
Northamptonshire ACRE

Community Renewal Fund Project – Full
Circle

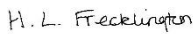
Evaluation Report



December 2022



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Project:	Community Renewal Fund Project – Full Circle
Document Title:	Evaluation Report
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1.0 Introduction

In May 2022, Focus Consultants 2010 LLP was appointed by Northamptonshire ACRE to undertake an independent evaluation of the Full Circle project. The project runs from January 2022 until December 2022.

This evaluation report involves a desk-based evaluation of existing documentation, an output and progress review, telephone and face to face interviews with the project team and key stakeholders, consultation with project beneficiaries as well as an assessment of the impact of the project. The evaluation covers the following:

- Policy and sector context of the project. This data should include the changing conditions of the food and drink industry, the current structure of the sector, and perceived barriers to growth.
- Analysis of the design and performance of key activities, using case studies to highlight areas of good practice or recommendations. This data will include reference to performance against outputs and outcomes and note evidence of early good practice.
- A review of the nature of the project governance and delivery, including the effectiveness of the relationships with partners and stakeholders.
- Stakeholder consultation to be undertaken throughout, adding value to the “hard “project information from the people delivering the project.
- A survey to gather qualitative data and feedback from beneficiaries.
- Case studies of businesses/individuals supported.
- Value for money assessment and benchmarking.
- Project delivery and best effective practice recommendations for consideration as well as key lessons learnt for the rest of the programme.
- Evaluation Report: the presentation of the findings so far, all drawn together into a cohesive report, followed by a presentation where key conclusions and recommendations are drawn out.

There is a requirement for all UK Community Renewal Fund grant recipients to undertake an evaluation. The Full Circle evaluation follows the intended structure and covers each of the elements outlined in the UKCRF evaluation guidance. This requirement is fixed and applies to all projects irrespective of the nature or scale of the projects.

Focus has taken every care to conduct the study professionally, openly and thoroughly, to retain an objective stance, to balance the opinions expressed and explore the justification for the comments made. It must also be recognised that there are inevitable budget and time constraints, which limit the resource available for the evaluation.

It should be noted that this assessment was undertaken during the Coronavirus Pandemic and the impact of this will be felt throughout the remainder of the project delivery period for the Full Circle project. This will undoubtedly have an impact on the final spend and outputs achieved by the project.

2.0 Project Background

This section considers the context in which the project was designed, including the project objectives and the details of the delivery approach.

2.1 Background and Details

2.1.1 Background

A successful application was made via North Northamptonshire Council through the UK Government Community Renewal Fund (CRF) to deliver a sustainable food place in North Northamptonshire. Sustainable Food Places is a partnership programme led by the Soil Association, Food Matters and Sustain: the alliance for better food and farming. It is funded by the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation and The National Lottery Community Fund.

The project – Full Circle – comprises rural food chain mapping and the piloting of two food waste mobile applications and one sustainability audit application.

North Northamptonshire is characterised by its rurality, with 70% of its 381 square miles classified as 'rural'. Research undertaken by Northamptonshire ACRE in 2020 identified that 58% living in rural areas did not know where to go to access food support if they needed it, and 45% said that their rural location meant food was more expensive.

Through the mapping exercise and a combination of food waste/sustainability applications, the project aims to build resilience in North Northamptonshire by facilitating knowledge transfer activity across the hard-hit hospitality and food and drink sectors in the area, whilst reducing food waste and supporting businesses to understand their role in moving towards a net zero economy. The two connected projects will build a framework that will support knowledge transfer activity and the dissemination of good practice across the food sector and local communities of North Northamptonshire.

The apps are designed to help businesses to upcycle food waste, with the three options allowing for the right solution to be provided for each business identified. The Food Loop app aims to act as a catalyst for suppliers to utilise food waste, acknowledging their role as a potential force for good by promoting collaboration with foodbanks and community initiatives, helping to provide those in need with local surplus food whilst simultaneously driving and developing a sense of community. Through the Zellar platform, the project encourages businesses to improve and change behaviours by providing easy access to critical sustainability drivers such as the need to transition to renewable energy, invest in local carbon biodiversity and local offset projects. The platform demonstrates the measurable economic, environmental and social benefit of the initiatives.

The CRF scheme pilots three different options for supporting a sustainable food network in North Northamptonshire, pulling together a wide partnership of local actors to comprehensively identify both current initiatives and any gaps in provision, including: Public Health, Northamptonshire ICN Primary Care Networks in the North, North Northamptonshire Council Environmental Health

Officers and Economic Development representatives, NHS social prescribers, voluntary sector groups, and Town and Parish Councils.

The project was awarded £106,250 from the UK Community Renewal Fund.

2.1.2 Strategic Context

The food and drink manufacturing sector is identified by SEMLEP as a focus for the area's development, with opportunities around clean growth, reduced waste and improved productivity a means of driving growth across the area. With Northamptonshire a key supplier of food to the region (the county's top fruit and small fruit comprise 30% and 24% of East Midlands regional production)¹, there is significant scope for reducing and reusing food waste to improve food security and mitigate against food poverty.

SEMLEP's Local Industrial Strategy highlights food utilisation strategies as an important factor in clean growth for the area. Although large companies have the capacity to develop reduction strategies more readily, the 96% of food and drink manufacturing businesses in North Northamptonshire that are SMEs lack the resource to pursue improvements in efficiency and digital transformation at a time when survival is their main priority. The project aims to provide a digital solution to food waste which will support sustainable growth and productivity through the dual benefits of income generation and engagement with the charitable sector. The Midlands Engine Science and Innovation Audit (2016) similarly finds that lower waste processes in the agri-food sector, value creation from the 'circular economy', and zero waste food chains are instrumental to increasing productivity in the sector.

Moreover, reducing food waste could be closely associated with alleviating food poverty. According to the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2018), in the UK, 1 in 3 children are living in poverty and an estimated 14 million people, one fifth of the nation's population, are suffering in 'impossible situations' in which paying bills and putting food on the table can be incredibly difficult. Although utilising surplus food isn't a long-term solution to food poverty on its own, the UK wastes 9.5 million tonnes of food each year, which represents a significant resource which could be better diverted to people in need.

Locally, Northamptonshire ACRE carried out a survey (2020) to investigate food insecurity and poverty in rural Northamptonshire that has been exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic. Rural food poverty is defined as: the inability to obtain sufficient healthy affordable food, whilst rural food insecurity is defined as: not having reliable access to a sufficient quantity of affordable, nutritious food. Data showed a complex web of issues including financial hardship, infrequent or non-existent bus networks, poor rural broadband, a lack of confidence online and villages without a local shop stocking a good range of nutritious food at affordable prices. 25% of respondents worried about the cost of food and 45% said that food was more expensive because of their rural location. 60% of respondents were not sure where they would get help, and although 9% mentioned a town foodbank, many commented that although they were aware of a food bank in the local town, they were unable to get to it, or that the value of the food received was lower than the cost of public transport.

¹ D. Goymour, NACRE Research Report: Northamptonshire Food Systems, February-May 2022

The North Northamptonshire Strategic Plan (Scope and Issues Consultation) considers North Northamptonshire as well placed to be an exemplar of sustainable living and working. The JCS already includes a vision to be ‘a showpiece for modern green living and well managed sustainable development: a resilient area where local choices have increased the ability to adapt to the impacts of climate change and to global economic changes’. The Plan proposes sustainable urban-focused development and a proactive approach to meeting rural needs, supporting greater self-reliance for the area as a whole. The network of settlements will be strengthened through the development of local food and fuel supply chains.

With a significant portion of North Northamptonshire classified as ‘rural’, the project has been designed to overcome the challenge - to better understand the area in more detail – identified in SEMLEP’s Local Industrial Strategy, described as the requirement for “long term vision, innovative thinking and joined-up working”. The mapping process will also support the government’s overall net zero ambitions and wider environmental considerations by forging a link between local consumers and their local food suppliers, in raising awareness of local produce, and by encouraging consumers to ‘buy local’ thereby reducing journeys to larger supermarkets further afield.

The concept of natural capital lies at the heart of North Northamptonshire’s growth strategy which recognises the importance of the natural environment and the opportunities it provides to enhance economic prosperity, productivity, and inward investment. Accessible natural capital is also seen as a means of facilitating community cohesion, activity and healthy living.

2.1.3 Meeting CRF Requirements

The UK Community Renewal Fund is a government programme which aims to support people and communities most in need across the UK, investing in skills, community and place, local business, and supporting people into employment.

The project was designed to directly deliver against both the ‘Investment in Communities and Place’ and ‘Investment for Local Businesses’ priorities identified by the UK Community Renewal Fund, which is designed to empower places to take a more holistic approach, changing overly prescriptive funding priorities and ‘priority axes’. Projects need to align with long-term strategic plans for local growth, target people most in need and support community renewal. In addition, projects should show how they complement other national and local provision.

The Full Circle project also supports the Fund’s Net Zero objectives as a scheme that is based on low or zero carbon best practice, whilst supporting the growing of skills and local supply chains. The Full Circle project is designed to test and raise awareness of different potential solutions to reducing food waste which both decreases carbon emissions and increases sustainability.

2.1.4 Project Details

The food chain research and mapping is the basis of the project, building on data from the North Northamptonshire Foodbank group and Made in Northamptonshire directory, as well as farmers and hospitality venues who participate in the Weetabix Northamptonshire Food and Drink Awards.

The mapping concurrently leads to referrals to food and drink producers and hospitality businesses piloting one of three food waste/sustainability applications to reduce food waste and showcase sustainability options.

The project covers two pilot projects:

- a. **Rural food chain mapping:** an interactive GIS map including smaller market towns looking at current initiatives and gaps showing farms and farm shops, producers, large manufacturers, independent food shops, rural supermarkets through to foodbanks and community larders and those involved in tackling food poverty.

The mapping activity sees project staff work with local Parish Councils to supplement existing databases to collate a comprehensive network of food and drink organisations. A steering committee of partners use the map to identify any gaps and how to impact access to affordable healthy food.

- b. **Food waste and sustainability audit applications:** the apps target a 'hit list' of businesses identified in the rural mapping across the whole of North Northamptonshire alongside existing contacts who are FHR3+, with more food waste, who have been hardest hit during the pandemic.

MiN provide training on best practice to both one-to-many (online) and one-to-one support. Businesses are encouraged to adopt one of the three options:

- Food Loop: online B2B solution for redistributing surplus food from growers, producers, retail and hospitality, introducing them to a comprehensive list of businesses, charities and community initiatives able to upcycle and/or redistribute surplus food.
- Too Good to Go: a B2C app allowing consumers to purchase 'waste' items from restaurants, bakeries, hotels, independent food shops and takeaways.
- Zellar: online platform recording local offset partnerships, emission reduction, renewable energy and low carbon technology.

The businesses and organisations that took part in the pilot received a 1-year licence at no cost and were surveyed to evaluate what worked well for the different sectors. It was anticipated that the different types of businesses, charities and consumers would have different goals and the piloting of these applications, and the evaluation, would be instrumental to future recommendations.

The programmes are delivered by Northamptonshire ACRE and Made in Northamptonshire, which are connected to the North Northamptonshire Foodbanks Group, the Sustainable Food Network North Northamptonshire, the Weetabix Northamptonshire Food and Drink Awards, and the county's Good Neighbours scheme by project staff. The project relies on NACRE and MiN's existing networks and contacts, allowing activity to commence as soon as possible.

NACRE is responsible for the promotion and sign up of organisations onto the QGIS mapping, whilst MiN manage the three food waste/sustainability applications.

Training to businesses and organisations is delivered by staff from both partners, supported by a consultant trainer recruited for the knowledge transfer event.

