

COMMUNITIES LIVING SUSTAINABLY: GROWING AND GREEN SPACE LEARNING SUMMARY

About Communities Living Sustainably

Communities Living Sustainably (CLS) is a £12 million programme funded by the Big Lottery Fund. Twelve communities in England have received up to £1million to help deal with the potential impact of climate change and build the sustainability and resilience of their local community. The programme will run for five years, with these communities providing inspiration to other communities across England and sharing what they have learned with each other.

The Groundwork UK Learning Partnership

The Groundwork UK Learning Partnership is made up of five organisations each with expertise in tackling climate change and helping communities to live more sustainably. The partnership comprises Groundwork UK, The Energy Saving Trust, The Federation of City Farms and Gardens, The New Economics Foundation and Building Research Establishment (BRE). This partnership has been brought together to encourage and support the funded local communities to capture and share any learning from their projects.



Key Findings

This learning summary shares information about the work CLS projects are carrying out around growing and green space up to March 2014.

Food and Growing Activities are proving to be practical, fun and the most accessible part of CLS projects for engaging communities in sustainability issues. All groups report high local interest and good attendance at any food, growing or cooking related events. It confirms that food and growing activities are a good 'hook' for engaging the public with the wider sustainability agenda and projects are using this opportunity to engage their community with wider project activities and local sustainability issues. This learning should encourage funders and policy makers looking to facilitate community engagement and action around sustainability to include a focus on growing activities.

Case study: Green Prosperity, Hull: Working closely with their partner, East Hull Community Farm, the project promotes growing your own food and healthy cooking and eating to the local community through practical gardening activities. 100 people regularly take part in an introduction to gardening sessions, composting and horticulture training, food growing activities and a seed swap event. They also run courses for families, schools and youth clubs on how to harvest, prepare and cook the produce grown on the farm.

Projects are addressing the rise in food poverty and the increase in food bank use through their growing activities. The rise in food poverty has emerged as an important issue for many projects, especially those in areas of high social deprivation. Eleven projects have plans to, or are already involved in food distribution, either through food banks, food co-ops or their own distribution mechanisms. These small scale projects could act as test cases for how to tackle food poverty at a local level and provide an

opportunity to add value to food bank services by providing opportunities to source fresh food locally as well as providing skills to service users in food growing and preparation.

CLS funding is supporting communities to map the available green space in their area and to develop relationships with local authorities and housing associations to facilitate community growing activity. This reinforces the findings of The Policy Exchange 2013 report 'Park Land' which found that a lack of publicly available data about Britain's open spaces is currently proving a barrier to community involvement. CLS provides interesting examples of how open space can be mapped at a localised level and showcases the progress that community growing projects can make with a supportive local authority or housing association. In some cases, projects are using temporary 'Meanwhile' arrangements with landowners, allowing them to bypass complex lease issues. These projects provide practical examples for local authorities and housing associations to replicate.

Case Study: Real Food Wythenshawe. The project has made substantial early progress with their mapping activity. They compiled a list of approximately 70 suitable sites for growing in the local area, owned by Wythenshawe Community Housing Group and listed key staff involved in their management and maintenance. This list was then refined through a series of site visits and meetings with these key staff to identify the most suitable sites for growing fruit and vegetables. The sites were assessed against key criteria including proximity to community groups to manage the site, level of maintenance required, potential for future development and a favourable cost benefit analysis. Twenty key sites were identified and they now plan to match local interested growing groups with these spaces and canvass local residents near to these sites to encourage their involvement. One growing project has been successfully established, a garden site for sufferers and those recovering from cancer.

Partnership working is proving successful and is supporting projects to gain skills, knowledge and the potential to access materials and in kind support. This validates the thinking behind the CLS programme to fund a partnership of organisations in an area. CLS is a predominantly revenue funded programme and it was hoped that groups would use these partnerships to enable them to source capital materials to add value and further progress their activities. There is evidence that groups are finding ways to progress this. Many grow on land supplied by partners from local authorities and housing associations, to prisons and community farms. Projects are also benefiting from the support of knowledgeable local partners around food and growing activity. Half of projects are working with existing growing projects within their area to deliver activity. Practical experience, training and support from other local groups working in this field appears to be one of the most widely used methods of learning for communities.

The CLS Growing and Green Space Network will follow the progress of these projects and continue to publish its findings. To be added to the mailing list please email helen.phillips@groundwork.org.uk

