



Community Gardens Ireland

Let's Get Growing!



A sustainable vision for community growing spaces throughout Ireland



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Community Gardens Ireland

Community Gardens Ireland is a network of community gardens and allotments on the island of Ireland. In existence since 2011, it aims to support and promote community gardening in Ireland and Northern Ireland. Community Gardens Ireland is a purely voluntary group, whose committee has membership from all over the island of Ireland.

Community Gardens Ireland contribute positively to consultations regularly. In 2021, we have made the following submissions:

- Pre-budget submission to the Joint Committee on Social Protection, Community & Rural Development & the Islands
- Food Ombudsperson Consultation
- Climate Action Plan, 2021 consultation (Ireland)
- Climate Change Bill, 2021 consultation (Northern Ireland)
- Community Foundation Fund, in partnership with Social Farms and Gardens Northern Ireland (grant application)
- Public Consultation on the environmental assessment of the Draft CAP Strategic Plan 2023-2027

Our committee for 2021/22 is made up of the following volunteers:

- Taragh Cosgrove – Foxford Community Garden, Mayo
- Maeve Foreman – Mud Island Community Garden NEIC Dublin
- Tara Gallagher – OURganic gardens, Donegal
- Claire Lyons – Cherry Orchard Community Garden, Dublin 10
- Dónal McCormack – Blessington Allotments, Wicklow (current chairperson)
- John O'Donoghue – Muck & Magic Community Garden, Ballymun (current treasurer)
- Conor O'Kane – Social Farms & Gardens Northern Ireland (current secretary)
- Órlaigh Sally – Co. Tyrone & Community Gardener
- John Murphy – Co. Galway & Masters student
- Miren Samper – Blarney Park Community Garden, Dublin 12
- Justyna Traore – Top of the City Community Garden, Waterford





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Table of Contents

1. Executive Summary	4
2. Government Support for Allotments, Community Gardens, Urban Orchards and Community Food Initiatives.....	5
3. Background of Allotments & Community Gardens	6
4. Local Authority provision of plots in Ireland: 1911 – 2020.....	10
5. Local Authorities Actions on Allotments & Community Gardens.....	12
6. European Case Studies	17
7. Climate Change & Biodiversity	26
8. Recommendations	27
Appendix 1: Community Gardens Ireland 2021 Survey Findings	29
Appendix 2: Health & Wellness information on allotments & community gardens	30



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1. Executive Summary

Community Gardens Ireland is a network of community gardens and allotments on the island of Ireland. In existence since 2011, it aims to support and promote community gardening in Ireland and Northern Ireland.

Internationally, the evidence-based benefits of community gardens are many, from the proven physical, mental health and well-being benefits to educational, environmental, cultural and social gains. There is evidence that they hugely increase social capital by encouraging active citizenship and social connection, help reduce health inequalities, and contribute to reducing anti-social behaviour, thus making communities safer.

Despite the proven benefits, existing legislation and commitment in the form of the current Programme for Government, there is no country-wide policy in place to increase the number of allotments and community gardens. The existing legislation also provides little protection for communities. There is currently no clear duty put on local authorities to provide community growing space. Older legislation (1926 & 1934 Acquisition of Land (Allotments) Acts) were repealed in 1994 but in recent years they have been referenced by government departments, local authorities and others.

In urban areas the amount of land available for allotments and community gardens will become increasingly scarce unless this is address by Government. Community Gardens Ireland's own recent survey of its members highlighted that the majority of community gardens surveyed had temporary licences which can have large implications for funding purposes, and some were on temporary sites zoned for housing.

Compared to other countries, Ireland lags behind in the provision, support and protection of allotments and community gardens. Both Scotland and Wales have recently required that any change of use of allotments and community gardens be approved by a Scottish Government Minister or Welsh Government Minister before proceeding.

This submission therefore calls on the Department of Housing, Local Government & Heritage to provide support for community growing groups by reviewing the following recommendations for implementation:

Recommendation 1: Policy		Recommendation 2: Data		Recommendation 3: Support	
1A	New national strategy	2A	Waiting or registration list	3A	Approval by third party
1B	Irish National Community Growing Forum	2B	Urban areas	3B	Improved local authority communication
1C	Replacement legislation	2C	Measurable objectives	3C	Irish seed sharing library
1D	Local authority development plans	2D	Improved financial records		
1E	Community Land Trust				
1F	Clear responsibility				



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2. Government Support for Allotments, Community Gardens, Urban Orchards and Community Food Initiatives

The 2020 Programme for Government contains the following:



Programme for Government –
Our Shared Future

government and emerging EU policy.

- Establish an Independent Agriculture Appeals Review panel in legislation, as a priority, and ensure that the panel includes participants with practical knowledge and experience of farming.

International Market Diversification and Trade

As Ireland is a small open economy, exporting food and drinks produce to over 180 countries internationally, we recognise the importance of international markets and trade.

We will:

- Seek to protect existing markets and open new markets.
- Support the promotion of sustainable, high-quality Irish produce in premium target markets, to give our farmers a competitive advantage.
- Firmly defend Ireland's interests in international trade deals that may emerge, working with our network of colleagues in the European Commission and representatives in the European Parliament.
- Work closely with the agri-food sector to secure access to priority markets and to avail of opportunities that existing markets such as China and Japan afford the sector.

We will:

- Promote short, efficient routes to market that connect small food producers to the consumer and provide advisory, investment and marketing support for those who wish to diversify into new products.
- Support local authorities to expand the number of farmers' markets, farm shops and food emporiums; and support the formation of community-owned markets in all towns, showcasing local food produce from local farmers, growers, and food producers.
- Work with local authorities and local communities to develop community gardens, allotments, and urban orchards.
- Encourage schools and colleges to provide access to land where students can grow their own food.
- Support the small food producer, providing support for on-farm diversification enterprises, and investment in local processing facilities, allowing farmers to sell their products into the local and wider domestic markets.
- Examine how other countries have been successful in developing premium markets from family-farm produce.
- Introduce local food procurement policies for the public sector to encourage the availability of nutritious, locally sourced food in public sector areas such as schools, hospitals, government buildings, and prisons.

- Work with local authorities and local communities to develop community gardens, allotments, and urban orchards.

In addition, the COVID-19 Resilience & Recovery 2021 plan for The Path Ahead calls out support for community food projects as follows:

COVID-19 Resilience & Recovery 2021 The Path Ahead

- A programme of "citizen empowerment" wellbeing activities and initiatives will be delivered by Local Authorities with local partners, including activities supporting healthy living, physical activity, community food, creativity, managing chronic diseases and positive ageing.



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3. Background of Allotments & Community Gardens

3.1 Ireland

Allotments and Community Gardens have a long history in Ireland. Before the establishment of the Irish State in 1922, an act was enacted which assigned tenants with an allotment (no more than half an acre) when a cottage was provided. The law (Labourers Cottages and Allotments (Ireland) Act, 1882) still remains in effect.

Power to Land Commission where 3. Where under section eight of the principal Act the landlord and tenant of any holding have agreed and declared, or shall agree agreement and declaration as to and declare, by writing under their hands, what is the fair rent of the holding, and such agreement and declaration has been or shall fair rent of holding is filed, to make be filed in court, the Land Commission may at any time within six months from the passing of this Act, or within twelve months from an order as to the accommodation the date of the filing of such declaration and agreement, whichever shall last happen, order the tenant of such holding for the of the labourers employed on the accommodation of the labourers employed thereon to improve any existing cottage or cottages, or build any new cottage or cottages, holding, or assign to any such cottage an allotment not exceeding half an acre, and may by such order fix the terms as to rent and otherwise on which such accommodation is to be provided, and any such order may be made on the application of the landlord, or of the tenant of the holding, or of any labourer bonâ fide employed and required for the cultivation thereof.

