

Food Growing Space in New Development

Practice Note

2026



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1. Introduction

1.1 Purpose and scope

This practice note supports the implementation of emerging Bristol Local Plan policy *FS2: Provision of food growing space in new developments*, which requires new residential development to provide spaces that encourage and enable food growing. This document provides guidance on how, **where appropriate and in line with the nature of the scheme**, spaces can be designed to specifically facilitate this. Otherwise, space for food growing can be provided in the form of outdoor amenity space that can be used flexibly for food growing as or when the need arises, in accordance with policy *DC1: Liveability in residential development including space standards, aspect and private outdoor space*.

The guidance also supports extant policies *DM15: Green Infrastructure Provision* and *DM27: Layout and Form* in the Site Allocations & Development Management Policies, which expect new development to provide spaces and landscaping with suitable conditions to facilitate food growing.

How to use this document

This document uses case studies, primarily from within Bristol, to illustrate different types of food growing spaces. Applicants can draw on the examples highlighted here when developing their proposals, whilst alternative, innovative approaches will be similarly encouraged.

These case studies also highlight the role played by community organisations in sustaining food growing projects through the provision of resources, training, or management. Consequently, applicants interested in providing larger, dedicated food growing spaces are encouraged to reach out to local food growing groups when planning for food growing spaces, to understand whether the proposal could address any deficiencies in local provision, or to connect future occupants to existing resources and networks. This can help ensure the successful, long-term management of newly built food growing spaces.

Applicants may find the [Bristol Good Food 2030 directory](#), and the additional resources linked in the 'Further resources' section, a useful starting point when reaching out to community organisations.

Benefits of food growing

There are multiple benefits of food growing in an urban environment. Not only can it contribute to the wider network of green spaces across the city that support pollinators and other wildlife, but it can also support good mental and physical health and wellbeing by creating opportunities for exercise, outdoor activity and socialising within communities.

Food growing spaces also create opportunities for citizens to develop new skills, reconnect with where their food comes from, and reap the health benefits of fresh, nutritious food grown themselves. It also supports self-sufficiency, and improves access to affordable fruit and vegetables, creating opportunities to tackle food insecurity. As a result, food growing spaces are frequently connected to community kitchens that offer both meals and lessons in how to cook using the resources available.

1.2 Food growing in Bristol

Bristol is a Gold Sustainable Food City, a citywide achievement awarded in June 2021 recognising Bristol’s ongoing commitment to making meaningful and lasting changes to improving the urban food system.



Bristol Good Food 2030

Food growing is a prominent part of Bristol’s Gold Sustainable Food City status, with a vibrant network of food growing activity taking place across the city. This network includes allotments, city farms, community gardens, market gardens, school grounds, shared gardens, private gardens, balconies and window boxes.

The importance of urban food growing is recognised in Bristol’s [One City Plan](#), which includes a goal that ‘wildlife-friendly food growing areas have been established in every ward in the city’.

Bristol’s [One City Climate Strategy](#) also recognises how food growing can be an opportunity to engage with children and adults about health, wellbeing and nutrition, as well as enabling people on low incomes to save money and improve health. The Strategy also recognises the link between food growing spaces and the reduced consumption of carbon intensive food and drink.

The [Good Food 2030 Framework](#) was developed to deliver on the food related goals and objectives in the One City Plan and One City Climate Strategy. The framework aims to build a food system that is good for Bristol, and one that can lead other cities in co-creating a food system that is good for people and the planet.



Bristol Good Food 2030

1.3 Planning policy context

National Planning Policy Framework

Under the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), the planning system has a social objective to support the creation of vibrant and healthy communities, and an environmental objective to mitigate and adapt to climate change.

Local health needs can be addressed through access to healthier food choices and the provision of green infrastructure, which includes allotments and community orchards. Planning processes should ensure spaces are safe, inclusive and accessible, with a high standard of amenity for existing and future users. They should also promote social interaction, wellbeing, and the sustainability of communities.

The NPPF also gives significant weight to outstanding or innovative design which promotes high levels of sustainability. It states that opportunities to improve biodiversity in and around developments should be integrated as part of their design, especially where this can secure measurable net gains for biodiversity or enhance public access to nature.

National Design Guidance

National design guidance recognises that nature is a critical component of well-designed places, supporting physical activity through the provision of play, food growing and recreational spaces. Green spaces promote health, well-being and social inclusion, and can contribute towards achieving biodiversity net gain. Green infrastructure provided as food growing space can also be used to reduce overheating and air pollution.

Local Plan policy context

The Bristol Local Plan sets out an overall framework for the provision of green infrastructure through a series of interconnected policies. Food growing spaces can promote biodiversity, mental and physical health and wellbeing, and help adapt to and mitigate the effects of climate change.

