



NOTES ON THE LAND



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SETTING THE CONTEXT

Introduction

We stand at the precipice of an undeniable crisis that looms over the future of rural land and land use in the UK. Whether you live in the densest urban block or on the most remote country lane, whether you are young or old, this affects us all.

The urgency of this moment cannot be overstated, as the next decade will witness an unprecedented reimagining of rural land use, influencing generations to come, bringing both tremendous opportunities and profound challenges.

The next 10 years will see the biggest intergenerational shift of wealth in history, including the biggest transfer of land ownership. Brexit has resulted in significant changes in the subsidies that landowners, especially farmers, have become dependent on, such as the Basic Payment Scheme ending at the end of 2023. With the challenges of climate change, inequality, rising food costs and environmental degradation, the interest and need for regenerative land management has become critical.

Together, these factors and others have highlighted the urgency for finding new ways of working and solutions.

Many are wrestling with the questions:

- What does the future of land use look like in the UK?
 - What is needed going forward for the health of the land and for the good of people and the planet?
 - What innovations can drive a more sustainable land economy in the UK?
-

We are living with the impact of poor, short-sighted decisions made about woodland management 50/60 years ago, leaving our woodlands with only 7% in good condition but our woodlands impact jobs, contribute to our heating, provide for our furniture and contribute to the cost of housing.

Subsidies that have long provided a lifeline to farmers are dwindling, leaving an uncertain future in their wake.

Over 200,000 (50%) farms have vanished in the UK in the last 55 years.

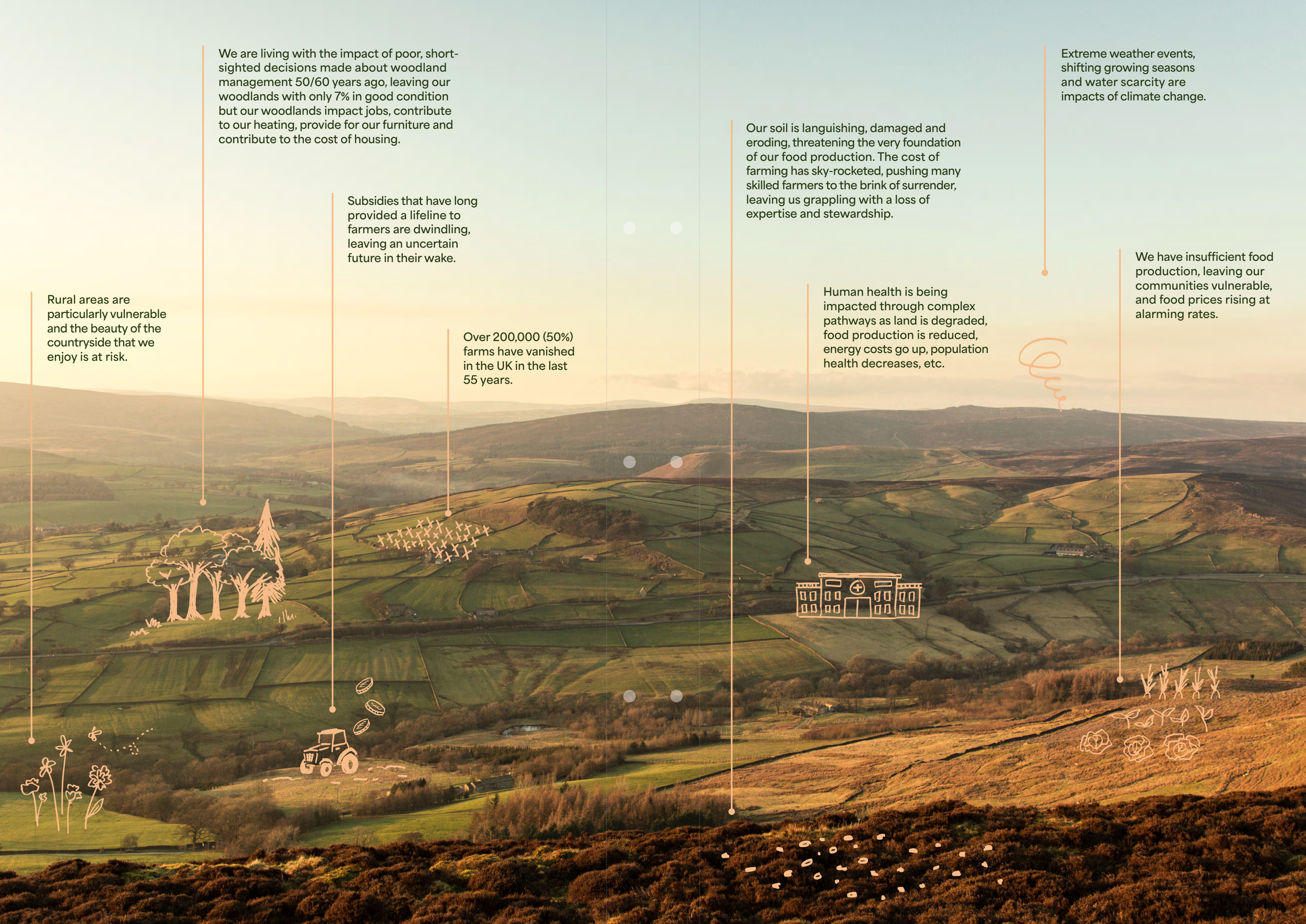
Our soil is languishing, damaged and eroding, threatening the very foundation of our food production. The cost of farming has sky-rocketed, pushing many skilled farmers to the brink of surrender, leaving us grappling with a loss of expertise and stewardship.

