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# NORTH AYRSHIRE COUNCIL

26 January 2021

## Cabinet

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**Title:** North Ayrshire Food Growing Strategy

**Purpose:** To seek Cabinet approval of a North Ayrshire Food Growing Strategy and associated action plan.

**Recommendation:** That Cabinet approves the proposed Food Growing Strategy and action plan at Appendix 1.

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### 1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 The provision of food, with dignity, is a central component of the North Ayrshire Council Plan. Similarly, the Fair for All Commission, Youth Commission, Child Poverty Action Plan and Covid-19 pandemic have all highlighted the need to increase food security in North Ayrshire for vulnerable people. The Council supports a wide range of food initiatives and aims to strengthen the development of sustainable, local food production which complements and adds to local community food provision.
- 1.2 The wider benefits of local food growing are also recognised, for example reducing social isolation and improving physical and mental health, providing outdoor learning opportunities, reducing our carbon footprint and potential for linkages with the Ayrshire food and drink sector.
- 1.3 The proposed North Ayrshire Food Growing Strategy and the supporting action plan (attached as Appendix 1), sets out the strategic framework for the Council and its partners to support and increase the opportunities for community food growing across North Ayrshire, with the aims of addressing poverty, increasing sustainability and empowering communities.
- 1.4 It has been developed by considering relevant legislation, national guidance and reviewing national and local priorities for food growing and shaped by local consultation including via the North Ayrshire Food Forum.
- 1.5 Cabinet approval is sought for the proposed North Ayrshire Food Growing Strategy and associated action plan at Appendix 1.

### 2. Background

- 2.1 North Ayrshire has a longstanding commitment to supporting local people to grow food. Council support for a number of growing and allotments groups has increased steadily over the years. Community allotments provide opportunities for local people to take

ownership of local land and brings physical and mental health benefits. The provision of food, with dignity, is a central component of the North Ayrshire Council Plan, as encouraging the development of local food growing networks has social, environmental and economic benefits. The Fair for All Commission, Youth Commission, Child Poverty Action Plan and Covid-19 pandemic have highlighted the need for greater food security. Increasing local food production, whether it is commercial, or community contributes to the climate change emergency through a reduction in “food miles”. The Food Growing Strategy sets out the range of activity and an action plan to develop closer links between food growing and community food provision through the North Ayrshire Food Forum.

2.2 Officers, together with the North Ayrshire Food Forum have prepared the proposed Food Growing Strategy and action plan, which is attached as Appendix 1, taking consideration of the following:

- A partnership approach to preparing local food growing strategies;
- Delivery partners and advisory bodies;
- Land and planning;
- Grow-your-own initiatives; and
- Assistance to local community groups.

2.3 The main aims of the food growing strategy are to:

- Strengthen and increase food growing in North Ayrshire
- Support community managed allotment sites
- Develop further allotment sites in partnership with communities
- Identify and facilitate alternative land suitable for food growing, such as community gardens and raised beds.

2.4 The intention of the strategy is to outline the steps and actions through which the partners will support and increase the opportunities for community food growing across North Ayrshire. It identifies how this can contribute to the North Ayrshire Food System, which provides food with dignity in local communities.

2.5 North Ayrshire Council’s approach to community empowerment is sector-leading. Allotments are all led by community organisations, and support from the Council through locality teams, Community Asset Transfers and the Community Investment Fund have enabled allotments to flourish. As part of the Council’s Open Space Strategy and Allotments Policy, we monitor demand for allotments and actively seek to identify new sites for food growing where required. We also encourage and support communities to take part in food growing.

2.6 The North Ayrshire Food System was set up in response to the learning from the Covid-19 pandemic. It builds on work of community organisations, like Fullarton Community Hub and Witlees Community Association and others, who have been exploring new models of providing food with dignity beyond emergency foodbanks. These models include community fridge, larders and co-operatives. The potential to develop partnerships between community food needs and food growers are the focus of the action plan. This enhances the well established approach already in place in schools, and in some cases food is grown in local schools, prepared, cooked and eaten with school meals as an enjoyable and educational experience and there is a desire to build on this approach further.

