

QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL
Wednesday 8 September 2021

1. QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR WRIGLEY
Re: County Farms and Development

The Leader of the Council has made great play of his credentials in building-up and protecting the County Council owned farms estate.

Indeed, in his written report to Council on 20 July, the Leader said:
"I am not sure how a rumour was circulated that the Farms estate was up for sale back in April / May of this year but to clarify the situation I have not suggested selling nor would I suggest it."

1. When did the Leader become aware that NPS, the county council's property agents, had submitted in 2018 the County owned farm land at Markhams Farm, Shillingford, near Exeter, as a site for nearly 800 houses?
2. Is the Leader also aware that NPS submitted land at another County owned farm, Manor Farm, Dawlish, for potential development.
3. Will the Leader today confirm that the County Council owned farms are not for sale and that Markhams Farm will not be sold for housing by this Conservative administration?

REPLY BY COUNCILLOR HART

At the County Council meeting on 20th July 2021, I gave a detailed report on the running of the County Council's farms estate (See Appendix 1).

1. Land in Alphington was identified in the 2010 Farms Estate Strategic Review (p25 section 7.1) which includes the DCC land at Markhams Farm. Officers have briefed both myself and the Chair and Vice Chair of the Farms Committee prior to submission to Teignbridge District Council as part of their Housing and Economic Land Availability Assessment 'call for sites' to support the District Council to meet their objective of providing 620 homes per year up until 2033 in Teignbridge as set out in their Local Plan (see page 17) [local-plan-2013-33.pdf \(teignbridge.gov.uk\)](https://www.teignbridge.gov.uk/local-plan-2013-33.pdf)
2. Yes – officers have briefed me and discussed any potential sites to be submitted as part of the HELAA process.
3. As previously advised, the County Farms Estate is not for sale. Both Markhams Farm and Manor Farm have been submitted as potential land for development to Teignbridge District Council for their consideration. Should the

land at Markhams Farm be considered viable for housing development by the District Council then we would seek to dispose of the land (in the region of 80 acres) to meet this demand and generate capital receipts to invest in the Council's capital programme and enable land to be replenished. You will recall from my report of the 20th July that since 2009/10 the Council have acquired in excess of 300 acres of farm land.

This approach fully aligns with the recommendations made by Sir Donald Curry CBE FRAGS, in his capacity as Chair of the Sustainable Farming and Food Delivery Group, his paper on 'The Importance of the County Farms Service to the Rural Economy' (November 2008) where it was acknowledged that identifying development opportunities and disposing of farm land cannot be opposed and that Local Authorities are well placed to identify future development opportunities and should consider acquiring land as the opportunities arise.

My report to Council in July set out a clear position in relation to the Farms Estate and highlighted the investment of £1.8m to acquire 309 acres of productive and well located farm land since 2009/10, the generation of £27.8m of capital receipts from the sale of farms whilst still broadly maintaining c10k acres (9571 acres) and the investment of in excess of £10.8m to improve farm holding infrastructure, meet statutory requirements and improve farm buildings and accommodation.

**2. QUESTION FROM COUNCILLOR DEWHIRST
Re: LED Lighting and Insect Biodiversity**

There have been a number of reports in the media in the last few days that indicate that highway LED lighting is harmful to the insect biodiversity in the area of the lights. The energy efficiency of these lights is clearly a fact and is helping to improve our carbon efficiency in the Council, but it would appear to be at the expense of our insects.

Please can you indicate what measures Devon County will be taking to mitigate the harmful effects on our insect population.

REPLY BY COUNCILLOR HUGHES

DCC are currently rolling out 45,000 LED upgrades in residential areas. The rating of the new lamps is 3000K, which is very similar to the sodium lamps they are replacing. Insects are generally attracted to lighting above 3000K, therefore any possible effect on the insect population is argued to be neutral when the new lamps are run at 100% brightness all night. However, in mitigation, the lighting will operate as part night lighting for the majority of areas and in addition dim to 75 and 50% brightness later into the night.

DCC is also extending its management software in new installations where possible, which will give much more control on future dimming.

However, we will keep this under review as greater understanding of this topic develops.

**County Council
Cabinet Member Report
22 July 2021**

**Report of the Cabinet Member for
Policy, Corporate and Asset Management**

I have been asked to report as follows for Full Council on 22 July 2021:

By Councillor Hannaford on:

Can the Leader please confirm that there are absolutely no plans to sell off our county farms estate. Could he or the relevant cabinet member also please outline the investment, development work and land acquisitions that have taken place during the last council term.

Furthermore could council please be updated about our Devon County Council commitment and vision for our county farms estate to ensure they have a secure , sustainable ,and profitable future.

Response

I am not sure how a rumour was circulated that the Farms estate was up for sale back in April / May of this year but to clarify the situation I have not suggested selling nor would I suggest it. One of my first decisions when we took over the Council in 2009 was to actually put a Cabinet Member responsible for the Farms Estate, and organised a review of the estate to look at the large list of backlog maintenance work, a lot of it critical. There was also need to do something urgently about Slurry handling on Dairy farms for the Environment Agency. We are now investing in the property to modernise a number of the farm houses.

The Farms estate is now in a much better condition than in 2009. We may have less farms, but they are more practical and viable farms for our tenants to work.

Please see table below for full details.

Year	Size (ac)	No of farms	Capital receipts (£)	Capital investment (£)	Land purchase (£)	Land purchase (ac)
2009/10	10,001 ac	82	£1,173,600	£63,252	£799,311	85 acres at Ide & 60 acres at Rockbeare
2010/11	9,888 ac	80	£1,275,000	£588,746	0	0
2011/12	9,729 ac	75	£1,241,000	£1,121,004	0	0

2012/13	9,650 ac	75	£1,247,500	£1,489,777	0	0
2013/14	9,509 ac	71	£1,021,500	£552,215	0	0
2014/15	9,687 ac	68	£608,924	£377,000	£615,000	102 aces at Braunton
2015/16	9,619 ac	69	£3,843,000	£1,284,000	0	0
2016/17	9,590 ac	69	£1,476,115	£1,107,944	£150,000	26 acres at Marwood
2017/18	9,570 ac	68	£11,130,000	£778,599	0	0
2018/19	9,555 ac	65	£2,700,644	£1,365,740	0	0
2019/20	9,544 ac	65	£1,569,062	£1,189,225	0	0
2020/21	9,572 ac	65	£610,000	£954,093	£278,980	36 acres at Rose Ash
TOTALS			£27,896,345	£10,871,595	£1,843,291	309 acres

In summary between financial years 2009/10 and 2020/21:

- the estate has reduced in size by 429 acres
- the estate has purchased 309 acres in 5 separate blocks
- the Council has invested £1,843,291 on the purchase of the replacement land (average of £5,965 / acre)
- the number of residential equipped holdings has reduced by 17
- the estate has generated £27,896,345 in capital receipts
- the Council has invested £10,871,595 in improved infrastructure on the estate – largely NVZ/SSAFO compliant slurry stores and farmhouse renovation and energy efficiency works

It is perhaps worth noting that we have been very successful buying land that is well located to the Estate. It is very rare that land sufficiently well located to existing holdings comes to the market, but we have pursued most, if not all suitable opportunities.

Councillor John Hart

Cabinet Member for Policy, Corporate and Asset Management