

To: Council

Date: 3 October 2022

Report of: Head of Law and Governance

Title of Report: Public addresses and questions that do not relate to matters for decision – as submitted by the speakers and with written responses from Cabinet Members

Introduction

1. Addresses made by members of the public to the Council, and questions put to the Cabinet members or Leader, registered by the deadline in the Constitution, are below. Any written responses available are also below.
2. The text reproduces that sent in the speakers and represents the views of the speakers. This is not to be taken as statements by or on behalf of the Council
3. This report will be republished after the Council meeting as part of the minutes pack. This will list the full text of speeches delivered as submitted, summaries of speeches delivered which differ significantly from those submitted, and any further responses.

Addresses and questions to be taken in Part 2 of the agenda.

1. Address by Ian Middleton: Plant-based Food and Sustainable Farming motion

Addresses and questions to be taken in Part 2 of the agenda

1. Address by Ian Middleton: Plant-based Food and Sustainable Farming motion

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak on Cllr Dunne's motion.

The motion references the County Council's adoption of a similar policy and as the proposer of the motion that led to that, I've since been contacted by other local authorities and organisations asking for help and advice on how to do the same. So I hope it may be useful for me to offer some insights here.

Avoiding meat and dairy is the single biggest way to reduce your personal environmental impact and could cut individual carbon output by as much as 50%. That was the conclusion of a comprehensive analysis of the global impact of farming

recently published in the journal 'Science', which assessed the full effects of meat and dairy production on land use, climate change emissions and water and air pollution.

According to the United Nations Environment Programme, meat production alone accounts for 18-25 per cent of the world's Greenhouse Gas emissions. If left unchecked, animal agriculture is predicted to account for 70 per cent of all global emissions by 2050.

Analysis shows that while meat and dairy provide just 18% of calories and 37% of protein, it uses 83% of farmland and produces 60% of agriculture's greenhouse gas emissions. Even the very lowest impact meat and dairy products still cause much more environmental harm than the least sustainable vegetable and cereal alternatives.

There have been claims from some quarters that the county council policy is anti-farming, but that's very far from the truth with both my motion and Cllr Dunne's including specific references to supporting local farmers and food producers.

But the vast majority of the meat and dairy consumed in the UK is not locally produced. Instead it comes from intensive factory farms, both in terms of the livestock itself and the growing of feedstock, often in areas that have been cleared in some of the most environmentally sensitive areas on the planet. Cheap imported meat and dairy products from countries with far worse human and animal welfare standards than the UK also make up a considerable proportion of our daily consumption.

Whilst intensive farming can have damaging environmental consequences, supporting smaller local farms can be comparatively beneficial. Not only do they grow our food, but they have an important role in maintaining the habitat and rural landscape we all love.

I have no doubt that small scale local farmers will continue produce meat and dairy for the foreseeable future. But to make that a commercial proposition, consumers have to be prepared to pay a fair price for their products. By reducing our daily consumption of cheap, intensively farmed foods and eating less but better quality, locally produced alternatives, we can support local farmers and ensure they can continue to make a living.

A plant-based diet is also cheaper than one that has meat in every meal, something that is now hugely important for everyone, and growing fruit and vegetables is by far the most efficient use of farmland. Local market gardens are now one of the fastest growing and most profitable forms of agriculture and in Oxfordshire we're already ahead the curve with roughly twice as much farmland devoted to arable compared to livestock.

There have also been concerns raised that adopting a plant-based only policy is an attack on freedom of choice. But again this is a mischaracterisation.

Neither my motion nor Cllr Dunne's looks to restrict what people eat in their daily lives, that will always remain their personal choice. Equally it's every councillor's choice to eat what they want. The only difference is that the council will not be actively supporting a non-plant-based offer in what it provides.

Instead they will be setting an example by showing that even a small reduction in the consumption of meat and dairy can have a big impact on climate change and health without sacrificing our enjoyment of food.

Most of us will eat roughly 21 main meals a week. If every member of this council removed meat and dairy from just one of those meals that would be the equivalent of 16 people going fully plant-based.

Some may find they prefer to do more than that or already have. But the aim is not to force people to make drastic changes to their diet. The point is that in demonstrating and highlighting alternative dietary options that are already widely available, we start a conversation with our residents and help promote a positive behavioural shift that will have significant impacts on both health and climate change, not to mention animal welfare.

So I hope you'll agree that such a lot of benefit for such a small change has to be worth doing and will support Cllr Dunne's motion and adopt its recommendations along with other authorities who have already enacted similar policies or are likely to do so in the near future.

The Cabinet Member Councillor Thomas will provide a verbal response at the meeting

This page is intentionally left blank