

Annual Review 2024



Fordhall pigs, photo courtesy of Rob Lee, Fame Bright Photography

Proud to be community-owned
1 farmer, 8,000 landlords



2024 Key Stats

16 beautiful & unique family celebrations

welcoming

590

guests



17

school visits

522

children partaking in a worm dance

132

Individuals received a tour/talk on the Fordhall story.



135 individual volunteers gave

3557

volunteer hours!



£28,000

raised to invest in Silvopasture

2,500

trees planted



55

new shareholders

50%

of new shares were bought as gifts!





Chairperson's Report

Whilst I have been a Board member of the Fordhall Community Land Initiative (FCLI) since its inception in 2005, this is my first year as Chair, and so I hope I will do this report justice.

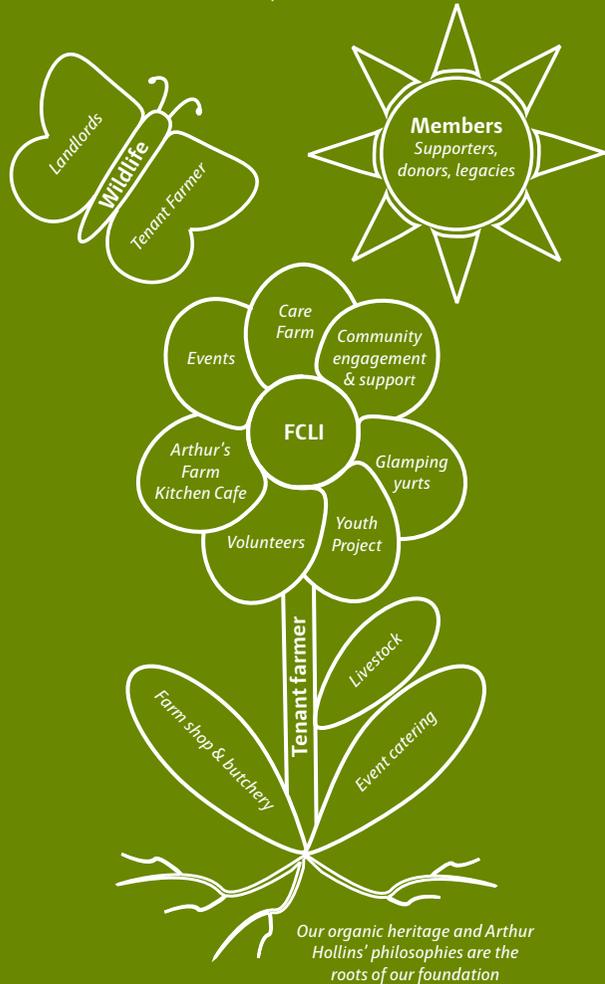
Before we look back at 2024, I first wanted to speak about 'collaboration' and what we as the Board thinks it means here at Fordhall Farm. Fordhall is an informal partnership, we have the FCLI as the charitable landlord and Ben as tenant, with his commercial farm business. At one level we are independent but equally we cannot successfully exist without the other.

We rely on collaboration

This symbiotic relationship is essential to the success and longevity of both enterprises. The organic farm serves the community and wider public interest and the community ownership allows the vast array of community activities to take place and all from the same land.

As a Board we have talked a lot about this relationship this year. We want to ensure we recognise and value the benefit it brings to FCLI – it's not just a rent cheque. With this in mind, I would like to share with you some of the Board's thoughts to highlight and celebrate how the tenant farmer and FCLI work with each other. This valuable collaboration and the relationship between the two can sometimes be

The Fordhall Community Land Initiative (FCLI) sustains livelihoods on the land, provides experiences with nature, runs activities that nourish bodies and minds - with a focus on nurturing our planet - whilst using our story to inspire others.



The Fordhall Community Land Initiative (FCLI) is a volunteer-led, charitable community benefit society, with over 8,000 non-profit making community shareholders.

Since 2006, it collectively owns 128 acres Fordhall Organic Farm in perpetuity.

The enterprises onsite work collaboratively to ensure Fordhall continues to thrive.

missed or overlooked.

On the one hand, the FCLI and its many hard-working volunteers, support site maintenance and conservation efforts. This increases the biodiversity at Fordhall, which benefits the land, our planet, the livestock and in turn the farmer. Benefits that, we hope, will be seen not just through Ben's tenancy but for many more tenant farmers after him. Our work in its many forms also brings people to the farm who may pop into the farm shop and buy some of Ben's produce.

In return, Ben, our tenant farmer adapts his work on a daily basis to enable our visitors to safely engage with the farm. Whether it is a school visit, WI tour, legacy visit or scout group, the route we take and impact on the farm changes for each individual visit and Ben always accommodates us with a smile! He is also very good at telling our story and building our profile when out and about with his catering business. He gets the Fordhall branding out to places we could never reach, and that helps us all.



Then there are lots of other things from donating fleeces to help create the floating paths, to allowing us to use the quad bike, as well as pure cash contributions such as those made for the Care Farm raised beds, the Silvopasture project and the Youth Project outdoor kitchen. Of course, on a weekly basis, we are able to purchase organically-reared beef and lamb, and Fordhall free-range pork for Arthur's Farm Kitchen. Plus,



Pigs enjoy fallen apples donated by local residents

our youth project uses a visit to the farm shop each morning as an experience in budgeting and meal planning, sourcing ingredients for their lunch that day.

Finally, and really importantly, the tenant farmer and his staff team have offered FCLI visitors some truly memorable experiences. This has included hands-on burger making sessions for our Care Farm, sausage linking with key donors on site visits, butchery tours and experiences for projects such as Renew and Restore in Nature (supporting those in our community with a cancer diagnosis). My guess is that several office volunteers have had quite a few lamb cuddles this spring too!

