

Food Security For All: It Matters!

30 November 2023, WI Hall, Bridport



1. Introduction

The aims of the event were to

- help bring the voice, experience and needs of the under-resourced into the conversation about food security
- inform local authorities, and feed in to the town's Food Security Plan
- set a course for a way forward re developing Food Security over the coming years

This is part of a programme of events in a Dorset Council-supported project, which is a partnership between HOME in Bridport, Bridport Food Matters, Sustainable Bridport and Opera Circus. The project has also involved two events on HOME's allotment in Skilling.

40 people gathered over some delicious seasonal food to hear a series of 'stories' about community initiatives working with vulnerable people and building food security from the grassroots up. These stories informed lively discussion and co-creation of the way forward.

Participants represented many community organisations (including Bridport Local Food Group, Hazelmead Co-housing, Food Links, Glut stall, Cupboard Love, community allotments, Living Tree) as well as 2 primary schools, local authorities and statutory bodies (Social Prescribing, CAB; AONB) etc. and interested individuals.

The context: why are we working on food security? BFM *Candida Blaker*

Bridport Food Matters (BFM) is essentially a communications and networking platform and umbrella group, also working on some food growing projects. Along with others, BFM has been working on Food Security and a Sustainable Food System. We're currently supporting BTC over the development of a Bridport Food Security Plan.

Several things we know about food, climate and health, which should inform our actions:

- There is a need to be more self-sufficient in our food production and less dependent on imports, which mostly come from countries at high risk of global heating.
- If food is produced in harmony with nature, it not only mitigates climate change but can have a POSITIVE effect on Climate Change, and the food is healthier for people, as well as for the planet.
- A localised food economy with supply of food that is produced agro-ecologically and with short food miles, is good for the environment, healthy for the soil and for consumers, as well as for the economy - if we can do it at sufficient scale.
- More vulnerable people around the world are affected most harshly by climate change (and wars, and pandemics) – and their needs and voices are often not considered.

Food Security is about a sustainable food system which meets the needs of all sectors of society, and which provides access to nutritious food for everyone. Currently large sections of the community can't access good food, for a range of reasons but mostly financial.

There is clearly a growing acute need for 'emergency' food provision; the cheaper & ultra-processed food also contributes to a health crisis; the question is how can we develop longer-term & more sustainable solutions?

We are seeking the win-wins – what's good for the environment, our community and our economy.

2. Key points from Community Stories:

i. HOME and the Skilling Allotment

Tina Ellen Lee

HOME in Bridport is a local charity set up to provide cultural, educational and practical pathways for people to begin to access opportunities to create self sufficiency. HOME founded and supports the Edible Garden Projects and the Community Allotment in Skilling working in partnership with Sustainable Bridport and local primary schools.

This is a community project based around the HOME in Bridport allotment in Skilling, which is linked to the school's Edible Garden Project begun 10 years ago.

The allotment was founded as a space for growing food, giving access to families in the Skilling community, where people could gather to talk, listen to music, have a barbecue, learn gardening and preserving skills - an educational resource. The hope is that eventually this would become community led.

The success of the allotment over the years has depended mainly on being able to fund a community gardener and arts worker who can oversee the allotment as well as encouraging and working alongside the community. One of the challenges has been our inability to organise continuous activities and funding, in particular during and after Covid, when such a community space is so badly needed.

This project funded two events at the allotment for families to learn about the work of the garden, share a lunch, plant and harvest, in particular for those with small children.

Some of the mothers who attended the events said there were very few outdoor places where they could take their children to do outdoor activities, gardening, cookery and nature, where they could also learn something. They suggested we share information with mother and toddler activity groups, child minders, the primary schools and others.

Conversations included the sense of exclusion in this community and "... the deep seated remnants of social class structure and all the accompanying assumptions that still remain; and do affect interactions. It's very important that ordinary people feel that they can make an approach. Reducing poverty/increasing access needs to be central to a town's activities."

There has been general confusion as to why local government is not more keenly involved with such initiatives. There was agreement that local institutions and councils should connect more with the community and learn from them informally - for instance attend allotment events.

