

**North Yorkshire Council**

**Corporate & Partnership Overview & Scrutiny Committee**

**9 September 2024**

**Notice of Motion – Right to Grow Feedback Report**

**Report of the Corporate Director of Resources**

**1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT**

- 1.1 The report reviews a Right to Grow motion proposed at the Scrutiny Board on 24<sup>th</sup> May 2024. This information has been provided to enable the Committee to consider the proposal made and to draft a response for Full Council's consideration.

**2.0 SUMMARY**

- 2.1 On 24 May 2024 the Scrutiny Board considered a Notice of Motion from Cllrs Gostlow and Mason relating to a Right to Grow approach for the Council. It was agreed that the motion should be considered by the Corporate & Partnerships Overview & Scrutiny Committee at the September 2024 meeting, with the intention of reporting back to Full Council in November 2024
- 2.2 This report provides a brief explanation of what we mean by 'Right to Grow' and the potential emerging implications of implementing the approach for North Yorkshire Council.
- 2.3 Whilst supportive of establishing an approach to community growing spaces, it is identified that there are potential implications for delivery across a number of service areas. Further work is needed to ensure that all service areas required to develop a community grow process have appropriate capacity to respond, particularly during the current transformation and savings priorities for the council.

**3.0 BACKGROUND**

- 3.1 The initial proposal to support a Right to Grow motion was proposed by Councillor Hannah Gostlow (and seconded by Councillor Steve Mason). It stated:
- 3.2 *This Council notes:*
- *Its own commitment to conserving biodiversity in order to help mitigate climate change by increasing capture and storage of carbon in ecosystems, and support adaptation to climate impacts.*
  - *That trees and green space in urban environments can help prevent floods, cool streets, sequester carbon emissions, filter air pollution, and provide an important habitat for insect and plant-life.*
  - *The increasing need to put the health and well-being of residents at the heart of our Council strategies.*
  - *The powerful evidence which demonstrates the link between people's health and wellbeing and the availability of fresh locally produced food.*
  - *That the cost-of-living crisis is creating real hunger reinforcing the need for healthy fresh food at an affordable price.*
  - *That communities coming together to grow can radically reduce costs to NHS and social care budgets by reducing loneliness and providing healthy food.*

- *That there is plenty of under-used publicly owned land which could be used for community food growing while also improving the public realm.*

### 3.3 *This Council agrees:*

- *Identify and produce a map of all Council owned land suitable for community cultivation that is publicly available at no cost to residents, and actively promoted across all wards.*
- *Land should be considered suitable for cultivation for food or biodiversity unless containing proven hazards or unless development is due within 24 months.*
- *Make this land available for cultivation by a simple license to community organisations at no cost.*
- *Ensure the license does not contain conditions that present a significant barrier to residents in terms of financial or practical requirements.*
- *Ensure that where community groups cultivating on public realm land for food growing or wildlife spaces, the groups are given an opportunity to bid for the land should it be tendered to sale.*
- *Allow the necessary infrastructure such as access to water and/or for water harvesting to enable sustainable cultivation for all.*
- *Ensure that allotment provision adheres to the 1969 Thorpe Report which recommends a minimum provision equivalent to 15 plots per 1,000 households. In the 2011 census, 256,594 households were recorded in North Yorkshire.*

## 4.0 **Community Growing**

### 4.1 What is a 'Right to Grow'

The term 'right to grow' in the strictest sense is a phrase coined by Incredible Edible. Incredible Edible is a national recognised network of groups committed to food activism and community resilience. The 'Right to Grow' campaign seeks to effectively enshrine in law - and at its minimum, council policy - a community right to rejuvenate and cultivate areas of 'unloved' public land for food and wildlife. A draft Bill has been developed by Incredible Edible in order to lobby Government to protect spaces for community grow. This comes with considered elements that communities would wish to see such as:

- maintain a list of public land suitable for "community cultivation" or "environmental enhancement", including land owned by the NHS, government agencies and possibly water utilities.
- Make it straight forward for community groups to secure free leases to cultivate the land
- Place a moratorium on disposal of any land to allow groups to bid for the land (in line with Community Right to Bid processes).
- apply for a certificate of lawful use to cultivate the land for an agreed period, without any rental charges or ownership change
- Land that was too contaminated for growing vegetables could still be used for alternatives (ie bee keeping)

4.2 Some local authority areas have adapted the approach to create community grow policies which uphold the spirit of the proposed bill.

4.3 Hull and Runnymede Councils have formally granted motions to adopt a Right to Grow approach. Calderdale, (the original home of Incredible Edible in Todmorden) have developed a policy direction over time with a more diverse approach to community grow. They have provided a good framework for how communities can work with councils to achieve a similar process.

Further information on these approaches can be found at:

- Incredible Edible Limited: [Right To Grow – Incredible Edible](#)
- [Right to Grow: Progress in Hull – Incredible Edible](#)
- Calderdale Council: [Sustainable food | Calderdale Council](#)

4.4 What each area has in common are key ingredients for developing a successful approach to community growing. These could be summarised as:

- Understanding local community interest and capacity to develop grow spaces
- Working alongside officers, from across service areas to understand the most effective way to achieve community grow and understand the implications this can have on several areas of council resource (i.e. assets, planning, legal, localities...)
- Providing information to support communities to develop a community grow approach (i.e. toolkits, templates)
- Identifying funding opportunities for communities to develop and maintain grow spaces

4.5 Initial work to understand how such a process could be delivered in North Yorkshire has identified that there are multiple implications across several service areas in order to have an efficient approach, considering the expanse of North Yorkshire and the current transition priorities of the new council.

