

# **The Hillyfield**

## **Application for a Multi-Use Building at The Hillyfield, Land Lying South of Harbourneford, South Brent, Devon**

### ***Planning Statement***

*[www.geo-ltd.com](http://www.geo-ltd.com)*

*June 2017*

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# 1. The Hillyfield

## 1.1. Site Description

- 1.1.1 The Hillyfield is an 18.5ha mixed agricultural holding on the southern periphery of Dartmoor National Park. It is in an agricultural area of small mixed farming and occasional hamlets, where the rolling green hills of the moorland margins are punctuated by steep sided narrow valleys with fast running streams and rivers flowing off of the moors. Woodlands are found mainly on the steep land in these valleys, as at Hillyfield. The area is within the designation 'severely disadvantaged area' on the 'Less Favoured Areas' Map of England used by the Rural Payments Agency and others.
- 1.1.2 The land lies south of the hamlet of Harbourneford, and north of Marley Farm and White Oxen Manor. South Brent and Buckfastleigh are within walking distance on National Cycle Route #2. Dartmoor National Park boundary is 200m to the South, marked by the A38 dual-carriageway. Although not easily visible from the site it's noise carries clearly into the valley.
- 1.1.3 A legal access to the Hillyfield is across the driveway of 'Brooke Cottage', Harbourneford. A new access to Hillyfield was granted planning permission from Drybridge Reservoir, about 300m from the A38 Rattery junction, and has subsequently been instated.
- 1.1.4 The holding is not prominent in the landscape from any public viewing points, though its higher margins can be fleetingly glimpsed from the A38 and through gateways in the surrounding lanes.
- 1.1.5 The 11 hectare woodland element of the holding runs along the steep sided slopes of the River Harbourne with rock features and significant climbs from 70m to 128m above sea level.
- 1.1.6 On the east facing slope lies the 4.28ha 'Hillyfield Plantation', a Plantation on Ancient Woodland Site (PAWS). This was largely felled and replanted with native coppice in 2013 by the current owner following a Statutory Plant Health Notice by the Forestry Commission (SPHN #11/00404/01). The felling and new planting has transformed a predominantly larch plantation into a mix of Douglas fir, oak stands and mixed native broadleaf, with a variety of native coppice areas. Hillyfield Plantation also includes 2ha of established mixed broadleaf woodland.
- 1.1.7 Also within the site, and managed together with Hillyfield Plantation, on the opposite valley slope is 'Tom's Brake', a 4.3ha semi-natural woodland including mixed plantation and mixed broadleaf, currently being cleared of larch and replanted due to a 2nd Forestry Commission notice (SPHN #13/00732/04).
- 1.1.8 The river valley bottom is an ecologically rich wet-woodland of alder and willow (with additional new planting of 125 willow stools for a short rotation coppice crop already yielding income and reduced flooding and erosion). This leads to the open level pastures downstream, which rise up to the east in two fields to the valley top. The southern edge of the holding has been newly planted with 2ha of mixed broadleaf woodland creating what is, despite the audible presence of the nearby A38, an attractive clearing in a wooded valley with no overlooking roads or developments.

## 1.2. Forestry Enterprise & Management

### Management

- 1.2.1 The Hillyfield is managed to provide ecological, economic and wider community benefits. Woodland management at The Hillyfield aims to support and enhance biodiversity whilst developing a viable woodland enterprise that stimulates and re-kindles a 'Culture of Wood' on Dartmoor.

- 1.2.2 Partly designated as Ancient Woodland, the Hillyfield has been managed for at least 450 years. Only in the past 35 years have the woods fallen into significant degradation, with little to no active management due to a failing woodland economy.
- 1.2.3 In partnership with Forestry Commission and Dartmoor National Park the current owner has completed work to remove significant laurel invasion and control bamboo and to address two Statutory Plant Health Notice (SPHN) notices requiring the felling of Japanese Larch.
- 1.2.4 Since 2010 the woodland areas have been brought into active management, working to a Forestry Commission approved Woodland Management Plan. This has been assisted by grant aid from EWGS funding and support from DEFRA through the RDPA Farm Improvement Scheme, contributing to a growing wood business selling timber products and firewood.
- 1.2.5 The planting schedule in the Woodland Management Plan at The Hillyfield was drawn up by Rupert Lane, who is a Chartered Forester and worked as senior woodland officer of Dartmoor National Park for 29 years.
- 1.2.6 Hillyfield is a typical example of a small-woodland in the UK. It has suffered significant neglect over the past 35+ years and certain features are in a critical condition. Before management recommenced in 2010 there was rampant infestation of invasive species that required considerable investment in time and resources to tackle. On top of the steeply sided valley terrain, the site had significantly challenged access to and within the woodland, and had suffered seriously from pests and disease. During the late 1970's large areas of Ancient Woodland had been removed and replanted as coniferous plantation by previous owners, and subsequently left without thinning or continued management.
- 1.2.7 This picture is similar for many of the small and unmanaged parcels of woodland throughout the UK, marginalized as less-productive land, often steep and rocky and difficult to access. Often then have been sold off separate to the main farm holdings which means that they do not benefit from the usual farm buildings and other structures which would have grown up to manage the agricultural and forestry use of the land as a whole.
- 1.2.8 The Hillyfield is a successful example of turning the tide of neglect and attempting to bring this important natural resource back into active and sustainable management for the benefit of the environment, rural economy, and landscape character.
- 1.2.9 Volunteers have contributed an enormous number of hours work over the last seven years. In just three years between 2012 and 2015 (excluding 2013) this equated to over 13,900 hours, or £90,000 of support in-kind (if calculated at minimum wage). On top of this, the project has been successful in attracting over £77,000 from Forestry Commission Grants for woodland improvements such as access, tracks and planting, as well as funding from DEFRA (through the RDPA), the RDPE, and Dartmoor National Park's Sustainable Development Fund (DSDF).

### Enterprise

- 1.2.10 The woodland elements of the Hillyfield had been neglected for at least 35 years. On top of this, the Plantation on Ancient Woodland Site, and other areas planted with Japanese Larch have had to be completely cleared of larch under order of SPHNs and are being re-stocked with mixed broadleaf, coppice, and conifer plantings. This has resulted in significant re-structuring of the woodland holding. This is work that was intended to be carried out eventually, although over a much longer time period, but was accelerated (with accompanying challenges) due to the SPHN requirements.
- 1.2.11 The challenges of small-woodland regeneration and Ancient Woodland restoration are significant, and the investment required is high, both in labour and money. Grant support has been an essential contribution.

