

Good to Grow

What helps Scarborough communities to grow food, what holds them back and what more could be done to support community food growing?

A community research project delivered by Coast and Vale Community Action

Funded by the Communities Innovating Yorkshire Fund

Part of the Yorkshire Policy Innovation Partnership

GOOD TO GROW
BROUGHT TO YOU BY CAVCA

YPIP
YORKSHIRE POLICY INNOVATION PARTNERSHIP

UKRI Economic and Social Research Council

Acknowledgements



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Contents

Part 1 Introduction **1**

- About Good to Grow
- About CaVCA
- About YPIP

Part 2 What we did **2**

- Building relationships and providing practical support for communities
- Developing relationships with policymakers, universities and other stakeholders
- Promotion and awareness raising
- Online survey
- Conversations with growers and non-growers
- Growing the network

Part 3 What we learned **5**

- What prevents people from growing food
- What helps people to grow food
- What prevents community food growing projects from scaling up
- What we learned about community research

Part 4 What else we achieved **12**

- Supported local groups
- Connected organisations
- Contributed to wider discussions
- Promoted local food growing

Part 5 Reflections and lessons for the future **14**

- Confidence
- Framing
- Participation
- Power
- Collaboration

Part 6 What we want to do next **16**

Part 7 What others can do **17**

Part 8 Conclusion **19**

Appendices

- Appendix 1 – Survey questionnaire
- Appendix 2 – Interview prompts

Part 1 Introduction

About Good to Grow

Coast and Vale Community Action's Good to Grow project was one of 22 community-led research projects selected by the Yorkshire Policy Innovation Partnership (YPIP) in summer 2025. Through its Communities Innovating Yorkshire Fund (CIYF), YPIP supported place-based projects seeking to generate insights into innovative policymaking. Good to Grow focused on community food growing in Scarborough and formed part of YPIP's Climate-ready Places work package.

The economic, social, environmental and health benefits of community food growing are well established, as is its potential to increase resilience in the face of climate change. However, our experience in Scarborough suggested that, although there are several successful food-growing groups in the town, they are relatively small and many people in our communities still do not grow food on any scale.[1]

Working with community growing groups, school gardening groups, allotment committees, allotmenteers, private gardeners and people who do not currently grow food, we set out to investigate two main questions:

1. Why do more people in Scarborough not grow their own food? What prevents them from doing so, and what might help?
2. What prevents existing community food-growing projects in Scarborough from scaling up, and what might help?

Good to Grow enabled us to build on previous work around climate and environmental action, including our Circular Coast initiative, the Waste Not Want Not project supported by the National Lottery Heritage Fund, and our long-standing participation in the Climate Coalition's Great Big Green Week.

The project also helped us develop a deeper understanding of what community research looks and feels like for a voluntary sector organisation and for community members. It built on our involvement in Phase 1 of UKRI's Community Research Networks programme and sat alongside our work with the National Lottery Community Fund to help develop its new Community Power Fund. It also worked hand in hand with our Street Action project, funded by the National Lottery Community Fund, which supports people to take action to improve their lives and neighbourhoods. Together, these different strands of work enriched the project and deepened our understanding of community research, community power and what they mean in the everyday lives of local people.[2]

We want this report to be read by policymakers and the public alike. We hope it will encourage policymakers to consider what more they can do to support people to grow food. We hope people who do not currently grow food will be inspired to start, and that those who already grow food will feel encouraged to continue, to do more where possible, and to know that their efforts are recognised and valued.

About CaVCA

CaVCA is a registered charity and a company limited by guarantee. We exist to help people and places to thrive. Working across communities along the North Yorkshire coast and inland, we work closely with local people, learning and working together to enable positive change for individuals and communities. We seek to build alliances across sectors and between different communities, focusing on what we have in common and valuing everyone's contribution.

CaVCA provides high-quality managed workspace, community facilities, social action support and community projects. We work collaboratively, building close and trusted relationships and encouraging the sharing of power.

About YPIP

YPIP is a regional partnership exploring new and better ways of sharing knowledge and making decisions to improve lives and places across Yorkshire. It brings together academics, decision-makers and communities to use collaborative research and innovation to address local challenges and inform policymaking.

Through CIYF, YPIP supported projects and collaborations that contributed to its work on inclusive growth, sustainable living and data informatics. Projects were required to involve members of Yorkshire communities or to strengthen their capacity to participate in policy innovation.

[1] Huq, F.F. and Deacon, L. (2025), A systematic review of community gardens and their role in urban food security and resilience, Discover Sustainability, 6, 696. https://doi.org/10.1007/s43621-025-01628-5

[2] UK Research and Innovation, Networks to strengthen public's role in research and innovation (12 April 2023). https://www.ukri.org/news/networks-to-strengthen-publics-role-in-research-and-innovation/

Part 2 What we did



Building relationships and providing practical support for communities

Our interest in community food growing evolved naturally from earlier work and existing relationships with food growing groups in Scarborough, particularly GROW Scarborough, the group which tends our community garden at our building, The Street, donates produce to the Scarborough Community Fridge and is the driving force behind the seed hubs in local libraries. We also had relationships with the Gallows Close Kitchen Garden (a sizeable growing space adjoining the Gallows Close community centre on the Barrowcliff Estate in Scarborough), St Martin's Food Garden (a smaller space in the churchyard of St Martin's church on South Cliff) and Stepney Hill Eco Project (another sizeable space at Stepney Hill Farm, just outside Scarborough).

