

Report of Director of City Development

Report to Executive Board

Date: 16 May 2012

Subject: Community Food Growing

Are specific electoral Wards affected? If relevant, name(s) of Ward(s):	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Are there implications for equality and diversity and cohesion and integration?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Is the decision eligible for Call-In?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Does the report contain confidential or exempt information? If relevant, Access to Information Procedure Rule number: Appendix number:	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No

Summary of main issues

1. There are a number of organisations in Leeds who support and undertake food growing, harvest produce or process food for sale. The proposal is to establish a community food growing network that would bring partner organisations together to develop a website and undertake marketing activity.
2. Organisations would include those that provide advice and training on food growing, fund raising and healthy living, plus landowners, local food outlets, schools and local community groups that want to get involved. The business sector would also be invited to get involved as sponsors, to provide discounts on gardening equipment and materials and to provide corporate volunteer support for local food growing projects.
3. The Council would support the network by providing expertise and materials from the plant nursery, developing competitions associated with 'in bloom', endeavouring to bring more land into use for food growing (including in parks) and supporting 'friends of' and community groups to adopt edible flower beds in parks.

Recommendations

4. It is recommended that Executive Board supports the planned development of a community food growing network in Leeds.

1 Purpose of this report

- 1.1 This report outlines proposals to encourage and support food growing in Leeds by establishing a community food growing network.

2 Background information

- 2.2 Community food growing is the cultivation of land by local people, either on their own land or also on land owned by someone else. Community food growing can have benefits for mental health and wellbeing, levels of physical activity and improved access to healthy food in an area. There are also wider environmental and social benefits from engaging local groups in food growing as well as the aesthetic improvement to the public realm when unused space is brought into productive cultivation.
- 2.3 The Council is able to support community food growing as the primary allotment provider with 96 allotment sites throughout the city. For someone new to food growing, taking on an allotment plot can be daunting and in many areas of the city there is a long waiting list. Food growing can however be undertaken with the minimum of space and for example the Back to Front project delivered in partnership with the Council, NHS Leeds and Leeds Metropolitan University has been encouraging people in highly populated urban areas to use their front gardens for food growing.
- 2.4 Food growing can also take place in parks and there is opportunity to grow fruit bushes as well as designate areas of land for food growing. It is however important that any food growing projects are sympathetic to the landscape character of the park. For example BTCV is preparing a feasibility study to examine the potential to return the walled garden at Gotts Park to a productive kitchen garden. A mix of flowers, vegetable and fruit would replace the current life expired rose garden. This would be an inclusive social enterprise project offering a range of volunteering and training opportunities to local residents and disadvantaged people.
- 2.5 There is increasing interest in providing edible flower beds that are not only aesthetically pleasing, but enable fruit and vegetables to be grown, combined in a way that naturally controls weeds and other pests, whilst attracting beneficial insects and birds. Such beds can be incorporated into public displays and combine flowers, herbs and vegetables to support and encourage community food growing.
- 2.6 A good example of this is the Council entry to the RHS Chelsea Flower Show in 2007 entitled 'Scent of a Roman'. This was inspired by archaeological sites in Yorkshire that demonstrate how the Romans incorporated plant species which were introduced to the UK for their culinary and medicinal uses.

- 2.7 There are opportunities to harvest soft fruit that grows naturally on trees and bushes throughout the city, as well as encourage planting of fruit trees. Leeds Urban Harvest for example is a voluntary group that collects fruit and distributes to the community. Damaged fruits are turned into juice, preserves, jams and chutneys.
- 2.8 The food strategy 'Leeds Food Matters' includes the following key aims:
- **Choosing and accessing healthy food:** to improve people's ability to choose and obtain healthy food that meets the nutritional requirements that are right for their stage of life.
 - **Environmental sustainability:** To help and encourage people to choose a healthy diet that promotes sustainability whilst supporting the environment and the local economy.
- 2.9 Community food growing supports both of these aims, and there are a number of organisations in Leeds who support and undertake food growing, harvest produce or process food for sale. This is in addition to traditional allotment provision which remains an important opportunity for the community to grow their own food.

