
Edible York Ad Hoc Scrutiny Committee

22.03.2011

Edible York – Draft Final Report

Background

1. At a meeting of the Scrutiny Management Committee in December 2010 Members agreed to undertake a scrutiny review on the theme of food growing in the City. Councillor D'Agorne had registered the topic and the original Topic Assessment Form is attached at **Annex A** to this report.
2. An Ad Hoc Scrutiny Committee¹ was set up to undertake the review and they agreed the following remit:

Aim

3. To improve how City of York Council supports community food growing

Key Objectives

- i. To develop an information page on City of York Council's website which provides information and links to organisations involved in food growing initiatives
- ii. To identify the barriers to communication between City of York Council and voluntary organisations
- iii. To identify potential areas of land in the city suitable for food growing
- iv. To consider how best to enable and encourage individuals and groups to grow food
- v. To encourage schools to participate in local food growing initiatives

Timetable & Scope

4. The timetable and scope for the review are attached at **Annex B** to this report. For clarity the project excluded the function of allotments in community food growing although it is recognised that there are crossovers between the two areas of food production.

Consultation

5. The following were consulted as part of this scrutiny review:
 - Relevant City of York Council officers
 - Representatives of Edible York

¹ Committee Membership = Councillors D'Agorne (Chair), Funnell, Galvin & Waudby

- Representative from British Trust for Conservation Volunteers (BTCV)
- Representative from St Nicholas Fields
- Representative from Yorkshire Wildlife Trust
- Archbishop's Advisor for the Environment (York Diocese)
- Advanced Skills Teacher for Sustainable Schools

Options

6. Members are asked to consider the information below, which forms the basis of the draft final report. They are asked to inform the Scrutiny Officer of any amendments they may wish to make.

Introduction

7. 'Gardeners who grow their own fruit and vegetables could be the healthiest people. That's the conclusion of Dr Laurence J Trueman, a molecular biologist and biochemist currently working as a consultant to the horticulture industry specialising in the effects of eating fruit and vegetables on human health.'²
8. Various initiatives including the 'Five a Day' scheme have been prominent in the media in recent years in an effort to promote a diet richer in fruit and vegetables than many people eat. One small but effective way of encouraging people to eat more fruit and vegetables would be for the Council to have a more positive support programme in place that allowed people to access clear and concise information on food growing and the opportunities and support available within the City to do this.
9. The Committee were keen to promote the benefits of home grown food, as they believed it to have significant health benefits. Not only will the food you grow taste better it is generally believed to be healthier, especially if picked and eaten fresh from the allotment or garden. Dr Trueman who is quoted on the Royal Horticultural Society website states that 'freshness is a major factor in the effectiveness of fruit and vegetables to fight disease, and the best way of getting the freshest produce is to grow and harvest your own'
10. There were also other benefits from growing your own food;
 - Increased exercise could lead to improved health
 - Financial benefits – it is cheaper to grow your own fruit and vegetables than buy them
 - Improvements to community cohesion and intergenerational working

Information Gathered

11. In order to understand what was already happening across the City the Committee met with representatives of organisations involved with food growing programmes. The Committee learned what each organisation was

² [The Royal Horticultural Society Website](#)

currently doing. An overview of what each organisation is doing is summarised below:

Yorkshire Wildlife Trust (YWT)

12. The YWT did not currently have any food growing projects within the City. They had been delivering the Running Wild project, which provided safe, constructive and fun outdoor activities for young people aged 8-18 living in York. The clubs currently met on evenings, weekends and school holidays at different green sites across York. Young people could come along and get involved with practical projects to improve their site, play environmental games, produce outdoor artwork, take part in practical conservation tasks and much more. However funding for this project was due to finish in March 2011 and YWT were currently looking at ways to extend this.
13. YWT had recently submitted a grant application to deliver the 'Dig In' project in York. This is a Big Lottery funded project that will support community groups to grow food with an emphasis on supporting young people and families. Ten initial sites within play areas across the City had been agreed with the Parks & Open Spaces Department at City of York Council. YWT will shortly know if their bid has been successful and if so, they plan to start the project in September 2011.

