

# All's Well Down On The Farm

An old farmhouse has been transformed into a thriving base for community projects

by GARRY FRASER

The building houses multi-use spaces for classes

IT'S taken eight years to come to fruition, but for those involved in the Bridgend Farmhouse Renovation Project it's been worth the wait. An old and crumbling 19th century farmhouse near Craigmillar Castle, Edinburgh, is now the bustling hub of a community garden, café and workshops as well as multi-purpose rental spaces for performance, talks and exhibitions.

Built originally in open countryside, the farmhouse now lies well within Edinburgh's boundaries, just past Cameron Toll on the A7 road to Dalkeith. This makes it easily accessible for anyone to use its facilities.

"We're keen to make this centre provide a unique community venue for those living locally, as well as the wider community of Edinburgh and beyond," says Development Manager Donna McArdle.

The range of projects and workshops on offer is extensive. Drop-in days on Wednesdays and Sundays can

lead to anything from building park benches to constructing an outdoor stage. There is a *Come Dine With Me* community meal, upcycling classes, natural cosmetics and a history project. There is also a new bothy-build being launched to show people how to build their own eco home. There are different courses running every weekend delivered via Edinburgh City Council and private workshop providers.

Training in forest and survival skills for 12-16-year-olds involves bushcraft, outdoor cooking, green wood-working and in September and October, in partnership with the council and Liberton High School, a range of courses like garden sculpture and wild plant foraging.

"We have arts and crafts, wood and metal work and bike maintenance workshops. We also have the capacity to run mini-festivals, markets and lots of different types of events," says Donna.

"There's also a beautiful multi-use space upstairs for different classes like pilates, dance, corporate away days, mini conferences, training and musical events. The list is endless! We plan to be a popular venue for weddings, anniversaries, birthday parties and even funerals, as well as hosting regular art exhibitions. We're also going to launch a community share issue allowing members to become part-owners of the building."

"It all started with two locals, William Golding and John Knox back in 2009," continues Donna. "They agreed that instead of letting the farmhouse fall to bits it should be turned into a community centre."

So the seed was sown, and the charitable company Bridgend Inspiring Growth was set up to deliver a series of outreach courses to secure National Lottery funding for the restoration. The property, however, was still owned by the council and in 2014 they put it on the market.

"Bridgend Inspiring Growth bid against 14 other bids, but after nearly selling it to someone else, the council agreed to give a year's licence to us," says Donna, "on the proviso that we could prove that we had the means to raise the necessary capital."

"Eventually, councillors put forward the first urban transfer in Scotland and agreed to transfer ownership of the farm and the surrounding land – for just £1. This was the first example of urban asset transfer in Scotland."

One of the council's provisos in the asset transfer was that if Bridgend Inspiring Growth dismantled and couldn't continue, the building couldn't be sold but should be kept for the community for perpetuity.

The way things are escalating and the enthusiasm and commitment by those involved, this venture could continue to grow and give inspiration for other communities to follow suit.