

DIRECTORS' REPORT TO ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 18th OCTOBER 2017

Note: the text in this report refers to the twelve months up to October 2017, while the financial information in the appendix is specific to the financial year April 2016 to March 2017, in line with our reporting obligations to the Financial Conduct Authority.

1. Organisation and Governance

Lease of Young Wood

Woodlanders is now into the third year of its ten year lease and management agreement over Young Wood. Rent to the Forestry Commission has increased according to the agreed sliding scale from the starting point of £1500 per year to a present level of £2500 per year. It will rise again to £3000 in July 2018.

Planning consent and regulations

Planning consent was secured in September 2017 for the installation of a secure store and erection of a lean-to office (see section 4).

Shareholder membership

At early October 2017, membership currently stands at 52, with 710 shares having been sold. The share price remains at £1 per share, minimum holding 5 shares. Membership has not increased substantially since the previous year, which reflects the limited promotion and attention we have given to this way of extending Woodlanders' 'community of interest'. The directors are conscious that this is an area for further energy and discussion.

Open events

We held a public open day at Young Wood in late July, which thanks to good promotion succeeded in attracting nearly 100 visitors.

Board of Directors

The five directors, Jenny Archard, Gavin Saunders, Rachel Wootton, Hannah Bester and Chris Engert, have met as a Board on a six-weekly basis and run the organisation through the past year. The role of Chair of Board meetings is rotated between the directors. Jenny remains Company Secretary and Gavin Treasurer. The directors work in a voluntary capacity and receive payment only for funded project roles, revenue-generating delivery activities or funded development work.

Business Plan

The directors devoted considerable time over the spring period to drafting a fresh business plan for Woodlanders. Amongst other things this generated a new mission statement for Woodlanders which is "*Working with nature to fire spirits, kindle community and foster wellbeing*". The business plan is a working document which is subject to ongoing refinement, not least in the light of the Halpin development work (see below).



Halpin Trust

During 2016 through personal contacts we were invited by the Halpin Trust, a small grant making charity, to apply for developmental funding for Woodlanders. The Halpin Trust awarded Woodlanders a grant of £12,850 in May 2017, to be spent over the subsequent 9 months. The purpose of the grant is to allow Woodlanders to devote director time, which is otherwise preoccupied with project delivery, to developing and improving our core enterprise in several important respects:

- Researching and developing our ability to attract income-generating work more effectively, including team building days, commissioned wellbeing work, and courses
- Strengthening our harvested wood supply, to allow more consistent generation of timber and wood products
- Improving our communications, with respect to website and social media marketing
- Streamlining our admin with respect to accounting and data management
- Developing our covered space by building an office/secure store, and enhanced roundhouse.

These strands of activity are now underway, and are recognised by the directors as crucial to setting Woodlanders on a more stable footing, not least by equipping us to generate the income we need to cover core costs (notably rent and insurance).

Staff

During the year we have contracted the following staff to manage, lead or assist on grant-supported or otherwise-funded activities: Jenny Archard, Gavin Saunders, Sam Lomas, Lee Kimber, Andy Lloyd. All staff are hired on casual contracts though the Directors intend to move to an employed payroll in the coming year.

Volunteers

Woodlanders has continued to provide support and coordination for the Neroche Conservation Volunteers group during the year, with Gavin Saunders working with lead volunteers Peter Maben and Nick Milton. Email updates were sent to the



volunteer database on a monthly basis. Three NCV tasks are provided per month, two on local nature reserves and sites belonging to Butterfly Conservation, the Blackdown Hills Trust, Somerset Wildlife Trust and the Forestry Commission, and one at Young Wood. During the twelve months ending on 30 September 2017, 33 task days took place, clocking up 300 person-days (or 1500 hours) of volunteer work. Meanwhile four volunteers (Claire Criddle, Charles Hill, Rosie Viant and Fran Cook) have worked closely with staff in running Wild Learning sessions.

Promotion and Publicity

The website www.youngwood.org.uk was updated regularly and the active Young Wood Facebook page has 550 likes, with posts regularly reaching in excess of 2000 people. Other promotion has included monthly Mailchimp newsletters to our database of 230 volunteers, participants and supporters, articles in the Neroche parishes newsletter, and printed flyers.

Risk management

For good governance, the Board has created a risk register and reviews this regularly - this includes things like funding, staffing, site management and succession planning.

During the year Woodlanders strived to maintain a safe working environment for participants, volunteers and staff, by maintaining appropriate risk assessment and safeguarding procedures based on a set of health & safety, safeguarding and child protection policies.

There were no reportable incidents during the year.

