

# CHURCH LAND AND THE CLIMATE CRISIS

## A CALL TO ACTION

The science is unequivocal: we are in a climate and ecological emergency – both of which are driven by human activity – and need to find ways to collectively cut global greenhouse emissions while simultaneously working to restore the rich biodiversity of our world, which is too frequently being destroyed.

The Church of England's 'Routemap to Net Zero Carbon' takes some important steps towards addressing these challenges and begins by recognising the climate emergency and the necessity of a 'strong, visible Christian response to what is happening to our world.' However, most of the routemap focuses on changes to church energy use and identifies retrofitting large church buildings and secondary schools as the best opportunities for reducing carbon emissions.

Church land use is mentioned only in passing, under the heading 'Complex Areas'. Land owned by the Church of England's National Investing Bodies (primarily the Church Commissioners) is considered outside the scope of the report, which is unfortunate given that agricultural land owned by the Church of England is likely to create more greenhouse gas emissions than all Church of England buildings combined.

Operation Noah's report, ***Church Land and The Climate Crisis***, which will be published in September 2022, presents the urgency of reducing greenhouse gas emissions in all sectors, focusing in on emissions from land use and the ways land can be better used to store carbon. Woodlands, peatlands, grasslands and farmland can all be managed in ways that will mitigate the impacts of the human activity that is dangerously heating the planet. Taking the biblical mandate that the land belongs to God and should be used justly, we suggest ways the Church could use its land to protect creation, mitigate global heating and enhance biodiversity.

We have responsibilities to our siblings already suffering the severe impacts of the climate emergency around the world, with record temperatures and drought in the UK bringing a glimpse of these impacts much closer to home. We also need to acknowledge the vital contribution land and agriculture make to human needs for food and water, respecting the expertise of farmers, scientists and conservationists in finding the best ways forward. We are grateful for contributions from all these groups in writing this report and in the development of key priorities for the Church to take forward.



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## The three key priorities identified are:

### Tree growing

The Church Commissioners and dioceses should increase tree coverage in line with comparable landowners. We need the right trees in the right places, planted at the right time and cared for to maturity.

### Peat protection and restoration

The Church needs to restore and protect peatlands, so that they act as a carbon sink, rather than a source of emissions.

### Supporting farmers to reduce emissions

Church landowners should bring about positive change by promoting farm carbon audits and supporting farmers to make identified changes that will reduce emissions.

All of these areas require working with partners, collaboration and resource sharing to promote land use that is good for people, nature and the climate. The report includes some useful resources to find out more and learn from others as well as forming the foundation for Operation Noah's forthcoming campaign on Church land use.

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Who owns land matters. How landowners use their land has implications for almost everything: where we build our homes, how we grow our food, how much space we leave for nature.

**Guy Shrubsole, Who Owns England, 2019**



## Report launch webinar: Church Land and the Climate Crisis

The report was launched at a free webinar on Tuesday 20th September from 7pm-8.30pm. Speakers included Hannah Malcolm, (Church of England ordinand, climate justice campaigner and Operation Noah trustee); Andy Lester (Head of Conservation, A Rocha UK), Alan Radbourne (Science Project Manager, UK Centre for Ecology & Hydrology) and Sharon Hall (Campaign Officer, Operation Noah).

**Watch the webinar now:** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KvcTz9DHcMs>

## For more information on how you can get involved:

Contact Sharon Hall (Bright Now Campaign Officer at Operation Noah) on [sharon.hall@operationnoah.org](mailto:sharon.hall@operationnoah.org) to learn more about how you can get involved in our Church land use campaign at a local, diocesan or national level.