"ADDRESSING THE COMMUNITY NEED"

Exploring and Evaluating Woodlands Community Café and Neighbourhood Food Service

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PREAMBLE

The purpose of this report was to look at Woodlands Community Development Trust's (WCDT) Community Café and their main pandemic food response (Neighbourhood Food Service) to consider what value they bring locally, what kinds of ethics underpin them, and how they work.

WCDT has been running a community café since late 2013. In its lifetime, the café has served over 20,000 healthy vegetarian and vegan meals. The scale of the café has varied as funding for the service fluctuated (see Appendix 1 for full timeline). Immediately pre-pandemic, while based at Glasgow Golden Generation's Fred Paton Centre on Carrington Street, the café was open from 3pm for volunteers to come together and cook food from scratch that was shared by an average of 70 people each week. From 5.30-8.00 pm people gathered for three courses of seasonal vegetarian, and often vegan, food, carefully prepared to meet different dietary needs and not relying on waste food from the supply chain. It offered a range of experiences for volunteers and visitors, including cooking demonstrations, meditation sessions, and music workshops. It also provided a large communal space for people to come together, eat and talk, for whatever they felt they could give for the meal (at this point, the meal followed a model of pay as you feel). The café also offered weekly advice surgeries from the local Citizens Advice Bureau.

In March 2020, as the pandemic took off, the café was forced to close at short notice and WCDT no longer had access to their usual kitchen at the Fred Paton Centre. WCDT then worked to support those who were struggling locally, in recognition of heightened strains on household budgets and challenges getting to the shops during the pandemic. In collaboration with Flourish House (FH), Maryhill Community Central Halls (CCH) and Queens Cross Housing Association (QCHA), the Neighbourhood Food Service (NFS) emerged. It delivered batch-cooked frozen meals to people who needed it, made by the cooks from WCDT and CCH, supported by the existing infrastructures that the different partners could bring. Over a 13-month period, the NFS delivered more than 22,000 meals and 3800 grocery bags to over 350 different households. WCDT staff cooked over two-thirds of the meals, all of which share were vegan, utilising a new but smaller kitchen at Flourish House on Ashley Street. The NFS lasted until May 2021, when it was wound up when its funding ended.

Between July and November 2021, a simplified outdoor version of the community café was held on the Woodlands Community Events terrace at 66 Ashley Street. This served a one pot soup or stew, with cake, teas and coffees to an average of 35-40 people per week.

Thus, despite the difficulties of the pandemic, food work at WCDT has managed to continue, though its future at time of writing is uncertain. This report reflects on this food work through drawing on previous evaluation exercises carried out by the organisation, and more recent data collected towards the end of 2021. It draws too on my knowledge of the café based on my time there as a researcher between 2015 and 2016. The next section offers a summary of the report's seven main findings. ¹

¹ From November 2020 WCDT have also offered a Community Veg Box Scheme linked to their Climate Action Work. This scheme is not considered in detail within this evaluation but instead is looked at in a separate policy document: *Woodlands Community Café and Veg Box Scheme. Integrating anti-poverty and climate breakdown work.* Maggie Kelly, March 2022.

KEY FINDINGS

FINDING 1: COMMUNITY IS CENTRAL

Community is an enduring and central value of the food work at Woodlands Community Development Trust (WCDT). The café is an important social space for those who visit as a place where people can come together, non-judgementally and across difference, to share a meal. Being and eating together is a central pivot of the café.

FINDING 2: THE CAFÉ MODEL IS MULTI-FUNCTIONAL

The community café offers a multi-functional social space meeting a variety of needs including social isolation, food insecurity, reducing stigma and breaking down barriers of difference.

FINDING 3: FOOD QUALITY IS IMPORTANT

The quality of the food is important to café users. It enables people to access high quality, low cost food, without relying on highly variable deliveries of food waste from the supply chain.

FINDING 4: THE FULLEST FORM OF THE CAFÉ MEETS THE MOST NEEDS

The disruption of the pandemic suggests that food projects can meet basic social and nutritional functions in different ways. However, the difference between the pandemic model and the older versions of the cafe highlights how many of the things beyond food, such as music, advice and cookery workshops were beneficial to users and are missed.

FINDING 5: CONNECTIONS BETWEEN CAFÉ AND GARDEN COULD BE STRONGER

Connections between the café and the garden could be stronger. Prior to the pandemic, many people come to the café with no knowledge of the garden, despite the movement of volunteers between the two. However, if a stronger connection was desired it would need properly resourced and supported. Hosting the café on WCDT's Terrace adjacent to the garden, presents opportunities to build on these connections.

FINDING 6: PANDEMIC FLEXIBILITY RESULTED FROM EXISTING STRENGTHS

The Covid-19 response was nimble and flexible. It benefitted from the way Woodlands is embedded in the local community. It built on existing relationships with collaborating organisations.

FINDING 7: PEOPLE WANT THE CAFÉ TO CONTINUE

Longer term, the main concern from users and staff is that the café continues to exist. If funding can be found, the café offers a potentially more sustainable² model than other emergency food programmes. It does not rely on food waste from the supply chain, allowing this waste (and its associated carbon) to be eliminated without disrupting socially beneficial community-based cafes. It also gets away from using waste food to feed stigmatised people, which has been highlighted as problematic by food scholars³.

² Here I am using sustainable in the broadest sense to encompass not only environmental sustainability, but social sustainability. As Stephen Wheeler and Christina Rosan (2021, p. 4) recently put it, sustainability "connotes a process of continually and actively moving in directions that promote ecological health, social equity, quality of life, cooperation, and compassion." Wheeler, S. M. and Rosan C. D. (2021) *Reimagining Sustainable Cities: Strategies for designing greener, healthier, more equitable communities.* University of California Press: Oakland, California.

³ In the UK, see Lambie-Mumford, H. (2017) *Hungry Britain. The Rise of Food Charity*. Policy Press: Bristol.

1. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this report is to evaluate the food work at the Woodlands Community Development Trust (WCDT) which, until the Covid-19 pandemic, revolved around a community café. In response to the pandemic, the food work at WCDT took the form of the Neighbourhood Food Service (NFS) – a collaborative project with other local organisations, providing frozen home-cooked meals and groceries, and latterly a return to a scaled-back version of the café, hosted outdoors. For a full timeline of café growth and changes over time, see Appendix 1. This report considers these variations, focusing on the café's iterations, and the contrast with the NFS.

