



# Sussex and South Downs Region Local Food Plan



[A week's CSA share – Brighton CSA Fork & Dig it CIC](#)

Photo by Julia Lawton

## Report and Draft Action Plan: May 2025



# **Local Food Growth Plan – Report and Draft Action Plan**

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## Background / Context

As part of the development of the Local Food Plan [Local Food Plan | Sustain](#), Sustain requested Expressions of Interest to pilot this work at regional levels, to be defined by the region. The aim of the project is to increase the amount / market share of agroecological food which is grown and consumed locally, with a goal at national level to expand the market for local agroecological food by 10x by 2030.

There are multiple definitions of local food. For this project, Sustain has defined local food as “food that is produced, processed, sold and eaten within the same region or local administrative area through transparent, SME-focused supply chains.” This work specifically looks at food which is produced for sale, excluding home-grown, allotments or community-grown food.

The Sustainable Food Places-member Food Partnerships across West Sussex, East Sussex, Brighton & Hove and three districts of Hampshire with or developing food partnerships (Winchester, East Hampshire and Havant) agreed to submit an expression of interest, and this was successful. The region was defined as Sussex and South Downs. After the expression of interest, plans for local devolution emerged that the proposed Mayoral Combined County Authority will include East Sussex, West Sussex and Brighton & Hove, so this region is timely and sits well for future regional plans.

**As a pilot of Sustain’s national plan, Arun & Chichester Food Partnership is leading on regional work to build a plan to expand the market for local agroecological food in West Sussex, East Sussex, Brighton and Hove and the specified areas of Hampshire County Council.**

The agreed actions are:

- Establishing baseline data and local context
- At least one public event to bring together actors in the food system to co-develop a plan
- Creation of a Draft Action Plan
- Providing a report on this project.

This work was undertaken from mid-February until end of April 2025.

***"We are on an ambitious journey to co-create a plan to expand and grow the local, sustainable food sector." [Local Food Plan | Sustain](#)***

The draft action plan addresses many multiple different themes and considers the barriers, looking at places for collaboration and solutions, pilots and policies, to address the key areas of:

1. Ensuring that we have the people with the right skills, knowledge and qualifications to meet current and future needs of a growing local food system.
2. Addressing barriers to profitability, growth and entry into the food production field
3. Enabling the greater reach of the producers - increasing routes to market and connecting with retailers and the hospitality and tourism sectors. Enabling them to fulfil the increased demand.
4. Improving consumer awareness of local food, addressing barriers and increasing demand.

These actions will have these intended positive outcomes:

- Building food resilience at a regional level
- Improving local employment, economy and rural sustainability
- Reducing the climate impact of food
- Reducing instability in the industry and in future consumption

This work will be undertaken by a wide range of organisations, including food partnerships, public, private and charitable sector organisations, forums, partnerships and networks related to industries and themes, and others.

## Snapshot of regional assets and council commitments to local food economy

	<b>East Sussex</b> (including districts of Eastbourne, Hastings, Rother, Wealden and Lewes)	<b>Brighton &amp; Hove</b>	<b>West Sussex</b> (including districts of Chichester, Arun, Horsham, Mid Sussex, Crawley, Adur & Worthing)	<b>Hampshire</b> districts of East Hampshire, Havant, Winchester  (defined for this area of Sussex and South Downs)
<b>Food Partnership</b>	<b>Good Food East Sussex network of 5 partnerships:</b>  <a href="#">Eastbourne</a> – SFP Food Partnership (SFP Bronze)	Sustainable Food Places Gold Level <a href="#">Food Partnership</a>  Council endorsed <a href="#">Food Strategy and Action Plan</a>	<b>West Sussex Food Network (informal):</b>  <a href="#">Arun &amp; Chichester Food Partnership</a> (SFP Bronze)  <a href="#">Adur &amp; Worthing Food Partnership</a>	<b>Hampshire Food Alliance (multi-agency, multi-sectorial partnership)</b>  <b>HCC Food Insecurity Partnerships Officer to support the establishment of independent Local</b>

	<b>East Sussex</b> (including districts of Eastbourne, Hastings, Rother, Wealden and Lewes)	<b>Brighton &amp; Hove</b>	<b>West Sussex</b> (including districts of Chichester, Arun, Horsham, Mid Sussex, Crawley, Adur & Worthing)	<b>Hampshire</b> districts of East Hampshire, Havant, Winchester  (defined for this area of Sussex and South Downs)
	<a href="#">Hastings Food Network</a>  <a href="#">Lewes</a> - SFP Partnership (SFP Bronze)  Rother - Food Partnership  <a href="#">Wealden</a> - SFP Food Partnership		<a href="#">Mid-Sussex Food Partnership</a>  Horsham Food Partnership (food poverty focus)  Crawley – no Food Partnership	<b>Food Partnerships (LFPs)</b>  East Hampshire – developing a food partnership within district council.  Havant – developing a food partnership within borough council.  <a href="#">Winchester</a> – SFP Food Partnership
<b>Economic Development</b>	Experience Sussex – food & visitor economy  <a href="#">East Sussex County Council ‘Prosperity’ strategy (2024 – 2050)</a> - Acknowledges importance of assets that could ‘define the core of a locally rooted growth narrative. This involves local supply chains and high local multipliers as (for example) independent retailers in the county’s town centres source and sell locally grown food.’ (p23)	<a href="#">Greater Brighton Economic Board (includes parts of E &amp; W Sussex) Food plan</a>  <a href="#">Economic Plan 2024 – 2027</a> - “Brighton & Hove Food Partnership can provide links to a key aspect of the city’s nascent regenerative economy through the emerging Food Strategy”	Experience Sussex – food & visitor economy  Sussex Six in 3 Districts – Horsham, Chichester and Mid-Sussex  Farmers Markets and Good Food Events – e.g. Chichester & Horsham  Business and financial support for Sussex’s remaining independent abattoir (notably Horsham DC)	East Hampshire District – Grow Up! Rural economy programme  Hampshire Fare <a href="http://hampshirefare.co.uk">hampshirefare.co.uk</a>
<b>Procurement / Climate Change / Sustainability</b>	Commitment to “source sustainable, organic and local food and	Commitment to “source sustainable, organic and local	<a href="#">Draft Sustainable Procurement policy</a> states: “Source sustainable, organic	Commitment to supporting the local economy in the <a href="#">county procurement strategy</a> -