Collaboration

This year we have benefitted from funding from the following:

- Blackdown Hills AONB Sustainable Development Fund
- Blackdown Hills Natural Futures Project
- Halpin Trust
- Heritage Lottery Fund
- Somerset Skills and Learning CIC
- Taunton Association for the Homeless

In addition we have been fortunate to work with the following organisations and individuals:

- Andi Rickard, scything trainer
- Anthony Mackarel, Lantra trainer
- Blackdown Hills Hedge Association
- Blake Training
- Bridgwater Community Mental Health Team
- Butterfly Conservation
- Clarity CIC
- Forestry Commission East Devon Beat
- John Walters, entomologist
- Knight Brothers Travel
- Making Local Woods Work programme operated by the Plunkett Foundation
- Michael Fairfax, public artist
- Neroche Parish Hall
- North Taunton Partnership
- Somerset Ornithological Society
- Taunton Association for the Homeless
- Wellington Children's Centre
- Youth Unlimited CIC

2. Grant-Funded Projects and Contracts

Wild Learning 5

The fifth year of this project, with the main funding from SS&L (Somerset Skills and Learning) and a small match from Taunton Association for the Homeless. The funding is focused on deprived communities in Taunton Deane and SS&L require a number of learners to be registered, complete learning plans and show outcomes.

We use the core of funds for our Wild Learning project to provide regular learning and wellbeing days for adults from our local area, primarily for people who are homeless, isolated, having mental health issues or unemployed. This year we held fifteen Wild Learning Tuesdays and worked with over 40 people on this part of project with eleven gaining a John Muir Award. Twenty seven learners were residents of Taunton Association for the Homeless, often with dependencies, mental health issues and other needs. We see some of their residents come back year after year, and eventually move on, others move on



very quickly. We also have some local Taunton residents who keep coming back as they find it very hard to access other support or find meaningful activity whilst looking for work. Some of the learner's comments:

"My attitude has changed whilst being here as all the stress at home makes me angry".

"I enjoyed cooking, making new friends; escaping the town, enjoying the peace and quiet and learning new things basically everything. Learnt to respect others as well as look after myself. Hoping to volunteer in the future."

"I enjoyed the peace and the quiet and taking part in activities that I never thought I would do in my life. Most of all meeting new and interesting people. I became more confident in group sessions".

With some of the funding targeted at volunteers, we were able to run a Woodland Management course over 3 days in the winter for our existing conservation volunteers. This was attended by thirteen people, two of whom also helped with Wild Learning days. We had great fun doing a bit of theory and then putting it into practice. People said they gained a better understanding of the make-up of woodlands, improved their tool use, became safer in their practice and enjoyed the company of other like-minded people. These learners have already had an impact on the local woodland and other places where they use have been able to share their new skills and knowledge.

Meet the Neighbours

This project, funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund under its 'Sharing Heritage' strand, began in late 2016 and runs to the end of 2017. It is designed to enable the community of people who are involved with Young Wood to meet the diverse community of wildlife which inhabits it.

We have spent the past season watching, catching, sampling, identifying and learning about the many layers of life in our woodland. These have included trees, flowering plants, fungi, insects, spiders, breeding birds and small mammals. A variety of groups have taken part in this recording process, assisted by a number of outside experts, and the total species list for Young Wood consequently stands at over 400 species.



Working with local artist Michael Fairfax we have created a green wood sculpture on site, known as our 'collection shrine', which provides a focal point for 'found' natural objects collected during walks around Young Wood. Alongside this we are making a 'tree of life' as a framework for naming all the species we have identified as living in Young Wood. By the end of the project there will also be an online record of our natural history, on our website.

We hope this work will provide an ongoing resource to support our learning and wellbeing programmes at Young Wood, as well as helping to inform our conservation management.

Volunteer development programme

Woodlanders received grant support from the Blackdown Hills Natural Futures project and Blackdown Hills AONB Sustainable Development Fund, to invest in our volunteering provision. This coincided with the tenth anniversary of the foundation of the Neroche Conservation Volunteers.

The grant was used for the following:

- Holding an NCV tenth anniversary event
- Promotion of volunteering opportunities through a new flyer and other materials

- A questionnaire survey of the volunteer database to inform the development of our provision
- Practical training for volunteers on scything, and provision of certificated training in petrol brushcutter use
- Purchase of additional equipment including a second brushcutter and a set of Austrian scythes

3. Charged-for services and products

For Families - Forest Folk & Dangerous Dads

As we had no funding for families activities this year we ran a series of Friday sessions in the holidays for families called 'Forest Folk' which were very well attended.

The first Dangerous Dads session ran at Easter and was very successful. We are looking for a new (male) session worker to lead new days in the coming year.

We want to build on this and offer more days in 2018, with days having a seasonal focus.

