Herefordshire Council

Director of Public Health Annual Report 2022

A RECIPE FOR HEALTHY AND SUSTAINABLE FOOD

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CONTENTS

FOREWORD

Welcome to my first Director of Public Health Annual Report which I am required under the Health and Social Care Act 2012 to produce on the health of the local population. This provides me with an opportunity to raise key local issues and showcase some of the great work being undertaken across the county.

I have chosen to highlight the importance of healthy and sustainable food. Food plays a fundamental role in our lives, from providing us with the nutrients that we need to live, through to connecting people and places and bringing family and friends together. However, we are facing some significant challenges with rates of obesity remaining stubbornly high and climate change posing a serious threat to our way of life.

A sustainable local food system is fundamental for good public health, directly through its effect on nutrition and indirectly through its impact on the environment. Food is vital for building healthier communities and connecting us with our environment, our bodies and each other. However, these connections are weakening with many systems of food production unsustainable, an increasing burden of chronic disease and persistent disparities in food access. The current cost of living crisis has also shone a light on the importance of healthy food and the effect this can have on widening health inequalities.

Herefordshire has already made some fantastic progress in this area, most notably the introduction of a local food charter and many community initiatives focused on growing and eating local food. But there is still much more that can be done. While effective government policies are key to creating healthy food environments, there are many actions we can do as individuals, families, communities and local institutions. Healthy and sustainable food presents a win-win for population health and our environment and we have an opportunity for us all to play our part.

This report summarises the key challenges facing Herefordshire and highlights some of the good work that is already underway. It also sets out a 'recipe' for future actions to reimagine our food environment and build healthier communities. I hope the report provides 'food for thought' and encourages all to promote the issues highlighted and improve attitudes and actions around food.

Matt Pearce
Director of Public Health

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank the following people who provided support in the development of this Annual Report

- Kristan Pritchard, Public Health Lead
- Michael Dalili, Public Health Registrar
- Charlotte Worthy, Intelligence Unit Team Manager
- Richard Vaughan, Sustainability and Climate Change Manager
- Abby Marshall, Projects and Promotions Officer

INGREDIENTS FOR HEALTHY AND SUSTAINABLE FOOD

1 Work in partnership

There are multiple components to and influences on the food we access and choose to eat due to the complexity of the food system. Strategic partnerships can influence these components through taking a whole systems approach to food, by bringing together a multi-agency food partnership and creating a vision to achieve better food outcomes.

2 Consider the impact food has on the environment

Food contributes to carbon emissions in a variety of ways, during growing, processing/production, transportation and waste. Population growth increases food demand and environmental change. The weather can affect food supply and even nutritional value.

3 Deliver good food education

Food is not only essential for us to survive but can also provide a useful opportunity to encourage social interaction and reduce isolation within communities. Local lunch clubs, coffee mornings and evening activities often involve food. There are many positive impacts across communities associated with growing food, eating together and sharing skills and knowledge.

4 Support healthy food for all

Food insecurity has become an increasing issue both locally and nationally, shown by widening health inequalities and increased food bank usage. There are many activities at a local level that can support the provision of healthy food for all as the cost of living crisis continues.

5 Enable local food procurement and strengthen the food economy

The increased demand for local produce and support for retailers during the pandemic has highlighted the importance of growing our own food and of our local food systems. Purchasing locally sourced food has many benefits, but enabling local small scale producers to access large and public sector scale catering markets is complex.

6 A healthier local environment

The environment around us plays a fundamental role in our food choices whether that is through the messages we see in advertising, the proliferation of unhealthy energy-dense food or our ability to access high quality growing spaces. All of these things often make choosing healthy food very hard and choosing unhealthy food very easy.

7 Play *your* part

Everyone can play a part in supporting a healthy and sustainable food system by making small changes to the way we live our lives.

1.0 WHY IS HEALTHY AND SUSTAINABLE FOOD IMPORTANT?

Every year unhealthy diets cause a high number of deaths. A significant proportion of British people are struggling to afford a healthy diet and unhealthy diets are related to 6 of the top 10 risk factors for the global burden of disease.[1] In short, our food systems are making us sick.[2, 3] The population consumes too much saturated fat, salt and sugars, and eats too little fibre, fruit and vegetables and oily fish.[4] This in turn can contribute towards a range of health conditions and non-communicable diseases including diabetes, cardiovascular disease and some cancers.[5]

As well as people's health, food also has significant environmental, social and economic effects, from production, through processing and transportation to preparation and consumption. The high-tech nature of most farming systems has led to us becoming increasingly distanced from agriculture, and consequently the story behind our food.[6] Reducing food miles and promoting increased use of seasonal, good food produced locally can help address these risks while creating increased opportunity for the local economy. Having a diet that improves the health of people and the environment is therefore often deemed as a "win-win situation".

1.1 The complexity of the food system

Our food system is complex and there are many influencing factors (see Figure 1). Food can be described as 'an interconnected system of everything and everybody that influences, and is influenced by, the activities involved in bringing food from farm to fork'.[7]

By improving the food system, we can impact upon health through addressing the wider determinants.* Food can provide a focus for the community, create opportunity for skills development, increase local food growing, support those most in need, reduce loneliness and increase social interaction.

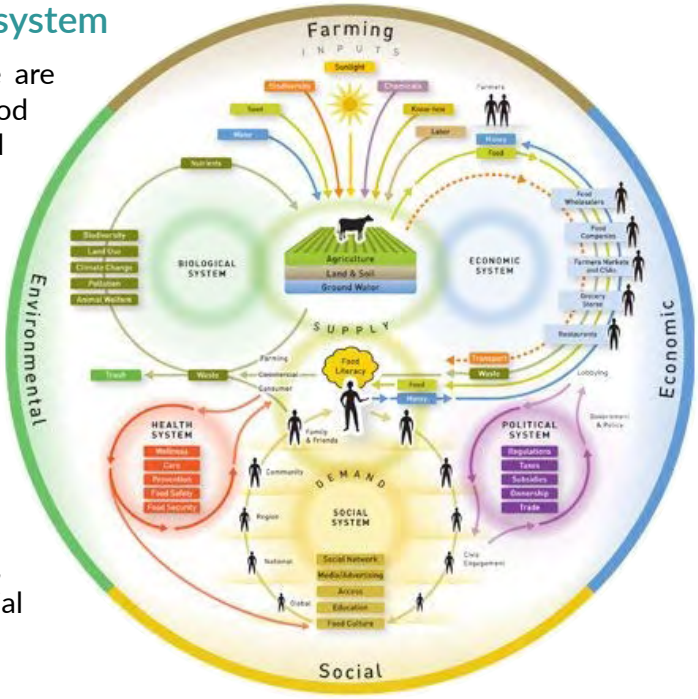


Figure 1 Food system map[8]

*The determinants of health include the social and economic environment, the physical environment, and the person's individual characteristics and behaviours

HEREFORDSHIRE FOOD ALLIANCE

The Herefordshire Food Alliance (HFA) formed in 2020 and is an informal partnership of stakeholders from food banks, Borderlands Rural Chaplaincy, voluntary sector, Herefordshire Council, Farm Herefordshire, NFU Mutual Hereford, farmers, growers and community groups. The alliance is dedicated to working together towards a thriving and sustainable local food economy which contributes to a healthy lifestyle, healthy communities and a healthy environment.

