

Local Food Growing Scrutiny Task Group – Final Report

Purpose

1. To present to the Climate Emergency and Sustainability (CES) Policy Development and Scrutiny (PDS) Panel the findings and recommendations to emerge from the Task Group review of Local Food Growing.

Background

2. At its meeting on [14 September 2023](#) the Panel agreed to establish a task and finish group to consider local food growing. The review was asked to focus on policy development and contribute to a new Local Food Strategy for the organisation, being developed in parallel.
3. The review's main driver was to explore how B&NES as a local authority can contribute positively to food security i.e. access to a sufficient quantity of affordable nutritious food, within the context of environmental pressures, competing priorities for land, and local food equality.

Membership

4. The opportunity to join the Task Group was extended to all non-executive councillors. The final membership is listed below:

Cllr Sam Ross (Chair)
Cllr Michael Auton
Cllr Jess David
Cllr Eleanor Jackson
Cllr John Leach
Cllr Ruth Malloy
Cllr June Player

Meetings

5. The Task Group met on the following dates:

Meeting date	Content
24 November 2023	Scoping of the review and to agree terms of reference.
15 December 2023	Local food insecurity and community involvement – Milly Carmichael – Health Improvement Officer Allotment provision across B&NES – Paul Pearce - Team Leader - Parks and Green Spaces
19 January 2024	Allotment Association/Bath Growers Network and Transition Bath – Jacky Wilkinson, John Ingram and Lyn Barham

2 February 2024	Planning update – Richard Daone - Deputy Head of Planning Policy
23 February 2024	Grow Timsbury – Deborah Griffin Allotment provision in Radstock – Sean Fletcher Grounds and Maintenance Supervisor Radstock Town Council
15 March 2024	To agree the final report's findings and recommendations
12 April 2024	Overview of the draft Local Food Strategy – Chrissy Storry – Project lead

Terms of Reference

6. To support the development of a new Local Food Strategy for B&NES Council through consideration of:
 - Allotment provision current and future within Bath and North East Somerset;
 - Community approaches in local food growing projects
 - The impact of planning policy on local food growing
 - Community engagement and the role of the B&NES Council in promoting local food growing
 - Local food insecurity and opportunities to promote food security locally.

Key findings

Legacy and a new Strategy for B&NES

7. The most recent document to articulate the council's position in regards to local food growing is the [Local Food Strategy 2014-2017](#). This legacy document is structured around three interlinking strands - food production, procurement and public health. Although the Strategy is seen as a positive document it was acknowledged that it requires updating, particularly in the light of the council's newly adopted [Corporate Strategy 2023-2027](#), which identifies the refreshed priorities for the authority.

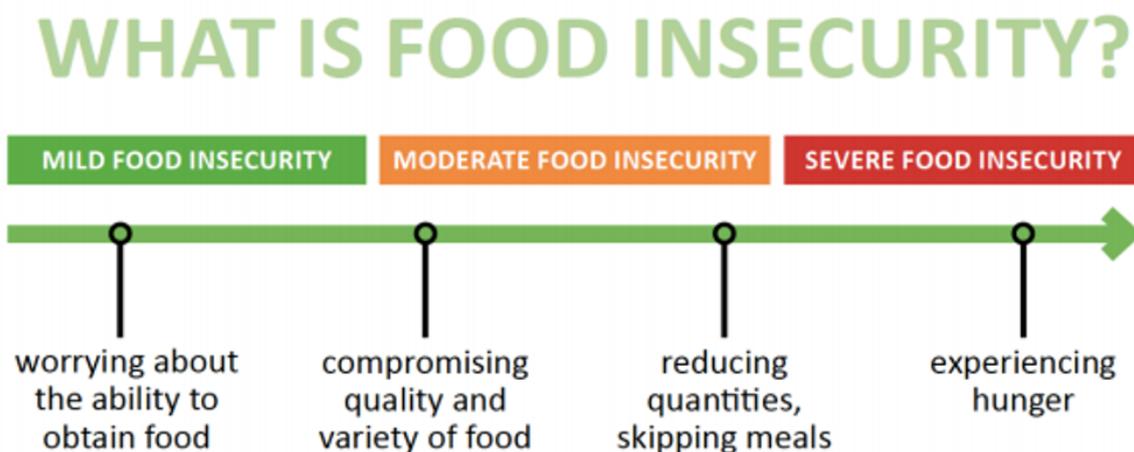


8. Consequently, work was taking place to develop a new Local Food Strategy in parallel to the Task Group review. This enabled the Task Group to adopt a policy-based approach to its work and for the review's findings to feed into the new Strategy. It also coincided with work on land use allocations for the new Local Plan and what obligations developers might have to provide space.

