

Chairs report to the June 2023 Annual General Meeting of Raincliffe Woods Community Enterprise CIC. November 2021 to October 2022

People

Over these 12 months the organisation has grown considerably from just one employee, the Community Woodland Manager, to three, with the addition of a Heritage Woodland Officer post which started in May, funded through the North York Moors National Parks Farming in the Protected Landscape (FiPL) with further support from the NHS Green Social Prescribing (Test & Learn) Programme. Also in May our Events and Outreach post started, funded through the Heritage Lottery Platinum Jubilee Fund which enables us to relaunch the Secret Wood Event which was well attended.

We were delighted to recruit Rob Weatherley to the post of Heritage Woodland Officer in October 2022 when the previous post holder left. Robs enthusiasm for the outdoors and his commitment to RWCE CIC was obvious well before his appointment with his volunteering time towards our events.

At the end of October we were very sad to hear that Paul Thompson our Community Woodland Manager would be leaving us to take up a post with Forestry England. Under his direction we have achieved so much more and it is a testimony to his unique skills in both forestry and community engagement. So unique are his skills that we were unable to recruit anyone to match them.

Board membership

Welcomed new Board Members Terry Smithson, Lottie McFarlane and Martha Cattell

Retirement of Robert Sword who steered the organisation through some very difficult times and had the vision to establish a Management Team from within the Directors which got us to where we are today.

Our Volunteers

A special thanks to all our volunteers who help out on our fortnightly events undertaking ditch and drain clearing, fencing, path maintenance, tree planting, assisting with wellbeing walks and events, survey work and last but not least controlling invasive plants species and the dreaded rhododendrons. Through the Higher Tier Woodland Stewardship this volunteering time has brought in significant income.

As Directors we are also volunteers and are able to bring our work and life experience to support the organisation. Post Covid all organisations are finding gaining volunteers to step up as directors is proving challenging. Anyone who would like more information on the Director positions are welcome to contact any of our current Directors for more information. As a Director you do make a difference and influence the organisation.

Finance

We have strengthened our financial controls and greatly appreciate the input from Jen. These improvements also help our Accountants to track the different expenditure for each funded project and our reporting back to funders. Although we have been successful in

bidding for monies for specific projects these provide very little to cover the day to day running cost and with the end of the Power to Change funding we are very dependent upon income from the sale of timber. Each year that goes by the timber to extract gets ever more difficult to access by our contractors and this reduces the value to us after contractor and haulier costs. Some additional income was generated from our own clearing work around windblown and unsafe trees.

After the winter storms and the problems of falling trees in Forge Valley we were pleased when Scarborough Borough Council and North Yorkshire Highways took back responsibility and agreed not to charge us for this work. The cost of tackling Ash Dieback is going to be a serious challenge. It is estimated at over £15 billion in the UK alone before we can move on. In some areas of the woods Ash makes up 25% of the tree cover and there is little sign of disease resistant trees developing locally.

The Heritage Woodland Officer and the Events and Outreach Officer both need to develop their own income streams to sustain the provision and we are investing in these skills to broaden the experiences we can offer.

We have also invested in equipment to improve provisions at our events. We continue to look for opportunities to make provision for visitors and welfare facilities which limits access for some people. These discussions include North York Moors National Park who are aware that they have no visitor provision in the eastern area of the park and that Throxenby Mere is a gateway to the National Park with no signs to inform visitors.

Before Paul left he set up a survey and this provided an interesting insight in to the users of the woodland. The number responding was only 62 and of those, 32 were female 21 male, 1 non binary and 8 did not record. One respondent registered three entries.

The results are on display but more importantly is our commitment to enter all those who entered, into a prize draw. First prize is an A2 heritage print map and 2nd prize is an A3 heritage print map.

The number drawn will cross reference to the number each respondent was allocated in the survey.

That is the end of my 2021/2022 report, any questions?

Update on the current year

Last December we were unsuccessful in recruiting to the Community Woodland Manager post. Given the problems most organisations are having recruiting we took the decision to restructure roles and responsibilities and grow our own staff.

Anglo American had provided 6 months funding for a Forester, Paul Taylor, which took some of the Community Woodland Managers work load, Claire Rodway stepped up from her volunteering support to our wellbeing walks and events and has now become part of our

staff. This enabled Rob Weatherley to take on more of the day to day management alongside his Heritage Woodland Craft role and Wellbeing activities.

We are working closely with the NHS around an initiative called Green Social Prescribing and developing a range of outdoor activity experiences.

We are seeking significant financial support to help with dealing with Ash Dieback especially in Forge Valley NNR. Our priority is the tree line alongside the highway.

Our 10 year thinning programme is now left with mainly hard to reach stands of Larch on very steep slopes. Our licence runs until 2025 and without some track work we may not be able to remove the full quantity of Larch planned.

Ash dieback is producing significant income removing dangerous trees as well as sales of oversized Larch and ride widening which creates track side habitat and more daylight to dry out the main track.

We are working with the Rotunda Geology Group and Scarborough History & Archeology Society to enhance the existing Geology Trail in Forge Valley, plans are to create a longer circular route bringing in the archeology and history present in and around the site. This project also links in to Universities of York, Sheffield Hallam and Hull Geography and Environmental studies Departments who we now have good links to.

Just before Paul left he had developed a bid to the Anglo American Foundation a worldwide organisation which invests in Nature Recovery projects. In January we submitted a revised bid to study the habitat for two red list species the native White Clawed Freshwater Crayfish and the Common Eel, also Water Vole, Marsh Tit and Pine Martin.

This will be undertaken in conjunction with the Yorkshire River Derwent Partnership, Derwent Anglers, Natural England, Scarborough Field Naturalists and many of the other organisations who have an interest in the woodlands.

Robert Peacock
Chair
Raincliffe Woods Community Enterprise CIC
June 2023.