



Climate Emergency Development Plan Document

Topic Paper: Agriculture and Rural Sustainability

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This is one in a series of topic papers produced to inform the preparation of the Council's climate change Development Plan Document (DPD)

Topic Paper
Renewable energy
Natural climate solutions
Town Centre Design and Density
Mine water energy and deep geothermal
Building Standards and energy efficiency
Coastal Change and flood management
One Planet Development
Sustainable Transport

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Executive Summary

Agriculture is one of the areas least covered by planning restrictions due to the origin of the system in 1948 and an intention to provide a light touch regime for agriculture to ensure continued food production. Considerable permitted development rights exist for agricultural development types, but diversification needs planning permission.

Nationally, agricultural emissions have decreased by 16% overall since 1990, but there has been only modest progress since 2011, when the industry's GHG Action Plan was agreed. Agriculture currently contributes around 20% of Cornwall's Carbon footprint. In many cases farms are broadly CO₂ balanced as they sequester as much as they emit. The issue mainly relates to methane and Nitrous Oxide. It will be important to support proposals or development on farms designed to reduce the emissions of these gases.

Whilst it is recognised that there are generally few controls over agriculture by planning, particularly around management regimes, there are clear ecosystem links provided on farms and estates that impact on wider public goods such as pollinator habitat, natural flood management, biodiversity, food and fuel growing and countryside access for active lifestyles. The question is how to link these to development.

Cornwall has a largely dispersed population and therefore measures to help increase sustainability and reduce the need to travel are essential to decreasing carbon emissions. A policy position that provides greater certainty for rural facilities where they may not have been permitted previously will potentially help to address this issue. Clustered uses and facilities, potentially to be shared by a number of smaller settlements may also help to reduce the need to travel and distances travelled.

There was support in the scoping stage of the DPD for the development of further opportunities for people to live as part of a group and to reduce their impact through sharing of facilities and the construction of zero carbon, low impact homes. Whilst this has been included in the same topic grouping in the draft DPD it is contained in a separate topic paper <<link>>

What is this topic paper about?

The Council is preparing a new Plan to set the framework for dealing with climate change. This will sit underneath the Local Plan and forms the strategic framework for planning decisions. This topic paper summarises the latest available evidence on transport. Reflecting the wide scope of this topic there are a number of overlaps between this paper and the other papers.

To view all the topic papers and the latest update on the Climate Change DPD, please visit [Climate Change Development Plan Document](#)

Can I comment on this topic paper?

The Climate Change DPD topic papers are factual in nature and set out the planning policy context and current issues in Cornwall, along with potential future approach to inform policy development. There will be opportunities to comment on the content of the Climate Change DPD at various stages of its development. As such we are currently seeking views on these topic papers, in particular any gaps in evidence.

If you wish to be kept informed of any forthcoming consultation please email climateemergencydpd@cornwall.gov.uk with your contact details.

Introduction

British agricultural Greenhouse Gases (GHG) emissions in 2017 were 45.6 million tonnes of CO₂ equivalent (10% of UK total GHG emissions), comprising methane (5.6% of UK total), nitrous oxide (3.1%) and CO₂ (1.2%). In Cornwall the emissions count is higher at 19% reflective of the balance of agricultural and other uses across our landmass. Nationally, agricultural emissions have decreased by 16% overall since 1990, but there has been only modest progress since 2011, when the industry's GHG Action Plan was agreed.

Agriculture is one of the areas least covered by planning restrictions due to the origin of the system in 1948 and an intention to provide a light touch regime for agriculture to ensure continued food production. Considerable permitted development rights exist for agricultural development types and these have recently been extended to allow the conversion of agricultural buildings through a prior notification process that allows for some permitted development operations (often referred to as 'class Q' conversions)

Renewable energy installations have formed a considerable element of agricultural diversification proposals ranging from small private installations to reduce energy costs to larger more land intensive installations operated by third parties (such as energy companies). These have implications for agriculture with a diverse set of issues relating to continued viability of units to removal of land temporarily from active agricultural production.

The use of land and removal of land from production continues to raise issues and objections. The NPPF places great importance on the avoiding the development of Best and Most Versatile (BMV) land, defined as grades 1, 2 and 3a. There is continued pressure to use this type of land for development, particularly on the edges of urban areas and for the siting of renewable technologies.

The National Farming Union (NFU) and others have identified issues regarding emissions on farms and the impact of pollutions resulting from land management, agricultural practice and the keeping of animals. In many cases on farms they are broadly CO₂ balanced as they sequester as much as they emit. The issue is methane and Nitrous Oxide. It will be important to support proposals or development on farms designed to reduce the emissions of these gases. This could be in the form of anaerobic digestors, ammonia scrubbers on chicken houses, and other technologies

Whilst it is recognised that there are generally few controls over agriculture by planning, particularly around management regimes, there are clear ecosystem links provided on farms and estates that impact on wider public goods such as pollinator habitat, natural flood management, biodiversity, food and fuel growing and

countryside access for active lifestyles. The question is how to link these to development.

