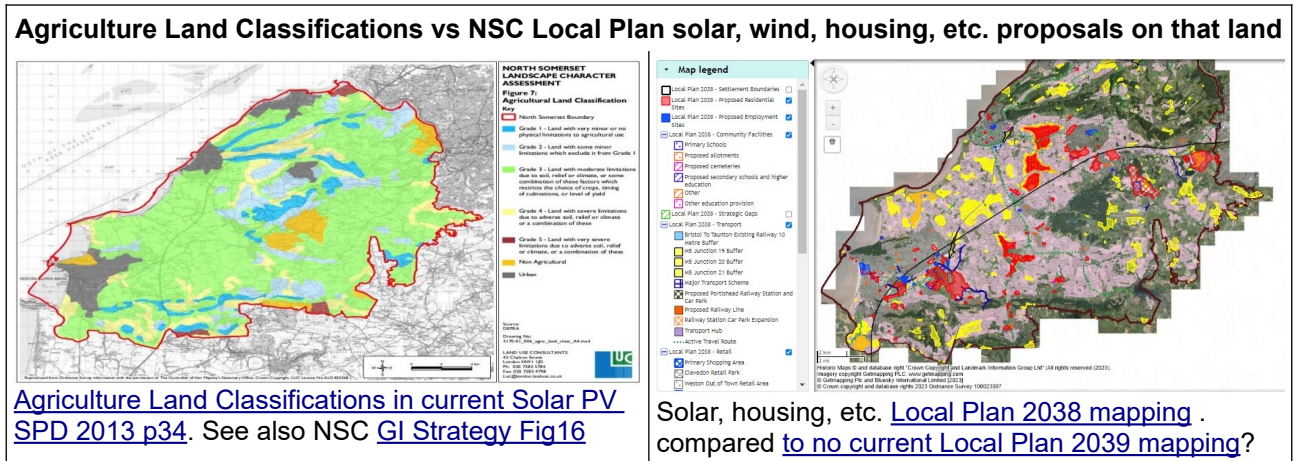


Farming, Food Production and Food Security in relation to Transport, Climate and Communities Policy and Scrutiny Panel

Thursday, 30th November, 2023

This document is written in relation to the discussions at the meeting above.

[Food is one the government's 13 Critical Infrastructure Sectors](#). We have concerns that despite this, farming, food production and food security are not being consistently or fully addressed and supported, across all of North Somerset Council's (NSC's) policies, plans, strategies, etc. We are also concerned that a Rural Strategy is not in place in relation to these documents, especially in relation to Bleadon. Clarification of land use proposals is welcomed. Also, reassurance as to the future of farming throughout North Somerset for continued local food production and national food security.



One of the [Corporate Plan & Budget consultation](#) ambitions is "Our communities are caring, healthy and safe, where people help each other to live well" with 3% of the budget "helping people keep well and stay healthy" However, how this relates to food is unclear, as food production and security isn't specifically mentioned in the Corporate Plan or [Action Plan](#). As you will be aware nutritious food, including meat, vegetables, fruit and dairy is essential to health and well-being. Dairy is particularly important for early life (including infant formula) as well as for [those who are ill](#), or [elderly](#) or need end of life care (e.g. fortified milk, cheese, yoghurt, butter, buttermilk spreads, etc.). It's concerning that NSC plans, policies, strategies, etc. may put this need at risk.

The [UK Food Security Report 2021: Theme 2: UK Food Supply Sources](#), 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." (05 Oct 2023). [DEFRA](#) indicates that 39% of England's dairy herd is farmed in the South West, which will reduce if agricultural farms are switched to solar farms grazing sheep. The South West also has the smallest average farm size compared to the average for England, so if small farms are encouraged to diversify e.g. solar, BNG, nature recovery, housing, etc. food production and security will be affected. Removing agriculture from our communities may also significantly impact on the rural economy, as well as food production and security. "In 2020, after deductions for wages, rent, interest and asset depreciation and taking subsidy contributions into account, the total income from farming in England was £3.6bn, with the South West contributing the most (19%) and the North East the least (4%)."