Suggested actions to include:-

- raising longer term funding
- find a community gardener who could manage all three spaces (the allotment and the two Edible Gardens at St Mary's and Bridport Primary.)
- Work with the community on a plan for activities for 2024-2025 including family cookery workshops, mother and baby workshops, encourage gardening and volunteers, make the spaces more accessible, community conversations and events.
- Sharing of allotment and Edible Gardens produce
- Share the aims of the Edible Gardens in planting, growing, harvesting, eating and learning about local good food and in particular in relation to climate and access.
- Partner more deeply with other local organisations, BADAS, the Town Council, volunteer services and others and work collaboratively with BMF, Sustainable Bridport and the schools sharing our learning from over 10 years of running these projects in partnership.

ii. Children and Learning –What we eat. Edible Gardens (EG) Sarah Wilberforce

- Volunteer gardener coordinator for 2 school Edible Gardens and community allotment – over ten years. There is a team of volunteers, with one paid gardener working at 3 sites
- Working with Sustainable Bridport and Home in Bridport under BFM umbrella
- St. Mary's Skilling: one form entry. 30% free school dinners, SEND department big. Garden consists of food growing beds, 2 tunnels, orchard, foraging hedge, & wild area
- B.P.S. two form entry. More recent EG with raised beds, tunnel, natural hillside site with mature trees

Access

- Both schools follow a common curriculum with topics allowing workshop event, from the team, to each year. More resources needed to BPS due to its size.
- Summer is about growing and harvesting food. Winter is more for cooking in school kitchen
- BPS is behind a locked gate so children can only go when staff access it with a key. St. M has open access with TAs and teachers visiting the garden with kids; free to enter every school day, and AScape and Forest School going there after school day. Family events at community allotment in holidays.

- Education sites are contracted to the school during lesson hours & terms. After school, others can use the site.

Projects this year (2023)

- Citizen science 'Soil your Undies' & Soil biome, + No Dig garden Charles Dowding, + Tastings & Smellings workshops, + Baking Bread + Water Capture & no waste Wessex Water event,
+ take part in Food Festival June, + Build a pond, made at BPS but seeking funds for St. M,
+ Family Cooking workshops in kitchen after school (st.M only), +plant swaps in the Shed,
+ Glut taken to Glut stall each week.

Objectives

- Grow, Cook, Eat, Socialise.
Children need to distinguish between Real Food and Ultra Processed Food.
Reaching families through their children.
Knowing where their food comes from.
Living outdoors in nature
- The Gut biome. Dr Tim Spector – book Food for Life. Nutrition – Health – Environment.

iii. Co-creating a new food culture through the repurposing of public land - WeDigNoDig - *Rachel Millson*

The WeDigNoDig (WDND) project was inspired by the Incredible Edible (IE) movement and their Right to Grow campaign. WDND aims to support people from across Bridport to grow food in public spaces which anyone can harvest, using no-dig methods. As IE has demonstrated, growing in multiple public spaces throughout a town provides not only supplementary food and the opportunity to gain growing skills, but also helps engage people from the whole community to come together to co-create a new, localised, sustainable food culture.

Whilst tending our pilot bed throughout the Summer and Autumn we have had many interesting food themed conversations with people walking past, making their way to & from the medical centre. This has clearly demonstrated that there is a lot of support in Bridport for repurposing public spaces in order to grow food in this way.

At the Food Festival in June we shared info on WDND and consequently seven people came forward identifying plots of land they were keen to get growing on. Our role was to meet with the council to secure permission to grow and then provide everything needed to set up and plant up the beds. The Council have not yet given us permission to set up the beds and we are still not clear what their objections are or who is actually doing the objecting. We are hoping that the offer from Incredible Edible to put the relevant staff from Todmorden council (the original IE town) and Bridport council in touch with each other for reassurance and advice will be taken up.

