

FARMS ESTATE COMMITTEE

22 February 2021

Present:

County Councillors

Councillors R Edgell (Chair), J Brook, J Berry, C Chugg, T Inch and C Whitton

Co-opted Members

L Warner (Tenants' representative)

Apologies

Councillors A Dewhirst

* 151 **Minutes**

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meetings held on 7 and 21 December 2020 be signed as correct records.

* 152 **Items Requiring Urgent Attention**

There was no item raised as a matter of urgency.

* 153 **Revenue Monitoring (Month 10) 2020/21**

The Committee received the Report of the County Treasurer (CT/21/19) on the County Farms Estate Revenue Monitoring (Month 10) 2020/21, noting the target surplus of £464,000 and providing a summary of the annual budget and detailing income and expenditure to date.

* 154 **Capital Monitoring (Month 10) 2020/21**

The Committee received the Report of the County Treasurer (CT/21/18) on the County Farms Estate Capital Monitoring (Month 10) 2020/21, noting that the approved capital programme for 2020/21 included schemes totalling £600,000. There was an overspend of £30,888 in 2019/20 thus the balance of capital available to spend in 2020/21 was £569,112.

The Committee noted that, to fully fund the decent homes improvements programme without delaying any works, £600,000 had been brought forward at month 8 from the 2021/22 Estates Capital Programme. The revised 2020/21 budget was therefore £1,169,112.

The Chair congratulated the Land Agent on the successful bid for land acquisition that had recently completed.

155 **Management & Restructuring Issues.**

The Committee considered the Report of the Head of Digital Transformation and Business Support (BSS/21/01) on the County Farms Estate management and restructuring issues.

(a) Part Higher Henland Farm, Kentisbeare

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

RESOLVED that Part Higher Henland Farm Kentisbeare amounting to 9.89 hectares (24.45 acres) or thereabouts of bare land be let again to the tenant of Higher Henland Farm, Kentisbeare on a Farm Business (a)(a) agreement commencing 25 March 2022 and terminating 25 March 2024, subject to terms being agreed.

(b) Land at Newcombes and Glebe Farms, Roborough

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

RESOLVED that the land at Newcombes and Glebe Farms, Roborough be advertised to let in two lots and in internal competition between the tenants of Ten Oaks Farm, Roborough; Furze Barton Farm, Ashreigney; Furze Cottages Farm, Ashreigney; Lower Farm, High Bickington; Lower Northchurch Farm, Yarnscombe; and Great Blakewell Farm, Chittlehampton for a term of up to five years and on a Farm Business Tenancy commencing 25 March 2022, subject to terms being agreed.

(c) Land at Southwoods Farm, Uffculme

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

RESOLVED that the 28.76 hectares (71.11 acres) or thereabouts of land at Southwoods Farm, Uffculme be advertised to let in internal competition between the tenants of Great Southdown Farm, Burlescombe; Westcott Farm, Burlescombe; Higher Henland Farm, Kentisbeare; Lower Henland Farm, Kentisbeare; Dungeons Farm, Cullompton; and Tarrants Farm, Payhembury for a term of up to five years and on a Farm Business Tenancy commencing 25 March 2022, subject to terms being agreed.

(d) Land at Bulleigh Elms Farm, Ipplepen

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

RESOLVED that parts NG 4649 and 4955 forming part Bulleigh Elms Farm Ipplepen and amounting to 0.27 acres or thereabouts be declared

permanently surplus to the operational requirements of the Estate and sold to the neighbouring special purchaser, subject to terms being agreed.

(e) Great Stone Farm, South Molton

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

RESOLVED

- (i) that the tenant's proposed surrender of the holding be accepted; and
- (ii) the farmhouse, buildings and 73.19 hectares (180.86 acres) or thereabouts of land at Great Stone Farm, South Molton be advertised to let as an equipped residential progression dairy farm in internal competition between existing tenants of the Estate and on a Farm Business Tenancy for a term of up to 15 years commencing 25 March 2023 and expiring 25 March 2038, subject to terms being agreed.

156 **Progress Report on Farmhouse Refurbishment Programme**

The Committee noted the Report of the Head of Digital Transformation and Business Support (BSS/21/02) reporting on progress on the Farmhouse Refurbishment Programme.

It was highlighted that, out of a total of 68 dwellings on the Estate, 28 dwellings had been improved and a further seven were currently undergoing improvement works or were due to have works carried out prior to the end of this financial year, leaving a further 33 dwellings yet to be improved.

