



FOOD IS MISSING FROM ENGLAND'S PLANNING MAP

What 269 local-authority plans reveal

LOCAL FOOD IS PUBLIC INFRASTRUCTURE BUT ARE POLICY MAKERS MAKING IT A PRIORITY?



CLIMATE RESILIENCE

Food-producing green space can support adaptation and multifunctionality.

PUBLIC HEALTH

Growing can connect diet, activity, wellbeing and community participation.

LOCAL SUSTAINABILITY

Shorter, visible food systems can strengthen place-based resilience.

STUDY SCOPE

The study examined planning across England to see if local food systems were prevalent within local planning objectives.

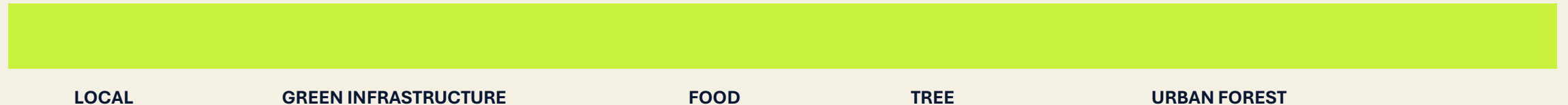
269

PUBLICLY AVAILABLE PLANS

209

LOCAL AUTHORITIES WITH
AT LEAST ONE ACTIVE PLAN

Five plan types



N.B. The sample covers formal planning documents — not the full universe of community-led food activity.

The headline finding is not marginal

1.2%

of coded objectives directly concerned local food systems or non-commercial food production

