

Report from the South Warwickshire Sustainable Farming Group Planning Evening

26th January 2023 at The Bell in Alderminster

Facilitated by Kirsty Righton

Attending

Includes a brief overview of what each person is farming for information sharing between group members.

Name	Where	Farming
Tom Newbery	Honington	Arable, contractor, in Countryside Stewardship
David Willoughby de Broke	Ditchford	Arable and grass keep, in Countryside Stewardship
Jim & Julia Sessford	Charlecote	arable, direct drillers
Jon & Nick Francis	Land around Fulready. Shop in Brailes	Rent land, 100% grassfed cattle, pigs, market garden, agroforestry, Paddock Farm butchery & shop
Frans Harmer		Pulled out of Countryside Stewardship, looking for other ways to go forward
Mark Meadows	Alderminster	Arable, maize, in Countryside Stewardship
Chris Righton	Brailes	Contract arable out, grass leys, in Countryside Stewardship
Ed Alexander	Fulbrook	Mainly arable, grass & several smaller schemes e.g. tree and pond
Sally Eadon	Warwickshire Wildlife Trust - Agricultural land advisor	Can help with one to one follow up advice following group events and any queries regarding wildlife friendly farming. (Sally is from a mixed farm, mainly beef with some sheep and an arable rotation for feed)
Emma Kersley	Heart of England Forest	Conservation grazing

Group members' interests

- Sustainable farming and where it's going
- Regenerative agriculture
- Maintaining profitability and learning from others
- Carbon - audits, offsetting

Events so far – what's good, what's not and what works for you

Members value the fact that being involved in the group allows them to see an initiative or practical farming practice locally where the weather, soil, conditions etc are similar to theirs which has greater relevance and benefits for learning.

Frequency – once a month is preferable.

Length – 2 hours is optimum, unless there is good reason for longer.

Time of day – this is more difficult to get right for people due to other commitments. Evenings are generally preferred, however in the winter late afternoon is ok due to shorter days. It was accepted that sometimes events have to be held during the day.

Type – Farm walks are universally popular :) Visits to group members' farms to learn about their farming practices are also beneficial. Practical walk-through demonstrations of systems/programmes/applications such as the Farm Carbon Toolkit are really helpful.

Topics we have identified to cover – including those previously suggested

We grouped ideas into similar areas, and I (Kirsty) have moved a couple since and had a go at labelling the groups which we didn't have time to do on the night – we can review the group headings if you're not happy, but I thought it might help a bit. There is of course, a bit of overlap between groups with some topics fitting under more than one heading and a lot going easily under regen ag.

Further information and/or details for an event are outlined against relevant numbers below the table.

Measuring/Tools	Arable	Regenerative Ag	Mixed farming	Learning resources	Schemes/Policy	Additional...
Biodiversity net gain & offsetting ¹	Establishing new systems e.g. undersowing	Regenerative agriculture – understanding soil fertility	Utilising livestock in a farming system	Lamport, FarmEd visits ⁴	Defra, RPA, ELMs etc - updates, info, training (ongoing) ⁵	'Kiss the Ground'- regen ag and soil health film by Gabe Brown ⁷
Carbon audit and offsetting	Cover crops follow up visit to David Willoughby de Broke's farm ²	Carbon capture & sequestration – achieving & accuracy	Retaining fertility from livestock & maximise food outputs ³	Visit Jake Freestone at Overbury Estates ⁴	Assistance with applying for capital grants	Catchment sensitive farming ⁸
	Break crops ²	Making unproductive land profitable		Rob Harvard - expert on grass-fed angus cattle & wildlife corridors ⁴	Deciding on most beneficial schemes for your farm ⁶	
	Bird & bee mixes ²	Using organic principles in 'conventional' farming				

1. David Lowe from Warks CC is the lead in the Warks Habitat Biodiversity Audit. Emma Holman-West at Alscot Estate might be happy to host as she's done the audit – Franz to put Kirsty in touch with Emma – APRIL
2. Following the interesting visit in Nov '22 to David WdB's farm at Ditchford, the group want to go and look at the result of using the cover crops. This could be combined with another topic such as break crops and/or bird and bee mixes – MAY/JUNE
3. Nick & John Francis have a mix of enterprises including, cattle, chickens, market garden, agroforestry, and are trialling different systems which are of interest to the group under this topic. Possibility for our summer farm walk and social – MAY - SEPT

4. Kirsty to explore, and subject to group interest as none of them are in our area so will require greater time and travel commitment. Jim & Julia Sessford and Mark Meadows know Jake Freestone at Overbury Estate, and John Francis knows Rob Harvard whose farm backs onto Overbury so there is potential to combine these two – TIME TBA
5. A webinar presentation and Q&As with Defra representatives from the Future Farming and Countryside Programme will update on ELMschemes (a more detailed, in-person event on SFI will follow later in the year - exact details of this TBC) – 28th FEB
6. Signposting with direct support to the group from Sally Eadon, contact her on: 07495 457132, or Sally.Eadon@wkwat.org.uk
7. All agreed that we would watch the film together and discuss, and David WdB has confirmed that the first drink is on him! – LATE AUTUMN/WINTER
8. Kirsty to explore options with Nicola James at Natural England

Upcoming events:

- 28th February, 7-8.30pm - Defra webinar - ELMs update
- 22nd March, 6-8pm – Barn Owls on Your Land, with South Warwickshire Barn Owl Survey. This is the rescheduled talk from December and will once again be hosted by Prof. Rosemary Collier at Warwick Crop Centre, The University of Warwick, Wellesbourne, CV35 9EF