



**Food
Exeter**

**Exploring
Community Food Hubs
in Exeter**

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1. Introduction

Food Exeter has researched food poverty in Exeter over the past two years, including collecting evidence of need and ideas for change from organisations across the city and from people with lived experience of food poverty. This research shows that there is serious food poverty and food insecurity in the city and that there is no joined up approach to tackling this issue in our city¹.

One of the ideas which emerged from our discussions about food poverty with other organisations was investigating the role of Community Food Hubs as a way of enabling bottom-up solutions. Food Exeter decided to embark on a new project to investigate the potential of Community Food Hubs in Exeter - this report is the result of our explorations.

2. What are Community Food Hubs?

The term Community Food Hub is used to describe a cluster of socially, environmentally or economically beneficial activities in a neighbourhood relating to food. This could include cooking, buying, eating, and growing food, as well as emergency responses. Food Hubs are set up for various reasons, including reducing food poverty and insecurity, increasing community cohesion, improving the connection between people and locally produced food, as well as providing more access to nutritious food.²

Experience in the UK and elsewhere has shown multiple benefits arising from a Food Hub approach.³ Cooking can help to increase confidence, raise self-esteem, develop social and team working skills, while being active within a hub means learning new skills, developing independent living skills and having a better understanding of healthy eating.⁴ It is widely recognised that community food growing has a positive impact on people's physical and mental health and well-being.⁵ Community cafés enable people in need to eat at least one hot nutritious meal a day, reduce isolation, improve social interactions and help community cohesion.⁶ Offering such activities alongside emergency food provision can also help reduce the stigma of having to visit a food bank.

For more detail on community food hubs as concept, see <https://foodexeter.org.uk/ib/community-food-hubs/>

1 <https://foodexeter.org.uk/ib/exeter-food-poverty-summit-2018/>

2 Confusingly, the term food hub is also being used to describe rather different kinds of activities that focus on aggregating local food from small producers and building links to local consumers. For this, see <https://foodresearch.org.uk/publications/food-hubs/>

3 For example <https://www.greenerkirkcaldy.org.uk/project/community-food-hub/> and https://www.sustainweb.org/pdf/Building_Sustainable_Community_Food_Hub.pdf

4 <https://www.communityfoodandhealth.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/cooking-in-the-community.pdf>

5 https://www.sustainweb.org/resources/files/reports/GH_Benefits_food_growing_for_health.pdf

6 <https://www.communityfoodandhealth.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2011/03/cfhsclaritycommunitycafere-search-1951.pdf>

3. Report Aims

Food Exeter wanted to better understand what community food hubs could mean in Exeter and to test the idea that one or more community food hubs could be developed in the city. This research was to gather information and views as there was little easily accessible information and no information available in one place on existing activities or future plans.

The working assumptions on which this research report was based were that:

- Food-related activities in community-based spaces within a neighbourhood bring multiple benefits
- A Community Food Hub needs to have a space to operate from; for this reason we looked at existing community centres and facilities already engaging in some food activities and linked to an active local community.
- If various food activities happen in the same location, they can mutually support each other. For example a community garden can provide ingredients to a cafe, or for cookery workshops and people develop related and complementary skills. Community cafés appear to be a key element in establishing other related food hub activities and there is considerable interest and activity in community cafés already around the city⁷
- Levels of activity in Exeter relating to community food hub activities are relatively low and those engaged in this activity are not connected. Activity is fragmented and tends to be hand to mouth, as opposed to regular and on a financially sustainable footing.
- There is the potential to support the development of one or more community food hubs in Exeter

The aims for this report were :

- To build a clearer picture of existing food-related activities based in some of the city's community centres. Due to limited resources this is unfortunately not a comprehensive review of community food activities in Exeter, but an attempt to understand some of the existing activities that have the potential for future development
- To gather views of some stakeholders engaged in these activities (managers, users and volunteers) on their current and future activities relating to food including food insecurity and food poverty the barriers that they face in relation to expanding food activities their desires and visions in relation to this area of activity
- Test our assumptions (above)
- Make recommendations on next steps for possible community food hub activity in Exeter or any other areas for future focus, based on our findings

⁷ Our working definition of a community cafe is a place where prepared, healthy meals are served at little and/ or no cost, run on a not for profit basis, offering corollary activities such as cooking classes, and using volunteers, some of whom will be themselves vulnerable people.

We are aware that much of the important community food work already happening takes place outside of community centres/physical spaces - and we were able to expand our research to cover a very limited amount of this but due to scant resources we are aware there are a lot of activities and groups we could not interview. We also retained focus on activities that had their own facilities with the assumption that this may make it easier to expand their provision.

Note also that this report does not cover emergency food provision in the city. Our focus is on where food is used as way of securing ongoing beneficial outcomes, but not on emergency responses.

4. Methodology

We first needed to identify existing community centres in the city. This raised the question of what comprises a community centre. Our original focus was to be on mainstream community centres undertaking a limited range of food activities, and with the potential and/or interest to expand their activities. We defined community centres as being based in a neighbourhood, offering space and a regular and good range of activities for local people, used mainly by those living nearby. With a limited budget, we selected the following four centres to interview, that met this definition:

Wonford Community and Learning Centre
Newcourt Community Centre
The Beacon Community Centre
St Katherine's Priory

In addition, we also interviewed **St Sidwell's Community Centre**, which already has a strong alignment with our definition of a community food hub, running a community cafe, veg garden, cookery classes, bakery and more. St Sidwell's serves its local area, but as a city-centre organisation also works with the wider Exeter community and sometimes further afield.

