**Quantock Lakes podcast transcript**

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Will Evans: Hi, I’m Will Evans and welcome to another episode of ‘Ahead of the Field’ from NFU Mutual, where today we’ve come to Somerset, the perfect place for a country wedding.

We’ll be hearing about a farming family who pulled together to secure their future…

We just sat down with mum and dad and the family and went through it to check the academic side, and after that meeting, it was relatively clear what we had to do.

…the risks they took to make it happen…

It was about building up processes, building a team and then doing a lot of work on understanding what the commercial growth could look like within the weddings.

…and why weddings have provided a successful business model…

Every event we run, we have between 100 and 200 people coming in through the doors, so from a brand perspective, my aim is just to make sure that we create amazing weddings and amazing experiences.

And to find out more about the subject of farming diversification, NFU Mutual has published its new diversification report with insights, advice and farmer’s own stories that you can download right now. Just go online and search for ‘NFU Mutual diversification’.

Welcome to Quantock Lakes, a stunning venue at the foot of the Quantock Hills in Somerset, just to the west of Bridgewater. The Jeanes family have been farming this land for over a hundred years, but now it’s also home to a beautiful bespoke barn and wedding venue. We’re standing by the lakes at the foot of the Quantock Hills and we’re joined by Naomi and Andrew. So, what is it we can see in front of us, here?

Naomi: So, we built this pontoon in the winter of sort of ’18, coming into ’19, and we’ve built it as an additional outdoor ceremony space, you know, the demand is there to get married outdoors. And we already have three licensed spaces indoors and, obviously, it creates a fantastic photo opportunity as well for both guests and couples getting married with us.

Will Evans: Has there been a big increase in demand for outdoor wedding spaces like this?

Naomi: Yes, there is, indeed, but really, for us, it was about building something that creates another opportunity, another option for a ceremony space, to get married. The British weather always comes into it, so there’s always a plan B, but we plan to run outdoor ceremonies here from April/May 2020.

Will Evans: So Andrew, could you give us a bit of a potted history of the farm, please?

Andrew: Yeah, so traditionally, for nearly a hundred years – or just over a hundred years actually, it was a mixed farm with dairy and arable enterprises, from my great grandfather to my grandfather and dad. And now my brother and I are predominantly doing the farm work. In 2003, we invested quite heavily in the dairy industry, but sort of five years later, realised that probably, long-term, it wasn’t going to be sustainable and we started to look at other options. From sort of 2008, we started to diversify, we grew predominantly our wedding business to a point where a couple of years - where growth couldn’t be sustained without having somebody to head that role up. And so Naomi came home.

Naomi: So, I’d been away working in the corporate world for 20 years and, as the wedding business grew and as we developed the newest part of the venue, our number of weddings doubled and we needed to put a load of process in-place and build a team to make it happen. So, now we work as a family across the farming business.

Will Evans: So, we’re now standing out on the pontoon in the middle of the lake, the Quantock Hills are all around us, lots of space, lots of trees, lots of greenery and it feels like we’re in the middle of nowhere, but we’re not really. We’re quite close to lots of centres of population, so you’ve got the perfect venue here. What was the catalyst for diversifying? I mean when you grew up, were you always just going to be a straight commercial farmer or had you always got diversification in mind?

Andrew: No, I think one of the key goals when I came home was identify that we were very reliant on single-farm payment, as it was then, and general subsidies. And I wanted to try and set a goal where we could have some diversification projects in-place to help cover that, should that dry up. So that was one of the key goals.

Will Evans: So, at that stage, what did the farm look like?

Andrew: Well, in 2003, we were milking 120 cows twice a day, predominantly loose yards, and we were farming around 700 acres of combinable crops. Between sort of 2003 and 2007, we increased the dairy herd to 300+, milking three times a day and increased our arable acreages to just shy of 3,000 acres. At the same time, we dug the two lakes, as you’ve seen here today, and we started running charity events to just dip our toe in the water to see if we, a) could do hospitality and events and, b) whether we actually enjoyed it or not.

