

**The Case for a
Benchmark Standard for
Community Growing and
Allotment Provision in
Northern Ireland**





Foreword

Social Farms & Gardens NI and Local Council officers from each of the 11 Local Councils have co-designed this proposed Benchmark Standard for Community Growing and Allotment Provision in NI. In addition, the report recommends actions to support the sector to flourish. The research, over the past 18 months, involved organising workshops with expert input, discussion groups, interviews and policy information network meetings examining the amount of land designated for community growing and the varying processes and barriers across Northern Ireland for the release of public land for community growing.

Community gardens, allotments and growing projects have proved their value to their local communities - the source of fresh local affordable food, a space for our precious pollinators and wildlife, a place to enhance physical and mental well-being and build strong resilient communities that are contributing to climate action and sustainable development goals. They play an important role in place shaping promoting people's health, happiness and well-being.

In order for this developing sector to thrive Local Councils and public landowners need to ensure the energy, excitement and enthusiasm of communities, that want to grow, is harnessed rather than depleted by disproportionate procedures for food growing on public land. The release of public land in a deliberative and supportive manner is the significant action that will ensure there is an abundance of food growing projects in our communities in the future.

Social Farms & Gardens NI - Patricia Wallace, Manager; Miriam Turley, Growing Resilience Officer and Lead Report Researcher; Conor O'Kane Growing Resilience Officer, North West


This is a really important report for people and places in Northern Ireland. Huge thanks must go to Social Farms & Gardens NI and those Council officers who took part in the research and together showed us not only the great community work already going on but pointed to how more people could see the benefits of growing food locally.

In this perfect storm of climate crisis, food costs and health service demands, the evidence of getting more people actively growing close to their homes is well made and undeniable. That's why we at Incredible Edible are working with partners in England to create a Right to Grow on Public Land that would make it easier for so many more to nurture communities close to home.

For Northern Ireland the report's recommendations could help us all in the UK see what a step change in engaging people in their own well-being looks like. Fantastic piece of work.

Pam Warhurst CBE, Community Leader, activist and environment worker best known for founding the voluntary gardening initiative Incredible Edible in Todmorden, West Yorkshire





The rapid increase of interest in community growing in recent years has been accompanied by a significant increase in demand for land for community growing spaces, but still, ready access to land is a primary obstacle facing local communities. Public land, especially land set aside by Local Councils for community allotments remains the primary route in support of citizen interest in growing. Though allotments fulfil many valuable functions there are constraints to the wider purpose of delivering the collective ideas behind 'social farms and gardens'. We don't leave allotments behind, and this report makes the case for consolidation of existing practice and identifying further land sites to expand allotment growing. The agenda however is much more ambitious than what allotments alone provide. The movement has eyes on a bigger prize. Large swathes of public land remain un-purposed and derelict, underutilised spaces, idle, waiting on market solutions. And yet, community innovation and creativity bring readymade proposals to repurpose declining green and brown field sites, transforming neglect and abandonment into ventures for community fulfilment.

Engaging Local Councils in NI to reimagine possibilities for public land has been one of the most significant achievements of community land use advocates in recent decades. The work of Social Farms & Gardens in NI has subtly engaged local government to consider bigger picture opportunities, opportunities that are taking shape in the emergence of social farms and community gardens, adding support for collective ownership to sit alongside the tradition of allotment growing. A new narrative is beginning to take shape and play out. Public bodies are considering the social value their assets present to fulfil policy objectives concerned with personal health and wellbeing. New forms of community organising are visible across our villages, towns and cities covering large heritage landscape management to support for the most marginalised in our society with access to social farms and gardens.

This report records what has been achieved, what has yet to come and what's needed going forward. The Benchmark Standard for Community Growing and Allotment Provision in Northern Ireland sets out critical recommendations for action that embeds future practice by drawing from existing best practice, drawing from lessons learned by local government and communities working together. It adds substantially to the wider narrative on the rights of people, of communities and place and provides further evidence of the social impact and social return on investing public land into the hands of those in whose name it exists, the public at large. Development Trusts NI welcome this report and the contribution it makes to the campaign for community ownership of land and property assets.

Charlie Fisher, Chief Executive Officer, Development Trusts NI



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Introduction



Introduction: Social Farms & Gardens (SF&G) is a community development charity working to support community growing projects

The benefits of community growing spaces are many, from the proven physical, mental health and well-being benefits to educational, environmental and cultural gains. There is also ample evidence that they hugely increase social capital by encouraging active citizenship and social connection, help reduce health inequalities, and contribute to biodiversity enhancement and climate mitigation.

In recent years, and especially since the series of Lockdowns during the Coronavirus pandemic, SF&G in Northern Ireland have witnessed a rise in the interest in community growing. In addition to the inequality crisis, the climate crisis, food insecurity in the wake of Brexit and Covid, and an increasing desire from people to be connected to food, it seemed important to look at any structural support that could be offered to increase capacity for local food growing.

In 2021 Social Farms & Gardens (supported by the Urban Agriculture Consortium and in partnership with Development Trusts NI) carried out a series of well attended workshops with Local Council officers in Northern Ireland to identify barriers to access to land for community growing. The workshops showed that:

- Developing policy and resourcing for Community Growing on Public Land needs to be prioritised in order for the vital work of the sector to thrive. It cannot be reliant solely on the goodwill and energy of individual Council officers.
- Calculating targets for growing space per head of population would bring NI into line with the other UK nations and provide a useful way of assessing our ongoing performance.
- A permanent staffing and resource base for community growing within Councils is needed for developing procedures and maintaining relationships between Council officers and communities. This would support community growing initiatives which at present are vulnerable to changing or under-resourced staff, and finite funding streams.
- It is important to include the Housing Executive and other public landowners in this work.
- Social Farms & Gardens could develop a framework for Councils and other bodies from their experience gained in NI and across the UK.

(For a copy of the full report from these workshops contact miriam@farmgarden.org.uk.)



Castlecaulfield Horticultural Society in Parkanaur Walled Garden

A key weakness identified in Northern Ireland is that public bodies have no statutory duty to provide allotments or community gardens, unlike in the rest of the UK and Ireland. Having since carried out detailed research with all 11 councils into the provision of allotment plots and community gardening space in Northern Ireland, and taking into consideration the surge in demand for community growing space in recent years (and especially since March 2020), we believe that now is the time to provide a benchmark standard to aid local authorities and public bodies in NI in bringing the quantity (and quality) of provision in line with and beyond the rest of the UK.

This provision standard can be met by direct Council provision, and by enabling local communities to grow by making public land available. Proportionate community asset transfer procedures can facilitate a productive relationship between community groups and public landowners.

The majority of the community growing projects in Northern Ireland run on Council owned land, and all of the 11 Councils are already working in a generous and empowering way with communities wanting to grow. We know the energy is there within Councils to develop this practice in its many forms. Through the outcomes of community planning processes, Councils are increasingly seeing how public assets can contribute to community identified goals. Many publicly owned pieces of land in NI have underused areas that could have value added through community management for food growing, while also saving money through reduced management costs, and attracting investment through grants and the community sector. All this can be done while achieving shared aims of improving community cohesion, health and wellbeing, biodiversity enhancement and climate mitigation.

However there are numerous barriers to community management of public land, including limited resources, different approaches from different departments of Council and different public bodies, lack of awareness of the benefits of this way of working, and the variety of models that can be used, and lack of support and access to resources that could help facilitate partnerships. There are also policy barriers, and at times a cultural hesitancy to releasing land to communities for less than market value. Some barriers are within the power of each Council to change, and others may require coordinated effort and appeal to outside bodies for support. In all cases cooperation, mutual support and building relationships will help us all.

