

Introduction

1. The Government recognises the value for communities of green spaces – allotments, parks, orchards, gardens etc – we go there to run, play, walk the dog or just relax and these spaces also provide a home for our wildlife (including bees, insects, small creatures and plant-life) as well as acting as ‘natural’ defences against the effects of climate change.
2. As part of the localism and decentralisation agenda, the Government has committed to measures that will enable individuals and communities to gain access to the land they need. Whether your ambitions are to find a space to grow fruit and vegetables or create and conserve a community orchard, then our guides on these subjects should help you find the space you need and get the best use from it.
3. A compendium of case studies has been produced as a partner to this guide to illustrate the variety of reasons people have for wanting to start an allotment or find space for food growing as well as the different partners involved – from the National Society of Allotment and Leisure Gardeners through to social housing landlords and local authorities. Hopefully these will provide you with some inspiration about what can be achieved.

What do we mean by space for food growing?

4. Over recent years there has been a renaissance in grow-your-own gardening as we increasingly appreciate both the health and environmental benefits that come with growing food locally. The burgeoning popularity of ‘grow-your-own’ has meant that waiting lists for allotment plots have soared, leaving local authorities struggling to meet demand. In 1996 there was an average of 4 people waiting for every 100 plots but today around 87,000 people are on waiting lists for just over 152,000 statutory plots managed by principal local authorities¹, the equivalent of 57 people waiting for every 100 plots².
5. The majority of allotment authorities (e.g. parish, town, district or borough councils, not counties) will have one or more allotment sites in their area and will maintain their own waiting lists of people wanting a site. So get your name down and maybe ask your local authority how long they anticipate you will have to wait. The management of some allotment sites has been devolved to an Allotments Association who, in some cases, may also manage the waiting lists for the site/s for which they have responsibility. Where that is the case, the local authority should be able to either pass on your details to the appropriate organisation or, provide you with the relevant contact details. Where a local authority has provided allotment land, it should also provide a

¹ Not including those run by parish or town councils of allotment associations

² Surveys undertaken by West Kirby Transition Town in conjunction with the National Society of Allotment and Leisure Gardeners show waiting lists for allotments have grown considerably. The latest survey results were published on 6 May 2011 and are available to view at http://www.transitiontownwestkirby.org.uk/allotment_surveys.html

tenancy agreement containing important information such as who is responsible for the site's maintenance and any limits on how long you have your tenancy for as well as what you are able to use the plot for in addition to growing your own fruit and vegetables. If you are unsure about whether an allotment plot is right for you, find out if any of the sites local to you have open days where you could go along and get more information.

6. Increasingly, however, there is significant pressure on local authority land as they must balance a wide range of competing priorities for land, including use for other leisure and recreational activities that also bring people together. Where a local authority has no allotment sites at all, you can get together with five other friends/neighbours in your local area and tell your local authority that you all want an allotment. Local authorities (except Inner London Boroughs) must take that into consideration when fulfilling their duties under the Allotments Acts 1908-1950 (to provide allotments where they are of the opinion that there is a demand for them in its area).
7. The majority of larger local authorities have allotment strategies which will explain what is being done to make more plots available: if yours doesn't, you might also bring the Local Government Association's good practice on the subject to their attention.³
8. But you don't need to wait. You can try to find other land which could be easily converted into allotment plots or community gardens, such as derelict public or private sector land; green space surrounding social housing estates; or land owned by a school, a residential care home or hospital. Grow it, Cook it, Eat it, a Groundwork project in Salford, used the space in alleyways behind and between people's properties.
9. If your project is aimed at a particular group (e.g. young children; elderly adults, or individuals recuperating from a long/serious illness or injury, you may be more likely to get access to land from a school, hospital, nursing home etc as they will see the benefits for their students/residents/patients etc. Increasingly schools are getting directly involved in food growing projects as can be seen from the published case studies; maybe your own child's school has an ongoing project and would welcome your help as a parent/carer or other relative. Alternatively, you could twin with the school and set up a joint allotment style project with nearby residents - subject, of course, to protecting the safety of the children being taught there. The National Society of Allotment and Leisure Gardeners whose aims are the protection, preservation and promotion of allotments has an additional membership category for schools.
10. In March 2011 the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs-commissioned *Food Growing in Schools' Taskforce*, chaired by Garden Organic and bringing together expertise from the private sector, schools, environmental organisations and the media, reported. The report raised further awareness of the opportunities available for food growing in schools, the benefits that such activities can bring to children's education, health and

³ "Growing in the Community", Second Edition, [Local Government Association 2008](#); and "A Place to Grow", [Local Government Association 2010](#)

well-being and the range of support available for schools interested in getting involved in food growing projects.⁴ The Royal Horticultural Society also offers comprehensive support for school gardening projects through its Campaign for School Gardening.⁵

How do I start?