In order to work towards a sustainable, resilient food culture the whole community needs to be involved. As climate and economic stressors pile up we are in danger of serious fractures opening up in our already divided town. We are also currently missing out on the insights and talents of so many members of our community. We need to understand why only some people respond to local authority consultations or get involved in community projects and learn from communities that don't have this problem. Luckily the Incredible Edible movement

has practical solutions to these problems and we are asking for support to implement them in Bridport.

iv. Health and Wellbeing – Social prescribing, Cowshed

Mary Watkins

Mary spoke about health, and the impact of meeting and growing in Green Spaces such as the Cowshed. She suggested any household that will not be experiencing either mental, physical or financial hardship will be extremely fortunate, and as a Community we should continue to identify ways of supporting people.. The Cowshed is a mini community meeting twice weekly welcoming anyone who wants to just hang out in a garden, or may like to volunteer, and they offer a range of activities not just gardening e.g. craft work in winter. Mary has also raised money for artists to work with people e.g. creative writing, sculpture, outdoor cooking and sunshine art.. Mary also referenced their relationship with the Day Centre as a space for their clients and provider of food for them (similar to AScape using St. Mary's EG, another example of partnership working). The Cowshed is suitable for people with mobility impairment. People who believe that supported green space experiences may help them can be referred through social prescribers or they may self refer.

v. Access to and redistribution of food

Ian Bark

- In the 12 months to mid-2023 1 in 7 of all UK adults (or their households) have experienced food insecurity. 13 million people in the UK struggle to get enough to eat (9 million adults and 4 million children).
- Amongst those referred to food banks in the Trussell Trust network, one in five (20%) are from working households.
- Over 3 million tonnes of food wasted across the food industry each year is good-to-eat when it's discarded - equivalent to 7 billion meals, which could instead be helping frontline organisations support their communities

Organisations such as the Bridport Food Bank, The Food Glut Stall, Bridport Community Fridge, Helpful Hampers and the Community Soup Kitchen, are but a few of the food related organisations that serve two distinct, but complimentary roles in our community: the alleviation of hunger and food poverty; and the reduction of food waste.

The Bridport Food Bank: Cupboard Love was started in 2013 since when it has developed from literally a cupboard in the church into a regular twice weekly service, becoming a charity in July 2021. It still operates out of, though is separate to, St. Mary's Church on Wednesday mornings and out of the Youth and Community Centre on Monday evenings.

While the provision of free food is an appropriate solution to an immediate or short-term need, Ian has come to realise that the overwhelming majority of those who find themselves in food poverty more often than not have quite complex additional or underlying needs.

From simply providing emergency food parcels and by coincidence reducing food waste, the Bridport Food Bank is now a one stop gateway to support, for those in Food Poverty. Cupboard Love provides a range of additional support need including emergency food parcels; Personal hygiene and household cleaning products; free hot and cold drinks, cakes and biscuits; Bridport Clothes Bank; support and advice from Citizens Advice; and from the Bridport Energy Champions; as well as financial support via the Bridport Hardship Fund. By providing support in a holistic manner the aim is to help people back to a position where they no longer need to use the service.

For many people the preparation of a meal is a means to alleviating hunger in as cost and time effective way as possible. Cooking for pleasure is not part of the process. In order to

ensure that Food Bank users have access to a range of quality staple fruit and vegetables the food bank now tops up by purchasing from Washingpool Farm Shop, as well as working closely with those donating fresh food.

A permanent covered venue for food would be helpful. But what it would look like is a much more complex question to answer. Perhaps the answer is to separate out the alleviation of food poverty and the reduction of food waste as follows:

- A permanent covered building that incorporates all that the Bridport Food Bank already offers, plus on-site representatives from a range of social, medical services plus a cafe/day centre. This would serve local needs best.
- Redistributing surplus food free of charge is the start but it only scratches the surface of complex domestic producer and supply chain issues. Education has a potentially huge role to play in this.

And one final thought: is it because the more removed we have become from food production, the more profligate we are with it?

vi. Community Fed Oldham - Stir to Action

Jonny Gordon-Farleigh

[Stir to Action](#) is an economic development body with various projects related to food and farming. These include the creation of a UK-wide programme on family farm succession to encourage the democratic ownership farms; access to land for minoritised groups; and a digital platform to support mentoring for agroecological approaches.

Jonny spoke about Community-Fed Oldham, which was funded by Public Health within Oldham Borough Council. The scheme included grants of between £2.5 and £15K for winners of a Food Security Challenge, and a capacity building programme of training, study visits, and mentoring for local food charities and businesses.

