

**Key Decision – No**

\* Delete as applicable

**HUNTINGDONSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL**

**Title/Subject Matter:** Right to Grow Policy Review

**Meeting/Date:** O&S (Environment, Communities & Partnerships)  
4th September 2025

**Executive Portfolio:** Cllr Julie Kerr Executive Councillor for Parks and Countryside, Waste and Street Scene

**Report by:** Head of Operational Services

**Ward(s) affected:** All

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**Executive Summary:**

In December 2024, Councillor M A Hassall, seconded by Councillor S W Ferguson, forwarded a proposal with the aim of addressing the growing challenges of food insecurity in Huntingdonshire, driven by the cost-of-living crisis, climate change, global instability, and public health recovery. The proposal aligns with Huntingdonshire District Council's Corporate Plan Priority 1: Improving quality of life for local people, and the Joint Administration's commitment to Do, Enable and Influence.

The Council resolved to refer the proposals to the Overview and Scrutiny Panel (Environment, Community and Partnerships) and subsequently to Cabinet for consideration. Although the motion was lost, it was encouraged to resubmit the proposal through the newly established submission process, so it could be considered as part of the Panel's future work programme.

These proposals are intended to explore how the Council might support residents in accessing fresh, affordable food through community-led food growing initiatives and a possible district wide 'Right to Grow' policy. The Council acknowledges the strong link between access to fresh, locally grown food and improved health and wellbeing, as well as the potential for community cultivation to reduce social isolation and demand on health and care services.

This report explores how community growing initiatives might contribute to improved health and well-being across our communities. It draws inspiration from approaches such as 'Right to Grow' to consider how similar principles could inform local thinking. The report presents a range of exploratory options that align with the Council's strategic priorities, including public health, sustainability, and community engagement. These options are not formal proposals, but indicative

workstreams intended to prompt discussion, support creative thinking, and guide further investigation.

The Overview and Scrutiny Panel is invited to consider the contents of the report and reflect on which strategic elements, if any, could be advanced for inclusion in the Council's Corporate Plan and Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS).

The Panel's feedback will be vital in shaping the direction of future work, ensuring that any actions taken are well-resourced, effectively targeted, and aligned with the Council's overarching objectives.

**Recommendation(s):**

The Overview and Scrutiny Panel is invited to consider the contents of the report and reflect on which strategic elements, if any, could be advanced for inclusion in the Council's Corporate Plan and Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS).

## **1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT**

- 1.1 This report explores how community growing initiatives might contribute to improved health and well-being across our communities. It draws inspiration from approaches such as 'Right to Grow' to consider how similar principles could inform local thinking. These options are not formal proposals, but indicative workstreams intended to prompt discussion, support creative thinking, and guide further investigation.

## **2. WHY IS THIS REPORT NECESSARY/BACKGROUND**

- 2.1 In December 2024, Councillor M A Hassall, seconded by Councillor S W Ferguson, forwarded a proposal with the aim of addressing the growing challenges of food insecurity in Huntingdonshire, driven by the cost-of-living crisis, climate change, global instability, and public health recovery. The proposal aligns with Huntingdonshire District Council's Corporate Plan Priority 1: Improving quality of life for local people, and the Joint Administration's commitment to Do, Enable and Influence.

### **2.2 Key Acknowledgements:**

- The urgent need to prioritise residents' health and well-being.
- Strong evidence linking health outcomes to access to fresh, locally grown, non-ultra-processed food.
- The impact of hunger and affordability on vulnerable households.
- The potential of community-led food growing to reduce loneliness and healthcare costs.
- The availability of underutilised public land suitable for cultivation and biodiversity enhancement.

### **2.3 Proposals:**

#### **2.4 Land Mapping and Access**

- Identify and publicly map council-owned land suitable for cultivation.
- Promote access across all wards, excluding hazardous or soon-to-be-developed sites.

#### **2.5 Licensing and Support**

- Offer simple, free licenses to community groups for food growing.
- Minimise financial and practical barriers.
- Extend public liability insurance to cover growing projects.

