



Brighton & Hove Food Partnership Impact Report 2023

Globally and nationally, 2023 was a turbulent year including wars, extreme weather events and a cost-of-living crisis. In the face of this, ensuring food security at a household and national level has become a prominent political issue. As we head closer to the 2030 target for carbon emissions reduction, the role that food and farming plays in climate change is also increasingly in the spotlight.

A place-based Food Partnership is a model that was pioneered in Brighton & Hove and is now a recognised movement, with 95 local food partnerships across the UK.

Food Partnerships seek to build resilient food systems: whilst they play a pivotal role in co-ordinating emergency food responses, they are also future focussed.

No single organisation, whether public, private or third sector, holds the powers, remit, or insight to change the local food system alone, which is where Food Partnerships come in, creating inclusive and cross-sector alliances that work at all levels, across all parts of the food system.

Food Partnerships demonstrate what can happen when you embrace a co-ordinated, complex, and place-based approach to driving change.

In this report, we look at the impact the Brighton & Hove Food Partnership had in 2023 by working with individuals to create positive change in their lives; at community level to build active food citizenship; and at strategic and policy level – and the places where there is synergy between them all.



Working with individuals to create positive change in their lives

Food and Cookery Skills:

Across 103 Community Cookery sessions, with topics ranging from batch cooking and low-energy cooking to using cookery to support better mental health, we offer healthy meals, cookery, and life skills to marginalised people across the city. 769 bookings were made, 288 of which were for children, and we piloted 8 new courses in the last year alone.

Feedback continues to be resoundingly positive: The average score given to our courses was 5 out of 5, and 75% of participants felt happier after attending. Even 3-6 months later, 60% are cooking more from scratch and 53% throw less food away.

'The course was very good and very educational. Not scared of food anymore. Teacher very attentive to our needs. I wanna do more classes and learn more about cooking. I wanna stop eating takeaways and junk food.'

- Community class participant

Beyond cooking classes, we distributed 2,000+ copies of our Low Energy Cookery Booklet to low-income households and have provided 1,380 'In the Bag' healthy recipe kits to local families.

We launched our new, fully-booked course, 'From Farm to Fork – an Introduction to Food Systems', which is a free course led by academics, activists, policy-makers and more, to provide a comprehensive introduction to food systems and how to improve them.

As part of the Ageing Well Partnership, we provided training on undernutrition in older people for professionals and carers, offered community cookery sessions and produced a series of social media posts about how to spot and address weight loss in older people.

Wellbeing in Nature:

Across the 4 gardening groups that we run regularly within Brighton & Hove at Saunders Park, Preston Park, Stanmer Park, and our dementia-friendly gardening group, over 60 volunteers have given 1,005 hours of their time. 75% of attendees at our gardening groups report increased confidence and skills, and 68% of attendees report socialising more. We host 7 community gardening groups in our land at the Stanmer Wellbeing Gardens, and we have 3 rentable garden spaces for events, which are used by multiple forest schools.

With volunteer help, we launched the new 'Pond Garden' space at Stanmer Wellbeing Gardens in May, which played host to 272 primary school children and young people from 4 local schools and 2 youth clubs to participate in outdoor learning, with thanks to funding from the Fonthill Foundation.

'Both days were brilliantly organised and well thought out. The children had an amazing day of learning in a stunning environment with very knowledgeable leaders'

- Woodingdean Primary School Teacher

We also launched our new venue for hire at 'The Clubhouse' in the old Waterhall golf club building on the downs just outside Brighton. Here and across the downs, we offer people supported opportunities to connect with nature and food production, through the **Changing Chalk project**, which works with ten partners across East and West Sussex. The project aims to reverse the decline of the fragile chalk grassland that surrounds Brighton & Hove, whilst connecting local communities to the landscape on their doorsteps.