Policy *FS2: Provision of food growing space in new developments* requires all new residential development to provide on-site opportunities for local food growing of an appropriate size and quality, with spaces designed to be safe, usable and accessible to all residents. The policy sets out the types of spaces, both private and communal, that new development may provide, and the various purposes that food growing spaces may serve. These are considered in more detail in chapter 2 of this guidance.

Policy *BG1: Green infrastructure and biodiversity in new development* requires all proposals to contribute to the wider green infrastructure network, whilst taking all opportunities to deliver multi-functional benefits. Policy *BG4: Trees* expects landscape treatment of new development to take practicable opportunities to increase canopy cover and ensure that any new streets created are tree lined.

Food-growing space also can support meeting requirements for nature design considerations set out in policy *DPM1: Delivering well-designed, inclusive places*. Interventions in the built form, such as the provision of green roofs, green walls and green decks, can create further food growing opportunities.

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Policy *NZC1: Climate change, sustainable design and construction* aims to ensure that development is made resilient to climate risks through the incorporation of green infrastructure and landscape design. Food growing spaces help cool the surrounding areas or provide a shaded outdoor area that enhances external comfort.

2. Food growing in new development

This section considers the many different types of food growing spaces that can be designed into the outdoor areas of new development. Guidance, case studies and key considerations have been provided to suit a range of sizes and amenity areas.

The options are grouped into the following categories:

Shared growing spaces

- Edible landscaping
 - General landscaping
 - Hedgerows
 - Trees
- Vertical growing and living walls
- Roof gardens
- Communal gardens
 - Community gardens
 - Mini allotments
 - Courtyards

Private growing spaces

- Private gardens
- Balconies
- Window boxes

Other growing spaces

- School gardens
- Orchards
- Therapeutic gardens
- Meanwhile gardens

2.1 Shared growing spaces

Edible landscaping

Most developments include some element of soft landscaping, so consideration should be given to the use of food producing plants instead of, or alongside, ornamental species. This can include nut trees, fruit trees, vines and perennial edible shrubs such as herbs, artichoke, currants, and rhubarb. Edible landscaping may be particularly suitable for development associated with education or community enterprises, as users may not be able to maintain a high level of commitment all year round.

Edible landscaping can be appropriate in most types of development, and comes in many forms:

General landscaping

Landscaping is a feature of most developments, and ornamental planting is common in communal or public-facing areas. These spaces offer opportunities to incorporate edible plants or fruit bearing trees alongside more traditional ornamental species.

Specific practical considerations: Underground utilities or parking may constrain the depth of soil, whilst overshadowing from buildings may reduce the viability of larger fruiting trees.

Edible landscaping is frequently expected to retain the aesthetic qualities associated with conventional ornamental planting. Where this is important, species selection and planting design may need to be tailored for visual coherence.

Some edible plants require higher levels of maintenance and involvement, such as pruning or replanting. Where this is less practical, robust, perennial plants such as watercress, chives, rhubarb and blackberries may be more suitable.

Where might this be appropriate: Development of all types, including residential or commercial, in communal or public facing areas.

Case study: Northstowe

The new town of Northstowe in Cambridgeshire is intended to have up to 10,000 homes upon completion. The town is one of the 10 NHS Healthy New Towns and as part of the planning process a [Healthy Living and Youth & Play Strategy](#) was developed. The strategy includes measures to promote access to healthy food and productive landscapes across the neighbourhood, such as a requirement for fruiting espaliers along boundaries and communal front gardens, or for planting in the public realm and in play areas to include plants suitable for foraging. These include apples, currants, wild cherries, damsons, mirabelles and loganberries.

Alongside formal growing spaces in schools and community gardens, this relatively simple alternative approach to landscaping ensures that food growing and harvesting opportunities are made visible and easily accessible to all residents.

Hedgerows

Larger developments such as business parks or residential developments can include edible hedgerows to define boundaries or to provide screens and shelter.

Specific practical considerations: An appropriate management scheme will often be required to maintain this more disparate form of planting. Clear access for maintenance and fruit harvesting must be considered, particularly where planting may be planned on marginal land.

Where might this be appropriate: Development of all types, including residential and commercial. Between plots on larger development sites; the edges of sites and marginal land; or, where appropriate along footpaths or other routes through sites.

Case study: Edible Hedgerows – Really Wild Lockleaze

Local people are replanting hedgerows and rediscovering their recipes - from elderflower fritters to blackberry wine.

The UK has lost many of its hedgerows, a vital habitat of species abundance found on the edges of woodlands, groves and meadows. Hedgerows provide benefits to us beyond their delicious fruits – they help us continue our foraging traditions, connecting us to natural and ancestral history, and also provide essential habitat corridors to support native wildlife.

Before house building began in the 1950s, Lockleaze was once farmland criss-crossed with hedgerows. Now, the [Really Wild Lockleaze](#) project is rewilding their neighbourhood by planting native hedgerows containing many edible species such as elder, hazel, crab apple and hawthorn. They have planted hedgerow species and berry bushes on housing greens, on the marginal land of Lockleaze Sports Centre and within the boundaries of new developments such as Shackleton Heights.

