

# GRAND

The magazine for National Grid grantors

SUMMER 2012

nationalgrid

## On the cress of a wave

The rise of Britain's  
greenest superfood

## CRIME HITS NEW HEIGHTS

Fighting back against  
the metal thieves

# Berries *fit for a Queen*

The grower at the heart of the Jubilee celebrations

**PLUS:** The couple who bailed out of the rat race • Into the valley • Let battle commence • Win a 32" TV for summer

# WELCOME TO GRIDLINE

Summer's here and it's time to **celebrate** the best of British with our **incredible, talented grantors**

**A**s the nation prepares for a sultry summer of sport and patriotism, what better theme for this edition of Gridline than everything that's great about Britain?

Many of the stories in the pages that follow celebrate the very real diversity and ingenuity of grantors, and the work they do to put the home nations on the map.

We've chatted to the fruit grower who has a culinary date with the Queen, the grantor who has rejuvenated a green corridor of northern England and the man behind the resurgence of a long-established herb that's rapidly garnering a reputation as a superfood.

Hard work, dedication and an eye for something a little different are the common attributes of many of our grantors, and inspirational Julie Scott is no different.

She is behind a campaign to gain national recognition for the army of land girls who kept the nation running through the traumas of two world wars, by working on land now owned by many grantors.

We've also included a brief article about the recent National Grid grantor



survey, which will shape the way we get our messages across to the people who make our work possible.

I hope you enjoy the read and will then take a few minutes out of your busy schedule to think

about whether the work you do might be worth a national platform in the next edition of Gridline. After all, the magazine is only as good as the people and issues we cover.

Have a good summer!

**Dawn McCarroll**  
Editor, Gridline

## GOT A STORY?

Please contact Gridline if you have any news or stories that you think would be of interest to other grantors.

**Tel:** 01926 656 325

**Email:** [gridline@uk.ngrid.com](mailto:gridline@uk.ngrid.com)

**Write to:** Gridline,  
Summersault Communications,  
23-25 Waterloo Place, Warwick Street,  
Leamington Spa, Warwickshire CV32 5LA.

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## National Grid's Land and Development Group

The Land and Development Group is responsible for acquiring all rights and permissions from statutory authorities and landowners needed to install, operate and maintain National Grid's electricity and gas transmission networks. The Group acts as the main interface for landowners who have gas and electricity equipment installed on their land. Your local contacts are listed below.

### ELECTRICITY AND GAS

- ➔ North-west and Scotland 0161 776 0706
- ➔ South-east 01268 642 091
- ➔ South-west 01452 316 059
- ➔ East 0113 290 8235.

### WAYLEAVE PAYMENTS

- ➔ For information on wayleave payments, telephone the payments helpline on 0800 389 5113.

### CHANGE OF DETAILS

- ➔ To inform National Grid of changes in ownership or contact details, telephone 0800 389 5113 for electric and 01926 654 844 for gas, or email [grantorservices@nationalgrid.com](mailto:grantorservices@nationalgrid.com).

### ELECTRICITY EMERGENCY

- ➔ Emergency calls to report pylon damage to National Grid can be made on 0800 404 090. Note the tower's number – found just below the property plate – to help crews locate it.

### ELECTRIC AND MAGNETIC FIELDS

- ➔ For information on electric and magnetic fields, call the EMF information line on 08457 023 270 (local call rate). Website: [www.emfs.info](http://www.emfs.info).

### GAS EMERGENCY

- ➔ 0800 111 999.

### DIAL BEFORE YOU DIG

- ➔ Before carrying out any work in the vicinity of gas pipelines, overhead power lines or underground electric cables, you should contact Plant Protection on 0800 688 588 so that searches can be made to determine the exact position of any National Grid assets.

### CUSTOMER COMMENTS

- ➔ Write to Land & Development, National Grid House, Warwick Technology Park, Gallows Hill, Warwick, Warwickshire CV34 6DA. Or email [ld.customercomments@uk.ngrid.com](mailto:ld.customercomments@uk.ngrid.com).



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Turn to page 20 for the result of last issue's photo competition

## M&S giftcard competition winner

A big congratulations to Averil Cox, a grantor from Horwich in Lancashire, who won the £150 M&S voucher competition in the last edition for correctly answering the question: How many rhubarb producers currently operate within the Rhubarb Triangle? The answer was 11.

Averil said: "Yippee... I'm delighted to have won. Now I can look forward to expanding my wardrobe with something other than wellies and waterproofs."



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Multi-user pipelines being pioneered by National Grid could cut emissions by 90 per cent

## New push for carbon capture

NATIONAL GRID HAS welcomed a Government announcement of the next stage of a £1 billion competition for Carbon Capture and Storage (CCS), key in the drive to ensure future energy security and reduce emissions.

Carbon dioxide is captured at fossil-fuelled power stations and industrial plants, and transported by pipeline to secure storage sites under the seabed so it cannot be released into the atmosphere.

Fitted to existing power stations, the technology could

reduce carbon dioxide emissions by 90 per cent from 2016.

