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North Devon Council
Brynsworthy Environment Centre
Barnstaple
North Devon EX31 3NP

K. Miles
Chief Executive.

POLICY DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

A special meeting of the Policy Development Committee will be held in the G107, 1st Floor, South West Institute Development Building, Petroc, Barnstaple - Petroc College on **THURSDAY, 23RD MAY, 2024 at 6.30 pm.**

(NOTE: A location plan for Petroc is attached to the agenda front pages. There are also limited spaces to attend the meeting in person. Please check the Council's website for the latest information regarding the arrangements that are in place and the requirement to book a place 2 working days prior to the meeting. Taking part in meetings (northdevon.gov.uk).

Members of the Policy Development Councillor L. Spear (Chair)
Committee

Councillors Bishop, Bulled, Bushell, Clayton, Jones, P Leaver, Patrinos, Turton, Wilson, Worden and Williams.

AGENDA

1. Apologies
2. Items brought forward which in the opinion of the Chair should be considered by the meeting as a matter of urgency.
3. Declarations of Interest.
Please telephone the Corporate and Community Services team to prepare a form for your signature before the meeting. Interests must be re-declared when the item is called. A declaration of interest under the Code of Conduct will be a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest, an Other Registrable Interest or a Non-Registrable Interest. If the item directly relates to your interest, you must declare the interest and leave the room for the item save in the case of Other Registrable Interests or Non-Registrable Interests where you may first speak on the item as a member of the public if provision has been made for the public to speak. If the matter does not directly relate to your interest, but still affects, it then you must consider whether you are affected to a greater extent than most people and whether a reasonable person would consider your judgement to be clouded, if you are then you must leave the room for the item (although you may speak as a member of the public if provision has been made for the public to speak) or, if you are not, then you can declare the interest but still take part).
4. To agree the agenda between Part 'A' and Part 'B' (Confidential Restricted

Information).

PART 'A'

INTERNAL ITEMS

5. Agriculture. To consider agriculture within the North Devon area.

(NOTE: Appendices A to F (attached) together with Appendix G (to follow) provide responses to set questions that were sent to the panellists to seek their views prior to the publication of this agenda).

- (a) Councillor Robin Milton. Local Farmer - Appendix A (attached). (Pages 7 - 8)
- (b) Local Farmer and Deputy Chair of the National Farmers Union. Appendix B (attached). (Pages 9 - 10)
- (c) North Devon +. Appendix C (attached). (Pages 11 - 14)
- (d) Land Agent - Bloomfield Landsense. Appendix D (attached). (Pages 15 - 16)
- (e) Local Farmer and Chair of Exmoor Hill Farming Network. Appendix E (attached). (Pages 17 - 18)
- (f) North Devon UNESCO Biosphere Partnership. Appendix F (attached). (Pages 19 - 20)
- (g) Director - Mole Valley Farmers. Appendix G (to follow).

6. Proposed format of the meeting:

6:30PM: The Chair of the Committee will open the meeting, run through the housekeeping items and introduce the group lead.

6:40PM: Councillor Bullas as Group Lead will then outline the purpose of the special meeting and briefly explain why the subject is being scrutinised together with how the session will work.

6:50PM: The Chair will then allow follow up questions from the Committee members.

7:40 PM: Chair to suspend Standing Orders to allow opportunity for Members from Torridge District Council and the invited public to ask questions of the panellists.

8:20PM: Actions/next steps to be agreed by the Committee.

8:30 PM: Chair will formally close the meeting.

PART 'B' (CONFIDENTIAL RESTRICTED INFORMATION)

Nil.

If you have any enquiries about this agenda, please contact Corporate and Community Services, telephone 01271 388253

15.05.24



North Devon Council protocol on recording/filming at Council meetings

The Council is committed to openness and transparency in its decision-making. Recording is permitted at Council meetings that are open to the public. Members of the public that attend meetings must be aware that these meetings are open to the public and so therefore both individuals and the Council itself have the right to record the meeting. The Council understands that some members of the public attending its meetings may not wish to be filmed. The Chair of the meeting will make sure any request not to be filmed is respected.

