

The County Farms Estate  
Management and Restructuring

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 recommendations as set out in the opening paragraph of section 1 to 3 of this report.

1.0 Part Lower Northchurch Farm, Yarnscombe

1.1 It is recommended that NG 0040 and 0041 forming part Lower Northchurch Farm, Yarnscombe and amounting to 3.39 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.

1.2 The Yarnscombe Estate comprises:

(i) Lower Northchurch Farm	50.92 hectares (125.82 acres)
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Total	50.92 hectares (125.82 acres)
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1.3 At the County Farms Estate Committee meeting of 27 September 2021, members resolved under minute ref FE/7(b):

*'that endorsement be given to possession proceedings for Lower Northchurch Farm, Yarnscombe being concluded and that in due course the holding be advertised to let on the open market as a new entrant opportunity and on a Farm Business Tenancy for a term of up to seven years, all subject to terms being agreed'.*

1.4 A neighbour and potential special purchaser has subsequently expressed interest in purchasing a small paddock to the rear of their property.

1.5 The land constitutes an opportunity for the neighbour to acquire a pony paddock which will add significant value to their property. The neighbour is aware of this and is prepared to pay a significant premium for the benefit.

2.0 Part Lower Farm, High Bickington

2.1 It is recommended that NG 1926 forming part Lower Farm, High Bickington and amounting to 2.13 acres or thereabouts be declared permanently surplus to the operational requirements of the Estate and sold.

2.2 The High Bickington Estate comprises:

Lower Farm	33.44 hectares (82.64 acres)
Part Lower Farm (NG 1926)	0.86 hectares (2.13 acres)
 Total	 34.30 hectares (84.77 acres)

2.2 Part Lower Farm, High Bickington (NG 1926) has been allocated for development in The North Devon and Torrington Local Plan 2011-2031.

2.3 The allocated site is in two ownerships. The County Council and NPS colleagues are working with the neighbouring property owner and his own professional advisers to develop an outline planning application for residential development of the combined site which is to be submitted to the Local Planning Authority in due course.

2.4 The land in question has always been earmarked for disposal following the successful development of the adjacent former Little Bickington Farm property which was transferred to and developed by the High Bickington Community Development Trust.

3.0 Part Glebe Farm, Rattery

3.1 It is recommended that:

- (a) Part NG 2249 (0.38 acres or thereabouts) be declared permanently surplus to the operational requirements of the Estate and transferred to St Mary’s Church, Rattery, subject to terms being agreed.
- (b) Permission be given to discuss and agree terms with the Parish Council for a permissive path agreement granting rights for the Parish Council to create and thereafter maintain and repair a permissive path through Part NG 2249 and NG 2854.
- (c) NG 8726 and NG 0017 amounting to 9.96 acres or thereabouts be let to the Veterans Farm-Able Foundation as an alternative and more secure base, subject to terms being agreed.

3.2 The Rattery Estate comprises:

Glebe Farm	19.21 hectares	(47.45 acres)
 Total	 19.21 hectares	 (47.45 acres)

3.3 The former farmhouse at Glebe Farm, Rattery was sold several years ago. The farm buildings and land extending to 19.21 hectares (47.45 acres) or thereabouts was retained for it’s mid to long term development potential on

part, and as useful 'away' land for one of the Estates nearby retained dairy holdings (Cobberton Farm, Dartington).

- 3.4 The tenant of Cobberton Farm, Dartington has farmed the land at Glebe Farm, Rattery on a series of 12 month Farm Business Tenancy Agreements since 2013.
- 3.5 The County Council has discussed with the Parish Council plans to develop the farmstead through either the Class Q permitted development rights to convert the existing agricultural buildings, or by perhaps using the permitted development rights as the 'fall back' position to an outline planning application for a more aesthetically pleasing residential development more in keeping with the character and appearance of the village environment. In early 2021, following an informal consultation exercise, the Parish Council confirmed it would not support any planning application for new-build housing on the site of the buildings at Glebe Farm.
- 3.6 The County Council is currently developing a Class Q permitted development submission associated with proposed conversion of the agricultural buildings.
- 3.7 In February 2022, the Local County Council member, Councillor Dan Thomas, put forward a Parish Council request for permission to create a permissive footpath through Glebe Farm, Rattery.
- 3.8 The proposed route of the permissive footpath is unlikely to cause any harm to the agricultural occupation and use of the land and is unlikely to cause any detrimental impact on the County Councils proposed development of the farmstead.
- 3.9 In the spirit of wanting to work more collaboratively with the Parish Council, it is proposed that heads of terms be discussed and hopefully agreed for a permissive path agreement with the Parish Council to enable a permissive footpath to be created along the proposed route.
- 3.10 More recently the County Council has been approached by the Church Warden of the St Mary's Church, Rattery to ideally acquire the freehold interest in Part NG 2249, extending to 0.38 acres or thereabouts to create a memorial garden and scope for potentially extending the conventional burial ground. The Church hopes to offer work in the grounds of the church as part of a social prescribing programme. The works would also see the biodiversity of the area improved.
- 3.11 The land in question to the rear of the church yard is partially overgrown and subject to rocky outcrops rendering the area of limited commercial use to the Estates farm tenant.
- 3.12 Members may recall receiving a verbal presentation from Mr J Hibbard, the Chief Executive of the Veterans Farm-Able Foundation at its meeting of 27 September 2021 before resolving, under minute ref: FE/3:  
  
'that the County Farms Estate Land Agent explore possibilities and report back to a future Committee'.

