

# Culture and Communities Committee

10.00 am, Thursday, 8 August 2024

## Right to Grow

Executive/routine  
Wards

Routine  
All

### 1. Recommendations

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- 1.1 It is recommended that Committee notes:
  - 1.1.1 This update on existing food growing initiatives in Edinburgh and the support already available for food growing initiatives; and
  - 1.1.2 That officers will explore how a 'right to grow' policy fits with the wider food growing provision within Edinburgh (as outlined in the Next Steps section).

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## Right to Grow

### 2. Executive Summary

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- 2.1 The report has been prepared in response to a [motion](#) by Councillor Osler, which was approved by Committee on 7 December 2023, and an [adjusted motion](#) by Councillor Osler that was approved by the Council on 21 March 2024.
- 2.2 The report considers the possibility of whether Edinburgh could also adopt “a right to grow” policy on Council-owned land that is deemed suitable for cultivation, provides information about what support is already available (outside of allotment provision) and what more could be provided to allow residents to grow food, as well as providing high-level next steps in consideration of adopting a “right to grow” policy on Council-owned land.

### 3. Background

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- 3.1 Urban food growing takes many forms, such as allotments, community gardens, or even food growing in private gardens.
- 3.2 Edinburgh is home to over 45 allotment sites, 1,718 Council-managed allotment plots, and over 70 community growing projects. Demand for plots and spaces for community growing has increased significantly since 2020 and, as of March 2024, the waiting list for allotments sits around 6,000. Meanwhile, the demand for sites for community gardening projects continues to grow.
- 3.3 The Council has a dedicated Allotment Officer who oversees the waiting list and running of allotments.
- 3.4 Several teams within the Council (including Neighbourhood Environmental Services and Housing) are responsible for developing community growing spaces on public land.
- 3.5 Officers have been reviewing prospective projects to involve urban growing, exploring potential sites for future projects, and working with organisations specialising in urban food growing to better understand barriers and facilitators to successful food growing initiatives.

- 3.6 Even before Covid-19 and sharp increases in cost of living, an estimated 24,000 adults experienced food insecurity in Edinburgh. Edinburgh's poorest households spend one fifth of their income on food.
- 3.7 The food eaten contributes 30% of total greenhouse gas emissions in the United Kingdom, yet a third of the food produced is wasted, and further contributes to greenhouse gas emissions. Meanwhile, more than half of food-related emissions are associated with consumption, manufacturing, and transport. As a result, food systems in Edinburgh make a significant contribution to the city's greenhouse gas emissions.

### **Current Strategy**

- 3.8 [The Council's Food Growing Strategy \(2021-2026\)](#) and [Allotment Strategy \(2017 – 2027\)](#) set out a variety of actions to boost local growing in Edinburgh. Enabling community growing and providing allotments are both statutory duties for the Council.
- 3.9 In the [2024/25 budget](#), the Council allocated £750,000 per annum over the next three years to support food growing and tackle flooding in Edinburgh.

### **Actions Agreed**

- 3.10 On 7 December 2023, a motion by Councillor Osler asked for a report looking into the possibility of whether Edinburgh could also adopt "a right to grow" policy on Council-owned land that is deemed suitable for cultivation.
- 3.11 A further motion by Councillor Osler was approved by the Council on 21 March 2024 to include what support is already available (outside of allotment provision) and what more could be provided to allow residents to grow food.
- 3.12 It is noted that the Council has a statutory duty to develop a Good Food Nation Plan in the 12 months following the Scottish Government publishing the final national Good Food Nation plan. This 12-month window is expected to begin early 2025.

### **Good Food Nation and Incredible Edible**

- 3.13 A report to Policy and Strategy Committee on 28 May 2024 - [Food Overview: Council Programmes, Initiatives and Regulatory Functions - Response to Motion by Councillor Faccenda](#) - provided an assessment of all food-related initiatives across the Council to inform the Council's Good Food Nation statutory plan.
- 3.14 [Incredible Edible](#) promote the 'right to grow' on public land and call for local authorities to map out and publish all public sector land suitable for growing. The campaign requests that local authorities create a simple process where communities can apply to cultivate this land for a defined period without the need for a formal lease or complex license. This streamlines the process of land acquisition and makes urban growing much more accessible.