Food equality

9. The initial focus of the Task Group during information gathering was to consider local food insecurity across B&NES. Briefed by the public health lead, members learnt that local food insecurity is defined as **'lacking regular access to enough safe and nutritious food for normal growth and development and an active and healthy life.'**
10. As illustrated in **figure 1**, food insecurity is assessed on a sliding scale ranging from mild insecurity - worrying about obtaining food - through to the most severe insecurity, where people experience hunger.

Figure 1 – food insecurity sliding scale



11. When considering localised B&NES data, information obtained through the November 2022 council's voice box survey suggested that 3% of the population **sometimes or often do not have enough to eat**. The areas with highest food insecurity risk were identified as Whiteway, Whiteway West, Twerton West, Twerton, Fox Hill North and Westfield North.
12. Members were told that food poverty is not standalone and is shorthand for poverty generally. Also, it is often the case that unhealthy calories are cheaper leading to associated public health challenges e.g. white sliced bread can be significantly cheaper than its wholemeal equivalent.
13. The Task Group was introduced to the B&NES Fair Food Alliance (BFFA), which oversees and coordinates food insecurity work across B&NES. This group of more than 60 members represents a broad range of statutory, voluntary and education organisations. Members noted that around 4200 people per week in B&NES were in receipt from food from affordable food projects <https://www.banesfoodfinder.org.uk/>

14. Although BFFA had plans to address food insecurity, it was acknowledged that these did not currently sit within a wider strategy for local food growing. The Task Group discussed opportunities for addressing insecurity and chose to focus predominantly on the issues linked to allotment provision and food growing across B&NES.

Allotment provision

15. The Task Group initially focused on allotment provision within Bath, welcoming officers from the council's Parks Team to brief members. The Task Group learnt that the Parks Team currently manages 160 open spaces, including 24 allotment sites within Bath. Allotments in the parished areas within North East Somerset are managed by the respective parish and town councils. In addition, Bath also has private allotments such as Bath City farm, as well as local hosing provider - Curo offering a handful of allotment sites.

16. The 24 sites managed by the council comprises of 1200 plots. The standard size being 125 square metres, costing circa £75 a year. Prices had increased recently but a reduced fee of £30-£40 a year was available to people on low income. The fee was much cheaper than private sites which were charging circa £600 a year. The council was exploring offering a more diverse range of plot sizes, including starter plots.

17. The allotment service is run on a cost neutral basis with the £90k running costs met by allotment fees. Members were told that the waiting list for an allotment currently stood at 580 people within Bath, with several allotment sites including a 3 year + waiting list. A further issue flagged is that a number of people applied during the pandemic and when offered an allotment were uncontactable or had changed their mind.

Figure 2 – Bath allotments and waiting times

Locations and plots

Allotment site	Location	Plots	Estimated wait
Abbey View	Abbey View Gardens	63	3+ years
Avon Park	Avon Park	11	3+ years
Bloomfield Road	Bloomfield Road	153	2+ years
Brookfield Park	Eastfield Avenue	11	2+ years
Canal Gardens	Lime Grove Gardens	47	3+ years
Claremont Road	Claremont Road	51	3+ years
Combe Down	Church Road	64	2+ years
Corston View	Odd Down	18	3+ years
Eastfield Avenue	Eastfield Avenue	23	2+ years
Fairfield Park	Charlcombe View Road	55	1+ years
Fairfield Valley	Fairfield Park Road	19	2+ years
Foxhill	Bradford Road	10	3+ years
Hampton Row (organic site)	Bathwick	11	8+ years
High Common	Sion Hill	35	2+ years
King George's Road	Lansdown View	18 (10 raised beds)	3+ years
Larkhall	Charlcombe Lane	96	1+ years
Lower Common East	Upper Bristol Road	146	2+ years
Lower Common West (organic site)	Upper Bristol Road	58	2+ years
Lyncombe Hill Farm	Alexandra Park	52	3+ years
Lyncombe Vale	Lyncombe Vale Road	11	1+ years
Mendip Gardens	Banwell Road	15	3+ years
Monksdale Road	Monksdale Road	138	2+ years
Moorfields Road	Moorfields Road	31	1+ years
Ring Common	Cow Lane	73	2+ years

18. Recently there had been a shift in focus from growing (only) to 'growing and health', with the benefits on wellbeing and physical health from managing an allotment being recognised.
19. Members when exploring the potential flexibility around tenancies learnt that Bath's allotment tenancies were currently allocated to a named individual. The current arrangements did not allow formal sharing of tenancies/allotments but anecdotally officers were aware of informal sharing arrangements taking place.
20. The fundamental challenge to emerge during information gathering was the difficulty in identifying land/space for new allotment provision, particularly in Bath. One new allotment site had been established in Bath in the last eight years at Fairfield/Valley Park, consisting of 20 plots. The council receives money from developers as part of planning gain agreements, such as Section

106, but officers found it difficult to utilise, with allotments generating public opposition when proposed for an area.

