



View of Lydling Farm, Shackleford

## Farming in the Surrey Hills

### **"Surrey doesn't do farming"**

– one could be excused for reaching that conclusion by looking at most books about farming in Britain. And yet it is farming that has shaped the landscape of the county.

A partial solution to this conundrum is that Surrey is a relatively small county, significant parts are urbanised (particularly to the north) and much of the agricultural land is only of medium quality – hence not lending itself to high yielding, intensive farming.

To put some numbers on this, England has about nine million hectares (ha) of agricultural land with an average farm size of 87ha. Surrey farms are much smaller, at 62ha.



Chalk downlands at Chipstead

If we focus on the Surrey Hills National Landscape, official data records 240 holdings covering about 14,000ha. But of these, half are less than 20ha and less than 20% are

A Beulah Speckled Face Ewe



over 100ha. In other words, we have a large percentage of small-holding units with very few people – apart from their owners – gaining employment there. Indeed, of the 683 people recorded, 217 are part time farmers, and 128 are part-time or casual workers. No wonder farming and agricultural employment doesn't make the headlines!

Of the 120 or so farms that keep livestock, only 5 are still dairy units. No pig farms are recorded and there are only 16 holdings left that regard themselves as "mixed farming". This highlights a need to specialise in one type of farming – and of course this brings its own risks such as disease, being hostage to global pricing and changes in political policies. The only other realistic options are giving up farming or diversifying.

Many of the challenges faced by our farmers are outside their direct control. For example, cereal producers may have little idea what the selling price of their crop may be when

it is harvested. An even more worrying issue for livestock farmers is that abattoirs are closing. This has become an acute issue for our producers. The local unit at Aldershot recently closed with animals now being taken to overworked facilities in Sussex and Kent. What do you do when you can't move cattle on from your farm and hence get product to market or income to pay the bills?

Faced with these, and other stresses, it is not surprising that farming has a high suicide rate nationally. Data suggests that three people in the UK farming and agricultural industry die by suicide every week (between 2 - 3% of all suicides in England and Wales) – and sadly that rate is rising. We need to support our farmers – the countryside would look very different without them.

Ken Bare

All photos by Gordon Jackson



Oilseed Rape on the Hogs Back

## Chairman's Views

### Stepping Down after Seven Years



Gatton Park

After seven fulfilling years as Chairman of the Surrey Hills Society, I will be stepping down at the next Annual General Meeting in October. It has been a real privilege to lead the Society through a period of significant growth and development. Thanks to the dedication of our volunteers, trustees and members, the Society is now more active than ever – delivering a wide range of events and community projects that celebrate and protect the unique landscape of the Surrey Hills.

With this increased level of activity, the trustees have taken the important decision to strengthen the Society's leadership. In addition to appointing a new Chairman, we will also be recruiting a part-time Chief Executive Officer. This new role will provide professional support to our volunteer team, helping to manage day-to-day operations and build long-term sustainability.

So much has happened during the last seven years, but for me, my enduring memory will be the many beautiful spots I have discovered along the way. Accompanying this article are photographs of some of my favourite places that I will always hold dear.

I look forward to continuing to support the Society in new ways after stepping down and I remain confident that with fresh leadership and additional capacity, the Society will continue to thrive and grow. Thank you all for your support and enthusiasm over the years – it has been an honour to serve as your Chairman.

*Gordon Jackson*



Frensham Little Pond



From the garden at Leith Hill Place



Denbies Hillside

## Meet our Trustee – Shauna Robinson

**“For the past two years, I’ve had the privilege of serving as a trustee of the Surrey Hills Society, and I have thoroughly enjoyed every minute.”**

As a partner in a global professional services firm in London and a proud resident of the Surrey Hills for the past 13 years, I feel incredibly fortunate to live, work, and raise my family in such a beautiful area. What continues to inspire me is the Society's unwavering commitment to conserving our precious landscape, supporting local businesses and farmers, and promoting the health and wellbeing benefits of time spent in nature. I'm constantly amazed at how much the Society

achieves with such limited resources – thanks to a small but passionate team and an incredible army of volunteers who carry out vital work such as hedge planting, scrub clearance, and maintaining safe trails. It has also been rewarding to see how effectively the Society collaborates with a wide range of partners – from Surrey County Council to the National Trust and Surrey Wildlife Trust – to deliver real impact across the National Landscape. If you live in the Surrey Hills and are looking for a fun, meaningful way to get involved, I warmly encourage you to get in touch, become a member or volunteer and be part of something truly special.



