

AUGUST 2022  
FINAL REPORT

# Waltham Forest

## Food Growing Strategy & Action Plan



# Waltham Forest Food Growing Strategy & Action Plan



September 2022

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*"...food being grown on the streets amongst us ...vegetable boxes grown by community gardeners and proliferate in front gardens throughout our local communities"*

**WF Resident**

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## Part 2

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# Forward

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Food growing – in gardens, allotments and community growing schemes – is not new to Waltham Forest. We have long been aware of the social, environmental and economic benefits of ‘growing your own’ and have been working and promoting local food growing for a number of years. The Council’s commitment to improving the allotment service has seen increased numbers of residents taking up food growing, and we know this has been especially valued during the Covid pandemic. OrganicLea, the local food growing workers’ co-op at Hawkwood Nursery is recognised across London and nationally for its contribution to the local food landscape, to food affordability, to the climate emergency agenda to the health and wellbeing of our residents, and for its food growing skills training.

Our Food Growing Strategy allows us to build on this strong base of knowledge and experience by extending food growing provisions across the borough in a systematic, considered way. To do this meaningfully, it is important that we take account of a wide range of views. A residents’ survey, food growing workshops with schools, community groups, allotmenters and housing associations, and a myriad of research and conversations helped draft this Strategy and Action Plan, helping ensure it responds to local needs and aspirations.

We have also liaised extensively with professional stakeholders. Food growing relates to many service areas within the Council, and also links to the agendas of various external bodies. We hope this Strategy and Action Plan dovetails with those agendas to ensure action on food growing can make vital contributions to Waltham Forest’s health and wellbeing, social and economic vibrancy, and action to address the climate and biodiversity emergencies.

## Introduction

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**‘Waltham Forest - a champion food growing borough’** is a vision for a flourishing network of growing spaces and projects where communities, schools, families and individuals are able to grow, share and eat food that has been grown locally in Waltham Forest.

The aim is that food growing is accessible for all those that want to get involved and that it is visible. From public parks and underused land around housing estates, to back and front gardens, and from pocket parks to container gardening on balconies and windowsills.

This vision is underpinned by an integrated food growing action plan developed by Food Matters in partnership with the food growing communities in Waltham Forest, and Parks and Open Spaces. The food growing strategy and action plan will dovetail with a food strategy and food partnership being developed by OrganicLea, Hornbeam, and Sustain and in partnership with the Council will be delivered through a partnership including OrganicLea, community food growing projects, the Waltham Forest Food Growers Network, The Waltham Forest Food Distribution Network, housing associations, allotmenters, resident groups, and a range of other statutory, commercial and voluntary sector partners. The partnership will work with the Council to provide oversight of the strategy and ensure resources and infrastructure are secured. The strategy will support people to grow their own fruit and vegetables, help to make local produce more accessible and ensure residents have the knowledge, skills and confidence to prepare the fresh, nutritious food they have grown.

# Our Ambition

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## Imagine walking through Waltham Forest in 10 years' time...

You'll know you're in a thriving food growing borough, but beyond the bustling shops, cafes and restaurants, you will also find vegetables growing in front gardens, herbs in window boxes, tomato plants on roof spaces, fruit tree orchards in school grounds and vibrant growing projects in the communal spaces around social housing, schools and offices. The borough parks flourish with productive edible plants, and leisure time is spent in public spaces that incorporate food growing alongside sports facilities and leisure amenities. On housing estates, residents now use the once empty spaces around communal buildings for growing food and flowers, butterflies, insects and birds abound. Thriving allotments and community gardens bring together communities whilst providing essential wildlife corridors between the green spaces of the Walthamstow Wetlands and Epping Forest.

There's a vibrant and growing network of linked green spaces flourishing with edible plants and herbs attracting and supporting myriad bees, insects and birds, where people come together to connect, share and learn. Surplus allotment produce, orchard fruits and nuts are harvested for the food distribution network and community cooking projects. And children spend time growing and cooking seasonal produce through school programmes.

## How we make the ambition a reality

Waltham Forest has a head start: the borough has a history of community food growing activity with a vibrant community food growing sector. There have been significant Council resources invested in opening land for food growing, namely through the Allotment service, land utilized by OrganicLea at Hawkwood Nursery and other locations. This strategy aims to consolidate that work and expand food growing activity across the borough by focussing on collaborative partnership working, utilizing existing resources, and supporting communities to get involved.