- 1.2.12 Woodland products are hardwood and softwood timber grown on site, either used in the round or as 'added value products' through primary processing. Products include round-wood poles, firewood products, planks and cladding. As newly planted timber crops allow, coppice and greenwood products traditional to woodland management (including hurdles, brooms, pegs, charcoal etc) as well as biochar, a high value charcoal product used to enhance soil fertility, will be brought on stream.
- 1.2.13 The necessity of adding-value to home-grown timber in small woodlands for woodland enterprises is well understood. The economics of small-woodland restoration requires the woodland owner to add value wherever possible to timber grown on site and take advantage of other opportunities so as to be able to afford the investment required to bring the woodland back into active and sustainable management. This has been demonstrated in numerous case studies published in forestry journals including The Royal Forestry Society Quarterly (Alvecote Woods Vol.105 No.2, Sandhurst Copse Vol.110 No.4 see Appendix 1).
- 1.2.14 It can be seen both historically and to date that when this is not the case, and funds to continue active care of woodlands are not available, then woodlands which might have begun to be managed again would likely fall back into neglect. This is particularly relevant given that over the last five years grant support has reduced and is likely to continue to decline without European support, which requires woodland owners to think outside the box to provide a living income from a small woodland.
- 1.2.15 There is an established strong community network who purchase local timber products from The Hillyfield and come to enjoy activities on the land.
- 1.2.16 The woodland also provides non-timber forest products (such as berries, mushrooms, experiential products etc.), as well as occasional opportunities to enjoy the woodland for private and public events.
- 1.2.17 Volunteers are invited to take part in the hands-on management of the land through volunteer work schemes. Participants are invited to attend the monthly volunteer weekend / workday (held every month since 2010 directly supported by the DNPA SDF), for specific activities and tasks, as well as the seasonal forest worker opportunities.
- 1.2.18 In addition, the enterprise at the Hillyfield has enabled many to enjoy the special qualities of the woodland through:
- modest recreational and educational activities on the site
  - arranging private access agreements with local people
  - engaging the public in outreach events such as holding talks and stalls at shows etc.
  - arranging occasional courses and workshops
  - organising woodland open-days at Easter and the biennial Woodland Olympics event, which celebrates woodland culture on Dartmoor.
- 1.2.19 The vast majority of work taken place at The Hillyfield between 2010 and 2016 has been focused on improvements to the holding:
- the need to implement several major infrastructure developments to bring the woodland holdings back from neglect
  - the major undertaking of felling and extracting related to the two SPHN notices, whilst restoring the ancient woodland element of The Hillyfield through extensive replanting
  - the extraordinary level of planning negotiations required to continue and to secure the woodland business.

- 1.2.20 Over the five years between 2012 and 2016 the total income of the forestry enterprise has been over £132,000.
- 1.2.21 THMC Ltd, who manage the woodland, estimate the value of timber in the wood available over the next five years at over £250,000 if processed into best value products, with sustainable yields for the five year periods thereafter averaging over £72,000.

### 1.3. Planning History

- 1.3.1 The relevant planning history of the site is as follows:
- Prior Notification Application (ref: 0467/11) for renovation of existing tracks and creation of new tracks, no objection from LPA
  - Prior Notification Application (ref: 0297/12) for erection of three forestry storage buildings, LPA objection 18th June 2012
  - Prior Notification Application (ref: 0259/15) for erection of two barns, LPA objection 18th June 2015 – *being appealed*
  - Enforcement notice 1 issued 27th January 2016 – *being appealed*
  - Enforcement notice 2 issued 27th January 2016 – *being appealed*
  - Planning Application for hard-standing for forestry use (ref: 0040/17), approved 10<sup>th</sup> March 2017
  - Prior Notification Application (ref: 0001/17) for erection of one barn, LPA objection 25th January 2017 – *being appealed*.

## 2. This Application

- 2.1.1 This application is for a barn of 160m<sup>2</sup> identical to that applied for under application 0001/17 with the exception that the roofline has been raised by 0.5m to allow for the provision of two four bed dormitories in the roofspace and a simple shower and wash room. It is the addition of this space for the accommodation of volunteer workers which gives the need to apply for full planning permission.
- 2.1.2 It is our case on the appeal of the refusal of application 0001/17 that the provision of current workspace and welfare facilities for volunteer workers are development are reasonably necessary to the purposes of forestry on the holding and therefore permitted development. However, as they now form part of a building for which full planning permission is required the same case for covered workspace and welfare facilities for volunteer workers will be rehearsed here with the addition of the case for accommodation and volunteer workers in the roof space.

### 2.2. Need

- 2.2.1 The nature of the forestry activities at The Hillyfield has been a central issue in discussion over a considerable period of time between the applicant and DNPA. DNPA are very familiar with activities at the Hillyfield and have visited the site many times and hold numerous contextual documents for it<sup>1</sup>.
- 2.2.2 The proposed building has four elements – a welfare space for workers on site, accommodation for them over the welfare space, an enclosed covered workspace with doors, and an open covered workspace with one open side. The two workspaces are indented to be used as one and will be referred to as ‘the covered workspace’ from here.
- 2.2.3 The Hillyfield benefits from an unusual business model which eschews intensive, mechanised management of the woods in favour of continuous cover management utilising lighter machinery, horses and manpower. At the heart of this approach is the extensive engagement of volunteer labour. Over 4000 person hours are worked by volunteers on average each year. Some volunteers stay for several weeks, others make weekly or monthly visits. All benefit from rewarding work, and acquire training in and knowledge of woodland management. Although an unusual model it works well and is not unique to The Hillyfield.
- 2.2.4 Direct benefits of this model are that the woodlands are managed in a far more sensitive and ecologically beneficial fashion as the continuous regeneration of the woods is facilitated and heavy machinery is not used in the woods meaning that soil remains uncompacted and ground flora and fauna preserved. The local landscape also directly benefits as the character of the woods is maintained, rather than being destroyed by clear felling<sup>2</sup>, and is enhanced over time as the structure and species mix of the woods improved under active management.
- 2.2.5 There are also direct economic benefits as there is no imperative to extract timber quickly and in large volumes, and it is handled more gently. Timber is therefore extracted on an ongoing basis. Volunteer labour is key to the primary processing which goes on on site – producing firewood (logs), ‘rocket logs’<sup>3</sup>, and rough sawn timber – mainly planks used for cladding or decking. Processed timber has a far higher value than timber sold ‘in the round’ – up to 10 times greater. One forestry worker is also employed on the holding.
- 2.2.6 In summary, replacing machines with people at The Hillyfield is an established and proven business approach which has direct benefits to the habitats of the woods, the local landscape, the woodland enterprise and the local economy.

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<sup>1</sup> a copy of the most recent Hillyfield Vision, a composite of previous ones, is attached at Appendix 1

<sup>2</sup> with the exception of felling forced due to Statutory Plant Health Notices

<sup>3</sup> one log bonfires for gardens and events – see <https://www.rocketlog.co.uk/>

## 2.3. Covered workspace

- 2.3.1 The covered workspace is a place to work under cover, especially during very foul weather. It will be used (as the current one is) as a central space and meeting space for working groups, both volunteer residential workers and during volunteer days.
- 2.3.2 On a daily basis it will be used for activities such as:
- storage of hand tools including spades, de-barking irons, mattocks, chains, rope, tree-guards etc.
  - re-fuelling of equipment (chainsaw / strimmer)
  - general maintenance activities – sharpening of saws, fixing of tools, jobs requiring work-bench / vice / clamps etc.
  - timber drying space for useful timber for on-site projects.
- 2.3.3 In addition on occasion and mostly in wet weather it will be used for:
- shelter from rain to allow woodland management activities such as stripping wood, sharpening stakes and fence posts, splitting kindling, packing charcoal
  - making hurdles, making tree guards, making Rocket-logs, making and fixing tool handles
  - fence-making, gate-making and making other things for use around the site.
- 2.3.4 The space needs to offer both an open-sided space with sufficient clear-span area to be able to strip long lengths of timber, and also so that chainsaws can be used safely whilst under cover (due to noxious fumes), as well as a dry / warm room for activities that require a properly dry environment such as fixing equipment and tools. The enclosed room is also essential for working when weather is really too foul for being outside.
- 2.3.5 The need for such facilities has already been proven through the benefits and shortcomings of the existing facility (to be replaced with this one) as the centre of operations for operations for work-groups everyday as well as at the monthly volunteer workdays. It is an essential space, central to the site and close to the mobile sawmill providing a covered space to shelter during wet weather, allowing workers to continue to be productive between showers, as well as a workshop space to carry out a variety of tasks connected to the woodland management at Hillyfield.
- 2.3.6 All of the uses the covered workspace will be put to are ancillary to the management of the woods and the primary processing of timber, both small and large diameter thus extracted from the site.

