

An aerial photograph of several people walking across a large, green-tinted map of London. The map shows the city's street grid and the River Thames winding through it. The people are scattered across the frame, some walking alone and others in small groups, providing a sense of scale and movement over the city map.

London: A Growing City?

Environment Committee

LONDONASSEMBLY

Environment Committee



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Foreword



Zack Polanski AM
Chair of the Environment Committee

Our country is facing several interlinking crises. And Londoners face many of them daily.

The inequality in London is massive – and some of our poorest communities are being hit the hardest. This has an impact on many aspects of our day to day lives – and never more so, than in the food we eat.

Our food security is likely to be an increasingly important topic over the coming years. Most of the food Londoners eat is imported from outside the capital, and three quarters of the emissions from imported food come before it leaves the farm.¹ More food growing in London can tackle those emissions, and those from packaging and transport to reach the city too.

Our committee investigation has demonstrated another side of London that we all know and love – and that's our communities. From visiting OrganicLea in Waltham Forest to all the panellists who so often get their hands in the soil from the young Londoners we met to our senior citizens.

The issue of food is so huge that we knew we couldn't cover all aspects of it. Across the committee there was a desire to focus on food growing so that our investigation could offer tangible solutions.

Despite being so important to all of us every day, it's noticeable that food doesn't have a clear lead department in the GLA. Whilst lots of people are aware of it and it impacts their work – it feels like there's often risks that it can fall through the cracks.

This feels like it would be a huge missed opportunity. We know that giving marginalised communities access to the skills and resources needed to grow their own food is a important route to enabling both environmental and social justice.

I extend my thanks to everyone who submitted evidence written or orally, to all the staff who make these investigations happen and to my colleagues on the cross party committee who have worked really well together on this report.

¹ ReLondon, [London's Food Footprint](#), November 2021, p8

Executive Summary

Food is an important part of Londoners' daily lives. However, many people give little thought to where the food they eat comes from and how it is produced. Currently almost all the food and drink consumed in London is grown outside the capital. While there are positives to this – people have access to diverse food options, grown at scale (leading to lower prices), and available in shops and supermarkets across the capital – the reliance on industrial food systems and imported food also comes at a cost. This includes higher greenhouse gas emissions, a reliance on a small number of companies, and a lack of connection to the natural world.

Food growing provides people with a connection to nature and a source of healthy food. It also contributes to the city's biodiversity and green infrastructure – part of a web of green connections that link nature across the city. Growing and eating local food is also a simple way that people can reduce their climate impact.

A recent report by Professor Tim Lang for the National Preparedness Commission examined the UK's civil food resilience. It raised questions about the lack of attention given to the potential scale and impact of disruption to our food supply. The report highlighted options to ensure food is available when needed, including growing more food locally, but also strengthening community connections and people's ability to support each other.

In a city where more than half of households now live in flats – often with limited access to personal gardens, community food growing sites offer Londoners access to land to grow food. Such opportunities can bring a wealth of other benefits: helping people learn new skills, improving community cohesion, and contributing to people's physical, mental, and social wellbeing.

This investigation focused on local food growing projects in London, and the barriers people face in accessing the land and support they need to grow food. The Committee recognises that London will never be self-sufficient in food. However, given the many benefits of local food growing, the investigation aimed to explore whether there is more that can be done to protect existing food growing sites, as well as giving more people the opportunity to grow food locally. It builds on a previous meeting that the Committee held in March 2024 that examined issues around food security in London and made recommendations to the Mayor to increase support for the issue.

As part of this investigation, the Committee has heard examples of transformational food growing projects that are bringing people together to bring positive change to their local areas. However, we also heard the challenges that food growing projects face. Many have limited funding and find it difficult to secure the long-term leases needed to invest and plan effectively – particularly as Councils face pressures to raise money by charging higher rates or allocate land for housing.

Growers from ethnic minority backgrounds face significant additional barriers that need to be addressed. More diverse food growing networks, education and training are needed to create pathways to employment and leadership and support all Londoners to consider growing some of their own food. The Mayor should convene the different stakeholders to develop a plan to address this.

The Mayor of London has an important strategic role to play to support food policy across the capital, providing strategic planning guidance, and supporting London-wide networks and training. As a strategic authority, the Greater London Authority (GLA) can help support local food growing through ensuring it is integrated in regional planning frameworks, including the Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS), London Green Infrastructure Framework (LGIF) and the upcoming revision of the London Plan. Local authorities should be encouraged to increase access to growing sites by supporting the 'right to grow' on unused public land and providing secure leases to food growing projects.

For over a decade, the GLA has provided support to the charity Sustain to run the Capital Growth network. Capital Growth provides support and training to community food growing projects and local authorities. This ongoing commitment has been important in the development and growth of local food growing projects around London.

However, the Committee heard during this investigation that there was uncertainty about whether the GLA would provide any future funding to Capital Growth. This risks weakening the ability to share knowledge, skills and information across the city at a time when the positive impacts of food growing are needed more than ever. London's networks of charities, voluntary groups, and community growers are a vital part of the city's ability to cope with unexpected events, and the local food system and the green infrastructure it provides need to be strengthened, not put at risk.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1

The Mayor should commit ongoing funding to London-wide food growing networks to share learning and good practice across London boroughs and local food growing groups. The Mayor should also ensure that food growing is supported across all departments with clear ownership by one of the Deputy Mayors and is a significant component of other programmes and funding opportunities, such as his new Green Roots fund.

Recommendation 2

Ahead of the next budget for 2026-27, the Mayor should set out the steps he intends to take to make London's food system more resilient by end of this Mayoral term. This should include supporting the Right to Grow.

Recommendation 3

The Mayor should work with Boroughs to undertake a London-wide review of food growing sites across the capital and identify opportunities for making new land available for Londoners to grow food, including new allotments, community farms and orchards. The new Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) and Green Infrastructure Framework (LGIF) should include a map of current and potential land for food growing, as well as a metric to assess the average distance for Londoners to access a public food growing site.

Recommendation 4

As part of the London Plan review, the Mayor should amend the equivalent London Plan Policy G8 on food growing to:

- Require boroughs to undertake a full assessment of the need for new food growing sites including land available for growing by area and develop a strategy to increase access to growing sites, including a focus on using food growing to support those communities with the most to gain from a shift to healthy and sustainable diets.
- Strengthen protections for existing food growing sites.
- Require boroughs to set measurable targets to improve access to food growing opportunities – such as a target amount of land per population, and/or additional area for food growing per new development.
- Encourage London boroughs to work with communities to support a right to grow, such as Southwark’s Allotment Expansion Guarantee, and make additional land available for community food growing where needed with secure leases.
- Encourage London boroughs to identify a named existing officer responsible for supporting food growing to liaise between different departments and be a contact point.

Recommendation 5

The Mayor should convene stakeholders across London to agree actions to reduce barriers for “Black, Brown, and minority-led” food growing projects including:

- Supporting leadership training and representation in decision-making.
- Developing grants/funding for underrepresented growers and training providers.
- Convening training providers to review the diversity of staff and students.
- Working with local authorities to increase access to land.

Strengthening resilience

Currently 99 per cent of the food and drinks consumed in London are brought in from outside the capital.² A recent report by Professor Tim Lang for the National Preparedness Commission examined the UK's civil food resilience and highlighted the "fragilities built into the food system".³ It raised questions about why little attention has been given to the scale and impact of food supply shocks, listing a range of potential military, economic, political, health, environmental and social threats that could disrupt our access to food. While acknowledging that it is "an impossibility" that "everyone takes up farming or horticulture", the report highlighted options for increasing resilience. This includes strengthening the ways that communities come together to support each other and ensuring more people have access to land and skills to grow food for themselves.⁴

What is local food growing?

Local food growing is often defined in terms of "efforts to build self-reliant food systems in a particular area or region."⁵ It is generally characterised by its focus on sustainability, community involvement, reducing reliance on external supply chains, and connecting local communities with farming and the natural environment.⁶

Locally grown food currently makes up a small proportion of food consumed in London, with 99 per cent of the 6,347,000 tonnes of food and beverages that supply London coming from outside the city.⁷

London has a heritage of food growing. Across London 1,049 hectares are currently used for allotments, community gardens, and city farms, representing about 0.66 per cent of the capital's total land area.⁸ These growing sites are geographically spread across the capital (although not evenly), with generally more allotments in outer London and community gardens in central London (see Figure One).

