

Ecological Land Co-operative
Management Plan for 3 new smallholdings in
Sparkford, South Somerset

DRAFT

Overview

This Management Plan sets out how the three proposed residential small farms in Sparkford, 'the site', are to be managed. The principal aims of the Management Plan are to:

1. Protect the environment and enhance ecological services;
2. Maintain and enhance the landscape quality; and
3. Facilitate the provision of low-impact sustainable livelihoods and an increase in productivity, without prejudice to the first two aims.

We have consulted with Sparkford Parish Council (SPC) prior to submitting the application and, as set out in the statement of community involvement, questions and concerns raised have been reflected upon and addressed, including the role of the management plan in ensuring the Agricultural Workers Dwelling is used as proposed. Any additional matters arising during the course of the application will be fully considered.

For each section of the Management Plan we set out an overall objective, followed by requirements upon the ELC and the smallholders necessary in order to achieve the objectives. Both the ELC and those occupying the smallholdings (Stewards) must comply with the requirements set out in this Plan. The ELC has asked to be obliged to adhere to the Plan by way of a Section 106 Agreement and the Plan is binding on the Stewards by way of their agricultural business tenancy.

Monitoring arrangements are described for each element of the Plan, and the final part of the Plan details what the ELC will do if any of the requirements are not fully complied with. Monitoring is to take place annually (the 'annual audit'). The ELC is the body responsible for the Plan and guarantees its delivery, including providing South Somerset District Council with annual reports.

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LANDSCAPE CHARACTER

Our **objectives** are to enhance the natural beauty of the site in a manner sensitive to the existing local landscape character, and to *minimise* any adverse visual impact of the scheme. We envision achieving this objective by:

- Planting native trees and new hedgerow;
- Limiting the size and number of temporary dwellings, siting them sensitively within the site, and using screens to reduce their visibility;
- Limiting the size of the shared agricultural barn;
- Promptly removing redundant structures and non-functioning vehicles;
- Using sympathetic construction materials on any built structures (see Construction);
- Ensuring waste and the storage of personal effects is managed so that they do not become a nuisance or annoyance; and

In the first years of establishing the new affordable residential smallholdings there will be positive visual impacts as landscaping schemes are implemented. However, we acknowledge that any new buildings have the potential to produce an unwelcome visual impact. In order to ensure this is minimised the ELC will work with the LPA to ensure appropriate positioning, sympathetic materials, and screening where necessary.

Once the smallholdings have demonstrated that they are financially viable ongoing concerns, the ELC intend to submit a further application either seeking the retention of the dwellings in-situ or that the temporary accommodation is to be replaced with a permanent dwelling per smallholding, modest in size and built with natural materials, sympathetic to the landscape character and appropriate to the rural area.

Requirements upon the ELC

- To fully implement the planting specified in the planning application in the first appropriate season following a grant of planning permission.
- To ensure that an annual assessment of this planting on the site takes place and any replacement necessary take place in the next seasonally available opportunity.

- To only approve the siting of the Stewards' temporary accommodation in the area marked as residential on the site plan ref: AL-100C.

Requirements upon the Stewards

- To submit to the ELC for written approval details of their proposed temporary dwelling before moving it on to the site. Details are to include: the size of the structure; its visual appearance (i.e. colour and material); and details of any visual screening that Stewards intend to use to mitigate visual impact. The size is not to exceed 136 m² and screens are to be of natural colour or material and in keeping with existing vegetation.
- Remove redundant temporary structures, agricultural and domestic, within 40 working days.
- Limit the use of fixed external lighting to the hours between 06:30 and 22:00.
- Not carry out works affecting the main landscape features of the site without the written permission of the ELC: this includes the removal of mature trees, breaks in or the removal of hedgerows, or substantial reductions in hedge volume.
- Ensure that neither waste nor storage becomes a nuisance, annoyance, or damage to the ELC or Stewards or occupiers of other property in the neighbourhoods or the local or other authorities.