Other planning authorities have explored the use of Whole Estate Plans to help influence the management of estates and land and identify eco-system services that land managers may offer to the wider community. They consist of a document prepared by individual land-owning estates and may justify exceptions to usual planning policy, for instance to permit larger buildings than might normally be supported or other diversification or non-agricultural uses of the land. The plans set out the assets of the estate and the opportunities and threats which the estate may encounter and describes their plans for the future. A Whole Estate Plan would normally include environmental and social assets, public benefits, and issues as well as economic development projects. Endorsed Whole Estate Plans can be a material consideration in determining planning applications and will provide a solid understood contextual background to any development proposals providing. The inclusion of a development proposal within a Whole Estate Plan however does not guarantee that planning permission will be granted.

Rural communities are frequently portrayed as unsustainable due to a travel pattern that has developed and necessitated through the loss of employment and shops and services over past decades. Cornwall has a largely dispersed population and therefore measures to help increase sustainability and reduce the need to travel are essential to decreasing carbon emissions. A policy that provides greater certainty for rural facilities where they may not have been permitted previously will potentially help to address this issue. Clustered uses and facilities, potentially to be shared by a number of smaller settlements may also help to reduce the need to travel and distances travelled.

Policy Context and Evidence

National Planning Policy

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) (2019) sets out a framework of advice regarding the natural environment and rural issues. There is little direct content related to agriculture because the agricultural industry is subject to very few planning controls and provisions in terms of land management and operation. The provisions for rural activity include:

Para 83: Planning policies and decisions should enable: a) the sustainable growth and expansion of all types of business in rural areas, both through conversion of existing buildings and well-designed new buildings; b) the development and diversification of agricultural and other land-based rural businesses; c) sustainable rural tourism and leisure developments which respect the character of the countryside; and d) the retention and development of accessible local services and community facilities, such as

local shops, meeting places, sports venues, open space, cultural buildings, public houses and places of worship.

Para 84: Planning policies and decisions should recognise that sites to meet local business and community needs in rural areas may have to be found adjacent to or beyond existing settlements, and in locations that are not well served by public transport. In these circumstances it will be important to ensure that development is sensitive to its surroundings, does not have an unacceptable impact on local roads and exploits any opportunities to make a location more sustainable (for example by improving the scope for access on foot, by cycling or by public transport). The use of previously developed land, and sites that are physically well-related to existing settlements, should be encouraged where suitable opportunities exist.

Local Planning Policy

The Cornwall Local Plan promotes an approach to sustainable development in rural areas and currently contains three policies with direct relevance:

Policy 2 (Spatial Strategy) sets out the importance of protection and enhancement of environmental assets and supports the expansion of indigenous businesses including agriculture

Policy 23 (Natural Environment) (1) and (3) requires development to ‘sustain local distinctiveness and character and protect and *where possible* enhance Cornwall’s natural environment and assets...’ ‘conserve, protect and *where possible* enhance biodiversity...’ It is worth noting that the updating of the NPPF has removed the words ‘where possible’ from national policy, thereby changing the interpretation of policy 23 as the NPPF has primacy.

Policy 25 (Green Infrastructure) has cross-cutting provisions relating to development demonstrating the creation and enhancement of functional environmental infrastructure, ecosystem services and biodiversity, providing appropriate buffers to natural spaces and creating connections, including eco-system services and restoring and enhancing connectivity.

In addition:

Policy 16 (Health and Wellbeing) requires development to protect and alleviate risk to people and the environment from unsafe development by avoiding or mitigating potential hazards from future climate change impacts and providing flexible community spaces that promote health needs and social interaction.

Policy 4 (Shopping, services and community facilities) supports the development of new facilities and village shops but has little specific information or guidance on location and scale.

Evidence

The NFU has undertaken research and is developing an approach around holistic land management. NFU has produced 'Achieving NET ZERO Farming's 2040 goal' this sets out actions for reducing emissions, carbon storage and coupling bioenergy to carbon capture, utilisation and storage.

A Nature Recovery Network (NRN) and operating principles have been developed by the Local Nature Partnership and Natural England for Cornwall and will be published alongside mapping showing areas that may be suitable for further protection or safeguarding for rewilding etc. In July 2020 Cornwall Council was selected as one of three Councils to be involved in a pilot project to create a Nature Recovery Strategy. This will see a partnership approach to the refreshing of the Council's Environmental Growth Strategy and the development of the spatial expression of an agreed Nature Recovery Network. This work will enable the mapping of the elements of the NRN that require further protection through the DPD and also provide an opportunities map to help decision making.

Natural Flood Management – considerable work has been undertaken in developing a series of proposals for the management of natural flood techniques in the White River catchment. This knowledge and experience being developed has helped to inform the development of policy and linkages between development and land management.

