

Document for Leeds City Council regarding the development of a sustainable food strategy for Leeds

1. Purpose

The purpose of this paper is to obtain support from (and offer support to) Leeds City Council to develop a Food Strategy for Leeds that is sustainable and fit for purpose. This paper includes the findings from three locally held workshops that explored partner's views and made recommendations for practice. It also includes illustrations of how a concerted strategy would deliver the LCC vision and ambition to become a fair, prosperous and sustainable city (Best Council Plan, 2013) through meeting directorate targets.

2. Background: British cities rethinking their food systems

Food poverty and health inequalities are rising across the UK. In 2013 the Trussell Trust has delivered 900,000 free meals to people in need across the UK. This represents only a segment of the work of existing food banks, and only a portion of the malnourished that seeks for help. While these numbers make us questioning whether it is fair to treat food as a commodity, rather than a right, there are other issues that shake food agendas across the globe. Skyrocketing global populations; increased consumption of meat and dairy in developing countries; rising diet-related diseases, in particular obesity, diabetes and cardiovascular diseases, across the developed countries; increasing fuel costs that have encouraged farmers to turn crop production into agro-fuels production; climate change and environmental disasters (i.e. severe draughts) that make food production unpredictable; rising concerns for carbon emissions, that require drastic changes to the large amount of food that is shipped, air freighted, wasted.

Not only cities are more and more food insecure, but there is an evident need to act against poverty, health and environmental issues in a historical moment when an economic crisis is hitting the vulnerable hard, and carbon emissions have to be reduced sharply if we are to live on this planet long.

But how can local councils meet their responsibilities given the current financial constraints? Politicians and scholars have been asking what is the role of local governments and whether it is their role in steering change. Research has highlighted that Mayors, local coalitions with third sector organisations and creative approaches, designed around specific configurations of problems, resources and knowledge, can lead the way in socially innovative new settings and policies.

A number of cities across the UK (and beyond) have recognised that acting on their *food system* can bring economic, environmental and social benefits, as well as providing a direct way to tackle their rising food insecurity and food poverty.

A food system is a way of looking at food that considers food access, food availability, production, environmental cost and whether it reflects the cultural and social needs of the local community. Current UK urban food systems are unsustainable for reasons that include:

- large carbon footprints generated in shipping food from distant production sites,
- energy intensive production technologies,
- unfair distribution of food across neighbourhoods (food deserts), poor food quality leading to health problems including obesity, diabetes and more,
- exploitative cost to producers/workers.

Urban agriculture and local food sourcing, combined with other sustainability-focused procurement and buying policies, have the potential to form core elements for delivering a sustainable and just food strategy, while offering secondary health, ecological and social benefits associated with enhanced productive urban green spaces.

A number of British cities have started to look at their food systems, developing food charters (maps of principles and aims) or food strategies (list of actions to achieve their aims). Newcastle, Manchester, Birmingham, Plymouth, Brighton, Bristol, London, have all engaged with these in partnership with third sector and business organisations. In most of these cases, the leadership of this process is given to a reliable third sector organisation, which in partnership with representatives of the council, lead in the process (see appendix 1 - Benefits and components of an urban food system).

3. A new food strategy and the Leeds' Best Council Plan

A previous food strategy, in use until 2010, was based on existing council services plans. Feed Leeds aims to help the council to re-develop a food strategy that is suitable for the new council's approach to team working and to sharpen/integrate some of the goals stated in the Best Council Plan (BCP) towards greater ambition and long-term sustainability.

A new food strategy would include, for example:

- The development of specific waste reduction measures, which are currently missing from the performance indicators listed in the BCP;
- Measurable cuts to carbon emissions, which could drive the council towards the achievement of its targets.
- A net increase in local jobs in the food production sector, an objective that would also help the council to achieve its Working Well Action Plan. Research has revealed that Leeds has outstanding resources for this development, a propensity from the existing agricultural sector and a vibrant community ready to coalesce around a local food hub.
- The possibility to develop a council-led entrepreneurial project, making efficient use of existing assets, and maintaining council jobs.

