



## Farm Estate Advisory Group

### **Advice / Recommendations from the Farm Estate Advisory Group (FEAG), following a meeting held 10<sup>th</sup> October.**

The FEAG held a well attended, meeting this week with members, officers and interested observers. A number of substantial items were presented, worked through and debated thoroughly.

The main agenda items were detailed financial papers focused on the farm estate, but with reference to the wider authority finances and the commissioned 'CPC' Farm Estate Strategy report.

We as Chair and Vice Chair of the group offer you the following brief summary of consensus gained:

- We recognise and fully accept that there are significant financial pressures on the whole authority and that the corporate property portfolio is being asked to find in the region of circa £10m a year in capital receipts each year for the next 5 years.
- We discussed and agreed on the fact that land currently appreciates in Value, whereas due in the main to lack of investment our buildings depreciate.
- We understand and welcome the need to review the estate, how it operates, what it is trying to achieve, why and how.
- We agree the estate needs to operate on a more commercial, business basis but when doing so having a strong regard for some of its intended purposes for instance around supporting new entrants into farming and the agricultural sector.
- We are greatly concerned for those most impacted by any future decisions, our tenants, and we know they are in limbo without a clear strategy and are suffering because of this.
- We acknowledged the CPC report and its findings and options appraisals; but we fear this report was commissioned with an almost singular lens of financial pressures. It lacks detail of the wider impacts of possible future changes, it doesn't consider the council's 'sustainable principles' in sufficient detail, it doesn't highlight enough options around other council pressures (need for employment land, housing, climate and nature targets etc.) it doesn't acknowledge the need for wider engagement or the timeframes involved in this to make that meaningful and purposeful. It also doesn't have any regard for the woodland estate / holdings that currently sit firmly within the Farm Estate portfolio (although we acknowledge these are being looked at separately).

- Although we have the CPC report we can't rule out further options that need to be fully considered.
- We were informed of current time pressures senior officers are under to produce and have scrutinised an amalgamated Corporate Asset Policy (CAP). We have concerns around this, especially given the delays in formulating the new FEAG and the fact the report was first received by Council at the end of March 24.

### Recommendations

Recommendation	Accept (plus Action and timescale)	Partially Accept (plus Rationale and Action and timescale)	Reject (plus Rationale)
<p>1. Cabinet remove and allow a revision of the current time pressure for a re-design and presentation to scrutiny of any future CAP, and in doing so give the FEAG, and others that wish to support the process, 6-9 months to really have the ability to consider all the options in more detail and to carry out a thorough and wide consultation exercise with stakeholders.</p>			
<p>2. If the above is accepted this methodology is communicated to our key stakeholders through some effective communications ASAP.</p>			
<p>3. That the current Policies are used in this current financial year and into next, allowing the Corporate Property team to be able to realise / release the desired levels of capital income in regard</p>			

<p>to any vacant / end of tenancy farms within the period up to the end of 24/25. Capped at the amounts set out in the medium term financial strategy and where sales happen these are to be tested by open market sales.</p>			
<p>4. That the cabinet allows the corporate estate team to begin openly engaging with tenants that may be affected in line with point 2 above.</p>			

Membership of the FEAG on 10<sup>th</sup> October 2024

County Councillors: Gary Mitchell (Chair), Adrian Jones (Vice Chair), Raiff Devlin, Les George, Arwel Jones, Ed Jones, Adam Kennerley, David Meredith, Lucy Roberts, Jonathan Wilkinson

Observers: County Councillors James Gibson-Watt, Jake Berriman.