## 4. Main report

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### Current Community Food Growing Initiatives

- 4.1 There are a number of urban growing projects currently being taken forward by the Council that include the development of new food growing sites and community orchards and encourage increased participation in food growing in the city's parks. These include:
  - 4.1.1 Proposals for repurposing bowling greens at Victoria, St. Margaret's and Prestonfield parks to create community food growing spaces;
  - 4.1.2 Establishment of a food growing garden at the Council's Inch Nursey to deliver training sessions on food growing skills with the local community;
  - 4.1.3 Repurposing galvanised planters on Leith Walk for community food growing and creation of pollinator corridors; and
  - 4.1.4 Creation of pipeline projects with one site identified, at Gypsy Brae, and ongoing work to identify further sites.
- 4.2 In addition, the Council continues to work with the Royal Caledonian Horticultural Society and Scotland's Rural College to provide learning and teaching resources and courses on growing at Saughton Park, with plans to expand further throughout the city.
- 4.3 The Council is also supporting community growing groups, Granton Community Gardeners and Earth in Common, with a Climate Action Fund project. This seeks to build community capacity to create nature neighbourhoods and boost climate resilience through community-led initiatives like local food growing.
- 4.4 The 'Edinburgh Million Tree City' initiative includes the planting of new trees, including fruit trees, on both public and private land, via new developments and through replacement of old, diseased, and damaged trees.
- 4.5 As part of Thriving Greenspaces, officers are collaborating with colleagues from Housing and Homelessness to deliver an Estate Improvement Project, with schools Wildling Wee Spaces programme and with the Climate Change and Sustainability Team to align food growing strategies, plans and initiatives.
- 4.6 Scoping and feasibility studies have been conducted over the past few months with stakeholders to better understand what and where urban food growing projects are happening, the experiences groups have had with establishing them, and the key organisations involved. This has involved site visits and meetings with organisations such as Leith Community Growers, Granton Community Gardeners, The Royal Horticultural Society (The Caley), Transition Edinburgh South, Lauriston Farm, Friends of groups, Edible Estates, Leith Community Croft, Gracemount walled garden, Bridgend Farmhouse, and many others.
- 4.7 An overview of food growing initiative across the city is contained in Appendix 1.

## **Adopting a Right to Grow policy**

- 4.8 Urban food growing can offer a wealth of benefits and contribute to the following:
  - 4.8.1 Improve physical and mental health, reduce isolation, and foster community connections;
  - 4.8.2 Enhance access to fresh, locally grown produce, promoting healthy eating;
  - 4.8.3 Encourage skill development and boost self-esteem;
  - 4.8.4 Reduce food waste and lower carbon emissions from food production and transport;
  - 4.8.5 Enhance urban environments with sustainable green spaces and biodiversity; and
  - 4.8.6 Support local businesses by promoting the growing and selling of local food.
- 4.9 In September 2023, Hull was the first city to pass a [‘Right to Grow’ motion](#) and is now in the early stages of establishing working groups and piloting. This model shifts access to public land from permission-based to rights-based.
- 4.10 Engagement with stakeholders (paragraph 4.6) has helped to form principles for establishing urban community food (and flower) growing spaces in Edinburgh:
  - 4.10.1 Community buy-in: It is important that urban food growing projects are something the community wants. Good communications, accurate data (for decision making) and community collaboration will be essential for the implementation of a Right to Grow policy;
  - 4.10.2 Dedicated team: Such spaces are most successful when a paid member of staff is dedicated – at least initially – to setting up the space, training volunteers, and getting the garden embedded within the neighbourhood. Any proposal will need to consider how this can be funded and the role external partners have in bringing in funding and delivering support; and
  - 4.10.3 Accessibility considerations: care should be taken to ensure that spaces can accommodate a wide range of users and their needs. This includes planting raised beds being different heights (e.g., for wheelchair accessible), suitable path materials, safety considerations (e.g., lighting), seating, and public toilets.
- 4.11 Land is in demand for housing and there is a significant waiting list for allotments across the city. City Plan 2030 identifies land which has been designated for allotments and further work is on-going to identify additional spaces that have the potential to be allocated for urban food growing. However, care will be required to ensure land needed for sports and recreation, nature-based solutions, and for nature itself is not negatively impacted.
- 4.12 It is also important to understand the quality of the soil used for food growing whether it be for allotments or community growing space. Soil may need to be improved as part of the cultivating process. In some areas of the city, ground may

be unsuitable due to heavy metals or other issues and require the use of raised beds with imported soil. Also, there may be a need for additional infrastructure (e.g., paths for accessibility, a suitable watering point, or a place for tool storage).

