

Community
Food
Growers
Network

WORKING
with your
LOCAL
COUNCIL




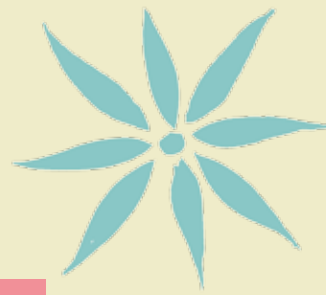
Who is this toolkit for?

This toolkit aims to help food growing projects work with their local councils in order to secure land, funding and publicity locally.

But I haven't got time to do this!

A lot of projects feel like they are too busy keeping their projects afloat to allocate time towards building a long term relationship with their Council. But, with shrinking funding pots and land across London coming under threat from developers - can you afford not to invest the time? Demonstrating that your work is relevant to your Council's strategic objectives (and it is!) is crucial to securing the future of your project.





Contents

We've written this toolkit to be as simple as possible, with template emails and checklists to help you approach your council with the relevant information. As always, if you'd like a hand or some extra support, contact info@cfn.org.uk.

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I) Who to contact

Councils can be very hard to understand from the outside, and it can be hard to find who to contact. Often, finding a supportive contact within the council to be your advocate is the first step to opening doors for your project. If your Council has an Environment or Sustainability team, they're a good place to start. Just search online the name of your Council, and "sustainability" or "environment". Look for email addresses and names of council officers in online articles or directories—send them a brief email (just a few sentences) introducing yourself and what you do, and ask to arrange a quick phone chat. Definitely mention that your project is doing work that fulfils the Council's strategic aims and obligations.

If your council doesn't have an Environment or Strategy team, try the Regeneration Team. They are often the most "forward looking" team in the Council, as their work isn't completely tied up with

project delivery. Projects like OrganicLea, Living Under one Sun, Growing Communities and Sutton Community Farm have found that developing a relationship with their Council has produced lots of opportunities and benefits further down the line.

What's the difference between a Council Officer and a Councillor, and how can they help me?

A council officer is someone who works for the council and was hired for a particular position, whereas a councillor gets voted in. This means that councillors are publicly affiliated to a political party, and are (in theory) directly accountable to voters. They are public figures and probably want to get re-elected, but are also tied up in party politics. Some councillors hold cabinet positions that may be relevant: ie Employment and Skills, Health



and Social Care, Environment and Open Spaces, which makes them a lot more influential. It may be worth it reaching out to them even if your project is not in their ward. Councillors often want to do something new and noteworthy in their area.

Council officers, on the other hand, are often far more anonymous, and are the cogs and wheels which keep the council working. If you want to boost your profile through a "champion", a visit that can

create some media attention, or an "endorsement", get in touch with your local councillor. (Their names and email addresses are published on your Council's website). If you want to intervene in local policy, potentially access funding or land, or seek useful opportunities and partnerships, then you want to contact the relevant council officers via the method above.

What local councillors serve your project: <https://www.gov.uk/find-your-local-councillors>

2)How to approach your Council:

What problems are you solving?

Each Council will have a series of strategies, policies and statutory responsibilities that they are trying to fulfil, often with sharply decreased budgets. In a time of budget cuts and decreased council staff, it is crucial to demonstrate that your project is fulfilling aspects of these strategies and responsibilities in order to access support.

Councils under stress may also be reluctant to try something new and untested, so it can be really useful to draw upon examples of how something has worked really well in other boroughs. It can be really useful to reach out to longstanding food projects to talk about their successes.

“It’s not enough to just have a great idea, you need to figure out how your project and the work that you do fits into local strategic objectives and policies, and communicate that”

Matt Maple, London Borough of Haringey Regeneration Team

It can be confusing to figure out what all of the policies are, and which ones could potentially give you a foot in the door. Here is a quick summary of some of the policies which you should look out for and mention in any initial contact with the Council. National and London-wide policies are also relevant to demonstrating your relevance, and we’ve included links to some throughout this guide. But it is very useful to be able to use the language of your Local Council when communicating how you can help them fulfil their priorities.

Council Policies, Plans and Strategies, and how they can be useful to your project:

1) Local Plan:

this is a document that sets out strategic objectives for the borough in key areas- housing, employment, environment, etc and often includes an index of

the policies relevant to each area. Make sure you are working with the most up to date document, Local Plans are in a constant state of revision and consultation.

