

A black and white photograph capturing a joyful moment between a man and a woman. The man, on the left, is shown in profile, looking towards the right with a slight smile. The woman, on the right, is facing forward, her face lit up with a wide, happy grin, her eyes squinted. Between them are several tall, lit candles in a candelabra, their flames creating a warm, glowing effect. The background is dark and out of focus, with vertical light streaks suggesting an indoor setting with windows or decorative lighting. The overall mood is intimate and celebratory.

**Public restaurants:
the high street's kitchen**

Blending the efficiency of large-scale catering with the warmth of neighbourhood hospitality to create a new category of eating out.

It's 2036. Public restaurants are everywhere. They've started outperforming takeaways because as it turns out, people didn't just want convenience, they wanted connection.

Town centres feel busier and more sociable, families eat out more often and fewer people eat lunch alone at their desks. Public restaurants act as anchor tenants, increasing footfall and helping keep town centres active throughout the day and into the evening.

Public restaurants connect people with local services, support healthier habits and make nutritious meals the visible, everyday norm. Health is woven into daily life on the high street.

Hospitality has become a respected career once again. Employees have predictable hours, opportunities to learn, clear progression routes and meaningful qualifications. Going to work means being paid fairly, eating well and being part of a team.

Local food systems are stronger and more connected, with menus planned alongside agro-ecological growers who now have reliable, long-term markets for their produce. More farmers can invest with confidence because demand is stable and predictable.

The infrastructure that supports public restaurants now serves other public institutions too. What began as a network of restaurants has become something much bigger: food infrastructure that makes healthy, affordable food easier to produce, distribute and access.

Public restaurants didn't solve loneliness, poor health or struggling high streets on their own. But they gave more people a reason to leave the house, eat well and spend time together.

In the same way that public leisure centres expanded access to sport and recreation, public restaurants expanded access to eating out and social connection. What began as an experiment in hospitality became a familiar part of everyday life: places that were affordable, welcoming and woven into routines across the country.



Absalon in Copenhagen is the best known example of a public restaurant.



The Opportunity

Over the past three decades we have lost many of the everyday places that once brought us together. Sure Start centres have closed, department store cafés have disappeared and many of the informal spaces that supported everyday social connection have been eroded. Today, almost a quarter of adults report feeling lonely at least some of the time.

At the same time, our appetite for eating outside the home has never been greater. We now spend around £120 billion each year on food and drink consumed outside the home, with an estimated 30–40% of that spending on convenience food. We haven't stopped eating out; we've increasingly swapped connection for convenience.

Access to eating out has also become more unequal. Recent analysis from the Office for National Statistics shows that households in the highest income decile spend almost seven times more on food away from home than those in the lowest. Yet the Joseph Rowntree Foundation recognises occasional meals out as part of a minimum acceptable standard of living. Eating out is no longer simply a leisure activity, it is part of participating in society.

The market has responded brilliantly to the demand for speed and convenience. The success of Lounges, food halls, Wetherspoons and IKEA Food demonstrates that people value affordability, informality and places that fit easily into everyday life. What is largely missing is a model that combines those qualities with healthy food, social connection and long-term public, environmental and economic value.

That is the opportunity.

If even a small proportion of our existing spending on eating out could be redirected towards places that make healthy, climate conscious food affordable, enjoyable and inherently social, hospitality could become a powerful force for improving public health, strengthening local economies and rebuilding the everyday connections that help communities thrive.

Public restaurants are designed to do exactly that.

What is a public restaurant?

If The Lounges are the high street's living room, public restaurants are its kitchen.

They are functional, welcoming and full of life; places where people meet, eat, work and pause. Like the kitchen in a family home, they provide a centre of gravity: somewhere people naturally gather and where some of the best conversations happen.

Public restaurants are designed to make eating out part of everyday life rather than something reserved for special occasions. They are the sort of place people return to regularly: somewhere to stop after work because there will be something good to eat, somewhere to suggest when friends ask where to meet, somewhere familiar enough to become routine.

Inspired by the belonging of a pub, the accessibility of a canteen and the sociability of a food hall, they combine convenience and connection in equal measure. They work equally well for a quick lunch, an informal meeting, a family meal or an afternoon spent catching up with friends. In many ways, they are the modern equivalent of the department store café: affordable, dependable and open to everyone. Shared civic spaces where all of us feel welcome.