11. How you go about starting to grow your own food will depend very much on the type of space you are most interested in using and what you want to use it for. So if you are simply interested in growing food to meet the individual needs of yourself and, perhaps, your family, you could either join a waiting list for a local authority allotment plot to become available or ask your council about privately-run allotment plots in your area. Alternatively, either on your own or joining up with others in your block or on your estate, you could explore growing food in containers (pots, tubs, troughs etc) on roof-tops or balconies.
12. Otherwise, why not contact the Federation of City Farms and Community Gardens who will be able to tell you if there is a community garden project running in your area which you could join in with. This is more likely to be a communal activity as space on community gardens is often very limited with an expectation that the whole community should benefit from gardening activities. That means you and your family get to meet new people as well as enjoying the benefits to your health and general well-being of getting outdoors into green spaces away from traffic and thoughts of work.
13. Alternatively, individuals wishing to grow food but who do not have the space in which to do so might want to consider sharing land with homeowners or other landowners who either do not have the time, capacity or inclination to maintain that land. The Landshare web site was set up specifically to match up such individuals. Garden share schemes are also being developed, an example of which is in the London Borough of Wandsworth which offers “Garden Partners”, a garden share scheme run by Age UK, where elderly people with gardens in need of maintenance partner up with people seeking gardens. <http://www.ageuk.org.uk/wandsworth/our-services/garden-partners/>
14. Community gardens (and farms) are mainly community-managed projects in urban areas ranging from tiny wildlife gardens and fruit and vegetable plots on housing estates to large city farms. Community gardens are usually set up by local volunteers and many rely on dedicated volunteers to continue running, although some are run as partnerships with local authorities or even employ paid workers. The activities of these community gardens will vary considerably but as well as food-growing activities, can include training courses, school visits, individual allotments and community businesses (e.g. Arkwright Meadows Community Gardens in Nottinghamshire involving a variety of organisations including RHS, FCFCG and Groundwork). Some may even provide play facilities and sports facilities and after school and holiday

⁴ The report can be viewed at Garden Organic’s web site at <http://www.gardenorganic.org.uk/organicgardening/food-growing-in-schools.php>.

⁵ Two reports published by the RHS about the benefits of gardening in schools can be found at www.rhs.org.uk/schoolgardening

schemes. You may even want to start one of these projects yourself. For more information, contact the Federation of City Farms and Community Gardens at www.farmgarden.org.uk. In addition, many Royal Horticultural Society groups run community garden projects and information about the resources they offer can be found at www.rhs.org.uk/communities

Community group wanting to start a food growing project?

15. Established community and voluntary groups that already have expertise in providing support to vulnerable people such as disabled people, victims of domestic violence or children might consider food growing projects as a way of providing the people they work for with opportunities to learn new skills, tackle post-traumatic stress disorders or overcome potential self-esteem issues. For example, Brockwell Park Community Greenhouses provides tailored activities for children and adults with learning disabilities whilst the ActivLives charity involved prisoners on license from an open prison to help with building the infrastructure of the garden.
16. Alternatively, you may just want to start a community garden with the aim of engaging the interest of everyone in the community regardless of age, background or interests (e.g. York Unifying Multicultural Initiative). The benefits of such projects are enormous: ranging from providing people with new opportunities to get active and healthy whilst also meeting new people; providing people with new skills and renewed self-esteem; and promoting inter-community harmony. Allotments and other green spaces also provide the perfect antidote to the stresses and strains of urban living – both for humans and for wildlife (such as bees, insects, small animals; and flora and fauna).
17. Either way, your first step will be to identify land that you can use. This could be derelict land belonging to the local authority or to a private company or individual (e.g. Dearne Valley, Bolton). Or maybe there is space on the housing estate where you live which could be cultivated as gardening space (e.g. Seeds for Change, North Devon and Ebury Bridge Gardening Group). Who owns the estate or the freehold of the estate? Find out from them if you can use some of this space to get a gardening club going. Neighbourhoods Green is a partnership initiative supported by a wide variety of organisations including the National Housing Federation and the Royal Horticultural Society through their “It’s Your Neighbourhood” Programme. The partnership raises awareness about the importance of housing green space and supports social landlords, tenants and residents and community groups to raise the quality of their design, management and safe use So if you and others who live on your housing estate have good ideas but are struggling to get a project off the ground, get in touch with Neighbourhoods Green at www.neighbourhoodsgreen.org.uk where they also have toolkits to help groups make the most out of their green space or RHS at www.rhs.org.uk/itsyourneighbourhood.
18. Perhaps you and other potential allotment holders live near a derelict allotment site? If so, why not approach the council and see if you can work

