

Our Gracemount Report

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2021



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Transition
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Edinburgh Health and
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Executive Summary

Local community groups along with Transition Edinburgh South have begun a community asset transfer (CAT) process for the Mansion House, Gracemount Community Garden, and stable block, located in Southeast Edinburgh. This report was commissioned as part of the Our Gracemount Project to investigate the interest for this in the community, as well as the capacity to undertake a CAT. This project is funded by the University of Edinburgh Community Grants Programme.

The project involved a variety of stakeholders in the area and used an asset-based community action research approach to increase engagement while understanding what the space means to the local community.

This report found that there is a long and fond connection with the Mansion House in the local area, with several generations having worked in, volunteered with, and otherwise used the Mansion House before it was closed. The memory of the community centre is still very alive in the community, and there is a general sense that it would be a considerable asset, particularly to young people, if it were to be in community ownership.

The Gracemount Community Garden, which has a gardener employed by Transition Edinburgh South, is used daily by a variety of local schools, after school groups, individuals, and youth workers. Over the period of this project, the garden hosted open days, art installations, and teas and chats, amongst other events.

There is a clear sense in the area that community ownership would increase people's wellbeing by creating a designated space for people to gather. Community ownership will also enable the community to actualise the many well-developed ideas for the space, which are currently difficult to carry out due to barriers such as lacking office space, kitchen space, and toilet facilities.

Introduction and Background

History of the Mansion

Gracemount Mansion was built in the late 18th century, expanded and altered many times over the years. The house and estate were gifted to Edinburgh Corporation in the early twentieth century and is still owned by its successor, the City of Edinburgh Council (CEC). The premises have been used for many community purposes, including a nursing home and a youth and community centre. Transition Edinburgh South (TES) runs the Gracemount Community Garden in the former walled garden of the Mansion.

The Mansion was closed for safety reasons in April 2018, resulting in the 5 different organisations that operated from there having to find new bases. This also meant the loss of toilets and kitchen facilities for the garden volunteers and the suspension of the extremely popular community meals provided every Thursday lunchtime. Since then, TES have been seeking to raise funds and approval for a portacabin to mitigate the loss of toilets and kitchen.

A long-term lack of maintenance, persistent vandalism, and repeated roof leaks ultimately caused a ceiling collapse. Further potential issues indicated by a Health & Safety report resulted in the closure of the Mansion. An assessment of work necessary to bring the Grade B listed building back to good order was put at about £1.35M (in 2018) with a warning that the final costs were likely to rise to well over £2M. Perhaps not surprisingly, the council does not have this amount of money to spare and there is no money available for Grade B listed buildings from National Heritage Scotland (formerly Historic Scotland). CEC decided to close the building with no plan or prospect of reopening.

In July 2020, the Edinburgh Living Lab (ELL) at the University of Edinburgh and the Service Design and Our Assets programme at the City of Edinburgh Council (CEC) published the 'Data and Design for Property Planning' report based on research conducted in Gracemount in 2019. The report revealed the need for a building which could serve as a 'community hub': "community members expressed their desire to have a physical location that plays a key role in community building and to have a dedicated youth centre and space" (Edinburgh Living Lab, 2020).

Source: [Transition Edinburgh South Website](#)

Friends of the Mansion

Early 2020, members of the local community partnered with Transition Edinburgh South (TES), who have been managing Gracemount Walled Garden for a number of years, to discuss transferring the mansion, stable block and surrounding grounds into public ownership. Following unanimous agreement, Friends of the Mansion (FoM) was formed and now has a social media presence of over 400 people. Attendees of FoM meetings are interested parties within the community, including church members, parents, local charities, and local district councils. FoM aims to engage local community members and together increase volunteering and fundraising options for the development of the mansion and grounds - all based on ideas from within the community.

In May 2021, FoM submitted a note of interest to CEC in relation to a Community Asset Transfer (CAT) of the buildings and grounds at the site, and running the Mansion, surrounding buildings and grounds as a community hub. The group is now in the process of establishing a charitable organisation, the Mansion House Development Trust (MDT), which will be the legal body to manage the CAT process. This includes applying for fundraising, arranging volunteering, and coordinating and approving charity and business activities. The aim is to be a welcoming hub in the heart of the community where people can meet, learn, and grow together.

Methodology

Between February and August 2021, the Our Gracemount Project used a variety of asset-based CAR methods to create a community around the Gracemount Mansion House and Community Garden, as well as understand what this community would like to see happen at the grounds.

Survey

To get a basic understanding of how the garden and mansion house had been and currently were being used, we designed an online survey aimed to reach far and wide within the community. We included a section of questions about the future of the mansion house to get an idea of the kind of methodologies that would be useful for the remainder of the Our Gracemount Project. The survey was shared on social media, through connections in the local schools, and in paper copies to youth groups via trusted youth workers. The survey had 123 responses, and was mainly filled out by women (87%) aged 31-60 (69%). although distributing paper copies through schools and youth project diversified the age range significantly.

What is Community Action Research?

Community Action Research (CAR) is a methodology aimed not only at collecting information from a community, but actively involving community members in the projects or ideas being explored (Community Ownership Support Service, 2020). CAR includes a broad umbrella of research methods such as questionnaires, world cafés, workshops, and public meetings. At the core of all methods used as part of a CAR project, however, is respect for the community's time, input, and opinions with the aim to '[strengthen] local pride, sense of community and quality of life' (ibid, p. 3) as well as increase volunteering.

