



Brighton & Hove

**F**   **D**  
**Partnership**

# Impact Report 2024



## Brighton & Hove Food Partnership- Using the power of food to improve health and wellbeing, act on the nature and climate emergency, address inequalities and create lasting community connections

We believe food is more than just fuel: it brings people together and changes lives.

Food is often looked at in terms of challenges - increasing levels of household food insecurity, climate change impacting fruit and veg production, diet related ill-health, problems of food and plastic packaging waste, depletion of soil quality...But food can also be a force for good. Well-nourished children learn better, community food projects reduce isolation and independent food producers, restaurants and retailers are good for the local economy to name a few.

For over two decades, we've **helped people to enjoy cooking, grow food, eat healthier diets and waste less food.** We prioritise working with people experiencing marginalisation, isolation, poor health and other life challenges.

**We are a hub for information, inspiration and connection.** We support grassroots community food projects including gardens, shared meals, food banks, shops, surplus food redistributors and composters. We work with independent food retailers, farmers and large scale caterers.

**Our community-based interventions underpin our broader mission:** addressing systemic food issues and advocating for a healthy, sustainable, and fair food system as set out in the city's food strategy and action plan. We understand that transforming a system involves working across a range of sectors and scales, and all our work intertwines and has overlaps and connections at its heart.

For readability in this report we demonstrate our impact in three themes:

1. Working with individuals to create positive change in their lives
2. Organising at community level to build active food citizenship
3. Working at strategic and policy level.

### Our values under-pin our approach across all our work

- We believe food has the power to bring about change
- We believe that everyone should have access to healthy affordable food
- We believe food is better shared and work better delivered in partnership
- We welcome diversity and are non-judgemental respecting different viewpoints and experiences
- We are professional, hard-working with a can-do attitude
- We believe in lunch breaks!



# Working with individuals to create positive change in their lives

## Food and Cookery Skills

Our social enterprise cookery school **The Community Kitchen** is a space where people cook, learn new skills and enjoy food together. There are classes for everyone from beginners to experienced cooks, through our community classes, private parties, and venue hire options. **We model environmentally sustainable cooking practices** such as low energy cookery; pulse and veg-based recipes; using 'wonky' produce; food composting; and tips for extending food life through correct storage.

Our community cookery classes offer low-cost/free classes to people who, due to low income, loneliness, and poor mental/physical health, benefit from in-person cooking groups. In 2024:

- **1120 adults and children** took part in community cookery classes
- **126 different sessions** covered **17 different topics** including batch cooking, make your own takeaway and community masterclasses in fish, baking, Indian and Thai cookery.

The impact of these courses is wider than the food taken home. Evaluation from 5-week-long cooking courses shows:

- **73%** report feeling more connected to others, **63%** feel happier, **62%** learned about other services and activities.

Our Fonthill Foundation funded schools cookery sessions are for pupils from **7 local primary schools**. **290 children** attended **3 weeks** of classes linked to curriculum learning. Children learnt different cooking techniques, tried new foods and flavours making **2-3 meals** that they could take home each week. They learnt how to be '**Food Waste Champions**' through quizzes, tips and practical demos.

**'An amazing place - very enjoyable! learnt lots of new cooking skills, tasted different types of food, learnt about science, and even forgot it was a school day! - local primary school pupil**



## Refugee Cook Up

Nearly **100 refugees and asylum seekers** attended Refugee Cook Up sessions at the Community Kitchen, held in conjunction with refugee support groups from across the city. From Syria to Ethiopia, and jollof rice to dahl, attendees work together to cook AND share dishes and stories from their local cuisine.



**“They enjoyed it so much. Great to see everyone empowered and coming up with their own dishes. The boys don’t have a communal space in the asylum hotel so this was the first time in weeks where they were able to sit down and eat all together while chatting “it felt normal” they kept repeating. Your kitchen is beautiful and helped them to feel good about themselves.’ -Refugee Hotel Staff Member**

## Community Gardening

We run **4 regular gardening groups** at Saunders Park, Preston Park, Stanmer Park, and our dementia-friendly gardening group hosted by the Garden House. Food grown in our gardens is used in the Community Kitchen and taken home by those involved in looking after the spaces.

