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# the plot.

#11, spring 2018

## EDITORIAL

In this edition of The Plot we'll be, as always, looking at what Community Food Growers Network has been up to these past few months and celebrating the new developments in the community food movement. Our Membership Development Co-ordinator, Nat, has been hard at it and you'll find in this edition some reflections from her on the last training that CFGN hosted. In the last edition, we shared with you a thorough update on how the CFGN London Plan response was shaping up. Another season gone and CFGN has submitted its response to the London Plan with Mama D of Community Centred Knowledge who was also a member of CFGN's London Plan Working Group, shares her thoughts on a proposed policy which stuck out to us. In the midst of blizzards in April and natural disasters world over,

we've also tried to use this edition to explore where the climate change conversation currently finds itself to reflect on what we should be doing next.

On the back page you'll find the words Paul de Zylva from Friends of the Earth, who kindly allowed us to reprint their work, as they explored Theresa May's 25 Year Environment Strategy back in January and summed up what works - and what really doesn't. Finally, we delve into sustainable bee-keeping with Sean Hearn as an increasing number of growers are trying their hand at housing bees - but are they doing so in the most sustainable way possible?

# What's New at HQ?

- An Update from CFGN's Latest Event

*Text by Nat Mady*

On a cold but sunny day back in February, we gathered at Organiclea for a days session looking at yields. The session was facilitated by Ru Litherland from Organic Lea and Joris Gunawardena from Sutton Community Farm and attended by Forty Hall Farm, Granville Community Kitchen, Dagenham Farm and Manchester-based Mossbrook Growers.

The aim of the session was to get the ball rolling on a more joined-up approach to measuring and recording yield data and to look at ways in which knowledge sharing across projects could impact on overall productivity of a site. A key outcome of the session was to discuss standardising the way yields are recorded to make comparisons fair and valid. We started off with each project talking through the key features of their site and the systems and processes they employ to record what is produced on the site.

In order to fairly compare yields across different sites we needed to come up with a standardised set of metrics to ensure everyone follows the same set of criteria. The first discussion was centred around area and this was largely around whether to include pathways and tractor turns in the areas of growing space. In conclusion, we decided to go for total area in metres squared, without pathways, based on the fact that pathways on different sites will be different sizes and therefore not comparable. The second key metric we needed to standardise was the weight of crops. The questions were around whether records should include everything that was produced or simply just what was harvested and sold. Some sites had kept records of grade-outs and also noted that some of the recorded harvest would be given to volunteers if it didn't get sold. For this we concluded that it would be best to standardise and record the marketable yield ie. crops that are good enough to sell. However, recording grade-outs and additional harvests for volunteers would be useful to record as part of additional and contextual notes. Other agreed metrics were using kg for weight and also recording the sale value for crops (£/weight), allowing the monetary outputs of a site to be compared.

We then moved into an entertaining round of 'Top of the Crops'. This involved comparing yields for specific crops like tomatoes, beans and squashes and then seeing which project had the highest yield. The winner then took the chair to explain in detail their growing techniques, favoured varieties and top tips for achieving high yields for that crop. Everything from sowing time, propagation module sizes to planting out date was accounted for making for a lively and interesting debate amongst all the growers!

"At first glance, a day spent looking at each others' yield data and recording systems might seem a tad number-crunchy. Actually, in years of visiting gardens and talking to growers this was one of the most revealing thing I've ever done: comparing yields really allowed us to start drilling into the fine details of HOW people were growing specific crops. Fascinating and educative, I'm looking forward to the sequel next year!!" Ru Litherland

Something quite interesting that came out of the discussions was how productivity and efficiency relate to outputs and how these outputs will be different for different projects, particularly as projects typically have a wide set of goals which go beyond the fruit and vegetables

they produce. For many, they are also driven by social and environmental goals in line with providing spaces for education and training as well as increasing biodiversity across a site and supporting local wildlife. For that reason it is important to measure yields alongside these other tangible outputs and outcomes.

