

# RSA CATALYST FUND PROJECT VERTICAL ALLOTMENTS



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# RSA CATALYST FUND PROJECT

## VERTICAL ALLOTMENTS



### Background

There has been a significant interest in 'Grow Your Own' and increased demand for allotments over the past few years. This interest and activity has numerous health benefits including healthy eating (5 a day), physical activity, social interaction and the development of plant therapy. This combined package has the potential to address some of the problems associated with obesity and in particular social isolation often experienced by the elderly. However, due to lack of sufficient allotments and the predominance of high density, high rise buildings in urban areas, the opportunities to 'Grow Your Own' are limited. A vertical allotment system called 'GutterGrow' was designed by two fellows to address this and provide a versatile and flexible unit to grow vegetables and plants on balconies, small patios or any limited or unlimited space. Its design enables accessibility for the elderly, people with disabilities and children of all ages.

### Pilot Project

The RSA catalyst fund has enabled a pilot project to be established in two residential homes Lammas Court and Kay Hitch Way based in Cambridge, run by Granta, a National Housing Association which has recently amalgamated with Metropolitan Housing.. Discussions with the Granta Community development officer and her team identified the two locations where they felt the project would benefit the residents both socially and health wise. Previously structured activity programmes based around services provided by Local Authorities have been reduced through current budgetary cuts

The Catalyst project has funded a variety of vertical allotment systems to enable residents to grow their own vegetables or plants on their balconies, in small patios or in a communal garden area. The project is also supported by Mr. Fothergills seeds who have agreed to provide the seeds and plug plants selected by the residents with relevant advice and the potential for setting up a gardening club.

**Kay Hitch Way** is a small complex supporting up to nine residents with special needs and physical disabilities. It has a small communal garden. A number of residents and the staff are very keen to grow vegetables they like, as the budget for food and household goods is minimal and restricts their choice of food they enjoy. One of the resident who is a wheelchair user, is a very keen gardener and is delighted with the opportunity to grow vegetables and plants in the vertical system. A member of staff is also very interested in supporting other residents to grow vegetables they like. She is an experienced gardener and has provided onsite advice and help.



**Lammas Court** accommodates twenty five elderly residents some with mini balconies, small patio areas and a communal area of lawns and shrubs. Residents meet on Wednesdays for a coffee morning so during this time discussions were held about growing vegetables and plants in the vertical system. There was considerable interest shown by residents who had been keen gardeners and others who wanted to be involved but needed support. A number wished to grow flowers as well as vegetables. It was agreed that we would draw up a programme which commenced in the New Year.

### **Lammas Court Diary 2012**



#### ***January***

A meeting was held on the 26th January with the residents to discuss the size, number and type of systems and selection of vegetable/plant seeds that they wished to grow. A number of areas and systems were explored for both communal and individual use, with one

resident, who was a keen gardener offering to help and support other residents in setting up and managing their vertical gardens. Seed Catalogues provided by Mr. Fothergills were distributed to the residents so they could make their selection.

In addition contact with the Cambridge Hub was initiated through an RSA contact Adam Grodecki. A meeting was arranged with Catherine Kemp, the Hub manager to discuss students involved in environmental volunteering, linking to the vertical allotments project. It was felt they could play a valuable social/supporting role.

### ***February***

A second meeting was held on February 22 to build examples of vertical systems in situ so residents could choose the size and location best suited to their needs, Initially four systems were chosen, a large two layered metre squared frame which would be managed by Resident 1 for other residents and herself. It was located in the communal space. Resident 2, a keen gardener would like a large selection of plants and had designed a system (almost like a 4 poster bed) so that she can grow soft fruit and other vegetables. Resident 3 chose a small two tier frame. She is 91 years and wanted her frame sooner rather than later. She decided to grow flowers and lettuce.

Resident 4 chose a small two tiered system that she could place on her balcony and wanted to grow hardy plants.

Resident 5 wanted to grow Tomatoes (not moneymaker) chilli peppers, green beans, mange tous, basil and Buzz lettuce all the year round.. She needed help from Resident 1 so it was decided that these would be grown in the large frame.

