



Garden is one of the most popular pastimes in Hexham and in the rest of the country. According to *Statista*, the average spend on gardens per household in the North East for 2019 was £732. Vegetables or flowers, borders or pots, most people like to get their hands dirty and to grow plants. Currently the demand for allotments in Hexham is at an all time high and the Town Council is trying to find more space for more allotments. During the pandemic the Town Council set up a link with a local business to distribute surplus fruit and vegetables to the fresh food bank. There is a need for more space for growing and a demand for surplus produce.

Hexham is blessed with all the delights of a town in a magnificent rural county with lots of green space, quite a lot of it uncultivated. Many people have gardens they can't manage and many people in the town don't have access to fresh food. Couple this with the climate crisis and our need to reduce food waste and the food miles attached to a lot of the food that we eat and you get... Grow Hexham.

On 30th October Hexham Town Council launched **Grow Hexham**

..."a project that matches local gardeners with idle gardens and spaces. Using recycled tools, shared skills, knowledge and food for the benefit of the grower, the owner, the fresh food bank and the environment".

Starting next year, Grow Hexham will begin to create a circular economy in fresh food. Matching uncultivated gardens and space with gardeners from the Town Council allotment waiting list, it will combine space, and place with skills, knowledge and time.

The result will be: more locally grown produce, shared between the owner and the gardener with any surplus going to the Community Grocery.

There will also be a repair and recycle scheme for tools will repurpose garden tools that are languishing in sheds while woodworking skills shares will provide raised beds. Gardening skill shares, seed shares and plant swaps will all contribute to a zero carbon, zero food waste project that is of benefit to the environment and the town.

What will Grow Hexham provide?

- Locally produced fresh food
- Support for those who experience food poverty
- Repaired and re-purposed garden tools
- A seed bank
- Plant share
- A reduction in food miles and food waste
- A reduction in carbon emissions
- 2 sheds
- A part time coordinator 's post

So what are the benefits of Grow Hexham for Hexham?

The benefits of Grow Hexham will be many: an increase in community gardening, a reduction in allotment waiting lists, an increase in local food production to suit the gardener and the garden owner, more fresh food going to the Community Grocery for people in need, recycled tools and skill sharing. The community will benefit from reduced food miles and a reduction in food waste, access to cheap fresh food as well as community building through sharing seeds, plants, knowledge, skills and experience. It will provide inter-generational links and support through the shared activity of growing. It will provide part time employment for a co-ordinator.

What impact will Grow Hexham have?

It will:

- Help the environment
- Boost the local economy
- Increase volunteering and skill sharing
- Build a sustainable community of gardeners
- Reduce Allotment waiting lists

How will Grow Hexham help the environment?

Grow Hexham will see local people accessing and eating locally produced food with the surplus going to the Community Grocery, which already sources surplus food from supermarkets. This project will reduce food miles, waste and the environmental impact of importing food. Our levels of food waste in the UK are mind boggling: we waste £14.3 million tonnes of food a year. Grow Hexham will help to keep food chains local and direct the food where it is wanted and needed. The range of plots

and gardens will contribute to plant and environmental diversity and a reduction in mono cultural farming and the use of pesticides. The recycling of tools and implements, and the sharing of seeds and plants, will reduce the need for new tools to be made and plants grown. Composting will also be supported to increase soil fertility and soil health.

Grow Hexham will involve mainly volunteers who will benefit from gardening but will also build relationships with people in different circumstances and locations in the town. This experience may lead them to apply for community based jobs or work in horticulture. It will increase their knowledge and understanding of environmental issues and biodiversity.

Who supports it?

Grow Hexham is a partnership project between Hexham Town Council, Hexham Community Partnership, Number 28 and The Community Grocery. Hexham Town Council is a multi party town council which is committed to environmental sustainability and building local social and economic resilience. It supports local environment groups, and has 4 allotment sites. Currently there is a long allotment waiting list and little prospect of the town acquiring more allotments in the short term. Hexham also has many large gardens that are uncultivated. Hexham Community Partnership is the managing agent for Number 28, a community hub in the east end of the town. It has a small community garden which is popular with residents. The Community Grocery is a *not for profit* shop using surplus food from local supermarkets. Grow Hexham is also supported by Transition Tynedale who run edible Hexham and the Community Garden on the Middle school site. We are

currently approaching local businesses, the Farmers' Market and charitable organisations for support.

So how can you help?

Grow Hexham is being crowd funded.

We need to raise £8,810 by 16th December.

As with a lot of crowd funding, if we do not reach our target we will get nothing. So time is pressing.

At the time of writing we have raised £1,502 donated by 38 backers with 45 days to go. Many, many, thanks to those who have already made a pledge. Some pledges are made anonymously and we cannot contact them to thank them. We'd like to say **Thank You** here.

We are seeking support from North of Tyne Mayor's Office, "Zero Carbon, Zero Food Waste" fund. We are on facebook, twitter, Hexhamtv and hopefully in The Hexham Courant, but it is the people of Hexham who can make this project happen by donating, no matter how small an amount, and telling their friends about it.

If you would like to support Grow Hexham click on

<https://www.spacehive.com/grow-hexham>

Thank you

Penny Grennan

Hexham Town Councillor and lead on Grow Hexham

Hexhamtv interview

<https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=2683086082000843>