## 2.4. Welfare room

- 2.4.1 The welfare room is needed to provide for the needs of volunteer workers and other workers on site. Its main uses will be for:
- daily meals, tea-breaks etc.
  - meetings, inductions & briefings (including site notice board)
  - first aid space
  - comfortable and (relatively) warm rest space for workers
  - electric charging point for personal equipment.
- 2.4.2 It therefore requires a decent cooking and eating area and rat-proof storage for food and kitchenware.
- 2.4.3 The European Commission have published a guide to Protecting Health and Safety for Workers in Agriculture, Livestock Farming, Horticulture and Forestry. It is a '*non-binding guide to best practice with a view to improving the application of related directives on*

*protecting health and safety of workers in agriculture, livestock farming, horticulture and forestry.'* and clearly states that

*'where you employ workers, you will need to provide sanitation and rest arrangements depending on the operation; provision of clean drinking water, canteens or lunch and break areas, toilets, showers and changing facilities, facilities for pregnant and breastfeeding women, communication facilities, a smoking policy'* p15

*'If workers and their families are living on the premises or if the farm is your family's residence, pay particular attention to their safety and health daily needs.'*

*'If your site is visited by schools, tourists or shoppers, remember that they are even more vulnerable since they are not familiar with the site and you are responsible for their safety.'* ...

*'Migrant workers and seasonal staff should not be overlooked.'* p19

- 2.4.4 It is therefore clear that the provision of welfare facilities is a requirement, not a luxury, for forestry workers.
- 2.4.5 As for the covered workspace the welfare room is intended to replace a slightly larger existing facility (6.9m x 6.6m in size), located in nearby pasture. This current welfare tent was erected in 2010 with funding from Dartmoor Sustainable Development Fund to encourage and support volunteer activities at The Hillyfield. There is an external table as well as the possibility to sit inside during foul weather.
- 2.4.6 The crew kitchen is used daily:
- in connection with work on the land as a kitchen for making tea and meals and as a rest-space with several comfortable leather sofas
  - for storage for food and kitchen equipment
  - for the notice board for workers to make notes and share task lists
  - as the location of the a first aid box for treating minor accidents. There is the accident book and information on Hillyfield for volunteers.
- 2.4.7 It is used monthly for the volunteer day as kitchen and eating space.
- 2.4.8 It is used two or three times a year for the woodland open-days and events taking place at The Hillyfield when a small gazebo is placed at the front from which food is served.

## **2.5. Sleeping accommodation**

- 2.5.1 Many of the volunteers working on site do so for periods of several days, weeks or even longer. They therefore need somewhere to stay overnight. They would make use of the kitchen in the welfare room and existing compost toilets, therefore the only additional facilities required are somewhere to sleep and wash.
- 2.5.2 In exchange for their labour The Hillyfield has to take care of volunteer workers – meeting their needs for food and shelter. This is a globally established model as found in schemes such as WOOOF (<http://www.woof.org.uk/>) and Workaway ([www.workaway.info](http://www.workaway.info)). Both are highly successful in providing valuable experience and training for volunteers and work for hosts. Volunteers expect to stay for free.
- 2.5.3 Volunteers are vital to The Hillyfield, however it would completely undermine its business model to then pay for them to be put up in local B&Bs or hotels. A cheaper solution is needed, hence the need to provide accommodation akin to a hostel in site for volunteers who can then be fed from the kitchen in the welfare space. This is a very specific type of residential use, specifically arising from the enterprise on the holding, and we would be very happy for it to be conditioned as such. Further, being part of a building otherwise used for forestry purposes, its residential use will be limited to this also through proximity.

- 2.5.4 At present the only residential use made of the site is by seasonal workers, some of whom live on site whilst working there, and then move on when this work ceases. They currently stay in two caravans stationed on site or sometimes in a yurt. These may rightly be regarded as seasonal workers, in that many times of the year there are forestry jobs to be done under the sort of management regime in place at The Hillyfield.
- 2.5.5 Under the Caravans Act it would be permissible to accommodate the forestry workers on site in caravans for most of the year, removing the caravans from site when they were not required. From the records Mr King-Smith has kept this would amount to no more than a few weeks each year. The caravans could be sited anywhere on site, rather than only at the most sympathetic location as is now the case.
- 2.5.6 The caravans are not, however, removed from site when unoccupied, as this would be logistically onerous. Whilst the caravans currently serve a valuable purpose on the site, it would be preferable to combine the sleeping accommodation with the welfare room so that the needs of the volunteers are met in one place, maximising the utility of one building and minimising landscape impact.

## 2.6. Location

- 2.6.1 The approved hardstanding in the pasture is the ideal location for both the covered workspace, welfare room and sleeping accommodation.
- 2.6.2 Following a community consultation exercise in December 2012 with local community residents in Harbournford, a commitment was made to move all noisy activities of processing timber away from the village and further into the woods. This was followed up by a questionnaire that demonstrated the support of village residents for this agreement.
- 2.6.3 This Location also allows for access to running water, essential for running some of the machines and timber cleaning activities.
- 2.6.4 For the kitchen the location also allows for access to running water from a spring which runs all year, there is only one other such spring at Hillyfield. The site is approximately central to all work areas and close to the compost toilet and volunteer workers' accommodation which proves optimally functional in the working day, especially when needed for health and safety purposes, or taking quick tea and meal breaks.
- 2.6.5 Overall the building will remove the need for the separate covered workspace, currently located in the woodland to the north west, the welfare tent in the meadow and the two touring caravans sited immediately to the north, siting all of these uses beside the main timber handling area for the holding.

## 2.7. Landscape

- 2.7.1 In the officer report on Prior Notification 0001/17 the officer noted:  
*The landscape character of the area is set out in the comments of the Tree and Landscape Officer and although not in public view, an isolated building of this size would have an adverse impact on the character of the landscape and if that planning application is made, would be considered contrary to policy DMD5 as well as policies COR1, COR3, DMD1a, DMD3 and DMD7.*
- 2.7.2 These matters were not relevant to a Prior Notification and appear to be pre-empting a planning application.
- 2.7.3 The character of the landscape in this location is a flood plain meadow – a natural pastoral landscape character. A barn is a commonplace feature of such a local landscape, managed, not an alien one, and the proposed barn is not excessively large (20m x 8m x 6m) and is to be located beside the now approved hardstanding in the same area (52m x 26m).
- 2.7.4 The site is not visible from any public vantage point or private houses.