Common recipes include elderflower fritters, berry crumbles, blackberry wine, hedgerow jams, wild garlic & nettle soup, hazelnut cakes, hawthorn berry ketchup and crab apple jelly.



Figures 1 and 2. Foraging and planting on marginal land

Trees

Tree planting contributes to carbon dioxide absorption, climate change and ‘heat island’ mitigation, shade provision, privacy, character, and can soften the impact of built elements. Where tree planting is proposed to meet the requirements of policy BG4, or if trees need to be felled and re-provided elsewhere, then fruit and/or nut trees could be included where appropriate.

Specific practical considerations: Consideration should be given to the location of productive trees; certain fruiting trees may not be suitable for roadside planting as fruit may drop onto pavements and roadways if not properly managed. Consider whether a footpath buildout may be required to maintain pedestrian accessibility and provide enough space and adequate soil depth to accommodate trees with the required root depth. The location of existing and proposed utilities routes will also need to be considered.

Where might this be appropriate: As part of wider landscaping; lining footpaths and roads where sited appropriately; as part of wider pedestrianised areas; within individual gardens. Trees should be carefully incorporated into designs, forming boundary treatments or the backdrop of views.

Case study: Northstowe

Fruit trees form a prominent part of Northstowe's edible landscaping strategy. Alongside a requirement for all private gardens to include fruit trees, [the Healthy Living and Youth Play Strategy](#) proposes that fruit trees should make up at least 30% of trees planted within communal green spaces such as podium gardens, pocket parks, and village greens. The strategy suggested that, where planted, fruit trees should not be too far dispersed to reduce maintenance demands.

Local varieties of fruit trees were purchased from the East of England Apple and Orchard project. When choosing what varieties to plant, consideration was given to rootstock size and pollination groups. Trees were planted in winter to reduce watering demands.



Figures 3 and 4. Early orchard planting within the Northstowe allotment meadows. Image credit: Northstowe Allotments

Vertical growing and living walls

Modular planting systems or vertical planters can be used to grow plants such as salads and herbs, and even some vegetables like cucumbers and certain varieties of aubergines and squash.¹ External building walls, particularly those that are south and west facing, can be used to train and espalier edible climbing plants grown either in large containers or in the ground. This can provide a simple way of greening walls without the need for modular systems.

¹ [Royal Horticultural Society, "Veg on Walls"](#)

Living walls may look unattractive during dormant winter periods but can be installed in relatively small spaces, and if properly managed provide additional benefits, such as insulation of buildings in winter and cooling in summer.²

Specific practical considerations: As these systems often have limited space for soil, an irrigation system may be necessary in addition to regular maintenance for seasonal harvesting and replanting. Solar orientation is particularly important, as is the selection of appropriate species in this more restricted growing space.

Where might this be appropriate: Developments of all scales and locations, but particularly those where open space may be limited due to high densities.

Case study: Redcatch Community Garden

[Redcatch Community Garden](#) supports local health and wellbeing by bringing people together through projects, activities and events centred around gardening and art. The garden has a range of planting and landscapes providing accessible connections to nature. Part of this is a sensory oasis formed of living walls, which create a sense of safety and seclusion, and make the most of the site arrangement.



Figure 5. Living wall. Figures 6 and 7. Trellises in the sensory garden.

Roof gardens

Rooftop spaces in both residential and commercial buildings can be made accessible to future occupiers and users to provide space for food growing in development where open space is otherwise limited.

Specific practical considerations: Design should take into consideration the load bearing capacity of the roof and its ability to accommodate the weight of planters, soil and people. Taller buildings may require the installation of wind breaks, especially from the north, and shelter for both users and plants. Planters are likely to look more coordinated if designed in from the start, and should a range of soil depths to allow for trees in addition to shrubs and perennials.

² [Royal Horticultural Society, "Green Walls"](#)

Maintenance access and safety is essential. Designers should ensure that the roof can be safely inspected, and that water retention and potential damage — especially following extreme weather — can be monitored effectively.

Where might this be appropriate: Development of all types, including residential, commercial, schools, and hospitals. Underused roofs offer a space efficient way to provide valuable food growing space and can be considered on both communal roof spaces and individual spaces such as private housing.

Case Study: Southmead Hospital Rooftop Herb Garden

Southmead Hospital's culinary, medicinal and therapeutic herb garden is planted with over 30 herbs for use in staff and patient meals. In addition to providing useful produce, it serves as a 'sensory haven' for staff and patients to use for outdoor breaks. It also serves to support the hospital's biodiversity by hosting pollinators.



Figures 8, 9 and 10. Rooftop herb garden and outdoor seating area. Image credit: Southmead Hospital

Communal gardens

Many residential developments at a range of densities provide shared external amenity space - this could accommodate communal food growing and provide a space all occupiers of a development can enjoy. This could come in a variety of forms, such as small individual growing plots or a shared growing space without subdivisions. Shared amenities such as these are more likely to be a success when the future community is involved in the design process from the start.

