

Agenda Item	<b>5</b>
Report No	<b>CP/3/22</b>

## THE HIGHLAND COUNCIL

**Committee:** Communities and Place

**Date:** 23 February 2022

**Report Title:** Growing our Future – Highland Community Food Growing Strategy

**Report By:** Interim Executive Chief Officer – Communities and Place

### 1. Purpose/Executive Summary

- 1.1 This report introduces 'Growing our Future', Highland Council's Community Food Growing Strategy. This responds to the Council's duty, through the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015, to prepare a food growing strategy.
- 1.2 The vision for the strategy is that by 2027 Highland communities are resilient, empowered and supported to grow their own food and the strategy aims to inspire, empower and support communities in the Highlands who want to grow their own food, through existing growing opportunities and new approaches to growing.
- 1.3 The benefits of community food growing are considerable and range from environmental and climate benefits to health and wellbeing. There are already a significant number of community growing projects across Highland and the strategy aims to build on the success and learning from these to encourage and support further community growing across the area.
- 1.4 This report introduces the Community Food Growing Strategy and sets out the key aims and objectives and the actions which will support the implementation of Growing our Future.

### 2. Recommendations

- 2.1 Members are asked to:
  - i. Agree and adopt Growing our Future – Highland Community Food Growing Strategy; and
  - ii. Note that an annual update on the progress of implementing the Strategy will be presented to the Communities and Place Committee.

### 3. Implications

- 3.1 **Resource implications** – a staff post, funded by the Council’s Transformation Fund until July 2023, was approved as part of the Council’s 21/22 Health & Prosperity Strategy in order to support the development and implementation of the strategy. This officer’s role is to co-ordinate activity to implement the strategy, working with other Council staff and community partners to deliver key actions. Continued staff capacity to support community groups in their project development and to work with other Council officers to progress the strategy, is likely to be required beyond this date.
- 3.2 There is an action within the strategy to explore a small grants fund to enable community groups to meet minor costs associated with exploring and seeking permissions for community food growing projects. Local place-based funds will help to support delivery. Also, many community groups seeking to start or expand community food growing projects are applying to Council funding streams for the associated costs, this may impact budget lines out with the scope of this strategy.
- 3.3 **Legal implications** - This strategy delivers against the duty contained within the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 to produce a community food growing strategy. The Act places a requirement on the Council in relation to the provision of allotment and food growing space, which will be delivered during the lifetime of this strategy through the action plan.
- 3.4 **Community (Equality, Poverty, Rural and Island) impacts** – This strategy consolidates, strengthens, and builds the Council’s support to communities that want to grow their own food locally and seeks to enable the ground swell of activity on food growing, and associated community resilience, that has taken place during the pandemic. Indirectly it will help to support food insecurity and has wider positive benefits for communities in relation to health and wellbeing outcomes. Actions to support the strategy implementation will include how to support food growing projects in disadvantaged communities across Highland, and to encourage inclusive approaches to food growing projects that can help remove barriers to participation for members of groups with protected characteristics.
- 3.5 **Climate Change / Carbon Clever implications** – This strategy will support the Council’s work to benefit the climate. Food systems are major contributors to climate change. Increased access to local food, reduced food miles, increased skills in food growing and composting, food education and enhanced biodiversity are all environmental benefits of community food growing that will be enabled through the work of this strategy. The Council will be better able to enable Highland communities to take action on climate change through support to the development of third sector food growing initiatives and this can also be supported through local food composting and collections plans which will be developed through the lifetime of the strategy.
- 3.6 **Risk implications** – Without a community food growing strategy in place the Council will fail to meet its obligations under the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015. Community food growing popularity is on the rise and there is a need for the Council to support communities in their ambitions including accessing public sector land for food growing. This strategy will support this growing demand.
- 3.7 **Gaelic implications** – there are no direct Gaelic implications arising from this report, however Gaelic culture has a strong connection to nature and local growing, which should be acknowledged as an important aspect of Highland communities’ local food knowledge and culture.

## 4. Background

- 4.1 The Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015, places a duty on Local Authorities to develop a Community Food Growing Strategy. The strategy must identify land in the local authority area which could be used for local food growing and how the authority intends to increase the availability of land where there is an identified need. There should also be a consideration of how there will be a specific focus on communities facing socio-economic disadvantage.
- 4.2 Community food growing encompasses a range of activities including allotments, community gardens and orchards, school food growing and edible towns. Projects can range in size from a few fruit trees in a park space or raised beds within a town or village centre to a market garden social enterprise. The strategy highlights this range through showcasing some of the excellent projects already in existence or in development across Highland.
- 4.3 The benefits of community food growing are numerous and include:
- Health improvements from the consumption of fresh fruit and veg, and physical and mental health benefits from low impact exercise and access to natural calming environments.
  - Environmental benefits such as biodiversity being created through the planting of pollinators and the diversity in habitats that gardens provide, improved soil conditions from composting and mulching practices, as well as the reduction in food miles and the associated lower carbon footprint, reduction in plastic usage and reduced waste are all resultant from people being able to grow their own food and access food from community growing spaces. Identification of land for growing is a key purpose of the strategy and one way in which this is being supported is through the Amenities Review where a key objective relates to community involvement and considering using existing green space in different ways including for community growing.
  - Economic benefits as households can save money on their food purchases by being able to grow their own food or have access to free local food. Community growing projects also tend to raise grant money externally which they bring into the area and spend on local goods, services and employment.
  - Social connections contributing to wellbeing and reducing isolation are built through volunteering, local events and with the increased use of community spaces. As well as the achievements gained through participating in community food projects contributes to a sense of pride and belonging.
  - Educational benefits range across age groups, with opportunities for sharing skills between volunteers and inter-generationally, and growing projects also acting as sites for learning about nutrition, horticulture, the environment, and the wider food system.
- 4.4 There has been a ground swell of interest over the last few years in growing your own food, which has been boosted during the pandemic, and there is a growing awareness and culture change towards improving our food systems and the environmental benefits of local growing. This strategy seeks to build on this momentum and support those who have an interest in growing to find suitable opportunities in which to participate and develop.

- 4.5 Community food growing projects have played a central role in local action on climate change for many years. However, more recently during the pandemic, community food initiatives have had a galvanising role in aiding communities to access food and other support. This strategy recognises the important part that those groups play in strengthening their communities and seeks to support community food growing groups that are working to, or who partner with projects that reach more vulnerable members of our community.
- 4.6 Many of the community food growing projects in Highland already act with inclusive values, creating inviting and accessible spaces and activities for people of all abilities to enjoy. With the rise in interest in green health activities, this strategy identifies the opportunities that exist in working in partnership to promote community food growing as a valuable contributor to reducing health inequalities.
- 4.7 This report introduces the Council's food growing strategy, Growing our Future, which can be found at **Appendix 1**. It provides the background to the development of the strategy, sets out the key aims and objectives of the strategy and the actions which will support the implementation of Growing our Future. The report seeks approval and adoption of the strategy by the Communities and Place Committee.

## 5. Development of the Strategy

- 5.1 The strategy was developed through a series of nine consultation events across Highland, which took place between November 2019 and February 2020, complimented by a survey for those unable to attend the events. Site visits to several community food growing projects took place, as well as informal engagement with partners and Highland Council officer workshops. A draft strategy was written and launched in September 2020 and a survey gathering feedback on the draft then took place in early 2021.
- 5.2 The Council's Community Food Growing Co-ordinator took up post in August 2021 and the initial focus on this role has been to finalise the draft strategy. The feedback from the consultation has been analysed and further engagement with schools and community partners including the Highland Good Food Partnerships has been undertaken. The draft strategy has also been considered by the Council's Climate Change Working Group. Also incorporated into the direction of the strategy has been the learning from covid and work of community groups and organisations through this period in relation to food growing and emergency food provision.

## 6. Growing our Future

- 6.1 The draft Growing our Future Strategy can be found at **Appendix 1**. The vision for strategy is:  
*By 2027 Highland communities are resilient, empowered and supported to grow their own food.*
- 6.2 The aim of the strategy is to inspire, empower and support communities in the Highlands who want to grow their own food, through existing growing opportunities and new approaches to growing.
- 6.3 The vision and aim of the strategy are supported by a number of key objectives:
- Build knowledge and understanding of Community Food Growing in Highland

- Communities are empowered to start growing or expand their growing
- Ensure communities are informed and connected, and are supported to access the resources they need
- Identify potential allotment and growing spaces
- Support communities to become more resilient through community food growing

6.4 As part of the strategy there is a detailed action plan laying out how the Council, High Life Highland, and our community partnership will work to meet the objectives laid out in the strategy. The full action plan can be found in the strategy document at **Appendix 1**, however key actions under each objective are:

- **Build knowledge and understanding of Community Food Growing in Highland**
  - Support the development and delivery of a Highland Community Food Growing Network
  - Develop and maintain a community food growing map highlighting all activity across the region
  - Highland wide guidance for community food growing groups
- **Communities are empowered to start growing or expand their growing**
  - Encourage communities and individuals to explore community food growing opportunities for their community
  - Encourage food growing projects in all schools
  - Green Young Leadership Programme
- **Ensure communities are informed and connected, and are supported to access the resources they need**
  - Work with communities to set up Tool Libraries
  - Encourage groups and individuals to work together and share resources
- **To identify potential allotment and growing spaces**
  - Carry out a green space audit and safeguard valued greenspace (including where there is potential for community food growing) with each Local Plan review
  - Develop a Green Space Map to include land that has been identified as suitable for community food growing
  - Explore development of a fund to support community food growing permissions (e.g. Title Investigations, planning permission etc)
  - Produce specific guidance on council processes and the options available to groups that want to access Highland Council land for growing
  - Consider community food growing as an alternative use of play space as part of the review of play areas
  - Review provision and management of allotments
- **Support communities to become more resilient through community food growing**
  - Develop guidance for community food projects to consider promoting inclusion and tackling inequalities in the design of their project
  - Support interested groups that coordinate emergency food provision to add community food growing elements to their work
  - Promote community food growing as a green health activity within health and social care referral pathways

## **7. Accompanying Guidance**

7.1 Initial accompanying guidance to support this strategy will be made available through our website. This can be found at **Appendix 2**. This will be reviewed as delivery of the strategy progresses and provides case studies from some of the projects in Highland. The guidance also includes advice and signposting to resources and specialised support covering:

- Setting up a group and managing volunteers
- Support and training
- Funding
- Working with schools and young people
- Finding and securing suitable land
- Promoting inclusion and wellbeing

## **8. Next Steps**

8.1 Following adoption of the strategy, progress on implementation will be monitored on an annual basis and reported to the Communities and Place Committee.

Designation: Interim Executive Chief Officer – Communities and Place

Date: 3 February 2022

Author: Kirsty Ellen, Community Food Growing Coordinator

**Appendix 1:** Growing our Future – Highland Community Food Growing Strategy

**Appendix 2:** Initial Guidance for Community Food Growing in Highland

# Growing our Future

## A' Fàs ar n-Àm ri Teachd

February 2022-2027

Gearran 2022-2027

### Community Food Growing Strategy Ro-innleachd Fàs Bidh Coimhearsnachd



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# Executive summary

'Growing our Future' is Highland's first community food growing strategy. It is part of the Highland Council's approach to supporting community empowerment and it's Health and Prosperity Strategy, achieving our net zero targets and improving the health and wellbeing of our communities.

'Community Food Growing' (CFG) should be available to every community in Highland, and we want to ensure that everyone who wants to grow their own food has the opportunity to do so.

This strategy seeks to improve the support, connectedness and access to information for growers across Highland. It will improve access to land for Community Food Growing, increase support to community groups to set up projects on Council land, and improve guidance to schools for grow your own projects on school grounds. It recognises the valuable role that Community Food Growing projects play in tackling inequalities and improving inclusion in our communities, learning from the pandemic, and in responding to the climate emergency, and seeks to build on the current momentum towards community growing and local food resilience.

The delivery of this strategy will be supported by a working action plan with partnership support, which details how we will achieve our vision that by 2027 Highland communities are resilient, empowered and supported to grow their own food. The strategy is accompanied by guidance to aid groups in thinking through the development of their project and signposting to the best sources of support as they do this.

## Our Vision

**By 2027 Highland communities are resilient, empowered and supported to grow their own food.**

# Community Food Growing

## Introduction

The Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 aims to help empower communities across Scotland and improve access to land for those wanting to grow their own food. It is a corporate priority for The Highland Council to enable community empowerment and support more community ownership.

The Council recognises the wide-ranging benefits of community growing and through this strategy the Council seeks to inspire, promote and support community growing across the Highlands.