2.1.5 Outputs

The project was contracted to deliver the following UKCRF outputs:

Contracted Outputs	Project Target
Organisations (businesses) engaged in knowledge transfer activity following support	110
Increase in footfall as a result of support	100
<i>Source: CRF Application Form</i>	

Output Breakdown	Project Target
Businesses (food and drink producers, hospitality businesses)	
Small businesses (less than £10.2m turnover)	70
Medium businesses (less than £36m turnover)	20
Large businesses (over £36m turnover)	10
Organisations (food and drink producers, foodbanks and similar food related)	
Public	20
Private	30
Voluntary	50
<i>Source: CRF Application Form</i>	

The food chain research will produce a written report with recommendations/actions to help steer future provision and support, whilst the piloting of the two sustainability apps and audit aims to demonstrate efficacy and will make a business case for other businesses to buy in to.

These initiatives will complement the neighbouring areas of Corby and East Northants and their FoodCaddy initiative for household food waste, providing valuable research data on participation, quantities of food, and benefits for charities, which can be used in future policy making.

2.1.6 Beneficiaries

The beneficiaries of the project can be divided across the two pilots:

- a. Rural food chain mapping
 - Individuals who access foodbanks
 - Rural families who want to buy local or seasonal goods
 - Partner agencies who want to understand the local food web
 - Foodbanks and other food support activities
 - Food and drink producers
 - Local food retailers and farmers

b. Food waste and sustainability audit applications

- Hospitality businesses
- Micro and small food and drink manufacturing businesses
- Individuals and families who can access food at a more cost-effective price
- Charities and not-for-profit organisations accessing waste food
- Eateries selling food that otherwise would have gone to landfill.

2.1.7 Funding Package

The funding package as detailed in the UKCRF Application is as follows:

Activity	Costs
Staff Costs	£33,000
Overheads	£4,950
Recruitment	£800
Equipment	£1,000
Publicity and Marketing	£6,000
Trainer for Knowledge Sharing	£3,000
Travel, Subsistence and Accommodation	£2,000
Evaluation	£10,000
Digital Resources for Food Waste and Sustainability:	
- Food Loop Licence	£8,000
- Too Good To Go	£2,000 (reprofiled)
- Zellar Sustainability Registration	£35,000
Total	£45,500
Other Costs Total	£106,250

2.2 Whole Systems Approach

The Full Circle project made possible by the funding from the UK Community Renewal Fund is providing farmers, producers, suppliers and food retailers with a trio of online platforms to help them chart their journey to sustainability. Our project is also providing a matchmaking service that is linking hospitality businesses with producers and suppliers who have food produce that would otherwise go to waste.























The project is a key part of the long-term journey of the North Northamptonshire Sustainable Food Network, which envisions the area as a ‘Sustainable Food Place’ - somewhere everyone can enjoy healthy, local, affordable food and where our communities can actively play a part in shaping their own food network. The North Northants Sustainable Food Network is a partnership of organisations, including charities, community and voluntary groups, local authority representatives and food and drink providers, producers and suppliers.

The Network is committed to developing a sustainable food environment, one in which everyone can flourish, aiming to:

- Eradicate food poverty and food inequality
- Increase the profile and importance of healthy eating
- Support local farmers and producers
- Educate young people about growing and cooking
- Encourage the 'buy local' theme

The Full Circle project is a key part of the Whole Systems Approach to the food environment of North Northamptonshire, illustrated overleaf. The Whole Systems Approach is designed to allow cross-fertilisation and a joined-up approach to dealing with each of the problem areas in tandem.

Food Environment of North Northamptonshire – A Whole Systems Approach

 <p>Strategic Collaborative Partnership and engagement Steering group Networking across the whole system Charter and ambitions Mapping and gaps</p>	 <p>Communication and marketing Increase individual, community and workplace awareness and understanding on the issues and actions  Awareness of support and help Promotion to the public</p>	 <p>Climate Climate change strategy Campaigns and Training, Sustainable action plans Reduce, redirect, recycle  Promoting food growing spaces in new developments</p>	 <p>Develop a good food movement from pregnancy through the lifecourse to older age Community activists Cooking and growing opportunities  Training and skills development Social prescribers</p>
 <p>Information and training Inform professionals and voluntary organisations on sources of help Workshops, webinars and knowledge sharing</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Food Environment of North Northants A Whole Systems Approach</p> <p>Our mission: <i>To ensure North Northamptonshire is a sustainable food place; where everyone can enjoy healthy, local, affordable food; communities can help shape their local food environment; and where together we can work towards the eradication of food poverty and insecurity.</i></p>		 <p>Community food initiatives: enable communities to engage in their local food environment e.g. Food for Life Incredible edible Community orchards & allotments</p>
 <p>Tackling food poverty Food bank provision Food poverty network  High quality social food provision e.g. Healthy Start, Free School Meals Incorporate actions in wider plans and policies</p>			 <p>Create an environment that provides access to healthy food Map access and promote Diet related health Food deserts Food swamps Retailers and producers Planning initiatives</p>
 <p>Food production & food waste Sustainable farming Food waste reduction Community swap shops/larders  Sharing Apps e.g. Olio Home food composting</p>	 <p>Food procurement & catering Restaurants, providers NHS and Councils provision  System wide food procurement strategy / policy</p>	 <p>Involving education settings from 0-19 to raise awareness and engage children and families Cooking and growing opportunities  Training and skills development Food policies </p>	 <p>Food economy Food retail, tourism and economic development plans. More healthy sustainable options available  Local supply chain </p>

Source: Public Health North Northamptonshire

3.0 Appropriateness of Initial Design

This section provides an analysis of the appropriateness of the initial design of the project. It includes a review of the project context, key partners' aspirations and expectations, project design including target outputs and outcomes, engagement and delivery processes. It has been informed by one-to-one consultation with key stakeholders. The following people were consulted with as part of the evaluation:

- Rachel Mallows, Founding Director, Made in Northamptonshire
- Jay Davenport, Project Officer, Made in Northamptonshire
- Craig Severn, Project Officer, Northamptonshire ACRE
- Sean Silver, Voluntary Sector Development Manager, Groundwork Northamptonshire
- Deborah Mbofana, Healthy Food Lead, Northamptonshire Public Health

3.1 Project Governance

The activities are delivered by a partnership comprising:

- Northamptonshire ACRE (Grant Recipient)
- Made in Northamptonshire
- Governance Board – representing the North Northamptonshire Sustainable Food Network:
 - Sean Silver, Voluntary Sector Development Manager, Kettering Volunteer Network
 - Deborah Mbofana, Public Health Practitioner, Public Health
 - Miranda Wixon, Director SOFEA food charity

The project aims to use the broader scope afforded by the Community Renewal Fund to take a more holistic approach to supporting sector development and sustainability, better integrating business and community interventions in a funding programme that allows a wider focus than EU funding. A transition to a healthy, sustainable and more equitable food system requires collaborative action between policy makers, businesses and civil society at the local level. The project brings together a partnership comprising: charitable organisations (via NACRE), multi-stakeholder cooperatives (via Made in Northamptonshire), local authority influence (via Public Health Northants) and community engagement (via Groundwork Northamptonshire). This innovative partnership model builds on local insight and knowledge, aligns with local plans for economic growth, and targets people most in need whilst community renewal.

3.2 The Partnership Model

3.2.1 Approach

There is a need to develop collaborative partnerships and communities of likeminded organisations to best tackle the range of issues facing businesses and residents alike. The CRF programme provides a mechanism and an opportunity for joined up working between the two partners to act as a catalyst for partnership working throughout the food chain in the rural areas across North Northamptonshire. The partnership aims to co-opt ideas and initiatives from across the food

journey in an effort to move away from the silo thinking that has characterised the move towards sustainability thus far.

The combination of the three tailored sustainability apps is an innovative approach to identifying the most appropriate routes for greater digital engagement in relation to waste and sustainability for the food and drink and hospitality sectors in North Northamptonshire. The offer of free digital food waste support and the sustainability audit is an important step to securing engagement and developing organisations with organisations across the entire supply chain in the area, in hope that these can be targeted in future projects.

The project was designed to demonstrate the potential that the Sustainable Food Network partnership has, to evidence the impact that the model can have, before scaling-up. The pilot project is therefore designed to test a range of interventions as part of a wider effort to better understand what the target area's organisations need, and which intervention will best support this. For example, some early intelligence is revealing a desire for more outdoor food activities linked to specific cultural communities.

3.2.2 Project Partners

The Sustainable Food Network partnership of Made in Northamptonshire and Northamptonshire ACRE represents a new delivery approach, pooling MiN's network of 450 businesses in the food and drink and hospitality sectors with NACRE's Town and Parish Council network and history of rural action. NACRE's physical presence in areas hitherto less accessed by MiN mean each organisation can expand the reach of the other. MiN and NACRE also proffer a similar ethos and similar values. The partnership model is considered a key strength of the project, with the collective considered to complement each other in terms of drivers and messages.

Northamptonshire's ACRE is a branch of Action for Communities in Rural England, which has a broad remit to support rural communities. NACRE's objective is to raise awareness of the food poverty which disproportionately impacts rural areas more so than city centres. CRF project represents only a small part of MiN and NACRE's broader remit. MiN's extensive network – via FEAST, MiN, Awards – has given the project significant access to a wide range of businesses on existing databases, which is supplemented by NACRE's work in local communities, identifying organisations and initiatives linked to food poverty.

The rationale behind the partnership was primarily around coverage and the sharing of contacts, merging MiN's extensive network – via FEAST, MiN, Awards – of businesses at a hospitality level and producers with NACRE's work in local communities, identifying organisations and initiatives linked to food poverty, as well as their awareness of farmers, food banks and food larders. The two partners see the challenge through two different, but related, lenses: MiN's main focus is around food provenance and promoting local food, whereas NACRE are engaged in promoting rural lifestyles. The partners mutually benefit from each other; any joined up thinking on reducing food waste and increasing sustainability in a collaborative is beneficial.

The project was designed for the two elements of the project to be divided between the partners, with NACRE responsible for the mapping exercise and the conversations with food banks, food

larders and community kitchens around food poverty, whilst MiN would concentrate on hospitality and retail businesses, using their existing database to quick start the project.

Sean Silver as a governance board member enabled the project to pool Groundwork into the partnership and aims to use food redistribution and waste prevention to develop communities. As the project develops membership on top of the policy and process that has been defined by the CRF programme, more community organisations will be drawn into the ‘One Place One Voice’ approach to a circular food network in North Northamptonshire. Groundwork represents the bridge between the business-orientated facets of the project to the community and voluntary sector.

The project offers a novel approach to building sustainability, resilience and security in the food sector and the community in North Northamptonshire. With new partnerships come new teething issues – community and voluntary organisations operate in different ways to business-orientated groups, with a wider range of interests and objectives incorporated into one project.

3.3 Project Context

3.3.1 Local Context

North Northamptonshire is home to a historic and notable base of cereal, condiments, fruit and vegetable production. Of the 381 square miles of North Northamptonshire, it is estimated that about 70% is rural. Research undertaken by Northamptonshire ACRE in 2020 for those living in rural areas identified that 58% of respondents did not know where to go to access food support if they needed it and 45% said food was more expensive because of their rural location.

Food poverty is a key issue within areas of North Northamptonshire. According to data from the British Red Cross and via Local Insight (Northamptonshire Community Foundation Northamptonshire Insights), the food vulnerability scores for East Northamptonshire, Kettering and Wellingborough were noted as ‘high risk’ areas.

