

Welcome to the first edition 2016

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Peas, Love and Bumblebees

The BUZZ

Issue 1

**The origins of L-CCiP
Events**

**Meet the Team – our
employees introduce
themselves**

**Honeycomb,
our new
social
enterprise**

**Cath Cairns'
Corner
Rethinking
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Croft News on
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Team member introduction

Although she thinks globally, Evie is very much a Leither, acting locally, as you'll see from her welcome message and the story of Leith Community Crops in Pots' origins, elsewhere in this newsletter.



Evie Murray

Dear Members, Friends and Supporters,

Welcome to what we hope will be the first of many issues of The Buzz, the newsletter of Leith Community Crops in Pots.

In this issue we try to give you an idea of our origins, our present activities and our possible future incarnations.

Our ethos, our values, our ideals. We are, above all, a community organisation.

More than facts and figures, however, I hope you will pick up a sense of our ethos, our values, our ideals. We are, above all, a community organisation, and we only exist as long as we continue to channel and support what you, the people of Leith, need and want, although we hope we can also inspire and inform. Apart from building community – helping people together take responsibility

for themselves, their environment and others – we are also an environmental organisation. These two elements are, for us, inseparable.

Our species evolved as hunter-gatherers, and we only have a thin veneer of a few thousand years of so-called 'civilisation' (and only about a century of fossil-fuel dependency and a couple of decades of computer addiction) on top of our essentially hunter-gatherer nature. This means that our mental and physical needs (and, arguably, spiritual ones too) cannot be met by sitting in isolation in front of computer screens, munching factory-farmed, supermarket-sold

fast-food. This lifestyle is unsustainable in every sense.

Rather than spend our time and energy railing against what is bad and wrong, however, we choose to promote positive alternatives. This is illustrated by our belief in the value of nature-play – the antidote to what some call 'Nature Deficit Disorder'. In essence, children love and need unstructured and unsupervised play in natural environments, and this is an element of what we provide that we want to develop. (This is also the best way, apparently, to get future generations to care about the environment – not by dry lectures seated in classrooms.)

Finally, as our motto says, 'we are for a happy, healthy, leafy Leith', but we are happy to cross-pollinate with organisations and individuals that share our aims and values, be they in Edinburgh, elsewhere in Scotland, or on the other side of the planet. We are therefore releasing our first newsletter into the wild not just to inform and inspire our members and supporters, but in this latter hope too. We are one among many organisations the world over working along similar

lines. Just as individual honeybees can do little on their own, but as part of a hive can fertilise tonnes of fruit, and make litres of honey, as part of a growing international movement we can (and must) change the world.

"Let's get buzzing! Let's get planting!" Evie

Survey

Many thanks to those who completed our online survey relating to food and food waste. The results have now been analysed and we're delighted by how environmentally responsible our respondents were. Please have a look at the results and see how you compare to your fellow Leithers: http://tiny.cc/global_citizens1. Note that we'll be asking all respondents to complete another version of the survey later in the year.

3.1MB PDF:



Tom



For me, horticulture is about so much more than just the production of food and plants. Above all, it is about wellbeing – of individuals, communities and our surroundings. Wellbeing is about many things; it is about outdoor activity (or even just being outdoors); about being aware of the seasons and the wildlife it brings our way; reclaiming, using and protecting open spaces; a chance to put passions and principles into something tangible. It's about a thousand other things too, but there isn't space to list them here.

And this is why it's such a genuine privilege to be asked to join the Crops In Pots team. I can see how all the people involved have already made a significant difference in Leith and how, with the contagious enthusiasm that drives the project, so much more is possible.

Eric

Eric, our administration officer, was born in Edinburgh, but grew up in



world, and ensure L-CCiP's continued existence. Perhaps it will also give me some job security!"

Elly

Elly has most recently worked for Fife Diet, developing and building two community gardens and hosting events, workshops and children's gardening clubs. She also produced reports and created publications and in the last year coordinated the pilot of the food co-op project. She has a degree in Social



Anthropology from Glasgow University and has previously worked on an organic farm in Sussex, as a board member for the North Glasgow Community Food Initiative and lived for four years at the environmental education charity Monimail Tower Project in Fife. She is a director of Reforestation a community woodland initiative in the Lothians.

"Working for L-CCiP is great because it's a job in which my conscience is at ease, and it's far more varied and challenging than the job title might suggest. One day I might be designing a rabbit-proof fence or building a raised bed, the next I can be drafting a speech or doing carbon calculations for a funding application. I am particularly excited about the prospects for L-CCiP spawning a social enterprise, which should give us more freedom to help build a better

I have been inspired by inclusive and creative approaches to learning and have developed my own approach, activities, workshops and courses to share skills and build confidence in growing food and connecting with nature. I love the way growing food brings out the best in children; both their amazing instincts to nurture and also their wildness, enthusiasm and joy in running around outside! Crops in Pots combines all the elements of people, land, nature and food growing which builds towards a sustainable and a hopeful future, I'm really excited to be a part of it.

The Croft





The Founding Story for Crops in Pots

It all started in a second-floor flat in Leith. The occupants were an adult couple, two teenagers, a two-month-old baby boy and a two-year-old girl. The mother of the youngsters had just been made redundant. No garden outside, just a bare, concrete yard. Two more children – boys aged two and five – with a traumatised background had been abandoned in to her care.

The woman was Evie Murray, and these circumstances were what inspired her to take actions that were to lead to the birth of Leith Community Crops in Pots.