Waltham Forest has the enthusiasm, skills, space and above all the desire, to make this ambition a reality. The aim of this strategy is to guide that ambition and empower people to translate policy into action.

## Purpose and Scope

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This Strategy sets out a framework for realising that vision for a vibrant food growing landscape in Waltham Forest over the next ten years, led by Parks and Open Spaces in partnership with other key Council services and external organisations and communities.

### Purpose and Scope

The purpose of this food growing strategy is to ensure that locally grown, healthy, environmentally and socially sustainable food is affordable and accessible to all in our community. We will do this by working collaboratively with the community and other stakeholders to become the lead food growing borough in London.

The Strategy is underpinned by the six [Sustainable Food Places](#) themes:

- Ensuring [good food governance and action](#)
- Building a local good food movement
- Promoting [healthy food](#) for all
- Building a [sustainable food economy](#)
- [Transforming food procurement](#)
- Food for the planet

Alongside the Sustainable Food Places themes this food growing strategy also aims to dovetail with the Mayor's London Food Strategy goals to make vital contributions to London's health and wellbeing, social and economic vibrancy, and action to address climate change and biodiversity emergencies.

Working within existing budgets and statutory duties this strategy is far reaching and looks to create a 10-year framework containing five long-term aims. These aims will be drilled down into more detailed actions in a rolling 3-year action plan. The actions will be delivered by the council and through partnerships with a range of food growing stakeholders. The action plan demonstrates where there are interlinking priorities and will pursue an efficient, joined-up approach by seeking to deliver crosscutting benefits wherever possible and within available funding.

### **Aims**

1. Increase access to food growing activities
2. Develop food growing skills across the borough
3. Improve food growing networking opportunities
4. Build better infrastructure to support food growing
5. Make food growing in the borough more visible

## **What is Food Growing anyway?**

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The overarching aim of this strategy is to provide increased opportunities for people living and working in Waltham Forest to get involved in growing fruit and vegetables. There are various ways to get involved in food growing from back gardens to community orchards and the benefits are multiple. What are the different ways to be involved in growing food?

### **Allotments**

The provision of allotments is rooted in the need to provide land for poorer communities to grow their own food due to rapid industrialisation in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century.

Today allotments are thriving and increasingly so, recognised as an antidote to urban living – providing access to affordable fresh fruit and veg, multiple benefits to physical and mental wellbeing, and opportunities to experience and create and contribute to nature friendly environments.

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## *Brighton and Hove Allotment Federation*

Despite the upsurge in the popularity of allotments, providing allotment services are still largely considered a drain on local authority resources. The Brighton and Hove Allotment Federation BHAF recently commissioned (March 2022) a [study](#) to examine and quantify the benefits of allotments to Brighton & Hove City Council (BHCC) and the City's residents. To help give a sense of the possible benefits of allotments to both Waltham Forest council and residents, Parks and Open Spaces staff have used the methodology used in the Brighton and Hove study (except instead of using number of plots, plot holder numbers have been used) to quantify an estimate monetary value (see Appendix 3). This methodology helps contribute baseline data to the sector's development of a standard formula that all Councils could use to evaluate and cost the benefits of allotments.

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## *Creating Nature-friendly Environments*

A new wildlife team at Higham Hill Common Allotments have created 'Wildlife HHCAA' to restore the pond and create more wildlife friendly areas. They also offer gardening tips, an information library and free wildlife friendly gardening courses

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Allotments are small parcels of land made available at low cost by local authorities to residents to grow fruit and vegetables. They can also be run by private allotment associations. Allotment plots can range in size and shape.

Allotment plot holders enter a contract for the lease of a plot and have responsibility for using and maintaining their plot, including any structures such as tool storage, compost bins, sheds and poly tunnels. Regulations are put in place to inform plot holders of best practice requirements on site to ensure sites are safe, to maintain health and safety standards, and plot holders understand what is required of them. It is most common for the local authority to run



*Batemen road Allotments*

and manage the allotment service but increasingly allotment associations, site representatives and community organisations assist the local authority (both formally and informally) in managing allotment sites. Allotments offer multiple benefits and can also provide a context for not-for-profit sale of surplus produce to support sustainability of an allotment society.



In Waltham Forest there are 27 sites with 1,655 plots across the borough, 6 council leased sites (council owned land with a lease agreement with each of the self-managed allotment societies); and 4 privately owned sites:

<https://www.walthamforest.gov.uk/content/allotments>.

And since 2019, the majority of the allotments are 5 rods in size. Waltham Forest allotment societies don't currently sell surplus produce.

