



## **About Pennyhooks Farm**

At the heart of Pennyhooks is a 100 acre organic grass land farm. It has been owned by the Otter Family for 70 years. It has beautiful views and water meadows with orchids, otters, water voles and a wonderful meandering brook within a lovely valley. There is a herd of 15 Aberdeen Angus cows plus their calves, as well as a flock of hens, some donkeys, goats and pigs. The cows have an important role in the care of the conservation on the farm, as by their carefully managed grazing, the species rich grassland is maintained.

## **Conservation and Archeology**

Pennyhooks' ancient valley is protected as a county wildlife site and currently by being part of the Natural England Higher Level Stewardship programme. Neolithic flints have been found here, as well as old field systems, and it also has a limestone tufa spring within a reed bed in the semi-ancient little woodland.

It needs constant care and attention to ensure that the significance of this special farm is maintained and if possible enhanced for the wellbeing of future bio-diversity here. The sense of wellbeing and a balanced ecology also often benefits those who spend time here. Recent research supports the perception that being outside in a natural environment has positive effects for mental and physical health.

## **Farm Accreditation**

Pennyhooks Farm Trust has accreditation with the Social Farms and Gardens network. It is a Soil Association organically registered farm (Reg no. G2623), and also has Red Tractor status, and sells its eggs and meat under these accreditations.

## **The Team**

The farm is run by Lydia Otter CEO, along with Richard Hurford, Farm Manager; and the work with the students is shared with Emma Masefield, Autism Learning Centre Director. The Trust employs a team of about 18 full time and part time staff. Their wide experience and skills are in: autism care, teaching, student support, psychology, woodwork, farm work, conservation, gardening, rural craft, home skills, book-keeping, willow weaving, administration and fund raising. They all share our ethos and a dedication to the wellbeing of young adults with Autism, and we pride ourselves on pulling together. Working at Pennyhooks requires a great deal of flexibility.

## **Resources**

Website: [www.pennyhooks.com](http://www.pennyhooks.com) reference BBC documentary

Social Farms and Gardens: [www.farmgarden.org.uk](http://www.farmgarden.org.uk)

## **The Major Appeal**

The vision is to provide facilities to live and work on the farm on a full-time basis. This model is rarely available in the UK.

Pennyhooks has shown it can effectively meet the needs of our students with our daily programmes. By engaging our students in a wide range of jobs which are needed by the farm, we enable our students to feel they have purpose; that they are contributing to a team effort, to the welfare of animals and to land of national conservation significance. They are also given opportunities to be involved in community engagement through our Open Days and to make products which are bought by members of the public and bring some funds back into the Trust. Student RW says simply, *'I like to be helpful'*.

The need for appropriate, life-long care is self-evident. Offering this alongside a working life at Pennyhooks is seen by families and autism specialists as being the best solution for these young people's long-term development and for them to have a happy life.

The urgent pressing need is to create residential accommodation at Pennyhooks to sustain the purposeful working life of these young people as they grow older – a home and a job for life. Plans are developing, and the Trust is in consultation with them and their families and experts in autism and rural building. Phase 1 will be construction of a home for 5 residential placements on the farm, with further homes being considered in the local community.

This is an ambitious and exciting project to secure the future at Pennyhooks. There is increasing urgency as parents and carers age and their anxiety naturally mounts about ensuring the best future for their children. They want them to be happy and fulfilled, in common with parents everywhere, and Pennyhooks seeks to use the farm and its environs to provide purposeful and stimulating employment and life skills. This 'enabling' environment and the specialist learning programmes are designed to do just that and are rarely available for this group of people.

In order to fulfil these plans, we need to develop a robust funding campaign to meet the building work and associated costs. We are currently in the process of recruiting a Fundraiser to support this.

## **Working at Pennyhooks**

No two days are the same at Pennyhooks. Naturally the students and carers are reliant on whatever the weather throws at them, so flexibility and adaptability are key. Generally we are guided by the seasons. We support students to join with the rhythms and routines of the Farm's daily life, as well as taking part in accredited work based training. The result is that they gradually develop skills which contribute to them leading purposeful adult lives. Our response to their needs is to work from success to success.



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