Evie's first decision was whether to put her new charges into the

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care system or try to look after them herself. Her background helped her decide. The job which she lost in the well known 2008 economic crisis was that of a drug addiction counsellor. She had grown up in Leith, and understood the environment and

the people. And she was an experienced parent: she felt qualified for the challenge, confident she could she could turn things around for the wee lads.

The old woman who lived in a shoe

Living in a shoe...

Evie says: "Loads of kids around me ended up on heroin. I ended up working with some of the people I'd grown up with: they became my clients. I decided I could help these foster children too, although I only had a wee house. With four children and two teenagers to house and look after, I was the (not so old) woman who lived in a shoe!"

"Well, perhaps not entirely like the woman who lived in a shoe..."

"Unlike her, I knew what I should do."

It was important to get all these kids outdoors and eating better food, sleeping better, etc. So began Crops in Pots. We embarked on a mission together back then to improve their lives, to bring health back to their world. My back garden

became a therapeutic space. Once empty, grey, dull and lifeless, it was soon full of children plants and wildlife. We achieved much for those kids, who had had such a difficult start. One of the boys calmed down so much he was able to concentrate enough to learn to read. Teaching him this had previously been something the school had found difficult".

A question of provision

There was another thing percolating in the background – my annoyance with

"why so much deprivation and inequality remained a part of Leith."

the food system was a real concern for me. My family had expanded. So had my recycling. So had the money I was

spending on food, and the amount of food wasted too. I was frustrated at how much it was costing, knowing fine well it wasn't good quality either – and that pesticides were used to grow the food".

Final straws...

The final straw coincided with the bee crisis hitting the headlines. The food system was not only extracting the wealth out of the community and dishing out poor nutrition, it was also destroying the nature on which it depended. By then I had shopped in the local supermarket (part of a huge chain) for years. The same people had worked there and served me for all this time. Despite its familiarity, having four children to shepherd around the place made it hard work! One day, feeling harassed, but relieved to be over the worst of the shopping ordeal (or so I thought), I attempted to pay my bill.

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I stuck my card in the slot and keyed in my number, but it didn't work and I didn't notice. I left the shop".

“Thirty seconds from the door, I heard shouts and running feet. Three security officials were running after me. They pulled me up, as if I had stolen the goods. The children were shaken by this little drama, and I berated the men, pointing out how long they had known me as a trusted costumer. I went back and paid with the same card (obviously, I'd made a typo)".

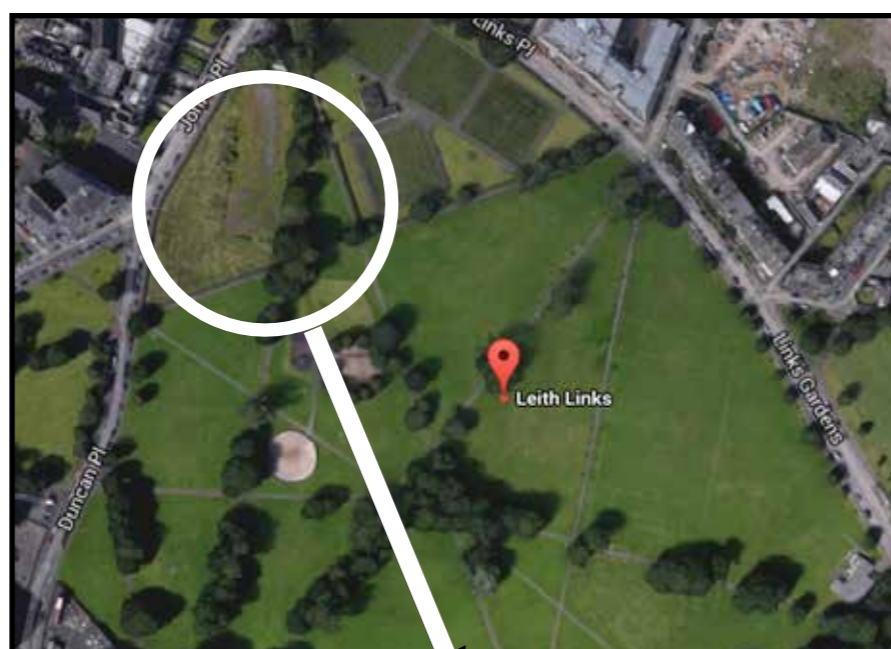
“The faceless unfriendly corporation was not where I wanted to shop for food. The food they were selling wasn't good enough for me and the kids – polluting the environment, damaging wildlife, killing bees... poor quality food, extracting wealth, and their business model was empty, with no community and no heart... (Well, OK. I still pick up the odd item now and then – mainly organic beer!)".

“time for change..."

“Despite its fluffy, flowery name, Crops in Pots got really serious; as well as being about traumatised children having a healthy life experience

it also came to be about reclaiming food sovereignty reconnecting people to land, and their cultural heritage. The direction of travel became very obvious, it is about creating a healthier, friendlier community, protecting environment and joining in on Scotland's local food revolution".