Sustainable Food Places membership

The HFA is a member of Sustainable Food Places (SFP) and a trailblazer for the implementation of the SFP model at a county-wide level. The HFA gained support to implement the SFP model from Herefordshire Health and Wellbeing board in 2021. The breadth of representation across organisations supports food system activity on many levels.

Herefordshire Food Charter

The HFA created a local food charter. The food charter is an engagement tool to raise awareness with individuals and businesses about how we can all contribute to a healthier, more sustainable food system.

2.0 FOOD AND HEALTH

Following a healthy diet has many benefits, including building strong bones, protecting the heart, preventing disease and boosting mood.[9] Poor diet is one of the leading risk factors driving the UK's high burden of preventable ill health and premature death, contributing significantly to the population's widening health inequalities.[10]

Food and diet are associated with developing chronic diseases, including cancer, type 2 diabetes, coronary heart disease and stroke, with red and processed meats and sugar sweetened beverages associated with increased risks.[11] Cancer and diseases of the circulatory system (such as heart disease and stroke) are the leading causes of premature deaths in Herefordshire.[12] Between them, they accounted for almost three-fifths (58%) of all deaths before the age of 75 in 2021.

2.1 Excess weight

While the factors that contribute toward excess weight are complex, it is widely acknowledged that the rise in excess weight is primarily driven by changes in the global food system, which is increasingly producing more processed, affordable and effectively marketed food than ever before.[13]

An estimated 15 million people live with obesity (body mass index [BMI] 30+) in the UK, with increasing rates among children and adults over the past 20 years and rising costs for the NHS, with an annual spend of £6.5 billion on obesity-related diseases.[14] While the prevalence of obese adults in Herefordshire has remained relatively consistent over time, it is estimated to be significantly higher than the England average, with 31% of adults classified as obese, compared to the England rate of 25% (see Figure 2). When considering adults who have excess weight, approximately two thirds of all adults are above a healthy weight threshold.[15]

Having excess weight is a key modifiable risk factor for developing type 2 diabetes. Approximately 15,750 adults in Herefordshire are estimated to have type 2 diabetes, with a further x% estimated to have non-diabetic hyperglycaemia (pre-diabetes). Evidence has shown that the approximately 10% of the NHS budget is spent on diabetes with additional costs to the social care sector.

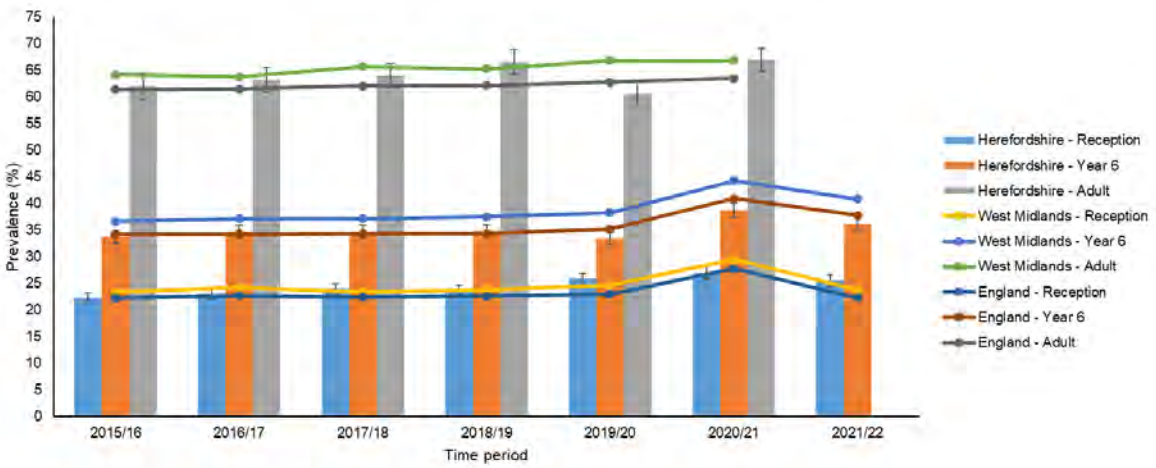
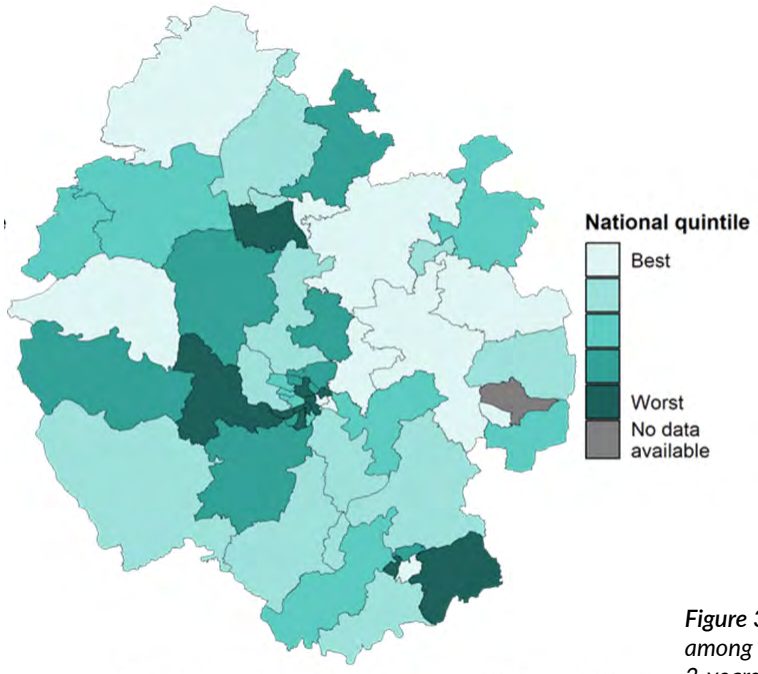


Figure 2 Prevalence of obesity and overweight for Reception, Year 6 children and adults for Herefordshire compared to West Midlands and England. (Error bars = 95% Confidence Intervals)

In 2018, the government set a target to halve children's obesity levels by 2030. The latest data indicate that in Herefordshire, approximately 1 in 4 (26%) children in reception year had excess weight in 2021/22; rising to over 1 in 3 (36%) of year 6 children. There is a long-standing pattern of levels of obesity almost doubling during primary school. This is particularly concerning as the proportion of reception children who have excess weight in Herefordshire has been higher than the England average for the last few years.[16]

Excess weight in Herefordshire 2021/22

Long standing pattern of excess weight increasing with age



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Whilst there is national evidence that obesity is highest in the most deprived groups in society, the pattern is not as stark in Herefordshire.[16] However, variation in obesity levels exist across the county with some areas having a higher proportion of children who are obese than others (see figure 3).

