

## **The future of the farm**

### **What changes are proposed?**

We are committed to maintaining access to nature and the countryside for the local community, but we must find a new way to run Grimsbury Farm.

The farm's financial position has deteriorated over recent years to the extent that South Gloucestershire taxpayers are now paying £250,000 each year to cover the shortfall in income. With costs continuing to increase, we must find a new operating model which minimises the impact for taxpayers.

With tighter finances, the council needs to ensure that every penny we spend is focused on our core priorities. We have comprehensively reviewed options, including ideas suggested by local people and have come to the conclusion that there are organisations much better placed to run the farm in a way which delivers the broadest benefits to the community.

We therefore believe the best way forward is to identify a charitable or not for profit organisation with the necessary background, resources and infrastructure to partner with us to run the farm and its facilities. It is important to us that we select a provider which shares our ethos.

We are now inviting third party groups to come forward with expressions of interest.

### **Why can't you keep Grimsbury Farm going as it is?**

Unfortunately, the farm's financial position has deteriorated over recent years to the extent that South Gloucestershire taxpayers are now paying £250,000 each year to cover the shortfall in income. With costs continuing to increase, and in line with our approach of making sure that every pound of council funding is spent wisely and effectively, we must find a new operating model which minimises the impact for taxpayers.

### **Why is the farm losing so much money?**

Over the last few years, operating costs for the farm have increased. At the same time, we have lost significant income received from an agricultural education provider who made use of the large animals on the farm. This means the farm now costs South Gloucestershire taxpayers roughly £250,000 per year to cover this shortfall, with about three quarters of those costs paying for the upkeep of large farm animals.

As a short-term cost-saving measure, we have looked to remove the large farm animals. However, this would not secure the long-term viability of the farm, and we have therefore looked at other options.

### **Will I still be able to visit the farm?**

The council is committed to maintaining access to nature and the countryside for the local community. We are seeking expressions of interest from third parties who plan to maintain public access to the farm.

The farm remains open to the public every day and we're always delighted to see people visiting us.

### **Could you charge an entrance fee to visit the farm?**

We know the farm is extremely important to you and having heard about the financial challenges facing the farm, some people told us they would be willing to pay to visit if it helped keep it open.

However, we also recognise that having a community resource like Grimsbury Farm that is free to enter, is a huge benefit to low-income families in a time when the cost of living is high. Through the survey we'd like to understand whether local people would be willing to pay to enter, or to contribute towards facilities and activities on site. We are asking for feedback about different entrance fee charges.

### **Will there be any impact on what facilities are available at the farm?**

At this stage, we can't be definitive. We have been approached by organisations potentially interested in taking on management of the farm and from early conversations, it seems unlikely that any organisation will be able to manage the farm as it is currently run. For example, they may need to introduce a small charge for entry, and/or they may need to change the balance of animals on the farm.

Through this survey, we want to understand what is most important to you when selecting the right provider.

## **Agreeing the best way forward**

### **What options have you considered?**

In finding the best way forward, we have considered a range of options, including:

- continuing to manage the farm, but reducing our costs by removing large animals and increasing income by charging an entrance fee,
- closing public access to the farm, but maintaining operations on a smaller scale,
- inviting a third-party provider with relevant experience to partner with to take over responsibility for the farm and facilities.

We've also reviewed ideas you've shared with us about how we might increase income from the farm. Many of these options require large upfront investment and ongoing additional costs, which we have not budgeted for.

Several people have asked whether we can secure grant money to help balance the costs of running the farm. Unfortunately, local authorities are not able to access grant money to fund services, so this would not be an option. Similarly, only registered charities can accept financial donations from the public.

We cannot continue to operate the farm whilst it is incurring such substantial losses and do not believe the council is best placed to continue managing the farm.

We therefore believe the best way forward is to identify a charitable or not for profit organisation with the background, resources and infrastructure to manage the farm in a way which supports our ethos of maintaining access to nature and the countryside for the local community.

### **How can local people have a say in the future of the farm?**

Having considered the options, we believe the best way forward is to invite a third-party provider to partner with to take on responsibility for the farm and its facilities.

We believe there are multiple organisations who would be interested in taking on the farm. We're asking farm visitors and other local people what you love about the farm to help us choose which organisation might be best placed to partner with us going forward.

A Community Conversation is running during May 2025, through which we'd like to understand your priorities for the farm. We'll use this feedback to score the bids from different providers.

### **When might any changes take effect?**

It is still early stages, and no decisions have been made. Once we have considered your priorities for the farm and agreed what factors we need to consider in choosing which organisation could partner us in running the farm, we can then formalise conversations with potential organisations. We would hope to have switched to a new way of running the farm in autumn/winter 2025.

### **Can you raise the money needed by adding more facilities or services that you can charge for?**

We've looked at a range of options to generate income, including options suggested by local people. For example, people suggested building new premises or repurposing existing facilities to incorporate a soft play or employing additional staff to run a farm shop, a forest school or a farmers' market.

These ideas require large upfront investment and ongoing additional costs, which we have not budgeted for. But we will share these ideas with the organisation we eventually partner with for consideration.

## **Practicalities and next steps**

### **Can I still visit the farm?**

Absolutely. We're always delighted to see people visiting us on the farm.

### **Can I donate money to the farm, and if so, how?**

There are limitations restricting the council's opportunities to accept financial donations from the public. Partnering with a third-party organisation could open up opportunities to secure additional funding from grants and contributions from the public.

### **Can I support the farm by joining the Friends Group or volunteering?**

There is a Friends Group which has done exceptional work in support of the farm. However, this group is currently inactive. A revitalised Friends Group could have a role to play in supporting the future of the farm. If you feel you could be involved, please contact us.

### **Expressions of interest**

We are interested in speaking to organisations with relevant experience who might be interested in taking on management of the farm. You can find further information and details of how to submit your expression of interest [here](#).