Expansion and an



award

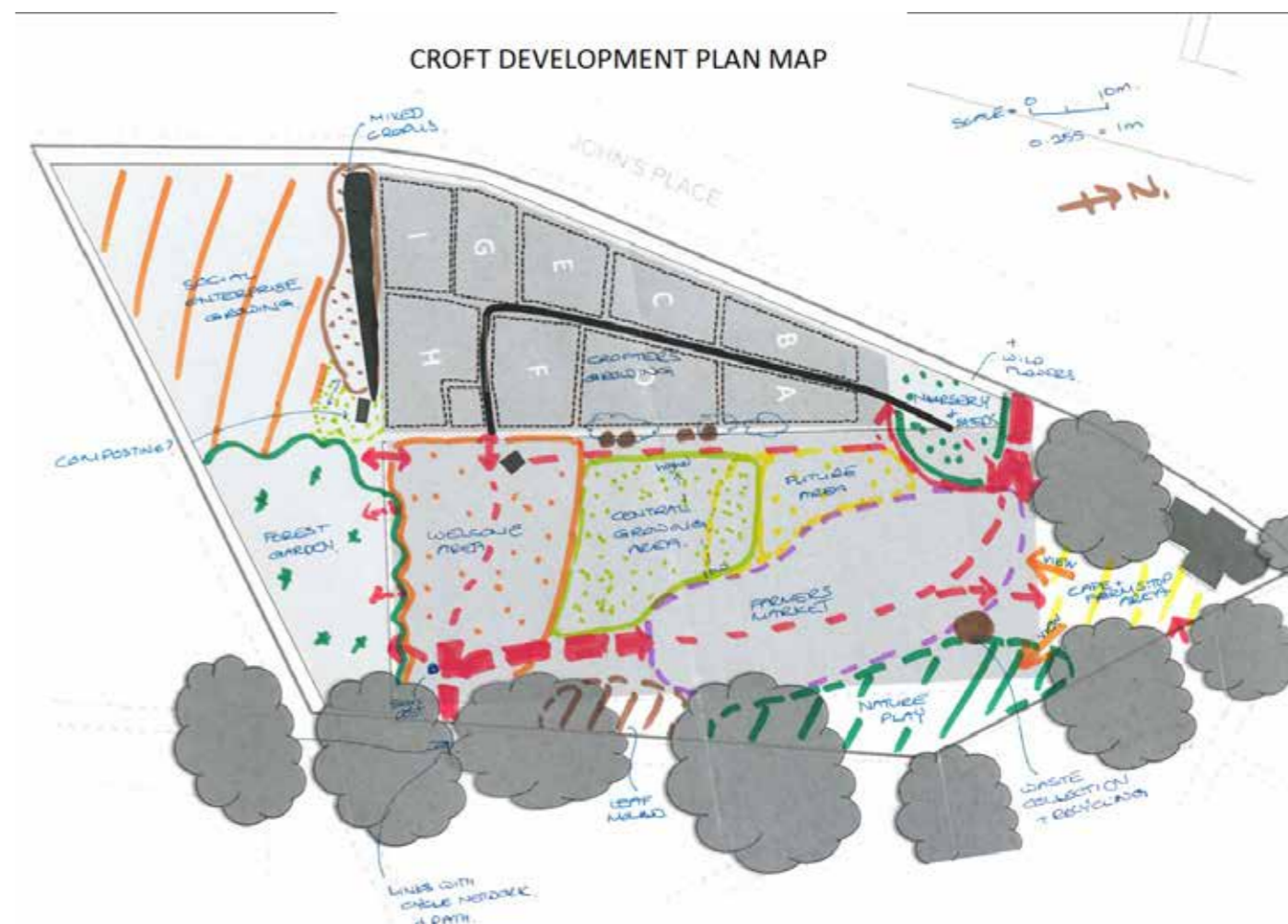
The project expanded from Evie's backyard (shared with Dr Bell's Family Centre) to the neighbouring Stanwell Nursery, and then to Leith Primary, with a few guerrilla-gardening

forays on the side. L-CCiP became a registered charity (a Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation or SCIO) and won major funding from the Climate Challenge Fund (CCF), employing a community engagement office, "Julie (recently replaced by Tom)" and an administration officer, Eric. Evie was given an Inspiring Volunteer Achievement Award by

Edinburgh Council, and we were appointed to manage what is now called Leith **Community Croft** on what we have been led to believe is 'common good' land – part of Leith Links Park – with and for the people of Leith.



**Climate
Challenge
Fund**



The future

We have now been awarded our second major slice of money by the CCF, and have also been successful in several small funding bids. "We now have two community education officers, Elly and Tom". And are setting up a social enterprise (provisionally called Honeycomb) to give us long-term financial security (our CCF funding may come to an end at the end of the 2015-16 financial year) and independence. This will be based in the building on Leith Community Croft and also use some of the land there.

You can read more about the Honeycomb project elsewhere in this newsletter, and also find out what Elly and Julie are doing!

Wordpress website.

Honeycomb, our new social enterprise

new venture, a social enterprise provisionally called Honeycomb!

There will be a Wordpress website (about what Elly and Julie are doing). I can take Julie's piece from the

It's early days yet, but we feel confident enough now to announce the forthcoming birth of our



Why we need a social enterprise

Leith Community Crops has grown at a phenomenal pace in the couple of years since its foundation in Evie's back yard. Most of this growth has been financed by the Scottish Government through the

Climate Challenge Fund administered by Keep Scotland Beautiful, to whom we are extremely grateful. We have also had smaller pots of money from other sources, such as the Schiehallion Fund and Awards for All.

As necessary and welcome as this money has been, it has been given to us for specific tasks and there is no guarantee that we can continue to receive it. Because we have exciting ideas that do not necessarily fit the requirements of particular funders, and we want to continue our work in schools indefinitely, we decided to set up a social enterprise to fund us and to

“carry out good works in its own right.”

(A social enterprise is a business that must work for the common good, and its profits and assets cannot be diverted for private gain.)

Why 'Honeycomb'?

Why did we decide to call our social enterprise 'Honeycomb'? Using Facebook, we asked our members and supporters to suggest names, and then we put the most popular ones to a vote. Honeycomb came out on top, and we like it because of its many positive connotations. We like bees – we hope to make all our growing spaces friendly places for pollinating insects. Furthermore, a honeycomb is the heart of a beehive, a store of treasure amassed through the coordinated efforts of thousands, and we want Honeycomb to be at the heart of our community: a concentration of healthy and environmentally sound food, good experiences, good company and good ideas,

“distilled from and for the environment and people of Leith.”