- 2.7 The Council has also established a Fairer Food initiative. The aim of the initiative is to map out community food provision, focus support to alleviate food insecurity and explore developments to strengthen community food provision such as Sustainable Food Cities.
- 2.8 In 2018, the Council provided communities across North Ayrshire with an opportunity to influence and shape local grounds maintenance arrangements. The initiative saw local people involved in workshops, garden competitions and community-based planting. Poppy seeds and orchard trees were planted in suitable locations and since then, new sites for growing has been actively embraced. The increase in planting fruit trees and vegetable planters has been driven by local demand and there is the potential to utilise further areas to turn them into community food growing spaces for fruit, vegetables and herbs in the right locations.
- 2.9 In 2019, North Ayrshire Council declared a Climate Emergency, and in March 2020 the Council committed £500,000 'towards achieving the required carbon absorption through tree planting in recognition of the importance of this as part of the Council's overall approach to becoming net zero.' Relevant Council policies, plans, and strategies will be considered to scope out opportunities to plant trees and will include fruit trees to create orchards, in suitable locations, for community benefit, as part of this commitment.
- 2.10 The physical and mental health and wellbeing benefits of gardening and growing your own food are well researched and documented. Horticultural therapy activities can relieve the symptoms of serious illnesses, prevent the development of some conditions, and introduce people to a way of life that can help them to improve their well-being in the longer term. Growing food can also offer education and training opportunities, not only in horticulture skills but life skills, literacy and numeracy. In turn these can lead to improvements in confidence, pride, quality of life and self-esteem, as well as reduced social isolation.
- 2.11 Volunteering and employability skills development opportunities can be created which align with the Council's Community Wealth Building strategy. Unused land and assets can be repurposed and brought to new life in communities thorough community asset transfer to allotment and community growers. Such opportunities, together with those afforded by the work being carried out by the Regional Economic Partnership workstream on Food & Drink will also be examined.
- 2.12 A summary of the key actions within the North Ayrshire Food Growing Strategy at Appendix 1 is provided as follows:
- To support the North Ayrshire Food Forum to develop as an independent, constituted body;
  - Work with community growers and locality teams to develop systems to share surplus produce through the North Ayrshire Food System;
  - Establish a process to register new requests for allotments;
  - Seek to identify land suitable for food growing through the Council's Local Development Plan, Regeneration Strategy, and Land & Property renewal workstream;
  - Work with local businesses in the food and drink sector to explore partnership opportunities for employment, skills development, and food based social enterprise or community co-operative opportunities, in line with the Council's Community Wealth Building approach; and
  - Work with local schools to promote food growing within the school estate.

### **3. Proposals**

- 3.1 That Cabinet notes the current level of work being undertaken within North Ayrshire to support community food growing options.
- 3.2 That Cabinet approves the proposed North Ayrshire Food Growing Strategy and Action Plan attached as Appendix 1.

### **4. Implications/Socio-economic Duty**

#### **Financial**

- 4.1 None.

#### **Human Resources**

- 4.2 The newly-created Fair For All Development Officer includes responsibility for Food With Dignity initiatives and localities teams will continue to support local community organisations active in allotments, growing and food initiatives.

#### **Legal**

- 4.3 The legislative framework relating to allotments and the statutory requirement for Scottish local authorities to prepare a Food Growing Strategy is set out in Part 9 of the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015.

#### **Equality/Socio-economic**

- 4.4 The Food Growing Strategy and Action Plan assists us to meet the Council's socio-economic duty set out in the Fairer Scotland Duty and the Child Poverty (Scotland) Act 2017.

The actions contained in the Strategy and Action Plan in Appendix 1, are intended to support the Fairer Food Initiative, reduce food poverty and increase the amount of, and access to, locally grown food available to all across North Ayrshire.

#### **Environmental and Sustainability**

- 4.5 The proposed North Ayrshire Food Growing Strategy contributes to the Council's sustainability agenda by reducing our carbon footprint and promoting sustainable growth of food produce.

As per the Environmental Assessment (Scotland) Act 2005, local authorities are required to undertake and consult on a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA), when a qualifying plan, programme or strategy is likely to have significant environmental effects.

Officers have deemed the Food Growing Strategy to be exempt from a SEA, as it is considered that this Strategy will have only a positive effect on the environment.

A pre-screening exemption briefing note will be submitted to notify the government SEA Gateway of the Council's intention of the above.

### **Key Priorities**

4.6 The actions accompanying the Food Growing Strategy aim to support the Council Plan's Fair For All Strategy and deliver against the key priorities in Aspiring Communities and Inspiring Places:

- The Council's priority of 'North Ayrshire has active and strong communities' is supported through the provision of empowering opportunities for community groups to participate in local food growing and a North Ayrshire food system.
- To enable children to have access to appropriate food support and deliver against the Council's priority of ensuring that 'North Ayrshire's children and young people experience the best start in life'.
- The local food growing initiatives will help deliver against the Council's priority of 'North Ayrshire is vibrant, welcoming and attractive environment' by working with communities to improve the quality of the local environment through a participatory approach.
- As part of Public Health Reform, North Ayrshire Council is a leader in implementing Public Health Priority 6 – 'A Scotland where we eat well, have a healthy weight and are physically active.'

