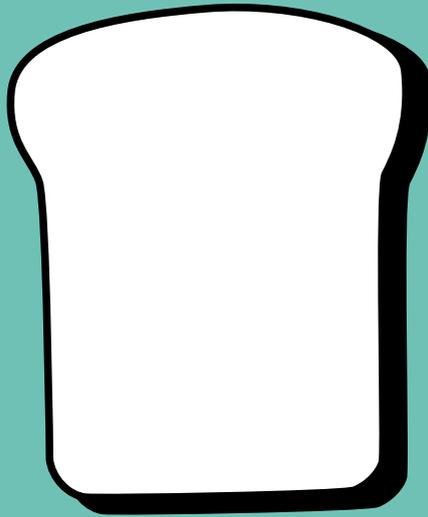




Centre for Local Economic Strategies



The role of independent food retailers, markets and community food initiatives in local centres

Summary of a report by CLES for Manchester City Council

Matthew Jackson & Sarah Longlands

Introduction

What we eat and how we purchase food are two key policy agendas in the modern day United Kingdom. The continued rise of poor health and in particular obesity has seen numerous high profile campaigns that have sought to improve the health of the nation and improve decision making around the purchase of food. The way in which we purchase our food and how we locate different types of retailers has also become a social inclusion and regeneration issue with ongoing debates around how local planning decisions can influence the make-up of our high streets.

In addition, local authorities are being increasingly viewed as “place shapers” with a role to play in balancing these different agendas around poor health, support for a viable and vital food retail industry, regeneration and awareness raising around healthy eating. Whilst there has been much commentary on the role of local authorities as local planning bodies in food retail and particularly with regard to supermarkets, with the recent policy documentation from the Competition Commission, there has been relatively little said about the role of local authorities in supporting independent food retail, markets and social enterprise and what role these other food mechanisms actually play in local places. There is also a lack of clarity about exactly what mechanisms are at the disposal of local authorities to manage the different agendas around food in their areas.

Manchester City Council thus commissioned the Centre for Local Economic Strategies (CLES) in Autumn 2007 to undertake a research project which would enable a greater understanding of the role Independent Food Retailers, Markets and Community Food Retailers currently play in supporting the sustainability of local centres and neighbourhoods within the city. The research also required recommendations to be proffered as to how the local authority could support these local food mechanisms in under performing areas of the city, particularly where previous research has indicated that there are “food deserts”. This research was important as it aimed to bring together a range of food related agendas including health, economic development and planning.

Manchester as a city has a diversity of food and other retail offer and a local authority which has a strong commitment to understanding, sustaining and improving its food offer and the benefits this brings in both

social and economic terms. There is a cross-departmental ethos across regeneration, economic development, health, planning and environment as to the role local food can play in improving the sustainability of both places and livelihoods through their Food Futures Group.

This summary document presents an overview of the key findings of the research undertaken by CLES between September 2007 and February 2008 and how these findings relate back to key national level policy agendas. The research was undertaken in two parts with findings detailed in two separate reports.

Part 1 of the research examined the existing role of Independent Food Retailers, Markets and Community Food Initiatives in Manchester's local centres. Detailed research was undertaken into the existing shape and role of Independent Food Retailers in two localities, namely Cheetham Hill and Chorlton; the existing shape, food offer and role of Markets in two localities, namely Wythenshawe and Longsight; and the role of Community Food Initiatives in neighbourhoods across the City.

Part 2 explored how local authorities generally can further support these local food mechanisms, and how these support mechanisms can be applied to the Manchester context and in particular in supporting the development and sustainability of currently underperforming local centres.

Research questions and methodology

At the outset of the research activity, three core research questions were proposed, namely:

‘What is already known about the role of Independent Food Retailers, Markets and Community Food Initiatives in improving the performance and sustainability of neighbourhoods? This needs to include what is known specifically about Manchester and in comparable urban areas that experience high levels of deprivation.’

‘What role can local authorities play in supporting Independent Food Retailers, Markets and Community Food Initiatives and the sustainability of local centres?’

‘What can practically be done in Manchester (i.e. development of action plan for taking forward support for local and community retail within struggling centres within the City)?’