Resident 6 wanted to grow a range of herbs, rosemary, parsley, thyme, mint, cherry toms, salad leaves in the large frame.

Resident 7 wanted to grow lettuce, spring onions, beetroot and tomatoes in a small frame outside her door. She is 95 and was a bit worried she'll let everyone down but she was reassured it's to enjoy and have fun .

Resident 8, a keen gardener would like a large selection of plants and had designed a system (almost like a 4 poster bed) so that she can grow soft fruit and other vegetables.

Resident 1 is a keen gardener and she has offered to help to grow a variety of vegetables chosen by residents on the large frame in the communal space.

A contact with the Cambridge Hub was made at the RSA catalyst event which connected students wishing to be involved in environmental causes. The Manager Catherine Kemp was interested in the project and identified 2 students who were keen to provide support to the residents in Lammas Court. A meeting was held on February 22nd to discuss their involvement. One student is a keen gardener and interested in ethical food sources and community enterprise'

The other student was unable to make the meeting but still interested in being involved. . so it was agreed that we would arrange a programme once the planting sessions started.

Plants and seeds selected by the residents and ordered from Mr. Fothergills

Beetroot

Carrots

Tomatoes

Chilli peppers

Onions

Mixed herbs

Salad leaves

Courgettes

Raspberry canes and strawberry plants.



### ***March***

A visit was arranged on March 12<sup>th</sup> but postponed to the 27<sup>th</sup> as the seeds hadn't arrived. Additional frames were built and a variety of containers and gutters were provided with compost to start planting seeds at the appropriate time. Both students were away as their term had ended but hoping to get involved when they return.

Unfortunately one of the residents had been admitted to a nursing home so was unable to participate anymore. Resident 2 was pleased with her small frame outside her flat and is looking forward to growing her flowers



Further discussions with residents at their coffee morning encouraged more interested participants. A newly arrived resident expressed an interest in a small frame for her balcony to grow plants and flowers.

### ***April***

This month was cold and wet but salad leaves seedlings planted by Resident 1 were beginning to grow. Visits were arranged on the 4<sup>th</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup> to check that residents were happy with their frames and to help with additional planting. Unfortunately some of the packets of seeds had been misplaced so additional ones were ordered. They are all looking forward to a bountiful harvest and thought it would be good to hold a vegetable feast with everyone involved.

### ***May***

Visits were arranged for 4<sup>th</sup> 10<sup>th</sup> 16<sup>th</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup> to provide gutters and additional containers and to continue planting seeds. Currently, carrots, beans, courgettes, peas, beetroot and herbs are in outside containers. The frame for Resident 8's raspberries and beans has been built. She is very happy with the arrangement and is planning to add more plants.



The earlier cold wet weather has not been ideal for the plants but everyone is hoping this current warm spell will encourage growth. The students were busy with assignments so unable to help.

### ***June***

Seedlings are growing well, Resident 1 brought the tray of salad leaves into the communal room so other residents could cut the leaves for their own use. It was then placed outside to continue growing.



Resident 6 is very happy with her small frame outside her door. She is growing spring onions, mixed salad leaves and beetroot and is looking forward to sharing them with other residents.



Sadly Resident 8 had to leave for a nursing home but wants to continue growing her fruit and plants on her balcony in her new residence. She has removed the frames and we are hoping to contact her when she is settled.

A new resident Resident 9 has arrived who used to garden and is keen to get involved. We thought she'd be interested growing chilli peppers but apparently it is bad luck for her family to grow them so she has decided on flowers this year. She has decided on a small frame just outside her flat and is enjoying choosing the plants and flowers.



Unfortunately the students found that their assignments and exams left them little time to get involved so any additional support was not delivered.

### ***July***

Sadly Resident 6 died after a short illness. Her vegetables were incorporated into the main frame as she had wished to share them with everyone.

