

Community Food projects on council land: Opportunities and Risks

Opportunities

Health and wellbeing:

- Provide access to fresh fruit and vegetables
- Provide opportunities for physical exercise

Environment:

- Improvement of external environments otherwise unused and neglected
- Bringing under utilized or low social value publicly owned green space into public use.
- To increase local city based food production, ideally for local consumption within the vicinity of the growing area
- Increase in bio-diversity and environmental sustainability through good land use
- Reduction in carbon emissions through access to sustainably produced local food
- Encouraging spin off sustainability opportunities such as community composting and rain water harvesting

Educational:

- Opportunities for children to learn about food; food growing and environmental issues on their doorstep
- Projects can provide skills and employment training for young adults etc.
- Provision of an educational facility, linking local people - often living in deprived urban areas far removed from the countryside – with the food they eat.

Community Cohesion and Safety:

- Growing projects provide opportunities for all community members to become involved
- Projects bring people out of their homes enabling increased interaction.
- The presence of community members outside their homes increases community safety
- Neglected and hidden spaces which may have attracted unwelcome behaviour can be made more attractive and utilised productively
- Potential for organisation of related social and educational events around the growing area; this might be healthy cooking classes or social events; both binding the community as well as educate on growing and healthy eating.
- To encourage people in urban areas to engage with, and take pride in, their local surroundings.

Corporate

- To forgo works to such areas as local people take on management of given over green space.
- Reputational benefits. Opportunities for media interest in the localised 'grow your own' movement.
- City council seen to work closely with community, facilitating innovative community projects which address sustainability issues.

Risks	Mitigation measures
Project set up	
There is not enough interest among community members to initiate project	Projects will not be supported unless there is enough community interest to suggest it is viable.
There are differing views on how a piece of land should be used i.e. maintained for dog	Full consultation with community members will be undertaken before a project starts and opportunities

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walking, or sports use etc.	created for maximum involvement with local people
The use of the land for food growing constitutes a change of previous use (e.g. from open access to temporary allotment).	According to Local Government Act an advertisement must be run in local press on 2 occasions over 2 weeks to inform local community and allow them to express views.
Proposed land is ear marked for future development e.g. housing, industry, development	Appropriate agreements will be drawn up from the outset. Complete transparency will be required from the landowner on potential future use of sites. Break clauses and time limited leases or licences to be drawn up.
There is restricted access to the land	Council officers to seek resolution with project members to find suitable access routes, but where this is not possible, an alternative site may have to be found.
Soil at the proposed site for the food project may be contaminated.	A risk assessment should be undertaken to assess potential contaminants followed by soil sampling for presence of contamination. Mitigation action taken (e.g. decontamination or use of raised beds only). If contamination cannot be remediated, another site should be found.
The proposed site has a designation in local planning policy which does not permit food growing.	A planning application must be submitted to apply for change of use.
There are costs relating to land preparation e.g. stripping turf and other vegetation and installing services such as irrigation and security fencing. Who provides this?	Consultation between community group and council dept responsible for existing management of land to negotiate approach. Potential for council to assist preparing land in some cases through Cityparks services. Approach reflected in lease.
Project requires funding	Projects will be supported to develop budgets/business plans from the outset and funding either provided or signposted likely funding sources e.g. Food Partnership 'Good Food' small grant scheme, BHCC discretionary grants programme, etc.
Project members seek to erect fencing or temporary structures such as a shed for tool storage.	Development Control (Planning) must be consulted over whether a planning application is necessary. Issues of structures incorporated into licence/lease.
During project operation	
Site attracts vandalism	Proportionate security measures ie fencing etc will be introduced from the outset. Encourage sense of community ownership and 'defensible space'.
There is not enough interest among community members to sustain project	Responsibility will be agreed within the lease/licence with guidelines about restoration of land to original state.
Site becomes untidy and unmanaged	Licence /agreement with the Council will include action in the eventuality site becomes unmanaged
Increase in traffic	Encourage use of sustainable transport where necessary. Site projects where local community can access them by sustainable means.