Will Evans: So, was that the first idea you had for diversification? Did you have lots of ideas or was that what you were always going to…

Andrew: The events side and the weddings and the lake side came from a farm I was working on in South Africa where I was working in a vineyard and they had a small wedding venue there. And I think – yeah, it came from there really, I thought, you know, ‘we can do this’.

Will Evans: So, how did you initially start putting it all into practice?

Andrew: So, after we did the charity events and lots of people commented on the backdrop and how wonderful it was, we teamed up with a marquee company who was local and just started running some weddings, effectively. I think we were doing sort of three or four in the first year, the second year was 12 and then it started to grow from there.

Will Evans: So, there was obviously a demand for it.

Andrew: There was a demand. I mean when we converted our first barn, which is a very small barn, the ‘Rustic Barn’ as we call it, we developed that barn as if we wanted to use it as offices or it could have been a holiday let, so really broadly.

Will Evans: How much of a mindset change was it to go from being a dairy farmer? Farmers, sometimes we get stuck on our farm where we don’t see many other people and suddenly, you’ve got people coming onto the farm, was that a big change for you?

Andrew: Yes, it was. Communication was probably the biggest thing that I’ve struggled with, and that’s part of the reason – you know, Naomi has been great for the business, because she’s done it in the big, wide world, so to speak. I also think, from travelling, when I was younger, after A Levels, and I played a lot of sport as well, which also helps with confidence and communication and it enabled us to succeed. I think the other thing with sport and farming is there are a lot of ethics there, which you have to be motivated and you’re driven within yourself. And diversification projects aren’t just about the money – well, they are about the money, but you have to be driven to make them work and be passionate about them.

Will Evans: And I guess a certain amount of discipline as well.

Andrew: You’ve got to be disciplined, I think, in anything you do. Farming is one, dairy farming teaches you discipline. I’m going to go back to sport again, it’s discipline, you know, everything is about discipline.

Will Evans: So, how much is left of the original farmstead now?

Andrew: So here, at Inwood Farm, all the old stone and brick traditional buildings are utilised for wedding accommodation. The wedding venue utilises my grandfather’s old workshop, which is now our ‘Rustic Barn’. The old cubicle housing, which we used for our young stock, and the silage pits, are now commercial buildings and all the land now is used for cropping for a biogas plant.

Will Evans: Perhaps you could just give us a bit of a timeline of how long it took to get to what we see before us today, here.

Andrew: 2003 was our main dairy investment, five years later we realised that we definitely wanted to start diversifying. We opened our first commercial let in 2009. In 2015, we’re at the point where we had to significantly invest into the wedding side, which was our Quantock Barn. Shortly after that winter ’16, we then made the decision, when we were TB-free, to sell the dairy herd. Following that, we then invested into our second phase of accommodation, which is our granary barn, and other commercial projects.

Will Evans: And as a fellow ex-dairy farmer, how difficult was that decision to sell the cows?

Andrew: Yeah, it’s a good question. On paper, it was a relatively straightforward decision. When you brought emotion into it, it was trickier. I have known a good friend of mine who worked for Andersen as a consultant, and when I drafted all the figures together, he came down. And we just sat down with mum and dad and the family and went through it to check the academic side, and after that meeting, it was relatively clear what we had to do. Plus, I think being TB-free - and we’d been shut down previously for four years, we had 40 days to make a decision, and that also helped and we have no regrets to-date. The only other point I will make on that is that because we had dipped our toe into diversification projects which had succeeded pre-selling the cows, it gave us confidence, as a family, that we could actually do it.

Will Evans: What was that like for your parents? They’d obviously known it, a traditional farm, for most of their working life, was that a big thing for them?

Andrew: Yes, it was a lot harder for mum and dad, to be honest, they lived still on the site where the dairy was and I think that the daily noise of the milk pumps running, etc, etc, I hadn’t heard for a couple of years because I lived down the road. So, for mum and dad it was tricky, but the fact is, we’re lucky enough as a family, we can all sit down round the table and have a black and white conversation of the direction. And everybody was aligned to the fact that selling the cows was the right decision.

