

**14 December 2020**

**Agenda Item: 7**

## **REPORT OF THE CORPORATE DIRECTOR, PLACE**

### **FOOD AND DRINK SECTOR BUSINESS SUPPORT TOOLKIT**

#### **Purpose of the Report**

1. To update Members on Government help for small and medium sized businesses (SMEs) in the food and drink industry.
2. To inform Members of the Business Toolkit created to support Nottinghamshire's food and drink sector and seek approval for its launch.

#### **Information**

3. As recognised in the Council Plan 'Your Nottinghamshire, Your Future' (2017-2020) under the commitment to making Nottinghamshire stand out as a great place to live, work, visit and relax, this Council wants to share everything Nottinghamshire has to offer with as many people as possible. Local heritage is a tremendous asset which has not always been championed sufficiently and it is for this reason that work began in 2019 with the publication of the Council's first ten-year visitor economy strategy to maximise tourism's contribution to the economy, employment and quality of life in Nottinghamshire.
4. One area of focus within the Strategy was making more of local food and drink, through collaboration with food businesses and showcasing local food and drink experiences. Food and drink is very important to Nottinghamshire, and to the Council. Brooke Farm in Linby produces fruit and vegetables, eggs and bedding plants, selling them through its onsite farm shop and local garden centres to contribute to its running costs. The Farm, along with a smaller site at Balderton, where the focus is on Horticulture, provides employment and training for people with learning disabilities.
5. To support older residents, the Meals at Home Service supplies fresh and nutritious ready-made meals direct to homes to support independent living. This service includes the offer of Home from Hospital food packs. For the County's school age children, the School Catering Service provides popular and healthy meals, made from quality products. The number of school meals served daily by the Service across the majority of Nottinghamshire's schools averages approximately 49,000. In keeping with the approach of the Meals at Home Service, local sourcing is at the heart of the school catering offer. This Service makes the most of seasonable local produce from local suppliers to create meals when ingredients are at their best, as illustrated overleaf:



Meat from Mike Maloney's in Tuxford, where their produce comes from animals that are born and reared outdoors such as beef from Holme Farm in Rampton and pork from East Drayton and Hockerwood Farm in Upton



Venison from Sherwood Forest



Organic milk and yoghurts from Acorn Dairy



Seasonal vegetables distributed by our supplier and grown locally where possible such as carrots from Bilsthorpe and onions from Retford

6. The school meals prove to be extremely popular among pupils of all ages, with over 70% recently saying they were either satisfied or very satisfied with the value for money, taste, quality and the variety of food on the menus. The Council also offers support and advice on promoting school meals through printed marketing materials, taster sessions, theme day ideas, recipe testing events and support for parents' evenings.
7. Furthermore, Nottinghamshire is a fantastic county full of great local organisations with unique and special food and drink products on offer - companies range from global players to artisan producers.
  - From British carrots, leeks and parsnips which complement potatoes, sugar beet, vining peas and various cereals, to seasonal fruit and salad. Including the Bramley Apple which was first grown in Southwell and the brand new 'Pilgrim' apple variety to commemorate the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of when Nottinghamshire helped form a nation. Many of the most influential pilgrims who sailed to America on the Mayflower were from Scrooby in North Nottinghamshire and the surrounding area.
  - From hand-tended vines to grow grapes for English Sparkling Wine, to local micro-breweries.
8. The Council wants to support these companies and shine a light on the talented producers (many of which supply national supermarkets) to help promote their produce to those inside and outside of Nottinghamshire.
9. The food and drink industry is a major contributor to the United Kingdom's (UK) economy. On 22 June 2020, new strategic interventions were jointly announced by the Department for International Trade (DIT) and Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) to offer immediate support to help the agriculture and food and drink industry grow their trade activity overseas. The plan included a package of eight measures, providing help for SMEs, allowing them to capitalise on trade agreements being negotiated by the DIT with Japan, United States, Australia and New Zealand. The full range of measures announced can be found at **Appendix A**.
10. To give people across the UK certainty over the winter, over recent weeks the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced further financial support for businesses and employees through the extension of the existing furlough and self-employed schemes and expanding business grants to support firms. To date, food service businesses and food and drink manufacturing businesses have accounted for 10% of all furloughed jobs in Nottinghamshire.