This strategy has been developed in the context of:

- a national vision for Scotland as a Good Food Nation;
- The Highland Council having declared a climate emergency;
- setting carbon neutral targets for our infrastructure; and
- making a commitment to improving food systems through signing the Glasgow Food and Climate declaration.

## What is Community Food Growing?

Community Food Growing creates spaces where people can have access to land to grow food for themselves and others. It enables people to grow food together as part of a community, fostering social connections while providing nutritious fruit, vegetables and herbs for local consumption. Community Food Growing takes many forms such as allotments, orchards, edible towns, school growing, community gardens and more, and can run at any scale from a few trees or High Street planters to a market garden run as a social enterprise. The nature of each project varies and reflects the uniqueness of each local context and the needs and aspirations of the community.

# The benefits of Community Food Growing

The benefits of Community Food Growing are endless, from improved mental health to reduced carbon footprints and saving money, to meeting new friends. Food is one thing that unites us all and improving our relationship with food can be transformative.

## Health

Those involved in growing their own food eat more vegetables and this has a direct impact on physical health. At a time when vegetable consumption is below public health targets<sup>1</sup> it is even more important to support people and communities to connect to the land and their food.

'Growing Your Own' (GYO) and gardening also give a wonderful opportunity for people of all ages and abilities to engage in low-impact exercise and improve physical and mental health.

Green spaces and gardens offer a calm place for people to unwind from the stresses in other parts of their lives and is increasingly being prescribed as a therapy option for those suffering from mild to moderate mental illness, to assist with rehabilitation and recovery, to alleviate symptoms of dementia and to help reduce physical pain.

## Environmental

Community growing spaces provide a fantastic opportunity to increase biodiversity, especially if native hedging is planted rather than fencing and companion planting and wildflowers are incorporated into plans. Food growing shouldn't just be about producing for human consumption, it can also support pollinators and provide a nourishing habitat for a range of flora and fauna.

An organic approach to community growing can help to reverse soil degradation and help to address the loss of organic matter from the soil, reduce soil compaction and erosion.

Community growing also provides opportunities to reduce our carbon footprint through reduced air miles for food transportation, reduced plastic packaging, and absorbing carbon emissions through planting orchards and soil management.



Photo by Markus Spiske on Unsplash

## Economic

Growing your own food is a great way to save money and take pressure off families on lower incomes. It also generates a sense of localism around food, encouraging the awareness of and purchase of locally grown and produced food, and so builds a food culture that benefits the local economy.

Community growing projects tend to spend grant money on local goods and services and employ local people, thereby bringing money and employment into the local area. Growing spaces also provide a fantastic opportunity for volunteers to develop a wide range of skills and therefore increase employability and individual opportunities.

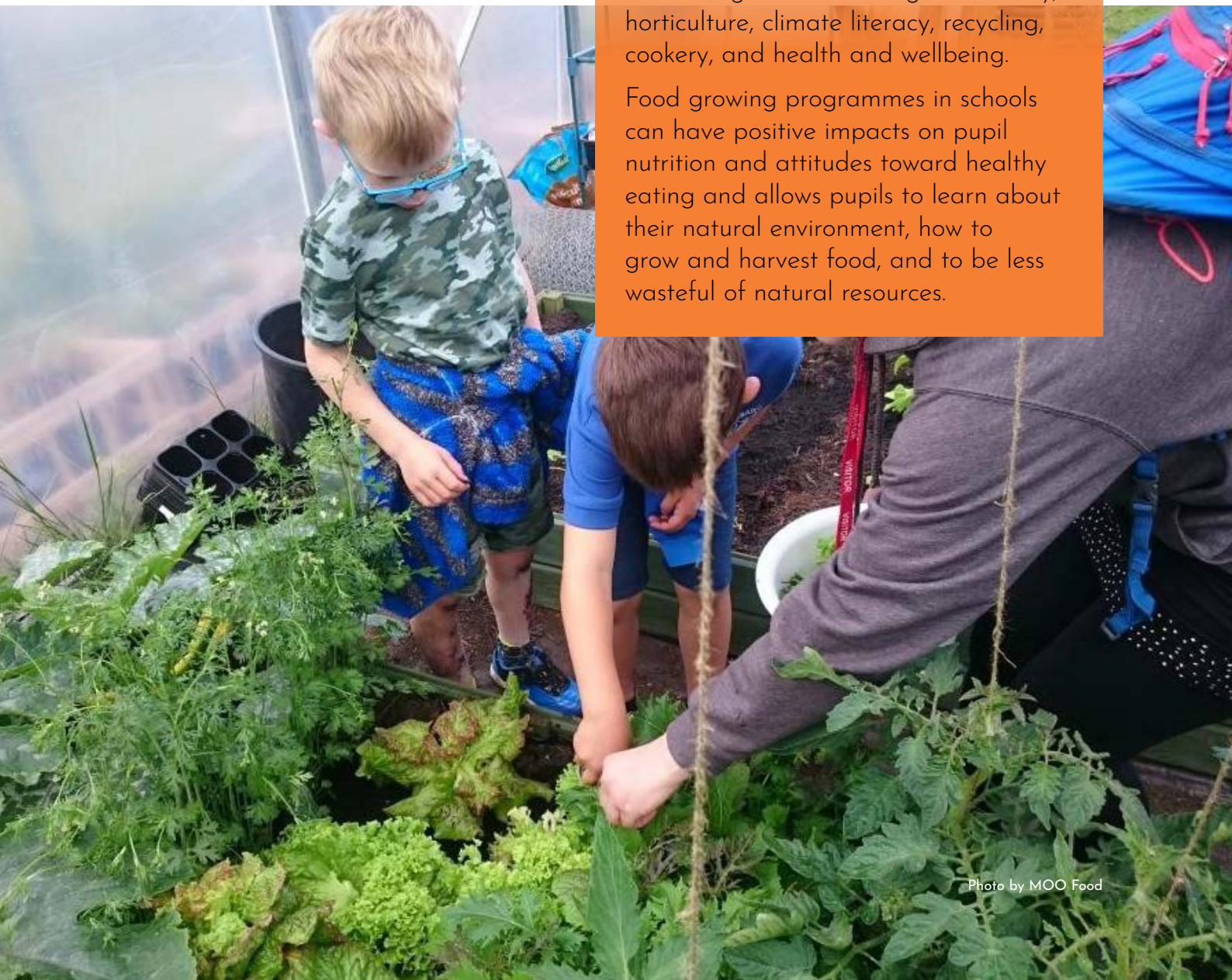
## Social

Community growing provides opportunities for people to volunteer within their community and connect with those they live beside. Through events, festivals and celebrations social isolation can be reduced and a sense of place developed. When people work together in their community towards a shared goal there is increased pride and feeling of belonging.

## Education

Community growing can contribute to learning, offering both practical skills development and a therapeutic environment. Food growing is for all ages and encompasses a broad range of learning areas including biodiversity, horticulture, climate literacy, recycling, cookery, and health and wellbeing.

Food growing programmes in schools can have positive impacts on pupil nutrition and attitudes toward healthy eating and allows pupils to learn about their natural environment, how to grow and harvest food, and to be less wasteful of natural resources.





## This strategy

## Aim of strategy

### Our Vision

By 2027 Highland communities are resilient, empowered and supported to grow their own food.

## Our Aim

The aim of this strategy is to inspire, empower and support communities in the Highlands who want to grow their own food, through existing growing opportunities and new approaches to growing.

## Our Objectives

The key objectives of the Highland Community Food Growing Strategy are:

- Build knowledge and understanding of CFG in Highland.
- Communities are empowered to start growing or expand their growing.
- Ensure communities are informed and connected, and are supported to access the resources they need.
- Identify potential allotment and growing spaces.
- Support communities to become more resilient through community food growing.

## The Scope

During the consultation phases in the development of this strategy many other elements to food were discussed including small scale and community supported agriculture, crofting, local food procurement and shorter supply chains. Although all hugely valuable to local food provision these elements are out with the scope of this strategy and the intent of what this strategy aims to achieve. However, The Highland Council recognises their importance and interrelatedness and aims to contribute to the wider work on these matters through our support to the Highland Good Food Partnership, and in our commitment to the Glasgow Food and Climate Declaration.

# How we developed this strategy

A key priority in developing this strategy was to include the communities of Highland from the outset and to develop this strategy together. In order to achieve this, we took several approaches, including;

## Community engagement events

We worked in partnership with nine community growing groups across the Highlands to host community engagement events from November 2019 to February 2020. These events were attended by interested individuals, local landowners, representatives from various groups and local food businesses.

Attendees shared their aspirations, challenges and together we highlighted opportunities and potential solutions.

These events helped us to:

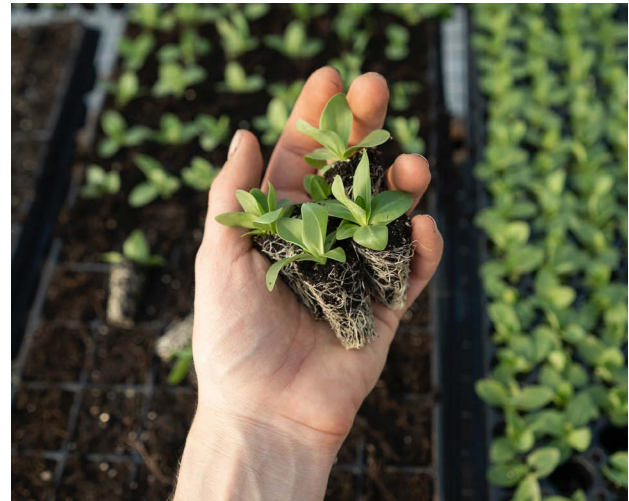
- stimulate interest in CFG;
- connected interested people within communities and facilitate conversations;
- design a strategy that reflects local needs and aspirations; and
- identify various exemplar Community Food Growing projects and a wide range of community activity.

## Community Food Growing Survey

For those who couldn't attend events there was an opportunity to contribute through completing an online survey from November 2019 to February 2020. This was promoted through social media, local newspapers and BBC Alba.

## Survey on the draft strategy

A public consultation on the draft version of this strategy took place in early 2021 and comments were considered in the final version.



Potting Photo by Zoe Schaeffer on Unsplash

## Learning from the pandemic

During the pandemic the Council gathered information through a framework for participation and involvement about communities' responses to the pandemic, which has helped us to better understand the impact of COVID-19 and observe communities' shift in approach to food resilience.

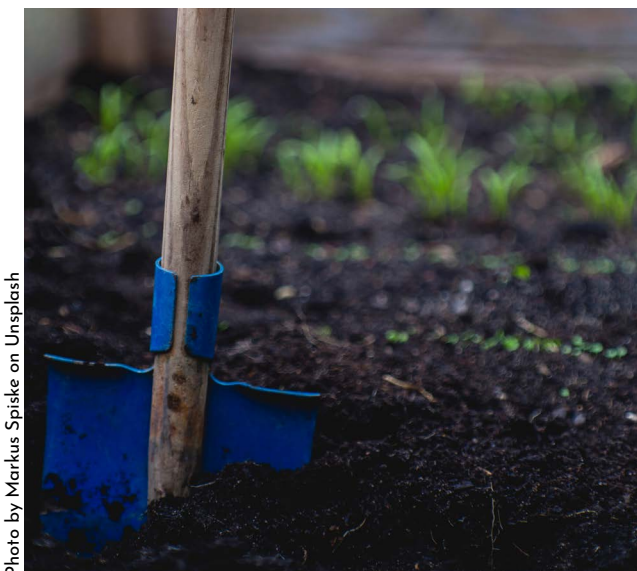


Photo by Markus Spiske on Unsplash

## Site visits

To get an accurate feel for what was happening on the ground we visited several different types of Community Food Growing sites. These included, TBI Culbokie Community Allotments, Ullapool Allotments, Helmsdale Kitchen Garden, MOO Food, Inverness Botanic Gardens, Nairn's Community Orchard, Inverness High School Farm and Caiplich Farm (a small holding).

## Highland Council Officer workshops

As the subject of food touches all aspects of public policy from education to planning and from communities to finance, we facilitated multi-disciplinary workshops with officers from 14 Highland Council departments. This afforded the opportunity to come up with Council-wide priorities and agreed actions.

## Schools survey

Head Teachers and key staff involved in food growing in schools were surveyed to better understand the opportunities, barriers and needs of schools to develop and deliver food growing.

## Informal engagement with partners

There have been discussions throughout the process with key partners checking our understanding and gaining informal feedback as the strategy has developed. See appendix 1 for a full list of partners consulted.