#### **2.6 Community Group Opportunities**

- Allow groups cultivating public land to bid for it if it becomes available for sale.
- Provide infrastructure such as water access or harvesting systems.

#### **2.7 Allotment Provision**

- Adhere to the Thorpe Report standard of 15 plots per 1,000 households.
- Collect and publish data on allotment availability and uptake.
- Volunteering and Foraging

- 2.8 **Promote volunteering to support growing initiatives.**
- Align with existing foraging maps and similar community-led schemes.
- 2.9 **National Advocacy**
- Write to local MPs to support a statutory “Right to Grow” as proposed in Amendment 483 of the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill.
- 2.10 At the Council meeting held on December 11, 2024, Councillor M A Hassall put forward a motion urging the Council to promote food security by mapping council-owned land for community cultivation, enabling low-cost licenses for growing, enhancing allotment provision, and advocating for a “right to grow” nationally.
- 2.11 The discussion highlighted the wider benefits of such an approach, including supporting residents during the cost-of-living crisis, improving health and well-being, making better use of public land, and aligning with the Council’s corporate priorities.
- 2.12 Although the motion was not carried, it was acknowledged that the issues raised warranted further exploration. Accordingly, it was encouraged to resubmit through the newly established submission process, enabling the matter to be considered as part of the Panel’s future work programme and ultimately leading to the preparation of this report

### **3. EVIDENCE FOR CHANGE**

- 3.1 There is strong evidence from UK-based academic research that community gardens and “right to grow” policies deliver a multifaceted benefit to health, wellbeing, and community life, particularly for urban and disadvantaged populations.

#### **3.2 The Positive Impacts**

Studies such as Rogers' 2023 Masters thesis (Appendix 1) and the Centre for Mental Health's evaluation of the Markfield Park garden (Appendix 2) highlight how engagement with community gardens uplifts participants' mental wellbeing and fosters a deeper sense of social connection, especially among those who are otherwise isolated or living with mental ill-health. For many, the principal reason for joining a community garden is the improvement in mental wellbeing and the experience of being immersed in nature; participants report feeling more positive, less stressed, and socially connected as a direct consequence of their regular involvement.

- 3.3 ‘The Impact of Community Gardens on the Wellbeing of Individuals’ report (Appendix 3) provides robust data specifically on individuals with mental health difficulties: a multi-year study tracked people referred to a therapeutic community gardening programme and found that their wellbeing improved and was sustained over several years, even during the Covid-19 pandemic.
- 3.4 Academic work also illustrates that the value of community gardens extends far beyond just horticulture. Being involved in these shared green spaces increases knowledge of wildlife, practical conservation, sustainability, and the importance of local biodiversity—often learned through informal, intergenerational and social

activities. Participants frequently cite gaining practical environmental skills and empathy towards the natural world as meaningful aspects of their involvement.

- 3.5 The spaces themselves foster a sense of ownership and pride, not just among adult volunteers, but also among young people and school groups who are introduced to new experiences and develop confidence outside traditional classroom or home environments.
- 3.6 Economically, these initiatives are argued to be cost-effective, with evidence (as cited in the Centre for Mental Health's report) suggesting substantial long-term savings to public health budgets by reducing loneliness and demand for NHS and social care services. Markfield Park's example also illustrates broader community benefits—rejuvenation of neglected spaces, improved perceptions of safety, and pride in the local environment—all of which contribute to community cohesion.

