

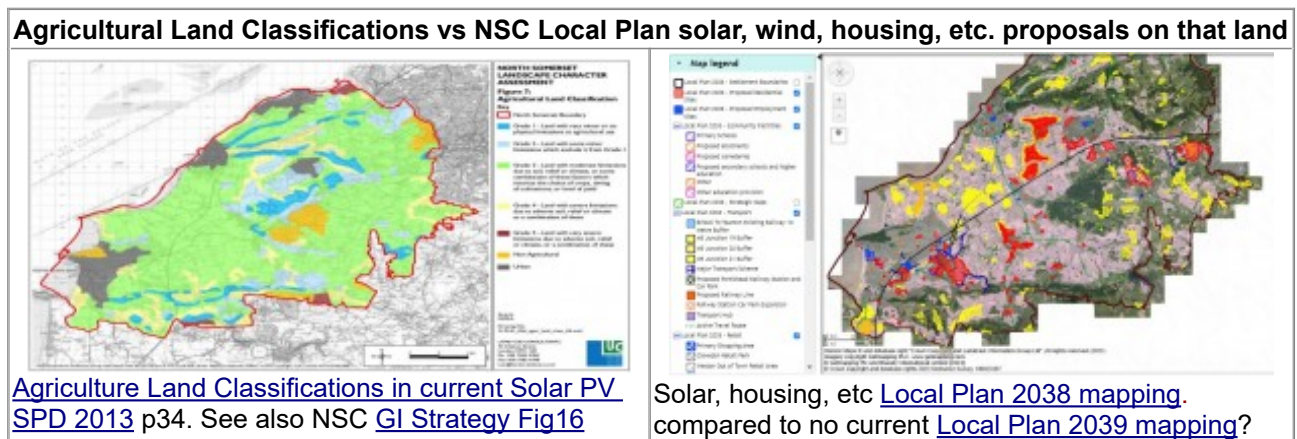
Dear Councillors,

I am asking all Town & Parish Councils to help support local food production and security in their responses to the North Somerset Council's (NSC's) [Corporate Plan](#) and [Local Plan 2039](#) consultations. As you will be aware the resulting policies will effect our communities for generations to come.

If you haven't already, this is our opportunity to respond on behalf of our rural communities as NSC "... [must submit every development plan document to the Secretary of State for independent examination](#)... *But the authority must not submit such a document unless... they think the document is ready for independent examination.*"

It is unfortunate that the timing of these consultations is over the Christmas period, closing on the 10th and 22nd January 2024, respectively. However, I believe that your response to this issue at any level will benefit the health, well-being and economies of all our residents. "*The right to appear or be heard at the examination is limited to those persons who make representations seeking a change to the plan at this stage*" (See Local Plan [p2 & p10](#))

My fellow Bleadon councillors and I are concerned that, although [food is one of the government's 13 Critical Infrastructure Sectors](#), NSC's policies do not appear to reflect this status. Although food is raised in NSC's [Green Infrastructure Strategy](#), its [Local Plan 2039 consultation document](#) doesn't seem to protect the land needed to deliver that food. It appears to potentially allocate agricultural land to other NSC priorities such as solar, nature recovery and biodiversity net gain projects, housing, highways, etc., without clearly stating where or how the food that was produced on that land will be 'offset', and continue to be produced. If you have not done so already, please consider a response to the [proposed Local Plan DP53 'Best & Most Versatile Land' policy](#) (NSC Development Management Policy p203).



For example [Local Plan DP53](#) states, "*The proportion of Grade 1 land in North Somerset is approximately 7% and 10% for Grade 2. 60% falls in Grade 3*" and "*The best and most versatile (BMV) land (grades 1, 2 and 3a) will be protected from significant, inappropriate and unsustainable proposals... Development will not be permitted unless it is for...*" a variety of reasons. It seems that this important food growing land is not fully protected from development. There appears to be no information as to what proportion of the Grade 3 land is 3b, and therefore what proportion of agricultural land and associated food production could be lost.

The [UK Government Powering Up Britain Energy Security Plan 2023 \(p38\)](#) states, "*We consider that meeting energy security and climate change goals is urgent and of critical importance to the country, and that these goals can be achieved together with maintaining food security for the UK. We encourage deployment of solar technology that delivers environmental benefits, with consideration for ongoing food production or environmental improvement.*" How is NSC ensuring 'ongoing food production' in and across all their policies?