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## *Oliver Road Allotments*

Located in Osier Way, Leyton E10, the Oliver Road Allotments site is run by Leyton Allotment Society. They sell seedlings and plants which they grow themselves with the income going back to the society for site improvements. They also organise and run an annual 'Produce Show' with prizes for best produce. The show is open to everyone with local residents encouraged to come along to see what goes on at the allotments. [leytonallotmentsociety@gmail.com](mailto:leytonallotmentsociety@gmail.com)

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## **Community Growing Projects / Spaces**

Community growing projects are found in urban or semi-urban spaces in parks, on allotment sites, underused green spaces, on social housing estate shared land. There are multiple models of community growing projects and spaces, they provide an environment to support a number of different purposes that extend beyond just growing fruit and vegetables - for example, education and training, mental wellbeing, opportunities to 'green' an urban area, upgrading underused or vacant and derelict land, building community cohesion and capacity, and market gardening. Community food projects and community gardens have significant and multiple social benefits. Some projects focus on food growing as the outcome others focus more on using food growing as a tool to support and facilitate participants' health and wellbeing, training and development or community cohesion.



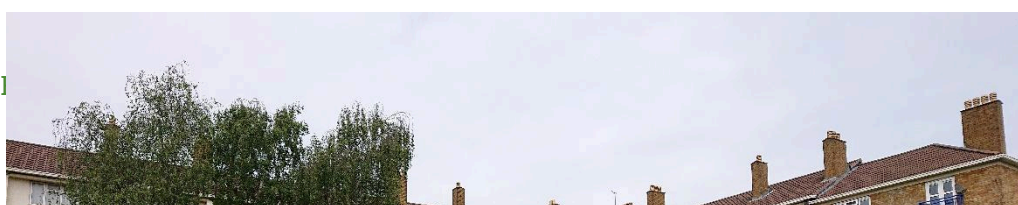
## **Community Orchards and Woodlands**

Community orchards and woodlands provide an opportunity for local residents to make use of underused spaces as well as giving people access to locally grown fruit. They can contribute to improving and creating nature friendly habitats, particularly in urban areas, to build resilience against urbanisation and climate change impacts. Community Orchards and edible woodlands can offer a range of ecological benefits in addition to bringing communities together, increasing access to greenspaces in an area where perhaps greenspaces are lacking or underutilised. Community orchards provide welcoming environments for all ages to get involved in food growing as they are well suited to and thrive in urban environments and require less maintenance compared to allotments or community food projects.

<http://www.commoncause.org.uk/ringmer-community-orchard>

Many of the Boroughs small secondary woodland sites, have been designated as Sites of Importance to Nature Conservation 'SINC's, with some sites being directly linked to particular community or school groups such as Newport school which has become the custodian of Dawlish Road Nature Reserve, E10 5RF

On numerous Council Housing Estates, resident groups have created community gardens, raised beds, and orchards such as the Sunken Garden Community Garden & Orchard (pictured below), Prospect Hill, E17 6EQ



## Civic Planting, Edible Borders and Hedgerows

There is scope for less formal growing activities to be explored within communities – both official and unofficial – by planting, picking, and eating produce grown in civic areas, underused or temporary spaces, borders and hedgerows for example the Wildflower Meadow Project planted and tended by ‘Love North Chingford’ Gardening Group Volunteers. This type of growing is more commonly found in urban areas where community groups and individuals seek permission from a landowner (private and statutory landlords) to grow food plants in planters, raised beds, unused areas of grass and along verges, for example. Guerrilla gardening, where people grow on someone else’s land without permission, has been recognised in the UK since the 1970s and results in neglected spaces being reclaimed by a group for the purposes of food growing. Although not encouraged, this type of growing has brought positive benefits for urban environments and those utilising the spaces and has demonstrated the types of growing and benefits that can be achieved through civic planting, edible borders to grow fruit and vegetables.

<https://www.incredibleedible.org.uk/>

## Growing at home

Front gardens, back gardens, pots, raised beds and windowsills can all be used to grow fruit and vegetables. Growing at home can be a great introduction to food growing for first time growers or a good alternative for those wishing to grow on a smaller scale than allotments or community food projects. Food plants can be grown amongst flowers and other garden perennials attracting bees and other insects into the garden. For those that don’t have their own garden there are examples of garden share schemes in other parts of the UK.

