



# BENSHAM BITES

## Project Report

Dingy Butterflies CIC works with residents, communities and organisations in Gateshead to explore the key issues that affect their community and support them to make a change. This is achieved using creativity and art to engage people and work with them in social action, to have a voice in their community.

# INTRODUCTION

Bensham Bites is a pilot project, funded by the Royal Horticultural Society, that brings together various Gateshead community organisations and food projects, both existing and new, into one network. Through creative processes we explore community food growing, food waste and rescue and the nutritional benefits for health and wellbeing.

Food poverty is a major concern evidenced by the Gateshead Food Partnership with about one in four Gateshead children growing up in poverty. Following consultation with residents and community workers we identified the need to improve partnership working between organisations, working with residents, to increase awareness of food waste within the community, exchange knowledge and skills around food preservation and rescue, enabling us to redistribute saved food to people in need in our community. Giving people agency and ownership of the project, linking people and community organisations to develop a locally led food waste and rescue strategy. We will concentrate on the following themes:

- Food growing
- Food rescue
- Food preservation
- Food redistribution

Some of the groups are in the early stages of creating a garden or allotment, whilst others have established green spaces, with varying levels of experience and knowledge. We will support those on low-income suffering from food poverty and using the local food bank; explore the health and wellbeing benefits of growing and eating healthily; and growing and sharing food from different cultures.



## PROJECT PARTNERS

The current network members include:

1. Dingy Butterflies CIC - a community arts organisation working in Bensham & Saltwell and lead organisation on the project
2. Artist and bee keeper Barbara Keating who led on one of our previous projects Bee of Bensham and led on three of the workshops
3. The Royal Horticultural Society - community outreach programme and project funder
4. The Comfrey Project - a refugee and asylum seeker organisation who run a community allotment and garden and who led on one of the project sessions
5. Herb Hub - an allotment project supporting residents wellbeing, and who ran two of the project sessions
6. Bensham Court Tenants and Resident Association - an older persons tower block with a new community allotment
7. Rawling Road Medical Centre - a GP surgery who are looking to create a community garden
8. The Chev - a group that supports Jewish girls with special educational needs who have recently taken on an allotment
9. Gateshead Council's Food Partnership who we are a member of and have signed up to their food charter

We have also recently added the new Bensham Grove Physic Garden to the network and will be looking for further network members as the project develops.



## PROJECT WORKSHOPS

Over the course of the project, we ran a series of six workshops led by different people in the network and community. They took place in four different areas in the community, Herb Hub allotment, Bensham Grove Community Hall, St Chads Church Hall and The Comfrey Project. These workshops were for an invited group of residents, community workers, and health workers. They were an opportunity to exchange knowledge and skills, learn from each other, and develop a series of workshops and dehydrated products using waste and rescued food, which we could then promote and run for the wider community and expand the network. The workshops included:

- 1) Savoury - led by Barbara Keating exploring savoury dehydrated foods including dried vegetables, soups, and how they could be saved or bulk bought, dehydrated, and packaged for distribution
- 2) Herb oils and tinctures - led by Suzanne and Emma of Herb Hub exploring the health benefits of herbs and spices making herb oils and tinctures using herbs from the Herb Hub allotment
- 3) Sweet - led by Barbara Keating exploring sweet dehydration making fruit leathers, crackers, healthy jelly sweets and how you could be creative with food to engage people and children
- 4) Herb Harmony - led by Suzanne and Emma of Herb Hub, exploring how can we enhance the flavour, health and nutritional benefits of our food with fresh and dried herbs, making jams, jellies, chocolates and infused honey and butter
- 5) Composting - led by Nicola of The Comfrey Project to introduce their new composting bins and learn about what food waste can and cannot be composted in the UK.
- 6) Bringing together everything throughout the project to create dehydrated foods for the table at the Gateshead Food Partnership launch on the 8 November 2024.

## PROJECT CASE STUDY

Bensham & Saltwell has one of the largest Orthodox Jewish communities in Europe with over 600 families, established at the end of the nineteenth century. The Chev, is a group formed to support young Jewish women in the community who have additional learning needs. The group had recently taken on an allotment in the community with the intention of teaching the women about nature and food growing. However the allotment was not in a good state and needed a lot of work to make it usable, which the group leaders had little experience.

