

**Democratic Services Section
Legal and Civic Services Department
Belfast City Council
City Hall
Belfast
BT1 5GS**



**Belfast
City Council**

MEETING OF THE CLIMATE AND CITY RESILIENCE COMMITTEE

Dear Alderman/Councillor,

The above-named Committee will meet in the Lavery Room and in Hybrid Format in City Hall on Thursday, 11th January, 2024 at 5.15 pm, for the transaction of the business noted below.

You are requested to attend.

Yours faithfully,

John Walsh

Chief Executive

AGENDA:

1. Routine Matters
 - (a) Apologies
 - (b) Minutes (Pages 1 - 10)
 - (c) Declarations of Interest
2. Notices of Motion - Quarterly Update (Pages 11 - 16)
3. Update on Belfast Retrofit Delivery Hub - Brenda Roddy to Present (Pages 17 - 26)
4. Social Farms and Gardens - Request to Present to Future Committee Meeting (Pages 27 - 114)
5. Response from The Minister of Foreign Affairs re: New Irish Passport Design - for notation. (Pages 115 - 116)
6. Date of Next Meeting

Climate and City Resilience Committee

Thursday, 7th December, 2023

MEETING OF THE CLIMATE AND CITY RESILIENCE COMMITTEE

HELD IN THE LAVERY ROOM AND
REMOTELY VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS

Members present: Councillor R-M Donnelly (Chairperson);
Alderman Copeland; and
Councillors Anglin, Bell, Bower, R. Brooks,
T. Brooks, Collins, Doherty, M. Donnelly,
D. Douglas, S. Douglas, Kelly, McAteer,
McCabe, McKeown, Smyth and Walsh.

In attendance: Mr. J. Tully, Director of City and Organisational Strategy;
Ms. D. Caldwell, Climate Commissioner;
Ms. C. Shortt, Monitoring, Learning and Reporting Officer;
Ms. B. Roddy, Project Support Officer – Climate;
Mrs. K. Bentley, Director of Planning and Building Control;
Ms. M. Quigley, Adaptation and Resilience Advisor;
Mr. S. Leonard, Neighbourhood Services Manager and
Mr. G. Graham, Democratic Services Assistant.

Apologies

An apology was reported on behalf of Councillor Long.

Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of 9th November, 2023 were taken as read and signed as correct.

Declarations of Interest

No declarations of Interest were reported

Variation to Minutes

The Committee noted the following variation to the minutes of 9th November, 2023 under the heading:

Kerbside EV Proposal

The representatives from BT Openreach agreed also to undertake to work with the Inclusive Mobility and Transport Advisory Committee (IMTAC) with regard to the design and/or evaluation of the technical trial.

Belfast Sustainable Food Partnership

The Committee agreed to the allocation of £30,000 from within the City and Organisational Strategy Budget to develop a food strategy including a comprehensive city-wide and communication plan as part of the Council's food strategy and vision.

Embodied Carbon - Reimagining Construction
[Presentation - Dr Siobhan Cox,
Senior Lecturer School of Natural and
Built Environment, Queens University]

Dr Cox attended in connection with this item and was welcomed by the Chairperson.

The Committee was provided with an overview of embodied carbon in the context of the construction of buildings. Dr Cox reported that embodied carbon was used from the extraction of materials, operation and refurbishment of buildings culminating in the end of life and demolition process.

The Members were provided with a timeline in connection with each stage of a building's life cycle, including details of the carbon emissions associated with each stage of that process. The Committee was informed that embodied carbon represents approximately fifty percent of the total carbon associated with the life cycle of a building and that globally embodied carbon represents approximately eleven per cent of greenhouse gas emissions associated with new construction.

Dr Cox reported that the World Green Building Council suggested that by 2030, new buildings, infrastructure and renovations to buildings will have approximately forty per cent less embodied carbon with significant up-front carbon reduction and that all new buildings would be required to have net-zero operational carbon.

The Members were informed that currently there were numerous methods used to measure embodied carbon stating that the Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors (RICS) had set out a detailed methodology to calculate whole life carbon from the early design stage through to the project design and project completion. Dr Cox reported that the built environment data base was being used to collect data on carbon emissions and stated that professional bodies were being requested to use the database to estimate the carbon produced in connection with potential development projects and for that data to be shared with other professionals to heighten awareness around embodied carbon.

The Committee was informed that embodied carbon targets were being put in place across Europe to evaluate and reduce embodied carbon. Dr Cox reported that there are a number of targets that could be considered which are targeted at different parts of the building. She stated that it was ambition for buildings to reach an A++ rating by 2050.

Dr Cox emphasised the importance attached to measurement in regard to embodied carbon and the increased use made of recycled materials in the construction process. She referred also to the opportunity to re-purpose existing buildings and of the need to optimise the design of buildings in reducing embodied carbon.

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The Committee was provided with opportunities for the Council to show leadership in this field. Dr Cox referred to the current committed capital programme currently £300 million and the possibilities to calculate and set targets for its embodied carbon production. She referred to opportunities to substitute timber for steel and make use of less virgin materials. The Belfast Stories project was highlighted as a possible development proposal which could be considered for its embodied carbon assessment.

A further area for consideration was the current building control regulation and Council planning policy manifesting in the Belfast Local Development Plan. A reduction in the demolition of building was highlighted as a further area for consideration and the opportunity to re-configure building design allied to modifying the current use of buildings.

A Member referred to the opportunity for the Council to become a civic leader in the area of embodied carbon reduction to make greater use of recycled materials and of the need to publish its results.

The Climate Commissioner confirmed that the Council was exploring ways to measure embodied carbon as part of its draft local development plan and was engaging constructively with the Department of Physical Programmes as part of that process.

A Member asked a further question in regard to liaising with developers in regard to exploring re-use of existing buildings as opposed to demolition and a preference for new build construction. Dr Cox highlighted the need to raise awareness of carbon calculation and the benefits associated with more simplified building design features.

Dr Cox stated that it was important that developers were encouraged to consider embedded carbon as part of their industry standard specification. A Member suggested that the Council might wish to consider how other local authorities, including Liverpool, Manchester and Leeds had approached the problem of reducing embedded carbon.

The Climate Commissioner stated that she would report back to the Committee after consultation with other UK authorities and on the measures under consideration to manage embedded carbon as part of the Belfast Stories development project. The Climate Commissioner agreed also to consult with the Department of Physical Programmes requesting that they work in partnership with Queens University Belfast (QUB) to explore ways in which the Council could reduce its embedded carbon footprint as part of its future capital development programme.

The Committee noted the contents of the presentation and the Chair, on behalf of the Committee, thanked Dr Cox for her detailed and informative presentation and she departed from the meeting.

Passive House Standards at Erne Campus
[Presentation – Dr Barry McCarron,
Head of Business Development, Southwest College]

Dr McCarron attended in connection with this item and was welcomed by the Chairperson.

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Dr McCarron referred to his role as chairman of the Passive House Association of Ireland and reported that the Erne Campus was the largest passive premium building in the world and that passive house standards was now a global enterprise and provided the Committee with arrange of passive house standard located throughout the world. Dr McCarron reported that the United Nations had recommended passive house design be adopted since 2007.

The Members were informed that forty percent of global emissions was attributed directly to buildings and that there were seventeen sustainable development goals with passive house standards meeting eight of those goals directly and eleven indirectly. He reported that passive house design was the fastest growing building standard and best energy standard in the world. Dr McCarron referred specifically to a developer who was building that two hundred and fifty home to passive house standard in the city currently.

The Committee was informed that there were five passive house standards within the building construction industry. Dr McCarron highlighted the importance of insulation and referred to the key areas of insulation in regard to floors, roofs and walls, with particular attention to thermal bridging points. The Committee was informed of the requirement to undertake triple glazing as standard and ensure that buildings were airtight.

Dr McCarron informed the Committee that the Erne campus used a combination of bio-oil micro-chip and air to water heat pump technology. He referred to the air-quality within the building which was comparable to the quality of the external air and the requirement to ensure sufficient battery storage for period when the sun failed to generate sufficient energy. He stated that the cost of the building equated to thirty million pounds which was £3,552 per m².

The Members were informed that the project members had attended numeral internal events in recognition of their passive house development including Cop 26 and Cop 27. Dr McCarron reported that £300 million pounds of passive house development had been identified in Belfast and that it was cost effective approach, over the long term, given that all existing buildings would require to be retro-fitted if the UK was to meet its climate emission targets.

In response to a question from a Member in regard to the comparative costs of a passive house design building compared to a standard build, Dr McCarron stated that the costs were comparable with standard building costs. Dr McCarron reported that the Belfast building control regulations dictated the uplift in connection with passive house design.

A member raised a further question in regard to the payback period associated with passive house design and construction. In response Dr McCarron reported that the Erne campus was anticipated to secure a saving of two million pounds over a twenty-five-year period. In response to a further question in regard to the Council and its intention to undertake the Belfast Stories development, the Climate Commissioner stated that the project had not adopted one particular standard of passive house design, but agreed to report back to the Committee on how the development would be undertaken in terms of its emissions and embedded carbon output.

The Committee noted the information provided by Dr McCarron and thanked him for his informative and detailed presentation.

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**Retain: Sustain programme and short film on
tackling eco anxiety in the wider Belfast Community
[Presentation - Lise McGreevy, Photographic]**

Ms. McGreevy attended in connection with this item and was welcomed by the Chairperson.

Ms. McGreevy informed the Committee that she had been employed as a visual artist over the past 10 years with a commitment to the promotion of peace, a shared future, equality and now climate change. She stated that she was working collaboratively with Queens University Belfast (QUB) as their first 'Artist in Residence'. The Members were informed that her current project proposal was focused on reduce and recycle which should be a fundamental objective for both the business sector and public institutions.

She highlighted the opportunities and advantages of the potential cost benefits to schools and young people through her recycle and reuse initiative. She explained that her concept was based on the principle that all end-of-life and near end-of-life materials had the potential to be recycled with the cost benefits being redistributed to those most in need.

To that end, she reported that she had devised a sustainable programme called Retain/Sustain and that its aim was to assist those companies which adopt the pilot scheme to reduce their recycling costs while promoting their corporate responsibility by helping local communities. She stated that she was actively encouraging global companies to use Belfast as their recycling base with the longer-term objective of those companies adopting the scheme on a global basis and thereby becoming more sustainable and economically viable.

Ms. McGreevy reported that it was her intention to promote a joint venture between the business sector and primary schools in partnership with QUB to undertake a pilot programme working with Espresso. The pilot programme would involve Espresso providing schools with their end-of-life and near end-of-life coffee machines and coffee pods which would be used in schools. She stated that the saving made by using the coffee machines could be directed back into the education system and assist schools in maintaining their education services. The Members were informed that based on the success of phase one of the project proposal, phase two would involve working directly with four schools to assess the viability of the project.

In response to a question from a Member as to whether the scheme was currently operational and if an assessment had been undertaken as to the potential savings for school budgets, Ms. McGreevy stated that no projection could be made until completion of phase one and that the project was a new concept.

In response to a further question on when the project was anticipated to reach a global audience, Ms. McGreevy stated that it would be dependent on the success associated with the pilot study. In response to a further question on funding requirements, Ms. McGreevy reported that she had secured £1,300 to fund the pilot project which would be used to cover the pilot facilitation fees and that phase two involving four selected schools would follow after completion of the pilot study. Ms. McGreevy stated that she was requesting funding from the Council to facilitate phase two of the scheme after completion of phase one.

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The Committee noted the information provided by Ms. McGreevy and informed her that any funding application would be considered in the context of all funding applications made to the Council and would be considered in the context of a business plan which would be set against an agreed funding criterion.

The Committee thanked Ms. McGreevy for her presentation and she departed from the meeting.

**Local Development Plan
[Presentation - Kate Bentley]**

The Director of Planning and Building Control provided the Committee with an overview of the Council's role as planning authority in the delivery of sustainable development. She reported that climate change and resilience formed a central role in the formation and application of planning policy. The Members were informed that planning policy was required to strike a balance between economic, environmental, and social considerations and of the need to ensure that the right development was undertaken in the right place and at the right time.

The Committee was informed that plans, policies and programmes had been subject to strategic environmental assessment and sustainability appraisal over a considerable period and that the Council's Local Development Plan (LDP) was a key delivery component of the Belfast Agenda. She stated that the objective was to help guide and implement sustainable development over the next fifteen to twenty years.

The Director stated that there were two parts to the LDP namely, the Plan Strategy, which had been adopted in May 2023 and the Local Policies Plan which would look at the allocation of land and zoning within the city. She reported that the Planning Act of 2011 directed that any planning determination must be made in accordance with the LDP unless material considerations determined otherwise, which established the primacy of the LDP in the planning led system.

The Committee was informed that the Plan Strategy contained a number of strategic policies covering a range of areas, including growth and sustainable development, climate change, mitigation and adaptation, which were key elements within the planning strategic policies.

In terms of growth and sustainable development, the Director reported that there were a number of policies, one in particular setting out the growth ambitions contained within the Belfast Agenda, and which needed to be sustainable. She referred specifically to the delivery of thirty-one thousand homes by 2035 and the support of an additional sixty-six thousand inhabitants within the city. The Director emphasised that development required to be sustainable and in the right place. She confirmed that the LDP sat within the context of the Regional Development Strategy.

The Members were informed of the range of strategic policies which were relevant to green and blue infrastructure, and which supported environmental resilience and a reduction in greenhouse gas emissions. The Director referred to the one hundred and seven operational plan strategy policies in addition to seventeen supplementary planning guidance documents.

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She highlighted specifically some of the operational policies, including flood risk, the accommodation of new homes, mitigating environmental change and sustainable drainage systems. The Members were provided with a timetable for the adoption of the LDP Local Policies Plan and the many challenges which required to be addressed as part of that process.

In response to a question from a member in regard to flexibility of planning policy in the face of a change in emphasis, citing the reduction in the level of office space within the city, the Director stated that policies were long term and the LDP required to have a level of flexibility to accommodate behavioural and social change, including a change in planning priorities.

In response to a further question in regard to embedded carbon calculation being incorporated with planning policy, the Director stated that there was currently a policy within the planning process to make that request but it could not be required as part of the planning process. She stated however, that the planning supplementary guidance could be adjusted, over time, if it was considered necessary to amend it to make other such requests.

The Committee noted the information provided and thanked the Director of Planning and Building Control for her detailed and informative presentation.

Update on the Belfast Carbon Disclosure Project
Submission 2023 and UK Score Cards
[Presentation Claire Shortt,
Monitoring Learning & Reporting Officer, BCC]

The Committee considered the undernoted report on the Belfast Carbon Disclosure Project:

“1.0 Purpose of Report or Summary of Main Issues

- 1.1 To update members on the recent award of A status to Belfast through the Carbon Disclosure Project (CDP) cities reporting framework and the results of the UK Climate Score Cards.**

2.0 Recommendations

- 2.1 The Committee is requested to note the 2023 CDP award of A status to Belfast, which follows the 2022 award of A status and the 2021 CDP award of B status to Belfast, and to support the annual submission by Belfast through this internationally recognised carbon and climate reporting framework. The Committee is also asked to note the scores for Belfast in the UK Climate Score Cards rankings.**

3.0 Main report

Background - Carbon Disclosure Project (CDP)

- 3.1 In July 2021, the Council made the first annual submission to the Carbon Disclosure Project (CDP), with an update provided to**

Council in October 2021 and December 2022. The submission was undertaken to support baselining of activity and emissions in Belfast, and to enable full participation by Belfast in global climate action campaigns such as the Race to Zero, the Cities Race to Resilience campaign, Cities Race to Zero campaign, the Global Covenant of Mayors, and the WWF One Planet City competition. All of these campaigns require members to have made a submission through a recognised reporting mechanism, of which CDP is the most well-known. The survey consisted of multiple questions across themes such as, waste, transport, energy, emissions, climate risk and vulnerability, adaptation, mitigation, public health, planning and finance.

- 3.2 Belfast has been recognised by CDP as one of 119 cities across the globe that is taking bold leadership on environmental action and transparency, despite the pressures of a challenging global economic situation. The process has been designed to encourage and support cities to ramp up their climate action and ambition, CDP's Cities A List is based on environmental data disclosed by cities to CDP-ICLEI Track. A clear momentum in city climate disclosure and action is building – over 900 cities (939 in total) received a rating for their climate action from CDP in 2023. In 2023, just over one in ten cities scored by CDP (13% of such cities) received an A.
- 3.3 A city submission to CDP illustrates the level of ambition, activity and transparency each city adopts. Belfast has made its submission public in all three submission years to ensure maximum openness and transparency around our plans. The Belfast submission in 2021 was the first time Belfast had participated in CDP, and we were congratulated on having achieved a B ranking at such an early stage. In 2022, our second submission achieved an A ranking and this ranking has been preserved in 2023.
- 3.4 Along with the projects mentioned in previous submissions such as the Belfast Net Zero Carbon Roadmap (2020), One Million Trees, Living with Water Programme, UPSURGE and the Belfast Tidal Defence Project, the submission this year also included evidence such as the updated Belfast Agenda, the Met Office Heat Maps and the Local Development Plan. The current development of the Climate Action Plan was also highlighted in this submission along with the progress towards a Local Area Energy Plan. Projects such as the solar PV potential in the city and the work around the circular economy helped maintain this year's A ranking.

UK Climate Score Cards

3.5 Climate Emergency UK assessed all UK councils on the actions they've taken towards net zero. The scorecard assessment consists of 91 questions or less, depending on council type, across 7 different sections, created in consultation with over 90 different organisations and individuals. Each council was marked against these criteria and given a right to reply before the scores underwent a final audit. This work was completed between January and August 2023 and results were announced November 2023.

3.6 Belfast scored 43%, ranking number one in N. Ireland with the average ranking in the region being 21% this year. The councils are scored on themes based around building and heating, transport, planning and land use, governance and finance, biodiversity, collaboration and engagement and waste reduction and food.

The link at appendix 6.2 illustrates Belfast's scores across each of the categories and compares them across all other councils.

The questions are answered using information gathered by volunteers that is published and collected through FOIs to councils. This is then combined, and councils get a right to reply to its accuracy.

In 2023, Westminster Council received the highest score in the UK and Thurrock Council received the lowest.

4.0 Financial and Resource Implications

4.1 There are no financial and resource implications.

5.0 Equality or Good Relations Implications/ Rural Needs Implications

5.1 Any good relations or equality implications will be identified as part of the Council's screening process."

The Committee noted that information contained within the report and congratulated the climate team on their dedication and hard work resulting in the achievement of an 'A' ranking in the carbon disclosure project including the impressive results attained within the UK climate scorecard.

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Thursday, 7th December, 2023**

**Tree Cutting at Orangefield Playing Fields –
Stephen Leonard, Neighbourhood Services Manager**

The Neighbourhood Services Manager provided the Committee with an update on the unauthorised tree felling which had been undertaken by contactors, acting on behalf of NIE, at Orangefield Park in May 2023.

The Committee was informed that NIE has accepted blame for the incident, highlighting a communication failure between NIE and the external contractor. The Members were provided with a written statement from NIE setting out the circumstances surrounding the tree felling and the measures they would be putting in place to repair the damage, including a new tree planting scheme, on site, at no cost to the Council.

A Member referred to a similar incident which had occurred previously and highlighted the lack of consultation with residents and the frustration and anger which had been generated in that local community.

A Member requested that future agreements be strengthened, and that guidance be sought from the City Solicitor in regard the enforcement powers available to the Council to prevent a future occurrence.

