Urban Food Futures

Changing the fate of our food environments

Impact on Urban Health

söif — SCHOOL OF INTERNATIONAL FUTURES

Shift

Contents

Explore 2035 as reimagined in this report at
foodfutures.urbanhealth.org.uk

Foreword

At Impact on Urban Health we believe all children have **the right to the things they need to be healthy**, no matter where they grow up. This includes access to nutritious food. Today, this isn't the case, especially in inner cities.

Children in families with a low household income are being failed by the food system. A system that floods people with invitations and opportunities to eat unhealthy food and puts a price premium on healthy, convenient options. For too long the food system has prioritised short-term profits over people and planet. As this report shows, society is changing and it's now time for the food system to catch up.

> The increasing instability of food supply chains caused by climate change, and the ever-growing risks of regulation, mean that companies across the globe must adapt to ensure their long term prosperity.

For this transformation to be successful, people, communities, and their wellbeing must become a much more central focus for companies. Partnerships that deliver public good and business returns could become the norm and provide platforms to amplify diverse community voices toward food system improvements.

We have real hope that change is possible. There is growing demand from consumers, entrepreneurs and employees for businesses to show a positive contribution to society.

We commissioned this research before the Covid pandemic. Already then it felt as though the food system was at a time of flux, with traditional boundaries in food supply chains being removed. Little did we know this process would accelerate as the pandemic forced companies further online and to consider their role in public health in a way they had perhaps never done before. The risk from this state of uncertainty is that differences in people's food experiences further diverge. The opportunity is that the food system is reshaped to deliver a more equitable future.

We hope that by visualising what the future could look like, particularly for people on lower incomes, we can collectively influence the forces at play and move toward a preferred future food system that works for us all.

We invite food companies, public sector actors, civil society and communities to join us on this journey.

Jessica Attard,
Portfolio Manager, Impact on Urban Health

Introduction

What will the food environment in inner cities be like in 2035? What will have changed and what will be similar to today? Will the trends shaping the food environment help address childhood obesity, or further increase the inequality gap that currently exists around access to nutritious diets?

And whatever the forces of change are, is there anything we can do as a sector to prepare, or to shape them for the better? Are we focusing our efforts and resources in the right direction, or are there new opportunities for innovation?

These are the questions that have driven the development of this project.

This piece of work is not intended to offer definitive answers about the future, since the future is uncertain.

What we hope it will do is:
- Build a better understanding of the direction of change
- Describe possible futures, including a likely future for the food environment
- Set a vision for a desired, preferred future, that businesses, civil society and policymakers can align around
- Surface tangible 'platforms for change' that actors across the system can use to take action

This project is a collaboration between **Impact on Urban Health**, strategic foresight experts **SOIF** (**https://soif.org.uk/**), and **Shift** (**https://shiftdesign.org/**).

Executive summary

The urban food environment is a critical driver of childhood obesity, particularly in lower income communities.

We commissioned this project to explore the future of food environments, their impact on childhood obesity, and ways to change things for the better. It involved futures analysis, community research, and engagement with those working in and around the food system.

No one knows for sure how the food environment will evolve over the next 15 years, but current trends can show us what's likely to happen. The probable future involves starker inequalities. Families living on lower incomes will spend more of their income on food, be more vulnerable to food system shocks, and have less access to affordable healthy options.

> In this future, market failure in the food system means that childhood obesity is even more entrenched, and the socio-economic food divide becomes wider.

Research with families on low incomes in inner-city London showed they have a clear vision for a more equitable future food environment in which access to healthy, tasty, convenient, affordable food is a right, not a luxury. But they are sceptical that businesses and policymakers are committed to building this future.

We can influence change for the better through our choices and actions. To shape a better future for our food environment, we need to build a shared agenda, with a clear role for businesses, civil society and policy makers, and a clear voice for communities. There are leverage points for change.

Improving the food environment will require a set of changes that create a positive reinforcing loop. This is built on four evidence-based intervention points, or 'platforms for change', that we can start to act on today to shape a better 2035:

1. Enshrine universal access to healthy food as a right
2. Enable local communities to demand better and influence the changes they want to see
3. Support and promote values-led actors, such as purposeful food businesses, in the food system
4. Raise the regulatory floor to discourage behaviour that damages the food environment

Impact on Urban Health has already started to invest in these areas. We invite you to work with us in shaping the urban food system for the better.

Section 1

Context setting

Why the food environment matters for childhood obesity

The urban food environment has changed dramatically over the last two decades. Cheap, calorie-dense food is now easier than ever to access from densely situated stores and fast food outlets. External cues and the design of our food environment act as prompts to eat, influencing what food we buy.

Our environment makes it incredibly easy to consume excess calories, driving an increase in childhood obesity in the UK.

The behavioural science literature points to food purchasing and eating behaviours as being largely automatic. We buy and eat food as an instinctive response to what is in front of us, with little conscious awareness.

> What is in front of us is influenced heavily by what is most accessible, available, and affordable in our local environment.

In other words, when it comes to eating we tend to go with the easiest option.

Our preference for the easy option is understandable; our increasingly complex lives mean we have little time or attention for everyday decision-making such as when and what to eat.

For families with lower incomes, this is further exacerbated by the context in which they live. High cognitive strain, time pressure, financial worries and other stressors can lead to less healthy diets.

In order to effectively tackle childhood obesity we need to change the options available to families, to make it easier for all families to access healthier food that is also affordable and convenient.

Impact on Urban Health's Childhood Obesity Programme aims to shift the balance in favour of healthier food becoming the default, affordable, easiest option for all.

Looking ahead to 2035 helps us align around priorities for today, and actively shape the future we want to see

Foresight helps organisations to improve their awareness of their changing external environment, and therefore to decide what they should focus on to achieve their objectives in conditions of uncertainty.

As the pioneering French futurist Gaston Berger said, "**the purpose of looking at the future is to disturb the present**". It helps you become more resilient and better prepared for change.

> Futures and foresight methods can also create a platform for new thinking about strategy, policy, and innovation.

Futures approaches start from the outside, taking a wide view, because they assume that change in systems— for example the food environment— come from wider social, economic, political or technological changes. The former CEO of Intel, Andy Grove, put it like this: "snow melts from the edges."

Futures methods also focus on making sure we **understand the whole system, patterns of change**, and the complexity within it.

For these reasons, foresight and futures work is **used to inform what we choose to do in the present**, to more intentionally shape the future we want to see.

This can encompass:

- Challenging current assumptions
- Avoiding surprises and anticipating threats
- Generating new perspectives
- Extending horizon planning
- Shaping the future through social and commercial innovation
- Creating fresh narratives about change and aligning stakeholders around them

This report is grounded in robust, evidence-based foresight methods complemented by qualitative research with local families

We followed a five step process:

Stage 1
Scoping and scanning for change.
Comprehensive scanning for drivers of change influencing the future food environment. Looking across Societal, Technological, Environmental, Economic, Political/Regulatory spheres, as well as Values. We also interviewed senior experts from across the food system.

Stage 2
Ordering – developing domains of change (with stakeholders) and identifying implications.
Sense-making by clustering the drivers of change to form defining themes of the future. These represent different aspects of the future landscape and give us a view of the probable (likely) future. This provides a springboard to define a preferred (better) future, and to explore what this means for communities, families and senior stakeholders.

Stage 3
Building citizen perspectives on what needs to change.
Qualitative research with local families on a lower income in inner-city London, understanding their lived experiences of the domains and their fears and hopes for the future food environment. Using a mix of co-creation sessions and 'edge participant' interview (see slide 19) with people already living elements of the future.

Stage 4
Investigating what can change (with others) and how to make it happen.
Looking across our learnings about what needs to happen to bring about a desirable future environment, and citizen perspectives on the changes that people want to see. Exploring what needs to happen at a system level to make this happen, and who needs to be involved.

Stage 5
Integrating understanding and communicating impacts.
Summarising recommendations as a set of Platforms for Change and a "flywheel", a visual tool for expressing how change can happen; communicating the findings and bringing them to life creatively.

Section 2

Probable food future

What does the food environment of 2035 look like if we carry on as we are?

We identified more than 40 'drivers of change' that will influence the local food environment over the next 15 years

Social:
- Ageing population
- Decreasing space for kitchens in urban homes
- Continued decline of the high street
- Growth of multi-generational households
- Growing social isolation and loneliness among young people
- Growing recognition of the importance of school breakfast clubs
- Growing influence of digital and targeted marketing
- Growing pressure and reliance on food banks
- Increasing anxieties about body image
- Increasing gentrification of traditionally lower income urban areas
- Increasingly fragmented and solo eating occasions
- Rise in single person households

Economic:
- Growing financial pressure on farmers
- Growing pressure on healthcare system from obesity
- Growing number of people in in-work poverty
- Growing concentration of large global seed, fertilizer and agro-chemical industries
- Increasing financial pressure on restaurants
- Increase in automation of low-skilled work
- Increasing pressure on social housing and affordable homes
- Increasing strain on public budgets
- Increasing levels of inequality
- Increase in global supply chain and food price volatility
- Squeezed margins of 'big-four' supermarkets

Technological:
- Growing uptake of precision agriculture
- Growth in alternative proteins: both lab-grown and insect based
- Increasing access to high speed broadband
- Innovation in personalized health monitoring
- Increasing innovation in meal replacement products companies

Environmental:
- Changes in types of food production caused by climate change
- Growth of food waste
- Increasing effects of urban air pollution
- Rising food shortages due to climate change and population growth
- Unsustainability of livestock industry

Values:

- Changing understanding of obesity
- Declining loyalty towards 'big food companies' from millennials and gen Z
- Growing popularity of flexitarians, vegetarians and vegan diets
- Growing interests in local food
- Growing expectation of convenience and immediacy
- Growing understanding and acceptance of climate change
- Rise of millennial leaders in the corporate world
- Rise of socially responsible businesses
- The rise of food as identity

Political:

- Continued pressure on the NHS
- Decline in funding for youth centres and activities
- Growing regulatory pressure on sugar in food and drinks
- Increasing consumption of ultra-processed foods
- Increasing role of local government
- Increasing mainstream support for UBI and UBS schemes
- Increasing tension between public health regulation and industry interests
- Increasing competition for agricultural land
- Uncertainty about the future of migrants working in UK agriculture

A systems analysis of the drivers revealed six cross-cutting areas or 'domains' that will determine how the future food environment evolves – for better or for worse

1
Climate ready foods

As environmental pressures come to a head, will the food system adapt to be more resilient to shocks in an equitable way? Or will households with lower incomes face reduced access to fresh food, and be left behind in the transition to nutritious meat alternatives and sustainable fresh food?

