

Annex 4 Farming Survey

The following is a review of face-to-face consultations with local farmers in Mevagissey parish.

The agricultural land which encircles Mevagissey is of a typically Cornish Coastal type. This is chiefly Grade 3 Agricultural land and valued at between £8,000 £10,000 per acre, dependent upon accessibility and location. There is a typical holding of approximately 24 acres, comprising of pasture and woodland, for sale in the Parish of St Ewe at the moment with an asking price of £200,000. Smaller plots of easily accessible land can command a higher prices particularly if they are being bought as “pony paddocks” for example.

Between 65% and 75% of those who farm in the area were spoken to, some being tenant farmers, some being owner occupiers and others being landlords, there are also those who own land and rent extra acreage.

Most of our farms are mixed, with the emphasis being on diary, beef and sheep with their arable production being mainly aimed at providing feed stuff for their own animals. One of our farmers has decided to give up his suckler beef herd to concentrate more on sheep. He is due to expand his flock to 800 ewes which will mean that after lambing there will be upward of 2,000 animals on his land.

Due to the pressures of modern farming and the need for larger and more viable farms a large number of what were traditionally little more than small holdings, were amalgamated thus resulting in many of the original farmhouses in the area being sold off as private homes. As a result of this most of those who farm in the area actually live outside the parish. The one exception, whose farm house is in the parish, has most of his land outside of the parish.

Farming does not contribute a lot to the local employment situation. Most farms are worked by the farmer and family members with all the heavy work such as harvesting, hay making, silage making, shearing etc. being done by contractors. The one exception to this is our local soft fruit producer who has, in addition to the family, one full time employee and employs extra people for picking and packing in season.

Smaller fruit and vegetable farmers who deal with the big supermarkets can be restricted in their growth by the strict conditions that are imposed upon them by supermarkets. They stipulate the exact packaging and presentation etc. and even the manufacturers from whom they have to purchase equipment. Packing requirements can change from one year to another and this can cause wastage and loss of money. This is the reason why some small producers find it easier and more profitable to concentrate on supplying only local outlets.

Livestock farmers also face some of these problems. Animals have to be slaughtered at very precise weights in order for the meat products to fit into certain sized containers. For example 4 lamb chops or 4 pork chops have to fit into precise sized packages and if an animal is slaughtered when it has grown slightly too big then it will either be rejected or the price per kilo will be significantly reduced

Many of our farmers have taken advantage of the beauty of the area and run B & B's or have converted outbuildings and barns into holiday accommodation, but do not have plans to invest in further development in the immediate future.

There are still a number of unconverted barns and out buildings in the area, in various states of repair, which could be developed into more holiday accommodation or small industrial/craft units without undue impact on the landscape or environment. One of the farmers who has already invested heavily into the holiday business, would like to expand the residential art and textile courses that he and his wife organise and this would tie in well should anybody consider developing/encouraging the arts and crafts side of Mevagissey's business.

There is very little opportunity to develop the coastline in this area. The land adjacent to Colona Bay at the Western edge of the parish has three owners, one of which is the National Trust, in addition the foreshore is owned by The Duchy. Public access is only available via The Coastal Path, although there is a private unfenced road which runs through pastureland to Chapel Point and is an extension of Chapel Point Lane. It is apparent that there is no enthusiasm to exploit/develop this very special bay. At the other end of the parish is Portgiskey which could lend itself to some sort of commercial development but it is difficult to access by land, although there is an old sunken road which joins the B3287. The only alternative to this is to come in by sea or somehow from Pentewan.

The Coastal Path itself runs across land farmed by two of the parish's farmers. It causes some problems to the farms with inconsiderate members of the public leaving litter and failing to control their dogs, which can lead to loss of livestock.

The siting of agricultural building such as large livestock handling facilities and buildings in which to house agricultural machinery has to be within reasonable reach of the homestead. Old and sometimes listed farm buildings are often not economically viable to restore to modern agricultural use, therefore it becomes necessary to put up modern, easy to erect buildings which are perhaps not totally in tune with the landscape but are designed for a particular job.

Although there is a lot of woodland in the area it does not lend itself to commercial forestry, as timber is extracted it is replaced. Around Heligan Gardens there is an amount of planting taking place which is to recreate what was there in the past, rather than becoming commercial woodland.

Farmers tend to regard themselves as stewards of the land, they want to protect and maintain the look of the landscape. There is great pride in the Cornish hedges that divide fields and farmers are keen to retain, maintain and replant them as they offer shelter to both livestock and wildlife.

The farming community are aware of how easy it would be to damage the walls, hedges and tree tunnels that form so much of the character of the county. The need for ever larger delivery vehicles is a worry even though the 'back way' into Mevagissey via Goran High Lanes is a good road it does become increasingly narrow as it approaches Portmellon.

The road which runs from the Portgiskey Crossroads to the mini roundabout at the top of Vicarage Hill is getting busier and it is difficult when large agricultural machinery meets buses, large 4x4's or delivery lorries. Should there be future development in this area it was felt that there would need to be widening of the road which would result in the destruction of the Cornish hedges on at least one side of the road thus changing the character of the area.

Although the Neighbourhood Development Plan does not endorse sites for future housing development, this subject was touched on with those who own smaller parcels of land or areas on which it is impractical to farm. Not unsurprisingly, they were not reluctant to consider the prospect of selling for development. It was even suggested that in places like Chapel Point Lane infilling would be possible so that both sides of the lane are equally developed. It was pointed out that there is land in Portmellon which could easily be developed without detrimental impact on the landscape.

The idea of financing a road to link Valley Road to Tregoney Hill by building 100 homes was not dismissed by the owner of the land, but he felt that the topography of the terrain was such that the level of development would have to be far too great.