### Challenges and Concerns

- 3.7 Although the benefits of community gardens and “right to grow” policies are well supported by research—including improved wellbeing, reduced loneliness, and strengthened community cohesion—several challenges and risks also emerge from both academic studies and local feedback.
- 3.8 One ongoing concern is sustainability, as these initiatives rely on ongoing volunteer engagement and active community participation; if enthusiasm fades, areas can quickly become neglected, attracting litter and antisocial behaviour, which may reduce their value or make areas feel less safe.
- 3.9 There are also worries about social inclusivity and gentrification, with some residents expressing fear that new initiatives could feel exclusive, serve outsiders rather than locals, or change the character of neighbourhood spaces.
- 3.10 Economic and resource limitations present practical hurdles, as start-up and maintenance require steady investment in management, infrastructure, and ongoing support, without which growing areas may struggle to survive or benefit the most vulnerable.
- 3.11 Any areas assigned for growing initiatives must be managed with careful attention to inclusivity, sustained support, and regular maintenance.
- 3.12 There is a need for proactive planning to avoid volunteer burnout, clarify who the areas are for, and ensure safety for all users, particularly in areas where vulnerabilities or inequalities already exist.
- 3.13 If these issues are not addressed, there is a risk that the positive impacts highlighted in the research could be undermined by decline, neglect, or unintentional exclusion. **Therefore, while the overall evidence is positive, the long-term success of these policies and initiatives hinges on continued resource and management, equitable access, and continuous community engagement.**

### 4. OPTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

- 4.1 The options outlined are not presented as fully developed solutions, but rather as potential workstreams for further enquiry. They are intended to

support initial discussion and investigation by the Overview and Scrutiny Panel, which will determine whether, and how, any, some, or all of these options should be progressed.

#### **4.2 Land Mapping and Access - Identify and publicly map council-owned land suitable for cultivation.**

- I. Huntingdonshire District Council (HDC) maintains digital mapping layers that clearly identify land managed under the Alternative Land Management (ALM) regime, as well as land owned by the Council that is not currently subject to any formal management or maintenance arrangements (Unused).
- II. Both ALM-managed and unmanaged land present opportunities for community-led food growing initiatives. Although the mapping portal is not currently accessible to the public, it could be made available to help community groups identify suitable locations for cultivation. This would enable alternative uses of the land beyond biodiversity enhancement. However, making the mapping publicly accessible would require additional resources and budget, which are not included in the MTFS
- III. To maximise community engagement and uptake, HDC could consider actively promoting the availability of suitable land for food growing initiatives. This could include targeted communications through local networks, community newsletters, social media channels, and partnerships with voluntary organisations and town/parish councils.
- IV. Clear guidance on how to access the mapping portal (once made public), along with information on the application process for leasing or licensing land, could enable residents and community groups to take part.

#### **4.3 Licensing and Support - Offer simple, free licenses to community groups for food growing. Minimise financial and practical barriers. Extend public liability insurance to cover growing projects.**

- I. The current HDC Land Transfer Policy (Appendix 4), approved by Cabinet in November 2023, provides a clear and consistent process for handling requests to lease or take ownership of Council-owned public open spaces. It ensures that all applications are considered fairly and transparently.
- II. When land no longer supports the Council's corporate or investment priorities, decisions regarding the disposal of small land parcels or surplus property are made in line with the Disposal of Small Land Parcels and Disposal Policy (Appendix 5).
- III. Requests to lease or license small areas of public open space—defined as less than 0.25 acres—are delegated to the relevant Senior Leadership Team Member responsible for Open Spaces, in

consultation with their Executive Member. All decisions must follow the reporting and delegation rules set out in the Disposal Policy, with a formal record of each decision maintained and reported to Cabinet for information.

- IV. HDC's approach reflects the model adopted by Hull City Council through its Right to Grow policy (Appendix 6 ). Hull's scheme includes a formal application process where community groups must submit detailed project proposals for review. Applications are assessed against strict criteria to ensure suitability, safety, and community benefit. If approved, applicants enter into a legally binding licence agreement with the Council, which includes a fee and is issued on a rolling annual basis. This agreement outlines the responsibilities of the group and allows the Council to reclaim the land if needed for future development or if the project ends.
- V. If decided upon, adopting a similar model, HDC could help to ensure that access to land for community growing is fair, well-regulated, and legally robust. This approach could support the promotion of suitable sites across all wards, excluding those that are hazardous or earmarked for development.

