



WEA GREENING WINGROVE PROJECT

GROWING - CASE STUDY

ABOUT THE PROJECT: VERTICAL VEG STREET

This project was inspired by growing projects in back alleys in Middlesbrough. We wanted to put our twist on this and focus on the street front and encourage residents to grow healthy food in the front areas of their houses.

OUTCOME: Increased community understanding of climate change and the impact their actions have on the environment and the potential impacts of climate change

OUTCOME: Increased sustainable behaviours and practice with resources used more efficiently with an increase in production, recycling, re-using and saving and a reduction in waste

OUTPUT: By the end of the project 1,000 will benefit from awareness raising information sessions

OUTPUT: By the end of the project 250 people will be involved in 100 new community and individual growing sites developed in gardens, back yards and lanes, allotments, community sites and development land

WHAT?

The Vertical Veg Street Project began in April 2014. It was inspired by a visit to a gated back alley in Middlesbrough. This remarkable place had become a green haven for local residents. Instead of focusing on the long open back alleys in the project area, the WEA Greening Wingrove Project decided to try and create 'green living streets' at the front of properties.



WHO?

The project is being delivered in partnership with Vertical Veg, Newcastle City Council and Newcastle University.

Our expert is Mark Ridsdill Smith, who has been doing Vertical Veg for many years in London and has recently moved up to Newcastle.

Newcastle City Council received money from a European funded GAIA project, to research the possibility of 'green infrastructure' in urban spaces.

Newcastle University has a similar engineering research programme - 'Blue / Green Cities' – which is looking at green infrastructure to reduce the impact of flooding.

HOW?

The terraces in the Wingrove area typically have an area of concrete at the front of the house measuring 1m x 3m and with railings and a gate. Most of these areas are neglected and act as litter traps.



Having seen what can be achieved up the front of a terraced house in London (see www.verticalveg.org.uk) we wanted to focus on this small manageable area which could be

transformed into a 'potted' veggie patch.



The project team commissioned the Greening Wingrove Community Interest Company to carry out door to door surveys using Community Organisers. The aim was to talk to residents about how they view the area and if they would be interested in taking part in this project.

The Community Organisers spoke to 172 people (133 households). Overall 79 (59%) of households expressed an interest in the Vertical Veg Street Project and of these: 32 (41%) of households were very interested, 32 (41%) of households were quite interested and 15 (19%) showed some interest. The decision was taken with Newcastle City Council to pilot the project over the summer of 2014.

RESULTS

Three sign up sessions were held – one at a local school and two ‘street-side’. 20 people initially signed up.

One of our first sessions ‘*When Engineers meet Gardeners*’ linked this project to flood mitigation. We invited university engineers to talk about how container growing and water capture can help reduce flooding. In addition Mark, the gardener, showed residents how to make irrigation containers.



From June to September 2014 we held 11 weekly ‘pop up’ sessions and a number of other sessions and activities in the area. We focused on two streets in the Project area – Dilston Road and Croydon Road (typical terraces).

Each session had a different topic and people were invited to come along, learn about growing, get their hands dirty and take home a container. There were sessions on beans, tomatoes, strawberries and herbs and much more!

Residents could take home containers, hanging baskets and cuttings and were encouraged to put these in the front of their houses.

On average 14 people attended each session. The sessions were ‘hosted’ outside the houses of residents on the two streets and were run under a gazebo and out of the back of a car!



In year 1 of the pilot, a total of 225 people took part in 20 sessions. Over 150 are on a Vertical Veg Street mailing list.

Throughout the autumn and winter we held monthly sessions on planning, Christmas sprouts, etc, with the objective of trying to maintain the interest built up over the summer. In Spring 2015, we launched a new series of pop up events with 12 evening events happening fortnightly from March to September. We also had three whole day events on Saturdays for those who can’t attend during the week.

So far after 16 events we have had 122 people attending.



Of those attending the events:

- 77 (64%) are women
- 44 (36%) are men
- 36 (30%) have attended more than one event

Those attending the 2015 sessions are coming from all over the project area (and beyond!).

