



FOOD EXETER 2017

A FOOD STRATEGY FOR EXETER: REDISCOVERING AND REDEVELOPING LOCALISED FOOD SYSTEMS

Report by Dr. Rebecca Sandover

Introduction

Food security and Food Justice are complex issues in Britain facing consumers, producers, local authorities and policymakers alike in the 21st Century. There are urgent problems that require addressing at both national and local levels: from diet-related ill-health to hunger, from Agri-Industrial supply chains to supporting local production, from food waste to food poverty, food knowledge and more.



In recent years government food policy has been criticised for failing to address these issues and enabling a market-driven approach to food policy based on agri-food systems. However inspiring, creative work is happening within communities to promote vibrant food cultures and increase opportunities to access 'healthy' food. Cities, it has been recognised, are ideally placed to promote localised food strategies and to join up the disparate actors working towards similar ends. From 2013 The Sustainable Food Cities Network have worked with localised food partnerships to transform food cultures and food systems. The network has rapidly grown from the first 6 cities in 2015 to the 47 that are working today towards common goals of implementing and supporting sustainable food systems that meet the needs of local communities. Relating firmly to this, Food Exeter (formerly Exeter Food Network), has been undertaking work on developing a food strategy for Exeter. As part of this process a consultation process was launched that included a workshop to deliberate on the priority aims and action areas of the strategy, and to identify areas where network members can collaborate to strengthen their effectiveness. This report provides an introduction to Food Exeter, outlines the consultation processes and presents the published strategy along with suggestions for future work.



Food Exeter – Background

by Martyn Goss, Food Exeter Convenor

In 2015, members of Devon and Cornwall Food Association (now Exeter Food Action) met with colleagues from Exeter Food Bank to discuss ways of working together and idea sharing. This process of dialogue led to Exeter Food Bank agreeing to take fresh fruit and vegetables and passing this on to users, as well as the usual dried and packaged foods – leading to recipients learning about recipes, diet, food preparation and cooking. This marked a step change for local food banks.

From this initial conversation a further meeting was held with people from other community food projects who were invited to join the group. The aim was to share good practice and resources, and build up synergy to develop new work. This was the birth of the Exeter Community Food Network (which became Exeter Food Network and now is renamed as Food Exeter) supported by Sarah Bird from Devon Public Health and in line with the 2014 Devon Food Strategy from the Devon Strategic Partnership.

Since then the network was grown from 2 partner organisations to more than 24, including local farmers, retailers, chefs, public bodies, community based NGOs, food activists, academics and nutritionists. It has set up occasional working groups and started an Exeter Summer Cookery School for school children to address issues of 'holiday hunger'.

The network promotes greater cooperation between local groups, running workshops and developing new links, such as with the University of Exeter. Through this journey of developing as a city-wide organisation, Food Exeter has become a Sustainable Food City and works closely with other organisations such as Food Plymouth, Feeding Britain, People's Food Policy and Food Power.

Since December 2016 a representative Steering Group has been established to put together an Exeter Food Strategy and Action Plan. A draft strategy was opened to consultation with the wider network in April 2017 and the final version is published here. Food Exeter has an active website and is now looking ahead to fund new initiatives to support its aims to rediscover and redevelop localised food systems.

Food Exeter member projects include Food Glorious Food, Make Lunch, Drink Well-Age Wisely, The University of Exeter, Soil Association, Exeter City Council, Public Health Devon, Foodcycle, Real Food Store, Fit Food Cookery School, Exeter Allotments Forum, West Town Farm, Shillingford Organics, Embercombe, Broadclyst Community Farm, Exeter Food Action, Devon Community Housing, Exeter Food Bank, Devon County Council, ExVOS, St. Sidwell's Centre, St. Petrock's Centre, Exeter Community Initiatives, Devon Communities Together, Exeter VegShare and more.



A Food Strategy for Exeter: Consultation Process

In 2016, Dr. Rebecca Sandover and Prof. Stewart Barr were awarded funding from The University of Exeter to run a community workshop with **Food Exeter** to support the process of developing a food strategy for the city. Working collaboratively with partners from organicARTs, West Town Farm and the Food Exeter steering group, a workshop titled 'Feeding Exeter' was held at West Town Farm, Ide in April 2017. The workshop aimed to strengthen the development of a supportive network working to further a vibrant local food culture that is accessible to all. Based on deliberative methods it used a mixture of open discussion, soap box presentations, hands-on and exploratory workshops based in the stimulating

environment of West Town Farm. The workshop had sessions exploring network members' challenges and resources plus sessions to feedback on the draft food strategy. Feedback on the draft strategy was also collected by email from respondents who were not able to attend the workshop. Feedback and findings from the workshop were presented to network and steering group members and shaped the final strategy.