He advocates these developments to expand West Dorset's food and farming sector:

1. Set up a legal membership body – structured as a democratic body – for both organisations and individuals working in the local food & farming sector
2. Develop a multi-year funding bid to raise at least £1M
2. Invest into industry and business training, employment, and business creation and conversions

3. Feedback from discussion groups:

SOME CHALLENGES:

- School culture is curriculum-driven and does not necessarily embrace outdoor learning
- Moving away from the culture of dependency on handouts.
- Engaging the 'hard to reach'.
- Disseminating information about what is already happening in the community, to reach a wider demographic, the majority of people in the town are not aware of all the activities re local food and food security in Bridport.
- Many community food initiatives, with some (and growing) links but a lot of disparate effort.
- Recruitment and retention of volunteers; how to get people to be committed/ reliable.
- Local authorities are not necessarily supportive of community initiatives e.g. use of green or brown spaces, whether town or rural.
- Access to land and planning restrictions

OPPORTUNITIES AND ACTIONS:

i. Engaging further with Children and Young People:

- **Takes a town to raise a child** – increase our engagement with schools
 - Linked to curriculum
 - DBS check support service for volunteers interested in helping with projects. *[Dorset Volunteer Centre offers this as a free service – should be more widely known]*
 - Involve more young people directly in these conversations *[link to Edible Gardens, which has been trying this?]*
- Can more use be made of after-school club provision; and suggest pre-school munch club (helped by older volunteers)?
- Edible Gardens (BPS and St Mary's) has potential for greater school and family engagement – needs the support of staff including TA's, PTA's and parents/volunteers.
- Get the ideas of the Zoe project out to mother and toddler groups etc. Maybe using a Public Health project?
- Colfox school should be involved in Edible Gardens (and other food security actions). They face certain challenges. *[HOME has been trying to engage them.]*
- Minerva Trust (now called Initio) should be on board with these projects, embedding into the curriculum, and facilitate their introduction in all 17 schools. *[HOME]*
- Schools own food could be incorporated into school meal schemes - schools could use their garden produce – e.g. salad bar, new potatoes, alongside Food Links school meals, especially in the summer. Could Food Links provide seasonal menus, with food donated from gardens...?
- Put more effort into young people's voice – what actions/ projects would they support. What can we do more and better with future decision-makers. BYCC needs to be involved in these community food events.

ii. Growing food around the town – food everywhere!

- **Can the Town Council (and sponsors of the beds) convert their flower beds to food beds?**
- **Invite 'Incredible Edibles' to town for a session**
- Could the Gardening Club encourage its members to grow veg more than flowers, or take care of planters in town for veg? Also Magna Housing's green spaces?
- Community composting scheme including Council green / brown waste
- Make use of unused or under-used allotments for others who want to grow / are on waiting list? Current waiting list/process for allotments is over 100. Could divide allotments into smaller patches or have people sharing on a bigger piece of land? Could Allotment Society and BTC identify under- or un-used allotments and make them available to community projects?
- Develop a land/garden-share scheme.
- Find the easy wins – match a Planter with a business sponsor, with a youth group and signage.
- Community allotments – and Allotment Society - to be on board and work together on raising consciousness about seasonal and health-giving growing; and collaboration over e.g. volunteers for help with allotment projects. *[HOME]*
- **Need a permanent community garden Coordinator** for Skilling allotment and schools projects, who would work with volunteers. *[Sustainable Bridport & HOME]*
- **Hold events in different community spaces**
- Create Opportunities for residents to express their skills in growing. A celebration!

iii. Other suggestions for increasing food supply

- Producers Co-operative – how do producers who currently sell independently, join up? This could help with a more vibrant farmers market? Online food orders direct from farmers -see '[In my Back Yard](#)'
- Could gardeners be incentivised to sell excess food?
- What happens to hospitality, catering, bakery, restaurant food excess currently? Could it go to our food 'redistribution' projects?
- Farm donations to food banks/ food redistribution projects? Tax break?
- Market Gardens for New Entrant farmers – on long term leases [*Feeding Bridport Direct* idea] linked to Bridport Skills Hub, for increased supply of food direct
- Gleaning from underused public and private fruit trees, processing & distributing
- Wild crafting / bush crafting (rabbit, venison, pheasant, hips/ haws)
- Fungi – basis for 3-d printing.
- Ideas: Grazing Land publicly owned by Co-operatives. Local Livestock rotate. Aqua Culture (Sea grass, seaweed, shellfish, finned fish) tie in to waste water treatment, solar aquatic greenhouses; engineered wetlands.
- How could we learn from [Liege Food Belt](#) -30+ new Co-ops and businesses in 10yrs. [*Deborah, Hazelmead*]

iv. **More cooking and eating together** - good for health & wellbeing, and building community connections & resilience