National Grid is designing, constructing and operating a multi-user pipeline system in projects around the country.

This system favours a 'cluster' approach where several regional carbon emitters feed into a single pipeline to be more cost-efficient.

"The development of CCS technology will ensure a diverse mix of electricity generation in the future and meeting carbon emission targets," said Chris Train, network operations director.

### Proposed regional CCS clusters

➔ **Humber:** On Humber Gateway Development with 2CO Energy on the Don Valley Power Project, near Doncaster; Alstrom, Drax and BOC Linde on White Rose Project near Selby; and C.Gen Power on its North Killingholme Power Project.

➔ **At Grangemouth, near Edinburgh:** with Summit Power and Petrofac on Caledonia Clean Energy.

➔ **On Teesside:** Consortium with BOC, International Power, Fairfield Energy and Premier Oil Progressive Energy on Teesside Low Carbon Project.



Dylan Everett, the Trust's countryside operations manager, with the machine

## Teamworking for nature

THE NATIONAL TRUST is working closely with National Grid on a project to preserve a heathland bog habitat.

Later this year, National Grid is carrying out a fittings-only refurbishment on the 400kV overhead power line crossing Plaitford Common in the New Forest National Park.

"There was a need to clear vegetation from around several towers to ensure they could be accessed safely," said project

manager Lyndon Bufton.

"The National Trust planned to remove invasive birch and willow trees shading out rare mosses and lichens. By pooling resources, we are keeping impact on the habitat to a minimum."

A 35-tonne amphibious machine, brought in before January's bird-nesting season, ground out invasive tree stumps to allow natural bog species and wildlife, including damselflies, spiders and moths, to thrive.

# Digging for victory

GRANTOR JULIE SCOTT IS coordinating a campaign to pay tribute to the women who kept British farming going through two world wars.

The fundraising campaign for a new bronze sculpture honouring the work of the Women's Land Army (WLA) is being led by the Staffordshire branch of the Women's Food and Farming Union (WFFU).

The sculpture at the National Memorial Arboretum in Staffordshire will be based on the famous wartime recruitment poster of the land girls, as they became known.

"Many Gridline readers have parents and grandparents who employed land girls on their farms in both wars," said Julie (right), a dairy farmer near Stafford.

"The land girls kept Britain fed during the war and they deserve a permanent memorial



One of the unsung heroines at work on the home front



to acknowledge this."

The Women's Land Army, whose 80,000 land girls produced 70 per cent of Britain's food in WW2, was formed in 1917 to take the place of thousands of farm workers who left to fight.

## For more information...



... about the Tribute campaign, [www.womenslandarmytribute.co.uk](http://www.womenslandarmytribute.co.uk)

## News in brief

### GARDEN REVAMP

The local community has benefited from the work of National Grid volunteers at a wildlife centre in east London.



More than 20 employees from the flagship London Power Tunnels project supported the London Wildlife Trust's environmental and educational work in Hackney.

National Grid's London Power Tunnels project is building more than 32km of tunnels for electricity cables beneath London to ensure continuing safe and reliable power supplies.

The volunteers worked at the East Reservoir Community Garden as part of the project.



### TAKING IT TO EXTREMES

James Dean and Ian McKenna (above left and centre, with friend Chris), lands officers in the north-west and Scotland region, were stars at the recent Cumbrian Commotion in the Lake District's Grizedale Forest.

"We were part of a three-man team competing in a 10km all-terrain run, followed by a 25km mountain bike race and a 1km three-man canoe race," said James.

"It was a really warm day, an extremely tough event, and after three hours 40 minutes, we were ready for a pint."

## Project watch

### North West Coast Connections

**WHAT?** National Grid has been asked to provide a connection to the electricity transmission system for the proposed Moorside nuclear power station near Sellafield in West Cumbria and wind farms in the Irish Sea, so consultation is under way.

**WHY?** The UK is committed to cutting greenhouse gases and National Grid has a vital role to play as low-carbon electricity generation replaces a quarter of power stations over the next 10 years.

The introduction of new wind generation and nuclear power will need a significant reinforcement

and extension of the electricity transmission network. Most proposed new wind generation is in remote locations not served by existing connections and substantial reinforcement of the system is needed to take higher output from new, more efficient designs of nuclear station.

There is currently no transmission system serving the West Cumbria area so the challenge is to find the most acceptable way of upgrading and developing the network to supply energy generated by the new projects to homes, businesses, schools and hospitals.



## For more information...



... on the connection options go to: <http://www.northwestcoastconnections.com>

## Contact Gridline



Call, email or go online.  
Tel: 01926 656 325  
Email: [gridline@uk.ngrid.com](mailto:gridline@uk.ngrid.com)  
[www.nationalgrid.com](http://www.nationalgrid.com)

# Emergency catch of the day



Fishermen bring in their haul from a former firewater pond at the site (right)

LOCAL ANGLERS ARE REELING in the benefits after a gas storage facility in Greater Manchester was decommissioned.