### **Community Wealth Building**

4.7 The Food Growing Strategy aligns with the Council's Community Wealth Building mission of 'Enhancing local wealth and the creation of fair jobs and maximising the potential of all our places through working in partnership with our communities and businesses'.

The Food Growing Strategy will support delivery of the Land and Assets objective by 'supporting the wider regeneration of our communities by maximising all of our land and assets including through alternative uses for community and business benefit.'

The Food Growing Strategy will support the procurement of local food in partnership with local growers.

Volunteering and skills development opportunities will also be created through this Strategy.

## **5. Consultation**

5.1 The proposed Food Growing Strategy has been developed to align with national guidance and to allow the Council to meet the statutory requirements of the Community Empowerment 2015 (Scotland) Act.

Consultation has taken place between Streetscene, Connected Communities and the wider North Ayrshire Food Forum.

A public consultation was carried out in August 2018 on all aspects of the national allotment's guidance for local authorities. This has informed the draft strategy and the developing partnership with the Food Forum and growing organisations.

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### **Background Papers**

North Ayrshire Council Growing Strategy – Appendix 1

# **North Ayrshire Council – Food Growing Strategy**

## **Introduction**

The provision of food, with dignity, is a central component of the North Ayrshire Council Plan, as encouraging the development of local food growing networks has social, environmental and economic benefits. The Fair for All Commission, Youth Commission, Child Poverty Action Plan and Covid-19 pandemic have highlighted the need for greater food security. Increasing local food production contributes to the climate change emergency through a reduction in “food miles”. Community allotments provide opportunities for local people to take ownership of local land and brings physical and mental health benefits. The Food Growing Strategy sets out the range of activity and an action plan to develop closer links between food growing and community food provision through the North Ayrshire Food Forum.

The intention of the strategy is to outline the steps and actions through which the partners will support and increase the opportunities for community food growing across North Ayrshire. It identifies how this can contribute to the North Ayrshire Food System and help to provide food with dignity in local communities.

## **1.0 Strategic Context**

North Ayrshire Council recognises the importance of allotments and food growing, with active support for the community managed sites focused through the North Ayrshire Locality Teams and North Ayrshire Food Forum.

North Ayrshire Council's approach to community empowerment is sector leading. Allotments are all led by community organisations, and support from the Council through locality teams, Community Asset Transfers and the Community Investment Fund have enabled allotments to flourish. The Council is monitoring demand for allotments and will actively seek to identify new sites for food growing. We will also encourage and support communities to take part in food growing.

In the right environment, food growing can become a powerful tool in addressing food poverty, promoting healthy lifestyles and bringing people together to reduce social isolation in communities.

There are a number of community groups and projects in North Ayrshire actively engaged in carrying out a range of innovative and valuable food-based initiatives. It is through these partnerships that the Food Growing Strategy has developed and will provide many benefits including:

- Supporting the development of sustainable, local food production which complements and adds to local community food provision, supporting the Fair for All Strategy and Child Poverty Action Plan; and
- Encouraging healthy lifestyles through the regular physical activity of community gardening, or tending an allotment, to link with the Council Plan, Active Communities Strategy and the Public Health priorities;
- Bringing communities of all ages together, to share skills and learn together, linking to the North Ayrshire Community Learning and Development Strategic Plan;

- Encouraging volunteering, skills development opportunities and pathways to work, supporting the Council Plan;
- Looking after the environment, linking to the Council Plan, North Ayrshire Local Biodiversity Action Plan, Local Development Plan 2, Allotment Policy, Open Space Strategy and Environmental Sustainability and Climate Change Strategy;
- Building civic pride, sense of place, self-confidence, self-esteem and linking to the Council Plan and Community Learning and Development Strategic Plan.

## **2.0 Key Drivers**

### **2.1 National Level**

The Scottish Government's aspiration is for the country to become a 'Good Food Nation'; a land of food and drink, not only in what we produce but also in what we buy, serve and eat and for this to be underpinned by community food growing.

North Ayrshire Council developed the Food Growing Strategy in partnership with the North Ayrshire Food Forum, taking account of national guidance.

### **2.2. Local Level**

#### **2.2.1 North Ayrshire Council Plan**

North Ayrshire Council's vision is a North Ayrshire that is Fair for All. Encouraging food growing strongly supports the Council Plan priorities of Aspiring Communities and Inspiring Places, as follows:

- Active and strong communities;
- Children and young people experience the best start in life;
- Inclusive, growing and enterprising local economy;
- People enjoy good long-term health and wellbeing;
- Vibrant, welcoming and attractive places; and
- A sustainable environment.