Will Evans: So Naomi, perhaps you can tell us what your role is in that.

Naomi: So, around the time that Andrew was just talking about, in 2015/2016, we had invested in the ‘Quantock Barn’, part of the wedding venue, which ultimately meant that we could sell more weddings, we had a venue to sell from. And year-on-year we were looking at doubling our number of weddings from around 20 weddings in 2016 to 44 in ’17. We also were very aware that we couldn’t manage all of that diversification with the boys on-site and we started having serious talks about me coming back. We also felt it was important that someone in the family had that kind of hands-on role within the weddings and in that first year, I think I ran most of the weddings just to get a really good hands-on view of how to run weddings, how to run the bar staff. And then, ultimately, it was about building up processes, building a team and then doing a lot of work on understanding what the commercial growth could look like within the weddings.

Will Evans: So, what were you doing before? Had you had any experience for this kind of thing?

Naomi: So, my initial career was in Red Bull and that was in events, and then throughout my career I worked in digital marketing roles in particular, ending up at Clarkes, where I headed up digital marketing for Europe. It was quite a big role where I was travelling a lot and this, obviously, came at the same time when we were looking at the next steps for the wedding venue. So, you know, it was a conversation that we had as a family and, yeah, we made the jump and I decided to leave the world of corporate after 20 years.

Will Evans: It must have been a big decision to leave a successful corporate career to come back to working with the family.

Naomi: It was, but we knew that we could do it, we had the confidence that we could run events. We also knew that there was a massive opportunity here and some of my commercial experience, in particular, we felt could really help drive the business forward. It was a relatively straightforward decision, to be honest.

Will Evans: So, you’ve obviously brought a strong marketing background to this business, how has that helped, going forward?

Naomi: Yes, but at the end of the day, marketing is quite straightforward in a way. You need to know your audience and for us, it’s just understanding who is getting married, what mediums they’re looking at to understand where they want to get married. We work very closely with some great suppliers, we have photographers here every week taking amazing photos, so we’ve got content at our fingertips and it’s really been about just making use of that. We don’t spend a huge amount of money on big print media campaigns or anything like that, we use digital media well.

Will Evans: Andrew, as farmers, we’re used to doing things ourselves, aren’t we? How important is it to get that expertise in?

Andrew: Yeah, no, definitely it is. I think, as a farmer diversifying, like you’ve just said, we try and do everything, you know, jack of all trades, master of none. It’s really key, as a farmer diversifying, to understand your limitations and know when to seek professional help and guidance.

Will Evans: So, perhaps we can go and have a look around the rest of the place.

Naomi: Brilliant. OK, let’s go.

Will Evans: So Naomi, what are we looking at here in front of us?

Naomi: So, we’ve got the ‘Rustic Barn’ in front of us, which was the original part of the venue, so this is my grandfather’s old workshop that we developed to form part of the venue. It originally had the marquee on the side, which we leased in the early days, just to really dip our toe in to see whether we could make the events work. It’s steeped in heritage, the original bar that we put into the Rustic Barn was my grandfather’s old workbench. And when we developed later parts of the venue, Andrew and Ian used their carpentry skills to build further bars and actually, all the rustic furniture that you see in there today.

Will Evans: Fantastic. OK. So, we’re just walking round to the commercial units now, perhaps you could tell us a bit about that.

Andrew: Yeah, so the first one we’re coming to is a John Deere franchise. In 2007, we identified that there hadn’t been a John Deere dealership in our area for quite some time. So, I went and spoke to the gentleman who was running the branch in Cheddar and suggested that he might like a branch at Inwood Farm. And these talks lasted for about a year and then we finally opened our first commercial let in September 2009.

Will Evans: How big was the risk when you decided to take the plunge and start building all this?

