



# Bristol City Council

Food sustainability topic paper (April 2024)



# Contents

1. Introduction .....	1
1.1 Purpose of this topic paper.....	1
1.2 Local plan review background .....	1
2. Health and sustainability policy context.....	2
2.1 Overview .....	2
2.2 Health in Bristol .....	3
3. Policy overview .....	4
3.1 Policy FS1: The provision of allotments.....	4
3.2 Policy FS2: Provision of food growing space in new developments.....	5
3.3 Policy FS3: The protection of existing food growing enterprises and allotments .....	5
4. Policy background .....	7
4.1 National planning policy .....	7
4.2 National Planning Policy Framework.....	7
4.3 Planning practice guidance (PPG).....	8
5. Food sustainability, health and wellbeing .....	9
5.1 Public Health Strategy 2020-2025 .....	11
5.2 Spatial Planning for Health: An evidence resource for planning and designing healthier places (2017) .....	12
5.3 Using the planning system to promote healthy weight environments (2020).....	12

# Introduction

## Purpose of this topic paper

1. This topic paper has been prepared to support the council's proposed food sustainability policies FS1-3. These policies have been prepared as part of the local plan review process. It provides supporting information and justification for the inclusion of these policies.

## Local plan review background

2. Bristol City Council currently has an adopted Local Plan which comprises of the following documents:

- The Bristol Core Strategy (2011).
- The Site Allocations and Development Management Policies (2014).
- The Bristol Central Area Plan (2015).
- Supplementary planning guidance.

3. The adopted local plan acknowledges the relationship between spatial planning and food systems in a number of policies:

- Core Strategy Policy BCS9 recognises the multi-functional role of the city's green infrastructure, including its role in food production.
- Policy DM15 Green Infrastructure Provision expects new residential development to be designed and located to facilitate opportunities for local food growing and to contribute to allotment provision in the city.
- Policy DM29 Design of New Buildings expects proposals for new development to incorporate opportunities for green infrastructure such as green roofs, green walls and green decks which could be used for food growing.

4. As part of the local plan review process, draft policies FS1-3 have been prepared to better promote food growing across the city and support the council's wider ambition to improve food sustainability and the health and wellbeing of residents.

# Health and sustainability policy context

## Overview

5. Bristol City Council declared an ecological emergency in 2020 and developed a One City Ecological Emergency Strategy and Action Plan for an ecologically resilient, wild-life rich Bristol by 2030<sup>1</sup>.

6. The climate and ecological emergency is also a priority theme within the Bristol Health and Wellbeing Strategy which aspires for citizens to thrive in a city that supports their mental and physical health and wellbeing. The strategy also identifies obesity and food equality as a priority alongside creating a healthy place.<sup>2</sup>

7. The One City Food Equality Strategy 2022-2032 was launched last year to address inequalities faced across our local food system, including, but not limited to, food insecurity.<sup>3</sup> In 2021, Bristol was awarded Gold Sustainable Food City status by the UK partnership programme Sustainable Food Cities, making it the second city in the UK to achieve this status.

8. To build on this, the Good Food 2030 One City Framework for action was developed and launched in 2023.<sup>4</sup> The framework sets out six themes: eating better, local food economy, urban growing, food waste, food justice and good food governance. This includes work to encourage healthier food options and promote sustainability through the Bristol Eating Better Award.<sup>5</sup>

9. The urban growing theme considers how nature-friendly food production as a commercial enterprise, as well amongst communities and individuals, can be maximised. It sets the following vision:

- Growing to be more nutritious, sustainable, and culturally relevant produce than ever before.
- Council-owned land is easily accessed; the best and most versatile land is protected and growing space is available in all areas of the city.

10. The One City Plan also includes the ambition for urban food growing to become widespread across the city.

11. To support the progress made so far, the proposed suite of food sustainability policies is intended to build on the requirements in existing local plan policy and ensure development appropriately considers food sustainability and helps promote healthy and safe communities.