# Strong Communities



Photo by MOO Food

Community food growing brings people together and helps enhance social connections, while also increasing our sense of belonging and pride in place. It can create sources of free food within communities, add locally produced nutritious food to emergency food provision, increase food growing skills and learning opportunities, and for some with a social enterprise interest can provide an income to support the wider charitable work of the organisation (see case studies in the accompanying guidance document “Initial guidance to accompany Growing Our Future”).

## Community response to climate change

Growing food together within a community helps build resilience, knowledge and confidence. A changing climate will impact communities across the Highlands, so it is of paramount importance that communities have the capacity to come together to respond to, withstand and recover from adverse situations.

Community growing offers a wonderful platform for developing understanding of climate change within communities. It creates opportunities to discuss some of the factors involved in climate change such as our behaviours around food; purchasing, cooking and waste, the way that our wider society manages land; soil management, choice of crops and farming practices, and the impact that our food supply networks have on the environment. Increased awareness results in people understanding the environmental impacts of human activities and being able to make informed choices. Studies show that

people are less likely to waste food that they grow, and they are more likely to put Growing Your Own waste in compost, thereby returning nutrients to the soil and further reducing their carbon footprint.



Photo by MOO Food



# The COVID-19 pandemic and food resilience

The need for emergency food provision across Highland, Scotland and beyond, increased dramatically during the pandemic, and there are still so many unknowns regarding the longer-term impacts on poverty and access to food following the pandemic. Communities have responded to these challenges and increased vulnerability in their communities, positively and wholeheartedly. Many new community groups have sprung up and existing groups, not previously focussed on food security, have diversified to support the local response to food provision. Community larders and fridges have become more common and include reducing food waste as part of their aims. The scope of the role of emergency food provision to meet local need and demand is out with this strategy. Community Food Growing interweaves with food poverty. Through Community Food Growing projects, partnerships have emerged

between community growing and food banks, and individuals who have surpluses of home-grown food are sharing through community fridges. See the case studies in the supporting guidance for examples of what's happening in Highland.

Community Food Growing on the scale discussed in this strategy is not at a level of production that would address food emergencies across Highland, nor can emergency food provision in general be the sole answer to food poverty. However, community food growing can be of support to those groups that are responding to food insecurity, and who believe it is of interest to the people that they assist. With The Highland Council working more closely than ever with community groups to support emergency food provision we aim to support these groups in their food growing ambitions and to become part of wider community resilience planning.



Food deliveries during 2020 lockdown - Dingwall HUB. Photo by Molly Fearn

# Culture change -building on the momentum

The pandemic has also impacted the number of people who have been growing their own food. There are many factors affecting the rise in food growing; more time at home, loss of other activities, increased appreciation for gardens and green space and connection with nature affecting our sense of wellbeing during stressful times. There has also been an increased awareness around food supply chains and the potential vulnerabilities out with our control that impact on our access to food. This all provides opportunities for community growing.

In order to adapt to a changing world, we as individuals and communities need to shift what is normal. Community growing is a wonderful way to practice and embed a culture that prioritises values such as sharing, kindness and support, moving individuals and communities towards

helping each other and making our communities more resilient.

More opportunities for Community

Food Growing and a stronger network of groups in Highland will increase the visibility of projects and improve the ability of individuals to connect to local activities. Once people start to realise that by lending their support to Community Food Growing they can save money, develop their own skills, share the workload, benefit the planet, connect to their community, support others and benefit their own mental and physical health then a culture shift towards Community Food Growing becoming the norm will be seen.



Photo by MOO Food

# Opportunities to promote inclusion and improve wellbeing

Community Food Growing projects provide an opportunity to bring together people from different backgrounds and of all abilities. Many of the case studies that feature in the accompanying guidance for this strategy illustrate how growing spaces in our communities can create inclusive, welcoming places that provide positive experiences for anyone to participate in activities that benefit their health and wellbeing. Taking steps to encourage participation of different groups, and to consider accessibility in the design and development of projects can contribute to the aim of developing stronger communities.

Community Planning Partners in Highland are committed through the Highland Outcome Improvement Plan to reduce inequality and to tackle the issues that lead to inequalities. Through our work with the Highland Green Health Partnership, community growing will be promoted as a valuable part of reducing health inequalities and improving mental wellbeing in Highland. The Green Health Partnership has a focus on mental health and health inequalities and seeks to co-ordinate activity across sectors to better connect the delivery of health outcomes with the health-improving potential of the natural environment.

# Community Growing

## Community growing in the Highlands

There is a wide range of community growing models present across the Highlands, with communities designing projects in-line with local needs and opportunities. Below is a summary of the various models and examples of how this is happening in Highland. Further information on the projects mentioned can be found in the case studies section in the accompanying guidance document. The Highland Food Activity Map lists a wider range of current projects across the region. Projects not listed and can be added by contacting the Community Food Growing Coordinator.

**Highland Food Activity Map:**  
[www.highlandgoodfood.scot/food-map](http://www.highlandgoodfood.scot/food-map)

## Networks

### Highland Good Food Partnership (HGFP)

Highland Good Food Partnership started off as a conversation between different food sector stakeholders in the Highlands. A conference was held in the winter of early 2021 and lots of project groups were started and key areas of work identified. The Highland Good Food Partnership now has a multi-faceted role, supporting different projects, collaborating with numerous Highland partners – public, private and charities – to achieve the goals set out from the beginning: to collaborate with locals to create a sustainable, local food system. The partnership works around four main areas of focus: health and wellbeing, education and training, local food economy and community food. With only two part-time employees the partnership wouldn't run without the engagement and input of all the partners and individuals contributing their time and energy.



# Allotments

Allotments are plots of land made available for non-commercial gardening and food growing, leased out by an individual or community group for that sole purpose. Anyone interested in having an allotment, can search the Highland Food Activity Map for locations near them. If there is a waiting list, there are other growing opportunities to consider, such as community orchards and community gardens.

## Loch Broom and Ullapool Growing Group (LUGG) - Community Allotments

LUGG was started by some active members of the Ullapool community in 2010 with an aim to provide space for growing food for local people. Grant funding provided money for a beautiful tool shed, compost toilet, polytunnel and materials for outdoor raised beds. Since this there has been further development, including, a deer fence, water system and solar panels in a polytunnel to charge the water pump. LUGG has been used by community groups for various projects including mental health and children's groups and the hope is that in the future more people can use the allotments.



Photo by LUGG allotments

## Knocknagael Allotments and Green Hub

The project is seeking to respond to the demand in Inverness for community growing spaces, and seeks to benefit social and health needs, and climate and environmental challenges. This area of Inverness is identified for strategic growth over the next 20 years, but currently community food growing spaces are lacking. At the time of writing Knocknagael Ltd is applying to the Scottish Government for a Community Asset Transfer of an area of farmland to transform into a large scale allotments site, an orchard, areas for walking and wildlife and green space for the benefit of the community. The Highland Council has also approved part of Knocknagael Farm to be allocated for Housing and Community (Food Growing) uses in the Proposed Inner Moray Firth Local Development Plan 2. While this means the mechanism for how food growing is delivered in this area is not yet fully established, both options provide the local community the opportunity to realise their ambitions in this part of the city in the coming years.

# Community gardens

A community garden is a joint effort among interested parties to create a green space where all people involved share part of the upkeep and garden rewards. There are lots of different kinds of community gardens from therapeutic gardens to public beds for growing vegetables, fruits, herbs and flowers. There is a range of inspiring examples across the Highlands, many of which also run elements of social enterprise.

## Raasay Walled Garden

The long-neglected garden is slowly being restored since coming into community ownership. It now grows local produce and flowers for residents, local businesses and visitors in polytunnels and outside beds and also operate a community food waste compost scheme with the local primary school. The garden is open to the public and provides a beautiful amenity space for locals and visitors. During the pandemic the community realised what an important asset the garden was and were able to increase the amount of produce grown. Customer numbers increased as they had access to fresh seasonal produce without having to leave the island. Volunteer numbers also increased and helped alleviate the isolation felt by many who were able to participate and help in a safe outdoor environment. They also removed set prices for produce and offered it on a donation basis, ensuring that no one was excluded due to their financial circumstances.



Photo by LUGG allotments

## Badenoch and Strathspey Therapeutic Gardens

This is a small charity which provides social and therapeutic horticultural activities at growing spaces within a local allotment site, beside a Medical Centre and at tabletop gardening sessions at three Care Homes/Day Centres across the area. Elderly people, many of whom have dementia relate to the gardening and associated craft work that is completed at the sessions. People who may have various disabilities attend the Growing Spaces and Hospital Therapy Garden, where they enjoy the time together. They learn to grow a variety of flowers, fruit, herbs and vegetables and take produce home to cook and enjoy.



Photo by B&amp;S Therapy Garden

## Helmsdale Kitchen Garden

The Helmsdale Kitchen Garden project commenced in January 2014 with the aims of stimulating interest and the encouragement of participation in horticulture both at home and on site. This addresses a desire to educate and advocate the benefits of environmentally sustainable gardening. The project also aims to advance a retail, educational and health facility for the community and visitors by establishing community led horticultural activities, including and not restricted to allotments, orchard, health benefiting gardens, exercise trails and art installations.



Photo by Helmsdale Kitchen Garden

## Thurso Grows

Thurso Grows is operated by Thurso Community Development Trust and includes running a community garden space of 1000m<sup>2</sup> and associated workshops on composting, gardening and food waste minimisation. The project promotes local produce and encourages people to grow at home while taking a community aspect to sharing food. They are now working on a social enterprise and, with Thurso Community Benefit Society as their trading arm, are about to launch Socially Growing. An asset transfer of Highland Council's Greenhouses in Thurso and the creation of a Zero Waste Refill Shop will see commercial growing take place and a business which will support the community growing part of the project in the long term.



Photo by Thurso Grows

## Inverness Botanic Gardens – The GROW Project

The GROW project is a therapeutic garden, created by and for people with additional support needs – mainly learning disabilities. It is a healthy, positive and beautiful educational and working environment, enabling people to work meaningfully and enjoyably towards reaching their potential. There is a large vegetable plot, a fruit cage, polytunnels, a wildflower meadow and wildlife gardens and ponds. The project is open to the public, through the Botanic Gardens. The team work with the Royal Caledonian Horticultural Society offering trainees an individual-centred course – 'Grow and Learn'. Since the COVID-19 crisis began, they have diverted resources into supporting local food charities, such as Inverness Foodstuffs and Crown Cupboard. There is good collaboration and they hope to improve upon the variety and seasons they can offer free food.



Photo by Grow project Botanics

# Community orchards

A community orchard is a collection of fruit trees shared by communities which grow in publicly accessible areas. As well as being a source of delicious, tasty and nutritious fruit for many generations, orchards also provide a place to learn, exchange knowledge, hold celebrations or seek quiet contemplation.

## MOO Food - Community Orchard

In 2018 MOO Food was funded by Highland Council's Carbon Clever Fund to plant an orchard of 50 mixed fruit trees in an underused green space in Muir of Ord. The trees were planted for the community by the community and the space is now used for workshops, village gatherings and festivals.



Photo by MOO Food

## Wester Ross Growing Communities Association - Pocket Orchards

This project plants community fruit trees in Wester Ross townships from Kinlochewe to Dundonnell. Accessible to all ages and abilities, providing small public spaces with Spring blossom, Summer shade and shelter, and free Autumn fruit for all. There are now about 240 orchard trees in Wester Ross communities from

Plockton to Ullapool. Most of the pocket orchards are quite small - perhaps 6-9 trees. They are there both for community and environmental benefit. Many of the local schools now have pocket orchards: the biggest one so far is at Gairloch High School, with 37 trees.



Photo by Wester Ross Growing Communities Association

# Edible towns/villages

Edible villages are a simple idea; take over underused or unattractive bits of public land to plant food to feed the community. The food growing could be fruit trees or bushes, raised beds, herb gardens or planters. Everyone in the community has the opportunity to benefit from this style of growing initiative, as anyone can harvest produce and enjoy the tasty delights.

## MOO Incredible Edible

MOO Food is a community led charity in Muir of Ord that facilitates community food growing all over the village. The MOO Incredible Edible project has 25 growing boxes in various locations filled with seasonal fruit, herbs and vegetables as well as a large orchard and several pocket orchards. A diverse mix of groups are involved in the planting, maintaining and loving these growing spaces.



