

Hi Mark,

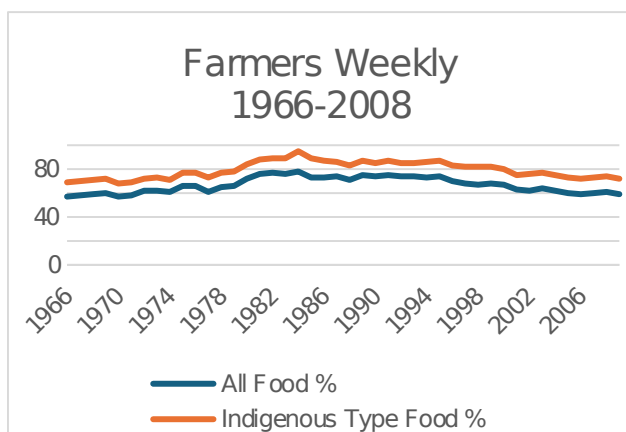
It was good to see you at the Regulation 19 - Additional Sites Consultation at the library last week to air various planning related issues. From what we discussed I think we are actually of the same or similar opinion on many points and certainly share some of the same frustrations. We touched on farming and specifically food security. As acknowledged this is of particular relevance in the current climate as government and councils tackle the balancing of land use for homes, energy and indigenous food production.

Despite NSC being aware of the government [UKFSR 2024](#) findings we continue to be concerned that NSC has not declared a **NSC Local Food Security Emergency nor created a Food Security Plan**, to protect local farmland for local indigenous food production and security. For example, some extracts from the [UK Food Security Report 2024](#) that I believe can be directly and indirectly addressed via NSC's Corporate Plan, Local Plan and related policies.

- **Theme 1: Global Food Availability** - *“The number of undernourished people around the world is increasing. Climate change, nature loss and water insecurity pose significant risks to the ability of global food production to meet demand over the longer term.”* Including the UK.
- **Theme 2: UK Food Supply Sources** - *“The production-to-supply ratio was at 62% for all food and 75% for indigenous foods (meaning those that can be grown in the UK) in 2023, showing a small increase from 61% and 74% in 2021. This is a continuation of the **broadly stable trend** seen in recent years. Extreme weather events continue to have a significant effect on domestic production, particularly arable crops, fruit and vegetables. The UK continues to be **highly dependent on imports** to meet consumer demand for fruit, vegetables and seafood. Many of the countries the UK imports these foods from are subject to their own climate-related challenges and sustainability risks.”*
- **Theme 3: Food Supply Chain Resilience** – various points relating to global supply chain security as Europe and other countries begin to focus on their own food supply and security issues and export less. E.g. *“Following the Russian invasion of Ukraine, total UK imports of sunflower oil fell to 224,000 in 2023, a 25.3% decrease, creating temporary shortfalls for key processors while driving substitution of other oils, such as rapeseed”,* that can be grown in the UK.
- **Theme 4: Household Food Security** – *“While a large majority of households in the UK continue to be food secure, there has been a **notable decrease in food secure households**. Most people do not meet government dietary recommendations, with those from lower-income groups less likely to meet recommendations than those from the highest-income groups.”*

One of the challenges appears to be from confusion regarding the jurisdiction of food security. It is one of the 13 national infrastructure sectors to which central government must adhere but will always remain a concern for people at a local level. It is interesting to note that housing is not one of the 13.

It is recognised that food supply needs to move from ‘Just in Time’ back towards ‘Just in Case’. According to DEFRA's figures in [1984 the UK was 95% self-sufficient in indigenous food types](#), compared to the current 75% ‘broadly stable trend’, i.e. the UK is **NOT food secure** and highly dependent on foreign imports. With the current rate of housing and energy developments on agriculture land, and related forecasted population growth, this level of food production, food security and self-sufficiency is at risk and will be dropping fast locally and nationally. As you're aware 60% of North Somerset land is grade 3 agriculture, which appears to be under particular threat from all types of development including, solar and housing, along with the associated farming skill losses at all levels, how is NSC protecting land for food production?



I believe NSC's Lucy Shomali's minuted response to my Food Security Emergency question, as quoted from the [UKFSI 2024](#) summary stating a 'broadly stable picture', is misleading. On reading the full information 'stable' doesn't mean secure, and 'picture' doesn't highlight the actual falling trend since the 1980s, e.g. 95% in 1984 to 75% in 2024 and highly dependent on imports.

The government's Food Security Seventh Report of Session 2022–23 [Footnote 11](#) "*Defra is the lead Government department on food supply..., although the UKFSR states that "the role of government is an indirect one; to plan for and coordinate responses and **intervene only where necessary to ensure the continuity of supply**" given that the "underlying infrastructure of the supply chain is owned and operated by private industry."*" The National Planning Policy **Framework** suggests the minimum protection that NSC can give to grades 1-3a&b agriculture land for food security purposes. [Para 187b](#) states "*Planning policies and decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by ... recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside, and the wider benefits from natural capital and ecosystem services – including the economic and other benefits of the best and most versatile agricultural land...*" non-fruit trees and woodland do not increase food production or security. [UKFSI 2024](#) "*In 2023, 69.7% of the UK's land (17 million hectares) was used for agricultural production, a **2.3% decrease in UAA [Utilised Agricultural Area] from 2022. This is a broadly stable [downward] trend consistent with previous years.**"*" A trend that will worsen with non-food land developments and diversifications such as housing, solar, BNG, etc.

If NSC do not plan for food security now, it is possible that in the future that in the government will intervene, stating that NSC did not protect residents local food security and then take over local decision-making (unacceptable), i.e. a similar unacceptable situation that councillors have described for the current 60% increase in housing quota.

Prof. Tim Lang's robust report published last month, [Just in Case: 7 steps to narrow the UK civil food resilience gap](#), describes seven key steps to ensuring civil food resilience, four of which are at the local government (NSC) level:

1. Learn from others
2. **Assess the public's mood, perceptions and engagement**
3. **Map the community's food assets**
4. **Local authorities are key to building civil food resilience**
5. **Create local Food Resilience Committees to co-ordinate resilience preparation**
6. The UK central state must create and maintain a coherent food policy
7. Re-set the Government Resilience Framework for food

I think this approach could well be a game changer for policy makers moving forward. I would encourage you to share it during this critical phase of planning that will set the structure for the next generations, especially via the Local Plan and DP53.

Since Jan 2020 the [ONS CPI Index](#) has risen from 108.2 to 135.4 in Jan 2025, a 27% increase in 5 years. When does a food crisis become a food emergency? If food is unaffordable and/or unavailable there is no food security. Who will be held liable and potentially blamed if/when food shortages become problematic, especially if the Local Plan has permitted the loss of needed agriculture land for food production?

If you feel that central government is driving a coach and horses through local decision making and engagement on planning, like I do, has NSC officially written to central government explaining food security concerns, challenged them on their development logic and received a direct order to use agriculture land and reduce food security? If so, please can you tell me under what legal jurisdiction/legislation and send me the related correspondence.

I believe NSC has a great opportunity to create a Local Plan that protects farmland to benefit local food production, food security, economies, communities and our countryside for generations.

I would appreciate a meeting with you as soon as possible, to discuss this complex issue and report, and to support you in any way possible.

Kind Regards,

Martin Slade BSc.(Hons)