



Final Report

Building the Local Food Economy

September 2021 – March 2022



April 2022

Submitted to: Shropshire Council Business Growth Service

From: Shrewsbury Food Festival together with Shropshire Good Food Partnership

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SUMMARY

This initiative, led by [Shropshire Good Food Partnership](#) (SGFP), has engaged with producers and consumers across the county. The aim was to enable producers to grow their businesses and consumers to access more local, high-quality food. Food and farming are key elements of the economy, particularly in a rural county like Shropshire and a focused approach to support the sector can deliver significant economic gains as well as wider physical health, social wellbeing and environmental impacts.

Our objectives were to:

- Increase awareness of Shropshire food producers and direct purchase opportunities for local fresh and value-added food and drink.
- Enable creation of webs of hyper-localized food producers and consumers
- Develop a growth plan to deliver a 10% retail market share for local non-multiples by 2030.

We have done a lot in a short timeframe, with key achievements being:

- The visibility of food businesses has been boosted through an upgrade of the [Shropshire Food and Drink](#) website. This now has new features including mapping, improved search functionality, user interface and producer portal. There are circa 200 businesses on the platform and web traffic has increased by approx. 50%. This has created a central place to find out about food and drink providers in the county.
- Five projects have taken place across Shropshire to support local food marketing. These ranged from support to the expansion of Treflach Farmers market to creating a hyper-localized food network around Oswestry bringing producers, retailers and consumers together to build pride in and commitment to the local food economy. Marches Grow Local have worked with producers on communications, from webpage set up and search engine optimization to developing tailored guidelines for social media use. Local to Ludlow have looked at how to use digital platforms to expand access to good food beyond southern Shropshire and in Market Drayton we have ensured that local producers benefit from the newly created e-commerce platform and Buttercross market, as well as improving their social media skills.
- Facilitating learning and knowledge sharing has been a core part of this initiative with both online and in person sessions bringing the local marketing delivery partners together to exchange experience and insight. There have also been sessions on market gardening and setting up community-supported agriculture schemes and on community food businesses along the food chain.
- An investigation of opportunities for public procurement with the outcome being a joint proposal with Telford & Wrekin, Herefordshire, Monmouthshire and Powys for a Marches Sustainable Food Network to develop a regional Dynamic Purchasing Food Hub.

- Increased access to local food through major retailers has been progressed with a pilot 'Buy Local' shelf imminent in the Midcounties Co-Operative stores around Shrewsbury.
- A growth plan focuses on an MSME food and farming marketing support hub that would draw on a range of different local service providers. This is starting through a partnership with the Food for Thought initiative.

The intended outcome of all these activities is to facilitate an increase in direct sales for Shropshire food enterprises. Given the short timeframe of the project and fact it ran from September to March, which is off-season for many producers, it has only been possible to document this impact in a few cases. For example, Treflach Farm saw sales at their farmers market up by over 100% from when they had done it before without any external support.

Key insights that have emerged so far include:

- The value of tailored marketing support to individual businesses, with generic guidelines produced through this process enabling a wider reach.
- Linked to the above is having a range of service providers and an understanding of their specific skills and experience and unique ways of working, to be able to know how to effectively link them with producers, processors or retailers. Whether a traditional family farming business who want help extending the reach of a veg or meat box or a new processor who needs access to diverse food retail opportunities.
- The potential for blended models, for example using digital platforms to extend the reach of farmer's markets, building on shared logistics and tools to create efficient routes to larger markets.
- Finding ways to build on the capacity of existing players to see how they can be supported and connected to fill gaps in the market. For example, we are working with Shropshire's Own to improve their offer of an online marketplace for different local produce items.
- The importance of networking, peer support and exchange in enabling shared learning and the development of new ideas. SGFP creates this space and it is proving a fertile ground for collaboration and strategic thinking on how we can work effectively as a county-wide food system.
- The importance of engaging people with services, in the form of experiences, rather than just product offerings. Telling the story of produce is essential and enabling a direct connection between people and the land and food that comes from it is even better in terms of creating a long-term relationship and buyer support.

SGFP will continue to monitor and evaluate the impact of this initiative over time and will provide updates and recommendations to Shropshire Council Business Growth Service. This grant has enabled us to build a strong presence and develop thinking on how we can continue to build the local food economy and a good food movement to support it.

