

FARMS ESTATE COMMITTEE

20 November 2023

Present:-

Councillors J Yabsley (Chair), J Brook (Vice-Chair), J Berry, R Chesterton, A Dewhirst, H Gent, C Whitton and L Warner (Tenants' representative)

Apologies:-

Ms M Broom (Devon Federation of Young Farmers' representative)

Members attending in accordance with Standing Order 25

Councillor M Wrigley

* 103

Minutes

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 11 September 2023 be signed as a correct record.

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Items Requiring Urgent Attention

There was no item raised as a matter of urgency.

* 105

Revenue Monitoring (Month 7) 2023/24

The Committee received the Report of the Director of Finance and Public Value (DF/23/105) on the County Farms Estate Revenue Monitoring (Month 7) 2023/24, noting the target surplus of £534,000 for 2023/24 and detailing income and expenditure to date.

* 106

Capital Monitoring (Month 7) 2023/24

The Committee received the Report of the Director of Finance and Public Value (DF/23/106) on the County Farms Estate Capital Monitoring (Month 7) 2023/24, noting that the approved capital programme for 2023/24 included schemes totalling £750,000.

There had been an underspend of £31,018 in 2022/23 and an in-year receipt of £120,000, thus the balance of capital available to spend in 2023/24 amounted to £901,017.

The Land Agent updated the Committee as to the Slurry Infrastructure Grant and reported that DEFRA continued to be lobbied to unlock grants for local authority landlords.

The report at paragraph 2.3 showed the current five-year capital allocation for the County Farms Estate and Members wished to note their concern at the zero allocation for 2027/28. Officers clarified this was a technical detail and hoped to update further at the next meeting.

It was **MOVED** by Councillor Dewhirst, **SECONDED** by Councillor Brook and

RESOLVED that the Committee write to DEFRA to lobby for further grants for local authority landlords in accordance with the recommendations made to Government by Baroness Rock.

* **107** **Management and Restructuring Issues**

(Councillor M Wrigley, Leader of Teignbridge District Council, attended in accordance with Standing Order 25(2) and spoke to item (f) Manor Farm, Holcombe.)

The Committee considered the Report of the Director of Transformation and Business Services (BSS/23/10) on County Farms Estate Management and Restructuring issues.

(a) Part Glebe Farm, Rattery

It was **MOVED** by Councillor Yabsley, **SECONDED** by Councillor Dewhirst and

RESOLVED that 1.53 acres or thereabouts of land forming part Glebe Farm, Rattery and more particularly described as part NG 2244 and part NG 2854 be let to the Parish Council for community use only on a security of tenure excluded common law tenancy for a term commencing 25 March 2024 and terminating 25 March 2039, subject to terms being agreed.

(b) Southacott Farm, Mariansleigh

It was **MOVED** by Councillor Yabsley, **SECONDED** by Councillor Brook and

RESOLVED that:

- (i) The tenant's early surrender of Southacott Farm, Mariansleigh be accepted.
- (ii) Southacott Farm, Mariansleigh be advertised to let internally amongst existing tenants as a dairy progression opportunity and on a Farm Business Tenancy for a term of up to 20 years commencing 25 March 2024 and terminating 25 March 2044, subject to terms being agreed.
- (iii) Part Southacott Farm, extending to 15.49 acres or thereabouts and comprising existing woodland and steep 'waste' ground suitable for woodland restoration and additional woodland planting respectively, be retained in hand and utilised by the Council for environmental enhancement initiatives.

(c) Thorne Farm, Ottery St Mary

It was **MOVED** by Councillor Yabsley, **SECONDED** by Councillor Brook and

RESOLVED that the existing lease granted to the Ottery St Mary Town Council be amended by way of a Deed of Variation to extend the leased area by approximately 100m² in order to facilitate an alternative access route to the skate park through the Kings School campus, subject to terms being agreed.

