

# The Sainfoin Centre

Building a modern regenerative farming education centre

Grant awarded: £100,323

Total project value: £151,800

Location: Whittington, Cheltenham



## Cotswolds National Landscape

Funding themes met:

Climate

Nature

People

Place

## Introduction

Whittington Lodge Farm is managed by Stephanie Ackrill and her father, Ian Boyd. It's a 280-hectare mixed organic farm, renowned for the quality of its 100% grass-fed organic beef and abundant wildlife. Stephanie and Ian received a grant from Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL) in 2021 in the first round of funding.

Disillusioned with conventional farming and wanting to work in harmony with nature, Ian started implementing organic and regenerative practices 20 years ago. The farm has since become a well-known demonstration site, regularly hosting events and farm tours for diverse groups. Stephanie wants to build on this legacy as she takes over management of the farm.

They successfully applied for a FiPL grant of just over £100k to improve farm tracks and develop a multi-use events space, the Sainfoin Centre, enabling the farm to host more visitors and offer them a better experience.

Stephanie said: "Our vision was to create an educational centre in the Cotswolds so people could continue to learn about regenerative agriculture. My father has a wealth of knowledge to share, which is second to none. We see the benefits of that all around us in nature. We needed to upgrade the farm with a new multi-purpose building together with our farm tracks to continue to host more groups of people and make them feel welcome and comfortable".

**"The application for FiPL was easy, logical and straight-forward".**

Stephanie Ackrill



*The Boyd and Ackrill families in 2022, at time of works.*

## How the project came about

In 2005, the farm began to establish more species-rich grasslands throughout the farm, aiming to boost insect life and bird populations. They then transitioned to being organic and introduced herbal leys into the arable rotations. They also brought in a herd of pedigree Hereford cattle.

The cattle live outside year-round mob-grazing across herbal leys, species-rich grassland and permanent pasture. This grazing method is used to build soil health, support biodiversity and supply 'Pasture for Life' certified organic beef for their popular and profitable direct sales enterprise.

The farm is a popular destination for people that want to see wildlife and learn about regenerative agriculture. When FiPL launched, the family had already decided that developing their role as a demonstration farm was a priority. But it was going to take a long time to realise this vision. The FiPL grant helped speed the process up.

In their funding application, the family set out to increase tours by 10 per cent each year, hosting just over 1000 tours over the course of 10 years. Our Local Assessment Panel recognised the applicant's strong track record as a demonstration farm and agreed that there was a growing need for facilities like theirs to support the uptake of nature friendly and regenerative farming in the Cotswolds.

Stephanie said: "We saw a story about the FiPL scheme in the farming press on the Monday and had applied for it by the Wednesday. We were thrilled to be granted funding in the first round".



Talking to builders

New farm tracks

## Delivery

For many years, the farm used a small barn for educational events and workshops. However, the facilities were basic and the structure had become unsafe. This space was rebuilt to create the Sainfoin Centre, an adaptable, multi-use space with modern kitchen facilities and solar roof panels. Accessible toilets were also added to the side of the building. Outside, sections of farm track were upgraded with hardcore to ensure groups can go on farm tours year-round, without getting stuck in the mud.

The build was ultimately very successful, but not without its challenges. Stephanie explained: "Straight-away we had to replace the original contractor, which we didn't expect. Unfortunately, their budget exceeded that of the original builder. To keep costs down, we needed to offer our own labour on easier build tasks and cut costs on materials. We saved about £60k, but we had to work hard for that – we became very well known in our local builders' merchants".



Ian Boyd and Stephanie Ackrill with their Hereford cattle

Stephanie kept open lines of communication with their FiPL Officer during unavoidable delays or modifications to the build, keeping within the agreement terms.

## Outcomes

After much hard work, with months of long days and managing the project, the family's perseverance and enthusiasm paid off and the Sainfoin Centre opened in 2022.

Stephanie said: "Offering a clean, modern space to come back to after a farm tour is brilliant. We can cater for people properly now, offering a warm welcome with teas and coffees and giving presentations and talks in comfort".

The Sainfoin Centre is primarily used for educating the farming community and others about regenerative agriculture. It's been a great success so far with a notable increase in visitors in the first year. Other groups and businesses can also book the space, making it a valuable resource for the wider community and a useful source of extra income for the farm.

Stephanie said: "We use the new space and enjoy it with other people, it is a springboard to a new chapter in our history here". For more info see: [www.cotswoldbeef.com](http://www.cotswoldbeef.com)

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



The Sainfoin Centre, opened in 2022