



Future of Causeway Farm

Background

Following various discussions and email exchanges between Middleton Parish Council (MPC) and Suffolk County Council (SCC), MPC agreed to gather the views of Middleton residents regarding the future of Causeway Farm. The current tenancy comes to an end in October 2024. SCC are keen to hear the views of local people so that these may inform decisions they will make relating to the farm's management after that time.

A community meeting, attended by approximately 60 people, took place at Middleton Village Hall on Monday 18th March 2024. An overview presentation was shared with attendees link [here](#). All those present then divided into groups to discuss the issues they would wish SCC to consider when determining the future of Causeway Farm.

A summary of those discussions is set out below.

Fundamental question

Recognising SCC's need for the farm to be financially sustainable, a fundamental question has emerged from all the investigations and discussions so far - is Causeway Farm viable as a stand-alone conventional farm? The current tenant until recently ran a nursery school (for 26 years) from the farmhouse and it is difficult to see a future for the holding unless there is some form of diversification or if someone is undertaking some specialised niche project e.g. cheesemaking or specialised horticulture.

Therefore, we believe SCC has three options:

1. Find a tenant to take on the farm in its entirety recognising that they would need to demonstrate clear plans for additional sources of income beyond conventional agriculture.
2. Break up the different parts of the farm.
3. A mixture of the two, recognising however that the more the farm is reduced the greater the challenge of running it sustainably as a single unit.

What are the options for diversification?

We don't have a clear understanding of the options that SCC might be considering. At our community meeting local people expressed an interest in the following. These are not mutually exclusive and clearly to be viable any new tenant may need a variety of additional sources of income.

- **Running a Care Farm.** Typically, this would be where packages of day care services are offered. These would be commissioned by statutory providers such as Social Care departments or could be purchased by individuals acting as self-funders or using their personal budgets. There are many successful examples of these types of operations. SCC already has two County Farms that provide day care services.

- Opening a Farm Shop. There are other farm shops reasonably close by. However, a successful Farm shop existed at the other side of the village for a number of years
- Alternative energy / community energy (see below)
- Are there other options?

Break-up of the farm.

If there is not a genuinely sustainable future for the farm, as a stand-alone agricultural unit, what are the options open to SCC and what are Middleton villagers' views on these?

The different options:

- **Development**
 - There is general acceptance, albeit reluctantly, that there is a case for limited development along Back Road. (see map)
 - There is also acceptance that the farm's outbuildings on The Causeway present an opportunity for development.
 - Causeway Farmhouse - if the farm were being broken up it seems logical that this should be sold with a parcel of land.
 - Beyond this there would be no appetite in the village for further development
- **Wildlife**
 - There is widespread support for the marsh land alongside the Minsmere river to be managed with wildlife in mind (see map)
 - Related to this there is a request to SCC that they coordinate discussions with Suffolk Wildlife Trust and with the other landowners with adjacent land who are also considering partnering with SWT. This could allow for the creation of a wildlife corridor along both sides of the Minsmere river on what is now unproductive land.
 - It would also make sense to include, in any wildlife enhancing scheme, the parcel of land (marsh grazing) between The Causeway and Mill Street (see map)
- **Permissive paths**
 - Whatever happens with the land there are several suggestions the village has for permissive paths. The village would like these to be conditions for anyone taking on ownership or management of the land. Please see map for more details
 - A path along the north side of The Causeway
 - A path or paths connecting Mill Street to Title Street
 - A path across the field behind the Hastoe housing development to connect to the Recreation Ground
- **Care Farm**
 - We are asking that if a provider comes forward with interest in running a care farm, this should be given support by SCC.
 - Given the potential for contributing to making the farm financially sustainable and to addressing pressures on the local care system we believe that SCC should actively encourage potential care farm providers. It may be the case (as set out above) that a prospective care farm tenant might wish to keep much of the land, house and buildings intact as fragmentation might weaken their business case.
- **Alternative energy**
 - There was a great deal of support for this from the village. We are not sure about the viability for wind generation but possibly solar? The field to the north of The Causeway could be an option as could the field behind the new Hastoe Housing Development. The sacrifice of potentially high quality agricultural land would obviously need to be considered.
- **Community Woodland Creation/ Wildlife Habitat (additional to marsh grazings)**

- The village would be keen for SCC to consider the creation of new woodlands on different parts of the farm. We understand there is potential for support from both the Forestry Commission and the Woodland Trust particularly if schemes are community led and accessible. We recognise this option will require expert advice but nonetheless we feel this option concurs with national policy and should be investigated.
- The village would like SCC to consider the option of encouraging greater wildlife on the field behind the Hastoe housing development. E.g. through creating ponds, woodland plots, nest boxes and scrub for nightingales etc.
- Renting or selling different fields or plots of land individually
 - If the farm was being broken up there may be interest from specific individuals or groups for buying or leasing different parts of the farm. These would need to be considered by SCC. Potentially SCC could invite different groups to come forward with proposals for different parts of the farm.
- Lion Link
 - SCC need to be aware of the [Lion Link plans](#) as these have a high likelihood of impacting Causeway Farm.
- Community ownership
 - It is not clear if there is the capacity, within the village, to take on the ownership of Causeway Farm. However, this is an option we would be interested in exploring further. It would be helpful to understand if transferring ownership of the farm from the county council to the local community is something SCC would consider? This could be a powerful demonstration of the council's commitment to devolution and community empowerment. A strong case could be built that such a move would also deliver against the county council's "four ambitions":
 1. Looking after our health and wellbeing;
 2. Strengthening our local economy;
 3. Protecting and enhancing our environment;
 4. Providing value for money for our residents"

Summary

As is clear from the above the residents of Middleton have a real interest in the future management of Causeway Farm. We hope it is also clear that collectively the village has a deep understanding of the farm and its potential. There is a great deal of expertise amongst residents relating to many of the different options for the future of the holding. Consequently beyond helping to determine the future direction of the farm we believe there is significant potential for the village to help in supporting its successful operation.

We welcome the invitation from SCC to be involved in shaping the future of the farm and we acknowledge that this invitation demonstrates that SCC recognises the value our involvement will bring. We are also aware that the current tenancy expires in October and appreciate the pressure this creates for some quick decisions. It may be that a temporary holding arrangement becomes necessary in the short term, perhaps by way of annual licence. We would be happy to meet with Council representatives as soon as is practical to discuss this paper and agree the nature of future village involvement in the decision making process.

Regardless of what happens we would like to ensure that the village remains involved in supporting the successful future of the farm beyond the date when any new tenancies are in place. We believe having the village as an active partner in running / overseeing Causeway Farm or its constituent parts (if broken up) is essential.

Causeway Farm, Middleton

Key

-  Potential development
-  Permissive Path
-  Wildlife

