

SFP Gold Awards Application Form 2026

This form is for completing an SFP Gold application.

Before starting your application, please fully read this form.

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Background

Sustainable Food Places (SFP) brings together pioneering food partnerships from towns, cities, boroughs, districts, and counties that are driving innovation and best practice around healthy and sustainable food.

The Sustainable Food Places Award is designed to recognise and celebrate the success of those places taking a joined-up, holistic approach to food and that are achieving significant positive change on a range of key food issues. The award is the only one of its kind in the UK.

The SFP Gold Award builds on the Bronze Award criteria of recognition of whole food system, cross-sector activity and has the Silver Award criteria as a baseline including exceptional work that is beginning to be embedded at strategic level. The Gold SFP award must additionally demonstrate innovative and embedded activity across two areas of exceptional work that could easily be represented on an international stage as well as showing both a strategic approach and a citizen led good food movement.

Why go for gold?

- The award provides an incentive for leaders, institutions, businesses, groups, and individuals to act on healthy and sustainable food
- To celebrate the collective work happening across your place
- To facilitate collaboration
- To secure funding and resources to deliver action on healthy and sustainable food.
- To show leadership and ambition to your UK network of Sustainable Food Places
- To monitor and document the impact of healthy and sustainable food action

Gold Award Criteria

Gold Criterion 1

Evidence of significant continued action and outcomes across each of the six key issues demonstrated by extending reach to new audiences and beneficiaries and successfully embedding positive change.

If one of your areas of exceptional achievement directly relates to one of the 6 Key Issue action areas please make note of this in the relevant part of Section 2 but please ensure all Key Issue areas and action areas are completed.

Gold Criteria 2

Exceptional achievement in two areas of food-related activity, the ambitions for which will be identified and described by the food partnership in the applicant place and agreed in advance with Sustainable Food Places Programme Management Board along with measures through which their achievement can be judged.

Gold Criteria 3

Evidence that the applicant food partnership and programme is embedded and sustainable and supports growth of the SFP movement including:

- the longevity of the partnership to date and its success with securing resources.
- the strength and traction of the partnership and the degree to which it includes key representatives and is recognised and supported by key institutions and the wider food movement.
- the degree to which a robust culture of food activism and related good food movement has developed that is not entirely dependent on institutional funding or support.
- Direct support to SFP members and prospects
- Regional or cohort specific working
- Acting as an ambassador for a systems approach, cross-sector approach to food

SECTION 1: Information about your partnership and your place

Name of your partnership:
North Lancashire FoodFutures
Name and contact details of person/people leading on this application:
Anna Clayton anna@lessuk.org – FoodFutures’ Coordinator
Geographic region which this award will represent:
The political boundary we cover is Lancaster District (please see map below). We refer to this area as North Lancashire for inclusivity/ engagement reasons.

What year did your partnership achieve an SFP Silver Award:
2023

Please provide us with background information about your place: [Advisory word limit: 400 words](#)

This is to help the panel understand the context in which you are working. *You may include (but not limited to): Population and demographic information, location/geography & economic and social challenges.*

ANSWER:

Lancaster District covers an area of 576 square kilometres and currently operates under a two-tier local authority system. The District includes the city of Lancaster, the towns of Morecambe, Heysham and Carnforth, and the surrounding rural villages. The 2024 population estimate for Lancaster District was 145,000 with Lancaster City having an estimated population of around 52,000.

Lancaster's economic profile is primarily made up of micro businesses, with 2025 figures showing 4,585 active enterprises in Lancaster District, 87.9% of which had less than 10 employees. The District has several economic assets of national economic importance: Lancaster University, Heysham Power Station and Heysham Port, and construction work began for Eden Project Morecambe in June 2026.

Lancaster has high levels of access to the natural environment - the predominant land use being 'green space'. Urban areas include open and green spaces and the hinterland includes large parts of the AONBs of Arnsdale & Silverdale and the Forest of Bowland. Agricultural land is mainly classified under grades three to five, with dairy and livestock grazing in less favoured areas and lowland livestock grazing being the most common farm types. Carbon dioxide emissions in Lancaster District are below the national average, but emissions from transport are particularly high.

Lancaster District has a high proportion of White British residents: 93.1% compared to 81% in England¹. Lancaster District hosts two universities and includes several popular coastal retirement destinations. The proportions of residents in the 15-24 and 65+ age groups are therefore higher than the national average. Population density is significantly below both the county and national averages.

Statistics illustrate the impact that the ongoing cost of living crisis is having on the district. 2025 figures rank Lancaster as the 135th most deprived area out of 296 Districts in England and 13.2% of households were in fuel poverty in 2023 in the district, making it the 56th highest in England and above the national average of 11.4%. One in five children in the district also live in poverty, with this figure rising to one in three in some of the most deprived wards. This is reflected in major health inequalities across the district with a difference in life expectancy of over a decade for men and eight years for women between the richest and poorest wards².

This not only poses a huge challenge to developing healthy, inclusive food systems within the district, but inequalities also have political implications: in May 2025 Reform UK took control of Lancashire County Council, making it harder for FoodFutures to gain traction for social and environmental justice work at a county level.

¹

<https://www.lancaster.gov.uk/information/getting-to-know-our-communities#:~:text=The%20Lancaster%20district%20has%20a,compared%20to%2079.8%25%20in%20England.&text=The%20largest%20minority%20group%20is,the%20population%20originating%20from%20Poland>.

²

<https://www.lancaster.gov.uk/information/getting-to-know-our-communities#:~:text=The%20Lancaster%20district%20has%20a,compared%20to%2079.8%25%20in%20England.&text=The%20largest%20minority%20group%20is,the%20population%20originating%20from%20Poland>
[www.northlancashirecab.org.uk/assets/child-poverty-in-lancaster-and-morecambe-a-report-by-ellie-curry-\(1\).pdf](http://www.northlancashirecab.org.uk/assets/child-poverty-in-lancaster-and-morecambe-a-report-by-ellie-curry-(1).pdf)

How have you considered equity, diversity and inclusion in the structure and work of your partnership?

Advisory word limit: 300 words

ANSWER:

FoodFutures continues to embed equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI) within the structure, governance (informed by sociocracy) and day-to-day practice of the partnership (co-design and participatory approaches are used to shape all projects). The Silver Award application identified several groups that were underrepresented within partnership activity, including residents from rural areas, lower income neighbourhoods, young people and those from non-white ethnic backgrounds. Since then, the partnership has intentionally adapted its engagement approaches, communications and governance processes to better support participation and ownership from these groups. This has included targeting Pots of Possibility funding, FoodFutures events, training and outreach to under-represented communities.

One key area of continued development has been deepening community-led storytelling and participation through inclusive, place-based approaches. For example, as part of the [Mapping Our Place](#) project, FoodFutures worked with local artist Sarah Hymas and community groups in Halton (a village close to Lancaster) and areas of higher deprivation to enable residents to share stories and experiences of their neighbourhoods through participatory mapping and creative workshops. This “counter-mapping” approach enabled communities to shape their own narratives rather than being defined solely through institutional or statistical perspectives.

Alongside this, [THRIVE magazine](#) has continued developing its citizen journalism approach to intentionally profile a wider range of voices and experiences. Examples include:

- The 2025 [“What food means to me” issue](#) which included interviews with contributors from diverse cultural and social backgrounds, helping explore food, identity and belonging through personal storytelling.
- [Global flavours, local friendships](#) - exploring Lancaster’s International Lunch Club, run by Global Village Cafe, which features chefs from Syria, Ukraine, Afghanistan, Sudan, Bangladesh and more.
- [In their own voices](#) - a poem celebrating the diversity of North Lancashire’s food scene.

FoodFutures has also continued to seek out opportunities for young people to shape partnership activity directly. For example, FoodFutures collaborated with local music charity More Music to take part in the Three Degrees youth-led climate action festival in Morecambe’s West End, while continuing to support schools with food growing and healthy eating through the [Where The Wildings Are! Project](#). Meanwhile, collaboration with local youth charities has led to young people sitting on the judging panel for [Pots of Possibility](#), FoodFutures’ participatory grant-making process. A youth-led strategy is also starting to emerge for Summerhouse Community Farm; starting with school visits and partnership development in 2026 to support site observations and collect dreams for this new community farm.