- 4.13 Critical to the success of any food-growing initiative is support for new and existing growers. This can involve a support worker, partnership with allotment holders and the [Federation of Edinburgh and District Allotments and Gardens Associations](#), or ties to other horticultural and third-sector organisations to help individuals develop the skills and knowledge required. Additional support may be necessary in the creation of the space, fencing, cultivation, sourcing seed or plants, soil amelioration and composting, watering, managing pests and diseases, as well as limiting access by pets, reducing vandalism or anti-social behaviour, etc. Working with third-sector organisations can also support health and wellbeing activity as well as cooking skills and using recipes with fruit and vegetables, etc.

## 5. Next Steps

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- 5.1 As noted earlier in this report, there are a number of actions already being progressed to develop and maintain food growing provision in the city and the adoption of a Right to Grow policy would need to be carefully considered alongside all of this on-going work.
- 5.2 As a first step, it would be beneficial to carry out a larger exercise to map all existing community growing projects and organisations who support such projects to identify gaps in provision. This would enable learning to be captured and identify current provision, availability of growing sites, partnerships with existing groups and organisations, training and support for growers.
- 5.3 The mapping exercise would also focus on exploring potential new sites for food growing, general availability of land across the city, gaps and opportunities in support.
- 5.4 Stakeholder workshops will support this by capturing learning and best practice case studies from across the city and elsewhere, identifying land availability and related opportunities for growing sites and consulting on and generating ideas for how to take forward the Right to Grow agenda (including the establishment of a Right to Grow partnership / working group if appropriate).
- 5.5 Alongside this, an officer working group will be established within the next three months to start formally reviewing in more detail which Council services are involved in the establishment and maintenance of community urban food (and flower) growing spaces and to map out existing projects and identify opportunities for future ones.
- 5.6 Using the information generated alongside the development of the Edinburgh Good Food Nation plan, officers will develop proposals for how a Right to Grow policy could apply to food growing spaces in Edinburgh, laying out the steps that need to

be completed, likely timescales, and any resource requirements. This will be reported back to Committee by Summer 2025.

## 6. Financial impact

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- 6.1 The Council budget agreed on 22 February 2024 allocated £750,000 per annum for three-year for Flood Prevention/Biodiversity (including Trees and Food Growing). This budget will be allocated to developing and delivering urban food growing projects over the next three years.
- 6.2 Work to carry out the next steps will be undertaken using existing resources.

## 7. Equality and Poverty Impact

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- 7.1 An integrated impact assessment will be carried out when developing Right to Grow proposals. This will ensure policies and actions within Edinburgh's plan seek to reduce poverty appropriately and ensure access to food in ways that respect all of Edinburgh's communities.

## 8. Climate and Nature Emergency Implications

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- 8.1 As a public body, the Council has statutory duties relating to climate emissions and biodiversity. The Council

*“must, in exercising its functions, act in the way best calculated to contribute to the delivery of emissions reduction targets”*

(Climate Change (Emissions Reductions Targets) (Scotland) Act 2019), and

*“in exercising any functions, to further the conservation of biodiversity so far as it is consistent with the proper exercise of those functions”*

(Nature Conservation (Scotland) Act 2004)

- 8.2 The City of Edinburgh Council declared a Climate Emergency in 2019 and committed to work towards a target of net zero emissions by 2030 for both city and corporate emissions and embedded this as a core priority of the Council Business Plan 2023-27. The Council also declared a Nature Emergency in 2023.

### **Environmental Impacts**

- 8.3 As this report is summarising existing and potential projects, there are no direct environmental impacts from approving the recommendations in this report.
- 8.4 However, future work to increase urban food growing in Edinburgh would support The City of Edinburgh Council's key priorities of net zero by 2030 and the Nature Emergency declared in 2023. Increasing the amount of food that is locally grown can provide a range of environmental benefits, including: reducing carbon dioxide

emissions (e.g., reducing 'food miles' associated with transporting food grown elsewhere), benefits to nature (e.g., improved biodiversity), waste reduction (e.g., via composting), and improved air quality. This will also support the Edinburgh Biodiversity Action Plan (GN27), to increase people growing food, especially in areas of deprivation.

- 8.5 Future developments of this work will require an integrated impact assessment. This will ensure policies and actions will aim to reduce emissions associated with the production and consumption of food in Edinburgh, and support a food system that boosts, rather than damages, biodiversity.

