

TBS/25/2  
Farms Estate Committee  
10 February 2025

## **The County Farms Estate Management and Restructuring**

Report of the Director of Transformation and Business Services

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

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### **1) Recommendation**

That the Committee approves the recommendations as set out in the opening paragraphs of sections 3.1, 3.2 and 3.3 of this report.

### **2) Background / Introduction**

Decisions to declare any asset surplus to the requirements of the Estate in advance of disposal must be approved by the County Farms Estate Committee. All or any estate rationalisation or restructuring proposals must also be approved by the Committee. Proposals to let or continue to let all or any part of the Estate to any tenants and for how long need to be approved by the Committee. The appointment of new tenants either from the open market (starter farms) or internally (progression farms) are delegated to an Interview Panel Sub-Committee convened to meet as and when required.

### **3) Proposals to sell, let or restructure the Estate**

#### **3.1 Part East Fingle Farm, Drewsteignton**

It is recommended that:

- (i) Part East Fingle Farm, Drewsteignton comprising the listed farmhouse, buildings and 9.95 acres or thereabouts of land (more particularly referenced as NG 3232, 3436, 2740, 2940, 3443, Pt 4241, Pt 3658, and Pt 4657), be declared permanently surplus to the operational requirements of the Estate and sold on the open market with vacant possession as soon as possible after 25 March 2027.
- (ii) The remaining 55.90 acres or thereabouts of land forming East Fingle Farm to be amalgamated and let with Higher Fingle Farm on a Farm Business Tenancy for a term of six years commencing 25 March 2027 and terminating 25 March 2033, subject to terms being agreed.

3.1.2 The Drewsteignton Estate comprises:

(i)	East Fingle Farm	- 26.20 hectares (65.85 acres)
(ii)	Higher Fingle Farm	- 22.83 hectares (56.41 acres)
	Total	- 49.03 hectares (122.26 acres)

3.1.3 East Fingle Farm, Drewsteignton was let as a starter holding on the open market from 25 March 2013. In 2016, the current stater tenant was granted a new Farm Business Tenancy of the holding to take her term of occupation up to the maximum 14 years permitted by Estate policy. The current tenants Farm Business Tenancy is due to expire on 25 March 2027.

3.1.4 As a reminder, the current detailed farms letting policy is contained in Appendix (v) of the Farms Estate Strategic Review Report of March 2010. Paragraph 2.1 of Appendix (v) states:

*'Starter farms will be let on an initial term of seven years to new entrants from the open market. This length of term may be extended at any time during the continuation of the tenancy provided a sound business case for an extension can be made. Tenants may stay on a starter farm for a maximum term of 14 years'.*

3.1.5 Paragraph 5.2 of Appendix (v) adds:

*'During that second term tenancy it will be stressed upon the tenant the importance of progressing to another holding since it will not be the general policy of the Authority to willingly grant a further, third, tenancy on the same farm, although specific individual circumstances may justify such a policy'.*

3.1.6 For completeness, members ought to be aware of the only caveat to the above strict policy. This is set out in Paragraph 5.3 of Appendix (v) and states:

*'For some specialist and highly intensive rural businesses however, it may be possible to demonstrate sufficient growth and expansion potential on the same holding for a period of years beyond the initial tenancy term offered. In some instances, therefore, it may not be necessary to move holdings in order to 'progress' within the Estate and it may be possible after perhaps a modest extension of time on a starter farm to progress directly into the private sector'.*

3.1.7 The farmhouse at East Fingle Farm is Grade II listed and the holding is located within the Dartmoor National Park. The farmhouse appears to have been poorly maintained in the 70's, 80's, and 90's. In c.2018, a programme of sympathetic repair, maintenance, and improvement works to the farmhouse was approved and listed building consent for the works obtained. Unfortunately, once the work commenced, it soon became apparent that the condition of the farmhouse, constructed with cob, random stone, and concrete rendered walls over random rough stone foundations, was much worse than anticipated. The scale of the renovation works was reduced back to the front and gable end elevations only.

Consent to replace the energy inefficient crittall windows was not approved. The farmhouse roof is detailed in the English Heritage listing as tin over thatch and is likely to need to be replaced in the near future.

- 3.1.8 So far, the County Council has had to spend a significant amount of capital on:
- the essential structural repairs to part of the farmhouse (the need for further structural works cannot be discounted).
  - installing a wet (oil fired) heating and hot water system,
  - replacing the life expired and non-compliant septic tank with a package sewage treatment plant.

