



Bishop's Castle

Community Food

Resilience Strategy

2021 – 2025



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Imagine...

Imagine a Bishop's Castle whose food came from within a few miles of Town, from the farmers and producers that are a part of our community. You know who produced your meal - that they are managing their land well, are caring for their livestock with respect, and that they share your values for our local landscape and agricultural heritage. Come what may, your local producers are filling the shelves.

Imagine a Bishop's Castle that is blooming: where fruit and veg are growing in public places and are picked at their peak. Community gardens are bringing together new gardeners and experienced growers to learn side by side, as children watch the seeds they've planted start to sprout. The food you've grown alongside your neighbours is shared with the satisfaction of knowing where it came from, and that you're giving your loved ones the gift of health.

Imagine a Bishop's Castle that tourists and other communities are drawn to: for the vibrant local culture, the local products and the amazing local food served in our restaurants and cafes. They come back, they bring friends and they take away ideas for things they can do to brighten up their own communities.



What is a Community Food Strategy?

A Community Food Strategy allows us take stock of what's happening in our local food system. It is a look across the food system: from production, to processing, retail, preparation and disposal. It looks at the needs of our community: what resources we have, any issues or gaps, who needs support, and who can lend their skills. From this, we can take steps to making our community more food resilient through targeted actions.

Food touches our lives in so many ways each day, making it a unique tool capable of addressing a wide range of issues. The Bishop's Castle Community Food Resilience Strategy seeks to take specific steps to improve health, community connections, economy and environment.

Planning and action now will help us to be more prepared for unforeseen future events that may impact on local food supply.

Setting the Table in Bishop's Castle: Our Local Food System

Why does Bishop's Castle need a Community Food Resilience Strategy?

This strategy is being written upon the backdrop of COVID-19, extreme weather events, the departure of the UK from the European Union after a decade of national austerity measures, and compounded economic hardship from all these crises. COP26 failed to address the significant role of food and agriculture in climate change. This time of great uncertainty has had and will continue to have impacts upon our food system and food security.

We have learned that food supply chains that have long been taken for granted are fallible. This is not unique to Bishop's Castle, but like all towns and cities, BC is a part of the global food system.

The global food system has been built to feed a population of nearly 8 Billion



Castle Hotel owners Henry and Bex Hunter. (Image credit: Castle Hotel Instagram)



The Three Tuns Brewery. (Image credit: Three Tuns website)

people. This has meant a focus on the efficiency of industrial production, but the trade-offs have made significant impacts on our environment, our health, our local economies and our connection to how food is produced.

Our Local Food System

BC relies primarily on conventional food retailers. The SPAR and the CO-OP are the two main commercial (chain) retailers in Town, although their supplies are limited by their size and ability to store products. There are some local shops offering a small selection of vegetables and local produce such as meat. BC is fortunate to be the home of the excellent local Three Tuns brewery. The Town Hall hosts a monthly Farmers' Market, and another weekly market takes place in Lydham.

Restaurants, pubs and cafes are key employers in BC and have suffered under the Pandemic, but are the heart of BC social life, our tourist industry, and several seek to source from local producers where possible.

Bishop's Castle has a number of fruit and vegetable growing sites: these include the BC Allotments (42, full-size and smaller, for rent from the Town Council), the Wintles (private) has 30 allotments, a total of 72 plots locally. There are also some private allotments in Welsh Street. The Wintles boasts a mixed fruit orchard and small vineyard. Little Woodbatch Market Garden operates a 40+ member Community Supported Agriculture (CSA)



Grass-fed Highland Cattle at Reilth Top, Bishop's Moat. (Image Credit: Jacky Harrison)

scheme. The Community College has a number of raised beds as an education resource for students, as does the Primary School.

Many local farmers produce livestock for wholesale markets and sell through our local auction yard each Wednesday. Several sell direct to consumers through box schemes.

What makes Bishop's Castle special is the large number of quality local producers and food-related initiatives taking place in and around the Town.

These are the existing local resources that we have to expand on, and they will be crucial to overcoming some struggles that our community faces along with other towns and cities across the UK.