### **2.3 Key North Ayrshire Policies and Strategies**

Key strategies, plans and policies within the Council link directly to the objectives of community food growing including:

- Fair for All Strategy;
- Child Poverty Action Plan;
- Community Wealth Building Strategy;
- Environmental Sustainability and Climate Change Strategy;
- North Ayrshire Local Biodiversity Action Plan;
- Public Health Priorities – Early Adopter of Priority 6, Diet and Healthy Weight;
- Active Communities Strategy;
- Local Development Plan 2;
- Regeneration Strategy;
- Open Space Strategy;
- Allotment Policy; and



- North Ayrshire Community Learning and Development Strategic Plan.

### **2.3.1 Fair For All**

Food poverty or food insecurity is embedded as one of North Ayrshire's Fair for All themes, as part of the inequalities strategy and forms a strategic pledge:

'To enhance the well-being of individuals and communities through access to good food and specifically to engage with partners to improve and increase activities related to the production and distribution of good food.'

North Ayrshire Council's approach to the Food Growing Strategy is in the context of the Child Poverty Action Plan, Climate Change Strategy and Public Health Reform. Key partners include the Community Planning Partnership, KA Leisure, the Green Health Partnership, Team North Ayrshire, who include the local business community partners, and the North Ayrshire Food Forum, consisting of representatives of community growing organisations, allotments, food producers and the North Ayrshire Foodbank.

### **2.3.2 Child Poverty**

High levels of inequality, particularly poverty, exist in North Ayrshire. The last Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) highlighted continuing levels of deprivation in North Ayrshire and significantly higher levels than the Scottish average. The North Ayrshire Joint Child Poverty Action Plan Report 2018/19 highlighted the fact that 26.59% of children are living in poverty, after housing costs. Concerns about food insecurity were highlighted by the Youth Commission, Child Poverty Action Plan and through the Covid-19 pandemic.

### **2.3.3 Community Wealth Building**

Community Wealth Building is a key driver of the Council Plan, which has fairness and equity at its heart. In this context, there are many opportunities to increase food growing and develop diversity in ownership of the local food economy.

Volunteering and employability skills development opportunities can be created which align with the Council's Community Wealth Building strategy. Unused land and assets can be repurposed and brought to new life in communities through community asset transfer to allotment and community growers.

### **2.3.4 Climate Change**

In 2019, the Council declared a Climate Emergency and increased its efforts towards environmental sustainability, including food provenance and maximising the use of locally grown food. A commitment to use the natural and built assets sustainably, for example through increased local food production, encouraging biodiversity and balanced land use policy is the high-level vision within the North Ayrshire Environmental Sustainability & Climate Change Strategy 2017-2020.

### **2.3.4 Public Health Priorities**

As part of Public Health Reform, North Ayrshire Council is a leader in implementing Public Health Priority 6 – 'A Scotland where we eat well, have a healthy weight and are physically active.'

As an early adopter of a whole system approach to diet and maintaining a healthy weight along with access to nutritious and affordable food is fundamental to the success of this strategy.

### **3.0 North Ayrshire Food System**

Food poverty and access to good, healthy and nutritious food is something which, sadly, affects many families and individuals across the UK, impacting negatively on their health and wellbeing, both physically and mentally.

The importance of food was highlighted in the recent response to the emergency phase of the Covid-19 pandemic. The Council worked closely with its own services and community partners to establish a North Ayrshire Food System.

The North Ayrshire Food System was set up in response to the learning from the Covid-19 pandemic. It builds on work of community organisations, like Fullarton Community Hub and others, who have been exploring new models of providing food with dignity beyond emergency foodbanks. These models include community fridge, larders and co-operatives.

The Food System provided a variety of support mechanisms for vulnerable people with food requirements due to the pandemic. The North Ayrshire Food System is being developed during the pandemic recovery phase and through a multi-layered community food network aims to embed food growing, local supply and production.

The Food Forum, North Ayrshire community organisations, partners in local businesses and the third and voluntary sector are being supported by North Ayrshire Council to establish new and more dignified ways of accessing community food.

Throughout the Covid-19 pandemic, community food provision was in high demand and the innovative introduction of community fridges and pantries emerged to complement the high-volume community and free school meal bags. There is a natural link to food growing and, as progress into the recovery phase is made, discussions about building new community-based sharing of surplus produce through the Food System will be progressed.