CAR is a sustainable research methodology. By creating long-term connections between actors in the community, CAR methods enable a continued engagement with the projects in the community after the research itself has taken place (Senge & Scharmer, 2006).

Friends of the Mansion

Our Gracemount Project attended and facilitated FoM meetings, allowing us to get to know the community and their process. An online ‘world café’ style consultation was carried out at an FoM meeting. The attendees were split into break out rooms and brainstormed ideas on volunteering, income generating activities, learning and development, social activities, management and other aspects of what it would look like to have the Mansion House be in community ownership.



Bunting at the Gracemount Open Day (9th July 2020)

Events

The Gracemount Community Garden is in busy use with several events a week involving the local schools, the resident gardener, outdoor after school clubs, and more. The researchers gathered information on these through the surveys but did not attend due to Covid-19 restrictions. The Our Gracemount Project hosted one event in the garden specifically aimed to increase awareness of the garden, involve new volunteers, and create ideas for the future use of the space. The ‘Gracemount Open Day’ involved a foraging class, bird call workshop, bunting making, seed saving, circus skills workshop, bug hunt, paper-people art installation, and a presentation of the TES plans for the mansion grounds. More than 40 people attended the open day, including children and parents from the local schools, members of local churches, and long-time Gracemount residents.

Since the Gracemount Open Day, several events have taken place in the garden through the networks created between people in the planning for this event. These include a children’s art exhibition and a ‘tea and chat’ event series.

Bunting

A 'bunting station' was set up at the Gracemount Open Day, where people were invited to write what they liked about the garden or the mansion house or what they would like to see in the future. Adults and children created colourful pieces of bunting to be hung in the garden as a reminder of the event and the community's ideas and feelings about the place.

What is an Asset-Based Approach?

Asset-based community development roots community change in the assets that already exist in a community rather than focus on what a place lacks (Haines, 2008). These can be organisations, physical spaces, or even connections between local community members. An asset-based approach to community development adds to the sustainability of using CAR methods by recognising that 'assets that exist in communities are multifunctional in nature' (Green & Haines, 2015, p. 12). What is already present in a community can be built upon to achieve positive social, economic, and environmental change.

Paper People

A temporary art installation with 'paper people' was created during the Gracemount Open Day. Everyone was encouraged to draw and write on little paper figures that were then exhibited in a raised bed. One side of the figure was for people's favorite memory and the other for what people would like to see in the future.

Interviews

Towards the end of the project, the researchers identified key people in the community for in-depth interviews. 8 interviews were done with members of TES, FoM members, the Gracemount Community Gardener, and attendees of the Gracemount Open Day. A wider call was made for interviewees through the garden facebook page and connections in the local school without success, which we attribute to the time-consuming nature of being interviewed.

Results

What the Mansion Means to the Gracemount Community

55% of survey respondents had spent time in the Mansion before it closed, participating in youth clubs, toddler groups, church meetings, community meals and activity days.

The range of responses associated with what the mansion meant to the community were vast. For some, it was a home and a safe place for young people, 'the only place where they might have someone who looked after them'. Others went to creche groups which 'meant a lot because of the loneliness and isolation of being a young mum.' It was the 'heart of our community', a 'hub', a 'community asset', a 'haven' and a 'resource with great potential'.

Several people interviewed remembered the community meals held in the mansion, and the sense of community and mutual support they created. One interviewee described the mansion as a 'jewel in the area' whose reputation extended beyond the local area; it was 'one of those projects that communities focus around,' according to a local community development worker. Several respondents recalled the mansion being a key part of their childhood, and for some it had been part of their family's lives for generations.

“Well we used to go to the mansion for our youth club, which was really really good because it kept the bairns and that off the street. I was a member for over 12, 13 years”

“My mum was a member of the mansion youth club when she was younger. And my uncle, he used to DJ and all of that. Used to have valentine discos. So it's quite a bad loss.”

Respondents to the survey also highlighted the historic nature of the building, both as a beautiful building and the rich history associated with the mansion as a community space. Ultimately, the general feeling of what the mansion meant to the Gracemount Community can be summed up in the words of one interviewee: “We deeply miss it. It was a brilliant location.”

Community Asset Transfer

Several respondents felt that if the Mansion was in the hands of the community, it would make people feel valued. There is no similar community resource in Gracemount or the surrounding area, and community members feel that having access to a space like the Mansion would enable their needs and opinions to be listened to.

“I think we’d feel valued and I think [...] it would be a safe place to go [...] For a good number of years there’s been a lack of in this particular area in Edinburgh. I just think it would give us some hope I guess, and aspiration that stuff can be achieved.”

“It was just a really good hub for the community and unfortunately that’s now not there [...] so there’s nothing really for the wider community.”

This is reflected in the ideas that came up during a Friends of the Mansion meeting; attendees' ideas had a focus on the social benefits that would come from being able to use the space.

The loss of the Mansion space was described as a ‘hammer blow’ to the local community.



“It’s just sad to see it go. So just try to save it!”

