



GASCOYNE
ESTATES



THE FUTURE OF LAND

AUTUMN 2023



Lord Salisbury (left) and Anthony Downs (right) open the eighth Infrastructure Charrette in the Riding School, Hatfield Park.

FOREWORD

This charrette was the eighth in the Infrastructure series. While not 'infrastructure' in its strictest sense, land underpins everything that we rely on.

In the short term, the energy crisis looks set to change our perceptions of energy security in an uncertain world, while inflation and the cost of living crisis has brought the price of food into stark relief.

The housing crisis continues unabated, with affordability worsening and no clear route to a resolution, while climate change and biodiversity collapse forms a serious and accelerating backdrop.

We need more of everything, while staying within planetary boundaries. We must also, Lord Salisbury reminded us, be the masters of change not slaves to it.

This sense of 'perma-crisis' is criticised by some as being overly pessimistic, but it does reflect the extent of the environmental, social and economic challenges facing us all in the coming years.

The task of solving these problems, some existential and some more limited, is going to require a substantial rethink of the way our businesses and government institutions work, and work together. There is, however, enormous potential for positive change in the way we use land.

By adapting the way we farm, we can make space for nature while providing nutritious food at a fair price. By connecting organisations we can free up land for development and provide high quality green spaces for communities to enjoy.

By being more efficient with our use of land, we can restore ecosystems and store millions of tonnes of carbon.

Optimising this complex system is possible, if we channel the principles of nature: instead of clear red lines and prescriptive policies, we should be seeking abundance, resilience and complexity.

Land is a finite and precious resource, and one that is central to many of the challenges we face today.

We must value it, restore it, and steward it for future generations.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'A. Downs', with a stylized flourish underneath.

Anthony Downs
Hatfield Estate Director
Gascoyne Estates
November 2023



CONTENTS

Introduction	2
Key note - Judicaelle Hammond	3
Session one: Access and Recreation	4
Workshop one	6
Session two: Built Form in the Rural Landscape	8
Workshop two	10
Session three: Food, Farming & Biodiversity	12
Workshop three	14
Conclusions	16

INTRODUCTION

On Thursday the 5th October 2023, Gascoyne Estates hosted Infrastructure Charrette No.8. The event was hosted in the Riding School at Hatfield Park.

The event focused on The Future of Land, a finite and precious resource subject to competing demands.

The event was split into three sessions which attempted to address the breadth of land uses in Hertfordshire: Access and Recreation, Built Form in the Rural Landscape, and Food, Farming and Biodiversity.

The event highlighted the importance of diversity and resilience in land use. As we face a series of crises from climate to housing, we need a more fruitful conversation about adapting our approach to land management in order to meet the challenges of the future.

As the key delivery partners, land managers must be central to policy development and debate.



KEY NOTE - JUDICAEELLE HAMMOND, CLA



The planet is grappling with the climate emergency, a nature crisis and increasing human pressures - the way we manage land is central to it all



The charrette was opened by Judicaelle Hammond, Director of Policy at the Country Land and Business Association (CLA). As a representative of landowners, land managers and rural business, the CLA are well positioned to comment on the challenges of land use decision making today.

Judicaelle's remarks highlighted the opportunities, demands, and risks that influence land use decisions.

She highlighted the services that our land offers, from food and energy generation to housing and leisure, alongside the critical environmental functions such as forestry and carbon sequestration.

The planet, she argued, is grappling with a climate emergency, a nature crisis, increasing food demand and dietary shifts, alongside social expectations around landscape and health.

We must find ways to use land more sustainably, she posited, and manage it in a way that benefits society, the environment, and the economy.

Judicaelle illustrated the complexity and lack of clarity that exists around the different agencies that interact with land managers. This causes confusion, costly process and frustration which is detrimental to the efficient operation of rural businesses.

In the absence of clear policy and direction land managers are forced to make decisions for the short and medium term, mostly focussed within their own boundaries.

Only by providing a clear direction of travel would land managers be able to work more effectively together at scale. There is role for government in this, but the voice of land managers and rural businesses must be recognised at every level.

SESSION ONE: ACCESS AND RECREATION

Andrew Gillett – Chief Legal Advisor, CLA

Andrew Gillett presented a positive vision of improvements and opportunities that the CLA have set out to support the growth of access. In its role as representatives of rural business, the CLA engages with government on the issue of access.

Andrew's analysis of access arrangements in different countries demonstrated that England has relatively permissive access rights. He highlighted, however, that there was significant pressure to increase these further.