Human health is being impacted through complex pathways as land is degraded, food production is reduced, energy costs go up, population health decreases, etc.

Extreme weather events, shifting growing seasons and water scarcity are impacts of climate change.

We have insufficient food production, leaving our communities vulnerable, and food prices rising at alarming rates.

Rural areas are particularly vulnerable and the beauty of the countryside that we enjoy is at risk.



This convergence of crises demands our attention, our ingenuity and our collective wisdom to forge innovative solutions that will protect our land and secure a resilient and prosperous future for all.

We have a historical opportunity to do something and this moment gives us a chance to think about what kind of world we want. It is at this intersection that innovation holds new promise, we can change, the future can be better and there are people who have been finding promising alternatives.

We aren't starting from scratch, there are farmers, social entrepreneurs, impact investors, small holders, wood workers, bee keepers, worm farmers, developers and others who are working to find innovative solutions with regenerative economics as the driver, where people, the planet and all the creatures among us can flourish.

Questions I've been exploring, and invite you to consider:

- What is the future economic of the land?
- What does it look like for the land to be stewarded well, in a way that promotes the health of the land for the good of people and the planet?

The power of the human spirit is able to meet this challenge, we have the potential to reimagine just about anything. We can't afford to have small incremental changes, we need to take bigger risks and invest in a new, better future.

Will you join me to see what I've been seeing, and partner with me on the multitude of opportunities before us?

See into a new, more wild and flourishing future for all.

Case studies

Potential solutions can be found within the ecosystem and network of people we have been engaging with and beyond. There are many who have been pioneering new ways forward. Here are just a few of them:

Tim Waygood

Church Farm, Ardeley

A Farm that Feeds People. This farm is a pioneer and example of what the future could be and how, when the farm thrives, communities thrive.

Dan Harper

Precious Plastic East

Serial social impact entrepreneur and eco activist using plastic waste in Gt. Yarmouth, turning it into useful objects including buttons, bowls and furniture.

Peter and Grace How

Lightfoot Farm, Hants

Micro farmers with international development experience who have come from Afghanistan to the New Forest.

The Crafty Goat

Ice Cream Parlour

Warren and Ellie Goff have a goat farm in Essex with an ice cream parlour for their award-winning ice cream, along with a post office, play area and more!

Anna de la Vega

Urban Worm Farmer

Anna is helping flat dwellers and farmers alike realise the benefit of worms and get involved as part of the solution for our soil.
theurbanworm.co.uk

Nancarrow

Farm Feasts

A family farm for nine generations. One of the earliest to go organic, they have been pioneering experiences where people gather, feast and stay on the farm.