## Meet the Farmers

*Here, we profile six local farming families whose work exemplifies the diversity and resilience of agriculture in the region. They are all farmers with whom the Society has worked. We have planted many kilometres of hedge across the farms and helped with conservation whilst Pondtail, Titsey and Norbury Park have all helped with our Care Farm Project.*

*Farming in the Surrey Hills embodies a commitment to heritage, innovation, and stewardship within one of England's most cherished landscapes.*



**Angus Stovold of Lydling Farm in Shackleford** manages the renowned Rosemead Herd of pedigree Aberdeen Angus cattle, known for producing exceptional beef. Angus emphasises animal welfare and environmental sustainability, utilising traditional pastures that support regenerative practices and enhance biodiversity. The Society has helped plant over one and a quarter kilometres of native hedge. Angus has welcomed us to several Society events and in 2023 the Society held their first Bioblitz day at Lydling Farm.



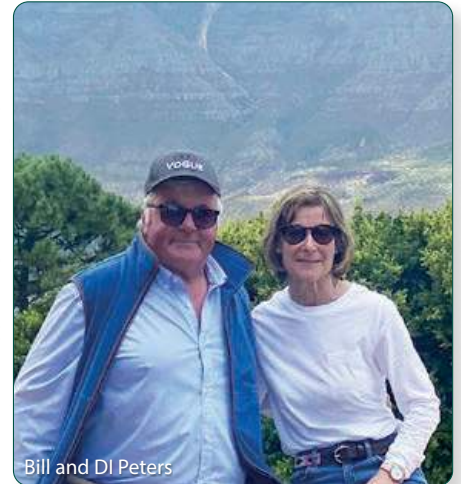
**Hugh Broom operates Sondes Place Farm** on the outskirts of Dorking, a mixed farm that integrates arable farming and cattle grazing with environmental management. Through the Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL) program, he has restored hedgerows, implemented conservation grazing, and improved wildlife habitats. His low-input, high-care farming system serves as a model for balancing productivity with landscape preservation. Hugh kindly hosted our very successful 2025 Chairman's Day.



**The Matthews family runs Manor Farm in Wotton**, managing 3,000 acres of owned and tenanted land with their son Christopher, who has shown a passion for agriculture since childhood. Laurence began restructuring the farm in 1989 to modernise operations. Paula established an accredited educational programme in 2007 and has since welcomed hundreds of local and inner-city school children each year to learn about farming. They have planted over 6 kilometres of hedge during the last few years working with the Society and many other groups of volunteers!



**Nellie Budd and her husband Keith operate Pondtail Farm in Brockham**, focusing on rearing Aberdeen Angus calves and maintaining a traditional farm environment. Their farm features free-range hens, pet ducks, and a thriving vegetable plot. Nellie is a key partner in our Care Farm Project, hosting therapeutic sessions that help individuals reconnect with nature and animals. Her compassionate approach has positively impacted many lives.



**Bill and Di Peters have managed Pitchfont Farm, part of the Titsey Estate**, for 39 years. The pedigree Sussex cattle graze the North Downs' rare chalk grasslands, contributing to biodiversity and landscape conservation. The Peters actively share their farming knowledge, welcoming visitors to learn about agriculture and sustainable land management.



**Mark Frost, tenant farmer at Norbury Park Farm**, has been a dedicated partner in our Society initiatives. From leading community hedge planting, funded through FiPL, to supporting inclusive care farm activities, Mark combines traditional livestock farming with a deep commitment to conservation, education, and community wellbeing.

**It has not been possible to include all the farmers with whom we work but these farmers are representative of the many that are the beating heart of the Surrey Hills, where passion, tradition, and innovation converge to ensure a vibrant future for farming and the countryside.**

Gordon Jackson

# Local Farms mean Business

## Stories from stallholders at Ripley Farmers' Market



*The Society attends various events during the year, including a regular visit to the popular Ripley Farmers' Market special summer market each year. Some of you may remember the Society's visit with our President, Chris Howard in 2023.*

The Society's stall at the market



Ripley Farmers' Market. Photos: Natalia Prykhodko

2025 is the 20th anniversary of the market – an achievement the volunteers who run it are very proud of. Since its very beginning, the market has always championed small local businesses and continues to provide an opportunity for them to sell their produce every month to shoppers who share their values of sustainability and low carbon footprint. They also particularly like to provide an outlet to sell for new start ups and this will often be small traders on local farms.