2
Fragmenting food consumers

As long-term changes in consumer demand patterns put more pressure on the food sector to deliver convenience and immediacy, can this be delivered in a way that's profitable and healthy?

3
Profitable purpose

As the external costs of businesses continue to increase and 'millennial' values become more influential among managers and leaders, how will social purpose and social innovation re-shape the food sector?

4
Changing views on inequality

As the social and political discourse around inequality in the UK evolves, what initiatives to provide universal basic services or income will emerge and how soon?

5
Placemaking under pressure

As the decline of the high street continues and local councils face budget constraints, will the future of local placemaking be shaped by private sector interests? Or will local communities increase their influence over how space is used?

6
Health in the chain

As awareness of the lifetime costs of unhealthy diets rises, will regulators and businesses work together to increase access to healthier options in lower income areas? Or will corporate lobbying protect food deserts from regulation?

It is uncertain how these domains will play out by 2035, but we can make a reasonable hypothesis based on the probable future

Environment in 2035:
What's likely

The pressures of climate change have worked their way through the food system. The food system is now more unstable, and shocks to supply chains are more frequent. Meat consumption continues to fall, and flexitarian and vegetarian diets are more mainstream, often featuring almost perfect meat substitutes. The shrinking mass production meat industry targets consumers living on lower income with a low quality offer, stretching regulations to do it.

> The salad days are over, literally. Supermarkets are innovating to produce more fruit and vegetables closer to home, but can't do this quickly enough to match the rate of decline of production in Southern Europe. Fruit and vegetables are more seasonal and less plentiful.

Business in 2035:
What's likely

At the same time, much of the food sector is – like much of business – thinking longer term. This is as much through self-interest as anything else. With the purpose-driven Millennial generation now nudging past 50, managers and employees alike now demand higher standards of the businesses they work for. A sustained campaign for investors to divest from unhealthy food (similar to fossil fuel divestment campaigns), especially around the livestock sector, has also had its effect.

The contrast between low margin efficiency-driven businesses and ESG-led (Environmental, Social and Governance) businesses that manage for long-run growth has never been sharper.

Innovation tends to come from smaller mission-driven food companies, and scales up when they are acquired by larger companies.

Tighter regulations are in place to restrict ultra-processed carbohydrates, but informal markets and distribution channels emerge in response, to evade levies and restrictions.

Consumers in 2035:
What's likely

Inequality has been eased by more inclusive social support, including some 'Universal Basic Service' provision that takes the edge off the worst of poverty without making things more affordable.

Families living on a low income still spend much of their income on food, and get access to worse quality food. They are more likely to be affected by shocks to the food supply system, and less likely to have easy access to fresh or healthy foods, despite the emergence of a generation of social enterprise entrepreneurs in the sector.

Channels in 2035:
What's likely

Lifestyle and food consumption patterns continue to become less structured, with snacking and 'on the go' eating commonplace. Food service businesses respond to new combinations of consumer demand around convenience, spend, and personalisation, but focus on the premium end of the market, where there is some margin to be made.

Regulation of consumer data and of hyper-targeted marketing has increased, part of a broader push by governments, regulators, and activist groups against the power of tech companies and tech platforms.

One welcome outcome: the rise of 'local platforms', which bring together coalitions of local businesses and which measure their success by social metrics as well as commercial ones.

> In 2035, families living on lower incomes still spend much of their income on food. They are more likely to be affected by shocks to the food supply system, and less likely to have easy access to fresh or healthy foods.

In this future, childhood obesity continues to be a by-product of inequalities in the food environment

At present, there are **two food environments co-existing** in a city like London – one facilitates better health, the other less so. The dividing factor is income and equality.
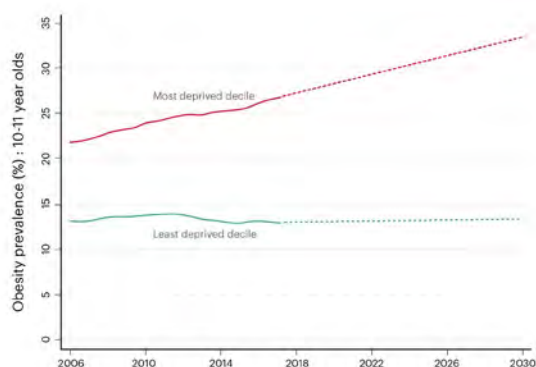
Food environments that have plentiful healthy options tend to be in affluent areas, and offer products at price points that are not accessible to households with lower incomes. The food environment for families with lower incomes tends to be saturated with unhealthy but affordable options, shaped by food deserts.

Market failures mean the food market behaves in a way that discriminates against consumers living on lower incomes.

This leads to worse health outcomes and higher obesity levels for households with lower incomes.

In this sense, the probable future described above doesn't contain big surprises. It suggests that **these market failures will continue to increase the socio-economic food divide** over the next 15 years. In terms of childhood obesity and the food environment for families with lower incomes, the future presents a steady increase in obesity prevalence.

Projected obesity prevalence for 10-11 year olds

Source: Based on historical data for 2007/08–2017/18 collected by the National Child Measurement Programme from children in Year 6. Future trends extrapolated based on past trend using Holt-Winters non-seasonal smoothing to project obesity prevalence to 2030. Obesity is defined as >95th centile on UK90 growth chart. Data courtesy of David Taylor-Robinson.

Projections suggest that if this trend continues as many as 1 in 3 children will be obese by 2030.

Preferred food future

What would a healthier and more equitable food environment in 2035 look like?

We don't have to accept the likely outcome – as actors in the food system we can set a vision for a better, preferred future and shape how things play out

In 2020, the food environment was primarily defined and dominated by the private sector. This remains true for the probable 2035 future too.

Our preferred future for 2035 is for a food environment that has **citizens and place at its heart**. A future that **recognises and respects an important role for the private sector**, but holds it to higher account and **balances its power and influence with the interests of communities**.

This is an ambition for a future that is shaped around an inclusive, **long term view of community wellbeing** and local liveability for all.

This will contribute to a reduction in childhood obesity over time, particularly for households with lower incomes.

Our vision is for a 2035 food environment where:

- Health, access to food, liveability and wellbeing are at the heart of local **citizen-centric placemaking**

- It's widely understood - by policymakers, businesses and communities - that **greater equity** is critical for improving health outcomes

- Everyone has affordable access to food that supports **planetary health** and sustainability, as well as **individual health**

- **Responsible food innovators** and social entrepreneurs re-shape the food industry according to their values

- Businesses at every step of the value chain are **held to account** more precisely for their social and public health impact

But this isn't a future for us to decide on alone – citizen perspectives matter

A future that truly has citizens and place at its heart is one that families also have a chance to shape and share their perspectives on.

After co-creating a probable and preferred future food environment with stakeholders, we took these out to **families with low incomes in inner-city London to explore their hopes, fears and priorities** for the future food environment.

The best foresight work includes an element of **citizen participation** - amplifying the perspectives, motivations and concerns of those ultimately most affected by the future food environment.

Shift worked to surface the experiences, views and collective visions of families living in inner-city London.

Shift conducted **exploratory community research**, working with two key groups; edge participants and citizen participants.

Together, we wanted to understand how the future might affect families living on a low income and to **identify what a preferred future would look like for them**.

The insights from the community were brought back to the project's cross-sector stakeholder group, and informed the development of the recommendations in section 4 and 5 of this report.

Read more about Shift's experimental methodology for this work below.

Research with 'edge' participants identified early signs of change in people's relationship with the food environment

Community research group one:
Edge Participants

Research question: How might aspects of the possible and probable futures impact families' access to a healthy diet?

Recruitment methodology: We used early indications about the possible and probable future food environments to identify families already living in future environments or displaying future behaviours. These included meal replacement super users, a vegan grower, a family living on a houseboat, and a family on Universal Credit living in an affluent area. All participants were recruited via special interest groups on Facebook.

Research methodology: Families completed a physical and digital cultural probe pack over two weeks. This included insights-generating tasks like creating a visual diary of their day, making a map of their food environment, and collecting photos of their favourite foods. Then they took part in 2-hour depth interviews via Zoom.

6
participants

6
cultural probes

12
hours of interviews

<£25k
household income

Community research surfaced local views of a preferred future for their food environments

**Community research group two:
Citizen Participants**

Research question: What does a preferred future look like for families living on a low income within inner-city London?

Recruitment methodology: We recruited a representative sample of families, all living within inner-city London, with a household income of under £25k, and with children under the age of 18. The majority were people of colour. All were recruited via parent and mutual aid groups on Facebook.

Participatory approach: An immersive video introduction shared a probable future for inner-city London, which was then explored via two interactive Miro boards including video content from Edge Participants. This was followed by small group discussions and voting on preferred futures. Participants also co-wrote stories of healthy and unhealthy food futures to share their views.

18
parents

3.5
hours

<£25k
household income

All
from inner-city London boroughs

What we learnt

Parents felt they didn't have to imagine an unhealthy future food environment, they were already living it

Parents remarked that the probable future discussed (see previous section) felt like how they already experienced inner-city London today. What's more, with issues of hyper-population, small spaces, fragmented working and low incomes, parents felt the situation was worsening with time.

They felt it was creating a food environment fuelled by corporate interests, at the cost of their own interests. Many families we spoke with loved the idea of growing their own produce, not because of its practicalities but because it was a symbol of what they feared they were losing: choice, transparency and control.

"
"We already live in the unhealthy future"

Citizen Participant

Citizens' desired future:
A borough where food is produced closer to home, so we feel greater control and transparency over what our families eat.

What we learnt

Parents believed that families living on a low income risked being locked out of a healthy future

For the parents we heard from, there was a sophisticated understanding of the things that drive unhealthy eating. Most were clear on the environmental, social, economic and political drivers that created food environments which impacted on the health of their children.

