

PETERBOROUGH



CITY COUNCIL

PETERBOROUGH RURAL ESTATE ACTION PLAN 2018-2019



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NPS PETERBOROUGH

VISION

-) The vision is for the estate to consist of 6 full time holdings of approximately 400 acres each. This would leave some 500 acres, about 1/6 of the current estate, available for new entrants into farming as starter farms and for social uses such as education.
-) Farms will be amalgamated over the next few years until the vision is achieved.

INTRODUCTION

This document aims to outline the process by which the Peterborough City Council Rural Estate (hereafter referred to as The Rural Estate) will be managed on a day to day basis for the year October 2018 to October 2019.

The Action Plan is to be read alongside the Strategy for the Management of the Farms Estate (March 2014), as the one informs the other. The Action Plan is divided into objectives as per the Strategy – these are Financial and Investment, Agricultural, and Social & Environmental.

It is intended that the Strategy be reviewed for 2020 in order to take the effects of Brexit into account.

The Action Plan has been written by the Rural Estate Manager following consultation with the Peterborough Farm Tenants Association, individual tenants, the Head of Property, the Corporate Director of Growth and Regeneration, and Councillor Seaton, the Cabinet member for Resources. The Action Plan has insight from the NFU, TFA and CLA.

FINANCIAL and INVESTMENT

General Purpose Buildings

The Management Strategy recognises that there has been no improvement in fixed equipment since the 1970s. The Council has agreed to provide new general purpose buildings as Holdings are amalgamated and at their discretion, on a case by case basis. For the year 2018, the first of these new grain stores has been erected at Lodge Farm, Thorney.

For the year 2019, the second new grain store will be erected at Willow Drove Farm, Newborough.

Repairs

Historically, repairs have been undertaken across the Estate in a reactionary manner. It is hoped that in future, a repair and maintenance programme will be developed which will be more proactive, although it is worth noting that as most of the buildings on the Estate were erected in the 1970s, the repairs required are extensive, and in some instances total replacement will be necessary.

Tenants are reminded that under the terms of their tenancy agreements, it is their duty to report repairs to the Landlord. If an item requires immediate attention, please make this clear when it is reported. Repairs should be reported directly to the Rural Estate Manager.

For those tenants who farm under a Farm Business Tenancy (post 1995), the repairing obligations are as follows:

ALLOCATION OF REPAIRING AND INSURING RESPONSIBILITIES

a) Repair and maintenance of dwellings

Item	Tenant	Landlord
Roofs including chimneys	Chimney sweeping, and roof tiles in accordance with new model clauses	✓
Exterior walls and main structural timbers		✓
Interior walls		✓
Ceilings and internal plastering		✓
Ceiling and floor joists		✓
Floors	Tiles and coverings	✓
Staircases		✓
Doors	Door furniture	✓
Windows and skylights	Glass and cleaning	✓
Gutters and downpipes	Clearing and cleaning	✓
Baths, toilets etc.	✓	
Electrical installations including fittings		✓
Water pipes	Above ground	Below ground
Foul drainage systems	Rodding	✓
Boilers and heating systems	Annual maintenance and repairs up to £50	✓

Internal decorations and treatments	✓	
External decorations and treatments		✓
Fire detection and security systems		✓

(b) Repair and maintenance of other buildings and fixed equipment

Item	Tenant	Landlord
Roofs including chimneys		✓
Structural frames and walls		✓
Cladding		✓
Floors		✓
Doors and gates	✓	
Windows		✓
Staircases and fixed ladders		✓
Gutters and downpipes	Clearing and cleaning	✓
Electrical installations and fittings		✓
Water supplies and fittings	Above ground	Below Ground
Foul drainage facilities		✓
Fixtures and fittings	✓	
External decorations and treatments		✓
Internal decorations and treatments	✓	
Timber and other infestations		✓

(c) Repair and maintenance of external works and services

Item	Tenant	Landlord
Rainwater drainage systems - above ground	✓	
Rainwater drainage systems - below ground		✓
Foul drainage systems - above ground	✓	
Foul drainage systems - below ground		✓
Slurry systems	✓	
Water supply systems - above ground	✓	
Water supply systems - below ground		✓
Electrical supply systems		✓
Gas supply systems	✓	
Garden walls and fences	✓	
Yard walls fences and gates	✓	
Roads and yards	Labour	Materials
Cattle grids	✓	
Field gates and posts	✓	
Bridges and culverts	Anything <1m	Anything >1m
Field drains ditches and associated works	All other dykes	Leading dykes
Field boundaries	✓	
Watercourses reservoirs ponds and associated systems	✓	
Signs and notices	Anything not erected by the Landlord	Anything erected by the Landlord

Tracks and Roadways

The material for roads and tracks will be provided by the Council, and labour will be provided by the Tenants, as is stated in the Tenancy Agreements. Where tracks are shared by tenants then those tenants should agree between themselves how labour will be undertaken.

