



Report to:	Climate and Environment Advisory Committee 04 April 2023
Lead Cabinet Member:	Deputy Leader and Lead Cabinet Member for the Environment, Cllr Brian Milnes
Lead Officer:	Head of Climate, Environment and Waste, Bode Esan

Sustainable Food: supporting initiatives in South Cambridgeshire

Executive Summary

1. This report provides an overview of current action and plans by the council to support sustainable food initiatives. It fulfils action 6.2 in the council's Zero Carbon and Doubling Nature Action Plan to explore feasibility of further work in the area of decarbonising food systems and agriculture (CEAC 4 October 2022).
2. Food is a key issue in relation to the climate and ecological crises and decarbonising food systems and agriculture will be necessary to meet national and international greenhouse gas emissions reduction targets. Most of the work to do this is beyond the remit or influence of the Council. However, there are ways a district council can support the emergence of a more sustainable food system. Broadly defined, these are:
 - Supporting allotments and community-food growing initiatives
 - Supporting a local food economy
 - Influencing behaviour around food: reducing waste and providing information about the climate impacts of meat and dairy consumption
 - Improving recycling rates for food waste
 - Encouraging environmentally-friendly farming
3. In South Cambridgeshire several service areas are engaged in this work, with climate change mitigation a co-benefit rather than the main driver. The report brings this work together and identifies opportunities to add value to the existing activity.

Key Decision

4. No, as all actions in the report have already been agreed through the council's corporate and service planning processes.

Recommendations

5. CEAC is recommended to note the report and provide comments to the lead Cabinet Member for the Environment.

Reasons for Recommendations

6. CEAC's role is to advise Cabinet on how to achieve the council's climate and environmental ambitions. Food production, distribution and disposal has significant implications for these, which means it is important that the council reviews whether it is doing all it can to encourage a more sustainable food system.

Details

7. Sustainable means able to be maintained at a certain rate or level, (Google dictionary). For a food system to be sustainable it must be economically, environmentally, and socially sustainable. The national organisation Sustainable Food Places defines sustainable food as:

Food that is produced, processed, traded and disposed of in ways that:

- *Contribute to thriving local economies and sustain the livelihoods of people working in the food sector (ECONOMIC SUSTAINABILITY)*
- *Protect the diversity of both plants and animals and avoid damaging natural resources and contributing to climate change (ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY)*
- *Provide social benefits, such as good quality food, safe and healthy products and educational opportunities (SOCIAL SUSTAINABILITY)*

8. Since CEAC's role is to advise Cabinet on how to achieve the council's climate and environmental ambitions we are mainly concerned here with environmental sustainability although the three elements of sustainability are linked.
9. Food is important to achieving the council's climate and environmental ambitions. Although not relevant to the council's targets for reducing carbon emissions on our own estate and operations, (emissions from food purchased by the council would be out of the scope of our targets, but in any case, the council purchases negligible quantities of food), food production, distribution and disposal is relevant

[Type here]

to the council's aspiration to reach net zero emissions from the district by 2050. Precise figures for the contribution from food production, distribution and disposal are not available, but greenhouse gas emissions from the categories of land use and land use change, and agriculture, (likely to be largely food production given the rural nature of the district) together accounted for 16% of South Cambridgeshire's greenhouse gas emissions in 2020-21. The land use sector needs to become a net sink for greenhouse gas emissions by the mid-2030s.

10. Food production in the district is also important to the council's doubling nature ambitions. Agricultural intensification has been the main cause of loss of nature in the UK. Environmentally sensitive farming is encouraged by government schemes such as Countryside Stewardship and Environmental Stewardship, for which there has been significant take-up in South Cambridgeshire. Post Brexit, new Environmental Land Management schemes are being developed to deliver outcomes for the climate and environment including creating and restoring wildlife-rich habitats. As these come on stream, there may be potential for more environmentally sensitive farming.
11. A key risk of the warming climate is to food security, that is, the availability of food at affordable prices, which may be impacted by drought and flooding, which may in turn affect global food prices. The council is already addressing the issue of households struggling to afford food as a key part of its cost of living work, prompted by recent hikes in inflation, attributed largely to the war in Ukraine. As detailed in paragraph 20, the council's cost of living work has clear cross-overs and synergies with work to support environmentally sustainable food production, distribution and disposal.

