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**To: Scrutiny Coordination Committee**

**Date: 5 February 2026**

**Subject: Community Growing Sites in Coventry**

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## 1 Purpose of the Note

1.1 Further to a Council motion in December 2025, this note sets out plans to enable Coventry residents and community groups to access Council-owned land that is underutilised for food growing and wildlife gardening. This will be subject to Cabinet Member approval.

## 2 Recommendations

2.1 It is proposed that Scrutiny Coordination Committee:

- 1) Endorse the proposal to be taken forward to Cabinet Member for formal approval in March 2026.
- 2) Provide feedback to help assist in drafting the policy and guidance.
- 3) Support with engaging communities at a ward level to encourage uptake.

## 3 Overview

3.1 Coventry's Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan set out an ambitious vision for the city which will help to improve the lives of people that live and work here, alongside supporting nature's recovery.

3.2 One of the initiatives within the Strategy is focused on the development of a network of community growing sites across the city for residents to help create and enjoy. The scheme supports residents and community groups to take ownership of their local environment through maintaining and improving the open areas for the benefit of the local community. This report focuses on bringing forward opportunities for residents to utilise Council-owned land which is disused or underutilised for community growing sites, to support food growing and wildlife. This will deliver significant benefits including:

- Health and wellbeing: encouraging physical activity in fresh air, improved wellbeing by spending more time in green space, increasing locally grown fruit and vegetable consumption
- Social cohesion and community: fostering stronger relationships within communities

- Environmental: increasing and enhancing local green spaces and biodiversity, Climate resilience: producing locally grown food for communities to help increase food security;
- Education and skills: providing an opportunity for residents to learn new skills about creating sustainable growing spaces, horticulture, composting and caring for wildlife
- Pride: this will help to engender local pride

3.3 Nationally, there is a campaign for government to adopt the principle of a 'Right to Grow' across the UK due to the benefits for people and wildlife. In Coventry we have already started doing this through 'Coventry Grows', a project which started in 2024 through the city's Climate Change Board to develop a number of pilot community growing sites in some of the city's most green-deprived areas, backed by funding from E.ON through the city's Strategic Energy Partnership. The Council would like to extend this opportunity to communities across the city who are interested in setting up community growing areas in their neighbourhood, through offering Council-owned underused sites, through introducing a new policy and guidance to support this.

3.4 This is a brilliant opportunity to help tackle inequalities in access to green space across the city and provides a new opportunity to bring people and communities together.

3.5 In Coventry we have already started community growing pilots through 'Coventry Grows', a project which started in 2024 through the city's Climate Change Board to develop a number of pilot community growing sites in some of the city's most green-deprived areas, backed by funding from E.ON through the city's Strategic Energy Partnership.

3.6 The pilot projects have seen the first site established in Stoke Heath, with further sites being developed in Hillfields, Foleshill and Tile Hill and 58 community volunteers involved over the last 12 months. The projects have been led by the Council, with support from Grapevine to bring new community growing groups together and Garden Organic to provide training to residents – with gardening novices very much encouraged to get involved. The pilot projects have benefitted from funding to support site set up, tools, equipment and seeds. The Council would like to extend this opportunity to people and communities across the city who are interested in setting up community growing areas in their neighbourhood, through offering Council-owned underused land.

3.7 Proposed planting could be good, wildflowers, native plants or fruit trees. This could include planting areas of mown grass on streets, taking on plots of land for food growing and nature gardens, using Council-owned planters, as well as potentially planting orchards and hedgerows in some of our parks and open spaces, subject to restrictions and covenants. A policy and process will be in place to provide guidance and support communities to ensure what is planted is appropriate for the location, which will include consultation with nearby residents.

3.8 The Council has worked with the Coventry Food Network in securing the national recognition to obtain the status as a 'Sustainable Food Place'. This recognises the City's partnership making healthy and sustainable food a defining characteristic of where people live, which includes building public awareness, active food citizenship

and local good food movement, with healthy food for all. Expanding community growing sites across the city will help to support this and help benefit communities if produce can be distributed via the Food Network and local networks where this is a surplus.