ACTIVITIES

1. Food Business Visibility

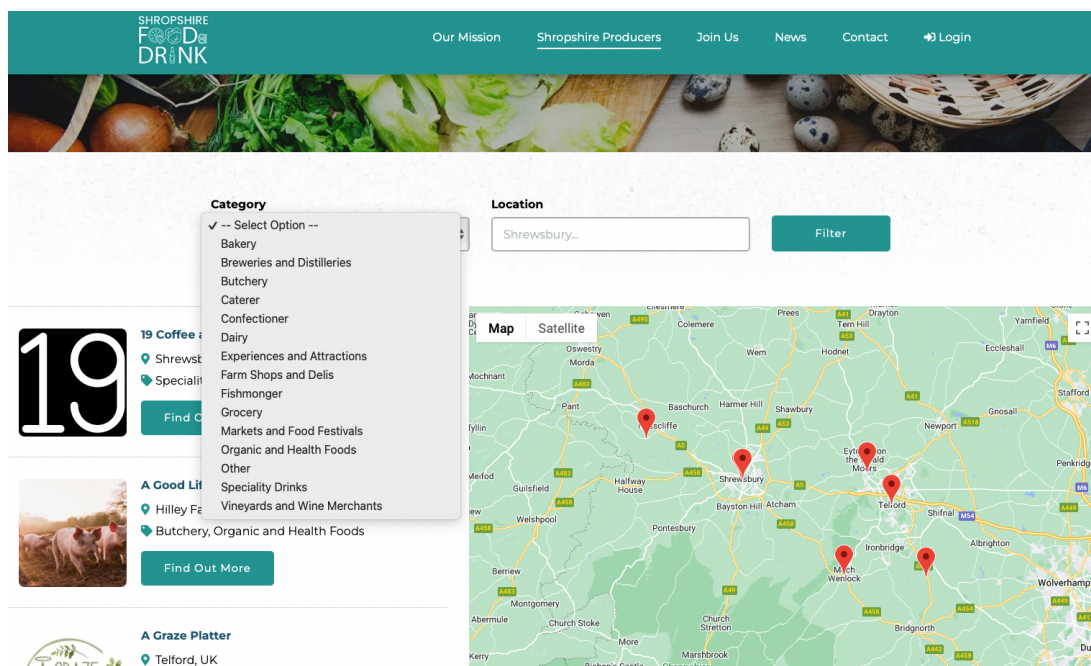
Expand on the Shropshire Food and Drink website to optimize technology for mobile use and user engagement. Build in new features to target both local residents and visitors and make it easy to find out where to get local produce. Develop creative user-interface allowing producers to directly upload real-time information on produce available and consumers to search using location based on effective google map interoperability.

The [Shropshire Food and Drink](#) website has been updated in line with the proposal and the new features went live at the start of March. There are about 200 businesses on there and web traffic has increased by 50%.

The main additions are:

- Google map feature to see where businesses are
- Portal giving producers the ability to update themselves, meaning that offers, seasonal updates etc can be done by them.
- Streamlined the categories and added in experiences as well which ties in well with the food and drink tourism agenda from Visit Shropshire
- Easy to search by category (bakery, breweries & distilleries, butchery, caterer, confectioner, dairy, farm shops & delis, fishmonger, grocery, markets & food festivals, organic & health foods, speciality drinks, vineyards & wine merchants) as well as location.
- Improved mobile user interface.

There has also been distribution of the Shropshire Food Directory.



2. Local Food Marketing

Support producers in marketing, from developing local market hubs and farmer markets to optimizing farm direct sales and deliveries. We will work with clusters of businesses on market hubs across Shropshire.

The aim of this part of the project was to support local ideas for local food marketing hubs in different areas. SGFP was responsible for the management of the funds. A call for proposals was launched (Annex 1), and there was an online session to outline the opportunity and have Q&As. There was a good response from across the county with a range of projects. Five initiatives were funded as outlined below; agreements were put in place, a kick-off call carried out and SGFP provided ongoing oversight, feedback on reports and support.

1. Treflach Farmer Market

Overall Project Aim:

- To strengthen food networks in the local area; i.e. connect community members with local farmers and producers to increase access to healthy, seasonal and sustainable food.
- To create a market for high margin (retail) sales for local, sustainability focused businesses.

2. Oswestry 5 mile food

“Our aim is to test the impact of a hyper localised network and campaign to promote and enable local food supply in and around Oswestry”

We will facilitate collaborations amongst this network to collectively:

- Promote the health, economic and environmental benefits of local food sourcing.
- Support new entrants in the food industry to find local market opportunities.
- Develop a ‘buy local’ movement, building pride in growing, producing, providing, and eating local food.
- Identify and test ways to make local food more accessible to all.

3. Marches Grow Local (MGL)

To build the local food economy in South Shropshire, MGL will pilot a support package for local food producers to expand their turnover that includes:

- Training on digital marketing
- Training on the set-up and use of the Open Food Network (OFN)
- Support to set up a delivery mechanism that is economically viable and considers the impact of carbon emissions

4. Local to Ludlow CIC

A feasibility study to explore the potential of new or expanded routes to market for local producers using digital platforms to create a more resilient local food economy.

Aims to:

- Increase access to local produce for areas in Central & East Shropshire and Telford via an online platform.
- Increase sales for local producers
- Scope out system for public purchase, order collection, collation of products and reorganisation of products for orders and then delivery and or pick up direct to consumer
- Identify main hub and satellite hubs
- To utilise Local to Ludlow producers that attend regular Local Produce Markets in Ludlow, currently every 2nd and 4th Thursday.

