

THE ENGLEFIELD ESTATE ANNUAL REVIEW

ENGLEFIELD ECHO



BEHIND THE SCENES

Film stars and farming pioneers stand out in a dramatic year for our Estates

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• Cover image: Thursday Murder Club stars Ben Kingsley, Helen Mirren, Pierce Brosnan and Celia Imrie on set at Englefield Estate



ENGLEFIELD ESTATE

A year of farming, filming and fire

At Englefield, in Hackney and at Glenmazeran we are proud of our traditions. But we are not afraid to look at the way we operate, measure our methods against new ideas and, where necessary, alter course.

Farming is central to our operations. We are proud to produce food and manage the landscape. But we have always been ready to listen and learn about better ways of working.

A theme of the Englefield Echo this year is the steps we are taking to implement regenerative farming practices on the Home Farm. An inspiring visit to the Estate by regenerative farming pioneer Gabe Brown helped to confirm our decision to make the change which we believe will improve our cereal yields, protect our soils and benefit wildlife and nature.

Carefully thought through change is evident in many other features in this year's Echo, from the move towards using electric vehicles and power tools to the remarkable work over 20 years at the De Beauvoir Estate in Hackney, which has seen the community transformed.

The skill and commitment shown by people on all three estates shines through these pages, not least at Glenmazeran, where the Estate team helped to fight Scotland's largest ever wildfire on nearby land, helping



to avert an even bigger environmental disaster.

Thankfully, it hasn't only been about earnest self-improvement on the Estate this year – we've also had some fun!

Our status as a location for filming was further solidified by the release of The Thursday Murder Club which shows off Englefield House and gardens at their very best effect. It was hugely enjoyable to watch the film in the company of many

members of the Estate team.

Combining a respect for tradition with a readiness to embrace new ideas has always been central to how we operate.

I hope you enjoy reading about all that has been going on in this year's Echo. **•**

Richard Benyon.



Innovation in agriculture is a constant process with the current focus on better caring for nature, wildlife and the soil

Changes have been made this year to the Estate's approach to Home Farm to better meet our responsibilities to the environment and the efficient production of food.

A strategic review of our agricultural operations by our recently appointed farm consultant Emma Watson of Gasson Associates has been one of the catalysts for change to our farming systems, which we believe will bring benefits.

Emma, working with George Chichester, who has been the Farm Consultant at Englefield for many years, produced a report which is informing our move towards a more regenerative system of agriculture. George retires later this year, and we are extremely grateful for all his help and guidance.

We were pleased to welcome Gabe Brown, a leading exponent of regenerative farming, to the Englefield Estate in July for an inspiring talk about farming profitably and in tune with nature.

The six principles of regenerative agriculture call for minimal soil disturbance, maintaining a wide diversity of plant species, keeping living roots in the soil year-round, keeping the soil covered, integrating livestock and understanding the specific context of the farm.

Gabe, who farms in North Dakota in the US, has shown that farming in tune with nature, creating a diverse ecosystem and healthy soils, can be commercially viable as well as environmentally sustainable. Several leading UK retailers are promising to

Moving towards regenerative farming

source more food from farmers adopting regenerative practices.



Property and Land, said with half the arable land 'rested' for a year input costs will be reduced but profitability maintained, even without support from the Government through environmental schemes like the Sustainable Farming Incentive, (SFI).

The area of arable land left fallow after the 2025 harvest has been drilled with catch crops, including vetches, legumes and other



James Meade and Emma Watson inspect the cover crop of chicory, clover, lucerne, sanfoin and grass



Emma shows James winter wheat, direct drilled in the last week of September

er plants designed to cover the ground. They will improve the soil health, ready for arable crops to be drilled again the following year.

In a change to traditional practices the land will no longer be ploughed or cultivated. Instead, seed will be directly drilled into the soil in a way that minimises the disturbance of the sub surface. No insecticides will be used, and fungicide use will be radically reduced.

In the next phase of the transition some sheep and cattle already being grazed on

pasture on Home Farm will be put onto the arable land, naturally manuring the soil and working in the cover crops to provide more nutrients.

This year's hot, dry summer has reinforced the view that we need to farm in a way that keeps moisture in the soil. The floods in 2024 also demonstrated the need to adapt our farming to mitigate the impact of extreme weather, driven by climate change.

James said moving to a more environmentally focused way of farming and following the principles of regenerative

We're interested and we're keen, everybody is on board

agriculture had been under consideration at Englefield for some time. "We want to be proud of how we are farming," he said. James added that those farmers who had been engaged in regenerative agriculture for many years were demonstrating it could be done profitably, but it was important to adhere to a system that fitted in with the specific requirements of the individual farm.

"In my view farming needs to prepare itself to farm without support," James told the Echo. "We saw after Brexit there was a shift towards public money for public good in farming and there was a lot of public money put into schemes like the Sustainable Farming Incentive and Countryside Stewardship to help the ecology and biodiversity. I don't think there is going to be support to the same extent now."

The Home Farm covers around 2,500 acres, with more than 1,300 in arable production, 450 down to pasture and around 560 acres of woodland. The deer park covers 140 acres. As part of the move towards regenerative farming the entire farm is being managed more holistically, James said. That includes a shift in the measures taken to protect and enhance wildlife and a continued focus on supporting farmland birds.

James said it would be a decision for the other farmers on the Estate to decide if they also want to adopt regenerative farm practices, and the Estate was always happy to share ideas as well as to learn from others who are further along on the journey.

He said: "As an Estate we're just starting out on this path and there will be plenty of lessons to be learned. We're interested and we're keen. Everyone is on board – that's the main message."

Emma, our Farm Consultant, is confident the changes now underway will reap >



“ This new direction will increase productivity... it's farming in tune with nature **”**

Profitable, productive and good for nature

financial and environmental rewards. "Englefield Home Farm wants to be a profitable and productive farming business, whilst following the principles of regenerative agriculture," she said.

There will be a more focused approach on growing the crop that works best for the soil and the weather, which at the Estate's Home Farm, is wheat.

Emma explained: "Instead of trying to grow break crops, like oil seed rape (OSR) or peas, in the years between growing wheat, which often proved costly and unsuccessful, we will put our resources into cover crops instead that will be good for the soil health and support biodiversity." With Emma's support we will also be widening the measures taken to support farmland birds, with a reduced concentration on one single species – the grey partridge – and a broader approach to farmland birds on the Estate.

"It should be all wildlife that we are worried about, not just a single species," she said. "The changes we are making will support the whole ecosystem. The grey partridge is a great indicator species – but they are not the be all and end all. There are lots of farmland birds that should be helped to thrive."

With challenging weather conditions like this year's drought and the floods of 2024, combined with changes in the support mechanisms for farming, now is seen by many as a good time to review operations and change direction.

Emma is convinced that following a path to regenerative agriculture is the right way to go. "Conventional or traditional farming wasn't working brilliantly," she said. "This new direction will increase productivity, whilst reducing costs and, more importantly risk - it's farming in tune with nature."

Mike Goodenough, Farm Manager and a Director of HBH Farming Ltd said, the Englefield Estate was right to make the change to regenerative farming based on the soil type and landscape of Home Farm. He said the gravelly soils were very susceptible to drying out in the summer, leaving crops wilting – and he believes improving soil fertility could pay off.

"Average yields should increase," he said. "Overall output might be down because 50% of the farm will not be down to cereals at any one time, but the average

yield from the wheat crop should improve." He described the changes as "a big, big learning curve" which would require flexibility as different cover crops will be tried to see which ones work best, both to encourage insects and improve the fertility of the soil, in time we should also see a reduction with inputs.

HBH Farming, which also carries out arable operations on other farms in the area, is seeing more of them switch to different regenerative measures on certain areas of land, but he said the Englefield Estate was unique in putting the whole of Home Farm over to the system in one go.

The reduction in cultivations, with an end to traditional ploughing/cultivating, means different agricultural machinery will be used, some of which might have to be hired in for specific jobs, he said.

"The key is to adopt the changes and learn by them however they turn out," he added. "At Englefield it is about fulfilling the Estate's goals and we believe this will work best for them. I am sure it will have its challenges over the coming years, but we're at the start of a journey." **»**



A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE

We're reducing our reliance on fossil fuels across several departments on the Estate, with some innovative pieces of battery-powered equipment proving their worth.

The most obvious change has been to part of our vehicle fleet. Two diesel vans have been replaced with Ford E-Transit vans and the Estate has also acquired an electric pool car.

Buildings Manager, Duncan Rands said the vehicles are performing well and can be charged up at the electric charging points installed as part of the renovation of the Estate Yard. Around half of the proposed 14 charging points have now been fitted.

Duncan said: "We have the vans on a lease basis, and they have all been fitted out with the storage needed to hold tools and materials for the Maintenance Team. It is part of our move towards carbon reduction on the Estate and so far, the new vans have gone down well. They both have the Estate branding on the sides and the bonnet."

For Rich Edwards, our Forestry Manager, developments in battery-powered tools are also making a difference to the day-to-day work of the team.

The Foresters have the use of a Husqvarna chainsaw and polesaw, both used for smaller jobs where less power is needed to cut through timber and other material. The team is also testing battery-powered kit made by major manufacturer DEWALT and providing feedback to the company as it develops more products in the range.

Rich said: "The battery-powered kit is much easier to use – for one thing you don't have to shout to be heard over the sound of an engine which is particularly useful during training. Although you still need hearing protection using battery chainsaws is much quieter than using petrol chainsaws."

The battery-powered tools have reduced carbon emissions, don't require fuel to be carried in vehicles and are energy efficient. They also need less maintenance than petrol powered tools.

Rich said the work the Estate is doing with DEWALT was particularly interesting, with some equipment not yet available on the



» Charging up the electric vehicles from charging points in Estate Yard

market being lent to the Forestry Team to evaluate.

Hollie Gautsch-Booth of DEWALT said: "At DEWALT user insights and feedback are core to our product development process. Spending time with and getting input from the landscape and forestry team at Englefield Estate has been invaluable – helping us refine and evolve our products to be the best in the market."

But Rich admitted there are still jobs in the woods that need petrol-powered chainsaws. "At the moment the battery powered equipment doesn't have the power to deal with felling larger trees," he said. "I am sure as the technology develops that will come, but we're not there yet."