In regard to a question from a Member in regard the cost of the restoration work at the park, the Neighbourhood Services Manager agreed to ascertain the costs and report back to the Committee, he agreed also to research from the estates section and the bio - diversity officer, if and when similar incidents of unauthorised tree felling had taken place throughout the city, and what the impact had been for wildlife, specifically in relation to Orangefield Park.

A Member suggested that it might be beneficial to consult with both elected representatives and the local community before any similar operation was undertaken. The Neighbourhood Services Manager assured the Committee that lessons had been learned from this unfortunate incident and that future operations of this nature would be undertaken under Council supervision.

Noted.

Date of Next Meeting

The Committee agreed that its next meeting be held on Thursday, 11th January, 2024 at 5.15 p.m.

Chairperson



Subject:	Notices of Motion – Quarterly Update
Date:	11 th January 2024
Reporting Officer:	John Tully, Director of City and Organisational Strategy Debbie Caldwell, Climate Commissioner
Contact Officer:	Clare Hutchinson, Strategic Planning and Policy Officer

Restricted Reports

Is this report restricted?

Yes

☐

No

☐

Please indicate the description, as listed in Schedule 6, of the exempt information by virtue of which the council has deemed this report restricted.

Insert number

1. Information relating to any individual
2. Information likely to reveal the identity of an individual
3. Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the council holding that information)
4. Information in connection with any labour relations matter
5. Information in relation to which a claim to legal professional privilege could be maintained
6. Information showing that the council proposes to (a) to give a notice imposing restrictions on a person; or (b) to make an order or direction
7. Information on any action in relation to the prevention, investigation or prosecution of crime

If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?

After Committee Decision

After Council Decision

Sometime in the future

Never

☐
☐
☐
☐
☐

Call-in	
Is the decision eligible for Call-in?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>

1.0	Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues
1.1	The purpose of this report is to update Committee on the progress of all Notices of Motion and Issues Raised in Advance for which the Climate and City Resilience Committee is responsible for.
2.0	Recommendations
2.1	<p>It is recommended that the Climate and City Resilience Committee:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Note the updates to all Notices of Motions and Issues Raised in Advance that this Committee is responsible for and • Agree to the closure of Notice of Motion 296 and Issue Raised in Advance 339 as referenced in Appendix 1 and paragraph 3.4 below.
3.0	Main report
3.1	<p><u>Background</u></p> <p>At SP&R Committee on 25th October 2019, the following Notice of Motion was agreed:</p> <p>“That this Council notes that other Councils produce a monthly status report in relation to Notices of Motion; and agrees Belfast City Council adopts a similar practice and produces a monthly Notice of Motion Update which will be brought to each full Council Meeting, detailing the following:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Date received 2. Notice of motion title 3. Submitted by which Councillor 4. Council meeting date 5. Committee motion is referred to 6. Outcome of committee where Notice of Motion will be debated 7. Month it will be reported back to committee 8. Other action to be taken.”
3.2	<p>Following a review exercise, a new database containing all Notices of Motion and Issues Raised in Advance at Committee was created and quarterly reporting to Committee commenced in March 2021.</p> <p>Appendix 1 is the latest quarterly update showing all active Notices of Motions and Issues Raised in Advance which the Climate and City Resilience Committee is responsible for.</p>
3.3	<p>Closure of Notices of Motion and Issues Raised in Advance</p> <p>At SP&R Committee on 20th November 2020, it was agreed that Notices of Motion could be closed for one of two reasons:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Notices of Motion which contained an action(s) that has been completed; and • Notices of Motion have become Council policy.
3.4	The Climate and City Resilience Committee are asked to agree that the Notice of Motion and Issue Raised in Advance as outlined below are now closed:

	<p>Category 1 Recommended Closures:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Belfast should join C40 (Ref 296) – This NOM made a recommendation that the Lord Mayor of Belfast should apply, on behalf of Belfast City Council, to join the C40 network and in any event, adhere to the C40's leadership standards. The Climate Unit upon enquiring, was informed that membership is currently at full capacity and there are no plans to accept new applications at present. The Climate Unit has registered the Council's interest, should applications open up again, and C40 have asked to be kept informed of any outstanding climate action similar to the CDP A achieved by Belfast in 2022. It is recommended that NOM is now closed. • Irish Passport Design (Ref 339) – This Issue Raised in Advance called for a letter to be sent to the Department of Foreign Affairs in Dublin, requesting that they include depictions/landmarks of Northern Ireland in any new proposed Irish passport design. This letter was sent on 10th November 23 and therefore it is recommended that this NOM is now closed.
3.5	<p><u>Financial & Resource Implications</u></p> <p>There are no additional financial implications associated with this report</p>
3.6	<p><u>Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment</u></p> <p>There are no equality, good relations or rural needs implications contained in this report.</p>
4.0	<p>Appendices</p>
	<p>Appendix 1: Notices of Motion Live Database – Climate and City Resilience Committee</p>

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Notice of Motion – Live Database

Ref	Type	Date of Council Meeting	Motion (including hyperlinks)	Proposed by	Referral route	Committee	Agreed actions (agreed decisions from committee/ Council)	Lead officer	Lead Department	Status	Status Update
277	Issue Raised in Advance	13/10/2022	Energy Efficiency Education Programme for citizens	Cllr Smyth	Issue Raised in Advance	Climate and City Resilience		J Tully	City & Organisational Strategy	Ongoing	In 2022 an Energy Efficiency Campaign was run through the Community Planning team, producing advice materials, delivered in a targeted manner through community services, advice centres and outreach teams. A similar approach will be taken to raise awareness during the incoming 23/24 winter period, including energy efficiency guidance and tips being included in the 2023/2024 'Cost-of-Living Support Guide' which has been disseminated widely across the city including being available in 100 public and community buildings as well as via the Council website This will be reviewed with the aim of developing resources that can be delivered on an ongoing basis and in a targeted manner.
278	Issue Raised in Advance	13/10/2022	New Ireland Forum and citizens Assemblies	Cllr de Faolite	Issue Raised in Advance	Climate and City Resilience	Council to write again to Taoiseach office re establishment of New Ireland Forum and citizen assemblies	N Largey	Legal & Civic Services	Ongoing	
296	Notice of Motion	25/10/2022	Belfast should join C40	Cllr Matt Collins	Agreed at Committee	Climate and City Resilience		J Tully	City & Organisational Strategy	Recommend Close	Having enquired about Belfast joining C40 the Climate Unit was informed that membership is at full capacity. C40 are primarily mega cities who will be 3million or more by 2030, and have some innovator cities who are seen as leaders on climate action. However C40 are not accepting new applications at present. The Climate Unit has registered our interest should this open up again, and C40 have asked to be kept informed of any outstanding climate action similar to the CDP A achieved by Belfast in 2022.
316	Issue Raised in Advance	15/06/2023	Felling of Trees in Orangefield Park	Councillor Brian Smyth	Issue Raised in Advance	Climate and City Resilience		J Tully/ Debbie Caldwell/N Largey	Legal & Civic Services	Ongoing	The Dec 23 Committee noted an update provided by Mr. Stephen Leonard, Neighbourhood Services Manager on the next steps and learning from the incident and changes to working practices associated with the tree cutting undertaken by contractors, working on behalf of NIE, at Orangefield Park
317	Issue Raised in Advance	15/06/2023	Climate and City Resilience Dashboard	Cllr Tara Brooks	Issue Raised in Advance	Climate and City Resilience		J Tully/ Debbie Caldwell	City & Organisational Strategy	Ongoing	The Climate Team are working with AWS at present to look at a needs assessment to inform what services a data platform could provide and what data would be required to deliver this. This follows an expression of interest process that took place in 2022 to test the market for providers of platforms.
324	Issue Raised in Advance	10/08/2023	Proposed agenda items for future meetings	Cllr Tara Brooks	Issue Raised in Advance	Climate and City Resilience		J Tully/ Debbie Caldwell	City & Organisational Strategy	Ongoing	Two of the four themed presentations requested (Passivhouse and Embedded Carbon) were included in the Dec C&CR Committee. The other two items requested relate to active travel which is covered by the CG&R committee.
339	Issue Raised in Advance	12/10/2023	Irish Passport Design	Cllr McKeown	Issue Raised in Advance	Climate and City Resilience	The Committee agreed to forward a letter to the Department of Foreign Affairs in Dublin, requesting that they include depictions/landmarks of Northern Ireland in any new proposed Irish passport design.	N Largey	Legal & Civic Services	Recommend Close	Letter sent to Department of Foreign Affairs 10th November 2023
Total			7						7		

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Subject:	Update on Belfast Retrofit Delivery Hub
Date:	11 January 2024
Reporting Officer:	John Tully, Director Organisational and City Strategy
Contact Officers:	Debbie Caldwell, Belfast Climate Commissioner Brenda Roddy, Project Support Officer (Climate),

Restricted Reports									
Is this report restricted?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>								
<p>Please indicate the description, as listed in Schedule 6, of the exempt information by virtue of which the council has deemed this report restricted.</p> <p>Insert number <input style="width: 30px; height: 20px;" type="text"/></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Information relating to any individual 2. Information likely to reveal the identity of an individual 3. Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the council holding that information) 4. Information in connection with any labour relations matter 5. Information in relation to which a claim to legal professional privilege could be maintained 6. Information showing that the council proposes to (a) to give a notice imposing restrictions on a person; or (b) to make an order or direction 7. Information on any action in relation to the prevention, investigation or prosecution of crime 									
<p>If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?</p> <table style="width: 100%; border: none;"> <tr> <td style="width: 70%;">After Committee Decision</td> <td style="width: 30%; text-align: center;"><input type="checkbox"/></td> </tr> <tr> <td>After Council Decision</td> <td style="text-align: center;"><input type="checkbox"/></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Sometime in the future</td> <td style="text-align: center;"><input type="checkbox"/></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Never</td> <td style="text-align: center;"><input type="checkbox"/></td> </tr> </table>		After Committee Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>	After Council Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>	Sometime in the future	<input type="checkbox"/>	Never	<input type="checkbox"/>
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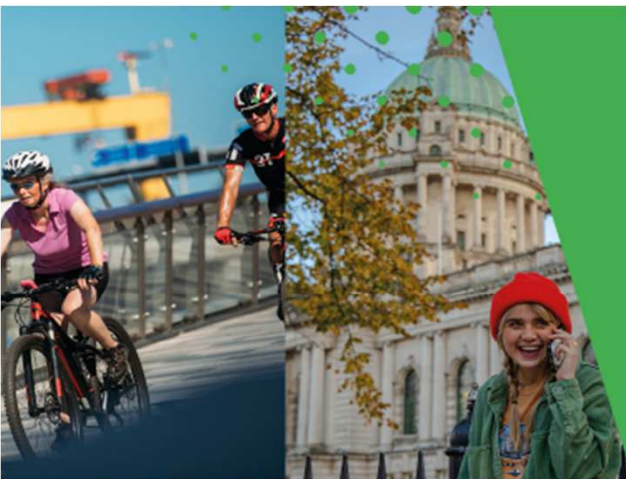
Call-in	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
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Is the decision eligible for Call-in?

1.0	Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues
1.1	The purpose of this report is to update Members on the Belfast Retrofit Delivery Hub
2.0	Recommendation
2.1	<p>The Committee is asked to note:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. the Retrofit Hub organised three roundtable events in November 2023 on retrofit of commercial and public buildings, creating customer demand, and potential funding approaches; ii. the key takeaways included - <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. the energy and carbon performance of commercial and public buildings is a key factor in protecting the value of the property and lease/rental incomes; b. demand for retrofit is driven largely by the availability of grants but is also affected by building regulations and the availability of trusted advice; iii. that members highlighted the need for a strategic overview of Belfast's built environment encompassing the market fundamentals as well as the need address retrofit / refurbishment, embodied carbon and the opportunity to develop a heat network in the city.
3.0	Main Report
3.1	<p>Background</p> <p>At the Climate and City Resilience Committee meeting in November 2023 it was reported that the Retrofit Hub planned to run three roundtable events later that month to explore topics in greater depth. These included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. retrofit of commercial and public buildings, 2. how to create customer demand for retrofit, and 3. potential funding approaches.
3.2	<p>These were intended to inform three of the ten 'work packages' identified by members in earlier meetings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Data and information 2. Co-ordination, learning and knowledge exchange. 3. Ensuring the just transition – checking for equality of opportunity 4. Pipeline development & funding options 5. Creating customer demand – Improving understanding, creating the market 6. Building energy performance assessment and monitoring 7. Supply chain development 8. Commercial sector 9. Local Area Energy Plan integration 10. Resilience assessment
3.3	<p>Key findings of the events are summarised below:</p> <p>Retrofitting of commercial and public buildings</p> <p>Commercial and public buildings comprise a significant proportion of city centre property. Commercial tenants (especially for offices) are increasingly seeking to occupy buildings that are energy efficient with low operational emissions – hence the energy and carbon performance is a key factor in protecting the value of the property and in ensuring the marketability (and therefore income) of the property. This is driving down demand for older</p>

3.4	<p>stock. The public sector is also a significant player accounting for an estimated 40% of occupied office space, with interests in letting and selling surplus stock.</p>
3.5	<p>With increasing legislation and customer expectations around energy efficiency standards, the commercial viability of both private and public office stock will increasingly be linked to the energy performance of the buildings. There is a significant lack of data on these buildings but categories of commercial/public property might include buildings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - certified to environmental standards which are already optimising rental income - currently at risk of not meeting market demands for energy performance, but for which a business case for improvement can be made; and - which have no business case for improvement and are therefore at risk of becoming “stranded assets”.
3.6	<p>It is likely there is a sizeable amount of stock particularly in the public sector that would be difficult to retrofit due to the location and the type of asset although this has not been assessed. Members highlighted the need for a strategic overview of Belfast’s built environment that encompasses the market fundamentals as well as the need address retrofit / refurbishment, embodied carbon and the opportunity to develop a heat network in the city.</p>
3.7	<p>Research reflects a trend from commercial and public sector office use towards leisure and residential, with low carbon emissions as a critical factor. More work is required to assess the energy efficiency of commercial and public buildings, whether or not they can be retrofitted and how this might be funded. Financial models include spend to save investment, with suggestions of a city-wide model providing the scale of finance (likely to be in excess of £100M) that investors require.</p>
3.8	<p>Creating customer demand for low carbon retrofit</p> <p>The most significant factor limiting investments in retrofit is the low availability of grants in Northern Ireland (compared to Great Britain and the Republic of Ireland) to support retrofit. This impacts not only the willingness of homeowners to invest but also deters suppliers from investing in developing the retrofit supply chain in Northern Ireland. While building regulations can also drive demand to a certain extent, these are minimum requirements and can only play a role when new building works are taking place. The mortgage will also increasingly drive the uptake of retrofit measures as banks will become increasingly reluctant to lend to F rated properties.</p>
3.9	<p>For households, as well as the upfront cost, the associated disruption and the level of bureaucracy are also key factors affecting willingness to retrofit. Most homeowners don’t know where to start and which installers to use.</p> <p>Provision of a trusted source of independent advice and support was identified as a key opportunity to unlock demand for retrofit. An impartial expert service is seen as important in terms of helping homeowners to decide what retrofit actions might be required, with guidance on potential impact, cost, funding options and priority. This would also support to households through the process of identifying contractors, managing works, post completion quality checks and optimising the benefits of works carried out. This in turn could benefit contractors by providing a type of ‘trusted trader’ assurance recognising those working to a high standard and ultimately generating additional business. Examples include a One-Stop Energy Store which was recently installed in the centre of Cork to provide advice and help support the development of energy communities as well as an end-to-end retrofit service being delivered by SSE.</p>
3.10	<p>There is a potential role for the voluntary sector in partnering with public and private sectors to support homeowners and tenants. Fears of disruption and risk could be reduced by taking an area-based approach where households can see neighbours participating and benefitting, with practical support needed to minimise disruption to householders during any works.</p>

3.11	<p>Pipeline development, funding options and supply chain development</p> <p>Some public sector bodies (eg Queens University) have created invest to save schemes which have been successful in creating a revolving fund to improve the energy efficiency of buildings. Queens University have also invested in reducing scope 1 and 2 emissions from their suppliers in order to bring down their Scope 3 emissions.</p>
3.12	<p>The lack of data on the city's housing stock (eg housing type, whether houses have a cavity wall, tenure etc) is also a constraint. A survey could help to map the housing stock and identify the quick wins (eg cavity wall insulation) and potential area based projects. An area-based approach was agreed to be the most likely to succeed however it needs to reflect the priorities of residents which tend to centre around energy costs, comfort and lack of disruption. This would therefore require advance community development and engagement work as well as a commitment from NIHE, Housing Associations and private landlords (private landlords have indicated that they would be willing to invest up to two years rent in retrofit works). There also needs to be clear independent advice available to residents throughout the process.</p>
3.13	<p>Creative funding approaches were also explored for an area-based approach, including one from Living Places that combines some public funding, with long-term institutional investment and "outcome buying" finance. In future the EPC rating is likely to be a key factor in the availability of mortgages as lenders move towards carbon disclosure of their mortgage books.</p>
3.14	<p>Next steps</p> <p>These findings will be incorporated into the Draft Retrofit Programme of work which is still under development with key actions agreed at the next hub meeting scheduled for 30th January.</p>
4.0	<u>Financial and Resource Implications</u>
4.1	None
5.0	<u>Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment</u>
5.1	Corporate policies will be followed, and appropriate screening and mitigating actions for individual work packages delivered where necessary.
6.0	<u>Appendices - Documents Attached</u>
	None



CLIMATE ACTION

Belfast Retrofit Delivery Hub
Update to Climate & City
Resilience Committee

Brenda Roddy, Climate Team

www.belfastcity.gov.uk/climate-change

Round table events



- **Retrofitting of commercial and public buildings**
- **Creating customer demand for low carbon retrofit**
- **Pipeline development, funding options and supply chain development**

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Creating customer demand for low carbon retrofit

One stop shop approach



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www.belfastcity.gov.uk/climate-change

Retrofitting of commercial and public buildings



matrix

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Low % of office stock with EPC rating of E or lower

High % of office stock with EPC rating of B or higher

Asset Risk	Market Risk
Specification Risk	White Elephant Risk

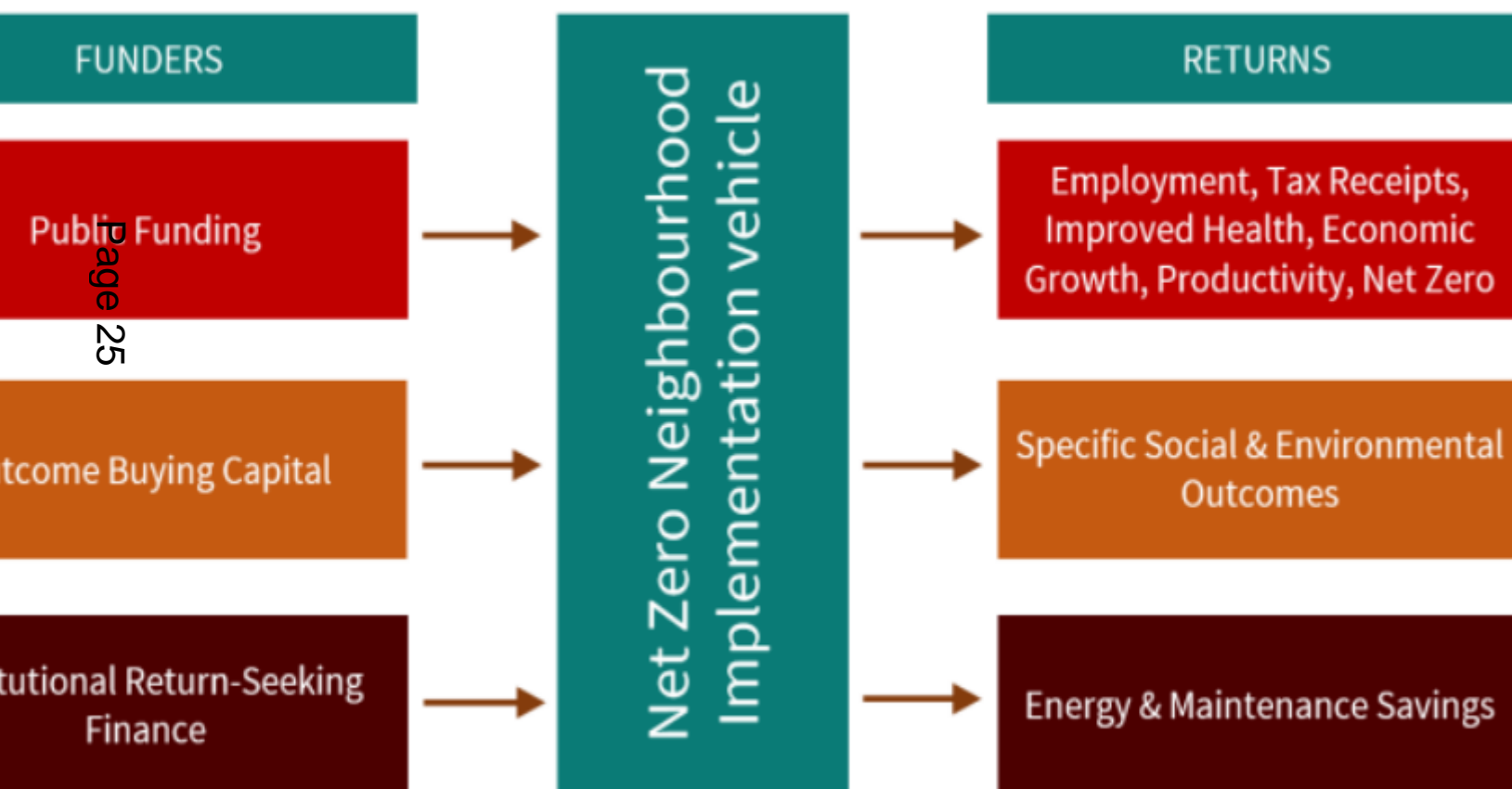
High % of office stock with EPC rating of E or lower

Low % of office stock with EPC rating of B or higher

Funding, pipeline projects & supply chain



Flows and Investment Cases



Source: Living Places

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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

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BOOST YOUR MOODS!