National Grid, which owns the Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) storage facility at Heath Farm Lane in Partington, donated fish from the site's firewater pond to the Warrington Anglers' Association to release them into



managed local waterways.

The National Grid LNG site is being demolished after 40 years as a strategic gas storage hub for the region. The pond once stored water for use in the event of a fire at the works.

The Environment Agency carried out checks to ensure the roach and other native species were suitable for their new habitats. "When the decision was made to decommission the facility, we committed to find our fish a new home," said Simon Richardson, UK LNG storage manager for National Grid.

National Grid has also donated several items of industrial interest from the site to the Manchester Museum of Science and Industry.



One-minute interview



**Duncan Pomeroy, land and business support manager**

**BACKGROUND:** I joined Land and Development in April 2012 after a 15-year career at National Grid in construction, health and safety and most recently in the high voltage maintenance business.

**CURRENT FOCUS:** Among my key priorities is to follow up the recent reorganisation within Land and Development and bring in new ways of working to support the massive infrastructure investment planned over the next decade.

**LEISURE INTERESTS:** Playing football, cycling, running, going to the gym, and watching my two children excel on the sports field.

**MOST OVER-USED PHRASE:** Umm!

**PET HATE:** Bad drivers and reality TV.

**LAST HOLIDAY:** Kefalonia in Greece. We love the weather, food, beautiful scenery and beaches, and the laid-back atmosphere.

**MOST TREASURED POSSESSION:** My family are what I treasure the most.

**WHO WOULD PLAY YOU IN THE HOLLYWOOD FILM OF YOUR LIFE:** I reckon Brad Pitt might just shape up for the challenge.

**FAVOURITE FILM:** The original Star Wars. It still impresses 35 years on.

## Survey views shape new grantor plan

FEEDBACK FROM GRANTORS on the effectiveness of National Grid messages will form the basis of a new safety action plan.

A three-month survey of gas asset grantors has created a more complete picture of how well the business is warning them about the potential dangers of working on or developing their land.

Niki Wileman, asset protection manager, said: "It's vital that we listen to grantors and use the information they give us to shape how we communicate with them.

"The potential cost of damage during construction work runs into many millions of pounds, so it's vital the letters and calendars we send to grantors are templated in a way that gets the messages across in the most effective way."



## Open door to show off best of British

FARMERS THROUGHOUT the country, including many National Grid grantors, were involved in the seventh annual Open Farm Sunday on 17 June.

The event provided a great opportunity for everyone to learn about how food is produced and the important role farmers play in

caring for the countryside.

National Grid is principal sponsor of Open Farm Sunday, which is organised by LEAF (Linking Environment and Farming), an organisation that promotes farming in harmony with the environment.

Visit [www.farmsunday.org](http://www.farmsunday.org)



Harriet, Andrew and Clifford the dog take a break among the 750 bales of straw that will make up the straw cottages



George, Elvis and Cola oversee the building work

# Cottage industry

The grantors who left the rat race behind to make history... with a little help from the three little pigs and Elvis

AN IDYLIC HOLIDAY IN DEVON prompted Andrew and Harriet Wishart to abandon their careers in engineering and computing, and leave the Surrey commuter belt for a new life in the country.

Five years on and the grantors are overseeing a groundbreaking plan to build the world's first terrace of load-bearing straw bale cottages.

Their vision is to use the Elmfield Farm Cottages, high on the Kent Downs, near Canterbury, as holiday lets when the project is completed this autumn. The former 30-acre smallholding has two existing holiday cottages alongside the family's home.

The couple share their land with a menagerie of animals, including ducks, chickens and three alpacas called George, Cola and Elvis, who are employed as lawnmowers and fox deterrents.

"Straw is the ultimate eco-friendly building material as it's renewable and a natural by-product of farming," said Harriet. "It's an excellent insulator, ensuring a building is warm in winter and cool in summer, while also saving energy and keeping fuel bills low."

Designed by Yorkshire-based specialist StrawWorks, the straw cottage terrace is composed of three self-contained houses. Andrew is project managing the build, and local volunteers, friends and family are

pitching in with a variety of plastering, carpentry and painting tasks to complete the cottages.

Altogether, 750 bales of locally sourced straw are going into the build. "It's important they are clean, dry and tightly baled to maximise their effectiveness," explained Harriet.

Clay excavated from the site is being used for the base plaster coats and externally the building is being rendered with a waterproof lime coating. The only aspect of the structure contracted out to conventional builders is the traditional pitched roof, clad with clay tiles.

Other environmentally friendly aspects of the project include a biomass boiler to provide underfloor heating and hot water, and a rainwater harvesting system for flushing toilets. Sewage will be treated via a septic tank and a reed bed before being used to irrigate a newly planted orchard.

"The eco credentials of the project are very important, but the cottages will also have all the mod cons," said Harriet. "We drew the line at composting toilets."