A new strategy is set

2024 has been a year of ongoing success for FCLI. We have continued to evolve and adapt but the Board have spent a lot of time looking to the future too. This included reviewing our Society Rules, which are now in place following approval at our 2025 AGM.

Our direction of travel is now based on our five new strategic impact areas, as approved by you at last years' spring AGM.

Let me talk you through these areas.

Sustain livelihoods on the land.

This impact area has been rising in priority, especially given the widely publicised impact of changes to inheritance tax on farming families.

Here at Fordhall, Cottage Field remains on our radar as a key priority for land acquisition. There is no change though, and the land remains empty with no development plans lodged and no clear purchase opportunity at the moment. We can but hope that an opportunity comes our way. A small strip remains rented by Ben for his catering business and free-range pig paddocks with the main field accessed from time to time on a short-term grazing licence and once a year to make a cut of hay. Essentially, whilst access has been restricted, there has been no change of use on the land and so it remains organic. I would like to acknowledge and thank those members that are regularly donating specifically for land purchase, and if anyone else is interested in this then please do contact the office.

Acquiring more land to enhance the opportunities we can provide for future organic farmers at Fordhall remains high on our priority list. The Board have also been discussing how we can support livelihoods on land outside of Fordhall and that is something we will continue to review as opportunities arise.

Experience Nature

Our really important work with young people continued thanks to generous funding from the Big Lottery's Reaching Communities Fund for our Youth Project. With this funding set to end soon, we remain hopeful for a successful new bid, though nothing is guaranteed and are seeking alternative funding options. I think it's amazing to say that each week Fordhall supports 10 vulnerable young people though this project alone.

The Care Farm for adults with learning disabilities thrived in 2024, with participants working hard to redesign the



Volunteers mulching the Silvopasture trees with sheep's wool

community garden and build new raised beds, creating a great foundation as we move into 2025. We have also set a focus to improve the inclusivity of our offer and accessibility of our experiences.

Elsewhere, the team have worked hard with Board member John Hughes – who was of course with Shropshire Wildlife Trust before his well-deserved retirement – in creating a site-wide conservation plan that all our projects can feed in to. This has been complemented by the creation of a new role, offering a Countryside Worker Level 2 Apprenticeship to a local young person (Ben Walkington, right), which has been funded by one of our incredibly generous members – thank you Jennifer.



Nourish bodies and minds

We do want to increase field to fork awareness through hands-on experiences with food and cooking to encourage behavioural change. It is incorporated into all of our regular delivery activities, we hope this will grow and expand over future years. Ensuring that connections between soil, gut and our health are celebrated throughout.

Nurture our planet.

By adopting a carbon reduction mindset, conducting periodic ecological surveys and regularly reviewing our site conservation plan, we will minimise our climatic impact whilst enhancing our natural landscape.

To support this, we ran an extremely successful appeal for our Silvopasture Project. This meant we could plant over 2,500 trees for the benefit of livestock, soil and climate from the winter of 2023 and into the spring of 2024. This work will continue

over the coming years across the farm, complemented by the new works planned under the River Friendly Farming project and all in partnership with our tenant, Ben.

Inspire others

Inspiring others been a key element of expanding Fordhall's reach. More capacity was created in 2024 to enable Charlotte to mentor and coach other community groups and share her wisdom. She has also been involved with a national campaign for community power, as one of the main leaders of the We're Right Here campaign, which is making waves at Government level. The Inspire work is a key part of our future direction. We want to ensure Fordhall has a seat at the table for change, sharing all the knowledge and experience we have gained over the years to make it easier for others to follow our path.

Away from strategic aims there have been plenty of other things keeping the Board busy. I think it's important to say that we discuss Health and Safety at almost every opportunity available. It remains a priority for the Board and of course is covered in every Board meeting. Policies and procedures were strengthened, particularly around tree safety in response to the increasing changeable weather patterns and some ageing trees on-site, and this remains an ongoing focus for the safety of all site users. A staff member has been trained to IOSH Managing Safely level to further demonstrate our commitment to safety.

More farms?

Before wrapping up, I also have one more really exciting piece of news for you. You have always said you'd like to see more people follow in the FCLI footsteps well, we have been given an opportunity for that to happen. We are in the early days of discussion and I can't give out too much detail but amazingly someone, after being a member since the beginning, has come forward and offered to donate their organic farm to the FCLI.

They love what we do and the similarities between the two farms are fantastic. We all want to see this organic farm protected and used in a similar way to Fordhall into the future. It is of a similar size to Fordhall and it's likely we will offer a long-term tenancy on it and engage with the local community to encourage local access and support. With our experience, we will look to support the existing team of people on the farm who are all doing a great job. As I said, it's early days and very much a 'watch this space' type moment. The FCLI Board is considering the matter carefully and believe we have the capacity to make it all work. We'll keep you informed as things progress and our members will be consulted throughout.

To conclude my report, I would like to offer thanks to the following:

- My fellow Board members for their support, enthusiasm and effort. The work on the strategy and developing the FCLI model has been fantastic.
- The staff team for their dedication and making Fordhall the wonderful place it is for everyone to visit. We would be lost without you all.
- Charlotte for basically dedicating every waking hour of her life to Fordhall.
- Our volunteers for supporting our outdoor work and site maintenance, as well as those that give time to support the small office team. It truly makes a huge difference.
- Our funders, donors and legacy givers for their generosity and enabling us to do such wonderful things for our farm and wider community.
- Our farmer Ben for being such a supportive tenant.