---

<sup>1</sup> One City Ecological Emergency Strategy (2021). [One-City-Ecological-Emergency-Strategy.pdf \(bnhc.org.uk\)](#)

<sup>2</sup> Bristol Health and Wellbeing Strategy (2022). [Bristol health and wellbeing strategy 2020-2025](#)

<sup>3</sup> One City Food Equality Strategy (2022), [One-City-Food-Equality-Strategy-2022-2032.pdf \(bristolonecity.com\)](#)

<sup>4</sup> One City Bristol Good Food 2030: A One City framework for action, [bristolonecity.com/wp-content/pdf/Bristol-Good-Food-2030-Action-Plan.pdf](#)

<sup>5</sup> Bristol Eating Better Award. [Bristol Eating Better Award](#)

## Health in Bristol

12. Over half of the adult population in Bristol is overweight or obese (55.7%), which is lower than the national average. There are significant disparities across the city in terms of healthy weight, and other key health indicators. The prevalence of excess weight in Bristol is relatively stable; however, amongst deprived groups there is a continuing upward trend and widening inequalities.

13. An estimated 8.1% of households in Bristol experienced moderate to severe food insecurity in the past 12 months (2022/23), higher than the previous year (4.6%).<sup>6</sup> There are varying levels of access to healthy and affordable food across Bristol, with several food deserts across the city.<sup>7</sup> Just under half of Bristol residents eat the recommended five portions of fruit and vegetables a day, with lower rates in areas of deprivation. In areas such as Hartcliffe and Withywood, more than a quarter of households bought less healthy foods than the previous year.<sup>8</sup> The latest data from the Monitor of Engagement with the Natural Environment (MENE) survey shows 60% of Bristol residents spend their leisure time outdoors, away from home at least once a week, compared to 65% nationally.<sup>9</sup>

14. These indicators show that whilst obesity is below the national average in Bristol, there is a clear need to support healthier food and lifestyle choices. Planning policy is one means through which the council can support its wider ambitions, plans and strategies.

---

<sup>6</sup> Bristol City Council, Bristol Quality of Life Survey 2022/23 ([JSNA 2022/23 - Food Insecurity \(bristol.gov.uk\)](#))

<sup>7</sup> Bristol City Council, 'Bristol Quality of Life Survey 2022/23', 2023 ([JSNA 2022.23 - Healthy Weight \(bristol.gov.uk\)](#))

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Bristol City Council, MENE survey 2018/19 and published March 2020, undertaken by Natural England and Defra ([JSNA 2022/23 - Promoting Healthy Urban Environments \(bristol.gov.uk\)](#))

# Policy overview

15. Three proposed policies seek to address both access to and the retention of food growing spaces in the city.

## 3.1 Policy FS1: The provision of allotments

16. This policy builds on an existing local plan - policy DM15 Green Infrastructure Provision:

Provision of statutory allotment plots on a development site will be sought when the level of residential development creates a need for 1750m<sup>2</sup> of statutory allotments, equivalent to 7 statutory allotment plots.

17. The current policy position has not resulted in the provision of any allotments. This is due to the very high threshold required for this policy to trigger. The provision target was derived from the Bristol Parks and Estates Allotment Strategy 2009-2019 which seeks to ensure an average provision of 7 statutory plots per 1,000 residents.<sup>10</sup> Given the average household size in Bristol is 2.3 persons per dwellings, this translates to approximately 435 dwellings needing to be proposed by a single development for the policy to be triggered.

18. The council currently provides about 7 allotments per 1,000 residents across the city as a whole. This is considered the minimum acceptable level of provision; however, when factoring waiting lists into account, it represents a deficit. To meet the demonstrated need in the city, 18 allotments per 1,000 residents would be required with a land area of approximately 60ha.

19. The proposed policy seeks to strengthen the council's existing policy requirement to both maintain the current level of provision and ideally, to expand it. Where new development would contribute to a shortfall in allotment provision, it will be expected to provide appropriate mitigation for that shortfall.

20. The proposed policy lowers this requirement from when development creates a need for 1,750m<sup>2</sup> of statutory allotments (7 statutory plots) to when development creates the need for 250m<sup>2</sup> of statutory allotments (1 statutory plot). This would lower the point at which the policy is triggered from approximately 435 dwellings to 60. The requirement for allotments will be applied proportionately to the size of the development.