Photo by MOO Food

## Let's Grow Ballifeary-Bught

This is a small Highland Council tenant-led project which started during COVID-19 (Autumn 2020) to provide a positive outdoor activity during COVID-19 restrictions that local people could take part in. With concerns during COVID-19 about availability of food in the shops, the project showed that it is possible to grow a range of healthy and tasty vegetables and salad leaves etc easily in Inverness. The project has made

healthy vegetables and salad available free of charge to anyone who wants to use them and turned an unused and quite sad-looking outdoor space in an area with high local footfall into a new community focal point which people could enjoy.



Before the project started

October 2020

Photos by Let's Grow Ballifeary-Bught



# School growing projects

Growing projects in schools have numerous benefits; not only is it a wonderful opportunity to up-skill the next generation and connect young people to food, but through schools a significant section of the community can be targeted, with parents and wider family members becoming involved. School communities also provide a pool of willing, enthusiastic volunteers.

Growing food permeates all areas of the curriculum, though it is specifically beneficial to health and wellbeing. Having a school garden links to the science experiences and outcomes of biodiversity and interdependence, the processes of the planet and investigations into the role of microorganisms through composting.

## Inverness High School - School Farm

Inverness High School has operated a school farm since 2006, with 3 polytunnels, 8 planting beds and an outdoor classroom. The key aims of the projects are; increasing the farm's biodiversity, maintaining small scale crop and food production for educational purposes, developing practical gardening and maintenance skills with the pupils and developing pupils' enterprise skills through the sale of school farm produce. They became the first school in Scotland to build their own wood fired clay pizza oven. The pupils in the senior enterprise class helped design and construct a pizza oven which is used every term as a way of celebrating pupil achievements.

Photos by Inverness High School Farm



## The Farmer Jones Academy

The Farmer Jones Academy works closely with schools to build relationships with pupils and teachers, creating growing spaces to give students hands-on experience through to practical business skills such as market research, brand awareness and web design. The Academy also delivers Food and Drink Technologies Foundation Apprenticeships which is equivalent to 2 Higher qualifications or more.

## Plot to Plate

Based at Invergordon Academy, Plot to Plate, is a community garden, where volunteers are encouraged to grow their own vegetables in raised beds and the polytunnel. Regular cooking sessions are held throughout the summer months where the produce is harvested and then transformed into healthy, low cost, tasty meals. They have also teamed up with the Academy's Rural Skills pupils who help with the beds, growing their own produce in a new bed that they have prepared. The project is open to anyone although the most disadvantaged members of the community are targeted. This encourages people to get out of their house, meet other people and to lead a healthier lifestyle without costing any money.

## Inverness College ABC Garden

The Active Botanic Community (ABC) Garden aims to transform underused space within campus grounds to develop a community and educational garden project, alongside an outdoor gym and recreational play facilities. The project will be accessible to all, with a focus on children and young people that have experienced or are currently experiencing challenges in their lives.

Through 'drop-in' and interactive sessions held within the garden, the project aims to act as a sustainable resource to improve the lives of the community by improving individuals' health and wellbeing.

# Resourcing

## Staffing and support

The Council has committed a staff post in support of this strategy and its implementation until July 2023. This officer will co-ordinate activity to implement the strategy, working with other Council staff and community partners to deliver key actions. Continued staff capacity to support community groups in their project development and to work with other Council officers to progress the strategy following this date, is likely to be required.

## Funding

Community food growing projects are led by community groups and volunteers who, as third sector organisations, require grant funding support to set up and maintain their projects. Funding streams within the Council are already sought and applied to for elements of this funding. This demand is likely to increase as more projects are initiated and develop and the Council should consider this need in forthcoming funding streams related to climate change adaptation, biodiversity enhancement, health and wellbeing, community development and food security. Local Place Based funding will help to support this approach.

Within the action plan there is a commitment to explore the creation of a fund designated to support the small early costs incurred by group when investigating feasibility and planning their projects, such as legal costs for taking out a lease, land title investigations and planning application costs.

## Land

Access to land is of high importance to community food growing initiatives and so land resources will be required as new projects begin and existing projects expand. The Council is committed through this strategy and through the Community Empowerment Act 2015, to make suitable land available to community food growing projects where possible and applicable. This will require coordination across services to agree approaches and processes to Council land acquisition by community groups. This will require a proactive approach from Council teams when: designating land within local development plans, when working on new housing developments and considering repurposing of existing community spaces to consider how community food growing needs and requirements can be incorporated.

# Action Plan

The outcomes of the community engagement exercise coupled with meetings and workshops with officers has resulted in a series of actions being identified to address the main challenges and opportunities across the Highlands. This action plan is intended to be a working document and will be reviewed periodically throughout the lifetime of this strategy.



## Objective 1: Build knowledge and understanding of Community Food Growing in Highland

One of the biggest challenges identified, which is experienced across the whole region, is the gap in knowledge, confidence and the feeling of being isolated in respect of Growing Your Own. To support our food growing community it is imperative to engender a culture of working together, promoting opportunities so that individuals can find their local groups, supporting and adding value to existing groups rather than starting up new entities and enabling peer support between groups across Highland. There is a wealth of knowledge, ideas and enthusiasm out there, it just needs to be brought together and shared.

Action	Lead	Timeframe	Resources Required
Support the development and delivery of a Highland Community Food Growing Network.	The Highland Council in partnership with the third sector as part of the Highland Good Food Partnership (HGFP).	Ongoing	Staff time to support HGFP to develop and coordinate activity.
Develop and maintain CFG map highlighting all activity across the region.	The Highland Council and HGFP	Ongoing	Work through Highland Food Growing Network sub-group of the HGFP, with support from Highland Council CFG coordinator to map projects and add to map.
Pilot a community learning and development GYO project.	High Life Highland	2022-2024	Staff time
Develop CFG webpage on THC website to host above information .	The Highland Council	2022	CFG Coordinator time to develop and update.
Highland wide guidance for CFG groups.	The Highland Council	Ongoing	Hosted on Highland Good Food Partnership website.
Raising awareness with Community Partnerships of how CFG supports their priorities and outcomes.	The Highland Council	Ongoing	Staff time and online resources.

## Objective 2: Communities are empowered to start growing or expand their growing

Having enough volunteers, with the right skills and sufficient available time was identified as a challenge across all areas of the consultation. There are opportunities going forward for projects to link up and share volunteer expertise. There are also many people who garden individually that have skills, time and the desire to contribute to a community project, which should be encouraged through awareness raising and support from Council officers and our partners. Support for schools' growing projects and links between schools and the community was also raised as an important area to build on.

Action	Lead	Timeframe	Resources Required
Encourage individuals to join existing groups.	The Highland Council	Ongoing	Develop CFG Highland Council webpage, develop through HGFP.
Encourage communities and individuals to explore CFG opportunities for their community.	The Highland Council and the HGFP	Ongoing	Community interest. Support from CFG Coordinator, Community Support and engagement Team and Tenant Participation Officers. HGFP project group time.
Encourage Grow Your Own projects in schools across Highland.	The Highland Council	Ongoing	Staff time to develop guidance for teachers and support from third sector. Support for Education staff. In partnership with community groups.
Develop guidance for cooking and eating Grow Your Own in schools	The Highland Council	2022-2027	Staff time.
Green Young Leadership Programme	Pilot by High Life Highland	2022-2027	Staff to drive pilot in HLH.

## Objective 3: Ensure communities are informed and connected, and are supported to access the resources they need

Several communities highlighted the need to work together in Highland as a wider community of growers. Which brings opportunity to share resources and tools. Developing a platform for sharing, will not only help communities save money but will also bring people together and reduce excessive consumption.

Action	Lead	Timeframe	Resources Required
Work with communities to set up Tool Libraries.	High Life Highland	Pilot 2022-2025	Library staff trained and onboard.
Signpost communities and individuals to various online resources, funds and other organisations.	The Highland Council	Ongoing	CFG Coordinator time to review and select most useful resources, developing a resource bank and making those easily accessible. Info circulated and hosted on HGFP.
Encourage groups and individuals to work together and share resources.	The Highland Council	Ongoing	Through Highland Good Food Partnership.
Include a trial site involving food growing in the biochar and carbon sequestration project.	Highland Council Climate Change team	2022-2023	As part of existing project. Officer time to expand to include food growing and share learning with community food groups.

## Objective 4: To identify potential allotment and growing spaces

Several communities throughout the region reported difficulty in accessing suitable land for Growing Your Own, many also felt overwhelmed and didn't know where to find out about land availability or who to ask. It is important to ensure everyone across the Highlands feels supported and empowered to access land for Growing Your Own.

Action	Lead	Timeframe	Resources Required
Carry out a green space audit and safeguard valued greenspace (including where there is potential for CFG) with each Local Plan review.	Highland Council Planning Service	2022	Development Planning team staff time.
Develop Green Space Map to include land that has been identified as suitable for CFG.	Highland Council Planning Service	2022-2025	Development Planning team staff time.
Explore opportunities to identify land with Community Planning Partners.	Highland Community Partnership	2022-2023	Staff time to support.
Explore development of a fund to support community food growing permissions (e.g. Title Investigations, planning permission etc).	The Highland Council	2022-2023	A small 'seed' budget will be required.
Produce specific guidance on council processes and the options available to CFG groups that want to access THC land.	Highland Council policy team	2022	Small amount of CAT team and CFG Coordinator time.
Provide simple occupancy agreements for smaller scale projects using Council land.	Highland Council Housing team	2022-2023	Staff time for a cross service working group.

Action	Lead	Timeframe	Resources Required
Consider the provision of space for community food growing in large and strategic housing developments.	Highland Council - Infrastructure and Environment Team	2022-2027	Ongoing as part of consideration of assessment process.
Co-location of services - promoting CFG opportunities beside libraries, community centres and sport centres.	High Life Highland	2022-2027	Staff training to support enquiries from public.
Consider CFG as an alternative use of play space as part of the review of play areas.	Highland Council Communities and Place Service	Dec 2022	Staff briefing and guidance required.
Promote GYO guidance on contaminated land.	The Highland Council	Ongoing	Website downloadable resource.
Provide free advice to community groups on contaminated land.	The Highland Council	Ongoing	Contaminated land team time.
Review Provision and Management of Allotments.	The Highland Council	2022-2025	Staff time - Community Food Growing Coordinator and Community Support and Engagement team.
Review guidance for community groups growing in school grounds to make it easier and less prohibitive.	The Highland Council	2023	Staff time.
Support Private Public Partnership schools in negotiating the use of their land for food growing.	The Highland Council	2022-2027	Estates team time.
Explore the development of guidance on planning requirements for Community Food Growing.	The Highland Council	2022-2023	Planning team time.



## Objective 5: Support communities to become more resilient through community food growing

Community Food Growing can play a role in making our communities more inclusive, improving social connections, providing benefits to mental health, wellbeing and creating accessible public spaces designed with all abilities in mind. Community Food Growing can also be a part of the community response to food insecurity. It can contribute to what community food providers offer, including locally grown nutritious food to emergency food provision.

Action	Lead	Timeframe	Resources Required
Develop guidance for CFG projects to consider promoting inclusion and tackling inequalities in the design of their project.	The Highland Council and the Green Health Partnership	2022-23	Staff time.
Support interested groups that coordinate emergency food provision to add CFG elements to their work.	The Highland Council	Ongoing	Staff time to collaborate with community food providers network, CFINE/Fairshare, Trussell Trust and HTSI.
Encourage CFG groups to be involved with community planning for emergencies.	The Highland Council	Ongoing	Community Support and Engagement team, working with HSTI.
Consider geographic areas of socio-economic deprivation when making land available for CFG where possible.	The Highland Council	Ongoing	Staff awareness of areas of socio-economic deprivation.
Promote CFG as a green health activity within health and social care referral pathways.	Green Health Partnership	Ongoing	Staff time to participate in the Green Health Partnership and to connect health and social care practitioners with the community food growing network.

## Additional Actions

Other actions that don't fit into the key categories:

Action	Lead	Timeframe	Resources Required
Progress the Glasgow Food & Climate Declaration commitments.	The Highland Council	Ongoing	Policy team and climate change team staff time to work with partners through HGFP and with other council officers.
Review Highland Food Growing Strategy.	The Highland Council	2027	Staff time or resource to commission a consultant.

## Accompanying guidance

Initial accompanying guidance to support this strategy is available through the Council's website. This will be reviewed as delivery of the strategy progresses and covers full case studies of some of the projects mentioned above, and assistance with:

- Setting up a group and managing volunteers
- Support and training
- Funding
- Working with schools and young people
- Finding and securing suitable land
- Promoting inclusion and wellbeing.