In a post-Brexit, post-pandemic landscape, food and drink manufacturing is thought to have an opportunity to develop its own sustainability. The project represents a seizing of the opportunities provoked by COP26; MiN and NACRE saw an opportunity to submit a bid than incorporated all sides of the food network from farming and food production through to food producers and food banks. The project forms the first step in illustrating the work that could be done to connect food production with people in need.

The local food base is facing a perfect storm of skills shortages, a lack of staff, price increases, disruptions to the supply chain and high energy prices. Northamptonshire more widely is also facing a severe economic downturn, with total numbers of unemployed Job Seekers’ Allowance, National Insurance credits and Universal Credit claimants increasing by 59.3% since March 2020 to 42,725.

3.3.2 Market Failure

The food and drink manufacturing industry is the UK's largest manufacturing sector, with 11,675 of enterprises contributing £29.92bn in GVA to the economy annually and 372,000 in employment in England and Wales alone, whilst 97.8% of active FDM companies are SMEs. In 2021, total food and drink exports were worth more than £21.44bn to the UK economy. However, with inflation at a 30-year high in the UK, and Brexit, the pandemic, and global instability challenging supply chains, productive food manufacture and sustainability are increasingly crucial.

In more recent months, food and drink have been making an increasing contribution to consumer inflation, with supply chain issues, increasing costs and labour shortages seeing household food insecurity levels increase by 60% since the start of the pandemic². FDM businesses have themselves been disproportionately impacted by increased energy prices, with 60% reporting a significant effect on production and supply, the highest of all sectors.³

With 58% of businesses reporting that they passed on price increases to customers in March 2022 (compared to 37% across all sectors), it is imperative that people and organisations can access and produce food in a more efficient, sustainable way to mitigate against the prospect of inflation peaking in late 2022 (according to the Bank of England). Food and drink manufacturers facing increased production and transport costs, new export legislation and climate emissions targets require targeted sector business support in priority areas such as sustainability, food waste and innovation. Similarly, SMEs and farmers operating in more rural locations are looking to diversify in efforts to boost their incomes and ensure they remain sustainable. According to DEFRA, 66% of farms already have some form of diversified activity, from accommodation and catering to farm shops and renewable energy.

Food waste is responsible for 8% of greenhouse gas emissions. WRAP estimated annual food waste arisings within UK households, hospitality and food service (HaFS), food manufacture, retail and wholesale sectors in 2018 at around 9.5m tonnes, with a value of over £19bn a year, associated with more than 25 million tonnes of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. Over 85% (by weight) of this wasted food arises in households and food manufacture. Tackling food waste across supply chains is a key priority, with particular emphasis placed on driving out inefficiency in supply chains to prevent waste and surpluses from occurring in the first place. However, SMEs are less likely than larger food and drink manufacturers to be pursuing food waste options.

Previously, local council websites and databases provided by the Trussell Trust (the UK's largest operator of foodbanks) offered some overlap but also a large number of gaps, missing any one-man-bands or new organisations that haven't been captured yet. The mapping element of the project is therefore designed to join-up a comprehensive network of businesses and organisations interested in sustainability and local produce in North Northamptonshire.

The project also focuses on three particular applications as means of reducing food waste and supporting the realisation of net zero ambitions:

² The Food Foundation, 'Food Insecurity Tracking', <https://foodfoundation.org.uk/initiatives/food-insecurity-tracking>

³ Office for National Statistics, Business Insights and Conditions Survey (BICS)

- Food waste in SMEs in food service and food production, through gifting to local foodbanks or resale.
- Food manufacturing connecting directly to foodbanks.
- Greater understanding of the importance of reducing food waste in households, food manufacture and food service and access to affordable food.

Moreover, the 'Planning for Sustainable Growth in the Oxford-Cambridge Arc' (February 2021) report similarly prioritises collaboration, digital transformation and sustainability as a means of achieving sustainable growth.

3.3.3 Project Rationale

The mapping identifies hospitality businesses and food and drink producers to pilot one of three food waste/sustainability applications to reduce food waste and showcase sustainability options. The apps are designed to encourage sustainable practices amongst businesses including local offset partnerships, and to connect consumers to affordable, surplus food as a means of reducing food waste. With 8% of greenhouse gas emissions attributed to food waste, the project's ambition to support shorter supply chains and its efforts to redistribute food will reduce the sector's communal carbon footprint whilst reducing inequalities of access between urban and rural areas.

The project serves a dual purpose of reducing food waste for environmental reasons and reusing food waste for community benefit. There is increasing demand for foodbanks, which are increasingly being forced to use their cash reserves to purchase food, whereas previously they could rely on donations from both supermarkets and individuals. Donations from individuals have rapidly diminished in the face of the cost-of-living crisis. It is therefore increasingly crucial to connect the food waste associated with restaurants, hospitality and food producers with those in need rather than letting surplus goods go to landfill.

Food is diverted from landfill or from Anaerobic Digestion, generating both an economic return for suppliers and a cost saving for local people seeking more affordable food, whilst creating the added benefit of connecting suppliers to community initiatives, creating a more resilient, sustainable local food chain. Although the project will have a positive impact on people in need of accessing food from local sources, the pilot is primarily concerned with identifying the best route to decrease food waste from businesses and organisations.

In addition to the pertinent food crises justifications for the map, the project aims to provide a platform for people to shop locally by identifying local farm shops and independent food producers. Shopping locally is an environmentally conscious decision for some due to the shortened supply chain, and a non-negotiable choice for those living in rural areas but without the ability to travel far due to personal circumstances. Multifaceted, the app is also designed for pubs and restaurants who want to use local produce to utilise food producers directly in the surrounding area.

It is important to acknowledge that the CRF application for the Full Circle project was made at a time of great enthusiasm, energy and hope with aligned goals and commitments to sustainability targets being made at an international level by governments. The profile and publicity around COP26 ensured a focus on 'sustainability' cascaded through to government departments and

agencies, businesses and individuals who were keen to find ways to contribute and play their part in supporting the commitments. In reality, businesses have faced challenges in the shape of the energy- and cost-of-living crises, which has seen focus shift towards survival with the longer-term idea of sustainability becoming a nice to have rather than a must have.

3.4 Appropriateness of Initial Design

3.4.1 Aspirations

The primary aspiration for the project was to enhance visibility of the entire food network, identifying any gaps in the supply chain and allowing NACRE and MiN to get know this part of the county well. With the relatively new Unitary Authority still in its infancy, the project serves a useful function to allow them to get to understand the rural food chain, raising awareness around sustainability and rural needs in the area.

Food producers, hospitality and catering businesses are thought to report that they are often left with surplus food. The food waste and sustainability audit process aims to encourage businesses to avoid allowing produce to go to landfill/Anaerobic Digestion where possible. Food waste that is not fit for human consumption can be used for animal feed, whilst edible produce could be purchased at a reduced rate by those accessing foodbanks or those that are struggling economically. The project is hoping to eventually encourage community-wide bulk purchasing of surplus produce for residents and to support community growing projects.

It is hoped that residents using the map will be able to access local producers quicker and easier than previously due to a raised awareness. The creation of the network itself aims to bring foodbanks and other organisations to work in closer collaboration to access surplus food. The project aims to connect such surplus food with community groups who have access to volunteers and who are aware of where support is most needed in their area, whether that be rough sleepers or those using foodbanks.

The project combines an ethos of no waste with an innovative desire to both support individuals and families who want to develop healthier lifestyles as well as businesses who want to access new markets. There is an ambition to see the map used by farmers to identify areas of diversification in terms of what they are growing and to provide additional platforms from which they can generate income from surplus food.

From a Public Health perspective, the project is the first step to providing a platform from which to illustrate the entire food journey. Northamptonshire is agricultural in nature and is home to significant swathes of food production and farming, which means the county plays host to the entire food supply chain, from 'field to fork'. The project is the first of its kind to consider the food journey in its entirety – it is designed to identify a linked solution to each layer, from production to consumption, solutions that prevent and distribute food waste. It is hoped that the project will act as a core model onto which additional services could be bolted-on where appropriate, one that pulls together a variety of actors who share the same agenda, where the outcomes are above and beyond the sum of their parts.

Overall, the idea of the ‘full circle’ is by raising awareness and visibility on the one hand, the project can generate interest and conversations around sustainability and food waste, with the apps presenting a means of utilising technology platforms to achieve those aims. The digital approach to reducing food waste and developing sustainability credentials amongst SMEs is hoped to drive good practices and to support the businesses involved to market their journeys and achievements more easily.

3.4.2 Target Area

Although MiN operate and work with businesses from across Northamptonshire, and NACRE works predominantly with rural communities across the whole of Northamptonshire, the project represents an opportunity to use North Northamptonshire as a pilot to spread support activities into new target areas.

In order to achieve the ambition of a vibrant network of services, businesses, producers and consumers, the project needs to demonstrate its viability and impact in the small pilot area of North Northamptonshire first. It is crucial that the project can demonstrate how the Sustainable Food Network and the Full Circle group can support resilience, efficiency, productivity and sustainability in North Northants in order to gain support and earmark a sustainable, circular food model as a priority for local authorities.

3.4.3 Impact of Covid-19/Ukraine on Delivery

One of the key challenges (not unique to the project) is that when the project was proposed, sustainability was more of a priority at a business level. In the last 6 to 12 months, businesses have been in survival mode, suffering from Covid-19, staffing issues, as well as increasing energy and fuel costs. The project was designed in response to COP26 in Glasgow in which sustainability was given its highest profile, with Covid assumed to be coming to an end and the cost-of-living crisis/fuel price inflation yet to be anticipated.

Although businesses recognise the importance of sustainability, it has been hard for the project to convince them that it is a priority for the moment. Some businesses have said that they don't have the capacity to engage with the project as much as first thought due to a variety of reasons, including needing to let staff go, costs have become prohibitively expensive, or because their supply chains have been disrupted by the war in Ukraine.

Businesses are being forced to rethink their business models and diversify in order to survive. Businesses are increasingly reluctant to move forwards with sustainability developments than before. Businesses are prioritising operational maintenance over strategic development, review and improvement. For example, the Food Loop aspects has been developed in conjunction with Produced in Kent, with the app operational only in Kent and North Northamptonshire. PIK are similarly finding limited take-up due to those three environmental factors.

The project is thought to have highlighted lots of food larders and banks that have likely come into being in recent months due to increased need as a result of either the Covid-19 pandemic or the cost-of-living crisis. NACRE have worked to identify these that weren't known before. MiN have similarly sought to identify any farms shops and producers not already featured on their database.

Through a range of targeted media and marketing approaches the project hopes the mapping exercise will be able to fill in those gaps as much as possible.

Over the course of the pandemic, project delivery shifted online to remote working. It was felt that for any future Sustainable Food Network project to succeed, it would need to balance a hybrid model that takes advantage of remote working where appropriate, but one that also uses a 'boots on the ground' model in order to capture new and local organisations. The project team are thought to be more creative and dynamic when working in-person.

There is arguably more of a need for projects of this nature to make the case for sustainability in the face of hardship than when the project was designed. Rapidly rising inflation and the associated war in Ukraine has made the project increasingly pertinent for businesses and residents alike.

However, these environmental factors have had a positive impact on the mapping exercise joining up community food banks and larders, which has seen a huge increase in demand from a greater number of vulnerable people in the area. Moreover, the pandemic engaged a wider number of community organisations to combat food poverty than previously. There is therefore a significant opportunity to use food to support community projects as well as families in response to both the Covid-19 pandemic and the cost-of-living crisis; food can be used for educational purposes as well as for its nutritional value.

4.0 Progress Against Targets

This section outlines Full Circle’s progress towards achieving the output and spend targets stated in the CRF contracts, with a focus on project implementation, drawing performance against expenditure, activity, and output targets. It entails analysing quantitative data provided by Northamptonshire ACRE and supplementing it with qualitative evidence gathered through consultations to provide commentary where appropriate.