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	<p><i>drink, avoiding unsustainable fishing and farming practices, in relevant catering contracts” via <a href="#">Orbis Shared Procurement service</a></i></p> <p>In ‘Prosperity’ - ‘novel approaches to local procurement (including by the public sector) are...likely to feature’ (p23)</p>	<p><i>food and drink, avoiding unsustainable fishing and farming practices, in relevant catering contracts” via <a href="#">Orbis Shared Procurement service</a></i></p> <p>Council have set ‘<a href="#">good food standards</a>’ committing to a healthier, more sustainable food system.</p> <p>BHFP host the <a href="#">Good Food Procurement Group</a></p>	<p><i>and local food &amp; drink, avoiding unsustainable fishing &amp; farming practices, in relevant catering contracts”</i></p> <p><i>In catering contracts WSCC specify that service providers where possible are to support local (Southeast) and British purchasing &amp; produce. WSCC school meals providers use the Soil Associations ‘Food for Life’ as an aspirational benchmark that encourages the use of more seasonal &amp; local food.</i></p>	<p><i>‘The Council spends a significant amount of money with businesses local to Hampshire. We are proud to continue to maintain around 60% of our third party spend with local businesses.’ (p18)</i></p>
<b>Public Health</b>	<p><a href="#">Healthy lives, healthy people: East Sussex Health and Wellbeing Board strategy</a> – 2023 – 2027</p> <p>PH provide multi-year core funding for all Food Partnerships</p>	<p>The Brighton and Hove Food Strategy Action Plan 2025-30, aligns with the Joint Health &amp; Wellbeing Strategy priority action area</p> <p>- ‘A whole city approach to food and wellbeing will be adopted, prioritising those with the poorest diets or least access to healthy food’ &amp; core outcomes of the Council Plan 2023-27.</p>	<p><i>The following pieces of work are underway.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>A countywide Joint Food and Nutrition needs assessment, completion Autumn 25.</i></li> <li>- <i>The West Sussex Draft Joint Local Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2025 – 2030 - due summer 2025</i></li> </ul> <p><i>Food and Nutrition is one of the five priority areas identified in this strategy that reflect the wider factors that impact our health.</i></p>	<p>Food Insecurity Partnerships Officer to support the establishment and development of independent Local Food Partnerships (LFPs) – collaboration with Public Health</p> <p>HCC is making significant progress in addressing food insecurity through the development of Local Food Partnerships. By fostering collaboration, sustainability, and community engagement, HCC aims</p>



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				to support the creation of a more equitable and sustainable food system for all residents.
<b>Other</b>			Via its corporate plan, WSCC commits to a sustainable and prosperous economy – supporting local business, local supply chains and produce, and local employment, wherever possible.	Support for County Farm tenants via County Land Planning and Environment

*We acknowledge this table isn't exhaustive and reflects our current findings in the timescale of this report – we hope to continue to build a more in-depth picture of the local government commitment to this work as we continue to deliver on the action plan.*

## **Local Food in Sussex and South Downs – current picture**

In keeping with the national [Sustainable Food Places](#) 'Local Food Plan' project, we are defining local food as:

*“food that is produced, processed, sold and eaten within the same region or local administrative area through transparent, SME-focused supply chains”*

Existing data on food produced locally doesn't necessarily fit into this particular definition – for example in Chichester District, there are many large-scale growers, some with overseas sites to ensure year-round production, who are selling far beyond their site locations on a national or international scale. This is why we have brought together some different sources to try to begin to build a picture of the scale and nature of the food bought and sold locally. We are aware that this is by no means a comprehensive assessment of the local food landscape but a snapshot of where we are starting from for this work.

The geography of the region is largely rural, with the South Downs to the north and significant coastline on the south, part of which forms the UNESCO Living Coast

Biosphere. It is home to the urban centres of Chichester, Brighton & Hove, Havant and Crawley, large country estates such as Goodwood and Cowdray and historical tourist hotspots including Petworth, Arundel, Beachy Head and Battle. There is stark inequality across the region, with particular issues around rural isolation with poor transport links, coastal inequality and areas of significant deprivation, and rising housing costs alongside rapid new housing developments with lagging infrastructure. The protected area of the South Downs has had an impact on the development of non-protected areas, with new housing being concentrated in areas such as Alton and Southbourne, leading to the loss of agricultural land.

In terms of food production, there is a rich history of farming on the South Downs – with 85% of it currently farmed land – which makes it distinct from many older National parks in the UK. The landscape is defined by centuries of cultivation. ([Source](#)).

In East Sussex, the most common types of farming are sheep, mixed livestock and crops, and arable cropping, made up of cereals and oilseeds. Horticulture, dairy and poultry farmers are also part of the local food supply but not the main contributors to the agricultural output of the area. ([A Tale of two counties; Strengthening local food cultures through mapping supply chains in East Sussex and Lancashire](#)).

The West Sussex Coastal Plain is defined as being ideal for horticulture due to its high winter light levels and some of the best year-round climates in the country, with crops grown year-round in glasshouses and polytunnels (source – WSGA Strategic plan 2017).