Social Farms & Gardens would like to acknowledge the help from a number of people and organisations for their input in the preparation of this report, namely:

- **Officers from the 11 Councils in Northern Ireland who generously gave time to collect information for the survey of current provision**
- **Louise O'Kane, Community Places**
- **Charlie Fisher, Development Trusts NI**
- **Jeremy Iles and Maddy Longhurst, the Urban Agriculture Consortium**
- **Dónal McCormack and other volunteers at Community Gardens Ireland for sharing information gathered as part of their own policy work in Ireland**
- **Arthur Acheson, Ministerial Advisory Group for Architecture and the Built Environment for Northern Ireland**
- **Ken Sterrett, Former Senior Lecturer in Planning and Urban Design at Queen's University Belfast**
- **Community garden staff and volunteers across Northern Ireland for their excellent work and for the information in this report and the use of photos**
- **Our funders: The National Lottery Community Fund, the Urban Agriculture Consortium and Sustain**



Harvest at Whiterock Community Garden, a community run garden on Belfast City Council land

Sign at Peas Park, Belfast

Summary of findings

7

Councils are providing allotments

117

Of these, the average number of plots provided is 117 (varying sizes)

Plot costs vary and are affordable but more expensive than in the rest of the UK

3

Councils provide Community Gardens

5

Councils have a dedicated page on their website for community growing

2

Councils have community growing policies, with 3 more in development

2

Councils are trialling Community Asset Transfer policies

Provision is less than the rest of the UK, but without figures from other NI public bodies, direct comparison remains difficult

Key Recommendation

It is recommended that Councils in NI aim in the next 5 years, in collaboration with other public bodies, to provide 1250sqm (0.3 acres) of community growing space per 1,000 households

This could be in the form of community gardens, community orchards or allotments. 1250 sqm is the equivalent of 5 full sized allotment plots.

This figure is chosen to allow comparison with other UK standards, for example the National Society of Allotment and Leisure Gardeners Association (NSALG) recommendation that 20 full sized plots are provided per 1,000 households. The 1250sqm standard is lower than reported averages in the rest of the UK, and SF&G recommends that this standard is revisited and extended in 5 years' time. However, this standard is recommended as it is ambitious, but achievable for all Councils, working with other public bodies. For Councils who will more easily reach this standard in the next 5 years, a higher standard should be adopted. Other Councils will not easily meet this target in 5 years, in these instances we recommend setting an alternative target, for example doubling provision every 5 years, based on demand, or similar target.

Recommendations are made in Part 3 on potential collaborations and funding sources to allow this work (which may involve acquiring land, or partnerships with other landowners, and capital works on site) to happen.



Community Orchard on Choice Housing Association land in Belfast

Recommendations are also included in improving structures and processes within Councils and with other public bodies to enable more community growing to take place. These include proportionate Community Asset Transfer policies, dedicated web page for community growing, and targets for waiting list times.

We have included a sample proportionate Community Asset Transfer procedure in Appendix I, along with two checklists which can be used as part of the procedure to identify suitable land, which have been developed in conversation with Council officers in the process of compiling this report, and in response to the absence of such procedure in most NI Councils. This procedure, if implemented in the proportionate and community centred manner in which it is intended, will enable Council and other public bodies to support independent community groups taking on management of land.



Part 1

Background Research:
Existing Policy and
Legislation

A Short History of Allotments and Community Gardens in Northern Ireland

The distribution of land for growing in NI has developed over the past 250 years, following the enclosures and the Gavelkind and Tanistry rulings, with similarities and differences from the rest of the island and from Britain. In the late 18th century, rural labourers made up a major part of Irish society, and provision of land for cottiers to grow food was seen as a way to stave off the worst poverty, obviating any threat they may pose to the established authority, and also to keep labourers close to the landowners crops so they were on hand when work needed to be done. In this way it meant that the labourer was paid partly in controlled access to land rather than in cash, and the garden was used for subsistence farming, rather than for profit. Gardens were also seen by policy makers as being morally and even spiritually improving for the rural poor. Within Ulster, following the Industrial Revolution, urbanisation of the population proceeded at a considerable pace during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In 1821, 2% of the population lived in towns of over 10,000 population (in effect, in Belfast). By 1901, the proportion was 28%, spread over a greater number of settlements, and by 1926, it was 36%. Belfast city grew from a population of 7,000 in 1800 to 400,000 in 1900, having outgrown Dublin, the former capital.

In Belfast the First World War led to a rapid increase in the number of allotments. These were in the main provided by the Garden Plots Association, not the City Corporation, but in response to the war effort the corporation leased land from the city parks to the Garden Plots Association, and provided a lot of advisory and administrative support. By the later part of 1915 more than 700 plots, comprising about 65 acres (26.3 hectares) had been established in eight different sites around Belfast. By the start of 1916, 1700 plots were planned, covering 149.74 acres (60.6 hectares). Plots in Belfast in this time ranged in size from 243 sqm to 324 sqm, but most allotments were of the smaller size. By September 1916 the success of Belfast Allotments had attracted national attention, being reported in the press, and the Garden Plots Association planned to form branches in all towns in Ulster.

Between the wars land requisitioned for allotments was returned to its original function. In Belfast in the 1930s the main allotment areas were Orangefield, the Ardoyne and Ballysillan.

The Second World War again prompted a response across the country to “Dig for Victory”. The Department of Agriculture for Northern Ireland issued reports urging allotmenters and gardeners to “leave no available land vacant of a crop, and make additional sowings of salad crops, to make good the shortage of imported vegetables”. During war land was requisitioned from City Parks and other public spaces for food growing. A Belfast Allotments Association was formed to give advice to ploholders. Leaflets were produced, noticeboards erected and demonstration plots laid out. Competitions and instructional lectures were organised. At the beginning of the war the number of allotments in Northern Ireland was approximately 1,800. By the end of the war the number was measured to be 7,000. A comparably large number of home gardens were also converted to vegetable production. (Adapted from *Rooted in the Soil, A History of Cottage Gardens and Allotments in Ireland since 1750*, Bell & Watson, 2012)

Allotment Legislation in Great Britain and Northern Ireland

Ireland

Before the establishment of the Irish State and Northern Ireland in 1922, when the UK government was carrying out cottage building schemes for rural labourers, the Labourers Cottages and Allotments (Ireland) Act, 1882 assigned tenants with an allotment (no more than half an acre) when a cottage was provided. The law still remains in effect in the Republic of Ireland. Within the first few years of the Irish State, the Acquisition of Land (Allotments) Act, 1926 was passed by the Dáil. This act was as a result of lobbying from plot holders throughout Ireland, and sought to mirror the 1908 Small Holdings & Allotments Act for England and Wales.

England

In 1908 the Small Holdings and Allotments Act (England & Wales) came into force, placing a duty on local authorities to provide sufficient allotments, according to demand. This Act did not apply to Northern Ireland. The rights of allotment holders in England and Wales were strengthened through the Allotments Acts of 1922, and again in the Allotments Act of 1925, which established statutory allotments which local authorities could not sell off or covert without Ministerial consent, known as Section 8 Orders. The 1922 Act specified 40 rods (1/4 of an acre) as the maximum size of an allotment garden.

