

## HAMPSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

### Decision Report

<b>Decision Maker:</b>	Executive Member for Recreation, Heritage, Countryside and Rural Affairs
<b>Date:</b>	19 March 2021
<b>Title:</b>	County Farms Policy
<b>Report From:</b>	Director of Culture, Communities and Business Services

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#### Purpose of this Report

1. The purpose of this report is to provide a summary of the County Farms policy review process and conclusions and bring forward the new Policy for approval.

#### Recommendations

2. That the Executive Member for Recreation, Heritage, Countryside and Rural Affairs:
  - i) Approves the new County Farms Policy set out at Appendix 1.
  - ii) Notes that the future leadership of the County Farms Service will be provided by the interim Assistant Director for Recreation and Natural Environment in CCBS.
  - iii) Notes the intention to bring forward an annual performance report for the County Farms Service commencing in 2022.

#### Executive Summary

3. The report outlines the policy review process that has been undertaken for the County Farms Service and sets out a proposed new County Farms Policy that looks towards 2050 to continue to attract and support new entrants to

farming while delivering high quality environmental, social and economic outcomes for the people and place of Hampshire.

4. In September 2019, the Executive Member for Countryside and Rural Affairs [approved a review](#) of the County Council's Policy for County Farms. The purpose of the review was to ensure a viable framework for County Farms service delivery in relation to emerging policies on Brexit, mitigation, climate change and the Vision for Hampshire 2050 and to consider the approach to farm replacement in light of land identified for development under the County Council's strategic land programme.
5. This report provides a summary of the review process and conclusions and how these have been incorporated into the new Policy and brings forward the Policy for approval.

### **Contextual Information**

6. HCC's County Farms Service was established in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century as the County Smallholdings Service, under legislation designed to support entry into the farming industry, to produce more food and provide ex-servicemen with employment in the growth area of agriculture.
7. Legislation was consolidated into the Agriculture Act 1970 with the aim of supporting young and new entrants into farming by providing affordable land and buildings under County Council ownership to new farmers, in a sector that has significant start-up capital costs, and where the average age of farmers is now 60. The objective of enabling new entrants into farming remains a core principle of the County Farms Service today.
8. The County Farms Review [report](#) of 14 April 2010, approved by the Executive Member for Policy and Resources, set out the approach to the ongoing management of the County Farms Service and Estate for a 15 year period to 2025 with reviews on a 5 yearly basis.

### **The County Farms Estate**

9. Hampshire County Council is one of 43 authorities (21 unitary authorities and 22 county councils) maintaining a farm estate. At the start of the review in 2019, the estate comprised 1,914 hectares of land across just under 30 different county locations, including 38 equipped holdings (that is to say, with a house and/or farm buildings), bare land lettings, grazing and some other arrangements (e.g. allotments, in-hand woodland and tracks). The Estate includes around 350 buildings and other structures.

10. Equipped holdings range in size from the smallest at approximately 1.8 hectares (4.45 acres) to the largest at approximately 114 hectares (282 acres). The holdings support a range of farm sectors, with principal use by area being for dairy, arable/horticulture and livestock. Some holdings are also currently occupied by horse livery enterprises.
11. The holdings vary in terms of their size, location, condition and therefore their suitability for particular types of farm business and rental income potential. The performance of the tenants' businesses is also variable with a number of very successful operations and others that are less so. A summary of the County Farms holdings and current tenancies is provided at Appendix 2.
12. The County Farms estate offers wider commercial opportunities, with the farm buildings at some locations having the potential to provide commercial opportunities, and land across a number of holdings is already identified for development within the County Council's strategic land programme.

