

Opportunities for a sustainable business at Ramsgate Academy

Report to the Board of Ramsgate Academy
and Thanet District Council

May 2003

Martin Stott

Contents

1. Executive Summary
 2. Project specification
 3. Background and context:
 - 3.1 Academy proposals
 - 3.2 Thanet District
 - 3.3 The school in its local context
 - 3.4 The Jackey Baker allotments site
 4. Opportunities for development
 5. Issues to consider
 6. Finding funds to realize the project
 7. Conclusion: options and recommendations
- Annex 1: Key contacts

*'This blessed plot,
this earth,
this realm...'*

Shakespeare King Richard II

1. Executive Summary

This report examines the prospect of establishing a business, as part of the Ramsgate Academy's business specialism, on the adjacent Jackey Baker Allotment site. It identifies a number of possible options for a 'green' business on the site in a partnership with the existing ploholders and their landlords Thanet District Council.

It concludes that the site and its proximity to the new school lend themselves well to such a venture and identifies a number of funding streams apart from the mainstream funding available to the school, to develop and sustain the project. It gives case study examples of similar successful ventures by other schools and community groups.

The report recommends that bearing in mind the site, the means of maximizing partnership opportunities with existing ploholders, the income generation opportunities, and the possible range of entrepreneurial skills and job opportunities that could be developed, the most promising these options are a combination of:

- Horticulture
- Composting and
- A town garden, garden centre

In order to make a project on the allotments site work in the timescale envisaged, the report recommends the Board and Thanet District Council that they:

- Agree in principle to the concept
- Appoint a project champion in the school to develop a proposal which commands the support of all the stakeholders
- make sure a proper business case is developed for the preferred option – even if the business is not strictly profitable, and test it against other possible options
- develop and maintain good liaison between the Board, Thanet District Council and the Jackey Baker Allotment site ploholder representatives
- Apply for grants from the organizations/ funding streams to support the initiative
- Build up the project gradually. It will not make a profit in the first year

- Put up a secure building/base on the site. This gives a sense of permanence to the venture and is essential after the initial start up phase for the storage of tools, seeds and other equipment.
- Do not move the allotment site. This will alienate plotheholders and will be very time consuming.
- In the longer term consider the opportunities to integrate the projects business focus into to the wider aspects of school life.

2. Project Specification

The brief is to examine the site where the new Ramsgate Academy will be located, and identify possibilities for integrating activities in the new school which can support the business/enterprise dimension of the schools' specialist status, with particular reference to partnership with the adjacent allotments site.

A subsidiary objective is to identify non-commercial opportunities on the allotments site which would nevertheless support aspects of the school curriculum and links with the local community.

The report is presented to the Board of Ramsgate Academy, and allotment landowners, Thanet District Council.

3. Background and Context

3.1 Academy Proposals

Ramsgate School is situated on the edge of the Newington Estate on the western edge of Ramsgate. Newington ward is one of the 20% most deprived in England according to the Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD). The school is an 11 – 16 secondary school. It has a published admissions number of 150 and a capacity of 766 with 645 pupils currently on roll. Approximately 10% are members of ethnic minorities, mainly Afghan, Iranian and Roma. The school faces exceptionally challenging circumstances: it has struggled with low attainment levels, under-subscription, above average levels of special and additional educational need and a significant number of pupils with challenging behaviour. Although the school has had to deal with a number of these issues since its inception, the emphasis on parental preference has exacerbated the problems – it has become the least preferred secondary school in the Thanet District, and is currently in ‘special measures’.

