

What Works in York and North Yorkshire?

Citizen Advisory Council What Works Here Inquiry, York and North Yorkshire
17th-18th November 2025

“York and North Yorkshire showed what’s possible when food systems work together across science, farming, community and local government. As a citizen adviser living on a council estate where food insecurity is often the starting point, it’s vital that experiences like ours inform national food policy and this kind of coordinated action becomes the norm, not the exception.”

Dominic, CAC Member

The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) is developing a new food strategy to ensure good food for everyone. The Citizen Advisory Council (CAC) was established in May 2025 to ensure citizen voices are at the heart of this strategy, bringing together 30 people from across the UK with lived experience and diverse perspectives on the food system.

The **What Works Here Inquiries** are a pioneering example of how citizen-led work can inform government policy. This report brings together the results from the York and North Yorkshire Inquiry. It draws on citizens' diverse knowledge and experience as well as the deep understanding of the regional food system contributed by local leaders, farmers, researchers, and business owners.

The citizens found that devolved political leadership, alongside an impressive research partnership and a clear plan from the local council, has driven food system change in the region. Underpinning this is a strong alliance between farmers, researchers, community organisations and local businesses. Barriers to progress include the power imbalance between farmers and large food businesses, missing infrastructure, and the proliferation of unhealthy food environments that limit affordable and sustainable options for local people. National government should level the playing field for farmers, producers and communities, and create the conditions for York and North Yorkshire’s devolved, research-led approach to thrive.



1 Day 1 at the inquiry with CAC members Hasan, David and Dominic

The conditions needed for York and North Yorkshire's food system to work

"Collaboration was so successful, that's where the progress is coming from"

Hasan, CAC Member

"Work that North Yorkshire was doing did feel successful. Most impressed by how organised they were, not just do-gooders, very organised, definite outcomes"

David, CAC Member

Regional experts Dr Belinda Morris from FixOurFood and Allison Kane from Deliciously Yorkshire helped organise the inquiry and set the scene for the Council.

Over two days, citizens met local authority representatives, the region's Mayor, farmers, business owners and researchers. Together they identified key learnings for UK Government to promote a good food system:

- **Support local procurement for health and the local economy:** make it easier for food to be sourced locally through connections between farms and anchor institutions. This model of collaboration will help create stable markets and reduce reliance on heavily processed, unhealthy food products.
- **Legislate large food companies on ultra-processed food:** shift power from large businesses by introducing taxation on unhealthy food and using that income to fund good food projects.

- **Protect regional identities and support local produce:** make all labelling and marketing honest. Big supermarkets use misleading packaging; companies should stop fabricating farm names as a marketing tool. Packaging should clearly show what has come from a real British farm.
- **Auto-enrolment of free school meals:** support local authorities and schools to implement auto-enrolment. York's work helping 22,000 children access food demonstrated its impact.
- **Devolve power and invest in local food strategies:** York and North Yorkshire demonstrates how mayoral leadership and cross-sector partnership can coordinate efforts and drive food system transformation. The White Rose Pact shows the possibilities of setting mutual cross-border priorities. The region's coordinated food strategy could be a replicable model for others.



2 Ben Mosely and CAC member Hasan during a visit to York Farm

Building on what works

Across the What Works Here Inquiry, the citizens were struck how much positive change is already happening in York and North Yorkshire. The Council members' reflections and analysis pointed to key examples of what is working well in the region:

<p>Protecting farmers through business diversity</p>	<p>At Yolk Farm, owners Emma and Ben Mosey demonstrated how diversification creates viability. Facing risks from avian flu, global supply chain shocks and supermarket pricing, they reduced their flock from 6,000 to 750 hens while becoming more profitable through restaurant, retail, and childcare. The business structure brings footfall to the farm, with animals and a children's activity area attracting family visitors.</p>
<p>Devolved political leadership</p>	<p>Mayor David Skaith's work demonstrated the potential of strong regional leadership coupled with a long-term vision for food system change – using devolved powers to improve transport, housing, workforce, and health.</p> <p>The White Rose Pact provides a stand-out example of regions working together to tackle infrastructure and logistical challenges, supporting regional growth and innovation.</p>
<p>Partnerships and collaborations</p>	<p>In York and North Yorkshire, councillors, researchers, academics and farmers are working together on North Yorkshire Council's Food for the Future framework: a regional plan with annual monitoring and evaluation. This successful partnership rested on willingness to share tools and knowledge.</p> <p>FixOurFood's approach of sharing their extensive research and best practice on an open-access website impressed citizens as a model useable beyond the region.</p>
<p>Food education and school food</p>	<p>Farmer Anna Longthorpe of Anna's Happy Trotters organises live feeds from the farm during food deliveries to educate children about where their food comes from, creating farm-to-plate connections that citizens felt are essential for long-term food system change.</p> <p>FixOurFood's work on auto-enrolment of free school meals has helped 22,000 children access school meals – a solution that came up consistently across the What Works Here Inquiries as a popular and effective way to get good food to children.</p>

Barriers to change

"Farmers who supply to supermarkets face the most risk" and "supermarkets have got them almost in a thumb screw, [I] didn't realise it was as bad as that"

Barbara, CAC Member

"Anna said she has lots of products she wants to supply locally, [but] just can't break...the grip of existing contracts. That's a clear way forward!"