As our work progressed, we realised that there were other organisations that were active around 'community food', and that some information from them would add range to this report, so we expanded our list to include:

Park Life Heavitree
YMCA Exeter
Age UK Exeter
West Bank Healthy Living Centre

The research underpinning this report comprised:

- face to face interviews with managers, volunteers and users of Wonford, Newcourt, Beacon, St Sidwell's and St Katherine's & Westbank centres
- web research, interviews and phone calls to establish what community food activities are taking place across Exeter.

After the primary interviews took place, Food Exeter interviewed a sample of 12 people whose organisations are impacted by food poverty issues and/or who work directly with people living

with food poverty. The interview findings formed the basis for a workshop on food poverty, (January 2020) attended by a good range of public and voluntary sector organisations. The issue of 'community food' was very central to discussions, so ideas arising from this workshop also inform the conclusions and recommendations presented here.

5. Community Centres & Community Food

This section captures some key facts and issues that emerged from our research, giving a broad-brush picture. There is more detail on what individual centres and organisations are doing in the appendices. The generalisations here refer to the community centres other than St Sidwell's - again more information about their activity is available in the appendices.

Types of community food activities in centres

Providing low-cost and free food

Each of the four initial community centres interviewed were carrying out some activities relating to free or low cost food, whether served in 'café' sessions, given out as part of another activity, acting as drop points for Exeter Food Bank or for other arrangements to take advantage of free surplus food. There have been very limited offers of cooking classes.

However, none of the Centres had the energy, capacity, funding or right facilities to undertake more ambitious work relating to food.

Community food growing

Food growing activities were available at some of the community centres we visited, with Newcourt having a designed-in community garden, and St Katherine's having a small number of raised beds. There was no suitable space at the other centres. However, there are a fair number of opportunities for people to get involved in community food growing in and around Exeter, with community gardens and growing projects at St Sidwell's Centre, Age UK Exeter, Westbank, Organic Arts, Broadclyst Community Farm, Shillingford Organics Farm School, Exeter Growers' Cooperative, YMCA Exeter, and Exeter Communities Together.

Community cooking classes

There is a shortage of free or very low-cost community cookery classes running and there was a wish to run them in the community centres. Our research also uncovered a number of past attempts to provide community cooking classes that failed because there was a poor match between the classes offered and the needs and wishes of the target audience e.g. classes provided at the wrong time of day and/or an inconvenient or inappropriate location. St Sidwell's Community Centre has recently launched The Sidwell Street Cookery School offering community cookery classes and hopes to increase its programme of events.

Community buying initiatives

We didn't find any community buying initiatives (food coops, veg bags, buying groups) in place, nor any interest in any such initiatives from centre staff and volunteers. This is not surprising as fresh food is readily available across most of the city, except for Exwick which is not close to any of the centres researched.

Community cafés in Community Centres

Our interviews showed that a Café offer is a useful or even vital 'gateway' into other services on offer, particularly for the more vulnerable in society and those who would not usually access certain services due to lack of knowledge or confidence. This is something that has been found through community cafés across the UK.

None of the community centres aside from St Sidwell's had a permanent functioning community café serving food at least 5 days a week. Only Wonford Community Centre has an ambition to create a community cafe. All the centres that we spoke to had some sort of 'community café' offer, but they varied greatly in scope and type. The most common offer is a café in a space within the centre, run one day a week with volunteers. This was about all that could be managed in terms of volunteer capacity and/or the capacity of the limited paid staff time for organising volunteers. All of these aimed to provide food very cheaply or sometimes free.

All the prices were below the market rate – but may still not be affordable for people on very low incomes. Sometimes free meals were made available to those in need, some of which was paid for by other agencies. None of these offer prepared, healthy meals. Food on offer was snacks, pizza, cakes, rolls etc. . Although all the cafés said they tried to serve healthier foods, e.g. by grilling rather than frying, they were limited by various barriers; (see Section 6).

Most of the café offers were sustained by donated food, for example Wonford receives donated food from the nearby Lidl supermarket.

Despite these limitations the cafés are clearly providing huge value in terms of social outcomes, however:

- Some volunteers were learning valuable skills e.g. YMCA hostel residents at Newcourt, whilst others experienced a calm, welcoming environment that helped mental health issues.
- For some of the volunteers, the free meal they received when volunteering was better than the food they ate at home, ensuring at least one nutritious meal each week
- The café offer has been found to draw less confident, vulnerable people into joining other activities at the centre.
- Where there is food poverty, the provision of food alongside an activity can be a stigma-free way of helping out e.g. the youth club at Wonford, where very hungry young teenagers come to youth activities and eat free food.
- Food poverty and a need to socialise in a free setting will draw people from across the city. Wonford found mothers with babies travelling from across the city to attend sessions they ran which included free food.