5. Market Drayton Traders CIC

Market Drayton Traders CIC aim is to increase trade to local businesses, initially focussing on local shops and hospitality businesses. They secured funding to launch an ecommerce/delivery service. Enabling customers to do their weekly shop online in one place whilst still supporting their local shops. The aim of this initiative was to build on this capacity to support local producers to engage, to use both the online platform and the monthly market, Buttercross Artisan Market.

An overview of the activities carried out, results and impact is provided here with full reports available on request.



2.1 Treflach Farmers' Markets

The aim was to strengthen the local economy by increasing high margin (retail rather than wholesale) turnover and reinforcing local job and businesses networks, maintaining local employment to secure rural livelihoods.

Treflach Farm will act as an 'anchor' business, working collaboratively with other local business to create a low cost environment to engage with local people and make a space for regular retail sales.

Keystone Partner Businesses

- Treflach Farm – regenerative/grass finished beef, free range pork, homemade pies
- Babbinswood Farm – organic lamb and vegetables, milk and dairy produce
- Tri Dyffryn Community farm business – honey, wax products and fruit wines
- Sue Dolman – locally sourced wool and knitted products
- Ellesmere Eco Flowers – locally sourced, seasonal flower arrangements
- Wackley Brook Farm - organic chicken

Objectives

- Increase stallholders to 15 to increase variety, interest and reach.
- Increase footfall by approx. x 3 from currently average 35 attendees to 100 attendees per market by the Christmas market (Sunday December 19th).
- In the same timeframe increase sales by x 3 times. E.g. Treflach Farm market turnover is currently average £350, this makes a sales target of £1050 per market.
- Engage with 10 young people per market through a fun and educational led activity teaching about nutritious healthy eating/seasonal food/sustainability etc.
- Engage with 10 adults per market through a workshops or led discussion focussing on healthy eating/seasonal food/sustainability etc.

Summary of progress

We ran 3 Farmers' Markets (October, November & December 2021) since the signing of the funding agreement. All three markets were extremely well attended by stall holders and the public, attendee numbers were up by +50% at least from June to November with December seeing the total number of attendees more than triple from November (at one stage approx. 100 cars and 300 people on site!). Treflach Farm sales went up by over 100% (i.e. not only did attendance increase but per customer spend also increased), other stallholders seem happy too. The roadside banners worked well in spreading the word for relatively low investment. The family friendly activities were particularly well received. This is a core lesson learnt, i.e. people engage with services (experiences) more than just product offerings.

Activities

We have run 3 x Farmers' Markets with family friendly activities.

Marketing materials both online and physical have been developed and delivered (banners and digital adverts).

Direct marketing (posters and flyers) put up/distributed

Materials purchased: 2 x Gazebos, benches, woodburner focal point, IT equipment/card readers

Car park infrastructure: Sleepers and stone purchased; digger hired to expand car parking

IT infrastructure: Card readers purchased and free to use by stall holders wifi established

Roadside banners bought and put up around Treflach and approaching main roads

Outcomes

Numbers of stalls increased from 5 in June to 20 in December

Numbers of attendees increased from approx. 30 in June to approx. 90 in November to well over 300 in December.

9 Family friendly activities run: make your own art supplies with farm based materials/guess the weight of the pig comp/squash carving/story telling/fire side candy apple making/forest school/woodland weaving/local silver band/local choral choir service.

Key lessons

Setting up the event is a huge amount of work and so we need people/volunteers to help with preparation.

People engage with services (experiences) more than pure product offerings. Therefore, we need to keep the offering fresh by creating new and interesting activities each month.

Challenges

Car parking. The Christmas market was a double edged sword, a fantastic success with regard attendee numbers but a real challenge with logistics of managing that number of people. It was decided to take the new year months off and restart when the ground is dry enough to accommodate the traffic/parking pressure.

Workload of core team in build-up and break down given majority of helpers are volunteers on the day only.

Wet weather provision. We had two large marquees for hot food vending/undercover outdoor seating/family friendly activities however this was destroyed in storm Arwen. Do we invest in new marquees?

How do we keep levels of stall holder engagement up? Since the Christmas market we are repeatedly being asked when the next market will be. We do not envisage stall holder engagement being an issue going forward.

Opportunities

The Farmers' Market is a wonderful opportunity to build networks with local producers and community. We aim to grow our engagement with young people helping with setting up and running the market as well as offering an opportunity to run their own stalls exposing them to gaining financial skills.

Future Considerations

Solve the car park problem – perhaps the market is suited to Spring to Autumn months only? Solve the issue of the long farm drive not allowing passing traffic. Potentially a volunteer at either end of the drive with walkie talkies to coordinate traffic. We will restart in May 2022.

