Edible Edinburgh: a Case Study in Smart and Sustainable Development

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1. **INTRODUCTION**

Edinburgh has a track record in defining itself a smart and sustainable city. In 2001 it was the first city in the UK to define itself 'smart' and since 2011 the City has sought to sustain and expand upon this development through its wider Sustainable Edinburgh 2020 framework.

Early consultations on the Sustainable Edinburgh 2020 framework served to highlight a number of issues regarding the city's food systems. Concerns about poverty and inequality include issues of affordability and accessibility of food. Concerns about wellbeing raise wide concern about the impact of food on health and in particular the issue of obesity. There is keen interest in community land ownership in the city and how this relates to local decision-making processes, use of brown-field sites, asset management and biodiversity. Food and packaging waste and an interest in more responsible consumption is a further issue of concern as is the need to support local growers, retailers and markets in order to build a sustainable economy. Local food production has been suggested as one of the top four indicators for a sustainable city.

Acting on the feedback from the Sustainable Edinburgh 2020 consultation, the City has proceeded to incorporate a sustainable food policy into the Sustainable Edinburgh 2020 Action Plan and Sustainable Procurement Action Plan (City of Edinburgh Council Policy and Strategy Committee, March 2012)[i] Further, the City Council has subsequently been working in partnership with key interest organisations to explore and progress the potential the city has to be smart in developing a more sustainable food system.

2. **SUSTAINABLE FOOD CITY**

Some might ask why Edinburgh needs a sustainable food city strategy. As the capital city of Scotland, Edinburgh is a European centre of commerce, culture and knowledge. Its population stands at 487,500 (Edinburgh by Numbers 2015)[ii] and is growing by 1% each year. It has a powerful economy, predicted to grow by an average of 2.6% a year to 2030 (Edinburgh 2013 Macro Scenarios)[iii] making it the most prosperous and productive city in the UK outside of London. Edinburgh also benefits from one of the UK's most highly-educated and productive workforces and boasts the highest percentage of professionals in the UK (Edinburgh Inspiring Capital)[iv]; almost 1/2 of the working-age population hold a degree level or professional qualification. Employment levels are high; there is a strong social economy, a volunteering rate of 29% and reported annual income to city charities of £86.2m (Edinburgh by Numbers 2015)[v]. All in all, this makes the city a magnet for international talent and tourists alike. But despite scoring consistently high in studies of wellbeing and quality of life, Edinburgh, like many other modern cities, is also home to a paradox.

Edinburgh shows little deviation from wider Scottish national trends in having one of the worst health records in Europe. Over half the city's residents are either overweight or obese, with less than a third of all residents eating the recommended 5 fruits and vegetables per day (Lothian Health and Lifestyle Survey)[vi]. Food poverty is rapidly increasing, evidenced by rising levels of food aid provision and the number of food banks being established (Lyall 2014)[vii]. And yet, at the same time, food waste accounts for one third of all household waste in our city (Messenger 2013)[viii]. The Scottish Government designated 2015 as 'The Year of

Food and Drink' to celebrate the continued success of Scotlands food and drink sector (the largest economic growth sector in Scotland), but this economic success is not reflected in our city economy. Less than 5% of our workforce is employed in manufacturing and primary industries such as farming and less than 10% work in accommodation and food services, traditionally a low pay sector (Edinburgh by Numbers, 2015)[ix].

The Scottish Government has set ambitious climate change emissions reductions targets of 80% by 2050 with an interim target of 42% by 2020 (Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009)[x] The City of Edinburgh Council has mirrored this target through the Sustainable Edinburgh 2020 framework, pledging to reduce carbon emissions in the city by over 40% by 2020 (Sustainable Edinburgh 2020 2012)[xi]. Studies estimate that our food system accounts for 30% of the UK's carbon footprint (Audsley et al 2010)[xii] so it would seem straightforward that if we address our food systems, we address a huge source of problematic emissions and a wider range of socio-economic challenges.