Section 3 from the Labourers Cottages and Allotments (Ireland) Act, 1882 (still in effect):

<https://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/1882/act/60/enacted/en/print.html>

Within the first few years of the Irish State, the Acquisition of Land (Allotments) Act, 1926 was passed by the Dáil. This act was as a result of lobbying from plot holders throughout Ireland, and sought to mirror the [1908 Small Holdings & Allotments Act](#) for England and Wales. The 1908 act was provided in England and Wales to ensure that local authorities have a duty to provide allotments when six persons request them, along with giving the rights to compulsory purchase or compulsory hire land, and requires local authorities to keep a list of those interested in a plot. More recent changes in Scotland and Wales have included and expanded the requirement for local authorities to provide land when requested – more details on this are in Section 6.1 below.

The 1926 act in Ireland gave powers to the local authorities to issue compulsory purchase orders for land for local communities and provide land for community growing when representations have been made to them. Changes were made in 1934 to this act, to include provision for those who could not afford allotments. Both the 1926 and the 1934 acts were repealed in 1994.

1926 act: <https://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/1926/act/8/enacted/en/print.html>

1934 act: <https://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/1934/act/7/enacted/en/print.html>

1994 repealing of both acts: <https://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/1994/si/315/made/en/print>



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More recent legislation which covers the provision of allotments includes the Local Government Act, 2001, and the Planning and Development (Amendment) Act, 2010 for local development plans:

Amenity, recreation and other functions. **67.**—(1) In accordance with and subject to [section 66](#), a local authority may take such measures, engage in such activities or do such things (including the incurring of expenditure) as it considers necessary or desirable to promote the interests of the local community in relation to the matters indicated in [subsection \(2\)](#).

(2) (a) The matters referred to in [subsection \(1\)](#) are—

(vi) allotments, fairs and markets, and related amenities, facilities and services,

Local Government Act, 2001, Section 67

'allotment' means an area of land comprising not more than 1,000 square metres let or available for letting to and cultivation by one or more than one person who is a member of the local community and lives adjacent or near to the allotment, for the purpose of the production of vegetables or fruit mainly for consumption by the person or a member of his or her family;

Amendment of First Schedule to Principal Act.

77.— The First Schedule to the Principal Act is amended—

13. Reserving land for use and cultivation as allotments and regulating, promoting, facilitating or controlling the provision of land for that use.;

and

(b) in Part IV by the substitution of the following for paragraph 8:

Planning and Development Act, 2010, Section 77

<https://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/2010/act/30/enacted/en/print.html>

There is a discrepancy between the 1882 act and the Planning and Development Act 2010 which requires updating. The 1882 act refers to “an allotment not exceeding half an acre” while the 2010 Planning and Development Act refers to “an area comprising not more than 1,000 square metres”. As one acre is equal to just over 4000 square metres, there is a different definition of an allotment between the 1882 act (max ½ an acre) or the 2010 act (max ¼ an acre). As noted above, both laws are currently in effect.

In practice, different size plots are often allocated for community growing. Fingal County Council, which has 900 allotments over four sites, offer three different plot sizes available to rent: 50sqm, 100sqm and 200sqm (the 200sqm plots are only available at Balbriggan and Turvey sites). According to Fingal County Council “*This means that there is an allotment plot to suit all levels of interest, experience and time commitment.*” However, while a maximum size is defined separately in two separate pieces of legislation, there is no minimum size for community growing spaces defined.

In addition, community gardens are not defined in legislation. This means that all community gardens are currently not secure in terms of legally defined areas, whereas allotments are currently defined. There has been an increase in recent years in the number of community gardens in Ireland, but the law has not kept up with the pace of community development.



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Community Gardens Ireland is concerned that elements of the 1926 and 1934 acts (such as compulsory purchase order of lands and provision of allotments to help with food poverty) are currently not legislated for in Ireland. In a worse case scenario, this may in time cause local authorities to increase yearly fees above a level that is affordable.

In addition, since the 1994 repealing of the 1926 and 1934 acts, government departments have referenced the 1926 act as if they are still in effect in parliamentary questions, such as in [2009](#), [2011](#), [2013](#) (link to Dáil record included). In addition, Cork City Council refers to the 1926 act in their current [City Development Plan in section 11.7](#) (link to development plan included). Similarly, numerous community groups and authors refer to the 1926 act.

The fact the Dáil record has a response from a government department that the 1926 acquisition of land (allotments) act was in force after its repeal, along with a local authority for a large city in Ireland referring to it in its current active development plan, indicates the need for strong clear legislation and up to date guidance given by government departments.

In 2016, COST (European Cooperation in Science and Technology) released a book called "Urban Agriculture Europe". This book was supported by the EU Framework Programme Horizon 2020. As part of this book, three elements are detailed as being essential for the sustenance of Urban Agriculture initiatives:

- Funding
- Knowledge
- Land (public and private)

The most critical element in ensuring that community growing space is made available is access to land. In urban areas, this will continue to be a challenge unless communities find it easier to obtain access to land on a temporary or permanent basis.

Community Gardens Ireland therefore believes that improved legislation is urgently required for the allotments and community gardens system in Ireland. The discrepancy in the definition of the size of an allotment should be clarified in revised legislation that replaces the 1882 act. In addition, revised legislation should be prepared which should include the need for local authority supplied community growing spaces to be affordable, and for a revised duty to be placed on local authorities.



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3.2 Northern Ireland

Northern Ireland is the only part of the UK (apart from London) that does not have statutory allotment or community growing space provision in place. With the exception of a small number of local authorities, a low priority has been placed on green infrastructure until very recently. Hence access to land is a real issue for communities wishing to grow food there too.

Social Farms & Gardens, a UK-wide charity with membership across the community growing sector, has been running its National Lottery funded Growing Resilience programme there for five years now. This brings together growing groups within local council areas to work together, engage in peer-to-peer training and help them find their collective voice to speak to decision makers, so community food growing can take its rightful place at the table as a healthy unifying force in our modern society.

Community Gardens Ireland have recently been jointly awarded a grant of 10000 euro by the Community Foundation of Ireland to work together with SF&G in NI on learning from each others experiences and processes, mapping our members and resources, and forging stronger cross-border linkages.