Community gardens

Community gardens are managed by a group with collectively responsibility for the whole space, with the produce grown shared amongst volunteers or distributed beyond the group. Gardens can be provided for occupiers and users of the development or can be set up to include the wider community.

Specific practical considerations: Planters should be accessible, with some beds raised to enable less mobile users to be involved in food growing. Management arrangements may also need to be developed with residents to ensure the continued success of such projects.

Where might this be appropriate: A variety of development types, including lower to medium density residential developments, or in schools, commercial, medical or community centres.

Case study: Hillfields Community Garden, Hillfields Park, Thicket Avenue, BS16 4EP

Hillfields Community Garden breaks the mould by being open to the public 24/7. This is a rare feature among community gardens, which are typically locked and restricted. This high level of accessibility invites more engagement, makes volunteering more flexible, and fosters a sense of shared ownership. It also means that passersby are more likely to get involved, and more people benefit from the garden overall.

As Hillfields sits between other larger neighbourhoods, the garden has become an important way of fostering local identity and belonging. The associated community group run events and workshops throughout the week connecting people with nature and to each other, through growing edible plants and shared meals.

To improve the resilience of the site the group built a community compost system with rainwater harvesting, making it easy for people to access the resources required to support the growing garden. They also planted a small orchard to increase shading and provide apple yields for eating. The beds are raised at various heights for accessibility.



Figure 11. Raised planters. Figure 12. Hillfields' compost and rainwater harvesting system

Mini allotments

Mini allotments, or micro-beds, are an increasingly popular method of introducing novice gardeners to food growing. Rather than taking on the responsibility of a full-size allotment plot, which can be daunting for many, in a mini allotment each individual (or small group) manages a raised bed or planter. The size of a mini allotment bed, at typically less than 8m², can appear more manageable, and therefore accessible. Individual raised beds may also be useful on smaller, awkward plots, as planters can be designed to fit the layout, or in sites where potential soil depth is limited.

Specific practical considerations: Planters should be provided in a variety of sizes and heights to accommodate different types of projects and groups of users.³ Mini allotments will require a formal system for allocating planters to users, as well as consideration of how shared resources and storage will be provided. Consider opportunities for signage to encourage site stewardship.

Where might this be appropriate: A variety of development types including residential, retirement and education settings as well as community centres. If designed as introductory growing spaces, they may be useful for urban residential developments where previous opportunities to gain food growing experience may have been limited.

Case study: Brentford Lock West

The mini allotment sitting on the roof of this medium-rise residential development in London responds well to the local demand for growing spaces, as evidenced by the long waiting lists for allotment plots in the Borough. Residents can register with the management company to use one of the 35 raised beds to grow herbs, fruit and vegetables, with space available for storing tools and soil.

Initially, local urban farm 'Cultivate London' were hired to run the mini allotment. This represented an extension of the relationship between the developer and the social enterprise, which had utilised the vacant site pre-development for polytunnel fruit and vegetable production. With a remit to actively engage residents in food growing, they provided regular workshops focused on the basics of starting a garden, managed a demonstration plot to showcase species and methods, and tended to any unallocated beds. Marking the success of the project, the allotment has since been handed over to residents as regular professional involvement is no longer required, though Cultivate London are still available to run training for new residents, and to upgrade the mini allotment when necessary.



Figure 13 and 14. Mini allotment plots. Image credit: [Brentford Lock West](#)

Courtyards

These spaces often create a sheltered micro-climate, ideal for cultivating food plants. They are particularly suited to wall climbing species and planters.

Specific practical considerations: Courtyards are likely to require a high level of maintenance to keep the space looking tidy. Irrigation and water run off should be considered at the design stage.

³ [Brighton & Hove City Council Micro Bed Scheme: Guidelines](#)

Areas of the courtyard may be shaded for much of the day due to boundary structures, and so south-facing/central areas should be chosen for plants requiring the most light.

Where might this be appropriate: A variety of development types such as hotels, business, offices, retirement units, health and residential care settings where enclosed spaces and internal gardens are likely to be the principles amenity spaces.

Case study: Wellspring Settlement, Barton Hill

The Wellspring Settlement has several courtyards across its sites in Barton Hill and uses the shelter these provide to grow fruits, vegetables and flowers.

The courtyard at the Settlement Site is a green oasis for residents in an area with low levels of access to high-quality open space. What was initially a neglected pocket of urban space has since been transformed with fruit trees, bushes, flowers and wildlife. Alive Activities host a free weekly gardening group here, with a focus on community wellbeing and health, linked to the aims of the Wellspring Settlement.

Visitors to the Wellspring Site on Beam Street enter the building through a courtyard planted with a variety of edible species. Though small, Wellspring has recognised and maximised its south facing aspect, illustrating how food growing spaces can be integrated at any scale.

