



## 1. Overview

This report summarises Neroche Woodlanders' activities as a social enterprise over the twelve months to October 2021. Financial information is provided for the financial year April 2020 to March 2021, in line with reporting obligations to the Financial Conduct Authority, together with an overview of the financial position now, at October 2021.

During the past twelve months we have ridden the continuing effects of the pandemic lockdowns, and while these have held back some of the development we hoped to pursue, we have emerged relatively unscathed with a continuing strong level of activity and a very good reputation.

We have continued to focus on our core purposes of providing nature-based wellbeing work and volunteering, while looking after Young Wood. As the climate

and biodiversity crises deepen and become an ever-more central preoccupation of society, we need to continue to provide a space for people to contribute to looking after their local natural environment, while having the opportunity to strengthen connections with others, and invest in their own wellbeing.



For the first time in nine years we were without funding from Somerset Skills & Learning, yet our adult and family-focussed wellbeing provision has continued with different sources of support. Our flagship Wild Explorers families project, funded by Somerset Community Foundation, continued. We developed our holiday time provision for children on free school meals, and for families with disabled children. Meanwhile the Neroche Conservation Volunteers continued to meet almost every week. We further developed our woodland camp, this year by creating a tree nursery

and growing area. And we began restoring the coppice-with-standards structure in Cold Croft Coppice, which is an area of ancient woodland within Young Wood. Throughout, we continued to comply with all Government guidelines to ensure we are as Covid-safe as we can be.

In the last few months the Board has had to devote a large amount of time to re-registering Neroche Woodlanders with the Financial Conduct Authority, in order to allow us to claim charitable status with HMRC, and bring our governing documents up to date.



## 2. Organisation and Governance

### FCA re-registration

Early in the year we became aware that we would need to re-register our Community Benefit Society - Neroche Woodlanders Limited - with the Financial Conduct Authority, who oversee these Societies. This is to enable us to become an exempt charity; we had thought our governing document already allowed this, but were informed otherwise by HMRC. With support and professional advice from Co-ops UK, that process has begun, and a new entity is now registered. There are a few more steps to take we are advised that the process

should be completed by the end of the winter.

### Board of Directors

There are currently six directors: Dr Rosemary Viant (Chair), Barbara Wilcox (Treasurer), Jenny Archard (Secretary), Gavin Saunders, Sarah Holdway and Rebecca Gould. 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, Jane Embleton, Rowen Wilde, Tiff Lovedale, Sarah Churchill, Eleanor Haynes, Lawrence Bole and Gilly Notely. All staff are currently hired on casual contracts as freelancers. We have a flexible contract with a virtual administrator, Chris Heron, who does a lot of work in the background.

### 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 Woodland Wellbeing, Wild Explorers and Young Saplings, including Lucy Montgomery, Barbara Wilcox, Rebecca Gould, Hannah Montag, Jo Hind, Christine Langston, Joseph Jones, Andreas Hofmeyr, Sue Farrell, Richard Threlfall, Anna Stewart, Kim Russell, Debbie James & Alison Bevan.

Meanwhile Neroche Conservation Volunteers has continued to operate throughout the year, on roughly four Wednesdays per month. During the twelve months ending 20th October 2021, 41 task days took place, clocking up 287 person-days (or 1435 hours) of volunteer work (figures for 2019 were 25 tasks and 210 person-days). As well as Young Wood, as the lockdown restrictions eased the group was able to return to previous haunts including Mount Fancy reserve and Thurlbear Wood. There were some additional novel tasks including tree planting on the Cotley Estate, and helping with the harvesting and threshing of thatching straw for Inthatch of Bishopswood. Tasks were organised by Peter Maben, Nick

Milton and Gavin Saunders, with regular volunteer support from Paul Jones, Peter Woodcock, Peter Joyce, Mike Woodhead, Mike Rostron, Tim Woodcock, Chris Baker, Fred Constantine-Smith, Joseph Jones and Andreas Hofmeyr.



### Volunteer and staff development

This year we were offered free training opportunities linked to the Wild Explorers project, so some freelancers and volunteers have completed training in Self-care, Resilience and Wellbeing for Staff, Trauma Informed Approaches and Dealing with Parent-Child Conflict. Through Redstart we had a free Introduction to Safeguarding which was attended by people from the wellbeing team. We bought an outdoor first aid refresher course in September from Metabolous Education, which was attended by most of the staff team and several volunteers, to ensure our first aid qualifications remain up to date.