The rules that the Council will apply are:

1. The recording must be overt (clearly visible to anyone at the meeting) and must not disrupt proceedings. The Council will put signs up at any meeting where we know recording is taking place.
2. The Chair of the meeting has absolute discretion to stop or suspend recording if, in their opinion, continuing to do so would prejudice proceedings at the meeting or if the person recording is in breach of these rules.
3. We will ask for recording to stop if the meeting goes into 'part B' where the public is excluded for confidentiality reasons. In such a case, the person recording should leave the room ensuring all recording equipment is switched off.
4. Any member of the public has the right not to be filmed. We ensure that agendas for, and signage at, Council meetings make it clear that recording can take place – anyone not wishing to be filmed must advise the Chair at the earliest opportunity to allow them to be directed to an area in the room where they will not be caught on camera. Subject to paragraphs 1, 2 and 3 above, audio recordings shall be permitted at all times during public meetings.
5. The recording should not be edited in a way that could lead to misinterpretation or misrepresentation of the proceedings or in a way that ridicules or shows a lack of respect for those in the recording. The Council would expect any recording in breach of these rules to be removed from public view.

Notes for guidance:

Please contact either our Corporate and Community Services team or our Communications team in advance of the meeting you wish to record at so we can make all the necessary arrangements for you on the day.

For more information contact the Corporate and Community Services team on **01271 388253** or email memberservices@northdevon.gov.uk or the Communications Team on **01271 388278**, email communications@northdevon.gov.uk.

Room G107 is located on the first floor of the South West Institute Development building at Petroc, Old Sticklepath Hill, Barnstaple, Devon EX31 2BQ. A lift is available to the first floor.

The following page shows a location plan of Petroc.

G Block on the plan indicates the South West Institute Development building.

Parking

Point 5 on the plan indicates the short stay car park which is located adjacent to the South West Institute Development building which is free to park after 5.00 p.m.

Cycle Racks

Covered cycle racks are located on the grassed area opposite Petroc's main reception, before the Lifestyle building.

Bus Routes

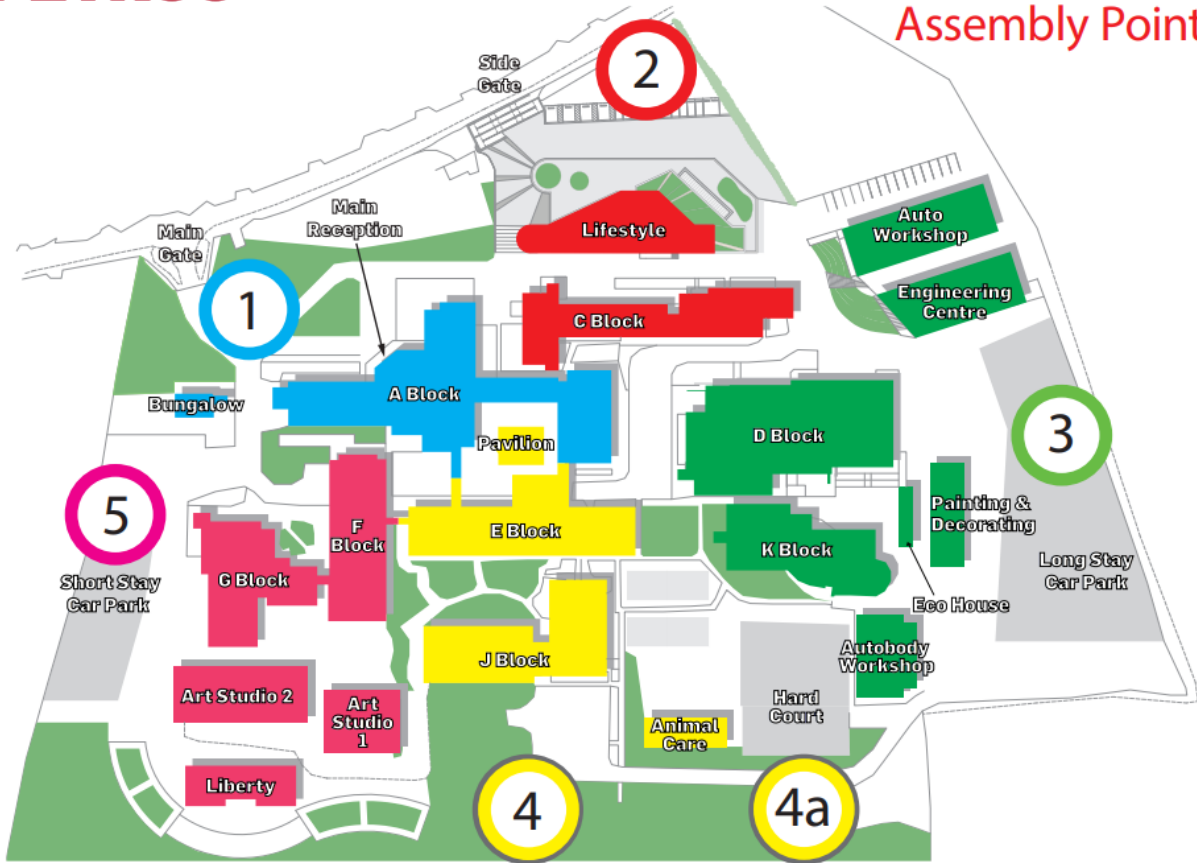
Stops in **Sticklepath Hill** (East bound) bus service 310