2.2 Private growing spaces

Private amenity spaces should be thoughtfully designed to enable food growing to take place if desired. Giving residents food growing opportunities in private amenity spaces can help provide year-round access to nature, support mental wellbeing, and can reduce pressure on oversubscribed allotment systems.

Private gardens

Applicants are encouraged to design flexible and usable spaces, and ideally to maximise sunlight and growing potential where possible.

Balconies

Balconies can enhance visual amenity and provide an opportunity to create a connection with nature, especially on sites where ground space is limited. Where balconies adjoin, this can provide an opportunity for vertical growing which has the added benefit of creating privacy between residential units. They can also help provide natural surveillance to communal areas at ground levels.

Specific practical considerations: Consider loading capacity at the design stage as well as the layout of balconies between stories to allow natural rainwater irrigation; for instance, balconies may be staggered to increase rain and light capture.

Window boxes

Window boxes can provide simple, low-space ways to introduce greenery into high-density developments. They can soften building facades, support pollinators and give residents a space for and connection with nature.

Specific practical considerations: Fixings must be secure to protect pedestrians below. Residents should be able to water and tend boxes safely.

2.3 Other growing spaces

School/nursery gardens

Food growing spaces in educational settings can complement curriculum learning, especially about healthy eating, sustainability and wellbeing. They can also encourage children to spend time outdoors and provide access to assets and experiences that they might not have at home. The skills and knowledge children learn through gardening, growing, harvesting and cooking with fresh produce can have knock-on benefits for adults and help form long-lasting, positive habits.

Specific practical considerations: Planters and beds should be appropriately sized to enable children to reach them. Ideally an outside, shaded teaching area should be included. Gates, entrances, paths and surfaces should be fully accessible to enable use of the garden by all pupils, including disabled students. If planting ahead of occupation, it would be beneficial to include edible plant species that children are more likely to want to eat to encourage more successful engagement with the space. Poisonous or irritant plant species should not be included. Consider what other learning opportunities can be incorporated, such as those that teach about sustainability and biodiversity. To manage the space over the holidays, either plant what can be harvested beforehand, or get the local community involved in the growing space.

Where might this be appropriate: Schools, nurseries, children’s centres and other early years settings.

Case study: Hackney School of Food

The [Hackney School of Food](#) fosters a holistic approach to food education across its kitchen garden and classroom. Pupils from over 50 local schools are taught how to plant, care for and harvest a variety of herbs, fruit and vegetable using nature-friendly techniques, which are then used as ingredients for cookery classes. For children, through the hands-on exploration of all stages of the food system, the process of learning how to make healthy and nutritious meals is made engaging and inspiring.

Outside of term time, the School’s garden and kitchen are opened to the community for wellbeing gardening sessions, seasonal cooking classes, and shared meals. Community groups can also hire the space for their own events and workshops – over 20 different groups make use of this every year. This dual educational approach, aimed at both children and the wider community, illustrate how a food growing site can provide a space for multiple different groups to come together, fostering connections and a healthier food culture beyond a single institution.

The School has also published its own [toolkit](#) to encourage other schools to set up their own food education hubs. Whilst recognising that schools in urban spaces may not be able to grow enough food to supply their kitchen, they reiterate that any edible growing experience can be transformative. Guidance is also provided on materials and dimensions suitable for children; planting appropriate species such as herbs, berries, and root vegetables; and integrating further resources such as rainwater collection tanks or play spaces.



Figure 15. Brick planting beds in the kitchen garden. Image credit: [Hackney School of Food](#)

Orchards

Orchards are classified as ‘habitats of principal importance’ by Natural England and DEFRA under the UK’s Biodiversity Framework, because they make ideal homes for thousands of species of flora and fauna. Planting trees with a high fruit or nut yield can also help strengthen food security and community resilience, providing sustenance for people as well as wildlife. They also contribute to increasing tree coverage.

Specific practical considerations: planting a variety of species such as apples, pears, plums, cherries and greengages will suit people’s different tastes. Locations where productive trees will impact on highways should be avoided due to their tendency to drop fruit along pavements and roadways if not properly managed. On smaller sites, trees may require pruning or training to maintain their shape; on larger sites they can be left to grow naturally.

Where might this be appropriate: size can vary from a small cluster of fruit trees to a whole field. Therefore, consider large greenfield sites as well as education and care settings, residential developments and health facilities.

Case study: Woodcroft Community Orchard

[Woodcroft Community Orchard](#) have planted over 50 trees since 2013 including apple, pear, plum, damson, gage, mulberry, quince and elder for the benefit of local residents, allotment holders, holiday food clubs, and the wider community.

The orchard supports local biodiversity, food resilience and community cohesion through group activities, such as workshops on pruning and scything, or play therapy and forest schools. The desire to encourage equitable access is reflected in the provision of space for refugees and social prescribing, furthering community connections and wellbeing.



