

HOUSING MANAGEMENT CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE

Agenda Item 70

Brighton & Hove City Council

Subject: Food growing on council land

Date of Meeting: 21 January 2010 Sustainability Cabinet Committee
8 February 2010 Housing Management
Consultative Committee

Report of: Director of Adult Social Care Housing

Contact Officer: Name: Francesca Iliffe Tel: 29-2246
E-mail: francesca.iliffe@brighton-hove.gov.uk

Key Decision: No

Wards Affected: All

FOR GENERAL RELEASE

1. SUMMARY AND POLICY CONTEXT:

- 1.1 This report was requested by Councillor Mears at Sustainability Cabinet Committee 8 May 2009 to explore issues around food growing on council housing land in relation to the Citywide four year project 'Harvest Brighton & Hove' (Brighton & Hove Food Partnership) which aims to extend food growing and consumption of local food in the city.
- 1.2 This report will be presented to Housing Management Consultative Committee 8 February 2010.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 2.1 That the contents of the report be noted as an update on work within the council to encourage local food growing.

3. RELEVANT BACKGROUND INFORMATION/CHRONOLOGY OF KEY EVENTS:

- 3.1 This report explores the following issues in relation to community food projects :
- What food growing activity is happening in Brighton & Hove on council land, specifically that belonging to housing?
 - What potential is there is for the development of further projects: what would need to happen to enable this in terms of legal structures, resources etc.
 - What models and good practice exist elsewhere in the UK between local authorities and the community?
- 3.2 A resurgence of interest in use of allotments in recent years has contributed to oversubscription of allotments service. There are currently around 2300 residents on the waiting list for allotments and the wait can be from 2 years to 8 years.
- 3.3 The allotments service is tackling the waiting list issue by: increasing the quantity of plots that are available; increased monitoring of the waiting list; and by

focusing attention on untended plots. Whitehawk Hill and Craven Vale allotment extensions have created a further 80 allotments, with around 20 of which shall be allocated to community groups, such as Bristol Estate Allotment Group, Transition Town and Whitehawk Food Project. Clearance of overgrown voided allotments on Moulescoombe Estate allotments has created a further 26 new 125 square metre plots. However, despite considerable effort by the Allotments Service to increase the availability of allotments, it is clear from the size of the waiting list that additional land for food growing is desired by the community.

- 3.4 The council owns substantial land within the city, some of which is not being used or is underused. Where there is interest from the community for temporary or semi permanent growing projects, mutually beneficial arrangements may be facilitated. **Appendix 1 lists risks and opportunities.**
- 3.5 The key objectives of the city's Food Strategy are to encourage the development of local food growing and consumption. The Sustainable Community Strategy, the Sustainability Strategy and the Core Strategy support access to allotments and locally produced food. Community food growing projects can support community cohesion and combat social exclusion, improve external environments and enhance community safety through better use of disused areas. They also encourage outdoor activity, an objective of the Active Living Strategy.
- 3.6 Some drivers for strategic food work in Brighton and Hove:
 - 10% of five year olds are obese and 13% are overweight
 - Only 15% of residents take the nationally recommended level of a minimum of thirty minutes physical activity five times a week
 - 56% of adults eat less than the recommended five portions of fruit and vegetables a day
 - Deprived wards in the city have a life expectancy up to five years below more affluent wards
 - The food system contributes 18% to the UK Carbon footprint
- 3.7 Brighton & Hove Food Partnership's project 'Harvest Brighton & Hove' aims to develop a series of approaches and models that build capacity within the city to establish food growing projects which can sustain themselves after the time limited 'Harvest' project ends in 2012. The models developed will be replicable within the city and in other urban areas in the UK. This way, Harvest can have an impact beyond the life and physical location of the pioneering original project in Brighton & Hove. For more information on Harvest: <http://www.harvest-bh.org.uk/>
- 3.8 'Harvest Brighton & Hove' consists of many projects, one of which is 'Breaking New Ground led by local *not for profit* organisation Food Matters (www.foodmatters.org). The project looks at how public spaces e.g. around housing estates or in parks could be used for productive food growing. Delivered in partnership with Brighton University this will involve developing an urban growing plan for Brighton & Hove identifying how the city could produce more of its own food. One site will be turned into productive space and three more sites supported. Learning and support will be offered to other groups that want to replicate the model.
- 3.9 Harvest is seeking to establish projects on council land where there is interest from the community within the next year. This has triggered a focus within the

council on the potential to facilitate food growing projects on housing land where tenants and residents express an interest.

