

Agenda Item	17
Report No	CP/33/25

# The Highland Council

**Committee:** **Communities and Place**

**Date:** **6 November 2025**

**Report Title:** **Growing Our Future – Community Food Growing Annual Report 2024/25**

**Report By:** **Assistant Chief Executive - Place**

## **1 Purpose/Executive Summary**

- 1.1 In response to duties placed on the Council under the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015, Members agreed a Highland Food Growing Strategy (2022-2027), *Growing our Future*, on 23 February 2022. The Strategy supports community food growing and allotments across Highland.
- 1.2 The vision for the strategy is that by 2027, Highland communities are resilient, empowered and supported to grow their own food through existing growing opportunities and new approaches to growing.
- 1.3 This report provides an update on progress of implementing the Strategy. The Council and partners continue to support community led food growing initiatives and Allotment Associations in line with the Community Empowerment Act.

## **2 Recommendations**

- 2.1 Members are asked to:

- i. **Consider and note** the progress made to implement the Growing Our Future strategy and deliver the community food growing action plan.

## **3 Implications**

- 3.1 **Resource** – The Community Support and Engagement team review has incorporated support for allotments and community food growing groups in the newly developed Community Support Officer roles. The Community Food Growing (CFG) strategy is overseen by a designated Community Development Manager as part of their functional specialism. The strategy and actions to support implementation have been embedded within the wider Council with named service leads and the action plan is monitored through management in the Performance and Risk Management System (PRMS).

- 3.2 **Legal** – Under the terms of the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 Section 9, the Council has duties regarding allotment provision, including producing allotment rules and regulations.
- 3.3 **Risk** – The Council is required to hold Rules and Regulations for Council owned allotment plots and to protect and provide allotments as part of its statutory duties set out within the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015.
- 3.4 **Health and Safety (risks arising from changes to plant, equipment, process, or people)** – There are no direct health and safety implications as a result of the policy however the Rules and Regulations do cover aspects of operational practice to support Allotment Associations and plot holders to operate safely.
- 3.5 **Gaelic** –  
There are no Gaelic language implications arising from this report.

## **4 Impacts**

- 4.1 In Highland, all policies, strategies or service changes are subject to an integrated screening for impact for Equalities, Poverty and Human Rights, Children's Rights and Wellbeing, Climate Change, Islands and Mainland Rural Communities, and Data Protection. Where identified as required, a full impact assessment will be undertaken.
- 4.2 Considering impacts is a core part of the decision-making process and needs to inform the decision-making process. When taking any decision, Members must give due regard to the findings of any assessment.
- 4.3 This is an update report and therefore an impact assessment is not required.

## **5 Background**

- 5.1 The Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 places a duty on Local Authorities to develop a Community Food Growing Strategy. In response to the duty, 'Growing our Future', the Highland Council's Community Food Growing Strategy (2022-27), was agreed in February 2022. The strategy identifies land in Highland which could be used for local food growing and outlines how the authority intends to increase the availability of land where there is an identified need. The strategy includes a clear focus on supporting communities experiencing socioeconomic disadvantage.
- 5.2 The vision and aim of the strategy are supported by a number of key objectives:-
- Build knowledge and understanding of Community Food Growing in Highland;
  - Communities are empowered to start growing or expand their growing;
  - Ensure communities are informed and connected, and are supported to access the resources they need;
  - Identify potential allotment and growing spaces; and
  - Support communities to become more resilient through community food growing.

5.3 To accompany the publication of the strategy, initial guidance on community food growing was produced and a detailed action plan was developed setting out how the Council, High Life Highland, and our community partners will work to meet the objectives laid out in the strategy. The action plan with a summary of progress is attached as **Appendix 1**.

## **6 Progress on the Action Plan 2024-25**

6.1 The action plan with a summary of progress is attached as **Appendix 1**. Highlights of activity in 2024/25 is outlined below.

