

Devon Churches Rural Forum Meeting Notes from 8th July 2020 – 10 am to 12 noon

By Zoom

1 Archdeacon Douglas opened the meeting with prayer.

2 Welcome and introductions

Present were: Douglas Dettmer (Archdeacon of Totnes in the chair), Penny Body (Secretary), Stuart Wilson (Market Chaplain), Dave Watson (Methodist Lay Minister), Howard Wilson (Regional Learning and Development Coordinator (South West) - The Methodist Church), Simon Franklin (The Bright Field Community), Philip Wagstaff (PEMD Rural Officer), David Curry (Vol. Environment Adviser Exeter Diocese), Ruth Frampton (Team Rector), Danny Semorad (Farmer, Church Warden, Devon Historic Churches Trust), Jane Hayes (Associate Priest), Graham Whalley (Tavistock Deanery), Marisa Cockfield (Team Vicar, Police Chaplain, Exeter Diocese Mental Health Round Table), Mike Clark (Barnstaple Archdeaconry Mission Development Adviser), Nora Corkery (Acting CEO Devon Communities Together), Sarah Cracknell (Project Manager Growing the Rural Church), Susanna Metz (Rural Dean, Team Vicar, Relief Milker, Teacher of Ministry and Mission), John Wibberley (Agronomist and Chair Devon FCN), Chris Keppie (Diocese of Exeter Church and Society and Environment Officer), Sylvia West (Deanery Synod Secretary and DFWI), Jane Skinner (Team Rector), Richard Yarwood (Professor of Human Geography, Plymouth University), Martin Beck (Devon and Cornwall Police Rural Crime Officer), Andrew Butler (Devon County Adviser NFU).

The chair especially welcomed Nora Corkery to her first meeting and thank Elaine Cook (outgoing CEO of DCT) well for her retirement and thank her for her many contributions to the Forum. We also wished Philip Wagstaff well as he sadly leaved the west country to become the Rural Officer for the South East. We thank Philip so much for all his contributions to this group and its predecessors over many years. Douglas also thanked Archdeacon Mark for his wise leadership of the Forum and looked forward to working with him in his new role as Principal of the South West Ministry Training Course.

3 Apologies were received from Joanne Jones, Andy Jerrard, Mark Betson, Bishop Nick McKinnel, Stephen Derges, Jane Frost, and Elizabeth Burke.

4 [Notes from the last meeting](#) on 4th February were agreed.

5 Matters and actions arising from the last meeting (not covered elsewhere on the agenda)

a) North Devon Show and Farm Visit August 5th with Bishop Robert – both cancelled but we will hope to re-schedule for 2021.

b) Rural Worship days

The Rural Worship Day being organised by Praxis South West on 21st November has been postponed to 2021 due to a clash of dates with the revised date for the 2020 Rural Ministries Southwest conference date.

As a follow-up from the DCRF 2019 Rural Worship Day – the Calendar of Seasonal Worship is still in preparation – delayed by recent events. Action: Penny and Chris.

6 DCRF Project Updates

a) Placements for Ordinands

There are no updates for this project since our February meeting as a result of the coronavirus hiatus. The team, led by Simon, will be looking towards 2021 for the first placements and look forward to working with Archdeacon Mark in his new role at SWMTC in due course.

b) Theology and Models of Rural Ministry - Lightening the Load.

Following the feedback at the February meeting, the shape of the document has been substantially revised and updated in the light of coronavirus. It now comprises an initial paper “A Theological Celebration of Rural Life, Ministry and Mission” followed by a five session toolkit. The full resource is called “Lightening the Load: Freeing the church for mission” and subtitled “A resource for multi-parish rural benefices in the wake of coronavirus”. The project has been handed over to Sarah Cracknell and the Growing the Rural Church Team to enable it to be taken forward and integrated with other work streams.

You can access the [“Theological Celebration of Rural Life, Mission and Ministry” paper here](#). As noted above, the paper is integral to the sessions and the full resource, but may also have some wider standalone interest.