#### Legislative Framework

13. The County Farms Estate is a 'smallholdings' estate and the County Council is a smallholdings authority as defined in Part 3 of the Agriculture Act 1970. The Act provides county councils with a discretionary power to provide opportunities for appropriately qualified persons to farm on their own account.
14. Where land held for smallholdings purposes is not required for that use, the 1970 Act allows councils to let the land. This power is in addition to the general power of local authorities to sell, exchange or appropriate any of its land under the Local Government Act 1972.
15. The Agriculture Act 2020 has not changed the discrete legislation applying to county smallholdings, save that retirement notice provisions now align with pensionable age. The Act also empowers Defra to provide funding, which it says it will do through the New Entrants Support Scheme, working with councils that have 'county farms' and others "*to create lasting opportunities for new entrants to access land, infrastructure and support to establish successful and innovative businesses*". Defra's plan is published in the November 2020 policy paper [The Path to Sustainable Farming: An Agricultural Transition Plan 2021 to 2024](#) (page 54).
16. The Agriculture Act 2020 sets out various provisions for farmers and land managers in England to receive public money for "public goods" – such as better air and water quality, thriving wildlife, soil health, or measures to reduce flooding and tackle the effects of climate change – through various new schemes, including the new Environmental Land Management scheme (ELMs). In practice, ELMs will be the key and only public funding support mechanism available to farmers and land managers currently receiving the

Basic Payment Scheme (BPS) direct payment (which largely pays farmers based on the total amount of land farmed), and it also replaces funding under other key environmental schemes, including Countryside Stewardship. Further detail on the transition towards the new schemes is set out in Defra's [Agricultural Transition Plan](#) policy paper.

## **Approach to the review**

17. The County Farms Policy review was initiated in autumn 2019 following approval from the Executive Member for Countryside and Rural Affairs on 19 September 2019. The [report](#) to the Executive Member for Countryside and Rural Affairs set out the governance arrangements and the scope, objectives and priorities for the review.
18. In line with the approach set out in the report, an officer Steering Group was established, under the direction of the Director for Culture, Communities and Business Services and comprising officers with relevant knowledge and experience. The Steering Group met on a series of occasions to review key themes relevant to the review including:
  - Tenancy policy
  - Land management
  - Climate change
  - Financial performance
  - Farm replacement and strategic land
19. A Member Advisory Group was convened comprising Cllr Heron, Cllr McNair Scott, Cllr Simpson, Cllr Latham and with The Earl of Malmesbury as an external consultee. The Member Advisory Group met on five occasions between June and October 2020 to discuss and review the following themes put forward by the officer Steering Group:
  - Introduction to the County Farms Service and estate
  - Purpose and benefits of the County Farms service and estate
  - Climate change, environment and diversification
  - Tenancy policy
  - Scale of the estate and farm replacement
20. The Member Advisory Group also visited some of the farms: Little Abshot, Lower Brownwich, Yew Tree and Attwoods Drove farms over two days during August 2020. These visits provided the Member Advisory Group with the opportunity to tour the holdings and have discussions with the farm tenants and hear their views on their approach to farm management and the County Farms service.

21. Tenants' views have also been sought on the key themes of the review, engaging through both ongoing informal dialogue and with a formal tenant questionnaire.

## **Summary of Review Findings and Conclusions**

22. The review considered the key issues, risks and opportunities under each of the themes identified above. Within each theme, this took into account the current and historic performance of the County Farms service and estate, existing and emerging legislation, County Council policies, priorities and programmes of work and examples from the wider agricultural sector, including other county farms services. A summary of the matters discussed and conclusions reached is provided below.