Figure 3 *Prevalence of obesity in Herefordshire wards among children in Year 6 (NCMP data combined 3-years [2018 to 2019, 2019 to 2020 and 2021 to 2022])*

National Child Measurement Programme

Each year, the public health nursing service deliver the national child measurement programme in Herefordshire. The service visits schools across the county to weigh and measure the height of children in reception and year 6. Using this data we can monitor the weight of children, but importantly help identify children and families that might need follow-up support.

TALK COMMUNITY HEALTHY LIFESTYLE TRAINER SERVICE

The healthy lifestyle trainer service provides motivational support to groups and individual adults, helping them to make healthier choices and having a positive effect on their health and wellbeing.

The service targets seldom-heard and disadvantaged groups. During 2022, over 1200 clients were supported by the service. The Council is also piloting family health coaches who provide holistic support for families that have not engaged with other services and help them make healthier changes.

2.2 Oral Health

The food we eat affects also effects our teeth. Good oral hygiene and a healthy diet are essential to support healthy teeth. Whilst there are several causes of tooth decay, people who regularly consume sugar are known to have a higher risk of developing dental caries. Children in Herefordshire have poorer oral health than reported nationally and by its geographical and statistical neighbours. Recent data shows that 39% children aged 5 experience dentinal decay.[17] Oral health remains a priority for Herefordshire's Health and Wellbeing Board.

TIME TO SHINE

Time to shine is a Council led programme that provides training for parents and early years settings on how children can maintain good oral health.

The training covers topics such as the main causes of dental decay and dental development. One element of the programme gives children the opportunity to brush their teeth while supervised by oral health leads to help implement good oral health habits and routines.

Early years settings staff are provided with training support around oral health. This includes help with starting a toothbrushing programme within the setting. Training and resources are provided to support the implementation, this includes toothbrushes and toothpaste. Children are supported by the setting and staff to particpate in good oral hygiene across the day within the setting.To date, 31 supervised tooth brushing settings are currently active with plans for this to be 40 settings by summer 2023 reaching approximately 1500 children.

3.0 FOOD AND THE ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

The global food system is widely recognised as the single biggest contributor to biodiversity loss, deforestation, drought, freshwater pollution and the collapse of aquatic wildlife. After the energy industry it is the biggest cause of climate change, responsible for 25 to 30 per cent of global greenhouse gas emissions.[18] If current levels are sustained, by 2050 emissions from the food system will be four times higher than the level needed for the UK to meet its net zero carbon target.[19]

A shift to plant-based diets, sustainable, seasonal and locally sourced foods and a reduction of food waste can greatly reduce carbon emissions from this sector.[20] The UK is roughly 60% food secure. It's mostly self-sufficiency in meat, dairy, eggs and grain but is heavily reliant on importing vegetables (50%) and fruit (84%).[21]

UK 60% Food secure

due to self-sufficiency
in meat, dairy, eggs and grain

but heavily reliant on
importing vegetables (50%)
and fruit (84%).[22]

3.1 Food production

Farming is an essential part of rural life and of Herefordshire communities' prosperity, with 77% of Herefordshire land farmed. Herefordshire has a large number of low-lying areas, liable to flooding and impacting upon land use and food production. The production of food is a major consideration for land use. Food is also a large contributor to consumption emissions, predominantly from meat and fish (see Figure 4).[22]

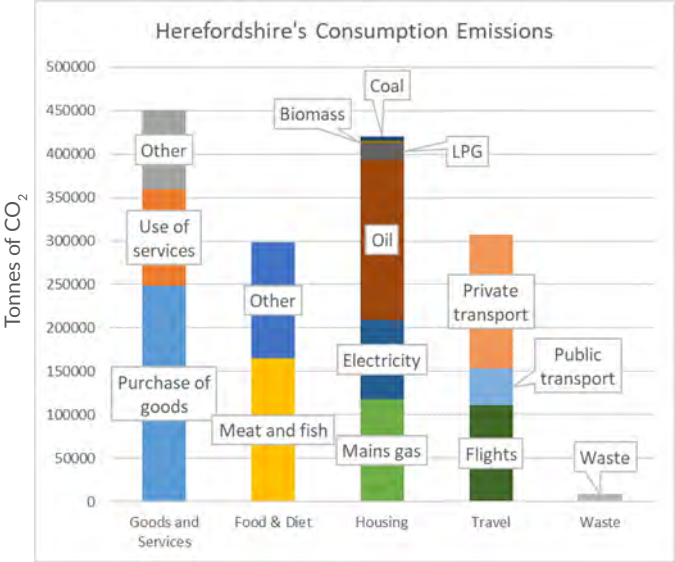


Figure 4 Herefordshire carbon emissions (consumption).
Data from Impact using methodology Version 1.6 (9 March 2021)

A third of Herefordshire's commercial holdings are grazing livestock farms on lowland, while 18% are general crop farms and 11% are grazing livestock farms on less favourable land. Among arable and horticultural crops grown on Herefordshire commercial holdings, the most numerous are wheat, oilseed rape and maize (see Figure 5). Across commercial holdings in Herefordshire, the most numerous livestock were table chickens* (8,384,993), followed by sheep and lambs (559,779) and turkeys (222,570).[23] Herefordshire grows a plentiful supply of fruit and vegetables, which has the opportunity to support a more local food system.[24]

By working to increase the county's biodiversity and promoting low carbon farming practices and local sustainable food produce, we can work towards a more sustainable future for the county.[22]

The environmental benefits of choosing seasonal, local produce include a reduction in our carbon footprint. Out of season produce often requires additional energy for growing in the form of heat and artificial lighting or transportation from a warmer climate. Local, naturally in-season produce can taste better as it is fresher, sweeter and perfectly ripe.[25]

The evidence is still emerging, but it is recognised that there are differing health and environmental impacts associated with healthy high plant-based diets and lower healthy plant-based diets.[26]

