

Defra response to House of Lords, Horticultural Sector Committee Report

To: English Councils
For info: Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland

1 'Sowing the seeds: A blooming English horticultural sector'- Lords Committee Report

On 6 November 2023, following an inquiry into the horticulture sector, the House of Lords Horticulture Sector Committee published a report: 'Sowing the seeds: A blooming English horticultural sector'.¹

The Report included 93 recommendations for Government to support and safeguard the future of the horticulture sector, deliver critical food security and meet environmental goals. These 93 recommendations included:

- The need to publish a Horticulture Strategy for England to set direction for the sector and give growers confidence.
- Back horticulture jobs by putting horticulture on the curriculum and producing a workforce strategy.
- More support for amateur and professional growers to help them transition to environmentally friendly practices such as using peat-free growing media.
- Urgently conducting and publishing its review of fairness in the supply chain.
- Reviewing the R&D landscape to support innovation.
- Mandating that all local authorities devise an allotment strategy as part of local plans, and to identify suitable land and training/mentoring partners as part of this strategy.

¹ <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld5803/ldselect/ldhortcom/268/26802.htm>

2 Government response to the Report

Defra published its response to the Lords' report on Monday 12 February.² In its response, Defra said:

- it will not establish a cross-department green/horticulture department;
- it will not appoint a horticulture minister or put horticulture on the curriculum;
- it will not publish a horticulture strategy;
- it will not extend supply chain fairness review or GSCOP to include horticulture and stonewalls on peat ban plans.

Defra did confirm its commitment to legislating for a ban on peat. However, it did not commit to increasing the amount of research being done on alternatives, particularly the environmental impact of alternatives.

In its response, Defra noted the *"Government Buying Standards for Food and Catering Services (GBSF) and supporting guidance will be updated to showcase the use of sustainable, high welfare, quality produce in the public sector."*

In response to the allotment strategy recommendation, the Government noted that *"The National Planning Policy Framework requires local authorities to consider the provision of access to allotments when producing planning policy and making decisions."*

3 Lords Committee response to Defra

Inquiry chairman, Lord Redesdale, told HortWeek, *"The Government's response to our report is underwhelming at best, and very disappointing at worst. By not publishing a Horticulture Strategy, which they had previously promised to do, it will not give the sector the direction it needs or help with grower confidence."*³

"We welcome the Government's commitment to publishing a review of the seasonal worker route, but its lack of urgency means that the sector will be waiting with bated breath for it to be published in 'due course'."

"The Government confirmed its commitment to legislating for a ban on peat, however, it is disappointing that it won't commit to increasing the amount of research being done on alternatives, particularly the environment impact of these alternatives."

² <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/65c51d63cc433b0011a90ac5/government-response-to-the-HoL-Horticulture-Sector-Committee-Report.pdf>

³ <https://www.hortweek.com/horticulture-industry-reacts-underwhelming-defra-response-lords-horticulture-report-updated/ornamentals/article/1861071>

4 APSE Comment

The decision not to publish a horticulture strategy is a disappointing one. A horticulture strategy, alongside a dedicated horticulture minister, would be more likely to provide greater support and direction for local council horticultural service teams; many of whom are struggling to operate amidst tightening budgets.

The domestic horticultural sector can play a key role in supporting health, wellbeing and climate change agendas. Therefore, APSE is hopeful that an updated GBSF will showcase the use of sustainable, high welfare, quality produce in the public sector. The Pandemic and War in Ukraine has demonstrated just how fragile global supply chains are to geopolitical shocks. A Government-led focus on the importance of local produce will help build greater resilience in our food supply chains as well as drive local economic growth and employment. A 2022 APSE report on local authority education catering found school meals *“can be instrumental in building community wealth... Councils have extensive buying power and by procuring produce from local suppliers, the council redirects further wealth back into the local economy”* The report is available to download from the APSE website [here](#).⁴

Similarly, APSE produces an annual allotment survey which consistently shows that there is unmet demand for allotments; increases in waiting lists but equally a strong recognition of the health and well-being benefits to communities. Allotments across the UK are a good source of horticultural learning and local food production. The role of the local authority in securing, managing and maintaining or supporting the management of allotment sites has been under increasing pressure, due to competing demands on budgets. The latest Allotments state of the market survey can be [found here](#).

APSE’s upcoming parks seminar will provide an opportunity for delegates to debate the future of parks, public realm and horticultural services. The event will be held at Manchester United Football Stadium on 14 March 2024. [You can view details and book online using this link](#).

All APSE members can sign up to APSE’s Parks, Horticulture and Grounds Maintenance Advisory Group network, which is an online network providing four learning events across the year, with expert speakers from across local government and the wider parks and greenspace sector. You can sign up to the network using [this link](#).

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⁴ <https://www.apse.org.uk/index.cfm/apse/research/current-research-programme/local-authority-education-catering-service-more-than-just-a-service/local-authority-education-catering-service-more-than-just-a-service/>

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Advisory groups are a free service included as part of your authority's membership of APSE and are an excellent way to network with peers in other councils. If you do not currently receive details about APSE advisory group meetings and would like to be added to our list of contacts for your service area, please email enquiries@apse.org.uk.

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- Education Catering
- Cemeteries and Crematoria
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- Housing, Construction and Building Maintenance
- Commercialisation, Income and Trading Network
- Parks, Horticulture and Grounds Maintenance
- Highways and Street Lighting
- Sports and Leisure Management
- Fleet, Transport and Vehicle Maintenance
- Waste Management, Refuse Collection and Street Cleansing

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