



Leeds Back to Front: a return to Cottage Gardens

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Background:

Data collection for this project was undertaken between spring and autumn of 2009. A late autumn, end of project event shared results with local people and aimed to raise the project's profile.

Aim:

Conducted in deprived and culturally vibrant local neighborhoods, this work aimed to investigate attitudes to the use of front gardens for growing fruits, herbs or vegetables (FHV)

Methods:

Door-to-door surveys with 361 people were conducted by multilingual interviewers at varying times of day. Interviewers used standardised interviewing technique and worked in pairs. Sampled addresses represented local housing stock and / or offered suitable front gardens.

We had 361 questionnaires from 186 (59%) females and 131 (41%) males; 115 (34%) were between 26-35 years old; 112 (35%) identified as White British (WB) and 171 (54%) as Black & Minority Ethnic (BME)

Results

Of those who gave an answer

- 23% would be prepared to use their front gardens for FHV growing. White British residents were less likely to agree with this suggestion.
- About 21% of people already grew some FHV and those of Bangladeshi or Caribbean origin were more likely to do so than others.
- 129 (42%) agreed that they would like to start growing or would like to grow more of their own at home.
- 162 people (45%) were specific about the support they would need. Most frequently mentioned were plants, compost, seeds and information.
- 196 (54%) wanted to be kept informed. Older people and those of Irish origin were more specific about their needs.
- 79 (45%) wanted related gardening information through the post, 35 (20%) through training groups or workshops and 25 people (14%) wanted home visits.

- 59 households (26%) were prepared to pay into a supporting membership scheme for the area.
- 38 (41%) of those renting from a social landlord said that they would like to start growing FHVs.

Conclusions

This project is about neighborhood renewal, health and the environment.

- Key barriers (small, paved, gardens with inadequate soil or preference for flowers) could be overcome with design solutions. Other barriers (theft/vandalism) have not been a problem elsewhere.
- people in this deprived neighborhood are interested or already grow some of their food and would pay into a membership scheme.
- people from BME backgrounds like the concept and already use their gardens in this way.
- subsequent funding from LGID was used to develop the website, newsletter and a 'how to' Back to Front manual due in October.

Next Steps

The project has applied for further funding to develop and deliver a community training programme to:

- simplify food growing with the help of the manual
- change perception that food growing schemes are unattractive;
- eliminate association between growing your own and making ends meet;
- Establish links with relevant stakeholders like housing associations

Critical evaluation should include measuring the impact of productive front gardens on a number of areas beyond 'health' alone.

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