The 2011 Localism Act as applied to England contains a wide range of measures to devolve more powers to councils and neighbourhoods and give local communities greater control over local decisions.



Apple pressing at Donegal Pass Community Garden, Belfast

Scotland

In Scotland the Community Empowerment Act came into force on 1 April 2018. It updates and simplifies legislation on allotments. It requires local authorities to maintain waiting lists and take reasonable steps to provide allotments if the waiting lists exceed certain trigger points. No one should be on a waiting list for more than 5 years. This is important, as legislation in other parts of the UK is viewed by some as ineffective on this point: though Councils are required to provide allotments, no timescales are attached to this duty, and therefore in actual fact Councils can indefinitely deprioritise taking action.

The Community Empowerment Act also strengthens the protection for allotments and clarifies the rights of local authorities and plot holders. Provisions allow allotments to be 250 square metres in size or a different size that is to be agreed between the person requesting an allotment and the local authority. The Act also requires fair rents to be set and allows tenants to sell surplus produce grown on an allotment (other than with a view to making a profit). There is a requirement for local authorities to develop a food growing strategy for their area, including identifying land that may be used as allotment sites and identifying other areas of land that could be used by a community for the cultivation of vegetables, fruit, herbs or flowers. When detailing how the authority intends to increase the provision of allotment sites and community growing areas of land in its area it must provide a description of whether and how this will apply to communities which experience socio-economic disadvantage.

Wales

In 2020, Social Farms & Gardens was commissioned by Welsh Government to map an evidence-based baseline of allotment provision across Wales. The rationale being that one of the First Minister's Manifesto pledges was to double allotment provision in Wales.

These results led to the creation of the 'Welsh Allotment Regeneration Initiative' with a Welsh Government investment of £130,000 targeted at the local authorities with the poorest level provision. The funding was provided to Gwynedd, Wrexham & Swansea local authority areas who could receive £26,000 of capital funding each to increase their allotment plot provision. This work is ongoing.

Northern Ireland

In contrast in Northern Ireland, a duty to provide land for allotments was never established and land reform giving communities more rights over how land is used, and more power to acquire land has never happened. Councils can provide allotments but do not have a statutory duty to do so (the main points of the NI 1932 Allotments Act are summarised below).

Community gardens are not defined in legislation. This means that all community gardens are currently not secure in terms of legally defined areas – whereas allotments in the rest of the UK are currently defined. There has been an increase in recent years in the number of community gardens in Northern Ireland, but the law has not kept up with the pace of community development.



Comber Community Garden, a community run garden on Ards & North Down Council land

The Allotments Act (Northern Ireland), 1932

The [1932 Allotments Act](#) allows Councils to acquire and improve land for allotments, or use land already in the council's possession which is not currently needed. Allotments should not exceed more than an eighth of an acre (approx. 1,000 sqm). The Act also stipulates that Allotments should not be given to anyone already in occupation of land in excess of an eighth of an acre, and that preference in allocating allotments should be given to people who are in "poor circumstances": either due to unemployment or having a high number of dependants.

The Act stipulates that the Allotments should be let at cost, and that tenancy agreements are required. Reasons why a Council could ask someone to give up their allotment are outlined, and other regulations, including the prohibition of the keeping of live animals on allotments.

Local Authorities are allowed to purchase and provide tenants with "manures, seeds and agricultural implements", with an expectation that tenants will pay for these resources within 6 months. The Act also makes provision for Local Authorities to give grants or loans, and to lease land to not-for-profit associations wanting to provide allotments.

The following sentence in section 7 of the Act seems to indicate that Local Authorities can expect financial support from Government for this purpose: *"Any expenses incurred by the local authority for the said purpose shall be defrayed as expenses incurred by them in carrying the provisions of this Act into effect."*

The Act does not make any mention of community gardens or orchards, and any future legislative reform would benefit from including other forms of community growing.



Community Orchard being planted in the People's Park in Ballymena

Comparison of NI legislation with best practice examples in other European countries

A review of community growing legislation of other European countries (namely Austria, Denmark, England, Ireland, Germany and Wales) has highlighted some areas where community growing is protected in law in ways missing in Northern Irish legislation. They are listed here for any Council wishing to strengthen their community growing policies.

- Protection of existing sites (establishing statutory sites)
- Definition of allotments and community gardens
- Rent caps for private allotments
- Establishment of the duty to provide community growing space, timelines included, and an indication of how this will be funded
- Rights of communities to acquire land as a priority over private development when in the service of food growing and provision of public green space
- Guidance for Councils delivering these duties on recommended area per head of population, with a given walking distance of people's homes, with a recognition that some communities have less access to fresh food and green space than others, and that this is a health inequality issue

Community Planning

In terms of broader land reform, local Government reform since 2002 in Northern Ireland aimed to reposition local government as the democratically accountable leader for economic, social, and environmental well-being outcomes, and provide processes for communities to contribute to spatial planning and the design of service delivery.

In April 2015 a two-tiered planning system was introduced in Northern Ireland which transferred the majority of planning functions from central government to District Councils. This also introduced a new power of community planning led by Local Councils. The combination of these two 'place shaping' powers ideally positions Councils to support and enable community growing through provision of land and services through the Local Development Plan and Community Plan respectively. Community Planning Partnerships (CPPs) collaboratively agree actions and functions related to planning, provision, and improvement of public services. Despite these reforms, engagement is needed to embrace a broader range of environmental and social issues, including climate change and the provision of accessible green space. (Rafferty 2020)

All comparisons in this report between Northern Ireland and the rest of the UK should be read in light of the fact that Councils in the rest of the UK have a wider range of responsibilities, including schools and housing, and therefore access to more land than Councils in Northern Ireland.

In achieving the provision standards recommended here, coordination with other land-owning public bodies will be necessary. This collaboration can be facilitated through community planning structures and the statutory link between each Council's community plan and the 11 Local Development Plans (LDPs) which are currently being produced.



Blythefield Allotments, community run on Belfast City Council land

Use of Local Development Plans and Strategic Planning Policy

We believe there is an opportunity for planning policy and guidance with regard to community growing space to be made much more robust and explicit, particularly since community growing land in Northern Ireland is not protected under the current legislation. There are increasing pressures on land, and potential for the need for green infrastructure to compete with housing needs. Because of this we urge that fuller and better land zoning and policy on the role of allotments and community gardens be incorporated into the new suite of 11 Local Development Plans across the region.

The local nature of community growing provision means that issues of spatial planning, planning policy and planning guidance are critical. Community growing provision should be planned into 20-minute neighbourhoods, as part of our green and food infrastructure. The 11 Local Development Plans (LDPs) and the Strategic Planning Policy Statement (SPPS) have a key role to play in enabling community growing.

The SPPS lists 6 core principles of the new two-tier planning system:



Improving Health
and Well-being;



Creating and
Enhancing Shared
Space;



Supporting
Sustainable
Economic Growth;



Supporting Good
Design and Positive
Place Making; and



Preserving and
Improving the
Built and Natural
Environment.

The provision of community growing space can help to deliver these core principles through the inclusion of community growing for health and wellbeing, for provision of shared space, for placemaking and for improvement of the natural environment.

Each LDP should form the spatial expression of the area's Community Plan and act as a vehicle to deliver the ambitions set out in the Community Plan.

