

The Case for a Local Food Strategy as Part of the Dawlish Neighbourhood Plan (DNP)

This paper argues that a Local Food Strategy and a Local Food Working Group would help the Steering Group take forward its task of producing a Neighbourhood Plan for Dawlish, in such a way that the Plan actively engages the community and leads to the Plan being implemented.

Background

The world today is faced with ecological, social and economic crises. There will be have to be major changes over the next 20 years. Urgent discussions have gone on at national and international level for at least 25 years. It was in 1987 when the 'Brundtland Report' (*Our Common Future* by the World Commission on Environment and Development) was published, that the term 'sustainable development' was coined. That phrase continues to promise a way to reconcile economic growth with consequent social and ecological exploitation. Scientific evidence mounts that action is needed to address anthropogenic climate change from carbon dioxide released by burning fossil fuels in power stations and by industry and transport. Targets and pledges are made by political leaders but business goes on as usual. The responsibility to reduce our dependence on fossil fuels is left to the individual and to local community action. Where politics and economics have failed, local action is succeeding, particularly with fast-growing local food movements worldwide (Lester Brown, *World on the Edge* 175-8).

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) is set within the context of a 'presumption in favour of sustainable development' (paragraph 14). The NPPF identifies 'three dimensions to sustainable development: economic, social and environmental'. The economic role is about supporting growth and innovation; the social role is about engaging communities and meeting their self-determined needs; and the environmental role is about protecting and enhancing our environment, especially by improving biodiversity, using natural resources prudently, minimising waste and pollution, and mitigating climate change by moving to a low carbon economy.

The government's 'Localism Agenda' is seen as 'the key to economic, social and political success in the future' (<http://www.localism-agenda.com/background/>). This means that responsibilities for sustainable development are increasingly devolved to local people, who are faced with enormous challenges (and opportunities) at a time when funding for local services is being cut. Significantly, the 'Localism Agenda' presumes 'an ethic of volunteerism'.

Localism and the Dawlish Neighbourhood Plan

A crucial aspect of the challenges we face is the need for sustainable development to accommodate substantial reductions in fossil fuel usage over the period of the Dawlish Neighbourhood Plan (DNP). In order to do its part in meeting the government statutory target of reducing national carbon emissions by 80% between 1990 to 2050, the Teignbridge Local Plan (TLP) has set its own target and 'will seek to achieve reductions in carbon emissions per person arising within Teignbridge of about 42% from 2009 levels by 2030'.

Some of the ways and means of achieving those reductions are matters of personal choice. Each of us, with our families, can 'reduce our carbon footprint by reducing our waste, being more energy efficient and making better transport choices' (TLP 1.6). Other measures would require cooperation: 'production of local food, renewable energy and local building materials should be maximised' and aiming for a 'mix of uses and activities' within the community to improve self-sufficiency (TLP S6 Resilience).

Where to start? is the question those involved in neighbourhood planning ask themselves. There are a number of examples of NPs who have decided to focus on local food: e.g. Cringleford, Exeter St James and Thame, who are encouraging protection or expansion of allotments and community orchards. The TLP includes many mentions of allotments, community led garden schemes and orchards, including in the section on Dawlish (DA6). Bishopsteignton NP 'Community Strategic Aims' include 'The encouragement of community self-sufficiency to making effective use of resources, through local food and drink production, and stewardship of our unique environmental setting'.

Food is a basic human need and it interests everyone. Dawlish is a tourism destination with an equable climate and locally produced food is increasingly what visitors expect – and not just pasties and cream teas. Growing and processing food has many possibilities for jobs and the local economy, and can also promote community building and be very enjoyable for those involved. As we reduce fossil fuels in favour of renewable energy it will make less sense to get food transported long distances, and more to use local energy for local production.

