

Bedfordshire Heartlands Rural Food Access
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Accessing Healthy and Affordable Food

A report on rural food access conditions and scope for
community-led interventions

(Version for external publication)

Prepared for the
Bedfordshire Heartlands Rural Food Access Project

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0. Executive Summary

0.1 The Project

The Bedfordshire Heartlands Rural Food Access project aims to increase access to affordable healthy food in the rural areas of Mid and South Beds, particularly amongst older people and families on low incomes. The project marries a community development approach (working with communities to determine the interventions they will support through voluntary effort) with a firm grasp of the economic realities (working with village shopkeepers, farmers, wholesalers etc to improve their ability to provide healthy, affordable food in rural areas). The project will run to March 2006.

The Rural Food Access project will work with rural communities to put in place initiatives to address difficulties accessing healthy and affordable food. Communities will be able to choose an initiative that meets their needs - from a vegetable growing scheme to a food co-operative. Community groups will be supported to investigate their particular difficulties in achieving a healthy diet. Further support will help each community to devise and implement an initiative that meets their needs. A grant scheme will provide financial support in getting the chosen interventions up and running.

0.2 Food Poverty and Access Issues

The importance of a healthy diet has long been recognised but is increasingly seen to be a key factor in public health. While under-nutrition is no longer a problem for most people in our developed society (though it can still affect certain sectors of society, particularly the elderly, and should not be forgotten), problems of over-nutrition and unsatisfactorily balance in our diets now have an evident impact on our health.

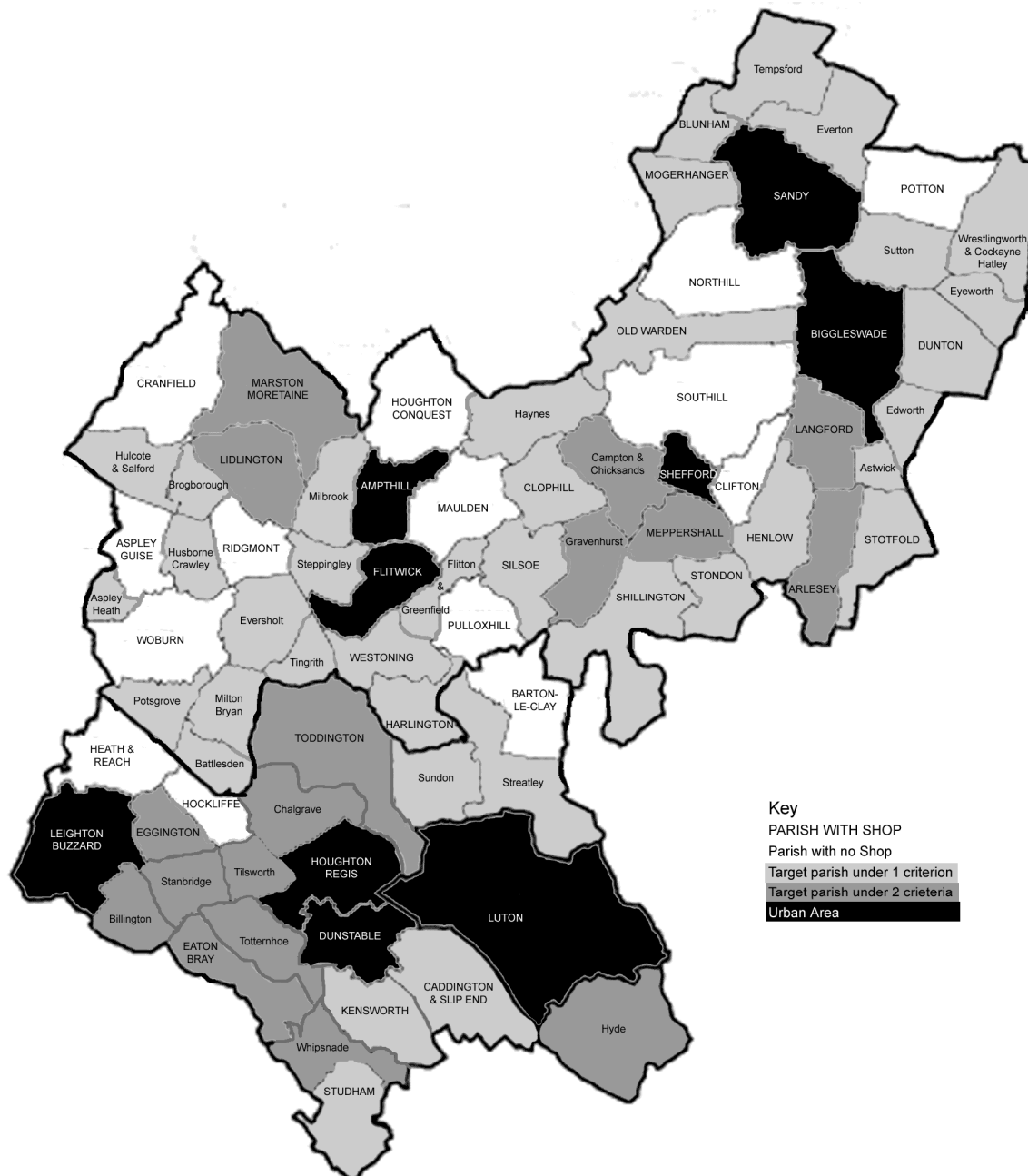
Changes in our food system and society over recent decades - from the loss of rural shops to changes in family structure - have left many people struggling to access the food needed for a healthy diet. Disadvantaged members of our communities, such as the elderly, families on low incomes and those without access to transport, suffer most. In rural areas, even those that are predominately affluent, small pockets of exclusion persist, particularly where those with little or no access to transport have no local source of food.

0.3 Rural Availability of Food

Chapter 3 looks in detail at a number of indicators of social exclusion, access to services and detailed research into the availability food carried out through the project. In all but 15 of the area's parishes (those coloured white below) there is a clear deficit in local availability of affordable food. Even in these parishes, the rural pattern of settlement will mean that pockets of food deprivation exist.

Amongst those parishes with some deficit of food provision, some can be identified as priority targets through other indicators (see map below and tables at end of Chapter 3). However, the variety of the indicators suggests that any rural parish stands to benefit from work to improve food access, particularly amongst more disadvantaged parts of the community.

Map of Bedfordshire Heartlands parishes indicating distribution of shops and incidence of other food poverty indicators



0.4 Improving Access

There are many different approaches to improving access to healthy and affordable food, according to the needs of the community:

- **Food Provision** initiatives aim to source and provide healthy food at affordable prices, ranging from veg bag schemes (providing a weekly bag of fresh vegetables) through wider co-operative buying groups (where a group collectively buy food in bulk) to community-run shops.
- **Food Delivery** initiatives aim to get available food to individuals. Deliveries may be offered by paid workers, volunteers or local shops.
- **Transport.** An alternative approach to food delivery is to provide transport to sources of healthy and affordable food.
- **Meal Provision.** Another approach is to provide meals, addressing further issues of cooking skills etc. Often targeted at children (Breakfast Clubs before school) or the elderly (Lunch Clubs), but Community Cafes may serve the wider community.
- **Education and Skills.** The right skills are essential to achieve a healthy diet. Providing information and developing skills in choosing, buying, cooking and growing food can help. Information may be provided through printed materials (eg simple recipe ideas) but demonstrations are more accessible (eg Cook & Eat Sessions or growing workshops).
- **Growing Food Initiatives** can help to encourage people grow their own food besides the development of the necessary skills. Space, tools etc must be accessible, while sharing responsibilities can encourage participation.
- **Food Partnerships.** Developing links between members of food communities brings benefits to all initiatives. Linking communities with food producers and strengthening community relationships with their local shops can greatly help to improve the availability of healthy food. The provision of healthy meals may be achieved through partnerships with schools or commercial caterers.

0.5 Existing Community Groups and Work in the Area

Wherever possible, the project will seek to work with existing community groups in the Bedfordshire Heartlands area and to build on work carried out by other organisations and through other initiatives. The work of the Bedfordshire Rural Communities Charity and the Mid Bedfordshire Healthy Living Initiative are particularly relevant. Chapter 5 lists organisations and notes scope for interaction with the Rural Food Access Project.

Note on Suppression of Data

This version of the report has been prepared for external publication. Certain data (contact details and prices in retail outlets) have been omitted to protect privacy and commercial interest.

1. Introduction to the Project

Aim

The Bedfordshire Heartlands Rural Food Access project aims to increase access to healthy and affordable food in the rural areas of Mid and South Bedfordshire, with a particular focus on families on low incomes and older people.

Approach

The project marries a community development approach with a firm grasp of the economic realities. Project work will be focussed on up to 12 community groups who will be supported in researching their own particular issues of food access and devising and implementing an intervention to address these issues. Community groups will be encouraged and assisted to work with existing providers of food (village shops, farmers, wholesalers etc), which are essential for adequate rural food access.

The project comprises four distinct areas of work:

1. Initial research

An initial research stage has mapped availability of food in the area, identifying food deserts, where food access is a particular problem. Further research has investigated community work in the area and food access interventions across the country.

2. Community training and research

Up to 12 community groups will be chosen and given support to investigate their own specific problems with food access and identify an intervention that would meet their needs. The groups will research the feasibility of their chosen interventions and develop the details of implementation.

As wide a range as possible of communities will be selected, not just those with an existing interest in food issues.

