

# SEVERN GORGE COUNTRYSIDE TRUST

England & Wales · Charity number 1004508

## Details

---

**Other names** SGCT

**Status** Registered

**Legal form** Charitable company

**Company number** [02647374](#)

**Registered** 1991-10-08

**Register** [View on the Charity Commission register](#)

## Contact

---

**Address** The Severn Gorge Countryside Trust  
Darby Road  
Coalbrookdale  
Telford  
TF8 7EP

**Phone** 01952433880

**Email** [staff@severngorge.org.uk](mailto:staff@severngorge.org.uk)

**Website** [www.severngorge.org.uk](http://www.severngorge.org.uk)

## Activities

---

**Objects:** TO PROVIDE MAINTAIN PRESERVE AND MANAGE FOR THE PUBLIC BENEFIT AREAS OF COUNTRYSIDE INCLUDING WOODLANDS OPEN SPACE AND OTHER LANDS WITHIN THE AREA OF BENEFIT.

**Activities:** The Trust manages land in the Ironbridge Gorge for the benefit of local people and for the benefit of visitors to the Gorge to balance public access, landscape, nature conservation, safeguarding historic and cultural features, with public engagement and developing awareness and knowledge of the Trust and its work.

## Classification

---

- **How:** Provides Buildings/facilities/open Space
- **What:** Environment/conservation/heritage
- **Who:** The General Public/mankind

## Geography

- **Area of benefit:** THE AREA OF THE SEVERN GORGE IN BRIDGNORTH AND THE WREKIN
- Shropshire
- Telford & Wrekin

## Finances

Period end	Income	Expenditure	Assets	Employees
2025-03-31	£412,207	£376,073	-	-
2024-03-31	£345,501	£339,149	-	-
2023-03-31	£327,894	£363,826	-	-
2022-03-31	£287,546	£327,750	-	-
2021-03-31	£307,664	£318,788	-	-

## Trustees

Name	Role	Appointed
<b>Maureen Bragg</b>	Chair	
Alan John Taylor		2020-01-17
Andrew Paul Harrison		2025-08-13
Anthony Graham Peck		2025-08-20
CAROLYN HEALY		
Caroline Emma BAGNALL		2022-01-12
Cllr Paul Anthony Davis		2025-01-21
GINA HEATHER DIANA ROWE		
MAXWELL SPEKE		2012-02-22
Mark Boylan		2024-04-24
NICHOLAS DENNIS DOWNES		
Philip John Revell		2026-01-14

**SEVERN GORGE COUNTRYSIDE TRUST**

England & Wales - Charity number 1004508

---

# Accounts

---



# Trustees' Report and Annual Accounts 2024-2025

## Company Information

# Severn Gorge COUNTRYSIDE Trust

## Reference and Administrative Details

Charity Name: Severn Gorge Countryside Trust  
Charity number: 1004508  
Company number: 02647374

## Registered Office and Operational Address

Severn Gorge Countryside Trust  
Darby Road  
Coalbrookdale  
Telford  
Shropshire  
TF8 7EP

Telephone 01952 433880  
[www.severngorge.org.uk](http://www.severngorge.org.uk)

## Auditors

Muras Baker Jones – Regent House, Bath Avenue,  
Wolverhampton, WV1 4EG

## Bankers

The Co-operative Bank – Colmore Row,  
Birmingham, B3 3BA

## Investment Advisers

LGT Wealth Management UK LLP -14 Cornhill  
London EC3V 3NR



## Contents

### Page

<b>Welcome from our Chief Executive &amp; Chair</b>	3
About Us	6
<b>Trustees Report</b>	
Our year at a Glance – How We Made a Difference in 24-25	6
What We Do and How We Do It	7
Sustainability	21
Annual Carbon Calculator	30
Looking Forward	32
Structure Governance and Management	34
Financial Review – How our Finances Look	40
Statement of Trustee’s Responsibilities	50
Financial Statements and Supporting Notes	53
Independent Auditors Report	54
Financial Statements	58
Principal Accounting Policies	61
Notes to Financial Statements	





# Message from CEO

## **Hello and welcome to our annual report, thank you for taking the time to read it.**

There is a certain rhythm and cycle to life at the Trust.

Sometimes the Trust follows the farming calendar, our wonderful meadows and Soay sheep relying on the cycle of grazing, lambing, shearing, haymaking and harrowing.

At other times we follow the financial calendar, with quarterly reports to our Trustees, annual Policy reviews, returns to the Charities Commission, pension providers and visits from the external auditors.

The weather increasingly defines the focus of our reactive work. We check culverts after every significant rain event and our riverbanks after flooding. Extremes of weather caused by climate change are increasingly damaging our sites, blowing down trees, increasing flooding and land movement, further increasing our workload. Through monitoring and reducing our carbon emissions as we work towards net zero, the Trust does what it can to be part of the solution.

I remain in awe of our volunteers. In a world with literally thousands of options to choose how to spend time, they CHOOSE to spend THEIR time helping the Trust for the benefit of others.

Sadly, this year we lost a long-standing Trustee, Chris Turley, who had been nominated by Telford & Wrekin Council. Chris had been a Trustee since 2011 and was passionate about the work of the Trust – his support, wise counsel, and good humour will be deeply missed.

Chris was a friendly, hardworking and committed Trustee and is missed by all who knew him at the Trust. Personally, I will always be in his debt as he was a member of the Personnel Committee that appointed me and we often shared chats about our respective allotments.

So I'd like to take this opportunity to say a big THANK YOU, to all our volunteers, be they Trustees, Lookers, Corporate groups, Chris who does our security, those that regularly keep us abreast of issues and interesting observations across our sites and not least the Tuesday Task team and our Thursday Conservation Volunteers, who turn up whatever the weather and make a visible difference to the World Heritage Site.

We couldn't do it all without you and it would be a lot less enjoyable too!

**John Paul Brayford**  
CEO



# Message from the Chair



No year is ever the same but this one has seemed a very challenging one for the Trust with several severe storms to contend with. The aftermath of Storm Darragh was quite devastating on Benthall Edge and added much additional work to their regular schedule. The impact of climate change is a key concern of the Trustees and so we have a Climate Change Working Group which regularly meets to support the Trust's ongoing efforts to reduce and offset carbon emissions as we work towards net zero. This is reflected in the Committee of Management supporting the Investment Working Group's decision to ensure that none of the Trusts financial investments are made in companies deriving income from coal or oil extraction.

Close monitoring of the financial position and consideration of alternative income streams due to declining rental income have been a priority of the Trustees. The new contracting arm of the Trust is steadily increasing to bring in additional income to support our core functions.

Community Engagement and Outdoor Learning opportunities are continuing to increase. There are now more courses for the local community, the use of the premises for local classes and events which encourage young people to discover the wonderful woodland around us. They will be the custodians of the future.

On behalf of the SGCT trustees, it is my pleasure to thank the staff and the volunteers for all their hard work this year. I would also like to thank the Trustees for their support of the Trust, knowing that our beautiful woodlands and meadows are being well maintained for enjoyment both now and for future generations.

**Maureen Bragg**  
**Chair**



# About Us

**Severn Gorge Countryside Trust is an independent charity, established in 1991 to care for over 289 hectares of beautiful and historically important land within the Ironbridge Gorge World Heritage Site.**

This includes ancient woodlands, wildflower meadows, river valleys, ponds, heathland, historic structures, and around 25 kilometres of footpaths for the public to enjoy. The land also includes three nationally important Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs), recognised for their unique wildlife and habitats.

Our mission is not only to protect and enhance this special landscape, but also to inspire people to connect with it. We run a wide range of Outdoor Learning and Volunteering Programmes that encourage local communities, schools, businesses and individuals to get involved with nature. One of our much-loved initiatives is the volunteer shepherd scheme, affectionately known as the 'Lookers', who help care for our rare-breed Soay sheep, essential to managing the meadows.

The land we manage was gifted to the Trust on a 999-year lease from the former Telford Development Corporation. To help meet the costs of looking after this land, the Trust receives 90% of the rental income from a number of commercial properties, managed on our behalf by Telford & Wrekin Council. This income is legally required to be spent solely on land management. While it provides essential support for our work, it does not fully cover the cost of managing such a large and varied landscape, so we continue to seek additional funding through grants, partnerships, and public support.

Through the dedication of our staff, trustees, volunteers, and supporters, we continue to protect this unique landscape for wildlife, heritage, and future generations.



# 2024/25 OUR YEAR AT A GLANCE



**OVER 3000 METRES**

of enhanced edge habitat completed as part of the Potters Light Gives Life project



**48 VOLUNTEER SESSIONS**

Were organised across our sites to undertake a variety of tasks, providing **4,510 HOURS** of volunteer time




**OVER 100 TREES**

dealt with in the aftermath of Storm Darragh, to clear property boundaries, access and rights of way



**71 CORPORATE VOLUNTEERS**

Joined us from 8 companies, giving their time to help us manage the landscape



**LAID 150 METRES**

of hedge following traditional hedge laying methods

**PLANTED 80 METRES**

of new hedgerow using native species



**RAISED £10,000**

Via the Big Give Green Match Fund, towards regenerating ponds within the Gorge



**25 EVENTS**

Were run as a part of our Outdoor Learning Programme, with a total of 285 attendees

**76% UPTAKE**



**1 NEW POND**

For the benefit of wildlife and to be used as an educational resource



**52 Sites**

managed by the Trust and its dedicated team of volunteers

# What we do...

**The Trust's key purpose is to promote, protect and conserve the living landscape of the Ironbridge Gorge for the benefit of local people and visitors.**

We aim to strike a careful balance between preserving the area's rich natural beauty, protecting its historic and cultural features, supporting public access and enjoyment, and raising awareness of the Trust's role in managing this special landscape.

To help us achieve this, we focus our efforts around five key charitable objectives:

to enhance a living and working landscape that retains its locally distinctive characteristics, habitats and species populations

to conserve and interpret, where appropriate all features of cultural and historical significance

to provide inspiring experiences of the natural world and encourage people to manage their local environment through volunteering opportunities

to provide high quality access for informal recreation for the enjoyment of all and to encourage outdoor activity for the benefit of health and wellbeing

to develop and promote a wider awareness and understanding of the Trust's work

Together, these objectives guide everything we do, from conservation work on the ground to the way we involve and engage people to take part in caring for this extraordinary place.



## How we do it...

*Examples of activities carried out and impacts and benefits achieved under each of these strategic aims are as follows:*



# Landscape and Nature Conservation

**AIM: to enhance a living and working landscape that retains its locally distinctive characteristics, habitats and species populations**

Managing and caring for our sites is one of the most direct and effective ways we can support local wildlife. Each site under the Trust's care is a haven for nature, many of them home to rare and threatened habitats and species. These sites are not only of great ecological importance, but they also provide valuable opportunities for people to connect with the natural environment, offering year-round experiences for both visitors and the local community.

Importantly, all of our land is open to the public, providing opportunities for people to connect with nature. This access plays a vital role in supporting the health and well-being of our community—helping people enjoy the outdoors, engage with, and feel part of the natural world.

Each year, the Trust carries out an extensive programme of land management to protect and enhance the special places in our care. These carefully planned activities help maintain vital habitats and support biodiversity across the Ironbridge Gorge. Examples of recent work include:

- ◆ **Restoring limestone grassland at Patten's Rock Quarry**, where woody growth was cleared to protect colonies of Twayblade, Greater Butterfly, and Common Spotted orchids—species that depend on open, sunlit ground.



- ◆ **Managing the transition zones between woodland, grass, and scrub**, where wild, complex edges provide essential habitats for insects and form the foundation of local food chains.
- ◆ **Clearing scrub from fragile heathland at Dale Coppice**, where small patches of this rare habitat are at risk of being lost without active intervention.

- ◆ **Maintaining species-rich hay meadows and pasture**, using a combination of traditional techniques, specialist contractors, and the Trust's own flock of rare-breed Soay sheep. These methods are well-suited to the small scale and sensitive nature of the sites and are supported by a dedicated team of volunteers.

Through this work, we aim not only to preserve the ecological richness of the landscape, but also to ensure it remains a place people can enjoy and learn from for generations to come.

## Ecological Monitoring

Understanding the condition of our landscapes is essential to managing them effectively. Each year, the Trust commissions independent ecological consultants to carry out detailed monitoring across key sites. This monitoring provides us with the critical data we need to track ecosystem changes, identify emerging environmental concerns, prioritise conservation efforts, and evaluate long-term trends.

The insights gained through this process directly inform our land management strategies, helping ensure that our work is evidence-based and responsive to the changing needs of the environment. Reviews from recent monitoring have confirmed the high quality of many of our habitats and the positive impact of our management practices.

Managing such a diverse and dynamic landscape depends on having clear objectives and access to reliable ecological and management information. However, ecosystems are constantly changing, and this natural complexity can present challenges when trying to meet specific conservation goals.

To help guide our approach, we host an annual Ecology Day during the summer months. This event brings together our ecologist, Trust staff, and the Ecology Working Group to visit managed sites, review outcomes, and plan future actions. These collaborative site visits provide a valuable opportunity to align our work with the Trust's broader objectives and ensure our habitats continue to thrive.



## Meadow Management

Wildflower-rich hay meadows have been in steady decline across the UK for decades, largely due to changes in farming practices. As these habitats have disappeared, so too have many of the birds, insects, and plant species that depend on them.

The Trust is proud to manage around 9 hectares of wildflower meadow, with our most species-rich sites being Ropewalk Meadow and Wilderness Meadow. These areas are vital refuges for biodiversity and are carefully managed to maintain and enhance their ecological value.

In recent years, meadows at Oilhouse and Crackshall have been brought under similar management regimes. Encouragingly, we are already seeing positive results, orchids are now spreading across all the Oilhouse fields, and Yellow Rattle, a key species in wildflower meadow restoration, is becoming well established at Crackshall. We look forward to observing how these meadows continue to develop over the coming years.

Our approach to meadow management follows

traditional methods. Meadows are allowed to grow, flower, and set seed through spring and early summer. A hay cut is then taken in late July or early August, after which our native Soay sheep graze the fields. This grazing serves a vital purpose: the sheep help disturb the soil with their hooves, creating gaps where new seeds can germinate, and they reduce the dominance of vigorous species that might otherwise outcompete more delicate wildflowers.

Some of the key plant species found in these meadows—typical of unimproved grassland—include Lady's Mantle, Eyebright, Yellow Rattle, Betony, Yellow Oat Grass, and impressive displays of Common Spotted Orchids.

Beyond their biodiversity value, species-rich grasslands provide a range of additional environmental benefits. They support carbon storage, water retention (helping to prevent flooding), and provide vital habitats for pollinators that benefit agriculture. Many meadows are also archaeologically important, preserving layers of human history within their undisturbed soils.



## Forestry Works

---

We manage and develop the woodlands of the Gorge under Continuous Cover Forestry principles and under the conditions of our Forestry Commission approved management plan. We also undertake work to meet the conditions of our Countryside Stewardship Grant which supports the delivery of national climate and biodiversity targets at a local level.

Continuous Cover Forestry aims to create a structurally and visually diverse woodland ecosystem with trees of all sizes and ages. This helps to protect soil, keeps land stable and allows opportunities to increase woodland resilience to climate change.

We continue to look after our veteran and potential future veteran trees across the hedgerows, fields and woodlands of the Gorge.

## 'Light Gives Life' Habitat Improvement Project

---

The Light Gives Life habitat improvement project has been completed this year, thanks to generous funding from the Potter Group Landfill Community Fund and the Postcode Local Trust. The project's core objective is to deliver measurable enhancements to biodiversity by developing and strengthening wildlife corridors across six sites within the Ironbridge Gorge World Heritage Site.

By creating a variety of edge habitats, we are not only supporting a richer and more resilient ecosystem but also contributing to the wider economic and social value that healthy natural environments bring.

In total, over 3,000 metres of enhanced edge habitat have been established. Where practical, felled timber is being recovered and repurposed into sustainable products such as firewood, charcoal, sawn timber, and turnery blanks, offering both a practical use and the potential for long-term carbon storage.

## Upper Haywood Plantation

---

Work was undertaken by new contractor Jake Woodhouse to improve conditions along the woodland ride at Upper Haywood. The area was previously heavily shaded under a closed canopy, with limited light reaching the ground. Jake felled over 120 trees by hand, carefully creating a valuable Zone 2 wildlife corridor with minimal site impact. Some timber was extracted using a forwarder, with the remainder scheduled for removal in late summer to avoid ground damage due to wet weather.

The felled timber was mostly firewood grade, with a few millable logs. Jake purchased the timber, and the income will be reinvested into the Trust's conservation work. The transformation of the site has significantly increased light levels, encouraging ground flora and improving habitat for nesting, foraging, and pollinating species. Additional habitat value was created through ring barking to establish standing deadwood.

## Dale Coppice Tree Safety Works

---

Essential tree safety work was carried out in Dale Coppice on Beech trees damaged by squirrels. The works completed by Watch Oak Tree Surgery included reductions, pollarding, and felling to ensure public safety. These actions have improved light penetration, benefiting ground conditions and biodiversity.

No timber was removed from site; instead, all material was retained as deadwood, a vital habitat for invertebrates and overall woodland health.

## Deer and Squirrel Management

The Trust manages approximately 120 hectares of woodland, where population control of certain species, particularly deer and grey squirrels has become increasingly necessary to protect woodland health and biodiversity.

Deer have no natural predators in the UK, and rising populations are placing growing pressure on woodland ecosystems. Overgrazing by deer significantly affects woodland structure and plant diversity, damaging the understorey and preventing young trees from establishing. This not only reduces biodiversity but also threatens the long-term sustainability of the woodland itself. High deer densities also negatively affect the deer population's own health, as competition for limited food sources can lead to malnourishment and a higher risk of disease.

