



# OLDHAM FOOD STRATEGY

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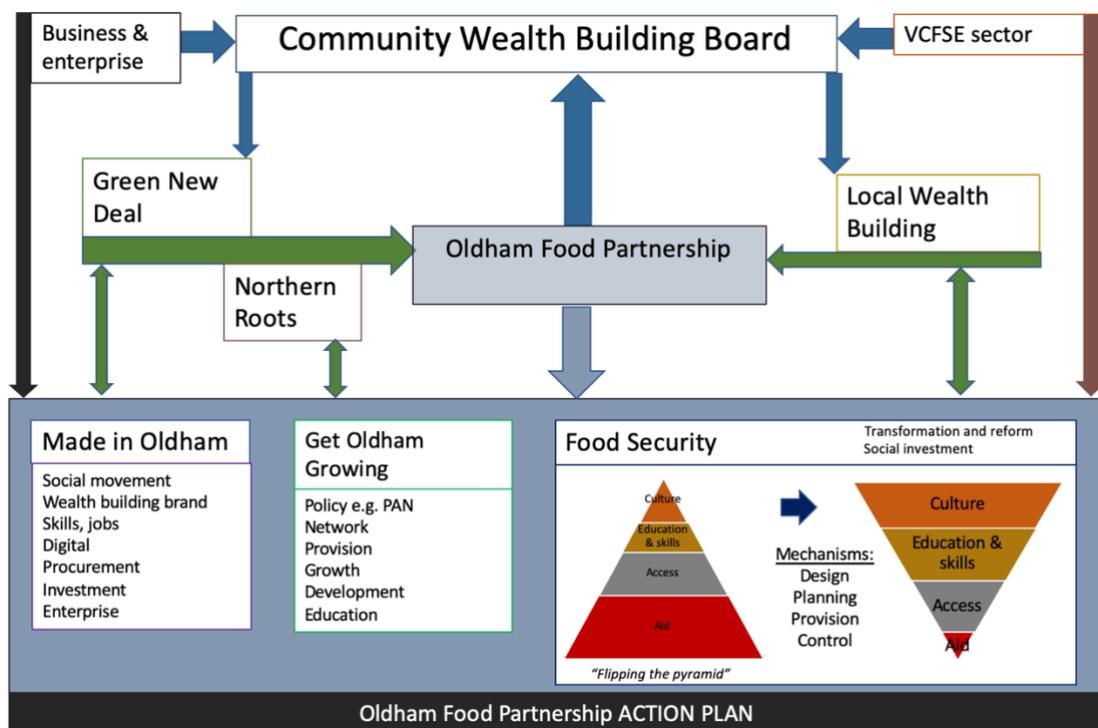
*1<sup>st</sup> September 2020*

# Oldham Food Strategy Executive Summary

## Vision

Food in Oldham has the power to change lives, through enabling communities to thrive; raising our aspirations; establishing infrastructure; and innovative ways of working which consider the impact of the food system as a whole. Good food in Oldham works to establish a resilient food system that delivers food security for all; tackling inequalities, diet-related ill-health and the environmental impact of the food we produce and consume, whilst at the same time building prosperity through local wealth-building, making Oldham a great place to live, work and play. This document sets out how we will achieve our vision as a collective whole and the role of people and place in this transformation. The accompanying action plan sets out what we will do and how we will measure and monitor our progress.

We will deliver the vision and food strategy through the following structure:



As is shown above there are three main delivery programmes discussed in the food strategy and these are Made in Oldham, Get Oldham Growing and Food Security. The various actions undertaken through these themes are highlighted in the accompanying action plan.

Governance and progress is tracked through the Oldham Food Partnership Board (see Terms of Reference) which reports into the Community Wealth Building Board. The work is coordinated through various partners and stakeholders within Oldham Council and across the VCFSE, business and wider public sector which form the Oldham Food Partnership.

Creating a more resilient and sustainable food system is a journey. This strategy sets out Oldham’s current position, highlights what is possible – building on Oldham’s successes, and more importantly the feedback we received from stakeholders across the borough. We have considered actions in light of current challenges and what is needed both now and in the future.

# Oldham Food Strategy

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## Vision

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## Context and background

This strategic review was commissioned prior to Covid-19 however, as with all active workstreams, this work has shifted and evolved in line with new priorities, challenges and insights the pandemic has brought forth. Oldham had many challenges before the pandemic such as inequalities in health, wealth and productivity and a reliance on public sector employment. Oldham is an ambitious borough, highlighted by the Northern Roots project, Gold Food for Life Standard school meals and, beyond food, the regeneration plans for the town centre putting leisure, arts and culture centre stage. Oldham has a very diverse population and active, representative VCFSE sector led by Action Together which are both progressive and responsive. The cooperative nature and collective ambition of Oldham as a borough generate ripe conditions to develop, implement and deliver an equally ambitious and thorough food strategy.

## The effect of the pandemic on the food system

### Food and health

“The fact the we went into the Covid-19 crisis with such high rates of obesity and diet-related disease has undoubtedly contributed to the UK’s appalling death rate.” Henry Dimbleby, National Food Strategy 2020.

Obese people are 150% more likely to be admitted to intensive care with COVID-19, and severely obese people over 300% more likely.<sup>1</sup> People with type 2 diabetes (both controlled and uncontrolled) are 81% more likely to die from the virus.<sup>2</sup> In the age of COVID-19, a poor diet is almost as great a threat to life as cancer or old age.

## Food and economy

The UK economy shrank by an unprecedented 20% in April as the country went into lockdown<sup>3</sup>.

There have been 3.3million new claims for Universal Credit since March 16<sup>th</sup><sup>4</sup>. 9.3million employees have been furloughed<sup>5</sup> and a further 2.4 million have applied for the Government's Self Employed Income Support Scheme.<sup>6</sup> By October when the furlough scheme comes to an end the Office for Budget Responsibility estimates that a further 1.6million people will have been made redundant<sup>7</sup>.

## The business of food

A third of the UK's total fall in GDP was caused by reduced demand in hospitality. 83% of employees in food and accommodation services were furloughed, more than any other sector. In many cases furlough has just delayed inevitable redundancies. McKinsey & Company estimates that 68% of jobs in this sector are at risk,<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Hippisley-Cox, J., Young, D., Coupland, C. et al. (2020). COVID-19 Disease with ACE inhibitors and Angiotensin Receptor Blockers including 8.3 Million People. (peer reviewed but not yet published)

<sup>2</sup> Barron, E., Bakhai, C., Kar, P., et al. (2020). Type 1 and Type 2 Diabetes and COVID-19 Related Mortality in England: A Whole Population Study. SSRN Electronic Journal. [online]. Available at: <https://www.england.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/valabhji-COVID-19-and-Diabetes-Paper-1.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> Office for National Statistics. (2020). GDP monthly estimate, UK: April 2020. Office for National Statistics [online] Available at: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/economy/grossdomesticproductgdp/bulletins/gdpmnthlyestimateuk/april2020#gdp-fell-by-204-in-april-2020>.