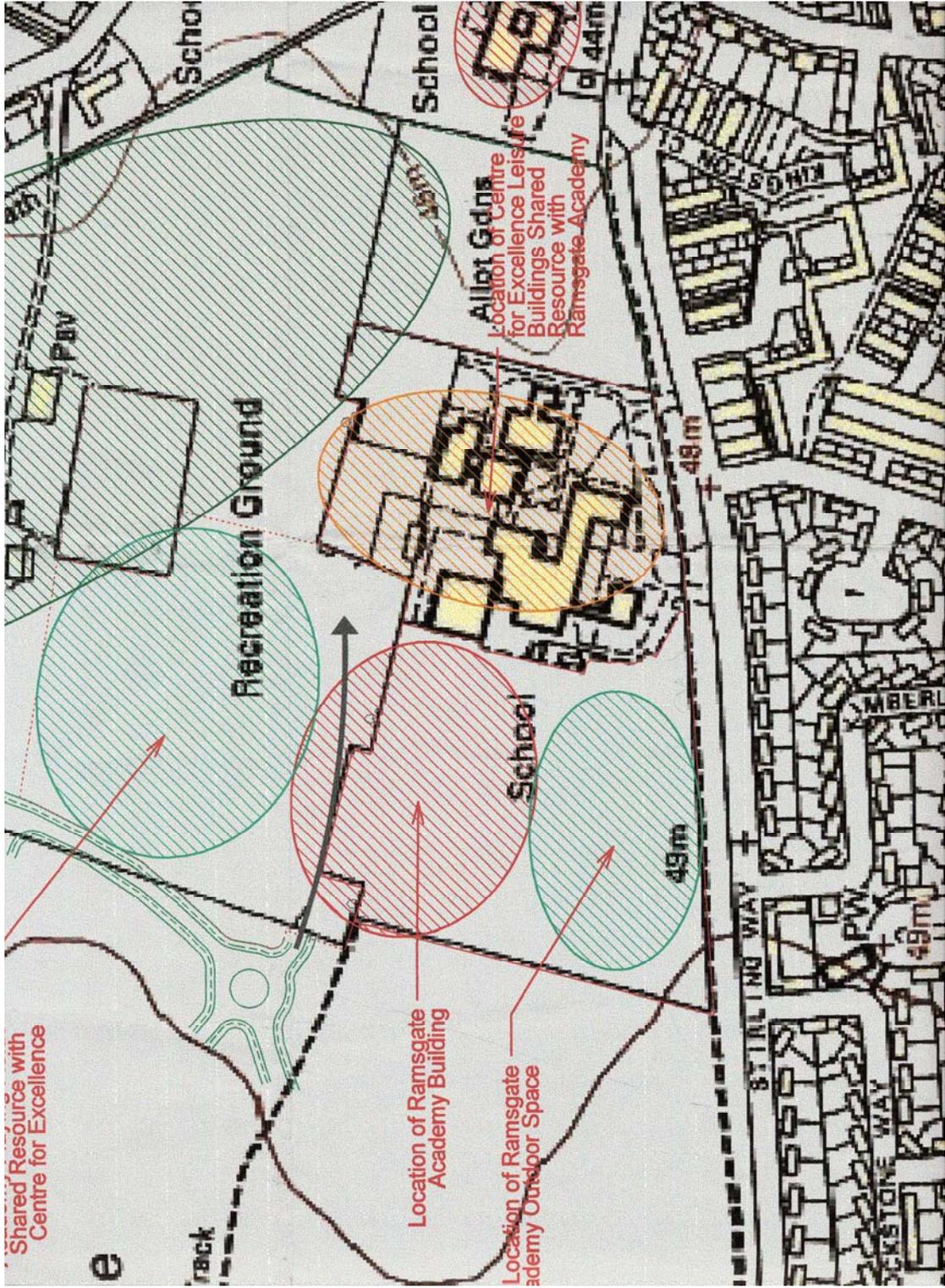
The school is due to close in 2005, and be replaced by a new build Academy School on the adjacent site. The new school will be an 11 – 18+ Academy, have a capacity of 1,180 pupils. The school will specialize in business and the performing arts, and is due to open in September 2005. The school will be independent of the local education authority, Kent County Council, and is being funded by the Department for Education and Skills, the Roger De Hann Charitable Trust, and Kent County Council.

3.2 Thanet district

Thanet District Council is the most deprived district in Kent and over 20% of the districts population live in wards considered to be in the 20% most deprived in England. There is a high proportion of lone parent households in the district and unemployment in February 2003 at 3.9% is the highest for any district in Kent and well above the Kent (2.0%) average.

3.3 The School in its local context

The current School is on Stirling Way, opposite the Newington Estate. (see map) It is surrounded by the Jackey Baker recreation grounds to the north and west, and the Jackey Barker allotments site to the east. The new school will be constructed immediately to the west of the present school site, on what is currently a playing field.





Ramsgate School current premises

The current school buildings will be demolished and the area turned into a hard recreation area.

