

Visit to iFarm 23 September 2023

We were delighted to be invited to a workshop run by [iFarm](#) for grass roots movers and shakers, introducing the [Community Climate Action](#) Planning approach for developing ideas for parish-level climate action plans. The session was in essence a condensed taster for the full suite of CCAP workshops that iFarm offer to groups, which would normally take 16 hours to complete, at the end of which groups can take away a Community Climate Action Plan to implement. It was held as part of iFarm's Visitor and Open Day.

Our taster session was attended by 16 people from a diverse range of backgrounds and communities, including Woodbridge, Kessingland, and Bury St Edmunds, among others. Our first task, working in five small mixed groups, was to scope out stakeholders that would have an interest in or play a part in delivering a Plan for a given community (a common observation made at this point was that almost everyone is, in some way or another, a stakeholder), followed by discussion of what our values were and identifying those which were sufficiently mutual to require reflection in any Plan developed. Thirdly, we were tasked with identifying the various benefits to health and wellbeing that we would want our Plan to deliver for our community, and finally identify a concise set of themes that we agreed a Plan should seek to deliver against. At the end of the session, each small group relayed back to all attendees the key points from each segment of their own workshop discussions.



iFarm work with SALC, EALC, and NALC (the Associations of local councils for Suffolk, Essex, and Norfolk respectively) to promote the use of Community Climate Action Planning to more parish councils across our region. If you are interested in having a CCAP workshop held for your community group or parish council, please contact info@ifarm.land to enquire.

iFarm is a volunteer-led Community Benefit Society (CBS), operating in six parishes on the borders of Norfolk and Suffolk. Its purpose is to combat loneliness and social isolation. Membership is locally rooted; volunteers with a vision for rural regeneration, led by a restorative approach to agricultural and horticultural business, scientific, educational and cultural activities.



After the workshop, we were treated to a tour of the farm, led by volunteer Brian, who talked us through the development of iFarm whilst showing us around.

When they acquired the site, a former pig farm, one of the first tasks they faced was to clear up and deal with the large quantity of barbed wire, washing machines, corrugated pig pens, and other abandoned scrap metal and rubbish that had accumulated on the site. The meadow that has emerged from the land formerly affected by the rubbish is now home to an abundance of voles, which in turn feed the sparrowhawks, kestrels, marsh harriers, and owls that the team have seen preying here.



They are in the course of installing a small solar PV array, which will power the static caravans and also the pump for drawing water from the well for irrigation, which in turn will incorporate a 5 m³ water tank for storage. The construction of the structure to support the solar array incorporates and repurposes the corrugated roof of one of the old pig pens. iFarm also plan to reconstruct and put into good use an old barn that has been kept dismantled in a neighbours' garage since the 1980s, subject to planning permission. Waste not, want not.

As a former pig farm, the fragile soil had been destroyed through many annual cycles of being turned to dust in the summers and slurry in the winters. 20 tonnes of green compost is being brought in from Bury to add to the beds, the greenery will be cut and the roots left in the soil to help the soil to recondition.



The farm includes a hop garden, which will support the microbrewery at the community pub The White Horse in Thelnetham nearby. Plums, cherries, pears, and quinces for the community orchard will all suit the local soil; it will be accessible to the public, which was their intention anyway as well as being a requirement of the funding.

The first serious attempt at growing has been that of a wide variety of peppers, which have gone down well at The White Horse.

This has all been achieved without needing to involve the local council, with funds coming from the Queen's Green Canopy scheme. They also receive mutual support from the brilliant community project based in Bury, Still Good Food, which helps to find users for food past its sell-by date – who have provided iFarm with local tomato plants to help raise a bit of income.

The focus of the farm is the conservation of woodland and nature, rather than producing food at scale, however this is as much about experience and demonstrating to others the possibilities.