21. The policy recognises that it may not be feasible to provide onsite allotments on some sites. In these instances, a contribution towards improving off-site provision, remediating plots and bringing them back into use, and where possible, expanding existing sites will be acceptable.

---

<sup>10</sup> Bristol City Council, 'Bristol Parks & Estates Allotments Strategy 2009-2019', p.6

## **Policy FS2: Provision of food growing space in new developments**

22. Existing policies DM15 Green Infrastructure Provision and DM29 Design of New Buildings both require development to incorporate green infrastructure that could be utilised for food growing. DM15 policy text states that:

All new residential development should be designed and located to facilitate opportunities for local food growing.

23. The explanation text notes that:

Given the range of potential benefits and functions associated with even small-scale food growing space, the policy expects new residential development to facilitate opportunities for local food growing. New residential development should therefore include areas integral to the development that provide suitable conditions for food growing, for example by containing suitable soil quality and depth.

24. To support the council's wider ambition to promote food sustainability in Bristol, this requirement has been drawn out into a specific policy, with greater additional explanatory detail.

25. The policy does not apply a specific metric for food growing space in new development but requires applicants to demonstrate in their design proposals how they have included consideration of food growing. This could be provided in a variety of forms, ranging from more actively managed schemes such as community gardens to ensuring beds or balconies in private amenity space are appropriately designed for small scale food growing as and when residents may wish to.

26. The policy will be accompanied by a practice note which will provide further information on ways to incorporate food growing into new development.

## **Policy FS3: The protection of existing food growing enterprises and allotments**

27. This policy does seeks the protection of agricultural enterprises and allotments, both commercial and community oriented, from inappropriate development. The policy recognises the role these enterprises serve in supporting Bristol's food system and promoting health and well being and community cohesion.

28. Bristol is home to a wide range of food growing enterprises, both commercial and community orientated. These include community farms, commercial agricultural enterprises, public communal gardens. Many of these uses provide services and opportunities for outdoor activity and healthier eating and contribute towards the local food economy. The policy seeks their protection, stating:

Development which would have an unacceptable impact on the viability of an existing local food growing enterprise will not be permitted.

29. The policy also extends specific protection to allotments:

Development which would result in the loss of active allotments or which would have a harmful impact on their community food growing role will not be permitted.

30. Development may cause an unacceptable impact in a number of ways, including through overshadowing, pollution, noise or site fragmentation. The policy applies this approach in a manner similar to agent of change and policies HW1: Pollution control and water quality and HW1A: Noise.

# Policy background

## National planning policy

31. Both national planning and public health policy recognise the role the physical environment plays in determining health outcomes.

## National Planning Policy Framework

32. The NPPF (2023) Section 2. Para. 8 states that the purpose of the planning system is to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development and establishes economic, social and environmental objectives towards this end:

- a) an economic objective – to help build a strong, responsive and competitive economy, by ensuring that sufficient land of the right types is available in the right places and at the right time to support growth, innovation and improved productivity; and by identifying and coordinating the provision of infrastructure;
- b) a social objective – to support strong, vibrant and healthy communities, by ensuring that a sufficient number and range of homes can be provided to meet the needs of present and future generations; and by fostering well-designed, beautiful and safe places, with accessible services and open spaces that reflect current and future needs and support communities' health, social and cultural well-being; and
- c) an environmental objective – to protect and enhance our natural, built and historic environment; including making effective use of land, improving biodiversity, using natural resources prudently, minimising waste and pollution, and mitigating and adapting to climate change, including moving to a low carbon economy.

33. The NPPF further states in Section 8. Para. 96 that planning policies should aim to achieve healthy, inclusive and safe places which:

- a) promote social interaction, including opportunities for meetings between people who might not otherwise come into contact with each other – for example through mixed-use developments, strong neighbourhood centres, street layouts that allow for easy pedestrian and cycle connections within and between neighbourhoods, and active street frontages; ...
- c) enable and support healthy lifestyles, especially where this would address identified local health and well-being needs – for example through the provision of safe and accessible green infrastructure, sports facilities, local shops, **access to healthier food, allotments** and layouts that encourage walking and cycling.