This really is just a taste of the amazing practitioners pioneering in the rural context, but there are so many creative, inventive, entrepreneurial individuals like Brian Eno (Earth Percent); Yasmeeen Lari; Paul Wenham at Ashburnham, ushering in a new agrarian renaissance and environmental future; Kate Cooper at We Wear the Trousers; Chris and Zoe with the little farm fridge shop; Ash Farm with their shepherd's hut; leather studio and more; the work of Hauser and Wirth and I could go on and on.

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LAYING THE GROUND WORK

Ecosystem thinking

Any hope we have of making an impact in social and environmental innovation is intrinsically connected to the health and vitality of a wider network, or rather, a wider ecosystem.

As R. Conway says:

“Systems encompass many actors, competing incentives and hidden nuances. It is a mistake to assume that just because human centred design processes create innovations that meet human needs, that their diffusion into a system will follow a linear route that mirrors that of consumer markets.”

We must seek to understand the necessary connections, processes and interdependence of institutions and individuals, as well as culture and ideas, that enable innovation for the public good to take root. As we understand the wider ecosystem we can look for the strategic opportunities to bring change for the whole system. On the right are a few of the most important actors as it relates to the future of the land.

“We tend to focus on snapshots of isolated parts of the system and wonder why our deepest problems never get solved.”

PETER SENGE
Author





"We abuse land because we regard it as a commodity belonging to us. When we see land as a community to which we belong, we may begin to use it with love and respect".

- Aldo Leopold

SEEDS OF HOPE

WILD FLOWER SEEDS

Sprinkle on 1m² soil and cover by raking or rolling.



While the issues are hugely challenging and complex, there is also reason to hope.

Because things must change, it opens up tremendous opportunities for us to redesign the future and find new solutions to the biggest issues affecting people, communities and the environment.

"The path toward ecological renewal and a healthy economy of the land moves us from a society based on selfish wealth accumulation to one that is community oriented and life affirming."

There are already people who have been experimenting with solutions, those working to change policy and investors ready to invest differently.

There are signs of hope!

TITLE	AUTHOR
Braiding Sweetgrass	<i>Robin Wall Kimmerer</i>
Sex, Economy, Freedom and Community	<i>Wendell Berry</i>
Rooted: How regenerative farming can change the world	<i>Sarah Langford</i>
A Small Farm Future	<i>Chris Smaje</i>
Surviving the Future	<i>David Fleming</i>
Regenesi <i>s</i> : Feeding the world without devouring the planet	<i>George Monbiot</i>

BOOKS

A selection, not comprehensive, of the reading that helped my thinking.



DISCOVERY

TIMELINE



Past season of innovation

This work has been set up by everything that came before it. As early as 2009, I was having conversations about the shifting social and physical landscape in the UK. As a social innovator I became aware of the need for a cultural shift toward an agrarian renaissance.

Moments of significance:

- Launched 16 social justice campaigns + projects
- Trained over 200 social entrepreneurs
- Idea catalysing conversations with Tim Waygood
- Creatives move in big numbers to the city
- Realisation of the need for an agrarian renaissance



Resting the fields

During 2020 there was a fallow year, which gave way to the space to shape the opportunity. Initial research emphasised the decline and renewal of the rural economy, and allowed me to see where the rural might lead the way for a new economic future where communities and planet flourish.

Moments of significance:

- Space to consider the challenges and opportunities
- Articulated “What is the future economic of the land?” as a key question to answer



Planting the seeds of curiosity

As 2021 gave way to huge economic shifts nation-wide, I turned my attention to discovery, finding the people trying to make change happen. Engaging in both traditional research and natural encounters, I shaped my understanding and grew curiosity for the notion that rural economies could lead the way. I also hosted a series of events to catalyse more philanthropy for the common good in the UK.

Moments of significance:

- Met with 70+ landowners, activists, social entrepreneurs and land agents
- Read large volumes of research + thought pieces



Developing a fertile root system

I chose to explore the question and required response more deeply. I identified the need for a new imagination for the land. Many of the land owners I was meeting with felt overwhelmed and ready to sell.