### Promotion and Publicity

Our website [www.nerochewoodlanders.org](http://www.nerochewoodlanders.org) has continued to develop during the year, and we use an online booking platform (Bookwhen) for charged-for events. 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.

We continue to be held up by Forestry England as a key example of independent use of the public forest estate for provision of social wellbeing and environmental gain.

We were visited by the new Chief Executive of the Forestry Commission, Richard Stanford, in early October.

### 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:

- Somerset Community Foundation
- Corton Hill Trust
- Open Mental Health (SPARK)
- Somerset Activity and Sports Partnership (conduit of Govt funding for HAF and Short Breaks)
- Blackdown Hills AONB
- Somerset West & Taunton Council
- The Halpin Trust
- Taunton Rotary club (for purchase of loanable toddler waterproofs)

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

- The Taunton One Teams
- SW&T Council
- Priorswood Community Centre
- The Link Centre
- Positive People
- Redstart Learning Partnership
- Holy Trinity School
- Minerva School
- Forestry England
- Butterfly Conservation
- John Binnie
- Somerset Wildlife Trust
- Knight Brothers Buses
- Woodsmith charcoal suppliers

### Wild Explorers

This project continues to go well despite the pandemic; it is funded by SCC through

Somerset Community Foundation, targeted at local families with 'needs' of some kind. Because of more lockdowns, we created and delivered more 'nature craft at home' packs, and in December we gave out packs to 28 families (60 children). We ran two 'Forest Fun' sessions - tasters to get new families into the woods - with nine families, though these were smaller than planned because of Covid guidance. We ran three blocks of six sessions for families connecting with some 18 families through the year. We have also run three blocks of parent-and-toddler groups connecting with another ten families. We ran more Parent Toddler sessions in spring/summer following the very successful start last year; these were well attended. In the spring/summer we ran another series of six Saturday sessions, and we aim to get families to attend regularly. The new autumn group has just begun.



The impacts of the project are beginning to show. One of the PFSAs who has recommended families to come along has been really surprised at the impacts on a young mother and SEND child, who have both become much more independent in just six sessions of attending. She is keen to refer more families. We have seen behavioural changes in the children and reduced stress in the parents, plus some being more willing to get involved in other activities. To date we have worked in depth with 18 families and overall supported 57 families.

### Families in the Forest

We ran one session of Families in the Forest with some funding from the Corton Hill Trust, bringing families that we have engaged with in the past back to the woods.

We provided transport for them to access the woods.



### Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) - Easter and Summer 2021

This central government funding, channelled through SCC and then SASP, is to enable children on free school meals to get fed and active in the school holidays. We bid for funding for the first round at Easter, and ran four days with around 16 children attending each one. We had free eggs donated by Fenton Farms, and lots of food to give away, so the team pulled together a series of hand-drawn egg-based recipes for children to take home along with some eggs. Children were enrolled in collaboration with Redstart Learning partnership schools in Taunton, so that we could target the most needy ones. These sessions were a great success, so we bid to run five days in the summer holidays and we again worked with around 16 children per day, plus running a Family Feast session at Lammas (the Celtic summer festival) with the most families we have ever had in the woods at one session (37 adults & children plus ten staff and volunteers) - even though it poured with rain!

### Sessions for Families with Disabilities - Short Breaks

We are now in a pattern of applying to the SCC Community Inclusion Team for funds for every school holiday, so that we can offer two woodland sessions for families. These

sessions usually see three to five families attending, often with a child who is on the autistic spectrum (ASD), has sensory processing issues, language delay (DLD) or attention hyperactivity disorder, and sometimes with physical issues. They are hugely rewarding sessions, with parents and children telling us how much they feel free and able to be themselves, not judged by those around them. Some families book in repeatedly which means we are able to create relationships and help them build skills. Sessions have three staff and two volunteers so that ratios are high.



### Woodland Wellbeing (adult groups)

We were successful in gaining Open Mental Funding to run adult sessions from April to August 2021. A number of people who had been to Wild Learning before the pandemic were keen to return, and new people were referred by various agencies. It was noticeable how nervous people were; the impacts of the lockdowns had a very big effect on this group. These sessions have a well-structured and yet simple format: tea, and toast around the campfire with a 'check-in' and talk about the day to come; a walk to explore the woods, with mindfulness exercise; practical crafts and activities including cooking lunch, and then a wrap up, again around the campfire.