[DEFRA](#) data gives us some insight into the scale and changes to the farming sector over time; however, it is not an indicator of the scale of farming for ‘local food’ in our definition which refers to food that is ‘*produced, processed, sold and eaten in the same region.*’

Local Authority	Number of holdings 2024	Number of holdings 2013	Difference
Brighton and Hove	11	See 'Lewes'	
Eastbourne	9	see 'Wealden'	
Hastings	<5	see 'Rother'	
Lewes	206	230 (includes B&H)	-13
Rother	493	528 (includes Hastings)	-35
Wealden	924	953 (Includes Eastbourne)	-20
East Hampshire	326	320	+6



Havant	22 (51 including Fareham)	57 (includes Fareham)	-6
Winchester	431	394	+37
Adur	17	see 'Arun'	
Arun	100	134 (includes Adur & Worthing)	-17
Chichester	473	488	-15
Crawley	7	see 'Mid Sussex'	
Horsham	481	505	-24
Mid Sussex	262	272 (includes Crawley)	-3
Worthing	<5	see 'Arun'	
<b>South East &amp; London</b>	<b>12511</b>	<b>12,996</b>	<b>485 (- 4%)</b>
<b>England</b>	<b>102261</b>	<b>102,836</b>	<b>575 (- 0.5%)</b>

*\*Please note, some districts have been combined in 2024 figures to be comparable to 2013 data.*

Comparing data from 2024 to 2013 shows a decrease in holdings in East Sussex and Brighton & Hove from 1711 to 1643, and a decrease in West Sussex from 1399 to 1340. The reasons for this are not clear – farms have likely moved into other use but some could have been combined into larger farms. Interestingly in the Hampshire border areas (East Hampshire, Havant, Winchester, Portsmouth, Fareham & Gosport) there has been an increase from 771 to 808 holdings comparing 2013 to 2024.

Looking at the ‘South East and London’ region, the percentage loss of holdings is 4%, interestingly compared to England as a whole only at 0.5% - indicating that this drop in the number of holdings is disproportionately affecting the South East region.

Recent data from the Soil Association shows there are 82 Soil Association-registered organic producers in East and West Sussex, 25 of which are in West Sussex and 57 in East Sussex (including Brighton & Hove). This does not provide the full picture of producers using nature-friendly methods, for example there may be others registered only with ‘Organic Farms and Gardens,’ small-scale farms without certification or ones using a different nature-friendly approach.

Looking more closely at sustainable farming practices, the Brighton & Hove Food Partnership describes ruminant animals as the “*key to the success of sustainable farming in Sussex; in managing grassland for biodiversity, pushing back invasive weeds and scrub, and fertilizing crops.*” They go on to explain how many local farmers are

lowering their artificial inputs and working towards a more mixed farming system, taking a holistic approach working with nature rather than against it ([source](#)).

We would be remiss not to mention Sussex's thriving and growing wine industry, which is fantastic for the visitor economy, though we have specifically excluded drinks and beverages from this plan.

## **Identifying barriers to expanding the local food sector**

### **Employment, Skills and Training**

Our region benefits from two agricultural colleges – Brinsbury College in Horsham District, part of the Chichester College Group, and Plumpton College in Lewes District.

The local land-based sector was identified as a key employment area by the Sussex Chamber of Commerce and they have produced a 'deep-dive' report to boost skills and employment in this area. West Sussex alone employs over 10,000 full-time staff in the sector and is home to the largest area of glasshouse production in England, but there is a skills and employment gap.

*"Businesses in the sector need more staff across all jobs areas and for those people to have a higher skill set. There are specific recruitment challenges within the land-based sector such as a lack of affordable housing in rural areas and little or no public transport. Other barriers such as unsociable hours, competition from other industries which pay better and a lack of interest in the sector from domestic workers make the sector unattractive. There is still a lack of understanding about the diverse work offer within the sector. Businesses will consider employing people with less specialised skills if they have the right transferable skills such as a willingness to learn, attitude, aptitude and professionalism" ([Future Skills Sussex Local Skills Improvement Plan Deep Dive report](#)).*

The suitability of course content has also come up in consultation with local farmers, highlighting the need for colleges to adapt and evolve to teach alternative farming methods including regenerative and biodynamic approaches. In East Sussex, this feedback led to the establishment of the Farmers Advisory Group to Plumpton College, giving farmers the opportunity to influence the content of courses to meet the changing needs of the industry. Other growers are supporting skills development directly; for example, in Brighton and Hove, one local [Community Supported Agriculture](#) scheme offers a 'Grow the Growers' training programme where people gain practical horticultural knowledge and skills whilst contributing productivity to their market garden.

## **Supply chain infrastructure**

In 2022 Sustain published a report mapping supply chains in two counties in England, one of which was East Sussex. The report highlighted a number of issues, including:

- Lack of data available on infrastructure and local food enterprise
- Decreasing levels of infrastructure – processing (milk/abattoirs) and distribution facilities
- Desire to diversify their markets and connect more directly with the community
- Lack of consistent labour
- Poor financial return on most common routes to market – e.g. milk contracts.

*“Most farmers expressed the need to diversify their business to supply into local markets. Barriers to achieving this type of diversification include a lack of know-how, time-constraints, limited social networks, access to affordable finance, limited or no access to local infrastructure, and lack of business advice or guidance.”*

The report identified the following infrastructure needs for East Sussex:

- Food hubs for a range of farm types – processing, packing, distribution and marketing
- Milk processing unit with storage and vending machine equipment
- Mobile abattoirs and on-farm cold storage.

## **Threat of closure for last remaining abattoir**

As explained in the Brighton & Hove Food Partnership briefing to local authorities June 2024:

*“Small abattoirs are the backbone to enabling conservation and regenerative grazing. Larger and more centralised abattoirs do not take animals that have been reared in this way due to the carcass specifications in place for supplying the supermarket and large wholesale market. Small abattoirs can service native and rare breeds that are critical to grazing sites that are more balanced with supporting nature due to their ability to graze on unimproved species-rich grassland and scrub. The small abattoir near Henfield (Downland Traditional Meats LTD) is under multiple pressures and at risk of closing. This includes financial and staffing pressures due to the size of the operation, the older manual infrastructure and system, and the lack of other abattoirs in the local area meaning they work over capacity. The business does not have the capital to secure the required investment to change this and would require a concerted effort from local authorities, organisations, and businesses to support and invest in it.”*

## **Existing projects and plans in our region to grow the local food sector**

**Land Use Plus** – Brighton & Hove Food Partnership is working strategically to improve food production practices that impact on nature recovery and climate change through the Land Use Plus Project. It is taking a joined-up approach to local land use, combining food production with nature restoration, education and connectivity.