Throughout the project we developed many new connections including with individual gardeners and allotmenteers, allotment committees, voluntary and community sector organisations seeking to incorporate food growing into their activities, school groups and people who were not currently growing food. We did this primarily through networking and informal conversations as part of CaVCA's day-to-day work. We met allotmenteers by simply visiting sites and talking to whoever was there. Other contacts were made through specific CaVCA activities, for example with someone who uses our climbing wall and also helps his parents with their garden. Our informal approach established trust and common ground and so secured people's involvement.

We used some of our funding to enable existing groups to buy materials for their activities and to help new projects to get started. This deepened trust further and opened up opportunities for more structured conversations and increased participation in our food growing survey. Thanks to CIYF, growers bought tools, compost, netting and timber for greenhouse shelving. This linked the abstract notion of "policy innovation" with tangible things that ultimately helped produce food and was a powerful way of connecting research to practice.

Developing relationships with policymakers, universities and other stakeholders

Existing relationships, which we have developed further through the project, include those with the Public Health and Localities teams at North Yorkshire Council, the National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR) Health Determinants Research Collaboration (HDRC) North Yorkshire, and Scarborough Coastal Health and Care Research Collaborative at the York and Scarborough Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust. We also had connections with the Fix Our Food research programme, based at the University of York, the Scarborough Food Collective and the YPIP team. Many of these helped shape the thinking behind Good to Grow and we hope our learning will help enhance their work.

Good to Grow connected with policy development on a number of fronts and enabled CaVCA, and some members of the wider food growing community, to join conversations about resilience, health, early years education and land use. Examples include supporting GROW Scarborough and North Yorkshire Council's Public Health team with the piloting of the Community Grow policy to release pieces of council-owned land for community growing[3], being involved in North Yorkshire Council's work in Scarborough early years settings to encourage food growing, meeting with a Scarborough Town Councillor to discuss the transfer of Scarborough's allotment sites from North Yorkshire Council to the town council, and exploring a potential funding bid with Fix Our Food. Additionally, regular networking with other projects supported by CIYF and with university-based researchers as part of YPIP has improved our understanding of the broader context we are working in and of community research.

We don't expect our activities or our community research to have an instant impact on policy, the development of which can be complex, but we hope that we, and the communities we are part of, can contribute and be listened to.

Promotion and awareness raising

We promoted Good to Grow and community food growing not only through our website and social media channels but also in our day-to-day interactions with other organisations and the public. Routine daily interactions worked well, leading for example to us supporting the Ding Dong Bells social group in Seamer to revive its gardening activities, and to including people waiting for their NHS diabetic eye screening in the foyer at The Street, in our interviews. These interviews featured in the short Good to Grow film we produced with local sound designer Nick Granville-Fall of Ideosound[4], who was himself an interviewee.

Becoming an affiliate of Fix Our Food, writing a blog for its website, and connecting our work to the Food for the Future Framework[5] raised awareness of Scarborough community food growing in a wider policy context.

During the Climate Coalition's Great Big Green Week (6–14 June), we took the opportunity to promote Good to Grow and Scarborough's community food growing projects, attracting local media attention, securing interviews with BBC Radio York and That's TV North Yorkshire and featuring on local radio station This is the Coast.

Online survey

Our online survey attracted 116 responses from Scarborough and nearby. It ran from early December 2025 until the end of January 2026. We used it to start conversations in community settings such as the Wetherspoons on Westborough in Scarborough where people accessed the questionnaire via a QR code and completed it on their phones. The results are discussed in Part 3 of this report. The survey questions are in the Appendices.

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[3] North Yorkshire Council, Community Grow Policy (June 2026). https://edemocracy.northyorks.gov.uk/documents/s69185/Appendix%20C%20-%20NYC%20Community%20Grow%20Policy%20FINAL%20June%202026.pdf

[4] Ideosound https://ideosound.com/

[5] Food for the Future: A Framework for Action (North Yorkshire Council and FixOurFood, 2025). https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.17978637

Conversations with growers and non-growers

In April 2026, we started semi-structured interviews with local people about food and food growing. By June 2026, we had interviewed 60 people, 30 who do not currently grow food and 30 who do. Findings from these conversations are discussed in Part 3 of this report and the interview questions are in the Appendices.

Growing the network

Many Scarborough people grow food, whether in private gardens, allotments, community gardens, back yards, back alleys, or on windowsills and balconies. There is scope for more collaboration between all these growers.

We took some small steps towards this through the creation of a community food growers network, which initially met regularly and provided a forum for sharing common challenges, opportunities and know-how. When attendance dropped off, we organised site visits to individual growing projects to which all members of the network were invited and a WhatsApp group was set up for day-to-day communication.

“I've learned so much about different vegetables that people grow and eat and it's blown my mind.”

Good to Grow film participant



Part 3 What we learned

Through our online survey, semi-structured interviews, daily interactions with community food growing projects and by immersing ourselves in the local community food growing landscape, we gained several insights into what prevents people from growing food, what enables them and why existing community food growing initiatives do not scale up.

Additionally, we deepened our understanding of what community research looks and feels like in practice.

Our survey attracted a good spread of people with different levels of interest and commitment to food growing.

15.5% said they loved growing food, grew a lot of food and were pretty good at it. By far the largest group, 75%, said they liked growing food and did what they could when they could (31%) or they were interested in growing food but didn't have much confidence or know-how (16.4%) or they didn't grow any food but would like to give it a try (27.6%).

Only 9.5% said they didn't grow food and were not interested in giving it a try. This indicates that more people in Scarborough would grow more food if barriers were overcome and support offered.

"Things want to grow. So if you just throw seeds in and leave them, they'll just grow and you can eat them."

