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Theme 3: The West Sussex Food System and its Wider Influences

Chapter 6: Food Availability and Access in West Sussex

Contents

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This chapter discusses food availability and access in West Sussex, starting with UK-level food supply and retail trends, moving to local patterns and then to system-level and place-based solutions. It defines core concepts, reviews UK food supply and retail alignment with the Eatwell Guide and presents local analyses of supermarket distribution, fast-food exposure and the community food system. The Priority Places for Food Index (PPFI) then highlights neighbourhood-specific barriers to healthy food availability and access in West Sussex.

Food availability and access strongly influence dietary habits, nutrition and health; limited access may make a nutritious diet unattainable, with choices shaped by what is available. The chapter concludes with areas of focus to improve availability and access - such as planning and regulation, transport and community/household growing - framed within the Creating Healthy and Sustainable Places Framework and local initiatives. This chapter links to Chapter 7 (Food as a Commercial Determinant of Health), Chapter 8 (Food Poverty) and Chapter 10 (Food and Climate in West Sussex).

Summary

Food availability

- Food availability refers to the physical presence of sufficient quantities of food of appropriate quality Food availability refers to the physical presence of sufficient quantities of food of appropriate quality within a given area or population.
- The UK produces ~60% of the food it consumes.[1] Domestic supply is stronger for staples (grains, meat, dairy) and more import-dependent for fresh fruit/veg and seafood. National production is regionally concentrated. Therefore, West Sussex's food supply is at risk from threats to international, national and regional production.
- The UK retail environment does not align with the Eatwell Guide. Across store types, foods high in fat, sugar or salt (HFSS) remain overrepresented relative to dietary recommendations.[2] This is despite the Soft Drinks Industry Levy (2016) and the Food (Promotion and Placement) Regulations (2021). 19% of products sold in three leading UK supermarkets are still HFSS, well above the recommended 8%.[3]
- In West Sussex, per capita supermarket availability is broadly comparable across districts (0.20–0.29 per 1,000). Worthing has the highest rate of supermarkets per 1,000 and Adur the lowest. However, per capita rates mask variations in store size, geographic distribution, transport and affordability.
- Other local/sustainable retail sources are currently being mapped by food partnerships across West Sussex. The Sussex Six campaign encourages local pubs, restaurants and retail businesses to source at least six locally produced food and drink items, supporting local suppliers, boosting the regional economy and reducing food-related carbon footprints.[4] To date, the campaign has added over 636 local products across 106 local businesses.[5]
- Fast-food outlet exposure is lower than the England average at county level (West Sussex: 86.3 outlets per 100,000, England: 115.9 per 100,000). However, exposure varies locally (e.g. Worthing highest, Horsham lowest) and is denser in urban areas. Proximity to schools is common, one-third of West Sussex schools are

within a 5 minute walk of a fast-food outlet; more deprived neighbourhoods have a higher number of fast-food outlets, warranting targeted regulation.
- There is currently no single, county-wide dataset of community food projects in West Sussex but these projects are being mapped across the county.

Food access

- Food accessibility refers to the ease with which individuals or communities can obtain adequate, nutritious, and culturally appropriate food and includes physical access, economic access and social and cultural access.
- The Priority Places for Food Index (PPFI) identifies neighbourhoods that lack access to healthy, affordable food.[6] In West Sussex, Crawley has the highest concentration of priority places, followed by the coastal strip (Bognor, Littlehampton and Worthing).
- While several West Sussex neighbourhoods fall within the top 10% of priority places nationally, the barriers to access vary by place. For example, one South Crawley neighbourhood is close to a supermarket but faces significant socioeconomic constraints, whereas a similarly ranked East Crawley neighbourhood has fewer socioeconomic barriers but is less proximate to a supermarket.
- Local food supply and access to healthy food can be increased by growing more food in 'urban agriculture, gardens, allotments and community settings'.[7]
- Food growing and gardening, whether individual or communal, provide multiple benefits for people and places including improved fruit and vegetable intake, increased physical activity, improved mental wellbeing, increased biodiversity and greater social inclusion.[8-11]
- In the UK, around 12% of households lack access to a private or shared garden.[12] There are sociodemographic inequalities in garden access, with people from the Black ethnic group and young people having worse access. Access is poorer in certain neighbourhoods in West Sussex. 37% of households lack access to a garden in Heene (Worthing) and 21% in Manor royal & Northgate (Crawley).[12] This limits opportunities for household food growing and demonstrates the value of community growing projects and promoting garden space through planning standards.
- Barriers to community food growing include land availability and tenure, time pressures, knowledge, confidence, startup costs, infrastructure limitations, funding and environmental concerns.

Assets which support a shift towards a healthier food environment

- **System-level levers:** WSCC's Creating Healthy and Sustainable Places Framework and the Healthy Places Workstream supports Local Planning Authorities in reviewing Health Impact Assessments and neighbourhood plans and in working towards developing hot food takeaway guidance; planning policy leads can use it to embed healthy retail and growing spaces in plans/designs.[13]

- **Place-based actions to build local supply and access:** Targeted transport and outreach (e.g. community transport, mobile food buses, popup pantries) to bring produce into priority neighbourhoods. Community and household growing (expand gardens, allotments, orchards, school gardens and community supported agriculture schemes). Alongside advice, support and assistance for new growers and food producers to access land and start sustainable food businesses.

- **Support coordination through mapping:** Complete and standardise community food mapping and use PPFI for prioritisation.

- **Infrastructure & logistics for resilient local supply chains:** Safeguard and strengthen local processing capacity (such as the region's last small abattoir, Downland Traditional Meats Limited in Henfield). Improve logistics systems for local food distribution and sales. This could enable local growers to spend more time focusing on food production and less time transporting/selling, while also reducing food waste.

Defining Food Availability

Food availability is 'the availability of sufficient quantities of food of appropriate quality, supplied through domestic production or imports'.[14] It is determined by the supply of raw ingredients entering food production, the volume of food reaching the market (via domestic production and imports), the geographic distribution of that food and the infrastructure through which consumers can access it, such as retail or distribution venues.[15]

Retail Food Environment: Food Deserts and Swamps

While availability describes the overall supply landscape, the retail food environment shapes what people can *practically* obtain in their neighbourhoods. Retail food refers to food items sold for-profit in retail settings such as supermarkets, markets, convenience stores and independent shops, both in-store and online.

Food deserts and food swamps represent two geographic factors which contribute to inequalities in retail food availability and access.

Food deserts

Food deserts are areas with few or no shopping facilities that offer affordable and nutritious food. These areas are characterised by a lack of supermarkets or large grocery stores within practical travel distance, which often forces residents to rely on smaller, more expensive convenience stores with limited fresh produce.[16]

Food swamps

Food swamps are areas with a high density of outlets selling calorie-dense, fast-foods relative to healthier options. These areas are associated with increased risk of adult and childhood obesity.[17]

Defining Food Access

Food access refers to people's ability to access 'adequate resources (entitlements) for acquiring appropriate foods for a nutritious diet'.[14] Access depends on both physical proximity to food outlets and the economic capacity to afford nutritious food.

The factors affecting household access to food include[18]:

Food affordability and income

- Household income and benefit adequacy
- Food prices and price volatility

- Cost of healthy food versus cheaper, energy-dense food

Physical access to shops

- Access to transport (private vehicle ownership, reliability and cost of public transport)
- Rural location (lower shop density, longer travel times, weaker transport infrastructure)
- Accessibility for disabled people (store layout, assistance, accessible transport)
- Accessibility for older people (mobility, safety)

Online access to shops

- Access to devices, connectivity and digital literacy; risks of digital exclusion
- Delivery coverage and slot availability (some rural areas lack reliable delivery services)
- Minimum order values and delivery fees

Acceptability and dietary requirements

- Access to culturally appropriate food
- Access to foods for modified diets

Defining Food Security

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"[14]

Food availability and access are two out of the four pillars of food security. The other two pillars are food utilisation and food stability.

Food utilisation refers to the use of food 'through adequate diet, clean water, sanitation and health care to reach a state of nutritional well-being where all physiological needs are met'.[14] Themes 1 and 2 of this health needs assessment touch on aspects of food utilisation.

Food stability is achieved when access to healthy food is maintained at all times and is not impacted by economic, seasonal or climate related shocks.[14] Many factors can impact the stability of food supplies such as climate change, the emergence of new diseases and pests, conflict, growing and aging populations and socioeconomic factors influencing the cost of food production. Chapter 10 will discuss the climate related factors affecting food stability.

Food insecurity occurs when people lack access to the quality and quantity of food required to live a healthy life. This topic and the state of food insecurity in the UK and West Sussex is covered in detail in Chapter 8.

Food Availability

The food available to consumers depends on food supply chains and the availability of places to obtain food. This section first outlines the UK food supply, then examines the retail food environment, including fastfood outlets, and community food projects.

UK Food Supply

Domestic food production refers to food grown, raised, or processed within the UK, at commercial, community or household scale. The UK produces around 60% of the food it consumes.[1] Domestic supply is stronger for staples (e.g. grains, meat, dairy, eggs) and more import-dependent for fresh fruit, vegetables and seafood. Approximately 85% of fruit and 47% of vegetables sold in the UK are imported and domestic production of both fell by about 1% in 2024 compared with 2023.[19]

Domestic production is regionally concentrated. For example, the South East of England produces close to 50% of top and soft fruit and hosts roughly 25% of national glasshouse capacity for protected edibles and ornamentals.[20] Within the South East, West Sussex is a high-productivity horticulture hub that generates around £1billion in annual sales and supports over 10,000 full-time equivalent jobs.[20] West Sussex accounts for 23.01% of UK horticulture value while containing only 7% of UK horticulture businesses.[20]

UK food supply is exposed to regional, national and international risks to food production and distribution. Recent threats including supply chain disruptions, rising inflation, labour shortages, climate change and increasing operational costs have led to higher food prices and intermittent shortages.[21] Some of these issues are discussed further in Chapter 10: Food and Climate in West Sussex.

The National Preparedness Commission released a report in 2025 outlining ways to increase resilience against threats to food availability.[7] Local options for building resilience in West Sussex are set out later in this chapter.

Retail Food

In 2021, 11 supermarket chains controlled around 95% of the UK retail food market.[22] Supermarkets can be divided into several categories depending on their size and target markets[2]:

- **Traditional convenience stores** – these stores are small, providing a limited range of food and household products. They tend to offer limited parking and extended opening hours. Examples include Tesco Metro and Sainsbury's Local.

- **Extended convenience stores** – these stores are larger than traditional convenience stores and offer a wider range of products, including fresh food counters. They tend to offer more parking. Examples include Lidl and Aldi.

- **Superstores** – these are the largest supermarkets with more extensive parking. They offer a much wider range of food and other services such as pharmacies and travel agents. Many are open 24/7. Examples include Tesco and Asda.

Given that over 80% of our calories in the UK are purchased from supermarkets, the availability of these stores and the foods they stock significantly influence dietary intake.[23]

Alignment of the retail food environment with public health recommendations for healthy eating

The Eatwell Guide, as previously discussed in this needs assessment, is a visual representation of a healthy, balanced diet, dividing food into five main groups: fruits and vegetables, starchy carbohydrates, protein, dairy and healthy fats. It emphasises consuming a variety of foods from each group and reducing intake of foods high in fat, salt and sugar.[24] The mix of products available in UK supermarkets is not proportional to their contribution in the diet recommended by the Eatwell Guide.[2]

A 2015 analysis of 41,194 food and drink products sold across 12 UK supermarkets (4 stores from each category above) found that, on average, 36% of products available were high in fat and/or sugar.[2] In contrast, the Eatwell Guide recommends that no more than 8% of our diet should comprise of foods high in fat and/or sugar.[24]

Figure. 1. Percentage of supermarket foods and drinks in each food group by supermarket type compared with the Eatwell plate, reproduced from 'Does the food retail environment reflect UK public health recommendations for healthy eating?'[2] (The Eatwell plate is the visual representation of a healthy plate of food provided in the Eatwell Guide)