This report is based on data from interviews and a survey carried out in 2021. It also draws on data from earlier evaluation periods. This reflects the way that food work at WCDT is embedded in the social life of Woodlands, however unstable the café's future prospects might be at time of writing.

The WCDT community café, like its broader projects such as the community garden, constitutes part of what the sociologist Eric Klinenberg calls *"social infrastructure*"⁴. Social infrastructure, for Klinenberg, is made up of the places which people can come and be together; and as such acts as the fundamental social support required for social cohesion and democratic society. Places which are public but welcoming and inclusive are of great social importance, and as I have highlighted in my academic work on Woodlands Community Garden, supported through a great deal of work, in terms of building connection, shared meaning and cultures of support⁵.

The café meets a range of needs, including overcoming social isolation and addressing food insecurity. The pandemic has highlighted increasing strains on household budgets with knock on effects on food insecurity⁶. Within the landscape of emerging food support in Glasgow, the café holds a distinctive place. There is a notable distaste emerging for food banks as a structure of emergency food support, and the plethora of alternatives emerging from pantry models to community fridges highlight an urge to move towards more horizontal and dignified approaches⁷. One aim of this report is to highlight the specific character of food support at WCDT and its distinctiveness against this broader landscape, not only in its formal characteristics, but in the values that it centres – community, climate and food ethics. This latter is most obviously present in the vegan food served and in its uncommon use of mainstream suppliers, as opposed to the FareShare supply chain food waste redistribution scheme.

⁴ Klinenberg, E. (2018) *Palaces for the People*. Penguin: London.

⁵ Traill, H. (2021) The idea of community and its practice: Tensions, disruptions and hope in Glasgow's urban growing projects. *The Sociological Review* 69(2): 484-499

⁶ Weakley, S. (2021) 'Glasgow Socioeconomic Indicators in the Covid-19 Crisis: drivers of poverty' in *Glasgow, Tackling food poverty with a city plan.* Glasgow Community Food Network report. Glasgow.

⁷ Nourish Scotland (2018) Understanding the Dignity Principle in practice – Summary of Findings. Available online: https://www.nourishscotland.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Guidance-Notes-on-Dignity-in-Practice-Summary-of-Findings.pdf [last accessed 03.03.22]

See also: Mould, O. (2021) Mutual aid: can community fridges bring anarchist politics to the mainstream? *The Conversation*. Available online: https://theconversation.com/mutual-aid-can-community-fridges-bring-anarchist-politics-to-the-mainstream-174491 [last accessed: 03.03.22]

2. METHODOLOGICAL NOTE

This report offers a secondary reading of the data from previous evaluation exercises, alongside a more recent café survey and a series of interviews with staff and organisational contacts from collaborators in the Neighbourhood Food Service project. The data collection for this report involved interviews with four members of staff involved in food work at WCDT. They were all part-time, though two had been with the organisation for many years. I also interviewed three representatives of the collaborating organisations in the Neighbourhood Food Service (NFS), in order to gain insight into that programme from outside of the organisation. **Table 1** presents details on the evaluation survey data sources.

Year	Data source	Number of participants
2017/18	Volunteer survey	33
2016/17	Café attendees survey	103
2018	Case study testimonials	2 café users, 3 organisations – Citizen's Advice Bureau, NHS Health Improvement Team, Home Start North Glasgow
2020 (Pre-covid)	Café attendees survey	16
2020 (Neighbourhood Food Service)	Service users survey	24
2021	Café attendees survey	17
2021	Qualitative interviews	7 (4 key staff, 3 collaborative organisational representatives)

Table 1: Summary of data used in the report⁸

Analysis proceeded thematically, re-reading transcripts, data and reports to draw out common themes and ideas and look for developments. This builds on prior work carried out by the author on WCDT in academic research which fulfilled the requirements of a doctoral degree⁹. This work provided a point of verification for the current report, however the focus here is on the data provided by WCDT and the data collection described above.

⁸ These figures and dates offer an estimate, based on documents sent to the author by the charity.

⁹ For more details on this research, see Traill, H. (2018) Community as idea, and community practices. Tension and consequences for Glasgow's growing spaces. Thesis for examination, LSE. Available online: http://etheses.lse.ac.uk/3789/

The evaluations have been treated here as illustrations of a broader picture rather than as representative samples. Taking a thematic approach to draw out common themes and understandings over time is a way of exploring underlying values within the work, given the limits of the data. In this way, while this report recognises the at times thin data it draws on, relatively robust conclusions about the values, practices and experiences discussed here can still be drawn.

For this exercise, together with WCDT, the research's focus was defined as exploring four themes:

- 1) evaluating food service provision during the pandemic;
- 2) exploring user and staff experiences of the food service;
- 3) exploring the values expressed in and underpinning food service, with particular interest in climate and vegetarianism; and
- 4) looking at the link between the café and the community garden.

This report proceeds firstly by setting out the key themes that emerge from existing historical evaluations, then discusses the 2021 survey, the organisational interviews and the staff interviews each in turn. Finally, it offers a discussion of the salient themes, strengths and challenges associated with taking the food work at WCDT forward in years to come.

3. THEMES FROM PREVIOUS DATA COLLECTION EXERCISES

The data collected in previous evaluation exercises offers a useful window into the sustained value offered by the café over time. I draw in this section on surveys from the periods 2016-17, 2018 and two data collection exercises in 2020, one pre- and one during pandemic (see Table 1), which capture a range of different points in time over which to consider the on-going impact and values expressed in the food work at the WCDT. Rather than focus on figures and statistical trends between often not directly comparable data, instead I draw out key recurrent themes from past evaluations.

3.1 BUILDING SOCIAL CONNECTION

Time and again the social value of the café is reiterated – in 2018 volunteer survey the value of being part of and supporting community emerged as a keystone of volunteering there. Similar themes emerge in 2016/7 café participant survey and 2020 pre-Covid exercise. Taken together, one can see a strong trend over time: the communal value of the café is unavoidable to attendees and staff. Some describe it as meeting 'friends' or people like them, at least one describes it religiously, thus:

"The restorative effect of community and congregation is overwhelming". (Survey respondent)

Alongside this, the café has several other functions that emerge from this body of data. Volunteers and participants find different things useful and valuable within the café. The café meets a broad range of needs, and in this it can be seen as multi-functional¹⁰. These include but are not limited to: increasing knowledge of nutrition; increasing confidence; increasing awareness of social issues such as asylum, race, and food justice; offering opportunities to help others; easy access to vegan food; reducing loneliness; providing training in food hygiene and food safety; increasing healthfulness of and diversity in diets; and offering pathways to employment. In many cases, these reflect the café's flexibility to meet a range of individual needs.

