

Matt Cooper statement – 21.9.23

BaNES prides itself on being one of the more forward thinking councils in the UK, putting climate considerations at the heart of governance. However, this awareness needs to include every aspect of council activities, including the provision of food. The science is clear that meat and dairy are major contributors to the climate and ecological emergencies, and it has been said that switching to a plant-based diet is *the single most effective thing* an individual can do to reduce their impact on the planet. The amount of research on this over the years is now vast.

However, it's not always easy for individuals to change their diets when they're surrounded by menus that are heavily biased towards meat and dairy options. This Council has the opportunity – and I think, the duty – to simply prioritise plant-based food options wherever they can, treating the climate emergency with the urgency it requires.

In the news last week, more than 650 academics called on British Universities to commit to 100% plant-based catering on campuses to fight the climate emergency. Meanwhile the UK central government is facing a legal challenge regarding its failure to introduce measures to reduce meat and dairy in its food strategy. It is ignoring the insistence of its own advisors that a food system based predominantly on plant-based foods must be the goal, and should be the default option in all public sector catering.

The south west has a large farming community. Genuinely supporting farmers means looking honestly at the future and recognising where change is necessary. Simply continuing with the status quo is a betrayal.

Many other councils around the country have already passed motions which raise awareness of the benefits of eating more plant-based foods and have voted to lead by example, by ensuring that all food provided at internal events is plant-based. Even if this only applies to refreshments at a very small number of events per year, it is a small step that sends a powerful message, and helps to normalise plant-based eating.

In the midst of a climate emergency, supporting a move towards healthy plant-based diets for Bath citizens is a logical and necessary next step. Will councillors meet with me to address any concerns they may have, over cost, inclusivity, choice, and local impacts of such a direction, and hear how it could be an enormous win for health, sustainability and budget?