Summary of what is happening in Brighton and Hove

- 3.10 Brighton & Hove has a rich history of well established organisations and food projects ranging from the Allotments Federation to highly successful projects which engage well with local communities and schools such as Stanmer Organics, Care Co-ops Community Farm, Moulsecoomb Forest Garden and Whitehawk Community Food Project. These are focused on Allotments or Cityparks land and achieve a higher level of community engagement than individual allotments. These community food projects operate on council land through a lease agreement.
- 3.11 A preliminary audit of growing currently taking place on council housing land has identified limited activity. Two examples include: the project set up by Maggie Smeeth, chair of Central Whitehawk Tenants Association, at the Greenhouse in Whitehawk; and an area of land outside Lichfield Court in Whitehawk where a tenant grows fruit and vegetables. However there is increasing demand from residents for areas of tended or untended land to be made available for community growing.
- 3.12 One example of a community request for food growing space on an area of Housing owned land has arisen in Bevendean. Local community members have formed an organisation called Bevendean Community Garden. The group consists of highly motivated individuals with diverse skills who propose setting up a new community food project linked to Bevendean Primary School and the local community. Negotiations to enable this to happen are currently underway; officer support is being provided by officers working in City Parks, Sustainability, Legal, Estates, and Housing. It is hoped the Bevendean project will be on site by summer 2010. The preliminary work to facilitate this project has fed into the *risk and opportunities* appendix which can be used to set a checklist for facilitating future food projects.
- 3.13 Further examples of requests to use housing land that are soon to be considered are the South Hawk Allotment Project in Henfield Close Whitehawk, land behind Plaistow Close in Whitehawk, and land near Craven Road.
- 3.14 Officers within housing have carried out some preliminary work and identified areas of land in Whitehawk and Portslade that might be suitable for community growing. This work is still ongoing, with maps being developed to denote the potential areas. A map of land owned by Housing is attached at **appendix 2**.
- 3.15 A *call for interest* was placed in the Autumn 2009 edition of 'Homing In' inviting residents who might be keen to grow food locally to contact a named officer. Only a handful of residents expressed an interest, but a few more asked for information about allotments. The December issue of 'Homing In' carries a larger article and housing staff are planning more face-to-face communication with Tenant Association representatives and other residents who may be interested.
- 3.16 Anecdotally, residents, particularly those with no gardens, are keen to be involved in growing food, and some of the support that might be needed include:-
 - Support to organise a group, or to be put in contact with other local people

- Land in close proximity to homes
 - Training: e.g. for general growing; growing in containers or raised beds; cookery demonstrations
 - Activities or volunteering events to be invited to – especially for those who have never had a garden. For example volunteering opportunities on Tuesdays and Thursdays at the Whitehawk Community Allotment near Bristol Estate.
 - Tools, compost, equipment, seeds etc - or funding
 - Information e.g. on allotment sharing, support available, what has worked
 - Ability to try things out without needing to commit themselves to e.g. a community gardening committee or a Tenants Association (e.g. be referred to an existing community food project)
 - A license which can be used to secure an understanding of responsibilities where land management is passed to residents
- 3.17 Consultation with officers from Housing, Legal, Cityparks and Estates indicate that smaller plots on housing land could be let to the community through a specific licence. Where a community group or individual requests use of land near their residence e.g. on their estate, this could be facilitated through the following process:
- i) Consultation with officers from housing
 - ii) In principle support from Housing
 - iii) Consultation with the local community
 - iv) License drawn up and signed by individual/group
 - v) Community group develops community garden
 - vi) **Appendix 1: Risks and opportunities** lists some of the issues that may come up in the process of setting up a food project, and how these issues could be handled.
- 3.18 The pilot of the *Turning the Tide* Strategy in the Moulsecoomb area presents an opportunity to establish ‘*Grow your Neighbour’s Own*’ gardening projects in Council housing gardens (a *Harvest Brighton and Hove* initiative). *Turning the Tide* aims to tackle social exclusion in Council housing. ‘*Grow your Neighbour’s Own*’ is an initiative that can help to promote community cohesion and well-being, offering residents who don't have gardens the opportunity to grow their own food using the gardens of residents who have gardens but aren't keen or able to use them whether for time, knowledge or mobility reasons. ‘*Grow Your Neighbour’s Own*’ involves pairing up gardeners with tenants who have unused gardens and can improve community networks and promote well being.
- 3.19 The Tenant Service Authority (TSA) is currently consulting on a new regulatory framework for social housing in England. This proposed regulatory framework would require social landlords to agree local standards and priorities with residents. During 2010, Housing Officers, will be working with residents to agree local priorities for their area. Opportunities to grow food could be included as one of a menu of local outcomes for residents and the Council to prioritise for their local area.

Summary of good practice in the UK

- 3.20 Initial research has found recent emerging examples of projects between local councils and the community. This indicates that Brighton & Hove is in the forefront of work of developing models to facilitate the development of food projects, just as it was pioneering in developing a Food Strategy for the city. Other councils making progress include Calderdale, Huddersfield, York, Croydon, Bristol, Camden and Islington.
- 3.21 At Calderdale a pioneering community food project called 'Incredible Edible Todmorden' www.incredible-edible-todmorden.co.uk/ and a core group of officers from the Conservative run council led on work establishing a local project called 'Calderdale Incredible Edible'. A Calderdale – wide project to increase food production and consumption was developed. The project was based in deprived areas and delivered strong community cohesion and engagement benefits. See **appendix 3** for further information.
- 3.22 Calderdale Council made a decision at Cabinet in April 2009 to utilise council land where appropriate for community growing of fruit and vegetables. A tranche of model licenses was developed by Calderdale's legal services for use between the community and council. Three licenses were produced for food growing in the following settings: i) pots and containers (e.g. growing vegetables in public squares); ii) tree planting/orchards; iii) land on housing estates (for allotment style growing). 19 food projects are currently being processed.
- 3.23 Other councils adopting the 'Incredible Edible' approach include Islington, Huddersfield and York. The Welsh Assembly is also exploring potential implementation for Wales.
- 3.24 The London boroughs of Camden and Islington are also supporting the development of community growing projects on council owned land. Camden has recently made available funding of £1 million pounds for supporting such projects. Islington is at a similar stage to Brighton currently looking at the legal situation and developing licences and agreements.

