

North Somerset Council [Executive Meeting 06 December 2023](#)

Public Speaking Session Farming, Food Production and Food Security

In May this year an article was published in [The Grocer](#) entitled, "Is British farming facing an existential crisis?" It stated that the UK's self-sufficiency is slipping, with the president of the National Farmers Union indicating that "the very existence of British food production is now under threat".

At that time, I decided to stand for election to become a parish councillor, to try and support and protect our rural farming communities. Although I'm not speaking on behalf of the local council today, my fellow councillors support my concerns.

According to the Big Issue, "The [cost of living crisis is exposing the severity of food poverty](#) in the UK. Millions are being pushed below the breadline as food prices soar, with many struggling to feed themselves and their families." In the last year food prices increased by 19%, with nearly [3 million people using a foodbank](#). "The Trussell Trust reported a [37% increase in the number of three-day emergency food parcels](#)." I believe this can only get worse if local and national food production is not protected.

Although North Somerset Council has declared a [Climate Emergency](#) and a [Nature Emergency](#), it doesn't appear to have a clear plan for protecting local farming, food production or food security. Food production does not appear in the [Corporate Plan](#).

Its [Local Plan](#) has a 'Best & Most Versatile Land' policy, however, there seems to be little information as to how a change in land use will affect the soil or risk food production, whether from an increase in solar panel farms, nature recovery or biodiversity net gain projects - housing, or road developments. The government and council talk of 'sustainable' development - then surely development must be undertaken in relation to the ability to feed ourselves.

The [UK Food Security Report](#) states that, "In meat, milk, and eggs, the UK produces roughly equivalent volume to what it consumes... over 50% of vegetables ... but only 16% of fruit." If the council's policies are supporting and encouraging farmland to be built on, or put out of action for 20-30 years, how will the Council ensure that current levels are maintained? Especially in light of current wars, the potential reduction in food imported and the resulting increase in food costs?

Food is one the government's [13 Critical Infrastructure Sectors](#). DEFRA indicates that [39% of England's dairy herd is farmed in the South West](#), which will reduce if agricultural farms are closed, or switched to solar farms grazing sheep. The South West also has one of the smallest average farm size, so if small farms are encouraged to diversify away from farming, food production and security will be affected. Removing agriculture from our communities may also significantly impact on the rural economy. In 2020, the total income from farming in England was £3.6bn, with the South West contributing the most, at nearly a fifth.

In summary, we are concerned that a [Rural Strategy](#) is not in place for our rural communities. We ask that farming, food production and food security is addressed and supported, across all of North Somerset Council's plans and policies. We also ask for your reassurance that the council supports a future for farming throughout North Somerset, and that the current level of food production and security is protected for residents, both locally and nationally.

