

Options Appraisal for Future Models of Community Agriculture and Growing Initiatives in Sandwell

for SANDWELL METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL



Summary with no financial information

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1 Executive summary

1.1 Summary of issues and project brief

Sandwell has a national reputation for its health-driven community food growing initiatives. Programmes have been primarily delivered by 'Growing Opportunities', an initiative hosted within the local charity Ideal for All.

The work of Growing Opportunities was part funded by the Primary Care Trust, which is now under the Public Health section of Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council (The Council). However, current pressures on public funding have meant that core funding for Growing Opportunities has come under serious review.

This study was commissioned with a view to identifying the options the Council has in supporting community food programmes. In carrying out this work the consultants were asked to consider the effect of a reduction, perhaps to zero, in core funding for Growing Opportunities from the Council; or if funding is to continue, how it can be shown to be effective and good value for money in delivering local priorities in terms of public health and well-being.

The study has considered the potential future of community based growing in Sandwell in the round, and noted its potential as a vehicle for creating diverse benefits including employment and skills development, enterprise and job creation, urban land regeneration, public health and wider health outcomes.

1.2 National context

Recent evaluations of community food initiatives, such as the £60 million Local Food programme supported by Big Lotteryⁱ, have shown that they have a significant, positive effect on community integration and on human skills and well-being. Other programmes indicate how food initiatives can act as a vehicle for local economic regeneration and the development of employment skills, as well as offering a therapeutic environment for those with diverse forms of disability or mental health issues.

Despite the significant impact of Local Food and other programmes which have supported this sector in recent years, there is currently a much bleaker future facing community food projects, due to the much tighter fiscal control from public sector, and the closure of other grant support programmes. Increasingly charities and other not-for-private-profit organisations in all sectors have to become more businesslike in their approach to financial viability, and there is an increasing need for solid evidence of the value for money of community food initiatives as a vehicle.

However, one area in which there is new energy and momentum is in the development of food strategies at a city or local authority level. The Soil Association and other partners are now leading the Sustainable Food Cities programmeⁱⁱ, which will have 60 participating areas. This programme and others likeⁱⁱⁱ it have recognised the importance of joined-up approaches involving agencies, businesses and local people, with interests ranging from economic development, public health, planning and environment, and community development. Community food initiatives can provide a vehicle which satisfies many of these strategic objectives.

1.3 How effective are community food initiatives as a vehicle for social good?

Community food initiatives can meet multiple economic, social, human and environmental objectives. Food is not just about food! It is a vehicle which not only generates the production of food for local consumption, but can also present an opportunity for:

- nurturing employment skills, enterprise development and new jobs
- meeting health targets in relation to diet, exercise and social integration
- providing opportunities for maintenance and recovery for people with long-term conditions
- regenerating the local environment and addressing climate change impacts
- building community and addressing inclusion
- raising awareness of healthy diets and sustainable food systems

Evidence is building of the efficacy of community food initiatives. For example:

- the Local Food programme's report on Social Return on Investment^{iv} showed that every £1 invested in 3 local food projects returned around £7 to society in the form of social and economic outcomes including health and well-being, training and skills
- the same study showed a 25% increase in physical health and vitality, 22% increased mental health, and a 19% increase in individual resilience and self esteem
- the USDA in 2010^v reported on how local food systems have the potential to positively impact the local economy, through import substitution and localization of processing activities, and stimulating additional business activity within the local economy by improving business skills and opportunities; and a study^{vi} by New Economics Foundation shows the much higher local multiplier effect of local and independent enterprises
- a study^{vii} of the financial benefits to society of helping one person out of mental health care for one year, from Growing Well in Cumbria, was evaluated by New Economics Foundation, and showed a net fiscal benefit of over £12,000; in Sandwell, 'meaningful change' has been shown for 65% of participants in therapeutic gardening sessions for adults with long term conditions (Growing Opportunities programmes use of Short Edinburgh Well Being Scale)
- a review of 19 case studies of 'well-being; projects including community food initiatives for the Big Lottery found significant personal health benefits^{viii}
- the evaluation of the Local Food programme has shown that community food initiatives are highly effective in building community, and provide an important educational resource and volunteering opportunity
- a report on local food and climate change in 2010^{ix} found that there are distinctive opportunities for community food initiatives to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in every part of the food chain; and a community food advice service in South Wales^x has unlocked several derelict sites to create cherished community gardens.