Huff and puff but these houses will never come down



Andrew sharpens the stakes that hold the bales of straw in place

## For more information...



... on the straw cottage project go to: <http://www.elmfieldfarmcottages.com>



Pickers work from dawn until mid-afternoon grading all the strawberries by size and shape

# STRAWBERRY FIELDS FOREVER

Deep in the **Garden of England**, where the climate lends itself perfectly to our **national fruit treasure**, a family firm has won a **royal seal** of approval

**I**f Sean Figgis blushes slightly when pressed about his Jubilee year connection with royalty, it's well hidden by the rosy glow that working outdoors brings.

He's modesty itself, playing down the scale of the 650-acre multimillion-pound fruit farm deep in the Darling Buds territory of Kent.

But that matter-of-fact demeanour slips slightly when asked about the firm's own home-bred strawberry varieties.

"Anything with the letters EV in it is ours," Sean said, with more than a hint of pride. "We produce the Sweet Eve and Eve's Delight."

It's a nod to Sean's great-grandfather Edward Vinson, who founded the company in south London in the 1830s and whose name is honoured by one of the nearby streets in Graveney, near Faversham.

Sean is the fifth generation to be involved in the business, breeding and developing new varieties, propagating and growing, and harvesting and packing the fruit that ends up on supermarket shelves.

This part of the Garden of England, not far from the sea, is perfect for growing fruit like strawberries, which make up 90% of the farm's fruit harvest.

"We need reasonably cold winters with lots of rain, and



Sean with the latest batch of berries destined for the supermarket shelves or garden parties

then dry, sunny weather the rest of the year. Our growing season is a few weeks ahead of the rest of the country," explained Sean.

His firm's reputation for excellence explains the honour of being asked by British Summer Fruits to provide 'Royal Sovereign' strawberries for the Queen's Jubilee garden parties. The same variety was served at the 1953 Coronation banquets. "We managed to trace a propagator who had some of the original strawberry plants. It was a great honour, but they had to be perfection so there was some

pressure that went with it," he said.

Managing director Sean and his uncle Peter Vinson - the breeder who knows by look, feel, and above all, instinct which plants will bear the tastiest fruit - are no strangers to pressure though.

Overseeing every aspect of the process, from seed to flower to fruit and then on to picking and packing every day from April through to October, is a logistical feat. And even when it's quiet here, the packhouse handles imported EV berries grown in Huelva, Spain.





Row upon row of table-top (quicker to pick) and coir bag-grown strawberries have to be manipulated to be ripe at staggered times, so the 350-strong summer batallion of pickers and 50 packhouse workers are constantly busy.

The plants are drip-fed from reservoirs via computers that constantly monitor the soil's moisture, but Sean insists the human hand is the best technique.

We visit one tunnel basking in moist Mediterranean heat, a sea of succulent red berries tempting us in, and he orders picking to begin. Moments later a group of students without a care in the world wander by, baskets in hand, ready to strip the ready fruit.

They will pick a staggering 160 tonnes of strawberries, Ribena-bound blackcurrants and blueberries in the busiest week - each punnet traceable by barcode - with Wimbledon fortnight marking a surge in demand.

The pickers, most from Eastern Europe, bring with them huge logistical issues that go some way to mitigating the price of a pack of strawberries in our shopping.

Sean said: "We run three campsites with 150 caravans during picking season. We look after the students because we're a responsible and ethical business. If you look after people, they'll look after you in return. It's really

## Sweet facts

➔ Edward Vinson's supplies 2,300 tonnes of strawberries, 50 tonnes of blueberries and 70 tonnes of blackcurrants each year.

➔ EV is one of the largest and most successful of the UK's soft fruit growers.

➔ Table-top growing brings a 25 per cent saving in picking costs, but means large capital investment.

➔ Tiny predators are used to kill off disease-causing insects, meaning fewer chemicals are used.



hard work for them and it's also very stressful for us."

Weather, yield and sales have to be in perfect symmetry to meet what Sean stresses are 'very tight margins' for the business to flourish. That's where the EV breeding programme is so important, as the company sells eight million plants, grown at nurseries across southern England, to other UK growers along with 12 million in northern Europe and six million in Spain.

The programme helps ensure the perfect strawberry in terms of taste, sweetness, shape and colour, but the equation also relies on never letting the fruit get over 23 degrees and then, once picked, reducing it to two degrees in the packhouse cooler as soon as possible.

From there, it's on to the supermarket chains and dessert bowls of Buckingham Palace - let's hope One approved.

## For more information...



... on the Edward Vinson fruit business go to:  
<http://www.edwardvinson.co.uk>

# TESTING OUR METTLE



"We have liaised with National Grid and scrapyard owners to reinforce the message that aluminium on towers is low value, but very high risk"

Thieves are going to **increasing heights** to risk their lives for **metal**. Geoff Parkinson, **overhead line delivery engineer**, reveals how National Grid is **taking a stand**



Geoff and Sgt Lees developed a trigger plan to tackle the thieves

**I**t's a common sight in villages and towns across the nation - the poster advertising a raffle for the church roof repair fund.

But frequently there's a more sinister reason for these seemingly simple requests for donations because, as the global price of scrap metal soars, its theft is increasingly big business.