### **Allotments Update**

One of the actions within Growing our Future was to review the Council's approach to allotments. A revised policy was agreed in March 2024 along with new rules and regulations for allotments. Actions identified within the review were incorporated into the action plan that supports the Strategy. Progress to date includes:

- 6.3
  - The recent annual meeting of the Allotments Steering Group identified opportunities to strengthen cross-service collaboration, particularly in aligning planning processes with emerging community food growing priorities. Early identification of potential allotment sites for inclusion in planning applications was highlighted as a key area for development including:
    - Delties, Nairn development includes allotments (25 small plots)
    - Milton of Leys, Inverness (pending approval) - includes area of allotments
  - The Allotment Steering Group also included discussion on the need to ensure consistent sharing of information across services to support delivery and avoid duplication to maximise officers' time.
  - Demand for allotments remains concentrated in urban areas such as Inverness, Culloden, Aviemore and Dingwall with emerging interest from communities in Lochaber.
  - Culloden West Allotment Association has 44 people interested in becoming plot holders. This is already almost double what the anticipated capacity at the new site will allow for. This new site would be on Council land and therefore fall within the requirements of the Community Empowerment Act.
  - Inverness - Knocknagael Green Hub: Work is progressing to create, maintain and manage food growing activities, including allotments, for the benefit of the community.
  - Inverness – Balvorie Park Association: This project aims to create community woodland, orchards and allotments in Milton of Leys. A community asset transfer was agreed for the land in June 2024, and the legal work relating to the sale is nearing completion.
  - Planning colleagues continue to review potential allotment sites during development of Highland Development Plan, including with reference to Local Place Plans.

## 6.2 Community Food Growing

**Growing in Schools** - work continues to promote and develop growing projects in schools.

- Go Flourish at North Kessock Primary School an outdoor learning initiative is in its second year. Since installation of the school garden in summer 2024, pupils have engaged in cross-curricular, hands-on learning while gaining practical experience in food growing and preparation. The project supports academic achievement, healthy lifestyles, and wellbeing, and is being evaluated in partnership with the University of St Andrews. The garden also functions as a community space, hosting events and workshops that foster intergenerational engagement and strengthen local connections. Expansion of the project is planned through work with Dalneigh Primary School, starting early 2026.
- Highland Good Food Partnership (HGFP) ran successful online 'growing in schools' workshop with approx. 30 attendees. HGFP have taken more of a focus on connecting people and supporting networking.

### Community Growing projects

- The community garden at Grant Street, Merkinch (Clay Studio) on previously unused land, is enabling young people to get involved in growing food for the community.
- HLH Seed Libraries: This has been a successful pilot and have expanded to other areas.
- Tool Library: Clachworks (Inverness Tool Library) with 480 tools to hire is now situated at Newstart at the Carse Industrial Estate. They have been working with Transition Black Isle to successfully train them using a booking system.
- Carrbridge Ahead - Community Orchard, used by groups and individuals of all abilities. Carrbridge Primary will use the orchard area for their Eco Schools projects and out of school activities. Identified benefits of the project include:
  - Grow and conserve a mix of local varieties of fruit;
  - Optimise potential for wildlife on the site;
  - Create and implement an orchard management plan to grow and harvest local produce to be shared locally however leaving at least 10% for wildlife. This will address local health inequalities;
  - Encourage the creation of more community growing spaces and to work with other community orchard groups; and
  - To offer a place of recreation.

Designation:	Assistant Chief Executive – Place
Date:	30 September 2025
Author:	Cai MacIver, Community Development Manager
Appendices:	Appendix 1: Growing our Future: Strategy Action Plan

## Strategy Action Plan with Notes

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

Action	Lead	Timeframe	Notes
Support the development and delivery of a Highland Community Food Growing Network	THC in partnership with the Highland Good Food Partnership (HGFP)	Ongoing	During 2023/early 2024 HGFP have coordinated a series of workshops for CFG groups covering skills development and networking, funded by Sustainable Food Places. They are now taking a focus on connecting groups and signposting to information.
Develop and maintain CFG map highlighting all activity across the region	Highland Council and HGFP	Complete	Map available on the HGFP website. Communities can add to the map by contacting HGFP.
Pilot a community learning and development GYO project	Highlife Highland (The Highland Council)	Not started	The intention is to pilot this during the lifetime of the new Highland Community Planning Partnership Community Learning and Development plan. Work on this has not yet commenced.

			<a href="https://highlandcpp.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/CLD-Plan-2024-2027.pdf">https://highlandcpp.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/CLD-Plan-2024-2027.pdf</a>
Develop CFG webpage on THC website to host above information	Highland Council	Complete	Webpage updated for launch of strategy <a href="#">Allotments and Food Growing Strategy   Climate change   The Highland Council</a> .
Highland wide guidance for CFG groups	Highland council	Complete	Guidance doc downloadable from THC webpage. Resources are on HGFP website and circulated to workshop attendees.
Raising awareness with Community Partnerships of how CFG supports their priorities and outcomes	Highland Council	Ongoing	CFG strategy is on the Community Planning Partnership website. Work is ongoing to raise awareness of CFG and wider benefits within partnerships.