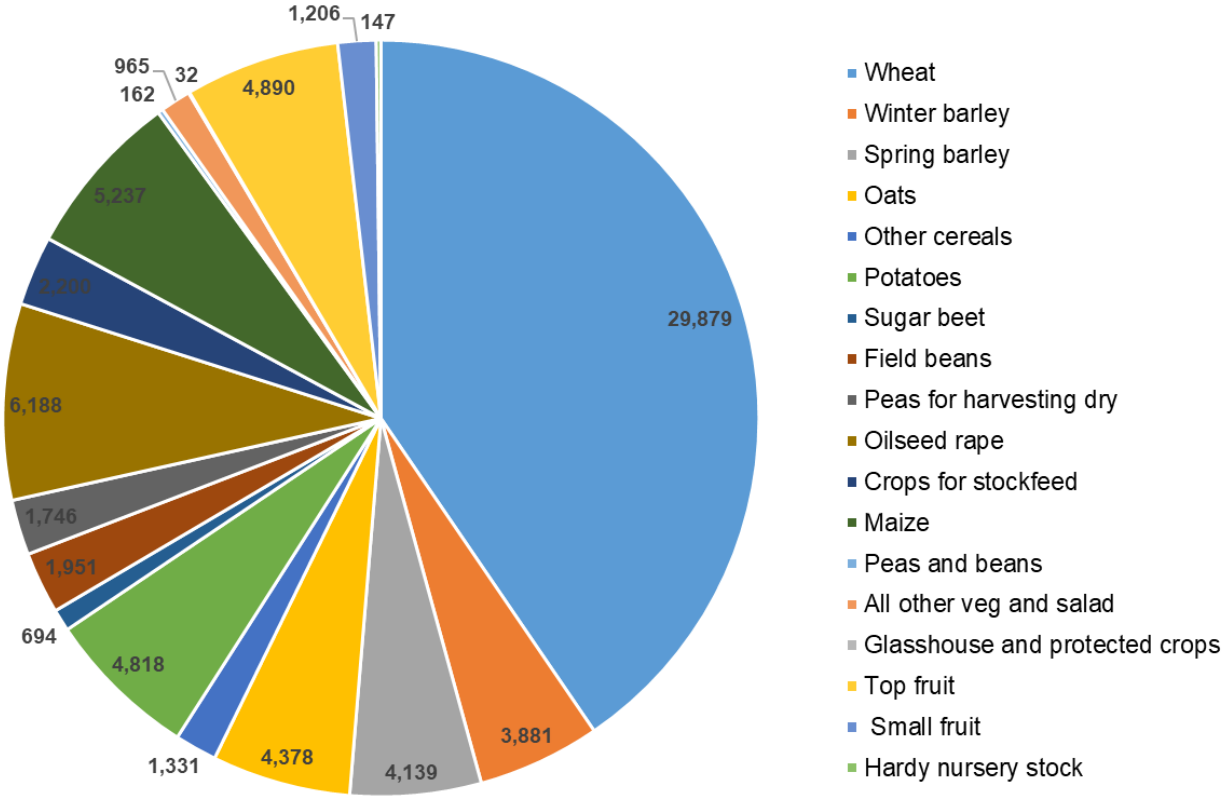


Figure 5 Number of arable and horticultural crops on Herefordshire commercial holdings (2021).

*Table chicken are chicken raised for meat rather than eggs.

3.2 Phosphorus in freshwaters

Clean air and water are vital to a healthy environment in which good food can be produced. The Wye is not as clean and healthy as it could be due to phosphate pollution washed into it from surrounding areas. The Wye catchment is a significant contributor to national food security and enabler for food sovereignty. A recent report indicated high levels of phosphate in Herefordshire rivers from a number of sources, a major concern in an under-managed and under-regulated establishment.[27] Herefordshire Council is working towards an approach to support high standards of land use nutrient efficiency to reduce legacy phosphate, which will benefit our rivers and eventually the wider economy.

PHOSPHATE POLLUTION

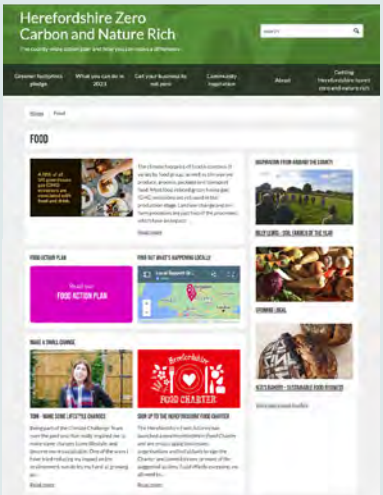
Herefordshire Council is working with Powys, Monmouthshire and the Forest of Dean local authorities and wider partners to put in place a legally compliant plan to secure sustained reductions in phosphate pollution that cause algal blooms and harm the delicate ecological balance of the watercourses. The development of a plan to encompass the entire Wye catchment will take time to prepare and will need to be in place for several years before the health of the river is restored.

HEREFORDSHIRE ZERO CARBON PLAN

Food is a key focus of Herefordshire's plan to reach net zero carbon and be nature rich by 2030.

The actions align with the Sustainable Food Places framework activity and include;

- a focus on minimising food and packaging waste
- diverting surplus food and food waste to the most appropriate use
- influencing land use and management to protect and enhance land for community growing and commercial sustainable agriculture
- influencing public procurement
- promoting county-wide campaigns and education.



3.3 Household food waste

In the UK, around a third of all food is wasted.[22] Over 7 million tonnes of food is thrown away by Herefordshire households.[28] In Herefordshire, recent evidence indicates that more than a third of black bin rubbish is food waste and its packaging. Food waste per kilogram per household per week increased from 2019 to 2022 among affluent rural communities and reduced across urban family groups. This indicates that more food tends to be wasted by those who can afford to do so. From 2022, local analysis found that 70% of the food thrown away in Herefordshire was considered avoidable*. The photo (see Figure 6) was taken from a bin collected in Herefordshire.

Figure 6 Contents of a bin collected Herefordshire. The cost of the items shown in the photo total £56.19.

HEREFORD RIVER CARNIVAL

Herefordshire Talk Community health and wellbeing trainers delivered cooking demonstrations at Hereford River Carnival 2022 using food surplus.

The Talk Community health and wellbeing trainers created healthy meal ideas using food surplus provided by The Living Room. The team had to be creative as they didn't know until they arrived what ingredients were available.

The carnival is one of Hereford's biggest events. In previous years, it has attracted up to 20,000 people. Helping people to understand how they can better use surplus food is both good for the home finances and the environment.

*Food thrown away considered as avoidable is defined as food and drink thrown away that was, at some point prior to disposal, edible (e.g. Slice of bread, apples, meat).

ROSS COMMUNITY GARDEN

Haygrove Community Gardens was established in 2013, where during the summer months school educational visits take place. The gardens have recently expanded to include a zero waste stall, a Talk Community hub, a growing club and cooking club. 65 volunteers support the gardens.