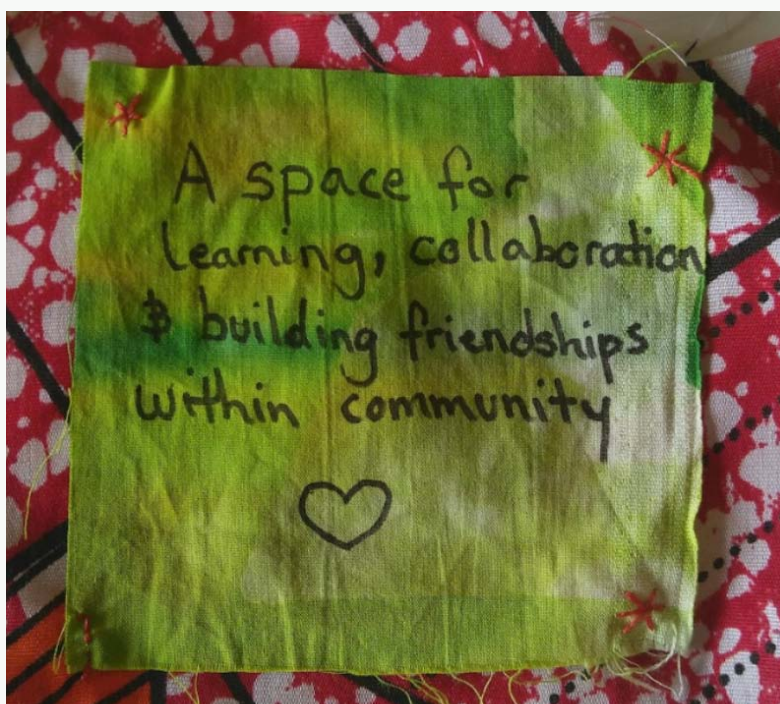
Source: Friends of the Mansion meeting (21st April 2021)

Ideas for the Space

Mansion

- 79% of respondents would like the mansion to be used for youth projects
- 67% for a community garden hub
- 66% for an after-school facility
- 66% for apprenticeships and skills training
- 56% for an environmental education centre
- 56% for arts/performance/music;
- 39% for pre-school childcare
- 26% for a local history hub
- 25% for Gracemount Community Church.

Other ideas for the use of the mansion ranged from bike workshops and toy libraries to boxing, dance, and exercise classes.



Source: Bunting created at Gracemount Community Garden Open Day (9th July 2021)

“I would do some voluntary work in there because I suffer with mental health so I don’t work, so I could do some voluntary work.”

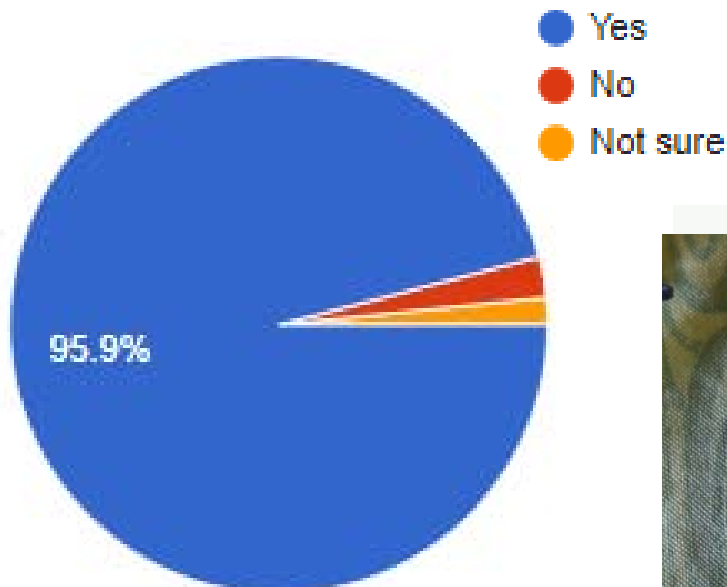


Source: Bunting created at Gracemount Community Garden Open Day (9th July 2021)

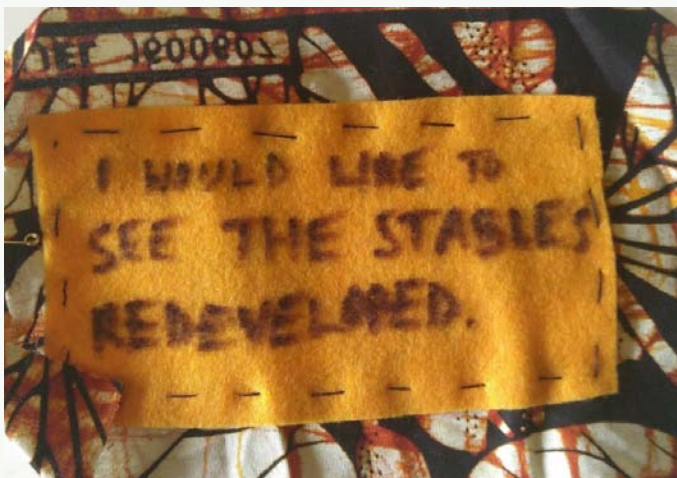
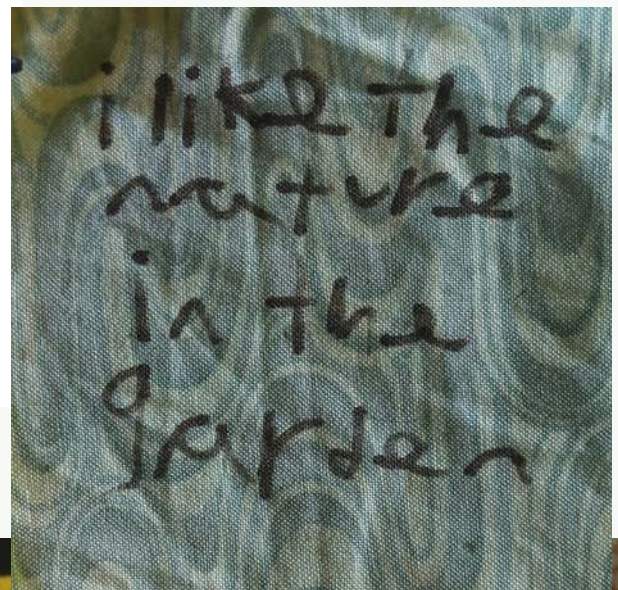
Stable Block