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

Action	Lead	Timeframe	Notes
Encourage individuals to join existing groups	Highland Council Community Support and Engagement	Ongoing	Community Support and Engagement team administer an allotment 'register of interest' and direct individuals that enquire towards known CFG projects
Encourage communities and individuals to explore CFG opportunities for their community	Highland Council Community Support and Engagement and the HGFP	Ongoing	Support has been provided to community groups and individuals by the CFG Coordinator from Aug 2021- March 2024. Ongoing support is in place from Community Support Coordinators and one Community Development Manager holds the functional lead for this area of work.
Encourage Grow Your Own projects in schools across Highland	Highland Council	Ongoing	A session on CFG in Schools was included in the Sep/Oct 2024 school managers training programme.
Develop guidance for cooking and eating Grow Your Own in schools	Highland Council Catering	Complete	School catering have issued guidance to catering staff.
Green Young Leadership Programme	Pilot by Highlife Highland	2022-2027	This is now a fully incorporated Young Leaders programme for 12-25 years old across Highland. This allows those who have an interest in environmental

			issues to be part of our universal leadership programme and find deployment in a subject that is of interest to them whilst gaining accredited SCQF awards, training and valuable recognition for their volunteering leadership. <a href="#"><u>Conservation and Leadership Volunteering - High Life Highland Rangers</u></a>
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**Objective 3: Ensure communities are informed and connected, and are supported to access the resources they need**

Action	Lead	Timeframe	Notes
Work with communities to set up Tool Libraries	Highlife Highland	Complete	Clachworks had a promotional stand at Inverness Library to raise awareness of their existing tool library, this was successful, with 480 tools to hire, now situated at Newstart at the Carse Industrial Estate. They have been working with Transition Black Isle to train them using a booking system.
Signpost communities and individuals to various online resources, funds and other organisations	Highland Council Community Support and Engagement	Ongoing	Guidance doc containing information and signposting to other resources is available to download on the Council's CFG webpage.  Community support officers are an ongoing source of guidance for CFG groups and individuals.

Encourage groups and individuals to work together and share resources	Highland Council	Ongoing	Work continues to raise awareness and encourage wider collaboration through the Community Support and Engagement team.
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#### **Objective 4: To identify potential allotment and growing spaces**

Action	Lead	Timeframe	Notes
Carry out a green space audit	Highland Council Environment Team	Complete	This is now complete and as noted below, a public facing map is being developed.
Safeguard valued greenspace including where there is potential for CFG with each Local Plan review	Highland Council Development Planning	Ongoing	NPF4 is making CFG land a bigger priority. Commitments have been included in the allotments policy.
Develop Green Space Map to include land that has been identified as suitable for CFG	Highland Council Environment Team	2022-25	With the green space audit now complete, this work is currently being progressed.

Explore opportunities to identify land with Community Planning Partners	Highland Community Partnership	Ongoing	CPP website updated with CFG strategy. Ongoing discussions with NHS Health Improvement Officer with a remit for community use of NHS land.
Explore development of a fund to support community food growing permissions (e.g. Title Investigations, planning permission etc)	Highland Council	2022-23 - complete	A specific funding stream has not been identified however groups are signposted to the Council's Ward Discretionary Fund and SAGS development fund.  THC have made pre-planning advice free to remove this cost barrier for new projects.
Produce specific guidance on council processes and the options available to CFG groups that want to access THC land	Highland Council	2022 - complete	The CAT process has been simplified for low-risk projects that are supported within the council. Information on CAT process is available on THC website.
Provide simple occupancy agreements for smaller scale	Highland Council Housing team	2022-23 complete	Informal arrangements have been trialled, with a form and process in place for smaller scale projects as these arise.

