

4.4 Food growing as part of new developments

- 4.4.1 Policies in both the 2018 Cambridge and South Cambridgeshire Local Plans make recommendations for allotment provision as part of open space standards for new developments⁵⁹. In many cases where provision of allotment on-site is not possible, planning contributions are sought. However, in addition to formal allotment provision, new developments offer the opportunity to think more creatively about incorporating opportunities for food growing into design.
- 4.4.2 The inclusion of food growing areas extends beyond conventional provision of gardens and allotments in that it can also include the creative use of roofs, balconies, atriums and courtyards where external space is limited. It could also include the use of edible plants as part of the landscaping of new developments, rather than the use of ornamental trees and shrubs.
- 4.4.3 There are many benefits associated with food growing as part of new developments, including:
- Improving the physical and mental wellbeing of residents;
 - Increasing biodiversity;
 - Supporting low carbon lifestyles by reducing carbon emissions associated with long distance food transportation; and
 - Greening the urban landscape.
- 4.4.4 Provision of food growing will need to be considered and integrated with other uses for open space, for example provision of sport and play facilities and access to open space. Consideration will also need to be given to the on-going management of the growing space and who will harvest the produce.

Technical and practical considerations

- 4.4.5 The following technical issues need to be taken into consideration as the starting point for food growing whatever the scale or circumstances or features being considered:
- **Land:** how much external land, if any, is available on the site, or can be made available through the design process?
 - **Use of building:** is there potential to incorporate growing spaces within, around and on the building? Design of balconies can provide small spaces for individuals to grow a limited selection of plants and are particularly suited to high density residential developments. It is critical to consider aspect. North facing balconies overshadowed by other high density buildings are unlikely to be suitable for food growing. Planting containers / window boxes can be incorporated into balcony design. Railings and structures joining neighbouring balconies can also be designed to support climbing / espaliered plants. Loading capacity for containers should be addressed at the design stage. Designing buildings with atriums or courtyards with adequate exposure to sunlight can create deliberate opportunities for food growing. Such situations will often create micro-climates allowing high value tender plants such as tomatoes and

⁵⁹ Cambridge Local Plan (2018) Policy 68: Open space and recreation provision through new development. South Cambridgeshire Local Plan (2018) Policy SC/7: Outdoor play space, informal open space and new development.

citrus fruits to be cultivated. Ground level beds or planters can be used. Care must be given in internal spaces to providing irrigation systems and allowing for water run-off.

- **Aspect and light:** Ideally growing spaces should be south facing. Food plants require exposure to direct sunlight during the growing period. If this is limited it may not prohibit food growing but it may restrict the choice of plants to those which require less light.
- **Water:** Any food growing will need a reliable water supply. Incorporating rainwater collection into any design is desirable, but easy access to mains water may also be necessary. Consideration should also be given to water delivery and storage systems to ensure risk of Legionella is controlled.
- **Wind:** Exposure to salty sea wind can damage plants and hinder their growth. Adequate protection needs to be planned into any growing space to allow crops to thrive.
- **Soil/growing medium:** An essential component for growing food which will vary according to the setting. Rooftop or container growing may require a more lightweight growing medium.
- **Compost:** All food growing requires on-going inputs to maintain the fertility of the growing medium. Provision of on-site composting is one option to provide this and will also help manage organic 'waste' generated within the development.
- **Contaminated Land:** Soil in urban settings may need to be checked for contamination and quality. Any site must be made safe for its existing use. The suitability of the land for growing food should be assessed as previous or current land use could have created contamination of the soil. It is the developer's responsibility to ensure any risks posed are appropriately managed. Depending on the circumstances, soil contamination can be overcome by use of containers or raised beds.
- **Access:** Depending on who the site will be used by (elderly people, children, etc.) adequate access must be planned for. In addition, heavyweight materials such as compost and tools may need to be taken to the site – a particular issue for rooftop or balcony growing.
- **Storage:** Adequate provision for the storage of tools and associated equipment will need to be integrated into the design.
- **Management and Maintenance:** Who will be growing the food and will there be a need to provide on-going management of the growing areas by a caretaker or external contractor?

4.4.6 Where creative approaches to food growing are proposed as part of new development, we would recommend early engagement with the local planning authority to ensure that all the above considerations are taken into account.