

**Cyngor Cymuned CERI /KERRY Community Council – Serving the villages of Kerry, Sarn and Dolfor**

Clerk: Sarah Reast, Ysgubor Crugnant, Pennant, Llanbrynmair, SY19 7BN. Phone: 07743 689912

Email: [clerk@kerrycommunitycouncil.gov.uk](mailto:clerk@kerrycommunitycouncil.gov.uk)

RFO: Ria Roberts, Phone: 01686 671275, Email: [rfo@kerrycommunitycouncil.gov.uk](mailto:rfo@kerrycommunitycouncil.gov.uk)

*Sarah Reast – 02/06/2025*

**DRAFT Notes from the public meeting concerning the management of Powys County farm estates by Powys County Council 27/05/25. These notes are compiled from those taken by the Clerk and RFO and from the recorded transcript and are paraphrased unless shown within quotation marks.**

**Attendees:**

PCC Officers: Gwilym Davies, (Head of Planning and Regulatory Services and Matt Perry (Chief Officer) from the Department of Economic Growth and Development

Unions: Aled Jones President NFU, Sarah Lewis President YFC, Ian Rickman President FUW

Elected Members: Russell George MS, Steve Witherden MP

County Councillors: Cllr. Jeremy Brignall-Thorpe, Cllr. Elwyn Vaughan, Cllr. Ben Breeze, Cllr. Glyn Preston, Cllr. Gareth Jones, Cllr. Geoff Morgan, Cllr. Karl Lewis, Cllr. Aled Davies, Cllr. John Yeomans, Cllr. Graham Breeze, Cllr. Adrian Jones, Cllr. Joy Jones, Cllr. Ian Harrison

Town and Community Councils: Cllr. David Evans (Rhayadr)

Members of Kerry Community Council: Cllr. Brian Pryce, Cllr. Trevor Blatch, Cllr. Carmen Seal, Cllr. David Jones, Cllr. Veronica Wildish, Cllr. Roy Gardner, Cllr. Catherine Fairclough, Cllr. Fleur Blatch, Cllr. Trystan Davies, Cllr. Susan Robertson, Ria Roberts (RFO), Sarah Reast (Clerk)

Members of the press: BBC Wales, Farmers Weekly

Members of the public

**Welcome by Cllr David Jones, Chair Kerry Community Council:** The decision to hold this meeting came after writing to PCC a number of times over the last 18 months about tenanted farms. The 2018 Farm Development Plan has been in operation from a time when tenancies were fairly secure but times are changing and these tenancies are now threatened. Farming needs stability as it is a very long term business. Of the 133 tenanted farms in Powys, 30 are in Sarn which were mainly purchased by the old Montgomeryshire Council before and immediately after the First World War. The community are very proud of young tenant farmers leading the way and diversifying but many people will be affected by these changes which will have a drastic effect on the broader social, economic and community viability of the area so it feels beholden upon the Community Council to represent these local concerns.

**Presentations by PCC Officers**

**Matt Perry** acknowledged the uncertainties and was anxious to welcome dialogue to find a way forward to achieve greater stability. The current policy is due for renewal and PCC are following procedures to get that done over the next few months

**Gwilym Davies** PCC have not changed their policy and are not selling all the farms. The Officers jobs are to compile considerations to present to the decision makers. They have to take into account the need for land for new housing, commercial opportunities and community spaces. The big concern is the liabilities associated with farm tenancies and other properties in the council estate such as the presence of asbestos and the need for repairs. The capital from PCC estate needs to offset the cost of other Council priorities such as new school buildings. Since 2022, 5 holdings have been sold and more buildings will be sold but land will largely be retained. The policy renewal will be handled by cross party representation in the form of the Farm Advisory Group and will seek to encourage new

entrants, retain land for a mixture of uses, maintain the quality of the estate, meet community needs, get best value for money and reinvest into the estate. Once the policy is in draft form, it will go out to consultation with the farming sector, communities and unions and in meetings such as this one.

