



Sow the City
9 Wilcock St
Manchester
M16 7DA

September 2020

RE: Open Letter - Support for the Community Gardening Sector in Greater Manchester as part of the COVID-19 Response

Community gardens and community food growing projects are vitally important to the physical and mental health of the residents of Greater Manchester.

The virus has shown with terrible clarity the damage being done to our health by the modern food system. Diet-related illness is one of the top three risk factors for dying of COVID-19. This has given a new urgency to the slow-motion disaster of the British diet. Even before the pandemic, poor diet was responsible for one in seven deaths in the UK (90,000 a year). That is vastly more than the death toll from traffic accidents (1,780 a year) and almost as fatal as smoking (95,000). This is a medical emergency we can no longer afford to ignore.¹

To survive the COVID-19 crisis and its long term impacts, the community gardening network need the help of local councils, public authorities and businesses during and beyond the end of the current crisis.

We ask for:

- Increased **access to land** so we can expand our activities and develop new projects.
- **Funding to cover the very significant shortfall in generated income expected** over the next year so we can help more people and continue to deliver services to everyone in our communities.
- **Adoption and implementation of policy** that supports the development of community growing projects in Greater Manchester.

Through the Covid outbreak, community growing projects have provided food for those most in need. We are very experienced in supporting our local communities, providing unique spaces and opportunities for everyone, including vulnerable people, older people with dementia, people experiencing anxiety and depression, young people, disabled people, and people with learning difficulties.

Community gardens generate a significant amount of their income through school visits, charitable enterprise (cafes, markets, team days), events, produce sales and donations. Like our commercial peers, we are facing a significant and ongoing drop in generated income. However we are not currently eligible for the Small Business Grants.

¹ National Food Strategy Part One July 2020

Our organisations must retain core staff and volunteers to maintain affordable provision of fresh food, and the mental and physical health of our vulnerable beneficiaries.

When the immediate crisis abates, community gardens will be places for people to recover from issues caused by this crisis, including trauma, anxiety, depression, isolation, fear of going out, and loss of work. We are skilled in volunteer management, education, career development and promoting positive mental health. Our sites provide fresh food, fresh air, and opportunities to connect with nature and urban agriculture. Gardening is also excellent at addressing the root causes of obesity, which has emerged as a priority to address as the pandemic has progressed. Finally, growing food and gardening is also one of the best ways to improve engagement with climate change issues, which is of course a crisis that continues in the background as the pandemic dominates the headlines.

We look forward to hearing how councils and government are able to provide support for our sector to continue through this crisis so that we can continue to support local people in need within our great conurbation.

Signed by the Chairs, Trustees, Staff, Volunteers and service users of:

Rachael Antwis	Founder	Barlow Road Community Orchard
Carolyn Kagan	Chair	Chorlton Alliance
Dr Karim Adab	GP Partner	Chorlton Family Practice
Martin Toal	Chair	Chorlton on Medlock Allotment Society
Wendy McCormack	Executive Headteacher	Christ Church CE; Lewis Street & Lark Hill Primary Schools, Salford
Christian Berger	Project Lead	Fallow Moss Garden
Deborah Thompson	Public Health Consultant	Freelance
Nicolas Browne	GP Principal	Gill Medical Centre
Gary Millar	Director of Social Enterprise and Investment	GMCVO
Giles Wilmore	Lead for People and Communities	Greater Manchester Health and Social Care Partnership
Mike Ormerod	Executive Director	Groundwork Greater Manchester
Rich Browning	Chief Executive	Healthy Me Healthy Communities
Chris Walsh	Co-founder & Co-ordinator	Kindling Trust
Mo Blue and Juliet Davis-Dufayard	Co-founders and co-ordinators	Let's Keep Growing (Longsight)
Mike Wild	Chief Executive	Macc
Andy Kelly	Director of Facilities	Manchester Central
Ali Abbas	Joint co-ordinator	Manchester Friends of the Earth
Emma Flynn	Assistant Director North Locality	Manchester Local Care Organisation
Katy Calvin-Thomas	Acting Chief Executive	Manchester and Trafford Local Care Organisation
Joe Ravetz		University of Manchester
Haleh Moravej	Founder	Met Munch (dept Nutritional Sciences, Manchester Metropolitan University)
Lisa Davenport	Head of Centre	Moss-Side Millennium Powerhouse
Lucy Cooke	Community Development Worker	New Springs Community Project Group
Robin Lawler	Chief Executive Officer	Northwards Housing
Elsa Little	Trustee	Old Moat Greenies Community Allotment
Corin Bell	Director	Open Kitchen Manchester

Rachel Bennion	Petrus Service Manager	Petrus Community Garden, Rochdale
Sam Payne, Josephine Payne, Mike Hodson	Directors	Platt Fields Market Garden
Katie Ulrick	Co-ordinator	Riverbank Community Garden
Marva Lashley	Lead	Ryder brow Community Allotment Society
Jon Ross	Director	Sow the City CIC
Mark Burton	Chair	Steady State Manchester
Adrian Smith	Director	Unique Improvements
Joe Ravetz	Co-Director of the Collaboratory for Urban Resilience & Energy	University of Manchester
Dr Michael Hardman	Senior Lecturer in Urban Geography	University of Salford
Mark Stein	PhD in Sustainable Food Procurement	University of Salford
Michelle Howarth	Senior Lecturer	University of Salford
David Beck	Lecturer of Social Policy	University of Salford
Chris Dabbs	Chief Executive	Unlimited Potential
Dave Saunders	Lead	Whalley Rangers
Ric Francland	Founder	Wudl

