

farms

Newsletter for tenants of Cambridgeshire County Farms Estate

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Approved for circulation

Revival of old varieties – a success



In June David Wheatley hosted a successful farm walk at Wisbech St. Mary

David was the winner of last year's Millennium Cup for farming and conservation. A total of 45 tenants and their families saw the fruits of David's hard work since 2001, when with a Countryside Stewardship grant he has restored a large traditional orchard. This involved fencing, laying on water, grazing with sheep, fruit tree pruning and scrub removal to restore the orchard to its former glory.

David has been instrumental in securing the future of the region's old and scarce varieties of apples, pears, plums and cherries. We saw a 3.5 ha collection of older and well known local varieties such as Beauty of Bedford, Norfolk Beefing and Grimoldby Golden which

David planted this year. There are some 241 evocatively named varieties. The site will form a regional collection and will be an important resource to complement the National Fruit Collections at Brockdale Horticultural Trust, Favissham.

We were also pleased that Nigel Russell from the Rural Development Service, Cambridge was able to attend. Nigel has been closely involved with David in giving advice on the Stewardship Schemes and the Regional Collection. After the walk David's family, particularly his sister, provided us with a memorable barbecue. Our thanks to David and his family for acting as hosts for the evening. ●

tenancy matters

Farm Management Plan Review – Revised Estate Objectives

After many months of meetings and reports the Council's Cabinet approved the revised Policies and Objectives for the Estate on the 11th July. The revised Farm Management Plans based on the new policies were prepared at the same time. The revised policies and plans were required to keep ahead of the changes happening in the countryside, farming and the Council.

Now the emphasis has moved to implementing the changes. We have recently held a number of meetings around the County for tenants to look at the revised Farm Management Plans and to discuss the implications with their Patch Officer. These were held at Hereward Hall March, The Maltings, Ely, Shire Hall and Sackville House, Cambourne and all were fully booked.

More than 3000 acres is currently being let in accordance with the revised plans. Later in the year the Opportunity to Buy scheme will be revised and relaunched.

Below are the revised Estate Objectives. Please read these carefully as they affect you all and if you have any queries or concerns, please contact your Patch Officer. These are not in any order of priority.

Revised Estate Objectives

1. To promote (full-time) fixed term commercial farm business opportunities and foster links between the Council and private/institutional estate landlords with the aim of securing tenant progression and development.

2. To promote short term/part-time fixed term opportunities for new entrants by making best use of land held pending long term development/sale.

3. To realise, only at vacant possession value, the sale of identified surplus property on the Estate by taking proactive steps to bring forward a continuing stream of capital receipts whilst at the same time protecting and enhancing the asset value of the retained Estate.

4. To make financial provision for the proper management of the Council's statutory and contractual repair liabilities.

5. To maintain or increase rental income, so far as is practicable, significant items of capital expenditure will be justified with a business case.

6. To provide a positive experience of the Estate/countryside by promoting and publicising environmental initiatives to increase biodiversity, public access, archaeological protection / enhancement and conservation / amenity projects.

7. To support rural development and economic re-generation by encouraging wider farm diversification, letting appropriate facilities for non-agricultural use and identifying land sales for social housing.

The following policy statements expand on the objectives.

1: Annual maintenance

- Retain the policy to identify for sale properties with a high maintenance liability.
- Identify in a progressive planned maintenance programme the latent liability for repairs, in particular those falling under

statutory or contractual responsibilities.

- The budget must cover the statutory and contractual liabilities of the Council (but not to a standard beyond recognised good practice).
- Prioritise repairs where the cost is shared with tenants under the tenancy contract.
- Ensure tenants repair covenants are enforced.
- Maintenance expenditure will be set at a level commensurate with good asset management practice and will be measured by levels of tenant satisfaction.

2: Capital improvements

- Farm management plan reviews should design out the need for investment, where possible.
- The annual budget should contain a provision for the payment of contractual compensation to tenants at the end of tenancy for approved improvements and fixtures where the option to purchase is taken by the Council.
- It is acknowledged that tenants will sometimes invest in capital improvements on their holdings, which will normally remain their property until the end of the tenancy. The Council will encourage this investment by approving investment and agreeing compensation write off terms.
- The Council will prioritise alternative ways of investing in the estate, for example, sharing investment with tenants in return for a more secure rent.
- The Council will prioritise investment on improvements or replacement fixed equipment to facilitate the generation of capital receipts.