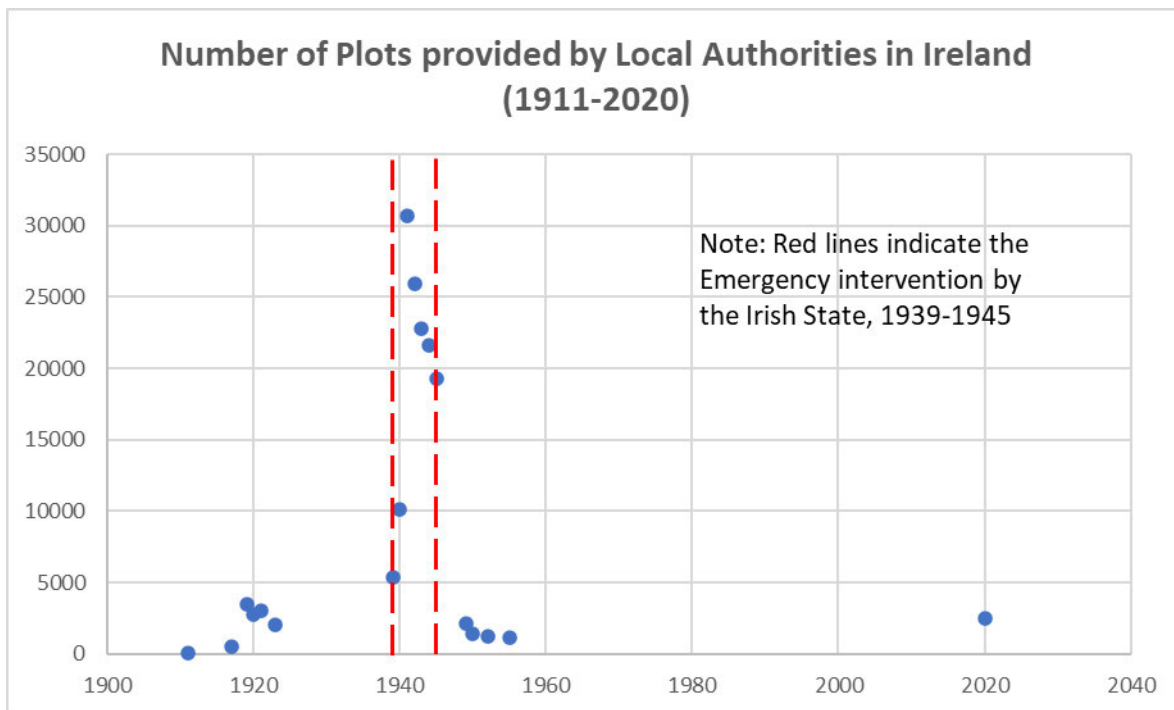
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4. Local Authority provision of plots in Ireland: 1911 – 2020

In 2021, Community Gardens Ireland researched the number of plots provided by local authorities in Ireland from 1911 to 2020.

Apart from the period of 1939 to 1945, the number of plots provided by local authorities has remained largely static in the 2000-3500 range where data exists. On the other hand, the population of Ireland has increased from approximately 3 million to 5 million as highlighted on the below graph:



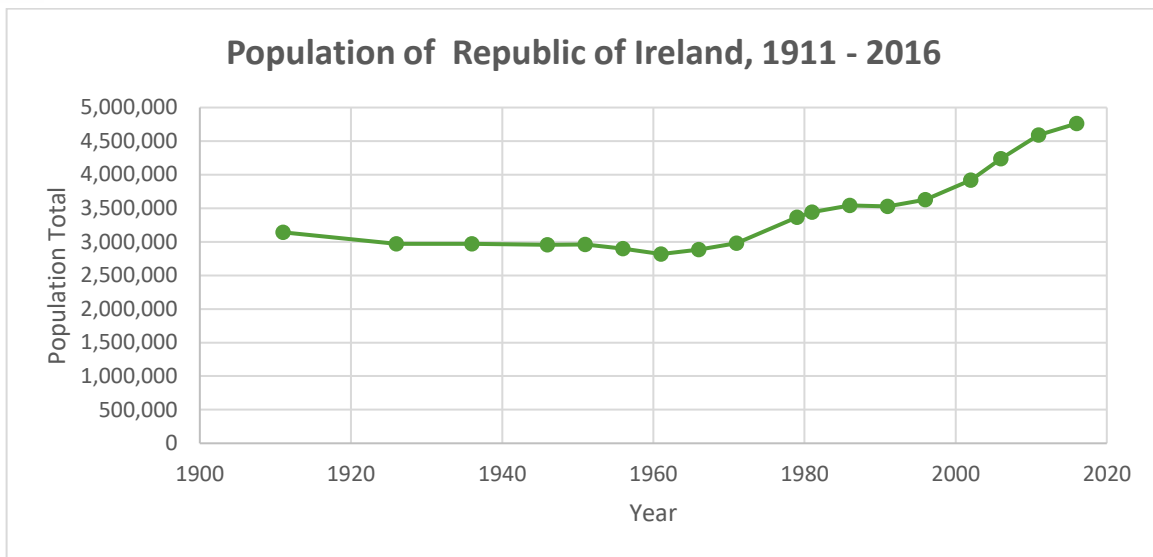
Ref: Dáil records & “Rooted in the Soil: A history of cottage gardens and allotments in Ireland since 1750”, by Jonathan Bell & Mervyn Watson & Local Government Management Agency report on “A PROFILE OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT CLIMATE ACTIONS IN IRELAND”, 2020

Community Gardens Ireland are aware of private community growing spaces in Ireland, however no official figures are available on this.



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Ref: CSO.ie

The years of 1939-1945 were vastly different to today's Ireland, however, the only time when there was a large increase in the number of plots provided by local authorities was when there was direct government intervention during these years.

There is a substantial gap in the recording of information by government department or local authorities between 1955 and 2020. Following discussions that Community Gardens Ireland have had with academic researchers, it is believed that the number of plots in the 1980s were at close to zero. Some community growing space continued in urban areas such as Dublin City. However, no official figures from government departments are available to reference.

In addition, there was a well recorded increase in interest in growing your own from the early 2000s onwards. None of these trends are reflective in the above graph as there are no official figures from government sources or others to detail this information.

South Dublin County Council now have a reported waiting list of over 10 years for some plots in their jurisdiction, while during COVID-19 there was well documented feedback from suppliers such as Quick Crop or Irish Seed Savers which detailed that demand for seed had increased by up to 500%. Fingal County Council, the fastest growing county in Ireland with a population of 296,214 had 900 allotments over four sites (<https://www.fingal.ie/council/service/allotments-management>). They no longer operate a waiting list but allocate plots on first come first served basis each January, with preference going to those renewing plots.

Community Gardens Ireland believes there is now record demand for land for communities to grow their own produce.



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5. Local Authorities Actions on Allotments & Community Gardens

5.1 Local Government Management Agency Report, January 2020

In January 2020, the Local Government Management Agency released a report on "A PROFILE OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT CLIMATE ACTIONS IN IRELAND". Within this report contained details of the number of local authority allotments and community gardens in Ireland, as shown:

64 of 148

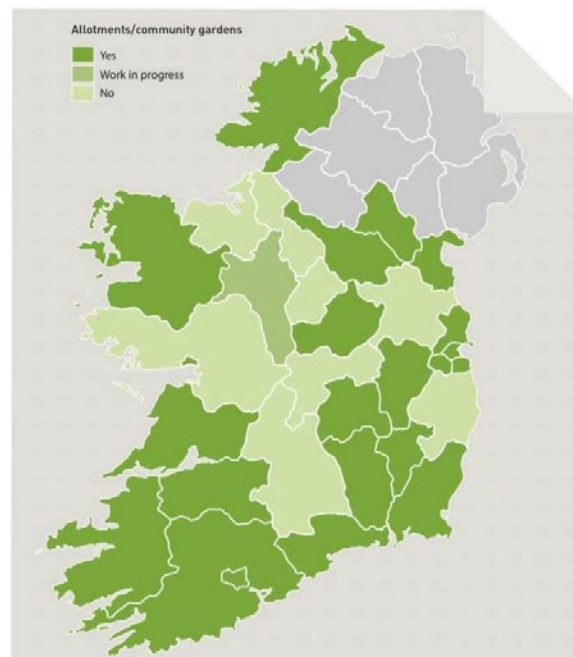


Figure 3.14: Local authorities providing allotments or community gardens.

