



Nurture through Surrey's nature

'There is something infinitely healing in the repeated refrains of nature – the assurance that dawn comes after night, and spring after winter.'

Rachel Carson

Having lived all my life in the Surrey Hills I love our AONB, covering one quarter of the county, the most wooded county in England. This beauty is overlooked by many, often including those living in Surrey. In contrast and much more hidden from view is the ugly fact that 10 per cent of Surrey's children live in poverty, and around 10,000 Surrey children suffer from mental health disorders. These startling facts, combined with my career in rural estate management, were the inspiration behind the idea of focusing my shrieval theme on 'Nurture through Surrey's nature'.

As High Sheriff I set out to support existing charities and organisations which are already delivering nature-focused, society-benefiting projects. From care farms to camping trips, nurture farms to mentoring in allotments, scout camps to social prescribing, outdoor education to high ropes courses, on farms, in forests, parks, gardens or at the local football



High Sheriff and Jenny Seagrove, Mane Chance

Photos: Andy Newbold Photography

pitch – there is such a diversity of initiatives and opportunities.

It has been an amazing discovery, with a momentum of its own, that everywhere I turned I found the outdoors being favoured over the indoors, and helping to improve lives. It was exciting to celebrate the message 'Nurture through Surrey's nature', to build on it, to share ideas, enable conversations and encourage new collaborations.

Throughout the year I met inspirational people providing opportunities to nurture all ages within the countryside. The growth in the 'nurture through nature' arena is so exciting, and Surrey is achieving so much. Here, space limits and allows for only a few examples:

Change of Scene – supports children excluded from school through caring for animals and being cared for, creating positive memories that can never be taken away.

Leatherhead Youth Project – young people with very limited life opportunities, given the chance to discover themselves in unfamiliar surroundings, by spending nights in a hammock under the trees in the Surrey Hills.

Viewpoint – promotes social inclusion for young people suffering from mental health and social challenges; by using horses they learn to read body language and to respond appropriately with non-verbal strategies.

HMP Send – women are growing fruit and vegetables for the Clink restaurant at HMP Highdown, giving them qualifications and skills.

The coronavirus has highlighted the need for nature as a healer. It has also shortened the shrieval year, altering traditions; the Declaration of Mr Shahid Azeem, my successor, took place on Zoom with an audience of 1,500. However, my plan to hold a 'Nurture through nature network' – walking and talking in the name of networking – an event to bring together the users, providers and funders who believe in nurturing through nature, both national and local, just would not have been the same on Zoom. It is to be rescheduled. Although my year as High Sheriff has come to an end I look forward to continuing this work.

◆ Bridget Biddell DL
High Sheriff of Surrey 2019-20



Open Farm Sunday, High Sheriff with her police cadet and assistants