Any requests for materials must be made to the Rural Estate Manager, in order for materials to be ordered

Capital Projects

Drainage Schemes: Where holdings are so wet as to be uncroppable, despite the best endeavours of the tenant, the Landlord will – within reason – carry the cost of a drainage scheme in order to invest in the asset of the land, and maintain the income earning potential of that asset.

Where a drainage scheme would merely improve poor yields on land which is capable of holding a crop, then the Landlord will enter into a Finance Agreement with the tenant in order to assist the tenant in maintaining the land.

If there are other capital projects that tenants would like the Landlord to consider, then tenants may submit a business case for consideration. This should outline what the capital project is, the financial and agricultural benefits of the project, and the cost of the project. Capital projects will usually be subject to Finance Agreements if they are approved.

Rent

Rents have been reviewed in 2018, and will be reviewed again no sooner than 2021.

Rents are set at financially sustainable levels. When letting starter holdings this might result in rents at the lower end of the market levels. Where appropriate, non-financial benefits to the Council, environment and community will be taken into account when assessing acceptable rent levels.

Disposals

The Council has no plans to sell off any farm holdings in 2018/2019, and there is nothing identified in the Strategy.

According to the Strategy, small disposals which maximise revenue for the Council will be considered on the Rural Estate. Some land off Crownland Road will be sold in 2018, and one surplus residential property off Speechleys Drove. Out-dated farm buildings which are obsolete for the purposes of modern agriculture will be considered if they are no longer required. These will provide a capital receipt for the Council.

The disposal of Fletchers Farm Buildings for residential conversion will take place in 2018/19..

In order to achieve the strategic goal of six full-time holdings (plus some opportunity for new entrants) not all of the current residential units will be required where the Council considers properties to be surplus in respect of the strategic goal tenants might be offered the opportunity to purchase the freehold of those properties subject to independent valuation.

If there are any farm tenants who wish to purchase the rural residential property that they rent from the Council under their agricultural lease, they may request to do so. This will be considered on a case by case basis as the situation is fluid in relation to how we achieve the six full-time holdings plus new entrants' holdings and that each case will be taken on its particular situation and merits.

AGRICULTURAL

New Entrants

An official policy for New Entrants, the selection process, and a tenant specification have been drawn up and were road-tested during the relettings process in 2018. These will be submitted to the Scrutiny Committee for formal sign off in Autumn 2018.

Potential starter tenants will be expected to submit a business plan, financial forecast for the first two years, and a record of experience to the Landlord, who will utilise an appropriate scoring matrix in order to process the submissions and shortlist applicants for interview.

New entrants will be given a ten year term with a five year break clause, in order to give them a good start to grow their business.

Dan Frost and Lance Charity will join the Estate from October 2018.

Lettings

The Council will aim to let land on longer-term agreements when appropriate. A 10-year term will generally be the minimum length considered when reletting land although each letting will be considered on a case-by-case basis.

From October 2018 short term FBTs will no longer be utilised, except in exceptional circumstances.

Tenants are reminded that under the terms of their tenancies, they must farm the land themselves, and not use contractors for the majority of the operational farming: No more than 20% in any one cropping year.

Failure to farm the land in accordance with the tenancy agreement may result in a notice to quit.

Although Local Authority Agricultural Holdings Act tenancies are not subject to succession rights, successions have historically occurred on the Rural Estate where a tenant's immediate family member has an interest in farming, relevant experience, and wishes to succeed to the tenancy. In future, direct successions will not take place, but where a tenant's son or daughter wishes to farm alongside their father then joint tenancies will be considered, with appropriate terms and rents. These will be form a new Farm Business Tenancy for both parties, to replace the old Agricultural Holdings Act tenancy. If tenants wish to explore this avenue then they are encouraged to inform their landlord; please get in touch with the Rural Estate Manager at your earliest opportunity.

