

For immediate release 03/November/2016

The Gaia Trust will sell properties at Welcombe, North Devon

Following an exhaustive options appraisal, the Board of the Gaia Trust has decided to dispose of all the land and buildings that it owns at Welcombe in North Devon. These were transferred from the Yarner Trust when it was wound up in January 2015. The disposal will be carried out in accordance with the rules by which a Registered Charity must operate.

In 2015 the Gaia Trust, an environmental charity with agricultural holdings in Devon and Cornwall, accepted responsibility for the Yarner Trust estate. The Gaia Trust was aware that Yarner had for many years generated insufficient income either to sufficiently cover the operational costs of the charity or to maintain the historic fabric of its buildings.

Concerned to establish a realistic plan for the future of the properties at Welcombe, the Gaia Trust has explored a number of options for the buildings in pursuance of its charitable objectives. The research was undertaken with support and advice from the Heritage Lottery Fund, Architectural Heritage Fund and Charity Commission, together with legal, accountancy and estate management advice.

Gaia Director Matt Edworthy commented, “Professional surveys and other estimates put the total cost of restoring and renovating the Barton alone – the old manor farm at the centre of Welcombe estate - in the region of £0.75 million. There are also other buildings, some in a very dilapidated state. Indications from potential grant-giving agencies are that a project of this kind would be unlikely to meet their funding criteria. Gaia would also have to find substantial match-funding. In any case, a cost benefit analysis throws doubt on whether an investment of this scale could be justified.”

Gaia Trust has consulted the community at Welcombe on two occasions, In May and July this year. The realities and implications of the decisions facing the Trust were explained and discussed. The community expressed strong views and were invited to make alternative suggestions that would allow Gaia to meet its objectives. The Parish Council was unable to find a way for the community to raise the funds necessary to take part of the estate into community ownership. Charity law would not permit the Trust to gift any of the estate.

Matt concluded, “Tough though this decision has been, it is unavoidable. Throughout the land small charities are either struggling to survive or are being wound up as public sector support dwindles and competition for grants increases. Shedding a loss-making part of Gaia’s estate strengthens our financial independence and capacity to take on the challenges of post-Brexit Britain. By taking this decision now, the Trust will be in a better position to do what we were set up to do, that is, bringing people and nature together through the sustainable, productive and ethical stewardship of agricultural land.”

Ends _____

For further information, please contact Matt Edworthy, the Director of the Gaia Trust, at edworthy@gaiatrust.org.uk / 07765346165 and look at our [website](#)

Notes to editors _____

The Gaia Trust manages over 250 hectares of land for agriculture, wildlife and public engagement in Devon and Cornwall. The Gaia Trust’s most accessible properties are Treraven Farm in the Camel Valley near Wadebridge in North Cornwall and Home Farm Marsh on the Tarka Trail near Bideford in North Devon. The Gaia Trust also owns Bodwannick Manor Farm in the Camel Valley and Chark Moor near Lostwithiel.

Founded in 1988 under the banner, ‘Conservation is not enough’, the Gaia Trust forges links between traditionally managed farmland, wildlife and nearby communities, to promote sustainable living, health and wellbeing.

The Gaia Trust is a Charitable Incorporated Organisation. Registered office: The Gaia Trust, Deli Farm, Delabole, Cornwall PL33 9BZ