The methodology for the commission used a range of research methods to detail findings and to develop the key recommendations for Manchester City Council. A literature review was undertaken of key policy areas relating to the local food retail agenda. Surveys and interviews were undertaken with customers, key local stakeholders, Independent Food Retailers, Market Stall Holders and Community Food Initiatives across Manchester using the following methods:

Independent Food Retailers – the Independent Food Retail aspect of the research was focused upon Cheetham Hill, with retailer and customer surveys undertaken. To complement this research, we also undertook research activities with the Unicorn Co-operative in Chorlton and a sample of their customers;

Markets – the market aspect of the research was focused upon Wythenshawe and Longsight, with surveys undertaken with traders and strategic interviews with Market Managers and Deputy Market Managers;

Community Food Initiatives – the Community Food Initiative aspect of the research was based upon a number of initiatives across Manchester, including: Manchester Allotments; Bentley Bulk; North Manchester Zest; Leaf Street; and Hulme Community Garden Centre.

Desk-based secondary research was carried out into (best) practice from elsewhere in the UK. Strategic interviews were undertaken with local authority Heads of Department and Area Regeneration Teams within Manchester. All these research activities then informed the development of an action plan of recommendations for the local authority to implement.

Core findings of research

The local food retail environment in Manchester is varied and diverse. There are local centres in the city such as Cheetham Hill where the local food 'offer', shaped by demand and demographic considerations effectively 'works' with local food mechanisms making a key contribution to local centre vibrancy and sustainability. Within these 'working' centres there is however a strong commitment to local food retailing and a tradition of networks of family owned and run food stores. This commitment and tradition is coupled with a sustainable demand from local neighbourhoods and residents for local food retailing. The drive of regeneration and health agendas within the city has also led to a number of food and locally focused food initiatives.

Despite these positives, there are a number of local centres and neighbourhoods within the city which are effectively underperforming when it comes to local independent food retailing and the provision of markets and community food initiatives. The research found that there are however a number of roles Manchester City Council could play in these local centres. There is a key policy and delivery opportunity to develop new approaches and support mechanisms, and to build upon existing project and strategic activity through a targeted local centre based approach.

Research findings: the role of local food

The role of local food and policy contexts

The initial research also sought to frame the Manchester based activities within the national policy framework with regard to local food retail. There are a number of key perceived roles which local food retail can play and benefits it can derive, notably in:

- improving health through a focus often upon fruit and vegetables and healthy eating;
- regenerating the local economy through local money flows and encouraging entrepreneurship;
- regenerating local centres through a local retail presence;
- ensuring social inclusion through diverse provision and cohesion through retail interaction;
- enhancing the environment through local supply chains and local customers.

These five thematic agendas of health, regeneration, planning, culture, and environment were used to frame the findings of the primary research in Manchester into the existing role of Independent Food Retailers, Markets and Community Food Initiatives within local centres.

The role of Independent Food Retailers

In part 1, we examined the role of Independent Food Retailers in two local centres, Cheetham Hill and Chorlton. For the purpose of the research, Independent Food Retailers were defined as retailers operating within local centres which specialise in fresh food produce relating to fruit and vegetables, meat, fish, and other dried products which are owned independently. It was clear from the research with retailers and customers that the Independent Food Retailers played a number of roles in the two local centres:

improving health – they proffered improved health benefits through: a varied product base; a focus upon fruit and vegetables as a core product; and a location which promotes frequent shopping as a result of proximity to housing and communities;

encouraging regeneration – they encouraged regeneration through: many businesses being sustainable as a result of being

in operation for a number of years; being demand led by the needs of the local community; through local employment and local economic spend; and offering a strong understanding of the need for affordability in the most deprived areas;

influencing planning – they influenced planning considerations as a result of highlighting the benefits of agglomerative networks of stores. This is particularly evident in Cheetham Hill, where there is positive competition between large and small food retailers. Additionally, they highlight that a range of stores operating at a range of scales and selling similar products can operate successfully in a locality;

promoting culture and leisure – the Independent Food Retailers, particularly in Cheetham Hill, support the local Asian community in product and cultural terms. The sustainability of stores is often based around strong cultural and family networks of customers;

enhancing the environment – they enhanced the environment through promoting local supply chains and local ‘travel to shop’ patterns. The majority of retailers utilise local wholesalers and many customers often come from the local neighbourhood, mitigating the need to travel to the shops by private transport.

