



farms

Newsletter for tenants of Cambridgeshire County Farms Estate

Scrutiny Committee report says:

the County Farms Estate is a well managed asset



An internal Council watchdog has applauded the County Farms Estate following a review of the 33,000 acre estate.

The group of cross-party Councillors who scrutinised the estate presented their findings on the 23rd March concluding it is well managed, offers excellent value for money, and provides a significant long term stream of income.

Each year the County Farms Estate brings in around £2.6 million rent and on average a further £3 million from the sale of surplus property. These funds help provide other

Council services in local communities.

As well as financial benefits Councillors also highlighted how the farms have a positive effect on the environment and were impressed by the wide ranging initiatives taking place – such as the creation of new woodlands.

Councillors Mandy Smith and Lucy Nethsingha were part of the Corporate Issues

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Awarded for excellence

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Scrutiny Committee sub group who reviewed the County Farms Estate which was chaired by Councillor Bob Farrer.

Cllr Bob Farrer said: "County Farms are at the heart of communities and the review has shown why they should have a long future. One of the drivers for the review was to make sure the Council is maximising the use of its farmlands as the annual income helps to pay for other

Council services for our residents."

Cambridgeshire County Councillor John Reynolds, Cabinet Member for Resources and Performance, said: "This in depth review of County Farms Estate is great reading and the operations are managed very effectively. Cuts in money the Council receives from Government means we are working harder than ever to make all of our services as efficient as possible. County Farms play a vital role in rural communities, but the money injected into

the Council each year means we have a steady stream that can help support vital frontline services. On top of the financial benefits the farms help to create a diverse and interesting environment that we should be all proud to call home."

A report on the findings by the Scrutiny Committee sub group review will be presented to the Council's Cabinet within the next two months. ●



Solar panels – How FiT is your roof?

Carter Jonas has been commissioned to evaluate barn roofs on the Estate with the purpose of installing PV solar panels to benefit from the Feed in Tariff Scheme.

They have completed a desktop study of 120 barns where we believe three phase is installed. Early indications look promising and a large number of roofs with solar panels fitted will be financially viable. Typical installations are predicted to produce between 8,500 kwh and 25,000 kwh of electricity a year costing between

£35,000 and £100,000 and making a return of approximately 10% per annum for 25 years. A final report is due in April and it is hoped we can fund a number of projects through BUPA.

Carter Jonas will be inspecting buildings in the forthcoming weeks to confirm their predictions and to make an assessment of the physical

installation. Tenants will have the ability to be involved in schemes, whether investing in projects personally or purchasing electricity from the system at a cheaper rate. ●

If you think you have a suitable roof or wish to investigate erecting a wind turbine please contact Robert Smyth to discuss the possibilities.

Campaign for the Farmed Environment latest

In a recent *Farmers Weekly* a writer said that most farmers have the same approach to the Campaign for the Farmed Environment as they do to going to the doctor. They see it as a problem and hope it will go away.



The farming industry has agreed a menu of options but not enough farmers are using them. Farm Minister Jim Paice warned that farmers must take the campaign more seriously or he will take action. That could be 6% set aside with no payment.

There is no doubt that some find the options confusing while others are hoping that someone else will do enough so that they can get away with doing nothing. The Campaign for the Farmed Environment is not perfect and may be a bitter pill for some, but prevention is better than cure.

The Campaign for the Farmed Environment team have suggested that if every farmer in England established just one hectare of pollen and nectar mix, and two of wild bird seed on every 100 hectares of land in production, together with buffers beside vulnerable watercourses, then the Campaign will succeed.

There are no fixed percentages for options that count towards the Campaign's success but as a guideline if every farm put 3 - 4% of arable area into key target options in ELS and Campaign voluntary measures, then farmers can avoid losing a minimum of 3 per cent of farm payments and 6 per cent of productive land.

For farmers renewing or entering ELS they should ensure that one third of their agreement points are in key target options including field corner management and pollen and nectar and wild bird seed mix.

Every farmer has the power to make the Campaign a success. They need to work with their agronomists and advisers to decide the best way to contribute to the Campaign on their individual holdings. ●

Sales incentive package


In January Members approved an Incentives Package as part of the existing Opportunity to Buy scheme. The Council wishes to encourage tenants where their property has been identified for sale in the 2006 Farm Management review, to either:

- buy their property or alternatively;
- to surrender it so that it can be sold.

The package is a time limited measure to increase the capital receipts from property.

Interest has been strong and a number of properties are currently being valued and a few tenants are agreeing terms to surrender their properties early. If you know your property has previously been available for sale/purchase but have not received a letter, please contact Robert Smyth as soon as possible. ●

Wind farms on the Estate



The 12 turbine windfarm on the Council's Estate at Warboys has been a great success. 4 new sites are now being investigated following approval by the Council's Cabinet in February.

