



**NATIONAL
HOUSING
FEDERATION**

Edible Estates

A good practice guide
to food growing for
social landlords

neighbourhoods



Co-ordinating 40 years (1975-2015)
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Joshua Zeunert	Writtle School of Design

Researched and written by

Steve Cole	Neighbourhoods Green
Nicola Wheeler	Neighbourhoods Green
Sarah Williams	Capital Growth
Allison Borden	Planning Aid for London

Neighbourhoods Green, established in 2003, is a partnership initiative hosted by the National Housing Federation which champions the role of green space in creating sustainable communities and supports the housing sector to take forward best practice in the design, management and use of open spaces.
www.neighbourhoodsgreen.org.uk

Planning Aid for London is a charity that has been providing town planning advice in the Greater London area since 1973. PAL has supported community food growing efforts across the capital since 2009 and has FAQs about community food growing on its website.
www.planningaidforlondon.org.uk

Capital Growth was launched in 2008, by food charity Sustain, in partnership with the Mayor of London and Big Lottery Local Food Fund with the aim of supporting community food growing in London. So far over 2000 projects have been supported through the campaign, involving 99,000 people with over a quarter of these on housing land or involving tenants and resident groups in the capital. Eleven housing associations supported the campaign and inspired food growing in their communities and helped residents overcome the barriers to start a food growing project. www.capitalgrowth.org

Introduction

This guide has been developed to share learning and good practice from communities and social landlords who have been involved in food growing initiatives on social housing owned land. The guide offers a practical support those working for or with housing providers in collaboration with local people, to establish food growing schemes. This print version is designed to be easily accessible for those working out on site or in meetings about food projects. A more detailed version of the guide with more extensive case studies is available via the Neighbourhoods Green website. www.neighbourhoodsgreen.org.uk/resources/foodgrowing

Foreword

Over the last decade access to healthy affordable food has become a substantial issue in the UK. To help address this, opportunities for people to learn about where food comes from, and how to grow their own, are increasingly being taken up by local communities and backed by social landlords, government, celebrities, and major trust funders. This has led to a rise in community food growing projects which not only provide a much needed facility to residents but can enhance community cohesion and reduce anti-social behaviour. As such, it is little surprise that, in 2011 over 37% of Housing Associations and other social landlords reported food growing on their estates and are increasingly turning over their lawns to provide areas for their communities to grow food.

Social Landlords in partnership with organisations like Sustain and Planning Aid for London have been at the forefront of this movement as part of their broader mission to improve the lives of residents in their communities. The National Housing Federation through Neighbourhoods Green recognises that such schemes play an important role in enabling the delivery of great homes and promoting health and wellbeing amongst communities. We hope this guide will support our members to make the best possible use of food growing schemes as part of their green space assets.



David Orr
Chief Executive
National Housing Federation



Why food growing?

Food-growing has many benefits and is a flexible way to engage both individuals and groups in practical projects. These benefits include positive outcomes for those involved as well as benefits for the community and for the wider environment. Below is a summary of some of the commonly cited potential benefits of food growing projects.

Benefits for the individual

- Supporting healthy lifestyles: improved physical and mental health as a result of regular outdoor activity and contact with nature.
- Providing access to affordable, healthy food.
- Encouraging healthy eating: better understanding of food and access to fresh fruit and vegetables supporting a better quality diet.
- Skills development: volunteering opportunities empower people through learning new skills or using existing skills while landlords' schemes can create potential routes to work through schemes.

For the community

- Developing community cohesion: bringing different parts of the community together to learn together from each other and build a sense of community.
- Educating and empowering communities to make the best informed choices about food.
- Improving community safety: increasing positive use of outdoor spaces and reducing crime / anti-social behaviour ('via eyes on the street').

For the environment

- Increasing biodiversity and improving the local environment.
- Contributing to reducing climate change.
- Improving the local environment by delivering a better aesthetic appearance of housing estates.
- Improved mitigation of extreme weather events such as flooding and urban heat island effect.