The café has also brought people together across difference. To quote one person from the 2017 survey:

"[*I* have] less fear of being with people from different nations and accents" (Survey respondent)

As such, some come to the café with a distinct social politics and a wish to give back. Others instead arrive with a need for sustenance (whether for food or social contact). The access to the Citizen's Advice Bureau, meditation, and music in the pre-pandemic version of the café all in different ways widened the appeal and possibilities offered. As such, the values expressed in food work at Woodlands are clearly multiple – offering dignified space for meeting urgent economic and social needs, and providing a range of social benefits from social integration to employment support.

¹⁰ This extends Morgan's (2015) work on how the food system is multi-functional, because food is multi-functional. He argues there are many "prisms – social, economic, ecological, cultural, political, psychological, sexual – through which food is viewed, valued and used in society" (p. 1380). See: Morgan K. (2015) Nourishing the city: The rise of the urban food question in the Global North. *Urban Studies*. 2015;52(8):1379-1394.

3.2 FOOD ETHICS, CLIMATE AND VEGETARIANISM

The data available from the surveys of volunteers and participants¹¹ points to several key themes in relation to food ethics. It is a minor but continuous theme. In the 2016 participant survey, the high quality of the food is an almost unanimous theme as ever. The survey also emphasises the impacts on local diets, especially in including more vegetables and fruit. Where no change was registered, it was often because the participant was already vegetarian. In this small detail, the subtle potential of the café becomes more apparent. Although it does not proselytise a vegan diet, it does talk about health, avoiding food waste, composting, and therefore brings volunteers especially but also participants into contact in an everyday setting with a distinctive set of food ethics around sustainability and individuals who hold such ethics and opinions.

The 2018 volunteer survey again spoke to the ways the café brings together both those with a strong moral orientation to food justice, encouraging other people to avoid food waste and eat healthily, and those who come principally for company and free food, and yet are exposed to those who are interested principally in the café's ethics. This bridging effect is also encapsulated in the general sense of the café as a space of learning (especially from the highly knowledgeable staff)¹². There is a suggestion from a respondent in one survey that the cafe ought to provide information on its environmentally sustainable ethos *"more overtly"*, but the subtlety of the café's approach may be more successful and certainly the glowing reports in previous evaluations of the learning and exposure to food justice and vegetarian cooking would speak to this.

3.3 LINK BETWEEN CAFÉ AND GARDEN

The link between the café and garden emerges with some ambiguity in the existing evaluative data and reports. A main pathway for volunteers to get involved in the café is via the garden. The 2018 volunteer survey suggested 12 out of 33 (36%) surveyed volunteers came through this route, for example. Word of mouth is another common route. Yet the 2016/7 survey report suggests:

'Links to the garden project could be made more apparent and an occasional printed newsletter could help to improve and extend the information provision on environmental issues.' (Evaluation report)

The fact that common volunteers exist for both the garden and the café suggests a degree of fluidity between projects for volunteers, and their common ethic I will return to below, yet there is a sense that these are *distinct* projects and that overcoming this boundary has been a concern for the past 5 or so years.

¹¹ Whilst a distinction between volunteers and café users can be useful in addressing segmented needs, it should be recognised that these categories are prone to some fluidity with some volunteers first encountering the café as users. Movement in the opposite direction is rarer.

¹² The echoes of the sociologist Robert Putnam's distinction between building social capital (within social groups) and bridging social capital (between social groups) is not incidental here. See: Putnam, R. D. (2000) *Bowling alone: the collapse and revival of American community*. Simon & Schuster: London.

3.4 VOLUNTEERING

The value of volunteering to the café is recognised in the various reports and evaluations covered. For example, in 2017, a report which notes the café has exceeded expectations adds:

"None of these would have [been] possible without the help and commitment of volunteers which are the most valuable resource we have". (Evaluation report)

This again is reiterated in the 2018 collated report, which amplifies the idea that they are crucial for the 'positive and long-term changes to a healthier and happier community'. Volunteers are also themselves beneficiaries of the café's success, accessing support and social connection outwith and within the café, through WhatsApp, regular volunteering, and email contact.

An interesting point from the 2018 survey is a note on time. Reflecting on the low response rate (26%) from the volunteer mailing list, the author of a report on that survey notes that since the café began four years before, there is a natural turnover (and current volunteers are most of the respondents, with 94% of respondents being regular volunteers who attend the café more than twice a month). Although some on the list do ask to be removed, many stay to remain in contact with the organisation. This speaks to the strong emotional connection that volunteers build with the organisation and although it lies outside the boundaries of this report, it is worth noting the evidence in the evaluations of the consideration given to volunteer needs and development.

3.5 COVID-DATA AND THE LIMITS OF THE PANDEMIC

The data emerging from the NFS users is distinctive in this evaluation in that it speaks to a heightened food insecurity and the acute period of crisis in which it emerged. Food insecurity grew during the Covid-19 pandemic, in Glasgow and elsewhere¹³. The data collected in 2020 around the NFS highlights that although this wasn't intended as long-term support 92% of people supported used the service for 11+ weeks. The survey results speak again to a kind of multi-faceted support including meeting needs arising from food insecurity and health related vulnerability. Fifteen respondents recorded reduced stress and anxiety (63%), ten (42%) noted a reduced strain on budget, and fourteen responded that they felt less isolated as a result of the programme (58%). The feedback on the programme was, in the words of the evaluation report from 2020/21 *"emphatically positive"*.

One indicative comment that emerged in the exercise was around the need for something in the longer term, and how the NFS *"takes the stigma away from foodbank"*. This comment echoes activist calls for cash first approaches to food insecurity and the need to centre dignity in food aid¹⁴. It also suggests a line of continuity in terms of the ethic of the programme between the previous café models and the NFS in centring dignity.

¹³ Weakley (2021).

¹⁴ Nourish Scotland (2018) Understanding the Dignity Principle in practice – Summary of Findings. Available online: https://www.nourishscotland.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Guidance-Notes-on-Dignity-in-Practice-Summary-of-Findings.pdf [last accessed 03.03.22]

Glasgow Community Food Network (2021) Glasgow, Tackling Poverty With a City Plan. Report.

The NFS was not without issues, and suggestions included broadening the demographic reach – the underrepresentation of ethnic minorities is raised in the report shared by the WCDT as a concern – and for targeting grocery deliveries to include fresh produce. Yet overall, this nimble programme for meeting the immediate needs emerging during the pandemic appears from the data to have been successful in reducing food insecurity, associated anxiety and social isolation.