At national level we have seen the Scottish food and drink policy, Recipe for Success (2009)[xiii]. The Scottish Government has made considerable investment in children's food education, in communities, on resource use, Climate Change and a wide range of health and cultural initiatives. At community level the responses have been varied and often creative, drawing on the skills, talents and enthusiasm of committed staff and volunteers. The community food sector in Edinburgh includes community shops and cafes, healthy eating projects, initiatives to reduce food waste and carbon emissions, community gardens and allotments and the provision of emergency food aid and community meals. Both individually and collectively these initiatives have made a real difference to people's lives, particularly amongst vulnerable groups including the elderly, minority ethnic communities, and those experiencing homelessness, addictions or mental health issues.

But few of these initiatives address the sustainability of our food systems in a comprehensive manner. Our food systems and ways of 'fixing' them are disjointed and this is reflected at the highest level in our national governance structures with food policy responsibility fragmented across a range of government portfolios including Communities, Food and Drink, Health and Third Sector work. With such inherent contradictions in our social, environmental and economic systems and absence of a systemic approach to managing what is evidentially an issue of increasing importance it has become clear that if Edinburgh wants to be a *sustainable* city, it needs to develop as a sustainable *food* city.

In September 2011 the City of Edinburgh Council and the Soil Association Scotland held a city seminar to examine food-system models of good practice and explore how to make change for the better. Gathering together agencies and organisations with interests in food – growing, distribution, buying, manufacturing, catering - the seminar concluded that the public sector needed to lead the way and to lead by example. The city's three largest public sector organisations – National Health Service (NHS) Lothian, the City of Edinburgh Council and the University of Edinburgh agreed to explore how they might pursue this agenda within their respective organisations and also work together in partnership to lead the development of a more sustainable food city.

NHS Lothian, the City of Edinburgh Council and the University of Edinburgh, are the three largest employers in the city with a combined staff in excess of 50,000 (Edinburgh by Numbers, 2014)[xiv] and a significantly wider client base. Each has a substantial food budget and is responsible for providing nourishment for people at key points in their lives - nursery and school aged children in their formative years, young people living away from home for the first time and people in hospitals and residential care who are sick, elderly or otherwise vulnerable. With the support of the Soil Association Scotland, the three organisations formed the Edinburgh Food for Life Partnership (EFFLP), and along with the Scottish Government, funded a 3 year pilot project to:

- Identify and tackle barriers to providing increased levels of seasonal, fresh, local, higher welfare and organic food within public sector catering.
- Achieve the Soil Association's Food for Life Catering Mark in selected sites.
- Engage children and young people, parents, patients, students and staff to increase knowledge of where their food comes from.
- Evaluate the measurable impacts of the changes made.
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This Food for Life (FFL) model:

> 'works in partnership to transform food culture and food systems across the country; so we can eat food that is good for us, our communities and our planet. We work with food producers, suppliers, catering services, policy makers and Scotland's local authorities to link food culture, catering, curriculum and communities.
> (Soil Association Scotland)'[xv]

The FFL Catering Mark (Soil Association Certification)[xvi] is at the heart of the Food for Life Scotland programme. The Catering Mark is an independent certification scheme which rewards caterers for producing menus using fresh, healthy, seasonal, local and organic ingredients, including high welfare animal products and fish from sustainable sources. The Catering Mark has three tiers – bronze, silver and gold – in recognition that change takes time, and enables caterers to make stepwise progress towards producing healthy and sustainable menus.

The Food for Life Bronze Catering Mark Standard is a fixed standard for all certified meals;

- No undesirable additives and hydrogenated fats
- At least 75% of dishes on the menu are freshly prepared
- All meat is from farms which satisfy UK welfare standards
- Eggs are from cage-free hens (free range from 2015)
- Menus are seasonal and in-season produce is highlighted
- Catering staff are supported with skills training and are engaged in food education
- No GM ingredients
- No fish are served from the Marine Conservation Society 'fish to avoid' list
- Information is on display about food provenance
- All suppliers meet appropriate food safety standards
- Caterers in schools, early years and residential settings meet nutrition standards/guidelines

The Food for Life Silver and Gold Catering Mark Standards, in addition to meeting the Bronze standard, require additional points which address three core principles.

