Notes from Transition Cambridge Food Group Meeting, Wednesday 13th August 2008

1. Feedback from last meeting

Participants at the last meeting had agreed to follow through on a number of issues as follows:

- **Unused Council land.** Carl Myhill had been in touch with Council about the use of various plots of Council-owned land. He had also asked about the possibility of planting fruit trees on sites normally planted with other types of tree. Unfortunately he was absent from the meeting due to illness.

- **Garden Share.** Colin Clews had written to Age Concern, Help the Aged and the Cambridge Volunteer Service to seek their opinions on the viability of a garden share scheme. Unfortunately none of the organisations had responded at this stage.

- **Transition Cambridge Tree Group.** Colin had also been tasked with contacting the TC Tree Group as they had talked of looking at trees for food as well as fuel. However, Transition Cambridge had advised that the Tree Group was yet to get off the ground.

- **Changing Spaces – Local Food Grants.** Emily Bingley brought information about applying for funding under the Changing Spaces programme. Due to time constraints she was unable to present them.

- Emily was also tasked with contacting Dave Fox, Secretary of Cambridge Allotments Association to invite him to the meeting. Dave was in attendance and his presentation to the group is summarised below.

2. Trumpington Community Orchard

Ceri Galloway and Dave Jackson talked about setting up the Community Orchard. The land upon which the Orchard now stands is Council-owned land that had been allowed to fall into a state of disrepair. Fly tipping was common.

A small group of individuals met weekly for approximately 18 months in order to get the project underway. One of the aims of the project was to create a biodiverse environment. The Cambridge Biodiversity Plan sees the creation of orchards as a priority and the group was able to draw upon this to obtain a grant of £12,000 to clear the site. A further £8,000 was obtained from Lottery funds.

The land is now leased from Council for a period of 13 years – this period being determined on the grounds that it will bring the Orchard lease in line with that of the neighbouring allotments.

The project has required, and continues to require a considerable amount of work on the part of the management committee – on average half a day a week per person. As well as maintaining and developing the plot, the management committee also undertakes outreach work to schools and the local community.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, they are keen to expand the management group.

3. Cambridge Allotment Society

Dave Fox gave a detailed presentation on allotments.
Nationally there are approximately 300,000 plots. In the immediate post-war years there were 1.4 million – in part a result of the Dig for Victory campaign.

In Cambridge there are currently 29 allotment sites, housing from two to 200 plots. The majority of sites are Council-owned although there are a number of private sites such as those owned by Pembroke and Peterhouse colleges. There are approximately 1,000 affiliated plot holders with an age range of eight to ninety eight.

The standard plot size is ten poles – this being the size deemed necessary to produce sufficient seasonal fruit and vegetables for a family of four. Allotments are meant to be used solely for the production of fruit, flowers and vegetables for family and friends. They are not meant for commercial use.

There is an increasing demand for allotments and this is only likely to increase in line with increasing food prices. However, there are already waiting lists for allotments – at least 400 people are currently waiting. No leadership from Council as to how this demand will be met.

There are a number of issues around new housing developments and the provision of allotments. The new development at Trumpington will bring in 5,000 people yet provide only 80 allotments. Developers are also trying to get out of their responsibility to provide allotments by suggesting ‘community gardens’ instead. These are totally impractical for food production. Small allotment sites are still under threat from development; Elmfield Close – housing two plots – is about to be lost. Peterhouse College sought to re-classify their land as development land but had to back down following protests from plot holders.

Dave is of the view that we need at least twice the current provision but, since there is no allotments champion within Council, this is unlikely to happen.

4. Discussion Paper on Proposed Model for Food Group

Colin Clews spoke very briefly to the discussion paper he had circulated to some members of the group (there were only three people at the last meeting). Given that there were twelve people at this meeting, this paper will now be circulated to everyone present.

The key points of the paper were to establish four key areas of activity:

- Intra-personal – giving people the knowledge and skills to grow their own food.
- Inter-personal – small scale interactions between individuals (e.g. seed and plant swaps)
- Community – wider scale interactions between larger groups (e.g. the Trumpington Community Orchard)
- Policy/Campaigning – seeking policy change at local and national levels (e.g. campaigning for a Cambridge Council Food Policy)

Colin circulated a list and asked that all those present indicate what kinds of activities they would be interested in and, in particular, what they would be willing to help organise. As has been stated at previous meetings, there are many potential activities for a Food Group but none of them will happen unless we have the human resources to carry them through.
Colin asked that everyone read the discussion document once it had been sent to them and let him know their thoughts. If feedback was generally favourable, he proposed that the next meeting look at the practicalities of putting it into action.

Transition Cambridge Steering Group are proposing to show the film ‘The Power of Community’ at the Cambridge Arts Cinema on November 25th as a fund-raising event. Colin suggested that it might be useful to have the 25th as a target date for ‘going public’ with the Food Group.

5. **Next Meeting**

The next meeting will be at **8 p.m. on Wednesday 27th August**. Venue at present is uncertain as the Transition Café will be closed that night. Suggestions for an alternative venue welcome.