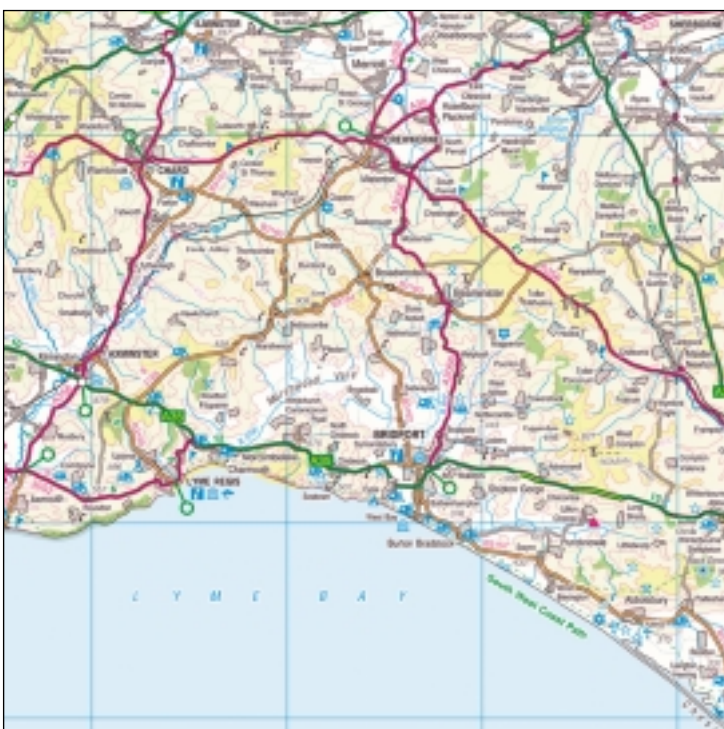


Bridport, Dorset



© S Lewis



Population: 7,500
Including hinterland: 19,000

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Introduction

This small town nestles on the coast of West Dorset. A lively working town, the main industries are engineering, food, tourism, rope and net making, and agriculture. A large proportion of these are small businesses, paying wages at the low end of the scale and offering only limited security of employment.

Bridport is nevertheless a thriving place, with a fishing port, flourishing and visible arts scene, a museum and numerous community groups with many specific interests. So there is good reason to want to live in Bridport. The town is also the local service hub for a rural population of around 11,500 people.

Immediately evident is the abundant local food industry, with its many outlets: cafes, delicatessens, bakeries, even a local food celebrity or two.

Establishing itself over recent years, this local food sector now includes local food markets, on-farm processing and producer networks, a Food Week, and local food directories. Much of this activity is driven by the West Dorset Food and Land Trust, and by local food businesses in the area.



© Countryside Agency/I Dalglish



Why local food is important

If products are produced, processed and marketed locally:

- people can buy fresh, seasonal produce – resulting in healthier diets;
- by gaining back the middle ground for producers that has been lost over past decades, more of the 'food pound' is retained within the local economy, providing local job opportunities;
- links between producers and the community are strengthened – customers know who has produced the food they are eating (the issue of 'traceability' is becoming more and more important);
- pollution from 'food miles' and packaging are reduced;
- more sustainable systems of land management are encouraged.

The local food sector

Although many consumers are persuaded of the benefits of local food, the sector remains relatively small and fragmented. The main problems relate to having to compete with economies of scale achieved by the global food supply and distribution market. Other barriers blocking the growth of local food chains include government and EU legislation and the lack of capacity of local producers.

So while there has been measurable progress in the sector, and local food is definitely ‘on the up’, serious growth will require much greater diversity of supply, coordination and infrastructure. And producers need support to achieve this.

The West Dorset Food and Land Trust

Founded in 1996, the Trust is a local community-based organisation. It has played a key role in developing the local food sector in Bridport and West Dorset. Its main aims are to:

- promote healthy eating;
- promote the local food sector;
- organise practical, community-based initiatives that help to achieve these aims.

In 2003 it established the Centre for Local Food; the Centre is a hub for many of the Trust’s activities.

The South West’s response to the Sustainable Food and Farming strategy places emphasis on local food chains; the Trust’s work is therefore very much in accord with regional policy.

The Centre for Local Food

Opened just a year ago, the Centre has made remarkably rapid progress in bringing the wider benefits of local food to the community.