with them to bring the space back into use and how this might best be done (e.g. York Unifying Multicultural Initiative; and The People's Community Garden, Ipswich). Find out if your council has a policy on asset transfer, or would be willing to consider transferring the land to you. The Asset Transfer Unit www.atu.org.uk can provide advice on this.

19. In addition, voluntary and community groups can use the Community Right to Challenge in the Localism Act 2011 which came into effect on 27 June. This new right allows groups to mount a challenge to run local authority services where they believe they can do so differently and better. This could include the management of an allotment site. They will need to submit an expression of interest which, if accepted, will trigger a procurement exercise for the service.
20. Alternatively, you may be able to exercise the new community right to reclaim tool, using the Public Request to Order Disposal (PROD) for underused/vacant land (where it is publicly owned). This new right can be exercised on most underused publicly owned land so if you have identified land which you think could be put to better use, you might want to check out who owns that land, by visiting <http://publicassets.communities.gov.uk>. Where you are thinking of using derelict land, you should check the soil first for contaminants - the land may not be appropriate for food growing or the contaminants may cost a considerable amount to clear. Under-used land, including 'brownfield' land may also have a wildlife/heritage value and or designation, so you should talk to your local authority before setting your heart on seeking its re-use. The use of land for allotments or growing food can enrich the environment and provide a home or visiting spot for a wide variety of wildlife but upheavals can also displace other creatures from living there or using it as a local food source, maybe including endangered species, and so it is best to check.
21. Where your project is aimed at a specific group (e.g. children) or has a specific objective in mind such as promoting gardening as physical or mental health therapy, you might consider getting into contact with your Primary Care Trust, local schools, Sure Start centres or nursing homes to see if they have either land to lease and/or interest from amongst their users (inpatients/outpatients, pre- or primary school children, older students, residents) in the type of project you are considering. A meanwhile lease agreement may also be helpful if you are looking to lease land in this way. Meanwhile Leases are template licenses developed by Locality that can be adapted for use by communities wanting to grow food or take advantage of unused land for recreational and leisure purposes or by landowners wanting to lease out spare land.
22. If you are finding it difficult to find out what land may be available for your food growing project, you can ask your council about any land that is available for sale in your area, and/or visit the following:
 - **Landshare**, an exchange website for people who want to grow their own fruit and/or vegetables and those with land to spare - anything from a small garden plot to considerable acres of land.
www.landshare.org.uk

- **The Place Station**, which is a web site that introduces owners of land and buildings across the UK to social and community entrepreneurs with ideas for transforming their local area.
www.theplacestation.org.uk
- The Federation of City Farms and Community Gardens are developing a **Community Land Advisory Service** designed to act as a trusted intermediary and broker between landowners and community groups.
www.communitylandadvice.org.uk

23. Where you have identified land that you want to buy which is of great importance to the life of the community (eg existing temporary allotment sites), local voluntary and community organisations and Parish councils can nominate it for the local authority to list as an “asset of community value” under the Community Right to Bid provisions in the Localism Act. Under these provisions, when and if the owner puts the listed asset up for sale, community interest groups will have an ability to trigger a 6 month window of opportunity - a delay before the owner can dispose of the asset – to prepare a business plan and raise capital to bid for the land. The Community Right to Bid is due to come into effect in Autumn.

