

Agenda Item	8
Report No	CP/11/24

The Highland Council

Committee: Communities and Place

Date: 22 May 2024

Report Title: Growing Our Future – Community Food Growing Annual Report

Report By: Assistant Chief Executive, Corporate

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 through existing growing opportunities and new approaches to growing.
- 1.3 This report provides the second annual update on progress against implementation of the strategy.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 Members are asked to:
 - i. **Note** the progress made to implement the Growing our Future strategy and deliver the community food growing action plan.

3. Implications

- 3.1 Resource:

The fixed term post to coordinate and deliver on this strategy, funded by the Council's Transformation Fund, has now come to an end. Delivery of the strategy and action plan is now embedded with the relevant services and partners.
- 3.2 Legal:

The strategy delivers against the duties contained within the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 to produce a community food growing strategy and in relation to the provision and protection of allotments.
- 3.3 Community (Equality, Poverty, Rural and Island):

The community food growing strategy consolidates, strengthens, and builds the Council's support to communities that want to grow their own food. Indirectly it helps to

support food insecurity initiatives and has wider positive benefits for communities in relation to health and wellbeing outcomes.

3.4 Climate Change / Carbon Clever:

The strategy supports the Council's work on NetZero and improving biodiversity. The Council is better able to enable Highland communities to take action on climate change through support to the development of third sector food growing initiatives.

3.5 Risk:

The post of Community Food Growing Co-ordinator has come to an end, and so this coming year will be the first that the strategy does not have a lead officer. Action has been taken to embed the strategy across the organisation to ensure delivery of the actions identified and provide ongoing support in the area of food growing.

3.6 Health and Safety (risks arising from changes to plant, equipment, process, or people):
There are no health and safety implications arising from this report.

3.7 Gaelic:

There are no direct Gaelic implications arising from this report.

4. Background

4.1 The Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 places a duty on Local Authorities to develop a Community Food Growing Strategy. In response to the duty, 'Growing our Future', the Highland Council's Community Food Growing Strategy (2022-27), was agreed in February 2022.

4.2 The vision and aim of the strategy is 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

4.3 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.

5. Progress

5.1 A review of the Council's allotment policy has taken place over the last year. A detailed report on the review and the updated policy was presented to this Committee in March 2024. [Link to papers](#)

Actions identified within that review have been incorporated into the action plan that supports the Strategy and will be reported as part of this annual report in the future. See Appendix 1 for details of those actions.

5.2 Some actions to support the allotment policy are already being implemented. These include:

- Commitment from the Council's planning team to provide allotments groups with free pre-planning advice.
- Council Allotment Steering Group has been set up and will continue to meet annually.
- Allotments annual reporting took place in 2023 and is available on the Council's website [here](#).
- Support to Allotment Associations in formation and sites in development. Currently the Council is working with five community groups who are developing new projects.

5.3 A series of ten community food growing workshops were delivered from April 2023 to February 2024. Four more are expected to be delivered this spring and summer. The series has been led and coordinated by the Highland Good Food Partnership with support from the Council's Community Food Growing (CFG) Coordinator. This workshop series titled Get Your Community Growing was funded externally through Sustainable Food Places and delivered by local projects across Highland. The aim of the series is to foster connections between groups, encourage peer support between projects and contribute to the growth of the good food movement.

5.4 The workshop series includes:

- Getting Started – Inverness Botanic Gardens 'Grow' Project
- Mushroom Growing – Rhyze and Abriachan Community Forest
- Hugelkultur growing – The Field Alness
- Connecting Inverness Food Growers – New Start Highland
- Composting – Rosemarkie Amenities Association
- Challenges of Growing in the Highlands – Craigdhu Croft Lochaber
- Social Media – Green Hive Nairn
- Fruit Care – Green Hive Nairn
- Seed saving – Seeds of Scotland
- Community Gardening for Wellbeing – Strathspey Therapy Gardens

5.5 There were 149 participants between April 2023 and February 2024 from across Highland and feedback included:

- "I would highly recommend the course to anyone."
- "Meeting amazing people was a joy."
- "Continue what you are doing, excellent day, clearly explained and presented and an enjoyable social event. Thank you."
- "So exciting to see so much is going on around Inverness."
- "We feel so much more connected to the great community of like-minded people and groups/organisations."
- "Feel very encouraged after today."
- "This event was a great source of expertise."
- "I will pass on what I learned to the rest of my group."
- "I have learned how not to kill carrots."
- "No space on the form to give the course 11/10 marks :)"

5.6 Resources and guidance supporting these workshops were developed and shared with participants, and this learning is now available to all through the Highland Good Food Partnership website [here](#).

