

| Name of representative/organisation: Ian May, Farmer and Chair of Exmoor Hill Farming Network | Answers provided to questions from the Committee: |
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| 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>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> |
| 2. What are the challenges and how do you see they can be overcome? | <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> |

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| | <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> |