
PUBLIC QUESTIONS

- 1.1 Pursuant to Council Procedure Rule 10, the Proper Officer has received the following question of the Leader of the Council from Mrs Carole Shorney of 19 Folly Lane, Hockley, GM-Free Campaigner on behalf of Friends of the Earth (South East Essex Group):-

“Our question accompanies the GM-Free collage made up of postcards signed by members of the public in Hockley on Saturday 12 April 2003. This collage is a visual representation of our concern about GM crops and food and of our request for Rochford District Council to adopt a policy to become GM-free.

Over the next year or so, the Government will decide whether to allow GM crops to be commercially grown across the UK. If it does, it would lead to widespread GM contamination of our food, crops and environment.

In the US and Canada, where GM crops have been grown commercially for a few years, the levels of contamination of crops through cross pollination and mixing after harvest have already caused serious economic damage. In a small area like Rochford, we are certain that there will be similar effects. These could have a serious impact on the image of Rochford and the food produced here. It would also threaten the choice of local citizens who want to buy food free from GM.

Will the Council therefore give full consideration to the proposal to declare Rochford GM-free and specifically to adopt the following policies?

- Request the Secretary of State for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) to provide legal protection for this District from specific GM crops in line with Article 19 of 2001/18/EC*?
- Ensure that no GM crops are grown on land over which it has control?
- Adopt a GM-free policy for all goods and services for which this Council is responsible?
- * Using the law to protect our area is a real option open to Rochford District Council. If a biotech company wants to market a GM crop in the EU, it needs to obtain a marketing consent under the Deliberate Release Directive (2001/18/EC). Once a consent is granted, that GM crop can then be marketed across the EU without any further local consultation, including in Rochford.

On a case by case basis, for those GM crops that are relevant to its area, Rochford District Council can use Article 19 of the Deliberate Release Directive to request that a condition is attached to individual GM marketing consents, in order to protect its geographical area. It can do this by writing to

the Secretary of State for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Margaret Beckett) and directly to the European Commission.

Other local authorities around the country have already voted to go GM-free, including South Gloucestershire Council, South Hams District Council and Norton Radstock Town Council, both in Devon. Devon and Lancashire County Councils have also taken significant steps to becoming GM-free.

The accompanying booklet 'Now or Never' sets out our concerns and explains why it makes sound economic sense to keep our area free of GM crops.

SE Essex Friends of the Earth Group would be delighted to meet with your officials to discuss this important matter in more detail."

Sarah Fowler

Head of Administrative & Member Services

Background Papers: question received

For further information please contact J Bostock on:-

Tel:- Ext 3900

E-Mail:- john.bostock@Rochford.gov.uk