2.2 Oswestry 5 Mile Food (OsNosh)

Objectives and progress are captured in these graphics:



2.3 Marches Grow Local

Working with local food and drink producers, Marches Grow Local created a 'support' package to help producers develop their digital marketing and online sales to retain existing customers and reach new ones.

They were able to deliver the support package to four producers:

- Hare Hill Farm (HHF) <https://harehillfarm.co.uk/>
- Long Mynd Cider (LMC) <https://longmyndcider.com/>
- Clun Valley Organics (CVO) <https://www.clunvalleyorganics.co.uk/organic-meat>
- Blackhurst Farm (BF) <https://www.facebook.com/BlackhurstHighlandBeef>

The first stage of the support package was to meet with each producer in-person or online to understand how their business works, who their customers are, how they are reaching them, and what their pain points are. Depending on the outcomes of this first session, the producers could ask Marches Grow Local to undertake any (or all) of the following options:

- A website review
- Social media review
- Google Analytics review
- Search Engine Optimization (SEO) – Key word research and implementation of off-page SEO
- Demo of the Open Food Network (OFN) for online food and drink sales; population of an OFN shopfront with the producer's products

From working with the different producers MGL wrote a guide to [Developing a Social Media Strategy](#). Often with social media, users tend to post without thinking about what they are trying to achieve or who they want to reach, so a strategy is vital.

The full report summarises the work undertaken for each producer, what we learned, and how it could be improved moving forwards. The following is a summary of work with different producers:

1. Hare Hill Farm (HHF)

HHF is a 0.75 acre market garden in south Shropshire. Produce is sold in veg-boxes to the local community, loose at local markets and to local restaurants. It is run by a young couple. Currently only one of them works in the market garden full-time but, ideally, they would both like to do this in future. For HHF, we focused on a website review, social media review and demo of the OFN.

2. Long Mynd Cider (LMC)

LMC has been running for 3 years, but the producer has been making cider for over 20 years. Both still and sparkling cider are made; the still cider is sold in local pubs and the sparkling cider is available to buy online. The producer has his own young trees on site that he hopes will provide a good crop soon. Before this is available, he sources all his apples from local orchards.

The majority of LMC's business comes from word of mouth. The producer is not interested in social media or developing a blog. MGL were conscious that any suggestions made in the Pilot could be taken forward and sustained by the producer, so we did not recommend the producer start using these channels. A Google analytics review was done, along with keyword research for Search Engine Optimization. A quick win we created for LMC was a QR code to add to the posters / coasters, etc. they use locally. The idea here was to encourage people who enjoy drinking LMC in the pub to try the sparkling version which can be purchased online. LMC has an existing online ordering system linked to their website and a delivery system in place. A demo site was populated for the OFN introduction.

3. Blackhurst Farm (BHF)

Blackhurst Farm have a large commercial arm selling hogget (through Halal butcher in Craven Arms and through FarmFresh). The side of the business that they want to grow is a smaller concern: Highland Beef. Since 2015, they have increased their herd of 3 to 34, which includes cows, calves and a bull. They sell the Highland beef in boxes and generally sell out over the weekend after receiving the meat. We gave specific feedback on their social media channels (Facebook and Instagram) and gave them ideas for content development. The main recommendation with social media is to work on a strategy otherwise it can be a significant time-sink and not result in increased sales/conversion.

We also discussed other ways Google Drive can help with business admin, such as creating a shared spreadsheet (with links to photos/videos) to record work undertaken for the agri-environment scheme, Countryside Stewardship, and creating a Land Management Plan in Google My Maps. Guidance on creating a plan in Google My Maps was shared. A short intro video on using Google drive also done.

BHF does not have a website. Their online presence is on Facebook and Instagram. They have considered creating a website but are concerned that they would not have time to regularly update it and think it would be expensive to pay for the domain and hosting costs to only have a 'static' page on display. MGL suggested creating a holding page on an existing website that could be used by the producer to push traffic to their social media channels. To test this idea, we created a holding page on the Middle Marches Community Land Trust website, which can be viewed here <https://middlemarchescommunitylandtrust.org.uk/the-hub/buy-local/blackhurst-farm>

MGL is supporting BHF with a demo and shopfront which requires extracting product detail from Facebook and Instagram.

4. Clun Valley Organics (CVO)

CVO has just under 300 breeding ewes (rare breed), about 90 traditional Herefords and Highlands with followers, 2 sows and a boar (Berkshires). They also have 3 holiday lets including a Hobbit House, two shepherds huts and an eco-cottage. Guests can buy produce from the farm as part of their stay.

Support involved testing a new website they were about to launch to find any glitches and review it with a 'fresh pair of eyes'. They have implemented most of the recommendations we made in the review.

CVO currently uses Facebook and Instagram but posting is infrequent, whereas their visitors often post. Suggested making the most of this using hashtag/QR code so that it is quick and easy to pick up on these and share on own channels, so post regularly without having to develop their own content.