3.4 The Jackey Baker Allotment site.

The allotment site immediately to the east of the current school is roughly rectangular in shape, fronts onto Stirling Way and is (1.78 ha) 17,850 sq meters in size (approx 4.4 acres). The site has a grass roadway up the eastern side as is largely flat with a dip towards the middle.



Jackey Baker Allotment site looking towards Newington Estate

Approximately half the site is in cultivation. The back third and a larger strip adjacent to the school, amounting to some 2 acres (0.8 ha) have been uncultivated for some years, and the northwest corner has become overgrown.



*The back of the
allotment site looking
northeast*

A strip at the front is also uncultivated but the middle is all let and in good condition. There is vehicle access from the entrance gate to the eastern edge of the site from Stirling Way. The fences are in poor condition, but there is no evidence of vandalism. There is water on the site and a local stables in Manston delivers free horse manure. The site is managed by Thanet District Council's Allotment Officer. There is no functioning independent allotments association, but enough active individuals to ensure that the site has managed recent decline successfully, and members participate in the Ramsgate and District Leisure Gardeners Association.

Although the site has seen better days this is not a reason for moving it. The ploholders are well established, there are good services to the site and good access. Creating an alternative site will take substantial investment. Relocating statutory allotments sites is a time consuming process involving extensive consultation, evidence of lack of demand on the existing site, and the permission of the Secretary of State.

4. Opportunities for development

The proximity of the Academy to the allotment site presents a wide range of opportunities to link the two creatively. The allotments site is significantly underused, but plot holders remaining on the site have expressed enthusiasm at the idea that new life might be breathed into it in partnership with the school.

The links to the school are various. The primary focus is in terms of the development of a sustainable business as part of the Academy's Business specialism, but other aspects of the school curriculum could also be enhanced, including environmental education/Local Agenda 21, healthy eating policies and aspects of community development/citizenship/life skills/social outreach such as developing collaborative projects between school pupils and the mainly elderly plot holders.

All of this links well with the vision set out by Elizabeth Adlington and David Carter from Capita (project managers contracted by the DfES) in their January 2003 presentation, the emphasis on sharing facilities with other schools and the local community, the sponsorship of activities by partners from the local community, and a commitment to learning that extends before and after the school day.

The following section summarises some of the options and illustrates them with case studies. The striking thing about all the case studies is the way in which successful projects integrate and combine several different activities; plants, vegetables, animals, orchards, coppicing or composting to make a successful and exciting venture.

The assumption is that 2 acres (0.8 ha) would be available for the school on the Jackey Baker allotment site.

1. Town Garden Centre

Gardens and gardening are one of the most popular of British pastimes. Garden Centres have grown enormously in popularity, and are highly profitable. The site could support intensive cultivation of annual bedding plants, and perennials such as lavender. Relatively easy to grow and sell, the site lends itself being so close to urban areas. Plants could be grown for sale from the site, through the school (parents, staff etc) or supplied directly to bulk purchasers e.g. council parks and recreation department,

or local elderly peoples homes. Growing wild flowers and selling the seed is another possible variation on this idea.

Case Study:
Brockhill Park School, Folkstone

Brockhill Park School, has had a successful garden centre for many years. It has greenhouses, and a courtyard vegetable and plant garden. It also runs a small farm and sells produce including animals (sheep and cattle) in the locality and to the school caterers. As well as its gardening side, its farm has open days, lambing weekends etc and the enterprise is profit making.

*Contact: Ian Langley , Farm Unit, Brockhill Park School, Sandgate, Folkstone, Kent
Tel:1303 265521*

2. Horticulture

Growing vegetables on this site is a real possibility. Intensive vegetable growing could include sale of seedlings e.g. lettuce and herbs, as well as vegetables ready for consumption. Outlets could include:

- direct sales from the site;
- sales via the school community;
- a 'veg box' scheme to local households;
- sale through local farmers markets or W.I. markets;
- sale to local cafés, restaurants or other institutions such as hospitals or elderly peoples homes.
- supplying the school itself.

There are 23 care homes in Broadstairs and Ramsgate alone, with more in Margate and Cliftonville and a large hospital in Margate, so supplying one or more institutions is a realistic prospect. *Produced in Kent* lists eighteen farmer's markets in the county including one at Cliftonville.

In terms of vegetable growing there are a number of specialist options that could be considered including:

- organic vegetable production;
- specialist ethnic vegetables;
- soft fruit, or out of season vegetables grown in poly tunnels.