Shared meals

We have defined shared meals as an initiative where local people gather to eat together, usually involving voluntary effort, and not in a café setting. There has been a growth of one-off celebratory shared meals in the UK, supported by organisations like the Big Lunch.⁸ Topsham hosts a notable 'longest table' event.⁹

⁸ <https://www.edenprojectcommunities.com/thebiglunchhomepage>

⁹ <https://www.facebook.com/events/725171304631429/>

We found very little activity of this kind in Exeter. There is a new monthly shared meal initiative in Alphington, run by private providers as a community event, and Wonford Community Centre hosts a weekly shared meal provided by Exeter FoodCycle.

Community fridges/pantries or free surplus food

None of the centres had set up community fridges or pantries, although some had been discussing this idea. But two of the centres did have surplus food from supermarkets available at their cafés for anyone to take away. However, sometimes this did not all get used, as the produce might not be something that people used or looked unappealing.

Holiday hunger programmes

Several of the centres were involved in running 'holiday hunger' programmes in the summer holidays to provide nutritious food for children, especially those entitled to free school meals. These included doing cookery sessions and creative activities, as well as providing a free freshly cooked lunch. The holiday hunger programmes were supported by grant funding. These activities are all temporary, with no systematised provision for holiday hunger work in the city.

6. Barriers to food-related activity in Community Centres

All four of our focus community centres were engaged in delivering community food action of some sort and each saw it as significant. However, in each case, the scope of this activity is fairly limited by a number of barriers:

- a shortage of volunteers to support food-related activities and of people capable of training and retaining volunteers to carry out food-related activities
- a shortage of volunteers with sufficient cooking skills, meaning that for example, donated fresh food couldn't be used as no one has the skills to make it into a meal.
- insufficient space to accommodate activities
- inadequate / poorly designed kitchen space and conflicting user wishes over kitchen space
- uncertainty about the overall future of the Centre which limits medium or long term planning
- anxieties and uncertainties about the overall financial sustainability of each community centre. These limit ambition and set up a tension between the need to secure income by renting out Centre space for activities offered by external providers who charge for the activity, and the wish to serve the genuinely local community especially those on low incomes, with free or low cost services. See Appendices for more detail.

It would be fair to say that for a city the size of Exeter, the type and level of provision of community food activities is low. St Sidwell's Centre could be said to operate a regular community café open to all, and the overall picture is of a very piecemeal, hand to mouth level of provision. However, there is clear and strong interest in improving this situation.

7. Other Community Food providers

As we talked to people, we learnt about a great deal more activity around 'community food' in other places, for example:

- Church groups providing community food e.g. Alphington Lunchbox
- Charities with café space (Age UK)
- Pubs and cafés offering very affordable deals for people on lower incomes e.g. New Inn Alphington, Daisy Café Heavitree
- Black and Minority Ethnic groups e.g. Hindu Association
- Neighbourhood groups e.g. Countess Wear residents community meal
- They are various soup kitchens and hot meals in the city centre mainly targeted at the homeless and vulnerable housed – as shown in our map of food support in Exeter. <https://foodexeter.org.uk/ib/free-low-cost-food-in-exeter/>

There is great potential to help improve the scale and type of benefits that these numerous initiatives are providing, often to people in real need, whether through low income, disability, isolation or mental health issues.

8. Future community café interests in Exeter

Our research uncovered underlying interest in the idea of one or more additional and more comprehensive community cafés in the city.

- Discussions are happening around the fact that the city centre has several churches with large, underused kitchens, where there could be potential to run a community cafe project focusing on providing nutritious hot meals for vulnerable people in the city centre.
- Parklife hope to open their new community café within Heavitree park in 2020
- Wonford Community Centre trustees would like to open a community café and are currently considering options for funding etc. However, there are uncertainties over the future of their building, as it may be demolished to build a new leisure centre.
- There is a need to find ways to provide healthy, nutritious food for the city's homeless /street-living people, in a setting that they perceive to be acceptable and secure. A community café could help with this problem

9. Other current activities

We came across some innovative food initiatives:

- Park Life Heavitree have a 'share a meal scheme' to provide cooked meals to families who needed them, e.g. if they had just left hospital or had a baby.
- Westbank run a Cook & Chat scheme which involves giving one-to-one advice on cooking to individuals in their own homes.

We found a number of potentially significant future initiatives that are likely to happen / are happening in the city.

- The national charity Feeding Britain, is hoping to initiate a pilot in Exeter in 2020, which could lead to the set up of a community café and/or a service providing nutritious, healthy meals delivered to where they are needed. This could mean, for example, community centres being able to offer meals that they only have to reheat.
- Fareshare South West are starting a new partnership with Exeter Food Action in early 2020. This will mean local charities and organisations having access to significant amounts of high quality, low cost surplus food.
- Food Exeter are exploring the feasibility of a Local Food Centre which could include provision of processed fresh food (prepared vegetables etc.) to be used by not for profit organisations and local businesses. This would make cooking meals easier in places with limited kitchens.
- Food Exeter, under the Sustainable Food Cities 'Veg Cities' banner, will be setting up two new community food markets in association with local communities during 2020



10. Key findings

We believe that even this quite small-scale research into Exeter's community food activities has provided a valuable picture of activities in the city which can be hidden, appear under-rated in their significance and value and which have the potential to deliver so much more in terms of social, environmental and economic benefits to Exeter.

