

Agenda Item	9
Report No	CP/13/23

## THE HIGHLAND COUNCIL

**Committee:** Communities and Place

**Date:** 24 May 2023

**Report Title:** Progress Report on the implementation of *Growing our Future* – The Highland Community Food Growing Strategy

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

### 1. Purpose/Executive Summary

- 1.1 In response to duties placed on the Council under the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015, Members agreed a Highland Food Growing Strategy (2022-2027), [Growing our Future](#), on 23 February 2022.
- 1.2 The vision for the strategy is that by 2027 Highland communities are resilient, empowered and supported to grow their own food. The strategy and associated guidance aim 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 This report, and actions detailed in Appendix 1 provide the first annual update on the progress with the implementation of the Strategy. Progress has been made against most action points of the strategy, with constructive support and engagement from relevant Highland Council officers and stakeholder organisations. An increased interest in community food growing activities has been observed in Highland, with many community groups keen to incorporate some form of food growing within their projects.

### 2. Recommendations

2.1 Members are asked to:

- Note the progress made to implement the food growing strategy and deliver the community food growing action plan to date and the subsequent benefits to the Highland region.

### **3. Implications**

- 3.1 Resource - a fixed term post, funded by the Council's Transformation Fund was approved as part of the Council's 21/22 Health & Prosperity Strategy, to support the development and implementation of the strategy has been agreed until July 2023. This officer's role is to co-ordinate and embed activity to implement the strategy, working with other Council staff and community partners to deliver key actions.
- 3.2 Legal implications - The 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.
- 3.3 Community (Equality, Poverty, Rural and Island) impacts – The community food growing 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 includes 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.
- 3.4 Climate Change / Carbon Clever - The strategy supports 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.
- 3.5 Risk - The post of Community Food Growing Co-ordinator is funded through the Council's Health and Prosperity Strategy 21/22 for a period of 23 months. This concludes at the end of July 2023. Whilst the co-ordinator has been essential to develop the strategy and organisational approach to food growing, it is important the approach is embedded throughout the organisation to ensure ongoing delivery of the strategy and associated outcomes.
- 3.6 Gaelic - 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 socioeconomic disadvantage.
- 4.2 In response to the duty, 'Growing our Future', the Highland Council's Community Food Growing Strategy (2022-27), was agreed in February 2022. The vision for this 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.
- 4.3 The strategy was developed through listening to feedback from consultation with a range of internal and external stakeholders across Highland between 2019-2021 and it was considered in draft form by the Council's Climate Change Working Group. The Council appointed a Community Food Growing Co-ordinator in August 2021. The initial focus of this role was to finalise the draft strategy, and latterly to support its implementation and the delivery of actions.
- 4.4 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
- 4.5 To accompany the publication of the strategy, initial guidance on community food growing was produced and a detailed action plan was developed setting out how the Council, High Life Highland, and our community partners will work to meet the objectives laid out in the strategy. The action plan with summaries of progress is attached as Appendix 1.
- 4.6 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.

## 5. Benefits of Community Food Growing

- 5.1 Community growing in all its forms can provide wide-ranging, and long-lasting, benefits to communities and to individuals. It also contributes to the goal of Scotland becoming a Good Food Nation by enabling people from all walks of life to enjoy and learn about nutritious and healthy food. Benefits include:
- **Health:** Increased consumption of fresh fruit and vegetables. Physical and mental health benefits from low impact exercise and access to natural calming environments.
  - **Environment:** improving biodiversity 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.

- **Economic:** 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:** making community connections that contribute to wellbeing, encourage inclusion and reduce isolation. These connections are built through volunteering, local events and with the increased use of community spaces bringing a sense of pride and belonging.
- **Education:** 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.