The positive impact of volunteering in our gardens remains consistently high: **95% of attendees reported increased wellbeing, and 70% reported that they socialise more after attending.**

For people living with dementia, accessing the outdoors can become increasingly challenging, especially as mobility declines. Our garden group offers a serene, inclusive space where people can reconnect with nature, surrounded by familiar faces and supportive staff.



**“This is a very special place... the glory of it is it’s so different from our home, if we live alone, our lives are pretty mundane. So this is like a wonderful highlight in the week ... The garden speaks for itself... it’s like a fairytale.” Dementia Gardening participant**

Thanks to funding from the **Hendy Foundation** and **East Brighton Trust**, and construction support from **RJ Dance** - Saunders Park has a sturdy new shed to store gloves, essential tools, and refreshments.

## Growing New Roots - part of the Changing Chalk Partnership

This project led by the National Trust brings together **10 partners** with the aim of reversing the decline of the chalk grassland that surrounds Brighton & Hove, whilst connecting local communities to the landscape on their doorsteps. Our expertise in this partnership is helping people facing mental health, financial, and physical barriers to access this landscape. As part of this we deliver '**Growing New Roots**', an **8-week long group** designed to support individuals with a mental health diagnosis to engage in wellbeing activities within this natural environment.



- Post course evaluation shows that **75%** of attendees **reported improved wellbeing**.
- A lasting impact is that **50%** of participants reported **spending more time outside** after attending.

**'I am deeply privileged and touched to have had this incredible opportunity. Please keep doing these extraordinary projects helping people connect with their local community as well as with nature' - Growing New Roots participant**

## Soil in the City - a partnership with Sussex Surplus, Rock Farm, and Farming the Future

This project brought people using food banks and community shops closer both to the outdoors, and the local and organically grown food there. Between July 2023 and July 24, **329 people** across **26 trips** visited **11 local farms** and **land projects** - **with 100% of participants giving positive feedback**. Farmers fed back that they enjoyed these visits and the chance to understand more about the lives of people using emergency and affordable food projects.

**Lasting relationships have been developed** with one farm now providing subsidised vegetables to a Very Local Food Project veg box scheme and two of the farms involved now host ongoing school visits.

**'Totally out of the ordinary – the sights/smells/tastes/colours. The enthusiasm of everyone involved has truly lifted my spirits and it was just wonderful to see the pride of the farmers of their sites. Such a joyful experience on everyone's front.'** - Soil in the City participant



## Hirable Community Spaces

### Stanmer Wellbeing Gardens

A 4-acre site run by us is in the heart of Stanmer Park, housing **13 'plots'** across a range of habitats: some are used for food-growing, others for wildlife conservation. We host **2 forest schools** and **9 community gardens** on-site and run our own food growing and wellbeing activities. **3 hirable spaces** are available as part of this social enterprise model. Spaces were booked **490** times with events from wreath making workshops to outdoor therapy groups. **55** adults & children celebrated birthdays in this beautiful space.

### The Waterhall Clubhouse

This former golf clubhouse - and our newest venue - sits on the outskirts of Brighton with stunning views over the South Downs. Our vision is to create a base to connect urban residents to the landscape on their doorsteps, providing opportunities to learn about nature-friendly food production, to get involved in wellbeing activities in nature whilst helping to protect the chalk grassland landscape

**'Absolute top spot. Perfect for our event - such amazing views and an amazing site to explore and discover the wonders of chalk grassland habitats' - Waterhall Clubhouse customer**

Our fortnightly volunteer group put in **400+ hours** of maintenance, contributing to site-wide improvements including planting over **400 hedgerow trees**, shelter repairs and replacement and soil fertility. We have brought in funding for specialist tree surgery to keep the site safe and to invest in rainwater collection

**"Well-being gardens is aptly named. All the sites are a joy and that feeling of well-being and ease comes over you when there. Magical spaces!" - Wellbeing Gardens Customer**

We secured over **£20,000 of funding to improve the building**, alongside over **£6000 of free/ in-kind support from experts & volunteers**. This enabled us to improve electrical safety, plumbing and hot water, remove old carpeting, redecorate & repair external cladding, and secure planning permission for a new sustainable heating system.

