
To: Business, Economy and Enterprise Scrutiny Board

Date: 23 September 2026

Cabinet Portfolio: Cabinet Member for Jobs, Regeneration and Climate Change

Subject: Community Growing Sites in Coventry

1 Purpose of the Note

- 1.1 Further to a Council motion in December 2025 and Cabinet Member approval in March 2026, this note provides an update on the Council's plans to enable Coventry residents and community groups to access Council-owned land that is underutilised for food growing and wildlife gardening. Note this programme was discussed at Scrutiny Board in February 2026, and the note is intended to provide an update on activity.

2 Recommendations

- 2.1 The Business, Economy and Enterprise Scrutiny Board are recommended to:
- a) Provide feedback to help assist in finalising the policy and guidance.
 - b) Support with engaging communities at a ward level to encourage uptake.
 - c) Identify any other relevant recommendations to the Cabinet Member for Jobs, Regeneration and Climate Change.

3 Information and Background

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, improving climate resilience and 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 by creating spaces in neighbourhoods that are accessed and maintained by the local community.

- 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 piloting '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.
- 3.4 'Coventry Grows' has seen sites developed in Stoke Heath, Foleshill and Tile Hill, and we are working with a group in Hillfields to develop a further site. 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.
- 3.5 The Council are now extending 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 which will be done through the launch of the Community Growing sites policy and guidance.
- 3.6 Proposed planting could be food, 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.
- 3.7 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 there is a surplus.

- 3.8 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.
- 3.9 Since this item was last brought to Scrutiny, it has received formal Cabinet Member approval and recruitment has been underway for resources to deliver the programme, alongside work to develop the policy and guidance. An apprenticeship has also been created as part of the Green for All programme, hosted by the Food Union and will gain new skills to help support community growing in Coventry.

The Coventry Growing Sites Policy

- 3.10 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.
- 3.11 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.
- 3.12 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.
- 3.13 As part of the programme and 26/27 budget proposals, the Council has made funding available for recruitment of a Community Growing Programme Coordinator. This post has now been filled, and the role will oversee implementation of the policy and guidance along with coordination for the community growing sites. They will 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, Sustainability, Sports, Education, Ecology, Drainage, Highways, Streetpride, Legal, Property, Insurance and Finance amongst others.

4 Delivery Plan

- 4.1 The Citywide Community Growing policy is now planned to launch in Autumn 2026. The policy has been drafted and is in consultation with teams across the Council to ensure full endorsement, address any barriers and simplify the process. The Sustainability Team will oversee delivery, within input from other service areas as appropriate. The team will put in place monitoring arrangements for sites to ensure they are being used as intended. There will be guidance in place for site holders, which will include advice on growing, pesticides and signposting for any issues that may occur on site.
- 4.2 £100k has been committed per year for 3 years to support the delivery of the programme, which includes staffing 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 waive fees for GoCV+ members to help make the scheme accessible to all.
- 4.3 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 working with organisations including the Food Union to look at how we can create a tool library that participants can access.
- 4.4 The Community Growing Programme Coordinator will help provide support to individuals and groups that have successfully set up a community growing sites to secure further funding. The Community Resilience Team have also offered additional support to communities to help raise funds to support site activities.
- 4.5 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. Work is already underway engaging communities in some of the most green-deprived parts of the city, with Warwickshire Wildlife Trust and Grapevine undertaking community organising in Hillfields and Radford to build community relationships and help identify ways to better connect people with nature. A training programme is also being developed, with input from a range of organisations including Garden Organic, the Wildlife Trust, Coventry University, National Trust and Coventry Outdoors to provide residents and groups with the skills needed at whatever level they are at.
- 4.6 Finally, the impact of the programme will be closely monitored and evaluated, capturing not only the quantitative outcomes in terms of area enhanced, produce grown etc but also the qualitative impacts on participants.

5 Climate Change Impact

- 5.1 The potential impact of increasing the number of community growing sites across has been identified as a priority project in the Council's Climate Change Action Plan. The benefits include improving underused green spaces in the city, which will be managed to support wildlife and increase climate resilience. The programme will also contribute to an increase in local sustainable food production, helping to make communities more resilient in the face of rising food prices. The programme will also provide an opportunity to increase awareness and education around conservation management and growing within communities and encourage groups to network and learn from each other.

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.
- 6.4 There are opportunities to help increase green social prescribing as part of the programme, with links made with the NHS who are keen to support. This is part of a national NHS drive to increase support for patients to engage in nature-based interventions to improve mental health and reduce health inequalities.

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