



### 1. Overview

This report summarises Neroche Woodlanders' activities as a social enterprise over the twelve months to October 2020. Financial information is provided for the financial year April 2019 to March 2020, in line with reporting obligations to the Financial Conduct Authority, together with an overview of the financial position now, at October 2020.



Making new benches with milled larch

Like the rest of society, we have been substantially affected by the restrictions imposed on us by the Government's response to the Covid-19 pandemic, which, along with other factors and choices have influenced the direction we have taken and priorities we have adopted. While we have ridden this period comparatively well, it has held back some of the development we hoped to pursue. The direct influence is likely to continue for at least the next six months, and indirectly for the foreseeable future.

We continue to focus on our core purposes of providing nature-based wellbeing work and volunteering, while looking after Young Wood and contributing to places and events elsewhere. We think our work is even more important as we begin to emerge from the pandemic and find ways to deal with the climate crisis. We ran Wild Learning (until lockdown in late March) through an eighth year of funding from Somerset Skills & Learning, but SS&L chose not to fund us again for the current year. However we secured major new funding from Somerset Community Foundation to expand our families work. We developed our woodland camp, especially in response to Covid-19 requirements, and adapted our offer by distributing Nature Craft packs to our target family audience. We also tried to keep in touch with as many people as we could, be it learners, families or volunteers. We have complied with all Government guidelines to ensure we are as Covid-safe as we can be.

Despite the problems of the past year we are now in our strongest financial position yet, with some exciting new work beginning to be rolled out.

### 2. Organisation and Governance

#### Lease of Young Wood

Woodlanders is now into the sixth year of its current ten year lease and management agreement with the Forestry Commission (which began in July 2015). We continue to pay Forestry England an annual rent of £1000.

## **Shareholder membership**

Shareholder membership stands at 54, with 735 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 subject. We need to review the purpose of our membership and shareholding offer and overhaul the current arrangements.

## **Board of Directors**

The current directors are Dr Rosemary Viant (Chair), Barbara Wilcox (Treasurer), Jenny Archard (Secretary), Gavin Saunders and Sarah Holdway. The directors work in a voluntary capacity and receive no payment for governance-related 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, Sarah Holdway, Gavin Saunders, Alan Bruford, with Jane Embleton and 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 has worked alongside Jenny and Sarah on Wild Learning, Wild Explorers and Young Saplings, including Charles Hill, Rosemary Viant, Barbara Wilcox, Lucy Montgomery, Gilly Notley, Abby Wilson, Belinda Sutton (Kilkaldi), Becks Gould, Liz Curley, Lawrence Bole, Richard Threlfall, Christine Langston, Ellie Hayes and Sue Hannam.



Meanwhile Neroche Conservation Volunteers has continued, and only suspended activities for 8 weeks during Lockdown. Until March, three NCV tasks were organised per month. Tasks ceased until mid May, but then resumed weekly at Young Wood, before resuming more fully elsewhere in September, now on four Wednesdays per month. During the twelve months ending 2nd October 2020, 25 task days took place, clocking up 210 person-days (or 945 hours) of volunteer work (figures for 2019 were 29 tasks and 254 person-days). Tasks were organised by Peter Maben, Nick Milton and Gavin Saunders, with regular volunteer support from Paul Jones, Peter Joyce, Mike Woodhead, Mike Rostron, Rowen Wilde, Phil Bisatt, Quentin Nichols, Philip James and Chris Baker.

## **Promotion and Publicity**

Our website [www.nerochewoodlanders.org](http://www.nerochewoodlanders.org) has continued to develop during the year, and we now regularly use an online booking platform (Bookwhen) for charged-for events. An email newsletter continues to be sent to our contacts database on a roughly-monthly basis, using Mailchimp. We have three Facebook pages for different strands of work; Neroche Woodlanders' main Facebook page has nearly 1000 likes, with posts regularly reaching 100-300 people; Young Saplings parent-toddler page has nearly 100 and Wild Explorers (project) pages only 26 but has reached over 3000 people. Other promotion has included regular articles in the Neroche parishes newsletter.

## **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. We suffered two break-ins during the year, one in January and another in July. These demonstrated the need to improve our on-site security, which led to the decision to purchase a second secure container.