- Sourcing ethical and environment-friendly food
- Championing local producers
- Making healthy eating easy

With public sector commitment in place via the EFFLP, a number of key of organisations from the public, private and third sectors were keen to progress wider, city level action towards becoming a sustainable food city. Over the course of 2012, three key events were held with a range of organisations in order to establish whether there was indeed broad and significant interest in developing a sustainable food agenda at city level and models of good practice for taking this forward.

In March 2012, in partnership with the City of Edinburgh Council, the Soil Association Scotland hosted a national (Scotland) seminar to network interest in the newly emerging

sustainable food cities agenda. With over 80 attendees, the event allowed individuals and organisations from within the Edinburgh and from other cities, to engage, share information, and start to build a network for support and further action.

In September 2012, in partnership with Nourish Scotland, a delegate from Copenhagen's 'House of Food' met with Council staff, elected members and newly emerging sustainable food partners to share details of work in Copenhagen to convert public sector meals to organic food. The event presented a model of good practice ('menu conversion') and highlighted how a public sector lead had cemented the city's wider reputation as home to the 'New Nordic Cuisine' and a raft of award winning, internationally acclaimed restaurants. The event served to further engage Council staff and elected members with the aims of the EFFLP project and to see the potential of this as leading the way in a wider city agenda.

In December 2012 a stakeholder consultation event was hosted by the City of Edinburgh Council to agree a way forward. Key agencies and businesses involved the city's food agenda attended from the public, private and third sector and an action was charged to the steering group which emerged – Edible Edinburgh.

The Edible Edinburgh steering group agreed the aspiration to transform Edinburgh's food system to create a sustainable food city and agreed the vision –

> 'Edinburgh is a city where good food is available and accessible for all, making for healthy people, thriving communities and a sustainable environment.'
> (Edible Edinburgh, 2014)[xvii]

Group members came from different back grounds and had different interests in food. In order to work collaboratively and to ensure that members were informed across the broad spectrum of food issues, the group agreed to take up to one year to build capacity, explore issues, fill knowledge gaps, examine models of good practice and identify what action might best be designed and delivered to transform our city's food systems.

Between January 2013 and September 2013 the group held monthly, half-day seminars on themes of land use, environment, skills and employment, procurement, health and culture. Each themed seminar was led by one or more of the group with contributions invited from 'experts' from universities, agriculture, employment organisations, etc. Investing the time to his learning process was invaluable. Not only did it serve to make the group more cohesive and to affirm the imperative of transforming our food systems it also highlighted how food could be used to engage and take action on a raft of wider, social, economic and environmental issues. The investigations also made clear the need to incorporate good food policies and strategies into city's governance systems. To do that, legitimacy and support for the agenda had to be demonstrated.

The steering group drafted an outline Sustainable Food City Strategy and planned a public consultation with a difference. Following popular events in the UK and Europe, Edinburgh hosted a Feeding the 5,000 event in October 2013. Held in the heart of the city, 5,000 people enjoyed a delicious free meal created by local celebrity chefs and community groups from ingredients that might otherwise have been thrown away. A small army of volunteers was mobilized to help distribute information, set up the site, displays, cooking stations and marquees. Extra volunteers were recruited to help the community cooking groups with food preparation, peeling and chopping vegetables. Volunteer stewards helped coordinate participants and the public, provided directions and ensured the site was kept clean and orderly. A team of pledge-takers encouraged visitors to make a personal commitment beyond the event and another team promoted and encouraged responses to the Edible Edinburgh consultation. The day-long event involved participatory cooking sessions,

educational and campaign stalls, discussion groups and fun, family events. It highlighted the benefits of local food and issues of food waste and social responsibility. It also served as a high profile launch for Edible Edinburgh and the public consultation for a Sustainable Food City plan.

Attended by Members of the Scottish Parliament and local elected members, the event was a huge success and received wide press coverage. The draft sustainable food strategy consultation received over 400 responses and a number of qualitative interviews were completed. Feedback received both on the day and in follow up was analysed and used to develop the first ever Sustainable Food City plan for the City of Edinburgh.

