



The Fordhall Community Land Initiative Ltd.  
Fordhall Farm  
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## **A new farm for the community**

Fordhall Organic Farm, near Market Drayton became England's first community owned farm back in 2006. It is set to double in size thanks to the generous gift of a second farm. The farm being gifted is not in Shropshire, but incredibly is 200 miles away in Devon.

West Town Farm, near Exeter is a 170-acre organic beef and sheep enterprise. But like Fordhall it hosts a number of community activities. Arts, community gardening, camping, weddings and community events all sit alongside farm shop.

West Town Farm owner Andy Bragg said "Farms should be at the heart of rural communities, which is why I've encouraged local people to make use of West Town Farm. As I approach retirement, I wanted to ensure these links continued, which is why I decided to give my Farm to Fordhall Community Land Initiative."

Fordhall Organic Farm was saved from development in 2006 thanks to funds raised by 8000 shareholders, who together form the Community Benefit Society 'Fordhall Community Land Initiative'. Charlotte Hollins, General Manager at Fordhall Community Land Initiative said "The similarities between West Town and Fordhall are striking. Both are organic, pasture-for-life livestock farms and have community at our heart. We both want to show a different direction for farming and understand the importance of retaining those connections to the land both within our communities as well as the soil. We have also both been described as slightly quirky, different and even crack-pot at times! Dad (late Arthur Hollins) and Andy are such similar characters."

"The charitable structure of Fordhall Community Land Initiative means that the amazing work begun by Andy in Devon can be continued and secured well into the future, alongside the work of Dad, at Fordhall. Both with local people fully involved in the process" explained Charlotte.

Transfer of the farm won't happen until 2027 to allow legal and governance structures to be finalised.

Existing staff at West Town, including Andy will all remain to continue the wonderful work nurturing both the farm and local community. The Fordhall Community Land Initiative will be on-hand to support and guide the team using nearly 20 years of experience in community farm ownership.

"I suppose some people will think it's strange to give my farm away. I don't want West Town Farm to be gobbled up by some giant agri-business. What I care about is that the farm's place in the community and locality. I want the farm to benefit everyone and I know that giving it to Fordhall Community Land Initiative will ensure this happens. Fordhall's values are strongly aligned and gifting West Town Farm to Fordhall will protect West Town Farm's mission and values. Although we are 200miles apart, the synergy between us means we are both on the same path. Learning together, supporting each other and playing a part in our local communities. Whether that is hosting school visits, art groups or barn dances etc, and the local community will always be welcome." said Andy.



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### **For more information**

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### **Websites**

[www.westtownfarm.co.uk](http://www.westtownfarm.co.uk)  
[www.fordhallfarm.com](http://www.fordhallfarm.com)

### **History of West Town**

West Town Farm has been owned by the Church of England for centuries. The Bragg family have been tenants since 1955, and Andy was offered the opportunity to buy it in 2022. Andy took over the tenancy in 1982 and farm turned organic in 1992. Meat produced is sold via a farm shop on site and online.

Andy Bragg is the third generation of his family to farm West Town Farm as tenants, and it was under his guardianship that the farm became organic in 1992. Healthy soil and wildlife habitats have been prioritised and protected since then.

The tenant farmers are Kate Sharp and Simon Higgins.

The farm is very much part of the local community, with regular open days, barn dances, school visits and weddings, a permissive path.

Andy is passionate about West Town Farm, its place in the local community and the land's organic future. He doesn't have children, and has been thinking about securing the farm's long term future for some time. He has now decided to gift West Town Farm to an organisation that shares his values and that will protect it for generations to come.

The organisation that Andy has chosen is the Fordhall Community Land Initiative, which is a charitable Community Benefit Society owned and run by over 8,000 members. The Society and its shareholders have owned Fordhall Organic Farm, near Market Drayton in Shropshire, since 2006. Andy has also been a shareholder since this time and is satisfied that Fordhall's mission and vision is aligned with his own.

The plan is for the farm's ownership to pass to Fordhall in the early part of 2027

The charity Organic Arts also runs from the site and will continue to do so in the future.

Both West Town and Fordhall Farm are part of the regenerative farming movement. This combines producing high quality, nutritious food with building biodiversity and soil health.

Visitors are welcome either to explore the farm trails or to attend the special events that regularly take place.

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Fordhall sits on the edge of Market Drayton, Shropshire. Once part of a large estate, the Hollins family were tenants for several generations. Arthur Hollins was an organic pioneer, turning the farm organic in the 1940s.

In 2005 the family was threatened with eviction by their distant landlord, with the farm disappearing under industrial development. A national campaign raised enough money to buy the 126 acres and in 2006 it became England's first community owned farm thanks to 8000 non-profit shareholders.

Since then it has thrived. Tenant farmer, Ben Hollins (Arthur Hollins' son), sells organic meat in a farm shop and runs a successful catering business. As the tenant at Fordhall Farm, his farming sits comfortably alongside other projects run by the Fordhall Community Land Initiative, including Care Farming, a youth project, educational visits, social prescribing, farm trails, glamping, weddings and a café for the numerous farm visitors.

Charlotte Hollins (Arthur Hollins' daughter) is General Manager of Fordhall Community Land Initiative. Her role also includes consultancy, supporting many other land-based organisations to become community-owned. Charlotte is also one of seven community leaders leading the We're Right Here Campaign for a Community Power Act.

### **Links between the farms**

Organic, pasture fed, community involvement and positive environmental action are clear links, but 200 miles separates the 2 farms. However, the community-ownership approach that has allowed Fordhall to thrive for 20 years can be adopted at West Town, with tweaks to respect local conditions

Andy Bragg has been a Fordhall shareholder from the start and has watched it develop, making several visits. When planning for West Town's future, Andy's options naturally included Fordhall. The common ethos of the two farms makes the distance between them almost irrelevant.

The charitable Community Benefit Society status enjoyed by Fordhall Community Land Initiative can be extended to West Town Farm, allowing new opportunities to be pursued and even more openings for people to become involved in farm life.

Community ownership of pubs, shops playing fields and farms has grown steadily over the past decades. It is a well-established model for businesses where profit isn't the sole motive. The village shop in Ide is community owned.

A benefit of community ownership can be to the tenant farmer. Modern tenancies are often short term (5 years or less) at Fordhall the tenant has a 100-year agreement which allows investment for time, energy and money in the business and similar arrangements can be made at West Town to safeguard livelihoods on the land.