

Dig In

Community Food Growing in West Lancashire

Secure At Last!

The Digmaor Inspired Growers Allotment Society (DIGAS) has had more obstacles to overcome in setting up their allotment site than most. However, thanks to an Awards for All grant for security fencing, they have finally achieved their dream of a secure and fully functioning site.

Ron Cooper, Secretary writes: 'DIGAS are delighted to have received a grant from the Big Lottery Fund. This has purchased a security fence, which is needed to safeguard our crops and gardening equipment. Before it was our allotment site, the land was used for fly-tipping of builders rubbish, old tyres and a base for vandalism and underage drinking. We started planting crops in March 2011 and since then the site has been transformed into a wonderful place. DIGAS already has planning permission for the fence. However, the planning permission took longer than anticipated and this delayed our application for the Grant from the Big Lottery Fund. There have recently been some bouts of vandalism. But we hope that the new security fence will stop this. So, the Big Lottery Fund Grant which will pay for it has come along at the right time. AA Fencing of Aintree installed the fence in the first week of November and DIGAS has arranged a grand opening day in December to celebrate!'



DIGAS have also recently created their own website (using the free Community Web Kit package from BT): check it out at www.digas.btck.co.uk



Community Food Growing Project Grants



It is the last opportunity to apply for a Community Food Growing Project Grant! In this final year of the project, we have a remaining fund of £5,000 to award in grants to groups. Grants of up to £2,000 are available to groups wanting to set up new allotment / community food growing projects or up to £1,000 to those already running sites. The grant money is provided by NHS Central Lancashire to encourage more people to get involved in growing their own food and / or make their sites more productive.

For an application form, please contact Martin at the CVS on 01695 733737. Deadline is 14th Feb 2012.

Celebrate the New Year by learning something new!

Members of the Soil Association will be delivering a course called 'Growing Organically' on Tues 7th Feb 2012 at 10—12.30 at Digmaor Community Centre, Skelmersdale. Discover the benefits of growing organically and how this practice benefits nature and improves the soil. Cost is FREE—£10 booking fee (refundable on attendance). The course is organised by West Lancs CVS so for more information or to book a place, contact Greg Swift at CVS on 01695-733737 or email gregs@wlcvs.org



Dec 2011

West Lancs Community Food Growing Project supporting local people to grow their own food

Notes from West Lancs Allotment Federation

The WLAFF Exec Team manned an information table at the **Green Fayre Skelmersdale** in July, and ran a very successful Vegetable Tombola using produce direct from the allotments (soil included!). This proved very successful and it was rewarding to see families taking away fresh vegetables. The tombola raised £73.00 for Federation Funds. We are now looking to repeat this success next year with something bigger and better. If you have any ideas, please tell us about them. In August we attended the official opening of **Hesketh Bank Allotments** where Prof. David Bellamy cut the ribbon. This led to a three-page item in Lancashire Life magazine, which also included a few words from me.

Burscough Allotment Society is now set up at their site in Richmond Avenue. They already have over 50 on their waiting list and are exploring the district looking for more land. **St. Teresa's Allotment Group** in Upholland is growing with 36 plots now occupied, and they are in the process of applying for planning permission to further develop their site. In Skelmersdale, **Digmoor Inspired Growers** have at last got their plans accepted and have obtained the finance to complete their fencing.

The status of some local authority allotment sites is still in question. The Council are currently insisting that there are only two statutory sites in the Borough. This is contrary to a survey they completed in 1998 when six were declared as statutory. We believe that once 'Statutory' is declared it cannot be revoked. The **National Society** is now pursuing this. Only time will tell.

We received some excellent advice from **Alan Hull, ARI mentor**, which led us to successfully apply for funding from the **Cooperative Community Fund**. They awarded us £1000 to be used for core admin expenses.

I would like to thank all nineteen reps that attended our most recent meeting, the largest turnout since we started on this project. At the end of the meeting, Alan Hull was there to enlighten us all on the benefits of NSALG membership and self-management, plus lots of advice on securing additional funding.



Ray Fowler, Chair

School Gardening is Growing

As part of evaluating the School's Community Food Growing Programme, the project is undertaking a questionnaire survey of the schools worked with. The results of the survey will be featured in the Spring issue of Dig-in, but in the meantime, we thought we'd feature one school for whom the Gardening Club has been a catalyst of change!

At Pinfold School, Sue Fielding reports that 'around 20 children attend the Gardening Club each week, and 'Growing Gourmet Grub' has now been linked to 'Cooking Gourmet Grub'. There has been amazing support from everyone involved, and the enthusiasm of the children is an inspiration to all. Furthermore, successful grant applications and the support of the community have helped the impetus. We have also, thanks to the support of the Community Foundation for Lancashire, been able to open our Gardening club to **all** the four to eleven year old children of the village free of charge, so this is now a community venture not just a after school club. All the children at some point have tried something they have not eaten before, even if it was in the soups they have made from the crops grown! 50% of the children involved in the project have started growing fruit and vegetables at home....This has been a truly amazing project, leading to, and opening so many different and fascinating doors for the school, staff, and children'.

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Woodland Products

If you are looking to buy your allotment supplies locally, check out the products on offer at Mere Sands Wood reserve, Rufford. Each product is made at Mere Sands Wood as a by-product of routine habitat management. Each is FSC certified, 100% sustainable, and almost carbon neutral. All profits go directly back into managing the nature reserve for wildlife. They are available through their shop. The range includes:

- **Beanpoles:** native hardwood poles are cut on rotation. The stumps regenerate after cutting, making them 100% sustainable. 8ft long, but can be trimmed to fit in your car. £5 for bundles of 13.
- **Charcoal fines / Biochar:** has been used since ancient times as a soil improver. Benefits include: increases soil mineral levels including Ca, Mg, P and K; increases microbial soil life; improves soil structure; retains moisture (but paradoxically also helps drainage); increases capacity for cation exchange (helping plants to make the most of available nutrients); retains nutrients; neutralizes soil acidity. Use at 250g per m². £2.00 per kg
- **BBQ charcoal:** Made on site. Easy lighting & almost smokeless. Although carbon is released through burning it, the same amount is then taken up by the regeneration of the same tree-stumps from which it was made, making it carbon neutral, sustainable, renewable, and leaving a rejuvenated habitat behind it. £4.00 per bag (roughly 5kg)
- **Firewood:** Native hardwood from habitat restoration work: mainly birch with some alder, willow, sycamore & beech. Seasoned for 1 year & split. Average log length 12". Fill your car boot for £15 - £25 (negotiable for small/large cars!) Also available in lengths & larger quantities for home
- **Live willow rods:** Live rods for weaving & basketry, or for planting as living fences, hurdles, sculptures, tunnels etc. Harvested to order between November and March.

Mere Sands is currently applying for Awards For All funding to establish a full rotational hazel coppice system which will allow them to produce a wider range of products more consistently.. This would also aim to involve local people in the management of the coppice and promote traditional crafts, skills and products through running coppice management and green woodworking courses. This will also help to raise awareness regarding the un-sustainable nature of many popular commercial products such as charcoal transported from South America resulting from permanent rainforest destruction, or bamboo beanpoles from Asia.

For more information, contact Duncan Goulder, Reserves Officer on 01704-821809 or email: dgoulder@lancswt.org.uk

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!**

Martin Trengove
John Hutchison
Debbie Shepton

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West Lancashire Council for
Voluntary Service



Central Lancashire



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