



Subject:	Update on the GROW Community Garden
Date:	12 th February 2026
Reporting Officer:	John Tully, Director of Organisational and City Strategy
Contact Officer:	Debbie Caldwell, Belfast Climate Commissioner Brenda Roddy, Climate Project Officer

Restricted Reports

Is this report restricted?

Yes

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No

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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

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☐
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Call-in

Is the decision eligible for Call-in?

Yes

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No

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1.0	Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues
1.1	To provide an update on delivery of the €30,000 Growing and Greening capital programme funded through the Shared Island Fund.
2.0	Recommendation
2.1	<p>The Committee is asked to note:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> I. the installation of facilities to increase the volunteer base and extend the teaching season of a community growing project led by GROW NI at the Waterworks site including a solar energy array, an innovative hot composting system, a shelter for hosting workshops, and a composting toilet; II. that the site is also one of four sites selected to serve as a satellite site to the demonstrator site at Lower Botanic funded through the EU Horizon funded UPSURGE project; III. the support of community partners Wild Belfast, Brink! and Belfast Healthy Cities in project design and management; IV. the consultative processes used for selecting the site and the cross-departmental collaboration and support provided across Council departments to ensure the project was delivered on time; V. the opportunity for sharing knowledge, replicating across other community growing sites with a knowledge sharing event scheduled for February 2026; VI. that delivery is scheduled for completion by the end of February 2026 and that opportunities for utilising any underspend are being pursued; VII. a final report will be brought back to committee in due course.
3.0	Main report
3.1	<p>Background</p> <p>In 2023 Belfast City Council successfully partnered with Cork City Council on a Shared Island Fund bid, working in partnership with Wild Belfast, Brink! and Belfast Healthy Cities. €30,000 was secured from the Shared Island Fund in July 2024 to support community-led, sustainable urban food growing and urban biodiversity enhancements. The project is on schedule for completion by the end of February 2026.</p> <p>Wild Belfast and Belfast Healthy Cities were involved in the programme design, however, competing work priorities limited their ability to drive development and manage the project. With their assistance, a workshop was held involving community partners involved in growing and greening across Belfast to agree the scope of the projects and potential sites for delivery. Belfast Healthy Cities continued to support the project, with a memorandum of understanding clarifying their role. As the funding co-ordinator, Cork City Council advised that the growing and greening elements could be combined and delivered across one project site.</p>
3.2	<p>Programme selection</p> <p>The consultation workshop in February 2025 involved Wild Belfast and Belfast Healthy Cities as well as lead partners on biodiversity, conservation, climate, community growing and Council parks outreach staff. Key recommendations of the event were for: the works to focus</p>

on a single Council owned site for expediency; the project to tap into existing community led growing and greening initiatives, especially ones that work with communities and sites across the city; and the delivery organisation to have a need for capital works and the capacity to host and actively engage the community in additional growing and greening works. It was noted that community groups would be unlikely to have capacity to commission and deliver capital programmes to the required timescale therefore support from the Council's Property and Programmes Team would be required to lead on the commissioning and project management of the capital works. A community growing project led by GROW NI at The Waterworks was ultimately selected as the target site for the works.

3.3

Project development

This project focused on GROW's core site at The Waterworks which serves as a demonstrator, test bed for innovation and learning centre. There is a high level of demand for skill sharing, however, activities at the site were limited to spring and summer due to lack of shelter, light and heat for site users. The seasonality and level of use by individuals and groups had the potential to be extended through:

- **Facilities to increase the volunteer base** – GROW had a steady stream of volunteers but numbers on site and the length of time that they could spend on site were limited by the facilities available. The site is off-grid and the community hub had a minimal electricity supply from old and inefficient solar panels which wasn't adequate for heating, lighting or kitchen facilities. The external shelter was open to the elements on all sides and toilet facilities consisted of a Portaloo which clashed with the group's ecological values. Extensive research was carried out to identify an option for a toilet facility suited to the site, budget restrictions, ethos, proximity to housing and that met with planning and environmental health considerations, with a composting toilet ultimately selected as the best option.
- **Facilities to extend the teaching season** - creation of a shelter would allow for greening and growing related workshops to be extended through to late autumn, winter and early spring, possibly doubling the number of workshops (6 x with 15 people at each) an increase of at least 90 people.
- **Composting demonstrator** – the cost of purchasing compost is currently prohibitive for community growing projects. The use of an innovative hot composting system would reduce this cost, rapidly escalating composting timescales, supporting biodiversity gardening work as well as being a demonstrator composting system for other community projects across Belfast to learn from.

<p>3.4</p> <p>3.5</p> <p>3.6</p>	<p>Project capital items</p> <p>The project aimed to test innovative solutions to problems commonly experienced by the growing and greening group. The following capital investments were selected:</p> <table border="1" data-bbox="276 405 1465 1019"> <thead> <tr> <th>Item</th><th>Cost (TBC)</th></tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Solar energy array - a series of 4 solar panels, an energy inverter and storage battery estimated to quadruple energy generation on site. Complemented with a mobile battery to capture the electricity generated for the lighting and heating of social spaces across the site and the charging of battery power tools.</td><td>£6,650</td></tr> <tr> <td>Community shelter – a wooden, wind and watertight construction. Carefully selected to meet the funder requirements and locally sourced.</td><td>£7,029</td></tr> <tr> <td>Ridan 200L hot composter – with associated maturation boxes.</td><td>£4,992</td></tr> <tr> <td>Composting toilet</td><td>£2,680</td></tr> <tr> <td></td><td>£21, 351 (€24,417)</td></tr> </tbody> </table> <p>Replication and publicity</p> <p>An initial knowledge sharing event is being planned for late February with a demonstration on the use of the hot composter by the supplier and a tour of the site, aimed at Council staff that work with community growing and greening groups. The event will be used to publicise the project, partners and funders. It is hoped that the trialling of innovative solutions to common issues will lead to their roll out across the city.</p> <p>UPSURGE satellite site selection</p> <p>The GROW site is one of four sites selected to serve as a satellite site to the demonstrator site at Lower Botanic funded through the EU Horizon funded UPSURGE project and already fulfils that role as lessons were learned from its use of a solar energy system and a composting toilet. A development programme of approximately £3K aims to complement the Shared Island programme by funding low energy lighting, heating, power tools, watering systems and community event equipment.</p>	Item	Cost (TBC)	Solar energy array - a series of 4 solar panels, an energy inverter and storage battery estimated to quadruple energy generation on site. Complemented with a mobile battery to capture the electricity generated for the lighting and heating of social spaces across the site and the charging of battery power tools.	£6,650	Community shelter – a wooden, wind and watertight construction. Carefully selected to meet the funder requirements and locally sourced.	£7,029	Ridan 200L hot composter – with associated maturation boxes.	£4,992	Composting toilet	£2,680		£21, 351 (€24,417)
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<p>4.0</p>	<p><u>Financial and Resource Implications</u></p> <p>External funding (€30,000) was allocated from the Shared Island Fund. Clarification has been requested from the funders on the opportunity to utilise any underspend on additional relevant capital items on the GROW site.</p>												

	<u>Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment</u> None
5.0	Appendices
	None