Lastly, some of our Crofters have actually constructed hexagon-shaped beds, this shape being an efficient way of apportioning a resource. Seen from above, these look like – you guessed it – a honeycomb!

What will Honeycomb do?

“Our first project may be a farmers' and arts-and-crafts market”, with an emphasis on local organic food. We envisage running this on Wednesdays, thus avoiding competition with other Edinburgh markets, and this should give us an income stream to establish other wings of our social enterprise.

Shop, café, outdoor play area...

A 'farm' shop might follow – to sell products made from plants grown on a special social enterprise section of the Croft (ready-to-cook mixes of plants and herbs, plant-based cosmetics, grow-your-own-salad hanging basket kits, etc.) and other local products. We would also like to offer space to be used as distribution hub for local organic vegetable growers, so that people who live in local tenements can sign up to their box schemes. Then we envisage a café, with an outdoor seating area. These projects depend on us clearing various legal hurdles, and refurbishing and altering the building, but we believe we can do it.

Once the building is smartened up it could be used as a meeting place by community groups, for information exchange, for training events, etc. Why not have, in addition, a herbal medicine outlet, using plants grown on the Croft? We also intend to have a nature-play area, which could potentially

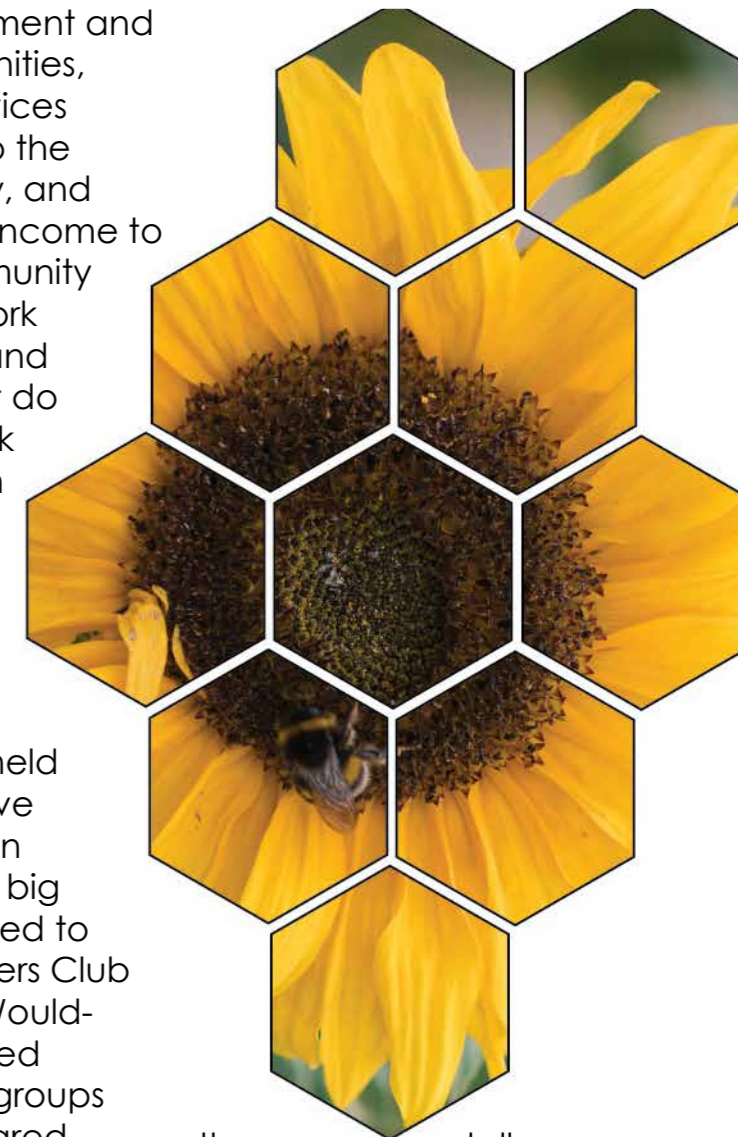
be used for therapy and research, as well as offering simple fun for local kids.

In these ways, Honeycomb could provide employment and training opportunities, offer various services and amenities to the local community, and generate some income to fund Leith Community Crops in Pots' work in Leith schools and elsewhere. What do you think? Check out coft news on Facebook.

Shared visions

In February we held a very productive Croft consultation event in a lovely big room kindly loaned to us by Leith Dockers Club (huge thanks!) Would-be Crofters formed themselves into groups according to shared visions of what and how they wanted to grow, and each group was then allocated an area of the Croft to manage

and subdivide as they saw fit. These areas are now in various stages of cultivation and constitute an interesting patchwork of shapes, techniques and plant varieties. Rather



than tell you here what people are doing in each area, we invite all readers to visit the Croft and see for

themselves, and to read Cath Cairns' article elsewhere in this newsletter about what some Crofters are into: hügelkultur!

As Crofters will know, there is an outdoor tap and reels of hose, to make your watering easier, and we demolished the prefabricated building to make way for what we hope will be an outdoor seating area for a social enterprise café – see the 'Honeycomb' article for more on our social enterprise aspirations.

Want to take part?

With more visible on the Croft, interest in the project continues to grow and we are constantly approached by people wanting to join. Alas, the land has been allocated for now, so we cannot guarantee immediate places in the group areas. There are other options, however. Firstly, by

all means visit the Croft and chat to Crofters. They may be happy if you offer to lend a hand.