Following the Trust's Continuous Cover Forestry system, natural regeneration is the preferred method for restocking woodlands. However, this approach is being increasingly compromised by deer browsing. While the Trust has invested in alternative control methods such as fencing and deer enclosures long-term monitoring shows these measures alone are insufficient.

To maintain a healthy balance, the Trust continues to work closely with a professional deer stalker and neighbouring landowners to manage deer populations responsibly. The goal is to ensure that trees, wildflowers, birds, and other woodland wildlife all have the opportunity to flourish within a balanced ecosystem. Deer management strategies are reviewed annually in response to ecological monitoring and survey results.

In addition to deer, grey squirrels present another significant challenge to woodland regeneration. Grey squirrels strip bark from young trees, particularly oak, beech, and sycamore causing long-term damage and, in many cases, leading to tree death or deformation. This behaviour can undermine decades of conservation work and threaten the structural integrity of future woodland canopies. The Trust uses targeted control measures to reduce grey squirrel populations, in line with national guidance and best practice. Monitoring is ongoing, and management efforts are adjusted as necessary to support the health and resilience of the woodlands.

## Ongoing effect of Ash Dieback (ADB)

The effects of Ash Dieback (ADB) continue to have a significant impact on the Trust, both financially and environmentally. Given the high number of ash trees throughout the Gorge, the landscape will inevitably change as the disease progresses.

In line with our Continuous Cover woodland management approach, we are encouraging natural regeneration with a mix of different species. This will help to offset the loss of ash trees and support the development of a more climate-resilient landscape capable of sustaining a diverse range of wildlife. Where natural regeneration is not sufficient, the Trust will plant appropriate native species.

Like many landowners and land managers, the financial and operational burden of managing Ash Dieback is substantial. In the past 12 months alone, the Trust has spent approximately £20,000 on essential tree works to remove diseased ash trees. To date, we have invested over £100,000 in efforts to manage the disease and the resulting public safety issues.

Tree felling across the Ironbridge Gorge will continue to increase as the situation develops. We will work closely with Telford & Wrekin Council on all aspects of tree management and will keep the local community informed of any planned works.



## Re-wilding

The Trust is rewilding a number of small sites, mostly areas that are hard to access or too small to manage easily. Each site was carefully reviewed by the Trust's Ecology Group before deciding to reduce intervention.

Grassland areas left to rewild will slowly turn into woodland over time. Without cutting or grazing, we expect to see a mix of plants and habitats develop within about 10 years.

We now have a formal Rewilding Strategy, which helps guide our work, support funding applications, and shows how we're adapting our land management. You can read the strategy here:



If we look at rewilding more sites in future, we will notify the local community and carefully map and monitor any changes.



## Telford Treescapes Project – Final Year Update

Launched in 2022, the Telford Treescapes Project saw the planting of 120 large trees, including Elm, Cherry, Lime, and Field Maple, alongside 300 whips along Jiggers Bank, supported by the Local Authority Treescapes Fund in partnership with Telford & Wrekin Council.

Now in its final year, the trees are thriving thanks to the ongoing care and dedication of our staff and volunteers, who have carried out regular watering, weeding, mulching, and pruning. Their commitment has played a crucial role in ensuring the young trees establish successfully. In the years to come, this growing treescape will develop into a striking, biodiverse avenue, enhancing the landscape and providing valuable habitats for a wide range of wildlife.



## Countryside Stewardship (CS)

Some of the land managed by the Trust falls under the Countryside Stewardship (CS) scheme, which provides financial incentives to support environmental conservation. The scheme aligns with Defra's 25-year Environment Plan and strategic goals of creating a cleaner, healthier environment that benefits both people and the economy.

The CS scheme aims to:

- ◆ Increase biodiversity
- ◆ Improve habitats
- ◆ Expand woodland areas
- ◆ Enhance water and air quality
- ◆ Support natural flood management

Under the agreement, the Trust carries out a range of activities, including woodland ride creation and mowing, squirrel and deer control, tree thinning, and meadow management. Capital works have also been completed, such as fencing, gate replacements, and hedge laying, all contributing to the protection and enhancement of the natural landscape.

## Zone 2 Woodland Management – Sutton Wood

As part of our ongoing efforts to enhance biodiversity, ride-side management was carried out in Sutton Wood to develop Zone 2 habitats. Trees within 3–4 metres of path and track edges were selectively felled to break the canopy, increasing light levels on the woodland floor and encouraging the growth of a shrubby layer.

This new vegetation structure supports a rich variety of wildlife, offering important nesting, nectar, and foraging opportunities for birds, bats, and invertebrates. The work also addressed future tree safety concerns, focusing on poorly formed trees and those affected by ash dieback.

All work was carried out by Trust staff using our own machinery. Felled timber was extracted to the roadside for seasoning, to later be processed into firewood or milled into boards, steps, and fencing materials at the Trust's sawmill, providing a valuable income stream.

While the immediate impact of felling can appear stark, woodlands recover quickly, and by late summer, signs of the work are greatly diminished.



## Firewood Production and Estate Timber

The Trust is Woodsure 'Ready to Burn' certified, ensuring that all firewood sold contains less than 20% moisture. In the past year, we sold 40 cubic metres of logs to local residents, generating over £5,000 in income. With the recent investment in a tractor-powered billet saw, we aim to increase production over the next 12 months.

The ongoing removal of ash trees affected by ash dieback presents a reliable source of firewood. The Trust's own machinery enables efficient processing and movement of this timber.

In addition to firewood sales, we continue to make use of our estate timber, producing gateposts, timber treads, and other materials to maintain and improve access infrastructure.



## Impact of Storm Darragh

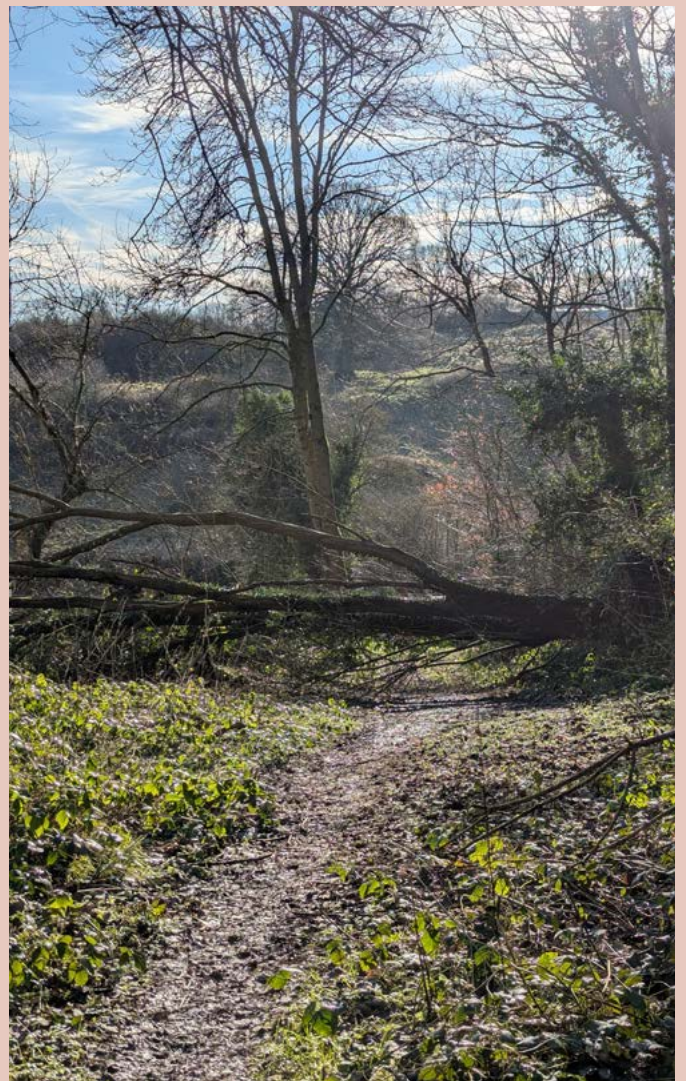
Like the rest of the country the Gorge is having to cope with the increased frequency and severity of storms. This year Storm Darragh hit the Gorge with force. Unlike the usual south-westerly winds that trees in the area are adapted to, Storm Darragh brought strong winds from the north, which tend to cause more damage to our woodlands.

The worst-hit areas were Workhouse Coppice and Benthall Edge, where many large oak trees were blown over, blocking rides and footpaths. In some cases, tree crowns snapped up to five metres above the ground.

Thankfully no one was hurt. A few trees struck buildings and roads, but the majority fell across footpaths. Clearing these has been a key focus for the Trust's team.

Although the damage may look severe, it's part of the natural woodland cycle. The gaps left by fallen trees create space for new growth, offering opportunities for different plants and trees to establish. All usable timber is being extracted for sale or use in-house.

So far, we've cleared over 100 fallen trees from paths and tracks. Given the scale of the damage, we're aiming to have the cleanup completed by the end of summer 2025.





# Cultural and Historical Features

**AIM: to conserve and interpret, where appropriate,  
all features of cultural and historical significance**

The Ironbridge Gorge is world-renowned for its role in the Industrial Revolution, but its legacy stretches far beyond the Iron Bridge itself. Across the landscape, reminders of the area's industrial past are embedded in the terrain. The Trust is responsible for around 60 historic structures, including lime kilns, mine breathers, adit entrances, and more modest features like brick arches and retaining walls.

To date, the Trust has invested over £300,000 in preserving this industrial heritage. These efforts not only protect important elements of the World Heritage Site but also allow visitors and local communities to better understand the Gorge's significant role in shaping modern industrial society.

## Monitoring and Maintenance

To ensure these features are safeguarded for the future, the Trust commissions an annual Structures Inspection Report. Each structure is assessed from fixed reference points to monitor condition changes and identify recommended actions. These are then evaluated using a risk management framework, which considers potential impacts on public safety, nearby highways, high-traffic areas, and neighbouring properties.

All recommended actions are categorised by risk level, ranging from:

- ◆ **Level 0** – No action required

to

- ◆ **Level 4** – Repair required imminently

An **action plan** is then developed each year to address all Level 4 issues, where possible, or to explore alternative risk mitigation in consultation with structural engineers.

We engaged consultant structural engineer Mark Dady of Mark Dady Associates to undertake a comprehensive survey of all our structures. Inspections took place during the summer, and the final report was presented to the Committee of Management in November 2024.

The report made the following recommendations:

- ◆ Potential to stabilise the pipework wall in Bower Yard wall further by filling the pipes with pea gravel, thereby adding weight to the structure. The pipework could then be exposed and retained as an architectural feature.
- ◆ Remove any fallen trees from the safety fencing around structures
- ◆ Reinstate, repair, and stabilise all fencing, including replacing sections where palings are missing.
- ◆ Formally monitor the tension cracking in the ground behind Coalport wall on a monthly basis for 12 months.

This report is submitted for the Trustees' consideration and discussion. Trustees are asked to review the recommendations outlined and assess their potential implications, particularly in relation to health and safety, as well as both immediate and longer-term financial commitments. Any works identified as requiring immediate action will be scheduled into the Annual Work Plan and incorporated into the Annual Budget.

## Archaeological Surveys

To protect the integrity of the Gorge's historical landscape, archaeological surveys are commissioned whenever works may impact culturally or historically significant features. Any discoveries made during these investigations are recorded for future reference.





# Community Engagement and Outdoor Learning

**AIM: to provide inspiring experiences of the natural world and encourage people to manage their local environment through volunteering opportunities**

Providing opportunities for people to engage and interact with the environment is a key remit for the Trust.

Our Outdoor Learning Programme is about providing opportunities for people to immerse themselves in the environment through creative workshops and walks. It is about encouraging people to enjoy the simple pleasure of spending time outside in nature or learning a new skill.

Our Volunteering Programme provides opportunities for the local community to learn more about and help with the management of the landscape on their doorstep. Engaging with nature has been well demonstrated to have positive effects on both physical and mental wellbeing. We hope that this in turn promotes the desire to protect and preserve the natural environment, for present and future generations.

## Volunteering

The 2024/25 volunteer programme held a total of 48 sessions across 19 different sites. We engaged a total of 57 volunteers throughout the year, 21 of whom were new to volunteering with us. The average number of volunteers at each session reached an amazing 19 (up from an average of 15 in 23/24), giving a whopping 4,510 hours of time to the Trust.

The volunteer team has undertaken a great variety of tasks over the past year, doing wonders to help the Trust achieve more of its objectives. In the Spring, they rejuvenated our pollinator garden and helped us prepare for our plant sale, carried out much needed scrub clearance at Patten's Rock Quarry, repaired steps at Sutton Wood and Captain's Coppice and even helped us root out the few ragwort plants remaining in Wilderness Meadows.

Summer saw the group tackle tree care at Jiggers Bank, giving the newly planted trees the best start, orchid counting in Patten's Rock Quarry, plant surveys in Wilderness Meadows, willow bed maintenance and of course hogweed control and scything at Shakespeare Meadow! The volunteer trip took place in June, and we took them out to the Pontyscyllte Aqueduct for a trip along the canal followed by a meal in Llangollen. The sun shone beautifully for us and it was a great day out to celebrate and thank the volunteers for all that they do for the Trust.

Moving into Autumn, the tree and scrub work picked up again. The group aided St Trinity Church in Coalbrookdale by tackling the overgrown rear church yard, even uncovering some long hidden gravestones from amongst the bramble. We also went to clear some areas of bramble and blackthorn from Church Road Fields, ahead of the sheep grazing in hopes of helping them reach more areas. Coppicing of holly and hazel took place at Jiggers Bank and Workhouse Coppice, and as a change of pace we carried out some footpath surveys of Benthall Edge.

Winter saw us harvesting willow from the willow bed, as well as hedge stakes coppiced from hazel at Benthall Edge and Sutton Wood. After a wonderful Christmas Party (with coffee at the Furnace Kitchen, bring and share meal and awards and quizzes!), and short break, the team returned in January to some hedge laying training with Bob Thurston, before continuing with the work at Crackshall over the following weeks. The volunteers reported that they found the training useful and a great reminder of how to undergo this heritage skill.



## The Tuesday Team

The Tuesday Team have continued to support the Trust by giving some of their time to tasks on our sites. They usually meet for 2 hours on a Tuesday afternoon, co-ordinating with our Volunteer and Community Officer, Amber, to determine tasks and sites around the Gorge. They set their own programme each week, with the Trust providing tools, equipment or guidance as required. Over multiple sessions they have worked wonders to cut back huge swathes of laurel within Dale and Oilhouse Coppice, as well as helping with many other jobs. The smaller group size and shorter time period means they are better suited to some tasks that will not fill a whole Thursday for the main volunteers. We are very grateful for the extra time and effort put in by the Tuesday Team, who also continue their work on Beeches and Lodge Local Nature Reserves as well as aiding other community groups.

## Corporate Volunteering

The corporate volunteer sessions have continued to expand, with many of the companies arranging repeat visits for their teams. In 2024/25 we had a total of 78 corporate volunteers join us from 8 different companies. They have helped with a wide variety of different tasks, including pond creation, step maintenance, holly cutting, and bird box building.



We will be continuing to grow our corporate volunteering opportunities and relationships, as well as exploring how we can encourage businesses to support us in other ways.

## Perfect Pond!

Thanks to funding from the Hilton Jones Charitable Trust and lots of time and effort from our volunteers, we were able to create a brand-new pond behind the office in Coalbrookdale as the start of our Outdoor Learning Area. We were granted planning permission and began digging the hole and shaping the area with help from volunteers. We purchased a large liner as well as aqua compost and planting pots, then asked for any donations of pond plants from local people to get it started. Thanks to additional funding from the Wrekin Community Fund, we were able to add a pond dipping platform, and we fenced around the area with chestnut pale fencing to keep out dogs.

The pond became attractive to wildlife within just a few weeks, with dragonflies spotted egg laying in the summer and pond snails appearing. Since then, it has really begun to flourish, and in the spring we even spotted frog and toad spawn! It will be kept as a wildlife pond and utilised as a learning opportunity for adults and families; a great example of how beneficial even small ponds can be!





## Outdoor Learning Programme

During the 2024/25 Outdoor Learning Programme we ran a total of 27 events, including some aimed at children and families. We tried to offer a range of different activities for people to get involved with, including wreath making, bat walks, weaving, and foraging (plus lots more!). Although we sometimes struggled to fill our workshops, we engaged a total of 285 people, and overall uptake was 76%, up from 66% the previous year.

We started off the programme with a Step into Spring Walk, taking a 3 mile loop around Coalbrookdale and concluding with some foraged nettle and wild garlic soup, 11 people joined in total and it was great to share more about the local area. This was followed up by a first-time foraging walk, funded by Telford & Wrekin Council as part of their Telford Walk Week. Due to the funding, it was advertised as a free event, and although 17 people booked places only 5 attended on the day. The second walk funded by the council was a water wildlife family friendly walk, with 23 people attending – going 3 over the stated booking numbers.

*“A lovely, pleasant walk in areas previously unknown followed by lovely home-made food afterwards”*

As summer set in we began with some more arty workshops, including bluebell woodland needle felting, landscape weaving, and dyeing and upcycling with indigo. These were all well attended and it was great to see everyone’s beautiful creations and the experimentation with such different art forms.

Amber led a series of family friendly walks in the summer holiday, although sadly these were not as well

attended as in previous years or even during other holiday periods. A moth morning session was cancelled due to lack of uptake, and a bat walk scheduled for September instead after multiple families expressed an interest. This was fully booked and Amber was assisted by Cadi Price to take the participants through using the bat detectors and identifying moths.

