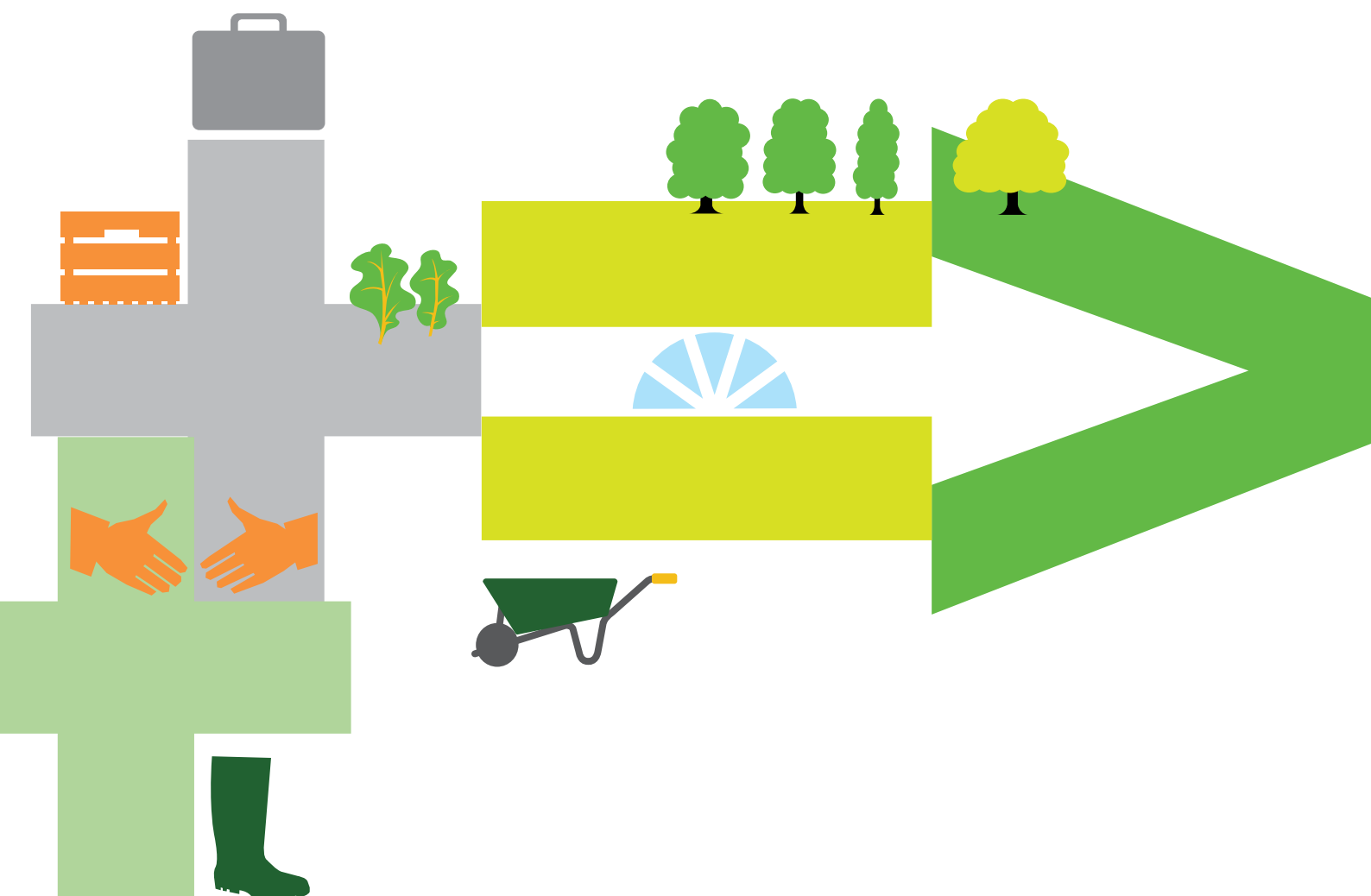


ACCESS TO LAND: WORKING WITH LOCAL AUTHORITIES A GUIDE FOR COMMUNITY FOOD ENTERPRISES



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KEY STRATEGIES

Across the UK and beyond, community food enterprises (CFEs) are proving they have a positive role to play in their local economies. They are providing healthy food for local people, supporting livelihoods, training local people, protecting their local environment, demonstrating ethical business practices, and much else. Yet CFEs achieve these successes in the face of many barriers. Land prices are high, and resources are costly in a food economy dominated by big businesses and low food prices.

CFEs often rely on a range of support from local authorities. Often, the most important form of support is in gaining access to land. By offering CFEs affordable leases on public land and supporting them through the planning system, local authorities can make a critical difference to their viability.

Shared Assets supports the management of land for the common good. Through our Better Land-based Economies project (2015-17), we have worked with and supported three leading community food enterprises, Ecological Land Cooperative, Kindling Trust and Organiclea, over two years as they worked to access land, grow their businesses and create new livelihoods. This work was funded by Friends Provident Foundation.

Despite the challenges they face, these enterprises have shown that a few key strategies can help build a positive relationship with their local authorities.

Know your council's priorities and get on board

At any one time local authorities will have a number of key priorities across a range of social, economic and environmental agendas. These may be guided by the agenda of the national government, council cabinets, funding and investment opportunities, or the results of local needs assessments. Council priorities could include anything from improving local health and wellbeing, supporting small businesses, or improving green space. In most cases, you probably have something to offer. Council staff are more likely to provide support if you design your project or activities to suit these objectives. It's also important to pitch your offer in the language and terminology that your council is using.

To find out what priorities are guiding your local authority, do your research. Have they recently published any new strategies? Are there any new council-led policy forums or consultations that your council is running? Can you get involved? The priorities of local councils and staff within them are not always clearly evident from the outside. Ask to meet a local councillor or council worker and ask for their insight.

Learn who's who