SCALE

269 plans

across five plan types

CONTEXT

15.54%

of 'food' mentions in Local Plans referred to local food production

REACH

20 authorities

had a food-specific objective

Statutory Local Plans dominate an uneven evidence base

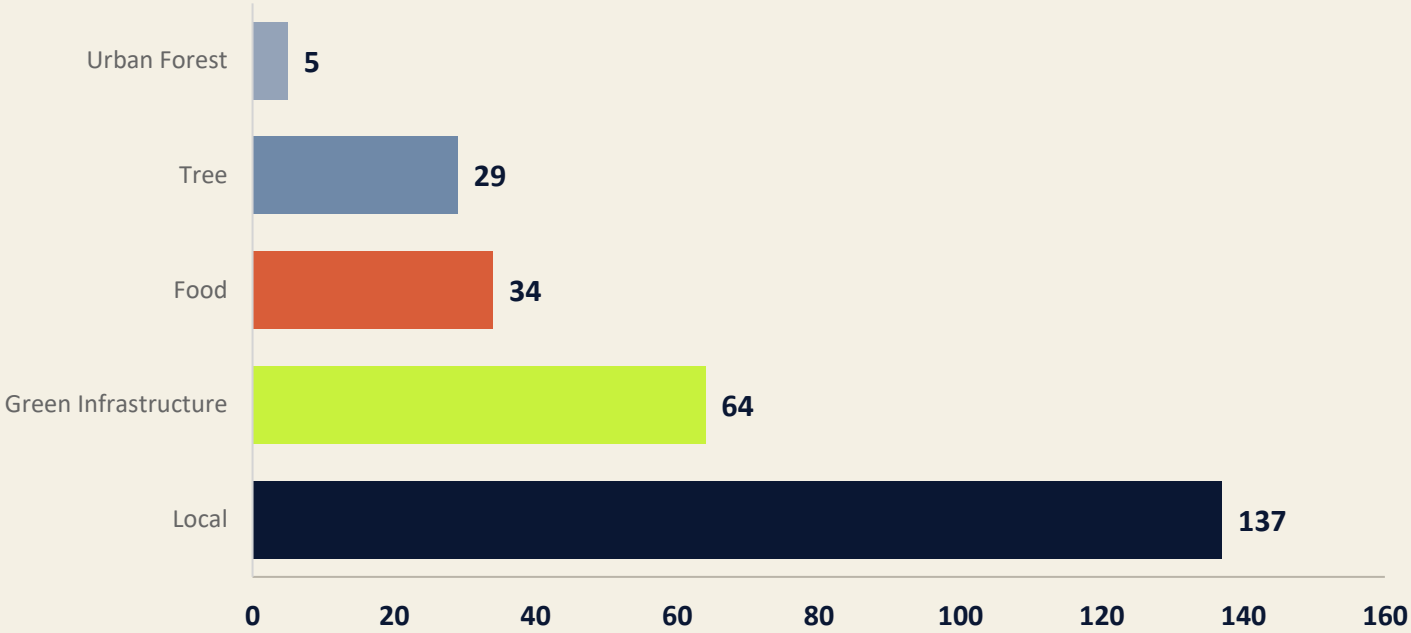
269

PLANS REVIEWED

137

LOCAL PLANS

Optional strategies appear far less consistently.



42%

of councils with an active plan produced only a Local Plan

MANDATED

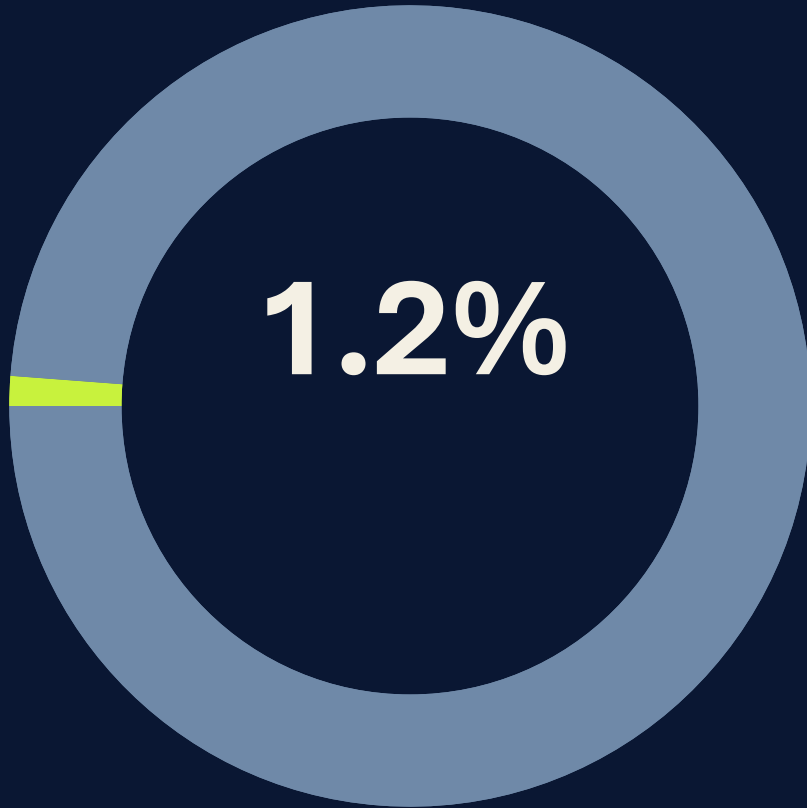
Local Plans

OPTIONAL

GI • Food • Tree • Urban Forest

When policy attention is scarce, legal duties shape what gets written down.

Local food barely registers as a planning objective



A SYSTEMIC BLIND SPOT

Food production is underrepresented against infrastructure, economic development and environmental goals.

The result supports the study's central hypothesis.

Environmental ambition does not automatically include food

71%

GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE

of objectives were
environmental

88%

TREE PLANS

of objectives were
environmental

0

URBAN FOREST PLANS

had a food-production
objective

Only one Tree Plan had a food-production objective — and fruit was sometimes framed as a slip hazard, not an asset.

