

GRIDLINE

The magazine for landowners

Autumn 2019

Inside

Wombling free... the charity keeping London's countryside alive

An open mind to open water swimmers

The grantor making a living out of hiding from wildlife

WIN A two-night getaway for two

A man with glasses and a grey t-shirt is kneeling in a large pumpkin patch. He is surrounded by many pumpkins of various sizes. A dog is sitting next to him, looking up at him. The background shows a field of pumpkins stretching to the horizon under a cloudy sky. A power line tower is visible in the distance.

Mind the
Squash

The former City banker who quit the daily Tube crush to pursue a passion for pumpkins

nationalgrid

Some useful contact numbers

The Land & Acquisition Services team are 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 with gas and electricity equipment installed on their land. Your local contacts are listed below.

ELECTRICITY AND GAS

» Land teams – all regions **0800 389 5113**

WAYLEAVE PAYMENTS

» For information on electricity wayleave payments, telephone the payments helpline on **0800 389 5113**

EASEMENT ENQUIRIES

» Email box.electricityeasements@nationalgrid.com

CHANGE OF DETAILS

» To inform National Grid of changes in ownership or contact details, telephone 0800 389 5113 for electric and 01926 654844 for gas, or email grantorservices@nationalgrid.com

ELECTRICITY EMERGENCY

» Emergency calls to report pylon damage to National Grid can be made on **0800 404090**. 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 023270** (local call rate). Website: 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 688588** so that searches can be made to determine the exact position of any National Grid assets

QUESTIONS

» For questions about our power cables or other assets contact the Plant Protection Team. Cadent provide first line support for our assets – **0800 688 588** – plantprotection@cadentgas.com



Gridline is produced by **SONDER**

Victoria Court, 8 Dormer Place, Leamington Spa, Warwickshire CV32 5AE

Put a face to the name...

REGIONAL GRANTOR ASSISTANTS

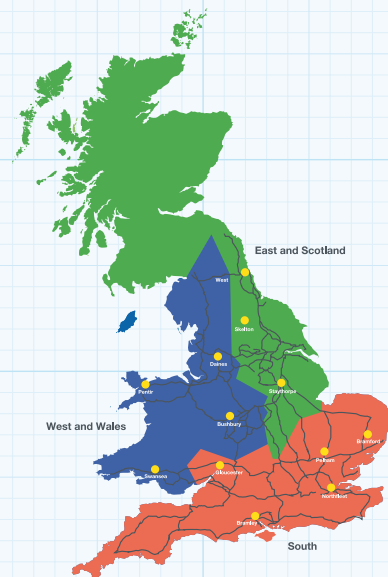
- 1 Caroline Suttlng, South
- 2 Lauren Munro, East and Scotland
- 3 Becky Kearsley, West and Wales



CENTRAL COMMUNITY RELATIONS TEAM

- 4 Ellie Laycock
- 5 Jackie Wilkie
- 6 George Barnes
- 7 Thippapha Montorano
- 8 Palvinder Kalsi
- 9 Nicky Boucher
- 10 Deena Wood

How to contact National Grid if you are a grantor



Land officers provide a day-to-day point of contact for National Grid grantors. You can also contact them if you have any questions about compensation, reinstatement, maintenance or refurbishment plans in your area – the team will be happy to help.

If you have any queries, please telephone **0800 389 5113** and select from the four options below.

- OPTION 1** Electricity wayleave payments and change of name/address/ownership of land
- OPTION 2** West and Wales
- OPTION 3** East and Scotland
- OPTION 4** South

LUMP SUM PAYMENT FOR CONVERTING WAYLEAVES TO EASEMENTS

Many of National Grid's grantors currently receive annual payments in line with their wayleave agreement and the rates set by the NFU and CLA. But did you know you can convert the wayleave into an easement and receive a one-off capital payment instead?

National Grid encourage you to seek professional advice from a qualified chartered surveyor or agricultural valuer. National Grid will pay reasonable agent's fees in accordance with its published Surveyor's Fee scale together with solicitor's fees, upon completion of the easement. So there should be no need to pay an agent any of the payment rightly due to you.

If this is of interest to you or you wish to find out more about easements and the payment which you could receive then please contact us directly or through a qualified agent at box.electricityeasements@nationalgrid.com



CONTENTS

NEWS AND FEATURES

- 04** The latest news updates from the world of National Grid
- 05** **Keep your land safe and secure by working with Land Officers**
- 06** How to play your part by tapping into a windfall that's helping to improve the British countryside
- 08** **"Don't knock it until you've tried it" – the grantors diving in to support open water swimming**
- 11** The grantor carving a niche in the ghoulish Halloween high jinks market down on the pumpkin farm
- 14** **The team upholding the legacy of an ancient act... and keeping the spirit of the Wombles alive**
- 18** The perfectionist grantor cornering the market by making wildlife watching easy
- 20** **WIN: A relaxing two-night stay at one of the UK's beautiful array of National Parks**



Welcome...

First of all, a big thank you to everyone who completed the feedback survey in the last edition of Gridline.

We gained invaluable information about what you think of the magazine and were delighted that around 90% of you felt it made you more aware of National Grid's role and aims, and 80% felt part of a wider grantor community because of the stories we've featured.

You'll have already noticed in the names listed opposite that we have a team of colleagues dedicated to looking after the needs of the landowners we work closely with. We do this to make sure the assets on their land are protected so that a safe and reliable electricity service can be delivered to millions of UK families.

One of my main roles is to build strong relationships with both grantors and the wider community to ensure we work as partners, and long may that continue. The very fact that all the grantors approached by Gridline want to appear in the magazine says a great deal.

In this edition we've been to the home of the Wombles – Wimbledon Common – to find out about the work that goes on behind the scenes to encourage biodiversity, we've dipped a toe in the world of open water swimming and met the grantor running perhaps the largest bird hide business in the world.

On a more topical note, we visited the farmer who decided to sell his land but kept his hand in by diversifying into the slightly more spooky market of pumpkin growing.

There's also an invitation for grantors living near Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and National Parks to have their say in winning grants to enhance the landscape for future generations to come.

As always, thanks for being a part of the grantor stakeholder family and enjoy the read.