Ref: <https://www.lgma.ie/en/publications/local-authority-sector-reports/a-profile-of-local-government-climate-actions-in-ireland-final.pdf>

As the above image shows, eight local authorities in Ireland do not provide any allotments or community gardens. According to the LGMA's report, there are almost 2500 plots provided by local authorities (2400 allotments and 97 community gardens).

It should be noted that this is the first publicly available record of the number of local authority provided allotments and community gardens since 1955. Community Gardens Ireland is concerned that no official records are kept regularly on the number of plots provided at local authority level. All objectives related to improving the number of community growing spaces should be measurable and reported on regularly.

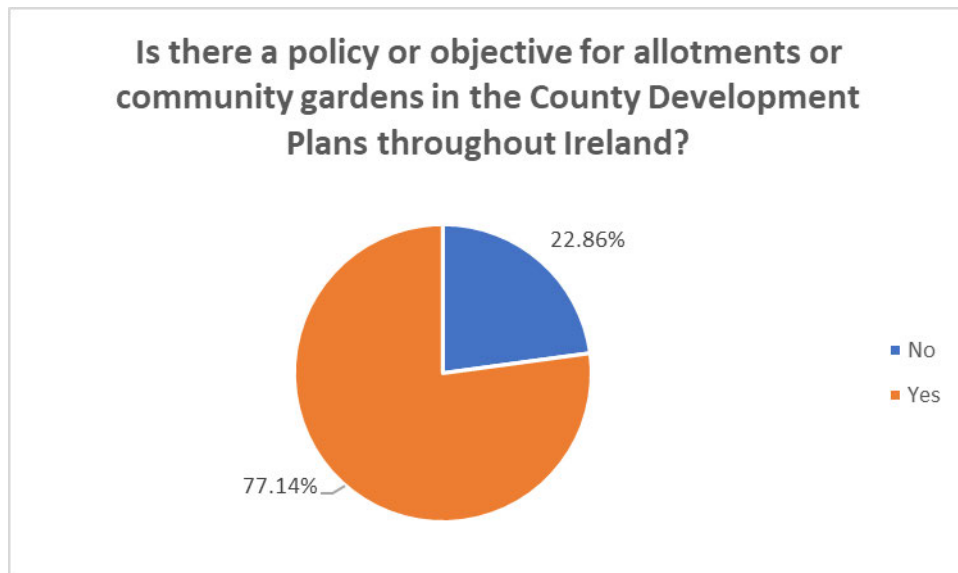


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In April 2021, Community Gardens Ireland reviewed every county development plan in Ireland to compare local authority policies prepared on community growing initiatives. The details are contained in the below sections.

5.2 County/City Development Plans: Policies or Objectives



As shown above, over 22% of all county development plans do not contain any reference to allotments or community gardens. It is of concern to Community Gardens Ireland that this figure is not at 100% for all local authorities in Ireland.

In May 2009, guidelines were issued by the then Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government for planning authorities on sustainable residential development in urban areas (Cities, Towns & Villages).

Page 38 of 79 detailed the following:

"Development plans have tended in the past to emphasise detailed quantitative standards, but there is now an increasing focus on the quality of public open space, which ensures that the reasonable expectations of users are more likely to be fulfilled. Qualitative standards include:

Provision for allotments and community gardens: *Allotments are small plots of land which are let (usually by a local authority) to individuals for the cultivation of vegetables and plants. They are of particular value in higher density areas."*

Ref: <https://assets.gov.ie/111252/bf943e60-30d5-4ac3-8c7a-dc4f68b3d688.pdf>

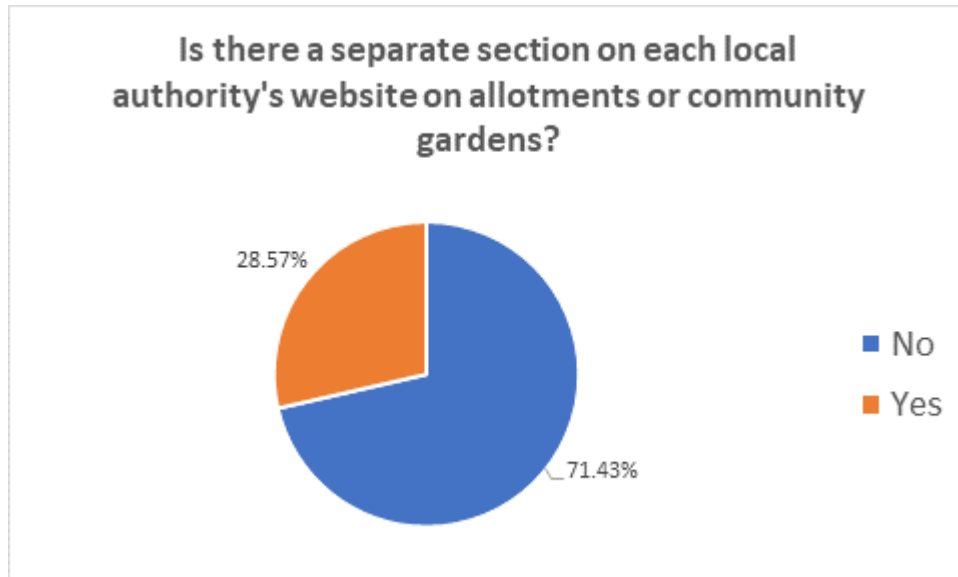


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Community Gardens Ireland believes that local authorities must do more to meet the guidelines for planning authorities on sustainable residential development in urban areas (Cities, Towns & Villages).

5.3 Local Authority Website: Page on Allotments or Community Gardens



As shown above, 71% of all local authority websites contain no separate section on allotments or community gardens.

Providing a distinct page on each local authority's website for allotments or community gardens would encourage the set-up of further community growing spaces. It would also allow local residents an easy direction for where to focus energies when requesting new spaces to be set up.

Community Gardens Ireland received feedback from community groups in urban areas that it can sometimes be difficult to know which department has oversight of allotments or community gardens. In some cases, the same local authority may have numerous departments looking after community growing spaces, depending where they are located.

