

Parks & Environment Service

Roundup of the year - 2025

2025 has been a busy year for the Parks & Environment Service; below is a summary of some of what has been going on across the Service in the last 12 months.

Some goodbyes and hellos!

- About to wish Stuart Young a long and happy retirement after 43 years at the Council as he finishes up on 31st December.
- Welcomed Pauline Connell to the Bereavement Service team.
- Welcomed Brett McCaldin to Eildon area as Assistant Operations Manager.

Operations

This year we continued to deliver essential maintenance services across our communities:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provided 766ha of parks & open spaces grounds maintenance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mechanically swept 350km of streets 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provided 580 burials within our cemeteries
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Managed 100ha of trees and woodland 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Manually cleansed 350km of pavements 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inspected approx. 5000 headstones for safety
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Delivered 51ha of 'space for nature' (16% increase on last year) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 139 play parks routinely inspected 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 80km of countryside footpaths maintained
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintained grounds of 65 schools, 6 care homes & 145 cemeteries or churchyards 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 27 Public toilets cleansed and serviced 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provided support to winter gritting and emergency weather events, such as Storm Eowyn in January
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Worked collaboratively with BEAR on targeted litter picks on the A1, deploying resource from across the region 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supplied and installed 12 Christmas trees across communities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supported collaborative working across frontline services

Alongside these vital day to day operations, below summarises the year in the life of Parks & Environment.

Community outreach

- Celebrated a huge amount of community work through the Greener Gateway Community Awards, continuing the Schools Award category developed in collaboration with Education.
- Completed the Gala Policies Habitat Management Plan which incorporated extensive community engagement and provides an Action Plan for further development and funding bids
- Supported the establishment of the Friends of Gala Policies Group and secured £45k total of SG Nature Restoration Funding and Fallago Environment to deliver improvement works.
- Hosted 4 “Grow Borders” Community Food Growing Network events at sites across the region.
- Hosted a Networking event for Community Enhancement groups, partnering with colleagues from Keep Scotland Beautiful.
- Further developed and supported the volunteering opportunities at the Walled Garden Community Garden, Hawick with an input of circa 3000 volunteer hours.

Bereavement Services

- Headstone Safety – completed inspections at 12 sites across the region.
- Introduced new procedures in alignment with the Burial and Cremation (Scotland) Act 2016.
- Moved offices, from the Newtown Depot site into Council Headquarters, including vital (and increasingly fragile) burial records.
- Identified a digital solution to modernising the Bereavement Service, to be implemented in 26/27.
- Undertook public and stakeholder engagement ahead of the development of the Council’s first ever Cemetery Strategy, looking at provision and management of Cemetery land.

Parks/Grounds maintenance

- Had a successful season of grasscutting, continuing the approach piloted in 24/25 and working with communities to agree local priorities.
- Achieved Green Flag Status again for Wilton Lodge Park following a review and overhaul of the Park Management Plan and regular Stakeholder meetings.
- Won a place in the ‘Top 10 Green Flag Award Parks in the UK’, as voted for by the public for Wilton Lodge Park, Hawick.

Biodiversity

- Delivered 51ha of naturalised areas under our management.

- Pollinators Along the Tweed: Year 3 actions undertaken at numerous Eildon sites, with the Cheviot sites assessed, habitat plans developed, and initial site preparation undertaken in partnership with Buglife and Tweed Forum.

Play Parks Investment Programme

- Successfully delivered five upgraded sites across the Scottish Borders – in Denholm, Bonchester Bridge, Broughton, Chirnside and Duns and worked closely with Cockburnspath community in the self-funded delivery of an upgrade to their Play Park. Thanks to community engagement colleagues for their support engaging with local communities seeking their views on play investment, and to SB Contracts on their work.
- Undertook engagement with Earlston and Eyemouth community and stakeholders regarding the forthcoming investment in Play across their communities. Thanks to Engineering & Design colleagues for their hard work Eyemouth.

Commercialisation / Funding

- Developing our income generation capacity, delivering 35 commissioned works with a combined value of £57,000.
- Successfully bid for £20k from the Fallago Environment Fund to support pond and habitat enhancement work at Gala Policies.
- Obtained funding for feasibility study regarding the Wilton Lodge Walled Garden Community Hub.
- Explored income generation via Council assets ahead of potential pilots in 2026, e.g. QR code deployment/advertising space

Cleansing

- Undertook 2 targeted Litter Picks, in partnership with BEAR and Keep Scotland Beautiful to address roadside litter along the A1 corridor
- Began preparation of the Council's inaugural Litter Strategy
- Undertook review of sweeper routes to maximise effectiveness/efficiency
- Supported the Eyemouth Development Trust in establishing a community-run public toilet facility on Harbour Road

Community Food Growing

- Organised the distribution of 61m³ of free compost to local food growing projects.
- Produced 12 Community Food Growers Newsletters.
- Secured leases with Abundant Borders to develop two new community food growing gardens on SBC land.
- Continued to support SBC Allotment ploholders

Digital transformation

- Migrated Play Park Safety Inspections into Confirm, developing paperless processes and reducing double handling of data/enquiries, including training and on-boarding of Play Inspection Staff and Assistant Operations Managers.
- Developed our project plan for migrating Grass Management operations into Confirm.
- Developed Digital Transformation in the Bereavement Service, in line with legislative compliance, with a new system coming in 2026.
- Developed use of vehicle trackers to optimise operations and enable real-time information across cleansing and grass management services.
- Thanks to the Transformation Team and DIS Team for their hard work across these projects!