Joe Martin
Compliance Manager, Land & Acquisitions

The strongest link set to help millions

A 472-mile link between the UK and Denmark to enable the sharing of renewable energy is scheduled to be completed by 2023.

The Viking Link will have the capacity to power one and a half million UK homes and is a joint project between National Grid Ventures, part of National Grid, and Danish system operator Energinet.

The 1.4 GW high voltage direct current interconnector, which will be the longest in the world when completed, will stretch from the Lincolnshire coast to Western Denmark.

Industrial manufacturing company Siemens will be supplying and installing equipment for two converter station sites in Lincolnshire, UK and Revsing, Denmark.

Energy revolution

Britain is set to achieve an historic milestone this year, with more electricity being generated from zero carbon sources than fossil fuels for the first time since the Industrial Revolution.

According to National Grid Electricity System Operator, annual power generation data from the past decade shows our reliance on cleaner energy sources such as wind, solar, nuclear, hydro power and storage will overtake coal and gas-fired power generation this year.

It marks a 'tipping point' milestone in Britain's journey towards the Government's target of net zero emissions by 2050, and has been achieved by increased partnerships with our neighbours and a transformation in clean energy led by National Grid.

Outstanding again

The National Grid training centre apprenticeship programme has been hailed as "outstanding" for the third time in a row by Ofsted inspectors.

The National Learning and Development Centre in Eakring, Nottinghamshire, is the only one of its kind in the UK and offers a range of technical, professional and leadership development courses and residential work experience programmes. With a 50% female attendance on many courses, it's also helping young women to consider STEM careers.

The centre boasts an electricity substation, overhead lines, virtual reality suites and the only fully functional gas transmission training facility in Europe.

NEWSLINE

The latest news from National Grid and its landowner partners



The teams spent the day volunteering at RDA's HQ and the scout centre (right)

Saddling up for the scouts

The team at the forefront of National Grid's relationship with grantors has joined forces to make a difference in the community.

More than 50 Land Officers and support team members from Land and Acquisitions jumped at the chance to give two much-loved and well-used organisations a facelift.



Team member Becky Kearsley rolls out a wheelbarrow in a horse field at RDA



One group headed for the Riding for the Disabled Association's (RDA) new headquarters near Warwick, where they cleared overgrown areas and painted the stables for the charity.

The rest went to Berkswell near Coventry, where the area's scouts have used the Rough Close campsite facilities for decades, to paint cabins, renovate walkways and hammer in new fence posts.

Joe Martin, Compliance Manager in National Grid's Land and Property team, said: "Our Land Officers, and Central and Regional teams spend a lot of time every day meeting and talking to grantors on the phone about issues on their land and in the wider community. Our teams are spread all over the country and enjoy volunteering, not only to help stakeholders but also to meet each other so they can work together to resolve any grantor issues."

KNOW THE LIE OF YOUR LAND

Almost every region of the UK has experienced a rise in rural crime. It's a blight that cost the nation almost £50 million last year and one that affects not only landowners through loss of livestock and equipment, but also National Grid substations, cables and pylons. "That's why working together with our grantors to ensure security and safety is a major priority that forms one of the most significant factors in the way we operate," says Tim Skuse.

The Regional Land Manager South, whose patch covers a swathe of southern England from Cornwall to Norfolk, is keen to stress the partnership that exists between grantors and National Grid's teams.

His plea follows a handful of reports of people spotted without identification on grantor land.

He adds: "Our grantors are our eyes and ears and if they have our assets on their land – and 70% of our equipment is in rural areas – we need to make sure they know who is on their land and what to do if they're not sure if someone should be there or not. "It's important for landowners to know that our

Land Officers and Land Agents are there to work with them prior to working on their land, but also sometimes in an emergency."

The majority of work National Grid carries out is planned, when teams will contact grantors in advance to inform them about the need for maintenance or replacing pylon fittings and cables.

Surveyor Rob Govier says: "That might mean a letter or personal visit in advance, but whenever our teams arrive to discuss work needed on your land, always ask for ID. Don't be shy. They'll be expecting you to check and will thank you for doing so."

The personal approach whenever more complex work is needed is in place to help National Grid's engineers overcome any issues they may face on grantors' land and to reassure grantors.

Tim adds: "We will need to discuss the access we may need, where to create crossing points and any mitigation that may be needed during the work. We want to work with our landowners because we are all on the same side when it comes to making sure only authorised people are allowed on their land."

A FEW KEY POINTS TO REMEMBER:

Land Officers and Agents **WILL NOT** always be in National Grid liveried vehicles

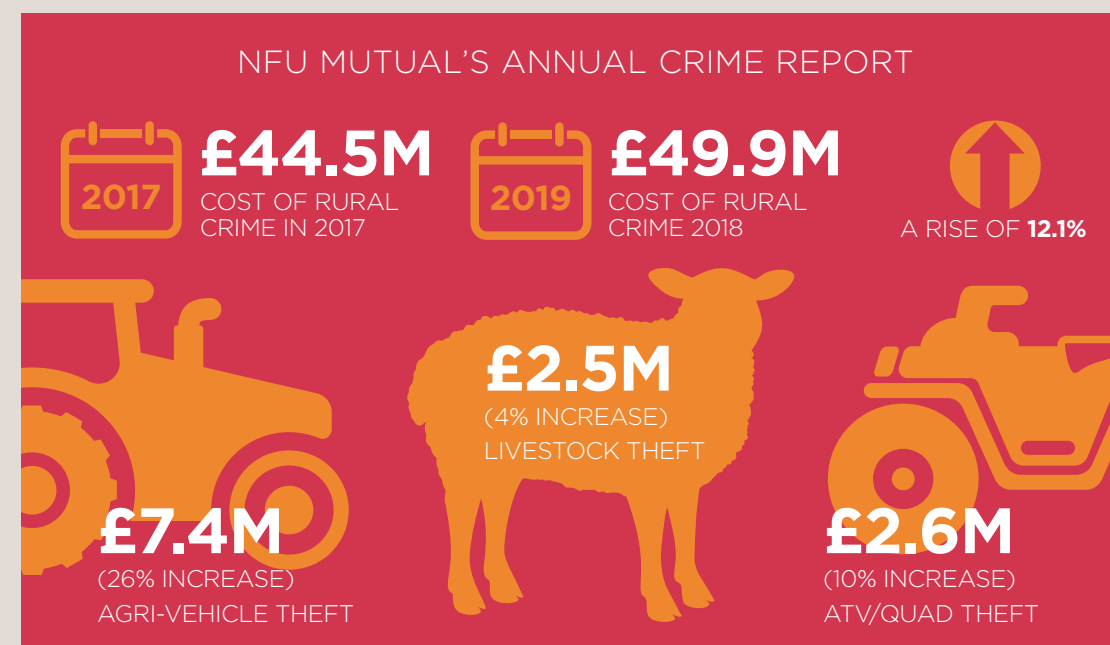
They **WILL** always have official National Grid identification and a National Grid lanyard