#### 4.4 Insurance

- I. Following a conversation with our insurance provider, no significant concerns were raised from a property perspective. Aside from the usual considerations there appear to be no outstanding implications at this stage. While no issues are currently anticipated, they would need to revisit this assessment once further details about the initiatives become available, to ensure all property-related aspects remain appropriately managed.
- II. Community groups and individuals could be encouraged to register with the Neighbourhood Network, which offers a blanket insurance scheme for its members at no cost. This approach was considered appropriate by Hull City Council for its '*Right to Grow*' scheme and may offer a practical interim solution for HDC.
- III. In terms of financial barriers, the full cost of administering such a scheme—including application processing, legal agreements, and ongoing management—has not yet been fully mapped out. If any proposal is taken forward for further exploration, there will be a resource impact that must be carefully assessed as part of the development work.

#### 4.5 Community Group Opportunities - Allow groups cultivating public land to bid for it if it becomes available for sale. Provide infrastructure such as water access or harvesting systems

- I. HDC's policy framework does allow for the possibility of transferring public open space to third parties, including community groups, under specific conditions. Groups currently cultivating public land may apply

to lease or acquire the land if it is declared surplus and no longer contributes to corporate or service priorities. However, this is subject to a rigorous application process:

- II. To acquire the land, applicants must submit an outline business case, accompanied by a non-refundable application fee of £500, which covers initial administrative costs.
- III. If the outline case is endorsed, a detailed business case is required, with further fees including £3,000 for business case preparation, £1,000 for land valuation, and £1,000 for legal fees, excluding any additional ancillary costs.
- IV. All costs must be fully met by the applicant, and there is no guarantee of approval at any stage. If approved, the transfer is formalised through a legally binding agreement, ensuring the land's purpose is preserved and any future development benefits (e.g. biodiversity gain) are recoverable by the Council.
- V. This process mirrors the legal structure used by Hull City Council under its Right to Grow policy, which also includes strict criteria, a formal licence agreement, and a fee-based application system to ensure accountability and legal protection.

#### **4.6 Providing Infrastructure Such as Water Access or Harvesting Systems**

- I. Cambridgeshire is currently facing significant water scarcity challenges, particularly in the Greater Cambridge area. The Environment Agency has flagged risks of deterioration in local water bodies, and over-abstraction from the chalk aquifer has led to declining water levels and damage to rare chalk stream habitats.
- II. Given this context, any proposal to provide water infrastructure—such as mains access or rainwater harvesting systems—must be carefully evaluated. While such infrastructure would greatly benefit community growing projects, it would also involve notable costs and planning considerations:
- III. Rainwater harvesting systems typically cost between £2,000 and £5,000 per site, depending on scale and installation complexity.
- IV. Mains water access may require trenching, connection fees, and ongoing usage charges, potentially exceeding £10,000 per site.
- V. These costs would need to be fully funded by the applicant, as per HDC's policy, which states that no additional cost should fall to the Council.
- VI. Additionally, any water infrastructure must align with regional water efficiency goals and avoid increasing abstraction from already stressed sources.



- VII. Given the environmental pressures and financial implications, HDC would need to assess infrastructure proposals on a site-by-site basis, ensuring they are sustainable, cost-neutral to the Council, and compliant with broader climate and water management strategies.
- 4.7 **Allotment Provision - Adhere to the Thorpe Report standard of 15 plots per 1,000 households. Collect and publish data on allotment availability and uptake.**
- I. In the district, the responsibility for allotment provision lies with parish and town councils, who are best placed to assess and respond to local needs.
  - II. Adopting the Thorpe standard, seen as best practise but not legally binding, would place unrealistic expectations on land supply and could divert attention from more flexible, locally responsive solutions.
  - III. Many areas in Huntingdonshire face competing pressures for housing, biodiversity, and recreation space, and a rigid allotment quota could conflict with broader strategic priorities outlined in the Corporate Plan, Climate Strategy, and Healthy Open Spaces Strategy.
  - IV. Instead, HDC could support a collaborative and needs-based approach, working with parish and town councils to identify opportunities for community growing where there is clear interest and capacity.
  - V. This would allow for a more sustainable use of land, that ensures allotment provision is integrated into wider goals around health, wellbeing, and environmental stewardship—without imposing a one-size-fits-all standard.
  - VI. There is currently no national dataset in England that comprehensively tracks allotment availability and uptake across local authorities. Allotment provision is highly decentralised, with individual parish and town councils responsible for managing their own sites, waiting lists, and tenancy records. As a result, data is held locally and varies widely in terms of format, accuracy, and accessibility.
  - VII. This lack of a centralised system means that any attempt by HDC to collect and publish district-wide allotment data would be resource-intensive and time-consuming. It would require contacting each parish and town council, requesting data in potentially inconsistent formats, verifying its accuracy, and maintaining it over time. Without a national framework or reporting requirement, the burden of coordination, data cleaning, and publication would fall entirely on the district council, making it a significant undertaking