The evaluation method has been designed to allow the positive / negative impact on those assisted to be measured, both qualitatively and quantitatively, while also highlighting the direct impact of the assist delivered and drawing conclusions against the hypotheses established at the start of the project.

4.1 Output Targets

4.1.1 Contracted Outputs

The project was contracted to deliver the following UKCRF outputs and associated outcomes:

Contracted Outputs	Project Target
Organisations (businesses) engaged in knowledge transfer activity following support	110
Increase in footfall as a result of support	100
<i>Source: CRF Application Form</i>	

Output Breakdown	Project Target
Businesses (food and drink producers, hospitality businesses)	
Small businesses (less than £10.2m turnover)	70
Medium businesses (less than £36m turnover)	20
Large businesses (over £36m turnover)	10
Organisations (food and drink producers, foodbanks and similar food related)	
Public	20
Private	30
Voluntary	50
<i>Source: CRF Application Form</i>	

4.2 Progress Towards Targets

4.2.1 Review of Outputs Achieved

The table over the page lists each of the outputs achieved up to and including December 2022 and records the target contracted, the progress to date compared to those targets, and how that relates as a percentage towards the CRF contracted outputs.

Contracted Outputs	Project Target	Progress Against Targets	%
Organisations (businesses) engaged in knowledge transfer activity following support	110	140	127%
Increase in footfall as a result of support	100	N/A	N/A
<i>Source: CRF Application Form</i>			

Output Breakdown	Project Target	Progress Against Targets	%
Businesses (food and drink producers, hospitality businesses)			
Small businesses (less than £10.2m turnover)	70	82	117%
Medium businesses (less than £36m turnover)	20	12	60%
Large businesses (over £36m turnover)	10	4	40%
Organisations (food and drink producers, foodbanks and similar food related)			
Public	20	2	10%
Private	30	32	107%
Voluntary	50	62	124%
<i>Source: CRF Application Form</i>			

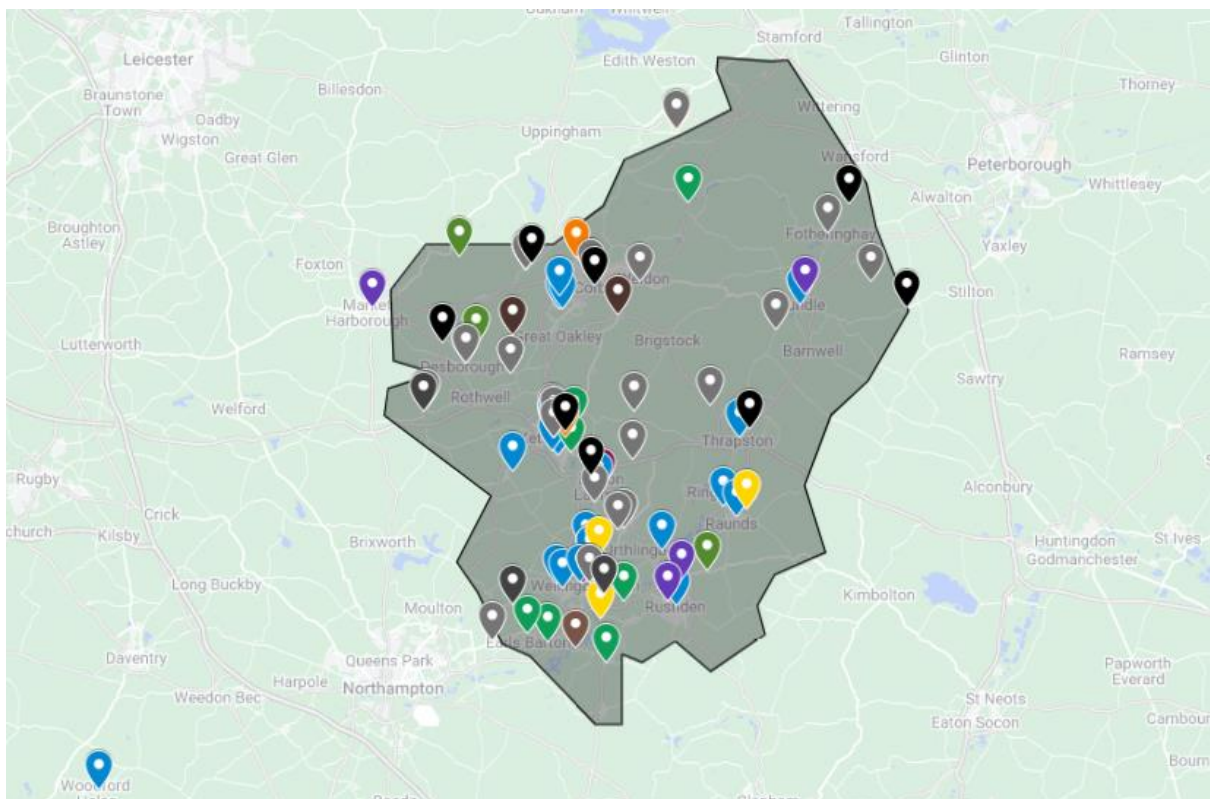
- The project has supported **140** organisations with knowledge transfer activity to date, which represents **127%** of the overall target of **110** respectively. The project has recorded details for 208 organisations in total and is still making efforts to identify any community groups involved in food.
- An additional 51 community groups and SMEs were approached to be added to the map; although keen to be involved in the project, they chose not to be featured on the map due to concerns about increasing footfall as a result, as they felt they wouldn't be able to accommodate more users.
- The project approached 233 businesses about signing-up to the food apps and assessment tool; of these, 100 have registered.
- With regards to Public Organisations signing up to the map, only 2 public food banks requested to be added. It was found that the majority of public sector organisations approach did not provide the sort of service that would make sense for them to be added to a public-facing online map.
- The project has made excellent progress with regards to the outputs relating to small businesses, having already achieved **117%** of the overall target with weeks of delivery still remaining.
- Similarly, the project has exceeded expectations in terms of its target number of private (**107%**) and voluntary (**124%**) organisations supported.
- The project will need to concentrate resources on recruiting public organisations across the rest of the programme.

- This can be attributed to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic; evidence from consultation with the project team and stakeholders suggests that business, even innovative ones, have concentrated on survival and staff retention rather than growth through recruitment.

It is worth acknowledging the intangible nature of many of the additional / non-contracted outputs produced as a result of organisations' involvement with the Full Circle project. Organisations themselves report that the project has helped to broker ad-hoc relationships with local community groups and charities, or to instil sustainable practices into business models, which isn't necessarily captured in these outputs yet. The experience of other similar projects suggests that outcomes relating to footfall are often realised sometime after the intervention has taken place.

4.2.2 Food Chain Mapping

The map has a variety of colour-grouped pins showing farms and farm shops, producers, large manufacturers, independent food shops, rural supermarkets to foodbanks and community larders and those involved in tackling food poverty.



North Northamptonshire Sustainable Food Place – Map (December 2022)



The map illustrates that the northeast region of North Northamptonshire is the least well served; although the map shows the location of its members, it does not demonstrate the reach or catchment area for each.

It should be noted however that some organisations have chosen not to join the map in an effort to reduce their visibility or because they couldn't cater for additional footfall. Anecdotal evidence of benevolent restaurants donating surplus food wishing to remain anonymous, or community larders already at full capacity, allude to the good works/social responsibility that many businesses have while generating additional revenue for themselves and maintaining a level of service to existing clients in need (for example, food bank users).

4.2.3 Project Expenditure

The table below shows the contracted expenditure compared with the spend to. As of December 2022, the majority of the contracted spend has been achieved.

Activity	Contracted Costs	Actual Spend
Other Costs Total	£106,250	£105,626.08

There is a small underspend can be attributed to the Full Circle website costing less than expected:

5.0 Delivery and Management

This section provides a qualitative analysis of the implementation and management of the project. It includes an analysis of delivery performance, marketing, manufacturer and beneficiary engagement, governance, management, ideas and next steps.

5.1 Project Delivery

5.1.1 Project Management

The novel CRF model incorporates traditional business support functions with community interests and the voluntary sector. The project is seen as a 'match.com'-esque model for food production and consumption in the area.

NACRE is responsible for the funding and have set up a Scrutiny Board for PMs to report any challenges, updates and progress. MiN and NACRE in tandem sit on the Scrutiny Board alongside a number of other local partners. The core project team sit in tandem with a representative from the Communities Team (North Northants Council), the Food Bank Alliance, as well as Public Health and local community/charity personnel in regular monthly meetings.

The Steering Group is thought to be an effective mechanism for delivering the visions of both NACRE and North Northants, with partners sharing collaborative visions. The small size of the group is considered a strength, with each member dedicated, committed, and expected to contribute fully, challenge and add ideas were appropriate.

The NACRE and MiN project staff catch up on a bi-weekly basis, and the project is largely steered by semi-regular team meetings and interspersed Scrutiny Board meetings and project meetings with the wider group – the North Northamptonshire Sustainable Food Network, which has been operating for around 18 months, launched the CRF project one year after its establishment. In the future, the Sustainable Food Network is expected to implement monthly meetings alongside a clearer programme of work for the year, with the structure allowing for members to come and go at different times when required.

5.1.2 Process

To engage businesses, the project issued questionnaires via a QR code that provided more information about the project, where they could fill in their basic details and allowing for data sharing across the two partners. Businesses/organisations are then contacted to understand what each of them does, and to establish whether they are interested in any of the available apps. Businesses are then sent the appropriate links for each of the apps that they have shown interest in, with businesses supported by the apps to complete the required information to sign-up to the platform.

NACRE and MiN have together set up a share-point through Teams, consolidating the information gathered from businesses – with permission – to aid data sharing and collaboration in a GDPR compliant way. In practice, each partner approaches with a slightly different angle, with NACRE

concentrating on food banks and food larders, whereas MiN have focused more on producers and hospitality organisations. Food producers might be signed up at one end of the project to market their surplus food, whilst foodbanks are signed-up to receive the surplus food at the other end.

In practice, the project has worked more collaboratively than expected, with the strands working more in tandem than exclusive from one another. There has been some crossover, with NACRE speaking to some hospitality or cafes if they have been local or because they were already known to the NACRE team. NACRE has however made sure to avoid duplicating any MiN members. Additionally, Full Circle has worked very closely with the North Northants Food Bank group in conjunction with MiN.

This represents a slight divergence from the early designs of the project, which expected the mapping exercise to feed into the food waste applications. This can partly be attributed to data; the project has been conscious that businesses – particularly producers and hospitality businesses - belonging to MiN's database had signed up as part of MiN only, or the Weetabix Food and Drink Awards through the Mallows Company. The project was thus wary of handing the data over to NACRE for the mapping exercise in a GDPR compliant way.

5.1.3 Performance

Mapping Exercise

The mapping has started effectively, although there is currently an imbalance between food crisis-orientated organisations and hospitality businesses. The map was delayed whilst the website itself was set up and whilst the site waited to secure a domain name. Project staff have needed to adapt their approach to engaging with businesses to secure their permission to be included on the map, instead visiting the premises in person, which has proved much more successful. In-person visits have also proved to be a more effective way of explaining the project to organisations and to demonstrate the importance of the interventions before other problems arise.

The mapping has perhaps been easier to generate outputs because of an 'opt-out' approach, meaning organisations would be featured on the map with information readily available from the public domain unless they requested otherwise. It should be noted however that some organisations have chosen not to join the map in an effort to reduce their visibility or because they couldn't cater for additional footfall. Anecdotal evidence of benevolent restaurants donating surplus food wishing to remain anonymous, or community larders already at full capacity, allude to the balance between generating additional revenue whilst maintaining a level of service to existing clients in need.