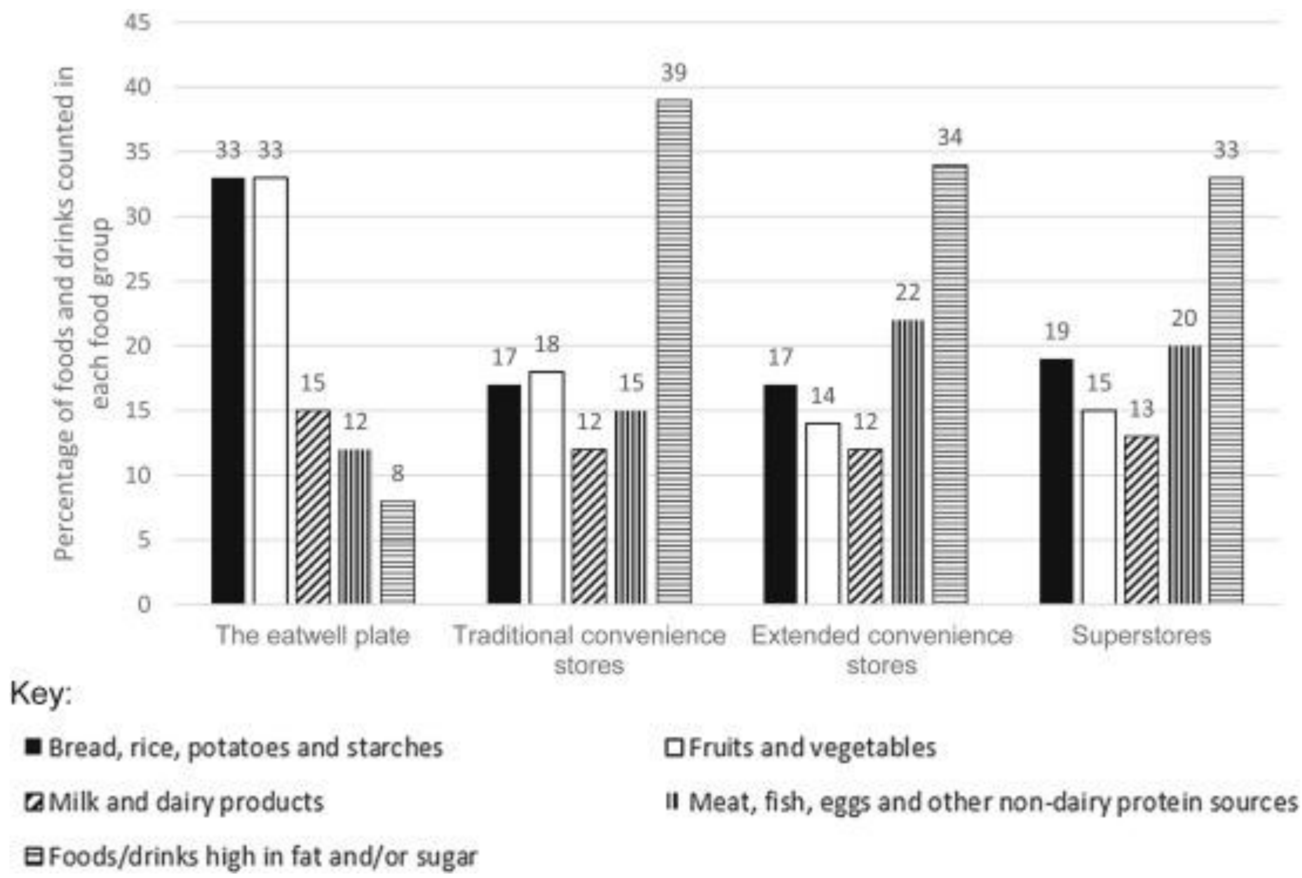


Figure 1 illustrates how the proportion of foods available by group varied by supermarket type. Traditional convenience stores had the highest share of foods high in fat and/or sugar (39%).[2] Extended convenience stores had the lowest share of fruit and vegetables and all store types fell below the Eatwell Guide's recommendation of 33% for fruit and vegetables.[2] These findings indicate that healthier options are underrepresented across store types and that the local mix of store types could further limit access to healthy foods. Further detail on retail practices and their relationship to the commercial determinants of health is provided in Chapter 7.

Since 2015, several measures have aimed to curb sales of unhealthy foods, including the Soft Drinks Industry Levy (2016) and the Food (Promotion and Placement) Regulations (2021). While research shows regulations have led to a statistically significant reduction in sales of foods high in fat, sugar or salt (HFSS), 19% of products sold in three leading UK supermarkets are still HFSS – an improvement on 2015 levels but well above the 8% benchmark.[3]

As part of the 10 Year Health Plan, the UK government has proposed a healthy food standard for large food manufacturers and retailers to 'make the average shopping basket of goods sold slightly healthier'.[25] It is estimated that reducing average daily intake by '50 calories would lift 340,000 children and 2 million adults out of obesity'.[25]

Unfortunately, healthier options remain underrepresented across store types and policy measures have not yet closed the gap with Eatwell recommendations. Ultimately, what households can buy is shaped by the number, type and location of stores within practical reach.

Supermarket availability in West Sussex

Local analysis of the food environment has examined the number and distribution of major national chain supermarkets in West Sussex. Key points from this analysis are shown below.

Table 1 provides an overview of the number and rate (per 1,000 population) of major national chain supermarkets across West Sussex, using the Food Environment Assessment Tool (FEAT) inclusion criteria for supermarkets, which they define as 'major national chain supermarkets, both small- and large-format stores, operated by Tesco, Sainsbury's, Asda, Morrisons Aldi, Lidl, The Co-operative, Waitrose and Iceland'.[26] The FEAT tool uses Food Standards Agency (FSA) food hygiene rating data to map the location of places where food is supplied or sold directly to people, such as supermarkets, at a local level. Rates per population were calculated using 2023 mid-year population estimates (latest available at time of writing).

The analysis was based on a snapshot of the Food Standards Agency Food Hygiene Rating Scheme open data (accessed June 2025), from which we filtered premises to those meeting FEAT's supermarket inclusion criteria. Counts were then compared to the number on the FEAT tool, as of June 2025. FEAT does not show whether retail outlets sell healthy food options but it allows us to map, measure and monitor access to retail food outlets at a neighbourhood level. As this data is a pointintime snapshot, findings may be affected by recent supermarket openings/closures.

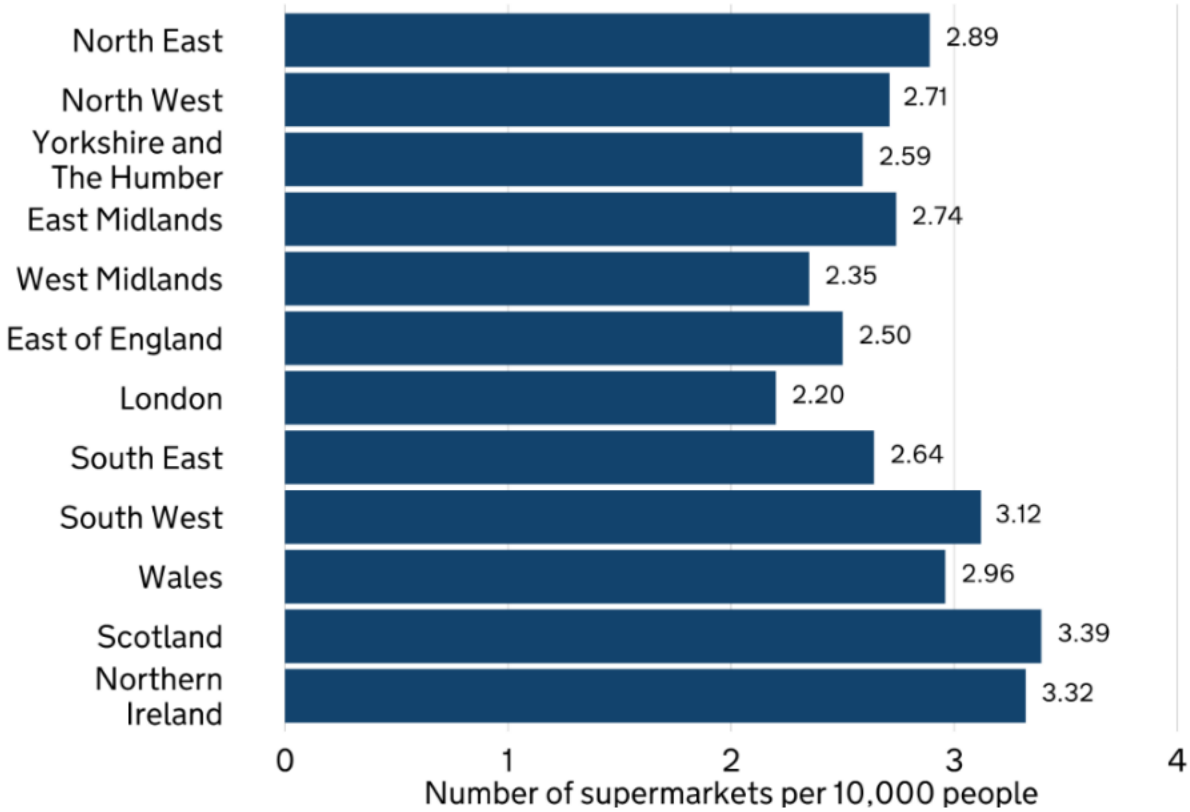
Table 1 - Number of major national chain supermarkets per 1000 population in West Sussex.

Area	**Number of major national chain supermarkets**	**Mid-Year Estimates 2022 population**	**Rate per 1,000 population**
Adur	13	64,687	0.20
Arun	38	168,008	0.23
Chichester	31	128,003	0.24
Crawley	26	120,545	0.22
Horsham	33	149,464	0.22
Mid Sussex	33	157,915	0.21
Worthing	32	112,240	0.29
West Sussex	206	900,862	0.23
Source: FSA FHRS data (accessed June 2025) and ONS Mid-Year Population Estimates - June 2023 *Major supermarkets refer to national chain supermarkets, both small and large format stores, operated by Tesco, Sainsburys, Asda, Morrisons, Aldi, Lidl, Co-op, Waitrose and Iceland.*			

Worthing has the highest per-capita availability of major supermarkets in West Sussex (0.28 per 1,000), whereas Adur has the lowest (0.20 per 1,000). Variation across districts is relatively narrow (0.20–0.29), suggesting broadly comparable availability of national chain supermarkets.

The most recently available data for the UK, published in The United Kingdom Food Security Report 2024, shows that the average number of supermarkets per 1,000 in the South East is 0.26.[18] Figure 2 shows how the South East compares to the rest of the UK. The data in Figure 2 is based on the Supermarket Retail Points released by GEOLYTIX, which uses a different definition of supermarkets than FEAT.[27] This limits our ability to make comparisons between the rates in Table 1 and Figure 2.

Figure 2 – Number of supermarkets per 10,000 people in the UK by English region and county 2023 – reproduced from the United Kingdom Food Security report 2024 [18]



While per-capita availability is a useful proxy for access to a supermarket, it does not capture:

- Store size (linked to type of food on offer, as discussed above)
- Geographic distribution
- Cross-boundary shopping (people using stores in neighbouring districts)
- Car ownership/transport, opening hours, or price differences (access)
- Independent and non-chain retailers (excluded by definition)

For example, while Chichester has the second highest rate of supermarkets per 1,000 population in West Sussex (0.24), it also has the lowest population density of the districts within West Sussex.[28] Low population density means people are more spread out across the district and this may impact how close they live to the available supermarkets, thus impacting their access to these retail spaces.

Proximity to a supermarket is important, as smaller retailers generally carry a limited range of affordable food. A 2023 study by Which? reported that the majority of small local shops 'did not stock essential budget line items, meaning that the cheapest options are not available to people reliant on their local shops'.[18]

Local research has looked at the geographic distribution of supermarkets in West Sussex. This can be compared to the distribution of rural and urban output areas.

An output area is the smallest geographical area used for census statistics. An urban area has a population >= 10,000. All other output areas are rural, these are determined as smaller or larger based on population density. Output areas are also classified based on their distance to a major town or city. These two forms of classification can be combined:

- Smaller rural: Further form a major town or city
- Smaller rural: Nearer to a major town or city
- Larger rural: Further form a major town or city
- Larger rural: Nearer to a major town or city
- Urban: Further form a major town or city
- Urban: Nearer to a major town or city

Figure 3 shows these classifications applied to West Sussex. Figure 4 shows the location of supermarkets across West Sussex in 2025, based on the inclusion criteria used by FEAT.

When compared side by side, these maps demonstrate how the distribution of supermarkets is concentrated in urban and larger rural areas within West Sussex.

Figure 3 - Combined Classification of West Sussex Output Areas 2021 – reproduced from West Sussex 2021 Rural Urban Classification Dashboard[29]

