

Rural Report

A monthly newsletter focusing on issues of rural life and farming of relevance to the work of the Church of England in the Diocese of St Edmundsbury and Ipswich.

■ Information is drawn from organisations connected with the countryside (in its widest sense) within Suffolk and beyond.

■ The newsletter will produce brief reports giving factual information on a range of issues. Items may be of general interest or provide opportunity for prayer.

■ If more details are needed on any of the topics mentioned, contact brianrobertchester@gmail.com or call 01572 757600



Issue 154: February 2026

■ **Farmers are being encouraged** to spend half an hour observing the biodiversity on their land by taking part in the Big Farmland Bird Count. The event's organiser, the Game & Wildlife Conservation Trust, is keen to attract more nature-friendly farmers, after numbers taking part plateaued. The Big Farmland Bird Count runs from February 6 to 22. Farmers are asked to spend 30 minutes at a spot on their land counting the numbers and species of birds they see.

■ *"Local Nature Recovery Strategies are one of the most ambitious tools to emerge from the Environment Act 2021. Designed to map out where nature restoration should happen, they offer a practical way to target environmental investment where it will have the greatest impact. Suffolk launched its LNRS on the same day as Norfolk, cementing a joint approach that recognises the ecological continuity between the two counties."* CLA east adviser Peter Ewin

■ **The Rt Revd Dr Joanne Grenfell**, newly enthroned Bishop of St Edmundsbury and Ipswich, came equipped for rural life with a pair of purple wellingtons – a gift from her previous base in the London borough of Tower Hamlets. Bishop Joanne told the *East Anglian Daily Times*: "They knew I was really willing to learn about farming in Suffolk and they took it seriously and thought: 'We'll buy her some wellies.'"

■ **A group of Suffolk farmers** blocked the Port of Felixstowe in a protest against taxes and cheap imports. Eight tractors were used to block both entrances to the port. Spencer Campbell, a farm worker from Stowmarket, said: "We have certainly caused a lot of disruption. Whether it will get us anywhere I don't know. This won't be a one-off - there'll be more of this and more disruption." *East Anglian Daily Times*

■ *"It does feel, at last, as though we are making some progress. In the last decade, attitudes and awareness have shifted. The public is now concerned about ultra-processed foods while the importance of reversing the decline in biodiversity and the focus on soils as crucial to the future of humanity, are all issues that many people are engaged with. Farmer attitudes are changing too. We may sometimes be sceptical about the 'regenerative farming', but it's a wave that is finally rolling in our direction."* Helen Browning, chief executive as the Soil Association enters its 80th year.

■ **Graham Miles, Suffolk agricultural chaplain** for the past six years, has launched a new group, Farmers Support UK, through which he plans to develop his work with the farming community. Graham told the *East Anglian Daily Times*: "I get farmers across the country contacting me and my licence only covers me for Suffolk. I'm also dealing with MPs and I have to be careful what I say because of representing the church." Having relinquished the chaplaincy, he says the new role will allow more freedom and flexibility. He added that he was 'really thankful for all the support the diocese has given me over my past six years.'

■ *"Hedgerows are a defining feature of the British countryside, offering far more than aesthetic appeal. When managed with care, they provide a wealth of ecological benefits and contribute meaningfully to sustainable land management."*

Isabella Dreist, placement student, Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust
<https://www.nlaf.uk/Library/content/Detail.aspx?ctID=ZWVhNzBIY2QtZWJjNi00YWZiLWEIMTAatNWExOTFiMijjOWU1&rID=MzQyNzc=>

■ **Scientists at the James Hutton Institute** have discovered that a gene that they called HvST1 may play a key role in their quest to safeguard the future of barley. The barley industry, which faces challenges from climate change, soil depletion and pest pressure, needs varieties that are hardier, more productive and better suited to diverse growing conditions. James Hutton Institute (2026)

■ **A rural rodent survey** by BASF Pest Control Solutions has revealed that resistance to rodenticides, the increasing complexity of effective control programmes and recent warmer winters have led to a rise in rat and mice infestations across UK farms.

This newsletter was initiated under the guidance of the Diocesan Rural Affairs Group set up as a means of identifying current rural issues and considering how the church should respond.