3. Community-led interventions

At least 6 interventions, as chosen and devised by the community groups, will be implemented. Support will be given and a grant scheme available to help towards start-up costs. The hope is that the interventions will continue beyond the end of the project.

Possible interventions include shopping delivery schemes, community cafes, low cost vegetable bags, co-operative buying groups, growing schemes, shopping transport initiatives...

4. Work with producers

A network of producers will work with the project to provide a direct link with local food production.

Rationale

The Bedfordshire Rural Affairs Forum (BRAAF) has identified "access to healthy and affordable food" as a key priority. Nationally, many initiatives have worked to improve access but work has been concentrated in urban areas. Rural areas exhibit very different characteristics, with small pockets of social exclusion even in generally affluent areas. The majority of villages no longer have a shop and many of those that remain no longer carry a full range of foods, serving instead as top-up shopping outlets, and the food they carry is often highly priced. People who lack access to transport (especially older people and those on low incomes) can experience great difficulty in accessing healthy foods at affordable prices. There are numerous other factors contributing to poor food access, which are further detailed in Chapter 2.

The Bedfordshire Heartlands Area

The Bedfordshire Heartlands area comprises the two districts of Mid Bedfordshire and South Bedfordshire, both classified as *accessible rural* areas.

The area is predominately rural by geographic area, with a number of fairly evenly spread urban settlements¹. Mid Bedfordshire contains five urban settlements (Amphill, Flitwick, Sandy, Biggleswade and Shefford), all of which are small, and, with the exception of Shefford, traditional market towns. South Bedfordshire contains two large urban settlements (Dunstable and Leighton Buzzard).

The area falls into three of the Countryside Agency's *Countryside Character Areas*²: 88 Bedfordshire and Cambridgeshire Claylands, 90 Bedfordshire Greensand Ridge, and 110 Chilterns. The area exhibits considerable landscape variety, with elements both of *planned* landscape (with regular fields and large, nucleated settlements) and *unplanned* or *ancient* type (with a large number of small, dispersed settlements).

¹ Following the current government definition, an urban settlement is taken to be one with a population of over 10,000

² CA (website a)

2. Food Poverty and Access Issues

What is a healthy diet?

The importance of a healthy diet has long been recognised but is increasingly seen to be a key factor in public health. While under-nutrition is no longer a problem for most people in our developed society (though it can still affect certain sectors of society, particularly the elderly, and should not be forgotten), problems of over-nutrition and unsatisfactorily balance in our diets now have an evident impact on our health.

"Most people can improve their health by achieving long-term changes in the balance of foods that they eat, to ensure that starchy carbohydrates (cereals, bread and potatoes) and fruit and vegetables make up the main part of most meals and snacks"

Press (2004), *Food Poverty and Nutrition toolkit*

The scientific evidence for the importance of a healthy diet is substantial. Recent studies³ have shown that healthy eating can:

- Reduce overall mortality
- Reduce sudden cardiac death
- Reduce risk of coronary heart disease and stroke
- Reduce risk of diabetes
- Reduce risk of cancer
- Reduce arthritis and osteoporosis
- Improve sense of well-being
- Improve mental health

The basics of a healthy diet

The basic advice for a healthy diet can be expressed very simply. By following these simple messages, and being supported in overcoming the obstacles to doing so, the diets of most people can be significantly improved.

- **Enjoy your food!**
- **Eat plenty and a variety of** – fruit, vegetables⁴, starchy foods (choose wholemeal options)
- **Eat moderate amounts of** – meat (choose leaner options), fish (eat oily fish at least once a week), milk and dairy products (choose lower fat options)
- **Eat only small amounts of** – sugary foods (choose reduced sugar options), fatty food (choose lower fat alternatives), salty foods (avoid adding salt in cooking or at the table)
- **More specific ways** to improve diet include – increasing fibre, choosing healthier fats, seeking sources of calcium, vitamin D, folic acid and other micro-nutrients
- Consume alcohol within sensible limits
- While over-nutrition and unsatisfactory balance of diet are the key problems, **under-nutrition** (failure to consume sufficient food for our basic nutritional requirements) can be a problem, particularly amongst the elderly

³ Detailed in Press (2004)

⁴ This key message is focus of the Department of Health's 5 A DAY programme

Achieving a healthy diet

Hard evidence has shown that people on lower incomes, in families with no earner and on benefits tend to:

- Consume more total calories and considerably more fat, salt and non-milk extrinsic sugars
- Eat less variety of foods
- Eat more processed foods, which tend to be higher in saturated fat, salt and added sugar
- Eat less fruit and vegetables, less fish and less high-fibre breakfast cereals
- Eat more sugar and sweets
- More fatty foods more often
- Have lower blood levels of vitamins
- Fish consumption is falling, fruit and veg consumption is static - against wider trends

The ability to achieve a healthy diet Access to healthy and affordable food is determined by a complex and interrelated set of factors. These factors have been well documented in a number of reports and studies, although most concentrate on urban areas, where deprivation is most concentrated and evident. Nonetheless, a number of myths persist in the popular imagination about why disadvantaged groups endure poor diets⁵.

In reality, many people experience a number of significant obstacles to affordable healthy diets. The project is primarily concerned with access, but other factors have a bearing on access in the widest sense.

- Poor accessibility to affordable healthy foods
- Low income and debt
- Socio-cultural factors
- Food production and food chain factors
- Lack of opportunities to experiment and develop cooking skills
- Lack of accessible and accurate information
- Food labelling
- Food marketing
- Poor literacy and numeracy skills

Positive Factors for Healthy Diets

More positively, the following factors contribute to people's ability to achieve a healthy diet:

- **Accessibility**
Healthy food must be available in the right place and at the right price
- **Awareness and knowledge**
What is a healthy diet?
Which foods are healthy?
Where are healthy foods available?
What is a portion of fruit and veg?
- **Skills**
Cooking
Growing

⁵ Lobstein (1997)

What is an affordable diet?

- Average spending on food £17.63 per person per week (National Food Survey)
- The right food must be available in the right place at the right price
- Other costs incurred in shopping for food (eg transport, child care) must be taken into account
- More processed foods can appear cheaper and tend to be less healthy
- Lack of awareness, knowledge and skills can discourage purchase of cheaper foods

3. Rural Availability of Food

This chapter looks in detail at a number of indicators of social exclusion, access to services and the detailed research into the availability food carried out through the project.

Rural Social Exclusion

Defining Social Exclusion

Social exclusion is a short hand label for the problems that can arise when individuals or wider communities suffer from a number of linked problems, including unemployment, low income, lack of skills, poor housing, poor health and family breakdown. A combination of many such problems can result in individuals and communities being prevented from benefiting from the services and facilities that most of us take for granted, including access to healthy and affordable food. The barriers to services and facilities include both a simple lack of access and a disenfranchisement that results in the socially excluded having no say or control over their circumstances.

Contrasting Urban and Rural Social Exclusion

Social exclusion exists in both urban and rural areas. Social exclusion is more concentrated and evident in urban areas but the consequences for affected individuals are similar everywhere.

The Countryside Agency has looked in depth at the particular characteristics and issues of rural social exclusion and has drawn up the following list of differences between rural and urban areas:

- Socially excluded households in rural areas tend to be geographically scattered. By contrast, social exclusion is often concentrated in urban areas, especially on housing estates;
- The manifestation of social exclusion differs eg. rural housing problems may relate more to affordability than to quality and rural jobs problems may relate more to low pay and seasonality than to unemployment;
- Distance, isolation, sparsity of population and poor access to jobs, services and other opportunities compound the problems for rural people;
- The myth of a rural idyll leads to misconceptions about the countryside, with many people finding it difficult to believe that social exclusion exists in green and picturesque surroundings; and
- More traditional attitudes in rural areas about self sufficiency and making do can lead to social exclusion going undeclared or unheeded. Rural communities may also be seen by others as more self-contained and mutually supportive, with less need of external support.

Tackling Rural Social Exclusion

The characteristics of rural social exclusion demand a particular and targeted response. Rural deprivation often affects isolated individuals, small communities and scattered groups, often in the midst of widespread affluence. Increasing polarisation between the affluent and excluded can be hidden by statistics comprising average figures.

Rural social exclusion can go unrecognised by the usual government indicators, such as the widely used Index of Multiple Deprivation. New indicators are being developed, with the involvement of the Countryside Agency, which should allow greater recognition of rural problems.

Working with communities at a local level allows better identification of socially excluded groups. The approach of the Rural Food Access project is to draw on national indicators, the findings of local research and the local expertise of Community Development Workers.

National Indicators of Social Exclusion

The most widely used national indicator for social exclusion is the set of Indicators of Multiple Deprivation, most recently compiled in 2004. The set of indicators cover a number of factors contributing to social exclusion, as well as a combined ranking. Figures relate to the Office of National Statistics' new Super Output Areas (SOAs), a smaller geographical unit than wards, each of which is contained within a single ward.

As outlined above, these are of limited use in identifying rural social exclusion, but can give some indication of particularly deprived areas. For ease of comparison, all the figures cited are percentile rankings of deprivations, indicating the percentage of areas more deprived (ie a ranking of 0.0 indicates the most deprived area, 20.0 indicates that 20% of all areas are more deprived and 100.0 indicates the least deprived area).