In diverse ways the Centre meets the needs of both suppliers and consumers. It is the first such centre in the UK. So, for example, producers and other food businesses can go there for business support and training, to network with other producers and to get help with funding. And local people can learn about growing and cooking food, participate in voluntary activities out in the community, and enjoy finding out about Bridport’s food heritage.

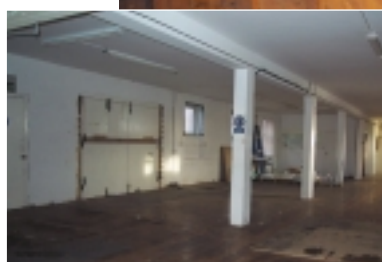
Only this time last year, the Centre was a semi-redundant rope and net industry building serving no purpose. After refurbishment, it was opened and within months transformed into a vibrant community resource¹. At a cost of £100,000 this is extraordinary value by any standards.

Peter Simpson of the Countryside Agency’s Eat the View team says the Centre is unique in the way it

“manages to bridge the gap between the market place and the producer” .

The building is now a recognised centre of activity. It is equipped with commercial kitchens, ICT equipment, workshops and food distribution facilities. The Centre has developed in such a way that it now engages with the community in the widest sense. It is because it is a community project, rather than a commercial proposition, that it has

¹ The Centre was developed by the Food and Land Trust with partnership backing from SWRDA, Leader Plus, New Opportunities Fund and the District and County Councils.



From redundant building . . .
to a real community asset.

remained open to an interesting mix of people, with diverse needs.

Any major enterprise of this kind needs a prime mover. The Centre's then Director, Tim Crabtree saw the potential and set about getting the funding and establishing the partnerships to make the Centre happen.

“Nothing can happen until you start. The way the Centre has developed shows that it is possible to start an organisation and give it some free rein to grow in a way consistent with community needs.

At the start of 2003 we had a redundant building on our hands but lots of ideas. It is fantastic to see people coming together here now, getting the things they need to develop – either in business or as people. That is engaging with the community in the widest sense.”

Tim is an excellent example of how a person with the right team, skills and vision can effect enormous change.

Funding the Centre's work

The Centre has established an excellent track record in attracting funding, and much of its income is from charitable donations. This includes core funding for the Director's post and administrative support. Neil Judd is the Centre's new Director. He is sure that the Centre is successful with funding applications because it puts forward practical proposals that are “eminently fundable” – funders not unnaturally like to see results.

Most of the bids include an amount for core funding. The Centre also receives rental income from tenants in its building, and from renting out the kitchens. Neil wants the Centre to be able to cover its own running costs this year, although he recognises that funding is always finely balanced.

Working in partnership

The Centre works with a whole range of organisations from within the town, at county level and nationally. For example, it liaised closely with the town's community partnership, Bridport Community Initiative (BCi) when setting up a community learning facility at the Centre. And it is currently engaged with BCi, the town council and West Dorset Food and Land Trust to take forward Bridport's Beacon Town work.

Expanding the area's local food sector

Working with the Countryside Agency to develop a 'foodcheck' model

Local food is seen by many market towns as playing a major role in regenerating the towns and their hinterlands. But this can only come about if the town has a clear grasp of existing food production, distribution and infrastructure.

A structured stocktaking exercise, similar to the market towns 'healthcheck' process, is now being piloted by the Food and Land Trust, working closely with the Agency's Eat the View team. This national pilot is also being tested in Faringdon, another Beacon Town with an active local food economy.

The foodcheck will help towns to match food production and processing with consumption. Towns must first conduct an audit of the town's local food web, carry out a feasibility study to assess opportunities, and develop and implement an action plan.

The Countryside Agency plans to produce a foodcheck handbook, similar to the healthcheck handbook, detailing the process and giving examples of good practice, including the experiences of the pilots in Bridport and Faringdon.

The local food audit in Bridport

The work to audit Bridport's local food sector started in early 2004. Although the local food economy is strong and diverse, the results of the audit will be used to identify aspects that need further support and any inhibitors to expansion.

The Food and Land Trust is interviewing 50 organisations at various stages of the food chain and is reviewing existing local information, including feedback from the town's healthcheck.

Some interesting trends are already emerging. It is apparent, for example, that at the moment it is difficult for local producers to distribute their produce to local outlets. A small-scale distribution infrastructure could help meet this need, and the Food and Land Trust could play a part in this.