- If your borough council doesn’t have a Local Plan yet, and is currently in the process of writing it - get involved! Give us a shout asap and we will help you with putting in submissions the best we can. This means that in the future, your Council will have policies specifically written to support the work of your project, which opens the door to funding, support and increased impact.

- If your local Council does have a Local Plan, have a read through

the contents page to see what sections/policies might be relevant to your project: employment, open space/environment, health and wellbeing...

- Still overwhelmed? Simply hit “Ctrl + F” to search the Local Plan document for key terms like “garden” “allotment” “green” “food” “skills” “employability” “biodiversity” and “open space”.

2) Local Implementation Plans:

these are documents that set out a three year plan for a local area, so reading through the relevant plan for your local area will give you a good idea of any planned



developments that could be relevant to your project.

3) Neighbourhood Plans:

these are developed by Neighbourhood Forums (community groups can apply to be an officially recognised Neighbourhood Forum) that focus on the space and development strategy for a smaller area. This can include protecting areas of community importance and setting local priorities for development.

4) The London Plan:

this is the overarching spatial strategy document produced by the Mayor of London and the GLA. It sets out the framework/priorities for development in terms of environment, housing, economy, transport and social issues. It's a hefty document and can be interesting to read select portions, and all Local Plans and Neighbourhood Plans need to fall in line with the vision set out by the London Plan.

5) A "Core Strategy"

document is part of a borough's Local Plan which sets out the vision for the borough for the

coming 15-20 years, and lays out a plan of what needs to be done. This document will bring together a series of policies that your project's work is relevant to. Pick out a few of the policies that seem the most relevant to the work that you do- employment, open spaces, health and wellbeing - and look over them to see which of your project activities is most relevant to those policies.

A Health and Wellbeing Strategy

This will list commitments to getting people active and healthier, eating more fresh, nutritious food, and engaging in activities that improve mental wellbeing. It may also include aspirations to make outdoor places greener and more pleasant. If your project engages with local people and results in improved physical and mental wellbeing (which it probably does), you can refer to this Strategy to demonstrate that your project is fulfilling strategic objectives. Some mental health policies include support for social prescribing, which means that local NHS services can refer patients to "non clinical" services like community gardening.

An Employment Strategy (or Employment and Skills, Enterprise, Training, Economy...)

This will cover the strategy for getting people skilled up and qualified to enter into and maintain employment. This will often specifically look at employment support for marginalised and under-supported groups. This means that if your project provides volunteering opportunities or training for unemployed people, mental health services users, disabled people, people with few qualifications or otherwise at high risk of unemployment, your activities can support this strategy. Have your volunteers or beneficiaries gained employment or started up a business following on from their time with you? Remember to brag about it!

Sustainability, Environment or Biodiversity Strategy

Food growing projects are often pigeonholed into "environment" even though the impact spreads across various strategies. The Environment Strategy will most likely be relevant when highlighting policies

which mention preserving and creating green spaces, fostering biodiversity, and improving air quality. Some projects find that their proximity to a waterway means that they are able to access funding from flood defense and sustainable drainage programmes.

6) Sustainable Community Strategy

Last, but not least, all London Councils have a Sustainable Community Strategy. These documents will often include commitments to improving the environment and health of a local area. Because these are issues which most food growing projects are concerned with, the SCS can be a good port of call for demonstrating your relevance to the Council.

"Offer them solutions to problems rather than being a problem"

Brian Kelly, OrganicLea

Case Study: Organiclea



OrganicLea is one of the largest and best-networked local food projects in London. They are a workers cooperative, providing employment for 16+ coop members, plus sessional staff. They work with hundreds of volunteers, and provide opportunities for young people, adults with support needs, and people interested in learning about food growing and sustainability.

OrganicLea started in 2001 on a one acre patch of derelict land in Waltham Forest, where a small group of dedicated individuals established a site of sustainable food production which contributed locally grown food to market stalls.

The next stage was to act as a distribution hub working with organic farmers close to London to set up a weekly market stall and box scheme. As the project gained profile and experience, they seized the opportunity to scale up when a Council nursery was closed down and became available. OrganicLea engaged with Waltham Forest Council for two years of lease negotiations, fundraising and site design. Finally, in 2009, the Hawkwood Nursery Site opened, and has been growing delicious organic veg and a local food system ever since!

