

Restore Britain Kent Motion for Time Limited Debate:
Protecting and supporting Kent's Farmers

Proposer – Oliver Bradshaw

Seconder – Dean Burns

MOTION

This Council resolves to:

- 1) Recommend that the Executive engage with Kent schools, hospitals, businesses, and other publicly funded organisations to encourage them to prioritise sourcing Kent produced food, fruit, vegetables, and game where possible, thereby supporting local farmers, and game dealers.
- 2) Recommend that the Executive work with relevant partners to explore options for agricultural land management in Kent that maximise farming use and best support and promote the permitting of sustainable conservation practices and countryside pursuits.
- 3) Recommend the Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport examines the impact of deer in Road Traffic Collisions (RTCs) across Kent and consider whether a county-wide Deer Management Plan could help mitigate such incidents and improve public safety.
- 4) Recommend the Executive explores and reports on how country pursuits and other conservation activities can contribute to Kent's environmental targets, biodiversity goals, Local Nature Recovery Strategies, and rural economic development.
- 5) Recommend that the Executive develops a strategy for youth involvement in agricultural or agricultural adjacent fields by promoting apprenticeships, vocational opportunities or volunteering and the potential reopening of school farms to provide opportunities for young people and combat the growing level of NEETs (Not in Education, Employment or Training) in the County.
- 6) Recommend the Executive explores the viability of offering support or incentives for farmers and similar rural business operators to aid in helping tackle winter services such as road gritting.
- 7) Recommend that the Executive explores with District Councils and other relevant partners, the options for reviewing water extraction rights for farmers to reduce strain on the public water supply.
- 8) Recommend that the Executive explore, with District Councils and other relevant partners, options for the active promotion, support and incentivisation of solar schemes focused on existing buildings and other infrastructure instead of on farmland itself.

Background Information provided by the Restore Britain Kent Group

- Agriculture is a major component of Kent's rural economy. In 2023, total income from farming in Kent was £187.76 million. The county is renowned as the "Garden of England" and a national leader in high-value horticulture, producing a significant proportion of the UK's top fruit, soft fruit, apples, cherries, vegetables, and hops. Around 62% of Kent's land area is farmed, and the sector supports thousands of jobs directly and indirectly while underpinning the county's food and drink industry as farming enterprises (crop and animal production) account for 86.5% of food and drink production enterprises in Kent.
- Kent's food and drink production sector is substantial, with 2,145 enterprises across Kent employing around 20,500 people and accounting for 3.3% of all enterprises in the county. This sector, closely linked to farming and horticulture, underpins local supply chains and contributes significantly to the county's economy and the UK's wider £120 billion food and drink industry.
- Kent farmers and gamekeepers help maintain the county's extensive public rights of way network of over 4,300 miles and play a vital role in managing significant areas of woodland, including the ancient Blean Woods complex, contributing to landscape preservation and biodiversity.
- Medium-sized shoots in Kent, together with larger estate shoots and numerous farm syndicate shoots, contribute to the local rural economy through employment, supply chains, tourism, and community activity. Nationally, shooting generates £9.3bn of wider economic activity.
- The Covid-19 period highlighted the vulnerability and strategic importance of Kent's farming sector, with pressures on labour, investment, and supply chains reinforcing the need to maximise domestic food production.

The Restore Britain Kent Group believes that:

- Farmers are the backbone of the country. They work long hours year-round, often in unpredictable weather, to grow high value crops and raise animals, ensuring food security and supporting Kent's rural and wider economy.
- Productive farmland, including orchards, soft fruit fields, arable land, and grazing areas, must be protected from inappropriate mass housing, industrial development, and large scale solar farms, while enabling farmers to diversify sustainably through farm shops, storage, processing facilities, agritourism, and other on farm enterprises.
- Farming, horticulture, viticulture, and gamekeeping apprenticeships and rural skills pathways should be actively promoted and expanded to encourage young people into these vital careers and sustain Kent's rural heritage and workforce.
- The farming and shooting sectors, alongside conservation activities, provide significant economic and employment benefits across both rural and urban Kent.