3 Main issues

- 3.1 The proposal is to establish a community food growing network that would bring partner organisations together under one banner to help promote activity in a more effective way. 'Feed Leeds' has been suggested as a suitable name for the network. Organisations would include those that provide advice and training on food growing, fund raising and healthy living, plus landowners, local food outlets, schools and local community groups that want to get involved. The business sector would also be invited to get involved as sponsors, to provide discounts on gardening equipment and materials and to provide corporate volunteer support for local food growing projects.
- 3.2 Creating an overall identity or brand is a fundamental part of ensuring that the network is established, recognised and able to grow in the future. Community food growing makes a positive contribution to several key areas including health, climate change, biodiversity, community engagement and horticulture, and as such it is important that a local food growing network has its own unique identity. One major aspect of this would be to establish an instantly recognisable website to achieve the following:
- Promote all food growing projects in the city.
 - Have a map so people can find out about, and get involved with, food growing projects in their area.
 - Provide other relevant information such as how to find land for food growing, how to access food growing training or funding opportunities for food growing projects.
 - To enable an online forum to exchange ideas, support each other and grow the network.
 - 'feedleeds' to be registered as a domain name.

- To encourage people with other ideas to contribute as the network is developed, to promote more civic enterprise.

3.3 Establishing a website would require funding for website design, creation and development along with input of content. An example of such a website supporting new food growing spaces is Capital Growth (www.capitalgrowth.org), a partnership initiative between London Food Link, the Mayor of London, and the Big Lottery's Local Food Fund. Capital Growth is essentially a campaign to create 2,012 new community food growing spaces across London by the end of 2012. The website enables members to sign up and includes a postcode finder on local growing spaces, training, events, legal advice, support on selling produce, and resources to encourage schools to get involved. There is the potential to develop a website in Leeds modelled on Capital Growth.

3.4 A number of potential partners have already been identified and Parks and Countryside have hosted meetings that brought together key organisations and individuals involved in community food growing across the city. This has enabled a better understanding of what community food growing projects are already out there with a view to complementing the work of Parks and Countryside and gather support to develop a Leeds community food growing network. Participants included representatives from the following organisations or projects who are keen to be involved, with an outline of how they could contribute:

Organisation / Project	Description
Permaculture Association, a national organisation based in Leeds	Would be interested in being involved with, and possibly supporting a community food growing project in the city. The association has received a 4 year grant for their LAND project which has allowed them to set up learning and demonstration projects, one of which is in Leeds.
University of Leeds, School of Geography	Have received research grant funding by the Economic and Social Research Council UK for workshops based around the theme of community food growing that could be used to contribute to the proposed project.
Edible Public Space	A community food growing project in Chapeltown.
Urban Harvest	A voluntary group who aim to harvest otherwise unused fruit from trees around Leeds and process them into jams and juices to be consumed or sold on locally
NHS Leeds - Back2front project	Based in East Leeds it aims to encourage more local food growing, particularly in the front gardens of back to back houses. The project involved a community survey, the creation of 3 demo gardens, the production of a local food growing manual and now has funding to employ a member of staff for the next year to continue developing the project in certain areas of the city.
Groundwork Leeds	Work all over Leeds doing hands-on development of community food growing projects with various organisations such as schools and homeless charities depending on availability of funding.

Organisation / Project	Description
Urbal Fix	Led by a landscape architect based at Leeds Metropolitan University who is currently investigating how community food growth can be implemented within the city. The project looks at how local food growing can benefit large cities like Leeds and is currently developing a mapping system to identify food growing opportunities across the city.
BTCV	Currently has a food growing project at Hollybush in Kirkstall and have previously looked into fundraising to establish a Leeds-wide food growing project.
NHS Leeds	In support of the food strategy and linked with the benefits of physical activity.

3.5 Parks and Countryside Contribution

- 3.5.1 Establishing a Leeds-wide food network may be able to contribute to the clearance of a number of individual allotments and 6 whole allotment sites that are not currently fit for purpose in order to make them useable again. There are however, other ways in which the Council is able to support community food growing.
- 3.5.2 Parks and Countryside intend to create a 'Community Food Growing Officer' post to not only manage allotments but also help co-ordinate the work of the network and generally support and encourage community food growing in parks. This post will be funded from efficiencies within the service and it is hoped that this post can be released and recruited during the summer.
- 3.5.3 'Friends of', community and local charitable groups could work with Parks and Countryside staff to identify potential food growing areas in green spaces. To ensure this works effectively, an application process would be established whereby community groups could be given permission to create and maintain designated areas for food growing. In particular flower beds in community parks and prominent locations within the city centre (e.g. Merrion Street Gardens, Lovell Park) could be planted as edible ornamental beds and new tree plantings will include fruit and nut bearing species.
- 3.5.4 As part of the 'In Bloom' initiative, schools are already encouraged to enter 'design a flowerbed' and 'design a poster' competitions. These competitions are open to all 4 – 14 year old children in Leeds and there were over 3,000 entries in 2011. There is an opportunity to consider another competition that would not only allow children to design an edible bed, but also take part in growing and turning the final design into reality. Whilst the winning entry could be incorporated into a bed and publicly displayed, schools could also more generally be encouraged and supported to set aside small areas of land within the school boundary for food growing.
- 3.5.5 In order to support these initiatives the Council's plant nursery, based at Red Hall is growing fruit and vegetables, (including tomatoes, chillies, lettuce, peas/sweet peas, lettuces, and sweetcorn), fruit bushes and herbs with a view to encouraging more community food growing. This includes a starter pack with seeds, pots,