Plants that have grown reasonably well in spite of the weather have been broad beans, lettuce, runner beans, onions, tomatoes and herbs. However the courgettes were disappointing and they have had a lot of problems with squirrels who are treating the vertical allotment as a snack bar and digging up and eating the plants



Lammas Runner Beans

Resident 3 is happy with her flowers and lettuce which are growing well on her small balcony



Resident 2's flowers are in full bloom and she is happy continuing to grow them in her frame



### *August*

This month harvesting runner beans, broad beans, onions and lettuce continued. A visit on the 15<sup>th</sup> confirmed that vegetables were not in as much abundance this year mainly due to the poor growing season and the continuing squirrel raids. However those that chose flowers were happy with their blooms.

### *September*

A visit on the 17<sup>th</sup> September and discussion at the coffee morning concluded that they had enjoyed the whole project and would definitely like to continue it the following year. There is always new residents arriving and the project manager felt that it was an interesting and fun project to invite them to join. They are hoping that specific areas outside the ground level flats can be designed for accommodating the vertical frames and they hope to adapt an area on the lawn more suitable for the large frame to be accessible with a pathway for more residents.

### ***October***

A final crop of small round carrots were harvested and available for residents to collect. Resident 9 is now growing herbs in her frame and happy to continue exploring different plants through the winter as were the other residents with small frames. The large frame and containers were dismantled and stored until next spring.

## **Kay Hitch Way Diary 2012**

### ***January***

The team, staff and residents met on the 26th January and decided on a large stepped vertical system and a location which enabled wheelchair access. Plant and seed catalogues were distributed so residents and carers could choose the varieties they wished to grow.

### ***February***

A basic unit was built in situ on February 22nd so residents and carers could learn how to configure the system to their own requirements and choose the appropriate containers to fit the system.



Resident 1 deciding the height she wanted for ease of planting and number of containers and gutters



The following vegetables were selected by residents, the most popular choice being carrots potatoes and tomatoes.

Early purple broccoli  
Boltardy beetroot  
Harlequin Carrots  
Yolanda courgettes  
Sweet million tomatoes  
Moskotka tomatoes  
Cuar di bue tomatoes  
Kohl rabi  
Spring onions  
Spinach  
Potatoes

The other residents are also being encouraged to participate

### ***March***

A visit was arranged on 27<sup>th</sup> to ensure all the seeds had been delivered and to discuss the variety and number of containers that were needed. It was decided not to involve the students at Kay Hitch Way as residents would find it confusing.

### ***April***

A selection of containers and gutters were placed in the frames and bags of compost delivered. However due to the cold wet weather the carers decided to start a number of the seedlings in a warm room in the building.

### ***May***

Planting continued outside. The seedlings given an extra boost with the current warm weather. Unfortunately Resident 1 has been in hospital for the past few weeks but Resident 2 who showed little interest earlier started to plant the tomatoes and has taken ownership of the seedlings.

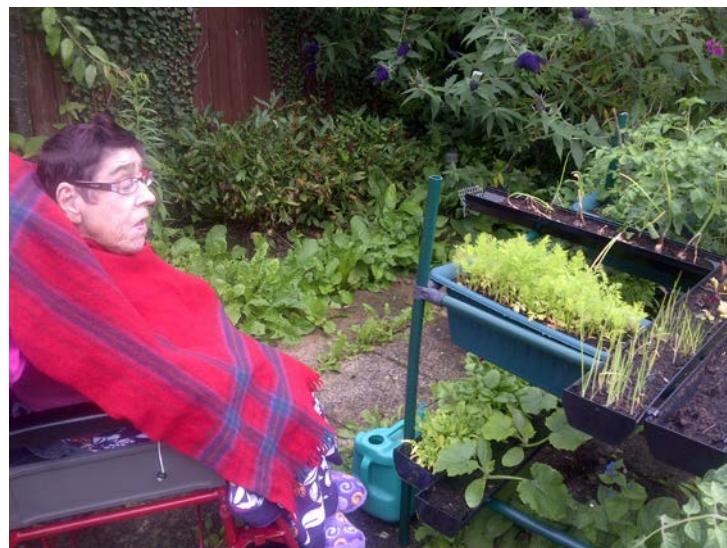


### ***June***

The plants are growing well and an additional section was added to the frame to support the peas etc. Hanging baskets were provided for the tomatoes which are the most popular plants for residents. They are anticipating that Resident 1 will return soon as she is disappointed to miss some of the activities.

