

The Levelling Up, Housing and Communities Committee

Children, young people and the built environment

Submission of evidence by Sustain: the alliance for better food and farming

Sustain is an alliance of over 100 organisations and communities working together for a better system of food, farming and fishing, and cultivating the movement for change.

<https://www.sustainweb.org/>

Together, we advocate food and agriculture policies and practices that enhance the health and welfare of people and animals, improve the working and living environment, enrich society and culture, and promote equity.

The alliance is a registered charity (no. 1018643) and company limited by guarantee (no. 02673194).

Sustain's area of work in the context of children, young people and the built environment includes

- The Childrens Food Campaign
- Capital Growth

The Childrens Food Campaign brings together children's and health charities and professional bodies, trade unions, school food experts and environmental organisations. We campaign for policy changes in our schools, in our communities and throughout our society so that all children can easily eat sustainable and healthy food.

Capital Growth works with a network of growers in London to give people the opportunity to grow food as part of a healthy, resilient food system.

Summary recommendations

- Progress national development management policies to avoid duplication and inefficient use of resources by each local planning authority
- National strategies on obesity and public health should provide evidence for local plan policies. Local authorities should not have to provide evidence through a multitude of individual local studies.
- Make climate change a material planning consideration as this affects the long term health of children
- Look at the definition of "amenity" in the advertising regulations so the effect on children's mental and physical health can be taken into account in decisions.
- Tackle pollution from waste from intensive agriculture (which makes up 25% particulate pollution in cities)
- Ensure access to open space at home and at school with the opportunity to be used for food growing.
- Require new development to include opportunities for food growing.
- Set national internal space standards with adequate kitchen and dining space in homes and schools.

- Ensure new development is part of a walkable neighbourhood with easy access to services and healthy food linked by green routes planted for biodiverse and edible landscaping.

The experiences of children and young people of their built environment

Question 1 *How do children and young people experience outdoor spaces in towns, cities and rural areas across the country? For example, their streets, estates, villages, neighbourhoods and parks?*

Advertising

1. Young people are heavily influenced by their built environments. One key example of this influence comes in the form of outdoor advertising for unhealthy foods. Research shows it influences their food choices.¹ HFSS marketing is linked to a strong preference for HFSS products,² more snacking,³ eating more calories⁴ and HFSS products replacing healthier foods.⁵ The links between child obesity are sufficiently strong to have been defined as a causal relationship.⁶
2. When local authorities have brought in restrictions on this type of advertising, there have been significant public health impacts. The independent evaluation of the advertising restrictions across the Transport for London estate found that it has led to a 1000 weekly household decrease in unhealthy food purchasing across London, as well as a 20% reduction in chocolate and confectionery purchases.⁷ Further modelling research from the University of Sheffield indicates that the reduced calorie intake associated with the policy could lead to 94,867 fewer cases of obesity, 2,857 cases of diabetes prevented or delayed and 1,915 fewer cases of cardiovascular disease. In turn, the lower incidence of these diet-related illnesses could then save the NHS £218 million over the lifetime of the current population.⁸

Hot food takeaways

3. Hot food takeaways are associated with diet-related diseases such as obesity, and there are higher rates of hot food takeaways in areas of higher deprivation, worsening the UK's health inequalities.⁹ The space dedicated to Hot food takeaways

¹ Ferguson CJ, Muñoz ME, Medrano, MR. [Advertising Influences on Young Children's Food Choices and Parental Influence](#) The Journal of Paediatrics. 2012; 160(3):452 – 455.

² Boyland EJ, Harrold JA, Kirkham TC, Corker C, Cuddy J, Evans D, Dovey TM, Lawton CL, Blundell JE, Halford JCG. Food commercials increase preference for energy-dense foods, particularly in children who watch more television. *Pediatrics*. 2011; 128(1):93-100.

³ Boyland EJ, Nolan S, Kelly B, Tudur-Smith C, Jones A, Halford JCG, Robinson E. Advertising as a cue to consume: a systematic review and meta-analysis of the effects of acute exposure to unhealthy food or non-alcoholic beverage advertising on intake in children and adults. *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition*. 2016. 103:519-533.

⁴ Boyland EJ, Whalen R, Christiansen P, McGale L, Duckworth J, Halford J, Clark M, Rosenberg G, Vohra J. [See it, want it, buy it, eat it: how food advertising is associated with unhealthy eating behaviours in 7 -11 year old children](#) [online]. Cancer Research UK. 2018.

⁵ Thomas, C, Hooper L, Petty R, Thomas F, Rosenberg G, Vohra J. 10 years on: [New evidence on TV marketing and junk food consumption amongst 11–19-year-olds 10 years after broadcast regulations](#) [online]. Cancer Research UK. 2018.

⁶ Warwick Obesity Network. [Government Consultation: Rapid review of the academic evidence for and against restrictions on advertising to fight obesity](#) [online]. 2020.

