

# BUCKS FOOD GROWING NETWORK



Buckinghamshire Community Food Growing Strategy

*Growing Food Together* - Sustainable and Healthy Communities

*Created October 2021*

## Buckinghamshire Community Food Growing Strategy

### Growing Food Together - *Sustainable and Healthy Communities*

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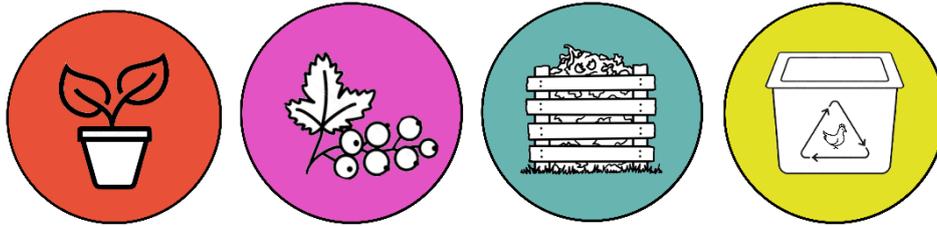
*Growing Food Together brings together the work of the Bucks Food Growing Network sub group of Buckinghamshire Food Partnership to explore community food growing across the county, celebrate best practice and identify areas for improvement and exploration.*

## Introduction – What is Community Growing?

Community Growing is food growing, gardening and horticulture, in spaces where the intended purpose is to use the land for the benefit of the community. Throughout Buckinghamshire communities have come together to get involved in gardening, food growing and distribution as part of enjoying where they live. The value of these activities has always been recognised as beneficial to the health of people and the planet and even more so now that they help individuals improve their mental health and wellbeing which has an impact on all aspects of community life.

The interest in Community Growing in the UK has been on the increase; notably with the impact of the 2020 Covid Pandemic, and the movement towards reducing food waste and engaging with food redistribution within local communities. There has been more promotion of the lifestyle and health benefits of community growing, using green spaces and outdoor education for physical and mental wellbeing. As with cooking, there is a need to sustain knowledge and skills in growing, to develop citizenship and stewardship across future generations. Horticultural and other tasks involved in community growing which are connected to physical tasks alongside healthier eating patterns (usually the result of eating fresh produce grown in the garden) are often cited in research and local campaigns.

For Buckinghamshire these trends are also true, with many statutory services increasing the use of the outdoors and growing, to increase engagement and to develop and enhance the wellbeing of residents from all walks of life. Buckinghamshire Council manage and maintain a number of parks and green spaces across Buckinghamshire with many community allotments devolved into the management of Parish or Town Councils or private associations.



## Vision: Buckinghamshire Community Food Growing

We believe that everyone in Buckinghamshire should have the opportunity to grow and eat local, healthy, affordable, sustainable and culturally appropriate food.

We champion community initiatives and projects that make gardening accessible at home, school, work and within the communities where we live. We aim to do this by bringing people together through growing based activities, educating them about food production and redistribution; whilst building local networks and sharing good practice to motivate and inspire others. We commend 'Growing Food Together' for sustainable and healthy communities.

### Our Values:

- **Community Participation, Cohesion and Development with Cultural Competency**
- **Green Infrastructure and Improved Biodiversity**
- **Healthy Food: Food Sovereignty, Equity and Access**
- **Engagement with the Food Cycle to Enhance Health and Wellbeing, Education and Skills**

### How the vision might be achieved

Bucks Council has a policy for developing Green Infrastructure (GI) and we feel community growing spaces should be part of that infrastructure. Incorporating growing spaces into *Green Infrastructure* will engage the communities of growers to be more supportive of the GI and to support initiatives to enhance biodiversity and to better understand the food cycle and to move to a lower carbon footprint diet. We aim to achieve this vision by:

- Engaging people in local communities to provoke their interest in the concept of community growing
- Reducing barriers by making community growing accessible, local and something of which to be proud.
- Demonstrating and supporting them to grow some of their own food, proving that it is not that difficult and that the effort is worthwhile.
- Encouraging gardeners to appreciate the taste of in-season home grown produce
- Providing simple recipes to gardeners to use their produce and to offer ideas for storage.
- Explaining to gardeners about the benefits of growing organically, highlighting the importance of biodiversity in supporting healthy food growth.
- Encourage moving to a lower carbon footprint diet.

