

Cambridgeshire County Farms Estate - Objectives and Policies

Estate Objectives:

In order to create a more commercially viable Estate, for both the Council and its tenants, the objectives for the Estate approved in the Rural Strategy are as follows:

Objective 1: To promote and encourage commercial farm enterprises; maintain farm rental value; maintain the capital investment programme and minimise rent debt.

Objective 2: To provide full time opportunities for the creation of fixed term commercial farm businesses and to encourage new entrants to expand their businesses and plan for moving on.

Objective 3a: To realise, only at vacant possession value, the sale of identified surplus property on the Estate taking proactive steps to bring forward a continuing stream of capital receipts

Objective 3b: To continue to reduce overall maintenance and management costs whilst combining the need to fulfil landlord's liabilities with proactive work across the range of Estate objectives.

Objective 4: To identify part time new young entrant and retirement opportunities and ensure a steady turnover making the best use of land held pending longer term development / sale.

Objective 5: To promote environmental initiatives together with improved access to the Countryside, link with schools to provide a wide educational experience of farming and the countryside.

Objective 6: To support rural development and economic regeneration by encouraging wider farm diversification; letting appropriate facilities for non-agricultural use and identifying land sales for social housing.

Estate Policies:

Used in the review and implementation of the Farm Management Plans are:

1. The physical criteria for the retention of full time holdings will include:

- Compact blocks of land with good internal access between fields;
- Modern dwellings with basic accommodation and amenities or possibility to provide these at reasonable cost;
- And conveniently located in relation to the dwelling with good access and yard;

- Modern farm buildings of a general purpose type with good eaves height and easy entry for the highest and widest vehicles.

2. Selection of holdings using these criteria will reduce the Council's maintenance liability in respect of:

- Farm buildings especially those of traditional construction which may have consequential Health and Safety liabilities;
- Dwellings, including routine maintenance and periodic structural repairs.

3. The reduced number of holdings should lead to a gradual reduction, in real terms, in maintenance costs by selling surplus farmsteads.

4. The economic criteria for the retention of holdings will reflect the profitability of the enterprises most likely to be undertaken. It is likely that full time commercial arable farms will be in the region of 150 350 acres whilst commercial/intensive horticultural units are likely to be 20 50 acres.

5. The economic criteria for the retention of land and property will be as follows:

- An overriding presumption against the premature sale of land which has long term development value and which might otherwise be sold;
- Property will not be identified for sale where it would have a serious adverse effect on the value or management of retained land;
- Good and reasonable quality land in compact or closely related blocks will be retained.

6. Isolated and detached blocks or poor quality land or properties which are uneconomic to retain will be zoned for sale with vacant possession subject to the caveat in (d) above.

7. Retirement holdings on the Estate will only be offered where property is retained for sound estate management reasons.

- The provision of retirement housing off the Estate in conjunction with Housing Associations is being pursued. Six sites throughout the County are currently under various stages of investigation and a sample survey of older tenants housing needs is in progress.

- Initial reports from this limited survey suggest that there would be support from a significant number of tenants for both housing association rental and shared ownership schemes. Some 25% of tenants in the sample survey have been able to make their own provision for post retirement housing.

8. There will be a presumption against capital investment except where it is essential and where:

- the Plans are being implemented and a long term holding is substantially complete and where the fixed equipment is inadequate; or
- substantial refurbishment to specific farm buildings of traditional construction is required to save consequential repair costs and where long term development potential is to be safeguarded; or
- substantial capital receipts can be achieved over and above the capital expenditure.

9. Diversification of farm business will be encouraged on the full time holdings where it is ancillary to the main activity of commercial agriculture or horticulture.

10. The retirement at 65 years of age will be applied to all lettings where the amount of extra land being added to a tenancy exceeds 2.5 acres.