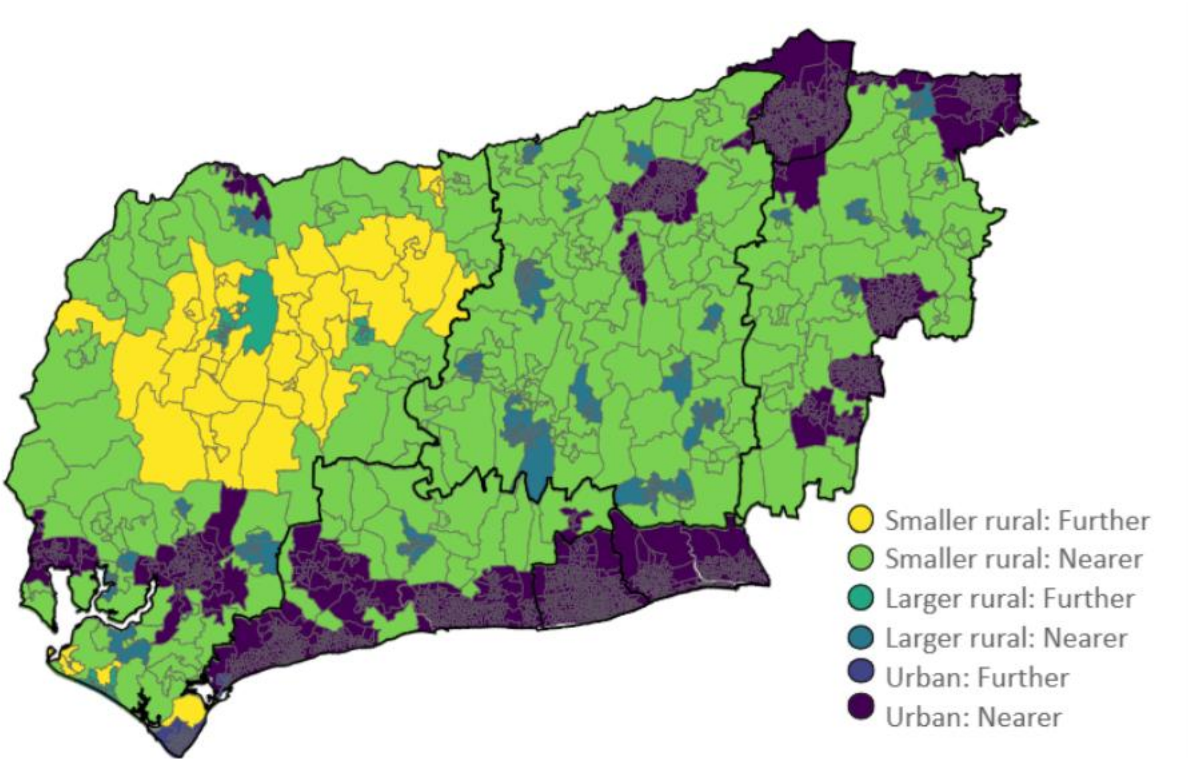
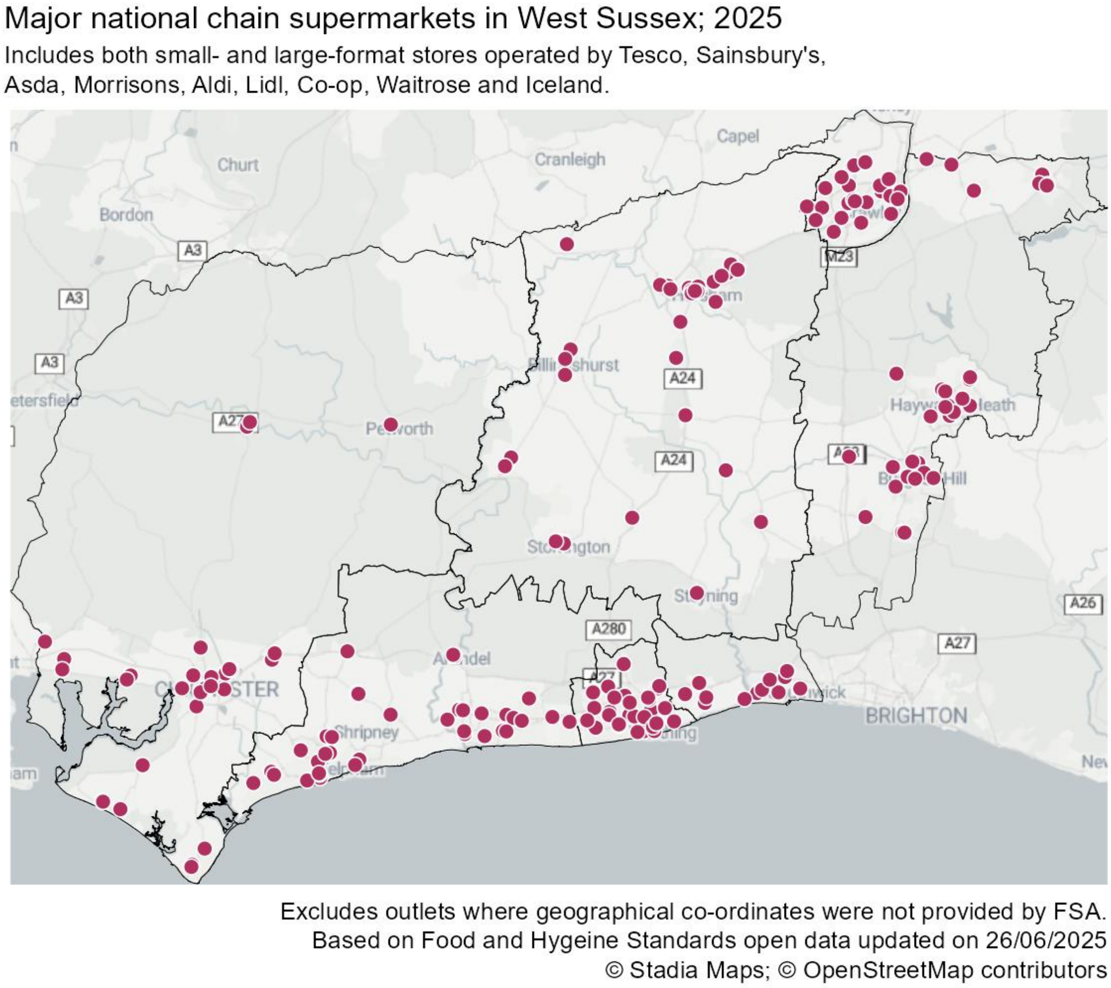


Figure 4 – Geographical distribution of major national chain supermarkets in West Sussex.



Other sources of retail food in West Sussex

Across West Sussex, there are many places to buy local and sustainable produce, including farmers' markets and independent retailers. Mapping exercises to better understand where these retail spaces are and what they offer have been completed or are being undertaken in all of the districts and boroughs across West Sussex. These maps (see later in this chapter) provide a baseline for availability and help pinpoint gaps and opportunities for growth.

Sussex Six is one such opportunity running across Horsham, Chichester and Mid-Sussex. This campaign encourages local pubs, restaurants and retailers to stock more locally sourced produce and supports producers to sell proactively to local businesses.[4] Participating businesses commit to 'sourcing six (or more) new food and drink products from local suppliers'.[5] To date, 106 businesses have signed the pledge and over 636 Sussex products have been added to shops and menus across the three districts.[5] While the pledge does not guarantee that locally sourced food is healthier than previous offerings, it delivers other benefits, such as supporting the local economy and reducing the carbon footprint of food. Wealden District Council (East Sussex) has approached the campaign to explore wider roll-out, indicating strong regional interest in scaling the model.[5]

Fast-Food

Fast-food outlets offer quick, low-cost meals; however, these options are often energy-dense – high in calories, salt and unhealthy fats – and low in vitamins, fruit, vegetables and fibre. As a result, regularly eating at fast-food restaurants makes it extremely difficult to follow a healthy diet.

Fast-food outlets in West Sussex

In February 2025, the Office for Health Improvement and Disparities (OHID) updated an indicator within its 'Wider Determinants of Health' profile, which provided a summary of the rate of fast-food outlets per 100,000 population.[30] This was based on data from the Food Standards Agency's (FSA) Food Hygiene Rating Scheme as of February 2024.

There are caveats to be aware of when interpreting the analysis on fast-food outlets presented in this chapter. These include, but are not limited to, the following:

- This data does not provide information on the levels of consumption of fast-food within a particular area and as highlighted by the Health Foundation, a higher concentration of outlets could indicate additional factors e.g. town planning and the economic benefits of having outlets clustered together.[31]

- Third party and direct delivery services are increasingly available which may dilute the impact of geographical proximity of premises.

- This indicator measures exposure rather than access, availability or consumption for individuals and as highlighted by OHID will be affected by factors such as opening hours and public transport or delivery options, amongst others.[32]

Despite these caveats, assessing exposure to fast-food outlets can help inform the development of targeted interventions to improve aspects of public health in West Sussex (e.g. reduce obesity rates) and increase the availability of healthier foods.[33]

In 2024, there were 777 fast-food outlets in West Sussex, equating to a rate of 86.3 outlets per 100,000 population.[34] This rate is significantly lower than England (115.9 per 100,000).

The number of fast-food outlets per 100,000 has increased in West Sussex since baseline figures in 2017 (75.5 per 100,000).

Figure 5 shows a comparison of West Sussex with its nearest statistical neighbours (local authorities with similar characteristics, such as age profile and density, to West Sussex).

Figure 5 – Fast-food outlets per 100,000 population, 2024. Blue bar indicates West Sussex. Source: OHID, based on Food Standards Agency data.[34]

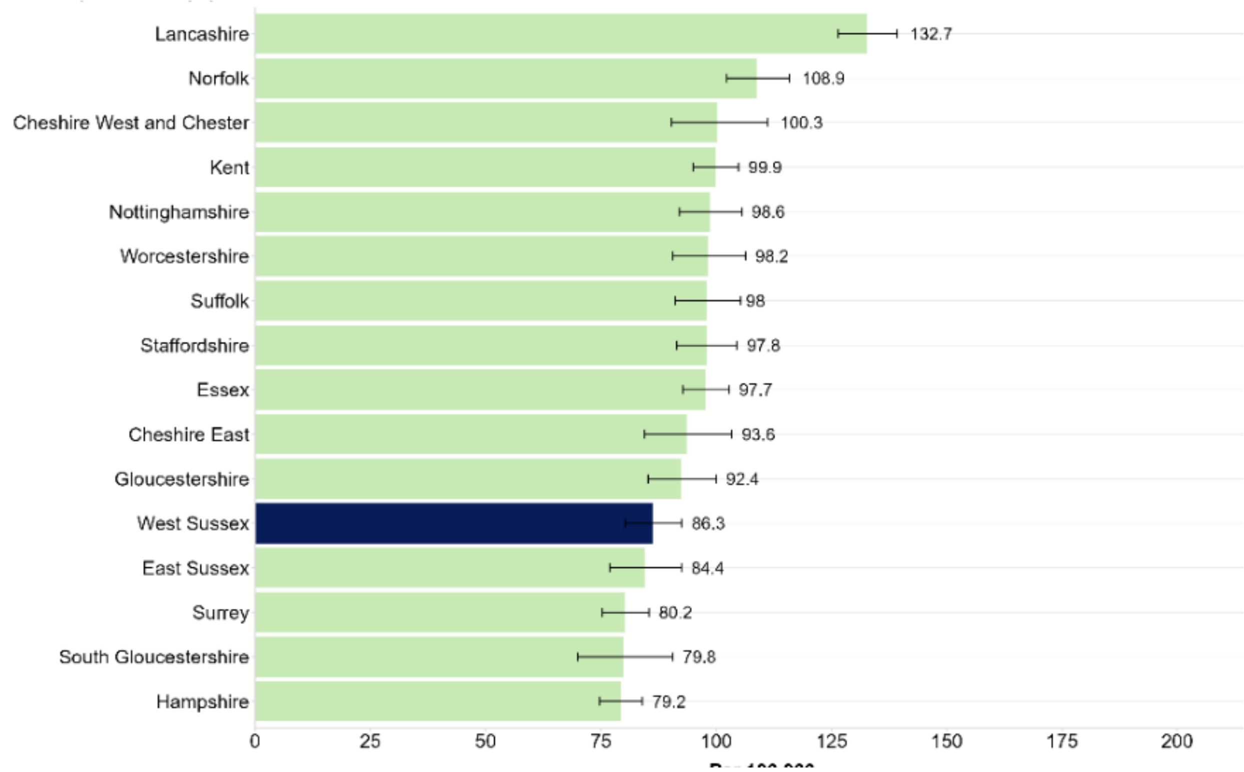
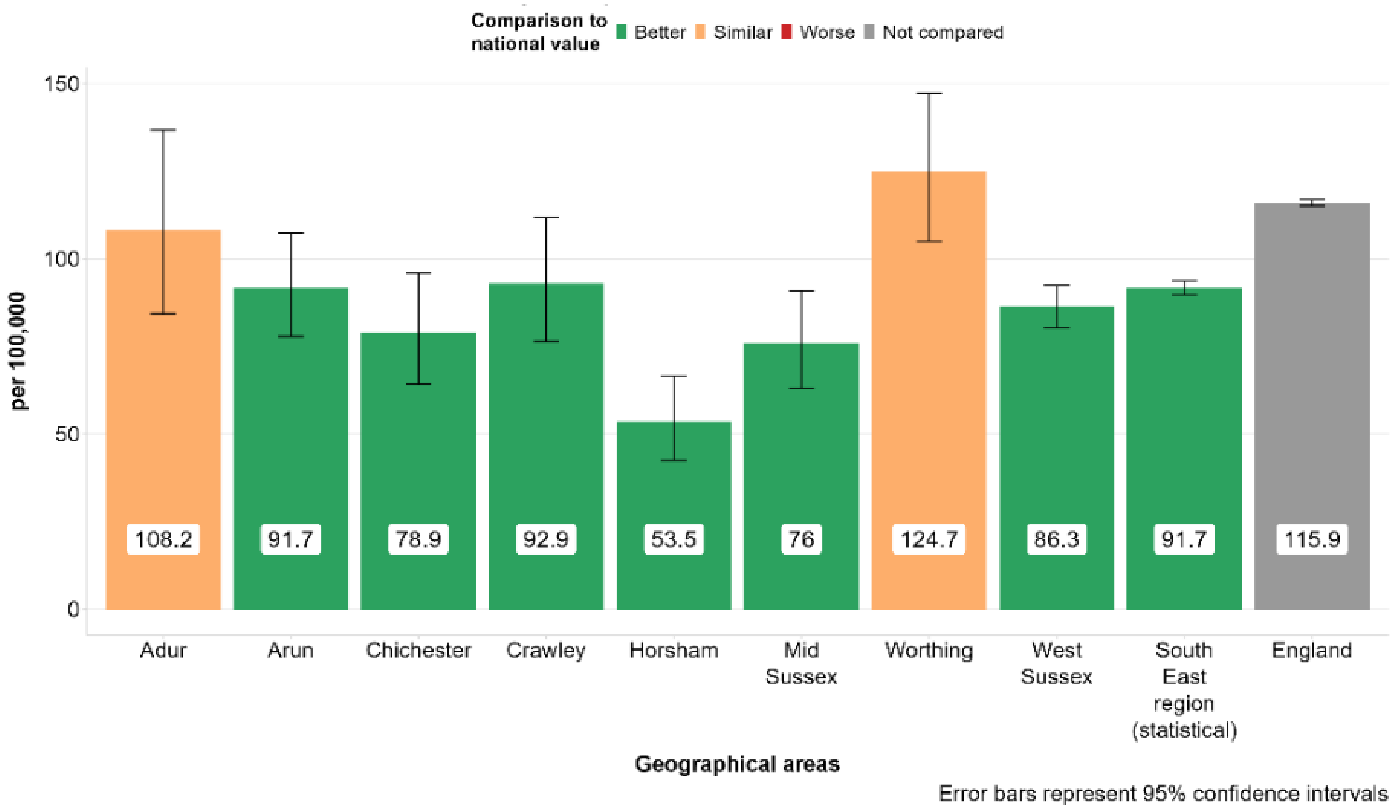


Figure 6 shows a comparison of fast-food outlets per 100,000 by lower tier local authorities within West Sussex. Worthing had the highest rate of fast-food outlets per 100,000 in West Sussex (124.7) and Horsham had the lowest (53.5).