The indices of multiple deprivation include sets of figures, scoring each SOA for each of seven domains:

- Income
- Employment
- Health Deprivation and Disability
- Education, Skills and Training
- Barriers to Housing and Services
- Crime and Disorder
- Living Environment

A *combined score* of overall deprivation is calculated from a weighted average of the seven domains.

Like most accessible rural areas, the area under consideration emerges as suffering from relatively little deprivation under the combined score. The domain of most concern is *Barriers to Housing and Services*, which includes a measure of access to food retail outlets.

On the combined overall scoring of deprivation, no rural or mixed ward in the area contains an SOA falling below the 44th percentile and only 16 out of all 69 SOAs in rural or mixed wards come below the 70th percentile.

The rural and mixed wards containing the SOAs ranking as most deprived under the combined score of multiple deprivation are as follows:

Bedfordshire Heartlands Rural and Mixed Wards containing most deprived Super Output Areas (under combined score)			
Ward Name	Ward Type	SOA Code	Deprivation percentile (combined score)
Caddington, Hyde and Slip End	Rural	E01017562	44.9%
Shefford, Campton and Gravenhurst	Mixed	E01017440	54.6%
Arlesey	Rural	E01017378	58.6%
Eaton Bray	Rural	E01017571	61.8%
Kensworth and Totternhoe	Rural	E01017588	62.3%
Toddington	Rural	E01017622	62.5%
Marston	Rural	E01017418	63.2%
Caddington, Hyde and Slip End	Rural	E01017564	63.4%
Caddington, Hyde and Slip End	Rural	E01017561	64.7%
Houghton, Haynes, Southill and Old Warden	Rural	E01017412	65.7%
Kensworth and Totternhoe	Rural	E01017586	66.0%
Stanbridge	Rural	E01017615	66.8%
Streatley	Mixed	E01017616	67.5%
Northhill and Blunham	Rural	E01017423	67.5%
Houghton, Haynes, Southill and Old Warden	Rural	E01017410	68.3%
Potton and Wensley	Rural	E01017427	69.0%
Woburn	Rural	E01017451	70.9%
Clifton and Meppershall	Mixed	E01017391	71.0%
Kensworth and Totternhoe	Rural	E01017587	71.5%
Northhill and Blunham	Rural	E01017424	74.2%

Under the *Income* domain, only four SOAs fall below the 50th percentile and a further six under the 60th percentile.

Bedfordshire Heartlands Rural and Mixed Wards containing most deprived Super Output Areas (under Income domain)			
Ward Name	Ward Type	SOA Code	Deprivation percentile (Income domain)
Shefford, Campton and Gravenhurst	Mixed	E01017440	39.0%
Eaton Bray	Rural	E01017571	43.8%
Caddington, Hyde and Slip End	Rural	E01017562	45.1%
Marston	Rural	E01017418	48.7%
Arlesey	Rural	E01017378	50.6%
Maulden and Clophill	Rural	E01017420	52.5%
Kensworth and Totternhoe	Rural	E01017586	53.5%
Toddington	Rural	E01017622	54.4%
Clifton and Meppershall	Mixed	E01017391	57.0%
Stotfold	Rural	E01017446	58.3%
Potton and Wensley	Rural	E01017427	60.3%
Houghton, Haynes, Southill and Old Warden	Rural	E01017411	62.5%
Caddington, Hyde and Slip End	Rural	E01017564	63.2%
Northill and Blunham	Rural	E01017423	63.6%
Arlesey	Rural	E01017377	65.0%
Caddington, Hyde and Slip End	Rural	E01017561	65.0%
Kensworth and Totternhoe	Rural	E01017588	65.5%
Langford and Henlow Village	Mixed	E01017415	65.9%
Marston	Rural	E01017416	67.7%
Potton and Wensley	Rural	E01017428	67.9%

Barriers to Housing and Services is the domain under which the area emerges as most deprived, unsurprisingly for a rural area. Three of the area's rural and mixed SOAs are ranked amongst the 5% most deprived in the country, a further four in the 10% most deprived. In total, 47 of the 69 SOAs fall below the 50th percentile.

Bedfordshire Heartlands Rural and Mixed Wards containing most deprived Super Output Areas (under Barriers to Housing and Services domain)			
Ward Name	Ward Type	SOA Code	Deprivation percentile (Services domain)
Kensworth and Totternhoe	Rural	E01017587	3.3%
Stanbridge	Rural	E01017615	3.9%
Houghton, Haynes, Southill and Old Warden	Rural	E01017410	4.4%
Cranfield	Rural	E01017395	5.5%
Houghton, Haynes, Southill and Old Warden	Rural	E01017412	7.8%
Woburn	Rural	E01017451	8.9%
Cranfield	Rural	E01017396	9.9%
Streatley	Mixed	E01017616	10.6%
Northhill and Blunham	Rural	E01017423	11.2%
Silsoe	Rural	E01017445	11.6%
Kensworth and Totternhoe	Rural	E01017588	12.1%
Caddington, Hyde and Slip End	Rural	E01017564	14.4%
Shefford, Campton and Gravenhurst	Mixed	E01017441	14.7%
Northhill and Blunham	Rural	E01017424	15.1%
Potton and Wensley	Rural	E01017425	17.0%
Barton-le-Clay	Rural	E01017560	17.2%
Shillington, Stondon and Henlow Camp	Mixed	E01017444	18.1%
Potton and Wensley	Rural	E01017426	18.5%
Caddington, Hyde and Slip End	Rural	E01017561	19.4%
Caddington, Hyde and Slip End	Rural	E01017562	21.8%

Rural Retail Outlets

Rural retail outlets serve as a key source of food to many people living in rural areas, particularly those that have little or no access to transport. The decline in local shops - manifested by closures, increasingly limited stock and higher prices - has exacerbated food access difficulties for many rural residents. The mapping study carried out by this project and other national data demonstrate that many rural settlements provide little or no access to healthy and affordable food.

The problem is felt to some extent in almost all rural settlements, but analysis of the data allows identification of areas most affected. It must be remembered that even in settlements with relatively good availability of food, there may still be more isolated outlying hamlets where food access is a real problem.

Mapping Retail Outlets of Food

The project carried out a mapping study⁶, through the Bedfordshire RCC, of the food outlets in rural Mid and South Bedfordshire, identifying:

- Location of shops and other food outlets, including markets
- Range of food stocked in each outlet
- Price of selection of basic food items in each outlet
- Accessibility of each outlet (i.e. opening times, proximity of transport links, ease of access for the disabled, pushchairs etc)

Between 12 January and 19 February 2005 over 50 villages and approximately 70 shops were visited. Markets, farmers markets, farm shops and supermarkets were also visited.

Geography of the Bedfordshire Heartlands

The area falls into three of the Countryside Agency's *Countryside Character Areas*⁷: 88 Bedfordshire and Cambridgeshire Claylands, 90 Bedfordshire Greensand Ridge, and 110 Chilterns. The area exhibits considerable landscape variety, with elements both of *planned* landscape⁸ (shaped by the Enclosure Acts of the 19th and 18th centuries, with regular fields and large, nucleated settlements) and *unplanned* or *ancient* type (largely untouched by late enclosure, with a large number of small, dispersed settlements).

The area has a large number of very small settlements, dispersed around larger villages. Each parish may contain several such settlements. This has implications for food access. Even in parishes with a perfectly good shop, those parishioners inhabiting outlying settlements may still be some distance from the shop and any public transport. The following analysis of the provision of shops by parish must not be taken to indicate that all residents of other parishes have no access problems.

Analysis is further complicated by the availability of data at different geographic levels. While *parishes* are the boundary system which most closely fits a popular conception of the arrangement of the countryside, rural parishes are grouped into *wards*, for governmental purposes. Official statistics, such as the indices of multiple deprivation, are sometimes provided for smaller units, the *Super Output Areas*, which do not relate in any standard way to the parishes.

⁶ Ground research was carried out by Hugh Williams, whose report on the process and some ideas it generated is reproduced in Appendix B.

⁷ CA (website a)

⁸ Rackham (1987)

Access to Supermarkets

Supermarkets play a key role in food access for most of the population, accounting for over 90% of all retails spending on food⁹ (the leading five multiple retailers alone accounting for over 75%). The dramatic rise of supermarkets over recent decades has contributed to the decline of local shops and driven many surviving village and neighbourhood shops to reposition themselves as convenience stores, catering for "top-up" shoppers, stocking a limited range and charging a premium. People in rural communities with little or no access to transport therefore experience significant difficulties in accessing healthy and affordable food.

The Countryside Agency publishes data showing the distance of rural households form various services¹⁰, including supermarkets. The figures show a striking level of inaccessibility for those without transport, with 18 out of 26 rural and mixed wards having no supermarket within 2km of 50% of the population.