Monitoring

- Each year the ELC will conduct an annual audit. The team will evaluate every element of the requirements during the visit, and record its observations in an annual report.
- Any genuine reports of a failure to observe the requirements in this section will be investigated by the ELC within 10 working days.

BIODIVERSITY & SOIL FERTILITY

Our **objective** is to make improvements in ecosystem health. This includes an increase in habitat and biodiversity, and improvements to soil health and fertility.

Requirements upon the ELC

- Select Stewards who are evidently committed to and experienced in land management practices which contribute to ecological restoration.
- Commission a regular ecological survey by a qualified professional.
- Test soil nutrients and evaluate soil structure as part of the annual audit.

Requirements upon Stewards

- Not to use agro-chemicals: artificial inputs in the form of synthetic pesticides, herbicides or fertilisers¹.
- Not introduce invasive species.
- Ensure that all chemicals (e.g. fuel, paint), waste, manure and compost is properly managed and disposed of and does not become a pollutant on the site or elsewhere.
- Where there is livestock, ensure that all external boundaries are maintained as stock proof, either through managing hedges or fencing, in collaboration with neighbours where necessary.
- Manage grey water soakaways and any other source of waste water to ensure that there is no contamination of water bodies, water courses or groundwater; and no cause of soil erosion.

Monitoring

- Each year the ELC will conduct an annual audit. The team will evaluate every element of the requirements during the visit, and record its observations in an annual report.
- The ELC will investigate any genuine report of major pollution within 24 hours, and any genuine report of minor pollution within 3 working days.

¹There may be some instances, like those identified in the Wholesome Food Association Rules & Regulations where failure to use agro-chemicals may create greater negative ecological impact than their use. In such exceptional circumstances their use will be considered to be in compliance with this Plan.

ENERGY & CARBON EMISSIONS

As of 2019 it is now government policy to become net zero in carbon dioxide emissions by 2050. Sustainability in the short term requires significant reduction in fossil fuels from current levels. Our first **objective** is to reduce the consumption of non-renewable energy. Our second **objective** is for the site to sequester and store carbon dioxide.

Requirements on the ELC

- Install a photo-voltaic system on the roof of the shared barn.
- Select Stewards who are evidently committed to both the reduction in personal consumption of fossil fuel and to land management practices which contribute to carbon sequestration.
- As soon as resources allow, record the site's overall contribution to sequestering carbon dioxide.

Requirements upon Steward

- Stewards are required to generate their electricity on site from a renewable source. The use of a 'back-up' generator is permissible but Stewards are to be working towards consuming as high a proportion of renewable electricity as practicable.
- Stewards will report annually to the ELC on their movement towards net zero emissions.

Monitoring

- Each year the ELC will conduct an annual audit and the team will report on whether electricity is being sourced from renewable sources.
- Where possible we will report on the sites overall movement towards net zero emissions.

ANIMAL WELFARE

Following the guidance of the Farm Animal Welfare Council, our **objective** is that animals should be managed in such a way that they enjoy the 'five freedoms' – freedom from:

- Malnutrition,
- Physical discomfort and extremes of temperature,
- Injury and disease,
- Fear and distress, and
- Unnecessary restrictions of behaviour.

Requirements upon the ELC

- Investigate any genuine reports or charges of animal cruelty made against Stewards within 3 working days.

Requirements upon Stewards

- Ensure animals are kept to the highest possible standards of welfare.
- Inform the ELC immediately if they are accused of animal cruelty. In the event of a genuine report of animal cruelty being made, tenants are required to facilitate a monitoring visit concerned with animal welfare by the ELC or their agent(s) at any reasonable hour.
- Ensure animal feedstock comes from sustainable sources.

Monitoring

- The condition of animals, their stocking density and any land and housing that animals are using will be assessed as part of the annual audit.

CONSTRUCTION

This Plan has been written to cover the five years for which the ELC seeks a temporary planning permission. During this period, Stewards will reside in temporary, removable structures. The requirements placed on the ELC and the Stewards with regard to temporary dwellings is addressed in Landscape Character above.