3. <u>POLICY AIMS AND OBJECTIVES</u>

A core group of Edible Edinburgh members has remained stable throughout the life of the initiative. A few original members have left, a few new have joined, largely reflecting the changing stages of initiative's early development. This flexibility is not without challenges, for example, ensuring that all members are engaged, have a role to play and feel valued within the initiative. However, it also allows a good degree of freedom from formalities and beauracracy. The initiative has no formal organisational policies, however, broad aims and objectives can be summarised as follows;

- validate the sustainable food agenda, raise awareness and engage across sectors.
- influence and inform policy, engage and educate decision makers and activists.
- connect, integrate and improve coordination between policies, programmes and practice; e.g. planning system, procurement, climate change and adaptation plans, etc.
- communicate across and between sectors to raise awareness, and inform new ways of thinking around food and integrated issues.
- create visibility in all aspects of the sustainable food agenda, supporting existing activity and encouraging new. Establish Edible Edinburgh as a collective identity to give coherence to the issue of sustainable food, to foster aspiration and stimulate growth.
- identify and address gaps, initiating new programmes where resources allow or seeking resources for this.

4. <u>STRATEGY</u>

The Edible Edinburgh Sustainable Food City Plan (Edible Edinburgh, 2014)[xviii] was published in July 2014. It recognises that Edinburgh is already home to a vast range of good food related activity and was inspired by the many people and organisations leading the way in delivering positive change by tackling health inequalities, food waste, food poverty and many more food related issues. The plan was therefore developed as a tool to help strengthen and expand this activity, to identify and address gaps and to engage with as many people as possible to develop Edinburgh as a sustainable food city.

The plan is set out as follows –

Vision:

Edinburgh is a city where good food is available and accessible for all, making for healthy people, thriving communities and a sustainable environment

Outcomes:

- More fresh, healthy and sustainable food eaten
- Fewer people living in food poverty
- Our natural environment and resources are protected and conserved with fewer emissions
- A thriving food economy with greater diversity in local food production and distribution
- A transformed food culture with greater awareness and skills

Aims:

- Health and Well being - To create fair and affordable access to sustainable food, and ensure people can use it to provide a fresh, healthy and nutritious diet
- Land Use - To grow, produce and distribute food more locally while conserving and protecting our natural resources and environment
- Environment - Use our natural resources more efficiently in order to minimise our ecological footprint and reduce levels of avoidable food waste
- Buying Food - To develop a thriving local food economy based on public and private sector businesses procuring more sustainable food
- Economy - To develop a diverse independent food sector which offers a variety of high quality skills, training, and employment opportunities
- Cultural Change - To inspire, enable and support people to connect with food & the everyday pleasures and cultural traditions of eating, sharing and celebrating meals together.

Objectives and actions for achieving the above are outlined in the Action Plan, with food poverty currently identified as a priority action area. Edible Edinburgh has identified food poverty as a major barrier to advancing the sustainable food agenda. The Council's poverty profile shows that more than 1 in 5 households in the city (22% or 48,400 households) live on low incomes, and that slightly higher numbers (24% or 53,600 households) experience particular aspects of poverty, such as fuel poverty. Many children are affected by these hardships: 18% of all children in Edinburgh live in low income households, a total of some 17,600 children. Although it is harder to measure or estimate how many individuals or families experience food poverty, it is clear from the experience of city agencies and responses to engagement work with communities that this is one of the common effects of low income through unemployment and low pay, especially where employment is part time or on zero hours contracts and at minimum wage. Over half the households on low incomes are working households (City of Edinburgh Council Communities and Neighbourhoods Committee, May 2015)[xix] This rise in food poverty has also been evidenced by the rapid rise in the number of food banks. Between 2011 and 2013, Scotland experienced faster growth in the number of food banks launching with the Trussel Trust (largest single provider of food banks in the UK) than any other region in the UK (Ellison 2015).[xx] There are now approximately 24 food banks in Edinburgh.