For Head Gardener Susan Broughton a weed machine powered with a mower is having a beneficial impact on keeping paths



» Electric chainsaws are now being used for some of the forestry work

and other paved and gravelled areas clear of weed and algae.

Susan described the machine as being like a giant electric toothbrush with several different attachments designed for different jobs.

"It takes up the weeds so that we don't have to use any chemicals," Susan explained. "There are three different brushes depending on the task, but it gets down between paving stones and can even be used to clear away algae."

"Some of the jobs used to require a lot of water before we had the machine, so it is saving water too."

For the conventional weeding of beds and borders, however, Susan said there is no obvious replacement for the good old-fashioned hoe. **»**

Perfect BACKDROP

Top billing for Englefield House in the film of the year



Film audiences around the world have been delighted by one of this year's most successful Netflix dramas, *The Thursday Murder Club*.

Four of the biggest names in British cinema and TV took the lead roles. But for the staff, residents and visitors to the Englefield Estate, the location – Englefield House – also deserves top billing.

Filming with Dame Helen Mirren, Celia Imrie, Pierce Brosnan and Sir Ben Kingsley took place in the summer of 2024. The film was released in selected cinemas on Friday August 22 this year (2025) and screened from August 28 – appropriately a Thursday – on Netflix.

For Peter Carson, our Events Manager, the drama generated more interest than anything else filmed at Englefield.

Peter told the Echo: "We've had other productions that are high profile like Disney's *Cruella* and Netflix's *The Crown* but I don't think that any of them has had as much publicity as *The Thursday Murder Club*, particularly on social media."

That publicity has included huge praise for Englefield House, which is Coopers Chase, the luxury retirement home where members of *The Thursday Murder Club* live and work together as amateur sleuths solving crimes.

Peter believes the fact that Coopers Chase plays such a prominent part in proceedings is one reason for the extra



interest generated in the location. But he also thinks that the way Director Chris Columbus showed off the beauty of Englefield House and its grounds, also made a big impact on audiences.

"From the very start of the film through to that very last shot of the sun dramatically setting, Englefield House looked stunning," he said. "I haven't heard anyone who has seen the film say anything other than 'my word, doesn't Englefield House look spectacular.'"

One of the consequences of such sumptuous on-screen presence for Englefield House has been an unprecedented number of enquiries from people asking if they can hold private parties and wedding receptions at the House.

"I think I had more enquiries in the couple of weeks following the film being released than I have in the previous three or four months," said Peter. "It is great so many appreciate the house and gardens and want it as their venue for their special occasion."

For *The Thursday Murder Club* the work by the Estate staff in preparing the location began long before the cameras started rolling.

Peter explained that film companies go to an enormous amount of trouble in selecting locations that give them exactly what they want for the movie they are making. Location Scouts, Production Designers, Producers, Set Designers – even the film's Director and



other top Executives – can all pay separate visits to the location before a decision to use a location is confirmed.

However, sometimes a Film Executive who already knows Englefield and what it offers can make that decision a little easier. The Production Designer on *The Thursday Murder Club* was highly experienced James Merifield.

When he first read the script of Richard Osman's best-selling book on which the film is based, Englefield House came immediately to mind. James had worked there in 2017 on the film *Breathe* starring Andrew Garfield and Claire Foy.

He said the geography of the house in relation to the church, and the eclectic style of the building lent itself to *The Thursday Murder Club* and Coopers Chase.

That didn't mean there was nothing for the set designers to do to make Englefield House and grounds ready for filming. Two essential locations in the book and the film – the Jigsaw Room where members of *The Thursday Murder Club* meet and the graveyard where one of the murder victims is discovered – both had to be installed.

In both cases the temporary structures, made of lightweight materials with no risk of causing damage to the historic property, were created for the external shots. However, when the film crew decided they wanted to dig a shallow grave for one scene, our Forestry Manager Rich Edwards was on hand to advise on the best place



▲ Above: Head Housekeeper Amanda Thacker with the jigsaw used in *The Thursday Murder Club* filming (right).

▲ Top left: Ron, (Pierce Brosnan) greets his son Jason (Tom Ellis).

▲ Top right: *Thursday Murder Club* stars Celia Imrie, Ben Kingsley, Helen Mirren and Pierce Brosnan

to dig the hole, avoiding the roots of valuable trees. Peter thanked a number of departments on the Estate who assist him with the logistics of supporting filming operations, from the very beginning of the process to the very end.

As well as Rich, who also advises film crews who want to film in Englefield's extensive woodlands, Peter calls upon the services of Head Housekeeper Amanda Thacker who oversees and organises the removal of furniture, pictures and carpets from the rooms needed for filming as well as their safe storage and return when the production team move out.

Gamekeeper David Wiggins can also be relied on to lend a hand where needed and the gardening team, led by Susan Broughton, often have contributions to make to the smooth running of the filming operation. He also paid tribute to support from the Rev Julia Myles and churchwardens at St Mark's. Peter said: "It's a major team effort that allows these things to happen."

During the filming of *The Thursday Murder Club*, all ▶



✖ The cast is visited by Steven Spielberg on set”

Both Dame Helen Mirren and Celia Imrie told various interviewers about how much they enjoyed filming on the Estate

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◀ four of the main stars, as well as the supporting cast of highly recognisable British television and film regulars, could often be seen in and around the Estate.

“You get little chance to talk to them – they are in work mode, as are you and the house staff,” he said. “You might say ‘hello’ but it’s rare to get to know someone when they are filming here.” It was heartening, however, he agreed, to hear and read the compliments paid to the location by some of the movie’s stars when being interviewed.

Both Dame Helen Mirren, who plays The Thursday Murder Club’s leader, Elizabeth, and Celia Imrie, who plays Joyce, a recent and enthusiastic recruit to the club, told various interviewers about how much they enjoyed filming on the Estate and its “dreamlike beauty.”

The publicity before and after the film’s release – and the success of the film itself - led to dozens of media inquiries for interviews with Peter - and even a request from a major news programme to film an outside broadcast live from the Estate in the week after the launch.

Peter, however, had to decline these approaches for contractual reasons but to also lessen the level of publicity so as to protect the privacy of local residents. Englefield House is a private home and the Estate is a working rural business. Filming is a part of the operation, but visitor numbers are limited. ✖



✖ Drawings produced by James Merifield (left and above) were brought to life on set, turning Englefield House into Coopers Chase

SET DESIGN IN A BEAUTIFUL LOCATION

How it all came together for Production Designer James Merifield and the Englefield Estate staff



✖ James Merifield

Production Designer James Merifield said working with the team at Englefield House on the set of The Thursday Murder Club was “a real joy.”

James was instrumental in choosing the House and grounds as the fictional Coopers Chase for the movie, having used the location for another film several years earlier. “I had it in my memory bank,” he said. “And as I turned the pages of the script I thought, ‘ah yes – Englefield House...’”

He said finding the perfect location for any film is only half the challenge – striking up a good working relationship with the people who live and work there is also absolutely vital to make things go smoothly.

“I have to say Zoe Benyon and the whole family and everybody behind the scenes, all the staff, were so helpful,” he said.

The beautiful location has been credited with playing a significant part in the film’s success, even though, as James revealed, it initially seemed just too impressive for a retirement village, even for the story’s creator.

James said: “It is true that in the book Coopers Chase is nothing like as grand as Englefield House which, in reality, was based on the retirement home where Richard Osman’s mother lives. But I think the Director, Chris Columbus thought it was right to make it aspirational.

“It’s like a kind of Hogwarts for older people. Hogwarts in the Harry Potter films is aspirational – it’s somewhere children would love to go and study. We wanted to make Coopers Chase somewhere older people would want to go and live and Englefield provided that.”

Englefield House had all the ingredients James was looking for, but some additions were needed to fit the plot of the film. He said the changes – the construction of the

orangery, known as the Jigsaw Room, where the amateur sleuths meet to crack crimes, and the ancient cemetery, which is crucial to a major storyline – was made much easier with the support of the Englefield team.

“The spot where I wanted to put the orangery had two large topiary style yew hedges that had to be removed,” he said, “but everyone was so accommodating. And I felt a little better about it when I noticed, in an old black and white photograph of Englefield, that there had been a Victorian orangery on roughly the same spot many years earlier.”

The Coopers Chase orangery was built of lightweight material and had no impact on the fabric of the House and was removed once filming had finished.

The construction of the cemetery in the grounds required the go ahead from the Estate’s Forestry Team, who advised on the best place to dig a shallow grave, without disturbing

the roots of the surrounding trees.

James revealed that the set build for the team working on The Thursday Murder Club came with a few perks. As well as getting to work in such a beautiful location with supportive hosts, the preparation for the Heritage Live concerts was going on as the set was under construction.

“The set builders were up ladders, doing their work, while the musicians were rehearsing on stage in the background,” he said. “They had entertainment while they worked!”

James said he would love to return to Englefield to film the next book in The Thursday Murder Club series – and the script is already written and ready to go.

“Coopers Chase is Englefield,” he said. “If we make the next film then we will have to go back. I hope the team at the House enjoyed having us – it was a real joy for us and we’d love to work there again.” ✖

Making filming run smoothly

When a film crew decides to use Englefield House for a production there is plenty of work for the housekeeping team to do before the cameras start rolling.

As a private home and a historic Grade II* listed building with a large number of interesting items, keeping everything safe and secure is the first priority.

But it is also important for the Estate to meet the needs of the film crew quickly and efficiently. Head Housekeeper Amanda Thacker and her colleagues must balance those two demands.

Amanda recently oversaw the filming of two very different projects – the Netflix blockbuster, The Thursday Murder Club, and a high-profile television advertisement for a major brand.

Amanda said: "Successful filming takes lots of planning, it's like navigating a ship through a storm, it takes a team. No one person can do it on their own and I have a small, trained team of Housekeepers by my side."

The film crew will stipulate which items they need removing from the rooms they are using – and then, under the direction of Amanda, the team swings into action. "We supervise the movement of fragile, historic



8 Rolling up a carpet needs teamwork

objects and respond to any issues that arise," Amanda said.

If the film crew wants all the rooms to be empty, professional movers will be called in and storage organised. If paintings must come down a specialist team is engaged to safely remove them and ensure they are properly handled and cared for.

Amanda said: "The specialist team make specific crates to protect the paintings. Some paintings are very fragile and need to be stored in individual crates. These are carefully labelled with the contents and where the picture comes from."