As part of Changing Chalk, we run 'Growing New Roots', an 8-week nature connection group, designed to improve mental wellbeing. Over 3 courses, 45 people attended either a taster session or the full course, with 100% of attendees from our most recent course stating that they plan to spend more time outdoors after attending, and 92% reporting increased levels of wellbeing – including their levels of resilience, and connection to others. This is reflected in the inspiring feedback from participants, such as:

'I have learnt a great deal about the South Downs and how much we need to protect them really fell in love with our local landscape.'

'I would not hesitate to be part of another group on the changing chalk project, I absolutely loved every minute of it. I have become more outgoing, more willing to leave my house and always up for a new adventure, thank you to everyone involved I'm forever grateful.'



'I haven't been able to get out of bed for days, but my friend told me about this trip to the countryside and encouraged me to come. The fact there was a free bus collecting us from our affordable food hub where I feel safe, made it much more encouraging for me to come along, and I'm so glad I did.'

Through our Soil in the City project, we brought 120 people accessing Affordable Food Hubs out to experience a day at a local farm over 12 different trips.

Volunteers:

Over 240 volunteers have supported us in the last year across our gardening, composting, and cooking projects. In the last year volunteers have given nearly 10,200 hours of their time to our various gardening, cooking, and composting projects.

We provide tailored training opportunities for volunteers. Training courses have covered mental health first aid, first aid, food hygiene, dementia care, nutrition, composting, safeguarding & boundaries, and more. In total we've had 269 people attend our training sessions in the last year.

“So genuinely I can't say enough how precious the volunteering sessions are to me and how glad I've been this year to have them as a constant and reliable tool for mental wellbeing - and that it's free and accessible without a car! Whilst volunteering sessions like these can't treat the issues I have, they help keep me in a positive mindset and hopeful about the state of the world and my future, which is as essential as therapy.”

We have above-average levels of representation from within the LGBTQIA+ community across our staff, volunteers, and attendees on our courses with, for example, 22% of volunteers across our gardens and compost schemes identifying as LGBTQIA+. Following a series of internal equalities and diversity training sessions, we identified that our organisation is underrepresented in terms of racial diversity: an issue reflected more broadly across the food & environment sector, where only 4% of employees identify as non-white. We have created an internal equalities and diversities working group to help direct and drive our race, equity, diversity and inclusion practices.

We promote and signpost to volunteering opportunities across the city's community food projects including food banks, meal projects, gardens and surplus food redistribution.





Building active food citizenship in the local community

Compost:

Our community composting scheme run in partnership with Brighton & Hove City Council continues to grow. Over the last year we've opened 9 new community compost schemes and relaunched 2 dormant schemes, which brings our total number of compost schemes across the city to 56, supporting over 1,200 people to turn their food waste into compost. Community composting avoids the resource-intensive process of food waste being transported out of the city for disposal - instead creating healthy and rich compost fed back into local soils.

"I love the fact that through something as simple as collecting and 'donating' our fruit and vegetable waste and cardboard, we are contributing to our local community, our environment and being part of an initiative with collective, common purpose for the benefit of Brighton and Hove'.

- Compost scheme participant

As part of our National Lottery Climate Action Fund project 'Food Use Places', we've expanded composting into community settings. We worked across East Sussex, helping install 8 'hot' compost tumblers that collectively give the capacity to recycle 590kg of food waste per week – the equivalent of 19 wheelie bins. The Food Use Places project, which we lead, is a partnership of 12 community organisations across East Sussex that uses food as an entry point (be it through surplus meals, affordable food, or composting) to engage people that are currently under-represented in climate action.



On Valentine's Day, Food Use Places hosted a successful 'Loving Living Soil' event, which saw 50 compost enthusiasts from across East Sussex come together for a day of soil-based learning.

Networks:

A key strand of our work is to champion and support community-led food projects including gardens, compost schemes, food banks, affordable food projects, surplus food redistribution, shared meal settings and cookery clubs. This involves building and supporting a range of networks.

