

August 1917...

Brandon Rural District Council, like other authorities across the land, are acutely aware of how scarce food is becoming and all the associated dangers that come with it. Keen to prevent unscrupulous sellers profiteering on the black market, pushing prices beyond the reach of Brandon folk, the council is taking matters into their own hands and imposing regulations on some foodstuffs being sold in the town. A register of Brandon shops, held by the council, offers close scrutiny of who is selling what and how much they sell it for. Whilst the council's single-minded focus on protecting the Brandon consumer is laudable, it is doing nothing for the council's reputation outside the town.

Every Friday, Alfred Jessop, a market gardener from Mildenhall, takes his cart round Brandon selling homegrown vegetables. Generally speaking his customers are very happy, however Mrs Hunt, a widow living on Thetford Road, became agitated when she felt conned by him. You see she has a friend who lives in London and who has very limited means of growing vegetables because their home has only window boxes. Mrs Hunt bought some seed potatoes from Alfred and promptly sent them off to her friend still in their original packaging. Her hope was the friend could plant the small tubers in the window boxes thus reaping a bountiful harvest later in the year. In times of food scarcity every little helps. The friend wrote back saying the potatoes were no good for planting, but instead looked like the larger eating variety. They would be good for the dinner plate, but no use as an investment for a later harvest. Mrs Hunt made a formal complaint against Alfred who, despite having the backing of a local councillor and a multitude of happy customers, was found guilty and fined. Of course it was the word of Mrs Hunt's friend against Alfred, but Brandon's councillors are sending a message to all food sellers, they will not tolerate its residents being conned!

Councils have not been isolated from the war and like businesses across the land they have a shortage of manpower, caused by losing men to the war effort. So it makes sense for any council to merge with its neighbour councils in regulating food. Fixing prices and safeguarding the supply chain is a huge undertaking, especially for smaller councils to monitor. Brandon has been exploring a merger with the two councils in Thetford, where an initial meeting resolved to join them together, with eight representatives from Thetford and four from Brandon. Truth be told it did seem the Thetford councillors were more eager than the Brandon delegates.