

**The County Farms Estate
Collaboration with the North Devon UNESCO Biosphere Reserve Partnership**

Report of the Head of Digital Transformation and Business Support

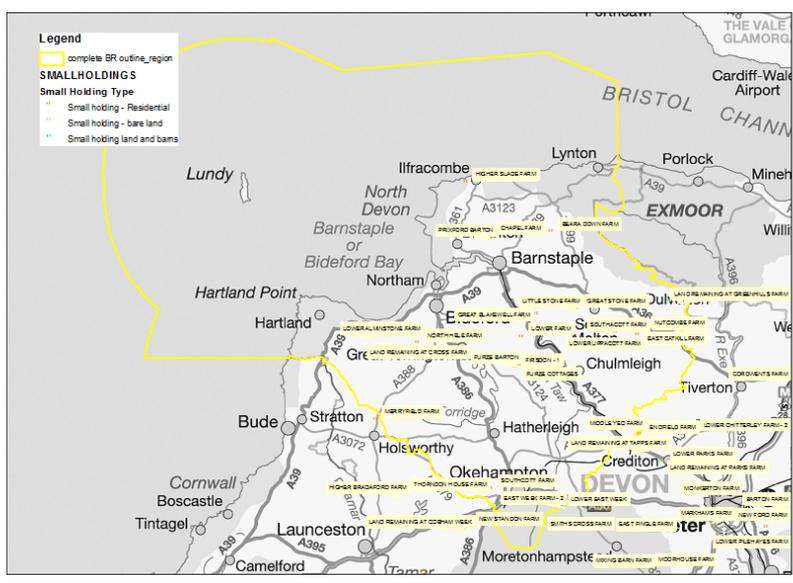
Please note that the following recommendations are subject to consideration and determination by the Committee before taking effect.

Recommendation(s):

That all potential opportunities to utilise the assets of the County Farms Estate and to work collaboratively with Estate tenants for the benefit of the North Devon UNESCO Biosphere Reserve Partnership be explored.

1.0 Background

1.1 The County Farms Estate has approximately 20 properties within the area of the UNESCO Biosphere Reserve. Devon County Council has a policy of supporting and promoting sustainable development including sustainable rural economies using its farm estate as a key asset for demonstrating and assisting these policy areas. The UNESCO designation has similar purposes for developing and promoting best practices in sustainable development and setting exemplary action internationally for others to learn from. The UNESCO designation is overseen by a partnership of 34 organisations that work collectively towards the aims and values that the designation brings.



1.2 Officers of the Biosphere Reserve are aware of the Devon County Council 'Ten Point Plan' for its own business and Estate to respond to the Climate and

Extinction Crises. Further the proposals recently published in the CPRE report regarding Local Authority farms functions is acknowledged, as is the overall agricultural industry strategy proposed by the NFU for net zero emissions.

- 1.3 The North Devon UNESCO Biosphere Partnership also has strategies for net zero emissions, climate change adaptation and the climate extinction responses. Consequently, it has active programmes to address these issues that require collaboration with land managers. These programmes include: The Woodland Enterprise Zone, the Estuary Focus area project to reduce bacteria loading on shellfish waters, The Connecting the Culm Project, the Torridge River Improvement Project, Woods For Water, and Natural Flood Management Projects.
- 1.4 Given the synergy between the Devon County Farms Estate and the Biosphere Reserve it is proposed to create a mutually beneficial working relationship to help address the demands rather than burden tenants with more demands. Officers of the Biosphere Reserve are seeking to work proactively with the Estate tenants and agents to access the best advice and facilitate funding to enable the farms to be both viable and beacons of good practice in the UNESCO Biosphere.
- 1.5 The Biosphere Partnership would like to support the Estate and involve it in its programmes for the following areas:
 - (i) Carbon reduction through:
 - Improved management, condition and functionality of woodlands and woodland extent
 - Improve the carbon content in soils
 - Creating cost effective measuring and monitoring systems for emission reductions
 - (ii) Flood attenuation through:
 - Improvement to the absorption capacity of the soils on the farms through good stewardship
 - Making the appropriate land-use and land management changes to improve flood resilience in sensitive catchments
 - Where suitable include attenuation features such as swales, leaky dams and wetlands to buffer run off
 - (iii) Improve water quality through;
 - Reducing run off
 - Apply precision farming techniques to reduce pollution from excesses and reduce costs
 - Buffering watercourses
 - (iv) Improving Biodiversity and being exemplar in the community for habitat management through
 - Best practice in habitat management aligned to Nature Recovery strategies
 - Joining our Pledge for Nature campaigns to improve the resilience for biodiversity such as leaving at least 250m of hedge per year to be uncut and or restore or make a new farm pond.

- Restoring traditional orchards

1.6 The Biosphere Partnership has social and economic values that it would like to achieve for the area and would welcome involvement of the Farms Estate in achieving these.

1.7 It is recognised that a collaborative approach between Devon County Council, its agents, tenants and officers of the Biosphere Reserve Partnership is required. This will involve establishing good direct communication with the various stakeholders.

2.0 Case Study examples

2.1 Discussions are currently taking place with the tenant of Lower Farm, High Bickington for a 'woods for water' capital grant administered through Biosphere Officers and involving the creation of a new deciduous woodland on marginal land adjacent to a watercourse running through the farm and to fence off the watercourse to prevent stock accessing it. This project is designed to reduce the risk of pollution from agricultural sources in the watercourse.

2.2 Discussions are currently taking place with the tenant of Ten Oaks Farm, Roborough to possibly 'sublet' to the Biosphere approximately 12 acres of ancient woodland so that it can be put into proactive management. Initially it is proposed that a woodland audit would be carried out and grants obtained to carry out management work such as thinning to allow for natural but controlled regeneration. It is hoped this site may become a demonstration, education and training site for the Biosphere. This could, if successful, be applied to other woodlands in the county farm estate and other DCC freeholds.

3.0 Options/Alternatives

3.1 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.

4.0 Consultations/Representations/Technical Data

4.1 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.

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

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

5.0 Financial Considerations

5.1 The Author is not aware of any financial issues arising from this report.

6.0 Environmental Impact Considerations (including Climate Change)

6.1 The Author is not aware of any environmental impact (including climate change) issues arising from this report.

7.0 Equality Considerations

7.1 The Author is not aware of any equality issues arising from this report.

8.0 Legal Considerations

8.1 The Author is not aware of any legal issues arising from this report.

9.0 Risk Management Considerations

9.1 The Author is not aware of any obvious risks to manage.

10.0 Public Health Impact

10.1 The Author is not aware of any public health impact.

11.0 Summary/Conclusions/Reasons for Recommendations

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

Rob Parkhouse, Head of Digital Transformation and Business Support

Electoral Divisions: All

Local Government Act 1972: List of Background Papers:
None

Who to contact for enquiries:

Dan Meek, NPS South West Ltd, Venture House, One Capital Court, Bittern Road,
Sowton Industrial Estate, Exeter, EX2 7FW
Tel No: (01392) 351066
Email: dan.meek@nps.co.uk