The mapping has already engaged a number of not-for-profit organisations in the mapping picture, although there are a vast number of businesses who would benefit from a place in the map. Although foodbanks are perhaps the most closely associated charitable organisation with the programme, there are many more organisations that use food as part of their project work. Until the project has established a core of organisations, it cannot access the wider market. The core is also important to meet people's expectations.

It should also be acknowledged that the Full Circle map has at times been in competition with the DiscoverNN mobile app launched by North Northamptonshire Council and funded by government's Welcome Back Fund. Both the Full Circle and DiscoverNN apps aim to support local businesses and to encourage people to shop local, and there is some overlap with retailers and eateries who could be featured on both – DiscoverNN is primarily focused on culture and tourism and includes green spaces, theme parks, water activities, shopping, local eateries, health, beauty and business services.

Sustainability Applications

The project has purchased annual licenses to the Zellar, Food Loop and Too Good To Go platforms, which provides access to the businesses without cost or risk, allowing organisations to test the interventions over the course of a year before deciding whether to continue the subscription themselves. The difficulty is in the lack of capacity within the business to invest their time in sustainability efforts; whereas larger businesses might have specific sustainability-orientated staff, smaller businesses don't.

Despite the relationships being fostered by the fledgling project, there have been difficulties in signing-up businesses to the sustainability apps, even amongst businesses who have shown a genuine interest in participating the scheme but who are now preoccupied with survival. Moreover, some of the community-based organisations such as foodbanks have been concerned about the added visibility and footfall that the apps might generate, with fears of oversubscription commonplace at a time when they are already struggling to support their members. Each of the applications is discussed in brief below:

- **Food Loop:** when the project was first set up, the Food Loop app hadn't been finalised (eventually launching in April 2022), so although the project could raise awareness of the service, the app wasn't yet operational. With the app operational, it has been easier to demonstrate the potential benefits to organisations. There is anecdotal evidence of local producers using the app to foster new connections in their local communities, and data shows that North Northamptonshire has signed-up more members than in Kent – where the app was developed and launched.
- **Zellar** has arguably proven the most effective app of the three; although some producers have no waste product, sustainability is almost universally applicable to all sizes of business: small shops are reported to have adopted new processes to reduce food that is near its sell-by-date or to use waste food for baking; some producers have found it useful to benchmark their sustainability journey against other similar organisations; and some consider it crucial to identify other organisations with sustainability credentials that fit with their greener ethos. It is agreed that the Zellar app would prove to be more effective across the wider Northamptonshire area as it would be able to access and connect with more farms.
- The sustainability audit has struggled somewhat too, with some of the larger producers and organisations already involved in securing B CORP status, which is a much longer and more expensive process needed to meet the sustainability requirements of major supermarkets. Zellar is more of a narrative of their sustainability journey, where businesses can earn credits,

with their sustainability score illustrated on their profile. For larger businesses who would typically employ sustainability managers, B CORP is a much bigger company status for sustainability and environmental targets. The status is expected for some suppliers. The project is instead targeted at more local, mid-sized hospitality producers.

- **Too Good To Go:** although a number of businesses/providers have created a profile on the Too Good to Go app, there has been some lag in the businesses actually supplying food for the recipients also signed-up to the platform. The Full Circle project chose to reprofile the Too Good To Go budget after the app failed to distribute appropriate licences for the North Northamptonshire area. The team have continued to promote the app as part of the full circle approach.

The Full Circle project aims to track food from producers, to restaurants, to food banks. In practice, all aspects of the circle need to be operational in order for the project to succeed. The rural nature of the project has made it challenging to secure enough organisations for each element of the circle for it to work. The challenge is recruiting enough members to a newly-launched membership platform – one that extolls the virtue of mass membership – that at the start, doesn't have any members.

As of December 2022, the project was aiming to sign-up 50 organisations respectively to the map and to the sustainability apps. At present, a significant number of businesses have been signed-up to feature on the map, whilst around 100 businesses have registered to the apps. The project team will need to focus on retail and hospitality businesses in order to meet the mapping output targets, with the finite number of food banks, food larders, community kitchens and community gardens thought to be identified already. Despite the strong interest, food banks are often short on volunteers and are also similarly preoccupied with supporting their members rather prioritising sustainability. It is only through conversations with the project team can they glean what the benefit of a more circular food economy could be for them.

Although the project is slightly behind schedule in terms of outputs achieved, it is confident of achieving and surpassing all targets in time – the CRF project represents the start of a process; the apps will continue operating, as will the businesses, with the project designed to broker the first relationships. It is also worth acknowledging that MiN have around 85 members, which represents a strong pipeline of businesses to be signed-up to the project when it is fully operational.

5.2 Challenges

Engaging with businesses and not-for-profit organisations alike has been more difficult than first expected. It was suggested that over the course of the Covid-19 pandemic, an urgent sense of community had developed, one that raised awareness of people's immediate access to food – whether through restrictions in travelling/shopping as necessitated by national lockdown requirements, or via foodbanks. It was hoped that following COP26, there would be a much more concerted effort to marry the shared drives towards responsibility and sustainability, and much more of a focus on preventing waste or diverting it to those in need. In practice, businesses have

been preoccupied with survival and have shown some reluctance to engage in new projects when their own future is so uncertain.

It is anticipated that the challenging economic climate will persist through the lifetime of the project, which is likely to translate to a continued reprioritisation of survival over sustainability amongst target businesses. In response, the project has sought to be more refined in its targeting of beneficiaries, aiming support at smaller shops including farm shops, more publicising, expanding its horizons to encapsulate schools (which are less impacted by fluctuations), but the challenges remain.

The project has benefitted from an existing database of businesses and organisations operating in the North Northamptonshire area. A key objective is to identify and map organisations that are perhaps missing from formal supply chains – such as community larders. One key challenge from the outset was the county-wide nature of both MiN and NACRE's operations, whereas the project is concentrated on North Northamptonshire only. Northamptonshire is characterised by two Unitary Authorities; the funding for the CRF project only applies to North Northamptonshire, which excludes many of the county's larger conurbations such as Northampton.

There have been a number of challenges stemming from the rapid nature of the roll-out, confirmation and delivery of the Community Renewal Framework. There were substantial delays between the project bid submission and approval of funds, with the project subsequently squeezed into a shorter timeframe than initially designed. Although the reduced timeframe has not stopped the project from commencing, it has put pressure on some elements of the delivery: for example, the project needed to skip the testing phase of the apps. The project would have benefitted from more time to design and develop the project. The team has also had to facilitate new conversations with new organisations, to set up a new community – innovative, novel approaches can take time.

The project has since greatly benefitted from a short-term extension which has enabled partners to deliver outputs into December 2022. It was suggested that most CRF projects would have struggled to deliver fully their schemes within the short timeframe, in part due to the time taken to build the project infrastructure, project relationships, and to mobilise staff and activities.

5.3 Lessons Learnt

The applications could have a significant legacy in North Northamptonshire and beyond providing the project can secure enough engagement and get the apps fully functional quickly. Without enough take up, early users might find a lack of options on the apps. Similarly, the map will need regularly updating, and in the future might have to be split between hospitality and food crises functions. Once fully operational, it will be important for traffic to be driven to the map to ensure that it is used.

The project could perhaps have been clearer about what each of the technological solutions are and how they fit into the marketplace. For example, Too Good to Go is a national application in which businesses subscribe in order to be able to list surplus food packages on the platform for consumers to purchase in order to reduce waste and generate a small financial return.

The project's scope represents a very small area of Too Good to Go's national agenda, and Full Circle was unable to negotiate a suitable contract with them. With Zellar, the project needed to understand where the app fit into the wider marketplace and how it would be differentiated from B CORP status.

Food Loop was developed by Produced in Kent in conjunction with the project team. With the tailored versions of the applications brand new, there was always going to be teething issues and development required. As of June 2022, the project has managed to secure the appropriate landing pages for each of the applications.

MiN and NACRE's project officers could perhaps have worked more collaboratively to split the target area, focusing on all potential businesses and organisations rather than relying on the networks and expertise of each partner to target their niche. There is also more the project could do to work with different community groups to tap into other organisations and their existing networks.

At present, with a small budget for a demonstrator project, the Steering Group is largely acting out of goodwill. An additional Project Officer would allow the scheme to plan and implement many more interventions – an officer could plan and identify which areas could be targeted, before the Steering Group (complete with its representatives from across the spectrum) could each make decisions and act in a way that creates a joined-up structural difference.

Moreover, with the CRF programme scheduled to reach an abrupt halt, there is a risk that the efforts and momentum started by the pilot project will be lost. Business engagement and website maintenance will require continued staffing/funding. The achievement of moving from a pilot to a scale-up could be slow.

5.4 The Future

5.4.1 Opportunities

The main opportunity for the project is around full circle connectivity and the ability to trace the path of food from producer to end user in a much more socially and environmentally conscious way, with the added value of some financial benefits for those involved. There has been a huge rise in veganism, vegetarianism, and the connection between food and the environment; the project forms part of the wider conversation on food origins and the environmental impact of food production; the project could allow North Northamptonshire to be at the forefront of the shift, using technology to connect their own local full circle food chains. The project's technology makes it easy and cheap for people and businesses to reduce their food waste in a cheap and efficient way.

With the county now split across two unitary authorities, the project has an opportunity to demonstrate the value of their network in one area in hope of influencing the other to embed the same approach. There is scope for the project's identified approach to be implemented across urban areas and across local authority boundaries, expanding the reach from North Northamptonshire to encompass towns and other rural areas across the county which are also facing rural poverty. A number of businesses from West Northants have demonstrated a

willingness to be involved in the project. Other areas of the county are identifying themselves as the 'UK's Bread Basket' etc; it is hoped that the Sustainable Food Network could help the county to exhibit its own food identity.

It is hoped that in the wake of Covid-19 and hopefully a mitigated cost of living crisis, consumers and businesses alike will be able to invest more time and understanding in how to implement the various interventions to their benefit.

The project is acting as a catalyst for the development of the wider Sustainable Food Network; the Sustainable Food Network is already looking to recruit a food project manager to continue the legacy of the project, with the project representing the 'setting up' phase, before the initiative continues into the future where it is likely to achieve outputs far above and beyond the initial targets.

5.5 Summary – Delivery and Management

- The Full Circle project, made possible through funding from the UK Community Renewal Fund, is providing farmers, producers, suppliers and food retailers with a trio of online platforms to help them chart their journey to sustainability and to provide a matchmaking service that will link hospitality businesses with producers and suppliers who have food produce that would otherwise go to waste. North Northamptonshire as an exemplar of a rural area is facing burgeoning pressures around food security in which its residents are struggling to feed themselves – it is increasingly important to connect those with food to those without.
- The project aims to use the broader scope afforded by the Community Renewal Fund to take a more holistic approach to supporting sector development and sustainability, better integrating the network of disjointed business and community support interventions in a programme with a wider focus than EU funding to provide a bottom-up co-designed approach.
- The NNSFN Steering Group is thought to be an effective mechanism for delivering the visions of both NACRE and MiN with North Northants Council, with partners sharing collaborative visions. The small size of the group is considered a strength, with each member dedicated, committed, and expected to contribute fully, challenge and add ideas where appropriate.
- In practice, the project has worked more collaboratively than expected. There has been some crossover, with NACRE speaking to some hospitality businesses or cafes if they have been local or because they were already known to the NACRE team. There is more the project could do to work with different community groups to tap into other organisations and their existing networks.
- Engaging with businesses and community organisations alike has been more difficult than first expected. It was suggested that over the course of the Covid-19 pandemic, an urgent sense of community had developed, one that raised awareness of people's immediate access to food. In practice, businesses have been preoccupied with survival and have shown some reluctance to engage in new projects when their own future is so uncertain. In response, the project has sought to be more refined in its targeting of beneficiaries, aiming support at smaller shops

including farm shops, more publicising, expanding its horizons to encapsulate schools (which are less impacted by fluctuations), but the challenges remain.