Our Agricultural Heritage

Bishop's Castle is the historic home of Sir Albert Howard (born at Colebatch, 1873), who was one of the early founders of the organic movement.

Howard believed that care for the soil was the key to healthy and long-term sustainable food production, and thus, human health.

BC is now home to the Albert Howard Society which honours the life and work of Sir Albert.

(Image credit: The Albert Howard Society)

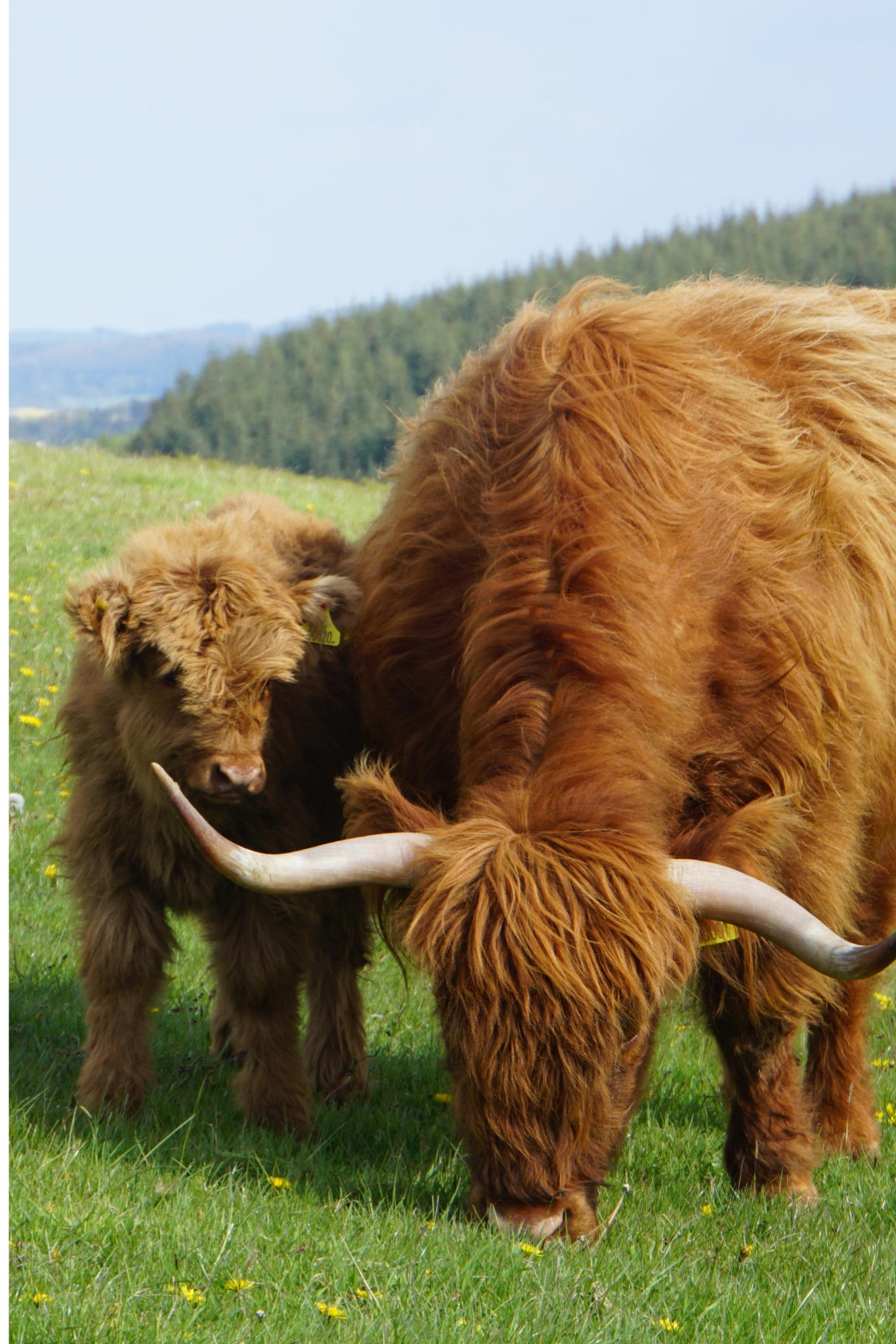
Bishop's Castle is a rural community with a strong agricultural heritage. It is part of the larger Marches Area on the English-Welsh Border, and within Shropshire - itself a part of the Midlands with significant rural production capacity. Despite this, small farms and agricultural jobs are diminishing.