And finally, to you, our members. We would not be here without you and we are so thankful for your continued support.

We've all got an exciting future ahead and can achieve great things.

Jack Tavernor, Chairperson.

Your Tenant Farmer's Report



Butchery Extension

Last year construction on our new butchery extension was underway. I am pleased to share that now all is complete. It's been really useful for giving my butchers more space and creating the opportunity to increase capacity if the need arises. In general, we have been a little short on space for the team for a long time, so this offers a much better working environment. It's also been used for some tours and other activities, such as burger making sessions for the Care Farm.

New Website

Launched in Oct 24, the new website took longer than expected, all-in-all, around 9-10 months. We wanted to better promote the farm's produce to reflect all the efforts made in the careful production of our meat and the rearing of our livestock. The new website is more user friendly and enables us to promote what we do much better. Exciting news is that we recently won 'Best Online Business 2025' at the Farm Shop & Deli Retailers Awards! James the Farm Shop Manager had been pushing for the new website since he took over the Manager's role some years ago, and so he was key in

managing the project and driving it forward. It would not have been the success it is without his leadership.

I must also mention and thank Mel Morris from Outlands Creative who offered her wonderful skills for the design and creation of the website, bringing James' vision to life. Please do say well done to James if you visit the shop or if you are using the website. We were up against some really big national competitors and online shops, who had much bigger budgets – so to win it for James and Mel was incredible.

Catering

2024 was not as busy as the previous year with a few events and venues changing. The good news is that we have been awarded the Northern RHS Flower Shows for the next three years. It's a lovely organisation for us to collaborate with because they have a very similar ethos and they are very interested in sustainability, our farming system at Fordhall and how our meat is sourced. As with Edgbaston, they are really interested in the story and what Fordhall Farm is, it's not just about the highest bidder or tender. The RHS are particularly interested in the high welfare of the animals, the sustainability of the farm and they are keen on seeing if they can get involved in other areas of the farm too.

We are all really excited about this new contract. The whole team are getting involved, putting new ideas forward and looking how we can do something a little bit different. We have also signed a long-term contract with Edgbaston. We've been working together for 10 years, but only on short term contracts and this year we have come up with an agreement where we are going to be a sponsor of the



The farm shop team celebrate their award

Credit: Melanie Morris

stadium and in return, they have given us a long-term commitment. For our business, it gives us a bit more stability and helps us to plan future investments into the business.

Solar Installation on cattle sheds

At last year's AGM we were in the middle of installing the solar panels on the beef sheds, and they actually went live shortly after – the last week in May 2024. We have 83kw of solar panels which are on the beef sheds (right of the drive as you approach the farm). They feed electricity into the whole farm and it produces around 50% of our total electricity usage. Last year we generated around 60 megawatts of electricity! It's been such a benefit, especially with electricity prices continually increasing. I have thought about increasing the number of panels, but I am not sure it will be worthwhile because quite often it's in the middle of the day we are producing most electricity, in fact more than we are using, and it's not profitable to sell it back to the grid. The benefit for us is actually using it. We use a lot of electricity overnight too, with various fridges and freezers so, the only real benefit would be if we could store it, but at the moment that's not viable. So, we will stay as we are for now but monitor technology for overnight storage and consider that in the future.

The electricity that we still purchase from the grid is under a renewable/green contract, but nothing beats generating it yourself.

Herbs and clover

We will be incorporating some more herbs and clover in to the grassland in 2025; this is to try and rejuvenate it and add some extra species. Some of the grasses we are adding to the pastures are



Meadow Foxtail, Cocksfoot, Yorkshire Fog, Crested Dog's Tail, Red Clover, White Clover, Ryegrass, a range of Plantain, Burrs Foot and Chicory. This will give us nice flowering herbs and plants which will be great for pollinators and hopefully we can get some more honey from the bees. Most importantly, they all have different root depths. This is important to the farm because our livestock are outside all year-round grazing. These different plants will pull different nutrients from different levels within the soil and hopefully it will remove nutrient deficiencies and help the animals have better immune systems and become healthier. At the moment we use a mineral bucket for the cattle to given them magnesium, as we find they are short of this at some points of the year. Cattle cannot store magnesium in the body so they have to always be eating a little bit. Hopefully having different plants with different root depths will mean they can source more of the nutrients they need through their grazing habits. If you visit towards the end of summer 2025, you should see slightly different plants in the pastures and I'll let you know next year how it all goes!

New fencing and gates

We have worked hard on improving infrastructure on the farm by doing around 4,000 metres of fencing and adding new gates. Work has mainly taken place by the river, reducing access for the livestock. Some of the paddocks have been re-fenced and we have fenced in all the trees planted as part of 2024's Silvopasture work. Hopefully, it stops the cows getting out (or in!), although it never quite seems to quite do it – sometimes the other side is far too tempting!

We put 20 cattle in House Field at the start of 2025 and the next day - I don't know how they do it - they were found in the field at the bottom! Apparently, all the gates were shut, so maybe they went

through the pond – I'm not quite sure!

We have invested in more expensive fence posts this year too. We were finding that with many fences the wire lasted, it was just the posts that were rotting and snapping. Traditional fence posts last 6 – 10 years and eventually just rot and snap. This time we have used redwood fence posts that are treated, so hopefully they will last a lot longer. I hope they do, as they cost me a lot more money!