Although Ripley is located just outside the Surrey Hills National Landscape, many of the businesses selling with them are within the boundaries. Read their stories below:

**Nutfield Dairy, Brays Farm, South Nutfield.** Run by young tenant farmers Matthew and Betsie on behalf of the owners the Countryside Restoration Trust charity, they follow regenerative farming principles with their small herd of shorthorn cows that are 100% pasture fed. The milk they produce is used to create dairy products such as farm cheeses and a range of yoghurts. They are sold in selected local outlets as well as at farmers' markets.



Matthew Elphick and Betsie Edge

**Brightleigh Farm in Outwood** is another example of organic farming following Pasture for Life principles with 100% pasture fed cattle, rare breed pork and pasture fed chickens. They sell their meat and eggs at their on-site farm shop and at selected farmers' markets.



Julie Fitch Davey at Brightleigh Farm

Brightleigh have also diversified to small business set ups in their unused farm buildings where Julie Fitch Davey, ceramicist of **Ceramic Fitch**, transformed an old cow shed to create a workshop, space to sell what she makes as well as running classes in pottery throwing. Julie was able to fund this diversification with the help of Surrey County Council's Rural Prosperity Fund and she's in the process of applying for a second grant for further renovations. She sells her individually crafted pottery at selected farmers' markets including Ripley.

Another small business located on Brightleigh Farm is Batts Hill Distillers who are award-winning producers of gins, coffee liqueur and clementine vodka. They also sell via independent farm shops and at farmers' markets. Find out more about these initiatives on our visit to Brightleigh Farm on 14 August.



John Brown of Cheese on the Wey. Photo: Natalia Prykhodko

**Cheese on the Wey** is based at the Old Dairy at Pierrepont Farm, near Farnham. They are artisan cheesemakers using pasteurised milk from the farm whenever possible to produce a wide range of different cheeses. Cheesemaker John Brown is very proud of his range of cheeses and for the past two years they have won gold awards at the prestigious Melton Mowbray artisan cheese competition, up against 120 cheesemakers from all over the country. John is passionate about keeping everything to do with his craft as local and sustainable as possible. Shoppers can buy from the farm shop itself but they trade at many different farmers' markets all year round.

**Iain Spigs** is a smallholding in Ockham run by Iain Macarthur who cooks and sells his own barbecued sausages for sale at each farmers' market and other village celebrations. He always had an interest in animals and worked as a professional chef for some years. The pork for the restaurant he worked in was imported from Spain and it got him to thinking about whether he could develop his own small business to provide locally-sourced meat. He now has an award-winning sausage and pork business from his smallholding and loves nothing more than being able to feed his family with a flavoursome roast that he knows has a healthy provenance. Stallholders and shoppers to the market are also fans and queue up especially on cold winter mornings to buy his hot treats!



Iain Macarthur of Iain Spigs. Photo: Natalia Prykhodko

**The Hairy Pig Company** is based at Hollybush Farm, Wood Street in Guildford and has been a smallholding since the 1700s. It is now being restored to fulfil a vision of developing the buildings and 4 acres of land fit for purpose in the 21st century. Luke and Krisz are behind these ideas with sheep, pigs, goats and poultry and a few more unconventional animals such as emus, parrots and kookaburras. Sheep are the main breeds for meat production, whether it's lamb, hogget or mutton. They sell lamb at farmers' markets so the name 'The Hairy Pig Company' can be confusing but it's a reference to the herd of Mangalitza pigs that reside at the farm. This is a breed from Krisz's native Hungary and are renowned for their curly coats, stripy piglets and exceptional taste. The prime pigs take up to two years to mature and produce a marbled fatty pork. They are kept in relatively low numbers in the UK so they are aiming to slowly build a herd of important male and female bloodlines.

Luke and Krisz started at Ripley Farmers' Market in September 2023 and have become popular with both regular and new customers each month. They love hearing feedback and recipe ideas from customers and really enjoy the community feel in a beautiful location and they say it's their favourite market!

*Diane Cooper*



Luke Gates from Hollybush Farm. Photo: Natalia Prykhodko

# A Landmark Moment for Nature in the Surrey Hills

It's not often that we can say, hand on heart, that something truly historic has taken place in our landscape – but the declaration of the Wealden Heaths National Nature Reserve (NNR) on 27 June 2025 is exactly that. Just a short journey from London, the reserve is already a haven for walkers and wildlife lovers.