As well as tile lead, thieves have stolen road signs, manhole covers, war memorials and even a statue of former Olympic athlete Steve Ovett. And the epidemic shows no sign of stopping.

The fastest-growing crime in the UK is costing industry around £770 million a year, as well as causing increases to energy customers' bills, not to mention the risk to the lives of the people responsible.

Copper, brass and bronze are bestsellers for thieves, who move them on rapidly to unscrupulous scrapyards, but the aluminium steel and aluminium alloy used on National Grid's towers are also targets, despite being virtually worthless relative to the risks involved in stealing them. ➔

# THE ENGINEER

You have to look a very long way up into the angry, rain-filled skies of Greater Manchester to see just how far criminals will go to feed their habit.

Geoff Parkinson points to a precarious ledge 130 feet up beyond a minefield of barbed wire and anti-climb guards, as he recalls the day he responded to a potential disaster.

Drivers on the adjacent M60 in Middleton, near Rochdale, were oblivious, as heroin addict Desmond Brady waited while an accomplice reached the top of a National Grid pylon, armed with bolt cutters and no safety harness.

The climber's goal was the taut, aluminium earth wire that runs between the two live conductor cables and weighs around a quarter of a tonne. Only luck and lack of wind stopped the 300-metre span of cable springing clear on to live cables to arc out a lethal jolt of 275,000 volts.

Had Geoff and his rapid response team not disturbed the gang, they would have fled with their haul - worth just £75.

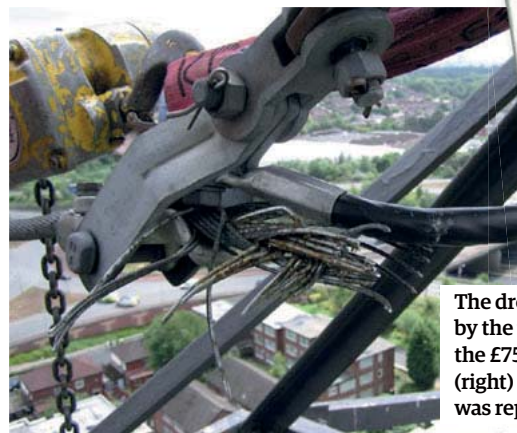
"When we arrived, we found the cable cut and held in place at one end by a suspension clamp, which isn't designed to hold that weight, so it was a race against time," said Geoff, who's responsible for 6,000 pylons across the north of England.

"It crossed above homes and a main road so we alerted police, who evacuated the area while we secured it. No one was cut off because the power was re-routed, but the consequences could have been catastrophic."

None of the offenders were caught after the first attack, but the vandals' time was about to run out.

Geoff worked with local police to draft a trigger plan. A fortnight later another two faults were reported and officers were on the scene in minutes, catching Brady after a brief helicopter chase.

The three incidents cost National Grid and Cable & Wireless, whose fibre optic line was also cut in the attack, a staggering £445,000 in upgraded security and repairs.



**The drop risked by the thief as he cut the £75 cable, and (right) how his case was reported**





## In numbers

# 363

metal thefts from National Grid equipment in 2011-12, a rise of 32% on the 274 in 2010-11

# £5,000

a tonne - the cost of copper has doubled since 2009, fuelled by demand from China and India, but National Grid uses the metal only sparsely

# 6,000

metal thefts were suffered by power suppliers last year, with more than 25,000 homes experiencing blackouts

# THE POLICEMAN

Experienced police officer Sergeant Dave Lees has seen human frailty and tragic folly in all their forms during his time in the force.

So the extreme actions of criminals willing to risk life and limb for the price of a tank of petrol don't come as too much of a surprise to him.

"In most cases these people are desperate. They're trying to get money for drugs and don't even consider the risks," explained the Rochdale-based officer.

With the mission statement of police forces to protect their communities and shield the public from harm, breaking the metaphorical metal theft chain is high priority.

Incidents like this on the Greater Manchester Police patch have led to increased security around towers, strengthened anti-climb guards, the use of anti-climb paint and the installation of wireless CCTV cameras.

Sgt Lees' team, part of the Operation Alloy force-wide metal-theft crackdown, plotted tower and substation locations on their systems to ensure early response to any future incidents.

"It's been a great example of multi-agency working. We have liaised with National Grid and the scrapyard owners to reinforce the message that aluminium on towers is low value, but very high risk," he said.

Regular offenders' identifications are circulated to scrap dealers in the area, who are all RAG-rated (red, amber, green) based on their likelihood of handling stolen metal.

Sgt Lees said: "The consequences of untrained and unsafe people going anywhere near a tower does not bear thinking about for the communities below or the people committing the crime, which is why education and awareness are our most powerful weapons."

## Electricity grantor checklist

➔ National Grid engineers won't visit your land without giving seven days' verbal or written notice, unless there's an emergency.

➔ We will use only registered, liveried National Grid employees, unless we inform you in advance that we will be deploying contractors.