Good to Grow film participant



What prevents people from growing food

Lack of space

60.5% (26 out of 43) of people who responded to the question in the survey about reasons for not growing food cited lack of space. In our interviews, lack of space was also the most frequently discussed practical barrier. Several interviewees described wanting to grow food but feeling they had nowhere to do so. Many people lived in accommodation with no garden, or only very small or heavily shaded outdoor spaces. Some were interested in community growing but felt projects were too far from where they lived. Growers and non-growers alike raised concerns about a shortage of allotments, long waiting lists and the need to make suitable public land available for food production.



Lack of time

48.8% of survey respondents (21 out of 43) who answered the question about reasons for not growing food said they lacked time. In our interviews, time pressures were linked to work, family responsibilities and caring commitments. Several participants described busy lives in which gardening felt like another task competing for limited free time. Even experienced growers said they sometimes struggled to keep on top of their plots. Others suggested that growing food had to be enjoyable, not another obligation, and that working with others in community gardens might help.

Need for convenience

37.2% (16 out of 43) who answered the survey question about reasons for not growing food said it was more convenient to buy food from the shop. In our interviews, growers and non-growers said supermarkets provided easy year-round access to a wide choice of inexpensive food and modern lifestyles favoured convenience. Even interviewees who saw the potential benefits of growing food felt the time and effort involved was hard to justify when food was so readily available in supermarkets.

Lack of knowledge

20.9% (9 out of 43) of people who answered the survey question about reasons for not growing food thought they lacked knowledge. In our interviews, many people said they were unsure about where to start, what to grow, when to sow seeds and how to deal with pests. Existing growers often reflected on how they had learned from family members, trial and error or support from other growers. This suggests a need for mentoring, informal learning, demonstrations and opportunities for beginners to learn alongside experienced growers.

> **“I don't actually know where to start.”**
>
> *Good to Grow film participant*



Cost

14% (6 out of 43) of people who answered the survey question about reasons for not growing food said that they could not afford to buy equipment and materials to get started. In our interviews, cost was also discussed as an initial, rather than ongoing, obstacle, particularly the expense of compost, tools, seeds, watering equipment and making raised beds. Existing growers knew how to keep costs down by sharing resources, saving seed, making compost and reusing materials. Participation in community projects was also talked about as a way to reduce the financial barriers faced by new growers.

Lack of confidence

7% (3 out of 43) of people who answered the question in the survey about reasons for not growing food said they thought they would be no good at it and 9.3% (4 out of 43) thought it would be too physically demanding. In our interviews, some participants worried they would waste money or simply kill the plants. Others felt they lacked knowledge or physical strength. Experienced growers treated mistakes and setbacks as learning opportunities and saw food growing as something anyone can do with encouragement, again indicating a role for informal mentoring. They also identified raised beds, adapted tools and community support as ways of making growing more accessible.

Other barriers

Other reasons for not growing food were that shops offer better quality and more variety (one person), not being interested (one person), having picky eaters in the household (one person) and a fear that growing food would attract mice and rats (one person).

What helps people to grow food

Our survey asked all respondents to select various options that might help to develop food growing in Scarborough and why they thought growing food was important. Respondents who did not currently grow food were asked what might help them get started.

Space

39.7% (46 out of 116) of people who answered the question “Which of the following would be most useful to you?” chose “Finding spaces to grow more food”. In our interviews, participants repeatedly mentioned unused and neglected spaces, school grounds, church gardens, community centres and housing estates as potential food growing sites. There was strong support for using public land to enable local people to grow food close to where they live, with several interviewees highlighting the importance of creating growing spaces that are welcoming, accessible and visible to encourage wider community involvement.

Coordination

Survey responses indicated demand for several options that would require some coordination. 41.4% (48 out of 116) chose “Sharing of resources”, 41.4% (48 out of 116) chose “Knowledge exchange and networking opportunities”, 39.7% (46 out of 116) chose “Developing and being part of Scarborough’s food growing community”, 27.6% (32 out of 116) chose “Setting up ways to exchange produce” and 27.6% chose “Finding volunteers for community growing projects”.

Interviewees from community projects consistently emphasised the value of coordination and how sharing knowledge, tools, compost, seeds and volunteers reduced costs, built confidence and prevented groups from working in isolation. Many interviewees felt more could be done to connect people, coordinate activity and share opportunities.

Motivations

Our survey asked respondents to rate the importance of various reasons for growing food on a scale of 1 to 5, 1 being not important and 5 being very important.

70.7% (82 out of 116) rated “Healthier Diets” as very important, 62.1% (72 out of 116) rated “Environmental Sustainability” as very important and 62.1% (72 out of 116) rated “Waste Reduction” as very important.

Most respondents also rated as very important “Education and Skill Development”, “Mental and Physical Wellbeing”, “Regeneration” and “Empowerment and Resilience”.

“Food Security”, “Economic Savings”, and “Building Community” were not rated as very important by most respondents.

In our interviews, people's motivations for growing food extended well beyond producing fruit and vegetables. Participants described the mental health benefits of spending time outdoors, the satisfaction of eating food they had grown and the enjoyment of sharing produce with family, friends and neighbours. Many also spoke about teaching children where food comes from, protecting the environment, reducing waste and strengthening community connections. Although relatively few survey respondents rated food security as their highest priority, several interviewees reflected on how the COVID-19 pandemic, rising food prices, climate change and geopolitical instability had made them think more about local food resilience.



“It gives me great joy to see things successfully growing that I planted from a seed and tended through to harvest and eating.”