*“It was relaxed and the tutors made it fun and interactive Very helpful too.”*

In Autumn we had local artist and printmaker Sophie Woodhouse lead a Gathering Inspiration workshop where attendees used natural and unconventional materials to hone their drawing skills. She also led a festive decorations workshop in November utilising scraps of leather, which was great fun! Our wreath making workshops were once again fully booked months in advance, and it was great to continue teaching people how to use natural materials to make beautiful unique Christmas wreaths.

*“Made it all from scratch and were supported all the way”*

We concluded the OLP with a willow plant support workshop led by Daisy Askins, utilising some of the willow harvested from our own willow bed, and a lino printing workshop with Rod Sheppard, focused on springtime and new growth.

*“The teaching was high quality and relaxed. It was great to learn a new technique using such wonderful colours.”*

## Wild About Art

Thanks to our successful bid for funding from Envirogrant, we also had the pleasure of running an extra children's art programme in the summer. We held 6 sessions, 4 with external tutors and 2 with led by our Volunteer and Community Officer as an internal tutor. These sessions were all completely free due to the funding and were aimed at children aged 8+. The idea was to explore different art techniques inspired by, or using, natural materials to engage children with the natural world. The sessions were all fully booked very early on, although some attendees that booked would not always turn up. As places were limited, we put measures in place to ensure plenty of reminders went out and cancelled bookings if people regularly did not show up. This enabled us to open places back up. This seemed to help and attendance for most sessions was high.

The theme for each session was different. We started with nature weaving, collecting materials to add in from the nearby woodlands and working them into the woven artwork of each student. We then had a session where children learned to weave a basic willow tray, then using their tray on a walk to collect different natural items. The next session was plant pressing, where each student filled their very own plant press (made from the Trust's own wood!) and created candle holders and cards from pre-pressed flowers. We then had a session exploring nature painting, taking inspiration from the local environment and trying unusual methods of mark making. Print making was the next session, using leaves, flowers, bark and moss as well as recycled materials to create different printed textures and shapes. Finally, we held a session on cyanotype and anthotype printing, very simple methods of photography using UV exposure to 'develop' the prints.

All of these sessions received wonderful feedback from the children and their parents, below are some of the comments we received on our feedback forms:

*'So interesting to learn how to make the baskets with Daisy and Amber. Then going for a walk later to use.'*

*'My 9 year old liked searching through the sticks for the different colours, my 10year old loved trying something new and different. I loved just the right amount of help & encouragement that was given by staff.'*

*'We liked the freedom the children were given to create whatever they liked. We enjoyed learning lots of new techniques too. It was great that Pam and Amber were so patient and encouraging with children. It was very relaxed and a great environment for the children to try art in a way they probably wouldn't at school.'*

*'Just a to say a huge thank you for holding the event and providing such fantastic opportunities for the children. My children always come away from the SGCT excited and full of ideas for things they can try at home. It's such a lovely place to learn. Please, please continue!'*





# Access and Recreation

**AIM: to provide high quality access for informal recreation for the enjoyment of all and to encourage outdoor activity for the benefits of health and wellbeing**



Research has shown us that spending time in good quality outdoor spaces is good for our physical and mental health and wellbeing. In short, green spaces can make us feel healthier and happier.

The Trust looks after a wide range of habitats so people can explore, engage with and better understand the natural world. The more connected people feel to the natural world, the more benefits they experience for their wellbeing.

Green spaces also play an important role in protecting the environment. They help reduce flooding, absorb carbon emissions, and provide vital habitats for wildlife.

We aim for our sites to feel as natural as possible, so we work hard to balance the need for good paths, signs and interpretation with the need to preserve the very sense of countryside we all head outdoors for. We have tried to remove any unnecessary barriers to people's enjoyment, by removing squeeze stiles and replacing them with kissing gates and providing rest points to pause and savor the fantastic views.

We continue to look for opportunities to improve our footpath network and aim, as far as it is practical, to make the network safe and accessible to all.

Helping people experience and enjoy the natural world is at the heart of the work of the Trust and that is why all our 289 hectares of land is available freely for the public to enjoy every day of the year.

As well as making improvements on the ground, we're also passionate about the quality of the visitor experience, from making sure our walking maps are easy to follow, to providing helpful information and local history in our free leaflets.

The volunteer team have been helping tackle some of the access improvement works on our sites. In the summer they worked in Upper Haywood, fixing broken stiles and adding a new hand rail along the steep bank into the wood. This section is a part of the Monarchs Way and we received a thank you letter from the chair of their association. After Storm Darragh, a section of path in Lydebrook was left damaged. The Tuesday Team went to help install a new handrail and slightly reroute the path to avoid the damaged section, a great help in the aftermath of such a destructive winter.

On other sites volunteers often help repair and maintain many of the flights of steps and sections of boardwalk.

## Strategic Access Review

We look after approximately 25 kilometres of footpaths, including over 2,000 wooden steps and 18 wooden boardwalks. The Strategic Access Review, completed in 2015, still helps guide our Annual Work Plan. We also update our Strategic Action Plan every year using information from our twice-yearly footpath surveys. These surveys help us spot any repairs or maintenance that need doing.

We have been working to update the strategic access review and trialled using volunteers to assist with this on Benthall Edge. It worked well as it made it easier to cover the myriad of paths that cross the wood. We made note of any footpath furniture, its location, and condition. It has drawn light onto the fact that many of the entrances to our sites could use some updating, which we hope to focus on in the coming year.

## Walking Festivals / Guided Walks

The Ironbridge Walking Festival celebrated its 20th anniversary this year, and we were proud to be involved with the planning process. Our Volunteer and Community Officer (VCO) led 5 walks this year and back marked 1 walk. They all took in sites that the Trust manages and were a great opportunity to highlight the fantastic range that falls under our care. The VCO will continue acting as a committee member with the festival going forward.

We were also invited to partake in the Telford Walk Week once again and offered 3 family friendly walks across the event. Thanks to funding from Telford & Wrekin Council these were offered for free. They all had good bookings, but sadly the bad weather at the start of the week did hamper the turn out! Those who did come along seemed to have a lovely time, and we hope they might join us for more events in the future.

## Footpath Repairs

We continue to invest in the paths and access features across the Gorge. More people are using our sites, and wetter winters mean that some paths and boardwalks are wearing out faster than expected. Our regular surveys help us identify sections that need repair. We then prioritise the work and allocate resources based on urgency.

Repairs and maintenance are carried out either by our own team or with the help of volunteer groups. More

and more, we're using timber from our own land, sawn on our own mill, for this work. We're also very grateful to local walkers and visitors who report problems—they act as our eyes and ears, helping us keep the path network safe and open for everyone.

## Family-Friendly Activity Walks

The Trust has created four circular 1km family trails, located in Benthall, Haywood, Loamhole, and Maws. Designed with families in mind, each trail follows established footpaths and is part of a fun map series featuring Milly and Orla, the Trust's office dogs, illustrated in cartoon form. Along each route, children and families can enjoy a variety of activities and challenges, making outdoor exploration both engaging and educational.

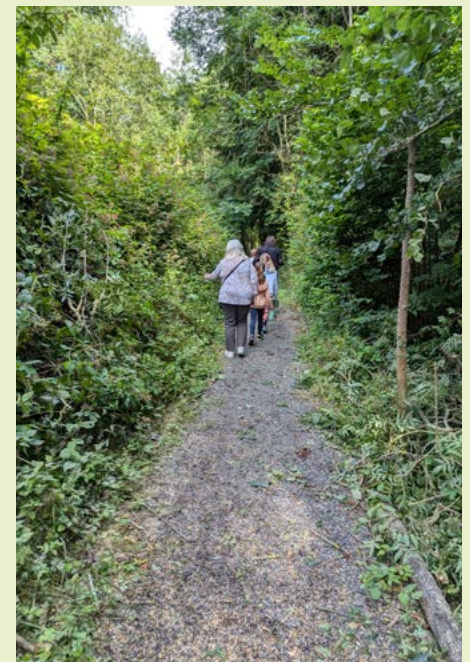
**Bounding in Benthall:** along past Doris the Dragon, the Lime kiln and Bower yard picnic site

**Maws Paws:** along the new Tile Trail, Preenshead and Boat Inn meadow path.

**Hilly Haywood Adventure:** up the zig zag path to Silkin Way and into Haywood Plantation.

**Splish Splash Splish in Loamhole Dingle:** along the path to the footbridge and stream and through the meadow.

All of the Milly and Orla family friendly walks can be downloaded from our website.





## Walking Trail Leaflets

The Trust has produced five free Walking Trail leaflets that showcase some of the best walking routes around the Ironbridge Gorge World Heritage Site. The walks provide people with the opportunity to discover some of the hidden gems of the Gorge and learn more about the landscape and history of the area whilst they explore. Visitors can make a day of it by visiting some of the many historic sites and attractions along the walks and stopping for a while for refreshment at one of the many cafés, pubs and restaurants in Ironbridge and the surrounding area.

The leaflets are available to download from our website, from the Visitor Information Centre and from various outlets in the Gorge. The leaflet dispenser in Station Road car park is regularly refilled and around 20,000 leaflets have been dispensed this year.

The route for the 'Iron Trail' links existing paths into a circular walk that includes both built and natural features within the World Heritage Site to encourage visitors to explore beyond the built environment. Its objective is to highlight otherwise unseen heritage such as the remnants and evidence of the iron production process that made the Gorge 'the birthplace of industry' within the natural landscape.

The 'Lime Trail' of Benthall Edge takes the walker through a wooded landscape steeped in the geology which benefitted the past industries of the Gorge. The footpath follows a circular route taking the walker through beautiful SSSI woodland, with iconic viewpoints of the Gorge and Coalbrookdale, before descending to the valley bottom along the Severn Valley Railway.

The 'Sabbath Walks Trail' follows in the footsteps of Richard Reynolds who built the wide footpaths in the 18th Century for his workers and families. This trail takes in Dale Coppice and Lincoln Hill and the viewpoint at the Rotunda with views of the Iron Bridge.

The Ironbridge to Blists Hill Victorian Town Trail is as it says, linking Ironbridge to Blists Hill with a safe traffic-free route through Lloyd's Coppice whilst seeing historic remnants on the past once linked to Blist Hill furnaces.

The circular Trail 'Loamhole Dingle; History under your feet' takes you from Upper Furnace Pool and through the wooded dingle to the Ropewalk where nature meets the industrial past. This walk can also be linked with Lydebrook Dingle as part of the Shropshire Way.

These trails will hopefully encourage more visitors to explore the landscape of the World Heritage Site on foot.

## Walks Books

To support people to get outdoors and closer to nature we have published several guided walks books. These will help everyone to visit our sites and enjoy their natural beauty and find out more about the forces that have shaped them – natural and man-made. Each book offers a number of self-guided walks that offer opportunities to explore the history of the area as well as the diversity of landscape, geology and wildlife. All the books can be purchased from the Trust Office, and are also available at Ironbridge Gorge Museum sites, the Visitor Information Centre, and some local shops. Copies of the routes can also be downloaded from our website; [www.severngorge.org.uk](http://www.severngorge.org.uk).





# Raising Awareness

**AIM: to develop and promote a wider awareness and understanding of the Trust's work**

One of the Trust's main goals is to help more people understand and appreciate the work we do to care for local wildlife, landscapes, and historic places. We want to build stronger connections between communities and the natural and cultural heritage on their doorstep, helping everyone feel part of protecting these special places for the future.

To do this, we use a variety of approaches:

- ◆ **Getting Involved in the Community:** We run public events, guided walks, volunteer days, and school visits, giving people the chance to get hands-on and learn more about what we do. These activities make conservation feel approachable, fun, and meaningful for people of all ages.
- ◆ **Bringing Places to Life:** We try to create informative and engaging materials like signs, leaflets, and family trails, that explain the history and wildlife of our sites. Whether you're exploring a woodland or walking through a meadow, you'll discover stories that help you connect with the landscape in a deeper way.
- ◆ **Sharing Our Work Online:** Through our website, social media, newsletters, and videos, we share regular updates, behind-the-scenes stories, and achievements. It's a great way for more people to see what's happening and get involved, wherever they are.
- ◆ **Working Together:** We team up with local councils, schools, community groups, and environmental organisations to raise awareness of the importance of protecting nature and heritage. By working in partnership, we can do more and reach more people.
- ◆ **Welcoming Everyone:** We aim to make all our activities inclusive and accessible, so that everyone feels welcome, whether you're new to nature, a regular visitor, or just curious about what we do.

At the heart of it all, we want to inspire people to care for the woodlands, meadows, and wildlife that make our area unique. By helping people understand the value of these places, we hope to encourage long-term support, pride, and shared responsibility for their future.

## Volunteer Lookers

Our volunteer 'Lookers' play a vital role in caring for the Trust's flock of around sixty native-breed Soay sheep, which are used to help manage and maintain our wildflower meadows.

The term 'Looker' goes back many years, when country workers were paid to watch over grazing animals across several farms, often spending most of their time outdoors. Today, the role is far more modern—but still just as important. Our Lookers work on a rota system, visiting the sheep every day to check on their welfare and sharing updates through a WhatsApp group.

The Soay sheep are essential to the conservation of our species-rich meadows, helping to manage the land in a natural and sustainable way. The Looker programme has been running for over 12 years, and our volunteers are skilled in a wide range of sheep care techniques, including handling, ear tagging, and giving injections when needed.

Any ewe lambs born are registered with the Rare Breeds Survival Trust (RBST). We are keen to grow our number of registered pedigree ewes to support the long-term future of the Soay breed and help improve its conservation status on the RBST watchlist





## Annual Open Evening

The Annual Open Evening offers local residents the opportunity to meet Trust staff, Trustees, and Volunteers, and to learn more about the Trust's ongoing work. It also provides an opportunity for the community to raise questions, concerns, or ideas.

To engage with as much of the local community as possible, the venue for the Open Evening is rotated each year across different parts of the Trust's landholding. This year's event took place on Wednesday 15 July at Coalport Village Hall. We were delighted to welcome local wildlife and landscape photographer, Andrew Fusek Peters as our guest speaker. His talk, *'Butterflies and Beyond'*, was both informative and engaging, and was very well received by attendees.

Trust staff also delivered a brief presentation highlighting recent achievements and upcoming projects. Following this, guests were invited to take part in a Q&A session.

A total of 32 people attended the evening. They had the chance to explore a range of displays showcasing the Trust's work, including our Volunteer and Outdoor Learning Programmes, Woodland Management initiatives, and efforts to address the effects of ash dieback.

## Partnership Working

We continue to develop and strengthen partnerships with a wide range of organisations and individuals for the benefit of local communities, visitors and wildlife. Successful partnership working allows us to develop new areas of work, including 'Outdoor Learning', environmental arts and alternative land management techniques.

- ◆ Barrow Parish Council
- ◆ Broseley Town Council
- ◆ Coalbrookdale Scouts
- ◆ Dawley Angling Society
- ◆ English Heritage
- ◆ Environment Agency
- ◆ Field Studies Council
- ◆ Forestry Commission
- ◆ Harper Adams University
- ◆ Ironbridge Gorge Museum Trust

## Ironbridge Gorge Heritage Festival

In September we saw the return of the Ironbridge Heritage Festival, spanning 2 weeks with different events taking place throughout the Gorge. The Heritage Open day took place on the 14th of September on the Wharfage. The VCO and FOCS had a stand for the day, with a few volunteers coming down to help cover them

at lunch. Overall, the day seemed to be a success, and we engaged with over 150 people throughout the day. As well as some of our charcoal and crafts for sale, we also had some children's activities, and our free walk leaflets available.



- ◆ Ironbridge Gorge Walking Festival
- ◆ Ironbridge Meadows and Pastures group
- ◆ Jackie – Lets Flow Yoga
- ◆ Local Community
- ◆ Lodge Field Group
- ◆ Madeley Town Council
- ◆ National Trust
- ◆ Natural England
- ◆ Neighbouring farmers and landowners
- ◆ NHS – CAMHS- BEE U
- ◆ Randlay Primary School
- ◆ Secret Severn Arts Trail
- ◆ Shrewsbury & Newport Canal Trust
- ◆ Shropshire Wildlife Trust
- ◆ Small Woods Association
- ◆ Sutton Maddock Parish Council
- ◆ Telford & Wrekin Council
- ◆ Telford Green Spaces Partnership
- ◆ The Gorge Parish Council
- ◆ The Coracle Trust
- ◆ The World Heritage Site Steering Group
- ◆ Vine Willow Wood
- ◆ Wellbeing with Gemma
- ◆ Wolverhampton University

## Tackling Climate Change

As the custodian of over 50% of the landscape in the Ironbridge Gorge World Heritage Site we are working hard towards supporting the biodiversity crisis together with addressing the climate emergency.

Our overarching goal is to become carbon neutral in 2030 and we have worked towards this by:

- ◆ Initiating a Carbon Calculator to record our CO<sub>2</sub> emissions and identifying areas we can change.
- ◆ Installing energy efficient lighting.
- ◆ Divesting from all fossil fuel investments

Future plans include:

- ◆ Investigating the installation of solar panels on the office building
- ◆ Investigating a switch from diesel in landscape management vehicles to a more sustainable biofuel

Ongoing ecological monitoring for biodiversity

Continue to transition to electric power tools for landscape maintenance

For more information on what we are doing please visit our website page.



The Trust faces many challenges in its goal to achieve net zero by 2030 include capacity and resources – financial, people and expertise. In particular, upfront capital expenditure is a substantial barrier to the pace of our decarbonisation efforts. For example, purchasing electric vehicles and machinery together with the increased cost of using biofuel as opposed to diesel in vehicles

The Trust will continue to deliver nature-based solutions to reduce emissions from, and capture and store carbon from a diversity of habitats, including woodlands, meadows and ponds.