Figure 6 – Fast-food outlets per 100,000 by Lower Tier Local Authorities within West Sussex. Areas coloured according to comparison with national rate. Source: OHID, based on Food Standards Agency data.[34]



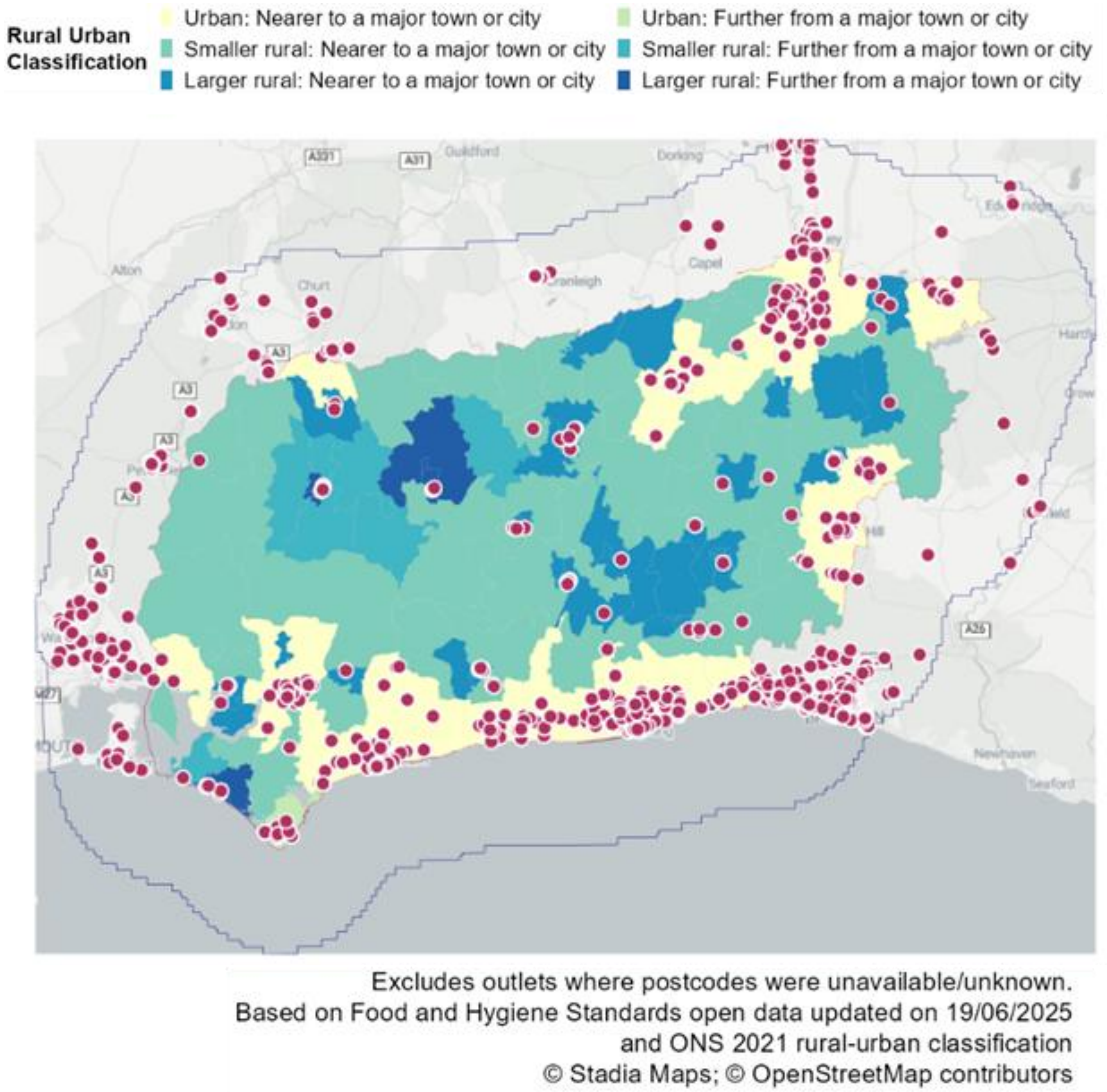
The Public Health and Social Research Unit extended OHID's methodology to look at smaller areas in West Sussex (alongside neighbouring areas), including food outlets where it was clear or likely that they were accepting orders for takeaway. Neighbouring areas were included if they were within five miles from the county border, as people may travel or order food from 20-30 minutes away across local authority borders.

Any outlets identified as a main chain (with over 100 outlets) who offered delivery were selected. Alongside this, a postcode search (based on each unique combination of post town and district e.g., PO19) was conducted on Just Eat, one of the UK's most popular delivery services, to identify smaller businesses that offered takeaway.

For each lower tier local authority, business names of any remaining outlets not identified as offering delivery were manually searched for in Just Eat. As FSA data is regularly being updated, this search strategy was initially applied to FSA data in March 2025 and subsequently applied to a snapshot from June 2025. Therefore, outlets may have been missed or subsequently opened or closed since the manual search was conducted.

Maps were created to gain a further understanding of the food environment across West Sussex and neighbouring local authorities. Figure 7 shows the distribution of fast-food outlets across West Sussex Lower Super Output Areas (LSOAs) using the 2021 Rural Urban Classification, developed by the Office of National Statistics (ONS). The points on the map indicate outlets that offered takeaway on Just Eat across West Sussex (based on search in March 2025) and within 5 miles from West Sussex borders.

Figure 7 - Geographical distribution of fast-food outlets in and around West Sussex, 2025. Map is colour coded according to ONS Rural Urban Output Area Classifications.

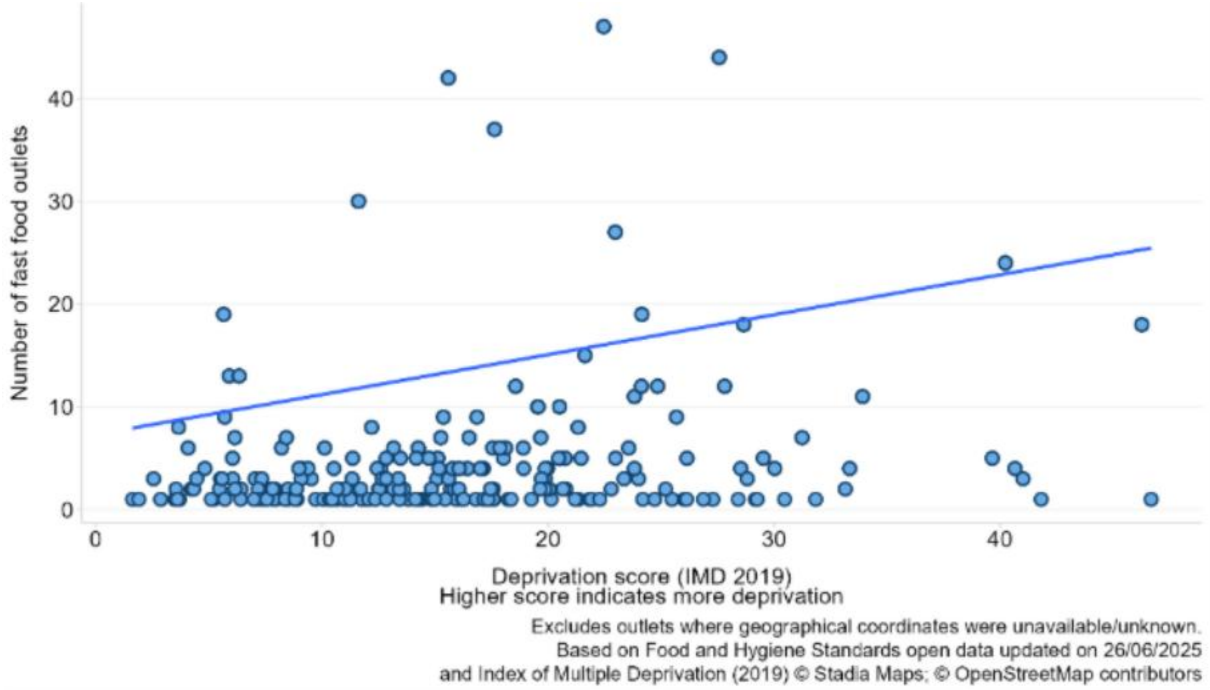


The density of fast-food outlets is greater in more urban areas across West Sussex (indicated in yellow and light green).

Analysis also looked at the relationship between the number of fast-food outlets and levels of deprivation across West Sussex, using the Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) 2019. As the IMD is an area-based measure (assessing deprivation at neighbourhood level), it is important to note that not everyone living in a deprived area will be deprived and not everyone in the least deprived area will be affluent.

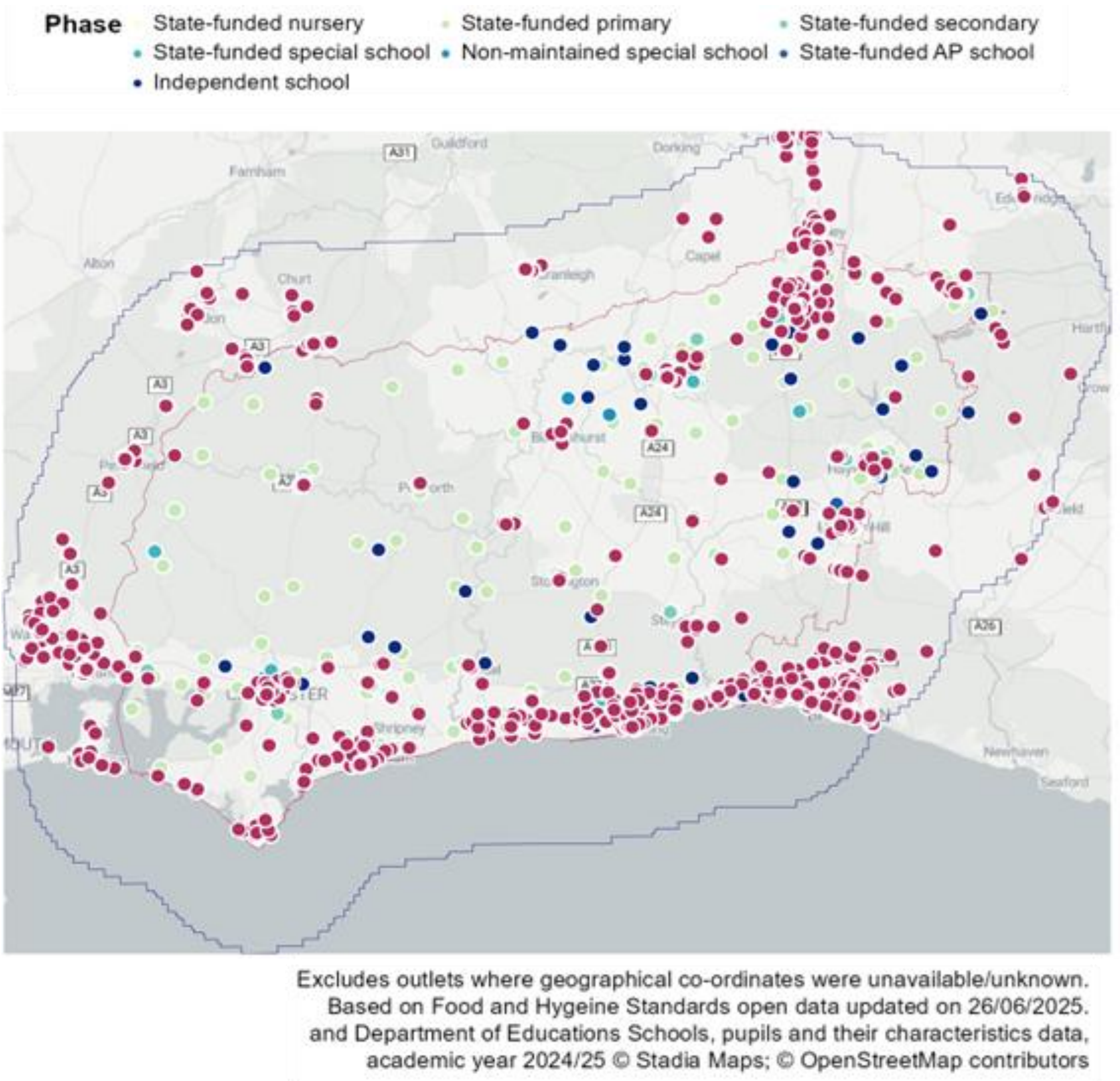
Figure 8 shows how West Sussex neighbourhoods with a higher deprivation score tended to have a higher number of fast-food outlets. However, this trend was not particularly strong (a weak positive correlation was found between fast-food outlets and deprivation score).

Figure 8 - Relationship between number of fast-food outlets and deprivation by West Sussex neighbourhoods (2011 LSOAs). Based on the English Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD), 2019.



Local analysis has also looked at the distribution of fast-food outlets in relation to schools in West Sussex. Figure 9 shows the geographical distribution of fast-food outlets that offered takeaway on Just Eat in March 2025 across West Sussex and within 5 miles from West Sussex borders, these are represented by the red points. The green and blue points on figure 9 then show the distribution of schools within West Sussex. In 2024/25, roughly one third of the 332 schools in West Sussex were within 400m (an approximate five-minute walk) of at least one fast-food outlet. Most of these schools (227) were state funded primary schools. More focused work on food outlets relative to schools in West Sussex is currently being undertaken and has recently been published.

Figure 9 – Geographical distribution of fast-food outlets and schools in and around West Sussex, 2025.



Community Food Projects

Food is a powerful catalyst for community connection. Local projects that grow, cook, sell and share food can boost health, support the environment, teach practical skills, reduce waste and bring communities together.[35] Community food projects often offer alternatives to mainstream ways of shopping and eating, giving residents more control over their food and strengthening ties to their communities and nature.
There are many models of community food projects across the UK. These include[36]:

Food bank/emergency food aid provider: provide free mainly nonperishable (and sometimes fresh) food and household supplies sourced from donations and surplus. Often linked to community organisations; they operate with varied referral policies, may offer social and wraparound support, and relieve those in food crisis while connecting people to longer-term help.

Community fridge: a publicly accessible refrigerator stocked mainly with surplus food from redistributors and local retailers, where anyone can give or take items to cut food waste and, in many cases, help ease local food insecurity.