If you're **STILL IN DOUBT**, call the number that relates to your area on page 2 and we'll check if planned or emergency work is scheduled



If you're in any doubt, call **0800 389 5113** and select:

- Land Officers and Agents **WILL NOT** always be in National Grid liveried vehicles
- They **WILL** always have official National Grid identification and a National Grid lanyard
- If you're **STILL IN DOUBT**, call the number that relates to your area on page 2 and we'll check if planned or emergency work is scheduled
- Wayleave payments and change of name/address/ownership of land - **Option 1**
- West and Wales - **Option 2**
- East and Scotland - **Option 3**
- South - **Option 4**



FOR EMERGENCIES DIAL 999. IF YOU'RE UNSURE ABOUT SUSPICIOUS ACTIVITY CONTACT .BOX.GROUPSECURITY@NATIONALGRID.COM OR CALL 0800 40 40 90



CHANGE YOUR PERSPECTIVE

BIG GRANTS AVAILABLE FOR COUNTRYSIDE ENHANCEMENT SCHEMES

Grantors are being urged to play a greater role in a nationwide initiative that is enhancing the landscape by reducing the impact of National Grid's transmission lines.

The Visual Impact Provision (VIP) project, launched five years ago, is already making positive changes to the landscape in four key Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) and National Parks in Dorset, North Wessex Downs, the Peak District and Snowdonia. National Grid is now urging landowners to partner applicants (opposite) to seek grants for local visual improvement and landscape enhancement schemes as part of the Landscape Enhancement Initiative (LEI).

Grants of up to £200,000 are available for projects in each of the 30 National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty in England and Wales impacted by National Grid transmission lines, some of them built in the 1960s when planning priorities were different.

Tree planting, hedgerow management, footpath work and dry stone wall rebuilding are covered by the scheme, which will distribute grants until 2021.

Projects encouraging biodiversity are also high priority for the LEI, which has emerged from the VIP Stakeholder Advisory Group (SAG) set up to advise National Grid on where the local part of a total £500 million pot allocated by watchdog Ofgem should be spent.

If you're a grantor living in a National Park or AONB and have a project in mind, get in touch at nationalgrid@trustcsr.com or call 01285 841912.

DYFFRYN MAENTWROG WOODLAND RESTORATION AND LANDSCAPE IMPROVEMENT - SNOWDONIA NATIONAL PARK

A trio of projects designed to add to the magic of Snowdonia National Park are being funded by the LEI scheme.

New forestry planting is creating wildlife corridors through species-rich habitats, with more than eight hectares of native woodland planted and 871 metres of hedgerow already restored at Maentwrog.

A programme to control invasive plant species such as rhododendron is also helping to conserve and revitalise the landscape's ancient

woodland at several sites including Llan Ffestiniog.

The third project, Snowdonia Traditional Boundaries, recognises the importance of historic features including hedgerows and dry-stone walls as hallmarks of the unique local culture and landscape.

Natural Resources Wales, the National Trust, the Woodland Trust, North Wales Wildlife Trust and both Welsh farming

unions, along with nearly 100 individual landowners, have joined in the delivery of the projects.



DID YOU KNOW?

All electricity transmission network owners in Great Britain are funded by a price control mechanism set by Ofgem, the electricity and gas markets regulator.



"The LEI has brought together charitable and voluntary organisations to make landscape and biodiversity improvements"

JONATHAN CAWLEY, DIRECTOR OF PLANNING AND LAND MANAGEMENT AT SNOWDONIA NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

HIGH WEALD AONB, KENT

A project to screen overhead lines from walkers and create a sense of timelessness is transforming an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty in Kent.

Tree planting is shielding the lines and pylons from key viewpoints along the promoted 1066 Walk and the Sussex Border Path trails and footpaths in the countryside just south of Tonbridge.

Lost and overgrazed hedges are also being restored to strengthen the landscape's distinctive boundary features and enhance wildlife habitats thanks to an LEI grant funding the three-year project.

The AONB is working to enhance the historically rich area, a beautiful mosaic of patchwork fields, small copses, shaws and hedges, through its Beautiful Boundaries project.

The grant is also funding education sessions for landowners at nearby Scotney Castle to promote long-term sustainability.

Gerry Sherwin, Business Manager at the High Weald AONB Partnership, said: "The LEI has offered our farmers a rare opportunity to work together to improve the scenery and wildlife around the transmission line. Walkers from near and far are already appreciating the new hedges when they've been in blossom and in the run up to Autumn."

DID YOU KNOW?

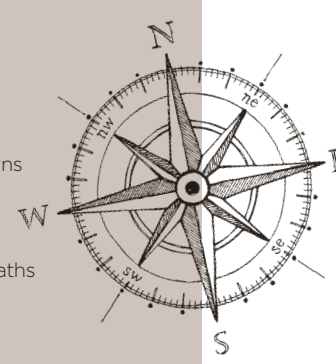
The energy regulator, Ofgem, set aside £500 million to mitigate the visual impact of existing electricity infrastructure in nationally protected landscapes.

