

Sustainable Food Cities / Sustainable Food Places

Our big idea for the National Food Strategy is this: **there should be a cross-sector food partnership in every major town, city, metropolitan borough and county across the UK.**

Harnessing the passion, creativity and commitment of individuals and organisations – including local authorities, businesses and community groups – these food partnerships help to make healthy, sustainable and local food a defining characteristic of where live, bringing significant social, economic and environmental benefits, from tackling food poverty and diet-related ill-health and creating new jobs, businesses and prosperity to combatting climate change, biodiversity loss and waste.

Over the past 7 years, Sustainable Food Cities has supported the establishment of 57 local food partnerships that are having a clear and measurable impact in transforming their local food culture and food system for the better. Our 5-year Phase 3 Sustainable Food Places programme, which is about to begin, will create a Network of over 100 food partnerships in both rural and urban municipalities that are perfectly placed to support local delivery of the National Food Strategy.

Which of the National Food Strategy priorities could this deliver on and what trade-offs, if any would there be with others?

It could deliver on all of them! The SFC approach is a tried and tested model offering a framework for change based around six key issues, and our values and priorities closely match those of the National Food Strategy:

1. Promoting healthy and sustainable food to the public
2. Tackling food poverty, diet-related ill health and access to affordable healthy food
3. Building community food knowledge, skills, resources and projects
4. Promoting a vibrant and diverse sustainable food economy
5. Transforming catering and food procurement
6. Reducing waste and the ecological footprint of the food system

Further roll out of the local food partnership model would help to ensure that National Food Strategy priorities can be effectively implemented at a local level.

What impact would it have?

Increasingly, cities and other local municipalities are understood as key agents of social, economic and environmental change and are vital to the implementation of national policies and strategies. With the right impetus and support, local food partnerships can have a transformative impact on all six key food issues outlined above, using an integrated approach to deliver more than the sum of their parts.

Is there any evidence of success?

There has already been impressive and measurable progress, for example:

- setting a new agenda for local action that tackles the root causes of food poverty 'beyond the food bank';
- persuading hundreds of businesses and public sector institutions serving 1 billion meals a year to provide only verifiably sustainable fish; and
- supporting citizen action (and over 1000 businesses) to reduce the availability of sugary foods and drinks.

An evaluation of SFC by the University of the West (UWE) of England in 2019 concluded that:

"SFC has evolved into a mature and increasingly stable network. Phase 2 has moved beyond proof of concept to show evidence of impact in a range of areas ... [and] has had a determining role in shaping changes at the local level. Analysis of 25 areas in Phase 2 reveals that SFC-funded coordinators and partnerships initiated and augmented a considerable volume and variety of food programmes, projects

and activities. SFC has [also] sponsored a series of campaigns leading to an unprecedented level of public engagement in sustainable food issues. Over a 7-year period, evidence from 327 policy actions in 29 leading SFC cities shows that local partnerships are both convening and giving shape to a new food policy landscape in cities. The SFC model is marked out by its unprecedented infrastructure for policy advocacy, networking, coordination and outreach into popular civil society.”

What does this big idea need to succeed?

SFC is funded by charitable foundations and provides tailored advice and support to new and existing food partnerships, as well as national learning events, webinars, national campaigns, peer mentoring and advocacy. The programme also includes grants to enable places to establish and coordinate their local food partnership. The UWE evaluation showed that an initial Phase 2 grant of £1.7m raised an additional £3.5m in local cash and in-kind contributions - a return of £2 for every £1 investment.

In Phase 3, we are expecting £5.7 million in funding from charitable foundations, of which half will be distributed as grants to local food partnerships. With interest in the food partnerships model significantly exceeding our capacity and resources, however, we need to secure additional sources of funding.

The National Food Strategy and UK Government Departments can help by giving SFC partnerships and the SFC approach formal recognition and endorsement as an effective model for driving and delivering food system transformation at a local level. We believe food partnerships should be given the same level of recognition as local economic or nature partnerships.

We hope the National Food Strategy team will consider referencing Sustainable Food Cities and food partnerships in the National Food Strategy vision as a vital way in which local authorities and citizens can engage with the positive new food agenda.

While they can operate on relatively small amounts of income, when partnerships do receive investment, they are much more effective and often use that investment to secure more from elsewhere. We would like the National Food Strategy team to advocate for a central Government grant to support further expansion of local food partnerships and of the SFC Network.

What can we offer the National Food Strategy team, to help you understand this in practice?

We think the best way to achieve this is for you to visit some of our member partnerships. We would be very pleased to organise a fact-finding trip for the National Food Strategy team and to host citizens’ assemblies or other consultation activity.

Who is submitting this big idea and would like to help it become a reality?

Tom Andrews, Programme Manager for Sustainable Food Cities on behalf of the SFC partners: Soil Association, Food Matters and Sustain: The alliance for better food and farming.