Good communication between the House team and the film crew is essential. "With

help from the house's curator, Gareth Hughes, the Housekeeping Team are trained to a high standard, and they are a crucial part in making sure this runs seamlessly," she said.

An extensive selection of photographs of the objects in their correct places in every room is taken at the start of the process so everything can be returned to its rightful place once filming is over.

"We need help from the Estate Yard and the Gardens Team to move large items such as carpets," Amanda said. "For example, the library carpet requires eight people to lift it!" Being polite and helpful is the priority for the Housekeeping Team. "A firm hand in a velvet glove is required to manage all the different people that make up the film crew!" she said.

"My team manage to take this all in their stride and always have smiles on their faces. When the film starts rolling, we must monitor the areas of the House that are being used like little mice - not seen or heard but always keeping a watchful eye over the House."

While film crews come and go, the architecturally unique House and its historically important contents must endure, as they have done for centuries. That's always in the forefront of Amanda's mind. **8**

Filming a major TV advertisement at Englefield House

Not all the films made at Englefield House are blockbuster movies. As The Thursday Murder Club hit cinema screens and the streaming service, Netflix, another film was being shot on the Estate, this time inside the hallways and library of the House.

The subject remains a closely guarded secret. But we can reveal to readers of the Englefield Echo, that the film will be the latest episode in a long-running series of much-loved advertisements that have captured the hearts of TV viewers.

Producer Patrick Duguid of Passion Pictures was the man behind the cameras when the cast and crew took over the House for two days of filming in early September 2025. He was full of praise for the Englefield team who helped to make the process run as smoothly as possible.

Patrick said he was looking for a large stately home with the wow factor for the film and Englefield House perfectly fitted the bill. "Our Locations Manager also works on major feature films and has a long list of large stately homes

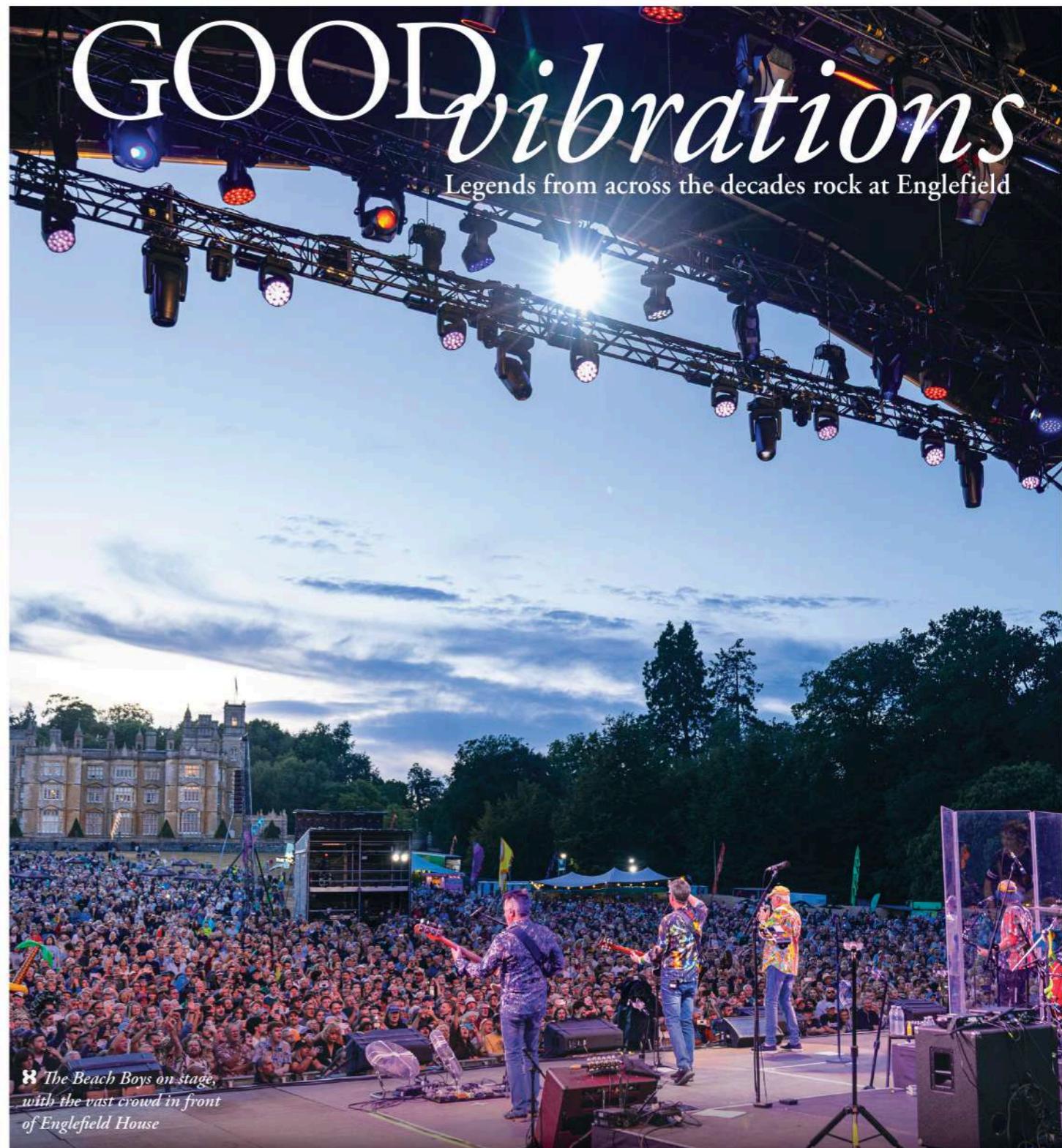
in his head," he said.

"Englefield House stood out because it is such a beautiful property and within striking distance of London, which always helps."

He said the support from the team at Englefield, including our Events Manager Peter Carson and Head Housekeeper Amanda Thacker, had been first class. "From the first time I went to Englefield and met Amanda the care and respect they have for the property shone through," he said. "We always want to leave the

property that we use for filming as we found it." The location and its unique historic atmosphere will play a big part in the final film when it is screened, once post-production is complete.

Peter said: "We are always happy to accommodate filmmakers, whether they are making a major Hollywood movie or shooting a creative new ad for television. Production values for both are of the highest standard and of course the location plays such an important part." **8**



8 The Beach Boys on stage, with the vast crowd in front of Englefield House

The Summer Concerts at Englefield always attract a range of artists with wide appeal – and this year was no exception.

Thousands of music fans from across generations packed the grounds in front of Englefield House to enjoy four nights of concerts in July.

From indie band, The Wombats, who headlined on Thursday night, to pop legends The Beach Boys, who topped the bill for the closing session on Sunday, Englefield proved once again to be the perfect backdrop for a summer celebration of entertainment.

There was even a surprise appearance by superstar Janet Jackson and her son, Eissa, who briefly joined her brothers, The Jacksons, on stage on Saturday night. Lulu and David Essex also wowed the crowds on Sunday night before The Beach Boys wrapped up the event, part of the Heritage Live series, with a stunning set featuring their many hits.

Peter Carson, our Events Manager, said: "As always we're grateful for the support of our Estate staff and our neighbours in staging Heritage Live's Summer Concerts. It is lovely to be able to welcome music fans to Englefield to enjoy such a great line-up against the backdrop of the house and grounds." **8**

Fighting FIRE with fire

Estate staff from Glenmazeran played a significant part in battling the biggest wildfire in Scottish history in the summer.

The blaze, which caused devastation to almost 30,000 acres of moorland and woodland and killed ground-nesting birds, insects, reptiles and mammals, thankfully did not reach Glenmazeran itself.

But our Head Keeper Murray Wilson and Underkeeper Lee McGibbon were part of a more than 100-strong group from rural businesses across the area who answered a call for volunteers to support the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service in fighting the wildfire.

The significant contribution made by those volunteers from up to 30 estates, including the provision of equipment worth over £3m, played a major part in containing the fire which broke out at Carrbridge and Dava in the Strathdearn area in late June.

As well as the damage to the landscape, flora and fauna, many miles of deer fencing was destroyed along with other features including grouse butts. Up to a million recently planted trees were lost and efforts to regenerate peatbogs seriously undermined.

The alarm was first raised by the Head Keeper at the Cawdor Estate, Paul Wilson, Murray's cousin.

Ross Ewing, Director of Moorland at Scottish Land and Estates, said: "The response from the estates was incredible." He described the number of estate employees and rural businesses that turned out to help and their willingness to use their equipment as a "testament to the community spirit that these land managers have between them."

Vehicles from private estates used to help fight the fire included all-terrain Argocats, tractors, diggers, water bowsers, fogging units – used to dampen down dry areas – and leafblowers.

The expertise of a majority of the Estate workers in the practice of muirburn – the rotational burning of heather to help it regenerate and reduce the risk of wildfires – also proved crucial, Ross said.

Restrictions on muirburn imposed by the Scottish Government and designed to protect valuable peat from fire damage, come into effect in January 2026. But Ross and other land managers are concerned they may disincentivise some estates from continuing to follow the practice and maintain the equipment needed to control fires.

Glenmazeran's Head Keeper Murray Wilson and Underkeeper Lee McGibbon were part of more than 100-strong group of volunteers who helped to support Scotland's Fire and Rescue Service during this summer's wildfires

Pictures taken after the blaze had been extinguished show that areas which had been subjected to controlled muirburn suffered less devastation than areas that were unmanaged, demonstrating the value of the practice in reducing the flammable material.

Ross said: "Eighty of the 101 estate staff who turned out to fight the fire had experience of muirburn, they've been trained in muirburn, essentially. The people who turned out had real experience of using fire in a controlled way."

One of the tactics used to control the wildfire was a procedure called tactical back burn. "Essentially you light a fire in front of the fire with a view to killing the fuel so that it comes to a stop," Ross said.

“The response from the estates was incredible... a testament to the community spirit that these land managers have between them

» A wildfire races across the Scottish landscape. It was a blaze like this one which more than 100 farmers, gamekeepers and other land managers fought in the summer

Muirburn is expected to be allowed to continue in Scotland when the new rules come into effect but licences to carry it out may be more difficult to obtain. "The worry is that by making it that much harder to get a licence some estates might say this is going to be too much hassle for us," Ross said.

One of the biggest lessons from the wildfires was the value of private landowners in responding to crises in the Highlands. Ross concludes his report on the incident highlighting the contribution landed estates make.



