Foreword

Food shapes our city from what we eat, the way we produce it, how we package it, the distance it travels, the food we waste, the people and businesses we buy it from, to the strength of our local economy and the health and wellbeing of our people.

Leicester has a rich cultural food heritage - we are significant food producers with a vibrant food and drink economy and one of the largest outdoor markets in the country. We have diverse communities bringing a great blend of food knowledge and cuisine from all corners of the world, we even have a cheese named after the city.

That said, we continue to experience a number of continuing health and poverty challenges, in addition the Covid-19 pandemic is having a significant impact on the City. However, there are also opportunities as people are becoming far more concerned about the quality and provenance of the food they eat, the impact food has on their health and the environment, and a growing consciousness about food poverty.

Developing a new Food Plan is timely as more than ever there is a focus on food, particularly on the importance of eating well to stay healthy, access to good food for all, reducing food poverty, tackling environmental issues and increasing sustainable and fair practice within the food sector.

Leicester’s Food Plan is an ambitious long-term programme which began when the first plan was developed in 2014. It aimed to tackle food poverty, see more community food projects in place across the city, increase good food knowledge and awareness, develop a thriving good food economy and new food growing initiatives.

The first Plan has seen a number of developments which have led to positive changes across the city, in particular:

- a focus on good nutrition in early years and the children’s healthy weight strategy providing healthier food to children through improved food standards for Leicester City Council school dinners and the development of the holiday food programme
- reducing food poverty through the Feeding Leicester pilot and increased support to the emergency food partnership
- increased support and encouragement for communities to grow their own food
- the provision of comprehensive support to the food and drink sector to improve procurement practices, reduce food miles, support local food growing and encourage re-distribution of surplus food to reduce food waste.
We are therefore pleased to introduce Leicester’s Food Plan (2021 – 2026). This plan will build on the success of the previous food plan and create new opportunities for concerted local action. It aims to support individuals, families and communities to recognise the importance of having access to healthy, affordable and sustainable good quality food to improve health and make a positive contribution to the climate change agenda.

The plan offers further opportunities to:

- Develop and support the food and drink sector to address health and sustainability such as reducing food waste, reduced sugar and salt content in food and increasing the availability of good food.

- Support our vibrant food businesses to take positive steps to minimise waste, operate sustainably and generate quality employment.

- Support businesses and organisations across the city to make healthy and sustainable choices about the food they produce, buy and sell for us to eat.

The plan also recognises the importance of allotments and community food growing projects in supporting people to grow their own food, feel confident in cooking from scratch and enjoy eating together with all the positives that this brings in increasing community cohesion and reducing social isolation.

At the heart of this plan is the community and voluntary sector, the action plan has been developed as part of a city-wide consultation and we are grateful to the community members, voluntary, business and public sector representatives who have contributed to its development.

This Food Plan creates an important opportunity for all stakeholders and the public to work collaboratively to develop a good food culture across Leicester City and we look forward to continued partnership work to achieve the vision of Leicester as a Healthy and Sustainable Food City.
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Leicester Food Plan Vision

This is Leicester’s second Food Plan; it is a five-year plan (2021-2026) that aims to make Leicester a ‘healthy and sustainable food city’.

The Vision:

Leicester – A Healthy and Sustainable Food City
A place where the production, distribution, purchase and use of food supports better health, stronger communities and a successful economy – while protecting the environment and conserving natural resources.

The term ‘good food’ is used throughout this document and is defined below:

**Good Food** – healthy, nutritious, affordable food produced with care for the environment and natural resources in a thriving local food economy
Vision - Making Leicester a Healthy and Sustainable Food City

Ambitions

To enable the Food Plan to achieve its vision, a number of ambitions have been developed. These six ambitions focus on the whole food system, recognising how health, social, economic and environmental factors are interconnected.

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<th>AMBITION –</th>
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<td><strong>1</strong></td>
<td><strong>Supporting Healthier Food Choices</strong></td>
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<td>Making <em>good food</em> decisions throughout life for better health and wellbeing.</td>
<td><strong>Reduction</strong> in numbers of children and adults identified as overweight. <strong>More</strong> children choosing school meals, increased levels of breastfeeding in the city. <strong>More</strong> nurseries adopting good food standards.</td>
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<td><strong>2</strong></td>
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<td>Improving access to <em>good food</em> for all.</td>
<td><strong>Improved</strong> collaborative, co-ordinated longer-term solutions. <strong>Improved</strong> holiday food and activities programme reaching more children in need. <strong>Increased</strong> uptake of healthy start vouchers.</td>
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### AMBITION –

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<th>Building food confident communities</th>
<th>More community-based food initiatives are connected and sharing good practice.</th>
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<td>Connecting communities to understand and develop skills about <strong>good food.</strong></td>
<td><strong>Increased</strong> knowledge and number of active community growing/cooking projects developed.</td>
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<td><strong>Increased</strong> choice of <strong>good food</strong> offer provided by the city's food and drink sector.</td>
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### AMBITION –

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<th>Promoting a diverse, vibrant and responsible food economy</th>
<th>Increased number of businesses within the food and drink sector that provide a <strong>good food</strong> offer.</th>
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<td>Working with businesses to provide a <strong>good food</strong> offer for the city.</td>
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### AMBITION –

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<th>Transforming food procurement and catering</th>
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<td>Supporting organisations and businesses to make <strong>good food</strong> buying and production decisions.</td>
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<th>Promoting Sustainable Food and Addressing the Climate Emergency</th>
<th>Reduced food waste in domestic refuse/commercial refuse - <strong>Better</strong> food use and reduced <strong>food</strong> waste.</th>
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<td>Support a shift towards a sustainable food system which addresses the climate emergency facing us, along with declining biodiversity and the impacts of food and packaging waste.</td>
<td><strong>Increase</strong> in food produced and procured locally.</td>
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<td><strong>Increased</strong> knowledge about the environmental impact of food decisions (what we eat, how it’s packaged and how far it’s travelled) by all.</td>
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Why have a Food Plan?