5. <u>GOVERNANCE SYSTEMS</u>

Like all cities, Edible Edinburgh faced an early challenge – how to make sustainable food part of a busy city agenda, and how to keep it there. The initiative had to find ways to embed new values and principles within the existing culture, policies and strategies of our city council and with wider stakeholders in the business and third sectors.

Edible Edinburgh built credibility over time through work on the related Edinburgh Food for Life Partnership and delivery of Feed the 5,000 as a major city event. It also had an inbuilt

credibility via the individuals and organisations represented on it. The chair of Edible Edinburgh is the convenor of the City of Edinburgh Council's Transport and Environment Committee, and while Edible Edinburgh remains an independent, cross-sector partnership, this connection with city administration helps in linkages with city's governance systems, both directly via the Council and via the city's Community Planning Partnership – the Edinburgh Partnership.

Community Planning is a process whereby public services in a local authority area are planned and provided in consultation among all public bodies in that area. It was given a statutory basis in the Local Government in Scotland Act 2003 in order to deliver better services. The Edinburgh Partnership oversees Community Planning in Edinburgh, with policies and programmes designed and delivered by a number of further partnerships. Edible Edinburgh is formally recognised within these structures and in this way is linked into the city's Community Planning arrangements.

Additionally, the City of Edinburgh council has formally agreed to 'endorse and support' the Edible Edinburgh Sustainable Food City plan, further embedding the legitimacy of the plan within city governance structures.

Edible Edinburgh's strategic partnership group meets four times a year to assess progress and determine priorities. Members of the group connect widely across the food sector in the city to deliver action. A part-time project officer and group members share leads on different areas of the action plan which involves wide ranging activity from policy work to networking, education and communication and project development and delivery.

6. <u>INITIATIVES</u>

The numerous seminars, events, consultations and Feeding the 5,000 festival , were all important initiatives in their own right in terms of raising awareness, interest and participation with the sustainable food agenda. Initiation of the EFFLP was crucial to establishing a public sector lead. And the development of the first ever Sustainable Food City Plan, rooted in city governance structures was a major milestone on the road to transforming our city's food systems.

Since the launch of the Edible Edinburgh Sustainable Food City Plan in July 2014, Edible Edinburgh has worked to deliver the actions and objectives outlined in the Plan. In December 2014, Edible Edinburgh met with the Glasgow Food Policy Partnership and a number of national agencies, leading to the elected leaders of both Edinburgh and Glasgow Councils issuing a joint statement on food poverty in February 2015 (City of Edinburgh Council, 2015)[xxi]. The statement commits the cities to eradicate poverty in all its forms. Acknowledging the generous commitment of food and time to food banks by citizens and communities, the statement noted that food banks are a crisis response to an immediate problem, not a sustainable solution to food poverty. The Leaders pledged to avoid the establishment of these emergency responses as part of the support systems for poorer families, seeing this as charity welfare, rather than a sustainable system providing social security for citizens. They pledged to work with all relevant stakeholders, including people with first-hand experience of poverty to ensure that all citizens have access to sustainable, nutritious food as a matter of course, not as a result of charity.

The statement was the first of its kind and received wide media attention. The Directors of Public Health in the two cities issued a follow-up statement emphasising the health effects of food poverty. These moves inspired and provided the model for the UK Sustainable Food Cities network to follow. Under the banner 'Beyond Food Banks', the leaders of over 30 UK cities have now signed a Food Poverty Declaration calling on the UK government to take urgent action to reduce benefit delay, review how benefit sanctions and welfare reforms are

being implemented and make sure that all jobs pay enough to meet basic needs (Sustainable Food Cities Network 2015)[xxii].

Edible Edinburgh has also participated, supported and provided input to a range of community events in the city such as workshops in peripheral estates, educational events with a range of organisations, and the inaugural community-led Power of Food Festival. It also launched a website in June 2015. This hosts an online Sustainable Food City Food Charter, which invites individuals and business to make a commitment towards achieving the sustainable food city vision. Other actions include ongoing work with the EFFLP, maintaining an overview and influencing key policy developments and making responses to consultations such as the Scottish Government's 'Becoming a Good Food Nation' discussion document (Becoming a Good Food Nation, 2014)[xxiii] which suggested a vision for a national food and drink policy, proposed priority areas of work and laid the foundations for the newly established Scottish Food Commission.