"Land-based and rural businesses mounted an incredible response, alongside government agencies. For this they deserve total admiration," he writes. "Beyond this, it is vital that the Scottish Government takes steps to ensure that it does not inadvertently compromise hundreds of years of collective skill and experience that enabled land managers to respond decisively and effectively to this emergency. Without this invaluable knowledge, it is clear that a far greater swathe of the landscape would have succumbed to the flames." **»**

Managing the MOORLANDS

Wildlife is thriving at Glenmazeran, reflecting the hard work of our keepers

Skills and equipment gained through many years of good moorland management proved their worth on the Glenmazeran Estate this year, both in the fight against Scotland's worst ever wildfire and the protection of red-listed wading birds.

Head Keeper Murray Wilson and Under Keeper Lee McGibbon played a significant part in helping to bring under control the blaze that ripped through close on 12,000 hectares of moorland and woodland in June at Carrbridge and Dava in the Strathdearn area, a half-hour drive from Glenmazeran.

Murray reports that despite the exceptionally dry spring and summer Glenmazeran continues to support a healthy population of threatened wading birds, including curlew, lapwing and oystercatchers, thanks to sound management practices.

Armed with equipment from Glenmazeran, including an Argocat with a 500-litre water tank, pressure washers and leaf-blowers, Murray and Lee fought the flames as part of a 100-strong team from around 30 estates from in and around the area where the blaze took hold.

Murray takes up the story: "I got the call about the fire pretty quickly because my cousin, Paul Wilson at Cawdor, was right at the centre. We were quickly on the scene – and it turned out to be a job that lasted three days."

Murray explained that things got particularly difficult on the first night of firefighting. "We had to withdraw, it was getting pretty hairy. The fire was on several fronts, it was dark, it was difficult to communicate above the noise of the pressure washers and leaf blowers and all you could see were flames and smoke."

But early the next day he and Lee were back and stayed on the scene, with only short breaks, until the blaze was declared under control at the end of day three.

Murray supports the conclusions of the report by Scottish Land and Estates that the support of game keepers and farmers and was essential. "They provided the water in the fire appliances pulled up at the side of the road but they didn't get into fighting the fire directly," he said.

"It was vital that they were able to fill up the tank on the Argocat so we didn't have to pull muddy water



Murray Wilson
takes in the view



from the burns and risk silting up the filters, but it was the keepers who fought the flames."

He welcomed the strong sense of community among those who turned out to fight the wildfire, some travelling for three to four hours to get there. "We do it because, even if it's not on our land it could be next time – everyone supports one another – it's what we do," he said.

He added the fire showed it was time to revise and update fire plans and check fire-fighting equipment. "It has sharpened everyone up and acted as a wake-up call," he said.

Wildlife affected elsewhere was spared at Glenmazeran and, Murray explained, the red grouse and wading birds on Estate land have had a good year, despite widespread concerns about drought.

"Spring was really good," he said. "We're at a bit of a higher altitude and we just had little spells of wetter weather which were absolutely needed and with the warmer temperatures it was perfect for insect life.

With that and the re-wetting we have done to help restore the peat, the chicks have done well."

"We managed them all through to fledging," Murray said. "They live off insects and the warm spring got them off to a good start. The work we do, including predator control, gives them a helping hand." **•**



Inverness-based artist, Shaun Fraser has produced a bronze sculpture inspired by the landscape and an old building on the Glenmazeran Estate in Scotland – and put on display more than 500 miles away in the centre of London.

The piece, entitled "Seeking Shelter" is made up of three bronze casts created from impressions taken from the stonework of a former dwelling on the Estate, not far from Inverness. The artwork has been installed at Aird House, Inverness Terrace, in London.

Shaun (above) and at work (right) is a sculptor and visual artist based in Scotland and often London too. He studied at the Edinburgh College of Art and the Royal College of Art and has had his work featured internationally and has won a number of awards.

He said: "The notion behind this artwork is the overarching theme of 'place and provenance', the sculptural work grapples with suggestions of domicile, home, ownership and belonging.

As a nod to the name of both Aird House and its location on Inverness Terrace I took a series of bronze casts from an old dwelling in Glenmazeran, a rural area located above the banks of Loch Ness, outside of Inverness in the Scottish Highlands.

"The bronze casting process took place at Black Isle Bronze based in Nairn. These casts have been placed on public display at Aird House on Inverness Terrace in Westminster.

"This bronze artwork establishes a lasting link between these two locations, the rural and the urban, the north and the south, separated by 550 miles.

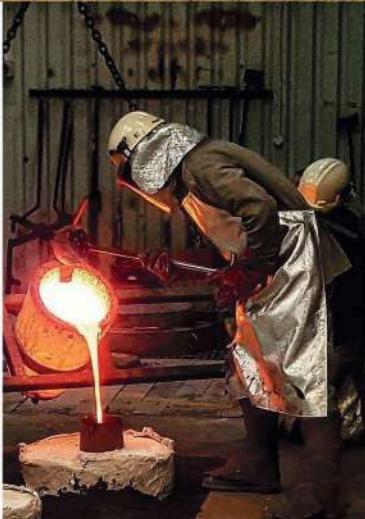
"It presents a contemplation on the preciousness of home, the concept of belonging and the relationship between the old and the new as the 19th century rubble impressions contrast with the contemporary structure of Aird House. It marks the coming together of different times, different textures and rich visual qualities."

Edward Crookes, Chief Executive of the Englefield Estate, paid tribute to the work and Shaun's ability to reflect the unique qualities of the Glenmazeran Estate in his sculpture.



SCULPTURAL REFLECTIONS

A little bit of Scotland comes to London – inspired by an old stone wall from a Glenmazeran building



"The Estate is pleased to have been able to play a part in the creation of this artwork," he said. "The Scottish Highlands have long been an inspiration to visual artists, and it is good to see this tradition maintained and to see Shaun draw on this reference to Glenmazeran." Shaun added: "My work frequently comments upon notions of identity, links to landscape and connections with place."

"The Scottish Highland landscape in which I was brought up is a constant source of inspiration for me. Landscape has always featured heavily as a part of my notion of self. There's a certain sense of fidelity which I attach to this topography which is elemental."

"I have tried to tap into this sensibility again with 'Seeking Shelter' presenting a work which is sensitive to its Highland heritage and candid within the modern context". **•**

TURNING BUILDINGS INTO A COMMUNITY

A relentless focus on providing people with what they need has paid off at the Benyon Estate

Placemaking is the art of creating vibrant, healthy and meaningful places that enhance people's well-being and connection to their community.

Over almost two decades De Beauvoir Town in East London has undergone a transformation, with better homes, shops, workplaces and schools. In close collaboration with others, the Benyon Estate has helped to make those improvements possible.

So what does it take to turn a collection of buildings into a community? That was the challenge facing the Benyon Estate in De Beauvoir Town in East London nearly 20 years ago, when the Benyon family and Estate trustees began reviewing its management after many decades under the day-to-day control of outside property management companies.

With more than 300 residential properties and some notable commercial buildings, including shops and office space, the opportunities for positive placemaking were significant. But the challenges were just as daunting.

The area lacked a coherent collection of places to shop. Businesses struggled to find the right kind of offices appropriate for the modern workplace. And local families had nowhere close at hand to send their children to school.

Residential tenants of the historic early Victorian homes owned by the Estate and distributed across De Beauvoir were also deserving of a better standard of service from their landlord, including a faster response to problems and an effective maintenance programme.

Edward Benyon knew De Beauvoir and the Benyon Estate well when he was first asked to take a leading role in its management. His parents had owned a house here from 1970 to 1992 and Edward still has his home here.

Initially he operated as a client of the property management company. But by 2007 it was clear a more hands-on approach was needed and Edward was asked by the Trustees to become Estate Manager, a position he has held for the past 18 years.

Over that time, with the support and skills of the Estate's team of property specialists, inspiring commercial tenants and innovative partners, the Benyon

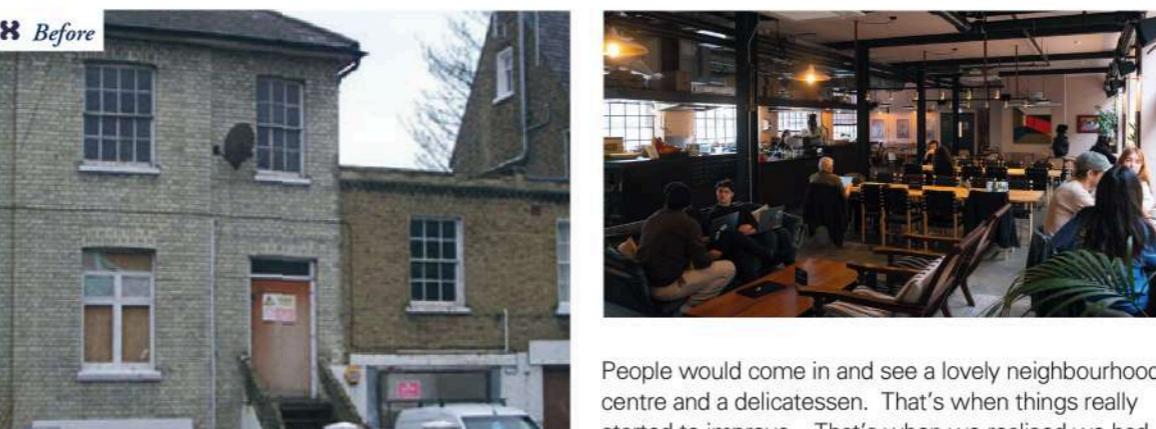


Estate has become an exemplar of good placemaking practice.

The creation, with businessman Harry Davies, of the De Beauvoir Deli on Southgate Road on the site of what had been a tumbledown car spares shop, was the catalyst for the revitalisation of the neighbourhood shops that are now a cornerstone of the Estate.

Edward says: "The Deli was a big turning point. If you can imagine when people were coming in to look at our houses to let they would come into De Beauvoir and they would see a really run down retail neighbourhood centre and this falling down car spares shop.