The Countryside Agency was asked by the Government to help consumers to understand the connections between the food they buy and the countryside they value, and to work with others to develop projects to achieve this aim and to improve the market for regional produce.

In response, the Agency's 'Eat the View' initiative is working to raise public awareness and secure a more favourable market that will enable farmers and other land managers to diversify and adopt more sustainable practices.

The Eat the View team contributed to the Government's regional food strategy and played a major part in the cross-party work that in 2003 investigated the local food sector. This examined issues related to local food and the impacts of local food initiatives. It is also working with, and funding, the efforts of two Beacon Towns, Faringdon and Bridport, to expand the local food sector.

Over the last few years there has been growing interest in improving the food provided in the public sector, including the provision of more local products. The Government has now established the Public Sector Food Procurement Initiative to incorporate sustainable development into public sector food and catering. At a national DEFRA conference in November 2003, Lord Whitty, Minister for Food, urged public sector bodies, such as schools, prisons and hospitals, to start making meals more sustainable. For information about 'Eat the View' see

www.countryside.gov.uk/livinglandscapes/eattheview/index.asp

Helping businesses to flourish

Local food businesses may want to grow but lack the practical expertise or the confidence to take the next step. The Centre provides businesses with access to:

- workspace, including a commercial kitchen, distribution depot and office space;
- business support and training in areas such as diversification, direct marketing and producer cooperation;
- technical support, such as product development and food hygiene training;
- finance, in partnership with the Wessex Reinvestment Trust (see page 36).

Setting up any kind of food-related business can be difficult and costly, in part because of the hygiene regulations and the equipment and workspace required. The Centre provides incubation support to help new businesses get off the ground. For example, they can hire the commercial kitchen at reasonable rates as and when they need to.

All those who handle food need to have been trained in food hygiene and health and safety measures. In addition, recent legislation has been introduced concerning hazard risk assessment. The Centre runs training on all of these elements. Several farm shops, for example, received hazard assessment training at the Centre before they opened for trading.

Case study

Sarah Moore



Sarah Moore is a local business woman, and single parent. The Centre is supporting her while she establishes her business (*Moore Than Enough*) as an outside caterer, using local or organic food where possible. Sarah says she would not have got going without the "fantastic support" she has had and certainly could not have afforded all the equipment that she would have had to buy to set up at home. She uses the commercial kitchen to create new food products and treats the Centre as her base.

The Wessex Reinvestment Trust

Rural businesses that wish to expand face problems finding affordable business accommodation and housing for employees; they also need easier access to finance. The Food and Land Trust has helped to set up the Wessex Reinvestment Trust (WRT). This is the first entirely rural community finance initiative in the UK.

The Trust provides a springboard for rural regeneration by offering:

- funding to support small business and social enterprise start-ups and expansion,
- loan finance for housing,
- access to property and workspace.

Community property trust

This year, the WRT and Countryside Agency have joined forces to develop a community property trust in West Dorset.

The community property trust will acquire land and/or property on the open market, using a combination of public sector grant, commercial finance and local investment (raised through share/bond issues). The assets would then be held in trust and put to a combination of commercial and community use. This would include affordable housing, workspace, community facilities and land-based enterprise.

Research and community consultation over the past three years have confirmed the need for greatly increased investment in these resources, but at present the local community does not have the capacity to turn them into reality. The community property trust will be the vehicle to take these initiatives forward.

The long-term aim is to achieve sustainability both for the trust and for other community projects, such as those that currently operate from the Centre.

This would be either through the transfer of surplus income or the provision of land and property for enterprising activities.

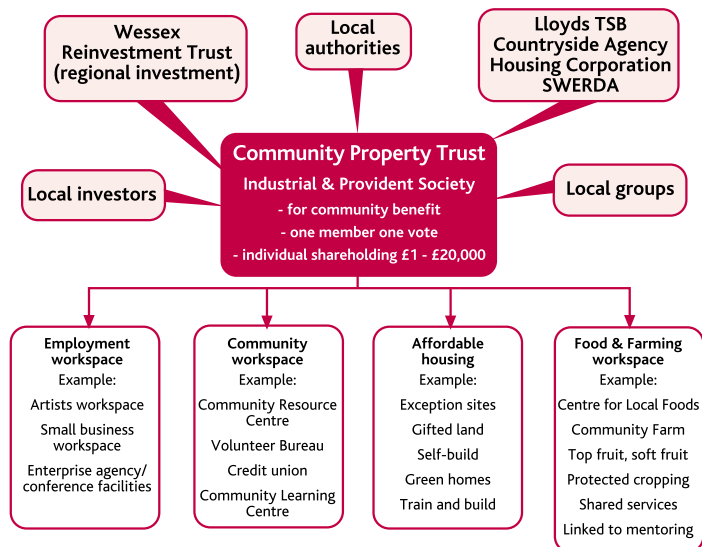
The plan is to register the trust as an Industrial and Provident Society for community benefit, and to prepare feasibility studies for an initial portfolio of land and property projects.