The LDP will be used in making decisions on the future development of each Council area, including individual planning applications and appeals. Given the competing demands on public land currently, for housing, for green space, for agriculture and food growing and for biodiversity, the LDPs are an important opportunity for each of the 11 Councils to allocate and zone space for community growing. The statutory link between each LDP and Community Plan should facilitate this process and enable collaborative working between the partners. The T:BUC (Together: Build United Communities) shared housing schemes offer an ideal place to deliver or pilot this approach, and relevant Departments should be part of this conversation.

NSALG has produced design-led, policy-based, [guidance](#) for planners and developers who are looking to include allotments in new developments. Sustain, in partnership with SF&G have produced a [guide](#) with examples of planning policies around the UK that support community food growing. It is aimed primarily at planning authorities to help them to use food growing as a way of creating healthy communities.

Other Forums for Communication

While Community Planning Partnerships seem the best fit for facilitating communication about cross sectoral provision and land availability for community growing, other forums of communication may be more appropriate in each Council area, for example Neighbourhood Renewal Partnerships (NRP), or Sustainable Food Place (SFP) partnerships. While well-functioning communication platforms are worth using, information from these conversations should be channelled into the community plan, which will link into the LDP in terms of spatial planning.

Sustainable Food Places

5 of the 11 NI Councils are working towards a [Sustainable Food Place Award](#). Some of the suggested actions for achieving the award are:

- Ensure communities can access and take control of green, brownfield and unused building spaces that can be used for food social enterprises and community food projects, for example by **mapping available assets and/or offering special lease options**.
- Increase participation in food growing and related activities through increased allotment provision, the incorporation of growing sites into new and existing developments, the development of edible landscapes and through initiatives such as Incredible Edible and The Big Dig.

If adopted, the recommendations in Part 3 of this report would greatly help any participating Sustainable Food Partnership to achieve an award.



Peas Park Guerrilla Garden, Belfast

Other sources of Recommended Provision

Two other well quoted UK sources of provision standards (which are both Allotment based) are the 1969 Thorpe report, which recommended 15 allotment plots per 1,000 households and the National Society of Allotment and Leisure Gardeners (NSALG) which currently recommends 20 allotment plots per 1,000 households. In square metres this is 3,750 /5,000sqm.

Provision elsewhere in the UK

In England and Wales, we are aware of some authorities quoting much higher provision levels. For example, the following paragraph in a report by Newcastle University in 2012 - [The social, health and wellbeing benefits of allotments: five societies in Newcastle](#).

“The recent increase in academic and media interest has largely been mirrored by an increase in demand for allotments generally. However, this has not been reflected in provision of plots by Local Authorities. Newcastle has a higher than average level of allotment provision (**national average is 15 plots** per 1,000 households and Newcastle has 22.2 plots per 1,000 households), however, even here there is currently a waiting list of approximately 826 on Newcastle’s 2,640 allotment plots provision.”

The Association of Public Service Excellence (APSE) survey local authorities across the UK regarding their allotment provision on a yearly basis, and produces regular state of the market reports for allotments in the UK, such as [this one for 2022](#). Unfortunately, these reports do not include a ‘plots per 1,000 households’ figure for comparison, but have some information on provision. For example, in 2022, 32.5% of councils surveyed provided less than 250 allotment plots, 29% provided between 250-1000 plots, 27.5% provide 1,000-2,000 plots and 11% provide more than 2,000 plots. Half of these plots are standard sized plots. According to APSE half of councils this year say they intend to increase their allotment provision, either by direct provision of sites, or provision by builders/developers as part of a housing/planning policy, or provision by community groups supported/facilitated by council.

Again, higher provision in the rest of the UK is partly accounted for by the greater area of responsibility of those Councils and therefore greater public land ownership.

Increase in demand in the last 20 years

In recent years in Northern Ireland, we have seen a substantial rise in interest in community growing which has produced a wide diversity of community growing initiatives. From community orchards to street planting schemes, from guerrilla gardening to forest gardens, the choice of what type of project to set up is broad and very much depends on the needs of the local community, the resources on offer and the type and area of land available. This new interest in community growing has been supported by a number of different funding streams - through local Councils, the Housing Executive and the Public Health Agency, the European Union Programme for Peace and Reconciliation in Northern Ireland and the Border Region of Ireland Peace III 2007 - 2013, which provided the financial basis for a number of new community gardens to be set up across Northern Ireland and the Border areas. Since then, the National Lottery Community Fund has provided project funding, and the National Lottery 'Space and Place' funding has provided capital grants for many projects. In addition, there are a number of different agencies promoting community growing and allotments; notably Social Farms & Gardens, The Conservation Volunteers, Groundwork Northern Ireland, Keep Northern Ireland Beautiful and Grow It Yourself. Together these organisations constitute a level of support for community growing initiatives. More information on allotment waiting lists is included in Part 3.

At a UK level the Association for Public Service Excellence (APSE) has documented a growing demand for allotments. The [APSE 2019 state of the allotments market report](#) summarises some of these UK wide issues nicely [here](#) –

“Figures released by the National Allotment Society (NAS) revealed that of the councils which responded to a recent survey, over 40% reported a “significant uplift” in applications to join waiting lists, with a 300% increase in one case. This increase in demand is set against a [65% decline in the total area of allotment land available](#) caused by the growing demand for new housing land and the fact that the most deprived urban areas have experienced [eight times the level of allotment land loss](#) than the least deprived areas.”

This worrying figure is more concerning, when we consider recent figures show that with regards to personal greenspace, as much as one in eight of the UK population have no access to a garden.



Annual BBQ at Eden Allotments, Carrickfergus. Managed by Mid & East Antrim Council with the support of Field Representatives, on Council Land



Gardens of Sanctuary training at Grow Community Garden, a community run garden on Belfast City Council land

Changing Demographics

Although the allotment legislation in Northern Ireland hasn't changed since the 1930s, there have been urban/rural changes over the last 90 years. The [1926 census](#) states that there were about 51% of the population living in urban areas. In 2015 [NISRA stated](#) that the numbers based on 2011 census were up to 65%. While these demographic changes are significant, it is important to remember that community gardens are equally important in rural areas, providing social contact, exercise and a supportive learning environment for those wanting to grow their own fruit and vegetables.

COVID 19 Impact

Research has suggested that physically greener, more natural environments, are beneficial for human health and well-being. This has been particularly prevalent during the pandemic where many media and academic reports have highlighted how people have turned to gardening and growing their own food.

During the recent Covid 19 crisis small community growing groups around Northern Ireland were quick to respond, safely, and effectively, to the needs of their communities. They led the way in diversifying their activities, providing food delivery to the vulnerable and isolated, checking in on neighbours through phone-round schemes, and later on in lockdown encouraging their neighbours to grow at home, so that fresh food was still being provided locally. SF&G worked with local Councils to develop guidance for Council run sites to enable them to stay open during this period, providing important physical and mental health relief during that period, and enabling people to keep growing. Indeed, the rise in interest in growing at home has been a positive feature of the crisis and seems to characterise the "new normal" after lockdown. According to the [2021 APSE state of the market report](#), the Coronavirus pandemic has seen a huge reliance on allotments as places where people are able to go to gain exercise and recreation and resulted in a noticeable increase in demand for new plots and sites. In their 2021 state of the market report, APSE reports that 94% of Council respondents in the UK experienced a significant increase in demand for allotments.

Community Gardens and Resilience

During the pandemic community gardens adapted their working practices and continued to operate, contributing to the local food supply in times when food insecurity was causing panic buying in the supermarkets. The groups that were best able to adapt and respond quickly to the situation were the ones that had strong infrastructure in place: secure access to land and control of decision-making processes, core funding or funding that could be repurposed, and strong core staff and volunteer teams.

