

Growing Green Spaces



2019-2021 Report



Foreword

I'm pleased to present the report for **Growing Green Spaces: Phase Two (March 2019–June 2021)**, an initiative to grow and sustain green volunteering across York, funded by the City of York and managed by York CVS.

Volunteers have achieved remarkable things in York's green spaces, despite the intense challenges posed by the pandemic.

The pandemic has highlighted the inestimable value of York's green spaces, from its best-loved parks and nature reserves to its smaller pockets of beauty and biodiversity. Visitors to **Holgate Community Garden**, for instance, variously described the small but vibrant space as a 'lifesaver', a 'hub of activity', and a 'huge source of 'the community spirit which is so lovely and unique and has been invaluable, especially in lockdown'. A new volunteer gardener for **Friends of Rowntree Park** commented:

Getting out to garden has given me some structure. It was needed after lockdown. I've come to this park since I was little and it's great to feel I'm helping give something back.

Most groups were forced to suspend their activities during each lockdown; some groups had to postpone their projects until Spring 2021, and many have had to adapt their sessions to adhere to the rule of six. For this reason, the full impact of many of the Growing Green Spaces grants has not yet been felt, as some groups have yet to complete their projects, and the number of volunteers involved has been limited for safety reasons. But I have been amazed by the resilience and creativity with which York's dedicated volunteers have responded to the necessarily constrained, stop-and-start nature of growing green spaces in a pandemic – and some have even reported huge influxes of new volunteers! Grants have helped VCSE groups tap into this enthusiasm for green spaces: we've funded tools, sheds, refreshments and transport for volunteers, a volunteer coordinator position, promotional materials and activities, facilitated gardening sessions, and – of course – plants, seeds, and manure!

It's also been inspiring to see the connections different groups have been able to forge and nurture, despite being so restricted and atomised. For example, unable to hold their usual gatherings and cookouts at the allotment, **York Unifying Multicultural Initiative (YUMI)** redirected their crops to **Door 84's** food bank; **Redfearn Community Group**, an alley-greening collective in Fishergate, provided advice and inspiration for the blossoming greening activities taking place in the Groves via **Greening the Groves** and the **Markham Lanes Project**; and **Bishophillbillies** and **Rooting for Justice** supported a new community garden on Cygnet Street.

I'm glad that Growing Green Spaces has been able to contribute to this spirit of collaboration by facilitating workshops for groups to meet, discuss their successes and challenges, and share learning and resources. I'm also very excited that, as Growing Green Spaces concludes, we have funded the creation of **Wild York** – a directory for all of York's green spaces, places, conservation activities, and volunteer opportunities, which will enable more sharing and solidarity.

This collaborative spirit was definitely evident in our discussions with CYC's Public Realm staff, so I would like to thank them for their generosity and enthusiasm. Likewise, I'm much indebted to our innovative and supportive Advisory Group, composed of **Tony Chalcraft, Steve Cinderby, Imelda Havers, Holly Hennell, Lotte Inch, Jude Parks, and Tom Waring** and chaired by **Jane Hustwit**, who has been an inexhaustibly helpful mentor and critical friend to the project. Thank you very much to all of you. Above all: thank you so much to the wonderful volunteers who have made York's green spaces flourish!

Stef Lambert, Growing Green Spaces Coordinator
York CVS



yorkcvs



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Introduction

In April 2019, the City of York Council (CYC) commissioned the York Centre for Voluntary Service (CVS) to run a second phase of Growing Green Spaces, a small grants programme for voluntary projects in York's green spaces. This second phase ran from April 2019 to June 2021; over the course of this period and three funding rounds, we awarded £75,383 of funding to 32 different projects.

The main aims of Growing Green Spaces, as set out in our Service Level Agreement with CYC, were to increase volunteering in green spaces, widen participation in volunteering, and support groups carrying out voluntary work in green spaces.

The desirability of these aims is self-explanatory: we instinctively know that green spaces – and their volunteers – are crucial. This is reinforced by the burgeoning evidence base demonstrating the wide-ranging benefits of access to high-quality green space. We now know that:


- **visits to green spaces have a direct affect on our physical and mental health¹**
- **'greener environments are...associated with better mental health and wellbeing outcomes including reduced levels of depression, anxiety, and fatigue, and enhanced quality of life for both children and adults'²**
- **gardening reduces the risk of heart disease, obesity, and cancer, and stimulates serotonin production³**
- **green spaces in England contribute £2.2bn to public health⁴**
- **every £1 local authorities spend on maintaining parks saves £34⁵**
- **urban parks improve air quality, reduce urban heat stress, reduce the risks and mitigate the effects of flooding, sequester carbon, and boost biodiversity⁶**


Amid this abundance of evidence, one of the most striking findings is that the more biodiverse a green space is, the greater its psychological benefits.⁷ For every new species volunteers have planted (and they have planted a lot!) and attracted, the benefits have been felt by users of the green space – whether or not they are involved in volunteering. Sara Mair from YUMI told us:

Passersby through the allotment have stopped to admire the space with some saying seeing it is a highlight of their walk and they make regular trips to the garden.

Alongside the metrics included in this report, then, Growing Green Spaces has helped generate a kind of value that eludes precise measurement. It can be glimpsed, however, in these social media posts we discovered by searching the spaces' names. Here, the delight of exploring a local green space during lockdown and discovering daffodils, crocuses, snowdrops, tulips, and snake's-head fritillaries is palpable.







 **naomisglass** • Follow
Rowntree Park

 **naomisglass** We did a Good Friday walk in our area, listening to readings and reflections at 8 stops. Here are some of the photos I took during the walk.


[#goodfriday](#) [#bishyroad](#)
[#rowntreepark](#)

5w

14 likes

APRIL 2

 Add a comment... [Post](#)



charlottethegardener • Follow
Glen Gardens



A walk through my local park revealed these treasures #york #glengardens #iris #crocus #bulbs #gardentreasures #winterflowers #gardening

64w



pilates_york ❤️❤️❤️❤️



64w 1 like Reply



behlinglinda They are beautiful.



64w 1 like Reply



37 likes

FEBRUARY 13, 2020



Add a comment...