A marketing exercise identified developers for 4 sites at Chatteris, Coveney, Farcet and Littleport which have potential for wind turbines. Cabinet, who are the main decision making group of Members in the Council, approved the next stage which will be to agree exclusive terms with the developers. This will give developers the confidence to go ahead with costly investigations and public consultations leading to hopefully planning applications to the relevant District

Councils in approximately 2 years time. If successful construction may be a further 2 years later.

The Council's involvement will be solely in granting a lease and the developers will be responsible for the planning application and all investigations and consultations.

There may also be opportunities on the Estate for smaller scale wind turbines and also solar panels. These could be an interesting diversification for some tenants and it may be that there are joint venture opportunities with the Council.

Carter Jonas have been appointed to provide advice on small scale solar and wind turbines. If you are interested contact Robert Smyth. ●

Full house at annual tenants meetings

This years meetings were held at Quy Mill Hotel at Stow Cum Quy and the Cromwell Hotel at March on the 25th and 27th of January respectively. Cllr John Reynolds, introduced, followed by a report

on the past year by John MacMillan.

We had some very interesting guest speakers this year, covering a wide range of topics. Benjamin Bodart from Offre & Demand Agricole, a

French company based in Bartlow, gave an interactive presentation on the world grain markets, and techniques and training to plan when best to sell crops. At Quy, Alexander Creed from Strutt and Parker

talked about the possibilities of renewables on farms, and at March, Nick Barber from Carter Jonas also talked about renewable energy, with wind turbines proving to be a controversial issue. ●

Woodland – new bridge and path at Oakington



Thanks to a Forestry Commission Woodland Improvement Grant, the hard work of woodland contractors/tenants David Wheatley and Martin Rix, and the cooperation of tenants, there's been a lot of activity over the winter at several woodlands on the estate.



Left to right: Cllr John Reynolds, Anita Stone (Forestry Commission), Peter Freeman (tenant), Sarah Shepherd, Julie Grove (Oakington parish council), John MacMillan, Jamie Bell (Forestry Commission)

“This new route is welcome addition to the local walks and will be even more so in a few years when the Centenary Woodland has developed” *Local resident*

Grant funding was secured to carry out works at Reach, Doddington, Foxton, Somersham and Mansell Wood, Oakington. Works included carrying out the first thinning of the woods and coppicing to improve woodland structure, encourage ground flora, and improve access for the public.

At Mansell wood, the grant also funded a new footbridge, providing a link to a new permissive footpath which enables walkers to enjoy a circular walk to the Centenary

woodland, planted last year to mark 100 years of the estate.

The bridge and countryside walk were officially opened by Councillor John Reynolds the Cabinet Member with responsibility for County Farms on 10th March 2011, joined by staff from County Farms, The Forestry Commission, Oakington parish council and the tenant, Peter Freeman. Locals are already enjoying the new walk, and it provides a great link between Oakington and Histon, away from busy roads. ●



Woodland management on the Estate

Over 40 woods on the Estate have reached a stage when management is required. We will apply for further Forestry Commission grants this year to fund works to be carried out this winter. There are clear benefits for wildlife, shooting and even a sustainable source of firewood.

If you are interested in getting involved with managing woods on your holding, please get in touch with Sarah Shepherd. It may be that training can be organised.

BUPA

(Better Use of Property Assets)

Investment funding on the farms estate still available

Already £500,000 of schemes have already been completed including a new crop store, a dwelling extension, upgrading dwelling insulation, barns doors, beet pads, 3 phase electricity and drainage.

In progress are two crop stores and three more dwelling extensions. Funds are still available for improvements on the estate, but time is running out. Schemes that can be considered include:

- Cavity wall insulation
- Loft insulation
- Barn insulation
- New farm buildings
- Land drainage
- Beet pads
- Double glazing
- Crop assurance improvements
- General farm improvements

Hurry and take advantage of this offer before it's too late. An increased rent will be required by way of an improvement charge, but some of the initial feasibility work may be free. ●

If you have any schemes you'd like to discuss, contact any of the County Farms staff.



Maintenance on the Estate

As in previous years there is a 5 year rolling programme of maintenance although budgets are under more pressure.

For properties due this year inspections for any maintenance required is underway now. Electrical installations will be checked by EC Testing, and any up and over barn doors will also be serviced by PH Doors. Even if it is not your year to have the 5 year check, general maintenance requests can be considered at any time. For example pot holes, rotten fascias or nuisance tripping of electrical fuses. ●



If you have maintenance requests please contact Sarah Shepherd on (01223) 699095.

Could we send this to you electronically?

To save costs, reduce paper wastage and help the environment, we'd like to send as many tenants' newsletters out by email as possible.

If you would like to receive yours by email, send your email address to sarah.shepherd@cambridgeshire.gov.uk



New babies – congratulations!

★
Congratulations to Burwell tenant Ben Barber and his wife Hazel on the birth of their daughter. Amelia Lily was born on the 8th November 2010 at 5.10pm, weighing 8lb 2oz.