Our research shows that great efforts are made by the voluntary and community sector to provide free or low cost food in Exeter across a wide range of types of venue and organisation. However, the provision is fragmented, some of it highly dependent on a few people and/or temporary funding. Critically, relatively little of what is provided comprises nutritious, healthy meals, with sweet snacks, sandwiches etc., being the most common provision.

a) Fragmented, small scale delivery by the community and voluntary sectors. There is a considerable amount of activity relating to 'community food' in the city, but it is highly fragmented, partial and in many cases, running in a 'hand to mouth' fashion. The great majority is being delivered by very small and/or very stretched community and voluntary sector organisations. They are doing this on the most minimal of resources, with extensive voluntary input, often by other local people who often also face barriers to participation and who benefit both themselves and others by volunteering.

b) Agency policies around the role and potential of 'community food'. We were not able to identify any clear policies on or much understanding of the potential significance and value of activity around community food in any of the lead agencies whose clients most need and might benefit from such activities including. Devon and Exeter Councils, Housing Associations, the NHS, Social and mental health services, schools. For example, improved nutrition of vulnerable people would reduce health and social care costs.

Our sense from this research, (confirmed by later interviews with local agencies about the impacts of food poverty) was that community food activity is to some degree invisible to most agencies. We believe that Food Exeter's research is the first time that any attention has been paid to this area of social activity as a whole.

c) There is a wide and disparate range of organisational stakeholders for community food. A really wide range and type of organisations, scattered across the community, voluntary and public sectors, have a strong implicit stake in the issue and role of 'community food', albeit often unrecognised. This includes agencies dealing with homelessness and vulnerable adult housing, health agencies dealing with malnutrition and obesity, faith groups with underused physical spaces, through to local faith and community groups who want to build a sense of place and community.

d) Silo working. Given c) above, it is no surprise that each organisation is generally working alone, with very minimal sharing of knowledge and resources. Potential future shared approaches are not spotted due to the separation of the activities and the wide range of headings that community food slots into – food poverty, public health, mental health, healthy eating, strengthening community, building skills, both formal and informal.

e) Emergency food provision 'versus' preventing people falling into food poverty. The Food Exeter interviews and workshop highlighted strong interest in initiatives that would help people avoid falling into food poverty and responses that empowered those receiving help more

– for example, social supermarkets, buying groups etc. However, there was recognition that the relentless and growing demand for emergency help is a strong daily driver, and this creates a tension between responding to that level of need, and having space to consider ‘up the pipe’ solutions.

f) A lot is achieved for very vulnerable people, with very little resource. Community Centres and a small number of other charities and faith organisations are delivering an impressive range of community food activities, that reach some of the most vulnerable and low-income residents of Exeter. They are providing meals and snacks which reach people experiencing food poverty, using food to draw in and engage people who then benefit from other aspects and services of the place they are in and to build skills, confidence and well-being. The amount achieved for the money spent is impressive.

g) Random and uncertain financial basis for community food. Financial input that supports food activities tends to be random and unreliable, based on miscellaneous grants. The community centres are caught in a conundrum of striving to maintain financial viability, (thus favouring private renting of their space) whilst also wanting to provide free and cheap food and other services for local people, particularly those most in need of those services.

h) Lack of the right skills for supporting food activities. There is a shortage of people with the skills to train and support volunteers engaged in community food activities. Experience elsewhere shows that this is a critical element in building up sustainable food services that rely on, often by design, significant volunteer support. Similarly, other skills and knowledge like menu-planning, the financial side of catering and food hygiene are also in short supply.

i) Limited offers of nutritious, healthy food. Barriers of time, money and skills, as well as cultural barriers mean that only the more sophisticated ‘café’ offers provide nutritious food. There is a disproportionate, entirely understandable reliance on cheap, quick food fixes.

j) A ‘community food hub’ model in Exeter? The reality of developing existing community food activities into more active hubs to provide comprehensive food activities would be very complex. In many cases this is either not a goal of the centres interviewed, or currently appears unachievable due to funding and space constraints

Our research did confirm the central role that food-related activities play in delivering other important social outcomes, so the broad idea of increasing the number of places where these activities are nurtured is borne out as a future goal for the city as a whole.

The development of more community food ‘hubs’ or clusters in Exeter seems unlikely to proceed in anything other than a small and piecemeal way, unless some of the barriers highlighted in this report are addressed. Experience elsewhere suggests that flourishing food hubs usually have paid food workers, often grant funded, who are passionate about cooking, growing and sharing food and who can set up and run activities, with the support of volunteers. They are also run by organisations who have made a commitment to having ongoing food activities, even if it is not their main purpose, as they recognise the benefits of food activities, healthy eating, and the power of food to bring people together. A hub also clearly requires appropriate facilities, including purpose built kitchen, eating areas and ideally growing spaces.