11. There is no denying the COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in tough times for the circa 3,115 Nottinghamshire food and drinks businesses and it seems there are hard times to come. At the time of writing this report, Nottinghamshire is under the strengthened local restriction Tier 3, which sees hospitality venues forced to remain closed and only allowed to offer takeaways. Whilst there are already government grants of £2,000 to £3,000 for businesses in Tiers 2 and 3, the Council recognises that there is more to be done.
12. In keeping with the rest of the nation, Nottinghamshire's lifestyle and finances clearly revealed abrupt changes to consumers' food and drink purchasing behaviour. Kickstarted by the stockpiling rush as consumers prepared for the first period of self-isolation and seeing an unprecedented surge in online shopping, consumers have now embarked on new habits aligning with stay-at-home lifestyles and reassessed some of their priorities. This is the much-needed catalyst for huge opportunities. Many businesses are thriving from flexibly adapting to new consumer needs and in the long-term the crisis is expected to leave several lasting legacies. Since the pandemic, 48% of UK consumers are now willing to pay more for local foods and those brands that emphasise local brands and supply chains.
13. Categories which have emerged as key winners in the short-term are those tapping into the explosion in home cooking and baking. Meanwhile, the post-COVID scene is set to offer a myriad of opportunities to harness consumers' heightened interest in physical health, emotional wellbeing, local businesses, the environment and value for money.
14. Food and drink manufacturing is a priority sector for the Derby. Derbyshire, Nottingham and Nottinghamshire Local Enterprise Partnership (D2N2 LEP). Two recently approved projects are worthy of noting. Namely. free scientific support to help food and drink manufacturers and support to get unemployed people into food and drink sector jobs.
15. The Coronavirus pandemic has brought about some big changes in how the food and drink sector operates, both from the consumer and producer perspectives. In October 2020, the D2N2 LEP approved the Driving Research and Innovation project – a three-year project that runs until the end of December 2022. Part -funded by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and run by the Food Innovation Centres at the University of Nottinghamshire School of Biosciences and their collaborators. Available to food and drink manufacturing SME's in Nottinghamshire, the support can take many different forms from help with product development and packaging, measures to adopt a more sustainable approach to production, ways to switch to online sales or making the most of a new consumer trend, such as nutritious food. For more information about the Food Innovation Centre visit:  
<https://www.nottingham.ac.uk/biosciences/facilities/food-innovation-centre.aspx>
16. In November, DBC Training were allocated £2m of European funding to deliver the 'Taste Local' programme. DBC Training, founded in 2000, is a leading provider of training and employment, providing high-quality employer solutions with the aim to improve productivity and learner focused solutions to support individuals to be the very best they can be.
17. The funding is being invested in skills to help support unemployed people into food and drink sector jobs across Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire. DBC Training is working with Orbital Recruitment and the Food & Drink Forum with aid from European Social Investment Funding (ESIF) to boost employment in this sector - supporting over 1,500 local people into new jobs. Taste Local will fund training for residents to help improve their employability and support business recovery through a tailored offer and free of charge recruitment solutions. Courses include (but are not limited to):

- Basic Food Hygiene
- Food Safety
- Standards & Certification
- Health & Safety in the workplace
- Bespoke modules such as Butchery / Bakery
- Access to additional funding such as Kickstarter & Apprentice incentives

18. More information on Taste Local is available online by visiting: <https://www.dbc-training.co.uk/copy-of-business-administration-1>

### The Nottinghamshire Business Toolkit: Supporting Local Food and Drink

19. At this Committee's September 2020 meeting, members approved the COVID-19 crisis Economic Recovery Action Plan. An ambitious economic recovery action plan which sets out how the Council and the County can recover from the COVID-19 pandemic by rebuilding Nottinghamshire's economy together to emerge as a county moving forward. The Action Plan provided further impetus to helping Nottinghamshire food and drinks businesses to recover.
20. In response, a Graduate Trainee from the council's internal Graduate Development Programme was commissioned to develop an initiative to provide support to Nottinghamshire's food and drink sector. Research and data analysis was conducted, alongside working with internal and external partners, industry experts and local businesses to identify support opportunities. This work culminated in the creation of the Business Toolkit: Supporting Local Food and Drink.
21. The Business Support Toolkit has been produced in alignment and in response to the Council's recent 'COVID-19 Visitor Economy Recovery Planning Business Survey'. The results of which demonstrated a need and desire for business support from local respondent businesses:
- a) 46% of businesses stated a positive public relations/marketing toolkit for businesses to use would help them
  - b) Businesses stated a regional push to demonstrate what is best about the area would help their business
  - c) An overwhelming amount of suggestions for a focus on encouraging day visitors and even local Nottinghamshire residents to visit local businesses
22. In the research stages of developing the Business Support Toolkit, the views of industry experts local to Nottinghamshire were sought, specifically from the Food and Drink Forum ([https://www.foodanddrinkforum.co.uk/public/?page\\_id=85](https://www.foodanddrinkforum.co.uk/public/?page_id=85)). The result of these discussions was that many businesses in the sector were looking for business support and many businesses would be in favour of using a Toolkit.
23. The Business Support Toolkit is therefore intended as resource to be used by food and drink firms across Nottinghamshire. It has been designed to help local businesses capitalise on the most recent consumer trends, particularly locally produced food and drink, whilst simultaneously supporting the food and drink sector to meet increasing retail consumer demands expected to be triggered by the second national lockdown.
24. The Business Support Toolkit covers the following eight key areas, a copy of which can be found at **Appendix B**:

- Better leverage of Nottinghamshire's assets
  - Support and practical guidance on sourcing food and drink locally
  - Emphasising local provenance, including making links to local history and heritage
  - Tips and guidance for using 'in season' produce
  - Tips and guidance on increasing collaboration with the wider local business communities
  - Using social media to champion local Food and Drink and devise a COVID-19 appropriate marketing strategy
  - Using local Food and Drink to combat and mitigate some COVID-19 effects
  - General COVID-19 support and resources for Food and Drink businesses
25. Subject to member approval to launch the Business Support Toolkit, to raise awareness of its existence, consent is also being sought to implement an extensive public relations campaign to ensure it reaches as large an audience as possible.