² ReLondon, [London's food footprint](#), November 2021, p.7

³ National Preparedness Commission, [Just in Case: 7 steps to narrow the UK civil food resilience gap Executive Summary](#), 6 February 2025, p.3

⁴ National Preparedness Commission, [Just in Case: 7 steps to narrow the UK civil food resilience gap Executive Summary](#), 6 February 2025, p.19

⁵ Quinn, M. [Locally Grown/Locally Raised](#). In: Idowu, S.O., Capaldi, N., Zu, L., Gupta, A.D. (eds) *Encyclopedia of Corporate Social Responsibility*, Springer, Berlin, Heidelberg, 2013, [accessed 3 April 2025]

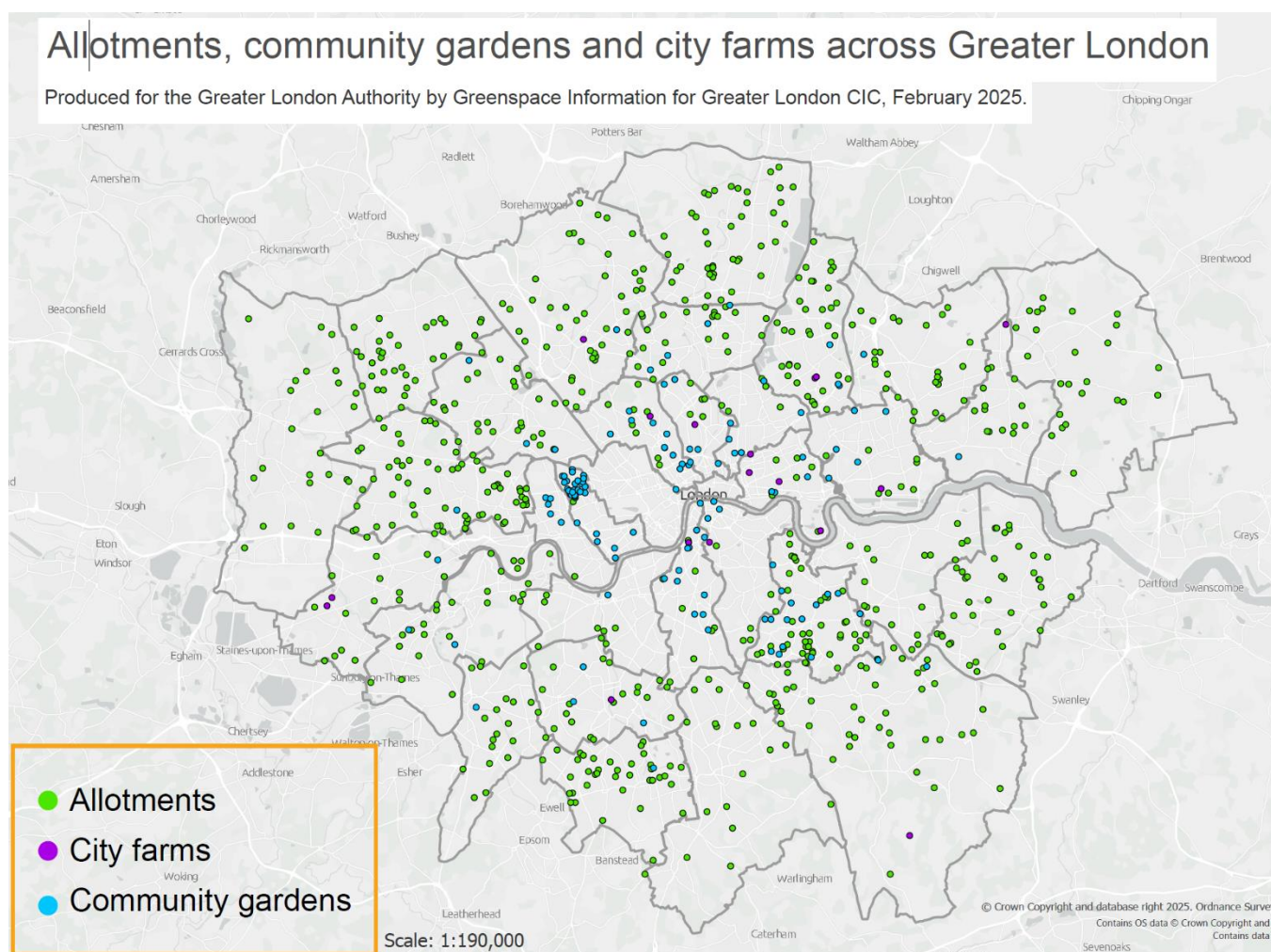
⁶ House of Commons Library, [CDP 2022/0155 Debate Pack: Debate on supporting local food infrastructure](#), 5 September 2022

⁷ ReLondon, [London's food footprint](#), November 2021

⁸ Greenspace Information for Greater London CIC, [Key London Figures](#), 2024, [accessed 3 April 2025]

The right to request an allotment, a plot of land that can be rented to grow fruit and vegetables, was set out in the Small Holdings and Allotment Act 1908 - although the statutory requirement to provide them was ended in 1963 for inner London boroughs.⁹ This partly explains why there are considerable differences in the number and type of food growing sites across the capital. Ealing has sixty allotment sites,¹⁰ whereas Kensington and Chelsea and the City of London have none.¹¹ However, the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea has developed a community kitchen garden scheme since 2009, which now has over 50 sites and gives over 700 residents the opportunity to grow food.¹²

Figure One: Greenspace Information for Greater London map showing the location of community gardens in London.¹³



⁹ [The Small Holdings and Allotments Act 1908](#) The [London Government Act 1963](#) (para 55) removed the statutory requirement for inner London boroughs to provide allotments.

¹⁰ Ealing Council, [Allotments sites](#), [accessed 10 March 2025]

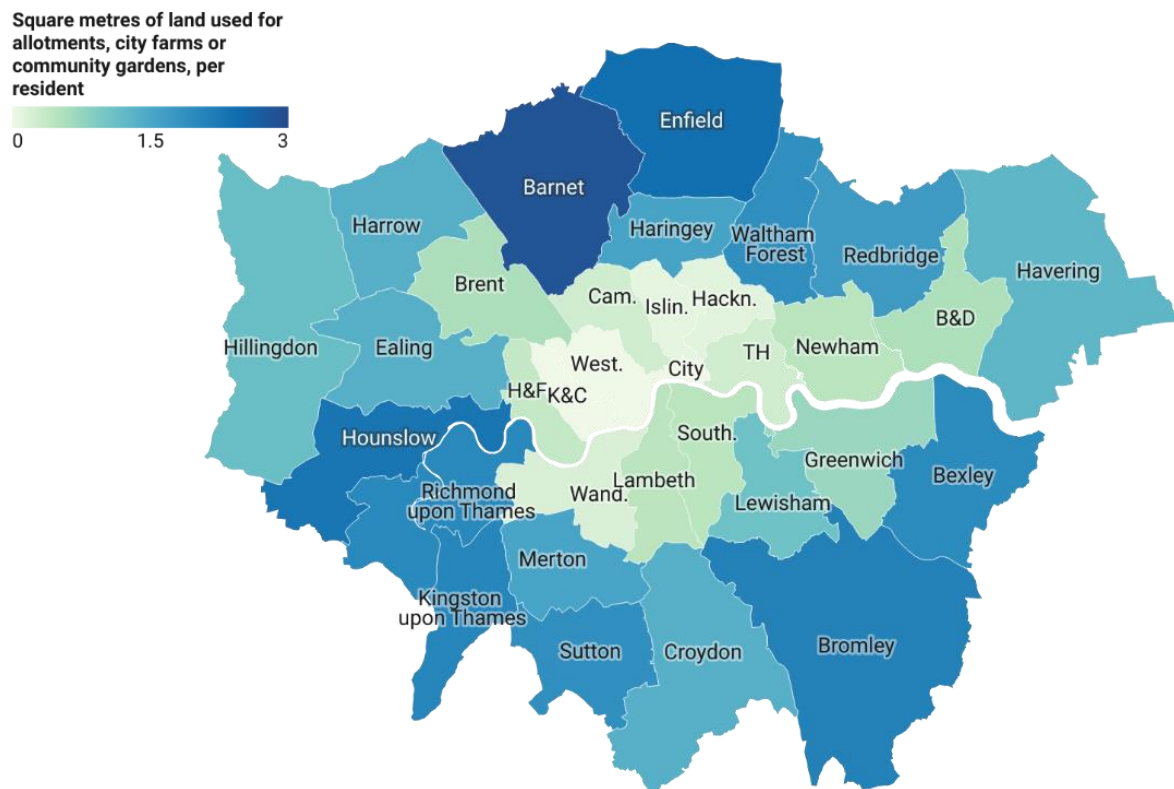
¹¹ See Appendix 2 for a complete list of numbers of allotment sites by Borough. Based on Parks for London [Allotment Fees and Charges 2023-24](#), [accessed 10 March 2025], updated by London Assembly Research Unit.

¹² Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea, [Community Gardens](#), [accessed 10 March 2025]

¹³ Map produced by Greenspace information for Greater London (GiGL) for this investigation.

These differences mean that inner London boroughs tend to have smaller amounts of community land available for food growing per resident than those in outer London (Figure Two).

Figure Two: Land used for local and community food growing by London borough population¹⁴



Map data: © Crown copyright and database right 2018 • Created with Datawrapper

Data from the Capital Growth food growing network shows there are around 650 active community gardens in London, employing approximately 1,000 paid workers, 24,000 volunteers and over 1,100 trainees.¹⁵ There are also over a dozen City Farms.¹⁶

With more than half of London households currently living in flats, community gardens, urban food projects and allotments are important ways for many Londoners to grow their own food.¹⁷ However, Capital Growth told us that more than 40 allotment sites have closed in the last decade, and waiting lists are very long in many boroughs.¹⁸ Capital Growth also highlighted

¹⁴ Land use data provided [Greenspace Information for Greater London CIC](#), February 2025 Borough population data are mid-2023 estimates provided by the [Office for National Statistics](#), July 2024 Map produced by London Assembly Research Unit

¹⁵ Sustain, [A year in London's food gardens: Capital Growth network survey findings 2023-2024](#), 19 August 2024, p.1

¹⁶ There are twelve [London City Farms](#), as well as others not part of this group.

¹⁷ London Assembly Research Unit, [London's Housing Stock](#), November 2024, p.9 – based on Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, [English Housing Survey](#), 2021

¹⁸ Capital Growth, [Written evidence submission Ref No. LFG002](#), September 2024, p.6

pressures on larger scale farms in London's green belt, from housebuilding to large-scale tree planting, which is already squeezing out food growing.¹⁹ In the Lea Valley alone, much of the land formerly used for growing food has applied to replace glasshouses with new housing estates or industrial developments.²⁰

Our investigation

The Committee previously looked at the issue of food security and the resilience of London's food system in early 2024.²¹ We decided to revisit the issue in this Assembly term to look at how food growing could be supported further, particularly as the GLA updates its spatial strategies for land and the local environment with work on a new Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS), Local Green Infrastructure Framework (LGIF) and updated London Plan.

