials for plant sales or exchanges.

Involving the next generations takes place with regular visits to the nursery at the Castlemilk Hall to introduce the children to the fun of gardening and, associated with that, inviting Primary 1 children to plant bulbs at the Low Green (the holes were prepared beforehand!). The involvement of local children will continue, with ideas to involve P4 /5 pupils, and also around the Low Green were numerous small stones hand painted by the Brownies.

Areas of achievement

- a) Continuing with the excellent gardening which makes Carmunnock a colourful last village in Glasgow
- b) Being an inclusive group for all - meaning everyone is welcome even if they just want company or if they possess years of proven gardening skills
- c) Holding seasonal chit- chat meetings to discuss what the community wants and not just for a few self-interested people
- d) Numerous fundraising events, including the plant sale, cookery demonstration and supporting Carmunnock as the community sees fit
- e) Being a key part of the Flower Festival being held at Glasgow Open Doors' time, at which over 20 local organisations will have a display that advertises their group
- f) Being the 'go to' body for advice and ideas that fulfil the three pillars - these may be church related, community related, fundraising related, heritage related, schools related, and war memorial related. Certainly, those within Carmunnock Community Gardeners are a hands-on group!

Recommendations/suggestions

One reason why Carmunnock Gardeners became part of the Beautiful Scotland non-judged category was to consider the next steps for them and the wider community on Glasgow's south, especially with its proximity to Busby, East Kilbride , and Castlemilk. Time has moved on as well as potential avenues. One of the keys or even catalysts, has arrived via the Presbytery Action Plan which parish wise links Carmunnock with Castlemilk - something that is historic of course!

And so, a few suggestions to start with:

- a) Via this parish union/linkage, look at if there are common issues that can be addressed together using skills from both communities. These may include environment/ecological ones such as litter, dog fouling, sowing wildflower drifts, continuing to grow edibles, and encourage the sharing of skills from the Castlemilk Men's Shed
- b) Developing or continuing with a joint history, probably via the Heritage Society, and see what could be celebrated through plantings.

Now one or two associated with Carmunnock:

- c) Do we guess that the grass cutting issues are purely a temporary issue? Start dialogue via existing links in GCC but be willing to explore in more depth the reasons. The longer grass makes the village scruffy. If the avenues in the 'parks' department are inconclusive, consider approaching elected members!
- d) The specific issue of the long grass in the graveyard shows a level of disrespect by GCC. Try the avenues as above, but then try through Presbytery! Don't forget the rich heritage of the

Covenanters and consider using channels such as www.covenanter.org.uk/lanarkshire.html. The onus for this is with yourselves, as my involvement could be taken as a conflict of interest!

Next steps:

It is important that the success of what happens in Carmunnock continues to be told. Your previous successes were noted when you received the Certificate of Merit from the Royal Caledonian Horticultural Society.

- a) Increasing the overall profile and public awareness is perhaps the next step, although you may feel this has been successfully achieved. One way is a non-private Facebook page; one of the Carmunnock pages is private and so the wider story can't be told www.facebook.com/search/top?q=carmunnock%20facebook. Consider a gardening related public page which tells your story and what you get up to each week around Low Green, and perhaps add the occasional 'story' about favourite plants & how to propagate them.
 - b) I am not sure if progression into the judged Beautiful Scotland section is the next logical step or being part of It's Your Neighbourhood campaign - I think it is the latter – please do speak to Juliette at Kepe Scotland Beautiful.
 - c) As the work with schools and even with Tiny Tots & Nursery grows, consider the RHS School Gardening programme <https://www.rhs.org.uk/education-learning/school-gardening> and how you can be supportive. Likewise, consider a supportive element in developing Eco Schools initiative <https://www.keepsotlandbeautiful.org/eco-schools/>
 - d) With the input by group members into Carmunnock Church (linked with Castlemilk?), is a consideration of Eco Congregation Scotland another logical step to increase awareness with Eco issues: <https://www.ecocongregationscotland.org/> Also associated with this, and the historic church, you could maintain links with <https://www.scotlandschurchestrust.org.uk/church/carmunnock-parish-church/>
There are several graveyard/cemetery Friends who network, and so is that another avenue to open and follow? Maintain and increase the links related to Scottish Covenanters
 - e) The team within KSB are always available to discuss ideas or suggest contacts with other Friends groups who may be able to share ideas or concepts. That's all part of being within the KSB 'Climate and Nature Friendly Communities' Network as well as their 'Our Heritage Our Future' programme.
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