



Food growing and planning

Lessons from Brighton and Hove

There has been a resurgence of interest in ‘growing your own’ food in recent years, perhaps in recognition of the impact of the current food system on both our environment and our health. Many allotment sites have long waiting lists, resulting in communities and local authorities looking for ways to increase access to space for food growing in other ways. In cities this is a particular challenge, where the pressure on vacant land to provide housing or light industry is huge. However, even in the most developed urban landscapes it is possible to create spaces for growing food which can deliver a range of beneficial outcomes. Brighton and Hove, a city with a long history of sustainable food work, has pioneered an approach to encourage and support food growing within the planning system and develop policies which ensure that this continues with the future development of the city. These include ensuring that overarching policy in the Local Plan supports food growing, and that every new development in the city has considered how it might incorporate productive growing spaces within its design.

1. Growing food in cities

Almost 80% of us live in cities or towns today, where gardens and open spaces are at a premium. This is particularly true in Brighton and Hove, a city squeezed between the protected South Downs and the sea, with many residents living in flats or houses with little or no access to external space. The benefits of being outdoors and involved in food growing are well documented. The impact on both physical and mental health through access to nature, fresh produce and physical activity are clear. Growing food, particularly in public spaces such as schools or parks, provides opportunities for education and awareness-raising with children who are otherwise totally disconnected from how and where food is produced. Productive gardens in cities can provide oasis of green not only for people but also wildlife, encouraging biodiversity, even in the heart of the concrete city.

Encouraging creative use of the built environment for growing food, for example on roofs and walls, and landscaping around buildings, can create habitats for birds and insects and contribute to a greener city, as well as the potential to improve building performance through temperature regulation and insulation. To ensure that these multiple benefits are delivered it is essential that policies and strategies acknowledge the role that food can play in the health and well being of our urban spaces and all who live and visit them.

2. Planning and food growing

The planning system is fundamental to developing a sustainable food system. Not only is there a need to protect potential land suitable for food growing, from small scale allotment sites to larger scale areas of fertile farmland, but also to allow for the essential infrastructure necessary to support activities at all points of the food supply chain – from abattoirs to local shops, from mills to small units for local processing.

In Brighton and Hove land is at a premium – although surrounded on the north by publicly owned farmland, this is mainly downland, with thin chalk subsoil which presents a challenge for sustainable food production. It also falls under the protection of the South Downs National Park requiring use of land for food production to be balanced with public access and conservation.





In a densely populated city it is essential to be creative in finding opportunities to encourage food growing in unlikely places throughout the city. It is surprising how much potential space exists and how productive these spaces can be – pockets of land on housing estates, underdeveloped brown field sites, corners of parks and recreation areas. Not all land is suitable for growing, and clearly land is needed for a range of other uses such as outdoor sport, children’s play, dog walking and community activities.

3. Harvest Brighton & Hove

Brighton and Hove has had a Food Partnership since 2003, and a comprehensive food strategy, Spade to Spoon, which supports a sustainable and localised food system in the city. In 2009 the Partnership, together with Food Matters, initiated a city wide project to support community food growing, Harvest Brighton and Hove. A partnership programme working with a variety of organisations across the city, including the City Council, Harvest aims to increase the space available in the city to grow food, support people to grow more food and increase access to locally produced food, and now supports over 100 community projects.

The project also aims to develop policy and strategies which secure long term support for food growing and safeguard allotments and land for the benefit of future generations. Part of the project’s legacy was to explore how the planning system could be used to support food growing into the future. The city has a strong track record in planning for sustainability and in recent years developed policy in support of sustainable food in the now superseded Core Strategy (2010). Evidence of this commitment is also shown by the allocation of a sustainability officer in the planning team with