## **Collaboration**

This year we have benefitted from funding from the following:

Somerset Community Foundation  
Somerset Skills and Learning CIC  
Somerset West and Taunton Council  
Halcon One Team

The Halpin Trust  
The Drandjeaw Trust  
Greggs Foundation

In addition we have worked with the following organisations and individuals:

Blackdown Hills AONB  
Blackdown Hills Trust  
Blackdown Hills Facilitation Fund  
Butterfly Conservation  
Chris Heron (Time Well Spent)  
Clare Viner Storyteller  
Community Inclusion & Activity Team, SCC  
Fare Share South West  
Forestry England - East Devon Beat  
Goren Farm  
Gordon and Geraldine Field  
Halcon One Team  
Heaver Bros  
Holy Trinity School

Job Centre Plus Taunton  
The Link Centre  
Knight Brothers Travel  
Make Lunch Taunton  
MIND  
Minerva School  
North Taunton Partnership  
Neroche Parish Council  
Pluss Positive People  
Royal British legion  
Norton Fitzwarren Camp  
Somerset Wildlife Trust  
Somerset CCS Village Agents  
Taunton Learning Partnership

## **Wild Learning & Families in the Forest**

The year started really well with us attending others' family events (Taunton Green Fayre & Pride in Priorswood) and running four families events in the woods. Altogether we worked with 66 families through the Wild Learning project.

The adult Wellbeing Tuesdays started with a taster session at Job Centre Plus in Taunton, a new partnership for us. This year we stopped working with ARC, by mutual agreement, as they were no longer able to provide any support staff for sessions. We worked with 27 adults through only 12 Tuesday sessions before the lockdown took effect. The funding also enabled us to train 16 volunteers in our woodland wellbeing ways, some of whom have stayed with us through the year. Six learners gained their Discovery Award through the John Muir Trust.



Children feeding the dragon in the play area

Early in the lockdown period we made the decision to stay in touch with our clients/customers as best we could. We gained some emergency funding to pay for a second hand phone and credit from SCF. We kept in regular contact with all our cohort of adult Wild Learners, plus some from previous years, to help them contact local support services for help with shopping and collecting medicines. It became a weekly check in for some.

Also during lockdown we used SS&L funding to create an online training course in Woodland Management, delivered by Zoom, with nine learners.

In total we worked with 116 learners. Our target was 115 for the whole year, so we did well despite the pandemic.

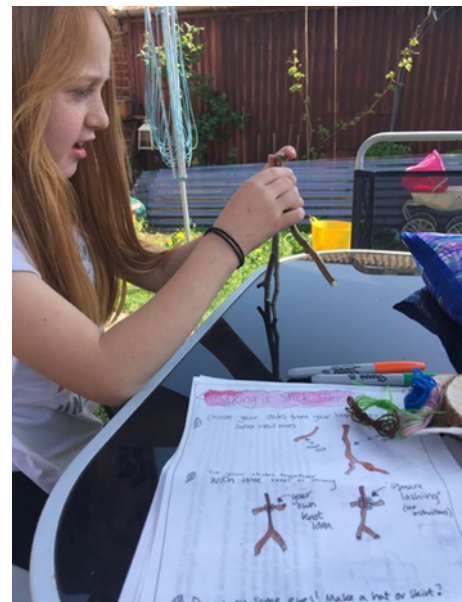
We were very disappointed by SS&L's decision not to fund Wild Learning for 2020/21, after having successfully delivered this programme with their support for the past eight years. We were offered no feedback on why we were rejected this time. At the time of writing we have yet to secure an alternative funding stream for our adult-centred wellbeing programme.

### **Wild Explorers**

This started in 2019 as a commissioned project to bring families from the Halcon Estate into the woods for regular Forest School based sessions. With new substantial funding from Somerset Community Foundation we are very excited to be growing Wild Explorers into a bigger project which will run for 2 years and 3 months. The funding bid to SCF was submitted as lockdown commenced, after months of research and communication with schools, agencies and families. We now have a project for disadvantaged and low income families in Taunton that offers funded Forest School for Families as a series of regular sessions, plus funded parent-toddler groups through the year. We have started with outreach and Nature Craft packs and will continue with those through any further lockdowns. We are grateful to Somerset Community Foundation and the Early Help Fund who think that our work is really needed at this time.

