



Report of the Head of Scrutiny and Member Development

Executive Board

Date: 22nd June 2011

Subject: Response to the review of Home Farm Temple Newsam Scrutiny Inquiry Report

Electoral Wards Affected:

Ward Members consulted
(referred to in report)

Specific Implications For:

Equality and Diversity

Community Cohesion

Narrowing the Gap

Eligible for Call In

Not Eligible for Call In

(Details contained in the re

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. The Scrutiny Board (City Development) considered a number of requests for scrutiny of the farming operations at Home Farm, Temple Newsam following publication of a consultation document by the Acting Director of City Development on the need to reduce costs. The Scrutiny Board (City Development) agreed to undertake an inquiry on this matter and established a working group.

2. This report gives the Acting Director of City Development's response to the Scrutiny Board (City Development) inquiry report and recommendations on Home Farm, Temple Newsam,

3. The Executive Board is asked to consider where there is a difference of opinion between Scrutiny and the Director/Executive Member, or where recommendations are directed specifically at Executive Board, to pronounce on these matters.

1.0 Purpose Of This Report

- 1.1 To provide the Acting Director (City Development) response to the Scrutiny Board (City Development) recommendations following publication of its inquiry report on Home Farm, Temple Newsam.

2.0 Main Issues

- 2.1 The 2011/12 budget for the Parks and Countryside service included a saving of £100,000 from Home Farm, Temple Newsam whilst the Scrutiny Board report identified a net cost of Home Farm activities to the Council of £347,000. As well as the farm and visitor centre at Temple Newsam, some outlying agricultural holdings managed by Parks and Countryside are grouped under this budget heading.
- 2.2 A consultation document on specific proposals to deliver the budget saving was circulated to stakeholders, including farm staff, Temple Newsam ward councillors, the Friends of Temple Newsam and the Rare Breeds Survival Trust in February 2011. The White Park Cattle Society and Rare Breeds International made written representations to City Development Scrutiny Board and the proposals were discussed at their meeting on 8th March 2011, when a working group of Cllr Procter, Cllr Atha and Cllr Elliot was established. This reported back to Scrutiny Board on 17th May, accompanied by an officer commentary and this report is essentially a fuller version of that commentary. It is drafted to be read in conjunction with the Working Group's report.

3.0 Acting Director's Comments to the Scrutiny Board's Recommendations

- 3.1 The following text responds to each of the Scrutiny Board's recommendations.

Recommendation 1: That the Acting Director of City Development ensure that the accounts for Home Farm are simplified to show more readily income and expenditure for the farm and which excludes all other operations.

Response: Agreed with qualification. Currently the Parks and Countryside service maintain agricultural land at 4 separate locations. Our proposal moving forward is to withdraw from agricultural activity at peripheral sites and focus on Temple Newsam Estate. This will in turn make a contribution towards the facilitation of this recommendation. To accommodate the recommendation it is the directorate's intention to realign budgets and the associated income/expenditure to show an overall view of the visitor attraction and the agricultural operation at Temple Newsam, as they are interlocked elements of one visitor product. This process has commenced with further transitional change over the remainder of this financial year.

Recommendation 2: That the Acting Director of City Development considers engaging a consultant to look specifically at:

- (i) how the farm could operate on a commercial basis but integrated as a whole visitor experience rather than seeing the current visitor attraction in isolation from the farming operation.
- (ii) maximising all grants and subsidies that are available for Home Farm.

Response: Agreed with qualification. There is a case for seeking consultancy support for future improvements to the commercial performance and visitor benefits of the combined operation and provisional enquiries have been made to assess options in progressing this further. Notwithstanding that, officers propose to implement common sense measures to reduce costs which would not prejudice any credible future proposals and will retain minority rare breeds interest. Consequently, it is not felt that the engagement of a consultant should be considered a prerequisite to the process of scaling back farming operations.

There is also a need for clarity of interpretation when reference is made to Temple Newsam Farm continuing to try and operate as a commercial farming enterprise. Scrutiny's own recognition of the incompatibility of local government working practices with a commercially viable farming operation as highlighted in paragraph 27 of the Scrutiny Inquiry Report, supports the view that this is an unrealistic expectation.

Our vision is that the farm should operate as a working farm specialising in the conservation and presentation of minority rare breeds while operating to the highest agri- environmental practices creating an environment within which the farm can flourish as a visitor attraction.

By operating to high agri-environmental standards the farm will be able to benefit from additional subsidies through schemes such as Natural England's, higher level stewardship programme. Agri-environmental schemes are voluntary agreements that see farmers and land managers receiving annual payments on top of their basic payments in return for managing their land in an environmentally sensitive way. The principle objectives for these programmes are focussed on;

- wildlife conservation;
- maintenance and enhancement of landscape quality and character;
- natural resource protection;
- protection of the historic environment; and
- promotion of public access and understanding of the countryside.