In addition to these more targeted approaches, the partnership continues to use sociocratic approaches to reflect on and adapt its organisational culture towards greater inclusivity, including ongoing discussions about how to support local residents and communities in dealing with conflict during politically divisive times. This reflective developmental learning approach is embedded into the annual rhythm of the partnership: all working groups go through a winter reflection process which then shapes a public strategy day in February, a spring into action programme of events in April and celebrations in September/ October.

As part of the winter reflection process all working groups question: who is currently not involved and why is this? Answers to this question then shape the year's priorities and approach to community engagement.

SECTION 2: SFP Key Issue activity and impact

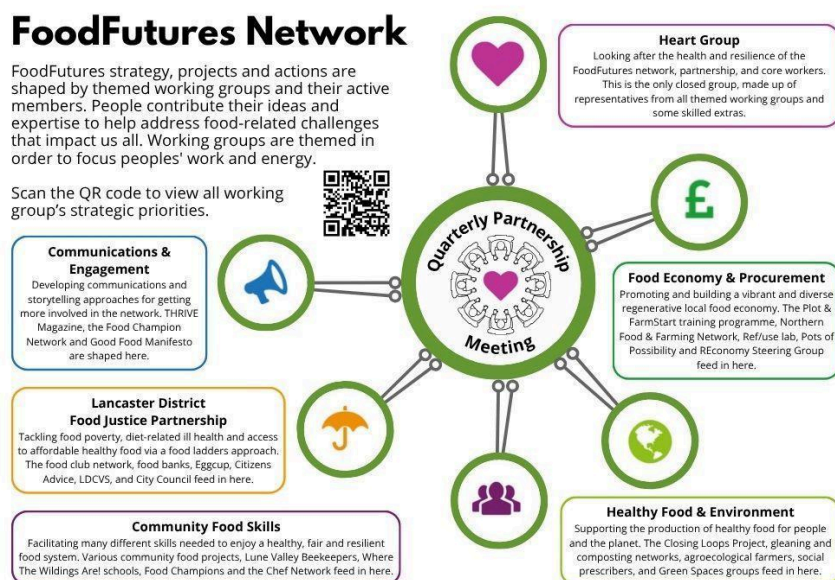
Please describe the activity and impact of local food work delivered in your place within the last three years against the SFP 6 Key Issues below. Your SFP Silver Award application will have covered this in detail and this section is to reiterate and update based on that application. When referring to your silver application it is permissible to be brief and give a reference page number from your silver application for readers to get further detail. Hyperlinks to blogs, videos, websites etc. are all acceptable but require one or two sentences for context. Please use hyperlinks with impact and brevity in mind.

We advise that you keep answers to within 400 words for each Key Issue. Whilst you won't be penalised for going over this limit, this will help the panel focus on your main achievements. The panel will expect broadly silver levels of activity in this section.

Key Issue 1: Taking a strategic and collaborative approach to good food governance and action

Action area A: Establish a broad, representative, and dynamic local food partnership

The Silver Award application outlines the core structure and governance of the FoodFutures partnership, including its sociocratic approach and themed working groups.



Since achieving Silver status, FoodFutures has continued strengthening and broadening the partnership through deepened strategic relationships and regional collaboration.

FoodFutures' Heart Group continues to have good representation from all themed working groups and now has better District-wide geographical representation. Following its last annual review of membership, it has formed stronger links with the University of

Cumbria and now occasionally opens up longer heart group meetings to specific stakeholders where relevant to the agenda e.g. food circle development. It has also set up a dedicated Going for Gold working group to support the partnership's work towards the Gold Award.

Relationships with Lancaster City Council (LCC) have deepened significantly, including continued annual funding to support the FoodFutures coordinator role. LCC have also made a new commitment to co-fund a Lancaster District Allotment Development role which started in April 2026 following the recommendations of the district-wide [Allotments Review](#), which the council commissioned LESS and FoodFutures to undertake on its behalf. Joanne Ainscough, a city councillor, has also joined LESS (the current secretariat for FoodFutures) as a voluntary director.

FoodFutures has also supported the evolution of several strategic projects into more independent and resilient organisations whilst maintaining strong partnership links. This includes the [Lancaster District Food Justice Partnership](#) and [reWilding Roots](#) (formerly Where the Wildings Are!), both of which emerged through FoodFutures-supported activity and have now been established as independent registered charities contributing actively to the wider partnership ecosystem.

The partnership's role within the wider regional food movement has also expanded significantly since Silver. For example, in 2025, FoodFutures was asked to [facilitate county-wide food systems workshops for the Lancashire Climate Action Network](#) and now has been commissioned by Public Health at Lancashire County Council to support the set up and development of a Lancashire wide resilient food network. Meanwhile, the partnership is increasingly supporting and mentoring emerging food partnerships elsewhere in Lancashire and Cumbria, and is currently working with Cumberland food partnership and a new food partnership in Westmorland and Furness on a large National Lottery bid focused on food system transformation.

Action area B: Develop, deliver, and monitor a food strategy/action plan

The development of [Our Food Futures: A Community Food Strategy for North Lancashire 2030](#) and FoodFutures' participatory approach to delivering and monitoring this work is outlined in the Silver Award application.

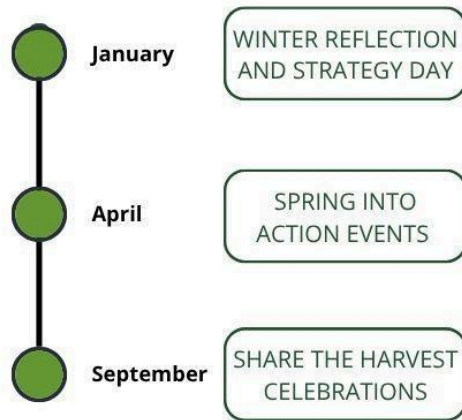
Since 2023, FoodFutures has continued embedding the strategy through an annual rhythm of participatory review, reflection, action and celebration.

Join in for positive change



Join a quarterly partnership meeting or working group to learn about local initiatives. Collaborate on food projects with others or start your own with the network's support.

FoodFutures Annual Calendar



These are key FoodFutures events, but many other workshops, skill shares & events take place across Lancaster District every month. Don't miss out - visit foodfutures.org.uk/whats_on page to network, socialise and connect.

A winter reflection and [annual review](#) process involves:

- All working groups reflecting on their strategic priorities, how they are doing against each, questioning who is missing from the work and setting strategic priorities for the year ahead - including topics for discussing at a February strategy day; spring into action events; fundraising, comms and engagement priorities.
- Publishing an [annual review](#) that pulls together working groups' reflections and data and highlights progress against the Our Food Futures strategy.

This reflection process is followed by a strategy day, a strategic programme of events during the growing season and harvest celebrations.

This annual rhythm, alongside working group meetings and open quarterly partnership meetings, provides regular opportunities for residents, organisations and partners to review progress, identify emerging priorities, respond to challenges and shape future activity collaboratively.

The infographic below highlights evidence of impact resulting from the strategy.

PROGRESS HIGHLIGHTS SINCE SILVER

- The number of schools supported to grow food, care for wildlife and learn outdoors has increased from 12 to 42.
- A major increase in engagement with food partnership events, from 24,000 people engaged online in 2023 to 97,000 in 2026. This has been paralleled with an increase in event participation: for example, gleaning trips attracted 134 people in 2026 compared to just 44 in 2023.
- The amount of surplus food redistributed via key network actors has increased:
 - from 78 to 96 tonnes through Eggcup.
 - From 6.2 to 12 tonnes through gleaning.
 - And from 1.1 to 3.9 tonnes through Share the Harvest.
- The number of households supported through food clubs has increased from 1,000 to 1,205
- One new Food Circle has fully launched in an area of significant food insecurity. Another is forming.
- 47 trained compost mentors.
- Over £200,000 of grant funding won to support the growth of the Northern Food and Farming network.
- A new community farm purchased and over £30k raised through a community crowd funder to support it's initial infrastructure.