As the largest city in the East Midlands and the tenth largest in England, Leicester faces a number of challenges related to health and environmental sustainability, these are outlined in Figure 1 below.

**To improve health**

- 24% of year 6 Leicester children are obese
- 66% of adults in Leicester are overweight
- Less than half of the Leicester population meet the recommended fruit and vegetable intake of ‘5 a day’

**To combat food poverty**

- 32nd most deprived local authority in the country
- There are approximately 22 food banks operating in Leicester
- Three out of four residents live in the 40% most deprived areas in the country

**To support a thriving and sustainable food economy**

- There are over 100 food and drink manufacturing businesses in Leicester
- The food and drink manufacturing sector is worth £600m across Leicester and Leicestershire

**To reduce the ecological foot print of the food system**

- 15-30% of UK greenhouse gas emissions comes from food
- 5-10% of the UK total greenhouse gas emissions is from food waste. 11.5 tonnes of food is wasted every year with 60% coming from households
- Meat and dairy consumption is responsible for over 50% of emissions (from a typical diet)
- With most of these occurring in agriculture (45%), food manufacture (12%) and transport (12%)

*Figure 1: Food related challenges to Leicester (2019)*
Governance

The Food Plan Board is a partnership involving representatives from Leicester City Council, the voluntary and community sector and the business community. The Board will monitor the progress of the ambitions of the Food Plan.

Development of Leicester’s Food Plan 2021-26

Leicester City Council has consulted with a wide range of partners such as the voluntary and community sector, food and drinks sector, education, health and Leicestershire County Council. Consultation events have led to the development of a number of actions in priority areas such as food poverty, health and sustainability in the food and drink sector and addressing climate emergency.

On-going consultation and engagement with partners will remain a priority in order to progress the Plan along with an annual review of the action plan.

Links to other strategies

The Food Plan supports a number of key strategies including:

Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy, as a result of the high prevalence of heart disease, diabetes and other obesity-related conditions in Leicester, actions for improving diets are prioritised within Leicester’s latest Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy. An annual Food Plan report will be presented to the Health and Wellbeing Board.

Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland (LLR) Infant Feeding Board oversees implementation of the Infant Feeding Strategy and action plan, encouraging breastfeeding and healthy weaning. Encouraging and supporting a healthier diet is also a priority for the Oral Health Promotion Board through the implementation of the Children’s Oral Health Promotion Strategy.

Leicester’s Climate Emergency Action Plan 2020 to 2023 is a key document that the Food Plan links with due to the production, distribution and use of food accounting for 30% of UK greenhouse gas emissions.

Other plans including Leicester’s Biodiversity Plan and Allotment strategy are currently being developed.

The Feeding Leicester Steering Group (FLSG) leads on food poverty and will report into the Food Plan Board.

There are also clear links with the work of Leicester’s Business Improvement District (BID) which is a business led, not for profit organisation working to transform Leicester city centre, making it a better place to live, work, visit, study and do business.

Where appropriate, we will develop links with Leicestershire County Council and Universities to support progress in procurement, environmental sustainability, health and communities.

All these strategies have their own priorities and action plans and the Food Plan does not seek to replicate these but rather to acknowledge and compliment the important role that each one plays in improving the food system.

Leicester Food Plan members are members of Sustainable Food Places Network to share and develop good practice.
Leicester’s Food Plan 2014 – 2016

achievements:

- An established cross sector Food Plan Board facilitating partnership work to improve health, ensure the success and vitality of the local economy and provide stewardship of the environment and natural resources

- An active and founding member of Sustainable Food Cities

Supporting Healthier Food Choices

- The development of a healthy weight strategy for children and young people which aims to halt the rise in children presenting as overweight or obese in Year 6 by 2023

- The implementation of the ‘1000 tweaks’ social media campaign to encourage individuals, families, organisations and businesses to make small changes to help children and young people to eat good food and enjoy physical activity

- Support to schools to increase positive healthy eating behaviours, knowledge about nutrition and increased cooking and growing skills

- Support to early years settings to provide healthy, balanced meals and snacks for under 5’s and their families through “Eat Better, Start Better”. To date over 100 settings have engaged in the programme and 39 settings have achieved the ‘Good Nutrition for Under 5’s’ award

- Improved support to breastfeeding mums so that by 6-8 weeks, 58% of mums are still breastfeeding. This is significantly higher than the national average

- In 2015, Leicestershire Partnership Trust achieved level 3 of UNICEF Baby Friendly Initiative and in 2018 University Hospitals of Leicester achieved level 2

- Improved food standards for Leicester City Council school dinners serving fresher, healthy, ethical food using some local and organic ingredients though the Silver Food for Life Served Here accreditation award