Food pantry/social supermarket: often use a low-cost membership model where a weekly fee is exchanged for a basket of food, are often volunteer-run, and aim to ease food insecurity, reduce waste, build skills and connect members to wider support and community activities. They aim to offer the element of choice around food products, enabling people to meet dietary requirements alongside dietary preferences and providing autonomy and removing stigma.

Food cooperative (small buying group): small, democratic buying groups (often ~20 households) that pool orders to access wholesale and surplus food below retail prices; some operate with a mixed economy model (differing levels of membership) and aim to provide affordable, healthy, environmentally friendly food while strengthening community.

Wholesale purchasing/co-operative buying (larger scale): sometimes full-scale shops with tiered membership pricing and volunteer discounts, who pool collective buying power to source food below retail prices.

Street trading: mobile, market style stalls run by volunteers or staff. They may use wholesale/surplus supply to sell affordable food. Some accept Healthy Start vouchers. They can work with councils/social landlords to target food deserts, can offer education/employment opportunities and improve access to healthier, more sustainable food options.

Community meals or community café: free or pay-as you-can, freshly cooked food from mainly surplus ingredients in community settings, prepared by volunteers (with food-safety oversight); they can incorporate food education and training, sometimes targeted to specific at-risk groups. They aim to reduce social isolation and food insecurity, cut food waste, and promote wellbeing with nourishing food, often alongside wraparound support.

Cooked meal delivery services: often linked to community cafés. These services prepare free or low-cost, nourishing meals from mainly surplus food for home delivery or partner agencies. They offer volunteering opportunities while reducing food insecurity, food waste and malnutrition. (The 'Meals on Wheels' service discussed in Chapter 5 is an example of a commercial meal delivery service, often subsidised by councils or offered at a negotiated price, but it is not a community provision and not based on volunteers).

Community vegetable box: Subscription-based model which provides weekly fresh produce via delivery or collection, sourced from wholesale markets and local farms/allotments. They can offer flexible box sizes, often accept Healthy Start vouchers, and have a focus on improving access for households facing food insecurity or living in food deserts.

Community supported agriculture: a partnership between farmers and community members where households pre-pay for regular shares of fresh, seasonal produce, providing farmers with stable income while fostering sustainable local agriculture and community connection through volunteering, farm visits and events. There is sometimes an alternative model where individuals contribute time rather than money, but the concept remains the same. The consumer has a stake in the farm either through their time or money, thereby sharing the risk normally held by the farmer.

Community food redistribution

Many community food projects rely on redistributing surplus food from retailers, suppliers and households which increases food availability for people facing food insecurity, increases food resilience and reduces the environmental impact of wasted food. Chapter 10 explores these links between food and climate in more detail.

An estimated 19% of total global food production is wasted across households, the food service and retail.[37] In West Sussex, on average 40% of household waste is food.[38] Of this waste food, approximately 70% is avoidable.[38] Of the avoidable waste food, 41% is not used in time and 25% is wasted due to cooking more food than is consumed.[38] While most household leftovers cannot be redistributed for food safety reasons, this represents a significant amount of food that could be redistributed through community food projects.

One such community food project is the monthly Community Food Hubs, run in partnership by WSCC's Recycling and Waste Team, WSCC's Communities Team and UK Harvest.[39] Seven hubs operate across West Sussex every month, redistributing surplus food that would otherwise go to waste. A bag of groceries is available for a suggested £5 donation. The hubs also bring together multiple agencies providing cooking skills training and financial, health and employment support. These hubs are discussed in more detail in Chapter 9. Further examples of community food projects across West Sussex are discussed below.

Community food projects in West Sussex

This section provides an overview of community food projects operating in West Sussex, drawing on existing local mapping exercises. It describes the availability and distribution of provision and cannot comment on service quality or individual access. The mapping exercises referenced earlier (see: *Other sources of retail food in West Sussex*) also aim to capture community food projects, and work is ongoing to collate and complete these datasets to provide a clearer county-wide picture. As mapping is ongoing, the findings presented here should be considered indicative rather than definitive. Once mapping is complete, it will support the identification of best practice and gaps in provision for future focus.

There is currently no single, county-wide dataset of all community food projects in West Sussex. Most available intelligence has been generated by local food partnerships, working closely with emergency food providers and community organisations.

Food partnerships are composed of a network of organisations working together to address food poverty within a given geographical area.[40] Some approach this by supplying food aid to households in a collaborative manner; others do this and offer wraparound support to address the root causes of food poverty; while others take a strategic, systemic approach where collaborative food aid and wraparound support is one of several objectives within strengthening and transforming the food system.

Nationally, more than 100 local food partnerships are registered with the Sustainable Food Places Network (SFPN), which supports the development of food partnerships across the country and aims to establish a food network in every place.[41] While partnership structures vary across the UK, all partnerships registered with the SFPN focus on addressing the network's 6 pillars: Food Governance and Strategy; Good Food Movement; Healthy Food for All; Sustainable Food Economy; Catering and Procurement; and Food for the Planet.[42] Food partnerships and their role in addressing food poverty and insecurity are discussed in more detail in Chapter 8.

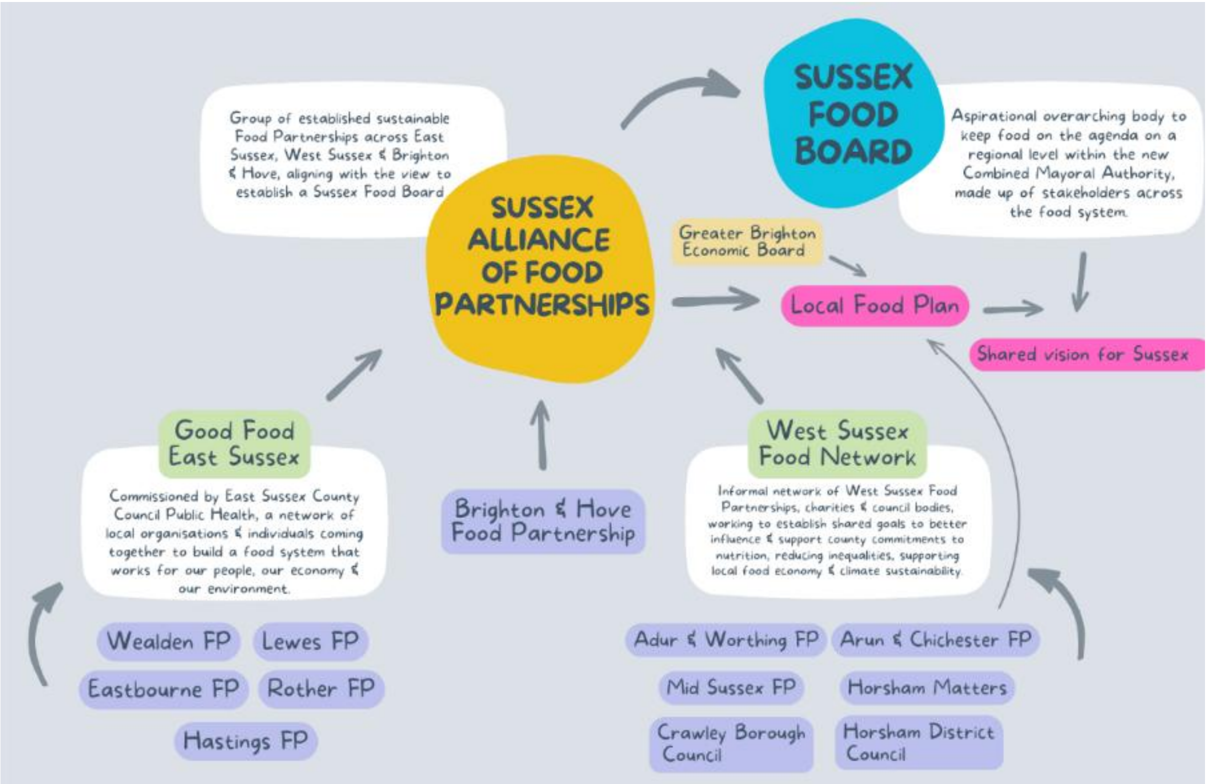
There are three SFPN style food partnerships operating in West Sussex: Arun & Chichester Food Partnership, Adur & Worthing Food Partnership and Mid Sussex Food Partnership. Arun & Chichester and Adur & Worthing Food Partnerships are registered with SFPN, while Mid Sussex Food Partnership is in the process of applying for registration. All these partnerships have multi-agency member organisations that make up their steering groups/boards, which include food banks, the advice sector, food sector organisations, local government and other pivotal voluntary community sector organisations (VCS).

Crawley has several key VCS organisations which collectively operate a food aid, essentials and wraparound support offer for residents. The town also has an informal Cost-of-Living Partnership Group, comprising statutory, voluntary, and community organisations, which addresses food poverty alongside broader impacts of the cost-of-living crisis. In addition, the Crawley Food Bank Partnership which is led by The Easter Team and Crawley Open House, works collaboratively with other local providers, including Ten Little Toes Baby Bank and Freeshop Crawley, to support residents. FreeShop Crawley's wraparound offer includes mental health groups, financial workshops, help with form filling and employability.

Horsham also operates a food aid network of 16 food banks through Horsham District Foodbank, which is managed and funded by the charity Horsham Matters. Their wraparound offer includes budgeting support, benefit checks and advocacy support. Horsham and Crawley do not currently have an SPFN-style Food Partnership but both areas are well connected with Horsham District Council and Crawley Borough Council respectively, and Horsham District Council is focusing on moving towards a SFPN model.

The Arun & Chichester, Adur & Worthing and Mid Sussex Food Partnerships along with local authority representatives from Crawley and representatives from Horsham meet together regularly through the West Sussex Food Network (WSFN). This is an informal network of food partnerships, charities and local government bodies working to establish, influence and support countywide commitments to nutrition, reducing inequalities, supporting the local food economy and creating climate sustainability. The SPFN Food Partnerships are also part of the Sussex Alliance of Food Partnerships. Figure 10 below helps outline the food partnerships structure across West Sussex and Sussex more broadly.

Figure 10 – Food partnership structure across West Sussex and Sussex more broadly, courtesy of Arun & Chichester Food Partnership.



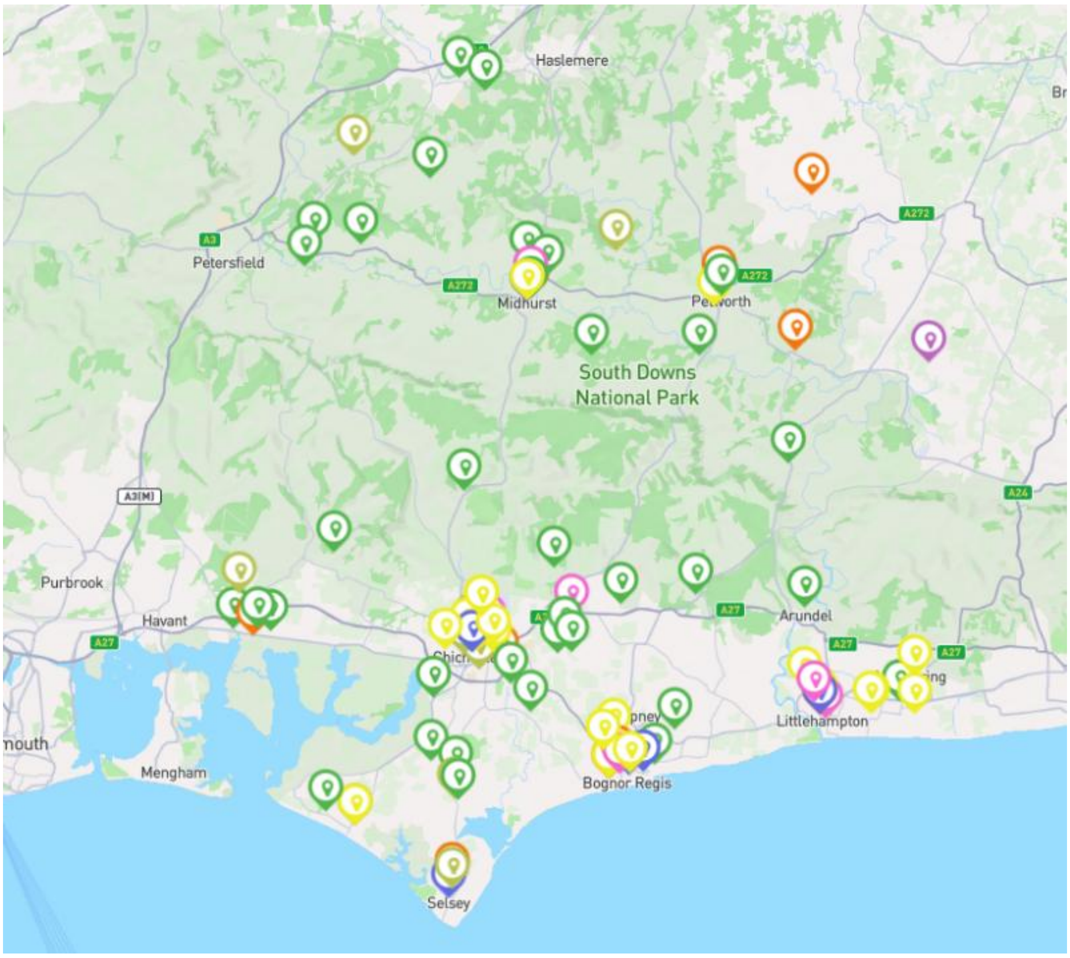
The extent and format of community food project mapping varies considerably by district and borough, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2 - Food system mapping status by district and borough in West Sussex

District/Borough	Mapping Status	Format	Responsible Organisation
Adur	Complete	Directory	Adur & Worthing Food Partnership / Community Food Network
Arun	Complete	Interactive map	Arun & Chichester Food Partnership
Crawley	In progress (to be updated)	Table and web list	Crawley Borough Council
Chichester	Complete	Interactive map	Arun & Chichester Food Partnership
Horsham	Complete	Document	Horsham District Food Bank
Mid Sussex	In progress	To be confirmed	Mid Sussex Food Partnership
Worthing	Complete	Network map	Transition Town Worthing

An online interactive map of community food projects in Arun and Chichester has been produced by the Arun & Chichester Food Partnership, shown in Figure 11. This interactive map categorises projects by type, including community cafés and lunch clubs, food banks, community food providers, non-food support services, community growing initiatives, local and sustainable food projects, and food education. While local and sustainable food providers (green) are spread across Arun and Chichester, community food providers (yellow), food banks (orange) and community cafes/lunch clubs (pink) are concentrated in more urban areas.