## **6. Progress**

- 6.1 There has been an increased interest in recent years in growing your own food in Highland, as elsewhere, whether in allotments, community growing projects or at home, along with an increasing awareness and culture change towards improving our food systems and the environmental benefits of local growing.
- 6.2 This interest appeared to increase during the Covid-19 pandemic, and we have incorporated learning from the Council's response to Covid and the work of community groups and organisations through that period in relation to food growing and emergency food provision into the direction of the strategy.
- 6.3 The subsequent cost of living crisis has highlighted the impact of increasing food and energy prices on households, including those currently struggling to feed themselves and their families. This has also encouraged people to consider the option to grow their own food and create resources in local communities.
- 6.4 The strategy has allowed us to build on this momentum and to better support those who have an interest in growing to find suitable opportunities in which to participate and develop community projects.
- 6.5 During 2022 - 23, progress has been made on most of the key actions against the objectives highlighted in 4.4 from the "Growing our Future" action plan. Some examples of key activities and progress under each objective are set out below:
- 6.6 Objective 1: Build knowledge and understanding of Community Food Growing in Highland**
- 6.6.1 Knowledge and understanding of community food growing, it's benefits and potential positive impact it brings to communities within Highland has seen an increase in the last year.
- 6.6.2 Working with the Highland Good Food Partnership (HGFP) we have been able to develop networks for communicating with food growing groups, including regular meetings of community food growing organisations, the development of the Food activity map. The HGFP website continues to develop with support from our

community food growing coordinator and is a resource for members of the public on different areas of food growing and related community projects.

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

6.7.1 Understanding the benefits of community food growing has led to more community groups considering setting up CFG projects to help support and provide wellbeing activities for people in their area. Groups have set up, or are considering developing, projects of all scales from incorporating planters into existing projects, taking over a planting area in a local park, to large-scale gardens with polytunnels to help support food larders.

6.7.2 *Food Growing in Schools:* Food growing within schools has grown momentum. A survey was recently undertaken with all schools in Highland to understand what Grow Your Own activity is currently happening and what support would benefit those schools who had yet to provide this activity for their pupils. 87 schools (44% of schools in Highland) took part in the survey regarding food growing activities. Overall, a high proportion of respondent schools are growing food (83%) and a good proportion are engaging the community to utilise their skills in their projects (62%). There was a strong view that training for teachers would be supportive in furthering this work; the main barriers to food growing were time, space and knowledge. Guidance has been created to support the cooking and eating of Grow Your Own produce within schools.

6.7.3 *Food Growing in the Community:* The Council responds to requests for support on a case-by-case basis and the community food growing coordinator (CFGC) is a point of contact and support during the process of establishing a new CFG site. The Community Support Co-ordinators (CSC), who were in post until end March 2023, were a further source of support for groups developing CFG projects. Examples of support include:

- Dingwall Community Development Company are working to establish a new allotment site. The CFGC is supporting the process of establishing the project, with guidance on community engagement, forming an allotment association, contaminated land advice and planning guidance. More information can be found [here](#)
- Raigmore Community Gardens - Council officers are working as part of a steering group along with community volunteers, the local primary school and NHS staff to enable the set up of a new charity developing gardens on sites within NHS facilities and on community green space.
- Croy Community Garden – support from the CSCs and the CFGC helped this project to engage with its community, resulting in more volunteers, including those leading the project, links with the local school and partnership working with the private sector.
- Auchtertyre Community Garden – The CFGC helped bridge communications between Council officers, Highlife Highland and community members so that the project could progress.
- Aviemore Allotments – The CSCs local knowledge has helped to identify a site

in an area with few land options; in mapping land, talking to NHS partners and navigating planning conditions, as well as guidance in collaboration with the local volunteer action group, in establishing a group of interest individuals into an allotment association with charitable status.

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

- 6.8.1 *Mentoring networks and knowledge hubs:* - The creation of mentoring networks and knowledge hubs is a key outcome from the action plan. Highland is fortunate to have a group of skilled and knowledgeable growers and gardeners and we would like to see this skill-base shared within communities for the benefit of everyone. The Council is developing a resource bank of guidance and relevant information which will be a valuable resource hosted on the Highland Good Food Partnership website.
- 6.8.2 This year will see the launch of a series of funded workshops through the HGFP. Which will deliver mentoring and networking opportunities between community food growing groups, and a legacy of online resources is being created following the workshops to help support Highland growers.