- 2.7.5 It is an unusual situation to be making a planning application for a barn which the LPA have already stated is unacceptable via an inappropriate route. We also find their position inconsistent with that on application 0076/16 - full planning consent for an agricultural barn of similar size, in the same valley and adjacent to The Hillyfield, visible from public vantage point, also not grouped with other buildings. The building was for the storage of fodder and for lambing on a 11 acre (4.5ha) holding.
- 2.7.6 The Tree and Landscape Officer made no comment.
- 2.7.7 The LPA should behave consistently.

## 2.8. Policy

- 2.8.1 DMD5 requires that:

- 2.8.2 *Development proposals should conserve and/or enhance the character and special qualities of the Dartmoor landscape by:*

- respecting the valued attributes of landscape character types identified in the Dartmoor National Park Landscape Character Assessment;
- ensuring that location, site layout, scale and design conserves and/or enhances what is special or locally distinctive about landscape character;
- retaining, integrating or enhancing distinctive local natural, semi-natural or cultural features;
- avoiding unsympathetic development that will harm the wider landscape or introduce or increase light pollution;
- respecting the tranquillity and sense of remoteness of Dartmoor.

- 2.8.3 The proposed building is of traditional utilitarian appearance, and will be sited recessed into a traditional managed landscape – on a meadow with a backdrop of woodland. Such buildings are an integral part of such landscape character. Considering the holding as a whole this is a good location for the building, given the understandable views of the local community that the quarry is too close to residential properties. We do not agree, then, that there is conflict with DMD5 as suggested and will seek a fuller dialogue with the LPA on this. We are also struggling to understand why the hardstanding was found to be acceptable but this building, adjacent to it, would not be.

- 2.8.4 We also cannot see why COR1 is not satisfied, given that the building and its use will directly positively address criteria d), e), h), and m). Similarly for COR3 the use of the building will directly contribute to woodland conservation on Dartmoor and its landscape impact, as discussed above, is unproblematic. We can also see no problems in satisfying DMD1a, DMD3 (sustaining Dartmoor's woodlands is an important aspect of overall sustainability in the park), and cannot see the relevance of DMD7 as the site is not in a settlement.

- 2.8.5 National policy also provides clear support for the development and diversification of agricultural and other land-based rural businesses, whilst seeking to protect National Park landscapes.

### **3. Other Matters**

#### **3.1. Flood Risk**

- 3.1.1 The site is in Flood Zone one and so there is no need for a Flood Risk Assessment.

#### **3.2. Surface Water Drainage**

- 3.2.1 Surface Water from the roof will be disposed of in a soakaway to the south of the building.

#### **3.3. Foul Drainage**

- 3.3.1 There is an existing compost toilet for faeces and urine. Grey water from the kitchen sink and shower room will be processed via a horizontal reed bed system to the south of the building.

#### **3.4. Lighting Statement**

- 3.4.1 No external lighting is proposed.

#### **3.5. Renewable Energy Statement**

- 3.5.1 The building will be off grid with all electricity provided by the solar PV panels mounted on the roof. Heating and hot water for the welfare room and sleeping accommodation will be from a wood burner utilising firewood from the site.

#### **3.6. Transport Statement**

- 3.6.1 The provision of the building will not change the pattern or intensity of transport to and from the site as it is replacing facilities already there.
- 3.6.2 All access, except in the case of emergencies, will be made via the new access track to the north west rather than via the Harbournford access.

## Appendices

## 1. Alvecote Woods

# Alvecote Wood – our story

**Sarah Walters** describes how forestry novices went about turning a neglected site into award-winning conservation woodland.

Regional winner of the Small Woodlands Excellence in Forestry Award 2013 and Gold in Best of England Award 2014.

In 2013 Alvecote Wood won the RFS Excellence in Forestry award in the small woodlands category. This represented a major journey in just six years from neglected woodland with novice owners to an award-winning site.

We do not have a forestry background, although both of us have had a lifelong interest in conservation and wildlife. Stephen is an engineer and Sarah a doctor who took ill health retirement in 2006 due to the inherited disease cystic fibrosis. We frequently passed Alvecote Wood, just a mile from our home, on our regular cycling route, and in 2007 Stephen noticed a 'For Sale' sign in the ditch. We were drawn to the neglected site for its wildlife potential, and Sarah's pension lump sum gave us the wherewithal to compete in the sealed-bid auction. The previous owners were impressed that we wanted to do what they had been unable to do with the site, and after some last minute haggling, we became owners on 2 October 2007.

We knew that the 4.45ha (11 acre) wood was ancient semi natural woodland from its designation, and research into its history confirmed this to be the case, its unusual shape dating back at least to 1650 and almost certainly earlier, with woodland on the site before Domesday. Its characteristics

were not that of typical ASNW, having been heavily modified by its use as wood pasture through the 19th and 20th centuries, with grazing by sheep, pigs, cows, horses and goats. It was overgrown with effusive brambles, nettles and elder thanks to its high fertility. The majority of trees were pedunculate oak aged between 100 and 200 years, with almost no trees aged between these and saplings grown in the last few years since grazing ceased. Regeneration was not happening thanks to the stifling bramble overgrowth. The site was also becoming waterlogged thanks to failure of drainage, with trees dying and falling as a result. Access into the site was poor and on a dangerous blind bend, and access around the site was limited by bramble and successive generations of stock fencing in various degrees of decay. There was a lot of work to be done to realise our dream of managing it for wildlife and use by community groups.

## Seeking advice

The first thing we did was to seek advice from anybody and everybody we felt could help. The local Forestry Commission (FC) officer (Paul Webster) was of enormous help, as were the Warwickshire Wildlife Trust, the eminent local naturalist Maurice Arnold, the local Parish Council, Pond Conservation, Butterfly Conservation and many others too numerous to mention. We were encouraged to put in place a management plan, and to apply for various grants from the FC to help with fencing, improved access tracks and general woodland management. We also applied for a felling licence, and for permission to construct a shed for equipment including a tractor – permission that was granted owing to the presence on site of concrete foundations for early 20th century livestock housing. We were advised that we needed a tractor, and were lucky to find a 40-year old tractor in good condition at a local farm auction that could be put to work with relatively little renovation, as well as a rotary slasher at a reasonable price.



*Sarah and Stephen in the woods.*



*Betty's Wood showing ponds, growing trees and Alvecote Wood in the background.*

## Initial work

In the first couple of years we set to building a new, safer entrance, category 1 and 2 forestry tracks, equipment shed, six new ponds, and bridges across ditches. We also renovated the drainage on site, repaired and replaced boundary fences and removed internal partitions, many of which were hidden under profuse bramble growth. We cut new mown paths and rides, created an area for occasional camping, and planted new wildflower areas in the main clearing. We also planted a new hedge along the roadside and undertook tree safety work along the road and within, so that we could start a programme of public open days on a site that was previously closed to the public. Saplings that were struggling to escape the brambles were cut free and protected. In 2009-10 we started to restore an over-stood coppice on the site, as well as planting areas we had cleared of bramble with future coppice of ash, hazel and field maple. We also started to thin an area that had been protected from grazing and was now over-dense, with straggly trees, little light, and a few European larch trees out of character for the

site. Upon advice, we also removed the single mature sycamore that was generating a lot of seedlings capable of overwhelming the ancient oak woodland. Work continues every year to expand the coppice, clear the rather rampant large holly population, and encourage regeneration in areas where the canopy is broken.