The initial engagement with the Council included approaching the Councillor who held the Environment portfolio for

Waltham Forest with a three page proposal about how local food production could benefit the borough. Members of the coop built relationships with Regeneration and Public Health officers, and ensured that they invited officers and councillors to events to keep the relationships alive. They were able to access grant funding, and used it as an incentive to gain council support by arguing that the funding will generate jobs in the borough and keep money circulating locally. They built community buy-in through events and outreach, and used this to leverage for support. They've been able to use their position as a well regarded community project to work with the Council to write a Sustainable Food Strategy, leverage funding, and support newer projects in establishing themselves.

How can your Council support you?

Funding is often the main reason food growing projects approach a Council. Councils do control a lot of budgets, but you often have to build some kind of relationship with them before

getting an opportunity to apply for a grant or bid for a contract. A good relationship with your Council can help you access Section 106 funds (from new local developments) or the Highways department if your growing area falls under their jurisdiction.

*“Don’t ask for money
- ask for support in
making things happen”*

Brian Kelly, OrganicLea

Land:

Councils own a lot of land, and can help you access spaces to use for growing activities.

*“Projects that seek
to work on Council
land can transform an
undermanaged facility
into a productive asset...
You will probably be
competing against housing
developments, but you
can argue that you’re
providing long term social
and economic benefit over
short term capital receipts”*
Mark Walton, Shared Assets

Councils often have an events budget, and can support your project in reaching out to more people through hosting or participating in events.

Apprenticeships:

Councils often play a large part in delivering Apprenticeships and can support your project's ability to do that.

Policy:

working in partnership with your Council means you are able to

lay the groundwork for the future and write in support for food growing projects into the policies that will shape the activities of the borough in coming years. If you build a positive working relationship with people in your Council, you can develop a Food Strategy and make sure support for community food growing is written into the public health agenda, open spaces strategy and Local Plan.

Case Study: Royal Hill Community Garden and London Borough of Greenwich

The Royal Hill Community Garden is a small community growing space that was set up by a group of local residents on a patch of derelict land that belonged to the Council. They cleared lots of rubbish from the

space, and built raised beds, a seating area and murals. After putting lots of love and time into the space, they were devastated to hear that the Council was proposing to build homes with car parking on the site. Frustrated

“You need to be on the radar to find out about funding - so show up, be persistent and be helpful”

Matt Maple, London Borough of Haringey Regeneration Team

by the seeming lack of concern from the Council, they raised the profile of their struggle through media coverage, and approached their local Councillors via surgeries. Through talking to their Councillors, they were able to generate discussion about their concerns and take it to a higher level. They submitted an objection to the planning proposal, and therefore were invited to the planning hearing. They presented their objections to the development on the basis of highway safety and tree protection, and successfully overturned the planning application.

Show your project is relevant to your Council's strategy and priorities.

Are you ready to get engaged? Here's what you need to do.

Does your project encourage people to do physical activity, including walking or cycling to and from your project?

- **Read** your Council's Health Strategy, and mention how you fulfil the goals of the strategy when you approach them
Contact: search for your borough's Health and Wellbeing board, Public Health team, Health & Adult Services, Social Care

Does your project participate in any activities that make streets and public spaces greener? (planting trees, maintaining public areas, growing food on the street or in parks)

- **Read** your Council's Environment or Open Space Strategy
- **Read** the Health Strategy, and look out for any reference to Healthy Streets
- **Cite** the Healthy Streets Framework- a London level approach to make the city

greener and healthier through better street design

- **Contact:** search for your borough's Parks and Open Spaces team, Transport Team, Highways Team

Does your project ever run or host sessions about cycling and cycle maintenance?

- **Cite** any reference in your Council's Health Strategy and Transport Strategy to healthy streets and active lifestyles

- **Cite** the Healthy Streets Framework- a London level approach to make the city greener and healthier through better street design

- **Contact:** The Transport or Public Realm teams in your Council. Also, see the "physical activity" contacts above. Might be worth connecting with Sustrans to piggyback on their Council engagement.

Does your project ever run or host sessions about healthy eating or cooking food?

- **Cite** any reference in the Health Strategy to healthy eating

- **Contact:** See if your council has a Healthy Eating team

Does your project ever run or host activities in addition to gardening that contribute to positive mental and physical health, such as yoga/tai chi sessions, meditation or mindfulness, playing or listening to music, drawing or crafts?