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

- 6.9.1 *Green Space Audit:* A green space audit was undertaken by the Environmental team in 2022 to identify potential areas of THC land in each Highland community which would be suitable for community food growing and biodiversity projects. The audit highlighted the need to verify ownership in a number of cases and a Greenspace officer is currently being recruited and part of their role will be to finalise this work by verifying ownership. It is hoped that this information will be available to communities soon. Initial work to provide simple occupancy agreements for small scale projects has been undertaken, looking at best practice from other local authorities.
- 6.9.2 The Community Support and Engagement team, as well as other community facing officers, are responsive to individual requests from community groups and individuals who wish to access land for community food growing. For example, Council officers have supported the development and subsequent community asset transfer application for Carrbridge Community Orchard.
- 6.9.3 *HLH Sites:* Highlife Highland (HLH) remain a key partner in delivering the targets from the "Growing our Future" strategy. Community and sport centres are commonly at the centre of communities and HLH have been supportive in providing space and staff time to develop community-led food growing projects, such as sites in Dalneigh and Culloden.
- 6.9.4 *Allotments review:* A review of allotment provision in Highland has begun, an allotment steering group has been set up to examine the existing management and structure of allotments within Highland, with the intention of providing guidance on how this can be improved.

6.9.5 Contaminated land is a consideration for all groups looking to grow food on new land, a set of resources have been pulled together to help inform groups of best practice and Environmental Health continue to be supportive in providing information from contaminated land searches.

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

6.10.1 The Highland Council has seen a rise in the number of community groups wanting to provide community larders and fridges for those in need, especially given the impacts of the cost-of-living crisis. Linked to this has been an increased number of community groups looking at ways of growing food to provide resilience for their communities. Links and networks have been created between food growing initiatives and community larders, these have been supported where necessary.

6.10.2 The Highland Council remains a key partner in the Green Health Partnership, with food growing becoming a key green health activity within health and social care referral pathways. More community groups are becoming aware of these benefits and how they can provide opportunities for food growing as part of a health and wellbeing programme.

## **7. Next Steps**

7.1 The strategy and the action plan will continue to provide a framework for the Council to support community food growing activities and will be monitored on an annual basis. Much of the work is ongoing and involves supporting local communities. There are some key actions that will require a focus

- Review of the Council's Allotments Policy
- Guidance on planning and land development in relation to CFG.
- Funding for the fixed term post of Community Food Growing Coordinator role was agreed until July 2023. Going forward, the work is embedded within existing teams across the organisation to continue with the positive progress that this time-limited investment has enabled.
- Opportunities will be explored for groups to access small seed funds to support the development of community food growing projects (title investigations. planning permission etc)

Designation: Executive Chief Officer, Communities and Place

Date: 5 May 23

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Background Papers:

## Action Plan with Notes on Progress

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

Action	Lead	Timeframe	Work undertaken
Support for development and delivery of a Highland Community Food Growing Network	THC in partnership with HGFP	Ongoing	Regular meetings. Funding gained by HGFP to provide a series of workshops, webinars and online resources to support food growing skills
Develop and maintain CFG map highlighting all activity across the region	The Highland Council and HGFP	Ongoing	Communities gradually adding activities to map. Map shared regularly.
Pilot a community learning and development GYO project	Highlife Highland	2022 – 2024	Using Croy Community Garden as a pilot. Group to form locally before proceeding.
Develop CFG webpage on THC website to host above information	The Highland Council	2022	Page in place and subject to ongoing updates.
Highland wide guidance for CFG groups	The Highland Council	Ongoing	Guidance available on HGFP website
Raising awareness with Community Partnerships of how CFG supports their priorities and outcomes	The Highland Council	Ongoing	Will be progressed through new Community Planning Team.

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

Action	Lead	Timeframe	Work undertaken
Encourage individuals to join existing groups	The Highland Council	Ongoing	THC allotment register of interest enables signposting to CFG groups
Encourage communities and individuals to explore CFG opportunities for their community	The Highland Council & HGFP	Ongoing	Ongoing support for community groups interested in CFG activities. Specific support for some case study projects.
Encourage Grow Your Own projects in schools across Highland	The Highland Council	Ongoing	Survey of schools to understand current GYO activity and where support might be needed. Complete Dec 2022



Develop guidance for cooking and eating Grow Your Own in schools	The Highland Council	2022 – 2027	Catering team has development specific guidance for schools regarding incorporating growing your own produce in school catering. January 2023
Green Young Leadership Programme	Pilot by Highlife Highland	2022 - 2027	Ongoing programme by HLH highlighting that food growing can be used to gain leadership qualification

