



# The Scottish Environmental Horticulture Manifesto:

Priorities for a future Scottish Government from the HTA

*Manifesto Tuathanachas-gàrraidh na h-Alba: Prìomhachasan airson Riaghaltas na h-Alba san àm ri teachd bho chomann-malairt Tuathanachais-ghàrraidh (HTA)*

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# What is Environmental Horticulture?

The Horticultural Trades Association (HTA) represents over 85 member businesses across 144 sites in Scotland, and around 1,400 businesses across the United Kingdom.

*“The environmental horticulture and landscaping industry encompasses a wide range of activities—including companies that cultivate ornamental plants, manufacturers of garden equipment, wholesalers and retailers such as garden centres, and specialists in landscape and arboriculture who maintain home gardens and expansive parks<sup>1</sup>.”*

We are the original green industry and the gardens, infrastructure, green spaces and plants that we grow, nurture and maintain, underpin the health and resilience of Scottish communities, the economy and the environment. In 2023, the environmental horticulture industry supported contributions of £2.6bn to GDP in Scotland (excl. garden tourism<sup>1</sup>) and supported 59,700 jobs. The sector has the potential to grow its GDP contributions to £5.1bn by 2030.

This document builds on work that the HTA has undertaken in collaboration with the Scottish Government to support the delivery of a wellbeing economy that maximises prosperity, resilience, and health, delivered through a thriving environmental horticulture sector.

**This sector generally encompasses the following specific activities:**



Supply of garden goods



Arboriculture



Landscape services



Garden tourism



Ornamental plant production



Wholesale of garden products and flowers



Retailing of garden products, plants and cut flowers

# Priority Areas for Action

*Raointean prìomhachais airson gnìomh*

## Protecting and Supporting Communities

*A' dìon agus a' cumail taic ri coimhearsnachdan*

We welcome the Scottish Government's recognition that environmental horticulture protects and supports communities through its economic, environmental, health and wellbeing contributions. Organisations such as Keep Scotland Beautiful and the numerous community-led voluntary 'Bloom Groups' are excellent examples of how local people working together can deliver both individual and collective wellbeing and improve their surrounding environment. The growth of the sector will help to make communities more resilient and maximise the delivery of cross departmental policy aims. This can be delivered if the Scottish Government:

- **Strengthen cross-departmental working by establishing a horticulture and green spaces group which regularly convenes industry, the third sector, representatives from environmental agencies, local authorities and key government officials to ensure that access to, and maintenance of, green spaces and infrastructure are considered in policymaking and delivery.** This could be delivered through an expanded version of the horticulture and vegetable roundtables and include relevant officials from Directorates, including Agriculture and Rural Economy; Business and Better Regulation; Education Reform; Environment and Forestry; Jobs and Wellbeing Economy; Lifelong Learning and Skills; Local Government and Housing; and Planning, Architecture and Regeneration. The effectiveness of this group would be bolstered by Ministerial attendance biannually on a rotating basis to maximise cross-departmental cut through. The group should explore the potential of establishing legal protection, along with maintenance standards requirements, for green spaces.
- **Ringfence funds for planting greenery and green spaces to protect against potential shortfalls or budget cuts in project delivery, ensuring that commitments to local sourcing are met.** Further, Scotland's National Adaptation Plan progress report recognises that “green spaces contribute to temperature regulation during hot weather, bring biodiversity benefits and can improve flood resilience.” We welcome the Scottish Government's ambition in the NPF4 to improve green infrastructure, but this must be supported with tangible action to secure and maintain funding.

*83% of Scottish adults agree that public green spaces are important to them and 90% say they make an area a pleasant place to live<sup>2</sup>.*

- **Continue to build on the work done to raise the profile of social therapeutic horticulture amongst policymakers, by launching a health and wellbeing campaign, using industry expertise, to drive interest in working in the sector and raise awareness of the value of therapeutic horticulture and green care interventions.** Funding for Social Therapeutic Horticulture services and facilities must be increased and protected to deliver long-term health and economic benefits. Trellis Scotland<sup>3</sup> estimate the economic benefits per person from reduced public service use as a result of attending a therapeutic garden project are £830–£31,520 (after 1 year) and £6450–£11,980 (after 10 years) (Pretty and Barton, 2020).