Working with us on Bensham Bites, three of the group leaders attended the workshop sessions and learnt and engaged with the various sessions. Engaging with the other network members and the workshops, they learnt about how to use a dehydrator to preserve food; the wellbeing benefits of certain herbs and spices and the different ways to compost. In addition to the workshop sessions, they were also able to learn from the experienced members of the group, valuable information, hints and tips about growing food; as well as discuss planning issues they had around building a space on the allotment for the young women to be in and run workshops.

The project bought them a small dehydrator and over the course of Bensham Bites they learnt from Barbara Keating about dehydrating waste food and what they could create with it from Barbara's and Herb Hub's workshops. From this they created their own dried vegetable and rice pot, designed a brand and label and are now looking to get a food hygiene certificate so they can sell it and give it to people in need in the community. This has been promoted about various events, including Bensham Bites and in the wider community.



## COMMUNITY EVENTS

### Gateshead Food Summit

Gateshead Food Summit took place on 8 November 2024 at Baltic Centre for Contemporary Art. This was the launch of the Gateshead Food Partnership and the Food Charter for organisations to sign up to. We were represented on the food summit through:

1. a stall presenting the outcomes of the workshops alongside stalls from the Comfrey Project and The Chev who also presented outcomes from their work with us.
2. Speakers Sheinaz Stansfield, Bensham Bites member and health worker and Nikki Dravers, Bensham Bites member and Gateshead Food Partnership Programme Lead, both talking about their experience of food poverty and how projects like Bensham Bites could support local people.
3. Sheinaz Stansfield, Suzanne Amey (Herb Hub) and Christie Wright (Royal Horticultural Society Outreach Officer), led a breakout panel about community engagement using Bensham Bites as an example.
4. Dehydrated food packs, created by Bensham Bites members, led by Barbara Keating, placed on tables as snacks for attendees. The ingredients included rescued food.

There were over 170 attendees to the summit, from across Gateshead, the North-East and nationally. It was an opportunity to promote our project, engage with others within the community and discuss how our work is and could support our community.



## Bensham Bites Networking Event

Bensham Bites Networking Event took place on the 26 November 2024 at St Chads Church, Bensham. The networking event brought together 30 people consisting of residents of Bensham and representatives of 17 community organisations. The event was an opportunity for people to get together, find out about Bensham Bites and taste some of the food developed during the project. It involved Barbara Keating, The Comfrey Project, The Chev and Herb Hub presenting some of the outcomes of the project, a presentation by the network and an opportunity for attendees to discuss the future needs and direction of the project. Below are the groups attended not including Dingy Butterflies and Bensham & Saltwell residents.

1. Gateshead Food Partnership
2. Gateshead Food Bank
3. National Trust - Tyne Derwent Way
4. Gateshead Bridge Builders
5. Gateshead Council (arts team)
6. Royal Horticultural Society Growers
7. Comfrey Project Project
8. Big Local Gateshead
9. Connected Voice
10. Friends of Saltwell Park
11. Herb Hub
12. The Chev
13. Skills for People
14. Barley Mow Village Hall
15. Chopwell Community Food
16. Pelaw Community Garden
17. The Tynesider

The ideas and thoughts of the attendees has been gathered and will influence the future direction and funding of the project..





## PROJECT OUTCOMES

Through the project we have:

- Knowledge and skills exchange and development around food growing, dehydration and distribution as evidenced in The Chev case study.
- Improved partnership working amongst the current network and the potential to expand and work with more residents and organisations towards a common goal of developing a food waste strategy in the community.
- A series of potential future goals, that are actionable now, with some development and a potential imagined future, created through community consultation.
- Mapped community food assets, such as allotments, community gardens, community kitchens - both with and without hygiene certificates- to support future working in the area

## PROJECT OUTPUTS

- formed a network of community organisations that are working together in the Bensham community to improve and deliver food opportunities for the benefit of the community.
- developed a series of six workshops that we can replicate and facilitate in the community to promote knowledge exchange and awareness of food waste and rescue. These would be free for residents and those in need to attend but with the potential for organisations to pay to attend to create an income for the project.
- created several dehydrated products using reduced and bulk bought food, such as dried soups, crackers, fruit leathers and sweets and herb oils that we could develop further. There is the potential to develop a community led social enterprise selling these items as well as giving them out for free to food banks and those in need.

