



Grounded  
INSIGHT



CORONATION  
GARDENS  
For food & nature

# Coronation Gardens for Food and Nature

Community food growing research report



The  
Wildlife  
Trusts



INCREDIBLE  
EDIBLE C.I.C

theWI

garden.  
organic



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# Glossary

<b>CFG</b> – Community Food Growing	<b>PSO</b> - Police Support Officer
<b>COP15</b> – United Nations Biodiversity Conference 2022	<b>RHS</b> – Royal Horticultural Society
<b>CSA</b> - Community Supported Agriculture	<b>RSPB</b> - Royal Society for the Protection of Birds
<b>CVS</b> – Council for Voluntary Service	<b>RtG</b> – Right to Grow
<b>DCMS</b> - Department for Culture, Media and Sport	<b>RVS</b> - Royal Voluntary Service
<b>Defra</b> - Department for Farming, Rural Affairs and Environment	<b>SRUC</b> – Scotland's Rural College
<b>DH</b> – Department of Health	<b>TWT</b> – The Wildlife Trusts
<b>EDI</b> – Equality, Diversity and Inclusion	<b>VCSE</b> – Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise Sector
<b>FTE</b> – Full Time Equivalent	<b>WI</b> – Women's Institutes
<b>GOSH</b> - Gardens and Open Spaces Hull	
<b>HFP</b> - Hull Food Partnership	
<b>ICS</b> – Integrated Care System	
<b>IE</b> – Incredible Edible	
<b>LATH</b> - Looking After the Homeless	
<b>MHCLG</b> - Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government	
<b>MoU</b> – Memorandum of Understanding	
<b>MP</b> – Member of Parliament	
<b>NASP</b> - National Centre for Social Prescribing	
<b>NCVO</b> – National Council for Voluntary Organisations	
<b>NFWI</b> - National Federation of Women's Institutes	
<b>NHS</b> – National Health Service	
<b>NIMBY</b> – Not In My Back Yard	



# Summary

## Rationale

Coronation Gardens for Food and Nature is an initiative between four organisations: The Wildlife Trusts, Incredible Edible, Garden Organic and the Women’s Institutes (WI). It aims to create a legacy through encouraging individuals and communities to grow fruit and vegetables in nature-friendly ways. The initiative is a response to unfolding multiple, interconnected crises – climate breakdown, nature’s decline, economic instability, and widespread health challenges, both physical and mental. It recognises that routes through and out of these intersecting crises can be found in local, place-based community action including community food growing (CFG).

## Approach

This research explores different types of CFG initiatives, the benefits they bring, challenges those involved face and how CFG initiatives can be scaled up. The research was conducted by Grounded Insight, primarily through depth and group interviews with 50 people involved in CFG across the UK over 2024-25.

## Understanding community food growing

CFG projects aim to enhance the knowledge of locally available natural resources. Although the food production may be modest, projects can help boost nature; support adaption to climate change; build skills; improve health, general well-being and neighbourhoods; create circular economies; foster community connections and local democracy; and support food sovereignty. This research project understands CFG as the practice of people in a community of place and/or interest coming together to cultivate food, mainly fruits, vegetables and herbs. CFG is distinct in that community members work collectively to manage a site and grow produce for that community – for shared benefits.

## Partner organisation approaches to community food growing

Each of the founding partners of the Coronation Gardens initiative – The Wildlife Trusts, Incredible Edible, Garden Organic and the WI – are based on the premise of nurturing individual and collective voluntary action from the bottom up, for wider environmental and societal good. Each are involved in CFG in different ways, reflecting their differing organisational histories, priorities, structures and resources.

## Case studies

This research showcases five CFG case studies from across the UK. Each of the profiled CFG projects aims to support people, communities, nature and the climate, though with different emphases. Each project relies on the incredible efforts, knowledge, commitment and time of a band of volunteers and project leaders, most of whom are funded for a few hours but give many, many more. The case studies are:

- Hull’s Right to Grow initiative, a city-wide realisation of Incredible Edible’s national campaign to get a change in local legislation for a Right to Grow.
- Incredible Edible Conwy, which includes a full gamut of growing sites across the historic Welsh town and is a beacon for the Incredible Edible network.
- Incredible Edible Crewe, which highlights the transformations which can be inspired by one person, a collection of sites of raised beds and volunteers drawn from existing groups associated with the parish church.
- Sustainable Kirriemuir’s trio of growing projects, including a community garden, several primary school growing sites and a large-scale community supported agriculture scheme on a 2000-acre estate in rural Scotland.
- The Sage Network, a therapeutic horticulture project grown from a few planters in a very small, tucked away site behind a multistorey carpark in Dover.

## Benefits and impacts of community food growing

CFG projects bring many diverse impacts, to individuals and communities, to neighbourhoods and local democracy, to nature and the climate.

**Exercising personal agency for climate and nature**  
Many of the leaders of the CFG projects were motivated by a sense of feeling like they were making a difference: to the people they work and volunteer with, to their local community and to the global climate and nature crises. They were motivated by taking positive action in the face of interconnected and overwhelming crises, providing an example of the power of small actions which others could replicate. Volunteers and project leads valued the opportunity to take political action and feel a sense of efficacy through their local food growing.

## Supporting social connection and reducing loneliness

Involvement in CFG projects brings many physical and mental health benefits by bringing people together, reducing loneliness, forging connections, creating a sense of belonging and purpose, and a reason to be outside connecting with nature. CFG projects bring together people who otherwise wouldn’t meet, creating unlikely friendships and community connections.

## Overcoming personal challenges, developing knowledge and skills

Volunteers valued learning about growing from others, including people with expertise, as well as the hard physical work involved and the satisfaction of growing and seeing the changes they helped create on the site. Many volunteers expressed pride in the results of their efforts in transforming formerly disused and discarded spaces, benefited from getting their hands in the soil and being in nature. One group of volunteers with learning difficulties valued the practical skills they were learning through their CFG volunteering.

## Benefits to nature and climate

All the CFG case studies were committed to growing with wildlife and nature. Flowering plants and wildflowers were planted, dead piles of wood encouraged, and bug hotels were installed to support insect populations. Several projects had undertaken bioblitzes to get a baseline survey of biodiversity in their growing areas. All CFG projects were committed to reusing materials, reducing waste and their carbon footprint, creating compost and water harvesting. Food production varied across the sites, with some producing a considerable volume.

## Neighbourhood improvement

CFG case studies made a considerable difference to improving the appearance of local areas and could transform derelict or disused land into attractive and productive spaces, improving pride in local place.

## Changing and influencing local power structures and dynamics

CFG projects can shift power dynamics locally. All the projects in this research had some connections with local decision-makers and the local council, though some were stronger than others. The Hull case study is an example of this local democratic engagement, where through the influence and lobbying of local voluntary and community groups, local politicians voted for the city’s residents to have the Right to Grow on public land.

## The ‘ripple’ and ‘snowball’ effects

CFG projects can breed more growing activities, including the original project expanding outwards to more and bigger growing sites, or volunteers in the original project being inspired to initiate their own growing project. The energy created around the RtG in Hull has triggered various projects,

from university research to new community outreach growing projects. Through developing the community farm as an enterprise, Sustainable Kirriemuir is creating job and training opportunities, underscoring how CFG can act as a potential stepping stone in bringing forward the next generation of food growers and land managers and can create more resilient communities of place.

## Community food growing leads to community-powered places

CFG projects can create a sense of identify within the community, develop grassroots networks, and help create a sense of place. Place-based volunteering has the potential to transform communities as people get to know each other and work together on things they care about. In this sense, CFG projects are usually about much more than the produce which is grown. The benefits and impacts of CFG projects are often interconnected, multi-faceted and of a reach and scale that can seem out of proportion to the scale of the project itself: the power of small actions is profound.

## Challenges and barriers to community food growing

## Volunteer recruitment, management and retention

Having a large enough pool of volunteers to be able to do the work required to keep projects going is a common issue. Volunteers valued the regularity and permanence of weekly gardening sessions without them being too formal. This requires a delicate balance by project leads which can come at a personal cost, with a pressure of expectation, and an uncertainty if there will be enough people to do the necessary work. The research underscores the importance of a paid project lead, or volunteer manager, position to support and scale CFG projects.

## Access to suitable land and facilities

Each of the CFG case study project leads expressed challenges regarding accessing suitable land and facilities. Constraints include hard and physical boundaries, access, soil fertility and/or potential contamination, and facilities such as water and power. These factors were a motive to grow and seek alternative spaces and sites, either in the past or at present.

## Bureaucracy and administration

The interface between people getting their hands into the soil and the bureaucracy that is attached to CFG projects, especially if they want to expand, creates a tension and challenge between grassroots action and top-down bureaucracy which can frustrate and dilute CFG efforts. The need for processes can come up against the expectations from local groups who may want and need a level of support from the local council or indeed from funders, but who do not want or need to be told how to manage the land or be burdened with red tape and reporting requirements.



### Financial sustainability

Securing funding and creating financial sustainability was a core concern of all the CFG projects in this research. Whilst funding for equipment and donations have been relatively forthcoming, securing funding for staff time is extremely difficult, yet across the CFG projects, having a paid project lead was highlighted as being a critical enabler.

### Wild versus neat: different views on land use and appearance

People have different preferences and ideas about what looks nice and how public spaces should be used. Some residents want grass verges and areas for wildflowers and grasses mowed rather than left; and using spaces for nature rather than dog walking, for example, can be met with intense opposition from community members. Community opposition can be a significant barrier to CFG projects getting off the ground and expanding, and therefore community outreach is a key part of CFG projects, especially if they are in multipurpose and open access locations such as parks.

### Understanding the enablers and sustaining factors for community food growing projects

#### Incredible people: changemakers, networkers and space curators

CFG projects are powered by the inspiring individuals who initiate them and who keep them running, but their time, energy and willingness to work for free is not limitless – they are likely to become burnt out, disenchanted or at the very least, be limited in growing activities to what can be done in several hours a week. The value volunteers place on the project lead cannot be overstated in providing direction, management and support for the growing activities.

#### Activism takes many forms: volunteer recruitment and retention

Volunteers are the people power behind the community growing projects, and attracting and retaining the range of volunteers to create and implement community food growing is a challenge. People are attracted to give their time for CFG projects for different reasons – and their activism takes many forms. Valuing and welcoming all forms of activism and volunteering is key, which means understanding people's motivations for getting involved in CFG projects is important. Some people are drawn to the activism and rebellious element of growing in public spaces, whilst this can be off-putting to others who may be more drawn to the social connectedness or nature elements. Whilst volunteers' motivations differ, all need to feel included and supported.

#### Not all places are created equal: CFG and the art of the possible

Places are unequal – deep geographical differences exist in the UK on multiple measures and place matters greatly in enabling CFG projects to emerge. Factors including local socio-economic

and demographic factors play a part, as does the presence, strength and connectedness of the local voluntary and community (VCSE) sector and the local political landscape. Areas have different levels of resource and power – including access to funding, land, influence and social infrastructure – and these are unequally distributed across the UK.

#### Access to power and resources: land, funding, expertise, networks

Each project in this research found and secured access to land to grow from a landowner. Landowners ranged from the local council, parish churches, a large rural estate, a householder's garden, and voluntary organisations, including the National Trust. Some of the CFG sites are hard-standing and only suitable for raised beds and planters; others have been used for growing for decades. Project leads either already had, or sought and developed relationships with key individuals who could provide access to funding or land and/or access to knowledge and influence.

#### Supportive power holders and decision-makers

Having access to people with power, resources, skills and connections is a key enabler for community food growing projects. Sometimes this is the project lead themselves, a close network of influential and/or determined local people, and/or a connector such as a community organiser or builder. Understanding local politics and political structures is also helpful – with important relationships between project leads and local authority open spaces/parks and gardens departments, town councils and food partnerships, for example. Finding ways to match the priorities of the growing project to local political and policy priorities is helpful.



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### Stories matter: communications, community outreach and education

Telling compelling stories about CFG, reaching out to the local community and going into schools to educate children about food growing are important elements in sustaining and growing CFG projects. These elements help CFG projects to be more than the sum of their parts.

#### CFG projects are situated in time and place

We can understand the factors shaping the emergence, continuation and faltering of CFG projects as situated in time and place, shaped by a multitude of factors that shift in significance over time and are in turn shaped by the impact of the projects themselves. CFG projects are affected by:

- Individual factors, including motivations, personality, identity and resources.
- Relationships and social networks, including an individual's family, friends, neighbours, colleagues and wider social networks.
- Groups and organisations, both the presence and absence of them and their connection to each other.
- Local environment and place, including local spaces, events, institutions and politics.
- Wider societal and global influences, such as the climate crisis, COVID-19 pandemic and geopolitics.

Using this analysis to understand the factors and forces shaping CFG projects, and people's motivations to take part in them or set them up, helps to see where the points of influence may lie for those operating in the different spheres and consider recommendations.

### Recommendations

Priority and summarised recommendations which are aimed towards the different sectors and actors who can enable CFG include:

#### Coronation Gardens partners and VCSE organisations enabling community-led activism

- Review the role of CFG in relevant strategies and specify its role in delivering organisational objectives.
- Seek new and wider partnerships across the range of topics and impacts that CFG intersects with.
- Follow the principles of community organising in CFG projects.
- Grow and connect existing initiatives which embrace community activism and all types of volunteering.

- Continue to develop ways to support existing and potential CFG project leads.

#### Funders of CFG and community-led activism

- Consider providing funding for the CFG project lead roles.
- CFG crosses many agendas and organisations which funders can help to create connections between.

#### National government and policymakers

- CFG cuts across different government departments and agendas, including health, environment and food, volunteering, neighbourhood and democratic renewal. It should be prioritised and included across departmental strategies and priorities across England, Scotland and Wales.

#### For the Westminster government

- Provide powers for local authorities, in particular planning departments, to facilitate the availability of land for CFG, and give a Right to Grow legislative backing.
- Integrate CFG into Defra's developing thinking on the Food Strategy.
- Champion the local social infrastructure for volunteering and community activism.
- Champion CFG within the community-led version of the 'neighbourhood health service'.

#### Local government and local health systems

- Local councillors should pass a motion for the community's Right to Grow.
- Strategic authorities can recognise and promote CFG in their forthcoming Spatial Development Strategies.
- Integrated Care Systems can recognise and support CFG in social and green prescribing activities.
- Parks and open spaces departments can champion CFG.
- Local Nature Partnerships and Local Food Partnerships can offer support and connections for CFG projects.

#### Current and future CFG project leads: the change-makers

- Seek forgiveness rather than permission for taking changing the world into your own hands.



# Introduction

We're living in a moment of unfolding multiple, interconnected crises – climate breakdown, nature's decline, economic instability, and widespread health challenges, both physical and mental. This is the era of polycrisis<sup>1</sup>.

The UK is facing a dramatic loss of biodiversity, a staggering 41% of UK species in decline,<sup>2</sup> and the country now ranking among the bottom 12% globally in terms of biodiversity intactness.<sup>3</sup> But the UK isn't alone in this struggle. At the 2022 United Nations' Biodiversity Conference (COP 15), nations agreed on a global target to restore 30% of nature by 2030 – a bold commitment, and one that the UK has pledged to uphold. The causes of biodiversity loss and climate change are numerous, but land use changes and the industrialised food system play central roles. Industrial farming, for instance, is the largest driver of the UK's biodiversity loss,<sup>4</sup> while emissions from agriculture account for 11% of the nation's total emissions,<sup>5</sup> overtaking emissions from electricity.<sup>6</sup>

Yet a massive amount of food is wasted each year: UK households discard 4.7 million tonnes of edible food, costing them a staggering £4.9 billion annually.<sup>7</sup> At the same time, the UK's diet is out of balance. Too many of us consume too little fruit and vegetables, while overconsuming processed foods, sugary snacks, and meat. This distorted diet contributes to health crises – heart disease remains the second-leading cause of death,<sup>8</sup> while over a quarter of adults are obese, with obesity costing the NHS an astounding £6.5 billion annually.<sup>9</sup> Mental health is also in crisis, with one in four people in England experiencing some form of mental health issue each year.<sup>10</sup> The World Health Organization recently declared loneliness a public health concern.<sup>11</sup>

The socio-economic landscape has worsened too. Austerity measures, rising living costs, and stagnant wages have pushed more people into reliance on food banks.<sup>12</sup> Vulnerable groups – unemployed individuals, low-income families, those with disabilities or illnesses, and single parents – are bearing the brunt of this hardship. Meanwhile, inequality has widened, public services have been stripped back, loneliness is a growing issue,<sup>13</sup> and people are spending less time outdoors, despite overwhelming evidence of the positive impact this has on our well-being.<sup>14</sup> Trust in democracy and politicians is at an all-time low,<sup>15</sup> and volunteering has hit a record low, too.<sup>16</sup>

Routes through and out of these intersecting crises – which are, by their nature, caused by disconnection, fragmentation, to interdependence, cohesion and connection – can be found in local community action. People are embedded in places – places we live, play, learn and work. It is here, at the grassroots, where we can be empowered to take action – for nature, for climate, for community and for ourselves. Community food growing is one approach. It is not only a way in which we can understand the intersecting and multiple crises we are experiencing but is a way to also challenge and face them. Indeed, food is the common thread that binds us together across age, income, culture and ability, and activities around local food can take us into a different relationship with each other and the planet.<sup>17</sup>

In response to this, the four project partners, with support from the National Heritage Lottery Fund, sought to create momentum and understanding about food growing – for people and for nature. Coronation Gardens for Food and Nature<sup>18</sup> aims to create a legacy through encouraging individuals and communities to grow fruit and vegetables in nature-friendly ways by aiming to encourage everyone – households, schools, businesses and communities – to grow edible plants, for food and for nature. A two-year project, running between 2023–2025 and funded by The National Lottery Heritage Fund, it combines the experience of The Wildlife Trusts, Incredible Edible, Garden Organic and the WI.