Stewards may build agricultural structures such as animal housing or a glasshouse. Our **objective** is that structures are built using natural materials wherever possible, in keeping with the local aesthetic and which can be removed at the end of the temporary period, if necessary.

Requirements upon the ELC

- Review building designs submitted by Stewards, approving plans where satisfied that: the design is a good example of sustainable development in terms of building materials and construction techniques; and the development could be reversed if required without causing harm to the site.

Requirements upon Stewards

- Submit to the ELC plans and elevations for each construction where planning permission is required. This should include a reversibility statement, a description of the construction materials, energy use, water use and the removal of waste where relevant. The statement is to set out how the building could be reversed if required, and what the final condition of the development site would consequently be. This information must be submitted and any proposed works approved by the ELC before any works commence and where appropriate, before any application for planning permission is made (if required). This requirement does not apply to agricultural structures which are too small to allow a human to stand upright in (e.g. small chicken coops).

Monitoring

- Monitoring for this heading is based on development, not a regular timetable. After a building has been completed, the ELC will check and confirm that it is as detailed in the approved plans.

- Should any development need to be removed, then the ELC will check and confirm that the measures in the reversibility statement have been applied.

SOUND

It is our **objective** that the Stewards minimise noise disturbance during the day and do not disturb public tranquillity during the night.

Requirements upon the ELC

- Ensure that there is a sound insulated area within or near the barn to minimise the noise generated by the back-up generator.
- Ensure that ELC staff or its contractors consider the specified noise level rating when procuring the back-up generator for the site.

Requirements upon Stewards

- Except in an emergency, not use the back-up generator at night, between 10pm and 7am for Mondays to Saturdays or 10pm to 8am Sundays and public holidays.

Monitoring

- The ELC will investigate any genuine report of sound pollution within 10 working days. If there are more than two genuine reports of sound pollution, the ELC will investigate within 3 working days.

ANNUAL OPEN DAY

The **objective** of the annual open day is to spread understanding of the ELC's approach to ecological agriculture and low impact development. To this end the site will be opened to the public once a year.

Requirements upon Stewards

- From Year Two, open the whole site for a minimum of half a day annually. The date is to be advertised at least a month in advance and is to be advertised in the local area.
- The development on the site, its overall management, and the nature of the eco-smallholdings and the livelihoods they support is to be explained to those attending the open day.
- Provide the ELC with information on the open day in order for the ELC to be able to report on the day.

Monitoring

- There will be a brief report on the annual open day included in the annual report.

TRANSPORT

Our **objective** is to minimise the number of vehicles parked on the site and the number of journeys made to and from the site.

Requirements upon the ELC

- Select Stewards who have an evidenced awareness of the environmental issues related to vehicle use and a commitment to minimalising vehicle use.

Requirements upon Stewards

- Ensure that at most times there are no more than two non-agricultural vehicles parked overnight per smallholding.
- Ensure across the whole site there are no more than an average of 25 vehicle movements per day. This does not apply to electric bicycles.

Monitoring

- During visits to the site and during the annual audit, ELC staff will record the number of vehicles on site.
- The ELC will investigate and genuine report of non-compliance with these requirements. If the report is of minor non-compliance, the ELC will investigate within 10 working days and if the report is of major non-compliance, within 5 working days.

LAND-BASED LIVELIHOOD

Land-based livelihoods are fundamental to this scheme. Our **objective** is to support the creation of a land-based livelihood on each of the smallholdings. Land-based livelihoods are businesses based on the production, use of, and sale of crops, livestock, trees, and bees or any combination thereof.