<sup>4</sup> Department for Work and Pensions. (2020). Universal Credit declarations (claims) and advances: management information. GOV.UK. [online] Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/universal-credit-declarations-claims-and-advances-management-information>

<sup>5</sup> HM Revenue & Customs. (2020). HMRC coronavirus (COVID-19) statistics. GOV.UK. [online] Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/hmrc-coronavirus-covid-19-statistics>.

<sup>6</sup> Billard, L. and Allen, D. (2020). Statistical bulletin Self-Employment Income Support Scheme (SEISS) Official Statistics Press Queries. [online] Available at: [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/891603/SEISS\\_Official\\_Statistics\\_June\\_2020.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/891603/SEISS_Official_Statistics_June_2020.pdf).

<sup>7</sup> Ibid

<sup>8</sup> McKinsey. (2020). COVID-19 in the UK: The impact on people and jobs at risk. McKinsey. [online] Available at: <https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/public-sector/our-insights/covid-19-in-the-united-kingdom-assessing-jobs-at-risk-and-the-impact-on-people-and-places>.

a much higher percentage than in any other industry. There is no doubt that there have been winners and losers in the pandemic: the supermarkets who had online delivery models saw their market increase dramatically, as did the custom through many of the convenience stores as people shopped locally. People bought what they could from where they could. Sales of long-shelf life processed goods increased as people stockpiled for lockdown resulting in bare shelves and unfulfilled orders across retail. Logistics providers, manufacturers and the retailers themselves didn't break but struggled to cope to fill the gap left from the overnight closure of the eating out sector which accounts for around a quarter of all of our food provision. The closure of this sector left an abundance of products in outlets and in the food supply chain with no route to consumer, much of it in large format sizes which cannot be easily repurposed to suit the nature of the 'direct to consumer' market. Innovative but reactive solutions sprung up where they could, however, much was deemed surplus/waste and was redistributed to VCFSE sector to use to feed communities in need. 97% of the hospitality sector is made up of SMEs whereas in food retail, in Oldham especially, 95% of supermarket spend is with Tesco and Asda. The nature of hospitality is more localised, whereas retail is more nationalised or globalised. Local business has lost out to the large corporations. This disparity has also been exacerbated by the financial support schemes available during the crisis phase and into recovery.



## Food Poverty

Prior to Covid-19, in 2015 it was estimated that 10.7% (24,500 people) were in food poverty in Oldham<sup>9</sup>. A subsequent survey looking at child poverty specifically for Oldham shows that at best there are 19.1% of children living in poverty after housing costs (Saddleworth) rising to 66.2% in the ward with the highest rate (Werneth).<sup>10</sup> During the pandemic this was expected to rise significantly. Food vouchers have been provided for families with children in receipt of free school meals and more targeted welfare support, food vouchers have been provided to people who are struggling. This may be due to the fact they are shielding and clinically vulnerable, isolated, have no access to food outlets or simply not in a position financially to source food.

Much of the food available has been provided by mutual aid groups locally and the VCFSE sector. The food coming through these channels has been provided by donations or sourced through providers such as Fareshare UK. Other food access programmes such as The Bread and Butter Thing and food bank support through the Trussell Trust services specific cohorts or members and as such they can be limited in their application and uptake. There is no one size fits all solution to food poverty and crisis support in Oldham, there is however, a strong co-operative approach between Oldham Council, Action Together and Oldham Food Bank.

<sup>9</sup> <https://committees.oldham.gov.uk/documents/s58856/food%20poverty%20food%20banks%20v1.3.pdf>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.gmpovertyaction.org/mini-poverty-monitor/>

Using food surplus has its benefits and faults. It can be abundant and a good use of food fit for human consumption and keeps costs down of managing waste. However, it can also be of poorer nutritional quality. The more we process and add steps into our food chain, the more chance it won't meet the requirements set out by the buyer, therefore ends up generating waste. Critics argue that it is also a way to reinforce brand and marketing messages making it increasingly difficult for shoppers to switch to unbranded goods during thriftier times.

## Food and the environment

There has been a great deal of fluctuation in the availability of food and the purchasing patterns of consumers during the pandemic. As such there has been a large amount of waste experienced in the supply chain. For example, there was a very high demand for minced beef which is typically prepared from cheaper cuts of meat, but there was much less demand for prime meat cuts such as steak and roasting joints. When we combine this with the closure of hospitality outlets we had large amounts of prime meat being wasted but Polish mince being sourced as customers drove demand for more versatile, affordable and easy to freeze and batch cook minced beef products. This is the case of having a too highly optimised and inflexible system, where products destined for the wholesale market cannot be easily re-routed into consumer-friendly products. This example illustrates a lot about what we experienced during the early stages of lockdown - fresh products being quite abundant but not always uniformly desired and due to the nature of their short shelf life, being diverted quickly into surplus food schemes. This ensured that food fit for human consumption was being eaten rather than being charged for being destroyed. However, the flip side of this was that there wasn't always much ambient, longer shelf life, more processed food in the food surplus chain.

This changed as lockdown embedded. Domestic food waste looks to have reduced through the pandemic as people have more time and fewer distractions enabling them to be able to cook what they have bought.

However, the wider environmental cost is likely to be high. Food supply chains have had to adapt and shift as the pandemic has moved around the world. Producers have not had the access to labour they may have needed to harvest both in the UK and abroad. This volatility has combined and caused waste at farm level. We have had to lengthen and adapt supply chains pulling food in from further and further afield. Standards, some environmental, some welfare will have had to be less onerous to ensure food was available when and where people needed it. Logistics services too had to prioritise product categories as desired by the retailers and as such the range of options in the supermarket were restricted, this will have caused more food system adaptation. One of the other key elements that was witnessed was due to the closure of hospitality, there were reports that 50% of all milk was being poured down the drain; after all you can't furlough cows. The impact on the cheese industry and wider dairy was catastrophic with campaigns running to support independent dairies who had no outlet. Doorstep milk deliveries surged in popularity but there was only so much surplus their growth could realistically absorb.