5.7 Work has taken place to make land available for CFG, such as improving and simplifying the process for community groups who want to use Council land for food growing.

The Council's estates, amenities, and housing services all now have processes in place to outline how community groups can use Council land with simple agreements, which are supportive of smaller scale projects that don't require leases or other legal agreements over the land.

5.8 Community groups have been supported in accessing Council land through simple agreements as well as through leases, licence to occupy and Community Asset Transfer (CAT) processes.

For example:

- Swanston Ave Garden, Incredible Edible Inverness. Formation of a new community garden will take place in 2024.
- Flourish, North Kessock Primary. A new therapeutic garden, supported by a teacher facilitator, will be planted this Spring to be used as an outdoor learning and play space.
- Balvonie Community Woodland and Allotments – Balvonie Park Association are working to secure land at Milton of Leys by CAT through the Council.
- Ness Castle Primary – Council land has been identified neighbouring this new build school and work is taking place led by Holm Community Council to develop a community project.
- Carrbridge Community Orchard – a CAT process of land into community ownership has taken place.

5.9 The Council's environment team have been identifying Council land that may be enhanced for biodiversity, including sites where community orchards and other community food growing uses can be enabled as part of the Council's greenspace enhancement project using Nature Restoration Funds.

An example of this work includes enhancements at Merkinch Nature Reserve, with the Council working in partnership with the Friends of Merkinch group planting a 98-tree orchard alongside the planting of 900 other native trees and a wildflower meadow.

5.10 The Nairnshire Area Committee commissioned a CFG feasibility study funded by the Nairn Common Good, which is currently taking place in Nairn.

5.11 The High Life Highland library service have been running a trial seed library project at Ullapool Library and Nairn Library, and if successful will look at expanding the idea out to other locations in the future.

Inverness Library have also hosted Clackworks, a third sector organisation, to provide a pop-up tool library and to promote this developing organisation.

6. Next Steps

- 6.1 The strategy and actions to support implementation have been embedded within the wider Council with named service leads and the action plan will be monitored through management in the Performance and Risk Management System (PRMS) going forward.
- 6.2 The Community Support and Engagement team review has incorporated support to allotments and community food growing groups in the newly developed Community Support Officer roles. The CFG strategy will be overseen by a designated Community Development Manager.
- 6.3 The Council's duties to oversee and respond to demand for allotments will be managed through annual reporting and by the allotment steering group who will meet annually.

Designation: Assistant Chief Executive, Corporate

Date: 22 May 2024

Author: Kirsty Ellen, Community Support Officer

Background Papers: Growing Our Future – The Highland Community Food Growing Strategy

Appendices: Appendix 1: Growing our Future: Strategy Action Plan - update

Growing our Future: Strategy Action Plan – Update

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

Action	Lead	Timeframe	Notes
Support the development and delivery of a Highland Community Food Growing Network	THC in partnership with the Highland Good Food Partnership (HGFP)	Ongoing	During 2023/early 2024 HGFP have coordinated a series of workshops for CFG groups covering skills development and networking, funded by Sustainable Food Places. CFG coordinator has supported the fundraising and background work for the workshops.
Develop and maintain CFG map highlighting all activity across the region	Highland Council and HGFP	Complete	Map available on the HGFP website. Communities can add to the map by contacting HGFP.
Pilot a community learning and development GYO project	Highlife Highland	2022-2024	Will be progressed through the new Highland Community Planning Partnership Community Learning and Development plan for 2024-2027.
Develop CFG webpage on THC website to host above information	Highland Council	Complete	Webpage updated for launch of strategy Community Food Growing and Allotments Climate change The Highland Council

Highland wide guidance for CFG groups	Highland Council	Complete	Guidance document downloadable from THC webpage. Resources are on HGFP website and circulated to workshop attendees.
Raising awareness with Community Partnerships of how CFG supports their priorities and outcomes	Highland Council	Ongoing	CFG strategy is on the Community Planning Partnership website. CFG will be included in the new Highland Community Learning and Development Plan for 2024-27.