Figures for 2022 reveal:

- 12,542 visits to the zero waste stall
- 42,308 tonnes of food were handed out at the zero waste stall
- 756 children visited the gardens
- 4,045 volunteer hours
- 60 adults supported throughout the year through therapeutic gardening sessions

SOIL FROM THE CITY

Pedicargo collect trade food waste by cargo bike and process it into compost using a Tidy Planet rocket composter. The rocket speedily breaks down food waste into nutrient- and microbe-packed compost that can regenerate the soil in the city it came from.

4.0 FOOD INSECURITY

Multiple factors affect national food security and the resilience of food supply chains, potentially leading to disruption and rising food prices. They include:

- geopolitical tensions (e.g. war in Ukraine)
- rising production costs,
- the cost of living crisis
- labour shortages
- commodity prices
- the climate and nature emergency.[29, 30]

Most recently the shortage of fruit and vegetables has been blamed on difficult weather conditions abroad, but UK farmers have continued to raise the issue of high utility prices making growing out-of-season produce no longer viable.[31] In 2020 wheat yields in the UK dropped by 40% due to heavy rain and droughts during bad times in the growing season. Although they have bounced back in 2021, this is an indicator of the effect that increasingly unreliable weather patterns due to climate change may have on future production.[21]

4.1 Cost of living

Price and affordability are major determinants of the food people choose to purchase, particularly for people on low incomes. Research has shown that the poorest fifth of UK households would need to spend 43% of their disposable income on food to meet the cost of the Government recommended healthy diet.[32] Therefore, people on low incomes tend to have lower quality diets, higher rates of diet-related disease and higher levels of food insecurity – an issue that has been greatly exacerbated by the cost-of-living crisis.

The cost of living is often considered higher in rural areas. In Herefordshire 50.6% of households are deprived in one or more dimensions, consisting of education, employment, health and housing.[33] An estimated 28% of all households in Herefordshire are living in fuel poverty, up from almost 17% before the energy crisis, which was already above the national average.[34]

Nationally, food inflation rates increased significantly to 18% in March 2023. This led to concerns that the cost of living crisis is causing people to rely on cheaper, processed and high energy-dense foods lacking vitamins and minerals. Some GPs have raised concerns about rising signs of malnutrition.[35] Research has found that healthier foods are almost three times as expensive per calorie as less healthy foods with evidence suggesting that healthy foods have increased in price by twice as much as less healthy foods in the past year.[19]

The ability to afford food is not only affected by food prices, but also by the amount of income families have and the costs of other essentials. For example the number of households in Herefordshire with mains gas central heating is lower than the national average (69% vs 74%) and fuel options for these homes are often more expensive and less energy efficient, likely increasing fuel poverty vulnerability.[36] This may mean some households may not be able to afford enough food, while others could switch to cheaper calories that are less nutritious, fuelling the obesity crisis and increasing the risk of dietary diseases.

HERE FOR HEREFORDSHIRE HOLIDAYS PROGRAMME

The Here for Herefordshire Holidays programme is grant funded and provides free activities and a meal to children and young people that are eligible for free school meals.

Children and young people can access 16 hours of activities throughout the Easter and Christmas holidays and 64 hours of activities throughout the summer holidays. More than 40 activity providers delivered sessions across the county in 2022, with over 1000 children attending.

We are continuing to see increasing numbers of people in Herefordshire receiving support from food banks. In 2021, there were 2,792 vouchers redeemed at the two main foodbanks at Hereford and Leominster supporting 3,784 adults and 2,248 children. As of August 2022, 2,102 vouchers supporting 2,775 adults and 1,398 children were already redeemed. In addition to the increased demand there has also been a reduction in food donations, leading to low food stocks and more money than usual spent by food banks on buying food. Four per cent of respondents from a local survey reported always or often having to eat less or skip meals due to costs in the last 12 months.[37]

FOOD BANKS AND FOOD SHARES

Food banks are located across the county, in Hereford city and in the market towns.

Food banks are located in the city centre and market towns. Hereford Food Bank provides support county-wide. Food banks provide emergency food aid to those in need and a variety professionals can make referrals.

Food shares are increasing across the county. Food shares are open to anyone and redistribute surplus supermarket food. Regular food shares take place within the city and rural areas. Supporting those in hardship and reducing food waste.

GROWING LOCAL

Growing Local provide food education and support for those in hardship

Some of the projects delivered over the last year include:

- Big Eats are delivered every 6 weeks and open to everyone in the community
- Community Lunches are delivered every 6 weeks to senior members of South Wye area.
- 3,500 mini seed kits delivered to primary aged children.
- Family cook sessions are delivered throughout the year.
- School and youth cooking workshops continue to be a focus, including food and climate.

THE LIVING ROOM

The Living Room is based in Hereford. It supports people who need it most by reducing social isolation and food insecurity.

As well as being a community café and safe place for anyone, the Living Room runs a community larder, facilitates support groups and offers training and signposting.

The Living Room is leading on a local project to redistribute food surplus across the county. This will be undertaken over the next 12 months and will involve bringing local farmers, producers and food distributors together to ensure food can be redistributed in an organised way.

5.0 FOOD QUALITY AND CHOICES

The ability for people to live healthily is strongly shaped by a number of factors, often referred to as the wider or social determinants of health. This includes their early years education, the built environment, housing, available resources and access to facilities in their local communities to source healthy food.

5.1 Having a good start in life

Healthy behaviours start from birth with the first 1,001 days of life critical for laying the foundations for lifelong emotional and physical wellbeing.[38] Breastmilk as a critical first food are important first steps in ensuring that children receive the food and nutrition they need to grow, survive, and thrive. Compared to formula feeding, breastfeeding is more sustainable, using fewer resources, producing minimal or zero waste and significant carbon emission savings.[39] Breastfeeding can also be protective against excess weight with studies suggesting that breastfeeding can cut the chances of a child becoming obese by up to 25%.[40]

Public Health England recommends that children be exclusively breastfed for the first six months of life and complimentary foods should be introduced from six months.[41] Rates of breastfeeding in Herefordshire are higher than the national average with 77.2% of babies (national rate 71.7%) whose first feed is breastmilk and 55% (national rate 49.3%) of infants being exclusively or partially breastfed by 6-8 weeks.[42]

Eating habits and behaviours established in a child's early life will also influence their choices as they grow into adulthood, and intergenerational habits are often difficult to change.[43] We know that overweight children are more likely to grow up to become overweight adults.[44] It is therefore important that we encourage healthy behaviours from an early age.

Healthy Start

The Healthy Start scheme provides £4.25 per week to pregnant women and women with children (0-4 years) to purchase vegetables, milk and infant formula. Free Healthy Start vitamins are offered in children's centres across Herefordshire.