For social landlords

- Resident involvement: increasing participation of residents in neighbourhood activities.
- Partnership working: opportunities to link with and encourage different groups and agencies to work together.
- Economic benefit: Increased value of housing stock through better quality landscape.
- Economic benefit: Decreased rent arrears, void rates and void turnaround period.
- Economic benefit: Potential decreased maintenance costs due to residents maintaining spaces and less need for mowing.
- Aesthetic Improvements: Physical improvement to the landscape and green space on estates.

Benefits



Individual



Community



Environment



Social landlords



Different approaches to food growing projects

It is important to recognise that there is no one size fits all approach to food growing projects and that the manner in which a food growing project is set up and how it is managed will be determined by a number of factors. These include people factors, such as the personalities of local stakeholders, as well as physical factors like access to water and the geography of the neighbourhood. That said, there are certain principles which tend to be part of successful projects. First and foremost it is crucial that someone takes the lead in order to get a community food growing project started, develop it and manage it. This may involve the same organisation or individual or a different leader for each phase of the project.

This publication identifies four common approaches to food growing on social housing owned or managed green spaces:

1. **Community-led projects**
2. **Housing association led projects**
3. **Partnership projects**
4. **Organisation wide approach**

All of these approaches require different things from the landlord in order to deliver a meaningful project.

Community led projects

Initiated and led by residents, these are projects founded on the passion and activism of a small group of people who are determined to grow food locally.

The role of the housing provider:

Residents will need to approach their housing provider, both for agreement to use the land and support. Usually this will be through their tenants' and residents' association. It is good practice to have a key contact within the organisation, who is easily identifiable and can signpost queries. This could be a social inclusion officer or a community engagement officer. The housing provider can also assist by:

- Engaging with the wider community to ensure resident buy in.
- Promoting the project locally and within your organisation through tenant/staff newsletters, press releases, and leafleting.
- Giving permission and providing a simple agreement outlining expectations (licence, terms of use).

- Liaising with grounds maintenance teams to suspend or review maintenance of the food growing area.
- Signposting to other organisations who can provide support.

Benefits

- Community Led Partnerships engender a strong sense of empowerment and ownership among residents that initiate the project.
- This ownership motivates residents to apply for grants to fund and carry on the project.

Things to consider

- Measures need to be put in place to sustain the project in the case of leadership change.
- Need to ensure projects are inclusive of all residents.
- Requires a significant time commitment from local residents to manage the site.

I had a breakdown 4 years ago and never left my flat. Slowly I started coming down to the garden. It gave me somewhere to go, people to talk to. I love it!

Cranbrook Estate Resident

The Cranbrook Estate Statistics



£5,500 project budget:
£5,000 from the Tower Hamlets Council and £500 from Capital Growth.



10 families currently involved in the garden, from different nationalities including from Bangladesh, Turkey, Somalia, Canada, Denmark and England.



20 raised beds made from donated scaffold planks within which vegetables are grown all year round.

Case study:

Tower Hamlets Homes: The Cranbrook Estate

Transformation

The garden was started in May 2009 by a local resident in a space which had been designed as a play park but became neglected and ended up being used as a rubbish dump. A group of residents decided to clear the ground and transform it into a growing area.

Impact

The project has reclaimed neglected land and also helped break down barriers between volunteers from different cultural backgrounds. Different nationalities learn about different foods with the volunteers holding celebrations at certain times of year bringing dishes made using vegetables from the garden to share.

Case study:

Eastend Homes Westferry Estate

Partners: Capital Growth, Trees for Cities, Tower Hamlets Food Growing Network, Women's Environment Network

Size of food growing space: Over 175m²

7 new food growing sites have been created on estates as well as a small apple orchard.

People are actively using the green space where they live. In some instances these spaces were causing problems e.g. an old clothes drying area was using up space that could have otherwise been used to inspire and increase higher levels of social and communal behaviour. Now the space is being actively used, which has reduced anti-social behaviour in the area.

Case study:

Spectrum Housing Growing Spaces

Size of food growing space: Over 1000m²

Project budget: £254,700 over 5 years

Impact

- A stronger community: reduced voids, increased interaction between people living on the estate and people making positive use of the communal spaces.
- Increased access: Spectrum has been able to reach people they wouldn't otherwise have been able to reach.
- Financial savings: 82% of participants have said it has saved them money on their food bills.
- Resident Health: taking part in gardening and food growing has increased levels of physical activity.