Good to Grow film participant

Practical support

Our survey asked respondents what might help them to give food growing a try. 43.5% (27 of 62) said a free starter kit (pots, soil, seeds and instructions), 24.2% (15 of 62) said free seeds and seedlings, 35.5% (22 of 62) said a workshop or demonstration and 25.8% said a garden or allotment tour. 27.4% (17 of 62) thought joining a local food growing group would help, which we know would provide resources, learning and ongoing support.

In our interviews, participants talked about easier access to growing spaces, shorter allotment waiting lists, starter sessions for beginners, opportunities to learn from experienced growers, shared tools and equipment, small grants for community projects, stronger links between organisations and better promotion of existing opportunities. Many interviewees talked about the need for better coordination, modest investment and long-term support to help get more people growing.

What prevents community food growing projects from scaling up

This question interested us because one of our trustees had been researching Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) models and had held exploratory meetings with local community growing groups to discuss possibilities. We had also met members of the community who reminisced about Scarborough's market gardens and knew that market gardening sometimes cropped up in the many informal conversations that happen amongst members of Scarborough's community food growing projects.

Scaling up was not addressed directly in the survey, although it emerged in our interviews, alongside discussion about Scarborough's potential to become more self-sufficient in food. We found that, although the town has several successful community food growing projects, few, if any, wanted to become significantly bigger. Many felt they were already working at the limits of their time, energy and capacity. For them, getting more people to grow more food was the priority, not creating larger organisations or accessing more land.

In practical terms, this meant creating the conditions that support the long-term sustainability of existing projects and encourage the creation of new ones in more neighbourhoods. These conditions included reducing reliance on a small number of exceptionally committed individuals, attracting and retaining more volunteers, and providing stronger coordination and support. Interviewees also highlighted the importance of ensuring that land made available for food growing is fit for purpose, using funding strategically rather than for one-off projects, and making food growing a normal part of more people's everyday lives.

> **"The past few sessions I haven't had anyone and so already that feels quite precarious."**
>
> *Good to Grow film participant*

Community food growers were clear that they would not want to lose the benefits that community food growing at its current scale brings. They valued the sense of community, wellbeing and connection that smaller, locally rooted projects create, and were wary that these could be lost if projects became too large.

Most interviewees did not think that Scarborough could become self-sufficient in food but many thought it could become more resilient by growing a greater proportion of its own fruit and vegetables. This was seen as realistic and worthwhile. Many noted that, while Scarborough is surrounded by productive farmland, opportunities for large-scale food production within the town itself are limited so there would always be a need for food produced elsewhere. Some people commented that food production also needs to be balanced with other demands on land, including housing, recreation and biodiversity.

The idea of producing more food locally generated considerable enthusiasm. People spoke about making better use of gardens, allotments, schools, community spaces and underused land, while encouraging households to grow at least some food. Many felt that even modest increases in local food production would strengthen the town's resilience by reducing reliance on long supply chains, improving access to fresh, affordable produce and helping people develop practical skills that could become increasingly valuable in the future. Rather than considering whether Scarborough could feed itself entirely, interviewees were more interested in making food growing commonplace.

Early in the project we sought the thoughts of a market garden near Scarborough, which runs a vegetable box scheme, and a larger-scale food growing project in Sheffield.

The market garden told us:

> *"...growing food requires too much expense and too much time for the vast majority of people. There is also a curious phenomenon that people think it is somehow easier to do growing on a large community scale than an allotment or garden."*

The Sheffield project told us:

> *"From our experience market gardening is fundamentally different from community food growing, and treating them as the same, or making any assumptions that one could and should lead to the other is not a helpful starting point, and one which can lead to misunderstanding, unrealistic expectations and disappointment about the hugely positive potential of both activities when understood, supported and developed differently, and appropriately."*

Our view is that the development of market gardens or a Community Supported Agriculture scheme might play a role in Scarborough's food system in the future, but it is not yet the next step. Community food growing and commercial food production, even on a small scale, meet different needs and require different skills, resources and organisational models. Both have value, but one does not necessarily evolve naturally into the other.

The ambition of the community food growing projects we spoke to is not to become commercial producers. They simply want to grow food. Creating the conditions in which existing projects can thrive and new projects can emerge should be the priority.

“We have to be realistic about what we're setting out to do when we're talking about community growing.”

Good to Grow film participant

What we learned about community research

CaVCA is embedded in the communities it serves and interacts daily with the people who make up those communities. Our understanding and knowledge of our town and its people is constantly evolving. We don’t usually describe our day-to-day activities as research, but they are, in effect, an ongoing process of observing, asking questions, listening, learning and testing ideas.

Unlike time-limited research projects, we remain part of the place we seek to understand. We see issues develop, build long-term relationships and observe change. For us, research is not a discrete activity with a beginning and an end, but a continuous process of listening, reflecting, acting and learning alongside communities. This continuity gives our research a perspective that complements, and can sometimes challenge, other approaches.

Our thinking about community research has also developed through our involvement in the development phase of the Community Research Network programme in 2023. Although we were not selected for the implementation phase, we continued to build on that learning through subsequent work with North Yorkshire

Council, the People's Powerhouse and the National Lottery Community Power Fund. The findings from this work have been brought together in our *Community Power in Scarborough* report.[6]

The current interest in community research within academia and the public sector is an opportunity to bring the lived experience and practical understanding held by communities into research so that local voices are heard, understood, valued and used to inform policy and decision-making. However, there remain important unanswered questions about who defines the research agenda, who owns and controls the knowledge that is generated, and whether community research is primarily about producing evidence or about empowering communities to understand, shape and change the places in which they live.

