



SUMMARY REPORT



Closing Loops World Cafes

In October and November 2022, the Closing Loops project hosted four World Cafe events across Lancaster District. The events were held at the Gregson Centre in Lancaster, at the Civic Hall in Carnforth, at the Salvation Army in Morecambe and at the Victoria Institute in Caton.

INTRODUCTION

Each of the evenings started with a welcome and an introduction to Closing Loops by the project's coordinator Rachel Marshall. She introduced participants to the purpose and main themes of the project, which are:

- Surplus food and waste reduction
- Building a regenerative economy
- Healthy & sustainable food and cooking

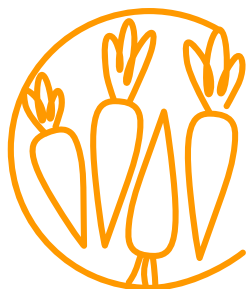
Rachel also introduced the Closing Loops team and explained the programme for the rest of the evening. Participants were invited to gather around the tables in small groups of four to five people and discuss questions that were spread out on large pieces of paper on the tables. Each table was facilitated by a Closing Loops team member.

The questions were around the three core topics of the Closing Loops project, and the outcomes of the discussions are summarised in this report.



SURPLUS FOOD AND WASTE

The topic of food waste sparked lively conversations under five key themes:



Education

Why do we have food waste?

Policy, governance and systems change

Ideas for community responses

Getting involved



Education generated the most ideas and comments, followed by ideas for Community Responses. Education was seen as an important way of tackling food waste, and it should be mindful of the context of people's lives. People felt there was a need and opportunity to educate school children, students, companies, consumers, young people, families and men.

Ideas for education that Closing Loops and others could provide included cooking skills to avoid food waste, composting skills, understanding date codes, nutrition, food supply chains, dealing with gluts, and growing food locally.

Most participants agreed around education, recognising the lack of skills, knowledge and understanding can both cause food waste and create a barrier to engaging with food waste initiatives, making it an important area to nourish. A challenge for the Closing Loops project is to constantly seek out opportunities to work with others, including through the Where the Wildings Are! schools project to promote and deliver learning opportunities.

The ideas of how communities could – and do – respond to food waste covered: growing more local food, collective preserving of food, working with organisations who cater for large numbers on food waste strategies, redistributing food waste (community fridges, food clubs, hyper local schemes), composting and gleaning food waste, community kitchens and collective cooking.

The needs and demands of being able to carry out these responses, as well as the benefits, were recognised. There was some disagreement whether or not councils or local people should hold the responsibility for these sorts of initiatives; some identified a blended model as best.

Many varied causes of food waste were raised with disagreement on whether corporations or individuals held the greatest responsibility. The challenge is to work with others to campaign for supermarkets to change practices which cause food waste, and create helpful examples and conversations around how individuals, families and communities can alter their shopping, cooking and eating habits to reduce waste.



Areas of Policy, Governance and Systems around food waste were identified. On a national scale these included making "Best Before" dates advisory, lack of a national strategy, policy to move people away from supermarkets to local shops, laws to oblige supermarkets to redistribute all their edible food waste, campaigning, and changing liability on using surplus or foraged food. Local level ideas were focused on the council playing a role in closing food loops, not just community groups. This could include more allotments, providing green bin collections for household food waste to be composted centrally as a local resource, and helping to control pest problems associated with composting.

Conversations on how to get more people involved in tackling food waste included; people wanting to know how to help, wanting to be directly asked, accessing land, free time available, child care, and flexibility of opportunities. Recognising these issues will inform how the Closing Loos team engages with communities and shape opportunities for volunteering and collaboration.

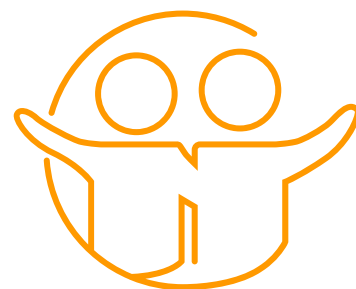
RECONOMY AND REGENERATIVE ENTERPRISE

At the tables focused on the topic of REconomy and regenerative enterprise, participants were invited to discuss and explore the following questions:

What, if anything, does regenerative enterprise mean to you?

Thinking locally, where do you see surplus (spaces, materials, skills, waste). And how can you imagine putting it to use in your wildest dreams!?

What skills or resources could you share?



Each world cafe session saw a slightly different response, with Lancaster participants being most familiar with the concept of regenerative enterprise compared to those attending the Caton, Carnforth and Morecambe sessions. It was questioned whether another term should be used given how few people were aware of it. The concept was also described as feeling quite academic and overwhelming. One group suggested that the term 'community' be used somewhere when the Closing Loops team considers how they talk about regenerative enterprises going forwards.