He outlined the 'Right to Roam' campaign, which focuses on representing the social injustice of access. They aim to see 'Right to Roam' extended across a wider range of landscapes and for access rights to be broadened beyond rambling to include a right to kayak, swim and wild camp.

Andrew outlined the CLA's plans to improve access by contributing to a dynamic mapping app with increased details and restrictions, a wider use of informative campaigns to connect with the public, and; future improvements to environmental land management with funding for infrastructure such as kayak launches, educational visits and permissive access.

Andrew further noted that the CLA's focus is on a more equitable, responsible, and sustainable approach to access across the UK, enabled by technology, legal frameworks, and education. The CLA acknowledges the nervousness of land managers and is certain that a pragmatic settlement can be reached.

Kate Ashbrook - Open Spaces Society

Kate Ashbrook is general secretary of the Open Spaces Society which works to protect public rights of way and open spaces across the UK.

Kate emphasised the importance of public rights of way as the most important means of access to green space. The Open Space Society, she outlined, campaign to register 'lost commons' and areas of land which stand to benefit

England's footpaths are extensive compared to other countries, but land managers do not always meet their obligations to maintain paths and welcome walkers



the mental and physical health of communities.

Kate argued that in many places public access is currently permissive and uncertain. This creates an environment which is not always welcoming, with paths poorly maintained and signage designed to be off-putting. Kate highlighted that the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 (CROW) went some way to increasing access, but is lacking in areas of high population density and lowland England. She advocated for increasing rights of access, particularly to woodlands and watersides.

Kate spoke passionately on behalf of the Open Spaces Society and its vision. She suggested that landowners should dedicate paths, providing greater certainty and opportunity to explore. She further proposed that significant developments should include rights of way and public green spaces as a condition of approval.

Finally, she appealed to land managers to fulfil their obligations with regard to access, arguing that well maintained, clearly defined rights of way will serve to discourage trespassing and other negative impacts.



A minority of people on both sides cause the majority of issues - access and rural activity can be compatible

Panel discussion

Chaired by Dr. Judith Plummer-Braeckman, the panel discussion established some valuable common ground. Both Andrew and Kate agreed that education was central to solving some land manager concerns with regard to access. Indeed, both speakers concurred that an appreciation of the rights and responsibilities of citizens in the countryside should be embedded in the school curriculum. This was a sentiment broadly held amongst the audience.

Education and interpretation is key to the safe and respectful enjoyment of the countryside

They further agreed that better signage and interpretation would reduce conflict between land managers and the general public, whilst ensuring that those accessing by legal means feel welcome. Highlighting the ways in which land is managed for different purposes would, it was argued, encourage the public to value their surroundings.

Many land managers in the audience raised concerns about the behaviour of some members of the public, who are unable to control their dogs, who drop litter or who ride vehicles through footpaths. However, the panellists argued that there is an element of ‘chicken and egg’ – that respecting the land is less likely when access is not granted freely, while freedom of access is seen as a threat to rural livelihoods. It was agreed by all, however, that such people are in the minority overall.

Finally, there was some debate about terminology. It was expressed that the ‘Right to Roam’ implies rights without responsibilities, while the ‘Right to Responsible Access’ balances the conversation more effectively.

WORKSHOP ONE

The workshops challenged participants to set aside their differences and formulate a single sentence per table on which they could all agree, and the one main area on which they could not agree.

In doing so, it aimed to focus on the areas of consensus and the major outstanding challenges. The first workshop asked:

How do we achieve safe, respectful access for the benefit of society?



“We must teach people to value the countryside and identify the different things that happen there”

“We have to get better at communicating what goes on in rural areas, through enhancing signage and welcoming communication”

“It must be established that with rights come responsibilities, and that minimising conflict is the responsibility of everyone”



“Encouraging access can have a beneficial effect on security and antisocial behaviour as people begin to take pride in the places they walk in”



SESSION TWO: BUILT FORM IN THE RURAL LANDSCAPE

Drawing upon the emotive issues of development and landscape character, this session sought to understand the pressures facing rural landscapes from buildings and infrastructure.

Victoria Hills, Chief Executive, Royal Town Planning Institute

Victoria Hills opened the session on the built environment. Victoria explored the complexity of the planning landscape which is supposed to be grappling with the chronic under-supply of housing in England.

She argued that a lack of political will, enormous complexity and a tight regulatory framework has resulted in a system which is breaking down. This reduces the capacity of local authorities to permit high quality development in the right places.