Since we opened in 2024 over 1000 people have visited the space for events ranging from farming conferences and away days, to mental health support groups and refugee group outings to yoga and queer wellbeing retreats.





## Community projects - building active food citizenship

We champion and support **community-led food groups**—ranging from **gardens and compost schemes** to **food banks and cookery clubs**—by fostering **peer networks**, securing **funding** and running **fundraising campaigns**, promoting **volunteering opportunities**, providing **resources** (such as kitchen equipment and compost bins), running **training**, and acting as a bridge to statutory services. We promote them via a community food directory on our website visited by over 6,500 people annually.

### Community Composting

A partnership with Brighton & Hove City Council and the volunteer-led community composting schemes which has run since **2010**. In 2024:

- **54 schemes** were run by **125 volunteer compost monitors**
- **1100 households** were involved
- **185 tonnes of food waste were composted**. That's **770 wheelie bins** worth of food waste diverted from incineration

**It doesn't need to be either composting or food waste collection. We need both!** Whilst BHCC will be implementing food waste collection from 2025 onwards, composters tell us they want to carry on using the schemes. Rather than having their fruit and veg peelings driven across the country for industrial processing they want to make nutrient rich living soil for use in local spaces. BHCC's economic development strategy commits to a 'circular economy approach' so we hope that this will be an area of joined up policy thinking in 2025 where the ambitions of the waste management and economic development teams come together.

**'Local composting helps reduce waste and provides quality soil for local projects. It's important for me to participate in small steps that will help make the world a better place.'** - Volunteer compost monitor



## Emergency Food Network (EFN)

We collaborate city-wide with food groups, advice services, and statutory organisations to adopt a **strategic and preventative** approach to food insecurity. Our food projects go beyond the immediate provision of emergency food by linking food support with advice, mental health support, and signposting services. We work to ensure everyone receives **dignified, culturally appropriate food support** and that services collaborate to minimise people feeling 'passed around'. Our priority is to end the need for crisis food support but until these services are no longer needed, we will support emergency food projects with training, resources, networking, and coordinate with statutory services.

We coordinate the EFN, uniting **48** groups offering **food parcels, affordable shops, meals, and vouchers**. Our annual survey of the network highlights gaps in provision and the realities of emergency food support. In 2024, our survey revealed:

- Each week: **6,297 people are supported by the city's food projects** - 1400 of these were children
- £15,770 was spent on food across the network each week. **That's £820,040 per year.**
- Volunteers give over **3,400 hours each week** to food projects and surplus food distributors.
- There has been a 18% increase in demand for services since 2022.

Through focus groups and interviews we listen to those locally in food insecurity. These insights shape our work. We strive to end the current reliance on emergency food, but know this cannot happen until structural issues of poverty and inequality are addressed, which remains our priority and is why we work to influence national policy such as our contribution to the parliamentary 'inquiry *'into the future of local welfare and crisis support'*. .

What brings people to food services:

- Projects noticed an increase in people with mental health issues, Black, Asian & Minoritised Ethnic people, and people in work.
- The main reason by far that projects thought people accessed their food was the increase in costs of living.
- Food projects reported on average 58% of people using their services were doing so indefinitely.