### Tenancies

23. The review recognised the important role that county farms estates provide nationally to enable new entrants to farming and proposed that this should remain a principal aim of the Hampshire County Farms Service. This is further supported by Defra's proposals for a New Entrant Support Scheme, to be co-designed with councils and other stakeholders.
24. The current practice of advertising new opportunities for starter holdings on the open market and securing the most appropriate tenant through a fair and transparent selection process, was supported. The selection process will include consideration of the prospective tenants' business plans and how well these meet the County Council's objectives, particularly in relation to sustainable land management and natural environment outcomes.
25. The review considered whether the scale of Hampshire's County Farms estate allows it to continue to offer progression holdings as well as starter holdings and, if so, how these should be made available to existing tenants. The review concluded that, while it is not possible to guarantee a progression opportunity to every tenant, such opportunities can be an important next step for tenants who may not be able to easily transition from a starter holding into the private let sector. It was therefore felt that it is appropriate to continue to offer progression opportunities to existing tenants, via an open application process, when a suitable holding becomes available.
26. Tenancy lengths for starter and progression holdings were reviewed. The need to provide tenants with sufficient certainty to enable them to plan for and invest in their businesses was highlighted, along with the importance of managing tenancies within a robust performance framework with regular farm inspections and ongoing dialogue with the tenants. It was agreed that the current standard tenancy lengths of 7 years with a 3 year discretionary extension period for starter tenancies and 10 years with a 5 year discretionary

extension period for progression tenancies, should be retained as the norm under the new Policy.

27. The support provided to County Farm tenants by the County Council was discussed. Participants in the review felt that such support was best provided by encouraging and enabling collaboration between tenants and that there were opportunities for joint professional development activities. It was agreed that social media platforms and virtual meeting technology offer improved ways to connect with and support the tenants in this respect and that this could include signposting to external learning and development opportunities and services that support the wellbeing of farmers. These opportunities have been incorporated into the new Policy.

#### Land management and farming systems

28. Participants to the review were in agreement that farming and food production should remain at the core of the County Farms service and the farm business proposals invited from prospective tenants. It was also considered important to achieve a high standard of animal welfare and sustainable land management, deliver positive outcomes for the natural environment and ensure that the County Farms estate is aligned to the County Council's climate change targets of carbon neutrality by 2050 and resilience to a 2°C temperature rise.
29. It was noted that these aims aligned well with the themes emerging from the Agriculture Bill that was being considered by parliament during the review and that came into effect as the Agriculture Act 2020 in November 2020. This paves the way for the introduction of ELMs from 2022 which will provide 'public money for public goods' including improvements in air, water and soil quality.
30. To support these aims the Policy sets out that the County Council will identify the environmental and social priorities for each farm holding to allow tenants to identify in their business plans how they will achieve these. The Policy also includes a requirement for tenants to adopt a sustainable farming system and an expectation that tenants will have membership of an appropriate assurance scheme, such as LEAF, Arla or Red Tractor, that incorporates high standards of animal welfare, food safety and environmental protection. These requirements will also put tenants in a strong position to manage the transition to ELMs over the next few years.
31. In addition to reducing the carbon emissions from the farms in line with the 2050 carbon neutrality target, the Policy recognises the role of innovative farming techniques, technologies and cropping to enable farms to adapt to and become more resilient in the face of temperature rise and an increase in extreme weather events caused by climate change.

32. Diversification of tenants' farm businesses was supported by the review, where this is complementary to the core farm business, increases the financial resilience of the tenant's business and integrates the farm into the local community. This is reflected in the Policy.
33. The review identified a desire to see the County Farms as part of the wider family of County Council services and seek opportunities to secure social benefits by aligning services. The Policy continues to encourage these wider social benefits from farms, including rights of way to enable residents of Hampshire to be able to access our rural estate for recreational and wellbeing purposes.

#### Financial management

34. An analysis of the revenue income and expenditure for the County Farms service was undertaken for the review and demonstrated that a small net income is generated each year when all revenue operating costs are accounted for against income generated from tenancies and other sources.
35. As a non-statutory service, and in light of the increased pressures on the County Council's finances, participants in the review considered that it was appropriate that the County Farms service should be funded through income from tenancies and other sources, and not be subsidised by the County Council. The County Council seeks to break even or achieve a small contribution to overheads in its financial arrangements for the management of the service.
36. To support this, there was agreement that rents should continue to be set at market rates and subject to regular review. However, it was also felt that there should also be sufficient flexibility to agree discounted rents, where a tenant is delivering substantial added value to the County Council, and to recoup any investment made by the County Council in farm improvements that benefit the tenant.
37. The importance of maintaining the County Farms estate, to ensure that it is fit for purpose, enables tenants to grow viable agricultural businesses and continues to generate the required rental income, was acknowledged in the review. This is reflected in the Policy and includes obligations and liabilities for the County Council as landlord and the tenants as set out in with the formal tenancy agreements.
38. It was noted that tenants are more likely to be able to access external grant funding to support additional investment in the farm holdings and their business and therefore it is important to continue to work in close partnership with tenants to identify and secure these opportunities.