Moments of significance:

- Seven people with land sought conversations with me about the future of their land
- All but one of those people sold (or gave back) their land, due to lacking the resources and network to innovate



Nurturing the sprouts of creativity

After dynamic period of exploration and discovery, I took time to slow down to create this work. Just as tender young plants need care, innovative ideas require nurturing, and a proposal for a new imagination for the land could not be achieved without time spent pulling together the learning and showing the work of the discovery season.

Moments of significance:

- Took time to see the potential for new initiatives and identify areas that can change more rapidly
- Critical evaluation to weed out ideas that were not for this time or this place
- Producing this work



Harvesting the fruits of insight

This is the opportunity before us as we look to invest in these innovations designed to unleash a new imagination for the land.

Together, we can set the stage for a new season; one of hope, change and flourishing rural economies.

Barriers for (new) landowners

This work has particularly focused on new landowners or landowners wanting to do something new for the good of people and the planet. As they seek to do something new, these are some of the biggest barriers they face:

ISOLATION

Landowners are isolated and face the challenge of limited access to information, resources and support. Landowners, particularly new landowners, don't know other like-minded landowners and therefore are missing out on opportunities for collaboration, knowledge sharing and collective action. This reinforces a mindset of scarcity.



With weak links and sparse networks, their potential for transformative change remains untapped.

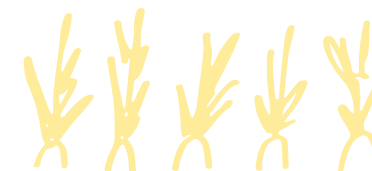
WEAK NETWORKS

Landowners are isolated and have sparse networks but the system as a whole suffers from weak networks. It is an interwoven web of connections that nourishes growth and possibility.

In the ecosystem, it is challenging to establish connections with relevant stakeholders, experts and organisations. Information and knowledge exchange platforms are hard to find and navigate due to siloed camps and competition. This creates a lack of interdisciplinary interaction and the cross-pollination of ideas, stifling creativity and hindering innovative breakthroughs.

SUPER COMPLEX

The Cynefin framework talks about the difference between simple, complicated, complex and chaotic problems. There are different approaches for addressing different types of problems in order to drive change. Change related to the land is uber complex due to the interplay between ecological sustainability, economic viability and social equity as it involves navigating diverse stakeholder interest, addressing historical and systemic challenges, adopting regenerative practices, ensuring food security, mitigating climate change, preserving cultural heritage and the list goes on.



There are landowners who are ready for something but are actually disconnected. There is a need to nurture a culture of collaboration, shared risk taking and experimentation.

SKILLS AND KNOWLEDGE GAP

Many new landowners have a deep desire to steward their land and nurture flourishing communities, however the land remains underutilised or farmed with damaging practices due to a lack of expertise or understanding across areas such as sustainable land management, renewable energy integration, community engagement, impact investment, regenerative economics, entrepreneurship etc. Bridging this gap through training programs and partnerships is essential to unlock their potential for transformative change.

