

# Draft Briefing: The role of councils in Community Food Growing

**20 April 2021**

Sustain is the alliance for better food and farming. We represent over 100 food and farming organisations and have been supporting local areas to develop food growing projects and programmes since 2008. This briefing sets out the actions we believe councils should be taking to support and championing food growing. It covers:

- Why councils should support food growing
- How they can support food growing
- A checklist of actions for self-assessment
- Examples of London councils that are showing leadership in this area

*If you have any comments or feedback on this briefing please contact [fiona@sustainweb.org](mailto:fiona@sustainweb.org)*

## **Why should councils support food growing?**

Supporting residents, community groups and organisations to access land for food growing has several key benefits across council objectives including:

- Access for residents to healthy, local food
- Healthy and active residents
- Resilient and mentally healthy communities
- Safer, cohesive communities
- Greener and environmentally sustainable communities

Councils have a unique opportunity to further the agenda and enable more residents to get involved in growing food and also to help access land and other assets that can increase sustainable food production.

During the last 10 years Sustain, through [Capital Growth](#) and [Good to Grow](#) networks, have supported councils to take steps to increase food growing and have shone a spotlight on leadership in this area.

# How can councils support food growing?

In Sustain's latest report [Response, Resilience and Recovery: London's Food Response to Covid-19](#) we set out areas to assess how councils are supporting food growing – each with a number of potential actions. These include:

1. **Take a cross cutting approach:** Include food growing in public health strategies, food strategies, local plans, and climate and nature strategies. This is especially important for councils as community food growing meets many council objectives and crosses the work of many departments.
2. **Build capacity:** Appoint a designated officer to champion food growing and create clearer pathways for accessing land, as well as links with local networks or key VCS organisations.
3. **Increase access to land and assets:** Proactively identify land for food growing, make access to land easier including mapping land and assets to increase local food production e.g. glasshouses.
4. **Plan for it:** Support for community food growing should be included in planning policies and frameworks (as it is in the overarching London Plan) and councils can secure and protect land for food growing.
5. **Connect with others:** Sustain's Capital Growth and Good to Grow networks can help councils to encourage and support food growing and signpost you to other relevant organisations.

On the next page we outline the areas of action we have previously assessed local authorities on, as a helpful checklist for councils and partnerships to review local actions and build action plans and access to land that can support residents and organisations to grow food in their local area.

## A Checklist for action

### A cross cutting approach

Have you included food growing into a food strategy, or other relevant strategies and plans?

The strategies and plans might cover the following areas or departments:

- Council's approach to improving public health
- Parks and green spaces strategies
- Climate and nature emergency action plans

### Capacity building and support

Do you have designated officer time to support food growing in the borough and/or are you working with lead initiatives or partnering with external organisations to develop orchards, community gardens or school food gardens?

This capacity building and support might cover the following areas:

- Council officers provide, or partnered with external organisations to provide, ongoing support to existing food growing projects
- Council provides small grants that are accessible to food growing projects and community groups, or other resources to support food growing in the borough

### Land use

Do you encourage and enable use of publicly owned land, including housing estates, for community food growing, with a clear route for residents to request use of land to grow food?

Do you develop food growing initiatives within public parks and/or work with friends of parks groups to support food growing?

Do you map and track the amount of land available to grow food and set targets to increase?

If appropriate, are you working towards making publicly owned land or assets (e.g. glasshouses) available for larger scale food production? (this may include farmland rented out on tenancies or county farms).

### Planning

Do you ensure that specific support for community food growing and edible landscaping is included in the council's planning policies?

Do you review how these policies are enacted?

Do you work with developers to ensure accessible community gardens are part of the design of new developments?

Do you look at ways to enhance or protect growing sites?

# Case studies

## Islington Council

Food Growing Contact: Michelle Webb. [michelle.web@islington.gov.uk](mailto:michelle.web@islington.gov.uk)

**Schools and Early Years:** The council supports schools by providing training and networking opportunities as well as making sure schools are aware of grants they can access to support food growing such as from [School Food Matters](#) and the school meal provider.

Their school meals contractor, Caterlink Ltd, provide grants to a number of schools each year to support school food gardens; as an added value services under the contract. They have partnered with organisations such as [Octopus Community Network](#) and Community Hubs in the borough on the 'Urban Wild Places' initiative, establishing a community nursery.

