

Carlisle - Healthy City

Abstract Number – 191

Food Carlisle

Title: FOOD AS A VEHICLE TOWARDS IMPROVED HEALTH AND WELLBEING FOR THE PEOPLE OF CARLISLE

Context:

Carlisle is the most northerly city in England and the only city in Cumbria. It is situated less than ten miles from the Scottish border. Carlisle is one of the largest English cities in terms of land but has one of the smallest population densities. Slightly over 100,000 people live across the Carlisle district with approximately 72,000 of these concentrated in the city itself.

In 2004 Carlisle was identified as one of the UK Department for Health's Spearhead Health Authorities. This meant that Carlisle featured in the bottom twenty per cent (of English Local Authority Areas) across four key health indicators - Male life expectancy at birth; Female life expectancy at birth; Cancer mortality rate in under 75s; and Cardio Vascular Disease mortality rate in under 75s.

A range of contributory factors were identified by the local government and health authorities in Carlisle. There were significant issues relating to diet and lifestyle; cancer rates; higher than average prevalence of smoking and alcohol related illness, and relatively high levels of winter deaths. Crucially the 2010 Carlisle Health Profile also identified issues around an aging and growing population, health inequalities (both in terms of outcomes and in access and provision), obesity and poor nutrition.

Why food?

Food can play a key role in dealing with some of today's most pressing social, economic and environmental problems. From obesity and diet-related ill health to food poverty and waste, from climate change and biodiversity loss to declining prosperity and social dislocation, food is not only at the heart of some of our greatest problems, but also a vital part of the solution.

Rationale: The Issue for Carlisle

The Carlisle Local Strategic Partnership sought to develop a greater understanding of the health intelligence behind Carlisle's food and diet related ill health issues; and then through the subgroups (including the Healthy City Steering Group) and the establishment of the Carlisle Food City Group

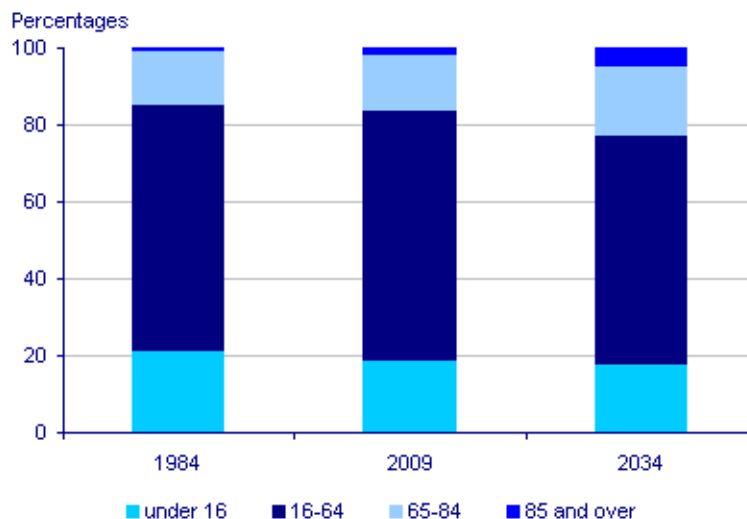
develop programmes that increased opportunity and provision and improved outcomes for key demographics.

In 2008 nearly a quarter of all adults (16 plus) in England were obese. Just under one third of women, 32%, were overweight (a BMI of 25-30), and 42% of men were overweight (NHS Choices 2010). The number of overweight and obese people is likely to increase. The Foresight (2007) report, a scientific report used to guide Government policy, has predicted that by 2025, nearly half of men and over one third of women will be obese. Obesity can cause a number of health problems, such as type 2 diabetes and heart disease. Being overweight or obese can also shorten life expectancy.

The Carlisle Health Profile identified that an estimated 26% of the population of Carlisle reported eating five or more pieces of fruit and vegetables per day (Graham, 2013). This is worse than the Cumbria and England average and therefore provided justification for the consideration and development of this area of work.

Additionally the UK has an ageing population. The Office of National Statistics (ONS) reports that over the last 25 years the percentage of the population aged 65 and over increased from 15 % in 1984 to 16 % in 2009, an increase of 1.7 million. It also projects that by 2034 23% of the population will be aged over 65 (See Figure 1).

Figure 1. Population by Age, UK, 1984, 2009 and 2034



Source: Mid-year population estimates, Office for National Statistics; General Register Office for Scotland; Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (2009)

In Carlisle it is estimated that in 2010 there were 23,300 Older People. By 2030 this figure is projected to reach 34,100, an increase of 46%.