In this investigation, we therefore particularly wanted to look at:

- the current barriers to food growing in London;
- the ways to increase opportunities for people to grow food; and
- how to support existing schemes to deliver health, economic, environmental and community benefits to different groups of Londoners.

Although supply chains and the distribution of locally produced food are important parts of local food systems, the Committee did not focus on this dimension in detail on this occasion. We also did not look in depth at food growing in private gardens which have many similar benefits for health and the local environment, but not everyone has access to them.

For the first part of this investigation, the Committee visited OrganicLea, a food growing cooperative based in the Lea Valley, touring its Hawkwood site near Chingford in the London Borough of Waltham Forest. The Committee saw the range of fruit and vegetables grown at the site in a large greenhouse and surrounding fields, which are used to supply a vegetable box scheme. The Committee also saw the training and community engagement undertaken with local volunteers.

During the visit to OrganicLea, the Committee also held a roundtable discussion with a range of invited stakeholders to understand the challenges involved in growing food in London. The Committee heard that there are several factors that hinder the establishment and growth of community-led food growing projects, including:

- conflicts over land prioritisation and usage
- limited funding
- lack of coordination and points of contacts within local boroughs
- unequal access to land and resources, especially for Black and minority communities
- the cost of doing business

¹⁹ Capital Growth, [Written evidence submission Ref No. LFG002](#), September 2024, p.8; Verbal evidence submission at roundtable at OrganicLea, 16 July 2024

²⁰ Hort News, [Lea Valley growers face extinction](#), 14 September 2022

²¹ London Assembly Environment Committee, [Letter from Environment Committee to Mayor of London](#), 18 March 2024

The Committee published a call for evidence from 7 August to 25 September 2024. The Committee received submissions from the following organisations: Plant Based Treaty, the Capital Growth network, the London Borough of Barnet, Southwark Council, a collaboration of organisations in Tower Hamlets, OrganicLea and Incredible Edible Lambeth. The Committee also received evidence from the GLA and was sent a copy of a recent report on urban agriculture, which was completed as part of a Churchill Fellowship by Leanne Werner, director of the charity Wilder.

On 16 October 2024, the Committee held a meeting at City Hall as the second part of its investigation. The Committee heard from:

- Professor Andre Viljoen, Professor of Architecture, University of Brighton
- Sandra Salazar, Go Grow with Love CIC, and 'Rootz into Food Growing' project
- Pauline Shakespeare, 'Rootz into Food Growing' project
- Sarah Williams, Director of Programmes, Capital Growth (remotely)
- Ruth Arnott, Community Gardening Coordinator, Southwark Council
- Jeremy Skinner, Assistant Director of Strategy, Insight and Intelligence, GLA
- Anna Kaskanlian, Senior Strategic Planner, GLA London Plan team, GLA

Growing: the benefits

Growing fresh fruit and vegetables has a wide range of positive impacts for Londoners' health and also for the wider environment. Plant Based Treaty, a campaign group that works closely with a number of local food growing groups, told us that being involved in food growing "promotes physical activity, enhances mental well-being, increases access to fresh fruits and vegetables, and contributes to well-maintained public spaces."²² It added that:

"Gardening on an allotment or in a community garden also fosters stronger community bonds, reduces social isolation, and creates opportunities for collaboration and celebration with neighbours."²³

Similarly, Oxford University's Environmental Change Institute, which undertook research in this area for the GLA, found that local food growing projects:

"Can improve mental and physical health and access to productive green spaces; can link people experiencing multiple disadvantage to appropriate services and support via trusted intermediaries; upskill individuals; and increase people's feelings of belonging and of influence over the environment in which they live."²⁴

Sarah Williams, Director of Programmes at the Capital Growth network, told us that "the biggest health benefit is clearly mental health and wellbeing... What you eat and how you eat it is a very complicated picture but there is no doubt that giving people access to grow their own food improves their health."²⁵

She described as "magical", the way that that food growing in community areas can create "a bit of a virtuous circle", making people feel safer and potentially reducing crime as people see other people looking after community spaces.²⁶

"There is no doubt that giving people access to grow their own food improves their health."²⁷

Sarah Williams, Capital Growth

²² Plant Based Treaty, [Written evidence submission Ref No. LFG006](#), September 2024, p.27

²³ Plant Based Treaty, [Written evidence submission Ref No. LFG006](#), September 2024, p.27

²⁴ Food Systems Transformation Group, [Enhancing the Resilience of London's Food Systems](#), February 2022, p.32

²⁵ London Assembly Environment Committee, [Meeting transcript: Panel 1](#), 16 October 2024, p.6

²⁶ London Assembly Environment Committee, [Meeting transcript: Panel 1](#), 16 October 2024, p.6

²⁷ London Assembly Environment Committee, [Meeting transcript: Panel 1](#), 16 October 2024, p.6

The Committee also heard about how growing food can have significant environmental benefits. Incredible Edible Lambeth, a local group which is part of the national Incredible Edible food movement,²⁸ highlighted how community gardens can support “critical pollinator populations, especially wild bees, as well as being important reserves for wild plant species which are threatened in urban spaces.”²⁹ Capital Growth explained that the permeable surfaces of food growing spaces and the harvesting of rainwater contribute to sustainable drainage and flood alleviation, as well as plants removing and storing carbon dioxide from the atmosphere (‘carbon sequestration’).³⁰

Sandra Salazar told us “Food growing and urban agriculture is so important for the development of London” because it tackles “wastage and pollution... [and] climate justice”.³¹ Food accounts for over ten per cent of London’s consumption-based greenhouse gas emissions – due to the kinds of food eaten, how and where it is produced, and the amount that is wasted.³² While there are a number of factors involved in carbon emissions from food, including the amount of energy needed to grow and transport crops, locally produced food generally has a lower carbon footprint than food flown in from other countries.³³ London, and the UK in general, rely heavily on food imports for a range of reasons including climate limitations, seasonal availability, and the desire for a diverse and affordable food supply.³⁴

Food growing can be done at a variety of scales – from small containers on private balconies and raised beds in communal public spaces, to formal allotments, city farms and larger sites in London’s greenbelt. We heard there are opportunities to connect people with food growing at all these levels, and also for people to develop the skills and experience to grow and support others. In its submission to the Committee, OrganicLea stated:

“The main reason why the vast majority of Londoners don’t grow a small amount of food is lack of know-how and confidence to do it...Almost everyone could be growing at least a container or window box with chillies, garlic, tomatoes, or herbs, this is very affordable and at scale could make a difference to the food footprint of London.”³⁵

Southwark Council also told us that opportunities to build social connections and leadership skills are an important part of many food growing projects.³⁶ A submission from groups in Tower Hamlets, co-ordinated by WEN (the Women’s Environment Network) highlighted that food projects can increase residents’ confidence to get into work or take up leadership roles. The

²⁸ Incredible Edible, [The Right to Grow](#), [accessed 3 April 2025]

²⁹ Incredible Edible Lambeth,; Quote in Incredible Edible [The Right to Grow](#) p9

³⁰ Capital Growth, [Written evidence submission Ref No. LFG002](#), September 2024, p.13

³¹ London Assembly Environment Committee, [Meeting transcript: Panel 1](#), 16 October 2024, p.22

³² ReLondon, [London’s Food Footprint](#), November 2021;

³³ Not all locally food will necessarily have a lower carbon footprint – for example if there if energy is needed to heat greenhouses out of season in the UK, or if economies of scale reduce the per unit transport emissions.

Sustain, [The Case for Local Food](#), 2021; Frankowska et al, [Environmental impacts of vegetables consumption in the UK](#), Science of The Total Environment, Volume 682, 2019

³⁴ Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs, [United Kingdom Food Security Report 2021: Theme 2: UK Food Supply Sources](#), updated 22 October 2024

³⁵ Capital Growth, [Written evidence submission Ref No. LFG002](#), September 2024, p.25

³⁶ London Assembly Environment Committee, [Meeting transcript: Panel 1](#), 16 October 2024, p.14

submission also stated that by having food growing activities at community hubs, such as the Limborough Community Food Hub, it was easier to engage with people to try something new. This led to greater crossover of groups and for residents to participate in mutually reinforcing activities such as coffee mornings and workshops alongside food growing.³⁷ However, Barnet Council told us that many food growing groups rely on volunteers and retaining them can be difficult. They also highlighted the need for “clear pathways to well-paid jobs” to attract young people to train in horticulture.³⁸

Community projects give people access to opportunities to land to grow food and also the equipment and skills needed. Training and support, such as workshops and learning from others, can help people acquire the skills they need to grow food. Training also supports people to gain qualifications to access employment in the sector. OrganicLea told us that for people looking to make food growing part of their livelihood there is a need to access work-based training up to at least Level 2 City and Guilds.³⁹ Capital Growth told the Committee that food growing “represents an opportunity to build and link into adult education and develop transferable skills leading to work or employment.”⁴⁰

“Our experience shows that [food growing] can be very accessible to people who have been marginalised by the mainstream education system.”