Community based growing can also help communities to build their capacity to support themselves and to increase community resilience. With the reductions in

council funding to date, and with further funding reductions in the future, community growing has the potential to contribute to a number of key council and partnership initiatives. This includes Facing the Future, Better Care Fund and its associated community offer and the Dials and Levers programme.

1.4 Local context

Sandwell has been assessed as the 12th most disadvantaged community in England. On average, the people who live in Sandwell do not live as long as people in other areas of England and spend more of their lives ill or disabled.

The Council has to deliver against priorities for public health, which are defined at a national level in the Public Health Outcomes Framework^{xi}, and at a local level by the Sandwell Scorecard and Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy. Other local objectives in terms of economic development, planning and environment, are also relevant.

The overriding approach contained within these strategies, is to take an holistic view whereby it is recognised that health and well-being are the outcome of creating a healthy working and living environment. This is supported by evidence from the Marmot Review^{xii} into health inequalities in England in 2010 that shows clearly that 'the largest influences on health inequalities are the physical, social and economic environments into which people are born, live and grow old.'

In the early 2000s, a food team was established by the Primary Care Trust (PCT), to support various interventions, including the 'Eatwell in Sandwell' programme^{xiii}, which followed on from the establishment of the food team, HAZ, Five a Day, and New Opportunities Fund. In 2005, the Sandwell Food Policy^{xiv} was designed to protect and enhance the health of the population and contribute to tackling health inequalities, and in 2008 a strategy was set out in Growing Healthy Communities: A community agriculture strategy for Sandwell^{xv}, in line with the Food Policy.

1.5 Growing Opportunities

The Growing Opportunities team was established in 1998. In 2001 it was absorbed as a cost centre within with Ideal for All (IFA), a local user-led charity for disabled people, to develop and deliver two viable community garden sites: Salop Drive Market Garden (three acres) and Malthouse Gardens (one-third acre). It has since then delivered a wide range of interventions which respond to the approach and objectives defined in the community agriculture strategy.

It has managed many community food initiatives with an emphasis on healthy diet and activity, in a safe, productive and green environment, in areas of significant deprivation. Growing Opportunities has won multiple awards for diverse achievements from urban regeneration to public health.

Since the year 2000, approximately £5 million of capital and revenue funding has been raised and invested from diverse sources, with core funding from service level contracts with the PCT, from charitable and grant giving organisations, Big Lottery, and a recent Landfill funded capital regeneration at a new site (Barlow Road, three acres), and through a growing portfolio of 'paid for' services, for example offering educational visits to local schools.

Current issues for Growing Opportunities

Funding from Public Health was significantly reduced in the year 2013-14 to xxx, and confirmed at this level for the year 2014-15. Other project funding is drawing to a close. Services provided to schools and other agencies have drawn an income of around xxx, which could potentially grow further. Current programme delivery costs including all overheads, to maintain the current level of service, are over xxx (although depending on the level of service and programmes delivered, could potentially be reduced to xxx). Growing Opportunities therefore faces a potential cash flow crisis midway through the coming year. Whilst the programme managers have been very successful in drawing in grant funding in the past, applications for significant grants often take at least six months to mature, and there are no major bids in the pipeline.

The **host organisation**, IFA, has undergone significant changes in its portfolio and management over the last two years, and although IFA has provided management services and cash flow security to Growing Opportunities, there may be some risk in the future stability of this as a host organisation. IFA's core objective is addressing disability and inclusion, which has coincided well to date with programme interventions by Growing Opportunities, but which might not be such a good fit within a potentially wider remit for the delivery of community food initiatives.

There is a current **contract** with the Council under its public health remit. However, there is room for improvement in the clarity of activities which the council would like to see delivered under this contract, and in the indicators of success by which the programmes delivered are seen to meet the Council's strategic objectives.

Growing Opportunities has been managed diligently by a number of individuals with deep experience in the community food sector. However two of the three **key managers** have left the organisation, and the remaining part-time manager may not have the capacity to reinvigorate the Growing Opportunities programme.

There are a large number of other, smaller community food initiatives which are running within Sandwell, several of which have been supported by Growing Opportunities, and more widely within the Black Country. **Integration** between these initiatives has been strong in places, but there is no overarching **coordination or strategic framework** for the community food sector in the borough, especially as the Community Agriculture Strategy has expired.

In summary, the '**do nothing**' option carries a serious risk to the ongoing viability of the Growing Opportunities programme. If lost, there could be severe consequences such as the loss of the Salop Drive market garden, as well as the disintegration of many years of building community networks.

