

## **Student project: how to use the agency of social housing provision to connect Scotland's green infrastructure**

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Biodiversity intactness in Scotland stands at 50%. The development of connected multi-purpose green infrastructure is strategised by Government as a conservation goal to address biodiversity loss. However, private gardens are rarely included in the strategy; more so the gardens of social housing, about which is known very little in general, and which account for one quarter of Scottish households. This first study of social housing gardens aimed to examine how the agency of social housing provision in Scotland could help to connect gardens to wider green infrastructure. It carried out a national survey of housing associations to understand their strategy, policy and practices relating to land management and biodiversity; and it recruited one housing association as a case-study. The survey results suggest that housing associations have begun to strategise biodiversity; one quarter has implemented green infrastructure, yet biodiversity conservation is of low priority; housing associations strongly value tenants' gardens for benefits of place-making and tenants' health and well-being; only a half values tenants' gardens as an element of green infrastructure or for the potential of gardens to connect tenants with nature in general; and lastly, there is a need in the sector for guidance and support to implement sustainable horticultural practices, and activities for tenants. This presents engagement opportunities for botanic gardens. The case study included two elements that together could be replicated by housing associations to assess their own estates. Firstly, a simple survey tool was created that could be used by non-horticulturalists to measure the structural heterogeneity and 'cues to care' of residents' gardens. Results were mapped using QGIS<sup>®</sup>. Secondly, an evaluation was made of the housing estate's gardens and public green spaces in relation to surrounding green infrastructure using publicly available datasets. This project was in partial fulfilment of the author's course, BSc (Hons) Horticulture with Plantsmanship.