## Food diversity and inclusion.

Oldham has a higher proportion (22.5%) of non-white Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) residents than in Greater Manchester (16.3%), the North West (9.8%), and England (14.6%). This proportion has increased from 13.5% in 2001. The ethnic composition in Oldham currently stands at 77.5% White, 10.1% Pakistani,

7.3% Bangladeshi and 5.1% 'other'. Oldham has a high proportion (22.5%) of residents aged under 16 and proportionally fewer (15.7%) aged 65 and over. The overall structure of the population has shifted downwards due to the growth in Oldham's Pakistani and Bangladeshi communities, which have younger age profiles.

According to the ONS, Oldham's population is projected to reach 255,200 by 2041 – a 9.2% increase from the 2017 population. This increase will come as a result of improving life expectancy, and the continued growth of Oldham's Pakistani and Bangladeshi communities. Higher fertility rates within these communities, along with some internal and international migration, will be key determinants in the town's future population growth.<sup>11</sup>

When we consider food and diversity we consider the range of diets of the Oldham population: the enjoyment of all cuisines representative of the many and diverse food cultures and heritage of the population of Oldham. We also consider the array of nutrients needed for a full, well-rounded diet and where these come from to arrive on our plates. Food is global in both the business and community sense. We need to take a broad view to ensure that the way we produce and consume food in the borough considers the diverse nature of our population, but also be inclusive, ensuring that we do not exclude or marginalise people through food based actions both now and in the future.

## The Pandemic, EU exit and Climate change

The pandemic has hit us hard and deep. We are in a new normal. However, this is not our only significant challenge on the horizon. From January 2021, the EU transition period will end and we will be operating in a different space. With much of our food being traded in foreign currencies, our poor national food security (in that we don't grow much of our food), and global food supply chains, we are about to have the heat turned up on what is already a significant problem – ensuring our citizens are fed an adequate and nutritious diet. Climate change will further add to the volatility in production and pricing making some areas in the world non-viable as a source of food production. We need to radically adapt what and how we eat - both for the current challenge and those to come.

## Where next for food in Oldham? Building back better

### Mission?

To build a good food culture within our communities. Put sustainable food production and consumption at the heart of food system planning and design, ensuring that we use cooperative approaches to find solutions and adaptations and focus on where we can facilitate, control and deliver most value in line with our vision. A mixture of approaches across all sectors, at all levels and considering every link in the chain. Food is cross cutting: different ingredients, methods, tools and infrastructure yield very different results. Some of what we will be looking to develop will be tried and tested recipes, others will be 'test-baked' from our experience and local know-how. Oldham is an ambitious and innovative borough but it is also resource-constrained and therefore a blend of approaches is called for. We will consider plans in a short, medium

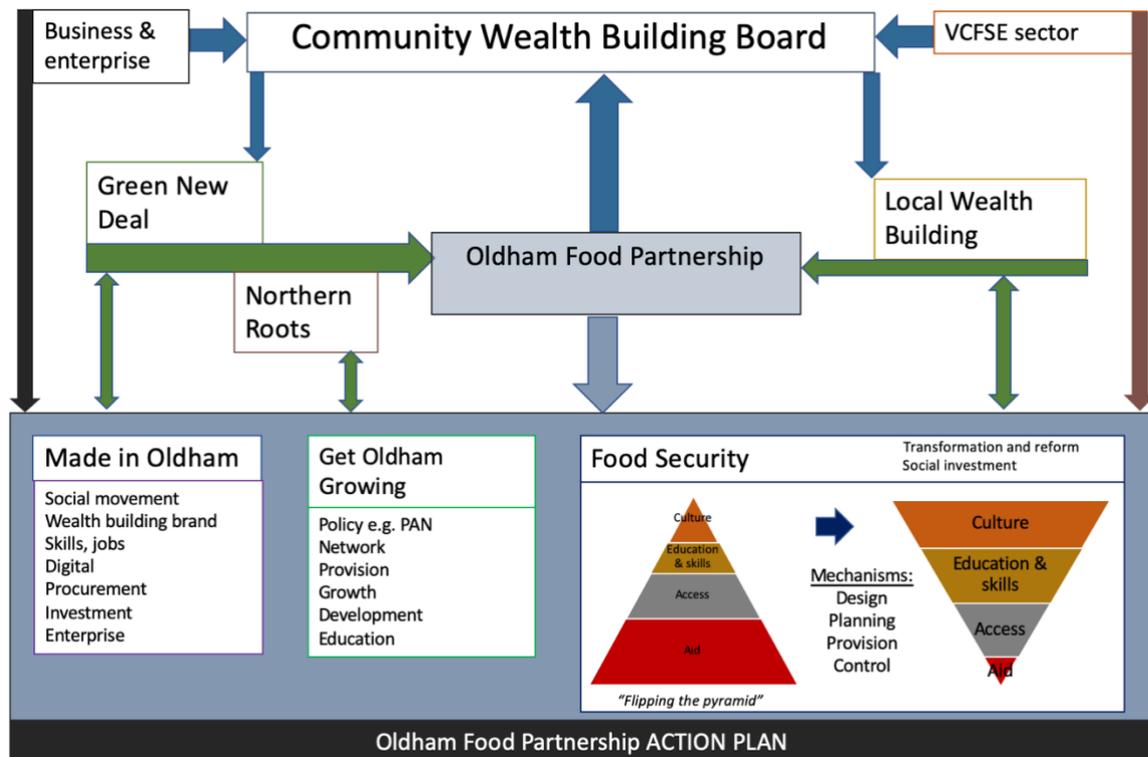
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<sup>11</sup> Oldham in Profile, Business Intelligence Service, April 2019

and long term context which captures the crisis, recovery and post Covid-19 phase; we will identify where action needs to take place to reflect local priorities and their evolution.

## The Food Strategy Blueprint

The Food Strategy is part of the Community Wealth Building Programme along with Green New Deal, Northern Roots, Local Wealth Building and Culture, Leisure & Tourism. The Food Strategy has three main themes; Made in Oldham, Get Oldham Growing and Food Security, this comes together through the Oldham Food Partnership and the associated governance as follows:



## Food governance in Oldham

There have been two connected structures for food in Oldham historically, the Growing Oldham: Feeding Ambition partnership (GO:FA) and the Oldham Food Network. The changing priorities, shifting resource and scale of the challenge has required a reboot and a call to form one central partnership supported by a network of partners and stakeholders. This new partnership, the Oldham Food Partnership will be made up of strategic representation from the local authority, business and enterprise and the VCFSE sector with the addition of representatives from the central workstreams. Wider attendance on topical matters will come from the network. This partnership will meet monthly initially moving to bi-monthly when the new workstreams and projects have embedded.