## 4.3 Planning practice guidance (PPG)

34. The PPG notes that the design and use of the build and natural environment are major determinants of health and wellbeing and that local authorities play a key role in shaping healthy places.<sup>11</sup> It defines a healthy place as:

One which supports and promotes healthy behaviours and environments and a reduction in health inequalities for people of all ages. It will provide the community with opportunities to improve their physical and mental health, and support community engagement and wellbeing.<sup>12</sup>

35. It also notes that green infrastructure, including allotments and space for food growing, can promote healthy and safe communities and:

Improve the wellbeing of a neighbourhood with opportunities for recreation, exercise, social interaction, experiencing and caring for nature, community food-growing and gardening, all of which can bring mental and physical health benefits.<sup>13</sup>

37. Ensuring the provision of allotments, space suitable for food growing in new development and the protection of existing food growing enterprises are policy ambitions which support both these objectives and promote the creation of healthy, inclusive and safe places and communities.

---

<sup>11</sup> [Planning practice guidance: Healthy and safe communities](#), para. 001.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid. Para. 003

<sup>13</sup> [Planning practice guidance: Natural environment](#). Para. 006.

# Food sustainability, health and wellbeing

38. A sustainable food system provides safe and healthy food to people whilst also creating sustainable environmental, economic and social outcomes. Growing more food locally is just one aspect of promoting food sustainability. Whilst the evidence for local food growing having positive environmental consequences, such as reducing transport emissions, is limited, local food growing can have significant and worthwhile outcomes which the suite of food sustainability policies will promote.

39. The health benefits of people engaging with nature, outdoor spaces and activities is well established. The UK National Ecosystem Assessment (2011) conducted a review of scientific literature relating to health and the natural environment. It established a number of key findings and assigned them associated levels of scientific certainty (Table 1).

<p><b>Observing nature and participating in physical activity in greenspaces</b> play an important role in positively influencing human health and well-being<sup>1</sup>. ‘Green exercise’, comprising of activity in green places (in the presence of nature), is associated with positive health outcomes, which exceed those experienced from exercising in environments lacking nature<sup>a</sup>.</p>	<p><sup>1</sup> Well established. <sup>a</sup> Virtually certain.</p>
<p><b>Ecosystems provide three generic health benefits: i) direct positive effects</b> on both mental and physical health<sup>2</sup>; <b>ii) indirect positive effects</b> which facilitate nature-based activity and social engagement (by providing locations for contact with nature, physical activity and social engagement), all of which positively influence health, and provide a catalyst for behavioural change in terms of encouraging the adoption of healthier lifestyles (improving life pathways, activity behaviour, consumption of wild foods)<sup>2</sup>; <b>iii) a reduction in the threats of pollution and disease vectors</b> to health via a variety of purification and control functions, such as local climate regulation, noise reduction, and scavenging of air pollutants<sup>b</sup>.</p>	<p><sup>2</sup> Established but incomplete. <sup>b</sup> Very likely.</p>
<p><b>Local greenspaces or nearby natural habitats are vital for all individuals<sup>3</sup>.</b> There is a clear link between the amount of accessible greenspace and psychological well-being. The more frequent the visits to nearby green spaces, the lower the incidence of stress<sup>c</sup>.</p>	<p><sup>3</sup> Competing explanations. <sup>c</sup> Likely.</p>
<p><b>Access to nature can encourage participation in physical activity</b> (green exercise)<sup>2</sup>: individuals with easy access to nature are three times as likely to participate in physical activity and, therefore, are 40% less likely to become overweight or obese.</p>	<p><sup>2</sup> Established but incomplete evidence.</p>
<p><b>Green exercise in all habitats results in significant improvements in both self-esteem and mood<sup>1</sup></b>; however, those habitats with open water produce a significantly larger degree of improvements in mental well-being<sup>b</sup>. The greatest effects for self-esteem and mood occurred within the first five minutes of activity. The improvement in both of these measures appears to be larger in green settings compared to exercising in areas lacking nature<sup>1</sup>. The greatest health outcomes are experienced by those</p>	<p><sup>1</sup> Well established. <sup>b</sup> Very likely.</p>