4. THEMES FROM 2021 SURVEY

A brief survey of attendees in 2021 highlighted continuous themes with other data collection exercises, and the data will not be exhaustively analysed here. A short paper questionnaire during the terrace café was filled in by 16 participants, a handful of whom were first-time attendees. Two things stand out from the initial question on what is enjoyed at the café: social connection and healthy, high-quality food. The café's impacts are also clearly demonstrated through reports of the mental health benefits of the café, overcoming low mood and isolation. The context of Covid-19 in this exercise was clear, such as:

"During Covid, my mental health took a dip, and coming to the café has helped me by talking to other people who have also suffered mental health issues." (Survey respondent)

Suggestions for improvement are worth some attention here since the café running during the 2021 session was a stripped back, outdoor, fully seated iteration. Providing soup with bread, and vegan cake and coffee, participants had access to the basics of social eating without the added elements of mindfulness, music, and volunteering opportunities. It became clear, even from this small sample, that even in this basic version, the café is still highly valued. The main suggestion from many surveyed was simply to keep the café going: *"get it indoors if possible"* and *"Nothing in particular. Just that it keeps going!"*

This brief exercise suggests several things when read in the context of previous data collection exercises. Firstly: the café, even in its most basic form, is still highly valuable as a means of allowing people to come together and eat. The core function that it fulfils, of bringing people together to eat and socialise for free in a dignified fashion, still functions in the barest version. It still fills hearts and minds, soothes isolation, and overcomes anxiety, speaking to the social importance of what social scientists call commensality (eating together)¹⁵. Secondly, the concern that the café in some form keep going speaks to the importance of the café in the social lives of participants. As one respondent put it: *"It has been a social lifeline for me"*.

¹⁵ See e.g. Smith, M. and Harvey, J. (2021) Social eating initiatives and the practices of commensality. *Appetite*. Vol 161: 105107; Blake, M. (2019) More than just food: Food Insecurity and Resilient Place Making through Community Self-Organising. *Sustainability*. 11(10). 2942. DOI: 10.3390/su11102942

5. ORGANISATIONAL INSIGHTS

Food work during the pandemic took an unusual form in moving from a weekly café on a Monday to a food delivery programme called the Neighbourhood Food Service (NFS). The NFS was a collaborative project built between WCDT, Queens Cross Housing Association (QCHA), Flourish House (FH) and the Maryhill Community Central Halls (CCH), covering a geographical area that spanned the constituencies of all four organisations and supported individuals and families with food during the harshest periods of lockdown and isolation. Households received 5 meals per week per household member, plus groceries if needed. QCHA gave figures that suggested in 2020-21, over 350 households were helped with emergency food support, including distributing 22,000 meals and 3,800 bags of groceries. This shared endeavour supported many people, over extended periods of time, during a time of acute crisis. WCDT's role in this collaboration was predominantly one of cooking, supplying around two thirds of all meals, all of which were vegan. The following sections look at how the collaboration emerged, considerations around sustainability, food issues that emerged, and the strategic successes that emerged from the project.

5.1 EMERGING IN A CRISIS

All three interviewees highlighted the context of the pandemic as it shaped the emergence of the NFS. Yet it did not emerge from nowhere— it built on the specific strengths and previously built capacities of the organisations involved. Drawing on the logistical support from one partner (QCHA), the funding and kitchen space available at another (FH), WCDT's network of volunteers, contacts, and skilled food workers, and the second kitchen and networks of the final partner (CCH) meant that the organisations could draw on their various strengths to benefit a much wider constituency than they might otherwise have addressed. It also limited duplication of efforts. It emerged out of an already existing local relationships between organisations addressing the well-known levels of need that stretch across the geographical area covered by the NFS. The service spanned an area covered by Cowcaddens in the east up into Maryhill, and stretching down to Woodlands and Kelvinbridge. (For the full area covered, see the map in Appendix 2).

This area is characterised by recognised levels of need that each organisation in normal times addresses individually through day programmes for those with enduring mental health problems (FH), and broader programmes of community-level support (QCHA, CCH and WCDT). There are recognised issues around food insecurity in the area. As one respondent put it in relation to the homework club they run:

"Children were really badly behaved until they gave them something to eat, but we also realised it was part of a more serious issue of food poverty". (QCHA)

In this context, where food poverty was already an established and ongoing issue, the pandemic had predictable impacts:

"We knew that when the pandemic happened, that people were going to feel the pinch, because we knew that they wouldn't be getting meals. The kids wouldn't be getting meals at school. People wouldn't be getting meals or snacks at activities that they attended... Plus, we also knew that a lot of the vulnerable, our tenants are vulnerable" (QCHA)

Designed as an emergency response, the NFS went on for far longer than anyone initially imagined, eventually winding down in May 2021. As I will return to later, moving beyond the initial crisis response has

meant developing different infrastructures for food support in the area, and this is the wider context in which future decisions about the café will need to be taken.

5.2 STRATEGIC BENEFITS OF COLLABORATION

Working together enabled a joined-up and much geographically extended approach to food support than could have easily been attained by any one of the partners within the collaboration. As one respondent noted, there were many well-meaning mutual aid projects that emerged during the pandemic, but they often pivoted around one phone number and many previously unknown volunteers. For the NFS, being able to draw on PVG checked and well-known volunteers meant that as organisations they felt they could safely rely on their volunteers. Queens Cross could also bring to the collaboration a whole contact centre (working from home). As they noted:

"A lot of the emergency food solutions around the city pointed to one person's mobile number, which was hugely stressful for those individuals whose mobile number was used because you get hit with all sorts of things, you know, it's not just a question of food" (QCHA).

This also builds on embedded ways of working within the organisations, who are comfortable and practiced in collaborating:

"The ability to collaborate is just part and parcel of the job. This piece of work reinforced that." (CCH)

"It wasn't a cold relationship, it was one that was already very warm. We were already very aware of each other, and there is other things that we had worked on previously, so it was easy for us, and I think it was an easy ask for [WCDT] at that point as well" (FH)

The NFS was therefore able to emerge somewhat organically out of existing projects, staff and conversations between the organisations. In this way, it grows out of an increasing attentiveness that one respondent situated as necessary within the sector as a whole:

"I think kind of the voluntary sector in general needs to look at kind of effective collaborations and one that crosses issues, you know whether it is a food issue, whether it is a mental health issue, or another disability, you know we are keen to work with a range of partners." (FH)

As such, it becomes clear how the NFS grew out of successful existing relationships as a nimble response to what was an unclear, developing situation. None of this work would have been as easy without existing organisational capacity, including facilities, networks of volunteers and flexible staff, and embedded connections to local people. In this, the work is facilitated by relationship building across different scales and contexts, very much embedded within the local context.