Those who had some understanding of regenerative enterprises described it as:

“Business (and other enterprises) that generates good rather than being extractive or degenerative; giving back more than it takes.”

“A business that channels any profits made back into the local community; offering a social and environmental benefit.”

“Going a step beyond sustainable: building back and improving rather than just sustaining.”

Some local examples of regenerative enterprises and networks came up:



The network developing around The Plot – a new organic market garden that also hosts Lancaster’s FarmStart training scheme. It was discussed how the Plot has teamed up with the Gregson to supply local veg to local residents whilst supporting this community centre. They have also teamed up with existing local distribution infrastructure – a local milkman that uses an electric vehicle to distribute the Plot’s local veg whilst offering locally produced milk in refillable glass bottles.



The Good Things Collective and the ecosystem of initiatives forming around them, who launch initiatives like the Community Riso Press and are re-imagining the use of an empty building.



Grow Caton who make use of underused back gardens to grow veg which is then shared with local residents.

It was questioned if local enterprises that restore or refurbish or fix furniture, clothes and equipment are also regenerative enterprises?

In terms of what might be involved in developing a more regenerative economy and more regenerative enterprises here in North Lancashire, it was suggested that:

- It would involve creating a shared vision that guides the many tiny decisions we take everyday.
- We will need to reduce and avoid waste in the first place – at all stages of business supply chains and life.
- We will need to change perspectives and behaviour towards needing less and making less.
- Distribution networks will need to match surplus with need in the community e.g. food, coffee grounds, compost, seeds, manure, empty buildings, growing space, unwanted items, skills and so on.
- It would require a shift from “own” to “allowed to use” and would therefore require a total re-organisation of how we see community and trade, with a shift towards more sharing and reusing and consuming and making new things much less.



Regenerative enterprise ideas and opportunities shared included:

Making use of existing professionals and skilled 'hobbyists' and tradespeople, some of which may be retiring and / or retired to keep fixing/refurbishing/traditional craft skills alive.

Re-purposing empty shops and other buildings to offer venues for community gatherings, skill sharing, fixing and repair cafes, art exhibitions made out of 'junk' etc.

Older generations sharing skills with younger generations eg re low waste, minimal consumption habits – to support learning from the past and re-innovating for the future.

Where to go for...? What to do with...? How to discard particular items correctly, well, or not at all?

Creating and sharing information around: How to repair? How to find refills, eg for ballpoint pens?

Matching under-used growing spaces e.g. back gardens, school grounds, with keen gardeners and growers that don't have access to land.

Creating a "don't ditch it" directory.

And many more!

Infrastructure and resources that already exist and could be made use of were celebrated and discussed. This covered: Freecycle, Freecycle, repair shops, clothes swaps, Grow Caton garden share scheme, Halton car share scheme, community fridges, empty shops, and amazingly skilled local residents!

Alongside the many ideas, some threats were raised as well, for instance health and safety regulations preventing some ideas from flourishing, that the concept needs to be made accessible otherwise it is overwhelming, and the risk that some ideas will just replicate capitalist systems that allow for more and more waste to be generated. These will all be considered when developing a strategy for stimulating a regenerative economy in North Lancashire.



FOOD AND COOKING

At the tables talking about food, cooking skills and the idea of a North Lancashire “One Planet” Menu campaign, the questions participants were invited to discuss were:

What is important to you when it comes to food?

What does a “One Planet Menu for North Lancashire” mean to you?

In an ideal world, how would you like to eat?



Participants shared a very broad range of things that matter to them when it comes to choosing what to eat as well as sourcing food. “Sourcing” is the better word here than “buying”, because a good number of people mentioned growing their own food, some in gardens and allotments but also in community gardens. This access to food growing to anyone is important for several reasons, and one aspect identified was affordability. While in shops, healthy and sustainable choices can be at odds with affordability, being a member of a community growing space can solve this apparent conflict and have additional benefits for mental and physical health.

Others did bring up the question of time and convenience though, so spending time on growing, sourcing and preparing food was recognised as not being feasible for everyone at all times. This makes it all the more important that healthy and sustainable options become much more readily available to everyone, at all budgets.

Participants shared many other points that are important to them when it comes to food, and they can be grouped under the headings of healthy, sustainable, affordable and food culture. Many points will straddle several of these categories, of course, for instance sharing food can be both a way to reduce food waste and a social activity. Under food culture, some very interesting points such as making food varied and tasty, eating together and knowing where your ingredients come from were shared.