95.9% of survey respondents agreed with the proposal to transform the derelict stable block into a community cafe, food hub, and meeting space. Other ideas included an arts space, an outdoor exercise space, a soft play, a space for social nights, and cooking lessons.

There are plans to use the stables for a community café, food hub, and meeting spaces. Do you like this idea?



Source: Our Gracemount Survey



Source: Bunting created at Gracemount Community Garden Open Day (9th July 2021)



Garden

For use of the garden space, the most popular ideas were food growing, seed saving and exercise classes, training in landscaping, joinery and climate friendly gardening, and a space for performance and music. Other ideas included a space for groups with additional needs, forest schools, an outdoor kitchen, woodland walks and a wildlife garden.



Source: Paper People created at Gracemount Community Garden Open Day facilitated by Callum Macleod (9th July 2021)



Source: Friends of the Mansion Meeting 21st April, 2021

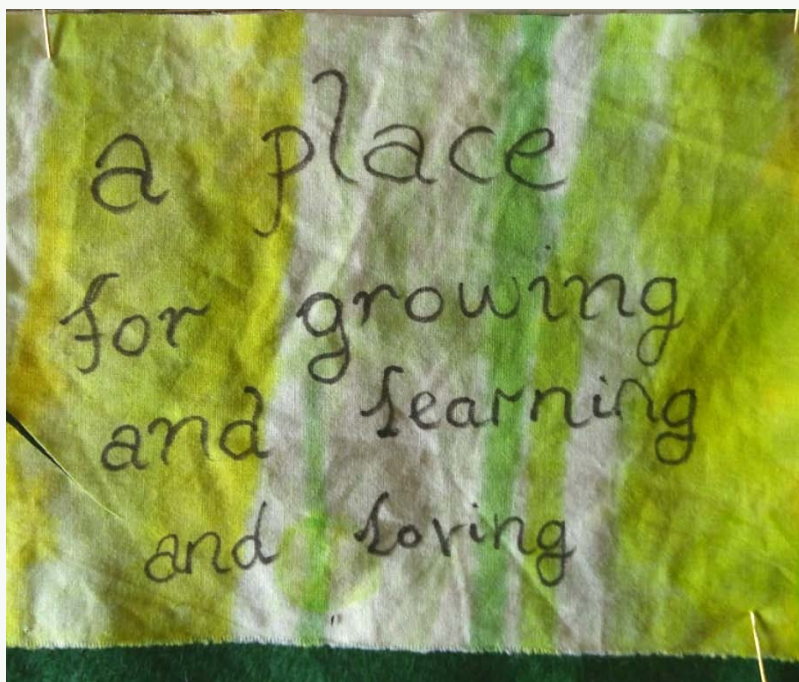
“The garden has been really full of energy, it’s still the heart of the community - people still go there, people still visit, people still value it, people still talk about it, people still use it as a meeting place, people still use it as an asset or resource.”



Source: Paper People created at Gracemount Community Garden Open Day facilitated by Callum Macleod (9th July 2021)



Source: Paper People created at Gracemount Community Garden Open Day facilitated by Callum Macleod (9th July 2021)



Source: Bunting created at Gracemount Community Garden Open Day (9th July 2021)

Conclusion

It was clear from the research we've conducted over the last 9 months that **there is a desire for the Mansion site to be reopened and functioning as a community space**. The level of involvement in Gracemount Community Garden demonstrates the desire for a community space. Although the garden is a valuable resource and community hub, the lack of indoor space serves as a barrier to some of the ideas that came out of this piece of research.



“The garden has been really full of energy, it’s still the heart of the community - people still go there, people still visit, people still value it, people still talk about it, people still use it as a meeting place, people still use it as an asset or resource”

The Covid-19 crisis is highlighting further the need for community spaces like Gracemount Community Garden and The Mansion House. As one interviewee pointed out, it's during a crisis that the value of community assets are realised. The research conducted as part of the Our Gracemount report makes it clear that there is a desire for The Mansion House to be transformed back to the community asset it once was.

“[Community hubs] quite often only materialise when there’s a crisis [...] And everyone goes why did everyone let that place shut? And that’s the value in community assets that are there. It’s like a good wine rack - not that you go to the wine rack everyday but it’s good to have it there in case you fancy a wee glass of red - it’s good to have, just in case.”