- The applications could have a significant legacy in North Northamptonshire and beyond providing the project can secure enough engagement and get the apps fully functional quickly. Without enough take up, early users might find a lack of options on the apps. In practice, all aspects of the circle need to be operational in order for the project to succeed. Until the project has established a core of organisations, it cannot access the wider market. The core is also important to meet people's expectations. Similarly, the map will need regularly updating, and in the future might have to be split between hospitality and food crises functions.
- There have been a number of challenges stemming from the rapid nature of the roll-out, confirmation and delivery of the Community Renewal Framework. There were substantial delays between the project bid submission and approval of funds, with the project subsequently squeezed into a shorter timeframe than initially designed. The project would have benefitted from more time to design and develop the project. The team has also had to facilitate new conversations with new organisations, to set up a new community – innovative, novel approaches can take time.
- The project provides an opportunity for different organisations – from commercial farmers to rural food banks, from the charitable sector to public health – to come together to develop an identity and long-lasting mechanism for a sustainable food network in North Northamptonshire. The project is forming connections across the full circle of producers and consumers that provide a series of mutual benefits including the avoidance of food waste, income generation, cost savings and support to those facing food shortages and food poverty. The project was always designed with legacy in mind – although the project has an end date, the apps will continue to operate.
- For producers, sustainability is a must and businesses are obligated to meet various sustainability targets as a priority. Businesses who are able to demonstrate their sustainability journey, or who are able to evidence the support they are giving to communities and food banks via their positioning on food waste, should secure a commercial advantage over other businesses.
- There is scope for the project's identified approach to be implemented across local authority boundaries, expanding the reach from North Northamptonshire to encompass towns and other rural areas across the county, which are also facing poverty. A number of businesses from West Northants have demonstrated a willingness to be involved in the project. It is hoped that the Sustainable Food Network could help the county to expand its own food identity.

6.0 Outcomes and Impact

To demonstrate the wide-ranging impact of the project, this section details the results of consultation with both staff and businesses engaged. A range of business consultation has been undertaken during the interim evaluation stage using the following:

- **Staff Feedback** – informed by consultation with project staff, this aims to detail the wider impacts and outcomes of the Full Circle project.
- **Case Studies of Beneficiary Organisations** – This section captures more in-depth feedback from one-to-one consultation with organisations who have received in depth support and provides a more detailed understanding of the impacts that support from the Full Circle project can have.

The findings of each of these is shown over the following pages.

6.1 Staff Feedback

6.1.1 Benefits

As the move towards sustainable practices picks up speed, the likes of Zellar and Food Loop will not be the only platforms available in the commercial landscape – the project is thus designed to help determine how popular/effective each of the interventions are, and whether the Sustainable Food Network should promote any in particular or simply all applications instead. The project gives the partners the opportunity to identify their approaches to supporting beneficiaries to reduce food waste, reduce food miles, as well as the other benefits associated with a mutually-beneficial food web. The relationships are a strength.

In hospitality, there is a growing perception amongst consumers that local is better; businesses will benefit from being able to demonstrate a small, local supply chain. In addition, many food waste solutions are currently expensive – landfill collection and even AD is prohibitively expensive for businesses. The project is forming connections across the full circle of producers and consumers that provide a series of mutual benefits including the avoidance of food waste, income generation, cost savings and support to those facing food shortages and food poverty. There are a mix of social, financial, environmental reasons to pursuing such a sustainable model.

For producers, sustainability is a must and businesses are obligated to meet various sustainability targets as a priority. Businesses are striving to achieve the ambitions set out by DEFRA (net zero or nature-positive by 2050), NFU (by 2040), and the supermarkets they are supplying to (by 2030). However, any shift towards net zero relies on a number of sometimes disjointed operational changes and initiatives - be that offsetting, renewable energy production, or recycling. The Zellar platform allows them to bring all of these efforts into one place; businesses can use the platform to display their narrative towards net zero.

For some businesses, the challenge can seem so vast and insurmountable, that the project's value is in its introduction to the solution, providing the first step. Zellar in particular allows businesses to organise their thoughts about their sustainability journey, to track their progress. There is currently

an unregulated industry around sustainability; although Zellar doesn't provide regulation, it provides structure and a score that helps to measure and demonstrate progress. Businesses who are able to demonstrate their sustainability journey on the Zellar platform, or who are able to evidence the support they are giving to communities and food banks via their positioning on food waste, should secure a commercial advantage over other businesses. For businesses, it is hoped that the platform/score could be used for marketing purposes.

The sustainability applications are also designed to build a community of North Northamptonshire businesses, with the hope that communication between businesses in the supply chain will aid the other elements of the project and will support the development of a triangulated supply chain. For example, a producers' surplus of specific ingredients could be used in local restaurants who might curate new dishes around the local supply. The project wants to create a legacy of a collaborative community of organisations who can support each other.

6.1.2 Impacts

The project provides an opportunity for different organisations – from commercial farmers to rural food banks, from the charitable sector to public health – to come together to develop an identity and long-lasting mechanism for a sustainable food network in North Northamptonshire. Food partnerships can drive a fundamental shift in local food culture and the local food system and become the hub of a rapidly growing good food movement of active and engaged citizens.

The project was always designed with legacy in mind – although the project has an end date, the apps will continue to operate; the project acts as an enabler in its of securing the licenses, the first step in understanding and connecting the full food supply chain. The interactive map – hosted on the Full Circle website via MiN – will remain the focal point that is accessible beyond the completion date for the CRF project. The project is forging links and raising awareness of sustainability as a priority in the area, and it is hoped that this will give the county a better chance of succeeding in the future.

The project is expecting to highlight the problems facing rural communities, whilst identifying how best they can be supported. From a social perspective, the project is highlighting the gaps in provisions to mitigate rural poverty, with nearly all efforts to date concentrated in city centres. People in the outlying areas could also benefit from travelling to a foodbank or having provisions delivered, whilst those in smaller towns and smaller parishes are lacking access to the same support services available in urban areas.

The project expects to have a lasting impact on younger people in the area by raising awareness of the potential links between food waste, sustainability, vulnerable families and foodbanks. This is arguably one of the successes of the project – although still in its infancy, North Northamptonshire is spearheading a new, innovative approach to a self-sustaining food network, one that is pushing boundaries in food waste and sustainability.

6.1.3 Unexpected Outcomes

Zellar is applicable to all businesses, be that food and drink or other sectors – an unexpected outcome has been the interest from local schools and catering departments looking to support their vulnerable families with free school meals in the wake of the cost-of-living crisis, whilst reducing food waste, and showing an interest in sustainability. As a result of these relationships, the project has begun having conversations about adopting food sustainability into the local curriculum.

Syan Farms (West Northants) were ineligible to join the project, but they are pursuing micro farming in a closed loop – an on-site solar farm supplements a water collection facility and a garden kitchen, which also serves as an educational tool, where local schools are invited to visit to developed a curriculum around micro-farming, sustainability, and food technology. Although the businesses sits outside the scope of the project, the educational arm is an offshoot from the project, an indirect spin-off that is owed to the conversations and relationships being brokered by MiN and NACRE together.

6.2 Case Studies

6.2.1 Mee Blueberries

Background

Mee Farmers are an established arable farm located in the Nene Valley, Northamptonshire. The farm is owned and managed by husband and wife team Peter and Zoe Mee with their children Charlie and Emily. The Mee family predominantly provide fresh fruit to supermarkets in the region, as well as selling grain wholesale for distribution both nationally and internationally.

In 2014, Peter and Zoe knew that in order for the business to be able to support the next generation, it had to diversify. Diversification is seen as a key way of delivering more financial sustainability of the business for future generations – farming is traditionally unreliable with success often dependent on weather, temperatures and other unpredictable factors. Planting 15 hectares of blueberries under polytunnels and installing a brand-new blueberry processing facility in 2019, the business is going from strength to strength.



Whereas the freshly picked fruit can be found on the shelves of leading supermarkets, as the fruit is graded and packed, fruit which would not meet supermarket shelf-life demands (because it is perfectly ripe at the time of picking) must be separated out. As this fruit is the sweetest and has the best flavour, it is frozen on site and it is this frozen fruit used in the business's new product lines.

The family's new range of blueberry-based products helps them to get the best of the excess berries they grow which would otherwise be classed as waste and likely used as animal feed. The

family harvested 150 tonnes of blueberries on their farm last year, 123 tonnes of which were packaged and transported around the UK to be sold in Waitrose and M&S. The remaining 27 tonnes would usually be classed as waste, but more than 12 tonnes have been used to develop the new product range. A proportion of the berries are frozen, with 6 tonnes sold in 2kg bags to local buyers, creating a short supply chain – any additional waste is then used to make a variety of new products: blueberry-flavoured gin liquor, jams, chutneys, fruit juice and chocolate bars.

The fruit is sold through a cooperative – Berry Gardens – which is sold nationwide; to encourage more local sales, Mee Farmers have increasingly organised pop-up shops on the farm and also sell to village shops in Northamptonshire. As the yield of blueberries on the farm has grown each year, so has the amount of waste. To date, the new ranges have allowed the business to reduce their waste by half.

The new lines of production require increased labour capacity too: the farm employs 1 FTE on the blueberries, 20 additional staff most of the year, plus around 70 seasonal staff all dedicated to fruit picking and packing.

As a result, the family have been recognised with an Innovation Award in the Weetabix Northamptonshire Food and Drinks Awards, as well as being named Family Farming Business of the Year in 2022.



Involvement with Full Circle

Sustainability is already an essential part of the business. Cardboard and plastic waste is recycled where possible, and renewable energy is used across the site, including solar panels and ground source heating. Increasingly, the larger supermarkets such as M&S require LEAF Marque Certification (Linking Environment and Farming), plus a number of additional modules to prove suppliers' environmental credentials – for example, as a minimum, suppliers are required to have 10% of their land in environmental stewardship.

Inspired to forge more links with local charities and businesses alike, the family engaged with the Full Circle project. At present, the small amount of food waste generated by the farm is distributed

locally. Mee Farmers have since forged close relationships with two local foodbanks – Peterborough Homeless Helpers and Milfield Community Fridge – for whom they donate fruit for food parcels or for use it chutneys to be sold for fundraising. The family have donated around 80kg of fruit to local homeless charities and foodbanks so far.

The business also sits on the new Full Circle interactive map, which they hope to use to identify other local businesses who share the same values or environmental credentials as them.

“The map is really good for business connectivity. We didn’t even know there were any local foodbanks other than those that have come to our local pop-up shop. That awareness of community – and connecting to community more – is really important”.

Having already made some progress with calculating the carbon footprint attached to the arable side of the business, Zellar was seen as a way of calculating the carbon linked to the farm’s fruit production, and to find ways of reducing its environmental impact. However, the Berry Gardens fruit cooperative already offer their own web-based carbon calculator for fruit businesses – Hortiplanet. For other retail and manufacturing outlets, Zellar is seen as really good at pointing out ways that they can start reducing their carbon impact, as they are likely to have less understanding of how to make the necessary changes.

6.2.2 Daylight Centre Fellowship

Background to the Project

Businesses across Northamptonshire have pledged their support and commitment to protecting the environment and to helping reduce food waste. The Full Circle project has seen scores of food and drink businesses from across north Northants unite to commit to sustainable, green change. Community cafes, food banks and food larders, food shops, community gardens, cafes, pubs, food manufacturers and farmers, have been featured in a new, interactive map. A trio of online platforms provides a matchmaking service that links hospitality businesses with producers and suppliers who have excess food produce.