However, in Exeter we already have several organisations, from established ones like Age UK or St Sidwell’s Community Centre, to much smaller offers, that provide a wide range of different food

activities, either in one centre, or across a range of locations. Between these organisations there is a wealth of knowledge and experience in supporting food activities. This means that there is potential to investigate the idea of prospective 'virtual' Community Food Hubs.

k) Community Cafés are wanted and needed in Exeter. Experience across the UK shows that fully fledged Community cafés, are a key 'anchor' for related beneficial community food activities, often delivering volunteer skills training (both formal and informal), providing nutritious low cost and free food, supporting local food producers, etc. The only community café in Exeter is within St Sidwell's Community Centre.

But it is clear that there is a real demand locally. People really want to have more places to meet and to be able to access affordable healthy food. Wellbeing Exeter carried out a 'Big Listen' exercise in 2017. There was strong support for more community cafés and more places for people to be able to get together easily. This suggests the need for an expanded range of community café offers being provided in the city, particularly where more nutritious food can be provided.



11. Recommendations

Here are some ideas for future activities and policies which would increase the quality and quantity of community food activities in Exeter.

Provision of practical, collective support

Given the similar needs and challenges faced by some of the organisations delivering community food, there is potential to put practical support in place, with one set of experts or project team able to help multiple organisations. A joint funding bid could provide something of this nature for example – a mobile team for the city. Just two years of provision could be enough to make a real impact and build up skills within city organisations, which could then be passed on as part of normal operations. Areas to focus on include:

- **Increasing nutritional value:** There is potential to work with any organisation currently offering food to people experiencing food insecurity, to adapt the current food menus, even slightly, towards providing some healthier options. For example, in the cafés just providing tea and cake, they could make a free, or pay as you feel, daily special focussing on fresh vegetables and fruit e.g. home made soup or vegetable stew. This could be made from free and low cost surplus ingredients to reduce the cost, tapping into the well-established food surplus distribution systems in the city, especially via Exeter Food Action
- **Sharing skills:** A support package to work with existing and new volunteers to give them more food skills training – cooking and storing food, using surplus produce especially vegetables, creating cheap but healthy meals from simple ingredients. If such a mobile team could be established, there is the potential to make this a community enterprise which can continue to provide specialist support and skills to community food initiatives across the city
- **Skill-sharing within other specialist areas of knowledge –** menu-planning, procurement, practicalities of design and layout, e.g. when upgrading a kitchen, business planning, legal basics for running food services etc.

Better networking and sharing

- **Initiate a dialogue with all organisations with a special interest in community food activities,** including those who are considering expanding their activities in Exeter to ensure a ‘joined up’ approach is taken. It is clear that there is much that could be shared for mutual benefit, from understanding community needs, template mini-business plans for community cafés or café sessions, through to sharing people with skills that others can learn from.
- **Set up a support network that links all those community and voluntary sector organisations working with food and communities,** to ensure that they are sharing knowledge, resources and looking at the future in ways that are collaborative and complementary. This would include learning from relevant projects and organisations within Greater Exeter
- **Given the strong interest in community cafés, and the positive benefits they offer, it would seem sensible to find ways to help those already hoping to initiate such activities.** So, a specific project could be to bring together all those running and those wishing to start community cafés, to share the knowledge and resources needed, and support them to make

joint funding bids for specialist help etc.

Policies and practice changes by local agencies

- **Review of local authority policy and funding arrangements with community centres.** Exeter and Devon Councils are renting premises to community groups running community centres. There is merit in:
 - Assessing the value for money and beneficial outcomes delivered by the Centres
 - Considering longer term policy and arrangements for the rent and rates arrangements paid by the respective charities that run the Centres, so that they are able to plan for the medium and long term. This would ideally include delivery of community services and things like food budgeting, reducing food waste, cooking skills and provision of healthy meals are all possible areas
- **Recognition of and support for community food across agencies.** Some better signposting, and increased understanding of what a crowded and fragile field this is would enable agencies to consider community food as an aspect of relevant policies and practice, and to reduce 'silo' working. A key policy area is to investigate the potential for community food initiatives to help prevent food poverty occurring in the first place and to help people emerge from it more quickly.
- **Fair Access to Food Alliance:** Food Exeter is already talking to organisations about setting up a new Fair Access to Food Alliance, bringing together stakeholders who want to help their clients/patients/users to address food poverty and malnutrition through both the organisation's own policies and empowering 'bottom up' action. Such an Alliance could bring a clarity of purpose to address the lack of joined up working, provide support for and connection with community food activities that are reaching people living with food insecurity. Such an Alliance can only happen if resources are found.

Appendix 1: Detail on Community Centre food activities

The Beacon Community Centre, Beacon Heath, an independent community centre, owned and run by Isca Community Enterprises, a registered charity. It leases the building on a long term lease from Devon County Council, using half and subletting the other half to a children's nursery. The charity was set up by Isca Church when the building became empty. It is a mixed local community with pockets of serious deprivation. The Centre opens 6 days a week.

Its aim is to bring people together to improve lives, have fun things to do and increase opportunities to learn new things. The centre hosts activities, events and offers rooms and spaces to hire for parties, meetings and celebrations. The centre has a café on Fridays from 10am – 12pm.