The Oldham Food Partnership will operate at arms-length from the Council in a truly cooperative manner working in an open, transparent and democratic way. This will ensure it is embedded within Council structures and operations but can work nimbly with partners and stakeholders beyond the Council. It will

provide the governance for the administering of grant funds pertaining to food and will also be coordinated through Council resource. For more information please see Terms of Reference, Oldham Food Partnership.

## Get Oldham Growing

We want to inspire, engage and develop community knowledge and skills around food growing, building on the great work being done across the various growing sites across the borough such as Lees Eco Hub, and those which are further along in the enterprise journey such as Veg in the Park. The focus of the Get Oldham Growing (GOG) programme is on informal and semi-formal growing sites which build on domestic growing skills but in a collaborative, community focused manner. Growing a network of skilled growers as individuals or collectives. Oldham has a number of eco-hubs around the borough which are fantastic assets. These assets all run with a large amount of autonomy, led by a few focused community leaders with some support from the Council's parks team. There is scope for the GOG programme to be developed focusing around volunteer engagement and support to increase the levels of participation across the various growing sites across the borough. The hubs are



open for a few hours each week and rely on one or two people on each site who are largely unpaid. Most are not viable as social enterprises without grant funds and as such there needs to be more done to get the best out of these assets or they run the risk of not realising their full potential. When running a site there are a number of obligations. There is the management of the site, the compliance e.g. safeguarding, health and safety etc. and then operations. This requires a great deal of time and skill in order to function well in all areas. From a volunteer experience perspective, this will vary across the borough and may not always be a high-quality experience. The volunteer journey, from seeing an initial piece of information through to becoming a regular Get Oldham Growing volunteer, in a set up akin to a 'Land Army', is something that needs careful consideration. What motivates people? What do they like doing? Where do they live and how do they get there? Knowing more about volunteers helps us to design opportunities that meet the needs of the site but also provide enriching experiences for the community. Many of the jobs that need doing on a growing site such as weeding, is not always seen as a desirable activity, there is a role to bridge what needs doing on a site with the volunteering experience.

## Health and Wellbeing through food growing.

Being in nature, physically active and a sense of social inclusion are all elements that have been proven to enhance wellbeing and health within participants. The diversity and high levels of footfall seen in some of Oldham's parks have formed the basis of developing this into growing-themed physical activity offer. Links with social prescription and the local healthy weight strategy layered with existing projects provides a strong foundation in which to grow a network of people who get their hands dirty.

Volunteering can help maintain the feeling of self-worth and offer important social contact, and that can counteract the negative psychological effects of social exclusion. With the impact of Covid-19 resulting in many jobs being lost, it is important to provide a service that seeks to help people maintain their positivity and outlook so that they may re-enter work when opportunities present themselves. Maintaining a routine, being valued in society and having access to food whilst developing new skills is progressive, even in challenging times, and can give people a focus beyond their immediate need. Layering into this are community leaders and trained volunteers who can help sign post and ensure community members can access support such as debt advice which may improve their situation and engage individuals who would not typically seek help.

**Site provision.** We have a number of sites around the borough. With the "Green Your Neighbourhood" work being scoped as part of the Green New Deal we could have the opportunity to bring more sites into service if the local need highlights insufficient capacity in the hyper-local area, or at least publicise existing sites more widely to encourage full use of them by local residents who may not know of them. Through using volunteer data we can model usage and identify gaps in provision. We can understand more about the demographics, engagement, locations and usage of various sites across the borough and seek to work with the various eco hubs to become more sustainable. Some areas such as Brighton and Hove have a Planning Advisory Notice (PAN) on Food Growing and Development as part of their Local Development Framework. This PAN outlines the technical considerations, links to the wider spatial vision as well as seeking to offer inspiration to developers as to what may be considered. It is therefore, possible to incorporate more food growing into developments, increasing the diversity and location of provision.

**Developing Get Oldham Growing as a brand and programme.** GOG has a logo and a web presence through the Council website. It currently doesn't have a means of promoting, engaging and managing volunteers centrally. There would be some development required here to build the brand, establish digital communications that are direct to the general public but also capture what is happening in each of the partner hubs. We would suggest a co-production session led by the Oldham Food Partnership Coordinator to ascertain how best Get Oldham Growing as a programme can function to support the hubs. This workstream works closely with social prescribing practices and as such it can be tethered to existing



pathways and referral partners. A sound volunteering policy and training for people engaged in the volunteering pathway would enhance and improve the outcomes of this project. This offer would require coordination between volunteers and the hubs, the performance of the project would sit with the Oldham Food Partnership. Through this programme we will foster food citizenship and grow a local good food movement.

## Made in Oldham

Over the last few years Oldham has commissioned a number of economic and regeneration focused studies and developed strategic development plans using specialist expertise and insight. Food, driven through leisure and hospitality was highlighted as a future economic growth area. Through the regeneration and capital projects in the town centre this has begun to come to life. The development of the Town Hall and Parliament Square has enticed some of the usual suspects, the national and regional chains and further development is planned through the Egyptian rooms. The mainstream casual dining sector here aids Oldham's rebrand in the market place. There is much more potential to further use food and beverage to drive food-centric placemaking activity. As the live-work balance is shifting, town centres look to reboot themselves in a post-covid world and create new identities. However, the food and beverage leisure and hospitality sector needs to be carefully dovetailed with local and independent, good quality outlets to avoid the clone models we are witnessing elsewhere. Oldham needs to build on the wants and needs of local people, be accessible in range, quality, price and be sustainable but also be sufficiently different to compete with its neighbours. There are a number of concerns around the healthiness and appeal many of the town centre businesses, the contribution to obesity and diabetes. In addition to this, sustainability is an increasing concern as is the changing nature of the labour force. Business support is largely provided through a GM wide service run by the Business Growth Hub, and this is focused around start-ups, which leads to a number of questions: does this generate the types of businesses you want to see operating in the town centre? Does it connect local supply chains, increase productivity and ensure that businesses are viable on paper? With regards to existing businesses, Oldham Council supports them with regard to matters pertaining to place but as challenges continue to emerge through EU exit and Climate Change, how do we help our existing businesses to grow? A fundamental goal here is to ensure that we create vibrant and diverse businesses operating across the spectrum of society, some more commercially focused, others more socially focused whilst remaining viable.

