

Laverstock & Ford Parish Council Partner Report

I am proud to be able to report that our River Bourne Community Farm in Laverstock yesterday achieved recognition as the Best Social Enterprise in Wiltshire, at the 2011 Voluntary and Community Service awards. The awards are organised by Wiltshire Council and NHS Wiltshire to highlight outstanding achievements of those people and organisations in the community who volunteer themselves, or exist to encourage volunteers to get involved in their community.

I think it is worth saying just a little about the farm, as many people and organisations have contributed to this stage of its development.

The farm was an idea of local businessman Ben Parker, who had grown up on a 1950's farm and believed it help shape his character for the better. Ben contacted Ian McLennan, our then Salisbury District Councillor and asked about the land at Cow Lane, Laverstock. Ian suggested that Ben put his idea to the Parish Council and he would then pursue the transfer of ownership to L&F PC.

We all wanted the project to succeed and first SDC Cabinet agreed the land transfer and then the Interim Executive of Wiltshire Council. Local people joined the board of the new Community Interest Company and began to fundraise and change the landscape for the better. An additional 58 acres was also rented from the adjacent landowner and grazing of sheep and cows was underway.

Anyone who knew the site before will know how much has changed. Dilapidated buildings have been completely renovated or rebuilt and others added. Much money has been invested but above all the

funding has been translated into many times its value by the hundred's of volunteers from all over.

The Parish Council has leased the land for a peppercorn rent and supports with additional grants. Southern Area Board has also made grants totalling just under £5000 and this has been used to provide brand new and attractive wooden fencing and the parking area has been cleared and levelled so far, with a better surface envisaged soon.

The Area Board chose the venue for one of its activity days for young people this summer and has also held a Young People's Area Board at the farm.

Education has benefited greatly and every school for miles has attended the farm, held a lesson whilst sitting on hay bale seating and used the farm for their practical projects.

In the village, the Laverstock WI has provided cream teas for visitors during the summer and two farm open days have been hugely successful.

Every day people wander in and around the farm just to see the animals or walk through the country setting, on paths where access was previously not possible. Lots and lots of the local people lend a hand when needed and everyone thinks it is the best and most inclusive project we have had for years.

Chairman, this is one of those occasions when every single one of us here should give ourselves a pat on the back for backing this winner.

Thank you.