Case study**Ashram Acres, Sparkbrook, Birmingham**

Ashram Acres has been operating in an ethnically mixed area of Birmingham for over 20 years. It occupies $\frac{3}{4}$ of an acre of land in former gardens behind a Victorian terrace.

There are two polytunnels a solardome, cold frames, and outhouses for goats and dairy and milking work. A food coop supplies milk eggs, and specialist ethnic vegetables for the local Afro Caribbean and south Asian communities, including callaloo, fenugreek, coriander, pumpkin shoots and spinach.

Contact; Judith Weltman, Ashram Acres, 23-25 Grantham Rd, Sparkbrook, Birmingham B11 1LU tel: 0121 773 7061

3. Community Orchard

The site could be planted as a community orchard. This would be much less intensive than Option 1 or 2, but the climate is well suited and in the medium term, two acres of fruit trees would produce a significant crop and sales. Wildflowers, whose seed could be sold, or livestock such as hens could be combined with an orchard.

Case Study**Blondin Orchard Ealing, London**

Covering half an acre of a two acre allotment site, Blondin Orchard has been established by a local residents group in partnership with the landowners, Ealing Council, to bring the allotments back into productive use, and encourage wildlife. The community orchard has 46 apple trees and also includes horticultural training and links with local schools.

Contact; Phaedre Mawle, Countryside Service, London Borough of Ealing, Perceval House, 14 Uxbridge Road, London W5 2HL

4. Willow/coppicing/renewable energy

Growing willow or short rotation hazel coppice could be accommodated on the site. Sales outlets to local crafts people, or as an energy crop would need to be developed. In the context of energy saving, the school itself could consider running some or all of its heating from locally grown wood, though this site would be insufficient to

provide all its needs. A small wind turbine could be accommodated on site along with other uses such as composting, though there are planning implications with any wind turbine.

Case study

Elder Stubbs Garden Group Cowley, Oxford

Elder Stubbs is a nine acre allotment site in Cowley Oxford where a partnership between the ploholders and a mental health charity has transformed a previously neglected site into a national showcase. Restore, a charity assisting people recovering from mental illness back into work took over two acres and has developed them for flower willow, hazel and vegetable growing. Ploholders have benefited from an infusion of energy onto the site (including an annual festival), and the security of a large number of regular users who have dramatically reduced the incidence of vandalism and theft. The site is now fully let and Restore have developed a highly successful business. Produce, including dried flowers, willow wreaths, and hazel wood products as a substitute for bamboo, are sold from their shop and vegetables are sold via a local "veg box" scheme.

Contact: John Purves, Elder Stubbs Allotments, 45 Hurst St, Oxford OX4 1 HA tel: 01865 725051

5. Composting and recycling

Government targets to increase composting and recycling, make this site as ideal one to assist the local councils achieve their targets in this area. Household garden waste, green waste from parks and other municipal facilities could be composted on site, with the compost being resold along with other garden products, plants or vegetables, as above, and used directly on the site by ploholders.

Case study
Proper Job/Chagford Community
Composting Project, Chagford, Devon

*Proper Job started out as a community composting initiative on the village allotments site in this Dartmoor village, With a mixture of support from Devon County Council West Devon DC and funds from the EU, it expanded over a five year period into a thriving market garden project growing vegetables both outdoors and in polytunnels and supplying its own café in the village, as well as selling the compost, and other recycled materials (wood etc) from its composting site. The ploholders were instrumental in establishing this thriving business which recently received a green business award from the South west RDA.
Contact ; Jo Hodges, Proper Job, 3 Fernleigh, New St, Chagford, via Newton Abbot, Devon
tel : 01647 432616*

6. City Farm

Keeping livestock, chickens, pigs, sheep, and goats, has been done in many urban areas. The site is just big enough to act as a city farm. It could be a major educational resource, but income, apart from paying visitors would be limited, and expenditure on keeping the animals healthy in a small area, would be considerable.

