

DIRECTORS' REPORT TO ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 17th OCTOBER 2018

1. Overview

This report summarises Neroche Woodlanders' activities as a social enterprise and community network over the 12 months to October 2018. Financial information is provided for the financial year April 2017 to March 2018, in line with reporting obligations to the Financial Conduct Authority, together with an overview of the financial position now, at October 2018.

The report presents a picture of a small enterprise in its sixth year of operation, developing a high reputation for wellbeing and nature connection work, managing a much-loved woodland base with good infrastructure built from natural on-site materials, and recognised by the Forestry Commission for pioneering work in using a public forest for social and environmental benefit. The report is also honest about the challenges and stresses of consolidating the enterprise, given its heavy reliance on a small number of directors, volunteers and experienced freelance staff, and its independent status without core external funding.

We have survived the impacts of 'austerity', which have been far-reaching. It has been a difficult in year in many ways, and if we are to continue and to grow, we will need to address a range of issues: stabilising finance for Wild Learning; stepping up our woodland management regime to bring in more income; enabling the Neroche Conservation Volunteers to grow again; and expanding the Board so that our Governance is robust. None of these are small things, and we are reaching out to our supporters to enable this wonderful community-based woodland enterprise to continue to flourish.

2. Organisation and Governance

Lease of Young Wood

Woodlanders is now into the fourth year of its current ten year lease and management agreement with the Forestry Commission. Rent began at £1500 per year in 2015, and had increased according to the agreed sliding scale, being due to reach £3000 per year as of July 2018. However following an approach to FC seeking a rent review in spring 2018, FC agreed to reduce the rent substantially, recognising the clear non-financial benefits now flowing from Woodlanders' presence at Young Wood, in terms of social and environmental gains. Subject to agreement of a side letter to the lease (currently awaited at time of writing), it is expected that the rent will fall to a new figure of £1000 per year, before the end of 2018.

Shareholder membership

Shareholder membership currently stands at 50, with 715 shares having been sold. The share price remains at £1 per share, minimum holding 5 shares. Membership has once again not increased since last year, which reflects the limited time and emphasis we have been able to put on promoting this aspect of our 'community of interest'.

Board of Directors

Rachel Wootton and Chris Engert left the Board during the course of the year. The remaining directors are Hannah Bester, Jenny Archard and Gavin Saunders. Hannah is Chair, Jenny is Company Secretary and Gavin is Treasurer. The directors work in a voluntary capacity and receive no payment for governance-related work. The Board is currently actively seeking new

individuals to become directors, based on experience and ‘natural fit’ to the way we work.

Staff

During the year we have contracted the following staff to manage, lead or assist on grant-supported or otherwise-funded activities: Jenny Archard, Sam Lomas, Alan Bruford, Gavin Saunders, Rowen Wilde. All staff are hired on casual contracts as freelancers.

Volunteers

Volunteers have continued to be essential to the running of many aspects of Woodlanders’ work. A group of volunteers have worked alongside Jenny, Sam and Alan on Wild Learning sessions, including Charles Hill, Fran Cook, Rosie Viant, Barbara Wilcox, Claire Criddle, Bea Chater, Sarah Holdway and Sara Drewe. Meanwhile Woodlanders has continued to coordinate the Neroche Conservation Volunteers group, with Gavin working with lead volunteers Peter Maben and Nick Milton. Three NCV tasks were organised 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 10th October 2018, 31 task days took place, clocking up 221 person-days (or 1215 hours) of volunteer work. At Young Wood, a number of volunteers have been instrumental in building the new office and secure store, notably Peter Maben, Paul Jones and Peter Joyce, while elsewhere across NCV tasks, Chris Baker, Quentin Nichols, Caroline Briggs, Philip James and Racheal Smith have been among the most regular volunteers.

Halpin Trust

The directors have continued to make use of the development grant of £12,850 provided by the Halpin Trust in 2017. The purpose of the grant is to allow Woodlanders to devote director time to developing and improving our core enterprise in terms of income-generating work, woodland management, communications, admin and data management. The grant also paid for the creation of our new office and secure store.