24. New Neighbourhood Planning provisions in the Localism Act 2011 provide communities with powers to decide the future of the places where they live and work. With a neighbourhood plan, communities will be able to establish general planning policies for the development and use of land in a neighbourhood. They will be able to say, for example, where new homes and offices should be built, and what they should look like and be able to influence what green spaces there should be. A referendum at the end of the process gives communities the final say on whether a neighbourhood development plan or order comes into force in their area. There are 200 communities acting as 'frontrunners' for testing out the principles of Neighbourhood Planning. In Bermondsey, for example, the community is looking at whether green space on council estates could be used to provide allotments, as part of their neighbourhood plan.

25. In addition, the National Planning Policy Framework was published on 27 March
[\(http://www.communities.gov.uk/planningandbuilding/planningsystem/planningpolicy/planningpolicyframework/\)](http://www.communities.gov.uk/planningandbuilding/planningsystem/planningpolicy/planningpolicyframework/). A new policy in the Framework enables local communities, through local and neighbourhood plans, to identify for special protection green areas of particular importance to them. This could include, for example, allotments – although local people may consider this unnecessary in the case of statutory allotments, which are already protected by Section 8 of the Allotments Act 1925. By designating land as Local Green Space, local communities will be able to rule out new development other than in very special circumstances.

26. Community groups can approach the Asset Transfer Unit which provides expert advice, guidance and support to local people and organisations who want to take ownership and/or management of under-used land and buildings. DCLG has funded the Asset Transfer Unit to develop practical

guide for community groups wishing to take on the management of their local public space:

<http://www.atu.org.uk/Guidance>

Attracting interest in your food growing project

26. From allotment associations and gardening on social housing estates through to community gardens, everyone involved in food growing projects is likely to want to attract greater community interest in these activities. The Local Government Association's good practice guidance for allotments includes useful hints on effective promotion and your council may be willing to help with this⁶. Local press, TV and radio are always looking for interesting news, and an interview on local radio can be highly productive. Also you might consider contacting doctors' and/or dentists' surgeries; schools; village halls and other local meeting places and ask if you can leave your leaflets for people to pick up and take away. The number of volunteers you have should gradually increase as more people get to hear about the project, so continued media activity is recommended. The benefits of growing your own food are enormous – you can be healthier eating more fruit and vegetables; whilst engaging children in food growing can increase their interest in then cooking and eating it.
27. Encouraging non-traditional activities, such as sculpture could be a way of attracting interest; open days where the community is invited to come and buy surplus fruit and vegetables and/or learn some basic gardening techniques may generate interest in the project which could then translate into more active users of the project. Whilst the Allotments Acts 1908-1950 state that allotments cannot be used to support a business, the sale of surplus produce can be carried out where the activity is clearly secondary to the main purpose of growing food personally for the allotment holder and their family. Gardening lessons for new users is perhaps another way of reaching people whose inclination may be to get involved with your group but whose lack of any gardening knowledge makes them fear taking that first step (e.g. Kitchen Gardens, a Groundwork project in Kensington & Chelsea). Garden Organic runs a Master Gardener Scheme which trains local people in how to encourage and support local people to grow food. Look to see if you have a master gardener locally or consider getting trained as one yourself (as well as getting more people involved in gardening, you will also learn valuable new skills of mentoring and interpersonal relations. <http://mastergardeners.org.uk>) Similarly, great fun can be had with festivals and competitions as a way of encouraging wider community interest in the prospect of getting more involved on a regular basis (e.g The Growing Kitchen, Wenlock Barn).
28. A more rigorous and intensive way of attracting interest in your project is to raise its reputation through the Green Flag Award (and Green Flag Community Award) schemes. The Green Flag Award is the national quality standard for parks and other recreational green spaces. It is run as an annual, peer reviewed, voluntary award scheme. The scheme rewards high standards of management and maintenance of green spaces in England and Wales and

⁶ "Growing in the Community", Second Edition, [Local Government Association 2008](#); and "A Place to Grow", [Local Government Association 2010](#)

the commitment and skill of those involved in creating those spaces. The related Green Flag Community Award recognises the achievements of community groups that own or manage spaces. The scheme recognises the achievements of community groups that own or manage public spaces and helps to ensure quality management on an on-going basis. The scheme is being reviewed and there may be an entry fee to help cover the judging expenses and administration of the scheme. For more information, visit the Green Flag web site at <http://greenflag.keepbritaintidy.org/> Royal Horticultural Society's "It's Your Neighbourhood" programme also offers assessment and feedback to grassroots community groups with the aim of helping them to make lasting improvements to their local areas.