➔ All employees and contractors carry National Grid identification and will, of course, use harnesses and appropriate safety equipment.

➔ National Grid has a statutory duty to fit an anti-climb guard and barbed wire to all towers and palisade fences to

substations. If you think they have been tampered with, or if there is evidence of digging to allow access under the fence, or ladders are placed over it, call the hotline (see below).

➔ Increasing numbers of pylons and substations now have wireless infra-red activated CCTV linked direct to our Network Operations Centre, where our staff are in 24-hour contact with police.

➔ If you're in doubt about any work taking place, call the hotline (see below).

**hotline 0800 404 090**

## Grantor profile **Bollin Valley Way**

Countryside manager  
Tim Harding combines  
work and pleasure

David Knowles (left),  
National Grid lands officer,  
with Partnership ranger  
Jim Middlemass



# YOU HERD IT HERE!

How **rare breed cattle** are key  
to an **ambitious project** for  
**people and wildlife**

**W**ith their striking, downturned horns and distinctive 'finch-back' stripe, Longhorn cattle can often be seen grazing the meadows of the Bollin Valley, in north-west England.

The herd was founded in 1988 by the Bollin Valley Partnership, a countryside management service funded by Cheshire East and Trafford councils, to carry out a conservation grazing role.

The Bollin Valley project started in 1972 as a pioneering experiment to balance the needs of wildlife, farming and the public in an urban fringe, conserving and enhancing the countryside while providing local people with opportunities for recreation.

Forming a linear green corridor, the valley stretches from

the source of the River Bollin, in the foothills of the Pennines, near Macclesfield, to where the river joins the Manchester Ship Canal. With the support of landowners, the local community and organisations such as the National Trust and the Environment Agency, much has been done to protect and enhance the landscape over the past 40 years.

Miles of footpaths have been created or restored - including the 25-mile Bollin Valley Way - as well as new parks, ponds, meadows and tree belts. Trout and salmon have returned to the river, and even otters have been sighted.

"Longhorns are hardy, docile creatures and are ideal for a country park accessed by the public," said Tim Harding, Bollin Valley Partnership's countryside manager, who



Even the footpath signs are made on site



David and Jim admire the gentle beauty of one of the Longhorns



The Longhorns have picked up a string of awards



A four-day-old calf with his mum

joined the project as a ranger more than 30 years ago.

"They help preserve species-rich meadows by grazing the coarse grasses that compete with wildflowers, and their use means we don't have to mow areas of pasture land."

Longhorns were the most popular cattle in Cheshire in the 1700s as a result of the pioneering work of breeder

Robert Bakewell. He successfully developed a large animal that could provide plenty of meat to feed a growing population.

By 1841 they were largely superseded by Shorthorns, which were more fertile and better milkers. The fightback began in the 70s as the Rare Breeds Survival Trust put Longhorns on the 'at risk' register and, thanks to the efforts of breeders, there are now more than 100 herds.

The Bollin cattle can be seen out in the pastures from spring to autumn, but are overwintered at Oakwood Farm in Styal, to avoid churning the ground in wetter months.

"As a rare breed, the Longhorns provide an educational focus and are a mascot for the valley," said Tim. "They're popular locally and we always get a good response when we ask people to suggest names for the newborn calves."

The Bollin cattle are run as a 'closed herd', breeding all its own replacements, but good quality bulls are brought in to ensure genetic diversity. "Our aim is to breed young, healthy animals with desirable traits such as easy calving, which preserve the breed for future generations," said Tim.

"The focus on quality means we can generate a good income from selling bulls to other breeders, with profits reinvested into improved public facilities. We sell to herds throughout the UK and as far afield as Germany."

Steers (young males) that don't have the potential to be successful bulls are sold for meat. Longhorn beef is now highly valued, producing the most succulent steak in Britain, according to chef Heston Blumenthal.

Tim said: "No two days are the same - you can be in the office in the morning and calving a cow in the afternoon. The people I work with all care passionately about what they do, and there's great pride in what has been achieved."



Part of the path will be closed this summer for essential maintenance

## Working together

Part of the Bollin Valley Way in Riverside Park will close for three weeks this summer to allow National Grid access to three towers for an overhead power line refurb.

"We regret the need to close the path for three weeks, but the work is essential to ensure the continued safety and reliability of the region's network," said David Knowles, lands officer north-west and Scotland.

## In numbers

**25** miles of path offer views from hills over Macclesfield through fields and villages, under and over roads, railways and canals, to Manchester airport and beyond

## For more information...



... about the Bollin Valley Way go to: <http://www.bollinvalley.org.uk/>

Tom Amery, managing director of The Watercress Company, pictured with a Harris hawk, one of the birds used to control pigeons



# NOT JUST A BIT ON THE SIDE

It's said to cleanse the blood and is the **current superfood** of choice. But there's **more to watercress** than meets the eye, as Gridline reveals





A water inlet flows into the beds at Warmwell Farm



Workers level the gravel in the beds before planting



Tractors move the gravel



Watercress is jam-packed with calcium, iron and vitamin C



The farm uses a range of natural pest controls, including Harris hawks

**I**n drought-hit southern England it comes as something of a surprise to meet a farmer who isn't praying for rain.

"A shortage of water is one problem we don't face," said Tom Amery, managing director of The Watercress Company, an amalgam of family farms in Dorset and Hampshire that have grown watercress for generations.

