



F Podsmead Food & Families Project Report





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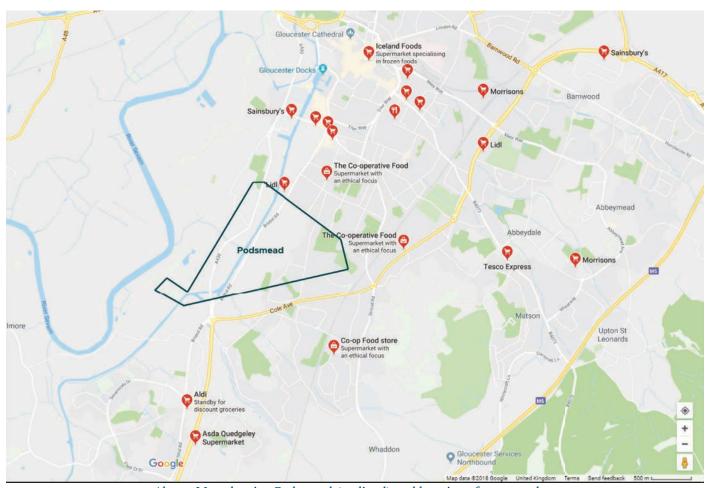
Background

The aim of the Food & Families project was to gather the views of residents on the Podsmead estate in Gloucester about their food choices and options. Our starting point was to work closely with residents and organisations active in Podsmead, recognising the assets and strengths of the community.



Gloucestershire County Council¹ (the project funder) wanted to understand what people thought would improve food options and choices, and support 'healthy eating' in a specific local area. Podsmead was chosen as it has few shops and poor public transport, limiting access to affordable healthy food. What we found will feed into future plans for improvements in Podsmead, as well as informing similar work elsewhere in Gloucestershire and further afield.

Evolving Communities and Healthwatch Gloucestershire were chosen to do this work because of our expertise in gathering the views of local people. In addition, Healthwatch Gloucestershire have a great deal of local knowledge that was considered beneficial to the project. Podsmead residents were involved as partners in designing and carrying out this research. This was important to ensure that we asked relevant, sensitive questions that made sense to local people in the context of their lives.



Above: Map showing Podsmead (outlined) and location of supermarkets

^[1] Gloucestershire County Council are working with Leeds Beckett University on a UK wide programme to develop practical ways for local authorities to address obesity via a 'whole systems' approach.

What we did

Evolving Communities appointed a researcher to lead this project between May-August 2018. The researcher and project team:

- met with staff and volunteers at the Podsmead Big Local (PBL) and other organisations active around Podsmead
- recruited three Podsmead residents and one local volunteer to form the project team
- based on feedback we changed the name of the project from the 'Healthy Eating Project' to the 'Food & Families' project
- spent time in the Melting Pot community café each week talked to staff, volunteers and customers
- distributed information about the project via the café, on noticeboards, in the community centre and social media
- produced questionnaires for residents on Shopping, Cooking and Good food
- worked with Play Gloucestershire developed a survey conducted by their Young Volunteers
- organised a free community meal event at the Melting Pot Café
- gave feedback, and thanks, to residents after the community meal about research findings and the next steps
- analysed questionnaires and surveys, discussed next steps with project team and funders, wrote report and asked for comments/feedback

Who we spoke to



Residents of Podsmead estate

A total of **36** Podsmead residents shared their views with us.

17 residents were interviewed at the community meal.

4 residents had a one-to-one interview with a researcher on another occasion.

12 residents answered survey questions via Young Volunteers from Play Gloucestershire.

3 volunteers for Podsmead Big Local (all Podsmead residents) spoke to us about about their voluntary role and related issues.

Organisations on Podsmead

We talked to staff from 10* organisations who are active in and around Podsmead estate. Face to face meetings were held with 7 local organisations, and with two local councillors.

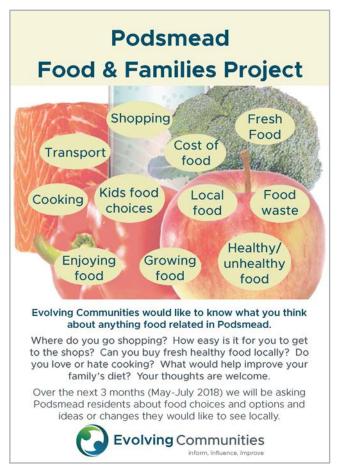
* Podsmead Big Local², Gloucestershire Gateway Trust³, GL Communities, Healthy Lifestyle Service, Play Gloucestershire, Wiggly Worm⁴, Gloucester City Homes⁵, Barnwood Trust, Community Wellbeing Service, Slimming World.