Cattle

We actually had a calf born successfully just last night, as I was writing this report. We have lost a couple of calves recently, which has been really sad. In

their place, I have purchased some calves from an organic dairy farm to train onto the cows so their milk and mothering instinct is not wasted. One calf we lost was because it was coming out backwards. Unfortunately, when they come out backwards, you have to get the calf out really quickly because when the back legs come out, it crushes the navel and they can die. If they come out slowly but forwards its far less of a problem because the heads out first and then they can breathe.

Last year we bought 11 new heifers from a

farm in the north of Scotland to add to the breeding herd. They are all pure Aberdeen Angus' and from a farm that operates on a very similar system to us with cattle outside all year round. This is very important to us and the reason for buying cattle from such a great distance from Fordhall. I felt that if they can thrive up in northern Scotland with its rougher weather, they should do pretty well here! We are calving at the moment and they are all up near the yard so we can keep a close eye on them.

Lambing

My son Jamie (right) was really involved with lambing this year, so I will let him share this update.



"We started lambing halfway through February. We brought in the earlier ewes that had been with the rams to the sheds. Usually it starts quite slowly, then builds up and the middle is busy, then it slows down again. The first batch were sent out to the field on the 1st March. In total, about 160 lambs went out to the fields with around 100 ewes. I lambed seven ewes myself (with some help from dad)!"



Overall, it has been a really successful lambing year with the dry warm weather, it meant that most were able to go straight into the field after lambing.

Family

Not one to be left out, Isabelle also wanted to contribute to my report:

"If you came here last year, you might know that we have a new baby in the family. Her name is Lily and she is one a bit year old and a couple of days ago she took her first steps. She is a little monkey and will be running around the house soon. She also dropped the remote control down the back of the bed (she takes after her dad)."

Thank you all for your support over another year as your tenant at Fordhall. Words can't describe how important having a long-term tenancy is for me and my family.

Ben Hollins, your Tenant Farmer.

(Plus, Maz, Jamie, Isabelle and baby Lily)



General Manager's Report

Last year, I wrote about the power of relationships and expanding our voice outside of the farm gate. Well, we certainly

did that in 2024. Through our partnerships between our teams, between Ben and our community activities, and between nature and us as humans (not forgetting the vital partnership with my very supportive husband and daughter, Oli and Katherine). Indeed, each tree we have planted is a new relationship between the soil, the microbes, the tree and the livestock. All of which benefit from each other. I love it all and I am sure Dad (Arthur Hollins) would approve too!

The year also brought us in to new-old territory. When one of our members and fellow organic farmer, offered his farm to Fordhall. It was a momentous conversation. There were feelings of honour and just 'wow' - most of all, a mix of excitement and responsibility. We could never had imagined when we looked at expanding our 'Sustaining Livelihoods on the Land' work, it could have led to this.

To be able to offer someone else, the opportunity you offered Ben and I in 2006 sounded too good to be true. To be able to truly share what we have at Fordhall, not just by sharing our journey and learning through my consultancy work, but by actually providing a long-term tenancy to a new farmer. This is something I could never have dreamed of – and on an organic farm too! You – our members and supporters – have helped make that possible. Ensuring Fordhall is not put at risk through the process is of vital importance. We will spend time before the transfer (expected in



We can't wait for our new trees to establish and become living barns like our existing woodlands

2027) investigating how we can empower their local community, as well as their staff teams and tenant farmer. So, whilst it will need more of my time in the short term, we hope this farm will continue its own unique journey under the custodianship of our membership.

It feels like now is a good time in Fordhall's journey to be looking at opportunities. Almost twenty years into community ownership, we have shown we are a resilient organisation. Our trading surpluses, whilst modest, are stable and even when we have changes in the team, we have robust systems and processes in place that help guide new team members as they join us, ensuring our values and our ethos remain strong throughout all of our work.

It is because of this, that I have been able to work with so many other groups through coaching, consulting and speaking at conferences during 2024. When I am out of the office, the team just keep everything ticking along smoothly. Working together, talking to each other, problem-solving together and supporting each other. The skills that any resilient ecosystem needs to thrive. Skills based on partnership working, shared values and a genuine desire to make things work. Fordhall is blessed to attract such incredible people to the team each year. They are the glue that hold us – and me – together.

So, as we look forward to 2025, our twentieth anniversary year, my hopes are that this little piece of magic that you have helped to create in Shropshire, 'remains strong and is shared in some way, so that other pieces of magic can continue to pop up everywhere.

I look forward to hearing your thoughts on the next step and in sharing that journey with you all, whatever it may hold.

Charlotte Hollins, General Manager

Staff and Board team of 2024



What did we achieve in 2024?

SUSTAIN LIVELIHOODS on the land

To work forever in partnership with nature and our tenant farmer, protecting our soil to provide sustainable food and livelihoods.

As noted in our Chair's report, Cottage Field remains a priority of the FCLI Board, but there is sadly, no progress to share. Regardless, we remain steadfast in our desire to purchase Cottage Field when it becomes available. The Board also remains conscious that for Fordhall to remain viable into the future, it will need to be bigger than its current 128 acres and so we continue to look out for local land that may come to market. With that in mind, during 2024, the Board moved £15,000 from our free cash reserves into an 'allocated' pot for 'Cottage Field or additional land' purchase, making this pot now in excess of £50,000.

As land continues to increase in value, it is actively sought by pension funds and other investors as well as farmers, so we would need to move quickly if the opportunity

arises. This is why the Board have been keen to have funds for a deposit ring-fenced and ready to go when needed.

Some members have decided to send us one-off donations or regular donations specifically towards land, meaning this pot will slowly continue to grow.

In the meantime, we continue to fly the flag for long-term tenancies and partnership working between tenant and landlord, which is evidenced through our Silvopasture project as noted on the following pages.