Secondly, we are hoping to develop the south-western portion of the Croft for our social enterprise – growing herbs and food for our café, for the production of cosmetics, etc. There may be work for you to do there or

elsewhere – ask a representative of Leith Community Crops in Pots.

Thirdly, let us know what your particular interests and skills are – perhaps we shall find you another task altogether! Lastly, if we see that Crofters are not

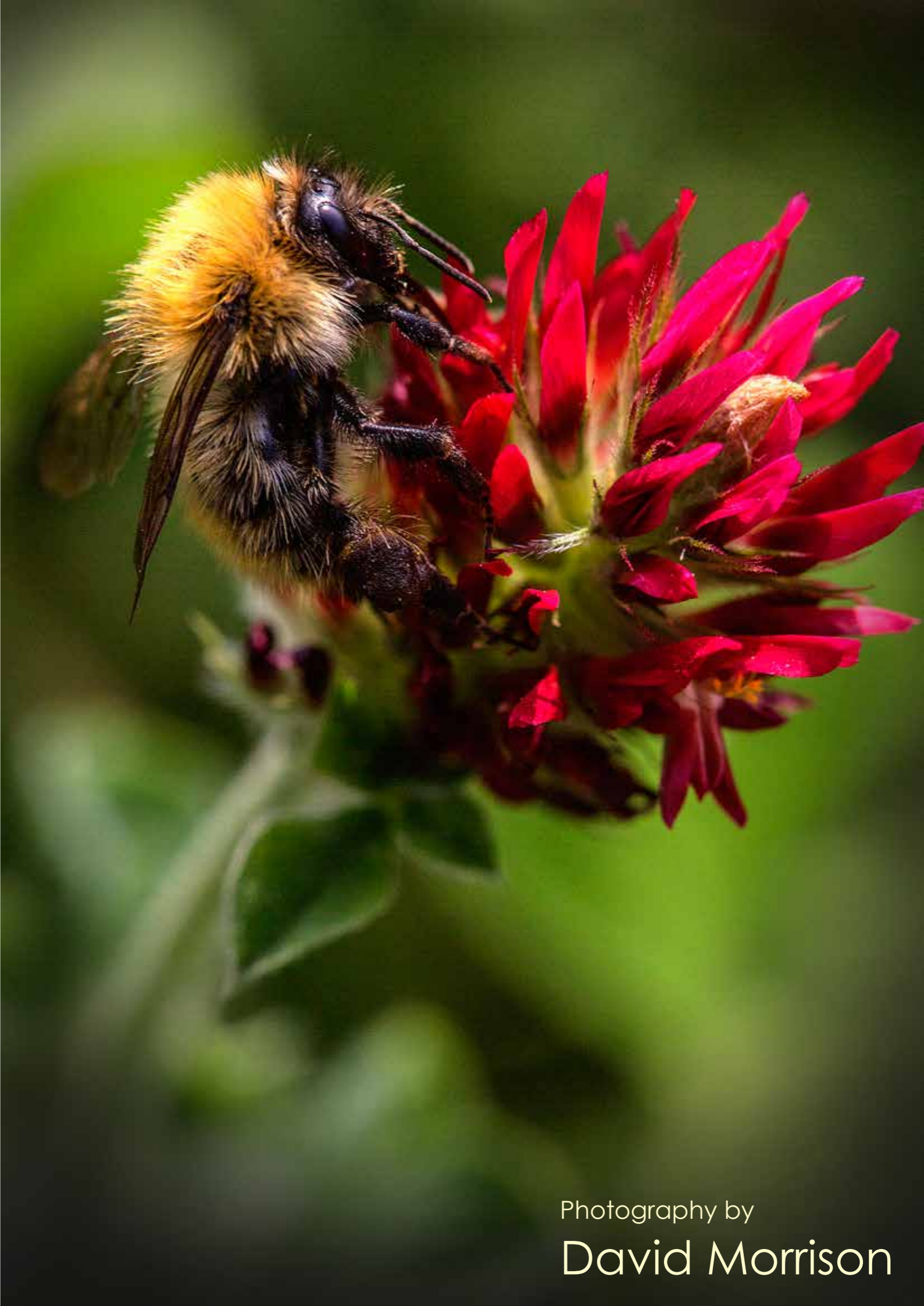
turning up and their plots are lying uncultivated then we shall reallocate these areas, so there is chance that you may get a space with one of the groups at some point. Please email lssy, our new communication assistant, at croftcommons@gmail.com to be added to our mailing list, learn about the new Croft Commons Group, etc.

A weighty matter

Finally, a weighty matter... As you may know, most of Leith



Community Crops in Pots' funding comes from the Climate Challenge Fund, and so we are especially keen to measure what we are doing to reduce greenhouse gas production. Last year we grew 229 kg of food on the Croft. We have harvested well over twice that this year! Because food on the Croft is grown without chemical fertilisers and is taken directly from the Croft to people's homes by foot or bike it has a much lower impact on climate change than the food bought from supermarkets, which it replaces. For this reason, we ask you to weigh whatever you harvest. Using the scales or spring balance in the weighing desk on the Croft.



Photography by
David Morrison



Are you 'compost' mentis?

Similarly, we would be grateful if you would weigh what material you bring to compost on the site. By the time you read this we should have a new super-duper composting system up and running. Landfilled waste has a large climate change impact compared to that which is composted, and it doesn't fertilise plants either. Please remember to bring your food and garden waste to our Croft compost bins, and help us do our bit for climate change!

