

Question from Dr Charlotte Houltram to the Leader of the Council

Lancaster prides itself on being one of the more forward thinking cities 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. Other councils, for example Oxfordshire, Cambridge City and Lewisham Borough, have committed to serve only plant based food at their events and I would like to see Lancaster do the same. This will help normalise plant based eating, which according to an Oxford University study is the single most effective thing an individual can do to reduce their environmental impact.

We are currently in a cost of living crisis. Meat and dairy products are almost always the most expensive part of a meal- whole food plant based meals are consistently considerably cheaper and healthier too. By doing the right thing for the planet, and promoting eating for good health, the Council can also save money; especially if the produce is sourced locally and seasonally, helping to work towards a circular economy.

We can and must move towards climate-friendly eating and I believe councils can lead the way with this. There have been substantial evidence based recommendations calling for a move away from meat and dairy including those embedded in The National Food Strategy led by Henry Dimbleby last year. I would like to see our council being part of the solution by committing to cease purchasing animal products to bring its food policy into line with its other climate awareness strategies.

"Given the Climate Emergency and Lancaster City Council's stated aim to reduce their carbon footprint, would the Council consider committing to serving only plant based fare at all its meetings and events, as several other Councils have done?"

The Leader thanked Dr Houltram for her question and replied:

"Thank you for bringing forward the issue as a contribution to our ongoing debate, which you can hear *(there were unsolicited comments from a few Councillors towards the rear of the room during the question and answer)* about the work we do for climate action under the circumstances we are in. In a week when both prime ministerial candidates have pledged to support fracking, it's clear that those who are prepared to respond to the huge challenge that climate change is bringing us, need to stick together.

So, you ask me, would the Council consider committing to serving only plant based food at all its meetings and events? I think the simple answer to that one is yes, *(further interruption from the back of the room)* because as a Council, we are not a Council that closes its mind, we are not a Council that is unwilling to discuss and think about big issues. I know that, even for those of you at the back who have made that noise, you're not unwilling to think and we have been asked to consider.

I would say that we work together, we have as one of our key themes that we are willing to work in cooperation with residents, businesses, other agencies, and as Leader of the Council, I can say that five group leaders within our shared administration will consider that. And alongside that, I talk regularly to our other leaders and therefore, I don't think they are going to cut me off, they will consider it. Where we go from there will emerge as a consensus as to what we do next, because that's how we do things here. We will take this forward with our residents, with the businesses, with our stakeholders because we have a regular pattern of community conversations; this is an ideal community conversation. We have a 'keep connected' website, this is an ideal item that could go on that website. Many things go on that website including thinking about public service protection orders and those kinds of things, so

we can consider it. And then we have, possibly, a more formal avenue of Overview and Scrutiny; that is about consensus, where will we place this, and I can't say which one we will do but I can tell you we will consider. We must, as you say, put climate considerations at the heart of governance.

We had a people's jury which reported in 2020 and it recommended that we promote plant based foods and put in place measures to reduce meat consumption. We already support the Lancaster District Food Justice Partnership and its theme of eating seasonally with more plants and high welfare local animal products.

So we are already building a coalition of the willing; that's what climate change has to be about. If we send people into a reaction where they say 'no' or do the opposite of the best thing we can do to reduce our carbon footprint, we have achieved nothing.

I am sure that, given the inspiration of your question, we are going to move on.