### **Family Nature Packs**

At the start of lockdown we were conscious that many families we work with would be confined indoors, while we ourselves still had lots of resources and access to the woods. Hence we developed the idea of Family Nature Packs as a way to deliver natural crafting materials and ideas direct to people's homes. With help and funds from the One Team (Rich Shadrick) and support from the Link Centre to do deliveries, we contacted low-income families we knew to trial if the idea would work. After an initial run of 15 packs we got into production and a team of volunteers worked with us each week to gather, make and distribute. We were also able to re-allocate some other grant money to deliver packs to families who have a child with a disability. Some packs were collected by agencies or families who came through referrals from the Royal British Legion, Taunton Learning Partnership, Priorswood Library and Make Lunch Taunton.



A recipient of a Family Nature Pack

To date, we have delivered more than 150 packs and still have plenty of resources and ideas to deliver more. This means we are ready for local lockdowns and are able to share them with the schools involved in the Wild Explorers project.

### **Young Saplings**

Young Saplings went from strength to strength, and before lockdown we had increasing, regular numbers of returning customers. During the lockdown we made improvements to the children's

play area making more space for children to play. We waited until the older children went back to school before resuming Friday sessions, with a current limit of 8 participants to allow for social distancing around the camp fire.

### **Greenwood Club**

This has been on hold this spring and summer due to Covid-19. We hope to resume activity either this autumn or next spring.

### **Way of Council and Vision Fast**

Jenny has been running regular Way of Council groups in the woods through the summer with Jane Embleton. This is a group process that promotes deep listening, and is also used as part of the Wild Learning and Family sessions. In the autumn Jenny led a ten-day Vision Fast, which was part hosted at Young Wood and part on Dartmoor. The woods make the perfect basecamp for this kind of deep nature-connection work, and enabled the participants to challenge themselves, to retreat and step into a different way of being in their lives.

### **Team Days**

In the autumn we have started again to run events for other organisations. So far we have run two events and there are enquiries for more.

### **Off-site sessions**

Off-site sessions were severely curtailed this year due to Covid-19, removing the regular events we attend like Skills of the Hills and Goren Festival. A small number of sessions were held before March, including a Families event at October half term for the Army at Norton Fitzwarren and for Forestry England at Castle Neroche. Both of these focused heavily on making dragons!

### **Consultancy**

Gavin continued an ecological monitoring and advice contract for the Blackdown Hills Trust's Neroche conservation grazing programme.

### **Products**

We undertook one charcoal burn during the summer and sold 70 2kg bags, either direct or via local community shops.

## **5. Young Wood**

### **Site management**

During the year we have further enhanced camp infrastructure and woodland management at Young Wood. We have a new roadside sign, a second secure storage container, an upgraded fire pit with new bench seating, an expanded children's play area, and new hand hygiene facilities. We have undertaken thinning of broadleaves, especially diseased ash, in parts of the wood and have used it to produce charcoal for local sale. None of this work would have been possible without the support of our regular volunteers.

Over the winter of 2019-20 we continued to diversify the canopy structure of the oak plantation behind the main camp, known as 'The Fields'. As well as enhancing habitats this



Volunteers bagging charcoal

generated timber which we have milled on site, using the Woodmizer mill brought to site and operated by Julian Pady of Goren Farm, Stockland. Milled larch has now been turned into new benches around the firepit. Meanwhile seasoned firewood has been used to produce charcoal, and supply the campfire. Other routine management work has included cutting glades and ride sides for insect and wildflower habitat.

We extended our botanical records for Young Wood during the year, with an orchid list now standing at 8 species: Early purple, Twayblade, Common spotted, Pyramidal, Bee orchid, Greater butterfly orchid, White helleborine and Bird's-nest orchid.



Milling timber with the Goren Farm Woodmizer

## 6. Financial Performance

### Financial year 2019/20

The Society's Unaudited Financial Statement for the latest accounting period, 1st April 2019 to 31st March 2020, is given at Appendix 1 at the end of this document. This shows that Woodlanders had a total income of £49,557 during 2018-19, and an expenditure of £39,664. 70% of income during year came from restricted grant sources (including contract-based funds for delivery of defined numbers of learners) - up from 58% in the previous year - with 28% from sales of services and products.

### Financial year 2020/21 to date

During the Lockdown period we applied for, and received, a £10,000 small business support grant from Somerset West and Taunton Council. We also received, unsolicited, an emergency grant of £5000 from the Halpin Trust, and an emergency grant of £750 from Somerset Community Foundation. The Board chose to pay each of the core staff (Jenny, Sarah and Gavin) £1000 each from this money, to offset loss of income during the Lockdown period. Of the remaining £12,000, £3000 has been invested in purchasing the second storage container, and £4000 has been earmarked to match-fund the £4500 secured from the Blackdown Hills AONB for the 'Old Trees, New Growth' project which begins in October. This leaves £5000 which is currently being held in reserve.