**Food donations have declined**, and over half of projects express concern about insufficient funds. To help, we ran a citywide **Food SOS** campaign, encouraging communities, schools, and networks to donate food and toiletries. **18 schools** and **7 community venues / local businesses** were involved. A separate **fundraising campaign** to help with paying for fuel and food run jointly with Citizen's Advice Bureau raised **£13,428 for emergency food** allocated to **supporting 9 food projects**.





## Food Use Places - a National Lottery Climate Action funded project

We lead this partnership of **16 community organisations** working together to reduce food/packaging waste and inspire everyday climate-positive action. The partners are trusted community organisations such as community centres, a sports club, youth projects, and older people's cafés who are engaging people in climate action, focusing on groups currently under-represented in this agenda

### In the first six months of the funding:

- **53 attendees** representing local business, the local authority, and other community organisations attended the launch event
- **7 community venues** developed food + packaging waste action plans
- **2 new compost tumblers** were installed in community locations, and a compost station was rebuilt with Moulsecoomb Forest Garden.
- **1170** people a week ate meals made using surplus food, preventing food waste whilst providing people with nutritious food and companionship
- **11 community engagement** events were attended by **596 people**.
- **188 people** took part in a multi-week learning activity in one of the partner venues
- **32 children** attended a Table Tennis Club / Real Junk Food Project after school club
- **122 children** took part in food waste cookery lessons at the Community Kitchen or helped cook with Moulsecoomb Forest Garden
- **64 people** attended a skills-based training session
- **289 people** across the partnership volunteered on the Food Use Places project during this period.

## Green Wellbeing Alliance (GWA)

The BHCC grant programme funding this work ends in March 2025 and we are currently seeking funding to continue this impactful work. The GWA is a network of organisations that provide therapeutic outdoor activities across Sussex improving mental health and wellbeing

Over the 5 years of funding from BHCC the network

- grew from **6** to **15** small nature & wellbeing organisations across East Sussex.
- reached over **1000 people** per year
- amassed over **80,000 volunteer hours**
- worked with **300+ professional referrers** from at least 30 different organisations annually
- saw **200 people moving into studies, work, or volunteering after getting involved**.
- Independent evaluation show the impact on participants, many of whom have multiple and complex mental health conditions, has been profound and lasting.

**'I have felt connected and good about myself in relation to others for the first time in a very long time.'** - GWA participant



## Working at a strategic and policy level

**No one entity can transform a system.** That is why we focus on facilitating cross-sector partnership work to drive long-term change. Our experience shows the benefit of including diverse voices in policy and service design, including those with lived experience of the issues being addressed. As we find time and again a good process of engagement and collaboration helps foster truly collaborative work, and ultimately creates better policies be that on health, inclusion, procurement, land use, farming or planning.

2024 has presented many challenges for our partners - financial strain on local authorities, a tough funding environment for community organisations (including us), and the ongoing cost-of-living crisis impacting people and local businesses. Nonetheless, we've received tremendous support from stakeholders which we're deeply grateful for.

### From Farm to Fork with the Free University

We piloted '**From Farm to Fork: an Introduction to Food Systems**', a course exploring the impact of food systems on communities and the environment, both locally and worldwide. Speakers included local campaigners such as the **Compost Club** and **Rock Farm**, and national researchers such as **Tim Laing** from the Centre for Food Policy.

**11** in-person evening sessions were attended by **40-50** people.

The final session was devoted to thinking about the Brighton & Hove food strategy, feeding into the action plan refresh, and shaping our '**Right to Grow**' campaign. Feedback was resoundingly positive, with multiple participants stating they wished the course wasn't ending.

### Right to Grow

We were part of the campaign for Brighton & Hove City Council to pass a '**Right to Grow**' motion which commits them to promoting biodiversity through food growing on council-owned land; encouraging developers to deliver space for food growing in new developments; and supporting local food growing through community gardens.

This is part of a broader project we're launching in 2025 called **Edible Brighton**, working with 3 organisations to help plant 'edible landscapes' across the city, cultivating overlooked corners to demonstrate what is possible with limited space and inspire others to follow suit.