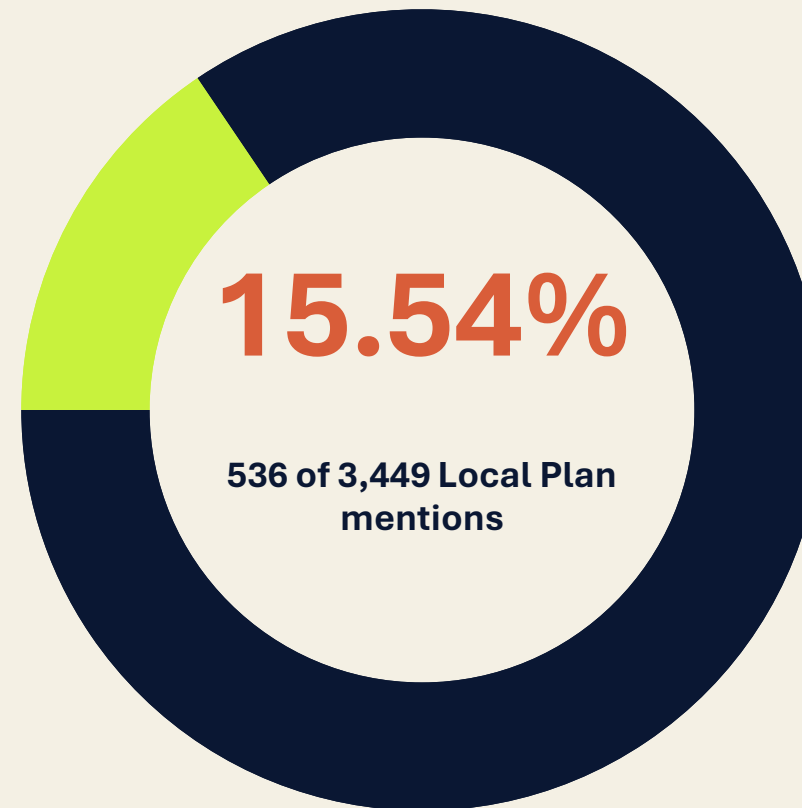
‘Food’ is visible. Food production is not.

5,194

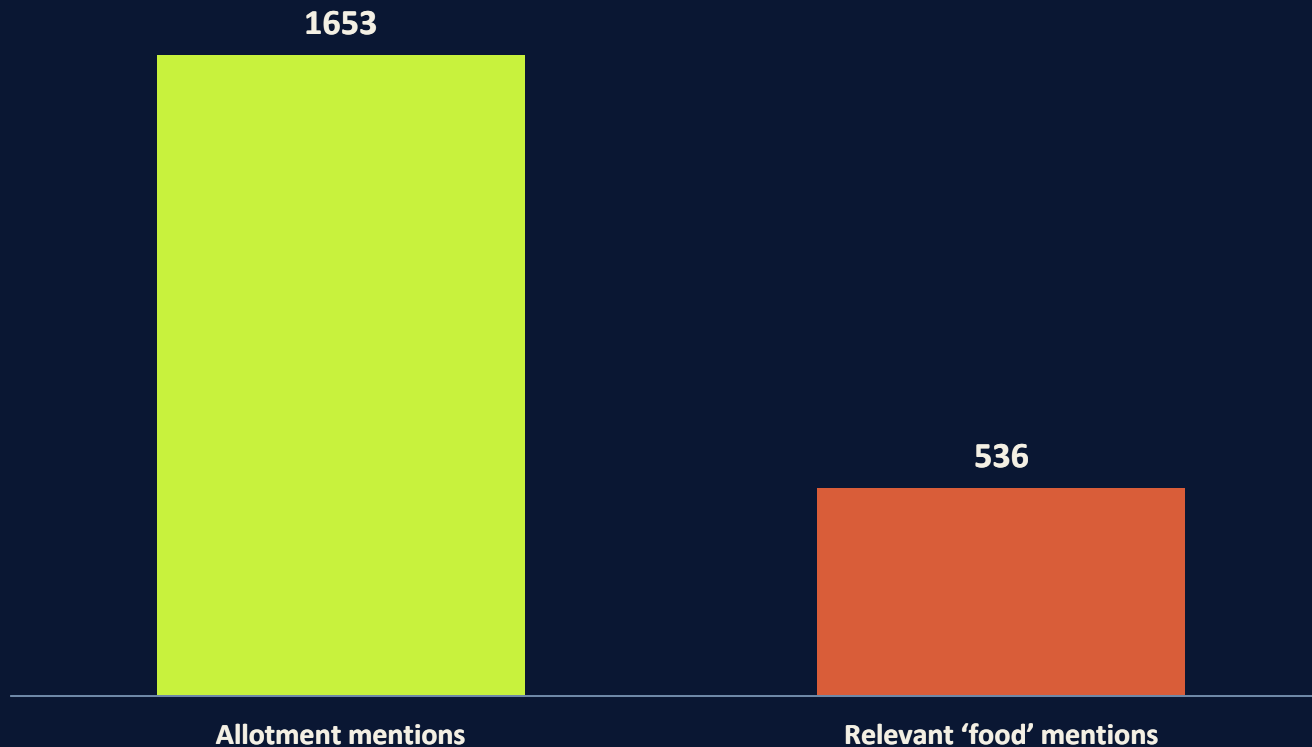
mentions of ‘food’ across Local, GI, Tree and Urban Forest plans were captured.