All the points that people brought up – many more than can be shared here – were noted, and they will feed into working with caterers, chefs and community groups to make better food options more readily available and to build food and cooking skills in the wider community. The Closing Loops food and cooking coordinators will create practical guidance for a North Lancashire Menu food campaign that supports cooks and chefs in balancing healthy, sustainable and affordable food messaging and incorporating local food cultures.



The question on what people understood by a One Planet Menu yielded mixed results. Several participants felt that the term either didn't speak to them, or was misleading for instance by implying that there should be just one diet for everyone. On the contrary, others understood it as meaning a way of eating that is fit for living on one limited planet, including influences from global cuisines while also being mindful of how ingredients are sourced.

The concept of Fairtrade came up, and even those who did not use that term brought up concerns about treating producers fairly, emphasising locally produced ingredients and avoiding air-freighted produce.

As a result of the world cafes and other discussions, the Closing Loops team decided to drop the term "one planet" from the campaign name. Instead, the Closing Loops food and cooking campaign will be themed around "Tastes of North Lancashire", and it will be based around five core values:





These values will inform all food-related activities of the Closing Loops project. For example, they will form the basis of developing guidance for community cooking sessions that balance healthy, sustainable and affordable food messaging with cultural aspects. The values will also be used as guidance for running events and developing training offers for chefs, community cooks and community food educators.

The "one planet" concept may still be used in the project's food messaging in other ways, encouraging a locally-based way of eating that is at same time global in its social and ecological responsibility, reflects global cultural influences and is inclusive of different ways and means of eating.

EVENTS EVALUATION

After dinner, there was time for informal conversations, networking and questions to the Closing Loops team members. Participants were also invited to give feedback, and they were asked a number of evaluation questions before the start and at the end of the event.

Data was gathered from the attendees using 'sticky dots' on flipcharts to address the following

- I know what is meant by a One Planet Menu for North Lancashire.
- I know what I can do to eat healthy and sustainable food.
- I understand the challenges around food waste.
- I know what I can do about food waste.
- I know what a regenerative enterprise is.
- I know what I could contribute to a regenerative enterprise.



Attendees placed orange dots against a Likert scale 'A lot, Quite a bit, A little, Not at all' at the start of the event before the discussions and green dots at the end of the event. The areas where there were the biggest increases in knowledge and understanding were around food waste challenges and actions, and knowing what a Regenerative Enterprise is.



At the end of each event, attendees were asked to place a dot on a similar four-point scale ('A lot, Quite a bit, A little, Not at all') in response to the following two questions:

How much did you enjoy this event? – 98% of attendees enjoyed the event.

How much have you learned from this event? – Most learning related to "People and Networks" and were focused on meeting new and interesting people, finding out about networks, and local/community projects. Numerous comments in this section were related to knowledge and understanding of what a regenerative enterprise is which supported the previous sticky dots exercise.

Planned actions arising from the events related to the topics of:

- Involvement/actions
- Telling others
- Food (e.g. vegetable surplus stall)
- Thinking about doing things

A WORD OF THANKS

The Closing Loops team would like to thank everyone who participated in the World Cafe events, the catering teams who fed us, the farmers and growers who produced the food and the venues that hosted the events. Closing Loops is a five-year £1.5 million scheme led by the FoodFutures partnership and funded by The National Lottery Community Fund. Thanks to National Lottery players, it will support community-led action and local initiatives to transform waste into a valuable resource, aiming to stimulate a zero-waste, circular and regenerative local economy. In these challenging times, we need to find new ways of working together and of running our local economy and food system.

ABOUT CLOSING LOOPS

Closing Loops is a five-year £1.5 million project led by FoodFutures, North Lancashire's sustainable food partnership.

The project is delivered by six local organisations (LESS, Lancaster District CVS, Eggcup, Global Link, Shared Future CIC and Scientists For Global Responsibility), and is funded by The National Lottery Community Fund.

Thanks to National Lottery players, Closing Loops supports community-led action and local initiatives to transform waste into a valuable resource. It aims to stimulate a zero-waste, circular and regenerative local economy.

SUPPORTED BY:



PROJECT PARTNERS:



STAY IN THE LOOP

Find out more about how you can get involved with the work of the Closing Loops project:

FoodFutures.org.uk/closing-loops

If you have any questions or feedback, please contact the Closing Loops Project Coordinator Rachel Marshall at rachel_cl@lessuk.org. To stay in the loop on upcoming events, visit our website and subscribe to the monthly FoodFutures newsletter.