At the end of the session we agreed that the next steps would be to all use the standardised system for recording yields during the season ahead with the aim of regrouping at the end of the year to compare again. Although the meeting was made up of predominantly larger scale projects that are growing to sell it would also be great to see other smaller sites measuring and recording their yields to collectively demonstrate the amount of crops that CFGN members are producing across London.

For more information about the session contact Nat M on [nat@cfgn.org.uk](mailto:nat@cfgn.org.uk).

# Chicken Shops, Community Food Growers and the new London Plan

*In Chapter 6 of the London Plan draft, policy E9 proposed that new hot food takeaways with A5 licenses which “generally sell food that is high in calories, fat, salt and sugar, and low in fibre, fruit and vegetables” be denied planning permission “within 400 metres walking distance of an existing or proposed primary or secondary school.” The policy focus is on the government’s fight against obesity as a potential benefit to public health. But how does it fit with ideas and ideals of community food growers and with the notion of ‘fixing a broken food system’? Here, Mama D of Community Centred Knowledge explores the questions that we could be posing around this policy, its context and its implications.*

Hot Food Takeaways exist and are popular in response to a number of intersecting factors which determine the food choices Londoners make. A primary, underlying reason, alongside the power of generic corporate advertising, is the economic poverty of particular regions of

London. The increase in precarity in work and the rise of multiple zero-hour contract jobs taken on by low income parent families all contribute to declines in physical - and mental - health in many neighbourhoods and a lack of ‘family-time’. Many school dinners are barely acceptable and calorie-rich, regional foods such as Chinese, Caribbean, Italian, Turkish, Lebanese, Indian and the ever popular, mainly Asian run chicken shops, offer inexpensive, accessible and satisfying meals. It is noted that alongside many fish and chip shops, most of these A5 licenses are owned by those of visible ethnic difference.

Childhood - and adult - obesity and diabetes are indeed representative of a failure to ensure the wide availability and accessibility of healthy food alternatives within a locality - in London, and indeed elsewhere. However, food is but one of the significant factors and there is a lack of developed discussion in the Plan’s support documentation around other deprivation indices which count. For example, access to open space for walking or appropriate venues for indoor or outdoor amenable and safe exercise; opportunities for widespread engagement in community food growing activities and availability of traditional market outlets which sell a diversity of fresh and healthy foods are insufficiently



acknowledged key factors. Furthermore, it is not known the extent to which depression, a sense of failure or a lack of future prospects contributes to the use of drugs, alcohol and other addictive substances. Of these, the easiest to come by is high calorie, cheap food.

To quote from Public Health England:

**'If an individual is poor, he or she is more likely to be affected by obesity and its health and wellbeing consequences.'** Those living in deprived areas are also:

- ***ten times less likely to live in the greenest areas compared with people in the least deprived areas;***
- *more likely to live near to fast-food outlets, which contribute towards the disparity in levels of obesity across the population; and*
- *more likely to feel unsafe in their neighbourhood, with consequent negative effects on their health, including a reluctance to take exercise.*

A subsequent question is who then owns the narrative discourse around this policy move and to what extent are local communities and households been included in suggesting solutions that might be effective? What, also is the response of food growing networks and activist organisations to the proposed curtailment of these chicken shops? Without good community partnership, how effective might be the Healthy Catering Commitment for the 7,000 plus existing A5 license owners who will still remain, assuming they are not regenerated away through 'opportunity areas' developments. Are those articulating and responding to this policy looking at the wider food system issues?

A further area of concern is whether the Healthy Catering Commitments will undermine the quality and culture of ethnic foods in ways which reduce access, especially to lower-income or older members of the community. What innovation could these food providers come up with if genuinely consulted and if they had more access to opportunities for community or small scale food growing? What are the barriers and opportunities to these possibilities and what proportion of 'community' food growers are drawn from the ethnic backgrounds which run the A5 food outlets or who frequent them?

Land access for food growing and good contacts for initiating and maintaining food hubs to cater for their communities may present high thresholds.