Site hire

Woodlanders has made the camp at Young Wood available for a range of hosted, shared or externally run events during the past year:

- A food hygiene course for outdoor learning practitioners, organised by Woodlanders and delivered by Blake Training.
- A regional chainsaw training course organised by Making Local Woods Work and hosted by us
- A regional first aid course organised by Making Local Woods Work and hosted/catered for by us



Craft Courses

We have struggled to reach a consistent market for our craft courses over the past year. The availability of other, higher profile course providers, and the current limitations of our marketing effort, have contributed to this. Other courses we have run have been:

- Woodland management for Blackdown Hills Natural Futures
- Mammal Tracking for BHNF

Wellbeing and Personal Development

Jenny has run four Medicine Wheel days this year, with a regular group of 5-8 women. She has been promoting these through her website for the last few years, and will begin to bring some of this work into Woodlanders activities in 2018. This summer Jenny went to California on a self-funded trip for five weeks to train with the School of Lost Borders, in their training for wilderness guides who lead vision fasts and rites-of-passage in wild places. Jenny plans to practice and develop this work over the coming years, especially for young people, and to use aspects of it in Wild Learning and other projects.

Contracted sessions - Team days, Youth groups, Birthday parties

- Bridgwater Community Mental Health team came for the third time for a Team Day, with 23 staff.
- Somerset GetSet (Children's Centres) brought 15 staff for a half day training in Play in the Outdoors



- Halcon youth group came back again for summer evening sessions
- We ran our first birthday party event in July and are now advertising this as a service at very competitive rates!

Off-site sessions

Woodlanders took part in the following events over the past year:

- Skills from the Hills hedgelaying event in March 2017, for the Blackdown Hills Hedge Association
- Pride in Priorswood community event in August 2017, for North Taunton Partnership

Consultancy

Jenny Archard undertook an extended programme of team development for Taunton Association for the Homeless, in a consultancy capacity through Woodlanders. She also undertook a piece of work on health and wellbeing activity in woodlands for the Making Local Woods Work project.

Wood products

During the summer of 2017 we developed our charcoal making and distribution capacity by a small amount, selling approximately 50 bags either direct or through local outlets. We sold hazel poles to a local landowner building a straw bale house, and fulfilled a small number of order for house signs and other small craft items.

4. Young Wood

Management

Over the winter of 2016-17 we began a thinning programme in Twelve Acre Copse, near the entrance to Young Wood. This involved coppicing of underwood and thinning of canopy larch, willow and oak. Our long term aim is to improve the structure of this block of woodland, which was in a poor state, offering limited value either in wildlife habitat or timber terms, while also yielding a harvest for use in construction and charcoal production.

Other regular management work has included the creation of new paths, cutting glades and ride sides for butterfly habitat.

Through the 'Meet the Neighbours' project we have begun to gain a clearer sense of the significance of different parts of Young Wood for wildlife, some of the notable species present, and the influence which this knowledge should have on management. Examples include:

- The presence of a regionally scarce ant, *Lasius fuliginosus* (the Jet Ant) in parts of Cold Croft Coppice, which requires old tree trunks to nest in.
- The presence of a good range of crickets and grasshoppers on the main ride network, highlighting the value of this open habitat.
- The presence of lesser spotted woodpecker at Young Wood, which needs dead standing timber.
- The importance of Young Wood for moth species, emphasising the need to maintain a diversity of habitats.
- The importance of the colonies of Wild Service Tree, Small-leaved Lime and Wych Elm in Young Wood, which need to be encouraged.
- The importance of Keepers Field for insects and flowering plants, and the need to maintain the type of by-hand management pursued over recent years there.



Infrastructure

The pole barn was completed next to the car park area in the spring, thanks to the work of the regular volunteer team. This is now being used to store firewood alongside the charcoal kiln.

An earth oven was constructed over the summer of 2017, as a focal project for Wild Learning and volunteer groups, and using cob made with clay from the site.

The proposed secure storage and office build is due to begin in October (see section 1 above).

5. Financial Performance

The Society's Unaudited Financial Statement for the latest accounting period, 1st April 2016 to 31st March 2017, is given at Appendix 1 at the end of this document. This shows that Woodlanders had a total income of £41,539 during 2015-16, and an expenditure of £52,510. The excess spend over income reflected outgoings against grants received in the previous financial year. 66% of income during year came from restricted grant sources (including contract-based funds for delivery of defined numbers of learners) - down from 79% in the previous year, with 33% from sales of services and products (up from 21%).

6. Business Forecast

Assessment of the year

Neroche Woodlanders is in its fifth year of operation as an independent social enterprise. During the past twelve months we have continued to build a strong reputation for our well-being work, and for the qualities of our woodland base and the activities and ambience it offers.

The Wild Learning project, now beginning its sixth season, together with the previous Families in the Forest programme, have continued to develop Woodlanders' reputation for using a wild place to enhance the well-being of people leading challenging lives on the margins of society. Despite the setback of Somerset Skills & Learning losing its entire Community Learning Partnership funding, and hence the grant aid to continue to support Wild Learning, we have secured enough funding from Taunton Association for the Homeless and one of its local sponsors to allow a reduced programme to continue through the autumn of 2017, and we are continuing to seek funds to extend this provision.