In March 2023, uptake for the NHS Healthy Start scheme was 64% across England, Wales and Northern Ireland. 744 (61%) out of 1212 eligible individuals had applied and received vouchers.[45] This equates to £154,000 unclaimed food vouchers locally.

KIDS KITCHEN

Kids Kitchen provide food activities for families in Herefordshire. They have fun, cook from scratch, use local food and make connections through their activities.

In the past year Kids Kitchen Herefordshire Hub have

- Distributed 70 recipe activity bags in partnership with food banks, children's centres and community centres
- Reached over 400 families through 'stay and play' style sessions and recipe bags

5.2 Children and young people

Schools are important settings for helping children to get sufficient nutrition to grow up healthily, focus in class and reach their full potential. Nationally, infant free school meals are provided to all state school children in years reception, 1 and 2. In addition, from year 3 onwards, free school meals are provided to children whose families are in receipt of certain benefits.

We know that nutritious hot lunches positively affect children's behaviours, physical development and attendance.[46] There have been recent calls for the expansion of free school meals, National School Breakfast and Healthy School Programmes to those on universal credit.[47] These initiatives play a vital role in protecting and improving the health of our disadvantaged communities.

High standards in food are important to ensure the food pupils eat is healthy. The school food standards are mandatory for all maintained schools, which must ensure healthy and high quality nutritious food is being served.[48] Cooking and nutrition is included within the national curriculum to help teach children how to cook and promote healthy eating.

Children entitled to free school meals are also eligible to attend the government funded holiday activities and food programme. The latest data indicates that approximately 4,000 children (5-15 years) are eligible for and claiming free school meals in Herefordshire, up from 3,600 children over the past year. The council has also continued to support those eligible with free school meals during school holidays.[49]

THE FOOD STANDARDS AGENCY SCHOOL FOOD PILOT PROJECT

Herefordshire Council is one of 18 local authorities participating in the national School Food Standards pilot project led by the Food Standards Agency and the Department of Education. Environmental health officers are carrying out additional observations on the food offer as part of their routine food hygiene inspections and identifying any red flags against the School Food Standards. Around 50 schools (primary and secondary) will participate locally and follow-up support will be offered where required.

A local survey that took place in 2021 asked children and young people in Herefordshire about their food choices and eating habits (see Figure 7).[50] As age increased, respondents more frequently reported having had nothing to eat or drink for breakfast, more chips or roast potatoes on most days, less fresh fruit on most days and more recent sugary drinks. However, older children also less frequently reported eating crisps, sweets and chocolates on most days, and more frequently reported having had salad and vegetables on most days.

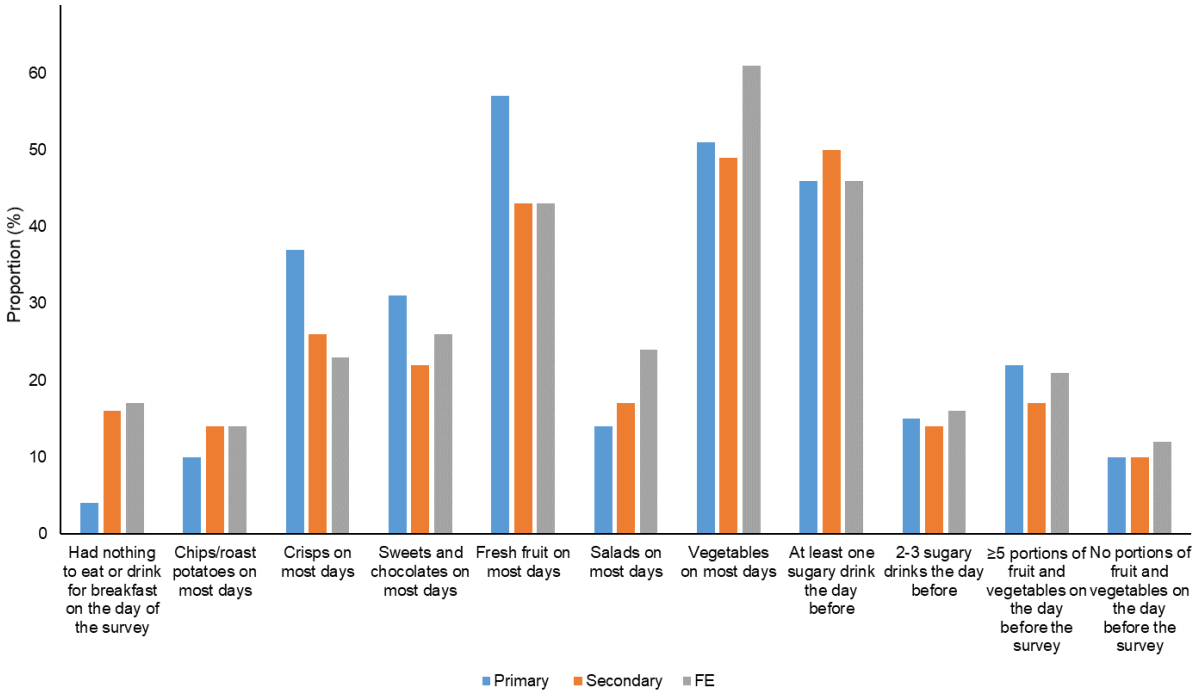


Figure 7 Responses to food questions on the Herefordshire Children and Young People's Quality of Life Survey 2021 by educational setting.

THE CART SHED

The Cart Shed supports adults and young people experiencing mental health difficulties.

They provide a variety of outdoor activities including food growing and other horticulture education.

Scan Swipe Swap

The NHS have developed a Food Scanner app to help families make choosing healthier foods easier. People can use their phone camera over the barcode of their chosen food and the app will show the nutritional information as well as healthier alternatives. The app compares the nutrition information for salt, sugar and fats. Choosing lower salt options will help to lower blood pressure, while less sugar and fat will help to look after peoples weight. There are also a range of resources to support schools with to encourage pupils to build healthier habits for life.

5.3 Adults and older people

Whilst our dietary requirements broadly remain the same throughout life, our modern ways of living and ageing population present several challenges to eat healthy and sustainably. For example, parents of young children frequently report time constraints that prevent them from preparing home-cooked food.[51] Parents also find it difficult to navigate an environment that heavily markets unhealthy food to children.[52]

As people age, several issues can make it difficult to maintain a healthy diet – for example, physical conditions like arthritis affect mobility and the ability to cook meals.

Poor oral health can also affect the general health and wellbeing of older adults through its influence on nutrition. Dental status, number of teeth, bite force and chewing problems may all be associated with the variety of food and nutrient intake, including fibre and vegetables, in older adults.[53] For example, older adults may avoid foods that are hard to chew, such as some fruit, nuts and vegetables, well-cooked meat and some bread.