Over the past three years, the partnership has focused on strengthening the long-term resilience and delivery mechanisms behind the strategy itself. A key part of this has involved developing stronger strategic alignment with institutions whose goals overlap. For example, elements of FoodFutures' strategy are now reflected within Lancaster City Council priorities around climate action, food growing and community wellbeing, as well as the Northern Food and Farming collaboration's [new strategy](#) around agroecology, resilient local food economies and food justice. These relationships help ensure that strategic work across the region is increasingly connected, mutually reinforcing and capable of operating at greater scale.

This strategic alignment also ensures greater financial sustainability through enabling the co-funding of key roles such as the allotment development coordinator, and the sharing of core resources. For example, LCC continues to allow use of its White Lund polytunnel site

by The Plot, LESS's organic market garden. Alongside this, FoodFutures is starting to reduce reliance on short-term grant funding by introducing pay-as-you-feel donations for events, and LESS is at the start of developing a consultancy offer.

Additional resilience has also come through the purchase of Summerhouse Community Farm in 2025 with £300k funding from UKSPF and a local trust. By creating a long-term physical hub for food growing, training and community activity, the farm purchase represents a major step towards delivering the strategy's goals around unlocking spaces, agroecological growing and community participation.

Finally, the Gold campaign has also prompted improved recording of both quantitative and qualitative evidence of change over time. The partnership has a dedicated spreadsheet which tracks key metrics such as numbers of people attending FoodFutures' events, amount of food waste saved through gleaning activities, numbers of composting champions inducted, etc.

It has also strengthened delivery of the strategy by [attracting new pledges](#) of support, broadening both participation and shared ownership of North Lancashire's food futures.

EXAMPLES OF THOSE PLEDGING TO TAKE ACTION AS PART OF THE GOLD CAMPAIGN

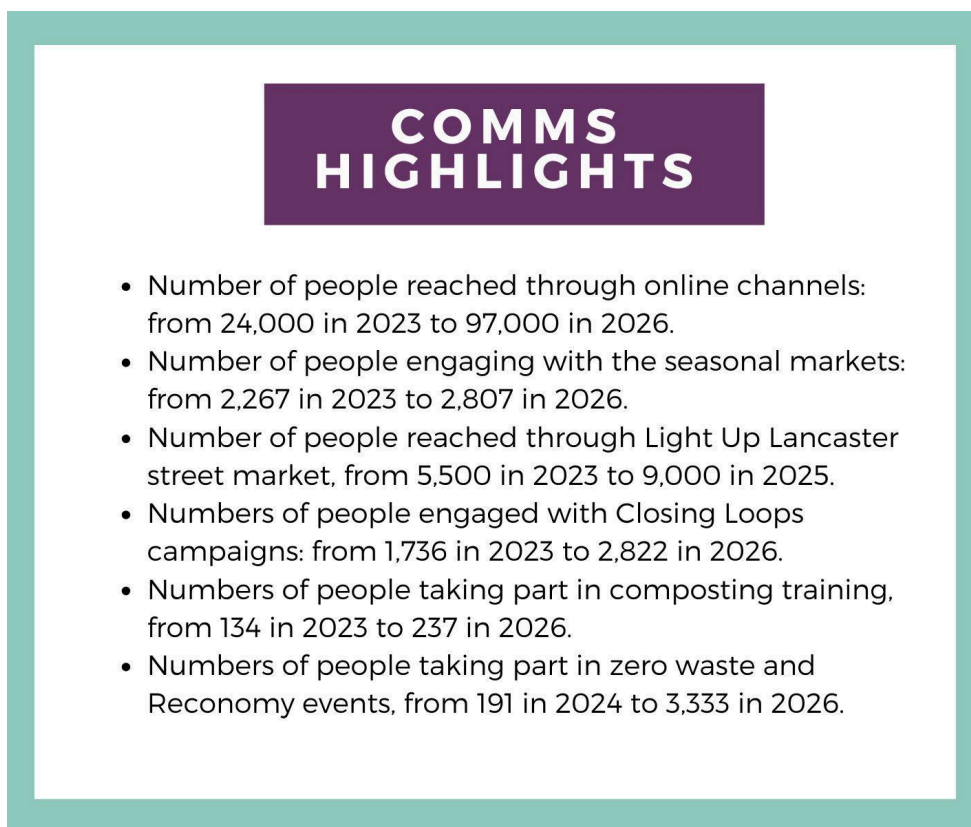
- Local MPs Cat Smith & Lizzi Collinge
- Prof. Mike Berners-Lee, Lancaster University Professor and Founder of Small World Consulting
- Mark Davies, Chief Executive of Lancaster City Council
- Joanna Young, Chief Executive of Citizens' Advice North Lancashire

Key Issue 2: Building public awareness, active food citizenship and a local good food movement

Action area A: Inspire and engage the public about good food

Key details of FoodFutures' communications, training and community engagement work can be found in the Silver Award application.

Since 2023, FoodFutures' communications have focused on stronger use of local media and coordinated press work - including the ongoing weekly food column in the Lancaster Guardian which attracts 300-500 views per article. The collective outcome of this dedicated focus on comms is a big increase in the numbers of people engaging with FoodFutures through various channels, as highlighted in the Infographic below.



In addition to this, [THRIVE](#), the quarterly community food magazine, continues to flourish thanks to a new partnership with local e-bike company E-Radicals, which is enabling sustainable print distribution of almost 5,000 magazines per year to 162 community hubs across the district.

As highlighted in the image below, training and participation opportunities have continued expanding across the District. These events are increasingly moving from ad hoc offerings to strategically coordinated programmes that respond to identified community needs. For example, following recommendations from the district-wide Allotments Review,

FoodFutures has re-run its [Growing Food and Community](#) training programme to support residents seeking practical growing and community organising skills. Meanwhile, seasonally embedded festivals such as Spring into Action which, in 2026, attracted 665 participants (up from 300 in 2024), have enabled workshops and skill sharing events to become annual features within the district's food calendar.



Localised campaign activity is also evolving into longer-term movement-building work. For example, the autumn [Share the Harvest festival](#) which focuses on gleaning and food waste, is now becoming an established annual event. It rescued 3,890 tonnes of food in 2025, compared to 1,100 the previous year.

North Lancashire also regularly links in with bigger campaigns – for example, as part of Fashion Revolution Week, an international campaign against fast fashion, the Closing Loops team have joined forces with Sewing Cafe Lancaster to raise awareness of the links

between textiles and soil health through fun educational activities such as “Bury Your Pants”.

Action Area B: Foster food citizenship and a local good food movement

Since achieving Silver status, FoodFutures activity has focused on strengthening the connective infrastructure that enables community food initiatives, growers, educators and residents to collaborate, share skills and support one another more effectively.

For example, to reduce dependency on long-term grant funding, FoodFutures has been using a movement building approach to embed and bring together key networks of support – such as the food champion, [food club](#) and compost champion networks – within the community in a decentralised manner. For example, there are now 86 Compost Champions who support peer learning around composting and soil health across a range of community growing sites within the district. The [Food Friends](#) small society lottery scheme (165 members) also continues to offer non grant funding support for the Plot and FarmStart training scheme for new entrants into horticulture.

Similarly, local food citizenship programmes have been bolstered through stronger connections to regional networks. For example, the district’s school growing initiatives are now benefitting from stronger connections to the [Morecambe Bay Curriculum](#) sustainability education network, which operates across the Lancashire and Cumbria coast, while FoodFutures’ emerging collaborations through the Lancashire Climate Action Network are leading towards the development of a [Lancashire Food Alliance](#).

In terms of funding and resource sharing, FoodFutures continues to support community food activity through participatory grant-making programmes including [Pots of Possibility](#), which distributed £70k to local food growing and resources sharing projects in 2025. Alongside this, FoodFutures hosts a freelance fundraiser who helps local organisations collaborate on and prepare food-related bids, thus strengthening partnerships and reducing competition between groups with shared goals.

Resource sharing has also become increasingly embedded through circular economy initiatives facilitated by Closing Loops and [Refuse Lab](#), including development of the [BayShare](#) network – a new initiative which links libraries of things, repair initiatives and maker spaces across the district. Meanwhile, progress has been made around land access through the [allotments review](#) and LESS (Lancaster District) CIC hosting of the [LandMatch North West pilot](#), which connects potential growers with landowners to unlock more space for agroecological food growing. Since launching in January 2026, Landmatch England has seen 124 people register through their website and 15 matches are now actively working towards forming a land-sharing agreement together.