- Contribute towards the implementation of the Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy with actions in the areas of nutrition, education, home insulation, and mental/physical health, with specific reference to the 4 key commitments in the Joint Health and Well-Being Strategy.

We recognise that, as Feed Leeds, we have a range of specialist skills on sustainable farming, urban agriculture, ecological intensification, environmental conservation, community cohesion and health, that we believe can contribute to achieve the council’s ambition in a number of ways. But we also recognise our limitations in the ability of transforming these in opportunities for the whole community, and this is why we are asking to work in partnership with council officers across directorates. We would intend to build upon the good work that has been started by key groups such as the Food Aid Network who support Food Aid providers in the city, the Older People Food Matters group which seeks to ensure key food and drink messages relevant to older people and their individual needs are promoted and acted on. And the progress already made by Feed Leeds.

4. Feed Leeds and analysis of need for a food strategy

Feed Leeds (FL) has been set up to promote and support local food growing for its social, environmental and health benefits and as such, aims to increase local food growing and consumption, improve the sustainability of food used locally and increase healthy eating. FL has also begun to map the local initiatives related to growing and selling local food as well as developing a specific initiative to engage with schools (LESSN). These initiatives are reflected in the objectives of FL: 1) support a local food network; 2) influence policy; 3) raise awareness. In 2013 Feed Leeds started to explore the local interest around the re-development of a sustainable food strategy and to discuss some possible priorities. To this aim, there were three Urban Food Justice workshops organised and attended by over 70 delegates. These were funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) and directed by Chiara Tornaghi within a yearlong social platform (see www.urbanfoodjustice.org). The consensus represented the views of delegates from a range of local organisations (Appendix 2), and those who seemed to be missed out (private business) were contacted later on. For example, Leeds based Arla Foods, the largest dairy processor in the UK has given support to the principle of a food strategy for Leeds. Appendix 2 – shares some preliminary work undertaken at the workshops to begin to develop a vision, aims and objectives for a new food strategy.

5. Plan to develop a food strategy

The workshops highlighted the need to set up a “food strategy working group”, participated by representatives of the council and other organisations, committed to (i) define the aims for a sustainable food system, (ii) identify actions and ways to measure achievements. This requires a cross-sectoral and a public-civil society-private partnership approach given that: 1) The causes of the problems are multidimensional; 2) Partnership work is cost-efficient; 3) There are cost-free resources that can be used; 4) Coordination (which imply multiple actions) is more effective; 5) Innovative approaches are creative and experimental, and need a critical mass to be developed and implemented. For the proposal to be delivered, it is essential to have the support and commitment of the public sector.

6. How would a sustainable food strategy deliver Local Authority targets

We can foresee a number of ways in which different sectors of the council could coordinate their efforts to achieve their key priorities. Here below are some examples of cross-council collaboration:

<p>Public Health: the sector could work in partnership with the allotment federation, Parks, and independent community food growing projects in targeting key priorities outlined in the Joint Health and Well-Being Strategy, for example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supporting people to choose healthy lifestyles by eating a healthy, sustainable diet and reducing the risk of long term health problems associated with diet • Ensuring everyone has the best start in life – embedding healthy eating messages and teaching fundamental life skills such as cooking and growing <p>In addition tackling the food environment to ensure the healthy choice is the easiest choice.</p> <p>This could include supporting community food growing in suitable spaces as a way to target specific PH problems like mental health, lack of physical activity, obesity, diabetes, healthy eating, and as a way to reduce social isolation and exclusion through cost effective initiatives such as Ecominds, Incredible Edible or Back to Front type projects.</p>	<p>Education: in line with the new School Food Plan, the sector could be supported in the task of implementing the plan, and particularly in the integration of cooking, food growing, and waste reduction in the curriculum. FL, through the LESSN initiative, is already providing support and networking to local primary schools. Growing support, as and when required by local schools, or by other educational initiatives, could be offered in partnership with the allotment federation, as part of a negotiation around the exchange of rent discounts with volunteering hours in educational projects around food growing (there are 1000 allotment holders in Leeds which could each dedicate at least 2 afternoons a year). This is a re-skilling army; it is 8000 hours of education, that would be delivered locally, with extraordinary effects on social cohesion, and further boost in volunteering.</p> <p>The sector could be supported in the launch of a campaign across the city to develop a ‘food growing skills and time’ bank, to be piloted over 6 month in key neighbourhoods in</p>
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<p>With the team responsible for food procurement, and the support of Feed Leeds, they could revise the food procurement policy in favour of more sustainable food, which would likely benefit the local economy, by increasing the demand for local food.</p>	<p>Leeds. Leeds Healthy Schools Team and the Children and Families Team within Public Health would be approached to support the development of any work linked to schools and schools would be directly encouraged to embrace the agenda and use their budgets to support children to have the best nutritional start to life.</p>
<p>Parks: The role of the Parks and Countryside department is crucial yet no-costs: this sector could reconvert under-used facilities (greenhouses) and sections of parks, into food production sites. The current 37 parks which the sector has agreed to potentially host a community garden, don't have permission to collect rain water. This needs to be addressed for the land to become an effective resource for food growing. With Waste Management and FL, they could identify sites where community composting can be installed and managed by allotment associations or other willing organisations. The local mowed grass and tree cuttings (which are currently taken away by external companies and costs the council a fair amount of money), could be kept locally and feed the local community composting. This would keep nutrients local (there is a growing science and business around nutrients recuperations in cities), save citizens money when buying compost, reduce the carbon footprints of gardening, and divert money to more available income for the local economy. Economic opportunities for local anaerobic digesters (producing energy with local organic waste) could also be explored. With Planning, Urban design, Public Health and Assets, Parks can contribute to create food commons (i.e. public orchards, perennial edibles in street verges), particularly in food deserts. There are hundred of varieties of fruit and vegetables that are perennial and need very little maintenance. Additionally Leeds has the environmental resources for growing one tree per person, which can fully deliver the annual average fruit intake for a healthy diet (a mature apple or plum fruit tree, for example, can produce 40 kilos of fruit each season). With Education and Museum, Parks could publicise land made available for food growing. In liaison with allotment associations, support allotment shops. For an entrepreneurial experiment, the sector could redeploy staff to commercial food production (on public land), helping to create local jobs around food production.</p>	<p>Housing: the sector could identify housing estates' land for food growing and encourage its use, especially in areas with high food poverty rates, strengthening links with the work of Public Health sector. With Feed Leeds and other third sector organisations (i.e. Permaculture Design Course, TCV, etc.) it could promote food growing in other parts of the neighbourhoods and food cooking locally. Planting of soft fruit bushes (raspberries in particular, but also black and red currants, and gooseberries) and fruit trees (apple, plum, hazelnut, cherries, mulberries, all grow very easily) would also increase the local intake of fresh food, which is a health priority. Consider the productive potential of front gardens as part of the array of options for tenants. The better use of council's own land within Housing estates and their green spaces can also contribute to Council's plan to efficient use of existing asset (as indicated in the Best Council Plan 2013). The use of greenhouses/conservatories as insulating devises has also been experimented elsewhere, and this can aid domestic food production. This could be delivered through the Warm Home Service grants, or be encouraged for any individual/family that can self-fund it.</p>
<p>Planning: with Urban Design, and possibly in collaboration with local FL experts in edible landscaping, could release guidelines and policy for edible public spaces (street verges) With Assets and contamination: identify suitable land for inner city commercial food growing and display gardens.</p>	<p>Waste management: with Parks, support the creation of community compost facilities. Explore/pilot food waste collections. With education, parks, public health and planning, develop a 100% recycling strategy, consider the expansion of Waste Doctors Project.</p>
<p>Urban Design: with Planning, support ecological intensification in public space, and develop guidelines for Neighbourhood Planning. With Public health, Planning and Parks design food commons in food desert areas (see above) and consider commissioning of Master Grower or Master Gardener type projects.</p>	<p>Markets and food procurement: develop a campaign for local food. With Assets, identify food outlets. Increase farmers markets. Dedicate a market stall for home grown food sharing or selling. The partnership should also support the work of the sector regarding their local food procurement.</p>
<p>Assets: identify land for commercial food growing, empty buildings for temporary uses/shops. In collaboration with Planning, the sector could also assess and quantify the amount of agricultural land currently underused, which is an economic asset for the future.</p>	<p>Museums: with Parks and Education, promote food growing on their sites or in Parks. Liaise with schools</p>

