

Resilient Green Spaces – reclaiming community-owned farm for community growing

June 2023

Resilient Green Spaces was a £1.27m partnership project to pilot alternative re-localised food systems and community-led green spaces in Wales that run until June 2023. As part of this, Social Farms and Gardens supported the development of new allotment sites across Wales. This was also focused on making more private and public sector land available for communities to grow their own fresh food.

This series of case studies aims to showcase the different types of land secured with the help of Resilient Green Spaces, as well as to share practical learning to inspire others who might be on a similar journey. This one introduces **UareUK in Wrexham** and their journey to rejuvenate a neglected Council-owned allotment site.

Introducing the site

UareUK is a charity based in Wrexham supporting refugees fleeing wars and persecution. They approached the Council to find a space for an outdoor project where refugees could enjoy growing food and also wildlife. They were offered an old, neglected allotment site that previously housed old garages. The site had a series of small beds built on top of tarmac, causing them to dry out very quickly. The wood had rotted away, and weeds had taken over the site.

With support from Keep Wales Tidy, they built three new raised beds for refugees to grow vegetables. The site will also include microplots and larger beds for schools and local community members, as well as a small fruit forest.

Support received from RGS

UareUK received financial support from Resilient Green Spaces to do some much needed groundwork. This enabled them to hire a digger driver who dug out and removed the concrete. They also took the beds apart and rebuilt them from new timber.

They appreciated that the grant (£5000) was mid-range, because smaller pots (i.e. £500) would only pay for tools or seeds, whereas larger grants required a significantly greater level of paperwork and staff capacity.

“A lot of funders, they wanna pay for something exciting. So if you say, I’m digging a pond, or, I’m planting a forest, or I’m making a massive bug hotel, they’ll love it. But when you’re saying, I need to take out some old dead wood and replace it with new wood, like a lot of funders just don’t wanna pay for that. But that’s the practical thing that makes all the other stuff possible.”

Katie, UareUK volunteer

Challenges and lessons learnt

The relationship with the Council has worked well so far, depending on the charity’s capacity. The Council own the site and UareUK has a no-rent contract with the right to work on it. Initially, the Council had offered to remove any rubbish accumulated on the site over several years where it had been neglected. But later, limited resources prevented compost from being delivered to the site which had been available for free from the local recycling centre. This is a complication for UareUK as they do not

have access to a van or other means of transporting bulky items. However, once the Council found some additional resources, they offered to remove more old wood and rubbish from the site, which was welcomed by UareUK as this is something hard to find funding for.

UareUK wanted to open the site to the wider community, but residents were concerned that an unlocked site would attract potential anti-social behaviour. The charity then fixed a combination lock to the entrance so that only those with the code could enter, and volunteers or leaders needn't be present.

This allotment project is led by one lead volunteer with limited capacity; therefore, the project aims to train a small group of existing volunteers to become 'lead volunteers' and to help run the site.

Key achievements

The intervention has created a space for refugees, asylum seekers and other members of the wider community to grow food that will be used in their cooking of varied dishes from all over the world. The meals will also then be shared with others through a local hub.

As the site is being prepared, UareUK are advertising plots to individuals and approaching other community organisations to offer them use of the site. Simultaneously, the site is improving local biodiversity and provides a special outdoor environment in an urban area with limited access to green infrastructure.

Tips for other sites

- If you plan to renovate an old, neglected site, make sure you include the transportation of heavy and bulky items such as soil and rubbish removal into any funding application.
- If there's the option, budget also for a paid member of staff, for example a 'garden facilitator'. This will progress the work faster than working with volunteers who may be limited by time.
- Don't try to be too neat and tidy. During the years of neglect, wildlife may have created a new and wonderful habitat at the site so when you are restoring it, make sure some of it is also kept. Approach Social Farms and Gardens or RSPB for advice!

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