Below are our annual CO<sub>2</sub> emissions for 24/25

## Annual Carbon Calculator

April 2024 to March 2025  
Report, Reduce, Change

### Summary

The Trust continue to focus on monitoring and reducing carbon dioxide equivalent (CO<sub>2</sub>e) emissions arising primarily from the use of fossil fuels, specifically oil, gas and coal. The main sources of emissions remain the gas boiler and the Trust's fleet of vehicles which includes the Valtra tractor, Toyota Hilux, minibus and other staff vehicles used for operational purposes.

Electricity used by the Trust is sourced from a mix of renewable and nuclear energy and its usage is carefully monitored, reduced where practicable and transparently reported. However, gas used for heating is currently supplied from a non-renewable natural gas source.

## Emissions Overview

For 2024/25 reporting year

- ◆ Total operating emissions 8.0 tonnes CO<sub>2</sub>e
- ◆ Emissions from Soay Sheep: 12.8 tonnes CO<sub>2</sub>e
- ◆ FTE staff: 5.75
- ◆ Operational Emissions per FTE: 1.39 tonnes CO<sub>2</sub>e

The rise in total emissions per FTE is partially due to the expansion of the Trust's operations following the creation of a new contracting arm, which increased staff numbers and work involving vehicles, machinery and tools.

### Year on Year Comparison

Year	Operational Emissions	FTE Staff	Emissions per FTE	Sheep Emissions
2024/25	8.0 tonnes CO <sub>2</sub> e	5.75	1.39 t/FTE	12.8 t CO <sub>2</sub> e
2023/24	5.3 tonnes CO <sub>2</sub> e	4.75	1.12 t/FTE	12.8 t CO <sub>2</sub> e
2022/23	6.2 tonnes CO <sub>2</sub> e	4.75	1.31 t/FTE	12.8 t CO <sub>2</sub> e

While operational emissions rose in 2024/2025, the Trust remains committed to minimising fossil fuel use and continues to track the impact of all contributing factors.

To mitigate emissions and increase carbon capture, the Trust continues to apply Continuous Cover Forestry methods in woodland management and is currently rewilding five grassland sites. These progressive land management approaches are expected to increase carbon sequestration year on year, delivering long-term environmental benefits compared to conventional practices.

For further information on the Trust's approach to climate action and carbon reduction, please visit: [www.severngorge.org.uk/tackling-climate-change](http://www.severngorge.org.uk/tackling-climate-change)



Scope 1: direct emissions of CO2 (kg) annually from fuel combustion and Trust vehicles (see Notes & Sources)			Scope 2: indirect emissions of CO2 (kg) annually from purchased electricity (see Notes & Sources)			Scope 3: other indirect emissions of CO2 (kg) annually: for example, transport-related activities in non-Trust vehicles, national grid transmission and distribution, outsourced		
Source of Scope 1 CO2 emissions		kgCO2e/year	Source of Scope 2 CO2 emissions		kgCO2e/year	Source of Scope 3 CO2 emissions		kgCO2e/year
Gas boiler - kWh annually	6,669	1,220				Gas grid transmission & distribution	No figures given in Government guidance and it is assumed to be zero	
			Electricity - kWh annually	5,693	0	Electricity grid transmission & distribution - kWh	5,693	104
Wood burners - weight of logs annually	4	185				Water supply & Water treatment - cubic metres annually	120	41
Minibus (diesel, 3960 kg GVW) - annual mileage	518	228				Methane (CH4) produced by Soay Sheep Flock	60 Average head of livestock over year	12,820
Toyota Hilux (diesel, 2730kg GVW) - annual mileage	4225	1,343						
Toyota Hilux (diesel, 2730kg GVW) - annual mileage	143	45						
Fiat 500 (petrol 1360kg GVW) - annual mileage	560	130						
Mitsubishi L200 (diesel 2890 GVW) - annual mileage	838	266						
Dacia (diesel 1090kg GVW) - annual mileage	448	121						
Vauxhall Astra (diesel 1678kg GVW)- annual mileage	178	48						
LFO Vehicle	33	10						
		4,282						
Valtra Tractor (diesel)	1704							
<b>Total emissions (Scope 1)</b>		7,879	<b>Total emissions (Scope 2)</b>		0	<b>Total emissions (Scope 3)</b>		12,965
<b>FINAL OUTCOME:</b>		<b>20.8</b>			<b>tonnes</b>			

## Notes and Sources

**Renewable energy supplies** Electricity or gas supplied from purely renewable sources where the supplier can demonstrate that the energy supplied to customers only comes from renewable sources can be included in calculations as having zero carbon emissions.

**Electricity** is supplied from 100% renewable sources by OPUS energy on a contract until February 2026. With Opus Advance, our electricity comes from renewable sources including solar, wind, hydro and anaerobic digestion. [www.opusenergy.com/our-energy-sources](http://www.opusenergy.com/our-energy-sources)

**Gas** is supplied by British Gas Lite on a contract until May 2025. The gas supplied to customers is natural gas. This is, broadly speaking, the case for all energy suppliers in the UK.

**Wood Burners** CO<sub>2</sub>e emissions from the two wood burners are included. There is debate about whether CO<sub>2</sub> in wood that is burnt should be included in annual carbon emissions because CO<sub>2</sub> is captured by growing trees and released by burning logs. However, such rapid release of CO<sub>2</sub> is very different to the slow release of CO<sub>2</sub> to the atmosphere during decay and decomposition.

**Office building** The Severn Gorge Countryside Trust is based in an award-winning sustainable building. The office is timber framed, wool insulated and heated by two log burners. The outside cladding is larch which we harvested from our woodlands. The office has a Mechanical Ventilation with Heat Recovery (MVHR) ventilation system that both supplies and extracts air throughout the office. This system is used to reduce the heating and cooling demands of buildings. The MVHR continually draws and circulates fresh air from outside, pre warmed by heat exchangers capturing heat from the stale air as it is expelled. The roof is made up from approximately ten thousand western red cedar shingles. The office is insulated with sheep wool mixed with recycled polyester; it has remarkable properties, in that during the winter it keeps the building warm and, in the summer, it keeps the building cool.

**Soay Sheep** the Trust owns a flock of native breed Soay sheep which are used to manage the wildflower meadows. The sheep emit methane which is another type of greenhouse gas. The carbon dioxide equivalent measurement of methane is  $1\text{kg CH}_4 * 25 = 25\text{kg CO}_2\text{e}$ . Whilst the sheep do emit methane, they are used to graze our species rich meadows as a key means to

enhance their overall biodiversity. We use the Farm Carbon toolkit to calculate the value of the carbon dioxide equivalent of the methane emitted by the sheep. <https://calculator.farmcarbontoolkit.org.uk>

**CO<sub>2</sub>e (carbon dioxide equivalent)** is a standard unit for measuring carbon footprints. The idea is to express the impact of each different greenhouse gas (CO<sub>2</sub>, methane, nitrous oxide) in terms of the amount of CO<sub>2</sub> that would create the same amount of warming. That way, a carbon footprint consisting of different greenhouse gases can be expressed as a single number.

**Conversion factors** (electricity, electricity transmission & distribution, natural gas, water, waste, vehicles). [www.gov.uk/government/publications/greenhouse-gas-reporting-conversion-factors-2023](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/greenhouse-gas-reporting-conversion-factors-2023) full set for advanced users in order to include the minibus which is classed as a 'Delivery Vehicle'. These are set annually in May.

**Scope 1, Scope 2 & Scope 3** The Greenhouse Gas Protocol (<https://ghgprotocol.org>) is recognised by the UK government as an independent standard for reporting greenhouse gases. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Carbon\\_emissions\\_reporting](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Carbon_emissions_reporting)



# Structure, Governance and Management

## Company Structure

Severn Gorge Countryside Trust is a registered charity and a company limited by guarantee. It is governed by its Memorandum and Articles of Association and managed by a Board of Trustees.

The Board is responsible for setting the Trust's strategic direction and ensuring it aligns with our core aims. It also ensures that the Trust is well-managed, operates within the law, and upholds strong standards of governance.

## Board of Trustees

The Directors of the charitable company (the Charity) are also its Trustees under charity law. In this report, they are referred to collectively as the Trustees.

The Board is supported by a Company Secretary, who manages governance processes and ensures compliance with regulatory and administrative requirements.

The following Trustees served during the year and up to the date of this report:

Name	Nominated by:
Maureen Bragg (Chair)	Community Trustee
Nick Downes (Vice Chair)	Barrow Parish Council
Mick Burton	Broseley Town Council
Gina Rowe	Community Trustee
Vacant position	Madeley Town Council
Caroline Bagnall	Shropshire Council
John Box	Shropshire Wildlife Trust
Max Speke	Sutton Maddock Parish Council
Chris Turley (deceased August 2024)	Telford & Wrekin Council
Mark Boylan (appointed 24 April 2024)	Telford & Wrekin Council

Paul Davies (appointed 21 January 2025)	Telford & Wrekin Council
Carolyn Healy	Telford & Wrekin Council
Paul Davies	Telford & Wrekin Council
Alan Taylor	The Gorge Parish Council

## Staff

JP Brayford	CEO
Kate Chetwood	Company Secretary and Finance Officer
Nathan Morris	Head of Countryside
Paul Ferrington	Estate Worker
Amber Bicheno	Volunteer & Community Officer
John Haddon	Landscape & Forestry Operative

## Who Governs the Trust?

The Trust is governed by its Committee of Management (COM) made up of several Member Organisations and Community Trustees. The Trustees are all volunteers with careers and experience in a wide variety of fields. The Committee of Management is currently made up of a maximum of 14 elected trustees.

In accordance with the Memorandum and Articles of Association, Trustees are elected by the membership for terms of four years. At the end of the four-year term Trustees may stand for re-election. Nominations for new Trustees are considered each year prior to the Annual General Meeting (AGM). All Member Organisations are circulated with invitations to nominate Trustees, advising them of any retiring Trustees and requesting nominations for the AGM. The Member Organisations are made up of a variety of local organisations that have a keen interest in the Ironbridge Gorge and also two Community Trustee places.

When considering appointing Trustees, the Committee of Management (Board of Directors) has regard to the requirement of any specialist skills needed.

## Trustee Induction and Training

The Trust provides an induction session to brief new Trustees on their legal obligations under charity and company law, the contents of the Memorandum and Articles of Association, the committee structure and decision-making processes, the 10-year Development Strategy and recent financial performance of the charity. They are also advised on the future plans and objectives of the Trust. During the induction they meet the CEO, Company Secretary and other employees. They are advised of appropriate training opportunities and are encouraged to attend.

## Management

The Committee of Management is responsible for setting policies and ensuring legality and good practice in accordance with the Memorandum and Articles of Association of the Trust and the Charities Act 2011. The Committee of Management meets formally each quarter. At each meeting, the COM considers reports from the management team on areas such as strategic development, financial performance and health and safety. Additionally, as appropriate the COM considers progress on current and future projects, governance and the annual budget and workplan.

The CEO is responsible to the COM for the management of the Trust and the conduct of the Trust's business in accordance with policies and budgets set by the COM. They are responsible for the day-to-day operation of the Trust within this framework and are authorised to act on behalf of the Trust on all matters other than those which by law are required to be decided by the COM. The Chief Executive is supported by Trust staff. The Trust also engages a number of professional advisers to assist in its work.

The Committee of Management met four times during the year, focusing on strengthening governance and ensuring effective oversight across the Trust's operations. Key areas included:

- ◆ A governance and diversity review, including Board composition and inclusivity.
- ◆ A proposed amendment to the Articles of Association to increase the number of Trustees.
- ◆ Monitoring of the Trust's new contracting arm and its initial contracts.
- ◆ Ongoing policy reviews. Specifically key internal policies.
- ◆ Close monitoring of the financial position and consideration of alternative income streams due to declining rental income.
- ◆ Regular review of progress against the annual plan and budget.
- ◆ Review of Tree Safety Report and Structures Report to assist with future woodland management and structure repairs.



## Sub Committees and Working Groups

The board had one subcommittee and three working groups supporting its work during 2024/2025. These have advisory powers and decision making is retained by the COM. A trustee chairs each committee/working group, with membership including other trustees and staff. Trustees participate in working groups to provide advice, input, and/or support.

## The Personnel Committee

The Personnel Committee met twice during the year. Its role is to oversee and make recommendations on matters relating to staff salaries, staffing, training, development, and support for both employees and trustees.

When reviewing staff salaries, the Committee considers market information for comparable roles, as well as the overall employment package offered by the Trust, including benefits such as annual leave and pension contributions. Outcomes from annual performance appraisals are also taken into account when awarding salary increments.

## Investment Working Group

The Investment Working Group (IWG) considers the strategic oversight and direction of the Trust's investment assets. It undertakes the long-term stewardship of the investments in order to further the Trust's aims. Its key purposes are to review the Trust's investment strategy and agree a statement of investment principles and policies, which sets out, the investment objectives, risk tolerance, liquidity requirements, time horizon, and agrees the Trust's approach to an ethical and responsible investment policy. The IWG consults with our investment advisor from LGT to help maximise the overall return within acceptable risk parameters, while ensuring that the strategy remains fit for purpose.

## Climate Change Working Group

Since declaring a Climate Emergency in November 2019, the Trust has continued to take action to address the causes and impacts of climate change. Efforts include reducing emissions, enhancing carbon capture through land management, restoring wildlife habitats, and exploring flood mitigation strategies.

Key strategies include:

- ◆ Using Continuous Cover forestry and rewilding to lock up carbon and support biodiversity.
- ◆ Championing renewable energy and cutting operational emissions.
- ◆ Developing and refining a Carbon Calculator to monitor the Trust's emissions, including methane



from the Soay sheep flock—which accounts for over 68% of total carbon equivalent emissions.

- ◆ Ongoing data collection to better understand environmental impacts and inform future targets.
- ◆ Advocating for fossil fuel divestment from the Shropshire Pension Fund, despite having no direct control over pension investments.

## Governance Working Group

The Governance Working Group met in October 2024 to review the results of a recent skills audit carried out by the Committee of Management. Trustees identified areas where the Committee could benefit from additional skills and knowledge.

They agreed to focus on two key areas to start with:

1. Fundraising – Gaining a better understanding of different types of charity fundraising and how Trustees can support these efforts.
2. Charity Legislation and the Role of the Trustee – Improving knowledge of charity law and the responsibilities involved in being a Trustee.



Trustees also discussed the current nomination process for Trustees by Member Bodies. While the process works, it limits the Trust's ability to involve people from the wider community who may be interested in becoming Trustees. Trustees agreed that efforts to increase diversity should be meaningful, not tokenistic.

To bring new perspectives and ideas and improve attendance, Trustees proposed increasing the number of Committee members from 12 to 14. It was suggested that:

- ◆ One new Trustee could be drawn from the SGCT Volunteers.
- ◆ The other could be a local community member ideally bringing a skill set that is currently missing from the Committee.

This change was approved in March 2024, and the updated Memorandum and Articles of Association have been submitted to the Charity Commission.

Trustees continue to receive training and support to keep their skills and knowledge up to date.

## Planning for the Future

The significance of the Trust's landholdings dictates the need for a planned, long-term approach to give direction and continuity to management.

This is achieved through comprehensive management plans for the Trust's sites and a Development Strategy that sets the overall direction of the Trust's work

The current Development Strategy was approved by Trustees in November 2017 and will guide the work of the Trust until the end of 2028. It sets out the Trust's vision, aims and plans for achieving its charitable objectives, identifies the successful methods of working that will be continued, the developments that will be introduced over the ten years and the opportunities that will be taken up if time and resources allow.

Copies of the full strategy can be downloaded from the website ([www.severngorge.org.uk](http://www.severngorge.org.uk)) or obtained from the Trust Office.

## Annual Work Plan and Budget

Each year, the Trust develops a detailed work plan and budget to make sure we can deliver the priorities set out in our Management Plans and Development Strategy, while staying within our means.

The aim is to balance ambition with sustainability, ensuring we don't overstretch our resources or compromise our long-term future.

The 2024/2025 work plan was set by the aims in our 2018–2028 Development Strategy, with work carefully planned to reflect our current financial situation, staff capacity, and environmental priorities.

## Risk Management

The Board of Trustees is responsible for identifying and managing the strategic and operational risks the Trust is exposed to, so that Trustees can make informed decisions and take timely action. Risks are assessed and managed through a Risk Management Strategy; the impact and likelihood of their occurrence are evaluated. Actions and procedures to mitigate the risks are detailed in the strategy.

In accordance with the Charity Commission's Statement of Recommended Practice (SORP) 2005, Trustees undertake:

- ◆ An annual review of the risks the Trust may face, which also identifies any new risks that the Trust may be exposed to
- ◆ The establishment of systems and procedures to mitigate against those risks identified in the review; and



- ◆ The implementation of procedures to prevent any potential impact on the charity should those risks materialise.

Trustees regularly review our risk management process and receive regular updates on actions put in place to mitigate the most significant ongoing risks.

It should be noted that any risk management system can only manage risks and not eliminate them.

The Trust has identified four principal risks that could impact its ability to deliver its charitable aims. Mitigation measures are in place to address each of these risks:

### Future Income Levels

A decline in income would significantly affect the Trust's ability to manage and maintain the living landscape of the Ironbridge Gorge for the benefit of the local community, visitors, and the environment.

- ◆ Primary income is generated through rental returns from the Trust's property portfolio, which is currently managed by Telford & Wrekin Council under a management agreement.
- ◆ The Trust is actively working with the Council to explore opportunities for diversifying the portfolio, including potential investments in modern properties to ensure a resilient income stream.
- ◆ Additional income is sought through grants, donations, and other funding opportunities including the contracting arm to reduce reliance on rental income and support future growth.
- ◆ Effective and efficient property management remains key to maintaining financial stability.