(d) Middle Winsham Farm, Braunton

It was **MOVED** by Councillor Brook, **SECONDED** by Councillor Gent and

RESOLVED that:

- (i) The tenant's proposed early surrender of Middle Winsham Farm, Braunton be accepted.
- (ii) Middle Winsham Farm, Braunton be advertised to let on the open market as a new entrant opportunity and on a Farm Business Tenancy for a term of seven years commencing 25 March 2024 (or as soon as practically possible thereafter) and terminating 25 March 2031 subject to terms being agreed.

(e) Mixing Barn Farm, Bovey Tracey

It was **MOVED** by Councillor Yabsley, **SECONDED** by Councillor Dewhurst and

RESOLVED Mixing Barn Farm, Bovey Tracey be advertised to let on the open market as a new entrant opportunity and on a Farm Business Tenancy for a term of seven years commencing 25 March 2025 and terminating 25 March 2032, subject to terms being agreed.

(f) Manor Farm, Holcombe

Councillor M Wrigley spoke in support of the request from the ACTION on Climate in Teignbridge CIC to occupy land off Hall Lane, Holcombe to create a Community Wildlife Area.

The Committee considered and discussed the request from ACTION on Climate in Teignbridge CIC, as set out in paragraph 3.6 of the report. Discussion points included:

- that although the land adjacent to the proposed Community Wildlife Area had not been allocated for development in the emerging Local Plan, that was not the same as saying the land may never come forward for development. It was noted that access to the potential

development land may need to pass through the proposed Community Wildlife Area and as the Committee had a responsibility to maximise capital receipts for the Council, permitting the use of the land as a Community Wildlife Area would put that future opportunity at risk;

- that an extant planning permission is understood to exist for soil deposition on part of the proposed Community Wildlife Area associated with a proposed/potential cycle path scheme linking Teignmouth to Holcombe and beyond and that the Council should be mindful to not frustrate that development; and
- that the proposed Wildlife Area would improve the lives for everyone, not just the local community.

It was **MOVED** by Councillor Yabsley, **SECONDED** by Councillor Brook that

- (i) Manor Farm, Holcombe be advertised to let on the open market as a new entrant opportunity and on a Farm Business Tenancy for a term of seven years commencing 25 March 2025 and terminating 25 March 2032, all subject to terms being agreed.
- (ii) The 1954 Landlord and Tenant Act security of tenure excluded lease of part NG 0392 comprising part of the farmyard and former parlour and dairy buildings be renewed for a further fixed term of seven years commencing 25 March 2025 and terminating 25 March 2032, subject to terms being agreed.
- (iii) That the request from the ACTion on Climate in Teignbridge CIC to occupy land off Hall Lane, Holcombe to Create a Community Wildlife Area be refused.

Councillor Dewhirst then **MOVED** an amendment, **SECONDED** by Councillor Gent (annotated in red):

- (i) Manor Farm, Holcombe be advertised to let on the open market as a new entrant opportunity and on a Farm Business Tenancy for a term of seven years commencing 25 March 2025 and terminating 25 March 2032, all subject to terms being agreed.
- (ii) The 1954 Landlord and Tenant Act security of tenure excluded lease of part NG 0392 comprising part of the farmyard and former parlour and dairy buildings be renewed for a further fixed term of seven years commencing 25 March 2025 and terminating 25 March 2032, subject to terms being agreed.
- (iii) That before the request from the ACTion on Climate in Teignbridge CIC to occupy land off Hall Lane, Holcombe to create a Community Wildlife Area is considered, Members and Officers attend a site visit to inspect the land.

The amendment was put to the vote and declared **LOST**.

The substantive motion was then put to the vote and declared **CARRIED** (replicated below).

RESOLVED that

- (i) Manor Farm, Holcombe be advertised to let on the open market as a new entrant opportunity and on a Farm Business Tenancy for a term of seven years commencing 25 March 2025 and terminating 25 March 2032, all subject to terms being agreed.
- (ii) The 1954 Landlord and Tenant Act security of tenure excluded lease of part NG 0392 comprising part of the farmyard and former parlour and dairy buildings be renewed for a further fixed term of seven years commencing 25 March 2025 and terminating 25 March 2032, subject to terms being agreed.
- (iii) That the request from the ACTion on Climate in Teignbridge CIC to occupy land off Hall Lane, Holcombe to Create a Community Wildlife Area be refused.