- Development of the holiday food programme through collaborative partnership working providing over 32,000 meals to 1,900 children in 2019
Tackling Food Poverty

- Development of Leicester as a Feeding Britain Pilot site (Feeding Leicester) – developing joined up, longer-term approaches to tackling Food Poverty
- Development of an Emergency Food Partnership to support food aid projects including increased access to surplus food, funding to purchase white goods and the development of advice offers in four food banks
- Emergency food provision in the city for those in crisis via the City Council’s customer services, delivered by the Action Homeless Food Stop Shop

Supporting Food Growing

- The Community Food Growing Support Programme (CFGS) provides funding to community groups to develop food growing skills and knowledge. Over 60 community groups and 70 schools in the city have been supported
- Leicester City Council maintains 45 allotment sites holding more than 3,000 plots, there are currently 22 allotment societies who have voluntary stewards providing day to day management and support to allotment holders
- Development of the Grow Your Own Grub (GYOG) project in schools. GYOG is a multi-agency initiative that offers support from Food for Life Soil Association to schools around food growing and cooking on the curriculum as part of the Food for Life award. In 2019 18 schools grew a meal in a wheelbarrow and designed a recipe as part of a competition supported by The Conservation Volunteers (TCV) and Leicester City Council

Supporting the Food and Drink Sector and Reducing Waste

- Comprehensive support to food and drinks businesses managed by Leicester City Council has secured £3.1 million of funding from European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) to deliver the ‘Collaborate’ project - a comprehensive three-year business support programme across Leicester and Leicestershire running from 2017 to 2019
- A “Meet the Producer” event was held linking local catering businesses with local suppliers. The aim was to reduce food miles, support local food growing and encourage re-distribution of surplus food to reduce food waste
- FareShare Midlands distributes tonnes of surplus food annually, reducing food waste and creating good links with local supermarkets such as Tesco and Co-op East Midlands.
Ambition 1: Supporting Healthier Food Choices

Making good food decisions throughout life for better health and wellbeing

Rationale

Average life expectancy in Leicester is significantly lower than the national average; 2.3 years lower in males and 1.2 years lower in females. It is estimated that mortality rates would decrease by 14% if all the population was a healthy weight.

It is estimated that 66% of adults in Leicester are either overweight or obese, this figure is increasing and expected to rise further, particularly as a result of Covid-19. Childhood obesity is also a major challenge for the city with 24% of year 6 children obese (including 6% who are severely obese), a further 15% are overweight which is significantly higher than the national average.

The personal and societal costs of obesity are high in that obesity is a risk factor for a range of diseases including cardiovascular disease, type 2 diabetes and some cancers. There is also a recognition that some Black and Minority Ethnic communities, including South Asians, develop these obesity-related diseases at a lower body mass index than white populations. Obesity is also an emerging independent risk factor for susceptibility to and severity of coronavirus disease 2019 (Covid-19).

Along with levels of physical activity, diet and the food environment are the most significant contributing factors to levels of obesity. Analysis of the food environment shows Leicester has 137.6 fast food outlets per 100,000 population compared to an average of 96.5 per population for England. This is one of the highest rates of fast food outlets per population in England indicating that residents are likely to be disproportionately exposed to fast food advertising. Only 51% of the Leicester population meet the recommended fruit and vegetable intake of ‘5 a day’ compared to a national average of 55% of the population.

The importance of good diet begins antenatally and in the early years. Optimal infant nutrition, especially breastfeeding, is a protective factor for the health of babies and mothers. Rates of breastfeeding in Leicester have recently dipped to become lower than the national average with 73% of mums starting breastfeeding. By 6-8 weeks, however, 60% of mums are still breastfeeding, this rate has steadily increased and is significantly higher than the national rate. In 2015, Leicestershire Partnership Trust achieved level 3 of UNICEF Baby Friendly Initiative and in 2018 University Hospitals of Leicester achieved level 2.
Obesity is one of the most serious and complex public health challenges. It is now recognised that wider environmental factors are a factor in rising obesity levels. Public Health priorities, particularly as a result of covid-19 will focus on ensuring that the healthy choice is the easy choice, for example making healthy school meals the most affordable and tastiest choice and developing growing schemes in our most disadvantaged communities. Further work on reducing levels of obesity across the City through a life course approach to healthy weight is planned.

**Eat Better Start Better**

The Eat Better, Start Better Programme developed by Children’s Food Trust and implemented locally by Leicestershire Nutrition and Dietetic Services (LNDS) supports early year’s settings to provide healthy, balanced meals and snacks for under 5’s and their families, both at home and while they are in childcare settings.

The Big Cook Little Cook programme provides practical tailored cooking sessions with children and families with a focus on nutrition themed topic. Families report an increase in fruit and vegetable intake, reduction in takeaways and increased confidence in shopping and preparing healthy food.

“The Eat better Start Better award has been a useful and rewarding experience for us. It made us reflect on our menu and we have made positive changes to our menus so that we meet the national nutrition guidance for the children in our nursery”

*Little Peepul Nursery*

**Progress since the last food plan**

- 89 ‘Good Nutrition for Under 5’s’ awards have been achieved (including reaccreditations)
- 38 early years settings have achieved reaccreditation, maintaining their high level of food policy and provision
- 12 network events have been held for health and childcare practitioners
- 25 nursery staff, children’s centre staff and child-minders have been trained to deliver Big Cook Little Cook
- 11 nurseries and charities are currently registered as BCLC hosts
- Over 450 families have benefited from the Big Cook Little Cook programme
- 13 newsletters have been issued to nurseries across the City providing them with key nutritional information, local event and service information, recipes and healthy activity ideas (since it was introduced in Jan 2019)
84 schools in Leicester City have engaged with the Soil Association’s Food for Life programme between 2015 and 2021, commissioned by Public Health Leicester City Council.