Source: Bunting created at Gracemount Community Garden Open Day (9th July 2021)

Continuing 'Our Gracemount'

Since the research directly for this report ended in July, the 'Our Gracemount' project has continued. Through networks existing before and new ones created during the research, community events have been held at the garden and Friends of Mansion meeting have continued.



Source: Parachute game by Trees and Seas Outdoor Adventures



The Friends of the Mansion are committed to building a community hub that allows local people to increase their wellbeing through offering a range of activities for young people, pre-school children and families, older people, that respond to their interests - a place to meet, relax, learn things together, as well as taking part in community events and celebrations.

This will reduce the isolation and anti-social behaviour that is a concern for many local people, particularly since the pandemic. We have established strong relationships with schools, youth services and other City of Edinburgh Council services, churches, and community organisations who support our proposals, and are also in contact with Police Scotland, Edinburgh Health and Social Care Partnership, local councillors, the local MP and Liberton and District Community Council.



Source: Cut Out Figure Activity facilitated by Callum Macleod

Acknowledgements

This report would not have been possible without the work and assistance from:

Lindsay Aitken Lynn Jamieson Hugo Whitaker
Richard Whiston Callum McLeod
Pat Abel Norrie MacPhail
Friends of the Mansion
Mansion House Development Trust
Chris Macefield
Edinburgh Health and Social Care Partnership

Thank you to the University of Edinburgh Community Grants Program for funding this project

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Contact

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Appendix 1:

Our Gracemount Survey

Our Gracemount

Do you live in Gracemount or surrounding communities? If so, we would like to hear from you!

This is the first survey in the 'Our Gracemount' project, which aims to understand how you, the people in Gracemount, want to use and be involved with the Mansion House, the Stables, and the Gracemount Community Garden.

The Gracemount Community Garden is a community-led food growing initiative. We grow using organic, regenerative, no-dig methods. Local school pupils learn and play in the garden, and we work together to grow and harvest food. The Mansion House and Stables are currently not functioning, but we hope to make them community owned and run with your input.

The first section will be about the Gracemount Community Garden, the second section about the Mansion House and Stables, and the third section about the future of these places. Finally, the fourth and fifth section will ask you to share some personal information if you would like to be involved further with the project.

This survey will take 5-10 minutes to complete.
Thank you for taking part!

Involvement in 'Our Gracemount'

'Our Gracemount' is a project started by Transition Edinburgh South and the Gracemount Community Garden. The project aims to involve the Gracemount Community to restore and revive the Mansion House and Stables, as well as increase involvement in the Gracemount Community Garden. We are looking for volunteers to help with the research part of this (talking to people and collecting ideas) or for any other project you think could take place in and around the Gracemount Community Garden! Are you interested in taking part?

Do you know of the Gracemount Community Garden? *

- Yes
- No
- Not sure

Have you spent time in the Gracemount Community Garden in the past year? *

- Yes
- No
- Not sure

Have you been a part of any of these groups or activities in the Gracemount Community Garden?

- School group
- Volunteer gardening
- Youth group
- Transition Edinburgh South event/meeting
- Other workshops or events in the garden (tell us more if you like)
- Other: _____

If you have spent time in the Gracemount Community Garden, can you please tell us what you did?

- Having quiet time
- Looking to see what is going on
- Spending time with my family
- Spending time with my friends
- Part of a youth group/program
- Food growing/gardening
- Exercising
- I have not spent time in the garden
- Other: _____

If you have not spent time in the Gracemount Community Garden, can you please tell us why not?

- Safety concerns
- Accessibility
- Location (too far away)
- Opening hours
- Other time commitments
- Other: _____

Did you spend time in the Mansion House before it was closed? *

- Yes
- No
- Not sure

Do you know about the Mansion House in Gracemount? *

- Yes
- No
- Not sure

If no, why did you not spend time in the Mansion House?

- Safety concerns
- Not easy for me to get to
- Not easy for me to move around
- Opening hours
- Other time commitments
- Other: _____

If yes, how did you use the Mansion House?

Your answer _____

Can you please tell us a bit about what the Mansion House meant to you?

Your answer _____

The future of the Community Garden, Mansion House & the Stables

Please tell us how you would like the Mansion House, the former stables building (now roofless) and the Gracemount Community Garden to be used in the future. The ideas below have come up previously, but we would love to hear any other suggestions you might have!

There are plans to use the stables for a community café, food hub, and meeting spaces. Do you like this idea? *

- Yes
- No
- Not sure

How would you like to use the Gracemount Community Garden? *

- Food growing classes
- Seed saving classes
- Training in climate, soil, and wildlife friendly gardening
- Training in landscaping/stonemasonry/joinery
- Physical exercise classes/events
- Performance/arts/music
- Don't know
- Other: _____

Could you please tell us what you see the Mansion House being used for? *

- Pre-school child care
- After school facility
- Local history hub
- Youth projects
- Environmental education centre
- Apprenticeships/skills training
- Gracemount community church
- Gracemount community garden hub
- Arts/performance/music
- Don't know
- Other: _____

Do you have other ideas for the use of the stables?