- 3.13 As a reminder, the Veterans Farm-Able Foundation is an eight-year old independent Charity based in Devon that looks after military veterans. The Charity provides agricultural and horticultural therapies to help improve physical mental health and wellbeing and also to help guide some veterans who wanted an introduction into farming. The benefits of working with nature and with animals is well proven.
- 3.14 There are apparently two million veterans currently in the UK, the highest proportion being in the South West and 100,000 in Devon alone, the majority being young men aged between 18 and 30.
- 3.15 The Charity is currently working with a number of veterans, supporting them in dealing with the impact of trauma, particularly Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and land mine injuries. The Charity also supports exclusive women's projects that take place in a safe, supportive environment.
- 3.16 The Charity is looking for a permanent base, to work with farmers and landowners in a similar way to the Apricot Centre, Totnes. Ideally, they would be looking for a smallholding between Exeter and Plymouth. The security of a base would improve the Charity's ability to apply for grant funding.
- 3.17 Having considered the potentially available County Farms Estate holdings within the Charity's preferred target location, Glebe Farm, Rattery was the best potential match.
- 3.18 Mr Hibbard has visited the holding with the County Land Agent and confirmed that Part NG 8726 and NG 0017 extending to 9.96 acres or thereabouts would be an ideal location for their Charity. The Charity may not need all of the land from the outset but would like the opportunity to plan for future growth and expansion.
- 3.19 The Charity is now considering discussing the sites potential with the Local Planning Authority and commissioning a detailed feasibility study.

#### 4.0 Part Lower Barton Farm, Aylesbeare

4.1 It is recommended that Part Lower Barton Farm, Aylesbeare be declared permanently surplus to the requirements of the Estate and surrendered back to the landlord, Clinton Devon Estates, subject to terms being agreed.

4.2 The Aylesbeare Estate comprises:

Lower Barton Farm	26.82 hectares (66.27 acres)
Part Topshayes Farm	52.37 hectares (129.41 acres)
Part New Ford Farm	12.65 hectares (31.26 acres)
<b>Total</b>	<b>91.84 hectares (226.94 acres)</b>

4.3 At the County Farms Estate Committee meeting of 22 November 2012 members resolved under minute ref: FE/161(b) The Aylesbeare Estate:

That the new management plan for the Aylesbeare Estate be approved providing for:

- Retaining and re-letting the house, buildings and 73 acres of land forming Topshayes Farm,
- Retaining and re-letting the 30 acres of land forming part New Ford Farm,
- Seeking to obtain vacant possession of Barton Farm at the earliest opportunity, surrender the lease of the Barton Farm farmstead back to the Head Landlord and retain and amalgamate the 58 acres or thereabouts of Barton Farm land to Topshayes Farm,
- Seeking to obtain vacant possession of Lower Barton Farm at the earliest opportunity, surrender the lease of the Lower Barton Farm farmstead back to the Head Landlord and retain and amalgamate the 64 acres or thereabouts of Lower Barton Farm land to New Ford Farm'.

4.4 In 2019 terms were agreed between the former tenant of Barton Farm and Clinton Devon Estates to surrender the lease of the Barton Farm farmstead back to the head landlord with vacant possession. The lease of the land was retained and 56.89 acres of land was amalgamated with Topshayes Farm.

4.5 The Clinton Devon Estate has since secured planning consent for the redevelopment of the Barton Farm farmstead and has exchanged contracts for the sale of the site to a developer.

4.6 Although not critical to the development proceeding, Clinton Devon Estate has asked if the Council's tenant and the Council itself would surrender a small area of Lower Barton Farm and more particularly described as part NG 8800 (approximately 0.1 acres in size) which adjoins the Barton Farm development site.

4.7 Clinton Devon Estates have agreed terms for the surrender with the Council's tenant and will be paying his and the Council's professional and legal fees.

5.0 Options/Alternatives

5.1 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.

6.0 Consultations/Representations/Technical Data

6.1 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.

6.2 No other parties have been consulted and no other representations have been received

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

#### 7.0 Financial Considerations

7.1 The Author is not aware of any financial 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 Environmental Impact Considerations (Including Climate Change)

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

#### 10.0 Equality Considerations

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

#### 11.0 Risk Management Considerations

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

#### 12.0 Public Health Impact

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

#### 13.0 Summary/Conclusions/Reasons for Recommendations

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

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Electoral Divisions:

Torrington Rural; South Brent & Yealmpton;  
Otter Valley

Local Government Act 1972: List of Background Papers

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Background Paper	Date	File Reference
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Nil

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