

The County Farms Estate
Improving the marketing exposure of the County Farms Estate
Report of the Head of Digital Transformation and Business Support

Please note that the following recommendations are subject to consideration and determination by the Committee before taking effect.

Recommendation(s):

That the Committee approves the increased exposure of the Devon County Farms Estate on social media (facebook, twitter, Instagram etc) in order to maintain high levels of interest in farms to let and the wider social and environmental outputs of the Estate in a society rapidly moving away from paper based systems to alternative and instantly available online platforms.

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 The Estate has a strong track record of attracting from a national audience high quality applicants for farms to let. Typically 4, 5 or sometimes 6 farms may be let per annum. Usually the lettings are grouped together so that the re-letting costs and specifically advertising expenses can be kept to a minimum but this is not always possible, particularly when existing tenants secure opportunities to progress at relatively short notice.
- 1.2 Traditionally farms have been advertised in the Farmers Weekly (the Agriculture Act 1970, previously stated that farms should be advertised nationally). Adverts are also placed in the Western Morning News on a Wednesday and Saturday when the publication has dedicated farming sections. Both of these traditional advertising platforms have become expensive and anecdotal evidence suggests are yielding less interest now compared to only a few years ago.
- 1.3 In addition NPS hold a mailing list and those on the list are emailed a notification and link to the letting particulars uploaded to the NPS website as soon as a farm is available to let.
- 1.4 Other organisations such as the Devon Federation of Young Farmers Clubs and the Tenant Farmers Association are also notified.

2.0 market research

- 2.1 For the last two letting campaigns those attending the viewing days have been asked where they saw the advert for the farm so that the effectiveness of the adverts could be monitored.

2.2 The NPS mailing list generated the most interest. The Farmers Weekly performed reasonably well but the Western Morning News generated very little interest.

3.0 Changing trends in advertising and communication generally

3.1 With the rapid and exponential increase in farmers using smart phones for their day to day business it is natural to assume that they would also use them to search for farms to let.

3.2 Groups such as the farming forum and buying/selling pages are extremely popular and used daily by many farmers and the ability to share articles, photos, adverts etc on line through these platforms means that topics of interest can be disseminated to a huge audience almost instantaneously.

3.3 The NFU, CLA, TFA and other member organisations and interest groups already use, with significant success, platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Linked-in, Instagram etc to share news articles.

3.4 Other County Farms Estates have also already moved to having an active presence on social media and using that as a way to publicise farm lettings. For example, Staffordshire County Council have seen an expansion in the traffic on their Facebook page used for farm advertising and information sharing. Norfolk County Farms Estate have a twitter page used to promote their own lettings and those of other Estates as well as information for current and prospective tenants.

3.5 Devon County Council already has a large online presence and active social media platforms including Facebook and twitter. By creating a Devon County Farms Estate account owned and hosted by Devon County Council but managed by NPS, awareness of farm relettings should be maintained or perhaps improved moving forward. It will certainly enable interested parties and stakeholders to share information more readily. Prospective applicants will be able to instantly link to the letting particulars on the NPS website as well as other useful information about the Estate, the process of taking on a farm or the application forms.

3.6 By developing the online presence, it is anticipated that the likelihood of applicants looking for a farm to rent are far less likely to miss an opportunity arising on the Devon County Farms Estate.

4.0 Options/Alternatives

4.1 Alternative options have been considered and discounted as they are believed to either be contrary to current Estate policy and/or not in the best financial interests of the Estate.

5.0 Consultations/Representations/Technical Data

5.1 The views and opinions of the Devon Federation of Young Farmers Clubs and the Estate Tenants Association will be presented by the two co-opted members to the committee.

5.2 No other parties have been consulted and no other representations for or against the proposal have been received

5.3 The technical data is believed to be true and accurate.

6.0 Considerations

6.1 The Author is not aware of any financial, sustainability, carbon impact, equality, legal, risk management or public health issues arising from this report

7.0 Summary/Conclusions/Reasons for Recommendations

7.1 The Author has prepared this report in accordance with the findings of the County Farms Estate Strategic Review (April 2010)

Rob Parkhouse, Report of the Head of Digital Transformation and Business Support

Electoral Divisions:

All

Local Government Act 1972: List of Background Papers:

None

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