

RECIPES FOR A REVOLUTION

Reclaiming our Food System: For a Just Food And Climate Transition in Tower Hamlets and Beyond

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



WHO WE ARE

Context behind our recommendations

Our 'Recipes for a Revolution' stem from a participatory research process led by the Blueprint Architect group: an evolving cohort of 20-30 people representing community leaders, organisations, activists and residents who are engaged in the food system of Tower Hamlets, London. As a group, our premise is to build a blueprint for a community-led food system that is both environmentally sustainable and socially just, tackling the issues specific to an urban area such as Tower Hamlets. We are part of the [Just FACT programme](#) (for 'Just Food And Climate Transition'), a 5-year funded project which aims to effect change by amplifying and centering the voices of those hit hardest by injustices in our food system. The programme is held through a partnership between the lead organisations WEN (Women's Environmental Network) and [Platform London](#) along with a [range of local community partners including community gardens, local businesses and food co-ops.](#)¹

● Get involved!

We invite all members of the Tower Hamlets community - from artists to food organisations, from councillors to local residents - to join this local food justice movement. We look forward to hearing from you!

For more information on how to get involved, you can contact:

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For the full-length publication, please scan this QR code.

For the full list of individuals, projects and organizations who took part, please refer to our full-length publication.



Wen.



Food Insecurity

The issue at a glance

With the cost of living crisis, prices are soaring, whilst incomes are stagnating or disappearing altogether due to unemployment and cuts to social provisions. We need a food system that addresses issues of access, affordability and ownership.

Our Recommendations

1. Support the development of local and affordable networks for food distribution

Leading the way: [St Hilda's Food Co-op](#) is part of a growing network of co-ops across Tower Hamlets. The Food Co-op serves around 80 customers a week, and supplies healthy, affordable culturally appropriate food to local communities, including fresh fruit and vegetables. It also increases access to produce that is organic, locally sourced and packaging free. The co-op is a place to shop, chat and meet. It is a space where people can access other projects and services, including initiatives designed to improve wellbeing, increase social networks and tackle isolation. It provides work experience, as well as training and mentoring for volunteers – the majority of whom are local women. Another great project leading the way is [Limborough Hub](#). In this Just FACT community kitchen and 'food hub', local organisations such as Quaker Social Action (QSA) are able to use the space to invite people seeking asylum to cook their own food and use fresh produce from the garden.

2. Integrate food policies into wider cross-sector policies

Leading the way: [R-Urban Poplar](#) is an eco-civic hub located on the corner of the Teviot estate, in Poplar. It's a great example of a civic hub embedded in a London housing estate that provides opportunities for both [food growing and waste management](#), which holistic food policy-marking could [draw and learn](#) from.

3. Repurpose waste materials and reintroduce them into the food system

Leading the way: [Just FACT](#) partner [MAD LEAP](#) have built an urban composting project and use waste management to grow food and power their mushroom farm. They advocate for an efficient model of food waste collection from housing estates that can be used to grow food, whilst creating local jobs in the process.

Advocacy and Agency

The issue at a glance

Local residents, if empowered to do so, can and should be actively involved in the decision making process regarding the future of their boroughs, and their food system should be shaped by their own experience and knowledge.

Our Recommendations

1. Prioritise transparency of all council operations including the policy-making process

Leading the way: The Blueprint Architects ask for more clarity around which specific areas each council member is responsible for when it comes to issues related to food. For instance, having clear pathways on who to contact for joining an existing community garden or starting a new one, including getting advice on land ownership and soil quality. This could also look like having more clarity on which council representatives to come to for issues specifically related to food justice as the borough has [a growing web of grassroots projects](#) actively working towards building alternative food systems.

2. Community involvement throughout the process of policy making

Leading the way: there are plenty of existing community-led food initiatives across Tower Hamlets – including all [Just FACT](#) projects and those listed in the [Tower Hamlets Food Support directory](#)². It's important for councils to connect and support existing local projects where possible so they can build relevant policy from a deep understanding of what's already there, and how it could be supported to grow.

3. Distribute power from local authorities into community-led projects, particularly over green and food growing spaces of all kinds

Leading the way: one example is Newham council, who launched its Community Wealth Building Strategy in 2020, with the aim of using its purchasing power and influence to keep wealth in the local economy. The council procures food and catering from local small and medium enterprises, co-ops and CICs and is actively helping these food providers get onto council supplier lists, as well as integrating them into contracts for healthy and sustainable food in council-run settings such as nurseries and care settings.³

Resources and Funding

The issue at a glance

Financial policy relating to food in the UK positions food as an industry rather than the foundation of a good life. It focuses on increasing profits over access to affordable and high-quality food.