OrganicLea⁴¹

Similarly, OrganicLea told the Committee about how training can create opportunities for people to access employment in food growing. This in turn can support the green jobs agenda and wider adult learning strategies. OrganicLea recommended that food growing training opportunities are part of the Mayor’s Adult Learning offer.⁴² They stated:

“there is scope to promote food growing as a rewarding Green Job so that training in the sector is considered by many more young and older people, rather than just those that have 'seen the light'. This could then link to T Levels and Apprenticeships. The training needs to be appropriate focusing on practical experience that makes people ready for employment.”⁴³

³⁷ Tower Hamlets Collaborative, [Written evidence submission Ref No. LFG008](#), September 2024, p.57

³⁸ London Borough of Barnet, [Written evidence submission Ref No LFG001](#), September 2-24, p. 4

³⁹ OrganicLea, [Written evidence submission Ref No. LFG005](#), September 2024, p.25

⁴⁰ Capital Growth, [Written evidence submission Ref No. LFG002](#), September 2024, p.9

⁴¹ OrganicLea, [Written evidence submission Ref No. LFG005](#), September 2024, p.26

⁴² OrganicLea, [Written evidence submission Ref No. LFG005](#), September 2024, p.26

⁴³ OrganicLea, [Written evidence submission Ref No. LFG005](#), September 2024, p.25

London-wide support for food growing

For over a decade, the GLA has played an important role in helping to nurture London's community food growing ecosystem.

The London Food Board was first established in 2004 as a non-statutory group created to advise the Mayor of London and the Greater London Authority on the implementation of programmes relating to food across the capital.⁴⁴

The GLA has supported the Capital Growth food growing network since it was launched in 2008. Capital Growth, which is run by the charity Sustain (an alliance of organisations working 'for a better system of food and farming')⁴⁵, was part of a high-profile campaign to create 2,012 community food growing spaces in 2012 to mark the London Olympics. The campaign was supported by the Mayor of London and Big Lottery Fund and encouraged 100,000 Londoners to get involved in food growing.⁴⁶

Policies to support food growing feature in both the current London Plan and Mayor's Food Strategy.⁴⁷ The Food Strategy, published in 2018 set out the need to work with local councils, private sector partners and food growing charities to support food growing.⁴⁸ The London Plan 2021, the Spatial Development Strategy for Greater London, sets priorities for how land is used.⁴⁹ Policy G8 in the Mayor's London Plan includes a focus on food growing. It highlights the multiple benefits of food growing, including how "community food growing not only helps to improve social integration and community cohesion but can also contribute to improved mental and physical health and wellbeing."⁵⁰

Jeremy Skinner, Assistant Director of Strategy, Insight and Intelligence at the GLA, told us that food growing "touches upon so many of the outcomes that we [the GLA] want to see achieved in the city in terms of health, biodiversity, sustainability, improvements in education and understanding how the environment works."⁵¹

⁴⁴ GLA, [The London Food Board](#), [accessed 3 April 2025]

⁴⁵ Sustain, [About](#), [accessed 10 March 2025]

⁴⁶ Sustain, [100,000 green-fingered Londoners achieve 2012 food growing target](#), December 2012, [accessed 4 March 2025]

⁴⁷ GLA, [The London Plan 2021](#), March 2021, p.331; GLA, [The London Food Strategy](#), December 2018

⁴⁸ GLA, [The London Food Strategy](#), December 2018

⁴⁹ GLA, [The London Plan 2021](#), March 2021

⁵⁰ GLA, [The London Plan 2021](#), March 2021, p.331

⁵¹ London Assembly Environment Committee, [Meeting transcript: Panel 2](#), 16 October 2024, p.1

The London Plan – Policy G8 A

In Development Plans, boroughs should:

- 1) protect existing allotments and encourage provision of space for urban agriculture, including community gardening, and food growing within new developments and as a meanwhile use on vacant or under-utilised sites.
- 2) identify potential sites that could be used for food production.⁵²

The London Plan recognises the Capital Growth network’s role in supporting food growing across London. It states that Capital Growth “is London’s food growing network, which continues to promote community food growing across the capital, as well as delivering food-growing skills and employment opportunities for Londoners.”⁵³ Support for Capital Growth was also reiterated in the updated Implementation Plan for the London Food Strategy, which was published in November 2023.⁵⁴

While there are many inspiring examples of food growing in the capital, there are also areas of London where people don’t have access to such groups. Sarah Williams told us:

“I think the GLA and the Mayor of London’s role is to put the spotlight on local authorities and what they are doing, trying to raise the bar across the board so that we have a minimum standard, you do not have this postcode lottery across London and you are seeing London have a whole joined-up approach to food growing, rather than it be dependent on where you are, what your borough thinks of it...”⁵⁵

The role of London’s boroughs

London’s local authorities have an important role to play in supporting local food growing in London. The 32 boroughs (and the City of London) lead on site allocations in local plans, overseeing local planning decisions and managing council land, which often include allotment sites and land in parks or housing estates that could be used for growing food.

Sustain’s Good Food Local report 2025 (see Figure Three), funded by the GLA, Trust for London and Impact on Urban Health, assessed action in food growing among councils in London.⁵⁶ It found 16 councils showing leadership, with 11 councils improving their score from the previous year.⁵⁷

⁵² GLA, [The London Plan 2021](#), March 2021, p.331

⁵³ GLA, [The London Plan 2021](#), March 2021, p.331

⁵⁴ GLA, [London Food Strategy implementation plan update](#), November 2023

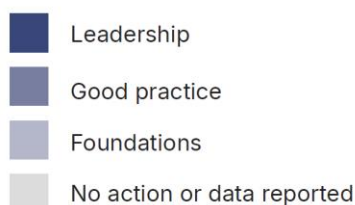
⁵⁵ London Assembly Environment Committee, [Meeting transcript: Panel 1](#), 16 October 2024, p.16

⁵⁶ Sustain, [Good Food Local: The London report 2025](#), February 2024, p.12

⁵⁷ Capital Growth, [Written evidence submission Ref No. LFG002](#), September 2024, p.10

Figure Three: Map showing London council rankings for action in food growing, 2025⁵⁸

Community food growing



The map for community food action can be viewed online at www.sustainweb.org/good-food-local/london

The report highlights examples of best practice and encouraging other London boroughs to improve their policies, such as planning policies to help residents access land. Capital Growth also host an inter-council network.⁵⁹ This provides a useful mechanism for sharing learning across the city.

GLA funding to support food growing

Capital Growth told us that it aims to be a 'one stop shop' signposting information and meaning that food growers don't need to 'reinvent the wheel', as well as filling gaps in the provision offered by more local networks.⁶⁰ Barnet Council told us that the Capital Growth network is "a useful resource for us, especially to connect and hear best practice and policy/project success stories from other boroughs that are more advanced with food growing."⁶¹

However, during this investigation we heard that despite supportive policies, the overall support for food growing from the GLA is currently less clear. Sarah Williams, Director of Programmes at Capital Growth, told the Committee in October 2024 that the GLA appeared to be no longer interested in taking a London-wide approach, asking "whose remit is it to know and even care what is happening across London? It used to be the Greater London Authority (GLA) and the Mayor of London, and now that remit has definitely dropped off."⁶²

She stated that there had been no clarity over future funding from the GLA:

⁵⁸ Sustain, [Good Food Local: The London report 2025](#), February 2024, p12

⁵⁹ The 2024 report stated that 20 Councils attend this. Sustain, [Good Food Local: The London report 2024](#), February 2024, p12

⁶⁰ Capital Growth, [Written evidence submission Ref No. LFG002](#), September 2024, p.7

⁶¹ Barnet Council, [Written evidence submission Ref No. LFG001](#), September 2024, p.5

⁶² London Assembly Environment Committee, [Meeting transcript: Panel 1](#), 16 October 2024, p.2

“There is no cross-cutting budget on food at the moment as far as I am aware. We have just had, ‘Thanks, we sort of appreciate all the work you do but there is not any money for you’, and we are only asking for quite a small amount at the moment. At the moment Capital Growth does not have any funding and we are running on some central reserve money that we have until we get the outcome of the City Bridge Foundation bid. In terms of that London wide view, that is why I was saying earlier on: whose responsibility and whose remit is it? Capital Growth might not be here to give the data and to give these answers much longer, so I think someone within the GLA needs to take a bit of ownership if they are serious about this agenda.”⁶³

Barnet Council also expressed concern about the potential “loss of a critical asset and beacon project for London.”⁶⁴

Pauline Shakespeare, who led the Rootz into Food Growing research project, stressed the importance of “core funding, sensible core funding, to be able to run a membership body that allows it to do the policy engagement that is needed in this space but also to do the outreach and connection to bring people in and to make sure that they are heard.”⁶⁵ She highlighted that this was equally true for Capital Growth and her own organisation.

Jeremy Skinner from the GLA told the Committee that the GLA has been changing the way it considers its programmes and budget to focus on an updated set of priorities. He said, “We need to make sure that conscious decisions are taken to avoid things falling through the gaps. Food, by its very crosscutting nature, is one that is vulnerable, and we need to make sure that it is supported.”⁶⁶

The Committee is concerned about the future of funding and support for the Capital Growth network. We have twice written to the Mayor, in March 2024, and again in November 2024, asking him to provide further strategic support and funding to support London’s local food growing network.⁶⁷

The GLA teams responsible for implementing the Mayor’s plans for food growing, community gardening and urban farming, as of November 2024, were the Health team, Green Infrastructure team, Planning team, and Skills and Employment team.⁶⁸ The GLA currently has one policy officer who co-ordinates all work relating to food policy.⁶⁹ While the GLA does not have dedicated programmes for food growing, it has often been supported as part of wider

⁶³ London Assembly Environment Committee, [Meeting transcript: Panel 1](#), 16 October 2024, p.9

⁶⁴ London Borough of Barnet, [Written evidence submission Ref No. LFG001](#), September 2024, p.7

⁶⁵ London Assembly Environment Committee, [Meeting transcript: Panel 1](#), 16 October 2024, p.27

⁶⁶ London Assembly Environment Committee, [Meeting transcript: Panel 2](#), 16 October 2024, p.5

⁶⁷ London Assembly Environment Committee, [Letter from Environment Committee to Mayor of London](#), 7 November 2024

⁶⁸ GLA, [London Food Strategy implementation plan update](#), November 2023, p12

⁶⁹ London Assembly Environment Committee, [Letter from Environment Committee to Mayor of London](#), 18 March 2024

projects, such as School Superzones (see below).⁷⁰ After this programme ends in March 2025, it is unclear what other funding from the Mayor will be available for food growing.

