

Dig In

Community Food Growing in West Lancashire

School growers enjoy getting 'chilli'



As we reported in the last issue of Dig In, a Skelmersdale based business called 'All About Food' donated a prize for the schools Show What You Grow day for the Best Chilli Plant. The lucky winning school was Pinfold Primary and their gardening club recently took up their prize and visited All About Food's office 'The Tree House'.

Lindsay from All About Food says: '*We welcomed the children to the Tree House, and took them on a trip around our office to meet all of our foodies (everyone who works here is known as foodies) and to explain about the different departments we have, so they could understand how our business works.*

This was followed by a short presentation about our Peri Peri chillies - looking at how the chilli farmers grow them, and in return how this helps the chilli farmers.

We also enjoyed a tasting session, trying different foods with chillies in before going to Nando's in Aintree for a hearty lunch.'

Sign up for RHS school gardening awards

As the growing season comes to an end, why not use the extra time to sign your school up for RHS School Gardening Awards?

This simple RHS scheme can help you develop your school garden whilst earning great rewards. The rewards scheme is made up of five levels that provide achievable goals which will help you turn your garden into a valuable learning resource.

Each level is easy to achieve by submitting a few words and photos via the RHS website. Each successfully completed level is awarded with a certificate and brilliant reward worth up to £200!

For more information and to sign up, go to: <https://schoolgardening.rhs.org.uk/school-gardening-awards>



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Allotment sites update - part 1

The CVS has just completed its end of season survey of allotment sites in West Lancashire. Taken collectively there is still a strong demand for allotments and a growth in the number of people active in growing their own food in the Borough. More plots are now being worked by friends or family members in support of the plot holder, and overall the survey reveals that there are 593 individuals actively involved in cultivating the 366 allotment plots in West Lancashire. Of these, 90 are new to 'allotmenting' since September 2016. The number of plots stayed roughly the same over the year at 366. Most sites have people on their waiting lists – 116 in total as at the end of September 2017. However a number of sites have vacant plots notably those in the east of the Borough in the Appley Bridge / Roby Mill / Up Holland areas. During the survey, the CVS visited a number of the sites and in this and the next issue we will be giving a flavour of both the achievements and challenges facing them.

Liverpool Road, Skelmersdale

Liverpool Road is one of the oldest West Lancs sites and still going strong. Tucked away in a lovely location in Old Skelmersdale, all 22 plots are full with waiting list. Plots include one full of wonderful dalias...

Points of interest:

- They have made recent improvements to their car park, and erected a wooden clubhouse. The latter has a solar panel for generating electricity which provides lighting in the clubhouse and enables plotholders to charge batteries for power tools etc
- They have also installed a composting toilet and undertaken all the work themselves.



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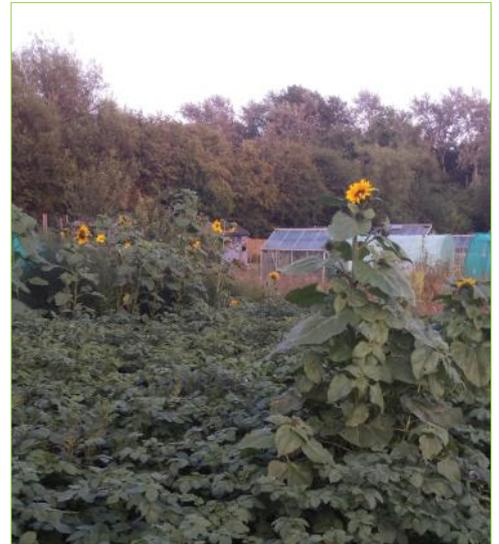
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Skelmersdale Horticultural Society

All 25 plots are full with a waiting list. The Society is recovering from the arson attack in June, and has managed to raise almost £500 via crowdfunding to help plottolders replace destroyed sheds.

They are currently managing the new site opposite them in the Tawd Park, but a new committee is being formed for this and independence is planned.

SHS are looking to raise some funds for further equipment, and working on reducing the flooding that has become a recent issue.



St Teresa's, Upholland

Established in 2011, St Teresa's Allotment Group (STAG) has 36 plots in an idyllic setting. There are currently 6 plots vacant, and it is hoped that advertising in the New Year will help find new tenants. However, enthusiasm remains high, and many plottolders have found unexpected benefits: *'It's not just a matter of food growing'* said one committee member, *'it's the community spirit that evolves, looking out for your neighbour.'*



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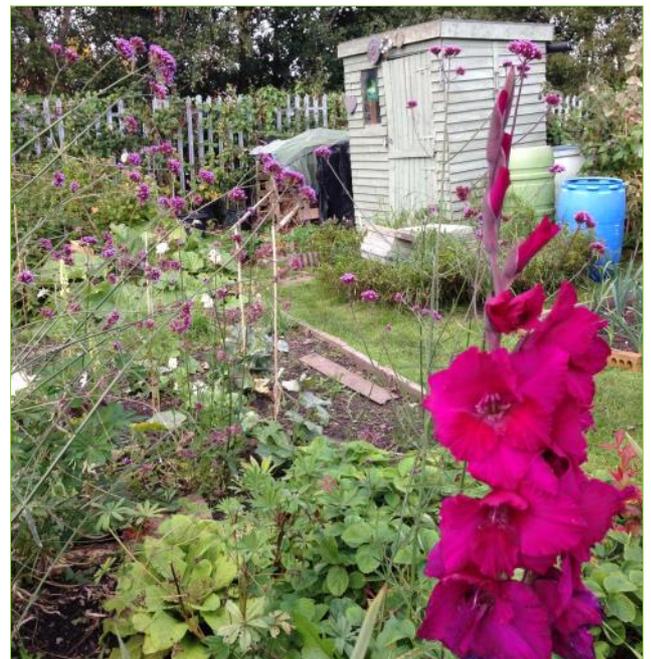
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Burscough Allotment Society

