



A community backgreen in Copenhagen, Denmark

Edinburgh Community Backgreens Initiative

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Introduction

This leaflet has been prepared to describe the Edinburgh Community Backgreens Initiative. The initiative was devised to explore the opportunities to improve the amenity and environmental sustainability of tenement backgreens in Edinburgh. The Initiative is promoted by a partnership of a Edinburgh Community Backgreens Association, a network of residents associations, and Re:Solution a local social enterprise.

The initiative is currently working with residents at seven sites in Gorgie Dalry. This leaflet is supported by progress bulletins - for further information contact Re:Solution, see contact details at end of report.

Background to the Initiative

During 2004, Re:Solution carried out a study of tenement backgreens in Gorgie Dalry in collaboration with Canmore Housing Association. Re:Solution surveyed the condition of backgreens and the attitudes of residents. The study also resulted in the development of a 'community backgreens' model, inspired by a regeneration project involving tenement backgreens in the Norrebro area of Copenhagen, but adapted to suit the Edinburgh context.

The pilot area of Gorgie Dalry is almost completely composed of traditional 19th century tenements

arranged in squares. The land within these squares was divided up into backgreens (each jointly owned by one of the tenements), which provided an important role as drying greens. During the wars, most of the iron railings which divided the backgreens were removed for the war effort. In some squares, these boundaries were re-established by Council renovation schemes, or by residents erecting fences. At other squares, the boundaries between backgreens blurred. Unlike Glasgow, tenements in Edinburgh tend not to have factoring schemes in place.

The initiative began with a survey of the condition of all backgreens in Gorgie Dalry. The pilot area included 350 backgreens servicing approximately 4000 households. The survey produced unexpected results, only 40% of backgreens were found to be in a good condition, 20% were inaccessible 'jungles' whilst the remainder were weedy or cracked concrete. Thus over half of backgreens in Gorgie Dalry were identified as not well maintained and/or providing low amenity to residents.

The feasibility study sought to identify why residents did not keep their backgreens in good condition. Residents were asked whether they would like the backgreens to be improved and why they had not done so.

Feasibility Study

Survey forms were delivered to 878 households at 7 of the worst tenement squares. Approximately 11% of the surveys were returned, the results showed that of those that responded to the survey, all would like to see their backgreen improved. Asked what factors stopped them from maintaining their backgreen, the responses were:-

- 45% cited a lack of time
- 21% said they had no space for tools
- 23% disliked gardening
- 66% said the overgrown backgreen was too big a job
- 18% had a lack of support from other residents

Residents were asked if they would prefer for the backgreens to be maintained by a gardening service or to do it themselves;

- 87% preferred a gardening service
- 85% said they would contribute to the cost of this service
- 18% would like to do it themselves

The value of 'greenspace', in promoting wellbeing, health and the economic prosperity of an area has been well acknowledged in recent years¹. Gorgie Dalry is a densely populated area with little provision of quality public greenspace, the dereliction of greenspace on the doorstep is a wasted community resource.

The conclusion drawn from the resident survey was that there was a significant number of residents living around derelict backgreen sites, which would like to see them improved, but did not have the time or resources to tackle a job which they felt was beyond them. It was found that whilst the majority of residents did not wish to become involved in gardening, there was a large group of people who would wish to contribute to the maintenance of the site, but who would not do so without the support of their neighbours.

¹ Greenspace and Quality of Life – Making the Links Technical Report, Greenspace Scotland 2005.



The tenement square between Smithfield Street and Wheatfield Road

Community Backgreen Model

One Site Approach

The premise of the community backgreen model is that tenement backgreens should provide a focus for a sense of neighbourhood within the tenement squares, facilitate the environmental sustainability of the adjoining tenements and provide a convenient greenspace for the enjoyment of the residents.

Where appropriate, and with the support of the residents, the backgreens within each tenement square should be managed as one 'community backgreen', (see illustration below). Access between backgreens is created by laying paths, removing fences and walls or installing gates.

The larger community backgreens would allow for the installation of new facilities which would improve the amenity and environmental sustainability of the tenements, these would include:

- small play areas for toddlers, and BBQ and relaxation areas for older residents.
- Where possible, secure bicycle sheds would be provided in the community backgreens.
- A community composting operation housed in a small shed in the middle of each site.

Community Backgreen Association

The engagement and participation of the residents around the site is central to the success of the community backgreens model. Residents from around a target site are invited to a presentation of the community backgreens model.

Residents who are supportive are invited to a second meeting to establish a Community Backgreen Association, which takes on the 'stewardship' of the site and manages its regeneration. Membership of the Association is open to all residents (both owners and tenants), around the site. The members elect a committee to manage the community backgreen on behalf of all the residents. In an area with relatively high turn over of residents, the Association would provide a vehicle for sustained management.

The seven existing Associations have founded Edinburgh Community Backgreens Association, a company limited by guarantee, established to promote the development of community backgreens in Edinburgh.



Community Backgreen Model



Participative Design Workshops

Residents attend participative workshops to develop the outline designs for their site. The workshops provide a medium for explaining the features of the community backgreens model and identifying the features the residents support. Re:Solutions design team then prepare a detailed design for the site specifying materials and plants. Whilst not wishing to preclude the aspirations of the residents, Re:Solution would seek to maximise the environmental sustainability of the site in terms of materials used, facilities introduced into the site (such as community recycling) and the planting strategies.

During the workshops, residents are surveyed to identify what time and skills they could volunteer to implement the community backgreen. It is assumed that the majority of volunteers would provide basic volunteer labour, however the availability of residents with useful skills such as brick laying is be mapped.