School Reports

Julie Brown, our former Community Education Officer responsible for Leith Pri-

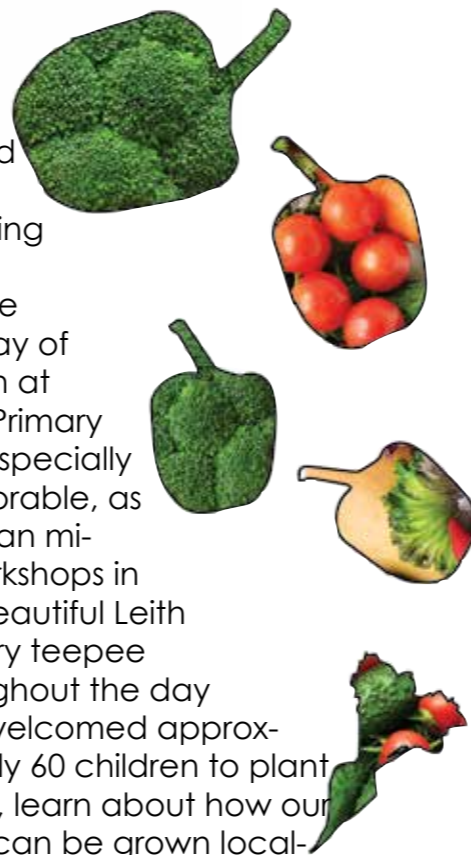
mary School, Stanwell Nursery and Dr Bell's Yard, got off to a good start this year, with many new raised beds constructed with the help of kind volunteers. Her 'Junior Carboneers' enjoyed getting their hands dirty as they learnt where food comes from and how it relates to the environment.

Building work at Leith Primary encroached on the playground and threatened the vegetable-growing, but hard work saw the old raised beds moved out of harm's way, new ones constructed, and them and the walled garden filled with compost. The beds yielded delicious veg, not least some super-sweet and crunchy kale, packed full of vitamins! A range of fruit was also established in all the growing spaces.

Julie's songs and workshops proved a big hit with the children, if the letters she re-

ceived are anything to go by. The last day of March at Leith Primary was especially memorable, as Julie ran mini-workshops in the beautiful Leith Primary teepee throughout the day and welcomed approximately 60 children to plant seeds, learn about how our food can be grown locally, and sing what is rapidly becoming our famous 'seed song'!

Visit: <http://wordpress.carboneers.com> to learn more about Julie's work. We wish Tom well in taking over the (conducting!) baton.



Hermitage Park and St Mary's RC primary schools and Leith Academy

Elly Kinross joined us this spring as Community Education Officer responsible for Hermitage Park and St Mary's RC primary schools and Leith Academy. Her after-school garden club at St Mary's quickly proved a hit and she also takes children out during school time too. She is working with the school to improve the infrastructure which will hopefully lead to a gate from the school into the schools allotment plot and a new greenhouse for the garden.

At Hermitage Park she has worked with the P2 and 3 classes, growing food and also planting out a rainbow bee garden to provide food for pollinating insects. She is now working with the school to improve the playground and to build more space for growing food.

At Leith Academy during the Autumn Term Elly ran sessions on local food, seasonal cooking and sustainable food production with the S3 Food Technology class. She is now working on a design for an edible forest garden at the school which will be planted out with pupils from the school in the new year.

Events, Past and Future

Waggle Dance: pointing the way to sustainable local food – for us and the bees

Our 'Waggle Dance' on Saturday 6 June was great fun, despite the weather forcing us indoors for all but the seed-bomb-throwing (remember those winds?). The two main purposes of the event were to point the way towards sustainable local food and to highlight the importance of pollinating insects. You can view a video of the event here: <http://tiny.cc/waggledance>. Thanks

very much to St James Scottish Episcopal Church for accommodating us at short notice, and thanks to all the participants and to the attendees listed at the end of the video.



Leith Lunches

Our Leith Lunches events, run by our Community Education Officer Elly Kinross, have proved very popular. While preparing and sharing a meal, participants discuss how to move towards sustainable family food choices. The free workshop covers food waste, shopping for sustainable food, cooking from scratch, composting and growing your own food. The next dates for Leith Lunches are 10.30 'til 1.30 on the 27th of January, 5pm 'til 8pm on February the 11th and 10.30 'til 1.30 on the 24th of February. Children are welcome.

To sign up for further lunches, or find out more, please contact Elly on elly@crop-sinpots.org or 0131 6038827. Also see the Leith Lunches section on our website (<http://cropsinpots.org>) for the latest dates.



Harvest Festival

Our Harvest Festival on 24 October at St James Scottish Episcopal Church was a joint event, run together with the latter and the Himalayan Centre for Arts and Culture. It was preceded by harvest stories in our new bell tent, told by Alison Galbraith of the Scottish Storytelling Centre. Highlights included a fascinating talk on crofting, and Himalayan dance and food fermentation workshops, as well as seed-harvesting and arts and crafts for the kids. See a video here: <http://tiny.cc/harvestfest2015>.



PERMACULTURE

Catherine Cairns

Rethinking Gardening

The seasons turn and the time will soon come again for our spring chores in the garden. Life will be stirring in the soil and it's every gardener's duty to tame the wildness and make it ready for their orderly plans and rows of seeds. But what if you knew that it didn't have to work this way? There's a new style of gardening that looks at the wilderness differently, that recognises the efficiency and simplicity of systems that have been perfecting themselves for aeons. It's called permaculture, and it could potentially be the key we all need to unlock the potential of our planet's naturally occurring abundance.