*85% of Scottish adults say green spaces are good for their mental health, and 77% agree that it is beneficial for their physical health<sup>2</sup>.*

## Creating the Conditions for Growth

*A' cruthachadh suidheachadh airson fàs*

98% of our Scottish members are SMEs, many of which are family-owned businesses, however rising costs are hampering their ability to invest and grow, and in some cases, simply survive. Many businesses report a 'never harder' or 'perfect storm' of costs which reduces their ability to invest, hire staff, and innovate. All cost reductions and efficiencies have been expended. The Scottish Government could take some medium-term actions to help alleviate cost pressures on SMEs in the sector. They should:

- **Deliver a business rates system that does not undermine competitiveness across the four nations.** Scottish businesses should not be paying higher business rates than those south of the border. This will help to position Scotland as a destination for bricks and mortar businesses to invest and encourage more Scottish registered businesses to expand and grow – something that should be encouraged. If the inequality in business rates persists, it will drive some companies south of the border, undermining Scottish competitiveness and economic growth potential.
- **Implement consistent kerbside collections across all Local Authorities in Scotland, similar to England's Simpler Recycling for households, which includes recyclable non-black plastic plant pots,** to ensure that garden centres are not facing additional costs and administration of disposing of household waste. This will free up funds that can be invested elsewhere in the business and support the delivery of the government's circular economy ambitions. This should be supported by collaborating with the sector to deliver a communications campaign to raise awareness of the recyclability of non-black plastic plant pots to maximise uptake from households.



## Driving Productivity, Employment and Investment

*A' cur air adhart tarbhachd, obraichean agus tasgadh*

Ensuring SMEs do not get left behind in the move to the increasing adoption of technology, AI and automation is vital to deliver sustainable growth and better jobs to communities across Scotland. Horticultural businesses, whilst prepared to invest, often can't raise the finance required to invest quickly enough, especially given the volatility of demand related to weather which makes businesses subject to short-term fluctuations in revenue. Access to financial support and grants to drive sustainability and productivity can be further improved if the Scottish Government:

- **Work with the sector to improve financial support for SMEs in environmental horticulture, focusing on water resilience, peat-free growing, energy efficiency, automation, and technology.** Work with Whitehall to create a central government funding pot to support productivity and sustainability, ensuring garden centre retailers—often excluded from existing horticultural grants—are explicitly included. Simplifying application processes, increasing lead times, improving communication about grant availability, and ensuring that the minimum investment (and land) requirements are manageable would increase grant uptake, improve competitiveness, and deliver environmental and economic returns in a short timeframe.
- **Ensure environmental horticulture is included in the Scottish Government's green jobs and sustainable skills definitions** so that the value of careers and opportunities in the sector are recognised and more widely accessible. Horticulturists can make a significant contribution to combating the dual impacts of climate change and biodiversity loss. However, Scottish horticulture businesses report being held back by a lack of qualified and experienced staff. Despite being the original green industry, environmental horticulture roles are not included in ONS 'green jobs' definitions. Government should continue to foster closer links between Scottish educational institutes, such as the SRUC and RBGE, and the environmental horticulture sector to ensure the next generation of horticulturists, whether entering or re-joining the workforce, know what green jobs are available, and how to get the right skills and qualifications to pursue them. The Scottish Skills Group could play a key role in this.
- **Introduce a Statutory Requirement to 'Grow Plants' into the curriculum at levels 1 and 2.** Engagement with horticulture can begin in childhood, providing health and wellbeing benefits for children and helping them build an understanding of science and the natural world. Government should also work with publicly owned tree nurseries within Forestry and Land Scotland to offer tree production apprenticeships.
- **Unlock barriers in the planning system and deliver consistency in the treatment of planning applications for environmental horticulture businesses who deliver green growth to address the "postcode lottery" effect between councils.** A more agile, responsive, system that allows sites to be retrofitted, particularly to make buildings more energy efficient would be welcomed. This includes reviewing the resourcing of planning officers, helping to reduce costs and delays in the system. This would result in greater efficiency, more sustainable premises, and more space to carry out business operations – resulting in better environmental and economic returns on investment.
- **Develop an action plan for ornamental and productive plant and tree production, working across the nations and across sectors to identify activities that will support UK-based plant production.** Activities to assess and consider include raw material supply, skills gaps, and grant support for non-forestry production. The Scottish Government could lead the way on tree nursery support, such as in scoping out the feasibility of establishing a GB Tree Procurement Unit, including modelling the demand for trees, and issuing multi-year contracts to nurseries to fulfil native tree planting, supported by government grants. A feasibility study should also be conducted to highlight which imported plants and trees could be grown in the UK.



1. The Economic Impact of Environmental Horticulture and Landscaping in the UK (Oxford Economics for the Environmental Horticulture Group, 2024)
2. Annual consumer Survey, 2024, Base: 339 Scottish adults aged 16+
3. Trellis Scotland, Cost-Benefits Analysis of Social & Therapeutic Horticulture November 2024 ([www.trellisscotland.org.uk/content/research](http://www.trellisscotland.org.uk/content/research))



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**Strong Roots report:** <https://hta.org.uk/strong-roots>

**Guide to help Scotland's environmental horticulture industry build resilience:** <https://adaptation.scot/take-action/a-guide-to-help-scotlands-environmental-horticulture-industry-build-resilience-in-their-businesses/>