Most references concern other planning issues — including takeaway locations, rather than growing food.

Local food production was mostly limited to statutory responsibilities to provide allotments at a set rate for a given population size.



Legislation determines what gets named



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Local Plans mentioned allotments

The statutory duty to provide allotment space makes the term almost universal.

The desired outcome — local food — remains far less visible.

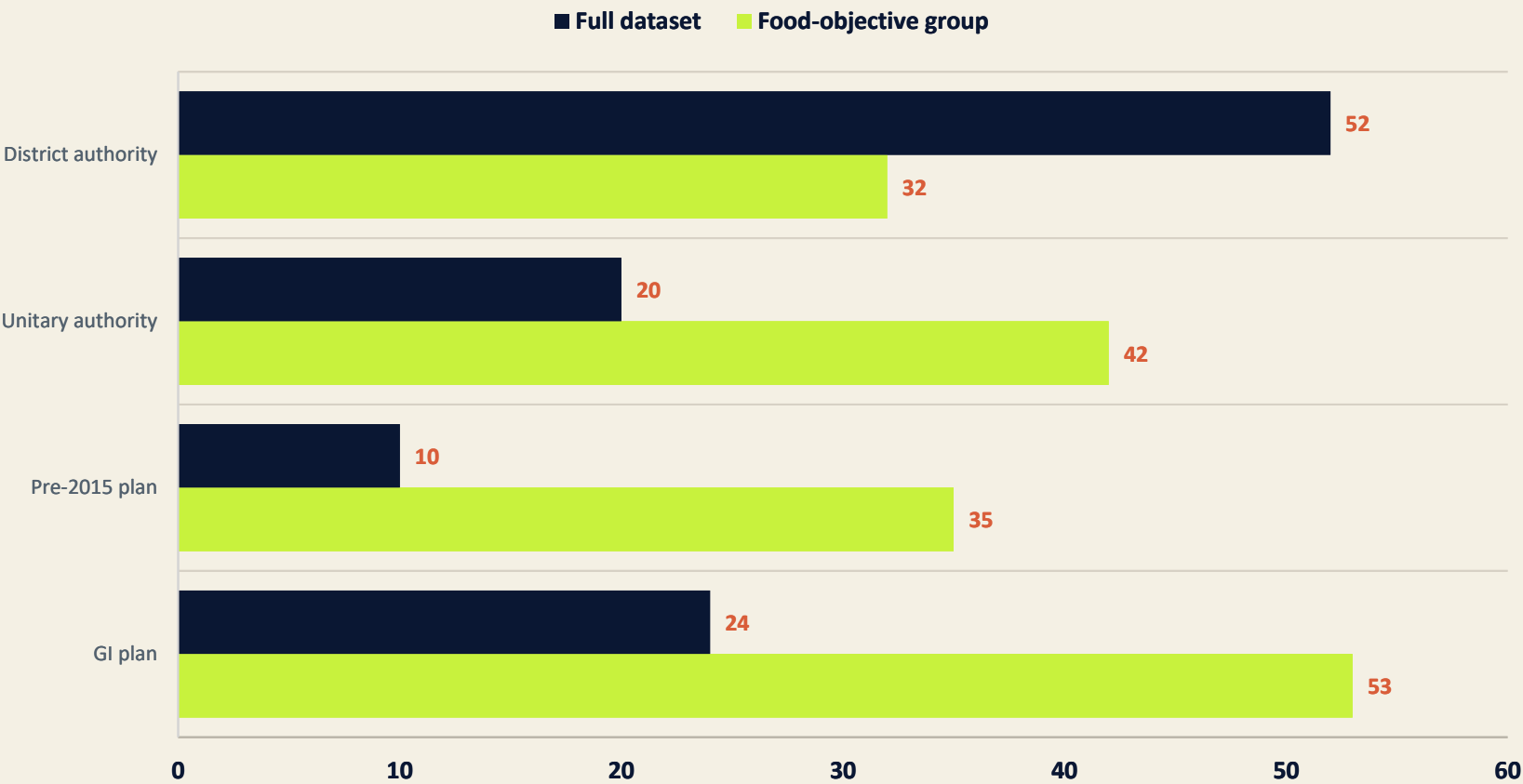
Food objectives cluster in specific plan contexts