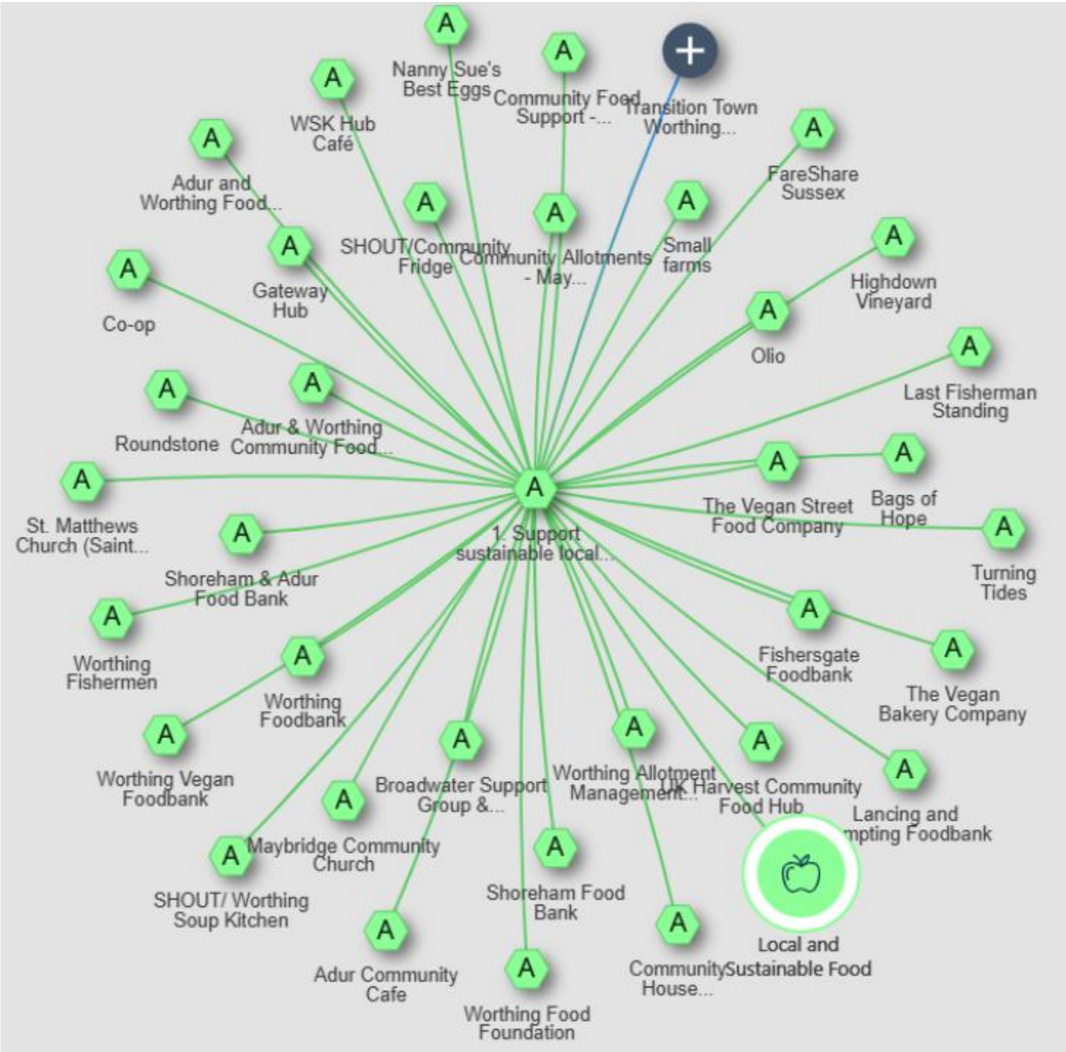
Figure 11 - Arun and Chichester Community Food Map, reproduced from the Arun & Chichester Food Partnership[43]



Code: pink - community cafes and lunch clubs, orange - food banks, yellow - community food providers, blue - non-food support e.g. citizen advice, olive green - community growing, green - local and sustainable food, purple: food education.

Another visual resource has been produced by Transition Town Worthing (Figure 12). This takes the form of a network or mind map, illustrating sustainable projects in Worthing, which sometimes includes food-related community initiatives. While this format does not allow for assessment of geographical distribution, it provides insight into the range and interconnectedness of community food projects operating locally. However, it's primarily focused on sustainability projects in Worthing and does not systematically cover food support services or the Adur district specifically. For a more comprehensive picture of community food resources across both Adur and Worthing, there are several useful sources. The Adur & Worthing Food Partnership/Community Food Network maintains a directory of local projects, including food banks, community cafés, pantries, and other initiatives. The councils' websites also provide interactive maps and dedicated food bank listings, which together cover most of the community food support options across both districts.

Figure 12 – Local and sustainable food provision in Worthing, reproduced from Transition Town Worthing[44]



As a geographically compact town, Crawley has a table based mapping of provision; this requires updating to include community gardens. Information on food support, including foodbanks and community cafés, is also available on the Crawley Borough Council website.

Horsham District Food Bank maintains a document listing community food projects within the district.

Mid Sussex is at the time of writing undertaking a mapping exercise, which should be available on the Mid Sussex Food Partnership website in Spring-Summer 2026.

As mapping remains incomplete, it is not currently possible to quantify the number or geographical distribution of community food projects across the whole of West Sussex. Mapping the local food system across West Sussex is a priority for the Health and Wellbeing Board's Food and Nutrition Delivery Group. This group was established in 2025 to meet the goals outlined in the Joint Local Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2025-2030.[45] More work in this area is planned over the coming years.

Emergency food aid in West Sussex

Across West Sussex, there are eight Trussell Trust foodbank charities operating various sites: Bognor Regis, Littlehampton, Chichester District, Worthing, Horsham, Shoreham, Haywards Heath and East Grinstead. There are numerous other independent food aid providers operating in West Sussex. However, as mentioned above, there is not currently a comprehensive list or map of these services.

Between April 2024 and March 2025, Trussell Trust food banks alone distributed:[46]

- 8,148 food parcels in Bognor Regis and Littlehampton; 2,651 of these were for children
- 5,427 food parcels in Chichester; 2,080 of these were for children
- 7,522 food parcels in Horsham; 3,187 of these were for children

These figures are just a snapshot of provision, with many other providers distributing emergency food across West Sussex. This data provides limited insight into repeat attendance and does not capture the number of parcels distributed by non-Trussell Trust foodbanks, which is significant, particularly for Crawley which does not have Trussell Trust foodbank. Food poverty is discussed in more detail in Chapter 8, while issues relating to access to food are discussed later in this chapter.

Challenges and limitations of current mapping

There are several challenges associated with mapping community food projects across West Sussex. Information can become outdated quickly as projects change in response to funding, commissioning, and volunteer capacity, so dedicated resource is required to monitor and publicise the information. In addition, the absence of a consistent mapping format or shared definitions makes it difficult to accurately assess coverage, compare provision between areas, or identify gaps. There is also currently no public-facing countywide site to share the information on a countywide scale. The WSCC database CLIO3 already shares some food provider information by locality and could be updated to do so on a countywide basis. However, CLIO3 is a database for professionals with a log-in, and there is currently no public-facing equivalent.

While there is evidence of a diverse range of community food projects in some districts, current knowledge is partial. It is not possible to determine from current data:

- County-wide coverage
- The relationship between provision and population need

These limitations restrict our ability to assess equity of access and to confidently identify duplication or gaps in services. Although assessing access and outcomes associated with community food projects is beyond the scope of this health needs assessment, this work aligns closely with the developing action plan of the West Sussex Food and Nutrition Delivery Group.

Food Access

The Priority Places for Food Index is a UK-wide tool used to identify neighbourhoods at the Lower Super Output Area level that 'have a lack of accessibility to cheap, healthy and sustainable sources of food - making them a Priority Place for Food'.[6] It is a composite index formed of the following domains[6]:

1. Proximity to supermarket retail facilities
   a) Average distance to nearest large grocery store
   b) Average count of stores within 1km

2. Accessibility to supermarket retail facilities
   a) Average travel distance
   b) Accessibility via public transport

3. Access to online deliveries
   a) Online groceries availability
   b) Propensity to shop online

4. Proximity to non-supermarket food provision
   a) Distance to nearest non-supermarket retail food store
   b) Count of non-supermarket retail food stores within 1km
   c) Average distance to nearest market
   d) Average count of markets within 1km

5. Socio-demographic barriers
   a) Proportion of population experiencing income deprivation
   b) Proportion of population with no car access

6. Need for family food support
   a) Children in relative low-income families
   b) Healthy start voucher uptake
   c) Distance to nearest food bank

7. Fuel Poverty
   a) Proportion of households in fuel poverty
   b) Prepayment meter prevalence

For each area, the individual domains are scored from 1-10 and then a composite score from 1-10 for each area is calculated, with 1 representing the highest priority places and 10 representing the lowest priority places.

Priority Places for Food in West Sussex

Figure 13 shows the geographical distribution of Priority Places for Food in West Sussex that are in the 1st to 3rd deciles, representing the 30% highest priority areas or the 30% of areas with lowest access to healthy and affordable food. Crawley is the area with the highest density of priority places, followed by Bognor and Littlehampton. Nine small coastal areas in West Sussex are among the 30% highest priority in the country on the Priority Places for Food Index. Five of these areas fall within Littlehampton, three in Bognor Regis and one in Worthing (see Figure 14).

Figure 13 - Priority Places for Food in West Sussex ranked in decile 1-3.[6] Red line indicates the boundaries of West Sussex. 1 = most deprived, 10 = least deprived.

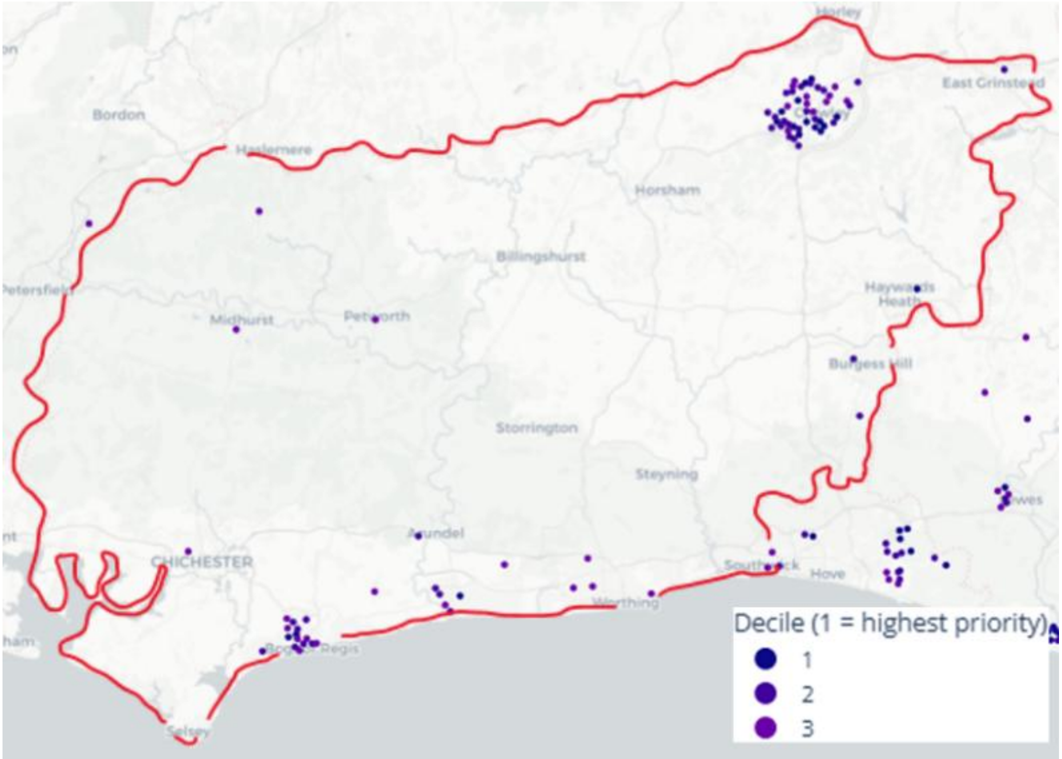
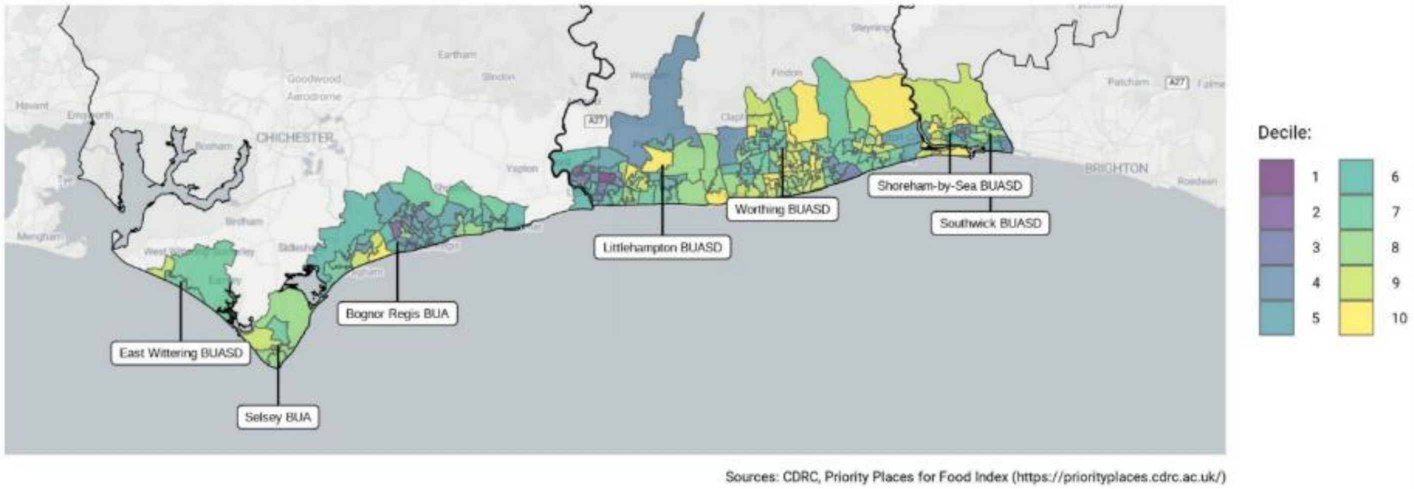


Figure 14 – Priority Places for Food Index deciles; lower super output areas in costal West Sussex.[6] 1 = most deprived, 10 = least deprived.