3.1.9 As stated above, the roof is likely to need to be replaced in the near future. If listed building consent could be secured, it would seem prudent to ascertain if the roof covering could be replaced with slate or at worst thatch, instead of the current tin over thatch. The farmhouse is likely to require further significant and possibly ongoing essential repairs and maintenance to ensure it is sympathetically preserved. The Estate can ill afford such significant and potentially ongoing financial liabilities on a single farmhouse.

3.1.10 It should perhaps be noted that the extensive works carried out, almost on an ongoing basis since c. 2018, has caused disruption to the tenants vital Air B&B letting diversification in the self-contained annex (eastern half of the farmhouse). It is foreseeable that the likelihood of further significant works in the future would also disrupt the letting diversification.

## 3.2 New Gulliford Farm, Dawlish

3.2.1 It is recommended that:

(i) The tenants proposed surrender of New Gulliford Farm, Dawlish on 29 September 2025 be accepted.

(ii) That the farmhouse, buildings and 36.46 hectares (90.10 acres) or thereabouts of land at New Gulliford Farm, Dawlish be advertised to let on the open market as a new entrant opportunity and on a Farm Business Tenancy for a term of six and a half years commencing 29 September 2025 and terminating 25 March 2032, subject to terms being agreed.

3.2.2 The Dawlish Estate comprises:

(i)	New Gulliford Farm	36.46 hectares (90.10 acres)
(ii)	Duckaller Farm	35.74 hectares (88.31 acres)
(iii)	Land at Cofton Cross	3.09 hectares (7.64 acres)
	Total	75.29 hectares (186.05 acres)

3.2.3 The current tenant of New Gulliford Farm, Dawlish has asked to be released from his tenancy early. He has requested to leave on 29 September 2025.

3.2.4 There is adequate time to get the farm relet on the open market, albeit a one-off advertising campaign will need to be implemented outside of normal advertising periods (most farms are let from 25 March each year and advertised collectively the autumn before) which will come as an additional estate management cost. It is however considered to be in the Estates best interests to relet the farm sooner rather than later.

3.2.5 New Gulliford Farm is a well located equipped residential holding with material diversification opportunities. It is considered the farm would present an attractive and viable new entrant opportunity, possibly a part time unit. Whilst the farm buildings are tired, the dry nature of the farm and anticipated beef, sheep and arable enterprises likely to be proposed by prospective tenants, does not necessarily require an abundance of buildings. The farmhouse has previously been renovated by the landlord and is understood to be in good habitable order and condition. The farmhouse has an EPC of D.

### 3.3 Tarrant's Farm, Payhembury

3.3.1 It is recommended that:

- (i) Tarrant's Farm, Payhembury be advertised to let internally to existing tenants as a progression dairy farm for a term of up to 15 years commencing 25 March 2026 and terminating 25 March 2041, subject to terms being agreed.

3.3.2 The Payhembury Estate comprises:

(i) Tarrant's Farm	88.27 hectares (218.10 acres)
Total	88.27 hectares (218.10 acres)

3.3.3 The current tenants Farm Business Tenancy expires 25 March 2026. The tenant, having been on the Estate for more than 25 years, intends to retire at the end of the term.

3.3.4 Tarrant's Farm comprising a bungalow, well equipped set of buildings, and 218.10 acres or thereabouts of land represents a viable and productive dairy progression farm. In fact, it is one of the better equipped dairy holdings on the Estate and is already attracting interest from a number of existing tenants keen to progress.

## 4) Options / Alternatives

4.1 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.

## **5) Consultations / Representations / Technical Data**

- 5.1 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.
- 5.2 No other parties have been consulted and no other representations have been received
- 5.3 The technical data is believed to be true and accurate.

## **6) Strategic Plan**

- 6.1 This report aligns with the following part of the Council's Strategic Plan 2021 – 2025 - <https://www.devon.gov.uk/strategic-plan>
  - Responding to the climate emergency – help wildlife and landscapes to recover. This is achieved through the appropriation of land to the highways department for the sole purpose of creating new woodland as part of a Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) commitment.

## **7) Financial Considerations**

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

## **8) Legal Considerations**

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

## **9) Environmental Impact Considerations (Including Climate Change, Sustainability and Socio-economic)**

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

## **10) Equality Considerations**

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

## **11) Risk Management Considerations**

- 11.1 No risks have been identified.

## **12) Summary / Conclusions / Reasons for Recommendations**

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

Matthew Jones,  
Director of Transformation and Business Services

**Electoral Divisions:** Hatherleigh & Chagford; Dawlish; Whimble & Blackdown

### **Local Government Act 1972: List of background papers**

Background Paper  
Date  
File Reference

Nil

#### **Contact for enquiries:**

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