### ***July***

Resident 1 has returned and though disappointed to have missed a few months is delighted to be involved again. Sadly her illness leaves her unable to eat normally so has not had the chance to sample any food grown but she is happy to continue caring for the plants for others. There has been a reasonably good crop of broad beans, runner beans, onions and carrots. The tomatoes are ripening however the growing season has been exceptionally wet and cold and the harvest has not been as bountiful as expected.



Resident 1 checking the vegetables

## **August**

The plants are continuing to grow well with runner beans ripening and the residents have enjoyed the different colours and taste of the harlequin carrots.

## **September**

There has been an abundance of the small bush variety of tomatoes which has been particularly popular with Resident 2 who has shown a growing interest in the garden. Overall though it has not been a great growing season this year, there has been sufficient success with beans, peas, onions, tomatoes (best grown in baskets) beetroot, carrots and some very small courgettes. Potato seedlings were grown in the gutters then planted and grown in a raised bed.



**Residents enjoying the vegetables with their meals.**

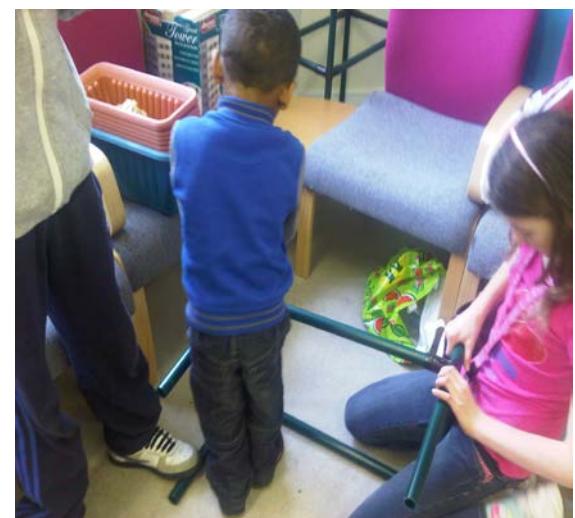
## **October**

The final crop of carrots were collected and the frames and containers were dismantled and stored. A final discussion with the residents and staff was held and it was agreed that overall the project was a success and enjoyable for the residents.

However, there were some mixed feelings about staff involvement as with the amalgamation of Granta and Metropolitan Housing Associations, there is currently some uncertainty over staffing numbers. It was mentioned the new manager who is very interested in continuing the project.

## Additional outcomes

Further promotion of the project in Luton resulted in an initiative set up with Aldwyck Housing Association which ran an Easter 'Grow Your Own' project with deprived children on their Hilltop Estate. The children built their own vertical systems, planted seeds of their choice and took their systems back to their flats. The community development officer would like to extend this to teenagers and adults next spring .



Aldwyck Housing Association was regional winner at the National Housing Awards for community involvement. [Www.housing.org.uk/get involved/community impact awards/overall regional winners.aspx](http://www.housing.org.uk/get_involved/community_impact_awards/overall Regional winners.aspx)

## **Luton Borough Council**

The Business Support Manager at Luton Borough Council was very interested in the potential of Vertical Allotments and has contacted local education providers and trainers with the following correspondance.

From: "Adams, Marion" <[Marion.Adams@luton.gov.uk](mailto:Marion.Adams@luton.gov.uk)>  
Date: Thu, 11 Oct 2012 13:59:48 +0100  
To: e-mail [lynettewarren1@ntlworld.com](mailto:lynettewarren1@ntlworld.com)>  
Subject: FW: Business Opportunity

Hi Lynette

Thank you for your email. This is the email (below) and attachments which has been sent to all independent private providers. I hope that it helps.

Marion Adams  
Business Support Manager  
Luton Borough Council

From: Adams, Marion  
Sent: 09 October 2012 09:46  
To: Underwood, Stephanie  
Subject: Business Opportunity  
Please could you forward this to the network. Now includes leaflet.

Dear Colleagues

I have recently visited an organisation which specialises in innovative projects. They have now taken their most recent venture through its pilot stage and would be interested to support small business start ups in this area. I was really inspired by what they are doing. Clearly it could be a great opportunity for learners who are on your courses or about to leave, but also I feel that it could also be a useful venture for independent private providers to use real work to deliver their curriculum.