Case study
Gorgie City Farm, Edinburgh

*Gorgie City farm has a two acre site with a range of animals including cows, horses, sheep, pigs, hens and ducks. It also grows fruit and vegetables which are sold to the public, as well as flowers, bedding plants and compost, and a range of educational services in a new educational center for the use of local schools. It has 100,000 visitors a year including many school visits.
Contact: John Percival, Gorgie City Farm,
Gorgie Rd, Edinburgh EH11 2LA
tel: 0131 337 4202.*

All these proposals or combinations of them, offer a significant range of work experience and job opportunities including horticulture, which remains a significant employer

in Kent, sales, marketing, contract negotiation and management, financial control, environmental education, construction repair and maintenance are all skills that could be obtained and would make students highly employable, or give them the opportunity to try out their own business ideas.

5. Issues to consider

To bring this project to fruition any of these proposals will need to address a number of issues. These include:

- The economic viability of the proposed project and the availability of subsidy if the initiative is unlikely to be profitable;
- The size and source of the initial investment.
- What the purpose of the collaboration is, quasi commercial, more community capacity building focused, or both.
- The extent to which the project is seen as stand alone in the context of the school versus the extent to which it is intended to integrate the existing plottolders on the site with any activity.
- The project in the context of wider development/regeneration proposals and visions for the area e.g. for the redevelopment of the old school site or the relocation of the Ramsgate swimming pool to somewhere around the Jackey Baker recreation ground in the next 5-10 years.
- The views of the existing plottolders and their willingness/capacity to participate in any new development on the site.
- The views of local people e.g. if a wind turbine was to be considered as part of the proposal, or if the composting/recycling side of the business developed and the possible impact of traffic movements to and from the site that this might have.
- The timescale/ phasing of the development e.g. in relation to the availability of grant aid.
- The commitment of the school's staff and Board of Governors to the project especially the need to recognize its long term nature and the need to have a project champion within the school's senior management who could devote time to it when it is needed and exert the influence to make things happen.

6. Finding funds to realize the project

The links to the curriculum, or other school activities, the size and nature of the allotments site, and the nature of the 'business case' that is put together, will all influence how this project develops, but the availability of external funding is also likely to be a key determinant in what activities are selected to be worked up by the school if the concepts set out in this report are accepted and worked up

Environmental education in the broadest sense, and allotments as a regeneration vehicle are both promising avenues for obtaining funding for the selected project(s). Four sources have been identified as the most promising. These are

1. The Allotments Regeneration Initiative

Launched in April 2003 as a response to the upsurge in interest in allotments, especially from people concerned about good quality sustainably grown local food. The Initiative, a partnership between amongst others the National Association of Allotment & Leisure Gardeners, the Federation of City Farms and Community Gardens, the Esmee Fairbairn Foundation and the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, has made available an initial tranche of £500,000 to 'stimulate more people to get growing on urban allotments both as individuals plot holders and through community projects'. Seven pilot projects have been selected across the country from Newcastle to Harrow in London. The contact for future funding rounds is :

Bethan Stagg Coordinator,
Allotments Regeneration Initiative
54-57 Allison St,
Birmingham B5 5 TH

Tel:0121 643 0402
E: ari@farmgarden.org.uk

2. The SEED Programme

The new Social, Economic and Environmental Development (SEED) programme is a part of the New Opportunities Fund managed through the Green Spaces and Sustainable Communities Initiative. £15.3 m is

available up to the end of 2004 for one or more of the following project themes:

- local food initiatives,
- waste minimization,
- re use and recycling,
- energy efficiency,
- biodiversity,
- consumption and lifestyles,
- sustainable transport,
- environmental education and community enterprise.

Applications are sought for sums up to £100,000, from local community groups voluntary organisations, not for profit community businesses, and local authorities in partnership with community groups.

The programme is managed by the Royal Society for Nature Conservation. For up to date information and an application pack check the website:

www.seed.rsnc.org

3. Shell Better Britain Campaign

The Shell Better Britain Campaign (SBBC) aims to enable effective action for community based sustainable development. SBBC has a Community Projects Fund that provides grants of up to £2,000 for projects that show both community benefit and environmental benefit. An ideal project is one that:

- Is led by the local community
- Makes a positive difference to the local environment
- Addresses wider environmental issues
- Helps to bring the community closer together

Contact:
SBBC
King Edward House,
135a New St,
Birmingham
B2 4QJ

E: enquiries@sbbc.co.uk
tel: 0121 248 5900
www.sbbc.co.uk

4. Community Renewables Initiative

The Community Renewables Initiative's aim is to help groups and individuals realize that renewable energy can contribute to diversification and regeneration schemes through the environmentally sensitive development of initiatives such as biomass and wood heat schemes, farm waste schemes and small and medium wind turbines. The Initiative is promoted by the Countryside Agency.