## The Farm Estate

39. Consideration was given in the review to the scale and nature of the County Farms Estate, including total acreage held, number of holdings and sector and viability of holdings. The review endorsed maintaining a diversity of holdings to support a range of farm business models, but it was agreed that the scale of the estate should not be defined by a specific number of holdings. A flexible approach to the allocation of land to holdings was supported, with an end of tenancy review and reshaping of the holding where appropriate, to provide the best possible opportunity for the next tenant.
40. The review identified an ambition to maintain the scale of the County Farms estate at its 2019 baseline size of 1,914 hectares, in order to provide sufficient suitable opportunities for tenants and sustain the required levels of income. It was noted that the County Farms estate is the primary source of land for the County Council's strategic land programme, with up to 252 hectares identified for development over the 10 to 15 year period from 2019. It was also noted that the strategic land programme is an important source of capital receipts which are reinvested to support the County Council's strategic priorities and that this longer-term financial opportunity remains an important aspect of the County Farms estate, particularly in light of the anticipated ongoing impact of Covid-19 on the County Council's finances and wider economy.
41. In considering these matters, the review concluded that the new Policy should include an ambition to maintain the scale of the County Farms estate through a farm replacement programme. There is currently an agreed corporate approach to facilitate land purchase where an appropriate business case can be made. The challenge is the identification of suitable land and further work is needed to establish how the County Council can engage most effectively within this particular specialist market place.

## **The Policy**

42. The revised Policy is provided at Appendix 1 of the report. The Policy comprises an overarching vision of 'Towards 2050: A vision for a Better Farming Future' and is divided into four main sections under the following strategic aims:
- *To provide inclusive opportunities for new entrants to a sustainable and innovative farming environment and opportunities for existing tenants to progress to larger holdings.*
  - *To achieve sustainable and adaptive systems of farming and land management to support high quality environmental, social and economic outcomes for Hampshire.*

- *To support tenants to establish and grow viable agricultural businesses by providing farms from which they can operate and thrive for the duration of their tenancy.*
  - *To maintain the scale and quality of the land and assets available to the County Farms Service.*
43. These aims capture and reflect the priority themes that emerged from the review. Each strategic aim is supported by a number of policy statements which address the key issues discussed and the conclusions reached in the review.
44. The new Policy comes at a time when the farming industry is facing significant change driven by Brexit, the new Agriculture Act and the Environment Bill. These changes place an increasing requirement on farmers to provide public goods for public money. The new Policy provides a clear but flexible framework for the future management of Hampshire's County Farms to ensure that they are able to meet these changing demands.

### **Implementation of the Policy**

45. The Policy provides a strong framework to work in partnership with both new and existing tenants to support the development of their business and further explore and develop the opportunities to deliver positive environmental and social outcomes for the County Council and the people and place of Hampshire.
46. Recognising the synergies with the Countryside Service and the increasing value being placed on the natural environment, leadership of the County Farms service will be provided by the Interim Assistant Director for Recreation and Natural Environment in CCBS. This will enable a more flexible, agile and holistic approach to the use of the County Council's rural estate.