Andrew: I don’t think there was a huge risk, to be fair. As I say, the first commercial let we did, I sat down with the John Deere dealership and we discussed how the building was going to look. I got them to invest within the build, which tied them in for a certain term, and from there we’ve done sort of little and often really. So, since 2008, every winter – or really every year, we’ve done something else, we’ve done another project, and every time, we’ve calculated the risk and it’s been worth it. It’s purpose-built, but it’s the same footprint of what was here originally, so the John Deere, the main offices, was the original silage pit from when it was a working dairy farm. There has been an extension put on it recently, the original John Deere unit had two mechanics and one salesman, and now they employ nearly 25 people.

Will Evans: Is that level of commercial nouse and awareness of what’s going on in the local area something that you would encourage all farmers to have?

Andrew: Yes, absolutely, I think you’ve always got to try and have your eyes open, but I think, I go back to the start, is that once you’ve done a couple of projects outside the norm, it gives you confidence and it naturally makes you sort of open your eyes to what else is available.

Will Evans: Before we carry on with the rest of this episode, just to remind you that NFU Mutual has published its new diversification report that you can download right now. Just go online and search for ‘NFU Mutual diversification’.

So, we’ve walked round the corner into the wedding accommodation, it feels very different to where we’ve just been. Perhaps you could just explain what we’ve got in front of us.

Naomi: So, this is the wedding village, which is the accommodation that’s part of every wedding that we hold here, and it sleeps 26, we have ‘The Piggery’ just in front of us, which, back in the day, housed pigs, and ‘The Posh Piggery’ is now our bridal suite. And if we just come in here now, so we’ve got a nice, open-plan kitchen and living area, and then we’re coming into the – well, one of the most important rooms, which is obviously the suite where couples spend their first night as a married couple.

Will Evans: Wow, it’s a really impressive room, isn’t it? Talk us through what you can see in here.

Naomi: Yeah, so we’ve got a lovely roll-top bath here and a huge, super-king bed and a lovely terrace outside as well.

Will Evans: And what about the design of the place, is that something you’ve done yourself?

Andrew: So, my brothers, Andrew and Ian, have been integral to the design and build of this place, they haven’t used architects, they’ve always had fantastic vision and creativity in getting the design done. Interestingly, they’ve developed their building skillset significantly over the years. Andrew, in particular, has done a lot of blockwork and Ian has done a lot of plastering, but they’ve both done a lot of carpentry in particular. And I think that’s really helped us at times, especially a few years ago where we were trying to keep costs to a minimum and try and create something really special.

Will Evans: And Andrew, is that a big part of the job that you enjoy?

Andrew: Yeah, very much so, I love designing things. And then the fact is, when you’re self-building, you can amend things. The amount of times I’ve run up to the office and spoken to all the girls, I’ve said, “Well, is this big enough? Is this right? What do our couples actually need?” It’s been really useful and it’s been a great journey, as I said. Naomi has just made the point of our skillsets developing, and they have, I can still remember laying my first brick in Australia, trying to earn some money. My brother plastering his first wall, to where we’ve got to today and now we’re efficient and we can do everything in-house.

Will Evans: And do you all agree on the design of everything?

Andrew: Yes, pretty much. I think where we are today, it’s quite clear of what works and what doesn’t. We design our rooms and everything accordingly.

Naomi: I think one of the biggest learnings we’ve had is about those preparation areas for grooms, for bridal parties, and we’ve very much applied that learning that we had here in the wedding village to the build that we’re doing at the moment, which is at the back of the venue, which will form another sort of getting ready area. But we always work together, we plan things together and one of the most important pieces of feedback is just asking our couples who get married here. We always ask for reviews, we always ask them what they think and that’s probably one of the key things that’s helped us drive and develop the venue and the accommodation as it is today.

Will Evans: And how have the family roles and the wider family’s involvement changed over time?

Naomi: I came back to the business three years ago and my role has been, I guess, pretty straightforward. It’s been about driving the weddings forward and the accommodation, and I think what’s happened over time is that roles have really developed. So Andrew’s role is very much more about the strategy and the commercial units and the caravan site. Ian very much is on a tractor and is still very much in touch with the arable side of things. However, as a team, we all muck in together, we were talking about farmers trying to do a bit of everything, we all do that as well. So, whilst we’ve got really specific roles, which helps make it work, we also really stick together as well.

