

## Insights and latest developments on the Park Royal Industrial Estate by Prof Geoff Rodgers, Brunel University of London

Food and drink is the second largest manufacturing sector in the West London economy, driven by the region's proximity to London and Heathrow. Of course, within the region sits the Park Royal Industrial Estate, which hosts over 500 food and drink businesses. These businesses produce around 30% of London's food, with an estimated £8bn annual economic contribution. It is not for nothing that Park Royal is known as "London's Kitchen".

Food infrastructure like Park Royal is of the same strategic importance as energy or transport infrastructure – cities, London, cannot function without it. Park Royal is the UK's largest industrial estate, providing employment for over 40,000 local people, most from surrounding boroughs. This makes it a place-based economic asset that should be at the centre of regional economic and innovation planning, not a peripheral logistics zone.

Food & drink manufacturing matters now more than ever. The food system is energy intensive, waste heavy, and under pressure from rising costs, regulation, and labour constraints. These issues aren't yesterday's problems, they are the challenges we will need to conquer if we are to meet our aspirations for a more sustainable, net-zero future.

And Park Royal is experiencing all these pressures; it is entirely representative of the UK food system as a whole. If solutions work on Park Royal, they can work anywhere in the UK, which positions the estate as a uniquely powerful living laboratory.

At Brunel University of London, we are trying to realise some of these opportunities with the **Park Royal Net Zero Food Systems** project. Led by Brunel, with civic and sector partners, the project is explicitly focused on:

- Energy reduction
- Waste minimisation and valorisation
- Digitalisation and automation
- Low carbon production and logistics

The project frames net-zero as a way to reduce cost, improve resilience, and drive growth, not just cut emissions. We view net-zero as an industrial revolution: an industrial efficiency wave for food manufacturing, comparable to the automation of previous decades.

The *Park Royal Net Zero Food Systems* project has now been running for two years. It is showing how place-based innovation works when universities, SMEs, civic bodies, and sector organisations co-design solutions. Many SMEs on the estate have never previously worked with universities yet face pressing innovation barriers. The project has allowed rapid audits, testbeds, demonstrators, and staff exchange, accelerating real world adoption.

Embedding projects within a wider eco-system such as Park Royal facilitates a move away from linear supply chains towards circular food economies. The estate enables industrial symbiosis: waste heat, by-products, logistics flows, skills and infrastructure shared across firms. It supports a shift from linear “make-use-waste” models to circular food economies, which reduce carbon cost whilst increasing food security. We are witnessing the gradual transition of Park Royal towards a prototype circular urban food district, away from its current profile as a manufacturing estate.

On Park Royal, this is also about inclusive growth and innovation, not just industrial output. Park Royal is embedded in diverse, sometimes deprived, communities, linking food production to employment, skills, health, and education outcomes. Food policy intersects with public procurement, nutrition, and health, making local manufacturing strategically important for public services.

Park Royal is already being positioned as a flagship exemplar for the UK food and drink sector’s transition to net-zero. The question is not whether food systems must change, but how quickly we can scale what works. If we can decarbonise, digitise and future proof the food system in Park Royal - feeding a global city at an industrial scale - then we can do it anywhere.