Most importantly, public restaurants feel different because they are hosted differently. Every restaurant is led by a local owner-host; someone for whom hospitality is a vocation rather than simply a business. Supported by a national system but rooted in their community, they are responsible not only for the performance of the restaurant, but for the atmosphere, relationships and sense of belonging it creates.

No two public restaurants are exactly alike. Each reflects the place it serves, develops its own regulars and evolves its own character. What unites them is a shared commitment to affordability, generosity and welcome.

Their impact extends beyond the dining room. By bringing people out of their homes and into shared spaces, public restaurants generate footfall, strengthen local loyalty and help create more vibrant town centres and neighbourhoods.

The result is more than a restaurant. It is social infrastructure, delivered through hospitality.



Why Now?

The timing is right.

People are looking for good value, convenient ways to eat well and more reasons to leave the house. Hospitality is searching for models that can remain affordable whilst operating sustainably. Developers are looking for uses that generate footfall, activate underused assets and strengthen the attractiveness of wider schemes. Local authorities are investing in social infrastructure, tackling social isolation and exploring prevention-focused approaches to public health.

These agendas are often funded, managed and measured separately, public restaurants will bring them together.

Rather than reinventing hospitality, the model draws together and reorganises proven elements from both public and private sector catering. It combines the efficiencies of large-scale food production with the warmth of neighbourhood hospitality, bringing together lessons from restaurants, food halls, workplace dining, universities, hospitals and other high-volume food environments.

The result is a model designed for how people increasingly want to live: convenient, affordable and sociable. They create affordable places to eat, reasons to spend time amongst others and a dependable source of activity within town centres and mixed-use developments. In doing so, they generate commercial value whilst contributing to healthier, more connected and more resilient communities.

The question is not whether people want everyday places to meet and eat, the question is whether we can create more of them in ways that also strengthen public health, social connection and local economies.

Public Restaurants are designed to do exactly that.

How does a public restaurant work?

Public restaurants are designed around a simple principle: use scale and operational efficiency to make eating out more affordable without compromising quality or hospitality.

The model combines lessons from large-scale catering, casual dining and food halls. Central production, simplified menus and aggregated purchasing reduce costs, while local operators focus on what matters most: food, hospitality and community.

Meals are served during focused lunch and dinner service windows, allowing teams to concentrate labour around peak demand and maintain consistent quality. Outside these periods, restaurants remain open for drinks, snacks and social activity.

Menus change daily and are published in advance. Instead of endless options, choice unfolds across the week. This allows the group to work closely with suppliers, respond to seasonal availability and reduce waste.

Labour-intensive preparation takes place in a Central Production Unit, with final cooking, finishing and service completed in each restaurant. This approach improves consistency, lowers labour costs and allows sites to operate efficiently without losing their local character.

Technology is used to ease operational pressure, not replace interaction.

The model is designed to deliver meals at an average price of around £10 while maintaining a gross margin of approximately 24%. This is achieved through menu design, central production, long-term supplier relationships and economies of scale.

Public restaurants are scaled through a social franchise system. Future operators begin as employees, develop their skills through an in-house academy and progress towards ownership through performance rather than personal wealth. Each restaurant remains locally led while benefiting from the infrastructure, purchasing power and support of the wider network.

Why scale matters:

In most hospitality models, scale primarily increases profit. In The Public Plate model, scale is different: across sites, networks and production, it is what makes impact possible. As the system grows, meals become more affordable, producers benefit from more stable demand, infrastructure becomes more efficient, and public value widens.

The CPU is the core enabling system of the model: it underpins consistency, quality and affordability across sites, while unlocking additional revenue streams beyond the restaurants themselves. By producing meals-in-progress centrally, it creates the capacity to serve a wider range of public sector settings.

The ambition is not simply to build a network of restaurants, but to build the food infrastructure that makes affordable, healthy eating and everyday social connection easier to access, while strengthening the wider food system around it.



The Organising Model

The Plate Public brings a steward-owned franchise system, designed to scale a national network of public restaurants. Its structure separates but tightly coordinates four functions: system design and central production, local restaurant ownership and operation, mission-aligned capital and steward-owned governance.