5.3 DIETARY PREFERENCES AND PROVISION DECISIONS

A conversation emerged between the different parties in the collaboration around what kind of food ought to be provided. This speaks the wider challenges and values around promoting vegetarian and vegan food.

Here, I want to highlight three ways to approach this. Firstly, there is the question of cost – as one respondent put it, "*from a cost point of view, veggie/vegan seemed to make sense*" (QCHA). But, secondly, this also connects to the question of food hygiene, as the respondent went on:

"I was a bit concerned about food hygiene concerns [with meat]. You start making food and making meat and not storing it correctly, or not chilling it correctly, or not being reheated properly" (QCHA).

Nonetheless, this is not a position that all were comfortable with. A third angle highlights what might be thought of as food preferences. As the respondent from CCH noted, they received feedback from *"older people"*:

"The very quick feedback from them was no, they didn't want to eat vegetarian food. They wanted to have fish pie or a chicken dish, a traditional type menu. It was that balancing feedback that started to shape the degree of how many vegetarian meals, how many meatbased traditional meals would come out, and it did ebb and flow throughout the period" (CCH)

This respect of dietary requests, especially from amongst older people, was reflected in the two kitchens providing different meals – with meat dishes coming from the CCH kitchen and vegan food from the kitchen operated by WCDT. It would be easy to see this as a simple cultural and generational clash between different ideas of good food, yet it is not as clear cut as this initial assessment suggests. QCHA noted that:

"We knew from our work in the community that despite what people say or the stereotype of what you think people might say about vegetarian foods, people generally eat it... it's just a food" (QCHA).

They added later that he saw little *"evidence"* to the effect that meat was requested and that they had few requests on the referral phoneline for specifically meat-dishes. Another partner noted that including more plant-based food was "*a journey that people have been on [at Flourish House]"* (FH). Nevertheless, sensitivity to this issue, and the requirements of social distancing, led to the dual kitchen solution: one vegan, one not.

5.4 VOLUNTEERING

The community café in most of its previous iterations at WCDT has relied on and offered many opportunities for volunteering (as do many of the other activities of the Trust). Yet the pandemic has greatly restricted the capacity of the café to involve volunteers, as I will return to below. In part, because of the collaborative work of the NFS, volunteer delivery was carried out by those from other organisations – because in part of the distribution of assets (CCH's minivan was used to deliver parcels), and in part because of the division of labour.

Nonetheless, as noted above, the impact of the pandemic on mental health and social isolation has been particularly acute in café users. While the NFS was not a café, it did offer some doorstep social contact to those receiving food parcels. This in itself however was a particularly emotionally taxing role for volunteers as the respondent from CCH reflected:

"I think it was very physically demanding and very emotionally demanding I think for everybody involved because it got right to the heart of a community that was really in crisis... I know that when people were delivering, it wasn't just a knock at the door and run off. There was the knock at the door and stand back and quite often, people wanted to talk." (CCH)

One element of community organisation work that has naturally been extremely limited by the pandemic is this contact with the wider community. Some of this was marginally mitigated by online classes and social activities, and some limited outdoor activities, across the organisations in the collaboration, not just at WCDT.

Yet everyday contact also forms important feedback loops for organisations— where conversations and comments from project participants can lead to project developments. As the meal example above suggests, there were routes for the NFS to be shaped by users, but this was limited, leading one partner with questions about the level of evidence around calls for meat options. Given also the accounts of the incredibly emotional work of delivery volunteers during the pandemic, and the isolation noted by chefs described below, the strangeness of the pandemic for organisations that so often work with communities is notable in the data.

5.5 POST-PANDEMIC RESPONSES TO ENDURING PROBLEMS

The successes of the NFS in providing food and support to local people during an acute crisis should not be underestimated. This does not mean it was without frictions. As a respondent noted, things became harder as they opened up:

"That became a wee bit more of a challenge. So, we had to adjust things as we went along, we had to negotiate on access times and space to put things" (FH)

Nonetheless, there were few course corrections offered by respondents when asked what they would do differently, if faced with the same situation. All baulked at the idea of another pandemic, but were ready to establish the systems again, perhaps faster. The sense I gained of the NFS however was as a project that, as one participant reflected, the project did *"develop and evolve"* and it would likely adapt again to future acute crises if needed.

Nonetheless, it was not a sustainable long-term response to food need and, as society moves towards discussions of endemic Covid-19, inevitably questions emerge about the legacy of the NFS. The acute problems that exist across Glasgow resulting from entrenched poverty within the city¹⁶ and the concrete problems highlighted by the respondents in this collaboration remain issues the organisations continue to work to address.

The organisations that came together to produce the NFS are producing different solutions to the enduring problem of food insecurity. QCHA and FH have invested in the infrastructure for a community food pantry emerging out of a community café on Wester Common Drive, roughly half a mile from their main building in the neighbourhood of Maryhill (which QCHA serve). Reflecting on this, QCHA noted that they aimed for a

¹⁶ Glasgow Community Food Network (2021)

"*phased exit*" from NFS with signposting on to the pantry that is available in Maryhill. The model allows for universal access through membership. A person becomes a member for £1, and can then shop for £2.50, getting £15 - £20 worth of groceries. It is embedded within a café where it is possible to buy coffee and café, which the respondent from FH noted was intended to:

"Give it a different feel to I suppose a kind of foodbank, which is what I was trying to move away from. The future of it, we are not sure what is going to happen in the future because the Scottish Government's plan is for there to be no surplus food... we may have to repurpose into something else over the next few years, but we think there is a model in there that can be exploited which could have food at its core but can do lots of other things" (FH)

The evolving response to food insecurity in Glasgow reflects the shifting terrain in which it is occurring, in which pressures both to *use* surplus food (through the FareShare scheme) and longer-term ambitions to *reduce* food waste throughout the supply chain (which will ultimately reduce the capacity of FareShare to support such projects) co-exist. This presents a longer-term question of business sustainability for organisations and an on-going uncertainty for surplus food models.

CCH are taking a different tack. Providing food remains central to meeting the needs of those who participate in activities at CCH, but instead of a pantry or community café, they are developing a different model.