The fostering of resilience is critical to protecting and promoting health and wellbeing at both the individual and community level. Resilient communities respond proactively to new or adverse situations, prepare for economic, social, and environmental change and deal better with crisis and hardship. The Cabinet Office's 2019 Community Resilience Development Framework states that:

“Community resilience is enabled when the public are empowered to harness local resources and expertise to help themselves and their communities to

- *prepare, respond, and recover from disruptive challenges, in a way that complements the activity of Category 1 and 2 emergency responders.*
- *plan and adapt to long term social and environmental changes to ensure their future prosperity and resilience.*

Community resilience requires a participatory approach to emergency management.”

For these reasons, providing community growing space, to self-managed community groups able to secure quality leases, is in the interest of society in general, and to those using the sites.

Allotments, Orchards or Community Gardens?

There are lots of ways that people can get involved in growing. A summary of some of the main models of community growing are included in Appendix 2. For people who want to work with their neighbours to improve the local environment and make their community a better place to be for people and wildlife then maybe a community garden or orchard is the best option. For people with plenty of time and a desire to grow lots of fresh produce, traditional allotments will probably be the best option. Allotments are more likely to be Council managed (sometimes with input from an allotments association), and community gardens are more likely to be community managed. Allotments are a significant community resource, public service, and quality council managed sites enable residents to produce significant amounts of locally grown food. Community Gardens while producing local food have also a specific characteristic of community engagement. Community Orchards are low-maintenance perennial plantings that can double as social space. There are benefits to all models, and each council will need to assess their own strengths and communities' needs. For this reason, this report recommends a level of allotment plot provision or equivalent community growing provision.

Community Managed Sites and Community Asset Transfer

Lower Cost Models

It is important to note that allotments and community gardens do not always need to be expensive endeavours. The creation of a new site with water, fencing and paths will of course require investment, but if the land is available at a peppercorn rate, and if local community groups are willing and able to take on management of a piece of land, a relationship can be formed which allows community growing to happen even on smaller sites. Appreciation of the hyperlocal is important here, as is the mobilisation of local volunteer labour and resources to improve a site if management is signed over to a local group. The SF&G [Community Land Advisory Service](#) provides advice and information for landowners as well as community groups on forming this relationship, and Sustain with Shared Assets has produced guidance for Local Authorities on [Food Growing In Parks](#), which outlines more and less formal agreements. These resources advise on building relationships with community partners over time, which will pay off over the longer term.

Benefits of Community Management

Indeed Joseph Rowntree Foundation [research](#) (JRF 2011) shows that land managed by well supported and organised community groups, under the right conditions, will deliver multiple benefits, including a heightened sense of identity, improved levels of activity and access to services, and a better physical environment. Another NI focused JRF [report](#) found that community managed assets have the capacity to “build shared resources, trust and relationships, even in the most divided communities”. (JRF, 2012). Three quality examples of this model are GROW Community Garden in the Waterworks Park in Belfast, the Playtrail on Education Authority land in Derry, and Incredible Edible Cloughmills, a council owned 4.5 acre former mill site, now a community garden and wider biopark.

Working with Housing Executive and other Public Landowners

Local Councils will rely on other public landowners to reach their benchmark standard. The Housing Executive have provided the following statement for this report:

"The Housing Executive's vision is for everyone to live an affordable and decent home, appropriate to their needs, in a safe and attractive place.

Our core values of making a difference, fairness, passion and expertise further support and articulate this vision. As an organisation we build strong partnerships, share great ideas and are always looking for new, creative and better ways to do things.

At present the Housing Executive facilitates community growing space within its estates across Northern Ireland. This includes amenity spaces, allotments, community gardens and community orchards & woodlands. The Housing Executive also provides funding to communities through the Community Grants programme and through community safety and it's social enterprise programme.

The Housing Executive is keen to work with Councils, public and community / third sector partners to further consider how best this information is made available with regarding existing provision and identify opportunities for new provision. As a statutory partner in the Community Planning Partnerships, we consider this to be an appropriate structure to nurture these conversations and ensure this important work has visibility and buy in across the public/private and community and voluntary sector. The Housing Executive is also keen to ensure the application process to deliver such a project is articulated clearly and is easily accessible.

In the meantime, queries regarding this should be directed to the Place Shaping Teams in each of the three NIHE regions:

Placeshaping.Belfast@nihe.gov.uk

Placeshaping.north@nihe.gov.uk

South.Placeshaping@nihe.gov.uk

Funding available

UKSPF

The [UK Shared Prosperity Fund](#) (UKSPF, or Levelling Up money) [objectives for Communities and Place](#) mentions green space and community led projects, including running and capital costs, and the interventions list also includes "NI3: Creation of and improvements to local green spaces, community gardens, watercourses and embankments, along with incorporating natural features into wider public spaces.". The Communities and Place strand is currently [expected](#) to come online 2023/24. This fund will involve Council working with local partners to develop plans. See below for the relevant guidance from the UKSPF website: [UKSPF Investment Plan Northern Ireland](#)

"...(the Community and Place UKSPF Investment Priority)....delivered by councils, working in partnership with local community-based partnerships (including charities, NGOs (non governmental organisations) or similar type organisations), to collaborate to deliver small scale capital interventions. The funding will be used to strengthen community and neighbourhood vitality across a locally defined area (of any scale) within each of the 11 council areas and to help develop community collaboration and bolster local civic pride.

Needs and priorities will be different across each council area and each plan should determine the right interventions based on local community plans and local strategic issues. It is expected that package of support developed across each council area will incorporate at least 3 of the 4 primary interventions set out on page 28."

Local councils and their partners can prioritise locally-determined packages of activity, drawing from the following predominantly capital activities:



local green space



community and
neighbourhood
infrastructure



active travel



arts, culture and
heritage activities



volunteering and
social capital

Route to market

The Programme will be delivered on a commissioned basis, through a direct allocation to each of the 11 local authorities who will then enter into arrangements with local partners directly.

Timing

Councils are expected to be commissioned in early 2023. It is anticipated that the main programme will launch during the 2023/24 financial year, running to March 2025.

Funding

£11 million (capital) will be allocated to the Communities & Place Programme. A further £2.8 million will be allocated to support revenue activities.



Part 2

Research Findings



Research Findings

A survey was sent out to all 11 councils and completed in the summer of 2022. The questions in the survey are listed in Appendix III.

Current Direct Provision of Allotments, Orchards and Community Gardens

These figures are based on figures provided in our survey. For guidance the recommendation in this report is that overall provision in each area should be **1250 sqm per 1,000 households**. The figures below do not represent the totality of support provided for community growing in each council area, just the land in allotments, orchards and community gardens on council land and directly managed by council. More detailed information on allotment provision is provided at the end of this section.

Council	Square metres of provision per 1,000 households*
Antrim & Newtownabbey	338
Ards & North Down	44
Armagh Banbridge & Craigavon	23
Belfast	58
Derry City & Strabane	155
Lisburn & Castlereagh	403
Mid & East Antrim	900
Mid Ulster	65

*An unpublished report on Allotment provision in England (2006) by the then Federation of City Farms & Community Gardens (now Social Farms & Gardens) and the University of Derby commissioned by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister suggests that -“Availability of allotments by households better reflects the use of allotments than by individuals. Frequently more than one member of a household participates in working one plot listed for the individual household”. This can be explored further but it does suggest that if more than one person per household works an allotment it may well be a more accurate measurement of assessing need for further provision.

