

LIMBOUROUGH COMMUNITY HUB

2021-2025



CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

03-04

WHAT WE DID

Growing together
Cooking and sharing meals
Food pantry and lunch club
Community events
Use of the hub

05-11

IMPACT

Key impacts
Limborough in numbers

12-14

REFLECTIONS

Key learnings
Looking to the
future

15-16



INTRODUCTION

The Limborough Food Hub was established in 2021 as part of Just FACT (Just Food and Climate Transition), a pioneering five-year programme in Tower Hamlets aimed at tackling food insecurity and climate change through community-led action. Situated in Mile End, Limborough quickly became a beacon of sustainability and social connection. This transformation was made possible through the generous support of Poplar HARCA, who provided the space for Wen to create a hub that empowers local residents to take meaningful climate action through food. From the outset, Limborough was designed as more than a physical space, it is a living, breathing example of climate justice in practice.

THE HUB INTEGRATES MULTIPLE ELEMENTS TO CREATE A HOLISTIC FOOD ECOSYSTEM:

- A community garden with 18 raised beds and a greenhouse for growing culturally significant crops.
- A Chelsea flower garden and wildlife area to promote biodiversity and wellbeing.
- A community training kitchen, intentionally meat-free to encourage low-carbon diets and accommodate diverse dietary needs.
- A food pantry, offering affordable groceries to residents facing economic hardship.
- A workshop and meeting space, hosting everything from composting and seed-saving sessions to cultural cooking classes and advocacy training.



Together, these spaces have become a vital community resource for many, providing not only food and skills but also dignity, belonging, and hope. Limborough is where climate action meets everyday life, creating opportunities for people to grow, cook, eat, and learn together.

OUR MISSION:

- Our mission is clear yet transformative: to create a better food system that is fair, sustainable, and rooted in community. This means:
- Fairness: Ensuring equitable access to nutritious, culturally appropriate food for all, especially those most affected by poverty, housing insecurity, and systemic exclusion.
- Sustainability: Reducing carbon footprints through plant-based cooking, local food growing, and waste reduction practices like composting and surplus redistribution.
- Community: Building spaces where people connect across differences, share skills and stories, and co-create solutions that reflect their lived experiences.
- Food at Limborough is not just nourishment, it is a tool for empowerment and climate justice. Every seed planted, every meal shared, and every workshop delivered contributes to a vision of a resilient local food system that prioritises wellbeing, cultural heritage, and environmental responsibility.

WHY THIS MATTERS IN TOWER HAMLETS

Tower Hamlets faces some of the highest levels of food insecurity and housing precarity in London. Many families live in temporary accommodation without access to basic cooking facilities, while others struggle to afford fresh, healthy food. At the same time, the borough is on the frontline of climate vulnerability. Limborough addresses these intersecting challenges by creating a space where food becomes a catalyst for change, reducing isolation, restoring dignity, and building resilience against climate and economic shocks.

As one participant from Quaker Social Action shared:

“This kitchen feels like home. It’s the only place where I can cook a hot meal for my children. It’s priceless.”

GROWING TOGETHER

The Limborough garden has been the heart of our hub and the community, a green sanctuary in the midst of urban life that continues to surprise and inspire visitors. Over the years, it has grown into a thriving space for learning, wellbeing, and cultural connection.

A FLOURISHING GARDEN ECOSYSTEM

Limborough boasts 18 raised garden beds, a large greenhouse, and a Chelsea flower garden. These spaces have enabled residents to grow fresh, cultural appropriate and seasonal produce while reconnecting with nature. The addition of a wildlife area with native and perennial plants has supported biodiversity and created a haven for pollinators.

A GROWING COMMUNITY OF GARDENERS

What began in 2021 with just 8 dedicated growers has expanded to 25 active members by 2025. This growth reflects the sense of ownership and pride residents feel in cultivating their own plots. Regular gardening sessions which started off as bi weekly and now weekly, supported by Wen and Poplar HARCA, have provided opportunities for skill-sharing and social connection.



HANDS-ON LEARNING AND SUSTAINABILITY PRACTICES

Gardening at Limborough has gone beyond planting. Residents have learned seed saving, composting, propagation techniques, and soil health management. The introduction of composting systems and wormeries has helped reduce food waste and create nutrient-rich soil, reinforcing the hub's commitment to circular, sustainable practices.

CULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE OF CROPS

Many gardeners grow vegetables and herbs that are central to their cultural diets, such as amaranth, bottle gourd, coriander, and Bangladeshi spinach. These crops are not only nutritious but carry deep emotional and ancestral value, allowing residents to keep traditions alive and share stories across generations.