While several areas within West Sussex are in the 10% highest priority places for food, not all these places face the same barriers to access. Figures 15-17 show the Priority Places for Food Index domain rankings for two neighbourhoods in Crawley and one in Arun. Although these three neighbourhoods all rank 1 overall in the Priority Places for Food Index, the drivers of need differ. In the South Crawley neighbourhood (Figure 15), households live near supermarkets (proximity 9) but face access barriers (accessibility 3) alongside very limited online delivery (1) and high socio-demographic constraints (1). This demonstrates how being proximate to a supermarket does not mean you necessarily have increased access to food, especially in the context of socioeconomic barriers.

In the East Crawley neighbourhood (Figure 16), the challenges are primarily proximity (3) and accessibility (3), with few alternative retail options (2). In the Arun neighbourhood (Figure 17), there is good supermarket accessibility (8) but this co-exists with high fuel poverty (3), socio-demographic barriers (3) and limited online delivery (2). Across all three areas, non-supermarket options are scarce (2–4) and family food support needs remain moderate (4–5). This underscores the need for area-specific interventions and a nuanced approach that addresses affordability, transport, digital exclusion and alternative provision rather than relying on proximity to a supermarket alone.

Figure 15 – The Priority Place for Food Index rankings for a neighbourhood in South Crawley[6]

Figure 16- The Priority Place for Food Index rankings for a neighbourhood in East Crawley[6]

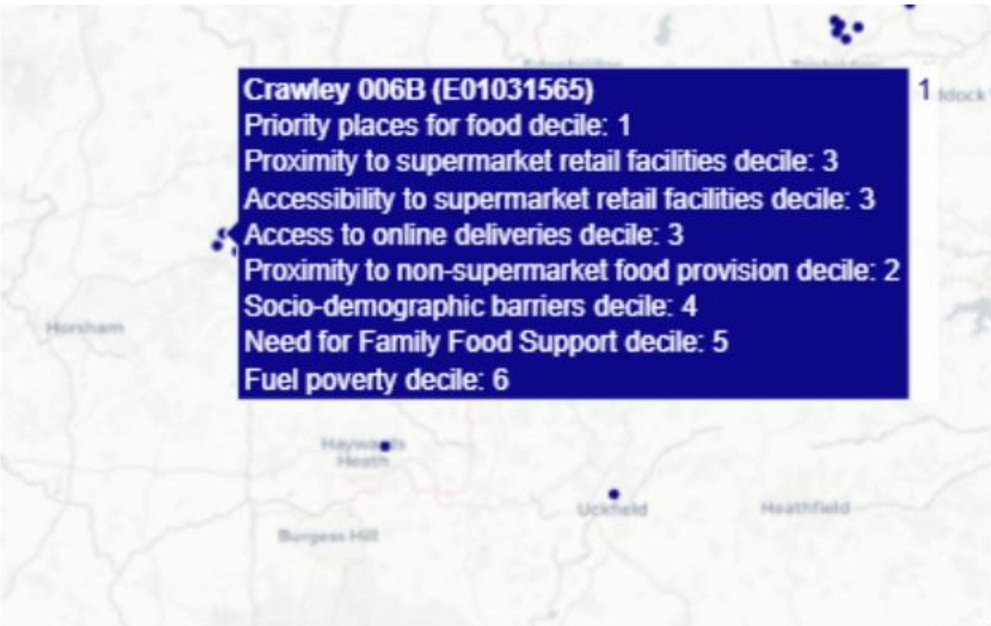
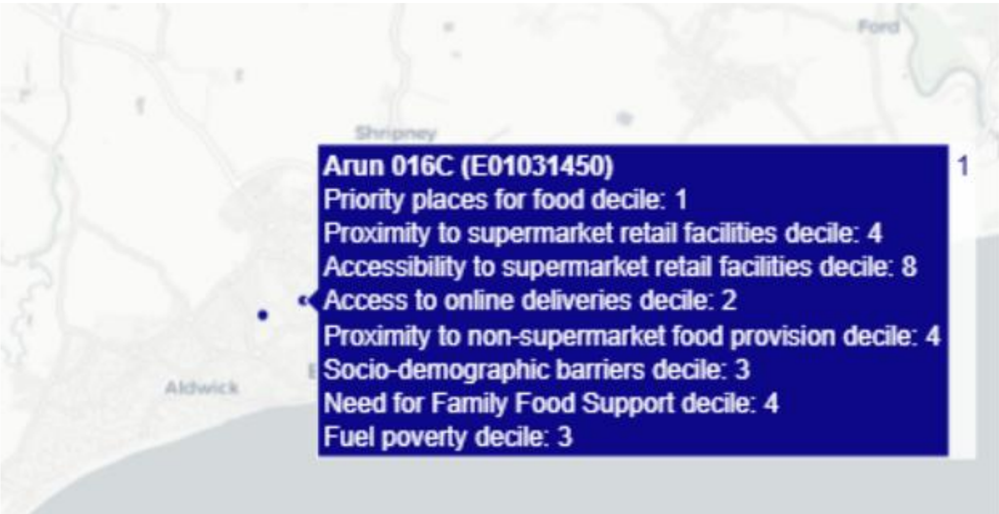


Figure 17- The Priority Place for Food Index rankings for a neighbourhood in Arun[6]



Increasing Food Availability and Food Access in West Sussex

While food aid, such as food banks, provides essential emergency relief, it is not a sustainable long-term approach to improving food availability and access. The remainder of this chapter focuses on sustainable, longer-term solutions.

Improving healthy food availability and access in West Sussex requires both system-level policies that shape the retail environment and place-based community action. Planning and regulatory tools can limit the concentration of unhealthy outlets, embed healthy retail within local plans and ensure design features that support food availability and access. In parallel, community and household-level growing can strengthen local supply and resilience.

The Creating Healthy and Sustainable Places Framework

WSCC has published the *Creating Healthy and Sustainable Places: A Public Health and Sustainability Framework for West Sussex* and is actively working to ensure application in practice through the West Sussex Healthy Places Workstream.[13] Together, these provide guidance and practical support to deliver the approaches outlined above, with the Priority Places for Food Index guiding where action is most urgent. The framework sets out best practice for planning and developing healthy places, while the workstream supports Local Planning Authorities by reviewing Health Impact Assessments, reviewing neighbourhood plans and working towards developing hot-food takeaway guidance. The framework advises that healthy developments should increase people's opportunities to enjoy healthy food by[13]:

- Avoiding concentrated areas of unhealthy food outlets and enable choice
- Incorporating accessible local food outlets to meet local needs
- Improving opportunities for growing local produce such as allotments, community growing / orchards, community shops and farmers markets
- Providing adequate and suitable garden space for small scale domestic food production
- Enabling opportunities for leisure and physical activities

Transport

While the WSCC *Creating Healthy and Sustainable Places* Framework aims to improve the availability and accessibility of healthy food in new developments, work is also needed to improve the access to existing retail spaces. There is a need to identify communities that lack the transport and infrastructure required for access to healthy food and determine solutions to these barriers such as mobile food buses, pop-up pantries, or community transport interventions.

A 2026 project, jointly led by Community Transport Sussex and the West Sussex Food Network, will map areas with food access issues and identify resources that could help. This could inform new or improved transport links to affordable supermarkets and rural food hubs.

Regulation of fast-food outlets

Many strategies to increase the availability of healthy food target the commercial determinants of health. Key actions include regulating the density and location of outlets selling predominantly unhealthy food and restricting the promotion and advertising of unhealthy products. Advertising restrictions are discussed in more detail in Chapter 8.

Planning and public health roles

Public health and planning each have roles in restricting unhealthy food outlets, especially near schools. The role of planning is clearly stipulated in the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) 2024:

"Local planning authorities should refuse applications for hot food takeaways and fast-food outlets: a) within walking distance of schools and other places where children and young people congregate, unless the location is within a designated town centre; or b) in locations where there is evidence that a concentration of such uses is having an adverse impact on local health, pollution or anti-social-behaviour."[47]

A new version of the NPPF is currently under review, with recommendations to amend this wording to within 'reasonable' walking distance.[48]

This forms part of a wider system-based approach to improve food access and availability by limiting clusters of unhealthy outlets in areas frequented by children and in neighbourhoods already experiencing health inequalities. In West Sussex, planning applications for fast-food outlets are primarily handled by district and borough Local Planning Authorities (LPAs). A review of local planning policies is underway to support consistent assessments. Further work is required to develop localised policies which include the provision of local data on appropriate vulnerability markers that will strengthen decision-making on hot-food takeaway regulation.

Environmental Health and Trading Standards distinct, complementary roles

While Environmental Health Teams may feed into planning policy frameworks as consultees, their core function is to ensure that existing businesses provide safe food, rather than to regulate the availability or location of fast-food outlets. Their statutory remit is food safety and hygiene including the registration/approval of food businesses, inspections, food hygiene ratings and enforcement where necessary.

Trading Standards Food Officers work closely with local district and borough Environmental Health Officers, together ensuring the safety of food businesses within West Sussex. Trading Standards oversee food standards, ensuring food composition, allergen and labelling information is correct and regulating fair trading.

Together, Environmental Health and Trading Standards play essential but different roles in ensuring that the food available to residents is safe, while planning and public health lead on policies that shape the location, density and promotion of food outlets.

Changing access to fast-food

In addition to the increased physical density of fast-food outlets, online ordering and delivery platforms have significantly increased access to fast-food, delivering directly to homes. This can dilute the impact of purely location-based restrictions near schools or town centres and highlights the need to consider complementary measures (e.g. advertising restrictions).

Promoting food growing

The National Preparedness Commission recommends increasing local food security and resilience by growing more food in 'urban agriculture, gardens, allotments and community settings'.[7]

Household and community food growing

Food growing and gardening, whether individual or communal, provide multiple benefits for people and places.

The benefits of gardening to individuals include:

- Improved fruit and vegetable intake[8]
- Increased physical activity levels and access to green space[8]
- Reduced anxiety and depression, improved mental well-being and quality of life[9, 49]
- Improved emotional regulation and reduced sensory overload for neurodiverse participants[50, 51]
- Supports independence by accommodating a wide range of physical disabilities[11]

The benefits of gardening to communities include:

- Greater social inclusion and cohesion[11]
- Increased food security and resilience[7]
- Enhanced biodiversity, reduced carbon emissions through shorter food chains and greener neighbourhoods[10]

In an effort to transform mental health services while recognising the above benefits, NHS England has established pilot projects in green social prescribing.[52] Green social prescribing uses nature-based interventions, including community gardening projects, to improve mental and physical health. These projects have been extended and evaluation is ongoing,[53] but early outcomes include 85% uptake of interventions and 'positive improvements in mental health and wellbeing and strong engagement in communities experiencing high levels of social inequalities that affect health and wellbeing'.[52]

Examples of community food growing initiatives in West Sussex

This list is not exhaustive and serves as an example of community food growing initiatives across West Sussex.

Chichester

Chichester City Council manages 7 allotment sites, containing over 450 occupied plots. Only residents of the Chichester parish (the PO19 postal code area) may apply for an allotment. These allotments are very popular and in most cases a waiting list is maintained.

The Grow Chichester project maintains two community gardens, one in Bishop's Palace Gardens and the other in Oaklands Park, and two community orchards, one behind the Festival Theatre and the other in the Whyke Estate. The project offers general gardening sessions as well as therapeutic gardening sessions for older adults and those with mental and physical health problems. The produce grown across the community gardens and orchards is shared between the garden volunteers, offered to the public by way of a donation and passed on to local food-sharing projects.[54]

Adur and Worthing

Adur and Worthing Councils manage a total of 21 allotment sites, 8 in Worthing and 13 in Adur. Allotments are available for any resident living within the respective councils who is aged over 18. Allotments are very popular with waiting lists for all sites.[55]

A community garden project, called Apron is also active in Shoreham-by-Sea, focusing on, community education sessions, volunteering opportunities workshops and events that enhance wellbeing.[56]

Arun District

Arun District Council has several allotment sites, however there are currently no vacancies and the waiting lists are closed.[57] There are several other sites across the district which are managed by local parish and town councils. Examples include Fort Road and Howard Road managed by Littlehampton Town council.

Arun has several community orchards including locations in Arundel, Littlehampton and Bognor Regis. These promote biodiversity, education and help to preserve rare Sussex apple varieties. They offer an opportunity for people to meet, relax or get active by helping to care for the trees and their surroundings.[58]

Horsham

There are 10 allotment sites in Horsham Town, most of which are leased from Horsham District Council or parish councils and managed by allotment societies. Many of these sites have vacancies.[59]

The district also has several local community allotment sites including Nuthurst, Pulborough, Billingshurst and Chesworth. These provide residents unable to work on their own the opportunity to share the work of a plot, learn more about gardening and enjoy time outdoor with others, without the responsibility of their own plot.