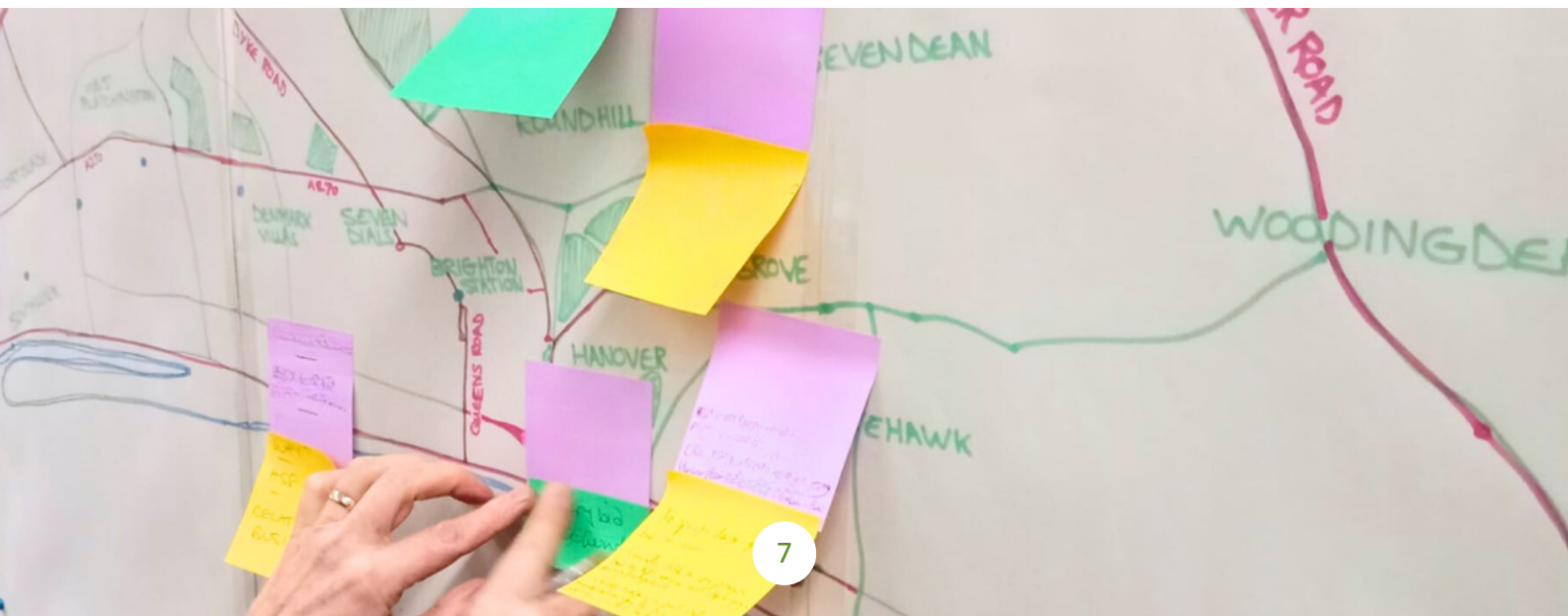
The Green Wellbeing Alliance is a network of 15 small nature & wellbeing organisations across Brighton, Hove, East and West Sussex. Across the alliance, 92% of people that attended an outdoor group reported an increase in their wellbeing levels, whilst 84% reported that they had increased their socialising through the groups.

Our newsletters are read by over 4,000 people across Brighton & Hove, providing an important source of information about community food events, jobs, and news.

109,000 visitors from 5 different continents visited our website in the last year, with almost one tenth of these visitors accessing our information about emergency food, proving that we continue to be a vital hub for local people needing to access food.

We spearhead the city's Emergency Food network, which now consists of 51 organisations working out of 59 locations. EFN member feedback reveals that this is 'a very valuable resource – making [us] realise we are not alone'. Within the network there is an increase in Affordable Food projects where users shop for low-cost food, increasing their dignity and agency – one of our partners has expanded to three different neighbourhoods in the city.