HEALING THROUGH HORTICULTURE

The garden has also been a space for wellbeing. Through Soil Sisters sessions, women recovering from trauma have found therapeutic benefits in gardening and cooking together. These sessions have combined practical skills with emotional support, creating a safe and nurturing environment.

CORPORATE VOLUNTEERING AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Limborough's garden has become a popular site for corporate volunteer days, where teams from local businesses roll up their sleeves to help maintain the space. These sessions not only strengthen ties between the hub and the wider community but also foster environmental awareness among participants.

PRODUCE GROWN

EXAMPLES OF PRODUCE GROWN IN LIMBOROUGH GARDEN:

- Tomatoes (5 varieties),
- Pumpkin
- Spinach
- Courgettes
- Lemon
- Coriander
- Mint
- Garlic
- Potatoes
- Onions
- Herbs such as Thyme, lavender, rosemary and basil
- Strawberries
- Rhubarb

Produce that is often imported:

- A variety of Bangladeshi Gourd (Khodu)
- Hyacinth beans (Uri)
- Amaranth,
- Bangladeshi cucumber
- Dugi amaranth stem
- 10 different types of Nagas
- 6 varieties of chilly plants
- Bangladeshi Aubergine



“I love coming to the garden - we chat, we laugh, and we work hard. But I always go away feeling happy.”

Limborough community gardener

COOKING AND SHARING MEALS

Food has always been at the heart of Limborough's work bringing people together, reducing isolation, and creating opportunities for learning and cultural exchange. Our kitchen and shared meals have become a lifeline for many in the community.

AN INCLUSIVE, MEAT-FREE KITCHEN

Limborough's kitchen was intentionally designed as a meat-free space, promoting low-carbon diets while ensuring inclusivity for those with dietary restrictions such as halal, kosher, and pork/beef-free requirements. This approach has allowed everyone to cook with confidence, knowing the space is safe and respectful of cultural and religious needs.

WEEKLY QSA COOK-UP SESSIONS: RESTORING DIGNITY THROUGH FOOD

Since 2022, Quaker Social Action (QSA) has run weekly cook-up sessions for families living in temporary accommodation without access to cooking facilities. For many, these sessions are their only chance to prepare a hot, culturally appropriate meal. Parents have shared how vital these sessions are for their children's health and wellbeing, restoring a sense of normality and dignity in extremely challenging circumstances.

ST MUNGO'S GRUB CLUB: FOOD AS CONNECTION AND PURPOSE

Monthly sessions with St Mungo's have provided people experiencing homelessness with a safe space to cook, eat, and connect. In 2025, women-only sessions were introduced to meet the unique needs of women facing rough sleeping. These gatherings go beyond food, they offer companionship, laughter, and life skills. One participant said:

"Local people are lucky to have a hub to come and chill and enjoy this space."

*"Cooking together reminds me of home—it's not just about food, it's about belonging."
— Limborough participant*

WEEKLY LUNCH CLUB: REDUCING WASTE AND BUILDING WELLBEING

What began as a simple lunch club evolved into wellbeing cooking sessions, where participants bring surplus or near-expiry ingredients to cook and share meals together. These sessions reduce food waste, strengthen community ties, and create a sense of shared responsibility for sustainability.

CELEBRATING HERITAGE THROUGH CULTURAL COOKING WORKSHOPS

Events like Aromas of a Distant Land have showcased the rich culinary traditions of our community. Women cooked Bangladeshi vegetable curries using produce grown in the Limborough garden, sharing stories of recipes passed down through generations. These workshops have boosted confidence, encouraged public speaking, and inspired some participants to pursue catering as a career.



FOOD PANTRY

This was set up during Covid as a response to meet a hyperlocal local need for emergency food services. Due to the current austerity measures local residents are in greater need of support with meeting their needs. Access to subsidised food is a vital service provided by the Food Pantry which runs weekly on a Friday and Saturday. This is managed and facilitated by Burdett Foundation Initiative BFI formerly Burdett Football Club (BFC).

WEEKLY LUNCH CLUB

Our Wednesday lunch sessions began as a way to use surplus and redistributed food to provide meals for local residents in need. While sourcing excess food proved challenging, we explored partnerships such as Felix, who offered hot meals—though logistical issues around delivery remain a hurdle we are working to resolve.