EXPERIENCE nature

To create and maintain inclusive connections between people and nature to improve wellbeing, leaving lasting memories and understanding.

Experiencing nature is a core part of our delivery at Fordhall Organic Farm. It is through fun experiences on the land that we believe we create memories and heartfelt connections to nature, which in the long-term impact our behaviours and lifestyle choices.

Deepening our knowledge of Dung Beetles, we invited farm vet and dung beetle expert, Claire Whittle, to run a public 'safari', providing an insight into dung beetles and their value in the regenerative farm ecosystem. We also ran a 'Poo Patrol' version for younger children to share the importance of the dung beetle to the recycling system of poo!

In collaboration with the conservation charity Buglife, we hosted a free 'Buglife on the Farm' event, featuring an interactive bug hunt with a special focus on pollinators. They shared the importance of pollinators



for plant life and food production, we discussed life cycles, some of the things that have been harming pollinators, and learnt of the thousands of pollinators that exist – not just bees.



Through the summer we ran events that celebrated relationships in nature including worms, composting, bugs, trees, river life and growing seeds. Not forgetting the youth in our community, the team organised a wild campout in the woods complete with a foraged meal on the campfire.

Our biggest new project in 2024 was 'Renew and Restore in Nature' kindly funded by



the Lingen Davies Charitable Trust. We ran fortnightly free, fun and uplifting sessions on the farm for those with a cancer diagnosis. Each fortnight, these therapeutic sessions included cookery, mushroom identification, willow weaving, felting, yoga, mindfulness and even some bushcraft in the woods. We aimed to help attendees forget about their diagnosis, whilst knowing they are in a safe and accommodating space. We are delighted to share

that this pilot project was so successful, funding has been awarded for 2025.



Renew and Restore group enjoy a mindfulness walk and the view from our Ringwork and Bailey site

“Going through cancer treatment during a global pandemic was isolating to say the least. I never thought I would do anything other than go to hospital appointments ever again. To be on the farm and laugh and learn and talk and enjoy these sessions has been such a positive pleasurable experience, that just a couple of years ago I would have thought unimaginable. Thank you for sharing your beautiful space with others”

Renew and Restore participant

Our Care Farm which supports adults with learning disabilities continued to move forward at pace. They dismantled old compost bays and



Emlyn, Jamie and Amy building raised beds (above) and Felicity (right) with her vegetables she is growing at home



built new ones using recycled plastic panels, then filled them with earth ready for the growing season ahead. This work was kindly funded by a donation from our tenant farmer Ben, via his Event Catering business.

Showing off her new found skills, Felicity said “I have now helped my sister build a raised bed at home” and she very proudly bought pictures in to show all her friends how she is taking her learning and love of growing back home.

The Care Farm also created a new market stall to sell their produce to passers-by, building their connection and communication with regular visitors to the farm’s trails.

Their highlight had to be entering the Market Drayton in Bloom competition. Their wonderful garden was judged by the mayor and expert judges and they proudly won second place in the ‘Best Wildlife Garden’ category. The challenge is now on for winning 2025!

In 2024 we were definitely working to staff capacity. We worked with 17 different local schools delivering multiple day visits and we hosted six youth residentials. This totalled 454 children on school day visits, and a further 68 children for residential experiences. Funding from DEFRA, via Ben’s Stewardship agreement, supported some of these sessions.

Whilst we were stretched, the team did not turn anyone away and every teacher and child left with a memory to cherish.

“Excellent! Words cannot express how wonderful everyone is at Fordhall Farm. Thank you so very much! I am so impressed with how much work is completed every year to enhance the facilities at the farm. A very lovely day, lots of activities provided from a very knowledgeable, calm and enthusiastic farm teacher, Rachel. Once again, Thank you.”
Pre-school group, Gnosall Primary



Tree hugging with a school educational visit

Our weekly youth project, supported a further 10 young people through our alternative curriculum offer. Working with three local schools, our placements offer weekly time out of school to vulnerable young people. We develop their confidence and self-esteem, along-side practical communication, conservation and life skills training, offering AQA certificates along the way. They get to meet the animals too!



“He just is not suited to the standard classroom environment, but he thrives at the farm”

Assistant Head, The Grove School

Fordhall experiences are not just targeted at

families or organised events. We also have our free open farm trails and our yurts remain open throughout the year for small group glamping holidays. The focus for us is to maintain this level of activity across site, whilst creating space for small expansions for both schools and our wider community.

“My 10-year-old said it was ‘probably our best holiday ever’ - we absolutely loved staying at Fordhall Farm. Everything about the ethos, the history, the attention to detail... we felt very welcome and grateful to experience it all. I would highly recommend it to anyone looking for a peaceful, restorative ‘reset’, surrounded by nature. We cooked and ate outdoors, watched the cows and calves come and go, played games around the woodburning stove, went on walks across fields and through the trees, felt cosy in the bedroom-yurt, and relished in the quiet and solitude” Yurt guest, 2024.

NURTURE our planet

To minimise our climatic impact, whilst also enhancing our natural environment to build resilience and support biodiversity.

The Silvopasture appeal we ran at the end of 2023 continued into 2024 and raised a staggering £28,000, demonstrating how important you believe this project to be. Every penny is creating living barns for our livestock for generations to come.