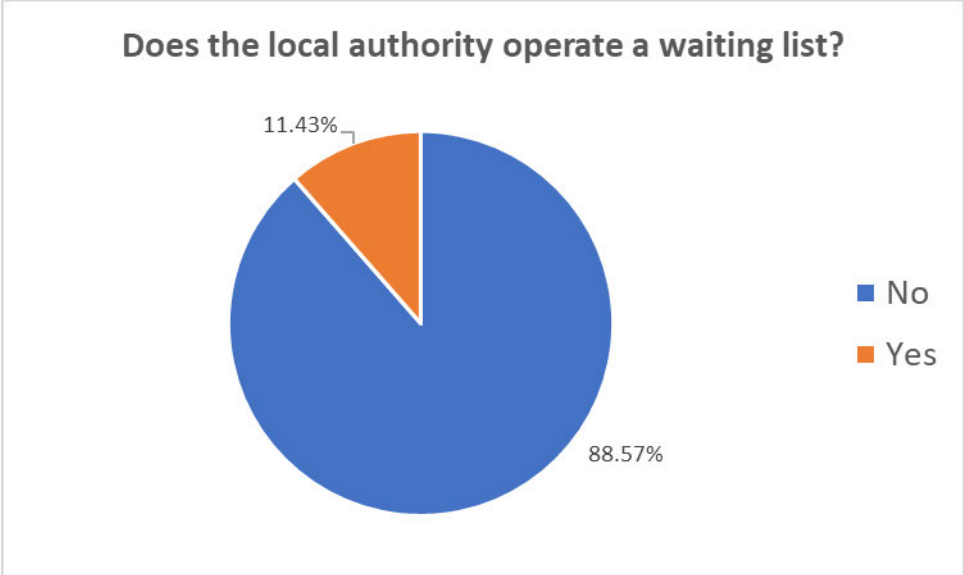
This is a simple fix at local authority level to agree which sub-department have oversight of local authority allotments and community gardens. This would then translate easily into the separate departments on each local authority website.



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5.4 Local Authority Waiting Lists



Only 11% of local authorities operate a waiting list, according to their website. Some local authorities (e.g. Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council) operate a waiting list, but have specified that it is closed – Community Gardens Ireland assumes this means it is closed to new applications as they have sufficient interest already for their existing community growing spaces.

Other local authorities keep a waiting list for the areas they currently provide allotments and community gardens only (South Dublin County Council). However, this has led to a 10-year waiting list for an allotment in South Dublin County Council, [according to local residents](#). For areas outside of the areas where allotments are currently provided, no waiting lists appear to be present.

In another case, some local authorities used to operate a waiting list but no longer do so (Fingal County Council).

This is a concern for Community Gardens Ireland. Firstly, local authorities have no useful data available to them clearly showing demand in areas to enable adequate long term planning – if a waiting list system was put in place, it would allow local authorities to accurately review how many residents are looking for community growing spaces in specific areas, and then decide how to act accordingly.

In addition, it is a potential duplication of activities. Local community groups are often set up to request allotments or community gardens in areas. These community groups request local residents to register their interest with them, but due to GDPR regulations, they cannot hand over this data to the local authorities, which means that the local authorities then need to go out to the same local residents again for the same information.



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Community Gardens Ireland believes strongly that each local authority should set up a waiting list or registration system for community growing spaces. While being of benefit to local residents, this would also allow local authorities to accurately plan future community needs. Given the size and population spread of counties, it would be preferable if each urban area (greater than 1500 people) had a unique waiting list or be part of a registration system. It would not make sense for a person in Fermoy to be offered a plot in Skibbereen, for example, even though they are within the same local authority.

5.5 Local Authority Income & Expenditure

Currently, no local authority reports regularly on the income and expenditure from allotments and community gardens. This was not always the case – in the below extract from the 1952 Bray Urban District Council budget, the costs of administering allotments and cost of land and seeds are clearly laid out.

Allotments - administration	30
Allotments - Cost of Land and Seeds	80
Salaries	1,894
do. - Surveyor & Overseer - part	305
	11,360
	11,360

-4-

	Estimated by Manager.	Adopted by Council
	£	£
<u>GENERAL URBAN PURPOSES</u>		
<u>State Grants</u>		
Bounty in Lieu of Rates	350	
Allotments	40	

Ref:

https://www.wicklow.ie/Portals/0/Documents/Arts%20Heritage%20&%20Archives/Archives/Collection%20s/Digitised%20Collections/Bray%20UDC%20Minute%20Books/BUDC_M_12%20-%201949%20to%201952%20-%20PartB.pdf

Community Gardens Ireland believes that each local authority should include in their annual report all income and expenditure from allotments and community gardens.



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6. European Case Studies

6.1 Scotland

In June 2018, the Scottish Government introduced Part 9 of the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act. This involved the delivery of further guidance for local authorities when it comes to community growing initiatives (i.e. allotments). This updated previous legislation for the provision of community growing spaces, gave guidance to local authorities and put revised duties on local authorities to provide space for communities to grow their own.

Allotments - Further Guidance for Local Authorities

(Part 9 of the Community Empowerment
(Scotland) Act 2015)

June 2018



Ref: <https://www.gov.scot/binaries/content/documents/govscot/publications/consultation-paper/2018/06/allotments-further-guidance-local-authorities-part-9-community-empowerment-scotland/documents/00537266-pdf/00537266-pdf/govscot%3Adocument/00537266.pdf>

6.1.1 Protection

As part of this act, the Scottish Government added a role for a third party (Scottish Minister) whenever there is a change of use of land used for community growing purposes. Section 7.7 details the following:

"7.7 The Act offers added protection for allotments. Allotment sites owned or leased by the local authority cannot be sold, their use changed or, in the case of leased sites, lease renounced without the



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consent of Scottish Ministers. Privately leased or owned allotment sites are outwith the scope of the Act, and therefore this food-growing strategy (FGS) guidance.”

6.1.2 Climate Change

As part of this act, the Scottish Government highlighted the reduction in carbon emissions from community growing, with estimates of between 2kg and 5kg of carbon equivalent for every kilogram of vegetable produced:

“Carbon emissions (including reducing energy use, more sustainable transport and less waste) can be reduced by between 2kg and 5kg of carbon equivalent for every kilogram of vegetable produced”

6.1.3 Clear duty

The revised Scottish legislation puts a duty on local authorities to do the following:

- Produce and manage a waiting list.
- Provide allotments when 15 people are on the waiting list.
- Ensure that people do not remain on the list for more than 5 years for a plot.

6.1.4 Community Growing Forum Scotland (CGFS)

In recent years there has been the establishment of a Scottish Community Growing Forum. The forum is a collaboration of national and regional green and grower organisations in Scotland with a shared vision and commitment to work together with every community in Scotland to benefit from food growing and nature-based activities. The CGFS state the following:

“We have worked together for 9 years to help organisations throughout Scotland support their communities, and partnered with the Scottish Government to develop policy and legislation including Part 9 of the Community Empowerment Act and Good Food Nation. We operate in all 32 local authority areas, and work together to better support the thousands of communities, representing hundreds of thousands of households, we represent.”

Their partners include: The Royal Horticultural Society, Greenspace Scotland, Scottish Allotments and Gardens Society, Central Scotland Green Network Trust, The Scottish Government Food and Drink, Royal Caledonian Horticultural Society, Social Farms & Gardens Scotland, Transition Edinburgh South, Trellis, Nourish, Glasgow Allotment Forum, and East Renfrewshire Council.”