*“we work to reconnect the public with their local food supply, and increase understanding of where and how food is sourced. Key to this will be creating new, local, supply chains to unite farmers and citizens.”*

**Sussex Grazed** – Bringing together landowners, farmers and residents with a local meat box scheme, from conservation grazing animals on local chalk grassland. This scheme maximises animal welfare, biodiversity, nutrition, sustainability and fair prices for farmers, as well as minimizing waste and costs for the consumer.

**Meat Working Group** – This multiagency group was established to directly address the issue of the threat of losing local abattoirs as referenced above. A [report](#) from the Brighton & Hove and Wealden Food Partnerships has been released in April 2025, with recommendations for local authorities to invest in the only remaining Sussex-based site or establish new infrastructure.

**Greater Brighton Economic Board Food Plan** – The Greater Brighton Economic Board aims are to protect and grow the region’s economy through creative, innovative initiatives which coordinate economic development activities and investment. Following the Covid-19 pandemic and subsequent cost of living crisis and rising inflation rates, the Board agreed to develop a regional food plan that would look at rebuilding local supply chains and infrastructure. In 2023 the Board commissioned an [investigation](#) to cost out investments in food systems infrastructure, including dynamic food procurement, a regional food hub, training and support programmes, community supported agriculture and large-scale community composting.

**Sussex Six** - Sussex Six, run by Natural Partnerships CIC, launched in the Horsham District in June 2023 and has received significant support from Horsham District Council. The initiative encourages local businesses to commit to sourcing six (or more) new food and drink products from local suppliers. It is free for producers and suppliers to be listed on the site. They have a Sussex Food and Drink Directory as well as a specific directory for districts signed up to the scheme. Three councils in the region have signed up – Horsham, Chichester and Mid-Sussex. A total of 106 businesses have committed to the pledge, amounting to over 636 Sussex products newly added to shelves and menus across the region. They have been approached by Wealden District Council to explore rolling Sussex Six out across the district, linking to the work of Wealden Food Partnership and the Connecting Local Buyers & Suppliers work noted below.

**Connecting suppliers and buyers** – Wealden Food Partnership works closely with farmers, growers, and food producers, as well as local shops, restaurants, and caterers, to facilitate relationships between buyers and suppliers and encourage the use of local produce. They run local buyer-supplier events and have created a directory listing a variety of farmers, growers, producers, and buyers. This directory will be grown to become a county-wide resource, and the events will run twice a year. The directory is a valuable tool for businesses looking to source locally and for producers seeking new markets for their products. It is part of their long-term vision to make local food the first choice for consumers and businesses alike.

**Farmers Markets** – There are multiple farmers markets across our region, 14 of which are listed on Sussex Food and Drink's [online directory](#). For example, Eastbourne Food Partnership is working with partners The Towner and Your BID Eastbourne to develop a new Farmers Market in the town, with a package of support for small businesses. Additionally, Wealden Food Partnership have supported Burwash setting up a community market. Farmers markets range from being organized by local councils to being fully commercial entities. There is an opportunity for Food Partnerships to work together to produce a toolkit for communities and/or local authorities for setting up successful Farmers Markets that support local producers and promote the benefits of local food to the wider community.

**The Twinning Project** – East Sussex partners are launching a new Twinning programme to match local farms with schools. The project will support the development of the relationship between the school and the farm, which would include the farmer visiting the school to talk about what they do and then inviting children to the farm to become mini-farmers for a day. The aim is to build and support long-term sustainable links between schools and farms to help children understand more about what their local farms do, where food comes from, what's available in their local area, promoting the wellbeing element of being outside and doing physical activity and providing access to good quality produce. It also opens doors to farms providing produce to their local schools including exploring alternative options for school meals.

The Twinning programme is being developed based on identified need and interest from farmers and works collaboratively with existing programmes and projects delivered through the LEAF Education programme to train farmers in working with children and young people, and South Downs National Park Authority.

**Changing Chalk's Farm School Project** - This project connects local primary schools with farms, providing creative ways to engage children in conversations around sustainable farming and environmental conservation.

**Skills Improvement Plan** - As referenced above, the Skills Improvement Plan by Future Skills Sussex has presented a series of recommendations alongside examples of existing initiatives that support the land-based sector in Sussex:

- Create a pan-Sussex structure to improve the planning and coordination of activities and training to support an employer led skills offer to the land-based sector that builds the capability of the sector
- Improve the evidence base for the land-based sectors
- Long term planning to support promotion of the sector to targeted groups of people.
- Develop knowledge exchange opportunities to help businesses improve their understanding of the skills needed to become Net Zero
- Explore the use of existing funding to be used flexibly to meet the needs of employers

**Hampshire's County Farms** - Hampshire County Council provides farming opportunities to new farmers looking to develop their skills in agriculture by having their own farm and then supporting them through their tenancy. Hampshire County Council is one of 43 smallholding (or 'council farm') authorities in England & Wales that offer this service. Acre for acre nationally, council farms are a significant provider of new chances for people to farm. They also play an active role in looking after Hampshire's environment and tackling climate change.

### **Hampshire Food Alliance (HFA)**

The HFA is a partnership that brings together different agencies and sectors to tackle food insecurity and build a sustainable food culture. The ambition is for Hampshire to be a place where no one worries about their next meal, and emergency food assistance is a thing of the past. The HFA aims to foster communities to thrive in an environment that promotes good health, boosts the local economy, and is kind to our planet.