Wrey Arms (West bound) bus services 5B, 21, 21A, 21C, 62C, 322, 386, 646, 815, 821, 903, 921

([Sticklepath, Barnstaple – Bus Times](#))

Fire evacuation procedures

Fire evacuation procedures - Upon hearing a constant 2-tone alarm, please leave the building via your nearest marked fire exit and make your way to the nearest assembly point which is the short stay car park (Point 5 on the map). Lifts are not to be used. Please do not take time to pick up personal belongings and leave the building promptly.



Name of representative/organisation: Councillor Robin Milton, Farmer.	Answers provided to questions from the Committee:
<p>1. How do you see the current state of agriculture in North Devon? What is its primary role and how do you think it contributes to the wider North Devon economy?</p>	<p>Precarious and under substantial pressure financially and environmentally. Primary role is food production although not exclusively with its contribution to the wider ND economy being difficult to quantify but substantively more the directly attributable to the food production element.</p> <p>It includes food, environmental delivery and management, tourism, landscape and cultural aspects as well as the local economic value -every £ spent in agriculture is multiplied many times in the rural and ND economy.</p>
<p>2. What are the challenges and how do you see they can be overcome?</p>	<p>Challenges include financial security of farm businesses, environmental impacts and mitigation requirements, government targets and changing schemes for the rural economy, lack of understanding of agricultural economy, demands of land use for development, green energy, environmental mitigation, food production, varying scheme targets, water impacts, environmental lobbying.</p> <p>Can only be addressed by more inclusive joined up thinking rather than the current disjointed approach often driven by single issues (including environmental organisations looking for media presence):</p>

<p>3. What are the opportunities going forward for farming and what can farming contribute to the future of North Devon as a whole?</p>	<p>Opportunities are considerable. Food is a basic requirement of any civilisation and with the precarious state of world affairs currently this is increasingly important.</p> <p>A stable and well managed agriculture is vital to ensure the best use is made of the rural economy in conjunction with environmental and social demands whilst not offshoring our environmental responsibilities and impacts in pursuit of cheap food.</p> <p>Collaborative actions recognising the importance and value of agriculture especially as the principal land management activity must be actioned by farmers, environmentalists, policy makers to give multiple benefits and multiple income streams.</p> <p>It is agriculture that that stands to gain or lose most from poor policy and ND as a whole that will ultimately be the loser if better rural inclusivity is not developed.</p>
<p>4. What can North Devon Council do to support the situation with agriculture in North Devon?</p>	<p>I will leave this to other panellists to answer.</p>

Name of representative/organisation:	Answers provided to questions from the Committee:
<p>David Chugg, Local Farmer and Deputy Chair of the National Farmers Union.</p> <p>1. How do you see the current state of agriculture in North Devon? What is its primary role and how do you think it contributes to the wider North Devon economy?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Farming is at the heart of rural communities in North Devon. • Farmers produce high quality, climate-friendly food, fuel, fibre and flowers while maintaining and enhancing our beautiful countryside, protecting some of our most valuable natural assets and providing the foundation for the country's largest manufacturing sector, food and drink. • Farmers are custodians of some of our most beautiful landscapes within North Devon, which attracts thousands of tourists every year. The Mental health benefits of access to our beautiful countryside are undeniable. • Farming provides employment not only to the farmer, but to all associated industries (feed suppliers, machinery dealers, mechanics, contractors, butchers etc)
<p>2. What are the challenges and how do you see they can be overcome?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Farmer confidence is at an all-time low (NFU Farmer confidence survey 23/24) • Farmers are expected to produce (more) at the same time as impacting less • They are being pressed to deliver even more public goods, especially environmental • Increasingly expected to help deliver towards renewable targets • With the reduction in BPS, farmers are under huge financial pressure to continue to ensure their businesses are profitable. They must increasingly seek their returns from the market. • Rural crime puts an increasing burden on farmers, as there has been a rise in theft of equipment such as GPS and quad bikes. • The winter weather will have (and has had) a detrimental impact on crop and livestock production.