NATIONAL PARKS ELIGIBLE TO APPLY FOR LEI FUNDING

- ▶ Brecon Beacons
- ▶ Lake District
- ▶ New Forest
- ▶ Northumberland
- ▶ North York Moors
- ▶ Peak District
- ▶ Pembrokeshire
- ▶ Snowdonia
- ▶ South Downs

AONB ELIGIBLE TO APPLY FOR LEI FUNDING

- ▶ Anglesey
- ▶ Blackdown Hills
- ▶ Cannock Chase
- ▶ Chilterns
- ▶ Clwydian Range & Dee Valley
- ▶ Cornwall
- ▶ Cotswolds
- ▶ Cranborne Chase & West Wiltshire
- ▶ Dedham Vale
- ▶ Dorset
- ▶ Forest of Bowland
- ▶ High Weald
- ▶ Howardian Hills
- ▶ Kent Downs
- ▶ North Wessex Downs
- ▶ Quantocks
- ▶ Shropshire Hills
- ▶ Solway Coast
- ▶ Suffolk Coast & Heaths
- ▶ Tamar Valley
- ▶ Wye Valley



To find out more visit <http://lei.nationalgrid.com>



SOAK YOURSELF IN *nature*

GRANTORS URGED TO MAKE A SPLASH AND BACK THE WONDER OF WILD SWIMMING



laughter, giggling and chit-chat echo over the otherwise whispering reed beds of a meandering river, its banks bristling with abundant wildlife. Nearby, behind a bush, the photographer is temporarily stark naked as he struggles into his wetsuit, more than ready to suffer for his art.

He doesn't rush. The field is in the depths of a grantor's land and his subjects, mercifully out of view, are a group of five women enjoying an equally liberating experience. They're in cossies and it's almost September, but they insist it's always fine after the first 10 or 20 seconds.

Open water, or wild swimming, has almost doubled in popularity in the past few years, with first-timers pulled back time and again as if by a current by the hobby's physical and mental benefits.

"There's nothing quite like it," says the Outdoor Swimming Society's Ella Foote (left) as she leads the group with more than a hint of subterfuge through cow-filled fields to the water's edge at Thundry Meadows near Farnham in Surrey.

Within minutes these seasoned swimmers, around half a century's experience of open water exploration between them, are in and rolling back the years. All bar Ella are in their 50s and 60s but say the weekly watery commune with nature – no winter break for these hardy souls – makes them feel younger.

More than four million people a year take to our countryside's lakes, lochs, rivers and seas and the numbers of official open water swimmers are doubling every year as the hobby's health benefits gain credence.

"The smells of the countryside and the different

IN NUMBERS



4.1M

The number of people who swam in lakes, lochs, rivers and seas in the UK in the year since November 2017.



94%

The percentage of open water swimmers aged between 25 and 65.

views from below the banks make it feel like you're a part of nature. It's a totally joyous, addictive experience and the water itself feels silky smooth. Nothing like a swimming pool," added Ella.

The swimsuit-clad group defiantly eschew wetsuits, insisting they're a barrier to getting closer to nature in their frequent get-togethers on the Thames and its Home Counties tributaries.

THE COLD THAT BINDS

As Ella talks, one of the friends she's met through the burgeoning network of outdoor swimming clubs shrieks "this is better than being in work" as the group float downstream on their backs like children in a water park's lazy river.

Julie Ward, 61, has never been to this river on grantor Surrey Wildlife Trust's land before. She usually escapes her west London home with weekly 5km swims along the rural Thames with her new circle of friends: "When you get in, the cold bonds you. You're with high-powered bankers, accountants and nurses but it doesn't matter what job you do. No one even asks. It's a very primal thing to do because you're all equal and part of the natural environment.

"You swim at dirt level past blackberry bushes, dragonflies and reeds and it's a very mindful activity that's good for your mental and physical health. Even >>

"The initial reaction is 'that's not for me', but once you've done it there's no going back. Don't knock it until you've tried it"



The ladies of the lake (l to r) Jeni Orme, Sharon Elliott, Julie Ward and Carol Carter

in winter when you're standing on the frosty bank thinking 'what am I doing?', you feel great afterwards and then go for a warm cup of tea and some cake... there's always cake."

ENLIGHTENED GRANTORS

Since its launch in 2006, the Outdoor Swimming Society has grown into a 70,000-strong collective of wild swimmers all sharing a vision of opening up areas to swimming and offering advice and information to help people dip their toes in the water.

"In this country, private land ownership, public risk aversion and lack of knowledge about what's permissible have combined to limit opportunities for swimming, but that is slowly changing," said Ella, who has been wild swimming for 12 years.

Elsewhere in Europe, where a more liberal culture of personal responsibility and public access has allowed the pleasures of outdoor swimming to persist,

the tradition of splashing in beautiful inland waterways flanked by riverbank changing huts lives on.

Campaigners dream of the day when 'swimming forbidden' signs are replaced with helpful information boards, entry ladders and perhaps a changing hut or two, but that will depend on the nation's landowners.

Ella, who runs the thedipadvisor.co.uk website offering advice and guided swims, said: "Enlightened grantors such as the National Rivers Authority and wildlife trusts know we're hugely protective of the places where we swim and always leave them as we found them."

"Fears about owners' liabilities are legitimate and the risks to inexperienced or ill-prepared swimmers are real if overblown, but as long as people use common sense, read the water and look out for each other it's the most rewarding thing they'll ever do."

SIMPLE PLEASURES

The sink or swim question for the uninitiated is usually 'where can I do it?'. The answer, surprisingly, is anywhere with public access and navigable rivers a foot from the bank and hence beyond private ownership.

But Ella wants more and more grantors and landowners to embrace this most exhilarating of simple pleasures, either by allowing swimmers to use their water, or by giving it a go themselves.

She said: "The initial reaction is 'that's not for me', but once you've done it there's no going back. I always say to cynics 'don't knock it until you've tried it'."



Jeni forgets all her troubles with a weekly wild water dip

OUTDOOR SWIMMING SOCIETY'S SAFETY TIPS

SPOT THE DANGERS - Ask locals for advice, read local warning and guidance signs, and find your exit point before entering the water. Beware of underwater hazards and water currents.

SWIM SOBER - Alcohol and drugs impair judgement, swimming ability and body temperature.

SWIM WITH OTHERS - Take someone with you when you go into water. If something goes wrong they will be able to get help for you.

INCREASE YOUR EXPOSURE GRADUALLY - Get used to the temperature. Cold water shock 'gasp reflex' can be triggered in water below 15°C.