The company, a National Grid grantor, has 50 acres of watercress beds on its 14 farms in the UK, as well as operations in Florida and Spain. It also produces a range of other salad crops.

At Warmwell Farm, six miles from Dorchester, there are 40 bright green watercress beds spread out either side of a disused watermill.

An aquifer provides the farm with almost unlimited spring water that has been underground for half a century or more. It's the mineral-rich water from the natural chalk formations of Dorset and Hampshire that gives this peppery little superfood its powerhouse of nutrients.

"Our UK farms use up to 50 million gallons of water a day, but 99 per cent of it is returned to local streams and rivers via a settlement pond, in as good a condition as it came out," said Tom. "We're just borrowing the water."

Traditionally, watercress was a hardy winter vegetable, only eaten when there was an 'R' in the month, but the arrival of supermarkets in the 1970s and 80s transformed the market to create year-round demand for watercress as a salad crop. The introduction of 'washed and ready-to-eat' bags in the 1980s helped extend shelf life.

"Until the 1950s, most watercress was bronze-coloured," said Tom. "An outbreak of crook root disease nearly wiped out the industry, but prompted a switch to the green variety, which could be grown from seed more easily."

"Today the English season extends right through the summer months, using staggered sowings. Then production is switched to our overseas locations in order to meet demand through the winter."

Seeds are germinated in thin layers of compost in a polytunnel. Ten days later, the seedlings are shovelled up and scattered by hand in shallow gravel beds where they grow to maturity. Gradually, pure spring water is introduced to the bed in increasing quantities throughout the growing

"In the old days, we used to do the harvesting by hand... it was back-breaking work"

period to feed the plant. The water is at a constant temperature of 10-11 °C to warm the leaves in winter and cool them in summer.

After about 30 days, special machines resembling oversized lawnmowers harvest the crop.

"In the old days, we used to do the harvesting by hand," recalled production manager Tim Jesty, a fourth-generation watercress grower. "You'd stand ankle deep in water and it was back-breaking work. It took 10 men 15 hours to harvest three tonnes by hand, but the same task can now be accomplished by six men in just an hour."

At the height of the season, harvesting takes place on a daily basis, with the gravel beds cleared and meticulously prepared for each new crop.

Watercress perishes fast, so the leaves are dispatched almost immediately after harvesting by refrigerated truck to Alresford Salads in Hampshire, where they are washed, bagged and delivered to supermarkets within 48 hours. ➔

## In harmony with nature

➔➔ Protecting the local environment is a priority for The Watercress Company. The heathland and dunes that surround Warmwell Farm are home to five species of reptile, including the rare sand lizard.

➔➔ The company stopped using pesticides 12 years ago and two of its

farms are run on entirely organic principles. A range of natural pest controls have also been adopted, including bats – which can each consume up to 3,000 insects a night – and the use of falcons and hawks to scare off foraging pigeons.

**In numbers**

**50 billion**

seeds propagated each year  
by The Watercress Company

**15** essential  
vitamins and  
minerals in  
watercress

**100 tonnes**

of watercress consumed each week in the UK



A British native plant, watercress grows wild in streams and ditches and, prior to the advent of the railway, would have been picked and sold locally. Historically, commercial watercress production in the UK began around 1800. In poorer families, it was eaten on its own, giving rise to the nickname 'the poor man's bread'.

Special trains took the watercress in wicker flats to London and other major cities, where buyers bought posies

**Clockwise from top: Watercress farming 90 years ago; fourth-generation grower Tim Jesty; workers at Bailey's Gate, Dorset; and well boring for new beds at Bere Regis, Dorset, in the 1920s**

of fresh cress for a few pence from street sellers - perhaps the first example of 'food on the go'. During the 20th century, watercress declined in popularity as people saw it as little more than a garnish served up in steakhouses.

Things changed in 2003, with the formation of the Watercress Alliance between The Watercress Company, Vitacress and Alresford Salads to pool resources on a generic promotion of the crop's health and taste benefits.

"We ran a successful PR campaign around the slogan 'Not Just a Bit on the Side' to remind people about how cress is grown, its provenance and health benefits," explained Tom.

An annual Watercress Festival attracts 12,000 visitors each May and the plant's profile was raised further when a BBC Countryfile report led to a 30 per cent surge in sales. Appreciation of the superfood status of watercress, which contains more vitamin C by weight than oranges, more calcium than milk and more iron than spinach, is rising.

Recent research indicates it contains chemicals that inhibit the growth of colon cancer and breast cancer cells. In the last decade, The Watercress Company has doubled its turnover and the UK industry is now a £60 million business.

"We've had to become very good at marketing over the years, but, of course, there's a great deal to talk about with watercress," said Tom.