3.9 The Council's Green Skills Strategy identifies nature conservation, and land-based skills including horticulture as areas that need to be strengthened. This initiative will help support this, helping to provide more practical opportunities for residents to develop and maintain growing spaces. Programmes such as Coventry's Nature Towns and Cities Green for All will provide resources to support residents with training and skills from organisations including Garden Organic and Warwickshire Wildlife Trust, alongside the opportunity for groups to learn from more experienced gardeners in their areas.

#### **4 The Coventry Growing Sites Policy**

4.1 This policy will enable the Council to extend the opportunity to all communities across the city to access disused or underused Council land for community growing and nature gardening. This builds on the Coventry Grows pilot and existing allotment network and creates a significant opportunity to improve the quality and extent of green space across the city for the benefit of people and nature.

4.2 In order to facilitate community growing across the city, a new policy will be introduced where residents will be able to apply to use Council-owned land for community growing sites. The Council will provide guidance in terms of available sites through an online map, alongside growing advice and any requirements to support site set up such as surveys. Community growing sites will be regulated, with a legal agreement between the Council and residents to enable them to use the land for growing. It is proposed that the land will be available for use on a rolling annual basis, this allows for the agreement to be terminated should the land be required for other purposes in the future or if the project comes to an end.

4.3 Whilst plans at this stage will focus on Council-owned land, there is an opportunity to work with other landowners across the city as part of the initiative. This could include partners such as social housing provider Citizen who have expressed an interest, alongside the Canal and River Trust where there is potential land that could be used adjacent to the canal.

4.4 It is proposed that there is dedicated resource allocated to coordinating the community growing sites, who will be able to help simplify the process for communities by coordinating with Council services that will need to be consulted on sites, which includes Parks and Open Spaces, Climate Change & Sustainability, Sports, Education, Ecology, Drainage, Highways, Streetpride, Legal, Property, Insurance and Finance amongst others. The resource can also help to signpost to funding opportunities, provide guidance and help build a community growing network across the city so that groups can learn from each other. The Council will help to support groups by offering a tool library.

#### **5 Delivery Plan**

5.1 It is proposed that the Citywide Community Growing policy will be drawn up, agreed and implemented Spring 2026. It will be led by the Climate Change and Sustainability Team, with input from other service areas as appropriate. The

Climate Change and Sustainability Team will oversee delivery, with monitoring arrangements of sites to be agreed.

- 5.2 £100k is sought to support the delivery of the programme, which includes the programme coordinator role and recharge costs to other service areas for their time to support applications, which includes developing legal agreements, checking land ownership documents and undertaking surveys (depending on the number of sites and the uptake from the community). It is envisaged that successful applicants for community growing sites will pay a small fee to support some of these costs – this is in line with other local authorities who are already doing this. There is the potential to introduce reduced fees for GoCV+ members to help make the scheme accessible to all.
- 5.3 It is recognised that the Coventry Grows pilot has also provided funding to cover some of the practical elements of setting up community gardens, including tools, storage, seeds etc, alongside training. It is not proposed that the citywide Community Growing initiative would receive any additional funding for these activities as we don't have budget to support all groups at this time. However, the Council is working to try and secure more sponsorship from the private sector alongside public sector grants and can also work with community organisations to support grant applications to help raise funds to support site activities.
- 5.4 The Nature Towns and Cities Green for All programme, which the Council is leading and secured just under £1m to deliver, will help to support with community engagement, mapping sites and training.

## **6 Health Inequalities Impact**

- 6.1 The Coventry Grows pilot project sites were selected from a long list of potential sites to target green deprived neighbourhoods in Coventry- providing opportunities for residents who have minimal access to green space to adopt green spaces and manage them for their communities. The new policy would also look to encourage and prioritise applications from green deprived areas of Coventry where possible.
- 6.2 Community growing has many health and wellbeing benefits, increasing time spent doing physical activity in green space, as well as increasing access to fresh locally grown fruit and vegetables. Increasing the number and quality of green spaces in urban areas of the city will help to improve air quality for communities as well as working to reduce the urban heat island effect and its impacts, which will disproportionately impact Coventry's more deprived communities.
- 6.3 Participating in a community growing site also helps to foster stronger relationships and cohesion within communities and support residents to learn new skills and knowledge in growing and caring for spaces for wildlife. This can help improve well being and quality of life as well as provide key skills that could help as a route to employment.

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