Will Evans: So, we’re outside now, looking across the fields up towards the Quantock Hills. Us, both, as farmers, born and brought up in these kinds of areas, looking at these stunning views, you can take it a bit for granted. But for guests coming here for a wedding, it must really take their breath away when they open the window in the morning.

Andrew: Yeah, exactly that. Lots of our guests, coming from towns and cities, aren’t able to open their doors and look out across a beautiful green countryside with the backdrop that we’ve got here.

Will Evans: Andrew, what crops do you grow here?

Andrew: Well, historically, when we were dairy farming, it was very simple. We had one year Italian grass, some maize and we’re growing grade one milling wheats on a contract for Warburtons. Since selling the dairy herd, that spring of ’16, we threw the whole thing up and changed the whole thing around. And now every acre that we have is cropped for our local AD plant.

Will Evans: So what are the benefits of that to you?

Andrew: I think the key benefits, from the farming perspective, is that our cropping is now split between fodder beet, hybrid rye, forage rye, maize, and some Italian rye grasses. And that enables us to be – our workload is spread throughout the year as opposed to peak harvest conditions where timeframes seem to get shorter and shorter with the climate.

Will Evans: So that very much complements the rest of the business then?

Andrew: Yeah, it does, it enables me to still be very involved with my brother on the farm side and it gives us time and continuity across the ten months of farming now. The other thing it does with the AD plant, we’ve built up a wonderful relationship with them and we work very closely with them for the cropping and the harvesting side of things. And also the way we’ve got it set up now is that we’ve actually been able to put a benchmark figure in per acre so we know we’ve got some sort of guaranteed incomes a year, going forward. We’ve always been geared up over-capacity because my brother and I, we like playing sport and we like to have time with the family, so we prefer to go out there with bigger tackle and get the job done to enable more time to ourselves.

Will Evans: We’re also joined today by Naomi Parker, the local NFU Mutual agent. Naomi, how closely involved have you been with the farm over the years?

Naomi P: I’ve had a relationship with the Jeanes family as their insurance agent since about 2007, although the family have insured with the agency, historically, over several decades, I believe, I think the relationship goes back. But yes, my relationship is since about 2007.

Will Evans: And what can other farmers learn about the growth of this business, do you think? Whether that be in terms of the diversification or the pace of the development.

Naomi P: I think that, as the Jeanes family have already eluded to, it’s been a gentle progression to test the waters and make sure that it’s done as safely as possible, I guess. That’s a great way, from an insurance perspective, that’s a great way to move and everything is a considered detail. Conversations, communication is key, so keep your insurance advisor informed of what’s coming up so that we can be reactive. Particularly where there is a diversification, a move away from that general norm, and we can react quite well to putting property covers on and things like that. It’s those conversations around the liability plus also that contingency cover, so your business interruption, what happens if something really serious happens. So those conversations are where that relationship with your insurance advisor really has strength.

Will Evans: And Naomi, what have you gained through the relationship with Naomi and the local NFU Mutual office over the years?

Naomi: Well, again, I think it’s down to communication, we’ve always been able to pick up the phone and ask questions, and there’s been many questions, whether that would be something to do with the accommodation or the venue in particular. I know I picked up the phone the other day to Naomi and we were talking about the very current topic of food allergies and how we can best cover ourselves there. And yeah, so really we’ve been working with NFU Mutual for decades and it’s been a relationship that’s just developed over time.

Will Evans: So, as lovely as it is out here, it is winter, it’s a bit fresh. Perhaps we could pop back to the Quantock Barns, because I saw a nice open fire in there earlier.

Naomi: Yes, definitely, let’s go and sit by the fire.

Will Evans: So, for farmers who are looking to diversify, building a brand can sometimes be a challenge. That’s obviously your area, how have you built up such a strong brand here?