"We're not involved in any other food work such as Woodlands at this stage because I think they have the real expertise in that area and we wouldn't want to be seen to start to compete, if that's the term, against those sort of activities... The fridge idea was what we felt was probably our best way of meeting and responding to the current need." (CCH)

A community fridge model allows locals to come and take what they need as and when they need it (again, the food is provided by FareShare), after the organisation have taken what they need to support their activities. Some commentators have commended a growth in the provision of community fridges as horizonal, peer-to-peer mutual support, however this particular iteration appears to be less peer-to-peer and more a means for surplus redistribution from the organisation¹⁷. In this way, the NFS participant organisations continue their food work along different pathways, without the overarching structure of acute crisis to force certain patterns of collaborative working. It is notable that food insecurity continues to be important to all of the organisations and the sense that the established model of the café at WCDT is something others would not wish to be seen to compete with. It is also clear that an infrastructure of food support is emerging with organisations investing in large fridges and cargo-bikes to support their work.

Notably, for FH, food potentially takes on another perhaps more strategic role, and one related to the values of the café. FH are interested in a future iteration of the WCDT café potentially taking up residence there, noting:

"The real attraction for us was for [a community café] to be run by a partner organisation within our space that our people could access. That other people could come into our space

¹⁷ Mould, O. (2021)

and do that anti-stigma work that happens naturally when you collide two worlds, because people have a perception until they are confronted with the reality and that is when perceptions actually change." (FH)

This reflects the importance of dignity and inclusivity within the café model, as well as the way that FH users who used to attend the café **'would rave about it... a convivial atmosphere'** (FH). Thus, while the collaboration within the NFS was time-bound, in tracing the future directions of food work in these organisations, the distinctive position held by WCDT's community café within the broader terrain of responses to food insecurity is clear. It is clearly distinct in its refusal to rely on supply chain food waste, thus refusing to endorse the continued tolerance of high rates of food waste in the supply chain. It is also clearly valued for its ability to bring together people across social differences.

6. STAFF REFLECTIONS

Building on themes emerging in previous evaluations, staff at WCDT reaffirmed the notion of the centrality of non-judgemental community to the café, and the value of good food in supporting this:

"We didn't judge people, everybody was the same, equal to us, no matter which culture or which background or which society they belonged to." (Staff 1)¹⁸

"It's always hard to know because we didn't ask how many people actually went to the café because they actually needed the food. Some people do. To me it was more a case of they needed the company and it fulfilled that in an amazing way. Obviously some people did, but I think there was a whole mixture across the board." (Staff 2)

As the staff noted the ability of the café to meet different needs was valuable in bringing together people from a variety of different backgrounds through food. This was echoed in different ways by all the staff interviewed, and it reaffirms the idea from partner organisations who saw the café as welcoming and inclusive. The café then was a space that prioritises dignity for individuals and offers what I have called elsewhere a "*practice of equality*"¹⁹.

This sense of coming together over food in a welcoming, non-stigmatising and equal fashion resonated very strongly with staff, supporting the evidence from the data collection exercises across the years that also suggest its important social value.

6.1 NEIGHBOURHOOD FOOD SERVICE

Unsurprisingly, the NFS provided a disruption to the usually highly social experience of working at the café. Moving from working with a team of volunteers to create a freshly prepared three course meal, to batch cooking and freezing, alone, in a kitchen was a big change for staff. It led to a sense of isolation from the community. One of the cooks noted how they now *"really appreciate partnership working"* and noted the absence of volunteers as a real loss, saying, they would *"miss that human contact"* (Staff 3). Another put it succinctly: *"it's a bit weird just doing it all*" (Staff 2). This sense of disruption within the pandemic speaks to the ways the café is in more ordinary times a highly social experience.

The value of the programme remained clear to staff however (as reflected in the survey detailed above), with one person adding:

"I'm quite certain that with the requirement to self-isolate and not having people to go shopping... people were in a sticky situation sometimes and I think that was a lifeline for a lot of people, just knowing that somebody's bringing some meals." (Staff 2)

Nonetheless, one notable current that fed back through the organisation was the sense that people wanted the café back. One staff member, who was often in the garden, would find themselves asked continually

¹⁹ Traill, H. (2018)

¹⁸ All staff are referred to in this way (Staff 1, Staff 2, ...) to preserve confidentiality between the author and the staff whose insights shared made this report possible.

when it would reopen. The loss of social contact thus was felt not only from the kitchen outward, but from the participants in the café too. It was suggested:

"It was such an important part of their week, and they were sort of champing at the bit, when can we do it again, more than anything." (Staff 2)

As such, the NFS didn't address the social needs which the café so clearly does, as noted by staff:

"While the meal service was very important and it was helping people who didn't have access to this food and were struggling for a wide variety of reasons, we weren't able to bring people together" (Staff 4)

Thus, the experiences of the café workers during the NFS can be seen to reflect the inherent difficulties of the pandemic, characterised by isolation and a lack of social contact. The continual insistence of café attendees that the café should open, and the ways staff noted the lack within the NFS is not to say it was not valuable for users. Clearly, the capacity to support those isolating was important. But the fundamental heart of the café is social, and as such was irreplicable during times of acute crisis.

6.2 PANDEMIC CAFÉ

The Woodlands Community café reopened on the Woodlands Events Terrace in late Summer 2021, in much reduced fashion. As a large decking area, outdoor but sheltered from the wind, the terrace became a useful space during the pandemic for allowing people to be together outdoors. In its latest iteration, the café splits opinion among the staff because while it offers a space for people to be together – and build that all important social glue – it is also limited in its replication of the successes of the previous iteration. Rather than the three-course meal available previously, with mindfulness, music and children's play, volunteering opportunities and cookery demonstrations, the most recent version of the café is stripped back – offering soup and bread, tea and cake – and outdoors. This exposed version can be seen on the one hand as simpler and one member of staff noted *"I think it serves its purpose"*, later asking:

"Was the three-course meal necessary? I don't know. I think it's providing something nutritious which we're doing and something homemade is enjoyed by everyone and appreciated" (Staff 2).

Similarly, another noted:

"No-one is coming along and saying, oh, this soup is nice but what I really want is x, y, z. Because we're addressing the community need and that has always been the primary thing." (Staff 4)

Yet for one member of staff, the loss of the extras – the singing, the mindfulness, the mass of volunteers – is a massive loss:

"We had a huge space, we had a big kitchen and everybody was in there. Here it's just limited, you know, although we are doing the service". (Staff 1)

It also becomes difficult for staff to hold extracurriculars at the café. One member of staff reflected on trying to reintroduce cookery workshops, noting that they felt:

"Like I was interrupting what they were doing because there are only five tables there and I had to go over to one of the big ones. And there's only two big ones so I felt basically like I was just kind of in the way". (Staff 4)

In this sense of disrupting the conviviaity of the space, they still lamented the loss of the *"vibrant" environment"* that was previously possible and is thinking on different ways to incorporate what has been lost.

