



Developing a Food Plan

1. Establishing the need for a food plan

A food plan is critical in helping to make food more of a priority in your town or city and in order to realise the pivotal role it can play in driving positive social, economic and environmental change. Along with the creation of a food partnership it is crucial in creating a joined up approach to food related issues in your town.

Without a food plan there is no clear focus on the food related activities that help achieve your wider priorities and there is nothing against which to measure progress. This document briefly outlines the different options for structuring a food plan, the issues it is worth covering in your plan and considers some of the options on how to implement it.

2. Choosing a format for your food plan

There are many different formats for documenting your city's priorities when tackling food:

Food Strategies

These tend to be larger documents, providing background history, case studies and mapping of the current situation, outlining where there are problems or opportunities relating to the local food system. In many cases, such as the London food strategy, this is put in the wider regional, national or international context of agendas which food touches on. In some cities, such as Bristol, a baseline study was commissioned as a separate report, prior to a document outlining the priorities of the city. Most strategies will present priorities and ideas for actions, although most do not include the detail on who will help implement these actions or how they will be resourced (see action plan).

Charter

A charter is usually defined as being a much slimmer document which outlines the local priorities and the basic principles that the local partnership is supporting e.g. Plymouth, Bristol and Cardiff. These have the benefit of taking less time to create, are much more easily digestible and are often promoted as something that other local organisations and businesses adopt in order to show support of the local food vision. As smaller documents that are often widely promoted to the public, they do not go into the detail of activity required to create demonstrable change, and as such are sometimes accompanied by an action plan.

Action Plans

The most successful sustainable food city programmes to date have produced an action plan which details what activities they will aim to implement in order to create change. These are often in addition to existing strategies, and in some cases the action plans are renewed every few years, where a strategy may have a longer shelf life. They list which organisations, and in some cases specific individuals, will lead or be involved in helping to implement these activities. The actions will usually be put in a framework relating back to the city's priorities.

3. The content of your food plan

Most recent food plans in the UK are holistic in the issues they cover, and present a vision that fits with a wider definition of sustainable food. Historically some plans have focused solely on one or two elements such as food and health. Whether a strategy is structuring its priorities within a framework of field to fork, birth to death, or some other way, in order to get buy in and support from all those needed to meet the Sustainable Food City approach, we would advise it covers the following themes: health and wellbeing; environmental sustainability, local economic prosperity, community resilience (skills and access to community assets) and fairness throughout the food chain; and it may be useful to think about whether it includes more specific key food issues such as: sustainable supply chains, community food projects, food Knowledge and skills, public sector food, food enterprises, food poverty and access, healthy and sustainable diets, and food waste

For more information on examples of actions that sit under these headings, have a look at the Sustainable Food Cities website – sustainablefoodcities.org – when it goes live in early August.

4. Consulting on your plan

Crucial to any plan having a chance of success is the involvement of local partners in its formation. Whilst a core group might develop the first draft of a food plan, an intensive period of consultation is required to get involvement and commitment in its construction and, ultimately, implementation. This consultation is crucial in identifying other lead people and organisations who should be involved in the partnership driving the food agenda, as well as those involved in the wider network.

5. Implementing your plan

So you've developed a food plan and you've consulted on it. Now you actually have to implement it! Below are a few useful tools and mechanisms for making it happen:

- ***Local Government buy-in***

If you have a local food partnership or are trying to establish one, you need to decide to what level you want to involve local government. It is crucial they are involved to some degree, and in many towns and cities they lead the development of a partnership and action plan. Local government involvement can give your plan credibility and will help to create change in other related local policies. Some strategies specifically relate their priorities to existing local policies to better embed food as a priority. Taking this one step further, if you seek senior political buy-in, demonstrating how a food partnership or strategy relates to their main priorities will help to increase the likelihood of support. Some towns and cities avoid this level of involvement however, in order not to be entangled in local politics or local government bureaucracy, or to be too closely aligned to one political party.

- ***Policy change***

Policy change needn't be just in the public sector, although there is much focus on it. Every organisation procures food, from charities putting on lunches at meetings, institutions running staff canteens, through to local government running or commissioning school catering. Other policies that can be targeted include planning policy around access to land for food growing, or food retail provision. Policy change can

mean that support for an issue is embedded within an organisation and enforced, with the commitment having more longevity (than without a policy). Any food partnership should have a good understanding on what policies have clout and where food can be woven in. Advocating for policy change in local government and in other organisations can be one of the main functions and tools a partnership can use to implement its vision.

- ***Education/training***

Promoting learning around food or skills to help those working in food are often a main strand of implementation of a food plan. This can range from teaching children cooking in schools, improving food growing skills in the community or providing business training for enterprises. The most progressive plans ensure that the bigger picture of a sustainable food system is incorporated in some way into their training and education, for example Good Food training for London, which provided training for public sector caterers and added in issues of sustainability into more traditional cooking skills.

- ***Practical projects***

This is a catch all term for those initiatives that are usually characterised by having some element of capital expenditure attached, from creating a community food garden, to building a kitchen or local food centre. The more substantial projects are rarely financed through the implementation of an urban food plan, but rather through charitable or private finance. However, it can be useful to invest in smaller projects to help make your urban food plan or partnership visible to the users of that space and the wider public. It is often a useful way of justifying time in the plan and partnership if senior staff of those organisations involved can physically see some of the results, even when policy change, training and other elements of your implementation may have a bigger impact, albeit less visible.

- ***Public celebration/publicising/communication***

So you're doing all this great work and changing the world. Now, you need to shout about it! Some of the elements mentioned above double as publicity drives, including consultation on the plan, training and practical projects. Other activities that cities have commonly used include running or being part of existing food awards, food events or weaving a food element into other events. As most cities have some existing celebratory food activity, it's important that the wider messages of a sustainable food plan are communicated.

- ***Partnership working and networking***

As mentioned throughout the document a successful food plan will have a partnership with involvement from local government, business and community groups (see Sustainable Food Cities document on governance bodies). As only a limited number of organisations and people can or want to be involved in the regular meetings of a partnership, it is important to regularly engage a wider network of those involved in the food sector to keep the momentum and buy-in to the urban food plan. Beyond doing public celebration events, there is a role of keeping those in the food sector aware of what each other are doing, either through networking events, newsletters or a magazine.