## Current context for Buckinghamshire:

There was a consistent demand on food banks in Buckinghamshire, even before the Covid pandemic. However, due to many factors the impact of lockdown disproportionately affected many already experiencing inequality and saw a rise in universal credit claimants, redundancies, business closures childcare demands and distress as a result of losing loved ones. Food banks had to rapidly respond to more families and individuals who, for a variety of reasons, found themselves having to access support through the food bank network.

At the height of the pandemic foodbanks witnessed a 400% increase in demand compared to 2019 figures (<https://www.jrf.org.uk/report/uk-poverty-2020-21>). Trussell Trust foodbanks historically did not offer fresh items to their food parcels due to storage constraints (Aylesbury & Chiltern Foodbank,) but One Can Trust covering Wycombe and South Bucks began to diversify their contents during the Covid lockdowns to give a more balanced offer to its users. The Vineyard Storehouse and One Can Trust began to receive private fresh donations including the 'Grow To Give' allotment surplus scheme emerging across the county. This was alongside Public Health's 2020/21 'Grow it, Cook it, Eat it' project which offered growing kits for balconies, terraces and small gardens to support people to try gardening to top up their fresh food intake as well as investing in community gardens/allotments in the most deprived areas of Buckinghamshire.

Brexit has impacted on many food and supermarket supply chains, with both imports and exports fluctuating, and many other supply issues as the network has been disrupted and affected by changes in taxation, transport and standards. This, however, has opened the door for communities to embrace local growers and producers and raised awareness of the need to find new ways to support local businesses and farmers to sell their produce at a local level.

The Covid 19 pandemic also saw more residents embrace being in the outdoors as one of their allowed activities. Increasingly, allotment associations and parish councils received requests for space to become available for allotment plots, as well as other community growing opportunities where land and capacity allowed. As many sectors begin to build back from the closures, limitations and restrictions it is unclear how community growing behaviour may or may not be impacted. Will people maintain an interest in the outdoors and nature? Will they still be interested in growing their own food knowing they have a ready supply more easily available, and will they wish to continue to volunteer and support others within their communities? Will there still be demand for opportunities to skill share, which brings numerous benefits such as job creation, increasing social capital and community cohesion?

Food deserts are neighbourhoods where residents face barriers to accessing affordable nutritious food which is essential to keep in good health. These areas are currently being mapped across Buckinghamshire by Public Health through their obesity focussed campaign. A whole systems approach is required to combat rising obesity statistics, and involves combined effort and changes to the food system such as: eating less and better quality meat; obtaining more plant-based foods from sustainable sources; ensuring food standards to improve the quality of food provision; highlighting the fight against fast food chains and market saturation; monitoring the growth of the vegan food market. Buckinghamshire historically had its roots within agriculture, with a network of market towns and farmers' markets. However, there is now a greater divide between rural and urban areas in the movement towards fairer food for all and equal access. Community food growing can be a tool to reconnect this divide across all parts of the county.

There are several mass housing developments underway across Buckinghamshire and many of these spaces have been planned with little thought to food growing. The Aylesbury Garden Town development in particular, gives our Food Growing Strategy a channel to bring forward recommendations that challenge new housing plans and those already in existence, to learn from missed opportunities and to look at what possibilities there could be for community food growing across the county.

## National Themes for Community Food Growing

The *National Food Strategy*, a government commissioned, independent review into our UK food system, has highlighted key areas where current action, provision and support is needing greater input and exploration. It calls for a greater understanding of the systems, processes, barriers and inadequacies experienced in the UK food supply system. Key recommendations connected to Community Food growing are:

- Escape the junk food cycle and protect the NHS by getting fresh fruit and vegetables to low-income families.
- Launch a new “Eat and Learn” initiative for schools.
- Reduce diet-related inequality through extending the eligibility for free school meals.
- Fund the Holiday Activities and Food programme for the next three years
- Trial a “Community Eatwell” Programme, supporting those on low incomes to improve their diets.
- Make the best use of our land by guaranteeing the budget for agricultural payments until at least 2029 to help farmers transition to more sustainable land use.
- Create a long-term shift in our food culture, investing £1 billion in innovation to create a better food system.
- Strengthen Government procurement rules to ensure that taxpayer money is spent on healthy and sustainable food.