## **9. Risk, policy, compliance, governance and community impact**

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- 9.1 As the report summarises existing relevant work, as well as ongoing workstreams across the Council, no community engagement has taken place.
- 9.2 Urban food growing has the potential to positively impact most residents in Edinburgh. This includes health and wellbeing benefits, such as increased access to fresh food and vegetables, improved food security, increased physical activity through gardening activities, and improved mental health.

## **10. Background reading/external references**

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- 10.1 [Edinburgh Biodiversity Action Plan.](#)

## **11. Appendices**

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- 11.1 Appendix 1 – Edinburgh's Food Growing Initiatives.



## Edinburgh's Food Growing Initiatives

### Boosting local growing

The Council's [food growing strategy \(2021-2026\)](#) and [allotment strategy \(2017 – 2027\)](#) set out a variety of actions to boost local growing in Edinburgh. Enabling community growing and providing allotments are both statutory duties for the Council.

As part of the 2024/25 budget setting, the Council allocated £750,000 over the next three years to support food growing, and tackle flooding, in Edinburgh. A report providing further details on how the budget will be spent will be brought to the Culture and Communities committee this summer. The report will also address points raised in the motion to full Council by Cllr Osler in Spring 2024.

### Food growing within allotments

There are 48 allotment sites in Edinburgh, including 7 private sites, with approaching 2000 plots in use across these sites. Two of these sites, Newcraighall and the extension at Leith Links, have opened since the food growing strategy was introduced in 2021. Demand continues to exceed availability, with approximately 6,000 people on the allotments waiting list.

### Food growing on wider Council land

The Council provides access to land for community food growing through a variety of means. The first two programmes provide opportunities specifically for Council tenants to grow food on the land around their homes. There are then growing or fruit-picking opportunities in some of Edinburgh's parks and schools, along with ad-hoc opportunities for communities to lease land from the Council for community growing projects. More widely, the Council allocates land through the planning process for future community growing spaces. This section provides an overview of all these growing opportunities.

### Housing Revenue Account Estates Capital Investment

1 in 3 tenants have said they want the Council to prioritise improvements in community food growing/gardening. The Council's housing team support Council tenants who would like to grow their own food in their back greens. Through the 'Responsive Estates Improvement Programme', the team can prepare the area for small community growing projects, such as the through the installation of raised beds. Any changes made through this programme are based on tenant recommendations and requests and have a maximum spend of £10,000.

### Social housing community garden projects

On larger pieces of Housing Revenue Account land, more significant scale community gardens can be developed. Currently, there are 46 of these community gardens. Gardens range from some with a handful of raised beds, to others with 70 raised beds, polytunnels, community sheds (etc).

The management and development of these gardens, including working to support community use of them, was tendered out in June 2021, with Edible Estates (Community Interest Company) becoming a delivery partner until 31<sup>st</sup> October 2023. This contact included the option to extend for a further two 12-month periods. This extension has been utilised and the Community Gardens framework will be re-tendered in Spring 2024. Alongside providing tiered layers of support that match communities' needs with the existing gardens, Edible Estates have carried out feasibility studies on new gardens in:

- Muirhouse;
- Broomhouse;
- Hutchison;
- Mount Lodge;
- Crewe Road;
- Dumbiedykes; and
- Oxfangs

Overall, in 2023, the Edible Estates and the Community gardens programme helped open three new gardens, built or replaced 92 raised beds, developed 10 new composting facilities across the city, installed capacity for harvesting 7000 litres of rainwater and delivered 591 hours of community garden sessions.

Edible Estates runs 'Growing Youth' and 'Lend A Hand' programmes to provide skills development and learning opportunities for young people who aren't in employment or education and individuals over 50 who aren't in employment retrospectively. These programmes support the development of the community gardens, including building sheds for tools and the raised beds. More information on these programmes and community growing in Edinburgh's Council Estates can be found on the [Edinburgh Growing Together website](#).

The Edible Estates team and the Council successfully secured UK government shared prosperity funding in 2023 to facilitate some of this work.

### **Council land leases**

In specific cases, the Council has leased land to community food growing groups. This is often where the land is part of a wider cultural or community structure that the Council owns or manages. [The lease of Gracemount's walled garden](#) is an example of this. On occasion, the Council has also supported Community Asset Transfers of land to communities for food growing. These situations arise on an ad-hoc basis where the community have identified a piece of land and approach the Council to progress the opportunity.

### **Growing in Edinburgh's Thriving Greenspaces**

Edinburgh's Thriving Greenspaces Strategy recognises the potential of Edinburgh's parks and greenspaces as community growing spaces. Currently there are a small number of community growing spaces in Edinburgh's parks.

