POSITION STATEMENT

Norfolk Estate – Land Management/Agricultural Policy

Agricultural Policy

General

The short term outlook for the agricultural economy is unclear at present but some landowners/farmers, if their location and finances allows are planning far beyond ‘Brexit’.

The current CAP funding within ‘Pillar One’ is 2.3 Billion (Sterling) per annum, which is land area based, current direct payments make up an estimated 55% of farmers’ income.

‘Pillar Two’ funding is 1.2 Billion per annum, which is aimed at rural development, of which 80% is targeted towards ‘agri-environmental schemes’.

It is the ‘Pillar One’ funding that will be under pressure post-2022, which is the date when the government has confirmed the existing funding will be honoured, to remove the existing system could take up to yr. 2025.

Securing a free trade agreement within Europe would probably be top of our wish list, when you consider that our beef exports to Europe total £312 million, Lamb £289 million and Dairy £754 million, which accounts for 93%, 96% and 72% respectively as a percentage of total production. Much of the potential for growth over the next 10 to 20 years is from the Far East, from countries like China, Indonesia and the Philippines. By 2030 it is predicted that two thirds of the world’s middle class will live in Asia Pacific.

In conclusion, agricultural policy and farming practices within the Arun Valley, which is predominantly grazing land by virtue of the water meadows, we hope that future livestock returns can be at worst be maintained along with any agri-environmental scheme payments that can be used in conjunction with each individual farming system. The Estate wishes to see the current farming activities continuing into the future on a profitable basis.

The Estate is already highly committed to conservation activities and, as long as they do not have unacceptable adverse commercial consequences, we wish to continue to work with all the national and local conservation organisations to ensure that the lower Arun Valley is a place where wildlife can flourish.

There are four SSSIs areas on Estate land, and our commitment to their continued existence is absolute. We do however have concerns that future sea level rise may make the water in the River Arun more saline as time passes, and we believe that insufficient planning is underway to mitigate such an event.

Arun Valley Land Management – Position Statement

Everyone now recognises that the Environment Agency does not have a legal duty to maintain the river banks and structures, only permissive powers which they have chosen to exercise.

In exercising that power over the years, they have created an expectation that maintenance will continue.

To walk away from maintenance means that they would need to give notice of their intention to cease and remove our legitimate expectation. The Environment Agency’s flood defence appraisal has identified sections of the river where the costs of maintaining are greater than the benefit of maintaining defences.

We have serious concerns about the EA’s LTRAS proposal to cease the maintenance of the flood defences on the main river in LTRAS SU4 (between Warningcamp and Houghton Bridge). This is estimated to save the EA only some £35k pa, but at the same time it will increase the flood risk to Arundel because of the increased tidal prism. Action to alleviate this risk is estimated to cost some £1.5m, but the EA is reluctant to provide the necessary funding.

Discussions have been held with the DEFRA Floods Minister and the EA but, regrettably, to no avail thus far, despite the unintended consequences of the EA’s decision being pointed out repeatedly. An offer by the Estate to make a long-term contribution to the continued maintenance of the flood banks and structures has been put forward

I note that no account has been looked at in relation to the loss of Public Rights of Way and it can be argued that the local Rights of Way network generates an economic benefit.

It doesn’t appear that the impact on the Arun Valley railway line has been made clear. The areas identified as at risk from flooding include large parts of the track bed and it could be argued that the impact on the public purse by withdrawing maintenance and passing it onto Network Rail is of no benefit to the taxpayer.

If the economic analysis is greater than a case can be agreed and I refer specifically to the withdrawal of maintenance from SU4 as this unit is intrinsically linked to SU5 and subsequently to the town of Arundel, then maintenance in this section should not be withdrawn. The low-lying land on the estate in the Arun Valley contains a considerable number of structures and watercourses associated with water level management and flood defences. We are disappointed that the EA has chosen to abolish the River Arun IDB, but will nevertheless take appropriate action to ensure that the ex-IDB structures and watercourses are properly maintained in the future. In addition we have put in hand a programme to ensure that the non-IDB watercourses remain in a serviceable condition. In respect of the main river, as well as Swanbourne Millstream, we will continue to work with the EA to ensure that all the structures are properly maintained, and that the watercourses themselves are free-flowing.

Finally, if it would help, for both conservation and the alleviation of flood risk, the Estate would be pleased to participate in, and provide land for, a properly funded scheme to create an overflow fresh water lagoon in the Arun Valley between Arundel and Amberley which could be used to retain flood water and thereby reduce flood risks further downstream.

PK
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