Might planning initiatives support linkages between the two types of entrepreneur: the grower and the seller? There are benefits in trialling locally grown potatoes and other vegetables used in 'chicken shops'? Other hot food outlets also could make use of locally grown pak choi, chayote, cabbage, spinach, carrots, okra and tomatoes, all of which are ingredients in many a healthy ethnic food offering and which are to be found within local food growers harvests. Thyme for change?

Why is it that corporate chains which also have a hot food takeaway provision which may well contribute to childhood obesity and diabetes are nowhere discussed in the policy narrative or the supporting evidence. Indeed, the nutritional difference between 'hot counter' chicken wings and the A5 offers are likely imperceptible. Many of the former do not even operate under the stringencies of A5 licensing. Recently, some chain outlets have provided minimal seating and thus possibly qualify for A3 licensing escaping the gaze of local planners,

but are equally as frequented by hordes of schoolchildren at lunchtimes.

For many children Hot Food Takeaways, as described, may represent not only a lunchtime alternative, but also an after school (or even breakfast) meal in households where there may be few low cost alternatives. The uptake of 'chicken shop' provisions cannot be viewed in isolation from child food poverty statistics, which of course relate to discussions on family poverty, regional deprivation, closure of traditional markets, access to good, culturally appropriate foods by working class families.

Of course, not to be overlooked are traditions of good food even where there is poverty because of food practices which value sound offerings of wholesome vegetarian and vegan food, as a tradition, despite the stereotypes applied to these communities by mass media and even arising out of planners perspectives:

**'Local planning authorities and planning applicants could have particular regard to the following issues:**

- ***proximity to locations where children and young people congregate such as schools, community centres and playgrounds***
- ***evidence indicating high levels of obesity, deprivation and general poor health in specific locations***
  - ***over-concentration and clustering of certain use classes within a specified area***
- ***odours and noise impact***
- ***traffic impact***

(London Plan topic paper: Hot food takeaways January 2018, italics are authors)

The intersection of race and class further disadvantages lower income families who are often on the receiving end of these racial stereotypes. The media tropes of working class immigrant children and adults hanging around hot food takeaways owned by their brethren and being perceived as anti-social and generating offensive smells, noise and waste is an attribution as old as class distinctions have been in place.

This is further compounded by fear and distrust of 'foreign' others. To what extent does this play into highlighting these A5 providers as the main cause of poor public health?

The relationships between the different amenities relating to health, social welfare and associated infrastructure, and the local food economies, especially from a local community perspective need to be considered in the light of the potential impact of these A5 license curtailments.

What might be the impact of the A5 license reductions in the context of gentrification where traditional foods vie with new 'foodism'? This draws attention to a role for the diversity of local communities in borough and London wide planning decisions to ensure more just decision making. In the absence of this, the larger corporations, with bigger advertising budgets, compete for the attention of school children in the same localities as smaller A5 food outlets.

It is also not known what relationships may exist between the mainly Asian owned chicken shops and local grocery outlets in terms of ownership, management or staffing. This too needs to be explored to optimise both local amenity value and a variety of food provision in what might otherwise be a food desert.



As A3 licenses have not been singled out, sitting and eating within these food outlets or transporting home a greasy bag with half of a chicken may become more acceptable ways of becoming obese. We ask, is this a matter then of power and politics?

Many of these issues may not even seep into the consciousness of policy makers who live more privileged lifestyles and for whom there are more food options both locally and within a short car ride away. They are also perhaps able to afford living in areas where food deserts don't exist and 'chicken shops' barely feature: instead patisseries, niche delicatessens and wine sellers are in abundance, but receive no negative nutrition-critical focus.

There is a need for carefully controlled integrated impact assessments to be carried out with full community involvement to further study the implications and opportunities this policy has for the affected communities and their environments as well as for the unexplored opportunities which exist. The development of more comprehensive, inclusive and well designed lifetime neighbourhoods offer a way forward to show how health affirming change can be implemented, especially in the more deprived communities of the city.

The full policy to which this article is written in response can be found at

<https://www.london.gov.uk/what-we-do/planning/london-plan/new-london-plan/draft-new-london-plan/chapter-6-economy/policy-e9-re-tail-markets-and-hot-food-takeaways>.