Housing Association led projects

In some situations it may be the housing provider who are keen to initiate a food growing project on an estate. This could be because the estate is new or recently regenerated or it may be the proposed solution to an area experiencing problems such as anti-social behaviour. Food growing can also be a tool to bring together or develop more resident engagement.

The role of the housing provider

The primary role of the landowner would be to identify the need and aspiration for food growing among new or existing tenants. It may be an idea to offer taster sessions or workshops to inspire local people. You might also assist by:

- Promoting the project locally and within your organisation through tenant/staff newsletters, press releases.
- Developing an allocations policy for new food growing spaces.
- Liaising with grounds maintenance teams to suspend maintenance of the area.

Benefits

- Local residents have support from the landowner from the beginning of the project.
- Spaces can be designed to accommodate food growing if newly built or redeveloped.
- Less outgoing expenditure on third party organisations.
- Empowering to communities.
- Clear demonstration to residents of social landlord investing in the community.
- The project can be flexibly delivered e.g. through allocation of individual plots to families, communal gardening or both depending on what suits the community.

Things to consider

- Need to ensure that local community is brought into the project at the earliest opportunity.
- Requires a higher level of internal expertise and capacity (although this can be a beneficial learning experience for all parties).
- Requires good communication from the social landlord.
- May require a plan to be drawn up before commencing work.
- The project will need to meet internal organisational objectives, aims and KPIs care should be taken to ensure that there are not conflicting demands placed upon the project.

Savings



One Bangladeshi family reported savings of approximately £1,040 per annum by growing vegetables that were expensive to get at local markets.

Partnership Projects

In many situations there may be a combination of local organisations and individuals interested in setting up a growing project. For example a local organisation or charity may have secured external funding to support food growing in the area and be looking for suitable locations. Even if a local lead for the project isn't forthcoming from the community, a food growing project may still be welcomed in the area. Often, partner organisations can act as an intermediary to support resident involvement, facilitate workshops and deliver training sessions.

The role of the housing provider:

In this case, the role of the landowner is primarily to work with the partner organisation to ensure that it consults meaningfully with the local community. They may also assist by:

- Promoting the project locally and through tenant / staff newsletters, generating press releases.
- Giving permission and providing a simple partnership agreement outlining expectations.
- Liaising with grounds maintenance teams to suspend or alter maintenance of the area.
- Supporting the development of a group to take on the long-term management of the site.

Benefits

- Partner organisation takes responsibility for community engagement and project delivery.
- External funding, skills and expertise brought to the project from partner organisation.
- Independent organisation can focus on project delivery rather than getting caught up in housing management issues.
- Requires less time commitment from the social landlord staff team.
- Gets the growers to build networks.
- Builds the capacity of growers and sets them up to take ownership of the project.

Things to consider

- Need to ensure that local community is brought into the project at the earliest opportunity.
- Measures need to be put in place to sustain the project once external funding comes to an end.
- Need to spend a substantial amount of time reviewing and revisiting the requirements of the external funder / what has been agreed to and what needs to be tracked, documented and reported.
- Potential for unforeseen costs and delays.
- Plan for additional time to ensure adequate communication something that may not be funded and that could require availability of paid staff outside of normal working hours.

Landor Road Statistics



£42,000 over 18 months
(half the budget went
to infrastructure costs)



125 people (approximately)
from the neighbourhood are
involved in the garden



£500 raised locally by residents
for tools



Case study:

Family Mosaic Housing Association Landor Road Community Food Garden

Lessons learned:

Compromise is a necessary part of creating a community space, but often hard to achieve!

- Team building activities for residents would be a useful addition to this type of project.
- Ensure that information is being tiered out and down. Follow-up to confirm that those responsible for taking action have followed through.
- Developing links within the local community and other food growing projects is critical to project sustainability. Don't be shy – local businesses, organisations and food growing projects can be a fantastic source of in-kind donations and support for your project.

Case study:

Metropolitan Capital Growth Metropolitan

Metropolitan was the first social landlord to support the Capital Growth campaign, committing to create 20 new community food growing spaces by the end of 2012 as part of their community regeneration strategy. The vision for the project was to help to build healthy, sustainable and cohesive communities.