<p>3. What are the opportunities going forward for farming and what can farming contribute to the future of North Devon as a whole?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employment – encouraging more young people to work within agriculture • Supporting the environment and the fight against climate change. The NFU has an ambition to achieve net zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2040 - reducing our impact on the environment and increasing the production of green energy sources. • Utilising renewable energy sources. • The contribution towards the tourist industry cannot be underestimated – the green countryside attracts thousands each year. • Farmers often diversify to provide farm shops, attractions, and tourist accommodation (however poor market returns should not force farmers to do so)
<p>4. What can North Devon Council do to support the situation with agriculture in North Devon?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote the Back British Farming message - In an increasingly volatile world, food production is vital to our country’s health, wellbeing, and security • Promote the farming sector • Procure local produce (promoting and driving local, seasonal, and fresh food purchasing, by serving more local food in our hospitals and our schools) • Importantly, recognise that to stay competitive the industry must continue to adapt and invest. • Through the wider planning regime support good applications that deliver jobs and growth to the economy (either direct agriculture or diversified businesses) • Continue to push for better broadband provision in rural areas • Help to educate our young people about food production and taking care of the countryside • Support a growing agricultural contribution to renewable energy.

Name of representative/organisation: Graham Woolcock North Devon+	Answers provided to questions from the Committee:
<p>1. How do you see the current state of agriculture in North Devon? What is its primary role and how do you think it contributes to the wider North Devon economy?</p>	<p>It is in a bit of a static confusion. Basic Payment Scheme is reducing and farmers are struggling to find a way of making this loss up. Not sure whether SFI is a way forward for some who have bad experiences with “The Ministry” and fines in Countryside Stewardship Scheme. Its primary role is to ensure the rural economy stays vibrant. Each farm supports at least 25 – 30 local businesses and if the farms don’t have the money to spend then these businesses will ultimately be lost – causing a worsening of GDP in the rural areas.</p> <p>The current state is very sector dependent – mixed bag of how well each sector is surviving. Beef and sheep are generally doing ok, arable took a big hit last year due to the very wet weather in July through to November and dairy and pigs continue to struggle</p> <p>What has to be remembered is that agriculture provides food security and feeds massively into the local food supply chain. It also has direct impact on other important sectors such as tourism and hospitality. We really do need to maintain and develop local supply chain particularly in light of the focus on the reduction of food miles and seasonal availability.</p>

2. What are the challenges and how do you see they can be overcome?

The Government are going away from the Basic Payment Scheme which farmers have relied on in the majority of cases as cashflow. Now after 6 years of reducing payments and only recently the launch of the SFI offers the farmers are having difficult decisions to make.

SFI can work for some farms and in fact some are getting more payments than their BPS and it hasn't affected their core farming practices. Others are not so lucky and have to look at differing options which will have an impact on their farm and maybe lead to a reduction in stock numbers.

Government legislation on slurry is also seeing a lot of farms leaving the Dairy sector. Some discussions I have had seem to say that planning for bigger lagoons will not be passed – something that the councils should look into if they wish to keep milk being produced in our area.

Preconceived ideas that SFI is all about rewilding has to be changed as there are a number of options that can improve the way you farm. Soil testing, Nutrient Management, Pest Management, Low input payments, introducing herbal leys and legumes can all be funded.

We also need to ensure farmers/landowners are getting enough support. A bottom end price capping on what supermarkets can pay the farmers to ensure they are being paid a fair price for their product.

We need to continue to educate farmers with good farming practice, with good incentives to manage their land correctly. Additional funding for further education and getting workers

	<p>qualified in things like PA1&2 (spraying), telehandler etc should also be considered.</p>
<p>3. What are the opportunities going forward for farming and what can farming contribute to the future of North Devon as a whole?</p>	<p>Beef and lamb prices still remain high – which is giving optimism to some. Some have taken advantage of this and put in more stock now rather than looking at the long term vision. It will take time to see who is right but there are some encouraging signs in this sector for the majority.</p> <p>SFI is flexible and more importantly you get paid on a quarterly basis aiding cashflow and allowing expenditure in the rural economy for 12 months of the year. It can also enhance what you are currently doing. Hedgerow management has to be looked at – some internal hedges are now worth £46 per 100metres so it's worth deciding whether you can cope with every other year cutting. The application process is relatively easy and if you are worried there is specific help out there or your agents would be very pleased to help you submit an application. The weather this winter has meant most hedges haven't been cut anyway so each farmer needs to see if they can accept that on a 3 year offer.</p> <p>Diversification isn't for all and early figures for Tourism this year are worrying with a drought of bookings in July and August currently. UK Prosperity funding for some farm diversification projects (building conversions) will shortly be available and maybe an opportunity for some – subject to planning.</p> <p>As per above - provides food security and feeds into local food supply chain and has direct impact on other sectors such as tourism / hospitality. Need to maintain local supply chain</p>