Naomi: So, we’ve really worked hard on understanding our audience and very much built our marketing around that. The other thing is that we’re very lucky to have, every event we run, we have between 100 and 200 people coming in through the doors, so from a brand perspective, my aim is just to make sure that we create amazing weddings and amazing experiences. Not only for that couple who are getting married, but also for all their guests that come through the door, and referrals has become a massive part of building the brand.

Will Evans: And I guess it helps having such strong links with local businesses as well.

Naomi: Yes, it does. We’ve got some wonderful suppliers that we work with and we see that as a really important part of our strategy here.

Will Evans: So, word of mouth is obviously very important, what about social media? Has that been something you’ve been able to utilise?

Naomi: Yes, so pretty much all of our paid digital marketing is on social media. It’s lucky that you can pretty much target and pay for ads based on people who have recently got engaged, and also we’ve got an array of amazing content from photographers and videographers that come and work at weddings here. So we work really, really closely with them so that we’re taking full advantage of that content.

Will Evans: I guess when people are looking for a wedding venue, it’s changed a lot over the last five or six years. Now, they would look on Instagram and social media.

Naomi: Yes, definitely, and there’s a few sort of key directories, wedding directories, that we work closely with as well. People aren’t engaging with print media quite as much as they used to and, again, it’s about finding the right audience. And we track and monitor every single bit of spend that we do put against marketing, and we very quickly work out what’s working and what isn’t working.

Will Evans: As we can hear, there’s building work going on so the place obviously isn’t finished, what’s happening over there?

Naomi: With our accommodation offering, we’ve identified that we can reach a much wider audience with additional accommodation. The original farmhouse is now being currently renovated into additional accommodation which will, hopefully, be around nine bedrooms.

Will Evans: So, shall we go and have a look in the Quantock Barn? Wow, what a space, it’s huge, isn’t it? It feels so much bigger when you actually come inside than it looks even outside.

Naomi: Yeah.

Will Evans: And it’s cosy though, as well, as well as being a big space, isn’t it?

Naomi: It is, yeah, and when we designed this barn in particular, we just wanted to take full advantage of the fact that we’ve got the lovely views of the lakes and the Quantock Hills, and yeah, create a space that was really functional for all kinds of events. You’ll see the bar in front of us, a very big bar, we knew that that was important and the other thing that we wanted to achieve was to have a bar next to a dancefloor. So we’ve all been to events and weddings where they tuck the bar or the dancefloor in two different places, and that’s something that we really want to achieve by designing it in the way that we have. The bar in front of us, the oak is actually from an oak tree on the farm and Andrew and Ian both built this along with the lovely rustic furniture that you see in here.

Will Evans: You’ve managed to really retain the farm feel of it as well, haven’t you? That was obviously a conscious decision, was it?

Naomi: Yes, absolutely.

Will Evans: So, what does a wedding here look like, Naomi? How do you use this space?

Naomi: So, we’ve got three licensed ceremony spaces, we’ve got the space in here, which is the Quantock Barn, which is for our bigger weddings, that’s over 120 people. We’ve got our brand new outside licenced space where we can sit any number of people, up to 400 people, and then we’ve got our more intimate ceremony space, which is the ‘Rustic Barn’, the original part of the venue, which is licensed for up to 120 people. So what we do is, we tend to have pre-ceremony drinks either in this barn or in the Rustic Barn and Frank’s Bar, so we’ve named ‘Frank’s Bar’ after my grandfather. That used to be part of his workshop. And then we typically have a drinks reception after the said ceremony in the hub, which is the Quantock Barn itself, or out on the patio.

So, in the summer months, everyone is outside on the lawns, on the pontoon, and then we typically use the Meadow Barn, which is our newest extension, for the wedding breakfast. Now, that flow works really well, it means that we don’t need to do big furniture turnarounds in any part of the venue. And it also means that, for every part of the day, we can use a different part of the venue, and, luckily, we’ve got such great inside space, that with the addition of the Meadow Barn, it means that we can have much bigger year-round weddings. So commercially, that makes a lot more sense and also enables us to deliver a lot more growth in future years.