They were also very clear about the things they felt must change to give them free and fair access to healthier food. They found it easy to see how government, council and industry actors could play a role in progress. However, with market dynamics squeezing time, wages, house sizes and space, they struggled to envision a 'healthy future' that would truly benefit them and their families.

> "To live in the healthy future, you'd have to be rich"
>
> **Citizen Participant (not verbatim)**

Citizens' desired future:
A borough where work is stable, and where councils, businesses and developers are held to account for providing and preserving space for healthier lifestyles.

What we learnt

Parents believed improving basic living standards would have the biggest influence on families' health

For parents we heard from, income was inextricably linked with health. They saw this as a clear equation where money, space and time were the key requirements to protect their families' health within unhealthy food environments.

However, they find they're often left with none of these and feared some aspects of the future would squeeze them even further. Most parents we spoke with believed that access to healthy food (or the money to afford it) is a right, not a luxury. They felt a change to basic living standards could help to rebalance the money, space, time equation.

"Healthy food shouldn't be a luxury"

Citizen Participant (not verbatim)

Citizens' desired future:
A borough where our families' access to affordable food and nutrition is treated as a basic human right – not a privilege.

What we learnt

Parents didn't trust that a market driven by cost and convenience could allow much room for health

Parents spoke with clarity about what governments, councils, developers, retailers, food businesses and food manufacturers could and should do to protect child and family health. However, having seen equations of convenience and cost shape market dynamics, parents felt at the mercy of those with more power to shape and change food environments.

They were also deeply distrustful that meaningful commitments would be made by those with power to improve family health or to design businesses centred on them. This was especially acute when parents considered convenience, the vital ingredient that makes squeezed lives work and which has historically represented poor quality, poor practice and options that are bad for our health.

"It all comes down to money"

Citizen Participant (not verbatim)

Citizens' desired future:
A borough where affordable convenience doesn't have to be bought by sacrificing quality, nutrition or health.

What we learnt

Parents wanted local food environments to be shaped according to their values, not that of someone else

Families we spoke with liked the idea of change and progress coming from independent, locally-grown businesses who would shape the food environment according to their values.

Despite this, having been burnt by rapid local regeneration, they worried that those able to set up new organisations wouldn't come from low income families and would fashion the food environment to meet the preferences, needs and desires of others, perhaps people with more disposable income, instead.

"Gentrification drives out people who've been there for years"

Citizen Participant (abridged)

Citizens' desired future:
A borough where purpose-driven businesses are made in line with our values, and with our families, our preferences and our budgets in mind.

What we learnt

Parents wanted assurances that future assistance or entitlements would cover real food, not just fuel

For parents, there was both a hope and a fear around increased support from the government. They felt that this was an important component of a healthier future, but worried that this support wouldn't come with a robust awareness or acknowledgement of the multiple roles of food.

Parents worried that joy, togetherness, freedom, choice and flavour would be sacrificed, by a response that prioritised health and sustenance above all else. This was especially important to the parents we met who use food as a way to reward, connect and show love.

"
"That's punishment not nourishment"

Citizen Participant (in reaction to functional, nutrition-based food replacements like Huel)

Citizens' desired future:
A borough where freedom, flavour and joy haven't been stripped away from the (local) food that our families can afford.

Section 4

Starting to shape a better food future today

To shape a better future we need to come together around a shared agenda

Our research identified that socio-economic inequality will continue to be a key driver of childhood obesity and an unequal food environment. **We can't solve inequality directly, but we can address key aspects of the food system that will help to make a difference.**

We don't have to accept the future that is likely if things continue on their current trajectory. We can focus our efforts on shaping a more equal, less obesogenic 2035 food environment.

We've identified four priority areas or 'platforms for change'. These are anchored in the data and research, and represent an achievable and impactful level of ambition.

In each area some work is already being done, including by Impact on Urban Health and their partners. But progress needs to be accelerated, with more stakeholders across the system aligned around and driving towards the same goals.
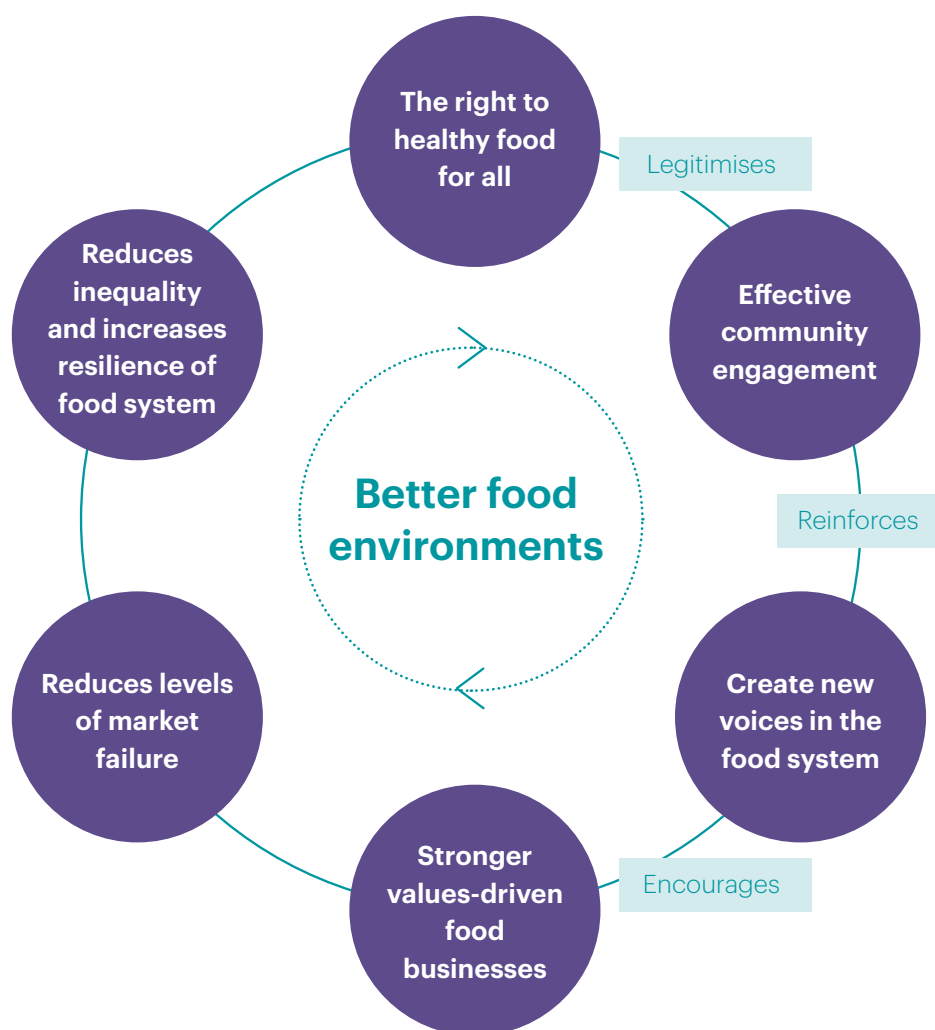
We believe actors in the charity, business and policy spheres can make the most difference.

Each has a role to play in delivering against these platforms for change. The questions and imperatives they raise for you specifically will depend on where in the system you sit, and the assets and influences you can draw on.

We've pointed to some implications for each platform for change, but **we view this as a starting point for collaboration and conversation**.

We invite you to read the four platforms for change below and **think about what you can do to help bring about positive change in the food environment.**

Improving the food environment will require a set of changes that form a positive reinforcing loop, with involvement from actors across the food system

The right to healthy food for all

Legitimises

Effective community engagement

Reinforces

Create new voices in the food system

Encourages

Stronger values-driven food businesses

Reduces levels of market failure

Better food environments

Reduces inequality and increases resilience of food system

Source: SOIF

These steps form a 'flywheel', a concept developed by the management expert Jim Collins. It is a visual way to express a strategy for change and sharpen focus on elements that matter.

Collins writes: "Once you fully grasp how to create flywheel momentum in your *particular circumstance* [his emphasis] ... and apply that understanding with creativity and discipline, you get the power of strategic compounding. Each turn builds upon previous work."

At its heart, it's a simple idea: how do we design a system so it creates a positive reinforcing loop and therefore a virtuous circle of change?

Jim Collins (2019) Turning the Flywheel. R H Business Books.

The flywheel can be achieved through four evidence-based 'platforms for change' or intervention points

1

The right to healthy food for all

Legitimises

2

Effective community engagement

Reinforces

2

Create new voices in the food system

Encourages

3

Stronger values-driven food businesses

4

Reduces levels of market failure

Reduces inequality and increases resilience of food system

Better food environments

Source: SOIF

These are anchored in the systems analysis of the drivers of change, reinforced by the findings from the community research.

Platform for change 1
Enshrine access to healthy food as a right

Platform for change 2
Enable local communities to demand better and play a part in change

Platform for change 3
Support and promote values-led actors in the food system

Platform for change 4
Raise the regulatory floor to set better parameters for the food environment

The platforms for change provide a shared ambition for businesses, policymakers and civil society to align around

This set of platforms for change are **focus areas for future activity that will help to make a better 2035** a reality.

They are evidence-based areas that we think will make a big difference. They mobilise parts of the system that support a better food environment, and damp down the parts of the system that don't.

They are mutually reinforcing and exist alongside each other as a coherent integrated strategy.

Each platform for change describes what the ambition is and what it would take to achieve it, along with risks and challenges, and indicators and examples of progress.

We've also included in each an example of a comparable change achieved in another sector. This is valuable because it can be hard for us to imagine dramatic changes happening in a sector we're a part of – it often takes inspiration from outside to understand what's really possible.

Each platform ends in a provocation for businesses, for civil society and for policymakers – inviting you to reflect on the implications of this platform for you.

Platform for change 1
Enshrine access to healthy food as a right

Platform for change 2
Enable local communities to demand better and play a part in change

Platform for change 3
Support and promote values-led actors in the food system

Platform for change 4
Raise the regulatory floor to set better parameters for the food environment

Platform for change 1:

Enshrine universal access to healthy food as a right

Platform for change 1

Enshrine universal access to healthy food as a right: **the ambition**

Access to healthy food is currently a luxury only affordable to the more affluent in our society. In 2035, it will be even more of a luxury unless we make a change. As a society we acknowledge the importance of ensuring everyone has access to healthcare and water, regardless of their income, but we leave access to healthy foods to market forces.