Discussion: Douglas commented that the Lightening the Load paper has been well received and, it is hoped, will be used widely when complete. Sarah is leading the group working on the accompanying tools and resources and will be rolling out as widely as possible. The material will also be adapted slightly to fit with Methodist church nomenclature.

7 Update on Rural Crime with Martin Beck – Devon Rural Crime Officer

Martin Beck updated us on developments within the Rural Crime structures of the D&C Police service and on rural crime itself.

Sergeant Dave Thubron who is based in Ilfracombe will be joining the Forum and is keen to link the work of churches and the police in supporting rural communities against rural crime. Two new Rural Officers have also started working with Martin – they are Julia Fry who is based in Tavistock and Kerry Whiting in South Molton. This is encouraging and is a result of the good progress already made in rolling out the police’s National Rural Strategy in Devon.

Heritage Crime includes crime against national monuments, shipwrecks, battle fields and churches amongst others. Martin said that there are 40 thousand sites in Devon alone that need care. In 2019 there were 152 recorded crimes against churches including damage in churchyards, theft of lead and thefts from churches. Identifying crimes as “heritage crime” rather than just “thefts” for example, is important in being able to recognise the full extent of the problem and see patterns against these particular targets.

During the lockdown, metal theft was lower, but people are now about again visiting farms asking for scrap.

Marisa asked if there is any fresh guidance for churches, in relation to security, who find themselves closed during lockdown. Martin said if there were any concerns with a particular church to contact him and he would arrange for the right person to advise in situ. (Martin’s contact details were circulated in the internal DCRF contact list sent round earlier this year – or email Penny who will forward.) Also, once all church/heritage crime has been collated together there will be an examination of any particular issues we need to address in our area. In the meantime, Martin has made available a [report from Sussex Police to help church’s develop a crime prevention strategy](#).

With more people in the countryside there have been increases in the amount of livestock worrying. Exmoor has seen significant off-road biking and poaching. Dartmoor has seen raves and livestock road casualties in particular.

Martin would like us all, where possible, to publicise the Countryside Code to help reduce damage and crime in our rural areas. Materials, including a poster for downloading and display, can be accessed [here](#). Maybe Parish magazines and websites could also be used to publicise the code. Nora offered to include reference to the Countryside Code via “[Love Devon](#)” newsletters and Sylvia will do likewise via the Devon Federation of WIs.

The police are also collaborating with [Clean Devon](#) and other agencies to reduce fly tipping in Devon. Fly tipping and additional litter have been a problem during lockdown.

On Modern Slavery and Exploitation, Martin said that many nail bars and car washes had closed during lockdown but vigilance is needed in case operations move more into the countryside. He sent a very useful one page resource sheet which you can access [here](#).

John thanked Martin for all the work the police have done with farmers and with the FCN.

Douglas asked about the effects of Covid on police colleagues. Martin said there had been some issues for police on the frontline which had needed to be managed.

8 Main Item – “Farming Now”

Presentation by Andrew Butler – Devon County Adviser [NFU](#) – with discussion and questions

Douglas welcomed Andrew Butler to the meeting and thanked him for spending the time speaking with us.

You can access Andrew’s full presentation which contains more detail on prices etc. than the notes below [here](#)

Andrew explained that the NFU is a trade association for farmers in England and Wales. It has 55, 000 members representing 46,000 businesses, three thousand of which are in Devon.

Sector Reports – Slides 3 to 7

Devon is well known for dairying and we have two large dairies – Arla and Crediton – in the county with Mueller at Bridgwater and Davidstow in Cornwall. Most of our milk in Devon is supplied for the retail market and so our farmers have not been quite as affected by Covid as dairy farmers in the midlands, for example, who supply more coffee shops, restaurants etc. In such places the milk price has decreased to around 15 ppl in some cases.

With a recession, we can expect commodity prices to be generally lower. For cereals this is good or bad depending on whether you are buying or selling! Cereal farmers need higher prices, livestock producers low. With Covid the price of malting barley has collapsed as a result of less beer being brewed. This means there is much more being sold as feed barley so the price has decreased.