### **Financial arrangements and implications**

47. The primary source of income for the County Farms Service is the rental income received from the farm tenancies, bare land lettings, and grazing arrangements, supplemented by wayleave payments and occasional commercial lettings (e.g. temporary site compounds) where the opportunity arises. Revenue repair and maintenance costs and staff costs make up the majority of the expenditure.
48. The County Council currently receives a BPS grant payment for some of the land managed within the County Farms portfolio. The level of grant received varies each year, linked to changes across the rural estate. BPS grant is applied to relevant expenditure on the County Farms estate on an annual

basis. Unallocated grant is carried forward for use in future years. Under the agricultural transition plan set out by the government, BPS grants will reduce over the next few years as ELMs is introduced. For County Farms, BPS grant income is expected to reduce to zero by 2027.

49. Capital investment totaling £2.4million is identified in the [CCBS Capital Programme](#) for 2021/22, approved by the Executive Member for Commercial Services, Human Resources and Performance on 19 January 2021. This investment will be used to deliver a number of essential maintenance and compliance schemes and is funded from capital receipts accumulated from discrete disposals of County Farms land and buildings over a number of years.
50. It is expected that the day to day operational provisions of the new Policy can be implemented within current revenue resources, with the accrued BPS grant available to support the implementation of the sustainable land management approach set out in the new Policy. Opportunities to generate additional income and secure external grant funding will continue to be sought.

## **Performance**

51. The review considered the contribution that Hampshire's County Farms service makes within the wider agricultural sector:
  - Starting up in the farming industry is a recognised challenge in the UK and there is a shortage of inclusive new entrant opportunities. A key route in is through the let land sector, which represent 35% or thereabouts of all UK agricultural land.
  - As a small estate, representing only 2% or thereabouts of land held for county farms purposes nationally, Hampshire's standalone contribution to the industry could be seen as relatively insignificant. However, the national county farms estate, of which Hampshire forms part, collectively and as a national service provides a significant proportion of new entrant opportunities each year. For example, it provides around 12% (on an area basis) of land let on new farm tenancies.
  - New entrants are reported to take around 23% of all new occupier lettings nationally each year. County Councils have been responsible for around 49% of these opportunities in recent years. On average over the last 10 years, Hampshire has offered one new entrant opportunity per year.
  - County Farms help to provide longer and therefore more sustainable new entrant opportunities. For example, the average letting period for a fully

equipped county farm is almost 9 years, compared with an overall average of 7.5 years in the UK let land sector. The average letting for a Hampshire County Farm is 9.6 years with 41% of lettings being for 10 years or longer.

- Councils also provide in the region of 58% of all fully equipped holdings available to rent. 80% of Hampshire's farm lettings are fully equipped.

52. The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic has proved to be a challenging period, but the majority of County Farm tenants have continued to perform well during the year, some finding innovative ways to quickly and effectively respond to local need. Milk vending machines located at a number of farms have proved a real success and lifeline for local communities and well-stocked farm shops have benefitted from increased demand, with more households choosing to shop either locally or online. The tenant at Lower Brownwich Farm expanded his Boxxfresh delivery service nationally in early 2020 and was therefore well placed to respond to the sudden surge in requirement for in food delivery services early in the pandemic.

53. The new Policy has an increased emphasis on performance of the County Farms Service and the estate, and it is proposed to provide an annual performance report to the Executive Member for Recreation, Heritage, Countryside and Rural Affairs from spring 2022.

## **Consultation and Equalities**

54. As noted earlier in the report, engagement about the County Farms policy review has taken place through informal dialogue throughout the review period. The pandemic has prevented the County Farm tenants from meeting as a group, but in December 2020 and January 2021 all farm tenants were invited to take part in some informal group tenant engagement sessions, via MS Teams.

55. In February 2021, County Farm tenants were invited to take part in a survey and 26 tenants participated, by completing an online questionnaire. Feedback from tenants has been mainly positive, with many anticipating and already operating to the higher environmental expectations incorporated into the new Policy. Further detail on the outcomes from the tenant consultation questionnaire are provided at Appendix 3.