A lack of a clear approach to food production within North Somerset is a major concern for the future of rural farming communities, such as Bleadon, especially as not all farmers are land owners. It is also unclear as to which NSC policy, strategy, plan takes priority over another, especially with regards to food production. For example, the main document relating to land use appears to be NSC's current [Local Plan 2039](#) consultation. Page 203, DP53 references Best & Most Versatile Land, and 'local food production' but not farming. It recognises "The proportion of Grade 1 land in North Somerset is approximately 7%, and 10% for Grade 2. 60% falls in Grade 3.", this current [77% agricultural classification](#) doesn't appear to relate to any NSC documented current or future food production use or any food security strategy. The Local Plan 2039 consultation states, "Grades 1, 2 and 3a will be protected from significant, inappropriate and unsustainable

proposals”, but these still have exceptions allowing building on it. Of the 60% Grade 3, “Where the land classification is uncertain or classified as grade 3 without further subdivision, a full survey will be required to establish its quality.”. It appears that if the fine line between Grade [3a and 3b](#) is proven to be 3b, the agricultural land can be built on. E.g. Langford [mega-solar developments built on Grade 3b and 4 land](#) NB: South Gloucestershire is being called ‘[solarshire](#)’ due to its potential 1 million solar panels corridor.

Local Plan 2039 page 98, “North Somerset Wind Energy and [Solar PV Supplementary Planning Documents](#) will be updated to highlight potential locations identified as most technically suitable areas for renewable energy scheme from the Renewable Energy Resource Assessment Study (2021).” How can the public comment on the Local Plan 2039 solar and wind proposals without these updated documents being published? How can the public view and comment on its effect on farming, food production and security, if the related solar and mapping has been removed from the [Local Plan 2039 online mapping](#)? (This was openly and transparently published via the [Local Plan 2038 mapping](#)). Where are these proposed locations? Has NSC considered the effect on farming, food production and security if all these identified solar, wind, housing, etc. areas (Grades 1-3a and 3b-5) are built on as potentially proposed?

Over the years we have raised food security concerns with a number of officers and councillors. They have been helpful and understanding, yet farming, food production and food security is still not clearly addressed within or across NSC's current or proposed policies, strategies, plans, etc. The following will try to explain food concerns, in relation to some of the papers discussed at the meeting above. We appreciate that the individual officers that produced the information are expected to be following the ambitions and goals as set out by North Somerset Council and its councillors, e.g. via its Corporate Plan. These comments are therefore a reflection of NSC's apparent lack of clear reference to food production and the rural farming perspective, not about the officers document production. Reference should also be made to our [Draft Rural Strategy Considerations](#) and Bleadon Parish Council Biodiversity comments.

We believe that issues of farming, food production and food security can, and should, be applied to all of NSC documents, plans, strategies, etc., to help support and secure the future of farming and related rural communities within North Somerset, including Bleadon.

[Strategic Asset Management Plan updates, including Development Programme](#)

Discussed at the 30 November meeting

This document opens with a summary, “The report includes an update on the council's Development Programme for the delivery of homes and jobs on land that it owns.” (Section 1.2) How are farming 'jobs', on both public and private land, addressed across North Somerset? (both directly via asset management and indirectly via NSC policies) How are the range of jobs in related industries identified and supported, including machinery maintenance/operation, food production/packaging/retail, next generation education/skills/experience of land management regarding farming/crop and animal rotation/pest control?

(Section 3.1) “The overall aim of the Strategic Asset Management Plan (SAMP) is set out at the beginning of the document which was adopted in Feb 2021: “North Somerset Council holds property to sustain and support its corporate objectives as set out in the Corporate Plan, and other strategies. The aim of the Strategic Asset Management Plan (SAMP) is to set out the Council's vision, aspirations and objectives for its land and property assets portfolio, and to outline a 10-year plan for how it intends to achieve these outcomes.” As far as I'm aware NSC's proposed Corporate Plan has no clear 'corporate objectives' or ambitions with regards to 'sustain and support' farming, food production or food security. Neither it seems, does NSC's proposed Local Plan 2039 or Biodiversity SPD (or unpublished Rural Strategy). The majority of references to food appear in NSC's Green Infrastructure Strategy, but any intentions in this strategy may not be achieved if there is no clear reference to food in the other documents, nor any public or private land to grow food on. How is farming, food production and security addressed for NSC land assets, e.g. via the SAMP? What is NSC's 'vision, aspirations and objectives' for its land in relation to food?

NSC appears to be prioritising housing, nature recovery, BNG, animal/insect habitats, nature parks, solar, etc. above food production and security. “At this stage the SAMP assessment process is primarily focusing on buildings, however connected workstreams looking at land-based assets are also progressing through the Development Programme and through work to identifying sites for renewables and biodiversity: these will be reported separately.” (Section 3.9) Is NSC 'identifying sites' to support the current and any future increased levels of farming, food production and security within North Somerset?