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

Action	Lead	Timeframe	Notes
Encourage individuals to join existing groups	Highland Council Community Support and Engagement	Ongoing	Community Support and Engagement team administer an allotment 'register of interest' and direct individuals that enquire towards known CFG projects
Encourage communities and individuals to explore CFG opportunities for their community	Highland Council Community Support and Engagement and the HGFP	Ongoing	Support has been provided to community groups and individuals by the CFG Coordinator from Aug 2021- March 2024. Ongoing support is in place from Community Support Officers.
Encourage Grow Your Own projects in schools across Highland	Highland Council	Ongoing	A session on CFG in Schools will be included in the Sep/Oct 2024 school managers training programme.

Develop guidance for cooking and eating Grow Your Own in schools	Highland Council Catering	Complete	School catering have issued guidance to catering staff
Green Young Leadership Programme	Pilot by Highlife Highland	2022-2027	Green leadership is a new concept for the deployment of our Young Leaders 12-25 years old across Highland. This allows those who have an interest in environmental issues to be part of our universal leadership programme and find deployment in a subject that is of interest to them whilst gaining accredited SCQF awards, training and valuable recognition for their volunteering leadership.

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

Action	Lead	Timeframe	Notes
Work with communities to set up Tool Libraries	Highlife Highland	Pilot 2022-25	HLH are working in partnership with a Pop-Up tool library provider. Clachworks have recently had a promotional stand at Inverness Library to raise awareness of their existing tool library.
Signpost communities and individuals to various online resources, funds and other organisations	Highland Council Community Support and Engagement	Ongoing	Guidance document containing information and signposting to other resources is available to download on the Council's CFG webpage. Community support officers are an ongoing source of guidance for CFG groups and individuals.

Encourage groups and individuals to work together and share resources	Highland Council	Complete	See comment above re. HGFP community food growing workshop series.
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Objective 4: To identify potential allotment and growing spaces

Action	Lead	Timeframe	Notes
Carry out a green space audit	Highland Council Environment Team	2022	Timescale delayed due to recruitment for lead officer. Green space CFG audit is taking place as part of the wider assessment of Council land for biodiversity enhancements. Several sites have been identified and will inform the Green Space map as below.
Safeguard valued greenspace including where there is potential for CFG with each Local Plan review	Highland Council Development Planning Team	Ongoing	NPF4 is making CFG land a bigger priority. Commitments have been included in the allotments policy.
Develop Green Space Map to include land that has been identified as suitable for CFG	Highland Council Environment Team	2022-25	Council webpage with map is in the process of being created as part of a wider map of land that is suitable for alternative management approaches.

Explore opportunities to identify land with Community Planning Partners	Highland Community Partnership	Ongoing	<p>CPP website updated with CFG strategy.</p> <p>Individual project to establish Allotment site in Aviemore on NHS land in progress.</p> <p>Ongoing discussions with NHS Health Improvement Officer with a remit for community use of NHS land.</p>
Explore development of a fund to support community food growing permissions (e.g. Title Investigations, planning permission etc)	Highland Council	2022-23 - complete	<p>A specific funding stream has not been identified or developed. Groups are signposted to the Council's Ward Discretionary Fund and SAGS development fund.</p> <p>THC have made pre-planning advice free to remove this cost barrier for new projects.</p>
Produce specific guidance on council processes and the options available to CFG groups that want to access THC land	Highland Council	2022 - complete	<p>The CAT process has been simplified for low-risk projects that are supported within the council. Information on CAT process is available on THC website.</p>
Provide simple occupancy agreements for smaller scale projects using Council land	Highland Council Housing team	2022-23 complete	<p>Informal arrangements with services for low-risk projects such as taking over flower beds and pocket orchards is being trialled. I.E HRA land for Raigmore residents' association and Amenities land for IEI Swanston Avenue Garden. Estates team have a process for school estate land.</p>

Consider the provision of space for community food growing in large and strategic housing developments	Highland Council – Infrastructure and Environment Team	2022-27	<p>This commitment has been included in the allotment policy for the housing development team.</p> <p>Local development plans include space identified. Planning team are open to conversations when applications come in where allotments could be included.</p>
Co-location of services - promoting CFG opportunities beside libraries, community centres and sport centres	Highlife Highland	2022-27	Seed libraries: Ullapool and Nairn Libraries are being used as a seed library location. If these prove successful HLH will look at expanding the idea out to other locations in the future.
Consider CFG as an alternative use of play space as part of the review of play areas	Highland Council Communities and Place Service	Ongoing until 2027	Trial ideas did not come to fruition. Explore again once green space map is complete and if play spaces have been identified.
Promote GYO guidance on contaminated land	Highland Council	Complete	Link to guidance recommended by our contaminated land team is included within the strategy supporting guidance document.
Provide free advice to community groups on contaminated land	Highland Council	Complete	Contaminated land team have already been helping with enquiries. Signpost groups to them or CSOs can make enquiries for new projects.