56. Data sources for the agriculture and farming sector in the UK highlight a continuing increase in the average age of farmers, an underrepresentation of women and a lack of diversity in terms of ethnicity. The review recognised the potential for gender inequality in Hampshire's County Farms service, which had only one female tenant at the time of the review, and the importance of removing barriers for new entrants to farming. The new Policy

reflects a more open and inclusive approach to the recruitment of tenants as the first step in enabling opportunity and increasing diversity across Hampshire's County Farms estate.

## **Climate Change**

57. The County Farms estate forms part of the County Council's wider corporate estate and is therefore subject to the County Council's climate change strategy and targets.
58. The approach to achieving a carbon net zero position for the County Farms estate and ensuring its resilience in response to a potential 2°C temperature rise is being considered as part of the wider approach to the County Council's internal carbon reduction programme set out in the recent [report](#) to Cabinet.
59. The County Farms service will continue to work closely with those leading the County Council's climate change programme and farm tenants to identify and implement appropriate actions in line with the emerging strategy.

## **Conclusions**

60. The review of Hampshire's County Farms Service set out to ensure that there continues to be a viable framework for the delivery of the service in light of changes in the agricultural sector driven by Brexit, the new Agriculture Act 2020 and the Environment Bill.
61. The review recognised the important contribution that county farms continue to make to farming in the UK, in particular their role in enabling new entrants to the sector. The review also identified the increasing requirement for farmers to provide public goods for public money and the particular role of the Hampshire County Farms estate in contributing to the environmental and social priorities of the County Council.
62. The new County Farms Policy, now brought forward for approval, provides a concise and forward thinking approach that strengthens and reaffirms the County Council's commitment to these principles and the wider benefits the service offers for the people and place of Hampshire.

## REQUIRED CORPORATE AND LEGAL INFORMATION:

### Links to the Strategic Plan

Hampshire maintains strong and sustainable economic growth and prosperity:	yes
People in Hampshire live safe, healthy and independent lives:	yes
People in Hampshire enjoy a rich and diverse environment:	yes
People in Hampshire enjoy being part of strong, inclusive communities:	yes

### Other Significant Links

<b>Links to previous Member decisions:</b>	
<u>Title</u> <a href="#">County Farms Policy Review</a>	<u>Date</u> 19.09.2019
<b>Direct links to specific legislation or Government Directives</b>	
<u>Title</u> <a href="#">Agriculture Act 2020 (legislation.gov.uk)</a>	<u>Date</u> 11.11.2020

### Section 100 D - Local Government Act 1972 - background documents

The following documents discuss facts or matters on which this report, or an important part of it, is based and have been relied upon to a material extent in the preparation of this report. (NB: the list excludes published works and any documents which disclose exempt or confidential information as defined in the Act.)

Document

Location

None

## **EQUALITIES IMPACT ASSESSMENT:**

### **1. Equality Duty**

The County Council has a duty under Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 ('the Act') to have due regard in the exercise of its functions to the need to:

- Eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation and any other conduct prohibited by or under the Act with regard to the protected characteristics as set out in section 4 of the Act (age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation);
- Advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic within section 149(7) of the Act (age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation) and those who do not share it;
- Foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic within section 149(7) of the Act (see above) and persons who do not share it.

Due regard in this context involves having due regard in particular to:

- The need to remove or minimise disadvantages suffered by persons sharing a relevant protected characteristic that are connected to that characteristic;
- Take steps to meet the needs of persons sharing a relevant protected characteristic that are different from the needs of persons who do not share it;
- Encourage persons sharing a relevant protected characteristic to participate in public life or in any other activity in which participation by such persons is disproportionately low.