As Rob Fairbanks, Director of the Surrey Hills National Landscape, says: "This is a transformative designation... and a testament to the robust partnership driving it."



Covering a remarkable 2,765 hectares of heathland, woodland, and grassland, this new reserve combines the Thursley National Nature Reserve with 2,240 acres of partner managed land and marks a transformative moment for nature recovery in the Surrey Hills. It is the largest NNR in the county and the ninth to be launched as part of the King's Series of National Nature Reserves, a legacy initiative creating or expanding 25 such reserves by 2027.

At its heart is the iconic Devil's Punch Bowl, steeped in folklore and literary history, inspiring the likes of Tennyson and Conan Doyle. But while stories of old are etched into this landscape, so too are the tracks of nightjars, sand lizards, adders, and natterjack toads, all of which will benefit from the long-term protection and coordinated care this designation brings.



What makes this achievement so meaningful is the partnership of nine organisations working hand-in-hand – from Natural England and the National Trust to local authorities, conservation charities and private landowners. At the opening ceremony, Marian Spain, the Chief Executive of Natural England particularly highlighted the unique participation of the Hampton Estate, a working farm, as one of the partners.

As Molly Biddell of the Hampton Estate puts it:

"We are so proud and excited to be a part of the Wealden Heaths National Nature Reserve. This recognition reflects how precious our Surrey heathlands are, and how important it is that as land managers we all work together to protect these unique habitats. At Hampton Estate, we feel privileged to be managing Puttenham Common as part of our farming business, using conservation grazing, woodland management and shared stewardship to increase biodiversity and create a nature-loving community."

The work of the Biddell family is a shining example of how farming, conservation, and community can align – delivering benefits for nature, climate, and people alike.

Gordon Jackson



## Regenerative Farming in the Surrey Hills

### A Hopeful Future

Regenerative farming is an emerging approach to land management that goes beyond sustainability. It actively restores soil health, boosts biodiversity, improves water retention, and builds climate resilience – helping both nature and farmers thrive.

In the Surrey Hills, where mixed farming has long shaped a cherished landscape of woods, fields, and hedgerows, regenerative techniques are gaining momentum. Practices like reduced tillage, crop rotation, cover cropping, and agroforestry are helping restore ecosystems while enhancing food security.

This shift is vital. The region faces real threats: soil degradation, water run-off, declining pollinator populations, and economic pressure on small farms. The emerging Surrey Hills National Landscape Management Plan places farming at the heart of a 75-year vision for a thriving, nature-rich landscape, promoting agri-environment schemes, skills training, and policies that support sustainable land use.

Crucial to this vision is the Making Space for Nature programme – a collaborative initiative led by local landowners. It focuses on creating connected wildlife corridors, improving water quality, and restoring natural habitats across farmed and managed land.

A key part of this work is monitoring indicator species – birds, insects, and plants that signal ecological health. Species such as the lapwing, turtle dove and purple emperor butterfly show when nature is recovering. To highlight their importance, the Surrey Hills Society commissioned a series of artworks depicting these indicator species which can be seen across the Surrey Hills.

Regenerative farming, coupled with joined-up conservation, offers a hopeful path forward. By working with farmers to heal the land, we can ensure a resilient, beautiful, and productive Surrey Hills for generations to come.

*Gordon Jackson*



*Paintings created by an 'Our Time' artist at HMP Send, taking part in a programme delivered by Watts Gallery Trust and funded by the Michael Varah Memorial Fund.*



Sam Jones

## Sam Jones joins our Project Team

As well as providing support for our existing work, Sam is working with Kate Bannister, the Society's Volunteer Co-ordinator to create a new strand of our volunteering that looks specifically at improving access to the Surrey countryside for all. We're always looking for new volunteers, so sign up to receive our volunteer newsletters that come out regularly. Please email us at [volunteering@surreyhillssociety.org](mailto:volunteering@surreyhillssociety.org) to join the mailing list.