Requirements upon Stewards

- To operate a viable agricultural business on their holding as per the terms of their agricultural business tenancy agreement. A viable agricultural business will be defined as:

A business based on the production, use of, and sale of crops, livestock, trees and bees or any combination thereof and which is profitable in at least one of the first three years of business, and which is capable of meeting household living costs by the fourth year of occupying the holding.
- Either one member (or more) of each of the three households will need to work full-time on the holding or two or more members of each household will need to work part-time on the holding so that together they constitute at least one full-time equivalent worker.
- Provide the ELC with an updated business plan annually as part of the annual monitoring. The business plan is to include: detailed and comprehensive profit and loss and balance sheet forecasts for 3 years; a cash-flow forecast; marketing strategy and land management plans.
- Provide the ELC with annual business accounts. The accounts are to be prepared to Companies House small business accounting standards.
- Report annually to the ELC the number of agricultural workers, in Full Time Equivalents, who are both working on their holding and living in their household
- Report annually on the number of volunteer days worked on the small farm.

Monitoring

- Monitoring will be: an inspection of the site / farm business; a review of the businesses' annual accounts and business plans; and a review of the Stewards' reports on the number of full-time equivalents who are both working on their holding and living in their household.

PROTECTING THE SMALLHOLDINGS FOR ECOLOGICAL AGRICULTURE

The three agricultural workers' dwellings at Sparkford will stay tied to their land holding, and remain in agriculture for use by an agricultural worker, in perpetuity. The freehold remains in the possession of the ELC so that it can ensure the implementation of this Plan.

Requirements upon the ELC

- Never seek to remove any conditions which restrict the land to agricultural use.
- Never seek to sell the freehold.

Requirements upon Stewards

- Stewards are prohibited from subletting (whole or part) their temporary dwelling. The hosting of WWOOFers², volunteers or an apprentice is not considered subletting.
- Stewards must occupy the dwelling as their main residence.

Monitoring

- The ELC is to investigate any genuine reports of subletting within 10 working days.
- The ELC is to investigate any genuine reports of Stewards not occupying their dwelling on their holding as their main residence within 10 working days.

²WWOOFers are volunteers who work on organic farms

DISCOUNTED, AFFORDABLE LEASE PRICE, INCLUDING RESALE

The ELC is offering affordable access to smallholding. It is central to the ELC's mission and objectives that the lease remains affordable in perpetuity.

Requirements on the Stewards

- Ensure an up to date resale valuation of their smallholding every year using the ELC valuation formula including the cap on improvements.
- In the event that Stewards wish to sell their lease, they must offer their property back to the ELC. If the ELC does not wish to or cannot buy the property back at the resale value within 9 months, the Steward may sell the lease to a new Steward with the prior approval of the ELC at the resale value or less. Approval cannot be unreasonably withheld. Any new Steward would be subject to the same conditions and requirements as the existing tenant.

Monitoring

- The ELC will report on the sale and re-sale prices of the leases.

MONITORING, FAILINGS AND ACTION PLANS

Each year the ELC will produce a report on the site known as an annual audit. This will be made binding on the ELC by way of a Section 106 Agreement. Within each annual audit, the ELC will identify any of the requirements within this Plan which have not been fully complied with. The first of these annual reports is to be submitted within 18 months after being granted planning permission.

If a requirement has not been fully complied with, the ELC will agree with the Steward(s) an Action Plan to meet any outstanding requirements within an agreed time-frame. If agreement cannot be reached on any aspect of the Action Plan, then ELC may finalise the Plan. The Steward may appeal by applying to the ELC Board of Directors within 10 working days of the finalised Action Plan being issued; the Board will issue a final decision within one month. Stewards are obliged by their lease to carry out the Action Plan.

In the event that the Steward does not carry out an Action Plan within the specified timeframe, the ELC may at its discretion:

- Issue further directions that may address any or all of the requirements of the Management Plan, or
- Terminate the lease upon a period of notice of six months. A decision whether to require a Steward to sell their lease must be taken by a vote of members at a general meeting. As per the rules of the ELC, the meeting must be quorate. Compensation will be paid at 75% of the resale value, provided a final review of the site verifies that no further deterioration has taken place over those six months.