20

authorities had a food-specific objective

Share of category total (%) — food-objective group versus full dataset

Population size made minimal difference.



Existing institutions already point to routes forward

5 / 10

COMBINED AUTHORITIES

had published documents relating to local food production — a stronger signal than the wider dataset.

100%

MUFPP CITIES

in the study had a specific food plan, compared with 13% of the full dataset.

BRISTOL + BRIGHTON

CITY EXEMPLARS

show that local authorities can embed food strategy and urban agriculture in wider policy.



THE GAP IS INSTITUTIONAL AND CONCEPTUAL

- **No statutory requirement**
What is not required is easily displaced.
- **Fragmented responsibility**
Planning, health, climate and food sit in separate silos.
- **Limited capacity**
Knowledge, finance and ownership are inconsistent.
- **Conceptual invisibility**
Local food is treated as a community benefit, not infrastructure.

England can learn from devolved approaches

SCOTLAND

32 / 32

local authorities must produce a Food Growing Strategy.

WALES

WELL-BEING

Food is being connected to public-body well-being plans and sustainable partnerships.

NORTHERN IRELAND

FRAMEWORK

A Food Strategy Framework is paired with a 2025–2027 action plan.

RECOMMENDATION FOR ENGLAND

Create a clear planning mandate for local food — with ownership, evidence and measurable outcomes.

Planning needs a richer food-system ethnosphere

ETHNOSPHERE

THE WIDER INTELLECTUAL + SOCIAL WEB

Stories, ideas and knowledge frame what institutions can imagine — and therefore what they plan for.

An underdeveloped food ethnosphere leaves local food as an “unknown unknown”.



DESIGN IMPLICATION

Create the conditions for knowledge to circulate — so local food becomes visible, legitimate and actionable in planning.



FOOD IS MISSING FROM ENGLAND'S PLANNING MAP

Local food systems and production are absent from local authority planning across large parts of England

Knowledge is absent amongst local authority based stakeholders leading to outcomes based around statutory requirements, rather than local need

Change can be driven by spreading best practice and altering statutory incentives.