Post



charlottethegardener • Follow
Glen Gardens



A walk through my local park revealed these treasures #york #glengardens #iris #crocus #bulbs #gardentreasures #winterflowers #gardening

64w



pilates_york ❤️❤️❤️❤️



64w 1 like Reply



behlinglinda They are beautiful.



64w 1 like Reply



37 likes

FEBRUARY 13, 2020



Add a comment...

Post



krissy555 • Follow ...

krissy555 From my walk this morning- love this little park! 😊
#holgatecommunitygarden
#sunshine #coldandfrostmorning
#pandemicdays

16w

melodywright21 Where is this? I'm always walking around Holgate and have never seen this! Looks lovely x

15w Reply

— Hide replies

krissy555 @melodywright21 at the end of the terraced

15 likes
JANUARY 15

Add a comment... Post



krissy555 ...

20w

melodywright21 Where is this? I'm always walking around Holgate and have never seen this! Looks lovely x

20w Reply

— Hide replies

krissy555 @melodywright21 at the end of the terraced street opposite the Spiritualist church...it's only small, but very pretty..😊


20w 1 like Reply

15 likes
JANUARY 15

Add a comment... Post



 **elsiesingler** • Follow
Hull Road Park York

 **elsiesingler** 🌸 #Spring
10w


   

4 likes

FEBRUARY 22

 Add a comment... Post



 **awaywithmaja** • Follow
Rowntree Park


 **awaywithmaja** Rowntree Park looking spectacular with these fall colors! 🍂🍁 This is my fourth autumn in York and I swear it gets better every year 😊

I've got a new blog post out (👉 I know right! I've barely published anything in the last two months 😅) with all the best places to see


   

👍 Liked by friendsrowntreepark and 304 others

OCTOBER 21, 2020

 Add a comment... Post



 **mikealanlong** • Follow
Hull Road Park York

 **mikealanlong** Tulips #hullroadpark #tulips #flowers #plants #yorkshire #york #park #nature #naturephotography #wildlife #trees

1w

8 likes

APRIL 28

 Add a comment... Post

But the myriad and self-evident benefits of green spaces are both a blessing and a curse, as **Dr Anna Barker** acknowledges in her thinkpiece on the future of parks:

This quest for renewed legitimacy through evidence of economic value tied to wider public goods – public health, social cohesion, education and environmental protection – is likely to pull the management of parks in diverse directions. At the same time, severe cuts to budgets undermine the ability of park managers to realise, let alone maximise, the differential benefits of parks.⁸

At times, it has felt as if Growing Green Spaces has been pulled in diverse directions. Faced with so many excellent applications from voluntary groups and charities, our Advisory Group was forced to consider not only which projects would generate the greatest impact, but what kind of impact was most important. Was a project to create species-rich meadowland near a leafy suburb more valuable than a container garden in a concrete jungle, for instance?

A way to unite these diverse strands is suggested by **Public Health England's 2020 report on access to green space**, which concludes its list of benefits by stating:

Disadvantaged groups appear to gain a larger health benefit and have reduced socioeconomic-related inequalities in health when living in greener communities, so green space and a greener urban environment can also be used as an important tool in the drive to build a fairer society.⁹

As a social action organisation, CVS' approach to Growing Green Spaces has prioritised the potential of green spaces to reduce inequality. Consequently, we employed a Theory of Change plan and asset-based approach, thinking in terms of how to mobilise people and create the conditions of possibility for increased volunteering (e.g. empowering people with information and decision-making power):

- 1 While Phase One of Growing Green Spaces had focused on CYC parks, Phase Two adopted a more expansive approach, including in its remit natural and semi-natural spaces such as woodland, rivers, and grassland, but also smaller green spaces such as community gardens, allotments, raised beds, and orchards.
- 2 We used indices of multiple deprivation to weight funding application scores from different wards, while also considering micro-pockets of deprivation within wards and levels of access to high-quality green space.
- 3 Conscious of the fact that time is a huge barrier to volunteering in green spaces, we progressively slimmed down the application process to make it more accessible and inclusive. Our final funding call in 2021 asked only for short 'pitches' and framed our role as more facilitative:

You provide the idea and we'll help you make it a success. We can help you find out how to get permission, get other people on board, and give you growing advice to get started...Grants are open to community groups and charities, but if you are an individual who wants to apply, please get in touch with the Co-ordinator, Stef Lambert, who can advise on how you can link up with an existing group or residents' association.

We received 44 pitches – the highest number of applications received by a 50% margin. It should be noted, however, that very few of these applications were from people not already affiliated with groups, so the shorter application process only represents a step towards widening participation. Regrettably, COVID-19 stymied our plans for face-to-face, co-productive activities.

- 4** As well as publicising the grant to ‘Friends of’ groups and environmental charities in York, we approached and proposed growing projects to VSCE groups with a record of working with those facing a barrier to volunteering (e.g. **York Travellers Trust, Door 84, Changing Lives, York Racial Equality Network**), offering to link them up with mentors from other groups.
- 5** Finally, we prioritised flexibility when it comes to grant-giving. It became clear in 2020 that a minority of groups would complete their projects by Growing Green Spaces’ conclusion in June 2021, and that many would need to go on hold (particularly ones involving elderly or otherwise vulnerable volunteers) for most of 2020 and early 2021. Allowing groups to continue their projects *beyond* June 2021 therefore seemed crucial to ensuring the people with the most to gain from Growing Green Spaces would benefit. For similar reasons, we decided to hold a 2021 funding round for projects starting in Spring this year. Though their progress won’t be captured in this report, we are confident in our 2021 grantees and excited to see what they achieve. We hope that they – and others involved in or supporting green volunteering – will benefit from the lessons learned that conclude this report.

References

- 1** Wendy Masterton, Hannah Carver, and Tessa Parks, '**Parks and green spaces are important for our mental health – but we need to make sure that everyone can benefit**', *The Conversation* (2020).
- 2** Public Health England, '**Improving access to greenspace: A new review for 2020**' (2020), 11.
- 3** Richard Thompson, '**Gardening for health: a regular dose of gardening**', *Clinical Medicine* 18.3 (2018); Zoë Schlanger, '**Dirt has a microbiome, and it may double as an antidepressant**', *Quartz* (2017).
- 4** Mark Kniver, '**Green spaces worth £2.2bn to public health in England**', *BBC News* (2016).
- 5** Vivid Economics, '**The economics of urban parks**' (2016).
- 6** University of Leeds Ecosystem, Atmosphere & Forest (LEAF) Centre, '**A brief guide to the benefits of urban green spaces**' (2015)
- 7** Emma Wood et. al, '**Not all green space is created equal: biodiversity predicts psychological restorative benefits from urban green space**', *Frontiers in Psychology* (2018).
- 8** Anna Barker, '**A "Think Piece" on The Future of Public Parks**', The Parks Alliance (2019).
- 9** PHE, '**Improving access to greenspace**', 57.