Bedfordshire Heartlands Rural and Mixed Wards Accessibility of Supermarkets			
Ward Name	Ward Type	Households over 2km from nearest supermarket	Households over 4km from nearest supermarket
Silsoe	Rural	100.0%	97.4%
Harlington	Rural	100.0%	76.9%
Arlesey	Rural	99.9%	0.0%
Shillington, Stondon and Henlow Camp	Mixed	99.9%	85.2%
Toddington	Rural	99.9%	87.4%
Eaton Bray	Rural	99.7%	15.8%
Langford and Henlow Village	Mixed	99.5%	20.2%
Marston	Rural	99.4%	36.3%
Stanbridge	Rural	99.0%	32.3%
Houghton, Haynes, Southill and Old Warden	Rural	98.9%	37.7%
Heath and Reach	Rural	97.6%	37.9%
Westoning and Tingrith	Rural	92.9%	1.2%
Flitton, Greenfield and Pulloxhill	Rural	91.9%	0.0%
Kensworth and Totternhoe	Rural	85.8%	30.8%
Clifton and Meppershall	Mixed	79.9%	0.0%
Woburn	Rural	73.1%	34.2%
Northhill and Blunham	Rural	68.3%	9.1%
Maulden and Clophill	Rural	64.0%	45.2%
Streatley	Mixed	41.2%	0.0%
Potton and Wensley	Rural	29.1%	11.5%
Caddington, Hyde and Slip End	Rural	24.1%	0.1%
Shefford, Campton and Gravenhurst	Mixed	13.5%	6.8%
Cranfield	Rural	10.1%	0.0%
Aspley Guise	Rural	10.0%	0.1%
Stotfold	Rural	0.3%	0.0%
Barton-le-Clay	Rural	0.1%	0.0%

⁹ Corporate Watch (Web)

¹⁰ Countryside Agency (Web b)

Provision of Rural Shops

The area has 69 rural parishes, of which 31 have no shop. The following table lists the parishes with no shop in order of the deprivation ranking of the ward.

Rural Bedfordshire Heartlands parishes with no shop			
Parish	Ward	Deprivation Ranking of Ward¹¹	
		Combined measure	Barriers to services & housing
Hyde	Caddington, Hyde and Slip End	1	9
Campton & Chicksands	Shefford, Campton and Gravenhurst	2	10
Gravenhurst	Shefford, Campton and Gravenhurst	2	10
Totternhoe	Kensworth and Totternhoe	5	1
Whipsnade	Kensworth and Totternhoe	5	1
Haynes	Houghton, Haynes, Southill & Old Warden	8	3
Billington	Stanbridge	9	2
Stanbridge	Stanbridge	9	2
Tilsworth	Stanbridge	9	2
Chalgrave	Stanbridge	9	2
Sundon	Streatley	10	6
Streatley	Streatley	10	6
Tempsford	Northill and Blunham	11	7
Everton	Potton and Wensley	12	11
Sutton	Potton and Wensley	12	11
Wrestlingworth & Cockayne Hatley	Potton and Wensley	12	11
Eyeworth	Potton and Wensley	12	11
Edworth	Potton and Wensley	12	11
Eversholt	Woburn	13	5
Potsgrove	Woburn	13	5
Milton Bryan	Woburn	13	5
Battlesden	Woburn	13	5
Hulcote & Salford	Cranfield	15	4
Brogborough	Cranfield	15	4
Astwick	Stotfold	17	24
Aspley Heath	Aspley Guise	20	20
Husborne Crawley	Aspley Guise	20	20
Tingrith	Westoning and Tingrith	24	25
Flitton & Greenfield	Flitton, Greenfield and Pulloxhill	25	15
Milbrook	Amphill
Steppingley	Flitwick West

¹¹ Figure represents ranking of rural wards, where 1 is the ward containing the most deprived SOA

Availability of Food in Rural Shops

In parishes with a surviving village shop, the availability of basic healthy foods can often be severely limited. The following tables show availability of categories and selected healthy lines of food.

Availability of Food Categories in parishes with a shop								
Parish	Number of Shops	Fruit & Veg	Bread	Groceries	Meat	Milk	Chilled	Frozen
Potton	5							
Arlesey	4							
Barton-le-Clay	3							
Caddington & Slip End	3							
Cranfield	3							
Toddington	3							
Henlow	2							
Kensworth	2							
Langford	2							
Maulden	2							
Northhill	2							
Shilington	2							
Silsoe	2							
Southill	2							
Stotfold	2							
Blunham	1							
Clifton	1							
Clophill	1							
Dunton	1							
Eaton Bray	1							
Eggington	1							
Harlington	1							
Heath & Reach	1							
Hockliffe	1							
Houghton Conquest	1							
Lidlington	1							
Marston Moretaine	1							
Meppershall	1							
Mogerhanger	1							
Old Warden	1							
Pulloxhill	1							
Ridgmont	1							
Stondon	1							
Westoning	1							
Woburn	1							
Aspley Guise	1	No info provided						
Studham	1	No info provided						
Key		- Plenty		- Limited		- None		

Availability of Healthy / Sustainable Food Lines in parishes with a shop											
Parish	Number of Shops	Potatoes	Wholemeal Bread	Semi-skimmed Milk	Healty Ready Meal	Free Range Eggs	Tinned Tomatoes	Rice			
Potton	5										
Arlesey	4										
Barton-le-Clay	3										
Caddington & Slip End	3										
Cranfield	3										
Toddington	3										
Henlow	2										
Kensworth	2										
Langford	2										
Maulden	2										
Northhill	2										
Shilington	2										
Silsoe	2										
Southill	2										
Stotfold	2										
Blunham	1										
Clifton	1										
Clophill	1										
Dunton	1										
Eaton Bray	1										
Eggington	1										
Harlington	1										
Heath & Reach	1										
Hockliffe	1										
Houghton Conquest	1										
Lidlington	1										
Marston Moretaine	1										
Meppershall	1										
Mogerhanger	1										
Old Warden	1										
Pulloxhill	1										
Ridgmont	1										
Stondon	1										
Westoning	1										
Woburn	1										
Aspley Guise	1	No info provided									
Studham	1	No info provided									
Key		- Available			- None						

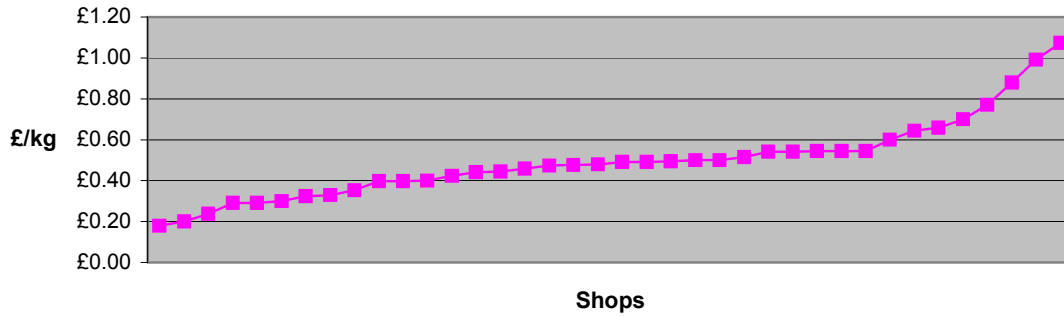
The above tables illustrate the variety of availability amongst rural shops. While most shops stock a fair range of basic groceries and chilled foods, fresh produce and meat are far less widely available, a symptom of the tendency for shops to concentrate on a top-up convenience range. Amongst shops selling fresh meat, the majority stocked only sausages and bacon (indicated as a limited range in the above table). In no village with a single shop is a comprehensive range of foods available.

Wherever availability is limited, interventions to strengthen the relationship between the community and their shop, and to build the range of affordable, healthy foods stocked, are to be preferred. A danger of alternative interventions would be further damage to already fragile retail outlets. Anecdotal evidence suggests that the initiation of community transport schemes has already contributed to the closure of one or more rural shops.

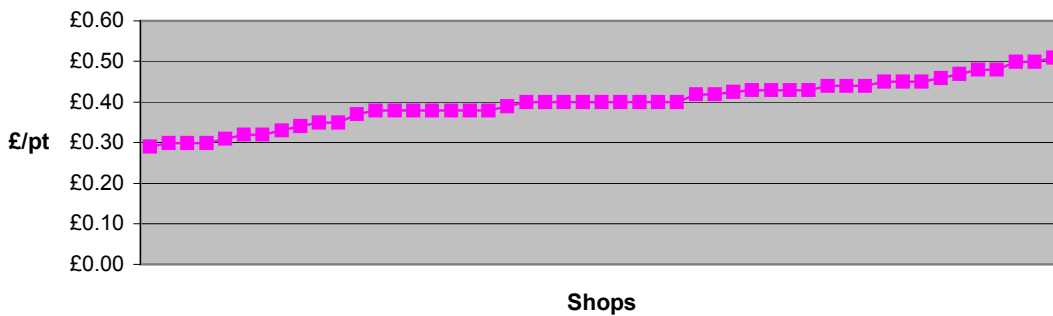
Price Variation

Prices in rural shops vary enormously, as indicated by the following charts

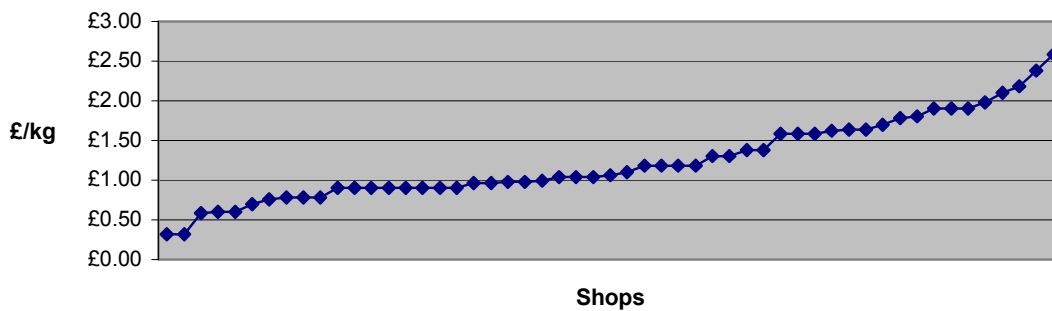
Price Range of Basic Potatoes



Price Range of Semi-skimmed Milk



Price Range of Basic Pasta



The figures plotted in the above charts indicate the lowest available prices and include some market town outlets. The full figures are reproduced in full in the table below.