- **Create more opportunities to eat together** e.g. 'long table' events - find the venues and opportunities? Can build other things around this. [*BFM & Partners e.g. New House Farm*]
- Dining Co-Operative (members contribute time and/or money – weekly meals, special meals monthly, snacks daily) [*Bridport Co-Housing*]
- Involve the Friendly Food Club in workshops to cook healthy and nutritious food?

v. **Skills and capacity building**

- **Skills sharing, music and storytelling**, e.g. on allotments
- Build on conversations, celebrate people's knowledge and experience – establish a vehicle/ project for people to share their knowledge – e.g. foodbank customers, families via school, community allotment participants, etc.
- Building food 'capacity' and skills for cooking, preserving etc. and offer to range of people including young mothers
- Cooking skills and favourite recipes, themed cooking, bread, fermentation, cultural
- Training, Employment and Business support especially for new initiatives [*STIR to Action*]. Link to Dorset Wilding and Regen farming group?
- Proposed Learning Hub should have a focus on Food (cf. Bridport Investment Plan). Food and Farming could be a 'Residency' as part of a funding bid. [*BTC Dave Dixon*]

vi. **Public Engagement:** changing attitudes, raising awareness, **offering experiences**

- **Farm, gardens, allotment visits, and public food gardens** – to connect with food production
- **Cooking together**
- **Collaborative decision-making.** Could trial Citizens Assemblies, consent based decision making, co-creating to discuss controversial issues e.g. more food in green spaces, verges etc. is it "Good enough for now/ safe enough to try" ideas with a time +/- scope limit. [*Deborah, Transition Network, Hazelmead*]

- Programme of events e.g. after school, where we raise awareness about the Edible Gardens, allotments and glut stall etc. etc.
- Food & creativity – e.g. Cowshed has creativity sessions in the winter; HOME in Bridport incorporates arts ...others?
- Make use of BFM marquee at the annual Food Festival (15th June) to showcase and share information about community initiatives – groups can participate [Contact bridportfoodmatters@gmail.com if you'd like to be present/share some information]

vii. Collaborations are vital and can address a range of groups / interests

- Bridport Food Matters has a growing number of 'partners' – collaborators for joint projects, and/or who share the vision; this could be further developed. [BFM]
- Food bank has clothes bank, CAB, and offers some funds; Glut stall has cooking demos and has clothes;
- Plant swap 11th May [Community Shed, BFM, Edible Gardens, Plan-B, Hazelmead?]
- Should Bridport collaborate with other like-minded communities e.g. Lyme?
- Better community engagement with local authorities is needed – how? Is Dorset Council listening to Parish councils? Soften prejudice towards councils; and increase awareness about what councils can do.
- Corvée – citizen work tax. Required hours for various public efforts.
- A day of mass Disobedience (or Action?) – reclaim public space

Develop a food consortium (and the voluntary and community sector) to enable access to more diverse sources of funding and capacity building

- **Need for multi-year funding, some large funding programmes**, e.g. Lottery, University research (many are required to engage with the community).
- Dorset National Landscape (AONB) Community Fund 2024-25 is likely to be a bit bigger than usual, and lots of actions/ items from today are likely to be fundable.
- **A wider vision and collaborations to help pool efforts of smaller initiatives**, including a mentoring platform and more links to educational bodies
- Can Community Fed Oldham project (Stir to Action) be scaled down to a Bridport-sized initiative? What is the minimum funding required?
- What about a small grants scheme for projects to develop their own local ideas, in particular young people
- **Community Network body for food sharing**, umbrella = *Bridport Food Matters*
- Social prescribing is offering VCSE (voluntary, Community and social enterprise) networking
- Need to build the local volunteer sector. (BTC has a list of volunteers; involve DVC, etc.). Micro Adventure project from Cornwall could be a good way of recruiting people: Miss Elvy. [Mary, Cowshed]

A Food Hub venue? A market, Hub, cooking together, learning centre etc.