At the same time Carlisle has always, and continues to face particular geographic challenges. Two thirds of its population are centred in an urban area, the remaining one third spread over an extremely large, sparsely populated rural area. This has always presented significant difficulties for service provision and access for residents in rural communities. Access to good food is therefore a key issue with our aging population, as is supporting the rural food economy.

We additionally judged that the food supply for Carlisle was inequitable, unsustainable, and insecure:

- Inequitable, as we see more and more people in our city depending for their next meal on Food Banks. While others have a widening choice of up-market restaurants, cafes and specialty food shops.
- Unsustainable, as food miles steadily increase, and what we eat is more and more produced through intensive farming which rubbishes biodiversity.
- Insecure, because the food supply chain to this, the most remote city in England, has become dangerously long. The field to fork ideal is becoming much longer in food miles and this can have an impact on the nutritional value of food.

Description: *How we started*

Following a meeting of key stakeholders in 2012, and a high-profile event which gathered strong political and public support, a "Carlisle Food City" steering group was established in 2013. The steering group has 45 members, with a balanced mix of representation from the public, private and third sectors.

In 2013 Carlisle was chosen to be one of 13 founder members of the new UK-wide Sustainable Food Cities Network. This Network is an alliance of public, private and third sector organisations using food as a vehicle for driving positive changes. The Network helps people and places to share challenges, explore practical solutions and develop best practice in all aspects of sustainable food.

Achievements:

In 2014 we launched a Carlisle Food Charter and Action Plan. The Food Charter lays down principles for working together towards a city food culture where every individual, every family, and every food outlet (schools, nurseries, colleges, hospitals, care homes, cafes, restaurants, workplaces) has access to locally produced, healthy, affordable, delicious food. The Food Charter principles are set out under five headings:

- a thriving local economy
- health and well-being for all
- environmental sustainability
- lifelong learning, education and skills
- stronger, closer communities



Carlisle was successfully chosen to be one of 13 founder members of the new UK-wide Sustainable Food Cities Network. Tom Andrews, Director of Sustainable Food Cities, highlights:

“Five years ago, there were only four cities in the UK that had realised the power that a joined up approach to promoting healthy and sustainable food could have in driving really positive social, economic and environmental change for their residents. When we started the Sustainable Food Cities programme in 2012, Carlisle was one of the first of a new small group of pioneers who really understood how such cross-sector collaboration could help to tackle what I believe are some of the greatest challenges that face us today - an epidemic of diet-related ill-health, the erosion of our high streets and our local food economies, and the degradation of our air, soils, water and wildlife. The efforts and successes of pioneers such as Carlisle has inspired more and more places to take up the healthy and sustainable food challenge, to the extent that 33 towns, cities, boroughs and even counties have now initiated similar programmes as part of the Sustainable Food Cities Network and more are joining every month. So I want to thank you for your instrumental role in creating what has become a powerful movement for positive change across the UK and to wish you every success in taking it to the next stage...”

In advancing this agenda we have increased cross-sector engagement and partnership working. As part of this we have held a number of events, these include stakeholder conferences and smaller events which promote local

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food, producers and healthier options. We have also advanced a number of projects.

Five key projects

1. Fair Food Carlisle

Fair Food Carlisle is a project set up in 2012 by Sustainable Carlisle and Brampton Food Network, which are both incorporated community enterprises. Its story starts in 20 Carlisle workplaces, where it enables employees to buy and have delivered to their workplace a wide range of foods from 50 producers based within 30 miles of the City.

The story continues with two new projects spun off this year:

1. Fair Meals Direct, a takeover from Meals on Wheels for the Carlisle sector of the County, delivering to vulnerable people hot meals based on locally produced ingredients. This successfully addresses some of the issues identified in regard to the aging population, rural communities and poor uptake of fruit and vegetable consumption.



2. Skilful Food, which supports people in food poverty with sourcing and cooking fresh ingredients, at the same time giving them an opportunity to grow some of their own food. Skilful Food participants are referred from the Carlisle Food Banks, homeless hostels and other agencies engaging with people in crisis or continuing poverty

Fair Food Carlisle is operated by a mixture of employees and volunteers, and works out of a rented depot in the City Centre. Its key aim is fairness throughout the food chain - alike to customers, suppliers and staff. Its establishment as a hub for the distribution of locally produced foods will

enable it to expand over time into supplying commercial and public food outlets.

2. Community food growing

Carlisle is now ready to launch its first comprehensive initiative to produce food on urban land, recognising that supply will soon become a critical factor as demand grows through its other initiatives. The initiative is community-led and is taking the opportunity of unused or underused land which can be made available by Carlisle City Council and other urban landowners.

In addition to the aspiration to make a significant contribution to the City's food supply, the opportunity for community groups across the City to gain experience and training in growing food is important in its own right. Producing even small amounts of food, and even when success is initially limited, if well supported, can have a powerful impact on the food attitudes and habits of those involved.