Beyond commercially driven businesses, Oldham as a cooperative Council has forged strong links with enterprise and food traditionally through food growing and specifically Get Oldham Growing activity to create a wave of socially driven enterprises. Capital funding has been made available as start-up grants, this may be to fit out a town centre shop or to provide infrastructure for food growing. However, food-based enterprises are hard to make financially viable and many struggle to remain solvent. Oldham in Place, developed through the Local Access Fund is a great opportunity for Oldham to reimagine what is needed and help specifically support the social enterprise sector to develop and flourish.

All enterprises and business, socially driven or profit driven have to ensure that their cash flow is manageable and that their revenue exceeds expenditure. It is commendable that Oldham Council primes businesses and enterprise in some areas to stimulate the market and overcome barriers to entry based on capital. However, more can be done to ensure these businesses have the best chance of success through support to plan the business from concept to launch and through influencing the environment in which

these businesses operate. Through planning, design and control coupled with assessing the appropriateness of provision it is possible to increase the odds of success.

In addition to consumer orientated businesses, the food system from farm to fork has the potential to add value through its supply chain. Local food production, processing and manufacturing has a key role in prosperity however, with the dominance of global brand and finance control historically they lack much local autonomy. However, with a refocus on the Sustainable Development Goals both large globally owned corporates and also SMEs that are independently controlled can be useful partners to work with on their role within society in Oldham. The Business Growth Hub and Midas support work with the Advanced Manufacturing sector and large accounts, that coupled with Olham in Place gives a strong working platform to discuss the role these organisations can play as good employers e.g. GM Good Employment Charter, as environmental contributors e.g. use of surrounding land for staff growing projects and their role as food buyers and sellers in the marketplace, champions of Made in Oldham. By working to build on the relationships with the Business Growth Hub and others, we can begin to explore how Oldham can reach its potential to deliver sustainable economic growth through collaboration and exploration across the themes outlined in this strategy.



When building out the Made in Oldham theme 'Growing the food economy' it will become more evident that there are obstacles in the current system that need to be overcome. For example, the lack of food infrastructure to enable short supply chains which are the key to keeping food affordable to the consumer but also viable for the producer to offer. When we move to more sustainable, quality and healthy offers it increases the cost of production. To overcome this, local food infrastructure provision is scrutinised. Some of this can be overcome through partnership working such as local processing infrastructure, distribution networks or hubs. It has been seen through the Oldham School Meals Service that it is possible for some larger local operators to act as distribution networks to enable smaller, specialist food providers to access wider markets. Food markets play a key part in bringing more operators together, working

on mutually beneficial projects to overcome these barriers e.g. e-commerce platforms and delivery shared services. These 'hubs' can take many different forms. The most successful are those that grow organically through finding shared solutions which are typically a physical and digital combination. Hubs which are designed without being coproduced or addressing a largely evidence-based local need generally fail. Working strategically but opportunistically with the food sector is key to operating cost effectively, being impact driven and realistic but offering real value through expert knowledge and skills which add value to operators and help them find solutions in new and often unfamiliar areas.

Food is a real societal leveller. It cuts across boundaries. People with no formal education can be successful. With increasing opportunities at all levels to trade, people can start out in a community centre, build their brand in the street food scene and progress to bricks and mortar outlets. Covid-19 has disrupted this, however, despite lockdown, food has remained a strong social feature in people's lives. Post lockdown, the government's Eat Out to Help Out scheme has shown that restaurants were 27% busier than they were over the same period the year before. This is a clear indication that people are willing to eat out, however,

wider challenges will come with personal financial insecurity and lack of general footfall when government stimulus schemes end and further heightened when business financial support runs out (i.e. VAT reduction, Business Rate Holidays, Business Interruption Loans and Bounce Back loans). There is still excitement to meet and eat and this sector will get back on its feet in the coming months but it will have a turbulent time, with many unpredictable challenges to navigate. The make up of the retail, hospitality and leisure is expected to be significantly different. Many businesses were not financially well at both ends of the spectrum, the lack of reserves and financial management in small independent businesses through to the constant evolution of corporates brought about the private equity and venture capital funding.

There are additional challenges with the EU exit which brings cost issues which will have to be navigated arising from food supply and trade coupled with immigration restrictions which will affect some areas within the sector more than others. The Indian food scene was already finding it difficult to recruit chefs due to the salary required to fulfil visa requirements. With the Town Centre Masterplan setting out the commitment to provide opportunities to learn, develop new skills and gain employment, food, with its accessibility can be a great place to work and gain vital skills which can have a multiplier effect. There is much work to try to steady the ship for the moment with business support whilst setting the course for the vision Oldham has for its food future. For example, by developing people's skills in food coupled with nutrition and sustainability they will take that knowledge positively impacting their households. As skilled employees they have the potential to improve the health of their customers, reduce the environmental impact of businesses and their suppliers building a food economy which is equipped to deal with the challenges ahead. Through developing food business skills and that of their staff, there is an opportunity to help communities thrive, be healthier, happier and help Oldham achieve its ambitions towards net zero.



When we consider developing professional skills through formal training routes there are level 2 courses in Food Preparation and Cookery and Hospitality provided by Oldham College. These courses lead to jobs in food service as front of house or kitchen assistants. These are lower paid entry level jobs. To develop more professional cookery skills Oldham residents have to travel to Manchester, Tameside or Rochdale. To be a lead cook in care or a chef beyond a general assistant most employers would look for a level 3 qualification. In addition to the food service sector when we consider Oldham's ambitions around Advanced Manufacturing and the Green Economy we also have an absence of HE or FE offers around food technology, science or engineering. Oldham therefore has to compete to attract the skilled labour for it to advance. There are courses in Enterprise and Entrepreneurship connected with Create:Oldham and Oldham Enterprise Trust who supports young entrepreneurs. We would like to see this developed to incubate more food and beverage operators and technology companies.

Northern Roots and their work with Oldham College developing an enhanced horticulture programme offers a real synergy which can develop as the site develops. Northern Roots will offer really practical opportunities to learn, but also an affordable way to manage some of the maintenance that the site will require. This partnership with Northern Roots and Oldham College coupled with the relationship Northern Roots has with the University of Salford provides a good foundation to perhaps consider other formal

education routes which could help develop Oldham residents. Food doesn't just offer entry level jobs but more could be done to develop the workforce opening up senior, management or technical positions that are already required in the borough. Consider food manufacturing, digital service and technology companies, laboratories, breweries, nutrition and regulatory services, food service development and management, research and procurement.

