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# 2023: A YEAR IN REVIEW







**As the year draws to a close, the Church Commissioners for England are reflecting on the milestones achieved in partnership with our tenant farmers throughout 2023.**

This year, sustainability and collaboration were at the core of our work. To this end, we published our landmark report [Our Approach to Sustainability for Real Assets](#) in July, outlining our approach to environmental stewardship. To gain an improved understanding of our tenants' businesses we visited over 50% of our equipped farms to better understand the work and environmental aspirations of our tenants, as well as continue ongoing engagement. We also expanded our team with a [new Environmental Asset Manager](#), who is currently rolling out our environmental goals across the portfolio and driving tenant engagement. From workshops to research projects and discussions with some of the farming industry's leading organisations, below are some of our highlights from the year.





Scott Norris from the Navestock Estate, interviewed for our first edition of 'In Conversation With'

### **'In Conversation With' series**

Launched in 2022, our 'In Conversation With' series continues to highlight the work of our tenant farmers through in-depth interviews with our Farmland Team. This year, we spotlighted a range of farmers from the Carlisle, Tyneside and York Estates. Read the interviews [here](#).

### **Promoting sustainable food production through Pre-Letting Environmental Assessments**

As part of our commitment to promoting sustainable and nature-friendly farming practices, we have partnered with the [Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group \(FWAG\)](#) to carry out Pre-Letting Environmental Assessments across new tenancies. This includes requirements for soil testing, data sharing and collaborative environmental targets.

### **Engaging with farmers through workshops and farm walks**

Throughout the year, the Farmland Team hosted a series of events giving tenant farmers the tools to ensure the sustainability of the environments they work in while improving profitability.

On the Rochester Estate, we brought together farming tenants and the RSPB in March to discuss reversing a decline in the area's bird numbers through wetland management and improvements to Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). We followed up with an [event](#) at [Elmley National](#)

[Nature Reserve](#) on the Isle of Sheppey in July, where tenants, local landowners, land managers and the RSPB discussed ways to improve both environmental and economic sustainability within grazed systems.

This work culminated in November, with a get together of farmers and land managers looking to form a new cluster group on the Hoo Peninsula. This will promote the restoration of this historic marshland environment through knowledge sharing and advice on public and private finance.

In the fens, [Fenland SOIL](#) facilitated a [workshop](#) held with Church Commissioners' tenants to discuss the challenges and opportunities presented by farming lowland peat in May.

In June, we invited several tenants from nearby Estates to join us at the [Groundswell Regenerative Agriculture Festival](#) at Hertfordshire's Lannock Manor Farm.

The year concluded with a [farm walk](#) led by Martin Lines of the [Nature Friendly Farming Network](#), bringing together arable and mixed farmers from across East Anglia to observe the practical changes Martin has made to his arable system to benefit both the environment and his business.



A visit to Elmley Nature Reserve on the Hoo Peninsula



Bartonsham Meadows © Lisa Stevens

### Understanding our portfolio through tenant surveys

This year, we began undertaking a portfolio-wide survey to better understand our tenants' businesses and identify areas for collaboration. We encourage all tenants to complete the survey as it will help to inform future investment, feed data into reporting and set social and environmental targets.

### Promoting biodiversity through new tenancy agreements

In April, we granted a tenancy agreement with [Herefordshire Wildlife Trust](#) to protect Hereford's Bartonsham Meadows from flooding and to improve soil and water quality. [Read more.](#)



The Church Commissioners visit the Crown Estate to learn about woodland and deer park management

Later in the year, we granted another tenancy agreement with Natural England to improve biodiversity near Wybunbury Moss, a National Nature Reserve near Crewe in Cheshire. Work is already underway to restore the site to a more natural state. [Read more.](#)

### Cross-sector collaboration

Throughout the year, we shared knowledge and promoted best practice with some of

our peers from the agricultural sector – from prominent landowners like the [Crown Estate](#) and [Bradford Estates](#) to farmers' groups like the [Tenant Farmers Association \(TFA\)](#).

This included our regular quarterly meetings with other institutional landowners such as the Crown Estate, the Duchy of Cornwall, the National Trust and the Duchy of Lancaster to discuss sustainability projects across our portfolios.

In the summer, we visited Bleak House, a SSSI managed by the [Staffordshire Wildlife Trust](#), to learn how the Trust is restoring the site by grazing cattle using No Fence collars, aiding bracken and woodland management. [Read more.](#)

### Making our voice heard on real world change

Our Farmland Team's Principal Asset Manager Ciara Williams met with [EG magazine](#) alongside our Head of Strategic Land Joanna Loxton on the Chichester Estate to discuss the Commissioners' commitment to social and environmental stewardship. This was followed up by an article in the [CLA's Land & Business magazine](#) focusing on the renewed relationship between landlord and tenant.

### Looking to 2024

In 2024, we will strive to build on this collaborative approach to deliver more tangible outcomes to benefit tenants across the portfolio. We look forward to working with tenants closely in the new year as well as continuing engagement through the survey, events, and farm visits. Please click [here](#) to contact the Farmland Team directly.

Warmest wishes for the season,

The Church Commissioners for England's Farmland Team