Food & Families project team

Four people were recruited; three Podsmead residents and one local volunteer (through Healthwatch Gloucestershire). Team members received support and informal training. Team members:

- gave us their ideas, views and insights on the research topic
- suggested different approaches and methods to use and people to talk to
- took on different roles adviser, community researcher, volunteer
- helped with the design and distribution of questionnaires, flyers and by giving feedback
- conducted research interviews with residents
- discussed findings, next steps and commented on the draft report





- Podsmead Big Local (<u>www.podsmeadbiglocal.org.uk</u>); funded by the Big Lottery. Projects include the Melting Pot Café and Hub, and a programme of events & activities chosen by the community.
- Gloucestershire Gateway Trust (www.gloucesterhshiregatewaytrust.org.uk); the charitable partner of the Gloucester M5 services. GGT fund a range of initiatives/groups and an annual survey by community researchers.
- The Wiggly Worm (<u>www.thewigglyworm.org.uk</u>); their mission is to make a difference to people's lives by creating opportunities through practical experiences and challenges in the world of food.
- Gloucester City Homes (<u>www.shapethefutureglos.co.uk</u>) are active in the area consulting the community about their Regeneration Plans.

Key messages

About the research method

Language is important – 'healthy eating' can imply failure or judgement and may be impossible for people who are struggling.

People are wary of being seen as a problem to be fixed – supporting existing community activity and strengths offers a 'way in' and gives something back.

Working with people as partners needs funding – the free meal was a good incentive but extra funding may have encouraged more residents to get involved.

About food choices and options

Podsmead residents have to travel to get fresh food at good prices – a good quality shop on the estate would help.

Getting shopping home on public transport is difficult and expensive – affordable food options are needed close to home.

Parents want ideas for quick, cheap and healthy meals – a cooking club or class could help.

Low income limits food choices – a free food donation/collection point would be welcome as would home grown food.

Physical activity opportunities are limited around Podsmead – people want to get more active.

Views from Podsmead

Food and eating is personal and can be a sensitive subject, especially if people feel criticised or blamed for their choices. Early conversations with residents and staff at the Melting Pot Café were important in deciding what approach to take, what questions to ask and when and how to ask them.

We were reminded early on that food should be about enjoyment and happiness and that it can offer comfort. The Manager of the Melting Pot Café sees food as a way of bringing people together – so the idea of a free community meal to promote the recently refurbished café was born.



The project team designed three separate questionnaires (*Shopping*, *Cooking* and *Good food*) to support conversations with residents at the meal; Young Volunteers completed a shorter survey with their family and friends. The questions were worded to avoid being intrusive and to enable comfortable conversations. This 'light touch' approach helped deliver a successful community event.



1. Shopping

The residents of Podsmead we spoke to said they could not get fresh, healthy and affordable food on the estate. People said they travelled to supermarkets and some went to independent shops in Gloucester to get what they wanted and needed at the right price.

Residents with a car said they had a wide choice of supermarkets: those most frequently mentioned as cheap and convenient were Lidl, Tesco, Asda and Iceland.

"I still have to travel out to get fresh food; it [quality] isn't great locally."

Residents without a car said that buying food was difficult, especially for those with mobility issues, small children and push-chairs. Several people said they wanted to buy in bulk to save money, but that having to get the bus there and a taxi home with the shopping, added extra costs. Extended families gave each other lifts and several residents said they shopped online for the convenience of home delivery.

Residents said that the shop on the estate was convenient, but it offered limited choice, had little fresh food and was expensive. Some people used it only for buying gas and electricity, others found it useful when they ran out of something. Residents were unanimous in saying the estate needed a different, cheaper local shop.

People commented about the closure of the estate's two Takeaways, with some residents saying they would like a good quality Takeaway such as a fish & chip shop on the estate. Others said that food outlets were not as important as having a pharmacy on the estate.

2. Cooking

Podsmead residents enjoy a wide range of food; favourite dishes include sausage and mash, pasta, curry, Sunday roast, tandoori chicken, spaghetti bolognese, rice, peas, chicken and potato wedges.

Most people we spoke to said they had learned to cook from parents or grandparents. Some cooked from fresh ingredients and enjoyed it, but several residents spoke of being stuck in a rut and turning to the same dishes or ready meals.

"I can cook but I've no time and it's just too expensive to buy ingredients round here."





Everybody's hungry and I'm really tired after work." Busy parents mentioned being short of time, the cost of ingredients, tiredness and stress meaning they could not always produce the sort of meals they would like.