Good to Grow was therefore part of our wider effort to understand what community research looks like in practice, what it is and what it is not, and how it can lead to meaningful change. One of the most important lessons has been that, for us, community research is inseparable from action. Research has helped us understand community food growing, but getting involved has helped us understand it better.

The project did not simply gather evidence. It connected growers, made small grants, provided encouragement and practical support, shared learning and contributed to policy discussions. These activities were not separate from research. They were part of the research process. They tested ideas, generated insights and strengthened relationships.

This approach, coupled with our work on the Community Power Fund, has led to us thinking more about the systems and power structures within which community research operates, and the extent to which they enable or constrain its ability to influence policy. While these questions were beyond the scope of a project exploring the barriers to and enablers of community food growing, Good to Grow did provide examples of how they play out in practice.

Our close relationship with GROW Scarborough enabled us to support its efforts to secure land from North Yorkshire Council through the council's Community Grow pilot. However, our ability to influence the development of the policy itself, or the pace at which land is released, has been limited. Similarly, as discussions progressed around the transfer of responsibility for Scarborough's allotments from North Yorkshire Council to Scarborough Town Council, alongside concerns about the condition of allotment sites and long waiting lists, there was no obvious mechanism through which community organisations and growers could contribute their knowledge and experience.

When we joined a meeting of the Yorkshire and Humber Knowledge Mobilisation Network, which we want to remain involved in, we felt the term knowledge mobilisation was understood differently in academic circles from how it might generally be understood in the voluntary and community sector. Finally, although as one of 22 projects funded through YPIP's CIYF we understood that we were part of a much larger programme, it was difficult to understand that wider context, to see how the learning from individual projects was being brought together or how it was influencing policy.

These examples illustrate why we need to continue the conversation about what community research is, how it relates to community power and how it can support communities to influence the systems that shape their lives. We believe that community research must place community power at its heart and be measured not only by the quality of the evidence it produces, but also by the extent to which it enables communities to understand, influence and change the places in which they live.

[6] https://cavca.org.uk/community-power-in-scarborough-insights-from-over-1300-voices-across-three-years-of-conversations/

Part 4 What else we achieved

We hope and believe that Good to Grow has contributed to the evidence base for supporting community food growing, as well as to wider discussions about community research and community power. It has also strengthened community food growing in our area.

Supported local groups

We provided encouragement, moral support, practical advice and money for tools, materials and equipment to the Ding Dong Bells social group based at the Bell Close Community Centre in Seamer. The group had been developing the centre's garden for two years but, after a few setbacks, was about to give up. We persuaded them to persevere and this year they have successfully grown several crops. We also helped Scarborough and District Mencap, through encouragement and a micro grant, to revive its growing area. Both organisations provided many valuable interviews.



"Thanks for all your help and support, it's really appreciated. Love and thanks from everyone at Ding Dong Bells."

Card from Ding Dong Bells Social Group

"Our garden is coming on really well, thank you. We now have a wellbeing corner for staff and service users to enjoy some quiet time. Some excellent broccoli, peas and lettuce on the go and plenty of beautiful flowers."

Email from Scarborough and District Mencap

Connected organisations

By initiating the Scarborough Community Food Growers Network we sought to strengthen mutual support between the town's different food growing projects. In-person meetings were complemented by visits to individual growing sites and the creation of a WhatsApp group. Attendance at the in-person meetings varied, but the WhatsApp group proved valuable for day-to-day communication and the sharing of ideas, information and encouragement. Although progress has been made, there is more to be done to foster collaboration.

Contributed to wider discussions

The project also enhanced CaVCA's contribution to local and regional discussions about food, climate resilience and community growing. We attended meetings of the Scarborough Food Collective and advocated for growing as a route to food resilience. We contributed, alongside GROW Scarborough, to a Community of Practice on Growing as part of North Yorkshire Council's Food Insecurity project. We affiliated to the Fix Our Food Commission and joined a working group developing a proposal around transforming local food systems. With GROW Scarborough, we attended the Food for the Future celebration in November 2025, where the Food for the Future Framework was launched, and we supported GROW Scarborough in its participation in North Yorkshire Council's pilot Community Grow policy.

Through YPIP's "Coffee and Collaborate" meetings and the Yorkshire and Humber Climate Commission's Share and Learn sessions we connected with other food growing and climate resilience initiatives across Yorkshire. This helped us place our work within a regional context and learn from others.

Promoted local food growing

Good to Grow raised the profile of Scarborough as a place where community food growing is not only happening but thriving. Participating in Great Big Green Week generated local media coverage, introduced new audiences to community food growing and placed our activities within a national campaign. Good to Grow also helped us build new relationships with local groups and individuals, and it was pleasing to collaborate with local sound artist Nick Granville-Fall to produce the project film.

Good to Grow, then, did more than generate research findings. It strengthened relationships, supported local groups, connected organisations, influenced wider discussions and raised the profile of community food growing in Scarborough. This could not have happened without the generosity of the many individuals, community groups and organisations who shared their time, knowledge and enthusiasm with us. The achievements described here belong as much to Scarborough's communities as they do to CaVCA.

Part 5 Reflections and lessons for the future

We are pleased with the outcomes of this project but, as with any piece of work, we can look back and see things we might have approached differently. This doesn't detract from what we achieved, but it does provide lessons for future community research and community food growing support.

Confidence

We know that our strengths are being rooted in the community, building trusted relationships, and generating knowledge and understanding through practical action. Our work in the Community Research Network programme in 2023 helped us understand how these strengths apply to community research. Yet when applying to CIYF we included elements of what we thought was a more academic-sounding approach. We should have trusted our own strengths more, since these were what we used when it came to delivery.

