

Farming in Protected Landscape programme
Funding case study

Cotswold Farm Park

Increasing accessibility and inclusivity

Grant awarded: £116,308

Total project value: £245,062

Location: Guiting Power, Cheltenham.



**Cotswolds
National
Landscape**

Funding themes met:

People

Introduction

Cotswold Farm Park was established in 1971 and designed and created by Joe Henson, a site where he brought together rare breeds of farmed animals that were dying out, due to other breeds being favoured in commercial farming. Today, the park still hosts rare breeds but is also used to raise awareness about how food is produced and how farming shapes our landscape.

The park is managed in partnership by Joe's son, Adam Henson (presenter of BBC's Countryfile) and Duncan Andrews. Duncan Andrews first contacted our FiPL officer, Scott Brown to find out more and see if the park's plans fitted the criteria for the grant.

Part of the aim for the FiPL funding is to provide opportunities for all people to discover, enjoy and understand the landscape and its cultural heritage. The management plan of the Cotswolds National Landscape also has clear priorities under health and wellbeing, access and recreation that synchronised with the park's desire to make access and inclusivity improvements.

The park has a tremendous reach, attracting visitors into the Cotswolds from far and wide. But while visitor numbers have been good, the park team are also aware of underrepresented groups.

The park aspired to be welcoming and accommodating to the highest standards for people with all abilities. However, they also wanted to see the diversity of UK society more fully represented in their visitor numbers.

The park staff had a desire to evolve the space – as feedback from disabled people and those with health conditions and impairments were generally saying 'we can't get round all parts of the park and we want to'.

Turning the vision into a plan

The park staff had already discussed a plan to improve the park by creating greater opportunities for all visitors to interact with the animals on display and enjoy the sites and other facilities. Duncan said:

"We had really wanted to improve accessibility for all, but other demands were constantly competing for our resources, so they had been put on hold."



The entrance to the Cotswold Farm Park

Installing the assets on site

"We spent a lot of time on the design work, because it was all unique to the park. We were able to put the build into action quickly after getting the decision as we have a good team here, together with our sub-contractors.

"The biggest challenge was doing all the work in the winter, starting in January 2023. The first two weeks were fine and dry, beginning to put the wide walkway in, but then the heavens opened and the building site turned into quagmire."

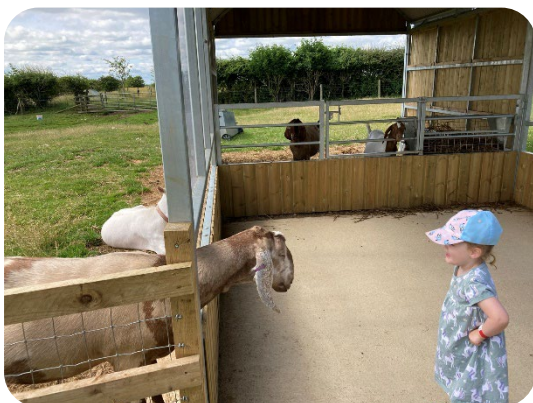


One of the new elevated walkways at the park

Outcomes

After such hard work from the park team and sub-contractors, the walkway has much improved access, bringing visitors much closer to the animals, with shelter points. The walkways are perfect for family buggies and mobility aids to pass each other.

Duncan said: "The range of assets that have been supported by FiPL - from mobility scooters through to play equipment in the woods is encouraging all people to be aware of their surroundings and to enjoy it – getting adults and children into nature, which is important for our mental and physical health."



New sheltered areas provide good access to the rare breeds on the farm



Interactive interpretation boards (right) were also part of items funded by FiPL.

The Cotswold Farm Park has seen a significant increase in disabled people that come as day visitors due to greatly improved accessibility. The number of advance carer tickets has increased by 51% from 1,750 (between July 2022 to July 2023), to 2,636 (between July 2023 and July 2024). The park has also targeted marketing campaigns at more people from urban areas outside the Cotswolds and are seeing more groups of children with special educational needs.

The FiPL funding also enabled the park to loan off-road mobility scooters for visitors to use. Since their introduction, the scooters have been booked 29 times (to July 2024). Disabled people can use their own mobility aids or book the scooters on-site.

Culture change

Regular, year-round training for the park's team is making a positive change to the organisation's culture and values by increasing awareness about disabilities and people with health conditions and impairments.

Duncan said: "It's really focussed us to have a better understanding and awareness of what disabled people and those with an impairment or condition and children with special educational needs require. Cotswold Farm Park has vastly improved its accessibility and inclusivity."

More information about access to the Cotswold Farm Park can be found here:

<https://cotswoldfarmpark.co.uk/plan-your-visit/accessibility/>

Please note: Figures are based on final approved claims and estimated total spend on the project.