## Land Use & Farming

The [Land Use Plus project](#), funded by the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation, enables us to work with **farmers, ecologists, councils and national food and farming organisations** to work at a landscape scale to implement climate and nature friendly food production practices on the chalk-grassland surrounding the city. We highlight and communicate the benefits of a localised food system, spotlighting the voices of local food producers and procurers.

**50 people** attended our ‘**A Vision for Food and Farming**’ conference at the Waterhall Clubhouse, which explored what will enable more local food production in the future. This included a discussion on **enterprise stacking** - layering multiple agricultural enterprises on a single piece of land, with each enterprise complementing the others; **regenerative**

**grazing practices; local meat production;** and what an educative community or “**Beacon**” **farm project** could look like.

Funding by Farming the Future and working with Wealdon & Lewes District Food Partnerships, we ran an outreach and scoping project to understand what is needed to connect **local farmers, procurers, and community institutions** such as schools, care homes and community groups. **24 participants** representing these groups attended **3 focus groups**. Participants were interested in a **twinning project** connecting farmers with schools via educational visits, and the piloting of local produce in canteens.

**We look forward to seeing this pilot develop in 2025.**

### Sussex Grazed

This scheme works by connecting consumers with local farmers involved in conservation grazing, to deliver ‘farm-to-fork’ meat that is sustainable and high-welfare via a direct buying meat box scheme. The chalk-grassland needs to be grazed for biodiversity value and this approach supports local farmers to bring this meat into the local food system. We had 222 orders for meat boxes in 2024, and piloted our first venison share in a partnership with Natural England and the South Downs National Park Authority.

We established a local meat working group bringing councillors together to highlight the challenges the local meat industry is facing such as the closure of Sussex’s second-to-last local abattoir. In February 2025 there will be an event with [Changing Chalk](#) on regeneratively farmed local meat - ‘Why should we eat (some) meat?’ - focussing on local food production.



## Including the views of people with lived experience in policy and service design

We use participative methods to shape projects, services, and policy work, ensuring diverse voices are included. We act on feedback and offer service users opportunities to volunteer, co-deliver, and collaborate. We recognise time is precious and offer thank you vouchers for participation.

In 2024, **175 people** contributed to **focus groups** and **interviews**, including:

- The **Community Kitchen Participation Panel** a mechanism for community cookery participants to improve the way the kitchen is run
- **Focus groups and workshops** attended by **109 people** from underrepresented communities for **FoodSEquals**
- A **co-design** workshop as part of the **Food Use Places** project development, attended by **12**
- **4 focus groups (49 attendees)** and **5 telephone interviews** for a NHS project on equalities to gain insight from people who are disabled or have long-term health conditions and are food insecure

We're deeply grateful to participants for sharing their insights. .

### Food SEquals

We are a partner in the UKRI-funded [Food SEquals project](#), led by the University of Reading, which explores food inequality in less affluent areas. Using innovative community research methods, the project aims to create products and policies informed by lived experience.

Collaborating with the University of Sussex, we support a team of Community Researchers (people from underrepresented communities trained in research techniques). They ran 9 focus groups with their communities covering food policy, fish and beans and pulses

A clear message from the food policy sessions was that **those in less affluent communities want to be included in discussions about the food system and policy change.**

The findings of policy sessions are outlined in a University of Sussex [2024 policy brief](#).

Groups also discussed the reasons for eating more beans and pulses and the barriers and ways to overcome them. The next stage of this work is to design a beans and pulses recipe kit.