Key Issue 3: Tackling food poverty and diet related ill-health and increasing access to affordable healthy food

Much of FoodFutures' recent work tackling food poverty and food insecurity is explored in greater detail within Exceptional Area 2 below. Since achieving Silver Award status, Lancaster District Food Justice Partnership (LDFJP) and FoodFutures have continued strengthening and embedding a whole-systems Food Ladders approach across the district.

The core infrastructure described in the Silver application remains active, including three food banks, a [network of 12 food clubs](#) and the Eggcup buying cooperative, which together continue supporting approximately 1,200 households experiencing food insecurity. Approximately 200 volunteers support the 12 food clubs to operate, and 45% of these are also members of food clubs. The ability of local partnerships to support organisations facing crisis e.g. Eggcup having to find a new home; a winter support campaign being run in response to feedback that some food clubs were overwhelmed over the Christmas 2024 period; and the fact that people supported by food clubs have gone on to volunteer with those clubs or a food circle, is an early indicator of movement up the food ladder and being supported on a journey towards participation and leadership within local communities.

Since Silver, the Lancaster District Food Justice Partnership has become an independent charity, strengthening its ability to coordinate activity and secure longer-term funding for food justice work locally. Coordination with FoodFutures led to the LDFJP being able to successfully secure two years of grant funding for a continuation of the development worker role, while ongoing partnership with the food clubs has led to the adoption of a shared approach to data collection which will help the LDFJP prove impact going forwards.

A coordinated [winter pressures support campaign](#) was run for the first time during the 2025/2026 festive period in response to some services being overwhelmed by demand the season before (due to many services being shut).

As described in more detail in Exceptional Area 2, a key focus since the Silver Award has been creating more opportunities for residents to move up the food ladder through the development of the Food Circles model, which links food clubs with growing spaces, community kitchens, skills development and participation opportunities as shown in the diagram below.

Key points – Food Circles ...

- ▶ ... are a community-based alternative to food banks. They focus on long-term food security by supporting people to move 'up the food ladder' – from emergency food aid toward sustainable, empowering food systems like food clubs, growing spaces, and community kitchens.
- ▶ ... connect key elements of our local food system. A Food Circle brings together food clubs, community kitchens, growing spaces (like allotments), and composting, creating a closed-loop system that supports local resilience, sustainability, and social connection.



Progress has also been made in connecting food justice work with local food production and shorter supply chains. For example, the [Local Food for Local People](#) project used a £10k grant from Pots of Possibility to research and pilot the possibility of purchasing food from local growers for distribution to food clubs after the quantity and quality of surplus food available from FareShare declined significantly. The project showed how a cooperative buying approach can increase access to fresh locally grown produce for those experiencing food insecurity whilst supporting regional producers. This pilot is being used to make the case for a proportion of Crisis and Resilience Fund money to go towards procurement of food from local farms and producers.

Action Area B: Promote healthy eating

A key development since Silver has been the creation of a more systematic framework for the creation of healthy food environments. Lancashire County Council has now adopted an organisation-wide [Food Plan \(2024-28\)](#), embedding food across public health,

procurement, education, environment and community development through four strategic priorities supported by an implementation group.

In addition, in 2025 the Lancashire Healthy Places Programme was commissioned for two years alongside a Community of Practice which brings together the County Council, District councils, Food Active, Active Lancashire and Together an Active Future. Its purpose is to coordinate action and share best practice around healthier food environments and support Healthy Weight Declarations. Together, these approaches mark a shift from an individual behaviour change model towards a population-based approach focused on creating healthier weight environments.

At a district level, the healthy eating initiatives and partnerships described within the Silver Award application also continue to develop across North Lancashire, including skill-sharing around healthy and sustainable food through workshops on fermentation, seasonal cooking and food preservation. These are supported by a [community chef network](#), with [North Lancashire recipes](#) being developed and shared through community meals and pilot [landed community kitchens](#), while [social prescribing networks and volunteering opportunities](#) continue (537 listings in the directory, representing 304 organisations), connecting residents with 61 food growing, cooking and nature-based wellbeing activities across the district. A [guide to social prescribing for FoodFutures](#) has also been created.

Since achieving Silver status, FoodFutures has increasingly focused on addressing the structural barriers that prevent people from accessing healthy and sustainable food, particularly in communities experiencing food and energy insecurity.

This shift is reflected in projects such as Stanley's Community Centre's *Cooking on a Budget* programme, which supports residents to prepare healthy low-cost meals whilst also responding to fuel poverty through slow cooker-based cooking approaches. Participants received training in meal planning, bulk cooking and affordable healthy eating, alongside a slow cooker to take home, helping ensure equipment and energy costs did not become barriers to participation.

Alongside this, initiatives such as the Food Circles pilots and [Landed Community Kitchen](#) – a new initiative for North Lancashire which fed 289 people in 2025 – are increasingly linking healthy eating with community cooking, food growing and low cost access to fresh local produce, for example through the gleaning network, which directly supports food clubs and community meals and was recently featured on a [Channel 4 show about 'Secrets to Supercheap Shopping'](#).

Key Issue 4: Creating a vibrant, prosperous, and diverse sustainable food economy

Action area A: Put good food enterprise at the heart of local economic development

N.B. This Key Area is explored in more detail within Exceptional Area 1 below.

Over the past three years, North Lancashire has focused on establishing the shared infrastructure and collaborative systems needed to strengthen long-term resilience within the local food economy. This work continues to be overseen by the FoodFutures Economy and Procurement working group ([see their strategic priorities here](#)) and is facilitated by the [Closing Loops Regenerative Economy work](#) and their Pots of Possibility funding.

[Lancaster City's Council's strategy](#) also remains committed to building an inclusive and prosperous economy within the District, with community wealth building and sustainable business/ innovation being a key part of this.

This is vital work as recent years have highlighted the fragility of many small-scale food enterprises, with difficult economic conditions forcing several valued local food businesses to close. In response, FoodFutures has increasingly prioritised collaborative and solidarity-based approaches to strengthen resilience across the sector.

Examples include the development of new food infrastructure projects including the pilot of [Gather](#), North Lancashire's emerging food hub, which supported ten local producers to deliver 1,100 orders in 2025 through shared sales, marketing and distribution systems using the Open Food Network platform.

FoodFutures is also actively working with a couple of local organic farmers who are approaching retirement but who are eager to ensure that their farms remain in agroecological production. This has so far resulted in [Backsbottom Farm working with the Biodynamic Land Trust to find a land steward](#).

This, plus local modelling of the potential for agroecological production in the region (carried out through FIPL in collaboration with FoodFutures, Lancaster University and two local consultancy firms), indicates a strong commitment to expanding nature-friendly food growing throughout the region. (To learn more about this modelling project [listen to this Carbon Calling podcast interview](#) with Henry Russel from 18 minutes 46).

Alongside this, the purchase of Summerhouse Community Farm in 2025 (enabled by UKSPF funding) has created a long-term community asset which will support agroecological food growing, training and enterprise development. The Plot's organic market garden and [FarmStart training scheme](#) – both described in more detail in the box below – are relocating to Summerhouse and will continue to develop as important entry

points for new growers and sustainable food enterprises within the region. This site may also host Gather going forward once the infrastructure is in place.

SPOTLIGHT ON THE PLOT AND FARMSTART

- The Plot recently celebrated five years of operation, during which time it has produced over 460Kg of organic mixed salad, 360Kg of kale and over 600Kgs of tomatoes
- To date, FarmStart has trained 19 people, with 12 of those trainees going on to work in organic horticulture, either on a paid or voluntary basis. Comments from trainees included:

'It was one of the best experiences in my life! Honestly.'

'The impact that the farmstart program had on me was that I ended up being employed in the horticulture field, so it's it's changed the trajectory of my career path'

- The Plot's former home, Old Holly Farm, will now go on to host a new group of tenants who previously volunteered at The Plot. They are delighted with the opportunity to carry on growing at the farm with a new set of aims.

Action Area B: Promote healthy, sustainable, and independent food businesses to consumers

Alongside the initiatives described within the Silver Award application, recent work has focused on improving the visibility, accessibility and public reach of North Lancashire's sustainable food economy.