The site is thriving with all 13 plots full, and a waiting list. The new fence (funded by our community food growing grants) was installed in 2013 and has made a big difference to security of the site. It has even provided extra vertical growing space!

Points of interest:

- The society has become good at raising funds by selling homemade preserves at local fayres
- The site was managed by the Borough Council until 2012 when it became self-managing, and it has since gone from strength to strength.



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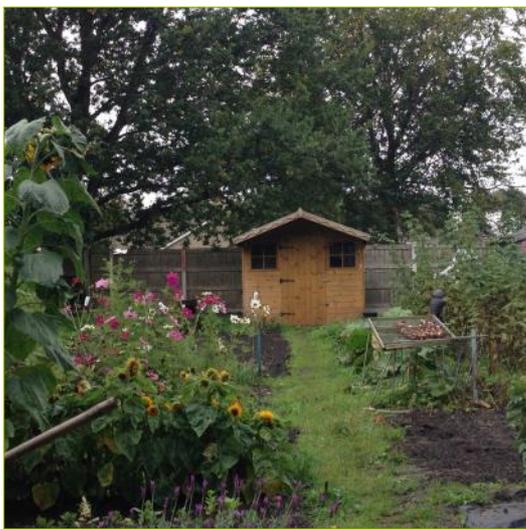


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DIGAS, Skelmersdale

After establishing the site in 2010, the ploholders at DIGAS are still showing that people's determination to grow can overcome the most testing of circumstances! They have endured several years of uncertainty as the adjacent building and land on which some of the site is located, has been up for sale (still unresolved). If this sale goes ahead, they will lose 4 out of their 12 plots.

This year has seen 10 break-ins and the group are looking at ways of increasing security. Despite all this, crops are thriving on the remaining 8 plots and the ploholders remain resilient and undaunted!



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Food for Thought

At this year's Green Fayre and Burscough's YobsFest, Burscough Community Farm conducted a survey to find out more about people's attitudes towards food, health, and diet.

They asked four questions:

1. How much influence do you think diet has on your health?
2. How much influence does being outdoors have on your health?
3. Would you grow your own food if you had the opportunity?
4. Which is most important to you Organic or Local?



The first two questions were both answered positively by over 95% of people, with most people knowing that a good diet and getting outdoors is good for their health. The answers to Question Three were more surprising, with over 90% of people answering that they would want to grow their own food if they could only have the opportunity. Obviously, more allotments are needed!

Neil Hickson, the community farm co-ordinator says: *The last question is the 'biggie' for me. I enjoyed asking it, and to be fair, lots of people did squirm as I told them they couldn't have both. The ones that didn't give the snap answer of 'local,' very quickly came down on the side of local. Local was again in the 90%.*

It seems that people have got the message that local is good. They don't want excessive food miles and they do want to support their local farmers. That's great. They want to save the planet, that's also great. But the use of herbicides and pesticides that impact on their health and on wildlife in their locality is perhaps less of an issue to them. As an organic grower, of course, I have an issue here. Growing organically is really hard sometimes, but I think it is important enough to go to all that trouble. For me, the biggest thing about organic growing is the benefit to the local environment. It's clear to me, we have to keep getting the organic message out there.

We will keep asking people what they think. If you have any questions you think we should be asking, please feel free to email me: neil@burscoughcommunityfarm.org



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Launch of Elswick Community Garden

On Friday 25th August Elswick Community Garden sprang into life with a bug hunt and picnic for local residents and children. The garden has been a long held ambition of Cllr Maureen Nixon who lives nearby. Together with Cllr Claire Cooper and Cllr Terry Devine, this dream has now been realised.

On the day local residents had a chance to look at the plans for the garden created by the Groundwork Trust and to suggest what they would like to see. There are already plans for memorial seating and a sensory garden for local residents to sit and enjoy.

The gardens have already received support from the community fund for integrating refugee families and Lancashire County Council to purchase materials and topsoil for raised beds for growing fruit and vegetables. Tanhouse Action Group (TAG) has also purchased some small raised beds for use in the garden. Fruit trees have been donated by Dave Beeston and Book Cycle and Wigan Council. Fruit bushes have been donated by James and Emma Furnell.



The West Lancs Community Food Growing Project aims to get more people involved in growing their own food and eating more healthily. We are working with local communities and schools to set up community food growing initiatives and providing help in finding the land (and funds) that might be needed. **We are keen to hear from anyone interested in growing their own food with others in West Lancs. Please get in touch!**

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Keep up to date at our website: www.wlcvs.org/projects/community-food-growing/



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