



Annual Review 2024

For the year ending 31st March 2024



Welcome



I am delighted to introduce the 2023/2024 Annual Review for the year ending March 2024 – a busy 12 months of continued growth, learning and achievement. Notably, we have achieved more impactful delivery, expanded our partnership working and helped an increasing number of woodlands into management. I took the reins from my predecessor, Ian Baker, in December 2023. As we reach the mid-way point for most of our current funding, I am looking towards strategic stability, strengthening our core, and finding new funding stream opportunities as the charity for woodland and wellbeing in the UK. I thank all our talented staff, members, supporters, funders, volunteers and partners, without whom none of this would be possible.

CEO Simon James
simonjames@smallwoods.org.uk

About us

As the UK association for woodland stewardship and care, Small Woods believes in “growing together.”

We are a thriving community with a shared passion for UK woodlands which, when well managed and used, are vital to successful local economies, flourishing wildlife, and the wellbeing of local communities, as well as being hugely valuable in the fight against climate change.

Our vision

ENVIRONMENT: To enable more sustainable woodland management by supporting networks of woodland owners and managers with our knowledge and advice.

ECONOMIC BENEFITS: To use our community expertise to increase the number of productive woodlands and advise the best use of woodlands for their owners and/or managers.

HEALTH AND WELLBEING: To encourage the use of woodlands for social forestry through community projects, helping people get healthy the woodland way.

PRESERVATION: To educate to protect woodlands for the future by developing a culture for future generations that respects nature, heritage skills, and community.

Our year in figures

April 2023 – March 2024



63

staff members

32,814 ha

UK woodland
represented by
our members



53ha

directly
managed
by us



1,830

members received
advice through articles,
events and courses



22 SWA events
attended by **336**
members



4

magazines
and **21**
newsletters

21,194 social
media followers



457



people trained in
woodland skills and
traditional crafts

28% increase on previous year



2 woodland skills
apprenticeships

2,596



people supported
across the UK through
23 projects, training,
demonstrations, events,
and member support


SmallWoods



Our woodland management work

Current funding from the Environment Agency, Forestry Commission, and Severn Trent Water is yielding positive results. The Small Woods team is enhancing biodiversity through the Mercian Woodland Biodiversity Project and providing Mercian courses and workshops to train the sector in sustainable management. The Woodland into Innovation — Biochar project is exploring new markets for diseased ash, converting it into biochar for soil improvement and carbon sequestration, as well as producing traditional charcoal economically.

Resilience is a core focus, with efforts to assess woodland conditions and update management plans to promote species diversification, habitat restoration, and sustainability.

Greater and wider opportunities

Small Woods projects lead in pioneering sustainable economic growth, particularly through the woodland group scheme, which is developing a certification structure for small woodlands to become FSC compliant, opening opportunities for private investment in carbon sequestration and biodiversity. Training programmes from the Mercian project, Lost Woods, and Resilient Woods Network are expanding across the UK, offering new nationally accredited and non-accredited courses. These include updates to core courses on coppice management, green woodworking heritage skills, and sustainable woodland management.

8 woodland management projects across the UK

78 woodland skills and traditional craft courses

Our social forestry and wellbeing work

Social forestry and wellbeing activities have continued steadily with successful programmes across Wales and England. Our evaluation report highlights that 77% of participants showed increased wellbeing, 92% felt they learnt new skills and 94% felt that attending sessions had made them feel happier.

Using the five ways to wellbeing — Connect, Give, Take Notice, Keep Learning, Be Active — a range of programmes have run effectively, from conservation and woodland management to nature crafts, nature walks, mindfulness and everything in between. The Small Woods flagship project, Build a Bench, based at the Green Wood Centre, has been providing training for staff in Wales to set up new woodworking projects inspired by this programme.

Pioneering courses

Staff are now delivering Sustainable Woodland Management Training within our social forestry projects, as well as a rollout of Wellbeing in Nature Leader training. This pioneering course has been developed in collaboration with established outdoor training providers, bringing together decades of experience in outdoor learning and wellbeing.