31 schools have achieved Bronze accredited Food for Life award, with seven schools at Silver and one reaching Gold. The incremental award scheme provides a comprehensive and flexible framework designed to highlight the good work schools are doing. The approach supports schools to develop a whole school approach to good food and to implement meaningful change for the benefit of staff, pupils and the wider community.

Training and support are offered to schools to create a healthy and sustainable food environment, increase knowledge and skills around food and nutrition and enable children and families to make healthy choices around food.

Over 50 schools have engaged in training including lunch box audits, food growing, food education, health and sustainability and cooking on the curriculum.

Food for Life School of the Year went to Bridge Junior School

The school has actively engaged in the programme, from inviting parents and carers in for themed lunches, growing their own food and taking children on a trip to Leicester Market.

This inner-city school enables children to know where food comes from by growing food on site and taking part in the ‘Out of the City’ farming project at Roots Farm.

The Nutrition and Dietetic Service visited the school to talk with parents about lunch boxes and support parents to sign up to nutritionally balanced school meals.

foodforlife.org.uk
Improving access to *good quality food* for all

The Department of Health defines food poverty as ‘the inability to afford, or to have access to, food to make up a healthy diet’. The current economic climate and ongoing welfare reforms have contributed to many households in the city facing increasing financial pressures, poverty and negative impacts on health outcomes.

### Key issues impacting Food Poverty prevalence in Leicester

- Over 43,000 households’ main source of income is through welfare benefits with 26,000 children growing up in poverty.
- Leicester is the 32nd most deprived local authority in the country, three out of four residents live in the 40% most deprived areas in the country.
- An estimated four out of ten Leicester Children reside in the 20% most deprived areas in the country for Income Deprivation Affecting Children (IDACI).

The Covid-19 pandemic has increased the financial insecurity of families which directly impacts on levels of food poverty in the city. A recent survey by the Food Foundation found that 22% of households reported losing income as a result of the pandemic. Challenges around accessing food created widespread fear in the population at the height of the pandemic.

Emergency interventions were implemented by the Government and local authority including the Food Hub and Covid Winter grant scheme. Community food projects, aided by funding from LCC, DEFRA and the Waste Reduction Partnership (WRAP) were able to access a wider range of food and increase storage capacity.

The City’s food banks noted a 32% increase in referrals between 2017-2019 this rose to a 40% increase in demand in 2020. Food projects reported that the increase in demand was due to increased poverty, isolation and job loss with many new families accessing support.

Access to free school meals during lockdown was a national and local issue. Leicester experienced higher recorded Covid-19 rates and therefore remained in lockdown between March 2020 and April 2021. Between January 2020 and January 2021 there has been a 4% increase in eligibility for free school meals. (School Census Data)

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Developing Leicester’s Approach to Tackle Food Poverty

Leicester’s first food plan set out an action to develop a strategic approach to tackle food poverty. Research carried out in 2014 and 2015 by LCC included the mapping of food bank provision and monitoring demand for emergency food provision across the food aid system. Increased awareness of the impact of hunger on the wellbeing of families was raised when Leicester’s Health and Wellbeing Survey reported that 1 in 4 children were ‘worried about food’.

Action Homeless, providers of the City’s emergency food provision, funded by Leicester City Council have supported and developed The Emergency Food Partnership since 2016. FareShare Midlands have been instrumental across the food aid network by re-distributing food from the food industry to over 90 groups in Leicester.

Leicester’s unique community food banks often offer wider services beyond meeting immediate food need, adding value to lives of beneficiaries and promoting social inclusion. The partnership has supported community food banks to manage demand and stock issues, increase capacity to widen food offer, develop affordable food provision such as low-cost pantries and develop links with other food projects.

Pathways out of poverty: Food Bank Plus

helping people access emergency advice through community food projects

From 2019 Feeding Leicester worked with Feeding Britain, funded by the National Lottery, to set up a project to increase access to advice to tackle issues that have made people vulnerable to hunger.

Reaching People led this service working with four community food projects across the city. Weekly sessions offered comprehensive, holistic assessments, bespoke advice and case advocacy addressing issues such as welfare benefit applications and entitlement, challenging benefit decisions, financial management and housing issues.

Clients reported previously experiencing multiple barriers to accessing support, particularly digital skills and access to devices and a lack of community-based support.

Support has been provided for 469 households with:

- Over 60% of clients reporting that health issues had contributed to their financial hardship and/or presented a barrier to issue resolution
- The total increase in clients’ annual income was £246,620. This is mainly due to lack of knowledge of disability entitlement or having been unsuccessful in previous applications
- Clients being able to resolve long-standing, complex issues as well as increased wellbeing and being able to move to a position of greater financial resilience.

Funding to this project was extended by Lottery with longer term funding options currently being explored.
In 2017 Leicester City Council alongside Action Homeless, FareShare Midlands the voluntary sector set up Feeding Leicester, a multi-agency strategic partnership to develop an inclusive, co-ordinated approach to address food poverty and develop longer-term solutions to address the underlying causes of poverty.

