As I See it on The Land February 2026

It is rather a long time ago since I last wrote. A whole winter has nearly passed with the farm fully involved in the Governments Sustainable Farming Initiative (SFI). Seeds, to create what is called a ‘cover’ crop were sown into the stubble across the farm when the combine had finished its work. However, lack of moisture and only a couple of varieties of the chosen plants have played any part in the scheme. There will have to be a different mix this year. Mustard, turnip and phacelia survived in varying amounts due to soil type and whether the straw had been baled leaving the ground bare, or where the straw had spread badly behind the combine on windy days, leaving strips of thicker straw down the field. The drill had a difficult job going through the straw.

These plants grew slowly at first, but then once the roots got established parts of the fields looked quite good. Mark had to take photos regularly from the same spot in each field to prove that we were abiding to the rules of the scheme before we received payment from the Rural Payments Agency.

In November a neighbour’s ewes and hoggets (lambs born in March and April 25 destined for slaughter when fat) were turned into the mustard which was so tall you could not see the animals. The lambs were kept in the crop by two strands of electric fencing held by insulated posts around the outside of the fields. The outside 4 metres (wide) were growing ’flowers’ under another part of this RPA scheme and could not be grazed!

When Ashley came to do his daily lookering, providing it was not too windy or wet, he got a very small drone out of his vehicle and launched it into the sky. I had never seen anything like it. Within seconds he had it so high up that he could identify where they were grazing or resting within a twenty acre field. If there was a lone animal, he could drop the drone down close to where it was and make it move. In my younger days that would have taken a long time and exhausted the dogs searching for them. Technology!

Unfortunately, it seems to have rained a lot since the grazing started that so much of the crop has been spoilt (trodden under foot). The animals have been taken away since Xmas. The stalks and whatever is left growing will be sprayed off in a few weeks’ time and the ground will be planted with something pretty!!

I am pleased to say we are still going to grow some wheat. During the last week of September Mark drilled the land we look after in Woodchurch. In October he started drilling some of the stubble fields along the canal at Hamstreet.

One morning I received a phone call from a dog walker to say a car was on fire, along the canal track, in the back corner of a field right on the ditchbank. It had been ‘stolen’ from Brenzett. It was gutted and you could not tell its make. Mark had it loaded onto a metal trailer and took it to Ivychurch, securely guarded by Alsatians. Within minutes a car drew up on the road with a young man saying ‘that’s my car’!. It

was not released until the insurance company took responsibility for any oil contamination in the ditch. The water only had to flow about half a mile to be pumped into the canal.

More land was planted with wheat at Ivychurch, all of which has grown well. The stubble crop was sprayed off with roundup, after drilling but before the wheat germinated.

Mark has been busy with hedge cutting, ditching, machinery repair and is already working on the combine. So, he does expect a harvest!!! Much of last years wheat has been loaded out of our store thus giving space for machinery to be worked on in the dry. The wheat has gone with prices at their lowest for years. There is plenty in the world everywhere at the moment.

One daffodil out in bloom!

Peter Sillibourne