3: Sales and purchases

- The Council will continue to manage proactively its capital sales programme. Professional resources will be directed to accelerating capital receipts, including those currently defined as speculative projects.
- The Council will identify for capital receipts targets the specific resources required to achieve those targets, for example, compensation to tenants, necessary restructuring investments, specialist advice (architects, planners, highways etc).
- Sales will only be of property at vacant possession value.
- Sales will not be encumbered with covenants or restrictions unless this is necessary to protect the value of retained property.
- Sales to tenants of identified surplus land at a vacant possession value will be permitted subject to the Council being satisfied with the valuation.
- In accordance with the Council's current disposal policy the Council will continue to seek best consideration for all sales and all exceptions will be considered on their merits by Cabinet.
- Capital purchase of land will normally only be approved where the business case can show it unlocks marriage value from the Council's existing landholdings.

4: Environment, public access and community value

- The value of the County Farms Estate to the wider community is to be publicised by working closely with the Office of Environment and Community



Services and Parish Councils to provide better public access opportunities, and to promote conservation and amenity projects.

- b) To take full advantage of EU and DEFRA farm conservation funding which now actively supports greater public access and environmental protection.
- c) Environmental credentials will be used to select new tenants when business credentials are equal but will receive a higher weight where care for the environment is the pre-eminent feature of the farm.
- d) Archaeological features will continue to be protected, taking advantage of DEFRA "High Level Scheme" grants where appropriate. Service Level Agreements should be retained in full to maintain work completed to-date, and to improve sites where very visible and well used by the public. This responsibility will require a revenue budget provision.
- e) The market for biomass is at an early stage and will be kept under review by the Council.

5: Management of the Estate and Governance

- a) The core management responsibility will remain in-house as this is the most efficient use of resources and important for the delivery, with others, of the capital sales programme. Private sector resources will continue to be used for specialist projects, for example, mineral development or rent arbitrations, where the in-house team may not have experience.
- b) There is scope for dealing with routine estate management more efficiently, and releasing qualified senior professional

staff to carry out more suitable work, by following the private sector practice of recruiting and training 'estate managers', not graduate surveyors (who tend to be short term and have a heavy training commitment).

- c) Member governance of the delivery of objectives/policies will be achieved by the provision of regular reports to the Corporate Services Portfolio Holder and Corporate Services Spokes; the use of a Member Advisory Group on tenant selection and the submission of an annual report to the Corporate Services Service Delivery Group.

6: Retention of the Estate

The Council will not sell the entire estate, nor accelerate the capital sales programme beyond property identified by existing policies.

7: Flexibility of letting; contracting and sub-letting

- a) Subletting of whole farms will not be permitted. Subletting of fields for specialist cropping, and subletting in particular for crops grown by other County Farms Estate tenants, will be permitted but subject in each case to approval in advance (and at an agreed fee) and by standard licences to ensure proper management practices and to protect the Council's property.
- b) Residency on holding will be required where a dwelling is provided except in the last five years of the tenancy (an end date will be required in all cases). In each case any exception, is subject to approval in advance and where a subletting is

intended (at an agreed fee), and by standard 'licences' to ensure proper management practices and to protect the Council's property.

8: End of tenancy compensation

- a) **Improvements**
The approved improvements for which there is a latent liability will be identified; a provision in the revenue budget will be made to meet this liability.
 - b) **Single Farm Payment Entitlements**
The "Historic Entitlements" owned by an outgoing tenant will be compensated (but on a reducing scale to 2012); regard will be had to the open market value but the compensation may be less than this level. A provision will be made in the revenue budget to meet this liability.
 - c) **Ingoing Tenants**
 - i) Where ingoing tenants hold their entitlements, compensation will not be paid to the outgoing tenant (but each case will be judged on its merits).
 - ii) Existing policies for ingoing tenants paying for crop 'tenant right' compensation will continue.
- 9: Farm size and progression holdings**
- a) The Council will increase target (excluding starter, specialist or diversified holdings) farm size to an average in the range 150-200 ha.
 - b) Investigate options to facilitate the retirement of older tenants, through the provision of retirement
- tenancies (where legally possible), or social housing provided by other authorities.
- c) The Council will provide starter, smaller specialist or diversified holdings to create opportunities for entrepreneurs where it is sensible/in the Landlord's interest to do so, e.g. where land is being held pending longer term disposal.
 - d) Applications for nationally advertised holdings to let, will be considered in the following sequence:
 - i) New entrants.
 - ii) Existing County Farm tenants.
 - iii) Others.
 - e) Letting to non-farming bodies will be considered where supported by a business case and the letting is appropriate to the location/site.
 - f) Extending tenancies of tenants over 65 will be considered in exceptional circumstances where it is in the Landlord's interest to do so.
 - g) Tenancy length for new entrants will be 5-15 years and in the case of the longer tenancies with an 'option' between years 5 and 10 for either the landlord or tenant to call for a performance review to assess whether the tenancy is extended or terminated at the end of the current period.
 - h) Tenant selection (see Environment 4 (c)).
 - i) Foster links between the Council and private/institutional estate landlords with the aim of securing tenant progression and development.