## Southwark Council

Food Growing Contact: Rosie Dalton-Lucas. [rosie.dalton-lucas@southwark.gov.uk](mailto:rosie.dalton-lucas@southwark.gov.uk)

**Dedicated Officer Time:** The newly appointed Community Gardening Coordinators will support community gardening and food growing across the borough. The Coordinators are creating a programme of support for community gardening, focusing on food growing on estates, helping and signposting residents to identify land that can be used for food, as well as supporting already-existing community gardens across Southwark.

They are leading on a pilot project involving seven housing estates, as part of the Great Estates programme, supporting residents to start gardening groups and develop food growing sites, and expanding their support in 2021 with the launch of the Allotment Expansion Guarantee.

## Waltham Forest Council

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**Increasing Access to Land:** The council has identified existing and potential new community food growing sites (mainly in parks and housing); and is busy contacting different users and stakeholder groups (consultation survey and workshops – December 2020). The mapping and consultation process of land and assets to increase local food production will involve residents' input, and propose, potential sites for development.

The council actively encourages and enables the use of publicly owned land for community food growing and already has a high number of existing community food growing sites across the borough.

## Tower Hamlets Council

Food Growing Contact: Natalie Lovell. [natalie.lovell@towerhamlets.gov.uk](mailto:natalie.lovell@towerhamlets.gov.uk)

**Partnership and Voluntary Sector Working:** Tower Hamlets' Food Partnership lead organisation, the [Women's Environment Network \(WEN\)](#), ran a Keep Growing campaign, with over 700 people signed up to receive free growing packs, training videos and online events. They also connected community gardens and allotments with community food banks.

The Food Partnership, which the council jointly founded and is an active member, includes the Tower Hamlets Food Growers network, which supports around 90 food growing spaces across the borough and has over 1,400 members. The Live Well courses on growing and cooking food for residents of the Burdett Estate started in October 2017 addressing the connection between food and mental health. The most recent course had to adapt due to Covid-19, and produced a series of low-cost health recipes, gardening videos and downloadable material. These resources were disseminated to the Tower Hamlets Food Growers network. East End Homes continued to support its multiple community gardens on patches of vacant land across its estates. There was a high profile orchard of 20 fruit trees planted in Victoria Park in March 2019 by Trees for Cities, working with the Victoria Park team. The trees were planted in a community planting day with 58 adults and 41 children.

## Greenwich Council

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**Strategy & Planning:** The Royal Borough of Greenwich Parks, Estates and Open Spaces Allotments Action Plan (2019-2024) aims to support other existing community gardens. The Action Plan supports identification of new community growing areas within existing Parks, Estates and Open Spaces sites and other land owned by RBG. Support for community gardens food growing (including estate based food growing) is part of a food environments commission with [GCDA](#) (a local food-based social enterprise), under the banner of the Good Food in Greenwich (GFig) partnership.

Within the council's Local Plan, community food growing is recognised as "important, not only in helping to provide people with healthy local food, but also because it involves exercise, fresh air and interaction with the natural environment which has proven to be positive for mental well-being." Food growing is referenced in the borough's healthy weight and carbon neutral action plans and is overseen by the Healthy Weight Taskforce, ultimately accountable to the RBG Health and Wellbeing Board.

## Sustain publications

[Edible Estates](#)

[Food Growing in Parks](#)

[Fringe Farming in London](#)

Capital Growth also has a host of growing related publications. [Find them here.](#)

## Sustain initiatives

Capital Growth: Launched in London in 2008, the network has supported over 3500 growing projects to date with a host of projects, campaigns and resources. During this time we have supported a number of councils, housing associations and worked closely with the Mayor of London's Food Team. The network also hosts a map to find your local growing projects.

[www.capitalgrowth.org](http://www.capitalgrowth.org)

Good to Grow: Part of the Sustainable Food Places initiative, this initiative supports networks and gardens throughout the UK, providing access to online tools and information and hosting a national Good to Grow weekend of action (previously Big Dig Day). The network also hosts a map to find your local growing projects.

[www.goodtogrow.org.uk](http://www.goodtogrow.org.uk)

## Useful resources

[Working with your Council](#) (CFGN Toolkit)