In addition to the work of Gather, a major development has been the redesign and relaunch of the [Little Book of Local Food](#), originally published in 2012. The updated version combines a [printed Z-card guide](#) with an online platform that can be continually updated,

alongside the [online local food directory](#), making it easier for residents to discover local producers, retailers and sustainable food initiatives across the district. An initial print run of 2,500 copies was distributed widely through community venues and public spaces in April 2026.

Sustainable food enterprises and North Lancashire recipes continue to be featured in [THRIVE Magazine](#).

The [FoodFriends small society lottery scheme](#) also continues to run and supports the training of new small-scale farmers through the FarmStart scheme and the development of the market garden that hosts their training. It now has 160 members and produces around £8k every year that can be allocated as needed. It continues to work with and promote its food partners: currently nine fantastic local food businesses that provide £30 Local Food Vouchers as prizes.

FoodFutures' seasonal markets have also continued growing as important public spaces celebrating local food culture and enterprise; complementing Lancaster's weekly charter market. Increasing emphasis has been placed on broadening participation and diversity among stallholders, with significant growth in businesses led by women and people from diverse cultural backgrounds.

In 2023, 2024 and again in 2025, FoodFutures collaborated with Lancaster BID and Lancaster City Council to deliver a special market as part of the *Light Up Lancaster* public arts festival, featuring 20 stalls and engaging over 9,000 visitors across three nights in 2025, with a 20% increase in footfall and over 50% increase in stalls compared to the previous year, and 65% increase in footfall and 50% increase in stalls compared to 2023. This collaboration looks set to continue as the market has become embedded into this annual cultural event.

Key Issue 5: Transforming catering and procurement and revitalising local and sustainable food supply chains

Action area A: Change policy and practice to put good food on people's plates

Achieving large-scale change within public food procurement systems remains complex and challenging. However, activity within North Lancashire is increasingly connected to wider regional and national collaborations seeking to address the structural barriers limiting healthier, more sustainable and locally rooted procurement.

A significant example of this has been FoodFutures' involvement in the [Northern Food and Farming collaboration](#), which has worked alongside the University of York's FixOurFood research programme, Foodrise UK and other regional partners to explore how procurement systems can better support healthy diets, agroecological farming and resilient regional supply chains. In this way, FoodFutures' work has directly contributed to the development of a [Northern Food Procurement Strategy](#) centred around three interconnected goals: increasing access to nutritious meals, strengthening support for local farmers and producers, and celebrating regional food cultures and production, as shown in the diagram below.



Crucially, there is evidence that local and national advocacy around sustainable procurement is having an impact on the policies of some key local anchor institutions. The Infographic below highlights key progress made in Lancaster University and the University

Hospitals of Morecambe Bay NHS Foundation Trust procurement policies, with Lancaster University, in particular, setting ambitious targets for the coming academic year.

LANCASTER UNIVERSITY PROCUREMENT STANDARDS

in the 2026/2027 academic year, the university will:

- Increase non-meat options to 50% across retail menus.
- Reduce single use plastic from front of house service, including cling film.
- Introduce reusable takeaway containers in retail outlets.
- Implement a policy to purchase products that only contain sustainably sourced palm oil wherever possible.

The university has already:

- Prioritised plant-based and vegetarian diets on the hospitality menu.
- Included access to information on calorie, macro-nutrient and ingredient information across all menus.
- Reduced single use plastic from milk supply across campus using the FreshKeg system.
- Signposted the carbon impact of menu items.
- All eggs are free-range.
- Where possible, all meat is Farm Assured and locally sourced.
- No fish is served from the MSC fish to avoid list.
- Reduced the impact of food waste by utilising the “too good to go” platform.
- Prioritised the sourcing of ingredients within 30 miles to reduce the carbon footprint associated with transportation.
- Promoted seasonal menus for conferences and hospitality.
- Charges 20p for a disposable coffee cup to encourage reusable coffee cup use.
- All disposable coffee cups are UK manufactured and biodegradable in 90 days & reusable polycarbonate cups are used in the bars on a deposit basis, replacing single-use plastic cups.
- Increased weighting of sustainable and ethical practice measures on all future food tenders from 10% to 15%.
- Worked with Pelican procurement in the pursuit of net positive supply chain, regularly reviewing contracted KPI's.

UNIVERSITY HOSPITALS OF MORECAMBE BAY NHS FOUNDATION TRUST FOOD AND DRINK POLICY

The Trust has a Sustainable Food Policy and endeavours where possible to buy products that reduce the carbon footprint of the Trust, support local businesses, farmers and producers.

Catering Management will continue to work with Supplies Department and local suppliers to promote sustainable procurement (wherever possible).

When the menu planning group are planning menus for both patients and the staff restaurant they will take into consideration:

- The availability of locally produced / grown seasonal products.
- To not use fish species that may be deemed as being at risk by the Marine Conservation Society.
- Use ingredients that cause minimum harm to the environment, e.g. through farming methods.
- Cooking methods that reduce water, electric and gas consumption.
- Fairtrade coffee is used in the restaurants and vending machines.
- Food packaging where possible is recyclable.
- Purchase food low in additives and salt content.
- When purchasing new equipment look at energy and water usage.
- Red Tractor Mark products.
- When purchasing products from a supplier the Trust follows Government Buying Standards considering sustainability where possible.

Meanwhile, at a county level, [Lancashire County Council commissioned the Soil Association's Food for Life programme in 2023](#), with 100 schools across Lancashire now enrolled. The programme supports schools and caterers to improve food quality and work towards meals that are at least 75% freshly prepared, additive-free and sustainably sourced, while also embedding food growing, cooking and food education throughout school life. This work strongly complements FoodFutures-linked initiatives such as [reWilding Roots](#) (formerly Where the Wildings Are!), which has expanded school growing activity and food education across the district. Back in 2023, reWilding Roots had only worked with 12 schools across the district, engaging with around 1,500 pupils a year. Today, it has worked with 42 schools and has engaged around 5,000 pupils.

Practical examples of this shift are increasingly visible locally. In spring 2025, [Ryelands Primary School](#) became the first school in Lancaster District and Lancashire to achieve a Food for Life Silver Award and the school is now working towards Gold in 2026. Pupils grow fruit and vegetables through the school gardening club, use produce in cooking lessons and learn about seasonal food and sustainable growing. The school also hosts a compost demonstration site, using a Ridan composter to turn kitchen food waste into compost that can be used on the school grounds and shared with parents, whilst also sharing learnings with other compost demonstration sites.

Action Area B: Improving connections and collaboration across the local supply chain

Since achieving Silver Award status, increasing attention has been given to strengthening the connective infrastructure that enables local food producers, community initiatives and residents to collaborate more effectively across the supply chain.

Many of the initiatives already described throughout this application – including [Gather](#) food hub, Eggcup's buying cooperative, [Food Circles](#), the [Landed Community Kitchen](#) and the [Local Food for Local People](#) project – share a common focus on aggregation, cooperative purchasing and socially embedded distribution. Together, these initiatives are helping create a solidarity economy with more resilient links between local producers and local residents, while increasing access to fresh and sustainably produced food for communities who might otherwise face financial barriers to accessing local food.

Work to strengthen supply chains is also being taken forward at a regional scale through the [Northern Food and Farming network](#), which recently secured £200k over three years from the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation to develop more resilient agroecological supply chains across the North, including work around public procurement, regional infrastructure gaps and support for sustainable producers.

Alongside these larger initiatives, FoodFutures and its partners have increasingly sought to model these approaches directly. When commissioned to cater for FoodFutures events, local cafes or community chefs are asked to design menus that are plant based (or if

animal products are appropriate for the event they must be organic and/or pasture fed); designed around seasonal produce, and sourced from projects from the network such as The Plot and other regional growers. Where ingredients are sourced internationally, these must be organic and/or fairtrade. This has helped demonstrate practical examples of shorter, more sustainable and fair supply chains, collaborative purchasing and values-led catering within community settings, leaving event attendees with the 'tastes of North Lancashire' and occasionally a recipe to try!