Much of the food produced in and around BC (primarily livestock) leaves our area for processing and sale. That means that the Town is very reliant on importing food – and many of the same products that are produced locally and shipped out.

Several times in the last few years, food supplies to BC have been disrupted due to weather or the pandemic, and consumers often have little choice when prices increase because of the Town's limited retail choices. Market fluctuations on livestock and meat have impacted the returns for local farmers, which makes it hard to remain competitive and plan for the next season.

By having a local food strategy, Bishop's Castle will be able to plan - actively and strategically as a community - how to develop the local food system into something more resilient and locally-focused.

The Town will support local food producers and encourage more local growing so that we will stock more of the food produced in our area in local shops. We will do our part to reduce transport emissions by choosing local food first, thus reducing supply chain food miles. We will celebrate our rural heritage and the bounty of our landscape.





Food System Facts



Food Production and transport: World-wide, the food and agriculture system accounts for over 30% of CO₂e (13.7 Oil Metric Tons). In the EU food is the second largest contributor to our individual carbon footprints (Production/Processing/Transportation/Storage/Cooking/Waste).



Obesity: Public Health England's figures show Shropshire's adults are amongst the country's most obese with 72% in Shropshire and Telford & Wrekin classed as overweight or obese in 2018-19, the latest period for which data is available.



National Food Banks in 2019/20 has helped 1.9 million people, 300,000 more than the previous year. Food Bank use has increased every year from 2008 when just under 26,000 people used them. Food Bank use in BC has increased as a result of the pandemic.



Requests for school meal vouchers in Shropshire have increased. At the beginning of the autumn term 2020 4,883 children were eligible for benefits-related free school meals. The figure in September 2019 was 3,569.

Food System Impacts



Poor mental health and loneliness, alongside poor physical health from the burden of Non-Communicable Lifestyle Diseases (NCDs). These carry a significant cost-burden to the NHS.



Financial insecurity and debt due to the impacts of the pandemic, compounded by years of public sector and benefits cutbacks, alongside inflated food prices and food accessibility have the most impact on families, the elderly, BAME groups, and the vulnerable.



A changing climate due to an increase in Green House Gas (GHG) emissions, resulting in increased extreme weather events like droughts and floods.



Unknown impacts of Brexit on trade and food imports/exports as the UK leaves the European Union.



A reliance on imported foods (often with high associated emissions and packaging), rather than eating food that is locally produced and seasonally available.



A lack of spaces to grow, as well as food growing and preparation knowledge.



Routes to market and retailer contracts for SME local producers are unreliable or non-existent.



Brexit & Community Food Resilience

The Community Food Resilience Group emerged from the need to safeguard the community's food security after being impacted by the Coronavirus pandemic. A lack of clear information and guidance from the National and County Council levels of government on what to expect from a Brexit scenario and how to plan for it means that communities are developing their own response plans.

Numerous reports² have highlighted that Brexit is very likely to impact the UK food system in a few key areas:

- Price increases due to less favourable trade agreement on EU products
- Decrease in food availability due to supply chain disruptions from delayed port and border crossings, having an impact on fresh fruit and vegetables in particular
- Reduced quality of food from new trade deals with non-EU countries like the USA, Canada and Australia which use higher rates of pesticides, herbicides and anti-biotics than the UK, with many varieties that have historically been banned in the UK and EU, some using GMOS.



Lambing season at Reilth Top, Bishop's Moat. (Image Credit: Jacky Harrison)

These are already being experienced by people in Bishop's Castle, and especially by those already impacted by lost income, benefits changes or job loss due to Covid. Reduced availability and higher cost of fresh produce will further impact those already experiencing economic hardship through diet-related ill health, like increases in diabetes, obesity, heart disease and increased mortality³, and the growing

problems caused by heavy anti-biotic use in livestock.

