

Ringmore Neighbourhood Plan - Consultation with Local Businesses

Business: Mount Folly Farm

Date: 7th February 2020

A delegation from Ringmore Parish Neighbourhood Plan Steering Group consisting of Mr Richard Baker, the Steering Group Chairman, and Dr Malcolm Findlay, visited Mount Folly Farm on the evening of 7th February 2020. They met with Mr John Tucker, who co-owns and operates the farm along with his daughter, Cathy. The purpose of the meeting was part of a RNPSG consultation initiative with local businesses in Ringmore Parish. The Tucker family farms some land within the parish although most of its land is immediately adjacent to it in the parish of Bigbury.

Over the course of the meeting, Richard Baker provided Mr Tucker with a broad overview of the Ringmore Parish Neighbourhood Plan and the role the Plan might play in decisions related to planning and development, should it be approved and come into force. Mr Tucker kindly responded to questions around his plans for developing Mount Folly Farm over coming years and also presented a very interesting range of ideas on how he and other farmers in the area might contribute to future development of the area and improve amenity for both residents and visitors. The discussion forms the basis for meeting notes that follow:

Background Information

Mount Folly Farm is based at the top of Folly Hill in the parish of Bigbury, South Devon, though a substantial part of its 650 acre holding is situated within Ringmore Parish. The Tucker family relocated from East Prawle to take ownership of the farm in 1983 and since then have, through various land acquisitions, steadily expanded to reach its current extent. The farm engages in a diverse range of agricultural and tourist-related activities which include growing cereals and vegetables, livestock farming, car-parking, camping, self-catering holiday accommodation, and weddings. The farm is heavily committed to vegetable crops including, amongst others, cauliflower and cabbage, and provides employment related to the harvesting of these. Static caravans are delivered to, and removed from, the two caravan parks in Ringmore parish along a track that runs across land belonging to Mount Folly Farm.

Mr Tucker is a well-known character in the local area and is highly respected for his approach to maintaining its rural character and also for his engagement with charitable activities.

Infrastructure

In discussing infrastructure, Mr Tucker expressed particular concern over the ability of the current local road network to cope with current and inevitable future demand. He highlighted the section of single track road, with three passing places near to Harraton Cross which prevented the free flow of traffic to and from these cross roads. He went on to give further examples of severe summer traffic congestion caused by the numbers of cars heading to and from beaches at Challaborough and Bigbury, and the times he had been unable to proceed with essential movements of agricultural machinery. Mr Tucker acknowledged that it was unlikely that state funding would become available to alleviate the situation so offered his own carefully considered solution, which involves employing local farmers in small but strategic road widening projects. In his scheme, farmers would do the work of digging out banks and preparing sections of road for ultimate finishing by professional tarmac companies. He believes this approach would result in vastly reduced costs and could be part of a reciprocal arrangement for housing provision, discussed below.

Mr Tucker indicated that he did not experience undue problems in his operations in Ringmore parish due to poor communications and internet signal. He did nevertheless propose that there is significant room for improvement and is supportive of siting masts and other apparatus wherever these will provide maximum benefit. He also commented upon the strain that has been imposed upon the sewerage system in Challaborough due to expansion of the holiday caravan parks without an adequately planned system for dealing with the huge increase in sewerage during the holiday season.

Housing

Mr Tucker expressed a strong desire to see local settlements functioning as communities, rather than being holiday home dormitories. He suggested that more affordable housing provision, coupled with measures to control traffic flow through settlements could be key catalysts for this. He was of the view that quid-pro-quo arrangements with local farmers could be a useful tool in this respect, with landowners being allowed to pursue small scale housing development projects provided that they include housing that is demonstrable affordable and will remain so for perpetuity. Farmer engagement in the road improvement scheme mentioned above could also be offset against consent for housebuilding.

Environment

Mr Tucker gave a range of interesting examples of the provision he makes for nurturing wildlife in the course of his farming operations. This included tree-planting and hedge management, in particular timing the cutting of hedges to avoid disturbing nesting birds. He commented on the prevalence of sparrow hawks on parts of his farmland and the negative effect their predation is exerting upon other local bird populations.

Employment

With Mount Folly Farm being based in the Parish of Bigbury, employment is not directly accountable in the Ringmore Parish Neighbourhood Plan. The farm does nevertheless provide employment opportunities for Ringmore parishioners. None of the current farm staff live in Ringmore parish though, and the work is inevitably quite physical and hence not well suited to Ringmore's generally older residents.

Future plans for land in Ringmore Parish

In the course of the meeting, Mr Tucker noted that he had no plans to further extend the farm's current acreage. He was asked whether he had any particular intentions for his land in Ringmore parish, specifically whether any form of diversification, such as installation of solar panels or wind turbines, was planned. He replied that he had no plans in this respect.

Richard Baker thanked Mr Tucker for hosting the visit and for sharing his ideas on how development in Ringmore parish might be approached in a mutually beneficial way.

Key points to emerge from this meeting were:

- That connectivity for road traffic is the predominant factor in allowing for and coping with any future development in Ringmore and adjacent parishes, for business or residential purposes.
- The current road network is inadequate for the volume of tourist and day-visitor traffic and the resultant congestion is hampering farming operations
- Mr Tucker believes a solution to the current traffic problems may lie in a road widening programme that would involve local farmers doing the initial stages of the work
- Mr Tucker is supportive of any necessary installation of equipment that will improve communications and broadband capacity
- Mr Tucker is supportive of any measures that would improve amenity in local settlements and encourage full-time occupation by families
- Mount Folly Farm engages in measures to nurture and support wildlife
- There are no plans for Mount Folly Farm to diversify use of agricultural land in Ringmore parish
- There are no current plans for Mount Folly Farm to acquire more land in Ringmore parish