The differential between highest and lowest prices is startling, particularly for staple and fresh foods. The data indicate that shops can successfully sell healthy foods at affordable prices though many charge exorbitantly high prices. There is curiously little correlation between the levels of prices charged by each shop for different foods. While supermarkets are generally very cheap for certain lines (generally the key *known value items*, KVIs), they are not always competitive in other categories, for example fresh produce and eggs.

Complete Price and Availability Tables and Chart

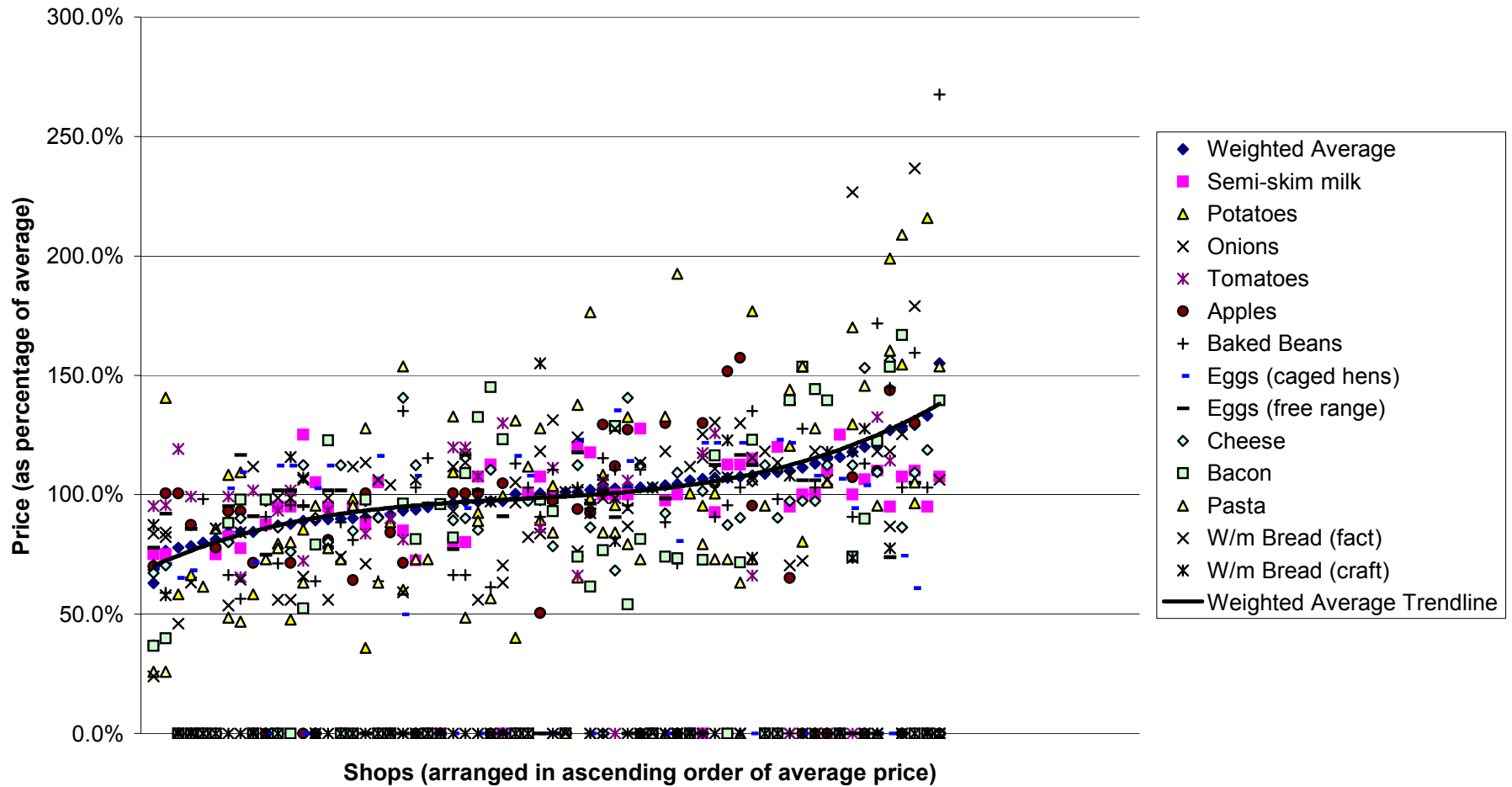
The tables and chart on the following pages present a more complete set of data for the price and availability of certain key food items in the rural shops of the Bedfordshire Heartlands area.

The chart illustrates the distribution of prices around a weighted average (plotted on the y-axis) for each of 13 key food items for all shops (ranged along the x axis in order of the average price of the basket of 13 food items). A trendline for the average basket price indicates a clear range of prices similar to those of the individual food items above. However, the scattering of all prices demonstrates that the prices of particular items can deviate significantly from the average. Thus, one of the shops with the cheapest average basket price is selling potatoes at almost 150% of the average price for potatoes in all shops.

The table below (omitted) presents the complete set of data depicted in the chart and clearly indicates availability. Shops are listed in order of average basket price with the weighted average listed first in the table. Thus, the Tesco store at Flitwick (included for the purposes of comparison) has an average basket price of 0.63, where the average of basket prices for all shops is 1. In other words, prices at Tesco are, on average 63% of those elsewhere.

At the other end of the scale, the [name omitted] store at [location omitted] is on average 55% more expensive than other stores. Fortunately for those living in [location omitted], another local store [name omitted] offers significantly lower prices.

Distribution of Food Prices in Rural Beds Heartlands Shops



Pricing and Availability in Bedfordshire Heartlands Rural Shops

[Table omitted]

Summary of Indicators and Identification of Target Parishes

The data presented in this chapter serve as indicators of parishes that might experience greater difficulties accessing healthy and affordable food. Food access is determined by a complex interplay of factors, none of which are adequately captured by statistics. The indications should therefore be taken as only indications and not a prescription of those parishes which should engage with the project to the exclusion of others.

The tables on the following two pages summarise the key indicators for each rural parish in the Bedfordshire Heartlands area, broken down into parishes with and without a shop. The table for parishes with a shop is sorted by the number of food categories available while that for parishes with no shop is sorted by proximity of the nearest supermarket.

Availability of food items

On a measure purely of the proximate availability of a wide range of foods, parishes higher on the two tables have better access. Clearly there is a significant obstacle to food access for those parishes with no shop, while those whose shop stocks a limited range will also experience obstacles to obtaining the food for a healthy diet locally. Indeed, with the exception of the 16 parishes whose shop(s) stock 5 or more of the 7 categories of food, all can be considered to suffer a lack of adequate food provision.

It is interesting to note that almost all of the shops stocking a good range of foods (wide provision of 5 or more categories) do so at an average price that is close to, or below, the average. The exception is [location omitted], where the basket of foods costs 27% more than the average.

The conclusion is that all but the 15 parishes listed below experience a significant lack of adequate availability of healthy and affordable food. Even within these 15 parishes there will be relatively isolated smaller settlements, where ready access to shops will be problematic for those with little or no access to transport.

<p>Parishes with local shop(s) providing good range of food items at reasonable price</p> <p>Barton-le-Clay, Cranfield, Potton, Maulden, Caddington & Slip End, Shilington, Marston M'taine, Stondon, Southill, Toddington, Arlesey, Pulloxhill, Heath & Reach, Lidlington, Woburn</p>

Other Indicators

Amongst all other parishes, some prioritisation can be achieved through the detail of the indicators. Those towards the bottom of the first table below have very poor availability of food categories in their shop(s), while those towards the bottom of the second table below have poor access to supermarkets.

In both tables, particularly significant indicators (ie fewer than 6 food categories stocked to any extent, prices 10% or more above average, access or deprivation rankings amongst 10 worst wards) have been highlighted (in bold and shading) and parishes shaded according to the number of indicators suggesting food access difficulties. In the table of parishes with no shop, it is taken as read that having no shop is an indicator that all those parishes meet.