Will Evans: So, what is it that makes Quantock Lakes so special as a wedding venue?

Naomi: There’s two main things. One, we provide a really personal service, so from the viewing appointment, which is with Laura, who is our lovely sales girl, through to having two really good planning meetings throughout the process. I meet every single bride and groom and make sure that I have at least one planning meeting with them so that I really understand everyone’s wishes and also that I’ve got a really clear handle on who’s who. A massive part of what we do is try and create a real destination-style wedding, so our couples come in and do their finishing touches the day before their wedding.

And we then check them into the accommodation where they can have a great family gathering with friends and family. And then the wedding day itself is the next day and then they stay another night, so what we don’t want to do is, we don’t want to do back-to-back weddings, we don’t want couples high-fiving their next couple in the next day for their wedding. And we feel quite passionate about the fact that that is a really key selling point for us and it seems to be working well. So, weddings booked are going strong and 2020 and 2021 are looking well-booked-up

Will Evans: So, it must have been amazing for you to get married here, as I know you did, and Andrew did as well, to get married in somewhere that you’ve created, that must have been incredibly special.

Naomi: I got married here ten years ago, which was right at the start of this incredible journey that we’ve been through. We had the Rustic Barn, which is the old, original barn, and a marquee in the place where we’re standing right now. And then Andrew got married a couple of years ago and he utilised the Quantock Barn, where we are now, and then Ian got married as well a year ago, and he was lucky enough to be able to take full advantage of all the accommodation too. So, all three of us have got married here and have been through the various phases of development.

Will Evans: What advice would you have for other farmers who might be looking at wedding venues as a diversification project for them?

Naomi: I guess one of the first things I would say is that it’s taken us a long time, it’s been one hell of a journey and for many years, initially, we made no money. So you’ve got to be in it for the long-haul, you’ve got to be prepared to work really hard and do all the jobs out there. And I guess the other thing is really understanding your audience, really understanding what couples want, and having a really good look around at the venues around you. How can you stand out? How can you build that key point of difference so that you can be really marketable in your local area?

Will Evans: And Andrew, what about you? What would your advice be?

Andrew: The key thing is, from the outset, is you need to engage with the local parish council and from there, your local district councils, and get a feel from them what they might want to see, how it looks, how it’s run, before you go actually in for planning. By going in very cold and being a surprise sometimes to a parish council, a district, can be negative in the long-run.

Will Evans: So really, it’s about the importance of building relationships.

Andrew: Yeah, absolutely, and over this journey, we talk about we’ve built lots of relationships, key relationships, with the people within the parish council in and around Sedgemoor. And now those relationships are strong, I can pick up the phone and talk them through a new idea we might have and they will give us some key guidance. And it might not have to cost anything to get that guidance, to give you a feel on which direction you need to take to be successful.

Will Evans: So, thank you so much, both, for showing us around, we’ve really enjoyed the day.

Naomi: No, thank you very much.

Andrew: It’s our pleasure.

Will Evans: As we stand here outside the wedding venue and in front of the lake, it’s really striking that all three of the siblings had their special day, had their wedding day here. And I think that’s a real testament to what they’ve built and what they’ve created here.

So, as we close, here, at Quantock Lakes, what’s been really obvious is the level of thought that’s gone into the process here, they’ve done it a step at a time, they’ve put in loads of research, loads of legwork, real attention to detail along the journey. It’s the range of diversifications that are so impressive and it’s really allowed the whole family to get involved in the business, and all the siblings to have a role and really build a future for their families, going forward.

As I mentioned earlier, NFU Mutual has published its new diversification report with insights, advice and farmer’s own stories that you can download right now. Just go online and search for ‘NFU Mutual diversification’. In the meantime, if you’ve enjoyed this podcast, please do subscribe, rate and review in the normal way. For now, from me, Will Evans, NFU Mutual and everyone here at Quantock Lakes in Somerset, it’s goodbye.