Promotion and Publicity

An email newsletter is sent to the volunteer database (250 addresses) on a monthly basis, using Mailchimp. The website www.youngwood.org.uk was updated regularly, and a new website under a new domain name of www.nerochewoodlanders.org is under development. The Woodlanders’ Facebook page has 680 likes, with posts regularly reaching 100-300 people. We held an open day at Young Wood in May. Other promotion has included articles in the Neroche parishes newsletter, and printed flyers.

Excellence in Forestry Awards 2018

The Forestry Commission offered to enter Woodlanders in the Education and Learning category of the Royal Forestry Society’s Excellence in Forestry Award 2018. As a result we were shortlisted and won joint Silver Award prize in that category. Gavin collected the award jointly with Rob Greenhalgh of FC at a ceremony at Westonbirt in August. The judges said: *“This project demonstrates how working in partnership can bring benefits to both parties. The small scale woodland management techniques carried out by the group help the surrounding wildlife to flourish whilst the participants undertaking the tasks have a positive and empowering setting to work in.... The impact this project is having on the local community is an asset to the success of the enterprise.”* See <https://www.rfs.org.uk/awards/excellence-in-forestry-winners/education-and-learning-award-2018/>.

Risk management

For good governance, the Board has created a risk register and reviews this regularly - this

includes 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:

- The Halpin Trust
- Somerset Skills and Learning CIC
- Inspired to Achieve (Positive People Programme)
- Arc Inspire (formerly Taunton Association for the Homeless)
- Claims Consortium, Taunton
- Greggs Community Foundation
- Country Landowners Association Trust
- Taunton Deane Borough Council
- Blackdown Hills Natural Futures Project

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

- Forestry Commission East Devon Beat
- Blackdown Hills Hedge Association
- Blackdown Hills AONB
- Butterfly Conservation
- Churchinford community shop
- Clarity CIC
- Knight Brothers Travel
- Making Local Woods Work programme operated by the Plunkett Foundation
- North Taunton Partnership
- Taunton Association for the Homeless
- John Binnie
- Quantock Orienteers
- Hestercombe House
- Neroche Parish Council
- Wildwood Trees and Timber
- Devon Wildlife Trust
- Somerset Wildlife Trust
- South Somerset District Council

3. Grant-funded Projects and Contracts

Wild Learning & Families in the Forest

In the late summer, after many delays, we were informed that SS&L (Somerset Skills and Learning) had had their funding withdrawn by central government, so we would not receive any funds for Wild Learning for the coming year. After discussions with Taunton Association for the Homeless, they promised to part-fund us and helped find additional sponsorship support from Claims Consortium Group, a local business. This enabled us to begin the program in the autumn 'as usual', not knowing if we could continue beyond Christmas.

After much lobbying from all quarters, SS&L had some funds reinstated and ours was one of the first Community Learning Projects to have funds awarded. So from Oct 2017 to June 2018 we

ran two courses of Wild Learning Tuesdays and some Taster sessions at the TAH hostel, and worked with 50 people on this part of project, with 17 gaining a John Muir Award. 27 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. We also used the funding to subsidise ‘Families in the Forest’, a series of short sessions for 25 local families, which had positive impacts and kept us connected with local people.

Some of the learner’s comments:

“Wild Learning saved my life. Coming has helped me to learn and grow, and to get out of the house and make friends. I’m now ready to leave, as I’ve found other interests and want to learn new things. This is because of what you’ve shown me, and what I’ve learned about nature. Oh, but I would still like to make a stool!!”

“The range of people I’ve met, tasks I’ve taken part in, places I’ve explored and skills I’ve learnt, along with many other things have altogether helped shape me into a better person. The support, encouragement and love I’ve felt has helped me push myself in ways I could never have imagined.”