In hindsight, there may have been advantages in working alongside an academic partner, particularly in relation to research design, data analysis and evaluation. This would have worked well alongside us playing to our strengths, adding academic rigour to our findings while grounding the academic partner in the community.

Framing

Our question about scaling up community food growing could have been framed more broadly. As Good to Grow progressed, we realised that the projects we were working with were not seeking to become significantly larger. They simply wanted to become more sustainable, involve more people and inspire more people to grow food.

If we were writing the proposal today, we would place greater emphasis on understanding how community food growing can spread through a network of local initiatives, rather than assuming that scaling up means existing projects becoming bigger. This would allow us to explore in greater depth what a more self-sufficient local food system might look like and the roles that community gardens, allotments, schools, private gardens, market gardens and other forms of food growing could play within it.

Participation

We engaged with a wide range of organisations and individuals, but there are some groups we would seek to involve more fully in any future project. These include people growing food in their own gardens and allotments but not connected to wider community growing, and people who have come to Scarborough from other parts of the world and bring different knowledge, traditions and tastes to growing and eating food. We spoke to some. We could have spoken to more.

There is also potential to work more with schools, public sector organisations, social landlords and businesses that have outdoor space suitable for food growing. Some already recognise the benefits that food growing can bring, but there is scope to involve more.

Power

In developing our proposal, we might have thought more about the power relationships within which we would be working, including those with YPIP and those with the communities we were engaging with.

The YPIP team was supportive, flexible and permissive, giving us freedom to develop Good to Grow in ways that reflected local circumstances. However, as previously discussed, we sometimes struggled to see the bigger picture of YPIP's work beyond the headline of "working on new and better ways of sharing knowledge and making decisions to improve local lives and places in Yorkshire". The online Coffee and Collaborate sessions were useful and interesting but did not always feel like the right place to question or challenge. To have done so may have enriched the partnership, but we did not have the sense that it was our partnership to enrich.

We also reflected on the power we held in relation to the communities we worked with. Good to Grow was rooted in community conversations from beginning to end, but we defined the research questions, designed the survey, carried out the interviews, interpreted the evidence, structured the film and wrote this report. There might have been scope for sharing these responsibilities with community growers and other stakeholders. We could, for instance, have established an advisory group to help shape the research as it developed, challenge our assumptions, interpret the findings and help decide what action should follow. The Growers Network might have evolved into something that could have done this, but attendance was too sporadic and there was no obvious appetite for it.

Collaboration



The provision of micro grants, facilitation of in-person growers' meetings, organisation of site visits and creation of a WhatsApp group fostered collaboration and provided new routes into community food growing for local people. However, they were only partially successful.

There is already a great deal of informal sharing between community food growing projects and an openness to new people joining, but there is also a tendency for groups to focus on, and be protective of, their own projects. This is understandable given the time, energy and commitment devoted, usually in a voluntary capacity, to developing them. A town-wide commitment to get more people growing more food is clearly desirable, but only if responsibility for achieving it is shared and the burden does not fall on a handful of committed individuals with limited support.

Collaboration can and does happen, but it cannot simply be organised into existence. It requires the development of trusted relationships, generosity from power holders and a shared willingness to contribute to the common good. That takes time to bring about.

> **“I think we need to get back to a more sharing mindset.”**
>
> *Good to Grow film participant*

Part 6 What we want to do next

The Good to Grow project was not the start of the story. Nor is it the end. The project grew out of existing relationships, connections and interests and our learning will enrich what we do next. In particular, we want to:

- Maintain and strengthen the relationships built with growers, community organisations and public sector partners.
- Continue to support community food growing through advice, networking, project development and support to access funding and other resources.
- Develop the Growers Network as a space for sharing knowledge, solving problems, visiting projects and welcoming new growers.
- Support more people to start growing, particularly those who are new to food growing or are not currently connected to existing projects.
- Champion community food growing by sharing this report with local, regional and national partners and contributing to discussions about food, health, climate resilience and community development.
- Continue developing our understanding of community research, testing approaches and sharing what we learn.
- Contribute to conversations about community power and community research, particularly around who defines research questions, who owns knowledge and how communities shape decisions.
- Work with partners to identify opportunities for making better use of land, buildings and other community assets for food growing.
- Continue exploring what a more resilient and self-sufficient local food system could look like, recognising that community food growing is one part of a much wider picture.
- Remain open to new opportunities that build on the relationships, ideas and momentum created through Good to Grow.

Part 7 What others can do

We don’t want to be prescriptive in describing what organisations in other sectors should do, or to include in this section the list of recommendations customarily included in reports of this nature. Instead, we see this as an opportunity to offer an invitation to join us on our journey and to encourage other organisations to include us in the work they are doing. The contribution each sector can make will be different, but everyone has something to offer and has their own starting point.

We invite our public sector colleagues to

- Continue recognising the role that community food growing plays in enabling people to lead healthier, happier lives, creating better connected and more resilient communities and helping us all to respond to climate change.
- Continue looking for opportunities to work alongside community growers when developing policies, strategies and services.
- Keep developing ways to use public land, buildings and other assets to support local food growing.
- Value community knowledge alongside professional and academic expertise.
- Keep working with us and others to explore what a more resilient local food system could look like.

We invite the voluntary, community, faith and social enterprise sector to

- Continue supporting local people to grow food in ways that reflect the needs and strengths of local communities.
- Look for opportunities to work together, share learning and make better use of existing resources.
- Keep using food growing to support wellbeing, community cohesion, social connection, skills development and climate action.
- Continue experimenting, learning and sharing what works.