OLDER ADULTS - ORAL HEALTH PROGRAMME

The Mouth Care Champion Programme was established in response to a need identified in the Adult Residential care sector.

In collaboration with partners, a training package was developed for the care homes. The training covers causes of dental disease, mouth care, nutrition, and products available to facilitate the care.

The training has gone beyond the care homes sector into adult foster care.

SHEDS TOGETHER COOKERY CLUB

Talk Community Bromyard, organised by the Age UK Hereford and Localities team, runs a cookery club hub for the over 50s.

The Sheds Together Cookery Club runs on a Monday from Bromyard Methodist Church, bringing people together to cook, eat and socialise. Using budget-friendly recipes and with the help of the wonderful volunteers, people can learn new cooking skills and great ideas to make healthy and nutritious meals alongside new friends and enjoy the delicious food that they've cooked together.

6.0 POLICY AND THE FOOD ENVIRONMENT

The evidence clearly shows that the environment in which we make food choices exert a powerful influence on our diets. We are never far away from calorie dense, sugary or fat-rich temptation. In our everyday lives we are exposed to advertising, promotions and pricing which push us further towards making unhealthy choices.

Eighty per cent of processed food sold in the UK is unhealthy when compared to World Health Organisation guidelines.[18] In line with increased food prices due to inflation, volumes of vegetables have recently fallen by over 6%, while sales of snacks and sweets rose by almost 4%, suggesting that the nutritional quality of purchases is also being affected.[54]

Access to fast food is easier than ever, with fast food outlets representing more than 1 in 4 (26%) of places to buy food and the growth in takeaway delivery companies during the pandemic.[19] However, the portions of food or drink that people eat out or eat as takeaway meals contain twice as many calories on average as their shop-bought equivalents.[55] Additionally, sale promotions are disproportionately applied to less healthy foods, increasing the discrepancy in costs, while almost a third (32%) of food and soft drink advertising spending goes towards promoting less healthy food and drink.

The negative impacts of ultra-processed foods on health are widely known, but they also adversely affect the environment.[56] While nationally we have seen low fruit and vegetable consumption during the last decade[57, 58], the proportion of adults in Herefordshire meeting the recommended 5-a-day is higher (62.7%) than rates in the West Midlands (52.6%) and England (55.4%).[15] While this is positive, it still means that just under 40% of our population are still not meeting current guidelines.

Many retailers use 'product placement' to influence purchases in food stores. Studies suggest that greater availability of healthy foods is linked to better dietary choices.[59] This can include healthier food at check-outs, food placement in-store and promotions on healthy products.[60]

A number of local authorities have implemented local food award schemes to encourage healthier purchases by providing calorie labelling and requiring cafes and restaurants to offer a healthier food range.[61] These schemes provide a promising mechanism in engaging retailers to improve the healthiness of food retail environments and support consumers to make more informed food choices.[62]

COMMUNITY ALLOTMENTS – PLOTTING FOR THE FUTURE

Hereford city has several allotment areas north and south of the city. In addition to these, there are sites within many of the market towns. Allotments provide communities with space to grow their own food whilst also encouraging exercise and benefiting our wellbeing. Some parts of the country are using 'green social prescribing' as a way of connecting people to nature-based activities, such as allotments in their local community to support with health and wellbeing.

HEREFORDSHIRE LOCAL PLAN 2021-2041 DEVELOPMENT

The Council are working with planning colleagues throughout the development of the various strategic policies within the new Local Area Plan. This includes a community facilities and open space policy. In addition to this, the local development of a Health Impact Assessment tool for planning applications is underway that will consider how we create and utilise spaces to grow food as well access healthy food.

6.1 Policy

Commercial influences on health should not be underestimated. The sale of products high in fat, sugar and salt is a profitable business and a variety of approaches are used by the food sector to market products detrimental to health.

In recent years, the government has introduced policies aimed at shifting the food environment towards healthier options. The most notable of these is the 2018 soft drinks industry levy on sugary drinks, resulting in a 29% decrease in average sugar content in soft drinks with high public support, removing 48 million kilograms of sugar from the nation's diet every year.[57, 63, 64]

The Calorie Labelling Regulations 2021

The Calorie Labelling Regulations 2021 were recently introduced that aim to provide consumers with information to enable them to make healthier food choices when eating out [65, 66]. In addition, rules limiting the location of unhealthy foods in shops have been implemented, but the implementation of marketing restrictions on high in fat, sugar and salt products have been delayed until 2025.

6.2 Public procurement

The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) is responsible for overseeing public procurement of food and catering services. Most recently, this has included building and implementing a 'balanced scorecard' for procurement in the public sector, considering price, production, health and wellbeing and more.[67] The government buying standards for food and catering services (GBSF) are relevant for the public sector, including the NHS, prisons and armed forces. The wider public sector is also encouraged to apply the GBSF standards and should include food and drink offered in vending machines.

Billions of pounds are spent each year on contracts to buy food for public institutions, like care homes and schools. Small producers like local farms can fulfil these contracts using modern buying systems. Such systems have already been used successfully for the procurement of other services.[68]

MARCHES FOOD HUB PROJECT

Herefordshire Food Alliance has been working across the Marches area (Monmouthshire, Powys, Shropshire and Telford and Wrekin on the Marches regional food hub feasibility study.

Figure 9 Map of the Marches region.[62]

A successful grant application during 2022 has secured funding for the delivery of a viability study to explore a Marches regional food hub.

The funding supports a 12 week study due to complete in March 2023.

The aim of the study is to explore the feasability of creating a Marches-wide food hub, connecting local food producers with public bodies, such assuch as local authorities, hospitals, and schools.

If the study concludes the food hub is feasable, the hub would enable shorter local supply chains which would benefit the local economy, support food security and have environmental benefits.

7.0 FOOD ECONOMY

Herefordshire has high employment rates in the food sector, which may well contribute to the high number of households in fuel/food poverty due to low wages.[69] Herefordshire is well-known for its poultry, potato and soft fruit production, with notable businesses including Bulmers (Heineken), Avara, Weston's Cider, Black Mountain Roast and Two Farmers crisps.[70] While Herefordshire is a large food producing county, the majority of produce often goes out of county for processing.[71]

The number of jobs by Herefordshire industries with more than 1000 employees are presented below (see Figure 8). The three industries in Herefordshire with the most jobs were i) growing of crops, market gardening, horticulture; farming of animals; ii) hospital activities; and iii) primary education.[72]

The food manufacturing and processing sector's high employment concentration in Hereford is almost four times as concentrated as the national average and accounted for 43% of all employment for this sector in the Marches area (consisting of Herefordshire, Shropshire and Telford and Wrekin).[73]