Background to the Daylight Centre

The Daylight Centre Fellowship was established in 1994, registered in 2003 and ever since we have assisted disadvantaged and vulnerable adults particularly rough sleepers, vulnerably housed, those in poverty and those who are socially isolated. As such, we are at the very forefront of social action within Wellingborough and the surrounding areas.

For more than 26 years Wellingborough’s Daylight Centre Fellowship has been serving homeless people and those with complex social needs, including the vulnerable, lonely or those with addictions. Prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, the centre was a hive of activity, providing about 30 hot meals and 50 food parcels every day.

Although based in Wellingborough, there is no Daylight Centre equivalent in Kettering, Corby or elsewhere in North Northamptonshire. A number of service users travel to Wellingborough to access the services from the surrounding villages; at times, homeless people are helped into the town by benevolent passers-by.



Many charities have faced additional pressures due to the pandemic, especially those like the Daylight Centre whose services are often stretched. Clients became increasingly isolated whilst individuals and families on low incomes suffered even greater poverty. The Centre was forced to close and adapt its operational model to a delivery service instead, delivering 3,000 food parcels in the year following as well as 8,000 hot meals and snack packs to vulnerably-housed individuals and a further 8,000 meals to families in difficult financial circumstances. The Centre pivoted to provide takeaway hot snacks and drinks as well as showers for homeless individuals.

"So, the challenge was to meet the growing need in our community but with reduced staffing, with some being furloughed at the onset whilst we grappled with the 'new norm' and what it meant for us. "While we also have a large volunteer base, initially we had reduced capacity as some of our volunteers are in vulnerable groups and had to self-isolate.

"Funding was another issue. "The revenue from our Daylight charity shop was affected by retail closures and the necessity for reduced operating hours, with the result that there has been a deficit in our unrestricted operational funds, at a critical time of increased need.

The Centre also plays an important function in providing emotional support and reassurance for people who have the opportunity to connect with someone they know and trust.

The Veggie Patch

In March 2022 the Daylight Centre launched its 1-acre community allotment garden in Wollaston – the Daylight Veggie Patch – which is designed to empower those impacted by homelessness, poverty and social exclusion. The Centre works with service users, members of the community and corporate volunteers to grow organic fruit and vegetables. Service users and volunteers grow

together to weed out homelessness and harvest community. This brings opportunities for healthier lifestyles, social connectedness, contact with nature and personal development. By working together everyone can reap the benefits of improved mental and physical wellbeing.



The produce grown at the garden is used in the Centre’s kitchen to feed the service users, as well as supplementing the food donated to the Wellingborough Food Bank to provide more nutritional meal packages for families. Any surplus produce is sold, with every penny raised reinvested back into the project, helping our service users to live life on the veg.

The range of services requires substantial cash and food donations often collected in supermarkets. However, in the wake of the cost of living crisis the numbers of donations has reduced as people try to reduce spending where possible. The Veggie Patch forms part of the Centre’s wider vision to create long-term sustainable income across the foodbank, Daylight Centre’s community cafe, shop and allotment.

Involvement with Full Circle

The Daylight Centre Fellowship, based in Wellingborough, has signed up to Zellar, one of the apps provided by the Full Circle project.

Carina Fisher, chief executive of Daylight Centre Fellowship, said: “We are looking for things like ground coffee beans and eggshells – anything we can get our hands on really for the allotment which is brilliant in terms of the health and wellbeing of our service users.

“We believe everyone has the right to have a well-balanced diet and all the food we grow on our allotment will go straight to our food bank. We also hope to start selling produce to local restaurants and at all times aim to be environmentally focused with minimal food waste.”

Zellar is encouraging the Centre to complete its sustainability targets and to track their carbon emissions. For the Centre, environmental and financial sustainability are closely aligned – the app is supporting the Centre to explore where they could reduce energy and save costs at the same time, be that through turning lights off, using more efficient heating systems, or reducing the length of their supply chains.

Zellar calculates a sustainability score based on energy usage that can be used to raise awareness of sustainability within the organisation. The app also provides a useful list of tips and ‘easy win’ options to check, which are particularly valuable for a small charity balancing environmental ambitions with the day-to-day running of the site.

The Centre has also signed up to Too Good To Go which could see surplus produce from the kitchen or allotment sold to the public to generate additional revenue. Although the Centre has only recently signed-up, they are already benefitting from a new relationship with a local bakery based in Kettering who have since been donating 20 loaves of bread each week which represents a significant cost saving as bread has always been purchased by the Centre directly. The Centre hopes to create many more relationships with local producers that would support their long-term sustainability.

The Centre, the Wellingborough Food Bank and the Veggie Patch are all featured on the Full Circle map as well as google maps which is thought to be a useful means of raising awareness in the local area.

6.2.3 Cottingham Village Store

Background

A community shop serving the rural North Northamptonshire villages of Cottingham and Middleton, located between Corby and Market Harborough, The Village Store and Café sources all its meat from local farms, sells jams, marmalades and honey made by local producers and buys and sells its milk from the local Penrose Dairy. Allotment-holding villagers donate excess produce to the shop, to ensure nothing goes to waste. The Store and Café serves a local market of both elderly and young people, many of whom don’t drive and so cannot access the nearest supermarkets in Corby, plus cyclists and walkers passing through. Cottingham and Middleton boast a local population of 1,500 people.

“The village stores has a small footprint with limited fridge and freezer space. Every inch of it is filled with fresh, locally sourced produce, along with anything villagers may run out of. We are competing against supermarkets which people can easily drive to from here, but the shop has so much history and we are supported by villagers as well as ramblers and cyclists exploring the Jurassic Way.”

Cottingham Village Stores & Café has been owned by a Christian organisation since 2011 and the committee rents the premises for around £5,000 a year. Operating largely as a volunteer

organisation, the Store and Café rely on six management committee members, three part-time staff, and a bank of around 12 volunteers, which has been whittled down following the Covid-19 pandemic.



Involvement with Full Circle

Keen advocates of a 'buy local, sell local' mantra that directly aligns with the ambitions of the Full Circle project and wider Sustainable Food Network, the shop relies on input from the local community that provides it with a unique selling point over neighbouring supermarkets.

Allotment holders from the village donating their excess seasonal produce to the shop, ensuring food waste is minimised. The shop's local supply chain also utilises a nearby abattoir for meats, pies from Stamford, and a range of neighbouring suppliers. However, wholesale products such as dairy and milk production is harder to source locally, with milk thought to be re-badged a number of times before reaching the shop. The shop's biggest challenge at present is the rising cost of wheat and milk, whilst bread prices have increased 15% in the last month resulting in one local bakery going out of business.

Retired NHS Consultant, Sue Aspinall, the shop's committee, said: "We order in fresh produce every week from our suppliers and are always looking for more local suppliers and products. We may be a small player but like to think being part of Full Circle will put us on the map a bit more."



Cottingham Village Stores & Café is one of scores of businesses to have signed up for Northamptonshire's Full Circle project, pledging its support and commitment to protecting the environment and to helping reduce food waste.

As well as being featured on the Full Circle interactive map (which shows where all the food businesses, food banks and food larders are situated in north of the county), the community shop has also signed up to the Food Loop app, which matches businesses who may be seeking to receive or use food supplies with other businesses that have unwanted produce.

Impact of Involvement with Full Circle

"It's made a really big difference in the way we think about food waste; one of our volunteers now does proper stock control every couple of weeks, highlighting when things are nearing their sell-by-date so we can reduce them".

As a result of improved awareness, the shop has been able to reduce their food waste and improve their stock control. Their involvement is having consequences across the organisation, inspiring behavioural changes and reconsiderations of existing processes. For example, the team are now thinking about how much of any fresh product should be opened at any one time, and how long will it last in the fridge afterwards. Zellar is thought to be a step in the right direction towards providing a toolkit for small organisations to consider sustainability and food waste as part of their operation.

Additionally, the store and café sources vegetables from the local allotment. The Shop want to use the map to identify where their local food producers are – a portion of the shop is dedicated to local sellers, from chutneys, honey and brownies. Small shops are reliant on being able to distinguish themselves from larger organisations through offering local produce, which in turn

provides additional revenue to equally small local producers. The map is seen as a way of demonstrating to local producers and visitors alike that there is a market for locally produced food.

“The interactive map is a really brilliant idea. We get a lot of passing trade from walkers and cyclists coming through the village”.

“We became a lot more focused on using up things that were near their sell-by-date, using eggs for cakes and bread into bread and butter pudding, or vegetables for soup. Although we weren’t offloading it onto other people, we were recycling it in our little shop”.

6.2.4 The Green Patch

Background

The Green Patch, run by Groundwork Northamptonshire for more than 15 years, is an award-winning community garden and green space on the edge of the Grange housing estate in Kettering that hosts volunteer days, children’s clubs, education sessions and family events. Groundwork Northamptonshire has been managing and growing the Green Patch since 2007, transforming it from a site that wasn’t managed and barely used, into a vibrant green space and friendly hub that is used to host a number of services

The 2.5-acre site is the biggest community garden in Northamptonshire and offers sessions every Tuesday and Thursday for adults and children with special needs, volunteering days for companies, all whilst selling homegrown seasonal produce in vegetable boxes.



Groundwork Northamptonshire employ a full time gardener to manage the growing of produce, ably supported by approximately 40 volunteers.

The Green Patch also acts as a community hub for the local area, providing a food bank every Tuesday and Thursday in partnership with Tesco. Any excess that can't be distributed is composted. The multi-dimensional community garden prioritises health and wellbeing, access to green spaces, community growing schemes, and alleviating food poverty with nutritious, locally-grown food – all on the same site.

The Green Patch sees over 250 adults and children come through the gates every week – to some it has been a lifeline – and it is supported by a range of funders and partners. The Green Patch is tailoring activities towards an increasing number of vulnerable children facing food poverty as a result of the cost-of-living crisis.

Grey said: "By taking part in the Full Circle project, The Green Patch hopes to raise awareness locally of the importance of sustainability and reduction of food waste. We would encourage others to join Full Circle and make a difference to reducing the carbon footprint, promoting sustainable practises, and slashing food waste. We all need to play our part."

The Green Patch are already registered with Neighbourly, an online platform that helps businesses make a positive impact in their communities by donating volunteer time, money and surplus products – in this case, the Green Patch benefit from links to supermarkets that allows surplus food to reach the groups that can put it to good use, including: homeless centres, schools, breakfast clubs, community centres, community fridges, community cafes, night shelters, refuges, churches and hospices.

Neighbourly is home to a network of over 22,000 charities, schools and community groups across the UK and Ireland.



Involvement with Full Circle

The Green Patch is a proud member of the Full Circle Project, a Northamptonshire initiative focusing on sustainability and reducing food waste. The Green Patch is featured on the new Full Circle interactive map, which is helping to raise awareness of both the sources of surplus food and the potential for greater interconnectivity between food producers and users. There is an increasing understanding that reducing food waste is reliant on communication and connections between organisations. The app is a useful platform to raise awareness of food waste.