Parents we spoke to doubted that there would ever be space in a healthy local food environment for families with lower incomes like them. They want a future where access to affordable food and nutrition is a right, not a privilege based on wealth.

The universal right to healthy food matters because the consequences of poor nutrition and obesity ultimately affect us all. The NHS estimates that the social costs of obesity will reach nearly £50 billion in the next 30 years. This is due to lost productivity and chronic conditions that prevent people from making their full economic contribution, as well as the cost of healthcare.

The language of rights can feel theoretical and focused on abstract notions of fairness - but it has very practical consequences. When society commits to a particular right, it clears the path for institutions to be created to deliver against that right. For example, we created the NHS when we decided that everyone had the right to healthcare. Universal Basic Services (UBS), for example, could be one mechanism to deliver against the right to healthy food, but there are also other options.

Progress is being made...

In 2019, Labour announced proposals for a new Fair Food Act to reduce by **50%** the demand for food banks.

...But it's slower than it needs to be

One - fifth of UK families would have to spend **42%** of their after-housing income on food to follow the Government's recommended Eatwell Guide diet.

Platform for change 1

Enshrine universal access to healthy food as a right: **how to achieve it**

What might it take to achieve this?

- Mainstream political agreement on the importance of **universal access to healthy food as a right**, and ultimately enshrining it in legislation.

- Public sector activities to then **promote and underwrite this access right through those places where public institutions deliver food to people** – enforcing healthy food standards and free meals in schools; healthy food standards enforced in the NHS; healthy meals on wheels.

- Potential introduction of Universal Basic Services or universal food box systems. **UBS should be framed as a reform that is a more effective way of meeting social needs and reducing social costs**, not just about justice and fairness. For example, it costs far less to prevent ill-health than it does to treat its effects over a lifetime. As shown in work by Joseph Stiglitz and NEF, such services are usually more efficient to run, and give better value for money, than services purchased by individuals. They also help to build community solidarity in ways that markets cannot.

The Fair Food Transformation Fund

An example of positive change

The Fair Food Transformation Fund, supported by the Scottish government, has committed to making Scotland "a country where everyone has access to healthy, nutritious food without needing emergency food aid."

The initiative focuses on food provision in ways that enhance dignity and embody respect. Funding goes to 'food justice' projects – community groups that embrace the social value of food.

Platform for change 1

Enshrine universal access to healthy food as a right: **barriers**

What are the risks and challenges?

- Changing views of what people should have a right to can be a slow and difficult process. It's a large shift in how we talk about food - it's likely to be undercut by actors with differing views.

- In general, UK policy finds it hard to address social and economic issues in a holistic way, because of the way that Departmental budgets and responsibilities are assigned.

- The mainstream UK political discourse is not yet leaning in this direction. Recent Conservative obesity reforms emphasised the personal nature of the struggle with obesity, and set out to offer tools for individuals to tackle their own problems. The key message of the reforms was based on "a call to action for everyone who is overweight to take steps to move towards a healthier weight, with evidence-based tools and apps with advice on how to lose weight and keep it off".

Inspiration for change from another sector
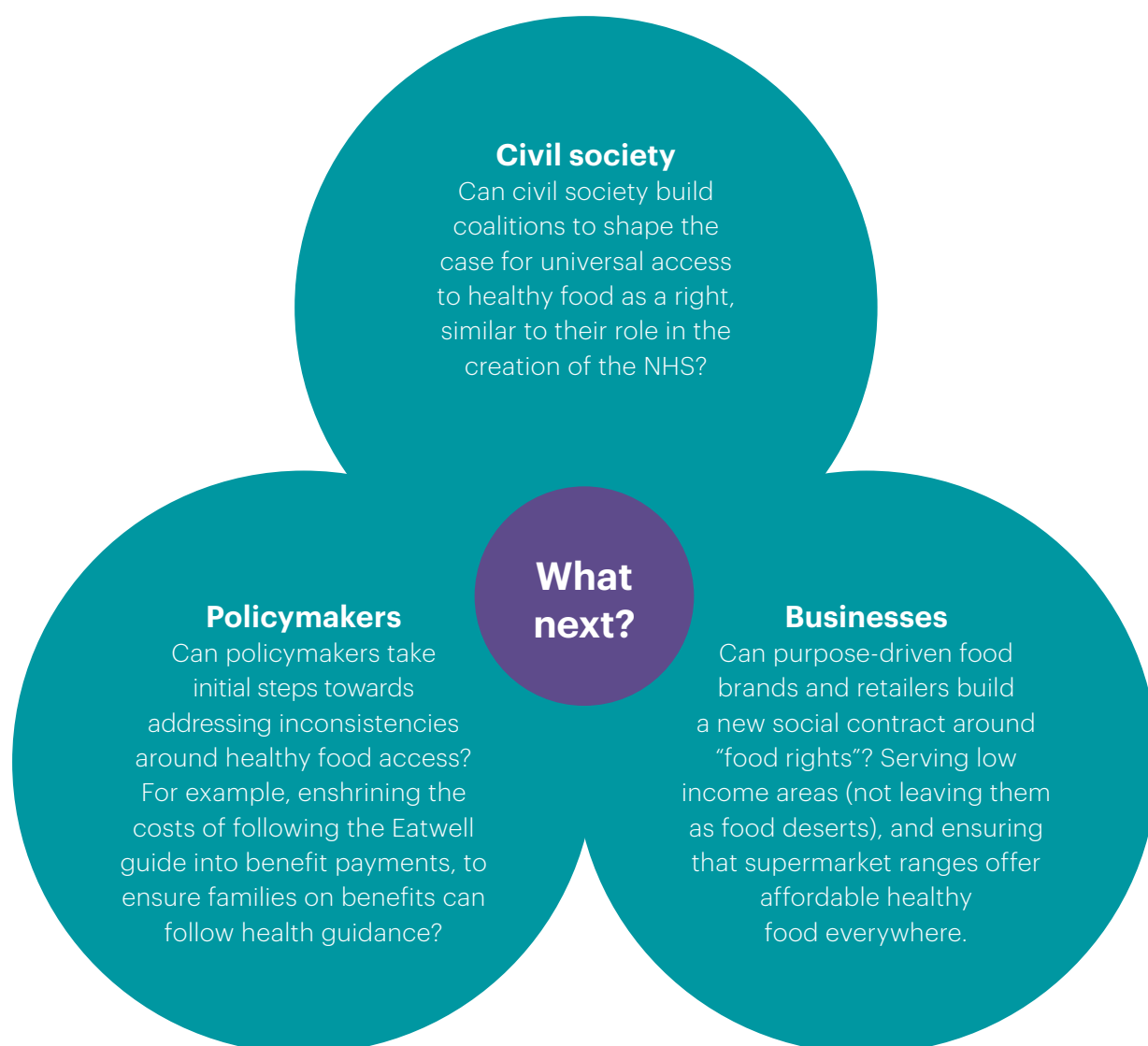
In 2001 Brazil's government formally enshrined the 'right to the city', giving all residents not just the right to housing but to shape, use and enjoy cities to ensure quality of life.

It placed responsibility on the public and private sector to prioritise the social use of space and buildings over their financial value, and to involve residents of all incomes in decision-making.

Platform for change 1

Enshrine universal access to healthy food as a right: **what next**

Civil society

Can civil society build coalitions to shape the case for universal access to healthy food as a right, similar to their role in the creation of the NHS?

What next?

Policymakers

Can policymakers take initial steps towards addressing inconsistencies around healthy food access? For example, enshrining the costs of following the Eatwell guide into benefit payments, to ensure families on benefits can follow health guidance?

Businesses

Can purpose-driven food brands and retailers build a new social contract around "food rights"? Serving low income areas (not leaving them as food deserts), and ensuring that supermarket ranges offer affordable healthy food everywhere.

Platform for change 2:

Enable local communities to demand better and play a part in change

Platform for change 2

Enable local communities to demand better and play a part in change: the ambition

Civil society, government and businesses have a key role to play in improving the food environment, but success relies on citizen participation. Social change happens most effectively, and most in line with citizens' needs, when people are supported to organise and campaign for what they want to see happen. Hillary Cottam's work in this space demonstrated that a small amount of resources and listening to what people want can create dynamic effects in local systems; unlocking spare capacity and untapped knowledge.

Citizens and small local businesses often have a vision of a healthier food environment, and are deeply invested in a better future for them and their families. When we spoke to families with lower incomes from inner-city London, they had a clear understanding of what they wanted from both local authorities and the government. However, their voices are not prioritised and they lack the power and mechanisms to influence or demand change.

Local communities have to be brought into any discussion about local food systems, and given the power to take leadership roles on issues. A healthier food environment is something local families have a clear stake in, but currently often feel disempowered from improving, and lack the connections or ability to make demands. We need to find better ways to listen to communities and act on their priorities in a way that gets new voices in the food system - influencing discussions and shaping what happens. To imagine what this could look like, look to the housing market. In recent years, citizen activism has increased dramatically - for example the self-organised 'generation rent' movement that was created to give a voice to renters silenced by more powerful corporate interests.

Progress is being made...
CoFarm Cambridge are working towards establishing community farms in all **343** UK local authorities by 2030.

...But it's slower than it needs to be
In 2019 the UK had just **50** community fridges. There are plans to double that by the end of 2020 using National Lottery funding, but this will nowhere near meet demand.

Platform for change 2

Enable local communities to demand better and play a part in change: how to achieve it

What might it take to achieve this?

- **Increase the capacity of local communities** - who are under time and resource pressure to make ends meet. There is increasing training and support available to enhance community participation and economic development. This could include access to practical tools for campaigns and projects, or mentoring from successful engagement elsewhere.

- Create **prototypes of how community self-organising works in practice**, so people can see what's possible and replicate the models and learnings. This establishes a sense of possibility of a better future, as well as a foundation for rapid scaling.

- Prototype and test **different types of spaces for equal discussion between communities, businesses, local authorities**—where co-creation, co-production and joint decision making can take place.

An example of positive change

Incredible Edible, founded in Todmorden, Yorkshire, in 2008, is now a network of 100 community-based organisations across the UK. It has a three-pronged strategy to improve local food production and expertise.