## Beekeeping in Community Food Projects

*Text by Sean Hearn.*

Beekeeping has made a dramatic rise in public awareness but not all beekeeping is created equal. It's time for the community food movement rethinks its relationship to beekeeping.

Beekeeping has seen a dramatic rise in popularity over the last ten years especially in urban areas. Local and urban honey are now ubiquitous and awareness around the issues bees face is more readily available. Pesticides, lack of forage and diseases are commonly discussed in the media and companies and organization are keen to be perceived as bee-friendly. However there is a common misconception that all beekeeping is the same and that beekeeping is synonymous with ecological sensitivity.

However beekeeping practice, much like farming practice, is expressed in a whole spectrum of different practices, each with their own techniques, assumptions and values.

The majority of beekeeping practiced in the UK is far more aligned with the industrial farming systems that have become so alarmingly prevalent, than the ecologically sensitive practices of organic farmers. Conventional beekeeping very often includes introducing pesticides and antibiotics into the hive, routine sugar feeding, regular and stressful interventions in the honeybees nest space and suppressing the reproductive processes of the bees. Sound familiar?

Unfortunately the foundation of conventional beekeeping comes from an industrial mindset much like industrial animal husbandry. Yield and 'efficiency' are prioritized over systemic health.

Industrial beekeeping is still the hegemonic force in the beekeeping world and beekeeping alternatives are 20 years behind the rest of the sustainable food movement. The massive majority of beekeepers regardless of their individual intention for learning about bees will be trained in beekeeping methods that are fundamentally geared towards high yields of honey.

As public awareness of bees has risen so has the number of new beekeepers with unprecedented numbers of urban beekeepers. So much so that in the beekeeping community a conversation has begun questioning whether our cities have enough forage to support the burgeoning honeybee population.

Now, a fringe group of beekeepers are bucking the industrial trend and exploring alternative practices.

Recently, we have seen a massive rise in entrepreneurial beekeepers starting businesses focused on the premium high value product that urban honey has become. In this somewhat hysterical drive to jump on the good PR bandwagon that bees have become many companies owning high rise properties employ beekeepers as part of their corporate social responsibility programs. I think it is fair to suggest this is equivalent to dealing with the systemic issues affecting chickens by setting up micro battery farms on every corporate high rise. The green wash is so absurd as to become farcical.



Where does this leave the state of beekeeping in community projects. The massive majority of urban community food projects that are focused on sustainability and high levels of welfare, projects that would never dream of keeping animals in conditions that threatened their welfare, nevertheless have bees on their sites whose basic lifecycle is being compromised. I know this is not intentional on the part of these projects and often the beekeepers involved but it is simply the case. I personally feel it is time for us as a community to start having this conversation so we can more consciously choose how to move forward and find more healthy ways of working with Honeybees

This situation is not necessarily caused by ill will in any way but it seems that people just don't know. The Life Cycle of honeybees is complex and alien to us. If we see a mammal in conditions where it is difficult for it to move, for example, it is no great leap of the imagination for us to identify with this animal and recognise that this being is not being kept in ways that support its health, this touches us viscerally. Who amongst us knows what the equivalent would look like in a honeybee family?

We simply don't know how a healthy honeybee family behaves and how we might interact with them in a way that respects this health.

As projects are often understaffed and workers and volunteers overworked and underpaid, they often lack the capacity to skill up staff in sustainable beekeeping and there persists a basic assumption that having bees on site is inherently a good thing. Can we begin to challenge these assumptions and offer more nuanced perspectives on the ways we work with Honeybees?

Simply supporting our wider community becoming aware of this issues will be a massive step forward. Understanding how bees behave, the challenges they face and the issues surrounding beekeeping practice can sound daunting. But as a community we excel in sharing complex ecological and social ideas simply and effectively and we can do the same with bees. Sustainable beekeeping as a practice is not only more suited for community projects because it is a more ethical way of relating to honeybees, it is often much more practical. Most sustainable hives are open source, have a lower carbon footprint, can be built simply with minimal carpentry skills for a fraction of the cost of conventional hives.

