



# CIVIL FOOD RESILIENCE CASE STUDY 7: BIRMINGHAM

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



Birmingham is a diverse urban area requiring a large agricultural hinterland (both domestic and through imports) to provide sufficient food supply. The Birmingham Food System Partnership (BFSP), based in the Council's Public Health team, leads on delivery of the Birmingham Food Strategy, by applying a whole-systems approach to understanding the city's food system and improving food behaviours and related inequalities at the population level across Birmingham.

## Approach

### Network Mapping (Internal):

Along with researcher Dr. Kelly Parsons, the Partnership is mapping the local council to identify how departments and portfolios link to the food system. This offers opportunities to build networks, reduce siloing, build food systems thinking across the Council and take a coordinated approach in crisis events. This mapping research is being done with a view of making the process replicable in other Councils.

### Infrastructure:

The Council's ownership of the Birmingham Wholesale Market offers essential infrastructure and opportunities to engage with food resilience, such as housing the Birmingham Food Hub (see case study). The Wholesale Market links to public procurement and discussions have been taking place in recent years to increase supply from surrounding counties.

### Procurement:

The BFSP views Procurement as the strongest lever for strategic and impactful change.

BFSP is currently working with a Legal team that is offering their services pro bono to examine potential legal levers within procurement law to break the stalemate between councils and procurement contracts. For example via the Social Value Act to include stringent social value

criteria, Competition Law or Modern Slavery links via international markets to prioritise more ethical shorter supply chains.

### **Asset Mapping and Community Food Infrastructure:**

Resilience work includes expanding the Surplus Food Hub to build more resilient local supply chains and support community food infrastructure.

Asset mapping has been taking place, and includes advocating for integrated affordable food models and supply chain innovations in new community hubs and through public sector engagement.

## **Challenges**

---

As a food partnership within a very expansive council, identifying key contacts and officers whose work links with food presents a challenge. Accessing the council hierarchy is made possible through the team's position in public health, however identifying what an officer's remit is is difficult because online resources do not give full information on responsibilities of roles.

Building links with Procurement is difficult "because pretty much anyone I've spoken to in procurement is interim. They come, they go - you get a new person who knows how to procure paper clips. They know nothing about food" (Sarah Newton, Coordinator BFP). This is a blocker to increasing buying power through procurement, and to work strategically to link rural and urban food systems, and aligning public procurement with resilience goals.

## **Opportunities**

---

The Food Partnership holds a diverse facilitatory role in the City's food system. Being council-embedded, it has access to decision makers, systems and resources to drive change.

In addition to potential Legal levers, Sarah is developing a practical 'How to Guide' as a toolkit for food systems and Public Procurement. This would have wider application across SFPs.

BFP is interested in how discretionary procurement contracts could be used to set up 'below threshold' contracts (dependent on local frameworks) with smaller local suppliers to avoid big tender processes and their associated restrictions.

## **Pilot Project: Full of Beans**

---



The Food Partnership has won awards for its "Full of Beans" campaign as a way to influence behavioural change and health outcomes, with additional benefits of plant-rich protein sources, alignment with the Planetary Health Diet (Eat Lancet Report 2025), resilience and sustainability.

"The Full of Beans campaign is all about increasing the amount of beans and pulses eaten in schools, in families, and in food businesses."

This program had included the development of a range of accessible resources and 'Full of Beans' activities to help people discover, explore and celebrate beans and pulses through growing, tasting and cooking.

BFSP has been working with communities to build awareness of healthy eating guidance and shifting the acceptance and demand for the target food, "because you can't shift a supply chain without people being willing to eat what you're planning to serve" - Sarah Newton, BFP.

Birmingham's Beans materials are valuable resources for other SFP members.

## Birmingham Food Hub



*Image: Emmanuel Blondel Carpintero, Birmingham Food Hub Coordinator*

The Food Hub supports the Birmingham Food Justice Network. BFJN comprises over 270 independent groups across Birmingham and surrounding areas which serve vulnerable communities via foodbanks, food pantries, pay-as-you-can meals, warm hubs and schools. The role of the food hub is to collect surplus and discarded fruit, veg and other products and to communicate what is available to the wider FJN so that collections can be coordinated and food redistributed/ repurposed. This is a valuable physical resource for storing and distributing food, reducing food waste and convening and building networks.

The unit at the Birmingham Wholesale Market which houses the Food Hub offers an opportunity to share the space with producers coming from Wales and the counties surrounding Birmingham. Links with farmers for food surplus donations are sporadic, as a result of the terms of their contracts for large grocery retailers. Maintaining relationships with farmers is difficult, since they are often busy and coordination with the Food Hub requires extra communication. There is therefore great interest in 'gleaning' of surplus and collection from overproduction from farmers in the areas surrounding Birmingham to redistribute from the Food Hub.

Emmanuel explains that the imports which come into the wholesale market reflect the cultural diversity of Birmingham's communities, with a range of products coming from Africa and South Asian producers, as well as Spain and the Mediterranean. While there are many businesses which buy from the Wholesale Market, there are many individual buyers.