63 volunteers planted 2500+ trees and 26

- Silver birch (*Betula pendula*)
- Hawthorn (*Crataegus monogyna*)
- Dogwood (*Cornus sanguinea*)
- Beech (*Fagus sylvatica*)
- Blackthorn (*Prunus spinosa*)
- Guelder rose (*Viburnum opulus*)
- English oak (*Quercus robur*)
- Sessile oak (*Quercus petraea*)
- Holly (*Ilex aquifolium*)
- Scots pine (*Pinus sylvestris*)
- Beech (*Fagus sylvatica*)
- Spindle (*Euonymus europaeus*)
- Field elm (*Ulmus glabra*)
- Rowan (*Sorbus acuparia*)
- Hornbeam (*Carpinus betulus*)
- Sweet chestnut (*Castanea sativa*)
- Crab apple (*Malus sylvestris*)
- Goat Willow (*Salix caprea*)
- Wild cherry (*Prunus avium*)
- Aspen (*Populus tremula*)
- Alder buckthorn (*Frangula alnus*)
- Black poplar (*Populus nigra*)
- Field maple (*Acer campestre*)
- Lime (*Tilia platyphyllos*)
- Dog rose (*Rosa canina*)
- Hazel (*Corylus avellana*)

The trees we planted spring 2024

different species over 500m of farmland in early 2024. Each tree was matched to the topography, soil type and microclimate in which it was planted. They will take some years to establish and in the meantime our volunteer team are keeping a close eye on them.

If you want to read more on how and what we planted see <https://www.fordhallfarm.com/silvopasture>.

We had the valued support of some corporate teams too, all coming to get their hands in the soil and lend their planting power. TTC (Trusted Training and Compliance) based in Telford brought 11 people to the farm in February 24. As did a team from the Environment Agency, getting stuck into planting and sliding through the wet ground to get to the location! We have been incredibly grateful to everyone involved.



Sadly, the wool tree guards were not yet in production, so we opted for a fully compostable cardboard for the little trees (whips) and a pine resin wood pulp guard for larger standards, all fully biodegradable and compostable.

A mulch is vital for suppressing the grass growth and to reduce competition for nutrients whilst the trees establish. Our biodegradable mulches have been made using Fordhall's own sheep fleeces and straw.

Below ground is also key. In a healthy farming environment, looking after soil biology is crucial. So, it wasn't just the plants we paid attention to in 2024. Microbes perform a variety of services in the soil, from

breaking down organic matter and releasing nutrients to plant life, to improving soil structure and allowing for better root penetration. Soil sampling helps to monitor the presence of beneficial micro-organisms in the soil and we are pleased to share that bacterial and fungal activity was seen to be in good health in all fields sampled.

Our Carbon Footprint report for 2024 showed improvement on 2023 too, with a carbon balance result of 27.3 tonnes carbon dioxide versus 41.1 tonnes in 2023. That said, there was work on the farmhouse in 2023 which influenced that year's result. These figures are reflecting only the core operations of FCLI and is Ben's (our tenants) farm operation.

We also continued creating 'floating paths' in some wetter areas of the trails. These paths use sheep fleece as a path underlay in boggy areas in place of less environmentally friendly synthetic underlays – and it works a treat!

At the end of the year, we launched our River Friendly Farming appeal, which has gone incredibly well. You'll hear more about cow bathing pools in next years' annual review!

NOURISH bodies and minds
To provide and promote healthy, nutritious food using local, seasonal produce and encourage responsible eating choices through education.

Food forms a central part of all of our activities on site and whilst we were not able to run the public cookery sessions we had hoped for, cookery remains central to all of our organised group activities. Whether that be the Care Farm making chutneys and

soups, or the youth project making their daily lunch following a visit to the farm shop to purchase their ingredients.

“That was brilliant! Can we cook on the fire every week?” said one youth project participant.

Providing a space for people to develop their love of food is just as important to us as sharing something on the specials board in Arthur’s Farm Kitchen, putting kimchi on the menu, or celebrating a recipe in our Grazer newsletter.



Care Farm cooking lunch from their homegrown produce

Footfall has gradually increased in Arthur’s Farm Kitchen and our rainbow salad, Shropshire Carlin pea casseroles and beetroot ketchup have been served almost as many times as a Fordhall pork baguette! Everything is cooked fresh onsite, and the Care Farm love taking edible flowers and other goodies into the café to see what chef can do with them.

Joe’s story - one to celebrate.

Joe started his Fordhall journey as a Friday volunteer. When he was first dropped off by his mum, she told our volunteer leader, Mike, how quiet and anxious he was and that it was unlikely he’d attend regularly, but she wanted to push him to come out and get involved to improve his social skills.

Joe found his place in the group and quickly

became a Farm Friday regular. Not long into his placement he expressed an interest in cooking. So, not one to shy away from an opportunity, Volunteer Leader, Mike, spoke to chef and soon enough he started to volunteer for a few hours a week in Arthur’s Farm Kitchen.

Joe’s attendance at Fordhall has since tripled; doing a day of volunteering in the café, a day on Farm Friday, as well as now having paid work every Saturday in the kitchen, and these hours are steadily increasing. This is an amazing achievement for Joe. His confidence has rocketed and it is great to see him so involved in the community. He even cooked the Christmas dinner for the volunteer party last year – Well Done Joe!



Joe helping the volunteers to coppice some willow

INSPIRE others

To share our story and expertise, empowering people to adopt an ecosystem approach to food, land management and community ownership.

Our Inspire work saw a lot of growth in 2024, with a total of 323 of Charlotte’s hours being dedicated to this work.

Charlotte offered advice and guidance to nine different projects across the country,



Charlotte supporting Babbinswood Organic Farm with their current share offer.

including Babbinswood Farm Community Benefit Society, the Ecological Land Cooperative and Broadway Village Gardens. She helped these groups to set themselves up, refine their processes and consult with their community. Community engagement has always been high on Fordhall's agenda and it is something we are proud to share the value of.