4. CONSULTATION

- 4.1 Internal consultation included: Head of Housing Management (East Brighton) who has consulted with housing officers and through them Tenant Association representatives. Other council officers consulted include those from Cityparks & Allotments; Estates; Legal; Planning; Ecology; Environmental Health; and Community Development. Council lawyers have been consulted on the legal processes which may need to be set up to facilitate food growing projects on council land.
- 4.2 Research into good practice elsewhere in the UK has involved consultation with Brighton and Hove Food Partnership, Food Matters (local food policy organisation), Sustain, Food Links (national food policy bodies); councils: Calderdale, Islington, Croydon and Camden;

5. FINANCIAL & OTHER IMPLICATIONS:

Financial Implications:

- 5.1 "The financial implications arising from this report are for staff time spent on the monitoring of community interest and liaising with residents associations, and costs of equipment such as tools. Costs of staff time will be met within the existing resources of the Housing department, funded by the Housing Revenue Account (HRA). In respect of the costs of tools, the Food Partnership will provide some funding as part of the 'Harvest' project, will also run a 'tool library' for use by community groups, and provide small grants suitable for this type of project. Grants for tools may also be provided through the HRA Estate Development Budget (EDB) through the normal EDB bidding processes"

Finance Officer consulted: Susie Allen Date: 10/12/09

Legal Implications:

- 5.2 "Sites will need to be looked at, from the legal point of view, on a case by case basis but, in principle, appropriate legal documentation could be drafted to reflect the circumstances of each case"

Lawyer Consulted: Anna Mackenzie Date: 09/12/09

Equalities Implications:

- 5.3 Existing projects and those to be developed will be available to any resident showing an interest but a focus may be given for outreach to specific local minority groups through mentoring schemes. Some projects have, or have specifically requested, raised beds to enable residents with mobility issues to participate.

It is envisaged that food projects will contribute to the city council's financial inclusion and social inclusion work, and will increase the capacity of local communities to access and consume locally grown and healthy foods.

Sustainability Implications:

- 5.4 Sustainability benefits of this work are considerable. They include: making productive use of land which is underused; increasing local food production and a more sustainable food system; increasing consumption of healthy, fresh produce; increasing outdoor activity; increasing community cohesion; increasing skills and capacity in the community.

Crime & Disorder Implications:

- 5.5 Anecdotal evidence from 'Incredible Edible Calderdale' is that the food projects do not suffer vandalism despite being located in areas of high deprivation. Reasons for this may include the strong sense of community engagement, cohesion and ownership of these projects. The worse they have suffered are homeless people digging up and eating produce but this is not seen in a negative light. Food projects frequently engage e.g. excluded school children, young offenders and community 'payback' teams and have great potential for positive

impact on these individuals. Security and troubleshooting for each project can be explored on a case by case basis.

Risk & Opportunity Management Implications:

- 5.6 A document at **Appendix 1** explores risks and opportunities.

Corporate / Citywide Implications:

- 5.7 Relevant City Food Strategy objectives 1) To support educational initiatives across all sectors of the community to raise awareness of the production of food and its role in supporting health, the economy and the environment. 4) Increase access for all residents to nutritious, safe affordable food. 6) Encourage the development of a vibrant local food economy, expand local food production and create opportunities for city residents to access locally produced food. 10) Be accountable and rooted in the community, celebrate the part food plays in the community and culture of the city.

6. EVALUATION OF ANY ALTERNATIVE OPTION(S):

- 6.1 This work will include establishing resident priorities, and supporting residents to harness and increase community capacity, community interest and community skills in local food production. The work is currently at a very early stage, and housing staff will continue to work with residents, council colleagues, the Food Partnership and Food Matters to evaluate the feasibility of using available housing land. The Food Partnership is also looking at alternative land options with other land owners in the city, e.g. schools, hospitals and businesses.

7. REASONS FOR REPORT RECOMMENDATIONS

- 7.1 The reasons for the report's recommendations are to raise awareness among members of the Committee of emerging work within the council in relation to local growing projects, and to provide information on the role that housing land can play.

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION

Appendices:

1. Risks and opportunities
2. A map of land in Brighton and Hove owned by Housing
3. Calderdale 'Incredible Edible'

Documents in Members' Rooms

None

Background Documents

1. Spade to Spoon; A Food Strategy and Action Plan for Brighton and Hove (2006) http://www.brighton-hove.gov.uk/downloads/bhcc/sustainability/food_strategy/SpadeToSpoon-WEB_FINAL_SEPT06.pdf