## **5.0 IMPACT ON OTHER SERVICES/ORGANISATIONS**

5.1 Early indications of the impact on services would suggest that implementation is more complex than it initially appears. Work is required across multiple service areas to understand firstly the set-up resource required and the resources, roles and responsibilities needed in the long term. There is no identified additional resource in order to develop this against other priorities and action would need to be absorbed into current service capacities. The impact of the motion could be identified across the following services:

- Assets and Property – mapping, negotiating and managing land assets. Note: restructure processes pending and several land/asset reviews underway
- Communications and Marketing – development and design of information
- Customers – developing and managing enquiry processes
- Finance – best value disposal of land assessment, utility costs, grant funds
- Highways – mapping, assessing and managing requests
- ICT/data systems support – mapping, developing systems for delivery
- Legal – best value disposal of land assessment, lease/contract development
- Localities – community engagement, development, grant management
- Planning – assessment of land allocation, development of planning policy, change in permissions, managing applications
- Public Health – research and outcomes monitoring, partner and community engagement

5.2 This list is not exhaustive but gives an indication of the breadth of resource, time and coordination requirements needed to have an appropriate approach to community growing initiatives supported by the council.

5.3 As a consequence, colleagues have expressed concerns as to the council's ability to deliver on the motion at a time of multiple demands on service areas. Priorities are currently focused around the transformation of services across the new council and on establishing priorities for managing the council's deficit position up to 2027/28.

- 5.4 Alternative approaches could be considered which help provide a 'lighter touch' approach to reduce impact on services and to allow time to understand the most efficient and effective way to support community initiatives. Reflecting on a more community responsive approach (i.e. assessing land that the community identify rather than a mass mapping approach, developing lease templates) would support the spirit of the motion and enable some initial time for officers across the affected service areas to develop and test a process that can be managed within current resources.

This would enable time to gain a clearer understanding of the legalities and impact on land asset management, and to engage with communities to understand how such a process could work best, reduce 'red tape', and manage expectations. Findings could then be brought back to an appropriate committee in due course.

## **6.0 EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS**

- 6.1 Not assessed at this stage.

## **7.0 CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS**

- 7.1 Community grow could make a contribution to biodiversity and carbon reduction initiatives. A full assessment has not been completed at this stage.

## **8.0 CONTRIBUTION TO COUNCIL PRIORITIES**

- 8.1 Developing healthy and biodiverse community spaces supports the Council Plan priority themes of:

### **Place and Environment –**

- Communities are supported and work together to improve their local area.
- To promote biodiversity and support nature recovery.
- To promote sustainable land use and green spaces.

### **Health and Well-Being –**

- People are supported to have a good quality of life and enjoy active, healthy lifestyles
- Reduced variations in health tackling the root causes of inequality.
- To encourage people to make informed choices about their health and encourage active and healthy lifestyles.
- To maximise the potential of natural assets and environment within North Yorkshire to improve physical and mental health.
- To reduce health and social inequalities through healthy place-shaping and targeted work with groups, communities and neighbourhoods.

### **Organisation –**

- A well-led and managed, financially sustainable and forward- thinking council and a carbon neutral council.
- To embed climate change into every service and into policy and decision making so that taking climate responsible actions becomes 'business as usual'.

An approach to community grow spaces also supports the Council's **pillars of Locality Working**, particularly the principles of:

- local action – bringing together local councillors, public sector agencies, businesses and communities to get things done in their local area
- local empowerment - Devolution of services and assets to town and parish councils and community groups where they want to take these on and have the capacity to do so

## 9.0 OPTIONS CONSIDERED

Taking account of the information within this report and the issues raised at the meeting, the options available to the Committee are:

### 9.1 **Agree the motion –**

Agree no further information is required and agree a recommendation to go to the next meeting of Full Council in November 2024.

### **Not uphold the motion –**

Agree no further information is required and that the Motion is not progressed. Recognise the complexities and demands of the Motion upon council resources.

### **Not uphold the motion and agree an alternative way forward –**

Officers can examine an alternative approach through a cross-service officer working group. This allows opportunity to develop a more responsive approach to community grow within the context of current capacity and cross-cutting strategic priorities.

## 10.0 RECOMMENDATION(S)

The Committee is asked to recommend to Full Council that the Motion as written is not upheld due to the implications of the approach on council priorities and resources.

The Committee recommend that Full Council give additional time to officers to develop a responsive approach to community grow within the context of current capacity and cross-cutting strategic priorities.

Gary Fielding  
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3<sup>rd</sup> September 2024

Report Author and Presenter – Angela Crossland, Head of Healthier Lives, Community and Economy – Public Health

Note: Members are invited to contact the author in advance of the meeting with any detailed queries or questions.