★
Congratulations also go to Warboys tenant Jonathan Short and his wife Victoria on their new arrival. Isabel Violet was born on the 11th January 2011, weighing 7lb 8oz at Hinchinbrooke Hospital, Huntingdon.

We would like to wish them all the best for their future. ●

Coping with volatile markets – subsidised training on offer

Rupert Lynch, Offre & Demande Agricole



Already anticipating changes in the CAP, Offre & Demande Agricole (ODA) decided in 1997 to invest in the observation and analysis of agricultural markets.

Over the last 13 years, Offre & Demande Agricole has been collecting data, developing information networks throughout the world, analysing markets, training professional and developing forecast models. Offre & Demande Agricole are specialists in price risk management and as we have seen over the last year, the risks involved have greatly increased as these agricultural markets have become ever more volatile.

Offre & Demande Agricole, (a company of 90 staff and 10 expert market analysts), is a 100% private and independent company. Its own research department anticipates market trends, gives a comprehensive analysis of world markets as well as strategic recommendations throughout the year. The information selected has become essential to the decision-making process at a time when the internet is offering a wealth of information, sometimes contradictory and often difficult to use.

Being efficient in markets which are constantly moving requires the acquisition and sharing of new skills. Offre & Demande Agricole offers a comprehensive

Upcoming courses

- Dates to be confirmed Flegcroft Farm, **Whittlesey**, PE7 2LA
- 10, 11 & 17 May Strixton, **Wellingborough**, NN29 7PA
- 12, 18 & 19 May **Eye**, Suffolk
- 17, 24 & 25 May Bartlow, **Cambridge**, CB21 4EN

More Info: www.oda-agri.co.uk

Offre & Demande Agricole Ltd, Unit 3, Three Hills Farm, Bartlow, Cambridge, CB21 4EN

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Email: oda-uk@oda-agri.com

3 day training program designed to give all market participants the tools they need to manage their risk such as the futures and options markets.

Our consultants are specialists in the markets and have an excellent understanding of how they work. Through their experience, they have the ability to adapt and teach, thus allowing them to share their knowledge in a practical manner.

Act Fast!

50% grant funding is still available through Land Skills East for these courses. For more details, please visit <http://www.landskillseast.co.uk/bursaries/index.asp>

County Farms will also offer a further £250 contribution to the first 10 tenants who attend. For more details, please contact Sarah Shepherd.



Calling all Fenland Farmers

– new blog launched

www.fenlandfarmers.org.uk

What is a blog? A blog is a website which allows participants to share information for the benefit of everyone.

This site has now been successfully launched across the Fens area of East Anglia, to bring farmers, farm workers, small holders and those involved with the agricultural industry together. It has been funded by the Talk about Local Project and the Learning and skills improvement Service.

If you are a farmer, a small holder or a farm worker and would like to discuss, promote your ideas please use this website. Regular contributors would be welcome for articles, discussions, tips and advice on farming related matters. e.g., sugar beet, potatoes, vintage machinery, information on local events, farming memories and just about anything of interest to Fenland farmers.

It is your website, your voice, so please browse, contribute and comment to regular posts. It is being run by fellow farmers and volunteers. ●

If you would like further information visit the site or email nyree.scott@cambridgeshire.gov.uk



Late rent payment warning

More than 50% of tenants pay their rent by Direct Debit and are given advanced notice of when the money will be taken from their account. If there is insufficient money in your account you may go overdrawn incurring bank charges.

Tenants who cancel direct debit payments with little or no notice to the Council set off an unnecessary chain of actions at Shire Hall which wastes time and money. This is unacceptable. In future a £100 administration charge will be made if insufficient or no warning is given.

Cancelling Direct Debit mandates and late payment of rent can put your tenancy at risk. As a result of a small number of persistent payment problems bailiffs will be used to recover the value of rent owed. This last measure is a result of tenants breaking agreements to pay repeatedly and without warning. ●

If you have problems paying your rent on time please contact County Farms staff without delay.

Cambridgeshire County Council have been working with Northamptonshire County Council since October 2010 in a partnership known as Local Government Shared Services. It will be business as usual, but you may notice new branding, logos and letterheads on correspondence from us.



Rent Review 2011

87 rent review notices were served for October 2011 on holdings where rents are out of line with others on the Estate. Already a number have been agreed. As in previous years we take a balanced and fair approach with the aim being to reach a figure that is acceptable to both parties and is in line with what others are paying both on and off the Estate.

A number of those being reviewed are in line to receive additional land or an extension

of a present tenancy from October 2011. The rent on the holding being reviewed will first need to be agreed before the reletting can be finalised.

In the last 4 years the rent has increased by almost £400,000, an important contribution to pay for services provided by the wider County Council.

Please contact Robert Smyth or Christopher Burton if there are matters you would like to discuss at this stage. ●