Saying that, it's not always easy to find out who holds the power, and where help is likely to come from. Councils are large and complex bodies. Finding those who are both supportive and also hold the power and resources to support you can be complicated. Be prepared to pursue multiple channels of support within your council. You might need to develop relationships in teams working on a wide range of issues. Finding information about officers and staff teams can be tricky, but information about elected members (councillors) is usually much more publically accessible on the council's website. Find a councillor with an interest in or responsibility for an area that is relevant to your work, or who is elected to represent a ward where you are based, and contact them directly. Ask those who do support you to champion you to the people who need to be convinced (eg planning committees). If a staff member requires evidence of the need for your enterprise and the benefits you can provide, ask them how you might best provide this in a way that helps them share it with colleagues.

See a problem and offer a solution

In gaining support from your local authority, it's important to demonstrate that your enterprise is needed. You can draw on reliable, authoritative research into social or economic problems in your locality. Statistics on employment, household income, educational attainment and health are often easily available. Councils may have commissioned research in to barriers to local economic development. Clearly articulating these problems and how you can help address them is important.

The problems you can address are not only those experienced by communities, but by councils themselves. With ongoing cuts to council budgets, many local authorities are struggling to run services and to maintain public assets. Two of the most pressing responsibilities that local councils face are improving public health and providing adult social care. CFEs can often offer viable and creative solutions by providing employment, education and wellbeing activities. Simply by working on public land and in public buildings, you can help maintain them. Improving soil, increasing biodiversity, occupying and caring for buildings, and maintaining public access can offer cost-effective solutions for the stewardship of public assets.

Demonstrate your potential. Then scale up.

Councils have a duty to ensure those occupying public land or gaining from their support are able to succeed in delivering what they have promised. You will therefore need a convincing business plan covering income generation, cost of delivery, risk management, and governance. Whilst a local authority may offer you land at a reduced rate, they will need evidence that you will be able to pay rent. They will also want to see evidence of past successes – either those of your current enterprise or, if it is newly formed, those of the people involved. Many successful CFEs start life on a small patch of land, or by offering food activities on other organisations' sites. All these first steps can help prove your potential and demonstrate local interest and support for your activities.