Over time, the lunch club evolved into “Wellbeing Cooking Sessions”, where participants bring leftover or near-expiry ingredients to Limborough and cook together. These sessions reduce food waste, foster creativity, and create a warm, communal space for sharing meals.

Recognising the potential for growth, the Limborough women’s group requested a Food Hygiene course to gain qualifications for catering opportunities. With support from Wen and Poplar HARCA, this training was arranged for 25th November 2025, paving the way for future development of the Lunch Club and empowering women to lead and expand its impact.



COMMUNITY EVENTS: CELEBRATING TOGETHER

Community events at Limborough have been central to building relationships, fostering cultural pride, and creating joyful spaces for learning and connection. These gatherings have brought together residents, partners, and volunteers in ways that strengthen social bonds and promote climate-conscious living.

CULTURAL AND SEASONAL CELEBRATIONS

Limborough has hosted Eid celebrations, Ramadhan meals, Harvest Festivals, and end-of-year celebration parties. These events are vibrant occasions filled with shared meals, music, and activities such as henna art and crafts. They provide opportunities for residents to celebrate traditions while connecting with neighbours and partners sharing food in an inclusive environment.

NATURE AND WELLBEING TRIPS

Our summer trips to Kew Gardens and beach outings have offered participants a chance to experience nature beyond the urban setting. These excursions are more than leisure, they promote mental wellbeing, encourage environmental stewardship, and create lasting memories for families who rarely have access to such experiences.



CREATIVE AND EDUCATIONAL WORKSHOPS

Limborough has hosted arts and crafts sessions focused on recycling and upcycling, turning waste into beautiful, functional items. Recipe book sessions have captured traditional dishes and stories, preserving cultural heritage for future generations. These workshops bring out participants' creative skills while reinforcing sustainability values.

Wider public events like Aromas of a Distant Land have showcased the culinary traditions of our community, allowing women to share recipes and stories linked to their heritage. These sessions have boosted confidence, encouraged public speaking, and inspired some participants to explore catering as a career.

CORPORATE VOLUNTEER DAYS AND KNOWLEDGE SHARING

Limborough has become a hub for corporate volunteering, where teams contribute to garden maintenance and event support while learning about food justice and sustainability. Additionally, knowledge-sharing visits with Just FACT partners have connected Limborough to a wider network of climate action projects, fostering collaboration and innovation.

***“These events make us feel part of something bigger—a community that cares about each other and the planet.”
— Limborough participant***

AROMAS OF A DISTANT LAND

The women have been involved in the power of Food festival run by Just Fact. The women hosted a live cooking session open to the public for the event. They cooked Bangladeshi cultural vegetable curries which the women grow themselves at Limborough garden.

The women talked to the public about the vegetables they were cooking including the methods of cooking and ingredients they were using. They also hosted a Q&A session after the shared lunch with everyone. They told their stories of the recipes that have been passed down through generations and how they have kept going through cooking these recipes for their families.

The event was named Aromas of a Distant Land; the women related to this as they migrated from their mother land of Bangladeshi to the UK. This event really boosted the women's confidence of public speaking and showing their skills that they have which has now encouraged them to pursue into catering. In addition, the women have indicated that they would like to deliver more of these types of workshops to the general public – it gives them pride in their culturally rich foods and are able to share their heritage through the food shared.



EXAMPLES OF DISHES COOKED & CULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE

- Bangladeshi Khodu Curry– Celebrating heritage and seasonal produce grown at Limborough.
- Phita (Rice Cakes) – Traditional Bangladeshi delicacy prepared during cultural workshops.
- Kimchi & Fermented Foods – Linking global food traditions with sustainability practices.
- Plant-Based Meals ; Amaranth stir-fry, lentil dishes – Promoting low-carbon diets while respecting cultural tastes.
- Pizza & Baking Sessions (St Mungo's) – Building confidence and life skills for people experiencing homelessness.

COMMUNITY HUB USE

Limborough has served as more than a garden and kitchen, it has become a collaborative space for learning, advocacy, and innovation. Over the years, the hub has hosted a wide range of activities that connect local residents, partner organisations, and wider networks working toward food justice and climate action.

SUPPORTING THE JUST FACT NETWORK

As part of the Just Food and Climate Transition (Just FACT) programme, Limborough has been a key venue for training sessions, partner meet-ups, and knowledge-sharing events.

