



Submission to the Environmental Audit Committee enquiry on Sustainable Food from Food Matters and the Brighton and Hove Food Partnership

Introduction and Summary

1. This is a joint submission from Food Matters and the Brighton and Hove Food Partnership. Both organisations have worked extensively and collaboratively for the past seven years to create a more sustainable food system in Brighton and Hove and welcome the opportunity to submit evidence based on this experience to the Environmental Audit Committee enquiry on Sustainable Food.
2. The nature of the enquiry is wide ranging, and we have therefore kept our submission to four key areas where we feel we have evidence and experience, as well as some general considerations:
 - **A model for local action to create a sustainable food system:** the role of Food Partnerships and a strategic integrated approach to food work
 - **Planning and access to land:** the importance of access to land at a local level for sustainable food production
 - **Capacity building and skills development:** building capacity and empowering individuals and communities
 - **Affordable food in a sustainable food system:** ensuring that while the real cost of food production and consumption is reflected in food pricing, sustainable food is available and accessible to all members of the community.
3. The following is a summary of recommendations for action on sustainable food systems:
 - **Support the development of a research agenda to provide baseline data and evidence of what works**
 - **Undertake an evaluation of the social, economic and environmental impact of local community food initiatives**
 - **Support the establishment of food partnerships as a model for delivering a sustainable food system at a local level**
 - **Partnerships between landowners and community groups should be incentivised through the tax system or other means.**
 - **The 'community right to buy' should explicitly include the right to buy land for sustainable food production**
 - **Research must be undertaken to understand the impact of rising food prices on the poorest in society and to understand how to ensure sustainable food becomes the 'norm' and not a niche market, and increase accessibility in our poorer communities.**

General considerations

4. The creation of a sustainable food system requires action at both a national and local level, by both national Government and local authorities, and by industry and the individual. It must include a mix of legislation, voluntary action, financial investment in research and development and leading by example, for example supporting sustainable food procurement. The target to reduce carbon emissions by 80% by 2050 will require concerted action on all aspects of the food chain, which contributes over 22% of UK ghg emissions, if it is to be achieved.
5. We are concerned that current Government policy, whether driven by the economic situation, or ideology, favours a less interventionist approach than is required if we are to have any impact on the twin crises of diet related disease and climate change. For example, in relation to public health, the current Government's direction of travel is to emphasise personal responsibility and the 'nudge' approach, and to encourage 'responsibility deals' from industry, and we are concerned that the effectiveness of this is limited and is a slow burn approach. Without a firmer and more robust lead from Government on these issues anything we may achieve at a local level will fail to create meaningful change.
6. Creating a sustainable food system requires 'joined up' action both within national government and local authorities. This approach was reflected in *Food 2030* and we would encourage the current Government to continue to develop and deliver this strategy and to maintain full cross departmental engagement in the issues.
7. Government policy on sustainable food must reflect the relationship between agriculture and food production/processing, public health, environmental sustainability and economic prosperity, and that solutions to prevent diet related health crises can be the same as those required to reduce the food system's impact on climate change. Agricultural policy, for example, should recognise and be consistent with the requirement from public health and climate change to increase sustainable consumption of fruit and vegetables and decrease meat consumption.
8. There needs to be more explicit acknowledgement by Government and local authorities of the value of food in our culture and society, and in particular the role that it can play in delivering a range of desirable public policy targets – for example increasing social inclusion, improving educational attainment, reducing food waste, delivering skills and training, improving physical and mental health and creating local employment opportunities. Financial Investment in sustainable food, for example in the school meals service, and food work, particularly at a local level, can reap a range of both direct and indirect benefits.
9. There is a lack of baseline data and evidence of what works underpinning the creation of a sustainable food system. There is a need to develop a systematic research agenda and prioritisation of funds to more fully understand how to achieve this. From a local perspective, for example, we require more evidence / data in order to understand what priorities for action in the areas of healthy diet and climate change are going to give us the best return on any investment of time, money and effort. We look to national Government to provide this information or to fund the gathering of such information.
10. Over recent years there has been a revival of interest in food across the UK and a variety of initiatives and projects at a community level which are contributing in small but important ways to the creation of a sustainable food system – from farmers markets to growing projects and

from cookery classes to food festivals (see below for an illustration of this in Brighton and Hove).

11. Some, but not all, of this activity in the last few years has received public support, for example funding from the NHS or Big Lottery (Food for Life, Local Food Fund) but is now in danger of losing this in the current economic climate and the positive results of this investment will be lost. Our experience is that these projects often require a relatively small investment but can deliver a high return. The social, economic and environmental impact of local food projects should be evaluated and their contribution to a sustainable food system better understood. Examples of best practice should continue to be supported and mainstreamed.