The potential to develop partnerships between community food needs and food growers are the focus of the action plan, along with exploring linkages with the Ayrshire food and drink sector.

### **4.0 North Ayrshire Food Forum**

The North Ayrshire Food Forum was developed from the 'Fair For All' Strategy in 2017. They have been key partners in the development of the Food Growing Strategy. Its membership is drawn from North Ayrshire Council services, NHS Ayrshire and Arran services, Pennyburn Community Association, Saltcoats Link Up, Be Inspired, Beith & District Community Council, Irvine Youth Forum, The Conservation Volunteers, Café Solace, Ayrshire Community Trust (Third Sector Interface), NHS Public Health and NHS Dietetic Health Promotion, The Conservation Volunteers, Eglinton Growers, Eglinton Community Gardens, Organic Growers of Fairlie, Pryde, North Ayrshire Ranger Service, Scottish Allotments and Gardens and the Three Towns Growers.

As part of the fairer food consultation and research, the People's Panel posed questions to a cross-section of residents about access to food and participation in food growing in order to assess food insecurity. The People's Panel provided data for the first time in relation to what

people think about food in North Ayrshire. This covered food access, cooking, consumption and growing. Over 1,300 responses were received. The food growing element relates to the support to allotment groups and community growers over the years.

The Food Forum is currently developing its governance in order to establish itself as an independent organisation with ideas to pursue, which include:

- Libraries - expanding summer/holiday programmes, community growing and rolling out the model of the Largs Seed Library;
- Garden sharing - Green space that residents are not able to maintain; and
- Mentorship – supporting what is already happening naturally and encouraging intergenerational learning.

## **5.0 Fairer Food Initiative**

The Council has established a Fairer Food initiative. This has been working over a three-year period to map community food provision, focus support to alleviate food insecurity, investigate developments like Sustainable Food Cities and develop a Food Strategy.

The Fairer Food initiative has achieved the following:

- Food Forum established for North Ayrshire with 27 organisations and 58 individuals participating;
- Embedded questions about food in the People's Panel survey to gather evidence – this has established that 85% feel they have access to good food and 12% of people are active in growing food they eat;
- 102 community food opportunities have been mapped;
- Data has been added to the Open Data Portal about access to food and allotments; and
- Developed and delivered the participatory budgeting event dedicated to food development.

### **5.1 Fairer Food Participatory Budgeting**

The Council has used its funding to stimulate thinking differently about food through a Fairer Food Participatory Budgeting event, with funding of £20,000. In June 2019, over 400 people attended, and 338 people voted at Eglinton Park Racquet Hall, for the local initiatives they elected to receive funding to improve food access in North Ayrshire. The range of successful groups show a diversity of interest in food growing or dignified food provision.

## **6.0 Community Growing Opportunities**

There are a range of options available to communities to enable them to grow produce such as fruits, vegetables and herbs for eating.

### **6.1 Allotments**

Allotments are plots of land at a specific site assigned to individuals or groups for growing food. This is a well-established means of community growing in a managed way. The plots of land in North Ayrshire are generally leased from allotment organisations / associations,

aligning with the Council's community empowerment approaches. North Ayrshire Council's role is to:

- maintain an allotment waiting list;
- when certain trigger points of demand are reached, a duty to take reasonable steps to ensure:
  - that the number of people on their waiting list for an allotment does not exceed half the total number of allotments owned and leased by the authority; and
  - that a person on the list does not wait more than five years for an allotment;
- a requirement to make allotment site regulations;
- a duty to produce an allotments report for its area each year - this includes such matters as the location and size of each allotment site and the number of allotments on each site; and
- a duty to include the identification of land for allotments and other community growing and how the authority will meet demand for such land.

### **6.1.2 Allotment sites**

North Ayrshire Council does not own or manage allotments. The Council works in partnership with local, self-managed community allotment organisations through the Council's Locality Co-ordinators and Officers. Communities have been empowered through Community Asset Transfers and the Community Investment Fund and this has enabled allotments to flourish.

The community allotment organisations and associations operate in the following locations across North Ayrshire:

- The Arran Community Land Initiative (Whiting Bay);
- Eglinton Growers - allotment society for Irvine, Kilwinning and surrounding villages (borders Eglinton Country Park, Irvine);
- Organic Growers of Fairlie (Pier Road, Fairlie);
- Garnock Valley Allotments (near Sersley Drive, Kilbirnie);
- Three Towns Growers - allotment and community garden site (Elm Park, Ardrossan); and
- West Kilbride Allotments (Ballees Farm near Dalry Road, West Kilbride).