Aims

1

To increase the number of volunteers enhancing York's green spaces and the diversity of volunteering opportunities

To increase the number of volunteers involved in supporting activity within green spaces in the City of York, energise communities to be engaged with and involved in volunteering in green spaces, and to develop the mix of local volunteering opportunities available

2

To increase the involvement of people who don't traditionally volunteer

To increase the involvement of people who traditionally don't volunteer or might have a barrier to volunteering in green spaces, such as those with health issues

3

To support voluntary groups

To promote the financial and organisational sustainability of voluntary groups by supporting projects to develop infrastructure and income generation and sharing best practice and learning in this area among beneficiary community groups



What we did...

1 To increase the number of volunteers enhancing York's green spaces and the diversity of volunteering opportunities

funded

- new projects
- projects that allowed existing organisations to expand their volunteering offer (e.g. facilitated sessions, tool stores) and create new roles
- volunteers' transport costs
- refreshments for volunteers
- promotional activities
- volunteer recruitment events
- a broad range of 'green space' projects, including container gardens, alley greening, street planters, and community allotments

promoted

- through a website: www.growinggreenspaces.co.uk
- through social media: @greenspacesyork and <https://www.facebook.com/greenspacesyork>
- on BBC Radio York
- through CVS' volunteer centre, York Volunteers

consulted

- a survey asking what York residents wanted to see in green spaces; these were then included as suggestions in subsequent funding calls

advised groups

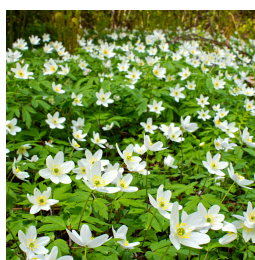
- on flexible and micro-volunteering
- how to run family-friendly volunteering sessions
- on inclusivity

505

**volunteers
involved**

**On average,
groups
supported by
Growing Green
Spaces'
regular
volunteer
numbers
increased by
60%**

Volunteers planted..



**WOOD
ANEMONE**



DAFFODILS



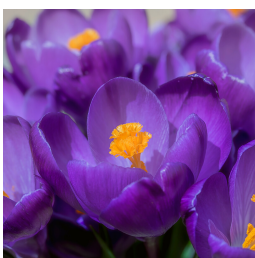
SNOWDROPS



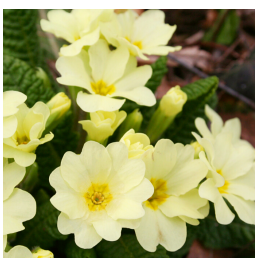
BLUEBELLS



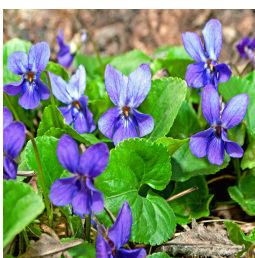
**SUNFLOWER
S**



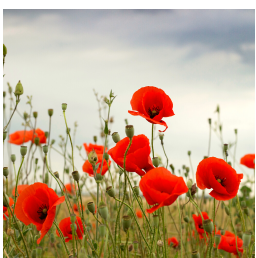
CROCUSES



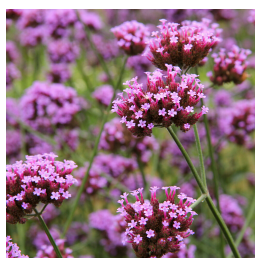
PRIMROSES



VIOLETS



POPPIES



VERBENA



**CORN-
FLOWERS**



FOXGLOVES



SCABIOUS



LAVENDER



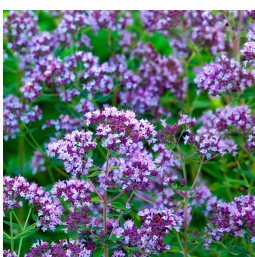
PANSIES



**SILVER
BIRCH**



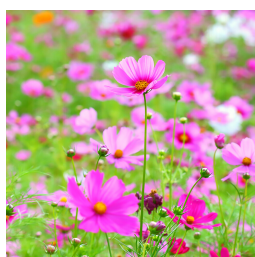
LEEKS



MARJORAM



FRUIT TREES



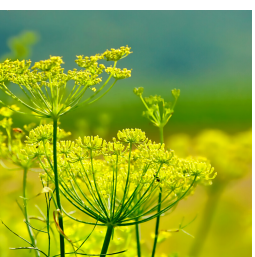
COSMOS



BERRIES



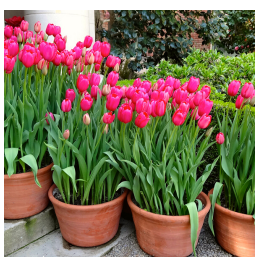
CABBAGE



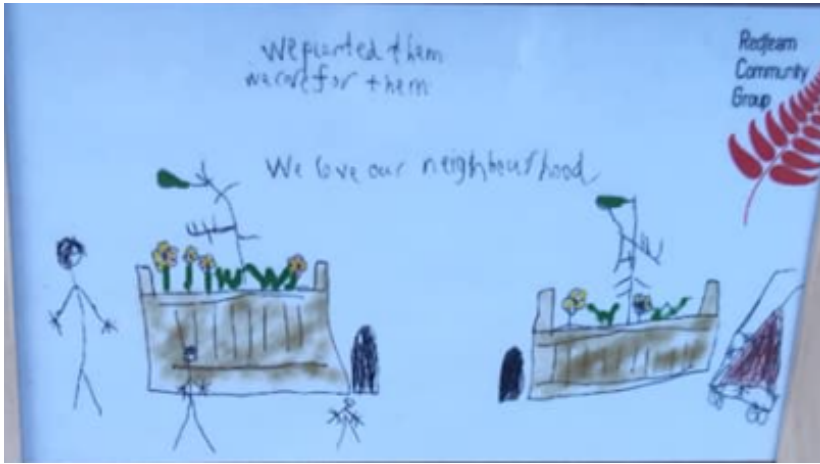
FENNEL



BETONY



TULIPS



That patch of badly dug dirt was badly dug be yours truly volunteering with @Fr_RowntreePark and I nearly did a faint. And I ache. And I'm dead proud of myself.