Some quotes from attendees:

*"It provided a high point in our week - something to look forward to and reflect on. I gained an unexpected and very real appreciation of a supportive and diverse group. In addition, the acceptance by the team and group of X's dementia and his poor communication skills has given me the*

*confidence to take part in other group activities."*

*"Massive positive impact on feeling comfortable with people... usually only being able to spend a limited time with people due to de-personalisation, anxiety and OCD. Also feel lifted by nature and basic natural being and existence. Being able to eat - I struggle to, but can in this group and location and actually enjoyed it!"*

Overall 25 people attended the adult wellbeing sessions.

### Young Saplings

Young saplings is back in full swing with 11 parents in the group now, most being returners from the previous academic year. We already have a waiting list again, showing a real need for this provision.

### Way of Council and Vision Fast

Jenny continues to run regular Way of Council groups in the woods and online 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 again led an eleven-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 enable the participants to challenge themselves, to retreat and step into a different way of being in their lives.



### Off-site sessions

Again, many events we would usually attend do not happen or were hugely scaled back. We attended a Priorswood Community event in August, where our stall made wood cookies with children, whittled wands and bashed flowers onto flags. Although we did not count exact numbers, we worked with around 40 families that day.

### Products

We undertook two charcoal burns during the year and sold 370 kg (97 3kg bags and 40 2kg bags), most of it to a wholesaler, Woodsmith Charcoal, in Crewkerne and the rest direct to local buyers or through Churchinford community shop. Together this brought in £850 gross. This was the most charcoal we have produced in a year to date.

## 5. Young Wood

### Site management

We obtained a grant through the Blackdown Hills AONB Challenge Fund, to create a tree nursery and growing area at Young Wood. We levelled a plot next to the existing Cabin and tool store, and erected deer fencing around it. We built raised beds inside, and a small polytunnel, together with a drip-feed irrigation system fed from rainwater collected from the roof of the Cabin. The raised beds have been stocked with seedling and sapling oak, maple and lime which we will use to restock areas where conifers are harvested elsewhere on the site. The tunnel has begun to be used as a growing space for raising salad vegetables for campfire cooking, as an addition activity for wellbeing sessions.



During the year we also extended the covered area off the back of the kitchen with a permanent frame and canvas tarpaulin.



Over the winter we began coppicing a small coup of overstood hazel on the south east corner of Cold Croft Coppice. This part of Young Wood is mostly stocked with Norway spruce, which we hope gradually to harvest and extract over the coming years. The spruce stands over the previous old hazel coppice crop, which has declined to nothing in places while remaining fairly vigorous in lighter areas. The hazel needs to be re-coppiced to save the stools from failing, and needs to be cut on a rotation across a grid of coups. The coup we chose this time could be coppiced now because the spruce is sparse above it, allowing enough light for regrowth to take place. The harvested coppice wood will be gradually transported back to the pole barn to be used for firewood, charcoal and crafting purposes.

## 6. Financial Performance

### Financial year 2020/21

The Society's Unaudited Financial Statement for the latest accounting period, 1st April 2020 to 31st March 2021, is given at Appendix 1 at the end of this document. This shows that Woodlanders had a total income of £74,177 during 2020-21, and an expenditure of £57,811. 74% of income during the year came from restricted grant sources (including contract-based funds for delivery of defined numbers of learners) - up from 70% in the previous year. Due to Covid and our need to lockdown we received

grants from Somerset West and Taunton Council and the Halpin Trust, totalling nearly 16% of our income.

### **Financial year 2021/22 to date**

Following a difficult year for everyone we are getting back to normal with both sales and funded projects for families and adults. We have continued with our families work supported by Somerset Community Foundation and other smaller funded work, while school holidays activities have been funded through Somerset Activities and Sports Partnerships. The adult wellbeing sessions have been funded by an Open Mental Health grant. A continuation of this work is awaiting a further grant and a bid to the Lottery or similar source.

## **7. Looking forward**

This has been a very busy year with wellbeing and family work, especially with the new HAF funding in the holidays. We set out to develop our training provision, build stronger relationships with like-minded organisations, bring in more funding for flagships projects, widen our volunteer network and get new people involved. We have done reasonably well on the latter, and still have the aim of developing a training programme/course that enables us to help people transform their connections to nature. The sticking point with this is making time to develop the resources and market, which takes time away from delivery of projects - a balance we are still working towards redressing. This winter needs dedicated (and paid) time for key staff to develop those resources.