- **Cite** the Health Strategy, and any mention it makes of mental wellbeing

- **Look out** for the Thrive London framework, an approach that seeks to take action on mental health in London (London level)

Do volunteers or participants at your project get to eat and/or take home fresh produce?

- **Cite** the Health Strategy, and any mention it makes of mental wellbeing

- If you live in Enfield, Redbridge, Tower Hamlets, Croydon or Merton, they are currently developing Food Poverty Action Plans

Are you in Lambeth or Croydon? These are Food Flagship Boroughs, and should be supporting local food projects

It is important to remember that Council websites can be notoriously difficult to navigate, so don't get too bogged down in this. The Council will have strategic priorities related to healthy eating, physical activity, skills, learning and employment - so use that as a jumping off point. The easiest way to find the

relevant documents is probably to search the name of your borough online, along with "health/skills/environment strategy". This should get you to the relevant area of the Council's website, and from there you can browse around and find the documents you need.



Case Study: Wolves Lane Consortium

Wolves Lane is a horticultural centre owned by the London Borough of Haringey, which is made up of several acres of greenhouses, a cafe space, outdoor growing beds and some office space. LB Haringey had used it to grow seedlings for parks, as well as for running a range of programmes and services. However, due to government cuts, LB Haringey was looking to transfer ownership of the space, and invited organisations to bid for the lease. Haringey initially approached OrganicLea, based on the profile and relationships that OrganicLea had built over many years of working with Councils. OrganicLea, in turn, facilitated a consortium of local food initiatives

to step up and develop a business plan for the use of the space.

Although there was a wealth of experience and vision from the groups in the consortium, it was OrganicLea's track record of managing assets and building relationships with councils that gave LB Haringey the confidence to give the contract to the consortium, with the lease officially held by OrganicLea. The members of the consortium (which include London Grown, Crop Drop, Shared Assets and several other growers) are able to use the space to develop local food businesses, learning opportunities and community space.

3) Action Plan and Resources

Reach out to and engage

Sample Action Plan

Step 1:

Assess where your project's strengths lie using the checklist in the "Show your project is relevant" section. The most common areas that community food projects are active in are: health and wellbeing or training and employability. Try to find the relevant documents, or open the Core Strategy or Sustainable Community Strategy documents for your borough.

If you don't have time to read through the relevant documents thoroughly, just search the document (Ctrl + F) for key phrases such as "healthy eating", "nutritious", "exercise", "outdoor", "skills" etc and read a few paragraphs for context

Step 2:

Figure out who your best point of contact based on the checklist above is.

Step 3a:

Reach out to the relevant Council Officer

Documents referred to:

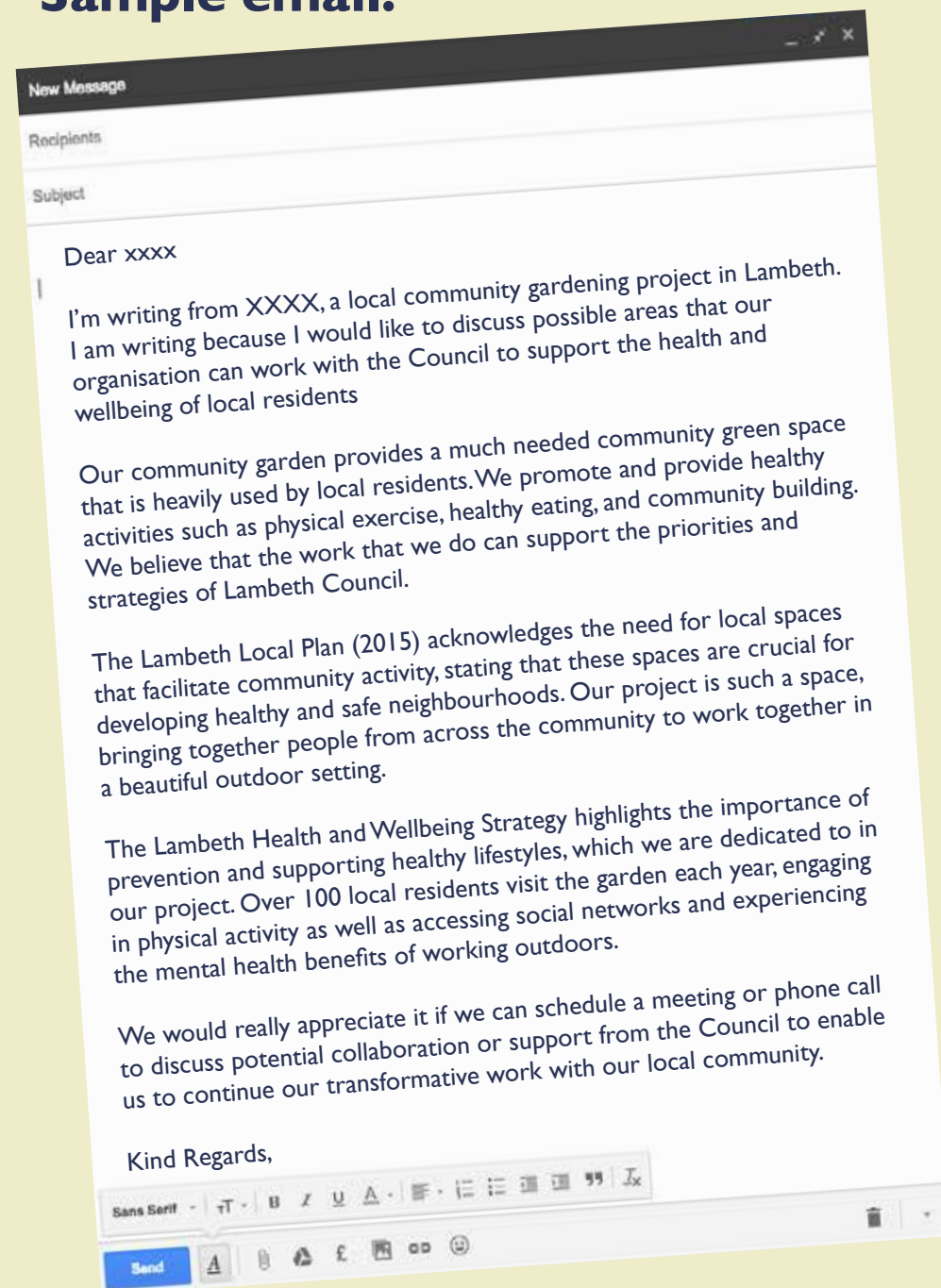
Lambeth Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2013-2023

<https://moderngov.lambeth.gov.uk/documents/s58400/03b%20HWS%20270613.pdf>

Lambeth Local Plan 2015

<https://www.lambeth.gov.uk/sites/default/files/pl-lambeth-local-plan-2015-web.pdf>

Sample email:



Step 3b:

Reach out to your local councillors

- Emphasise how your project provides an opportunity for community engagement
- Invite them to attend an event, they could in turn introduce you to someone, be listed as a champion of the project, visit the project and invite a local newspaper to come and take photos

