

Time for a Buckinghamshire Food Partnership?



June 2020

The food and farming charity Sustain, with support from the Rothschild Foundation, is leading a scoping exercise to see if there is demand for more joined-up work to support food and farming in Buckinghamshire.

Why does food and farming matter?

Improving the UK's food system provides the opportunity to improve millions of people's lives, relieve the NHS of costly health problems; boost economic prospects for thousands of British businesses and communities; and help UK food contribute to national goals of preventing child obesity, net zero climate emissions and restoring nature:

- **4m** people employed in the agri-food sector in 2018; roughly 6,000 per constituency [[Defra](#)]
- **96%** of our 6,800 food and drink manufacturing businesses are SMEs [[Food and Drink Federation](#)]
- **£27bn** The overall impact of obesity on economic development [[Public Health England](#)]
- **20 to 30%** of greenhouse gas emissions are from food and farming [[Food Climate Research Network](#)]
- **72%** of UK land is farmed so has a major impact on wildlife, climate, water, air and habitats [[Defra](#)].
- The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the need for a **more resilient** UK food system [[UK Parliament POST: The Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology](#)]

In a Buckinghamshire context, the county provides unique opportunities and challenges in terms of its food culture. Historically agriculture was a dominant economic force in the county; now despite farmland covering almost 50% of the county's land area, agriculture contributes just 0.5% towards the county's GVA (Gross Value Added). On the other hand, the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) is currently the most visited AONB in Britain, with 55 million visitors each year spending a total of £400 million. A largely commuting population provides challenges of sense of place and belonging, and the county's rural profile contributes to social isolation. Whilst considered the fifth least deprived local authority, Buckinghamshire also plays host to several pockets of deprivation in Aylesbury and High Wycombe, with attendant health inequalities.

The coronavirus crisis has had a significant impact on much of Buckinghamshire's profile – with hospitality and tourism taking an enormous hit; whilst agriculture and food production have survived and potentially thrived [[Buckinghamshire LEP](#)].

Food has a part to play in all of these challenges and opportunities.

Taking a systems approach

The food system is complex and actions take place across multiple sectors. If any part fails, other parts are affected. Large players such as supermarkets have a large voice and representation nationally, which is not the case for smaller businesses, organisations and groups.

But with a local partnership approach lots can be unlocked.

The market for local food can be helped or hindered by local authority policy, as well as individual considerations such as convenience, quality and environmental credentials. The ability of individuals to eat well every day can be aided by the location of convenient healthy food businesses, and

shaped by motivation and skills development in cooking and food growing. Institutions such as schools, hospitals and colleges can leverage better processes through procurement – from wages and job security to more local sourcing and sustainable farming practices.

Working locally and collectively we can organise the system for the best outcomes, and advocate for appropriate support nationally. Now is the time to work collectively to build health and resilience into Buckinghamshire's food provision, and create a deliverable action plan for a better food future.

The role of a food partnership

A food partnership takes food as a system – demonstrates the connections between food, health, community, social equity, the environment and economic prosperity; and draws out how this approach can deliver a sustainable food system fit for the future. An integrated, joined-up, whole food system approach can bring together people and organisations with diverse interests for the mutual benefit of all.

More than 60 Sustainable Food Places (SFP) across the UK are now taking this approach – in areas that cover 20.4 million people.

What difference have food partnerships made?

In recent years food partnerships across the UK have:

- Run mass outreach events with the local community, engaging with millions of residents across the network, and promoting local businesses; for example Urban Food Fortnight in London has over the last five years regularly had over 100 events promoting locally-produced food in businesses and community settings to thousands of people. This work has included matching interested enterprises along the supply chain e.g. local growers with restaurants.
- Brought millions of pounds of investment in from outside of the partnership areas to support the local food economy; providing more jobs, and providing skills, training and business opportunities. Many of the partnerships have provided support to food business start-ups, and outlets for them to sell through, including markets, empty shops, and online platforms.
- Coordinated activity to reduce sugar in thousands of schools, leisure centres and other settings; worked alongside this to promote healthy eating messages to the public to support the shift to a healthier offer; and joined forces to stop the Coca-Cola Christmas truck from visiting local areas.
- Increased the availability and consumption of vegetables in 22 places from towns and cities to counties and regions; supporting food growing networks with thousands of spaces, advertising campaigns (with national vegetable sales uplifts of 2.3%), and increasing the uptake of healthy start vouchers (subsidising fruit and vegetables for low income families with young children).
- Gained commitments from caterers serving a billion meals to only procure demonstrably sustainable fish, with the majority of fish served in cities such as Durham and Bournemouth & Poole being demonstrably sustainable.
- Implemented food poverty and access action plans in over 60 local alliances; improving coordination of local public sector and charitable support for those in need; the Food and Fun programme piloted by Food Cardiff provides a lifeline for families facing the lack of food provision for children during the summer holidays. Following its huge success, the programme is now being rolled out in fifteen local authorities across Wales with a £500,000 grant from the Welsh Government.

- Worked closely with local resilience forums to coordinate the food response during COVID-19 to shielded groups and other vulnerable and low-income households locally. In Greenwich, the partnership coordinated additional items to go in the food boxes and provide a more tailored response to the recipients' dietary needs and circumstances. In Buckinghamshire, 110 community food providers and Council officers worked together in Wycombe and Aylesbury to coordinate their response and make sure everyone in those areas continued to meet their food needs in a dignified way.

Bringing everyone together

The starting point is to **bring stakeholders together** to share thinking and explore a common vision or purpose and aims. Representatives should be included from the public sector, third sector and business sector. Meetings provide the opportunity for stakeholders to explore the need and purpose of a food partnership, with a shared strategy and action plan. This is also an opportunity to look at what it is aiming to achieve and who should be involved. As well as looking at anything that has been done in this area already.

The next step for the Food Partnership is to nominate a smaller group of people who are going to actively work to take the idea of the partnership forward. This group could be called the steering group, steering committee, secretariat or management committee. The steering group leads on the development of the food partnership, the action plan and the food strategy.

Taking this approach further

At this stage there are several ways to give your views:

1. Answer some key questions using this online survey: <https://www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/BucksFoodPartnership2020>
2. [Book your place](#) on an online **Buckinghamshire food** stakeholder discussion group on 1st July at 2-3pm, or 2nd July at 6-7pm
3. Or get in touch with hannah@sustainweb.org to have a more in-depth conversation.

We look forward to hearing from you. The survey closes at 5pm on 31st July 2020.

About Sustain, the alliance for better food and farming

Sustain is the UK's alliance for better food and farming, a UK charity bringing together hundreds of third-sector, business groups, local authorities and communities at national and local level to improve the food we eat and the way it is produced, so that it is better for people and the planet. We champion policies to improve children's health; farmer and food worker livelihoods; and the impact of production on the environment and nature; grassroots work to alleviate food poverty, support community growing and enterprise skills; and promotion of vibrant food cultures, good food education and traditional production techniques.

Sustain is a registered charity, not affiliated to any political party and works in alliance, in a participatory and non-partisan way to secure better food, farming and fishing for the benefit of people and the planet.

*[Sustain](#): The alliance for better food and farming, charity number 1018643.
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