DON'T JUMP - Before jumping in, check for depth and hazards and get used to the water temperature. Stay within your limits, and swim near the shore, not away from it.

THINK SAFE - Spot the dangers, follow safety advice and read signs, swim with friends and recognise the signs of someone in trouble in an emergency

For safety tips visit www.outdoorswimmingsociety.com/is-it-safe/



For more information on how to get started, visit www.outdoorswimmingsociety.com



GARDENING LEAVE

THE INVESTMENT BANKER WHO SWAPPED STOCKS AND SHARES FOR SQUASH





Charles said the lure of the land tempted him back to his childhood home

Investment banker Charles Eckley was at the top of his field in the City when he took redundancy and the ensuing spell of paid leave.

Then after dabbling with other options, fate took over as his father's health waned and he made the decision to make his mark in a very different field closer to his childhood home.

"It took gardening leave to a whole new level," laughed the 55-year-old who turned his back on the cut-throat global financial markets... to grow pumpkins in Kent.

"I'd always been fascinated by the speed squashes grew at and the different varieties, so when my father died I decided to pursue my passion. I don't regret leaving the world of equity finance and hedge funds behind, not for a minute."

For the past four years he's been literally ploughing a lone furrow – doing the hard graft himself and calling on son, daughter, wife and volunteers only to help at the 16-day Pick Your Own pumpkin event in

IN NUMBERS



£4K

The amount Charles raised for the British Heart Foundation, Heart of Kent Hospice and Demelza Hospice Care for Children last year.

27

million tonnes of pumpkins were produced in 2017, around 30% of them in China.

the run-up to Halloween – on his 23 acres near Maidstone. More than 20,000 people visit the electricity grantor's free fair to enjoy 'foodie' cookery displays and handicraft stalls showing the versatility of squashes and gourds and to buy one of the plant's 80 different varieties.

"Most people know about the traditional pumpkins associated with Halloween and some even eat butternut and spaghetti squash, but I don't think they realise how many different types or how long-lasting they are," he said. "We let families wander through the fields and it's wonderful to hear the squeals of joy as the children discover them all mixed in together."

HARD WORK

From the colourful red and white Turkish Turban to the mint blue Crown Prince, which is great in curries, the huge traditional orange Monster Smash or the cannonball-shaped gem squash, there's far more to pumpkins than just carving.

Their extended shelf life for a start. Squashes actually mature the longer you leave them and have an 'eat by' date of six months from picking – which is why Charles is keen to espouse the marketing message that a pumpkin isn't just for All Hallows' Eve but a staple part of a healthy balanced diet.

His late father, a wheat, barley, beans and linseed farmer, thought his son was mad to settle on a single crop... but he'd be proud of how Charles' Pumpkin Moon business is working out.

"It's hard work from the time the crowds leave because I clean up, organise the gleaning and then



plough, ready for seed drilling in mid-May. From October 1 it's hectic – we cut all day so we're ready with 300 wheelbarrows for our customers," he said.

The gleaning, along with the educational visits from local schools he's trying to promote, is an altruistic aspect of a business that couldn't be further removed from his previous life in the Square Mile.

"I love it. We always grow around 75,000 pumpkins, so no one is disappointed. But that means there's leftover crop, so we have 80 gleaners who come in and pick 25 tonnes of squash which are distributed to 20 cities around the UK," beamed Charles.

BIGGER SCALE

It means the vitamin-packed food from this little corner of Kent ended up in 1,000 hostels, homeless centres and foodbanks to create 320,000 portions of food in the six months after last year's third event.

Charles' passion for pumpkins has always been burning inside him even when he was advising transatlantic companies on the best investment to make millions overnight. "We lived in south London and had a small garden and I always grew them there. Now I just do it on a bigger scale."

With luck, the traditional orange pumpkins start to grow from July, when they are green, before maturing in appearance and taste on the sometimes three-metre long vines. But as Charles admitted, the small sales window means he's at the mercy of the elements.

"It's very seasonal, so if it pours with rain through half-term week up to Halloween or we have Storm or Hurricane whatever, our team are left huddling together in a tent," he said.

Mercifully that hasn't happened, although you get the feeling that Charles would be reasonably happy simply giving something back to people in need even if the event was a washout.

"We'd love people from London for the day but we're marketing it locally, first using Instagram and Facebook, with the emphasis on educating young children on farming and how good, fresh food comes from a field near their home," he said.

As you read this, Charles may be on to the clear-up stage which lasts until December, when he takes a hard-earned break. "There's time for a holiday and filling my days with some fun before it all starts again. There is pressure then, but it's a far cry from the City."

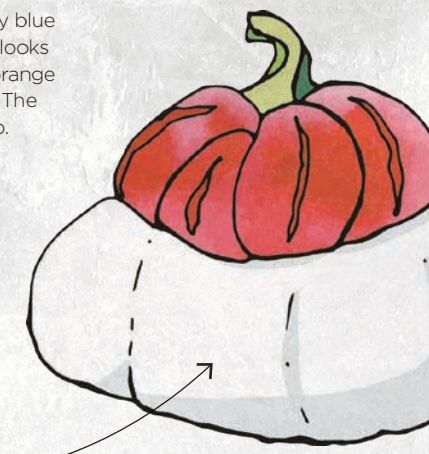


For more information about pumpkins and tasty recipes visit www.pumpkinmoon.uk



CROWN PRINCE

An attractive squash with silvery blue skin that's great for cooking. It looks good, stores well, has a dense orange flesh and is ideal for roasting. The seeds are tasty roasted too.



TURKISH TURBAN

Unusual looking and good to eat, this orange squash with flashes of green and a knobby top tastes like butternut squash and is good for roasting, baking and making soup.



HARLEQUIN

A winter squash with stripes of green, gold and orange, and a high sugar content that makes it a tasty squash to cook with.



CASPERITA

A small, white Munchkin-type pumpkin with sweet-tasting pale flesh.