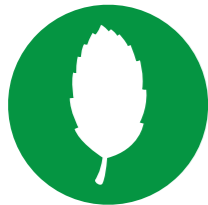
The Community Food Resilience Strategy sees addressing 'Food Brexit' as a standalone issue in the strategy. At a time when many people in the UK are already vulnerable it's still not clear what impact on food supply chains this is going to have in the medium to long-term.

Local Actions

Food Brexit and Supply Chain Disruptions



Emergency Support Systems:
The BC Food Bank; School Meals and care for kids; Meals on Wheels; Restaurant and Cafes as support hubs



Home Pantry:
Guidance on pantry basics to have at home; Recipes for affordable and healthy store-cupboard meals; Grow Your Own support



Direct Sales from producers to consumers: Connecting local farms to local peoples; local food in restaurants and retail shops



Gleaning and reducing food waste: Sharing the bounty and harvesting of the season; local composting activities; food sharing; preserving skills





The Vision

The Bishop's Castle Community Food Resilience Strategy aims to do 3 core things:



To build community food resilience through four sustainable food themes:

- Climate, Landscape and Biodiversity
- Community and Food Relationships
- Local Food Economy
- Food Resilience and Participation



To proactively build up the community's food resilience in response to both known issues and unknown and unanticipated future crises



To bring together existing networks of local people and similar local projects to help achieve our local food ambitions.



Print by Artist Rosanna Morris

Climate, Landscape and Biodiversity

Climate change and biodiversity loss are set to be the defining challenge of our times. Significant change at a global level from leaders is needed, along with lifestyle changes by everyday citizens. Bishop's Castle Town Council, alongside the UK as the first Nation to do so, has declared a state of "Climate Emergency". This forms the backdrop to our local Climate Action Plan and underpins community decision-making.

While it may seem like changing the global tide of climate change is impossible at such a small community scale, Bishop's Castle and its hinterland has a part to play alongside every other town and city.

A focus on healthy soils, farming systems and their links to human, plant and animal health is central. This is not a new idea, but one put forward by, among others, BC's own Sir Albert Howard, as a founder of the organic movement at the turn of the last century.

The BC Community Food Resilience Strategy seeks to:



Support farms to reduce chemical inputs and increase natural land and waterscapes for habitats so as to restore biodiversity.

One out of every three bites of food we eat is made possible by pollination by birds and insects, although animal and insect species are in critical decline.

The BC Community Food Resilience Strategy seeks to:



Safeguard pollinators by creating natural wildlife corridors that can help support these creatures that make life possible.

Across the world a third of people are obese, while another third are starving or suffering from poor nutrition. The issue is not a lack of food for a world population of 8 billion, but simply of food not getting to many who need it. This issue of access is largely related to food waste. A third of all food is discarded, much of it before it even leaves the farm gates, due to strict aesthetic standards defined by grocery retailers.

The BC Community Food Resilience Strategy seeks to:



Reduce food waste through working with local retailers and producers so that good produce that is of a lower aesthetic standard is made available for people to use.



Continue the principles laid down in the "Fight the Plastic" campaign in Bishop's Castle to encourage local retailers to reduce single-use plastic packaging waste.

Agricultural emissions, including those from transport are a key contributor to climate change accounting for approximately 20-30% of global Green House Gas [GHG] emissions. Producing more food sustainably where there is demand in the local community can reduce transport emissions and mitigate climate change.

The BC Community Food Resilience Strategy seeks to:



Support the Local Food First initiative by helping local producers to develop local routes to market, so that food produced in our area stays here, and reduces import-export traffic.



Showcase the value of eating locally and seasonally to support a sustainable and healthy approach to food and planet.

Community Needs

People are affected by their disconnection from food. Many have lost a basic knowledge about how food is produced, how to cook and prepare healthy affordable meals from whole ingredients. Heavily processed commercial foods which are high in salt, fat and sugar have a negative impact on health and wellbeing.

Numerous lockdowns throughout the pandemic have highlighted the epidemic of loneliness, mental health difficulties and disconnection we feel from one another and our communities. We have missed out on sharing meals which are central to our cultural and community bonds.

Allotments provide growing space for individuals or families, and community gardens offer an opportunity to work, learn, collaborate and share together with neighbours of all ages.