10 years ago beekeeping training was almost entirely monopolized by the industrial mind-set style of beekeeping. Fortunately there has been a sea change in british beekeeping and now there are many more types of beekeeping trainings available and enthusiastic beekeepers are increasing willing to share what they have learnt. Alternative trainings now exist in most parts of the country and are often very affordable. Community gardens are already havens for these wild bees and with minimal effort and resource we can continue to support a diverse range of bees in our gardens. There a various regional networks of beekeepers exploring more sustainable methods. In London we have formed a network of beekeepers called London Ecological Api-centred BeeKeepers network (LEAbees for short) who are keen to support all beekeepers exploring sustainable beekeeping.

Bees affect people. Something happens when you enter an apiary, that touches people and leaves an impression. Bees give us the gift of helping us to reconnect with the world around us, in its complexity, wildness and wonder. It is rare in most people's lives to be in relationship with something still so connected to it's wild nature, with something that so fiercely insists on our presence.

Being in a relationship with honeybees supports a deepening understanding of our interconnection to all life.

Honeybees have a natural place in any community garden and their presence creates beneficial and often unexpected connections. I hope we can find ways that support people in our communities to share in this connection, so that our gardens all have apiaries that become spaces of delight, community resilience and learning.

*Sean Hearn is sustainable beekeeper based in London. Sean regularly delivers talks and training around sustainable beekeeping. Sean has also worked in community food projects as a grower. He currently is a grower at the Castle Climbing Centre, and manages the apiary there and at Organiclea's growing site Hawkwood. Follow their blog at*

<https://attheapiary.wordpress.com/>.



# The 25-year environment plan score card

Text by Paul de Zylva, Friends of the Earth.

Reprinted with permission from FOE, [friendsoftheearth.uk](http://friendsoftheearth.uk). Theresa May's original speech can be found on the [gov.uk](http://gov.uk) website under Prime Minister's Speech on the Environment 11 January 2018. ([www.gov.uk/government/speeches/](http://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/))

## Here's what we don't like

**No legal underpinning:** The government's word is no guarantee. The plan must have legal grounding if it's to stay on track.

**Too vague on climate change:** The government should ban fracking and open-cast coal mining. It should unlock subsidies for new onshore wind power capacity. And it must stick to the UK's carbon budgets so that we make our fair contribution to meeting the Paris climate change agreement.

**Too slow on plastics:** The government says many plastics are avoidable. If so, why take so long to act? And why just "explore" extending the 5p charge for plastic bags, when small retailers already welcome the idea? This could happen today. Why the wait? The government should reduce and ultimately ban single-use plastics.



**Bad air:** A Clean Air Strategy will be consulted on this year and this will "set out how we will continue to seek improvements to public health". This is inadequate – we need action now to prevent the 40,000 early deaths each year from air pollution. The government should urgently publish a revised Air Quality Action Plan which will end illegal levels of air pollution by the end of 2019. This should include a nationwide network of Clean Air Zones and a scrappage scheme to help people replace the most polluting vehicles.

**Toothless environment watchdog?** Will the new environment watchdog be properly resourced and free to regulate? Natural England and the Environment Agency have been weakened by cuts and political pressure to pull their punches instead of protecting our environment.

**New forests for old?** The plan backs the creation of a new Northern Forest from Hull to Liverpool, which is welcome. Meanwhile, the government also supports the routing of HS2 north of Birmingham which threatens 35 irreplaceable ancient woodlands.

This is a supreme irony. England needs both new forests and old woodlands.

**Wishy-washy on flood risk:** The government says it will see whether drainage schemes to protect households from flooding should be required in new developments. So far it's resisted making Sustainable Urban Drainage Schemes (SuDS) standard – egged on by developers who say they would add to costs. The Environment Agency (EA)'s role in assessing flood risk from new development is only to be "considered". The EA is routinely ignored by local councils. It has said that it lacks the resources to scrutinise all planning applications.