Community Managed Community Gardens on Council land, and Peppercorn Leases

The survey did not collect information on the area of land owned by Council which is given over to community managed growing projects, in all cases through a peppercorn lease (free or for £1 a year). It is recommended that each Council collects this information, along with land provided by other public landowners and count it towards their provision. However, the following Councils lease land to community groups for community growing:

- Antrim & Newtownabbey
- Ards & North Down
- Belfast
- Causeway Coast & Glens
- Derry City & Strabane
- Lisburn & Castlereagh
- Mid & East Antrim
- Mid Ulster

Newry Mourne & Down have six such gardens planned

Community Orchards

Four councils (A&ND, L&C, M&EA and NM&D) provide community orchards, and one council (AB&C) has one planned.



Beehives at Community run Tullacorr Allotments, on Derry City and Strabane District Council land



Rookery Wood, community run on Forest Service land in Castlecaulfield, Mid Ulster

Other Forms of Support for Growing Offered by Councils

All Councils provide forms of support for community growing other than land and facilities. For example, Newry Mourne & Down and Fermanagh & Omagh Councils have recently run small grant schemes specifically for community growing, and Causeway Coast & Glens recently distributed £80,000 in community growing grants, funded by the Department for Communities. Many Councils contribute to Live Here, Love Here grants which support community growing. Mid & East Antrim Council provide in kind support to allotment holders in the form of manure, bark, compost and seeds, as well as on site events for plot holders, and have provided educational programmes for the public. Armagh Banbridge & Craigavon Council have recently provided an innovative programme of education in Permaculture and Community Growing. This was developed during Covid to provide a safe space outside for people to socialise to combat loneliness. A successful Green Gym programme continues to be run and further Growing Skills programmes are planned. Belfast City Council over the years has provided a programme of in-kind support for community growers. Fermanagh & Omagh Council in recent years ran an innovative Peace IV funded networking and capacity building programme, which built relationships between community growers, as well as providing education. Derry City & Strabane District Council have started work on Acorn farm, an ambitious 2 ½ acre project, in a strategic partnership with a number of local Voluntary and Community Organisations. The project will drive forward the sustainable food agenda in the area by bringing regenerative food production, education and tourism together on one site.

Existing Council Policies in Northern Ireland

At time of publishing, seven of the 11 Northern Ireland Councils have declared a Climate Emergency.

One Council (Ards & North Down) has an operating community growing strategy, and four Councils (DC&S, M&EA, Belfast, and NM&D) have draft strategies, although two of these (Belfast and M&EA) have been in draft for over 10 years. None of the Councils have set targets for community growing provision. The NM&D strategy is not solely on community growing, but includes community growing as part of its (draft) Sustainability strategy.

Online information for the Public

Six councils have a page on their website dedicated to community growing (links provided below), with one in development.

[Antrim & Newtownabbey](#)

[Ards & North Down](#)

[Belfast](#)

[Derry City & Strabane](#)

[Mid & East Antrim](#)

[Mid Ulster](#)

Community Asset Transfer Procedures for Councils Leasing Land to Communities

All Councils who returned data on leasing land to communities are offering peppercorn rent (£1 per year or similar) to communities for the lease of land.

One council (NM&D) has a draft Community Asset Transfer policy which has been especially adapted for community growing sites. This is important, as often Community Asset Transfer (CAT) procedures for buildings and more developed assets (which a number of councils have, at least in draft form) can involve a high level of bureaucracy, demanding time from community groups, and in the case of land for community growing groups this level of risk management is disproportionate to the value of the land, or the risk involved. A sample proportionate CAT procedure is included in Appendix I, which is based on conversations with Council officers during the 2021 workshops, and looking at the procedures in NM&D and in Rhonda Cynan Taff Council in Wales, which is leading the way in this regard.

A number of NI Councils are currently looking at introducing these procedures, and some are adapting existing procedures in use for the lease of land for sports facilities to communities. Two Councils have bought land for community run sports facilities, and thought this same mechanism could potentially be used to buy land for community growing.

We asked what procedure Councils use to identify land suitable for community growing, for example when a new allotment site or community garden is being planned, or when a community group gets in touch wanting to find land to grow on. 4 Councils responded that they use the Community Planning Department of Council to identify potential sites for community growing. Two other Councils replied that they consider each request for land on a case by case basis and there is no procedure.

Mapping

One Council (D&S) has mapped community growing sites on a GIS system. Other Councils expressed a willingness to do this in future, and to share information where appropriate if a shared platform ever became available (for example [Land Explorer](#) or similar).

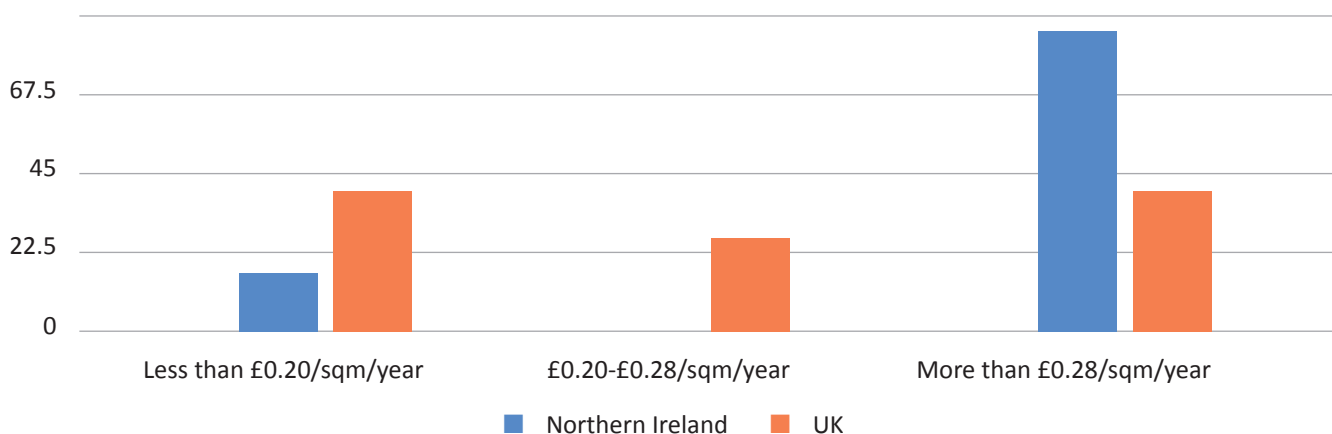
Allotment Rents

The Table below shows the average cost of an allotment plot in Council areas that provide allotments per sqm. These figures are an average of varying sizes and plot rents.

Council	Annual rent £ per sqm
Antrim & Newtownabbey	0.38
Ards & North Down	1
Belfast	0.31
Derry & Strabane	0.14
Lisburn & Castlereagh	0.32
Mid & East Antrim	0.64
Mid Ulster	0.51

Allotment rents are seen as affordable in Northern Ireland (ranging from 14p/sqm/year to £1/sqm/year), but more expensive than in the rest of the UK. The APSE survey of allotment sites across the UK in 2021 found that only 37% of respondents charged more than 0.28/sqm/year, and 37% of respondents charged less than 0.20/sqm/year.