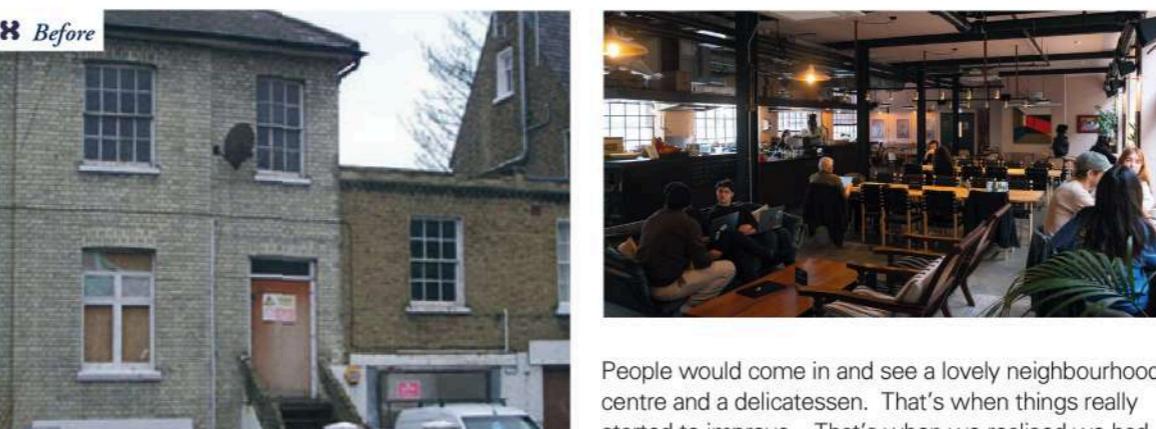
"When we built the Deli, everybody upped their game.



People would come in and see a lovely neighbourhood centre and a delicatessen. That's when things really started to improve... That's when we realised we had the ability to do something really quite special here."

The De Beauvoir Deli and Deli Café across the road are now part of a neighbourhood centre that perfectly matches the needs of the area. There are now several cafés, a pizza restaurant, fresh food shops, a flower shop, garden centre and wine bar across a portfolio of 14 shops.

A significant development on the Estate came with the provision of workspaces for commercial tenants through the conversion of the industrial buildings along De Beauvoir Road.



“The area lacked a coherent collection of places to shop and local families had nowhere close to send their children to school **”**

Edward and Head of Commercial Property Josh Summers visited other offices in London to see what worked. Edward says: "One of the things that really struck me was half of the offices had desks with computers on them but the other half would have ping pong tables, snooker tables, bean bags, juicers, coffee machines...all that sort of stuff."

Edward and Josh thought it would make sense to provide shared spaces for relaxing and taking breaks so that tenants would not need to include those facilities within the office spaces they were paying rent for – and it would make the whole offering more appealing.

The transformation, completed in 2017, saw numbers 92 to 96 De Beauvoir Road become the De Beauvoir Block, a network of 33 workspaces, ranging from 300 to 2,500 square feet, designed and equipped to support individuals and businesses in the creative industries. Neighbouring buildings at 98 and 100 De Beauvoir Road have also been transformed from mixed-use office and residential to contemporary office space.

The layout means start-ups can keep their costs down by 'hot-desking' in the building and, as they grow and take on staff, trade up to more spacious accommodation. The Block café and courtyard provides that all-important chill-out space for lunch, coffee breaks and time away from the desk.

Edward says: "I did an online webinar during Covid with the management company KPMG and they were talking about the future office market and I remember somebody saying that the offices that will survive Covid are the offices where there is the maximum amount of landlord participation. That's what we have. Without the café I don't think the Block would have survived."

The ability to pivot and respond to community concerns has been an important part of the development of the Benyon Estate, as demonstrated by the building of a much-needed new school. >

Two new schools a boost for the area

◀ The site at Kingsland Road already had outline planning permission for residential and commercial development - along with a pub - when the Estate was approached by the founders of a new Academy in desperate need of land to build a school in De Beauvoir.

The scheme for residential and commercial development, along with the pub, were dropped and the site made available for education. The result is the Waterside Academy which opened in 2013 and is now gaining plaudits for the quality of its teaching.

A further opportunity to improve the education offering in De Beauvoir came when the then Mayor of London, Boris Johnson, announced the closure of the fire station on the corner of Kingsland Road in January 2014. The site was acquired by the Department for Communities and Local Government on behalf of the Department for Education.

They partnered with the Benyon Estate because of its local knowledge and existing relationship with the secondary school. The Estate obtained planning permission for the school, retail space - which has since become a dental surgery - and 68 flats.

The flats were pre-sold to social housing provider Dolphin Living to provide much needed affordable homes for working Londoners. Edward recalls: "Our deal with the Department for Communities and Local Government included the transfer of the freehold to the Benyon Estate once the development was complete."

The site opened in 2019 and Hackney New Primary School and 333 Kingsland Road have been recognised with a number of architectural awards, including the Royal Institute of British Architects Stirling Prize, the RIBA National and Regional Awards for 2022 and the International Architecture Awards.

Involvement in the community is a hallmark of the way The Benyon Estate is run today acknowledging that it takes a wide range of organisations and individuals to create a cohesive whole and the Estate can use its position to help drive that process forward.

From the De Beauvoir Gardens to St Peter's Church and family events like Party in the Park or the Jazz Festival, working with others is seen as vital, demonstrating an engagement that was simply not there when outside managers looked after the Estate.

Residents now have places to eat, places to shop, places to work and places to relax. Their children can be educated just a short walk away and the community is clearly thriving. There is still more to do, but the Benyon Estate is much, much more today than a collection of buildings. ■

How working with commercial tenants *benefits* the community

Three commercial tenants of the Benyon Estate demonstrate the importance of working closely with their landlord for the benefit of both their own businesses and the estate as a whole.

Harry Davies, the proprietor of the De Beauvoir Deli and café, grew up in the area and lived opposite Edward Benyon's parents. He was pulling pints in a pub but dreaming of setting up a specialist food business when the opportunity came up to open the delicatessen.

He says: "It wouldn't have happened without the Benyon Estate being prepared to back me. Who else would give a lease on a shop to a 27-year-old bar tender, which is what I was at the time we started?"

In the 16 years since the Deli first opened, on the site of what had been a car spares shop, the market for fine food and drink has dramatically expanded creating challenges for the sector.

But Harry believes being in De Beauvoir with a thriving population interested in good food has helped his business stay ahead of the competition and survive where some other similar businesses elsewhere have failed.

Saved from the bulldozers

With their distinctive doors painted in "Benyon Blue" the Estate-owned residential properties dotted throughout De Beauvoir provide homes for a wide range of tenants, from long-standing residents who have lived in the same home for decades to young professionals in house shares or flats.

The Estate operates a rolling programme of maintenance and prides itself on responding quickly to issues raised by



Top: Scott Pattinson (right) with Luke McMahon in Albers on the corner of De Beauvoir Road

Middle: Jimmy Stephenson sits in the window of Hector's an intimate wine bar

Right: Harry Davies, proprietor of De Beauvoir Deli and café, grew up in the area



At the other end of the Estate Jimmy Stephenson is fast gaining a reputation as a seller of interesting and unusual natural and classic wines from across Europe. Hector's started as an off-licence specialising in great bottles to take home. It now also operates as an intimate wine bar selling a large selection by the glass, accompanied by tapas-style small plates.

Jimmy - who chose to name the place Hector's, after his grandfather whose picture hangs on the wall behind the bar - credits the Benyon Estate with giving him the opportunity to set up his own business in a sector he is passionate about.

As well as promoting the concept of natural wines, made with minimal intervention to capture as much of the natural taste and energy of the grapes as possible, Hector's carries a good selection of the wine world's classics.

And a good relationship with the Benyon Estate, means he is in the process of negotiating to expand his space, making use of extra cellar space to buy wines shortly after bottling and properly age them.

Jimmy said: "The Benyon Estate has been good to me since we opened - which is not always the case with commercial landlords."

Scott Pattinson has spent the past year shaping Albers, a neighbourhood restaurant on the corner of De Beauvoir Road and Englefield Road that has quickly established itself as one of East London's most talked-about dining rooms.

Albers is rooted in comfort and community. The menu moves with

tenants. In the past, before the Estate was taken back in hand with Edward Benyon at the helm, that was not always the case.

"I was very conscious, when I first took over, that we were not good landlords," Edward explained. "Our response times were very poor. Nowadays 70% of our lettings are done through word of mouth."

De Beauvoir, with its wide tree-lined streets and beautiful historic early Victorian homes built of mellow brick, survived the Luftwaffe's bombs of World War II.

The majority saw off a further threat in the 1960s when Hackney Council proposed demolishing the buildings and the neat chequerboard streets to create higher density social housing.

Around one-third of De Beauvoir was compulsorily purchased and demolished by the council's bulldozers before the then Labour council briefly lost control of the local authority and the redevelopment plan was reversed by the incoming administration. Today no one would dream of suggesting taking a wrecking ball to such a unique and

the seasons and guests come for crisp, comforting plates that never feel overcooked and for the atmosphere - which they describe as buzzing, warm, and unpretentious.

The restaurant's design was created with the input of friend and collaborator Luke MacMahon, a De Beauvoir-based furniture designer. They built a space that reflects Albers' philosophy: bold yet approachable, refined without pretension.

Scott's connection with the Benyon Estate began more than five years ago when he opened the café at The Block, serving tenants and visitors. That partnership has since grown into the current site at Albers.

With the support of General Manager Zac Spooner, Albers' operations have been strengthened and the drinks programme elevated. Recognition came recently when food and travel film makers Topjaw named Albers' cocktails among the best in London.

In both kitchen and front of house, the atmosphere is designed to feel open and unpretentious where everyone can feel at home. Much like a good pub, Scott works to make Albers the great leveller where food, people, and stories are shared.

Scott says: "We want people to feel welcomed, to eat well, and to discover something familiar in a new light. That's what keeps our guests coming back."

The restaurant has attracted critical praise in both local and national press, as well as a strong following online. With demand growing, Albers has expanded its offering, from private dining to wedding receptions, while staying true to its roots as a neighbourhood space. ■

well-preserved part of London.

The Estate is aware of its responsibility to ensure that the properties it owns and manages incorporate all the necessities of 21st century life. Creating contemporary living in period property is the sentence that best sums up its approach.

That means including fast broadband, modern kitchens and bathrooms and energy efficiencies to support wildlife and nature - but in a way that doesn't compromise the history and heritage. ■

Giving BARN OWLS a home

Providing more nesting sites for barn owls is helping this spectacular bird of prey to thrive, despite the challenges

A team approach to building barn owl boxes is providing cosy new nest sites for the birds – and giving school children experience of carpentry and conservation.