### **Hampshire Local Food Partnerships**

In collaboration with Public Health, the Food Insecurity Partnerships officer is working to support the establishment and development of independent Local Food Partnerships. Hampshire has three long-standing local food partnerships - Winchester (SFP since 2019), Andover (SFP since 2023) and Gosport (SFP since 2024), of which Winchester is in the scope of this project. Winchester has a vision to create a healthy and sustainable food culture for people living and working in Winchester District, regardless of income, including aims of good food for all, strengthening the local economy, environmental sustainability, strong and resilient communities and fairness in the food chain. Three new LFPs have been established in the past 18 months, including two in scope of this project; East Hampshire (current focus: growing its membership to develop from an initial food support provision to a wider stakeholder base, establishing a sustainable network) and Havant (current focus: establishing a cross-sector membership base and setting up local food redistribution and cooperative food source project).



**Local Visitor Economy Partnership** – Covering East Sussex, West Sussex and Brighton and Hove, this ten-year strategy features actions that bolster support for local food. Multiple relevant objectives are included in the latest strategy, including:

- Champion pan-Sussex product development programmes to improve visitor appeal and experience, promoting and supporting the development of bookable experience Focus on key destination drivers offering opportunities for growth, including wine tourism, Blue Green Sussex, screen, gastro tourism, heritage, and the culture and creative sectors
- Strengthen visitor economy supply chains to include and increase Sussex produce, services and businesses and champion local product to the visitor economy sector

**Experience Sussex** (aligned to the LVEP plan) - Experience Sussex is a visitor economy development programme, co-funded by East Sussex and West Sussex County Councils, hosted by WSCC. Food and Drink is an important and essential part of the Sussex visitor economy offer. The visitor economy creates a mutually beneficial relationship between the visitor experience, the destination offer and the sector's ability to enhance the economic resilience of local food and drink production. They also acknowledge the rising trend in food experiences, which not only attract tourists but also connects locals with their region's food.

**South Downs National Park Plan** 2020-2025 looks to the park's future to 2050. It includes consideration of the importance of buying local for the local economy and employment, and includes suggestions such as “buy local” and “throw a star party with local food and drink” as recommendations for the public. Although food production and sales are not highly prominent in the 2020-5 plan, it recognises the importance of food and grazing in creating the landscape of the national park. The plan commits to fostering social and economic wellbeing of their local communities, investments in new skills for farmers and foresters and prioritising green infrastructure planning,

South Downs National Park Authority also administers the [Farming in Protected Landscapes](#) programme, which is intended to help farmers and land managers in protected landscapes manage these areas during the changes in national approach to agricultural policy according to Defra's [Agricultural Transition Plan](#).

**Brighton & Hove City Downland Estate Plan** - The City Council has committed to protecting their 5,200 hectare estate of farmland, nature reserve and recreational space, including support for regenerative farming and provision of an affordable and sustainable local food supply. *‘We will encourage local food production, incentivising new entrants and current producers and land managers to adopt practices at farm scale which meet our sustainability and net carbon zero objectives’.* (see p68) *New*

*entrants and current producers and land managers to adopt practices at farm scale which meet our sustainability and net carbon zero objectives’. (see p68)*

### **Eastbourne Downland Whole Estate Plan 2020-2045 - Lewes and Eastbourne**

**Councils** - As in Brighton & Hove, Eastbourne Borough Council has committed to the protection and preservation of their estate, alongside supporting economic activity including their tenant farmers that are seen as stewards of the land - *‘Help to build a value-added brand for produce from the Estate. A distinct brand based on the special qualities of the Estate could add value to their produce. Consumers are increasingly interested in the provenance of their food and its ecological footprint, and retailers are sensitive to this. The Council values the role of its tenant farmers as stewards of the important habitats and ecosystems on the Estate, and it is hoped that discerning consumers will also value this’*. (see p51)

**Newhaven Fishing project** - Lewes District Council received funding through the Levelling Up fund to regenerate Newhaven Harbour and set up a sustainable fishing processing plant, landing stage and local seafood restaurant. The processing plant is underway, the landing stage is nearing completion, and the restaurant is in the earlier stages. The project aims to support and promote the local fishing industry and consumption of sustainably caught and produced food,

## **Events**

Over the last few months, the Arun & Chichester Food Partnership hosted and attended events to consult with relevant stakeholders and encourage involvement in the development of this local food plan.

### **1. Bognor Food Forum – 6 March 2025, at Shore Community Church**

17 people registered for this event.

This event was centred around education, skills and training – how do we meet current and future needs for food production in the local area, with an introduction from the development officers from Arun & Chichester Food Partnership.

Speakers:

- Paul Burry, Head of Learning, Brinsbury College
- Jason Burt, Managing Director of Farmhouse Cookery and founding Director of Bognor Makerspace

Workshop time was given to consultation on these topics:

- Why buy local food?

- How can we change behaviour?
- Who has the power and responsibility to make changes to the food system?
- How can we have the right skills for the future?

Summary of results are attached in Appendix B.

## **2. Sussex & South Downs Local Food Summit – 26 March 2025, at Brinsbury College**

This event brought together 37 stakeholders in the local food system. 50 people registered and many more expressed interest but were unable to attend on the day. Attendees ranged from food producers, retailers, local government officers (economic development, communities & partnerships, climate change), food partnerships, press and more.

The Arun & Chichester Food Partnership development officers provided brief context about the Local Food Growth Plan, the draft action plan and the day.

Five speakers spoke about their work in different aspects of the local food system, highlighting specific issues and their creative, impactful work to improve the local food system. The speakers were:

- Sophie Robinson, Land Use Plus Project Manager, Brighton & Hove Food Partnership: Sussex Grazed and local meat
- Angela Blair – Food Policy Coordinator, Brighton & Hove City Council: Food economy resilience and the Greater Brighton Food Plan
- Garry Mortimer-Cook – Enterprise Manager, Horsham District Council: How the council supports local food enterprise with Sussex Six
- Jools Lawton – Brighton CSA – Fork and Dig It CIC: Growing with and for the local community
- Fred Duncannon - Owner of Stansted Park Farm Shop and co-founder of The South Downs Food Festival

A panel with Q&A, hosted by Vera Zakharov of Sustain, also included Hilary Knight of Sussex Food and Drink/ Sussex Six. Sophie Robinson was unable to attend the panel.