**(A web link will be added here when the guidance document has been published)**

# Appendices

## 1 Stakeholders involved in shaping this strategy

Representatives from the following organisations have helped to shape the Highland Council's first Community Food Growing Strategy:

Badenoch and Strathspey Therapeutic Gardens

Green Hive Nairn

Helmsdale Kitchen Garden

Highland Green Health Partnership

Highland Third Sector Interface

High Life Highland

Inverness College UHI

Lochaber Environment Group

MOO Food

Planet Sutherland

Raasay Development Trust

Social Farms and Gardens

Transition Black Isle

Thurso Grows

Ullapool Community Trust

Viewfield Garden Collective

## 2 National strategic context

### Meeting national aspirations through community growing

Community growing projects will help us fulfil our obligations under the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 and help deliver a range of other strategic priorities across the Council area:

#### Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015

Section 119 of the Community Empowerment Act places a duty on every local authority to prepare a food growing strategy for its area. This must:

- Identify land that may be used as allotment sites;
- Identify other areas of land that could be used for community growing; and
- Describe how the authority intends to increase provision, in particular in areas which experience socio-economic disadvantage.

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#### Glasgow Food and Climate Declaration

The Declaration brings together all types and sizes of local authorities to speak with a unified voice in renewing their commitments to develop sustainable food policies, promote mechanisms for joined-up action and to call on national governments to put food and farming at the heart of the global response to the climate emergency.

The Highland Council signed the Declaration following the passing of a motion at a meeting of the Council on 24<sup>th</sup> June 2021. It was one of the first local authorities in Scotland to join this global movement, recognising it as an important step forward in our regional climate action journey and has made the following commitments.

- Commitment 1 - developing and implementing integrated food policies and strategies;
- Commitment 2 - reducing Green House Gas (GHG) emissions from urban and regional food systems;
- Commitment 3 - calling on national governments to establish supportive and enabling policy frameworks and multi-level and multi-actor governance mechanisms.

The Growing our Future - Community Food Growing Strategy is an important element of the Council's work towards achieving these commitments.

## Scottish Government Good Food Nation Bill

The Scottish Government set a vision for Scotland, that by 2025 Scotland will be:

“a Good Food Nation, where people from every walk of life take pride and pleasure in, and benefit from, the food they produce, buy, cook, serve, and eat each day.”

Our Growing our Future strategy contributes to this aim by creating a culture of interest in food; promoting knowledge about what constitutes good food, valuing freshly grown local food and improving access to healthy food and the skills to grow your own.

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## National Planning Framework 3 (NPF3)

This sets more localised food distribution networks. The Central Scotland Green Network is a national development in NPF3 with community growing identified as one of the priority themes for action.

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## Scottish Planning Policy

The Scottish Government has stated that Scottish Planning Policy should be used to routinely incorporate new growing space into new development plans.

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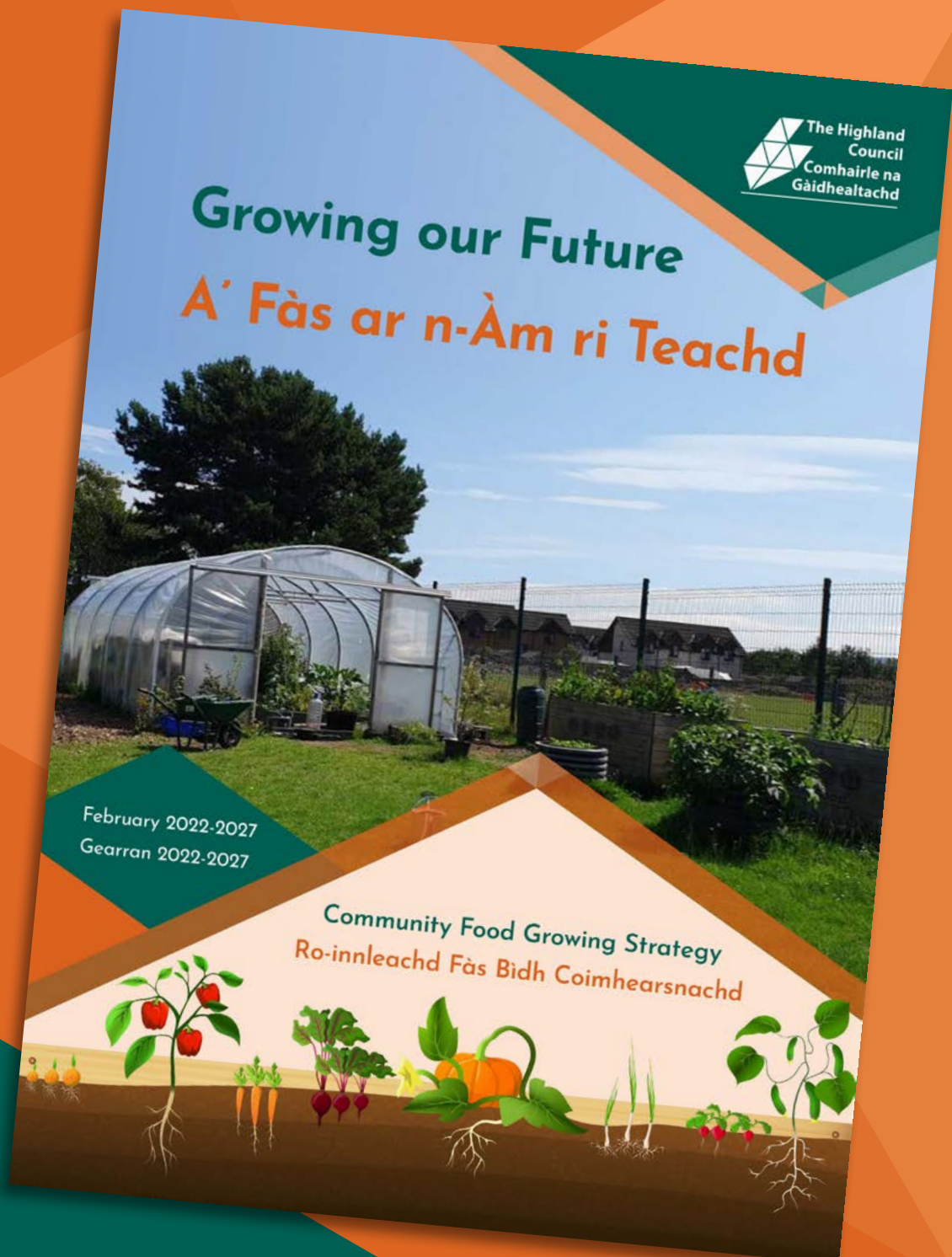
## Natural Health Service

Scotland's natural environment is a resource that can be used to help tackle some of our key health issues. Our Natural Health Service aims to show how greater use of the outdoors can help to tackle physical inactivity, mental health issues and health inequalities. A range of partners across environment, transport, sport, education and health are involved.

### 3 Draft strategy consultation questions

- Q1.** Do you agree with Growing Our Future's strategy objectives and vision?  
If not, what should these be?
- Q2.** Have we picked the right priority actions and approach to encourage and support more community growing in Highland?  
If not, what should we be doing instead?
- Q3.** Have we clearly set out the steps you can take to grow your own in Highland, if you don't do so already?  
If not, how can this guidance be improved?
- Q4.** Are you aware of any other support for groups interested in community growing which isn't detailed within the draft strategy?
- Q5.** Does the draft strategy clearly set out how to find and secure suitable land for food growing?
- Q6.** Where do you live?
- Q7.** What is your gender?
- Q8.** What is your age?

# Initial guidance to accompany... Stiùireadh tùsail airson a dhol an cois...



# Contents

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**Section 1: Tools, resources and support**

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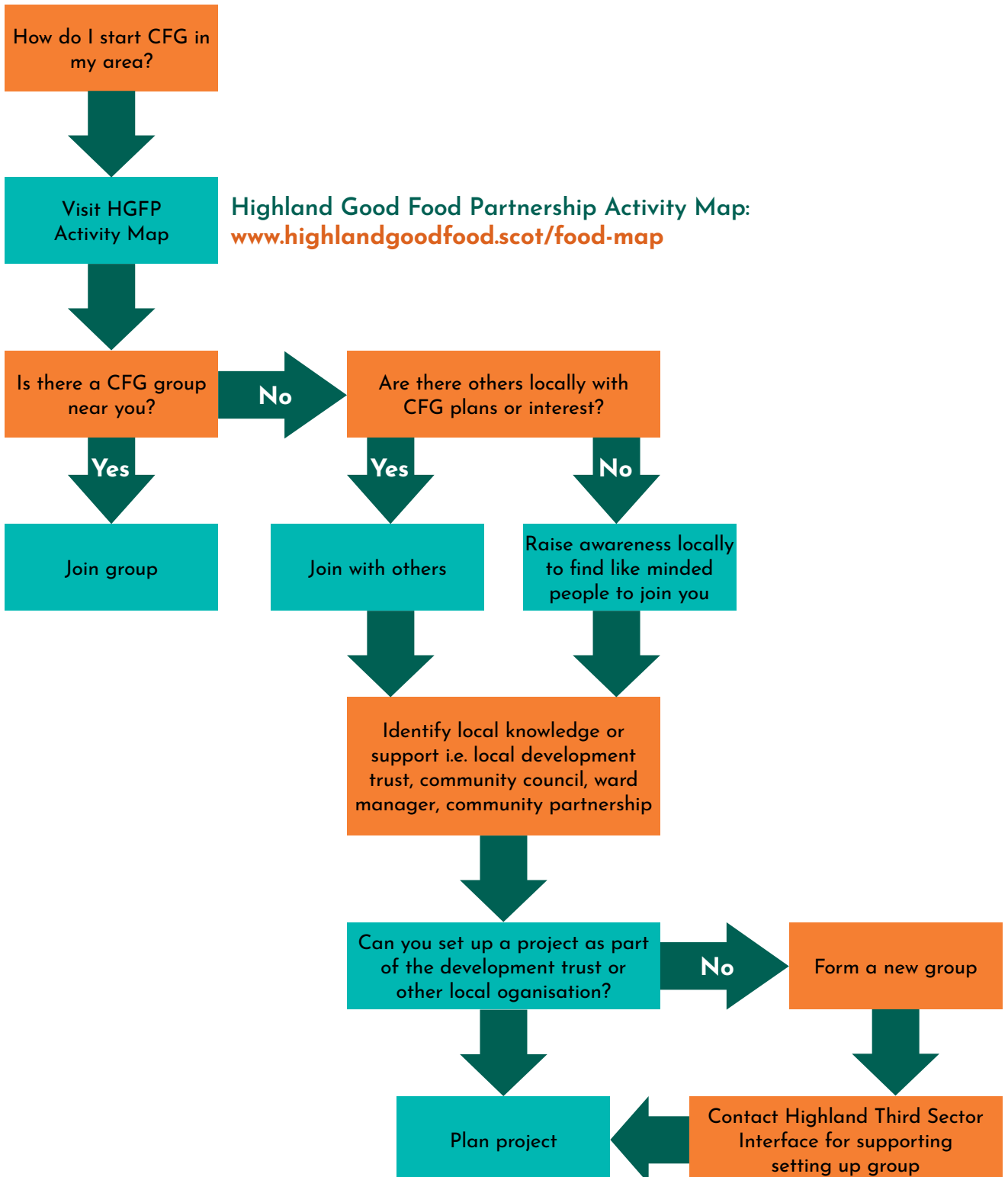
**Section 2: Case Studies**



# Section 1

There is a wealth of knowledge and support available to help communities throughout their Community Food Growing (CFG) journey. This guidance is designed to highlight the best sources of support, tools and resources to make it easier to find the support that you need.

If you would like to start growing in your community it is best to first, consider joining an existing group where possible. Follow the flowchart below to help you work out what the first steps are for you.





## Who can help?

Useful guides that cover all aspects of setting up and running a community food project

### Social Farms and Gardens

**Support:** Community Growing Resource Pack available to SF&G members. Membership is free.

[www.bit.ly/SocialFarmsAndGardens](http://www.bit.ly/SocialFarmsAndGardens)

### Community Ownership

**Support:** Community Growing Resource Pack.  
[www.bit.ly/DTASCommunityGrowing](http://www.bit.ly/DTASCommunityGrowing)

### Get Growing Scotland

**Support:** Resources and news from growing projects across Scotland.

[www.bit.ly/GetGrowingScotland](http://www.bit.ly/GetGrowingScotland)

## Setting up a group and managing volunteers

To set up a new group takes a lot of work and willing volunteers but there is help available and a good place to start for advice is Highland Third Sector Interface (HTSI). Getting the right governance structure in place from the start can help avoid issues in the long run and put you in a good position to raise funds; HTSI and OSCAR can help guide you through this process. Volunteers are an important cornerstone of any community food growing project and being active in recruitment and support is integral to the longevity of any project. SCVO resources can help think through volunteer management and the policies you need to have in place to best support people to be involved, and the Highland Good Food Partnership can help you link to other groups locally for peer support.