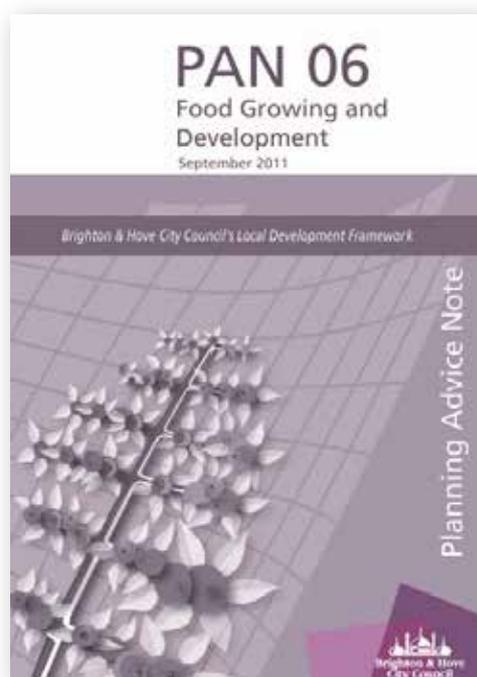
Aims of Harvest Brighton & Hove

- Increase the space available to grow food
- Help people have better access to local food
- Increase the skills and confidence of local people in growing their own food
- Increase awareness of the benefits of growing, buying and eating local produce
- Help develop strategies and guidance that support growing food within the city.

responsibility for food, and in particular supporting community food groups to access land.

4. Planning Advice Note

Food Matters and Brighton University first approached Brighton & Hove City Council with the idea of collaboratively developing a template Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) to encourage food growing proposals within new planning applications. The Planning Department responded enthusiastically, wanting to adopt guidance for real. They suggested producing a Planning Advice Note (PAN) because of a simpler adoption process; this could introduce technical guidance without the statutory processes that must be satisfied when developing SPDs. Similar PANs produced by the Brighton & Hove Planning authority include advice on renewable energy and waste management. Although the PAN would not introduce ‘requirements’ for new developments to include food growing, it would give a strong indication to planning applicants and developers that the Authority would like to see food growing addressed under the responsibility to deliver sustainable development. The guidance is not intended to deliver large scale urban agriculture projects, but rather to weave food growing into the fabric of development sites and the urban environment on whatever scale is appropriate.





• *Content*

The PAN is primarily intended to inspire developers to think about incorporating food growing into their plans from the outset, whether they are residential, commercial, mixed use proposals, new build or associated with existing buildings. Although the PAN does not give detailed technical advice (because of many variables involved), it gives a check list of issues that need consideration. In Brighton and Hove for example there are particular issues such as wind and aspect that accompany growing food in a coastal community. The PAN provides examples that can be incorporated into the planning of new developments, including: edible landscaping; rooftop allotments; productive green walls and roofs; planters on balconies etc. Real life case studies from Brighton and elsewhere demonstrate what can be achieved.

• *Management*

Unlike the normal landscaping provided in new developments, which are planted with low or even zero maintenance, food growing spaces clearly require on-going management – who will harvest the produce? This is a critical aspect that developers need to consider, as no-body, not least a local authority, wants to see spaces that are unkempt and unused. At the very least planting fruit trees and herbs are low maintenance, but provision of vegetable beds or allotments assume that there are people who will use them on an on-going basis. Developers need to consider who this might be - whether residents or workers in commercial units, or even a local community group, and where possible involve them in the planning from the outset. New developments, particularly those that are consciously incorporating a higher sustainability specification might include a 'green caretaker' who would have overall responsibility for management of growing spaces, for example in One Brighton.

The PAN in numbers:

- There has been a rise of approved application with food growing from **1% to 38%**
- **383m²** of food growing at ground level
- **142m²** of raised beds
- **87m²** of roof gardens

• *Achievements*

The PAN has now been in operation and available as part of the planning process for over a year. The response so far has been very positive, with approved planning applications including food growing rising from 1% to over 38%. Prior to adoption of the PAN there were estimated to be fewer than 5 applications that had included food growing. Monitoring for 20 months after adoption of approved residential planning applications revealed that proposals included 383m² of dedicated food growing provision at ground level; 142m² of raised beds; 87m² of food growing areas in roof gardens; 23 fruit trees and 2 nut trees. On average, 8m² space for food growing and 0.5 of a nut or fruit tree are being delivered per scheme. In addition a major city centre development providing student accommodation has proposed 20m² of raised beds for growing, 50m² of ground level food growing and 17 espaliered fruit trees. Landscaping, including green walls, will also include productive edible plants such as grape vines and herbs.