⁷ <https://journals.plos.org/plosmedicine/article?id=10.1371/journal.pmed.1003915>

⁸ <https://ijbnpa.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s12966-022-01331-y>

is increasing at a pace with an increase of 10% over 4 years.¹⁰ Analysis by The Times shows that almost 200 schools in England and Wales have ten or more takeaways within 400 metres of the site.¹¹

4. Sustain's report "Planning controls for hot food takeaways"¹² provides a guide to what evidence local areas need to collect to support and defend planning policies to restrict new hot food takeaways. The report also makes a series of recommendations on planning, design and licensing to tackle child obesity.

Food growing

5. Growing food in schools has benefits for health and wellbeing and educational attainment: a survey by "Food Growing Schools London" showed 61.7% of pupils improved awareness of healthy eating and 79.2% of pupils improved attainment as a result of involvement in food growing.¹³
6. School Food Matters¹⁴ exists to teach children about food and to improve children's access to healthy, sustainable food during their time at school. They aim to ensure every child understands the impact of the food they eat on their health and the environment, and has the food skills to live a healthy life into adulthood. They sent a letter summarising the impact of a good food environment to the Prime Minister in December 2023.¹⁵
7. Food growing gardens can be used as outdoor classrooms, helping teachers to deliver a wide range of curriculum-linked subjects. There is also a growing interest in encouraging pupils to value the food they grow and think about where their food comes from, particularly as a school's food culture is now assessed by Ofsted. Many schools have started to use 'enterprise' as a hook to engage pupils in food growing and encourage learning about maths as well as wider issues around the environmental impact of food.¹⁶

Question 2 *How do these experiences vary across income, race, gender, age?*

8. There is strong evidence that people from socially and economically disadvantaged backgrounds are at much higher risk of living in a neighbourhood which worsens their health.
 - Ammonia fumes from factory farms and emissions from transport are key drivers of poor air quality.¹⁷

⁹ <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/29590382/>

¹⁰ <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S135382921930783X>

¹¹ <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/kfc-local-councils-child-obesity-investigation-78vp0f5sl?t=ie#main-container>

¹² https://www.sustainweb.org/publications/hot_food_takeaways/

¹³ http://www.foodgrowingschools.org/why_grow/our_achievements/

¹⁴ <https://www.schoolfoodmatters.org/>

¹⁵ <https://www.schoolfoodmatters.org/news-views/news/dear-prime-minister>

¹⁶ <https://www.capitalgrowth.org/schools/>

¹⁷ <https://www.thebureauinvestigates.com/stories/2019-06-13/deadly-gas-ammonia-cutting-farm-emissions-could-save-3000-lives-a-year>

- Young people living in more deprived areas are at much greater risk of exposure to unhealthy food and drink advertising than those in less deprived areas.¹⁸
9. Capital Growth has considered how to encourage and support youth involvement and leadership in the urban food growing movement. This presentation¹⁹ explores the culture of urban food growing and community gardening and some of the key barriers of engaging teenagers and young adults in these spaces.

Question 3 How easily can children and young people travel to outdoor spaces and schools? How has this changed over the years?

10. Safe routes to school should be included in green infrastructure strategies and include edible planting which is also good for biodiversity. There is a need to reconnect children with nature and with the sources of their food.²⁰
11. A CPRE study of the impact of the Local Green Space designation found regional disparities with fewer designations in the north of England and under representation in urban councils where neighbourhoods are most in need of protected greenspace. The 2023 update²¹ found whilst there had been an increase in designations, deprived communities remain under-served. The report features a space for food growing and education at Lawrence Weston Community Farm near Bristol.²²

The planning system

Question 4 How well are children and young people's needs currently met by the planning process in terms of policy and guidance?

12. The planning process can help to bring about sustainable local food systems.²³
13. Given the scale and nature of the climate crisis, it will be children growing up today that are most impacted by effects of climate change. In this context, a planning system that suits the needs of children and young people will ensure that the planning process factors climate and environmental impacts into its decision-making.
14. To date, national planning policy and guidance has failed to acknowledge the influence of the built environment on obesity in children. National policy and guidance does not focus on the food system and how the built environment affects health and lifestyle of children with long lasting effects on their lives.
15. Designing places which enable access to good food helps to create healthy and vibrant places and avoid the creation of even more obesogenic environments.²⁴

¹⁸ <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1353829221000319>

¹⁹ <https://www.capitalgrowth.org/whats-on/mar21-engaging-young-people-in-food-growing/>

²⁰

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/861832/Living_with_beauty_BBBBC_report.pdf

²¹ <https://www.cpre.org.uk/news/more-local-green-spaces-but-deprived-areas-still-lacking-our-report-shows/>

²² <https://www.cpre.org.uk/news/local-green-spaces-new-research-proves-their-value-to-people-and-nature/>

²³ https://www.sustainweb.org/planning/for_planners/

²⁴ <https://www.sustainweb.org/news/feb18/>

16. Sustain's 2021 report 'Response, Resilience and Recovery: London's Food Response to Covid-19'²⁵ we set out areas to assess how councils are supporting food growing - each with a number of potential actions. These include:
- Capacity building and practical support for food growing;
 - Access to land and land use including supportive local planning policies;
 - Partnerships and support for growing within other council plans and strategies.
17. We also developed a toolkit²⁶ including useful information, links and signposting to help councils support food growing initiatives.
18. Brighton and Hove Council's "Food Growing and Development Planning Advice Note"²⁷ provides guidance and basic technical considerations on how food growing can be incorporated into development. The city council seeks to encourage food growing in the city even in small urban spaces as part of its commitment to sustainable development. Sections on edible landscaping and school gardens illustrate how food can easily be normalised in the everyday environment through the design of new development.