21. Community gardening where people are allowed to grow in public spaces was cited as a successful initiative. [The Alice Park Scheme](#)- managed by Alice Park Trust – was given as an example. Other initiatives included Walcot Street (opposite the YMCA), recognised as ‘outstanding’ in the South West in Bloom ‘Its Your Neighbourhood’ Competition 2019.
22. In addition, several allotments included areas managed as a community space. This was given to an individual at a reduced rate and utilised for bees, orchards and ponds. Additional communal spaces were seen as a positive initiative that helps people on the waiting list have a taste of growing.
23. The neighbourhood nature scheme was launched last year. This encourages residents to approach the Parks Team with ideas to improve the verge near their home. A risk assessment is undertaken and then an agreement can be agreed. The focus had predominantly been towards wildflower meadows, but residents had started to look at growing food. Restrictions on sheds and planting trees were in place but the initiative had been received as a good opportunity to encourage local growing.

Allotment provision - Radstock

24. The Task Group welcomed Radstock Town Council’s officer with responsibility for managing the council’s 45 allotments at Haydon.
25. Each allotment holder was charged £25 a year with the allotment size on average 110 square metres except for the raised bed allotments for children.
26. Underestimating the volume of work required was identified as key challenge for new allotment holders. However, the town council with a dedicated resource was able to offer an induction for new tenants and would now clear allotments left overgrown when vacated.
27. Positively, the allotments were seen as a space to share knowledge since experienced allotment holders readily share advice with less experienced neighbours or residents whose garden soil is completely different. Also, surplus produce was donated to the local Swallows charity café where they also serve produce they grow themselves at their head office in Westfield. Some produce, especially russet apples go to Mercy in Action’s food club.
28. Once more one of the challenges for the town council was being able to identify new parcels of land for additional allotments. This overarching difficulty was explored when the Task Group met with planning officers. A further problem is accessing a water supply, a particular problem at Larch Court allotments.

Planning and implications for local food growing

29. Any planning application for development must be determined against the development plan and the National Planning Policy Framework. The current development plan for B&NES requires provision of new food growing space and it also protects allotments. For larger schemes the applicant has to either provide provision for food growing or make a form of financial contribution typically via a S106 agreement. However, the Allotments Act 1925 and the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 only protect council owned sites, and only require need to be assessed and registered, not actually met in full. Demand fluctuates, since the 1920s when allotments kept miners from starvation (the origin of the Haydon allotments, Radstock)
30. Members noted that within Bath the council was in receipt of developer contributions however, as discussed, the Parks Team found it challenging to utilise these contributions.
31. To provide context, over the last fifteen years the council has secured green space provision for £2m including circa 70k for allotments provision. This typically was required to be spent within 5 years (can be upto 10 years). There was no evidence that these contributions had been refunded.
32. The council's Green Space Strategy determined that planning gain for allotments needs to be spent within twenty minutes' walk or within 900m metres of the development.
33. Members explored possible solutions to this challenge. Questioning whether the council could appeal to socially minded landowners who may support local food growing? However, it was recognised that this type of approach would require the resources within the council to do something with the land.
34. A further opportunity discussed was whether the Local Plan could introduce design codes for developments in respect of local food growing. The difficulty being that the provision of land is a balancing process with competing priorities. The risk highlighted being that the Local Plan could be refused by the planning inspector if priority was given to food growing over housing provision. However, members felt the council could be creative in such instances by looking at raised beds, vertical designs and living walls etc.
35. Focusing on North East Somerset, the evidence suggested that town and parish councils would benefit from some form of support to help manage allotments, as they often don't have the experience or understanding to manage them sufficiently. Members felt that the Parish Liaison or Area Forums offered an opportunity to address this gap.