An implementation plan detailing the tasks required to implement the community backgreen is prepared. The tasks are timetabled and the labour and material costs estimated. The implementation plan indicates which tasks would be undertaken by the volunteer team and which would be contracted out.

Resident Volunteer Workshops

Wherever possible the community backgreens are implemented by the residents working together as a volunteer team. All residents are invited to participate in the volunteer team. Re:Solution would support the team to implement the community green.

The tools and equipment for the resident volunteer team are purchased and stored in a secure shed erected on site. Ideally this resource would be used by the volunteers to maintain the site following its completion.

All volunteers are given an induction in the safe use of equipment and of site safety. Insurance is arranged through British Trust Conservation Volunteers for the personal and public liability of the volunteers.

A Workshop Leader is provided who is responsible for explaining the workplan to the residents, organising tasks, ensuring site safety and that the volunteers enjoy the workshops. Two to three workshops a week are held on weekday evenings (6-9pm) and/or weekend afternoons (5-8pm) depending upon the availability of the residents. The workshops run from April to November.

Community Backgreen Model

Community Shed

Each community backgreen will be provided with a 'community shed' (see illustration below), to house shared facilities. The facilities may vary depending upon the needs of the residents and the size of the site, but we hope to incorporate the features described below at most sites if we can access the necessary funding. The concept of the shed borrows from the successful Danish 'co-housing' model, where a resource is shared between a group of houses.

The sheds will include a separate space for gardening tools and equipment and an area for community activities.

The illustration shows the proposed community backgreen shed for the Wheatfield site. The top half of the shed houses a Rocket In-vessel composter, the bottom half provides storage space for tools and equipment and a work bench for various community activities. It is suggested that the community workspace could be used for meetings of the Community Backgreen Association and other groups, a place to have activities in the evenings and weekends.

Community Composting Operation

It is hoped that a community composting operation will be incorporated into the community backgreen model. The proposed composting system would use a 'Rocket' In-Vessel composter. The Rocket allows for all kitchen and garden waste to be composted in a safe enclosed environment resulting in compost which can be used within the community backgreen. Residents would collect meat, fish and vegetable scraps in a 'kitchen caddy' with a biodegradable liner. When full, the liner is tied up and taken down to the shed where it is deposited through a hatch into a hopper. The Rocket will be operated by the Assistant Green Caretaker (see below).

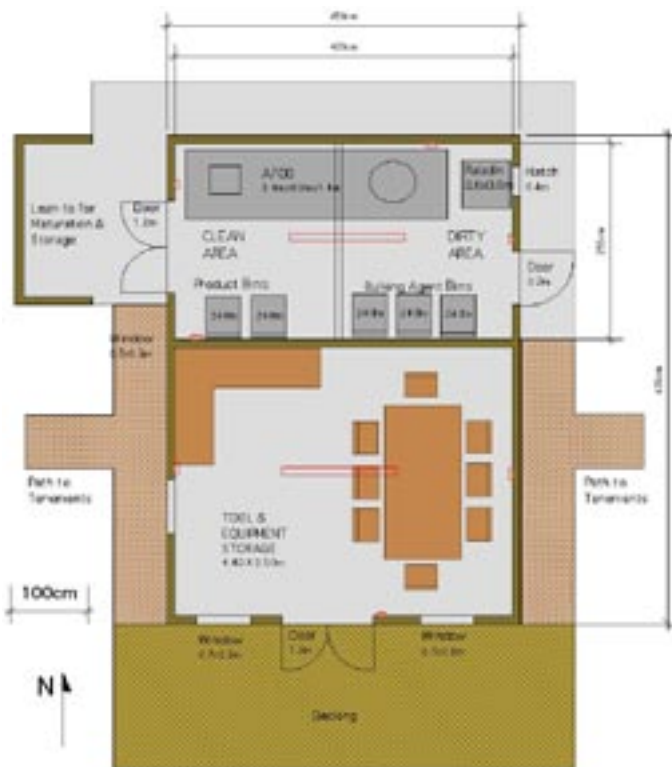
The Green Caretakers

Following completion of the first group of community backgreens, it is intended that Edinburgh Community Backgreen Association (ECBA) will operate as a community enterprise providing a 'Green Caretakers' service to maintain the sites on behalf of its member associations.

The service will include maintenance of the community backgreen and community composting facilities and ongoing support of the involvement of the residents in the improvement and maintenance of the sites.

ECBA would employ a Green Caretaker team appropriate to the number of sites it manages. The service would be paid for by monthly factoring payments made by households around each site.

The factoring system would be developed in partnership with Dunedin Canmore Housing Association, which is rolling out a tenemental factoring scheme throughout the city.



Project Partners



Edinburgh Community Backgreens Association

The Edinburgh Community Backgreens Initiative (ECBI) is the result of a partnership between Edinburgh Community Backgreens Association (ECBA) and Re:Solution.

ECBA is constituted as a company limited by guarantee. Its members are the seven existing community backgreen associations. Membership is open to other associations as they are formed. The members have appointed a board of directors responsible to direct the day to day operations of the company.

Re:Solution

Re:Solution is a social enterprise established to promote community-scale sustainable development projects. Re:Solution have been contracted by ECBA to deliver the ECBI. Re:Solution provide development support to community backgreen associations and resident volunteer teams.

Funding

The funding to support the costs of delivering the initiative has come from a variety of grant bodies including the national lotteries, Esmee Fairbairn Foundation, City of Edinburgh Council and the Scottish Community Foundation.

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