The start-up project will compare five models of urban land use for food production by the community and for building skills:

- Polytunnels
- Aquaponics
- Gardening by neighbourhood groups
- Gardening by people with chronic health issues
- Gardening by homeless people and others experiencing food poverty

The aim at each of these sites will be to establish a food production system, initially at a small, subsistence scale, provide a base for building skills, and to explore the potential for expansion into commercial production after the first season.

3. Obesity in childhood

In order to further understand the challenges within the Carlisle district an updated version of the Carlisle Health and Wellbeing Profile was produced in 2013, which provided updated information around inequalities, health data, obesity and nutrition. Due to challenges across the County of Cumbria associated with obesity, a Carlisle obesity profile was produced to allow us to develop an evidence-based approach to further addressing this problem.

Next steps are to use this data in the development and piloting of projects, working with a range of our partners.

One project that has been developed is:

The Local Healthy Option Award

This Award aims to enable customers of commercial food outlets to make healthier and more informed food choices. By doing so it has the potential to assist in the reduction of diet related ill health and therefore help to reduce the incidence of coronary heart disease, obesity, strokes, cancer and diabetes.

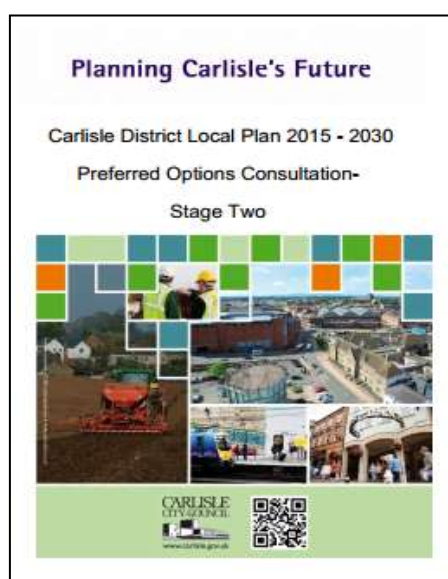
It additionally assists in promoting local, healthy, socially responsible food businesses. Knowing how our food is prepared and where our food comes from increasingly informing the individual's choice. Three food premises have piloted the scheme and now all offer a "healthy option" on their menu, and will be promoted on our Discover Carlisle tourism portal. We hope to further roll this scheme out at the end of 2014. We hope that this will encourage people to think about their food throughout the lifecycle and will provide us with tools to promote through schools and colleges.

4. Policy Development: The Carlisle Local Plan

Soon after Carlisle Food City was established, Carlisle City Council launched a widely inclusive consultation period on its draft Local Plan for the City's next 15 years. The Local Plan sets out the long term spatial vision of the district and a new vision for how Carlisle will grow and develop. It also identifies potential sites for new housing, economic and commercial development. The Plan is supported by various evidence based studies and public consultations throughout its evolution.

This was an ideal opportunity for the Carlisle Food City steering group to make sure that food became a key element integrated throughout the Carlisle Local Plan. After a series of submissions by the steering group, the Carlisle Local Plan includes:

- References in the Plan's base document to the importance of food in relation to Carlisle's economy, health and wellbeing, environment, and community resilience
- More detailed explanations about why and how food can have a positive impact in a new Health and Wellbeing Policy
- A recommendation that an Advisory Note on 'Community Food Growing' should be made available to all developers at the point of application for planning permission.



5. Research

A research subgroup, with input from the University of Cumbria, is establishing the methodology for gathering base-line and ongoing information about Carlisle's food supply, particularly with regard to the distance of the production sites of food consumed in the City. This will not only be useful in informing our knowledge base from a supply and distribution perspective, but will help with the traceability of our food and understanding where it comes from. Reducing the length of the supply chain can have a positive impact on the nutritional value of food.

Conclusion:

Because eating three times a day is a human need and habit, and because we enjoy eating, strategies and projects aiming to make food more healthy, more tasty and more affordable readily attract interest, involvement and support, to an extent that many other initiatives to improve health and wellbeing do not. Food can be seen as a powerful tool for more inclusive engagement.

A new city focus on food has sparked fresh, enthusiastic, cross-sector working, delivering policies, strategies and a wide range of projects which already appear to be having a positive impact on the health and well-being of the people of Carlisle. It has enabled innovation both practically and strategically.

The Carlisle Local Strategic Partnership is now actively working alongside the Carlisle Healthy City Steering Group and the newly formed Carlisle Food City group to explore new avenues for growing this agenda. The focus here will be on exploring how the initial promising work around food can be sustained beyond the short-term, through a combination of funding, cross-project efficiencies, capacity-building and good governance.