The sites, managed by Metropolitan, were set up in a variety of ways; from communal plots shared by everyone to individual plots and plots allocated to nearby schools. Sites were created at the request of residents on the estate and usually improved an area that was neglected, overgrown or attracted antisocial behaviour or nuisance. Almost every site has made provision for training where anybody can come and learn more about food growing.

Growers reported feeling a greater sense of belonging, improved social cohesion and a transformation of disused and no-go areas on their estates into places where people meet and talk.



Organisational Approach

This approach combines any or all of the other three approaches, and involves the social landlord making an organisational commitment and taking a strategic approach to developing a series of food-growing projects across neighbourhoods, in order to deliver the organisation's objectives.

The role of the housing provider

In this scenario the housing provider adopts a strategic approach, reinforced at a senior level, to ensure that food growing is considered in new developments and through other opportunities. This may include a commitment to having food-growing projects in each area or neighbourhood or committing to a certain number of new projects. The housing provider can also assist by:

- Having a key point of contact and information for groups interested.
- Forming partnerships with other organisations to help local groups.
- Promoting food growing to local communities through newsletters and other materials.
- Ensuring new development, interim space, or regeneration includes space to be used and / or adapted for food growing.

Benefits

- Allows projects to tie into broader organisational and regional goals such as Green Infrastructure strategies.
- The project can be approached in terms as multifunctional benefits and can build on existing improvements such as play areas and wildflower meadows to ensure the landscape delivers the maximum possible benefit at the lowest possible cost.
- Allows for a more robust approach to impact monitoring and analysis with cross site and scheme comparisons to ensure the best elements of projects can be replicated in the future.
- Staff working with residents can focus on using food growing as a tool which can attract funding and other resources across the sites.
- Involvement in these projects develops internal skills and capacity amongst staff.
- The impact of the projects can be more prominent and attract more interest in further neighbourhoods.
- Economies of scale can be achieved by working across multiple sites.
- Can lead to more meaningful partnership working across a number of projects.

Things to consider

- Requires initial investment of staff time to plan the approach.
- May involve an existing member, or members of staff developing new skills and contacts to ensure that knowledge is available for groups.

Impact



Food growing has provided many residents the opportunity to help their children to understand where their food comes from, while also getting them more interested in eating healthily (their 5 a day portions of fruit and vegetables) and exercising.

Step by Step Guide

1 Identify land

A suitable area (an overgrown corner, an underused expanse of grass or a concreted area) needs to be identified for food growing. Even the smallest spaces can be used to grow food in window boxes and containers. At this stage, key considerations include:

Access to water: can a tap be installed or is there a way rain water can be harvested? If metered, how will water be paid for and by whom?

Security and access: how will people access the site and will the space be gated/secured? Is there natural surveillance from homes that overlook the space?

Orientation: does the space receive a lot of light or is it largely shaded?

Storage: is there anywhere for people to store tools and materials?

Insurance: public liability (to protect the owner and site users) and cover for vandalism / theft – should this be paid, and if yes, by who?

Permitted use: Is planning permission required? Does the site already have planning permission or other legal status that allows food growing?

1.1 On existing estates

Often a participative mapping exercise involving residents can be helpful to avoid finding out that a neglected corner is actually a favourite children's play space, or attracts rare butterflies in the summer.

A challenge for some larger social landlords can be communication between different departments, such as those responsible for landscaping and green space and those

who work in community engagement. Communications can be easier if everyone involved is clear from the start on what the space will be used for, who will be involved and what the benefits will be. If there is a tenants association on the estate getting them on board at the outset can dramatically improve resident buy in.

If the decision is made to grow food on a patch of land which has not previously been used for this purpose you may wish to contact the planning department about the proposed changes. If planning does become an issue, there are a range of options available. Advice and information can be obtained, for free, via Planning Aid for London and other regional bodies.

Alternatively, new community rights can be used. Tenants could buy land to use for food growing and use a Community Right to Build Order (CRBO). A Neighbourhood Development Plan ('neighbourhood plan') could increase food growing spaces within housing estates and / or in the wider area and a Neighbourhood Development Order (NDO) could allow food growing without the need for planning permission. Pressure could be applied on the local authority to include policy / ies providing food growing or to identify sites for food growing.