Figure 16. Apple picking in the orchard.

Therapeutic gardens

Therapeutic gardens are where people with specific health needs can access safe and secure growing spaces which can help improve physical and mental health. They allow for the development of social and practical skills, connections with others, and for people to benefit from being outdoors.

Specific practical considerations: Consider whether the garden is being designed for a specific population that has physical, mental or emotional challenges. If so, request guidance from future users of the space as to what features should be incorporated. All sites should have level access, be wheelchair friendly, and be flexible for different needs. The site should also be clearly defined and easy to navigate. Consider the use of screening and vertical walls to create privacy if needed.

As these spaces should encourage physical interaction with nature, it's a good idea to grow herbs and other plants with sensory interest (e.g. smells, colours, tastes and textures). Provide spaces to sit, enjoy and reflect on the sensory experience. Avoid any plants that could cause discomfort or irritation.

Growing and harvesting can instil a sense of pride, responsibility and ownership that can make a significant difference to mental health and wellbeing. In care facility settings, this may also increase access to nutritious meals and associated benefits.

Where might this be appropriate: care homes, sheltered accommodation, retirement units, rehabilitation centres and health facilities. Gardens are well suited to quiet but visible locations.

Case study: Alive Activities

Across Bristol, several therapeutic gardens operate as part of social prescribing programmes or volunteer initiatives. These sites provide tailored health, wellbeing and social care activities that improve the lives of local residents.

[Alive Activities](#) has two dementia-friendly allotments in Bristol where they offer supported gardening and socialising sessions. They also run social and therapeutic horticulture sessions in care homes and community gardens around the city.

A key factor in their success is the presence of dedicated teams and volunteers who deliver personalised sessions based on individual needs.

The sites themselves are designed in a way that is accessible with raised beds and paths suitable for wheelchair use and mobility aids. For both people and support staff, it is important to have a calming environment.

Additional aspects that help curate successful therapeutic spaces:

- Ensure the site is accessible with public transport routes and there is parking for those that will need to use a car. For those using public transport, consider the comfort of those waiting and how they can be protected in all weathers
- The site should not have significant slopes or tricky steps
- Accessible toilets and hand-washing facilities
- Engagement with the local community with the design of the site to enable ownership

Meanwhile gardens

Food growing spaces can be accommodated on vacant sites that have been allocated for development but have yet to see construction start. Meanwhile gardens can provide community groups with additional space, whilst enlivening and enhancing the site prior to the main development coming forward. Uncertainty about the future of the site does not have to prevent its use completely - instead, it can act as a bridge between the past and future of the site.

Specific practical considerations: These spaces are typically offered to existing local growing groups, as the process of setting up a new organisation for a temporary site can be too resource intensive. Therefore, seeking the input of local growing groups early on in the process is essential.

During the final redevelopment, if the site is to be retained in some form, having an existing group involved can help maintain continuity, and further engagement can support the long-term integration of the site.

In all cases, it is essential to manage the expectations of the growing groups involved, making it clear how long and in what form the site will be available for, to allow groups to plan their growing season and investment accordingly.

In terms of infrastructure, meanwhile gardens are usually set up in moveable containers that can be relocated when necessary, and function well on hardstanding or on contaminated soil.

Where might this be appropriate: sites that are pending redevelopment or on previously developed land.

Case study: Carpenters Estate regeneration

Carpenters Estate in London is currently undergoing a 15-year, large-scale regeneration programme. To ensure that current residents can start to benefit from the investment, and to bridge the gap between the estate's present and its future, Populo Living are implementing a comprehensive

meanwhile use strategy. A key part of this is the provision of community gardens and food growing spaces, which respond to the limited access to green space highlighted by residents during the master planning phase.

Four community gardens have since been established across the site using materials donated by local businesses and from repurposed construction waste, such as rubble and wooden pallets. Fruit trees, herbs, fruits and vegetables have been planted in relocatable containers that can be moved around the site until they can be planted out and integrated into the estate in the long term. These food growing spaces have been designed and run with the need to encourage community participation in mind. The gardens have provided a space for developers to engage in discussions with residents about the future of the estate; for weekly food growing volunteering sessions; for shared meals; and for nature-based learning. Over time, residents have shaped the garden to suit their needs, for instance by growing a wider range of herbs suitable for different cuisines. Engaging and providing training opportunities for residents now bodes well for the sustained success of food growing spaces on the estate in the future.



Figure 17 and 18. Recycled wood and metal trough planters. Image credit: public works

3. Practical considerations for food growing spaces

There are various considerations that need to be considered when designing future-proof and sustainable food growing spaces. Ensuring these considerations are accounted for at the earliest practical stage of the design process will increase the chance of positive outcomes for both the developer and future users.

