

your *green.* business opportunity

Case Study **03** Oakwell Farm

The owners of Oakwell Farm re-examined their resources and realised that their land could be better used to make an increased profit. They created a children's nursery with extensive outdoor play areas, adopted sustainable technology and started to rent out an under-used field to a local allotment group. These steps have helped to maximise income and reduce operational costs.



Bringing change to life

Business Benefits

- Rental income from a field increased tenfold by allowing a local allotment group to work the land.
- 12 acres of accessible high quality greenspace gives the nursery a competitive marketing edge.
- Staff value greenspace, this reduces turnover and associated recruitment and training costs.

Wider Benefits

- Creating differing environments for the children to explore increases biodiversity value of the farm.
- Allotment group helps reduce food miles and strengthens local community bonds.
- Access to natural environments is profoundly important in the development of young children.

Awards

Eco-School Award , July 2011

Context

Oakwell Farm is located between Linlithgow and Philipstoun, West Lothian. Chris and Lesley Nock established a children's nursery in 2001 and gradually expanded this to meet demand. In 2009, they also responded to a request from a local group to rent out a field for allotments.

For many years, spanning three generations of the family, the farm operated a moderate sized dairy farm and produced some arable crops for both its own use and sale. When the farm was sold in 1991, the remaining 20 acres were rented to a local farmer for crop production. The owners have always been open to the idea of diversifying farm activities and, after previously trying boarding kennels, they started to develop a children's nursery in 2001 which has gone from strength to strength.

The Nursery

The nursery has been in business for 10 years and caters for children from 7 months to pre-school. Oakwell also offers an after-school facility for older children. Presently, there are 96 children cared for on a daily basis with 180 in total, per week. Almost 40 local people are employed in the business.

"The outdoor aspect of the nursery and continuity of staff are brilliant."

"What I particularly like about Oakwell is the emphasis on the outdoors."

"All the outdoor time is brilliant and I feel very happy leaving my child in the nursery's capable hands."

Parents of children within Oakwell Nursery.

The nursery's indoor facilities are 2 purpose built buildings, split into 4 main nursery rooms, but it is the extent and variety of outdoor space for children that is the most impressive aspect of the business.

These not only include patio areas for tricycles and scooters, sand pits and barked play areas with a play-house and trampoline, but also grassy parks with swings and slides, two summer houses with picnic areas, walks through 2ha of woodlands, a sensory butterfly garden, a vegetable growing garden, polytunnels and a pond.

These spaces are used for lessons, stories, snacks, walks and games on a daily basis. Wildlife is also catered for with bat and bird, including owl, boxes placed around the woodland and bird feeders are also provided. Deer, foxes, badgers and bees are now regularly seen in the grounds.





The Allotments

In late 2009, the Linlithgow and District Allotment Society (LADAS) wrote to local landowners expressing an interest in renting for community growing and were pleased to receive a positive reply from Oakwell Farm's owners.

Having secured planning permission in February 2011, the group worked to secure grants and funds from Transition Linlithgow and LEADER. Following this, physical works started on the site in May 2011 and the allotments were formally opened August 2011. The field is in a scenic position overlooking the Union Canal. There are 70 plots covering 1.15ha.

LADAS members manage the site independently of the land-owners. They have, as much as possible, adopted an environmentally friendly approach, including planting of native shrubs and wild flowers to encourage birds, insect pollinators and other wildlife.

The scheme also has a strong community element centred upon a communal hut where events are held including talks, demonstrations, produce competitions and barbecues.

Future

As the nursery expanded, it provided an opportunity to install energy efficient heating and lighting. In keeping with the sustainability ethos of the business, a ground source heat pump and an array of solar panels were installed. There are ambitions to expand on this capacity in order to keep down energy cost in the future.

“People are increasingly conscious of the need to eat healthily and to source locally grown foods, this allotment initiative is a very important signpost for the future.”

Fiona Hyslop, MSP for Linlithgow.

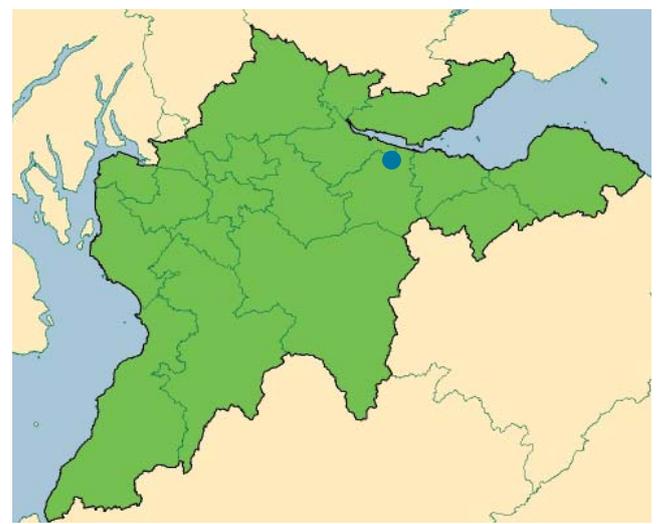
There are also plans for another poly-tunnel, a maze and to create a wildflower meadow on a boggy part of the site. It is anticipated that a gardener will be recruited in the near future to further develop and maintain the grounds.



Costs and Value

- To set up the allotment cost Oakwell £5,000 for installation of water supply and £400 in planning fees.
- The rental income from the allotment group nearly returned this investment within the first year.
- The rental income is ten times more than was previously received through tenant farming.
- the nursery does not need to pay for advertising to fill spaces, word of mouth testimonies regarding the extensive and rich greenspace generates new customers.

The map shows Oakwell Farm in relation to the CSGN area



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The CSGN will change the face of Central Scotland by restoring and improving the rural and urban landscape of the area.

What is the CSGN?

The CSGN is one of the 14 national developments in the National Planning Framework 2. It is the biggest greenspace project in Europe and will help to make Central Scotland a more attractive and distinctive place to live, to visit and to do business. The CSGN has wide political and partner support and an all encompassing remit, far beyond just a 'green' initiative, with economic development central on the agenda.

What are these Case Studies for?

These case studies demonstrate that green network and green infrastructure approaches can save money and create better solutions for businesses. They are intended to inspire other businesses to take similar approaches and to inform interested parties, such as planning authorities, in order to encourage a supportive environment for such initiatives.

Getting in Touch

To discuss this case study please contact:
Stephen Hughes, Monitoring & Evaluation Manager,
Central Scotland Green Network Support Unit.
E-mail: stephen.hughes@centralscotlandgreennetwork.org

For further information on the CSGN and other case studies please visit: www.centralscotlandgreennetwork.org

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