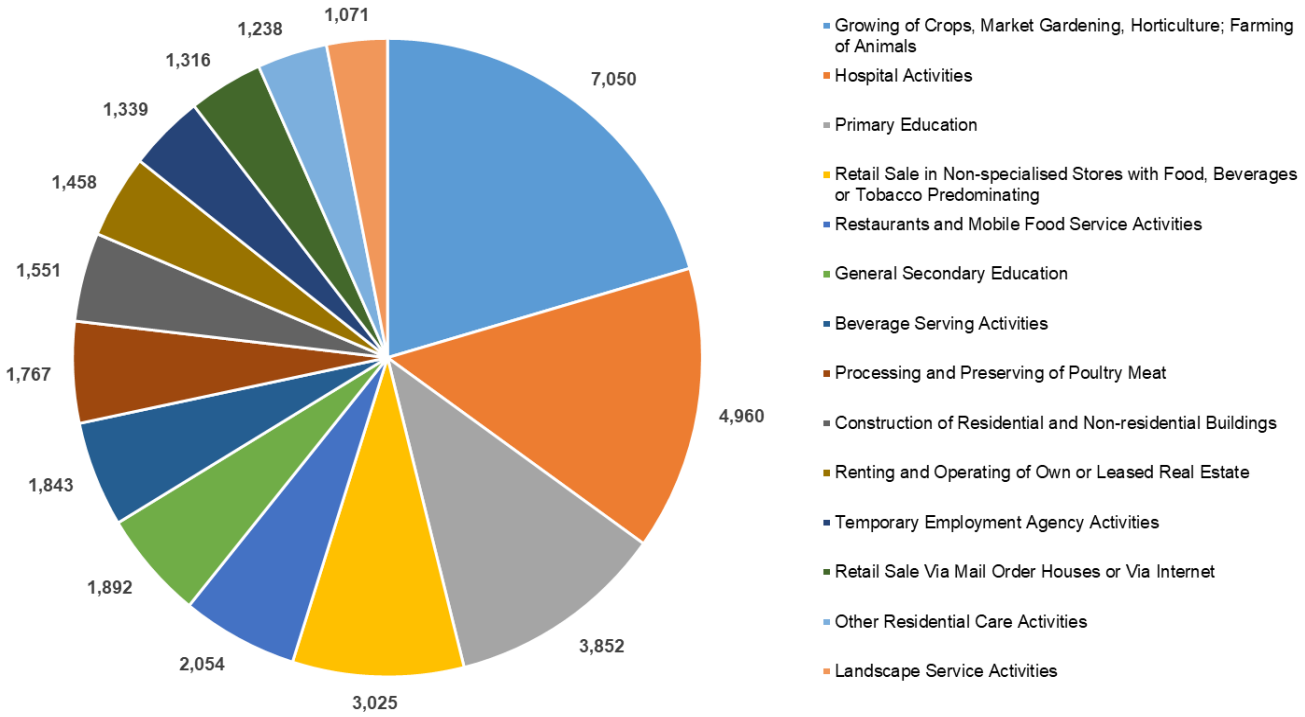


Figure 8 Number of jobs for industries in Herefordshire with ≥1000 jobs (2023).

Despite the importance of the food system, its workers are poorly compensated, with 22% only earning the national minimum wage or below, compared to 8% of all workers, and nearly half reporting food insecurity.[19] 42% of all supermarket workers in the UK (366,000 people) earn below the living wage.[30] Aldi has tried to address this, leading the way in being the first supermarket to recently introduce its fourth pay rise for staff in 12 months.[74]

BIG ECONOMIC PLAN

Herefordshire's Big Economic Plan includes reference to supporting sustainable food, with the 2050 plan including the ambition to transform land management and farming practices to support sustainable food production.

The Big Economic Plan will be overseen by a new Economy and Place Board consisting of public, private and voluntary sectors, working together to deliver the shared ambitions for the county. The plan aligns with and complements a number of plans and strategies across the county, including the Health and Wellbeing Strategy

STRONGER HEREFORD

Herefordshire Stronger Towns Partnership has been awarded £22.4 million pounds from the Towns Fund. This includes the Southside project led by Growing Local to create a community garden and educational building. In addition, grants have been made available to organisations to enhance and increase green spaces and support biodiversity.

The Growing Local Gardens project forms part of the Southside project.

The project will focus on three areas:

- Developing a new children's garden
- A field to fork cook school, café and farm shop
- Establishing a community market garden.

8.0 PLAY YOUR PART

Everyone can play a part in supporting a healthy and sustainable food system by making small changes to the way we live our lives. We have listed some simple steps that people can follow below:

Activity	Complete
Sign the food charter.	
Grow it...for zero food miles grow your own at home, at an allotment, join a community garden or a community orchard.	
Source it... source fresh, local and seasonal food, from independent outlets or buy direct from farmers markets or the farm gate. Connect to your food by finding out where it comes from, who produced it and how it was produced.	
Choose it...make informed, healthy food choices and choose certified foods such as Organic, Red Tractor and Fair Trade.	
Cook it... prepare and cook from scratch, learn new recipes and new skills.	
Eat it... avoid ultra-processed foods, eat more fruit and vegetables and less meat and dairy. Look for high quality, high welfare certification such as pasture fed, free range, organic and MSC for fish.	
Share it... connect with your community through food, e.g. via markets and cook clubs and influence others to engage with where their food comes from. Use apps such as Too Good to Go and Olio to share any surplus.	
Don't waste it... Waste less food by planning meals, buying only what you need and using or freezing leftovers. Compost what's left where possible.	
Reduce it...minimise the amount of meat we all eat	

9.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

This section provides some ways in which we can create healthy and sustainable food environments aligned with our 'ingredients' set out on page 3.

1 Work in partnership

- Build on the good work of the Food Alliance to co-ordinate activity across the county and deliver a whole systems approach to healthy and sustainable food.

2 Deliver good food education

- Continue to build on the national school food standards project alongside environmental health officers to support better school food
- All food served in schools to be compliant with the school food standards

3 Support healthy food for all

- Provide support to families to have the skills to cook from scratch and for children to learn healthy eating habits from an early age.
- Develop a central system to capture data on the number of residents accessing emergency food aid.
- Work with food retailers and partners to increase the take-up of the Healthy Start scheme.

4 Enable local food procurement

- Continue to explore the opportunities for dynamic food procurement to support locally sourced food.

5 Consider the effect food has on the environment

- Continue to raise awareness to the public on the effect of food on the environment to encourage informed choices.

6 Access healthy food where we grow, live and work

- Workplaces to provide healthy meal choices, with seasonal, local produce the preferred option.
- Consider developing a local good food awards scheme for different settings and retailers.
- Utilise planning and environmental policy tools to consider food growing and access to healthy food in local plans.

7 Play *your* part

- Consider ways we can all play a part in supporting a healthy and sustainable food system by making small changes to the way we live our lives.

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