- The hub regularly hosted Just FACT team meetings and collaborative workshops for staff and partners.
- Limborough welcomed groups from Lambeth working on food transition projects as part of the knowledge sharing events, creating opportunities to share ideas and strengthen the wider food movement.
- Multiple Just FACT partners have used the space for their initiatives, including:
 - R Urban – ran a session on resource sharing in Poplar.
 - Sunny Jar Eco Hub – providing plastic free solutions as part of their sustainability work.
 - Platform – convened a Blueprint Architect session to explore systemic change.

COMMUNITY TRAINING AND SKILL-BUILDING

Limborough has hosted diverse training sessions that reflect its commitment to equity and empowerment, including:

- Makkan re: Speaking up about Palestine – advocacy and awareness training.
- Trans-Inclusive Training – fostering inclusion and understanding.
- WoRD Wood Workshop – practical skills in wood recycling and furniture-making.
- Tower Hamlets Food Growers Network Workshop – collaborative learning on sustainable growing practices.

“Limborough is not just a hub—it’s a space where ideas grow alongside plants.”

WEN STAFF AND PROGRAMME USE

The hub has also been an alternative workspace for Wen staff, providing a welcoming environment for team meetings and planning sessions.

- Climate Sisters held 10 sessions at Limborough during Phase 2 (2024 -2025), totalling 30 hours of creative and climate-focused activities.
- Wen in person staff meetings every month

IMPACT

Limborough has delivered benefits across social, environmental, and wellbeing dimensions. Here's how our work has made a difference:

ENVIRONMENTAL BENEFITS

Our work has actively promoted meat-free diets, reduced food miles through local growing, and encouraged sustainable practices such as composting and wormeries. These initiatives have encouraged residents to discuss the links between food choices and climate action. Carbon emissions associated with Any leftover surplus from the Food Store then gets redistributed at the coffee mornings. We also used scraps from leftover meals to feed our wormeries. All the food grown this year together and distributing the harvest meant people had access to fresh food without having to buy from the shops.



CARBON SAVINGS

- Meat-free kitchen: Reduced emissions associated with eating less meat, reduction in meat consumption.
- Food waste in the local area reduced as a result of surplus food being redistributed through the Food Store and offering it back to the community opposed to it ending up in landfill.
- Communal cooking sessions: Lowered household energy use by sharing resources, reducing the need for multiple stoves and ovens running in separate homes.
- Reducing food miles by enabling residents to access fresh produce and grow culturally significant crops locally.

FOOD WASTE REDUCTION

- Weekly wellbeing cooking sessions: using leftovers, surplus and short-dated food into shared meals. Any leftover surplus from the Food Store is redistributed at the coffee mornings.
- Composting: Transformed food and garden waste into nutrient-rich soil, closing the loop on waste.

SOCIAL IMPACT

- Over 280 QSA sessions per year: Provided families with dignity, access to hot meals, and a sense of belonging.
- Cultural cooking events: Strengthened identity, confidence, and intergenerational knowledge-sharing among women.
- Community celebrations and trips: Reduced isolation and fostered joy, connection, and resilience.

“This kitchen feels like home. It’s the only place where I can cook a hot meal for my children. It’s priceless.”
– QSA participant

ENVIRONMENTAL BENEFITS

For families living in temporary accommodation, often surviving on as little as £8 per week, the Quaker Social Action (QSA) cook-up sessions have been a lifeline. These sessions provided the only opportunity for many parents to prepare a hot, culturally appropriate meal for their children, restoring dignity and normality in extremely challenging circumstances.

MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING

Gardening and shared meals have been powerful tools for reducing isolation and improving mental health. Participants have described the garden as a sanctuary, a place to “clear the mind” and “feel happy.” Cooking together has created safe spaces for laughter, conversation, and healing, particularly for women recovering from trauma through Soil Sisters sessions.



SKILLS AND CONFIDENCE

Limborough has empowered women with public speaking experience through cultural cooking events like Aromas of a Distant Land, and supported career aspirations by facilitating food hygiene qualifications. These achievements have opened doors to catering opportunities and boosted confidence in community leadership.

FOOD WASTE REDUCTION

Over the course of five years, Limborough has taught us valuable lessons about community engagement, sustainability, and the realities of delivering grassroots climate action. These insights will shape future projects and inform best practices for similar initiatives.

FLEXIBILITY AND RELATIONSHIP-BUILDING

Community work is not linear. It requires time, trust, and adaptability, qualities that are often undervalued or not factored by funders who focus on measurable outputs. Much of our impact has come from informal conversations, listening to residents' needs, and responding to unexpected challenges. These relational aspects are critical for building genuine community ownership but are rarely accounted for in funding models.