Sustainability has become increasingly central to The Green Patch and Groundwork Northamptonshire, who have invested in a number of initiatives which contribute to environmentally friendly practices as well as a wider effort to encourage the reuse and recycling of food where possible:

- Food forest poly-tunnels of perennial plants are grown into useful produce - with lots of herbaceous plants, herbs and flowers which are used in the food boxes.
- Fresh produce – The Green Patch runs a successful and seasonal ‘Veg Box’ scheme providing the local community with fresh produce at an affordable cost, encouraging healthy eating and positive well-being, with all proceeds going directly back into the running costs of the Green Patch. Local people are able to buy produce at affordable prices, thereby reducing food miles and climate emissions. To date, the Green Patch has sold hundreds of vegetable boxes to the local community.
- Grown produce is also used in cooking sessions for both volunteer sessions and those for children and families as part of an effort to raise awareness of where food comes from, and to support vulnerable families struggling to feed their children during the school holidays. In the Summer of 2022 alone, the Green Patch supported 600 vulnerable children in North Northamptonshire.
- Funded through Public Health, the new ‘Grow, Cook, Eat’ project aims to develop skills and confidence around cooking.
- A new environmental educational programme.

The Green Patch also host a ‘donation station’ for food that is close to its sell-by-date; the community garden acts as a conduit between supermarkets/local producers and communities of people in need – the ‘donation station’ is frequented daily by people short on food or looking to supplement their diets.

The community garden has proved so effective that the Green Patch is hoping to supply local restaurants with surplus local produce in the near future.

Manager Grey Lindley said: “Our vegetable boxes are sold from July to the end of February, and they have seasonal stuff in them like leeks, potatoes, broccoli, and salad greens. We are hoping to start supplying local restaurants with some fresh produce soon as well. Full Circle is helping us do this.”

6.3 Lessons Learnt from Case Studies

- Face-to-face contact with small organisations is thought to be crucial to securing interest in any Full Circle application – Jay and Craig played an invaluable role in making businesses feel like they have time for them, and helping them to determine which interventions are worthwhile and which aren't. Webinars, emails and marketing alone are often too easy to ignore. The Full Circle project and the Sustainable Food Network needs to retain its one-to-one approach that utilises The Mallows Company and Northamptonshire ACRE as a local partnership.
- It is important to highlight and market the map as a resource for walkers and cyclists to raise awareness of small shops in particular or producers offering pop-up shops.
- Neighbourly offers an existing platform that notifies potential users of surplus food. The Green Patch are already registered with Neighbourly, an online platform that helps businesses make a positive impact in their communities by donating volunteer time, money and surplus products – in this case, the Green Patch already benefit from links to supermarkets that allows surplus food to reach the groups that can put it to good use, including: homeless centres, schools, breakfast clubs, community centres, community fridges, community cafes, night shelters, refuges, churches and hospices.
- Similarly, some Full Circle members are located on the borders of the North Northamptonshire area, which allows them to access other population centres such as Market Harborough, which already hosts the Eco Village. Those closer to Harborough can tap into other local databases of producers which isn't necessarily as established in the target area yet. Any future Sustainable Food Network needs to consider how to integrate applications and databases across neighbouring areas to provide a more comprehensive network.

7.0 Value for Money

To explore the extent to which the Full Circle project has represented value for money we have applied a simple but standard analysis of the estimated cost per output. Drawing upon the analysis in the consultation and impact assessment sections, this section provides an analysis of the value for money that the project has provided and is benchmarked against similar interventions.

It should be noted that this is only an approximate method of understanding efficiency, as projects and programmes deliver a range of activities. The results should be viewed alongside the overall quality and impact of the project. The cost per output results can be used to compare the effectiveness of the project against other Community Renewal Fund projects and the programme as a whole.

7.1 Cost per Output

The CRF contribution to the Full Circle project is £106,250. This can be used to work out the costs per output of the outputs contracted and achieved by the project.

The table below shows the cost per output for the contracted outputs – this is what the cost per output was anticipated to be at the start of the project and assumes the full £106,250 was spent. It has been calculated using the following calculation:

$$\text{Full Circle Contracted Project Budget (CRF Contribution) / Contracted Outputs} \\ = \text{Cost per Output Contracted}$$

The table below also shows the cost per output of the outputs that have been achieved so far by the project. We have taken the ‘worst case scenario’ – assuming that all of the project contracted spend will be spent but no further outputs will be achieved.

In reality, the actual cost per spend achieved by the end of the project is likely to be better than this, as the numbers of outputs reported by the project increases as it draws to a close. These figures should be reviewed once all outputs have been reported. This figure has been calculated using the following calculation:

$$\text{Full Circle Total Contracted Project Budget (CRF Contribution) to date / Outputs Achieved to Date} \\ = \text{Cost per Output Achieved}$$

Output	Contracted		Achieved	
	Outputs	Cost per Output	Outputs	Cost per Output
Organisations (businesses) engaged in knowledge transfer activity following support	110	£966	140	£759
Increase in footfall as a result of support	100	£1,063	N/A	N/A

The project is delivering reasonably well in terms of value for money against the contracted benchmark for contracted outputs.

7.2 Perceived Value

Beneficiary survey respondents were made aware of the fact that some of the services they received from the team were provided free of charge due to external funding secured from the Community Renewal Fund. The survey asked businesses how much they would have been prepared to pay for the service they received, if this funding was not available.

Overall, taking into account the 2 responses to the business survey as well as interviews with beneficiaries as part of case studies, organisations are not willing to pay for app licences on their own. The project's value is in the creation of a network of organisations involved in the full circle of food use, from farm to fork – financial value comes from additional income revenue which could be generated from the applications, and from diverting food waste. Many food waste solutions are currently expensive – landfill collection and even AD is prohibitively expensive for businesses.

The Zellar platform allows them to bring all of these efforts into one place; businesses can use the platform to display their narrative towards net zero.

Conversations with businesses as part of the case study interviews reveals that the project has had a number of indirect economic impacts for their organisation; some applications have also proven more more valuable for different sizes of businesses:

- Zellar has proven to be the most valuable application for beneficiary businesses in terms of profitability. Food producers can use the platform to demonstrate their sustainability credentials which are increasingly fundamental to securing supplier agreements with supermarkets. The app also raises awareness of food waste for much smaller organisations, which can profit in a small way by reducing or reusing food rather than throwing it away at the end of its shelf life.
- Zellar is also supporting organisations to explore where they could reduce energy and save costs at the same time, be that through turning lights off, using more efficient heating systems, or reducing the length of their supply chains.
- Too Good to Go has also proven effective for some organisations as a means of selling surplus produce; some community gardens projects sell or distribute home-grown produce anyway.
- Both Zellar and Food Loop might prove to be more valuable for medium- to large-sized organisations with enough surplus or waste food to distribute for any meaningful income return, or impactful enough supply chains. It was noted that the Zellar app largely featured questions which were tailored to non-farming rather than farming businesses.
- Too Good To Go has been less valuable for larger commercial producers (due to difficulties around people coming on-site to collect surplus food). For small- to medium-sized businesses with large amounts of food waste, the app is thought to be a useful way of distributing it.

8.0 Lessons Learnt

The Steering Group is thought to be an effective mechanism for delivering the visions of both NACRE and North Northants, with partners sharing collaborative visions. The small size of the group is considered a strength, with each member dedicated, committed, and expected to contribute fully, challenge and add ideas where appropriate. In practice, the project has worked more collaboratively than expected. However, there is more the project could do to work with different community groups to tap into other organisations and their existing networks.

There have been a number of challenges stemming from the rapid nature of the roll-out, confirmation and delivery of the Community Renewal Framework. There were substantial delays between the project bid submission and approval of funds, with the project subsequently squeezed into a shorter timeframe than initially designed. The project would have benefitted from more time to design and develop the project. The team has also had to facilitate new conversations with new organisations, to set up a new community – innovative, novel approaches can take time.

Engaging with businesses and residents alike has been more difficult than first expected. It was suggested that over the course of the Covid-19 pandemic, an urgent sense of community had developed, one that raised awareness of people's immediate access to food. In practice, businesses have since been preoccupied with survival and have shown some reluctance to engage in new projects when their own future is so uncertain. In response, the project has sought to be more refined in its targeting of beneficiaries, aiming support at smaller shops including farm shops, more publicising, expanding its horizons to encapsulate schools (which are less impacted by fluctuations), but the challenges remain.

Face-to-face contact with small organisations is thought to be crucial to securing interest in any Full Circle application – Jay and Craig played an invaluable role in making businesses feel like they have time for them, and helping them to determine which interventions are worthwhile and which aren't. Webinars, emails and marketing alone are often too easy to ignore. The Sustainable Food Network needs to retain its one-to-one approach that utilises The Mallows Company and Northamptonshire ACRE as a local partnership.

One of the key challenges (not unique to the project) is that when the project was proposed, sustainability was more of a priority at a business level. Some businesses have said that they don't have the capacity to engage with the project as much as first thought due to a variety of reasons, including: needing to let staff go, costs have become prohibitively expensive, or because their supply chains have been disrupted by the war in Ukraine.

Businesses are being forced to rethink their business models and diversify in order to survive. Businesses are increasingly reluctant to move forwards with sustainability developments than before. Businesses are prioritising operational maintenance over strategic development, review and improvement. For example, the Food Loop aspects has been developed in conjunction with Produced in Kent, with the app operational only in Kent and North Northamptonshire. PIK are similarly finding limited take-up due to those three environmental factors.

Over the course of the pandemic, project delivery shifted online to remote working. It was felt that for any future Sustainable Food Network project to succeed, it would need to balance a hybrid model that takes advantage of remote working where appropriate, but one that also uses a 'boots on the ground' model in order to capture new and local organisations. The project team are thought to be more creative and dynamic when working in-person.

There is arguably more of a need for projects of this nature to make the case for sustainability in the face of hardship than when the project was designed. Rapidly rising inflation and the associated war in Ukraine has made the project increasingly pertinent for businesses and residents alike.

However, these environmental factors have had a positive impact on the mapping exercise joining up community food banks and larders, which has seen a huge increase in demand from a greater number of vulnerable people in the area. Moreover, the pandemic engaged a wider number of community organisations to combat food poverty than previously. There is therefore a significant opportunity to use food to support community projects as well as families in response to both the Covid-19 pandemic and the cost-of-living crisis; food can be used for educational purposes as well as for its nutritional value.

9.0 Next Steps

- The project aims to use the broader scope afforded by the Community Renewal Fund to take a more holistic approach to supporting sector development and sustainability, better integrating the network of disjointed business and community support interventions in a funding programme with a wider focus than EU funding to provide a bottom-up co-designed approach that utilises MiN and NACRE's strong local networks. MiN are also closely tied to the collective national effort to nurture shorter supply chains and local initiatives advocated by Food from England, for which MiN is a regional representative. There is an opportunity to operate collectively and regionally to better strengthen those field to fork connections.
- For the Full Circle model to be effective on a wider scale, the approach requires Local Authority intervention to bring together all rural businesses and residents, artisan producers, and community and voluntary organisations; for example, the likes of hospitals and schools could have an important role to play in the 'full circle' model, but would require public sector intervention to secure a working relationship with them.
- The applications could have a significant legacy in North Northamptonshire and beyond providing the project can secure enough engagement and get the apps fully functional quickly. In practice, all aspects of the circle need to be operational in order for the project to succeed. Until the project has established a core of organisations, it cannot access the wider market. The project was always designed with legacy in mind – although the project has an end date, the apps will continue to operate. Similarly, the map will need regularly updating, and in the future might have to be split between hospitality and food crises functions.
- There is scope for the project's identified approach to be implemented across local authority boundaries, expanding the reach from North Northamptonshire to encompass towns and other rural areas across the county, which are also facing food poverty. A number of businesses from West Northants have demonstrated a willingness to be involved in the project. It is hoped that the Sustainable Food Network could help the county to expand its own food identity.
- Any future Sustainable Food Network needs to consider how to integrate applications and databases across neighbouring areas to provide a more comprehensive network. Neighbourly offers an existing platform that notifies potential users of surplus food, which is a good example of a potential partner.