Each year we undertake the Emergency Food Network Survey to gather data and get a clearer understanding of the causes and impacts of food insecurity within the city. Comparing 2022 to 2023 data, we have seen the number of people using emergency food services increase by 25% with 6,400 people each week now receiving support from one of the members of the Emergency Food Network.



However, we know that food donations do not solve the underlying reasons that people use food banks, and we use information gathered from our annual survey and network members to campaign to end poverty.

This has included a consultation response to the All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Ending the Need for Food Banks, meeting with the chair of the Department for Work and Pensions, writing to the Prime-Minister following the budget and autumn statement and providing evidence to national campaigning organisations.



Our joint fundraising campaign with Citizen's Advice and Brighton & Hove City Council (in 2022-23) raised £76,790 to help pay for fuel, food and toiletries for local people in need.

Working at strategic and policy level

Food Insecurity

We worked in partnership with Bridging Change on research into the food access needs of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities and Refugees & Asylum seekers, culminating in a report with 16 recommendations for city partners including the Council.

Research revealed that for 69% of respondents, they or someone in their household skipped meals because of the increased expense of food and general costs of living, and that aside from financial reasons, over 30% of respondents said transport was one of the major issues for food insecurity.

At the Community Kitchen we used gluts of surplus veg to make 280 'Flavour Packs' – dehydrated vegetable packets that are distributed in affordable and emergency food hubs to add easy nutrition to meals.



We are founding members of the council's 'Food Insecurity Group', which has included worked with the Local Discretionary Social Fund, Community Hub, Impact Initiatives, and community partners to develop a co-ordinated and effective way for citizens in need to access food, cash, or advice.

We take our experience of working at a grassroots level and use it to help shape policy decision making. For example, we campaigned to change the criteria so that the allocation of Household Support Fund could be locally not nationally determined as we argued that local areas can best respond to local need.

Land Use and Farming

2023 saw the launch of our one most ambitious projects: the Esmee Fairbairn Foundation-funded Land Use Plus project. The project's goals are to encourage nature-friendly farming; increase awareness of the environmental impacts of food production; develop and improve local supply chains; and to support a joined-up approach to land use in the local area, whereby food production is connected with the environment and spaces for people.

This project works closely with Brighton & Hove City Council and the South Downs National Park to help achieve the vision of the 'City Downland Estate Plan', which is a plan with a 100-year scope that seeks to protect and enhance the chalk downland that surrounds our city. We've embarked on this vision with a mapping and toolkit project that shows which areas of downland surrounding Brighton are best to focus upon for initial restoration.

We've also contributed to developing a farm plan framework to inform future tenancy arrangements that aim to improve biodiversity and increase local food production. In October we held a food and farming event attended by 70 people at our new Clubhouse venue on the Downs, inviting farmers, food producers, and retailers to discuss the challenges and opportunities for nature-friendly farming and local food supply.

As our work with wellbeing and nature continues to grow, so too has our role providing influence on the local 'health and nature strategy'.

To date, we have worked with Sussex Community Development Association, the South Downs National Park Authority, the NHS, National Trust, Natural England and others. We continue to hold places on key strategic bodies including the Healthy Weight Programme Board, the Living Coast Biosphere Board and the Changing Chalk Partnership Board.





None of this would be possible without the support of our funders, staff, volunteers and partner organisations from the statutory, business and community sector. Thank you to everyone who is involved in helping us achieve a healthy, fair, sustainable food system for all.

Interested in getting involved with the Food Partnership, either by volunteering or donating? [Find out more about volunteering](#), or [how to donate to us online](#).

If you're interested in understanding more about the impact of food partnerships nationally, check out the [recent briefing](#) by Sustainable Food Places in Parliament advocating for a Food Partnership in every local authority.