- For redistribution of food? Fare Share, social supermarket. Redevelop the BYCC?
- Preferably for eating and cooking together...and preserving, value-adding.
- A public /community commercial kitchen
- Be wary of how to pay for overheads for a permanent venue
- Explore making use of existing locations – e.g. BYCC would like to develop more cooking together. Could the site be redeveloped/ redesigned? As a Hub, with Fare Share? Could the Day Care Centre become a family food hub - who runs it now? Arts Centre for covered market again? Meet with architects who work in communities to explore ideas of what this could be and how it could be funded. [BFM, Stir to Action, BTC, etc. etc.?]
- Hazelmead/ Bridport Co-Housing possibilities

4. Conclusions and next steps

Judging by the lively discussion at the tables and from feedback received, this was a good networking opportunity, and several useful connections were made. “Thank you, it was excellent for engaging people, dialogue, connections”

The six ‘stories’ provided an excellent opportunity to share learning and experiences which are not often heard. Opportunities for action were ‘co-created’. These will need to be reviewed and organisations identified which can get involved to drive them forward.

Overarching themes emerging including:

- The need and power of community building around food;
- Seeking more opportunities to cook together and especially to eat together;
- Benefits of creativity and arts for engagement in activities around food;
- Linking up – partnerships/ collaborations, between various services and groups

Next steps:

- This event report will be sent to Ele Saltmarsh, author of the Bridport Food Security Plan, and the final draft Plan will be shared with BFM for comments prior to submission to the Town Council Environment Committee in January.
- If any individuals / groups/ organisations can get involved to take forward any of the Opportunities listed in this report, please do so! And let us know on bridportfoodmatters@gmail.com so we can help get others involved.
- The partners delivering this project (BFM, HOME in Bridport and Sustainable Bridport) will review the actions, and suggest follow up.
- We will raise some funds to progress this work, aiming to hold another event to take forward some actions in the spring 2024.
- Any organisations/ projects which would like to join the growing collection of Bridport Food Matters ‘Partners’ so that we develop a stronger network and coalition, please email us.
- Please share your news with us, so we can disseminate it to the almost 400 BFM E-News subscribers. You can subscribe to the BFM E-Newsletter [here](#).

Together, we can make change happen.

Thank you!

Candida, Tina, Sarah, Rosie, Rachel, Robert, Jo, Ian ...

With thanks also to Dorset Council’s Communities and Culture Fund



Annex: List of registered participants:

Town councillor	Rose	Allwork
Hazelmead	Jessica	Baker
Deputy Mayor	Ian	Bark
Good Mood Good Food	Sue	Beckers
Hazelmead	Deborah	Benham
St Marys Edible Gardens	Emily	Boscher
Bridport Primary School	Jasmine	Chandler
Town and County Councillor	Kelvin	Clayton
United Diversity	Josef	Davies-Coates
BTC community officer	Dave	Dixon
BFM	Candida	Dunford Wood
BPS dinner lady	Gill	East
HOME	Robert	Golden
Stir to Action	Jonny	Gordon Farleigh
Resident, Plan B	Rose	Harris
Ripple Workshop	Eileen	Haste
Town Councillor	Karen	Hunt
Hazelmead	Hugh & Monica	King
HOME	Tina Ellen	Lee
Cupboard Love Food Bank	Sonia	Maynard
Community Allotment	Steve	Meek
Social Prescribing team	Kate	Michell
Living Tree - founder, chair	Jo	Millar
We Dig No Dig	Rachel	Millson
MP candidate	Edward	Morello
Local Food Links	Caroline	Morgan
Dorset National Landscape (AONB)	Tom	Munro
Living Tree Treasurer	Vince	O'Farrell
BTC community officer	Caroline	Pearce
Food Links	Tim	Peel
WDND	Julie	Penfold
Allotment Society	Mandy	Rathbone
BFM	Rosie	Russell
HOME	Jonathan	Scott
Hazelmead Co-Housing	Lin	Scrannage
Help and kindness	Jon	Sloper
Resident	Gemma	Snow

Hazelmead
Sustainable Bridport admin
Cowshed plot 17
BFM, Sustainable Bridport
Food Glut Stall
CAB
Hazelmead

Ella
Chris
Mary
Sarah
Peter
Rovarn
Root

Squirrel
Uren
Watkins
Wilberforce
Wilson