Individuals and community groups can find their nearest community managed allotment site through North Ayrshire Council's Open Data Portal.

The Council's Connected Communities Service delivers awareness training to encourage uptake of allotments through the Community Leadership Collective, based at Redburn, Irvine.

Demand for allotments can be monitored through interest in this programme. Close partnership working with participants, community allotments and the Food Forum will provide pathways for interested parties to access guidance, advice, information about external funding and a network of contacts.

In the context of food growing, the Council is working to enable and empower community organisations and allotments to flourish. The Council is monitoring demand for allotments and will actively seek to identify new sites for food growing and support communities to take part in food growing.

### **6.1.3 New allotment sites**

The growing communities in North Ayrshire have a high public profile locally and while no unfulfilled demand has been identified, there may be latent need. Communities who are interested in allotments can register their interest on the Council's website or contact local organisations directly.

The Council's priority is to establish demand across the area and work with interested parties and established organisations to meet this or to increase capacity in line with obligations under the legislation.

North Ayrshire's post-industrial context means a legacy of land which is not always suitable for growing and contaminated land is identified in the Local Development Plan 2 (LDP2).

LDP2 sets out the context for land use and development and includes a commitment to support alternative solutions which would improve the amenity or economic outlook of the surrounding area such as 'greening' solutions, which includes allotments.

Work will continue between the Food Forum, community allotments and planners to identify vacant and derelict land which is suitable for growing. Opportunities will also be identified from the public consultation on the Council's Regeneration Strategy. This will be integrated in the Council's current review of land and property assets as part of its transformation programme.

The Climate Change emergency, sustainability and biodiversity helps to frame the way in which new sites are viewed. This includes looking at gap sites, under-utilised and derelict land which provide opportunities for attractive, urban environments for wildlife, community growing, tree planting and reducing the carbon footprint.

In responding to deprivation and food poverty challenges, an allotment is not always the best solution. There are often difficulties about the size, scale and commitment to maintain them. While many community groups are experienced in providing support and access to equipment, often there are alternative options for growing on a smaller scale so that all participation is valued, encouraged and supported. This is not to diminish the need for access to allotments, or to reduce the size of plots to increase allotment activity. It recognises that for many people raised beds, community gardening or managing tomatoes in the local library provides an amount of community participation and nurture which they are happy with.

## **6.2 Community Gardens**

Community gardens are often classed as a single piece of land that is collectively tended and cultivated by a group of people.

Community gardens provide individual or shared plots on private or public land to enable fruits, vegetables and herbs to be produced.

### **Case Studies**

**Largs Community Gardens** provides opportunities for volunteers to get involved in growing.

The Council owned **Eglinton Country Park** contains a community garden as well as gardens maintained by special groups of volunteers for horticultural therapy.

The Ayrshire Community Trust created a flagship **Demonstration Community Food Garden** in the grounds of Eglinton Country Park. The Garden complements and adds additional opportunities for other voluntary groups such as the Eglinton Growers, Breaking Ground, Enable and the Castle Developments and provides a range of activities for community use.

It provides all members of the community with learning opportunities related to gardening, growing food and cooking and provides the community and volunteers with the opportunity to learn new skills, tools and coping mechanisms and promote positive changes in health, diet and lifestyle and fitness. The Countryside Ranger service is continuing to support the work started by the Ayrshire Community Trust.

The **Breaking Ground Garden Project** is a social and therapeutic horticultural service for people living within North Ayrshire. Based within Eglinton Country Park, it offers support, training and recovery for individuals who would like to improve their mental health. As a green prescription therapy, individuals are referred to the project from health service organisations. By taking part in outdoor gardening and conservation projects, you can work together in a group towards enhancing the park grounds to:

- encourage wildlife;
- provide enjoyment; and;
- provide a resource for the public, schools and other organisations.

Participants take part in a nine-month calendar of gardening activities. They will experience growing throughout the changing seasons and learn about plant care, propagation and garden maintenance. If you, or someone you know, is struggling with temporary mental ill health and could benefit from the therapeutic benefits of horticulture.

### **6.3 Schools**

The Council provides support and encouragement to schools and early years facilities in North Ayrshire, to offer significant opportunities for food growing in school grounds. This may be linked to sustainability such as ecological initiatives, intergenerational learning or improving health and wellbeing through improved understanding of nutritious food and family cooking.

The Food Growing Strategy enhances the Food for Life approach already in place in schools, where food can be grown in local schools, prepared, cooked and eaten with school meals as an enjoyable and educational experience. The importance of developing food-handling, hygiene and cooking skills is recognised through initiatives like 'Meal in a Can'.