Work is ongoing to explore the potential for disused bowling greens within parks to become growing spaces. Fruit trees are being planted as part of Edinburgh's emerging

nature network, which is starting by linking together several parks in Leith to boost biodiversity.

The Thriving Greenspaces team are currently supporting community growing groups Granton Community Gardeners & Earth in Common with a climate action fund project. The project seeks to create nature neighbourhoods and boost climate resilience through community-led initiatives like local food growing.

### **Planting fruit trees around Edinburgh**

Edinburgh aims to be a 1 million tree city by 2030, which means the Council is planting trees across the city in parks, streets and public spaces, as well as providing them to residents to plant in their gardens. In appropriate circumstances, these trees can be fruit trees. For example, the million trees project has worked with Edible estates to provide fruit trees for some of the community gardens. The upcoming refresh of the [Edinburgh Design Guidance](#) will also provide guidance on the inclusion and use of edible shrubs as part of landscaping in new developments.

### **Food growing in Schools**

There was a two-year allocation from the Council's budget over the financial years 2021-23 to support implementation of the new food growing strategy. As part of this 34 schools were collectively awarded £34,000 to develop or expand food growing projects in their grounds.

Ongoing opportunities for food growing within schools are identified and championed by schools on an individual basis, subject to their resource capacity and children's interests. [The Food for Thought Education Fund](#) is one opportunity for schools to secure funding to deliver growing opportunities.

In Wester Hailes, Canal View Primary School have partnered with Edible Estates and local growing group 'Wester Hails Growing Communities' to develop a school farm. Since 2017, the school has developed a polytunnel and growing beds. The project has two school farm gardeners who work with four P6 and P7 classes once a week throughout the year. The pupils are taught and supported to grow fruit and vegetables at the farm. Working with the gardeners and their teachers, the pupils have devised project goals which include cooking meals for the school, and an enterprise project grow produce to sell to raise income.

The aims of School Farm are to teach children to grow fruit and vegetables and tie this into the school curriculum, providing practical experience of topics the children are learning in the classroom, and real-world applications for pupils' skills – including website building, design, teamwork, construction and communication, as well as gardening. The School Farm also provides non curriculum activities where the children can learn practical skills, learn to work in a team, communicate with their peers, take responsibility and a place where everyone is equal. The Farm provides valuable outdoor time and hands-on learning experiences for pupils who struggle in the classroom.

The 'Wilding Wee Spaces' programme is a new programme that gives Edinburgh's school children an opportunity to tackle the nature emergency by rewilding part of their school

ground or nearby park. The children help decide what they would like to do with their patch of land to help nature; this can include planting fruit trees to create orchards.

## **Allocating land for growing through the Council's Local Development Plans and Open Space strategy**

As part of creating new developments and neighbourhoods in the city, there can be opportunities to create new allotment or community growing sites. The Council's local development plan, [City Plan 2030](#) includes proposals for dedicated food growing spaces in the Plan (BGN 4-7), as well as promoting allotments as part of other proposals and developments, such as at the Crewe Road South site (BGN 20, Place 6, H32). Further opportunities are identified as part of the [Open Space strategy](#). Subject to Scottish Government finalising the new regulations and audit process, the Council hopes to begin work on refreshing the Open Space strategy this year.

## **Supporting food growing projects led by Edinburgh's communities**

There was a two-year allocation from the Council's budget over the financial years 2021-23 to support implementation of the food growing strategy. Through this funding support was provided for:

- the Council's Inch nursery, for seeds and to deliver training sessions on food growing skills with the local community;
- the development of [Lauriston Farm](#) as Edinburgh's first large scale urban farm and community growing hub;
- [the Community Climate Fund 2023](#), through which the Council made available £140,000 to support community initiatives to tackle climate change. This fund was opened up to the community as a participatory budget. Several community food-growing initiatives were proposed by Edinburgh's residents as part of this exercise. Following public votes:
  - [Rhyze Mushrooms](#), a micro-mushroom growing project for community cafes successfully received £9,990. The project applies circular economy principles using cardboard and coffee grounds waste to grow mushrooms for the cafes.
  - [The Cargo-bike movement's food-sharing project](#) received £20,000. The food sharing project delivers surplus supermarket food to those experiencing food insecurity being accommodated in hotels, shelters, and hostels, as well as supporting the work of local food banks and various charitable organisations across Edinburgh.