We are concerned that successful cross-cutting areas, such as local food growing, may get lower priority due to the internal decisions being made around the budgets for the year ahead and delivery plans for mandates and missions being agreed. At the time of writing this report, we were yet to receive a response to our November 2024 letter requesting clarity on funding.

School Superzones (2022-24)⁷¹

Food growing was an optional component of the Mayor's funding for School Superzones across London. This provided £30,000 to each of 51 local programmes to fund interventions to improve health and the local environment in and around schools.

28 boroughs received funding and around 15 of the Superzones included support for food growing.

For example, in Newham the funding was used to support the establishment of a new farm the Royal Docks Academy in partnership with OrganicLea, including polytunnels, watering systems, compost and tools. The ongoing running costs, including a professional gardener, will need to be covered by the income generated through selling food and plants. The aim is that groups of students will regular come to the farm for enrichment sessions during the week and to learn new skills.

The Committee also heard that funding for food growing projects across London is often not sufficient to allow them to plan for the future. Capital Growth told the Committee that in response to its 2024 survey, 38 per cent of its members said that they were concerned about a lack of funding for staff. Short-term or low funding means that it is sometimes difficult to hire staff to manage volunteers and can lead to issues with retaining staff.⁷² Wherever possible, giving long-term funding allows organisations to plan effectively and focus their efforts on delivering outcomes for Londoners. The uncertainty around funding that we have seen experienced by Capital Growth highlights the precarious position that many food growing organisations across London are regularly in.

We recognise that it is not the Mayor's role to provide funding for all groups. However, it is important that the Mayor alongside local authorities, schools, charities and other groups to continue to support food projects that bring communities together, reduce social isolation, improve health, and help people take practical steps to respond to the climate crisis.

⁷⁰ GLA, [Written evidence submission Ref No. LFG003](#), September 2024

⁷¹ GLA, [Written evidence submission Ref No: LFG003](#), September 2024, p.17-18

⁷² Capital Growth, [Written evidence submission Ref No. LFG002](#), September 2024, p.6

The Mayor announced in his 2024 manifesto a new Green Roots Fund to provide funding to pay for green spaces. This could be one potential source of funding for supporting community growing projects.⁷³ In March 2025, the Deputy Mayor told us that an announcement on the fund would be made “very soon”, and it would be an “open and accessible fund for Londoners where we can deliver green space across the city at scale.”⁷⁴ He stated that it was being designed so that “residents or community groups can apply all year around to deliver community-based projects.”⁷⁵

Recommendation One: The Mayor should commit ongoing funding to London-wide food growing networks to share learning and good practice across London boroughs and local food growing groups. The Mayor should also ensure that food growing is supported across all departments with clear ownership by one of the Deputy Mayors and is a significant component of other programmes and funding opportunities, such as his new Green Roots fund.

⁷³ London Assembly, [MQ 2024/1608 \[Green Roots Fund Clarity\]](#), 29 May 2024

⁷⁴ London Assembly Environment Committee, [Meeting transcript](#), 4 March 2025, p.2

⁷⁵ London Assembly Environment Committee, [Meeting transcript](#), 4 March 2025, p.22

Increasing access to growing spaces

Access the city, many Londoners do not have access to their own land or gardens where they can grow food. Local and community growing projects can help provide that connection, but this requires access to land. Often there is unused land that could be used for food growing, but it takes local authorities and other stakeholders to agree and ensure that there are the facilities needed to ensure that this can be accessible to those who need it.⁷⁶

We heard many examples of barriers people face accessing land to grow food. Groups in Tower Hamlets that us that Stepney City Farm is not able to meet the demand from the local Bangladeshi community who “have the growing skills, but not the land” available to grow on.⁷⁷

Pauline Shakespeare coordinated the ‘Rootz into Food Growing’ project, which examined the barriers that black and brown food growers face. She told the Committee that some organisations are “constantly battling with local authorities not to be thrown off the land, which brings about a great insecurity to those projects and disrupts their work on a regular basis.”⁷⁸ Pauline explained that:

“If you have land for 12 months, that is kind of meaningless. It is greenwashing to make a neighbourhood look nice and gentrify it in some cases. Have meaningful land allocation that is looked at specifically to understand how and why and who it has been allocated to.”⁷⁹

She added that it is not just the length of leases that is important, but also the terms of the lease and the cost which affects how financially sustainable a food growing project may be.⁸⁰ Incredible Edible Lambeth echoed this in written evidence, saying “It is particularly difficult to secure long leases as councils can see the land as a potential opportunity for them to generate income.”⁸¹

Allotment sites provide an important way for Londoners, particularly those without gardens, to access land for food growing. Sandra Salazar, founder of GoGrowWithLove which teaches children and families to grow food, told the Committee that: “There is a new energy of young people who are now accessing or trying to access allotments because of the lack of green spaces in London where they can grow food.”⁸²

⁷⁶ Food Systems Transformation Group [Environmental Change Institute, University of Oxford], [Enhancing the resilience of London’s food system. Environmental Change Institute](#), February 2022, p.36

⁷⁷ Tower Hamlets Collaborative, [Written evidence submission Ref No. LFG008](#), September 2024

⁷⁸ London Assembly Environment Committee, [Meeting transcript: Panel 1](#), 16 October 2024, p.11

⁷⁹ London Assembly Environment Committee, [Meeting transcript: Panel 1](#), 16 October 2024, p.21

⁸⁰ London Assembly Environment Committee, [Meeting transcript: Panel 1](#), 16 October 2024, p.21

⁸¹ Incredible Edible Lambeth [Written evidence submission Ref No. LFG004](#), September 2024, p9

⁸² London Assembly Environment Committee, [Meeting transcript: Panel 1](#), 16 October 2024, p.10

Yet, allotment waiting lists in many parts of London are still too long.⁸³ Capital Growth told us about the difficulties in accessing allotments and other local authority land.⁸⁴ For example, it highlighted that “in 2022, Camden Council found that the average waiting time for an allotment was 12 years.”⁸⁵ Research by Greenpeace in 2023 found that 30,500 Londoners were on waiting lists for allotments in London.⁸⁶ More still needs to be done to improve access to opportunities to grow food.

Improving access to land

Our investigation has highlighted different options to improve access to land for food growing. We have heard about solutions that could operate at a local – Borough-level – as well as on a larger London-wide scale – where the GLA and Mayor could step in.

Southwark Council told the Committee about its ‘Allotment Expansion Guarantee’. This programme provides an opportunity for residents to develop a community gardening or food growing project on land owned by Southwark Council with the support of the Community Gardening service. Through this scheme Southwark reported to the Committee there have been 19 new resident led food growing gardens on housing estates, 239 new growing plots, with five more projects currently in development.⁸⁷ Ruth Arnott told the Committee that it typically takes “on average one year” between the first approach to have access to a site and growing starting.⁸⁸

Southwark also carried out an independent ‘Land Commission’ to explore how to “free up more land for public good”. It followed other Land Commissions in Scotland and Liverpool.⁸⁹ The Southwark Land Commission’s report highlighted the importance of land for local production, identifying “a clear need and opportunity for environmentally focused land use and management decisions to help meet social and ecological objectives”, and recommended supporting and resourcing local food growing projects.⁹⁰ Ruth Arnott, Community Gardening Coordinator at Southwark Council told the Committee:

“I would encourage other local authorities to either do their own Land Commission or to learn from Southwark’s, Liverpool’s or Scotland’s. I think there is a lot of potential for cross-council working on this, particularly maybe thinking about councils with similar situations, like inner-city, different areas and different political make-ups, working together a bit more rather than trying to reinvent the wheel.”⁹¹

⁸³ Capital Growth, [Written evidence submission Ref No. LFG002](#), September 2024, p.8

⁸⁴ Capital Growth, [Written evidence submission Ref No. LFG002](#), September 2024, p.8

⁸⁵ Capital Growth, [Written evidence submission Ref No. LFG002](#), September 2024, p.6

⁸⁶ The Standard, [Space to grow: with 30,500 Londoners on allotment waitlists here’s how to nab a plot of your own](#), 11 November 2023 [accessed 10 March 2025]

⁸⁷ Southwark Council, [Written evidence submission Ref No. LFG007](#), September 2024, p.46

⁸⁸ London Assembly Environment Committee, [Meeting transcript: Panel 1](#), 16 October 2024, p.14

⁸⁹ Scottish Land Commission, [About Us](#) [accessed 14 January 2025]; The Centre for Local Economic Strategies, [Our Land: Final Report of the Liverpool City Region Land Commission](#), 6 July 2021

⁹⁰ Southwark Land Commission, [Land for good](#), September 2023

⁹¹ London Assembly Environment Committee, [Meeting transcript: Panel 1](#), 16 October 2024, p.16

While Inner London boroughs don't have a statutory requirement to provide allotments,⁹² the London Plan makes it clear that all London boroughs should protect existing sites and "encourage provision of space for urban agriculture, including community gardening, and food growing within new developments and as a meanwhile use on vacant or under-utilised sites".⁹³

Other approaches to improving access to allotments and growing spaces include subdividing traditionally large allotments into smaller plots, which Plant Based Treaty told us that Waltham Forest has done.⁹⁴ Capital Growth also told us about Hounslow Council's Grow for the Future policy, funded by the Government's Shared Prosperity Fund, which aims to turn unused land across the borough into new allotment sites, community gardens and orchards.⁹⁵

The 'Right to Grow'

The Committee also heard that giving local communities the 'right to grow' offers a potential model for expanding access to food growing across London. It follows a similar principle to the approach taken in Southwark – by calling on local authorities to set up a simple process by which communities can apply to access suitable land for food growing.