There were workshops exploring these key themes and co-creating related contributions to the action plan:

- Food production and infrastructure
- Food resilience - planning a long-term future in unstable times with collaboration and coordination
- Skills and careers development
- Consumer demand and education
- The role of local government – opportunities and challenges

Additionally, there was lunch including local, sustainable food and an optional tour of the farm at Brinsbury College.

The day was highly focused and effective, providing significant contributions to the action plan, building networks and sparking ideas for collaboration.

Attendees rated the day highly. Details in Appendix C.

### **3. Buyer/ seller event (East Sussex)**

On Thursday 3rd April at Church Farm in Polegate, East Sussex, an Arun and Chichester Food Partnership development officer attended the 'Connecting Local Buyers and Suppliers' Event run by Wealden Food Partnership. This was the third in a series of events running twice per year. The overall aim of these events is to ensure more locally produced food reaches our communities' tables by facilitating relationships between producers and buyers and ultimately part of a long-term strategy to build a strong interconnected local food system.

There were 50 attendees including farmers, growers, producers, food partnerships, public health and support agencies, and talks from Longbridge Regenerative, Long Man Brewery, Experience Sussex, Sustainable Meat Eater, Eastbourne Food Partnership and the Arun & Chichester Food Partnership to discuss the Regional Growth Plan. The event provided insight into challenges and opportunities within the local food sector and engaged attendees around the development of the Local Food Plan.

## Draft Local Food Action Plan

Please see the draft actions of the Sussex and South Downs region Local Food Plan below, split into three categories based on what can be done now, within our existing plans and resources, what can be done ‘tomorrow’ with more investment, and what transformational actions we aim to do with significant long-term investment in this work. Actions we can take within our existing plans and resources are focused on working towards how to implement the mid- and long-term actions for true transformational change, but will depend on regional buy-in from decision makers.

To enable the delivery of this plan there are some initial organizational actions to set up appropriate structures for Food Partnerships and other key stakeholders:

Organisational actions
Formalise a network across the region with regular meetings and speakers
Create a ‘Food Resilience Forum’ to bring together local Climate Action networks and Transition Town organisations with local government
Create opportunities for engagement with local authority officers, councillors and CEOs
Work towards the creation of a Sussex Food Board, bringing together local government experts and actors across different specialisms including Public Health, Economic Development and Sustainability, with the intention of creating local food resilience plans.

Food Production and Infrastructure			
For today – what we can do now within existing plans and resources		For tomorrow – what we can do with a little more investment	Transformational – building a better future if there is long term investment
<i>Action</i>	<i>Expected timescale if known/lead</i>		
Feasibility study to understand how to scale up local food buying, including storage, logistics and ordering platforms.	BHFP - current	Explore routes to support small producers – eg, co-operative use of bigger producer's equipment, infrastructure, etc. Following results of farmer/producer consultation, plan and cost how to support SMEs ?	Explore alternative ownership of farming production including abattoirs, including public ownership (or cooperatives
Consultation with farmers and producers including survey, focus groups and report, to understand the best ways to encourage growth and viability of increased local food production	Summer 2025 – ACFP leading with support from multiple partners	Mapping available land and what it is used for, aligning with current geography and considering if this needs to be graded for most valuable agricultural land and any protection needed through the planning system.	Pilot or creating an alternative farm supermarket (physical with online offer).
Develop detailed understanding of infrastructure needs for a larger local food market – grain storage, refrigeration/ freezing, distribution needs etc.	Farmer forums, Economic development teams? 2025-2026	Look at solutions to the water shortage / high water costs for farmers.  Assess costs of future infrastructure needs for the larger local food market.	Define the requirements for increasing local food production + infrastructure.  Explore if underused publicly-owned buildings could be used to support local food producers.



Galvanise support and actions from the Local Meat Report - Identify the particular problem areas at the abattoir (excluding Barclays Homes) which need investment to allow it to continue until the end of the current lease: Sept 2031  Conduct/tender for a feasibility study for larger investment in the purchase of the existing site / new site to be presented to LAs	Local Meat Group – immediate  End June 2025  End Sept 2025		
Broaden the Supplier/ buyer directory from East Sussex to regional	Wealden Food Partnership - ongoing		
Create a buyer/supplier event in West Sussex	WS groups supported by Wealden FP - Autumn 2025		
Support development of new farmers markets by creating a toolkit to create farmers markets that support food producers & community sector.	Eastbourne FP Timescale tbc		

Food resilience			
For today – what we can do now within existing plans and resources		For tomorrow – what we can do with a little more investment	Transformational – building a better future if there is long term investment
<i>Action</i>	<i>Expected timescales if known/lead</i>		
Campaign: Raise awareness of seasonal. Ask local supermarkets to have seasonal aisle or displays	Autumn/Winter 2025	Explore viability of a “pay it forward” plan with producers and community food organisations Resource: <a href="#">LUSH starter pack</a>	Mapping local implications of global farming (water, soil, land) and central finance for adaptation and mitigation
Promote the Community Supported Agriculture model to improve resilience for smaller producers, and as places to train Produce a webinar to promote the benefits of CSA.	Summer 2025		Lobby for legislation changes as part of food strategy, to better support farmers and farming (which specific changes? Subsidise and incentivise local food growing by SMEs?)