Leith community crofters

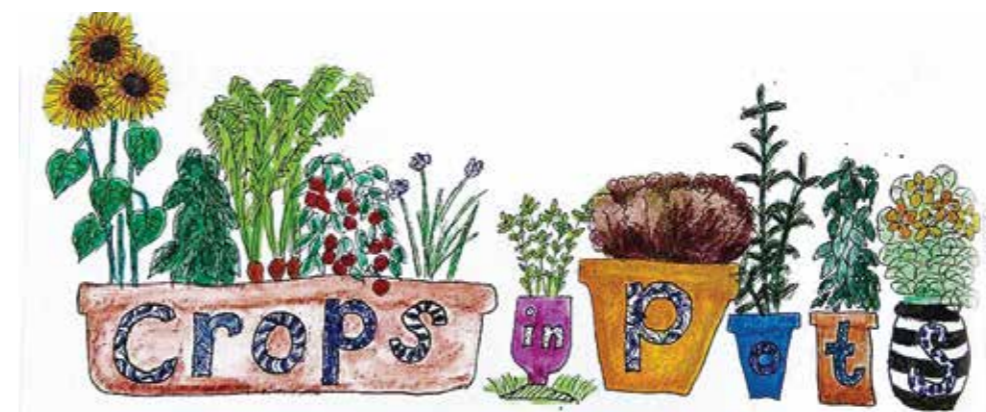


It's no secret that we are quickly approaching the age of scarcity, that soon we will be entering into a time when all resources will be limited and there won't be enough food to go around. Except that it's

not true, the great earth can provide for us all, if we begin to see and follow the systems it has in place, and work within these patterns to our mutual benefit.

The soil is dying, this much

is true, but it's not dead yet. Methods of agriculture from the post industrial age have pushed it to the very limit of its life, and has forced growers of all kinds to think that it's necessary to add things to the soil that



Modern knowledge

were once there but are now gone. This has led to a mindset of scarcity, led by the notion that nature is flawed and has to be improved on. This is also not true. There are new ways to work the land, that don't degrade the soil and can in fact bring it back

have learned that turning over the soil and exposing it to light, a common act in every garden and farm, actually causes great harm to this life in the soil, as the UV radiation from the sun kills the fragile microbes and fungi that are needed to sustain it.

plants that we grow there.

The organisms that exist in soil are designed to turn garden waste, all the unwanted leaves, twigs and wood, back into food for us all. They even actively move nutrients around so that



they reach the barren areas. Through a bed such as a hügelkultur a natural woodland system is replicated so that all these microorganisms have a place and can fulfil their function, supporting each other and providing abundance for the gardener.

It is a paradigm shift that is beginning to take hold in all different corners of the world. Through



Leith community crofters

to life. Modern knowledge has taught us that the soil isn't just a substance to support plants but that it's alive in its own right, with every tiny living thing playing an important role in keeping it healthy. We

to thrive. But luckily for us all this food is easily in reach of every gardener who wishes to do so. In permaculture there is no such thing as garden waste, and it's the very things that

many gardeners choose to throw away or often burn for convenience that can provide the soil with everything that it needs to sustain itself and all the



Leith community crofters

understanding what plants like to be neighbours – companion planting – one creates a plant community. Disease is reduced as this variety prevents it spreading. Symbiotic relationships form that share nutrients and inhibit unwanted plant growth.

see how they progress as the seasons turn. Year on year they should continue to provide abundance without the need for any added fertiliser, simply from the original ingredients added and through being a home for all those beneficial organisms. But there is scope for many other permaculture experiments



Diagram of Hugelkultur

Together they form a healthy system that doesn't erode or degrade the soil and encourages the unseen life within it.

on the Croft and beyond, and anything using the principles I have mentioned before can only benefit the soil and in turn the world as a whole.

There are many different styles of permaculture, with a hugelkultur being just one example. But they all follow along the same principles, working with the land, the plants and all the microorganisms rather than against them. There are currently two hugelkultur beds in the Community Croft, both at different stages and with different plants, and I am very excited to



The author hard at work. Cathreine Cairns

A little about 'Hügelkultur'

Hügelkultur is German word meaning mound culture or hill culture. It was practised in German and Eastern European culture for hundreds of years, before being further developed by **Sepp Holzer**, an Austrian permaculture expert. In addition,



recent permaculture voices such as Paul Wheaton and Geoff

Lawton advocate strongly for Hügelkultur beds as a perfect permaculture design.

Hügelkultur replicates the natural process of decomposition that occurs on forest floors. Trees that fall in a forest often become nurse logs, decaying and providing ecological facilitation to seedlings. As the wood decays, its porosity increases, allowing it to store water like a sponge. The water is slowly released back into the environment, benefiting nearby plants.

Mounded hügelkultur beds are ideal for areas where the underlying soil is of poor quality or compacted. They tend to be easier to maintain due to their relative height above the ground. The beds are usually about 3 feet (0.91 m) by 6 feet (1.8 m) in area and about 3 feet (0.91 m) high. (From Wikipedia)

Economic Growth Ecosystem services?

Opinion piece: Where was the environment?

R. Eric Swanepoel, our administration officer, lets off some steam...



As I write this, the dust has not yet settled after the Labour leadership contest. To the extent that the media mentioned policies (as opposed to Corbyn's dress sense or singing proclivities) it was disappointing that the contenders' views on the environment were not mentioned, as far as I know. Similarly, during the general election it seems that this fundamental issue was completely neglected.