Acknowledging where Oldham is currently at with formal training routes, we have sought to ascertain where there may be opportunities for Oldham. What is happening or not happening elsewhere in GM? What strengths does Oldham have from its assets, development plans, strategic priorities and people such as its spirit of entrepreneurship and diversity. But also its weaknesses; Aspirations aren't perhaps where we would like them to be in more deprived communities; there are some flagship employers but too much dependence on the Council and healthcare for employment; there aren't many self-employed business operators in the borough, which is a surprise given the spirit of entrepreneurship in the borough. More home-grown talent that is incubated, grows and scales up in Oldham has the potential to employ more people at a range of salary levels, contribute to local wealth and be shaped in a way which is more sustainable and delivers enhanced social value.

**Food and digital.** Food is one of societies fundamentals, it is accessible and provides a great social focus. In order to raise Oldham's food profile, champion good food and increase food skills there needs to be a great deal of communications and marketing content. However, with budgetary constraints, the impact of Covid (positive and negative) a more appropriate methodology and outcome would be to improve food and digital skills in the borough, producing content through learning whilst also build a social movement of engaged and skilled food enthusiasts across the borough. This would be a great fit with building the Northern Roots brand, Create:Oldham and help to improve the digital presence, develop creative food content (such as vlogs and recipes) and help to improve food skills, healthy lifestyle knowledge in a diverse and accessible way. Many people have taught themselves how to cook through online content during lockdown and through the Made in Oldham brand we aim broaden out and share different food heritages and histories in a manner which unites and builds a shared passion and a culture of good food in Oldham.

**Procurement.** Through the Local Wealth Building work led by Oldham Council the thinking has already been done about how we can support more Oldham based SMEs to access public sector contracts. Sustainable Food Procurement Policy and the associated working group is a useful tool and platform to bring all public sector procurement together sharing good practice and providing support on contracting, systems and suppliers. The flagship School Food Service which holds the Gold Food for Life accreditation is a leader in this field and can form the core knowledge base in which to further develop policy across the public sector and key anchor institutions. From a food perspective when we consider the food chain from farm to fork it isn't just the wholesaler that should be considered who tenders for the contract. To enhance social value and sustainability it is possible to consider the farmer, processor/manufacturer in understanding how we can enhance local prosperity throughout the supply chain. Oldham has 78 farms keeping livestock - it is not known how many of these animals end up being consumed in Oldham. With EU exit and climate change, what we eat needs to be more in step with what we produce to enhance food security. Pilot projects looking to see how we can work with more local producers and link them with public sector procurement would look to build local prosperity and food security. Through working with current suppliers, for example Oldham beef farmers, existing processors and wholesalers to establish how the food chain could be shortened and operated in a manner which would deliver most value to the farmers, processor/wholesaler

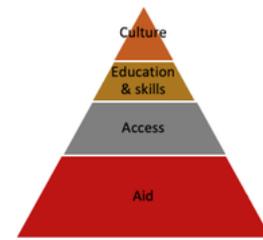
and the consumers based in Oldham. We expect financially this would likely be more expensive as a lot of meat is imported, however, in the drive to create more planetary diets, a shift to less meat but of a better quality could be an effective strategy. There is work underway at GM level through GMCA and GMHSCP to look at dynamic procurement systems linked to food category purchasing but more work needs to be done at local level to understand what is produced locally and how we can get it on the plate in schools and other institutional settings.

## Food Security

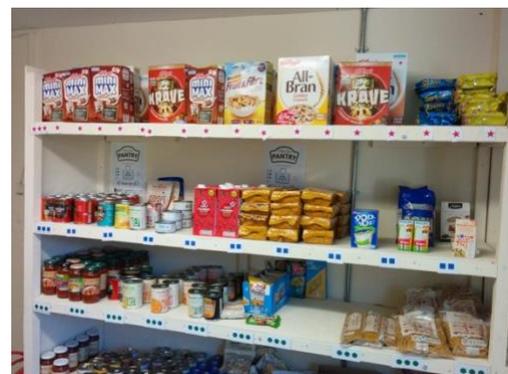
Much of the work done in this area has been reactive, driven by the need to assist people in poverty. Covid-19 has highlighted this challenge in ensuring people in food poverty do not go hungry. However, people experiencing poverty is now an even larger problem, coupled with poor diet and the link between obesity and Covid-19 mortality. The importance of tackling food poverty and improving the healthiness of diets has never been more poignant.

*“Food security exists when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life”*

We have reviewed the food landscape in Oldham to develop a model approach which has been used to bring partners and stakeholders together over a common aim. With an eye on mechanisms which can be used to seek to tackle food poverty and move to food security we focus on four key elements: Food Culture, Education and Skills, Food Access and Food Aid. This is an illustration of the current position:



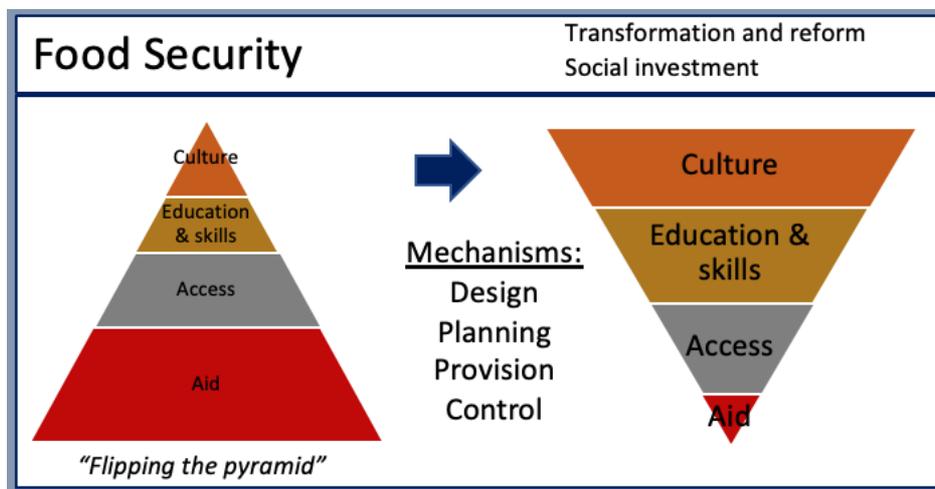
- **Food Aid** – The largest and most significant area of focus, being made available in many forms in many locations across the borough.
- **Food Access** – There are many different outlets operating in Oldham, from food banks, wider food redistribution schemes/social models to mainstream retail. The retail is largely dominated by a duopoly from Tesco and Asda. In addition to these areas, public sector and anchor institutions catering services are key to ensure all residents have access to good food throughout their daily lives. Beyond the built environment, adequate systems to ensure strong uptake of healthy start vouchers, free school meals, community food and other provision to ensure children start well, live well and age well across Oldham.
- **Education and skills** – Skill level is considered in commercial and domestic terms and formal and informal education routes. Skill level and learning varies significantly across the borough. Some food skills are passed down through generations, others aren't. But when these skills are lost, we



need to ensure people reacquire them. We need to ensure people can budget, get the best value for their budget, prepare and cook food in a manner which provides a healthy and nutritious diet.

