

## Presentation 4

### Developer perspective: why include food growing space in new development - case studies from Leeds, Brighton and London

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This set of slides considers what we can learn from new residential development that has included space for food growing.

#### Brighton

Brighton is always cited as an example of best practice in regard to planning policy for sustainability and requiring space for food growing to be included in new development. Having a policy is one thing, but are these spaces successful, years down the line. Brighton has long had a reputation for sustainable living and is lucky to have Food Matters (a national food policy organisation) based in the city. They led the way with the first city wide community-developed food partnership for Brighton and Hove and the city's food strategy was first published in 2006.

In 2011 Brighton & Hove City Council produced a pioneering and award winning "Food Growing and Development Planning Advice Note" (PAN), Nowadays it would be published as a supplementary planning document. It covered a gap in planning policy which has since been filled by their updated local plan under the heading of healthy communities.

The Planning Advice Note provides practical guidance on how food growing can be incorporated into developments. The aim is to weave food growing into the fabric of development sites and the urban environment. The Council reports that over a third of developments have incorporated food growing space into their development proposals. However, there is limited experience as few of the major developments have been built as yet.

We will look at the One Brighton scheme

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One Brighton is a mixed-use, city centre development. Developed by Crest Nicholson & BioRegional Quintain, it comprises 172 apartments – from "eco-studios" to 3-bedroom units – plus office and community space. split between a 12 storey block and an 8 storey block close to Brighton's main railway station. I should say, this is a high and windy site above the town centre. Some flats are owner occupied, others are rented or shared ownership.

Food growing was integrated into the design with 28 rooftop mini-allotments with their own tool box neatly built into it. Balconies have integrated planters suitable for growing food, External areas include 'edible landscaping'. The rainwater collection system was to be used for irrigation of rooftop mini allotments. This is an example of design overriding function as, hidden by cladding, it is difficult to maintain. The mini allotments are rented annually. Most residents keep them for the duration of their tenancies; some have had their allotments since the original sale of properties.

Initially, a specialist green caretaker oversaw the running of the site and gave encouragement to new growers; now the knowledge of running the building has matured, there is a general property manager. The allotment holders have a formal licence with responsibilities for repairs to allotment plots and keeping allotment garden areas clean and clear of rubbish/debris. They have no jurisdiction over the seagulls and bird protection has had to be installed.

The perhaps onerous requirement for plot holders to repair the raised beds given the exposure to sea & salt winds has not been enforced but now they are at a point where they

are beginning to fall apart. These plots incidentally are the only currently available plots. It is likely repairs will be carried out under property management.

The space brings residents together around a common interest and helps build a sense of community. There was perhaps over enthusiasm at the conception about the amount of food which would be grown and many just grow flowers. In terms of the development's one-planet objectives, the high density urban characteristics of One Brighton considerably limits the volume of produce in relation to the food needs of the community.

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## Leeds

Leeds is a Sustainable Food City with an active food partnership which includes the city council and Feed Leeds is a network of food growers initiated in 2011 by the city council but run as an independent community group. Leeds first had a food strategy in 2006. This map identifies the city centre development site which we will be looking at (the green arrow to the far right).

Leeds is the UK's third largest city. Known for its Victorian architecture, it has also unfortunately had a reputation for its failing high density council housing and poor economy.

It is now a reinvigorated city, the centre of Leeds City-region and part of the Northern Powerhouse. Investment has been attracted to change the nature of employment, centred on financial and legal services in the city centre which has required more modern housing for employees. With a great deal of new residential housing to come, this is an area of opportunity for a sustainable food city.

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## Leeds Core Strategy Adopted November 2014

Leeds City Council, as a partnership in Leeds Sustainable Food City, is supporting the initiative as they come to revise their planning policies.

The value of allotment gardens across the City is recognised as an integral component of the district's Green Infrastructure and in their contribution to public health. The council sees allotments as important facilities in providing for local food production close to communities and in contributing to local amenity and distinctiveness.

Aire Valley is one of the largest regeneration and growth opportunities in Leeds City Region where poor public health needs to be addressed. This is why provision of new opportunities for local people to grow their own food is a guiding principle for future development in the area.

By the way, policy also addresses the lack of sites for food shops to serve this area where people have limited access to fresh food.

There are some eco building schemes underway in the city, but we wanted to see how a mainstream development incorporated food growing.

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## Saxton, Leeds

As we saw, this development is situated close to the city centre. Leeds train station is a ten minute walk. It is not strictly speaking a new build, as the two 50 year old failed blocks were stripped back to the main structure and with the surrounding site were totally reconfigured. Completed in 2012 by developer Urban Splash, the 410 one and two bedroom apartments were available to buy, rent or through shared ownership. I even noticed one on airbnb if you want to give it a try.

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The blocks are shown in red.

The allotments and the orchard are on the right hand side of the plan in front of the lower block.

The amount of communal garden space was and still is a major marketing feature of the apartments with six and a half acres of private resident's gardens, wildflower meadows, an orchard and 97 allotments promoted as

*“space to grow your five a day, every day”*

and

*“Green fingered? Love the idea of growing your own right on your doorstep?”*

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Allotment licenses are £40 a year, and for this you get a plot measuring 2.5 m x 1.5m and the use of one of the 12 sheds, communal tools, water troughs and compost bins.

Unfortunately, less than half are in use. It is thought that the transient nature of the residents, mostly young people or students and lack of knowledge are the reason for low take up. If a plot is vacant it gets covered over to stop anyone else using it for free and to stop it getting covered in weeds. So rather than set up a club and promote fun, shared endeavour and community development in a beautiful garden which any resident could visit, managers would rather restrict access, income is foregone and this part of the grounds will become desolate.