In practical terms a successful application to join such a scheme could potentially result in additional subsidies and capital funding to plant and restore hedgerows and woodlands, promote biodiversity on the estate, have a less intensive land management regime with more diverse grasslands to include flowers with reduce use of nitrates. Furthermore rare breeds and managing land using minority rare breeds brings additional subsidies under such schemes.

External advice is being taken on grants and subsidies.

Recommendation 3: That the Acting Director of City Development identifies the Farm Manager's key role as the commercial success of Home Farm and its integration as a total visitor experience and that a business plan and timetable be developed to achieve this.

Response: Agreed with qualification. It is agreed that the whole operation should integrate farming and visitor experience. However it does not necessarily follow that the current farm staff have the skills to deliver an improved visitor experience as well as improved farm management, nor that it is reasonable to expect this. We feel the expertise of the farm manager would best be employed in developing a sustainable, efficient and environmentally sound farm within the existing curtilage of the Temple Newsam estate and cooperating in improvements to the visitor attraction along with other staff at Temple Newsam under the leadership of the Estate Manager.

Recommendation 4: That the Acting Director of City Development

(i) undertakes a review of the staffing levels and job descriptions at Home Farm to incorporate the visitor attraction

(ii) considers how to attract volunteers to work at Home Farm and where they could best be used to reduce operating costs.

Response: Qualified agreement with both (i) and (ii).

As emphasised in the Scrutiny Inquiry Report, staffing costs account for approximately 60% of the total expenditure for Temple Newsam Farm. On that basis, a review of staffing levels is necessary to achieve a budgetary saving as agreed at full council. With regards to the relationship between the farm and visitor experience please refer to paragraph 3.3.1 above.

The Parks and Countryside is taking steps to increase the level of volunteering across parks, though not necessarily or primarily as a cost saving but because of the inherent benefits of greater community involvement and participation, and the enjoyment and learning this brings to volunteers. Temple Newsam already has a very successful volunteer programme, though not currently on the farm. Agriculture with heavy machinery and livestock is a potentially risky area for volunteers and it is likely that most support would be at the visitor attraction and in environmental improvements around Temple Newsam farm.

Recommendation 5: That the Acting Director of City Development, in conjunction with the Farm Manager and RBST, determines the land management, livestock numbers and mix of breeds for Home Farm and the visitor and rare breed centres which ensures the continued viability of Home Farm.

Response: Agreed with qualification. In principal this recommendation is agreed but it is felt that this should be clarified in that while this will be done in consultation, responsibility cannot be transferred to these or any other consultees. While the mix and numbers of livestock and the land management regime are important, the thrust of the consultation document is that current financial losses are mainly due to excessive staff costs, and this is what needs to be addressed most urgently.

It should be noted that the decision to focus on Temple Newsam Estate and to forgo agricultural holdings at Lineham Farm, Whinmoor and Lotherton Hall will inevitably lead to a scaling back of livestock holdings due to the reduction in land available to sustain the herd. In keeping with the revised vision for the farm as briefly set out in 3.2.3 of this report, livestock reductions will initially be restricted to those breeds that are not identified as minority breeds by the Rare Breed Survival Trust, but subsequently all livestock numbers will be examined for reduction.

Recommendation 6: That the Director of Resources ring fences the profits from Temple Newsam Café for use by Home Farm, Temple Newsam.

Response: Not agreed. The Head of Finance for City Development has indicated that other activities in the estate also generate turnover in the café, and no doubt a review of these could result in subsequent recommendations for each of them.

Recommendation 7: That the Acting Director of City Development undertakes a review of the visitors' entrance to the farm to identify a more cost effective and

appropriate way for visitors to gain admission to the farm and which improves their overall visitor experience.

Response: Agreed.

Recommendation 8: That the Acting Director of City Development

(i) considers how Home Farm and the visitor and rare breed centres can be better promoted to increase visitor numbers and income.

(ii) develops a long term strategy that would improve the educational experience of the centres and would encourage schools to participate and pay a fee for the experience.

Response: Agreed

4.0 Conclusion to Working Group report

4.1 In the responses above officers have a measure of common ground with the Working Group. The measures proposed are moderate and will sustain the farm and visitor experience, while longer term improvement plans are formulated. Officers agree with the Working Group that the longer term, bigger picture must be the priority; however they would not agree that this means that progress should be shelved, and in view of the difficult financial position of the council cost saving measures should be proactively pursued.

5.0 Implications For Council Policy And Governance

5.1 Not applicable as there are no specific proposals.

6.0 Legal And Resource Implications

6.1 Not applicable as there are no specific proposals.

7.0 Recommendations

7.1 The Executive Board is asked to consider the responses and where there is a difference of opinion between Scrutiny and the Director/Executive Member, or where recommendations are directed specifically at Executive Board, to pronounce on these matters

8.0 Background Papers

8.1 Report of Scrutiny Board (City Development)