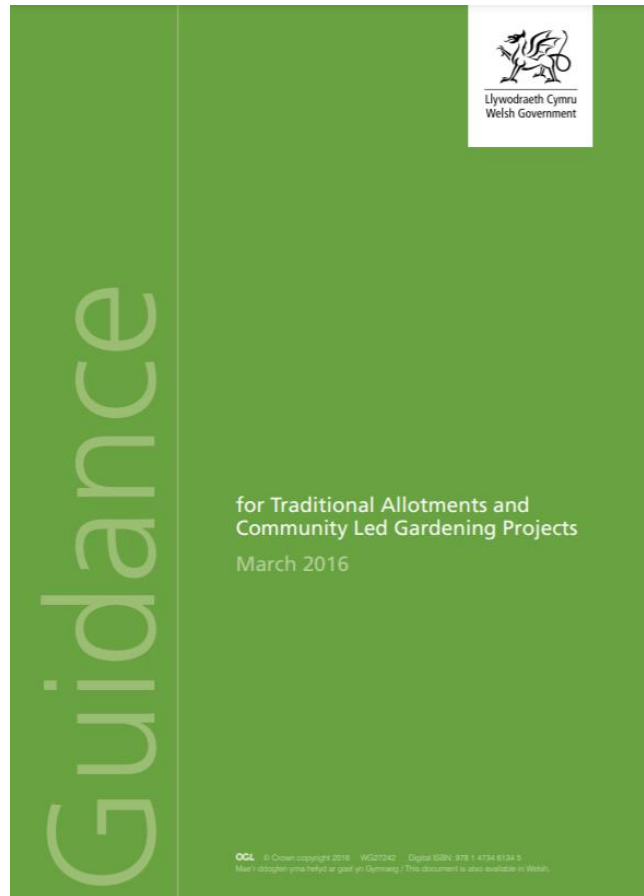
6.2 Wales

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In March 2016, the Welsh Government issued a guidance document for Traditional Allotments and Community Led Gardening Projects. This followed a report commissioned by the Welsh Government in 2009 which reviewed what the Welsh Government could do to better promote and support community growing.



In March 2021, Wales have released an updated set of documents for allotments and community gardens with revised guidance given to local authorities, towns, community councils, growers, community groups and landowners as detailed below:

Ref: <https://gov.wales/allotments-and-community-gardens>

6.2.1 Protection

Wales is similar to Scotland in that it requires the consent of a Welsh Government Minister for the change of use or function of land used for community growing documents, as detailed in the March 2016 document:



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“Statutory allotments have legal protection. They cannot be sold or used for other purposes without the consent of Welsh Ministers. Consent will not be given unless the Welsh Ministers are satisfied that adequate provision will be made for allotment holders displaced by the action of the local authority, or that such provision is unnecessary or not reasonably practicable.”

Ref: <https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2018-05/allotments-and-community-led-gardening-guidance.pdf>

6.2.2 Climate Change

In March 2016, the Welsh Government stated the following:

“community led growing projects can be a resource for education establishments to demonstrate what it takes to produce food from field to fork. They also provide extensive opportunities to learn about the environment and climate change and how to make positive changes to help combat these challenges.”

Ref: <https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2018-05/allotments-and-community-led-gardening-guidance.pdf>

6.2.3 Clear duty

In addition, the Welsh guidance details the duty already in place for Wales and England for the provision of allotments when requested by local residents from the 1908 Small Holdings and Allotments Act (England and Wales), still in effect. The above documents also recommends that in order to provide an accurate picture of the provision of allotment plots across Wales, local authorities should prepare an allotments strategy, compile a register of allotment sites, and details of plot numbers, vacancies and waiting lists.

“In order to provide an accurate picture of the provision of allotment plots across Wales, local authorities should compile a register of allotment sites and details of plot numbers, vacancies and waiting lists. Local authorities should also clearly advertise how potential allotment gardeners can register for a plot and record all enquiries. Recording demand for allotments is imperative - so that you can ensure growing space is provided in the areas of high demand. All local authorities should have a member of staff responsible for allotments and community growing spaces to ensure this information is collected, maintained and used to inform new provision. An Allotments Officer provides a vital link between the local authority, allotment associations and potential growers. Having robust systems in place will make it easier and more efficient (in terms of staff time) to manage waiting lists and deal with demand.”

Ref: <https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2018-05/allotments-and-community-led-gardening-guidance.pdf>



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6.2.4 Compulsory Purchase Order & Compulsory Hiring Order

In England and Wales, Councils are under an obligation to provide land for allotments where demand exists as per the Small Holdings and Allotments Acts 1907 & 1908 and let it at rent that does not incur a loss for that council, but is considered a rent which 'a tenant may reasonably expect to pay' (Allotment Act 1950).

Where it was not possible to make such a provision because the owners were not willing to let, or because the land had prospective building value, for example, then a council was empowered to exercise a compulsory purchase or a compulsory hiring order.

From the below link:

"The compulsory hiring order had: been specially framed and adapted to meet those cases where land has a present or prospective building value. These powers enable councils to obtain a perpetual tenancy of land at a fair rent without regard to any value which the land may possess for building, mining or other industrial purposes, but subject to the landlord's right of resumption when he requires the land in good faith for such purposes. More-over the rent cannot be raised against the council in consequence of their own improvements"

Ref: https://discovery.ucl.ac.uk/id/eprint/1348274/2/1348274_Lesley_Acton_Thesis_Volume2.pdf



6.3 Ireland

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Currently, the primary legislation in Ireland largely is based on that local authorities “may” provide allotments as per the 2001 Local Government Act. As highlighted earlier, several groups including community groups, local authorities and government departments have in the past referred to the 1926 and 1934 acts, which are now repealed.

In addition, there is no Irish Government endorsed policy or national plan on community growing spaces. There are currently no set targets to increase the number of community growing spaces before 2025.

6.3.1 Protection

In the past, Irish community groups have been removed by local authorities with land used for other purposes.

Liberties residents appeal to council over allotments closure

Housing crisis does not eliminate the need for 'more green space', say campaigners

© Wed, Dec 12, 2018, 22:07

Simon Foy



Members of the Save Weaver Square Community Garden and Allotments campaign protesting outside Dublin City Hall. Photograph: Catherine Cleary

SAVE GREEN SPACES IN DUBLIN 8!

WHAT'S HAPPENING?
Dublin City Council have given notice that the Weaver Square Community Garden & 27 family allotments are to close at the end of the year.

WHY SHOULD YOU BE CONCERNED?

- 1 Dublin 8 has the lowest proportion of green space in Dublin City, meanwhile, Dublin 2 has 20 hectares of green space (16x10,000 sq m). Dublin 8 is a high-density urban neighbourhood in desperate need of more parks, green spaces and gardens for community use. How our area will have even less for you and your family.
- 2 Since the Weaver Square Community Garden and Allotments have been established, hundreds of people have benefited from them. These social, health, environmental and educational benefits will be lost.
- 3 This is the ideal community resource for proper development in the Liberties in 2018. We have already lost Dublin Flood Co-Op, the Green Door and the site of Newmarket Square as a public marketplace.
- 4 Instead of making Dublin 8 a more livable place, we have witnessed an onslaught of transient, high-density, private property development at the expense of the residential community. Over 200 student rooms & 800 hotel rooms permitted by DCC in the Liberties alone.
- 5 We support moves to address the housing crisis. However, there are alternative vacant DCC sites that could be used without destroying a rare green space such as Weaver Square Community Garden and Allotments.
- 6 DCC are reneging on written commitments to keep the Weaver Square Community Garden and Allotments in the area. They are breaching their own Greening Strategy for the Liberties and the DCC Parks Strategy.

Design: @simonfoycartoon | www.saveweaversquare.com



Urban Gardeners' 'Save Weaver Square' organisers gathered this weekend and they held a spring bulb planting session in their allotment, as a community action group, they want to highlight and oppose Dublin City Council's plan to close the space. Pictured from left are; Con Cooney, Richard Taplin, Kieran O'Brien, Rita Garland, Sabina Stan, Aaron Jewell, Rian Elschlager, Miren Samper, Liz Harper and Samantha McCaffrey. Photograph Nick Bradshaw/The Irish Times

In 2018, a united campaign was organised by local residents against a decision by Dublin City Council to remove Weaver Square Community Garden and Allotments. This community amenity was active from 2011 to 2019 until the land was reused by Dublin City Council. Dublin 8 was noted during the campaign as having the lowest amount of green space in the city, and that there was a history of replacing community amenities with additional developments. The campaign supported the need to address the housing crisis but also requested that Dublin City Council provide for the needs of the local community.