This research forms part of the Coronation Gardens for Food and Nature initiative. It sought to understand the community elements of food growing, by exploring different community food growing initiatives, the benefits they bring, challenges those involved face and how community growing initiatives can be scaled up. Through almost 50 interviews with those involved in community food growing – from the founders of national and grassroots community growing initiatives to school children and local funders – we make suggestions about how the four project partners, and others, can help more community food growing to happen, with more people, in more places.

# Research methods

This research sought to understand different types of community food growing initiatives, the benefits they bring, challenges those involved face and how community growing initiatives can be scaled up. With this insight, it makes suggestions about how the four project partners, and others, can help more community food growing to happen, with more people, in more places.

The following key questions guided the research:

1. What is community food growing?
2. How do project partners support and encourage community food growing initiatives?
3. How, where and why does community food growing happen?
4. What are the benefits of community food growing?
5. What are the barriers and challenges that hinder community food growing?
6. What are the essential components for community growing initiatives to start and for them to grow?
7. How can the project partners support and encourage more community food growing?

The research was conducted using qualitative methods including a rapid evidence review and online semi-structured interviews with seven key members of staff from the founding partner organisations to understand the founding partner approaches to and involvement in community food growing. Case study fieldwork across the UK included site visits to community food growing projects and 50 interviews with project leads, volunteers and local decision-makers both in person and online. Case studies were identified using the following criteria:

- at least one Coronation Gardens project partner involvement.
- primary aim of project, including a mix of growing produce, supporting social isolation and/or older people, neighbourhood renewal, addressing the climate and nature crisis.
- scale and ambition, from very small to very large scale.

- location, including urban and rural, from different parts of the UK.
- practical considerations, including willingness and availability of project leads to be interviewed, and connect the researcher to relevant people involved in the project for research interviews.

Working with The Wildlife Trust's Community Organising Manager and their contacts through the Nextdoor Nature Programme, and building on intelligence gathered through the founding partner interviews, five community food growing case studies were identified:

- Incredible Edible Conwy
- Incredible Edible Crewe
- Sustainable Kirriemuir
- Hull's Right to Grow
- The Sage Network Community Garden, Dover

To maintain anonymity of the interviewees, the following identifiers are used in the report:

- Founding partner: member of staff from one of the four Coronation Gardens for Food and Nature partner organisations (The Wildlife Trusts, Incredible Edible, Garden Organic, The National Federation of Women's Institutes).
- Project lead: the person or people, paid or unpaid, who leads the community growing case study project.
- Project participant: people volunteering in growing projects (aside from the project lead).
- Project decision-maker: people holding power in some way in the growing project, for example as landowner and/or funder.

Interviews were used to create individual case studies of the growing projects, and thematic analysis was conducted across all interviews to extrapolate the benefits, challenges and critical success factors across the projects, and to draw the wider conclusions and recommendations.



# Understanding community food growing

## Defining community food growing

To understand what defines community food growing, we can look to the places and spaces which are used for community food growing as these are one of its defining characteristics. These spaces are usually shared or public spaces and so tend to be both accessible to and of benefit to the public, though they can include private land too. The most common spaces for community food growing include:

- Community gardens: a piece of land gardened by a group of people, using individual or shared plots on private or public land, sharing both the work and the reward.<sup>19</sup> Usually open to everyone to join. The 'gardening' isn't necessarily for food – it can be for improving appearance, providing access to green space and creating wildlife habitats.
- Community orchards: groups of fruit and sometimes nut trees grown by and for the community on private or public land, including council land, hospital sites, town greens, derelict sites, alongside paths, on the edge of forests and on allotments and open ground.<sup>20</sup>
- Community allotments: some communities start groups that find land and create their own allotment site, often where there is a lack of traditional allotment sites. Unlike traditional, local authority-owned public allotments, community allotments do not have a standard set rules, sizes or services as they are created by the community to meet their own needs.<sup>21</sup>

Other models for community food growing can include:

- Public planting in streets and communal areas, with an increasing number of schemes growing fruit and vegetables not just flowers and shrubs.
- Guerilla gardening whereby gardeners identify a disused, neglected or abandoned piece of land which they do not own and use it to grow either crops, flowering plants or to create wildlife areas.
- Meanwhile gardening, or the temporary use of land for gardening and food growing, which are particularly popular in areas with lots of unused land awaiting development and can bring waste land into productive use for a defined period.
- Forest gardening, which incorporates fruit and nut trees, shrubs, herbs, vines and perennial vegetables into public parks or woodlands.<sup>22</sup>

Whilst CFG is not an exclusively urban endeavour, it often happens in environments where space to grow is limited or restricted, and where there are drivers for communities to come together to grow food. Over the last 40 years, the population residing in cities has more than doubled<sup>23</sup> and by 2050, current projections forecast that two-thirds of the global population will live in cities.<sup>24</sup>

CFG projects aim to enhance knowledge of locally available natural resources. Although the food production may be modest, projects can help build skills for sustainable food growing, cooperative practices, knowledge exchange, wider community engagement and policy support.<sup>25</sup> Local food growing arguably has a major potential contribution to make to calls for food sovereignty.<sup>26</sup>

We asked founding partners their views on what community food growing comprises. Their responses included some common factors of public access, freely-given produce, community managed and volunteer-led and skills development:

*It's probably more classically linked not to Local Authority land, or if it is, it's given over for peppercorn rent, for example, and the Local Authority has put it aside for communities – they look after it and take ownership of it. The ownership structure doesn't matter but it's led by volunteers or supported by members of staff to build a volunteer base and its purpose is a space for communities to use – orchards, forest school, vegetable patches. It includes learning and training how to grow, and food produce that comes of it gets linked back to food bank or local school."*

**Interview, founding partner**

*Community food growing is a project where it's somehow accessible to either a specific community or the public – so it's rooted in the community not a private piece of land, but how they join in will depend on each specific project. I'd assume they would grow seasonally and a mixture of flowers, fruits, veg, whatever that community chooses to grow."*

**Interview, founding partner**

*Community food growing for me is where there are spaces where food is grown that people are welcome to have."*

**Interview, founding partner**

Combining the literature and founding partner responses, our working definition of community food growing is:

*Community food growing (CFG) is the practice of people in a community – of place and/or interest – coming together to cultivate food, mainly fruits, vegetables and herbs. CFG is generally a group gardening activity in which food is grown in a common area and the produce is provided free for the wider community.<sup>27</sup> CFG is distinct in that community members work collectively to manage a site and grow produce for that community for shared benefit.*

**Box 1:** Project definition of community food growing

## Understanding what is beyond the scope of community food growing

In understanding what community food growing is, we also need to understand what it isn't, and there are several related concepts and practices which are close to community food growing, but which fall outside of our working definition.

Community gardening is outside our scope because whilst it may have much in common with community food growing in terms of the motivations of those doing it, and the spaces in which it happens, it doesn't necessarily involve growing edible produce. A large-scale survey on community gardening is underway by the Royal Horticultural Society (RHS), the findings from which will be of great interest to those with an interest in better understanding all types of community growing.<sup>28</sup>

Urban agriculture, urban food growing and community-supported agriculture may all feature community food growing, but they are broader terms as the land in question is not necessarily cultivated cooperatively by the community, and/or the produce is not necessarily provided for free for the community.<sup>29</sup> Likewise, community food projects may include community food growing but are broader than this to include all aspects of food, from seeds and production to distribution and preparation to consumption and waste, and community, but also some form of third-party support by way of sponsorship, grants or state support. Community food projects include food hubs, food banks and community cafes and community food waste projects as well as community growing projects.<sup>30</sup>

Finally, given that an essential element of community food growing is that it is open to all members of a community and the produce is available to that community, we exclude from our understanding of community food growing those projects or activities which take place with a restricted group of people on land which is restricted to a closed group, such

as prisons. Public (for example Local Authority) allotments which are not open to the public, and which are managed by private individuals or groups of individuals, are also excluded.

## The steps involved in starting community food growing projects

The Welsh Federation of City Farms and Community Gardens created a resource guide for community growing which sets out a series of steps involved in community growing, for anyone who wants to get started.<sup>31</sup> The pack is a comprehensive introduction to setting up, developing and sustaining a community-managed farm, garden or related community growing space, set out in 12 steps which are summarised in Box 2. Incredible Edible also has a range of resources for those within its network on the practicalities of setting up and maintaining community food growing projects.

### Step 1 Beginnings: starting your group

Covers bringing people together and getting the word out about your ideas.

### Step 2 Finding & securing your site

Advice on where and how to find the right site. Also covers what on-site checks you need to make to ensure your potential site is suitable for community growing.

### Step 3 Involving the community & profile raising

Sharing and refining your vision by getting the local community involved in shaping your project.

### Step 4 Organising your group

Action and business planning, formalising your group by creating a management committee.

### Step 5 Planning & designing your site

Site analysis and design allows forward planning and enhances ownership and involvement by the group itself.

### Step 6 Money & budgets

Getting finances in shape, understanding financial processes and working up accurate budgets are all essential elements for your developing growing group.

### Step 7 Raising funds & generating income

Fundraising, generating income in other ways and saving expenditure.

### Step 8 Safety first: looking after volunteers, workers and visitors

Insurance, risk assessment and health and safety.

### Step 9 Recruitment & training

Taking on staff and volunteers and understanding what's involved in this process is an important step in a group's development.

### Step 10 Governance & paperwork

If your group is well organised and follows good practice it is more likely to function better, deal with administration quicker and be more robust for the future.

### Step 11 Becoming a membership organisation

Covers the basics of becoming a membership organisation, including membership fees.

### Step 12 Maintaining and developing your project

Making your group thrive. Retaining volunteers and community interest, working with advisors, carrying out an organisational health check and sustaining momentum.

**Box 2:** Steps involved in setting up, developing and maintaining community food growing projects



# Partner organisation approaches to community food growing

Each of the founding partners of the Coronation Gardens initiative are based on the premise of nurturing individual and collective voluntary action from the bottom up, for wider environmental and societal good. And each are involved in similar and different ways in community food growing, reflecting their differing organisational histories, priorities, structures and resources.



## The Wildlife Trusts

The Wildlife Trusts are working to bring wildlife back, empowering people to take meaningful action for nature and creating an inclusive society where nature matters. It is a

grassroots movement of 47 charities across the whole of the UK, Alderney and the Isle of Man, supported by members, volunteers, staff and trustees. Every Wildlife Trust works within its local community to inspire people to create a wilder future – from advising thousands of landowners on how to manage their land to benefit wildlife, to connecting hundreds of thousands of school children with nature every year.

The Wildlife Trust's 2030 Strategy includes the 'Team Wilder' approach, a community-led approach designed to engage and empower people to act for nature's recovery, and a move away from its more traditional volunteer-led model. Through building local, reciprocal relationships, the federation aims to lead more people (at least one in four) to take sustained collective action for nature and climate to achieve 30 by 30 nationally.<sup>32</sup>

As part of the Team Wilder approach, there are now around 50–60 people with 'Community Organising' in their job title across the federation and a 'train the trainer' programme is in place which follows the Community Organisers' Community Organising Framework (see Appendix 1). This approach aims to challenge power and provoke change by supporting everyone's ability to act, building collective power to effect change, overcome social injustice and build community and work together to shift and share power. Through harnessing the theory and approach of Community Organising, The Wildlife Trusts are operating in the space of Community Power.<sup>33</sup>

*"You take this [Team Wilder] definition and can translate it to any role in The Wildlife Trusts... [it's] supporting people's already existing power and facilitating and bringing this together in a community, you are enhancing what is out there and if [it's] not [there], providing leadership to build confidence for people to do it for themselves."*

Interview, founding partner

A National Heritage Lottery-funded project, Nextdoor Nature,<sup>34</sup> has accelerated the Team Wilder approach. This project which ran from 2022–2024 aimed to tackle the climate crisis by encouraging people to make individual efforts to help nature, focusing on people from areas of lower socio-economic status or multiple deprivations who are less likely to have access to nature and are also more likely to suffer the consequences of climate change. The project evaluation found that a wider range of people had been empowered to take action for nature through a Community Organising approach, and that the approach had enabled a sense of local pride by engaging communities, closing the 'value-action gap' and by transforming communities. Through 1,600 community-led transformations for nature in communities across the UK, 95% of the participants said there is now greater collaborative working between residents, local organisations and groups and 82% feel there is now greater decision-making about wildlife in the hands of local people.<sup>35</sup>

The Wildlife Trusts are working to bring wildlife to more people, and more people to wildlife because a thriving, wildlife-rich environment benefits both physical and mental health. People with nature on their doorstep are more active, mentally resilient and have better all-round health. However, just 35% of households with annual incomes below £10,000 are within a 10-minute walk of a publicly accessible natural green space.<sup>36</sup>

Whilst community food growing has tended not to be a strategic objective of Wildlife Trusts, and has instead been more opportunistic, it is becoming more prevalent over the last few years due to the Team Wilder way of working and Nextdoor Nature Programme because community food growing projects work hand in hand with Community Organising:

*"I think the Team Wilder approach allows the Trusts to think community food growing is relevant. Through Team Wilder there's a feeling they have permission to look at and work with their communities. They are learning about their communities more than, say, five years ago."*

Interview, founding partner

Another core part of The Wildlife Trust's work is encouraging wildlife gardening including through its long-standing Wild About Gardens initiative with the Royal Horticultural Society, extensive online resources on wildlife gardening, with schools and in urban areas, and its annual 30 Days Wild campaign. The ways individuals and groups are encouraged to take action for the Coronation Gardens initiative are drawn from The Wildlife Trust's resources on wildlife gardening, with a fifth new point about growing edible plants:

1. plant pollinator friendly plants
2. create a water feature
3. leave a patch of long grass or a pile of logs
4. go peat and chemical free
5. grow healthy food to eat, from herbs and salads to vegetables and fruit trees.<sup>37</sup>

Long-running campaigns such as Action for Insects<sup>38</sup> and Precious Peatlands<sup>39</sup> are also inherently connected to the Coronation Gardens initiative and to community food growing and an ambition of the organisation is to connect the Team Wilder and community organising side of its work with campaigning and mobilising.



**INCREDIBLE  
EDIBLE C.I.C**

## Incredible Edible

Incredible Edible's mission is to create

kind, confident and connected communities, with raised awareness of how we can live more sustainably, through the power of food. There are around 150 grassroots, volunteer-led groups in the UK originating from the original group in Todmorden in West Yorkshire. Incredible Edible is a bottom-up movement for grassroots change and the network is understood as a 'loosely federated group of friends committed not by structure and constitution but by hearts and passion to create a different future and a kinder present.' Its strapline, **if you eat, you're in**, underscores the network's ethos – which is that there are 'no rules, just an inclusive welcome.'<sup>40</sup>

Incredible Edible have one part-time paid member of staff. The network is based on a simple model of three spinning plates of:

- Community: growing food to share in public gardens
- Learning: searching out the skills to grow and cook from within the community
- Business: supporting local growers and producers through our weekly spend

These three spinning plates together make a 'sticky money economy'. These three plates are open to interpretation according to circumstances, but they define Incredible Edible as Incredible Edible.<sup>41</sup> The first two – community and learning – are central to the understanding of CFG adopted in this research. Founding partners explained Incredible Edible's perspective on and approach to CFG as an ethos, and simultaneously as a way to practically resist and challenge current power structures, get your hands in the soil and meet people. Being an Incredible Edible group is not a strict approach to growing or following a particular organisational structure:

*"... [We are] changing people's perspective on what is possible by inspiring people with different ideas and attitudes. We look at a world where many people feel they can't participate in gardening or food growing as don't have access to land, and Incredible Edibles says, "No, we won't accept this limitation, we will find another way". It's about a resistance to the current structures more than it is about what seeds to sow when and creating an MoU in your group. We have toolkits to help with the practical side but it's more an idea..."*

Interview, founding partner

*"People know they can take the idea of IE and use it to leverage their own version of what stands out to them about community growing and not feel controlled or constrained – the way you garden and participate in your local economies doesn't have to be constrained by arbitrary rules from the local authority or government – and we aren't going to set arbitrary rules about how you run your IE group..."*

Interview, founding partner

*"Some people see IE as a challenge to the system and a different way of approaching things. And, just as validly, some people see it as a bit of nice gardening, get your hands in the soil, meet people – probably most people see it like this, though the group leaders may see it more in the changing structures way. It's both simple and complex simultaneously – which is its biggest strength and weakness at the same time."*

Interview, founding partner



Incredible Edible is currently campaigning for a community Right to Grow; a change in the law so that more people have the right to grow more food in their local community.<sup>42</sup> This campaign aims to tackle a major obstacle to local food growing: the lack of available land close to peoples' homes. This land could be underused verges, space waiting for development or land which is simply derelict. By placing a duty on local authorities to simplify access to land for community growing, people will have a Right to Grow on suitable public sector land. Hull has already adopted this approach and is one of the case studies in this research. The Right to Grow campaign is a current priority for Incredible Edible, a way to start changing the rules and the culture of key institutions and move towards Community Power.

