

Community Growing Forum Scotland - Response to Call for Ideas for NPF4

We welcome the Scottish Government's call for ideas to help shape the National Planning Framework and we look forward to continued partnership working.

The Community Growing Forum Scotland [CGFS] is a collaboration of both national and regional green and growing organisations in Scotland, with a shared vision and commitment to working together to enable every community in Scotland to benefit from food growing and nature based activities. We have worked together for 9 years to help organisations throughout Scotland support their communities, and partnered with the Scottish Government to develop policy and legislation including Part 9 of the Community Empowerment Act and Good Food Nation. We operate in all 32 local authority areas, and work together to better support the thousands of communities, representing hundreds of thousands of households, we represent.

The Partners: The Royal Horticultural Society, Greenspace Scotland, Scottish Allotments and Gardens Society, Central Scotland Green Network Trust, The Scottish Government-Food and Drink, Royal Caledonian Horticultural Society, Social Farms & Gardens Scotland, Transition Edinburgh South, Trellis, Nourish, Glasgow Allotment Forum, and East Renfrewshire Council.

Why we are responding

Our 2019 review (which extended our remit and changed our name from the previous *Grow Your Own Scotland*) identified further issues and opportunities to work together, to provide support to communities and organisations in all sectors in the development and operation of green spaces, build equity, tackle climate and environment emergencies, propel transformation – and now, emerge from a pandemic. ***Evidence from our consultation demonstrated that planning is integral to the work of our Forum and the communities and organisations we represent.*** Planning at national, regional and local level is a key tool – or barrier, in delivering better green infrastructure and coordinating and delivering action on the climate and nature emergencies. Planning decisions have a major effect, directly and indirectly on communities, particularly those dealing with multiple challenges, who may not have the resource or resilience to engage with the planning system.

We have been working together during the NPF3 period, finding ways to be more effective and use the planning framework to accelerate local and system level change that can address critical issues. However, we see great potential for NPF4 to further support our work in areas including: climate emergency (greenhouse gases AND other measures of climate health), environment degradation (loss of biodiversity and fertile soil), physical and mental health, poverty, social cohesion and isolation, food security and economic innovation and inequity. We can also see how digitalised and simpler processes, when carefully and inclusively designed and implemented, can support equality and reduce discrimination. A longer timeframe to 2050 can support system change, however it can also

make it stall, and it is essential that system change can be rooted in local action. We need a planning framework with policy levers that will help accelerate change and improve traction and equity, and can truly be implemented at a local level by communities.

The current pandemic highlights key issues, including the necessity of greenspace access for health and wellbeing, and the fragility of our current food system, environment and green infrastructure. Our planning system can, and does, have a responsibility to address health inequalities and food access through increased greenspace provision, and where it matters most.

We anticipate, ***with evidence coming in daily***, that as we emerge from the COVID-19 pandemic, health and wellbeing will become more prominent and there will be an increased demand for access to community green sites that have the potential for community growing, allotments and orchards. Only through taking an integrated collaborative approach to planning can provision meet demand. An important aspect is that not one model fits every community – there are many models for food growing and greenspace access and use, and resource to establish, maintain and sustain sites will be tighter. Communities and decision makers should witness and experience what is actually happening in different communities across Scotland, to determine what suits needs and circumstances best. *This is not simply a paperwork exercise. Where new developments are proposed this requires insight, experience and expertise which we'd be happy to support. ACTIVE community green sites in a community can be highly effective, visible mechanisms for communities to come together and practice wellbeing for people, place and planet.* [Ref. Plan to Grow - A Planning Guide for Allotments]

Due to the COVID-19 crisis, not all members were able to input to our response, however previous work around our aims and objectives indicate that the stance we have taken will be broadly and enthusiastically supported.

What development will we need to address climate change?

We need an integrated approach to planning across all government departments.

Community growing, including allotments and orchards, can provide a localised response to climate and environment action and local food production. This is currently supported through Part 9 of the Community Empowerment Legislation, but the effective implementation of these new powers will need to be resourced through the provision of more land for local growing, and as an urgent action in places where it is needed most. The link below sets out current guidance to local authorities and many useful links to further information-

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/part-9-community-empowerment-scotland-act-2015-allotments-guidance-local-authorities-section-119-duty-prepare-food-growing-strategy/pages/12/>

How can planning support our quality of life, health and wellbeing in the future?

The health benefits of greenspace access and 'grow your own' are increasingly recognised,

with a multitude of research data from across the world. Greenspace is necessary for our health and wellbeing, and effective and holistic planning is integral to providing land to enable groups or individuals to access and effectively manage sites.

Growing sites have largely been able to stay open during the pandemic, under social distancing rules, and have provided a much needed greenspace and exercise opportunity. Increasing both is vital to supporting quality of life, health and wellbeing, particularly if we are to be “pandemic ready” in the future; however, the crisis has also highlighted the lack of quality local greenspace for many communities, particularly those in disadvantaged areas.

There is also an urgent requirement to include more localised food growing opportunities, and the Scottish Government along with local authorities have a role in ensuring communities are on board at the start, and can access resource for capacity building. [Ref: examples of integrating food into planning can be found in- Integrating Food into Urban Planning edited by Yves Cabannes and Cecilia Marocchino UCL press <http://www.fao.org/3/CA2260EN/ca2260en.pdf>]. We would also stress that retrofitting growing opportunities wherever possible (urbans farms on vacant and derelict land, green roofs etc.) into existing infrastructure should bear equal prominence to new developments.

It is not either or, we need change and need it fast.

What does planning need to do to enable an economy that benefits everyone?

A more local and inclusive food system is key to a fairer economy. This would allow for both home and community grown food to contribute to supply, and for local people to contribute to larger scale food production, particularly fruit and vegetables. Enabling food enterprises, that provide added value production, to flourish at a local level is an opportunity. In depth cross cutting analysis is required: we need robust data on land use, capacity, acreage, yield potential, skills. While we may not be able change the economy to meet all our food needs from Scotland, more arable land can be used to grow food. There are equity and food security issues and the planning system has a role to play.

[Ref: Feeding Britain - our Food Problems and how to fix them by Tim Lang]

How can planning improve and strengthen the special character of our places?

Effective planning has a key role to play in creating and maintaining opportunities for people to engage and take action in a local greenspace through growing food, planting fruit, creating safe spaces for play, recreation and health and wellbeing opportunities and quite simply creating better more attractive environments. Different models of greenspace provision offer an opportunity for everyone to become active and engaged at a level that suits them. Greenspace provision must be provided near to where people live and need it. Local people, policy makers and planning must understand the wide range of models for engagement through visits to different sites and hear directly from those who engage and benefit.

What infrastructure do we need to plan to realise our long-term aspirations?

Greenspace, including access to food growing opportunities like community gardens, allotments and orchards, must be regarded as basic infrastructure and included in NPF4. It should be given equal importance to other essential infrastructure such as transport and energy. Greenspace and food growing opportunities have a vital role to play in creating safer, healthier, wealthier and more equitable communities across Scotland.