Current and planned work by the council

Supporting allotments and community-food growing initiatives

12. Allotments and community growing sites not only provide a source of locally grown produce but also deliver benefits for health and wellbeing, community cohesion, education, biodiversity, climate change, food waste and the local economy. The council supports these through planning policy, which requires that developers make appropriate provision for these. It also supports these as part of community development work on new developments, for example, Northstowe, and through grants to community groups.
13. Current planning policy in the adopted Local Plan require developers to provide areas for community food growing and allotments, (policies SC/7 and SC/8). Guidance on best practice in implementing these policies is included in the Greater Cambridge Sustainable Design and Construction Supplementary Planning Document (Section 4.4). Similar policies are included in the First Proposals for the emerging Greater Cambridge Local Plan.
14. Community food growing projects are eligible to apply for up to £1,500 from the Community Chest and for up to £15,000 from the Zero Carbon Communities

[Type here]

grant. Projects funded include a community building for the Northstowe Horticultural Association, the Orwell Living Food Bank and an apple press in Girton.

15. Details are currently being finalised for new grant schemes funded through the government's Rural Prosperity and Shared Prosperity Funds. These schemes will run for two years April 2023 to March 2025, and it is anticipated that community food-growing projects will be eligible for funding under the 'Creation of new green spaces or improvements to existing spaces' theme.
16. An opportunity to support further allotments and community growing sites across Greater Cambridge is identified in a report produced in 2020 as part of the Greater Cambridge Local Plan development process. The Green Infrastructure Opportunities Mapping Report Plan includes an outline of an initiative to create a patchwork of allotments and community growing sites across Greater Cambridge, delivered through expansion and upgrading of existing sites and providing new sites in areas of deficiency and new development. The report sets out an overview of the initiative, potential delivery partners and funding mechanisms and indicative costs. Building on this, a further green infrastructure strategy evidence base is in progress which will define quantity, accessibility and quality standards for new open spaces. These standards will be incorporated into the emerging Local Plan policies.
17. CoFarm is a registered charity with a bold vision to create a network of community-based agroecological farms across the UK. Their subsidiary company CoFarm Cambridge is a community farm started in 2020 on 7-acres of privately-owned agricultural land off Barnwell Road in Cambridge. The GI Opportunity Mapping Report notes plans by CoFarm to develop a community food growing scheme across a patchwork of sites extending from Wicken Fen towards their Barnwell site in the city, in partnership with the National Trust.

Supporting a local food economy

18. There are various ways to help strengthen a local food economy. By supporting the development of community markets with advice (including a toolkit), market and stallholder directories and help with promotion, the council's Business Support team helps food businesses sell their produce locally.
19. Cambridge Food Hub is a pioneering project initiated by Haslingfield-based company Cambridge Organic. Its mission is 'to significantly increase the amount of locally and sustainably produced food that is consumed in Cambridge using processes and facilities that are as environmentally sustainable as possible and with an ethical business model that aims to provide value to its customers, suppliers, employees, owners, the local community and the environment in equal measures'. Currently an online hub, the vision is a building which would serve as a food storage and distribution centre, a small business incubator, shop and café to serve Cambridge and the surrounding area. The GI Opportunity Mapping Report notes that Northstowe was identified as a potential site for this centre.

20. Plans to lead the development of a South Cambridgeshire Sustainable Food Network as part of a package of cost of living support for households were agreed by Cabinet on 20 March. The network will include

- facilitating the setup of new foodbanks
- creating community vegetable gardens
- facilitating a better relationship between supermarkets and foodbanks to donate excess food
- delivering food parcels to those in need

21. Over the coming year we will explore the potential for this work to form the basis of an application for membership of the Sustainable Food Places Network. Sustainable Food Places brings together and supports local cross-sector food partnerships taking a whole food system approach. They have an award scheme recognising and celebrating the success of places taking a joined up, holistic approach to food and achieving a significant positive change on a range of food issues. Cambridge Sustainable Food are currently leading a campaign going for the gold Sustainable Food Places Award.