Review Provision and Management of Allotments	Highland Council	2022-2025 complete	Allotments policy review complete. New actions coming from the review have been added to this plan.
Review guidance for community groups growing in school grounds to make it easier and less prohibitive	Highland Council Estates team	Complete	Estates team have created a process for external groups who want to use School land. Observe North Kessock Flourish project for learning points.
Support Private Public Partnership schools in negotiating the use of their land for food growing	Highland Council	Complete	Discussed with school estate management team. They are happy to support when required. If any PPP schools have issues direct them to Service Lead Capital Planning and Estates.
Explore the development of guidance on planning requirements for Community Food Growing	Highland Council Planning Service	2022-23 complete	Commitment from planning team to provide allotments groups with free pre-planning advice.

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

Action	Lead	Timeframe	Notes
Develop guidance for CFG projects to consider promoting inclusion and tackling inequalities in the design of their project	Highland Council and the Green Health Partnership	2022-23	Draft started but not yet complete with NHS health improvement specialist.
Support interested groups that coordinate emergency food provision to add CFG elements to their work	Highland Council	Ongoing	Highland community food providers network was the route for this, but the network has dwindled. Links are encouraged between allotments and food provision projects within the allotments policy.
Encourage CFG groups to be involved with community planning for emergencies	Highland Council	Complete	This action was part of covid response planning, which has now diminished.
Consider geographic areas of socio-economic deprivation when making land available for CFG where possible	Highland Council	Ongoing	Project in Merkinch Nature Reserve in partnership with a community group took place in 2023 for biodiversity enhancements inc a community orchard. Review this action once green space audit completed and map in place.

Promote CFG as a green health activity within health and social care referral pathways	Green Health Partnership	Complete	HGHP has been promoting this through their network and social media. HGHP is currently going through a transition at the end of the programme funding.
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Additional Actions

Action	Lead	Timeframe	Notes
Progress the Glasgow Food & Climate Declaration commitments	Highland Council	Ongoing	More relevant at this point is the Good Food Nation Plan. The Council have responded to the Scot Govt GFN plan consultation.
Review Highland Food Growing Strategy	Highland Council	2027	To take place 2026/27

Allotment Policy Review Actions

Action	Lead	Timeframe	Notes
Develop template policy and procedures and governance documents, for allotment associations.	Highland Council Community Support and Engagement	2024	Underway - in partnership with Highland Third Sector Interface.
Support the adoption of template P&Ps and incorporation process for Allotment Associations	Highland Council Community Support and Engagement	Ongoing	For Allotment Associations that require becoming incorporated organisations to take on a lease of Council land, and those that wish to strengthen their governance. In partnership with HTSI
Set up and administer an annual allotment forum	Highland Council Community Support and Engagement	Ongoing	Annual meeting to be arranged
Council land made available for new or expanded allotment sites	Highland Council allotment steering group	Ongoing	When high demand is identified and/or trigger points are reached.
Support to AAs in formation & projects in development	Highland Council Community Support and Engagement	Ongoing	Currently supporting and in dialogue with Culloden West, Aviemore, Dingwall, Balvonie & Knocknagael. Support tailored based on needs of group. Community Support Officers will support on ongoing basis.

Allotments rules and regulations put in place	Highland Council Community Support and Engagement	2024	Coordination with Allotment Associations on Council land.
Allotments annual report	Highland Council	Ongoing	Template created in 2023 report
Steering group meeting	Highland Council Allotment Steering Group	Ongoing	Annually review annual report data and register of interest data, and identify what if any actions should be taken
Data handling measures in place	Highland Council	2024	Such as data sharing agreement with AAs, update privacy policy for Register of Interest
Reduce rents for AAs on Council land	Highland Council	2024	All land managing services with allotments sites
Guidance to AAs on environmental/sustainable pest and weed control	Highland Council amenities service	Due 2024/25	