SPRING TIME FOR RESOLUTION MAKING

Join in

AUTUMN

OPENING BIN BAGS!

All GARDEN

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30	Thank you

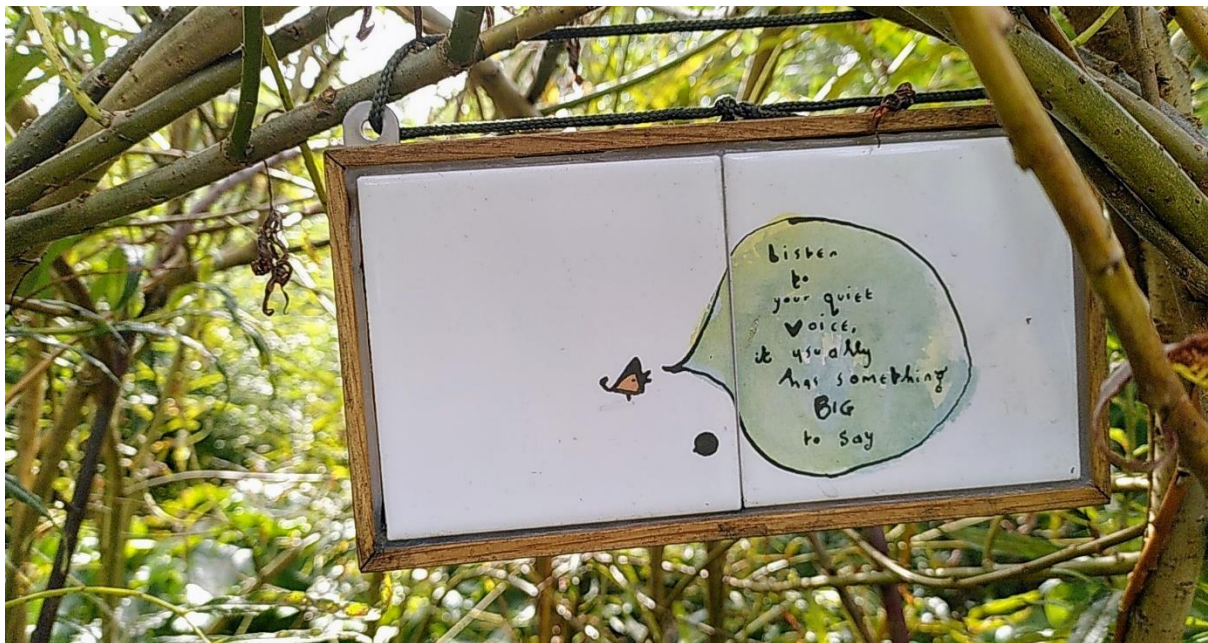
About Reclaim the Commons

Reclaim the Commons is a collective of community growing projects which aims to facilitate communication between residents with an interest in community growing in the Belfast City Council area. You can read more about our members and reach at the back of this report.

We aim to improve communication between people developing these spaces and decision makers, discussing how community groups and individuals are supported in this work, and support and help each other in making positive change for our communities.

In the past 2 years we have visited each other's sites, shared our skills and resources with each other, met with City Councillors to discuss issues of importance to community growing in the city and we made a presentation to the People and Communities Committee. We jointly organised the Belfast Gathering and organised an open day of 11 community growing sites across Belfast. We have taken action to make our gardens more inclusive and diverse and continue to prioritise social justice outcomes in our work. We meet regularly and have a WhatsApp group to support each other and plan future action. We welcome new members, please contact miriam@farmgarden.org.uk for more information.

The current secretariat for the collective is Social Farms & Gardens, who are funded to do this work in their Growing Resilience programme through the National Lottery Community Fund's People and Communities Fund.



Image; Art in Grow Community Garden by Corrina Askin

Summary and Recommendations

This report was written as a collaboration of the Community Gardens involved in the Reclaim the Commons network, a mutual support network of community growing spaces in Belfast. It summarises some of the conversations the network has had over the past 2 years around the needs of community growers in Belfast to help their sites thrive. We hope this message is considered by decision makers when planning future actions to support community growing in the city.

Reclaim the Commons is a recently formed network, and we have been operating with limited resources. We would like to grow and include the voices of more of the community gardens across the city. We would also like the opportunity to work with NGO and public workers to design a strategy for community growing in the city.

We believe this is an urgent time and appropriate support for growing for food biodiversity and health is needed. We believe there is room for much more community growing space in Belfast.

Supportive policy and infrastructure can make this happen. Policy will enable more land and funds to be available. Infrastructure, like a community growing forum, and appropriate information and support will mobilise the city's residents and spread this positive action to every community. A community growing strategy for Belfast can help coordinate efforts across sectors.

The network asks support NGOs, public bodies, and politicians to pay attention to what people are doing to improve their local environments, to value what has been achieved by citizen action, and to continue to consult with us on future developments.

Good communication between all aspects of this sector is a must, and we would welcome and be willing to co-facilitate a community growing forum for Belfast. Further recommendations are made throughout the report, and on page 19-20.

The network is growing, and we welcome new members. If you would like to join in and add your voice, we have regular meetups and would be happy to include you.

We look forward to the next phase of community growing in Belfast.

Introduction and Background to this Report

Community Growing in Belfast has developed over the last 120 years, beginning with allotments provided for workers in an increasingly industrialised and populated city in the early 1900s. Over both world wars, numbers of allotments rose, with land requisitioned from City Parks, with allotment numbers falling again between the wars. In recent times since 2000, we have seen a rise in community gardens in the city. (A detailed history of growing in the City can be found in Appendix 1.)

In 2011 Belfast City Council (BCC) commissioned [a survey](#) into demand for community growing in Belfast, which provides a snapshot of activity in the city at that time. A [consultation seminar](#) also happened in 2011. In 2012 Belfast City Council published a [draft Growing Communities strategy](#) for the city. A list of community gardens in the city in 2012 can be found [here](#), showing a spread across the city, but with more provision in the inner city in South and East Belfast.

Belfast City Council provided support for community gardens, with Community Outreach officers sourcing compost and support, organising in-kind contributions, signposting to funding opportunities and Conservation Volunteers providing horticultural training and running gardening sessions. This work provided sites across the city with advanced infrastructure. Groundwork worked with many communities in this time, for example running a meanwhile garden pilot, which secured several sites across the city, some of which are still running, including Shankill Community Garden and Connswater Community Garden.

Belfast residents have also independently embraced community growing in its many forms to meet their social, environmental and wellbeing needs, inspired by the example of sites in the UK and across Europe. Many churches, schools and charities have used land in their ownership to create spaces for residents to grow. Where no such site existed, residents took over derelict or abandoned land in their vicinity with or without permission and gardened it back into a state of care and health. This includes guerilla gardens and the more recent rise in alleyway gardens, especially since the Covid-19 pandemic, following the work of the pioneering Wildflower Alley, established 2015.

This new interest in community growing has been supported by a number of different funding streams - through Council, the Housing Executive and the Public Health Agency, The European Union Programme for Peace and Reconciliation in Northern Ireland and the Border Region of Ireland (Peace III) 2007 - 2013, which provided the financial basis for a number of new community gardens to be set up across Northern Ireland and the Border areas. Since then, the National Lottery Community Fund has provided project and capital funding for many sites, and Live Here Love Here grants (administered by Keep Northern Ireland Beautiful in partnership with local councils) support many gardens.

An increased demand for community growing spaces

Multiple local and global crises have led to an increased interest in community growing in Belfast in recent years. The climate and biodiversity crisis, food insecurity highlighted by supply chain problems during lockdown and due to Brexit, the inequality/cost of living crisis, added to an instinct that becoming more connected with our neighbours, our food and the land can only be good for us in an increasingly disconnected world have led citizens to organise in their neighbourhoods to secure the resources (land, funding, skills and training, and local support) to create spaces to come together and grow. This report is an opportunity for public bodies and support organisations to listen to people working in their communities to hear what it is they need to further their aims and strengthen relationships across the sector.

Social Farms & Gardens (SF&G) currently have records of 66 community gardens and allotment sites in the Belfast City Council area, and estimate there are 100-200 sites, including school and alley gardens. Much of what is achieved by this variety of projects and sites also meets targets and goals set by public bodies responsible for the city. Reclaim the Commons believes this is a key time to coordinate and resource community growing in the city of Belfast.

Despite this activity there does not yet exist a Forum for coordinating Community Growing in the City, and therefore staff and volunteers at individual sites can end up isolated and feel that their voice is not heard, despite the significant contribution they have to make.

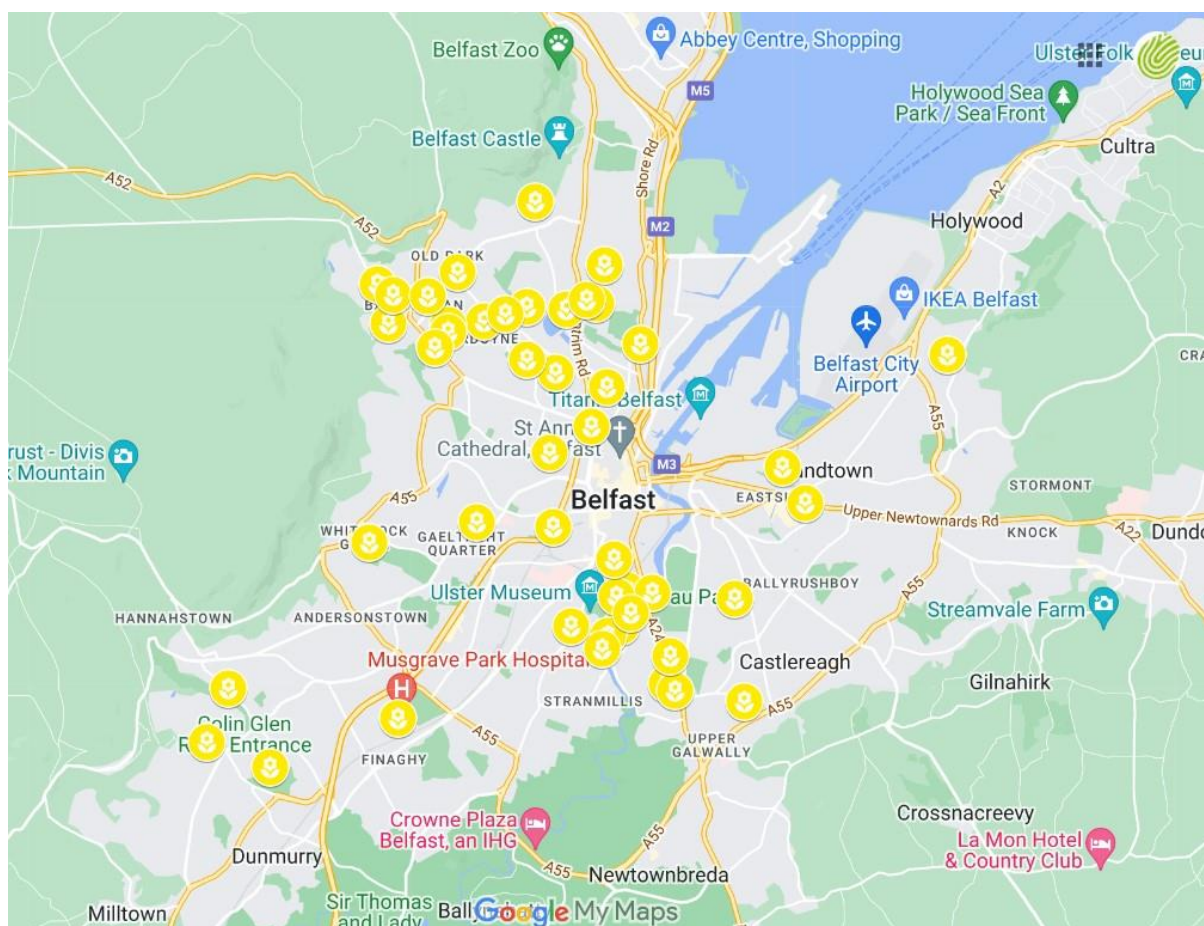


Image: A map of some of the community growing projects in Belfast can be found [here](#).

Description of Community Growing in the City

There are many different types of community growing site across the city, from allotments to gardens, to orchards, to city farms, wildlife gardens, gardens of reflection, guerilla gardens and sites run by public bodies, some sites acres big, and other sites tiny, handkerchief gardens at the end of a street, yet highly productive and colourful. Community growing sites are available across the city, but careful planning should be used to ensure access is fair and focused on areas of the city where residents may not have gardens or access to other greenspace. See below for more on mapping space in the city for growing.

As there are different types of community growing spaces in the city, there are also different organisations involved in managing these spaces. Some are run by funded charities or social enterprises. Some are run by Council, Housing Executive or other public bodies. Some are run by small voluntary organisations with limited funding and no paid staff. Some are run by informal groupings of people, with no constitution, bank account or formal structure. They may however have excellent relationships and communication, and are able to lever resources in from local residents and businesses, and through relationships with other groups and support organisations. This last type of group is sometimes overlooked or undervalued, and people working in this way ought to be recognised for all they accomplish on the basis of local trust and connection to their place.

Sources of support for community growers

There are many sources of support that communities can access to begin on their community growing journey. The Conservation Volunteers have helped many gardens and entries over the years improve their spaces in a practical way. Development Trusts NI and SF&G work to find routes for community groups to gain access to land. Numerous dedicated council officers have formed relationships with citizens involved and worked to see how best they can help with in-kind support. QUBSU Handy Helpers, and Scout and Guide groups have helped with clean-ups and materials. Some businesses are able to donate ex-stock, for example B&Q. PSNI have contributed with PCSP grants, as have many other funders as mentioned. Social Farms & Gardens work to network community growing groups in mutual support networks (with site visits and regular meetings) and to voice their needs, for example in reports such as this. All this should of course not overshadow that the vast bulk of the work is done by active citizens and CVS staff with limited budgets. These people are multiskilled and willing to sacrifice large amounts of time and energy to make their neighbourhood better. They are the experts on what works and what doesn't for their local area.



Image: Handy Helpers. *Some of the QUB Student Handy Helpers at a work day in Miracle Way.*



Quiet place

Citizens

ALL

CREAT-
-HOP-

Remini
4 memory

MAKE TIME

Share!
Food & Drink

Spinning
Gardens

Things
Citizens!
Gardens

WILDLIFE
ALL

like

The Belfast Garden Gathering, 2023

This report aims to represent the needs voiced at the Belfast Garden Gathering, hosted by the Reclaim the Commons network, supported by SF&G, in March 2023, as part of the Imagine! festival of politics and ideas. This event was planned in response to a perceived lack of coordinated support for growing in the city. See Appendix 1 for a letter written to Belfast City Council in 2020 calling for a community growing forum for the City. Following on from this, members of the network, consisting of 32 community growing projects in the city, have met with each other and with Belfast City Councillors to discuss policy needs for supporting growing in the city. The minutes of these meetings are available on request.



Image: Flyer used to promote the event.



Image: Gardeners from across the city contributed to the event.

The event at 2 Royal Avenue was well attended, with 60+ people from across the city, representing the community, CVSE and public sectors. Discussions were based around 7 themes:

- Funding and Resources,
- Land Access and Ownership,
- Skills and Training,

- Biodiversity,
- Outreach and Social Justice,
- Art,
- Information and Communication.

These themes were chosen based on the priorities and needs of members of the network. Informal presentations were made in each discussion group using an assets-based approach, that is in each group active community gardeners shared what worked well for them and what skills and information they had acquired in that area. Each discussion group also had a staff member from a support organisation specialising in that area. Discussions were based around the questions: What is already working in this area, and what more is needed: from politicians, from public servants/support organisations and from community growers. The results of these discussions are represented below, and the full notes are available in Appendix 2.