Brighton & Hove  
**FOOD Partnership**

**BEANS THEMES**

FoodSEqual  
Food Systems Equal

Brighton residents told our Community Researchers that they want to eat more beans & pulses. But why? And what is stopping them? Here is what people told us about their relationships with beans:

- BEANS BONUSES** (Icon: Heart with person) Beans are energising, Low calorie, Low GI index, High in fibre
- HEALTH & NUTRITION** (Icon: Beans can) Beans are energising, Low calorie, Low GI index, High in fibre
- AFFORDABILITY & ECONOMIC** (Icon: Pound sign) People said beans should be the affordable and convenient option
- DIVERSE BEANS** (Icon: Globe) It's mentioned that people would like a locally grown bean but would also enjoy different varieties from other countries

**'I really enjoyed both the fish and pulse study. They were very interesting and shared view points are wonderful, the exchange of ideas and multicultural backgrounds regarding food are fascinating' - focus group participant**



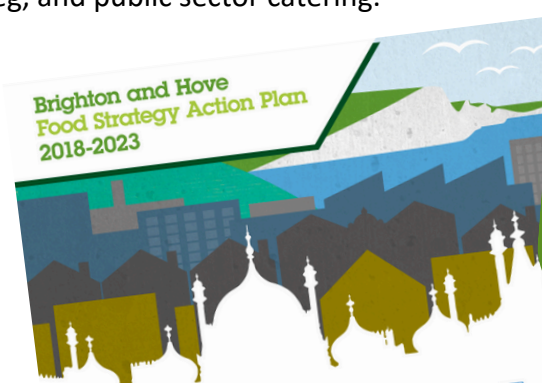
# Food Strategy and Action Plan

## Food Strategy Refresh

Brighton & Hove produced the UK's first citywide food strategy and action plan back in 2006. We've been updating the action plan - a process carried out every 5 years.

- **250 people** were consulted on their priorities
- We held **6 themed engagement events** focussing on: the food system; food and climate change; a more preventative approach to food insecurity; school meals; access to and consumption of fruit and veg, and public sector catering.
- It includes insights from **7 different regional and national research projects/partnerships**
- Findings from **8 focus groups** with people will lived experience of the issues

We now have **32 priority actions** with named lead partners. The plan will be publicised in early 2025.



Since the last action plan in 2018, **primary school meals have reduced meat from five days per week to three; breast-feeding rates in the city are 20% higher than the national average; and food has been embedded into at least 8 major local policy documents.**

## 2025's National Food Strategy

We welcome the Government's plans for a national food strategy. While local food partnerships, like the 95 across the UK, demonstrate the power of inclusive, cross-sector alliances, to have impact at a local level we know that national action is needed to create resilient food systems. As proud members of the Sustainable Food Places network, we urge the national strategy to reflect and champion the work of local partnerships.

## Comms and Community

Across our social media platforms and newsletters we have a reach of nearly 150,000 people.

- 6000 for our fortnightly e-newsletter
- 12,000 of our annual 115,000 website visitors access information about Emergency Food Services demonstrating the important role we play in signposting to vital services.

Our methods for disseminating work are as varied as the Food Partnership itself! We piloted the podcast 'Savouring Change' producing 4 episodes giving in-depth insights including sustainable grazing on the South Downs; the Household Support Fund; and our Community Kitchen.

Reels on topics from simple recipes supporting older people to eat well, to interviews with our community cookery chefs, brought our cookery work to life.

We spoke at over 20 events/ webinars and hosted 8 visits from other places in UK/Europe interested in learning about our work.



**Thank you to everyone who is involved in helping us achieve a healthy, fair, sustainable food system for all.** None of our work would be possible without:

- Our **269 amazing volunteers**, who spent over **11,800 hours** supporting our composting, gardening, and cooking projects.
- Our **12 board members** who volunteer their time helping with our visioning, strategy, and operations.
- Our **18 wonderful core staff members** and **7 freelancers**
- The support of our funders and partner organisations from the statutory, business and community sector.

**'Thank you for making volunteering at the community kitchen such a wonderful time. It's been a tricky year in many ways but coming into volunteer has been one of the most rewarding and enjoyable things I've done. Even when I feel a bit tired after work, nothing puts a smile on my face more than doing a shift at the kitchen.'** - Kitchen Volunteer

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

To stay in touch  
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