### **2. Equalities Impact Assessment:**

- 2.1 An Equalities Impact Assessment has been undertaken for the County Farms Policy. This identified that the Policy will have a positive impact in relation to protected characteristics of age, gender and race by providing more inclusive opportunities for new entrants to farming and support to tenants to establish viable farm businesses. The EIA also identified a positive impact on rurality arising from the renewed focus of the Policy on achieving high quality environmental, social and economic outcomes that support the communities of Hampshire. The published EIA can be found via the following link: [Equality analysis | About the Council | Hampshire County Council \(hants.gov.uk\)](https://www.hants.gov.uk/equality-analysis)

**County Farms Policy**

*Refer to separate document*

## Summary of the County Farms Estate and Holdings

### County Farms holdings:

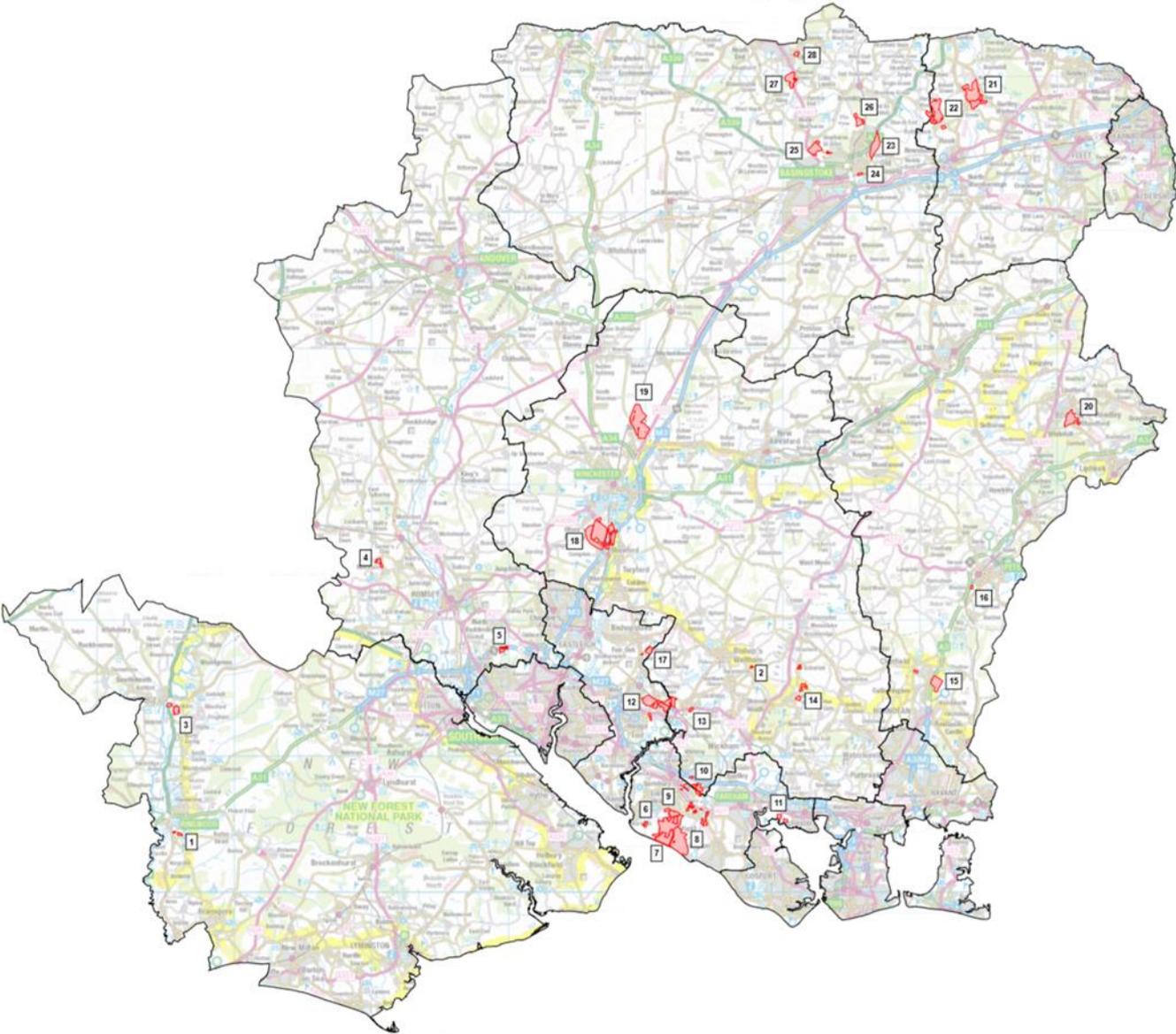
Farm type	No. equipped holdings	Area (ha)	Area (acres)
Dairy	8	571.22	1,411.50
Livestock	15	503.83	1,244.96
Arable & Horticulture	9	466.68	1,153.16
Livery	5	30.56	75.51
Vacant for development purposes	2	194.73	481.16
Bare land	-	109.62	270.87
Other (e.g. Woodland, ponds, compounds)	-	37.36	92.32
<b>Total</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>1,914.00</b>	<b>4,729.48</b>
Number of holdings available to county farms service at start of Review:	<b>38</b>	<i>[excluding one livery unit on 99-year lease]</i>	