The role of Markets

In part 1, we examined the role of markets in two local centres, Wythenshawe and Longsight. For the purpose of the research, markets were defined as a space where a variety of independent retailers and traders convene and network to provide a varied retail offer to local centres and communities. It was clear from the research with traders and market managers that markets played a number of roles in the two local centres:

improving health – they proffered health benefits primarily through the provision of good quality and fresh produce and a varied product base, offering in some cases fruit and vegetables. Markets also offer health benefits as a result of being a space for social and community interaction;

encouraging regeneration – they encouraged regeneration through promoting the sustainability of locally owned businesses; through a focus upon local employers and local spend; through the transferability of trading to new forms of markets such as the Farmers Market at Northenden; through bringing communities together; through local economic supply chains; and through a recognition of the need to keep prices affordable in a deprived area;

influencing planning – they influenced planning considerations through highlighting the importance of markets to local communities and local areas. The research also detailed that food does not necessarily have to be the core commodity for the sustainability of a market. Additionally, it is important to recognise that the sustainability of local markets in Manchester is not just important to the vitality of local centres, but also to the wholesale market, their staff and other local communities;

promoting culture and leisure – the research highlighted a key link between local demographics and the markets and their product offer, which was particularly evident in the Asian and Afro-Caribbean focused stores of Longsight Market. It also highlighted the importance of existing permanent markets being supplemented with specialist markets, as shopping and leisure patterns change;

enhancing the environment – the markets offered environmental benefits through a strong local supply chain focus and customers that often live in close proximity to the markets. The majority of market traders in Wythenshawe and Longsight utilise New Smithfield Market as their main suppliers, together with small local suppliers for other aspects of their produce.

The role of Community Food Initiatives

In part 1, we examined the role of Community Food Initiatives across neighbourhoods in the City. This aspect of the research varied slightly from the other two mechanisms, in that the focus was not on a specific local centre, but upon projects across a wider geographical area. For the purpose of this research, Community Food Initiatives were defined as ‘community enterprises’ or ‘green spaces’ which have the growth or

promotion of food and healthy food as one of their core objectives. In this study, this includes allotments, food-based social enterprises and publicly funded health initiatives. It is clear that Community Food Initiatives have significant benefits and roles in local geographical areas:

improving health – they offered access to and advice about the consumption of healthier food. Each of the Community Food Initiatives explored had benefits in terms of engraining the importance of positive and healthy eating;

encouraging regeneration – they encouraged regeneration through primarily community integration and community cohesion. They bring together diverse communities and encourage social inclusion. Additionally, they encourage partnership not only between participants but also between agencies relating to regeneration, health, education and employment;

influencing planning – they influenced planning through their strong emphasis upon developing green space in deprived areas. They enable green space to be integrated within predominantly urban environments;

culture and leisure – the Community Food Initiatives have a role in community integration and community cohesion terms. They provide the space for diverse people to come together to carry out community activities;

enhancing the environment – similar to planning, Community Food Initiatives provided a green space in which people can interact and promote healthy eating and a healthy environment.

Research findings: the role of local authorities

Part 2 of the research activity sought to answer the second and third of the three research questions. The core findings were as follows.

What role can local authorities play in supporting Independent Food Retailers, Markets and Community Food Initiatives?

Part 2 of the research highlighted a framework for examining case studies of roles local authorities can generally play in supporting Independent Food Retailers, Markets and Community Food Initiatives. Local authorities can play a number of roles at both a city level and at a local centre level to support Independent Food Retailers, Markets and Community Food Initiatives. Using a series of case studies to highlight key roles for local authorities, we framed local authority support activities and mechanisms within the following themes:

- locally focused procurement practices;
- local supply chains;
- strategy and governance;
- promotion and awareness raising;
- community development;
- business support;
- planning;
- provision of green space and liveability.