## Expansion - Betty's Wood

In 2010 the neighbouring farmer approached us to see if we would like to purchase part of the adjacent arable field. This was marginal land, damp and waterlogged with evidently poor yield, but valuable from a wildlife perspective, linking our woods with another small remnant of ancient woodland, an ancient hedgerow, and across the canal with a SSSI. We were already busy, but by chance had money to buy this land after Sarah's mother passed away, and so 3.6ha (9 acre) Betty's Wood was born, taking the site up to just over 8ha (20 acres) in size. In 2010-11 we created a new wildlife woodland with a Woodland Creation Grant from the FC. This was carefully planned to incorporate a linking native hedgerow,

# Features



*Betty's Wood - regeneration to left and new planting to the right*

wildflower meadows, a natural regeneration area, five new wildlife ponds, areas of mixed native broadleaf woodland and wet woodland to be managed in different ways (coppice, continuous cover forest and wet carr). All species planted there were either growing already in the woods, or on sites nearby – oak, ash, hazel, rowan, cherry, white willow, goat willow, field maple, lime, silver birch, aspen, poplar, sweet chestnut, crab apple, hawthorn, holly, alder, alder buckthorn and in the hedge, guelder rose, spindle, and dog rose, with some emergent oaks. We sought to create as diverse a set of habitats as possible, and in total about 6500 trees have been planted, cloned or regenerated on this site, and it is already flourishing with diverse wildlife. The Director of Pond Conservation came along to help us develop our ponds, pacing out their dimensions and depths while we had a digger on site, so they could be as good as possible, and we have been richly rewarded.

## Wildlife

Our love for wildlife was the prime motivator for and remains at the heart of this project. The site was already very promising, but it has grown better and better with every passing year. We have a good range of red-listed and amber-listed birds, including yellowhammer, willow tit, lesser spotted woodpecker, barn owl, lapwing, skylark, linnet, spotted flycatcher, cuckoo, woodcock, jack snipe, kestrel, buzzard, hobby, sparrow hawk and reed bunting. We have already attracted the two target species of butterfly to our site through management of wildflower meadows (brown argus and dingy skipper) and greatly increased presence of common blue, small, large and Essex skippers, small heath, small copper, brimstone and other meadow butterflies, as well as having a notable population of woodland butterflies, particularly purple

hairstreak. There are promising signs of regeneration of food plants in our coppice, including violet and honeysuckle. Butterfly Conservation Warwickshire has undertaken moth monitoring on the site, with excellent results including a first-ever sighting for Warwickshire. Dragonflies and damselflies are also thriving in our eleven ponds.

When we took ownership we already had some interesting wildflowers including snakeshead fritillary, cowslip primrose and blue bugle. Bluebells carpet the woodland floor in spring. The wildflower variety and range has since expanded, and we also have a fantastic patch of southern marsh orchid in Betty's Wood.

In the last couple of years we have seen grass snakes in two locations, as well as common frog, common toad and smooth newt. As well as the common mammals on site (rat, field vole, bank vole, wood mouse, grey squirrel, fox, rabbit, badger), we also have stoats. Muntjac deer are less welcome and mean we have to protect all planting and coppice stools very carefully, using recycled stock netting and chicken wire to exclude the rabbits. We have identified common and soprano pipistrelles and noctule bats in the woods.

We are actively involved in survey and recording programmes for birds, butterflies, moths, dragonflies and wildflowers. The woods are now a Local Wildlife Site and Site



*Meadow brown.*



*Southern marsh orchid.*

of Importance for Nature Conservation and we work closely with Warwickshire Wildlife Trust to ensure they are managed to maximum potential. Every year the range of wildlife increases; only this morning, I heard raven calling, and saw a flock of long-tailed tits using our new hedgerow to pass from one piece of woodland to another. Lapwing have already found our new ponds, and linnet, goldfinch and siskin feed on the teasel growing on their banks, and

bullfinch have found our coppice. We had an exciting sighting of a white admiral butterfly last summer. The site is alive and improving every year.

## Public Engagement

We were keen right from the start to engage the local community and offer them the opportunity to visit and enjoy the woods and the wildlife. However we were also keen to preserve the undisturbed character of the woodland and the sanctuary offered to wildlife away from people, paths and dogs. We struck a balance by starting a programme of monthly open days running from March to November each year, with guided tours, woodcraft demonstrations and a craft stall. We have also started opening the woods once a week for two hours on Wednesday evenings in the summer months. Community groups are also welcome to the woods, and we have had multiple visits from and camping by the Scouts, as well as visits and tours for local wildlife, birdwatching, natural history and other groups. Schools are also welcome, although access is an issue, as are the lack of toilet facilities, and we have undertaken our CEVAS (The Countryside Educational Visits Accreditation Scheme) training.

Sarah studied a professional photography course and held her final exhibition for it in the woods, and now runs photography workshops in them. We have also welcomed other activities including wedding and fashion photo-shoots.

There is a fantastic group of volunteers who helped us plant Betty's Wood, as well as helping with coppicing and general woodland maintenance during the winter. We have also welcomed people from the Starfish project (which helps people with mental health, drug and alcohol problems) to a work party in Betty's Wood. Haymaking also needs

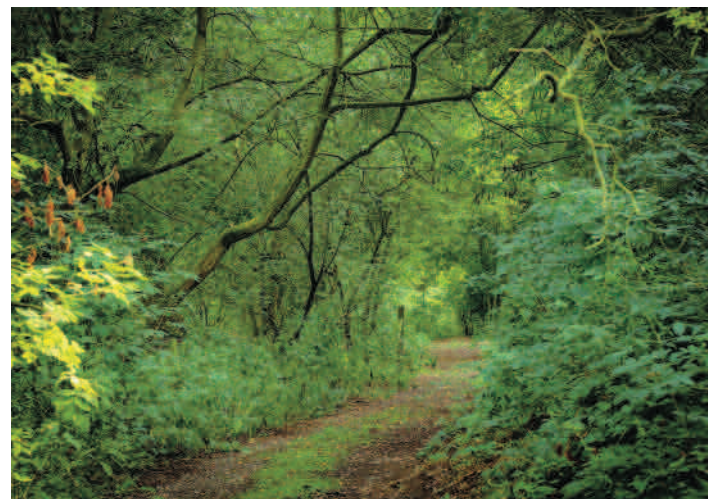
volunteers, and their help generated a good crop of hay for local horse owners in 2013.

Both of us have experience of website design, which helped develop our active website, and we also make use of social media including a blog, Facebook and Twitter. The latter have proved very successful in helping to engage the local community and supporters, and Twitter proved the best way of engaging new volunteers. Upon invitation, we are also very willing to give talks to wildlife and other community groups, and usually give about five or six talks a year. We are always willing to welcome people to the site by appointment. This year we hope to develop a guided walk using QR codes that visitors with smartphones can use to access information at various points round the woods.

## Products

Our priority is the wildlife, but that doesn't mean that wood and hay arising from management for wildlife cannot be used! Initially, we were constrained by lack of space for seasoning firewood, and were only able to supply ourselves, but in late 2012 we completed a new wood-drying shed, and we have permission to extend this. As a result we can now offer bags of seasoned firewood for sale at our open days. We also keep better quality wood for production of slabs for use as table tops and benches, although this has to wait until we have enough to hire a mobile sawmill for the day.