*"We know the anchor institutions in our lives need a major cultural shift to move from the top down but haven't embraced a truly people-based approach to people and environment... if we start with land, and we start with land that people's taxation pays for – which is low hanging fruit, we can establish a conversation between system and state. We are more likely to move into a Community Power position where it's appropriate for the things that touch people's lives – and food and the quality of environment is this – we are the pearl in the middle of the oyster – everything we try and do is to infect organisations to try and get them to do it in a different way."*

**Interview, founding partner**

Community Organising is Incredible Edible's 'bread and butter' way of working as IE groups wouldn't exist if people weren't organising themselves in the community, and that this way of organising could be a conduit for policy and systems change:

*"It's kind of is our bread and butter – our groups wouldn't exist if they weren't organising themselves in community... For us the bit of Community Organising that feels critical is taking a step back to bring the community into something that is more policy and systems change-related. The opportunity we have through Community Organising might be to get people to look up from the soil for a minute and think about the impact they are having, think if there are ways you can tell stories about what you do."*

**Interview, founding partner**

Unlike the other partners, Incredible Edible are an international movement, with Incredible Edibles featured in Seeds to Solutions, the book which tells stories about the network, established in France, Australia, Ireland and Spain. Their website also profiles inspirational projects from across the globe (see Box 3).

### Havana, Cuba

Around 8% of all land in Havana is under cultivation producing organic food for the city's inhabitants, with around 90% of all the fruit and vegetables consumed in Havana produced in the city's urban farms and gardens. The most widespread urban growing areas are the 'popular gardens' (huertos populares) launched in 1991, after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the oil shortages, economic impacts and food destabilisation this brought for Cuba in 1989. These gardens are small plots of state-owned land cultivated by individuals and community groups, primarily as a solution for providing food security. Most of the land is made up of otherwise disused pockets of land, leased for free to residents, who usually live very close to the land they are assigned.

### Rosario, Argentina

The local authorities created an urban agriculture plan in 2002 to green the city in response to flooding, fire and economic collapse. Local groups were supplied with training, seeds, materials, tools and growing spaces on municipal land. Now, hundreds of urban farmers, around 65% of whom are women, have been granted temporary ownership of public and private land across the city and are selling produce to the city's inhabitants, driving demand for local produce. In 2015 the programme extended, creating an agro-ecological green belt around the city, making large areas of land available to grow produce for the city's inhabitants. The green belt areas maintained soil integrity and reduced flooding and temperatures in the wake of 2020 wildfires in the region.

### Philadelphia, USA

The Parks and Recreations Department created a city-wide urban agriculture plan, released in 2023, which confronts the history's legacy of structural racism and land-based oppression. With a 10-year investment framework, the plan includes increasing access to growing space and building long-term support into for urban agriculture into the city's infrastructure, policies and programs.<sup>44</sup>

### New York City, USA

the City's Parks Department supports over 500 registered community gardens via their GreenThumb program, established in 1978. The GreenThumb program has a team of coordinators who support the gardens, and the groups can order bulk materials such as soil, compost, woodchips, mulch, lumber, and landscape fabric for free through the program, as well as access support with things like leases and water access as well as training on garden design, carpentry for gardens, and group development and organising.<sup>45</sup>

**Box 3:** International community food growing initiatives <sup>43</sup>

## garden organic

### Garden Organic

Garden Organic promotes organic growing and composting, citizen science and research, and seed conservation through its Heritage Seed Library. Garden Organic has been leading the way in researching and demonstrating best practice in organic growing for more than 65 years and brings together a movement of thousands of growers keen to have a positive impact on the green space they nurture.<sup>46</sup> Garden Organic brings a practical, organic, horticultural side of growing to the Coronation Gardens for Food and Nature initiative.

Over 500 volunteers work with Garden Organic through different programmes but using a similar model of upskilling local people through lead volunteers, which has similarities to a Community Organising approach, albeit without the implicit challenge to power structures. They tend to be funded by a local authority or another organisation to deliver a volunteer network in an area and their programmes include Master Composters, Master Gardeners, Waste Reduction Volunteers and a new one called Growing Buddies.

The Master Composters programmes involve volunteers encouraging householders to compost at source, and to use the compost to grow at home. The Master Gardener programme provides local support and advice for growing food and involves keen gardeners from a community sharing their skills with local residents, acting as a mentor through events or being attached to a space or site, providing free food growing advice for around a year. This programme is similar in a small scale to New York City's Big Reuse programmes, which bring the city's residents together to care for their own green infrastructure and empower communities to embrace composting, tree care, and reuse at a grassroots level, scalable citywide and beyond.<sup>47</sup>

The new Growing Buddies programme requires no horticultural knowledge from the volunteers but is made up of people who want to make a difference and can see that growing might be the answer. Garden Organic then provide the basic inputs for them to get started. They also provide training for community groups and have the Heritage Seed Library:

*"Our heritage seed library – a library of around 800 unusual or historic seed varieties, seeds of all varieties, all over the world, all vegetables, we know communities grow these seeds and varieties and have seed swaps, so we have volunteers who are seed guardians, a whole community of seed savers – I would call this a community of growers... we've sought seeds brought to the UK which have thrived and grown well here and worked with diverse communities across the UK to collect their food stories. Members' experiments as well: citizen science around food growing."*





# theWI

INSPIRING WOMEN

## The Women's Institute

The Women's Institute (WI) is the largest voluntary women's organisation in the UK with approximately 180,000 members in over 5,500 WIs across England, Wales, and the Islands. The organisation enables women to develop new skills, giving them opportunities to campaign on issues that matter to them and their communities. This includes environmental concerns, from pollution of the seas from oil thrown overboard from ships (1927) to a resolution calling for action to improve sewers to prevent pollution of watercourses (1958) to raising awareness of plastic pollution from synthetic clothing (2017).<sup>48</sup>

WIs are active in community food growing in various ways including through competitions, growing in public places, allotments and at home:

*Sometimes our WIs are asked to look after an existing community garden, e.g. schools garden or a derelict piece of land and council has asked the local WI to manage..."*

Interview, founding partner

*WI members love to do anything "community" [for example] competitions where they've done hanging baskets, vegetables growing out of bras and knickers – they are very imaginative when they get going on this sort of stuff. It [community growing] is a very active area of the WI: growing on roundabouts, hedgerows, also a lot of WIs have their own allotment and they all work on it together, will use the produce grown on it... [they've] even done stuff with window boxes and balconies. They come at it from all different angles. Once the produce is grown, we don't tend to hear as much about it. We tend to get stories about what they've done."*

Interview, founding partner

As with the other federated and loosely networked organisation partners, the National Federation of Women's Institutes (NFWI) tend to hear about food growing projects if a WI brings it to their attention; it isn't an area of work that is monitored centrally.

*WIs know their own communities and get involved in what's important locally for their community, for example, if there was a county agricultural fair, for example, and harvest events. They are passionate about locally sourced and grown food. We do monthly blogs, cookery blogs, and we make sure produce is seasonal on the blogs."*

Interview, founding partner

Reflecting on the types of community food growing WIs become involved with, the founding partners noted that sometimes members will be inspired by projects that the NFWI lead, such as their campaigns on bees and river water quality currently. At other times there may be a member who has a particular skill or interest like gardening and want to share it with the group, and other times they may be responding to the needs of the community, for example with the COVID-19 pandemic and cost-of-living crisis.

The place-based and local nature of WIs is strong, with local WIs getting involved in hedgerow planting in areas of new housing development to crisis support in response to flooding and the cost-of-living crisis. Campaigning and making change in their local area is common practice for WIs. WIs decide on what they campaign on locally; sometimes this is on a particular local issue such as a lack of public toilets, and sometimes it is led from the national federation.

*WIs seem to have branched out what they do and do a lot more for the community now... what used to be a hobby has taken a more serious slant, there is the need for it now,"*

Interview, founding partner

*... there are WIs that take it upon themselves to make change in their community... WIs in general have the empowerment to stand up for whatever it is they feel strongly about – a community garden, an area in the town which is looking derelict, they are not afraid to take the step and know that collectively they are a strong voice. WI carries the reputation about bringing about change which puts power behind them. It has always been there but over recent years we're seeing more of this."*

Interview, founding partner



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## Case studies

This research is built on five case studies, each showcasing a unique community food growing project from across the UK. Table 1 gives a snapshot of the case studies which range from urban to rural, from a few planters in a very small, tucked away site behind a multistorey carpark in Dover, to a large-scale community supported agriculture scheme on a 2000-acre estate in rural Scotland. Also included are Hull's Right to Grow initiative, a city-wide realisation of Incredible Edible's national campaign, and the Welsh Incredible Edible beacon project in Conwy Town, which includes a full gamut of growing sites. Every growing project featured aims to support people, communities, nature and the climate, though with different emphases. And every project relies on the incredible efforts, knowledge, commitment and time of a band of volunteers, and project leaders, most of whom are funded for a few hours but give many, many more.

Each of these projects is linked to one of the founding partners, often through The Wildlife Trust's Nextdoor Nature community organisers' network. Incredible Edible, as a leading force in community food growing, features prominently, underscoring its role in community food growing. The case studies were carefully selected to align with the research's definition of community food growing, though some projects stretched beyond these boundaries. In Kirriemuir, for example, whilst the community garden fit the strict definition, the vision, drive and resources of Sustainable Kirriemuir's trustees led to a broader initiative, an exciting new venture of a community farm.

Project	Location	Rural or urban	Primary aim	Scale	Funded project lead?	Founding partner connections
Hull: the Right to Grow	Hull, northeast England	Urban, city	Facilitating community growing across the city of Hull	City-wide initiative	Yes	Incredible Edible national network Yorkshire Wildlife Trust
Incredible Edible Conwy	Conwy Town, North Wales	Market town surrounded by rural	Improving local public places and inspiring passersby to eat and grow	6 sites including a 0.5ha nursery, an edible hedge, raised beds, borders & a garden	Yes	Conwy Incredible Edible is a beacon site in Wales and features in Seed to Solutions
Incredible Edible Crewe	Crewe, northwest England	Urban, town	Taking climate action through demonstrating local growing	3 sites, mostly raised beds, with an edible hedge	No	Cheshire Wildlife Trust Nextdoor Nature Community Organiser
Sustainable Kirriemuir: Food and Growing	Kirriemuir, central Scotland	Market town surrounded by rural	Growing local food for the community and sharing food growing learning and skills	4 sites: 1 ha community garden, community farm and two school growing sites	Yes	Scottish Wildlife Trust via Nextdoor Nature Pioneer
The Sage Network Community Garden, Dover	Dover, southeast England	Urban, town	Therapeutic gardening	One site, with raised beds	Yes	Kent Wildlife Trust via Nextdoor Nature Community Organiser

Table 1: Summary of case studies



## Case study

# Hull: Right to Grow

The city of Hull is a very tightly bounded urban area, a single tier local authority, and is quite geographically isolated. Its position as a port city on the north bank of the Humber Estuary historically created wealth through whaling and fishing, whilst current economic growth centres on green energy, communication technologies as well as its burgeoning creative and film industries.

Over 90% of the city lies below the high-tide line, and 95% of homes are at risk of flooding. The city has low tree coverage at 13% compared to the minimum target for UK towns and cities of 20%. There are high levels of deprivation, lower than national average emotional wellbeing and physical health and local food insecurity is comparatively high. The Liberal Democrats currently hold power, though council elections are often closely contested between Labour and the Liberal Democrats.

## Right to Grow's emergence in Hull

In 2023, Hull City Council were the first local authority to formally adopt the Right to Grow (RtG). Several factors coalesced to create the conditions and momentum for the RtG motion to be passed.

There is a thriving network of community groups in Hull, including many promoting the benefits of access to green space, food growing and cultivating for wildlife such as Yorkshire Wildlife Trust and Hull and East Riding Friends of the Earth. Over the mid-2010s, these groups, through the Food4Hull network and then the Hull Food Partnership (HFP), successfully lobbied the council to include local food growing in the Hull Local Plan (2016–2032)<sup>49</sup> on vacant land, on amenity green spaces within housing estates and other suitable open spaces.<sup>50</sup> The Local Plan lists and categorises the hundreds of open space sites in the city, and created eight growing sites, but provided no other mechanisms to realise community growing.

Over 2020, with the COVID-19 pandemic lockdowns, the benefits of being outside in nature and growing your own food increased in profile. Inspired by Incredible Edible groups and connecting locally with Rights Community Action and Timebank Hull and East Riding, the Gardens and Open Spaces Hull (GOSH) campaign for food growing and biodiversity on Hull's open spaces, emerged. GOSH brings together a wide range of interests and groups in Hull, from allotments, community orchards and guerilla gardening, to queer foraging, community organising and social leadership.

In September 2020, GOSH organised a pro-food growing demonstration at the council headquarters and a Labour councillor agreed to table a RtG motion. The motion was passed but had been significantly weakened. HFP organised local election hustings in 2023 between members of the public and local council candidates about issues that mattered to them in relation to food. Two key things emerged from these conversations: concern about the level of food bank usage in the city; and a desire to use public land for food growing because of the unavailability of allotments. The same Labour councillor tabled a second RtG motion, this one refined, bolstered and legally watertight with support from the Incredible Edible network including its CEO, Pam Warhurst. HFP secured cross-party support for the motion – something they knew was essential given the balance of power in the council – and in September 2023, the Right to Grow motion was debated and passed unanimously, receiving widespread media coverage.<sup>51</sup>

## Implementing the Right to Grow

The council established a Task and Finish Group for implementing the RtG's legal and policy framework. Elected members, council officers, HFP and voluntary and community organisations are on this group. This included consideration of health and safety issues such as the need for soil testing to ensure the site is safe to grow in if digging straight into the ground; access to water and water harvesting; insurance and licencing and leases. One issue was about identifying which part of the council owns land as it could belong to different departments, such as Highways or Parks and Open Spaces, or it could be allocated for housing or earmarked under 'capital' which the council is trying to sell off.

The pilot for the Right to Grow in Hull is considered to be council-owned Alderman Kneeshaw Park. The park's 'Friends of' group has a headline agreement with the council's Parks and Open Spaces Department to use part of the park for community food growing. This is currently on a small scale and is building up a community group and community interest through engagement. Key people involved in the pilot are involved elsewhere in the RtG movement, including GOSH and other local groups such as the East Riding and Hull Allotment Society. Yorkshire Wildlife Trust is providing support and advice on growing food with nature<sup>52</sup> in the park, which was also one of The Wildlife Trust's Nextdoor Nature<sup>53</sup> projects which draws on the principles of community organising to foster community engagement with nature. The University of Leeds

is conducting a research project on community engagement about community food growing in the park.<sup>54</sup>

The local policy environment is also supporting the implementation of the RtG, beyond the inclusion of local food growing in the Local Plan. In April 2024, Hull City Council launched a new Open Spaces Strategy, which includes the RtG. An Open Space Community Engagement Officer is charged with taking the work forward, including developing an Open Spaces Community Network, which launched in April 2024 and which aims to connect residents and draw on the expertise of local community groups, allotment associations, the Growers' Network and others. Hull Food Strategy 2024–2029<sup>55</sup> is another key strategic driver for local food growing in the context of Hull becoming a sustainable food city.

Other strategic drivers for implementing the RtG are the drive for local authorities to reduce the costs of asset management, the Local Flood Risk Management Strategy<sup>56</sup> which includes using nature-based solutions such as tree planting alongside engineered flood infrastructure, and the Hull and East Riding Local Nature Recovery Strategy<sup>57</sup> for boosting nature in the city.