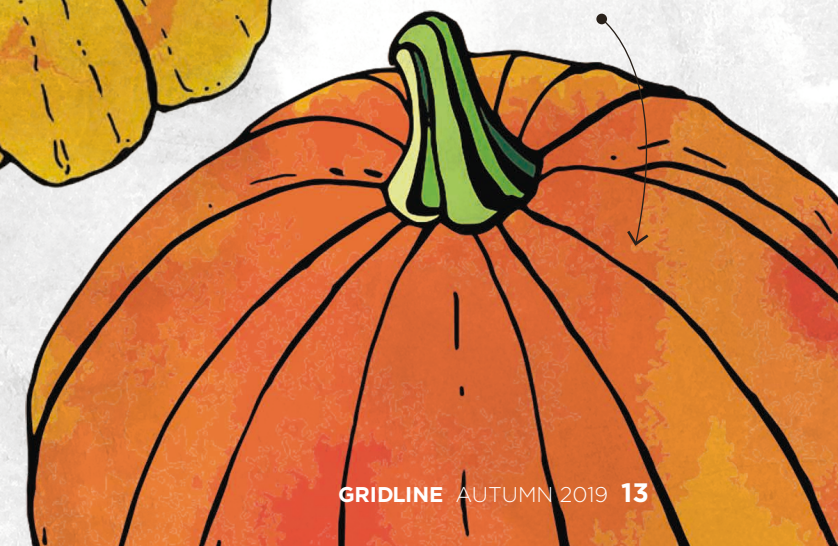
GOOSEBUMP

Not great for eating, but hugely popular at Halloween because of their warty skin.



MONSTER SMASH

The daddy of the pumpkin world, these bright orange beasts can grow to 130kg and make the perfect spooky centrepiece.





KEEPER OF THE COMMONS

LONDON'S LAST RURAL BASTION IS ALIVE AND FLOURISHING THANKS TO A GRANTOR CHARITY



The Grade II listed windmill (above) is now preserved as England's only museum of windmills



Bill Rowland (left) says the Commons team know how lucky they are to be a focal point for London and the world

Set on a plateau overlooking the skyscrapers of central London in the near distance, Wimbledon Common is a wonderful anachronism in modern society.

People run, walk their dogs, wander nature trails, chat with friends and even try Mongolian wrestling and Aussie Rules Football. The shrill ring of mobile phones is a rarity here.

Even the keepers, the liveried guardians of this 1,140-acre spread of London's countryside, roam the heathland and more mature wooded areas on horseback, using small two-seater vehicles only rarely.

It's a little like stepping out of the rat race and going back in time to a place where wildlife is abundant, air quality is pure and even car parking is charged on a £1 an hour voluntary basis.

The green space, a Site of Special Scientific Interest and a Special Area of Conservation, is protected as "an open, unenclosed and natural" place for exercise and recreation by its own 1871 private Act of Parliament – a pledge living on in Wimbledon and its sisters, Putney Heath and Putney Lower Commons.

FACT
Rent from sports clubs such as the Magpies Australian Rules Football team help boost the charity's funds, along with log sales and filming rights.

"The real trick is to maintain it well and ensure it is well cared for, but to keep it looking completely natural at the same time"

TODAY'S CUSTODIANS

Unfenced and constantly evolving, the sprawling areas of heather and gorse heathland and mature woodland are owned and maintained by the Wimbledon and Putney Commons Conservators, a registered charity with a dedicated team of 23, including keepers, maintenance operatives, playing field staff and admin.



"The real trick is to maintain it well and ensure it is well cared for, but to keep it looking completely natural at the same time," says Conservation and Engagement Officer Pete Haldane: "If we left it, nature would reclaim it as woodland within a few decades, but it's been like this for almost 150 years and we are simply today's custodians."

Most of the thousands of weekly visitors the Common welcomes see little of the work that goes on behind the scenes, and Peter adds: "There are always things to be done and places where intervention is needed, because it's such a large area.

"The woodland needs careful management to attract a wide range of species. Protecting the heathland is an ongoing battle against the encroachment of invasive scrub. Turn your back and it would all be overgrown."

The charity depends on a £1m levy collected from homeowners within three-quarters of a mile of the Common's perimeter, but with running costs of more than £1.6 million, it's a frugal existence that relies



Capital and country



increasingly on partnerships with organisations such as the Forestry Commission and Natural England, and support from the public, many of whom are blissfully unaware that the three Commons are charity-run.

BREAKNECK PACE

But it's Pete's army of volunteers, aged seven to 70, who ease the pressure on the maintenance team, with schools and companies joining scrub-bashing sessions and cutting back acres of holly to ensure daylight cuts through the canopy onto the labyrinth of walkways to offer a clear view and enhance safety and security.

Pete, whose father was once head keeper, has also launched a popular 'Adopt an Area' litter-picking team to invoke the spirit of the Wombles, the pioneering environmentally-friendly creatures who enjoyed their own series in the early 70s.



He says: "We sometimes have children and adults ask us where to find them, so we give them a clue but couldn't possibly reveal the precise location. They are part of the folklore of the Common but also sum up the spirit of community we have here."

The Common is a magnet for people seeking an escape from the capital's breakneck pace. Around 600 people descend every Saturday for the Parkrun, members at two golf clubs, including the London Scottish, the second oldest in England, use its 18-hole course, and riders trot out from a brace of stables along its 16 miles of paths.

OLD FASHIONED IS BEST

The main focal point is the car park and café, from where bird and bat walks get interesting within minutes as swans touch down spectacularly on one of the Common's nine ponds, which are also frequented by kingfishers and herons.

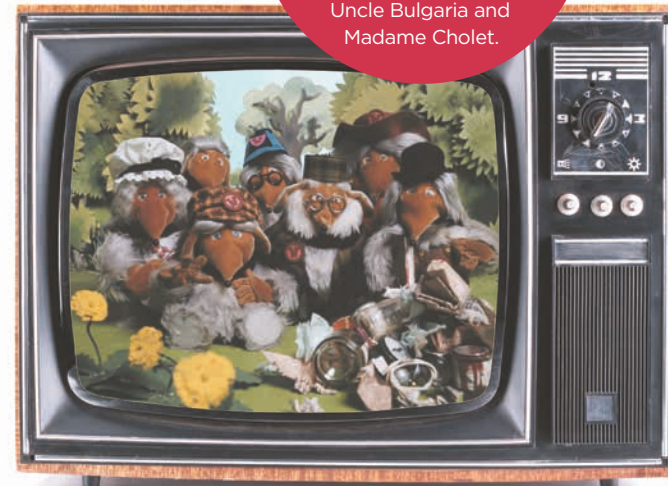
Most of the team live in cottages on-site and are on 24-hour call in case of any emergencies, but the worst crimes for the mounted keepers who have patrolled since the 1950s are minor by-law infringements.

