

This evening you are discussing the management of BNG and Nature Park sites in perpetuity for the benefit of horseshoe bats. As you are aware, nearly half of all farmers depend on tenancies; they don't own the farmed land, and are therefore dependent on you, and your land use designations, to be able to operate and produce food. In contrast to bats, I've heard no proposals to protect food production in perpetuity, despite this being in your powers to do so (for example, via protected tenanted smallholdings). Why is that? Bats and food production goals are not mutually exclusive.

As you're aware last November government debated land use and food security. The Minister for Food Security and Rural Affairs stated, "*It is not up to me to take decisions about local planning issues* [... such as competing housing land use allocation]. *That is what Local Plans are for*". Ministers agreed something needed to be done. The DEFRA minister stated, "*We are quite simply in a food and farming emergency*". However, it should be noted that this month DEFRA is said to spend £650K for its own staff to learn about farming – perhaps an indication as to why national food security is in crisis, and underlining why agricultural land use protection, at a local level by you, is so crucial – but still I've seen no council debates or policies on local food security, or improved agricultural land protection. Why is that?

You have a key role in ensuring the future of local farming. Government expects you to protect food production via land use designations; the NPPF gives you the tools to do so (Draft [2025](#)), but your current plan doesn't do that. Why not?

Your proposed Local Plan has the disastrous potential to permit building on every available piece of agricultural land, with no real limiting factors. This is especially concerning as unsupported farmers are being forced to diversify, sell or close due to economic pressures. Farmland is increasingly being bought by corporations as pension and development assets - rather than by individual, family based, small businesses for ongoing essential food production.

Is the destruction of farming and food security your intention? If not, then I urge each of you to review the Local Plan, before it goes to the Planning Inspectorate next month. I suggest you start by reviewing the two-page DP53 policy. Compare it with DP52 and see how little food production is thought of, even in comparison to recreational use. Google 'UK food crisis' and consider how the proposed lack of protection will contribute to that immediate problem. Please consider the potential your proposed plan has to destroy farming, self sufficiency and security - locally, regionally and nationally – and amend it accordingly.

Do not rush to lose agriculture land. Government will only intervene when you go beyond the current emergency and reach food failure status, by which point it will be too late to reverse the damage done by the local plan. If building additional housing, permitting solar farms, BNG or other developments will create a reduction in food production and security, then don't do it. Do not put our future at risk so carelessly, please fight to protect it.

The NPPF does recognise food production as a land use - protect the land and food security via the Local Plan, put it forward to the Planning Inspectorate. Let them clearly state where the priority comes in relation to other land use designations. It's you that sets the local land use. If agricultural land is not protected now, it will be gone forever, putting the public's health and wellbeing increasingly at risk.

As you know, food security is one of the 13 Critical National Infrastructure sectors, housing is not. Last September CPRE stated that over half of the 1.4 million brownfield sites could be built on rapidly, there is no need to use farmland. Why not state that you're unable to build 8K extra houses on top of North Somerset's own housing need, as you're protecting essential food production? How much agricultural land are you prepared to risk losing, like Bristol? Where are you expecting the food to come from, and at what cost and risk to quality, price and availability?

It has been asked many times - how much agricultural land was lost under the last Local Plan, and how much will be lost under the lifetime of the proposed one - but it seems that this hasn't been quantified by the council. How can a new local plan be submitted without knowing this key information? Where is the due diligence with regards food security?

For years, residents have approached councillors and officers, raising key food security issues - but requests for support, debate and transparency have been denied or ignored. I see from today's report that, when discussing land use or its disposal, you still choose to ignore farming and food security implications, why is that?

If you redesignate farmland as non-agriculture it will be developed. If you tie land up in in legal agreements for 20, 30 or 80 years, where will food be grown, especially if neighbouring authorities have the same approach to land use? How and what are you expecting people to eat? Residents believe that it's your duty to ensure land is protected and available for food production for generations to come. Over 6K farms were lost in 2024/25, with many farmer suicides. How are you going to ensure that farming skills are also not lost?

In summary, and reiterating previous requests - before you approve the Local Plan to be submitted to the Planning Inspectorate next month, please ensure that it protects farming, food security and food production land as a top priority; call a farming and food security emergency to reflect DEFRA's stated emergency; and add farming, food production and security implications to all reports.

Thank you.

(Video at 35 mins <https://youtu.be/Cr7MOAimtBM?t=2113>)