Summary of availability of food items, and other food access indicators, in Bedfordshire Heartlands parishes with a shop						
Parish	Ward	Food Categories Stocked (out of 7)		Average Price of Basket of Food Items	Access to super-markets ¹²	Combined Measure of Deprivation ¹⁰
		Good range	Limited range	Relative to average 1.00	Ranking (1 worst to 26 best)	Ranking (1 worst to 61 best)
Barton-le-Clay	Barton-le-Clay	7	0	[omitted]	26	41
Cranfield	Cranfield	7	0	[omitted]	23	22
Potton	Potton & Wensley	7	0	[omitted]	20	16
Maulden	Maulden & Clophill	7	0	[omitted]	18	28
Caddington & SE	Caddington, Hyde & Slip End	6	1	[omitted]	21	1
Shillington	Shillington, Stondon, Henlow Camp	6	1	[omitted]	4	29
Marston M'taine	Marston	6	1	[omitted]	8	7
Stondon	Shillington, Stondon, Henlow Camp	6	1	[omitted]	4	29
Southill	Houghton, Haynes, Southill & Old W	5	2	[omitted]	10	10
Toddington	Toddington	5	2	[omitted]	5	6
Arlesey	Arlesey	5	2	[omitted]	3	3
Pulloxhill	Flitton, Greenfield & Pulloxhill	5	2	[omitted]	13	56
Heath & Reach	Heath & Reach	5	2	[omitted]	11	23
Lidlington	Marston	5	2	[omitted]	8	7
Woburn	Woburn	5	2	[omitted]	16	17
Meppershall	Clifton & Meppershall	5	2	[omitted]	15	18
Houghton C'st	Houghton, Haynes, Southill & Old W	4	3	[omitted]	10	10
Silsoe	Silsoe	4	3	[omitted]	1	44
Eaton Bray	Eaton Bray	4	3	[omitted]	6	4
Kensworth	Kensworth & Totternhoe	4	2	[omitted]	14	5
Westoning	Westoning & Tingrith	3	4	[omitted]	12	49
Harlington	Harlington	3	3	[omitted]	2	61
Henlow	Shillington, Stondon, Henlow Camp	3	3	[omitted]	4	29
Clifton	Clifton & Meppershall	3	3	[omitted]	15	18
Northhill	Northhill & Blunham	3	3	[omitted]	17	14
Ridgmont	Woburn	3	3	[omitted]	16	17
Blunham	Northhill & Blunham	3	3	[omitted]	17	14
Clophill	Maulden & Clophill	3	3	[omitted]	18	28
Dunton	Potton & Wensley	3	3	[omitted]	20	16
Hockliffe	Heath & Reach	2	4	[omitted]	11	23
Stotfold	Stotfold	2	3	[omitted]	25	26
Eggington	Stanbridge	1	4	[omitted]	9	12
Langford	Langford & Henlow Village	1	4	[omitted]	7	32
Mogerhanger	Northhill & Blunham	1	3	[omitted]	17	14
Old Warden	Houghton, Haynes, Southill & Old W	1	0	[omitted]	10	10
Aspley Guise	Aspley Guise	No information provided			24	31
Studham	Kensworth & Totternhoe	No information provided			14	5

¹² The Access to Supermarkets measure is given by ward, not by parish. The Measure of Deprivation is given by ward, but relates to Super Output Areas at a more local level - the most deprived SOA is taken as indicative for the ward as a whole.

Summary of other food access indicators, in Bedfordshire Heartlands parishes with no shop						
Parish	Ward	Food Categories Stocked (out of 7)		Average Price of Basket of Food Items	Access to super-markets ¹³	Combined Measure of Deprivation ¹¹
		Good range	Limited range	Relative to average 1.00	Ranking (1 worst to 26 best)	Ranking (1 worst to 61 best)
Milbrook	Amphill	No Shop		
Steppingley	Flitwick West	No Shop		
Astwick	Stotfold	No Shop			25	26
Aspley Heath	Aspley Guise	No Shop			24	31
Husborne Crawley	Aspley Guise	No Shop			24	31
Hulcote & Salford	Cranfield	No Shop			23	22
Brogborough	Cranfield	No Shop			23	22
Campton & Chicksands	Shefford, Campton & Gravenhurst	No Shop			22	2
Gravenhurst	Shefford, Campton & Gravenhurst	No Shop			22	2
Hyde	Caddington, Hyde & Slip End	No Shop			21	1
Everton	Potton & Wensley	No Shop			20	16
Sutton	Potton & Wensley	No Shop			20	16
Wrestlingworth & Cockayne Hatley	Potton & Wensley	No Shop			20	16
Eyeworth	Potton & Wensley	No Shop			20	16
Edworth	Potton & Wensley	No Shop			20	16
Sundon	Streatley	No Shop			19	13
Streatley	Streatley	No Shop			19	13
Tempsford	Northill & Blunham	No Shop			17	14
Eversholt	Woburn	No Shop			16	17
Potsgrove	Woburn	No Shop			16	17
Milton Bryan	Woburn	No Shop			16	17
Battlesden	Woburn	No Shop			16	17
Totternhoe	Kensworth & Totternhoe	No Shop			14	5
Whipsnade	Kensworth & Totternhoe	No Shop			14	5
Flitton & Greenfield	Flitton, Greenfield & Pulloxhill	No Shop			13	56
Tingrith	Westoning & Tingrith	No Shop			12	49
Haynes	Houghton, Haynes, Southill & Old Warden	No Shop			10	10
Billington	Stanbridge	No Shop			9	12
Stanbridge	Stanbridge	No Shop			9	12
Chalgrave	Stanbridge	No Shop			9	12
Tilsworth	Stanbridge	No Shop			9	12

¹³ The Access to Supermarkets measure is given by ward, not by parish. The Measure of Deprivation is given by ward, but relates to Super Output Areas at a more local level - the most deprived SOA is taken as indicative for the ward as a whole.

4. Improving Access

Food Access Projects

Across the country, a large number of projects have been delivered to address issues of food poverty. Projects adopt a wide range of approaches, aim to address many particular issues and target a wide spectrum of communities and individuals.

Areas of Action

Food access projects can be divided into the following principal areas of action, although most will cut across a number of areas:

- **Food Provision**
A clear way to address problems of access to food is to source and provide healthy food at affordable prices in communities experiencing food poverty. Initiatives range from **simple veg bag schemes** (where members receive a weekly bag of fresh vegetables) through wider **co-operative buying groups** (where a group collectively buy food in bulk) to **community-run shops**.
- **Food Delivery**
Food delivery schemes are similar to food provision initiatives in their aim to make healthy and affordable food available to those experiencing food access difficulties. The difference is that the focus is on providing mechanisms for getting available food to individuals rather than on identifying new sources. Such schemes are often targeted at elderly people, who may find it difficult to obtain food supplies even when locally available. Delivery services may be offered by paid workers, volunteers or local shops themselves.
- **Transport**
Adopting the opposite approach to food delivery initiatives are schemes that provide transport to take people experiencing food access difficulties to sources of healthy and affordable food.
- **Meal Provision**
The above areas of work focus on providing access to basic food ingredients. An alternative approach is to provide meals, thereby addressing further issues of cooking skills, availability of cooking facilities etc. Initiatives to provide meals are often targeted at children (eg **Breakfast Clubs** running before school) or the elderly (often in the form of **Lunch Clubs**), but **Community Cafes** may also serve the wider community. Meals are often provided in a communal setting but may, like the traditional **Meals on Wheels** service, be supplied to homes.
- **Education and Skills**
Lack of skills is often a fundamental obstacle to achieving a healthy diet. Initiatives to provide information and develop skills in choosing, buying, cooking and growing food can significantly increase people's range of food choices. Information may be provided through printed materials (eg **recipe ideas** or **vegetable fact sheets**) but is often most accessible when presented through demonstrations (eg **Cook and Eat Sessions** or **growing workshops** on allotments).
- **Growing Food**
A number of initiatives can help to encourage people to grow their own food besides the fundamental development of the necessary skills. Space, tools and other resources must be made available and accessible, while sharing growing responsibilities amongst community members can encourage greater participation.
- **Food Partnerships**
The development of links between members of food communities involved in different parts of the food supply chain can bring benefits to all initiatives. Linking communities with food producers and strengthening community relationships with their local shops can greatly help to improve the availability of healthy food. The provision of healthy meals can often be achieved through partnerships with schools or commercial caterers.

Example Projects

The following projects provide instructive examples of how initiatives have been implemented, what benefits they have brought to the targeted communities and the issues encountered in delivering the project.

Project title	At the Heart of a Healthy Community
Location	Aberystwyth, Wales
Areas of action	Food provision, meal provision, growing food, education and skills
Target Groups	All
Outline	The project aims to involve community groups, reducing the barriers to enable access to, uptake of healthy food/eating, and/or increased physical activity. Funded by the Welsh Assembly Government - Inequalities in Health Programme, the project aims to target the prevention of CHD by using the community development approach and to encourage physical activity and healthy eating (and some smoking cessation).
Interventions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fruit and veg club set up on a housing estate • Work with commercial sector cafes to subsidise 'healthy eating breakfasts' • Funding of school gardens at Pupil Referral Unit • Production of a fruit and veg map of Aberystwyth • Funding of fruit tuck shops in various groups and organisations
Outcomes	26 community groups engaged in 41 initiatives
Resources	2 paid members of staff
Emerging issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Short term funding problematic for community development work • Working with groups more productive than with individuals

Project title	Healthy Bites Food Co-op & Café
Location	Barnsley, South Yorkshire
Areas of action	Food provision, education and skills
Target Groups	Children, single parents, women and children Planning to extend to elderly and disabled groups
Outline	Food co-op and community cafe run by volunteers whose activities are aimed at people on low income. There is a creche facility for the volunteers whilst working at the project. Local women work together to buy and supply low cost fruit and vegetables to members. A rota for childcare, meal preparation and co-op support operates. Transferable skills, increased social networking and confidence are key achievements of this project. A delivery system is now in operation to the elderly and other agencies in the area.
Interventions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cookery Class - volunteers are introduced to new foods and menus by demonstration and tasting sessions. • Nutrition/Health Education - users are encouraged and helped to chose healthy, low cost recipes. • Community Café - available to the volunteer staff. • Food co-operative and delivery service • Credit union

