



# CIVIL FOOD RESILIENCE CASE STUDY 4: PLYMOUTH

Case Study prepared for Sustainable Food Places by Dr. Daphne Du Cros,  
Shropshire Good Food Partnership



As a port city on the Western Approaches of the English Channel, Plymouth holds a unique cultural position as a key departure point for seafarers, adventurers and emigrants, famously the Pilgrim Fathers. Plymouth's geography shaped its historic economic base of fishing and seafaring, including privateering and involvement in the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade, alongside its strategic position for Defence. The latter

includes its nuclear Royal Naval Dockyard and Naval, Royal Marine, Army and former Airforce presence. As a Home Office dispersal area on the main Paddington to Penzance rail line, Plymouth is a key location for asylum seekers, refugees and immigrants in the UK. The city is also home to three universities. This is a context which Food Plymouth navigates, and has various implications for food resilience.

## Approach

Plymouth's military context brings both assets, notably around economic activity and high-skilled, well paid employment, as well as the risks of being a strategic port city, including the potential of being targeted. This was the case during the WWII, when the city was subjected to heavy aerial bombing, unexploded ordnance from which is still discovered regularly.

There is a perception in some quarters of a lingering colonial mindset, and a dominant 'white' cultural identity, alongside pockets of socioeconomic deprivation. This makes Plymouth vulnerable to division along racial lines. This is manifesting itself in frequent demonstrations by far right organisations and counter-demonstrations. Food Plymouth is seeking to engage with its regional Local Resilience Forum (LRF) and the City Council on the subject of Civil Food Resilience Planning and National Food Security. While this is a 'slow burn', progress is being made.

The 'Plymouth fish finger' pilot project has used under-utilised fish species caught by local Small Scale Coastal Fishers (SSCF). These species are currently often wasted or sold for non-human consumption. So, their use has benefits for the environment and food security, as well as the SSCF. Local school students worked with fishing industry partners to co-design the fish finger with

the aim of selling it into the local school meals system. The ultimate aim is for the fish to be caught by Plymouth SSCF, landed and processed right on the Plymouth Fish Quay and eaten within a few miles radius by Plymouth school students. Efforts to secure the infrastructure needed for upscaling production are currently underway, within the wider context of boosting local consumption, shortening supply chains and revitalising Plymouth's fishing industry.

## Challenges

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An historic insularity and resistance to 'incomers', alongside perceptions in some of structural racism, has been inflamed by far-right rhetoric and nationalism over the last two years. This is making visible minority groups feel unsafe in their communities, and in some cases worry that they may be targeted while accessing emergency food provision. The same issues have been suppressing the contributions of people of colour to economic development, but again signs of improvement are starting to emerge and breakthroughs are beginning to occur.

The Devon, Cornwall and Isles of Scilly LRF has not previously seen food as a high priority. But there are signs that this may be changing. The LRF is public sector focused and is felt to predominantly see voluntary and community sector organisations and faith communities as conduits for public outreach, rather than as full partners. Food Plymouth identifies a 'missing middle' of the Third Sector as a whole to support LRFs with proactive coordination and partnership working, rather than just vehicles for community engagement and as junior partners for reactive response.

## Opportunities

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Food Plymouth sees value in working closely with partner organisations across the food system, including the Plymouth Food Access Network (PFAN). Working with organisations to identify underserved communities may offer an opportunity to go to them and deliver support, rather than leaving them to feel exposed or forego food support entirely out of lack of agency and / or fear of discrimination. Likewise, releasing the cultural and economic potential of Global Majority communities in Plymouth is rising in profile. Food Plymouth's pioneering engagement with the Sustainable Food Places 'Fair Food' initiative could and should accelerate this, to all-round benefit.

In addressing household food insecurity, Food Plymouth draws on Dr Megan Blake's 'Food Ladders' model and follows the 'Cash First but not Cash Only' imperative to inform its responses. The growth of food co-ops informed by the Co-operation Town model, the presence of FareShare South West in the city, along with The Bridge food purchasing and redistribution warehouse, and the launch of the Food in Community gleaning and fruit and vegetable processing operation in nearby Totnes, are all considered to be potentially significant contributors to Plymouth's civil food resilience.

Attention to the work of Professor Tim Lang and collaborators around narrowing the UK's food resilience gap, including strengthening and relocalising supply chains, is another key area for exploration and development. On-going food systems, supply chains and climate change work with the South Devon Bioregional Learning Centre, the South West Peninsula Food Partnerships collaboration, and local social and environmental activists around the National Emergency Briefing

initiative, reflects this. Developing even closer links with the University of Plymouth is yet another priority.

A focus on 'Defence-Related Growth' has the potential to link in with and support Civil Food Resilience planning via the City Council and LRF, in order to counter vulnerabilities, noting the unique context of the city which may put it at risk.