Senior Keeper Richard Thompson, a former mounted

Pete Haldane (left) is the man behind many of the three sites' popular engagement and environmental initiatives

Once stagnant Beverley Brook (above) is being revived thanks to a South East Rivers Trust partnership

FACT
Former Deputy Ranger Ron Ribbins used to reply on behalf of the Wombles to every child's letter addressed to Great Uncle Bulgaria and Madame Cholet.



© Shutterstock. © Tony Evans/TimeLapse Library Ltd. / Contributor



"The woodland needs careful management to attract a wide range of species - turn your back and it would all be overgrown"

officer with the Met, says: "It's old-fashioned but it works. The six of us, all former military or police, are a visible presence and our role is to be seen and to reassure. In terms of crime, using the horses has an extremely preventative effect.

"You'll rarely see police on the Commons unless they're called, because we take care of things. We're proactive, but if there's an emergency we can reach most parts in a few minutes at a gallop."

Wimbledon Common is almost seven or eight different environments rolled into one, with massive electricity cables connecting London beneath – each one maintained to safeguard the wildlife that call them home, including badgers, Daubenton's bats, muntjac deer, and butterflies attracted by sapling oaks.



For more information about the Commons and how to donate, visit www.wpcc.org.uk



NOT COMMONLY KNOWN



Its most ancient feature is Bensbury Camp, a hill-fort that probably dates from around the 7th century BC.



Politicians Pitt the Younger, Castlereagh and Canning were among those who duelled here.



The best-known landmark on Wimbledon Common is the windmill, built in 1817 to grind corn and now a museum devoted to windmills and woodworking. Robert Baden-Powell began to write Scouting for Boys in 1907 in the cottage next door.



The common has been in public ownership since 1871, but thrived once the National Rifle Association left for Bisley in 1889. The first golf course followed in 1908. The heathland was used as a runway for bombers in the Second World War.

SEE BUT DON'T BE SEEN

THE CAMOUFLAGE KING IN A HURRY TO COMBINE BUSINESS WITH PLEASURE



BEMPTON CLIFFS



MINSMERE



SPRINGWATCH

(above) Examples of the craftsmanship enabling people to enjoy nature



Attention to detail is everything in the workshop



Farmer Jonathan Nothard doesn't have time for small talk. He lives life at breakneck speed and is only truly content when he's "getting things done".

He averages four hours sleep each night, works through the witching hours on his self-taught computer-aided designs and doesn't suffer fools gladly, which could make the interview tricky.

"I've got a wheat harvest to bring in," he states matter-of-factly, before softening: "I love it really. I sit on my tractor alone, going up and down the fields. No radio or chat for me. Just the sound of the engine."

Blunt and driven, it's little surprise that he has taken on an established family business just south of the Humber estuary near Scunthorpe and turned it into one of the world's largest, and arguably best, in its field.

The arable farmer grantor heads up Gilleards, a seven-man business that has designed, built, delivered and installed 1,000 bird hides since the first at Blacktoft Sands nature reserve in Yorkshire in 1975.

Other products include badger hides, boardwalks, classrooms, viewing platforms, fishing huts, Sand Martin nesting banks and tern rafts.

SINGLE-MINDED

Customers include the BBC, which used one of Gilleards' purpose-built studios to film Springwatch and host shows from the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds' Minsmere nature reserve in Suffolk.

"We've delivered and installed hides to Spain, France and even the desert near Abu Dhabi in the UAE so people could watch the flamingos in the wild," says Jonathan, allowing himself a rare smile of pride.

Closer to home on his 600-acre Garthorpe Farm,

Jonathan and wife Janice are gradually breathing fresh life into a disused, dying pond to coax a return of dragonflies, kingfishers, water voles and bullfinches... all in view of one of their more modest hides.

He is convinced that in these uncertain times, British farmers looking to diversify can use their greatest asset – wildlife – to generate added income and re-establish the fading link between city and rural communities.

Janice says: "The heaviest demand for hides comes between September and March, outside nesting season, and that fits in well with our wheat, oilseed rape and pea harvest between July and October."

"He likes to be busy all the time and looks like he doesn't have time to stop, but he's very single-minded and has a passion for the hides and the joy they bring to people's lives by getting them closer to nature."



(above) Jonathan and wife Janice in front of the hide he built to watch the rebirth of his pond

(below) Joiner Luke Dart works on an animal refuge which will end up on a Suffolk farmer's field

BUILT TO LAST

An avid bird lover himself, Jonathan naturally prefers the hides, viewing platforms and huts he can design bespoke for the aficionados, but accepts his firm's role in opening the countryside to a wider audience.

"We're seeing more orders for family and classroom areas because interest in seeing nature close up is growing considerably, and that can only be good for the younger generation and British farmers. Apart from our standard range of bird hides we try to put the 'wow factor' into all our designs or that little something no other bird hide or platform has," he says.

"Whatever we do, the priority is always on hand-built quality from start to finish because that's what our reputation is built on. We don't want to go back a few weeks later after installing a hide. Ours are built to last," adds the father-of-three.

QUALITY CRAFTSMANSHIP

Gilleards and its workshop boss of 25 years, Craig Gelder, have overseen 1,000 bird and wildlife hides for almost all the wildlife organisations in the UK, as well as hides for the RSPB, ornithological organisations and fellow grantors London and Chester Zoos.

Jonathan, who admits he "gets an idea in my head and runs with it", explains how he bought a former potato packing warehouse in the middle of Garthorpe in 2015 and turned it into a workshop, with painstaking build quality forming foundations as strong as the galvanised steel many of his designs now stand on.

Warming to the role of interviewee now, he adds: "I wanted to extend the business because wildlife is something I've always loved. It's probably the only time I relax, so combining that with another passion in

design and technical drawing meant I could work through the night and be in my element."

The company use only renewably sourced timber from local suppliers in Hull to reduce the carbon footprint, with an average 20 foot by 15 foot hide taking around three weeks to build.