Two further meetings have been arranged. Please ring Christine Larham on 01223 718405 to make an appointment.

31 October 2006 Hereward Hall, March
3 November 2006 Shire Hall, Cambridge

The Charles Leadbetter story

Just got rained off from the linseed harvest so I thought it was about time to say a few words, to look to the future and look back over the last few years.

I knew from very early in life that I wanted to be a farmer, being born on the family farm in the heart of rural Staffordshire. In 1993 and at the age of 18 I left home with £400 and the clothes I stood up in, in my Ford Orion. I got a job working as a tyre fitter near Uttoxeter earning £400 per month – I felt like it was fortune at the time.

One day I went to a local dairy farm and the farmer was calving a cow. I asked where his tractor with the puncture was but he asked me to give me a hand calving this cow. In no time at all he offered me a job as a herdsman, which I took.

After six months milking someone else's cows and ploughing their fields I suddenly realised that although you are getting paid every week the rewards are not the same as if I was at home but that was not an option. So with money from the tyre job and milking cows, I

started to rent bits of land for grazing and mowing. After, I rented up to 310 acres with land in Leicestershire, Derbyshire and Staffordshire, excessive travelling between land being the only downfall. I also ran a contracting business running three balers, spraying, combining and a bio-solids spreading contract.

Then last year Mill Farm came up for rent. I had a good look at it and soon realised that I could actually see myself there and fell in love with the farm. I moved in late October which I found really hard moving to a new area not knowing anyone, telling my customers that I would not be back next year and giving up FBT's on land which I had farmed for the last few years. I actually cried real tears as reality kicked in and I realised what I had done.

On a brighter note, I am now living on a 300 acre farm and

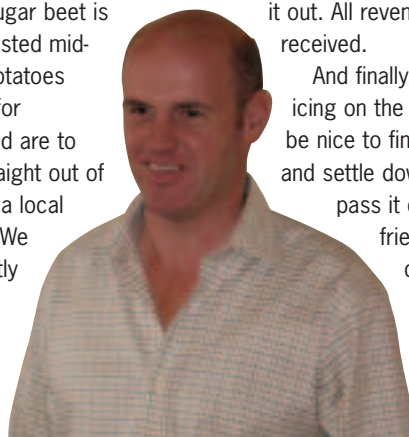
not travelling on the road every day to go to work. Hooray! The company who we spread bio-solids for insisted that we carry on for them and increased our workload to over 100,000 tons all to be done in ten weeks mid-July onwards. Cropping on Mill Farm consists of 195 acres of wheat, 30 acres of linseed, 20 acres of sugar beet and 50 acres of potatoes.

Yields are down on the wheat mainly due to the dry weather which will be sold next May/June or before if it gets to £100/ton. Fingers and toes are permanently crossed at this precise moment. Linseed is sold at £170/ton in mid-October. Sugar beet is to be harvested mid-October. Potatoes are grown for chipping and are to be sold straight out of the field to a local processor. We have recently had our application approved

for the Entry Level Stewardship scheme which consists of ditch management and 25 acres of standing stalks for wildlife and winter bird cover. With autumn fast approaching there are plenty of farm sales which is where I like to purchase most of my machinery and equipment. I don't buy new as it loses too much. I prefer to buy second hand, run it for a season and hopefully sell it for a profit. Well that is the idea!

Looking back over the years I like to think that most of the success has been down to not buying new but buying good second hand and if it's there in the yard not doing anything hire it out. All revenue is greatly received.