As an Industrial and Provident Society for community benefit, a community property trust would:

- secure community investment from local people as well as public sector grants where appropriate;
- identify, purchase and hold assets for the benefit of the community;
- manage the property, and covenant surpluses back to the community, for example funding the ongoing revenue costs of community regeneration projects.

The model that is developing here will be used to help other market towns.

Community property trust: potential stakeholders and projects



'Grow it, cook it, eat it'

Promoting healthy eating in schools



This project promotes healthy eating in schools through gardening and cookery activities. It includes introducing healthy eating weeks, holding healthy lunchbox sessions, creating vegetable gardens, advising people on low incomes about the economies and benefits of healthy eating, teaching new cookery skills, and implementing milk and fruit breaks.

Last year the Food and Land Trust ran a very successful pilot scheme to put local fruit on the menu at primary schools, with 180 children eating fruit at break time. At first, some teachers said there was not enough time and that there might be problems with take up. In fact, the scheme has been a runaway success, with 100% participation. The fruit works out at only 10 pence a piece, so is affordable for families on low incomes. The Trust now has plans to employ a driver to extend this to older age groups and more schools.

Other school projects include breakfast clubs and fruit salads on sports days. Many children do come to school having had little or no nourishment; breakfast clubs provide a sociable and nutritious start to the day.



The Trust runs projects that teach children about where food comes from and its importance to their own health.

Bringing people together through local food

Many people today lack the skills to cook basic meals, create recipes, grow produce and maintain a healthy diet and lifestyle. The Centre runs cookery workshops through the West Dorset Cookery Workshops Project, which is supported by the Department of Health Opportunities for Volunteering. The workshops are led by volunteers and are run in partnership with schools, youth organisations and community groups.

Recently 20 volunteers went out into local schools to discuss what local food means all over the world. This was an enjoyable and educational experience not only for the children but also for volunteers, who gain much from passing on what they know and getting together with others.

Case study

Giving young people new opportunities

The Centre is working with the LEA's 'Children out of school' service with children who have been excluded or are not at school for some other reason. It gives disaffected young people opportunities to learn cooking and ICT, and to garden at the community allotment. In a non-school environment, children learn from some so-called 'ordinary' people whom they see as less authoritarian and so less threatening. The 'Children out of school' service is now a tenant within the Centre, allowing the groups to work closely together.

Bridport's year of local food

2004 is Bridport's 'Year of Local Food'. Working with other partners, the Food and Land Trust is planning a series of activities and events with a food flavour. The activities planned include a Food Festival, Food Directory and website. They also include a local food heritage project.

Celebrating Bridport's food heritage

Since the 1940s and 1950s there has been a gradual loss of the tradition of community-based food production, such as allotments, school gardens and home preserving. The Food and Land Trust is planning a wide range of activities which celebrate the area's rich food culture and allow those with skills and knowledge to pass them on to a younger generation in the area.

The project, which is funded by the Local Heritage Initiative, aims to involve a wide range of local groups and individuals in investigating and recording Bridport's rich food heritage over the past 75 years and to celebrate and share this heritage with the local community and in particular young people.

For example, a series of workshops based on growing, cooking and preserving local food is planned. Research will take place using Bridport's museum, library and record office and the project, including the memories and knowledge of older people, will be recorded by a photographer and film maker. By happy coincidence, the project ties in with the town's World War II events. Members of the WI and local history society will help to coordinate the project. An exhibition to be held in the town's arts centre will show off the fruits of everybody's labours.



One of the best ways to help people to appreciate good food is for them to have the experience of growing and eating their own produce.

Sharing best practice

The Food and Land Trust is very conscious of Bridport's role as a Beacon Town that is well thought of and expert in local food. It is continually sharing good practice, through cookery and gardening workshops, seminars, a local food website, and by working with other agencies.