*There is so much to celebrate about our food, but we do need to act urgently to protect our health and that of the environment. This is a compelling and overdue plan of action. If the Government adopts it, we will, at last, be putting our food system on the right path to health and prosperity - Prue Leith, Restaurateur/ Chef*

The *National Planning Policy Framework* and a new *National Model Design Code for England* call for higher quality designs of developments and neighbourhoods where residents can grow and buy healthy food. The Government sees design codes as providing a framework for creating “healthy, environmentally responsive and sustainable places, with a consistent and high-quality standard of design”. For Buckinghamshire using these frameworks and guidance could mean we see significant opportunity to make food growing an important part of the increased development we are seeing across the county. Linking into planning and development on local levels and asking critical questions, can also link into the Green Infrastructure approach in Buckinghamshire.

Gillian Morgan, Sustain’s planning lead, welcomes the new planning advice:

*“This is a clear indication that planners, architects and developers should bring forward proposals which normalise food in the environment. This is a first step towards recognition that the ability to grow and buy healthy food contributes to better design which in turn leads to the wellbeing of communities”.*

The IPCC has produced its 6<sup>th</sup> report in August 2021, highlighting the current situation in regards to the climate crisis. Land degradation affects people and ecosystems throughout the planet and is both affected by climate change and contributes to it; in particular, industrialised farming, land use and land mismanagement. The current food system (production, transport, processing, packaging, storage, retail, consumption, loss and waste) feeds the great majority of the world population and supports the livelihoods of over 1 billion people. However, an estimated 821 million people are currently undernourished, 151 million children under five are stunted, 613 million women and girls aged 15 to 49 suffer from iron deficiency, and 2 billion adults are overweight or obese. Food security will be increasingly affected by projected future climate change and fruit and vegetable production, a key component of healthy diets, is also vulnerable to climate change. The overall message is that the consumption of healthy and sustainable diets presents major opportunities for reducing GHG emissions from food systems while also improving health outcomes. The reduction of food loss and waste will also lower GHG emissions and improve food security. Hence community food growing and support for food growing and repurposing food to reduce waste are key factors in the fight against climate change.

## Local Food Growing Movement for Buckinghamshire:

Buckinghamshire has a rich and varied landscape and natural resource but is currently facing a period of huge economic growth. Alongside planning for this growth, we need to plan for 'green growth' to protect and enhance the existing landscape. Green growth ensures that communities have access to high quality green spaces and green infrastructure which can be connected to the benefit and importance of community growing.

### *What is Green Infrastructure?*

Green Infrastructure is a planned network of multifunctional greenspaces and interconnecting links designed, developed and managed to meet the environmental, social and economic needs of communities. Green infrastructure can be described as a network of natural and semi-natural features.

These features include:

- individual street trees
- green roofs and private gardens
- allotments, city farms, orchards, cemeteries and churchyards
- parks and gardens - including country parks and formal gardens.
- rivers and woodlands
- transport corridors
- verges and embankments
- amenity green spaces - play areas, outdoor sports facilities, village greens and commons
- wetlands
- forests
- agricultural land

"a network of green space, urban and rural, which is capable of delivering a wide range of environmental and quality of life benefits for local communities".

*The National Planning Policy Framework 2012*

The Buckinghamshire & Milton Keynes Natural Environment Partnership (NEP) champions Green Infrastructure in Buckinghamshire ([greeninfrastructure@buckscc.gov.uk](mailto:greeninfrastructure@buckscc.gov.uk)) focussing on The Buckinghamshire Green Infrastructure Strategy April 2009 which was created by the Buckinghamshire Green Infrastructure Consortium (GIC)

[https://www.aylesburyvaledc.gov.uk/sites/default/files/page\\_downloads/CD-ENV-010-Buckinghamshire-Green-Infrastructure-Strategy-Bucks-CC-April-2009-.pdf](https://www.aylesburyvaledc.gov.uk/sites/default/files/page_downloads/CD-ENV-010-Buckinghamshire-Green-Infrastructure-Strategy-Bucks-CC-April-2009-.pdf)

### *A Vision for Green Infrastructure in Buckinghamshire*

The vision is based on a multi-functional network of natural, semi-natural and man-made greenspaces and green links that provide an environmental support system for communities and wildlife. The network should be high quality, bio-diverse and accessible and be widely valued by all those who visit, live, work and play in Buckinghamshire. Opportunities to inspire local communities and businesses to adopt low carbon and healthy lifestyles based on a greater awareness of their 'environmental footprints' should be encouraged. The network will further connect urban areas with the surrounding countryside via Rights of Way and access routes; providing opportunities for communities in towns and villages to access, enjoy and appreciate a variety of greenspaces on their doorstep and in the wider countryside. The network should connect a diverse range of wildlife habitats and provide important corridors for species dispersal and migration. The Green Infrastructure approach will be regarded as a long-term framework for sustainable development, protecting the County's natural and historic environment and enhancing the qualities that give Buckinghamshire its special character. Green Infrastructure will be delivered, protected and managed through the commitment and involvement of the public, private and voluntary sectors working in partnership with each other.

