

Lessons in Diversifying: The Kelsall Equestrian Centre Story

Speaker: Phil Latham, Kelsall Hill Equestrian Centre

Event: Farm Business Innovation Show 2025

At this year's Farm Business Innovation Show, **Phil Latham** shared a candid and hard-won account of transforming a 1,000-acre family farm into one of the UK's leading equestrian destinations. From early diversification attempts in dairy to award-winning venue development, Phil's story captured both the vision and the vulnerability behind creating Kelsall Hill Equestrian Centre.

Through humour, honesty, and practical insight, he revealed the real-world hurdles of planning, funding, and building major rural projects — and the lessons that can save others from costly mistakes. His key message: **diversification is essential for survival, but success depends on resilience, realism, and the right team around you.**

10 Key Takeaways for Diversifying Landowners

- **The cavalry isn't coming.** With reduced subsidies and tighter budgets, farmers must take control of their own financial future through creative diversification.
- **Learn from others.** 71 % of English farms have diversified, yet few share insights — collaboration across the sector could save everyone time and money.
- **Find your own path.** Each business has unique assets and constraints; a tenant's strategy will differ sharply from an owner-occupier's.
- **Professional teams pay for themselves.** Architects, Qs, and contract administrators may seem expensive, but weak specifications and missing oversight cost far more later.
- **Documentation matters.** Keep a daily site diary, detailed scope of works, and written records — vital protection when disputes arise.
- **Plan for the unexpected.** Covid delays, design flaws, and contractor disputes can double budgets; build contingency and patience into every project.
- **Cashflow before perfection.** Phasing developments and ensuring core rental or livery income early keeps loans serviceable through long builds.
- **Honesty builds credibility.** Sharing failures and lessons openly helps strengthen the wider rural business community.
- **Diversify within diversification.** From riding facilities to café, solar, and holiday lets, a mix of complementary enterprises spreads risk and builds year-round resilience.
- **People make it work.** Managing teams, communication lines, and clear responsibilities are just as critical as bricks and mortar — “If you want to go far, go together.”