St Nicholas Fields & York Rotters

14. St Nicholas Fields is York's leading organisation promoting sustainable living. From their base at York Environment Centre they provide inspiration, advice, practical examples and services to enable people in York and beyond to move towards a sustainable future. They also run various courses on growing your own food.
15. St Nicholas Fields is also involved with a project called 'Bearing Fruit'. The project is funded by Ecominds and volunteers can become involved with planning, designing, planting and developing a community orchard at the St Nicholas Fields Nature Reserve. In the future they will be looking at the possibility of developing a master gardener scheme (there are currently pilot schemes in London and there is potential to bring this to York as well).
16. York Rotters is a partnership project between St Nicholas Fields & City of York Council, which promotes home composting. Amongst many other things, they run occasional courses on how to grow your own vegetables using your own homemade compost.

Diocese of York

17. The Archbishop's Advisor for the Environment explained that throughout 2011 the Diocese would be focusing on ways they could help the environment. Whilst they were not going to be focussing on home food growing as one of their objectives they were keen to encourage churches within the Diocese to recognise the importance of the environment as a whole. Several events were planned with a 'Big Environment Celebration' being held on 28th May in York Minster.

18. Members also learned that the Oxford Diocese had been in contact with an initiative called [Grow Zones](#) and that this may be something that could be emulated in York. Grow Zones is a community project where a community team could club together to share skills, tools and produce to eliminate food miles and turn gardens over to permaculture. The project helps people to begin growing their own food.

British Trust for Conservation Volunteers (BTCV)

19. The main, current initiative of BTCV is the 'Carbon Army'. This initiative encourages people to grow their own food. BTCV have produced a guide packed with tips and advice on food growing and this is available on their [website](#). The Carbon Army initiative concentrates on several different themes and at the moment the focus is on tree planting (including fruit and nut trees).
20. BTCV have food growing projects running all over the country, have built raised beds for food growing in schools and generally work with schools and other organisations in relation to food growing in all ways. They have realised that schools sometimes find it difficult to sustain their food growing projects through long holiday periods and curriculum demands. They are looking at ways in which their volunteers could help to support York schools and sustain their projects through these times.
21. They have recently put in a local bid for lottery funding to run a 'York Get growing' project. They should know whether their bid has been successful by May 2011. If so then the project is scheduled to run for three years and as part of this there are plans to develop a mentor's scheme to support community food growers in the City.
22. They also have plans to run courses in food growing that are open to the public and have a target to grow food within 20 different Community sites within York. In addition to this they are involved in running several allotments in the City. In addition to they plan to support several allotment plot holders in the City

Edible York

23. Edible York was officially launched in November 2010. Its focus is on growing food, not only at home and on allotments but on public land as well. They currently support a network of food growing projects across York with an aim to make it possible for everyone in York to grow, cook and eat their own food.
24. Edible York has been awarded lottery funding to create five community beds for food growing across the city and they are committed to creating these over the course of the next year. To date they have created two public beds. Their next and possibly biggest challenge is to effectively engage communities and get them involved in growing their own food.
25. In addition to this Edible York also runs an initiative called Abundance, which is concerned with harvesting and distribution of fruit from trees across the city.

Other

26. The Committee were aware of other initiatives within the city such as the 'FiveThousand' project, which provided resources to unemployed people to grow their own produce. However, due to the relatively tight timescales of this review the Committee were unable to hear directly from every organisation that was involved with food growing within the City.