<p>with mental health problems, suggesting that exercise in ecosystems can be therapeutic for specific cohorts of people</p>	
<p><b>There is a growing use of ‘green care’ in many contexts in the UK, including therapeutic horticulture, animal-assisted therapy, ecotherapy, green exercise therapies and wilderness therapy<sup>2</sup>.</b> Green care produces health, social and educational benefits, but these have not yet been widely evaluated<sup>3</sup>.</p>	<p><sup>2</sup> Established but incomplete evidence. <sup>3</sup> Competing explanations.</p>
<p><b>Recent experience using smartphones (Mappiness) has shown increased happiness levels are associated both with vigorous outdoor pursuits, such as sports, running and exercise, and walking and hiking, and with less energetic activities, such as gardening, birdwatching and nature-watching<sup>2</sup>.</b> On average, respondents are happiest outdoors and least happy indoors, and report intermediate happiness levels when in a vehicle. All green or natural habitat types were linked with higher happiness levels than the continuous urban environment.</p>	<p><sup>2</sup> Established but incomplete evidence.</p>
<p><b>Experiencing nature has been demonstrated to have a significant positive impact upon heart rate and blood pressure<sup>2</sup>.</b> Green settings have a relaxing effect on autonomic functions, thus decreasing heart rate and blood pressure measurements. Green settings lead to a greater increase in parasympathetic nervous system activity and a greater decrease in sympathetic nervous activity than built environments<sup>c</sup>.</p>	<p><sup>2</sup> Established but incomplete evidence. <sup>c</sup> Likely.</p>
<p><b>Green settings offer opportunities for the building of social capital, which, in turn, benefits health<sup>2</sup>.</b> The presence of trees and grass in urban areas also has a substantial effect upon social engagement and neighbourhood ties. Areas with trees and grass encourage individuals to utilise outdoor space and increases the likelihood of social interaction. Green places can also increase social engagement and interaction through conservation activities and initiatives. By protecting nature, individuals can obtain social contact and derive value from being in the presence of nature<sup>b</sup>.</p>	<p><sup>2</sup> Established but incomplete evidence. <sup>b</sup> Very likely.</p>
<p><b>Ecosystems provide wild foods which can have a direct effect on health<sup>1</sup>.</b> Today, wild foods act as a supplement to purchased foods, as opposed to providing the sole means of nutrition, and interest in wild foods is growing.</p>	<p><sup>1</sup> Well established.</p>
<p><b>Ecosystems not only affect immediate health and well-being, but also affect health throughout life<sup>2</sup>.</b> Healthy behaviours may be followed as a direct result of an individual’s surroundings, although there is no guarantee of uptake. If 1% of the sedentary population moves to a healthy pathway, 1,063 lives and £1.44 billion will be saved each year. The earlier</p>	<p><sup>2</sup> Established but incomplete evidence.</p>

this shift occurs during life, the greater the impact upon health and society <sup>3</sup> .	<sup>3</sup> Competing explanations.
<b>Contact with nature at any age can derive a whole number of benefits for physical and mental health, contact with nature during youth can directly impact upon healthy adult behaviours<sup>2</sup>.</b> Research indicates that the frequency of visits to green places during childhood significantly correlates to the number of visits during adulthood. A lack of experience of nature as a child may directly result in a lack of contact during adulthood	<sup>2</sup> Established but incomplete evidence.

**Table 1 UK NEA Chapter 23 Key findings, Public Health England<sup>14</sup>**

40. Although discussing wider access to nature and ecosystems, food growing opportunities provide one method to realise these gains, tackling obesity, improving eating habits and improving access to healthier food.

41. Food growing has the added advantage of being both an activity and a means of interacting with and producing healthier food. Ensuring adequate provision of food growing space, both in new homes and allotments can help realise these benefits at both the domestic and community levels.