By working together on something practical, we found it easier to start meaningful conversations about the impact of lockdown on everyone's mental health so volunteers benefited from having the space to open up about this (a topic which is quite taboo within the community) and offer words of support to each other. We were also able to pick up on needs in the group and have supported one person with further emotional support as a result of the day and two people with further practical support.

Abigail Darton, York Travellers Trust



Without your scheme, I'm not sure we would have thought about [greening our back alley], so a big thanks!

GGs applicant

2 To increase the involvement of people who don't traditionally volunteer

- prioritised York's most deprived wards in funding rounds
- funded facilitated volunteering sessions that could support those who felt they needed it
- broadened the definition of 'green space' to include container gardens and street planters in order to benefit the communities most deprived of green space
- encouraged and funded projects that increased accessibility (e.g. wheelchair-friendly growing beds)
- shared resources on creating an accessible project with groups
- streamlined the application process to make it more accessible, offering in the last round to help individuals obtain permissions, expertise, and link them to constituted groups
- we approached VSCE groups with a record of working with those with a barrier to volunteering (e.g. **York Travellers Trust, Door 84, Changing Lives**) and proposed growing projects, offering to link them up with mentors from other groups

58%

of projects
took place in
York's six most
deprived
wards

Having organised sessions with a clear lead and activities has meant that some young adults with learning difficulties have been able to come along.

Abigail Gaines, Friends of Rowntree Park



The wheelchair-accessible growing area at Hull Road Park

3 To support voluntary groups

- **funded** activities intended to increase organisational capacity (e.g. a paid volunteer co-ordinator role)
- **advised** projects on how to increase their environmental and social impact and therefore more attractive to major funders
- **prompted** projects to measure and evaluate impact through a progress form designed in collaboration with the groups
- **assisted** with funding bids
- **shared** resources on constitution and governance
- **connected** volunteer groups to similar projects

The flexibility of the Green Spaces grant allowed us to balance [funds] from other sources with particular focusses or specifications [and] allowed us to demonstrate matched funding,

Andy Linley, Southlands Methodist Church



Hiring a volunteer co-ordinator helped Friends of Rowntree Park to embark on exciting new projects

47

groups given tailored funding advice

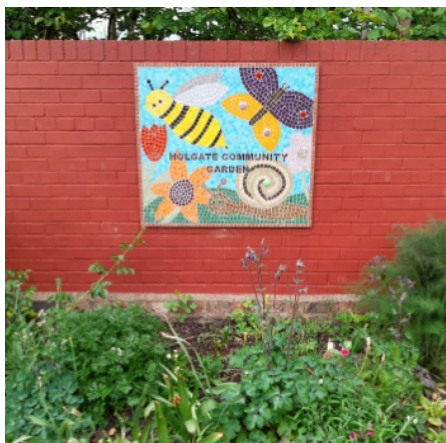
4

letters of support for major funding bids

6

peer learning/ networking workshops

2019



HOLGATE GARDEN

Holgate Community Garden expanded the work they do to keep the garden flourishing with flowers, fruit trees, and wildflower areas by running family-friendly gardening sessions, training new volunteers to scythe, and having pupils at the nearby school plant 170 bulbs.



YUMI GARDEN

The York Unifying Multicultural Initiative's (YUMI) International Community Garden is a tranquil place where people from different cultures come together to grow and cook. Their grant allowed them to expand their facilitated gardening sessions and develop referral pathways for refugees.



HULL ROAD PARK

The Conservation Volunteers (TCV) lead a dedicated Thursday volunteering group who tend the flowerbeds and carry out conservation work. Facilitated gardening sessions allowed them to support and engage vulnerable volunteers and start a new food growing group for local residents.



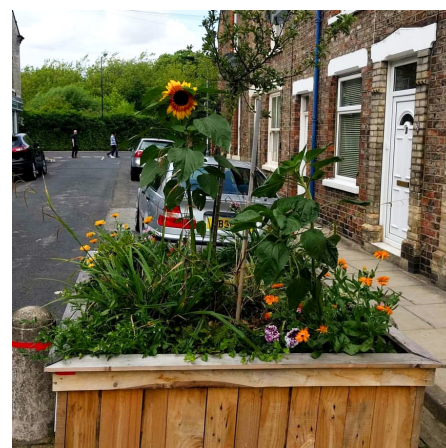
CLARENCE GARDENS

Previous GGS funding enabled TCV and York LGBT Forum to create an inspiring Human Rights Garden in the park. Continuation funding was provided for TCV to advise the LGBT Forum on how to make the transition to becoming an independent volunteering group.



FISHPONDS WOOD

The Friends of Fishponds Wood and Beech Grove are committed to increasing and maintaining the biodiversity of this precious woodland and the green areas in the nearby Beech Grove. They purchased a toolshed so that they can expand their action days.



REDFEARN

Redfearn Community Group is dedicated to greening the alleys and streets around Willis Street, Gordon Street, Wolsley Street, Wellington Street. A GGS grant furthered their mission to add beauty and biodiversity to the neighbourhood with planting parties, meet-ups, plant swaps and 'backyard crawls'!



ROWNTREE PARK

The Friends of Rowntree Park is a charity and tireless team of volunteers that help keep one of York's best-loved green spaces looking beautiful. Hiring a paid volunteer co-ordinator has helped to organise and grow their gardening, wellbeing, environmental and cultural initiatives.



POTTERY LANE

Dodsworth Residents' Association (DARA) are giving a neglected piece of land at the end of a junction between Pottery Lane and Dodsworth Avenue a green makeover by planting fruit trees and bushes. They will establish a regular volunteering group who will enhance the space further.



MILLENNIUM FIELDS

St Nicks led meadowkeeping sessions to enhance the grassland habitat at Millennium Fields, connecting the cluster of volunteer groups working in the area and teaching new volunteers how to scythe, coppice, create wildflower meadows, and plant trees.