Your answer _____

Do you have any skills that you would like to share or use in the Garden/Mansion House/Stables? For example construction, marketing skills, story-telling, or gardening/cooking

Your answer _____

Do you have other ideas for the use of the Gracemount Community Garden?

Your answer _____

Background Information

We would like to know a little bit about you! This will help us understand who we have reached out to and who uses the spaces we are looking develop. All the questions below are optional.

What is your name? (If you are interested in being involved in the future, this will help us contact you!)

Your answer

Which area do you live in?

- Gracemount
- Burdiehouse/Southhouse
- Gilmerton
- Inch/Fernieside
- Moredun
- Liberton
- Other: _____

How old are you?

- Under 18
- 18-30
- 31-60
- 61+

Are you a part of any groups or organisations in the area?

Your answer

What is your gender?

- Female
- Male
- Other
- I choose not to disclose

Involvement in 'Our Gracemount'

'Our Gracemount' is a project started by Transition Edinburgh South and the Gracemount Community Garden. The project aims to involve the Gracemount Community to restore and revive the Mansion House and Stables, as well as increase involvement in the Gracemount Community Garden. We are looking for volunteers to help with the research part of this (talking to people and collecting ideas) or for any other project you think could take place in and around the Gracemount Community Garden! Are you interested in taking part?

Would you like to be a part of the 'Our Gracemount' project? *

- Yes please!
- No thank you
- Not just now, but please keep me informed

If you are interested in taking part or want to know more, please leave your email address below, and we will get in touch

Your answer _____

Appendix 2:

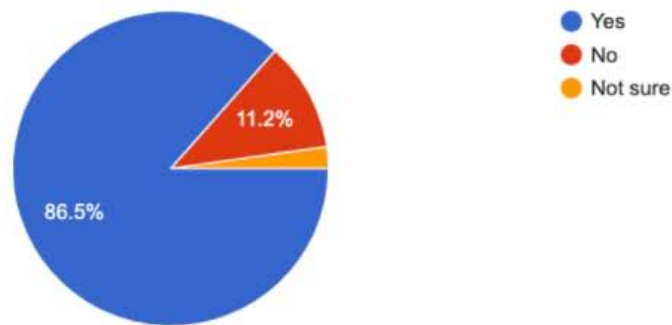
Preliminary Survey results

(26 July, 2021)

Our Gracemount Preliminary Survey Results

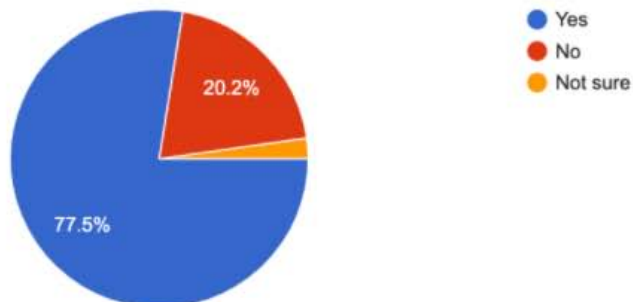
Do you know about the Mansion House in Gracemount?

89 responses



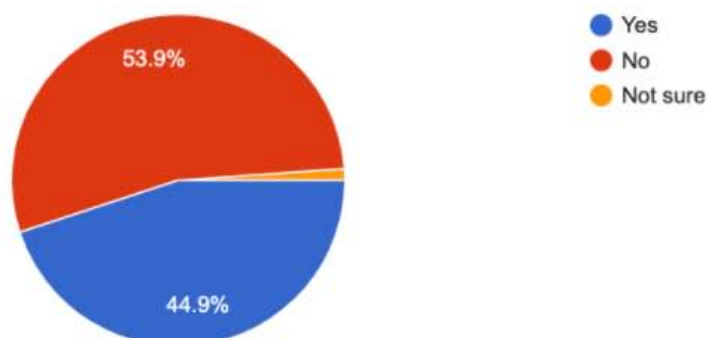
Do you know of the Gracemount Community Garden?

89 responses



Did you spend time in the Mansion House before it was closed?