Hundreds of people (pensioners, schools, adult education groups, therapy groups, families & locals) had benefitted directly from the site at Weaver Square Community Garden and Allotments. Those benefits ranged from learning GIY skills, improving mental health, better social integration, improved diet, physical exercise, reduction of pollution, reduced anti-social behaviour, improved self-esteem and building of a cohesive local community.

Dublin City Council provided some community growing space in a number of areas, however, the community group had no escalation point for this to be raised beyond the local authority if what was offered was not adequate.



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There are limited paths for community groups with limited funds to proceed where lands have been reallocated for other purposes. The current escalation point where this occurs is to the local authority – with no realistic alternative above this as court cases would be cost prohibitive for community groups.

Community Gardens Ireland believes strongly that a role needs to be appointed to provide support for community growers throughout Ireland. This role could be the Food Ombudsperson (as we detailed in our submission to the Food Ombudsperson consultation in 2021) or a government minister, similar to the legislation in Scotland and Wales.

Currently, no such provision exists in Irish law for a third party to be used as an escalation point for community groups when public land they are using for community growing purposes is to be used for other purposes. No duty is currently placed on local authorities to provide allotments or community gardens, other than that they “may” provide allotments. There is no oversight from a third party to have to formally approve the removal of existing allotments or community gardens from public land.

In addition, there are no government backed “community land trusts” which would encourage communities to purchase and set up community owned resources, such as are present in New York, Scotland etc.

6.3.2 Climate Change

Community Gardens Ireland made a substantial submission to the Climate Action Plan consultation process in 2021 where we called for set targets to be set for the increase in the number of community growing spaces in Ireland. As part of this submission, we referenced changes made recently in Scotland and Wales, along with numerous examples for why the increase in the number of allotments and community gardens would help communities.

6.3.3 Clear Duty

There is currently no duty on local authorities in Ireland for the provision of community growing space. There is also no set minimum of requests under which they must provide community growing space, nor is there a set timeframe under which the local authorities must provide this.

In addition, the price of community growing spaces provided by local authorities are not protected to help with food poverty.

6.3.4 Compulsory Purchase Order & Compulsory Hiring Order

The original 1926 Acquisition of Land (Allotments) Act gave powers specifically to local authorities for the compulsory purchase of land for allotments. This has been repealed, and therefore there is no current duty on local authorities to complete a CPO for this purpose. Community Gardens Ireland believes this should be rectified in an update to legislation for the benefit of community growers.



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In addition, Community Gardens Ireland believes there is scope in the Irish Government exploring the use of Compulsory Hiring Order legislation for the purpose of providing community growing spaces in Ireland, particularly for derelict and vacant sites.



Photographs from the Community Gardens Ireland Autumn Gathering, Top of the City Community Garden, Waterford, September 2021



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6.4 Other Countries

The Fédération Internationale des Jardins Familiaux is a European non-profit union of national allotment and leisure garden federations with more than 2,000,000 affiliated leisure gardeners and leisure garden families. The Fédération Internationale was founded in Luxembourg on 3rd October 1926.

According to the Fédération, Other European countries offer far more community growing space compared to Ireland. Germany, for example, offers up to 1.3 million plots. Poland offers approximately 1 million plots. Denmark, with a similar population to Ireland, offers over 40,000 plots.

In addition, numerous other countries have community-friendly legislation which provides benefits for communities who seek land for allotments or community gardens. In Germany, for example, their allotment garden legislation includes specific limitations for rent prices not exceeding four times the rent customarily paid in the area by commercial fruit and vegetable growers. In Denmark in 2001 due to concern over the removal of allotment gardens, all allotment gardens become permanent from November 2001 following the passing of legislation in their parliament.

Questions	Austria	Belgium	Denmark	Finland	France	Germany	Great Britain	Luxembourg	Netherlands	Poland	Slovakia	Sweden
Number of gardens per country	37473	5301	40000	4400	25000	1300000	400000	4826	27500	1000000	88000	25000
Limitation for rent price		No				Yes	Yes		No	Free		
Protection against resiliation of the lease	Yes	No			Yes	Yes	Yes	Partially	General legislation	Yes		
Allotment Garden Law	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No

List of EU and UK details obtained from the Fédération Internationale des Jardins Familiaux report from 2016. Ref: http://www.jardins-familiaux.org/pdf/E_INFO_2016.pdf

As highlighted earlier, the latest figures are that 2500 allotments & community gardens are provided by local authorities in Ireland. There is currently no specific allotment garden law, no limitation for rent prices, and no protection for any gardens in law. Community gardens are not defined in law.

With no clear policies, poor legislation and a low number of local authority provided community growing spaces, Ireland has quite a way to go to match our neighbouring countries.



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7. Climate Change & Biodiversity

7.1 Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) Report, 2019

A large argument in favour for the provision of more community growing spaces is that the spaces assist in the reducing of greenhouse gas emissions, improving urban food security, improving biodiversity and adapting to climate change impacts. In 2019, the IPCC released a report which included Urban Agriculture initiatives, as follows:

“Urban and peri-urban agriculture reduces the food carbon footprint by avoiding long distance food transport. These types of agriculture also limit GHG emissions by recycling organic waste and wastewater that would otherwise release methane from landfills and dumping sites (Lwasa et al. 2014). Urban and peri-urban agriculture also contribute in adapting to climate change, including extreme events, by reducing the urban heat island effect, increasing water infiltration and slowing down run-offs to prevent flooding, etc.

(Lwasa et al. 2014, 2015; Kumar et al. 2017a1209). For example, a scenario analysis shows that urban gardens reduce the surface temperature up to 10°C in comparison to the temperature without vegetation (Tsilini et al. 20151210). Urban agriculture can also improve biodiversity and strengthen associated ecosystem services (Lin et al. 20151211).”

“In summary, urban and peri-urban agriculture can contribute to improving urban food security, reducing GHG emissions, and adapting to climate change impacts (robust evidence, medium agreement).”

Ref: <https://www.ipcc.ch/srccl/chapter/chapter-5/>

7.2 Sustainable Development Goals

Community growing spaces also clearly help contribute towards some of the UN’s Sustainable Development Goals, for example:





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8. Recommendations

Community Gardens Ireland believes there are three main areas of growth for community growing in Ireland in Policy, Data and Support:

1) Policy

Action	Description
1A	<p>Community Gardens Ireland recommend that a new national strategy be prepared for Community Growing in Ireland by the Irish Government. This strategy should include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Legislative changes as per section 1C below - A plan for all state bodies who own land in Ireland to get involved & to make it easier for community groups or local authority to set up or facilitate the use of land - Guidance documents to be issued to local authorities, private landowners, community groups etc. similar to Wales & Scotland - A waiting list or registration system to be set up to be used by every local authority - A set target of double the current number of local authority community growing spaces to be provided by 2025
1B	<p>Similar to the activities being undertaken in Scotland, Community Gardens Ireland believe that there is the large potential for an Irish Community Growing Forum to be established in Ireland.</p> <p>The establishment of this should be championed by the Irish Government with all community growing stakeholders included such as Community Gardens Ireland, Irish Seed Savers, GIY etc.</p>
1C	<p>Community Gardens Ireland believe that the 1882 act should be replaced with up-to-date legislation. Such legislation should include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A clear definition of an allotment and a community garden - A clear duty to be placed on local authorities to provide or facilitate the provision of community growing spaces within 5 years - Details on the minimum number of local residents for whom the local authority must provide or facilitate community growing spaces upon registering their request (CGI believe 15 to be appropriate, similar to Scotland) - Revised abilities of the local authority to issue compulsory purchase orders or compulsory hiring orders for the purpose of community growing spaces - A requirement for the community growing spaces to be affordable, with provision to be made for those who cannot afford it.