## Climate Change

- ◆ Climate change as a long-term threat to both the Trust's operations and the natural environments under its care.
- ◆ All operational activities are being reviewed to reduce CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, including travel, heating, and electricity usage.
- ◆ Land management practices are being adapted to improve climate resilience, particularly in the Trust's woodlands and meadows.
- ◆ The Trust continues to prioritise nature-based solutions, such as rewilding and Continuous Cover Forestry, to sequester carbon and enhance biodiversity.

## Ash Dieback (*Hymenoscyphus fraxineus*)

- ◆ Ash dieback continues to pose a serious ecological and safety risk across the Ironbridge Gorge.
- ◆ The Trust has monitored the spread of the disease since it was first identified in 2012.
- ◆ An independent arboriculturist conducts regular surveys of ash trees on Trust-managed land.
- ◆ A dedicated Ash Dieback Policy has been developed to guide both proactive and reactive tree management.
- ◆ The Trust is exploring funding sources to support the increasing costs associated with tree felling, replacement planting, and ongoing safety work.

## Safeguarding

- ◆ The protection of children, young people, and vulnerable adults is a key priority for the Trust.
- ◆ Updated safeguarding policies have been implemented to align with current legislation and best practice.
- ◆ Ongoing training is provided to all staff, volunteers, and Trustees to ensure they understand their responsibilities.
- ◆ The Trust takes a proactive approach to maintaining a safe and inclusive environment across all its projects and activities.

## Public Benefit

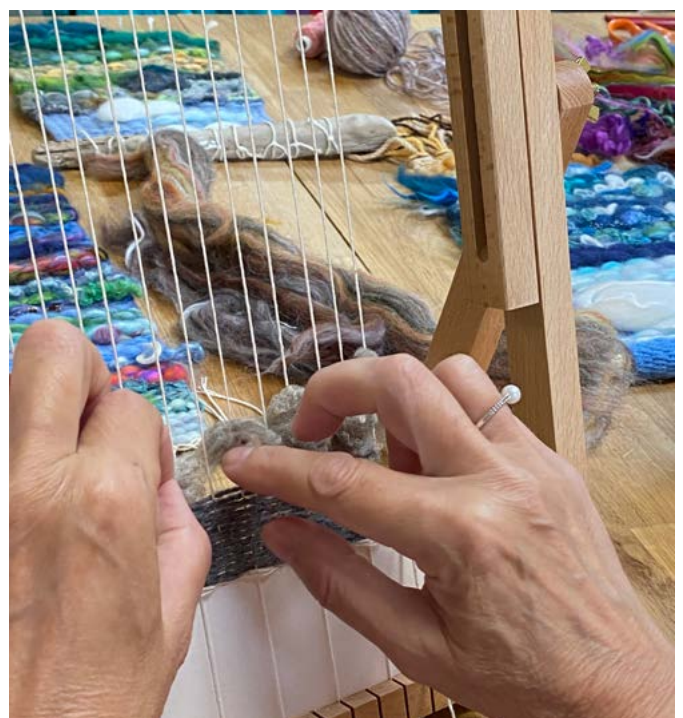
This annual report looks at what we have achieved over the previous twelve months. In setting our aims and planning our activities, Trustees have given careful consideration to the Charity Commission's guidance on Public Benefit.

Trustees believe that the provision of such benefit is an integral part to each of the Trust's charitable objectives. We work hard to deliver public benefit by promoting and protecting the beautiful landscape of the Ironbridge Gorge for everyone to enjoy.

- ◆ The 289 hectares of land that the Trust manages is available for the public to use freely, every day of the year.
- ◆ The benefits of access to green spaces to health and wellbeing are widely documented and accepted.
- ◆ The Outdoor Learning programme helps people engage with and appreciate the natural environment.
- ◆ Our Volunteer programme enables people to become actively engaged in their environment.
- ◆ The Trust land and activities are available to all and we try to make special provision wherever possible for the disabled and disadvantaged.

We believe that the work of the Trust has a positive impact on people, communities, wildlife and the environment.

This report also helps us ensure our aims, objectives and activities remained focused on our stated purpose. In order to achieve our aims the Trust must strive to maintain an efficient and effective organisation, that is well governed, professionally managed and which has the capacity, infrastructure and support necessary to deliver them.



# Financial Overview

## 2024/2025

**Our financial performance in 2024/2025 was stronger than expected, despite the difficult economic climate.**

We had budgeted for a larger deficit and expected to draw on our reserves. However, thanks to careful financial management and higher-than-anticipated income, not only from investments and grant funding but also from contracting services, timber product sales, and pop-up shops, we did not need to use our reserves.

In addition, we no longer have a pension deficit; we now hold a small surplus. This positive change further strengthens our balance sheet and overall financial position.

We ended the year with healthy reserves, giving us the confidence to move forward with plans to invest in alternative income streams.

### Our New Contracting Arm

In 2024, the Trust set up a contracting arm to help secure our long-term future and reduce reliance on grants and rental income. This new part of the Trust offers environmental and land management services to other organisations and landowners, providing a new source of income to support our core conservation work.

The contracting arm builds on the skills and experience already within the Trust.

Services include:

- ◆ Woodland management
- ◆ Habitat restoration
- ◆ Access and pathway improvements
- ◆ Ecological surveys
- ◆ Practical conservation work

These services are now being offered to local councils, businesses and similar land management organisations.

Any surplus generated is used to fund our core purpose, protecting and managing the Ironbridge Gorge World Heritage Site.

Setting up the contracting arm helps the Trust:

- ◆ Diversify our income, making us less dependent on external funding
- ◆ Build partnerships with councils, landowners, and environmental organisations
- ◆ Create job and training opportunities for local people
- ◆ Expand our conservation impact in the region while staying true to our values



## Ongoing Financial Pressures

While the Trust has delivered a positive financial result this year, it continues to operate in a challenging financial environment. Several ongoing pressures have the potential to impact future sustainability:

### ◆ Ageing Infrastructure

Many of the Trust's paths, access routes, and site features are in increasing need of repair and maintenance. Significant investment is required to ensure they remain safe, accessible, and fit for purpose.

### ◆ Rising Costs from Extreme Weather and Tree Disease

More frequent and severe weather events including storms and flooding are placing a growing strain on resources. In addition, the ongoing impact of Ash Dieback is leading to a sharp rise in emergency tree works and long-term woodland management costs.

### ◆ Increasing Core Operating Costs

The Trust is facing substantial rises in core expenditure, including staffing, contractor fees, insurance premiums, and energy bills, all of which put pressure on limited unrestricted income.

### ◆ Pressure on Traditional Income Streams

Several key income sources are under strain. Agri-environmental grants have been reduced due to government funding cuts, and rental income from the property portfolio has levelled off and is not keeping up with rising costs.

## Looking Forward

To help meet ongoing challenges and strengthen our long-term resilience, we are taking the following steps:

- ◆ Continuing to explore new sources of income
- ◆ Investing in capital infrastructure, such as machinery and facilities
- ◆ Improving our capacity to produce firewood and sawn timber in-house. This helps reduce external costs and creates potential new income opportunities
- ◆ Expanding our contracting arm to offer land management services to other organisations

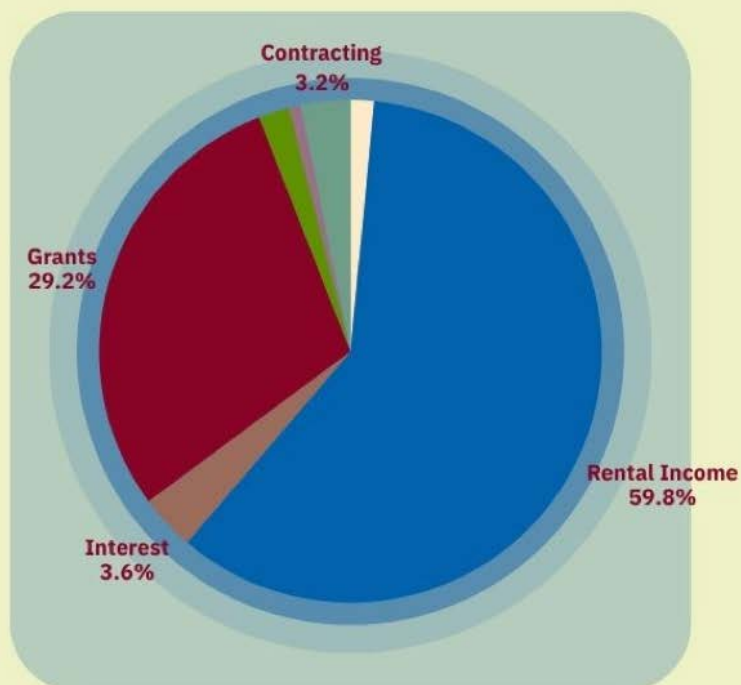
These steps are part of a wider strategy to ensure the Trust remains financially sustainable, while continuing to deliver its core charitable work. protecting and enhancing the Ironbridge Gorge landscape for future generations.



# Income

Income 24/25

- Rental Income**  
Income received from properties
- Interest & Dividends**  
Income received from Investments and bank accounts.
- Grants**  
Grant income received from a variety of organisations for projects.
- Timber Sales**  
Income received from sales of logs and standing timber
- Other**  
This heading includes sundry sales, room hire and includes income derived from 100 Club Lottery
- Outdoor Learning**  
Income derived from our Outdoor Learning Programme of Walks & Workshops
- Contracting**  
Income generated by contracting and landscaping work



## The chart above shows our main sources of income for 2024/2025

Income for the year increased relative to 2023/2024 by 19%, £412,207 in 24/25 from £345,501 in 23/24) This was primarily due to additional grant income in the form of Section 106 monies for Benthall Edge (an increase of 41%) together with an increase in rental income. The 5-year Countryside Stewardship scheme generated £23,503. A large proportion of the Trust's income continues to be invested in the management of the landscape. Agri-environment payments such as the Countryside Stewardship schemes are extremely important to the Trust. They are a key funding mechanism to support our woodland and meadow management.

The Trust continues to apply for grants from a variety of sources but is careful not to stray from its aims and objectives when looking for potential funding sources.

Income was generated largely from:

- ◆ Rentals received on commercial properties in the Telford area. (The need for a balancing package to provide sufficient income for the annual upkeep of the sites was recognised when the Trust was established. A package of commercial properties was transferred to Telford & Wrekin Council. They own the freehold of these income generating properties and are responsible for their management. They are covenanted to pay 90% of the income generated to the Trust to cover the cost of maintaining the land in the Gorge).
- ◆ Investments purchased by the Trust. These consist of Charity Investment funds, and an interest paying Bank Account
- ◆ Grants
- ◆ Contracting
- ◆ Timber sales
- ◆ Outdoor Learning Programme
- ◆ Small amounts from sundry sales, books, honey, charcoal
- ◆ Room hire

We received £246,364 in income from the rental properties, fishing and grazing rights compared to £234,522 last year. An increase of 5%. Several of the properties have had an uplift in the annual rental costs.

The Trust pays a 10% Management fee to Telford & Wrekin Council for managing the properties. The majority of the properties are on full repairing and insuring leases which means the tenant is responsible for the cost of repairs and upkeep to the property.

Interest and dividends provided £13,837 compared to £12,566 last year reflecting the changes in the Trust's investment makeup and stronger than anticipated returns on investments.

Standing timber/sawmill timber and log sales provided an additional £6,323.

An increase in the hire of the community room by groups has generated income of £4,456

## Grants to Help With Our Work

In support of its activities, the Trust received £120,432 (£81,723 in 23/24) from a wide number of bodies and is incredibly grateful to them all for their help and assistance:

**Countryside Stewardship** – the Trust received £26,423 in grant aid from this scheme. This grant contributes towards the Trust's woodland management costs. This is the third payment for this 5-year programme.

**Potters Landfill Tax** – £31,697 – Light Gives Light – Habitat creation

**Telford & Wrekin Council – Telford Treescapes** – £12,504 – Planting and maintenance of trees

**Big Give** – £9,902 – support towards the core costs of the Trust

**The Big Give** is an annual appeal that enables willing philanthropists to match the value of any donations made by supporters. This year, it was supported by the Environmental Funders Network (EFN), a UK-based network of foundations, family offices and individual donors supporting environmental causes.

The Gorge Parish Council – donated £500 towards the Big Give Campaign

**Wayleave Payments** – £406

**Bupa – Groundwork** – £236 – Willow bed restoration

**Suez** – £500 – Volunteer Support

**Veolia** – £974 – Children's Wild Art Activities

**Hilton Jones Charitable Trust** – £1,808 – Pond Creation

**Invest Telford** – £9,484 – Electric Sawmill

**Farming Recovery Fund** – £2,895 – impact of flooding

**Welcoming Spaces** – £497 – Volunteer support

**Section 106 Income** – £31,479 – Restricted income for Benthall Edge access and woodland work

**Donations – £3,018**

The Trust was fortunate to receive donations from individuals and organisations and we are very grateful to them for their support.



# Expenditure

## on charitable activities

Expenditure 24/25

### Woodland/Countryside Management

Costs incurred in the management of the 260 ha of land the Trust manages.

### Governance Costs

Costs incurred in the governance arrangements of the Trust.

### Projects

This heading includes expenditure on the Volunteer and Outdoor Learning Programme.

### Generating Voluntary Income

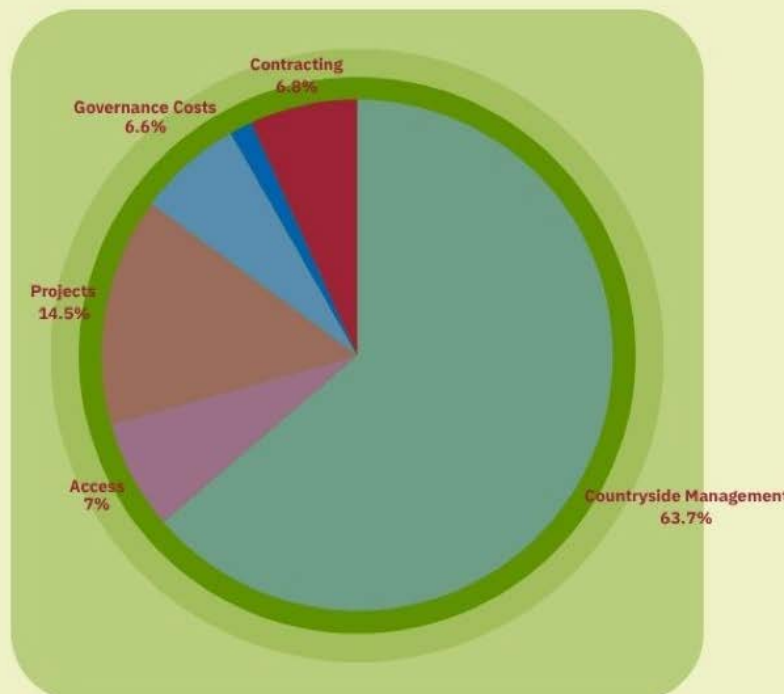
Administrative costs for generating voluntary income; grants, donations etc

### Access

Costs incurred on access works, repairs and maintenance

### Contracting

Costs incurred in undertaking contracting works, including salary costs, materials and equipment



Total expenditure for the year was £376,074 (£339,149 in 2023/2024), an increase of 10% reflecting continued investment in both core work and key projects including the contracting arm.

## Machinery Investment

During the year, the Trust made a significant investment in an electric sawmill and related tools, supported by grant funding. This expenditure forms part of our commitment to becoming carbon neutral by 2030. The electric equipment will help reduce our reliance on fossil fuels and lower emissions associated with our land management activities.

The electric sawmill is also enabling the Trust to mill its own timber in-house for use in access infrastructure repairs. This reduces costs by removing the need to purchase processed timber from external suppliers and allows us to make use of locally grown timber from our own sites. In addition to the financial savings, this supports our sustainability goals by promoting the use of local, renewable resources.

## Contracting

We also incurred expenditure related to establishing our contracting business, including employee costs for a Landscape and Forestry Officer and machinery. While we recognise that building up the business will take time, we are hopeful that it will develop into a sustainable and valuable source of income for the Trust in the future.

## Countryside and Landscape Maintenance – £239,438

Expenditure in this area relates to the ongoing care and management of land the Trust manages. Core costs include haymaking, hedge and ride cutting, structures inspections, tree safety surveys, maintenance of Jiggers Bank, and reactive landscape work such as tree safety operations — particularly in response to events like Storm Darragh.

Two key biodiversity and access improvement projects were completed during the year with external funding

support. The Light Gives Life project was funded through the Potters Landfill Grant, and the creation of the office pond was made possible through funding from Hilton Jones Charitable Trust. Both projects have enhanced biodiversity and made the sites more accessible to the public.

## Access - £26,248

Expenditure focused on improving public access on key sites impacted by prolonged wet weather and increased usage. Several flights of steps were repaired together with footpath and boardwalk repairs. To support these works sustainably and cost-effectively, timber was milled in-house from locally sourced logs, reducing reliance on external suppliers.

## Community Projects £54,385

Expenditure under Community Projects supported a range of activities aimed at engaging local people and visitors with the natural environment. This included costs associated with the Volunteering Project, the Outdoor Learning Programme, Wild About Art children's summer workshops, and a series of family-friendly guided walks. These initiatives are designed to foster greater connection to nature, promote environmental education, and encourage community involvement in the Trust's work.

We ensured that all restricted funds were used strictly for their intended purposes. The Trustees continue to monitor expenditure carefully to maintain financial sustainability while delivering maximum benefit to the community and the environment.