with ongoing resource implications. Allotment Information that we have acquired so far is seen in the table below.

Parish / Town	Locations	Waiting List?	Notes / Access
<b>Huntingdon (4)</b>	Hartford Rd, North St, Primrose Ln, Sallowbush Rd	Yes - 114	The 2024/25 annual fee for a 5 pole allotment plot is £41. <a href="https://www.huntingdowntown.gov.uk/council-services/allotments/">https://www.huntingdowntown.gov.uk/council-services/allotments/</a>
<b>Huntingdon comments</b> Capacity about 249			
<b>Hemingford Grey (1)</b>	Daintree Green	Waiting list: None now but usually has one.  Vacancy: 1 plot currently vacant	Contact Parish Council, deposit required There is an annual charge to cover the Parish Council's water bill. This usually £3-£5 depending on usage. <a href="https://www.hemingfordgreyparishcouncil.gov.uk/allotments">https://www.hemingfordgreyparishcouncil.gov.uk/allotments</a>
<b>HG comments</b> <b>Total plots:</b> ~60 <b>Vacancy:</b> 1 plot currently vacant <b>Waiting list:</b> None now, but usually has one <b>Cost:</b> £27/year for residents			
<b>Ramsey (1)</b>	Stocking Fen Road	Yes:12	Open to Ramsey & surrounding villages <a href="https://www.ramseytowncouncil.gov.uk/allotments">https://www.ramseytowncouncil.gov.uk/allotments</a>
<b><u>Ramsey Comments</u></b>  <b>R comments</b> <b>Total plots:</b> ~50 <b>Vacancy:</b> None <b>Waiting list:</b> 12 <b>Cost:</b> £10/year for residents			
<b>Sawtry (2)</b>	St Judith's Field (St Judith's Lane),	Yes (5)	<a href="https://www.sawtry-pc.gov.uk/allotments">https://www.sawtry-pc.gov.uk/allotments</a>

Parish / Town	Locations	Waiting List?	Notes / Access
	Rowell Way (off Gidding Rd)		
<p><b><u>Sawtry Comments</u></b></p> <p><b>Total Plots:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>S1:</b> 51 plots (15 are half-plots) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Full plots: 20m x 6m</li> <li>○ Half plots: 10m x 6m</li> </ul> </li> <li>• <b>S2:</b> 10 plots (all full-size ~20m x 6m)</li> </ul> <p><b>Cost:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Full plot: £28/year</li> <li>• Half plot: £16/year</li> <li>• £65 deposit (refunded if plot is returned in good condition).</li> </ul> <p>High turnover: around half of returned plots are in poor condition</p> <p>Many underestimate the work involved; health or time pressures often lead to plot abandonment</p> <p>Issues noted: misuse (e.g. abandoned tractor tires), even smaller plots can get overgrown</p> <p><b><u>Raised beds recommended for better maintenance and weed control</u></b></p> <p>St Judith's site has poor accessibility due to sloped terrain</p>			

#### 4.8 Volunteering and Foraging

- I. As with allotment data, there is no centralised dataset for foraging activity, and mapping such use across the district would be resource-intensive, requiring coordination with multiple local councils and community groups.
- II. Records of land use and suitability vary widely, and ensuring accuracy and safety would demand significant officer time. While some community-driven platforms such as 'Falling Fruit' offer open-source foraging maps, these rely on voluntary contributions and are not verified or maintained by local authorities.
- III. The Woodland Trust also provides seasonal guides and responsible foraging advice, helping people identify edible plants and understand sustainable harvesting practices, however, these resources are more educational than location-specific and do not act as a comprehensive mapping tools.