The Right to Grow campaign

The Right to Grow campaign aims for policy and legislative change to give individuals the right to grow fruit and vegetables on underused public spaces in order to increase food security.⁹⁶ Supported by Incredible Edible, a national network of food growing groups, the campaign asks for "local authorities to maintain a free, accessible map of all public land that is suitable for community cultivation or wildlife projects", and to "create a simple process whereby communities can apply to cultivate this land for a defined period without the need for a formal lease or complex license".⁹⁷

Ruth Arnott from Southwark Council, told the Committee she thought implementing a 'right to grow' policy was possible.

"I think we are down to the 'how', how things can work, and that is a lot about giving confidence on both sides, to landowners or custodians and groups. It is a balance and it is a working together situation rather than being against each other. We feel in Southwark that we are delivering on quite a few of the right-to-grow asks currently, albeit at maybe not the highest scale we could do it at. We have a process, we have

⁹² Inner London Boroughs had a discretionary power to provide allotments under section 55(4) of the [London Government Act 1963](#)

⁹³ GLA, [The London Plan 2021](#), March 2021, p.331

⁹⁴ Plant Based Treaty, [Written evidence submission Ref No. LFG006](#), September 2024, p.28

⁹⁵ London Borough of Hounslow, [Government backs Hounslow's plan to transform wasteland to grow food](#), 2 June 2023

⁹⁶ Incredible Edible, [Right To Grow](#), [accessed 3 April 2025]

⁹⁷ Incredible Edible, [Right To Grow](#), [accessed 3 April 2025]

officer support and we are trying to enable people who want to set up projects to do so.”⁹⁸

In January 2025, Southwark Council became the first London borough to adopt the Right to Grow motion.⁹⁹

There are some basic facilities that food growing sites need. Barnet Council told us that these include “good sunlight, access to water and storage.”¹⁰⁰ Plant Based Treaty and Camden Council also highlighted soil testing for contamination and accessibility and health and safety issues also need to be considered.¹⁰¹ The Tower Hamlets Collaborative told us that the availability of toilets is a particular concern for older people. Some community gardens, such as Mile End Community Garden (MECG) have raised funds to build compost toilets on site, “co-designing the toilet with residents to ensure the design meets the needs of different groups within the local community.”¹⁰² Introducing food growing areas near people’s homes or existing facilities can be another way of resolving some of these challenges.

However, Pauline Shakespeare from the Rootz into Food Growing project, cautioned that the time it takes for people to get access to growing spaces is often a barrier to people who live in short-term accommodation. She said:

“The right to grow also assumes a sense of permanence in terms of where you are located. Twenty years ago, that would have been different. People move around a hell of a lot, especially people who are more and more vulnerable. In London, as we know, there are barriers to people being able to stay in the same place and be part of a growing project. Projects are not just about people having a lack of will to stay engaged, but literally circumstances are preventing them from having a longer-term engagement with a project.”¹⁰³

Professor Andre Viljoen told the Committee that the ‘right to grow’ could be implemented in London, but highlighted that “It needs a strategy.”¹⁰⁴ Similarly, Sarah Williams, Director of Programmes at Capital Growth told the Committee “It feels like London is ripe for that [right to grow] ... I think local authorities and the Mayor of London have a real opportunity to drive that agenda forward.”¹⁰⁵ The Committee agrees. The Mayor has an important strategic role to play in significantly increasing access to food growing sites – so too do the Boroughs.

⁹⁸ London Assembly Environment Committee, [Meeting transcript: Panel 1](#), 16 October 2024, p.16

⁹⁹ Southwark Council, [Southwark Council allows ‘right to grow’ on unused council land in London first](#), 3 March 2025

¹⁰⁰ Barnet Council, [Written evidence submission Ref No. LFG001](#), September 2024, p.3

¹⁰¹ Plant Based Treaty, [Written evidence submission Ref No. LFG006](#), September 2024, p.30

¹⁰² Tower Hamlets, Collaborative evidence submission, [Ref No. LFG008](#), September 2024

¹⁰³ London Assembly Environment Committee, [Meeting transcript: Panel 1](#), 16 October 2024, p.16

¹⁰⁴ London Assembly Environment Committee, [Meeting transcript: Panel 1](#), 16 October 2024, p.17

¹⁰⁵ London Assembly Environment Committee, [Meeting transcript: Panel 1](#), 16 October 2024, p.10

Council officers responsible for food growing

In its written evidence to the Committee, Southwark Council explained that another key action it has taken to support food growing has been to establish two part-time Community Gardening Coordinators to be the main point of contact within the council for community gardening.¹⁰⁶ As part of their role, the Community Gardening Coordinators identify and gain funding for new community growing projects in parks and develop a borough-wide Community Gardening network to help support existing local networks and growers. The team also provide monthly two-hour training sessions to new estate community gardeners.¹⁰⁷

Ruth Arnott is one of the Community Gardening Coordinators at Southwark Council and was a guest at the Committee's meeting. Ruth told us:

"I think having people who come from a background of food growing, community gardening and working in these projects working either as council officers or as another organisation working with the council is key to understanding all the issues, because it is complicated and there are a lot of things to consider. Holding that space -- and we are lucky enough we have a permanent role now, which is somewhere to move on and develop from."¹⁰⁸

Other guests also reinforced just how important it is for councils to have dedicated officers whose role is to support food growing in the borough. Capital Growth's evidence to the Committee stated that food growing often "sits across multiple policy areas – public health, parks, climate change, community development and regeneration. This can make it difficult for councils to allocate budget and dedicated officer time."¹⁰⁹ Incredible Edible Lambeth told us the importance of a main contact point for food growing and to agree a common approach across a Council.¹¹⁰ Without any one officer being responsible, we heard that it is common for questions to be passed between different departments.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁶ Southwark Council, [Written evidence submission Ref No. LFG007](#), September 2024, p.48

¹⁰⁷ Southwark Council, [Written evidence submission Ref No. LFG007](#), September 2024, p.48

¹⁰⁸ London Assembly Environment Committee, [Meeting transcript: Panel 1](#), 16 October 2024, p.7

¹⁰⁹ Capital Growth, [Written evidence submission Ref No. LFG002](#), September 2024

¹¹⁰ Incredible Edible Lambeth, [Written evidence submission Ref No. LFG004](#), September 2024, p.10

¹¹¹ Incredible Edible Lambeth [Arup Framework for Food Growing](#), [accessed 3 April 2025]

Strengthening London's strategic plans to support food growing

The GLA is responsible for setting a clear strategic role for food growing in London. The London Plan must be reviewed every five years. The current London Plan was adopted in March 2021.

Anna Kashkanlian, Senior Strategic Planner at the GLA, told the Committee that “since the London Plan was published in 2021, there has been an uptake in food growing policies being incorporated into local plans as the policy asks them to. A few of them are starting to get a bit more ambitious with what they are asking for as well.”¹¹²

The upcoming renewal of the London Plan provides the GLA with an opportunity to further integrate local food growing into its regional planning frameworks and encourage the detailed consideration of potential food growing opportunities in local planning. While food growing is included in current policy frameworks, there are opportunities to make it more prominent. We heard of several ways in which planners could encourage food growing in the next iteration, including identifying opportunities to use unused land for food growing.

Professor Andre Viljoen told the Committee that food growing should be seen as “essential infrastructure” in regional and local plans and strategies.¹¹³

“The first step is to get it [local food growing] written into policy. Ideally, urban agriculture is part of the essential infrastructure within the London Plan. If you want to take it seriously, we have roads as essential infrastructure, water as essential infrastructure and food growing as essential infrastructure to transition to a more equitable, sustainable, circular system.”¹¹⁴

Professor Andre Viljoen, Professor of Architecture, University of Brighton

This concept of food growing as a part of London's essential infrastructure also addresses concerns that a lack of local food growing harms London's preparedness for shocks, and the need to support local food growing networks and sustainable urban farming.

Jeremy Skinner told the Committee that the GLA did see green infrastructure as a critical part of the overall infrastructure of the city, but acknowledged that the GLA had previously missed opportunities to “also see that as a food growing opportunity as well.”¹¹⁵

¹¹² London Assembly Environment Committee, [Meeting transcript: Panel 2](#), 16 October 2024, p.8

¹¹³ London Assembly Environment Committee, [Meeting transcript: Panel 1](#), 16 October 2024, p.21

¹¹⁴ London Assembly Environment Committee, [Meeting transcript: Panel 1](#), 16 October 2024, p.21

¹¹⁵ London Assembly Environment Committee, [Meeting transcript: Panel 2](#), 16 October 2024, p.9

The Committee's March 2024 letter asked the Mayor to set out an action plan to improve the resilience of London's food system.¹¹⁶ In response the Mayor stated that officers "will develop thinking on areas that the Mayor could prioritise to increase London's and Londoner's resilience to food shocks".¹¹⁷ We think more work is still needed in this area.

In advance of the update to the London Plan, the GLA is also developing a Local Nature Recovery Strategy and Green Infrastructure Framework, which will provide the opportunity to map London's biodiversity and identify strategic opportunities for improvements. This is an opportunity to ensure that food growing is fully integrated into decision making around how to use land.

Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS)

The GLA was appointed by the government as the 'Responsible Authority' to produce London's Local Nature Recovery Strategy. It is one of 48 Responsible Authorities across the UK. Every strategy must contain a local habitat map and a written statement of biodiversity priorities and is expected to be complete by summer 2025.¹¹⁸

Incredible Edible Lambeth told us that the GLA should create an 'Urban Agriculture Plan' for London and encourage local authorities to do the same.¹¹⁹ It highlighted the Philadelphia Urban Agriculture Plan as an example of a "a fantastic, detailed plan to right wrongs over land and achieve land justice." The plan aims to establish a 10-year framework for investing in and supporting agriculture and food justice and identifying pathways for establishing new projects.¹²⁰ London could learn from this approach as part of its framework for supporting green infrastructure across the city.

¹¹⁶ London Assembly Environment Committee, [Letter from Environment Committee to Mayor of London](#), 18 March 2024

¹¹⁷ Mayor of London, [Response to Chair of the London Assembly Environment Committee](#), 17 October 2024

¹¹⁸ Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs, [Local nature recovery strategies](#), 30 June 2023

¹¹⁹ Incredible Edible Lambeth, [Written evidence submission Ref No. LFG004](#), September 2024, p.23

¹²⁰ Philadelphia Parks and Recreation, [Philadelphia's Urban Agriculture Plan: Growing from the root](#), January 2023

London Green Infrastructure Framework (LGIF)

The GLA is developing the London Green Infrastructure Framework to provide up to date, London-wide spatial data and priorities for green and blue infrastructure.

The LGIF will include a wider range of both human-led and nature-led issues than the LNRS, and will provide evidence to target new, improved and protected greening. It will replace the existing All London Green Grid¹²¹ and Green Infrastructure Focus Map,¹²² and will form the green infrastructure spatial evidence base for any update to both the London Environment Strategy and the London Plan.¹²³

Sarah Williams from Capital Growth also highlighted the need to protect and promote larger-scale food growing projects in London's greenbelt. She said:

"A really missed area of opportunity is the growing at scale and the agroecological farming on the outskirts of London. There is some opportunity to maybe look at... best and most versatile land. It is a classification of agricultural land and is referred to in the National Planning [Policy] Framework (NPPF). That should be avoided for development and should be prioritised for things like agroecology. That is something that definitely could ramp up the London Plan."¹²⁴

The countryside charity, CPRE, as part of the More Natural Capital coalition have recently called for the GLA and local authorities to support the creation of six new major peri-urban community farms by 2030. They suggest that these are "managed in a nature-friendly way, including hedgerows, shrubs and trees to provide natural wind breaks, as well as incorporating areas to grow fruit and nut trees."¹²⁵ CPRE have also highlighted that the government's 'grey belt' policy, announced in the updated National Planning Policy Framework, potentially puts land used for food growing at risk.¹²⁶

The London Plan and Environment Act require new developments in London need to have a positive impact on the area of green space and its overall biodiversity – known as 'biodiversity net gain'.¹²⁷ Professor Andre Viljoen noted the importance of using the net biodiversity gain

¹²¹ GLA, [All London Green Grid](#), 15 March 2015

¹²² London Datastore, [Green Infrastructure Focus Map](#)

¹²³ GLA, [London Green Infrastructure Framework \(LGIF\) and London Local Nature Recovery Strategy \(LNRS\) Frequently Asked Questions \(FAQS\)](#), 17 July 2024

¹²⁴ London Assembly Environment Committee, [Meeting transcript: Panel 1](#), 16 October 2024, p.19

¹²⁵ CPRE, [Green Belt: food for thought](#), 17 January 2025

¹²⁶ CPRE, [Christmas dinner at risk under 'grey belt' proposals, CPRE analysis reveals](#), 23 December 2024; UK Government, [National Planning Policy Framework](#), updated 7 February 2025

¹²⁷ London Plan Policy G5 on urban greening and national policy in the Environment Act 2021; GLA, [The London Plan 2021](#), 2021; [Environment Act 2021](#), Part 6 Nature and Biodiversity

requirements for new developments to potentially create new food growing sites as part of “constructing... green, biodiverse ecological corridors.” He suggested that the Local Nature Recovery Strategy should include productive spaces for food growing as well as other green infrastructure.¹²⁸

Sarah Williams told us that Capital Growth had worked closely with the Green Infrastructure Team to provide a report to input into the Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS). Based on 150 responses, she said this “told us exactly how food growing sites can contribute towards nature recovery. That is from the habitats they have to the monitoring of species.”¹²⁹

Improving metrics

The use of specific measurable targets can help to inform planning decisions to ensure that people can access sites for food growing. This is particularly important for people in built up areas who do not have their own gardens. Capital Growth told us that there is an opportunity to strengthen the London Plan by ensuring that there is a target for all London boroughs to have a threshold amount of growing space both for recreational and productive use, such as a target per population.¹³⁰

In 2021, the Mayor pledged in his manifesto to “improve London’s network of green corridors and open spaces so that more Londoners live within a 10-minute walk of a green space” and developed a metric to assess this.¹³¹ Creating a similar metric to assess average distance to public food growing sites could provide insights for where further interventions for creating food growing sites could be prioritised. Similarly, the GLA has previously undertaken mapping of ‘plantable areas’ of land suitable to grow trees on.¹³² Stakeholders at the Committee’s roundtable suggested that there could be potential to do similar land mapping to identify land suitable for food growing.

In its written evidence to the Committee, Capital Growth highlighted Camden’s local plan as an example of how to take a comprehensive approach to the food system.¹³³ The plan’s policy SC4 aims to protect existing allotments and community gardens for food growing, as well as seeking to ensure the provision of suitable space for on-site growing as a part of all major housing developments. It specifies the provision of approximately 0.9 sqm per person, and where provision cannot be made on site, a contribution will be sought to deliver off-site projects.¹³⁴ This approach of setting a specific target for an area of land for food growing in new developments offers a model for ensuring people have access as London’s population grows. Councils should also establish a baseline of current overall access to food growing sites and set targets to improve access.

¹²⁸ London Assembly Environment Committee, [Meeting transcript: Panel 1](#), 16 October 2024, p.6

¹²⁹ London Assembly Environment Committee, [Meeting transcript: Panel 1](#), 16 October 2024, p.8

¹³⁰ Capital Growth, [Written evidence submission Ref No. LFG002](#), September 2024, p.12

¹³¹ GLA, [10 Minute Walk Map](#), [accessed 3 April 2025]

¹³² London Datastore, [Potential Woodland Creation Sites in London’s Green Belt](#), 2017

¹³³ Capital Growth, [Written evidence submission Ref No. LFG002](#), September 2024, p.11

¹³⁴ Camden Council, [Draft New Camden Local Plan](#), January 2024

Recommendation Two: Ahead of the next budget for 2026-27, the Mayor should set out the steps he intends to take to make London's food system more resilient by end of this Mayoral term. This should include supporting the Right to Grow.

Recommendation Three: The Mayor should work with Boroughs to undertake a London-wide review of food growing sites across the capital and identify opportunities for making new land available for Londoners to grow food, including new allotments, community farms and orchards. The new Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) and Green Infrastructure Framework (LGIF) should include a map of current and potential land for food growing, as well as a metric to assess the average distance for Londoners to access a public food growing site.

Recommendation Four: As part of the London Plan review, the Mayor should amend the equivalent London Plan Policy G8 on food growing to:

- Require boroughs to undertake a full assessment of the need for new food growing sites including land available for growing to reduce waiting times for community sites, including a focus on using food growing to support those communities with the most to gain from a shift to healthy and sustainable diets.
- Strengthen protections for existing food growing sites.
- Require boroughs to set measurable targets to improve access to food growing opportunities - such as a target amount of land per population, and/or additional area for food growing per new development.
- Encourage London boroughs to work with communities to support a right to grow, such as Southwark's Allotment Expansion Guarantee, and make additional land available for community food growing where needed with secure leases.
- Encourage London boroughs to identify a named existing officer responsible for supporting food growing.

Addressing barriers faced by minority groups

Throughout this investigation we heard about the additional barriers to food growing faced by different groups in London. Capital Growth told us it was aware of this too in terms of barriers to accessing land to lead projects:

“This is related to networks of influence and the often informal ways that land becomes available, and the lack of clarity on how to attain land. Whilst people involved in food growing are very ethnically diverse, those leading the projects, especially in paid positions are typically white.”¹³⁵

The Committee is keen to see the GLA lead the way in reducing these barriers to ensure all of London’s communities can access local food growing.

The work initiated by the Rootz into Food Growing project should guide London’s approaches in this area. Pauline Shakespeare, who was the project coordinator for the Rootz into Food Growing project (see box), told the Committee that there is a need for more resources to go into “monitoring black and brown people and their access to green space”. She said that the importance of access to green space was particularly clear during the pandemic, including the benefits that “local food growing projects run by people who look like them and are part of their community can bring.”¹³⁶

Rootz into Food Growing project

Rootz into Food Growing was a collaborative project between Ubele, OrganicLea, Black Rootz and Land In Our Names (LION), funded by Farming The Future. It aims are “to challenge and disrupt some of the structural inequalities that exist within the current UK food growing sector” and to “build a network of Black and Minoritised led growers pan-London who will receive relevant skills development and training opportunities enabling them to grow commercially.”¹³⁷

The project published a report in March 2021 which concluded that:

“These geographical and physical exclusions result in inequalities in being able to access nature for physical and mental wellbeing due to environmental and systemic racism.”¹³⁸

¹³⁵ Capital Growth, [Written evidence submission Ref No. LFG002](#), September 2024, p.7

¹³⁶ London Assembly Environment Committee, [Meeting transcript: Panel 1](#), 16 October 2024, p.4

¹³⁷ The Ubele Initiative, [Rootz into Food Growing](#), [accessed 20 January 2025]

¹³⁸ Calliste et al [Land In Our Names], Rootz into Food Growing: [Knowledge and experiences of social enterprise food growers from black/communities of colour](#), March 2021 p5