We undertook our first ever Crowdfunder appeal this summer, to help finance the Family Nature Packs. This successfully raised £1410 towards a target of £1500.



## 7. Business Forecast

Despite the challenges of 2020 Neroche Woodlanders is in a relatively strong position as we head into the autumn. Although we remain small we are an effective, respected community enterprise, well known locally for its innovative work and its inspiring location. Although our ability to deliver the full range of services remains hampered, the need for what we offer continues to grow, not least because of the social and psychological impacts of the pandemic.

We continue to need to improve our revenue income position, and we currently we do not bring in enough unrestricted income to cover the full cost of our operation, if the 'invisible' costs of

all staff time are taken into account. There is considerable scope to develop our training provision, not least for professionals interested in applying the nature-based learning approaches we have helped pioneer. There is also scope to develop the 'woody' side of our business, by strengthening our capacity to harvest and process timber, and developing ways to add value to that timber.

### **Key objectives for the next 12 months**

During the remainder of 2020 and into 2021, our major objectives are as follows:

- To build the profile of our charged-for services
- To secure more grant funding to develop our flagship wellbeing provision
- To build stronger, collaborative relationships with other like-minded organisations
- To develop our woodland work and capacity
- To maintain and widen our volunteer network
- To broaden our staff and director team, so that the provision is made for a succession in due course as long-standing individuals move on.

Dr Rosemary Viant  
Barbara Wilcox  
Jenny Archard  
Gavin Saunders  
Sarah Holdway

October 2020



**Neroche Woodlanders Ltd****Unaudited Financial Statement covering the period 1st April 2019 to 31st March 2020****Income**

<b>Project grant funding (restricted)</b>	
SS&L (Wild Learning 7)	£9,450.00
Greggs Foundation (W.Learning 8)	£1,740.00
SS&L (Wild Learning 8)	£10,650.00
SCF (Wild Explorers)	£4,910.00
SCF (Volunteering)	£1,968.00
Halcon One Team (Explorers)	£75.00
Drandjeaw Trust	£1,000.00
Halpin Trust	£5,000.00
<b>Sub total</b>	<b>£34,793.00</b>

**Expenditure**

<b>Project Grant Funded</b>	
Wild Learning 7	£7,026.70
Wild Learning 8	£11,573.15
Wild Explorers	£5,020.25
Halpin Trust grant	£1,529.57
SCF (Volunteering)	£520.00
<b>Sub total</b>	<b>£25,669.67</b>

**Income from charged services & products**

Charged-for sessions	£10,400.07
Participant contribs (W.Learning)	£211.65
Product sales	£60.00
Consultancy	£2,300.00
Volunteering session charges	£1,072.00
<b>Sub total</b>	<b>£14,043.72</b>

**Cost of charged services and products**

Cost of charged-for sessions	£8,648.56
Cost of product sales	£15.00
Cost of consultancy	£2,012.50
Volunteering	£0.00
<b>Sub total</b>	<b>£10,676.06</b>

**Other income**

Annual Subscriptions	£135.00
Donations	£585.00
Bank interest	£0.00
<b>Sub total</b>	<b>£720.00</b>

**Overheads**

Rent	£1,000.00
Insurance	£869.34
Fees & subs	£437.06
Core resources	£375.79
Asset purchase (noticeboard)	£636.00
<b>Sub total</b>	<b>£3,318.19</b>

<b>Total income</b>	<b>£49,556.72</b>
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<b>Total expenditure</b>	<b>£39,663.92</b>
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<b>Net Income/Expenditure</b>	<b>£9,892.80</b>
Shares purchased in 2019-20	£50.00
Capital sales	£1,250.00

Balance in Bank Account brought forward from previous year	£10,735.01
Balance in Bank Account carried forward to next year	£20,627.81
Fixed assets (as detailed on balance sheet)	£4,271.00
Current assets - cash in bank at year end	£23,263.82
Current assets - debtors at year end due to unpaid invoices (paid in following yr)	£2,168.00
Restricted funds (grant income) carried forward to following year	£9,123.33
Free reserves	£16,308.49