## Here's what we like

**Laws and standards:** A commitment to retain current EU green laws. This is good because EU standards will be central to the quality of our air, beaches, wildlife and food. Its goals will need new legal underpinning including to ensure trade deals do not undermine standards of foods, animal welfare and consumer protection.

**UK global leadership:** A promise to lead internationally on tackling climate change and wildlife crime. The plans says it places "the utmost importance on our commitments to biodiversity and nature

conservation under international agreements." But even now the Clean Growth strategy will make the UK fall short of what's needed to honour the Paris climate agreement.

**Water fountains:** The plan says it will support water companies, high-street shops, cafes and transport hubs to offer new refill points for people to top up water bottles for free in every major city and town in England. A nice practical action that will help deal with plastic bottle waste – although obviously not enough on its own.

**Young people's environment:** 2019 will be a Year of Environment Action "putting children and young people at its heart". A Nature Friendly Schools scheme will run in the most disadvantaged areas from autumn 2018. And a Natural Environment for Health and Wellbeing project will involve teachers, health professionals and councils to promote contact with nature.

**Seas and fish stocks:** The plan promises a "fishing policy that ensures seas return to health and fish stocks are replenished". The government says it will "extend the marine protected areas around our coasts so that these stretches of environmentally precious maritime heritage have the best possible protection."

**Nature recovery network:** The document mentions a new network for nature “to connect our best wildlife sites to overcome their isolation and fragmentation”.

Such a network could improve conditions for soil, water and air quality and help wildlife – from bees to beavers. Similarly, exploring the potential to link up National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty could help overcome fragmentation and make more space for nature, landscapes and natural features to function as they should.

## What would good look like?

Here are some ways to assess if the government’s plans are up to the task:

**Curbing climate change:** the UK must deliver its fair share of cuts in greenhouse gas emissions to meet

the Paris climate agreement’s 1.5 degrees temperature goal, and be zero carbon by 2040.

**Restoring nature:** the UK must lead international action starting by securing a strong global agreement on nature in 2020.

**Leading also means** ending the UK’s harmful consumption of commodities such as soy for animal feed which are driving the loss of rainforests and other vital habitats.

**The government must** back its words in law including current EU laws and standards – such as on air quality and nature protection – and ensure these are properly implemented and even strengthened post Brexit.



PHOTO CREDIT: PAUL GLENDALL

**The government must** direct public money for farmers and landowners away from harmful actions that are driving declines in wildlife, habitats and soil and water quality and toward wildlife-friendly farming, flood prevention and care of natural ecosystems.

**A fresh approach** to public health will transform people's food access and choices, and end persistent failures to ensure people breathe clean air.

**Everyone** will live within 5 minutes' walk of quality natural spaces in town and country alike and every child will have daily contact with nature for play, recreation, healthy development and educational attainment.

**All local councils** will have the resources and expertise to make good decisions about their area including properly assessing planning applications.

## Staying the course: 25 years is a long time

If Theresa May can deliver her grand plan she can outdo David Cameron, Gordon Brown, Tony Blair, John Major and Margaret Thatcher – prime ministers who presided over the past 25 years of environmental decline.

Imagine how much could have happened by now had they taken our environment seriously? We could be breathing clean air today instead of still having to force government to give us this as of right. We could be on the way to a zero-waste society not facing a rising tide of plastic. And the state of nature in the UK would not be so dire that over half of wild species are, shockingly, in long-term decline.

25 years ago, in 1993, England's footballers failed to qualify for the World Cup. That year the IRA bombed Warrington and London's Bishopsgate. And the oil tanker the MV Braer polluted seas around the Shetland Isles with 84,700 tonnes of crude oil.

Oil spills still happen. But this year England will play in the World Cup in Russia and Northern Ireland is mainly peaceful. So there can be progress in 25 years. But we need action fast. It's not just our quality of life, but lives that are at stake. We need our politicians not just promising the Earth but delivering it – for a change.

*Here's to the next 25 years, starting right now.*