In November 2023, the charity Sustain published a report by Zahra Dalilah reflecting on the outcomes of the project.¹³⁹

Capital Growth stated there is a need for a black-led organisation of food growers. They told the Committee:

“There is still an unfilled gap, for a London-based, Black-led organisation of food growers and food sovereignty advocates. Indeed, the reach of Roots into Food Growing was entirely unique as a majority of RiFG [Rootz into Food Growing] members did not previously belong to any other network.”¹⁴⁰

Pauline Shakespeare, Rootz into Food Growing, told the Committee that paid positions for black and brown growers in community food growing is extremely limited. She said:

“There is lot of reliance on volunteer support and goodwill from those communities to engage. Some of the research that was surfaced through Rootz into Food Growing was the challenge of black and brown people to feel welcome in community food-growing spaces, and not really having the agency to become stakeholders and decisionmakers in those projects. They were put in the position of beneficiaries, which is a bit of a lack of equity, from my experience.”¹⁴¹

Pauline Shakespeare also noted the importance of establishing links between community food growing projects and institutions that provide food growing training for young Londoners, particularly from ethnic minority backgrounds. Pauline suggested that there could be benefits from pairing young learners undertaking their horticulture qualifications with local community gardens, allowing young people from minority backgrounds to learn from growers that represent them.¹⁴²

She also highlighted the need to have:

“[A] review of horticulture training bodies in London to look at their diversity and inclusion both in terms of students graduating from those colleges and onward opportunities, if they are or are not tracking them, but also the diversity of the staff working in them and delivering training and their welfare and support for students coming from differing ethnic minorities.”¹⁴³

The Growing Cities report submitted to the Committee by Leanne Werner, director of Wilder, an environmental social enterprise based in Southwark, highlighted the Detroit Black Community Food Security Network.¹⁴⁴ This Network operates a seven-acre urban food and a cooperative

¹³⁹ Sustain, [Reflections on Rootz into Food Growing](#) November 2023

¹⁴⁰ Capital Growth, [Written evidence submission Ref No. LFG002](#), September 2024, p.8

¹⁴¹ London Assembly Environment Committee, [Meeting transcript: Panel 1](#), 16 October 2024, p.1

¹⁴² London Assembly Environment Committee, [Meeting transcript: Panel 1](#), 16 October 2024, p.28

¹⁴³ London Assembly Environment Committee, [Meeting transcript: Panel 1](#), 16 October 2024, p.28

¹⁴⁴ Wilder, [Written evidence submission Ref No. LFG009](#), September 2024; Werner, 2024 [Growing Cities: The Urban Agricultural Revolution](#), p.59

grocery store in Detroit, which aims to support the African American population in Detroit in the local food movement and position them in leadership roles.¹⁴⁵ London can learn from these approaches.

It is important that in taking steps to increase Londoners' access to food growing, we do this for all Londoners and not just a particular demographic. The Mayor could help reduce barriers by funding diverse training providers to enable people to learn skills for growing food and other careers in horticulture. The GLA also has a role to play in removing barriers that people face to access such courses and ensuring that across London there are a range of opportunities to learn and share learning.

Recommendation Five: The Mayor should convene stakeholders across London to agree actions to reduce barriers for "Black, Brown, and minority-led" food growing projects including:

- **Supporting leadership training and representation in decision-making.**
- **Developing grants/funding for underrepresented growers and training providers.**
- **Convening training providers to review the diversity of staff and students.**
- **Working with local authorities to increase access to land.**

¹⁴⁵ Detroit Black Community Sovereignty Network, [Home page](#), [accessed 15 January 2025]

Appendix 1

Committee Activity

The Committee conducted a two-part investigation into local food growing in London. For the first part of the investigation, the Committee undertook a site visit to OrganicLea at Hawkwood, near Chingford, which was followed by a roundtable discussion. on 16 July 2024, with the following guests in attendance:

- London Assembly Environment Committee Members: Zack Polanski AM (Environment Committee Chair), Bassam Mahfouz AM, Joanne McCartney AM, Gareth Roberts AM
- Brian Kelly, OrganicLea
- Sandra Salazar, Founder, Go Grow With Love C.I.C
- Sarah Williams, Programme Director, Sustain
- Victoria Sherwin, Incredible Edible Lambeth
- Julie Brown and Zosia Walczak, Growing Communities
- Philip Udeh, Ubele Initiative
- Mark Ainsbury, Food Policy Manager, GLA
- Nicole Collomb, Principal Policy and Programme Officer, GLA
- Isabella Haddow, Regeneration and Growth Strategies, GLA
- Ajay Larr, Regeneration and Growth Strategies, GLA

The Committee held a formal meeting for the second part of the investigation on 16 October 2024, with the following guests in attendance:

- Professor Andre Viljoen, Professor of Architecture, University of Brighton
- Sandra Salazar, Go Grow with Love CIC, 'Rootz into Food Growing' project
- Pauline Shakespeare, Rootz into Food Growing' project
- Sarah Williams, Director of Programmes, Capital Growth (remotely)
- Ruth Arnott, Community Gardening coordinator, Southwark Council
- Jeremy Skinner, Assistant Director of Strategy, Insight and Intelligence, GLA
- Anna Kaskanlian, Senior Strategic Planner, GLA London Plan team, GLA

The Committee also published a call for evidence from 7 August to 25 September 2024 which explored the barriers to local food growing, what would help scale up food growing in London and whether there are any specific changes that could be made to the London Plan to support more food growing. The Committee received nine submissions to the call for evidence from the following organisations: Plant Based Treaty, Capital Growth, Barnet Council, Southwark Council, Women's Environmental Network (Wen), OrganicLea and Incredible Edible Lambeth.

Appendix 2

Number of allotment sites by borough

London Borough	Current number of sites
Barking & Dagenham	16
Barnet	41
Bexley	35
Brent	21
Bromley	52
Camden	5
City of London	-
Croydon	17
Ealing	60
Enfield	32
Greenwich	18
Hackney	9
Hammersmith & Fulham	2
Haringey	27
Harrow	34
Havering	26
Hillingdon	35
Hounslow	29
Islington	5
Kensington & Chelsea	0
Kingston	22
Lambeth	3
Lewisham	37
Merton	18
Newham	9
Redbridge	24
Richmond upon Thames	25
Southwark	18
Sutton	36
Tower Hamlets	6
Waltham Forest	37
Wandsworth	10
Westminster	3

Source: London Assembly analysis, based on [Parks for London 2023-24 data](#), with updates

Appendix 3

Images from the Committee's visit to OrganicLea in July 2024

See also this video of the visit: [London Assembly Environment Committee visit to OrganicLea](#)



Other formats and languages

If you, or someone you know needs this report in large print or braille, or a copy of the summary and main findings in another language, then please call us on: 020 7983 4100 or email assembly.translations@london.gov.uk

Chinese

如您需要这份文件的简介的翻译本，
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Email 与我们联系。

Vietnamese

Nếu ông (bà) muốn nội dung văn bản này được dịch sang tiếng Việt, xin vui lòng liên hệ với chúng tôi bằng điện thoại, thư hoặc thư điện tử theo địa chỉ ở trên.

Greek

Εάν επιθυμείτε περίληψη αυτού του κειμένου στην γλώσσα σας, παρακαλώ καλέστε τον αριθμό ή επικοινωνήστε μαζί μας στην ανωτέρω ταχυδρομική ή την ηλεκτρονική διεύθυνση.

Turkish

Bu belgenin kendi dilinize çevrilmiş bir özetini okumak isterseniz, lütfen yukarıdaki telefon numarasını arayın, veya posta ya da e-posta adresi aracılığıyla bizimle temasa geçin.

Punjabi

ਜੇ ਤੁਸੀਂ ਇਸ ਦਸਤਾਵੇਜ਼ ਦਾ ਸੰਖੇਪ ਅਪਣੀ ਭਾਸ਼ਾ ਵਿਚ ਲੈਣਾ ਚਾਹੋ, ਤਾਂ ਕਿਰਪਾ ਕਰਕੇ ਇਸ ਨੰਬਰ 'ਤੇ ਫ਼ੋਨ ਕਰੋ ਜਾਂ ਉਪਰ ਦਿੱਤੇ ਡਾਕ ਜਾਂ ਈਮੇਲ ਪਤੇ 'ਤੇ ਸਾਨੂੰ ਸੰਪਰਕ ਕਰੋ।

Hindi

यदि आपको इस दस्तावेज़ का सारांश अपनी भाषा में चाहिए तो उपर दिये हुए नंबर पर फोन करें या उपर दिये गये डाक पते या ई मेल पते पर हम से संपर्क करें।

Bengali

আপনি যদি এই দলিলের একটা সারাংশ নিজের ভাষায় পেতে চান, তাহলে দয়া করে ফো করবেন অথবা উল্লেখিত ডাক ঠিকানায় বা ই-মেইল ঠিকানায় আমাদের সাথে যোগাযোগ করবেন।

Urdu

اگر آپ کو اس دستاویز کا خلاصہ اپنی زبان میں درکار ہو تو، براہ کرم نمبر پر فون کریں یا مذکورہ بالا ڈاک کے پتے یا ای میل پتے پر ہم سے رابطہ کریں۔

Arabic

الرجاء الحصول على ملخص لهذا المستند بلغة تفضل،
فارجاء الاتصال برقم الهاتف أو الاتصال على
العنوان البريدي أو عنوان البريد
الإلكتروني أعلاه.

Gujarati

જો તમારે આ દસ્તાવેજનો સાર તમારી ભાષામાં જોઈતો હોય તો ઉપર આપેલ નંબર પર ફોન કરો અથવા ઉપર આપેલ ટપાલ અથવા ઇ-મેઈલ સરનામા પર અમારો સંપર્ક કરો.

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