* **108** **Results of Tenants' Questionnaire 2023**

The Committee considered the Report of the Director of Transformation and Business Services (BSS/23/11) on the Results of Tenants' Questionnaire 2023.

An anonymous questionnaire had been sent out to 70 Devon County Farms Estate Tenants in May and June 2023 in order to gather feedback on their experiences. Overall, participation was very low with just 26% (18) of tenants responding.

Of the feedback received, there were two notable areas that warranted further investigation and potential improvement:

- slow response rates for either South West Norse building surveyors and/or Devon County Council to attend to both programmed and unforeseen repairs and maintenance.
- Tenants being unclear on how to and who to communicate compliments or complaints.

Discussion points included:

- That damp issues were taken very seriously, but it was not always possible to fully mitigate damp issues at the first attempt in old historic farmhouses constructed in wet and difficult locations.
- That questionnaires should be carried out more frequently with a choice of how to feedback (via email or by post).
- To congratulate the agents for having 'happy tenants'.
- That the Tenants' Guide appended to the report looked amazing!

It was **MOVED** by Councillor Yabsley, **SECONDED** by Councillor Brook and

RESOLVED that:

- (a) the actions reported by the land agents to improve traceability of repairs and maintenance requests made by Tenants be noted;
- (b) the proposal to report the questionnaire results and proposed actions to improve traceability of repairs and maintenance requests made by Tenants in the Estate Winter Newsletter be endorsed; and
- (c) the feedback confirming Members' beliefs that Norse require more funding to employ additional qualified Land Agent resource be explored at the earliest opportunity with Officers of the Council.

109 **Mental Health Strategy**

The Committee considered the Report of the Director of Transformation and Business Services (BSS/3/12) on Mental Health Strategy.

In February 2023 the Farm Safety Foundation Charity published research suggested that 94% of UK farmers under the age of 40 ranked poor mental health as the biggest hidden problem facing farmers today – a rise of 10% since 2018.

The Royal Agricultural Benevolent Institution's Big Farming Survey conducted in 2021 revealed that 36% of farmers in the UK were probably depressed, while 47% were constantly struggling with anxiety. Of the 15,000 respondents involved in the survey, only 8% of women and 12% of men reported having good mental wellbeing.

Fortunately, the crisis was being recognised by the industry and much work was being done to improve awareness within professionals such as vets who work closely with the farming community and to promote the problem, remove stigma, and encourage farmers to talk.

The Committee were in support of the proposals.

It was **MOVED** by Councillor Brook, **SECONDED** by Councillor Chesterton and

RESOLVED that:

- (a) Literature be produced and circulated to tenants signposting them to existing mental health support, possibly within the winter newsletter.
- (b) A series of training events be arranged for tenants to discuss mental health, signs and symptoms to be aware of, and steps that can be taken to improve mental health resilience, subject to funding being made available.

- (c) Norse Land Agents be provided with mental health awareness training to ensure early indicators are capable of being identified and tenants can be signposted to appropriate sources of support.
- (d) Periodic 'pasty and pint nights' be arranged for tenants to get together with the Land Agents to meet and chat on an informal basis.
- (e) A business case be prepared to consider adopting more of the initiatives already implemented by the Duchy of Cornwall's 'Tenants Support and Wellbeing Service' that cannot be delivered without additional funding being made available.

NOTES:

1. *Minutes should always be read in association with any Reports for a complete record.*
2. *If the meeting has been webcast, it will be available to view on the [webcasting site](#) for up to 12 months from the date of the meeting*

* **DENOTES DELEGATED MATTER WITH POWER TO ACT**

The Meeting started at 2.15 pm and finished at 3.45 pm