Can the space be used for more than food growing?

29. Space used for food growing, such as allotment sites, can often be used for other purposes as well – keeping a small number of hens and bees; growing flowers; social events such as barbecues, tombolas, competitions and bring & buy sales or even, in some cases, a selective range of playground equipment for children to remain entertained whilst their parents dig! Multi-functional sites which incorporate activities relevant for all age groups and backgrounds, (e.g. Stewart's Road Adventure Playground, a Groundwork project in Lambeth) can be especially popular as they provide more opportunities for better integration between different age groups and enable families to introduce the fun of food growing to children who might not want to visit a site that is solely focussed on food growing. By encouraging children to grow their own food, you can inspire in them a lifelong commitment to healthy eating: children who grow and/or help cook fresh produce are more likely to want to eat it. However, such sites may need planning permission, if the erection of structures or change of use is involved, and so you should approach your local planning officer to discuss your requirements.
30. What activities can be carried out on the space you are using for food growing will often depend on what the space is and how much of it exists. For example, it is unusual for local authorities to have vacant plots on existing allotment sites so they are likely to struggle to provide space for people to partake in activities beyond growing food, keeping some animals or holding small-scale social events. However, where space is tight, it is possible that an imaginative use of the land that is available (e.g. a treehouse) could help to create a space that all the family can use. Using the space to encourage more environmental sustainability is also worth exploring: rain water can be saved in butts, for example, and can be used to water your plants and the surrounding greenery; get encouragement from other allotment holders and ask your local authority about how you might go about installing such items.
31. Where the space is a communal garden rather than a local authority owned allotment plot, then having a picnic or barbecue area with tables, a sculpting/painting area or children's corner could prove popular. Similarly, setting aside some land for use as a pond or woodland to encourage wildlife, or for a community facility (building or outdoor space) could be a positive way of encouraging good community integration on the site (e.g. Diggin' It, Plymouth). Selling the produce grown in a communal garden can help to fund it and is a great way to benefit the wider community and share the food you

have grown. If you are considering any building work or changing the use of the land, it is always best to speak to the local authority in the first instance to explore with them what can be done and any permissions that may be needed.

32. Local authority plots, as mentioned above, are governed by tenancy agreements which might specify particular activities that cannot be undertaken on the site. But whatever space you are using for your project, if you are planning a social activity, it is always a good idea to speak to other plot holders and/or residents in neighbouring houses to ensure that your planned activities will not cause unnecessary disruption (through loud music, fireworks etc). By talking to your neighbours, you may also be able to attract more interest in the activities you are planning.
33. One of the main reasons for the resurgent interest in allotments has been people's interest in healthy, sustainable locally-grown food and if you have been involved in allotment growing for some time, you'll probably be keen to share the benefits of your fresh produce by gifting surpluses (if you are on a local authority owned allotment site). If you are involved in a community food enterprise or interested in starting one in your community, Making Local Food Work may be able to help you with information, advice and support. For more information, visit <http://www.makinglocalfoodwork.co.uk/index.cfm>. Or perhaps you are more interested in the benefits of producing compost from green/food waste and using that for the benefit of your local communities. If so, the Community Composting Network's web site may be of interest to you - <http://www.communitycompost.org/>

Will I need planning permission for a community garden / activities on allotment sites?

34. Land used purely for food growing, including some community gardens, would generally be classed as agricultural for planning purposes. The use of land for the purposes of agriculture does not normally require planning permission. However, this is subject to a few caveats so discussing your ideas with the local planning authority for your area before undertaking any work is recommended.
35. If you would like to use the land for a range of mixed uses (for example, an allotment with educational or other community facilities), this is likely to take your project beyond the scope of what would be considered 'agricultural' and may therefore require planning permission. Again, speaking with your local planning authority is recommended.