Implications for Manchester City Council

The general findings in part 2 also helped to develop a set of overall recommendations which could be applied to Manchester City Council:

Recommendations for Manchester City Council

Part 2 provided a series of local centre practical delivery recommendations for Manchester City Council to action in order to support Food Mechanisms in enhancing the sustainability of local centres. These local recommendations were supplemented by policy focused general recommendations of where change is required in city level process, policy and strategy in order to support Food Mechanisms at the local centre level. The recommendations were as follows:

Local centre practical recommendations

1. improve communication channels with existing retailers;
2. continue to market the district centre markets;
3. develop a 'what to eat and where to food shop in Manchester guide';
4. set up estate led fruit and vegetable stalls;
5. continue to develop community led school fruit and vegetable stalls;
6. continue to develop targeted Community Food Initiatives;
7. provide further outreach business support and advice for local food retailers;
8. set up Traders' Associations in underserved areas of the City;
9. promote improved fruit and vegetable offer within retailers;
10. provide a series of environmental interventions in the most poorly performing local centres;
11. reduce the size and scale of retail units in under-performing local centres;
12. bring new markets to underserved areas of the City;
13. pilot new environmental projects.

Food Futures Group policy recommendations

1. use the Local Area Agreement refresh to promote the importance of local food issues.

General policy recommendations

1. identify and promote local supply chains;
2. enable the Market Team to work more effectively with economic development and regeneration;
3. explore the feasibility of extending the role of the Food Access Group to become a delivery agency for food initiatives;
4. offer further locally responsive business support for local food retailers;
5. use Local Development Framework Core Strategy to consider supporting local food recommendations.

Part 2 also suggested three local centres Newton Heath, Harpurhey and Withington for implementing the local centre recommendations, the reasoning behind selecting those localities and an action plan for putting the recommendations into action over the next three years.

Links between this research and the wider policy context

This research fits within a range of national policy agendas and documents relating to health, regeneration, planning, culture and the environment, together with local policy in the form of Local Area Agreements and Food Strategies. The following section looks at the background to each of these themes in more detail, together with listing current policy initiatives relating to these themes.

Health

In recent years, there has been a string of Government publications, national level campaigns and new legislation around the food we eat and the impact this has upon the health of the nation. There has been a particular focus upon obesity amongst children, the value of school meals in health and economic terms, and the role of supermarkets and their food offer. Local Independent Food Retailers, Markets and Community Food Initiatives, form a key part of the response and solution to Government policy around health, particularly where the focus of initiatives and retail spaces are upon healthy food, and fruit and vegetables in particular. Current related policy initiatives include:

- *Choosing Health* White Paper;
- Choosing a better diet: a food and health action plan;
- The 5 a day programme;
- Healthy Living Centres;
- Action on obesity, nutrition and physical activity.

Regeneration

Physical, economic and social regeneration have formed key parts of the rejuvenation of cities in recent years in the United Kingdom. Whilst physical interventions and policy have often been around providing the conditions for growth of inward investment and national scale retail, there has been focus, particularly through the National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal, on local centre and neighbourhood level economic and social intervention and policy. Within this joined up thinking around health, crime and local economy amongst other issues, local centres and the retail offer of local centres has a key role to play in neighbourhood level regeneration and sustainability. Indeed, Community Food Initiatives have been seen as key to social interaction and social capital of local people within neighbourhoods, and

a feature of neighbourhood renewal funded projects across England. Similarly, the vitality and viability of local centres, local Independent Food Retailers and Markets are key to local economies and the wider cross-cutting issues of neighbourhood renewal. Current related policy initiatives include:

- Sustainable Communities Agenda;
- National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal;
- Neighbourhood Renewal Fund (soon to be reinvented as the Working Neighbourhoods Fund);
- Local Enterprise Growth Initiative (soon to be disbanded).

Planning

Retail planning policy in the UK has been in a cycle of change over the last 30 years, which has had significant implications for local centres and local independent food and non-food retailers. Whilst in the late 1970s, the local or neighbourhood centre was very much at the heart of the community and food retailing, planning legislation has firstly seen a laissez faire approach to out of town retailing, particularly supermarket development, followed secondly by a renewed vigour to ensure the vitality and viability of major town and city centres. This has often led to a feel of bias towards major centres and out of town retail, and a neglect of the local or district centre. This has had implications for the offer, cost effectiveness and sustainability of Independent Food Retailers and Markets, which are often located in local centres. Current related policy initiatives and legislation include:

- Planning Policy Statement 6: Planning for Town Centres (PPS6);
- Planning Policy Guidance 13: Transport (PPG13).