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### *Some examples of gardening sharing sites*

[www.lendandtend.com](http://www.lendandtend.com)

<https://www.incredibleedible.org.uk/news/incredible-garden-sharing-finding-more-space-to-grow/>

<http://transitionfrome.org.uk/projects-and-groups/frome-garden-share/>

Gardening at home doesn’t have the benefits of being part of a growing community as shared growing spaces such as allotments or community growing projects but there are myriad other benefits including having home grown food on the doorstep, being physically active and increasing biodiversity in urban spaces.

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*Front gardens have been promoted through the London in Bloom competition, with the Walthamstow in Bloom Gardening group having been very active in this area for over 10 years*

Examples of Individual Front Gardens



Council Housing Estate, E17

As with other issues in the borough, Waltham Forest housing and garden provision varies massively depending on where you live, 50% of residents in the middle of the Borough have no garden, whereas more than 80% in the North and South do. This amplifies the need for a diverse approach to support more food growing across the borough, to accommodate the varying living situation particularly for the most marginalised communities, and those least able to access growing spaces.

## Meanwhile use spaces

Meanwhile use involves the temporary use of sites awaiting redevelopment, for example a housing development. With agreement from the landowner, community groups may be able to use such spaces on a temporary basis for a given period for the purpose of food growing. This approach to food growing should make provisions so that items can be removed, and ideally located to a new space, at the end of the agreed term. This option is beneficial in terms of increasing diversity and temporarily upgrading underused spaces within the local area.

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### *CASE STUDY – The Skip Garden Kings Cross*

From 2009 to 2019, [The Skip Garden](#) could be found in middle of the King's Cross development area, a construction site of 67 acres. Between the cranes and the cement mixers, the flats and the office blocks, the Skip Garden was a moveable urban oasis - a portable garden that moves to different locations as and when land is sold built on. The garden was built by young people and local business volunteers, to create a sustainable community, a space where apple trees, fruit and vegetables grow in containers, and in polytunnels made with water pipes polythene. The latest incarnation – The Story Garden can be found in the grounds of the British Library and alongside growing, the project runs workshops and events to highlight and promote the benefits of urban growing.

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# About Waltham Forest

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Waltham Forest is one of the most diverse boroughs in London with 52% of people living in the borough from ethnically diverse backgrounds. In 2020 the population is recorded as at 276,940 made up of approximately 102,000 households. It has a younger than average population and an average life expectancy (women 84 years, men 79 years) on par with the England average. Like London, Waltham Forest also has a high proportion of working-age adults and there are proportionately fewer people aged over 65.

## Deprivation

Despite being a vibrant and culturally diverse borough, it is still relatively deprived ranking 82<sup>nd</sup> of 317 in the English Indices of deprivation 2019, and the 12<sup>th</sup> most deprived London borough, although improvements have been made since the previous English Indices of deprivation 2015. With higher levels of deprivation in the south of the borough where there is more dense housing and fewer green spaces.

## Physical Activity, Health and Wellbeing

Physical inactivity plays a significant role in mortality (it is the 4<sup>th</sup> leading cause globally) and there are high rates of inactivity in the borough - 70% of adults are inactive - and large variations across the borough in participation levels in physical activity and sport. Obesity and other diet related diseases including coronary heart disease, diabetes and some cancers are prevalent in the borough. With more than 10% of the adult population and 23% of children categorised as obese, and levels of diabetes, CHD and all cancers higher than the England average. Mental health can also benefit from people being more active and participating in activities such as food growing contributes to being active.

## Employment

The employment rate for the working-age population is 68.8 per cent, the lowest average rate across London and lower than the mean for all English regions<sup>1</sup>. Waltham Forest has the highest unemployment in the 2018-2021 period at 9.6%<sup>2</sup>. Waltham Forest residents currently have a median household income of £35,000. This places Waltham Forest 21 out of 33 London boroughs in terms of income. And although this is still higher than UK average income housing and other living costs are relatively higher in London than in other areas of the UK. Additionally, there is a relatively large disparity of incomes across Waltham Forest wards. Typically, those in the north of the borough earn more than those located in the south - a difference of £15,420 between the highest and lowest median income per household.