### Development Trust Association Scotland

**Support:** Link you to your local development trust.

[www.bit.ly/dtascot](http://www.bit.ly/dtascot)

### Highland Good Food Partnership activity map

**Support:** Link you to other groups in Highland.

[www.bit.ly/HighlandFoodMap](http://www.bit.ly/HighlandFoodMap)

### Highland Third Sector Interface

**Support:** Setting group purpose, developing constitution, volunteer development.

[www.bit.ly/HighlandTSI](http://www.bit.ly/HighlandTSI)

### HTSI Local Delivery

**Support:** Set-up and running of groups; volunteer management; training and capacity development and funding.

[www.bit.ly/HTSILocal](http://www.bit.ly/HTSILocal)

### OSCAR

**Support:** The Scottish charity regulator.

[www.bit.ly/OSCARCharity](http://www.bit.ly/OSCARCharity)

### Royal Horticultural Society

**Support:** Resources on setting up a group, volunteers and insurance.

[www.bit.ly/RHSCCommunityResources](http://www.bit.ly/RHSCCommunityResources)

### Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations (SCVO)

**Support:** Advice and resources on starting and running a charity, and supporting volunteers.

[www.bit.ly/SCVOSupport](http://www.bit.ly/SCVOSupport)

### Social Farms and Gardens

**Support:** Resources for getting started.

[www.bit.ly/SFGResources](http://www.bit.ly/SFGResources)

## Developing your project

Developing and implementing a community growing project can be a steep learning curve but there is help available. It is a good idea to speak to organisations that have experience of your specific type of project. You could consider joining as a member of a larger national membership body to help link you with similar projects across Scotland.

### Scottish Allotments and Garden Society

**Support:** Advice on setting up your allotment group.  
[www.bit.ly/ScottishAllotments](http://www.bit.ly/ScottishAllotments)

### Scottish Orchards

**Support:** Advice on orchard growing.  
[www.bit.ly/ScottishOrchards](http://www.bit.ly/ScottishOrchards)

### Trellis Scotland

**Support:** Skills sharing, help setting up therapeutic gardens.  
[www.bit.ly/TrellisScotland](http://www.bit.ly/TrellisScotland)

### Social Farms and Gardens

**Support:** Support for communities to farm, garden and grow.  
[www.bit.ly/SFGResources](http://www.bit.ly/SFGResources)

### Scottish Community Alliance

**Support:** Community Learning Exchange.  
[www.bit.ly/ScottishCommunityAlliance](http://www.bit.ly/ScottishCommunityAlliance)

### Men's Shed

**Support:** Support with practical help in your community.  
[www.bit.ly/mensshedscommunity](http://www.bit.ly/mensshedscommunity)

## Assistance with Funding

A great way to keep on top of what funding is available in Scotland is to sign up to Funding Scotland's Fund Finder. This provides the most current and up to date information on most community funds available in Scotland. Funding is becoming more competitive, so it is good to make sure your project is community led and where possible collaborate and partner up with other groups and organisations to strengthen applications.

### SCVO Funding Scotland

**Support:** Online fund finder.  
[www.bit.ly/FundingScot](http://www.bit.ly/FundingScot)

### Highland Council Grants

**Support:** Grants for community groups.  
[www.bit.ly/THCGrants](http://www.bit.ly/THCGrants)

### Highland Third Sector Interface

**Support:** Signpost to local funds available and provide social enterprise support.  
[www.bit.ly/HighlandTSI](http://www.bit.ly/HighlandTSI)

### Scottish Land Fund

**Support:** Community support to purchase land and land assets.  
[www.bit.ly/ScotLandFund](http://www.bit.ly/ScotLandFund)

## Who can help?

### Working with Schools and Young People

Partnering up with a local school or youth group is both exciting and rewarding. It is a great opportunity to engage the next generation and bring a community together.

#### Highland One World Global Learning Centre

**Support:** Support with sustainability projects in schools.

[www.bit.ly/HighOneWorld](http://www.bit.ly/HighOneWorld)

#### High Life Highland

**Support:** Young Leadership Programme and links to their youth work team.

[www.bit.ly/HighLifeHighland](http://www.bit.ly/HighLifeHighland)

#### Farmer Jones Academy For You Training

**Support:** Delivering Food Education in Schools.

[www.bit.ly/FJAForYou](http://www.bit.ly/FJAForYou)

#### MOO Food

**Support:** Share their primary school programme that is fully linked to curriculum.

[www.bit.ly/MOOFood](http://www.bit.ly/MOOFood)

#### Hi-Hope

**Support:** Opportunities for youth work experience across the Highlands.

[www.bit.ly/Hi-hope](http://www.bit.ly/Hi-hope)

#### Tree Council

**Support:** Orchards for schools guide, funding and free trees.

[www.bit.ly/TreeCouncilOrchards](http://www.bit.ly/TreeCouncilOrchards)

#### Highland Good Food Partnership Education and Training group

**Support:** Supporting food education and training projects.

[hello@highlandgoodfood.scot](mailto:hello@highlandgoodfood.scot)

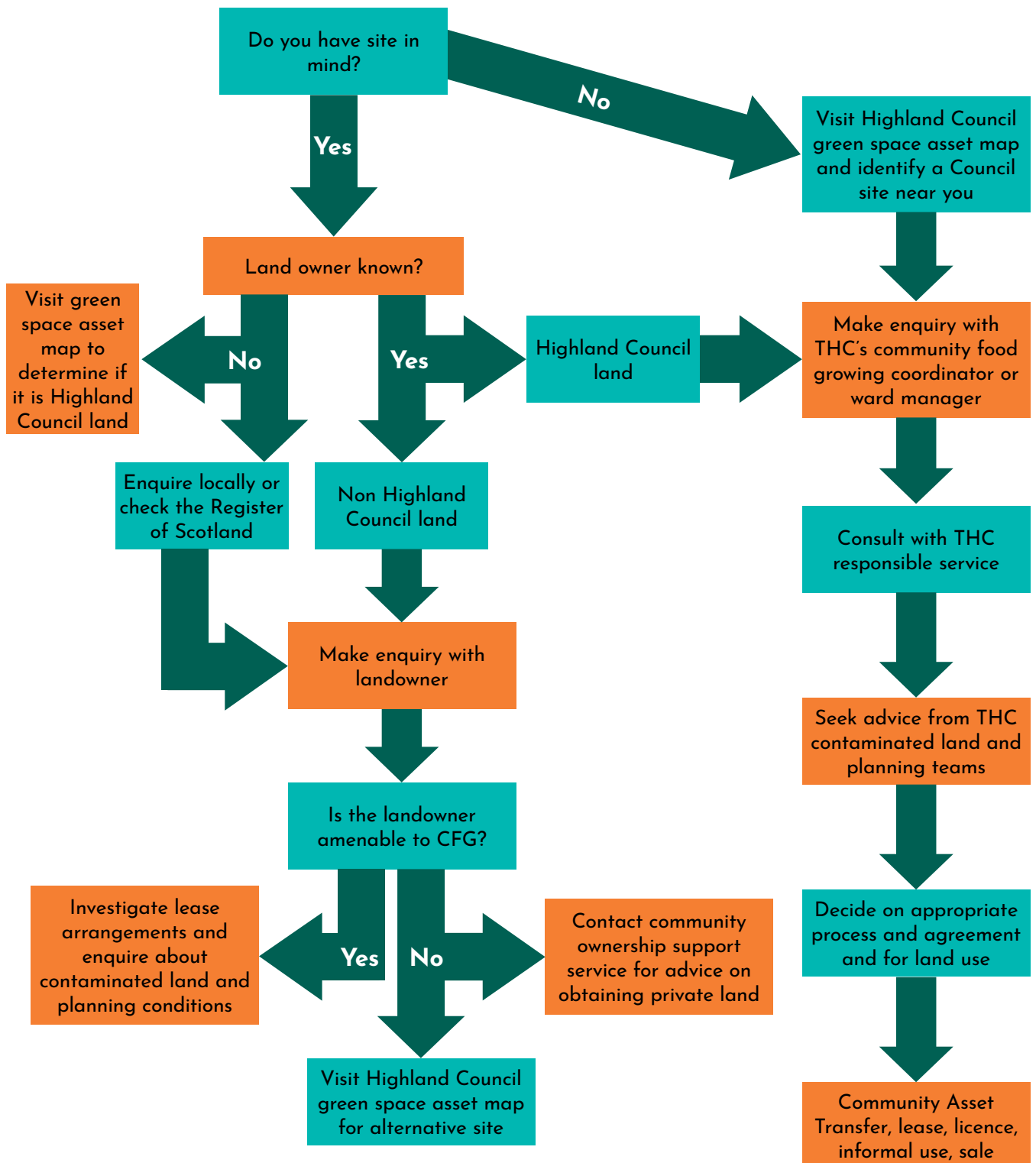
[www.bit.ly/HighlandGoodFood](http://www.bit.ly/HighlandGoodFood)

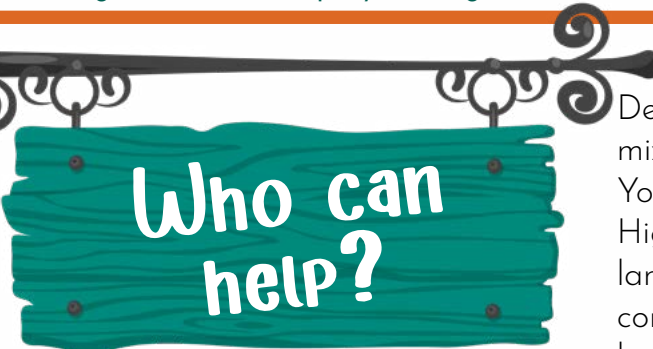


## Finding and Securing Suitable Land

There is no single solution that fits all for identifying suitable Community Food Growing land. However, there are people and organisations who can help, give advice and support communities along the way.

The Highland Council green space asset map is a good place to start to look for land suitable for Community Food Growing. Communal green space within all new developments will also have identified Community Food Growing spaces. The Highland Council also encourages communities to consider the potential within existing play parks to include Community Food Growing spaces.





## Who can help?

Depending on where you live there will be a mixture of different situations for land ownership. You may have public green space owned by Highland Council, common good land, or land owned by other public sector bodies or community development trusts. There may be land owned privately by individuals or companies,

or areas of land in housing developments owned by developers or housing associations. It can be difficult to know who owns land but finding and accessing the right site is a key part of starting your Community Food Growing project.

A good starting point is to speak to other local people, ask around and connect with your local community council and Councillors to tap into local knowledge. If you think the land may belong to Highland Council or is common good land, then check the Council's green space asset map or contact the Council's community food growing coordinator to help confirm. If you are unable to find out who owns the land, then contact the Registers of Scotland to do a title investigation. This has a cost and your group will need to be able to cover this.

Early discussions with the landowner are very important. You must be able to get permission to use the site, often through a lease or ownership, before you can progress with your project, submit planning applications or apply to some funders.

### Community Councils

**Support:** Identify your local community council.

[www.bit.ly/HighlandCommunityCouncils](http://www.bit.ly/HighlandCommunityCouncils)

### Local Councillors

**Support:** Identify and contact your local councillor.

[www.bit.ly/HighlandCouncillors](http://www.bit.ly/HighlandCouncillors)

### Ward Managers

**Support:** Identify and contact for local knowledge, network and links to relevant HC service.

[www.bit.ly/WardManagers](http://www.bit.ly/WardManagers)

### Highland Council Community Asset Transfers

**Support:** Advice on community asset transfer and map of council assets.

[www.bit.ly/HighlandCAT](http://www.bit.ly/HighlandCAT)

### Community Land Advisory Service

**Support:** Information on making land more available for community use.

[www.bit.ly/CommunityLandAdvice](http://www.bit.ly/CommunityLandAdvice)

### Registers of Scotland

**Support:** Public registers of land and property in Scotland.

[www.bit.ly/ROSLand](http://www.bit.ly/ROSLand)

### Community Ownership Support Services

**Support:** Support for communities taking on assets.

[www.bit.ly/DTASCommunity](http://www.bit.ly/DTASCommunity)

### Highland Community Partnership

**Support:** Public agencies and third sector collaborative working across Highland.

[www.bit.ly/HighlandCPP](http://www.bit.ly/HighlandCPP)

## Assessing the suitability of the site for food growing

Contact Highland Council's planning department about any medium to large scale community growing project or any project where new access routes or change of use of a site is necessary. They will explain what consents you may need and what information they need from you to help you get planning permission if required.