Workshop leaders/organisers: Kevin Cotter – (organicARTs/Loveloocalfood), Martyn Goss, Stewart Barr, Rebecca Sandover, Suzanne Hocknell

KEY FINDINGS

Food Exeter Challenges and Resources: Ways of Working together

- Community engagement helps promote the education of communities on healthy eating, nutrition awareness and to create spaces of community engagement. This work could be taken further via collaborative work amongst network members i.e. running a community café, smoothie bar, establishing an alternative food festival.
- Creating a more joined up, sustainable network with a clear identity can help to encourage policy change. A strong, vibrant network could also boost the visibility of Food Exeter members, i.e. food producers, retailers, food outlets through a Food Exeter badge.
- Sharing problems helps as others in the network can help to resolve practical challenges; Members have shareable resources i.e. The Lovelocalfood van, Exeter Food Action's food surpluses

STRATEGY FEEDBACK:

- Communication and coordination is central to working effectively across the network and within action areas.
- Stronger working relations with statutory authorities (and other important local bodies) will make the network more effective.
- Education is central to the network's aims and objectives and needs foregrounding in the strategy.
- There is a tension in the network between members focused on affordable healthy eating and those on promoting local, quality produce. However action areas can address both agendas.
- We need to learn from existing best practices by creating stronger links to other food partnerships e.g. Food Plymouth
- We need to highlight existing effective community food work i.e. on food waste.



Recommendations going forward

Food Exeter is a dynamic, growing network made up of committed organisations and visionary individuals. There is a strong will amongst members to collaborate, to work effectively with linked organisations and to learn from best practices elsewhere. Food Exeter's strengths reside in the commitment of key personnel, particularly the synergy within the steering group, who have a shared vision for sustainable and healthy food for all in Exeter. Currently Food Exeter is linked to external national and regional bodies that influence its actions and direction. It has strong internal links to grassroots organisations and community groups within Exeter that shape its knowledge of the city's food and health needs. These diverse links to national bodies, other food cities, statutory authorities, centres of research, Exeter-based community organisations, local food producers, makers and retailers, community arts programmes, educators and education centres, food activists, sustainability activists and more, provide a foundation for work going forward.

In particular engagement with The Sustainable Food Cities programme and Food Plymouth, coupled with links to central decision making bodies - Exeter City Council (ECC) and Public Health Devon, assist in developing Food Exeter's evidence base and potential outward reach. The diversity of experience within the membership both in the wider network and steering group is critical to its ability to understand food issues directly affecting communities in Exeter. However due to complex Agri-Food systems and a lack of resources, there is some disconnect between ideals and activities of Food Exeter organisations. Securing funding for administrative support and progressing work identified within Action Areas has the potential to disrupt these disconnects. Progressing proposed action areas would create activity working across agendas focused on promoting healthy food consumption and developing local food systems.





To take the work of Food Exeter forward it is important to continue to develop working relationships with important organisations in both the external and internal networks:

- Working relationships with decision makers is critical in bringing about recommended food consumption change to Exeter communities and boosting local food supply systems, as set out in the Priority Aims and Action Areas. Simple actions by local authorities could boost food culture in the City.
- Strengthening opportunities to collaborate and knowledge share amongst internal networks will assist in deepening Food Exeter's reach within local communities. This is particularly important in harder to reach communities that suffer from food poverty and have difficulty in accessing healthy food. Sharing knowledge and experiences from organisations working in these areas would increase general understanding within the network of these communities' needs.
- Identifying pathways to boost inclusion from Black, Asian and minority ethnic residents in Food Exeter's activities and decision making processes needs prioritising. Community food work is vital as it can act as a vehicle for developing positive communities in Exeter.
- Ensuring pathways to dialogue are effective, whether members are able to attend meetings or not, is important to develop network cohesion and to make progress on the Priority Aims. A more active website with a sign-in area for members and resources, such as newsletters etc. could support this process.
- Securing funding for administrative support of Steering Group volunteers is fundamental to secure effective future work, in particular boosting network coordination and communication.