SHORT RUNWAY

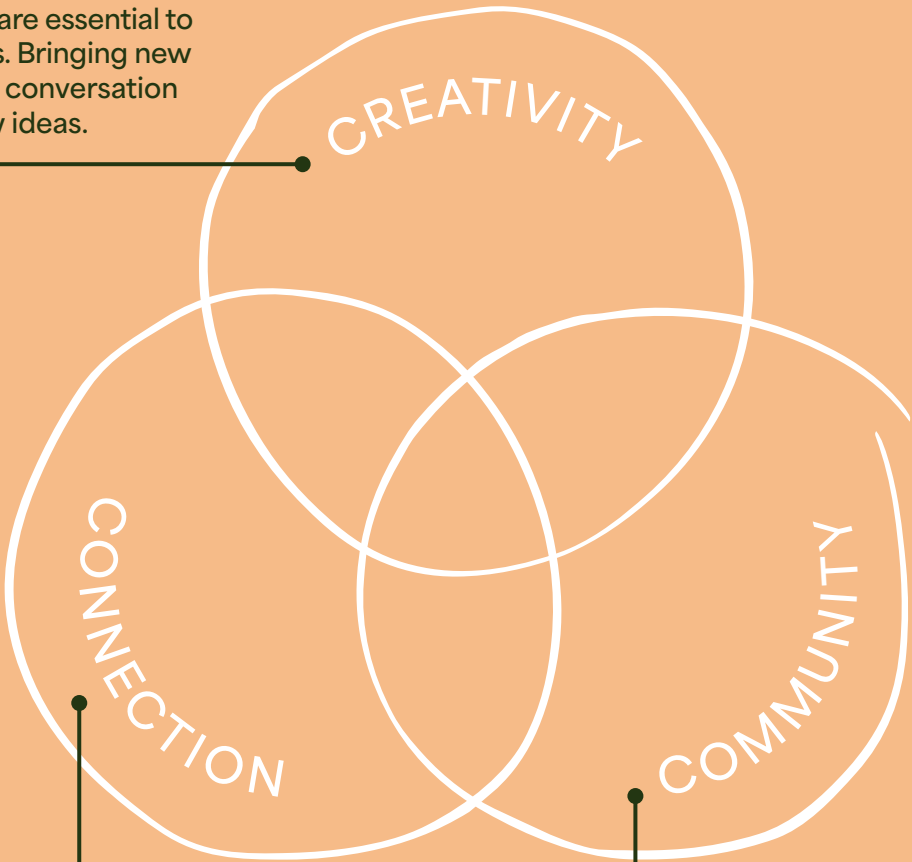
Many landowners are asset-rich and cash poor, which means they face a short runway, where they have valuable land assets but limited liquid capital to invest in innovative projects or even to cover their operational costs. To pivot away from unsustainable land practices in itself takes investment, to let the land rest takes investment etc. This financial constraint hinders their capacity to explore sustainable and community-focused solutions.

Time for change

For a new economic future for the land, where people and the planet flourish, it will demand that community, creativity and a profound connection to the land converge.

It's how we will sow the seeds of a sustainable future, cultivate better food systems and innovative economies. It's not just a Venn diagram, it's the blueprint for us thriving in harmony with the planet.

The right ideas are essential to solve real issues. Bringing new people into the conversation also brings new ideas.



We need to recommit to a connection to the land, a rooted sense of place. Knowing where our food comes from, fighting the climate crisis and rebuilding our systems for the common good.

Connection to others is vital to return a sense of belonging. True community will produce social structures that work for all. As people become more connected to the land, basic needs will be met in new ways. And healthy food systems will help people to live more closely together.

THE HOPE ON THE HORIZON

Solution-oriented approach

THE METHODOLOGY

To truly foster innovation, we must dismantle the barriers that are facing us, break down silos and embrace a culture of collaboration.

CONNECTING

CATALYSING

CREATING

By fostering and nurturing connections and creating spaces for diverse perspectives to converge, we invite the emergence of fresh ideas, unconventional paths and solutions that spark transformation. In doing so, we break down silos and create opportunities to connect seemingly unrelated people and ideas in ways that spark innovation.

Together, we shape a brighter future by tapping into the power of collaboration and collective wisdom.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

HOLISTIC

We don't strive to see 'the small picture'. It's the big one that is so important. We recognise that effective change may not be compartmentalised. We consider the interconnectedness and interdependence of various factors and systems, looking for the root causes that need to be addressed, striving for comprehensive and sustainable solutions. We recognise that we must take into account economic, environmental and social dimensions to create lasting positive change at both individual and systemic levels.

ALIGNMENT

To develop new solutions, we must work together, but often people can come to the table with a combination of conflicting or divergent goals or interests. We acknowledge that diversity is needed for a rich exchange of ideas that ultimately leads to better outcomes, but, without alignment, the risk of conflict is high. When there is alignment, resources and efforts can be pooled more efficiently, avoiding duplication of work and maximising the impact of interventions. It promotes synergy along diverse actors, enabling them to complement each other's strengths and address complex social challenges more effectively.

THE FRINGES ARE FERTILE

Innovation, creativity and new ideas often emerge from the periphery of established systems, norms or mainstream thinking. We don't want to just tweak what is but to truly seek transformation. Unconventional perspectives, diverse voices and alternative approaches found on the fringes of society or disciplines can be fertile ground for generating transformative and ground-breaking ideas.