In addition, a number of community-led housing and cooperative living initiatives within the district are also experimenting with shared food systems, including cooperative buying clubs, communal meals, local veg supply schemes and collective composting. Examples such as [Lancaster Cohousing and Lapwing Housing Co-operative](#) demonstrate how sustainable food practices, shared purchasing and community resilience can increasingly become embedded within everyday life and neighbourhood culture.

Together, these developments represent growing progress towards a more connected, collaborative and socially just local food economy.

Key Issue 6: Tackling the climate and nature emergency through sustainable food & farming and an end to food waste

Action area A: Promote sustainable food production and consumption and resource efficiency

Over the past three years, FoodFutures has increasingly focused on working with the public sector, businesses and citizens to drastically reduce the climate and nature impact of the local food system through more coordinated approaches to land use, agroecology, food growing, procurement and community engagement.

Strong partnership working with Lancaster City Council has remained central to this progress. The box below illustrates some of the key achievements of this collaboration:

LCC's ongoing support for FoodFutures and wider climate action activity contributed to Lancaster being recognised by Climate Emergency UK as the highest scoring local authority for climate action in England in 2025. This is also reflected in the extent to which FoodFutures' work is becoming embedded within local planning policy and development practice. Through close collaboration between FoodFutures, Lancaster City Council officers, Lancaster University and wider partners, several significant policy changes have been secured:

- **Section 106 planning policy has been expanded beyond traditional allotment provision to include wider community food growing.**

This broader definition enables the council to require more developments to contribute towards community growing infrastructure, while also giving planners stronger policy backing to negotiate features such as foodscaping, community orchards and other productive landscapes within new developments. The council has also established a cross-departmental approach to Section 106 negotiations, enabling food growing, biodiversity, placemaking and community infrastructure to be considered together rather than in isolation, maximising the social and environmental benefits of new developments.

- **Soil Protection Zones have also been developed through collaboration between Lancaster City Council, Lancaster University and FoodFutures partners.** These policies protect areas designated for future community food growing, orchards and allotments from soil compaction and degradation during construction, helping safeguard the long-term productivity of these spaces. **This locally developed approach has subsequently informed national guidance, been taken up by Natural England and presented internationally as an example of good practice.**

Alongside these policy developments, Lancaster City Council continues to work with FoodFutures to unlock public land for community food growing through long-term leases, management agreements and dedicated officer support for community groups. Together, these changes demonstrate how FoodFutures is helping embed food, climate and nature objectives into the systems and policies that will shape North Lancashire's landscape for years to come.

Alongside this, FoodFutures has strengthened collaboration with wider regional climate networks including Lancashire Climate Action Network and More Music's Three Degrees youth climate action festival, helping connect food system work with broader climate and community action across the county.

A major focus since Silver has been maximising land for food growing and nature. This has included the [district-wide allotments review](#) commissioned by Lancaster City Council, the development of [Summerhouse Community Farm](#) (which will be the new home for Lancaster District's FarmStart scheme), support for [Land Match North West](#), and ongoing work to increase access to land, growing skills and ecological stewardship.

Meanwhile, beacon projects such as [Claver Hill](#) continue to demonstrate how food production, biodiversity, education and community wellbeing can be integrated within shared community spaces.

Alongside this, regional collaboration around supporting agroecological transitions for farmers has expanded significantly through the [Northern Food and Farming network](#), which recently secured multi-year funding from the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation. This collaboration brings together organisations, researchers, farmers and community groups across the North of England around shared priorities including sustainable procurement, resilient local supply chains, farmer support and public engagement around climate-friendly food systems.

As highlighted in previous sections, community engagement around sustainability and local food continues to underpin this work through festivals, training, food growing projects, communications activity and participatory events which help connect residents with practical action around food, climate and nature locally.

Action Area B: Reduce, redirect, and recycle food, packaging, and related waste

Since achieving Silver Award status, FoodFutures' work on food waste reduction, composting and circular economy approaches has become increasingly embedded and coordinated across North Lancashire through the Closing Loops project and partners.

Community composting has expanded significantly during this period. There are now 13 demonstration sites established across schools, neighbourhoods, growing projects and community venues. Alongside the development of a growing Compost Champions network, this work has helped increase practical skills, local participation and understanding around food waste and soil health. Importantly, these community-led approaches are now complementing Lancaster City Council's reintroduction of household food waste collections in 2026, creating a more diverse and resilient local response to food waste reduction and resource recovery.

Food redistribution and gleaning activity has also grown substantially. Eggcup redistributed 96 tonnes of food in 2025 (increased from 78 tonnes in 2024). Since 2023, the amount of food redistributed through the gleaning network has also increased from 3,000kg to over 12,000kg annually, while volunteer participation has risen from 44 to 134 volunteers.

Alongside this, FoodFutures and partners have continued supporting wider sharing and reuse infrastructure locally. New sharing libraries and repair initiatives have emerged across the district, while the [BayShare platform](#) – developed collaboratively by [Refuse Lab](#) and Lancaster City Council – is creating a coordinated directory and access point for sharing resources locally, including tools, equipment and repair services.

Together, these initiatives demonstrate a growing shift towards circular, community-based systems that keep food, materials, skills and resources circulating locally for longer.

SECTION 3: Two areas of exceptional achievement

Please submit evidence for the areas of exceptional achievement agreed with the SFP board. A combination of quantitative evidence and storytelling will be the most impactful. Hyperlinks to blogs, videos, websites etc. are all acceptable but require one or two sentences for context. Please use hyperlinks with impact and brevity in mind.

There is no word limit, but we suggest 600 words per area of exceptional achievement.

Areas of exceptional achievement 1:

Building a more sustainable and just local food economy from the ground up

NB: While presented separately for the purposes of the Gold Award framework, these two areas of exceptional achievement form part of a single systemic approach. FoodFutures seeks to bridge the divide between food justice and sustainable food economies by building local infrastructures that simultaneously increase access to healthy food, strengthen community agency, support regenerative livelihoods and shorten supply chains. Rather than treating social and environmental justice as separate agendas, FoodFutures is deliberately prototyping a solidarity-based local food system capable of advancing both together.

Since achieving Silver Award status, FoodFutures has continued shifting its focus from establishing individual projects towards strengthening the underlying infrastructure needed for a resilient local food economy. While many of the initiatives described in our Silver application continue to flourish, the major change since 2023 has been the deliberate connection of these projects into a more coherent system that improves access to land, skills, markets, procurement and community participation. **Over the past 3 years, North Lancashire has secured over £330,000 of investment into new food infrastructure, established permanent community assets, expanded agroecological training and begun redesigning local supply chains to retain more value within the regional economy.** Collectively, these developments are beginning to transform the conditions that enable local food economies to thrive, leading to three key systems-level outcomes.

1. Expanded community stewardship of land

A first priority has been transforming access to land for agroecological food production. Since Silver, Lancaster District has completed a district-wide [allotments review](#), leading directly to Lancaster City Council committing funding for a dedicated Allotments Development Officer and placing greater strategic emphasis on building the resilience of and supporting more community growing and composting spaces.

Alongside this, the purchase of [Summerhouse Community Farm](#) in 2025 represents a major milestone for North Lancashire's food system. The farm provides a permanent community-owned base for agroecological food production, enterprise, training and public engagement. More than **400 people have already contributed to the participatory**

design process for the site, with over **£330,000 raised for the site through a mix of community crowdfunding and grants from UKSPF and a local charitable trust**, demonstrating significant local ownership, investment and long-term commitment. Together with the launch of [Land Match North West](#), these developments represent a significant expansion of the district's capacity to support new growers and community food production.

2. Building pathways into sustainable food livelihoods

Alongside increased access to land, FoodFutures has been developing clearer pathways for people to participate in, and ultimately earn livelihoods from, sustainable food systems.

Training now spans all ages, from [reWilding Roots'](#) and the [Morecambe Bay Curriculum's](#) rapidly expanding programme in schools through to the [Growing Food and Community](#) workshop programme and FarmStart, Lancaster District's practical agroecological training programme. Since Silver, reWilding Roots has expanded from working with **12 schools and around 1,500 pupils to 42 schools reaching approximately 5,000 children**, while Growing Food and Community has been reintroduced following recommendations from the district-wide allotments review. FarmStart also continues to provide an important entry point into ecological horticulture and enterprise development, with 12 of the 19 people trained going on to work in organic horticulture, either on a paid or a voluntary basis.