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

Action	Lead	Timeframe	Work undertaken
Work with communities to set up Tool Libraries	Highlife Highland	Pilot 2022-2025	Exploring collaboration with local charity on use of libraries as a venue for pop up tool libraries. Seed library trial planned for Fort William in Autumn 2023
Signpost communities and individuals to various online resources, funds and other organisations	The Highland Council	Ongoing	Information regularly circulated by HGFP newsletter and through the Community Support and Engagement team
Encourage groups and individuals to work together and share resources	The Highland Council	Ongoing	Series of CFG workshops focussed on skills sharing and peer support is ongoing this year through HGFP
Include a trial site involving food growing in the biochar and carbon sequestration project	Highland Council Climate Change team	2022-2023	Initial proposal failed in funding bid due to high costs of implementation.  Looking at allotment group to introduce small-scale project

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

Action	Lead	Timeframe	Work undertaken
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	Green Space audit has been completed by Environmental team. Due to issues around existing leases a Greenspace Officer is being recruited to finalise and provide support

Develop Green Space Map to include land that has been identified as suitable for CFG	Highland Council planning service	2022-2025	Due to issues around existing leases a Greenspace Officer is being recruited to finalise and provide support
Explore opportunities to identify land with Community Planning Partners	Highland Community Partnership	2022-2023	Waiting for new community planning officer to be in post for strategic approach. Case by case support has been given to individual groups such as Aviemore allotments' negotiation with NHS land
Explore development of a fund to support community food growing permissions (e.g. Title investigations, planning permissions etc)	The Highland Council	2022-2023	Our current approach is to direct groups to ward discretionary budgets and common good funding, or to external sources such as Think Health Think Nature funding.
Produce specific guidance on council processes and the options available to CFG groups that want to access THC land	Highland Council Community Support and Engagement team	2022	Guidance available as part of CAT process but specific options for food growing groups still to be developed.
Provide simple occupancy agreements for smaller scale projects using Council land	Highland Council Housing team	2022-2023	Best practice has been sought from other LAs
Consider the provision of space for community food growing in large and strategic housing developments	Highland Council Infrastructure and Environment team	2022-2027	Ongoing
Co-location of services promoting CFG opportunities beside libraries, community centres and sport centres	Highlife Highland	2022-2027	Support from HLH to provide space and staff time to locate CFG projects outside community centres/libraries (Culloden, Hilton, Dalneigh)
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	This is being incorporated into advice on community play park space
Promote GYO guidance on contaminated land	The Highland Council	Ongoing	Contaminated land guidance given to all groups considering new areas of land. Resources also available on HGFP website.

Provide free advice to community groups on contaminated land	The Highland Council	Ongoing	Environment Health team provide information and advice on sites of possible contamination. Advise on possible soil testing
Review provision and management of Allotments	The Highland Council	2022-2025	Steering group has been set up with first meeting in December 2022. Work is ongoing.
Review guidance for community groups growing in school grounds to make it easier and less prohibitive	The Highland Council	2023	Being progressed with Estates team
Support Private Public Partnership schools in negotiating the use of their land for food growing	The Highland Council	2022-2027	Being progressed with Estates team
Explore the development of guidance on planning requirements for Community Food Growing	The Highland Council	2022-2023	Planning team to use lessons learnt from recent projects to formulate FAQs

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

Action	Lead	Timeframe	Work undertaken
Develop guidance for CFG projects to consider promoting inclusion and tackling inequalities in the design of their project	The Highland Council and Green Health Partnership	2022-2023	Ongoing work with the Green Health Partnership (GHP) officer to use understanding gained through the GHP to create guidance
Support interested groups that coordinate emergency food provision to add CFG elements to their work	The Highland Council	Ongoing	Increasing numbers of CFG groups who are keen to support emergency food provision. Support and provide local network information
Encourage CFG groups to be involved with community planning for emergencies	The Highland Council	Ongoing	To be progressed through local resilience arrangements
Consider geographic areas of socio-economic deprivation when making land available for CFG, where possible	The Highland Council	Ongoing	Being considered as part of the allotments policy review
Promote CFG as a green health activity within health and social care referral pathways	Green Health Partnership	Ongoing	Partnership working with Green Health Partnership

## Additional Actions

Action	Lead	Timeframe	Work undertaken
Progress the Glasgow Food & Climate Declaration commitments	The Highland Council	Ongoing	The key action from The Declaration was to produce an integrated food strategy. This has now become a key action within the Good Food Nation Act and will be progressed as part of THCs requirements under that act.
Review Highland Food Growing Strategy	The Highland Council	2027	