CVO are interested in OFN as they have no proper systems in place to do this at moment. A demo site was populated from a price list for a remote introduction. They expressed concerns about determining appropriate prices and about the overhead of weighing and labelling individual items. To overcome this, a member of MGL participated in processing 264 items (pricing, weighing, labelling, digital documentation) of a Highland to help establish a system. CVO created an OFN shopfront and have designated MGL as administrators. Current top priority for MGL is to work with CVO to agree a system for inventory control, establish a workflow (including potential MGL involvement) for their OFN shopfront.

Further work

- 1) An Open Food Network extension (OFNX) was designed and offered to an additional five producers. Muckleton Meats (MM) responded positively.
 - MM have solid procedures and online ordering/delivery in place. OFN is seen as a potential alternative. They are also interested in other delivery routes.
 - MGL populated a demosite with MM website data and demonstrated OFN remotely. MM have since created an OFN shopfront, designating MGL as administrators and have provided full digital product lists. MGL will use these to populate the MM shopfront. This last phase is pending completion of CVO work (more time critical).
- 2) A Marketing Strategy Workshop in May 2022 (at The Venue, Pollardine Farm) is being designed in response to interest from the Pilot producers. Places will also be offered to the OFNX producer cohort and to other SGFP contacts as space allows.

A draft feedback survey has been designed to collect opinions from the producers as to the effectiveness of the Pilot and to solicit suggestions and/or criticisms. This will be completed at the Workshop. If the feedback is largely positive, MGL and SGFP will consider how they work together to fulfil this role of 'go-to' organisation for local start-up producers entering the market by building the capacity of producers to increase sales through existing channels and gain access to new markets.

2.4 Local to Ludlow CIC

Building on the strength of the local food and drink scene predominantly in the Ludlow area, the idea is to develop a greater knowledge and appreciation of local food with consumers and other businesses that may benefit in North and East Shropshire through:

1. Scoping: Review recent local research and successful projects elsewhere in the country on local food marketing. Complement with interviews with key local producers, larger business resellers, wholesalers and processors in South Shropshire to identify trends, gaps in provision, opportunities and interest in new routes to market.
2. Research: potential for new market routes using digital tools from the perspective of suppliers and potential consumer/buyers:
3. Development: Chart a way forward for each market route based on findings. Pilot actions that can be undertaken immediately and produce a mini business plan to get the project operational.

A document was produced outlining the requirements necessary for the set-up of a sustainable Shropshire Local Food Hub and Distribution Network. This covers identification of supply and demand, potential market,

Regular attendees of Ludlow farmers market have indicated an ability to supply additional products over and beyond their existing business operation (list available). The businesses who have shown interest, collectively offer a range of products that would fulfil the necessary range of everyday and more specialist local food and drink items. With regard to demand distribution networks work most efficiently where there are more densely populated areas. Shropshire is one of England's most rural and sparsely populated counties. Population density was 145 residents per square kilometre in 2020, therefore it makes sense to concentrate on more populated areas of the county where access to local produce is scarcer, propose targeting Shrewsbury/ Much Wenlock/ Telford belt.

The potential for a hub to act as a central location for aggregation and redistribution in an efficient manner was explored. A review of food networks in different parts of the country looked at the way they are set up, physical space used for receiving products and reorganising orders and storage of materials needed; and the transport of goods. Key considerations are efficiency of operations, food safety and liability, order cycle, software solution used and business model. The two main online solutions available are [Open Food Network](#) and [Food Commerce](#). An overview of each with pros and cons is provided in the separate report with comparison of start-up and annual costs. The scale of enterprise and percentage enterprise fee are key aspects of the business model and marketing and branding will be critically important.

Through the research phase a number of businesses already taking online orders and delivering local /organic food/drink to private addresses in and around Shropshire were identified. To date these all appear to be commercial operations attached usually with a retail outlet. Of particular interest is [Shropshire's Own](#) who have tried to act as an aggregator of local produce but have not reached full potential. It was agreed to find ways

to support them to grow, to improve marketing and communications, work on their business model and better link up with producers in the county.

The interest in OFN that has been supported by MGL is also of importance. Once there are a critical mass of producers on the platform independently, it will be clear if it makes sense for SGFP to create a food hub there to bring the producers into one place. In the meantime Ludlow market will look at setting up a shop-front.

2.5 Market Drayton Traders CIC

Market Drayton traders CIC is in the process of setting up an Ecommerce/ Delivery Service See <https://shop.marketdrayton.org.uk> The original investment was aimed at local bricks and mortar businesses such as shops & hospitality venues, to enable these businesses to reach a wider audience such as those that due to work commitments don't have time to access a 9-5 business and would usually use a delivery service.

