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mediation of space · making of place

PLANNING FOR FOOD

There is a 'broad consensus that global food markets are in transition to a period of higher prices and increased volatility' (Cabinet Office Strategy Unit January, 2008).

The global issue of food security is an important concern for our rural areas. UK farming has a vital role in feeding us, despite the clear decline in the percentage of food that we grow ourselves. The farming industry is not only central to our long-term food security, but also the sustainability of food production, food policy and consequently people's health. The industry also has a central role to play in the management of our much loved landscapes, biodiversity and is the cohesion of many rural communities. This global situation holds very real domestic concerns for the UK.

"In a rapidly evolving and uncertain world environment, changing demographics and the importance of food security raises important questions about the weight given to agricultural considerations in planning policy" (Alexander 2008 cited in Town and Country Planning Journal Feb 2008) the planners' role is critical in such discussions and the planning system – both development planning and the development management functions need to be recognised as an important tool to help improve UK food security in the longer term – giving consideration to the wider land use and spatial implications.

Future Challenges Impacting on Planning

- Increased food prices and market volatility
- UK health and diet
- Food safety
- Climate change and the impacts on production of food and adaptation - crops that can cope with hotter drier summers, cooler wetter winters, more intense rainfall events; potential loss of some productive land to coastal erosion/sea level rise, etc.
- Soil functions – the planning system can have a greater impact on soil functions, particularly through Sustainability Appraisals and Environmental Impact Assessments, which recognise the value of agricultural soils; Sustainable Urban Drainage Schemes and land management practices that help to secure soils as carbon sinks.
- Food production v the character and appearance of the countryside
- Future of the agricultural industry
- Food v fuel

The RTPI Rural Planning Network is asking its membership to get involved in a number of debates around food and the planning system such as ...

PTO ...

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Food - Our Future

Food Matters: Towards a Strategy for the 21st Century, Cabinet Office Strategy Unit, July, 2008 (page 32/para.89) states 'As one of the world's wealthiest nations, a part of the European single market and a country well integrated into global markets, the UK is well placed to access the foods it needs and weather the storms in global food markets'. Do we feel comfortable with this?

Land Use

Green Belt is an effective strategic planning tool. Agricultural land in the Green Belt is located close to markets, with lower food miles and potentially greater sustainability advantages. Is green belt land an opportunity for growing more locally sourced food in the face of upward pressures on food prices? Is there lessons to be learnt from other countries – may be the Netherlands where food is grown close to urban centres on reclaimed polders. Is greater protection of agricultural land (Defra involvement) and tougher stance on green belt policy needed to push local food supplies higher up the agenda?

Food Production

The World Bank estimates that “cereal production needs to increase by 50% and meat production by 80% between 2000 and 2030 to meet demand”(Cabinet Office Strategy Unit 2008) The UK has a role in increasing agricultural outputs to meet these targets – but how does this sit with our current environmental targets and the policies we currently have in place?

A Market Led Approach

Will a market led approach to agricultural production rather than subsidy led will be any less damaging to biodiversity, landscape, greenhouse gasses or climate change. Can we learn from other countries? Does the situation in New Zealand provide any clues?

Food V Fuel

Is the increasing demand for biofuels impacting on food insecurity by causing a change in the way agricultural land is farmed and an increase in food commodity prices?

The Role of the Planning System

What planning should be doing in the face of the current situation?

If you are not already a member of the RTPI Rural Planning Network why not join? – Visit http://www.rtpi.org.uk/rural_planning_network/ for more details or alternatively e-mail rural.planning@rtpi.org.uk

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