Community members engage with food in three ways. They grow locally in disused land; they promote local food businesses; and they work in schools to grow food there.

Incredible Edible

Platform for change 2

Enable local communities to demand better and play a part in change: **barriers**

What are the risks and challenges?

- Ingrained **social prejudice about the value that households with lower incomes bring** to conversations on issues that affect them.

- Lack of honesty and transparency about **how social innovation happens (slowly, often with stumbling blocks)**, which is often politicised—a pilot activity can be done as a gesture but then quickly dismissed as a failure.

- Risk of **not properly involving communities** in the design of initiatives designed to serve them.

- Risk of **consultation fatigue or extractive practices**, where communities are consulted but disheartened by receiving little change in return.
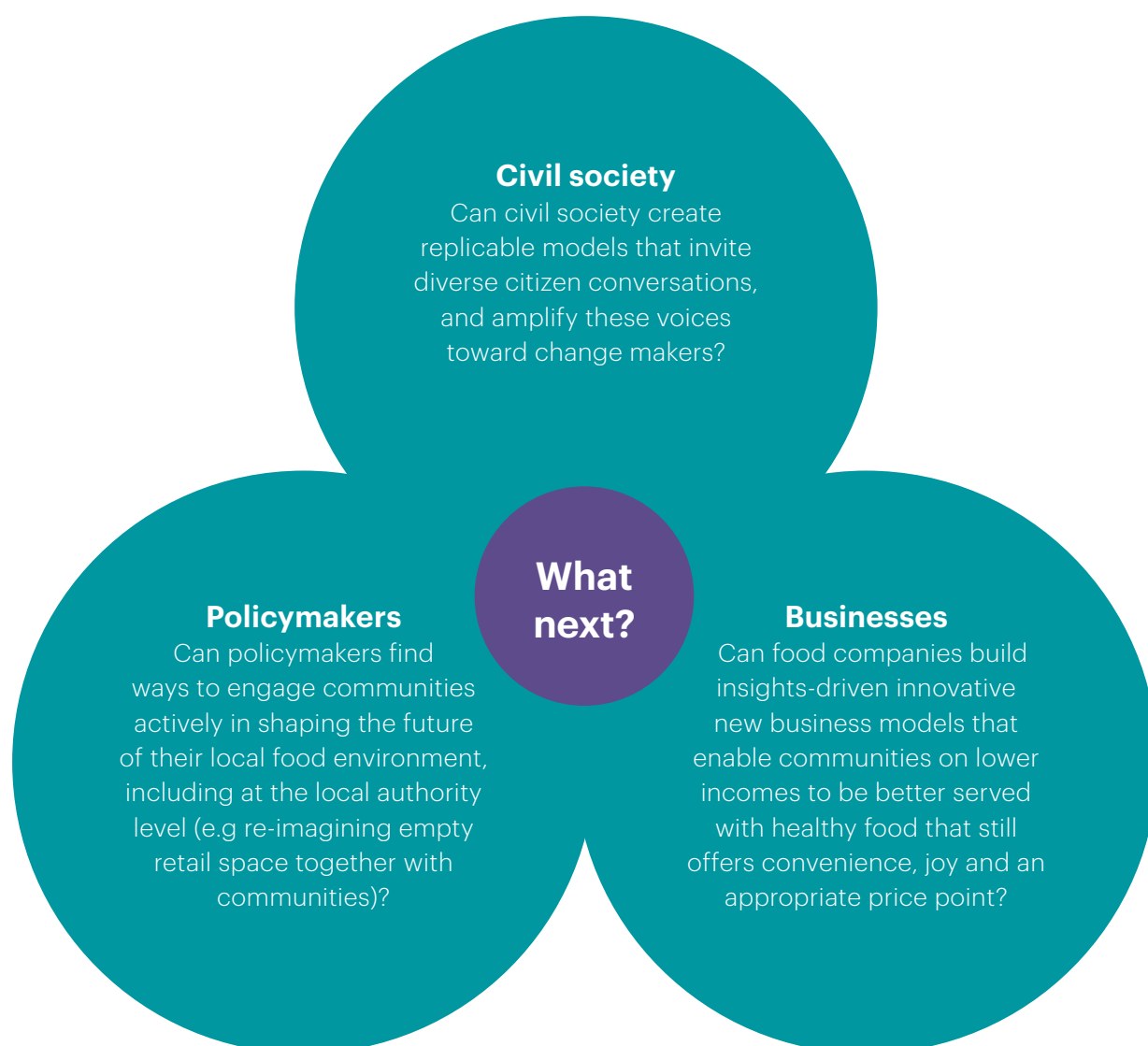

Inspiration for change from another sector

'Every One Every Day' is a grassroots network of thousands of people living in Barking and Dagenham. It brings residents together to work on neighbourhood projects focused on making everyday life in the borough better for everyone. Funding has come from local government and from Bloomberg Philanthropies and City Bridge Trust. The multi-year programme has allowed local communities to build practical projects that improve everyday life in their neighbourhoods.

Platform for change 2

Enable local communities to demand better and play a part in change: what next

Civil society
Can civil society create replicable models that invite diverse citizen conversations, and amplify these voices toward change makers?

What next?

Policymakers
Can policymakers find ways to engage communities actively in shaping the future of their local food environment, including at the local authority level (e.g re-imagining empty retail space together with communities)?

Businesses
Can food companies build insights-driven innovative new business models that enable communities on lower incomes to be better served with healthy food that still offers convenience, joy and an appropriate price point?

Platform for change 3:

Support and promote values-led actors in the food system

Platform for change 3

Support and promote values-led actors in the food system: the ambition

Historically, the food sector has been dominated by businesses driven primarily by profit, with limited regard for public health or the societal costs of the products they sell. This needs to change.

Values-led businesses consider health and social impact alongside profit, resulting in a very different contribution to the food environment. Instead of treating health and wellbeing costs, like childhood obesity, as an externality, they factor it into their business model and innovate accordingly. This results in more accessible, affordable, healthy food options. And it needn't come at a cost – members of the Global Alliance for Banking on Values performed better during the financial crisis than their mainstream competitors, likely because they made more responsible decisions about the reserves they held and what they invested in.

Change is happening – driven by the rise of more purpose-driven millennial managers at multinational companies, and the growth of social enterprise and mission-led food small businesses. But this needs to be accelerated and consolidated. This requires promoting different business models and innovators, such as the disruptors and social enterprises already trying to make a mark on the sector.

It also means working with existing dominant brand and retail players, who will likely still exist in 2035. They need to be encouraged to support better citizen health and learn from the disruptors. And they need to feel the real risks of non-action – whether that's pressure from regulators or consumer choices – and to be prevented from protecting profits through actions that have socially damaging effects.

Progress is being made...

Sales of purpose-led food and drink brands in the UK rose by **43%** from £5.7bn in 2013 to £8.2bn in 2018.

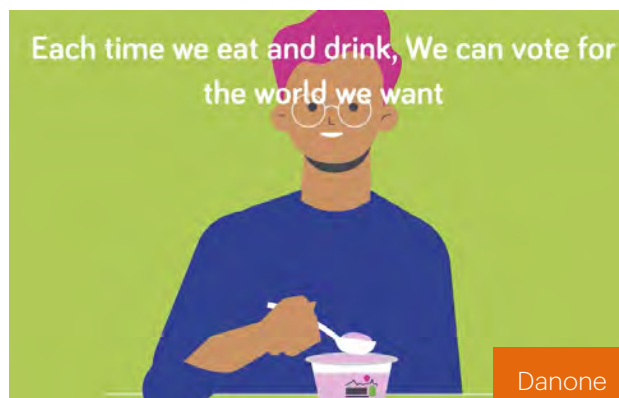**...But it's slower than it needs to be**

Public Health England set a 2016 target to reduce sugar in products by 20% by 2020, but the food industry has achieved only a **3%** reduction.

Platform for change 3

Support and promote values-led actors in the food system: **how to achieve it**

What might it take to achieve this?

- The **investment benefits of socially conscious food businesses need to be made clear**, pointing to their stronger longer-term growth prospects and greater resilience to risk and market changes, in particular factoring in climate change.

- Values-led food businesses **prove their efficacy in delivering on ESG goals**, for example, going plastic-free and meeting government guidelines on sugar and calorie reduction. In turn, they threaten the market share and employee retention of companies who fail to keep up with changing societal and staff values.

- Coalitions of **millennial managers and leaders across the food sector operate with a clear shared understanding of what a good, healthy future looks like**. These coalitions work to challenge the status quo and lobbying by larger food companies.

- These coalitions could also **utilise new digital and community platforms, creating trusted healthy spaces**. For example, a food delivery app just for local businesses that meet nutritional standards.

Each time we eat and drink, We can vote for the world we want

Danone

An example of positive change

In 2018, Danone added environmental, social, and governance criteria to a syndicated €2bn "positive incentive loan" from a group of banks led by BNP Paribas.

The interest rate will fall over time, provided Danone meets its ESG goals and gets a certain percentage of its sales from B Corp-certified divisions. If the company underperforms, it pays a higher interest rate. The banks believe that Danone's ESG commitments reduces their risk.

Platform for change 3

Support and promote values-led actors in the food system: **barriers**

What are the risks and challenges?

- Highly **processed, unhealthy foods remain cheap and generate good margins**, so there is both a strong short-term business model to provide them, and consumer demand.

- Business decisions on cost of social innovation may be negatively influenced by **investor perceptions of growth vs short-run returns**.

- Values-led businesses have **struggled to scale in the mainstream market at affordable price points**, because of the higher costs of better quality food. Commercial businesses have to deliver returns in some form, and in an environment of higher food costs there may be incentives to de-prioritise values-based models.

Insurance company, Lemonade

Inspiration for change from another sector

The values-led insurance challenger Lemonade disrupted an industry built on opaqueness and distrust. It's based on values of radical transparency and fairness for consumers. Their business model is designed to have no incentives to avoid paying out claims, or to add confusing complexity: 30% of claims are paid within three seconds. Lemonade has quickly grown to a $2bn company, and is the highest-rated insurer in the US. They're putting pressure on incumbents to catch up with their ethical approach.

Platform for change 3

Support and promote values-led actors in the food system: what next

Civil society
How can campaigners reach specific audiences within the business community - supporting managers who want to drive change within their company; or championing and supporting social enterprises to test new business models?