## What next for Hull's Right to Grow?

The RtG in Hull is proving to be an opportunity to engage and empower communities through food and nature projects. Through the work of the RtG Task and Finish Group, a framework should provide an easy guide to setting up a growing project on public land. The Open Spaces Network sits alongside this, along with the many growing groups in Hull, to create a network for sharing ideas and skills. The legal agreement and process was signed off by Hull City Council in March 2025, and people will soon be able to start applying for licences to grow on public land.





Case study

# Incredible Edible Conwy

Conwy Town is a medieval town on the mouth of the river Conwy in North Wales with a population of approximately 15,000 people. The town is enclosed by ancient walls in which Conwy Castle, a World Heritage Site, sits. A suspension bridge, designed by Thomas Telford, connects both sides of the river Conwy and is cared for by the National Trust. A popular tourist destination, the town has its own town council and sits in the county of Conwy. The county stretches into Snowdonia National Park and along the north Welsh coast. It also includes Llandudno Junction, an important centre of employment in the Welsh Assembly and industrial estate and RSPB wetland nature reserve.

Conwy Town is well connected by road and rail and is amongst some of the least deprived areas in Wales.<sup>58</sup> New restaurants and businesses have opened recently, and house prices have increased, especially within the town's walls. There is a strong interest and culture in the town of food and growing, from Incredible Edible Conwy and the community-owned orchard to Conwy hosting the 700-year-old chartered Honey Fair, and the Seed Fair, both organised by the Conwy Beekeepers.

## About Incredible Edible Conwy

In 2013, the two founders of Incredible Edible Conwy, Celia Williams and Ruth Bitowski, visited the site of the first Incredible Edible, Todmorden in Yorkshire, organised by Social Farms and Gardens. The visit sparked their idea to bring a similar project to Conwy. At around the same time, the organiser of the Conwy Feast, an annual local food festival showcasing local food produce, was looking for new projects. The founders held a community meeting to gauge interest in establishing an Incredible Edible Conwy, which was high.

Initially, the Conwy Feast secured some funding for IE Conwy, and managed the funds in their bank account. This was a major help given the bureaucracy associated with opening a bank account for small community groups. IE Conwy were offered their first site, the garden at The Toll House on the suspension bridge, owned by the National Trust, which provided a space for the group to work in. The Toll House garden had access to running water, a toilet and somewhere to store tools. With this opportunity and public visibility, the group began to grow.

Conwy Council's Parks and Gardens department have been very supportive of IE Conwy, giving them access to growing space, a shed and a tap and cost of water at the Tourist Information Centre, their second

growing space. Through funding from the council's Local Places for Nature team, the group installed new raised beds at the entrance to the walled town, provided by Conwy Council, which also gave the group access to another growing site behind Conwy Library. As IE Conwy gained momentum and secured more funding the group set up their own bank account with the Coop.

The founders were looking for a nursery in which they could bring plants on and found it through a local resident with a large garden in the town, who was part of a garden share scheme run by Celia Williams in which Ruth Bitowski was gardening. She gave the bottom part of her garden over to IE Conwy, and it is now the nursery and social hub of the group, with a substantial polytunnel, greenhouses and meetings every week for group gardening.

IE Conwy have planted a hedgerow in a park owned by Conwy Council, Top Park, and several group members have worked closely with the council's mowing regimes to bring more wildlife into the park; they have developed their own group as an offshoot of Incredible Edible called Get Top Park Buzzing. More recently, IE Conwy have piloted a scheme which gives away excess produce the group and other local growers to people who want or need it on a bi-weekly stall in the town. Called Veg-X, this was funded through the Welsh Government-funded Sustainable Food Partnership initiative in Conwy to help tackle food waste and food poverty.

In the summer, IE Conwy are present at the Conwy Seed Fair and Conwy Honey Fair and advertise their work through an active Facebook page, posters and signs around the town. The beds are also very visible, so the volunteers chat with passersby. Over the winter months a winter programme runs to keep the group together with social and craft activities and skills with courses such as first aid, health and safety and basic food hygiene.

## What next for Incredible Edible Conwy?

IE Conwy have submitted a funding bid for a pilot for one of the volunteers to take on responsibility for planning the IE Conwy gardens, to take some of the pressure off Celia Williams who is funded for one day a week to support the volunteers and activities at IE Conwy. She would love to see more Incredible Edibles across more towns, and for people to be inspired to grow at home. Celia is involved with lots of food and growing initiatives, including Food Share North Wales and as a field work for Social Farms and Gardens, and with Keep Wales Tidy.





## Case study

# Incredible Edible Crewe

Crewe sits within Cheshire East Council. It is extremely well connected, both regionally and nationally, shaped by its rich rail heritage, but experiences challenges associated with its legacy as a post-industrial town and heavy engineering past. Crewe household incomes are 30% lower than Cheshire East averages. Deprivation is high, with six out of 13 areas in the most deprived 10% nationally, concentrated around the town centre, and more than 30% of children living in poverty in three wards. Over a fifth of Crewe's areas are in the 10% most deprived nationally on the living environment indicator, with only 37% of green spaces assessed as being good quality. The town centre has struggled, and in 2021, Crewe was allocated £22.9m of UK Government funding through the Towns Fund to support the town's long-term economic growth, through nine projects.<sup>59</sup> A civil parish, Crewe has its own town council, responsible for activities such as allotments, community engagement, heritage and events and culture.

## Emergence and development of Incredible Edible Crewe

Incredible Edible Crewe was initiated by one person. After learning about the Incredible Edible network through conducting research as part of a permaculture course, they wanted to start growing in the community. Whilst allotment groups existed, they couldn't find a community growing group, so decided to take action. They were introduced to a member of the town council who worked for St Mary's Parish, and was supportive, seeing the fit with the funding priorities of Crewe Town Council and Cheshire East Council, and who facilitated a funding application and access to land.

The first IE Crewe project was established just before the COVID-19 pandemic and comprised four raised beds in the grounds of St Peter's Parish Church in central Crewe. The church and growing site is located on two school runs and has a lot of engagement from families who help themselves to the produce which is grown there: a simple crop of salad, strawberries, tomatoes, and some leafy vegetables like chard and kale. Now, a church volunteer and wildlife enthusiast does most of the work managing the beds, as the IE project initiator and lead grower has moved on to new growing projects.

In 2022, the parish church contact took on a new role engaging and benefiting the local community as a 'community builder' for St Mary's Parish based at the newly-built Caritas Centre which they also

manage. They wanted to smarten up the unattractive patches of grass outside the Caritas Centre, and the IE project lead was keen to do more growing, now equipped with a template from the work at St Peter's which could be adapted. The Caritas Centre Manager applied for and secured funding from Crewe Town Council and Cheshire East to set up four raised beds in the grounds.

They also made a connection with neighbouring charity, St. Paul's Centre and their Futures Project,<sup>60</sup> a charitable group supporting adults with learning disabilities with everyday life skills and encouraging their personal independence. A handful of members of the Futures Project now volunteer every Wednesday with the IE lead at the Caritas Centre, doing gardening and growing in the raised beds.

Looking After the Homeless, or LATH,<sup>61</sup> is one of the community groups using the Caritas Centre. They run a drop-in soup kitchen in the centre and use herbs and other produce grown in the Incredible Edible beds. A new community fridge is set to open at the Caritas Centre, which will mean the fresh produce can be kept for longer.

The Caritas Centre Manager introduced the IE lead to the Community Organiser at Cheshire Wildlife Trust who was working on the Nextdoor Nature project. He helped the IE lead secure funding from a corporate donor for an edible hedge and a swift box along one boundary of the Caritas Centre, with Cheshire Wildlife Trust providing some of the plants. Volunteers from the Crewe Clean Team and the Railway Cottages Association helped plant the hedge.

Cheshire Wildlife Trust's Community Organiser also helped the IE project lead secure funding for the third Incredible Edible site in Crewe. Also, with the support of the Caritas Centre Manager, the next site was developed in 2022 in the grounds of St Andrew's Community Hall. An unused, concreted space adjoining the hall and a Scout hut received funding from the National Garden Scheme and Crewe Town Council for a greenhouse, planters, soil, seeds and plants, equipment and publicity. An addiction recovery support hub, Connexions, meets in St Andrew's Church Hall and group members have helped create the site, doing weeding and watering, harvesting the produce and painting and decorating the tables and benches. A large water butt harvests rainwater from the Scout Hall roof and provides water for the site.

## What next for Incredible Edible Crewe?

Both the IE project lead and the Caritas Centre Manager have ambitions to grow the IE Crewe. They both would like to double the number of raised beds from four to eight at the Caritas Centre. The project lead has been invited to support an additional church site, this one an allotment rather than raised beds. This is appealing, but with more growing space, more volunteers are needed to help work on the sites, especially watering in the summer months. Having people who are willing to take on more responsibility, e.g. for social media, for oversight of the individual sites, and for the accompanying project administration such as managing funding is also a consideration.

The Caritas Centre Manager would like more of the groups that use the centre – from the Dementia group to the toddler group and the LATH group – to be more involved in growing. They would like to set up a Saturday gardening club inviting neighbouring families from the flats opposite the centre, making it a family-friendly inclusive space. They would also like to fundraise for more seating and benches at the site.



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## Case study

# Sustainable Kirriemuir

Kirriemuir in Scotland is a small former market town in the county of Angus with a population of around 6,000. Known as the Gateway to the Glens, it lies 16 miles north of Dundee between the fertile Strathmore valley and the foothills of the Grampian mountains. It has two primary schools and one secondary school, and there is little local employment beyond the town's services, farming and estate work. Many residents commute to Dundee or Aberdeen. Whilst overall it is in the 20% least deprived areas in Scotland,<sup>62</sup> there are both pockets of deprivation and of affluence.

Kirriemuir has a vibrant community sector and is a hot spot in the region for community-led development. It has some important meeting places for community meetings such as the town hall, and well-established groups such as Kirrie Connections for people living with dementia, Kirrie Food Hub to help combat food insecurity and reduce food waste, an active Rotary, and Sustainable Kirriemuir.

## About Sustainable Kirriemuir

Sustainable Kirriemuir was formed in 2019 by a group of local people who wanted to take positive community climate action. In its first few years, through community conversations, four key strands of work were agreed:

- Action for Nature, which includes Wild About Kirrie and Nest Box Kirrie<sup>63</sup>
- Active and Sustainable Travel, which includes an e-bike borrowing service, cycle skills programmes and basic bike maintenance
- Sustainable Living, which includes directories to recycling, local food and repairs
- Food and Growing,<sup>64</sup> the focus of this case study

The organisation's work includes a programme of events and workshops, including two town-wide events: Tattie Day in February and Apple Day in October. Sustainable Kirriemuir has grown considerably and in 2023 became a registered charity and launched its Strategic Plan 2023–2027.<sup>65</sup> One of its core charitable purposes is about educating people which it does across its work priorities, by having a strong website and social media presence, and running a programme of workshops and events. In July 2024, Sustainable Kirriemuir received two years of National Lottery Community Fund funding which is mostly used on staff costs, with six people now employed part-time for the organisation (3.6 FTE staff numbers).

## Sustainable Kirriemuir's food and growing

There are three elements to Sustainable Kirriemuir's food and growing work: food growing with primary school children, a community garden and an ambitious new venture – a community farm. Whilst they are connected, they have slightly different impacts and challenges.

The school growing projects take place in the two primary schools in Kirriemuir, one of which, Northmuir Primary School, has a 16m x 16m polytunnel, outdoor beds and a fruit cage. The growing area includes an orchard, areas of wildflowers and a hedge which create wildlife corridors. Starting in 2024, a school Community Gardener supports the children to grow fruit and vegetables, and with teachers to support them, delivers outdoor growing skills with the children.

The community garden is a growing space of around a hectare in St Mary's Field, behind the local church which owns the site. Sustainable Kirriemuir's lease on the site runs to 2028. This space used to be a market garden, and most of the work is done by volunteers, with some oversight and guidance from the part-time Growing Project Officer. The produce grown in the garden is sold locally via a WhatsApp group and in the town's zero waste shop, A Longer Table CIC. The space is also an educational one, with workshops on propagation, seed sowing, building a hibernaculum and food preservation. Growing follows a no dig, chemical free philosophy, and happens alongside wild areas developed by Sustainable Kirriemuir's Action for Nature volunteers including a wildflower meadow and a pond.

The third element is a new, ambitious venture of a community farm to transform a traditionally farmed 17-acre field on the Kinnordy Estate into a thriving ecosystem and a food production venture. The farm will be a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) Scheme<sup>66</sup> whereby people pay a membership fee and receive a veg box or share of the harvest but take on some responsibility within the farm. The CSA Scheme aims to deepen the connection between the farm and the community, provide a space for learning from the land and those working on it, and, crucially, to share the ups, downs, and realities of producing good nutritious food in Scotland. Volunteering at the farm will include more formal learning and structure than at the community garden, given the stakes and risks are higher. So far, funding has been received for two large polytunnels (10m x 30m), a work shelter, composting bays and composting toilets. The community farm will start small, growing on

two acres, with volunteers doing much of the work overseen by the farm manager.

## What next for Sustainable Kirriemuir's food growing work?

A new focus for the organisation's food growing work is the farm, with the school and community garden also remaining committed to delivering locally grown food alongside opportunities for learning. On a larger scale, the goal of the community farm is to establish a regenerative micro-farm that will provide vegetables, fruit, eggs, meat, honey and more for the community. A wide variety of different crops will be grown on the farm including traditional crops like potatoes and brassicas but also cash crops like lettuce and radishes which go in and come out of the ground fairly and can generate income quickly. A key aim of the farm is to understand how to be more resilient in the face of climate change and the instability of the food system, which is one reason for growing a high number of diverse crops, in case one gets a disease.

There are several reasons for integrating livestock to the farm: to help manage pests and diseases, increase soil fertility, produce manure and diversify income. One model under consideration is to have a series of schemes, or clubs, such as 'egg club' in which volunteers would pay to be part of the scheme and take on certain responsibilities such as cleaning out the chickens or putting them to bed, or marketing,

and they would receive in return a certain number of eggs each week.

The farm business plan is still in a development phase, but the model is likely to include a mix of paid staff and volunteers. In time, Sustainable Kirriemuir aim to recruit a trainee via an Angus Council scheme for young people and are looking to the new Eden Project in Dundee for connections with training course and volunteers too. They are currently working with two of Scotland's agricultural universities: the James Hutton Institute at Aberdeen University on heritage wheat varieties and with SRUC on community food growing at scale of wheat and cereal crops.

Aside from the anticipated direct employment on the community farm, the goal is for the adjacent area of the estate to be more vibrant and developed, with people starting up small scale businesses or social enterprises there, on the back of the community farm – for example a pickling business. Also, if likeminded commercial partners were found to do different growing projects, such as cut flowers or a tree nursery, this would contribute to the financial sustainability of the farm.

Sustainable Kirriemuir is at a hugely exciting time in its development and recently launched a community consultation at their annual Tattie Day to ask the community what they want from the farm.



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## Case study

# The Sage Network Community Garden, Dover

Dover is in the county of Kent and sits at the narrowest part of the English Channel, with its famous White Cliffs facing France. Although it is a major ferry port, the economic benefits this brings to the town are minimal as most people tend to pass through it rather than stay. The town centre has suffered a lack of investment and decline, with most major high street shops being located in out of town shopping centres. Dover has some of the most deprived areas in England.<sup>67</sup> Dover has a town council and a district council and is part of Kent County Council.

## Establishing the community garden

The Sage Network<sup>68</sup> was set up by two occupational therapists working in the NHS supporting people with dementia. Core to their approach is helping the people they support, including both patients and their families, tell their life stories, express their individuality and connect with the meaning in their lives. They set up The Sage Network to support people to grow and thrive in their local communities, through activities including community gardening groups, therapy workshops and Dementia Care Mapping.

The foundation of their work is providing therapeutic horticulture for people who can't access gardening because they don't have the space or need physical or emotional support to do so. Their first community gardening site was in the grounds of a school in Folkestone but they were looking for a new space as there were challenges including restrictions on access by only being open in school term time, and its suitability for people with physical disabilities. The Sage Network communicated with their local contacts and networks, including the local mental health team, that they were looking for a new space.



The Charlton Centre is a shopping centre built in 1981 on the high street in Dover town centre. There is a multistorey car park at the back of the centre. It is run down with many vacant units and was described as not a very cheerful place for people to come to, and that only people of Dover come through there for a purpose, rather than having a wander. Whilst a few retail businesses remain, such as a bed and mattress shop, the centre is now home to community projects such as Dover Big Local CIC which offers community events and groups and Dover Pantry which offers subsidised food for its members.

At the back exit of the Charlton Centre, before entering the multistorey car park, there is a short corridor with two doors leading off it. One is locked. The other, which is open on a Monday morning, leads to a small space which was overgrown and used as a dumping ground from the multistorey car park above. A local mental health nurse knew that The Sage Network were looking for a new gardening space and contacted a trustee of Dover Big Local CIC to ask if they could help. This trustee linked the space, which Dover Big Local are the keyholders for,<sup>69</sup> with The Sage Network.