1.2 For new developments

It is important to engage with community groups at an early stage of the planning process. In fact such engagement can help a development receive planning permission. Ideally a community group or representative could be brought on board before a planning application for the estate is submitted.

If an application has already been submitted there is still scope for social landlords to work with community groups around the inclusion of food growing spaces as part of the site plans.



With a new development it is worth registering as much of the green space as possible as potential food growing space (even if you do not intend to use it as such) to avoid any issues around land classification should you or the residents decide to repurpose it at a later date.

2 Get landowner's permission

Residents will need permission from the landowner which is likely to be your organisation. Particular care should be taken to ensure permission is gained from the relevant parties when proposed food growing is on sites with mixed tenure properties or multiple-ownership of land.

As it can be difficult for residents to find the right person to speak to, it is useful to have a nominated person and pathway for your organisation to guide people through the steps involved in setting up a growing space.

In some cases you may require planning permission in order to build certain structures or if you are changing the use of the land.

3 Consult the community

Identify needs and aspirations for a potential food growing project by speaking to local people. Social landlords can use their website and tenant's newsletters to stimulate interest and host events to gauge resident support for the project. The consultation process can be used as an opportunity to identify community champions with relevant skills and expertise.

Use practical activities such as seed sowing, cooking and other demonstration activities to find people who might be more interested in practical projects, than in written communication.

Encourage residents to air concerns and use examples of other projects (such as the case studies in this document), perhaps even visit other local projects to see how they overcame challenges.

4 Agree the parameters of the project

What does the project aim to do? Or what is the difference you wish to make via the project? Is the purpose to increase access to land for food growing or are there additional objectives around education, training and volunteering, generating income through the sale of produce? While projects can deliver multiple benefits clear articulation of these helps to manage stakeholder expectations, set achievable goals, monitor the success of the project and keep the project on time and budget.

Who is involved? Will the project be available to residents only or can the wider community also take part? Who are the local partners and other stakeholders that should be involved/informed? What are the roles and responsibilities of the differing participants?

How will the project be run? Are there project governance arrangements (a garden committee with a constitution)? Are there ground rules for use of the site? Will people have individual plots or be growing collectively in community spaces? Will spaces be allocated on a first come, first served basis or will those without gardens attached to their homes have priority? What sort of allocations policy/agreement is necessary? How will you measure your impact?

What are the timescales? If this is a pilot, how will you measure success? Are you making use of a temporary space before it is redeveloped? If funding is time restricted how will the project be sustainable?

5 Identify funding

Establishing a food growing project doesn't have to be expensive but you will need to think about how the basics: tools, materials, water and insurance will be provided. Is there any internal funding available or can time and resources be provided in kind by partners, contractors, corporate volunteers, the probation service or staff?

If planning permission is required, how will the fees be paid? Who will undertake preparation of the application, submit it to the Council and attend any necessary meetings? Are there community members who can apply their skills to produce the materials necessary for planning permission? Will expertise need to be bought in?

There are a number of funding sources available for food growing projects. These range from Trust funders to local government and the EU. Often there small pots of funding available locally or can you source materials (compost, manure, building materials) for free. Residents are often keen to be actively involved in identifying project needs and can be effective in sourcing free materials. Furthermore, as the case studies in this guidance illustrate food growing projects can deliver substantial cost benefits to housing associations. In order to better map these you may wish to use a Social Return On Investment (SROI) tool.

On the Green Square Group's Triangle Development, SROI tools identified savings from water management and food growing schemes at £750 per resident per annum. The approximate average cost per household of the Bedroom Tax is £728 per annum.

Advice on SROI tools and funding can be obtained from the Neighbourhoods Green website: www.neighbourhoodsgreen.org.uk

6 Think about the design

Ensure the layout of the space meets the needs of the users. A well designed space is critical to making sure the space is effectively used. You may wish to involve an external designer. When starting a project, key considerations include:

Access: will the spaces between and height of food growing plots (raised beds) allow for people of all ages and abilities to take part?

Integrating existing features: for example, can a wall be fitted with a trellis and used to grow climbing plants?

Environmental impacts: can the garden waste be composted to reduce waste disposal or can rain water be collected to reduce demand for a fixed water supply?



