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CASE STUDY:
A RIGHT TO GROW FOR HULL

When the northern city of Hull made headlines by adopting a Right to Grow policy, it catapulted awareness of the campaign into the public eye. But the headlines were only one part of the story. How did the policy come to be? And what impact has it had for the city?

The Right to Grow policy that has been implemented in Hull, in its scope and practice, is and will be unique to Hull. This will be true of Right to Grow in any other city or region. However, this case study will highlight some general approaches and methods that will be essential to any successful adoption of the policy. This report was compiled by Incredible Edible using reports provided by Hull Food Partnership and Hull City Council.

BACKGROUND

Hull City Council already had a right to grow, of sorts, as part of Hull Local Plan 2016 to 2032. Policy 46, section 1 reads:

"The use of land and buildings as new allotments, orchards and for local food growing spaces and production will be supported, including the temporary use of vacant or derelict land or buildings and the use of amenity green space on housing estates and other open space areas, where this does not conflict with other policy objectives or land use priorities."

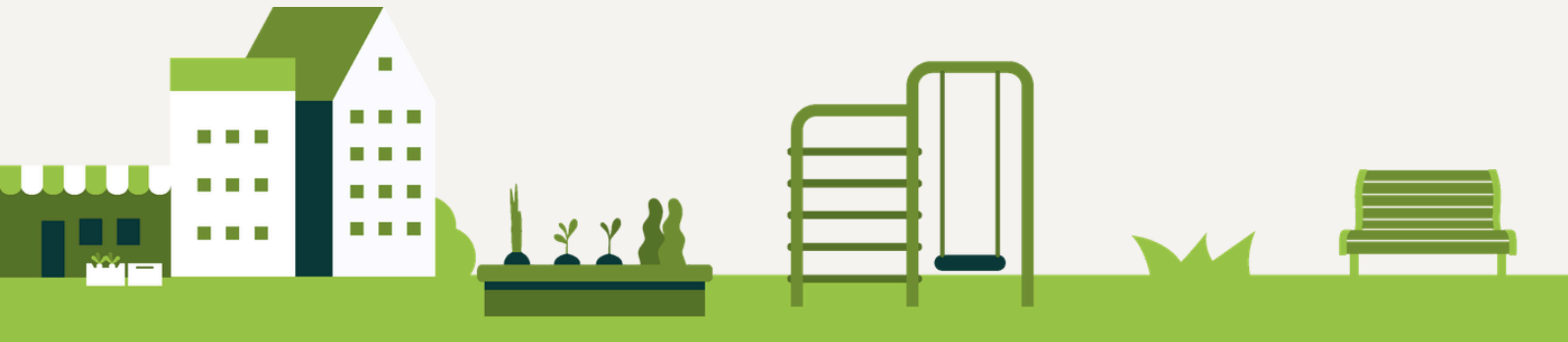
What this lacked was any of the formal mechanisms necessary to enable anyone to claim this right – at least not without serious commitment and effort, even before they lifted a spade.

An important first lesson here is that a declaration of a Right to Grow means very little without a mechanism in place to claim that right.

THE MOTION TO COUNCIL

The current Right to Grow Policy was born out of a series of 'Food Hustings' facilitated by the Hull Food Partnership in the run up to local elections in May 2023.

The issue of Right to Grow came up at one of the hustings and prospective councillor, Gill Kennett, offered to steer



a Right to Grow motion through council if she were elected. Significantly, a prospective member of the opposing party also promised to support the motion.

Hull Food Partnership realised that it had an opportunity to pass this motion with cross party support, and hopefully with enough momentum to ensure its effective implementation. At all of the hustings, there was a significant showing of candidates, who were appreciative of this opportunity to engage, and this could be further explored as a way of engaging local politicians on the Right to Grow.

Following the spring hustings, The Right to Grow motion was passed with unanimous support from Hull City Council's elected members in September 2023.

While the essential political work was done by a committed councillor, this was a collaborative effort. Councillor Kennett welcomed the guidance from Hull Food Partnership with support from Incredible Edible, and accepted the wording for the motion proposed by the two groups verbatim.