Key Points that emerged during the Review

27. During discussions with the above organisations and with Council Officers the Committee considered the following points in relation to each key objective of this review:

First Key Objective

To develop an information page on City of York Council's website which provides information and links to organisations involved in food growing initiatives

28. The overall aim of this review was to improve how City of York Council supported community food growing. The Committee looked at the current relevant pages of the Council's website. These can be accessed via the link below:

http://www.york.gov.uk/environment/Parks_and_open_spaces/

29. After consideration of the current information provided on the Council's website and discussions with Council Officers and representatives of the various food growing organisations within the City; it became clear that as there were so many different projects going on within the City, all being run by different organisations, it would be useful if there could be a single place from which to access information about them all.
30. Currently the relevant web pages were updated by the Head of Parks and Open Spaces and his team and there did not seem any reason to change this. However the Committee felt that the website could provide a lot more information. At the moment on accessing the Parks and Open Spaces web pages there was an 'Allotments' section. The Committee suggested that this be changed to 'Food Growing & Allotments' and within this section to build in a further menu offering the following options:
 - Allotments
 - Food Growing
 - School Food Growing Projects
31. Each of the above themes could then have its own information page. Within these pages there would be scope to add in links to relevant partner organisations within the city; for example, within the 'Food Growing' section there could be links to the Edible York website and the BTCV website. The section could also include links to the websites of national organisations such

as the Royal Horticultural Society and National Vegetable Society amongst others.

32. The overarching aim of the suggested changes to the website being that the City of York Council's website would become the first place that people would go to access information about all aspects of food growing, including links to websites (both local and national) offering advice on food growing, preparation of home grown food and cooking of home grown food. However, Members of the Committee realised that the website should not become over complicated or too wordy in itself and suggested that there was only a short paragraph connected with each external link. The bulk of the information provided would be within the links on each individual organisation's own website. The content of the information behind the links being the responsibility of each individual organisation and not the Council.

Second Key Objective

To identify the barriers to communication between City of York Council and Voluntary Organisations

33. During the course of the review Members discussed the barriers to communication with various voluntary organisations and Council officers. The Committee identified some key points, which are detailed in the paragraphs below.
34. There was a need for a 'one stop' information point that could provide access to everything related to food growing within the city. There were an enormous amount of 'food growing' initiatives and projects happening across York and it was important that information about all of these was shared. It was learned that the idea of a 'green portal' had been gathering momentum for some time. This was envisaged to be a 'one stop' website for all things green (not just home food growing information). Currently there was no known person or organisation that had the time or resources to spend on such a project, especially if it were run on a voluntary basis. The Committee felt that any such portal would need to be run independently and wouldn't sit within Council responsibilities.
35. However the Committee were positive about the benefits of such a portal and felt that there would be potential in asking students at one of the city's universities to volunteer to take this on as a project. Alternatively they suggested the possibility of several voluntary organisations jointly putting together a bid for funding to get this project off the ground. Any initiative would clearly need to be co-ordinated by an organisation that could provide the drive, resource and commitment to see the project through.
36. Further discussions were had around the possibilities of setting up a more general database to store information about all of the initiatives and organisations involved with food growing. However, it again became apparent that maintaining such a database and keeping it up to date would require an enormous amount of time and resource that neither the Council nor the voluntary organisations had. However improvements to the relevant pages on the Council's website was seen to be fundamental (and achievable within

existing resources) to successfully sharing information about all food growing initiatives and projects happening across the city [see information under First Key Objective (paragraphs 27 to 31 refer)]

37. The Committee believed that there was a need to improve communication around the opportunities for food growing within the city. One easy way of doing this would be to use Council publications such as Your City, Your Ward, the Housing Tenants Newsletter and the Allotments Newsletter to provide encouragement to residents to grow their own food as well as promoting food growing opportunities within the city.
38. Discussions were also had around using Council land for food growing. There appeared to be a general belief amongst the voluntary sector and the Committee that there were difficulties involved with using Council land for growing food. However, the Head of Parks & Open Spaces was able to clarify that a draft licence for using Council land for food growing had recently been approved by both Property Services and Legal Services and this was now ready for use. In light of this the Committee agreed that officers within the Council and members of the public needed to be made aware that this was the case and this needed to be better communicated.