Sarah also enjoys green woodturning, making small items such as garden dibbers, rolling pins, tool handles, chair legs, cord pulls and mushrooms. We both do a bit of chainsaw carving, making simple stools and toadstools. We have plans to make rustic furniture and walking sticks, and when our coppice is cut again, and when Betty's Wood comes online,



*Main path at Alvecote Wood.*

# Features



*Stephen talking to a group of visitors on one of our open days.*

there is the potential for beanpoles, stakes, pea sticks and other coppice products. In 2013 we generated 140 bales of dry wildflower seed hay for local stables. Production of craft products, seed hay and firewood are likely to expand in future as Betty's Wood grows, and our coppice becomes more productive.

## Future plans and landscape-scale conservation

Our site sits in the valley of the River Anker adjacent to the Coventry Canal, across which there is a SSSI. There are several other wildlife sites in the area, as well as areas being managed by farmers under stewardship for wildlife. There are also initiatives to develop other wildlife areas with public access along the canal and in the villages and towns by various landowners including the local councils. We could see the potential for this area to become a landscape-scale conservation area, provided the efforts were coordinated, and ultimately this could draw in more funding. In 2011 we instigated the Anker Valley Project and have already held multiple meetings with various stakeholders including Warwickshire and Staffordshire Wildlife Trusts, Canal and River Trust, Environment Agency, Forestry Commission, Natural England, Butterfly Conservation, North Warwickshire Borough Council and local wildlife enthusiasts. We hope to set up a landowner meeting to take forward some demonstration sites that have been identified. The Anker Valley Project will hopefully deliver benefits for wildlife and people into the future, and link with other landscape-scale projects such as the Tame Valley Partnership and the Central Rivers Initiative.

## Advice for the novice woodland owner

Owning woodland is a fantastic thing – but it can be hard work and involves a steep learning curve. Our advice would be, above all, to seek and take advice from people who can help you. The Forestry Commission, Wildlife Trusts, Woodland Trust, Natural England, RSPB, Butterfly Conservation, Pond Conservation – anybody who has the expertise that you need. Also get some training in the aspects of woodland management that you need – we have trained in coppicing, taken our chainsaw qualifications, trained in wildlife survey methods, green woodworking and done various courses on tree diseases, woodland planning, tree safety, European Protected Species, First Aid, Wild Play coordinator, CEVAS accreditation and so on. We have also learned a lot from our volunteers, local naturalists who visit the site, and people with farming experience who have helped us learn how to use some of our equipment. Even if you are an amateur owner, you can achieve a lot more if you adopt a professional approach. It doesn't mean you cannot just enjoy the woods – we do this a lot – but you will achieve a lot more, make a bigger difference and ultimately enjoy it more. We entered the RFS competition not because we thought we would win, but because we wanted to seek the advice of the judges, and saw it as an opportunity to improve – and would do so again. We will keep on seeking advice, keep on learning and keep on improving – we owe it to our beautiful woods, during our short stewardship, to do so.

**Sarah Walters** is a retired doctor who, with her husband Stephen Briggs, own and manage Alvecote Wood, a small ancient oak woodland in North Warwickshire that was recipient of the RFS Excellence in Forestry Small Woodlands award in 2013.

Email: [sarah@pragmasis.com](mailto:sarah@pragmasis.com)

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## Excellence in Forestry Awards

**Winner: Small Woodlands 2013**

### Name of Wood

**Alvecote Wood, Robey's Lane,  
Warwickshire B78 1AS**

### Background



*Owners Sarah Walters and Stephen Briggs, bringing professional standards to small woodland management*

Owners and directors Stephen Briggs and Sarah Walters bought Alvecote Wood in 2007. At the time the 4.5 hectares of predominantly oak Ancient Semi Natural Wood (ASNW) had been neglected for around 15 years. It was also over-fertile due to overgrazing in the 20th century.

They also bought an adjacent 3.6 hectares arable field which they planted as a new woodland in 2010-11. Known as Betty's Wood, this area provides links from Alvecote Wood to other nearby areas of conservation.

The owners carry out most of the woodland management themselves, under an FC Woodland Management Plan and EWGS grant support, with occasional help from directly supervised contractors.

The woodlands are managed primarily for wildlife and biodiversity and for use by community

groups. They have been adopted as a Local Wildlife Site and Site of Importance for Nature Conservation by Warwickshire Wildlife Trust.

### Managing the trees

Judges were impressed by the transformation of the original woodland from heavily neglected to exemplar woodland with good natural regeneration of oak. Coppicing has been re-established and the owners have also been actively cultivating acorns and cloning.

In Betty's Wood the owners have aimed to extend the natural mix within Alvecote Wood using predominantly oak, birch and other native broadleaves.



*New planting in Betty's Wood blends in to the established woodland and shows effective use of herbicides*

Sound silviculture is being practised. The need to control competing vegetation in planted areas and where there is natural regeneration has been recognised. Herbicides have been effectively used. Quite often, small woodland owners are reluctant to use herbicides because of a perceived ill-effect on the environment. Given the wealth of bird and insect life judges saw at Alvecote there is no such problem here.



*Coppicing had been re-established and saplings are protected from deer attack.*

Within Alvecote Wood the owners have not been afraid to cut down trees, where prudent, to allow additional light into the woodland and encourage natural regeneration and wildlife.

Managing for timber is not a priority, but some timber craft products are now produced and sold at open days.



*Where an old tree has been felled, added light on the woodland floor encourages regeneration and biodiversity of flora and fauna*

## Managing for wildlife

A proactive approach has been taken to creating additional ponds, establishing wildflower meadows, and installing bird boxes. Advice has been sought from a wide range of nature and conservation groups.

As a result existing species have thrived and new species have been encouraged. The woodland now supports a number of red-listed bird species and locally rare butterflies.

The owners have plans to continue this work, linking in with the Anker Valley Project, which focuses on nature conservation in an area between Nuneaton and Tamworth.

## Benefiting the landscape

The woods are visible from the Coventry Canal and from a public road. Planting has avoided straight lines, to provide a natural blend into the local landscape.

## Managing for access



*Informal paths through Alvecote Wood*

There are monthly Open Days from spring through to autumn with guided tours, displays and craft stalls. The owners open the wood to scouts, schools, wildlife groups and community groups for general visits as well as just for camping. They are happy to open for any interested group upon request.

The owners have been very grateful to the Forestry Commission, the Warwickshire Wildlife Trust, the Pond Conservation Trust and many others for advice and support throughout the project.

Find out more at [www.alvecotewood.co.uk](http://www.alvecotewood.co.uk)

**The 2013 Small Woodland Award was sponsored by**

**Wood-Mizer**  
*from forest to final form*

*Category judges were Tim Sawyer and Rob Guest, who have both held senior posts in the Forestry Commission in England.*

# Features

## Making a Small Woodland Pay

From 2004 to 2014 **Patrick Mannix** concentrated on revenue generation to fund the operation of his woodland. Now concerns about regeneration and tree health, essential for sustainability, have diverted his attention.