## FUTURE OF THE PROJECT

Next steps for the project are to evaluate the outcomes of the project and the networking event; see what is doable now from the networking event outcomes and what we can aspire to in the future; and look for further funding and opportunities to develop and expand the project and network to include more groups and residents.

We will look to expand the network promoting it to the wider community, through the community organisations own networks, our regular consultation events, via the Council's Gateshead Food Partnership, connecting to their food charter, and our social media, and active resident group.

1. Expand the network to include other growing, waste and rescued food and biodiversity groups and organisations working in Gateshead
2. Work with current food networks around growing, waste and rescued food
3. Apply for further funding to develop the project and network further
4. Develop a social enterprise working with local communities
5. Work with local schools to support their work around food poverty and biodiversity
6. Having signed up to Gateshead Food Charter work with Gateshead Food Partnership and the council using the charter as a guide.

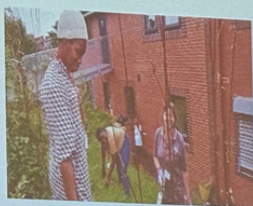
For further information on the project and how you can get involved you can contact

Ben Jones, director of Dingy Butterflies CIC on:

[info@dingybutterflies.org](mailto:info@dingybutterflies.org) or our website [www.dingybutterflies.org](http://www.dingybutterflies.org)



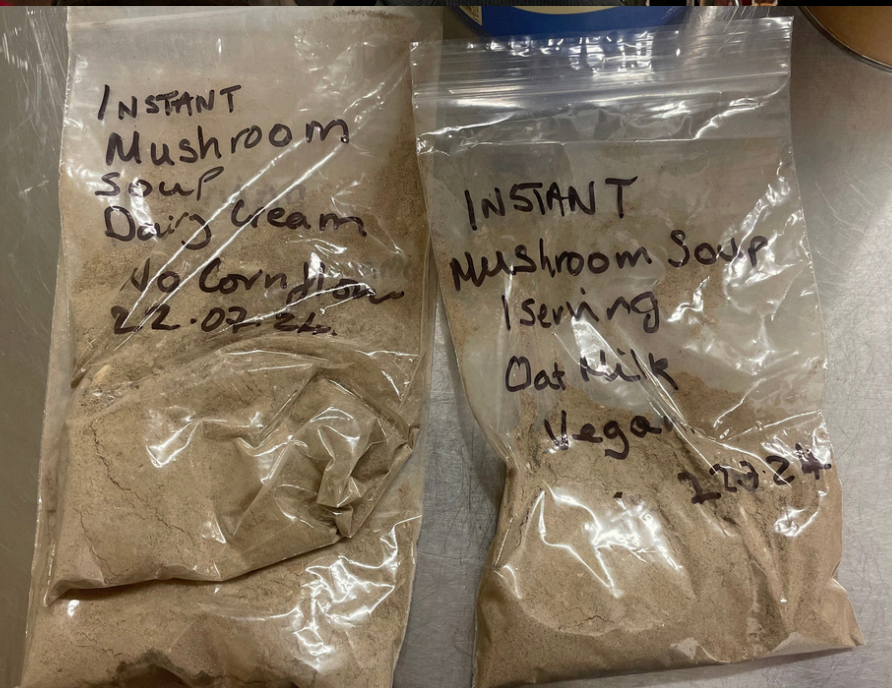
# Bensham Bites – Food Network



Work Together to Provide  
Healthy Nutritious Accessible  
Food for Bensham



Bites - Britain and Ireland  
200 species  
1000+ years  
12,000,000 - 24,000,000  
1000+ years  
1000+ years



Dingy Butterflies  
[www.dingybutterflies.org](http://www.dingybutterflies.org)

Project team  
Ben Jones, Dingy Butterflies, Founder and Director  
Barbara Keating, Bensham Bites Lead Artist  
Christine Wright, RHS Community Outreach Officer

Thank you to the network members who took part in the project especially

Christine Wright, Community Outreach Advisor, Royal Horticultural Society  
Sheinaz Stansfield, Oxford Road and Rawling Road Medical Centre  
Suzanne Amey, Herb Hub  
Emma Surtees, Big Local Gateshead  
Zivia Katz, The Chev  
Nicola Bushell, The Comfrey Project  
Nikki Dravers, Gateshead Food Partnership

To contact Dingy Butterflies CIC, you can email us at [info@dingybutterflies.org](mailto:info@dingybutterflies.org)