Wild Learning Six Week Programme

In the spring we were commissioned by Inspired to Achieve to run a parallel series of six Wild Learning days as a taster for clients on the ‘Positive People’ programme. This was very successful, engaging new learners from Wellington and Yeovil, some of whom progressed into volunteering.

4. Charged-for services and products

Team days and training events

- Forestry Commission (team build and learning event for Community Rangers, along with senior staff)
- Cosmic (local IT social enterprise based in Honiton)
- Halcon Link Centre, Taunton
- Making Local Woods Work - study visits

Deep nature connection and personal development work

Jenny has been running regular one day Medicine Wheel workshops and camps with a growing audience. This year two new offerings were launched and were well received.

- ‘Campfire Councils’ on two Friday evenings in the summer. Council is a deep discussion group, allowing people to delve into what matters, to speak and be heard.
- ‘Woman Time’ - a six day camp for young women who want to be immersed in the woods, the wild and mark a threshold of personal change.

School groups

We hosted and helped run a four night camp for a group of sixteen 14/15 year olds from The Portsmouth Grammar School in August. This camp aimed to bring this group into deeper connection with nature through bushcrafting, nature games and a solo night activity. It was a great success, and likely to lead another in 2019.

Parties and courses

- 2 adult birthday parties
- 3 courses held: 2 spoon making, 1 on Mammal Tracking (for BHNF)

Off-site sessions

- Skills from the Hills event in April 2018, for the Blackdown Hills Hedge Association
- Pride in Priorswood community event in August 2018, for North Taunton Partnership
- Activities for three Taunton Deane ‘community engagement’ events.

Consultancy

Making Local Woods Work: Jenny spoke at a Green Care conference at invitation of Plunkett Foundation’s MLWW project. Jenny also secured a contract, jointly with Clarity CIC, to research UK-wide woodland social enterprises’ work with ‘in need’ audiences.

Wood products

We continued to produce charcoal on a small scale, selling either direct or via Churchinford community shop.

5. Young Wood

Management

Over the winter of 2017-18 we continued a thinning programme in Twelve Acre Copse, near the entrance to Young Wood. This involved widening the corridor along the main access track, to create more edge habitat. This work yielded a number of large-diameter sawlogs of pine, larch and spruce, which were subsequently milled on site, using an external contractor with a Petersen mill, to produce a quantity of planked wood for use as cladding in new build projects.

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

Infrastructure

The major build project during the year has been the new office and secure store. A 20ft shipping container was purchased and placed on a newly-levelled site, and a wood-framed office/meeting space was built off the side of the container, using poles and milled timber from the woods. The office is currently being insulated, and a stove and solar system will be installed in due course.

In addition we secured a small grant from the CLA to build a disabled compost toilet, which is nearly complete.

6. Financial Performance

Financial year 2017/18

The Society’s Unaudited Financial Statement for the latest accounting period, 1st April 2017 to 31st March 2018, is given at Appendix 1 at the end of this document. This shows that Woodlanders had a total income of £35,967 during 2017-18, and an expenditure of £35,463. 83% of income during year came from restricted grant sources (including contract-based funds for

delivery of defined numbers of learners) - up from 66% in the previous year, with 17% from sales of services and products (down from 33%).

Financial year 2018/19 - to date

The picture for the current financial year to date (ie. April to October 2018) is as follows: total income to date is £30,535, of which £16,706 (55%) is from grant sources and £13,829 (45%) is from sales. Total expenditure to date is £22,355.

7. Business Forecast

The past year saw Woodlanders consolidate its provision of nature-based wellbeing activities at Young Wood, diversifying the groups and methods being used, and strengthening its reputation for this work. We also strengthened our relationship with the Forestry Commission. During a team development and learning day provided for FC staff in September (at FC's invitation), the regional director of FC, Kevin Stannard, described Woodlanders' work as representing "the future of modern forestry": namely, the use of an area of public forest, by a local community enterprise, for social wellbeing benefits alongside sustainable management. Although progress is slow, we are gradually developing an effective, respected community enterprise, increasingly well known for its innovative work and its inspiring location.