Through Charlotte's place as a community leader on the We're Right Here campaign; opportunities were grasped to speak at four national events and conferences. The big achievement of this work was the announcement of the Community Right to Buy in the King's Speech last summer. This provides a huge opportunity for communities across the country to take ownership of assets of community value. Charlotte

continues to work with central government to push for 'environmental value' to have an equal importance to community value.

Another ask of the community power campaign is the Community Right to Manage Public Services, and it was this next right that FCLI was awarded funding to pilot in Market Drayton. With the energy and determination applied to all her tasks, Charlotte has begun a national Community Covenant pilot in the town. A project that will see real decision-making powers delegated at neighbourhood-level. This new power-sharing agreement between Shropshire Council and the local community will decide how a Community and Family Hub is delivered in the town. The full impact of this work will be seen through 2025, but it was already gathering pace as we closed the door on 2024.



Free-range and happy - we had to squeeze in a piggy pic!

Plus...



Weddings



Water surveys



Food celebrations



Legacy gifts



Group tours



Yurts



Community Garden
 Greenwood Shelter
 Arthur's Farm Kitchen
 Farm Trails
 Farm Shop
 Parking



Treasurer's Report

2024 has continued to be a challenging, yet very positive year. Charlotte and the team have worked incredibly hard and because of this we managed to turn an operational budget (that's our day-to-day operating/trading budget) which forecast of a small deficit, into a welcome surplus. This was no mean feat and was achieved by a constant focus on looking for business opportunities and managing associated costs. So, from myself and the Board I would like to say a big thank you to the Fordhall Team – Thank You!

For those of you that study the accounts you will have noticed a larger overall accounting deficit in our income and expenditure report. To be clear, this was expected and takes into account planned investments made from our cash reserves during the year, including a new website (£3,000), updating of Arthurs Farm Kitchen (£3,500), wildlife surveying (£2,300) and non-cash moves such as depreciation (£45,301). So, this differs from our day-to-day trading budget which returned a modest surplus.

The biggest trading changes in the year include

a drop in income for Arthur's Farm Kitchen, primarily due to a reduction in wedding income as couples move towards smaller weddings. We plan to counter this in 2025, by creating small-wedding packages and building our family party bookings. There was also a reduction in gift aid income, which links to the donations received in the period. In contrast, there was an almost three-fold increase in consultancy income (up to £15k from £5.5k) relating work Charlotte's on the Community Covenant pilot and the coaching/mentoring she offers other land-based community projects, which the Board fully supports. We are aware that Charlotte's time is not unlimited, therefore further office resources are required to enable her to develop this important work further.

Gifts and donations increased to £58k from £42k against a continuing challenging back drop, linked to funds raised through our River Friendly Farming and Silvopasture appeals. Interest earned on deposits was up to £7.9k from £4.6k, because money in reserves has been moved to the best interest paying accounts, whilst ensuring the money remains safely within the £85k FSCS protection scheme where possible.

A more detailed explanation on our finances

Balance Sheet Dec 31st 2024

	2024	2023
FIXED ASSETS		
Tangible assets	1,329,383	1,372,380
CURRENT ASSETS		
Stocks and debtors	46,085	31,747
Cash at bank and in hand	370,386	414,849
CREDITORS falling due within one year <i>(including restricted funds)</i>	(171,477)	(194,782)
NET CURRENT ASSETS	250,012	251,814
TOTAL CURRENT ASSETS LESS CURRENT LIABILITIES	1,579,395	1,624,194
CREDITORS falling due after one year	(25,891)	(27,457)
NET ASSETS	1,553,504	1,596,737
CAPITAL AND RESERVES		
Share capital & share premium account	703,800	711,900
Income and expenditure account	849,704	884,837
SHAREHOLDERS' FUNDS	1,553,504	1,596,737

can be found in the Directors' Report circulated with the AGM notes. Overall, the Board were happy with the progress made in 2024, which was in line with the investment of cash reserves we had planned.

A few points for the 2025 budget.

Wage costs continue to increase, we have added £35k to the wage bill in this year's budget on the back of the increases to National Living Wage and National Insurance. The Board recognises how vitally important the staff are to Fordhall and has worked hard to find a way to adjust budgets to support these increases. It will be a challenge for 2025, but we have a plan to make it work.

The Board have made the decision not to initiate any new planned capital spending during 2025. Anything that was budgeted for, but not completed in 2024, has been carried forward, and will be reviewed as we go. This includes budgeted repairs to the farmhouse and continued spend on our climate and biodiversity work. Both of which will come from our cash reserves built up over previous years.

We have decided not to run any fundraising appeals for 2025. The Silvopasture and River Friendly Farms appeals have been very well received and all money raised from these has been ring-fenced and will be spent down over the next two years, with contributions from our tenant.

Having said that, we do still welcome regular donations and I should add that we are very grateful for all of the donations and legacy gifts we receive be they small or large. We have noted that during the year, some members have chosen to set up regular direct debits to directly support the acquisition of further land, this option remains open should anyone wish to do it. We also recognise that not everyone is able to give financially and we are equally as grateful to everyone who gives up their time, effort, energy, enthusiasm or simply shares the Fordhall word. It all helps us to be sustainable and successful as we move forward - Thank you all. It really is very much appreciated.

Paul Austin, FCLI Treasurer.

Auditor's Report:

In our opinion the financial statements: give a true and fair view of the state of the Society's affairs as at 31st December 2024 and of its income and expenditure for the year then ended; and have been properly prepared in accordance with United Kingdom Generally Accepted Accounting Practice; and are in accordance with the requirements of the Co-operative and Community Benefit Societies Act 2014.