What next?

Policymakers
Can policymakers procure from food businesses with clear ethical standards? Could there be a UKRI fund for healthier innovative food businesses, given that this is a significant and competitive UK sector?

Businesses
Can businesses articulate more clearly – and disclose – the commercial benefits of being a values-led business? While also developing ways to inform the investment community about the commercial benefits of being purpose-driven?

Platform for change 4:

Raise the regulatory floor to set better parameters for the food environment

Platform for change 4

Raise the regulatory floor to set better parameters for the food environment: the ambition

We need to use regulation to more effectively address the market failures and false externalities of the food system. Currently, market failures mean the food system can operate without factoring in external costs to health, society or the environment to its business and operating models. The goal is to raise the regulatory floor and disclosure requirement, so there is less ambiguity about whether increasing access to healthy options is an 'opt in' decision for businesses. Regulation also enables businesses to go further because it levels the playing field.

There is a needed paradigm shift around regulation, as too often businesses view it as something to be circumvented or overcome. It needs to be made clear, via emphasis on the social costs of not implementing such regulation, that this is what society wants from its food system.

In turn, the government has to be consistent around regulation. Regulation must be positioned as something that's good for both society and business. Businesses can benefit from regulation as a foundation for innovation. In turn, regulation is not designed to attack businesses, but instead to ensure that innovation is focused in areas that benefit society.

This is the 'push' factor that works alongside the 'pull' factor of platform 1. Together, they make acting more proactively to increase access to healthy, affordable food a must-do for businesses to survive and thrive.

Progress is being made…
The new UK Obesity Strategy will restrict promotions for unhealthy products which could reduce sales by up to **20%**.

…But it's slower than it needs to be
The UK's 'Eat Out to Help Out' **50%** off discount scheme in August 2020 provided government subsidies that made junk food even cheaper.

Platform for change 4

Raise the regulatory floor to set better parameters for the food environment: how to achieve it

What might it take to achieve this?

- We need to **re-frame the regulatory debate to be about addressing the external costs of cheap food**. These are currently being paid for elsewhere in the system, through the NHS, environmental degradation or welfare support for underpaid workers.

- Aggressive regulation should **clamp down on low nutrition processed foods, and to prevent concentrations of takeaways and stores** supplying these foods in deprived areas. This should be backed up with restrictions on marketing of unhealthy food at young children, including via social media, with incentives for businesses offering healthier options.

- Where possible, **regulation should encourage businesses to expand lines of healthy, affordable food**. Blanket bans on foods are unwise. Instead, as with the tax on sugary drinks, companies should be incentivised to reformulate their recipes to make them healthier. Subsidies could be redesigned to level the playing field between healthy and unhealthy food, with tax breaks and cheaper council rates offered to healthier businesses.

Country	Nature of tax	Commodities affected
Denmark	Tax of 2.15 Euros per kg of saturated fat in products containing more than 2.3 per cent of saturated fat (2011)	Meat, cheese, butter, edible oils, margarine, spreads, snacks
Hungary	Tax on selected manufactured foods with high sugar, salt or caffeine content (2011)	Carbonated sugary drinks and products which have healthier alternatives
Finland	Tax on confectionery products, 0.75 Euros per kilogram (2011)	Confectionery products (except biscuits, buns and pastries)
	Raise in excise on sugary drinks from 4.5 cents to 7.5 cents per litre (2011)	Soft drinks
France	Tax on soft drinks, 0.072 Euros per litre (2012)	Soft drinks

An example of positive change

In October 2011, Denmark became the first country in the world to introduce a tax on saturated fat. Although short lived (it was abolished in January 2013), it had positive impacts on the diets of Danish people. Different studies claim that the tax resulted in between 4.0% and 4.9% reduction in saturated fat intake. Furthermore, vegetable consumption increased on average by 7.9%. Studies estimate that this 'fat tax' saved 123 lives annually.
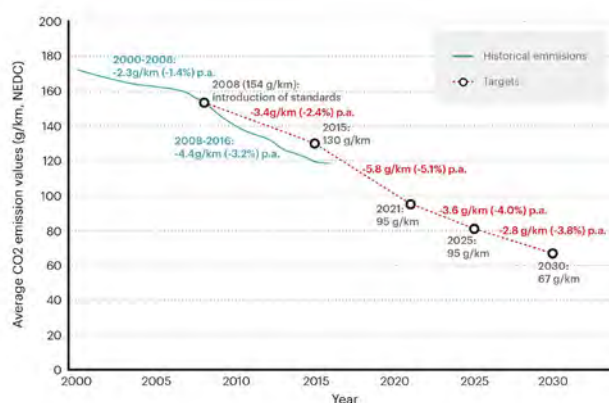
Source: Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development

Raise the regulatory floor to set better parameters for the food environment: **barriers**

What are the risks and challenges?

• Highly **processed, unhealthy foods remain cheap and generate good margins**, so there is both a strong short-term business model to provide them, and consumer demand.

• Business decisions on cost of social innovation may be negatively influenced by **investor perceptions of growth vs short-run returns**.

• Values-led businesses have **struggled to scale in the mainstream market at affordable price points** because of the higher costs of better quality food. Commercial businesses have to deliver returns in some form and, in an environment of higher food costs, there may be incentives to de-prioritise values-based models.

Inspiration for change from another sector

The EU's new vehicle emissions regulations limit the carbon emissions per kilogram of cars and vans sold. The permitted emissions level will fall over time. The result has been to increase the focus of car makers on accelerating the uptake of hybrid and electric vehicles – and is also expected to lead to materials innovations.

Graph: International Council on Clean Transportation

Platform for change 4

Raise the regulatory floor to set better parameters for the food enviroment: **what next**

Civil society
Can civil society help to shape the regulatory debate so that it also focuses on addressing the systemic, cumulative, and long-term harms of the food system, not just on protecting individuals from immediate, direct personal harm?

What next?

Policymakers
How can policymakers better design regulation so it all addresses systemic market failures such as food deserts and food swamps?

Businesses
Could dominant food brands and retailers join together to call for greater regulation, to accelerate change with an equal starting point?

Section 5

Where do we go from here?

Impact on Urban Health is already starting to invest in these areas – we want to mobilise more actors across the food system to start driving these agendas for change too

Source: SOIF

Platform for change 1
Enshrine access to healthy food as a right

Project: Reframing the story
People assume that child obesity is inevitable. To drive policy and reforms we need to change this conversation. Frameworks Institute, in partnership with Impact on Urban Health, has launched a communications toolkit to do this.
https://cotoolkit.urbanhealth.org.uk/

Platform for change 2
Enable local communities to demand better and play a part in change

Project: Changing spaces
Sustrans, in partnership with Impact on Urban Health, have worked with local people and children to implement youth-led improvements to outside spaces to increase physical activity and play. Their youth board ensures the project is led by the community it's aiming to support.

The right to healthy food for all

Legitimises

Effective community engagement

Reinforces

Create new voices in the food system

Encourages

Better food environments

Reduces inequality and increases resilience of food system

Reduces levels of market failure

4

Stronger values-driven food businesses

3

Source: SOIF

Platform for change 3
Support and promote values-led actors in the food system

Project: Good Food Fund
Through our partnership with Big Society Capital, Ascension Ventures and Mission Ventures, we've established a fund for healthy food start-ups to access financial and business support. It supports early-stage businesses to grow and scale.
https://stories.urbanhealth.org.uk/the-seven-healthier-snack-brands-chosen-to-test-a-new-food-industry-/index.html

Platform for change 4
Raise the regulatory floor to set better parameters for the food environment

Project: Greater industry transparency
In partnership with responsible investment charity ShareAction, Impact on Urban Health launched the 'Healthy Markets' campaign to harness the power of the investment system to support healthier food. Transparency and disclosure around health is low, and investors want companies to do better and rely on the government to enforce this.
https://shareaction.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Healthy_Competition.pdf

How we plan to take this forward: an invitation to join us in taking up the challenge of addressing food inequalities and shaping this system for the better

What we've seen from this research is not altogether surprising. In broad terms, without a concerted cross-sector effort, inequalities will widen. People with less money available will continue to have worse food options than others.

However, this report demonstrates that this future is not inevitable. There are clear routes to changing the trajectory we are currently on, to improve the food environment for everyone.

This requires focused, joint efforts by a range of people and organisations across sectors. There's huge potential for private-public-NGO partnerships who can bring their unique assets to bare. At Impact on Urban Health, we're already taking action toward a better food system and we'd like others to take action too.

Within the 'platforms for change' there are ideas for action that can be taken, depending on which sector you're in. These are just an initial set of ideas to achieve the change we want to see, but we'd welcome other ideas too.

We invite actors within the food system, and with influence over it, to work with us and with each other to move toward a preferred future food system for all.

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Appendix

Detailed domains analysis

Domains: more detailed analysis and supporting causal loops

The domains are a way of understanding the possible emerging future landscape.

They help us build an evidence-based picture of what the food environment might be shaped by in 2035, and the impact on childhood obesity levels in inner city areas.

Each domain tells a possible story about the future, with both more positive and more negative ways that it could play out.

The domains are built from a mix of desk research, expert interviews, analysis and workshopping:

- Scanning for drivers of change across a broad range of factors influencing the overall food environment.
- Expert interviews with stakeholders across the food system.
- A workshop with industry stakeholders to prioritise the drivers shaping change, and surface causal relationships and leverage points between them.

Shared here is a snapshot of each domain - using causal loops to describe the underlying system that informs the domain.

These include a 'positive' and a 'negative' loop. **The 'negative' loop (grey)** tends to reflect the dominant patterns of change. These largely reinforce existing childhood obesity patterns.

The 'positive' loop (teal) explores the potential for change and a better future.

Each diagram is accompanied by a narrative description.

1. Climate ready foods:
Underlying system

The 'positive' loop

The impact of climate change, and rising citizen concern about the environment, will compel businesses to change their production and supply strategies. There will be a shift towards food that can be grown locally, and in season, and flexitarianism will become more normal.