Food-related activities:

- Community café on Fridays, primarily hot drinks and cakes, (some bought, some made by volunteers and brought in)
- Food bank parcels available during café time. The feeling is that the café atmosphere really helps remove the stigma that can be associated with collecting food bank parcels
- Tesco food surplus available twice a week.
- Meet and Remember group for older people share a meal, run by a local charity with professional caterer volunteer - this is only a one off occurrence
- Considering community fridge or pantry
- Summer holiday fun days with free meal available
- Kitchen considered too small for anything more ambitious

Newcourt Community Centre is run by Newcourt Community Association, a charitable incorporated organisation, in a building owned by Exeter City Council. The centre is open seven days a week, 8am - 9pm. The aims of the charity running the centre are to benefit the local community.

Newcourt Community Centre makes enough from bookings for private events/courses to employ a part-time manager plus part time admin staff who deal with the room bookings, plus paid caretaker and cleaner. The Centre is large, with parking facilities, and is extremely popular as a venue for events, private parties and privately organised activities.

The Centre does not provide a wide offer for the local community outside the privately hosted offers of sports, dance, baby classes etc. There have been Christmas and summer barbecue events for local residents.

The Trustees are anxious about providing community benefit activities that don't contribute towards the Centre's core costs, as their first concern is to make enough to keep the Centre going. There is an underlying aspiration to do more such community activities.

Food-related activities:

- Café Thursday runs every Thursday from 10am – 12pm and is run in partnership with Exeter YMCA. The café provides free, easy to eat food – pizza, salad, sandwiches. There is a very friendly atmosphere, with YMCA staff helping to put new people at ease. The aim, from the Centre's point of view, is to encourage local residents in, particularly those who are isolated and/ or experiencing food poverty. YMCA provide all the food, staff and volunteers to run the café session. People with young children and older people come. Numbers attending fluctuate from very few to around thirty per session. These fluctuations make planning the food and managing volunteers harder.
- YMCA use their own clients as volunteers, as they live in nearby hostel. That is their prime reason for running the café. They would like to expand their offer but can only do this by having someone with a café-manager /volunteer coordinator role i.e. who understands health and safety and can support and train the volunteers.
- There is a decent-sized kitchen though not designed as a catering kitchen. Quite a lot of the kitchen storage space is kept locked with things used by one of the regular groups.
- The Centre has a community garden that people can get involved with. This is arranged as mini-allotments that people can take on. YMCA have one plot that they use for the café.
- The Centre tried cookery classes offered by Tesco, but they were not offered at a time that was convenient and didn't get much uptake.
- Centre is very interested in doing more food-related work, including cookery classes. Also interested in a community café but current space wouldn't work as the community hall is in continual use already.
- Considering a community fridge

Wonford Community & Learning Centre is run by a registered charity, in premises leased from Exeter City Council. They run youth clubs, as well as lots of other activities including bowls, line dancing, bingo, walking groups, parent carer cafés. Wonford has areas within the lower indices of multiple deprivation.

Food-related activities

- The Centre have worked hard to get a regular arrangement with Lidl supermarket, their immediate neighbour. The Centre now gets substantial amounts of free food [time a week?]
- The community café is on a Thursday from 10am – 1pm. Offers breakfast, jacket potatoes, soup, sandwiches at affordable prices. Free food parcels from Lidl available.
- The café is used by the local community builder as a handy place to meet local people
- Exeter FoodCycle run a free vegetarian community meal one evening a week. Free food parcels are handed out at this event. Some people want to come for the parcels but don't

want to eat meat-free meals.

- Youth group get free food during their sessions which is very popular. It was provided in response to anti-social behaviour issues and realising that kids were turning up hungry to the youth club.
- Considering a community fridge.
- The Centre has ambitious plans to open a community café that would be open to all, provide healthy food and volunteering and training opportunities. Currently looking for grant funding to make this happen. Due to their existing facilities this could be a relatively inexpensive project.

St Katherine's' Priory Community Centre is managed solely by volunteers from the Stoke Hill Community Association which is a registered charity. The charity leases the premises -a historic listed building, rent-free, from Exeter City Council. It is open to the public 16-20 hours a week. There are community activities on Tuesday and Thursday afternoons, hosting of hobby clubs, home education group and private offers e.g. aerobics classes, where market price is charged by the person hiring the space.

There is a wish to draw more people in to use the Centre and the café is seen as one way to do this, as well as seeking to reduce social isolation. Running costs are covered by bookings for private activities.

Food-related activities:

- The Centre's kitchen is very small, with a second servery area for hot drinks. Space in the centre is tight, which limits the space available for café customers as they can be 'competing' with other activities. The size of the kitchen limits what can be offered.
- Their cafe opens Fridays 10am - 3pm, with ambitions to open a second day in the week if volunteers can be found. Also seeking funding to improve their kitchen
- The café is used by passing walkers as well as Centre users. It makes a small profit
- The committee mentioned that there was potential to talk to Morrison's about free food as it is right by the Centre
- There are a small number of raised beds in the grounds, (which cannot be used for conventional beds because of legal limitations related to its historic site).

Appendix 2: An existing food hub?

St Sidwell's Community Centre, is a charity whose aims are about bringing people and organisations together, strengthen community, promote inclusion, particularly people living in or near the city centre which has pockets of serious deprivation. To do this, they provide opportunities for people of all abilities and ages, to meet and work together. St Sidwell's café is open Monday to Friday from 9am – 3pm. Volunteering by people who benefit from it is a core part of St Sidwell's ethos. As one of the more established and stable community centres, St Sidwell's offer advice to others who want to 'pick their brains'.