	2024 (£)	2023 (£)
OPERATING INCOME		
Merchandise	432	865
Property rental	20,500	19,500
Events & courses	3,579	2,871
Education	141,553	131,425
Arthur's Farm Kitchen	164,912	182,914
Newsletter	18,537	19,174
Gifts & donations	57,820	41,974
- Legacy income	776	1,235
Gift Aid	12,783	37,592
Grants	34,859	33,958
Other income	1,628	1,612
Consultancy	14,831	5,475
Yurts & Straw Lodge	36,353	33,452
TOTAL Income	508,563	512,047

OPERATING COSTS

<u>Costs of generating funds</u>		
Merchandise	372	801
Events & courses	3,930	5,569
Advertising & marketing	5,229	5,724
Project delivery	20,366	13,505
Education materials	15,166	14,560
Arthur's FK purchases	62,823	64,582
<u>Management and Administration</u>		
Staff salaries, NIC & pension	328,890	314,840
Travel	1,971	1,617
Printing & office supplies	17,098	20,345
Accountancy & audit	4,435	4,315
Heat & light	11,621	7,765
Insurance & rates	10,693	11,723
Repairs & maintenance	9,903	9,805
Telephone & internet	991	679
Subscriptions	1,555	1,303
Bank charges	1,602	1,991
Legal & professional	5,594	1,401
Staff training	6,064	5,653
Sundry expenses	609	458
Depreciation	45,301	44,032
Unrecoverable VAT	(3,788)	4,282
Total Costs	(550,425)	(534,950)
Operating Surplus	(41,862)	(22,903)
Other Interest receivable	7,913	4,699
Interest payable	(1,184)	(1,471)
Surplus/Deficit	(35,133)	(19,675)





Thank you to all our fantastic volunteers in 2024

These amazing 135 people together clocked up over 3,557 hours (3,374 hours in 2023 from 91 volunteers).

Environment Agency, Oliver Allan, Katherine Allan, Jenny Allaway, Katie Allen, Keith Atkey, Paul Austin, Matt Axford, Nicola Axford, John Baguley, Sally Baguley, Andrew Bailey, Steve Ballard, Rosemary Barker, Paul Beevers, Des Bennett, Hannah Billingham, Suzie Botting, Naomi Boulton, Joanna Brambley, Paul Brambley, David Braunsberg, Steven Breeze, Dan Bridgewater, Tim Brooks, Will Brown, Ceri Bythesea, Charlotte Bythesea, Reem Chamout, Howard Chetwynd, Neil Clark, Alice Clarke, Catherine Clarke, Jan Collins, Julie Cooper, Joyce Darby, Amy Davidson, Chris Davies, Laura Day, Will Dennis, Lucy Dowley, Clive Dyer, Kathryn Edwards, Chris Eldon Lee, Nina Elizabeth, Christine Evans, Callum Ewan, Lucy Ewan, Ben Fischer, Christine Fish, Mike Foy, Julian Francis, Dylan Franklin, Callum Furber, Harry Gamble, Ian Garnham, Sarayah Garnham, Sian Gatenby, Emily Grabarz, Suzanne Grundy, Tanya Guest, Amica Hardy, Peter Hardy, Buffy Hardy, Will Hawkins, Alistair Hicks, Benjamin Hollins, Matt Horton, John Hughes, Eleanor Humphries, Elaine Hunt, Michael Isaacs, Sandy John, Chris Jones, Jackie Jones, Seth Judd Eastwood, Victoria Kenny, Ruth King, Ellie Lee, Rob Lee, Anthony Lewis, Elaine Lewis, Audrey Love, Peter Mardy, Ed Martin, Bill McAllister-Lovatt, Sarasue McAllister-Lovatt, Edward McCarthy, Amanda McDonnell, Lindsey McGibbon, Lesley McNeil, Dave Mellor, Alaric Miller, Chris Mills, Stephen Morris, Christopher Mould, Christienne Murray, Karen Paes, Nikki Park, Joseph Pembleton-Hope, Dominic Pinto, Megan Platt, Graham Powell, David Proctor, Tim Reeves, Michael Revell, Dilys Riley, Peter Riley, Matilda Simon, Sarah Smith, Ed Smith, Kath Smith, Laura Smith, Pam Smith, Stephanie Soruce, Hannah Spencer, Guy Steel, Sharon Steel, Claire Sumner-Hughes, Christine Tate, Jack Tavernor, Gerry Thomas, Leda Tustin, Sue Walker, Cheryl Walker, Fiona Walker, Ben Walkington, Jane Walkington, Viv Watkins, Chris White, Freddy Williams, Matthew Young, Grace and Dux Advisory for all our payroll support.

Thank you x

Interested in volunteering?

We have weekly opportunities on our Volunteer Weekends or regular Farm Fridays. Call 01630 638696 or email mike.grabarz@fordhallfarm.com for details.

Free to Visit: Tuesday - Sunday

Fordhall Community Land Initiative Ltd.
Fordhall Organic Farm
Market Drayton
Shropshire, TF9 3PS
Office tel: 01630 638696
Farm shop tel: 01630 317531
Email: project@fordhallfarm.com

Opening Times for Farm Trails, Arthur's Farm Kitchen and Shop:

Tues - Sat: 9.30am - 5pm (Shop & Trails)
10am - 4pm (Arthur's Farm Kitchen)
Sun: 10am - 4pm (also open Bank Holidays)

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 www.fordhallfarm.com

Fordhall Community Land Initiative Ltd
Community Benefit Society Registered: IP30030R
Exempt Charity reference: XR91116