7. Recommendations

This proposal still needs to be shaped by cross directorate officers.

The next steps for the development of a new sustainable food strategy for Leeds, based on some of these ideas, would be a ratification of LCC supporting work, already underway through a range of initiatives, as for example with Parks' and Public Health involvement in FL.

This could for example lead towards the identification of a council officer for each sector, with whom to discuss these ideas, exchange knowledge, and work in partnership, as delegated representative of LCC to become part of a citywide food strategy working group.

We are looking forward to hearing from you and to discuss any of these ideas at your earliest convenience.

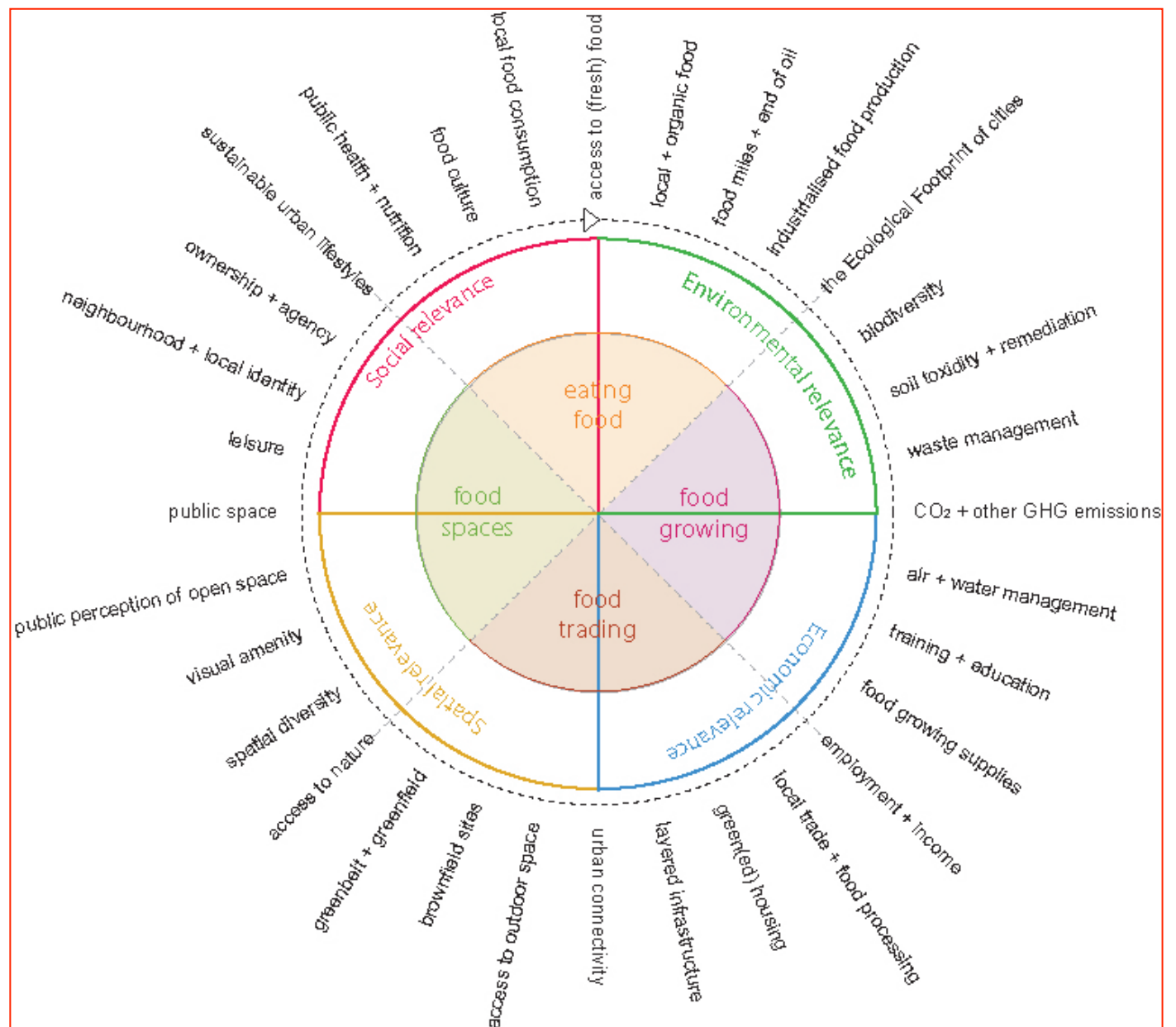
Sincerely,

Feed Leeds network

Paper Prepared by: Dr Chiara Tornaghi
 School of Geography, University of Leeds, and Feed Leeds secretary
 Email: chiara.tornaghi@gmail.com; c.tornaghi@leeds.ac.uk
 Phone: 0783 8404642

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Appendix 1 - Benefits and components of an urban food system (Source: Bohn and Viljoen 2012)



Appendix 2 - Preliminary ideas expressed at the workshops

This below is a summary of some of the ideas that have been expressed by local participants at the 3 workshops held in 2013. This does not intend to be set in stone, but rather to give an example of some of the ideas raised. We recognise that a sustainable strategy would need to be a collective effort, participated by all the relevant parties, and a constant work in progress, evolving with the society and community that give birth to it (The Brighton current strategy is an excellent example, being developed and redeveloped since 2006).

Principles - What we want	
1 Sustainability - Food in Leeds will be sustainably produced and sourced within 50 miles of Leeds (could put a %) and food waste will be minimised and surplus food put to beneficial usage (e.g. charitable donations, energy production) 2 Health and education - Healthy (and sustainable) eating will be encouraged by having and using a consistent message (food messages right for stage of life) to improve health 3 Economic resilience - Growing proportion of food will be produced in Leeds ("local food") 4 Justice - Decommodification of food to enable good quality food at right prices 5 Ownership of the public	