Feeding Leicester is part of a national network supported by Feeding Britain, a charity set up to implement recommendations outlined within an in-depth all-party parliamentary enquiry addressing hunger.

The multi-agency steering group, chaired by Liz Kendall MP, has agreed priorities set out below, which will feed into Leicester’s Food Plan as part of the action plan.

**Feeding Leicester Priorities:**

<table>
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<tr>
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<th>Protecting people from hunger</th>
<th>Low cost food for vulnerable groups</th>
<th>Supporting people in crisis</th>
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<td>• Co-ordination and partnership working</td>
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<td>• Social eating</td>
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<td>• Cooking Programmes</td>
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<td>• Advice and advocacy</td>
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<td>• Food Growing</td>
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<td>• Good food offer</td>
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**Building resilience**

**Addressing food crisis**

**Figure 2: Feeding Leicester Priorities**

**Influencing National Policy**

The National Food Strategy first published in 2020 backs up local priorities to support those in need, encourage a partnership approach, improve the range of foods available and develop longer term solutions.

Feeding Leicester will continue to work with Feeding Britain to influence national policy, addressing issues such as delays experienced when accessing Universal Credit, addressing the eligibility of free school meals and supporting full uptake for free school meals and Healthy Start vouchers through automatic registration.
Between 2015 and 2020 over 40 statutory, voluntary and community agencies successfully collaborated to deliver a targeted food and activity programme to increase access to healthy food for children and young people living in areas of deprivation in Leicester.

A co-ordinated, multi-agency approach supported a holistic, non-stigmatised activity programme with food aimed to alleviate family pressure during school holidays, reduce social isolation, increase activity and improve the diets and wellbeing of children.

Initial funding was insecure however funding streams were pooled from LCC, Feeding Britain and the Lottery. This has enabled the development of a longer-term approach to build capacity amongst community groups and enable adventure playgrounds to include food as part of their ‘play’ offer. The programme reaches 2,000 children every year.

Key successes of the programme include a strong commitment from all partners, effective corporate and local volunteer engagement and multi-agency co-ordination of the programme by LCC, Action Homeless, Playfair, Reaching People, and FareShare Midlands.

Feeding Leicester provides oversight to the programme and submitted evidence to an all-party enquiry on ‘hunger’ in 2018. As from 2021 the Department for Education are funding a National Holiday Food and Activities programme.

FareShare Midlands
- Organised volunteers co-ordination of volunteers, food compliance support for groups, sourcing healthy food for 20 groups incl. adventure playgrounds and fruit across all libraries in Leicester
- Sourced food for and delivered food to 20 groups and fruit to libraries across the city

De Montfort University Local
- Organised volunteers for groups and provided volunteers themselves
- Provided funding for the programme

Providers
- Included faith groups, a children’s centre, a school, neighbourhood centres adventure, playgrounds and community in targeted areas
- Provided food and activities to the children
- E2 project produced and distributed sandwiches

Leicester City Council
- Co-ordination, information governance, grant funding, food safety advice and training and provision of family swim passes

At least 32,000 meals plus 5,800 portions of fruit and 1900 children

From 2021 the Department for Education has released national funding for the Holiday Activity and Food (HAF) Programme.
Rationale

Food provides a unique opportunity to unite people and bring communities together. The rich cultural mix across Leicester increases the opportunity for good food to be available to all.

The Food Plan will ensure that meaningful work at a community level continues:

- Increasing access to good food
- Providing education on healthy eating, nutrition and cooking within disadvantaged communities
- Empowering communities to adopt positive, long term behaviour changes in relation to food and nutrition
- Supporting communities to grow their own food

There are a number of community organisations, allotments, food banks and religious / faith groups that regularly provide food to their communities and those in need that will be key in the work of the Food Plan in increasing community resilience and responding to need. Opportunities include celebration events that bring people together and highlight the cultural importance of food.

The role of the voluntary and community sector continues to be key in achieving the priorities of this Plan. There is a good foundation of community groups, food providers and food growing groups that have engaged in the food plan since 2014.

Since 2014 Leicester City Council have commissioned The Conservation Volunteers (TCV) to support community food growing. TCV link with food growing projects across the city to build community capacity and raise awareness of food growing in addressing diet related ill health. Their work includes training, sharing good practice and widening opportunities for collaboration amongst community groups, allotments and schools. The project also delivers a small grants scheme to incentivise food growing, over the past 5 years over 60 community groups and 70 schools have been supported to grow their own food and develop skills and knowledge around food growing and cooking.
Community Food Growing Support Programme

As part of the food plan The Conservation Volunteers in partnership with LCC, have developed a responsive food growing support programme to increase access to food growing skills and knowledge aimed at communities that have little knowledge, confidence, or easy access to grow their own food.

The successful programme has:
- Awarded small grants to over 69 community groups and 59 schools to support food growing activity
- Held over 70 workshops and events, engaging with over 1200 people
- Improved physical and mental health through regular outdoor activity, contact with nature and engagement with meaningful group activity
- Actively engaged with allotment societies to develop starter plots, community gardens and orchards

Melbourne Street Gardens:
The Conservation Volunteers and the Leicester City Council Allotments department collaborated to make this abandoned garden available to the community of Highfields. Working closely with Leicester Ageing Together and a co-founder member of Green Guardians Eco-Muslim group, the garden is now being restored by local volunteers.