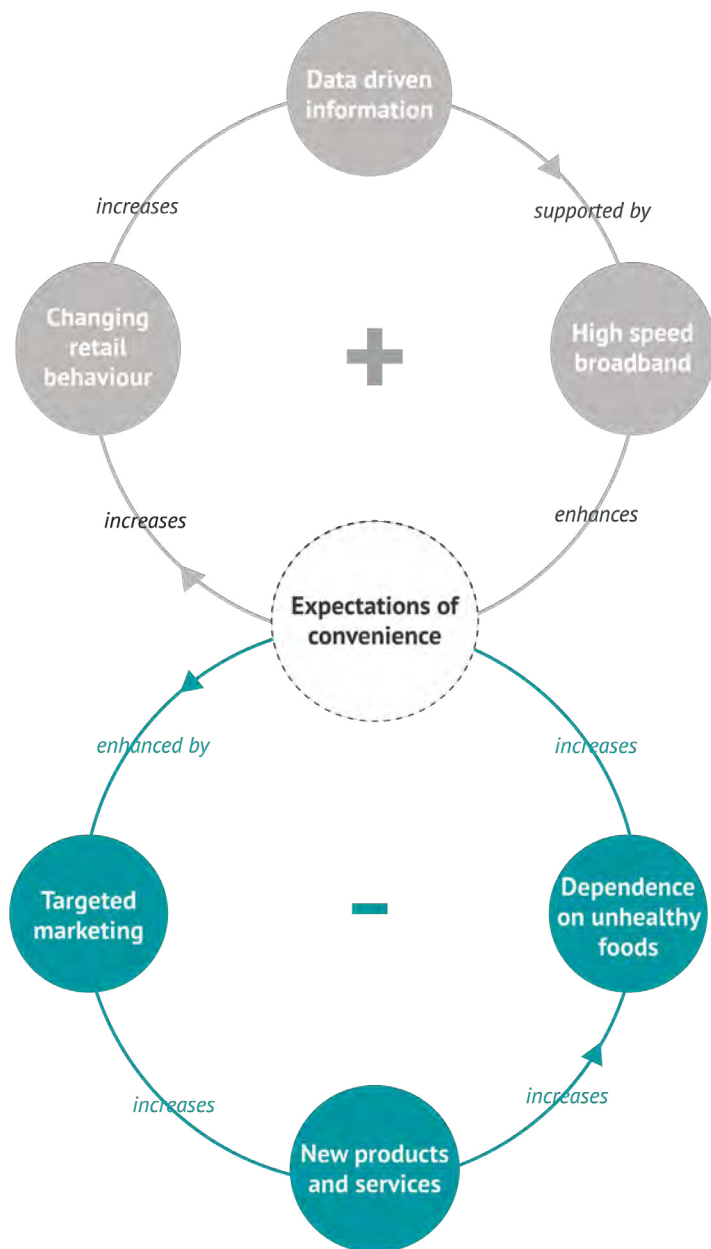Governments will reallocate subsidies, many of which currently go towards making inputs for Ultra-Processed Foods cheap, towards more sustainable food production.

The livestock industry will wane in importance due to changing consumer preferences, and with an acceleration in the availability, affordability, and flavour profile of alternative proteins, both lab-grown and insect-based.

The 'negative' loop

The 'negative' loop here tells the story of large agri-businesses resisting adaptation and continuing to emphasise strategies that make current agricultural practices more efficient, whilst doubling down on ultra-processed foods.

This is unlikely to generate the level of change required to make the food system carbon neutral.

2. The fragmenting food consumer: **Underlying system**

The 'positive' loop

Expectations of convenience and immediacy increase across the population, driven by irregular workdays, fragmented living spaces and the normalisation of personalised products and services informed by user data and preferences.
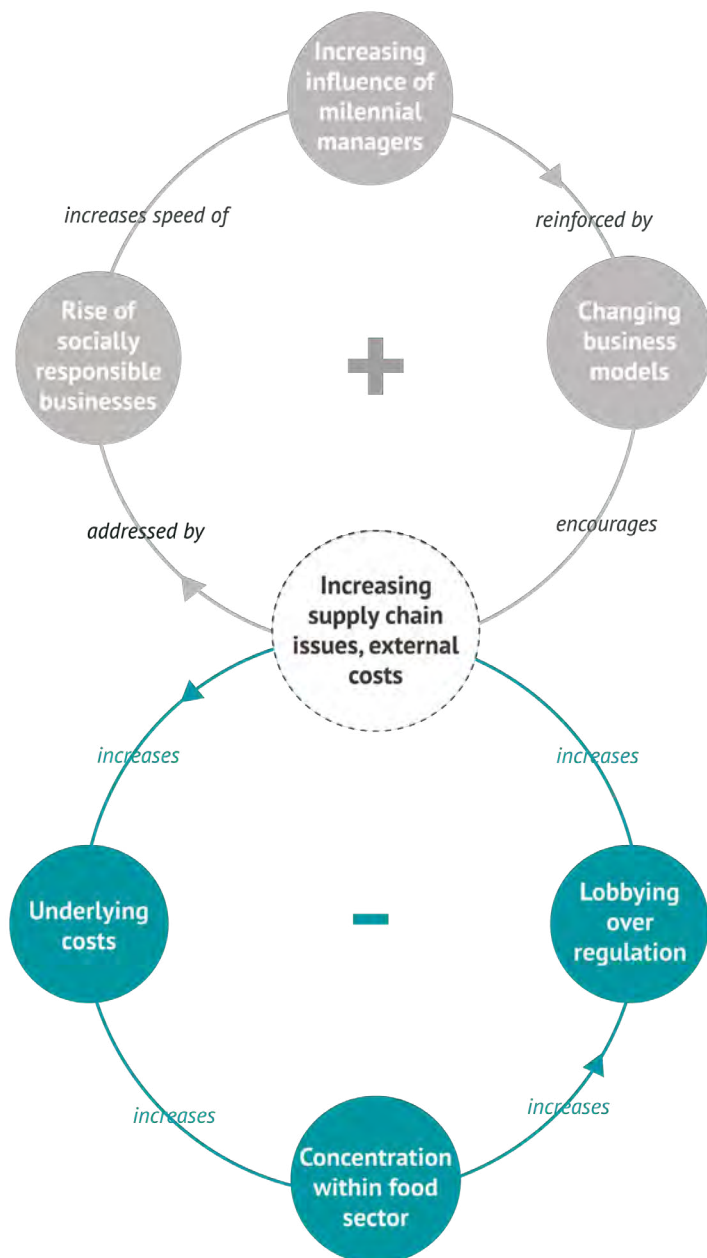
Businesses innovate around these emerging needs and preferences, resulting in new business models such as small-box shopping and hyper on-demand deliveries facilitated by high speed broadband.

The 'negative' loop

With more data and the ability to target offerings and marketing to specific customer tastes, businesses increase the proliferation of cheap, unhealthy but 'convenient' food, such as pre-packaged meals.

But new business models also face increased pressure from changing expectations. Convenience and 'made for me' solutions need to be balanced with continued affordability, regulatory pressure around healthy options, and margins while competing with large aggregators.

3. Profitable purpose:
Underlying system

The 'positive' loop

The shift by businesses in the direction of purpose isn't just about doing the right thing. It's also a response to the fact that increasing externalities are making it harder to do business.

This has driven the rise of more socially responsible businesses, notably in the food sector, where much of the innovation is coming from smaller mission-led companies who are focused on transparency and disclosure within supply chains.
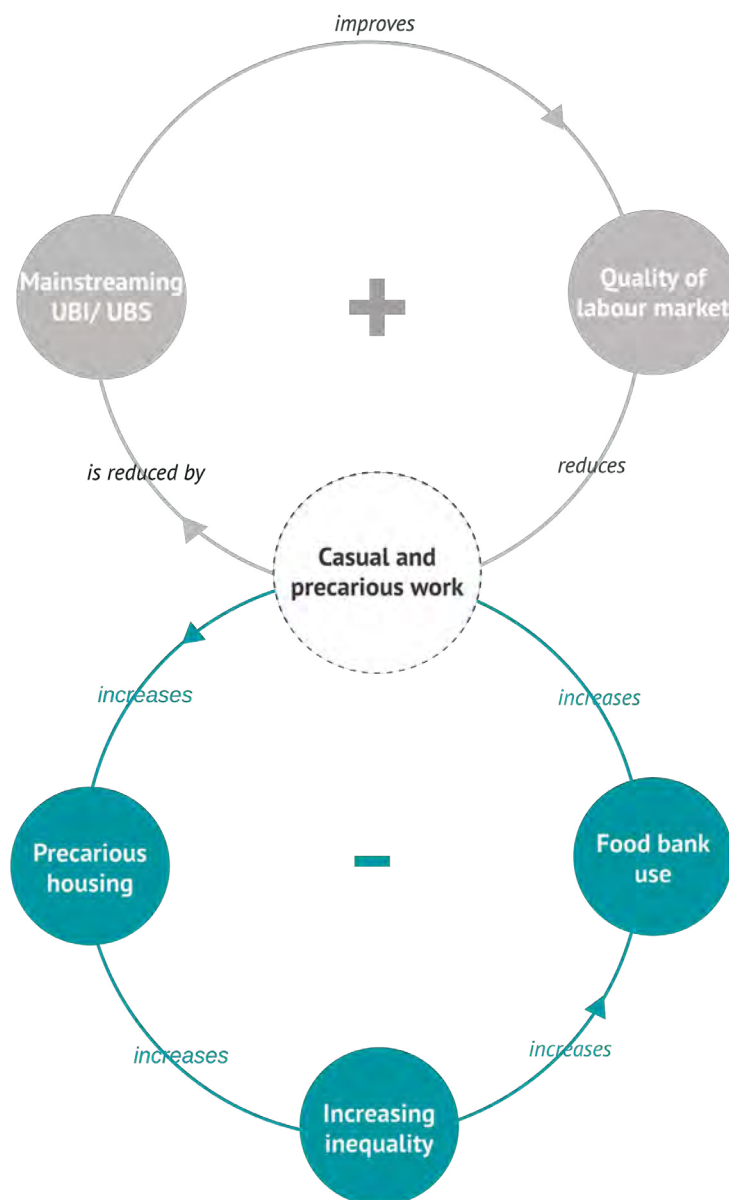
This trend is reinforced by the rise of millennial managers (the oldest now touching their 40s) and GenX managers, now in their 40s and 50s, who are more sceptical about traditional ways of doing business.