## Public Health Strategy 2020-2025

42. The government has recognised that a broad approach is required to address issues such as obesity and poor health and wellbeing. The strategy establishes that promoting healthier diets and healthier weight is a key priority. It sets the ambition:

*To enable current and future generations to live in local environments that promote a healthier weight as the norm and make it easier for everyone, regardless of background, circumstance or where they live, to access healthier food, enjoy healthier diets and live active lifestyles.<sup>15</sup>*

43. It further notes that to achieve this, PHE will:

*Support local authorities to create vibrant, health promoting environments, including healthier high streets, which facilitate healthier food options and physical activity.<sup>16</sup>*

44. The strategy identifies the management of the built environment as impacting many determinants of health, including through neighbourhood design, housing, transport, the natural environment and the food environment. It directs planners towards PHE 2017 guidance on planning and designing healthier places as a resource to inform planning policy approaches.

<sup>14</sup> Living With Environmental Change Partnership, UK National Ecosystem Assessment, 2011, ([UKNEA Technical Report, Chapter 23 Health Values from Ecosystems](#)), pp. 1154-1155

<sup>15</sup> Public Health England Strategy 2020 to 2025, Public Health England, 2019, ([PHE Strategy 2020-25](#)), p. 23.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid. p. 24

## Spatial Planning for Health: An evidence resource for planning and designing healthier places (2017)

45. Public Health England has produced an evidence summary to help inform spatial planning policy as it relates to health and wellbeing. The guidance provides a summary of key planning principles as they relate to various aspects of public health, including food growing and access to healthier food (Figure 1).

It notes that:

*There is limited, newly emerging evidence showing a positive association between urban agriculture, as defined by Kent & Thompson 2014, and improved attitudes towards healthier food, increased opportunities for physical activity and social connectivity, and increased fruit and vegetable consumption. The overall evidence base for these associations is relatively small and is based on and requires further research to clarify causal links (Kent & Thompson, 2014; McCormack et al., 2010).<sup>17</sup>*

46. Regarding allotments, the paper notes that although not a specific subject addressed by the review:

*Findings from a recent non-systematic literature review suggest that gardening in an allotment setting in the UK may result in numerous positive physical and mental health-related impacts and outcomes (Garden Organic & Sustain, 2014)<sup>18</sup>*

47. The guidance also recognises that:

*Urban food growing was also found to be associated with improved attitudes towards healthy eating, increased opportunities for social connectivity and increased opportunities for physical activity.<sup>19</sup>*

48. Whilst PHE recognises that much of this evidence is emerging, the benefits of food growing are becoming more apparent and should be supported by the spatial planning system. The proposed suite of food sustainability policies seeks to enable and protect local food growing so as to realise these benefits locally.

## Using the planning system to promote healthy weight environments (2020)

49. PHE recognises that allotments can provide:

*Options for physical activity, social connectivity as well as green space, and are in high demand. These assets can be utilised as part of a social prescribing programme and can have benefits for individual health and community cohesion. The Fruit and Vegetable Task Force (66) found that local food growing can help people understand food's origin and seasonality, be mentally and physically beneficial, support school*

---

<sup>17</sup> Spatial planning for health: an evidence resource for planning and designing healthier places, Public Health England, 2017, p. 31

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid. p.64

*curricula and develop young people's skills. It recommends an increased amount of land, and infrastructure such as soil quality, is allocated for fruit and vegetable production in planning proposals.*

Further information relating to the health outcomes associated with food growing and allotments can be found in figure 1.



## Healthier Foods

### Quality of Evidence:

- ▲ Improved
- ▼ Reduced
- High Quality
- Medium Quality
- Low Quality
- NR (Not reported):

Methodological quality of the original research is unclear and should be treated with caution.

**Greyed Out Text**

Association between a health impact & health outcome not obtained as part of the umbrella review.

### Best Available Evidence:

\* In some instances, more than one piece of review-level evidence reporting on the same health impacts and/or outcomes was identified as part of this umbrella review. In such instances this table highlights findings of the review(s) which reported evidence of the best methodological quality.

