



T: 07725699442

E: [ni@farmgarden.org.uk](mailto:ni@farmgarden.org.uk)

W: [farmgarden.org.uk](http://farmgarden.org.uk)

A: 22-24 Lombard Street, Belfast BT1 1RD

*CEO John Walsh  
Belfast City Council  
Belfast City Hall  
Belfast  
BT1 5GS*

*FAO: John Walsh  
CC: Kevin Heaney, Stephen Leonard, Debbie Caldwell, John Tully, Alison Diver, Mura Quigley.*

4/12/23

Dear Sir,

We are writing on behalf of Social Farms & Gardens to introduce our work and request an opportunity to present some of our recent research to the Climate and City Resilience Committee.

Social Farms & Gardens has been operational in NI since 2011, and we have been delivering a Growing Resilience programme funded by the National Lottery Community Fund in the Belfast City Council area since 2020. In this time, we have seen community growing become recognised in the mainstream as a wholesome activity for individual and community health, and a place for public bodies and active citizens to come together in partnership to serve the community and meet joint aims. We have also had many conversations, with community members, funders, council officers and staff of other support organisations about what makes community growing work. We have built up significant competence and expertise in this sector, and a good rapport with the people involved. We are also proud to be part of the City's Sustainable Food Partnership. We have produced a number of policy briefings, including the attached Benchmark report, which presents data on current provision of community growing space in all 11 councils in NI, compares it with provision elsewhere in the UK and makes recommendations on how councils can better support growing. These recommendations are in line with work being done across the UK on Sustainable Food Place Partnerships and Right to Grow campaigns.

It's encouraging to see the current interest in growing, especially since the beginning of the pandemic, and we hope to see this activity supported as much as possible. With climate and food supply challenges becoming more and more pressing, arming Belfast



citizens with the skills, land and resources they will need is an urgent matter, and one that we need to prioritise.

Social Farms & Gardens coordinates a Community Growing network in Belfast, including all types and sizes of community gardens and alley gardens. Please see attached for a report produced by this network earlier this year on what community growing needs to thrive in the City. You can see some of the spread of projects in the city [on this map](#) (although more time and resource is needed to complete this map, and there are many more initiatives than represented here). These initiatives are supported by a number of experienced support organisations operating in Belfast, including The Conservation Volunteers, Groundwork, Keep Northern Ireland Beautiful, 9ft in Common, ourselves, various biodiversity charities, and volunteer organisations like Volunteer Now and QUBSU Handy Helpers. We are currently partners with 9ft in Common, Eden Communities and Laurelbank Farm delivering a Belfast 24 project to support and promote the work of Alley Gardens. Gardens are also supported by funders, and by landowners, including charities, churches, and public landowners many of whom are represented on the Community Planning Partnership.

Social Farms & Gardens feel that a coordinated and joint approach to providing support to communities to look after their local environment will give them the best chance to succeed. We believe that a round table discussion, leading to a more regular working group, with representatives from these stakeholder groups and interested councillors will provide a robust framework to base future support for communities. We believe this working group could fit well within Community Planning structures, and will benefit from cross sectoral coordination. A Community Growing Strategy for the City could be produced for this partnership, with input from all stakeholders. We believe community growers from the many different types of garden should be represented on this working group, as diversity is a strength in community growing.

Social Farms & Gardens believe that appropriate community development and informational support is crucial to communities, and would commit to contributing to a working group aiming to provide this. We have been working in an intensive way in recent years in building peer to peer networking support to community growing groups, and believe our model could be a useful contribution. We would like to work with others so that this information and support can be provided in a coordinated and joined up way, and each stakeholder can play their part.

We are taking this opportunity to offer our knowledge and willingness to cooperate, to build a shared vision for mainstreaming community growing in our city, and look forward to hearing your thoughts on how we can pool our resources to best support our amazing citizens to make productive use of their green spaces and contribute to a resilient future for Belfast City.

Please let us know if we can meet with the Committee to present and discuss these ideas.

Yours sincerely

Miriam Turley

Senior Growing Resilience Officer & Policy and Research Officer

and

Patricia Wallace

NI Manager