2020



BISHOPHILLBILLIES

Bishophillbillies volunteers tend Bishophill Community Garden. Their GGS grant is going towards a neighbourhood greening project that will fill the streets of Bishophill with plants, flowers, protected pollinator zones, sensory gardens and street planters.



GLEN GARDENS

The Friends of Glen Gardens volunteer at a Green Flag Award-winning park in Heworth. They used their grant to create Keith's Wood – a woodland garden with native flowers, shrubs and trees and a wheelchair-friendly path winding through it.



WOOD THORPE

Woodthorpe Community Group is a long-standing organisation for residents who have revitalised the local play area and planted bulbs around the neighbourhood. A small grant from GGS funded a community bulb-planting event that added splashes of colour to Woodthorpe's verges.



THE GROVES

Led by Flower Power, the Greening the Groves project supports Groves residents to grow flowers and herbs by holding weekly gardening sessions. A facilitator helps residents develop knowledge and skills to green unused public spaces and back alleys.



CLIFTON BACKIES

The Friends of Clifton Backies (FoCB) have been maintaining and enhancing the wildlife reserve for over 20 years. They are using GGS funds to create a storage space near the site so that they can extend their volunteering activities and engage more volunteers.



TRAVELLERS TRUST

York Travellers Trust is a community-led organisation for the Gypsy and Traveller communities in and around York.

Their growing project is enhancing green spaces in and around the Clifton site and encouraging residents to take advantage of the physical and mental health benefits of gardening.



SOUTH LANDS

Volunteers have transformed an unloved patch of land beside Southlands Methodist Church into a community garden for local residents to meet, relax, play, learn about sustainable living and grow edible produce for Planet Food's pay-as-you-feel café.



EDIBLE YORK

Edible York is a charity that has helped to bloom a network of edible community gardens and leads Abundance, an urban harvesting project which gets volunteers picking and redistributing surplus fruit. Their grant allowed them to focus on the enhancement and maintenance of several fruit tree sites across the city, recruiting and upskilling new volunteers.



THE LANES GARDEN

The Lanes Community Garden committee are transforming a derelict plot in Clifton into a lush urban garden with raised beds, fruit trees and bushes, herbs, and flowers. Funding from Growing Green Spaces will help them to fully reinvigorate the site and recruit local volunteers.

2021



YSJ & RAY

Staff and students at York St John University have built relationships with Syrian refugees and offered them spaces within a community allotment to support them with their integration into the local community. GGS funds will pay for refugees to travel to the site.



SCARCROFT ALLOTMENT

Scarcroft Green Nursery is turning an overgrown allotment into a space for the children to enjoy, learn, and grow fruit and vegetables. The GGS fund will help get the garden fit for purpose, after which families will volunteer their time to maintain this vibrant, publicly accessible resource.



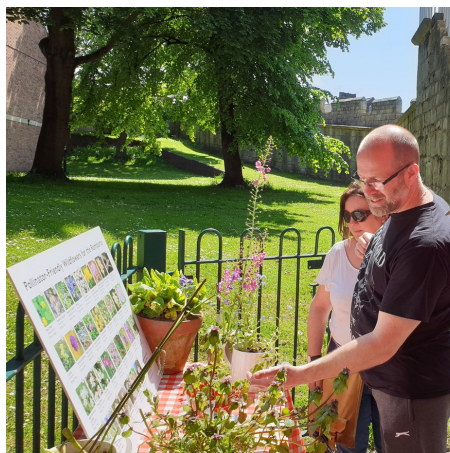
ACOMB GREEN

The Friends of Acomb Green has been working in the community for over 11 years. Funding will enable them to secure insurance, tools, and native plants to continue and enlarge what they already do on the Green and on Sovereign Park and add wildlife trails and signage to the sites.



DOOR 84

Door 84 is a charity and community hub in Clifton and one of the leading providers of services to children, young people and the community in York. GGS funds will contribute towards the creation of an all-weather outdoor area to run gardening activities.



YORK WALLS

The Friends of York Walls is a charity aiming to increase the public's engagement with the walls and ramparts of the city. They are embarking on an ambitious mission to enhance the ramparts with native wildflowers and use the process to explore new ways of engaging residents in deprived areas next to the walls with wildflower planting and heritage.



NEW EARSWICK

The Joseph Rowntree Housing Trust is expanding its no-dig edible raised beds at the New Earswick Folk Hall café, the hub for the JRHT-maintained social housing. So far, the garden has attracted interest from a diverse range of local residents and was particularly effective in promoting good mental health and wellbeing.



LIDGETT GARDEN

Lidgett Methodist Church's Community Garden is run by a small volunteering group who grow produce for the local community to pick and harvest and for the church's food bank to distribute and. Funding will revive the soil in time for their summer plans to start a larger regular volunteering group including users of the food bank.



GREENING LEEMAN

York Central Co-Owned's vision is of a thriving neighbourhood, connected to a thriving city, a place where citizens choose to take care of their environment and neighbours. GGS funding will allow them to kickstart some co-designed community greening within the Leeman Road area by running creative planning activities.



FOSS FAIRY TRAIL

The Foss Fairy Trail blossomed during lockdown when a local resident noticed fairy doors on trees on her regular river walks beside the Foss and decided to create fairy houses made from salvaged material. With the Groves Association and Flower Power York, they plan to enhance biodiversity and access by creating woodland areas and footpaths.



ROOTING FOR JUSTICE

Rooting for Justice is a social enterprise dedicated to tackling food poverty in York. Based on Haxby Road allotments, their pilot project will re-energise uncultivated land on these sites, working with local volunteers to grow fresh produce, donating produce to Tang Hall Big Local who provide hot meals and food parcels to vulnerable groups.

Wild York

WILD YORK

Wild York is a new collective identity for York's greening initiatives that aims to enhance green space and biodiversity on a city-wide scale by connecting the existing network more closely, thereby enabling resource sharing and capacity building. They are creating a website with an interactive map guide to green space volunteering in York.