It was noted that solar panels had not been installed on all dwellings; and that a tender process required that a feasibility report be provided to enable an informed decision as to installation.

Members were pleased to note the improvements to accommodation which would add value to the Estate.

It was **MOVED** by Councillor Berry, **SECONDED** by Councillor Chugg and

RESOLVED that adequate capital funding be assured to enable the remaining 33 dwellings to be improved to an equal standard over the forthcoming years.

157 **The Path to Sustainable Farming: Agricultural Transition Plan 2021-2024 (Minute *147/7 December 2020)**

The Committee considered the Report of the Head of Digital Transformation and Business Support (BSS/21/03) on the Path to Sustainable Farming: An Agricultural Transition Plan 2021 to 2024. The Committee had previously considered the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

(DEFRA) published Agricultural Transition Plan at its meeting on 7 December 2020, Minute *147.

The Report set out a summary of the Transition Plan; gave details on the Slurry Investment Scheme; and the New Entrants' Support Scheme, various consultations on which were expected to take place in early 2021.

It was DEFRA's plan during 2021 to work with Councils with 'County farms', other landowners and stakeholders to co-design a scheme that would create more lasting opportunities for new entrants.

The Agricultural Transition Plan offered the Estate a potential opportunity to draw down funding to provide more new entrant opportunities, whilst providing the Estate and its tenants access to potential funding to enlarge slurry stores or cover them to increase capacity and provide compliance with the Clean Air Strategy.

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

RESOLVED that the Report be noted and:

- (a) ensure tenants are informed and supported to draw down grants available from 2022 under the slurry investment scheme;
- (b) ensure tenants are provided with training and support to access at least the new Sustainable Farming Incentive component of the Environmental Land Management Scheme (ELMS);
- (c) ensure any tenants considering retirement, possibly triggered by the option of taking the lump sum basic payment from 2022, are supported where practical to do so; and
- (d) the Estate looks to bid for any potential funding available through the proposed New Entrant Scheme currently being considered by DEFRA.

158 Interim Devon Carbon Plan 2020 (Minute *120/24 February 2020)

The Committee noted the Report of the Head of Digital Transformation and Business Support (BSS/21/04) on the Interim Devon Carbon Plan 2020 with focus on the findings of Chapel 11, Food, Land and Sea, as this was an area where the County Farms Estate could be most engaged in leading the way in delivering the Carbon Plan objectives.

The Committee had at its meeting on 24 February 2020 considered the NFU Report - Achieving Net Zero – Farming's 2040 Goal and had subsequently resolved under Minute *120. Although the Covid-19 pandemic had frustrated some initiatives and ability to deliver on the resolutions made, the Report outlined those that had been delivered.

In discussions, the Land Agent confirmed that any training would be rolled out to all tenants of the Estate.

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

RESOLVED that the resolutions made at the Farms Estate Committee meeting on 24 February 2020 at Minute *120 be reaffirmed and, subject to additional funding, go further to:

- (a) Volunteer the Estate resource as an opportunity for the Climate Emergency Partners to trial and demonstrate potential best practices and innovations in farming designed to reduce the emissions from agricultural activities and/or to sequester more carbon.
- (b) Commissions a report to map and identify the natural capital account and associated base line carbon sequestration capacity of the Estate and individual holdings.
- (c) Conducts a study tour with tenants to the Dartington Hall Estate to explore the potential opportunities for Silviculture on the Estate.
- (d) Provide tenants with an ongoing programme of training events to better inform alternative farming practices designed to reduce carbon emissions and sequester more carbon.
- (e) Once the 'test and trials' period has concluded and the Environmental Land Management Scheme (ELMS) is adopted, signpost tenants to scheme options that reward tenants financially for reducing carbon emissions, enhancing natural capital, and providing additional or improved carbon sinks.
- (f) Commission a report to monetise the value of existing carbon sinks in the form of tradable carbon credits in order to generate additional revenue for inward investment in appropriate localised tree planting on potential pockets of surplus marginal land.

159 **Exclusion of the Press and Public**

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

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.

160 Management & Restructuring Issues

The Land Agent responded to Members' questions relating to the value of the land at Bulleigh Elms Farm, Ipplepen.

161 Farmhouse Refurbishment Programme

The Land Agent responded to Members' questions relating to specific farm details.

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

The Meeting started at 2.25 pm and finished at 3.25 pm