## Employment Costs

Employment costs increased by 9.1% to £217,618, due to a combination of factors. All staff received a cost-of-living pay rise in line with the National Joint Council (NJC) pay settlement of £1,290 per salary grade. In addition, the recruitment of a new staff member to support the expanding contracting business contributed to the overall increase in staffing costs. No Pension Deficit payment was required in 2024/2025

## Looking Ahead

Looking to the year ahead, a key area of planned expenditure is the replacement of the Trust Office roof, which has deteriorated over the last 18 months and is no longer fit for purpose. A designated fund has been established, with £50,000 set aside to cover the anticipated costs of this essential work. This investment will help protect the building and ensure it remains fit for purpose in the long term.

## Investment Policy, Powers and Performance

The Trustees are responsible for setting and overseeing the financial policies under which the Trust operates. Under the Memorandum and Articles of Association, the Trust has the power to deposit or invest funds as part of its long-term financial strategy.

## Our Investment Policy

The Trust aims to:

- ◆ Preserve the value of its capital
- ◆ Generate a dependable, growing income stream to support its core charitable work

In 2021, the investment policy was updated to reflect our commitment to ethical and environmental responsibility. No new investments will be made in companies deriving income from coal or oil extraction.

## Oversight and Management

Investment performance is reviewed by the Trust's Investment Working Group, which monitors reports from our advisors at LGT. They ensure that our investments remain aligned with the Trust's values and long-term goals.

## Performance Over the Last 12 Months

The past year has seen considerable volatility in global investment markets, driven by ongoing economic uncertainty, fluctuating interest rates, inflation concerns, and geopolitical instability. These factors have impacted both capital values and income from investments.



Like many charities, the Trust experienced a significant dip in the value of its portfolio in the first half of the financial year, followed by a gradual recovery toward the year-end. By March 2025, values had started to stabilise and show positive movement.

**As at 31 March 2025:**

- ◆ Value of investments: £493,664
- ◆ Cash held in bank accounts: £60,226

Despite short-term fluctuations, the Trust continues to take a long-term view. Day-to-day operations are not dependent on the immediate value of investments unless assets are sold. By maintaining a diversified, ethically aligned portfolio, we are positioned to benefit from future recovery and market growth.

The Trustees remain confident in the Trust’s investment strategy, which prioritises sustainability, ethical alignment, and resilience over short-term gains. The Trust will continue to monitor market developments closely while focusing on long-term security and income generation to support our charitable objectives.

**Severn Gorge Countryside Trust Funds**

The Trust’s funds are divided between unrestricted funds, restricted funds and designated funds.

The funds and their specific purpose are detailed below:

---

## Designated Funds

### Long Term Income Fund

This fund is established to support the Trust’s core activities by safeguarding against income shortfalls from void properties within the rental portfolio and ensuring a reliable income stream that keeps pace with inflation. Should rental income fall below the level necessary to meet the Trust’s essential obligations, funds will be drawn from this reserve to cover the shortfall. The Long Term Income Fund is managed by LGT Wealth Management and invested across equities, bonds, and other assets. All interest and dividends generated are retained within the fund.

### New Accommodation Fund

This fund was created to finance the construction of the Trust Office on Darby Road. It was initially capitalised through a transfer from the Long-Term Income Fund and will be used alongside restricted grants from the NHS and the Alcoa Foundation. The fund’s value will be written down over 50 years, reflecting the annual depreciation of the office building.

### Land and Structures Contingency Fund

This fund provides for necessary responses to significant issues related to geotechnical features, structural elements such as walls, land instability, drainage, and watercourses. An annual transfer of £10,000 is made to this fund when income permits. Works will be carried out once sufficient funds have accumulated, although some projects may proceed earlier if external funding is secured.

## **Farm the Flow Fund**

This fund was established to cover expenses related to the Farm the Flow Project.

## **Carry Over Funds**

These funds have been reserved for projects not completed within the expected financial year, primarily related to planned tree works. The funds will be utilized upon completion of these activities.

## **Lloyds Surrender Premium**

This fund originates from income received as a surrender premium from the Lloyds Bank rental property. It has been allocated to partially offset the depreciation cost of the Valtra tractor purchased in 2022.

## **Postcode Lottery**

Initially set up as a restricted grant from the Postcode Lottery, this fund was re-designated during the Covid-19 pandemic. The funder permitted its transfer to a designated fund, allowing the Trust to use it for any purpose.

## **Repairs and Maintenance Fund**

The Trustees have approved the establishment of a Repairs and Maintenance Fund to cover upcoming essential repairs to the Trust Office, which has now been in use for 13 years. One major concern is the cedar shingle roof, which is showing significant signs of wear and deterioration and will require replacement in the near future to prevent further damage to the building. To finance these necessary repairs, a transfer of funds was made from the Long-Term Income Fund. This designated fund will ensure that sufficient resources are available to maintain the Trust Office in good condition and protect the Trust's asset over the long term.

## **Land Rover Fund**

This fund was established to offset the cost of purchasing the new Hilux vehicle, using the sale proceeds from the previous Land Rover. The fund will be depreciated over the expected lifetime of the vehicle.

## **Sawmill and Electric Tools Fund**

This fund was set up to offset the capital cost of purchasing the electric sawmill and related tools, which were partially funded by a grant. The fund will be depreciated over the expected lifetime of these assets.

## **Restricted Funds**

### **Alcoa/Primary Care Trust New Office Fund**

This fund represents grant funding received towards the construction of the new Trust office. It is being amortised over 50 years, consistent with the office building's depreciation schedule.

### **Councillors Pride Grant**

This grant supports the development of the Outdoor Learning Area at the Trust office site.

### **Big Give Green Match Funding**

This fund supports the restoration of 5 ponds on the Trust's landholding. The work aims to increase biodiversity, capture more carbon, and encourage community participation.

### **Benthall Edge Section 106 Grant**

This grant was awarded as part of the Section 106 agreement linked to the redevelopment of the former Ironbridge power station site into a housing development. The funding is intended to mitigate the increased public pressure on the Benthall Edge Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) resulting from additional local residents. Specifically, the grant is designated to support improved access and woodland management at Benthall Edge. The funds have been set aside exclusively for these conservation and access enhancement projects.

### **General Reserve**

The Trust maintains a General Reserve comprising surpluses or deficits from the financial year. This reserve is also adjusted to reflect changes in the pension deficit: increases in the deficit reduce the reserve, while decreases enhance it. Trustees should be mindful of the pension liability's potential impact on the General Reserve.



## Table of Funds

<b>Designated Funds</b>	<b>Balance 1 April 2024</b>	<b>Balance 31 March 2025</b>
General Fund	£363,136	£509,936
Long Term Income Fund	£392,685	£350,437
Structures Contingency	£6,950	£6,950
Accommodation Fund	£165,600	£161,000
Lloyds Surrender Premium Fund	£31,000	£27,000
Postcode Lottery	£13,400	£13,400
Farm the Flow	£1,095	£1,095
Carry Over 22-23	£3,354	£3,354
Carry Over 23-24	£1,100	£1,100
Land Rover Sale	£10,400	£7,800
Repairs & Maintenance Fund	£0	£50,000
Revaluation Reserve	£270,592	£265,745
Sawmill & Electric Tools Depreciation	£0	£11,245
<b>Total</b>	<b>£896,176</b>	<b>£1,409,062</b>

<b>Restricted Funds</b>	<b>Balance 1 April 2024</b>	<b>Balance 31 March 2025</b>
Alcoa Accommodation	£6,569	£6,387
Primary Care Trust Accommodation	£62,870	£61,123
Councillors Pride Grant	£300	£300
Big Give Green Match Fund – Ponds, Newts & Shoots	£5,196	£5,196
Hilton Jones Charitable Trust	£1,808	£0
Veolia Envirogrant	£974	£0
Benthall Edge Section 106	£0	£31,342
<b>Total</b>	<b>£77,717</b>	<b>£104,348</b>

# Reserves Policy and Financial Overview

**The Trust generates an annual income in the region of £350,000 to £400,000, with the majority derived from rental properties. Additional income is received from environmental grants and modest sales of logs, hay, and timber. In 24-25, the Trust also started to generate income from contracting work.**

To ensure financial stability and protect against income volatility, the Trust maintains a reserves policy that requires holding an amount equivalent to the annual cost of operating the charity. This policy provides a buffer against short-term income disruption and supports effective risk management.

As of 31 March 2025, the Trust estimates that a reserve of £350,000 is required to meet its ongoing obligations. At that date, the balance in the Long-Term Income Fund stood at £350,437, closely aligning with the target reserve level.

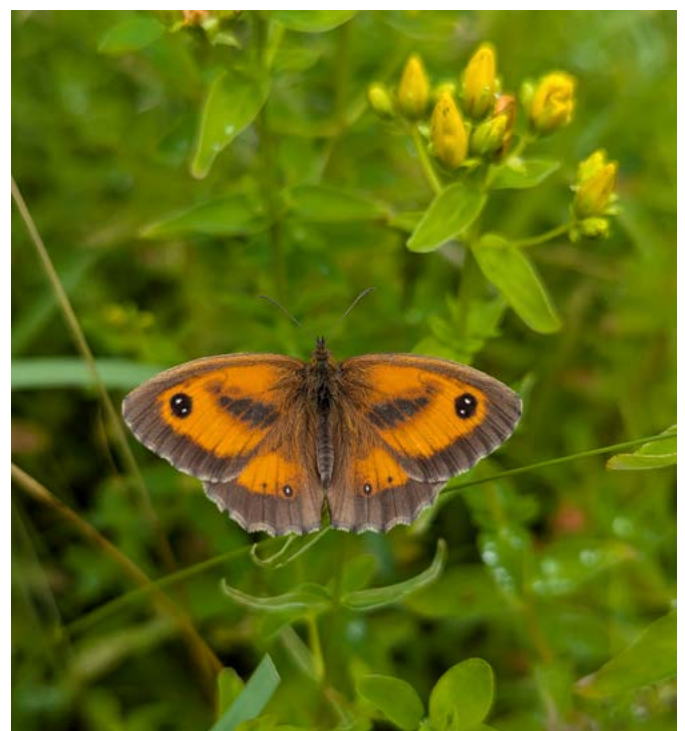
The rationale for this reserve level is primarily due to the Trust's reliance on rental income, which made up in the region of 60% of core income in 24/25. A loss of tenancy or void period could lead to a significant reduction in income. Holding reserves equivalent to one year's operational costs would give Trustees adequate time to identify replacement tenants or secure alternative funding sources.

Additionally, the Trust must consider the liabilities associated with land management, which can result in unforeseen expenditure. These liabilities are factored into the reserves assessment.

The reserves policy is reviewed annually as part of the budgeting process to ensure it remains appropriate to the Trust's evolving needs. The Trustees recognise that financial requirements may change from year to year, and the policy is adjusted accordingly.

In the event that the Trust were required to wind up its operations, reserves must also cover the cost of closure, including redundancy payments and other associated expenses. As of 31 March 2025, estimated redundancy liabilities were approximately £29,000.

In calculating available reserves, the Trust excludes fixed asset funds, pension liabilities, and any funds that are restricted for specific purposes, as these cannot be readily accessed. The resulting figure represents the Trust's 'free reserves'—the funds available for immediate use in response to unforeseen events or short-term funding needs.



## Pension Scheme

The Trust is an admission body in the Shropshire County Pension Scheme, which is a defined benefit scheme. This type of scheme offers employees a guaranteed pension based on their salary and length of service. As an employer, the Trust is responsible for ensuring that contributions to the scheme are sufficient to meet the future pension obligations, based on actuarial advice.

In accordance with accounting standards, the Trust must estimate and report pension liabilities within its financial statements. As is common among charities participating in defined benefit pension schemes, our scheme is currently reporting a surplus.

As of 31 March 2025, the pension scheme showed a surplus of £216,000, (an increase from £73,000 as at 31 March 2024). This represents a significant improvement in the Trust's funding position. The primary factors contributing to this improvement are higher bond yields and changes in actuarial funding assumptions and calculations.

Under current pension scheme regulations, this surplus is not accessible unless the Trust exits the scheme. Trustees should note that any surplus or deficit in the scheme will continue to fluctuate with market conditions. Their primary responsibility remains ensuring that the Trust continues to meet the required contribution levels as determined by the scheme actuary.

## Actuarial Valuation

At the last actuarial valuation in March 2023, the contribution rate payable by the Trust to the Shropshire County Pension Fund was assessed in two parts:

1. **Standard Contribution Rate** – This is calculated as a percentage of pensionable salaries and represents the cost of benefits being earned by current employees.
2. **Supplementary Contribution** – This may be required if the actuarial review determines that the accumulated liabilities of the scheme, covering benefits for past and present staff, are not fully funded by the standard contributions and the notional fund built up from past payments.

The total employer contribution rate is therefore the sum of these two components.

The Shropshire County Pension Fund has made significant progress in reducing its overall pension deficit and has implemented a clear strategy to continue this improvement. For the financial year 2024–2025, the Trust paid an employer contribution rate of 14.3%, and no annual deficit contribution was required.



## Future Plans

As we look ahead to 2025–2026, the Trust remains committed to managing the 289 hectares of the ‘living landscape’ within the World Heritage Site with the same care, consistency, and passion that have defined our work over the past 34 years.

### **Key projects for the coming year include:**

#### **Carrying Out Safety and Structural Work**

We’ll begin phased work based on our structural survey, including repairing fences, stabilising walls, and monitoring ground movement.

#### **Caring for the Land and Wildlife**

We’ll look after our woodlands, meadows, and wetlands, clearing hazardous trees, continuing to monitor the effects of Ash Dieback, planting native species where appropriate, and improving habitats to support wildlife and make the landscape more resilient to climate change.

#### **Improving Access and Visitor Experience**

We’ll upgrade entrances, signs, and pathways to make sites safer and more welcoming for everyone, including those less familiar with green spaces.

#### **Growing Outdoor Learning and Education**

We’ll expand our outdoor learning area, explore the idea of building an outdoor classroom, and offer education sessions for local schools and groups.

#### **Engaging the Community and Volunteers**

We’ll strengthen volunteering and training, helping local people get involved in landscape management. We’ll also explore new ways for people to get involved in monitoring nature, such as running a Bioblitz to record species and track changes over time. We’ll continue to offer corporate volunteering opportunities to local businesses, inviting them to take part in practical conservation tasks that support the landscape and offer a great team experience.

#### **Communicating with local people**

We’ll keep local people informed about upcoming work and make sure we listen to their feedback and concerns.

#### **Reviewing and Strengthening How We Work**

We’ll review our activities to see where we can grow or reduce work, ensure strong governance, and provide training to empower Trustees and staff to make good, strategic decisions.

### **Develop Contracting Opportunities**

We’ll continue developing a contracting arm to deliver conservation and land management services for other organisations, using our team’s skills to generate income and potentially create local jobs.

### **Tackling Climate Change and Reducing Carbon Emissions**

We’re committed to becoming carbon neutral by 2030. This includes ideas like a solar-powered timber kiln, switching to HVO fuel, and using electric transport for site visits. We’ll also manage the land with changes to future climate in mind, addressing flooding, and erosion issues to care for the landscape in the long term.

### **Raising Awareness and Promoting the Trust**

We’ll raise our profile by attending events, promoting our work, and encouraging more people to explore and enjoy the landscape we care for.

### **Maintaining a Safe and Functional Office Base**

We’ll continue to look after our office site, carrying out repairs and improvements to keep it a safe, welcoming place to work and visit.

### **Securing Grants and Partnerships**

We’ll keep applying for funding and building partnerships that help us deliver key projects and strengthen our financial viability.



# Statement of Trustees Responsibilities

## **The Trustees are responsible for preparing the Annual Report and the financial statements in accordance with applicable law and regulations.**

Company law requires Trustees to prepare financial statements for each financial year. The financial statements are required by law to give a true and fair view of the state of affairs of the company and of the profit or loss of the company for that period. In preparing those financial statements, the Trustees are required to:

- ◆ select suitable accounting policies and then apply them consistently.
- ◆ observe the methods and principles in the Charities SORP
- ◆ make judgements and estimates that are reasonable and prudent.
- ◆ state whether applicable UK Accounting Standards have been followed, subject to any material departures disclosed and explained in the financial statements.
- ◆ prepare the financial statements on the going concern basis unless it is inappropriate to presume that the company will continue in business.

The Trustees are responsible for keeping proper accounting records that disclose with reasonable accuracy at any time the financial position of the group and parent charity and enable them to ensure that the financial statements comply with the Charities Act 2011 and the Charity (Accounts and Reports) Regulations. They are also responsible for safeguarding the assets of company and hence for taking reasonable steps for the prevention and detection of fraud and other irregularities.

The Trustees are responsible for the maintenance and integrity of the financial information included on the charity's website.

In accordance with company law, as the company's directors, we certify that:

- ◆ so far as we are aware, there is no relevant audit information of which the company's auditor is unaware.

This report has been prepared in accordance with the Statement of Recommended Practice – Accounting and Reporting by Charities and in accordance with the provisions applicable to companies subject to the small companies' regime.

Approved by the Committee of Management on 10 September 2025 and signed on its behalf by:

**Maureen Bragg**

Chair

# Report and Financial Statements

For the year ended 31 March 2025

Company No. 2647374

Muras Baker Jones Limited  
Chartered Accountants  
Wolverhampton

## Opinion

We have audited the financial statements of Severn Gorge Countryside Trust (the 'charitable company') for the year ended 31 March 2025 which comprise the statement of financial activities (including income and expenditure account), statement of financial position and the related notes, including a summary of significant accounting policies. The financial reporting framework that has been applied in their preparation is applicable law and United Kingdom Accounting Standards, including FRS 102 The Financial Reporting Standard applicable in the UK and Republic of Ireland (United Kingdom Generally Accepted Accounting Practice).