This is deliverable throughout Buckinghamshire through Green Infrastructure Functions that link directly to Community Growing:

#### **Active Recreation**

- Accessible Green Infrastructure and access routes have a role in the provision of outdoor sports facilities – both formal sports provision and recreation.

#### **Passive recreation and quiet enjoyment**

- Well-designed, interesting and safe accessible Green Infrastructure of the natural environment to meet the demands for urban communities for tranquil spaces for relaxation and stress relief.

#### **Social venue/ meeting place**

- Accessible Green Infrastructure can provide an excellent focus for establishing a sense of place and community ownership.

#### **Education and training**

- Green Infrastructure can provide outdoor classrooms for school education and life-long learning and formal educational and training facilities where appropriate.

### **Wildlife habitat and biodiversity**

- Green Infrastructure can incorporate existing wildlife habitats such as designated sites, forestry and woodlands, nature reserves and Biodiversity Action Plan habitats. The creation or restoration of wildlife habitats can link, buffer and extend existing wildlife sites, contributing to an ecological network which is more resilient to the pressures of growth and climate change. This network can also provide opportunities for greater access to nature for local people.

### **Sustainable waste management**

- Green waste produced as a result of management and use of Green Infrastructure can be composted and reused within the space, or can provide a renewable energy source.

### **Green produce and food production**

- Allotments or community gardens can be regarded as forms of Green Infrastructure and provision for these areas should be considered in relevant development plans.

### **Integration of new and existing communities**

- Green Infrastructure can provide a sustainable setting for development and attractive surroundings for new and existing residents.

### **Shared experience of greenspace creation**

- Green Infrastructure can offer opportunities for social cohesion and for bringing new and existing communities together.

## **Growing Together- Community Growing Themes**

The Bucks Community Food Growing Network completed a mapping exercise in 2021 to scope all the Food Growing Opportunities and Projects across the county.

### *University/ College Grounds*

1. Berkshire College of Agriculture
2. Adult Learning Centre Amersham

### *Balconies/ Terraces*

1. Veg's in containers (Wycombe, Aylesbury & Chalfont)

### *Civic Public Buildings*

1. Grow It, Cook It, Eat It Micklefield Library High Wycombe

### *Community Woodland*

1. Buckingham Edible Woodland
2. Wendover Community Food Forrest

### *Forestry Commission*

1. Wendover Woods TBC

### *Care Homes*

1. Hampden Hall Care Home (early stages)

### *Housing Associations*

1. York Place, Aylesbury VAHT
2. Walton Court Flats, Aylesbury VAHT

### *Public Parks/ Gardens*

1. Urban Harvest
2. Grow To Give

### *Community Orchards*

1. Bearbrook Community Orchard
2. Fairford Leys Community Orchard
3. Coldhabour Community Orchard
4. Wendover Community Orchard
5. Chesham Community Orchard
6. Townsend Community Orchard Haddenham
7. Marlow Community Orchard
8. Amersham Community Orchard
9. Lowndes Park Chesham Community Orchard

### *High St/ Town Centres*

1. Amersham Herb Garden

### *Community Gardens*

1. Healthy Living Centre, Aylesbury
2. St Peters Church, Aylesbury
3. Vineyard Storehouse, Aylesbury
4. Waterside Academy, Chesham
5. Restore Hope, Chalfont St Latimer
6. Hampden Gardens, Aylesbury
7. Community Food Ark, Whaddon
8. Walled Garden - Missenden Abbey
9. Queens Acre, Beaconsfield
10. Micklefield Library, High Wycombe (CIB)