The Sage Network set to work on clearing the site with the invaluable help of Friends of Napier,<sup>70</sup> a charity supporting asylum seekers based at Napier Barracks, who gathered a group of volunteers to help clear the space. Other volunteers have been signposted from Dover District Council and Dover Big Local, through word of mouth and social media. The garden is hard paved, and all the growing is done in raised beds which have been built by volunteers from donated pallets.

Small pockets of funding have come from Dover District Council for equipment, Kent Community Council for some of The Sage Network's staff time, the Dover Freemasons, Dover Big Local and a corporate donation. In their first summer at the site in 2024, Waitrose donated its unsellable plants to the garden to a value of around £700. Many of the plants also came from one of the Sage Network's greenhouses, and they are doing seed swaps with the community gardens network.

The Sage Network's community garden growing group happens every Monday morning. Volunteers arrive, have a cup of tea and talk through the plan for the morning's activities. Whilst the garden is open



to other groups, not many groups currently use it besides The Sage Network. Dover Big Local built a shed with the intention of creating a Men's Shed project. However, as there is no manager, nor any power or water to the site, it isn't operating as a Men's Shed, though The Sage Network do use it to store some equipment.

Several organisations including Kent Wildlife Trust, Canterbury Cathedral Garden Team, several local schools, Dover district councillors and Stepping Out for Carers have visited the site, as has the town's deputy mayor.

## What next for the Sage Network Community Garden?

Following a community network forum event in 2023, Kent Wildlife Trust's Blue Mentor<sup>71</sup> made contact with The Sage Network to look at shared goals and potential combined projects about how communities build strength and resilience through a focus on nature. Conversations are underway to explore how they can work together.

Lots of different organisations and networks have expressed an interest in the community garden's work, from Age UK Dover and local art group Future Foundries to Canterbury Cathedral, whose head gardener visited. The cathedral has 23 acres of space and want to start community gardening. Members of the Sage Network community garden were invited to do some hedge laying at Canterbury Cathedral.

The Sage Network are keen to grow the community garden. They would like an additional larger, more accessible space in which they could have more control over. They want to establish the NHS as a client and are in conversations with the local Primary Care Network about the potential of their gardening group as a social prescribing destination.





# Benefits and impacts of community food growing

Community food growing projects bring many diverse impacts, to individuals and communities, to neighbourhoods and local democracy and to nature and the climate. Sometimes these benefits are obvious: new planters buzzing with edible plants outside a community centre, for example. Other times, the impacts may remain undiscovered but create a powerful ripple effect. Interviewees across this research underscored the importance of telling these stories of impact. This section does that, drawing on themes across all interviews.

## Exercising personal agency for climate and nature

Many of the leaders of the CFG projects are motivated by a sense of feeling like they were making a difference: to the people they work and volunteer with, to their local community and to the global climate and nature crises. Often these three factors are interconnected. Interviewees, particularly project leads and instigators, reflected that they are motivated by taking positive action in the face of interconnected and overwhelming crises, providing an example of the power of small actions which others could replicate. Volunteers and project leads reported that they valued the opportunity to take political action and feel a sense of efficacy through their local food growing:

*"I want to make a difference – not just to save the planet but in my local community too. I feel this is where I focus my attention as this is somewhere I can make a difference – climate change is a bit too... 'we're all doomed,' so I can get involved and do practical actions in the community."*

**Project volunteer, interview**

*"It's doing something positive in a situation that isn't. I know it's probably small, I don't grow enough food to feed one person in a year, but it's an outreach to anybody. It's what one person can do with eight hours a week and no money, if you replicated that or people got together and did these things together as projects...?"*

**Project lead, interview**

*"I went to the Restore Nature march, I do do that kind of thing, but the small things can make a difference too. Pockets of community action makes a massive impact. This floats my boat."*

**Project volunteer, interview**

*"People are starting their own Incredible Edible groups after seeing what we've done... at times when I felt 'I can't do this', I don't know what it was that made me keep doing it – I find it difficult to give up... seeing all the other groups suddenly appear and connections across [town] and people in my group going on to do others things..."*

**Project lead, interview**

This aspect comes through in the way in which the principles of reusing and recycling are integral to all the community growing case study projects, with most making their own compost, making raised beds and planters from recycled pallets and harvesting rainwater. This approach to reusing not only reduces their carbon footprint but helps take the stigma away that some people feel about reusing and having something that isn't new.

*"Group members don't maybe have the luxury of having everything new, you know, and I think if we're modelling that and we're saying, 'the reasons why we're doing this are actually beyond ourselves – they're about the world, the planet,' I think it becomes more acceptable."*

**Project lead, interview**

## Supporting social connection and reducing loneliness

This research supports other evidence that involvement in community food growing projects brings many physical and mental health benefits by bringing people together, reducing loneliness, forging connections, creating a sense of belonging and purpose, and giving a reason to be outside connecting with nature.<sup>72</sup>

*"People do it as it helps with social isolation. This is linked to the demographic which is often older retired people who want to stay active and be doing something: the sense of purpose is really important; it isn't altruistic..."*

**Interview, founding partner**

Volunteers across the CFG projects valued the camaraderie and sense of having a common purpose they shared with the other volunteers, with the time and space created for having tea and coffee time being central to every project. The importance of time taken over tea or coffee cannot be overstated. This time was when community intelligence was shared, support was offered up, conversations happened between people across social groups who otherwise may not have met, and laughs and banter were in abundant supply.

We heard from several older volunteers who lived alone what being part of the CFG project meant to them. One volunteer, whose wife died 15 years ago, said that the group was a reason to get up and get out of the house, especially as they had recently needed to stop driving. The 20-minute walk from home to the site was also important exercise for them. Another volunteer commented:

*"I've been working since the age of 16, I'm bored not working, I need human interaction... I've got lovely neighbours, but we don't live in each other's pockets. I suppose in all honesty I should say loneliness, but I don't feel lonely because I know I've got this."*

**Project volunteer, interview**

For the Sage Network project in Dover, the social aspect is especially important, with the primary aim of the group being to provide therapeutic gardening. The weekly gardening sessions provide an important form of social contact for the volunteers, all of whom are retired. As occupational therapists, the project leads support people through everyday activities, thereby engaging people subconsciously in something that doesn't feel like therapy.

We witnessed examples of unlikely friendships and connections between people who live in the same area but whose paths would not normally cross. One older volunteer who lived alone described being part of the CFG project as giving her tentacles into the community, with knowledge about tradespeople and community news being shared. In Dover, the involvement of asylum seekers from Napier Barracks meant an opportunity for social interaction between people that wouldn't otherwise happen. We could extrapolate from this that CFG projects can help with social inclusion, tolerance and arguably also with connecting and bridging social capital.<sup>73</sup> Economic analysis conducted for The Wildlife Trusts has shown that the organisations' health and well-being programmes save the NHS money and cut reliance on their resources.<sup>74</sup>

## Overcoming personal challenges, developing knowledge and skills

Volunteers reported a range of impacts they experience from taking part in the CFG projects. They valued learning about growing from others, including people with expertise, as well as the hard physical work involved and the satisfaction of growing and seeing the changes they have helped create on the site.

The sense of satisfaction and developing a new interest in gardening was shared by several volunteers who had previously had no interest, and even disliked, gardening. One shared their sense of satisfaction from planting 200 seeds; another had planted and was tending to pots of bulbs for the first time in their own garden. The Sage Network project leads noted that for the men seeking asylum housed in Napier Barracks who had helped clear the garden and occasionally helped with large compost deliveries, it was an opportunity to work within a local group, share their skills and help with their English and have lunch bought for them.

The project leads also reported personal satisfaction and growth through their involvement in CFG projects. From personal pride in transforming formerly disused and discarded spaces to volunteers returning week-on-week, and creating their own sense of a group; to overcoming personal shyness by putting themselves in a leadership role; to feeling the same benefits as all the volunteers of getting their hands in the soil and being with nature.

*"I'm not very good at... I'm quite shy, it's a challenge for me to put myself out of my comfort zone and you know it's like you're throwing a party and what if nobody comes."*

**Project lead, interview**

*"And we feel it too. It's not just our group members, is it? We get in the car after we've been in the garden on a Monday, and we're both grinning and you kind of think it's osmosis, isn't it? It just slips into your core and you feel better."*

**Project lead, interview**

The St Paul's Futures project volunteers in IE Crewe shared that they had gained new knowledge about interesting varieties of vegetables and herbs such as lovage and fennel. Each of them had taken produce home and cooked with it at the St Paul's Centre. They reported gaining experience of gardening and growing cycles – from planting, watering, weeding, harvesting, seed collection, and protecting plants from the cold – and practical skills such as using power tools to construct wooden compost bins. They were entrusted to look after the raised beds over a planned period of extended leave by the IE Crewe project lead which further boosted their confidence. One volunteer said that doing the gardening work made them feel that if they had their own garden, they could do work in it, having picked up tips from their volunteering.

## Benefits to nature and climate

An integral element to all the CFG projects in this research was a commitment to growing with wildlife and nature in mind and being climate conscious through reusing materials, reducing waste and their carbon footprint.



In terms of growing with nature, several food hedges were part of the CFG projects, which have been planted with native plants and are designed to provide something culinary for humans alongside providing habitat for wildlife. In the hedge in Crewe, planted with assistance from Cheshire Wildlife Trust, as the layer of hedgerow plants such as thornless blackberry, hawthorn and rosehip grow and establish, crops such as dandelions, burdock and wild garlic will be underplanted. These will provide forage, benefit soil integrity and help make space for the roots of all the plants. This layered approach will take around five years to establish. Across the CFG projects, flowering plants and wildflowers were planted, and dead piles of wood encouraged, along with bug hotels, to support insect populations, sometimes with quick results:

*“It’s small scale, but just in a year... to see even a few plants that we’ve got, because they’re free flowering, they’re quite generous with their flowers to attract bumblebees and things like that – butterflies, caterpillars, you know, they had that life-cycle through the year. It just proves that you don’t need to do a great deal, you can put perennial herbs in and: instant insects! Even with the little bits that we’ve done, you can see that the environment is a little richer... I’m proud of that.”*

**Project lead, interview**

In terms of growing with nature, the Action for Nature work theme of Sustainable Kirriemuir’s works alongside its Food and Growing priority, with a wild area in the community garden given over to wildflowers and a pond. Several projects have undertaken bioblitzes to get a baseline survey of biodiversity in their growing areas. A key success of IE Conwy is that it helped to spark a nature initiative. A couple volunteering for IE Conwy and for their local Wildlife Trust started the group ‘Get Top Park Buzzing’ to promote wildlife in the council-owned park behind their home. They secured Lottery funding to plant a community orchard, organised a tree planting day with local residents and secured buy-in from them and the council for a ‘no mow zone’ in the park to create a wildlife corridor, inspired by sightings of hedgehogs. They plan to plant more trees in the park to help protect homes from flooding.

There is a strong commitment to reusing and recycling across all the CFG projects. Where it is feasible, groups make their own compost and compost bins; the Futures Group volunteers in IE Crewe, for example, have built compost bins, which means the Caritas Centre now has a destination for the vegetable peelings they produce from groups such as the soup kitchen using the centre. Raised beds in several projects have been made from disused pallets from local building suppliers. Many of the plants that projects use are also

donated, commonly from project leads but also from supermarkets, such as Waitrose, in the case of The Sage Network in Dover. Sourcing locally is another important principle running through projects, such as the compost in the case of Dover, which is sourced from a local firm, The Friendly Farmers, which make their own ‘agrimagic compost’ to support regenerative farming. Rainwater harvesting is another key practice across the CFG projects.

Whilst food production has tended to be overlooked in comparison to other benefits arising from community food growing, it is an important product and, given food insecurity is on the rise, could become increasingly relevant. Studies suggest that yields of fruit and vegetables produced from allotments can be the same as commercially grown produce, and one study illustrated that there is enough land within the city of Sheffield to meet the city’s needs for fruit and vegetables.<sup>75</sup> For example, research suggests that if all the green space across England, Scotland and Wales was used to grow food, it could provide around 40% of the fruit and veg currently produced in and imported into the UK. As publicly owned land makes up just under half of total green space, this has big implications for the availability of healthy food.

In Kirriemuir, the community garden was now felt to be more of a demonstration garden than a space for producing food at scale, which was one driver for seeking land for the community farm. Nonetheless, the community garden produced an impressive amount of produce at 468kg of produce in 2024 and residents can buy the food through the local zero waste shop. In summer 2024, Conwy IE’s Veg X stall gave surplus produce to local people who wanted or needed it. Whilst not abundant, the produce itself is another way in which the growing is having a positive environmental impact in Crewe. The LATH soup kitchen use herbs and vegetables from the Caritas Centre beds, volunteers from St Paul’s Futures Project take produce back to cook at the project and passersby help themselves to produce on the school run past St Peter’s.

Our findings add information on the nature and climate impacts of community food growing to existing evidence on the nature and climate impacts the ecosystem services arising from urban agriculture, gardens and allotments. Biodiversity is one important service, with evidence on increased biodiversity within cropping areas including rare and important weeds, pollinators and other beneficial insects (e.g. predators of parasites of edible plants).<sup>76</sup> Urban growing has been found to reduce greenhouse gas emissions through soil carbon storage and carbon capture and can mitigate the impacts of climate change by providing cooling and shading and retaining storm water.<sup>77</sup>

**Neighbourhood improvement**

Community food growing projects can also make a considerable difference to improving the appearance of local areas and can transform derelict or disused land into attractive and productive spaces, improving pride in local place. The transformation of the community garden space in Dover, for example, from a fly tipping site to the community garden is a big success. Volunteers said the site was:

*“The total opposite to what’s going on around it, you open the door and it’s a breath of fresh air and it’s good for the people that are involved in other areas here, food banks, the art areas and the working groups for Dover Big Local.”*

**Project volunteer interview**

*“A complete oasis in a very distressed, depressed urban area.”*

**Project volunteer interview**

The impact that they’d made on this space was a source of pride for The Sage Network project leads:

*“Previously they were saying that people would throw things in the garden from the car park and I think that’s a really big shout out to us that we’ve made it into a space that actually maybe the people that used to do that look at it [now] and feel you know, proud... I think we could have come back a few times and maybe the shed might have been on fire or something, but it hasn’t, which is, you know, it’s great.”*

**Project lead interview**

Similarly in Crewe, there have been very few issues with vandalism of the open CFG sites, because there is a sense that people care about them now, and there is not an incentive to ruin them. The beds are open access, and the invitation is for everyone, not just those in need, to help themselves and do some planting. The Connexions group at the St Andrew’s site in Crewe were making the space their own, keeping on top of weeding, helping themselves to strawberries and other soft fruits, and painting and decorating the benches.

Once a space is uplifted, it may be more likely to stay that way, especially if the people who use the space or buildings next to it have a sense of a stake in it and the freedom and trust to maintain it.

**Changing and influencing local power structures and dynamics**

CFG projects can also shift power dynamics locally. Hull is a great example of this local democratic engagement, whereby through the influence and lobbying of local voluntary and community groups, local politicians voted for the city’s residents to have the Right to Grow on public land.

Beyond the city-wide example of Hull, our research unearthed examples of local power-holders visiting and/or supporting CFG projects. Dover District Council, for example, have supported the Sage Network Community Garden get off the ground with some limited funding, volunteer signposting and the garden has received a visit from local deputy mayor. A positive relationship with different parts Conwy Council, including the Open Spaces team, the Local Nature Partnership and the Sustainable Food Partnership, and with the town council, with alignment of their respective priorities have enabled IE Conwy to have access to both land and funding. The local environment officer described their responsibility as optimising the best use of public green space in the county, whilst the Local Nature Partnership manager described one of their key objectives as supporting local communities:

*“We have been conscious to break down perceptions and barriers about the local authority and we don’t have this “them and us” situation. We’re working together, it’s not “you delivering on our behalf”. Once they [CFG project participants] get used to seeing and knowing us, they become a lot happier with it.”*

**Project decision-maker, interview**

Gaining the attention of local power holders in CFG projects can help bring the need for neighbourhood improvements, both in the environment and in community relations, up the local political agenda:

*“Where you have volunteers who have set up food growing spaces and attracted the attention of those who hold power like MPs, councillors, police, the Local Authority, etc., there is always a better dialogue and connection. For example, if a local PSO [Police Support Officer] is involved, councillors come and see it and say “we need to do more of this” – so it opens conversations between those perceived as not having power and those with power. And that can help with situations when power has broken down, like building trust with the police again, through the proactive nature of work with PSOs.”*

**Interview, founding partner**



### The 'ripple' and 'snowball' effects

It is evident across the case studies that CFG project activity breeds more growing activities. A ripple effect from Conwy is the Get Top Park Buzzing initiative, and another volunteer is planning a community garden in the grounds of a new hospital in Conwy, growing some herbs and other edible plants, inspired from being involved in IE Conwy. The energy created around the Right to Grow in Hull is having a ripple effect, leading to all sorts of activity, including:

- The media coverage around the RtG motion being passed drew the attention of a national Friends of the Earth project, Postcode Gardeners, which has funded two organisations – Rewilding Youth and EMS – over two years to work in areas of Hull to reach communities who haven't engaged in growing for a long time.
- A connection has been made between a neighbourhood community in postcode HU9, a local church and food bank and Alderman Kneeshaw Park to provide a destination for the food grown in the park.
- A food mapping project took place, ExploreHU4, included taking people on walks to try and get them more engaged in what is happening on their doorstep and create a more coherent strategy around the RtG.
- The University of Leeds research on community engagement in the RtG continues, with further results expected in spring 2025.