The Wild Explorers project will end in late 2022, so we are beginning to think about next steps. The reality is that term days have more capacity than holidays, so we are considering ideas to work with families through closer work with schools. The Woodland Wellbeing project is awaiting

funding for a winter start, and needs further funding to keep it going in the longer term, so we have some ideas which again need development over the winter.



Though we have achieved some notable progress with woodland work, and added tree growing to our range of activities, we still have some way to go to create the fully reciprocal balance between human wellbeing and woodland enhancement which is our objective and a key part of what our ethos. Part of the reason for this is lack of staff time, and part is lack of suitable equipment. We will be training more staff and volunteers in power tool use during the winter to help equip us for more effective woodland work, and we also hope to address the issue of how to extract and move timber around the woods.

*Dr Rosemary Viant  
Barbara Wilcox  
Jenny Archard  
Gavin Saunders  
Sarah Holdway  
Becks Gould*

October 2021

## Financial Statement for the period 1<sup>st</sup> April 2020 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2021

<u>Income</u>		<u>Expenditure</u>	
<b>Project grant funding (restricted)</b>	<b>2020-21</b>	<b>Project Grant Funded (Restricted)</b>	<b>2020-21</b>
SS&L (Wild Learning 7)	-	Wild Learning 7	-
Greggs Foundation (Wild Learning 8)	-	Wild Learning 8	£14,193.60
SS&L (Wild Learning 8)	£7,500.00	Wild Explorers - SCF	£11,875.00
SCF (Wild Explorers)	£28,813.00	Halpin Trust Grant	£4,330.21
SCF (Volunteering)	-	SCF Volunteering	-
Halcon One Team (Explorers and Short Breaks)	£4,927.00	Halcon One Team (Short Breaks; Explorers)	£3,242.15
Drandjeaw Trust	-	AONB Old/New woods	£8,158.89
Halpin Trust	-	Donations - expenditure	£460.66
Open Mental Health Woodland Wellbeing	£13,779.00		
<b>Sub total</b>	<b>£55,019.00</b>	<b>Sub total</b>	<b>£42,260.51</b>
<b>Income from sales; charged services &amp; products (unrestricted)</b>		<b>Cost of sales, charged services and products (unrestricted)</b>	
Charged for sessions	£2,215.60	Cost of charged for sessions	£1,882.95
Participant contribs (HAF, Short Breaks)	£130.00	Cost of product sales	£413.84
COVID Small Business Grant from SCC	£11,625.00	Cost of consultancy	£2,025.00
Crowfunder	£1,410.00	Volunteering	£1,324.00
Product sales	£525.00		
Consultancy	£2,300.00		
Volunteering session charges	-		
<b>Sub total</b>	<b>£18,205.60</b>	<b>Sub total</b>	<b>£5,645.79</b>
<b>Other income</b>		<b>Overheads</b>	
Annual Subscriptions	£55.00	Rent	£1,000.00
Donations	£908.00	Insurance	£0.00
Bank Interest	£0.00	Fees & subs	£339.18
		Core resources	£4,728.96
<b>Sub total</b>	<b>£953.00</b>	Asset purchase	£3,836.98
		<b>Sub total</b>	<b>£9,905.12</b>
<b>Total income</b>	<b>£74,177.60</b>	<b>Total expenditure</b>	<b>£57,811.42</b>
	<b>2020-21</b>	<b>2019-20</b>	
Net Income/Expenditure	£16,366.18	£9,892.80	
Shares purchased in 2019-20	£10.00	£50.00	
Capital sales	£3,836.98	£1,250.00	
Balance in bank account brought forward from previous year	£20,627.81	£10,735.01	
Balance in bank account carried forward to next year	£41,272.07	£20,627.81	
Fixed assets (as detailed in balance sheet)	£7,340.00	£4,271.00	
Current assets - cash at bank at year end	£41,396.81	£23,263.82	
Current assets - debtors at year end due to unpaid invoices (paid in following year)	£0.00	£2,168.00	
Restricted funds (grant income) carried forward to following year	£26,935.00	£9,123.33	
Free reserves	£14,461.81	£16,308.49	