Outcomes	22 users per week
Resources	1 paid member of staff, 14 volunteers
Emerging issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Difficulties with consistency of quality and price of fruit and veg • Some members still cannot afford to buy produce and pre ordering is often a barrier

Project title	Age Concern Gwynedd & Mon Lunch Clubs
Location	Gwynedd and Anglesey, Wales
Areas of action	Meal provision
Target Groups	Elderly
Outline	This project runs lunch clubs for the over-60s, providing a three-course meal and an opportunity to socialise in various venues (village halls and hotels)
Interventions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lunch clubs four days a week
Outcomes	Serves 400 people per week
Resources	4 paid staff, 50 voluntary staff
Emerging issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Difficulties experienced in arranging transport, finding volunteers and securing further funding to expand to new areas

Project title	Asian Cookery Club Project
Location	Luton, Bedfordshire
Areas of action	Education and skills, meal provision
Target Groups	South Asian, African-Caribbean women
Outline	This is a 'cook and eat' project specifically aimed at South Asian and African-Caribbean women. It focuses on adapting traditional recipes to reduce fat, salt and sugar intake.
Interventions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cookery Class - the main activity of the project • Training - training programme accredited with the Open College Network • Recipe Book
Outcomes	20-25 users per week
Resources	3 paid staff
Emerging issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Has achieved notable success in reaching traditionally difficult groups to tackle dietary related health issues • Proving to be a useful opportunity to look at other needs of the community eg social isolation, literacy etc.

Project title	Ferguslie Women's Health on Wheels Project
Location	Ferguslie, Renfrewshire, Scotland
Areas of action	Food provision, education & skills
Target Groups	Children, elderly, women, single parents
Outline	A food co-op providing information, advice, support and a delivery service. The project is no longer running, partly through a lack of volunteers though also because the need for it has decreased.

Interventions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Food Co-op and Delivery Service - Provision of affordable fresh fruit and vegetables, dry goods/pulses • Information/Advice/Support - Leaflets and posters created and distributed
Outcomes	Achieved 150 users per week
Resources	1 paid member of staff, 8 volunteers
Emerging issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Difficulties experienced with funding, staffing and maintaining the commitment of volunteers • Projects such as this can not operate in isolation • Training must be part of overall scheme • Existing local skills must be acknowledged and made use of, taking into account that volunteers can only be asked to do so much • An ideal development would be the creation of a community shop, with real jobs for volunteers, taking child care and social responsibilities into account

Project title	Sandwell 5 A DAY Food Access Project
Location	Sandwell, West Midlands
Areas of action	Food Provision, Food Partnership
Target Groups	All within a disadvantaged urban area
Outline	Food access mapping study identified large networks of streets and estates with no shops selling affordable, good quality fruit and vegetables. The initiative introduced a sale or return scheme and a home delivery service to improve access to and availability of fruit and vegetables.
Interventions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Six local retailers were offered a six-week fruit and vegetable sale or return scheme, allowing them to improve their offering without taking the risk of losses • A delivery service was introduced to improve access for those experiencing difficulty in reaching shops or carrying shopping
Outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Three shops took up the offer and two of these continued supplying fruit and vegetables after the end of the six-week trial period • The home delivery service, which offered fruit and vegetables as well as other food and nonfood items, achieved 200 regular customers • Number of portions of fruit and vegetables per day per person increased from 1.49 to 3.2
Resources	Delivered through a government funded local 5 A DAY initiative
Emerging issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Targeted and funded interventions can have significant impact

Project title	Hastings and St Leonards - Fruit and vegetable co-ops
Location	Hastings and St Leonards, East Sussex
Areas of action	Food Provision, Growing Food
Target Groups	Members of existing community groups
Outline	The intervention was focused on two food co-ops, each collating orders from members (with a nominal membership fee of £1 or £5 for groups), ordering from a wholesaler and then bagging up orders for collection or delivery (using Sure Start van).

	<p>Alongside this, work with the local allotments federation aimed to increase occupancy rates of empty allotments by working with the media and through an innovative tree-planting scheme</p> <p>Other community activities included fruit stalls at six Playday events for children (organised by the local council and the Under-5s Unit) where fruit was sold at 15p a piece.</p> <p>Some work was done with the development of community cafés, whereby excess fruit and vegetables were cooked and frozen, to be served at a later time to co-op members and users of the community centre.</p>
Interventions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Two fruit and vegetable co-ops established
Outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Co-ops achieved 106 and 58 members (nearly half of which were groups supplying several people) • Users spent an average of just over £5 per week on fruit and vegetables from the co-op, compared with the UK average spend of £2.84 • One allotment site increased its occupancy rate from 15% to 85, although the increase was not wholly attributable to the initiative. • Over 200 pieces were sold at each Playday event, thus addressing access and availability issues and raising awareness of the existence of the fruit and vegetable co-op
Resources	<p>A project worker at the local health promotion unit co-ordinated the co-ops, which were run by volunteers at the community centres</p>
Emerging issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The co-ops were eventually merged • The involvement of groups such as Sure Start, Playlink schemes, local nurseries, crèches and playgroups allowed the intervention to reach a larger number of individuals

Lessons for the Bedfordshire Heartlands Food Access Project

The experience of the projects detailed above, and others, suggests a number of lessons that should inform work on the Bedfordshire project:

- Every possible step should be taken to ensure sustainability, despite the difficulties posed by short term funding. This is best done by engaging committed volunteers and linking interventions to existing work of CDWs
- Sustainable outcomes are often best achieved through work with defined groups, where possible engaging community development workers and building on existing relationships with communities
- Given the complexity of food access circumstances, and wider community issues, it is important to keep an open mind to other factors and the need to address them
- For food provision interventions to be viable, it is essential to identify viable and consistent supplies of good quality food at affordable prices
- Volunteers are essential to the viability of most interventions, especially in the absence of continuing funding. The benefits of the intervention must be sufficient to ensure continuing input from volunteers.
- The benefits of interventions can be multiplied by combining approaches to improving food access
- Working with a number of groups can multiply benefits and outputs

5. Existing Community Groups and Work in the Area

A wide range of community groups exist in the Bedfordshire Heartlands with community development work delivered by a number of organisations. Initiatives and schemes are briefly outlined in this chapter and markers set out for potential involvement in the Rural Food Access project (indicated by bullet points). Further contact details can be found in Appendix C.

Bedfordshire Heartlands PCT

Bedfordshire Heartlands PCT is responsible for a wide range of services aimed at improving the health of the area's population, including a number of community-focused initiatives. The PCT is the lead organisation in the Mid Bedfordshire Healthy Living Initiative (see below).

Health visiting

The PCT is responsible for provision of health visitors, who have excellent and established relationships with the communities they work with. Health visitors are often involved in other specific initiatives.

- Health Visitors can provide a key point of contact with community groups

Mid Bedfordshire Healthy Living Initiative

The Mid Bedfordshire Healthy Living Initiative aims to promote good health in the community in its widest sense, working in partnership with seven organisations from the voluntary and statutory sector.

The HLI projects deliver key services, helping tackle and prevent ill health and promote well being within local communities. The project works with three key groups: Young People, Vulnerable Families and Older People. Activities offered range from provision of a toy library, a young people's drug and alcohol outreach service, exercise classes and money advice, through to family support and women's groups. Making it easier for people to access a healthy diet is amongst the aims of the HLI.

Alcohol Services for the Community

Two projects address alcohol related issues. PUKE (Prevention, Understanding, Knowledge, Education) is an outreach project under-25s, aiming to educate & support young people around issues concerning alcohol. Funkeemunkee.co.uk is a website designed to help young people access health and social information in Mid Beds.

Arlesey Toy Library

The Arlesey Toy Library loans toys to local families, grandparents, toddlers groups, pre-schools and childminders.

- The Toy Library may provide a useful point of contact with the Arlesey community

Christian Family Care

Christian Family Care provide a range of services to women and children, both from their centre at Manor Farm, Sandy, and directly to communities across the area. Service include drop-in sessions for families, work with women's groups to improve self-esteem and confidence and youth groups.

- Christian Family Care has good contact with community groups through their services, many of whom are isolated.
- The Manor Farm Centre has available space and facilities with potential to serve as a base for community interventions.

Ear to the Ground

This project looks at how community members access information and how information and communication can become more accessible and appropriate for the community. Community members from all three target groups (young people, older people and families) have been recruited and trained to become 'Ears' for their community.

- Ears may provide useful channels to communities with food access difficulties

Heartlands Community Development Initiative

Bedfordshire Heartlands Primary Care Trust has employed two community development workers, to develop projects across Mid Beds, aimed at the target groups of older people and unsupported families.

One project, delivered in partnership with the RCC and Aragon Housing, seeks to establish cook and eat sessions in Aragon's residential retirement accommodation. Sessions are held every fortnight and actively supported for 6 weeks, after which the hope is that they will continue to run independently. A successful session is now established in Henlow and sessions being developed in Marston Moretaine, Stotfold and Bigglesade.

- Successful cook-and-eat sessions represent promising community groups of elderly people already engaged with food issues

It's Great Outdoors

It's Great Outdoors provides opportunities for those at most risk of social exclusion to access the countryside, through development of community groups, organising outings, promotion of the countryside and voluntary conservation. A community allotment has been initiated in Flitwick, with a further potential allotment project in Biggleswade. The project is run by Greensand Trust, the Ivel and Ouse Countryside Project and the Forest of Marston Vale.