- IV. There is currently no national framework for tracking or regulating foraging activity, which adds complexity to any attempt to formalise or map it at the district level. Nonetheless, supporting volunteering and foraging through partnerships and light-touch promotion could offer a low-cost, high-impact way to enhance public engagement with open spaces—without the administrative burden of formal land transfers or infrastructure investment.

#### 4.9 **National Advocacy - Write to local MPs to support a statutory “Right to Grow” as proposed in Amendment 483 of the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill.**

- I. Writing to local MPs to support a statutory “Right to Grow,” as proposed in Amendment 483 of the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill, could help raise the profile of community cultivation and strengthen national support for local food growing initiatives.
- II. The amendment, introduced by members of the House of Lords including Baroness Boycott, seeks to establish a legal framework that would make it easier for communities to access public land for growing food.
- III. While this proposal aligns with broader national goals around sustainability, health, and food security, it is not yet part of formal government strategy and faces barriers including legislative complexity, land ownership constraints, and the need for cross-party support.
- IV. Several councils, including Hull City Council, have already written to their MPs urging support for the amendment, reflecting growing grassroots interest in embedding the right to grow into law.
- V. For HDC, supporting this could signal a commitment to community empowerment and environmental resilience, but it would also require careful consideration of local governance structures, resource implications, and alignment with existing land use policies.
- VI. If adopted nationally, it could help standardise access and reduce administrative burdens, but until then, implementation remains dependent on local discretion and capacity.

#### 4.10 **Community Fridges and Food Banks**

- I. As the Council considers options on how best to support residents in accessing fresh, affordable food, community fridges could offer a compelling alternative to land-based cultivation. These initiatives provide a practical, scalable, and immediate solution to food insecurity—particularly in areas where space, time, or resources for cultivation are limited.
- II. In 2024–2025, the two community fridges in Yaxley and Oxmoor—supported by Food for Nought (Appendix 7) —redistributed

37,795kg of surplus food, preventing an estimated 30,236 kg of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions and delivering food with a monetary value of £94,487.85. Entirely volunteer-run, these fridges offer safe, welcoming spaces where residents can access nutritious food, receive referrals to support services, and participate in training on cooking and budgeting.

- III. Compared to cultivation projects, community fridges require less land, lower upfront investment, and can be deployed more rapidly in areas of high need. They deliver immediate impact by diverting food from landfill, reducing household grocery costs, and improving dietary habits. The Council could take direct action—such as providing core funding for refrigeration, transport, and volunteer coordination—to ensure these initiatives remain viable and impactful.
- IV. The Council could also enable their success by helping identify suitable locations, facilitating partnerships with local food suppliers, and supporting volunteer recruitment and training. This practical support helps embed community fridges within the fabric of local neighbourhoods and strengthens their long-term sustainability.
- V. Finally, through its ability to influence, HDC could champion sustainable food systems by raising awareness of the benefits of community fridges, encouraging local businesses to donate surplus food, and shaping regional and national conversations around food waste and food insecurity.
- VI. By recognising community fridges as a strategic alternative to cultivation and aligning their development with the Council's Corporate Plan themes, HDC can enhance food access, promote environmental sustainability, and foster stronger, healthier communities across Huntingdonshire.

