



Working with your local council

Some of our most fruitful partnerships are with local councils and local authorities. We are a gift to them.

We are a movement that empowers engaged citizens with a passion to create kinder, more confident, more connected communities. The local council holds the democratic mandate to work for the good of all citizens and we are ideal partners for them. When those relationships are established on a mutual vision and on mutual trust they flourish. Just like working with business it can take some time to get to know each other and to work out the best ways to work together.

This section helps you to understand how to map and approach stakeholders and how to open up a conversation that is mutually

beneficial. Like everything else at Incredible Edible, in each place people create the Incredible recipe with their own flavour – there is no one size fits all solution.

This section helps you to work out ways to connect with and partner with your local authority. In times of tough social circumstances and hard pressed budgets there is no better time for us to be working together with our local authority in order to create communities in which we can all grow and flourish. There are lots of tips here and if you need any more support get in touch with the Incredible Edible national team who have lots of experience in navigating these relationships to get the best result for everyone.

If you would like to read this whole Toolshed section in PDF format, or print it off to share with others, click on the 'download section' link on the right.

Resources

Getting started



Why work with your local council?
Sometimes it can be difficult, but it'll probably be worth it...
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Top tips for working with your local council
Some great advice to build up your contacts
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Learning from the network on working with councils
Reflections on working with councils
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How your local council could support your Incredible Edible activities
From accessing land to promoting your activities, here are some great ideas to take to your council
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Why work with your local council?

Do you want to turn a disused piece of land, a verge, a corner of a park or a planter that has been left empty for years into a lovely place where some vegetables, fruit or herbs can be grown for you, your friends and family or anybody can enjoy?

If the answer is yes, then you need to ask the owner and get permission. Unless the land belongs to a private business, the likelihood is that it belongs to the Local council. By getting permission you will avoid getting into a spot of bother and wasting all your hard work. That permission may not be anything formal, like a signed document, it could just be a chat with the right person to get the go ahead – it's amazing how sometimes bureaucracy can disappear when you know the right person!

By working with the local council, they could support your group in what you are doing and potentially get access to additional support from other agencies, or materials, tools, small grants/ pots of money etc. In the long run, it is really worth developing a

good working relationship with a couple of people within the local council.

Working with your local council can be the easiest or the hardest thing, it can be extremely rewarding and you can get loads of support, or it can be quite frustrating, but it is by no way impossible. If you don't already have a group constitution, you might need to get one to work formally with your local council as they need to engage with an entity rather than an individual or group of individuals – have a look in the [Get going: a guide to doing something Incredible](#) section for information on this.

Across the UK there are different local government arrangements with different functions being dealt with at different levels of local government. We are using the term local council to refer generally to the local government system in your area. A quick internet search will help you understand who the players are in your area.

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Top tips for working with your local council

We think the most important thing is to find someone or a number of people who understand what you do, why you are doing it and most importantly believe in what you are doing and the good that it brings.

There are a lot of fantastic people who work in councils who are really keen to get behind and support the type of things you are doing. It is also wise to appreciate that even though it is within their remit and what you are doing supports council officer's work, there are some people that won't want to engage with you and can appear to put problems and barriers in your way. It is important to stay positive and find someone else, as there is great support there, you just need to find it.

This is by no means exhaustive, but here are some council departments that might yield some success: Communities, Economic Development, Public Health, Environmental Health, Procurement, Education, Children's Services, Volunteer Services, Street Scene, Marketing and Communication, Finance, Governance & Support Services.

A really good way to engage with your local council and to start to find the best person or people, is to contact your local ward councillor (to find your ward councillor, use this website <https://www.gov.uk/find-your-local-councillors>). Ward councillors are always on the lookout and to be 'involved' or aligned with great things that are benefitting the area and people within their ward. Get them on your side, and that is a big tick in the box, and then work with their knowledge of the council and the movers and shakers within it to get more people interested and involved. You could always ask around other local community groups or people who are doing something similar and see who they are

working with in the local council. Then ask them who is the best person for you to talk to, or even ask them to introduce you. Pick up the phone and call the main switchboard. The staff there are very knowledgeable and hopefully will be able to direct you to the right department or person. Then have a chat with who you get put through to, as they might also be able to recommend others to get in contact with.