The weather these past few months has been feast or famine. The winter rain made planting difficult, then spring planting was hit by very dry conditions, so yield will be an issue for cereals this year, as well as the generally depressed prices.

Covid has had an effect on beef and sheep prices largely due to the change from supply for restaurants to more retail. Supermarkets needed more mince whereas restaurants usually take the more expensive cuts, therefore there has been an over-supply of the more expensive cuts which has brought the carcass value down. There has been a massive effort by retailers to promote steaks, for example, and the NFU has been working with the supermarkets to promote buying British rather than Irish beef and the price of beef is recovering now.

With sheep, the added complication is that about one third of our lamb is exported to France and with the general shut down the price dropped, so more lamb has been coming onto our markets.

Farming Profitability - Slides 8 and 9

Farm profitability has been recovering slowly since the dip in the foot and mouth years of 2001/2 and is now about £5 billion in the UK. Agriculture

contributes about £10 billion to the UK. In Devon this will be a higher proportion of contribution. There is also significant contribution from agriculture to landscape, employment and environmental work.

The Agri-food sector – slide 10

The Agri-food sector is worth £120 billion to the UK economy. This represents 6.3% of UK GVA. 13% or 4 million people are employed in the sector.

UK food self-sufficiency - Slide 11 to 13.

There has been a steady decline in UK food self-sufficiency. In the early 1990s it was 75%, reached a low of 59% in 2009 and in 2019 was 64%.

With increasing population self-sufficiency is bound to come down. Does this matter if we can still get the food we need? However, we have seen with Covid that some supply chains are quite fragile. Flour has been a good example. There has not been a shortage of flour, but a shortage of flour in the right packaging. The flour mills could scale up production, but many of the smaller packs are produced in northern Italy.

Producing vegetables is a high cost operation. Potatoes, for example, grow very well in our climate and we could be self-sufficient and grow more. Currently we produce 71% of our consumption. However, a potato harvester will cost between $\frac{1}{4}$ and $\frac{1}{2}$ million pounds and so a farmer needs to be sure they will make a profit when margins are already low, before making extra investment.

Current Big Issues – Slide 14

Brexit

The Agriculture Bill currently going through parliament will be very important. It is the first domestic agricultural legislation for a generation so it needs to be right for both farmers and the public.

The CAP (Common Agricultural Policy) has pros and cons. It didn't compensate farmers for the things they do for society as a whole, whereas the Agriculture Bill is focused on a theme of "Public Goods". It includes the **ELMs scheme (Environmental Land Management Scheme)** and you can see the full policy discussion document [here](#).

The big battle within the bill relates to animal welfare and food standards. We have all heard about the "chlorinated chicken" concerns about poultry produced with lower health and welfare standards in the USA for example. The issue of the chlorinated wash itself is not a problem, but if it is used to mask poorer biosecurity or disease then clearly this is not good.

The NFU had significant concerns about British farmers having to compete with future imports produced at lower standards than here. British farmers produce to very high welfare and safety standards, with labelling consumers can rely on. As a country we need to import food, but we need a level playing field.

As part of their campaigning the NFU have been running a petition in support of making it a legal requirement that for any future trade deals food imports should be produced to the same standards in welfare and safety as the UK. The petition has achieved more than a million signatures. You can access it [here](#).

Future Trade: The NFU are also working with the government on future trade deals. A Trade Bill now will set the tone for a generation and its terms will affect how people invest going forward and/or whether to go into or come back to farming, or leave the business.

Net Zero

Farming currently contributes about 10% of greenhouse gas emissions in the UK, and meat production in the UK causes fewer emissions than in other parts of the world. This can be reduced further with carbon sequestration in grass and woodlands and other measures. The NFU has a target for farming to reach “net zero” by 2040. You can read more about this [here](#).

The NFU is also working with the [Devon Climate Emergency Group](#) which is a partnership working towards a “net zero” Devon.