Aims	Actions
Increase environmental sustainability and local food growing Because it is crucial to reduce food footprints and carbon emissions and increase resilience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilitate access to land. Identify council-owned suitable land for commercial (or community) food growing and make it available • Enable community composting to supply food growers' with organic compost • Encourage food foraging and food swaps (stalls at farmers markets) • Encourage the reduction of food waste throughout the supply chain in Leeds • Influence Neighbourhood Design Statements and make sure they drive actions
Support local economic development through the promotion of local food consumption and production Because it creates job and promote food security (and because short supply chains produce less waste and are more environmentally sustainable)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assess capacity for growing already and link/support through the Leeds Food Hub (look for outlets for existing growers) • Encourage new food businesses alongside food growing • Use "waste" heat to help growing spaces i.e. polytunnels by crematorium • Street food, pop up shops • Encourage retailers headquartered in our region to further develop their local food policies, and to source food locally • Change procurement policies (supply to schools and hospitals)
Promote food education and public awareness around food quality and food growing Because it is integral to all the aims and because it is the foundation for health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote healthy eating consistently (limit take-away) • Liaise with former ALMOs to deliver estate growing/cooking classes • Promote food growing, seasonality and cooking in all Leeds schools Training new farmers, links to local agricultural colleges and farm start project • Offer cheap compost bins to Leeds residents • Promote local food celebrations (via Education Leeds, Schools Network, Red Hall)
Research needed: 1) Where is food produced and sold. 2) What is consumed. 3) What could be produced locally. 4) What campaigns/education are successfully driving behavioural (consumption) change	