Food and the Environment is one of the topics in the Eco-Schools Scotland Programme run by Keep Scotland Beautiful. It encourages educational establishments to consider all aspects of food growing within the environment as part of the green flag programme.

### **Case Study**

Mayfield Primary School in Ardrossan opened its polytunnel in 2014. This heralded a cohort of young learners growing carrots, parsnips and potatoes. They then worked with the Council's catering team to turn the produce into carrot jelly, soup and potato scones.

### **6.4 Wider Opportunities**

A wide range of community facilities such as libraries, community halls, centres and community hubs being developed in new housing developments, all offer opportunities to growing food.

The Council's libraries developed a project to grow food including potatoes, lettuce and carrots in their surrounding grounds or tomatoes, peppers and strawberries in their windows.

This has the potential to be extended to community halls, centres, schools and the community hubs being developed in new housing developments. Planning for gardening and growing has been integrated with care and attention so that food growing potential and intergenerational, community learning can take place. Fullarton Community Hub is a recent community asset transfer by the local community association who have secured funding, completed a new-build community centre and created a community garden in central Irvine.

## **7.0 Green Health**

The physical and mental health and wellbeing benefits of gardening and growing your own food are well researched and documented. Horticultural therapy activities can relieve the symptoms of serious illnesses, prevent the development of some conditions, and introduce people to a way of life that can help them to improve their well-being in the longer term. Growing food can also offer education and training opportunities, not only in horticulture skills but life skills, literacy and numeracy. In turn these can lead to improvements in confidence, pride, quality of life and self-esteem, as well as reduced social isolation.

KA Leisure, the Council's partner, recognises the health and physical activities on green health and promotes gardening and recognises that by taking part in outdoor gardening and conservation projects communities can:

- develop new skills;
- enjoy a weekly routine with goal orientated activities;
- meet and socialise with others;
- improve general health and wellbeing;
- gain self-confidence and self-esteem;
- learn about plants, natural history and conservation;
- improve the local community;
- produce nutritious food; and
- help preserve green spaces.

### **7.1 Green Health Partnership**

Close partnership working has been built up with the Green Health Partnership, established to encourage better use of the green spaces around NHS facilities, maximise green resources and encourage outdoor exercise.

## **8.0 Grounds Maintenance Participatory Budgeting**

During 2017 and 2018, the Council's Streetscene and Connected Communities services worked together to deliver a participatory approach to grounds maintenance. The Council approved part of the grounds maintenance budget be reserved to implement participatory budgeting. The aim was to provide communities across North Ayrshire with an opportunity to influence and shape how a portion of the grounds maintenance budget is delivered. The concept of grounds maintenance participatory budgeting was initially trialled as a pilot programme in the Three Towns locality of Ardrossan, Saltcoats and Stevenston.

The programme was branded and marketed under the 'Shaping North Ayrshire' banner and 'Your Environment, You Decide.' The initiative saw local people involved in the first Ayrshire Potato Day, workshops, garden competitions and community-based planting. Poppy seeds and orchard trees were planted in suitable locations and since then, new sites for growing has

been actively embraced. The increase in planting fruit trees and vegetable planters has been driven by local demand and the unique Grow North Ayrshire project with intergenerational food production within the grounds of libraries. These initiatives are supported by the expertise of the community growers, within the umbrella of the North Ayrshire Food Forum.

As the initiative is rolled out across the other five North Ayrshire localities, there is the potential to utilise existing flower bed areas, in the right locations, to turn them into community food growing spaces for fruit, vegetables and herbs, subject to consultation, ground work preparations and maintenance agreements. The Council recognises the challenges of the successful transition from traditional planting to food-growing and the importance of the community participation in the selection of bed locations and the type of produce. This will ensure that there is no unintentional negative aesthetic impact and food production is welcomed, tended and integrated into the North Ayrshire Food System.

## **8.1 Climate Change**

In 2019, North Ayrshire Council declared a Climate Emergency. At a special Council meeting on 5 March 2020, the elected members approved a single Investment Fund that consolidated the Climate, Infrastructure and Community Wealth Funds.

At this meeting, the members allocated £500,000 from the new Investment Fund 'towards achieving the required carbon absorption through tree planting in recognition of the importance of this as part of the Council's overall approach to becoming net zero.'

Relevant Council policies plans, and strategies will be considered to scope out opportunities to plant trees and will include fruit trees to create orchards, in suitable locations, as part of this commitment.

## **9.0 Funding and support**

The Council can offer financial support to community growers through its community funding, which is distributed via a participatory budgeting approach in its six localities.

