

# PENDLE HILL FARMERS GROUP

## ANNUAL REPORT FOR YEAR THREE 2020-2021

The Pendle Hill Farmers Group was set up in March 2018, following a successful application to the Countryside Stewardship Facilitation Fund. Currently there are 31 members covering around 3000 ha.

The group aims to:

- Increase understanding of local Countryside Stewardship priorities and knowledge of landscape scale conservation techniques, and to encourage the uptake of schemes
- Work together with as many group members as possible implementing these techniques on, and across, members' farms by:

i) Restoring, managing and expanding priority habitats: woodlands, grasslands, wetlands and moorlands

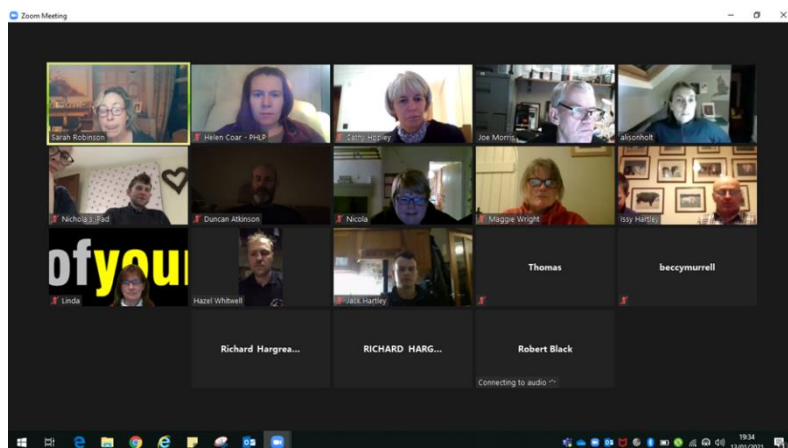
ii) Restoring traditional boundaries

iii) Implementing natural flood management techniques

This third year of the group operating has obviously been impacted and disrupted by the Covid 19 pandemic. Our plans for subject areas to cover for the 2020-21 year were as follows:

- Soil health, soil invertebrate health and links to vetmed
- Wildlife monitoring
- Farm carbon accounting

We had set up a series of events to cover these subject areas, but of course these had to be changed, and whilst we had hoped to be able to meet up later on during the summer of 2020, local Tier restrictions meant that this was not possible.



Instead, we decided that we would continue the work we had set out to do using digital meetings on Zoom and would increase our communication with the group through the delivery of a bi-monthly newsletter, produced and sent out to members in June, September, November 2020 and February 2021.

We met a total of five times as a group on Zoom as a group, and in addition group members were invited to a series of five local and national AONB zoom calls.

Zoom call shot above from the 'Whats a Hill Worth' meeting.

We concentrated on **soil health** and links to **Integrated Parasite Management**, **farm carbon accounting**, and knowledge transfer in relation to the Agricultural Transition Plan and the developing Environmental Land Management Schemes, as well as looking at the impact of the **Agricultural**

**Transition Plan** on upland farm businesses through the 'What's a Hill Worth' research project. We also provided information on Countryside Stewardship and through the Pendle Hill Landscape Partnership project were also able to offer mapping and photography support for members entering the Hedges & Boundaries scheme. Partnership working with the Pendle Hill Landscape Partnership has again brought multiple benefits to the Farmer Network, and these are set out in a table at the end of this report.

### **Soil health, invertebrates and the value of Integrated Parasite Management**

In June we were successful in applying for a change request which enabled us to add a new Integrated Parasite management project to our programme for the year. The project had the following objectives, which aligned with our facilitation Plan (sections 3, 5 and 7 – meetings and training on water quality, farmland birds and priority habitats and species):

- Raise awareness of the environmental impact of these products on dung, soil and aquatic invertebrates
- Offer 'worm count sampling' kits to group members whereby they can send dung samples off to a lab to get the work burden sampled at certain points in the year and then decide whether wormers are always necessary.
- Offer group interpretation of the worm count data with a local vet

Whilst we were able to start the project with a very informative Zoom talk from the local vet (who also has a Nuffield Scholarship to research this subject) in June 2020, the on-farm work to collect dung samples was not possible, and so this project has been delayed by Covid 19, and now forms part of our extension application for 2021-22.

### **Farm Carbon accounting**

We worked with Becky Willson from the Farm Carbon Toolkit during September and October over Zoom. Becky ran through the principles of farm carbon accounting and then in a second meeting went onto demonstrate the system with real data. This was very useful for members, who are talking a lot about the value of the carbon in their soils as a 'public good' and are very keen to see how this might fit into the new schemes. They are also keen to talk about soil carbon in relation to where best to place new farm woodlands, to ensure they can store as much carbon as possible.