Sam has already been joined by some volunteers in waymarking the National Landscape's promoted cycle and walking routes (Cycle Surrey Hills and Rail to Ramble) and over the months ahead will be looking to build a volunteer workforce to support this year-round work. A number of accessibility

At the end of February, the Society welcomed its latest recruit for its project work, Sam Jones. Sam is the Society's Senior Project Manager, and is responsible for overseeing the National Lottery Heritage Fund Growing Together project and our conservation volunteering work. With more than 10 years working for charities and the environment sector, Sam joins us from Surrey Hills National Landscape team where he was Access Lead. There he led on projects such as the new boardwalk at Frensham Great Pond and the new access path and accessibility improvements at Pierrepont Farm.



At Radius, Denbies Vineyard. Photo: Sam Jones



Exploring Denbies with the Surrey Coalition of the Disabled. Photo: Sam Jones












improvement projects are already underway, such as support for the Hills to Harbour Community Rail Partnership. This involves auditing and the creation of two accessible walks from Haslemere and Godalming stations. We're also in discussion with the North Downs Way National Trails office about supporting accessibility improvements along the Surrey section of the route and with our own Surrey Hills National Landscape team about the redevelopment of some promoted routes for equestrians. It's a busy and exciting time as we develop this new strain of work for the Society, which as well as making the Surrey Hills more inviting for more people, is also likely to generate new streams of revenue. Watch out for more updates over the coming months as well as opportunities to volunteer with us.





# Events programme August to September 2025

Below is a brief list of planned events we are running.

There is much more detail on our website and a link to a booking form which needs to be filled in whether an event is free or has a cost.

Our free walk every first Sunday of the month still needs to be booked.

DATE	EVENT DETAIL
<b>Sunday 3 August (am)</b> 	<b>Explore Pirbright</b> We will enjoy an easy and interesting walk with all round colour and the largest cemetery in the UK.
<b>Wednesday 6 August (am)</b> 	<b>Visit to Langley Vale</b> A guided walk with Langley Vale guide and nature specialist, David Hatcher, to discover the largest of four Centenary Woods with beautiful sculptures that commemorate World War I.
<b>Thursday 14 August (pm)</b> 	<b>Visit to Brightleigh Farm</b> A private visit to this family run farm where they are passionate about rearing healthy animals. A talk will be followed by a look around the farm and then we will enjoy a BBQ.
<b>Thursday 21 August (am/pm)</b> 	<b>Sayers Croft</b> Enjoy a tour of this beautiful historic site that was first used as an evacuee camp during World War II and is now a childrens' activity centre. Our tour will finish with lunch.
<b>Monday 1 September (am)</b> 	<b>Chilworth Gunpowder Mills walk as part of Guildford Walkfest (GWF) Launch</b> Join our President and Chairman of Guildford Walkfest, Chris Howard for the launch of this month-long festival. The launch will be followed by a short walk through the Gunpowder Mills site.
<b>Thursday 4 September (am)</b> 	<b>GWF Walking the Fox Way</b> Join our Vice President Ken Bare on this free 3.5 mile walk from Worplesdon to Normandy.
<b>Sunday 7 September (am)</b> 	<b>Explore Box Hill</b> Join our Chairman, Gordon Jackson, on a circular walk around Box Hill.
<b>Friday 12 September (am/pm)</b> 	<b>GWF Walking the North Downs Way</b> Join Chris Howard & Ken Bare on this 14 mile walk from Guildford to Dorking.
<b>Wednesday 24 September (am)</b> 	<b>Exploring Denbies hillside as part of Dorking Walkfest</b> Join Chris Howard on a walk from Dorking to Denbies and along a short section of the North Downs Way, learning about the history of the area.
<b>Thursday 25 September (am)</b> 	<b>Explore Ash and Lakeside Nature Reserve</b> Join Ken Bare and Chris Howard on this 2.5 mile walk.
<b>SAVE THE DATE</b> <b>Saturday 18 October (am/pm)</b> 	<b>Annual General Meeting at Hampton Estate and lunch</b> Following our AGM join the Hampton Estate famer to discover the workings of this historic estate followed by lunch.

 Family friendly  
  1st Sunday Walk of the Month (free)  
 Dog friendly but kept on a short lead throughout the walk  
  Signposting for events  
 am – morning event   pm – afternoon event   am/pm covers both morning and afternoon

*When booking yourself on a walk please make sure that you are fit enough to cope with the category stipulated.*

 Easy  
  Moderate  
  Challenging

**FOR FURTHER INFORMATION** [visit our website](https://www.surreyhillssociety.org)   **OR EMAIL:** [info@surreyhillssociety.org](mailto:info@surreyhillssociety.org)  
**OR PHONE:** 07530 949302 and leave a message