Contact:

Countryside Agency

John Dower House,

Crescent Place,

Cheltenham

Glos GL50 3RA

Tel: 01242 521381

www.countryside.gov.uk/communityrenewables

Kent local support team

Tel:020 8541 9436

E: reach@surreycc.gov.uk

7. Conclusions: options and recommendations

The creation of a new school, Ramsgate Academy and its proximity to some loved but underused allotments does present an opportunity to create a business based around sustainable development principles, and an opportunity to integrate social and environmental considerations into other aspects of the curriculum and school life.

The opportunities for a partnership with ploholders on allotments site are enhanced by their successful management of decline. As numbers of ploholders have declined the remaining cultivated plots have been consolidated in the front and middle of the site, leaving approximately two acres at the back, nearest to the recreation site and immediately adjacent to the present school site, unused and available.

Section 4 of this report sets out some six possible options, and various combinations and sub options, for the use of this area. Some of these may prove too expensive to implement, or not sufficiently central to the objectives of the school to be worth considering.

In my view bearing in mind the site, means of maximizing partnership opportunities with exiting ploholders, the income generation opportunities, and the possible range of entrepreneurial skills and job opportunities that could be developed, the most promising these options are a combination of:

- Horticulture
- Composting and
- A town garden, garden centre

These have the advantages of:

- the products being relatively high value added,
- being relatively quick and easy to produce (unlike an orchard which take a long time to come to maturity)
- having at least the potential of a ready market in what is a mainly urban area and
- having useful synergy with each other (compost for example can be sold to customers for fruit or vegetables, or can be used on the site).

In order to make a project on the allotments site work in the timescale envisaged, I recommend the Board and Thanet District Council that they:

- Agree in principle to the concept
- Appoint a project champion in the school to develop a proposal which commands the support of all the stakeholders
- make sure a proper business case is developed for the preferred option– even if the business is not strictly profitable, and test it against other possible options
- develop and maintain good liaison between the Board, Thanet District Council and the Jackey Baker Allotment site plotholder representatives
- Apply for grants from the organizations/ funding streams to support the initiative
- Build up the project gradually. It will not make a profit in the first year
- Put up a secure building/base on the site. This gives a sense of permanence to the venture and is essential after the initial start up phase for the storage of tools, seeds and other equipment.
- Do not move the allotment site. This will alienate plotholders and will be very time consuming.
- In the longer term consider the opportunities to integrate the projects business focus into to the wider aspects of school life.

Annex 1: key contacts

In addition to grant sources referred to, a number of other organizations are likely to be valuable sources of help and advice. These include:

For everything to do with allotments:
National Society of Allotment and Leisure Gardeners
O'Dell House, Hunters Rd,
Corby,
Northants
NN17 5JE
Tel: 01536 266576
www.nsalg.demon.co.uk

For support with community orchards:
Common Ground
Gold Hill house,
21 High St,
Shaftesbury
Dorset
SP7 8JE
Tel: 01747 850820
www.england-in-particular.info

For support with city farms and community gardens:
Federation of City Farms and Community Gardens
The GreenHouse,
Hereford St,
Bristol,
BS3 4NA
Tel: 0117 923 1800
www.farmgarden.org.uk

For support with community composting:
Community Composting Network,
67 Alexandra Rd,
Sheffield
S2 3EE
Tel: 0114 258483
Email: ccn@gn.apc.org
www.othas.org.uk

For help on the environmental use of school grounds:
Learning through Landscapes
3rd Floor,
Southside Offices,
The Law Courts,
Winchester

SO23 9DL
Tel: 01962 846258
Email: schoolgrounds-uk@ltl.org.uk
www.ltl.org.uk

For advice on growing food in cities:
Sustain – the alliance for better food and farming
94 White Lion St,
London
N1 9PF
Tel: 0207 837 1228
www.sustainweb.org

For advice on the organic aspects of horticulture and
gardening:
Henry Doubleday Research Association
Ryton Organic Gardens,
Coventry
CV8 3LG
Tel: 02476 303517
www.hdra.org.uk

The report's author:

Martin Stott
65 Divinity Rd,
Oxford
OX4 1LH
Tel; 01865 721482
Email: martin.stott@talk21.com