Rock Farm, located near Steyning and Horsham, is a 6-acre site operating as a market garden and community-supported agriculture project.[60]

Crawley

There are 20 allotment sites located across Crawley including Cherry Lane, Cuckfield Close, and Ifield Green. They are managed primarily by Crawley Borough Council.[61]

The borough also benefits from several community gardens, such as Crawley Community Garden and the Crawley Anniversary Garden, which contribute to community engagement and local foodgrowing activity. The Crawley Community Garden have two plots in Gossops Green where volunteers meet to learn, grow fruits and vegetables and share harvests.[62]

Mid Sussex

The district has several allotment sites with 2 run by the Mid Sussex District Council and the rest managed by town and parish councils.[63]

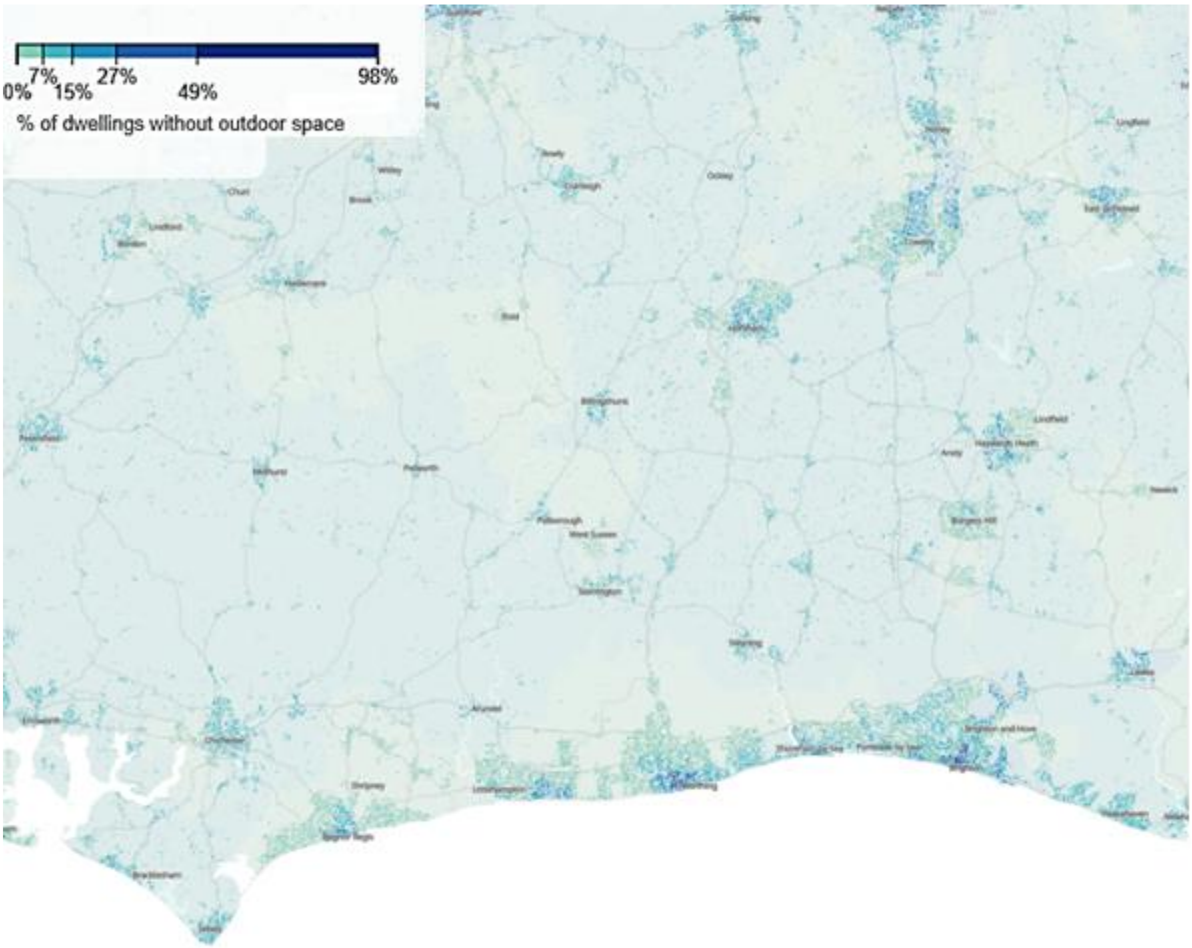
A new community growing garden will launch at Borde Hill in the Autumn of 2026. The Community Garden will offer an inclusive, sustainable space where families, schools, community groups and volunteers can come together to plant, grow, harvest, cook and enjoy food as a shared experience.[64]

Burgess Hill Town Council planted a community orchard at Batchelors Farm in 2023. Once the trees reach full maturity, the public will be able to harvest fruit from the orchard for personal use.[65]

Inequalities in access

In the UK, around 12% of households lack access to a private or shared garden.[12] In England, people from the Black ethnic group are least likely to have access to a garden and 16-24 year-olds are less likely to have access than those over 65, highlighting demographic inequalities.[66] In West Sussex, several neighbourhoods have a higher proportion of households without access to a garden than the national average, for example Manor Royal and Northgate (Crawley) at 21% and Heene (Worthing) at 37%.[12] Figure 18 shows the % of dwellings without outdoor space for neighbourhoods in and around West Sussex.

Figure 18 - % of dwelling without outdoor space in and around West Sussex.[12]



Barriers to community food growing

Community growing projects such as community gardens, orchards, allotments and school gardens can increase access to gardening opportunities. However, there are several barriers to community food growing, including:

Startup costs: Initial costs associated with land preparation, tools and materials can be prohibitive.

Funding: Securing consistent funding for ongoing costs like materials, maintenance and staffing can be a major challenge.

Time and priorities: Crop growing requires a lot of time and effort over long and sometimes intense periods, which can compete with other priorities such as employment or caring roles**.**

Interest and knowledge: Food growing can require specialist knowledge, which takes time, resources and interest to acquire.

Environment and sustainability concerns: Including climate change, soil health and water management. Chapter 10 highlights more about food and climate.

Infrastructure limitations: Lack of basic infrastructure like water access, storage facilities and on-site toilet facilities can hinder projects.

Land availability, tenure and responsibility: Securing suitable land for community food growing can be difficult, with limited access to public land and unclear policies regarding its use. It can be challenging to identify who will be responsible for the land lease.

Planning and policy levers

The availability of land for household and community food growing can be increased through national and local policies that require or encourage growing spaces in housing and community development plans.

For example, the National Planning Policy Framework recommends that policies and decisions should enable healthy lives by improving access to green infrastructure and allotments.[47]

Additionally, the WSCC Healthy Places Framework advises Local Planning Authorities and developers to improve opportunities for growing local produce through allotments, community growing and the provision of adequate and suitable garden space for small-scale domestic food production.[13]

In areas with limited green space and access to gardens, such as Heene (Worthing), innovative approaches can help. For example, using roofs, walls and balconies creatively can provide additional growing space.[67]

Community supported agriculture

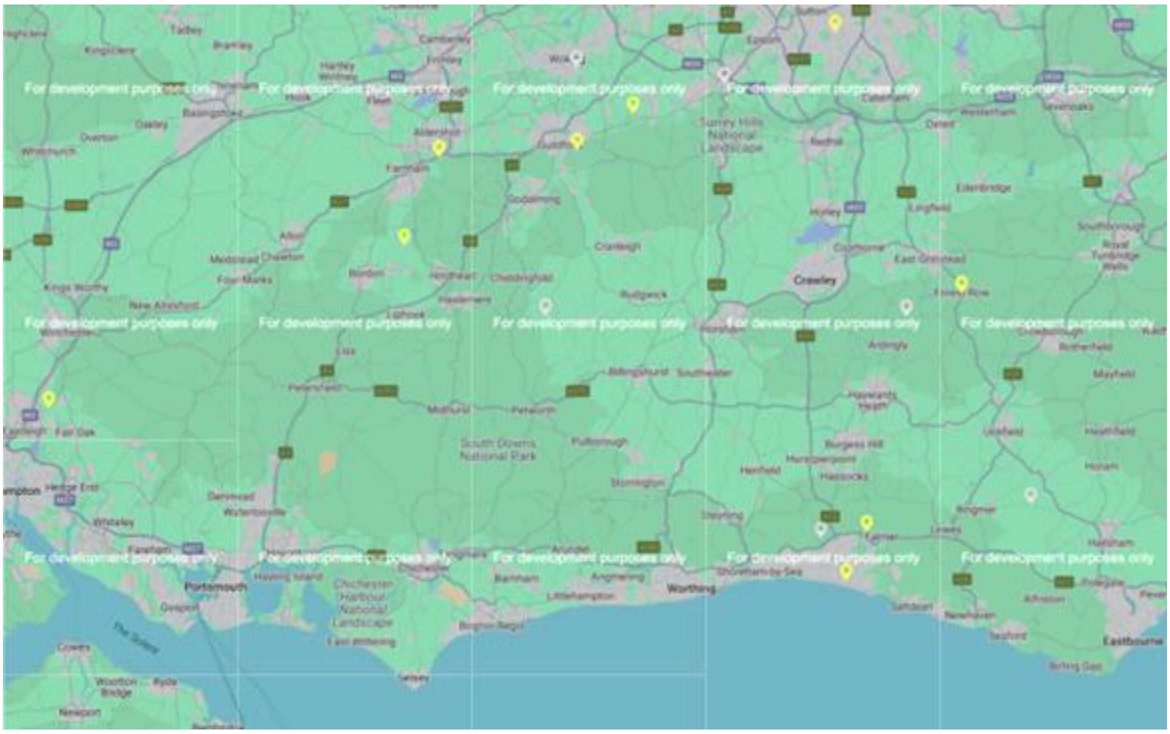
A definition of community supported agriculture is provided above, in the Community Food Projects section.

The Arun and Chichester Food Partnership, in collaboration with Sustain, has developed the *Sussex and South Downs Region Local Food Plan*.[5] For this work, local food is defined as 'food that is produced, processed, sold and eaten within the same region or local administrative area through transparent, SME-focused supply chains',[68] specifically referring to 'food which is produced for sale, excluding home-grown, allotments or community-grown food'.[5] The plan proposes increasing the proportion of food grown and consumed locally to achieve greater food resilience, local employment opportunities, a boost to the local economy, lower climate impacts and a more sustainable food system.[5]

One recommendation from the Local Food Plan is to expand community supported agriculture (CSA).[5] In 2024, West Sussex had 1,343 farm holdings,[69] yet only two CSA farms are registered with the CSA Network in the county.[70] These include Little Haymans Honey[71] which will start distributing shares in 2026 and What the Fungus[72] a local mushroom farm. It is unclear from existing data how much of the food produced on other local farms is actually consumed within West Sussex.

While there are very few CSAs within West Sussex, there are several around the county borders (see Figure 19). Compared to surrounding counties, West Sussex has no CSAs offering veg boxes or meat boxes. Given CSAs typically serve hyper-local areas, West Sussex residents may miss out on this affordable, sustainable and local produce. Examples of such projects elsewhere in Sussex include Sussex Grazed (a conservation grazing meat box scheme),[73] Tablehurst and Plaw Hatch Farm Cooperative (biodynamic farms producing meat, poultry, vegetables, milk and arable crops)[74] and Fork and Dig It (not-for-profit community horticulture project growing fruit and vegetables and offering 'grow growers' training).[75]

Figure 19 -Community Supported Agriculture farms in and around West Sussex.[70]



Possible areas of focus

Based on the data presented in this chapter, improving healthy food access and availability in West Sussex could involve:

- Strengthening access to affordable food:
    - Identify and remove transport barriers in priority neighbourhoods.
    - Pilot community transport routes, mobile food buses and pop up pantries connecting residents to affordable supermarkets and rural food hubs.
    - Completing county wide mapping of community food projects, to enable identification of gaps in provision and areas for future focus.
    - Using mapping and the Priority Places for Food Index (PPFI) to design local action plans for high priority neighbourhoods (e.g. South Crawley, East Crawley, coastal LSOAs) and match interventions to local drivers of need.
- Applying WSCC's Creating Healthy and Sustainable Places Framework to:
    - Safeguard and enable healthy retail in neighbourhoods.
    - Require communal and domestic growing space in new developments (garden standards, shared beds, balconies/roofs where appropriate).
    - Ensure Health Impact Assessments (HIA) consider availability and access to healthy, nutritious food.
    - Prioritising hot food takeaway regulation near schools and in high priority neighbourhoods.
- Strengthening local food partnerships:
    - Support local food partnerships to transition towards a Sustainable Food Places-model
    - Establish sustainable funding for existing food partnerships
- Grow local food supply through Community Supported Agriculture (CSA):
    - Convene producers and community groups to expand CSA and local supply chains (veg/meat boxes, community shops, markets), ensuring this is sustainable and not solely reliant on volunteers.
    - Broker land access (meanwhile use/leases), offer start up micro grants and connect CSAs to anchor institutions (NHS, councils, colleges) for regular procurement.

Summary

This chapter has demonstrated variations in healthy food availability and access across West Sussex. The Priority Places for Food Index (PPFI) highlights multiple, place specific barriers to accessing healthy and affordable food, despite broadly similar per-capita supermarket availability across districts. There are also inequalities in exposure to fast-food outlets and in garden access.

Mapping indicates a diverse landscape of community cafés, food banks/pantries, food education, growing initiatives and local/sustainable food providers, but coverage and format vary by district. With parts of Crawley and several coastal areas including Bognor, Littlehampton and parts of Worthing, being among the county’s highest priority places for food, targeted action is needed to ensure residents at greatest risk of poor access to healthy, nutritious food are supported by the community food system.

WSCC’s Creating Healthy and Sustainable Places Framework provides guidance and practical support across transport, planning/design, fast food regulation and community/household growing space to deliver actionable routes to improve availability and access. Sustained progress will require collaboration across the food system between the county council, district and borough councils, food partnerships, farmers and producers, local businesses and retailers, schools and the NHS and voluntary sector organisations.

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