“Property and Projects Officers have carried out a short review and refresh of the initial classifications in a two-stage process: Stage 1: Review of SAMP core assets to identify and remove assets such as farmland, carparks, playing fields etc. where there are no built assets that require maintenance (these will be looked at

separately/later)." (Section 3.11) With regards to 'identifying and removing' NSC assets, including any related land or barns, do any of the 20 questions (SAMP matrix?) mentioned at the meeting refer to protecting farming, food production or security?

"The progress above demonstrates that the council through control of the delivery of development on its own land can deliver high quality homes with positive outcomes for its residents and communities. In addition, the sites between them will generate a total approaching £15m in capital receipts to the delivery of other capital projects, as well contributing to infrastructure and services through S106 and the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL)." (Section 3.38) In September newspapers stated that NSC would have a [£50million budget gap](#) in the next four years, in [November this it was stated to be £13m](#), how much of this reduction was due to NSC land sales? Is NSC consciously selling off its farmland, as it has dropped 50% from [333ha in 2007](#) to [166ha in 2023](#)?

"This process compliments the Council's commitment to adopt a Corporate Landlord Operating Model, which will seek to ensure that all assets are properly overseen and managed at the corporate level." (Section 3.8) However, it is not clear how this relates to food production and security as a whole. There were several references to large-scale development on NSC land:

3.37 "Development activity is not solely focused on housing. As reported to the Executive earlier in 2023, Heads of Terms have been signed with a significant manufacturing company seeking to build new premises on council-owned land at Weston Business Quarter, creating around 300 jobs. Weston Town Centre and Castlewood sites are expected to include elements of commercial and community provision."

3.44 "Work will continue on other development sites owned by NSC, including Parklands phase 2, with the intention of creating an ongoing pipeline of delivery, but also taking into account the results of public consultation on the programme held in 2022. This includes considering the priorities and mix of housing and employment for such sites, including whether there are options to provide specialist or supported affordable housing to meet pressures reported through Adult and Childrens' Services. The paper to Council in January is expected to make recommendations as to which sites and types of provision will be prioritised."

"In February 2021, the Council adopted a Development Strategy for the delivery of homes and employment on land in its ownership. This included the following four objectives: To provide homes and jobs that meet the needs of our communities – current and future – while helping deliver government targets for housing supply." (Section 3.35) Is farming identified as 'jobs' that meet the needs of our rural and urban communities'? How do NSC policies and asset management support these farming jobs, both in public and private ownership?

Is NSC consciously supporting the reduction and potential cessation of farming in North Somerset, either directly through its own land sales, or indirectly via its policies supporting and encouraging land owners to sell or tie up their land for 30 years, e.g. BNG, solar, nature recovery, housing, etc. What will happen to the future of rural communities without farming? How will future generation get into farming without NSC rented start-up land and across the board policy support?

[Green Infrastructure Strategy Update](#)

Discussed at the 30 November meeting

Biodiversity and Habitats "Prepare a strategic plan for improving biodiversity in the North Somerset Nature Park and Develop improved habitats for greater horseshoe bats. We have commissioned the University of the West of England Bat Lab to identify the best locations for these Nature Parks to best support the protection and enhancement of land for the benefit of bats." How is public and private land relating to farming, food production and security being 'protected and enhanced' for the 'benefit' of people?

"We are in the process of updating the North Somerset and Mendip Bats SAC Guidance on Development: Supplementary Planning Document to take account of the new North-Somerset-wide habitat and connectivity modelling and made reference to the areas of specific importance for these sites within the Local Plan." The current Local Plan consultation appears to be blanket covering the majority of land across North Somerset with solar, wind and development proposals, how are the farming 'areas of specific importance', essential to the future health and well-being of residents, being addressed in the proposed Local Plan 2039? Nature recovery, BNG and solar projects appear to be based on modelling, has any 20-30 year actual data been gathered proving these types of initiatives work in the long term (not just a few years)?

"We are also embarking on our first land purchase to create the first Nature Park and discussing the inclusion of Nature Parks within strategic developments where habitat and connectivity for greater horseshoe

bats have the potential to be improved." Does NSC also intend to 'purchase' land to ensure and protect current and future farming, food production and security, or to 'create' new farming opportunities for current and future farming rural communities?

"Delivering Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG)" This initiative has the potential to lead to the destruction of farming in North Somerset, and nationally, if farming, food production and food security is not urgently recognised and protected. It has the potential to remove agricultural land to instead implement nature recovery, BNG, solar, projects for 30+ years, if not permanently. It also has the potential to destroy the land via chemical invasive species/pest maintenance, or lack of field rotation or soil erosion, making it very difficult if not impossible to reverse.