Community involvement in local food growing

36. The review then explored the role of the community in supporting local food growing, welcoming groups such as the Allotment Association and Grow Timsbury to provide evidence.
37. Bath's Allotment Association (AA) included 600 members, paying a membership fee of £6.50 a year. The organisation works with 2000 plots, forming a large community. The Association was witnessing younger people and females joining in increasing numbers but once more emphasised the challenge around waiting lists for plots.
38. Members noted that the AA in developing its Engagement Strategy was challenged by the lack of dedicated officers within the council to engage with to discuss progressing initiatives.
39. A similar issue around availability of land was noted in Timsbury. Grow Timsbury was formed in 2021 with the aim of acquiring a piece of land in the village to be used as a growing space to benefit the whole community.

Agriculture

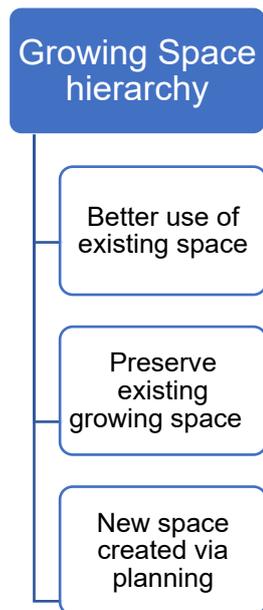
40. The review did not focus heavily on the role of local agriculture however, the Task Group did note that looking forward there was clear opportunity for B&NES as an authority to link better with farmers, including the Duchy re: Newton St Loe.
41. The role of agriculture as a local employer and contributor to the local economy was highlighted and it was felt that this should be recognised when determining development of agricultural land outside the green belt, and protective policies should be considered to safeguard this space.

Conclusions

42. The key conclusion to emerge from the review is that there is a huge enthusiasm for local food growing across the area with members hearing firsthand the demand in communities such as Timsbury, Radstock, Westfield and Bath. However, the availability of space is limited, and it is often the case that development opportunities for housing and employment (particularly in Bath) are at odds with the preservation or creation of space for growing. The Westmoreland Ward is a key example of this.
43. Members identified a hierarchy of space to summarise this key issue. The hierarchy consists of three layers based on enhancing, preserving and creating space for growing:

- i) **Level 1** - relates to being more flexible with existing space e.g. smaller allotment plots.
- ii) **Level 2** - considers preserving existing growing space, whether that be land for farming or allotment provision.
- iii) **Level 3** - creating new growing space using S106 funding, for example.

Figure 3 – The Space Hierarchy



- 44. The recommendations within the report look to support local food growing across all three tiers of the hierarchy.
- 45. From the evidence gathering it also emerged that there is lots of excellent work taking place across the authority around food security and food growing. However, the activities are not centrally coordinated through a lead officer/ coordinating group or active Strategy. Members welcomed the proposal in the developing Strategy to initiate a corporate approach and have reflected this within the recommendations.
- 46. As well as looking internally B&NES Council can build upon its strong community engagement focus to take on a major co-ordinating role and bring together community partners to ensure that the new Local Food Strategy is fully implemented in partnership with the community.

Recommendations

- i) **Better use of space** - To welcome the initiative of offering a more diverse range of allotment plots/community garden spaces and encourage the further development of this approach to help address waiting lists.
- ii) **Better use of space** - To invite allotment holders and the Allotment Association to contribute to a refresh of B&NES Council's allotment [rules and guidance](#)

To include consideration of:

 - Provision of starter plots, introductory lessons, a buddy system to help new tenants.
 - Varying the size of plots to allow sharing and to consider groups to be tenants rather than just individuals.
- iii) **Preserving growing space** – to invite the cabinet member with responsibility for planning to ensure the developing Local Plan and its supporting guidance complements the aims of the developing Local Food Growing Strategy, whilst also recognising the environmental and economic value of local Grade 1 agricultural land.
- iv) **Creating new space** -. To encourage the cabinet member with responsibility for planning to explore through Supplementary Planning Documents the potential of putting more responsibility on developers, particularly through larger developments to ensure local food growing opportunities are incorporated into submitted plans.
- v) The council to identify an officer lead for coordinating and leading implementation of the developing Local Food Strategy.
- vi) The Task Group welcomes and encourages the proposal to create a new Food Partnership – council led- which brings together community partners to implement the new Local Food Strategy.
- vii) The council through its community forums to initiate a ‘big food conversation’, inviting our communities to input into delivery of the Local Food Strategy, ensuring collective ownership.
- viii) The council through its Parish Liaison or Community Area Forums to facilitate support and the sharing of good practice for town and parish councils requesting support with the management of their allotments.