Project Hope:
Leicester Ageing Together and the Food Growing Programme sent out over 1600 seed packs during lockdown to help families grow their own lettuce, carrots and beetroot.
Sandfield Close Primary

Thanks to their supportive Head teacher, Sandfield continue to implement innovative approaches to improving lunchtimes and the healthy food choices of children in their school.

Their motto is ‘making lunchtimes special’ with 5 Grandmas volunteering at lunchtime to help reception children use cutlery. Good working relationships between teaching and catering staff helps develop a whole school approach to food and healthy eating. The Head teacher sees the value, especially in a social context, of the lunchtime experience. The school ensures that all of year 6 are on a rota to be lunchtime monitors.

A Teaching Assistant delivers cooking on the curriculum and has overcome barriers around cost, space and time to deliver family cooking during a school time session.
Working with businesses to provide a **good food** offer for the city

**Rationale**

Supporting and enabling a vibrant and diverse sustainable food economy is important to Leicester’s economic future. Driving health and sustainability outcomes through effective collaboration with businesses requires an understanding of food supply chains, and the consideration of targeted approaches to different segments of these supply chains. Essentially, the food supply chain includes several distinct stages - primary food producers, secondary food processors (manufacturers) and the food retail sector.

Food Supply Chain:

The food and drink manufacturing sector is worth £600m in the Leicester and Leicestershire economy and provides 2.7% of employment - twice the national share.
Leicester is home to world famous food and drink companies and also produces a wide range of ethnic foods, benefiting from a diverse range of small start-up businesses. There are over 100 food and drink manufacturing businesses in the city and the sector has expanded rapidly.

COVID-19 has had a significant impact on businesses across the economy, and the impact of this is still playing out. Leicester’s extended lockdown has forced many non-essential food retail and hospitality premises to close. Essential food retail premises have been able to remain open, and there has been a renewed reliance on shopping more locally. The extent to which changes in consumer behaviour instigated by the pandemic are temporary, or will become more permanent, is not yet clear. Government has provided significant financial support to businesses since March 2020, and this remains a dynamic and evolving picture. We will continue to work with partners to support businesses to sustain and adapt during these unprecedented times.

There is however potential to accelerate growth in this sector during the recovery from covid-19 and create jobs through developments in food technology, culturally tailored foods and through links with the tourism and hospitality sectors.

Alongside this, localising support for primary produce offers opportunities to work with County partners such as Leicestershire County Council and Brooksby Melton College to develop strategies for producing more of the food consumed in Leicester, and more of the produce needed by secondary food processors. Links with Universities locally will help us to identify routes to localising the supply chain, market shaping and innovative ways to support the producers nearest to the city. There is also the opportunity to work with communities and land owners to explore alternative routes to producing more of what is needed locally (e.g. Urban Agriculture and Community Supported Agriculture).

As a result, the food and drink industry has been identified as a priority sector for investment by the Leicester and Leicestershire Enterprise Partnership (LLEP). The LLEP developed a Food and Drink Sector Growth Plan in 2015, which identified a number of key barriers to business growth including: low investment in research and development, weak local supply chains and the lack of affordable food grade units.

The food and drink manufacturing sector has also been identified as a key priority in the City Mayor’s Economic Action Plan 2016-2020, where a key theme is Enterprising Leicester; a place where people, businesses and communities thrive and are supported to grow.

The Economic Action Plan has resulted in the delivery of Leicester Food Park, effective work with partners (LLEP, East Midlands Chamber, Food and Drink Forum, Leicestershire County Council) and delivery of Collaborate – a comprehensive business support offer for food and drink manufacturing businesses funded by the European Regional Development Fund.
Sustainability in the Food and Drink Sector

The Food and Drink Forum provides robust, hands-on food technical advice, training, and specialist business support to enable food and drink businesses to realise their growth ambitions.

The Forum provides a range of practical support to businesses including meeting food management standards, reducing energy, water and waste reduction and advice.

Encouraging Improved Practice Around Sustainability in the Food and Drink Sector

As part of efforts to embed sustainability within the food and drink economy, Leicester Food Plan board member the Food and Drink Forum conducted a survey of food and drink businesses to understand their interests in sustainability. Out of 31 businesses responding the survey found -

- 58% were interested in accessing a sustainable food business toolkit supporting with policies, access to local suppliers and examples of good practice
- 68% were interested in support with promoting the health/sustainability benefits of their products and businesses through local recognition (e.g. certification /endorsement)
- 52% were interested in an awards scheme and a visible statement to support (e.g. a local Good Food Charter)
- 77% were interested in links with community food projects as part of their corporate social responsibility.

Following this work, the Leicester and Leicestershire Enterprise Partnership (the LLEP, also part of the Food Plan Board) has convened a Food and Drink Peer Network and an Agriculture Peer Network – both of these networks are supporting local businesses with their future plans with sustainability and zero carbon considerations both featuring.

Next steps will build on this information to identify actions to highlight local successes and identify support for businesses wishing to progress sustainability ambitions.
Leicester Food Park

A purpose-built manufacturing facility providing food businesses with high quality premises. It supports start up and small food manufacturing businesses to produce safe and compliant products as well as the ability to achieve higher level certifications, which in turn allows them to access a wider range of customers.

The £5.8m Leicester Food Park was developed by Leicester City Council, with funding from the Council and the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF).