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Action	Description
1D	Community Gardens Ireland believe that every local authority should include a policy or objective on community growing in their City/County Development Plans.
1E	Community Gardens Ireland believes that a Community Land Trust should be investigated by the Irish Government for implementation. The Community Land Trust could help set up and preserve community growing spaces, while keeping key community supports in the hands of the community.
1F	It must be made clear which lead government department has responsibility for the promotion of community food initiatives.

2) Data

Action	Description
2A	Each local authority should hold a waiting list or registration system for local residents in each urban area to record their interest in a community growing space. The number of residents on the waiting list or registration system should then be reported on by local authorities on an annual basis.
2B	Each urban area (greater than 1500 people) to have a unique waiting list or registration system.
2C	All objectives related to improving the number of community growing spaces should be measurable and reported on regularly.
2D	All income and expenditure related to community growing spaces should be easily accessible on each local authority's annual financial report.

3) Support

Action	Description
3A	Similar to Scotland and Wales, a third party (e.g. Food Ombudsperson or Government Minister) should be required to approve if a community growing space is to be removed for another purpose.
3B	Every local authority should have a page on their website for allotments or community gardens and to encourage the set-up of further community growing spaces.
3C	The Irish Government should enable the use of the full library network in Ireland for seed sharing initiatives, similar to initiatives carried out by Wicklow County Libraries & Cabinteely Library, Dublin 18.

Community Gardens Ireland recommends that the Irish Government reviews the above recommendations with a view of putting them into effect.



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Appendix 1: Community Gardens Ireland 2021 Survey Findings

What kind of licence do you have?

Under 'OTHER', 8 said they'd no fixed agreement although some were in discussion for one

One had a 10-year licence (3 years to go) and another had a 5-year licence

Licence Type	Count
11 month licence	4
12 month licence	1
36 month licence	1
indefinite	13
permanent	5

Who owns the land your garden is on?

- Majority on land owned by local councils (Belfast, Cork, Donegal, Dublin (7), Fingal, Galway, Kildare (2), Leitrim, North Down, Waterford)
- 8 owned by community organisations/town
- 5 by local businesses or farmers
- 4 by church organisations
- The rest a mixture of abandoned land/ sold to private developer by DCC/ not sure

Is your site zoned for residential use, mixed use, or recreational amenity / green use?

Zoning Type	Count
Residential Use	5
Mixed Use	4
Recreational amenity / Green	15
Don't know	8

Source of Funding – Answers were wide & varied, indicative of hard work gardens put in to survive...

- Local County Councils
- CLÁR programme grant (Ceantair Laga Árd-Riachtanais - for small-scale infrastructural projects in rural areas)
- Community Services programme
- SICAP Programme (Social Inclusion & Community Activation Programme)
- Community Environment Action Fund (CEAF) (Local Agenda 21)
- Community Enhancement Programme (CEP) via LCDC
- Local funding (e.g. Changemakers /Local Development Partnerships)
- Heritage Lottery Fund
- Small grants from various sources
 - Annual Applefest Grant
 - Waste prevention grant scheme
 - Tidy Towns
- Fundraising /Voluntary collections/hosting open days
- Market (affected by Covid);
- Seed swap/donation for seeds/seedlings
- Donations of tools/seeds
- Membership fees- ranged from €5 to €50



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Appendix 2: Health & Wellness information on allotments & community gardens

As well as the obvious and essential contribution that community gardens and allotments make to the National Biodiversity Action Plan and the All-Ireland Pollinator Plan, the evidence-based benefits of community gardens and allotments include proven positive impacts on physical, mental health and well-being, as well as contributing to educational, cultural and social gains. There is also evidence that they hugely increase social capital by encouraging active citizenship and social connection, help reduce health inequalities, and contribute to reducing anti-social behaviour, thus making communities happier and safer places.

Physical & Mental Health - the evidence

A recent scoping review, the first of its kind, set out to critically examine studies that had been conducted on the impact of gardens and gardening on health and well-being between 1990 and 2019. From 8896 papers located, 77 studies were deemed thorough enough to be included, and over 35 validated health, well-being and functional biometric outcome measures were reported. The findings demonstrated links between gardens and improved mental well-being, increased physical activity and a reduction in social isolation.

The review concluded that gardens and gardening can improve health and well-being for people with a range of health and social needs (Howarth et al., 2020). A secondary objective of this scoping review was to build on the evidence to create logic models that could guide **health strategy decision making** about gardens and gardening as a non-medical, social prescription.

Social prescribing is on the increase in Ireland, as indicated by the All Ireland Prescribing Network (<https://allirelandsocialprescribing.ie/>) which was set up in 2019. Community gardens and allotments clearly have a role to play in social prescriptions, and Community Gardens Ireland have been in discussion with social prescribers to promote community gardening as being of benefit for communities and individuals.

Green Care

Green Care is an established international conceptual framework which incorporates a wide variety of activities in nature (Berget et al., 2010) and can be used to examine the potential role that community gardens and allotments play.

Gardens are sometimes developed under the umbrella of Social and Therapeutic Horticulture, an aspect of Green Care, for people with mental health challenges, or intellectual disability issues (such as that at W.A.L.K (<https://www.walk.ie/>) or Festina Lente (<https://www.festinalente.ie/>)). Healing gardens in hospitals and hospices and day care centres have become more common (e.g. <https://solascentre.ie/>). Horse Projects for inner city teenagers also fits in here - teaching them to care



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properly for their horses and in the process teaching a lot more besides, and a growing number of wilderness therapy organisations are doing innovative work with children and youth with challenging behaviour.

Benefits of nature on health & wellbeing

There are many documented examples of how exposure to nature can positively contribute to our health and wellbeing, improve the quality of people's lives, reduce their stress hormones and reduce the amount of medication they use (e.g. Van den Berg and Clusters, 2011). This supports what both individuals and healthcare professionals have experienced with 'nature therapy' for decades. Ensuring that all communities and hospitals have access to some form of a therapeutic garden would be an investment in national wellbeing and reduce pressure on our health services.

The recent growth of 'forest bathing' initiatives in Ireland, based on the Japanese concept of 'shinrin yoku' which promotes reconnecting with the natural world to get powerful health benefits (otherwise known as a walk in the woods...!) is another growing example of public interest in this area.

Community gardens and allotments offer a cost-effective, accessible solution to improve our health, strengthen community ties, and build a more resilient nation.

Useful References:

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[Green Care Coalition - https://greencarecoalition.org.uk/evidence-base/](https://greencarecoalition.org.uk/evidence-base/)

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