A model for local action to create a sustainable food system

12. Food is a cross cutting issue and therefore requires strategic, partnership working between stakeholders who may have diverse interests but share a common goal of creating an economically viable local food system which delivers healthy and affordable food within sustainable environmental limits. Locally this includes the health sector, the local authority, the community and voluntary sector, the business sector and individual residents.
13. The Brighton and Hove Food Partnership (BHFP) was established in 2003 by Food Matters, the Sustainability Team at Brighton and Hove City Council, the Primary Care Trust and other partners to create a place for all those with an interest in or working on food issues to work collaboratively to create a more sustainable localised food system. In doing this it 'joins up' social, environmental and economic concerns. The BHFP has pioneered this approach and is frequently contacted by other areas for advice on establishing similar partnerships.
14. To-day the BHFP is a not for profit limited social enterprise employing 12 full time equivalent staff, 20 volunteers and with an annual turnover of £600K. It is funded through a mix of service delivery for the Primary Care Trust and grant funding (Big Lottery, trusts and foundations). It delivers a variety of work including weight management programmes, cookery in the community, support for growing projects, community compost workshops, networking and information exchange, educational events and strategic advice and support, working with a variety of public sector and community partners. It is a vehicle for lobbying and campaigning for structural change in food related policy, all within the mission of the organisation to create a sustainable food system.
15. As a membership organisation rooted in the voluntary sector and working in partnership with statutory agencies, the Food Partnership reflects many of the principles inherent in the Government's localisation and Big Society agenda. It believes that empowering individuals and communities to take more control over their food will result in a more sustainable system which delivers better health outcomes and environmental sustainability. The myriad of locally based projects such as community gardens, community owned shops, buying co-ops, are truly the Big Society in action.
16. The establishment of local food partnerships is a way of creating sustainable food systems from the bottom up. However, as stated above this approach can only be effective if matched by Government action at the top. There are areas of work beyond the reach of local communities such as the operational activities of large scale national retailers or caterers, creating a fair trade system, the re-formulation of food products to reduce salt, and whilst we can lobby for change in these areas it requires Government action to achieve it.

17. Support should be provided for the establishment and running of food partnerships within local authority areas across the country as a model for delivering a sustainable food system at a local level. Although they have the capacity to ultimately become self sustaining through delivery of services, again reflecting the ethos of the localisation agenda, this cannot be achieved without initial support to build capacity.
18. Some examples of work delivered by the BHFP which is helping to create a sustainable food system within the City:
 - **Spade to Spoon: A Food Strategy and Action Plan:** Food Matters and the BHFP pioneered the development of a city wide food strategy in 2003 integrating the social, environment and economic impact of the local food system. It creates a framework for target setting and local action in areas such as education, waste and procurement.
 - **Harvest Brighton and Hove:** a lottery funded project to increase the amount of food grown in the city and access to locally produced food. In addition to creating opportunities for residents to grow more food it is looking at long term policy that supports local food production and how the city will feed itself in the future.
 - **Referral System:** funded by NHS Brighton & Hove the service is a single point of access for professionals looking to refer overweight and obese adults and children to healthy lifestyle programmes. Coordinators trained in behaviour change contact referrals to assess readiness to change and place clients on the most appropriate programme.
 - **Healthy Choice Award:** joint initiative from the BHFP and the Food Safety Team at Brighton & Hove City Council designed to help people identify restaurants offering healthier food when eating out. Breakfast clubs, nurseries, care homes and other settings can also apply for the award.

Planning and access to land

19. Access to land for food growing is an essential aspect of a sustainable food system. The value of land in the south east of England is a barrier to the creation of viable small scale food production such as horticulture or small mixed agricultural operations, yet it is essential to create opportunities for this to flourish. Partnerships between landowners and community groups with viable business plans for food growing should be incentivised through the tax system or by other means.
20. In a high density urban setting such as Brighton and Hove access to land is challenging, yet within the City there is a surprising amount of land, and the city council holds 10,000 acres of publicly owned farmland around the City. Small scale farming on the peri-urban fringe and beyond, and even within the City, is an essential component of a sustainable food system. The proximity to the market place offered by a city shortens the supply chain and offers additional opportunities for connecting with consumers.
21. The planning system should support small scale food production and related infrastructure (abattoirs, distribution hubs etc). Although giving more power to local communities through the decentralisation and localism bill sounds commendable there is a danger, particularly in an urban setting, that the competing interests and lobby of development (housing and industry) will outweigh the need to maintain or create new land for food production.