Together, these elements enable the network to achieve the efficiencies of scale associated with large hospitality operators whilst preserving local ownership, entrepreneurship and community participation. The purpose of this structure is simple: to make eating out more affordable whilst creating public value through good jobs, stronger supply chains, equitable ownership and healthier food environments.

Led by Carly Trisk-Grove, a founder with 20 years' experience running high-volume, social-impact restaurants, her first was a founding member of The Sustainable Restaurant Association. Alongside Carly, the emerging team includes senior hospitality professionals with experience of scaling some of the UK's most successful restaurant concepts, a development chef with more than 25 years' experience within a leading UK restaurant group, and support from one of the country's most respected chefs and food-system advocates. The model has been shaped through ongoing conversations with local authorities, academics, developers, investors, operators and food-system practitioners. This process has helped challenge assumptions, identify barriers and refine the model.

The Public Plate is designed around a number of core principles:

- Scale where scale adds value - central production, procurement, technology and training create efficiencies that individual restaurants could not achieve alone.
- Local ownership where local knowledge matters - restaurants are locally operated, rooted in their communities and responsive to local needs.
- A pathway from operator to owner - talented hospitality professionals can build equity through performance rather than personal wealth or access to capital.
- Supply chains designed for resilience - long-term relationships with growers and suppliers create more predictable demand and stronger regional food systems.
- Capital in service of purpose - investors are rewarded fairly, but governance remains independent of capital and focused on long-term mission.
- Value shared across the system - franchisees, communities, suppliers and investors all participate in the success of the network.
- Public value embedded by design - affordability, health, social connection, good jobs and environmental responsibility are outcomes of how the system is organised, not activities added on afterwards.



What We Are Looking For

Funding

We are seeking early funders who recognise the opportunity to help establish a new category of social infrastructure; a commercial hospitality model designed to deliver public value. As public restaurants do not yet exist, the first stage of funding is focused on validating the concept through pilots, strategic partnerships and operational proof.

We anticipate a blended funding approach involving:

- mission-aligned investors and philanthropy
- grant funding linked to food systems, health and social connection
- academic research collaborations and joint funding bids

Early funding will support:

- pilot delivery and operational testing
- refinement of the organisational and governance model
- building the evidence base required for long-term scale

Partnerships

Beyond funding, delivering public restaurants will require collaboration across local government, academia and property.

From **local authorities** we are seeking support with:

- identifying pilot sites and underused public assets
- introductions to landlords and strategic partners
- alignment across public health, regeneration and economic development teams

From **academic partners** we want to collaborate on:

- access to underused assets for pilot sites
- joint funding bids, public restaurants as living labs for food systems and public health

We want to build partnerships with **asset holders** who recognise the long-term social and commercial value public restaurants can create through:

- meanwhile use agreements
- subsidised pilot-phase leases or fit-out investment
- socially aligned development partnerships

Sites

We are typically seeking 4,000–6,000 sq ft across ground-floor accommodation with capacity for approximately 180 covers. Town-centre, mixed-use, campus or destination locations with legacy catering infrastructure.

The financial model assumes market rent, with a structured ramp-up during the first two years to support pilot-site establishment.

Growth Strategy

The ambition is to create a system capable of supporting a national network.

Stage 1 - Pilots (Years 1–2)

Funding requirements: £50,000 pre-seed funding to build a core. team, develop the organisational structure, and appoint legal, financial and property advisers. Seed investment of c. £600,000 for Pilot One, the same for Pilot Two

Public Restaurants do not yet exist at scale. The pilot phase is designed to test customer demand, operational performance and organisational design before expansion. The purpose of the pilots is not to prove the vision, but to identify where the model requires refinement.

Stage 2 - Early Expansion (Years 3–7)

Following successful pilots, the network expands at approximately two new restaurants per year. Expansion is financed through: c. £1 million additional equity investment plus c. £1.9 million Social Impact Fund capital (providing patient capital for new site openings whilst allowing capital to remain within the system and recycle over time).

Stage 3 - A National Network

As the network grows: affordability improves through scale, central production and procurement increases consistency and resilience, franchise fees support expanding head-office functions and social impact increases alongside commercial performance

The organisation is projected to reach overall profitability at approximately ten restaurants (Year Seven), with early risk capital forecast to deliver an 8.9% return.



