

This land is your land – facing change in a rural county

### **Thoughts at the end of the discussion day - by Bishop James Bell**

Mike Keeble, who sadly died in 2015, was a respected commentator, friend and ambassador of farming. Mike wrote a piece in a local newspaper on our first - or perhaps the second - Plough Sunday service in Ripon Cathedral. He was very appreciative, but added that we could have done with fewer psalms and more opportunity for farmers to air the real and pressing issues for the rural economy! Well Carlisle Cathedral has certainly done what was required, and not just for the farmers, but for so many involved in rural life in these parts.

One of the key observations was made by Caz Graham when she said, “we need to get smarter at finding the common ground.” That must involve enabling a good conversation, engaging all those who have something to contribute in the conversation, and ideally discerning appropriate concerted action. Might the church have an on-going role in getting people together? If so, the question is how to attract a greater number of practitioners, such as farmers or key players in the tourist industry. In my mind there is also the question of whether the church has a role in raising the issues locally as well as through the bishops in the House of Lords. Caz Graham's excellent contribution also prompts the question of the role of the media in telling the story of the land so that there is greater understanding of the land and those who work it and those who care for the environment and the issues of sustainable communities, access to services, infrastructure as well as the particular challenges posed by Brexit.

So much energy has been generated, so much conversation has taken place, so many views exchanged; the question we are left with is how to take this on. That is a question about what outcomes there will be, a question about making the significant investment of time and talent for this excellent conference worthwhile. The Archbishop asked how we are to engender hope when it is easy to feel helpless; how to be doers as opposed to feeling done to: how to realise our own capacity to bring about change. These are questions for us all. Today makes it clear that the Cathedral is ready to be a willing partner in all this.