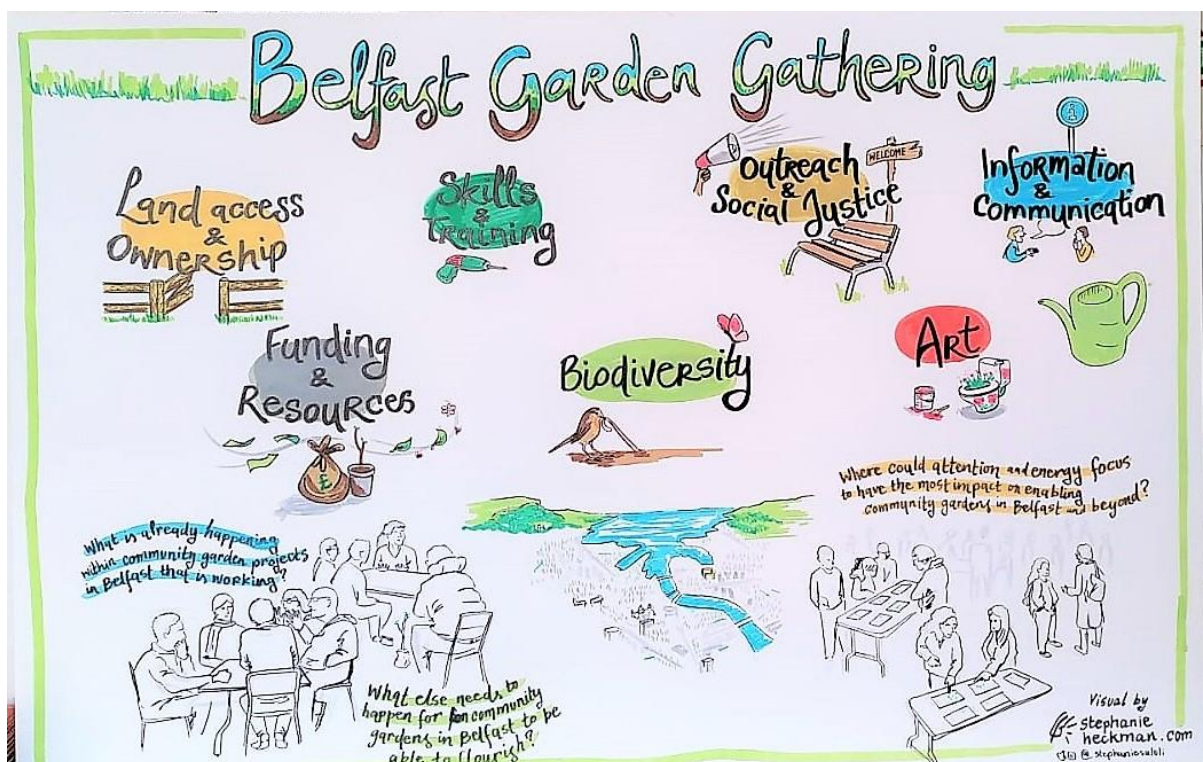


Image: The Belfast Garden Gathering covered a range of topics.

Funding and Resources

Different gardens will have different needs depending on their size, structure, and organisation. Many gardens run free from financial input altogether and operate on donations of plants compost and materials and salvaged materials. Some gardens access small grants and run fundraising events. Others have staff and apply for larger grants and provide services for the wider community beyond their volunteer gardeners. Other gardens again are publicly run or run by larger charities, and have a more stable budget, though in recent years the budgets of all gardens are under threat.

Constituting and gaining a bank account can offer many more opportunities to a group, demonstrating credibility to funders while providing limited liability. However, it is important to recognise the achievements of groups of neighbours, including alleyway gardeners, who are working on an informal or ad hoc basis who could be overly burdened by the administration required. For these groups there are other options- some small grants not requiring a constitution are available; a sponsoring organisation can often be found to partner with the group to provide insurance, or in-kind support or donations of material can be exactly what a group needs. Thinking creatively about how to support these incredibly important projects will give them the best chance to thrive. The important point is that a constituted group does not automatically produce a higher quality of project, neither is it accurate to assume that a more informal approach does not have benefits.

After initial capital expenditure (shed, paths, fencing etc) regular needs/costs for smaller gardens include compost/manure (a big yearly input), tools plants and seeds, public liability insurance, repairs and catering costs. Garden may run events and training sessions, which will involve facilitator and more catering costs. Some gardens will have costs for staff, employer liability insurance, office costs, and publicity and media.

With any grant available a group must weigh up how much money is available, if it suits their needs, and what the administrative burden of the grant is, which varies widely. Some grants and funders are incredibly useful, others are deemed “not worth applying for” as the work involved in applying for and administering the grant is too much. Grants that are too restrictive in their outcomes or demanding in their application or reporting processes will often fall into this category.

Larger organisations running community gardens welcome larger grants and have the administrative capacity to manage these grants. In these instances, trusting relationships like that practices by the National Lottery allows organisations to be flexible in what they deliver according to the community’s needs with proportionate checks and balances. Inclusion of core and staff costs in grants is essential for a healthy community and voluntary sector, and the recent trend of excluding these costs from some grants should be questioned.



Image; TCV staff planting apple trees in planters with materials provided by BCC.

In-kind contributions are often welcome in gardens, as they reduce the administrative burden of applying for and administering grants. These can range from compost donations, donations of wood or old park furniture, donations of old bedding plants (which can sometimes be cared for and sold on to the public as a source of income for the garden), waste items like paint, to corporate work volunteering days and practical support from council parks staff with tasks like grass cutting and fencing. Public bodies could think outside the box to find ways to support communities to access resources. Growing hubs in key locations in the city (possibly North South East and West, possibly on Council owned premises) could be identified and used to store and distribute resources and training opportunities. Tool libraries, Repair Cafes, seed saving networks and training on composting and upcycling are all ways to help residents to make the most of what we have. Some councils give away free excess/old planters, bedding plants, bulbs, benches, paint and other left-over materials to community groups. The current BCC compost giveaway scheme to community groups is incredibly popular, often oversubscribed, and builds good relations between communities and council.

Other countries in the UK have legislation to support more resources given to supporting community growing. Can councils and public bodies achieve more support for community growing without supportive legislations?

Skills and Training

Communities are made up of lots of amazing people with different talents, skills and abilities. Training should be provided in an accessible and non-overwhelming way, taking account of the many learning styles. Practical face to face training with resources suits most people (rather than online or only paper resources): “Seeing it happen makes it happen”. Learning with others also allows for emotional and relational learning: we can learn how to carry out activities in a group (dividing up tasks etc), and everyone learning from each other, rather than just receiving one-way information from the trainer. Support from Belfast City council staff, especially the outreach officers is very welcome and should be further supported, as demand for their time is high.



Image: Garden volunteers from a number of gardens helped to build this clay oven, learning something about the process as they did.

We can envisage the creation of fully funded hubs to build central, physical support enabling training access, and information on materials. In the meantime, databases on trainers will help projects and trainers. Practical permaculture training and basic horticulture skills training should be provided for as many residents as possible.

Support for a network of gardens could be helpful as among other things it would allow for groups to share skills between each other.

Biodiversity

Community gardens in Belfast have found that biodiversity is supported by community gardens and school green spaces increasing habitats and providing food and shelter for a variety of wildlife. We believe that more community gardens in the urban area will provide more opportunities to introduce people to nature. Role models for young people like Aaron Kelly, Rosalind Skillen, Dara McNulty are doing a great job, and it would be great to encourage more role models to become active like this.

Education is needed to help us bring about a culture shift for biodiversity. To bring about a better understanding of the environments which improve biodiversity, we need to increase information and outreach to all levels of education for children and adults. We need to change mindsets about the value of tidy gardens: shifting perceptions from ‘Weeds’ to ‘Native Pioneer Plants’.

We also need to promote the physical and mental health benefits of nature and biodiversity more, so that it is central to policy decisions.

Community gardens engaging in biodiversity education need more coordination between projects, to help each other find ways to introduce people to nature projects, and get more people involved to make projects more sustainable.



Image: Wildlife pond in Eglantine Community Garden.

Land Access and Ownership

Once a community group has decided to grow, they identify where this will happen. Groups occasionally work in a patchwork of sites or grow in their own private gardens and support each other, or find other models, but most groups want a piece of commonly held land that they can share and manage. This could be an acre of land or 25 sqm, and it is only by the community group talking and finding out what is available that the right match will be made. Often a smaller piece of land that is closer to where people are or has better access and amenities will be preferable to a larger more inaccessible site. Other considerations include biodiversity concerns, contamination, site security and suitability for growing (slope, drainage, soil depth etc). Most challenges can be overcome, and few sites will be exactly what a group wants, so all considerations should be weighed up and discussed by the group in relation to their skills and capacity. Where necessary, help can be enlisted.

Once a suitable site is identified the group will identify the owner and negotiate a usage agreement (or, if the owner is unknown or absentee, to weigh up the benefits of guerrilla gardening). Longer leases or licenses are preferable, especially if a group plans to invest in infrastructure. Peppercorn rents are almost always the best option, as most groups will not make an income from their project, and even those who do (social enterprises and CICs) will

be able to use any surplus to reinvest in the garden to reduce dependence on funding. Any public or third sector landowners should consider peppercorn or affordable rents for community groups using their land, and consider developing a policy which allows for this, taking into account the social good such projects provide, which can align with the aims of the public body or charity landowner. Template leases and guidance for landowners is available from the [Community Land Advisory Service](#).

Strategic support is needed to secure more land for community growing. Community growing should be written into local development plans, corporate and community plans for councils, and strategic documents for other land owning public bodies. Additionally, high level support for alley gardening will unlock the potential of much more land. This support needs to be responsive to the needs of those carrying out community growing, and requires close listening relationships between growers and policy makers.



Image: Residents at the Threes Sisters gardening Community tended a neglected piece of ground to make a productive garden.

To achieve social justice aims, gardens need to be planned to be close to those who need them most. Spatial planning and analysis of deprivation measure and food deserts will help with this. Zoning for community growing will help to protect existing sites. A community growing strategy for the city can bring all of this work together. Groups are encouraged to be creative: don't just use the land under your feet, use walls and roofs too. And if you are unable to complete your project on the land you have, be prepared to move to another site, or find alternative ways to continue.

Planners should be aware of the potential conflict between the need for land for housing, growing and biodiversity. These needs are not mutually exclusive, and well-designed sites will incorporate elements of all three. See for example [this guide](#), and many more from Sustain and SF&G.

Some groups here have been making links with others in the rest of the UK, for example PPR hosted Pam Warhurst from Incredible Edible at a conference in 2022, attendees heard about the legislation in place in England Scotland and Wales to promote and protect Community Growing, and the work being done UK-wide to encourage better access to land and resources.

The Social Farms & Gardens report on a Benchmark standard for land for community growing is cited as a good standard for public bodies responsible for provision to work to. This gives Councils a framework to develop policy on community growing -how much land and what resources and support is needed. It also includes information on supportive legislation elsewhere in UK and Europe.

Outreach and Social Justice

The problems of poverty, racism, exclusion, mental health crisis and climate breakdown can seem overwhelming. Community gardens in Belfast find it works to start small and learn from mistakes, but to be sure to start and take action, rather than just talk about it; to seek and offer solidarity with others; and to take encouragement from early wins and sharing this.



Image: A Pride celebration at Eden Alley.

These conversations echo the approach taken by many grassroots groups hoping to affect social change to address inequality across the country. The enormity of the task and our own perceived lack of skills can be disempowering and prevent us from taking action. The saying “Ná hAbair é, Déan é!” means “Don’t talk about it, do it!”, and encourages all to get stuck in in practically implementing our values rather than waiting for someone else to take the lead. This will empower people and create a ripple effect.

Community groups have many skills of communicating with local people and making them welcome. Outreach and social justice work involves thoughtfully applying these skills to make sure that marginalised people can access the same services and benefits as people with more advantages. This won’t be achieved overnight and involves building relationships across the sector. It also involves us helping each other, as no one has the answer, but we all hold a part of the puzzle. And the people and organisations we go to for help will be different from the ones we may be used to turning to. But the main thing is to start and find out.

It is important to share stories about what we do and be explicit about why we do it - we are not just meeting for cups of tea, we are changing our communities and our world. We need

opportunities to connect with each other, visit spaces and connect the dots between growing as an act of social justice - food justice, land justice, mental health, climate and biodiversity, racism etc. We achieve this by remaining open to others, and sharing generously -ideas, knowledge, spaces etc.

In order to do all this, we need more resources and more land. We need community growing to be prioritised in planning systems.

Politicians can support us by actively coming out and supporting community growing spaces. They can advocate for community growing on their committees and continue to ask us what we need.

Example of Outreach: Gairdín an Phobail/GROW.

“We provide opportunities for people to engage in activism for social and environmental change, for example through PPR’s Take Back the City land justice campaign, Social Farms and Gardens campaign for improved growing spaces, Black Mountain Rewilding, Anaka Women’s collective & PPR’s Right To Work and anti-racism campaigns.

We know that activism counteracts the effects of stress and combats feelings of helplessness / hopelessness by facilitating meaningful connections and contributions for social change. This can be as ordinary as learning how to grow lettuce alongside a newcomer to North Belfast, or as radical as connecting in with a land justice campaign to occupy & grow on neglected public spaces.”



Image: Gardeners from the Anaka collective at Gairdín an Phobail.

Art and Creativity

Locally specific murals are so valuable, as they tell positive stories of place and people. They help give ownership, and they help people reminisce and think. Art can also change people's behaviour and sense of pride in their place: where people see rubbish they add more rubbish but where they see beauty, colour, and love they want to add more to it!

Art in Community Gardens

In recent years artist Meadhbh McIlgorm has run the project Limin-alley, beginning during the Covid lockdown [in 2021](#), displaying art and commissioning murals as part of the Imagine Belfast festival [in 2023](#). This continues the work of community gardens such as Peas Park in North Belfast, bringing art to reclaimed public spaces in the city.



Image: Egress Alley art, by Laura Nelson, photo Credit Simon Mills.

More Art is needed. The wellbeing value of Arts cannot be underestimated, people can be supported to be creative and gain confidence in their artistic expression. The Arts in general are underfunded and need more support. Artist facilitators should be fairly paid across the board, from more to less experienced workers, everyone should be able to feel secure in their employment. Community Gardens can be a great venue for arts, and a mix of professional and amateur art is perfect. Art can be visual, or in the form of music, storytelling, sculpture etc. Art in nature is valuable, and gardening can be creative and artistic as well.

Community gardens can provide ideal spaces for collaboration in art, which in turn will lead to more joined up thinking and encourage the linking of artistic practice to the day to day life of people in communities.



Image: Some of the Art in Gardens in Belfast. Billboard image by Grace McAllister.

Many of the community projects in Belfast are developing beautiful and locally relevant murals to reflect their community's spirit. In North Belfast Eden Alley in Marsden Gardens have worked with Artist Pearla Mansoor to develop a mural on the themes of climate change, diversity and community. Residents in the Holyland in Belfast had a number of murals commissioned by local and international artists.



Image: Horsey Hill Mural, by Daniella Balmaverde, credit Paddy Duffy



Image: Eden Alley

Information and Communication

A wealth of information and resources exists online on how to set up a community growing project. Signposting to this information is helpful.

Information that is useful to community growers includes funding opportunities, information on training available, information on networking events, horticultural advice and template policies. Contacts for support organisations is also useful. Local case studies and the location and contact details for other community growers in the city and further afield allows community projects to find peer support.

Dedicated roles (potentially within council) to support community growers can facilitate communication and information. Council Outreach officers already carry out much of this work, and could be developed and linked with staff in support organisations and representative community growers to make sure information is joined up. This could form a “Community Growing Forum” for Belfast. This is seen as a community development work to support independent community growing projects and link them up with council run ones. These people could also signpost people to information about what funding and resources are available, and also to map community growing activity and communicate this with the public.

The continuation of the network was also deemed a priority, with a programme of regular meetings and site visits. Some ideas were proposed for the structure this could take. The theme for this network is a culture of kindness, sharing and openness within and between groups, challenging ideas of competition, and instead encouraging and supporting each other. This has been found to work and needs to be prioritised in the future.

Another priority for any information and communication work is finding ways to simplify communication and make it more reliable so that it is easy for busy people to access. There can sometimes be too much information, and it needs coordination and rationalisation. This work could be done between the network and BCC/support staff.

Networking and mutual aid

Community gardens everywhere benefit greatly from being kept in touch with other community gardens close to them. A local network serves as an information sharing resource, and also provides a source of mutual support between growers. Some facilitation is required to keep this going, but the involvement of people benefitting from the network in the running of the network is ideal.

Promotion and highlighting the work

Understanding the value of local community gardens requires an understanding of the value of small micro-local projects and providing infrastructure to support them. While large organisations can efficiently provide umbrella support and coordination across a city or country, locally based initiatives have a different role to play, and one does not substitute the other. A resourced and connected community garden with support will be better able to understand and deliver on the needs of the local community, and in turn will be better able to communicate these needs to support organisations and public bodies. The value of smaller projects should not be underestimated or compared to bigger organisations. Decision makers can tend to underestimate what many local rooted projects can achieve when properly supported.

Some community gardens have staff and volunteers who are skilled communicators and know how to best use the media. Some gardens do not have these skills and could use help with communication. Centralised information sources, like maps of gardens, shared open days, or a guide to gardens in the city makes sure that all opportunities are promoted. Support organisations can use their platforms to highlight the good work going on in all projects and can provide media training. Sometimes one or two projects can become known and overused as best practise exemplars, which can exhaust the time of those projects, and neglect to highlight good work elsewhere. Making sure to highlight many projects for their good work is important. Community gardens can also support and promote each other, sharing opportunities and achievements of neighbouring garden projects, promoting community and trust between gardens.

Mapping public space

Mapping tools described below could be combined with information BCC holds through Community Planning to represent currently held mapping information. Further investment could improve this data set to include as comprehensive as possible list of current provision, plus potential sites. Potential sites can be identified from information on publicly held surplus assets, plus crowdsourced information on what land is available/ could be used for community growing.

In 2020 the 9ft in Common project began as an investigation into ownership of and responsibility for alleyways and entries in Belfast. The project produced a [publicly accessible map](#) of adopted and unadopted alleys in Belfast, highlighted the potential for increased growing space in Belfast through alley gardening, and gathered stories of people's experiences of meeting neighbours in the alley and an increased sense of community.

Social Farms & Gardens provides a map of its member gardens in Belfast on their [website](#).

The PPR "[Take Back the City](#)" Map produced in 2020 is a useful resource as it includes layers showing parks and gardens in the city, as well as unused public space and levels of investment and deprivation. Investment in this map could lead to a layer representing community growing opportunities. Spatial representation of this information is especially useful as we are able to compare, for example, population density, access to other green space, etc.

Those with an interest in spatial planning in Belfast will remember the "[Missing City](#)" map of unused space produced by the Forum for Alternative Belfast in 2009. The Ashton Community Trust have also more recently launched the [North Belfast Garden Grid](#), mapping and providing solutions for the large number of problematic and wasted sites in North Belfast.

Reclaim the Commons have begun their own map of gardens in the city which can be found [here](#), and which we would like to develop to be representative of the breadth of activity across the city.

Communication across the city could be improved by a citywide Community Growing Forum, to discuss opportunities and share information.

Open Ormeau Collective's approach to communication.

Open Ormeau collective oversee a network of alley gardens in the Ormeau area. Each alley has at least one main contact, who communicates with the people on their own street, and then attends meetings of the organising committee. This means that organisation is decentralised, and no one person is responsible for all, but all alleys in the area are able to benefit from support and sharing resources. For example, Open Ormeau has constituted, secured funding and offered fruit trees and planter workshops to residents with support from TCV and BCC. People in each street were asked to take responsibility for one tree outside their back door, in an "adopt a tree" style scheme. This meant that the watering and maintenance burden is shared out, rather than one person needing to do it all.

In communicating with residents OO prefers going door to door and leafleting residents, as they find this is more accessible and gets a better response than online communication. There are now 8 alleys in the area with active gardens, and the collective has gone on to organise more positive events and programmes for the area.

This decentralised approach, with a focus on relationship building seems to work well, and work done to coordinate community growing across the city could perhaps use some elements of this approach.



cent

scented roses

FIND YOUR
HAPPY
IN

Pollinators

MENTAL HEALTH

BE PROUD
OF YOUR
AMBITIONS

Make a mini
meadow in a pot

Actions

Actions for community growers

- Community gardeners want to encourage each other to keep sharing their skills, energy, resources and ideas, as we will all be the richer for it.
- Show up for things, and rest and ask for help when you need to.
- Believe in your voice: be creative and don't be afraid to speak up.
- Ask for support from the network in achieving your aims. Remain open and generous. Vote for politicians who support us.
- Showcase your work and other's work when the opportunity arises.
- We should lobby and educate ourselves on statutory rules and regulations and share our learning.

