

Chair's Report

I'm Rosie Fell and I became Chair of Trustees last year, I took over from the wonderful Sue Bradbrooke who held the position of Chair for 9 years before retiring for a well-earned rest!

Well, where to start with my first year as Chair! I feel I had barely become accustomed to my new role as Chair before the world was hit with the Covid-19 pandemic. This year has produced a rollercoaster of panic, fear, hope and relief and many daunting and overwhelming days but most importantly, it has shown us as a team that if we all work together and look out for one another, we can get through anything. And I am incredibly proud of the way we have pulled through so far at Larkrise Community Farm.

I'd like to begin by thanking the Managers, Staff and Volunteers at Larkrise Community Farm from the bottom of my heart, every single one of whom has pulled together and supported not only the farm but also each other, during some of the most uncertain and challenging times of our lives. Also I would like to thank my fellow Trustees, for amongst many other things, their unwavering support, late night phone calls, short-notice emergency meetings and so much more.

Throughout the pandemic I'm proud to say that by working together closely and persevering through the hardest parts of national lockdown: a lockdown which saw the farm temporarily close to all but a very small core team of staff and volunteers for months resulting in a period of Very Low Income, we have managed to keep the farm running. And we have managed to keep all of our team on without making any redundancies, all without comprising on the quality and care we offer to all here at the farm.

Financially, we were incredibly grateful to be in receipt of the Government's generous furlough scheme, which we used for nearly all members of staff until the schools returned and the UK began to open up after the first wave, albeit in a phased and very different way of life than we had before the pandemic.

Rob, our Health & Safety Trustee, has worked tirelessly, producing detailed risk assessments and putting systems in place by working with the Managers and Staff to create a strict bubble system which has allowed us to welcome back students and farm users of all ages. Thank you for your confident and calm approach in what can only be described as a crisis, Rob. It is worth noting that Wiltshire Council commended us on our Covid-19 risk assessments, Covid-19 admin, plans and preparations, and have stated that they consider us to be one of their "Essential Services" providing Adult and Student Day Care in Wiltshire. Our contact at the Council told our hard-working Education Officer Amanda Paines that they were planning to use our Covid-19 paperwork as a template example to help other day care services with their risk assessments, plans and preparations.

Managers Wendy and Ashley worked so hard throughout lockdown and managed the various stages of full closure, partial closures and now the partial opening we have currently. They worked and are still working, long hours within very strict guidelines to keep our people, animals and the farm as safe as we possibly can. It is only right to say that our Staff and Volunteers' dedication and our Trustees' expertise has made, and continues to make, all the difference during this time.

We were fortunate enough to qualify for and be in receipt of a significant amount of grant money from various sources which has sustained us financially so far through the hardest months, and buffered most of the devastating financial loss we were facing in March. We owe a huge thank you to Treasurer Paul Simms for providing his time and skills to produce incredibly clear, concise financial pictures all throughout lockdown and beyond, and for being on call to help give details for grant applications and grant monitoring. Paul has proved to be a truly brilliant Treasurer and we are very glad that we have him on our team.

Our grants came from the National Lottery Coronavirus Community Fund, thanks to funding provided by the Government; the wonderful people at Wiltshire Community Foundation who themselves, raised a record-breaking amount of money to help Charities such as ourselves; the Wiltshire Council Covid-19 Discretionary Grant, and our landowner Taylor Wimpey. We also received some generous community support from Chris and Doreen Wickham, who gave us months of rent relief from our rental land at Ashton Meadows during the toughest parts of lockdown for us financially. Alex Hill of Alex Hill Electrical donated money to have our patio repaired so that the outside picnic area could be better utilised in the last parts of Summer once we were able to partially reopen. Gareth O'Neill donated his time and skills to make us a wonderful Farm Thank You video which can be viewed on our Facebook page, website and YouTube. We also owe a huge debt of gratitude to our Farm Users, their Parents, Families and Carers for returning to the Farm after what has been a frightening time for many, for supporting us and our Charity Aims and entrusting us to do the most important task of all: keeping people safe while they attend the Farm.

Never has there been a more telling sign of the need for a Community Farm than parents of farm users calling and messaging us and asking us, "WHEN CAN WE COME BACK, WE MISS YOU." The love and support we have received from farm users and their loved ones, and the thought that one day we can all be together at the farm again, really kept our Staff and Trustees going throughout lockdown and has been the defining reason behind our determination to get through this.