Third Key Objective

To identify potential areas of land in the city suitable for food growing

39. The Committee was informed that Parks & Open Spaces were responsible for over 200 sites within the city; many would be suitable for food growing. There were also numerous other sites owned by Parish and Town Councils, schools and highway verges, which offer potential. The Parks & Open Spaces Team were responsible for identifying sites and would consider any specific sites that Members may wish to suggest were suitable for food growing.
40. Community Groups could contact the Local Authority about these sites via the Contact Centre or by contacting the Parks & Open Spaces Team. This is something that, at no further cost, could be emphasised by using the newly improved web pages.

Fourth Key Objective

To consider how best to enable and encourage individuals and groups to grow food

41. As mentioned previously one way of enabling and encouraging both groups and individuals to grow their own food would be through the use of existing Council publications. These could be used to promote the basic idea of food growing at a local level and to raise awareness about food growing opportunities within the city.
42. There was scope to explore initiatives around garden share but Members realised that there could be potential legal problems if the gardens being used were attached to Council Housing. However, initially Council publications could be used to encourage communities/streets to undertake growing projects

together especially in terms of clearing overgrown gardens and communally growing food in them.

43. Discussions established that encouraging and supporting residents to work at a pace they could cope with was very important. It was important that residents and groups did not feel overwhelmed and that support was available to help them. Initially overgrown gardens and allotments could appear daunting. Recruiting volunteer mentors from amongst existing allotment tenants and associations to help clear overgrown plots would be beneficial, as would the continued support mentors could provide. The Head of Parks & Open Spaces has confirmed that this could be achieved at nil cost and the regular Allotments Newsletter could be used to advertise for volunteers to become mentors. In addition to this the Brunswick Organic Nursery have indicated that they would be happy to help clear overgrown plots.
44. Members of the Committee were keen to give all residents the opportunity to grow their own food, whether individually or as part of a group. They believed that a lack of tools may be a barrier to some people or groups becoming involved with food growing initiatives and therefore suggested that the Household Waste Depot at Hazel Court look at the possibility of setting up a collection point for garden tools that were being disposed of. It was envisaged that these tools could be collected from Hazel Court on a regular basis by an organisation such as the Community Furniture Store and sold on at a low cost. Initial discussions between the Waste Management Officer and the Scrutiny Officer indicated that this is possible, however they would not be able to store tools for very long and it would be unlikely that the scheme could be rolled out across all three household waste sites as resources would probably not be available. Any scheme that was successfully implemented could also be promoted and advertised within existing Council publications and on the Council's website.
45. In addition to this the Committee learned that CYC buildings such as those in Hull Road Park could be made available for use for community tool storage. Community groups could be charged a peppercorn rent and this would also include insurance. The Head of Parks and Open Spaces has confirmed that there would be no additional costs or resource requirements if this were implemented.
46. Further discussion led to the Committee wishing to promote partnership working between City of York Council and the voluntary sector to enable them to achieve their ambitions. It was also suggested that the voluntary sector might wish to work together more, especially in terms of seeking external funding. Some Members of the Committee believed that funding bids might be more successful if the voluntary sector worked in a more strategic way (i.e. one large strategic bid may be more favourable than lots of small & seemingly uncoordinated smaller bids)

