

### **Cabinet 14.11.12: Green Infrastructure Strategy**

My name is Virginia Williamson, and I'm convenor of Transition Bath's food group. I've been following the development of the Green Infrastructure Strategy since I was asked to contribute a paper on local food for the first draft in October 2010. Our report identified firstly what research and policy work B&NES had already done to encourage local food production and supply, and secondly what current local planning policy was with regard to local food production and retail. These were followed by recommendations. In 2007, B&NES commissioned research from Sustain, a national organisation, which provided a detailed analysis of the existing local food supply chain, and farmers' perceptions of the barriers to, and potential for, improved local supply. Unfortunately, nothing was done with this research but it retains value as a baseline for future research. Meanwhile, about 20 cities are pursuing the sustainable food city approach – Bristol was one of the first. Last year, an intern from the University of the West of England did research for a report to the Environment and Sustainability Panel. One of her interviewees from Bristol Council said how envious they were of B&NES because of the amount of agricultural land within its boundaries.

Although DEFRA and Natural England include agriculture within their definition of Green Infrastructure, B&NES – unlike a number of other authorities, some mainly urban – has ignored the role of agricultural land within its discussion of green infrastructure, other than to say that farmland is a source of biodiversity. The rural areas of B&NES are presented as space for recreation rather than a working landscape. Instead, the Green Infrastructure Strategy describes local food solely in terms of allotments and community gardens. A very small number of households are lucky enough to have an allotment, but agriculture must necessarily provide the rest. I see that the National Farmers Union has been added to the list of consultees since discussion at the workshop in April, and a few icons for 'food suppliers' (? I'm not sure what that means), have been added to the local food map. I'm glad to see that a statement about allotments providing 'food security' – a cynical misuse of the term – has been removed from this version. Discussion of food security is linked to climate change, and increases in food prices and agricultural land values (which have doubled in the past five years) indicate the impact of climate change on local as well as global food production.

If agriculture is going to be left out of the GI Strategy, where will it be addressed? I've been unable to find information previously available on the B&NES website, but I recall the first draft of the Core Strategy contained a pie-chart of local economic sectors - agriculture was not included. Similarly, a table showing employment within different sectors had a footnote saying that employment within the agricultural sector had not been quantified. Spatially, B&NES is largely a rural district. Who is responsible for agricultural issues within the Council? Is work on agriculture's role in local food production going on behind the scenes?

As far as I know – not. Although the Environment & Sustainability Panel apparently approved a concept paper on local food, it is not clear to us how this is being progressed. Is it because there is little interest from politicians? Aren't councillors from rural parishes interested in the farming economy and rural livelihoods? Aren't those of you who are convinced of the existence of climate change concerned that we are better informed and better prepared to ensure sustainability of local food production? The GI Strategy is wrong to state that local food production can be encapsulated as the provision of allotments and community growing spaces. Agriculture shouldn't be ignored. Please let us know how agriculture's role in sustainable food production is going to be addressed.