Actions for Public bodies and support organisations

- There is a role for public bodies and support organisations to provide places, platforms promotion and funding!
- Keep promoting our work and try to show the serious side of it as well as the pretty good news stories. This is important work.
- Belfast City Council could host a community Growing Forum, for garden staff and volunteers and support organisations as well as relevant council and other public servants, to coordinate community growing in the city and increase communication. This could be a subgroup of the current Sustainable Food Place Partnership being established at present.
- Planners can map land and prioritise community growing spaces in new and existing developments: this can be formalised in legislation and planning policy. Mapping land can be done in conjunction with other public landowners and can be done through community planning structures. This mapping can also contribute to a new community growing strategy for the council.
- Belfast City Council could carry out a scoping exercise to map community growing activity in the city (as agreed [at this meeting of Council](#) in June 2022).
- Our experience is that there are many incredibly supportive public servants, who have helped us in our work, and we'd like to see this approach spread throughout all departments of Council, Housing Executive etc. Public bodies can learn to welcome activism rather than fear it and develop collaborative processes that involve advocates and community growers. Community growing activists are a precious resource for the city and have the public good as our aim. We can help government achieve its aims!
- Support organisations can provide opportunities for us to collaborate and network in different arenas: Art, Biodiversity and general Community Growing. It is important we have chances to work together.
- Where possible support more opportunities for adults and children to learn about nature and biodiversity.
- We also need more access to evidence on the value of our work, for example to build the case for more training opportunities.
- Funders in all sectors support community growing and their work is valued and appreciated. We'd like funders to regularly evaluate the way they deliver funding and if it is in the best interest of communities. Explore more innovative and empowering mechanisms for funding e.g., participatory budgeting programmes for growers. Funding processes should be as simple as possible, and funders should question each layer of administration added to a funding process: is it really necessary? Who does it benefit? Is there an easier way to get this information?

- Funding can steer the nature of community growing spaces, for example it can be directed at Health and Wellbeing outcomes, or Environmental outcomes. It can be beneficial for funding for community growing to encourage the multiple benefits of community growing, to recognise the holistic benefits, and to allow communities to identify their own priorities and outcomes, as each project and community will be different.

Actions for Politicians

- Politicians are asked to legislate for community growing: Northern Ireland lacks supportive policy and legislation for local food, compared to the rest of the UK and Ireland, and public servants can struggle to support communities without policy and budgets.
- Councils and Government Departments can support targets for community growing provision e.g. the recommendations of the [SF&G Benchmark Report](#). As well as recommendations for provision this includes comparisons of our systems with other countries and considerations on locating provision close to where people live, on procedures for communities looking for land, and provision of support, funding and training.
- On planning committees use your influence to make sure sufficient green space and if possible growing space is made available to new developments: no more food deserts.
- We also ask politicians to keep visiting us in our projects, talking to us and listening to us, and using us. Work together to make Belfast a gardening city, and famous for its productive green spaces.

all species
COMMUNITIES



Page 58

Gardening
love + hope
is +



Physical health + giving
people purpose



weeds are food



It's not a weed -
it's a wish!

More
(Common
Life)

Conversation
Starters



Feed folk

Sun
moon
and
stars



Plants



respect
all creatures

Appendix 1

A brief history of Community Growing in Belfast

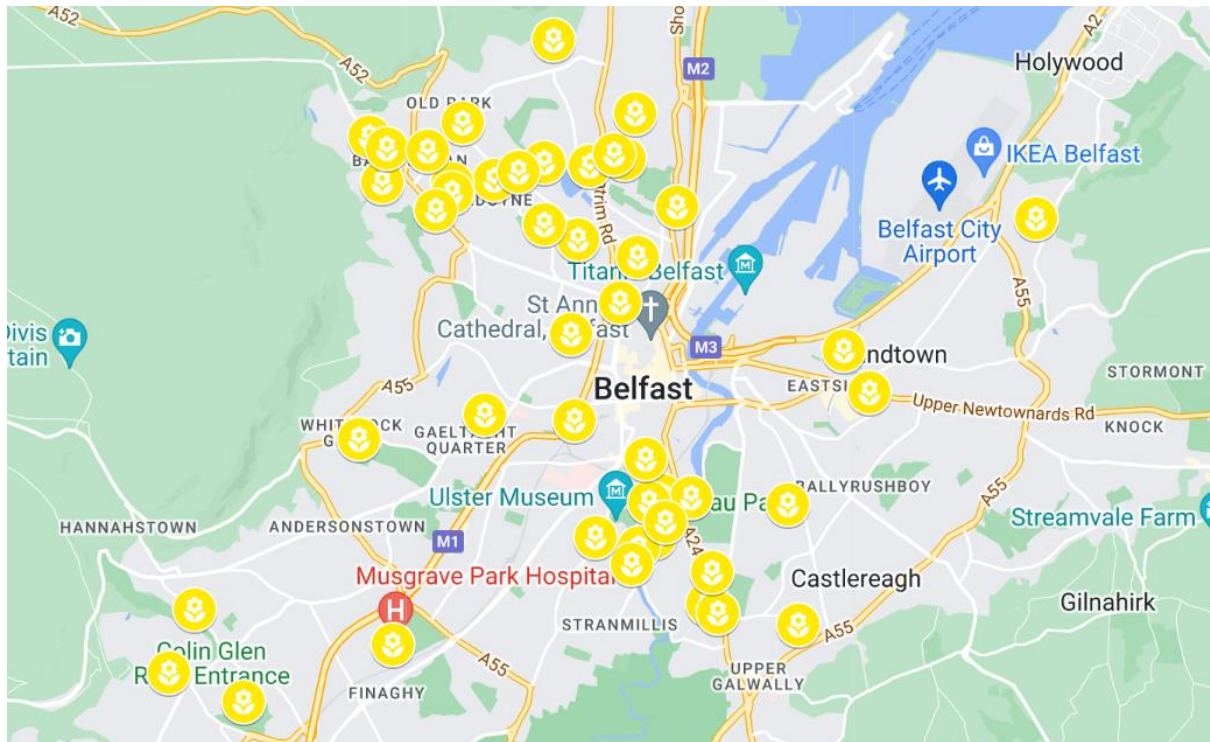
Community Growing has become popular in Belfast over the last century, with allotments initially provided to help residents feed themselves in an increasingly industrialised city with a rising population. The First World War led to a rapid increase in the number of allotments, in the main provided by the Garden Plots Association, not the City Corporation, but in response to the war effort the corporation leased land from the city parks to the Garden Plots Association and provided a lot of advisory and administrative support. For example, in Ormeau Park the Garden Plots association rented out 256 allotments, and in the Falls Park 145 plots were created. By the later part of 1915 more than 700 plots had been established in eight different sites around Belfast. By the start of 1916, 1700 plots were planned, and by September 1916 the success of Belfast Allotments had attracted national attention, being reported in the press, and the Garden Plots Association planned to form branches in all towns in Ulster. Between the wars land requisitioned for allotments was returned to its original function. In Belfast in the 1930s the main allotment areas were Orangefield, the Ardoyne and Ballysillan.

The Second World War again prompted a response across the country to “Dig for Victory”. The Department of Agriculture for Northern Ireland issued reports urging allotmenters and gardeners to “leave no available land vacant of a crop, and make additional sowings of salad crops, to make good the shortage of imported vegetables”. During war land was again requisitioned from City Parks and other public spaces for food growing, establishing new sites at Ballysillan Road, Glenbank, Crumlin Road, Springfield Road, Whiterock Road, Clondara street, Windsor Avenue, Stormont, Westland Road and Shore Road, in addition to other established sites at Woodvale, Alexandra, Musgrave, Falls Park and the low-lying part of Botanic Gardens near the Lagan. A Belfast Allotments Association was formed to give advice to ploholders. At the beginning of the war the number of allotments in Northern Ireland was approximately 1,800. By the end of the war the number was measured to be 7,000.

Post-war the use and provision of allotments in Belfast fell, until more recent times. Community gardening has become more popular in the last 20 years in Belfast beginning with a handful of projects in the 2000s, including the Greater Village Regeneration Trust (GVRT) run Blythefield Allotments, established 2005, the CVNI Knockbracken community allotments, Minnowburn Community Garden, established 2007, the East Belfast Mission/Skainos Garden established 2009, and Eglantine Community Garden established 2004. From 2009 into the early 2010s, Belfast City Council (BCC) established community gardens in Suffolk, Lenadoon, Glenbank, Musgrave Park, Finlay Park, Wedderburn Park, Knocknagoney and Falls Park.

Many of these gardens were supported by the Conservation Volunteers with weekly sessions and training. The Council also supported various projects operated by community organisations, including community gardens at Grove Park, Waterworks Park and Ballysillan.

There are now Community gardens all over Belfast, including those involved in drafting this report. Below is a map which can be [accessed here](#), showing some of the gardens in the Reclaim the Commons Network.



Appendix 2

Letter to Chief Executive of Belfast City Council, 2021

E: ni@farmgarden.org.uk

W: farmgarden.org.uk

A: c/o 7 Donegall Street Place, Belfast, County Antrim, BT1 2FN

*Suzanne Wylie
Belfast City Hall,
Belfast,
BT1 5GS*

**FAO: Suzanne Wylie & Belfast City Councillors.
CC Ricky Rice**

24/2/2021

Dear Suzanne,

I'm writing on behalf of Social Farms and Gardens to hopefully begin a conversation about the changing face of community growing, and especially alleyway gardening in Belfast. Social Farms & Gardens has been operational in NI since 2011. 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.

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. The recently announced funding to be available for alleyway gardening and the attention alleyway gardening has been receiving is brilliant, and we feel excited about the potential to really transform the city of Belfast.

It is this potential that has prompted us to write to you all today. We 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.

There are many sources of support that communities can access to begin on their journey. We ourselves have spoken to communities over the years to try to understand how this delicate process of a community coming together to care for a space works and have produced case studies and reports making recommendations on how this can best be supported by public bodies. More recently 9ft in Common has been working on making public information on ownership more accessible, as well as sharing inspiration and ideas on how the space can best be used. The Conservation Volunteers have helped many alleyways over the years improve their spaces in a practical way. Numerous dedicated council officers have formed relationships with citizens involved and worked to see how best they can help with in kind support. QUBSU Handy Helpers, and Scout and Guide groups have helped with clean-ups and materials. Some businesses can donate ex-stock, for example B&Q. PSNI have contributed with PCSP grants, as have many other funders. All this should of course not overshadow that the vast bulk of the work is done by active citizens on their own time and with little recompense. These people are multiskilled and willing to sacrifice large amounts of time and energy to make their neighbourhood better.

With no platitude intended, they are the experts on what works and what doesn't for their local area.

SF&G believe that a round table discussion, possibly 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. SF&G believe that appropriate community development and informational support is equally important as financial support 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 services and willingness to cooperate, to build a shared vision for greening 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 alleyways and contribute to the green recovery for Belfast City.

We'd appreciate it if this could be circulated to all city councillors on our behalf, to widen the conversation.

Kind Regards, Miriam Turley

Growing Resilience Project officer

A handwritten signature in grey ink, reading 'Miriam Turley'.

Thank you to;

Reclaim the Commons (Growing Resilience Belfast) members:

North Belfast Childrens Allotment
Urban Nature Connection NI
Three Sisters Community West Belfast
Ardmore Rossmore Community Garden
Rainbow Alley
Open Ormeau Collective
Grow
PeasParkBelfast
Carolan Road Alley Garden
Wildflower Alley
Restore Glandore ATC
Sandhurst Gardens Alley
Miracle Way
Carmel Street Community Garden
Horsey Hill
Northumberland Community Garden
Eden Alley
Eglantine Community Garden
Donegall Pass Community Garden
Rosemount Alley
Musgrave Community Garden
Cliftonville Mens Shed
Raby Street Community Garden
North Belfast Garden Grid
Belfast Indian Community Centre
Gairdín an Phobail ~ حديقة المجتمع
Norrth Belfast Women's Initiative & Support Project
Newington Residents Association
Shankill Womens Centre
Footprints Womens Centre
Forthspring Community Garden
Fourthriver Community Garden
Knockbreda Community Garden
The Larder Community Garden
Holylands Community Garden
Friends of the Field/Botanic Community Garden

FRIENDS OF THE FIELD

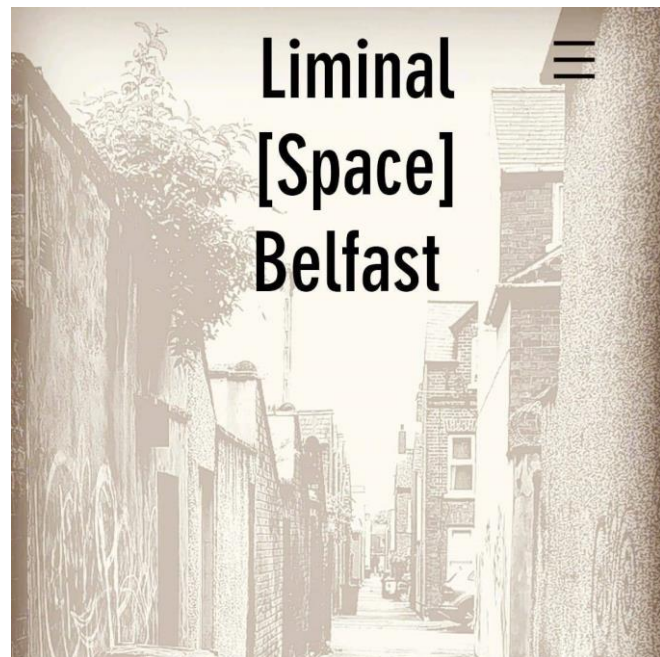


FOOD
COMMUNITY
BIODIVERSITY

WWW.FRIENDSOFTHEFIELD.CO.UK



LOWER
BOTANIC
GARDENS
BELFAST







**The Case for a
Benchmark Standard for
Community Growing and
Allotment Provision in
Northern Ireland**





Foreword

Social Farms & Gardens NI and Local Council officers from each of the 11 Local Councils have co-designed this proposed Benchmark Standard for Community Growing and Allotment Provision in NI. In addition, the report recommends actions to support the sector to flourish. The research, over the past 18 months, involved organising workshops with expert input, discussion groups, interviews and policy information network meetings examining the amount of land designated for community growing and the varying processes and barriers across Northern Ireland for the release of public land for community growing.

Community gardens, allotments and growing projects have proved their value to their local communities - the source of fresh local affordable food, a space for our precious pollinators and wildlife, a place to enhance physical and mental well-being and build strong resilient communities that are contributing to climate action and sustainable development goals. They play an important role in place shaping promoting people's health, happiness and well-being.

In order for this developing sector to thrive Local Councils and public landowners need to ensure the energy, excitement and enthusiasm of communities, that want to grow, is harnessed rather than depleted by disproportionate procedures for food growing on public land. The release of public land in a deliberative and supportive manner is the significant action that will ensure there is an abundance of food growing projects in our communities in the future.

Social Farms & Gardens NI - Patricia Wallace, Manager; Miriam Turley, Growing Resilience Officer and Lead Report Researcher; Conor O'Kane Growing Resilience Officer, North West

This is a really important report for people and places in Northern Ireland. Huge thanks must go to Social Farms & Gardens NI and those Council officers who took part in the research and together showed us not only the great community work already going on but pointed to how more people could see the benefits of growing food locally.

In this perfect storm of climate crisis, food costs and health service demands, the evidence of getting more people actively growing close to their homes is well made and undeniable. That's why we at Incredible Edible are working with partners in England to create a Right to Grow on Public Land that would make it easier for so many more to nurture communities close to home.

For Northern Ireland the report's recommendations could help us all in the UK see what a step change in engaging people in their own well-being looks like. Fantastic piece of work.

Pam Warhurst CBE, Community Leader, activist and environment worker best known for founding the voluntary gardening initiative Incredible Edible in Todmorden, West Yorkshire

The rapid increase of interest in community growing in recent years has been accompanied by a significant increase in demand for land for community growing spaces, but still, ready access to land is a primary obstacle facing local communities. Public land, especially land set aside by Local Councils for community allotments remains the primary route in support of citizen interest in growing. Though allotments fulfil many valuable functions there are constraints to the wider purpose of delivering the collective ideas behind 'social farms and gardens'. We don't leave allotments behind, and this report makes the case for consolidation of existing practice and identifying further land sites to expand allotment growing. The agenda however is much more ambitious than what allotments alone provide. The movement has eyes on a bigger prize. Large swathes of public land remain un-purposed and derelict, underutilised spaces, idle, waiting on market solutions. And yet, community innovation and creativity bring readymade proposals to repurpose declining green and brown field sites, transforming neglect and abandonment into ventures for community fulfilment.

Engaging Local Councils in NI to reimagine possibilities for public land has been one of the most significant achievements of community land use advocates in recent decades. The work of Social Farms & Gardens in NI has subtly engaged local government to consider bigger picture opportunities, opportunities that are taking shape in the emergence of social farms and community gardens, adding support for collective ownership to sit alongside the tradition of allotment growing. A new narrative is beginning to take shape and play out. Public bodies are considering the social value their assets present to fulfil policy objectives concerned with personal health and wellbeing. New forms of community organising are visible across our villages, towns and cities covering large heritage landscape management to support for the most marginalised in our society with access to social farms and gardens.

This report records what has been achieved, what has yet to come and what's needed going forward. The Benchmark Standard for Community Growing and Allotment Provision in Northern Ireland sets out critical recommendations for action that embeds future practice by drawing from existing best practice, drawing from lessons learned by local government and communities working together. It adds substantially to the wider narrative on the rights of people, of communities and place and provides further evidence of the social impact and social return on investing public land into the hands of those in whose name it exists, the public at large. Development Trusts NI welcome this report and the contribution it makes to the campaign for community ownership of land and property assets.

Charlie Fisher, Chief Executive Officer, Development Trusts NI

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Introduction

Introduction: Social Farms & Gardens (SF&G) is a community development charity working to support community growing projects

The benefits of community growing spaces are many, from the proven physical, mental health and well-being benefits to educational, environmental and cultural gains. There is also ample evidence that they hugely increase social capital by encouraging active citizenship and social connection, help reduce health inequalities, and contribute to biodiversity enhancement and climate mitigation.

In recent years, and especially since the series of Lockdowns during the Coronavirus pandemic, SF&G in Northern Ireland have witnessed a rise in the interest in community growing. In addition to the inequality crisis, the climate crisis, food insecurity in the wake of Brexit and Covid, and an increasing desire from people to be connected to food, it seemed important to look at any structural support that could be offered to increase capacity for local food growing.

In 2021 Social Farms & Gardens (supported by the Urban Agriculture Consortium and in partnership with Development Trusts NI) carried out a series of well attended workshops with Local Council officers in Northern Ireland to identify barriers to access to land for community growing. The workshops showed that:

- Developing policy and resourcing for Community Growing on Public Land needs to be prioritised in order for the vital work of the sector to thrive. It cannot be reliant solely on the goodwill and energy of individual Council officers.
- Calculating targets for growing space per head of population would bring NI into line with the other UK nations and provide a useful way of assessing our ongoing performance.
- A permanent staffing and resource base for community growing within Councils is needed for developing procedures and maintaining relationships between Council officers and communities. This would support community growing initiatives which at present are vulnerable to changing or under-resourced staff, and finite funding streams.
- It is important to include the Housing Executive and other public landowners in this work.
- Social Farms & Gardens could develop a framework for Councils and other bodies from their experience gained in NI and across the UK.

(For a copy of the full report from these workshops contact miriam@farmgarden.org.uk.)