Response to the Planning Advise Note has from the outset been positive, and the interest of the development community has been steadily gaining momentum with good practice being consolidated all the time. Many of the schemes are currently at the building stage, so ongoing input is needed to support implementation on site as outlined in proposals.

Developers across the country who may be sceptical and wary of including food growing in their plans should heed the words from the pioneer of green housing in Brighton, Crest Nicholson and Bio-regional, who acknowledge that the inclusion of rooftop allotments for residents in their One Brighton development created a unique and attractive selling point to potential customers. There is now a healthy waiting list for allotments amongst the new residents.

The PAN has achieved recognition nationally having been nominated for various awards, and recently received 'Highly Commended' in the Innovation category of the London and South East Construction in Excellence Awards.

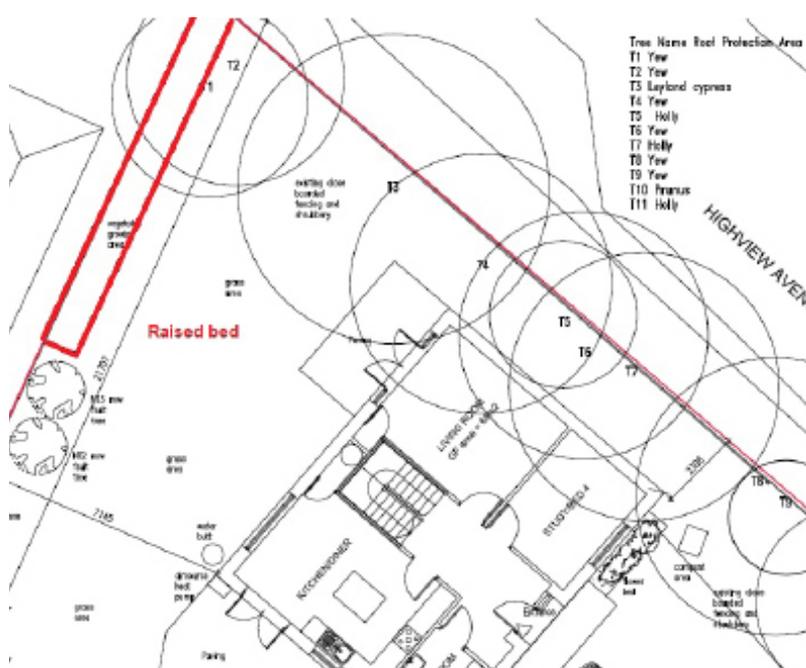


• Challenges

Although there may have been some scepticism and negativity from potential developers at the beginning, this was soon allayed once the process was underway. Politicians also expressed some concerns during the PAN's development that potential developers may be deterred from putting in applications if they felt it was going to add costs to their plans. However this has not proved the case. The cost of incorporating food growing can be negligible, although it will of course depend on the scale and ambition of the plans. As shown by the One Brighton feedback, investment can be recouped at the point of sales, as well as enhancing the profile of developers and raising their 'green credentials' and helping to bring otherwise sterile outdoor spaces to life.

There was always going to be a danger of developers 'ticking the box' and bolting on minimal growing schemes just to win brownie points with the planning authority. Time will tell when schemes are built if proposals end up being watered down or even disappearing, but it is the intention to monitor development and adopt processes to facilitate delivering initial proposals; and if they fail to understand why. There is no desire to encourage plans which are inappropriate or which are not accompanied by robust management plans, and clearly the planning authority will take a proportionate and case by case view of schemes. No-one wants to see failing growing sites due to poor or over-ambitious plans or lack of on-going maintenance.