It should be noted that not all farmers are landowners and that they depend on Local Authority and private tenancy agreements. Local Plan [DP54](#) states Landowners and "*Farmers are encouraged to diversify their activities and supplement their income from enterprises other than normal food production*". Therefore the future of farming, food production and security is at risk and will depend on NSC agriculture land classifications remaining the same overall. There appears to be no research or information on how NSC will ensure that food production will not decrease and/or be completely decimated. It is proposed that agricultural land be tied up in solar (20 years), Biodiversity Net Gain (30 years), housing and transport infrastructure (permanently removed). What research and risk assessment has NSC done on current land use and food production to ensure that it continues to contribute to local and national food security? How may landowner diversification effect rural economies and communities? How may it effect opportunities for the next generations of much needed farmers? No land, no farming, no food. We cannot depend on the current importation levels, as world food crisis, climate change and wars mean other countries are reducing their food exports to protect their citizens.

The [UK Government Food Security Report 2021](#) states, "... food security means strong and consistent domestic production of food combined with a diversity of supply sources that avoids overreliance on any one source... Home-grown produce is the largest source of food for the UK... In meat, milk, and eggs, the UK produces roughly equivalent volume to what it consumes... The UK produces a significant proportion of its other crop needs, including around 60% of sugar beet, 70% of potatoes and 80% of oilseeds... The UK produces over 50% of vegetables consumed domestically, but only 16% of fruit." If the current agricultural fields are built on, where will the current food production come from? How will this affect local and national food security? Supporting local food production will reduce food travel and importation of food (reducing food carbon footprint) and potentially lower costs. It will help local and national food security by being less dependent on importation of key food items, especially in times of global food crisis and wars. It may create more rural job opportunities throughout the whole food network from 'farm to fork'.

Whatever your council's, or your personal, views are of the climate and environment narrative, we believe that people should have access to local nutritious food. Has the land currently used for our local and national meat, dairy, vegetables and fruit production been fully considered and protected by NSC? [DP53](#), "For some uses it may be possible to return the land to productive agricultural use without any loss of quality, should the proposed use no longer be required. For example, solar farms or similar". What research has been undertaken to prove and guarantee that the land and soil 'may be' productively returned to agriculture? If fields are put out of action and replaced by solar and sheep, where will the dairy (milk, cheese, yoghurt, butter, buttermilk) come from, especially needed for the [pregnant](#), [infants](#), [elderly](#) and [unwell](#)? Has the relationship between rural farming districts been fully considered, including the loss of shared skills, machinery, land, barns, etc.? Surely solar should be on roofs not fields, closer to where the energy is required, including supermarket car parks, warehouses, solar tiles on houses, etc.? Has the environmental costs of mining, creating and disposing of solar panels and wind turbines been fully considered in NSC policies?

North Somerset Council is open to conversations on this topic. Our community has raised a number of concerns and I have had the opportunity for a number of meetings with NSC Councillors and lead officers and as indicated below:

1. [Food and related economy concerns presented to full NSC Executive Committee](#) on 06 Dec 23. I was subsequently offered a meeting with Cllr Mark Canniford, waiting for a date. (Sent to our two Ward Councillors)
2. Briefly indicated [food and rural community concerns](#) at the NSC Transport, Climate and Communities Policy and Scrutiny Panel on 30 Nov 23. Briefly spoke with Cllr Steve Bridger and subsequently sent document to the panel members. (Includes a short video link from a farmer's perspective.)
3. [Biodiversity Net Gain \(BNG\) SPD concerns](#) discussed with NSC lead officer on 21 Nov 23 with a subsequent SPD consultation submission 27NOV23.
4. [Future Rural Strategy Considerations](#) discussed at a meeting with lead officer on 17 Nov 23
5. [Last year's Bleadon BOB Local Plan Consultation submission](#) to Planning Policy Team on 29 Apr 22.
6. Concerns were raised at the NSC Corporate Plan & Budget (incl Rural Strategy) online meeting on 01 Nov 23, followed up with a request to meet Cllr Annemieke Waite 02 Nov 23 (Due in the next week or so, especially in regards to Rural Strategy and BNG).

As you may be aware NSC [Local Plan Guide](#) states that, "this consultation is a bit different to the previous three consultation stages in that the Government asks you to consider ([Planning and Country Planning Act 2004 s20 as amended](#)) whether the Local Plan policies are: **Compliant** - does the plan meet the legal requirements made under various statutes? **Sound** - has the plan been positively prepared, is it justified, effective, and consistent with national policy? **Meet the Duty to Cooperate** - has the council engaged and worked effectively with neighbouring authorities and statutory bodies? This means that specifically, we (NSC) are asking people to consider whether the policies and proposals in the Plan meet any of these tests when making a comment."

Your support for local food production, security and farming across all NSC policies, especially via these current consultations would be greatly appreciated. If you would like to discuss the above with me, have any questions or suggestions, or would like me to explain anything, please let me know.

Kind regards,

Cllr Jo Gower-Crane  
Bleadon Parish Council  
(Climate Change & Biodiversity)