**M**y interest in trees originated in the 1940s, when my elderly grandfather expected me to recite the names of trees on our afternoon walks near Lancaster, and later during summers spent on my uncle's smallholding on the edge of Bucklebury Common in Berkshire building barns, cutting logs, digging drains, etc.

I purchased the 32ha Sandhurst Copse and Sheepwalk, part ancient, mixed broadleaf woodlands, between Shamley Green and Farley Green in the Surrey Hills AONB in 2000. The early stages involved getting to know the property and the neighbours, including establishing a system for managed access for local walkers. I regarded it as selfish to own such an amazing place and not to share and allow others access to it; but on (my) terms! The relationship with the local community proved invaluable in resolving later problems with the local Planning Authority regarding the sawmill and other barns.

At the time my thesis was that woodland of this type only existed because it had been worked in the past, to generate valuable product, and it needed to do so in the future to cover its costs. Giving permission to walkers necessitates insurance and the work to keep paths clear and safe; no mean feat with current weather-related growing conditions of bracken and bramble! I set about producing and selling product. My aim was to demonstrate the revenue streams that could be generated to support a woodsman working the wood on a sustainable basis. The latest growth of the sweet chestnut coppice was 20 to 25 years old. Initially I worked with Mick, an excellent old country hand, and learned how to fell and process the material. Mick worked sweet chestnut for fencing and needed material for his pheasant pens – he was

also gamekeeper for a local shoot. Early product was traditional split fencing rails, posts, tree stakes and firewood logs. Definitely not enough to live off!

The significant breakthrough came when I purchased a petrol driven Woodmizer LT15 sawmill. Capable of processing up to 30 inch diameter logs, this was the smallest model and fortunately without wheels. Anything mobile would be stolen! The immediate purpose was to cut timber for construction of barns, including the cladding for the sawmill itself. My earlier firewood barn was constructed from roundwood posts and split chestnut rafters.

Access to the saw immediately opened up a panoply of opportunities. An early conclusion was that, as a small woodland owner, you do not make enough money by selling timber, you must add value on site. Do not sell timber to the person who is going to make picnic tables to sell to the pub, make the tables on site and sell them to the pub. By adding value on site you generate more revenue and use less timber, which means that the area of woodland required for



*Sawmill barn built by the author, clad in sweet chestnut cut on the LT15 Woodmizer.*

# Making a Small Woodland Pay



*1.5m x 100mm sweet chestnut waymark posts for the local Council for use on bridlepaths and footpaths.*

sustainable operation is reduced. If as woodland owner you do not have the skills, then join forces with someone who has. If the woodland is not large enough for long term sustainability then join forces with other woodland owners in the vicinity. The sawmill itself could be used on behalf of other local woodland owners.

My largest initial customer was the local council, I had the opportunity to quote for sweet chestnut hardwood waymark posts for bridlepaths and footpaths replacing treated softwood posts.

Other products made and sold included fence panels, picket fencing, oak beams for pergolas, fence posts and material for boardwalks.

Timber for revenue production is primarily sweet chestnut coppice. I have moved the coppice cycle to 30-35 years so that the material is large enough to process on the sawmill. Mature trees, 100 years or older (the oldest is c.320 years) are left to grow on, eventually to become veterans. Mature sweet chestnut of 80 years or less may be felled to provide timber and then to re-grow as coppice adding to that stock. All the barns and fencing on the site were constructed from this source. It is the ultimate sustainable resource, you do not even need to plant after felling!

Oak is also used for product, in particular beams for pergolas, etc. There are c.550 mature oaks on site. The intention is to identify the most important 50 or so for preservation and to fell the rest on a 70 to 90 year cycle, i.e. about six per year. However, problems with regeneration currently preclude use of this resource, except in the short term for ones in terminal decline, where the canopy has declined to 5% or less. My policy is that there must be at least ten healthy three-year saplings in order to fell each mature oak.

Silver birch is used for firewood. There are differing views on silver birch; it is one of the highest in calorific content, burning under controlled conditions in a stove is no problem, but very dry in an open fire it can burn quickly. I used to season for two years under cover; but would in future reduce that to one year or less.

The RFS South East Division visited the woodland in June 2011 and in reporting the visit, it was described in the Surrey Advertiser, "as an example to all such wood owners".

In 2013 and 2014 I reached the stage where I could demonstrate the spectrum of what was possible. Revenue was approaching £10,000 pa, without any active marketing. The site could probably support 5-10 times that activity on a sustainable basis.

In addition to the timber products, revenues were also generated by fees from use of a site for Forest School Teacher Training, small fees for regular visits from a local specialist school for severely autistic children, small fees for presentations on the wood to local organisations and for organised tours of the wood and deer control.

The picture would not be complete without reference to costs. All work on site, including construction of barns, felling, conversion of timber and manufacture of products is carried out by the owner, with the assistance of a part time gap student, or similar, in winters with a heavy felling programme. Fuel, equipment maintenance and insurance are ongoing costs.

Essential equipment includes a vehicle (old Land Rover Defender 90), Ifor Williams 2 ton trailer, LT15 Woodmizer sawmill, manual Tirfor winch, cable and rope, chainsaw and cutters for bracken and bramble. The relatively low level of utilisation of costly equipment is a concern financially; but sharing equipment is not straightforward.



*Sweet chestnut fence panels made from 0.5 and 1 inch offcuts in production of waymark posts.*

# Features



*Vigorous; but distorted, growth of sweet chestnut following frost damage to the lead bud, the remains of which can be seen!*

However, long-term sustainability of revenue generation is dependent on being able to grow timber trees. I have enough sweet chestnut coppice for 30 years and enough oak for 70 years; but beyond that is not certain. I have encountered serious problems with regeneration of both oak and sweet

chestnut to the extent that my efforts are now directed at this, and no longer, in the short term, revenue generation.

In six out of the last eight winters, sweet chestnut has lost its lead bud to frost. The form of older sweet chestnut coppice and trees on site demonstrates that this did not occur within the previous 25 or more years. If the lead bud is lost, nature does not care, it has many spare side buds! That is fine for seed; but not for timber. It appears to be the juxtaposition of the lead bud at a particular stage and a frost. The recent, more benign, winters may well exacerbate the problem, the bud reaches the critical stage earlier, there is more winter left and it only needs one frost. In a more severe winter the bud does not reach the critical stage until later. Currently all we can do is wait a few years and see what shape the growth adopts.

Regarding oak, although the location is not brilliant for oak (sand), 80-100 years ago oak of good form grew in the woodland. Now it is almost impossible. Leaf roller moth, frost, mildew and other causes result in successive loss of lead buds. What has changed?

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# Making a Small Woodland Pay

- Weather?
- Pest, pathogens and diseases?
- Depletion of nutrients?
- Soil microbiome?

All four are interrelated. Management of and potential depletion of nutrients in woodland is a very under researched area. I am working with Dr Glynn Percival, Bartlett Tree Research and Visiting Lecturer at Reading University on an assessment of this for the site and whether it may underly some aspects of the problems with oak health.

David Rose, the erstwhile head of Tree Health at the Forestry Commission Research at Alice Holt, said several years ago, when visiting the site, that "it was probably something in the ground"!



3-5 Year old oak struggling with continual loss of lead bud, and mildew.



Oak, 52cm dbh, c.100 years. On the 1846 tithe map this area is labelled as "poor arable field", raising the possibility of nutrient exhaustion.

