

Member champion: Community Food Growing Annual report 2015/2016

It has been a busy year and much progress has been made on moving towards a more coordinated view of growing in the city. Like last year much of my time has been spent focussing on improving allotments. I have myself attended various events across the city promoting food sustainability and community initiatives and have been on numerous sites visits outside Cardiff to learn how others promote allotments and growing. The most important lesson I have learnt on all my visits is that the more Councils engage with and enable individual growing communities to self regulate the better those communities fare. Conversely where Councils seek to keep control of growing and allotments those growing communities stagnate.

I am happy to report that relations between allotment holders and the Council are amicable and cooperative after the work done last year to foster deeper ties. Cardiff Allotment Holders Association (CAHA) the group which advocates for allotment sites in Cardiff, have vastly increased their capacity to mediate relations going forward. They have constituted themselves with charitable status to enable them to better access grants to aid and promote growing in the city. New working groups have been set up to deal with Water, Finances and Brick cubicles which have yielded very positive (if shocking) results. The Water group for instance initiated by myself last year and now mediated by CAHA discovered a simple and effective way to predict water leaks on allotment sites; this resulted in the discovery of water leaks costing in excess of £20,000 per year in wasted water. It was revealed that for at least the last 3-5 years the vast majority of the monies allocated for general maintenance have had to be diverted to pay water bills and make major repairs to the aging water infrastructure on sites. It was clear early on that alternatives to mains water needed to be sought soon to decrease wasted money and if the realisation of long term investment in other areas of allotment infrastructure was to be undertaken. To this end CAHA and the Water Committee have entered into a dialogue with Welsh Water to access grant funding to pilot new ways of providing water to allotment sites, it is hoped a pilot can be rolled out early next year with more coming on line as funding and suitability is determined.

The collaborative approach described above is exactly what I envisioned was needed to improve growing and allotments; many varied parties have contributed to its successful start however one name above all comes to mind which I need to thank here; Francis Mullins. Throughout the last two years Francis has been relentless in producing reports, gathering evidence and acting as critical friend to both the Council and CAHA, without his input little could have been achieved in such a short space of time and my congratulations and thanks go out to him.

The challenge now of course is to further expand on the role that collaboration plays in the management of allotments and promotion of growing. CAHA have already made some steps towards this with the drawing up of a draft plan for self-regulation of allotments in Cardiff. This ambitious plan which could see the management of allotments transferred to CAHA on a long term lease would follow model practice that has already been implemented in many core cities. The benefits are clear; with

the Council better able to focus on the strategic planning of new and expanded growing sites whilst assured that accountable and robust management of the day to day maintenance of allotments is taken care of. Where these kinds of arrangements have been made in other towns and cities in the UK, growing and in particular allotment growing flourishes, as grants and volunteer hours, which are not able to be accessed by Councils, flow into the communities.

As I enter my third year as Champion I look forward to realising my goal of more connected growing in our city, CAHA and individual allotment associations have already begun to explore these connections, with site visits occurring across the city and wider region. Creation of new community gardens focussed on refugees and the homeless are in the initial stages and the knowledge gained and networks created will begin to open up growing to those harder to reach communities. In time I am confident that we can and will see a sharing of excess produce right across our city so that no edible produce is wasted that could feed a hungry mouth.

Diolch/ Thank you

Councillor/ Cynghorydd Gareth Holden
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