We encourage businesses, large and small, to

- Consider how they might support community food growing through sponsorship, volunteering, sharing skills and expertise, making land available or donating materials.
- Explore opportunities to grow food in their own workplaces or on land they own or manage.
- See supporting community food growing as an investment in the places where their employees and customers live.

We invite researchers and our academic colleagues to

- Continue exploring how academic and community research can complement and strengthen one another.
- Champion the value of community knowledge and lived experience alongside other research methods.
- Work with communities and community organisations as equal partners in generating knowledge and help develop approaches to research that share power more equally between researchers and communities.
- Continue building the evidence base for the contribution community food growing can make to people’s health, stronger communities and sustainable food systems.

We ask individual food growers and food growing groups to...

- Carry on sharing your knowledge, experience and enthusiasm with others.
- Welcome new growers wherever possible.
- Look for opportunities to work together and support one another.
- Keep telling your stories and celebrating your achievements.

...and people who have not started growing yet to

- Have a go.
- Visit a local food growing project, talk to the people there and consider getting involved.
- Remember that even the most experienced growers had to start somewhere and a few pots in a back yard or on a windowsill are as good a place as any.
- Become part of the growing community in whatever way feels right for you.



“I just need to do it.”

Good to Grow film participant

Part 8 Conclusion

Good to Grow started with us wanting to deepen our understanding of community food growing in Scarborough. In particular, we wanted to find out what helps people to grow food, what prevents people from growing food and why existing community food growing projects don't scale up.

We have found that the things that help are access to suitable space, practical support, knowledge sharing, collaboration and the enthusiasm and encouragement of other growers. The things that prevent people from growing food are a lack of space, time, confidence and practical support, together with a perceived lack of opportunities to learn from others, gain confidence and become part of the local food growing community. The question of scaling up proved to be more complicated than we had anticipated. We came to the conclusion that community food growing projects can only grow so far before risking the loss of the relationships, sense of community and local character that make them so valuable. Rather than focusing on making existing projects significantly bigger, a better approach may be to create the conditions in which many more successful community food growing projects can emerge, each rooted in and responding to the needs of its own community. The next step is to foster greater collaboration and mutual support between projects, creating a stronger network of local initiatives through which more people can begin and continue growing food.

Looking back over Good to Grow, we think we have achieved what we set out to do. We have developed a much better understanding of community food growing in Scarborough, the barriers that prevent more people from growing food and the ways in which those barriers might be overcome. We have also come to see community food growing differently. It is not simply about growing food. It is about creating opportunities for people to learn, build relationships, improve their wellbeing and contribute to the places in which they live.

Along the way, we have also learned a great deal about what it means to do community research. The project has strengthened our conviction that community research is at its strongest when it is rooted in relationships, values community knowledge alongside professional and academic expertise, combines research with practical action and seeks to share power more equally between communities, researchers and policymakers.

Good to Grow is coming to an end, but our interest in community food growing and community research is not. We will continue building on the relationships, ideas and experience developed through the project and look forward to continuing to work with others who share an interest in community food growing and community research. The conversations started through Good to Grow will continue, and so will our work to support community food growing and to develop our understanding of community research in Scarborough.

Appendix 1 – Survey questionnaire

Growing Our Own Food in Scarborough

As part of the Good to Grow project, brought to you by CaVCA, we want to find out what more we could be doing to help communities in Scarborough grow their own food. Please help us by completing this short survey. It should take no longer than 10 minutes of your time and your response will be enormously helpful.

Your responses will be anonymous but there is an opportunity at the end of the form to provide your email address if you require any support with food growing or want to be involved in the project.

Good to Grow is funded by the Communities Innovating Yorkshire Fund (CIYF) – a commissioning programme delivered by the Yorkshire Policy Innovation Partnership (YPIP). YPIP is a regional project focused on academic, policy and community collaborative research on place based inclusive growth and sustainable living for informed decision-making.

*Questions marked * were required in the online form.*

In relation to food growing which category best describes you?

1. What kind of food grower are you? *

Mark only one option.

☐ I love growing food, I grow a lot of food and I'm pretty good at it — skip to Question 2
☐ I like growing food and I do what I can when I can — skip to Question 2
☐ I'm interested in growing food but I don't have much confidence or know how — skip to Question 4
☐ I don't currently grow any food but I would like to give it a try — skip to Question 3
☐ I don't currently grow any food and I am not interested in giving it a try — skip to Question 3

Where you grow food

2. Where do you normally grow food? *

Tick all that apply. Then skip to Question 5.

☐ In my garden at home
☐ In my front/back yard
☐ In window boxes and other spaces indoors at home
☐ At school or college
☐ At work
☐ At my allotment
☐ As part of a community project
☐ On pieces of public land – I'm a guerrilla gardener
☐ Other: _____

Your reasons for not growing your own food

3. Which of the following explain why you do not grow your own food? *

Tick all that apply.

☐ Lack of space
☐ Not enough time
☐ I don't have enough knowledge or experience
☐ I can't afford to buy initial equipment and materials
☐ It's more convenient to buy food from the shop
☐ I wouldn't know how to cook or use anything I might grow
☐ It's too physically demanding
☐ I know I wouldn't be any good at it
☐ Food from the shop offers better quality and more variety
☐ Other: _____

Helping you to give food growing a try

4. Which of the following might help you give growing your own food a try? *

Tick all that apply. Then skip to Question 5.