Fifth Key Objective

To encourage schools to participate in local food growing initiatives

47. The Scrutiny Committee met with the Advanced Skills Teacher (AST) for Sustainable Schools. The role of the AST is to advise schools on how to be sustainable. There are eight different themes (or doorways) running through the sustainable schools agenda of which food growing is one. Currently approximately 40% of York's schools are involved in food growing projects. It is hoped that this will gradually increase. Schools also have the potential to undertake larger food growing projects that could involve the community as a whole, such as the project being undertaken at Burnholme School. They have set up small community plots on school land for rent at £20 per year. The plots are available to all local residents and not just parents who have children at the school.
48. The AST acts as a co-ordinator between the schools and aims to bring cohesion to some of the food growing programmes that are already in place. The role looks at elements such as bringing plant and vegetable growing into science lessons so that children begin to not only understand the practical side of planting and growing but the scientific side as well. More work needed to be done to get schools to commit to food growing projects and the AST played an important part in supporting them to do this. Teachers needed to be motivated to undertake these projects with the children. In the long term the role was about ensuring that the sustainability agenda remained as part of the school curriculum.
49. The AST also convenes a group called York Edible Schools (YES) which brings together members of various groups already involved in school growing projects, including St Nicholas Fields, York Rotters, Five Thousand, Low Moor Community Kids Allotment and the council's allotments officer. YES and Edible York have been working together to look at ways of supporting schools to grow fruit and vegetables in their school grounds. The different members of the group bring different experiences and expertise. Since the advent of this group it has been easier for the AST to involve and co-ordinate all the different parties involved.
50. One of the main barriers to food growing in schools was the long holiday periods, especially over the summer months when plants needed regular watering. BTCV were currently looking at ways that they could help schools with this and were looking at asking volunteers to look after the projects outside of school term time. There were also ways in which families could get involved in looking after the food growing projects during holiday periods by volunteering to get involved.
51. The Committee discussed ways in which the Council could support the AST and food growing projects within schools. Again one way would be to make use of existing CYC publications, in particular the Allotments Newsletter. It would be possible to place an advert in the Allotments Newsletter asking for existing tenants to become mentors to support school food growing projects and provide and share their expertise with the teachers and children.

52. The AST post was a one-day a week post and was currently financed for the next financial year. The Committee were aware of the good work and progress that was achieved through this role and wanted to see guaranteed funding for the post to continue. This would allow for the co-ordinated expansion of the food growing agenda within schools.
53. The Committee were aware that food growing was only one strand of eight within the sustainable schools agenda. However they believed very strongly in the benefits to children of learning how to grow their own food, learning where food comes from and learning gardening skills. To this end they would like to see a commitment from CYC to prioritise the food-growing element of the sustainable schools agenda within the AST role.

Conclusion/Key Findings

54. The Scrutiny Committee was very supportive of the various food growing initiatives happening within the city. Alongside these they would also wish to see an increase in people growing food within their own garden, in allotments and on suitable Council owned plots of land. They realised it was important for the Council to promote food growing in anyway possible and the recommendations arising from the review suggest various ways in which this should happen.
55. The Committee cannot stress enough the importance of encouraging children and their families to become involved in food growing and the need to enable this by removing as many barriers as possible. They felt it was important to use all methods available to encourage children to become involved in growing their own food. They believed in the importance of actively involving schools in food growing and would like to see every school in the city have some form of food growing programme, activity or allotment.
56. The AST played a vital role in supporting the sustainable schools agenda, particularly in relation to supporting food-growing projects within the city's schools. Members of the Committee felt that funding for this role should continue so that the good work already undertaken could be built upon. The main focus of this role should also be on supporting and encouraging food-growing projects within schools.
57. The Committee noted that some of the barriers to growing food on Council land appeared to have been removed. The introduction of a licence enabling individuals and community groups to apply to grow food on Council Land was a step in the right direction. However, this was not widely known and as such should be promoted both inside the Council and out.
58. After taking all the information received into consideration the scrutiny committee have made the following recommendations:
59. **Recommendation 1** – That a collection point be established at the Hazel Court Household Waste Site for garden tools and Council officers investigate and implement a suitable system for collection, storage and distribution of the tools (including exploring the possibility of working with the Community

Furniture Store to distribute these). This should be for a trial period of 6 months and if successful then permanently implemented. (*Fourth key objective*)

60. **Recommendation 2** – That the Council website be updated to include more and clearer information about food growing opportunities, food growing information and links to voluntary sector organisations. (*First key objective*)
61. **Recommendation 3** – That the Council actively promotes local food growing by providing information and encouragement by using:
 - The Council’s website
 - Existing publications (Your Ward, Your City, Allotments Newsletter, Housing Tenants Newsletter)In order to provide information to residents on food growing opportunities as well as to generally promote the food growing agenda within the city. (*Overall aim and fourth key objective*)
62. **Recommendation 4** – That the Head of Parks & Open Spaces clarifies and co-ordinates the provision of information (internally & externally) in relation to food growing on City of York Council land. (*Second key objective*)
63. **Recommendation 5** – That a register of mentors be set up through advertising in the Allotments News for mentors for schools, community groups and individuals. (*Fourth & fifth key objectives*)
64. **Recommendation 6** – That City of York Council should encourage partnership working with the voluntary sector to help deliver their ambitions. (*Overall aim and second key objective*)
65. **Recommendation 7** – That the Schools Forum be asked to continue funding the Advanced Skills Teacher post that supports the sustainable schools agenda. The focus of the post should be on the food-growing strand of the sustainable schools agenda. (*Fifth key objective*)