Craig says: "Most of our customers are organisations like bird or wildlife trusts, but we've had numerous private clients. Each time the process is similar – we hand-build them in our workshop, dismantle them, and transport them to site and rebuild them again."

"Attention to detail is all and if I see something a few millimetres out we'll start again because we don't want to join the 'knock it out quick and forget about it' approach that seems to be happening in society."

Gilleards, insists Craig's boss, is something of an anachronism – a business that tops the global internet searches for bird hides but does so by relying on old-fashioned principles.

He says: "That's the way I like it. Quality craftsmanship builds our reputation and in the rare moments I do slow down to think, I'm certain we're doing it the right way."



For more information visit: www.bird-hide.co.uk

LASTWORD

Start the year in style with these two great prizes



WIN

A TWO-NIGHT GETAWAY FOR TWO

Leave the daily stress behind to indulge you and your partner in a luxury stay at one of the UK's stunning National Parks. Peace, quiet and the tranquillity of nature. What more could you want?

To enter, answer the question below and we'll add your name to the draw.

BMG Research may contact you to take part in a five-minute survey seeking feedback and opinions from stakeholders to help National Grid better understand stakeholder requirements.

Q How many cities was pumpkin grower Charles Eckley's excess crop distributed to?

Email your answer, name and contact details to gridline@madebysonder.com

Alternatively, send your entry to **Sonder Gourmet Break competition, Victoria Court, 8 Dormer Place, Leamington Spa, Warwickshire CV32 5AE to arrive no later than 28 February 2020.**



WIN

Enter our photo competition and you could win a £100 gift voucher

We've featured some superb pictures taken by grantors down the years, and there's usually a theme... but this time we're opening it up to any picture of you on your land. Just give us your best shot.

Best entry sent to the addresses on the left by 28 February 2020 wins a £100 voucher to spend on a high street shopping spree.

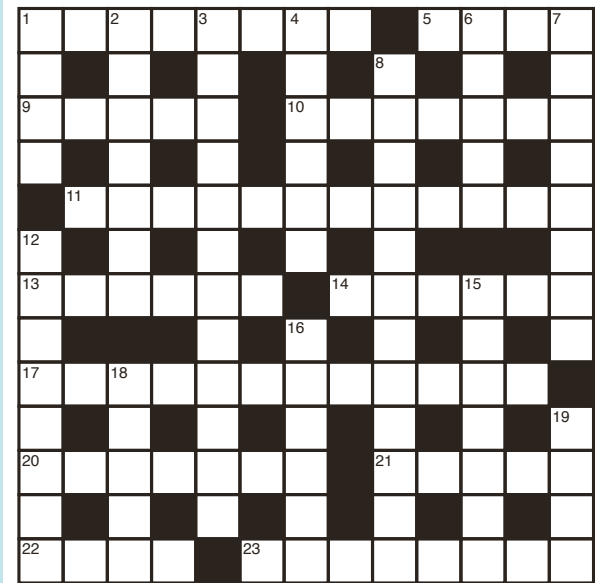
JUST FOR FUN CROSSWORD

ACROSS

- 1, 5 & 13 One of the pieces from Mussorgsky's Pictures at an Exhibition depicting an edifice which was never actually built (3,5,4,2,4)
- 5 See 1 across
- 9 A long rope with a running noose used for catching wild horses (5)
- 10 Genus of poisonous plants of which Monkshood is the common European species (7)
- 11 One who studies insects (12)
- 13 See 1 across
- 14 A machine for generating electric currents (6)
- 17 Botanist who has done much to help children understand the natural world by such things as the I-Spy club and a TV programme featuring a computer called Alice (5,7)
- 20 Adjective meaning watery (7)
- 21 Stringed instrument, introduced into Britain by minstrels in the 1840s (5)
- 22 Type of palm tree whose fruits of the same name are extremely rich in sugar (4)
- 23 Type of warbler native to Britain (8)

DOWN

- 1 Form of magnesium silicate, used for cosmetics, lubricants and as a filler (4)
- 2 German born psychologist popularly known for his book, Know Your Own IQ (7)
- 3 Shrub of north temperate zones with dark, leathery leaves and showy flowers in spring (12)
- 4 Large river of South America flowing into the Atlantic Ocean on the equator (6)
- 6 In a criminal charge, the defence of having been elsewhere at the time in question (5)
- 7 An elementary particle containing an electric charge (8)
- 8 Containing or uttering words of only one syllable (12)
- 12 Surname of one of the journalists who, while working for the Washington Post, investigated the Watergate affair (8)
- 15 Form of calendar including astronomical events, anniversaries etc (7)
- 16 Plant which grows in waste places and whose heads are used as brushes (6)
- 18 One of the disciplines in men's gymnastics (5)
- 19 A high deck at the stern of a ship (4)



© Brainwarp

SOLUTION: ACROSS - 1, 5 & 13 The Great Gate of Kiev, 9 Lassos, 10 Aqueduct, 21 Banjo, 22 Date, 23 Blackcap DOWN - 1 Tail, 2 Eysenck, 3 Rhododendron, 4 Amazon, 6 Alibi, 7 Ectron, 8 Monosyllabic, 12 Woodward, 15 Almanac, 17 Dynamite, 18 Teasel, 19 Vault, 19 Poop

COMPETITION TERMS AND CONDITIONS: GOURMET BREAK: The winner will be the first entrant selected at random who correctly identifies the answer and is a National Grid grantor at the time of draw. Editor's decision is final and no correspondence will be entered into. Gridline reserves the right to change the prize without notice. The prize is not transferable and can't be exchanged for cash. National Grid always seek feedback and opinions from stakeholders they interact with to better understand stakeholder requirements. By entering the competition you permit BMG Research to contact you on behalf of National Grid Gas/Electricity Transmission. Closing date: 28 February 2020. PHOTO: Winning image will be the most visually appealing, original and relevant to the theme and will feature in the next edition. The winner must be a National Grid grantor. Editor's decision is final and no correspondence will be entered into. Gridline reserves the right to change the prize without prior notice. The prize is not transferable and can't be exchanged for cash. Closing date: 28 February 2020. The competition winners' names will be published.

nationalgrid