In our opinion the financial statements:

- give a true and fair view of the state of the charitable company's affairs as at 31 March 2025 and of its incoming resources and application of resources, including its income and expenditure, for the year then ended
- have been properly prepared in accordance with United Kingdom Generally Accepted Accounting Practice
- have been prepared in accordance with the requirements of the Companies Act 2006

## Basis for opinion

We conducted our audit in accordance with International Standards on Auditing (UK) (ISAs (UK)) and applicable law. Our responsibilities under those standards are further described in the auditor's responsibilities for the audit of the financial statements section of our report. We are independent of the charity in accordance with the ethical requirements that are relevant to our audit of the financial statements in the UK, including the FRC's Ethical Standard, and we have fulfilled our other ethical responsibilities in accordance with these requirements. We believe that the audit evidence we have obtained is sufficient and appropriate to provide a basis for our opinion.

## Conclusions relating to going concern

In auditing the financial statements, we have concluded that the trustees' use of the going concern basis of accounting in the preparation of the financial statements is appropriate.

Based on the work we have performed, we have not identified any material uncertainties relating to events or conditions that, individually or collectively, may cast significant doubt on the charitable company's ability to continue as a going concern for a period of at least twelve months from when the financial statements are authorised for issue.

Our responsibilities and the responsibilities of the trustees with respect to going concern are described in the relevant sections of this report.

## Other information

The other information comprises the information included in the trustees' annual report<sup>2</sup>, other than the financial statements and our auditor's report thereon. The trustees are responsible for the other information. Our opinion on the financial statements does not cover the other information and, except to the extent otherwise explicitly stated in our report, we do not express any form of assurance conclusion thereon. Our responsibility is to read the other information and, in doing so, consider whether the other information is materially inconsistent with the financial statements or our knowledge obtained in the course of the audit or otherwise appears to be materially misstated. If we identify such material inconsistencies or apparent material misstatements, we are required to determine whether this gives rise to a material misstatement in the financial statements themselves. If, based on the work we have performed, we conclude that there is a material misstatement of this other information, we are required to report that fact.

We have nothing to report in this regard.

## **Opinions on other matters prescribed by the Companies Act 2006**

In our opinion, based on the work undertaken in the course of the audit:

- the information given in the trustees' report, which includes the directors' report prepared for the purposes of company law, for the financial year for which the financial statements are prepared is consistent with the financial statements; and
- the directors' report included within the trustees' report has been prepared in accordance with applicable legal requirements.

## **Matters on which we are required to report by exception**

In the light of the knowledge and understanding of the charitable company and its environment obtained in the course of the audit, we have not identified material misstatements in the trustees' report.

We have nothing to report in respect of the following matters in relation to which the Companies Act 2006 requires us to report to you if, in our opinion:

- adequate accounting records have not been kept, or returns adequate for our audit have not been received from branches not visited by us; or
- the financial statements are not in agreement with the accounting records and returns; or
- certain disclosures of trustees' remuneration specified by law are not made; or
- we have not received all the information and explanations we require for our audit; or
- the trustees were not entitled to take advantage of the small companies' exemptions in preparing the directors' report and from the requirement to prepare a strategic report.

## **Responsibilities of trustees**

As explained more fully in the trustees' responsibilities statement, the trustees (who are also the directors for the purposes of company law) are responsible for the preparation of the financial statements and for being satisfied that they give a true and fair view, and for such internal control as the trustees determine is necessary to enable the preparation of financial statements that are free from material misstatement, whether due to fraud or error.

In preparing the financial statements, the trustees are responsible for assessing the charitable company's ability to continue as a going concern, disclosing, as applicable, matters related to going concern and using the going concern basis of accounting unless the trustees either intend to liquidate the charitable company or to cease operations, or have no realistic alternative but to do so.

## **Auditor's responsibilities for the audit of the financial statements**

Our objectives are to obtain reasonable assurance about whether the financial statements as a whole are free from material misstatement, whether due to fraud or error, and to issue an auditor's report that includes our opinion. Reasonable assurance is a high level of assurance, but is not a guarantee that an audit conducted in accordance with ISAs (UK) will always detect a material misstatement when it exists. Misstatements can arise from fraud or error and are considered material if, individually or in the aggregate, they could reasonably be expected to influence the economic decisions of users taken on the basis of these financial statements.

Irregularities, including fraud, are instances of non-compliance with laws and regulations. We design procedures in line with our responsibilities, outlined above, to detect material misstatements in respect of irregularities, including fraud. The extent to which our procedures are capable of detecting irregularities, including fraud is detailed below:

In planning and designing our audit tests we identify and assess the risks of material misstatement within the financial statements, whether due to fraud or error. Our assessment of these risks includes consideration of the nature of the industry and sector, the control environment and the charity performance

along with the results of our enquiries of management about their own identification and assessment of risks and irregularities. In planning and designing our audit tests we identify and assess the risks of material misstatement within the financial statements, whether due to fraud or error. Our assessment of these risks includes consideration of the nature of the industry and sector, the control environment and the charity performance along with the results of our enquiries of management about their own identification and assessment of risks and irregularities. In common with all audits under ISAs (UK), we are also required to perform specific procedures to respond to the risk of management override. We also obtained an understanding of the legal and regulatory frameworks that the charitable company operates in, focusing on provisions of those laws and regulations that had a direct effect on the determination of material amounts and disclosures in the financial statements. The key laws and regulations we considered in this context included the UK Companies Act, Charities Act, UK tax legislation and other laws and regulations identified as risk areas identified from our discussions with management.

We communicated relevant identified laws and regulations and potential fraud risks to all engagement team members including internal specialists, and remained alert to any indications of fraud or non-compliance with laws and regulations throughout the audit.

After consideration of the above risks we then carried out audit procedures including the following:

- performing analytical procedures to identify any unusual or unexpected relationships that may indicate risks of material misstatement due to fraud;
- reading minutes of trustees meetings;
- reviewing correspondence with H M Revenue & Customs;
- enquiring of management and reviewing any correspondence with legal advisors concerning actual and potential litigation and claims;
- reviewing the financial statement disclosures and testing to supporting documentation to assess compliance with provisions of relevant laws and regulations described as having a direct effect on the financial statements;
- in addressing the risk of fraud through management override of controls, testing the appropriateness of journal entries and other adjustments; assessing whether the judgements made in making accounting estimates are indicative of a potential bias; and evaluating the business rationale of any significant transactions that are unusual or outside the normal course of business.

There are inherent limitations in our audit procedures described above. The more removed that the laws and regulations are from financial transactions the less likely it is that we would be aware of non-compliance. Auditing standards also limit the audit procedures required to identify non-compliance with laws and regulations to enquiry of the trustees and other management and the inspection of regulatory and legal correspondence, if any. Material misstatements that arise due to fraud can be harder to detect than those that arise from error as they may involve deliberate concealment or collusion.

A further description of our responsibilities for the audit of the financial statements is located on the Financial Reporting Council's website at [www.frc.org.uk/auditorsresponsibilities](http://www.frc.org.uk/auditorsresponsibilities). This description forms part of our auditor's report

## Use of our report

This report is made solely to the charitable company's members, as a body, in accordance with Chapter 3 of Part 16 of the Companies Act 2006. Our audit work has been undertaken so that we might state to the charitable company's members those matters we are required to state to them in an auditor's report and for no other purpose. To the fullest extent permitted by law, we do not accept or assume responsibility to anyone other than the charitable company and the charitable company's members as a body, for our audit work, for this report, or for the opinions we have formed.

.....  
Oliver Ross BSc(Hons) FCA (Senior Statutory Auditor)  
For and on behalf of Muras Baker Jones Limited  
Chartered Accountants and Statutory Auditor

10 September 2025

Regent House  
Bath Avenue  
Wolverhampton  
WV1 4EG

STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL ACTIVITIES  
(being INCOME AND EXPENDITURE ACCOUNT)

For the year ended 31 March 2025

	Notes	General Fund £	Designated Funds £	Restricted funds £	Total funds 2025 £	Total funds 2024 £
<b>INCOME</b>						
<b>INCOMING RESOURCES FROM CHARITABLE ACTIVITIES</b>						
Rents received	4	246,365	-	-	246,365	234,523
Grants	4	74,561	14,393	-	88,954	81,723
<b>INCOME FROM OTHER TRADING ACTIVITIES</b>						
Investment income		2,684	12,059	-	14,743	12,566
Section 106 income		-	-	31,479	31,479	
Other income		15,584	-	-	15,584	15,437
Gifts and Donations		1,968	-	-	1,968	1,252
Contracting income		13,114	-	-	13,114	-
<b>Total Income</b>		<b>354,276</b>	<b>26,452</b>	<b>31,479</b>	<b>412,207</b>	<b>345,501</b>
<b>EXPENDITURE</b>						
<b>COSTS OF RAISING FUNDS</b>						
Costs of generating voluntary income	5	5,495	-	-	5,495	5,302
<b>EXPENDITURE ON CHARITABLE ACTIVITIES</b>						
Woodland/Countryside Management	5	226,702	9,095	3,640	239,437	234,688
Access	5	26,040	175	33	26,248	23,174
Projects	5	52,132	1,078	1,175	54,385	53,704
<b>CONTRACTING COSTS</b>	5	25,559	-	-	25,559	
<b>GOVERNANCE COSTS</b>	5	20,642	4,307	-	24,949	22,281
<b>Total Expenditure</b>		<b>356,570</b>	<b>14,655</b>	<b>4,848</b>	<b>376,073</b>	<b>339,149</b>
<b>NET INCOME/(EXPENDITURE)</b>		<b>(2,294)</b>	<b>11,797</b>	<b>26,631</b>	<b>36,134</b>	<b>6,352</b>
<b>TRANSFERS BETWEEN FUNDS</b>		<b>4,000</b>	<b>(4,000)</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>
<b>NET INCOME/(EXPENDITURE) BEFORE OTHER GAINS / (LOSSES) – carried forward</b>		<b>1,706</b>	<b>7,797</b>	<b>26,631</b>	<b>36,134</b>	<b>6,352</b>

STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL ACTIVITIES  
(being INCOME AND EXPENDITURE ACCOUNT) continued

For the year ended 31 March 2025

	Notes	General Fund £	Designated Funds £	Restricted Funds £	Total Funds 2025 £	Total funds 2024 £
NET INCOME/(EXPENDITURE) BEFORE OTHER GAINS / (LOSSES) – brought forward		1,706	7,797	26,631	36,134	6,352
OTHER GAINS AND LOSSES						
Gains/(losses) on Investments - realised		-	4,326	-	4,326	(2,575)
Gains/(losses) on Investments – unrealised		-	(9,173)	-	(9,173)	30,229
Pension scheme actuarial (losses)/gains	14	145,094	-	-	145,094	88,205
<hr/>						
NET MOVEMENT IN FUNDS FOR THE YEAR		146,800	2,950	26,631	176,381	122,211
<hr/>						
TOTAL FUNDS BROUGHT FORWARD AT 31 MARCH 2024		363,136	896,176	77,717	1,337,029	1,214,818
<hr/>						
TOTAL FUNDS CARRIED FORWARD AT 31 MARCH 2025		509,936	899,126	104,348	1,513,410	1,337,029
<hr/>						

All income and expenditure derive from continuing activities.

The statement of financial activities includes all gains and losses recognised in the year.

## BALANCE SHEET

At 31 March 2025

	Notes	2025		2024	
		£	£	£	£
<b>FIXED ASSETS</b>					
Tangible assets	6		600,696		625,110
Investments	7		493,664		495,658
			<u>1,094,360</u>		<u>1,120,768</u>
<b>CURRENT ASSETS</b>					
Debtors	8	75,966		35,048	
Investments	9	40,794		39,056	
Cash at bank and in hand		105,246		71,013	
		<u>222,006</u>		<u>145,117</u>	
<b>CREDITORS - amounts falling due within one year</b>	10	<b>(18,956)</b>		<b>(1,856)</b>	
<b>NET CURRENT ASSETS</b>			<b>203,050</b>		<b>143,261</b>
Pension benefit pension scheme asset/(liability)	12		216,000		73,000
<b>NET ASSETS</b>			<u><b>1,513,410</b></u>		<u><b>1,337,029</b></u>
<b>THE FUNDS OF THE CHARITY:</b>					
General fund	11		509,936		363,136
Designated funds	11		633,381		625,584
Restricted funds	11		104,348		77,717
Revaluation funds	11		265,745		270,592
<b>TOTAL CHARITY FUNDS</b>			<u><b>1,513,410</b></u>		<u><b>1,337,029</b></u>

The financial statements were approved by the Committee of Management on 10 September 2025 signed on its behalf by:-

Maureen Bragg  
Chair

## NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

For the year ended 31 March 2025

### 1. ACCOUNTING POLICIES

#### a) BASIS OF PREPARATION

The charity constitutes a public benefit entity as defined by FRS 102. The financial statements have been prepared in accordance with Accounting and Reporting by Charities: Statement of Recommended Practice applicable to charities preparing their accounts in accordance with the Financial Reporting Standard applicable in the UK and Republic of Ireland issued in October 2019, the Financial Reporting Standard applicable in the United Kingdom and Republic of Ireland (FRS 102), the Charities Act 2011, the Companies Act 2006 and UK Generally Accepted Accounting Practice.

The financial statements are prepared on a going concern basis under the historical cost convention, modified to include investments and certain freehold property at fair value.

#### b) INCOME

Rental income is included when receivable.

Income from contracting projects is recognised when receivable.

Grants are recognised in full in the Statement of Financial Activities when receivable.

Income from investments and other income, including small sales of timber and refunds, are included when receivable.

#### c) EXPENDITURE AND IRRECOVERABLE VAT

Resources expended are recognised in the period in which they are incurred. Resources expended include attributable VAT, which cannot be recovered.

The proportion of employees time spent fundraising is shown as costs of generating voluntary income.

Resources expended are allocated to the particular activity where the cost relates directly to that activity. The cost of overall direction and administration on each activity is apportioned based on the direct costs incurred for each.

#### d) DEPRECIATION

Depreciation is provided on the cost of fixed assets to write off the cost less estimated residual value of each asset over its estimated useful life at the following rates:

Freehold property	Depreciated over 50 years
Fixtures & Equipment	10% straight line/20% straight line/33 <sup>1</sup> / <sub>3</sub> % straight line
Plant and Machinery	10% straight line/20% straight line/33 <sup>1</sup> / <sub>3</sub> % straight line
Motor vehicles	20% straight line/25% reducing balance
Facility Construction	10% straight line

No depreciation is provided on Freehold Land.

## NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

For the year ended 31 March 2025

### 1. ACCOUNTING POLICIES

#### a) BASIS OF PREPARATION

The charity constitutes a public benefit entity as defined by FRS 102. The financial statements have been prepared in accordance with Accounting and Reporting by Charities: Statement of Recommended Practice applicable to charities preparing their accounts in accordance with the Financial Reporting Standard applicable in the UK and Republic of Ireland issued in October 2019, the Financial Reporting Standard applicable in the United Kingdom and Republic of Ireland (FRS 102), the Charities Act 2011, the Companies Act 2006 and UK Generally Accepted Accounting Practice.

The financial statements are prepared on a going concern basis under the historical cost convention, modified to include investments and certain freehold property at fair value.

#### b) INCOME

Rental income is included when receivable.

Income from contracting projects is recognised when receivable.

Grants are recognised in full in the Statement of Financial Activities when receivable.

Income from investments and other income, including small sales of timber and refunds, are included when receivable.

#### c) EXPENDITURE AND IRRECOVERABLE VAT

Resources expended are recognised in the period in which they are incurred. Resources expended include attributable VAT, which cannot be recovered.

The proportion of employees time spent fundraising is shown as costs of generating voluntary income.

Resources expended are allocated to the particular activity where the cost relates directly to that activity. The cost of overall direction and administration on each activity is apportioned based on the direct costs incurred for each.

#### d) DEPRECIATION

Depreciation is provided on the cost of fixed assets to write off the cost less estimated residual value of each asset over its estimated useful life at the following rates:

Freehold property	Depreciated over 50 years
Fixtures & Equipment	10% straight line/20% straight line/33 <sup>1</sup> / <sub>3</sub> % straight line
Plant and Machinery	10% straight line/20% straight line/33 <sup>1</sup> / <sub>3</sub> % straight line
Motor vehicles	20% straight line/25% reducing balance
Facility Construction	10% straight line

No depreciation is provided on Freehold Land.

## NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

For the year ended 31 March 2025

### 1. ACCOUNTING POLICIES (Continued)

#### e) TANGIBLE ASSETS

Tangible assets are initially recorded at cost, and subsequently stated at cost less any accumulated depreciation and impairment losses. Any tangible assets carried at revalued amounts are recorded at the fair value at the date of revaluation less any subsequent accumulated depreciation and subsequent accumulated impairment losses.

An increase in the carrying amount of an asset as a result of revaluation, is recognised in other recognised gains and losses, unless it reverses a charge for impairment that has previously been recognised as expenditure within the statement of financial activities. A decrease in the carrying amount of an asset as a result of revaluation, is recognised in other recognised gains and losses, except to which it offsets any previous revaluation gain, in which case the loss is shown within other recognised gains and losses on the statement of financial activities.

#### f) INVESTMENTS

Investments held as current assets are stated at the lower of cost and net realisable value.

Investments held as fixed assets are revalued annually and the aggregate surplus or deficit is transferred to Revaluation Reserve.

#### g) GENERAL FUND

This represents unrestricted funds that are available for use at the Trustees' discretion in furtherance of the objectives of the Trust.