Together these initiatives are creating a much more coherent learning pathway through which residents can progress from first experiences of food growing towards skilled participation, employment and enterprise within North Lancashire's food economy.

3. Creating shorter, fairer local supply chains

The third major area of progress has been strengthening the infrastructure that connects local producers with local communities.

Many of the initiatives described throughout this application – including Gather, Eggcup's buying cooperative, Food Circles, the Landed Community Kitchen, Claver Hill, Lancaster Co housing, Lapwing Housing Co-op and FoodFutures' seasonal markets – share a common objective of shortening supply chains whilst retaining greater value within the local economy. Rather than operating independently, these initiatives increasingly reinforce one another through shared infrastructure, collaborative distribution and coordinated procurement.

One particularly significant development has been the [Local Food for Local People](#) pilot, which explored whether Household Support Funding could be redirected towards purchasing food directly from local growers for Lancaster District's food club network. As shown in the infographic below, the pilot demonstrated significant potential for scaling,

showing that locally sourced seasonal produce could improve the quality and consistency of food available through food clubs whilst simultaneously supporting regional farmers and keeping public investment circulating within the local economy. This illustrates that local procurement for the district's food clubs is both practical and achievable, whilst also highlighting a clear pathway for scaling the model through Lancashire's new Crisis and Resilience Fund.

LOCAL FOOD FOR LOCAL PEOPLE: TESTING A NEW MODEL FOR FOOD JUSTICE PROCUREMENT

 As part of the project, around 4 tonnes of locally grown vegetables were supplied through Eggcup to food clubs, alongside 1,500 locally prepared ready meals made using organic beef from Morecambe Bay Conservation Grazing Company.

 Local growers supplied 2.1 tonnes of potatoes, 660 kg of carrots and a range of seasonal vegetables including cauliflower, cabbage, beetroot and Romanesco, creating a more reliable and nutritious fresh food offer for food club members.

 Food clubs reported that locally sourced produce was significantly higher quality and more consistent than national surplus supplies, improving members' access to fresh fruit and vegetables.

"The quality of the veg we bought via the Local Food for Local People project was really good. It provided a really consistent offer for our members." — Eggcup Warehouse Manager

Gather, North Lancashire's emerging food hub, brought local producers together to market and distribute produce collaboratively through shared infrastructure and the Open Food Network platform. This pilot is now informing how this food hub develops and is hosted at Summerhouse Community Farm. In doing the pilot, it also developed more collaborative working relationships amongst the producers involved.

FoodFutures has also sought to model these principles directly through its own events and partnerships, commissioning local producers, community chefs and cafés to source seasonal ingredients from projects within the network wherever possible. In doing so, the partnership has demonstrated how collaborative purchasing and values-led procurement can strengthen regional supply chains whilst showcasing North Lancashire's sustainable food producers.

Why this matters

The innovation within North Lancashire does not lie in any single project. Rather, it lies in deliberately connecting land access, agroecological training, community enterprise, collaborative procurement and food justice into an increasingly coherent local food system, and through exploring practical ways of supporting re-commoning and designing more regenerative economies.

Many places have successful growing projects, food enterprises or food poverty initiatives. What distinguishes North Lancashire is the extent to which these are now being intentionally woven together to create mutually reinforcing infrastructure capable of supporting long-term systems change. This is further being developed beyond the food system through LESS's [Reconomy work and exploration of a place based investment fund](#). This work has included a recommoning community think tank and exhibition, and an event that have brought together representatives from over 20 local change-maker organisations to build a better shared understanding of regenerative economies (see graphic below for highlights of this conversation) in order to explore how we can collectively support each others missions whilst cultivating a more regenerative economy from the ground up.

Areas of exceptional achievement 2:

Developing Lancaster District Food Justice Partnership's (LDFJP) food ladders approach.

NB: While presented separately for the purposes of the Gold Award framework, these two areas of exceptional achievement form part of a single systemic approach. FoodFutures seeks to bridge the divide between food justice and sustainable food economies by building local infrastructures that simultaneously increase access to healthy food, strengthen community agency, support regenerative livelihoods and shorten supply chains. Rather than treating social and environmental justice as separate agendas, FoodFutures is deliberately prototyping a solidarity-based local food system capable of advancing both together.

Since achieving Silver Award status, FoodFutures and the Lancaster District Food Justice Partnership (LDFJP) have increasingly used Professor Megan Blake's Food Ladders framework as the organising principle for food justice activity across the district. North Lancashire contains some of the highest levels of food insecurity in the country and tackling this has become an increasingly urgent priority for the district. Assessors of FoodFutures' Silver Award application praised the importance of North Lancashire's distinctive network of [food clubs](#) in supporting movement from rung one to rung two of the food ladder. However, in recent years, FoodFutures and the LDFJP have become increasingly aware of a critical tension: **food clubs – the very organisations preventing crisis locally – are operating in increasingly fragile conditions due to rising demand, funding uncertainty and instability in national surplus food systems.**

In response, the focus of FoodFutures' Gold level work has involved working collaboratively to strengthen the resilience of the local food support ecosystem whilst also developing new approaches to support progression towards rung three of the ladder (self-organised community change).

This work has involved three interconnected strands.

1. **FoodFutures and the Lancaster District Food Justice Partnership (LDFJP) have played a key coordinating role during periods of acute crisis.** During the past three years, the district's food clubs have faced a number of challenges, including:
 - Eggcup, which coordinates the gleaning network and buying cooperative for the district's network of [food clubs](#), was faced with closure in December 2024 following financial challenges. FoodFutures and the Lancaster District Food Justice Partnership stepped in to help facilitate a coordinated response to the crisis which led to Eggcup being saved through a combination of a partnership with Lancaster City Council and a community crowdfunder that raised £14,000.

- Food Clubs have raised concerns around the consistent quality of fresh fruit and vegetables available through FareShare. This directly led to the [Local Food for Local People](#) project (supported through Pots Of Possibility) that is now informing a proposal to the Crisis and Resilience Fund.
- In 2025 the LDFJP raised concerns about a shortage in food support over the Christmas period when many food clubs were closed. In response, FoodFutures heart group helped bring together a range of partners to run a coordinated [Winter Support Campaign](#) during this period, which resulted in 200 people being fed across four events.

The success of these responses illustrates the district's progressive approach to food ladders. While Food Ladders often describe the journeys of individuals, FoodFutures and the LDFJP increasingly understands them as describing the resilience of neighbourhoods. Strong local relationships, shared infrastructure and trusted partnerships mean communities become better able to respond collectively when shocks occur.

2. **Working to strengthen the long-term resilience of the food justice ecosystem itself.** In 2025, the Lancaster District Food Justice Partnership was formally established as a charity to support fundraising and expand its strategic coordination role. FoodFutures works closely alongside it to support with links to external organisations and has provided freelance funding time to enable greater financial resilience for this strand of work in the longer term. The LDFJP has secured over £71k of funding in its first year of operation which has led to greater security for the development worker role. Importantly, the high profile of work being carried out locally has led to Peterson Logistics, a local company based at Heysham Port, coming onboard as a partner in this work. Peterson recently donated £6,000 to Eggcup and is about to organise a staff visit to the warehouse to see if there are other opportunities for support and collaboration. It is hoped this will become an ongoing partnership with annual support from the firm.
3. **Creating pathways for residents to move from rung two to rung three of the Food Ladder.** As outlined in the Silver application, North Lancashire's network of [food clubs](#) has been instrumental in helping residents move out of crisis towards more secure food access. The next challenge has been creating opportunities for people to progress beyond receiving support into participation, leadership and community-led change. In response, FoodFutures and the LDFJP have developed [Food Circles](#): a model proposed by local residents that brings together food clubs, agroecological growing and composting sites, community meals, shared cooking facilities, training and volunteering opportunities within a single neighbourhood system. By connecting these initiatives, Food Circles uses food as a gateway into skills, confidence, participation and leadership, while simultaneously strengthening

the resilience of the food clubs themselves. Two Food Circles are now operating in North Lancashire, with the box below illustrating the impact this approach is having on local residents.