COMMON GOOD PERSPECTIVE

Committed to finding solutions that are good for the collective well-being and benefit of all of society. Our innovations are focused on fostering inclusion and justice, promoting the flourishing of people and the planet. Fostering a common good perspective aligns incentives towards shared goals, minimising conflicting interests and prioritising the well being of all, thereby mitigating the impact of mixed incentives.

Opportunity and innovation spaces

To accelerate meaningful system change, we must invest strategically and creatively. There are a few opportunity spaces that, if we acted strategically, would have a significant impact and ripple effect. I am hoping we can harness this moment to innovate and harness the untapped potential to create lasting positive impact for society and the environment.

The key opportunity spaces identified are:

- Development
- Rural entrepreneurship
- New, dense networks
- Narrative change



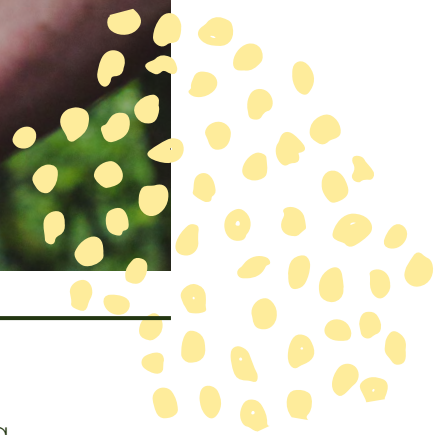
DEVELOPMENT

Development can be a pivotal solution for attracting investment to the land by creating opportunities for increased economic activity, improved infrastructure and housing. In particular, housing is part of the solution – integrating housing within sustainable land use and regenerative agriculture strategies in the UK can bring capital and accelerate a mixed economy for the land. It can foster rural economic development, support the agricultural workforce, enhance local food systems and encourage land stewardship.

RURAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP

There are many social entrepreneurs looking to start enterprises that carry a holistic vision and imagination for the land. However, many of them do not own or have access to land. Supporting and empowering social entrepreneurs will contribute to economic development, community resilience, sustainable rural revitalisation, social innovation, and will ensure effective leadership succession. By providing them with necessary resources, mentorship and opportunities, we can create a vibrant and inclusive rural landscape for the present and future generations.





NEW, DENSE NETWORKS

Dense networks are characterised by strong connections and robust interactions among the members, forming a vibrant ecosystem that fosters collaboration, knowledge exchange and collective impact. Building social infrastructure will take resourcing, as it will take time and talent to cultivate and strengthen the connections between individuals, organisations and communities.



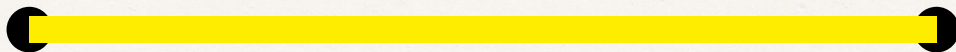
NARRATIVE CHANGE

There is vital work to be done to change the narrative around the environment and the economy. Stories have the power to reshape minds, ignite movements and drive system change. We need to broaden and ignite the public imagination and narrative change work is part of how we can do that.

ACTUAL

PROJECT

IDEAS



PROJECT MENU

Based on the opportunity and innovation spaces there are several strategic and creative projects that, if they were developed and launched, could have a ripple effect in the ecosystem.

With adequate resources, any or all of these ideas could be developed and delivered complete with impact reporting.



WOODLAND DINNER

I have experienced over and over again the power of a great dinner. There is nothing like a generously hosted and curated strategic dinner event to connect across silos and ignite new partnerships.

The Philanthropy for the Common Good Dinners serve as a prototype for the event I envision in The Woodland Dinner. We would gather British makers, impact investors, foundations, land owners, government leaders, trusts and patrons to catalyse several innovations and collaborations.

✂
RSVP

YOU  ARE INVITED

The table is set, will you join us?

☐ YES, I'M IN ☐ THINKING ON IT

SPRING
2 0 2 4

FUNDING TOOL

There is a need for an accessible and user-friendly funding tool that helps landowners understand the types of capital available to them and how to access them.

This tool will demystify the diverse avenues of capital available for various development projects, such as affordable eco housing developments, regenerative agricultural projects, green infrastructure and more. By providing a resource that maps and clarifies funding options, we could bridge the gap between visionary projects and the financial means to bring them to life.