## **5. KEY IMPACTS / RISKS**

- 5.1 The implementation of a district wide 'Right to Grow' policy presents a number of operational, legal, and community-level risks that Huntingdonshire District Council must consider carefully. Delivering such a scheme would require significant officer time and financial resources to manage land mapping, application processing, licensing, and community engagement. Without dedicated funding or staffing, there is a risk of delays, inconsistent delivery, and reduced public confidence.
- 5.2 Legal liability is another key risk. Allowing public access to council-owned land for cultivation introduces potential risks related to personal injury, land disputes, and property damage. If insurance arrangements are not clearly defined and communicated, the Council could be exposed to legal claims.
- 5.3 Infrastructure requirements, such as water access or rainwater harvesting systems, also present financial risks. These installations can be costly, and

if not fully funded by applicants, may result in unplanned expenditure for the Council.

- 5.4 There is also the potential for land use conflicts. Allocating land for cultivation may compete with other strategic priorities, including housing development, biodiversity enhancement, and recreational use.
- 5.5 Access to suitable land and the capacity to manage growing projects will vary across communities, raising concerns about equity and fairness. Some areas may lack the organisational infrastructure or volunteer base to participate effectively, leading to uneven uptake and benefit.
- 5.6 The absence of reliable, centralised data on allotments and land use further complicates planning and evaluation. Without robust monitoring, it will be difficult to assess the impact of the policy or respond to emerging needs.
- 5.7 Reputational risk is also a factor; if the scheme fails to deliver tangible outcomes or is poorly managed, it may undermine public trust in the Council's ability to support community-led initiatives.
- 5.8 Community opposition is another possibility. Residents may object to cultivation projects near their homes due to concerns about aesthetics, noise, or land misuse. Even successful projects may be abandoned over time due to volunteer fatigue or unforeseen challenges, leaving sites overgrown or misused, this can result in additional maintenance burdens and complaints.
- 5.9 Vandalism and anti-social behaviour are also risks, particularly on unsupervised or poorly maintained land. Additionally, failed crops—due to poor soil, weather conditions, or inexperience—can discourage participation and diminish the perceived value of the initiative.
- 5.10 Environmental concerns, particularly water scarcity in Cambridgeshire, must also be considered to ensure that any new cultivation projects are sustainable and aligned with regional water management strategies.
- 5.11 In contrast, community fridges offer a lower-risk, scalable, and cost-effective alternative or complement to land-based cultivation. These initiatives provide immediate benefits by redistributing surplus food, reducing waste, and improving access to fresh produce.
- 5.12 They require minimal land and infrastructure, making them easier to implement, particularly in urban or space-constrained areas. The success of existing community fridges in Yaxley and Oxmoor—redistributing nearly 38 tonnes of food and preventing over 30 tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions—demonstrates their effectiveness.
- 5.13 Community fridges also support the Council's strategic objectives by promoting health and wellbeing, reducing food insecurity, and fostering community resilience.

- 5.14 They are volunteer led, encourage civic participation, and offer opportunities for training and social connection. Given their proven impact and lower operational burden, community fridges may represent a more practical and inclusive approach to addressing food access challenges across the district.

## **6. LINK TO HUNTINGDONSHIRE FUTURES, THE CORPORATE PLAN, STRATEGIC PRIORITIES AND/OR CORPORATE OBJECTIVES**

- 6.1 [Corporate Plan](#)
- 6.2 [Climate Strategy Action Plan](#)
- 6.3 [HDC Healthy Open Space Strategy](#)
- 6.4 An important policy consideration is that Full Council approved the [Health and Wealth Strategy](#) in December 2024 and the pilot phase for the delivery of the support funding is now underway.
- 6.5 A key principle of the approach is that communities find solutions for problems themselves – rather than following prescribed approaches. As the fund is focused on Improved Mental & Physical Health, Economic Resilience, and Social and Community empowerment there may be significant opportunities, driven by communities themselves, to tackle and deliver against similar policy outcomes presented within this paper.

