

Presentation

Havant Borough Council Climate and Environment strategy open (virtual) meeting - Tuesday 8 December 2020

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I would like to talk about the importance of food and food production in tackling the existential threat of climate breakdown and environmental degradation.

The way we produce, transport and process food, and what we decide to put on our plates, all matter when we consider the crises facing us. Food systems contribute hugely to greenhouse gas emissions: 21% to 37% of global greenhouse gases come from food systems, and they are significant contributors to deforestation, biodiversity loss and declining water tables. Globally, business as usual in food production and consumption will lead to an 87% increase in greenhouse gas emissions by 2050, compared to 2010.

There are changes to be made at international and governmental levels, but changes can and must be made at the local level, particularly in terms of food knowledge and production and the need to move to a more plant based healthier diet.

In Havant, there are serious concerns about food poverty and obesity. There are complex reasons behind these problems but one strand of dealing with it is knowledge about food, where it comes from and how it is grown. Learning how to grow food encourages people to be active, to eat a diet richer in vegetables and fruit, to improve physical and mental health, as well as the health of the planet.

Havant Borough Council has a role to play in supporting, facilitating and educating the local community about food. For example, it has a resource of 12 allotment sites. with a total of 770 plots. As an allotment holder, I have seen at first hand some excellent food production but also a proportion of plots which have clearly been untended for some time, land which is wasted for food production. And I've also seen people take on a plot only to give up because they didn't know what to do and it all felt too challenging.

For allotment holders:

There is a need for a network to share information as well as guidance.

There is an opportunity to distribute gluts of produce to community food programmes, helping to alleviate food poverty and food waste.

There is an opportunity to engage with schools teaching about food. One of the key ways to address obesity is by engaging children in growing some of the food they eat.

Similarly, community gardens offer many benefits, introducing people to gardening and to learning about the importance of the natural environment for food production. In the Borough, open spaces could be planted with fruit and nut trees for community use. Residents could be encouraged to grow fruit and vegetables at home. In planning decisions on new developments, it should be a requirement that there are spaces for growing food. All this food would be local and seasonal.

There is huge potential for the Council to play a pivotal role in supporting and facilitating projects such as this which would address climate breakdown and public health as well as strengthening and educating communities. It is essential that the Council's Climate Action Plan incorporates a sustainable food policy.