**It's a fact**

- Watercress is a member of the cabbage family, botanically related to garden cress and mustard.
- Hippocrates, the father of medicine, built his first hospital close to a stream to ensure a fresh supply of watercress for his patients.
- The Greeks thought watercress made you witty, and the Romans that it could stop baldness.
- Watercress soup was popular in the 17th century for 'cleansing the blood'.
- Today it is illegal to grow commercial watercress in river water because of the risk of contamination from bacteria or liver fluke (a sheep-borne parasite).
- The Watercress Line steam railway, which once took cress to markets in London, is one of Hampshire's leading tourist attractions, carrying 120,000 passengers a year.

**It's a fact**

**4,000** watercress seeds weigh little more than a gram and depend on flowing water to grow effectively, hence the name

**For more information...**



... on The Watercress Company go to:  
[www.thewatercresscompany.co.uk](http://www.thewatercresscompany.co.uk)

# ANOTHER STRING TO THE BOW

A National Grid grantor is making an exhibition of the farmland's unique asset - a historic battlefield

**F**or more than 600 years there were few visible clues that the peaceful green fields of the Albrighton Estate in rural Shropshire once played host to one of the bloodiest battles in English history.

All that changed in 2008 when the Jagger family, who have farmed the 1,800-acre estate for nearly six generations, opened a heritage centre dedicated to the Battle of Shrewsbury.

Based in converted farm buildings, Battlefield 1403 consists of an exhibition centre, a farm shop selling home-reared beef and lamb and other locally sourced food, a cafe and a falconry centre.

A footpath links the centre with the council's circular Battlefield Heritage Trail. The 105-hectare site where fighting took place was officially designated a registered battlefield by English Heritage in 1995.

The Battle of Shrewsbury resulted in a decisive victory for King Henry IV over a rebel army led by Sir Henry 'Hotspur' Percy and was the first occasion when massed troops armed with the longbow were pitted against each other on English soil.

Martin Latham (left), from the local Shrewsbury Levy historical re-enactment group, is at Battlefield 1403 most summer weekends running public 'have-a-go archery' sessions. "A medieval longbowman could loose off three arrows before the first one landed to create a deadly hailstorm effect over a range of up to 300 yards," he said.

The heritage centre was the result of six years' planning by farmer Joyce Jagger, who has been joined by sons Jeremy (right) and Robert in running the shop and estate.

"My mother realised that the battlefield connection - together with selling our meat directly to the public - would help secure the future of the estate," said Jeremy.

The 21 July battle anniversary will see the re-creation of a medieval encampment, with archery, combat, music and dancing, for visitors to experience history first hand.

**For more information...**



... go to [www.battlefield1403.com](http://www.battlefield1403.com)



# Lastword

Your chance to enter two great competitions



Photo competition



## TIME FOR SUMMER

Congratulations to grantor Sheena Mayo, from Friar Waddon in Weymouth, Dorset, the winner of last issue's photo competition on the theme of 'nature', for this image of the morning dew on a dandelion clock.



## WILL YOU BE WATCHING?

The summer of 2012 is going to be one to remember, with the Games set to rock the whole nation.

So what could be better – apart from actually managing to get a ticket for the events – than watching them on a brand-new 32-inch, HD-ready television?

The television will be perfect for watching Britain's heroes go for gold in London or for just chilling out after a hard day's work.

If you'd like to be in with a chance of scooping the prize, worth £250, then get your camera out and snap a winning shot for Gridline's photograph competition.

The theme for this issue's competition is 'summer'. Send in your photo to Gridline Photo Competition, 23-25 Waterloo Place, Warwick Street, Leamington Spa CV32 5LA, or email it to [gridline@uk.ngrid.com](mailto:gridline@uk.ngrid.com). Closing date is 2 August 2012. Only National Grid grantors are eligible to enter and, regrettably, prints cannot be returned.

WIN!

## Lunch and a day at the races



IF A FLUTTER ON THE HORSES is your thing, then Gridline's day at the races will be a hot favourite.

Whether you're an equine expert with a nose for a long shot or just looking for a thrill-a-minute day out doing something different, a trip to the races is a fantastic experience.

As well as access to the premier enclosure at any one of 15

racecourses in the UK, the winner will receive a seafood platter or two-course lunch and welcome drink on arrival.

With any trip to the races there's always the chance you'll come home with more money than you went with – good news!

To enter, answer the following question, featured elsewhere in this issue of Gridline.

**Q** By what percentage has the theft of metal from grantors' land increased and what is the hotline number to report suspicious activity?

Send your answer to Gridline Races Competition, 23-25 Waterloo Place, Warwick Street, Leamington Spa, Warwickshire CV32 5LA. Please note you must be a grantor to enter. Closing date is 2 August 2012.

### Contact Gridline



Tel: 01926 656 325  
Email: [gridline@uk.ngrid.com](mailto:gridline@uk.ngrid.com)  
[www.nationalgrid.com](http://www.nationalgrid.com)

**nationalgrid**