The BC Community Food Resilience Strategy seeks to:



Increase the number of community gardens, allotments and edible garden spaces in BC on the principle of inclusivity and diversity as welcoming spaces for all.



Support household and community food security through skill-building, including food growing, preparation and cooking guidance through volunteers, in order to support an exchange of skills and knowledge across all ages.



Promote the health and wellbeing benefits of food growing, particularly through community growing projects and 'Going Wild in BC'.



Provide a community resource for sharing produce, gleaning and reducing food waste.



Assert a requirement for future housing development plans to include garden spaces for each household, as well as communal growing space, with particular attention to affordable housing units.

Policy Link: The BC Climate Action Plan

Through the Climate Action Plan, Bishop's Castle is committed to taking action on reducing local carbon emissions.

The Plan contains recommendations on what local people can do themselves, and pursues initiatives such as supporting the 'Shop Local' campaign and developing the list of local food suppliers and retailers, continuing to seek ways of reducing food waste - including re-directing 'surplus' food from our main retailers, seeking to install a Community Fridge, and other ideas.

Download a copy of the CAP at:

<https://bishopscastletowncouncil.gov.uk/sustainability/>

Local Food Economy

The local food economy in Bishop's Castle is dependent on conventional food retailers and transportation of food into the community. This often means higher prices in these outlets making food unaffordable and inaccessible to many (particularly fresh fruit and vegetables, which are essential to a healthy diet). While BC has an effective emergency support system in the BC Food Bank, ideally community members should feel economically secure and confident in their access to affordable and healthy food. Food is a basic human right and ensuring food security and freedom from hunger is essential. The area surrounding BC is home to many farms and food producers, who primarily sell their products (mainly livestock for the meat market) for export.

The BC Community Food Resilience Strategy seeks to:

-  Support community members' food independence through learning about and helping to establish household and community-level growing.
-  Provide a community resource for sharing produce, gleaning and reducing waste.
-  Encourage more food producers and retailers to sign up for the Government's Healthy Start Voucher Scheme for pregnant mothers with children under 4.



By building more outlets for local farmers to sell to their neighbours.

The BC Community Food Resilience Strategy seeks to:



Build links between local producers and customers through a 'Shop Local' initiative focused on 'Local Food First' in order to boost the local economy.



Facilitate and guide locally-focused public sector procurement to reduce reliance on long-distance transport and imports and support local producers. (The key public sector employers in BC are the Primary school, Community College, Care Homes and Hospital).



Encourage local shops to carry more locally produced products made on and from our landscape.



Support and encourage efforts of local cafes and restaurants to diversify eat-in and take-away options as ways to build more local trade.



Support gleaning activities for fruit and vegetables, communal apple pressing, etc, and encourage the use of the Town Hall's harvest 'produce' table for selling on to local people.

Bishop's Castle draws many tourists annually for its scenic walking trails, festivals and picturesque high street. Quality food from local producers, served in pubs, restaurants and cafes is a key draw for tourists.

The BC Community Food Resilience Strategy seeks to:



Promote Agri-Tourism through a local "Food and Drink Trail" to showcase the wide range of food and drink producers in our area and support the incomes of producers.

The loss of agricultural jobs and training, linked to the issue of land availability and affordable housing discourages new entrants to farming.

The BC Community Food Resilience Strategy seeks to:



Advocate for policy change on behalf of new entrants to farming by seeking more appropriate planning permission processes for agricultural workers and housing.



Encourage food and farming businesses to hire and train staff from our local area.



Work with producers and community groups to provide local training and courses relating to agriculture and food production for skill-building, including: livestock care, beekeeping, composting, seed saving, pruning and grafting and more.

Food Resilience & Participation

The notion of resilience is the ability to withstand unexpected shocks that may impact our community's food system. An important part of this is to be proactive in building a strong and diverse local food system in and around Bishop's Castle, rather than simply reacting with urgency as issues appear.

Underpinning all of these activities and plans is participation: Everyone in our community is welcome. This food strategy represents a place to build a discussion and appreciation for our local food system, our Town and our neighbours.

The BC Community Food Resilience Strategy seeks to:



Keep an open dialogue with people in the community so that everyone's needs and experiences with food are represented through the action plan.