Case study 1: Friends of Rowntree Park



£1,300 for a volunteer co-ordinator

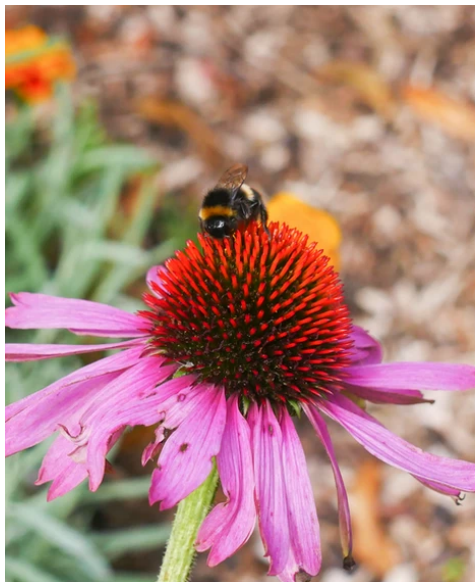
The Friends of Rowntree Park are a well-established volunteering group who have been improving the park since 1993 and have recently become a charity. They oversee a huge range of activities in the park, including garden volunteering, 'woods for wellbeing' sessions, and forest schools. They used their GGS funds to hire a volunteer facilitator, who has put systems in place to co-ordinate and attract volunteers. Since receiving their GGS grant in July 2019, FoRTP have attracted 82 new volunteers, 59 of whom are now regulars. New gardening volunteers have worked on two new projects so far: the Pollinator Project and the Friends Garden. New volunteers in gardening have included those with learning difficulties, some who felt socially isolated and also a recovering alcoholic.

I really enjoy gardening. I can't do much heavy work but being around others and feeling a buzz is great

Gill, gardening volunteer



Case study 2: Holgate Community Garden



£800 for planting materials and tools

Over the past six years, the Holgate Community Garden volunteers have transformed a derelict park at Upper St Paul's into a thriving, vibrant space in an area where most residents don't have gardens. They meet for family-friendly gardening sessions each month to keep the area flourishing with flowers, fruit, vegetables, herbs, and wildflowers. A GGS grant allowed them to purchase tools, manure, pollinator plants, and mosaic materials to increase the beauty and biodiversity of the area, as well as to acquire native wildflower bulbs and seeds that every pupil of St Paul's Primary School was able to participate in planting (around 170 students). This activity has resulted in several local families coming forward to volunteer and the new scythes have attracted a new volunteer who is keen to carry on scything for other green spaces throughout the city in future.

I absolutely think the things the people have enjoyed about the garden and volunteering have been helped the GGS grant—specifically, having quality tools to enable them to tend the garden (both useful and creates a spirit of their volunteer commitment being valued); [...] the super-positive experiences for each of the children at St Paul's School with the bulb planting they did and the connection to the garden that that experience has engendered.

Julie Fern, lead applicant

Case study 3: St Nicks at Millennium Fields



£5,000 for facilitated volunteering sessions

St Nicks is a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO) with the goal of helping York move towards a sustainable future. Beyond its nature reserve and Environment Centre, the organisation carries out a vast array of off-site activities, including habitat restoration. Their GGS grant allowed them to engage and train volunteers to enrich the grassland near Millennium Bridge. Volunteers learned to scythe, manage grassland, plant and coppice trees, and survey and identify species. The project was suspended and restricted owing to COVID restrictions, but – with £3,350 left to spend on volunteering sessions – St Nicks have involved 91 volunteers, held 19 volunteering sessions (234 volunteer hours), and recruited 33 new regular volunteers. The grant has also allowed them to develop their ambitious plans to expand the project, collaborating with Friends of Danesmead Wood, CYC Public Realm, and the Woodmeadow Trust to use Millennium Fields to be part of a pilot project for landscape scale approach to nature conservation working across the wider area including Fulford Ings SSSI with Natural England.

75

trees
planted

350

plants
established

91

volunteers
involved

2kg

of seed sown

The Millennium Fields habitats became a vital green space during COVID [...] 82% of volunteers were new to the project. Due to COVID and needing to restrict numbers, we did not publicise as widely as we would have normally so many were recruited through word of mouth or from passers by stopping to talk.

Jonathan Dent, Natural Habitats Manager

Lessons learned

1 Groups are harnessing flexible and inclusive ways to engage volunteers

Green volunteering in York takes many different forms. As well as running regular gardening groups, organisations such as **Friends of Rowntree Park** have unlocked the benefits of micro-volunteering by allowing people to litter-pick, water, and weed on an ad-hoc and solitary basis after being inducted.

In contrast, groups like **Holgate Community Garden** frame their gardening days as a series of monthly Facebook events in which the whole family are invited to plant. In one of our peer-support workshops, **Scarcroft Green Nursery** offered an excellent tip for family planting days: just as you might use nasturtiums as sacrificial crops to lure aphids away from beans, having some sacrificial herbs for young children to use for potions and mud kitchen cookery allowed adults to get more gardening done!

Groups that present their volunteering sessions as an opportunity to learn were successful in attracting lots of recruits. **Edible York**, for instance, ran hands-on fruit-tree pruning workshops, with donations welcomed but not required. **St Nicks'** Millennium Fields sessions promised 'scything, seed sowing, wildflower planting, coppicing and pruning', but added 'any age and ability welcome'.

Community 'days' or 'missions' also seemed to engage volunteers – more on which below!

Recommendations

For voluntary groups:

- experiment with different kinds of volunteering sessions
- frame volunteering as a way to learn new gardening, growing, and conservation skills or as workshops
- consult **Capital Growth's guide to inclusive volunteering**

Lessons learned

2 York has a wealth of energy and expertise - it just needs to be better connected

Volunteers in York have a range of resources available to them. Some of the groups we worked with benefited from membership of **CVS**, which is free and provides access to volunteer management forums and funding alerts. Many more benefited from discussions with **Jane Granville**, our Funding and Development Officer, who cascades funding calls to groups and consults with them on funding applications, including: **Friends of Rowntree Park**; **Bike Belles**; and **KindleWoods**. One group also took advantage of **York Volunteers**, CVS' volunteering centre.

Lots of projects benefited from hugely positive relationships with **CYC's Environment and Community Team**, who were frequently described as 'brilliant' for the practical help and support they provide. Volunteers also commented on how valuable they found the biannual meetings of the **York Open Spaces Forum** as a space to discuss best practice and share news. (However, quite a few also commented that they hadn't heard of the Forum and found it difficult to locate details online; see below.)