COHORTS

Joining a cohort would help break down the isolation landowners feel, while connecting them to ideas and partnerships they otherwise would not be able to access.

GoodStart:

A cohort of landowners to help ignite their imagination, build their confidence and capacity, work with them to design strategic plans, cultivate vital partnerships and unleash the full potential of their lands. The cohort will foster a culture of shared knowledge and collective growth, propelling the sustainable stewardship of our precious landscapes into the future.

Make Good:

There are a number of social entrepreneurs poised for action who want to launch projects on the land but do not have access. Make Good is a week-long accelerator that would help sharpen their ideas and get them ready for a pitch to a cross-sector gathering of landowners, investors and journalists to get these ideas off the ground quickly and with greater chance of long-term success. A Make Good specifically for social entrepreneurs who want to launch rural land-based enterprises.



ONE FARM JOURNEY

Imagine a captivating 'Future Landscapes Expo' showcasing the visionary transformation of a farm into a thriving mixed economy community.



The exhibition would feature architectural models, virtual reality experiences and interactive displays depicting innovative housing designs, sustainable art studios, fields full of food, agrarian businesses and lush new woodland designed to enhance biodiversity.

Visitors would be immersed in the concept of self-sustaining ecosystem where food-growing initiatives and organic farming coexist harmoniously with charming cafes and restaurants, all highlighting the integration of nature, art and sustainable living in this vibrant and forward-thinking community. It would be done in such a way to galvanise investors into specific projects, government to advocate for such countryside development and it would also provide a blueprint for the process to go from the idea/blueprint to it being a reality so that landowners know where to start.