22. One way of safeguarding against this is to ensure, as has happened in Brighton and Hove, that the core strategy and local plan for an area includes the need to create opportunities for sustainable local food production.
23. The 'community right to buy' aspect of the localisation bill should explicitly include the right for the community to buy land that is appropriate for viable sustainable food production. Currently this is not addressed in the framework. Publicly owned land suitable for food production should be identified as an asset to the community and subject to the right to buy.
24. The potential of urban agriculture / food growing within cities should be evaluated to assess the role it can play in sustainable food systems. Although the volume of food produced may not be substantial enough to be of value, the indirect impact of access to open space, physical activity, the visibility of food production for the education of children etc, can have social and health benefits.
25. In Brighton and Hove Food Matters and the planning department of the City Council as part of the Harvest Brighton and Hove project, are preparing a 'planning advisory note' which encourages all new developments and conversions to include food growing opportunities. In the city where space is at a premium this includes the creative use of roofs, walls and edible landscaping. This is a model that should be adopted by other cities.
26. A constantly recurring issue at local level is how to ensure that local shops are not squeezed out by the arrival of multiple retailers, whether out of town or on the high street. In the latter case it is often impossible for the community to have any impact if a multiple retailer moves into an existing premises and is not required to go through the planning system. The Decentralisation and Localism bill should allow communities to develop retail strategies for their neighbourhoods which can influence the right mix of traders which best supports local needs and a sustainable food system.

Capacity building and skills development

27. A sustainable food system requires skills and knowledge that have often been forgotten, at all points in the food chain. In a city this is more likely to focus on the consumer and provision of knowledge around cooking and healthy eating as well as information on food and how it is produced. The members of a local food partnership understand the particular needs of their community and how best to provide those skills.
28. Partnership working can add value to the work of individual organisations through linking partners, sharing information and attracting and distributing funding to smaller grassroots partners. In Brighton and Hove our Good Food Grants programme has distributed funds of up to £1000 to 111 smaller organisations over the past four years.
29. Capacity building in the local food system also requires the expertise and local knowledge provided by partnership working – again in the case of Brighton and Hove this focuses mainly on the market end of the supply chain, ensuring that there are outlets within the city for local producers to supply, and that there is an infrastructure to facilitate this. Food Matters is currently leading on a project to bring producers and catering buyers within the City's extensive hospitality sector together to explore how to increase the availability of local food.

Affordable food in a sustainable food system

30. No-one doubts that a sustainable food system must reflect the true cost of production and offer a fair price to producers both within the UK and internationally. This inevitably presents a problem for consumers used to 'cheap' food, and in particular for consumers on low incomes for whom the rising cost of food presents a real challenge when living on a limited budget.
31. Brighton and Hove, despite its position in the relatively affluent South East, falls within the most deprived 25% of all local authorities with pockets of severe deprivation amongst areas of relative wealth. The current cuts and moves such as the cap to housing benefit are expected to have a real impact in these communities. Much of the work undertaken by the BHFPP and Food Matters is with these communities where health outcomes are compromised by poor food access issues.
32. Research undertaken by Food Matters in 2007¹ has shown that there is a perception amongst low income consumers that 'organic' and sustainable food is 'not for us'. Farmers markets, box schemes and other means of accessing local sustainable food do not tend to attract low income consumers both because of this perception but also because the multiple retailers can offer cheaper, albeit less healthy options. This presents a genuine challenge to making sustainable food accessible to all.
33. Solutions to this issue can ultimately only be addressed by raising income levels. In the meantime there is a real worry that efforts to increase access to healthy and sustainable food currently undertaken by ourselves and many other projects across the country, all of which are facing budget cuts, will take a step backwards as incomes reduce and prices increase.
34. The importance of this issue must be acknowledged and addressed by national Government and local authorities. Firstly projects working on these issues must continue to be funded (long - term). Research must be undertaken to understand the impact of rising food prices on the poorest in society and in the longer term to understand how to ensure sustainable food becomes the 'norm' and not a niche market, and increase accessibility in our poorer communities.

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¹ *Food: What's on your Doorstep?* A series of participatory workshops exploring the relationship between communities and local, organic food, Food Matters (2007)

Appendix 1:

Food Matters

Food Matters is a not for profit social enterprise working to create sustainable and fair food systems. We believe in the need for an integrated, strategic approach to re-localising food systems starting in our own community. We run training and deliver projects which empower individuals and communities to make better food choices - better for health, for the environment and for the local economy. We are based in Brighton and Hove but have a national remit and work to influence and inform national and local policy with our experience of running local projects with local people. We also offer consultation services to organisations which share our objectives

Brighton and Hove Food Partnership

Brighton & Hove Food Partnership is a not for profit company that works for a healthier, more sustainable food system for Brighton & Hove. It is a membership body with 500 organisations and individuals working in partnership to create a sustainable and ethical local food system. The Food Partnership also delivers community based projects including practical training, information, education and support on nutrition, cookery, food growing, health and wellbeing.