### **Agricultural Transition Plan and ELM**

Post Brexit changes to farming support are the biggest within agriculture for decades. They will impact all farmers, but especially farmers in the uplands where BPS forms a large portion of income on a farm by farm basis. The 'What's a Hill worth' research project as detailed the level of these changes to upland farm businesses based on actual data from farms within the group, and so we had a good attendance at the zoom meeting where the results of the research was presented in January 2021.

As in previous years, our Christmas meeting was attended by the majority of members keen to hear the thoughts of our local NFU Countryside Officer Adam Briggs. Adam ran through the immediate impacts of post Brexit trading and tariffs and then went on to set out current ELM developments. As in previous years, there was a good lively discussion at the end of the talk.

As mentioned above, as well as the five meetings delivered for the group this year, we were also able to signpost members to two sets of webinars delivered locally by the Forest of Bowland AONB team and nationally by the National Association of AONBs. The first set out the opportunities available within the current round of CS, and the second the emerging details of the new environmental land management schemes - SFI, local nature recovery and landscape recovery, together with the other changes coming through the agricultural transition plan such as the new Farming in Protected Landscapes work.

**Countryside Stewardship**

This year one farmer member applied for the mid-tier of Countryside Stewardship, with endorsements from myself as facilitator.

**Participation and delivery in partnership**

One of the advantages of being a farmer member of the Pendle Hill Farmers Network is the links with the Pendle Hill Landscape Partnership. This is a four year HF funded programme in and around Pendle Hill which includes several projects which have been of great interest to the farming community. The projects and activity linked to the group is shown in the table below:

PHLP Project	Activity related to PHFN in 2019-20
<p><b>Traditional Boundary project</b> – help, advice, funding and training for the upkeep and restoration of priority traditional boundaries within the area (over and above those funded via CS)</p>	<p>Five farmer members have had walling or walling completed during the winter of 2020-21, with 1800m of hedging restored. This PHLP project is being offered to the Network members and continues to be oversubscribed.</p>
<p><b>Pendle WINNS</b> – a woodland creation and management project in cloughs and gullies, also tackling areas of non-native species – Himalayan balsam in particular.</p>	<p>Members are first to be offered woodland planting and management advice through this project, this year two additional network members have benefitted from this project, covering woodland management and new woodland planting.</p>
<p><b>EA Padiham Flood Management scheme</b> – this scheme of hard engineering around the Padiham settlement has been set up with the opportunity to bid for funds to delivery Biodiversity Gain. We are working with group members wanting to carry out traditional boundary restoration which will help through providing Natural Flood Management.</p>	<p>We are bidding for £20K to cover in the region of 180m stone wall restoration and 800m hedgerow restoration on three members farms. Currently in the planning stage, due to go to EA in the summer for approval, to be delivered during 2022.</p>
<p><b>Wild about Pendle</b> – a series of nature based projects ranging from community wildlife spaces to field scale meadow restoration</p>	<p>The Pendle Meadow Project began in the summer of 2021. Twelve meadows are being restored as part of the scheme, including eight on five members farms. This is</p>

	another way in which the PHLP can help PHFN member farms start to deliver more public goods.
<b>What is a Hill Worth</b> – this is a research project looking at mapping out the natural capital assets at a farm scale, the ecosystem services which flow from them, and then looking at the impact of investment in their management on the farm business.	The four farms chosen for this project are all members of the network. These farmers received farm scale information on their natural assets and ecosystem service delivery. The group were keen to hear the results of the research at the Zoom call in January.
<b>Graduate traineeships</b> – each year there is one traineeship within the project team, running each year from September.	Dom, our PHLP graduate trainee has had his contract extended and has been helping farmer members with their hedge & boundary scheme applications in early 2021, taking photos and producing the maps needed for their applications and claims.

Our second year has been very productive, the farmer members have been very interested and engaged with our continuing work on soils. They are also very appreciative of the opportunity to discuss the options and outlook for upland farming, as well as of the opportunities the Pendle Hill Landscape Partnership affords to them as members. Some members remain more frequent attendees than others. The challenge for the coming year will be to innovate to operate under Covid-19 restrictions, to continue to provide a programme which is interesting to them and to continue to encourage them to enter Countryside Stewardship agreements. We have a good age range of members, and so are keen to ensure there are elements which appear across the group.

**Plans within our extension application for 2021-22**

We have put together an application for a years extension to the group, following overwhelming support from the members to do so. The year will allow us to put the soil health and soil carbon work into practice and to continue to support the members in work towards additional CS delivery.

Sarah Robinson

22 April 2021