NI rents compared to UK levels



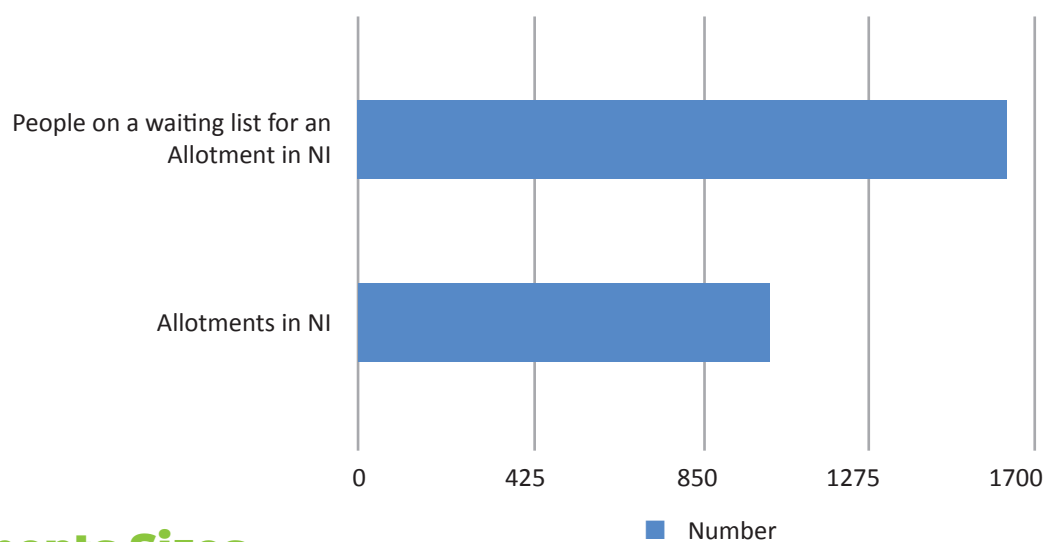
One Council (M&EA) offers a £10 discount on annual allotment rent for jobseekers, pensioners, students and people on disability allowance. Another Council (L&C) offers a discount for pensioners. No other Councils offer discounts, which is interesting in light of the legislation requirement that unemployed people or people with dependents should receive priority.

Waiting lists

All Councils providing allotments in NI keep waiting lists. Ratios of site-specific waiting list numbers to available plots range from 29% to 1000% (at Larne allotments, currently eight plots, with 80 people on the waiting list. 40 new plots are planned to accommodate demand). On average, across NI there are 1.6 times as many people on waiting lists than currently hold an allotment (total 1003 allotments in NI, total 1615 people on waiting lists). The waiting list for allotments in Belfast has increased from 283 in 2012, to 807 in 2022.

Waiting lists do not necessarily reflect total demand, as waiting times may put some people off applying. Additionally, people will only put their name on a list for a site in their neighbourhood, and there are likely areas of the country where no allotments or waiting lists are offered. Information on waiting list times was not widely available, but as a guide, APSE found in their 2021 report that 66% of council average waiting list times were less than 18 months. Private allotments do ease demand in some areas, and location of these sites should be taken into account when planning new sites. However, these facilities, while high quality and easing demand, may not be affordable for the average household, with rents sometimes 19 times as high as council annual rents (£0.14/sqm compared to £2.61/sqm).

Number of sites compared to waiting lists



Allotments Sizes

An allotment is traditionally measured in rods (perches or poles), an old measurement dating back to Anglo-Saxon times. 10 poles is currently the accepted size of an allotment, the equivalent of 250 square metres or about the size of a double's tennis court. Few if any allotments in Northern Ireland are of this size.

As allotments are leased from landlords, allotment holders are required to pay rent. This money is used to cover the water rates and general maintenance bills. This rent can be anything from a peppercorn amount through to £100 a year per plot holder, but most rents in NI are in the region of £25 - £125 each, with the average rent coming in at £0.47/sqm. Despite there being legal statutes relating to allotments, nowhere do they state how much rent should be charged or collected, instead general terminology is used, citing that the rent should be a 'reasonable amount' which the 'tenant would expect to pay'.



Part 3

Recommendations &
Conclusions

Recommendations

- It is recommended that Councils adopt a target level of provision of 1250 sqm (0.3 acres) per 1,000 households of community growing space in their Council area. This could be in the form of allotments, community gardens or orchards. This target should be reached in co-operation with other public bodies, for e.g., the Housing Executive and the Education Authority. For comparison with the format in which UK standards of provision are phrased (in terms of allotment plots per 1,000 households), 1250 sqm is the equivalent of 5 full size allotment plots. This target could be staged, e.g.: 1250 sqm per 1,000 households in 5 years, and 3750 sqm in 15 years' time.
- Community development support and horticultural training should be built into a programme of expansion, with funding available to community groups and allotments associations.
- Councils should adopt a proportionate Community Asset Transfer policy for release of land to community groups wanting to set up a community garden. See Appendix 1 for a sample procedure. For larger projects requiring investment on the part of the community group, longer term and more secure leases will be required.
- Councils should set targets for waiting-lists times for allotments.
- Councils could explore a centralised, more transparent, waiting list system for people to register their interest in obtaining an allotment plot. This system would enable Councils to have an instant picture of demand and whether demand is being met. A shared mapping platform could be explored to provide an NI picture of provision and demand.
- Councils should establish a clear point of contact for communities wanting to grow.
- Councils should draw up a community food growing strategy for their area, to help achieve some of these targets.
- Community planning and GIS mapping facilities should be used to make sure that new developments favour areas of greatest disadvantage.
- Groundwork should be done on coordinating this work with other landowning public bodies, potentially through community planning, neighbourhood renewal partnerships or Sustainable Food Place partnerships.
- Investigation should be undertaken into the potential for Local Development Plans and planning guidelines to include specific mention of food growing space.



Clady & District Gardening Friends

Conclusion

The policy trends demonstrated above, coupled by an analysis of the data from Social Farms & Gardens, APSE, and others, has demonstrated that the Covid 19 pandemic has seen a surge in people wanting to grow their own food and meet their own demands. There has been an increase in local food importance and provenance. We now have baseline data of Community Growing provision in Northern Ireland and some actions which can be taken to improve the numbers of growing spaces across NI. In order to increase the numbers of growing spaces provided we now need to have a benchmark standard for community growing provision so that planners, local Councils and public bodies know how much space they need to provide. We, therefore, respectfully, ask Councils in Northern Ireland to consider adopting the standard of 1250sqm per 1000 households, as an official benchmark standard.



Musicians at Grow Community Garden Belfast, community run on Belfast City Council land



Appendices

Appendix I: Stages for a Process for Communities Accessing Land, and Checklist to Use in Stage 2 and 3

The procedure and checklists below include a wide range of considerations to help communities and council officers decide what is important in choosing a suitable piece of land. Not all requirements will apply in all situations.

Stage 1	Community gets in touch with Council: They want to grow. Initial assessment on suitability of group. If appropriate link up with local group.	
Stage 2	Possible training on what is involved in managing a community site, licences and leases and how to run a consultation to get more people involved.	Community group fills in questionnaire for the Council on what they want from a bit of land.
Stage 3	Community suggests sites in their locality that might suit.	Council searches for available public land, with input from community planning to make links with Housing Executive and other public landowners/ potential sites e.g., churches.
Stage 4	Sites screened through filters, e.g., Planning applications, contamination, accessibility, biodiversity, and suitability for community's needs.	
Stage 5	Site advertised in local press to ensure other potentially interested community groups are kept informed.	
Stage 6	Potential sites offered to community, and a decision made.	
Stage 7	Agreement drawn up, which can be any one of a number of arrangements, to fit the group and the council and the site.	
Stage 8	Ongoing support from Council and SF&G etc. in terms of funding applications, capacity building and training etc.	