Physical Development

36. Structures that you wish to build or place on the land (such as sheds, tree houses, community hall, café or children's play equipment) may require planning permissions depending on the circumstances. If you are unsure about whether an intended use would constitute development, it is always best to speak to your local planning officer before carrying out any development of this nature. However, you can also contact Planning Portal at

<http://www.planningportal.gov.uk>. Alternatively, you can discuss your proposals with either the Federation of City Farms and Community Gardens or with the National Society of Allotment and Leisure Gardeners who provide advice to local authorities and allotment users on all aspects of running an allotment from what and how to grow to obtaining land for a new site and protecting and managing existing sites.

Trees

37. Trees, hedgerows and non-food plants on allotments can make a distinctive contribution to local biodiversity – offering a home to wildlife and by providing ‘green corridors’ which link to other nearby habitats. ‘Green corridors’ are particularly important to pollinators, such as bees, who often suffer in urban environments from having to travel too far. Trees and hedges can also provide valuable shade and wind protection. If your plans include tree work or tree felling, you may need to discuss this with your local planning authority or the Forestry Commission. Your local authority will be able to advise on trees protected by Tree Preservation Orders, conditions on a planning permission or because they are in a Conservation Area. The Forestry Commission controls tree felling if a large volume of wood is involved and can advise whether you will need a felling license – <http://www.forestry.gov.uk/forestry/infd-6dfk86>

Where can I get funding to start a food growing project?

Capital Growth

38. A partnership initiative between London Food Link, the Mayor of London and the Big Lottery’s Local Food Fund, championed by the Chair of the London Food Board. The partnership aims to create 2012 new community food growing spaces across London by the end of 2012. Capital Growth offers practical help, grants, training and support to groups wanting to establish community food growing projects as well as advice to landowners. <http://www.capitalgrowth.org>

Big Lottery Fund

39. Every year BIG Lottery Fund gives millions of pounds from the National Lottery to good causes. Their money goes to community groups and to projects that improve health, education and the environment. <http://www.biglotteryfund.org.uk/>
The following are examples of programmes for which community green space projects may qualify:

Basics Programme

The programme aims to ensure that voluntary and community organisations throughout England have access to high quality support that will help them to be more effective

Awards for All

A lottery grants programme aimed at local communities throughout the UK. Grants of between £300 and £10,000 are available to support participation in art, sport, heritage and community activities, and projects that promote education, the environment and health in the local community. Applications can be made at any time, the application form is short and simple, and the outcome is given to the applicant within eight weeks.

<http://www.awardsforall.org.uk>

Esmee Fairbairn Foundation

40. The aim of the foundation is to improve the quality of life throughout the UK. Their primary interests are in the cultural life of the UK, education and learning, the public open spaces and enabling disadvantaged people to participate more fully in society. The foundation has funded the Federation of City Farms and Community Gardens and Landlife (who work on derelict or unused land in the centre of communities, mainly in the north west of England).

<http://www.esmeefairbairn.org.uk/>

Growing Localities

41. The 'Growing Localities' programme was launched on 17 May 2012 by the City of London Corporation's charity City Bridge Trust. The programme marks the Diamond Jubilee with a £2m boost for green spaces and horticulture in London.

42. The programme has 2 distinct strands, Growing and Greening and Horticultural Work Training. For more information about this one-off grant programme and details of how to apply visit:

<http://www.citybridgetrust.org.uk/CBT/Grants/GrowingLocalities/>

Sources of additional information and guidance

National Society of Allotment and Leisure Gardeners:

www.nsalg.org.uk

Allotments Regeneration Initiative

www.farmgarden.org.uk/ari

Asset Transfer Unit

www.atu.org.uk

Federation of City Farms and Community Gardens

www.farmgarden.org.uk

Green Flag Award Scheme

<http://www.keepbritaintidy.org/GreenFlag/>

Garden Organic

<http://www.gardenorganic.org.uk/index.php>

Neighbourhoods Green

www.neighbourhoodsgreen.org.uk

Keep Britain Tidy – Eco Schools

<http://www.keepbritaintidy.org/ecoschools/>

Growing Schools

<http://www.growingschools.org.uk>

Locality

www.locality.org.uk

Landshare

www.landshare.org

Making Local Food

<http://www.makinglocalfoodwork.co.uk/index.cfm>Work

Planning Portal

<http://www.planningportal.gov.uk>

Community Composting Network

<http://www.communitycompost.org/>

Royal Horticultural Society

www.rhs.org.uk/communities

Groundwork

www.groundwork.org.uk