- **Food Culture** – One of the big obstacles to overcome is the interest in food and passion for good food when convenience, headspace and cost are such big factors. Covid-19 has given rise to more people cooking from scratch, eating as a family and using local provision. Passion for good food, cooked from scratch is the default for many in the borough but conversely the opposite is also true with people solely looking at food as fuel. Through the promotion of holistic healthy food cultures, through schools, hospitals, care homes, nurseries, workplaces etc we can begin to build components of good food culture, layering them and increasing individuals exposure to good food that developed to be appealing, tasty, affordable, convenient, sustainable and healthy.

To build a more food secure system we have to look to flip this pyramid into a model which is more just, sustainable and financially viable.



In the coming months there needs to be a transition to a solution that seeks to build a system which is more resilient and robust. Partners across the public sector, VCFSE and business sector have come together to shift the dynamics and reduce the demand on food aid projects. A multi-agency Food Security Steering Group (reporting to the Food Partnership Board) has been assembled to begin working on this shift. Over time the Food Security Steering Group should look to be part of the Food Power, End Hunger UK or Feeding Britain initiatives.

A more food secure system for Oldham looks to build on its strengths, local assets and opportunities arising from complementary workstreams both within the Council and through its wider cooperative partners.

### **Culture**

Oldham has a diverse population with diversity in food culture and heritage. We need to embrace this and bring together food based values which people are passionate about. Through authentic sharing of food cultures within and across communities we can build appreciation and a deeper understanding of how we can unite people through food, improving diets and practices which are healthier, less wasteful, affordable and locally rooted. We must consider the strength and skills within our communities: there is a wealth of knowledge but most people still have a lot they can learn from each other. For example;

- Cooking for single households or cooking for three generations in a household
- How to buy food to get the best value
- How to make the food you eat healthier
- Cooking for children or the elderly
- Convenience food for people on the go which is cheap and nutritious

Lives change and so do individual needs. We all need different things in our lives at different stages and as such our food knowledge and skills needs to expand to ensure Oldham residents and the businesses that serve them can help ensure that have all people have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life now and in the future. Programmes such as Get Oldham Growing and Made in Oldham are significant contributors to this work area.

### *Education and skills*

Community based education and more formal education opportunities need to match the breadth and depth of the ambition around food across the borough. Formal qualifications to enhance the catering, leisure and hospitality sector, coupled with on the job training will help businesses succeed and provide good employment opportunities. Strong business management and sustainability skills in the food sector will become increasingly important now and in the future. There is an opportunity for Oldham to consider this as part of formal educational routes but also through flagship schemes such as Northern Roots.

At community level, the provision of food courses which help people budget, plan and shop for their food as well as know how to cook it are particularly useful where those skills have previously been lost. Making training and development accessible and inclusive through the use of online videos, physical sessions at community centres and engaging the business community enables as many people as possible who would like to access information in different way get involved. Teaching people how to cook is resource intensive and due to the complex nature of people's lives this isn't always successful as behaviours and habits are often ingrained. A range and blend of resources and opportunities that are easy to access, blended with snippets of useful information in other programmes and schemes will help reach people in a range of ways.

### *Access*

Food Access is concerned with the ability to source food which is affordable, nutritious and meets the religious and cultural needs of the consumer. Food provision across the borough needs to be mapped against need. Increasing numbers of people are in poverty and as such mainstream retail is insufficient in meeting the affordability needs of the population. A range of opportunities to source food more cheaply, stretching budgets have been developed, many of which are present in Oldham such as food surplus redistribution models. This includes membership schemes such as The Bread and Butter Thing and pantries stocked by Fareshare and community fridges stocked through local food donations. Work is underway to map provision of food aid projects and surplus redistribution models and look to expand these with the support from Oldham's housing providers. These redistribution models are essential with assisting people to move beyond emergency food provision and find a route out of crisis. The provision of Community Support Agriculture building on Get Oldham Growing and link to Northern Roots can work in a small scale way to help supplement diets with fresh produce through helping out on the land with growers. This is an area that needs further exploration.

The next stage in developing a more robust food access model is to consider what and how we purchase food. As previously mentioned a significant amount of food retail spend goes to Tesco and Asda. Increasing the range and diversity of food retail, especially in smaller format stores, working along the principles of neighbourhood planning could look to provide a greater social return to consumers in Oldham. The range and availability of foods for different cuisines is quite fractured, grouped in retail by ethnicity rather than food category. For the Oldham population to have a diverse and integrated food culture more could be done to merge food offerings based on the type of food rather than the ethnicity of consumer. Stores catering for a wider customer base will potentially access foods at a better price in bulk, break down marketing and branding stereotypes, giving rise to more food purchasing freedom, choice and personal control. There is a role here for increasing the number, format and structure of food businesses operating commercially or as social enterprises to fill the gaps identified through neighbourhood planning principles.

Beyond that is the role of caterers across the public sector and our anchor institutions. Providing good food that is affordable, nutritious, tasty and convenient in schools, colleges, hospitals, care homes, nurseries and sports clubs across the borough would touch the vast majority of the population of Oldham in some way. There is work to do here to unite caterers and build on the great work of Oldham's School Meals service. A caterers' working group would be a good place to start to explore how more of the borough's caterers could support each other to improve standards, increase sustainability and promote health.

The last aspect to consider is the role of food clubs (formerly known as luncheon clubs) providing hot meals to people in communities to reduce isolation. They are particularly effective in reducing malnutrition and feelings of loneliness in older people, new parents and refugees and asylum seekers. Provision of these food clubs and their target communities needs to be mapped to better understand who they are catering for and what impact they have on their local communities. By providing greater understanding of their local population and the need they are serving will help them position themselves more effectively to receive funding with charitable donors. Corporate Social Responsibility and local grant funding are good mechanisms to keep this sector buoyant.

### *Aid*

Food aid in the borough is to support people in crisis offering emergency food parcels. To reduce the medium and long term need on crisis support a Food Security Steering Group has been formed.