GoodGym's Community Missions and **York Cares'** employee volunteering programme were indispensable for volunteers, with armies of volunteers descending on green spaces in need of blitzing or bramble-bashing. The **Princes' Trust** and local schools' enrichment programmes also proved useful. **Askham Grange Prison and Young Offender Institution**, an open prison in the York area, is an underused resource; women there are entitled to volunteer with registered charities. Some of the larger green volunteering organisations (e.g. **Friends of Rowntree Park** and **The Conservation Volunteers**) have been able to connect with the **University of York** and **York St John University's** volunteering teams; it is probably lack of time and charitable status that prevents more groups from doing so.



York has excellent reciprocal networks to exchange resources and knowledge, such as the **York Edible Exchange** and **York Plant Swap** Facebook groups. Many of the voluntary groups we worked with have benefited from the expertise and generosity of the well-established charities **St Nicks** and **Edible York**. St Nicks was often able to advise on conservation-related questions, whereas EY primarily provides support to new growing projects (through its new Growing Mentor scheme, among other routes) and, through its **Abundance** project, advice and assistance with fruit tree care and pruning. **Rooting for Justice**, a CIC focusing on food justice and security, operates on a similar model, with members positioning themselves in a facilitative role to fledgling community gardens.

Recommendations

For CYC:

- fund and promote Wild York, and redirect to it through the CYC website

For voluntary groups:

- join Wild York
- explore the resources above

It has become a commonplace to advocate for more 'joined-up' working; while the hyperlocal dimension to many green spaces projects is necessary and valuable, Growing Green Spaces grantholders did report that they found peer-support workshops valuable for linking up with similar projects and exchanging knowledge and resources. There is clearly a need for a directory of groups and the resources above, as well as a network that could draw in and empower new volunteers, which is why we made the decision to award funding to **Wild York**, a new network that will link up and promote green volunteering groups and opportunities across the city, currently contactable through Instagram and email letsgetwild.york@gmail.com.

3 Visibility is crucial

Predictably, groups with a social media presence (Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram) were generally more successful in attracting new volunteers. However, volunteering itself proved to be a powerful recruitment tool: **YUMI**, **Greening the Groves**, and **St Nicks** all reported that passersby had stopped to ask what they were doing and ended up volunteering. (**Friends of Rowntree Park** recommended to other groups their customised hi-vis outfits and Volunteers at Work signs!) We found that members of the public often aren't aware of how much volunteers do for York's green spaces and assume parks are entirely maintained by paid CYC employees – this lack of knowledge is in itself a barrier to volunteer recruitment.



Recommendations

For CYC:

- invest in signage making clear the contribution of voluntary groups to green spaces and how to get involved
- update and expand parks and open spaces directory

For voluntary groups:

- create and promote social media volunteer roles through York CVS' volunteer centre and the universities
- apply for ward funding to create signage and increase volunteer visibility

4 Information can increase participation (*and be a barrier!*)



In the 2021 GGS funding round, we positioned ourselves as facilitators of new initiatives and offered would-be volunteers help in getting the information they needed to succeed. It was great to be able to nurture enthusiasm for wildlife gardening and pollinator-friendly planting by connecting people to **CYC's Environment and Communities Officers**, local conservation expertise (from the generous staff at **St Nicks** and the **Woodmeadow Trust**), and **Edible York** and **Abundance's** seemingly encyclopaedic knowledge of community gardens and orchards in York! Groups also commented that our 'light-touch' advice on pollinator-friendly planting was useful.



This knowledge can be both enabling and overwhelming: even groups with expert knowledge at their fingertips admitted to finding the intricacies of wildflower meadow creation confusing, and the timescales required for conservation-focused projects can impede enthusiasm (for instance, waiting to survey species in an area before planting, or gradually decreasing the fertility of a lawn), so there is a delicate balance to be struck in environmental education and green volunteering facilitation.

But the practical and bureaucratic barriers that can squash initial enthusiasm also became clear. Residents interested in street planters and planting on verges had to navigate long and complicated email threads involving various different parts of the council, often to be told that their plans weren't feasible in their current form. In some cases this was for a very good and insurmountable reason: for example, one street fruit tree idea was a non-starter because of regulations concerning turning space. But – despite the challenges this presents – it would be useful for the Council to standardise the processes involved in starting up some common projects (e.g. a container gardening, back alley greening, verge planting, no-mow areas, street planters, adding features to a park) and creating brief, accessible 'how to' guides online, so that momentum can be maintained and even generated. Equipping citizens with the knowledge they need to get started would allow them to take on active roles in the City's new Pollinator Strategy.



Recommendations

For CYC:

- develop processes and online guides so that citizens can be inspired to participate in urban greening and make their projects feasible (e.g. attaching a wildflower verge project to an existing organisation with liability insurance) rather than undergo lengthy queries only to find out they are not feasible in their current form

5 Groups want to work with the Council rather than going at it alone

Growing Green Spaces began amid vibrant debates about the future of green spaces (parks in particular) and how to surmount the challenges caused by cuts. While Dave Morris, chair of the National Federation of Parks and Green Spaces, insists that **'the only way to halt the ever-deepening funding crisis affecting all parks across the UK is to make it a statutory service'**, there is growing enthusiasm and interest surrounding the possibility of community-owned parks.

However, the commercial viability of this is questionable, particularly in more deprived areas that have the most to gain from high-quality green spaces. It's also not clear that this would necessarily lead to a greater sense of ownership or control over public spaces among the general community; as Shared Assets write in their 2020 report **'Community ownership and management of parks and green spaces'**, Friends of organisations are, 'by definition', 'interest group[s]' and 'may not involve people from all parts of the community'. Community control therefore has the capacity to 'end up being exclusive rather than inclusive, with only certain "types" of people or uses welcome in a space'.

We discussed the prospect of community ownership with several groups, none of whom expressed interest in pursuing this route. One group remarked that – although the prospect of having more of a say in what happens in their green space is welcome – CYC benefit from 'economies of scale' and are better placed to shoulder the risks of being responsible for a green space (e.g. parks prone to flooding).