## Landscape

Waltham Forest is an outer borough situated in north-east London, topographically, it is relatively elongated with three main neighbourhoods: Chingford in the north, Walthamstow in the centre and Leyton and Leytonstone in the south. It is flanked on its east west borders by Epping Forest and the Lea Valley respectively. Waltham Forest land area covers approximately 3,881 hectares of those 841 hectares are green belt, making it one of the greenest boroughs. There are 213 hectares of Metropolitan Open Land

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[https://lginform.local.gov.uk/reports/lgastandard?mod-metric=49&mod-period=4&mod-area=E09000031&mod-group=AllRegions\\_England&mod-type=namedComparisonGroup](https://lginform.local.gov.uk/reports/lgastandard?mod-metric=49&mod-period=4&mod-area=E09000031&mod-group=AllRegions_England&mod-type=namedComparisonGroup)

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.trustforlondon.org.uk/data/boroughs/waltham-forest-poverty-and-inequality-indicators/>

(MOL), 76 parks including 7 premier parks and 27 Allotment sites, 30+ community growing sites and projects, and of the 75 RHS Gardening Club schools in the Borough, 62 are Eco-Schools, 39 have edible raised-bed gardens (see Appendix 1 for maps). These green spaces are vital to the health and wellbeing of Waltham Forest's communities and their environment.

Being one of the greenest London boroughs with relatively more affordable housing Waltham Forest is an increasingly popular place to live. There is a young diverse growing population with aspirations to have access to green open spaces, affordable housing, and social and economic opportunities within reach. Yet like many urban areas competition for land is fierce, juggling the need for more affordable housing, business and economic infrastructure, schools, and other amenities with the pressure to address inequalities in health and wellbeing, quality of life, air pollution and the climate and bio-diversity emergencies is acute.

This food growing strategy aims to demonstrate how a policy to support increases in food growing and food growing activities can support both a greener economy, support health and wellbeing and help mitigate the climate and biodiversity emergency. Through an action plan that takes a creative and collaborative approach food growing activities can be integrated with other competing policy objectives on land use, health, social justice and climate.

## **Why Food Growing: The Impacts and Benefits of Food Growing**

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### **Growing food for HEALTH AND MENTAL WELLBEING**

Being involved in food growing can provide multiple health benefits including improving cardiovascular health, managing weight and the associated health conditions of being overweight. Exercising outdoors can also help manage stress, anxiety and improve mood.

Whether it's in a community food growing space or a front garden food growing provides opportunities to engage in low impact exercise and physical health. Being outdoors and in contact with the natural environment also has therapeutic benefits and can reduce social isolation and loneliness. Being part of a community food growing activity can also help build friendships and confidence, all of which support mental wellbeing.

Building exercise into a daily routine helps long-term positive behaviour change and maintaining healthy habits. This is often a more sustainable and more affordable way to increase physical activity particularly for those living on low incomes where there are limited costs associated with the activity.

Engaging with food growing also increases knowledge and familiarity with fresh foods which can contribute to a healthier diet and makes healthier food more affordable.<sup>3</sup>

### **Food growing for CLIMATE and BIODIVERSITY**

The national and global food systems contribute substantially to the climate and nature emergencies. Conversely food growing in local communities can play a role in reducing those impacts and indeed contribute to carbon capture by creating shorter supply chains and lower greenhouse gas emissions. Growing food locally can foster low carbon habits, with less food going to landfill, and surplus crops being

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<sup>3</sup> Sustain and Garden Organic (2014) The Benefits of Gardening and Food Growing for Health and Wellbeing Report

repurposed or composted (See Higham Park Community Compost case study on page 21). Increasing 'green' spaces in urban and built-up areas where the presence of green spaces is often limited, can improve localised air quality, and contribute to carbon capture. This can reduce air pollution and particulates.

Local food growing can enhance local biodiversity through the growing of a wide variety of crops and by reducing the need for pesticides and fertilisers.

Community growing sites can also help strengthen green networks, especially in fragmented urban areas, by creating steppingstones and corridors linking habitats. Careful and knowledgeable food growing practices and planting schemes can support pollinator species.

Organic and low impact food growing, which tends to be more prevalent on allotment sites, community food growing projects and private gardens than commercial growing is beneficial for soil and human health.

Community food growing sites, allotments and private garden growing can present similar benefits to other green spaces for surface water management and the delivery of multiple ecosystem services, including reduced risk of flooding, and improvements to water quality. Historically, most allotments within the Borough were located on the west side along the Lee, in the flood zones, and those few allotments that remain in that area today, are still important natural sink holes for sudden downpours.

## **Food growing food for EDUCATION**

In England and Wales, the Personal, Social, Health and Economic (PSHE) curriculum states 'children should understand the benefits and importance of physical health, time outdoors, community participation and voluntary and service-based activities on mental health wellbeing and happiness.' With an emphasis on the 'benefits to mental wellbeing of physical exercise and time spent outdoors.'<sup>4</sup>

Food growing in schools and in community-based projects can offer opportunities to gain new skills, which can be used in other areas of learning and employment opportunities. Added to that giving children and young people the opportunities to learn about health and wellbeing through taking part in food growing activities will potentially form life-long interests and healthy habits.