In terms of snowballing, each of the CFG projects had grown, or were looking to grow, highlighting how CFG can act as a potential stepping stone in bringing forward the next generation of food growers and land managers, and create more resilient communities of place. This is particularly clear in the case of Sustainable Kirriemuir which, through developing the community farm as an enterprise, is creating job and training opportunities. Other examples of the snowball effect from case studies include:

- IE Crewe have expanded into new sites, with the original site now being managed by another volunteer, and the potential for this model to be continued with the project lead looking to become involved in a larger allotment site.
- IE Conwy over its 12-year existence has continued to grow and expand into different sites, from 2024's Veg X stall to 2025's funding bid submission for a part time garden planner to manage all the public sites in town.
- The Sage Network community garden in Dover seeking a larger growing site.

### Community food growing leads to community-powered places

This research supports evidence that CFG projects can create a sense of identity within the community, develop grassroots networks, and help create a sense of place.<sup>78</sup> Because many of the actions associated with community food growing are about giving power to people to shape their community, they can help to forge self-determination and self-governance, and they can also be more sociable and more connected places.<sup>79</sup> Where volunteering is grounded in local communities it contributes not just to individual well-being but also builds stronger relationships and thriving neighbourhoods. Place-based volunteering has the potential to transform communities as people get to know each other and work together on things they care about.<sup>80</sup>

In this sense, CFG projects are usually about much more than the produce which is grown – it is, in fact, mostly a by-product rather than the most important result/work of the projects. Interviewees reflected that they see CFG projects as helping create power in communities:

*The more I learnt about the Right to Grow, the more I realised that it isn't about food growing, it's about connecting with the community, education, getting people, children, adults, old people engaged with nature. This is a good vehicle for campaigning – it doesn't have to be everyone stood on the side protesting."*

**Project volunteer, interview**

*There is an element of being a resource, but for me it's far bigger than that... there's something about a cultural shift... it's all about sustainability and about community about rather than food charity."*

**Project decision-maker, interview**

Those involved in Sustainable Kirriemuir as trustees, staff and volunteers, are thinking big about how Kirriemuir can be known as a sustainable town that

others can learn from. As an organisation, Sustainable Kirriemuir was described as a conduit for people to express their views and take action on the climate and nature crises. In doing so, it has pulled the whole town together and had reportedly been the reason a couple re-located there from the north of England.

*Sustainable Kirriemuir has brought a sense to the town of pulling together in difficult times in terms of the climate and nature emergency and likeminded people who care about these things. It's given a place for a large number of people to target and focus their action and connection. Big events like Apple Day and Tattie Day, putting things on the map in terms of growing. We've found a tribe."*

**Project volunteer, interview**

*Last week we had like 50 people at the farm, all parts of the community, all ages, all helping out and it brings a bit of land back to life to have that sort of community and culture, and just to hear, hear people chatting and getting excited and having all these ideas for that bit of land – feeling like it's theirs and they have like ownership over it. It's been really amazing."*

**Project lead, interview**

Also, the benefits and impacts of CFG projects are often interconnected, multi-faceted and of a reach and scale that can seem out of proportion to the scale of the project itself. Our research strongly suggests that the power of small actions is profound.

*The benefits are incomprehensibly complex and multi-faceted, which is wonderful but challenging to express. Sometimes when I read stuff, the cynic in me says, "Can you really say that from something so seemingly small? Can it have such a bit impact?"*

**Founding partner interview**





# Challenges and barriers to community food growing projects

## Volunteer recruitment

In terms of volunteer recruitment, having a large enough pool of volunteers to be able to do the work required to keep projects going was a common issue, and was addressed slightly differently in the case studies. In most, the volunteer pool is made of up retired people, who bring great benefits including skills and knowledge, and autonomy over their time. But it also comes with challenges, including volunteers experiencing health and mobility issues, some of them travelling for extended periods, and others having multiple commitments including care giving and other volunteering.

*"We just about get round [all the sites] on a Thursday evening – we just about get round the gardens. Sometimes we have just four people. And it's all voluntary so you are reliant on people's good will. So scaling it up... it's getting the people on board. As you get older sometimes your body gets in the way of things you want to do."*

**Project lead, interview**

*"What I really want is in the summer somebody to come at night or in the evening every evening and water which is a sort of commitment that is fine if shared between a number of people and they can organise themselves so nobody waters it three times the same night and then nothing for three days, but I can't get round three sites a night, 7 days a week; and I don't want to."*

**Project lead, interview**

Retired people were not the key volunteers in one case study, and there, the project lead expressed a challenge in getting people interested in volunteering and in convincing people that they could make a difference to their local community; they observed a real sense of apathy and disempowerment:

*"A really strong block to people getting involved with things is they simply do not feel that anything that they can possibly do can make a positive difference... why would you think that you can change something when the people in power don't respond? There's a lever that people would push to change things, but it's not connected to anything."*

**Project lead, interview**

One project lead described several barriers hindering their ability to recruit more volunteers. As the growing space is not visible to the public, they don't get passersby in the way other projects do; and the project receives little publicity through the main partner and owner of the space. There is also a hard boundary to the space which is very small. These combined factors limit the project's expansion, even though both volunteers and project leads alike would like this.

The IE Crewe project lead has tackled the challenge of volunteer recruitment by setting up the growing sites in spaces which are close to potential volunteers who use services in adjacent or nearby buildings, which are also owned by or connected with the parish church, as is the case with the Futures service users (Caritas Centre), the Connexions service users (St Andrew's Hall) and church volunteers (St Peter's).

## Volunteer management and retention

Volunteers in these CFG projects expressed their appreciation of the regularity and permanence of the weekly gardening sessions but also valued that their contribution wasn't overly formalised and was kept fun. This was a key motivator and key feature of volunteer retention – a reason why people keep coming back. But it requires a delicate balance – a balance that the project leads are aware of and try to maintain which can come at a personal cost, with a pressure of expectation, and an uncertainty around who will turn up, and if there will be enough people to do the necessary work, such as watering in the summer months:

*"It's hard to keep going sometimes... you'd turn up and the people... I would be responsible for them – am I the right person to fulfil what they were expecting?"*

**Project lead, interview**

This links to another challenge around the over-reliance on a small number of people, most specifically, the project leads and initiators. The workload on project leads and trustees can be very significant.

*"There's so much to do and I think sometimes it can be overwhelming... I probably spend 2–3 days a week working on [organisational] stuff... Now I'm retired I'm able to do this and I really enjoy it and that's great. Sometimes it can feel like it can take over your life if you're not careful."*

**Project lead, interview**

One interviewee expressed being reliant on the (volunteer) project lead as the main challenge the project faces, and one which is hindering the CFG project's expansion as the lead wants to be able to train up others to manage the established sites so they can set up more sites.

*"I decided that I would rather get some stuff up and going myself before I try to recruit anyone so that they actually got something to see so that's put me in the position I'm in now and now I need to switch my attention to publicising it and I'm trying to persuade people that it's something they want to turn up and do every week people have become quite flaky in terms of it used to be like a no-no, in terms of making a plan and then not turning up."*

**Project lead, interview**

In Kirriemuir, those involved in setting up the community farm are looking towards recruiting and retaining a large number of volunteers and are experienced in volunteer management in other growing settings such as a market garden and community gardens. They are conscious that the farm will be different because it is a business venture, with financial targets, and there will be a lot of volunteers coming and going from the site, unlike more traditional market gardens who might train people up at the start of the season or take people on for a placement. The plan is therefore to have a more structured training and support programme for volunteers, and to rely on paid staff to do some of the work which wouldn't be reasonable to expect volunteers to do.

*"You can't expect volunteers to come in at 5:00 am in the morning to harvest for the market so you're kind of relying on paid staff to do those aspects of it. So that's where it becomes quite tricky... So yeah, it's trying to be realistic about that... And also, you want it to be fun. Like, you don't want volunteers coming along and being, like, 'Oh, no! I've got to do this, and I've got to do that!'"*

**Project lead, interview**

This quote underscores the crucial difference between volunteering and paid work – and the importance of having a volunteer manager and model which recognises this by keeping it fun and not making the work feel like paid work. In fact, this was a key potential barrier cited by several volunteers: that they didn't want a more formal environment as they were retired and didn't want to be reminded of being at work or being managed by someone. Interviewees recognised this dynamic, of volunteers not being a workforce, and needing to be treated as such; that volunteers have varying degrees of interest, time and commitment; and, crucially, of the importance of a paid project lead, or volunteer manager, position:

*"We recognise they are volunteers – they want to come out and have a lovely time, they are not a volunteer workforce. You need to acknowledge they are there on their own time, giving it for free, you work with them on that – different people have different ambitions and things they want to do. [Some] are dedicated to the hilt; others want a non-committal, come out for the day. It's all important. The permanence – they say they meet every Wednesday; they need to do this – this comes back to the paid position."*

**Project decision-maker, interview**

Volunteers themselves expressed their appreciation for the project lead and noted their importance in keeping existing volunteers motivated. Volunteers appreciated having a plan and some direction from the project lead; in several projects this was in the form of a white board or meeting over a cup of tea at the start of the session. Indeed, the main response to overcoming limits to scaling up CFG projects is to secure funding for a project lead for the CFG projects. This was the case in three of the four projects, although in none of the projects was a project lead funded full-time, and the ongoing strain of applying for funding and stitching together small bits of money here and there was a significant challenge for the project leads which is discussed more in the 'financial sustainability' section.

Other challenges to volunteer retention in CFG projects is keeping volunteers engaged over the winter months when there is little gardening to do. One project lead's response to this is to keep a programme of activities going over the winter by securing funding to do activities and courses. They are keen to support keep the group invigorated and motivated by organising trips to different growing groups.

Another key challenge around both volunteer recruitment and retention was identified as a need to widen and increase participation because of the scale of the climate and nature emergency, and not to create an echo chamber:

*"It's really interesting to be able to be involved with a group of people who share values, information and knowledge. A challenge is... it's difficult for us to break out of this group and get other people involved who aren't so interested. We're in a little bubble and it's nice but we need to really focus on the education to help people to understand and get involved. This is a challenge that I am aware of."*

**Project lead, interview**



## Access to suitable land and facilities

Each of the case studies project leads expressed challenges regarding accessing suitable land and facilities. This factor had been a motive to grow and seek alternative spaces and sites; either in the past or at present.

Several growing spaces were hindered by physical limitations; both hard physical boundaries, the most symbolic perhaps being the ancient walls of Conwy Town; and hard surfaces, meaning growing can only happen in planters and raised beds. This brings challenges around the need to bring/buy in topsoil, and limitations to how much can be grown. Also, whilst the aim is to maximise the crop from a small space, the plants become crowded, which limits what can be grown. In some locations, particularly perhaps post-industrial areas such as Crewe and Hull, there may be brownfield available, but they may be former industrial sites and contaminated. Doing soil surveys to assess the safety for food growing requires expertise and funds.

In Dover, although there is a shared desire for more volunteers, there are limitations to the space in several ways. It is quite a small space, hidden behind a locked door down an uninviting corridor at the back of the Charlton Centre. It is not wheelchair accessible, which has prevented The Sage Network working there with a brain injury charity, amongst others. There is no running water or power, so tea making facilities are in the main centre – this creates a disconnect and makes it difficult for the garden to be a stopping point for other groups such as Stepping Out for Carers who run walks for carers in Dover as they can't easily offer tea and cake.

In Kirriemuir, the community garden is hindered by a lack of soil fertility, space (at 0.9 ha) and the lease which expires in 2028 and has certain restrictions such as prohibiting livestock. These limitations helped to galvanise the desire and need for a larger area of land for food growing, which, thanks to the involvement of trustee and local landowner, is secured on the Kinnordy Estate. The land on the Kinnordy Estate is considered an incredible gift for many reasons, from its size and accessibility by road to the flexible lease, low rent and fertility of the soil. But it too has some challenging aspects, including managing roe deer, being adjacent to a field which uses pesticides, and working through other logistical issues such as how to get power to an electric fence. There are still some things which need funding to be found for, such as a secure base at the community farm to keep equipment safe, including from red diesel thieves, which is an issue across many rural areas.

A key issue for community food growing on public land is the availability of water. Hull Food Partnership have received requests for standpipes to be installed at public growing sites, but there are several issues with this. Given water stress in the East of England, there is reluctance to taking potable water out of the supply chain; the cost of installation and then the ongoing cost of the water as it would need to be metered and someone would have to pay for it; and finally, tap water isn't ideal for watering plants.

There are several options which are currently being explored. Water harvesting is one answer, and the Living with Water partnership are currently offering free water butts to anyone who asks for them in the city. The RtG network could potentially develop stronger links with churches and other community facilities to create a network of water butts, and potentially access to a tap, notwithstanding the previous point about water scarcity and the cost of metered water. Another consideration if access to water is impossible is, instead of growing food, which does need managed water supplies, the land is managed as a sponge space with flood attenuation in mind, with water being stored in trees and plants in the ground rather than above ground in water butts.

*“There's no such thing as a bad scrap of land for nature – it would be nice to look at green space or the sponge space – every bit takes a bit of water that helps people's lives – is this purpose for people or nature – how to keep green space functioning in a city for flood attenuation is one of the strongest things – a water butt storage will never be as good as storing it in street trees, say.”*

**Project lead, interview**

## Bureaucracy and administration

The interface between people getting their hands into the soil and the bureaucracy that is attached to CFG projects, especially if they want to expand, creates a tension and challenge between grassroots action and top-down bureaucracy.

In one case, the project lead has been offered funding but they need to open a bank account and formally constitute the CFG group in order to receive the funding, which they have resisted. They have been asked to develop another site which they are keen to do. However, they work full time and only have one day a week to dedicate to the growing project, and this is taken up with keeping on top of the existing sites, a challenge particularly intense in the summer months. Likewise, they are not on social media and don't want to be responsible for curating a digital space, although they are aware that this is another factor hindering growth.

*“I get why, but it's a whole barrel of bureaucracy in order to put yourself in a position to receive and administer money to do these projects. I will have to do it at some point if I want to get anything any bigger, but I hate it. If I could get away with somebody administering the things that need to be legally administered that have to be correct and have to be done in a certain way and then I would happily hive that off to someone else. All I want to do is get my hands in the soil.”*

**Project lead, interview**

The Right to Grow in Hull is intended to ease the process of growing on public land on communities, but it has taken time for the RtG Task and Finish Group to develop and streamline processes. Issues such as provision of group insurance, creating short-term (e.g. one year) leases (as in future the land might be sold off for housing) and health and safety have taken time to work through. The council and Hull Food Partnership, which has two part-time members of staff, are extremely resource-constrained, which has also hindered the speed of work. Interviewees reflected on the complexity of the bureaucratic process and length of time it has taken to get the top-down RtG initiative into a workable agreement for grassroots groups:

*“If the two can meet in a satisfactory way is unclear as they haven't got a workable agreement yet. And if community groups can actually use it. The proof will be in the pudding: in the delivery. You have two well intended people trying to come together – but it will be diluted.”*

**Project volunteer, interview**

The need for processes comes up against the expectations from local groups – such as Friends of Alderman Kneeshaw Park in Hull, who want a level of support from the council, but not to be told how to manage the land or red tape – and who want to be able to get on with the work. The council are not planning to share a map of the available public land, with concerns it could be used for profit making in a 'land grab', and that it could attract NIMBYs, both of which would create work for council officers in the current resource-constrained environment. They want communities to come forward with requests to manage land.

Issues around bureaucratic challenges are experienced on the community farm in Kirriemuir. The community farm needs to be registered as a separate smallholding to receive funding which involves much red tape. The availability of government support schemes for agriculture is another issue, with a lack of start-up funds for new food growing ventures, and the need to enter five-year contracts for

agri-environment schemes to fund wildflower margins, for example. Critical to this is that the estate owner needs to work on the assumption that they can turn the land back into one field that they can farm, should this be necessary.