So a huge thank you from us Trustees to all involved with the farm. We feel very humbled by the loyalty and team spirit we have witnessed this year and we are SO proud of our Staff. We plan to thank them individually with Gift Vouchers as a token of our appreciation.

Despite the long subject of Covid-19, which has dominated our year by a long way so far, we have also seen some important changes and reached some important landmarks at the farm.

Firstly, I and the Trustees would like to recognise the Wendy Self, our wonderful, caring and dedicated Farm Manager, has achieved 25 years at Larkrise Community Farm! Wendy, I would like to say to you a few words on behalf of myself and the Trustees. Wendy, you are the life and soul of the Farm. This is evident in the people you have helped over the years (people I know who still message you now or stop you in town to tell you that their happiest memories are of you and the Farm). It's evident in the animals you have cared for, and the friends you have made, and the incredibly low turnover of staff we are lucky to have at the farm. To put a finer point on it, when people or animals arrive at the farm, they tend to stay in either of two ways: a very long time, or forever! Congratulations Wendy in overseeing decades of successful change, and hasn't a lot changed in that 25 years? A new site, stables inside the barn, a roof on the arena, and a very wide and ever increasingly diverse array of activities on offer which you have added over the years. Not only are you the true public face of the farm Wendy, you are thought very highly of by all who meet you, and rightly so. As a token of our thanks and appreciation we have clubbed together and got you a bird table, and an apple tree, which you can put up in your garden (which I believe is newly renovated) or at the Farm. Your choice. When the current times allow, we will throw you a party!

We would also like to recognise Ashley for her hard work and amazing commitment to the farm. Ashley has soldiered on regardless of a broken wrist and Achilles Tendon issues, taking on paperwork to free up Wendy during the busy and hard times we have endured this year. Ashley you never fail to put a smile on everyone's face. Your sharp wit and great sense of humour has been exactly what we needed this year. We are proud to make you Business Manager of the Farm this year and recognise your incredible efforts. We have yet to find something you can't do, and that includes finding a way to make Staff, Trustees and Farm Users smile (and animals of course!) during some very challenging moments. You are reliable, adaptable, warm and kind. All the ingredients for a great human and an asset to the Farm!

To say thank you we have clubbed together and also got you an apple tree which you can plant at home or on the farm, to represent the fruits of your labour!

Our Staff have excelled themselves this year. The shock of the pandemic and everything that came with it, to being put on furlough and not knowing what their return date to the farm would be. Our Staff are all such loyal, hard workers who genuinely love and care for their jobs. We were delighted to welcome them all back from furlough, this only adds to the phenomenal team atmosphere at the farm and provides the consistency our farm users need, particularly after the year we have had.

Our Volunteers too, have been truly reliable and committed to the Farm throughout lockdown. Of note, we would like to appreciate these kind souls, who have been such an important and appreciated support this year, and have gone above and beyond consistently to help out wherever required. A special thank you to our Staff and Volunteers from me as Chair and my fellow Trustees. We feel lucky to have the team we do.

We did say goodbye this year to our wonderful and very highly thought of, Farm Trustee Peter Gale. Peter has been a Trustee and involved with the farm for 20 years now. We wish him well and all the best in his future and we are already missing his incredible experience and all his words of wisdom. During his time at the Farm, Peter showed true strength of character. Helping at the drop of a hat, giving us his time and skills, and he was so supportive to me as I took on the task of becoming the next Chair. Peter is sorely missed by all at the farm, but we are happy to know he is still available for farming help and advice. To thank Peter for all his years and time at the farm, we have done a collection and will be presenting Peter with a large fig tree, and a bottle of something bubbly, as a token of our love and thanks.

I would also like to share with you some wider support we have received: Andrew Murrison MP, who over the years has been truly supportive of the farm, having previously attended many of our events and even holding the raffle for us at a previous AGM. Andrew will be again be supporting the farm on Friday 17th October, to meet our Farm Users and Staff and hear all about how we have managed, and continue to manage, the pandemic that has hit the globe. We have also received a special Thank You card from Her Majesty's Representative, HM Lord-Lieutenant of Wiltshire, Mrs Sarah Rose Troughton, recognising the value and importance in the work we do, and this card and it's note will be on display at the farm from Friday.

Re-election of Trustees: we have re-elected all Trustees in their present roles.

Rosie Fell: Chair

Rob Ham: Vice Chair

Ali Rasey: Secretary

Paul Simms: Treasurer

Jane Wallis: Safeguarding Trustee

Cathy Kavanagh: RDA Trustee

Sarah Creed: Trustee