	<p>particularly in light of the focus on the reduction of food miles and seasonal availability.</p> <p>Farming needs to be a self-sufficient industry, that can afford labour and support which will aid the further economy. Trying to get this better balance has been and continues to be very difficult and making plans for 3 - 5 year plans for new agreements almost impossible.</p>
<p>4. What can North Devon Council do to support the situation with agriculture in North Devon?</p>	<p>Get a better understanding of agriculture as its changing and being told to change by central government. New animal health and welfare guidance is making some of the more older buildings redundant and new sheds will need to be built to accommodate guidance from the vet. The councils should not be looking at the old buildings first for class R or Q but the need of the business if it is to stay farming. In the majority of cases most farmers wouldn't want to convert those buildings as they are too close to their farmhouse and wouldn't want long term tenants or tourists in and out all day.</p> <p>Family businesses that split need some support. Businesses can't be left until the last minute to inheritance issues so if we want vibrant businesses they need to be supported at an early stage – so if a farmhouse needs to be built after a partnership split – what does the farmer need to do to show that this is needed for the farm to succeed?</p> <p>Look to support and promote initiatives for people and businesses to buy local produce and support wherever possible local supply chains to ensure food security.</p>

Name of representative/organisation:	Answers provided to questions from the Committee:
<p>Sally-Anne Bloomfield MRICS. FALA / Landsense Professional Ltd.</p> <p>1. How do you see the current state of agriculture in North Devon? What is its primary role and how do you think it contributes to the wider North Devon economy?</p>	<p>The definition of agriculture is wide and varying, encompassing but not exclusively, everything from arable, dairy, beef, sheep, pigs, poultry, fruit, vegetables and horticulture. As such differing sectors have differing opportunities, threats and risks and whilst markets may be volatile in in one sector (e.g. dairy), another may at that time be more buoyant (e.g. beef and sheep).</p> <p>As such agriculture by its very nature is multifaceted and therefore to categorise the state of 'agriculture' as one entity does little to recognise the complexities and challenges farmers across North Devon face. However common denominator's affecting farm businesses across 'agriculture' such as significantly increased costs, changes in weather patterns/seasons and an overhaul of farm subsidies and regulations have left certain farm businesses vulnerable and at risk.</p> <p>In terms of its primary role and how it contributes, again as above it is difficult to categorise, however food production, management of natural assets, the countryside and the landscape around us is what gives North Devon a sense of place and therefore agriculture's contribution to the wider economy, through say tourism, should not be underestimated.</p>
<p>2. What are the challenges and how do you see they can be overcome?</p>	<p>Regulation, cost, public perception, planning, competing with overseas markets, theft, startup difficulties, lack of</p>

	<p>infrastructure, isolation, an ageing workforce – to name but a few!</p> <p>Government support, changes to planning policies, consistency with decisions across markets, education, increased rural policing, diversification.</p>
<p>3. What are the opportunities going forward for farming and what can farming contribute to the future of North Devon as a whole?</p>	<p>Land, livestock and buildings as assets all have incredible potential to provide a variety of opportunities to those fortunate to own or manage them. Farming is a way of life, but it is also a business which can evolve and change over time. Having the ability (financially or timewise) to take advantage of opportunities is perhaps a bigger challenge.</p> <p>By way of contribution sustainable produce, conservation, protection of natural assets, education, tourism opportunities, employment, green prescriptions – contributions have enormous scope providing there is a realisation of the importance of farming and respect for the farming community.</p>
<p>4. What can North Devon Council do to support the situation with agriculture in North Devon?</p>	<p>As a Rural Chartered Surveyor, common issues affecting my client base where I think NDC could offer further support would be a better understanding of agricultural needs and regulations in particular around planning, s106 agreements and their implications on taxation, infrastructure requirements, and an increase in public awareness of agricultural sensitivity such as livestock worrying, farm thefts, trespass etc.</p> <p>Working with the farming community and understanding roles and needs is fundamental.</p>