It is the only Centre in Exeter that could already be described as a Community Food Hub. Its city centre location can make it harder to draw direct comparisons with other community centres, as it caters to a wider audience and has significantly greater passing trade. The cafe, bakery and outside catering are important financial contributions to overall running costs. Grants make up the shortfall. St Sidwell's are interested in linking with other community centres, using their staff to offer training for volunteers to cook healthy, affordable meals.

Food-related activities:

- initiate a dialogue with all organisations with a special interest in community food activities, including those who are considering expanding their activities in Exeter to ensure a 'joined up' approach is taken. It is clear that there is much that could be shared for mutual benefit, from understanding community needs, template mini-business plans for community cafés or café sessions, through to sharing people with skills that others can learn from.
- a community garden and holds the lease for 16 allotments
- bread making and cooking courses of all kinds; 30 free cookery classes running in 2020, plus the learning of volunteers attached to the café; St Sidwell's Cookery School offering competitively priced workshops including free places for those on low incomes
- cultural kitchen activities, with people of different nationalities inputting to events and meals
- Young Chefs course (holiday hunger project)
- External catering and running staff canteen for LiveWest Housing Association
- Community café offering healthy, affordable food, open Monday to Saturday. Picks up a lot of passing city centre trade as well as local people
- Receive surplus food for use in café
- Run a community bakery and sell bread
- Give away food to homeless people in the city centre. £6000 worth of food last year. 700 free meals provided, plus arrangement with Julian House who pay for meals for homeless at the café.
- Community food events, including events hosted by BME groups, with kitchen and café offered free.

Appendix 3: Some other organisations with community food activities

Westbank provides care and promotes health to communities across Devon and beyond. It is a registered charity and has a not for profit company arm. The Healthy Living Centre promotes and enables healthy living initiatives and activities for local people, especially those who feel marginalised and socially excluded groups and individuals. The Centre includes a very innovative gym with disabled access equipment, after school and holiday club for children, crèche, gymnastics club, conference and meeting facilities and a community café named Seedlings, which runs Monday – Friday 9.30am – 2.30pm.

Age UK Exeter is a local charity that provides support and opportunities to over a thousand older people in Exeter each week. Their main office and day centres are based in St Thomas. The Fire Station café in Cowick St welcomes anyone over 50 for good value, traditional home cooked meals. Age UK offer a variety of other services for older people all over Exeter including social groups, Men in Sheds project, swimming, exercise, dance and movement classes and an allotment project. The café is seen as a useful gateway to other services on offer at the Centre, but making it pay is a challenge.

Food-related activities:

- Firestation café offering hot meals at affordable prices to anyone over 50
- Mornings, lunch, including Sunday and takeaway hot meals. Aim for local sourcing and fresh ingredients, 'good value, traditional meals' in welcoming setting.
- Foodbank parcels available

Park Life Heavitree is a community group and charitable company that aims to bring together people in and around Heavitree Pleasure Ground in Exeter. The group run monthly events in the park. These normally have a theme and always involve quality hot drinks and cake. They also support the community through a share a meal scheme, funding through Sport England, the couch to 5K running clubs and summer volleyball sessions. Parklife are on the way to building and running a community hub and café, with building starting in 2020.

Food-related activities:

- Initiate a dialogue with all organisations with a special interest in community food activities, including those who are considering expanding their activities in Exeter to ensure a 'joined up' approach is taken. It is clear that there is much that could be shared for mutual benefit, from understanding community needs, template mini-business plans for community cafés or café sessions, through to sharing people with skills that others can learn from.
- The group have a van offering hot drinks and snacks when big events are held.
- The group's focus has always been to run a community café within the Pleasure Ground. They are well advanced in this goal, after years of negotiation and fundraising. Due to open March 2020. It will be run on a commercial basis with a goal of making the food as affordable as possible, healthy options

- Group has done cooking classes with local schools and has organised a number of community food events such as Big Lunch, Seed Swaps and Pumpkin Days
- They run the 'share a meal' scheme, providing free meals, usually frozen, to anyone who needs them. Done informally, through local suggestions e.g. someone who has just had a baby, or moved to the area
- Starting new community food activity from January 2020



Appendix 4: Community cafés – useful lessons & details

Provisioning

Some of the cafés used surplus produce supplied by Exeter Food Action or a local supermarket, but others bought most ingredients from nearby supermarkets.

Users

Most of the cafés did not target a particular group of people and were open to all, apart from one which was only open to over 50s. However, due to the fact that they mainly ran on weekday day times, they naturally reach the non-working population, e.g. older people and families with young children. St Sidwell's, being in the city centre and offering a wider range of food, is able to reach a wider range of people, for example staff from other local businesses and organisations, people coming to other classes at the centre, and also vulnerable adults.

Best options for community café structure

One of the lessons learned from one of the more long running community cafés is that it did not work that well when it was just run by volunteers, or when it was run by external operators, as they could not work well with volunteers. The best option was to have paid in house staff to manage the café and train and oversee volunteers. This enabled them to produce good food of consistent quality throughout the week.