In this way, the terrace café splits opinion. This corroborates on the one hand the 2021 café survey, which emphasised the social value of the café, even in its lean form. However, as the data collection exercises before have suggested, the café's ability to meet many needs is its strength, and despite one member of staff not personally enjoying the add on extras that came with the three-course meal at the Fred Paton Centre, they did note how people missed the singalongs, the music and the general space for the café to grow as people wanted different things from it.

6.3 GARDEN CONNECTIONS TO CAFÉ

Conversations with the staff also highlighted differences around the connections between the garden and the cafe. One of the longest serving staff, whose experiences of the early food work development include making soup in their flat to share at garden events, noted that when the cafe was smaller, they used produce from the garden:

"We used to get some from the garden, before, just like a salad or fruit. We used to cook and we used to give beetroot and tell them that's from the garden, and that made it different." (Staff 1)

Yet, as others noted too, they went on to say the possibility of doing this now is vastly reduced, given the greater scale at which the cafe works.

The loss of this connection also plays into the sense of space between the two projects. Historically, one member of staff reflected:

"People didn't know anything about the garden. We used to tell them, you can go and visit or you can volunteer there, if you like. We used to tell them what's happening in the garden" (Staff 1)

Another noted, in jest, that he would say they'd "*gone over to the dark side*" if volunteers went to the café, noting a "*complete difference*" between café and garden volunteers (Staff 2). This distance could be overplayed – data from 2018 in the cafe suggested that a high proportion of volunteers came to the cafe from the garden. Nonetheless, this is one thing the pandemic has shifted somewhat as the physical proximity between spaces when the café is held on the terrace, two doors down from the garden, which opens up new connections.

The capacity of the garden to provide space for safe, socially distanced encounters, and the restrictions on travel, greatly increased its use among locals. The pandemic exposed many who had not until that point been to the garden to its environs:

"One in particular of our long-term volunteers had never been to the garden until lockdown and she said, I didn't know this was here. I only live round the corner." (Staff 2)

Once the cafe was running on the terrace in the afternoons, it also opened up opportunities for people to move between the spaces, increasing the connection for many between the two:

"I mean sometimes we will be at the café and be like ... "Oh, I'm having quite a nice time at the café but it's closing up soon, shall we go sit in the garden?" And that's very often what people will do anyway... like an after party of sorts." (Staff 4)

This evolved into a small music making session that individuals began to self-organise following the café, sitting around on the deck singing songs together in the garden after their soup and coffee.

One of the staff, who pointed to a big space between the project that, until the pandemic, they didn't see a lot of connection between, however they added:

"These are two spaces that have a very small gap between the two of them, physically, but at the same time they both represent safe spaces for people who both live in the area and outside it, who can come along and effectively kind of share a space with other people if they wish to, they can meet others and meet friends and hopefully feel included in what's going on". (Staff 3).

This similarity of ethic, this continuity, is how and why volunteers can and do move between different aspects of WCDT's projects, because at its heart this reflects the deeper values of the organisation.

6.4 ENVIRONMENTALISM, VEGANISM, AND EVERYDAY ETHICS

One of the unique features of the Woodlands café is its menu of vegetarian and predominantly vegan food. Reflecting on this, one of the staff noted that, besides the Gurdwaras and their programmes of vegetarian free meals based in a keystone of the Sikh religion, they were the only community café that provide only vegetarian or vegan food. Equally, the values of the organisation and vegetarianism were seen as continuous by another member of staff, who said:

"Because everything we do is sort of based on things that are good for the environment, good for the climate, and it all kind of fits in." (Staff 2)

But this ethic has a specific way in which it is promoted, a quiet and to some extent background ethic. In this way, the café just is vegetarian – it does not try to convert visitors:

"But we're not forcing it on them, so they can go for the rest of the week eating whatever they want to... But I think it's an important step forward in terms of introducing people just to eating more vegetables." (Staff 2)

What the café does, and this does seem to be backed up by surveys of the volunteers and the general enthusiasm for the food in evaluation exercises, is introduce many to tasty, fresh food that happens to be vegetarian or in many cases vegan. One of the regular cooks sees their role as making *"really, really bloody brilliant cakes"* (Staff 4). This is not due to a lack of environmental awareness – they also note, they are:

"Very much into veganism and animal rights and stuff... But when someone will eat something and they will be like, 'Oh, that was lovely,' and you go, 'There's no meat in there, there's no milk in that, there's no eggs in that.' And they're like, 'What? Seriously?' I quite like that." (Staff 4)

This sense of gentle education is important in not alienating people who, as the staff member above points out, perhaps had never encountered a great deal of vegan food before. But the ethics of the café go wider. One member of staff pointed out the diet in Glasgow can be low in vegetables, thus introducing people to different ways of eating and cooking vegetables can also increase diversity in diets. The café, again demonstrating its kaleidoscopic capacity, can also introduce the basics of recycling and composting.

"We were putting the food waste, we were putting it in the garden, we were teaching the people to use the compost, and then we were showing people recycling." (Staff 1)

It remains important that this is rooted in compassion. Staff would regularly show awareness of the place café attendees are often starting from, and rooting any advocacy in an understanding of the limits within a deeply unequal society of access to environmentally friendly food. This was well encapsulated in this comment, from one of the regular cooks:

"If you're on a really tight budget, even if you are interested in local food, at the end of the day, you're not necessarily going to have the money to spend on getting local food, because it generally tends to be more expensive. If they're just there for a hot meal and a friendly face as I said, that's not really something that we can lecture people about or try to encourage them to spend more of their money on a locally grown lettuce, for £1.50 when you could get one for 25p out of Lidl." (Staff 3)

What is well captured in this comment, that also came across in the testimony of the staff at large, is a balance between *different* values. Supporting people to access high quality, vegan food for low or no money, showing people what is possible, and demonstrating ways of composting and recycling to reduce waste are all cornerstones of the café. Doing so in a context that reduces stigma around social isolation and food insecurity speaks to the multiple values that sit within the space, and the way that coming together to address issues collectively with dignity and without judgement sits at the heart of the WCDT approach.