We have always wanted to promote Young Wood as a catalytic setting for gatherings and discussions reaching out to wider communities of interest. To that end we continued to offer Young Wood as a venue for appropriate hire as a serviced space, both with staffing and without, and we intend to develop our infrastructure to make this provision more attractive to more groups.

Increasing the proportion of our income derived from sales of products and services continues to be a strategic priority for us, though grants and contracts will continue to be fundamental to our business model.

We are fortunate in having the use of a large area of semi-wild land, and although we use this land for a public service we are obliged to pay a rent to the Forestry Commission to occupy the site. This and our other overheads oblige us to generate an adequate surplus from our activities, in order to continue to operate. The overheads contribution we can claim through grant-supported projects is limited, and our paid for services do not currently generate enough surplus to make us financially sustainable in the medium term. Therefore it has become essential for us to improve our ability to generate enough surplus - not just to survive but to thrive, and reinvest in our place and our people. The developmental support granted to us by the Halpin Trust is

therefore a vital ingredient for addressing this issue. Our challenge is to market our offer more effectively, and streamline our operations to make them more efficient and effective.

Key objectives for next year

During the remainder of 2017 and into 2018, our major objectives are the following:

- To build the profile of our charged-for services, including team development services to business, woodland site hire and commissioned well-being activities
- To build on our experience and reputation for well-being programmes for families and adults by developing new externally-funded programmes and paid for sessions and longer programmes.
- To create a more consistent foundation of woodland management activity, as a backdrop for wellbeing and training activities, and as a source of raw materials and wood products.
- To maintain and widen our volunteering provision by linking it to funded projects



Jenny Archard
Gavin Saunders
Rachel Wootton
Hannah Bester
Chris Engert

October 2017

Neroche Woodlanders Ltd
UNAUDITED FINANCIAL STATEMENT
Covering the period 1st April 2016 to 31st March 2017

Income

Project grant funding	
Som Skills & Learning: Wild Learning 3	£0.00
Som Skills & Learning: Wild Learning 4	£2,608.79
Som Skills & Learning/Taunton Assoc for the Homeless: Wild Learning 5	£8,500.00
Som Skills & Learning/TAH: Wild Learning REAL	£4,000.00
Som Skills & Learning: Family Learning	£2,987.92
Som Comm Foundation/Comic Relief: Families in the Forest	£0.00
Heritage Lottery Fund: Meet the Neighbours	£9,400.00
Smaller grants: Cllr Ross Henley, Blackdown Hills Trust	250
Sub total	£27,746.71

Expenditure

Project grant expenses	
Wild Learning 3	£952.86
Wild Learning 4	£2,898.27
Wild Learning 5	£8,977.23
Wild Learning REAL	£3,774.86
Family Learning	£4,329.39
Families in the Forest	£7,645.32
Meet the Neighbours	£3,492.60
Smaller grants	£0.00
Sub total	£32,070.53

Notes

Final payments against a project whose income was received in previous FY
 Bulk of income for this project was received in previous FY
 Part of income received after end of FY
 Completed within FY
 Part of income for this project was received in previous FY
 All income for this project received in previous FY
 Expenditure for this project extends into next FY

Sales & services

Sales sessions	£6,795.51
Sales products	£720.50
Consultancy	£7,021.43
Volunteering	£5,835.41
Shares, subscriptions	£215.00
Sub total	£13,792.34

Cost of sales

Sales sessions	£5,961.65
Sales products	£773.13
Consultancy	£6,008.93
Volunteering	£3,981.10
Sub total	£12,743.71

Representing income from charged-for provision
 Representing income from sale of wood products
 Representing income from off-site consultancy for other bodies
 Expenses & grant income for volunteering tasks & dev'tment
 Representing income from share purchase and annual subs

Donations	£0.00
Bank interest	£0.14
Sub total	£0.14

Rent	£2,125.00
Insurance	£810.47
Fees & subs	£110.00
Print & design	£76.99
Web	£160.60
Core resources	£405.47
Training	£1,119.50
Asst purchase	£2,836.56
Other	£51.25
Sub total	£7,695.84

Total income	£41,539.19
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Total expenditure	£52,510.08
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Balance brought forward	£14,165.12
Balance carried forward	£3,194.23
Fixed assets	
Current assets: cash at bank 31/3/17	£8,682.27
Current assets - debtors at 31/3/17	£2,191.21
Restricted funds (grants)	£6,542.54
Free reserves	£4,330.94

from 2015/16 accounts

Capital items as detailed on balance sheet

Invoices issued but not yet paid at 31/3/16

Grants received for projects but not yet spent