As with the introduction of anything new, there is a period of learning on all sides and a process of embedding the concepts into general practice, which takes time and a process of monitoring and review. The ambition is that eventually it will be normal practice for food to be considered integral to sustainable development, and normal for this to be addressed from early design stages. However, it will take time for this to happen: it will be necessary to start right at the beginning in architecture and planning schools to ensure that future urban designers understand how to incorporate designs.



CASE STUDIES

Brighton and Hove

Varley Halls of Residence, Brighton University

New accommodation for 564 students.
Allotments proposed to supply canteen and potentially for student use in the future.
BREEAM Excellent.
Energy centre with Gas CHP. District Heating system throughout site and food growing facilities.

Developer: University of Brighton

Architect: BDP Architects

Planning application: BH2010/00235

Status: Completed in 2013



One Brighton, Residential and mixed use

Roof top raised bed allotments on 6th floor.
Zero carbon, zero waste development composed of 172 residential units. Sixth floor allotments, onsite composting facilities, biomass facilities and PV arrays.
Winner of the 2009 Sustainable Communities RTP1 award.

Developer: BioRegional Quintain and Crest Nicholson

Architect: Feilden Clegg Bradley Architects

Planning application: BH2006/01761

Status: Completed in 2010

The Keep, Woollards Field, Brighton

Historic Archive centre. Old fashioned community orchard. Local heritage varieties: 'White Transparent'
Two local schools involved. BREEAM excellent with 70% score in energy and water sections.
300kW biomass boiler using local woodchip, green roof, 17m2 solar thermal, rainwater harvesting.

Developer: East Sussex County Council

Architect: Atkins

Planning application: BH2010/03259

Status: Completion expected 2013



CASE STUDIES

Brighton and Hove

Park House, Hove

New five storey block of 71 flats.
Bespoke food growing planters for balconies, fruit trees, herbs.
Roof mounted PV array and air source heat pumps for each unit; passive design measures; water efficiency; rainwater butts; use of sustainable materials; tree-planting; and composting provision.

Developer: Hyde Newbuild
Architect: Yelo Architects
Planning application: BH2012/00114
Status: Currently under construction



Former Co-op Department Store, London Road, Brighton

New accommodation for 351 students with ground floor retail.
Edible landscaping 17 espaliered apple trees
Section 106: Off site open space contribution for allotment garden.
BREEAM Multi Residential Excellent (60% in energy and water sections).
Original 1920s façade retained, PVs, 150 cycle spaces.

Developer: Watkin Jones & Co-op Group
Architect: O'Connell East Architects
Planning application: BH2012/02675
Status: Currently under construction



Site J, New England Quarter, Brighton

One hundred and forty seven residential units, office, hotel and retail.
Rooftop allotments. Greenway and square with lift and stair access to Brighton Station. BREEAM Office Excellent and BREEAM Hotel Very Good. Green walls, brown roofs, PVs and car club.

Developer: Hyde Newbuild
Architect: Munkenbeck+Partners Urbanism
Planning application: BH2010/03999
Status: Residential block currently under construction.





5. Other tools to support food growing and planning

• *The City Plan*

The City Plan is the council's key planning document which will provide an overall strategic vision for the future of Brighton and Hove until 2030. In late 2013 it is undergoing a process of Public Examination, and adoption in 2014 is intended. The Plan will set out how the council will respond to local priorities, meet the challenges of the future and identify the location and type of development required, and supporting infrastructure. As a result of consultation with the Food Partnership, and with internal council support, the Plan includes several references to food growing and commitment to the provision of healthy and locally produced food. The inclusion of this commitment at a strategic policy level within the key Development Plan Document for the city provides a strong foundation from which further planning tools can be adopted to ensure successful delivery.

<http://www.brighton-hove.gov.uk/content/planning/local-development-framework/city-plan>

• *Sustainability Checklist*

Brighton and Hove City Council has developed a unique online sustainability checklist as a validation requirement indicating to applicants what issues they need to address to comply with policy, including issues such as renewable energy, materials, waste, ecological enhancement, composting etc. In 2011 when this was reviewed a 'food growing' section was added listing potential elements developers might include such as provision of raised beds or fruit trees. The checklist allows the Council to monitor how policy is being addressed by applicants, aiding future policy development, it also helps with the decision making process, and indicates where evaluation would be useful once the building is completed.