compost and information on growing, as well as demonstrations on how fruit and vegetables can be combined with non-edible plants to provide aesthetically pleasing displays. It is hoped that schools can be encouraged to adopt this approach to so that children understand where food comes from as well as help promote healthy eating.

3.5.6 There is also the intention to hold a number of master classes to create baskets, planters and containers that incorporate vegetables as well as flowers and herbs. Participants would receive tuition and then be able to leave the basket in the nursery greenhouses to grow on for a few weeks before collecting. At each class participants would be able to choose from a large selection of plants and various styles of planters and containers.

3.5.7 In addition to these contributions from Parks and Countryside, there can be a "One Council" approach with links to other areas of City Development and other Council directorates.

- Asset Management to identify suitable Council land
- Planning Services to look at ways of encouraging private landowners to follow this initiative
- Children's Services to link to schools and youth services
- Adult Social Care to examine potential for involving neighbourhood networks
- ALMOs to encourage food growing in social housing

3.6 Promoting the Community Food Growing Network

3.6.1 Once the network is established and a website in place it will be necessary to ensure the people of Leeds are aware of it and to inspire and enable them to get involved in food growing. Promoting the network could take the form of a campaign including the following:

- A launch event (e.g. linked to a competition to design an edible flower bed for millennium square, or a harvest festival)
- Setting and publicising a target number of new food growing projects/spaces to be established in the city in a given time scale. For example Capital Growth have a target of 2,012 spaces throughout London by the end of 2012.
- Promoting food growing events, workshops and competitions due to be undertaken by network members throughout the year.
- Promotion through press releases, website, and social media.
- Promotion at events, in newsletters, on websites of all the organisations involved in the network.
- Advertising campaign subject to suitable funding.
- Create a community land bank, which would hold land in trust, and rented to people and organisations growing food, with arrangements for governance and finance to be explored further.

- Further private sector involvement through sponsorship, making land available and the possibility of companies committing staff time to these projects through the corporate responsibility programme.

4 Corporate Considerations

4.1 Consultation and Engagement

4.1.8 Developing a community food growing network will encourage voluntary organisations, relevant charities and schools to work together with universities and the Council to encourage wider participation in all sectors of the community. A number of organisations that support this activity have already been invited to participate and it is anticipated that there will be greater support as the network develops.

4.2 Equality and Diversity / Cohesion and Integration

4.2.1 An EDCI screening has been completed and is referenced with the background documents.

4.3 Council policies and City Priorities

4.3.1 Developing a community food growing network will support the following priorities from the City Priority Plan:

- Best city for health and wellbeing, in particular *to make sure that people who are the poorest improve their health the fastest.*
- Best city for business, in particular *get more people involved in the city's cultural opportunities and improve the environment through reduced carbon emissions.*
- Best city for communities, in particular *increase a sense of belonging that builds cohesive and harmonious communities.*

4.3.2 Such a network will also support the priorities in the Council Business Plan *to improve the quality of Leeds' parks.*

4.4 Resources and value for money

4.4.1 The community food growing network will seek to bring together a number of organisations, projects and initiatives. This will maximise the potential for synergies by pooling expertise and enabling funding opportunities to support the development of a website and marketing campaign.

4.5 Legal Implications, Access to Information and Call In

4.5.1 There are no issues relating to confidentiality or access to information with the content of this report. Although the report does not require a decision it is still eligible for call-in.

4.6 Risk Management

4.6.1 There are no significant risks associated with this report.

5 Conclusions

5.1 There are clear benefits to health, education and the environment by increased community food growing and there is an opportunity to develop a network to support and promote this activity.

6 Recommendations

6.1 It is recommended that Executive Board supports the planned development of a community food growing network in Leeds.

7 Background documents¹

7.1 The Leeds Food Strategy 2006 – 2010 'Leeds Food Matters'.

7.2 EDCI Community Food Growing

¹ The background documents listed in this section are available for inspection on request for a period of four years following the date of the relevant meeting. Accordingly this list does not include documents containing exempt or confidential information, or any published works. Requests to inspect any background documents should be submitted to the report author.