The new food economy funding has been used to further develop this by supporting 6 local producers to get on board, providing free use of the online platform (other than transaction fees) and technical support. A group training session has been provided including the following local producers/processors. Additional 1:1 support will be available as required.

- *Pim's Produce (Fruit & Veg)*
- Pie-oneers (Pies)
- Margaret's Farm (Ferments, pickles etc)
- Buttercross Bistro (Home made ready meals)
- Fordhall Farm

This project also supported engagement of food businesses at [Buttercross Artisan Market](#), a newly formed market in the centre of Market Drayton aimed at supporting local crafts and producers. We have provided 20 free stalls to local producers, split over markets which happen on the 2nd Saturday over a period of 6 months. We are also hoping to expand the event to enable some stalls under marquee which will enable more space for some traders.

We are providing marketing support to food businesses that engage with the market and platform, with five Social Media Workshops x 5 run by an external consultant to cover facebook, canva, basics of social media, content creation and importance of online review and tiktok.

Banners, leaflets, and other promotional materials have been produced.

3. Learning Exchanges

Facilitate learning between the hyper-localized food hubs to share experience and insights. Quarterly peer exchange events and good practice guidelines shared.

The local food market fund supported organisations and businesses to try out different approaches to local produce marketing and the purpose of this activity area was to facilitate sharing and learning across the county on the different approaches.

An online learning exchange took place on 14th December 2021, this involved the grant recipients each sharing what they were doing and providing progress updates and key insights. This was followed by a discussion and sharing of ideas and identifying potential for collaboration.

An in person learning event took place at Treflach Farm on 9th March 2022, following a similar format, but with the projects nearing completion and more chance for interaction. It was a fruitful event and helped resolve some challenges and generate ideas for future collaborations.

Additional learning events were also organised for wider engagement of food businesses:

Market gardens and business models

The aim was to enable shared learning between growers, to support the development of market gardens across Shropshire. An event was held at Little Woodbatch Market Garden, Bishops Castle on 2nd September 2021, to look at practical aspects of setting up a market garden and to share more about the Community-Supported Agriculture (CSA) model. The event was attended by 12 people, most in the early stages of setting up market gardens, including Havenhill field and kitchen, Shrewsbury microgreens, Babbinswood farm, Dick's market garden and bakery and a range of individuals.

Daphne Du Cros shared her experiences setting up Little Woodbatch and led a walk around the garden and poly-tunnels. This was followed by a wide-ranging discussion, from practical questions on seeds and tools to the business model and how to set-up a CSA, opportunities and challenges. Local marketing was explored in depth from building demand to managing logistics during growth and different pathways to scale.

Community Food businesses

How can community-owned businesses play a greater role in the food system in Shropshire? This was the question which we explored at a session at Fordhall farm, England's first community-owned farm. Charlotte Hollis, manager of Fordhall Community Land initiative shared her story and the potential for community owned business as a way forward in our current context. Community businesses are enterprises that are owned and run democratically by members of the community, on behalf of the community. They may be at different stages of the food chain: farm, processing, retail - shops, pubs, cafes, farmer's markets and bakeries too.

We looked at the work of the Plunkett Foundation who support rural business growth through championing community business ownership. We discussed how to support the development of community food businesses in Shropshire; mapping what is going on and identifying how to support people who want to set-up something new. We will engage with Plunkett Foundation to see if can access resources.

Photos from Little Woodbatch Market Garden learning event



4. Local public and private procurement contracts

Explore opportunities with public sector to pilot a Dynamic Purchasing System (DPS). Work with supermarkets to increase retail space for local seasonal produce.

Public procurement

This provides a huge opportunity to create business opportunities for SMEs in the county. £2.4 Billion is spent on food and catering in the UK every year yet the government admits they [don't know where that money is being spent and probably never have](#). The National Food Strategy published in 2021 recommended UK wide implementation of Dynamic Food Procurement. Dynamic Food Procurement uses innovative technology to create an open digital marketplace that enables shorter, more transparent food supply chains which will deliver significant social, economic and environmental benefits for everyone.

As part of this Local Food Economy grant the current public procurement in the county has been explored and efforts made to link local producers into the supply chains. Meetings took place with Nigel Denton (Commissioning Development & Procurement Manager) and Janet Cross (Head of Shire Services). [Shire Services](#) provides catering services to a large number of schools and other venues both in Shropshire and the wider region. Shire Services is committed to 'great tasting, healthy, locally sourced food'. Produce is sourced from local companies, with The UK Foodhall and The Little Food company as core suppliers, however these companies are generally not accessible to local suppliers and source nationally. The challenge for individual companies is to create efficient logistics processes that can allow for sourcing smaller volumes from many different suppliers in a timely cost-effective manner.