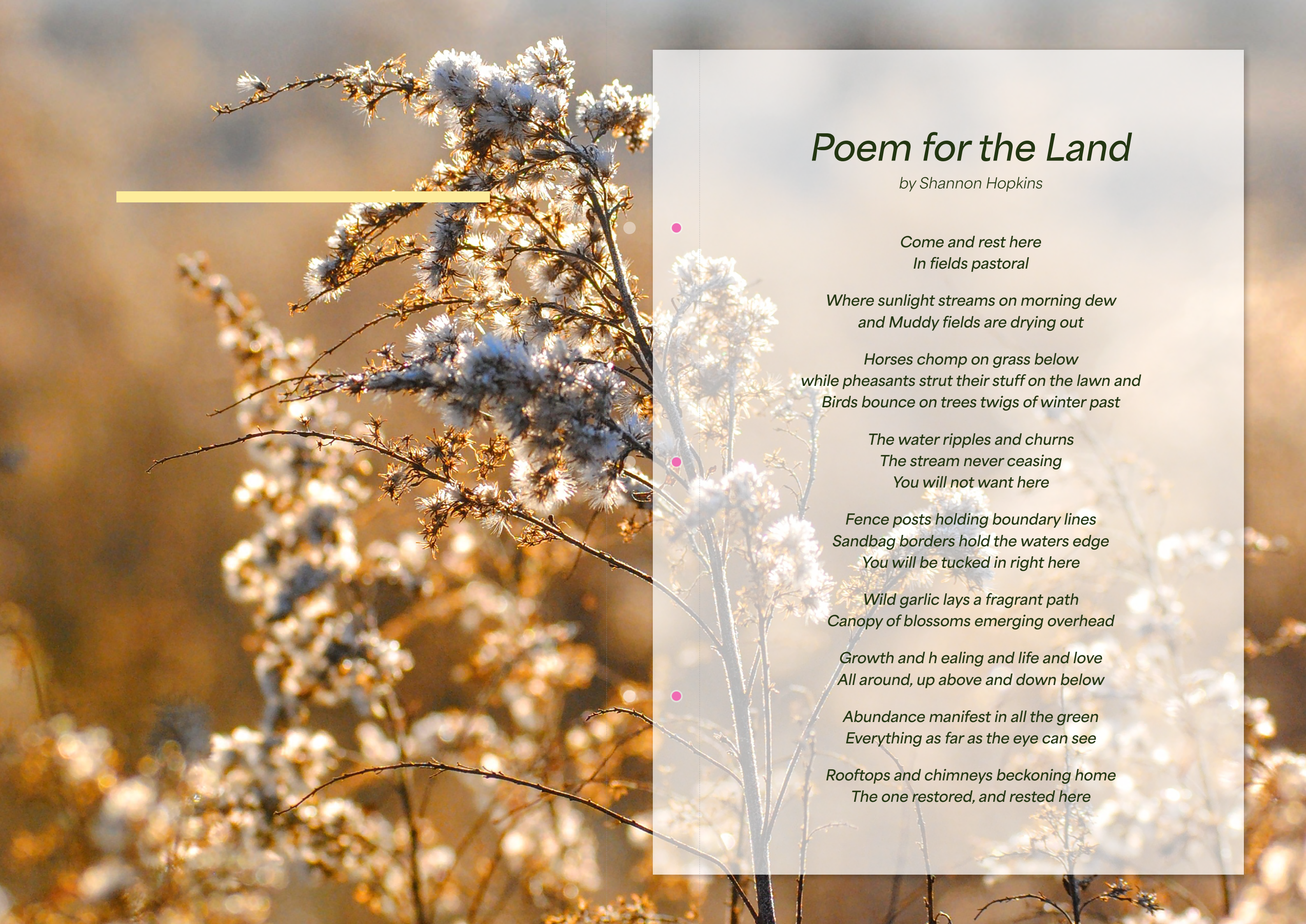
STORYTELLING GATHERING

Imagine a gathering where the power of storytelling becomes a force for change in the world of farming and rural land.

Our vision is to create a dynamic space, akin to the warmth of a camp fire, where writers, filmmakers, storytellers and campaigners converge to weave narratives that ignite hope and inspire action. Out of this gathering, multiple new stories would be told on a variety of platforms, working to shift the narrative and increase the imagination of what is possible in the world.

*“The clearest way
into the universe is
through a forest”*

JOHN MUIR
Mountaineer



Poem for the Land

by Shannon Hopkins

*Come and rest here
In fields pastoral*

*Where sunlight streams on morning dew
and Muddy fields are drying out*

*Horses chomp on grass below
while pheasants strut their stuff on the lawn and
Birds bounce on trees twigs of winter past*

*The water ripples and churns
The stream never ceasing
You will not want here*

*Fence posts holding boundary lines
Sandbag borders hold the waters edge
You will be tucked in right here*

*Wild garlic lays a fragrant path
Canopy of blossoms emerging overhead*

*Growth and healing and life and love
All around, up above and down below*

*Abundance manifest in all the green
Everything as far as the eye can see*

*Rooftops and chimneys beckoning home
The one restored, and rested here*

Moving forward



*“We’ve managed our way into
this mess we need to manage
our way out of it”*

NICK ADAMS
Environmental Ecologist

*We have an historic opportunity to do something,
and we’ve got this unarguable crisis that gives us
a chance to think about what kind of world we
want. I believe in the power of the human spirit,
and that we have the potential to reimagine just
about anything.*

We won’t get there without stepping out and taking risks, working together, or by business as usual.

We must develop new paradigms of mutuality with people, land and place. Without renewed philanthropy and new ways of engaging with creation, stewarding the land, and living out of our enough-ness, we will continue on a trajectory of individualism, bigger is better, winner takes all and whatever else at all costs. We must have new networks, new interventions and new experiments that help bring another world into being, where we see the healing of all creation and the flourishing of all humanity.

We need to catalyse collaborations, relationships and conversations that deliver the experiments and innovations that lead to a more sustainable, healthy future.

I believe the time is now. We cannot wait. I’m ready to roll up my sleeves and start working.

WILL YOU JOIN ME?

*In order to move forward, a team is needed,
as well as infrastructure, then I can begin
developing and building the projects.*

This work can not move forward without patrons and partners. Would you join me by:

- Investing in one or more of the projects
- Becoming an anchor partner as I begin to move forward with this work
- Investing so a team can be built



It is my firm belief that by investing now that over the next 18 months to two years:

- 2-3 game changing interventions will be discovered
- Dozens of existing and new solutions will be strengthened and created
- New initiatives will be catalysed and new networks will be nurtured

And the impact will be the beginning of wide-scale systemic change.