Think about what you are doing, and who the main beneficiaries are. Are you delivering growing with children or older people, or is your group providing mental or physical exercise or reducing isolation? Then try and talk to someone in Children Services or Public Health etc.

Does your area have a Food Partnership? If so, then contact them as they will have strong links with the local council and a wider support network. For more information about local food, see the [Working with local business](#) section.

When you contact someone, be clear about what you want to do. Give them examples of the type of things you will do or grow, timescales, how much space it will take up and if it will cause a hazard to the public. Try and understand what their drivers are and then make the case to them why they should support the work that you are doing.

Local councils are very risk averse, and so they want to know that whatever you are planning to do will provide almost zero risk to the general public. Also state that your group will tend the space, which we're sure they'll like to hear, as then they won't have to. Another really important thing to appreciate is that no two councils are the same and in a neighbouring area the best route 'in' might be 'x', that might not be the case in your local council. You might need to do a bit of trial and error until you find someone that you click with.

Can you help add to these top tips? If so, [let us know...](#)

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Useful links

[Find your local councillors](#)



Learning from the network on working with councils

Here are some learning points from experience across the Incredible Edible Network

It is very important to maintain that this is your project. Some people in councils see a great idea and even though their intentions are good and want to and do support it, they can almost end up taking it over and claiming it as the council's project. Sometimes this can be a positive, but not if you want to maintain it as a community led, community benefit project. Also be careful not to end up doing the council's work for them for free. Councils don't have much money and some might see an opportunity to get work that they should be doing delivered by someone else for a reduced rate or for free.

Having said that, this can also be an opportunity, as you might want to do something very similar to what the council want to do,

and you are able to deliver it much cheaper. Therefore you might be able to get money from the council for the project or even to pay someone, but make sure you get a Service Level Agreement first.

Unfortunately there can be a lot of 'red tape' and processes that the council have to go through before a decision is made, and so things can take a very long time before you are given the go ahead. Therefore plan well in advance if you want to catch planting/growing seasons etc.

At the end of the day, don't get too down heartened and give up. Remember, wherever there's will, there's a way!

Have you got any learning you'd like to share? If so, [let us know...](#)

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How your local council could support your Incredible Edible activities

Utilise the council's communication network for the benefit of your project.

If the council are involved in your project, maybe their communication/ press department can help you write a press release and issue it to all the correct contacts within the local press – after all, your project is benefitting the people of your area, involved the council and shines a light of great things that are happening. Or they could send a communication out on your behalf. Incredible Edible Wakefield ran consultation meetings on behalf of the council on the use of allotments and the Communities Directorate sent the information to every plot owner in the council area.

Access to land. Local councils have a lot of land which could easily be used by groups to grow things on. These could include unused allotment plots, grounds of council buildings that have now changed use (such as an old school, now used by community groups or as offices who don't use the grounds), planters, flower beds and/ or corners of parks, verges or areas of planting outside buildings where inedible bushes could be replaced by edible fruit or vegetables.

Access to buildings. Local councils have a lot of buildings which could be used by groups as a place for people to meet over food, be used as a community kitchen or a community cafe etc. If you have a proposal and want to either have a trial run or make something more long term, then you could explore asset transfer with your local council.

A lot of communities are starting to **reclaim back alleys** and turn

them into lovely communal areas where residents can come together, grow a few things and create a safe place for children to enjoy. These spaces belong to local councils yet nearly all of them are really keen to see them better used as this helps reduce anti-social behaviour, fly tipping and littering. Therefore, if this is something you want to do contact your local council as they could support you with:

- cleaning of back alleys using Street Scene equipment and removal of dumped rubbish

- working to stop people dumping rubbish in alleys through the Enforcement department

- potentially installing communal rubbish and recycling bins

If you have a communal alley and want to be inspired, here is a great video showing how a group of neighbours came together to transform alleys, and their sense of community, in Middlesbrough: <https://vimeo.com/265427290>

Money can be sought from a number of **small funding pots** connected with the local council Community or Public Health departments.

Departments such as Economic Development, Public Health, Environmental Health or Procurement could be very interested in and support **work related to local food**, such as setting up a local food map or trail, or local food market or event.

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