Paul, CAC Member

Despite considerable progress, structural barriers prevent a good food system from thriving and require policy intervention.

British growers, farmers and producers carry a lot of risk, from weather conditions to impacts of conflicts around the world, while supermarkets can source produce from elsewhere as needed. Critical stakeholders are being undercut by imported products, which may not abide to the same standards as those produced in the UK. Cristina Talens of Source Climate Change Coffee explained that when coffee prices doubled, retailers pushed to drop prices rather than adjust – retailer pricing is not realistic for giving farmers a fair share.

Unhealthy, ultra-processed food still dominates people's diets, and Yorkshire has increasing levels of food insecurity and higher rates of childhood obesity than the average in England. Tackling this means big businesses should stock and promote healthier, good food but there is little appetite for change and these companies have disproportionate dominance in the region due to the numbers of people they employ, regardless of the health impacts on people in the region.

Missing infrastructure and poor transport connectivity means food can't move quickly from rural areas into urban centres - in many areas there is just one bus a day which stops people from getting good food. The complexities of local procurement for schools, hospitals and prisons compound this: farmer Anna Longthorpe has products to supply locally but cannot break the grip of existing long-term catering contracts.

FixOurFood has done considerable research into how procurement could be improved. Government needs to listen to people researching and piloting ways to make procurement work for SME businesses and producers.



3 Mayor of York & North Yorkshire David Skaith meeting CAC members

Summary

"Having more infrastructure in place would be really important for people living further away from towns and shops who might have to travel quite a long way to get the food that they need"

Kerri, CAC Member

"There is a link between education and school dinners. If people are fed well, they learn"

Barbara, CAC Member

The CAC came away from York and North Yorkshire with an understanding of a regional food system that is flourishing thanks to a cross-section of committed stakeholders. They heard about the energy, innovation, resilience and collaboration needed to drive progress. York and North Yorkshire also demonstrated a strong sense of regional pride that underpinned much of the work being done.

While the region is already taking significant steps forward with its Food for the Future framework, there was a clear call for policies and investment from the UK Government that enable this framework to take root and thrive.

Structural change is needed to rebalance the playing field for farmers, growers, producers and businesses. Good food and food education matters to citizens and is needed to nourish future generations.

Thank you to the people in York & North Yorkshire who made this work possible

Dr Belinda Morris, [FixOurFood](#), and Allison Kane, [DeliciouslyYorkshire](#) brought together the inquiry's participants and set the scene for the Council. Those who participated included:

- Adam Bedford, [Fera Science](#)
- Appearing on behalf of the [Food for the Future](#) initiative:
 - Ruth Everson and Jenny Thompson, North Yorkshire Council
 - Paul Haslam, Councillor for York and North Yorkshire
 - Jan Thornton MBE, Vice Chair of FixOurFood
 - Sam Buckton, Research Associate at York University
- Anna Longthorpe, [Anna's Happy Trotters](#)
- Louise Cantlay, [Food Circle York CIC](#)
- Cristina Talens, founder of [Source Climate Change Coffee](#)
- [David Skaith](#), Mayor of York & North Yorkshire
- Site visit with Emma & Ben Mosey at [Yolk Farm](#)

Who we are

The Citizen Advisory Council is made up of 30 citizens from across the UK, representing a diverse cross-section of British society. The Council was formed in May 2025 and has been working with Defra to ensure the new Food Strategy reflects people's everyday experience of food. *The following Citizen Advisory Council members led the York and North Yorkshire Inquiry:*

- Barbara, West Yorkshire
- David Njoku, Berkshire
- Dominic Watters, Kent
- Hasan Nassar, Halifax
- Kerri Bridges, London
- Paul Fowler, Cornwall

The Inquiry Process

The What Works Here Inquiries used a participatory research approach, positioning citizens as researchers. Over two days in York and North Yorkshire, Citizen Advisory Council members conducted field research through site visits and dialogue with local stakeholders. Citizens took detailed field notes and then participated in structured reflection sessions. Through this collaborative analysis, citizens synthesised their individual findings into collective insights, distinguishing between what was working well, what barriers prevented progress, and what would support regional food systems.

The Food Conversation

Since 2023, the Food, Farming and Countryside Commission has run the UK's largest-ever public dialogue about food. Through deliberations in 12 parts of the country and over 75 community conversations, citizens explored policy interventions and produced the [Citizen Manifesto to Fix Food](#) in March 2025, a call for joined-up thinking to address food inequalities, poverty and waste.

Food Foundation Food Ambassadors

The [Food Foundation Food Ambassadors](#) are people aged 14 and up with lived experience of food insecurity who contribute to campaigns, research, and events as experts by experience. They've worked on campaigns from school meals to tackling food poverty, including with Marcus Rashford on the #EndChildFoodPoverty campaign.