Neighbourhoods Green process of designing for local people



7 Work with the local community

Assist the growers group in developing a structure that works for them, this could be a traditional chair and officers (secretary, treasurer) or a flat structure with rotating responsibilities. It might be useful to get the group to do a skills audit and draft a constitution or mission statement and agree ground rules. Developing or ensuring there are good project management skills within the group will ensure that they can take more ownership of the process.

Support them to create a project timetable and schedule. Set up regular meetings to share information about gardening, make decisions related to management of the growing space and to discuss upcoming events. This can be based around practical activities in the garden too, so as to encourage those who are not keen on traditional meetings. Develop short-, medium-, and long-term goals.

Start the project in a way that is appropriate for the community. It might be best to start small, or have some temporary beds to see how things go for the first season. You also might want to consider a mix of allocated and communal beds. Also find creative and

practical ways to get residents interested and involved, remembering that food growing has wide intergenerational and cultural interest.

Support the group to have a wider communication strategy that involves those who cannot attend meetings. This can include a notice board in the garden, a phone tree, an e-mail list, a newsletter or use of social media (like a Facebook page).

8 Launch the project

Getting everything on site is a big occasion. Naming a day and getting lots of people down to help is a great way to give the project a buzz. It can raise the profile of the project locally. If your organisation has a press, public affairs or publicity team you may wish to discuss the launch with them. MPs, Councillors, and other local dignitaries are often keen to attend such events.

9 Think about on-going support

It is also useful to have workshops at regular intervals (weekly, monthly, etc) to help the group to form and develop the skills it needs. Subjects to cover include:

How to create a gardening group with regular volunteer days.

Making a schedule of what is going on planting and growing cycles.

Seasonal produce.

Maintaining soil quality.

Cookery skills such as how to cook produce grown on site.

10 Ensure adequate maintenance provision

Good quality maintenance is crucial to the success of a growing space. There are a number of ways that you can give the garden a good chance:

Hosting weekly maintenance days in the garden.

Holding annual events to invigorate the garden.

Encouraging winter growing and other non-summer activities.

Promoting the garden space.

Introducing an allocation system if communal growing is not successful.

While community members will often provide the majority of the maintenance, particular consideration should be given to how maintenance will be assured if:

Key participants move away, or are no longer able to contribute their time.

Adverse weather conditions mean that regular gardeners are less likely to be outdoors (particularly if your food growing space is in an area with an older population).

Neighbourhoods Green has published extensive best practice guidance around maintenance which is available from:

www.neighbourhoodsgreen.org.uk/upload/public/documents/webpage/Greener-neighbourhoods-weblinks-2110.pdf

Having planned to stay for an hour, I stayed for three! I dug the earth, weeded as best I could, fed the soil, added compost and planted the tiniest microscopic seeds I'd ever seen in my life... I'm still buzzing today.

Landor Road Resident



Frequently asked questions

How much money does it cost to start a growing project?

There is no simple answer to this question as it depends on the size, ambition and type of growing space you are trying to create. Growing spaces have been set up with as little as £500, where there is an active group or a staff member backing the project. On the other hand for high quality beds that are built to fit in with a particular design, the price may come in excess of £5,000. Also when costing the project you need to think about soil – if this is needed to be brought in this can be the most significant cost. Other considerations are the need for someone to facilitate setting up a group or providing weekly sessions to support the group in gaining the necessary skills to maintain the space.

How do you make sure it is safe to use the soil?

Testing your soil is not a legal requirement but if you suspect that the soil is contaminated or if you are going to be consuming a large part of your weekly intake of food from the garden then it is advisable. The initial stage would be to look at the history of the site and do a visual assessment and then if the decision is made there are options available in terms of the extent of testing.

One solution is to build raised beds or use large grow bags and import the soil so you can rest assured that it is safe to grow food in. Research has also shown that any likely contamination is outweighed by the positive effects of growing your own food.

More information is available
www.environmental-protection.org.uk/committees/land-quality/papers/growing-edible-crops/

How should space be allocated and who gets the produce?

When planning the garden a decision needs to be made about whether all or some of the beds are communal or whether they are allocated to households. If the latter, then a decision should be made about who gets the plots – first come first served or priority to those without gardens or who have children. It is also good practice to have a simple agreement and to charge a small annual fee, so that if the garden or plot is not used then it can be reallocated.