The 'negative' loop

But there is also a strong legacy here. The concentration of the food supply sector means that there are choke points on change. Large players such as brands and manufacturers can lobby on regulation rather than adapt.

And the large supermarkets can either help change or stifle it – for example, through decisions on how much range they stock and the link between SKUs and local wealth levels.

4. Changing views of inequality:
Underlying system

The 'positive' loop

Frustration and social discontent with high levels of inequality and fragile work lead to a gradual mainstreaming of traditionally marginal economic ideas. Universal Basic Income (UBI) and Universal Basic Services (UBS) become normalised in the political and social discourse, both of which would allow people much improved financial security.
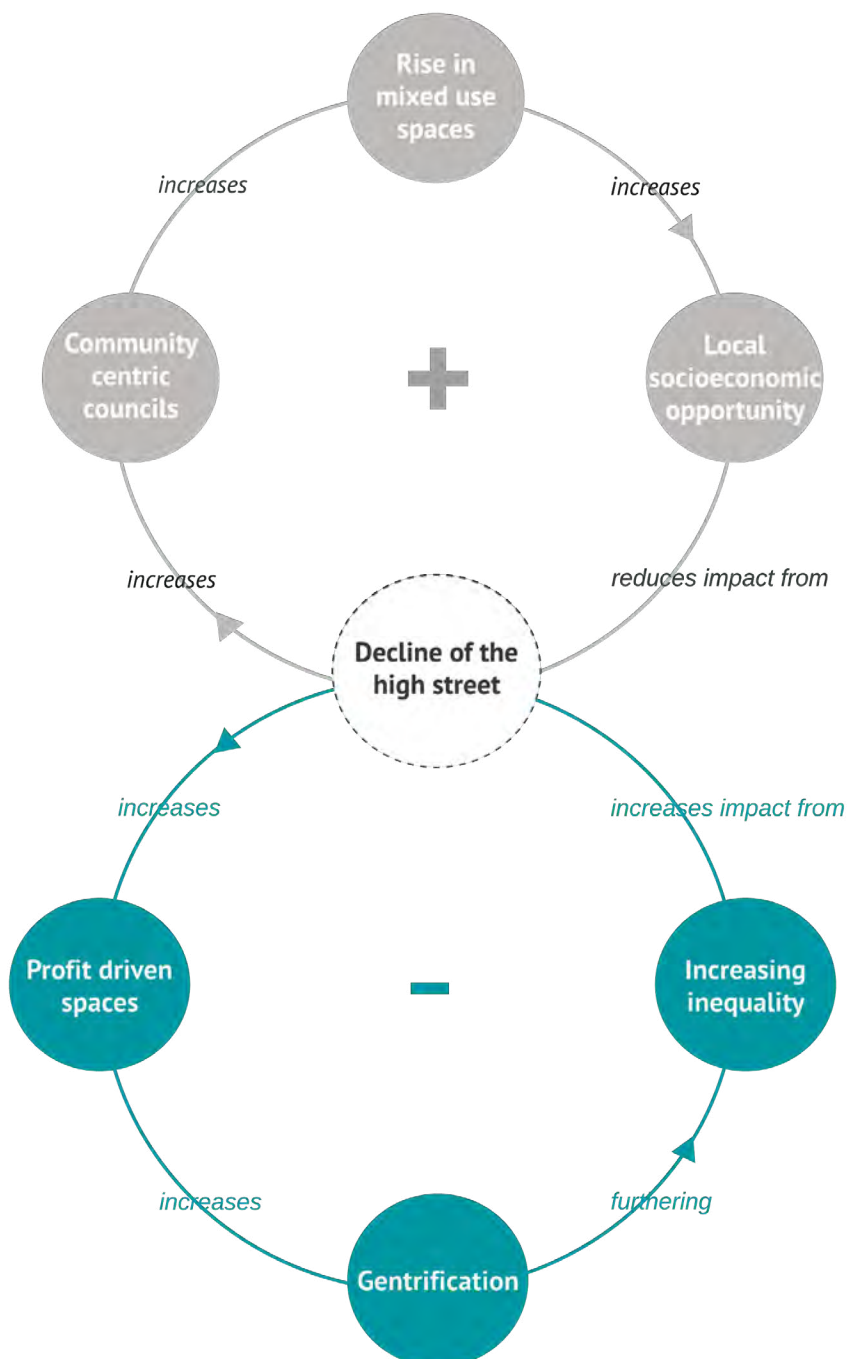
Removing the provision of exploitable labour forces employers to change their hiring strategies to incentivise people. Work will become better paid, with better benefits, and allow people to retrain if they need to.

The 'negative' loop

Levels of inequality are high, and are reinforced by the growing number of people in casual and precarious work, for instance those on zero-hour contracts.

Housing costs are one of the main factors in keeping inequality high, and ensuring that people cannot afford to stop working precariously. This inequality also increases reliance on food banks.

5. Placemaking under pressure:
Underlying system

The 'positive' loop

With the decline of the high street, some more visionary and community-centric councils focus local development around liveability.

This includes enabling more mixed use spaces, resulting in more local economic opportunity and citizen-centric placemaking. This leads to an active role of local government in maintaining public interest in liveability and placemaking for low income households. This may result in more local food production, restaurants and community-centric uses of public spaces (e.g. food streets).
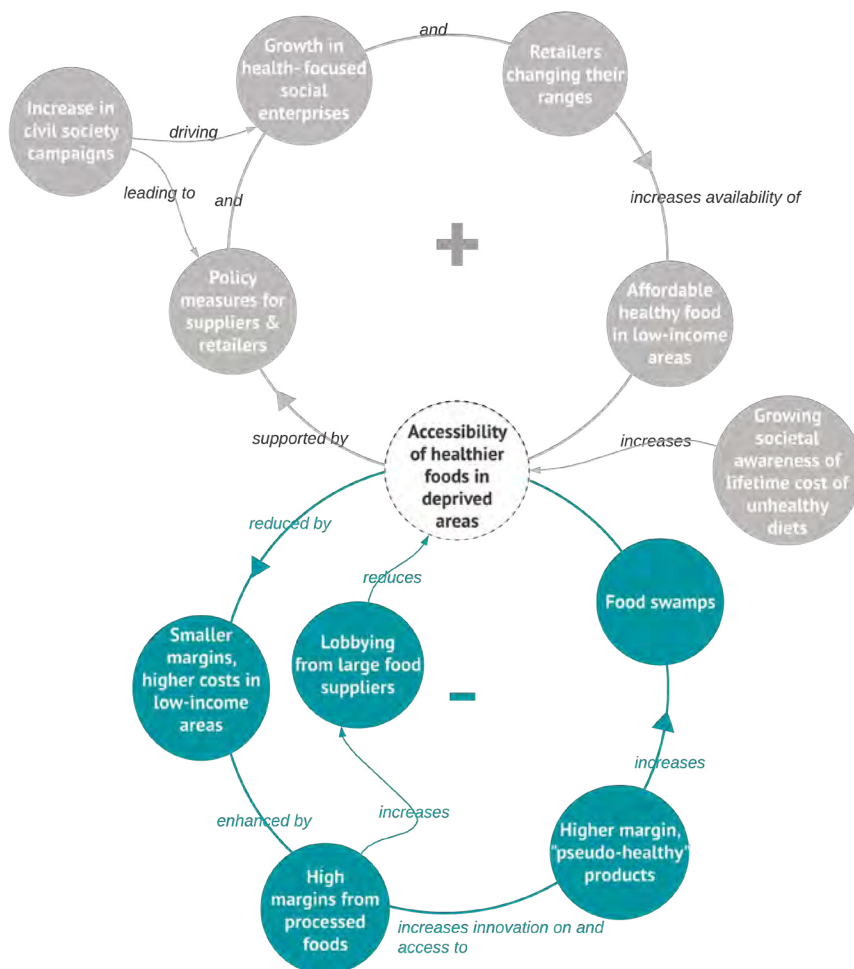
The 'negative' loop

The decline of the high street accelerates due to more online shopping, reduced customer footfall and high rents, resulting in fewer opportunities locally as high street shops and restaurants face closure.

Facing budgetary pressure, some local councils align with private sector interests such as real estate developers. Those actors shape the re-development of local areas in line with gentrification, resulting in more profit-driven and privately managed public spaces.

Gentrification, reduction of local economic opportunity and an increase in overcrowded spaces means falling real incomes and rising inequality for some groups, and declining liveability and health of localities.

6. Health in the chain:
Underlying system

The 'positive' loop

Growing societal awareness of the lifetime costs of unhealthy diets leads to an increase in civil society campaigns, enhanced by public awareness of budgetary pressures on public resources like the NHS. An increase in civil-society campaigns supported by digital platforms, alongside a rise in health-focused social enterprises, drives policy measures focused on reducing food deserts.

A combination of regulation and activism – and internal pressure from food company employees – has the potential to create new approaches to food production and distribution. This could come through new entrants such as social enterprises and existing players choosing to innovate.

The 'negative' loop

However, some food suppliers, but not all, may respond by lobbying around branding and packaging, preventing regulators from marking unhealthy foods to consumers. They may also respond to the discourse around health by innovating high-margin 'pseudo healthy' products that are ultimately still highly-processed, low nutrition and high calorie. Supermarkets can still sell disproportionately more high-margin processed foods in lower income areas to compensate for low consumer spending. This maintains distinctively different range plans in lower income areas.

Our partners

SCHOOL OF INTERNATIONAL FUTURES

Shift

About SOIF

SOIF are practitioners in planning, strategy and policy for the next generations. They help policy makers, civil society and business leaders improve the present and the future by using foresight and futures methods to make better strategic choices about the future, to improve the quality of their innovation, and make their organisations more resilient by better understanding and managing risk.

SOIF supports decision-makers grappling with complex, future-facing policy and strategy questions. They also weave and incubate networks of social change agents who are working for better futures at a community and global level.

About Shift

Shift is a design and innovation charity that takes a collective approach to tackling social problems. They use design thinking to help organisations maximise their impact, through rigorous research, bold creativity, strategic thinking and an open collaborative mindset.

Shift is a team of designers, researchers and strategists who work to provide the methodology, specialist skills and experience to help nonprofits be even more efficient and effective.

Thank you

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