When choosing land for community food growing sites, the former use of the site and potential for land contamination should be considered. The Highland Council's Contaminated Land Team welcome the opportunity to discuss site options, can check records, and provide advice free of charge. If a site does have a former use which is potentially contaminative, the site may need investigation and if necessary, remediation.

### Highland Council planning and building standards

**Support:** Advice on planning permissions.

[www.bit.ly/HighlandPlanning](http://www.bit.ly/HighlandPlanning)

### Highland Council Contaminated Land Team

**Support:** Advice on issues of contamination and suitability for use of land.

[www.bit.ly/HighlandContaminatedLand](http://www.bit.ly/HighlandContaminatedLand)  
[land.contamination@highland.gov.uk](mailto:land.contamination@highland.gov.uk)

### Contaminated land guidance

**Support:** Guide for growing on land which may be contaminated.

[www.bit.ly/ContaminatedLandGuide](http://www.bit.ly/ContaminatedLandGuide)

### Social Farms and Gardens

**Support:** Advice for all community food growing, including contaminated land.

[www.bit.ly/SFGResources](http://www.bit.ly/SFGResources)

## Promoting inclusion and wellbeing

Community food growing is a positive way that those experiencing health challenges can engage with the natural world and take part in activities that benefit their health and wellbeing. There are also many opportunities for CFG projects to support people who are experiencing food insecurity by creating opportunities to share food, contributing free food to the community, linking up with foodbanks and larders and enabling those without gardens to have access to land, skills and resource to grow for themselves.

### Nourish Dignity in Practice Toolkit

**Support:** Support community food growers to deliver food activities with dignity.

[www.bit.ly/DignityInPractice](http://www.bit.ly/DignityInPractice)

### Independent Food Aid Network

**Support:** Cash First Leaflet for Highland.

[www.bit.ly/IFANCashFirst](http://www.bit.ly/IFANCashFirst)

### Think Health Think Nature

**Support:** Green health promotion resources and directory of initiatives and activities.

[www.bit.ly/ThinkHealthThinkNature](http://www.bit.ly/ThinkHealthThinkNature)

### Trellis Scotland

**Support:** Scotland's network for therapeutic gardens.

[www.bit.ly/TrellisScotland](http://www.bit.ly/TrellisScotland)

## Section 2

The following case studies have been written by community groups to highlight some of the work already taking place across Highland, they don't necessarily represent the views of The Highland Council but aim to serve as a source of inspiration and learning from the experiences of others.







We are a small charity which provides social and therapeutic horticultural activities at our Growing Spaces within a local allotment site, beside the new Badenoch and Strathspey Hospital and at table top gardening sessions at three Care Homes/Day Centres across the area. Elderly people, many of whom have dementia really relate to the gardening and associated craft work that is completed at the sessions.

People in our communities who may have various disabilities attend our Growing Spaces and our Hospital Therapy Garden, where they enjoy the time together; they learn to grow a variety of flowers, fruit, herbs and vegetables; they take produce home to cook and enjoy.



## Project Questionnaire

What is your proudest project achievement

Receiving a significant amount of money a few years ago from Tesco Bags of Help which allowed us to redesign our Growing Spaces and make them DDA compliant, and much easier to maintain for all concerned, and more accessible for many people.

What is the biggest lesson you have learned through delivering your project?

The positive impact it has on those who attend our sessions from the elderly lady who said 'this is the best thing I have done' when making seed bombs for Christmas presents at one of our table top sessions, to those who 'just love' coming to our Growing Spaces and enjoying the social time while gardening.

How many staff work on your project (FTE)?

One member of staff who has a contract with us.

How many volunteers are involved in delivering your project?

All the Trustees are volunteers, and others who work in our Growing Spaces, plus others who carry out pieces of work from time to time - probably 10 - 15.

How are you funded?

We are funded by a variety of Trusts and have had support from Tesco Bags of Help and the Co-operative Community Fund.



Project

## Pocket Orchards

### How did the project start/what does your project do?

There are now about 240 orchard trees in Wester Ross communities from Plockton to Ullapool. Most of the pocket orchards are quite small - perhaps 6-9 trees. They are there both for community and environmental benefit. Many of the local schools now have pocket orchards: the biggest one so far is at Gairloch High School, with 37 trees.

Other sites include village halls, public open spaces, youth hostels and churches. Laide community woodland has some trees, as does the Inverewe (NTS) estate.

The majority of the trees are apples but there are also plums, pears, and cherries. At Poolewe there are also cornelian cherries, cherry plums, hazels, crab apples, as well as two chestnut trees and a walnut.

Funding has come from a variety of sources, including private donations, a crowdfunder, charitable trusts, and a grant from the Council's Ward Discretionary Fund.

There have been some setbacks. The pocket orchard at Achnasheen was completely destroyed by deer and deer have been a concern elsewhere too. At Inverewe the NTS has deer fenced the orchard there and we plan to add more trees (there are currently 12 apple trees).

At Aultbea the first site we planted, by the clapper bridge, has proved too exposed for some of the trees (we plan to replace the losses).

However, on the whole the trees are growing and slowly establishing themselves. The varieties planted have all been carefully chosen for West Highland conditions. Future plans include grafting to propagate old local varieties of apple, offering training in fruit tree care, and encouraging local people and schools to take advantage of the free harvest as the trees start to crop over the next few years. We also hope to inspire local crofters to consider planting fruit trees and hardy soft fruit in suitable places.

In the longer term the aim is to create resources for community resilience, contribute towards a more circular economy, and build biodiversity. The trees will we hope encourage pollinators, improve the soil with annual leaf fall, and provide shelter and wind resistance. But overall, the best outcome will be to reduce the sense of despair and dependence so common among rural highland communities. From small beginnings, if we can gradually rebuild local self-confidence and provide more hope for a better future, it will have been worthwhile.



## How did the project start/ what does your project do?

We have various pupil groups who come out to take part in a wide variety of projects that take place on the school farm. The key aims of the projects are as follows:

- 1) Increasing the farm's biodiversity through the development of native wildflower areas, orchards and soft fruit areas and different wildlife habitat zones. These include: two wildlife ponds, native winter flowering heathers, native wildflower areas (Operation Pollination), various tree and hedgerow zones and a grassland meadow area.
- 2) Maintaining small scale crop and food production for educational purposes. We use the polytunnels for growing a variety of food crops so pupils can get first-hand experience of how food is grown and the skills required for growing it. We also harvest apples and plums from the orchard area and process the fruit with the pupils to make jam and juice.
- 3) Developing practical gardening and maintenance skills with the pupils. The pupils learn some essential gardening skills including; preparing the ground, planting crops, making compost, repairing various garden structures, pruning trees and path maintenance among other things.
- 4) Developing their enterprise skills through the sale of school farm produce and products inspired by the school farm such as bird feeders and crop/ plant support structures.



## Project Questionnaire

**What is your proudest project achievement**

We became the first school in Scotland to build our own wood fired clay pizza oven. The pupils in our senior enterprise class helped design and construct a pizza oven which we use every term as a way of celebrating our achievements.

**How many staff work on your project (FTE)?**

We have several members of staff who are highly involved with delivering the various projects on the school farm. They include Morag Muschate, Lynsey Macdonald, Jack Trevelyan and various class teachers plus some garden volunteers who give up some of their time to help maintain the garden areas.

**What is the biggest lesson you have learned through delivering your Project?**

There is a never ending list of maintenance jobs for pupils to help with and that nature has a great habit of taking over!

**How many volunteers are involved in delivering your project?**

Between 2-4 volunteers help maintain the school farm but are not involved with delivering the projects.

**How are you funded?**

We fundraise ourselves through our own enterprise activities and have been supported in the past by council ward funding, and central government sustainability funds.

Name of organisation



## Lochbroom & Ullapool Growing Group (LUGG)

Project

LUGG Community Allotment

### How did the project start/what does your project do?

LUGG was started by some active members of the Ullapool community in 2010 with an aim to provide space for growing food for local people. There was significant opposition towards the development of the allotments by other community members. Grant funding provided money for a beautiful tool shed, compost toilet, polytunnel and materials for outdoor raised beds. Since this there has been further development, including, a deer fence, water system and solar panels in the polytunnel to charge a water pump. The ground is leased annually from The Highland Council.

LUGG has been used by community groups for various projects including mental health and children's groups and we hope that in the future more people can use the allotments.

Over recent years we have made it more friendly for wildlife with wildflower beds, a pond, insect hotel and bird feeders and most plot holders are organic gardeners.



## Project Questionnaire

**What is the biggest lesson you have learned through delivering your project?**

That it takes a collective effort to keep it going and to make improvements. It seems we are always lacking volunteers as people are already so busy making it difficult to make progress.

In 2017/18 we had repeated vandalism of the polytunnel by people who slashed the plastic. This is still an action to be addressed however the company that installed the polytunnel is no longer in business and we are struggling to find a company that can replace like for like. If any other sites are looking to put in a polytunnel I think they need to be mindful of this.

Some plot holders are also part of the chicken group and currently keep six hens of varying breeds on site. Their droppings go into the compost system on site.

We were down to three hens in December 2020 when the government declared that there was avian influenza and poultry should be kept indoors or in a run separate from wild birds.

As we couldn't feasibly do that and it felt cruel to keep them in such a wee hen house until there was no avian flu, we sent them on their holidays to a friend who would be able to keep them inside in a much bigger space until the flu passed.

It has proved a good time to let the ground recover so there is a better space now for them to come back to and possibly for some new hens. It is really important to highlight this as avian flu raises its head every now and again and if people are wanting to keep livestock then all eventualities need to be thought about.

Over the pandemic there has been a lot of things to consider to tending plots and as government guidance was constantly changing, many people were incredibly wary of coming to the allotments. People for various reasons gave up their plots, but the plots inside the polytunnel were snapped up quickly.

As we have not had working parties due to the pandemic, the communal areas have suffered, and I think we need some real help to get them back to a manageable state.

It has been challenging to say the least and limitations within our committee adds to the challenge. There is a lot of learning to do about running a committee and inspiring people to want to take more interest in the area where they grow.

*"Many hands makes lighter work"*



## Project Questionnaire

What is your proudest project achievement

We became the first school in Scotland to build our own wood fired clay pizza oven. The pupils in our senior enterprise class helped design and construct a pizza oven which we use every term as a way of celebrating our achievements.



Photos by Lechbroom & Ullapool Growing Group

How many staff work on your project (FTE)?

0 - it is all voluntary. It would be amazing to have someone employed to work there.

How many volunteers are involved in delivering your project?

There are 6 members on the committee and additional plot holders come along for monthly volunteer days.

How are you funded?

Through plot fees.





Project

Ballifeary Community Council

## How did the project start/what does your project do?

This is a small Council tenant led project which started off during COVID-19 (Autumn 2020) to:

- Provide a positive outdoors activity during COVID-19 restrictions that local people could take part in.
- Show, especially with concerns last year about availability of food in the shops, that it is possible to grow a range of healthy and tasty vegetables and salad leaves etc easily in Inverness.
- To make healthy vegetables and salad etc available free of charge to anyone who wants to use them.
- Turn an unused and quite sad-looking outdoor space in an area with high local footfall into a new community focal point which people could enjoy.

It is a very informal project and everyone is welcome to become involved. Organising events has been quite difficult during COVID-19 but we have held activities such as a socially-distanced plant swap, a spring bulb planting event, and weekly get-togethers when allowed. We also lit up one of the trees in the growing space last Christmas and invited local people to hang decorations on it and make Christmas wishes. We post news of events, what's growing/ready to harvest/recipe ideas on our Facebook page and also have a noticeboard on site.

We hope to be able to develop the space further to allow more planting areas for vegetables and fruit etc and also to let us grow flowers, shrubs and small trees which will be good for pollinating insects and other wildlife.



## Project Questionnaire

How many volunteers are involved in delivering your project?

We have a regular active group of around 6-8 adults and 6 children but a wider group who help with planting, donating plants/seeds and/or who just like to come along and chat when we are at the community growing space. Over the summer/autumn, we held weekly get-togethers for weeding, planting and planning and also provided large chalks for local children to make pavement art at the growing space.