Victoria highlighted that proper land use decision making can only be assured if the planning system is properly resourced. Existing planning policy such as the National Planning Policy Framework, Victoria argued, is insufficient for addressing issues of climate and biodiversity.

She highlighted the need to connect Local Plans and local decision making to strategic and national priorities in order to ensure that development delivers multiple benefits. This includes integration of Local Nature Recovery Strategies and strategic transport planning in order to establish clearer aims and make best use of limited land.

Finally, she implored the audience to dismantle siloes within planning and take a holistic approach to land use, so as to maximise utility at the landscape scale.

Christine Meadows, Land Management Consultant

Christine Meadows is an experienced landscape consultant, specialising in protected landscapes. Echoing Victoria Hills, she advocated a holistic view of land management which embraces natural processes. Christine demonstrated visually that we have an abundance of



A properly resourced planning system is required to deliver properly considered development, which delivers multiple benefits





Neil Lindsay, Managing Director, BLC Energy

Covering a vital element of our response to climate change, Neil Lindsay, Managing Director of BLC Energy made a nuanced case for the role of renewable energy production in the rural landscape.

He attempted to paint a balanced picture, addressing the aesthetic impact that solar and wind installations can have on landscapes which people value. However, he highlighted that with increasing demand for energy its production is going to have to go somewhere. Quite where, he explained, is subject to a series of technical and common-sense assessments: where is there capacity? Where can the impact be limited? Would the land deliver more benefit under a different use?

He discussed the history of protected areas, such as Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and the greenbelt, and challenged the principles of some of these designations which have not been reviewed for many decades. He argued that the centrality of land to many of the challenges facing society necessitates a review of policy to ensure that positive changes can be made.

Despite political sensitivity, Neil deftly explained the true impact of solar energy on English land use. To reach the 38GW capacity target by 2050, a maximum of 70,000 hectares of English farmland would be required. While this sounds a large number, that is only 0.7% of the total agricultural area – less than the area currently occupied by golf courses. With improvements in solar technology, this demand is likely to decrease over time.

He finished by noting the importance of public engagement, without which any land-use change is likely to meet resistance. This lesson is vital to manage the transition to a greener energy system, while dealing with the drivers of climate change, energy security and the cost of living crisis.

data points which can be layered on a map, but give no discernible meaning. Instead we should target an abundance of nature.

Nature, she argued, embraces messiness and complexity in order to build resilience. Christine posited that we should adopt a similar approach, building layers of different benefits and delivering a truly multi-functional landscape.

Alluding to the premise of the event, Christine challenged the idea that all land functions should be given equal weight in all cases. Instead we should be prioritising land use changes which deliver long-term adaptability to climate change, optimising a broad range of issues. In so doing, she concluded, we will be able to make our land work 'harder per acre' and deliver benefits more broadly.

The UK's entire solar demand would be accommodated on just 0.7% of farmland - less than that currently occupied by golf courses

WORKSHOP TWO

The second workshop asked the question:

What is a productive landscape?

Following the same format as previously, groups were asked to feedback a single statement on which they agreed, along with a point they could not agree on.



“Productivity cannot simply mean profitable. It must mean delivering social, environmental and economic benefits to the owners of land and wider society”

“Land cannot deliver just one function, it has to be multifunctional in order to deal with the crises we face”

“A productive landscape has to be connected at scale - there is no benefit to isolated pockets of abundance”



“We must find a way to value the benefits land management produces for society, and pay for their delivery”



SESSION THREE: FOOD, FARMING AND BIODIVERSITY

Food production is, and will continue to be, the predominant use of land in Hertfordshire. How we farm has a direct impact on the availability of land for other things, including development and biodiversity. We were fortunate to be joined by three speakers who are, in their own way, contributing to this debate.

Martin Lines, Chief Executive, Nature Friendly Farming Network

Martin outlined his approach to producing food and restoring biodiversity in his capacity as an arable farmer as well as CEO of NFNN. He detailed how he now embraces the elements of nature which generations before him would have considered an 'inconvenience'.

He connects his farmed landscapes with natural features, benefiting from the abundance of predatory insects. He minimises soil disturbance, building structure and improving water retention, and plants cover crops to defend the soil from leaching vital nutrients. He has, in line with regenerative practices, reintroduced livestock to the farm which provide natural fertiliser.

His key point, however, is that he does this both for the benefit of nature and for the bottom line. His farm is more productive, healthier and producing higher quality crops than ever before. His ability to derive multiple income streams from his land has made his farm highly profitable.