## Financial sustainability

Securing funding and creating financial sustainability is a core concern of all the CFG projects in this research. Whilst funding for equipment and donations have been relatively forthcoming, securing funding for staff time is extremely difficult. CFG project leads reflected that their role in creating and growing CFG initiatives is undervalued, with a limit on project growth above the time they can give for free.

*“We've proved it works and we know it could grow into something incredible, with a wider scope, more numbers in the garden, and a bigger impact – but we need to earn money to make this happen.”*

**Project lead, interview**

Additionally, the time required to source potential funders, write the bids and await the outcome is challenging. Project leads took a lot of time to find out about, apply for and manage funding, often stitching together various small amounts. One trustee, a former professional fundraiser, highlighted how securing funding has got even harder with government funding disappearing, funding pots shrinking and competition increasing. The short-term nature of funding has implications for staff turnover and the loss of expertise and knowledge.

*“Being able to source money for a period of time which means we can offer staff security otherwise we employ people and then lose them and have to start from scratch again. This is our main challenge. This is why we're looking at ways we can secure an income which isn't solely based on grant funding. This is the only way we can go.”*

**Project lead, interview**



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## Wild versus neat: different views on land use and appearance

People have different preferences and ideas about what looks nice and how public spaces should be used, which the pilot work in Alderman and Kneeshaw Park in Hull is illustrating, with some people wanting the whole space for dog walking, for example, and others not liking the look of the areas which are uncultivated, untamed and wilder. Some residents want grass verges and areas for wildflowers and grasses mowed rather than left; and using spaces for nature can be met with intense opposition from community members. Community opposition can be a significant barrier to CFG projects getting off the ground and expanding:

*“One of the big barriers – I’m a confident person – a lot [of] people who lead these projects are confident people – but you will have to consult with the neighbourhood about what they want – a lot of people will be put off... I almost was... because some people don’t like it – some people don’t want more nature – they get quite angry about the idea of something they see as untidy. Even if 99% of the community are behind it, the 1% often have the loudest voices. It’s upsetting when someone criticises your project, and I know from talking to others... people get really angry – real rage... If you want a quiet life and don’t want to have to engage in those discussions, this is quite difficult. I think this will put a lot of people off...”*

**Project volunteer, interview**

Clearly, community engagement is essential. In Conwy, the engagement of residents in the ‘Get Top Park Buzzing’ project so that the unmown areas of the park were supported, has been critical. In Crewe, it was necessary to get the support from the Caritas Centre committee for the growing project to have the planters made from smart-looking wood, rather than reclaimed pallets. Also, growing in raised beds is difficult to do following permaculture principles, and interviewees reflected that should this happen, people complain that it looks messy. This is clearly more of a consideration in sites which are publicly visible and accessible.

Allowing nature to be freer can also be a learning curve for council staff or contractors used to mowing and managing. This makes community engagement and signage essential, so people understand that the space is being managed for biodiversity not just left, as well as for the ability of the land to soak and retain water.





# Understanding the enablers and sustaining factors for community food growing projects

Certain conditions were present in the CFG projects which enabled them to come into existence. These include place-based factors, incredible individuals, and having access to land, funding and volunteers. Sustaining projects through having enough resources including the time and satisfaction of project leads and volunteers, finance and access to suitable land, and getting community and decision-makers on board were key. Getting these factors right can inspire offshoots and lead to more growing projects. Conversely, if they are absent or too strained for too long, growing projects may falter and stop.

## Incredible people: changemakers, networkers and space curators

CFG projects are powered by the inspiring individuals who initiate them and who keep them running, and the people leading the projects have some characteristics in common. A sense of wanting to take action and contribute to an endeavour bigger than themselves is one which all project leads expressed through their desire to take action for climate, for nature, their community and for the people living in it. Project leads expressed that they felt empowered by taking positive action, however seemingly small, in the face of the overwhelming environmental and geopolitical crises; providing an example of the power of small actions which others could replicate. Their world view, passion and drive to make a difference, is often a catalyst for CFG projects.

Stemming from their world view and way they wanted to effect change, was clarity on the goal of the community food growing project. Whether getting a Right to Grow motion passed in Hull, creating an Incredible Edible Todmorden in Conwy or Crewe, providing a conduit for a whole town's climate action Kirriemuir or therapeutic horticulture for older, socially isolated people in Dover – each project had a clear aim.

A sense of commitment and responsibility towards others, specifically towards volunteers, is another characteristic expressed by project leads who recognise that they provide the continuity and stability of regular group gardening sessions and that volunteers, whether they turn up or not on the day, are relying on them to be there as a consistent presence.

Other key traits all project leads expressed were determination, tenacity and not giving up in the face of challenges, overcoming any number of obstacles, from working with scant resources, to community

hostility to being spread extremely thinly across many different tasks. They are all extremely resourceful – finding donations, goodwill and workarounds in unlikely places. Project leads are also extremely good at building relationships with people, from funders and local politicians to potentially hostile community members, to donors and other groups who could be partners or associates. They were very well liked by those they worked and volunteered with and displayed persuasiveness in getting others to help them.

The project leads are exceptional curators of their growing spaces – creating time and care for the volunteers and grasping the central importance of the social element of gathering for tea and coffee for those who give their time to their projects and creating inclusive spaces both physically through having raised beds and planters, and emotionally for the volunteers. In this sense, all the projects are therapeutic spaces, although only one has this as an explicit aim.

Alongside this, they are excellent planners, making sure that there are a variety of jobs for volunteers to do, that everything gets done when it needs to; but ensuring that volunteers don't feel pressured so that their involvement feels like work. They are adept at treading a line between providing direction and support, with not being overly controlling or too attached to the results in terms of the produce from the growing.

They are often juggling multiple roles and tasks, including administration and financial management, marketing and social media, community engagement, volunteer support and management, community connector, health and safety, grant applications, project management and the business of growing itself. Along with this collection of characteristics, there is modesty about all of them – but each of them is remarkable in holding this collection of characteristics, skills and traits.

The skills and characteristics of the project leads are considerable, and they can make a lot of activity happen with very little funding. But they can't work indefinitely without pay, and if they do, they are likely to become burnt out, disenchanted or at the very least, be limited in growing activities to what can be done in several hours a week. The value volunteers place on the project lead cannot be overstated in providing direction, management and support for the growing activities. The most important factor in keeping projects going

and growing is having a project lead, and that person being funded for their time. Common to each project is a lead grower who organises access, kit, jobs, and provides a plan, as well as a set day for volunteering which volunteers can drop in and out of, with break time for tea and chats made a priority.

Each of the projects featured in this report had some minimal funding for the project leads, except one: IE Crewe. The project lead has been invited to support an additional church site, this one an allotment rather than raised beds. They want to take this on, but with more growing space, more volunteers are needed to help work on the sites, especially watering in the summer months. Having people who are willing to take on more responsibility, such as for social media, for oversight of the individual sites, and for the accompanying project administration such as managing funding is also a consideration. Without this, there is a natural block to the expansion of this project unless new volunteers come forward to manage the existing sites, and/or take on the administration including banking and social media because the project lead already works full time and is giving at least a day a week to the growing projects.

IE Conwy, in contrast, has some small amount of funding for the project lead. They have been able to grow and expand because of this and are looking to secure funding for a garden planner. This will enable the project lead to continue to grow the work and maintain the satisfaction of existing volunteers. The 'Get Top Park Buzzing' project lead in Conwy had advertised and listed their volunteer request through the local Wildlife Trust website, which meant that they were covered by their insurance. The work being done by the Hull Right to Grow Task and Finish Group should help those wanting to set up growing projects on public land overcome some of the administrative hurdles, for growing groups, such as providing a group insurance policy and information and support on soil testing.



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### Activism takes many forms: volunteer recruitment and retention

Volunteers are the people power behind the community growing projects, and attracting and retaining the range of volunteers to create and implement community food growing is a challenge. People are attracted to give their time for CFG projects for different reasons, and their activism takes many forms. Valuing and welcoming all forms of activism and volunteering is key, which means understanding people's motivations for getting involved CFG projects is important. Some people are drawn to the activism and rebellious element of growing in public spaces, whilst this can be off-putting to others who may be more drawn to the

social or nature elements. Peoples' motivations differ, but all need to feel included and supported.

At an individual level, understanding the motivations for volunteering and activism is extremely important to understand, because, as this research has borne out, people want to take part in different ways, to different levels of intensity at different points in their life. We know that people dip in and out of volunteering and give time face-to-face and digitally, and that some factors are strongly associated with people's decisions to continue to volunteer, namely enjoyment, feeling part of the organisation and not being pressured to do more. Figure 1 summarises the different elements of inclusive and flexible volunteering and is reproduced from NCVO's Time Well Spent.



Figure 1: Quality volunteer experience, from NCVO's Time Well Spent survey<sup>81</sup>

Activists and volunteers need to be motivated to keep coming and giving their time for free. A key element to this is the permanence of the volunteering sessions, with designated days for group gardening which volunteers can drop into. This continuity the project leads provide, without the expectation of commitment is a key sustaining ingredient for growing projects. The project lead providing some direction and support and holding a safe and inclusive space for everyone – including making the all-important time for tea and coffee – are further factors volunteers value and keep coming back for. Having a range of jobs for people to do, for a range of abilities – including physical limitations (and therefore having jobs which can be done sitting) – is critical, and another way in which project leads keep volunteers motivated.

Other ways in which volunteers are engaged is that over the winter months, a winter programme runs to keep the group together with social and craft activities and skills with courses such as first aid, health and safety and basic food hygiene. And new volunteers can be found in the summer as passersby see the growing activities if they are done in public.

### Not all places are created equal: place matters

Place matters greatly in enabling CFG projects to emerge. Factors including local socio-economic and demographic factors play a part, as does the presence, strength and connectedness of the local voluntary and community sector and the local political landscape. Places are unequal: deep geographical differences exist in the UK on multiple measures, including productivity, pay, educational attainment and health.<sup>82</sup>

The conditions in Hull which led to the RtG campaign gaining traction highlight the importance of place-based factors in CFG initiatives. These include the city's geographic location being isolated yet outward looking; its local political structures as a single tier authority; the close political power balance; a strong food partnership, closely connected to the council and local groups; high levels of deprivation and thriving grassroots activism of food poverty support, guerilla gardening, food growing and environmentalism. These combined factors created fertile ground for community groups to influence local politics, to want to do this and to be determined when they didn't initially succeed. Local activism was met with political access, aided by the Hull Food Partnership which formed an umbrella for a wide group of interests.

*"The Hull Food Partnership, which has driven this [Right to Grow] work forward, had been going for several years. We came along and gave it a push. We catalysed something that needed catalysing. Like all reactions, it was there to happen."*

Project lead, interview

If we look to the other post-industrial towns in this research, we see some similarities to Hull in, for example, socioeconomics, but in Crewe and Dover, local government structures are dispersed across district, town and county (Dover) and town and county (Crewe), there are no food partnerships nor comparably active networks of food, poverty and environmental grassroots groups. Also, the struggles experienced by both these town centres were highlighted in interviews and fit into a bigger issue around post-industrial town centre decline. There is perhaps therefore a more dispersed and fragmented landscape in these two towns around which to coalesce food growing and environmental activism.

Sustainable Kirriemuir arguably serves a similar function to the Hull Food Partnership, in that it brings together interests and activism on climate, nature, and food growing. In Conwy, the council-supported Conwy Feast was important for Incredible Edible Conwy's emergence, as were the various residents already involved in an active network of environmental and food growing groups. Conwy county has its own Sustainable Food Partnership, one of 22 in Wales, supported by the Welsh Government which has supported IE Conwy most recently with funding for the Veg X project. Both Conwy and Kirriemuir are reasonably affluent market towns, with a large pool of active and skilled retirees who want to put their energies to good use. Conversely, Crewe and Dover have struggled to engage people to get involved in growing, perhaps partly because there isn't the same pool of people to draw on.

### Access to power and resources: land, funding, expertise, networks

A key element of the national Right to Grow campaign is that local authorities should create a publicly available register of public land. Whilst this isn't part of Hull's approach, it is important for those wanting to grow to know what public land could be available. Whilst public land is important, it is by no means the only option. Each project in this research found and secured access to land to grow from a landowner. Landowners ranged from the local council, parish churches, a large rural estate, a householder's garden, and voluntary organisations, including the National Trust. Some of the CFG sites are hard standing and only suitable for raised beds and planters; others have been used for growing for decades, such as the householder's garden used as a nursery in Conwy and the community farm in Kirriemuir.

Project leads either already had, or developed relationships with key individuals who could provide access to (a) funding or land, often from the local town or county council, or the parish church, and/or (b) access to knowledge and influence, for example through the Incredible Edible network in redrafting the Right to Grow motion in Hull.



*"I liked and was inspired by with my initial meetings with [project leads] – they were so inspiring and so driven by what they were doing and the whole movement of it and the people getting involved in it – churches, schools – everyone had this one common aim."*

**Project decision-maker, interview**

Having access to networks, and having connections being made for them, also helped get some growing projects off the ground and spurred on. In Dover, for example, the person responsible for community organising and the Nextdoor Nature project at Kent Wildlife Trust knew of Dover Big Local's (the land manager) desire to uplift what became the community garden for the space. They also knew that The Sage Network were looking for a new gardening space, and they introduced and connected them at a community networking event.

All the sites were accessible to volunteers and all project leads had secured some funding, to get their projects going, even if only very small amounts for some topsoil and plants for raised beds.

Access to people with power connects closely with other enabling place-based factors, and different areas and communities have different levels of resource, power and influence, including access to funding, land, and people with power and influence. Another supportive factor for CFG projects lies in the ripple and snowball effects of small actions in inspiring, engaging and convincing others, be they volunteers, funders, politicians or local residents. In this sense, the multiplier effect is very much present.

**Supportive power holders and decision makers**

Having access to people with power, resources, skills and connections is a key enabler for CFG projects. Sometimes this is the project lead themselves, or a close network of movers and shakers such as in Conwy and Kirriemuir. Sometimes it takes a connector, like the national Incredible Edible connections helping with Hull's Right to Grow campaign; or the Cheshire Wildlife Trust's Community Organiser providing support to the IE project lead with accessing funding and planting the edible hedge, for example; and the role of the community builder and Caritas Centre manager in being able to provide both parish land, funding, a source of volunteers and connections to funding through the town council.

Understanding local politics and political structures is also helpful, with important relationships between project leads and local authority open spaces/parks and gardens departments, town councils and food partnerships, for example. Finding ways to match the priorities of the growing project to local political and policy priorities is helpful, as Hull illustrates well.

**Stories matter: communications, community outreach and education**

Engaging people and communities is essential in sustaining and growing projects. In some cases, this happened at the beginning of the projects; for example Sustainable Kirriemuir have held several community consultations, including at their inception, to gauge appetite for such an organisation, and currently about what the community would like to see featured in the activities and growing of the community farm. IE Conwy started with a community meeting, again, to gauge interest, and an offshoot – Get Top Park Buzzing – has engaged local residents to get their buy-in for letting the park grow wilder areas.

The Right to Grow campaign in Hull gathered momentum because of public engagement through hustings, the involvement of a range of community and activist groups, and through the pilot work of Alderman Kneeshaw Park which is highlighting the need for, and challenges of, local engagement as people have different views on what looks nice and what public spaces should be used for such as dog walking and nature. In other cases, community engagement is happening alongside project development. In Crewe, for example, the Caritas Centre manager is keen to engage more local residents and groups in the open access growing spaces.

Community events, such as the Conwy Seed Fair and Conwy Honey Fair and Sustainable Kirriemuir's Tattie Day, provide a way for growing groups to raise their profile, get community buy in and potentially recruit more volunteers and donors. Encouraging people to help themselves to the produce grown through prominent and engaging signage is also important.

Another insight shared from the RtG work so far is that the nature and biodiversity aspect, not just cultivating land for food, is important for the public, from rewilding to using nature friendly practices such as being chemical free. Connected to this, making the nature aspects of the growing publicly visible are important too with signs making the activity explicit, e.g. 'we're growing these wildflowers for bees'.

Hull Food Partnership's outreach work as part of the RtG has highlighted that involving children and young people and education around food is important, with many not having experience or understanding of how food is grown, or of how fruit and vegetables can be made into meals. Having an up-to-date online presence is also important. The role of RtG as a catalyst for community engagement, in helping people build self-confidence, and in nurturing people as well as plants, is clear.

Learning, developing, sharing best practice is another important enabler for CFG projects. Ideas for the model of the community farm in Kirriemuir, for example, have come from trustees and staff such as the farm manager's learning from elsewhere. This includes the farm manager's learning from other growing initiatives, such as Lauriston Farm<sup>83</sup> near Edinburgh which has community allotments, a community garden, a market garden and community enterprises on its land and sits under the Edinburgh Agro-ecological cooperative, and her place on the CSA Incubator Scheme. The landowner is a member of Scottish Land and Estates and has been on tours of other estates which are doing interesting growing projects. They are looking to other local initiatives such as Bowhouse<sup>84</sup> in Fife which aims to connect small growers and producers with restaurants and shoppers. The estate has created a monthly food market and aims to create a community of separate businesses who benefit from each other.

