

Community-run farm praise from MP

by James Pugh

SECRETARY of State Owen Paterson has praised a pioneering farm near Market Drayton whose siblings owners raised the £800,000 they needed to keep it running.

The North Shropshire MP visited Fordhall Organic Farm which was put into community ownership in 2006.

Mr Paterson described the transformation of the farm as 'impressive' and highlighted the commitment of the owners. The siblings, Charlotte and Ben Hollins, first appealed for help when their tenanted family farm was due to be sold for development.

But they were convinced the farm could be turned into a local asset and managed to purchase it thanks to the help of thousands of shareholders across the nation.

They have since renovated the buildings at the farm, creating a tea room, classrooms, restaurant, office space, farm shop and butchery.

Miss Hollins, manager of the Fordhall Community Land Initiative, said: "We were really pleased Mr Paterson found time to visit.

"We were keen to show him how the concept community ownership has allowed Ben to continue farming on land he would not otherwise have afforded, whilst simultaneously providing a valuable resource for the local and wider community."

Last week's visit gave Mr Paterson the opportunity to see the community farm in action.

He met a group from Market Drayton Infant School who had walked from the town to visit the organic farm.

Miss Hollins said: "The children took great delight in telling Mr Paterson what they had learnt about the farm.

"We then took a short tour of the farm, explaining how the community buy out has allowed Ben as the tenant farmer to have a secure 100 year tenancy."

Mr Paterson said: "Ben and Charlotte Hollins have demonstrated a clear determination to remain in farming. I salute their enterprise and commitment. The transformation at Fordhall over the last seven years is extremely impressive."

Book



CHILDREN at Nap took part in World book characters are Dylan Jones, Furnival, two, as C



Left to right, Fordhall board members Jack Tavenor, Richard Priestley and John Hughes, tenant farmer Ben Hollins, Owen Paterson, Charlotte Hollins, educational leader Julie Cooper and board member Helen Howes.

Inquest told of officer doubts

AN officer running a live fire army exercise where a Shropshire-based soldier was killed while in a safe haven was recommended for 'supervision' after struggling to pass his course, an inquest heard.

Lieutenant Jonathan Price, 26, passed his live fire tactical training course among the bottom third of its intake of 79. He finished the vital course with a B minus, a grade defined as performance to the standard expected 'in most respects'.

Army chiefs passed him as 'competent' while highlighting a range of shortcomings and concluded he needed 'increased levels of supervision'.

The lieutenant was confronted with that conclusion and said he previously knew nothing about it and had finished the course 'quite happy'.

Within nine months of passing he was put in charge of a live fire army training exercise in west Wales, which went tragically wrong.

Michael 'Mike' Maguire, 21, originally from Co Cork, Ireland, was hit in the temple by a shot probably fired by a fellow soldier attacking a target one kilometre away.

The shooting happened at the Castlemartin Ranges in Pembrokeshire at the beginning of May last year.

Mr Maguire, of the 1st Battalion, The Royal Irish Regiment based at Tern Hill near Market Drayton, was standing in a designated administrative area, deemed secure, outside the range where live fire training was taking place.

The inquest continues.