A focus on food growing within schools can improve and foster an understanding of where food comes from (and the wider related environmental issues) and the importance of healthy eating, particularly in relation to a willingness to try new and different foods.

Food growing spaces provide an environment to learn about other related topics including biodiversity, climate change, cooking, recycling and food cultures. The benefits of food growing are wide-reaching, and the different growing approaches can help to deliver opportunities for children through school projects, and adults through community food growing programmes.

## **Food growing food for SOCIAL BENEFIT**

There are opportunities for community growing projects to offer training and skills development to communities and individuals that can help to encourage confidence, social skills and development of transferable skills, potentially increasing employability.

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<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/relationships-education-relationships-and-sex-education-rse-and-health-education/physical-health-and-mental-wellbeing-primary-and-secondary>

Getting involved in food growing activities can encourage a sense of community, contributing to wellbeing and reduced feelings of social isolation and disconnect. This is especially significant where more vulnerable people are involved such as those in socio-economically deprived areas, people with disabilities, those experiencing mental health issues or immigrants.

Aside from the community and social benefits of being involved in a community food growing project, local food growing helps ensure people have access to local, plentiful produce which helps those families and individuals living on low incomes that struggle to afford fresh fruits and vegetables.



*The Limes Community Children's Centre*

## **Food growing food for ENTERPRISE AND THE LOCAL ECONOMY**

Community gardens and allotments can provide employment or skills building opportunities or payments for volunteers.

Growing your own food or being part of a community food growing project where you can eat what you grow can help make healthy, sustainable food more affordable. It can supplement the cost of fresh fruit and vegetables from local shops supporting families and individuals to access fresh foods where they otherwise might not, due to low incomes.

Other social benefits from growing activities are a greater sense of inclusion, increased confidence amongst peers and skills development. These can have both direct and indirect benefits to prepare people for employment and therefore benefit the local economy.

Allotmenters and community growing projects on allotment plots can sell surplus produce or by-products such as jams, chutneys, honey on a not-for-profit basis, and can generate income for the group to reinvest in their site. This could result in job creation and contribute to the circular economy by keeping money circulating in the local community and local businesses.

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## *The Higham's Park Food Aid composting project*

Set up as a volunteer response to Covid 19, in March 2020, Higham's Park Portal provided emergency food support to 66 local families in Higham's Park. This was the catalyst to the creation of the composting project the following year which involved 3 compost bins and a bike trailer taking waste fruit and veg to a nearby allotment where it was composted. Over a 24-week period, approximately 253 kgs of food waste was processed, saving 4 x full 240L food waste bins being sent to Waltham Forest food waste processing facility. The carbon emissions from anaerobic digestion for this amount of food waste is 2,581.61 kg CO<sub>2</sub>e / 2.5tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub>e. (253kg x 10.204 kg CO<sub>2</sub>e2). Composting has avoided these emissions, plus using bike transportation means no travel emissions



Higham's Park Food Aid

The aim to develop an Information and Central Networking Hub for food growing (see Action Plan page 32), and the fledgling Food Growing Network (supported by Organiclea) will make significant contributes to actions under the [Behaviour Change and Collective Action](#) (see page 19). This will include signposting to food growing related Climate Emergency initiatives across the borough and information on the benefits of climate friendly food growing.

### Mental Health & Wellbeing Strategy 2019-2021

“Services and events can be designed to include several of the Five Ways to Wellbeing. For example, food growing initiatives can involve physical activity, socialising, learning a new skill and eating healthy food. Physical activity offers are often delivered as group-based activities which enable social contact, for example the Our Parks sessions. Many social events provide a food offer and there is a need to ensure organisers understand the impact of healthy food on mental wellbeing as well as the impact of social contact”

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### *Case studies*

OrganicLea are a long-standing community food growing organisation providing supported, structured gardening and cooking volunteering and therapeutic horticulture and nature-engagement activities, for people referred or self-referred with common mental health conditions. They also provide low-cost garden maintenance and gardening in people's own homes to improve the mental and physical wellbeing of socially isolated, vulnerable adults with support needs.