Our Environment and Education Officer Dr Liz Mattison partnered with the West Berkshire Countryside Society's Barn Owl Group, to help them cut the cost of building the boxes that owls need to roost and rear their young.

The Barn Owl Group has created a template to make the boxes to a uniform design, using strong marine plywood that is resistant to rot. The Estate's Carpenter, Barry Sharp then cuts out the pieces for the boxes, which are screwed together by children attending The Englefield Estate's annual Schools Days.

Liz said: "It is nice that our carpenter is contributing time and expertise to creating the boxes, and that the children who attend Schools Days get a chance to learn some practical skills and knowledge of wildlife by putting the boxes together."

At least seven barn owl boxes have been put up on Estate land, mostly around the Home Farm and Estate Yard, with others sited by tenant farmers of the Englefield Estate on the land they manage.

Liz said: "It works best if two boxes are put up relatively close together as the barn owls like to nest and rear their young in one box and roost in the other, nearby – it means they can have a break from the owlets!"

The Barn Owl Group works in the Pang and Kennet valleys, supporting these beautiful birds, which rely on a diet of short-tailed voles which thrive in a habitat of tussocky grassland.

Cathy McEwan, Chair of the Barn Owl Group, said experts assess sites for barn owl boxes before installing them, then keep a regular check for signs they are being used, inspecting them for evidence of eggs and chicks. Only individuals licensed to handle barn owls can carry out monitoring work.

In the UK 80% of the barn owl population breeds in a box, Cathy said. "It's because most of their natural habitat has been lost. Barns have been converted and those that are left have been sealed up to keep out other birds' species, rats and mice."

She went on: "There are also fewer trees left with



• A barn owl in flight.
Below right: Estate Carpenter Barry Sharp working on an owl box.
Below: Choosing the right location for a barn owl box is crucial

holes in that barn owls like to nest in. Health and safety concerns mean that older trees are often felled and no longer last long enough to develop the holes the barn owls need for their nests."

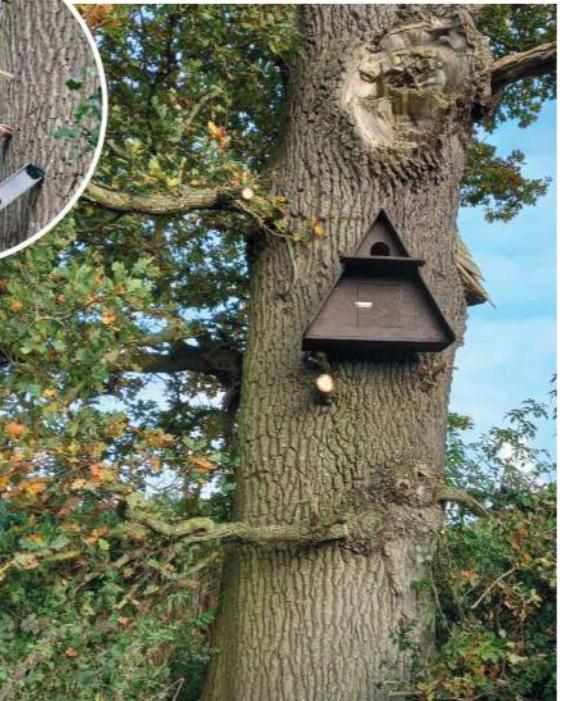
Cathy paid tribute to the support from the Estate, which covers the cost of materials as well as Carpenter Barry's time and skills in cutting out the pieces.

"The Estate also provides storage for our spare boxes and puts them up on its Home Farm and on some of the land farmed by tenants," Cathy added. "Letting the children put the boxes together on Schools Days is good for getting young people interested in wildlife and the countryside."

This year has been a challenging one for the barn owls because of a drop in the field vole population on which the owls depend. Cathy revealed that of the 210 boxes looked after by the Barn Owl Group, just 15 owlets had hatched in them.

"This year has been a bad year [for field voles], and we think some female barn owls would not have got to a sufficient weight to lay eggs."

The West Berkshire Countryside Society was honoured at the Newbury Show this year, winning the Trentham Conservation and Environment Award, with one of the barn owl boxes made at Schools Days on display. The award recognises organisations that demonstrate outstanding work in conservation and environmental education. •



Schools Days gave Thomas a love of the countryside

University undergraduate Thomas Stevens, who attended Countryside Days for Schools at the Englefield Estate when he was at primary school in 2016, credits the event with expanding his interest in rural affairs and his decision to opt for a degree in geography.

Thomas, now 19, said the experience, enjoyed by thousands of schoolchildren for the past 28 years, had made a big impact on him and opened his eyes to aspects of rural life he had been completely unaware of.

"I was at Englefield Primary School at the time, which is on the Estate, so you would think I would be familiar with the grounds – but I vividly remember being overwhelmed to see many things on the Estate that I had not been aware of before," he said.

"There is a very fond memory I have of climbing up into a combine harvester and of seeing all the agricultural machinery – but there were also more light-hearted things going on, like the ferret racing in the Deer Park. I wasn't particularly academic at primary school so having the opportunity to get outside and being able to observe what goes on and immerse myself in the countryside was really helpful," he added.

Thomas, who later attended Blue Coat School at Sonning, near Reading, started his studies at King's College in London in



September 2025 and hopes to one day work in property management or finance. He always had an interest in geography, but attending Countryside Days – also known as Schools Days – at such an impressionable age, reinforced his positive view of the subject.

"I feel that maybe Schools Days ignited that," Thomas said of his interest in geography. "I had always been quite attracted to geography because of the links it makes between the natural world and the human world – and underlining that link is something I think Schools Days provides."



The first Countryside Days for Schools was held in 1997 and was attended by 315 children from five Berkshire schools. In June 2025 the Estate welcomed more than 1,400 youngsters from schools across the county.

Dr Liz Mattison, our Education and Environment Officer said: "This is such an important event and a way to help educate young people on the role of land managers in protecting nature, producing food, providing homes for people and wildlife, and conserving the historic assets in our care."

She said it was so heartening to hear about the big impression Schools Days had on Thomas Stevens. "It is so nice to hear from a former primary school pupil who got so much out of it," Liz said. "We're really grateful to Thomas for sharing such lovely memories." •



LEARNING *from* ANIMALS

Putting Estate facilities to good use educating children

Children with a range of educational and behavioural challenges are being given opportunities to return to mainstream education or move into training or work, thanks to specialist support from outdoor learning experts based at Simms Farm in Mortimer Common.

The specialist education provider Amegreen Children's Services run an Equine Assisted Therapeutic Service called Stable Futures from the farm.

Up to 16 children at any one time interact with the 14 horses and ponies – along with goats, sheep, alpacas, guinea pigs and hens – in a range of learning and support programmes designed around their needs.

Stable Futures Centre Manager, Emily Clayton said the simple act of providing children, many of whom have suffered traumatic events in their lives, with an outdoor environment in which to learn has a huge and positive impact on their mental health, building confidence and overcoming difficulties.

"It's all about the environment," she said. "We're in the perfect location, right next to some lovely woods. We can go on forest walks and teach the children about orienteering and map reading in a great outdoor environment."

On the farm the children, aged between six and 18, undertake learning-based activities organised by Stable Futures. It operates as Alternative Provision (AP) in the education sector and is not a school but provides an education for children who are unable to attend mainstream schools because of exclusion, illness, or social and emotional difficulties. Demand for such services is growing.

Emily said the role of horses can be crucial in helping children who have been diagnosed with autism, Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), anxiety or depression and may struggle with relationships. Many of the centre's horses had themselves gone through a traumatic time and been rescued to become part of the Stable Futures team. "It gives the children and the horse a very strong connection," she said.



"We obviously carry out very thorough risk assessments on the horses before they are introduced to the children, but often their backgrounds and the things the children have been through show clear similarities," she added. Horses also respond directly to human behaviour, Emily explained, which allows children to see how the way they act has an impact on those around them. "Horses live in the present – and they reflect back to you how you are feeling," she said.

Stable Futures is partnered with a number of organisations that provide accreditation for the services it provides, including LEAP, which has been providing Equine Facilitated Psychotherapy and Learning since 2006, and the Riding for the Disabled Association.

Emily said it was so rewarding seeing the progress made by the young people. "The power of the horse is incredible – we like to say here that the horses are as important as teachers, and we are all learning from them every day."

James Meade, our Head of Rural Property and Land said: "It is heartening to know that the Estate's facilities are being put to such good use, carrying out really valuable and positive work with children in the community. Stable Futures is a force for good – and fully in keeping with our objectives and ethos here at the Estate."

Amegreen Children's Services, which also run the successful Haywards Farm School on the Estate, is owned and run by Gary Carlin and Rachel Redgwell and has a long association with the Englefield Estate. ☈



Scorched BUT safe

Hidden for decades, the fire-blackened timbers that tell a remarkable story of damage and renewal

Maintenance staff had a shock when they removed a panel covering wooden beams as part of repairs to a glass lantern at the top of a staircase in Englefield House – and found the timbers blackened and scorched.

Our Buildings Manager, Duncan Rands said there were concerns a hidden fire had been smouldering unseen in the roof of the Grade II* listed building and might break out again. "Initially it was pretty alarming," Duncan said. "Any fire in a roof space can be devastating."

He called Zoe Benyon to tell her: "I think we have a problem." But she was able to allay fears, explaining that the timbers would have been scorched almost 150 years earlier, when a major fire damaged a large portion of the House in 1886.

"I knew there had been a fire there in the 1880s and I was able to stop the panic," Zoe said. "In the Long Gallery, which was rebuilt after the fire, there is a plaque with a date - I think it's 1887 – describing the fact that it was rebuilt."

"I also knew the story of Mrs Benyon who at the time of the fire was in a carriage going along the Bath Road - now the A4 – and seeing smoke coming from the House and turning round to go back and raise the alarm.

"Of course, now we would just telephone the fire brigade on our mobile phone. I often think, when I am driving along the A4 and see the House, how she would have felt – she was a mile away from the House and in a carriage!"

"The third reason I knew about the fire is that we had the metal bannisters repaired and repainted on the red stairs in

2019 by Jim Johnson, who is a great craftsman.

"He told us that the banister on the top floor is different to those on the ground floor and first floor, and we realised that was because the original banister had melted – that shows it was some fire back in 1886."

