

FAO: Cllr. Tim Ball, Cabinet member for Homes and Planning, and
Cllr. Cherry Beath, Cabinet member for Sustainable Development, B&NES

30th January 2013

Dear Councillors Tim Ball and Cherry Beath

Food Security & Who feeds B&NES?

The purpose of this email/letter is to (a) ask what plans B&NES Council has to create a strategy or plan for a resilient food supply for B&NES and (b) to illustrate the need to protect agricultural land that is so important for our future food security against unsustainable development demands being placed on it.

My colleagues and I on Saltford Environment Group are aware of the pressure on B&NES Council from central Government to accept additional housing numbers within its Core Strategy that, if accepted, will undoubtedly lead to development on Green Belt agricultural land. Hence we adopted a policy earlier this month incorporating 6 core principles of why we cannot accept further development on our Green Belt (at <http://www.saltfordenvironmentgroup.org.uk/greenbelt.html#6coreprinciples>), the sixth principle being:

“Central and Local Government have a duty of care to take a more long term and strategic approach by first identifying the future 'carrying capacity' of the UK and local regions. This must be done against a background of world population growth that is creating an ever growing demand for food whilst the increasing episodes of extreme weather in the UK and worldwide due to climate change will reduce the UK's ability to feed itself or rely on imported food.”

This requirement on B&NES to permit additional housing on the Green Belt is being made regardless of the carrying capacity of B&NES or the UK with successive Governments having failed to implement a long term strategy to address an unmanaged rising population (the UK's population density is one of the world's highest at 674 persons per square mile) and extreme weather from climate change causing an uncertain future alternating between wet and drought years.

Extreme weather can drastically affect food production in the UK and overseas from where 40% of our food is currently imported. In 2012 according to the NFU, the UK's wheat production was down to the levels of the early 1980s with other crops drastically reduced too as a result of one of the wettest years on record. The implications for food security and food prices leading to food poverty are all too obvious. There are now 7 million more mouths to feed in the UK since 1980 as the population has risen from 56 million to 63 million (in 2011). This relentless growth in population level with no strategy to manage it downwards further raises the importance and value of our Green Belt and agricultural land for food production so any new housing needs to be on brownfield sites and with direct access to good public transport provision thus avoiding the need to build more roads on the Green Belt.

Bristol's 2011 report “Who feeds Bristol? – Towards a resilient food plan” makes interesting reading - its summary can be downloaded from this link:

http://www.bristol.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/environment/environmental_health/Wo%20Feeds%20Bristol%20Summary.pdf

The mathematics are worth consideration when you look at how much agricultural land is required to feed B&NES. The Bristol report suggests between 0.2 – 0.5 hectares per person i.e. 0.5 – 1.2 acres. This is obviously affected by diet (omnivorous, vegetarian or vegan) and food production methods (intensive, organic, soil fertility, etc.) but it is probably safe to say, and taking account estimates from various sources (The Land Magazine , Transition Culture, Soil Association etc.), that on average around 1 acre per person is required.

B&NES has a resident population of 176,015 (2011 Census). Thus if B&NES was to feed itself it would need to have 176,000 acres of agricultural land whereas the whole size of B&NES is 220 square miles or 140,000 acres. This shortfall of 36,000 acres does not take account of land used for the built environment, leisure, transport infrastructure etc. AND the fact that Bristol's own food footprint includes all of the West of England including B&NES and extends into Wales.

Food security is going to become an increasing issue for the UK as 2012 has highlighted. It is reasonable to accept that the UK will always have to import some food but extreme weather due to climate change makes imports less reliable or affordable. I would urge B&NES to look at this as a matter of priority; firstly because this is important in its own right, and secondly to help defend itself against unreasonable demands from central Government that it allows Green Belt agricultural land to be built upon. The lack of long term vision and strategy from successive Governments has created the problem we now face but if we implement solutions that will worsen the situation we're storing up huge problems for ourselves and successive generations.

I should be grateful if you could advise me:

- (i) What plans B&NES Council has for producing a resilient food plan; and
- (ii) That B&NES Council will resist any attempts by central Government to impose housing numbers in the B&NES Core Strategy that would require development on Green Belt land that could be used for food production purposes (and wildlife habitat that in itself supports food production) should the future need arise.

Yours sincerely

PHIL HARDING

(Committee Member & Website Managing Editor)

SALTFORD ENVIRONMENT GROUP

towards a sustainable future for our village

www.saltfordenvironmentgroup.org.uk