Development of Single Estate Plans has been undertaken across a number of National Park areas and by landowners including Local Authorities. A number of case studies exist and can be drawn upon to develop guidance for the creation of plans and linking to land use planning.

Facility studies were undertaken in preparation of the local plan and could be updated to provide a more up to date view of the situation for rural areas in Cornwall. Work exists to show the potential for further clustering of settlements and shared facilities, but this will need to be updated and developed as part of a future local plan review workstream.

The Town and Country Planning (Use Classes) (Amendment) (England) Regulations 2020 made on 20th July 2020 which takes effect from 1st September 2020 makes important changes to the Use Class Order that are designed to protect existing community facilities including shops. Two new Use Classes have been created; F1 (learning and non-residential institutions) which includes education, place of worship and public halls; and F2 (local community) which includes uses such as shops selling essential goods where there is no other facility within 1km, halls for principal use of the local community and leisure facilities.

Consultation responses to the agriculture and rural issues paper provided support for the development of a 'one planet development' policy approach to allow for alternative lifestyles in rural areas. Discussions have then been commenced with the Devon Climate Task Group following a representation on how the Welsh OPD

approach can be applied to Cornwall and Devon. This is discussed further in the 'Alternative Housing' topic paper.

Further or enhanced evidence needs include:

Further understanding the role of landowners in carbon capture and biodiversity offsetting and mechanisms for linking them to development and securing contributions (potentially via conservation covenants, especially related to Biodiversity Net Gain) – this work is on-going as part of the development of the Biodiversity Net Gain requirement and approach to implementation in Cornwall and as part of the development of the Nature Recovery Strategy for Cornwall. This will include the consideration of further options and opportunities to approach formally linking whole estate plans to planning policy.

The approach to increasing rural services and facilities may require an update to the facility study for rural areas developed as part of the Cornwall Local Plan in 2015 to provide background to any approach of development of additional clustered/shared facilities. This will help to supplement the approach to requiring the submission of evidence as part of planning applications and help to build a more strategic, spatial picture for a future local plan review.

Future Approach

Land management

There is established and growing evidence of the benefit of land management and the enhancement of natural systems in the enhancement and protection of development in Cornwall and the ability to help humans and species to adapt to climate change. Emerging national policy positions such as the Environment Bill and Agriculture Bill embed the role of land management in providing public goods and therefore justify the development of stronger links between development and the provision of public goods through land management. This could include links to contributions by development to ecosystem services, net gain policies, planting and habitat creation and farming practice and upland planting regimes linked to development in Critical Drainage Areas. This approach is linked to policy CC3 (reduction of flood risk) which provides a mechanism to require developments of more 50 dwellings or 1000 square metres to contribute to natural flood management.

To ensure new development supports enhanced land management and contributes to reducing greenhouse gas emissions a number of new policies are proposed, including consideration of:

- support for farm and rural diversification proposals that demonstrate through a whole estate plan, opportunities and a mechanism for sustainable practices and outcomes and other public benefits reduction of greenhouse gas emissions and sequestration of carbon;

- links between permissions for enabling development to ensure provision of ecosystem services on farms or estates;
- linking development requiring permission on agricultural holdings to improvement potential adverse impacts on air quality from ammonia and other water and air pollution. Providing special weight to the potential to impact on European Protected sites or a Site of Special Scientific Interest;
- supporting development of new agricultural buildings to house livestock, any new or expanded pit, tank or lagoon for storing slurry and anaerobic digesters to reduction of greenhouse gas emissions.

Policy iterations are intended to question whether an approach to enabling additional development in the countryside linked to agriculture and land management is supported and considered appropriate. The Agriculture and Environment Bills both make more formal links between agriculture and other land management to the provision of public and environmental goods. This will help to create the additional controls required to link the regimes alongside other policies being developed for the plan. It is worth noting that the Government is currently proposing reform of the planning system alongside the progression of the Agriculture and Environment Bills which may require further changes to be made over the coming months.

Rural facilities

The creation of more sustainable rural areas combines improvements to the way that residents travel and live. A major challenge will be helping our more dispersed communities to reduce the need to travel and to be able to work, shop and use services either at home or closer to home. Travel policy ideas are set out in the relevant papers, but the provision and retention of community shops and facilities, including employment space is important to balance the availability of services to reduce the need to travel. To ensure new development supports reducing emissions and supports more sustainable lifestyles a new policy is proposed to support the creation of new small-scale retail, employment and community facilities in rural areas where they are well related to settlements. These would potentially act as day to day community hubs for work and shopping and recreation to reduce the need for wider travel. It is worth noting that the Government has introduced new use classes designed to protect existing community facilities and shops, but employment space in villages may be impacted by changes to permitted changes from employment to other uses. The Government is also currently proposing reform of the planning system which may require further changes to be made to the policy approach over the coming months.