

The County Farms Estate
CPRE Report: Reimagining Council Farms – A vision for 2040 (March 2022)

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 notes this further report from the CPRE which remains broadly in keeping with the aims and objectives of the existing Estate Strategic Review Report established in March 2010.

1.0 Background

1.1 Members may recall receiving report BSS/20/01 on 24 February 2020 which introduced the Campaign to Protect Rural England (CPRE) Report ‘Reviving County Farms’.

1.2 Minute Reference FE/120 of 24 February 2022 records the committee resolution:

‘Members noted the CPRE report which was very much in keeping with the aims and objectives of the existing Estate Strategic Review Report of March 2010’.

1.3 In March 2022 the CPRE published its vision for Council Farms following further research and consultation with a wide range of stakeholders. A copy of the report is attached at Appendix 1.

1.4 The report is endorsed by Lord Curry of Kirkharle who, in his foreword, wrote:

‘We have entered a decade where farming faces a level of change not seen for perhaps a century. At this time, more than ever, we need to create opportunities in agriculture for new people excited by the challenges ahead and passionate about contributing to the future success of the sector’.

1.5 One of many key statements made in the report recognises the significant role Council Farms plays in the agricultural industry (page 11):

‘Availability of equipped farms to rent in the market is limited but council farm estates are structured to provide mainly land with buildings and/or homes. As

such and for their scale they have a disproportionate value for supporting the most talented into farming who may lack capital. They play a distinctive public service role to rejuvenate farming and ultimately to de-risk the supply of skilled, resourceful and passionate people into the sector and potentially, if such links could be forged, onto other institutional and private estates’.

2.0 Summary of report findings

2.1 The Vision:

- (i) In 2040, council farms are valued by local people, are actively contributing to the UK’s climate commitments and are identified as high-quality natural assets. They are secured and managed for the benefit of the whole community including prospective, new and existing tenants and others making a living from the land.
- (ii) Local authorities - In 2040 council-owned farmland is secured by a strong national narrative of taking the holistic best-value approach to municipal assets. It is managed in the public interest to deliver important global, national and local objectives, decided democratically. As a result, its value is fully recognised and councils no longer reduce their estates to tackle short-term budgetary pressures. After 20 years of sustained investment, the national area of council farm estates has grown significantly and most farm estates are stable and expanding. Council farmland hosts a diverse mix of tenants - private and family business but also community enterprise models - working in partnership with their council to be local beacons of innovative sustainable climate and nature-friendly farming.
- (iii) Farmers and growers - Councils are making the most of the potential of their farmland to provide opportunities for people from all backgrounds to work the land in their own right, supporting them to develop sustainable businesses and livelihoods, which benefit the wider local community. This has helped revitalise the land-based sector, by supporting progressive farmers and bringing in new, diverse, resourceful people equipped to produce food sustainably, in tune with nature and delivering net zero and beyond.
- (iv) Local people - Council farmland is secured for the benefit of the whole community both now and in the future. Local people are meaningfully engaged as key stakeholders directly and through a range of community groups in developing estate management plans, in understanding and valuing the benefits that council farmland provides and engaging with the opportunities it brings. Council farmland is recognised as special for generally giving citizens a stake and a sense of connection with their local farmed countryside and those working and stewarding the land. This is strengthened by council farms, which choose to make supplying food locally, educational and recreational access and other services a part of their approach.

2.2 Summary of report recommendations:

2.2.1 Central government should:

- (a) Build consensus around a new unifying purpose for the nation's council farm estate that frames a long-term national strategy and five year action plan which will guide local authorities to optimise management of their farm assets for delivering greater public benefits.
- (b) Support councils in developing new integrated strategies for their farm estates which build on local good practice to join up delivery of national and local social, economic and environmental objectives.
- (c) Harmonise and develop tools to recognise the value of public land which incorporate revenue, financial and natural capital values and wider social, economic and environmental public benefits and support local authorities to deploy these to better manage their farmland estates.
- (d) Reform reporting requirements on council farmland by updating information collected and reported locally and nationally to improve public understanding and scrutiny including on the nature and extent of holdings, support for new and existing tenants and public value including delivery of public goods.
- (e) Join up existing government Future Farming and Countryside Programme and other initiatives to maximise returns on cohesive investment in council farms and their agricultural transition.
- (f) Ensure sustained investment in and enhancement of council farms for the medium to long term by building for example on the government's own New Entrants scheme proposed financing for council estates.
- (g) Give councils a duty to assess wider social, economic and environmental benefits of planned uses in achieving best consideration when disposing of farms and farmland and to involve local communities in setting goals for their council farm estate and how it is to be managed. Ensure local people are properly informed of sales and that local not-for-profit models are considered as preferred options before sale.
- (h) Legislate to give councils a duty to put in place a net gain policy to enable judicious sales and purchases of land which protects and enhances the extent and quality of their farm estates for the future.

2.2.2 With support from central government, local authorities should:

- (i) Increase the access-routes and progression opportunities to work council farmland by developing new incubator and accelerator models to induct and equip more new entrants from all backgrounds to take up new opportunities on council farm estates and elsewhere.

- (j) Help new entrants, existing tenants and others working council farmland to realise local, novel and higher value market opportunities including supply via dynamic local procurement into council facilities.

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 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 Legal Considerations

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

7.0 Environmental Impact Considerations (Including Climate Change)

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

8.0 Equality Considerations

- 8.1 The Author is not aware of any equality 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).

Name

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Electoral Divisions: All

Local Government Act 1972: List of Background Papers

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Background Paper	Date	File Reference
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Nil

The above mentioned Reports are published on the Council's Website at:
<http://democracy.devon.gov.uk/ieDocHome.aspx?bcr=1>