Corporate Strategy 2009/2012

66. This topic is linked to the ‘Sustainable City’ aspect of the Corporate Strategy 2009/2012:

‘We aim to be clean and green, reducing our impact on the environment while maintaining York’s special qualities and enabling the city and its communities to grow and thrive.’

Analysis

67. Members are asked to consider the information presented in the draft final report. They are asked to give careful consideration to ensuring that all recommendations are fully evidenced within the body of the report and all points that they would like to see included have been addressed.

Implications

68. Recommendation 1 (*establishing a tool collection point*) – There are unlikely to be any financial implications associated with this however there may be resource implications should this be rolled out to all three household waste sites rather than just Hazel Court. The finance officer has been contacted and any updates to this implication will be reported to Members at the meeting on 22nd March 2011.
69. Recommendation 2 (*website improvements*) - The Head of Parks and Open Spaces has indicated that this could be implemented within existing resources.
70. Recommendation 3 (*promoting food growing*) - The Head of Parks and Open Spaces has indicated that this could be implemented within existing resources.
71. Recommendation 4 (*provision of information*) - The Head of Parks and Open Spaces has indicated that this could be implemented within existing resources.
72. Recommendation 5 (*Register of mentors*) - The Head of Parks and Open Spaces has indicated that this could be implemented within existing resources.
73. Recommendation 6 (*Partnership working*)– There may well be financial implications associated with partnership working. These will be assessed in accordance with financial regulations as and when they arise.
74. Recommendation 7 (*AST teacher*)

Financial - The funding for Advanced Skills Teachers (AST) forms part of the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG). The Schools Forum reviews the allocation of this funding annually and the Forum has decided to allocate funding to continue the AST programme during 2011/12.

The deployment of ASTs is reviewed annually and aligned to school improvement priorities outlined in the School Improvement service plan. An AST role has been aligned to support our Sustainable Schools Strategy and action plan and this work will continue during 2011/12.

The AST for sustainable schools is currently funded to do outreach work as an AST for one day a week and this funding includes a payment to the school to cover the differential between the substantive role as a teacher at a local primary school and the additional allowance as an AST. The AST role is primarily to support schools with developing their work on Education for Sustainable Development, particularly with regards to supporting the development of learning, teaching and the curriculum. The school also receives funding to cover the costs of supply cover for the outreach day. The total annual cost of the AST is estimated at £9,240 for 2011/12.

The overall level of the DSG is not yet known for 2012/13 and the Schools Forum will need to review the funding of AST roles, along with all other DSG priorities as part of the 2011/12 budget setting and local decision making process.

Other – There are eight strands that make up the sustainable schools agenda, of which food growing is one element. The Council’s Sustainability Officer has been contacted and Members will be provided with her comments at the meeting on 22nd March 2011.

75. There are no known other (property, legal, equalities) implications associated with the recommendations arising from this review.

Risk Management

76. There are no direct risks associated with the recommendations arising from this review however there may be longer term risks associated with sustainability and the Council’s sustainability officer is currently being consulted on these.

Recommendations

77. Members are asked to make any amendments to the draft final report prior to it being presented to the Scrutiny Management Committee and then the Executive.

Reason: To complete this scrutiny review.

Contact Details

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Final Draft Report ✓
Approved

Date 15.03.2011

Specialist Implication Officers

Wards Affected:

All ✓

For further information please contact the author of the report

Background Papers:

None

Annexes (online only)

Annex A Topic Assessment Form
Annex B Timetable & Scope for the Review