Name of representative/organisation:	Answers provided to questions from the Committee:
<p>Ian May, Farmer and Chair of Exmoor Hill Farming Network</p> <p>1. How do you see the current state of agriculture in North Devon? What is its primary role and how do you think it contributes to the wider North Devon economy?</p>	<p>Agriculture remains in a period of uncertainty largely due to changes as a result of Brexit, the long-term impacts (both positive and negative) of these changes are yet to be fully realised. The Agriculture and Environment Acts are still bedding in and changes in trade dynamics with Europe and elsewhere are still evolving.</p> <p>From an external point of view it may appear that agriculture is carrying on as usual although business dynamics are changing with new landowners buying up land for green finance opportunities such as BNG and Carbon Credits and new entrants and the more traditional family farming businesses are not best able to make the most of opportunities as they come up.</p> <p>Farming remains a core underpinning industry in North Devon, employing significant numbers of people both directly and in ancillary industries. Its core role remains to provide food and other agricultural products but is increasingly being asked to combine this with other environmental and climate goals.</p>
<p>2. What are the challenges and how do you see they can be overcome?</p>	<p>Increased volatility in input costs, markets and weather seem to be expanding challenges. To overcome input costs and market conditions continued focus on long-term business sustainability and resilience need to be a focus.</p>

	<p>To overcome weather volatility novel thinking (including learning from other regions and countries) and planning for resilience are going to be needed.</p> <p>Obtaining finance seems to be an increasing challenge for some, particularly with currently high interest rates. This would be a particular issue for new entrants, those without significant existing land holdings and those looking to change or expand their business.</p>
<p>3. What are the opportunities going forward for farming and what can farming contribute to the future of North Devon as a whole?</p>	<p>With the current focus on climate and the environment, farming has the opportunity to demonstrate how we can produce high quality produce at the same time as maintaining and enhancing the natural environment we live in and sustaining a vibrant rural economy.</p> <p>As mentioned before, as a core industry in North Devon, farming underpins a significant number of other ancillary businesses and rural communities. In the future a thriving farming community can only help maintain and increase the North Devon economy as a whole.</p>
<p>4. What can North Devon Council do to support the situation with agriculture in North Devon?</p>	<p>Signposting, convening and facilitating opportunities for business development and collaboration.</p> <p>Efficient and understanding planning processes.</p> <p>Enabling improved understanding between the farming and non-farming communities.</p>

<p>Name of representative/organisation: Andrew BELL North Devon UNESCO Biosphere Reserve</p>	<p>Answers provided to questions from the Committee:</p>
<p>1. How do you see the current state of agriculture in North Devon? What is its primary role and how do you think it contributes to the wider North Devon economy?</p>	
<p>2. What are the challenges and how do you see they can be overcome?</p>	<p>Viability of Farming</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Due to unfair trade deals; Farming to standards while other countries do not respect these standards. • A race to the bottom that has impacts on environmental quality. <p>Transition due Brexit has made challenges.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Climate change and severe event vulnerability <p>Continuation and expansion of Public payment for public goods is a sound mechanism, but there may not be enough public funds.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The pressure on land is immense for both energy and food. The market is driving too far in the energy direction. There is also a need to account for more land for nature, but this can be built into multiple land use systems. • We need to match land use with land capability. Some farms feel the need to intensify on land where it does not make financial or ecological sense. Landuse/ land management planning and better cooperation within the sector may release resources and solutions.

<p>3. What are the opportunities going forward for farming and what can farming contribute to the future of North Devon as a whole?</p>	<p>Land seen as more than just agriculture (environment, biodiversity etc)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A good opportunity to incorporate multiple income streams from environmental goods alongside food production. <p>AgriTech: to reduce the negative impact of farming.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Innovation to improve circular economy especially in nutrient recycling, rather than allowing run-off to lose the nutrients and the soil. <p>Develop only energy that is suited to the area’s capability.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some systems are taking a huge amount of land and not incorporating multiple use. • Improve local value-added processing <p>A bespoke land management framework created with landowners on a scale that makes sense to the farmers.</p>
<p>4. What can North Devon Council do to support the situation with agriculture in North Devon?</p>	<p>Policies to support solutions that lead to the reduction of pollution (slurry, stores, farm operations designed to improve the environment)</p> <p>Support local food (and forest) produce added value.</p> <p>Influencing local public procurement policy</p> <p>Ensure energy developments are multiple land-use so there can be shared use for biodiversity and farming.</p> <p>Onshore wind takes less surface per unit energy provided. A refresh of the policy and evidence is needed.</p>