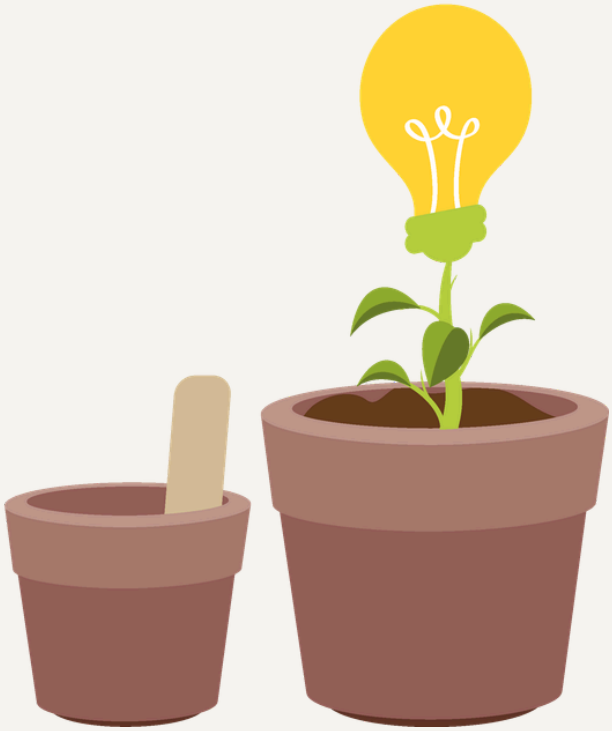
Food Partnerships are often knowledgeable but not expert. So, Hull Food Partnership chose to work closely with Incredible Edible on the development of the policy and specifically the wording of the motion, because of the expertise offered and experience of lobbying for a similar motion at a national level.

While the motion was passed unanimously, some councillors did express reservations, mainly around cost implications, guerrilla gardening and people using land for commercial purposes. Therefore, it is important to understand that there will be concerns and misapprehensions from members, and be prepared to address these issues with evidence as necessary.

THE TASK AND FINISH GROUP

The next stage (which in many ways was the most vital) was the implementation of the newly created policy. The initial plan was to put the policy through the relevant scrutiny committee. However, there were so many legal and logistical issues to address that the council instead decided to initiate a Task and Finish Group to complete the process.

The failure of Hull's previous Policy 46 included a lack of any simple way for anyone to take up the right, so the Task and Finish group was created to develop the concrete process necessary to implement Right to Grow. And, along the way, it would also need to address several complex issues.



The decision in Hull to bring together a collaborative group from across both the council and the community was a hugely important factor to ensure a well-balanced process for implementing the policy. Incredible Edible deemed this collaboration between citizen and state so important, that wording was subsequently added to the campaign's draft motion so that councils would also commit to this process as part of adopting the motion; *"Work with community representatives to develop a clear, simple and timely process"*

The group's permanent membership was made up of elected members, council officers (from Hull City Council's Parks and Open Spaces department) and co-opted members from Hull Food Partnership, Yorkshire Wildlife Trust and EMS Ltd (another VSCE organisation). Invited attendees included council officers from relevant departments such as legal, highways, neighbourhoods and estates, as well as other relevant experts.

The group met monthly for 6 sessions and addressed a range of issues including deciding who was to administer the scheme, what the application process would be and how consultations would be carried out and disputes settled. Other discussions that needed to be had included:



Cost

It needed to be made clear that this is a Right to Grow, but does not come with council or infrastructure support, for example supplying water outlets or storage facilities. There is a small administrative cost, and this did need to be accounted for.

Support

There is some existing support available, and this was collated. For example, the 'Living with Water' project can provide water storage butts, and the council convenes an Open Spaces Network that supports community growers.

The legal status of Right to Grow land

There was some concern over leasing arrangements and the ability of the council to take the land back. A licensing arrangement was agreed whereby the council can reclaim land. This contract also laid out other legal arrangements, so needed to be approved by the legal department.

What land is available and/or suitable.

Council land is subject to a variety of uses. Some will be subject to future development and some would be unsuitable (i.e. if it resulted in obscuring the view of the highway for drivers or pedestrians). It was therefore necessary to make sure that all relevant departments were consulted and would be able to give the proper advice to groups looking to take on land.