One mum who said she couldn't cook much with her children under her feet, said that having a babysitter would enable her to try new recipes and cook more often.

Several parents spoke of the efforts they made getting their 'fussy eaters' to eat properly, cooking food their kids would not reject or waste.

Two residents with diabetes were struggling to adjust, and said they would welcome practical ideas about what they could eat.

"I've been told to cut out carbs, sugar, pasta...
everything. I don't know what to eat and I'm
pregnant, I'm wasting away."

Podsmead residents living alone told us that cooking for one was a chore. A resident who was divorced said he used to enjoy cooking the family's Sunday lunch, but he no longer cooks much now he lives (and eats) alone.

"My kids don't like fruit or veg but I hide it by blending it smooth... they don't notice."



"I only cook food in the oven.

I don't eat any veg."

Several people commented on the enjoyment they got from cooking for others, sharing food with family and friends and trying new recipes;

"The more people I cook for the more I enjoy it."

"I love trying new foods... I'll invite friends round if I have too much."

When you cook for yourself it is very cheap... but you need to know how."

There was some disagreement about whether cooking from scratch using fresh ingredients was expensive. Some residents said that they could not afford fresh food, others believed that even cheap ingredients can be tasty if they are cooked well.

3. Good food

Podsmead residents are well aware that healthy eating means having a variety of fresh ingredients. There was agreement that processed food and ready meals can be high in sugar and fat, and that cooking from scratch is healthiest. However, residents told us that healthy eating is unachievable if you don't have easy access to affordable fresh ingredients.

We were told that for people on low incomes 'healthy' means 'expensive' food. Several residents said that good food should be cheaper; one suggested there should be 'lower bracket' healthy food options in shops and supermarkets.

"It's so much cheaper to buy crap food... only rich people can afford 'organic' food."

"I know ready meals are full of sugar and salt but I read the labels and try to buy the sugar free ones."

Only one resident told us he ate whatever he fancied without considering the ingredients; most people said they actively looked for ways to improve their diet.

One resident said she wanted to see more traffic light labelling on food.

Parents were conscious of their children's food choice; sugar and energy drinks were mentioned as a problem. There was also a feeling that others might judge them for their children's choices.

"They're [kids] making us look bad now, saying they like junk food best... it's because they don't get it very much.

You can eat cheaply and really well if you grow your own food... it's hard work but worth it."

Several Podsmead residents told us they would be interested in growing food, but some didn't have the relevant skills, time or space. One resident talked about the hard work and rewards of turning her bramble covered garden into a productive vegetable patch.



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Improvement ideas

1. Affordable food

Several Podsmead residents said that their income limited their choices and they simply could not afford fresh, healthy food.

The following ideas for improving access to affordable healthy food on the estate, were popular:

"Healthy food is expensive and cheap food is unhealthy... what am I supposed to do? They should make healthy food cheaper."

Good quality shop on estate



Residents agreed that a mini supermarket or shop on the estate selling a variety of food (including fresh fruit and veg) at good prices would help improve their food choices. Tesco Express and mini Aldi were mentioned. Several people said the Co-op was too expensive. Some residents suggested a fruit or vegetable shop, market stall or van would help in the short term, if the prices were affordable.

It was a suggested that some community transport could help people access the shops in the meantime – we were told a bus driver who lives on the estate might help out.

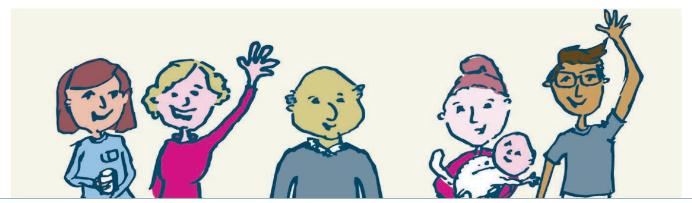
Free food donation/collection point

Residents were open to idea of sharing surplus food such as excess from supermarkets via a food donation and collection point on the estate. Some people were aware of the scheme already operated by Gloucester Gateway Trust⁶ but unsure of how it might operate on Podsmead, who would look after it and how people would access it.

People who had used the food bank in Gloucester said it was difficult to get to and that fresh ingredients were lacking. Donated food that included fruit and vegetables was a popular idea.

There were concerns about fresh food going off and one resident suggested it could be cooked immediately and free or cheap meals offered at the café.

"Definitely a good idea... it [food share point] would help you eat more healthier."



[6] <u>www.facebook.com/thematsongatewayhub</u> - scheme operated by Gloucester Gateway Trust receives free food from M5 services and Tesco via Fairshares.