Castlecaulfield Horticultural Society in Parkanaur Walled Garden

A key weakness identified in Northern Ireland is that public bodies have no statutory duty to provide allotments or community gardens, unlike in the rest of the UK and Ireland. Having since carried out detailed research with all 11 councils into the provision of allotment plots and community gardening space in Northern Ireland, and taking into consideration the surge in demand for community growing space in recent years (and especially since March 2020), we believe that now is the time to provide a benchmark standard to aid local authorities and public bodies in NI in bringing the quantity (and quality) of provision in line with and beyond the rest of the UK.

This provision standard can be met by direct Council provision, and by enabling local communities to grow by making public land available. Proportionate community asset transfer procedures can facilitate a productive relationship between community groups and public landowners.

The majority of the community growing projects in Northern Ireland run on Council owned land, and all of the 11 Councils are already working in a generous and empowering way with communities wanting to grow. We know the energy is there within Councils to develop this practice in its many forms. Through the outcomes of community planning processes, Councils are increasingly seeing how public assets can contribute to community identified goals. Many publicly owned pieces of land in NI have underused areas that could have value added through community management for food growing, while also saving money through reduced management costs, and attracting investment through grants and the community sector. All this can be done while achieving shared aims of improving community cohesion, health and wellbeing, biodiversity enhancement and climate mitigation.

However there are numerous barriers to community management of public land, including limited resources, different approaches from different departments of Council and different public bodies, lack of awareness of the benefits of this way of working, and the variety of models that can be used, and lack of support and access to resources that could help facilitate partnerships. There are also policy barriers, and at times a cultural hesitancy to releasing land to communities for less than market value. Some barriers are within the power of each Council to change, and others may require coordinated effort and appeal to outside bodies for support. In all cases cooperation, mutual support and building relationships will help us all.

Social Farms & Gardens would like to acknowledge the help from a number of people and organisations for their input in the preparation of this report, namely:

- Officers from the 11 Councils in Northern Ireland who generously gave time to collect information for the survey of current provision
- Louise O'Kane, Community Places
- Charlie Fisher, Development Trusts NI
- Jeremy Iles and Maddy Longhurst, the Urban Agriculture Consortium
- Dónal McCormack and other volunteers at Community Gardens Ireland for sharing information gathered as part of their own policy work in Ireland
- Arthur Acheson, Ministerial Advisory Group for Architecture and the Built Environment for Northern Ireland
- Ken Sterrett, Former Senior Lecturer in Planning and Urban Design at Queen's University Belfast
- Community garden staff and volunteers across Northern Ireland for their excellent work and for the information in this report and the use of photos
- Our funders: The National Lottery Community Fund, the Urban Agriculture Consortium and Sustain



Harvest at Whiterock Community Garden, a community run garden on Belfast City Council land

Sign at Peas Park, Belfast

Summary of findings

7

Councils are providing allotments

117

Of these, the average number of plots provided is 117 (varying sizes)

Plot costs vary and are affordable but more expensive than in the rest of the UK

3

Councils provide Community Gardens

5

Councils have a dedicated page on their website for community growing

2

Councils have community growing policies, with 3 more in development

2

Councils are trialling Community Asset Transfer policies

Provision is less than the rest of the UK, but without figures from other NI public bodies, direct comparison remains difficult

Key Recommendation

It is recommended that Councils in NI aim in the next 5 years, in collaboration with other public bodies, to provide 1250sqm (0.3 acres) of community growing space per 1,000 households

This could be in the form of community gardens, community orchards or allotments. 1250 sqm is the equivalent of 5 full sized allotment plots.

This figure is chosen to allow comparison with other UK standards, for example the National Society of Allotment and Leisure Gardeners Association (NSALG) recommendation that 20 full sized plots are provided per 1,000 households. The 1250sqm standard is lower than reported averages in the rest of the UK, and SF&G recommends that this standard is revisited and extended in 5 years' time. However, this standard is recommended as it is ambitious, but achievable for all Councils, working with other public bodies. For Councils who will more easily reach this standard in the next 5 years, a higher standard should be adopted. Other Councils will not easily meet this target in 5 years, in these instances we recommend setting an alternative target, for example doubling provision every 5 years, based on demand, or similar target.

Recommendations are made in Part 3 on potential collaborations and funding sources to allow this work (which may involve acquiring land, or partnerships with other landowners, and capital works on site) to happen.



**Community Orchard on Choice
Housing Association land in Belfast**

Recommendations are also included in improving structures and processes within Councils and with other public bodies to enable more community growing to take place. These include proportionate Community Asset Transfer policies, dedicated web page for community growing, and targets for waiting list times.

We have included a sample proportionate Community Asset Transfer procedure in Appendix I, along with two checklists which can be used as part of the procedure to identify suitable land, which have been developed in conversation with Council officers in the process of compiling this report, and in response to the absence of such procedure in most NI Councils. This procedure, if implemented in the proportionate and community centred manner in which it is intended, will enable Council and other public bodies to support independent community groups taking on management of land.



Part 1

Background Research: Existing Policy and Legislation

A Short History of Allotments and Community Gardens in Northern Ireland

The distribution of land for growing in NI has developed over the past 250 years, following the enclosures and the Gavelkind and Tanistry rulings, with similarities and differences from the rest of the island and from Britain. In the late 18th century, rural labourers made up a major part of Irish society, and provision of land for cottiers to grow food was seen as a way to stave off the worst poverty, obviating any threat they may pose to the established authority, and also to keep labourers close to the landowners crops so they were on hand when work needed to be done. In this way it meant that the labourer was paid partly in controlled access to land rather than in cash, and the garden was used for subsistence farming, rather than for profit. Gardens were also seen by policy makers as being morally and even spiritually improving for the rural poor. Within Ulster, following the Industrial Revolution, urbanisation of the population proceeded at a considerable pace during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In 1821, 2% of the population lived in towns of over 10,000 population (in effect, in Belfast). By 1901, the proportion was 28%, spread over a greater number of settlements, and by 1926, it was 36%. Belfast city grew from a population of 7,000 in 1800 to 400,000 in 1900, having outgrown Dublin, the former capital.

In Belfast the First World War led to a rapid increase in the number of allotments. These were in the main provided by the Garden Plots Association, not the City Corporation, but in response to the war effort the corporation leased land from the city parks to the Garden Plots Association, and provided a lot of advisory and administrative support. By the later part of 1915 more than 700 plots, comprising about 65 acres (26.3 hectares) had been established in eight different sites around Belfast. By the start of 1916, 1700 plots were planned, covering 149.74 acres (60.6 hectares). Plots in Belfast in this time ranged in size from 243 sqm to 324 sqm, but most allotments were of the smaller size. By September 1916 the success of Belfast Allotments had attracted national attention, being reported in the press, and the Garden Plots Association planned to form branches in all towns in Ulster.

Between the wars land requisitioned for allotments was returned to its original function. In Belfast in the 1930s the main allotment areas were Orangefield, the Ardoyne and Ballysillan.

The Second World War again prompted a response across the country to “Dig for Victory”. The Department of Agriculture for Northern Ireland issued reports urging allotmenters and gardeners to “leave no available land vacant of a crop, and make additional sowings of salad crops, to make good the shortage of imported vegetables”. During war land was requisitioned from City Parks and other public spaces for food growing. A Belfast Allotments Association was formed to give advice to ploholders. Leaflets were produced, noticeboards erected and demonstration plots laid out. Competitions and instructional lectures were organised. At the beginning of the war the number of allotments in Northern Ireland was approximately 1,800. By the end of the war the number was measured to be 7,000. A comparably large number of home gardens were also converted to vegetable production. (Adapted from *Rooted in the Soil, A History of Cottage Gardens and Allotments in Ireland since 1750*, Bell & Watson, 2012)

Allotment Legislation in Great Britain and Northern Ireland

Ireland

Before the establishment of the Irish State and Northern Ireland in 1922, when the UK government was carrying out cottage building schemes for rural labourers, the Labourers Cottages and Allotments (Ireland) Act, 1882 assigned tenants with an allotment (no more than half an acre) when a cottage was provided. The law still remains in effect in the Republic of Ireland. Within the first few years of the Irish State, the Acquisition of Land (Allotments) Act, 1926 was passed by the Dáil. This act was as a result of lobbying from plot holders throughout Ireland, and sought to mirror the 1908 Small Holdings & Allotments Act for England and Wales.

England

In 1908 the Small Holdings and Allotments Act (England & Wales) came into force, placing a duty on local authorities to provide sufficient allotments, according to demand. This Act did not apply to Northern Ireland. The rights of allotment holders in England and Wales were strengthened through the Allotments Acts of 1922, and again in the Allotments Act of 1925, which established statutory allotments which local authorities could not sell off or covert without Ministerial consent, known as Section 8 Orders. The 1922 Act specified 40 rods (1/4 of an acre) as the maximum size of an allotment garden.

The 2011 Localism Act as applied to England contains a wide range of measures to devolve more powers to councils and neighbourhoods and give local communities greater control over local decisions.



Apple pressing at Donegall Pass Community Garden, Belfast

Scotland

In Scotland the Community Empowerment Act came into force on 1 April 2018. It updates and simplifies legislation on allotments. It requires local authorities to maintain waiting lists and take reasonable steps to provide allotments if the waiting lists exceed certain trigger points. No one should be on a waiting list for more than 5 years. This is important, as legislation in other parts of the UK is viewed by some as ineffective on this point: though Councils are required to provide allotments, no timescales are attached to this duty, and therefore in actual fact Councils can indefinitely deprioritise taking action.

The Community Empowerment Act also strengthens the protection for allotments and clarifies the rights of local authorities and plot holders. Provisions allow allotments to be 250 square metres in size or a different size that is to be agreed between the person requesting an allotment and the local authority. The Act also requires fair rents to be set and allows tenants to sell surplus produce grown on an allotment (other than with a view to making a profit). There is a requirement for local authorities to develop a food growing strategy for their area, including identifying land that may be used as allotment sites and identifying other areas of land that could be used by a community for the cultivation of vegetables, fruit, herbs or flowers. When detailing how the authority intends to increase the provision of allotment sites and community growing areas of land in its area it must provide a description of whether and how this will apply to communities which experience socio-economic disadvantage.

Wales

In 2020, Social Farms & Gardens was commissioned by Welsh Government to map an evidence-based baseline of allotment provision across Wales. The rationale being that one of the First Minister's Manifesto pledges was to double allotment provision in Wales.

These results led to the creation of the 'Welsh Allotment Regeneration Initiative' with a Welsh Government investment of £130,000 targeted at the local authorities with the poorest level provision. The funding was provided to Gwynedd, Wrexham & Swansea local authority areas who could receive £26,000 of capital funding each to increase their allotment plot provision. This work is ongoing.

Northern Ireland

In contrast in Northern Ireland, a duty to provide land for allotments was never established and land reform giving communities more rights over how land is used, and more power to acquire land has never happened. Councils can provide allotments but do not have a statutory duty to do so (the main points of the NI 1932 Allotments Act are summarised below).

Community gardens are not defined in legislation. This means that all community gardens are currently not secure in terms of legally defined areas – whereas allotments in the rest of the UK are currently defined. There has been an increase in recent years in the number of community gardens in Northern Ireland, but the law has not kept up with the pace of community development.



Comber Community Garden, a community run garden on Ards & North Down Council land

The Allotments Act (Northern Ireland), 1932

The [1932 Allotments Act](#) allows Councils to acquire and improve land for allotments, or use land already in the council's possession which is not currently needed. Allotments should not exceed more than an eighth of an acre (approx. 1,000 sqm). The Act also stipulates that Allotments should not be given to anyone already in occupation of land in excess of an eighth of an acre, and that preference in allocating allotments should be given to people who are in "poor circumstances": either due to unemployment or having a high number of dependants.

The Act stipulates that the Allotments should be let at cost, and that tenancy agreements are required. Reasons why a Council could ask someone to give up their allotment are outlined, and other regulations, including the prohibition of the keeping of live animals on allotments.

Local Authorities are allowed to purchase and provide tenants with "manures, seeds and agricultural implements", with an expectation that tenants will pay for these resources within 6 months. The Act also makes provision for Local Authorities to give grants or loans, and to lease land to not-for-profit associations wanting to provide allotments.

The following sentence in section 7 of the Act seems to indicate that Local Authorities can expect financial support from Government for this purpose: *"Any expenses incurred by the local authority for the said purpose shall be defrayed as expenses incurred by them in carrying the provisions of this Act into effect."*

The Act does not make any mention of community gardens or orchards, and any future legislative reform would benefit from including other forms of community growing.



Community Orchard being planted in the People's Park in Ballymena

Comparison of NI legislation with best practice examples in other European countries

A review of community growing legislation of other European countries (namely Austria, Denmark, England, Ireland, Germany and Wales) has highlighted some areas where community growing is protected in law in ways missing in Northern Irish legislation. They are listed here for any Council wishing to strengthen their community growing policies.

- Protection of existing sites (establishing statutory sites)
- Definition of allotments and community gardens
- Rent caps for private allotments
- Establishment of the duty to provide community growing space, timelines included, and an indication of how this will be funded
- Rights of communities to acquire land as a priority over private development when in the service of food growing and provision of public green space
- Guidance for Councils delivering these duties on recommended area per head of population, with a given walking distance of people's homes, with a recognition that some communities have less access to fresh food and green space than others, and that this is a health inequality issue

Community Planning

In terms of broader land reform, local Government reform since 2002 in Northern Ireland aimed to reposition local government as the democratically accountable leader for economic, social, and environmental well-being outcomes, and provide processes for communities to contribute to spatial planning and the design of service delivery.

In April 2015 a two-tiered planning system was introduced in Northern Ireland which transferred the majority of planning functions from central government to District Councils. This also introduced a new power of community planning led by Local Councils. The combination of these two 'place shaping' powers ideally positions Councils to support and enable community growing through provision of land and services through the Local Development Plan and Community Plan respectively. Community Planning Partnerships (CPPs) collaboratively agree actions and functions related to planning, provision, and improvement of public services. Despite these reforms, engagement is needed to embrace a broader range of environmental and social issues, including climate change and the provision of accessible green space. (Rafferty 2020)

All comparisons in this report between Northern Ireland and the rest of the UK should be read in light of the fact that Councils in the rest of the UK have a wider range of responsibilities, including schools and housing, and therefore access to more land than Councils in Northern Ireland.

In achieving the provision standards recommended here, coordination with other land-owning public bodies will be necessary. This collaboration can be facilitated through community planning structures and the statutory link between each Council's community plan and the 11 Local Development Plans (LDPs) which are currently being produced.



Blythefield Allotments, community run on Belfast City Council land

Use of Local Development Plans and Strategic Planning Policy

We believe there is an opportunity for planning policy and guidance with regard to community growing space to be made much more robust and explicit, particularly since community growing land in Northern Ireland is not protected under the current legislation. There are increasing pressures on land, and potential for the need for green infrastructure to compete with housing needs. Because of this we urge that fuller and better land zoning and policy on the role of allotments and community gardens be incorporated into the new suite of 11 Local Development Plans across the region.

The local nature of community growing provision means that issues of spatial planning, planning policy and planning guidance are critical. Community growing provision should be planned into 20-minute neighbourhoods, as part of our green and food infrastructure. The 11 Local Development Plans (LDPs) and the Strategic Planning Policy Statement (SPPS) have a key role to play in enabling community growing.

The SPPS lists 6 core principles of the new two-tier planning system:



Improving Health
and Well-being;



Creating and
Enhancing Shared
Space;



Supporting
Sustainable
Economic Growth;



Supporting Good
Design and Positive
Place Making; and



Preserving and
Improving the
Built and Natural
Environment.

The provision of community growing space can help to deliver these core principles through the inclusion of community growing for health and wellbeing, for provision of shared space, for placemaking and for improvement of the natural environment.

Each LDP should form the spatial expression of the area's Community Plan and act as a vehicle to deliver the ambitions set out in the Community Plan.

The LDP will be used in making decisions on the future development of each Council area, including individual planning applications and appeals. Given the competing demands on public land currently, for housing, for green space, for agriculture and food growing and for biodiversity, the LDPs are an important opportunity for each of the 11 Councils to allocate and zone space for community growing. The statutory link between each LDP and Community Plan should facilitate this process and enable collaborative working between the partners. The T:BUC (Together: Build United Communities) shared housing schemes offer an ideal place to deliver or pilot this approach, and relevant Departments should be part of this conversation.

NSALG has produced design-led, policy-based, [guidance](#) for planners and developers who are looking to include allotments in new developments. Sustain, in partnership with SF&G have produced a [guide](#) with examples of planning policies around the UK that support community food growing. It is aimed primarily at planning authorities to help them to use food growing as a way of creating healthy communities.

Other Forums for Communication

While Community Planning Partnerships seem the best fit for facilitating communication about cross sectoral provision and land availability for community growing, other forums of communication may be more appropriate in each Council area, for example Neighbourhood Renewal Partnerships (NRP), or Sustainable Food Place (SFP) partnerships. While well-functioning communication platforms are worth using, information from these conversations should be channelled into the community plan, which will link into the LDP in terms of spatial planning.

Sustainable Food Places

5 of the 11 NI Councils are working towards a [Sustainable Food Place Award](#). Some of the suggested actions for achieving the award are:

- Ensure communities can access and take control of green, brownfield and unused building spaces that can be used for food social enterprises and community food projects, for example by **mapping available assets and/or offering special lease options**.
- Increase participation in food growing and related activities through increased allotment provision, the incorporation of growing sites into new and existing developments, the development of edible landscapes and through initiatives such as Incredible Edible and The Big Dig.

If adopted, the recommendations in Part 3 of this report would greatly help any participating Sustainable Food Partnership to achieve an award.



Peas Park Guerrilla Garden, Belfast

Other sources of Recommended Provision

Two other well quoted UK sources of provision standards (which are both Allotment based) are the 1969 Thorpe report, which recommended 15 allotment plots per 1,000 households and the National Society of Allotment and Leisure Gardeners (NSALG) which currently recommends 20 allotment plots per 1,000 households. In square metres this is 3,750 /5,000sqm.

Provision elsewhere in the UK

In England and Wales, we are aware of some authorities quoting much higher provision levels. For example, the following paragraph in a report by Newcastle University in 2012 - [The social, health and wellbeing benefits of allotments: five societies in Newcastle](#).

“The recent increase in academic and media interest has largely been mirrored by an increase in demand for allotments generally. However, this has not been reflected in provision of plots by Local Authorities. Newcastle has a higher than average level of allotment provision (**national average is 15 plots** per 1,000 households and Newcastle has 22.2 plots per 1,000 households), however, even here there is currently a waiting list of approximately 826 on Newcastle’s 2,640 allotment plots provision.”

The Association of Public Service Excellence (APSE) survey local authorities across the UK regarding their allotment provision on a yearly basis, and produces regular state of the market reports for allotments in the UK, such as [this one for 2022](#). Unfortunately, these reports do not include a ‘plots per 1,000 households’ figure for comparison, but have some information on provision. For example, in 2022, 32.5% of councils surveyed provided less than 250 allotment plots, 29% provided between 250-1000 plots, 27.5% provide 1,000-2,000 plots and 11% provide more than 2,000 plots. Half of these plots are standard sized plots. According to APSE half of councils this year say they intend to increase their allotment provision, either by direct provision of sites, or provision by builders/developers as part of a housing/planning policy, or provision by community groups supported/facilitated by council.

Again, higher provision in the rest of the UK is partly accounted for by the greater area of responsibility of those Councils and therefore greater public land ownership.