Growing Opportunities has no current **business plan** as it is subsumed within IFA and no priority is placed on it having its own plan. This is clearly needed urgently in order to safeguard a viable future for the programmes which it runs, and the other community assets which are associated with it.

Since the initial draft of this report, discussions have been progressing between the **Accord** Group and IFA, recognising a commonality in objectives, and the capacity of Accord to assist in delivery of the Growing Opportunities and related programmes.

1.6 Successes and gaps in the community food programme in Sandwell

There is already considerable activity underway across Sandwell around community based growing. This includes the allotments across the borough, a range of other community led growing projects and council supported projects such as those at Lightwoods Park.

In summary, our analysis is that the **positive aspects** of the community food programme in Sandwell upon which one can build, are as follows (with a focus on the work of Growing Opportunities - GOpps):

- programmes to date have focused on, and been successful at, addressing **health issues**, in particular through influencing diet, and offering a means of exercise, recovery from illness, productive work, socialising and community empowerment
- there has been a particular focus on addressing **inclusion** for those with disabilities and long-term conditions, and other disadvantage
- there has been some excellent work with **schools**, both with younger children offering an outdoor classroom to explore diverse curricula activities, and with older children leading to work experience
- the **management** of the GOpps programmes has been diligent and innovative, as reflected in national awards
- **community networks** and local partnerships have been nurtured

However, our view is that the community food programme in Sandwell **could be strengthened** in the following ways:

- by developing a more **strategic approach** to the food production and supply system in the borough, and by co-ordination of a multi-stakeholder approach for those with remits in economic, community, health, and environmental issues (i.e. to widen the scope from its current focus on health and disability)
- this wider remit might lead to a **re-structuring of programme leadership**, whereby Growing Opportunities might **diversify** its remit, and consequently its **hosting** within a new parent organisation, or become an **independent** social enterprise; alternatively one might create a **new organisation** with this more strategic and wider remit
- consider ways in which **urban food production** could be significantly increased, both as part of sustainable food systems agenda, and also as a vehicle for multiple economic, environmental and community initiatives
- addressing the need for local **employment skills**, using food production, processing, delivery and catering as vehicles for change
- broadening **community development** and capacity building through outreach activities to more sectors of the local population, and by closer integration with other community food activities.

ⁱ Countryside and Community Research Institute (CCRI), with f3 the local food consultants, More than just the Veg, Growing community capacity through local food projects, 2009

ⁱⁱ <http://sustainablefoodcities.org/>

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- ⁱⁱⁱ Sustain, Case Studies of Growing Well project,
http://www.sustainweb.org/growinghealth/case_studies/
The Health Impact Assessment of Greenspace guide offers an overview of the best available international scientific evidence on the health impacts (both positive and negative) of greenspace <http://www.greenspacescotland.org.uk/links-between-greenspace-and-health.aspx>
- ^{iv} Professor Paul Courtney, Countryside and Community Research Institute (CCRI), University of Gloucestershire, The Local Food programme: A Social Return on Investment Approach, 2012
- ^v USDA, Local Food Systems Concepts, Impacts, and Issues, May 2010
- ^{vi} Justin Sacks, nef The Money Trail, 2002
- ^{vii} Olivier Vardakoulis, nef consulting limited, The Economic Benefits of Ecominds, A case study approach, , 2013
- ^{viii} CLES Consulting, BIG LOTTERY FUND NATIONAL WELL-BEING EVALUATION Case study annex, 2013
- ^{ix} Local food and climate change, A publication commissioned by Making Local Food Work 2010
- ^x f3 the local food consultants, Evaluation of Community Foodie, 2014
- ^{xi} Department of Health, Public Health Outcomes Framework 2013 to 2016 and technical updates, , 2013
- ^{xii} Professor Sir Michael Marmot , Fair Society, Healthy Lives: A Strategic Review of Health Inequalities in England Post-2010, , 2010
- ^{xiii} Davis L, Barry V, and Caraher M (2006). *Neighbourhood Renewal Fund 'Eatwell in Sandwell' 2004-6: Successes, challenges, learning outcomes and opportunities. Final Evaluation Report June 2006.* Oxford: Ital Associates
- ^{xiv} Sandwell PCT 2005. Sandwell food policy. Sandwell Primary Care Trust, Sandwell, West Midlands
- ^{xv} Davis, L. 2008. Growing healthy communities: a community agriculture strategy for Sandwell 2008-12. Sandwell Primary Care Trust and Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council, Sandwell, West Midlands, United Kingdom