Economic growth was apparently one point on which all the major parties and the media agreed – that it is unambiguously a good thing and so must be promoted, the only question being how to do this. There is huge evidence, however, that economic growth, per se, does not necessarily lead to a better quality of life for most people. (Indeed, when it is coupled to widening inequality, quite the opposite.) Furthermore, economic growth (as measured by GDP) has long been correlated with increased

consumption of material goods and energy, and this increased consumption of goods and energy is related to the depletion of non-renewable resources and the destruction of the 'ecosystem services' on which we all depend.

Not apart but a part

To address this, there are those who argue for the marketisation – the trading, or buying and selling – of ecosystems and their 'services'. This is madness. The market has shown itself to be a

volatile and dangerous entity, focused on the short term and wide open to manipulation by the selfish and greedy. The very use of the term 'services' is arguably both a symptom and a cause (part of a vicious circle, then) of our alienation from nature and the environment. We may think that we are apart from nature, when really we are a part of it, and a mere intellectual understanding of 'ecosystem services' (full knowledge of which is impossible anyway) is not enough

Politicians rabbit on

to make a meaningful difference to how people (and corporations) behave. To put things bluntly, multinational corporations, legally obliged to seek short-term 'profit' for their shareholders, and governments, (subserviently doing these corporations' bidding and mindlessly chasing economic growth), constitute a cancer on planet earth.

Monoculture-deserts and profit-sucking supermarkets

Food is a major element in this cancer and this alienation, and therefore of the global environmental and wellbeing crisis in which we find ourselves. Industrial agriculture depends on very few people but vast quantities of agrochemicals, fossil fuels and, in some places, scarce water, and converts thousands of hectares of nature into monoculture-deserts with sterile and impoverished soils. More energy is used in growing this kind of food than is produced from it, and much of

what is grown, although edible by people, is then fed to animals for meat production – an extremely inefficient way of feeding people. Add to this the fact that between a third and a half of all the food produced is wasted – not least by profit-sucking supermarkets, which, by the way, destroy jobs rather than create them. (Walmart, Asda's parent company, destroys three jobs for every two it creates, according to Breaking the Set.)



Cure for global ills

It doesn't have to be this way. In fact, things absolutely have to change, so that food becomes a major part of the cure for global ills, rather than a cause. The production of

food must cease to be merely a massive industrial occupation, or a despised, low-status scrabble for existence (in the developing world, where the poor face massive competition for land and resources from the ruthless multinationals your pensions may be invested in). Neither should it be just a hobby for a few privileged middle-class people with spare money and time, and their own garden or allotment.

Shaky foundations in carbon-depleted soil

Growing food should be a part of all of our lives, at least at some point between cradle and grave, because it is both good for us and for the environment. No child should grow up not knowing

where food comes from. Indeed, no child should grow up without having eaten food that she or he has grown. No child should grow up without having plunged his hands into good, rich soil, full of wriggling earthworms. It's not smartphones or tablet computers which keep

us alive. Our edifice of superficially sophisticated technology is, if only we could see it, tottering on very shaky foundations in carbon-depleted soil.

Hideously misguided politicians and ecocidal, monocropping juggernauts

Politicians rabbit on about the importance of 'IT skills', of 'employability', of being educated for the 'jobs market' in an 'increasingly competitive world'. To emphasise and prioritise these things is hideously misguided short-termism, because no matter how adept little fingers are at 'swiping' tablet computers, they can do no 'coding', no 'serving the marketplace' on a devastated planet. Our society is incredibly fragile. We are a few days away from starvation and riots, should industrial agriculture, with its massive fossil-fuel dependency, its extended distribution systems and its increasingly narrow genetic base, break down and, with the climate change it contributes to, this is increasingly likely. The genetic base of our major food plants is, of course, getting narrower as traditional farmers,

custodians of the wide gene pool from which many modern crops were developed, are ridiculed and displaced by ecocidal, monocropping juggernauts. They are even trying to make it illegal to save seeds.



(Sorry, but that is far more important an issue than whether little Jenny is a whizz at Minecraft. And little Jenny should know it!)

Spin-off benefits and emotional connection

Furthermore (and perhaps most

importantly), just as with languages, arts and culture, the spin-off benefits of engagement with nature and gardening are enormous. It's not an either-or issue: if you want your children to do well academically – and be 'competitive in the jobs market'! – then they need to be happy, healthy and balanced. And, I would argue, for the sake of the environment on which we all depend, they need to develop a profound emotional connection with nature as children if they are to care about it as adults, and no amount of classroom lessons or wildlife documentaries can provide this. They need to climb trees, build dens, collect tadpoles and get their hands dirty. (You'll find more information on this on our website.)

Leith Community Crops in Pots exists for all these reasons. And it's probably safe to say that I speak for most of the Crops in Pots community when I state that we would love it if children could identify more invertebrates, plants and animals than company logos. We have arguably failed them, and the future of mankind, if they can't. With apologies to the Greens, it's high time that politicians started to talk about such

things – my 2016 Holyrood vote is yours to win!

Let me conclude by recommending a wonderful introduction to an alternative way of producing food, the BBC's 'Farm for the Future' documentary on YouTube. I think you'll enjoy it.

Want to get involved/support us?

There are various ways in which you can get involved. If you would like to volunteer for one of our projects or find out more about what we do :



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LCCIPinfo@gmail.com



<http://cropsinpots.org>



<https://www.facebook.com/LeithCommunityCropsInPots>



We would greatly appreciate donations too, not least to help us develop our social enterprise ideas. You can safely make an online donation with any debit or credit card by visiting. <http://tinyurl.com/support-LCCIP> We also accept cheques made out to Leith Community Crops in Pots. Our address is: Leith Community Crops in Pots.

Credits: www.rachelhein.com, David Morrison for photography and Inkyapple for page layout and some illustrations.



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