Our online social forestry and wellbeing courses are also going from strength to strength with new courses now available.



1,752 social forestry participants
across the UK

94% felt happier after
attending sessions

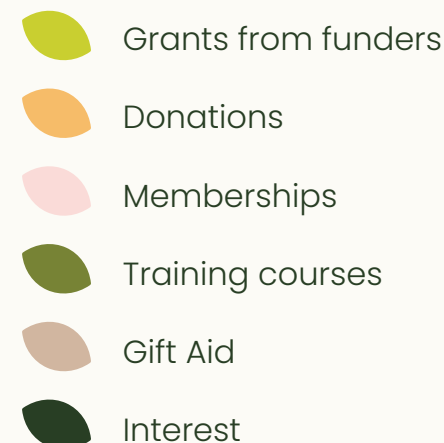
Our funding this year

While projects continue to be largely reliant on grant funding, work is underway to find more sustainable income sources. Current projects have been funded through statutory bodies, charitable trusts and foundations, enabling the organisation to deliver fantastic work by expanding, growing our reach and piloting important work.

We are hugely grateful to The National Lottery Community Fund, the Forestry Commission, Natural Resources Wales (NRW), the Environment Agency, the Swire Trust, Dulverton Trust and Garfield Weston Foundation for their continued support.

With many of our projects nearing completion, we seek to move towards sustainable, unrestricted sources. We continue to benefit from corporate supporters: Wesleyan, Severn Trent Water, Sprayway and Oboz, with Mountain Warehouse beginning to support us in 2023. Plans are already underway to develop our corporate offer to ensure Small Woods provides an attractive proposition for those wishing to invest in environmental causes.

A new gift shop has opened at the Green Wood Centre to raise funds while we continue to promote individual giving through appeals, donations and legacies. Our membership and training courses contribute to 6% of our overall income, with donations and legacy gifts continuing to grow. We plan to expand our membership offer, increasing benefits while engaging a wider supporter base.

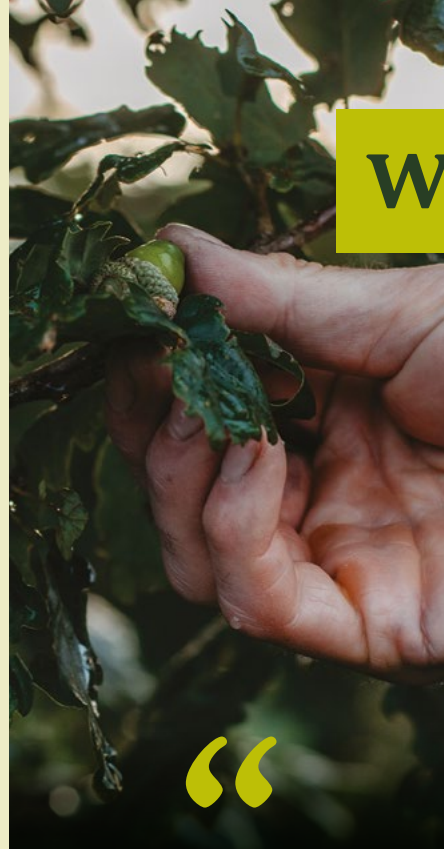




“

It cannot be overstated how much my life has changed since starting with Small Woods. I have friends, I am no longer socially isolated. Revolutionised my life.

Build a Bench project participant



“

Enthusiasm for woodlands makes us appreciate once more how lucky we are to have our woodland. Your organisation is going from strength to strength and making a positive difference to so many people's lives. Great to be part of it in a small way.

Member



“

I am continuing to learn and develop skills in a variety of crafts and woodland practices. The wealth of knowledge I have gained in a year and a half is amazing.

Woodland management apprentice



“

The course really helped me focus on documenting our small wood and understanding it better.

Course participant

Words from our beneficiaries

We'd like to thank to our funders and corporate sponsors for their support this year:



Ephesa UK Ltd



Get in touch

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