Question 5 How are children and young people's views and voices heard, considered and acted upon in the planning system if at all?

19. We suggest allocating funding to do action research in this area.
20. Newcastle City Council utilised a Schools Health Related Questionnaire as evidence to produce their "Hot Food Takeaway Supplementary Planning Document". The questionnaire had been carried out in Newcastle on a biennial basis in both primary and secondary schools in the city for a number of years. (We do not have up to date information on this survey.) The School Health Related Questionnaire was created through cooperation with the council and the NHS to establish children's eating habits.
21. Centre for Food Policy²⁸ has reported a PhD thesis by Dr Jess Brock (unpublished at present) which examined the participation of children and young people (up to 24 years) in co-designing food environment policy actions to address the problem of child obesity in a city in England. "A key finding was that despite being supported and/or encouraged to generate food environment policy actions to address child obesity, children and young people in this city largely suggested policy actions that focused on individual behaviour change. This finding suggests that involving children and young people in generating food environment policy actions to address child obesity is complex, and that this complexity must be considered when designing future participatory research projects."

²⁵ <https://www.sustainweb.org/publications/response-resilience-recovery-2020/>

²⁶ <https://www.sustainweb.org/reports/dec21-council-toolkit-councils-and-food-growing/>

²⁷ <https://www.brighton-hove.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2020-09/FINAL%20Food%20PAN%202020.pdf>

²⁸ <https://researchcentres.city.ac.uk/food-policy#unit=about>

Best practice and evaluation

Question 6 *Where are the examples of policy and good practice that are improving children and young people's experiences in the built environment, either directly or indirectly, in the UK or internationally?*

22. We would welcome formal research rather than a gathering of anecdotes. Here is an example from our recent work.

Rose Vouchers are encouraging families with young children to visit local retailers and street traders. For example, the Bridging the Gap pilot in Tower Hamlets Food Co-ops²⁹ where families visit for their weekly shop at the Teviot Centre and can also access wrap around services, youth services and the community growing group that operates from the centre.

And one we are looking to develop: School food pilots. Where introducing organic fruit and veg via ethical supply chains encourages caterers to redevelop recipes and engage with children in taste education and learn about the journey from farm to fork. Both pilots will facilitate farm visits with young people to organic farms surrounding the cities.

23. Gateshead Council uses planning policy to improve health and tackle childhood obesity by taking a zero tolerance approach to new applications for fast food takeaways. An external evaluation³⁰ looked at how Gateshead Council had been able to reduce the proportion of fast-food outlets in the borough by 14%. The density of takeaway outlets per capita was also reduced.

Question 7 *How are these outcomes measured? For example, through economic or health and wellbeing indicators?*

Outdoor advertising and childhood obesity^{31 32}

Food growing in schools³³

Cross Government working

Question 8 *How does the relationship of children and young people with the built environment overlap with policy areas beyond the work of DLUHC, such as public health, transport, policing and net zero?*

24. Trailblazer programmes are useful at a local level but are dependent on individual councils to develop their own approach. Stronger leadership is needed at a national level to avoid duplication and to be more efficient.

25. The toolkit 'Planning for Healthy Food Environments'³⁴ was produced as part of the childhood obesity trailblazer, Healthier Place, Healthier Future, in collaboration with

²⁹ <https://www.sustainweb.org/news/nov23-bridging-gap-tower-hamlets-coop-pilot-organic/>

³⁰ <https://arc-nenc.nihr.ac.uk/news/putting-the-brakes-on-fast-food/>

³¹ <https://journals.plos.org/plosmedicine/article?id=10.1371/journal.pmed.1003915>

³² <https://ijbnpa.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s12966-022-01331-y>

³³ http://www.foodgrowingschools.org/why_grow/our_achievements/

Sustain. Through inspiring case studies, it aims to prompt developers, urban designers, Councillors, and planners to consider the ways in which to develop local infrastructures and environments to integrate accessible food and support healthier lifestyles.

Question 9 Are government departments working together to address children and young people's needs in this respect?

26. Health: We would welcome closer links between spatial issues and health.

- Jointly produced evidence so that there is greater trust between departments eg on issues such as obesity & Mental health.
- Acceptance of public health evidence by the planning inspectorate. (context of fast food).
- Education: design of schools with kitchens to prepare and cook meals and dining rooms with space for shared mealtimes. Outdoor space with capacity for growing food.

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