

Response from Cambridge Sustainable Food CIC on the Draft Greater Cambridge Local Plan (Regulation 18)

About us

Cambridge Sustainable Food CIC coordinates the Cambridge Sustainable Food Partnership (part of the national Sustainable Food Places network). In March 2024 Cambridge received a Gold Sustainable Food Places Award, recognising citywide leadership on building a healthier, fairer and more sustainable local food system.

Consultation context

We welcome the opportunity to respond to the Draft Greater Cambridge Local Plan consultation (open 1 December 2025 to 30 January 2026).

We also welcome the Plan's strong framing around climate action, wellbeing, inclusive communities and green infrastructure across the 2024–2045 plan period.

What we support in the draft Plan

We strongly support the direction of travel in several draft policies that already touch on food system outcomes, including:

- **Healthy place-making and access to healthy food**, including recognition that development should provide opportunities to access healthy food via allotments and food growing.
- **Managing the local food environment**, including policy intent to control hot food takeaways/fast food outlets and reduce children's exposure to unhealthy food choices.
- **A clear proposed standard for food growing/allotment space** (0.4ha per 1,000 population) within the open space standards being explored.
- **Circular economy principles** that support operational waste management (including composting).
- **Protection of the best and most versatile agricultural land** (Grades 1, 2 and 3a).

These are strong building blocks. Our key recommendation is to make them work harder as a joined-up, deliverable “good food” offer across new and existing communities.

Our headline recommendation: treat food as essential infrastructure

We recommend adding an explicit theme alongside the existing themes set.

This could be titled “**Sustainable Food**” and could include a single strategic policy.

Why a separate category is needed

Food sits at the intersection of:

- **Health and inequalities** (food access and affordability)
- **Climate change** (GHG emissions, land use, resilience, waste)
- **Biodiversity/green infrastructure** (soil, pollinators, nature recovery, growing space)
- **Jobs and inclusive enterprise** (local production, processing, markets, community businesses)
- **Infrastructure** (last-mile logistics, waste/composting systems, utilities and space for community assets)

Without a dedicated category, the Plan risks missing the opportunity to plan food as a **connected system**.

We recommend the Plan explicitly frames a “**sustainable food system**” as cross-cutting infrastructure, alongside transport, water, homes, energy and green space. This would strengthen delivery and reduce the risk that “food” becomes limited to allotments and takeaways alone.

Targeted recommendations to strengthen draft policy

Strengthen “healthy development” so it delivers access to affordable, healthy food

The Plan already recognises “healthy eating” and the importance of access to healthy food. We recommend tightening delivery by requiring:

- **Food access as part of Health Impact Assessments:** Where HIAs are required, include a simple “food environment” assessment: walkable access to affordable healthy food; quality of the local food offer; and measures to avoid concentrating unhealthy uses. (This builds directly on the Plan’s approach to health and takeaways.)
- **Space for community food assets in new neighbourhoods:** Support delivery of community-scale assets that make healthy food practical and affordable: neighbourhood food hubs, community kitchens, food co-ops/social supermarkets, and periodic markets (especially in larger allocations and growth areas). This aligns with the Plan’s stated intent to enable access to local services and support social enterprise.

Use circular economy policy to tackle food waste and enable local redistribution

The circular economy policy already supports operational waste management and composting. We recommend making food waste and surplus redistribution more explicit, by requiring (particularly in major schemes and mixed-use centres):

- **separate, convenient food waste storage** for homes and food businesses (designed for easy collection)
- design that enables **community composting** where appropriate
- practical space that can support **surplus food redistribution** in neighbourhood hubs (small “last mile” storage/handling space can be transformational).

Why this matters: food waste prevention and redistribution are among the quickest local wins for carbon, cost-of-living support, and community resilience, and the Plan is already setting a strong foundation for waste design and circular economy statements.

Protect and proactively support a resilient local food economy on the urban edge

We recommend adding positive support for urban/ peri-urban food production and local supply chains, including:

- supporting appropriate farm diversification that strengthens local food supply (e.g., small-scale processing, storage, distribution, farm shops and community-supported agriculture models), where impacts are well managed
- identifying opportunities for community food growing at scale (where suitable) as part of resilience planning
- ensuring employment and rural diversification approaches recognise food as a strategic sector, not just “countryside uses.”

Make neighbourhood centres work for “everyday food”

The Plan’s wellbeing theme emphasises thriving centres and access to day-to-day needs locally.

We recommend the Plan explicitly expects larger developments to enable a balanced local food offer, for example:

- protecting/encouraging **small, walkable food retail** (including culturally appropriate food)
- enabling **affordable units** for community food enterprises
- designing in the basics: servicing, storage, and flexible space so healthy food retail is viable, not an afterthought.

Delivery and monitoring recommendations

A Local Plan/monitoring framework could realistically track some or all of the following indicators:

Food access and affordability

- % of households within a 10-minute walk of a “healthy food retailer” (define locally: e.g., supermarket, greengrocer, community food hub, market at least weekly).
- Number of neighbourhood centres with a weekly fresh-food offer (street market, community market or equivalent).
- Change in density of hot food takeaways within 400m of schools (or other agreed buffer), and net change in A5 uses in priority areas.
- % of major developments delivering “affordable food space” (e.g., low-rent unit(s) or peppercorn concession for social enterprise/community food).

Community food infrastructure and resilience

- Number and floorspace (sqm) of community food assets delivered (community kitchens, food hubs, social supermarkets/co-ops, shared storage/cold chain).
- Number of community kitchens with certified/compliant fit-out suitable for training/enterprise (food hygiene compliant, accessible).

Local production and land

- Area of BMV agricultural land (Grades 1, 2, 3a) safeguarded vs lost (net).
- Hectares of peri-urban land under active food production (commercial or community-supported) within Greater Cambridge (net change).
- Area of edible/fruit tree planting delivered (e.g., number of fruit/nut trees).

Skills, health and inclusion

- Number of school/community settings with food growing + cooking facilities delivered through development contributions.
- Accessibility KPI for growing spaces: % of new food-growing sites meeting inclusive design standards (accessible paths, raised beds provision, adapted plots).

Circular economy: waste prevention and redistribution

- % of new non-residential food premises with compliant food-waste separation and storage (designed-in, not retrofitted).
- Tonnes of edible surplus redistributed locally per year (through accredited/community partners), and/or number of redistribution partnerships enabled by plan-led space.
- % of major developments providing on-site or neighbourhood-scale composting provision (where appropriate), with a management plan

Local economy and enterprise

- Number of food enterprises supported in neighbourhood centres (start-ups, co-ops, social enterprises) and survival rate at 24 months where the Plan provides affordable workspace.
- Proportion of public-sector/community anchor procurement spent locally or a proxy such as number of anchor institutions participating in local/sustainable food procurement initiatives.

“Systems” Indicator - to prove the Plan is delivering a joined-up food offer.

- **% of strategic sites / major allocations delivering a Food Systems Delivery Plan** (a short, standardised plan covering access, community assets, growing space, waste, and local enterprise), secured through condition/S106.

Offer of partnership support

CSF CIC would welcome working with Greater Cambridge Shared Planning Service, public health and developers to help shape implementable guidance (for example, a short **“Healthy and Sustainable Food in New Development”** note or SPD module), building on the draft policy foundations already in the Plan.