### **Other Options Considered**

26. The recent Government announcements highlight both the difficulties and importance of the sector and declare the intent to create an environment for as many hospitality businesses to remain trading where it is possible. It is in alignment with national strategies to offer the Toolkit to support the sector and businesses locally in Nottinghamshire and the 'do nothing' option was therefore discounted.
27. Many food and drink businesses have been impacted by the restrictions of the past few months, and anything that supports the recovery and encourages residents to enjoy and experiment with local produce is sure to have a positive impact on the whole community well beyond lockdown.
28. The Business Support Toolkit enables support to be given to the food and drink sector in a flexible and adaptable manner. It utilises opportunities to capitalise on consumer trends, which also support the local Nottinghamshire economy. Additionally, the Toolkit offers support and guidance and covers the entire supply chain; farmers, producers, manufacturers, suppliers, retailers, hospitality and food service businesses. Subject to member approval, the intention will be to get some of our prominent local growers and processors to promote it.

### **Reason for Recommendations**

29. The Business Support Toolkit aligns with both the COVID-19 Crisis Economic Recovery Action Plan 2020 to 2022 and the Visitor Economy Strategy 2019 to 2020 objectives, whilst supporting a sector which has been hit the hardest by the COVID-19 pandemic. Accordingly, the Business Support Toolkit has considered the effects of COVID-19. The business support and practical guidance contained within the document is applicable to food and drink businesses, irrespective of the local COVID-19 situation. It is intended for individual businesses to identify and apply parts of the toolkit which are relevant to their circumstances at a given time.

### **Statutory and Policy Implications**

30. This report has been compiled after consideration of implications in respect of crime and disorder, data protection and information governance finance, human resources, human rights, the NHS Constitution (public health services), the public sector equality duty, safeguarding of children and adults at risk, service users, smarter working, sustainability and

the environment and where such implications are material they are described below. Appropriate consultation has been undertaken and advice sought on these issues as required.

### **Financial Implications**

31. To date, the costs of the Business Support Toolkit have been covered by the 2019-2020 Growth and Economic Development initiatives budget, including the printing of 1,000 physical copies.
32. Subject to approval, if the Business Support Toolkit were to be launched, the only additional costs incurred would be minimal Graphics Design costs to cover any final amendments made prior to the final launch and printing. These costs would be met from the 2020/2021 Growth and Economic Development initiatives budget.

### **Implications for Sustainability and the Environment**

33. Pledging to use only local produce can help support the environment, local businesses and our health. Fundamentally, by buying produce from nearby, directly supports small businesses and in turn their families and the community.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 1) To approve the launch of the Business Support Toolkit to enable commencement of support to Nottinghamshire's food and drinks sector at the earliest opportunity.
- 2) Subject to approval, it is recommended that an extensive public relations campaign is mobilised to launch the Business Support Toolkit, involving some of Nottinghamshire's prominent growers and producers to help with the promotion.

**Adrian Smith**  
**Corporate Director Place**

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### **Constitutional Comments (KK 16/11/2020)**

34. The proposals in this report are within the remit of the COVID-19 Resilience, Recovery and Renewal Committee.

### **Financial Comments (RWK 16/11/2020)**

35. The report proposes the launch of a Business Support Toolkit for Nottinghamshire's food and drinks sector. Any costs incurred will be funded from the Growth and Economic Development Initiatives budget, for which an allocation of £515,036 is included in the 2020/21 revenue budget.

### **Background Papers and Published Documents**

Except for previously published documents, which will be available elsewhere, the documents listed here will be available for inspection in accordance with Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972.

- Coronavirus (COVID-19) business support, pages updated on the Government website. Available online via:  
<https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus/business-support>
- *'Bounce back' plan for agriculture, food and drink industry*, Department for International Trade press release, published 22 June 2020. Available online via:  
<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/bounce-back-plan-for-agriculture-food-and-drink-industry-launched>
- *COVID-19 Crisis Economic Recovery Action Plan 2020 to 2022*, accessible online via:  
<https://www.nottinghamshire.gov.uk/policy-library/78888/covid-19-crisis-economic-recovery-action-plan-2020-to-2022>
- *Visitor Economy Strategy 2019 to 2020*, accessible online via:  
<https://www.nottinghamshire.gov.uk/policy-library/57133/visitor-economy-strategy-2018-2029>

### **Electoral Division(s) and Member(s) Affected**

- All