Various community groups are also partnering with local GPs to support mental and physical wellbeing through offering therapeutic activities in the natural environment such as the Walthamstow Village in Bloom group, which are assisting Addison Road Medical Surgery to create an eco-friendly garden as part of their 'Greener Practice' initiative. In June they also partnered with Waltham Forest Community Hub to create a garden for staff at CGL, the alcohol

and drug centre in Beulah Road, as part of a project to improve the employment opportunities for young people.

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### Bio-diversity Plan 2020 Update

The Bio-Diversity Action Plan (BAP) main objectives are to conserve key habitats and species and raise public awareness and involvement of all sectors of the community. The 2010-2020 BAP period has now end and a review has taken place to determine what has been achieved and what will be the priorities for the next 10 years.

In terms of its biodiversity, Waltham Forest is exceptional, containing one of the highest percentages of priority species and habitats in London. These habitats include food growing spaces such as parks, urban green spaces and private gardens.

Key objectives in the 2020 plan related to food growing include:

- 1) To protect and enhance the wildlife and habitats in Waltham Forest, in particular those of international, national and regional importance.
- 2) To ensure the proper consideration of biodiversity conservation in the management of all open space and amenity land in Waltham Forest.
- 3) To seek opportunities for increasing the area and number of priority and locally important habitats
- 4) To develop the long-term interest and involvement of people living and working in the Borough., including access to nature.

Several objectives and actions within the 2020 plan are still relevant and still applicable. Any new BAP will take forward relevant actions and objectives whilst also incorporating the council's priorities for the next 10 years which currently include provision for additional wildflowers and long grass areas across roadside verges, gardens & parks, allotments & community food growing sites.

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### *Apiaries*

Where sites allow, beekeeping activities are supported, including establishing hives and bee friendly planting. There are currently 3 beehives at Beechwood, 5 at Simmons, 4 at Pimp Hall, 3 at Hawkward, 2 at Seymour allotments, and Higham Hill Common are in the process of establishing a bee friendly site. There are also hives located in private gardens, and managed by groups such as Larkwood Honey, who regularly come together at The Epping Forest Beekeepers' Association meetings which take place at Chingford Horticultural Hall in Larkshall Road, Chingford, E4 6PE



*BEE17 Company Walthamstow*

## Other strategies

There are other strategies and plans that interact with the food growing agenda including the **Community Plan** on volunteering and community engagement; **Early Learning Education** on food growing on school grounds and understanding the benefits of a healthy diet; **Physical Health and Sports Strategy** on getting people more active; **Enterprise, Employment and Skills Strategy** on training and skills development; **Waltham Forest voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise Sector Strategy** involving and supporting civil society.

## **Where we are now - Food Growing in Waltham Forest today**

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### Allotments

There are a total of 2,601 allotment plots in 38 sites across the Borough. 1,655 in 27 Council managed sites, 621 in six Council leased sites, and 325 in four private sites. There are also eight community food growing sites with 120 raised beds. <https://www.walthamforest.gov.uk/content/allotments>.

Since 2019 the standard size plot in Waltham Forest is 5 rods having previously been 10 rods<sup>13</sup> this is approximately 30 square yards or 25 square metres. Reducing plot sizes has increased the number of plots by 250, in addition to increasing the number, clearing plots and improving their amenities, has doubled the number of allotmenters from around 700 to 1450. This ongoing programme of works enabled the waiting list to be re-opened to give more people the opportunity to have a plot. However, the Covid pandemic triggered a huge surge in demand which exceeded supply, and the waiting list had to be closed again. This demand has not abated, there are currently over 500 people on the waiting list. Once a site has a waiting list of approximately 5 years, applications are no longer accepted for that site.

Allotment sites are not evenly spread across the borough, there are a greater number of sites and allotments in the north of the borough where there are few households per square mile, with more and bigger gardens, and fewer allotments in south of the borough with higher numbers on the waiting list. Given that the location of allotments pre-dates the recent pressures on land and housing and that allotments are protected in law, the Council's Parks and Open Spaces team are working to address the uneven spread of food growing amenities across the borough by bringing gardening closer to residents through the creation of more community growing spaces and encouraging and promoting front garden food growing rather than developing new allotment sites.

The Allotment service is currently delivering an upgrading programme of facilities at allotment sites to increase accessibility to address barriers to participation such as those experienced by wheelchair users.

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<sup>13</sup> Allotments are traditionally measured in rods or poles (they're the same thing). A pole is a measure of area equal to 16.5 by 16.5 sq ft, or 272.25 sq ft.