I attach some information from them which I hope that you will find useful. I hope that you will find time to read this through and also to contact Lynette and Mike to find out more.

With thanks  
Marion Adams

Business Support Manager  
Luton Borough Council  
4th floor, Unity House  
111 Stuart Street  
Luton LU1 5N

## **Luton Cultural Services Trust**

**[www.lutonculture.com](http://www.lutonculture.com)**

There has been great interest expressed by Luton Cultural Services Trust in engaging an apprentice to work with the project. The Trust is a registered charity and manages LBCs arts, museums and library services. It operates 14 sites throughout Luton including Stockwood Discovery Centre which has extensive grounds and greenhouses and aims to grow and preserve heritage plants and involve local people in 'grow your own' initiatives and create new businesses.

## **Summary**

The project was agreed to be overall a great success by residents and staff in both Lammas Court and Kay Hitch Way, in spite of the poor weather and subsequent less bountiful crops. During discussions with residents and staff, it was agreed that they would all like to continue it in the following year.

In **Lammas Court** the residents enjoyed sharing the vegetables and salad as well as providing an additional interest and a focus for conversations. The loss of a number of residents was sad but did not reduce the enthusiasm for GutterGrow and we had many positive and supportive comments from residents and their relatives. In addition it was good that resident 8 wanted to take her frames to her nursing home which we hope to follow up and continue in that location. During our final discussions it was noted that residents would have welcomed more frequent visits to provide horticultural support and additional social interaction. We had hoped this would be supplemented by the students but due to the conflict of growing time and exams etc. this was unrealised.

In **Kay Hitch Way** residents enjoyed all the additional vegetables which supplemented their meals, particularly their favourite tomatoes. It created an additional focal point and activity for residents and they enjoyed knowing where their food was grown. Sadly, resident1 due to her condition is unable to eat and taste the vegetables but she is still keen to grow them for other residents

It was also a period of change for all residents and staff with Granta Housing Association merging with the Metropolitan Housing Association. The reorganisation of staff included some lost roles but remaining carers were keen to see the continuation of the project next year. However, there were some mixed feelings about staff involvement as there is currently some uncertainty over staffing numbers. It was mentioned the new manager is very interested in continuing the project. In particular there was some concern over the upkeep of the small garden in Kay Hitch Way as it has to employ outside gardeners from their budget for its upkeep.

The project was publicised within Grantas internal newsletter and it has been agreed to arrange a meeting with the new management team from Metropolitan to publish the outcome.

## **Future Development**

It is proposed that the successfully completion of the pilot project could lead to a future opportunity where the project could be continued by one or two people wishing to develop and establish it as business of their own.

The project team have shown that it is possible to grow a full range of vegetables herbs and flowers using this system and that attractive and productive vertical gardens can be cost effectively constructed.

The pilot project was designed to show the feasibility of installing and maintaining vertical allotments in a housing associations as a viable enterprise and future business opportunity.

## **Identified Markets**

The most promising market for vertical allotments has been identified as housing associations, schools, community groups and Local Authorities. These target groups offer the potential of multiple sales to single sites and contracts for a continuing range of horticultural and technical support.

## **Business Opportunity**

The business opportunity is for an enterprising individual to take a defined territory, and with the help and support of the SO team, to explore opportunities in the identified markets. It is expected that the business will :-

1. Identify and secure customers.
2. Supply, install and maintain vertical garden structures using GutterGrow frames
3. Supply a range of related support services

This opportunity would suit an entrepreneurially minded individual or individuals who would enjoy working with people and plants in a stimulating and rewarding environment. The pilot project has demonstrated the advantage of also being prepared to support regular social interaction with housing association tenants.

## **SO Support**

SO will provide demonstration frames and training in the installation and maintenance of the frames, support and advice on appropriate plants and containers and signposting to additional business advice. SO will also help in identification of suitable marketing targets and potential funding sources.

## **Entrepreneurial Activity**

This opportunity would be ideal for individuals seeking to set up their own environmentally friendly social enterprise in the dynamic 'grow your own' market.