Retirement Tenancies

In the past, it has been the case that tenants on 1986 Act "Retirement Tenancies" have been able to continue to farm their smallholding beyond retirement age. Whilst there is

nothing wrong with this, it has led to less land becoming available and fewer opportunities for new entrants to farming, which contradicts the ethos of a County Farms Estate. In future, it is intended that tenants who hold “retirement tenancies” will be served a Notice to Quit under case A and offered alternative housing when they reach their State retirement age, in order to free up more land for holding amalgamations and new entrants, as per the Strategy.

If you are affected by this or would like to discuss your options please do not hesitate to contact the Rural Estate Manager.

Amalgamations

According to the strategy the future of the Rural Estate involves amalgamations of holdings to form larger more financially viable blocks of roughly 400 acres each, as well as at least two starter holdings. These amalgamations will take place as land becomes vacant.

Whilst this continues to be the vision for the Estate, we will continue to work towards this goal, and it will remain part of the agreed Strategy.

Two amalgamations have been achieved to date.

SOCIAL & ENVIRONMENTAL

Social - Education

The Rural Estate has a potential educational value and the Council is in discussion with a number of education providers for use of part of the estate for educational purposes. In the past, Fletchers Farm was considered for educational purposes, but we are now looking elsewhere on the Estate. The use of the Estate for service provision is of great importance to the Council, and tenants’ co-operation with the Council in order to find areas which are perhaps less suited to commercial agricultural operations for education provision is appreciated.

Tenants are encouraged to take part in L.E.A.F’s Open Farm Sunday Initiative in order to promote a greater understanding to the community of how food is produced.

The majority of tenants were present at Park Farm Thorney for Open Farm Sunday 2018, and it is accepted that as Park Farm is set up for public demonstrations and has such a high number of visitors for this event, it would be unfeasible for Council farm tenants to run their own events on this day. **I would like to encourage more tenants to show their support for this initiative, either by volunteering on the day, or by attending in a visitor capacity to show support.**

Peterborough Rural Estate was represented at Park Farm this year, and will continue to attend in order to reach out to the public.

Social – General

Rural Crime: Fly tipping and hare coursing and theft continue to be an issue.

Please maintain vigilance, secure your yards and property, and report suspicious activity through the usual channels. It is imperative that all tenants work together on keeping farms secure with fences and gates, to prevent access and egress of criminals through unsecured land onto that which is secured.

Environmental

Tenants' businesses need to be financially as well as environmentally sustainable. As advised by the RSPB in 2010, habitat schemes should generally be directed towards low quality land. The Rural Estate's priority shall be food production but there is scope for improving wildlife habitat as well as landscape without compromising the agricultural output of the Estate.

The Estate at Newborough is likely to remain a largely agricultural fenland landscape for the foreseeable future.

Although the Rural Estate encourages environmentally sustainable farming, the onus will be on the tenant to apply for mid and higher tier Countryside Stewardship schemes and to comply with cross compliance, and the Council will accept no liability arising from a tenant's failure to adhere to his or her agreement.

Soil testing is a good way of monitoring farming practice across the Estate, the farms are only as good as their soil, and this must be farmed sustainably and kept healthy for future generations. Four yearly soil testing as part of Farm Assurance schemes is standard on most farms, and tenants are encouraged to share this information with the Landlord for monitoring purposes – some tenants already do this.

Wildlife is in abundance across the Estate; The owl box at Lodge Farm Thorney has had another successful year. Barn owls have been spotted in several fields. Lapwings have been in abundance, particularly in the west of the Estate.

The barn owl at Fletchers Farm will be relocated before development commences.

We will look at working with the Lincolnshire Wildlife Trust to promote osprey habitats over the next couple of years.

Wildlife spotted in 2018 includes: Fallow, Roe, Muntjac, kingfishers, lesser spotted woodpeckers, buzzards, red kite, sparrow hawks, skylarks, corn buntings, bats, barn owls and kestrels.

Tenants are encouraged to report wildlife sightings in order to inform our records and show what an environmentally diverse place the Rural Estate is.

2018/19 Summary of Actions – PROVISIONAL ONLY	
Finance and Investment	New grain stores: Thorney 2018, Willow Drove 2019 Further capital projects to be informed by tenant's agricultural/business requirements.
Lettings	New entrants on Flood and Moores for Oct 2018.
Rents	Rent reviews undertaken in 2018. No further reviews scheduled until 2021.
Disposals	Land adj Crowland Road. Fletchers Farm Buildings House and buildings at Panks Farm
Social & Environmental	All tenants to support Open Farm Sunday

If you wish to discuss anything in this Action Plan, please contact the Rural Estate Manager:

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