Shelton’s Coffee, based at Leicester Food Park, a purpose-built manufacturing facility providing food businesses with high quality premises, is a family-run producer of single origin Colombian Coffee providing a high quality, legally compliant product.

With support from the Food and Drink Forum Shelton’s are using compostable film and 100% recyclable boxes - all whilst ensuring the quality and integrity of the product.
Lakshmi & Son’s Limited, trading as Cofresh Snack Foods, is a Leicester-based company known throughout the UK for its range of Indian snack foods.

In 2018, Cofresh expanded their business and moved into a large warehouse. Through the support of Leicester City Council’s ERDF-funded Green BELLE project they were awarded a £10,000 grant, covering a third of the cost to replace existing lighting with low maintenance energy efficient LED lighting.

The new lighting is predicted to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by the equivalent of 43 tonnes of carbon dioxide in the first 12 months. That’s more than the weight of seven African bush elephants, or enough gas to fill eleven three-person hot air balloons!

The lighting requires less maintenance and will continue to provide similar carbon savings for many years to come. It was estimated that Cofresh would save around £20,000 on their annual electricity bill, based on typical energy costs.

Leicester City Council’s Energy Projects Team has helped hundreds of businesses across Leicester and Leicestershire to increase their energy efficiency and reduce their energy costs through Green BELLE and previous ERDF programmes.
Rationale

This plan aims to influence procurement practices within the public sector and businesses to become healthy, ethical and environmentally responsible.

A Plan for Public Procurement, written by DEFRA, highlights that effective public procurement can deliver a range of benefits:

- Supporting a thriving local economy and supplying quality nutritious food for customers
- Tackling health issues by enabling people to eat well across the public sector, including schools and hospitals
- Supporting farmers and food producers and rewarding them for operating to high animal welfare and production standards
- Building training opportunities into contracts, to ensure a well-skilled food and farming sector for the future

Many people rely on food either provided by caterers or food already prepared therefore maintaining healthy standards and meeting government recommendations based on the ‘eatwell plate’ is increasingly challenging in present day diets.

Leicester City Council’s Social Charter was developed in response to the Public Services (Social Value) Act 2012 which aims to improve economic, social and environmental wellbeing through procurement. A key theme of the charter is to promote locally sourcing contracts and supply chains.

In the last food plan Leicester City Council reviewed its standards and systems for procuring food and catering services. An assessment of the Council’s food spend in 2016 confirmed that the council’s main food contract is the delivery of school meals. LCC Catering Department has worked with the Soil Association Food for Life Served Here programme to improve their standards and in September 2019 reached Silver Standard.

Food for Life Served Here is a widely respected scheme, recognised by the Department of Health & Social Care and the Department for Education that is raising the standards of food quality, provenance and environmental sustainability in public and private sector catering. It is accepted as a framework that helps cooks and caterers to show they meet the school food standards as well as demonstrate their commitment to serving fresh, traceable, sustainably sourced food.

The Food Plan will be working with other public sector organisations in the city such as University Hospitals of Leicester (UHL) and Leicester’s Universities to develop and share best practice in good food buying standards and build on the considerable progress made by LCC Catering Department.
Using Good Food in school meals improves health outcomes whilst supporting and stimulating quality local food markets.

Increasing the uptake of school meals has been a priority of Leicester’s Food Plan since 2016. City Catering staff prepare around 13,000 school meals every day, served to pupils across 50 city schools. All meals are balanced and nutritious, with a diverse choice of menus available that cater for cultural, medical and lifestyle choices.

On a regular basis City Catering offer schools the opportunity to have a themed menu that is intended to encourage more children to choose a hot meal. As well as being fun, the themed menus encourage children to try new, healthy foods. City Catering often provide sample dishes of school meals at parents’ evenings.

The City Catering service has always aimed to ensure children across Leicester receive good quality hot meals. They signed up for the Soil Associations ‘Food for Life Served Here’ initiative that supports caterers and food providers to meet nutritional standards and serve fresh, sustainable and locally sourced food.

The service recently achieved the ‘Silver Served Here’ award which means they offer locally sourced free-range eggs, British organic milk and fish certified by the Marine Stewardship Council. Meat is British and is supplied to the Red Tractor farm standard and seasonal vegetables are served whenever possible.

Ongoing information and training is offered to catering staff and the good practice associated with having Food for Life Served Here is embedded within the service. This ranges from the use of standard recipes, portion control, good customer service, positioning healthy options prominently, allergen information, displaying provenance maps and understanding their importance.
Support a shift towards a sustainable food system which addresses the climate emergency facing us, along with declining biodiversity and the impacts of food and packaging waste

Rationale

Since the publication of the first Food Plan in 2014, world leaders have signed up to the Paris Agreement on Climate Change - aiming to limit global warming to within 1.5 degrees of pre-industrial levels. In response to the scale of the challenge involved in achieving this, Leicester City Council declared a climate emergency in February 2019 and has produced a new Climate Emergency Strategy and Action Plan.

A study for the Food Standards Agency estimated that food is responsible for 15-30% of UK greenhouse gas emissions, with most of these occurring in agriculture (45%), food manufacture (12%) and transport (12%). Meat and dairy consumption was found to be responsible for over 50% of emissions from a typical diet.

An estimated fifth of the food purchased by UK households (6.6 million tonnes per year) goes to waste, with another 2.9 million tonnes wasted in the food supply chain.
Changes to the way food is produced, to the dietary choices we make, and to how we deal with food waste, will all be necessary both globally and in Leicester to address the climate emergency.