## **7. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 7.1 The implementation of any Right to Grow proposals will require careful legal oversight to ensure compliance with existing land use policies, property law, and health and safety regulations. Establishing a licensing framework for community cultivation will necessitate the drafting of legally binding agreements that clearly define responsibilities, liabilities, and termination clauses.
- 7.2 Legal Services will also need to support the assessment of land ownership, suitability, and any restrictions on use, particularly where land is subject to future development plans or environmental protections.
- 7.3 In cases where community groups seek to lease or acquire land, the Council must ensure that all transactions comply with its Land Transfer and Disposal Policies, including the requirement for formal business cases and cost recovery. Additionally, the Council must consider its duty of care in relation to public liability, insurance coverage, and safeguarding, particularly where volunteers or vulnerable individuals are involved. Legal input will be essential to ensure that any schemes are robust, transparent, and enforceable.

## **8. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS**

- 8.1 Progressing any of the proposals will require coordinated resource from multiple internal services, including Operational Services, Legal, Estates, Finance, and Communications. Activities such as land mapping, licensing, infrastructure assessment, and community engagement will demand significant officer time and cross-departmental collaboration.
- 8.2 These resource needs must also be considered in the context of ongoing local government restructuring, which may affect service capacity, staffing levels, and the availability of specialist expertise. A full assessment of staffing and financial implications will be necessary to ensure that any proposals taken forward are deliverable, sustainable, and aligned with the Council's evolving structure and priorities.

## **9. HEALTH IMPLICATIONS**

- 9.1 Both cultivation-based initiatives and community fridges have the potential to deliver meaningful health benefits to residents across Huntingdonshire, though they do so in different ways.
- 9.2 Community-led food growing projects can support physical and mental wellbeing by encouraging outdoor activity, social interaction, and a sense of purpose. They promote access to fresh, locally grown produce, which is associated with improved nutrition and reduced reliance on ultra-processed foods. These initiatives may also help reduce social isolation and contribute to preventative health outcomes, particularly among older adults and those experiencing financial hardship.
- 9.3 Community fridges, while not involving physical cultivation, offer more immediate and scalable health benefits. By redistributing surplus food, they improve access to fresh produce and reduce food insecurity, especially in areas where cultivation is not feasible. They also support healthier diets and lower household grocery costs. In addition, community fridges often serve as hubs for wider support services, including cooking education and budgeting advice, which can further enhance health outcomes.
- 9.4 Cultivation projects offer long-term, holistic health benefits through engagement and activity, community fridges provide rapid, inclusive support that directly addresses nutritional needs and food access. Both approaches align with the Council's public health objectives.
- 9.5 The health benefits will depend on the successful implementation, accessibility, and sustainability of any initiatives taken forward and consideration should be given to ensuring inclusive participation and appropriate support for communities with the greatest need.



## **10. ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS**

- 10.1 Community-led food growing can support biodiversity, promote sustainable land use, and reduce the carbon footprint associated with food transport. However, these benefits must be balanced against environmental risks, particularly in relation to water use.
- 10.2 Cambridgeshire faces significant water scarcity challenges, and any new cultivation projects would need to be carefully managed to avoid over-abstraction and ensure alignment with regional water efficiency goals.
- 10.3 Community fridges, by contrast, offer a more immediate and measurable environmental impact through the reduction of food waste. In 2024–2025, the two fridges in Yaxley and Oxmoor prevented over 30 tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions by redistributing surplus food that would otherwise have gone to landfill. While they do not directly enhance green infrastructure, they contribute to climate resilience by reducing waste, lowering emissions, and promoting more sustainable consumption patterns.
- 10.4 Both approaches align with the Council's Climate Strategy and offer complementary pathways to achieving environmental sustainability.

## **11. LIST OF APPENDICES INCLUDED**

Appendix 1 - ['Earth community': The significance community gardens have for participants and environmental knowledge](#)

Appendix 2 – [Space to Grow](#)

Appendix 3 - [The Impact of Therapeutic Community Gardening on the Wellbeing, Loneliness, and Life Satisfaction of Individuals with Mental Illness](#)

Appendix 4 – [Transfer of Public Open Space](#)

Appendix 5 – [Disposal of Small Land Parcels Policy](#)

Appendix 6 – [Hull City Council Right to Grow Cabinet Report](#)

Appendix 7 - Yearly Report: Food for Nought

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