If the garden is communal then the group should agree how the food will be distributed. Some groups agree a minimum number of hours, others simply split produce between those present on the day.

Should we be concerned about access to water?

Access to water should definitely be considered when setting up a site. Where possible most, if not all, of the water should come from water butts and harvesting rainwater from buildings and other structures. Access to mains water is not essential, as many projects exist without this, but this does require a planned approach to harvesting rainwater. It also requires thinking about planting crops that are less 'thirsty', as well as using techniques such as mulching to prevent evaporation.

Mains water is expensive whether this involves setting up access or paying the water bills. It is also often 'hard' water which contains minerals and salts that can damage soil. If not monitored, mains water can lead to over watering and wasting of water. A sustainable approach to watering is the best option, but having a possible 'back-up' source (e.g. a local centre or access point) for particularly dry spells can be considered, but should not be a barrier to setting up.

Should groups have a lease or license to grow food?

Many groups operate without such an agreement, and this should therefore not be seen as a barrier to encouraging residents to grow food. Having said that, it is good to set out the basics in writing around the terms of the agreement, for example how long are you intending the group to be able to grow food at the site, do you want to have criteria for allocation of plots, or do you have requirements on use of the food.

Template licenses do exist that can be amended. If there are individual users it is good practice to have user agreements that states what will happen if the plot goes unused or if there is an issue with code of conduct.

What if there are future plans for the land?

Many sites with future plans have been used for temporary food growing under the idea of 'meanwhile uses'. In this situation it is important that residents understand this temporary nature and that a licence is set up. It is also worth thinking about a notice period in relation to the growing season and transferability of any materials or growing beds that are built.

Some landowners have been put off of such temporary growing due to the Allotment Act, but research has shown that this is not a barrier to temporary use of a site.

www.healthyplaces.org.uk/themes/promoting-active-communities/encouraging-spaces-for-community-food-growing/

Does the group need public liability?

Again this depends on the management of the site. If the landowner or housing association is actively involved in the management of the site it might be more appropriate for this body to take responsibility. If, however, there is an active group organising activity days and events, it would be encouraged that they obtain public liability, which can be organised at an affordable rate through many insurers.

It is also recommended that the group thinks about any health and safety implications of the site and undertakes a similar risk assessment for any activities or open events on site which would include holding a first aid kit on site.

How do you manage conflict between residents with different views?

Food growing spaces help to bring residents together and build closer communities, but this does not mean they are a cure all for all community cohesion issues. Sometimes issues that are bubbling away may come up through a community project, whether this is food growing or some other activity. Local officers need to be prepared for this and having a clear code of conduct for people involved can help to create clarity for what will happen if somebody does not behave appropriately. Offering mediation is also a useful solution.

What if the food gets stolen or the space vandalised?

Many people have concerns about food getting stolen or vandalised. Experiences of other projects show that this is not very common, as food growing projects often have frequent visitors or activity and therefore become safer as no longer 'neglected' spaces. Also the materials are not usually of significant value, although theft and vandalism does happen on occasion. Some groups have found that positioning of the growing space so it is overlooked, is beneficial. Also planting some of the more attractive produce, such as large squashes, away from reach is also a way to tackle this issue. Also when planting fruit trees it is good to remove all labels that might make them easy to re-sell.

Where can I go for more information?

A fuller version of this guide including useful links and example agreements is available via the Neighbourhoods Green website. Please visit www.neighbourhoodsgreen.org.uk/resources/foodgrowing

Edible Estates

A good practice guide
to food growing for
social landlords

From improving the quality of life for residents to increasing the financial value of property, investing in landscape has many benefits for social landlords. Over the last decade, the local food growing movement has been a key area of work for many social landlords with real benefits offered to residents, landlords, the environment and the wider community.

A more detailed version of this publication is available online at www.neighbourhoodsgreen.org.uk/resources/FoodGrowing

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National Housing Federation
Lion Court, 25 Procter Street, London,
WC1V 6NY

Tel: 020 7067 1010

Email: info@housing.org.uk

www.housing.org.uk

Contact

Steve Cole

Tel: 020 7067 1079

Email: steve.cole@housing.org.uk