

Matt Cooper statement

Last year I gave a statement to council about the benefits of plant-based eating, and I am grateful to councillor Warren for meeting with me. I learned that BANES doesn't have much direct responsibility for catering, and it seemed, at the time, there was little scope or appetite within the council for progressing plant-based eating initiatives. The national Plant Based Councils campaign has had many wins, including councils at Exeter, Calderdale, Oxford, Oxfordshire and most recently Nottingham making statements or passing motions in support of plant-based eating. I am pleased to say that, along with Iris Gerosa and Anthony Simpson, who are also speaking today, a local Bath & NE Somerset group for Plant Based Councils has now been formed. See the website plantbasedcouncils.org for info.

I am here, again, because we are still in a climate emergency, it has not gone away. Globally, last month was the hottest August on record, making it the 15th consecutive month of record-high global temperatures. Last year was the hottest year for the planet on record, with this year on track to beat it. In the UK, the extremely high rainfall between last October and this March that caused such havoc for farmers, significantly reducing crop yields, was found by scientists to be made 10 times more likely and 20% wetter due to climate breakdown. Last week, storm Boris caused extensive flooding across central Europe, tragically killing 8 people and forcing the evacuation of thousands from their homes. In fact, so many measurable indicators of Earth systems are off the charts, and so numerous are the global impacts of climate breakdown, that I could be here for hours listing them. The word emergency doesn't even get close.

So we urgently need to get to net zero, but we simply cannot do that without addressing our food systems - they are responsible for a quarter of all greenhouse gas emissions. Considering European emissions for the food sector, 83% are due to animal agriculture. Plant-based eating is the elephant in the room. If you are serious about meeting your net zero commitment, and I quote - "to provide the leadership to enable the Bath and North East Somerset area to become carbon neutral by 2030 as well as doing the same for our own operations" - then you must get serious about reducing emissions from our food systems. And to do this, there has

to be a shift away from diets with high meat and dairy consumption, to diets that are predominantly plant-based.

Showing the leadership you lay claim to is really what I'm asking for, to lead by example. Despite having little direct authority over catering decisions, you could make the bold move to issue a statement in support of plant-based eating within council settings; this would demonstrate real leadership. The normalisation of plant-based menus and eating in wider society requires such acts of leadership by our institutions.

I'll conclude with one of the asks of the Plant Based Councils campaign: will you commit to ensuring that food and drink provided at all internal meetings and events is 100% plant-based, and prioritise seasonal British produce to support local farmers?

Thank you.