Access

Identify who is likely to use the growing space (e.g. staff, residents, general public, elderly people, children, vulnerable users, etc.) and how they will access it. For example, ensuring access paths are level and wide enough for wheelchair users. Also consider how materials and tools will be moved through the development, especially routes for heavier items such as compost. Planters should not be more than approximately 1 metre wide to allow a range of users to comfortably reach all areas of the space from the edge.

Some level of seating and shaded cover should be incorporated into larger sites where possible.

Aspect, light and exposure

Exposure to direct sunlight is essential for food plants during the growing season. A location with a south or southwest facing aspect is ideal. Partial shade may suit some species, but areas of permanent shade should be avoided. If installing planters, these are best run north to south so that the plants receive even sunlight levels.

Applicants may consider an appropriate lighting strategy to allow for year-round use and enjoyment of the space.

To improve the security of growing spaces, design that incorporates natural surveillance from homes is encouraged.

Appropriate shelter from the elements is also an important consideration. Developers should consider the impact wind might have on any planting, particularly when including food growing spaces such as rooftop or balcony planters, or gardens in areas which might be subject to a wind tunnel effect unless adequate shelter can be provided to protect plants and gardeners.

Cost

Incorporating food growing space as part of a development's green infrastructure provision or landscape provision does not necessarily cost more than traditional landscaping. Consideration will need to be given to who will pay for any repairs and maintenance once the growing space is operational. Growing spaces that are well designed from the outset using robust materials are likely to have reduced maintenance costs than those that have been less well thought through. It may also be beneficial to provide training or skills sharing for the future community that will occupy the space so that they have the skills and knowledge to take care of the space themselves. This could be sought from local urban food growers with relevant experience.

Energy

When identifying how the space will be used and who by, consider whether a power supply will be needed to enable use of tools, lighting or social areas as to do this retrospectively would be costly. Ideally, a renewable energy source such as solar panels would be installed.

Flexibility

Landscaped areas, gardens and growing spaces that are designed to be flexible will be able to accommodate changes in trends and occupiers' interests in the future.

Maintenance and management

A crucial factor in ensuring the long-term maintenance of food growing spaces is involving the future community from the outset in the design of the scheme. The space is more likely to be well-used, valued and safe when community requirements and aspirations are included in the design process from the start.

Management of the food growing space should be set out in the landscape maintenance strategy, to ensure that clear and correct maintenance is taken forward by the responsible agent e.g. a landscape management company.

The management plan can also include a programme to involve residents. If it becomes clear that residents can take over the care of the gardens, a community management plan should be developed and agreed between the development owner and residents. This should set out clear expectations for how responsibility and management costs will be shared. Residents could also be

provided with an easy-to-follow community management plan setting out what must be done, with which tools, at which time of year.

Case study: Ambition Lawrence Weston

Under the Grow, Cook and Eat scheme, Ambition Lawrence Weston have been working with new and existing community groups to create or enhance growing spaces in their neighbourhood. To ensure that their support has long-lasting impacts, all the community growing groups have been provided with a management plan covering the different areas of their site.

Feature: Willow Fedge

What to do	When
Water if dry (Occasional/rare complete soaking is much better than little & often)	First-year only
Weeding	As needed
Mulching	Every year late winter/early spring
Pruning/weaving new growth	Only in winter months As needed to maintain shape (creative license granted! Can cut back to the original framework or weave new bits in)

Figure 20. Example management plan from the [Grow, Cook and Eat Community Toolkit](#)

For individual food growing spaces, residents could be provided with a basic handbook on how to start growing food from scratch.

Make sure that local growing groups are consulted and engaged in devising a management plan – they may be able to provide support to residents through workshops or advise residents on how to set up their own group.

Planting types should be chosen based on the level of maintenance considered feasible – smaller containers may require more management and maintenance than larger ones. Low maintenance edible landscaping, rather than communal growing, may be more appropriate for developments where occupiers will be temporary, seasonal or transient (such as students).

Materials

All materials chosen should be durable, waterproof and as sustainable as possible. To avoid deterioration, rotting, and additional upkeep, materials such as treated wood, recycled plastics, or galvanised steel should be considered for planters and furniture.

Pesticide and herbicide use

As far as is practicable, the use of pesticides and herbicides is discouraged in order to promote low-impact growing practices. Alternative methods such as companion planting can help support plant health without harming wildlife habitats and biodiversity.

Planting

It is important to plant native species or those that are suited to the local climate.

Where a growing space is highly visible, consider plants that provide year-round interest. Herbs and some species of edible perennials, such as fruiting shrubs and trees, are easier to manage, whereas annual edible plants require more maintenance. Where it is unlikely that regular maintenance will be possible, wild fruiting species such as plums, blackthorn, cherry, crab apple and hazel could be considered. Where more maintenance is possible, fruit trees could be trained or espaliered alongside other edible perennials and herbs. Consider the height and spread of the species being planted and what pruning regime will be needed.

Inedible species, particularly those that are toxic or poisonous, should not be mixed with edible species, especially where people are likely to pick the produce.