**The meeting was then opened out to the floor for questions which have been grouped into the following key topics and concerns:**

- **Financial Details:** Rental income from farms is around £1.2 million, the amount spent on maintenance is around £400,000 and the overall value of the estate is estimated at over £120 million. The estimated cost of bringing all farm buildings up to standard is 3.5 million. Several farmers said that their buildings had received no maintenance and that money was being wasted on successive reviews with no resultant repairs. A speaker asked the PCC Officers if there was any other sector providing revenue on the scale that farm tenancies do and they were told that there weren't thereby illustrating the importance of the estate for future revenues. It was asked whether other business models could be considered including borrowing based on the gross profit and the security of the land. PCC Officers were asked how many farms were due to be sold and they said that there was no set target but that it would be determined on a case-by-case basis. They also said that notices to quit were not always final but could be subject to negotiation. They were asked how many properties were currently empty but not on the market. They could not answer in the moment but said they would follow up.
- **Impact on Young Farmers:** Several speakers emphasised the importance of smallholdings as a stepping stone for young farmers and expressed outrage at the council's actions that are seen as hindering new entrants. One farmer shared a personal story of being told his tenancy will not be renewed, effectively ending his farming dream and impacting his daughter's future in farming. He said that he had found an investor to make a proposal to buy the farm but that PCC did not accept an invitation to consider the offer. PCC was asked by several speakers if they considered tenants as individuals and families with real life challenges or if they just saw them as numbers.
- **Tenant Farmer Mental Health:** Concern is raised about the mental health of tenant farmers facing eviction, with a request for the council to provide support and counselling and to consider their duty of care.
- **Management of the Estate:** There was criticism of the council's management of the estate, with claims that properties have been allowed to fall into disrepair. Speakers described the management as "an absolute disgrace." And some of the farm buildings being "uninhabitable". PCC Officers were asked for more detail on the timeline for the new policy. They said that it had to happen in this calendar year, the Farm Advisory Group would make recommendations to the portfolio holder who would then present it to the cabinet. It was pointed out that most of the cabinet members are based in the South of the county whereas most of the tenanted farms are in the North, the implication being that there was a lack of real-life experience of the challenges,
- **Call for Policy Change:** There was a strong call for the abolition or significant revision of the current policy. Elected representatives present were asked to support a cross-party letter to the council demanding change.
- **Woodland Management:** A question was raised about the management of woodland within the estate, specifically whether harvested woodland has been replanted. PCC Officers were asked how many acres of woodland were owned by the Council. They could not answer in the moment but said they would follow up.

## **Other presentations**

**Steve Witherden MP** requested that in the medium term a cross-party letter be written to PCC demanding that the policy be abandoned. He also requested that in the short term, farmers losing

their tenancies should be assigned a councillor and gave the example that if a teacher were to lose their job, a policy of “care first” would be instigated. He represents several tenants facing eviction and expressed disgust at their treatment and lack of thought given to their well-being. “You know its bad when a farmer says they hope they fail their TB test”

**Sarah Lewis President YFC** highlighted the fact that an unprecedented amount of young people are committing to training courses and degrees in agriculture and asked how they were to find their way into farming without affordable tenancies. She said she could understand the idea of selling a property that had become vacant by natural causes but thought that taking one away from a hard-working family was “unbelievable”. She highlighted the fact that school budgets have been run down over many years and asked why farmers specifically should have to pay for it.

**Cllr Elwyn Vaughan** asked for clarity on the policy and failing that, a moratorium

**Aled Jones President NFU** asked for the Well Being of Future Generations policy to be applied in this instance and for a moratorium on the current policy. He acknowledged that the situation wasn’t the sole responsibility of today’s regime but more an accumulation of many years leading up to the current “panic stations”

**Ian Rickman President FUW** expressed his appreciation of the passion of the young people and their role as the life blood of the sector. He asked for a pause in the policy.

**Russell George AM** expressed the need to consider improved food security in the light of global turmoil including protecting the estate. He recommended that a cross-party motion be put forward asking for a moratorium. He suggested that the County Councillors present represented a supportive force and that those absent should be noted.

**Cllr. Jeremy Brignall-Thorpe** expressed that the Council don’t want to have to sell any farms but they “cannot square the circle”. He suggested that the only other option is to raise taxes.

#### **Overall attendees’ comments/tone**

The tone of the meeting was largely critical of the Powys County Council's policies and actions. There was a strong sense of frustration and anger from tenant farmers and their supporters, particularly regarding the impact on young farmers and the perceived mismanagement of the estate. The council representatives present acknowledged the concerns and stated that they would take them back for consideration.

#### **Motion (draft) arising from the meeting.**

1. Recognises the valuable contribution that council-owned farms play in supporting food production and enabling young entrants into farming.
2. Regrets that selling council-owned farms risks reducing Powys’s and Wales’s food security and traditional farming practices, causing a shifting towards less sustainable practices.
3. Calls on Powys County Council to impose a moratorium on the sale of council-owned farms.
4. Calls upon the recognition of the importance of farming to the social and economic viability of the broader community

The draft motion was carried with no objections by the attendees.