This is where Dynamic Food Procurement comes in, with an [Advisory Board](#) set up to facilitate UK-wide, SME-inclusive, dynamic procurement, fulfilment and delivery capabilities for public sector food buyers. This is based on [successful pilots](#) that show how local farmers were able to supply the sector for the first time. The resulting supply chain transparency is unprecedented and enables more informed choices on welfare, carbon footprint, biodiversity impact to be made on the food at the point of purchase. What's more, there is strong evidence that a triple multiplier effect applies when redirecting food spend to regional food producers. [Indicative analyses](#) have shown that even a small minority % of food spend in a typical size local authority being redirected to small-medium enterprises in that region may generate more than £80 Million of annual incremental GDP (Dynamic Purchasing UK).

SGFP has been coordinating with local Councils and food partnerships across the Marches region to make the most of opportunities to access national funding to enable dynamic procurement to work here. This would be a far more strategic approach than trying to integrate business by business more producers into the current supply chain structure and could deliver far more wide-ranging benefits for the local economy.

The Marches presents an area of great collective opportunity and working together we can tap into resources from the Dixon Foundation and potentially the Marches Growth Hub, to support cross border collaborative ventures. Partners of the proposed Marches Sustainable Food Network include respective councils in Shropshire, Herefordshire, Telford and Wrekin, Monmouthshire and Powys alongside the Marches LEP. A concept note to access funding to develop a regional Dynamic Purchasing Food Hub was successful and we have been working on the full proposal and getting Shropshire Council engagement. This represents that best way forward on public procurement in the county.

Private Procurement

Major retail outlets provide opportunities to get more local produce in front of a large number of consumers who do not have the motivation or capacity to seek out local produce at farer's markets, independent shops or online. Meetings have taken place with a range of outlets across the county.

Most progress has been made with Midcounties Co-Operative. Russel Fox, Store manager at Bicton Heath, Shrewsbury has been actively engaged and set up meetings with the centralised buying team (Nicola Wilden, Direct Sourcing Manager; Molly Beatty, Senior Food Buyer). They have a 'Best of the counties' range as a premium line, but little of this produce actually comes from Shropshire. The company is keen to source more locally, they wrote *'Shropshire has a great Food Culture & we are eager to grow our supplier base & proposition in the region'* (pers comm Feb 22). SGFP has pulled together initial 'new product' ideas, primarily meat and dairy related.

Samples of the marketing materials used by the supermarket have been shared and SGFP would create materials to tell the story and branding to use alongside the producers own to give some uniformity to the new products. This includes the POS (Point of Sale, L-80mm H-70mm) used to highlight products to customers and the PSA (210mm H-75mm) is for staff to have the more detailed knowledge of what is stocked.

There is however, significant scepticism amongst Shropshire's producers that supplying into a supermarket would be a good business opportunity. Many have had bad experiences in the past and the focus of our discussions with stores has been on creating a 'Buy Local' shelf that would be a 'pot luck' for consumers, in the same way as the discounted close to date shelf is. Producers could then supply what they have surplus of in a way that supplements their core business. However all produce would have to be agreed in advance and have a code assigned for a specific item that is pre-defined and for which the marketing material is done. We are still exploring the viability of this, where the produce is agreed in advance but the supply times and volumes could be flexible. We are in process of negotiating common T&Cs, payment terms, trial quantities, compliance checks, distribution expectations, retail space available and margins. We haven't been able to close out on this in the timeframe of this grant, due to key staff absences. We will continue to develop this, aiming to get produce into the 7 stores in the Shrewsbury area as a starting point.

An important part of this work has been finding out which local producers in the county do want to scale up their business. Some are happy operating at a small-scale, others are ambitious to grow. Appendix 2 provides an overview of producers that have been engaged with in some way by SGFP or our partners in this project. It is an evolving document.

5. Growth Plan and Way Forward

Produce a growth plan for the county to increase retail market share for local independent businesses based on the practical experience from this initiative.

SGFP is positioned to enable cross-sector collaboration to scale up the local food economy in Shropshire. Based on the experience during this grant our proposal is to establish an **MSME Food & Farming Marketing Support Hub** to provide a go-to place for Shropshire's micro, small & medium enterprises working within the local food system as producers, processors and retailers. It will be a demand driven service to enable access to marketing and communications support from farm to fork. It will work with existing service providers and match supply and demand based on location, type of support required and most appropriate style of delivery.

The work to date has highlighted the huge demand for support on marketing and communication amongst local food sector businesses and has piloted a range of responses through different local people and organisations. The Shropshire Food & Drink website provides a central place to find out about local producers. Several of the local food marketing projects provided tailored personal input to food producers, processors and retailers, that has enabled specific needs to be met, with generic guidelines produced for wider sharing. Learning exchanges have shown the huge value in networking and pooling expertise and experience. Scoping out of public and private procurement opportunities has highlighted the growing opportunities that are potentially available to local food businesses as well as the gaps in capacity to respond. We have been able to see the ways in which different service providers work and their relative skills and suitability to engage with diverse target audiences.