The Locality Officers can be contacted via the Council website for information and advice on applying for funding from local and national funding sources, and the Connected Communities' Funding Officer provides further specialist assistance and knowledge.

The members of the Food Forum are also supportive of new organisations and willing to offer the benefit of their experience and share their growing expertise.

The Council's Community Asset Transfer (CAT) toolkit and team can provide a pathway should any organisation be interested in developing its own allotments. The CAT option provides a variety of models including leases and full ownership.

## **10.0 Commercial context of food growing in North Ayrshire**

Locally in North Ayrshire there are about 450 businesses in the food and drink sector, and these cover dairy and meat production and manufacturing of beef, lamb, venison, eggs, fruit and vegetables. The Ayrshire Regional Economic Strategy includes a workstream on food and drink and there are employment opportunities for community growers as well as contributing to local supply chains.



Of the 450 businesses, the Business Growth Team directly engage with about half of these, many of whom are family businesses. The general food production supply chain in North Ayrshire can cover – chocolate; ice cream; dairy; cheese; fruit and vegetables; confectionary; gin; spirits; lager; whisky; chicken; lamb; beef; shellfish; and salmon.

Access to local support and expertise through the mature food and drink network; community wealth building approaches; and opportunities for employment provide partnership opportunities for social enterprises and community co-operatives which will be explored as part of the strategy action plan. Opportunities from the work being carried out by the Regional Economic Partnership workstream on Food & Drink will also be examined.

## **11.0 Action Plan**

An Action Plan is set out in Appendix 1 and will be updated annually by action owners so that progress is kept on track and to assist with reporting and promotion of growing to new communities.

### **11.1 Monitoring**

North Ayrshire Council's Place Directorate will be responsible for collating information regarding food growing on Council owned land and for updating the Scottish Government, with the support of Connected Communities Services.

### **11.2 Review**

The North Ayrshire Council Food Growing Strategy will be reviewed in 2026 and every five years thereafter.

#### **Useful resources and further reading**

<http://www.growyourownsotland.info/allotments/>

<https://www.greenspacesotland.org.uk/Pages/FAQs/Category/resources>

<http://www.sags.org.uk/index.php>

<http://www.sags.org.uk/docs/ScotPlotGuide.pdf>

## **Appendix 1**

<b>Draft North Ayrshire Food Growing Action Plan:</b> Aim: Flourishing allotments supported by enabled and empowered community organisations			
No.	Action	Lead Owner	Timescale
1	Support the Food Forum to develop as an independent, constituted body	Connected Communities	Ongoing
2	Work with community growers and locality teams to develop systems to share surplus produce through the North Ayrshire Food System	Connected Communities	Ongoing
3	Establish a process to register new requests for allotments	Commercial Services	June 2021
4	Monitor demand for allotments and respond according to the national guidance	Commercial Services	Ongoing

5	Establish best practice in the event of a requirement for regulations to be developed	Commercial Services	June 2021
6	Continue to promote uptake of allotments through the Council and CPP websites, Food Forum and Locality Partnerships	Connected Communities	Ongoing
7	Develop and deliver awareness training through the Community Leadership Collective	Connected Communities	June 2021
8	Provide advice and support to individuals and groups setting up allotments or community growing organisations	Connected Communities	June 2021
9	Continue to support the Three Towns Growers development plans	Connected Communities	Ongoing
10	Work in locality teams to support the aspirations of community growers and allotments through the provision of funding advice; guidance on leases, governance models or community asset transfer; coordination of council services; and access to networking opportunities	Connected Communities	Ongoing
11	Work with local businesses and the Community Wealth Building team to explore partnership opportunities for employment, skills development, social enterprises and community co-operatives as well as examining opportunities arising from the Regional Economic Partnership workstream on Food&Drink.	Economic Development & Regeneration	Ongoing
12	Actively seek to identify land suitable for food growing through the Council's Local Development Planning process; Regeneration Strategy; and Land and Property Transformation Programme	Economic Development & Regeneration/Physical Environment	Dec 2021
13	Continue to work with Planning Team in order to identify land suitable for food growing as part of Local Development Plan 3	Economic Development & Regeneration	Ongoing
14	Seek opportunities to contribute to food growing, for example, planting fruit trees as part of the Climate Change commitment	Commercial Services	Dec 2021
15	Continue to gather information through the People's Panel Forum	Community Planning Partnership	Ongoing
16	Encourage food growing, food preparation and cooking skills through intergenerational learning activities in schools and communities	Education	Ongoing
17	Review the Food Growing Strategy	Commercial Services	Sept 2025