In March 2004, for example, the Trust hosted a national Beacon Towns seminar on local food. Funded by the Countryside Agency as a networking event, participants in market town partnerships and community regeneration came to see for themselves what can be achieved.

Case study

Washingpool Farm Shop



Washingpool Farm Shop is a successful and expanding outlet just outside Bridport. It employs 30 staff, including 6 family members and a full-time chef in its cafe. The farm shop stocks 50 local products. Its success is very much down to the quality of its produce. The family set up the shop in response to a downturn in farming. It has used the Centre for Local Food for basic food hygiene training, seminars on marketing, and to share good practice.

Update: Bridport

2004 truly was the 'Year of Local Food' for Bridport. The work of the West Dorset Food and Land Trust, through the Bridport Centre for Local Food, has been able to move on, even from its very promising start. And its reputation is growing nationally. The Trust was a finalist in Radio 4's Food and Farming Awards for its educational and campaigning work.

In the last 12 months the enormous demand for the facilities and programmes that the Trust and the Centre for Local Food offer has been confirmed. They have continued to put on a well attended range of events, workshops and initiatives, of which examples are:

- skills training and technical support;
- providing workspace, specialised equipment and business incubation support for local businesses, community organisations and social enterprises;
- working with disadvantaged and unemployed young people aged 14-24 to provide vocational training in horticulture and cookery;
- encouraging children and parents at local schools to grow, cook and eat healthy local food;
- hosting cookery workshops and other events to introduce local and organic food to people from a wide range of ages and backgrounds, and to encourage people to get involved in volunteering.

The Bridport Food Festival 2004, which promoted and celebrated the local food sector, was a resounding success. More than 1,000 people attended the tasting day to launch the festival. It brought together many different local producers and retailers. With cooking demonstrations and workshops, heritage talks, visits and walks, no-one could be left in any doubt that Bridport is the hub for local food activity in Dorset.

FruitTime!

The pilot fruit tuck scheme in Bridport Primary School has been an astonishing success, with nearly 400 children eating fruit daily and 20 volunteer parents helping. The scheme encourages children to eat fruit every day and to try out different types of fruit that would not always be available at home. Funding from Defra has now been secured for the Trust's trading subsidiary – Local Food Links Ltd – to purchase a vehicle to extend the scheme to schools throughout West Dorset.

The 'local foodcheck'

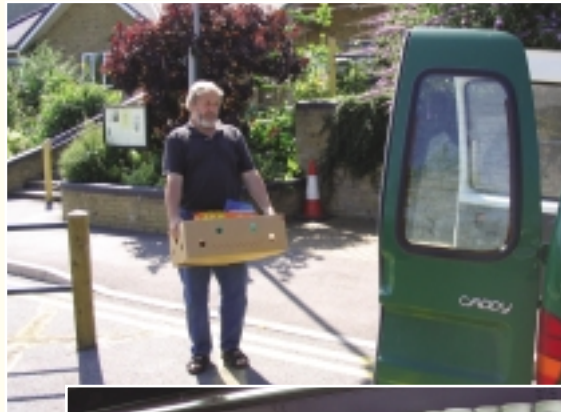
Bridport, together with Faringdon in Oxfordshire, was a pilot 'foodcheck' town in 2004. The foodcheck is a specific adaptation of the Countryside Agency's Market Towns healthcheck, aimed specifically at the local food sector in market towns. It enables towns to develop a detailed understanding of their local food economy, and to identify the key issues that can form the basis for future action.

The foodcheck in Bridport was completed in December 2004. First, an audit was carried out to collect information and identify the key issues to be addressed in the local food chain. Questionnaires and interviews provided a systematic way to engage with local producers and consumers. The three priorities for action in Bridport are summarised overleaf.



The Local Food Group

One of the first steps in the foodcheck was to set up a steering group to ensure good communication between the many parties with an interest in food. This group is now intended to become a permanent feature in the town to oversee action. The Bridport Local Food Group includes representatives of Bridport Town Council, West Dorset District Council, producers, retailers and community organisations. The Group will organise a coherent programme of activities such as a local food programme, specific activities to promote the area’s local food products to tourists, branding and regional coordination.



Distribution

The foodcheck audit identified the need for access to distribution systems and improvements to the local distribution infrastructure. A distribution constraint identified by local businesses related to the need for a wholesale service which links producers to retailers and caterers. The proposed solution is to set up a distribution centre initially based at the Centre for Local Food.