Fruiting trees will need to be located away from public highways to reduce the impact of ripe produce falling and creating safety and maintenance issues.

Air pollution

Consideration should be given to the air quality in the development area. Food growing spaces should be located away from sources of air pollution, such as busy roads, where plants and people using the space would be exposed to the harmful effects of vehicle exhausts and particulate matter. Consider whether any specific mitigation measures are needed to protect users against exposure.

Storage

Consider where tools and equipment will be stored to enable maintenance of the space. To avoid the need for further planning consent, storage facilities should be integrated into the development's original design.

Soil and ground conditions

Development within Bristol, particularly on brownfield sites, will require careful consideration of ground conditions. Contaminated land and remediation issues should be addressed in accordance with national and local policy, and any planning conditions imposed to be discharged at the appropriate stage.⁴

Any areas designated for food growing in the ground should be marked clearly on plans to enable an accurate assessment of remediation requirements by Pollution Control.

It is expected that any land remediation measures required to make residential development acceptable will be sufficient to allow for food growing or edible planting. In large public open spaces, this can include the use of clean cover systems, with a minimum of 300mm of soils to facilitate healthy plant growth. Further conditions may apply to the use of any imported top- or subsoils to ensure the safety of future occupiers.

In cases where growing food in the ground is not appropriate, growing space can also be provided in the form of raised beds and containers.

General advice on enjoying food growing spaces safely has been published by the UK Health Security Agency and can be accessed [here](#).

Waste and composting

⁴ For national guidance, see [Land Contamination Risk Management](#) (Environment Agency 2025).

Consideration should be given to how garden waste will be disposed of; where possible, on-site composting should be designed in from the start. This not only allows management of the waste generated from gardening in the growing space but also enables future occupiers to compost organic kitchen waste.

Water

A reliable water supply is essential for food growing spaces. Ideally rainwater harvesting systems should be incorporated where possible, not only to support sustainable design but also for optimal plant health and to reduce water bill costs for future occupiers. To mitigate against periods of dry weather, a mains water supply may be necessary, and certain sites may benefit from built-in irrigation systems which can help minimise water waste. Consideration will also need to be given to water delivery and storage systems so that the risk of Legionella is controlled.

Planters and raised beds will help slow water run-off from areas of hardstanding, contributing to a sustainable drainage scheme.

4. Resources

Local food growing groups

Applicants are encouraged to consult, engage with, or where relevant offer their meanwhile spaces to existing local food growing groups in Bristol. The list of groups highlighted within this document is not extensive, and applicants should refer to the [Bristol Good Food directory](#) when searching for further relevant organisations.

Training and resource providers

Applicants may wish to signpost residents and users to organisations that can provide further training opportunities and additional resources.

[Avon Wildlife Trust - Grow Wilder](#)

Grow Wilder aims to connect communities to nature through urban growing. As a learning hub, they provide courses in food growing and therapeutic gardening, with a focus on developing leadership as well as practical skills.

[Bristol Food Producers](#)

A network working to increase access to sustainable food growing opportunities in Bristol.

[Blaise Nursery Communities Growing project](#)

Blaise Plant Nursery can provide community growing groups with plug plants.

[Heart of BS13](#)

A neighbourhood charity working to tackle food insecurity in South Bristol running training courses on healthy eating and growing.

[Horfield Organic Community Orchard](#)

A local food project offering courses in how to care for and enjoy locally grown orchard fruit all year round.

Lockleaze Neighbourhood Trust - Really Wild Lockleaze

Really Wild Lockleaze has produced a series of toolkits on lessons learnt so far about rewilding in urban communities, highlighting opportunities for greening underutilised and marginal land.

Additional case studies

Edible City Andernach

The German city of [Andernach](#) has since 2010 been known as the 'Edible City' – a continuous landscape of urban food growing spaces which includes parks, playgrounds, school gardens and orchards. Paved areas, such as the main square, have been enlivened with mobile wooden planters, resulting in a city-wide sustainable food production system.

At the heart of the project is the aim to make spaces usable and welcoming to the public, residents and users. Food growing spaces have become a hub for social interaction and have reinforced a sense of collective ownership and responsibility for the city's green spaces.

Species planted include tomatoes, beans, onions, fruit trees, berries and herbs. Responsibility for the management of spaces has been transferred over time to different clubs, schools and care homes, engaging the wider community in food growing practices whilst spreading the cost of maintenance.

Long Ashton Growers (LAG)

LAG is a community cooperative focused on growing organic food using sustainable land management techniques. Produce is shared between members, with any surplus donated to local foodbanks.

The space is split between individual, and the more popular, communal allotments. Each communal plot (measuring 4x22m) is managed by a team of 4-5 people, with each person responsible for a crop within the rotation. Teams are led by an experienced grower who plans growing season.

Further resources on site include a polytunnel for year-round growing, PV panels powering the water pump, and a children's plot to encourage the next generation of growers.