Seymour Allotment lies in a flood zone, which makes the main pathway prone to flooding, a gravel pathway has been created to help ensure year-round access.



Currently allotment sites are categorized as low, medium high, determined by which amenities are available at a site, such as access to water, a club house, electricity, and toilet facilities. The cost of rent for an allotment is determined by the site's amenity level, if and when amenities change, so too does the rent charge at that site. The Council also aims to make as many sites as possible more sustainable through the introduction of boreholes, compost toilets and bike sheds.

#### Newly installed NATSOIL compost toilets at Hawkwood Allotment



## Community Growing projects

There are over 30 food growing projects across Waltham Forest in all shapes and sizes from those that focus on food production as a means to an end, to those that use food growing as part of a process to engage communities, individuals and groups to those that use food growing to address environmental issues, social inequalities, poor mental health or to encourage skills development.

One thing that stands out is that they are largely located in the south of the borough, where there is less access to community growing spaces and fewer allotment sites.

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### *OrganicLea - a community food project based in the Lea Valley.*

[Hawkwood Plant Nursery](#) is Organiclea's food growing and plant production site. Work is carried out by a team of growers from the workers' coop and volunteers who support the project's aim to encourage more food growing in London. Hawkwood is situated on the edge of the borough, and borders Epping Forest. The site includes extensive glasshouses, open fields, scrubland, and woodland edge.



Unused for some time, the workers' co-op has turned the site over to the production of a wide range of fruit, vegetables and herbs, by clearing land, improving the fertility of the soil, creating raised beds, repairing the glasshouse, developing irrigation systems and building a classroom. Hawkwood also offers opportunities to learn about organic food growing in a friendly supportive environment through volunteering and training programmes.

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### *Greenway Avenue Community Garden, E17 3QJ*

were four formerly abandoned tennis courts once sat now you will find a much-loved community growing space for residents in the Greenway Avenue neighborhood. The garden provides a space for the benefit of the community and for nature and the local ecology. The principal idea was to reinvent four disused tennis courts and to make a currently overgrown site into a space usable by and of benefit to the local and wider community.

The management of the site is based upon community stewardship and so the ongoing maintenance of the garden is led and carried out by the local residents and the members of the Friends Group. The garden provides an accessible, interactive space which retained a focus on nature and biodiversity for all sections of the community to enjoy

## Headline findings

It was clear from the very first workshop that there is a **huge appetite for more food growing** in Waltham Forest, but that residents, communities and groups want and need to be **better connected** with one another. They want **more support and training** and for **food growing to be more visible** across the borough. The first exercise demonstrated **how much food growing activity there is across the borough** but that **poor communications** limited their capacity to do more. For many people this was the first time they had heard about or come into contact with other food growers or food growing projects and activities in Waltham Forest

Although there were **clear frustrations** with the current situation with regard to **ease and access to land for food growing, resources, training and support** there was **great enthusiasm for this food growing strategy** and a **growers' network**. There was also a recognition of the potential these could bring to the food growing landscape in the borough.

The outputs from the workshops, have been combined with findings from conversations with council officers, other key stakeholders in Waltham Forest, experts in other areas of the UK, desk research to determine key priorities for the borough as detailed in local authority department plans and strategies (as detailed in other parts of this report) examples of food growing strategies, allotment strategies are the foundations on which this strategy and action plan have been developed.

## Waltham Forest Food Growing 3-year Action Plan 2022-25

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This is the first action plan for the Waltham Food Growing Strategy: A champion Food Growing Borough 2022-2032. It has been devised based on the outcomes from ongoing conversations with the Parks and Open Spaces Team at Waltham Forest Council, desk-based research, conversations with multiple stakeholders, an online survey with WF residents (733 responses) and the outcomes of three workshops held with communities that are involved or interested in food growing including schools, community food growing projects, 'allotmenters', housing providers, community organisations and individuals.

The main themes from the food growing workshops and the food growing survey fall into the following categories,

- More land available for food growing
- Policies / funding to support action on food growing
- Improved, more co-ordinated communications
- More visible food growing activities in the borough

These findings have been developed into the following 5 aims to help achieve the overarching vision '**to increase food growing opportunities for people working and living in Waltham Forest**' within the existing policy, resource, stakeholder and food growing landscape in the borough.

- Aim 1: Increase access to food growing opportunities
- Aim 2: Develop food growing skills across the borough
- Aim 3: Improve food growing networking opportunities
- Aim 4: Make food growing in the borough more visible
- Aim 5: Build better infrastructure to support food growing