While Zoe's reassurance settled immediate concerns, Duncan still needed to be sure the smoke-blackened beams were sound. A structural engineer was called in to examine them and reported they were as good as new.

Zoe believes that the effect of the fire of 1886 may actually have served to harden the beams, which date from the Elizabethan period. A similar process of carbonisation is sometimes used in Japanese construction to strengthen timber.

With the checks complete, the panelling that had been removed was put back in place and the restoration of the glass lantern was completed.

Duncan said the repair work, which brought the fire of 1886 back to prominence, was launched when water ingress, caused by the deterioration of seals around the glass lantern at the top of the red stairs, came to light.

"We had to take the box panelling off and that was when the scorched timbers were found," he explained. "As well as being important to carry out the repairs doing so has revealed a fascinating part of the history of the House."

"It demonstrates that with a property like Englefield House and all its history, there is always another story to uncover or investigate." **•**

When fire raged through Englefield House

The original fire broke out on August 12th 1886 in what was then the home of Richard Fellowes Benyon and his wife, Elizabeth Mary.

Richard was at home at the time of the fire, when his wife and their daughter were travelling along the Bath Road in a carriage, on their way to a garden party at Ufton Court.

The Englefield History website reports, in a record compiled from a newspaper article at the time, that in glancing over at the House she noticed smoke "of an extraordinary volume issuing from the House."

The report goes on: "She drove back with all speed to Englefield and prevailed upon her husband, who unfortunately is suffering from rheumatism, to leave the House and go to the Rectory at Englefield where he remained all the evening and during the night."

Separately a bricklayer working on the House had also seen the fire and sent a message to the Estate Yard, where the Estate fire engine was based. The report from the time records: "Mr Rhind, the clerk of the works who happened to be in the yard the time, with assistance got out

the manual engine and quickly attached the hose to a service pipe near the tower entrance." Other fire engines from a nearby farm and, eventually, from Reading and Newbury also arrived while Englefield villagers and staff, under the direction of Elizabeth Benyon, helped to remove pictures and other items from the Long Gallery onto the lawn in front of the house, saving many valuable paintings from being destroyed.

The fabric of the House was not so lucky, however, despite the efforts of staff and firefighters, and parts of the building were virtually destroyed.

Local reports from the time say: "It is uncertain in which particular spot the fire originated - the laundry, the kitchen, or in one of the servants' bedrooms, and it will probably remain a mystery."

"The wing destroyed ... [was] the old portion of the House, and much historical interest was associated with it. In this wing were the celebrated Long Gallery, King Charles' room, the laundry, kitchens, servants' apartments, etc, all of which are completely gutted, only the bare walls remaining." **•**



“
Mrs Benyon was in a carriage going along the Bath Road and saw smoke coming from the House

”

• Duncan Rands inspects the fire damaged beams below the glass lantern.

Far left: The Estate's restored fire engine gets a run out

A backwater on the river Kennet where it crosses Estate land has become a vital nursery area for young fish

A stretch of the River Kennet that runs through the Englefield Estate has been given a new lease of life thanks to work by the Rivers Trust for the Kennet and Pang catchments, otherwise known as Action for the River Kennet (ARK).

An abandoned meander sequence off the main channel had become heavily silted-up and was in danger of being lost. Supported by the Environment Agency (EA) and with the backing of the Estate - the riparian owner - this back channel is now providing a nursery area for juvenile fish, helping to boost numbers in the river system.

The 'so-called' Ufton Loop, upstream of Ufton Bridge at West Meadows, near Padworth, was becoming almost completely cut off from the main river, which had been straightened into a new artificial channel sometime in the early 20th century.

Following a topographic survey and a feasibility study of the site, ARK drew up a plan to enhance both the existing river channel and the Ufton Loop. With funding from the Environment Agency and with the support of the Estate, works on the ground managed by ARK, were undertaken in March of this year using specialist equipment including an amphibious excavator."

Gravel was brought in to create a riffle - an area of broken water in the main channel - which helped raise the water level upstream, encouraging more of the flow into the Ufton Loop.

Rupert Kelton, Project Manager for ARK, said it was essential to have permission from the Estate, as riparian owners of the river, to allow access for the work to be carried out.

"There were two main drivers for this work - the first was to support an improvement



“
The ‘so-called’ Ufton Loop was being cut off from the main river
”

8 Main picture: The straightened channel of the Kennet (right) and the Ufton loop that has been restored. Below: Rupert Kelton from ARK. The amphibious excavator. A diagram of the changes made

in fish numbers,” Rupert said. “Over the past 30 to 40 years the River Kennet has had a massive decline in coarse fish populations.

“Part of that is to do with habitat and the need for more nursery areas for young fish, away from the main channel. Slacker water and lots of in-stream cover through the loop means juvenile fish can find safe refuge.

“The second driver for the work was to restore connectivity with the flood plain, creating more habitats for biodiversity and allowing the river to spread out into the Englefield Estate’s woodlands, creating some lovely wet woodland habitat, and reducing the flood risk downstream by holding more water.”

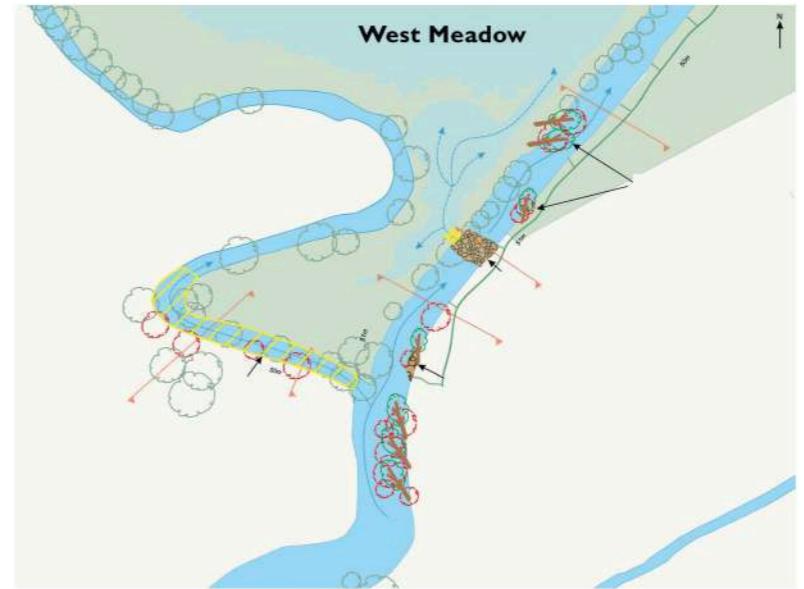
Rupert thanked the Estate’s Forestry Manager Rich Edwards, Education and Environment Officer Dr Liz Mattison, as well as Angus Hodge, an Estate farm tenant and Reading and District Angling Association, for their support with the project.

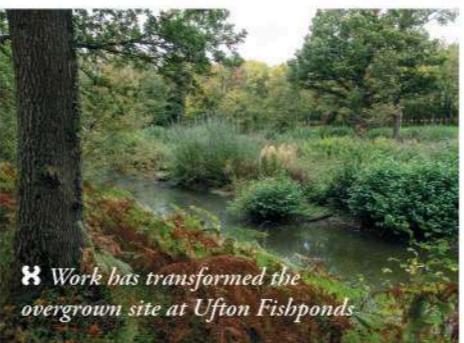
“As a Rivers Trust we can approach landowners to highlight issues and propose solutions, but we rely on the goodwill of landowners to help us make improvements happen,” he said. “We’re very fortunate to have a willing partner in the Estate who can see the benefits of conservation. Rich and Liz have been particularly helpful throughout the process.”

James Meade, our Head of Rural Property and Land, said: “As riparian owners, the Estate is extremely grateful to both ARK and the Environment Agency for successfully delivering this nature recovery project.”

With the work completed, populations of coarse fish, including barbel and chub should start to build up again, benefitting Reading and District Angling Association’s fishery and the wider ecology of the river.

Rupert said that wildlife is again making use of the island created between the Ufton Loop and the main river channel and otters have been spotted. “It’s a lovely wild space,” he added. **8**





Work has transformed the overgrown site at Ufton Fishponds

Historic fishponds are restored

Medieval fishponds, which would once have provided a food source for people living on what is now the Englefield Estate, have been cleared of undergrowth and debris so they can be enjoyed by lovers of the countryside and history.

The Estate's Forestry Team undertook the project at Ufton Fishponds to bring the Scheduled Monument back to a position where its historical significance and calm tranquillity could be appreciated by visitors.

Our Forestry Manager, Rich Edwards, led the project, with English Heritage consent. The work required careful management to preserve the archaeological integrity of the two-and-a-half-acre site, made up of a moated area, which once held a manor house, and three fishponds.

Rich said a culvert, which transported water from the moat into the fishponds, had partially collapsed, while the area at the centre of the moat was overgrown and the ponds were filling up with vegetation. The initial priority was to install a new pipe so the water could continue to flow from the moat into the lowest ponds.

Because of the historic importance of the site, the work had to be overseen by an archaeologist – and topsoil brought in to cover the new pipe also had to be screened to make sure it was free of any debris from another timescale, which could have caused confusion if the site is surveyed again.

Hazel, alder and willow trees which had not been coppiced for between 20 and 25 years, were re-coppiced and small trees and undergrowth were coppiced on the island in the centre of the moat. A mature oak tree was left to continue to grow on the island to provide valuable habitat for a range of insects, birds and bats.

The project provided an opportunity for local volunteers to play a part in the work which took place in June and September 2022. They helped to remove a redundant fence and cut back overgrown willow. Their support was greatly appreciated.

The site lies between two public footpaths, and the next task will be to install a new interpretation board so that visitors can understand and appreciate the history of the site and how it once would have looked.

According to English Heritage, the Ufton Fishponds site, just to the south west of St Peter's Church in Ufton Nervet, is thought to have been the manorial residence of the Ufton Robert Estate mentioned in 1333 as belonging to William de Uffington.

Ufton Robert was later held by the Perkins family, and when they bought Ufton Pole in 1560 the two manors were combined and the main residence moved to Ufton Pole, which is now Ufton Court.

Medieval moated sites are found throughout England and were built between 1150 and 1500 with the large majority dating between 1200 and 1325. Fish were an important part of the diet in the Middle Ages, especially on days when consumption of meat was forbidden on religious grounds. The high cost of fishpond construction and maintenance meant that pond bred fish were only available to people of high status.