"We have drafted and are consulting on a new supplementary planning document (SPD) on Biodiversity which includes the new mandatory BNG requirements. We have assessed NSC-owned land for the potential to create BNG units. We have engaged legal support on the creation of mechanisms (section 106 agreements) through which to secure BNG with developers and also to pursue the ambition of creating a Habitat Banking Vehicle through which NSC could sell the BNG units generated on its own land. We will recruit an additional Ecology Officer to manage the increased workload of assessing the BNG Plans submitted through the planning process once the legislation becomes mandatory (January 2024)" The Biodiversity SPD applies to public and private land, how is the existing farmed land within North Somerset, being protected? What is NSC's farming 'ambition'? What is the full 'potential' of NSC-owned land for the support and 'creation' of farming? What is NSC's plan for food seed 'banking', to preserve and protect local food variations, e.g. apples? What are the NSC 'mechanisms' to secure farming, especially if the land designations in the Local Plan 2039 do not fully recognise farming and allow Grades 1-3b to be potentially be built on?

"Iconic trees; protecting our levels and moors trees. An initial piece of work has been completed identifying these trees and using s106 funds we are hoping to progress this with the Forest of Avon Trust to contact the landowners with advice on grants amongst other things." How is NSC working with landowners to identify, protect and fund essential current and future farmland for food production, e.g. via S106 funds, grants, etc.?

[Green Infrastructure Strategy Action Plan](#)

Discussed at the 30 November meeting

"GI Strategy themes, Access Networks, Biodiversity & Habitats, Development Integration, Greenspace Stewardship, Trees & Woodland, Flood Risk & Water Quality (to be covered at a future Panel), The action plan contains 54 separate actions" Farming, food production and food security is not clearly specified as one of the GI Strategy Themes? Is food clearly addressed in any of the 54 separate actions? Is maintenance of rhynes an action to prevent flooding downstream? Do NSC have any potential wetlands projects that may affect farmland, flooding, etc.?

"Development & Integration, Mainstreaming green infrastructure, Creating North Somerset Nature Parks for strategic bat mitigation, The green infrastructure objectives and North Somerset Nature Park principles have been included in the Local Plan 2039, Inclusion of Building with Nature Standards within the Local Plan. These are encouraged through the draft Biodiversity Supplementary Planning Document." Nature parks and standards are clearly being identified and addressed, are essential food related actions, and the need for land, being addressed and fully supported in and across all of BPC's related policies, plans, strategies, etc.?

NSC "Rewilding champions lottery project. This £100,000 grant funded project with Avon Wildlife Trust, delivered between July 2021 and November 2022, saw residents volunteering to measure biodiversity to determine the success of the council's rewilding efforts. The project delivered 30 public engagement sessions, attended by 372 people and 70 survey sessions, attended by 139 volunteers totalling around 300 volunteering hours. 10 Rewilding Champions were recruited and are leading volunteers at some of our rewilding sites." A lot of money appears to be directed towards nature, rewilding, green initiatives, etc., how much money is directed towards measuring food production and security? How much money has been directed towards agricultural education and public engagement, and its essential food output?

"Greenspace Stewardship. Green Social Prescribing project. A UKSPF funded Ranger is in post seeking opportunities to bring green social prescribing providers into NSC parks and open spaces on NSC-led activities such as scrub clearance, tree planting, wildlife surveying, etc. for the benefit of wildlife and health and wellbeing." It seems ironic that NSC is putting a lot of time, money, resource and effort into being 'in' nature but very little into working with nature to produce nutritious local food production, an essential and core need to life?

Transport, Climate and Communities Policy and Scrutiny Work Programme November 2023

Discussed at the 30 November meeting

In relation to the above there are various plans for many things that use the land potentially excluding farming, food production and security. For example, Section Two "briefings, workshops, and informal panel meetings. Outcomes may, with Chairman's agreement, generate panel agenda items (for inclusion in S4 below) or, with panel agreement, be escalated to S1 above" EV Fund Commissioning Plan (potentially using solar panels on farmland for 20+ years to recharge the batteries, with unknown disposal of panels and batteries potentially affecting land extraction and land-filling somewhere); Biodiversity Net Gain (potentially tying up land for 30+ years, also potentially threatening beef & dairy production in favour of sheep that graze under solar panels). Section Three "agenda reports to the Panel meetings as agreed by the Chairman. This section provides for the forward planning of agendas and a record of panel meeting activity" - MTFP/Budget Monitoring and Panel engagement, Climate Action Plan, Green Infrastructure Strategy.

To reiterate, the above comments are used as an illustration in relation to the most recent meeting and documentation. We believe that issues of farming, food production and food security can, and should, be applied to nearly all of NSC documents, plans, strategies, etc., to help support and secure the future of farming and related rural communities within North Somerset, including Bleadon.