7. CONCLUSIONS

One of the aims of this exercise was to consider, in context, the NFS and the café as they relate to the values of the WCDT. The WCDT have recently expressed their core values as **creativity**, **nurturing**, **responsive** and **welcoming**. These values are expressed in the café in the creative and flexible response to need during the pandemic, in the central ethic of inclusivity and dignity within the café, and the ways the café supports and encourages volunteers and participants.

The café as a model for community food work is a dignified response to multiple social issues – not a sticking plaster to food insecurity but a space to explore food ethics, to meet what participants in the 2021 survey referred to as *"like-minded people"*, and to gather with others who will accept you across social difference. The café is also an outlier in the broader context of food support in the local area. The café is not an add-on to a homework club, a community pantry, nor a fridge in a hallway from which to take milk. Instead, it is a discrete social project of its own.

The NFS was undoubtedly both a necessary and a successful intervention in the context of crisis. Yet, the NFS did not carry the same potential for social connection that even a highly stripped back soup and tea version of the café does. This reflects the centrality of the café as a social eating space²⁰, where people can come together in dignity and without stigma.

The emphasis on quality, vegetarian (often vegan) food, reflects a refusal to silo issues of environmental justice from those of economic justice. Supporting local suppliers who are Glasgow-based with an emphasis on local and sustainable food reflects the capacity of organisations like WCDT to support local economies. For example, WCDT's use of supplier Seasonal Produce in the early pandemic when their restaurant trade suddenly dropped offered that organisation a lifeline.

The commitment to supporting ethical actors in the local economy is likely to have longer term stability in comparison to waste food redistribution programmes such as FareShare, whose reliance on waste from the supply chain seems likely to be troubled by Scottish Government commitments to reduce such waste over time. This commitment to reducing food waste might foreshadow a degree of fluctuation around what is provided over time, in the already unstable context provided by a competitive field of charitable funding. It also speaks to a deeper concern around the need to use the most environmentally friendly sources, rather than support the continued production of food waste.

The clear concern from members of the community is that the café continues in some form. The funding environment can clearly be volatile for third sector organisations, particularly in such uncertain times as pandemics, though it is a condition undoubtedly heightened by years of austerity²¹. Nonetheless, the café is for many a cornerstone of their local lives and an invaluable social and nutritional resource, and for it to disappear would be a great blow to the local community.

²⁰ Smith and Harvey (2021).

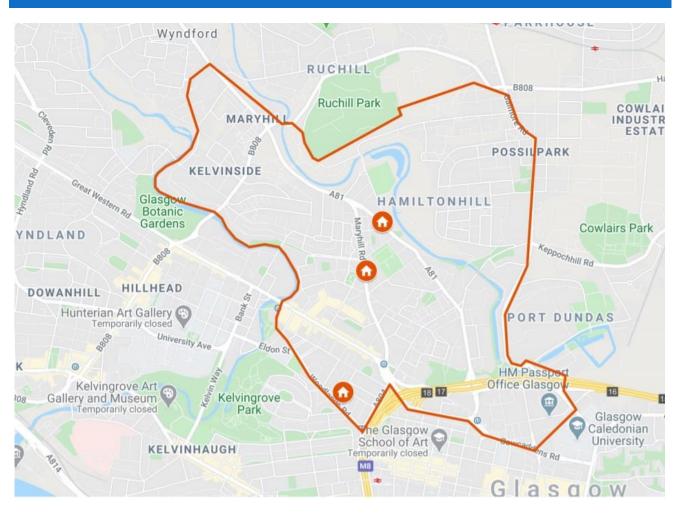
²¹ St Clair R, Hardman M, Armitage RP, and Sherriff G. (2020) Urban Agriculture in shared spaces: The difficulties with collaboration in an age of austerity. *Urban Studies*. 57(2):350-365.

APPENDIX 1 – CAFÉ TIMELINE

2010	Woodlands Community Garden created.
2011-2012	Cookery classes held over winter months.
June 2012	Film Screening and Discussion Event, about impacts of austerity in Greece and Greek model of local support centres. Helps influence thinking behind developing an alternative model of support to foodbank.
Autumn 2012	'Cookery with a Conscience' Cookery Class. Partnership with night shelter for destitute asylum seekers. Meals provided for asylum seekers at the end of class.
2012/2013	Fundraising and planning for a bigger scale project. Secured funding from Lottery Support and Connect Programme.
December 2013	Launch event for 'Local Food Social Support Hubs' held. Beginning of 18 month project funded by Lottery with 3 part-time staff.
2014/2015	'Local Food Social Support Hubs' rebranded as 'Pop Up Community Café'. After initially rotating venues and dates, a settled venue of Windsor Hall on Monday evenings is secured.
Autumn 2015	Lottery funding comes to an end, crowdfunding appeal helps plug initial gap in funding and a number of small grants secured to allow service to continue. Cafe runs with 2 rather than 3 part time staff.
2015/2016	Café re-establishes at new venue of Fred Paton Centre, and attendance continues to increase.
2016-2019	Café principally funded by a combination of Scottish Government and Lottery Funding, but also reliant on a portfolio of small grants and donations to meet full costs. Continues with 2 staff, one cook and one front of house. Additional support services and activities added to the café, including Citizens Advice Bureau advice, music workshops and a meditation group. Attendance at cafe averages 70-80 people per week, with over 40 volunteers involved in the project.
November 2019	Scottish Government Food Insecurity Team provide a bespoke 18 month extension of Fair Food Fund Grant, to enable us to document best practice. This funding also enables café to keep doors open after other Scottish Government funding comes to an end.
March 2020	Community Café Suspended due to pandemic.
May 2020	Neighbourhood Food Service (NFS) established in partnership with Queens Cross Housing Association, Flourish House and Maryhill CCH, funded by a range of emergency Covid funding schemes. Delivers over 20,000 meals in 12 months.

November 2020	Veg Box Scheme begins, run independently of the NFS, funded in part by Scottish Government Climate Challenge Fund. Run on fortnightly basis, with 25-30 households benefiting each fortnight.
April 2021	Due to impact of pandemic, Scottish Government allow small underspend from previous year to be carried forward into this financial year.
May 2021	Neighbourhood Food Service stops when Covid funding finishes.
July – November 2021	A simplified Outdoor Community Café runs on our Events Terrace, before taking a break for the winter. Using our NFS Partner Flourish House for kitchen.
March 2022	Scottish Government funding comes to an end (both Fair Food Fund and Climate Challenge Fund).

APPENDIX 2 – NEIGHBOURHOOD FOOD SERVICE AREA MAP



Map provided by Woodland Community Development Trust, March 2022