**Patrick Mannix** has owned, managed and worked Sandhurst Copse & Sheepwalk since acquiring the woodland in 2000. The overall objective is to leave the woodland in better condition in 30 years time, to maintain the character, to allow access, to use the woodland for the benefit of others, to generate revenue to support the woodland and to personally enjoy it!

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Email: pavm@globalnet.co.uk

## Share your experiences of owning or managing a woodland via the QJF

If you would like to share your experiences of woodland ownership or management, as Patrick Mannix does in his article, the Editor would be interested in hearing from you. Whether this relates to a small woodland or a vast forest estate, constitutes a success story or remains a suite of ongoing challenges, there is value in sharing your story.

For guidance on making a submission, please contact the Editor at [qjf@rfs.org.uk](mailto:qjf@rfs.org.uk).



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## 2. Hillyfield Visions

# Hillyfield Vision

## Overview

The Hillyfield is a classic example of agricultural land that has been sub-divided and left untended. Land now in need of significant, yet sensitive, restorative work.

Designated Ancient Woodland, and currently a PAWS site, it is rich in flora with a near constant belt of native bluebells throughout the woods.

Access to the Hillyfield is limited and the working terrain is steep with poor rides for woodland management. The Forestry Commission has helped with funding towards rides developed in winter 2011 and 2012 with access enhanced Spring 2016.

To comply with the order to fell the Larch at Hillyfield, there was a choice of employing large-scale forestry harvesters who would use heavy machinery and compact soil integrity, plus remove all Larch from site to take to Wales to chip. Alternatively it could be decided to manage the felling on site, using small-scale machinery with hand-felling. This would allow for small-scale sustainable local production that adds value and supports the local economy as well as providing materials necessary to develop the Hillyfield itself and providing greater wildlife and landscape value.

The work on felling the Larch has now substantially been completed and the focus is moving to processing the felled timber and back to the management of the holding as a whole.

## Vision

The Hillyfield is an example of how small woodland regeneration can generate a viable woodland enterprise, provide local timber for the local market, offer multiple community and ecological benefits, and inspire people to respect, enjoy, and cherish the natural world.

The holding is made up of two parts:

- 27 acres of mixed woodland being brought back into active management whilst providing community and ecological benefits
- 18 acres of pasture are managed under organic stewardship to raise and breed traditional and rare-breed livestock, and an orchard including the 'Hillyfield Hens'

## Themes

Well-managed mixed woodland regeneration project supporting and enhancing a diverse woodland ecology

- ecological benefit is at the centre of all our decisions.
- we have successfully felled and replanted over 3ha of PAWS with mixed broadleaf and coppice, and planted over 2ha of new mixed broadleaf woodland.

Dealing with disease and managing pests

- we are responsive to disease and pests in the woodland, actively controlling or eradicating where appropriate
- we are actively felling larch due to SPHN<sup>4</sup>, and have successfully removed or controlled invasive species including 4ha of Cherry Laurel, as well as Japanese Knotweed, Bamboo, and Himalayan Balsam
- we actively control and manage grey squirrel and deer populations to support natural woodland regeneration and provide NTFPs<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup> statutory plant health notice

<sup>5</sup> non timber forestry products

A viable woodland business providing local timber for the local market

- we sell firewood, planked timber, willow, and non-timber forest products (e.g. wild food and herbs)
- people are happy to know where their wood comes from, and recognize the environmental benefits of buying locally sourced timber.

Community Benefit – Engaging people in practical land management, learning rural skills, and enjoyment

- since 2010 we have held a monthly volunteer weekend attracting between 1 and 30 people each day
- we offer apprenticeships and short to medium term residencies for forestry workers (Wwoof, Helpex, Workaway)
- we help develop and activate a network of people passionate about woodlands and wood-skills
- we host events on the land to engage and inspire people in rural skills, sustainable livelihoods, and enjoy the special qualities of the Hillyfield
- we offer learning opportunities in woodland-management skills.

# Vision Appendix – Forestry Commission Approved Woodland Management Plan 2014 - 2024

## A long-term vision for the woodland(s)

- A thriving, healthy mixed woodland landscape maintained over the existing footprint with minor areas of additional woodland & habitat creation.
- Regeneration of larch clear fells, through significant percentage of natural regeneration, accepting more or less all species found on site today including 'advancing natives' such as beech and sycamore that prior to Phytophthora and Chalara would not have been favoured.
- Small stands of douglas fir (@6% in ASNW) will provide saw logs and site diversity ecologically and in terms of future product potential
- Structural diversity, severely impacted by phytophthora, will slowly return through working coppice and retention of a high proportion of over mature trees into senility.
- Vertical structural diversity provided by coppice, coppice with standards and keeping a close watch for new diseases.
- Habitat and associated wildlife interest, especially birds and butterflies, will be significantly higher than today primarily from increased open space and coppice activity.
- Increasing number of veteran and future veterans supporting hollows and cavities.
- Dead wood, both standing and fallen will be abundant.
- Invasive species will not be present on the estate
- Ash will still be present through strict monitoring and effective control to eradicate infected trees before spreading across the estate.
- An area (1f) is designated as a forest glade with specimen tree walk
- Active deer and squirrel management will be on-going.
- The estate will be appropriately kitted out with all equipment necessary to manage the land and process material in-house.
- Forestry and 'added value' products will be providing regular employment.
- Management to improve biodiversity and the growing timber and coppice stock will generate a sustainable income through firewood, charcoal timber and added value sales through development of quality local grown products.
- A community supported firewood scheme will be supplying firewood at a guaranteed moisture content of less than 25% to up to 75 clients within 7 miles of the wood.
- Appropriate buildings will be installed and equipped to add value to timber through milling and manufacture and for air and kiln drying with zero waste.
- Appropriate buildings, both permanent and temporary, will be providing a healthy work environment
- Zero carbon processing and drying through micro hydro and solar systems.
- Grant aid will have been sought to support emerging and on-going projects.
- A wide range of volunteers will be engaged in activities at The Hillyfield: BTCV, MoorTrees, Taskforce, Devon Youth Team, South Brent After school club, local schools, Devon Rural Skills Trust, WOOFER's and individuals from near and far

- Links strengthened with several education institutions using The Hillyfield for education and training including: Bicton college, Plymouth University, Schumacher college natural building course, South Brent & Dartington Primary Schools.
- The estate will be providing training and skill sharing on a range of subjects beyond forestry charcoal production, tree identification arboriculture and land management, scything, natural medicines & wild foods
- The estate will be an exemplar with opportunities for other land-owners and interested parties to attend a range of activities, join workshops and gain hands on experience through working demonstrations.
- A detailed log with summary reports will be a key tool for the benefit of the estate and those wanting to do something similar.
- A community interest company will be fully functional, engaging young people and adults in rural skills and sustainable livelihoods with annual woodland event days, offering a fun day to learn about woodland crafts and benefits of management through games and activities.
- The agricultural holding, mainly permanent pasture, but utilising the woodlands, will be grazed by sheep and cattle with chickens, ducks and geese with a focus on rare breeds, using working horses to prepare and harvest the land partially following permaculture principles
- Existing ponds will be producing fish
- A herbarium will be established with a tree nursery to help propagate local woodlands