☐ A starter kit (pots, soil, seeds and instructions)
☐ Free seeds or seedlings
☐ A mini workshop or demo to learn the basics and ask questions
☐ A garden or allotment tour
☐ A taste test – experience for yourself the difference between shop-bought and home-grown

☐ A friendly challenge or competition
☐ A personalised growing plan
☐ A gardening book or guide
☐ Joining a local food growing group
☐ Ongoing support and encouragement
☐ None of the above
☐ Other: _____

Reasons for growing our own food

Please rate the importance to you of the following reasons for growing our own food.

5. Food Security – reducing dependence on external supply chains, ensuring access to fresh produce, especially in times of crisis or economic instability. *

Mark only one option: 1 = Not Important; 5 = Very Important.

1 2 3 4 5

6. Economic Savings – food we grow ourselves can be cheaper than food we buy and we can donate surplus to those in need, or trade it or sell it. *

Mark only one option: 1 = Not Important; 5 = Very Important.

1 2 3 4 5

7. Healthier Diets – freshly grown food is often more nutritious, is free from harmful chemicals and encourages healthier eating habits. *

Mark only one option: 1 = Not Important; 5 = Very Important.

1 2 3 4 5

8. Environmental Sustainability – Local food production reduces carbon emissions from transportation, packaging and refrigeration. It also promotes biodiversity and soil health. *

Mark only one option: 1 = Not Important; 5 = Very Important.

1 2 3 4 5

9. Building Community – Growing food together fosters collaboration, strengthens social ties, and creates shared spaces for learning and celebration. *

Mark only one option: 1 = Not Important; 5 = Very Important.

1 2 3 4 5

10. Education and Skill Development – Community growing projects offer hands-on learning for all ages about biology, ecology, nutrition, sustainability and more. *

Mark only one option: 1 = Not Important; 5 = Very Important.

1 2 3 4 5

11. Mental and Physical Wellbeing – Growing is therapeutic. It reduces stress, encourages physical activity, and provides a sense of purpose and accomplishment. *

Mark only one option: 1 = Not Important; 5 = Very Important.

1 2 3 4 5

12. Waste Reduction – Food waste can be composted, and surplus produce can be shared, reducing landfill use and promoting circular resource use. *

Mark only one option: 1 = Not Important; 5 = Very Important.

1 2 3 4 5

13. Regeneration – Transforming unused or neglected land into productive growing spaces improves neighbourhoods, reduces crime and vandalism, and creates community pride. *

Mark only one option: 1 = Not Important; 5 = Very Important.

1 2 3 4 5

14. Empowerment and Resilience – Growing food gives people control over what they eat and how it's grown. It builds resilience against economic and environmental shocks. *

Mark only one option: 1 = Not Important; 5 = Very Important.

1 2 3 4 5

15. Are there are any other reasons for growing food which you think are important? *

_____

_____

_____

Developing the food growing landscape in Scarborough

16. Which of the following would be most useful to you? *

Tick all that apply.

☐ Setting up ways to exchange produce (swaps, barter systems, trading)
☐ Finding volunteers for community growing projects
☐ Publicity, marketing and promotion
☐ Sharing of resources – tools, compost, seeds and plants, people, containers
☐ Knowledge exchange and networking opportunities
☐ Help with preserving produce
☐ Finding spaces to grow more food
☐ Developing and being part of Scarborough's food growing community
☐ None of the above
☐ Other: _____

About you

17. How old are you? *

Mark only one option.

○ Under 18
○ 18 to 25
○ 26 to 34
○ 35 to 44
○ 45 to 54
○ 55 to 64
○ 65 or over
○ Prefer not to say

18. Gender: How do you identify? *

Mark only one option.

○ Woman
○ Non-binary
○ Man
○ Prefer not to say
○ Other: _____

19. What is your ethnicity? *

Mark only one option.

○ Asian or Asian British
○ Black, Black British, Caribbean or African
○ Mixed or multiple ethnic
○ White
○ Prefer not to say
○ Other: _____

20. Do you have a disability? *

Mark only one option.

○ Yes
○ No
○ Prefer not to say

21. What is your home postcode? *

_____

22. If you want to get involved in food growing and/or the Good to Grow project please supply your email address below

_____

Note: This appendix reproduces the wording and routing of the online Google Form in a print-friendly format.

Appendix 2 – Interview prompts

Grower interview prompts

What is your name and connection to Scarborough?

What is your connection to food growing in Scarborough?

Please describe the role that food growing plays in your life

Where do you get your food from now?

What has helped you grow your own food?

What has hindered/prevented you from growing your own food?

What help would you like in the future to help you grow your own food?

How important do you think people growing their own food is for the future of Scarborough? and why?

What would it take for us, as a town, to become self-sufficient in food?

Is there anything else you want to tell me about food growing?

[Would you be willing to take part in a focus group on this subject? Yes/No]

Non-grower interview prompts

What is your name and connection to Scarborough?

Please describe the role that food plays in your life

Where do you get your food from now?

What do you think about growing your own food?

Have you ever at any point in your life grown something that you have eaten? How did that go?

What has hindered/prevented you from growing your own food?

What sorts of things might help you to grow your own food in the future?

How important do you think people growing their own food is for the future of Scarborough? and why?

What would it take for us, as a town, to become self-sufficient in food?

Is there anything else you want to tell us about food and food growing?



Good to Grow

Community food growing in Scarborough

GOOD TO GROW
BROUGHT TO YOU BY CAVCA

YPIP
YORKSHIRE POLICY INNOVATION PARTNERSHIP

UKRI Economic and Social Research Council