Careers		
For today – what we can do now within existing plans and resources	For tomorrow – what we can do with a little more investment	Transformational – building a better future if there is long term investment

Action	Expected timescales if known/lead		
Make farming pay. Support Universal Basic Income for Farmers campaign.	Winter 2025	Work with estates to create a joined-up approach to promoting local careers and skills training.	What is a farmer today? Campaign – create one or more videos, make farming appeal to young people and career changers, change perceptions of agricultural work. Another video campaign specifically about technology side of the industry
How do we grow growers? Bring together an (online?) event and network to enable sharing of knowledge of traineeships, apprenticeships, courses etc so people can find the best one for their needs and spaces are created and filled. Work with local farmers, producers and agricultural colleges to understand what opportunities are available, what the gaps are and how to fill them.	Autumn 2025	Create and extend existing programmes <u>such as 'Farm School'</u> ; to create positive experiences for children, young people and adults in urban areas, connecting with farming and food production. Includes horticultural therapy, alternative education, farm twinning, young farmers, community growing and visits. Connecting with and teaching the value of local food and the skills.	Encourage development of agroecological and regenerative growing courses at local colleges, linking them with local growing spaces.
Establish level of need for training in rural areas for local food growing and	Summer 2025 – Plumpton/Brinsbury as partners		Marketing plan, including BBC / media exposure for routes to careers in local food, highlighting

production, to enable funding bids and allocation of funds.			the value of agricultural colleges and training.
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Education and consumer demand			
For today – what we can do now within existing plans and resources		For tomorrow – what we can do with a little more investment	Transformational – building a better future if there is long term investment
<i>Action</i>	<i>Expected timescale if known/lead</i>		
Create and implement customer-facing consultation to understand the best ways to encourage the growth of local food demand at regional and local levels.	ACFP leading Summer 2025	Explore a pan-Sussex brand. Strengths, weaknesses, opportunities. Inclusive – not a membership organisation. “Produced in Sussex” “Grown in Sussex.” “Sussex Grazed	A network of local events connecting consumers and producers. For example, tasting and information events showcasing local sustainable food and themed public events.
Promote the Sussex Six campaign and approach non-participating councils to ask them to commission this scheme by demonstrating impact in participating areas	Sussex Six and food partnerships Summer 2025	Develop local food knowledge hubs. For example, ‘Where could I take kids?’ ‘What farmers do?’ visits. Links to existing guides.	Explore how to promote local food to new markets. For example, develop ways to connect better with the 25-35 men’s market, which shows an interest in healthier eating, to increase their consumption of sustainable local food.
Promote existing guides (Sussex Six, Hampshire Fare,	Autumn 2025	Marketing – be vocal about local!	

Better Food Traders, South Downs, etc) to local consumers, retailers and producers. Encourage existing guides to cross-reference each other		<p>Campaign: i.e. Ask Me campaign</p> <p>Create local assets. How do we tell stories, make local food more exciting?</p>	
		Create and run new, regular community meals that focus on local food. Raise awareness of the importance of communities eating together, using community meals to educate about local and seasonal food, and encouraging connections with existing community meals and local food.	
Promote an “all Sussex” three course meal - “we have it all.”	All Autumn 2025	Work with community transport to connect to transport from urban areas to rural opportunities.	
		Work with hospitality organisations to develop agro-tourism and specific experiences which promote the use and enjoyment of local foods.	

Local Government			
For today – what we can do now within existing plans and resources		For tomorrow – what we can do with a little more investment	Transformational – building a better future if there is long term investment
<i>Action</i>	<i>Expected timescale if known/lead</i>		
Explore how the devolution agenda is an opportunity for collaboration on issues affecting local food i.e. skills and employment.	BHFP hosting a workshop Spring 2025	Financial incentives & support to scale up farm shop principles. LA: rent and rate-based incentive.	Campaign: The Sustainable Farming Incentive expanded offer is now closed to new applications. Campaign for local governments to get more money for local work to promote and support sustainable farming.
Have a launch event / events for the action plan, inviting allies in local government.	Summer 2025	Food resilience planning for local authorities and support	
Explore opportunities within existing funds such as Household Support Funds for supporting local food initiatives.	2025		
Explore using Good Food Local framework with local authorities	Winter 2025		



## **Next steps**

1. Develop a plan to start turning the draft action plan into reality, including expected timescales. Determine which partners will participate in the actions in the draft action plan, currently or in the near future. Engage multiple partners, but recognise that there will be varying levels of engagement and some areas may not participate.
2. Assess the investment required for actions in the next levels, financial, staffing and any other investment, thereby understanding what we need to resource.
3. Create bids, negotiations or other mechanisms to acquire desired resources to make the draft action plan become real.
4. Gain political support for this work, getting it endorsed by councils or other bodies.
5. Develop a joint vision of long-term aspirations outside of scope of this plan with the groups which are formed or enhanced during this work.

## **Appendices**

### **Appendix A**

#### **Costings**

##### **Sussex & South Downs Local Food Summit:**

10am – 2pm plus set up and optional farm tour. It would have been useful to have another hour and more flexibility with tea/coffee, which was limited. Up to 50 people. 50 people registered, 37 attended.

Venue	£150
Speaker travel expenses	£24.30
Lunch (provided by venue for 45 people)	£449.82
Coffees /teas (provided by venue for 48 people)	£144
Total	£768.12

##### **Bognor Food Forum**

£117 - rental of hall for 3-hour event, including crockery and cleaning. We provided coffee, tea, milk and fruit.

##### **Buyer/seller event**

£500 - space

£230 - lunch contributions

£200 - lunch food received in kind

£930 - total

### **Sussex Grazed project:**

This project is funded by National Lottery Heritage Fund as part of the Changing Chalk project, which is led by the National Trust, and has been running since 2023.

- Initial costs: £905 for a commercial freezer (for storing any excess long term and offal short term)
- Commercial fridge (which holds 20 boxes) at £3,023.99.
- Open Food Network charges 2% of sales for hosting the site, but nothing if we don't sell.