What is your proudest project achievement

We have created a new growing space, grown lots of vegetables and salads, built up a group of active volunteers and a larger group of local people of all ages who are very interested in, and supportive of, the project. We also know that people are using what we grow, and we have been able to donate some produce to Ness Foodstuffs (Ness Bank Church).

In late summer this year, we had a visit and very positive feedback from assessors from the Keep Scotland Beautiful "It's your neighbourhood" scheme, which was really encouraging given that we have only been running for a year and are a very small-scale project.

What is the biggest lesson you have learned through delivering your project?

That so many people are interested in growing food and that it brings together people from a wide range of backgrounds and ages.

Photos by Let's Grow Ballifeary



How many staff work on your project (FTE)?

None

How are you funded?

We started off the project with COVID-19 community resilience funding. We also successfully applied for support from the Arnold Clark Foundation. This money has paid for the materials for our four large vegetable containers (which were made by a local volunteer), for plants, tools/watering cans, compost and other materials. We have had a generous donation of compost from Scotbark in Inverness, seeds donated by Seeds of Hope, and have also had a lot of seedlings, plants and containers donated by local residents.

We are very grateful to The Highland Council for the support we have had from their local Tenant Participation staff.



## Plot to Plate

### How did the project start/what does your project do?

Our project is a community garden, run from Invergordon Academy, where we encourage volunteers to come along and grow their own vegetables in our beds and our polytunnel. This year we have also teamed up with the Academy's Rural Skills pupils who will be helping with our beds and will be growing their own produce in a new bed that they have prepared. Hopefully this will prove a good way to encourage healthy eating by seeing how vegetables are produced. It is hoped that some of the parents of these pupils may get involved.

How many staff work on your project (FTE)?

2 full time staff.

How are you funded?

We are funded through High Life Highland.

What is your proudest project achievement?

We held four open events during the summer which brought along some local people who enjoyed kebabs made from produce that they had picked.

How many volunteers are involved in delivering your project?

We have two volunteers to work on the project.

What is the biggest lesson you have learned through delivering your project?

Engagement with the public has proved difficult due to Covid restrictions and a sense of lethargy in some parts of the community. We have also realised that to maintain the garden we need a dedicated member of staff to take control.



## How did the project start/what does your project do?

The long neglected garden is slowly being restored since coming into community ownership. It now grows local produce and flowers for residents, local businesses and visitors in polytunnels and outside beds. There is also a community sponsored orchard, rose beds and some allotment style plots that local residents can use in return for a few hours volunteered in the garden each month. We also operate a community food waste compost scheme with the local primary school. The garden is open to the public and provides a beautiful amenity space for locals and visitors. It has created a part time job and lots of volunteering opportunities. Future plans include the restoration of the derelict greenhouses, looking at ways that the island can become more self sufficient for food and reducing food waste further.

During the pandemic we realised what an important asset the garden was to the community. We were able to increase the amount of produce we grew and our customer numbers increased as they had access to fresh seasonal produce without having to leave the island. Our volunteer numbers also increased and helped alleviate the isolation felt by many who were able to come along and help in a safe outdoor environment. We also removed set prices for our produce and offered it on a donation basis, ensuring that no one was excluded due to their financial circumstances.



## Project Questionnaire



During 2017/18 we received £61,000 funding from the Climate Challenge Fund which purchased 3 polytunnels, seeds and equipment as well as funding a full time gardener and a part time community engagement officer for a year. Match funding of £7,900 was provided by Raasay House Community Company who own and manage the garden on behalf of the community. This enabled us to get the garden back into production.

In 2018/19 we received £4,900 from The Mushroom Trust which allowed us to plant an orchard in one quadrant of the garden. Match funding of £1000 was raised by us through offering sponsorship of the trees to the community and visitors.

Raasay House Community Company receive an income from leasing Raasay House to a private business who operate it as a hotel and outdoor centre. Since the CCF funding ended some of this money has been used to fund the part time Gardener's wages and it also covers annual insurance costs etc. Purchases of small equipment, seeds and our other annual costs are paid for using income from the sale of produce, donations and fundraising events.

We are continuing to look at ways in which the project can become more financially sustainable.



Be realistic and don't over estimate how much you can do with the resources you have! We're still learning to abide by this ourselves.



0.6 FTE



7 volunteers are on the steering group, and we have another 6 or so regular volunteers (that's just under 10% of the island's population). Our average volunteer hours are nearly double the gardener's paid 20 hours per week during the peak season and the project would not be possible without this contribution.



Opening up the garden and creating a space for the community to enjoy after 30 years of the gates being closed while at the same time growing fruit, vegetables, salad, herbs and flowers which are enjoyed at such a local level.



Project

## The Grow Project

How did the project start/what does your project do?

The Grow Project is a therapeutic garden, created by and for people with additional support needs, mainly learning disabilities. It is a healthy, positive and beautiful educational and working environment, enabling people to work meaningfully and enjoyably towards reaching their potential.

We have a large vegetable plot, a fruit cage, polytunnels, a wildflower meadow and wildlife gardens and ponds. The project is open to the public, through the Botanic Gardens. We have reduced and reused waste since 2002.

We work with the Royal Caledonian Horticultural Society offering trainees an individual-centred course – **'Grow and Learn'**. It's a friendly, thriving place!



## Project Questionnaire

What is your proudest project achievement

The ethos of the place: prioritising people and planet. most of the trainees have been here for years because they enjoy it so much. We've received the Green Apple Award several times because of our natural methods and minimum waste approach to growing food. Many areas in the garden are given over to wildlife to support biodiversity and pollination.

How many volunteers are involved in delivering your project?

Since the COVID-19 crisis began, we have diverted resources into supporting local food charities, such as Inverness Foodstuffs and Crown Cupboard. A couple of our volunteers also help at Foodstuffs so there is good collaboration and we hope to improve upon the variety and seasons we can offer them free food.

How many staff work on your project (FTE)?

We also donate vegetable seedlings to local charities who are growing veg with vulnerable kids, people in poor health etc.

2 part-time Horticultural Trainers, assisted by occasional Relief Horticultural Trainers.

We have a thriving community volunteer group - currently over 20 of whom 16 come in on a weekly basis for 3 - 6 hours. It's a lovely place to volunteer. Previously, we have had Duke of Edinburgh Award participants and we currently have 5 High Life Highland Leadership volunteers comprised of 3 adults with mild learning disabilities and 2 teenagers, who are also doing their Saltire Awards.

How are you funded?

What is the biggest lesson you have learned through delivering your project?

Funded by NHS Highland and the generous support from individuals, including the Sutherland Family Trust. We are becoming more financially sustainable by introducing a daily charge to participants eligible for financial support. We also raise money from selling our plants and vegetables to Botanic Garden visitors.

Not to set targets! Be patient and the jobs will be done when they are done. The important thing is to support the trainees.





## How did the project start/what does your project do?

Thurso Grows is run by Thurso Community Development Trust and includes running a community garden space of 1000m<sup>2</sup> and associated workshops on composting, gardening and food waste minimisation. We also aim to promote local produce and encourage people to grow at home while taking a community aspect to sharing food. Previously funded by the Scottish Government Climate Challenge Fund we were able to redevelop our Garden space over two years. We are now funded by National Lottery Communities Fund for a further two years where we are taking an approach of empowering our volunteers to run workshops and have ownership of the garden and growing. They regularly sell produce at our Town Market and welcome others to the Garden, we also work with other groups including North Highland College and NHS to provide green health activities in the garden space.



## Project Questionnaire



Our project only commenced in April 2019 with staff in place a month later in May. Our community garden site was hugely neglected having been run by a previous organisation who had failed to recruit voluntary effort and had been in abeyance for the previous two years. We had no raised beds or space for growing at the point of commencing the project as all of the garden space was completely overgrown. In addition to this the focus previously had been wildflowers so the ground was not fully suitable for growing produce. We commenced very quickly a full redesign of the space and created raised beds which enabled us by July to actually have salad vegetables growing in the garden space. The skills of our gardener and project co-ordinator meant that regularly from August/September volunteers were able to take produce home and the garden was ripe with produce. Our harvest festival in October saw over 50 attend and all of the food provided was grown in the garden. It is a myth in Caithness that nothing grows, so our proudest achievement is that if you are determined enough it most definitely grows!



We hold regular garden sessions weekly which bring 20-30 volunteers each week. In addition to this we run community meal sessions with around 20 weekly volunteers.



1.8 FTE.



Thurso Grows is funded by the Climate Challenge Fund. We have also received smaller grant awards from Tesco Bags of Help and most recently Green Health Partnership funding, Lottery Communities Funding and Town Centre Regeneration Funding.



We were very fortunate to receive core funding towards running our project without it we would not be able to have made as great an impact as we have. The community garden space we inherited is testament to that, without the funding which has been made available to us if having to run on voluntary effort our garden space would still be under development. With funding we have been able to install a Polycrub®, which in Caithness conditions vastly improves our chances of success in growing.

**[www.polycrub.co.uk](http://www.polycrub.co.uk)**

Caithness is notoriously difficult to grow in and our season starts at least a month following normal growing guides.

However, we suffered with the exit of Climate Challenge Funding where we had thought on starting the project that we would have been able to continue funding. That made us have a really good look at sustainability of the garden in 2020 and where funding would come from next. We worked hard to secure new funding and in July 2021 were awarded two years of support from the Lottery Communities Fund. While working on this we also devised a plan for a social enterprise and now with Thurso Community Benefit Society as our trading arm we are about to launch Socially Growing which through an asset transfer of the Highland Council Greenhouses in Thurso and the creation of a Zero Waste Refill Shop will see commercial growing take place in our greenhouses and hopefully a profitable business which will support the community growing part of our project in the long term.



Photo by Thurso Grows



The initial idea started back in 2012 but it is in the last two years that the project has gathered momentum. In 2012, two fields at Knocknagael Farm part of the Scottish Government bull stud farm on Essich Road, Inverness, were identified as surplus to the farm. A planning application for 200 new houses was lodged in 2013. The land was eventually retained for agriculture and a community group was formed that took forward an initial feasibility study. The project has gathered momentum since 2019 when the group started to work with HIE<sup>1</sup> and DTAS<sup>2</sup> to follow a formal Asset Transfer Request process under the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015. Knocknagael Ltd was established in July 2020, and since opening to members in 2021, has seen an increasing membership.

This is a transformative project. The site (the smiddy field) is good quality agricultural land so has a strong potential to provide for community food growing and amenity areas. Knocknagael Ltd is seeking to acquire the field to develop these uses. The community-growing project will include allotments, an orchard, areas for walking and wildlife and community growing areas for the benefit of the community.

The project addresses the demand in Inverness for community growing spaces, and seeks to responds to social and health needs, and the climate and environmental challenges. This is an area of Inverness becomingly rapidly urbanised where community spaces are lacking.



## Project Questionnaire



There have been a number of major milestones achieved in the last year and a half that have given momentum to the project. A key moment was being successful in the application for a Scottish Land Fund Stage 1 grant in July 2020 to take forward a feasibility study and business plan for the project. This has allowed us to take forward a community consultation with more than 340 responses received in less than two months, and a 98% of support for the project. We have also identified future partnerships with a range of organisations such as Birchwood Highland, Action for Children and with local schools.

During this period the company opened to members and reached 60 members in the summer, and secured charitable status, two other important milestones. The commissioned work has provided the foundation for Knocknagael Ltd being able to submit an Asset Transfer Request to Scottish Government in October 2021, the culmination of a significant amount of effort<sup>3</sup>. The next steps will involve applying to the Scottish Land Fund for the purchase of the site and securing funding to implement phase 1.

<sup>3</sup> The commissioned work included a feasibility study and business plan by Community Enterprise, a Landscape Report by Harrison Stevens a landscape design practice and a Valuation Report by Bell Ingram.

**How many volunteers are involved in delivering your project?**

Currently we have almost 70 members, although we are not yet at the stage that we can take forward practical activities, many of our members have a strong interest in giving back to the community. We have organised several visits to different projects to learn from others.

**How many staff work on your project (FTE)?**

At the moment the project is run by volunteers. Knocknagael Ltd has 6 directors plus members.

**How are you funded?**

Our main source of funding for this stage has been the Scottish Land Fund.



The whole process has been a learning experience allowing the project, the company and those involved to develop and grow. A key lesson from the response we have received is that there is very strong community support for more projects of this kind and demand for allotments following the pandemic. More should be done to facilitate the use of public land for these purposes. While taking forward pioneering projects is challenging, a practical lesson is not to give up, progress can be made. Finally, we have also learned how much these projects can help bring people together in urban communities, something underestimated.



Photos by Knocknagael Ltd





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