From a management point of view, apart from weeding the site and painting the sheds, so far, they have been easy to manage. Promotional literature is circulated during the year to encourage take up. Allotments should be available to anyone living in the scheme and to local residents from the rest of the Saxton Gardens estate.” (in fact, although this was a planning condition, it does not actually happen, it is probably difficult to organise in a gated community such as this.

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## **Newham**

Newham is an East London Borough which has benefited from the transport investment from the Olympics. It too has poor quality social housing which is so energy inefficient that it is more sustainable to demolish and redevelop sites. The council has long been supportive of community food growing for its health value and especially for holding communities together at a time of change. Their local plan policies have now caught up with their practice as a council. This Policy comes under the heading of sustainability & climate change.

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Rathbone Market is part of the Canning Town & Custom House regeneration programme, It is a joint venture between landowners Newham council and developers English Cities Fund. Residents are minutes by underground to city finance centre at Canary Wharf.

The overall scheme consists of 650 new homes, a quarter of which will be affordable housing, a new market square, public open spaces & a new public library and community centre.

Phase One of the development from 2013, shown here included twelve rooftop allotments each subdivided into six 3m<sup>2</sup> plots on a 5<sup>th</sup> floor roof and a communal eco-garden on a lower roof. They are accessible only by ploholders with a key to the lift. Further communal roof gardens and allotments are being completed as part of the finalised development. These will be more visible and accessible. We wonder to what extent designers consider how garden waste will be removed and how refreshed compost will be brought in. Gardening can be a dirty occupation and the lift access to the gardens was pristine.

The development has been built to Code for Sustainable Homes Level 4 and the gardens and allotments are part of a commitment to offsetting the carbon emissions generated in construction by calculating the food miles saved. In addition, there is a London wide policy for green roofs to slow down rainwater run-off and reduce the heat island.

When the plots first became available, a local food growing group planted a show plot and gave interested residents a demonstration of how to get the most out of an urban garden.

English Cities Fund expected high demand for plots. Unfortunately, the allotments were not used and so each plot was reduced in size and the annual rental fee was lowered. This led to higher take up. Managing agents are now considering handing the management of all the spaces to a single body who will be able to take a more active approach.

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### **Waltham Forest**

Waltham Forest is a north east London Borough where local food growing is thriving due in no small way to local social enterprise “Organic Lea” whose disused council nursery now grows to supply a local veg box scheme and the provision of horticultural training.

Planning policy has been supportive since 2012 under the headings of both environment and health and well being.

The council’s detailed development management policy is very clear that new developments should offer the opportunity to create spaces for growing food and flowers. This may involve, for example, living roofs or Community Gardens where provision for food growing is part of landscaping schemes. Perhaps due to their greater experience of local schemes their refined planning policy points out that, “where such spaces are created, maintenance plans play a valuable role in ensuring long term success.”

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Walthamstow Stadium, a very popular greyhound racing stadium, closed in 2008. Now the site has been redeveloped with just the historic art deco frontage remaining. On the site behind, the 292 new homes developed by L&Q Housing Association were soon reserved.

The layout shows these plots as long raised beds. This is their first growing season so it is too soon to see if the lessons learned from earlier raised bed models of food growing provision have been learnt. There are more likely to be families living here, so that may make a difference. Also, some housing associations employ a gardener to move around their developments starting gardening clubs and encouraging residents to get to know each other by being out in the garden.

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### **Lessons Learned**

We have shared some experiences of design and management in these examples.

Overall conclusions include our caution to being complacent if a local authority has planning policies which support or encourage food growing. This type of policy is rather more like a serving suggestion. In an area where the council gives higher priority to provision, the requirement for space may still get overridden in favour of other priorities in negotiations with developers.

Not all food growing spaces require planning consent, it will depend on whether the authority considers there will be development eg a shed, engineering works eg running a water pipe, or change of use eg from a disused play park. We would recommend landscaping schemes show areas with potential for food growing and integrate edible planting with more ornamental planting. This also overcomes concerns that a designated area will fall into disuse.

We commend developers who view their developments holistically – building homes not residential units but caution against over optimism as to how much food can be grown. Consideration of sustainability & carbon reduction is to be welcomed of course, but only if there is support to make it work. We campaign for greater knowledge about good food but are concerned that in the favoured design model of privatised plots rather than communal gardens, the opportunity for sense of community and enjoyment of food growing and sharing is lost. We dont want young people to be put off growing food due to raised expectations of productivity, cost and responsibilities of licences, lack of confidence & only occasional social interaction and suggest interest would be maintained if garden plots were run as clubs with a knowledgeable grower from the community.

Most community food growing spaces in the country have evolved from residents wanting to get involved in the improvement of the open space around their estate and this results in a more beautiful garden for all to enjoy. The more fluid design is attractive to non gardeners alike and is more beneficial to biodiversity.

We thank the property managers and council officers that spared the time to talk to us.

**Gillian Morgan MRTPI**

**Planning Food Cities Project, Sustain: The alliance for better food and farming**

Sustain's online toolkit Planning Food Cities helps communities use the planning system to support community food growing <https://www.sustainweb.org/planning/>

Planning sustainable cities for community food growing: A guide to using planning policy to meet strategic objectives through community food growing  
[https://www.sustainweb.org/publications/planning\\_sustainable\\_cities/](https://www.sustainweb.org/publications/planning_sustainable_cities/)