And finally, to put the icing on the cake, it would be nice to find a good lady and settle down. Please pass it on to your friends and colleagues after all it is all in a good cause! ●



Council loses farm somewhere near Wisbech!

Last year Rita Fitzjohn, who farms with her husband at Speedwell Farm, called to report a problem. Their farm had disappeared off the map. Delivery of post was taking ages. Nothing new in that. They had a break in and the Police could not find them. When the Coldham wind farm was being planned they missed out on a public meeting invitation although the site is just next door. The last straw was when the local Building Society told the Fitzjohn's that their postcode didn't exist.

What had gone wrong? A Global Positioning System guides

almost every delivery van that drives around the countryside. The Police tap in a postcode into their computers to get directions to the scene of a crime. The invitations to the public meeting had been drawn together using computerised postcodes.

A quick call revealed that the Ordinance Survey had taken the Fitzjohn's farm name off the computerised map by mistake. Although now corrected it will take some time for the latest updated maps to reach all those who use them but hopefully the next new policeman on the beat will be able to track them down. ●

Direct Debit payers – be fair!

All tenants who have Farm Business Tenancies pay their rent by Direct Debit. If set up correctly, these are an efficient and trouble free method of payment and are favoured by many organisations. The Council has encountered some teething problems in recent years but in most cases these have now been sorted.

However the biggest problem in recent years has been tenants cancelling Direct Debits at short notice or in

some cases no notice at all!

It is not acceptable to be told by a bank that a Direct Debit mandate has been stopped or cancelled without first being informed by the tenant involved. For the Farms Team this wastes time that could be better spent elsewhere.

If you are concerned that you may not be able to pay your rent on time please contact your Patch Officer. If you do not contact us do not expect a sympathetic response. ●

Whittlesey farm hosts visits



tour and look at machinery started the visit. Bread tasting was another activity – five types of bread was tasted and recorded on sheets taken from the Fun with Flour pack supplied by the HGCA. Finally, farming DVDs and colouring activities

completed a most enjoyable morning's visit.

The children had listened intently throughout and hopefully went away with a better understanding of the role of the farmer. Finally, each child was given a copy of the Farming Facts booklet to pass on to their parents.

Both visits are good examples of the work being done to educate the public; school children, teachers and Council staff involved in the countryside. ●

Earlier this year, sixteen County Council officers visited County Farms Estate tenant, Philip Bradshaw, at Flegcroft Farm, Whittlesey. The farm was selected as the venue for a staff away day and was part of a fact finding educational exercise to see what farmers are doing at ground level.

The Countryside Access Team deal with public rights of way across Cambridgeshire in relation to the County's duties as a Highway Authority. The County boasts 2267km of footpath, 542km of bridleway, and 402km of byway. Tasks can be divided into:

- Improving the accuracy of the public legal record that is the basis for the network.
- Adjusting the record (Definitive Map and Statement) as changes occur.
- Maintaining routes so they are signed and fit for purpose, either directly or with Parish Paths Partnerships.
- Seeking to increase usefulness and use of routes.

The team works closely with the County Farms Estate to maintain, promote and enhance the significant part of the network that is found on their

13,000 ha (300 tenancy) holdings.

Philip has all of his 117 ha farm at Flegcroft under sugar beet, potatoes and cereals. In 1997 he built a 50,000m³ reservoir and collaborates with other local farmers with machinery and advice. Trained at Shuttleworth he subsequently achieved BASIS qualifications to support his off-farm consultancy and farm management work. He is a member of LEAF (Linking Environment and Farming), and FWAG (Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group) and recently received PR training as part of LEAF's "Speak Out" campaign. On farm diversification includes a meeting room complex constructed from a range of dilapidated buildings. It is available for use by visitors who have come from as far away as Bangladesh and Japan.

In May of this year Philip hosted a visit from the Year One pupils of Park Lane Primary School at Whittlesey. As part of their topic on growing, they were able to see at first hand what growing crops looked like and learn what is needed to make them successful.

The 42 children were split into three groups. A short farm

competitions

Muckspreaders' Cup: Ablitt leads tenants to victory

A gorgeous summer's evening saw the annual cricket match between the County Council staff and the County Farms' tenants at Sutton Cricket Club on Friday, 16 June.

With the staff side opening strongly they finished on 104 for 7 hoping that was enough to defend against the big hitters from the Tenant's team. Notable was John MacMillan being sent packing by tenants' media star George Munns for the second year in succession. This is sure to add some bite to the forthcoming rent review negotiations!