Benefits of volunteering by vulnerable people

This is often an aim of community cafés. For example, YMCA run a weekly café at Newcourt Community Centre, providing simple free food catering for a handful up to around 30 people per session. The YMCA's motivation is to provide volunteering opportunity for their hostel residents. They have found this to be successful, with YMCA clients mixing more and attending beneficial events. One of the volunteers has since got a job at Newcourt community centre. The YMCA volunteers have got more involved in community activities and have got to know more local people. The volunteers can find the work stressful, which means the menu has to be kept very simple. Paid staff supervising volunteers and taking responsibility for the menu and cooking can mitigate this in other places.

Volunteer and staff numbers

To deal with a maximum expected number of people of around 30, the YMCA Team provide 3 staff members, but this includes people who are supporting the visitors with IT and crafting support offers.

The lack of cooking skills of the team means that getting free food from Lidl, which is a possibility, is not realistic as the uncertainty about ingredients is too difficult for inexperienced caterers, voluntary or otherwise, to deal with.

Different users sharing one community centre kitchen

Where different groups use the kitchen and this leads to some problems, with things going missing, being put away in the wrong place, and some key storage space being kept for use by one group, limiting general storage space.

St Katherine's Priory Café

Volunteer and staff numbers. For one café session of 3 hours a week, centre has 12 volunteers, of whom around 6 are the reliable 'hard core'. Volunteers are mainly retired people or on benefits,

but not all.

Usage. Over 50 people use the café, with around 70% having hot food

Beacon café

Volunteer and staff numbers. Lacking volunteers with catering skills, which limits what the café can offer. Need more volunteers with catering skills in general and for the summer fundays in the holidays

Staff plus volunteers, hot meals cafe

Age UK Firestation cafe

Volunteer and staff numbers 4 staff and 2 volunteers each day (morning through to lunchtime session), serving approx. 30 people per day

Staff with properly trained and supported volunteers, hot meals cafe

St Sidwell's

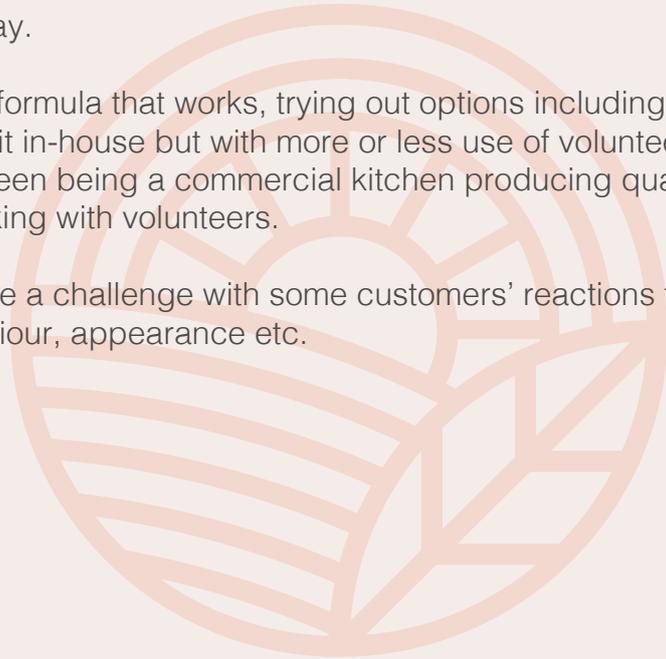
Volunteer and staff numbers

1-2 staff per day plus 4-8 volunteers

Serve 40+ customers per day.

Have worked hard to find a formula that works, trying out options including running café as separate business, running it in-house but with more or less use of volunteers versus paid staff. Have found a balance between being a commercial kitchen producing quality food, whilst supporting people and working with volunteers.

Welcoming all people can be a challenge with some customers' reactions to other customers, particularly relating to behaviour, appearance etc.



Appendix 5: Community Centres - a conundrum

If further serious consideration is given to ways of increasing community- based food activities in Exeter, a key issue will be to look at the different ways that such activities can be provided, including the city's community centres - both formal and informal.

Community Centres as a focus for future food-related activities

Those centres that are renting council-owned premises (Wonford, Newcourt and St Katherines' from Exeter City Council and the Beacon Centre from Devon County Council), all face a conundrum. To meet their running costs, they are obliged to rent out the centre's space for activities which one could say do not benefit local, low-income people as they cannot afford the prices. These activities typically attract people from outside the area too, especially where the centre has car parking. Yet each centre is run by a locally-based resident-oriented charity that has aims relating to providing beneficial services to local people. But they each find, to varying degrees, that there is insufficient financial surplus, and/or staff or volunteer capacity, to do as much as they would like to meet their charitable aims.

The other area that would merit examination is the complex interplay of funding (or waiving of rent, which is the same thing) by the council and beneficial outcomes that each Community Centre delivers for their community. The Centre's do not enjoy a position of security, knowing that were the council to change their policy on rent rebates given, some would need to close with immediate effect. This insecurity leads to short term thinking and thus limits possible radical changes and interventions that could be made, notably creating a network of community cafés in the city.

Finally, we also note that the cover provided by community centres is quite random and historic, with significant population areas (e.g. Heavitree, St Thomas) having no independent community centre.