The arguments with regard to farming and the environment are not straightforward. For example, much land used in the UK for rearing livestock is not suitable for other food production and the grassland sequesters considerable amounts of carbon. If we are to continue to eat beef and lamb and dairy products, then it may be better to produce domestically where we have the ability to produce from grass than to import meat which has been produced in feed lots in California or comes from South America where rainforest may have been cut down for the production. The NFU is keen to encourage people to think more about what they eat and about where their food comes from.

Chris spoke about the Church of England’s plan to become “net zero” by 2030 nationally. In Devon the Diocese of Exeter is focussing on churches, housing and schools and has some tenanted Glebe land. He will contact Andrew direct to follow up regarding this.

We shall be exploring the Climate Emergency and Net Zero further in our November meeting.

Discussion

Douglas spoke about some of the work the Church of England is able to do to support agricultural matters in the Lords. He asked how farmers were managing the various risks when the outcome of the bill is unknown, given the timeframe farmers have to work in. Andrew said that farmers were moving ahead as normal. There are some concerns on the phasing out of the Basic Payment Scheme without the detail of the new schemes yet in place.

John is also feeding into the debate about the Agriculture Bill and the ELMS scheme via various groups he is a member of. He listed five points he believes

are most important. These are:

- An overarching vision for **Ecosystem Security** in Agriculture/Environment integration;
- Food production **within** the context of this, not separated out;
- Vigilance regarding our **UK Food Standards & Farm Welfare** in all trade agreements;
- A simple '**5-star**' system peer-rated as for Ag Shows on ELMS + an Appeals panel;
- Devolving trust for **local solutions**, such as on Dartmoor, and with Exmoor's *Ambition*.

Richard asked about labour supply in Devon. Andrew said that the labour market was a concern for the whole UK and both agriculture and food service have been struggling since 2000. Covid has had an effect on labour movement and Brexit will do also. In Devon fewer vegetables are grown so there is less of a problem. Those new to picking in the UK are less skilled and slower but need to be paid the same.

There was a discussion about an increase in the amount of locally sourced food being consumed during the Covid time. It is hoped that this will continue strongly. Penny mentioned the "Farm Gate" booklet produced by David Ursell after foot and mouth which was a directory of where farm produce could be sourced. Perhaps something similar on-line may be possible?

Ruth commented that local shops had excelled during lockdown including helping solve the flour shortage - they could buy a sack of flour and then weigh it out and sell in 1Kg bags. She also said that social media was a very useful source of advertising for local suppliers. She also said that like many, since lockdown she has become aware of (and now uses) local sources of meat, fish and veg. The new Teign Valley Larder operates both as a food resource for people in need and also as an exchange to prevent food waste.

Marisa said that their four village community response group has helped a number of local suppliers connect with communities - and people are saying they want to stay with them, rather than returning to supermarkets.

Chris shared a useful map / list of local food & drink suppliers within Dartmoor which you can access [here](#)

Andrew concurred that local food business has been good for farm shops and other local suppliers and helped towards the net zero target because of lower food miles. As part of their Covid Recovery plan they are exploring how to bring this information together.

On Brexit, a no-deal will have a significant impact on farmers. Import tariff rates have been published and have been kept the same as before so there is some protection for farmers. However, if standard tariffs of 40% are applied to British lamb exports, for example, exporters would face a serious problem.

Danny spoke about his concerns for young farmers who he feels may face a

bleak future in the industry.

Slides 15 and 16. Andrew concluded by saying that we can all help to support our farmers – looking out for the Red Tractor label, buying local, signing the petition and supporting campaigns, joining “[NFU Countryside](#)”. His last slide gives some interesting headline facts and figures about UK farming in general.

Douglas thanked Andrew very much for sharing so much with us today.

9 Notices and Events

<https://www.devonchurchesruralforum.org.uk/whats-on/events-conferences-workshops/>

10 AOB

Chris shared information on new pages he has added to the Exeter Diocese website for “Coast and Rural” – you can access these [here](#)

Ruth shared information about the Teign Valley larder the church and community have set up in Christow. You can find out more [here](#)

11 Dates and themes of next meetings:

Monday 2nd November, 10am-12 noon

12 Closing Prayer led by Philip.