Growing food

Several residents pointed out that the gardens and open spaces on Podsmead were not well used. Some felt there was the potential to grow food and share the work in community allotments on Podsmead.

One resident said that older people might have the time and the skills to pass onto younger people. Another said that allotments wouldn't work without a strong community. A volunteer had been growing food at the Hub garden and

several residents hoped this work would continue. Residents know that home grown food is good quality and cheap, but they also know it takes time and

commitment. One residents talked about the mental health benefits of growing her own fruit and vegetables.

"In the evening I sit in the garden with a cup of tea and just switch off...you can't be depressed if you have a garden.

2. Cooking club or class

Several residents said that they would like to cook more, get ideas and learn new recipes. The idea of a cooking club or class at Podsmead, to help develop skills for making quick, cheap, healthy meals was popular.

"My two year old loves cooking, I'd like to have the time to cook with her... a cooking class would be great."

One resident said the lack of cooking lessons in schools was a problem and several people suggested that it would be useful and fun for families to learn together. Several parents said they would like to cook more with their children.

The new kitchen upstairs at the Podsmead Hub was suggested as the ideal venue.

3. Physical activity

Podsmead residents said that exercise – as well as food – is important for health. We were told that that there is nowhere to go to be active for young people and families on Podsmead.

While some residents said they felt safe living in Podsmead, others had safety concerns. Several parents said they wouldn't let their kids out alone.

"Have you seen it out there? Signs saying 'No ball games'... there's nowhere to go, nothing to do for me and the kids."

It's not safe to let the kids out and anyway, there's nowhere to go... there isn't enough to do round here."

Internet addiction was mentioned as an issue, but some parents preferred their young person to be inside due to safety worries one mentioned concerns about 'gangs'.

Several parents commented on the benefits of having Play Gloucestershire's Play Rangers⁷ on the estate every week. One local resident has just started a Podsmead Walking Group, which aims to hold regular group walks and socials.

4. Community building

Podsmead residents we spoke to were positive about recent community activity on the estate, especially the work of staff and volunteers at the café and the Podsmead Big Local Hub. They wanted more events to bring the community together – such as the free community meal. The Melting Pot, and the work of the Melting Pot manager were much appreciated.

"We're fairly new to the estate and we want to support the Melting Pot Café and this event... it's great."



"We're forgotten in Podsmead... we don't expect

anything. People

think nothing

changes anyway."

Several residents said the Hub could be further developed to host a wider range of community events and activities, out of office hours.

There was some concern about the divisions in the community, between the generations and between people on benefits and those in work. There was a mix of views, with some feeling a better sense of community could heal the divides on Podsmead, and others saying that nothing would ever improve.

Recommendations

This was a short term, small-scale project. However, residents were clear and consistent in their feedback and our findings are supported by similar research⁸ and by local organisations. This enables us to be confident in our recommendations:

 Act on what people have said – residents have told us their ideas for improvement. Short term these include the extension of the Matson Food Cupboard to Podsmead, cooking classes, community food growing, more community events and physical activity opportunities. Longer term ideas involve a new shop or mini supermarket on the estate.

^[7] Play Gloucestershire (<u>www.playgloucestershire.org.uk</u>) provide a safe space for children to 'Get Out and Play' in their own communities.

^[8] Community Survey Report 2017, Gloucestershire Gateway Trust, Nov 2017

- Maintain and build on what is already happening any change will need
 the input and support of local people and trusted groups active on the estate.
 Organisations on Podsmead want to work with us, to share learning and deliver
 actions it will be important to develop ongoing relationships, follow up and joint
 working.
- **Support and resource more 'bottom up' work** we had some success working in partnership with residents further funding and flexibility is needed for this. Offering a range of ways for people to contribute works best including community researcher roles, skill sharing and events organisation.

Next steps

Feedback, follow up and action on the findings of the Podsmead Food & Families project will be important to counteract the cynicism and hopelessness expressed by some Podsmead residents.

Future work should aim to involve a broader cross section of Podsmead residents, including older people and working people, children and young people. The work started with Play Gloucestershire's Young Volunteers could be developed.

"People need to know they are being listened to, so now we need to tell people what was found out from the questionnaires and what will happen next."



Melting Pot Manager

Thank you

We would like to thank Gloucestershire County Council for funding the project and the Public Health Team for their input and support throughout. This project was possible because of the help given by Podsmead residents and the organisations who gave their time to speak openly to us. Special thanks go to the project team: Josie Betton, Kay Campbell, Fatima Hussein and Nicola Whiteman who worked closely with our Researcher, Geraldine Cooney to support this project.



Get involved and volunteer with us

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