

FARMS ESTATE COMMITTEE

19 February 2024

Present:-

Councillors J Yabsley (Chair), J Brook (Vice-Chair), R Chesterton, A Dewhirst, C Whitton and Mr M Warner (Tenants' representative)

Apologies:-

Councillors J Berry and H Gent and Mrs L Warner

* **116** Minutes

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meetings held on 10 November 2023, 20 November 2023, 18 January 2024 and 19 January 2024 be signed as correct records.

* **117** Items Requiring Urgent Attention

There was no item raised as a matter of urgency.

* **118** Revenue Monitoring (Month 10) 2023/24

The Committee received the Report of the Director of Finance and Public Value (DF/23/18) on the County Farms Estate Revenue Monitoring (Month10) 2023/24, noting the target surplus of £534,000 for 2023/24 and detailing income and expenditure to date.

Of particular note was that forecasts indicated that income was expected to be approximately £96,000 higher than budget; and that South West Norse fees were expected to be slightly higher than budgeted due partly to an increase in maintenance spend.

Questions and discussion included:

- Members requested that a breakdown be provided of the South West Norse fees for Land Agent's time, building maintenance fees and other fees. The Land Agent agreed to look at how best to report this taking into account the existence of commercially sensitive data.
- The proposed changes to how end of tenancy valuation work might be concluded as referred to in paragraph 3.10 of the Report would be expanded upon in Part II of this meeting due to the matter currently being out for consultation.

* **119** **Capital Monitoring (Month 10) 2023/24**

The Committee received the Report of the Director of Finance & Public Value (DFP/24/19) on the County Farms Estate Capital Monitoring (Month 10) 2023/24, noting that the approved capital programme for 2023/24 included schemes totalling £750,000.

Of particular note was the table at paragraph 2.3 of the Report showing the current five-year capital allocation for the Farms Estate, a change from the November meeting.

The Report noted that one end of tenancy compensation settlement had been paid from the capital budget and it was further noted that there would be nine whole farms changing hands this coming Lady Day.

* **120** **Management & Restructuring Issues**

The Committee considered the Report of the Director of Transformation and Business Services (TBS/24/2) on County Farms Estate Management and Restructuring issues.

(a) Lower Chitterley Farm, Bickleigh

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

RESOLVED that:

- (i) The tenant's early surrender of Lower Chitterley Farm, Bickleigh be accepted.
- (ii) Lower Chitterley Farm, Bickleigh 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.

(b) Thorne Farm, Ottery St Mary

There was discussion around the poor fencing on part of the land and how this could be overcome, potentially with collaboration between landlord and tenant to draw down grant funding, even on short term letting arrangements.

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

RESOLVED that the 10.33 hectares (25.41 acres) or thereabouts of bare land at Thorne Farm, Ottery St Mary be advertised to let in internal competition between the tenants of Cotley Farm, Ottery St Mary; New Ford Farm, Rockbeare; Topshayes Farm, Aylesbeare; Lower Barton Farm, Aylesbere; and Perriton Barton Farm, Whimble on a series of 12 Month Farm Business

Tenancy Agreements, subject to the first Agreement being for a term of 1.5 years terminating 25 March 2026, and subject to terms being agreed.

* **121** **Exclusion of the Press and Public**

RESOLVED that the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the following items of business under Section 100(A)(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraphs 1, 2 and 3 of Schedule 12A of the Act, namely information relating to, and which was likely to reveal the identity of, tenants and information relating to the financial or business affairs of tenants and the County Council and, in accordance with Section 36 of the Freedom of Information Act 2000, by virtue of the fact that the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighed the public interest in disclosing the information.

* **122** **Holdings and Tenancies etc.**

(An item taken under Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 during which the press and public were excluded, no representations having been received to such consideration under Regulation 5(5) of the Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Meetings and Access to Information) (England) Regulations 2012.)

1. The Land Agent addressed the question raised in relation to paragraph 3.10 of the Revenue Monitoring Report (Minute *118).
2. Monitoring of Tenants on an Initial Farm Business Tenancy

The Committee considered the Report of the Director of Transformation and Business Services (TBS/24/3) on the County Farms Estate Monitoring of Tenants on an Initial Farm Business Tenancy.

There then followed discussion around the provision of farm accounts from tenants on an initial farm tenancy.

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

RESOLVED that further monitoring visits be made to the tenants of Thorndon Farm, Broadwoodwidge; Nunford Farm, Colyton; and Southcott Farm, Okehampton in Autumn 2024 when the tenants will be expected to present their farm accounts for consideration.

- * **DENOTES DELEGATED MATTER WITH POWER TO ACT**
The Meeting started at 2.19 pm and finished at 3.06 pm