Business support and training

With partners, the Centre is developing the range of courses it offers, to include Business Funding, Business Planning and Marketing; it will also offer a wide range of computer courses. A local food sector business network will ensure ease of accessibility to information and support. A longer term aim is to develop a business cluster to provide coordinated professional intervention, including technical support, managed workspace facilities and greater collaboration.

The Countryside Agency will be producing a handbook as a practical guide for other towns that wish to conduct their own foodchecks. The handbook will detail the elements of the process, offer tools for those carrying out a foodcheck and provide examples from experiences in Bridport and Faringdon. See www.eat-the-view.org.uk for regular news updates and further information.

Food, people, art

This project brought together an amazing assembly of local groups and individuals to find out about and record Bridport's rich food heritage, to celebrate it and share it with the local community. Through oral history recordings, older members of the community shared their 'living memories' with younger generations who are more familiar with supermarket culture than growing or preserving their own fruits and vegetables.

The project focussed on five main areas – farming, fishing, home growing and cooking, cider making, and young people's views on food. Expert advisers, a poet, photographer, food producers, volunteers, gardening clubs, the WI, schools and young groups all worked together to create different events for each area.

Amongst the manifest results were an exciting installation at Bridport's Arts Centre and a recipe book, both called 'Preserve', which combined visual art and colourful food in an enticing way. As well, a group of 12-15 year olds spent two weeks with a film maker, learning about film making and then producing their own film about food.



An exhibition, 'Preserve', was shown at Bridport's Arts Centre, with 78 glass preserving jars. The display drew attention to food through art. All of those involved agreed that the results looked pretty amazing. This free booklet features recipes from those who contributed.



Bridport Community Property Trust

The Bridport Community Property Trust was launched in March 2005. The Trust is a new community-led regeneration organisation that will develop and manage affordable housing, workspace and community facilities.

An organisation established for the benefit of the community, its aim is to create community-owned assets of land or property, through purchase or through asset transfer.

The Trust will work with two partner organisations:

- Wessex Reinvestment Trust will provide access to finance and technical support;
- Social Enterprise West will provide management services and develop a business incubation programme for potential new enterprises which would be housed in Community Property Trust workspace.

The Trust has the following innovative features:

- A combined focus on affordable housing, enterprise workspace and community facilities – this contrasts with the usual approach of, for example, housing associations, development trusts and community associations as separate elements. The housing developed by the Trust will be for the 'intermediate market' between social housing on the one hand and full-cost market housing on the other. The small surpluses created by this housing will be used in the long term to subsidise community facilities. It is assumed that the workspace will break even rather than make profits, but it will offer the opportunity to spread property management costs across the combined portfolio of housing, workspace and community facilities.
- By using a community land trust approach to affordable housing and workspace, the market cost of the land is separated from the cost of using the buildings. This will address the problem of the high cost of land. Land will be held in trust for the benefit of the community, and will be acquired as part of planning gain arrangements for regeneration sites, or on the open market prior to planning permissions for change of use. In this way the community can 'capture' increases in land value which result from the granting of planning permission or the injection of public funds into regeneration schemes. In turn, this will mean that the Community Property Trust does not need to pass on the full market cost of the land, thus ensuring that any housing, workspace or community facilities developed on that land are affordable.
- The use of a local reinvestment approach to finance property developments. The Trust will seek to access grants and commercial finance for the development of land and property assets. However, it will also look for local investors who are prepared to provide finance at a discount. This local reinvestment approach will be developed in partnership with Wessex Reinvestment Trust (WRT), which will offer ring fenced loan funds and the opportunity to invest in withdrawable share capital. WRT has received funding from the South West Regional Development Agency to develop this approach.
- Linking the local reinvestment approach with a proactive business incubation strategy, in order to support start-up businesses and social enterprises operating from the Trust's workspace. The Trust will operate managed workspace for suitable businesses, and will work in partnership with the Centre for Local Food and a new organisation, Social Enterprise West, to operate a proactive business incubation programme. This will target in particular sectors such as local food, environmental technologies and creative industries. These will then become customers of Wessex Reinvestment Trust, drawing down loans, and customers of the Community Property Trust by occupying workspace. The aim is to create a 'virtuous circle', which will lead to long-term sustainability.