With the start of the Tenant's innings, Clark got an early wicket bowling James Neal for 0 with his second ball. However, Dale Ablitt was not to be denied collecting 25 quick runs before being bowled out by Badger. George Munns notched up 16 including a 6 before being caught by the nonchalant John MacMillan at mid wicket demonstrating a very laid back Scottish style of fielding. David Wheatley completed the innings with an unbeaten score of 8 ensuring that the tenants retained the cup on a final score of 105 for 6. ●



Councillor John Powley presenting the cup to Dale Ablitt

Arson Attacks on farms

Cambridgeshire Constabulary Southern Division and the Cambridgeshire Fire and Rescue Service are working together to prevent stack fires caused by arsonists.

This involves using some brilliant new technology which has been developed and is manufactured here in England.

Stack fires caused by arsonists are a recurring and very expensive and dangerous nuisance. These fires can spread very quickly causing damage to neighbouring properties and crops endangering human life and wildlife and as such always require a response from the Fire Service. This could result in there being no Fire Crew available to respond to a real emergency and could ultimately lead to loss of life. As well as this there is the cost of the damage to the owner of the stack. Sometimes this can be in excess of £80,000.

Imagine this multiplied several times and it is easy to see how important it is to prevent stack fires caused by arsonists.

Mark Ticehurst, Arson Liaison Officer for the Fire Service commented: "It can take fire crews hours to deal with a stack fire, which means we are unable to respond as quick to real emergencies. We were called to six stack fires over this weekend alone. Hopefully

these devices will act as a deterrent."

Ellen Muirhead, Crime Reduction Officer for Cambridge Constabulary and a member of the Arson Task Force said: "This new equipment has been deployed to assist the Police in reaching stack fires more speedily in the hope of catching the arsonists. We are determined to do all we can to help local farmers and rural businesses to prevent deliberate arson attacks which are not only extremely dangerous but very expensive. These new devices will give us a fighting chance of identifying the arsonists, catching them and bringing successful prosecutions." ●

For further advice and a copy of the Fire Safety checklist please phone the Cambridgeshire Fire and Rescue Service, South Cambridgeshire District on 01223 376217.

If you know anything about any of these arson attacks please phone the Police on 0845 456 4564. If you see anything suspicious near straw stacks or other vulnerable locations which you think could be connected to arson please phone the police immediately using 999.

Waste – you can handle it

New rules were introduced on the 15 May, which brings agricultural waste into the category of "controlled waste".

What does this mean for you? You could get fined for having a farm tip. If you get someone else to take away your waste make sure that they are authorised and that you get a Waste Transfer Note from them which you should keep for two years. It means an end to burning plastic containers in the yard. It means that you have a "duty of care" and if you produce it you have a responsibility.

The definition of waste can include old spray cans, tyres,

batteries and in some cases manure and slurry.

There are exemptions, for example, disposal of waste potatoes or spreading mud from ditches. Up to 150t of road planning may be taken onto the farm but a special consent is required under the Waste Management Licensing Regulations. To get the exemptions farmers must apply to the Environment Agency.

These new Regulations are an extra cost and it is fair to cry "red tape". However, it is only bringing farming into line with other industries. ●

For more information call the Environment Agency at 0845 603 3113 or visit their website at www.netregs.gov.uk/dutyofcare

Farms to let: October 2007

Two farms will be advertised for letting to existing tenants early in the New Year. They are a 27 ha grassland holding with house and buildings at Earith and a 114 ha arable holding with a house and excellent buildings at Parson Drove. If you are interested please contact Christine Larham who will send you more details when they are available. If the farms attract no suitable candidates from the Estate's pool of tenants it will be advertised nationally. ●

Rent demands

This time rent demands are being sent out separately from the Newsletter. Invoices are produced centrally outside Cambridge and it is more efficient to deal with them this way.

In addition some people have asked why can they not have one invoice covering all of their different Agreements. Again for different reasons including automation and efficiency this is not possible.

STUART ROBINSON

Farm plastic disposal

For disposal of all farm plastics contact

**Stuart Robinson, Cherry Lodge Farm,
Puddock Road, Warboys**

07850 999870

£125 fixed price for farms up to 100 ha to include four collections per annum.

All areas of Cambridgeshire covered.