Old Lodge Farm sits next to Oaks Park along Woodmansterne Road, a 90-acre holding consisting of grassland, hedges and some small areas of secondary woodland. Downlands Partnership has managed the land, on behalf of Surrey County Council, since 2008, as holdback land when the animals are not out grazing the chalk grasslands of the North Downs and a safe place to lamb the sheep. In recent years, it has been an exciting time with new developments at the farm. We look to the future as we grow these opportunities to deliver to the local community and enhance the habitat in its management for wildlife.

Over the past two years, we have been running educational courses for people interested in smallholdings, running corporate events, installed two new volunteering groups, had staff accommodation built and constructed a plant nursery for growing chalk grassland flowers.

We were able to secure Surrey Council to commission the building of accommodation, for use during lambing. Spending the first lockdown in a tent at the farm, was certainly not the most pleasant of experiences and we are much more comfortable now!

Our brilliant volunteers have been busy, enhancing the range of habitats at Old Lodge Farm, including planting hedges, building nest boxes/flower troughs, managing the woodland/pond and lots of other odd jobs. Some of the wildlife you may be lucky enough to see at the farm now includes barn owls and little owls, skylarks, newts, toads, brown hairstreaks, kestrels, sparrowhawks and a swarm of several hundred starlings in the winter and spring.

Thanks to funding from the Downlands Trust and Fidelity International, we have been able to keep a flock of rescue hens. As well as providing delicious eggs, they will be used in our smallholding courses and as animal therapy with visiting groups of young people – who may find the cows a bit intimidating!

These partner organisations also funded the plant nursery, which we constructed over Christmas 2021, with the help of volunteers. It will soon be filled with chalk flowers, including kidney vetch, horseshoe vetch, thyme, marjoram and many more, will be ready for sale at local environmental shows and to our local partners for the various butterfly banks popping up in the area.

A lovely change to the past couple of years of lockdown, was being able to host Fidelity for a Christmas BBQ event. They had a taster of our livestock courses with some cow whispering and sheep MOTS, planting hedges and potting up some of our nursery plants. The weather was stormy, but it certainly didn’t dampen the mood…especially when the food was ready. A full belly in the dry barn, listening to festive music – some people were even breaking into dance!

Conservation grazing will always remain at the heart of what we do and the fantastic one hundred plus volunteers who help ensure our animals are secure on the 24 sites we graze. By enhancing the value of the farm for both wildlife and people, we look to demonstrate the value the farm brings to the local area and to secure its future in the coming years.