Waste reduction is another aspect of sustainable development where local food can contribute to the DNP being in conformity with national and district plans and policies. NPPF and TLP do not contain specific waste policies and targets (in the 'National Waste Management Plan': <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-planning-policy-for-waste>), but there is a presumption of the need for waste reduction. In NPPF under 'Achieving sustainable development' and our 'environmental role' is the aim to 'minimise waste and pollution' (para. 7). TLP similarly has: 'reduce our carbon footprint by reducing our waste' (1.6 and 1.17).

Growing and producing food locally, and for local consumption by residents and visitors, could make a big difference to the amount of waste produced and how we deal with it. There will be less need for packaging to protect food in storage and transit, and for sales/brand promotion. Such packaging as is still needed could be re-used, e.g. plastic pots can have uses in the garden. Glass jars and bottles can be re-used. Food and garden waste can be composted locally, with less need for transport and machinery. Developers should be urged to make provision for composting areas which householders can reach without driving. Local food leads to opportunities to cut down on waste going to landfill. One benefit of local waste mitigation is that it will help address the grave problem of plastic waste in the oceans ('Plastic Planet', *New Scientist*, 31 January 2015, pp. 28-32.).

Focussing on local food schemes gets people thinking of all the other needs for green spaces: increasing biodiversity, protecting wildlife, nature conservation and recreation, which gets away from the idea that all the important matters have already been decided by Teignbridge Council, in particular numbers and sites of new homes (a concern that was voiced as early as the preliminary public meeting on the DNP in October last year). We will have answers to anyone who asks 'what's the point?' of going through Neighbourhood Planning all over again. Dawlish people will have a say on how to meet various aspects of the Green Infrastructure provisions in the TLP, as long as we get them included in the DNP.

The Local Food Working Group

It has been recognised that the Steering Group cannot draw up the DNP solely by a combination of meetings and email exchanges. The 'Dawlish Neighbourhood Plan – Delivery Structure' recommends the setting up of working groups to focus on specific tasks. Local Food has many aspects which are either directly relevant to our duty to conform to national and district goals, or come within the scope of neighbourhood planning as demonstrated in the NPs by other local communities in the UK.

The topics and issues which could be explored, with a view to drawing up actions and recommendations to bring to the SG include the following:

- A survey of existing food growing by farmers and smallholders within the Dawlish area.
- What proportion of what is currently produced locally is consumed locally and if that could be increased.
- Whether farmers and smallholders would potentially be interested in producing more for the local market.
- What kind of locally produced food local restaurants would use if it were available.
- To what extent locally produced food would attract customers.
- Would some kind of local food marketing/ distribution function be necessary?
- What sort of processing would be required to make the food acceptable to local consumers.
- What more could be done to encourage garden owners to grow more of their own food.
- What needs to be done to expand the current (embryonic) Garden Share scheme.
- Whether there are parcels of land within the Dawlish area that might be made available for allotments or community orchards/ gardens.
- Whether land identified for future housing but currently not being used can be made available for food growing for a period of time (say 5 years minimum).
- The feasibility of setting a policy so that planners require developers of new housing to set aside parcels of land within new developments as community food growing spaces.
- Identify other local food projects/ initiatives with a view to discussing how they got started and the lessons they have learned.
- If start-up funding is needed, what potential sources are there? CIL monies?
- Are there ways of involving children/ young people, perhaps as part of school projects/ curricula?
- Could local food initiatives links be supported by local health care practitioners as part of encouraging healthy lifestyles?
- What expertise is available locally, in such issues as maximising yields, reducing labour, minimising crop damage, minimising energy inputs, improving soils?
- Identify a set of actions that would be feasible and likely to produce tangible benefits within the first 5 years of the planning period.
- What kind of outreach activities would be possible to gauge interest and encourage participation.
- How to explore the risks of taking no action on local food – identifying what is likely to become scarce/ expensive if we depend on food imports, and the impacts on well-being if nothing is done.

Clearly, the extent to which all these issues can be considered and in what level of detail depends on the number of people involved in the Working Group, how much time they can give, and the skills and expertise they bring. The plan for the Working Group will need to be reviewed once it is constituted and a timescale is set.