Council Site Checklist Draft

Site feature	Score			
	Not present	Present to some degree	Present	Don't know
Initial filtering				
Site free from planning constraints				
Site free from contamination				
No important biodiversity concerns on site				
Local community group interested				
Access for all				
On a bus route				
Near a centre of population				
Accessible toilets on site, or public toilets nearby				
Close parking				
Boundaries in place, or on offer				
Site secure (lockable gate)				
Suitability for vegetable growing				
South facing				
Good drainage, no flood risk				
Free from contamination				
Fertile deep soil				
Not shaded				
Security from vandalism/theft				
Free from invasive tree roots				
Access to water				
Check Biodiversity concerns with Biodiversity officer; OK to disrupt present wildlife, e.g. no important species, badger setts etc				
Accessible for vehicles and trailers				
Other				
Trees and hedges can be removed/ planted				

Community group site checklist

Site feature	Level of requirement			
	Essential	Good but not essential	Not needed	Don't know
Access for all				
On a bus route				
Near where particular people live, eg near a care home				
Dropped kerbs between site and houses/drop off point				
Accessible toilets				
Flat or gentle slopes for wheelchair users				
Turning space for wheelchairs and scooters				
Gates/doors wide enough for wheelchair users				
Gate/door catches low enough for wheelchair users				
Smooth paths				
Limited public access - to protect vulnerable users				
Guide dogs accepted				
No access to hazards, eg ponds, roads, steep drops				
Accessible shelter from weather				
Mobile phone reception for emergencies				
Friendly neighbours				
Close parking				
Calm environment, eg sudden loud noises				
Boundaries in place, or on offer				
Site secure (lockable gate)				
Suitability for vegetable growing				
South facing				
Good drainage, no flood risk				
Free from contamination				
Fertile deep soil				
Not shaded				
Not stoney				
Long lease/ permission				
Security from vandalism/theft				
Free from invasive weeds				
Cold store				
Nearby outlet to sell produce				
Free from invasive tree roots				
Sheds for storage or packing				
Reasonable position, eg not too windy or high				

Site feature	Level of requirement			
	Essential	Good but not essential	Not needed	Don't know
Access for all				
Access to water				
Pest free, eg rabbit or deer fencing				
OK to disrupt present wildlife, eg no important species, badger setts etc				
Accessible for vehicles and trailers				
Barrier to prevent spray drift from non-organic neighbours				
Suitability for animals				
Owner has offered permission for animals				
Water				
Sufficient grazing				
No poisonous plants, eg ragwort				
Fencing or hedges in good order				
Tractor and trailer access				
No waterlogging				
Housing for animals, or permission to build				
Convenient nearby access for farmer				
Storage for animal feed				
Nearby source of feed and beddings				
Nearby demand for manure				
Nearby organic abattoir				
Secure site				
Hand washing facilities				
Buildings				
Meeting room				
Barn				
Shed				
Secure storage				
Farmer's house				
Polytunnel				
Toilet				
Shop				
Café				
Shelter from rain				
Caravan				

Site feature	Level of requirement			
	Essential	Good but not essential	Not needed	Don't know
Access for all				
Other				
Permission to camp				
Not overlooked				
Children's play space				
Pond				
'Unkempt' wildlife area				
Trees and hedges can be removed/ planted				
Eligible for organic certification				
Suitable for rainwater harvesting				
Will you ever want to trade from the site				
You can meet requirements of any grants for the site				
Community compost site				

Appendix II: Types of community growing space

Allotments

Allotments are probably the most well-known and understood model of growing in the community. The 1932 Act does not define an allotment. Allotments are usually large areas of land divided up into smaller plots. The site is usually owned by the Local Authority, managed by an Allotment Association and the individual plots are cultivated by one person or family. The fruit and vegetables they grow are for their own consumption and not for sale. In some cases this land will also be used for the growing of ornamental plants, and the keeping of hens, rabbits and bees. The plots are usually of a standard size and having a yearly charge for rent and services such as water provision.

Community Allotments

Where there is a lack of traditional allotments available some communities start groups that find land and create their own allotment site. These community allotments do not have a standard set rules, sizes or services as they are created by the community to meet their own needs.

Community Gardens

Community gardens are usually started by local people who would like to grow food for their own use but also to benefit the wider community. Normally all growing on community gardens is done collaboratively by the volunteers. The idea is to share the work and then the reward. Most community gardens are open to everyone to join and do not have waiting lists.

Community Farms

Community farms involve both growing plants and keeping animals. Often larger and more extensive than community gardens or other community growing spaces. Community farms are working farms, producing meat, eggs etc. but also offer a wide range of volunteering and educational opportunities.

Community Supported Agriculture (CSA)

A social enterprise scheme, based on a direct, active partnership between farmers (or a growing project) and the local community. CSA's normally produce fruit and vegetables that are shared out between its members who pay a monthly fee. CSAs are designed to share the risks and rewards of growing equally between the grower and the consumer.

Community Orchards

As well as providing fruit and a green haven for the local community, many community orchards are excellent wildlife habitats and carbon sinks. Community orchards are growing in popularity as they are easy to establish, low maintenance and can be used for community celebrations such as Apple Day.

Incredible Edible schemes

Many towns in Wales are getting involved in the Incredible Edible movement. Incredible Edible schemes plant fruit and vegetables in public places for everyone to share. The produce is often grown in places with high footfall such as bus stops, town planters and alongside foot paths.

Abundance/fruit harvesting schemes

A growing movement that aims to make better use of neglected local fruit and nut trees by organising volunteers to harvest the fruit. The fruit is normally divided between the owner of the tree, the volunteer pickers and local charities and good causes.

Forest Gardening

A low-maintenance sustainable plant-based food production and agroforestry system based on woodland ecosystems, incorporating fruit and nut trees, shrubs, herbs, vines and perennial vegetables which have yields directly useful to humans. Forest Gardens can be easily be incorporated into public parks or woodlands.

Garden-share schemes

These schemes match and introduce committed, enthusiastic growers with local garden owners who want to see their gardens being used more productively. The agreement between the garden owner and grower usually stipulates when the grower can access the growing plot and the percentage of produce that will be given to the garden owner.

Meanwhile Gardening

The temporary use of land for gardening and food growing. These schemes are particularly popular in areas with lots of unused land awaiting development. They can bring waste land into productive use for a defined period.

Appendix III

Survey of provision of community growing land

- How many allotments do you currently provide? (sites, plots, acreage postcode, name)
- How many community gardens do you currently provide? (Sites, acreage, postcode, name)
- Do you keep waiting lists? What size are the lists? What is the turnover rate of the list?
- Do you have a community growing strategy or policy in place?
- How much do you charge per sqm?
- Do you offer discounted rates for certain groups?
- Have you a page on your website dedicated to community growing?
- Do you have a set target for how many community growing spaces (allotments or community gardens) they wish to have at the end of your current development plan?
- Do you have data on community managed growing space in your area?

Questions about procedures for communities accessing land

Is there a procedure for coming up with peppercorn lease arrangements, or disposing of assets for less than market value, if there is proven social benefit (a Community Asset Transfer procedure?)?

What are current procedures for community identifying public land for community purpose (Community planning?). How is land for food growing and other community interest currently mapped?

Does the Council have a procedure for procuring (buying) land for communities who want to grow?

Appendix IV: Community Growing Benefits