At the same time, the challenges of running a viable independent business, through a small group of active directors, staff and volunteers, with a small budget, continue to be challenging, collectively and individually. While wellbeing work has strengthened and raised its profile, woodland management and generation of woodland products has not achieved the same progress, partly because of the focus on the office build and partly due to Gavin's health issues. Wellbeing work itself is hampered by limited available staff time and assistant staff posts, meaning Jenny is carrying a heavy burden of project development, delivery and admin. We need new directors, fresh blood in terms of volunteers, and additional competent freelance associate staff, if we are to consolidate and grow to into a sustainable enterprise.

Key objectives for next year

During the remainder of 2018 and into 2019, our major objectives are as follows:

- To complete the development work initiated by the grant from the Halpin Trust (website, data management, marketing, woodland management)
- To further build the profile of our charged-for services, including team development services to business, woodland site hire and commissioned well-being activities, in order to ensure unrestricted net income covers core running costs.
- To maintain and widen our volunteer network, manifested as directors, Wild Learning volunteers, woodland management assistants and NCV volunteers.
- To broaden our staff team.

Jenny Archard
Gavin Saunders
Hannah Bester
October 2018

Neroche Woodlanders Ltd
UNAUDITED FINANCIAL STATEMENT
Covering the period 1st April 2017 to 31st March 2018

Income

Project grant funding	
Wild Learning 6 (SS&L, TAH, Greggs)	£11,400.00
Halpin Trust	£12,850.00
CLACT	£1,750.00
Wild Learning 5	£3,750.00
Sub total	£29,750.00

Development grant
Disabled toilet grant

Expenditure

Project grant expenses	
Wild Learning 6	£9,184.92
Meet the Neighbours	£5,430.76
Halpin Trust	£5,372.01
Smaller grants (including CLACT)	£1,052.76
People's Health Trust project	£720.00
Wild Learning 3	£1,681.80
Wild Learning 4	£395.00
Wild Learning 5	£2,841.15
Sub total	£26,678.40

Notes

Some spend carried over to 2018/19
Spend of grant rec'd previous year
Spend continuing into 2018/19
Some spend carried over to 2018/19
Late spend of surplus from previous year's project
Late spend of surplus from previous year's project
Late spend of surplus from previous year's project
Late spend of surplus from previous year's project

Sales & services

Sales sessions	£4,019.00
Sales products	£275.50
Consultancy	£725.00
Volunteering	£1,017.00
Sub total	£6,036.50

Cost of sales

Sales sessions	£3,610.71
Sales products	£48.59
Consultancy	£450.00
Volunteering	£167.54
Sub total	£4,109.30

Income and expenditure for on- and off-site courses, events & other charged-for provision
Income and expenditure for sale of wood products
Income and expenditure for off-site consultancy for other bodies
Income and expenditure for volunteering tasks & development

Shares, subscriptions	£100.00
Donations	£81.06
Bank interest	£0.00
Sub total	£181.06

Overheads

Rent	£2,937.50
Insurance	£851.00
Fees & subs	£427.38
Marketing	£43.15
Web	£143.57
Core resources	£131.62
Staff training and certification	£138.20
Asst purchase	£0.00
Other	£3.44
Sub total	£4,675.86

Income from share purchase and annual subs

Total income	£35,967.56
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Total expenditure	£35,463.56
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Total includes spend of surplus grant monies which do not appear in this year's income. Total excluding these surpluses was **£29,825**

Balance brought forward	£3,869.23
Balance carried forward	£4,373.23
Fixed assets	£7,048.00
Current assets - cash at bank 31/3/17	£16,009.41
Current assets - debtors at 31/3/17	£0.00
Restricted funds (grant income)	£10,940.33
Free reserves	£5,069.08

from 2016/17 accounts

Capital items as detailed on balance sheet

Invoices issued but not yet paid at 31/3/18

Grants received for contracted projects but not yet spent