Seek out the voices of our local farmers and food producers who have a key role in environmental stewardship and an intimate relationship to our landscape, the health of our soil and animals.



Instil a sense of pride in our community as a place of abundance, celebrating the farmers, growers and makers who bring their skills and gifts to feeding the Town and the landscape that makes it all possible.



Build connections with local and regional groups and networks that have an interest in local food issues and identify ways to work together to build food resilience and food system sustainability.

The resilience of the local community depends on economic stability through local employment, a safe and healthy environment that supports multiple species (each playing a part in our landscape and food system), and the health and wellbeing of our neighbours. A closer connection to real, good food supports all of these things.





Local Food Insights

In a recent survey conducted by Marches Grow Local (2020), residents of BC and the surrounding area were asked about how they grow and purchase local food:

- **72% said that buying local food "can help mitigate the climate and bio- diversity emergency" with 95% saying that this is an important issue.**
- **At least 70% of respondents currently buy vegetables, meat and eggs near to where they live but only 17% said that buying locally is "very easy", with "lack of availability" and cost being the top reasons for not buying locally more often.**
- **44% of respondents said that they would be encouraged to grow (more) food if group activities such as community allotments, training courses and farm visits could be organised in their area.**

The survey also revealed a number of opportunities to connect people seeking to share their land with others who are keen on growing but don't have the space.

Community Food Resilience in Action

The Bishop's Castle Food Bank

The BC Food Bank was established in 2020 in response to the Coronavirus Pandemic. It has offered a wide variety of food including fresh fruit and vegetables, a clothing bank, along with sign-posting services to customers for social and financial assistance. The Food Bank has played a key role in coordinating additional services such as extending school meals provision in partnership with local restaurants during school holidays, developing a Christmas meal delivery service with the chefs at the Castle Hotel, and a meat voucher scheme for Christmas dinners with A.J Pugh Butcher's.

BC Allotments

The Town Council allotments were opened in 2007 on land leased from Shropshire Council and are a thriving growing community within Bishop's Castle. There are 42 Allotments which are in the process of transitioning to an organic-only model. Annual rent is currently £50 for a full sized plot, £30 for a half and £15 for a quarter sized plot. Prices are for BC Parish Residents.

Wintles Allotments

The Wintles estate on the edge of Bishop's Castle has 30 allotments. These are cultivated organically by the Wintles' residents. A diverse fruit orchard and vineyard are also grown by residents.



Community Food Resilience in Action

Going Wild in BC

An initiative of the BC Community Partnership, 'Going Wild' supports local greening and biodiversity activities, including seeding wildflower verges, placement of bird boxes and a speaker series on subjects of local ecological interest.

The BC Community Seed Bank

The seed bank is an initiative of the BC Sustainability Working Group, a part of the BC Community Partnership. The aims of the seed bank are: to share knowledge of seed saving, growing and seed sovereignty; to foster community food security through inclusive access to open-pollinated seed; to support the species genetic diversity of seed stock outside of corporate ownership and by saving seed and returning it to the seed bank for others; to build community resilience in the face of climate change and food system shocks.

Little Woodbatch Market Garden

Little Woodbatch (est. 2018) produces vegetables for the local area, with a focus on fresh, organically produced and affordable produce. The farm is relentlessly dedicated to building community links through healthy, accessible food, providing an inclusive space for training and empowering those who want to learn about growing, and honouring the land that nourishes us.