Although the ponds are no longer stocked with fish Rich said it was a lovely spot: "It's an important asset for the Estate and a tranquil place for people to visit and see this historic site." 

Search and rescue training

Volunteers with a range of search and rescue skills train in the Englefield Estate woodland, making excellent use of our varied terrain to ensure they are prepared whenever the call comes.

Berkshire Lowland Search and Rescue, Hampshire Search and Rescue and Berkshire Search and Rescue Dogs, find the combination of dense cover and open rides gives them a realistic representation of many of the landscapes they encounter in their work.

Rich Edwards, our Forestry Manager, said the groups need good access to relatively large areas in which to train without disturbing people – and the Englefield woodlands fit the bill.

"The area they like is made up of old mineral workings, areas of dense vegetation and open ground with ponds," he said. "Neighbouring mature woodland gives a variety of cover with trees at different stages of growth and different heights."

Berkshire Lowland Search and Rescue use drones as part of their work, supporting Thames Valley police in missing person inquiries. Like Hampshire Search and Rescue they are affiliated to the national Lowland Rescue organisation which has groups all over the country.

Berkshire Search and Rescue Dogs, with 25 operational members, concentrates on training a range of breeds to carry out



 Lou Holmes with one of the search and rescue dogs

searches for people who have disappeared. Lou Holmes, the group's Chair, has been a part of the charity for 24 years and works with her collies. She said the number of callouts by the police average out at about one a week, across a year.

She went on: "We contacted the Estate to see if we could do some training in the woodlands. We are always looking for places to train – we need the dogs to have experience of a range of different locations and types of terrain.

"The Estate is really good to us. We can drive close to where we need to carry out the training and park nearby which means we aren't disturbing people. It is really useful to be able to access these areas."



"Seeing a group working their dogs in hi-vis jackets and using radios can make a difference," she said. "We are so very grateful to the Estate for their support. We are a charity and rely on the support of the community."

To find out more about the work of the groups or to support them, search Berkshire Lowland Search and Rescue, Hampshire Search and Rescue and Berkshire Search and Rescue dogs, online. 

Funding for good causes puts focus on the young

Encouraging young people to get active, engage in their communities and spend time with others is one focus of the grants from the Englefield Charitable Trust this autumn.

Of the nearly 70 awards made in October this year at least 15 went to groups and organisations that support children and youngsters, including Scout and Guides, children with mental and physical disabilities and young

people from deprived backgrounds.

Trustees choose who will receive a grant from many inspiring applicants. Beneficiaries this year serve communities in Berkshire, Hampshire, London and Scotland.

They include Churchmead School in Datchet, which will use the funding to refurbish equipment in its fitness suite and the Tall Ships Youth Trust,

which aims to change the lives of disadvantaged 12 to 25-year-olds by providing experiences at sea.

The Eastside Educational Trust, based in East London, receives financial support to deliver a creative programme of work to primary schools and those for children with special educational needs.

The funding will allow young people access to online

workshops linked to the national curriculum and celebrating diversity and well-being through drama and poetry.

Chair of Trustees Catherine Haig said: "The Trust continues to support good causes across the age spectrum, but young people today are under a great deal of pressure and so we are particularly pleased to be able to direct help to them." 



KEEPING IT GREEN AT THE BROOKS

Providing open spaces and places for children to play is an important part of any housing development

The Estate's continuing commitment to the community at The Brooks was underlined in the summer when Harry Benyon cut the ribbon to mark the official opening of the green space and playpark at the centre of the 100-home development.

Harry told guests that, as the original landowners of the site in Burghfield Common, the Englefield Estate was proud to work with partners to help create a true legacy development. "We believe it combines the very best of tradition with modern, sustainable living," he said.

The open space and playpark are an important part of the development, made up of two, three, four and five-bedroom homes, 40% of them designated as affordable. The Estate worked with ADAM Architecture and housebuilder, Croudace Homes, on the design and build of The Brooks. The design reflects many of the architectural details that can be seen on houses across the Englefield Estate.



The Estate's arrangements with Croudace include a Design and Community Code. It aims to give confidence to homeowners and occupiers, working with the Estate, that the appearance of the development and the principles of sustainability will be protected to the future.

Harry told the guests at the ribbon cutting event that the Estate takes its responsibilities to provide appropriate sites for new housing extremely seriously. "We strive to do so in a way that includes spaces for reflection and relaxation, like the green space and park we are standing in today," he said.

Harry was joined at the event, on a sunny day in June, by Mark Blunden, Project Manager from Croudace Homes. Invited guests included residents of The Brooks

and representatives from the partners who had played a part in bringing the project to fruition.

The new playpark encourages outdoor activity, with 2,500sqm of green space available for residents and the wider community to spend time with family and loved ones. Within the playpark there is a cradle nest swing, balancing beam, and stepping logs. A decking area overarching the pond to view wildlife and the wildflowers planted throughout the park is also planned.

Simon Halfhide, Sales & Marketing Director for Croudace Homes South Thames, "We are excited to have officially opened this new park to create a family-oriented space for residents to come together, play, and enjoy the local environment and picturesque views." ■



Chalkpit cottage makeover

Maintaining and updating the Englefield Estate's portfolio of homes is a year-round job and every year brings new challenges and successes.

A change of tenancy at 43 Chalkpit Cottage provided the opportunity for the Estate's Maintenance Team and contractors to strip out the property and undertake significant improvements, raising the Energy Performance Certificate Rating from an F to a C.

The semi-detached home had been extended over time and well looked after by the previous tenants. When they moved out it provided an opportunity to carry out significant works – the kind only practical when a property is vacant.

The work involved almost every part of the property from the floors, which were dug out to install underfloor heating, to the roof, which was repaired and re-tiled with traditional clay tiles in keeping with the majority of properties across the Englefield Estate.

Our Building Surveyor, Steve Forster explained that every major renovation project can reveal unforeseen issues. In the case of 43 Chalkpit Cottage an external wall had to be rebuilt and an internal wall on the first floor removed to enable a new first floor bathroom to be installed.

The property was also completely rewired to meet modern standards, an air source heat pump was installed, as were zonal heating controls. Insulation was dramatically upgraded to walls and roof space to include 400mm of loft insulation. The oil-fired boiler and oil tank were removed.

"A key improvement was the redesign of the upstairs layout to facilitate a new bathroom," Steve added. "This involved cutting a new window into the brickwork as well as allowing for mechanical extraction. The original downstairs bathroom was retained as a cloakroom/utility room."

Special care was taken to maintain the property's appearance through the use of traditional materials, including a Flemish brick bond to match the wall that was taken down and arched brickwork over the new bathroom window. A new kitchen by Howdens was fitted and space was provided for domestic appliances.

The refurbishment was carried out as part of a regular programme of work on properties across the Estate. Duncan Rands, our Buildings Manager said: "Each property is dealt with on an individual basis, depending on the amount of work that is required. Some properties may only require a light refurbishment, while others such as this one will require more work." ■



Edward Crookes,
Chief Executive,
with the prestigious
A&D award

Estate Yard *vision* recognised

The vision, innovation and sheer hard work that went into the creation of the offices at Estate Yard has been recognised and rewarded by the judges of a prestigious architectural and design award.

The repurposed former sawmill was the national and regional winner for projects up to 2,500 m² in the British Council for Offices Awards, presented at a ceremony at the Grosvenor Hotel in London on October 7th.

The offices at Estate Yard had earlier been crowned regional winners for the South of England and South Wales at a dinner in Bristol in June.

Judges for the national award said the project "set a benchmark for the adaptive reuse of historic buildings."

They went on: "Beyond environmental benefits the refurbishment prepared the ground for the next phase of rejuvenation for this area under the Village Plan for Englefield. It

supports local economic and social initiatives aligning with the Estate's long-term vision for community revitalisation."

The Estate Yard offices were also shortlisted in the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors (RICS) awards in the category Refurbishment and Revitalisation Project and the Architects Journal Retrofit and Reuse Awards.

Edward Crookes said: "We are proud that the sensitive conversion of the former Sawmill at the Estate Yard in Englefield Village into an open-plan and sustainable workplace which respects the building's industrial heritage has been awarded both a regional and national award by the British Council for Offices.

"We worked with Adam Architecture, Stonewood Builders Ltd, landscape architects Nicholsons and

interior designers Kitesgrove to bring the project to fruition and we're grateful to everyone involved for their expertise and dedication to the project." 



Shane and Paula
celebrated their wedding
with a beautiful blend
of cultures creating a
vibrant and heartfelt
day to remember.



Welcome

Anna McLean, who worked at the Estate for 11 months from July 2023 helping to compile a digital database of historic items, has returned to the House in a new role as Administrator. We're delighted to welcome her back.

Jack Garman has joined us as Underkeeper from the Goodwood Estate and working alongside our Head Gamekeeper, David Wiggins. We have also welcomed a new member of the Gardens Team, **Daniel Thorne**, Daniel and his wife, Leah, welcomed baby Eliza Alice, born on September 24th (below).

The Maintenance Team has welcomed new member **Paul Milton** to Estate Yard.

Mark Jackson, who was formerly a part of the Gardens Team, is working on a two-year project in the Estate woodlands supporting the Game and Forestry

departments in the effective management of deer and grey squirrels. The aim of the project is to reduce damage and enhance the economic and environmental contribution made by the Estate's woodlands.

Farewells

This year we said goodbye to **Calum Shortland**, Underkeeper, who has taken up a position with the Duke of Norfolk's Estate in West Sussex.

Well done to **Charlotte Moss**, who joined us as a Forestry Assistant on a fixed-term course under the Royal Forestry Society's Forestry Roots scheme. Charlotte has now taken a full-time job at Savills Petworth office as a Graduate Forester.

Congratulations!

Congratulations to Carpenter-joiner **Shane Sewell**, who married his bride, Paula in June. Shane, who takes on a range of tasks for the Maintenance



Our congratulations to **Iveta Senasiova**, the Digital Presence Manager at the Benyon Estate, and her partner, Oliver. Their daughter, Mia, was born in the summer (above).



Our Chief Executive **Edward Crookes** took over the Chairmanship of the Estates' Business Group, in May. 



ENGLEFIELD ESTATE

2025

This Echo is made possible with the kind help of all staff, family, tenants and friends of the Englefield Estate.
We would like to thank everyone for their contributions.



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