Clearly, he argues, there is no need to pit food and nature against each other; they can be beneficial aspects of a prosperous and abundant system which delivers against the needs of farmers and society writ large.

Harriet Cherry Agricultural Relationships Manager, Wildfarmed

Harriet introduced Wildfarmed as a 'regenerative brand'. Working with growers to achieve high standards of regenerative agriculture, they pay farmers a premium realised through direct sales to recognised brands.



Integrating natural processes into the farming system is good for business and good for the planet





They attempt to draw connections between producers and consumers, and underpin the transition to healthier farmed landscapes by sharing the value created.

Wildfarmed clearly demonstrate the issues facing land use. How do we ensure that producers are fairly paid for a product which is better for the environment? How do we create farming systems which deliver multiple benefits? How do we connect consumers to better quality products?

Becky Bone, Director of AT Bone

Becky then outlined AT Bone's approach to sustainable farming as a large scale agricultural contractor.

Some practices she outlined contrasted with her fellow



speakers, using some more conventional techniques to achieve high productivity. This included ploughing certain soil types, and the lack of an on-site livestock operation. She argued that the science of modern agriculture enables them to do this, sustain a profitable business, and avoid degradation of the land.

She outlined AT Bone's commitment to always put more back into the soil than they take out, leading to healthier soils and a more productive crop and ultimately business longevity.

The Bone operation, Becky said, invests substantially when the economics make sense, and sees the soils they farm as the basis of their long term viability. While different to the other two perspectives, the AT Bone model is indicative of a highly successful business model and one which remains aspirational to many farmers.

Panel discussion

Joined by Gavin Fauvel, Cranborne Estate Director at Gascoyne, the panel began by discussing modern practices, asking how certain we can be that what we are doing today is right; after all, we now criticise the post-war intensification of food production.

In dealing with nature, food and the climate crisis, the panel argued that there needs to be greater guidance from government to ensure we are going in the right direction. In a context where the UK imports over 40% of its food, the panel agreed that food security was critical, and that changing diets offered opportunities to grow more food for human consumption, instead of animal feed. There is, therefore, a need to focus on efficiency whether that is in inputs per tonne of food, or human-consumed calories per acre.

They concurred that the post-war consensus which drew clear lines between food and nature is being thoroughly challenged, and the learning curve is steep. However, it is critical that we learn quickly to deliver environmental benefits alongside healthy and abundant food. Finally, the panel discussed the increasing focus on soil as the basis of a sustainable farming system.

WORKSHOP THREE

The final workshop asked:

How do we better collaborate to optimise land use?

Following the same format as previously, groups were asked to feedback a single statement on which they agreed, along with a point they could not agree on.



“More opportunities to work together and communicate across boundaries are vital to ensuring we can deliver change at scale”

“Making space for land manager voices in development of strategy is central to success - without land managers on board, we can’t achieve anything”

“We have to be proactive. Let’s get together and define the vision, rather than waiting for government to tell us”

“We have to design systems which keep value in local communities”



CONCLUSIONS

Following a vigorous debate, the key conclusions from the event were:

Land must deliver more benefits per acre

Whether increasing biodiversity in agriculture, integrating renewable energy into cherished landscapes or increasing access for communities, land can no longer have a single purpose. Education is central to ensuring that conflicts between uses are minimised and a greater understanding of the complexities of land is achieved.

Land managers must be central to policy development

Private land managers at all scales will ultimately deliver these benefits. Without proper engagement at every level, the scale of the challenge will go unmet. The need to simplify decision making processes is apparent, and must be supported by government, not dictated by it.

Collaboration is required to deliver improvements and coordination at a landscape scale

We cannot solve these challenges within tight ownership boundaries. We must create opportunities to come together and collaborate. Through forums, clusters and events, we can build the case for land manager led change for the benefit of all.

Land use is a major problem for climate change, but also the best possible solution

The expertise and power to produce nutritious food, capture carbon and restore biodiversity is amongst us. Land managers and policy makers must adopt a long-term mindset, take this obligation seriously, and transform our businesses to deliver wider benefits.

Leadership is needed to create the environment for success

Land managers have a major role to play, but must speak in a unified voice. This will require leadership, coordination and planning. Leaders must emerge from within the Hertfordshire land management community to set a positive vision and drive change.





Further advice and information can be obtained from:

Anthony Downs

Hatfield Estate Director

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