Increase in demand in the last 20 years

In recent years in Northern Ireland, we have seen a substantial rise in interest in community growing which has produced a wide diversity of community growing initiatives. From community orchards to street planting schemes, from guerrilla gardening to forest gardens, the choice of what type of project to set up is broad and very much depends on the needs of the local community, the resources on offer and the type and area of land available. This new interest in community growing has been supported by a number of different funding streams - through local Councils, the Housing Executive and the Public Health Agency, the European Union Programme for Peace and Reconciliation in Northern Ireland and the Border Region of Ireland Peace III 2007 - 2013, which provided the financial basis for a number of new community gardens to be set up across Northern Ireland and the Border areas. Since then, the National Lottery Community Fund has provided project funding, and the National Lottery 'Space and Place' funding has provided capital grants for many projects. In addition, there are a number of different agencies promoting community growing and allotments; notably Social Farms & Gardens, The Conservation Volunteers, Groundwork Northern Ireland, Keep Northern Ireland Beautiful and Grow It Yourself. Together these organisations constitute a level of support for community growing initiatives. More information on allotment waiting lists is included in Part 3.

At a UK level the Association for Public Service Excellence (APSE) has documented a growing demand for allotments. The [APSE 2019 state of the allotments market report](#) summarises some of these UK wide issues nicely [here](#) –

“Figures released by the National Allotment Society (NAS) revealed that of the councils which responded to a recent survey, over 40% reported a “significant uplift” in applications to join waiting lists, with a 300% increase in one case. This increase in demand is set against a [65% decline in the total area of allotment land available](#) caused by the growing demand for new housing land and the fact that the most deprived urban areas have experienced [eight times the level of allotment land loss](#) than the least deprived areas.”

This worrying figure is more concerning, when we consider recent figures show that with regards to personal greenspace, as much as one in eight of the UK population have no access to a garden.



Annual BBQ at Eden Allotments, Carrickfergus. Managed by Mid & East Antrim Council with the support of Field Representatives, on Council Land



Gardens of Sanctuary training at Grow Community Garden, a community run garden on Belfast City Council land

Changing Demographics

Although the allotment legislation in Northern Ireland hasn't changed since the 1930s, there have been urban/rural changes over the last 90 years. The 1926 census states that there were about 51% of the population living in urban areas. In 2015 NISRA stated that the numbers based on 2011 census were up to 65%. While these demographic changes are significant, it is important to remember that community gardens are equally important in rural areas, providing social contact, exercise and a supportive learning environment for those wanting to grow their own fruit and vegetables.

COVID 19 Impact

Research has suggested that physically greener, more natural environments, are beneficial for human health and well-being. This has been particularly prevalent during the pandemic where many media and academic reports have highlighted how people have turned to gardening and growing their own food.

During the recent Covid 19 crisis small community growing groups around Northern Ireland were quick to respond, safely, and effectively, to the needs of their communities. They led the way in diversifying their activities, providing food delivery to the vulnerable and isolated, checking in on neighbours through phone-round schemes, and later on in lockdown encouraging their neighbours to grow at home, so that fresh food was still being provided locally. SF&G worked with local Councils to develop guidance for Council run sites to enable them to stay open during this period, providing important physical and mental health relief during that period, and enabling people to keep growing. Indeed, the rise in interest in growing at home has been a positive feature of the crisis and seems to characterise the "new normal" after lockdown. According to the 2021 APSE state of the market report, the Coronavirus pandemic has seen a huge reliance on allotments as places where people are able to go to gain exercise and recreation and resulted in a noticeable increase in demand for new plots and sites. In their 2021 state of the market report, APSE reports that 94% of Council respondents in the UK experienced a significant increase in demand for allotments.

Community Gardens and Resilience

During the pandemic community gardens adapted their working practices and continued to operate, contributing to the local food supply in times when food insecurity was causing panic buying in the supermarkets. The groups that were best able to adapt and respond quickly to the situation were the ones that had strong infrastructure in place: secure access to land and control of decision-making processes, core funding or funding that could be repurposed, and strong core staff and volunteer teams.

The fostering of resilience is critical to protecting and promoting health and wellbeing at both the individual and community level. Resilient communities respond proactively to new or adverse situations, prepare for economic, social, and environmental change and deal better with crisis and hardship. The Cabinet Office's 2019 Community Resilience Development Framework states that:

“Community resilience is enabled when the public are empowered to harness local resources and expertise to help themselves and their communities to

- *prepare, respond, and recover from disruptive challenges, in a way that complements the activity of Category 1 and 2 emergency responders.*
- *plan and adapt to long term social and environmental changes to ensure their future prosperity and resilience.*

Community resilience requires a participatory approach to emergency management.”

For these reasons, providing community growing space, to self-managed community groups able to secure quality leases, is in the interest of society in general, and to those using the sites.

Allotments, Orchards or Community Gardens?

There are lots of ways that people can get involved in growing. A summary of some of the main models of community growing are included in Appendix 2. For people who want to work with their neighbours to improve the local environment and make their community a better place to be for people and wildlife then maybe a community garden or orchard is the best option. For people with plenty of time and a desire to grow lots of fresh produce, traditional allotments will probably be the best option. Allotments are more likely to be Council managed (sometimes with input from an allotments association), and community gardens are more likely to be community managed. Allotments are a significant community resource, public service, and quality council managed sites enable residents to produce significant amounts of locally grown food. Community Gardens while producing local food have also a specific characteristic of community engagement. Community Orchards are low-maintenance perennial plantings that can double as social space. There are benefits to all models, and each council will need to assess their own strengths and communities' needs. For this reason, this report recommends a level of allotment plot provision or equivalent community growing provision.

Community Managed Sites and Community Asset Transfer

Lower Cost Models

It is important to note that allotments and community gardens do not always need to be expensive endeavours. The creation of a new site with water, fencing and paths will of course require investment, but if the land is available at a peppercorn rate, and if local community groups are willing and able to take on management of a piece of land, a relationship can be formed which allows community growing to happen even on smaller sites. Appreciation of the hyperlocal is important here, as is the mobilisation of local volunteer labour and resources to improve a site if management is signed over to a local group. The SF&G [Community Land Advisory Service](#) provides advice and information for landowners as well as community groups on forming this relationship, and Sustain with Shared Assets has produced guidance for Local Authorities on [Food Growing In Parks](#), which outlines more and less formal agreements. These resources advise on building relationships with community partners over time, which will pay off over the longer term.

Benefits of Community Management

Indeed Joseph Rowntree Foundation [research](#) (JRF 2011) shows that land managed by well supported and organised community groups, under the right conditions, will deliver multiple benefits, including a heightened sense of identity, improved levels of activity and access to services, and a better physical environment. Another NI focused JRF [report](#) found that community managed assets have the capacity to “build shared resources, trust and relationships, even in the most divided communities”. (JRF, 2012). Three quality examples of this model are GROW Community Garden in the Waterworks Park in Belfast, the Playtrail on Education Authority land in Derry, and Incredible Edible Cloughmills, a council owned 4.5 acre former mill site, now a community garden and wider biopark.

Working with Housing Executive and other Public Landowners

Local Councils will rely on other public landowners to reach their benchmark standard. The Housing Executive have provided the following statement for this report:

"The Housing Executive's vision is for everyone to live an affordable and decent home, appropriate to their needs, in a safe and attractive place.

Our core values of making a difference, fairness, passion and expertise further support and articulate this vision. As an organisation we build strong partnerships, share great ideas and are always looking for new, creative and better ways to do things.

At present the Housing Executive facilitates community growing space within its estates across Northern Ireland. This includes amenity spaces, allotments, community gardens and community orchards & woodlands. The Housing Executive also provides funding to communities through the Community Grants programme and through community safety and it's social enterprise programme.

The Housing Executive is keen to work with Councils, public and community / third sector partners to further consider how best this information is made available with regarding existing provision and identify opportunities for new provision. As a statutory partner in the Community Planning Partnerships, we consider this to be an appropriate structure to nurture these conversations and ensure this important work has visibility and buy in across the public/private and community and voluntary sector. The Housing Executive is also keen to ensure the application process to deliver such a project is articulated clearly and is easily accessible.

In the meantime, queries regarding this should be directed to the Place Shaping Teams in each of the three NIHE regions:

Placeshaping.Belfast@nihe.gov.uk

Placeshaping.north@nihe.gov.uk

South.Placeshaping@nihe.gov.uk

Funding available

UKSPF

The [UK Shared Prosperity Fund](#) (UKSPF, or Levelling Up money) [objectives for Communities and Place](#) mentions green space and community led projects, including running and capital costs, and the interventions list also includes “NI3: Creation of and improvements to local green spaces, community gardens, watercourses and embankments, along with incorporating natural features into wider public spaces.”. The Communities and Place strand is currently [expected](#) to come online 2023/24. This fund will involve Council working with local partners to develop plans. See below for the relevant guidance from the UKSPF website: [UKSPF Investment Plan Northern Ireland](#)

"...(the Community and Place UKSPF Investment Priority)....delivered by councils, working in partnership with local community-based partnerships (including charities, NGOs (non governmental organisations) or similar type organisations), to collaborate to deliver small scale capital interventions. The funding will be used to strengthen community and neighbourhood vitality across a locally defined area (of any scale) within each of the 11 council areas and to help develop community collaboration and bolster local civic pride.

Needs and priorities will be different across each council area and each plan should determine the right interventions based on local community plans and local strategic issues. It is expected that package of support developed across each council area will incorporate at least 3 of the 4 primary interventions set out on page 28."

Local councils and their partners can prioritise locally-determined packages of activity, drawing from the following predominantly capital activities:



local green space



community and
neighbourhood
infrastructure



active travel



arts, culture and
heritage activities



volunteering and
social capital

Route to market

The Programme will be delivered on a commissioned basis, through a direct allocation to each of the 11 local authorities who will then enter into arrangements with local partners directly.

Timing

Councils are expected to be commissioned in early 2023. It is anticipated that the main programme will launch during the 2023/24 financial year, running to March 2025.

Funding

£11 million (capital) will be allocated to the Communities & Place Programme. A further £2.8 million will be allocated to support revenue activities.



Part 2

Research Findings

Research Findings

A survey was sent out to all 11 councils and completed in the summer of 2022. The questions in the survey are listed in Appendix III.

Current Direct Provision of Allotments, Orchards and Community Gardens

These figures are based on figures provided in our survey. For guidance the recommendation in this report is that overall provision in each area should be **1250 sqm per 1,000 households**. The figures below do not represent the totality of support provided for community growing in each council area, just the land in allotments, orchards and community gardens on council land and directly managed by council. More detailed information on allotment provision is provided at the end of this section.

Council	Square metres of provision per 1,000 households*
Antrim & Newtownabbey	338
Ards & North Down	44
Armagh Banbridge & Craigavon	23
Belfast	58
Derry City & Strabane	155
Lisburn & Castlereagh	403
Mid & East Antrim	900
Mid Ulster	65

*An unpublished report on Allotment provision in England (2006) by the then Federation of City Farms & Community Gardens (now Social Farms & Gardens) and the University of Derby commissioned by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister suggests that -“Availability of allotments by households better reflects the use of allotments than by individuals. Frequently more than one member of a household participates in working one plot listed for the individual household”. This can be explored further but it does suggest that if more than one person per household works an allotment it may well be a more accurate measurement of assessing need for further provision.

Community Managed Community Gardens on Council land, and Peppercorn Leases

The survey did not collect information on the area of land owned by Council which is given over to community managed growing projects, in all cases through a peppercorn lease (free or for £1 a year). It is recommended that each Council collects this information, along with land provided by other public landowners and count it towards their provision. However, the following Councils lease land to community groups for community growing:

- Antrim & Newtownabbey
- Ards & North Down
- Belfast
- Causeway Coast & Glens
- Derry City & Strabane
- Lisburn & Castlereagh
- Mid & East Antrim
- Mid Ulster

Newry Mourne & Down have six such gardens planned

Community Orchards

Four councils (A&ND, L&C, M&EA and NM&D) provide community orchards, and one council (AB&C) has one planned.



Beehives at Community run Tullacorr Allotments, on Derry City and Strabane District Council land



Rookery Wood, community run on Forest Service land in Castlecaulfield, Mid Ulster

Other Forms of Support for Growing Offered by Councils

All Councils provide forms of support for community growing other than land and facilities. For example, Newry Mourne & Down and Fermanagh & Omagh Councils have recently run small grant schemes specifically for community growing, and Causeway Coast & Glens recently distributed £80,000 in community growing grants, funded by the Department for Communities. Many Councils contribute to Live Here, Love Here grants which support community growing. Mid & East Antrim Council provide in kind support to allotment holders in the form of manure, bark, compost and seeds, as well as on site events for plot holders, and have provided educational programmes for the public. Armagh Banbridge & Craigavon Council have recently provided an innovative programme of education in Permaculture and Community Growing. This was developed during Covid to provide a safe space outside for people to socialise to combat loneliness. A successful Green Gym programme continues to be run and further Growing Skills programmes are planned. Belfast City Council over the years has provided a programme of in-kind support for community growers. Fermanagh & Omagh Council in recent years ran an innovative Peace IV funded networking and capacity building programme, which built relationships between community growers, as well as providing education. Derry City & Strabane District Council have started work on Acorn farm, an ambitious 2 ½ acre project, in a strategic partnership with a number of local Voluntary and Community Organisations. The project will drive forward the sustainable food agenda in the area by bringing regenerative food production, education and tourism together on one site.

Existing Council Policies in Northern Ireland

At time of publishing, seven of the 11 Northern Ireland Councils have declared a Climate Emergency.

One Council (Ards & North Down) has an operating community growing strategy, and four Councils (DC&S, M&EA, Belfast, and NM&D) have draft strategies, although two of these (Belfast and M&EA) have been in draft for over 10 years. None of the Councils have set targets for community growing provision. The NM&D strategy is not solely on community growing, but includes community growing as part of its (draft) Sustainability strategy.

Online information for the Public

Six councils have a page on their website dedicated to community growing (links provided below), with one in development.

[Antrim & Newtownabbey](#)

[Ards & North Down](#)

[Belfast](#)

[Derry City & Strabane](#)

[Mid & East Antrim](#)

[Mid Ulster](#)

Community Asset Transfer Procedures for Councils Leasing Land to Communities

All Councils who returned data on leasing land to communities are offering peppercorn rent (£1 per year or similar) to communities for the lease of land.

One council (NM&D) has a draft Community Asset Transfer policy which has been especially adapted for community growing sites. This is important, as often Community Asset Transfer (CAT) procedures for buildings and more developed assets (which a number of councils have, at least in draft form) can involve a high level of bureaucracy, demanding time from community groups, and in the case of land for community growing groups this level of risk management is disproportionate to the value of the land, or the risk involved. A sample proportionate CAT procedure is included in Appendix I, which is based on conversations with Council officers during the 2021 workshops, and looking at the procedures in NM&D and in Rhonda Cynan Taff Council in Wales, which is leading the way in this regard.

A number of NI Councils are currently looking at introducing these procedures, and some are adapting existing procedures in use for the lease of land for sports facilities to communities. Two Councils have bought land for community run sports facilities, and thought this same mechanism could potentially be used to buy land for community growing.

We asked what procedure Councils use to identify land suitable for community growing, for example when a new allotment site or community garden is being planned, or when a community group gets in touch wanting to find land to grow on. 4 Councils responded that they use the Community Planning Department of Council to identify potential sites for community growing. Two other Councils replied that they consider each request for land on a case by case basis and there is no procedure.

Mapping

One Council (D&S) has mapped community growing sites on a GIS system. Other Councils expressed a willingness to do this in future, and to share information where appropriate if a shared platform ever became available (for example [Land Explorer](#) or similar).

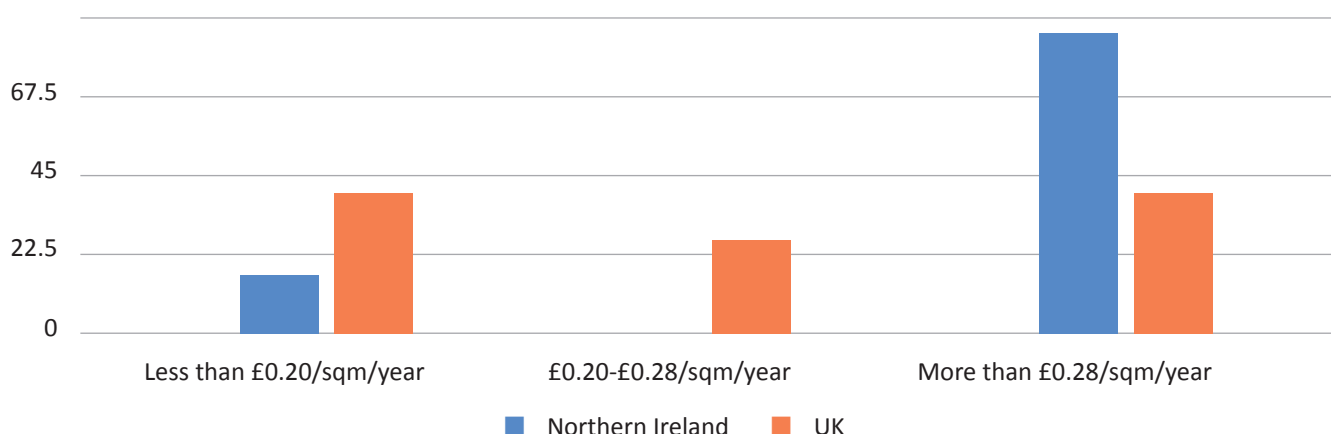
Allotment Rents

The Table below shows the average cost of an allotment plot in Council areas that provide allotments per sqm. These figures are an average of varying sizes and plot rents.

Council	Annual rent £ per sqm
Antrim & Newtownabbey	0.38
Ards & North Down	1
Belfast	0.31
Derry & Strabane	0.14
Lisburn & Castlereagh	0.32
Mid & East Antrim	0.64
Mid Ulster	0.51

Allotment rents are seen as affordable in Northern Ireland (ranging from 14p/sqm/year to £1/sqm/year), but more expensive than in the rest of the UK. The APSE survey of allotment sites across the UK in 2021 found that only 37% of respondents charged more than 0.28/sqm/year, and 37% of respondents charged less than 0.20/sqm/year.

NI rents compared to UK levels



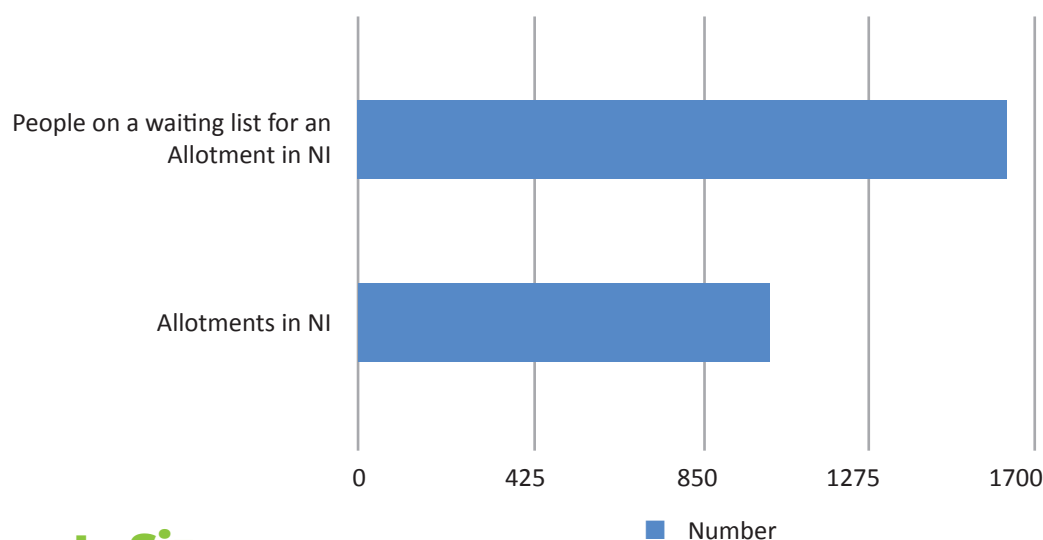
One Council (M&EA) offers a £10 discount on annual allotment rent for jobseekers, pensioners, students and people on disability allowance. Another Council (L&C) offers a discount for pensioners. No other Councils offer discounts, which is interesting in light of the legislation requirement that unemployed people or people with dependents should receive priority.