Recommendations

For CYC:

- involve voluntary groups in creating management plans for green spaces wherever possible
- allot funding to groups that do wish to pursue community management or ownership to seek consultation from organisations such as Shared Assets

6 There is a conflict between sustainability and social value

One of our objectives in our Service Level Agreement was ‘to support [voluntary groups] to become financially and organisationally sustainable’. ‘Sustainable’ is open to interpretation and there are many ways to approach this. In some cases, the best course of action was to advise well-established groups with charitable status on how to apply for major funding bids (e.g. Esmée Fairbairn, The National Lottery Heritage Fund, The National Lottery Community Fund, The Postcode Neighbourhood Trust) that would sustain them beyond the life of their Growing Green Spaces grant. In some ways, though, this means encouraging groups to think in terms of large projects that require ongoing investment, therefore rendering them less self-sustaining. Grassroots volunteer groups that have made the transition to registered charities (such as **Friends of Rowntree Park**) now face a dilemma: they have unlocked project-based funding for initiatives that will expand their social value, but still struggle with considerable core costs (e.g. volunteer manager roles) and lack insufficient income to meet those.

On the other hand, projects led by established charitable organisations with paid facilitators were able to increase their environmental and social impact, despite not technically being as ‘financially sustainable’ as grassroots, small-scale, entirely volunteer-run projects that rely on small fundraising events (e.g. revenue from plant sales) and networks of exchange (e.g. seed swapping) to provide small but essential injections of cash for tools, materials, volunteer expenses, and so on.

The tension between financial sustainability and social and environmental value was clearly manifested in the projects run in Hull Road Park by the York branch of **The Conservation Volunteers (TCV)**, a long-standing environmental charity with a record of community engagement. A grant of £10,000 was awarded to the Thursday gardening group, led and supported in horticultural and conservation activities by experienced TCV project officers, with the aim of establishing a Friends of group. An issue that the Advisory Group grappled with was whether a £1,000-grant to a grassroots organisation without staff costs could support a similar number of beneficiaries from the community (5–15) and – if so – should we aim to fund smaller groups?

However, the Hull Road Park volunteers engaged in conservation activities (e.g. wildflower patch creation) that would not have been possible without the specialist support of TCV officers. Moreover, facilitation meant that a group of vulnerable people (variously elderly, suffering from mental ill health, those with additional needs) felt supported to participate. For the project to maintain this crucial social and environmental value, ongoing paid facilitation appeared to be necessary. Was the aim of establishing a Friends of group, then, achievable – or even desirable?

Groups with charitable status who are able to deliver high-impact health and environmental interventions might consider new streams of funding, such as NHS grants (e.g. Clinical Commissioning Group funding and Green Social Prescribing funding), or securing council contracts (with social value commitments). Projects that are 'delivered' by a paid staff member from a charity should perhaps be considered more of a *service* than as a catalyst for long-term volunteering that will be *led* by the local community.

In contrast, we were able to support some groups that operate on a co-productive rather than 'service delivery' model, asking citizens what changes they want to see in their local area (**YoCo**), coalition-building (**St Nicks, Wild York**), experimenting with participatory mapping (**Bishophillbillies**) and co-design (**YoCo**), sharing expertise, skills, and resources (**Rooting for Justice, Redfearn, Edible York**), and creating reciprocal networks (**Edible York**). These approaches are to be welcomed, but need time, money, and funders' willingness to relinquish immediate measurable progress and control over the eventual outcomes.



Recommendations

For CYC:

- actively encourage more VSCE organisations to tender for services such as grass-cutting, hedge planting, etc., weighing the costs of paid volunteer facilitation against the social and environmental value these organisations deliver
- award funding for community groups to experiment with and embed co-productive approaches,
- proactively engage 'hard-to-reach' residents to co-design park management plans and consider making a (financial) contribution for their time



For volunteer groups:

- diversify sources of funding
- recognise that being in a community group places you in a position of power; consult the **IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation**, moving towards collaboration and empowerment rather than consultation
- If your goal is to involve the local community (rather than to carry out a contracted service), embed the principles of co-production. Rather than designing a project and then carrying out community engagement, co-design the project from the ground up, asking people what they changes they want to see in their local green space and helping them to achieve these.
- Link up with existing groups
- Proactively engage 'hard-to-reach' residents and consider making a (financial) contribution for their time

Grants

2019

Project	Organisation	Award
Hull Road Park gardening group	The Conservation Volunteers (TCV)	10,000
Hull Road Park growing group	TCV	8,385
Clarence Gardens gardening group	TCV	500
Millennium Fields	St Nicks	5,000
YUMI allotment	York Unifying Multicultural Initiative (YUMI)	5,000
Pottery Lane community garden	Dodsworth Residents' Association	600
Volunteering at Holgate Community Garden	Holgate Community Group	1,000
Toolshed for Fishponds Wood	Friends of Fishponds Wood and the Beech Grove	500
Redfearn alley greening	Redfearn Community Group	800
Volunteer co-ordinator for Friends of Rowntree Park	Friends of Rowntree Park	1,300

TOTAL AWARDED: 33,085

2020

Project	Organisation	Award
Greening the Groves	Flower Power CIC	5,280
Growing project at Clifton Traveller Site	York Travellers Trust	1,470
The Lanes Community Garden	The Lanes	1,170
Abundance urban harvest	Edible York	1,020
Toolshed for Clifton Backies	Friends of Clifton Backies	1,400
Keith's Wood	Friends of Glen Gardens	1,400
Community bulb planting	Woodthorpe Community Group	200
Southlands Community Garden	Southlands Methodist Church	1,500
Bishophill greening project	Bishophillbillies	2,250

TOTAL AWARDED: 15,700

2021

Project	Organisation	Award
Edible growing at New Earswick Folk Hall	Joseph Rowntree Housing Trust	800
Wild York website development	Kaizen Arts	3,838
Community allotment	Rooting for Justice CIC	1,500
Foss Fairy Trail and Wildlife Walk	Groves Association	1,800
Greening Leeman	York Central Co-Owned	2,000
Allotments for York refugees	York St John University	1,200
Scarcroft Green Nursery allotment	York Childcare Ltd	1,500
Wildflowers by the Walls	Friends of York Walls	1,500
Lidgett Grove community garden	Lidgett Methodist Church	400
Acomb Green planting and trails	Friends of Acomb Green	1,000
Door 84 outdoor area	Door 84	1,000

TOTAL AWARDED: 20,543