(bob@bleadon.org.uk 03DEC23)

"The UK's self-sufficiency is 'slipping', with many growers reporting receiving minuscule return" ...**"As NFU president Minette Batters put it in December, the very existence of British food production is now "under threat". (07MAY23)**

One farmer's view on UK custodianship farming



A short video relating UK climate, land use, grass, local and global livestock farming and the misleading use of global statistics

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M3X-_Bqs_0k

List of Links Referenced Above

Transport, Climate and Communities Policy and Scrutiny Panel 30 November 2023 - <https://n-somerset.moderngov.co.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=259&MId=1099>

Food is one the government's 13 Critical Infrastructure Sectors - <https://www.npsa.gov.uk/critical-national-infrastructure-0>

Corporate Plan & Budget consultation - <https://n-somerset.inconsult.uk/gf2.ti/-/1569250/187070085.1/PDF/-/Corporate%20Plan%202020-2024%20DRAFT.pdf>

Corporate Plan Action Plan - <https://n-somerset.inconsult.uk/gf2.ti/-/1569250/187065573.1/PDF/-/Corporate%20Plan%20Action%20Plan%202020-2024%20DRAFT.pdf>

BOB Rural Strategy comments <https://www.bleadon.org.uk/media/other/24400/DraftNSCRuralStrategyConsiderations-17NOV23.pdf>

DEFRA Smallholdings 2007 <https://whoownsengland.files.wordpress.com/2018/06/57th-report-2007.pdf>

Govt Smallholdings 2023 <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/72nd-annual-report-to-parliament-on-smallholdings-in-england-1-april-2021-to-31-march-2022/72nd-annual-report-to-parliament-on-smallholdings-in-england-1-april-2021-to-31-march-2022>

Strategic Asset Management Plan updates, including Development Programme, presented yesterday: <https://n-somerset.moderngov.co.uk/documents/s5389/6%20Strategic%20Asset%20Management%20Plan%20updates%20including%20Development%20Programme.pdf>

Green Infrastructure Strategy Update, presented yesterday: <https://n-somerset.moderngov.co.uk/documents/s5392/8a%20Green%20Infrastructure%20Strategy%20update%20-%20covering%20rpt.pdf>

Green Infrastructure Strategy Action Plan – progress update, presented yesterday: <https://n-somerset.moderngov.co.uk/documents/s5394/8c%20Presentation%20-%20Green%20Infrastructure%20Strategy%20update.pdf>

Transport, Climate and Communities Policy and Scrutiny Work Programme November 2023 <https://n-somerset.moderngov.co.uk/documents/s5396/10%20Work%20Plan%20November%202023.pdf>

Honeyhall mega-solar farm <https://www.baywa-re.co.uk/en/solar/yanel-solar-farm#about-the-project>

Land classifications <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/agricultural-land-assess-proposals-for-development/guide-to-assessing-development-proposals-on-agricultural-land#about-alc-grades>

Solarshire article <https://www.visit-gloucestershire.co.uk/county-at-risk-of-becoming-solarshire-due-to-number-of-photovoltaic-panels-planned/>

NSC £50million deficit <https://www.northsomersettimes.co.uk/news/23777894.north-somerset-council-faces-17-million-budget-shortfall/>

NSC £13million deficit <https://planetradio.co.uk/hits-radio/bristol/news/north-somerset-council-faces-challenging-financial-outlook/>

UK Food Security Report 2021: Theme 2: UK Food Supply Sources <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/united-kingdom-food-security-report-2021/united-kingdom-food-security-report-2021-theme-2-uk-food-supply-sources>

DEFRA Agriculture in the UK Evidence Pack 2021 https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1106562/AUK_Evidence_Pack_2021_Sept22.pdf

Local Plan Consultation https://n-somerset.inconsult.uk/gf2.ti/-/1527106/187311205.1/PDF/-/Local%20Plan%202039%20Pre-submission%20Plan%20_Reg%202019_%20FINAL%20ACCESSIBLE%20VERSION.pdf

NHS loss of appetite <https://www.wvl.nhs.uk/media/leaflets/5ff33ba1541a06.05494083.pdf>

NHS elderly and end of life nutrition <https://www.nhshighland.scot.nhs.uk/media/ykblqsql/food-fortification-guide.pdf>

British farming's existential crisis <https://www.thegrocer.co.uk/sourcing/is-british-farming-facing-an-existential-crisis/678965.article>

One farmer's view on UK custodianship farming https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M3X-_Bqs_0k