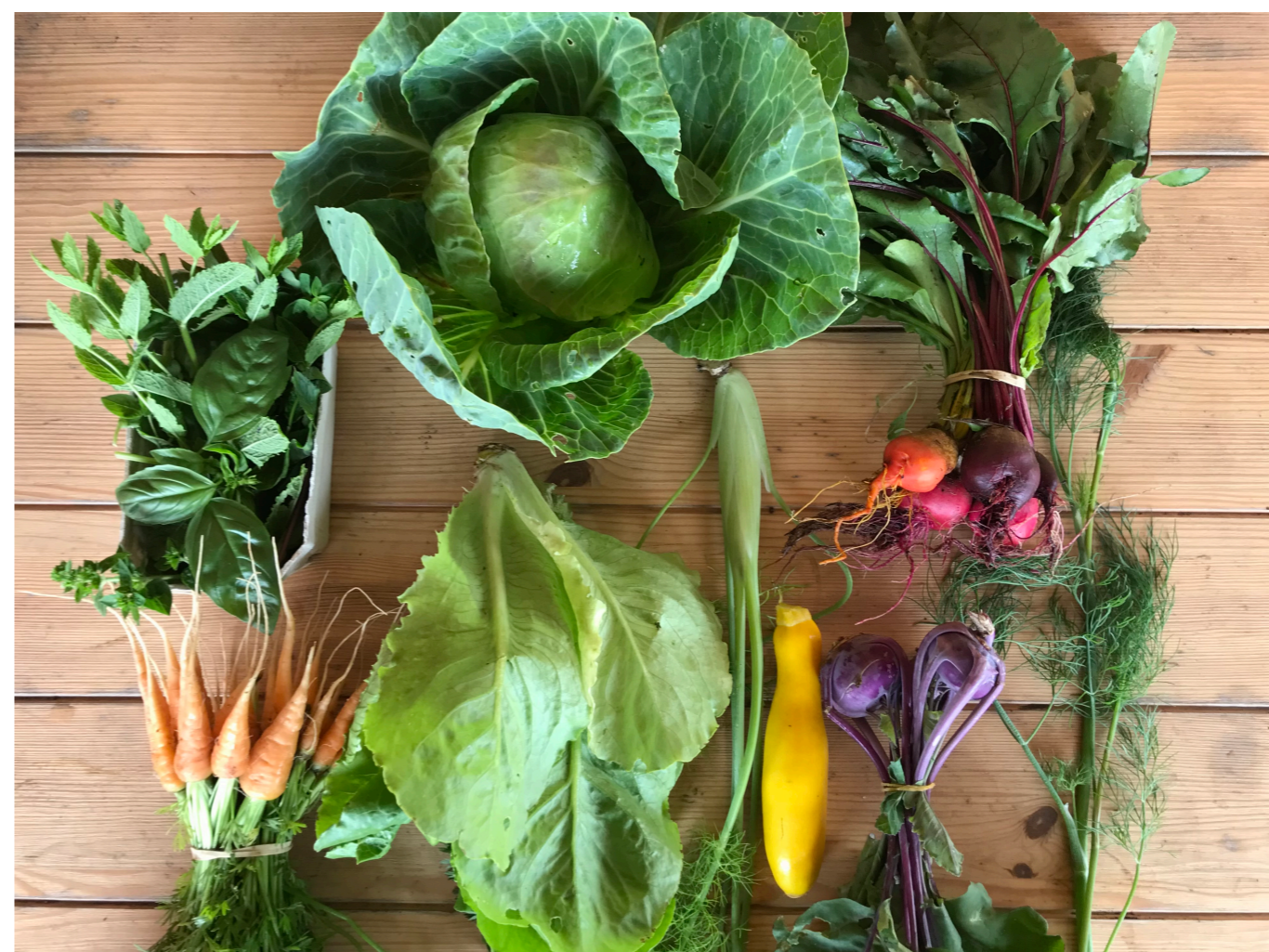




Our Call to Action

Food touches so many parts of our lives every day and has wide reaching impacts on our community and world. To reduce our impact and to moderate the effects of the climate emergency we are all collectively facing, we all have a part to play. Change is an active process that begins at home, in the tiny actions of our daily lives.

Bishop's Castle is a close community where we know and care for our neighbours, and the community thrives in so many ways because of the time and effort that individuals put in. Changing our local food system to one that is thriving, sustainable, resilient and central to the fabric of the Town has the potential to address issues in Bishop's Castle and beyond. The *Bishop's Castle Community Food Resilience Strategy* is part of this process, and the starting point for a celebration of sustainable local food.



Thank you.

The Bishop's Castle Community Food Resilience Strategy has been created by the Bishop's Castle Food Resilience Group, a collaboration of Little Woodbatch Market Garden, BC Community Partnership, BC Food Bank and BC Climate Action Group, with support of the Bishop's Castle Town Council.