



Mrs J Hoskin,
Branston Farm,
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27th September 2016

Dear Mrs Hoskin

South Hill Neighbourhood Development Plan Consultation – NFU Response

The South West NFU welcomes the opportunity to comment on the South Hill Neighbourhood Development Plan. The South West NFU represents approximately 1153 farmers and landowners in Cornwall and we recognise the importance of the neighbourhood and our response is given below along with some key priorities.

As you will be aware the farming community continues to face formidable challenges with increasing regulation, volatile markets and fluctuating farming returns. In response to these challenges farmers have had to consider the resources available to them and look at new ways of developing their businesses so that they can grow and remain competitive. This might include the need for modern agricultural buildings either to meet regulations or to change the use of existing buildings in order to respond to changing market demand.

Our members in South Hill are no exception and given that the area is largely farmed it is clear that any form of Neighbourhood Plan must adequately reflect the issues and opportunities of farming. Our vision for the area is:

South Hill is a sustainable rural community that is underpinned by an innovative rural economy, and thriving farming and food industry, which is profitable and supports viable livelihoods, underpins sustainable and healthier communities and enhances the environmental assets that are vital to the counties prosperity.

For the farming community this vision is to be achieved by the following themes

1. Strengthening our farming businesses to help them build profitability and respond to new opportunities
2. To create thriving localities that meet the needs of their communities, businesses and their environment.
3. Realising the value of the parishes environmental and landscape assets

In addition we would see some of the key priorities for farms to include (not in order of priority):

1. The ability for the next generation to take on management of farms and to support this through the provision of affordable housing to allow succession.
2. Develop farming enterprises that can meet the challenges of food security through modernising and becoming more efficient
3. Diversifying farming enterprises to meet new opportunities such as, *inter alia*, business units or tourism.
4. Developing renewable energy which meets the needs of the farm and are appropriate to the location and renewable resources available. The online plan reflects local views on renewables but does not appear to propose any specific outcome for renewables.
5. Access to reliable high speed broadband.

Food production is a key priority for economic growth both nationally but also importantly in a rural area such as South Hill Parish. In the Government white paper '*Local Growth: realising every place's potential*' the Coalition Government makes clear that the first priority "*is to return the nation's economy to health*". This includes creating, "*the conditions that will help business and gets the economy growing*" and this includes the support for farming enterprises so vital to the rural economy and enabling them to remain viable through diversified enterprises. We would expect that any proposals for developing farms will take this into account.

Diversification is in line with National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) that provides that local authorities should support development that enables farmers to become more competitive and sustainable and diversify into new opportunities. A key message within the NPPF is the need for economic growth. "*A positive planning system is essential, because without growth, a sustainable future cannot be achieved. Therefore, significant weight should be placed on the need to support economic growth through the planning system...the default answer to development proposals is yes.*" The South Hill neighbourhood plan has the opportunity to help support farms diversify and create new employment and income opportunities for the area. These will range from the provision of business units through to farm shops.

In the NPPF the government makes a number of very important statements related to the development of renewable energy. Paragraphs 95 to 98 make a number key points including: '*local planning authorities should recognise the responsibility on all communities to contribute to energy generation from renewable or low carbon sources*' (para 97); '*have a positive strategy to promote energy from renewable and low carbon sources*' which '*maximise renewable and low carbon energy sources*'. Renewable energy represents an important opportunity for farms to reduce their energy bills and also to create revenue that can help support farming activity. We understand that this can be a contentious issue within communities as has been highlighted by the government with the policy it has introduced for requiring areas to be identified for wind development in local or neighbourhood plans such as yours. Some of our members will be looking to erect wind turbines for electricity to be used on farm at a very small scale. We ask that you consider the issue of scale and how you can support our farmers.

Succession within farming businesses is often critical to their ongoing sustainability. This will often require the need for additional housing to enable the next generation to take over the farming enterprise and to allow the current generation to take a less involved role. We ask that the neighbourhood plan supports farms to build new housing.

To help guide any work we have developed some principles which we believe will help South Hill to shape any activity in the area. These are:

- Food security is a crucial issue for now and the future and any actions must ensure that we do not compromise our ability to feed ourselves
- We should look to increase farm productivity and decrease impact on the environment.
- The achievement of sustainable development in rural areas through the integration of environmental, social and economic objectives.
- Meet the needs of a diverse rural population and ensure equality of opportunity.
- Maintain and enhance the areas natural asset base including its landscape value.
- Farmers and landowners should always be consulted and listened to with regard to developing the area.
- Support sustainable growth in the rural economy.
- Sustainable farming will support the wider community.
- Not one system of farming is the answer and all should be supported for maximum benefit to society and the environment
- Encourage links between rural areas and urban centres.

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to this consultation and we hope that these comments are helpful and will be taken into account.

Yours sincerely,

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