Initial investment has been made in the Food for Thought initiative of Shropshire Food and Drink (see box overleaf). We are also keen to see Marches Grow Local (MGL) expand the offering they have developed through this proposal which is primarily targeted at rural producers. Key requirements are for development and hosting of simple "holding pages" for small-scale producers lacking the skills and inclination to learn to manage websites. These would have static content and links to more active social media that the producer would maintain for themselves. There is also growing demand for social media training and support on maximizing online engagement.

Consultation with producers identified other roles that SGFP could play to support them:

- Speak to local retailers on behalf of a group of producers, rather than each producer trying to approach retailers on their own.
- Talk to retailers about how to promote local produce throughout the year.
- Increase the presence of small-scale producers by promoting them on social media (instead of the producer having to run their own accounts).

SGFP will provide some ongoing support in these areas. We will also review the potential for a county wide food hub once we can see the impact of further support to Shropshire's Own and also how the plan for a regional Marches Food Network develops.

Food for Thought Overview

The Shropshire Food and Drink project development has resulted in us working with a number of SME producers and retailers and tackling issues that have been raised. Based on the projects that have been worked on we have had direct results of business growth and development and as a result are developing 'Food for Thought'.

This project consists of:

- Partnership working with Harper Adams University to enable food and drink businesses to do product development.
- Quarterly networking specifically for food and drink businesses with support present from the council, growth hub and industry experts. These will be located around the county working with members and relevant stakeholders to promote the region, increase business interaction and engagement and ultimately end up in a producer showcase event in February 2023.
- New marketing assets to promote the region in the form of booklets, giant deckchair cover, banners and marketing materials available at large scale events to bring focus onto the industry.
- Series of 'how to guides' as free downloadable resources from the website and a lead generation capture tool. This will enable us to follow up and support businesses who download so that they obtain the correct information.
 - What you need to start your food and drink business
 - Upscale your food and drink business
 - Marketing your food and drink business
 - Legal and trading standards signposting
- Consultation time with 6 individual businesses to give support and training on marketing, website journey, google analytics, business diversification. Each business will receive a day's worth of support to focus on their business with industry experts. The sessions will do a detailed analysis of the business working with the business owner and deliver bespoke training dependent on the business needs. Within the session Shropshire Food and Drink team will deliver the following outcomes on a one-to-one basis:
 - Business planning and development plans
 - Marketing refocus and training where needed - e.g. leaflets, marketing collateral at events etc.
 - Website analysis and customer journeys
 - Social media analysis of insights, targeted market segmentation, strategy planning for the months ahead
 - Canva basic training if needed

As an outcome of this training businesses will be supported through the implementation of the outcomes agreed and also offered a half price stand at large scale festivals to implement the plans put into place.

ENDNOTE

This grant has enabled SGFP to show how we can play a convening role, reaching out across the county to build the local food economy. We have enabled businesses and organisations to deliver on their priorities for marketing in a hyper-localized context as well as supporting the development of the Shropshire Food and Drink website providing a central point for visibility of the local food sector.

There has been a strong focus on building capacity to use digital tools. The power of collaboration has also been very evident as the learning exchanges showed, inspiring new initiatives. In some ways Treflach Farmer's market became a victim of its own success, but working as part of the Oswestry 5 mile project this can be built upon to spread the outreach and marketing opportunities more widely.

Some anticipated outcomes could not be achieved in the timeframe due to the timing of the funded project running from September 2021 – March 2022 being out-of-sync with the production season. Some activities were also hampered by the ongoing impact of Covid delaying meetings and public events or leading to the absence of key people at critical moments. However, overall there was good progress and now they have been initiated several activities are ongoing. In terms of impact the local marketing projects aimed to enable 20% increase in sales. This was achieved, significantly exceeded even, by Treflach Farm as their focus was an immediate real-time event; however the other initiatives are working on more complex activities and the result of these will only be possible to capture over time, so this will continue to be monitored into 2023 and updates will be provided to Shropshire Council Business Growth Service.

The SGFP led work on public and private procurement highlights the importance of a strategic approach to achieve an impact at scale. These are longer-term initiatives, but this funding has enabled key activities to be started and connections to be made regionally for addressing public procurement.

Underlying all this is the importance of having a Shropshire Food Strategy to get a more integrated approach to the food economy. SGFP is actively pursuing this with Shropshire Council.

Financial Overview

Expenditure

	Activity Area	Delivery Partner	Amount
1	Food Business Visibility	Shropshire Food & Drink	£12,500
2	Local food marketing hubs	Subcontract local organisations /businesses in each area to lead	£24,500
3	Learning Exchange	SGFP	£3,400
4	Local public and private procurement contracts	SGFP	£6,000
5	Growth Plan	SGFP & Shropshire Food & Drink	£3,600
	Total		£50,000

Annex 3 provides the payment record tracking and Annex 4 the project expenditure.

All supporting documentation is provided.