- The project's community groups may be appropriate for engagement in the project
- The project's expertise in food growing initiatives may be drawn on in the implementation of similar interventions amongst other groups

Mid Beds Citizens Advice Bureau

Mid Beds Citizens Advice Bureau delivers money and debt advice leading to income maximisation amongst the target groups of over 50's and unsupported families.

Spurgeons Child Care

Spurgeons Child Care has established Family Support Groups in Flitwick & Sandy. Parents are referred to these groups when they are experiencing social isolation, poor mental health, relationship issues and needs relating to parenting skills. Children are referred with special needs or behavioural problems. The Support Groups provide a safe place where parents and children can get advice.

Bedfordshire RCC

Bedfordshire Rural Communities Charity aims to 'encourage thriving, diverse and sustainable rural communities in Bedfordshire' through a wide range of services and projects, combining in-depth grass-roots work with communities and advocacy of rural issues.

Village Care Scheme

The Village Care Scheme helps to establish 'good neighbour schemes' that provide easy access to help and support for every resident living in the community, should they need it. Village Care Schemes

provide a focal point for services within the community and provide direct help to those that have difficulties with shopping, cooking and transport, amongst other things.

Schemes have been established in Barton, Clifton, Cotton End, Harlington, Haynes, Henlow, Houghton Conquest, Kensworth, Langford, Lidlington, Marston Moretaine, Northill & Ickwell, Potton, Shillington, Silsoe, Tempsford and Woburn.

- Village Care Schemes can provide ready-made access to rural communities. Some schemes have already started to address food issues

Promoting Rural Services

Recognising that the provision of essential services to rural areas in Bedfordshire is poor, the RCC actively promotes and supports community facilities, run by volunteers, and encourages the joint provision of essential services, such as a community shop and post office running in a village hall.

- The RCC's expertise may prove valuable to any interventions along the lines of a community shop

Social Inclusion Project

The Social Inclusion project aims to help people become more involved in their communities by identifying small rural communities that for many reasons lose out through, for example, lack of services. The Countryside Agency provided funding for a rural community development worker to identify and tackle social inclusion in communities with a population under 3000.

Parish Plans

Parish Plans set out a vision for a community's future and identify the actions needed to tackle issues of concern, with the hope of influencing the organisations that provide services to rural communities. It is up to the community, as a whole, to decide what is important to them, based on information provided through surveys, research and community participation.

- The creation of a parish plan is an indicator of community participation and some plans address issues of food access

Other Community Groups and Initiatives

A number of other groups and initiatives may provide opportunities for the project to access communities:

- **Dunton Community Garden** has over 200 members and already addresses food issues through vegetable growing
- **Aragon Housing** operates several community initiatives, aimed at its residents. Nine forums address areas of concern (including a residential retirement forum, aimed at elderly residents - a group likely to experience food access difficulties), while a partnership project delivers cook and eat sessions in residential retirement homes
- **Travellers' Sites** across the area represent contained communities with particular problems of diet and food access
- **North Chilterns Trust** operates a number of growing initiatives in South Beds and Luton, although the focus is on urban areas
- Many **Youth Groups, Parent and Toddler Groups, Luncheon Clubs etc** operate across the area and can serve as existing community groups to engage in the project

Appendix A. Bibliography

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Appendix B. Report by Ground Researcher

Hugh Williams, the researcher who carried out the ground research, provided the following feedback on the process and some ideas it generated.

Outlets Surveyed

Between 12 January and 19 February 2005 over 50 villages and approximately 70 shops were visited. Markets, farmers markets, farm shops and supermarkets were also visited.

In all but a handful of outlets the researcher was well received. The overall impression of the premises visited was of small businesses doing the best they could, working very long hours for little return. Most proprietors recognised the fact that they were a 'convenience store' and that many of the communities they served got the majority of their food and household goods from the nearest town's supermarket. A few had more entrepreneurial aspirations and were trying to do better.

The process

A list of village shops was taken from Bedfordshire Rural Communities Charity's (BRCC) database; this was supplemented by local knowledge and investigation on foot in settlements of reasonable size not on the BRCC list.

The data collection sheet was easy to complete. However, the section on freezer contents was more difficult. Many items were unpriced and therefore had to be bar code swiped. As the survey was in some ways an invasion into the privacy of the shop owner, the researcher adopted a low profile. Subsequently not all sections were filled in. Future surveys might just ask if there was a well-stocked freezer.

Space for additional comments would have been useful. The margins on the form were used during this survey.

Taking the project forward

Most village shop owners and their staff work very long hours; many more hours than are suggested by the opening hours displayed in their shops. Any work done with shop owners should take this into account. Proposals should demonstrate that there would be some benefit for proprietors, such as improved turnover and profit. In BRCC's experience, attendance at meetings arranged for village shop-keepers is poor. It is recommended that this borne in mind.

From a competition point of view, many of the non-perishable items were well priced; certainly when taking into account that most shops were centrally located in the village and therefore within easy walking distance, thus saving on transport costs. Some improvement could be made in the stocking of fresh fruit and vegetables. It is interesting to note that only Pottton and Biggleswade appear to have dedicated greengrocers. Dairy produce and meat also need to be addressed. (See *Ideas* below)

The research brief required details of shops, markets and other food outlets to be explored. Village pubs are outlets for cooked food. Some village schools still have active kitchens and they could both be considered for inclusion in community development work later in the project.

A detailed list of local suppliers of fresh fruit and vegetables, dairy, meat and bakery products compiled for each intervention area would aid the progress of the project. Co-operative bulk buying by linking shops, pubs and schools, where appropriate, could assist in keeping purchase prices competitive and turnover higher than it might be from single outlets.

Ideas for later phases of the project

Whilst outside the researcher's brief, these ideas are put forward from knowledge gained in discussions with shop owners and a strong personal interest in all aspects of food.

1. Village pubs could be encouraged to produce a simple and nutritious pensioners lunch at least once a week. This would encourage social contact and raise the awareness of the community to the needs of older residents.
2. A lunch club could be held in a village hall. Young mothers on a low income could be taught by other residents; drawing on personal knowledge and experience. Local extended families are often a thing of the past; a surrogate mother or grandmother could be a useful way of passing on helpful catering tips in an informal setting.
3. If the local school still has an active kitchen this could be used as a training and communal eating facility. Preparing local grown vegetables for casseroles and stews etc. would be a constructive way of demonstrating that the freezer and tin are not the only source of food.

Reflection

The village shop has been pivotal in this element of the project. If the whole community does not support its shop, it will fail. For many of them survival is on a knife edge. Some community development initiatives can improve one service at the cost of others. For example, Wrestlingworth village shop closed at Christmas 2004 after a valiant struggle to survive. The last straw was the Link bus, welcomed as an improvement to rural services, which takes residents to nearby towns with supermarkets. The village shop in Aspley Guise looks as if it may well suffer a similar fate. The 'convenience store' is a mind-set that needs to change. 'Convenience' needs to become 'necessity' before the survival of village shops becomes more secure.

Finally, three quotes to be borne in mind when deliberating the next stages of the project:

- From my father, 'there is no such word as can't'.
- From my housemaster on my leaving school, 'there is no progress without change'.
- From a Salvation Army officer, 'it's not my problem but I can be part of the solution'

Appendix C. Local contacts

Bedfordshire Heartlands			
Contacts for Community Development and Health Initiatives			
Initiative / Organisation	Contact	Position	Details
Age Concern Beds	Karen Birkin	Chief Executive	[details omitted]
Aragon Housing	Steve Nash	Community Development Officer	[details omitted]
Arlesey Toy Library			[details omitted]
Bedfordshire County Council	Jo Faul	Sustainability Officer	[details omitted]
Beds County Council Travellers' Sites	Anne Bailey	Gypsy Support Officer	[details omitted]
Beds Heartlands PCT	Stephanie Bennett	Health Visitor for Hard to Reach Families	[details omitted]
Beds Heartlands PCT	Linda Willis	Associate Director of Health Promotion	[details omitted]
Beds Heartlands PCT	Tracey Coker	Community Development Worker for Older People	[details omitted]
BigBarn	Anthony Davison	Managing Director	[details omitted]
Christian Family Care (Manor Farm Centre)	Ginny Redbond	Manager	[details omitted]
Dunton Community Garden	Jenny Pates	Project Co-ordinator	[details omitted]
Ear to the Ground	Justine Hunt	Community Development Officer	[details omitted]
It's Great Outdoors	Helen Spring		[details omitted]
Mid Beds Council for Voluntary Service	Mark Smith	Chief Officer	[details omitted]
Mid Beds District Council	Will Sparrow	Youth and Community Safety officer	[details omitted]
Mid Beds Healthy Living Initiative	Neil Timmins	Project Manager	[details omitted]
RCC Promoting Rural Services & Parish Plans	Zoe Ashby		[details omitted]
RCC Social Inclusion Project	Sandra Williams		[details omitted]
RCC Village Care Scheme	Andrea MacAdam		[details omitted]
South Bedfordshire District Council	Vivien Cannon	Community Involvement Manager	[details omitted]
South Bedfordshire District Council	Zulf Awan	Rural Community Development Officer	[details omitted]
Spurgeon's Childcare	Allegonda Munns		[details omitted]