The purpose of the Steering Group is to bring together key delivery partners in Oldham, to:

- Take a pragmatic lead on food security in Oldham, focusing on action and delivering change
- Clarify what this means for the four elements of the food security pyramid
- Identify other key stakeholders, gaps in our intelligence, and links with other agendas

In doing this, the Steering Group needs to:

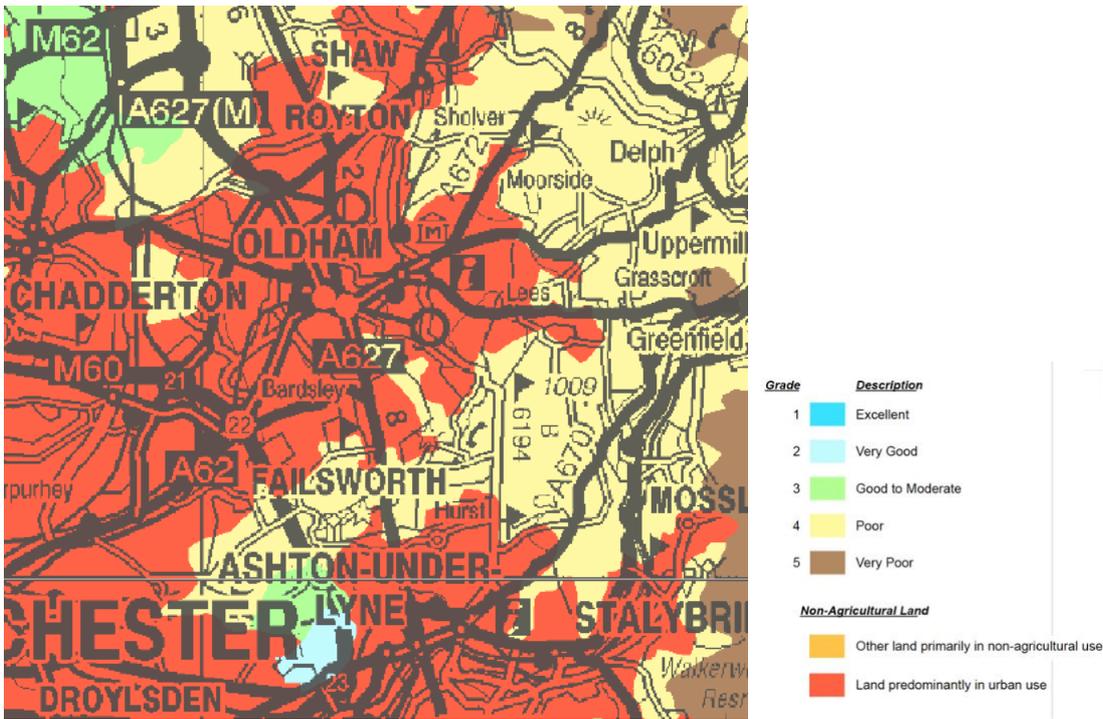
- Address social justice elements of food, such as reducing health inequalities and treating all people with respect
- Ensure people can access healthy food and find information about cooking healthy meals without stigma
- Focus on moving people out of food poverty and into a place of food security



### Wider factors influencing food security in Oldham

Food Security is a pressing concern now, but in the future climate change will threaten global food security. For this reason we need to increase Oldham's food sustainability by reducing the environmental effects of the way we produce and consume food. Reducing waste, eating locally and seasonally, and taking a balanced view as to how we shift the system to make diets more sustainable whilst being inclusive and socially just. Oldham has declared a Climate Emergency and as such there is work to be done to embed planetary diet focus into Food Security, recognising the contribution Get Oldham Growing and Made in Oldham makes in this transition.

Land use – much of Oldham's land quality is poor or very poor when we consider the agricultural land classification system maps. As such, much of the land in agricultural service is used for raising livestock and not growing produce or cereals at scale. For the community to have access fresh produce, there needs to be a network of hyper-local community focused sites and a good network of retail which has strong supply chains. To build food security for Oldham with regard to healthier and more sustainable diets, one solution would be to use more high-tech growing solutions such as hydroponics where this can be done in a viable and low carbon manner. This opportunity has been further explored through the Northern Roots project. High-tech food growing could increase productivity, create skilled jobs and improve access to healthy foods if designed and developed in a way which maximises economic and social returns.



Source Agricultural Land Classification map North West Region (ALC002)

Despite Oldham’s land quality being poor, much can be done to improve diets and make them more planetary focused. Shifting diets to ones which focus on fresh, unprocessed, seasonal, local, organic, less and better quality local meat and dairy, high animal welfare, Fairtrade, sustainable fish and champion campaigns such as the Real Bread campaign but this transition should focus on what is right for the people of Oldham. Prioritising fresh and unprocessed foods which increase the uptake of vegetables and better quality meat whilst being affordable, tasty and convenient should be central to add food programmes, training and campaigns.

Waste is a major issue, predominately in homes but also in the supply chain. There is much work to be done in training and skills development in reducing waste, understanding date coding and how to use everything which is purchased. Wasting food is bad for the environment and also bad for household finances. By reducing waste, food budgets can go further and reduce their negative environmental consequences. By working on the Made in Oldham brand and Get Oldham Growing we aim to increase the importance of food and societies perception as to its value. Programmes developed through partners such as WRAP e.g Love Food Hate Waste offer useful tools to bolt onto existing food training and community skills development sessions. Ensuring the Food Waste Hierachy is incorporated into existing policies and strategies to reduce food and packaging waste eliminates food waste from landfill and ensures surplus food and food waste are diverted into the most appropriate purposes. Continuing the domestic food waste collection schemes and encouraging businesses to actively manage their waste so that edible food surplus is redistributed and waste is collected and used to feed animals, generate energy or nutrients in more circular economy models.

## Implementing the strategy and taking action

1. The Food Partnership needs to be established based on parties identified from the original GOFA partnership but with increased representation from the three themes of the food strategy. Appoint a chair and members in line with the Terms of Reference.
2. Establish resource, budgets and timelines based on the strategy and action plan.
3. Prioritise the draft action plan and formalise what actions to be taken by who and when.
4. Establish a communications and reporting structure.
5. Liaise with SFP around the strategy and action plan.
6. Participate in regional and national knowledge exchange platforms.

## Conclusion

There has been a significant amount of good work around food in Oldham over the years as highlighted by the Bronze Sustainable Food Place award. However, we are in a new era, one of challenges presented by the pandemic, climate change and Brexit through to obesity, failing high streets, unemployment and inequalities. Food – both as a basic human need, as a commodity and as a system in how we produce and consume it has a significant part to play. By unlocking the potential in working differently through food we can build a more prosperous, healthy, greener and fair society for everyone.