The issue of food packaging is important too. Whilst modern packaging is acknowledged to help reduce food waste from spoilage, the use of plastics is increasingly under the spotlight as research demonstrates the extent of plastics pollution and its impact on wildlife, including the wide dispersal of ‘micro-plastic’ particles in the environment.

Leicester City Council currently recycles its food waste as part of waste collection services across the city. Approximately 70% of household waste is processed through a ‘Ball Mill’ which mechanically separates out the organic waste. The organic waste is composted and used to generate electricity for the national grid. The compost produced is used in land remediation projects. The new UK government Resources and Waste Strategy currently being consulted on will lead to LCC Waste Management developing a Waste Strategy.

To tackle these issues, big reductions in the impact of food systems and food choices in Leicester and elsewhere will be needed, with changes including:

- A move to more sustainable diets
- Significantly cutting energy and water use in food and drink manufacturing
- Reducing both food and packaging waste at each stage of the food cycle
- Cutting the carbon emissions of food transportation

As an urban area Leicester cannot directly change farming methods, but the choices individuals make can have a big impact. The council and other organisations can use their influence to educate city residents on sustainable food choices, including through Leicester Market and local food events. The council can also engage with residents through its waste system, encouraging the prevention of food waste and recycling of food packaging and enabling home composting.

At the same time food businesses based in the city can be encouraged to become more energy and resource efficient and referred to sources of support, and food miles can be reduced by increasing local food growing, including through work with schools and communities.

The Food Plan also links with the council’s Climate Emergency Strategy and Action Plan, which contains a wide range of actions the council is taking to tackle Leicester’s contribution to the climate emergency.
Reducing Food Waste in Leicester - Reducing Food Waste across the food industry - FareShare Midlands.

Food Plan partner FareShare Midlands’ dedicated team delivers against key Food Plan Ambitions – improving health outcomes, reducing the impact of food poverty and preventing good food from being wasted and causing unnecessary damage to the environment.

Leicester is home to some of the leading food and drink companies in the country, collectively employing thousands of people across the supply chain.

Since 2008 FareShare has worked hard to build relationships with many of these food companies to help implement solutions for their surplus food. Solutions which help to address socio-economic issues like poverty and preventing good food from being wasted and causing unnecessary damage to the environment.

By building relationships with over 500 manufacturers, producers, distributors and retailer companies across the food industry FareShare Midlands regularly supports over 90 groups across the city.

FareShare work to enable the food industry to keep to it’s commitment and support the food wast hierarchy.

From 2020-March 2021 over 1,334,000 kg worth of food was redistributed to members across the City of Leicester. This weight is roughly the same as 2,000 cows!

Last year 90 Leicester groups in total received food with a retail value of £1,970,808

Significant progress has been made with schemes like the Central England Co-Operative’s ground-breaking store level re-distribution programme that ensures all ambient food left over at the end of the day is re-directed to community groups free of charge.

Samworth Brothers, a leading manufacturer and supplier of premium quality chilled food to the retail sector have supported the holiday food programme across the city providing thousands of lunches to address hunger during the school holidays.

If all good surplus food reached bellies and not bins the entire population of London could be fed– some 62 million people!

FareShare Midlands works in partnership with the UKs largest food redistribution charity, FareShare. Fighting Hunger, Fighting Food Waste, Making a Difference
Find out more:

Organisations and individuals are invited to get more involved:

- Visit Leicester’s-food-plan to find out about upcoming events, read latest news and contribute to on-line discussion.
- If you’ve got questions or want to discuss any aspect of the Plan, you can contact Public Health at Leicester City Council.

Contact: foodplan@leicester.gov.uk

Read more about healthy eating and sustainable food issues locally or nationally:

- Sustainable Food Places Network
  Leicester is part of the SFP network which brings together food partnerships from towns, cities, boroughs, districts and counties across the UK sharing best practice on all aspects of healthy and sustainable food.
  www.sustainablefoodplaces.org

- Leicestershire Food Links
  Provides a directory of local food suppliers including farmers, farm shops, farmers markets, retailers and restaurants.
  www.leicestershirefoodlinks.org.uk

- Food for Life
  A partnership led by the Soil Association, offering information and services including standards for caterers and a programme for schools.
  www.foodforlife.org.uk

- Leicester Nutrition and Dietetic Service
  General information about a variety of topics including diet and lifestyle information for a range of common clinical conditions.
  www.lnds.nhs.uk

- The Conservation Volunteers
  Provide opportunities for outdoor activity and contact with nature, including food growing at multiple sites across the city.
  Contact: midlands@tcv.org.uk

- Fish Online
  Provides a buyer’s guide to choosing sustainably-sourced fish and avoiding products from threatened fisheries.

- Sustain: the Alliance for Better Food and Farming
  Details of campaigns and initiatives to promote healthy, sustainable food.
  www.sustainweb.org

- Change4Life
  Advice on eating well, moving more and living longer.
  www.nhs.uk/change4life

- NHS lifestyle support
  www.nhs.uk/live-well/eat-well
  Includes advice on healthy eating, healthy recipes, food safety and losing weight.

- LiveWell
  Integrated Lifestyle Service that supports residents in the City to improve their health and wellbeing.
  livewell.leicester.gov.uk