89 responses

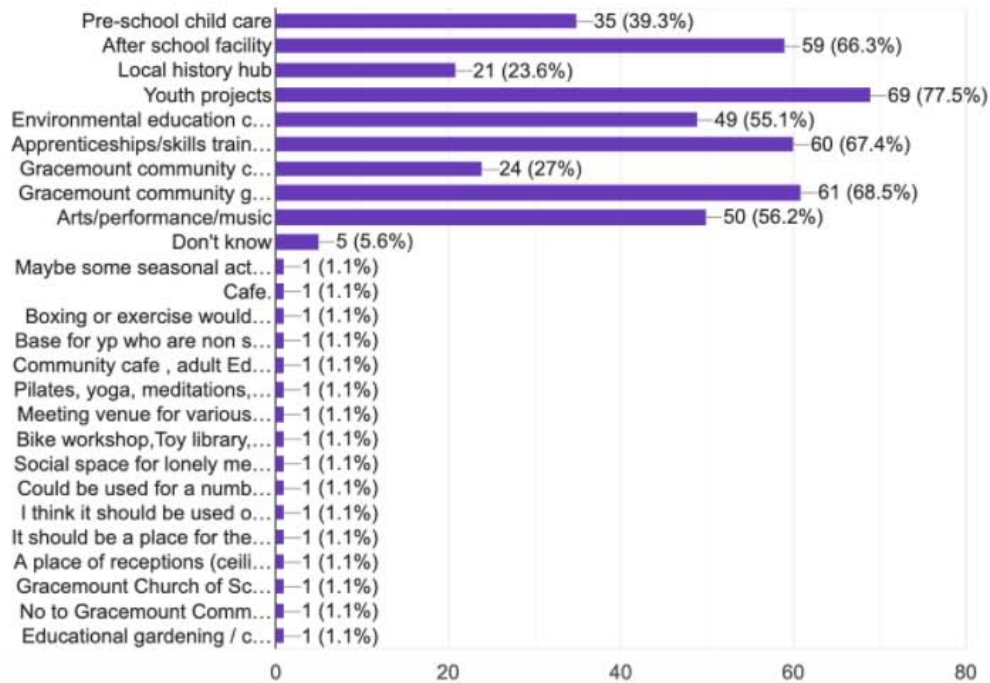


What did the mansion mean to you?



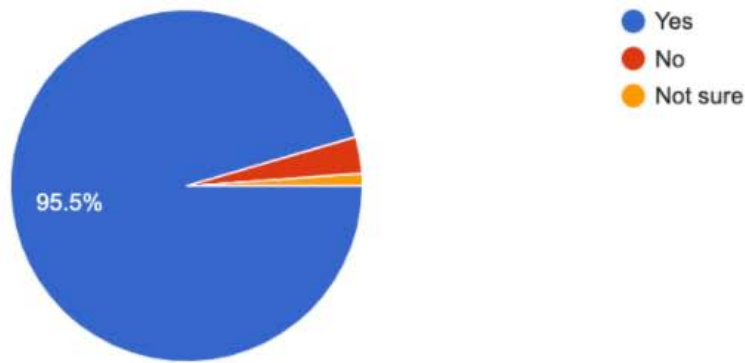
Could you please tell us what you see the Mansion House being used for?

89 responses



There are plans to use the stables for a community café, food hub, and meeting spaces. Do you like this idea?

89 responses

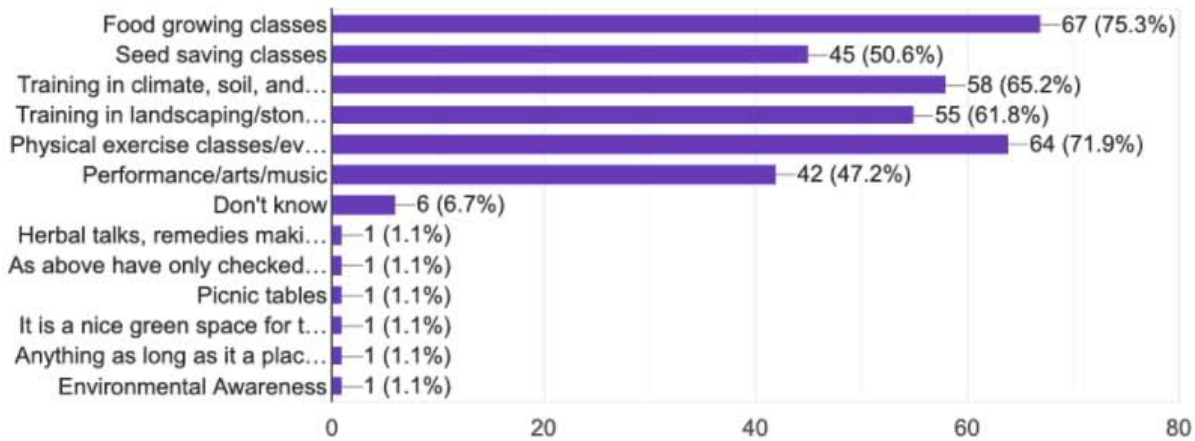


Do you have any other ideas for the use of the stables?



How would you like to use the Gracemount Community Garden?

89 responses



Do you have any other ideas for the use of Gracemount Community Garden?

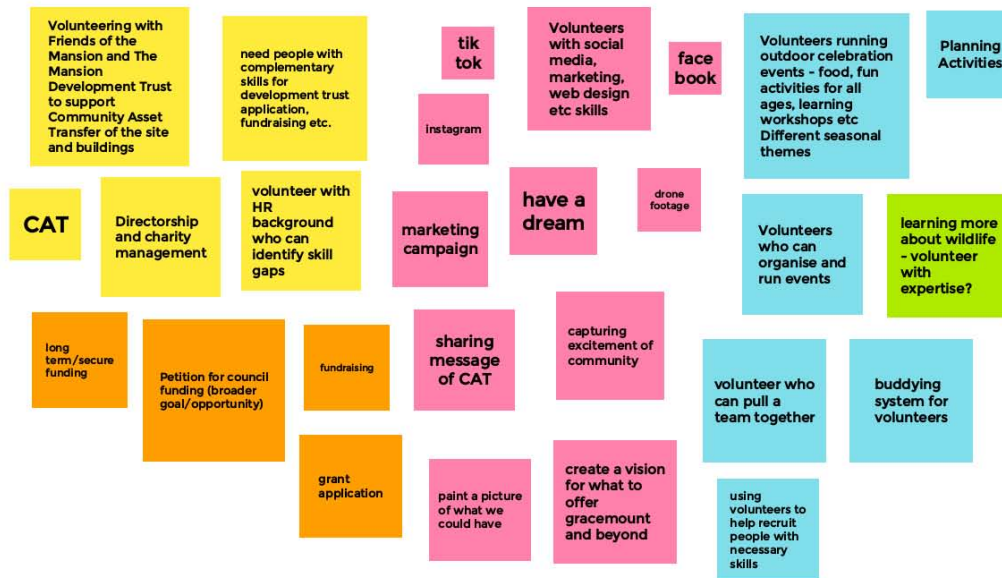


Appendix 3:

Jamboard, FoM Meeting

(21 April, 2021)

Volunteering - Management



Volunteering - other considerations



Volunteering - History, Science and The Arts



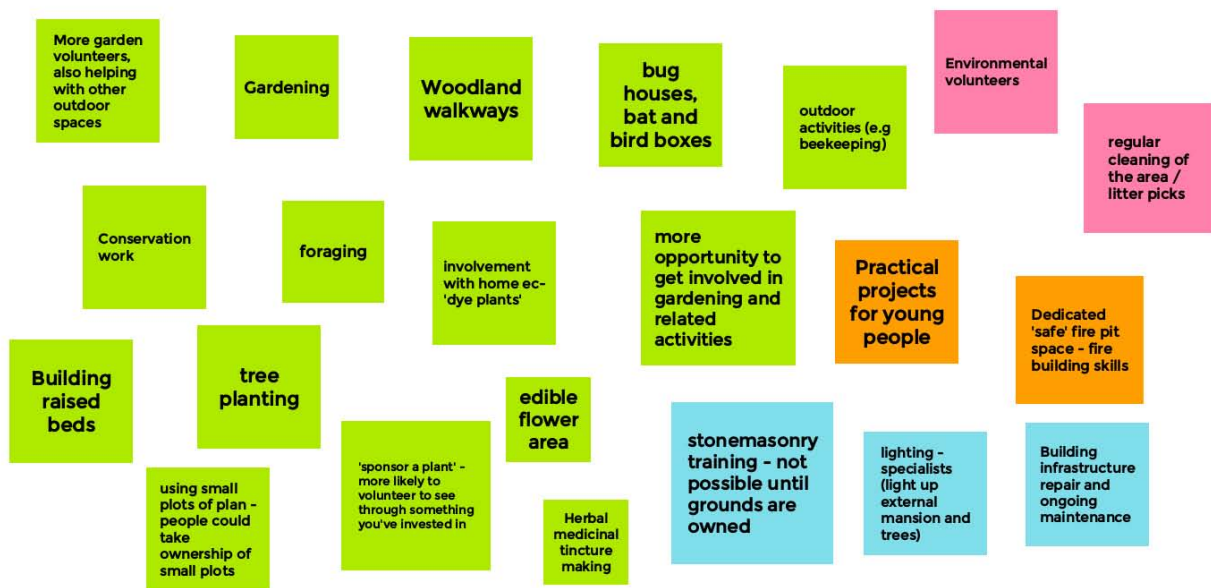
Volunteering - Health & Wellbeing



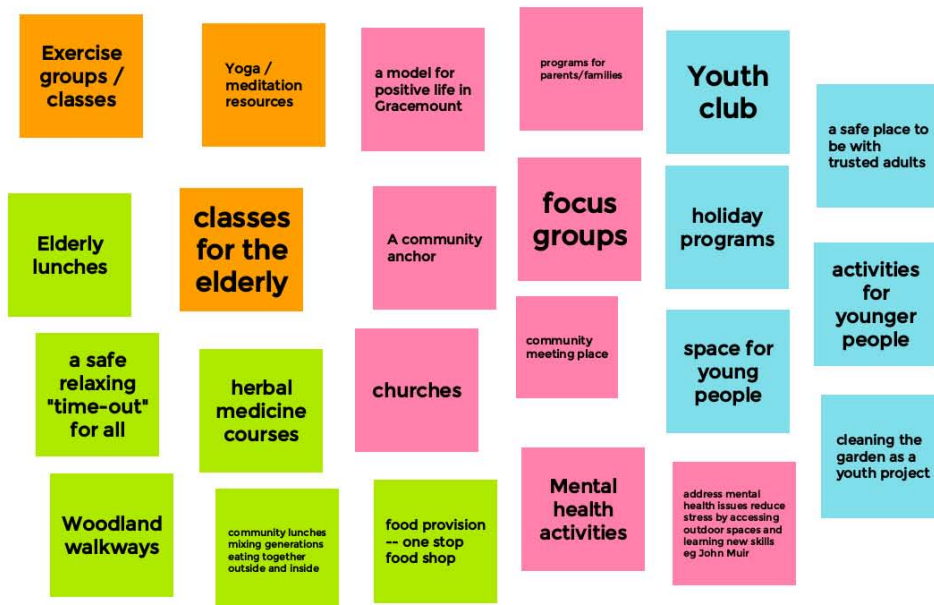
GENERAL IDEAS other things to consider



Volunteering - Gardening, Forestry, Land & Building Management



IDEAS - Social - H&WB



Ideas - History, Science and The Arts



IDEAS - Learning & Development



Ideas - Income generating