Waiting lists

All Councils providing allotments in NI keep waiting lists. Ratios of site-specific waiting list numbers to available plots range from 29% to 1000% (at Larne allotments, currently eight plots, with 80 people on the waiting list. 40 new plots are planned to accommodate demand). On average, across NI there are 1.6 times as many people on waiting lists than currently hold an allotment (total 1003 allotments in NI, total 1615 people on waiting lists). The waiting list for allotments in Belfast has increased from 283 in 2012, to 807 in 2022.

Waiting lists do not necessarily reflect total demand, as waiting times may put some people off applying. Additionally, people will only put their name on a list for a site in their neighbourhood, and there are likely areas of the country where no allotments or waiting lists are offered. Information on waiting list times was not widely available, but as a guide, APSE found in their 2021 report that 66% of council average waiting list times were less than 18 months. Private allotments do ease demand in some areas, and location of these sites should be taken into account when planning new sites. However, these facilities, while high quality and easing demand, may not be affordable for the average household, with rents sometimes 19 times as high as council annual rents (£0.14/sqm compared to £2.61/sqm).

Number of sites compared to waiting lists



Allotments Sizes

An allotment is traditionally measured in rods (perches or poles), an old measurement dating back to Anglo-Saxon times. 10 poles is currently the accepted size of an allotment, the equivalent of 250 square metres or about the size of a double's tennis court. Few if any allotments in Northern Ireland are of this size.

As allotments are leased from landlords, allotment holders are required to pay rent. This money is used to cover the water rates and general maintenance bills. This rent can be anything from a peppercorn amount through to £100 a year per plot holder, but most rents in NI are in the region of £25 - £125 each, with the average rent coming in at £0.47/sqm. Despite there being legal statutes relating to allotments, nowhere do they state how much rent should be charged or collected, instead general terminology is used, citing that the rent should be a 'reasonable amount' which the 'tenant would expect to pay'.

The background of the page is a solid dark green. It features several abstract white graphic elements. A large, stylized wavy shape, resembling a flame or a stylized letter 'V', is positioned in the upper right quadrant. A thick, straight white diagonal line runs from the middle left towards the bottom right. In the bottom left corner, there are more wavy white lines, similar in style to the one in the upper right.

Part 3

Recommendations & Conclusions

Recommendations

- **It is recommended that Councils adopt a target level of provision of 1250 sqm (0.3 acres) per 1,000 households of community growing space in their Council area.** This could be in the form of allotments, community gardens or orchards. This target should be reached in co-operation with other public bodies, for e.g., the Housing Executive and the Education Authority. For comparison with the format in which UK standards of provision are phrased (in terms of allotment plots per 1,000 households), 1250 sqm is the equivalent of 5 full size allotment plots. This target could be staged, e.g.: 1250 sqm per 1,000 households in 5 years, and 3750 sqm in 15 years' time.
- Community development support and horticultural training should be built into a programme of expansion, with funding available to community groups and allotments associations.
- Councils should adopt a proportionate Community Asset Transfer policy for release of land to community groups wanting to set up a community garden. See Appendix 1 for a sample procedure. For larger projects requiring investment on the part of the community group, longer term and more secure leases will be required.
- Councils should set targets for waiting-lists times for allotments.
- Councils could explore a centralised, more transparent, waiting list system for people to register their interest in obtaining an allotment plot. This system would enable Councils to have an instant picture of demand and whether demand is being met. A shared mapping platform could be explored to provide an NI picture of provision and demand.
- Councils should establish a clear point of contact for communities wanting to grow.
- Councils should draw up a community food growing strategy for their area, to help achieve some of these targets.
- Community planning and GIS mapping facilities should be used to make sure that new developments favour areas of greatest disadvantage.
- Groundwork should be done on coordinating this work with other landowning public bodies, potentially through community planning, neighbourhood renewal partnerships or Sustainable Food Place partnerships.
- Investigation should be undertaken into the potential for Local Development Plans and planning guidelines to include specific mention of food growing space.



Clady & District Gardening Friends

Conclusion

The policy trends demonstrated above, coupled by an analysis of the data from Social Farms & Gardens, APSE, and others, has demonstrated that the Covid 19 pandemic has seen a surge in people wanting to grow their own food and meet their own demands. There has been an increase in local food importance and provenance. We now have baseline data of Community Growing provision in Northern Ireland and some actions which can be taken to improve the numbers of growing spaces across NI. In order to increase the numbers of growing spaces provided we now need to have a benchmark standard for community growing provision so that planners, local Councils and public bodies know how much space they need to provide. We, therefore, respectfully, ask Councils in Northern Ireland to consider adopting the standard of 1250sqm per 1000 households, as an official benchmark standard.



Musicians at Grow Community Garden Belfast, community run on Belfast City Council land

The background of the page is a solid dark green. It is decorated with several white, stylized, wavy lines that resemble a stylized 'V' or a series of concentric, flowing curves. One large 'V' shape is positioned on the left side, and another series of wavy lines is in the top right corner. The word 'Appendices' is written in a white, sans-serif font in the lower right area.

Appendices

Appendix I: Stages for a Process for Communities Accessing Land, and Checklist to Use in Stage 2 and 3

The procedure and checklists below include a wide range of considerations to help communities and council officers decide what is important in choosing a suitable piece of land. Not all requirements will apply in all situations.

Stage 1	Community gets in touch with Council: They want to grow. Initial assessment on suitability of group. If appropriate link up with local group.	
Stage 2	Possible training on what is involved in managing a community site, licences and leases and how to run a consultation to get more people involved.	Community group fills in questionnaire for the Council on what they want from a bit of land.
Stage 3	Community suggests sites in their locality that might suit.	Council searches for available public land, with input from community planning to make links with Housing Executive and other public landowners/ potential sites e.g., churches.
Stage 4	Sites screened through filters, e.g., Planning applications, contamination, accessibility, biodiversity, and suitability for community's needs.	
Stage 5	Site advertised in local press to ensure other potentially interested community groups are kept informed.	
Stage 6	Potential sites offered to community, and a decision made.	
Stage 7	Agreement drawn up, which can be any one of a number of arrangements, to fit the group and the council and the site.	
Stage 8	Ongoing support from Council and SF&G etc. in terms of funding applications, capacity building and training etc.	

Council Site Checklist Draft

Site feature	Score			
	Not present	Present to some degree	Present	Don't know
Initial filtering				
Site free from planning constraints				
Site free from contamination				
No important biodiversity concerns on site				
Local community group interested				
Access for all				
On a bus route				
Near a centre of population				
Accessible toilets on site, or public toilets nearby				
Close parking				
Boundaries in place, or on offer				
Site secure (lockable gate)				
Suitability for vegetable growing				
South facing				
Good drainage, no flood risk				
Free from contamination				
Fertile deep soil				
Not shaded				
Security from vandalism/theft				
Free from invasive tree roots				
Access to water				
Check Biodiversity concerns with Biodiversity officer; OK to disrupt present wildlife, e.g. no important species, badger setts etc				
Accessible for vehicles and trailers				
Other				
Trees and hedges can be removed/ planted				

Community group site checklist

Site feature	Level of requirement			
	Essential	Good but not essential	Not needed	Don't know
Access for all				
On a bus route				
Near where particular people live, eg near a care home				
Dropped kerbs between site and houses/drop off point				
Accessible toilets				
Flat or gentle slopes for wheelchair users				
Turning space for wheelchairs and scooters				
Gates/doors wide enough for wheelchair users				
Gate/door catches low enough for wheelchair users				
Smooth paths				
Limited public access - to protect vulnerable users				
Guide dogs accepted				
No access to hazards, eg ponds, roads, steep drops				
Accessible shelter from weather				
Mobile phone reception for emergencies				
Friendly neighbours				
Close parking				
Calm environment, eg sudden loud noises				
Boundaries in place, or on offer				
Site secure (lockable gate)				
Suitability for vegetable growing				
South facing				
Good drainage, no flood risk				
Free from contamination				
Fertile deep soil				
Not shaded				
Not stoney				
Long lease/ permission				
Security from vandalism/theft				
Free from invasive weeds				
Cold store				
Nearby outlet to sell produce				
Free from invasive tree roots				
Sheds for storage or packing				
Reasonable position, eg not too windy or high				

Site feature	Level of requirement			
	Essential	Good but not essential	Not needed	Don't know
Access for all				
Access to water				
Pest free, eg rabbit or deer fencing				
OK to disrupt present wildlife, eg no important species, badger setts etc				
Accessible for vehicles and trailers				
Barrier to prevent spray drift from non-organic neighbours				
Suitability for animals				
Owner has offered permission for animals				
Water				
Sufficient grazing				
No poisonous plants, eg ragwort				
Fencing or hedges in good order				
Tractor and trailer access				
No waterlogging				
Housing for animals, or permission to build				
Convenient nearby access for farmer				
Storage for animal feed				
Nearby source of feed and beddings				
Nearby demand for manure				
Nearby organic abattoir				
Secure site				
Hand washing facilities				
Buildings				
Meeting room				
Barn				
Shed				
Secure storage				
Farmer's house				
Polytunnel				
Toilet				
Shop				
Café				
Shelter from rain				
Caravan				

Site feature	Level of requirement			
	Essential	Good but not essential	Not needed	Don't know
Access for all				
Other				
Permission to camp				
Not overlooked				
Children's play space				
Pond				
'Unkempt' wildlife area				
Trees and hedges can be removed/ planted				
Eligible for organic certification				
Suitable for rainwater harvesting				
Will you ever want to trade from the site				
You can meet requirements of any grants for the site				
Community compost site				

Appendix II: Types of community growing space

Allotments

Allotments are probably the most well-known and understood model of growing in the community. The 1932 Act does not define an allotment. Allotments are usually large areas of land divided up into smaller plots. The site is usually owned by the Local Authority, managed by an Allotment Association and the individual plots are cultivated by one person or family. The fruit and vegetables they grow are for their own consumption and not for sale. In some cases this land will also be used for the growing of ornamental plants, and the keeping of hens, rabbits and bees. The plots are usually of a standard size and having a yearly charge for rent and services such as water provision.

Community Allotments

Where there is a lack of traditional allotments available some communities start groups that find land and create their own allotment site. These community allotments do not have a standard set rules, sizes or services as they are created by the community to meet their own needs.

Community Gardens

Community gardens are usually started by local people who would like to grow food for their own use but also to benefit the wider community. Normally all growing on community gardens is done collaboratively by the volunteers. The idea is to share the work and then the reward. Most community gardens are open to everyone to join and do not have waiting lists.

Community Farms

Community farms involve both growing plants and keeping animals. Often larger and more extensive than community gardens or other community growing spaces. Community farms are working farms, producing meat, eggs etc. but also offer a wide range of volunteering and educational opportunities.

Community Supported Agriculture (CSA)

A social enterprise scheme, based on a direct, active partnership between farmers (or a growing project) and the local community. CSA's normally produce fruit and vegetables that are shared out between its members who pay a monthly fee. CSAs are designed to share the risks and rewards of growing equally between the grower and the consumer.

Community Orchards

As well as providing fruit and a green haven for the local community, many community orchards are excellent wildlife habitats and carbon sinks. Community orchards are growing in popularity as they are easy to establish, low maintenance and can be used for community celebrations such as Apple Day.

Incredible Edible schemes

Many towns in Wales are getting involved in the Incredible Edible movement. Incredible Edible schemes plant fruit and vegetables in public places for everyone to share. The produce is often grown in places with high footfall such as bus stops, town planters and alongside foot paths.

Abundance/fruit harvesting schemes

A growing movement that aims to make better use of neglected local fruit and nut trees by organising volunteers to harvest the fruit. The fruit is normally divided between the owner of the tree, the volunteer pickers and local charities and good causes.

Forest Gardening

A low-maintenance sustainable plant-based food production and agroforestry system based on woodland ecosystems, incorporating fruit and nut trees, shrubs, herbs, vines and perennial vegetables which have yields directly useful to humans. Forest Gardens can be easily be incorporated into public parks or woodlands.

Garden-share schemes

These schemes match and introduce committed, enthusiastic growers with local garden owners who want to see their gardens being used more productively. The agreement between the garden owner and grower usually stipulates when the grower can access the growing plot and the percentage of produce that will be given to the garden owner.

Meanwhile Gardening

The temporary use of land for gardening and food growing. These schemes are particularly popular in areas with lots of unused land awaiting development. They can bring waste land into productive use for a defined period.

Appendix III

Survey of provision of community growing land

- How many allotments do you currently provide? (sites, plots, acreage postcode, name)
- How many community gardens do you currently provide? (Sites, acreage, postcode, name)
- Do you keep waiting lists? What size are the lists? What is the turnover rate of the list?
- Do you have a community growing strategy or policy in place?
- How much do you charge per sqm?
- Do you offer discounted rates for certain groups?
- Have you a page on your website dedicated to community growing?
- Do you have a set target for how many community growing spaces (allotments or community gardens) they wish to have at the end of your current development plan?
- Do you have data on community managed growing space in your area?

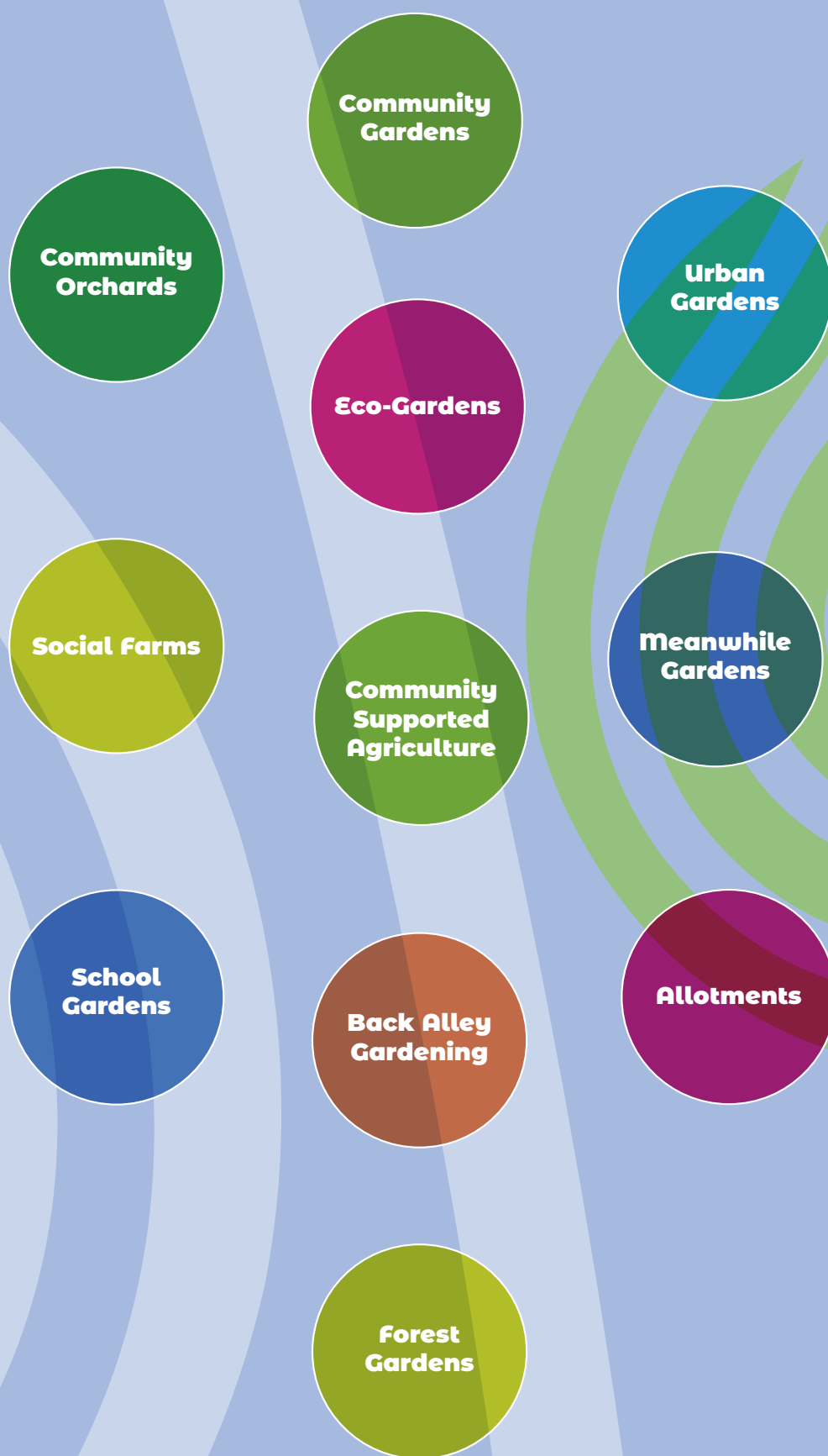
Questions about procedures for communities accessing land

Is there a procedure for coming up with peppercorn lease arrangements, or disposing of assets for less than market value, if there is proven social benefit (a Community Asset Transfer procedure?)?

What are current procedures for community identifying public land for community purpose (Community planning?). How is land for food growing and other community interest currently mapped?

Does the Council have a procedure for procuring (buying) land for communities who want to grow?









Mr Gareth Graham
Democratic Services Assistant
Belfast City Council
Legal and Civic Services Department
City Hall
Belfast BT1 5GS

8 December 2023

Reference No: DFA-TMO-06767-2023
Your Ref: C&CR 12.10.2023 GG/

Dear Mr Graham,

On behalf of the Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr Micheál Martin TD, thank you for your correspondence of 10 November in relation to the decision by the Climate and City Resilience Committee to request that the Department of Foreign Affairs consider including some Northern Ireland landmarks in the design of the new passport. It is also noted that the decision was ratified by the full Council at a meeting on 1 November 2023.

The existing Irish Passport, first issued in 2013, is a vital document of the Irish State and is currently ranked 4th in the Henley Global Passport Index as it provides our citizens with visa-free access to 190 countries. Frequent passport redesigns with enhanced security features are recommended by the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO). Therefore, the upcoming redesign is central to maintaining the integrity and reputation of the Irish Passport.

As part of the redesign process, the Department of Foreign Affairs sought input from the public on aspects of Ireland's diverse natural environment, which will feature as part of the new passport book and card design. This public consultation was conducted for an initial two-week period from 27 June to 11th July. Due to the large take up by the public as well as to allow for more contributions, the consultation period was extended for an additional week and concluded on 19 July.

The animals and vegetation provided in the consultation represented a wide range of species that are indigenous to the island of Ireland. The lists provided were not exhaustive but represent a meaningful sample to capture the island's wide range of fauna and flora. An open response box was also provided for the public to provide alternative suggestions. Overall this consultation provided an opportunity for everyone with an interest in the next passport design, regardless of location, to make relevant suggestions.

This public consultation received over 15,000 replies and is now helping to inform the design considerations for the new passport book. It is hoped that as a result of this process the public will connect with the next passport book and, in doing so, ensure the unique Irish identity is reflected in the next passport.

The results of the consultation are expected to be released before the end of the year and will be publicly available.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'L. Christian', with a horizontal line drawn underneath.

Lorraine Christian
Private Secretary to the Tánaiste and
Minister for Foreign Affairs