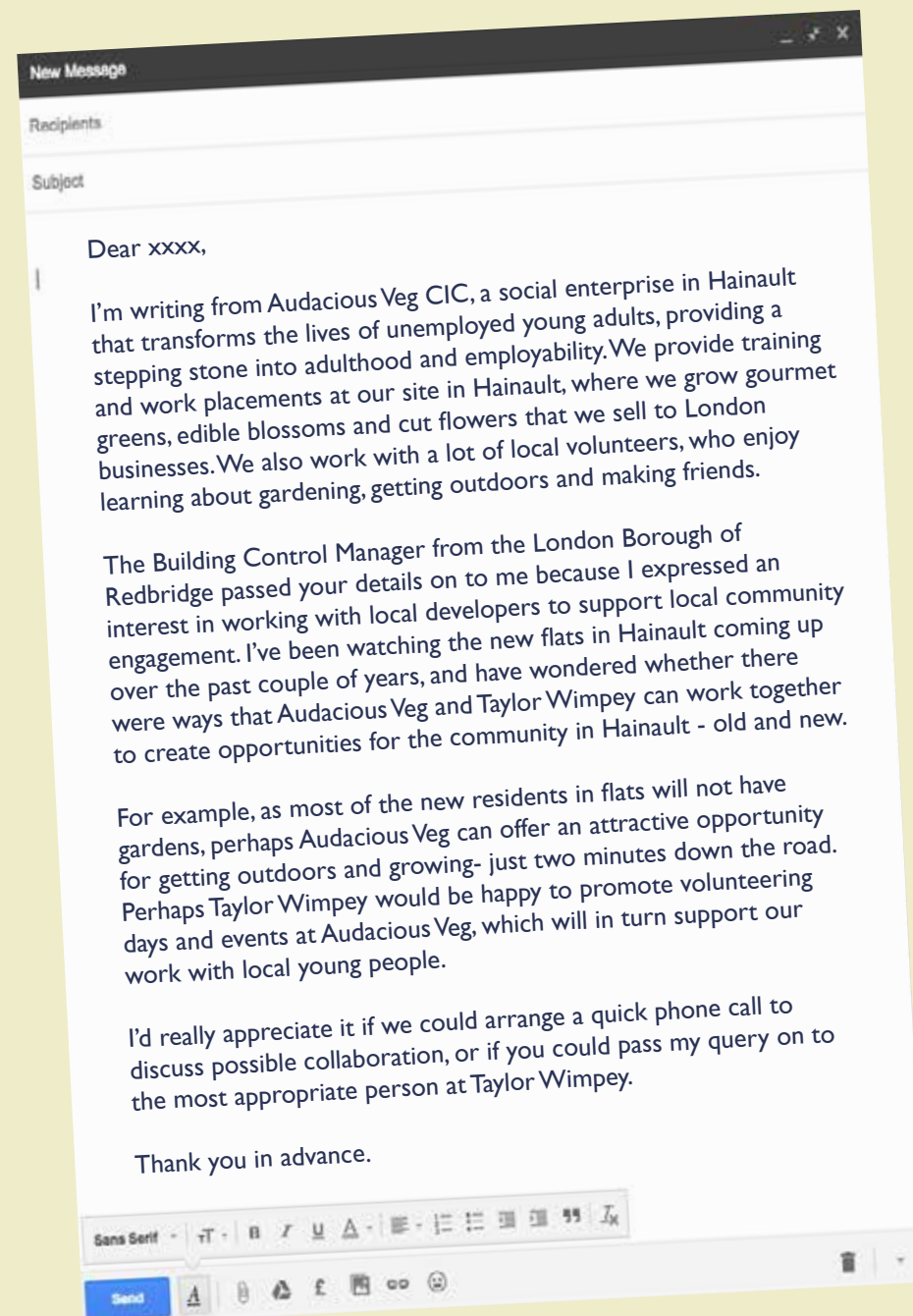
Step 3c:

Reaching out to local Developers

Sample email (Audacious Veg reaching out to Taylor Wimpey, a local developer)



Sample email:



Case Study: Living Under One Sun



Leyla from LUOS showed up to a meeting with local developers to ask for a simple thing - some of their scaffolding netting, to protect the community garden's crops from the birds. From this simple demand, she built a long running partnership with local developers, which included significant donations in kind of building materials and labour and rooftop gardens on the new developments.

She first made the connection by chatting to the workers, and asking them who was leading the development and what they were building.

"The relationship between Haringey and Living Under One Sun feels like a real partnership, which has been very positive - LUOS have great ideas, and can be trusted to deliver on them, which is invaluable"

Matt Maple, Regeneration Project Officer, Haringey

"Don't just get in touch with your Council - get in touch with your local NHS trust, local developers, Clinical Commissioning Group - all the local stakeholders."

Leyla Laksari, Living Under One Sun Founder and Coordinator

Go for it!


We hope that you found this toolkit relevant, useful and empowering. We look forward to hearing about the fantastic things you accomplish when you unlock the resources that Councils have access to.

The Community Food Growers Network is able to give you support if you're a food growing project trying to engage with your Council. We can sit down with you and skim through Council documents, help you write emails, and link you up with other projects who have been through this and can offer pearls of wisdom. Your situation will be unique, so take inspiration from the case studies but don't be afraid to try new things and most of all - be persistent! Don't take no for an answer, be creative, and get in touch if you want some help.

Good luck!

"Finding the right person to speak to in the Council can be tricky but it's worth persevering. Many local authorities have 'difficult' bits of land that they would welcome being brought into productive use, but even if they don't they can be well connected, and help to put you in touch with other projects, people or funding. It's important to be clear how you are meeting their agenda. They may be more interested in the fact that you are providing training, education, creating jobs, improving health outcomes or supplying local markets, than they are about the fact that you grow great food"

Mark Walton, Shared Assets



The Community Food Growers Network supports, connects and campaigns for grassroots local food projects in London. We meet quarterly, hold events, and give support to projects at risk of losing land or funding. It is free to join - check out our manifesto on our website and get in touch to find out more.

cfgn.org.uk