<http://www.brighton-hove.gov.uk/content/planning/planning-applications/sustainability-checklist>

• *Allocated officer time*

Brighton and Hove City Council planning team has included a sustainability officer with a food remit for the last couple of years in recognition of the importance

of food for delivering sustainability in the city. Having this expertise and focus embedded in the planning team had proved invaluable in a range of food related projects, in particular the development of the Planning Advisory Note. The officer also has responsibility for supporting community groups who are seeking access to land for growing projects. The allocation of officer time to support growing is a signifier of the city council's commitment to the issue.

• *Developer Contributions*

Historically, Section 106 agreements have been used as a way for developers to support off site measures to mitigate against negative impacts caused by development. The government has indicated a rolling back of S106 contributions in future, and it is expected

'Recognise, safeguard and encourage the role of allotments; garden plots within developments; small scale agriculture and farmers markets in providing access to healthy, affordable locally produced food options'
Brighton & Hove Proposed Submission City Plan
Feb 2013





that S106 will be used in future mainly to deliver only on-site measures. In Brighton and Hove there is a preference to support and encourage the incorporation of food growing and other sustainability measures as an integral part of new development rather than as an extra activity at the request of the council or community members.

The Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) is another mechanism to mitigate development and could raise funds from developers for supporting community infrastructure projects. This approach is currently being assessed for potential adoption by Brighton & Hove Planning Authority. In theory it could be used to lever in funds for food growing. In Brighton however, the CIL purse may be relatively small with a range of demands on it. In other areas with higher growth levels larger sums of money could be involved so the levy may be more useful. The approach that prioritises on site delivery of food growing and other sustainability measures is preferred in Brighton & Hove.

The screenshot shows a web browser window with the URL <http://www.brighton-hove.gov.uk/forms/sustainability.form>. The page title is "Food growing". On the left is a navigation menu with categories: CO2 emissions, Materials, Passive design, Greening, Water, Building standards, Technologies, Flood risk, Food growing (highlighted), Open space, Public realm, Biodiversity, Public transport, Pedestrians, Other users, Parking, Waste, Business, and Employment. Below the menu are buttons for "Save & Return" and "Supporting Info". The main content area asks "Is there provision for food growing included on the development site?" with radio buttons for "Yes" (selected) and "No". Below this are several input fields: "Raised beds", "Roof garden", "Dedicated area on ground level", "Fruit trees", "Nut trees", and "Other, please specify".

Conclusions:

- The value and benefit of food growing in cities is undisputed, demonstrated by the myriad of food growing projects that can be found in cities across the UK, such as Harvest in Brighton, Capital Growth in London and the Big Dig across the country. The challenge in going forward is to ensure that growing opportunities, beyond those provided by allotments, are integrated into the fabric of the city and supported by long term policy mechanisms, particularly those presented by the planning process
- All Local Authority Local Plans should include policies which support food growing in their area, on whatever scale is appropriate, from the support of small scale growing to larger scale commercial farms/ market gardens etc.
- The Planning Advice Note has proved a valuable and effective tool in Brighton and Hove to include as part of the planning process, with nearly 40% of new developments proposing to make provision for food growing. Every planning authority should include such advice as part of delivering future sustainability
- It will take time to ensure that architects, developers and property managers consider food growing as an integral part of new developments. Recognition of its importance should begin at colleges and universities where these disciplines are taught. Food growing should be considered as essential as including renewable energy measures or waste management systems for delivering sustainability
- Growing schemes must be realistic and accompanied by on-going management plans if they are to have long term success
- Having a Food Partnership in Brighton and Hove made the development of the PAN, the inclusion of policy to support food production in the City Plan and other measures possible, and will be key to monitoring future successes.