projects using Council land			
Consider the provision of space for community food growing in large and strategic housing developments	Highland Council – Infrastructure and Environment Team	2022-27 - ongoing	<p>This commitment has been included in the allotment policy for the housing development team.</p> <p>Local development plans include space identified. Planning team are open to conversations when applications come in where allotments could be included.</p>
Co-location of services - promoting CFG opportunities beside libraries, community centres and sport centres	Highlife Highland	2022-27	<p>Seed libraries: Ullapool and Nairn Libraries were initially being used as pilot seed library locations. This proved very successful adding Bettyhill, Dingwall, Wick and Caol</p> <p><a href="https://highlifehighlandranger.substack.com/p/a-growing-tradition-part-2?utm_source=share&amp;utm_medium=android&amp;r=3migvh&amp;triedRedirect=true">https://highlifehighlandranger.substack.com/p/a-growing-tradition-part-2?utm_source=share&amp;utm_medium=android&amp;r=3migvh&amp;triedRedirect=true</a></p>
Consider CFG as an alternative use of play space as part of the review of play areas	Highland Council Communities and Place Service	Ongoing until 2027	<p>Trial ideas did not come to fruition. Explore again once green space map is complete and if play spaces have been identified.</p>

Promote GYO guidance on contaminated land	Highland Council	Complete	Link to guidance recommended by our contaminated land team is included within the strategy supporting guidance document.
Provide free advice to community groups on contaminated land	Highland Council	Complete	Advice is provided by the contaminated land team or Community Support Officers.
Review Provision and Management of Allotments	Highland Council	2022-2025 complete	Allotments policy review complete. New actions coming from the review have been added to this plan.
Review guidance for community groups growing in school grounds to make it easier and less prohibitive	Highland Council Estates team	complete	Estates team have created a process for external groups who want to use School land. Observe North Kessock Flourish project for learning points.
Support Private Public Partnership schools in negotiating the use of their land for food growing	Highland Council	complete	A process has been agreed with the school estate management team to enable agreeing land for food growing.

Explore the development of guidance on planning requirements for Community Food Growing	Highland Council Planning Service	2022-23 complete	The planning team provide allotments groups with free pre-planning advice.
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#### **Objective 5: Support communities to become more resilient through community food growing**

Action	Lead	Timeframe	Notes
Develop guidance for CFG projects to consider promoting inclusion and tackling inequalities in the design of their project	Highland Council and the Green Health Partnership	2022-23	Work being progressed by NHS Highland and is currently ongoing but not yet complete.
Support interested groups that coordinate emergency food provision to add	Highland Council	Ongoing	Links are encouraged between allotments and food provision projects within the allotments policy.

CFG elements to their work			
Encourage CFG groups to be involved with community planning for emergencies	Highland Council	Complete	This action was part of covid response planning, which has now diminished.
Consider geographic areas of socio-economic deprivation when making land available for CFG where possible	Highland Council	Ongoing	<p>Project in Merkinch Nature Reserve in partnership with a community group took place in 2023 for biodiversity enhancements inc a community orchard.</p> <p>Review this action once green space audit completed and map in place.</p>
Promote CFG as a green health activity within health and social care referral pathways	Green Health Partnership	Complete	HGHP has been promoting this through their network and social media. HGHP is currently going through a transition at the end of the programme funding.

## Allotment Policy Review Actions

Action	Lead	Timeframe	Notes
Develop template policy and procedures and governance documents, for allotment associations.	Highland Council Community Support and Engagement	2024	This is now complete
Support the adoption of template P&Ps and incorporation process for Allotment Associations	Highland Council Community Support and Engagement	Ongoing	For Allotment Associations that require becoming incorporated organisations to take on a lease of Council land, and those that wish to strengthen their governance.  In partnership with HTSI
Set up and administer an annual allotment forum	Highland Council Community Support and Engagement	Ongoing	Annual meeting
Council land made available for new or expanded allotment sites	Highland Council allotment steering group	Ongoing	When high demand is identified and/or trigger points are reached.

Support to AAs in formation & projects in development	Highland Council Community Support and Engagement	Ongoing	Currently supporting and in dialogue with Culloden West, Aviemore, Dingwall, Balvorie & Knocknagael. Support tailored based on needs of group. Community Support Officers will support on ongoing basis.
Allotments rules and regulations put in place	Highland Council Community Support and Engagement	Complete	Coordination with Allotment Associations on Council land.
Allotments annual report	Highland Council	Ongoing	Annual report delivered
Steering group meeting	Highland Council Allotment Steering Group	Ongoing	Annually review annual report data and register of interest data, and identify what if any actions should be taken
Data handling measures in place	Highland Council	2024	Such as data sharing agreement with AAs, update privacy policy for Register of Interest
Reduce rents for AAs on Council land	Highland Council	2024	All land managing services with allotments sites
Guidance to AAs on environmental/sustainable pest and weed control	Highland Council amenities service	Due 2024/25	Integrated Weed Control Strategy Plan under development