FOOD CIRCLES IN PRACTICE: FROM RECEIVING SUPPORT TO CREATING CHANGE

Stanleys Community Centre in Morecambe demonstrates how Food Circles help residents move beyond food insecurity towards participation and community leadership. Alongside a food club supporting around 70 households each week (170 members), Stanleys now combines a community café, cooking courses, an allotment, composting demonstration site, community meals and advice services within one neighbourhood hub.

The different elements reinforce one another. Produce grown by volunteers supplies the café, cooking courses teach practical food skills using locally grown and surplus ingredients, compost returns nutrients to the allotment, and residents increasingly move between activities rather than remaining solely recipients of food support. During a recent Food Circle skill-share event, one third of participants had previously been food club members and were now actively volunteering across Food Circle activities, demonstrating progression towards rung three of the Food Ladder.

Danny's story from **Marsh Community Centre** illustrates the same journey. After joining the food club when his family faced financial hardship following the birth of their baby, he began volunteering in the community garden, helping grow food for other members. He now describes volunteering as a way of "helping the community and giving something back—not just taking," explaining that the centre "is a lifeline for so many people."

The [food champion network](#) also has a role to play in building North Lancashire's capacity and ability to support movement up the food ladder. Food champion inductions support people to find their role in the local network; they directly connect people up with projects or people or training that are relevant to their interests and 1-1 support has also been offered to help make ideas become a reality. Examples of what this has led to include a new initiative being launched in Bare that seeks to counter social isolation with regular Landed Community Kitchens; a member of a local community food project starting to talk about how they are linked to and supported by FoodFutures when they do presentations to other groups.

This work matters beyond North Lancashire because many places are grappling with the limitations of emergency food systems whilst seeking to reconnect food justice with local food production and community resilience. Food Circles, and the food champion induction process offer practical models for integrating food access, agroecological growing, shared infrastructure and community participation into a single place-based system that supports longer-term resilience.

SECTION 4: Embeddedness, sustainability and growing the movement

To what extent is the food partnership and its work embedded in local policy, strategies, and practice? How sustainable is funding and traction with stakeholders, including the local authority? To what extent do citizens and community organisations have a sense of ownership of, and agency with, the work of the food partnership? Are governance structures robust and democratic?

How does your partnership contribute to the food partnership movement? This might be direct support to SFP members and prospects, Regional or cohort specific working and acting as an ambassador for a systems approach, cross-sector approach to food. This can include contributing to forums, conferences, and sessions in the UK and abroad.

We advise that you keep answers to within 600 words. Hyperlinks to blogs, videos, websites etc. are all acceptable but require one or two sentences for context. Please use hyperlinks with impact and brevity in mind.

Embeddedness & sustainability

Rather than acting as the hub of a growing network, FoodFutures increasingly functions as enabling infrastructure: connecting people, organisations and ideas so that new initiatives can emerge, take root and eventually become independent while remaining connected to the wider movement. As one of the SFP assessors reflected during the Gold assessment visit, the partnership now behaves “like a strawberry runner” – continually putting down new roots which become resilient in their own right while remaining part of a connected system. FoodFutures heart group members have often used ‘mycelium’ as a metaphor for the network, with mushrooms being the

A key example of this embeddedness is FoodFutures’ ongoing relationship with Lancaster City Council. The council continues to support the partnership through funding for the FoodFutures coordinator role and has also committed funding towards a new Lancaster District Allotment Development role following a district-wide Allotments Review. Importantly, LESS and FoodFutures was commissioned to undertake this work because the council recognised the value of the partnership acting as a trusted, independent and community-connected body capable of engaging effectively with allotment holders and wider stakeholders.

During the Gold assessment visit, council officers reflected that FoodFutures now acts as a trusted critical friend: providing an independent community perspective, helping officers test and strengthen emerging policy ideas, connecting them with community expertise and maintaining momentum across electoral and organisational change. This trusted relationship has enabled the council to pursue more ambitious approaches to food growing, climate action and community participation than would have been possible through statutory processes alone.

These collaborations sit within a wider context of Lancaster City Council being recognised nationally as the number one district council for climate action in England, demonstrating how FoodFutures both contributes to and benefits from a strong culture of partnership working around climate, food and community resilience.

Political support for the partnership has also grown. Local MPs Cat Smith and Lizzi Collinge have visited FoodFutures projects and partnership representatives have attended meetings in Parliament and local environmental forums hosted by our local MPs, helping strengthen dialogue around food insecurity, land access and sustainable food systems at a regional and national level.

The strength and diversity of FoodFuture’ relationships has enabled the partnership to respond collectively during periods of crisis while also creating the capacity to seize new opportunities as they emerge. For example, as described in the previous section, when Eggcup faced closure in 2024, FoodFutures working groups and partners were able to work together to catalyse fundraising, communications and partnership support to help secure its continuation. This ability

to mobilise relationships and resources quickly demonstrates the resilience and mutual support that has developed across the partnership ecosystem.

FoodFutures, and [LESS](#) (the secretariat for FoodFutures) has also increasingly supported projects and working groups to develop their own independent sustainability while remaining connected to the wider partnership. Lancaster District Food Justice Partnership and reWilding Roots both emerged through FoodFutures-supported activity before becoming independent charities with their own governance and funding structures, whilst still contributing actively to the wider partnership and strategy-through representatives sitting on FoodFutures heart group, joining strategy days and reporting on progress at quarterly partnership meetings.

Alongside this organisational evolution, the partnership has begun systematically codifying its knowledge through coordinator and food champion induction processes, shared workshop plans, facilitation resources and skill shares and the we have started to develop a FoodFutures coordination handbook. These resources are helping distribute leadership and ensure that knowledge, relationships and ways of working become embedded within the partnership rather than residing with individual staff members.

Community participation and sociocratic governance are central to FoodFutures' approach. Working groups remain open to new participants and the partnership runs regular participatory strategy review sessions where residents, organisations and community groups can help shape priorities and identify emerging needs. Annual sociocracy training and facilitation methods are used to support collaborative decision-making, shared leadership and inclusive participation across the partnership.

Growing the movement

Locally, FoodFutures cultivates a local food movement through its annual rhythm of activities and through [food champion](#) induction. These seek to support people to find their role in the local network; they directly connect people up with projects or people or training that are relevant to their interests and 1-1 support has also been offered to help make ideas become a reality.

FoodFutures also actively contributes to the wider Sustainable Food Places movement by sharing learning, convening collaborations and supporting the development of emerging food partnerships elsewhere. Increasingly, organisations beyond North Lancashire are approaching FoodFutures not simply to learn about individual projects, but to understand the partnership's systems approach to food system transformation and place based movement building.

At a regional level, FoodFutures has played a leading facilitating role in convening conversations around food systems collaboration across Lancashire. In 2025, FoodFutures was commissioned by Lancashire Climate Action Network to facilitate a [Regional Food Alliance development](#) process involving three cross-sector workshops attended by over 90 participants. For many attendees, this was the first opportunity to connect with others working on systemic food issues across Lancashire

and explore opportunities for longer-term regional collaboration. Public Health at Lancashire County Council has since commissioned FoodFutures to continue this work in 2026 and support the set up of a Lancashire Resilient Food Network.

FoodFutures is also increasingly supporting the development of emerging food partnerships and food systems projects beyond North Lancashire, from being an active member of the Landed community kitchen network, the Landworkers' Alliance and a UK FarmStart working group, through to hosting the [North West Land Match](#) pilot and local projects being members of wider networks e.g Lancaster Seed Library is an active member of the Northern Seed Sovereignty network. Partners in Cumbria have also approached FoodFutures for support and learning as they develop their own Sustainable Food Places work, with a large National Lottery EOI recently submitted to support mentoring and shared learning activity across Cumberland Food Partnership (currently working towards a Silver SFP Award) and a potential new partnership in Westmorland and Furness. Similarly, FoodFutures has supported a learning exchange with a culturally aligned network in Shieldfield, Newcastle - with people from both areas visiting each other and supporting co-learning and skill shares.

Alongside this, FoodFutures contributes actively to wider regional networks including the [Northern Food and Farming Network](#), helping strengthen collaboration around agroecology, food justice and resilient local food economies across the North of England.