Insurance and liability

This was a major issue to address, as insurance costs could be a barrier to some groups. The options were: put the onus on the group to find insurance, set up a group scheme that groups could buy into, or for the council to cover the costs. Ultimately the decision was made that the council's own Public Liability Insurance (PLI) could cover groups who are doing only general gardening tasks and who don't use power tools or host open volunteering sessions. For those groups carrying out more than general gardening, maintenance with power tools and who organise activities on site that the public are invited to, their activities are not covered by the council's PLI and instead the council strongly encourages groups (especially constituted groups) to purchase their own PLI (to cover up to £5 million). But, importantly, in order to prevent barriers the council is clear that having PLI is not a requirement of the licence they sign with the council.

What does Right to Grow mean?

As the consultation progressed, it became obvious that there was a wish to adopt land for bio-diversity-only projects as well as food cultivation and this impacted, for example, the content of the licence and the sort of support that would be signposted

At the end of the Task and Finish Group process a report was produced, and the council could then proceed with implementation. But, having agreed a way to implement the policy the council officers still needed to put the system into place; a process which took several months to finalise.

Here are some general, but essential, learning points from this endeavour that should help other organisations and regions in their journey:

- *Right to Grow is a minimal cost and empowering policy, and therefore should be a way to engage local councils on a successful food project and policy*
- *Right to Grow is only policy if it is backed up by a concrete and accessible scheme that allows people to access that right*
- *Creating that scheme is a somewhat complex process. Passing the policy is only the beginning.*
- *It can take a long time. From the idea through to actual implementation took us approximately 5 years - The fact that it's slow is not unexpected, it has to happen at the speed which councils move.*
- *Have someone dedicated to seeing the process through from start to finish.*
- *Be willing to adapt elements to suit the desires and respond to the needs of the local community.*

Darren Squires,
Hull Food Partnership





IMPLEMENTATION

In May 2025, Hull launched delivery of their Right to Grow policy. This included the launch of a dedicated council webpage with an online application form, a list of helpful organisations and links, and a finalised set of internal processes in place.

As with any new scheme, learnings and adjustments continued to take place and by the end of the first year of delivery, there had already been 18 applications through the Right to Grow framework.

However, in the early parts of the programme, with some inevitable teething challenges, it became clear that not everyone who applied had fully understood what the program was for; five applications were seeking funding rather than land and two were for land that was not held by Hull City Council. The applications being made were for a mix of uses; with a little over half of them focusing on creating spaces for nature only, and a little under half working on food growing with nature.

For each application, the community member works with the council through the support of the Open Spaces Community Engagement Officer. This role acts as a key point of contact, and includes detailed discussion, site visits, guidance and help for the applicant throughout, and taking the lead on steering and nudging the application through the council's formal process.

By 18 months into the program, and following some applicants pulling out, there were three signed land access agreements in place, three very close to being finalised and an additional three moving through the process.

> *The main thing I've found helpful is to keep in contact with the applicants as much as possible to keep them informed, even when things are delayed. Most people understand that things take time, but I have been told many times by the applicants that having my role as a point of contact is really important to them. Also, without it, and without me chasing the application up at different stages and moving it on, it would delay the process as all departments are already stretched to capacity.*
>
> *Jane Winter, Open Spaces Community Engagement Officer, Hull City Council*



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A SIMPLIFIED PROCESS MAP FOR HULL CITY COUNCIL'S RIGHT TO GROW

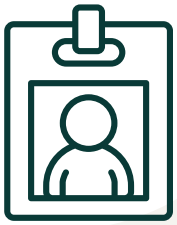
Land identified by community group



Application completed on council website



Application received by Open Spaces Engagement Officer (OSEO)



OSEO makes site visit to discuss plans



Relevant departments notified, and agreement in principle decision made



- Neighbourhoods and Housing
- Property and Assets
- Neighbourhood Co-ordinator
- Conservation Planning Officer
- Highways
- Contaminated Land Officer

Community consultation takes place led by OSEO and Neighbourhood Co-ordinator



Paperwork passed through Legal and is signed by applicants



Ward Members and relevant department Assistant Directors sign off paperwork submitted by OSEO



Growing can begin!