**CFG projects are situated in time and place**

We can understand the factors shaping the emergence, continuation and faltering of CFG projects as situated in time and place, shaped by a multitude of factors that shift in significance over time and are in turn shaped by the impact of the projects themselves.<sup>85</sup> CFG projects are affected by:

- Individual factors, including motivations, personality, identity and resources
- Relationships and social networks, including an individual's family, friends, neighbours, colleagues and wider social networks
- Groups and organisations, both the presence and absence of them and their connection to each other
- Local environment and place, including local spaces, events, institutions and politics
- Wider societal and global influences, such as the climate crisis, COVID-19 pandemic and geopolitics<sup>86</sup>

Using this analysis as a way to understand the factors and forces shaping CFG projects, and people's motivations to take part in them or set them up, helps to see where the points of influence may lie for those operating in the different spheres, whether and individual wanting to set up and lead a project, a funder wanting to enable CFG projects, a local councillor wanting to support local neighbourhood renewal efforts, or one of the four founding partners of the Coronation Gardens initiative. Understanding these factors shaping CFG projects is key for the founding partners and others who wish to understand how community food growing can be scaled up.





# Recommendations: scaling up community food growing

The following recommendations put forward proposals for how CFG can be scaled up, with suggestions for the Coronation Gardens founding partners and other VCSE organisations; funders of CFG and community-led activism; national policymakers; local government and NHS policymakers; and, perhaps most importantly of all, the current and future leaders of CFG initiatives. Recommendations in bold are the ones we consider to be the priority actions.



## Coronation Gardens Partners and VCSE organisations enabling community-led activism

*The more links we can make, the more we can become the sum of our parts. It's a way we can increase our clout as the message is getting out there – more people become involved in what we're seeking to do and bring their own ideas. We don't know everything and haven't got everything right. We have gone to visit other projects – it's vital that we talk to other organisations and all share what we're doing so we're become stronger together."*

### Project lead, interview

- 1. Review the role of CFG in relevant strategies and specify its role in delivering organisational objectives** on (e.g.) food growing, helping nature, climate change, EDI, physical and mental health, skills development and community activism.
- 2. Seek new and wider partnerships across the range of topics and impacts that CFG has**, e.g.
  - with calls for Community Power, through initiatives like the We're Right Here campaign,<sup>87</sup> a campaign to close the gap between politics and ordinary people to put more decisions in people's hands.
  - Develop a more strategic approach to working with local councils to create real work change within communities, utilising partner organisation connections.
- 3. Follow the principles of community organising (see Appendix 1) in CFG projects**, including starting with local power, stakeholder and greenspace mapping to understand the key groups and initiatives already operating in an area and where the gaps may be.
- 4. Grow and connect existing initiatives which embrace community activism and all types of volunteering**, e.g. Garden Organic's Master Gardener and Composter Programmes, The Wildlife Trust's Team Wilder approach, and the WT's local initiatives which could be shared and scaled. Much can be learnt from Incredible Edible's loose networked approach which inspires local CFG action, including from the case studies in this research which highlighted the connections between local Wildlife Trusts and Incredible Edibles.
- Continue to develop and deepen ways to **support existing and potential CFG project leads**, e.g. through providing mentoring/buddying opportunities, peer support, visits to other inspiring projects.
- Signpost towards existing resources and toolkits for CFG, e.g. Social Farms and Gardens 'how to' guide<sup>88</sup> and Incredible Edible's various online resources, as well as the work emerging from Hull's RtG Task and Finish Group.
- Tell compelling stories of different forms of CFG activism, impacts and volunteering through comms channels.
- Look to identify the potential of, and support the introduction to, others already in this community space. The Wildlife Trusts Community Hub<sup>89</sup> is one potential route and example.
- Help overcome sticking points for CFG projects through local support with access to, e.g., land, facilities and equipment, volunteers (including through, for example, group insurance and training courses) and connections to helpful networks.
- Recognise and help create opportunities for and into CFG projects which speak to activists' and volunteers' different motivations, e.g. by using the NCVO model (see Fig 1).
- VCSEs providing green and social prescription activities can follow the National Centre for Social Prescribing (NASP) and the Royal Voluntary Service (RVS) advice for designing volunteering programmes that work for people with health and social care needs who may be referred through social prescribing. This advice includes meeting people where they are, making it personal and social, and building circles of support.<sup>90</sup>
- Infrastructure organisations (e.g. local CVSs) can support local networking, connecting and volunteering opportunities for CFG.



### Funders of CFG and community-led activism

*“What makes the garden grow is the two of us – this doesn’t seem to hold any value in terms of funding criteria. This has surprised and depressed us. We are qualified, experienced therapists saying we’d like to make people better through doing wonderful things. We’ve proved it works and we know it could grow into something incredible, with a wider scope, more numbers in the garden, and a bigger impact – but we need to earn money to make this happen”*

Project lead, interview

13. A critical factor in growing and sustaining CFG projects is funding for a project lead. A little funding for this role goes a very long way, yet this funding is the hardest to secure. **Consider providing funding for the CFG project lead roles.**
14. CFG crosses many agendas which are often siloed within funders and between them, from the natural world and local democracy to place-based health and heritage. **Help** to reveal these silos and **create connections between themselves and other funders, infrastructure organisations and grassroots groups.**

### National government and policymakers

*“When we first started talking about it [the Right to Grow], it was about growing food on low incomes. Now it’s more than this...cultivating land for flood alleviation to soak up water, the biodiversity, it’s about growing communities together and the co-benefits of growing which are really important. People getting involved in where they are living and growing is more important than the food grown itself.”*

Project lead, interview

15. **CFG cuts across different government departments and agendas, including health, environment and food, volunteering, neighbourhood and democratic renewal. It should be prioritised and included across departmental strategies and priorities across England, Scotland and Wales.**
16. **Ministry of Housing Communities and Local Government (MHCLG):** The role of CFG in fostering community cohesion, neighbourhood renewal and local democracy are highly relevant to MHCLG. **Government should** take regard of the findings and recommendations of the National Preparedness Commission’s report on civil food resilience<sup>91</sup> including **providing powers for Local Authorities, in particular planning departments, to facilitate availability land for community food growing, and a Right to Grow given legislative backing.**
17. **Department for Farming, Rural Affairs and Environment (Defra):** Many ecosystems services and nature-based solutions flow from CFG. **CFG should be integrated into Defra’s developing thinking on the Food Strategy, e.g. by including a prominent role for Local Food Partnerships.**
18. **Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS):** Some places and neighbourhoods may need additional community development animation/support to realise the benefits of CFG which DCMS should champion. The critical role of volunteers, and understanding the motivations for different types of activism, can be supported through **DCMS championing the local social infrastructure for volunteering and community activism.**
19. **Department of Health (DH):** CFG is relevant to the work of building fairer towns, cities and regions through campaigns such as Health Equals<sup>92</sup>, and applying the Marmot Places<sup>93</sup> approach to addressing place-based health inequalities by taking action on the social determinants of health inequalities. **DH should champion CFG within community-led version of the ‘neighbourhood health service’** which would help people tackle the health and other issues that matter most to them by working with their strengths, building community leadership, and making better use of the assets, relationships and infrastructure available in the local neighbourhood.<sup>94</sup>

### Local Government and Integrated Care Systems

*“There’s a lot of good intentions but the bureaucratic process is complex. It’s taken six months to get agreement to a level which could potentially be used by community members, but it has to go through months of ratification, scrutiny committee, etc. So, you have a bottom-up initiative where communities want land to do growing and a top-down [one].”*

Project lead, interview

20. **Local councillors** can follow Hull’s lead and **pass a motion for the community Right to Grow** and follow the work of Hull’s RtG task and Finish Group in implementing the RtG, e.g. through group insurance and other bureaucratic hurdles.
21. **Strategic authorities can recognise and promote CFG in their Spatial Development Strategies** (including for its role in post-industrial town centre renewal).
22. In England, social prescribing is part of the NHS shifting towards preventing illnesses by bringing health services and support into community settings, including through ways to reduce loneliness and isolation. **Integrated Care Systems can recognise the role of CFG in social and green prescribing and support social prescribing link workers to find out about and include CFG in prescribing activities.**
23. **Parks and open spaces departments can champion CFG** in their own sites and parks, map local green spaces, provide the support for CFG projects, e.g. by linking potential CFG project leads to sources of local funding, providing access to facilities (e.g. tool storage, a tap), and to networks for potential volunteers.
24. **Local Nature Partnerships and Local Food Partnerships can offer support and connections for CFG projects.**
25. Those with **responsibility for volunteering and citizen action can network into other organisations** (e.g. local VCSE infrastructure organisations), and support the social infrastructure, especially in more deprived areas, which plays such an important role in catalysing and embedding the support networks for local citizen action.<sup>95</sup>

**Current and future CFG project leads: the change-makers**

*“Just because you’re an everyday person, doesn’t mean you can’t do something in your local community and change the way it looks.”*

Project lead, interview

26. **Seek forgiveness, rather than permission for taking action into your own hands – the power of small actions can change the world.**





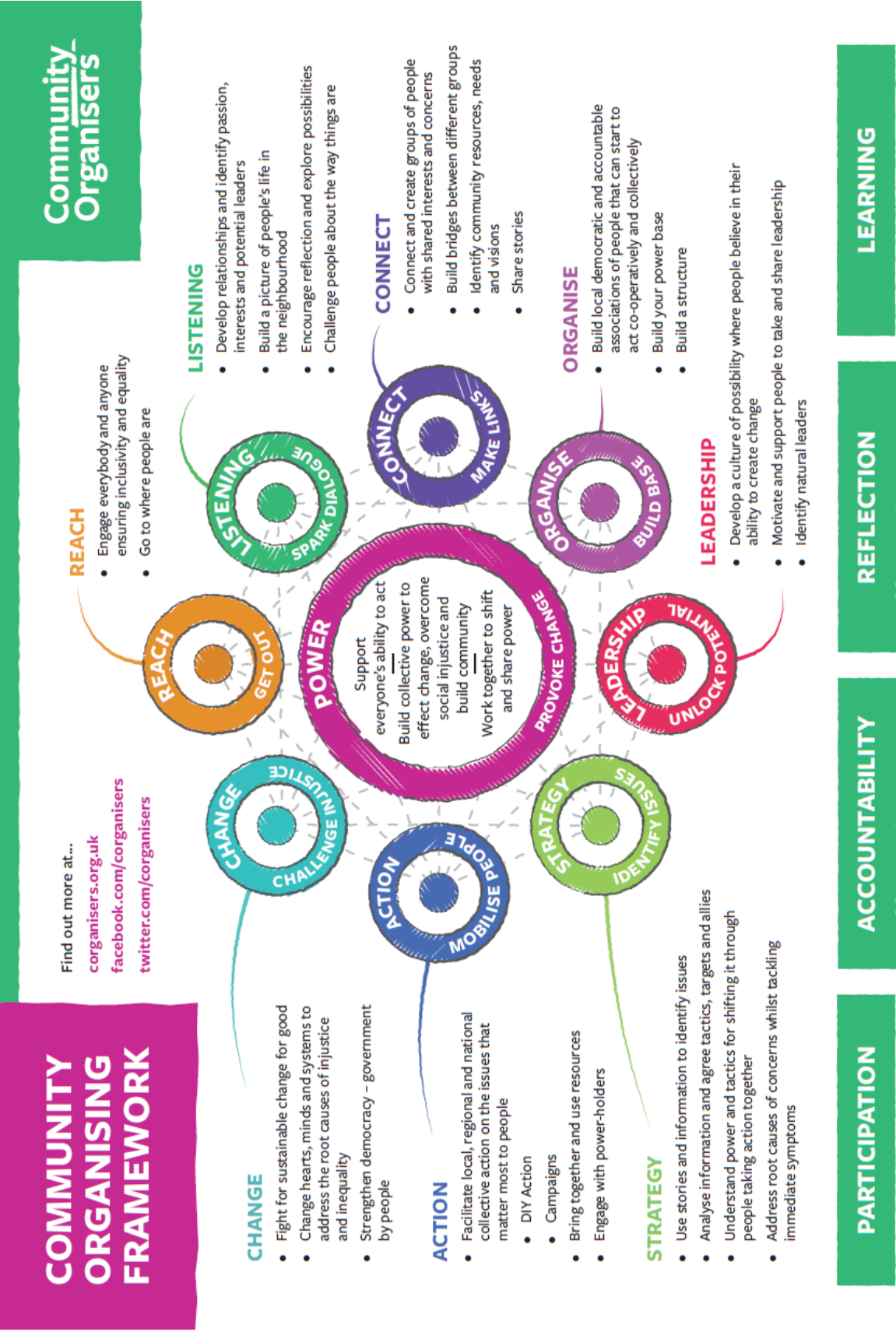
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Name	Role	Organisation
Bryony Carter	Community Organising Manager	The Wildlife Trusts
Helen Neal	Development Manager	National Federation of Women's Institutes
Kaye Brennan	Head of Campaigns and Communities	The Wildlife Trusts
Pam Warhurst	Founder	Incredible Edible
Pru Elliot	Campaigns Consultant	Incredible Edible
Thirzah McSherry	Director	The Wildlife Trusts
Vicky Constantine-Forster	Membership Operations Manager	National Federation of Women's Institutes
Celia Williams	Project lead and co-founder	Incredible Edible Conwy
Ruth Bitowski	Volunteer and co-founder	Incredible Edible Conwy
Liz Gordon	Sustainable Food Partnership Co-ordinator	Conwy Council
Libet Williams	Volunteer	Incredible Edible Conwy
Philip Vipond	Biodiversity Project Officer	Conwy Council
Charley Howes	Bionet, North East Wales Nature Partnership	Conwy Council
Cath Mosey	Volunteer	Incredible Edible Conwy
Nicky Jones	Volunteer	Incredible Edible Conwy
Adrian Pugh	Volunteer	Incredible Edible Conwy
Gayle Brace	Volunteer	Incredible Edible Conwy
Sue Roberts	Volunteer	Incredible Edible Conwy
Helen Braithwaite	Project lead	Incredible Edible Crewe
Becky Hurst	Community Builder & Caritas Centre Manager	Caritas Centre, Crewe
Andrew Stubbs	Wilder Communities Officer	Cheshire Wildlife Trust
Volunteers from St Paul's Futures project	Volunteers (4 individuals)	Incredible Edible Crewe
Alexia Stockton	Team lead	St Paul's Centre Futures Project
Clare Little	Project lead, trustee	Sustainable Kirriemuir
Steven Gardner	Project lead, trustee	Sustainable Kirriemuir
Antony Gifford	Project lead, trustee	Sustainable Kirriemuir
Linzi Burnett	Community gardener (schools)	Sustainable Kirriemuir
Zoe Farrell	Food & Growing Project Officer	Sustainable Kirriemuir
Fiona Graham	Volunteer, community garden	Sustainable Kirriemuir
Pat Winter	Volunteer, community garden	Sustainable Kirriemuir
Ann Warren	Volunteer, community garden	Sustainable Kirriemuir
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School growers	School children (5 individuals)	Northmuir Primary School
Amandla Taylor	Farm Manager	Sustainable Kirriemuir
Anna Route	Project lead, RtG Task & Finish Group	Hull Food Partnership
Darren Squires	Project lead, RtG Task & Finish Group	Hull Food Partnership
Andy Gibson	Outer Humber Officer, RtG Task & Finish Group	Yorkshire Wildlife Trust
Andy Steele	Wilder Communities Engagement Officer	Yorkshire Wildlife Trust
Claire Gribben	Community volunteer	Friends of the Earth, Hull and East Riding
Wendy Cruise	Project lead	The Sage Network, Dover
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Sean Dawson	Volunteer	The Sage Network, Dover
Gloria/Della Marcal	Volunteer	The Sage Network, Dover
Terence David Barnett	Volunteer	The Sage Network, Dover

# Appendix 1

## Community Organising Framework by Community Organisers<sup>96</sup>





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The Wildlife Trusts are a federation of 47 charities, 46 individual Wildlife Trusts and a central charity, the Royal Society of Wildlife Trusts. Together we have more than 900,000 members, 39,000 volunteers and 3,600 staff across the UK. We share a vision of nature in recovery, with abundant, diverse wildlife and natural processes creating wilder landscapes where people and nature thrive.



Wildlife Trusts care for – and have restored – some of the most special places for wildlife in the UK. Collectively we manage more than 2,300 nature reserves, operate 123 visitor and education centres and own 29 working farms. We undertake research, we stand up for wildlife and wild places under threat, and we help people access nature.

We work with businesses who are committed to being nature positive and take action to help restore 30% of land and seas for nature by 2030.

### **The Wildlife Trusts**

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