### County Farms tenancies:

Tenancy type	2019-2020
Lifetime	7
Retirement	3
FBT Less than 5 years	11
FBT 5 - 10 years	9
FBT 10-15 years	8
FBT More than 15 years	3
<b>Total</b>	<b>41*</b>

*[\*NB total number of holdings reported and tenancy types do not correlate, e.g. because some holdings may have 1+ agreements]*

Locations of the County Farms estate



## Hampshire County Farms Policy Review Tenant Survey - February 2021

As part of the County Farms Policy Review tenants of HCC farms were invited to take part in an online survey. Three quarters of the 35 tenant farmers responded which was a positive level of engagement and their views have helped to shape the proposed County Farms Policy.

### Key Findings

- 85% either agreed or strongly agreed that providing inclusive opportunities for new entrants into agriculture should continue to be a county farms service priority.
- A few tenants who responded did point out the significant financial challenges faced by new entrants perhaps best summed up by one respondent, who warned that:

*“The opportunity creates massive challenges in today’s climate in farming. Ever declining margins linked to increased capital requirements. Creates a very demanding set of obstacles. Not for the faint hearted!”*

- The respondents identified the most important characteristic for a new entrant to county farms as someone who has worked in the farming industry with relevant skills in agriculture (some qualifications or experience). The importance of understanding the agricultural industry along with being able to run a business was also highlighted.
- Half the respondents suggested the County Council could support tenants by providing ways in which information could be shared and tenants could access further guidance. Other ways in which the County Council could support tenants included increased inspections to assist tenants meet the standards expected of them, and access to capital funds for investment.
- Over three quarters of the tenants who responded were able to show the range of new approaches, techniques and principles they had adopted that showed a commitment to improving sustainability. Activities included: actively reducing use of inorganic fertilisers; implementing soil health strategy actions; grass rotation for soil health; precision methods of farming; and biodiversity enhancement measures.
- 58% of respondents are already accredited by an independent assurance standard such as Red Tractor, with two tenants having achieved the highest Arla 360 standard and one awarded the exemplar LEAF Marque amongst others.
- Of the 88% who said that they were considering how climate change affects their business and land management activities, 68% of these said they had

either taken action or were intended to take action to mitigate or adapt to climate change.

- 85% of respondents were looking to, or already had, incorporated natural environment management improvements including actions such as tree planting, hedgerow management and creating wildlife corridors. A few suggested that the County Council could signpost partnerships or assist with on farm landscape and environmental assessment and delivery.
- A benefit of County Farms that is often overlooked, it was clear from the study that most tenants make a meaningful contribution to their local community and recognise its importance in promoting an understanding of farming and its role within the countryside.
- In term of what more the County Council could do to help tenants succeed and thrive in their business a range of responses were received. Many referenced building stronger relationships, providing more opportunities for progression with one quoted as saying "*Nothing at the moment, happy tenant*".