### Population Groups:

- General Population
- Older Adults
- Children & Adolescents

### Disclaimer:

This diagram has been produced as part of a wider evidence resource, commissioned by Public Health England and developed by the University of the West of England. Please see the document Spatial planning

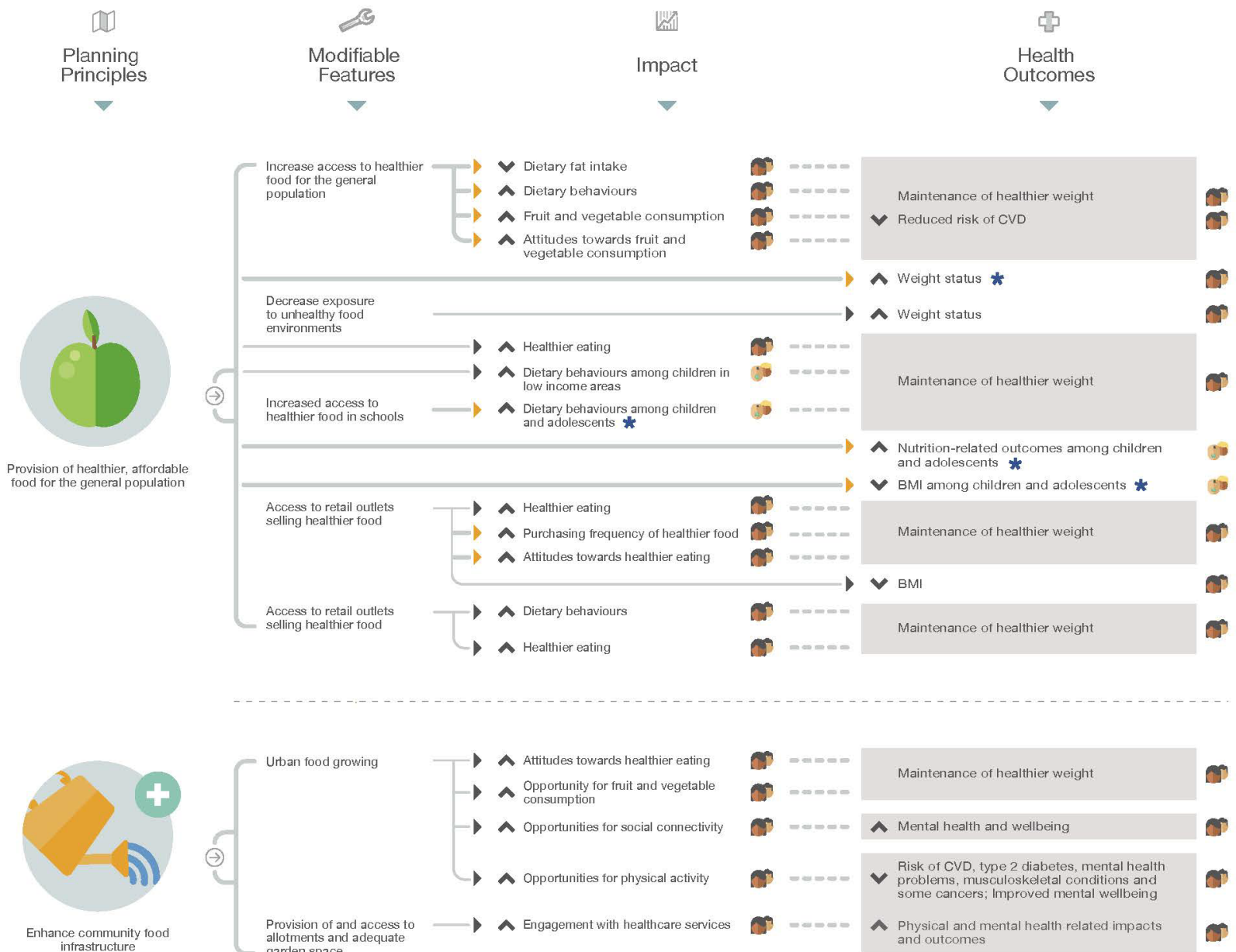


Figure 1 Healthier food and planning principles diagram (Public Health England, 2017, p.32)