Our Recommendations

1. Fairer wages for those working in the food system which reflect their value in society, particularly food growers

Leading the way: The Blueprint Architects ask that food growers are recognised as key, essential workers due to their service to the community, and for them to be remunerated accordingly. We also ask that all food industry workers – from delivery drivers to food distributors and from food shops service workers to warehouse workers – also be recognised as key workers due to their contribution to the food system and to be waged accordingly, with a salary equal or superior to a London Living Wage for all those working in the capital.

2. Fund local initiatives that are working towards a more just and fair food system

Leading the way: The Blueprint Architects ask that local authorities commit to ensuring that more long-term and sustainable funding is available for community-led food projects wherever possible, to address issues such as long-term staffing and training costs, so that skills do not constantly leave organisations because of an overreliance on volunteer labour.

3. Incentivise businesses to engage more meaningfully in our local food system

Leading the way: One example of this being done at a small scale is [Plastic Free Poplar](#)⁴, a community-led project which was all about supporting local market traders to transition away from plastic in a way that centres their needs and minimises negative impact on their business practice.

Knowledge and Training

The issue at a glance

We need better ways of sharing information so people are increasingly aware of what is happening locally and how to connect to each other. Cultural skills must be platformed, firstly by recognising and valuing them as meaningful sources of knowledge.

Our Recommendations

1. Provide paid opportunities and training for people to work within the food system, particularly in food growing

Leading the way: [Feedback's 'Green Futures'](#) project, is a Buckinghamshire based initiative aimed at supporting the local green economy and addressing youth unemployment through reconnecting young people to land and nature.⁵

2. Integrate knowledge about food systems into local schools and curriculums

Leading the way: The Blueprint Architects ask that just and fair methods of food growing and food consumption be integrated into the curriculum to support long-term cultural shifts towards sustainability and fairness. We also ask that produce for school meals be procured from local food growing initiatives to develop relationships between schools and community organisations, to enhance children's awareness of local food projects and to ensure that children are being given fresh, healthy food as often as possible.

3. Recognise, resource and connect local sources of knowledge of food and food growing

Leading the way: One example of this being done is through the [Tower Hamlets Food Growing Network](#), currently run by WEN. The network runs seasonal gatherings and provides direct practical support and training to local groups wanting to set up gardens.⁶ Another great example is [Misery](#)⁷ – a mental health collective for queer, trans and non-binary people of colour to come together and exchange knowledge about the land and growing. They hold monthly gatherings at Bethnal Green Nature Reserve and are a new partner in the wider [Just FACT](#) programme.

Land Use

The issue at a glance:

Climate justice is tied inextricably to the sustainable and fair use of land for the food system. Despite living and working in the borough, local communities continue to be deprived of the agency to make decisions on how to best use the land that they live on.

Our Recommendations

1. Implementing policies that encourage and promote more communal access to land

Leading the way: A best practice case study is [MAD LEAP's](#) mushroom farm, based in Poplar alongside [R-Urban's community garden](#). The initiative is embedded within a housing estate and the mushroom farmers share a sense of pride and ownership in having a permanent space to grow and experiment, and how different things happening in one spot creates a hub that draws local people in.

2. Better use of existing public spaces

Leading the way: One example is Waltham Forest Council, who has long supported and promoted community food growing gardens and small plots in the borough. In the last year, the council has doubled the offer to residents by ensuring allotments are used at their full capacity, keeping allotment lists active and diverse. Further work is now taking place across council services to encourage the use of public realm land for greening and food growing.⁸

3. Incentivise the use of private space for public good

Leading the way: [folx farm](#) is a five acre farm located between Hastings and Rye, where a team of women and non-binary growers lovingly cultivate organically raised, hand tended salad, herbs and vegetables which can then be delivered directly to Tower Hamlets. Folx farm uses a socially just pricing system whereby customers can select the cost that is most appropriate for their current personal circumstances. This is made possible thanks to donations from high-earning East London restaurants and other veg box customers who choose to pay more than the minimum price, through what they call a 'Food Access Fund'.⁹

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1. Definitions of terms such as 'food system', 'just transition' and 'socially just' are available in the glossary of our full-length publication.
2. Wilson, J. (2022). [Tower Hamlets Food Support](#). Women's Environmental Network.
3. Sustain, London Food Link. (2022). ['Good Food for all Londoners: Taking council action on food'](#) p.21
4. ['Plastic Free Poplar'](#). Sunny Jar Eco Hub.
5. ['Green Futures'](#). Feedback.
6. ['Tower Hamlets Food Growing Network'](#). Women's Environmental Network.
7. ['Instagram'](#). @miseryparty.
8. Sustain, London Food Link. (2022). ['Good Food for all Londoners: Taking council action on food'](#). p.22
9. ['Food Access Fund'](#). folx farm.