7. IMPLEMENTATION/IMPACT

The Sustainable Food City plan was published in July 2014. Much of the work of the Edible Edinburgh initiative remains focused on raising awareness of food issues and encouraging integration with related agendas. Like many other cities who aspire to become Sustainable Food Cities, the complex nature of our food systems mean that we remain unclear as how best to measure our impact as an initiative and/or the transformation of our city's food systems. This is something we are working on as a priority with several key partners and other cities with the UK Sustainable Food Cities Network.

In addition to Edible Edinburgh's high profile work on food poverty, perhaps the most notable area of progress to date is with influencing our public sector food procurement and catering systems via the Food for Life project. Over the last three years the EFFLP has achieved the following (Edinburgh Food for Life Partnership Evaluation Report, 2015)[xxiv].

- The University of Edinburgh was the first Scottish university to achieve the bronze FFL Catering Mark award, including all its catering outlets across the city.
- All City of Edinburgh Council schools have achieved the bronze FFL Catering Mark award – the first Scottish local authority to achieve this.
- The City of Edinburgh Council was the first to achieve Catering Mark bronze standard for a care home in Scotland. It has since built on this achievement to include four more social care locations.
- Several innovative pilot projects have emerged from the FFL project, including a FFL Action Group at one High School and organic fruit and vegetable trials with established suppliers.
- Several major food suppliers to EFFLP partners have joined the Catering Mark Suppliers scheme and one has obtained certification as an organic licensee.
- Edinburgh partners now serve 3.5million award standard meals each year.

Feedback from those involved with FFL at the point of service delivery has been positive –

> "The menu has changed for the better. We are still doing some of the same meals but with farm assured Scottish meat. We have had positive feedback from staff and pupils. The budget is the same but staff morale is a lot better!"
> (Julie Young - Senior Cook, Currie Community High School, Edinburgh)

> "It feels so much better to be putting TLC into the food rather than just opening packets. Preparing food together has bought our whole team closer"
> (Catering Team Leader, Edinburgh)

"Food for Life has improved what we can offer our students with regards to healthy and ethical food choices in a positive and interesting way."
(Ben Stewart - Depute Head Teacher, Currie Community High School, Edinburgh)

8. CONCLUSION

Work on the Edible Edinburgh Sustainable Food City Plan is, at the time of writing, only just entering its second year. Despite this, several lessons are worth sharing:

- Sustainable Food' is an emerging area of public policy and action. There is no one-size-fits all model or framework. A holistic, flexible approach is required because sustainable food is about so much more than just food, spanning the breadth of social, environmental and economic agendas.
- It is important to ground sustainable food in establish city governance systems – and keep it there. This must integrate sustainable food with other key city agendas – planning and land use, procurement, climate change, adaptation, waste, anti-poverty, health, economy, culture, etc.
- It is hugely helpful to have champions – those who make and influence decisions in your city and who network with other decision makers across a range of sectors.
- A clear plan is essential. It enables good management and aids communication. Having the plan adopted by the local authority and other public bodies is crucial to embedding sustainable food in organisational and city agendas.

Looking forward, Edible Edinburgh shall continue to work closely with the well-established community food sector in the city and the concerns of the sector will continue to shape priorities. In this respect, Edible Edinburgh shall endeavour to play an active role in supporting communities in making the most of the opportunities presented by the new Community Empowerment Act with respect to community land access and management.

Scotland's cities have potential to play a valuable role in connecting national policy and local initiatives. Building on the success of the Joint Council leaders' statement on food poverty, Edible Edinburgh will continue to work with Glasgow and key national and local organisations to press for change at local, Scottish and UK level. The cities are currently examining the potential of community food hub models in Scotland as one possible alternative to food banks.

Food is a complex issue, but a great one by which to engage people with sustainability, carbon and climate agendas. Sustainable food could be key to accelerating a growing understanding and action on climate change issues which, locally and globally are of pressing importance.

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