Influencing behaviour around food: reducing waste and providing information about the climate impacts of meat and dairy consumption

22. The council influences food behaviour through communication campaigns. Love Food Hate Waste campaigns help reduce greenhouse gas emissions, both because food production and distribution produce greenhouse gas emissions which are avoided when waste is minimised, and to a lesser extent because waste food rots and releases methane.

23. Reducing meat and dairy consumption and eating less and more sustainably produced meat and plant-based alternatives is recommended by the Committee on Climate Change. The council supports residents to make healthy and sustainable food choices through information and by ensuring that when catering for events, good quality, healthy plant-based options are available.

24. Three projects funded through the council's Zero Carbon Communities grant scheme have included promoting climate-friendly diets – two from Cambridge Sustainable Food promoting climate-friendly diets and one from Let's Cook supporting low carbon cooking.

25. Support for community-based sustainable food initiatives such as those in Bassingbourn and Haslingfield includes encouraging applications for funding through the ZCC grant scheme and using the ZCC newsletter and networking opportunities to share good practice.

Improving recycling rates for food waste

[Type here]

26. Food waste makes a two-fold contribution to climate change, directly in the methane emissions from food waste in landfill sites, and indirectly in the emissions from producing, packaging and transporting food which is not eaten.
27. The Council encourages home composting of food waste, with some exceptions for cooked food, meat, dairy, and fish. Information about how to compost and a link to purchase composting bins and kit are promoted to residents via the Council's website and as part of regular food waste campaigns.
28. The Council provides a fortnightly food waste collection within the green organic recycling bin, preventing it going to landfill and making it available as compost and a soil improver.
29. The Council has completed a separate food waste collection trial across Greater Cambridge which has been extremely successful, and we have collected over 1,400 tonnes of food waste from almost half a million caddies over the three years. This equates to 3.2kg per household per week (based on 55% participation rate).

Encouraging environmentally-friendly farming

30. As noted in paragraph 10, there is potential for more environmentally-friendly farming in the district. One mechanism for this is Biodiversity Net Gain. A good example of this is the pioneering BNG initiative at Lower Valley Farm, Fulbourn, being delivered by Bidwell's in partnership with landowners Cambridgeshire County Council.
31. The Green Infrastructure Opportunity Mapping Report recommends a strategic initiative to support environmentally-sensitive farming, (Strategic Initiative 14). This has yet to be fully explored. One separate initiative has, however, played a useful part in encouraging regenerative agriculture. As part of the Zero Carbon Communities Climate and Environment Week in 2021, seed funding was provided for the creation of a film profiling six farmers in South Cambridgeshire and neighbouring districts who are pioneering new environmentally friendly agricultural techniques. The film has been widely shared on social media and the project has grown from strength to strength, with a current campaign to fund a longer film on the same subject making good progress.

Implications

32. In the writing of this report, taking into account financial, legal, staffing, risk, equality and diversity, climate change, and any other key issues, there are no significant implications as the report covers actions already agreed through other processes and makes no significant proposals.

[Type here]

Background Papers

[Annual Progress Review of Zero Carbon and Doubling Nature Action Plan, report to CEAC, 21 June 2022, and Appendix.](#)

[Cost of Living – Options to Continue Support, report to Cabinet, 20 March 2023](#)

[Greater Cambridge Green Infrastructure Opportunity Mapping Baseline Report \(Land Use Consultants\) November 2020 \(greatercambridgeplanning.org\)](#)

[Greater Cambridge Green Infrastructure Opportunity Mapping \(greatercambridgeplanning.org\)](#)

[Lower Valley Farm | Bidwells](#)

Report Author:

Siobhan Mellon – Development Officer, Climate and Environment
Telephone: (01954) 713395

[Type here]