### Ongoing:

- 16 “shares” completed to April 25
- Have worked with 5 farmers and 2 deer stalkers
- Ambition to bring in at least 1 more farmer and 2 more deer stalkers by the end of the funded project in April 26
- OFN Case Study [here](#)
- Example share cost break downs [here](#) - often do multi-species shares but shown here is simplified form.
  - o Staff time is covered by funding ~ 4 working days per share
  - o Each share uses 3 volunteers for 3 hours each
  - o Hogget/Mutton/Venison are sold in ¼
  - o Goat is sold in ½
  - o Beef is sold in 1/40

### **Sussex Six campaign:**

How has it been funded?

1. 2022 – 2025 Horsham District Council Economic Development Budget HDC - UK Shared Prosperity Fund
2. 2023-2025 HDC - UK Shared Prosperity Fund
3. 2025-2026 2024 – 2025 Chichester & Mid Sussex District Councils

Horsham District Council used both SPF and its own budget over the first three years 2022-25 towards setting up Sussex Six, in total HDC spent £47,000 with Natural Partnerships CIC. (Directory, Branding, PR & Marketing, Workshops). HDC followed this up with another £20k of SPF in 25/26 to continue the programme in Horsham District, as well as introduce some new features to enhance its ongoing PR value and practical effectiveness for all Sussex participants. This included a quarterly new products newsletter, new themed 'sample menus' (i.e. offering a Sussex Breakfast) and a Horsham based market event with a live cookery theatre. In the first years HDC hosted quarterly workshop/networking events. In 25/26 HDC will host two and Mid-Sussex District council will host two via a separate contract, and the two will co-promote.

Cost for a local authority to join Sussex Six: quote available on request depending on the level of service required. [paula@naturalpr.biz](mailto:paula@naturalpr.biz)

If other areas are interested and want to find out more about this model, contact Natural Partnerships CIC for further information.

[Sussex Six - Sussex Food & Drink Awards](#)

### **Greater Brighton Food Systems Investment Project**

For costings of a food hub, dynamic procurement system, training and support programmes, community supported agriculture and large scale community composting, please see the 2023 **Greater Brighton Food Systems Investment Costings Project**.

## **Appendix B**

### **Bognor Food Forum Workshop Consultation**

**Why buy local food?** Attendees noted the benefits of producing and consuming more local food on our environment, our local economy and our health – citing the freshness, safeness and improved quality of local food compared to imports, as well as the cultural significance through heritage and preservation of local traditions.

**How can we change behaviour?** Attendees felt that a key to this was simplifying access to local food for consumers – having pop-up markets and supermarkets committing to stocking local products. Also, attendees noted the importance of educating younger people on the value of local food and ‘different’ ways to shop through school trips to places like Goodwood and Brinsbury college. Interesting ideas on marketing came up such as ‘Hello Fresh’ style cookery boxes using local produce and personal labels on things such as ‘picked and packed by Bob in Yapton’ could help connect consumers to their producers.

**Who has the power and responsibility to make changes to the food system?** Central government and local councils, and large supermarkets were all mentioned as having power and responsibility to change the food system, with things such as more legislation and incentives, support for local producers, council contracts (food procurement) and simpler processes around pop-ups, licensing and labelling. Consumers were also mentioned as having a responsibility – for example, at a local small-holding, demand for veg boxes significantly reduced following Covid and people stopped making the journey to pick up their boxes, so demand has to be there from consumers or the process needs to be simplified – which can have an impact on the producers.

**How can we ensure we have the right skills for the future?** Attendees noted schools as an important place to start – cooking isn’t given much space on the curriculum but it can teach the value of food, budgeting, encouraging using fresh, local produce. Also there is opportunity for more encouragement of career pathways into local food sector jobs. We need to educate decision makers on the

essentiality and fragility of the food system to increase prioritization and create local food plans. We need the right forums for all voices to be heard – industry, education, local government. Technology can be used to support education.

## Appendix C

### Feedback from Sussex and South Downs Food Summit



21 people completed the feedback form. Of these:

- 20 wanted to keep in touch about the progress of this work
- All rated the event as “successful” or “very successful”

There were requests for 42 places on groups to develop specific areas of the work (not unique, people could request to be part of more than one group):

- 6- skills and careers development in the food production sector
- 10- education and consumer demand for local food
- 6 – food production and infrastructure



- 7 – food resilience – planning a long-term future in unstable times with collaboration and coordination
- 11 – local government – opportunities and challenges
- 2 – other (including one “anywhere I can help”)

There was an open question: “What one thing, if any, you will take forward as a result of this event?”

Responses:

- *The belief that support for local food in Sussex is finally generating momentum and hopefully policy, support and actions*
- *Collaboration gives us a stronger voice to drive change within local and central government, ensuring food security and education for future generations*
- *Hope ... that the efforts and hard work taking place via these summits and reports will be heard by Government, regional and local bodies to secure the future of our food and landscape. Infrastructure is key to supporting local food production especially in the meat sector where butchers are in steep decline and abattoirs are closing (now only one locally in Henfield)*
- *The need to build food connections in Horsham and with connecting partners and pushing for food to be at the centre of wider authority strategy.*
- *How communication and interaction in person can help to build a potential local food awareness*
- *To invite Garry to talk to a programme board of 7 local authority economic development managers about Sussex Six. To discuss with Angela how to best get a local authority collaboration going on food to influence it being a priority for the emerging combined county authority.*
- *Exploring ADC joining Sussex Six*
- *To maintain relationships and keep on the agenda of our council staff and officers*
- *The need to network more to improve understanding and utility of the wide range of progressive activities*
- *Use our local markets to support this agenda*
- *Personally be more conscious of sourcing local food*
- *The issue around abattoirs in Sussex*
- *Seems not being discussed who is dealing with lack of farmers and food being grown locally*

- *Follow up with my local Parish Council to see if some of the CIL funding arising from the many housing developments happening in Ringmer can be used for a community growing project / infrastructure*
- *Such a lot of good things already going on -but a lot more to do*