### *Therapeutic Gardens*

1. Lindengate, Wendover

### *Care Farms*

1. Road Farm Countryways CIC

### *Green Corridors*

1. Aylesbury Greenway
2. Hazlemere
3. Bee Squared Pollinator corridor

### *Schools/ Nurseries*

1. Alfriston School Garden
2. Grow It, Cook It, Eat It Waterside Academy, Chesham
3. Jonathan Page Play Centre, Aylesbury
4. Beechview Academy, High Wycombe
5. Mapledene Children's Centre, High Wycombe
6. Chilternwood School, Downley
7. Hayden Hill Primary School, Aylesbury
8. Oak Green School, Aylesbury
9. Bowerdean School, High Wycombe
10. Little Chalfont School Garden
11. Grow to Give scheme

### *Allotments*

1. Aylesbury Youth Allotment
2. Triangle Project, Marlow
3. Womens Cultural Arena/ Grow It, Cook It, Eat It - Desborough Allotments High Wycombe
4. Olney Community Allotment Plot
5. Bierton Community Allotment
6. Grow Together CIC, High Wycombe
7. WARGAS
8. Community Grow, Aylesbury
9. Phoenix Project, Chesham
10. Grow to Give Allotment Scheme

This mapping exercise highlights the need for diversity and also cultural appropriation sensitivity, responding to the wealth of different communities and cultures across Buckinghamshire. This can help to increase effective engagement and productivity, as well as awareness raising throughout the county and its residents.



## Allotment Survey 2020 /21

In June 2021 the Community Food Growing Coordinator conducted a follow up allotment survey from 2020, to investigate the demand for local allotments, interest in community assets, pressure for additional land and desire for community orchards.

### Key Results:

- Only 14% have seen a drop in demand since the height of the pandemic.
- 35% of parish councils in Bucks are interested in exploring having a community orchard.
- One allotment has reassigned plots used for the community during the pandemic to new users to reduce waiting list.
- One town 'in Bloom' competition would like to look at encouraging veg and fruit growing into their scheme in addition to plants/ flowers.
- Weeds from unattended plots and a lack of attendance due to sickness have been the main issues arising this year so far.
- Three allotments would like to look into being a community asset and three say they are already.
- 28% of allotments would like more access to land to respond to demand and increases in population.
- Capacity is the main reason why parish councils are not keen to expand their allotment sites.
- It was also made clear that many people do not have reasonable expectations about the amount of work needed to tend their plots.
- Only one allotment site has spaces available pre annual audit.

## Future Opportunities

As a network we are dedicated to working together to address need and gaps within the community growing sector. Localised opportunities identified are below, with highlighted actions forming part of our action plan for 2021/22:

- Better countywide allotment information on the Buckinghamshire Council site
- Bus Stops fitted with pollinator rooftop (medium maintenance)
- Workplaces/ roof gardens for mental wellbeing and food production (high maintenance)
- Connection to Cooking Grow it, Cook it, Eat it (Public Health) 2021/22
- Edible Landscapes - hedgerows and trees. Plot possible locations (low maintenance)
- Community Orchards (low maintenance)
- Growing Food Citizens Schools Project 2022
- Living walls (irrigation systems) (high maintenance)
- Outdoor amenity spaces with Housing Associations (low to medium maintenance)
- Community Composting Scheme
- Harvest events 2021/22
- Preserving workshops- keep food for longer.
- Seed Saving advice
- Pots upcycle/ share, community growing project support.
- Influence on planning of new developments (Aylesbury Garden Town plus others)
- Increased volunteering opportunities for Buckinghamshire residents; with positive impact on physical and mental health.
- Increased Grow to Give countywide coverage
- Volunteer engagement and recruitment (social prescribing)
- Influence on planning and development

Food growing communities usually interact with the planning system either when a valued space is under threat from a developer applying for planning permission or when they have to apply for planning permission themselves. However, we want to play a proactive role in planning by helping to set the policies which will be used to assess planning applications.

Planning policies can support food growing by:

- Providing space for growing food within new developments
- Including edible plants and trees in planting schemes for new developments
- Encouraging local groups starting a community food growing space
- Protecting open space under threat from a proposed development
- Using land for food growing on a temporary basis e.g. pending its redevelopment.

This Growing Together strategy will also link directly back to the overarching aims of the Bucks Food Partnership 'Time for a Bucks Food Partnership' report (<https://www.sustainweb.org/publications/time-for-a-bfp>). This provides a framework to support the delivery of this action plan with the collective impact of the network: through collaborative working and combined resources.

*This Strategy has been created in partnership with the following Community Growing representatives*

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