For more information visit www.foodexeter.org.uk
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FOOD EXETER STRATEGY 2017



A. Our Mission:

Food Exeter works with others to rediscover and redevelop localised food systems.

Food Exeter is a member of the UK's Sustainable Food City Network, and also pursues, as part of its overall Mission, the 'six issues' around which that initiative is structured

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**, including production of and growing food
5. Transforming **catering and food procurement**
6. **Reducing waste** and the ecological footprint of the food system

The partnership's geographical area of focus is:

- For users /beneficiaries: people living or working in the Exeter City area
- For producers, processors and providers of food: operating within a 15 mile radius of the city centre.



B. Purpose of this document

This Food Exeter Strategy is a document that guides the work of Food Exeter, and the Food Exeter Network, as well as any other actors who want to engage with this process.

Food Exeter seeks to achieve its mission by:

- First developing, then driving the delivery of a **strategy and then an action plan for the city that innovates and also builds on existing food work** to address problems created in part by the unsustainable food supply chain. This strategy aims to embed sustainability, land use, soil health, human and animal health and food poverty outcomes into the business plans and ways of operating of many of the city's organisations, businesses and agencies.
- Using the strategy and action plan as a vehicle for influencing, lobbying, capacity building, coordinating innovation and networking to effect change.

This document is the result of the partnership's first round of work on developing a strategy and an evolving action plan. We fully expect to keep reviewing and adjusting the content as events unfold, so this should only be seen as a starting point, en route to an expanded plan. The current strategy is based on identified Aims and Action Areas. We will develop an action plan in due course.

C. Priority Aims

Food Exeter exists to promote work across all of the six Sustainable Food City themes, (see section A). However, it is a non-statutory partnership, which can only work through collaboration, and with no (at time of writing) dedicated resource to support its work.

The Steering Group has therefore **selected four priority aims to focus on in the short to medium term**. Should resources and progress indicate the opportunity to do more, additional aims will be reviewed and prioritised.

In selecting these aims, the following **criteria** have been applied, to come up with aims that seem both important *and* achievable:

- Is the aim achievable given the resources and leverage that we have access to?
- What evidence is there, ideally from the UK, that interventions can actually achieve this aim?

- Is this aim something that is not being addressed already, or where the potential for a step change is blocked or where existing action is fragmented rather than systematic?
- Can we develop existing food-related projects to extend or connect to have more impact?
- Are there local organisations, individuals and businesses with a strong interest in this aim, so there is a good chance of mobilising new actions?

Priority strategic aims	Desired Outcomes
Aim 1. Eating healthily	More people in Exeter have a healthier diet.
Aim 2. Reducing food poverty	More people in Exeter have access to affordable, healthy food.
Aim 3. Promoting a strong resilient local food economy	More people in Exeter buy sustainably grown food from local producers.
Aim 4. Developing a diverse and vibrant food culture	More people take part in community activities around food.

D. Focus on action areas

In order to make progress towards these aims, the Steering Group has selected a limited number of 'focus action areas'. The limited range of action areas reflects Food Exeter's current status as a voluntary collaboration with no dedicated time or funding i.e. we are trying to achieve something, albeit modest, rather than set out a huge agenda we know is beyond us at present. We anticipate adding further action areas as resources (people, energy, funding) come forward to support them.

These 'action areas' are still quite broad and each is now focused on:

- Auditing existing activities and their effectiveness
- Considering new or enhanced approaches
- Tackling barriers and grasping opportunities
- Getting agreed stakeholders to take action

Note: The action areas are not mapped against the four strategic aims, as each action area will contribute to several of the priority aims.

SUGAR SMART CAMPAIGN:

- Exeter version of a national campaign www.sugarsmartuk.org/news/exeter_goes_sugar_smart
- Working Group, sitting under Food Exeter SG already formed
- Doing initial work e.g. survey, getting organisations to sign up
- Applying for funding to do more work

SECURE NETWORK OF FOOD CLUBS ACROSS EXETER

- Current provision of school holiday and breakfast clubs across city's schools is very partial
- Goal is that all primary and secondary school children in Exeter who are in need (those at risk of food poverty) have access to breakfast and holiday food clubs
- Build on existing network collaborations e.g. Exeter Food Action, St. Sidwells and Public Health Devon

CREATING A LOCAL FOOD DISTRIBUTION HUB

- Local producers are impeded from selling locally at competitive prices because of distribution barriers
- Investigate potential to set up a local food distribution hub that would provide economies of scale, efficiency and reduce food surplus/waste.