“Some sisters are very shy to come, we try to encourage them to get out. [Some are] suffering from depression and we encourage them to come out and have time out of their own world and [do] something different. Very beneficial for ladies in the community. Before people were stuck behind doors suffering from trauma and stress; it’s good for your mental health to find out what’s happening in the community.” - Lipy, Limborough coffee mornings

LIMBOROUGH IN NUMBERS

40

Regularly engaged residents



240

Attendees



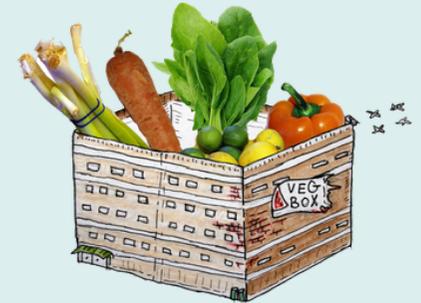
141

Volunteers



17

Partnerships



132

Community events



43

Public workshops



LEARNING

CONSULTATION IS KEY

In 2022–2023, we trialled a communal growing model to encourage shared responsibility and collaboration. While the intention was to foster collective gardening, engagement dropped significantly. Feedback revealed that residents valued having their own plots, which gave them a sense of pride and autonomy. This experience taught us that change must be co-designed with the community, consultation and dialogue are essential before implementing new approaches.

CULTURAL FOOD PRACTICES AND PLANT-BASED DIETS

Our meat-free kitchen sparked important conversations about food, culture, and sustainability. While many participants appreciated the health benefits of plant-based meals, others expressed concerns about taste, convenience, and cultural traditions. We learned that promoting dietary change requires respect for cultural identity, practical cooking skills, and an emphasis on flavour, not prescriptive messaging. Even using the term “plant-based” did not sit well with people from different cultures, and seen as a very Western term.

We create space for sharing knowledge, honouring existing practices—A cooking workshop participant felt confident to share this: “It isn’t a new thing (water frying), they do it in the villages in Bangladesh with fish, chicken etc (participant describes the process of cooking in the pot – and that her family do it that way) and if they eat right way, they don’t need the oil.”

INTEGRATION AND INCLUSION

Bringing together diverse groups, women’s networks, refugee families, corporate volunteers, has enriched Limborough’s community but also presented challenges. Differences in language, cultural norms, and expectations sometimes led to misunderstandings. We identified a need for training on inclusive language and behaviour, as well as clear ground rules to ensure that harm is not replicated in shared spaces.

THE VALUES OF OWNERSHIP

Our experience with communal growing reinforced the importance of personal ownership in community projects. Individual plots motivated gardeners to invest time and care, while communal spaces lacked the same sense of responsibility. Future initiatives should balance shared spaces with opportunities for personal stewardship.

***“We learned that community-led work is about listening, adapting, and valuing relationships as much as outcomes.”
— Limborough Project Team***

REFLECTIONS

INFORMING THE NEXT PHASE

These learnings will shape the future of Limborough and similar hubs in several ways:

- Deepening Co-Design: Every new initiative, from garden layouts to kitchen programming, will be developed through community consultation and participatory planning.
- Embedding Inclusion: We will continue with training on cultural awareness and inclusive practices for staff, volunteers, and participants to create safer, more welcoming spaces.
- Flexible Programming: Activities will remain responsive to community needs, with room to adapt quickly when circumstances change.
- Balancing Shared and Personal Spaces: Future garden designs will combine communal areas for collaboration with individual plots to maintain engagement and pride.
- Celebrating Cultural Food Heritage: Cooking sessions will continue to honour traditional recipes while introducing sustainable practices, ensuring climate action feels relevant and empowering.



KEY INSIGHTS FOR FUTURE PROJECTS

- Deepening Co-Design: Every new initiative, from garden layouts to kitchen programming, will be developed through community consultation and participatory planning.
- Embedding Inclusion: We will continue with training on cultural awareness and inclusive practices for staff, volunteers, and participants to create safer, more welcoming spaces.
- Flexible Programming: Activities will remain responsive to community needs, with room to adapt quickly when circumstances change.
- Balancing Shared and Personal Spaces: Future garden designs will combine communal areas for collaboration with individual plots to maintain engagement and pride.
- Celebrating Cultural Food Heritage: Cooking sessions will continue to honour traditional recipes while introducing sustainable practices, ensuring climate action feels relevant and empowering.

“We learned that community-led work is about listening, adapting, and valuing relationships as much as outcomes.”
– Limborough Project Team



POWERED BY
Wen.

POPLAR **HARCA**