Culture and leisure

The importance of culture, with regard to neighbourhood regeneration and local centres, has taken on added significance in recent years as a result of the increase of both new and old migrants into the United Kingdom's towns and cities. Migration has influenced the layout and offer of local centres with regard to food products. Many local centres increasingly have a strong ethnic feel and focus with regard to fresh and restaurant food. Whilst there is no specific Government policy relating to culture and food, there are aspects of neighbourhood renewal

policies that have ‘target group’ aspects to them. Additionally, within Government there is presently a strong focus on community cohesion and ensuring different communities ‘knit together’ within localities. Food and the diversity of the local centre potentially play a key part in this. Sport is also an area which is increasingly being used within Government policy to improve the health of local communities. Local food initiatives and local retail centre regeneration are being increasingly linked to sporting initiatives as part of a joined up and holistic approach to tackling health inequalities and ensuring neighbourhood regeneration.

Environment

The environment has taken on added scope in all aspects of Government policy, certainly in the last 12 months as a result of the Stern Review. A strong quality environment is particularly important for the economic vitality and sustainability of local centres. It is also important in the regeneration of neighbourhoods, with a strong focus upon liveability within the neighbourhood renewal agenda. Environment and health are also intrinsically linked with Community Food Initiatives and allotments in particular are contributing towards enhanced local environments.

Conclusions and remaining questions

Local Independent Food Retailers, Markets and Community Food Initiatives play key roles in the sustainability of some local centres in Manchester with regard to thematic policy agendas around health, regeneration, planning, culture and the environment. There is however a number of further roles local authorities can play in supporting food mechanisms, particularly in underperforming local centres. The research has however dealt us a number of further questions when it comes to local food, retailing and local centre sustainability, including:

- Is there a role in an urban environment for a sustainable local food network encompassing local growing, local production, local supply and local retailing?
- What is the role of larger retailers in local centre sustainability?
- What is the role of independent retailers in regeneration?
- Is local food retailing a key policy priority within wider sub-regional considerations?
- Is there a need for a cross-departmental approach to supporting local food retail?



This research was undertaken by Sarah Longlands, Director of Policy and Matthew Jackson, Senior Policy Researcher at the Centre for Local Economic Strategies (CLEs)

For further information on the wider research activity, please contact Matthew Jackson, 0161 236 7036, matthewjackson@cles.org.uk



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The original research was commissioned by the Food Futures Group of Manchester City Council. Food Futures is a partnership that embraces a wide range of individuals and organisations with an interest in improving food in the city. Its ambitious goal is to create a culture of good food in the city, based on the belief that good food is enjoyable, safe, nutritious, environmentally sustainable, and produced ethically and fairly; and that everyone in Manchester has a right to good food – no-one should have this right denied because of where they live, their income or their background. The Food Futures strategy embraces the whole food agenda for the city – from improving health, tackling health inequalities and reducing the environmental impact of food, to building sustainable communities and strengthening the local economy.

Our activities

Publications

Bulletin

CLES Bulletin is a policy bulletin produced around 12 times a year summarising a recently emerged issue.

e.g. No.58 Taking forward the Sub-National Review

Local Work

Local Work is a policy bulletin and think-piece produced around 10 times a year.

e.g. No.85 Making local food work

Rapid Research

CLES Rapid Research is produced around 5 times a year and provides a swift and incisive analysis of policy trends and developments, and investigates their relevance to regeneration practitioners.

e.g. No.11 The Working Neighbourhoods Fund, neighbourhood renewal and the third sector: the implications of the focus on worklessness

Research

CLES produces a number of pieces of policy research each year. These primarily relate to our three core research themes of:

- Employment and knowledge economy
- Environment and the economy
- Economic dimension of place shaping

Events

The two day CLES Summer School takes place in July every year. CLES also run a series of training events throughout the year.

e.g. Introduction to Local Economic Development

e.g. Evaluating Programmes and Projects

Centre for Local Economic Strategies

Express Networks • 1 George Leigh Street
Manchester M4 5DL

tel 0161 236 7036 fax 0161 236 1891

info@cles.org.uk www.cles.org.uk