LESSONS LEARNT

The pop up sessions were highly visible and were very successful in attracting passers-by. As such they were very popular. However, there were logistical issues particularly with activities spilling over onto the street or along the pavement.

In Year 1, we tried to move the sessions each week so that residents from along each of the roads involved in the pilot could take part. This worked to a large extent however, it did mean that we worked hard each week to find ‘hosts’ and meant that we couldn’t forward promote and market the activities.

In Year 2, we addressed this by identifying the host houses before all the promotional materials went out. We have 12 hosts identified and they are from across the project area.

The Vertical Veg Street sessions lead to ‘spin off events’. Feedback from participants indicated that people wanted to make their own containers from recycled materials and wood. We commissioned a carpenter to run some container making ‘taster’ sessions. In total five woodwork sessions were held to which 25 people attended.

Further woodwork sessions may happen but again there are logistical and Health and Safety issues to be considered. These range from the storage of materials, the number of people who can safely take part to the provision of equipment and adequate venues for running such session.



Many people who attended the events were not from the two streets targeted. However, those who did attend tended to come to more than one session.

In April 2015, we commissioned a catch up surveys with those people who had initially shown a high to medium interest in the activity to see why they did not attend. Only 28 of the original 40 people were spoken too despite repeated door-knocking and phoning.

Of those spoken to, 18 said that they had heard about the events although a small number said they hadn't received any information. 8 said they had come to at least one event with most saying they had been to between two and four. This however, does not match up with the project team's attendance lists for these events which indicate that with one exception these residents did not attend any sessions!

The main reasons for not attending were 'actually not interested' (5), and 'too busy' (9). Only 1 person responded that the sessions are held at the wrong time.

RESULTS

Those taking part were encouraged to put their containers in the front of their properties. However, in Year 1 many put them in their back yards. Anecdotal feedback informed us that residents were worried about vandalism and theft or felt their properties faced the wrong direction.

This perception has changed slightly in Year 2. There is evidence that people are putting their containers out at the front. Speaking to those coming along to sessions there is more confidence about putting stuff at the front of their property.

They also feel that as more people get involved there is 'strength in numbers'.



A regular weekly or fortnightly event helps to raise awareness and creates momentum. Many people said they had heard of the Vertical Veg Street sessions during the summer. Interestingly, the Year 2 attendees are a very different group of people to Year 1.

Many of the beneficiaries of the sessions were not a typical 'gardener/permaculture/transition town' resident. The project partners felt that because the sessions were held on the streets they were more accessible and approachable for a wider audience.

Discussions have been ongoing with Northumbria Water to try and develop a project which provides householders with slim line water butts for the front of their properties. The project team is now collecting details of householders who would definitely want a water butt so that we can evidence demand for Northumbria Water.

The project team has also been approached by Newcastle University's Estates Department who are very keen to work in residential areas up stream from the university site to try and install rain water capture systems.

The Vertical Veg Street Project is part funded by the European Union

We will be working with them over the next six months to try and hold information sessions for residents within the Spital Tongues area of the project to see if we can encourage and support the installation of water butts and possibly a rain garden.

NEXT STEPS

A full programme of Vertical Veg Street sessions is now running through until the Winter 2015. We are holding fortnightly sessions (come rain or shine!), Saturday workshops and will also be working with three schools in the project area.



To try to create a visual impact and show what can be done we are also planning to work with demonstration gardens to illustrate what can be done in these small spaces. Our Vertical Veg re-Vamp programme will work with four or five sites (either single houses or neighbouring houses) to create exciting and eye catching Vertical Veg sites. We will be working with volunteers to 'blitz' a property. The idea is to illustrate many different ways of growing vertically in small spaces.

The project is going from strength to strength. We are getting an increasing number of enquires from community organisations interested in doing 'one off' sessions with their service users with a view to developing gardening and Vertical Veg sites at community buildings. These sessions will be funded by the Big Lottery Fund. However, this shows that there is appetite for this kind of activity in urban areas.

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