Build good livelihoods and tell people's stories

Community food enterprises are run by and for local people. Many CFEs offer employment and training that truly help local people change their lives. From food growing and preparation, to enterprise skills and community work, CFEs can offer people a range of paths to employment and personal development. With the right support this can include people with barriers to work and education, including those with mental health problems and learning disabilities. Showing that trainees are working together helps show councils that your activities are building community and positive enterprising behaviour.

Gather case studies for your local authority of local people who have benefited from your work. As a result, have they improved their income or independence, become readier for work or training, or got a job? Identify where your support has helped someone overcome a barrier that others in your community experience too. If the person in question can explain this themselves, then even better.

Evidence your contribution

Whatever the benefits you are providing make sure you are able to evidence them. Whether you are creating economic, social or environmental benefits you should be clear about what you offer and able to demonstrate that you deliver it. See our **Local economic resilience, the part you play** resource for a wealth of information on how to describe and evidence how your work contributes to a range of different agendas that support local economic resilience.

Map your local food economy

Community food enterprises require a network of businesses, organisations and people that will help make your project viable. Many CFEs don't just need customers to buy their produce; they rely on distributors, retailers, and suppliers to form cooperative partnerships with. Demonstrate to your local authorities that, whilst you may be a small organisation, you are part of a wider group of enterprises that form a resilient local food economy. This will also show how your activities will support existing business, livelihoods, and organisations. Presenting local authorities with information about your local food economy may inspire them to not only support your enterprise, but those you wish to work with too, and to understand where they can best apply their limited time and resources. See our **Growing sustainable livelihoods** for advice on mapping your local food economy.

KEY STRATEGIES CONTINUED

Be realistic. Be specific.

Local authorities are under resourced and are tackling big issues such as housing, health and social care. Staff may be experiencing significant changes to their jobs, teams and budgets. Don't expect funding or a level of commitment or involvement that they are unable to provide, or that is disproportionate to the scale of the work that you are doing. Often the most you can expect is signposting, an introduction or advice about who best to approach and how. If you are looking for a site then be clear about what you need in terms of location, access, services such as electricity and water, and storage. Make sure they don't waste their time – and yours – suggesting sites that will never meet your needs.

FURTHER RESOURCES

In this series

Local economic resilience: the part you play
A guide for community food enterprises

Growing for change: creating good livelihoods for a better food system
A guide for community food enterprises

Understanding the planning system
A guide for smallholders and community food enterprises

Essential rural workers' accommodation for small-scale agriculture
A guide for local authorities

Local economic resilience: the role of community food enterprises
A guide for local authorities

You can find these resources at:
www.sharedassets.org.uk/innovation/local-land-economies/

Other resources

Kenny, T. & Coin, I., (2016), **Making Local Land Work: How social enterprises can help local authorities make the most out of their land**, Shared Assets

Project Partners

Shared Assets is a think and do tank that provides practical advice, support and training to landowners and communities who want to manage land as a sustainable and productive asset www.sharedassets.org.uk

Kindling Trust support new organic growers in Greater Manchester through their FarmStart training programme, and have established and support a cooperative of growers and buyers, and a worker owned organic box scheme www.kindling.org.uk

Organiclea run an organic market garden, a veg box scheme, provide training for new growers in London, and help them access land and set up new enterprises www.organiclea.org.uk

Ecological Land Cooperative secure land to develop affordable sites for farming, forestry and other rural enterprises, and opportunities for ecological land-based businesses in the UK
www.ecologicaland.coop

Friends Provident Foundation is a grant-making charity whose Building Resilient Economies programme aims to contribute to a more resilient, fairer and sustainable economic system www.friendsprovidentfoundation.org