#### h) DESIGNATED FUNDS

These are unrestricted funds earmarked by the trustees out of general fund for specific purposes or projects as detailed in note 11 and in the Trustees report. Included in designated funds are:

- i) Long Term Income Fund - this fund arises from the combining of the Income Security Fund and the Long Term Development Reserve and reflects monies held within Fixed and Current Asset Investments. The purpose of the fund is to provide additional income for the Trust's core work when rental income declines as properties reach the end of their expected commercial 'life' circa 2015 to 2025.
- ii) Land and Structures Contingency - this reserve reflects monies held within current asset investments. The reserve has been created to cope with expenditure arising as a result of land instability, drainage and watercourse issues and potential problems with existing structures.
- iii) Revaluation Reserve - this reflects the increase in the fair value of investments and land over their original cost.

## NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

For the year ended 31 March 2025

### 1. ACCOUNTING POLICIES (Continued)

#### h) DESIGNATED FUNDS - continued

- iv) Lloyds Bank Surrender Premium Fund and Carry Over Funds. These reserves relate to surplus funds arising on certain projects during the year for which the trustees have designated against specific expenditure over the next 2 years.
- v) Postcode Lottery Access Fund. Being grants received in respect of work to be carried out on steps in the Gorge. Re-designated by the grant provider as unrestricted.
- vi) Repair & Maintenance Fund. Being funds transferred from Long Term Income Fund in respect of anticipated repairs to the Trust's offices.

#### i) RESTRICTED FUNDS

These represent grants received for specified projects, the use of each grant being restricted to that project.

#### j) GOING CONCERN

The trustees remain mindful of the impact on the charity of external economic constraints and as a result regularly review projections and budgets for the current and subsequent periods. Based on these reviews, the trustees consider there to be no significant overall impact on the charity's ability to continue as a going concern.

The trustees have also reviewed the supply chains, key income sources and the capital resources available and consider that the charity has adequate resources in place to continue operating for the next twelve months.

#### k) EMPLOYEE BENEFITS

The charity contributes to a defined benefit plan for certain employees. A liability for the charity's obligation under the plan is recognised net of plan assets. The net change in the net defined benefit liability is recognised as the costs of the defined benefit plan during the period. Pension plan assets are measured at fair value and the defined benefit obligation is measured on an actuarial basis using the projected unit method.

The trustees believe that the scheme currently meets statutory minimum funding requirements. It is intended that the level of annual contributions to the scheme will be adjusted following the next detailed actuarial valuation. The directors note that the calculated notional deficit or surplus calculated under FRS102 can vary greatly from year to year depending on the assumptions made at the valuation date, but with normally little or no effect on short term cashflows.

### 2. (DEFICIT)/SURPLUS FOR THE YEAR

The (deficit)/surplus for the year is stated after charging:

	2025	2024
	£	£
Auditors' remuneration	2,880	2,748
Depreciation of tangible fixed assets	35,203	34,383
	<u>38,083</u>	<u>37,131</u>

## NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

For the year ended 31 March 2025

### 3. STAFF COSTS

	2025 £	2024 £
Wages and salaries	175,538	154,043
Social security costs	12,260	10,022
Other pension Costs	25,402	28,000
Other costs	4,418	7,828
	<u>217,618</u>	<u>199,454</u>

No employees received remuneration in excess of £60,000 (2024: None).

No Trustees received any remuneration in the year (2024 - £Nil). Apart from the Trustees, the company had 7 employees at 31 March 2025 (2024 - 6).

Staff costs in respect of key management personnel amounted to £55,051 (2024 - £52,359).

### 4. INCOMING RESOURCES FROM CHARITABLE ACTIVITIES

	General fund £	Restricted funds £	Total 2025 £	Total 2024 £
Rents received	246,365	-	246,365	234,523
Grants:				
Natural England:				
Countryside Stewardship	26,423	-	26,423	23,503
Other	2,840	-	2,840	2,202
Telford Treescapes grant	12,504	-	12,504	12,504
Bupa – Groundwork Willow	236	-	236	2,124
Potter Group – Environment Fund	19,761	-	19,761	31,697
Big Give – Green Match Fund	9,902	-	9,902	5,196
Hilton Jones Trust – Office Pond	-	-	-	1,808
The Tree Council	-	-	-	1,715
Veolia Environmental Trust	-	-	-	974
Farming Recovery Fund	2,895	-	2,895	-
Invest Telford – Sawmill grant	9,484	-	9,484	-
Worcestershire County Council -MEG	4,909	-	4,909	-
	<u>88,954</u>	<u>-</u>	<u>88,954</u>	<u>81,723</u>
	<u>335,319</u>	<u>-</u>	<u>335,319</u>	<u>316,246</u>

NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

For the year ended 31 March 2025

5. ANALYSIS OF EXPENDITURE ON CHARITABLE ACTIVITIES

	Generating voluntary income £	Woodland/ countryside management £	Access £	Projects £	Contracting expenditure £	Governance costs £	Total 2025 £	Total 2024 £
Direct costs	-	61,920	-	7,203	9,880	-	79,003	75,130
Employee costs	5,495	122,367	25,187	40,642	15,492	8,435	217,618	199,453
Insurance	-	8,767	169	1,040	-	-	9,976	9,769
Transport	-	5,870	113	696	-	-	6,679	7,297
Office and other costs	-	9,738	187	1,155	-	1,309	12,389	13,541
Trustee support	-	-	-	-	-	403	403	678
Professional costs	-	-	-	-	-	14,287	14,287	11,899
Depreciation	-	30,775	592	3,649	187	-	35,203	34,382
(Profit)/loss on disposal of tangible fixed assets	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	(13,000)
100 Club costs	-	-	-	-	-	515	515	-
	<u>5,495</u>	<u>239,437</u>	<u>26,248</u>	<u>54,385</u>	<u>25,559</u>	<u>24,949</u>	<u>376,073</u>	<u>339,149</u>

NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

For the year ended 31 March 2025

6. TANGIBLE FIXED ASSETS

	Plant and machinery £	Land and buildings £	Motor vehicles £	Fixtures & equipment £	Facility Construction £	Contracting Equipment £	Total £
<b>COST:</b>							
At 1 April 2024	121,541	629,476	51,421	49,038	4,495	-	855,971
Additions	4,860	-	-	4,967	-	964	10,791
Disposals	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
<b>At 31 March 2025</b>	<b>126,401</b>	<b>629,476</b>	<b>51,421</b>	<b>54,005</b>	<b>4,495</b>	<b>964</b>	<b>866,762</b>
<b>DEPRECIATION:</b>							
At 1 April 2024	35,545	122,527	33,924	36,169	2,698	-	230,863
Charge for the Year	15,121	8,752	4,374	6,318	450	188	35,203
Disposals	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
<b>At 31 March 2025</b>	<b>50,666</b>	<b>131,279</b>	<b>38,298</b>	<b>42,487</b>	<b>3,148</b>	<b>188</b>	<b>266,066</b>
<b>NET BOOK VALUE:</b>							
At 31 March 2024	85,997	506,949	17,498	12,869	1,797	-	625,110
<b>At 31 March 2025</b>	<b>75,735</b>	<b>498,197</b>	<b>13,123</b>	<b>11,518</b>	<b>1,347</b>	<b>776</b>	<b>600,696</b>

## NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

For the year ended 31 March 2025

### 7. FIXED ASSET INVESTMENTS

	2025 £	2024 £
Balance brought forward	495,658	464,158
Additions	198,838	121,369
Disposals	(191,701)	(120,098)
Revaluation adjustment	(9,131)	30,229
	<hr/>	<hr/>
Balance carried forward	493,664	495,658
	<hr/> <hr/>	<hr/> <hr/>
Historical cost of investments held at 31 March 2025	458,206	471,662
	<hr/> <hr/>	<hr/> <hr/>

Investments are acquired to provide fixed funding for certain of the Designated Funds set up by the Trust (see Note 11).

	2025		2024	
	Original cost £	Market value £	Original cost £	Market value £
<b>Abundance</b>				
- Telford & Wrekin Climate Action Investment	527	527	817	796
<b>LGT Wealth Management</b>				
- Investment portfolio	457,679	493,137	470,845	494,862
	<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>
	458,206	493,664	471,662	495,658
	<hr/> <hr/>	<hr/> <hr/>	<hr/> <hr/>	<hr/> <hr/>

### 8. DEBTORS

	2025 £	2024 £
Trade debtors	75,235	35,048
Prepayments	731	-
	<hr/>	<hr/>
	75,966	35,048
	<hr/> <hr/>	<hr/> <hr/>

NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

For the year ended 31 March 2025

9. CURRENT ASSET INVESTMENTS

	2025 £	2024 £
Short term deposits	40,794	39,056

10. CREDITORS - amounts falling due within one year

	2025 £	2024 £
Trade Creditors	18,956	1,856
	<u>18,956</u>	<u>1,856</u>

11. ANALYSIS OF CHARITABLE FUNDS

	At 1 April 2024 £	Income £	Expend- iture £	Other recognised gains/ (losses) £	Trans- fers £	At 31 March 2025 £
<b>Analysis of movements in unrestricted funds</b>						
General Fund	363,136	354,276	(356,570)	145,094	4,000	509,936
Long Term Income Fund	392,685	12,059	(4,307)	-	(50,000)	350,437
Land and Structures Contingency Accommodation Fund	6,950	-	-	-	-	6,950
Revaluation Reserve	165,600	-	(4,600)	-	-	161,000
Lloyds Surrender Premium fund	270,592	-	-	(4,847)	-	265,745
Postcode Lottery	31,000	-	-	-	(4,000)	27,000
Access Fund	13,400	-	-	-	-	13,400
Farm the Flow	1,095	-	-	-	-	1,095
Repairs & Maintenance Fund	-	-	-	-	50,000	50,000
Carry Over From 22/23	3,354	-	-	-	-	3,354
Land Rover sale	10,400	-	(2,600)	-	-	7,800
Carry Over From 23/24	1,100	-	-	-	-	1,100
Sawmill & Electric Tools Depreciation	-	14,393	(3,148)	-	-	11,245
	<u>896,176</u>	<u>26,452</u>	<u>(14,655)</u>	<u>(4,847)</u>	<u>(4,000)</u>	<u>899,126</u>

NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

For the year ended 31 March 2025

11. ANALYSIS OF CHARITABLE FUNDS continued

	At 1 April 2024	Income	Expend- iture	Other recogni- sed gains/ (losses)	Trans- fers	At 31 March 2025
	£	£	£	£	£	£
<b>Analysis of movements in restricted funds</b>						
Alcoa Grant	6,569	-	(182)	-	-	6,387
Primary Care Trust - New Office project	62,870	-	(1,747)	-	-	61,123
Councillors Pride Grant	300	-	-	-	-	300
Hilton Jones Charitable Trust - Office Pond	1,808	-	(1,808)	-	-	-
Green Match Fund Big Give - Ponds Newts and Shoots	5,196	-	-	-	-	5,196
Veolia Envirogrant - Wild Art Workshops Benthall Edge - Section 106 Funds	974	-	(974)	-	-	-
	-	31,479	(137)	-	-	31,342
	77,717	31,479	(4,848)	-	-	104,348
<b>Total Funds</b>	<b>1,337,029</b>	<b>412,207</b>	<b>(376,073)</b>	<b>140,247</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>1,513,410</b>

## NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

For the year ended 31 March 2025

### 11. ANALYSIS OF CHARITABLE FUNDS continued

The assets comprising each Fund at 31 March 2025 are as follows:

	Tangible fixed assets £	Fixed asset investments £	Current assets / (Liabilities) £	Total £
Accommodation Fund	161,000	-	-	161,000
Long Term Income Fund	-	339,844	10,593	350,437
Revaluation Reserve	111,925	153,820	-	265,745
Land and Structures				
Contingency	-	-	6,950	6,950
Lloyds Surrender Premium Fund	-	-	27,000	27,000
Farm the Flow carry over	-	-	1,095	1,095
Postcode Lottery Access Fund	-	-	13,400	13,400
Carry Over from 22/23	-	-	3,354	3,354
Land Rover sale	7,800	-	-	7,800
Repairs & Maintenance fund	-	-	50,000	50,000
Carry Over from 23/24	-	-	1,100	1,100
Sawmill & Electric Tools	-	-	11,245	11,245
Restricted Funds	67,510	-	36,838	104,348
General Fund	252,461	-	257,475	509,936
	600,696	493,664	419,050	1,513,410
	600,696	493,664	419,050	1,513,410

#### Fund transfers

Lloyds Surrender Premium Budget. A transfer of £4,000 was made to the general fund to offset the depreciation of capital machinery.

Repairs and maintenance fund. A transfer of £50,000 was made from the long term income fund to the repairs and maintenance fund as a contingency against future repair work needed for the trust's office building.

#### General Fund

Included within General Fund is a surplus of £216,000 arising in respect of the pension scheme balance at 31 March 2025. Under current pension scheme regulations, this surplus is not accessible unless the Trust exits the scheme.

## NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

For the year ended 31 March 2025

### 11. ANALYSIS OF CHARITABLE FUNDS continued

#### **Purpose of Designated Funds**

These are detailed in note 1(h) to the financial statements and also in the Trustees Report.

#### **Purpose of Restricted Funds**

These represent grants received and related expenditure in respect of specific projects as outlined above.

### 12. PENSIONS

#### Defined Benefit Scheme

The company is a member of the Shropshire County pension fund which operates a pension scheme providing benefits based on final pensionable pay. The assets of the scheme are held separately from those of the company. Contributions to the scheme are charged to the profit and loss account so as to spread the cost of pensions over employees' working lives with the company. The contributions are determined by a qualified actuary on the basis of triennial valuations using assumptions that: project the benefits forward into the future and then adjust them to current day values; estimate the probability of payments needing to be made. The most recent valuation was as at 31 March 2022. The company receives annual reports from the pension scheme which identify its share of the assets and liabilities of the scheme.

The pension charge for the year amounts to £25,000 (2024 - £28,000), against which employer contributions paid over to the scheme amounted to £22,906 (2024 - £21,795), together with the actuarial gains and losses on the scheme for the year is recognised in the statement of Financial Activities in accordance with SORP (FRS 102).

The most recent actuarial valuation showed that the market value of the whole scheme's assets was £1,951m and that the actuarial value of those assets represented 76% of the benefits that had accrued to members, after allowing for expected future increases in earnings.

The company's share of the market values of the main asset classes, at the year end were:

	2025		2024	
	%	£000s	%	£000s
Equities	58.9	666	56.5	622
Government Bonds	0.0	0	0.0	0
Other Bonds	13.4	151	14.6	160
Property	4.4	50	3.5	38
Cash/liquidity	0.7	8	1.4	15
Other	22.6	255	24.0	264

The assets of the Scheme are included in the accounts at open market value as at the year-end, and the liabilities have been calculated using the following actuarial assumptions:

## NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

For the year ended 31 March 2025

### 12. PENSION -continued

	2025 %	2024 %
Rate of increase in salaries	3.85	3.95
Pension increases	2.7	2.8
Rate of discount	5.8	4.9
Inflation - RPI	-	-
- CPI	2.6	2.7

The liabilities are determined using the projected unit method as distinct from the aggregate method used in the triennial valuation. Under the projected unit method, the current service costs will increase as the members of the scheme approach retirement. On this basis, the calculated notional funding position, in respect of the Scheme at 31 March 2025, and at previous year-end, was as follows:

	2025 £000s	2024 £000s
Value of market assets	1,130	1,099
Value of accrued liabilities	(914)	(1,026)
	<hr/>	<hr/>
Surplus/(Deficit)	216	73
	<hr/> <hr/>	<hr/> <hr/>

The actuary has confirmed that the valuation made above under the requirements of FRS102 does not indicate that there is either an immediate funding requirement or any immediate need to change the agreed contribution rates currently in force. The actuary has excluded from both assets and liabilities items which have neutral effect on the Scheme's financial position i.e. additional voluntary contributions, annuities secured in respect of pensions in payment and insurance contract for death in service benefits.

## NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

For the year ended 31 March 2025

### 12. PENSION –continued

The charge to the Statement of Financial Activities over the financial year comprised:

	2025 £000s	2024 £000s
<b>Operating charge</b>		
Current service cost	28	28
Admin expense	1	1
Past service cost/(gain)	-	-
	<hr/>	<hr/>
	29	29
	<hr/>	<hr/>
<b>Other income/charges</b>		
Expected return on pension scheme assets	(53)	(47)
Interest on pension scheme liabilities	49	46
	<hr/>	<hr/>
<b>Net interest/(return)</b>	(4)	(1)
	<hr/>	<hr/>
<b>Total charge to expenditure in the SOFA</b>	25	28
	<hr/> <hr/>	<hr/> <hr/>

Movement in balance sheet deficit figures during the year:

	2025 £	2024 £
Surplus in scheme at 31 March 2024	73,000	(9,000)
Movement in year		
Current service cost	(28,000)	(28,000)
Past service (cost)/gain	-	-
Admin expense	(1,000)	(1,000)
Net interest/return on assets	4,000	1,000
Contributions	22,906	21,795
Actuarial gain/(loss)	145,094	88,205
	<hr/>	<hr/>
Surplus in scheme at 31 March 2025	216,000	73,000
	<hr/> <hr/>	<hr/> <hr/>

### 13. MEMBERS' GUARANTEE

Severn Gorge Countryside Trust is a company limited by guarantee. Members' liability under the Memorandum of Association is limited to £1 each and the liability continues for one year after the cessation of membership.

### 14. TAXATION STATUS

The company is a charity under the provisions of the Income and Corporation Taxes Act 1988

## NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

For the year ended 31 March 2025

### 15. CAPITAL COMMITMENTS

At the year end 31 March 2025, the trust was not committed to purchase any assets (2024 - £nil).

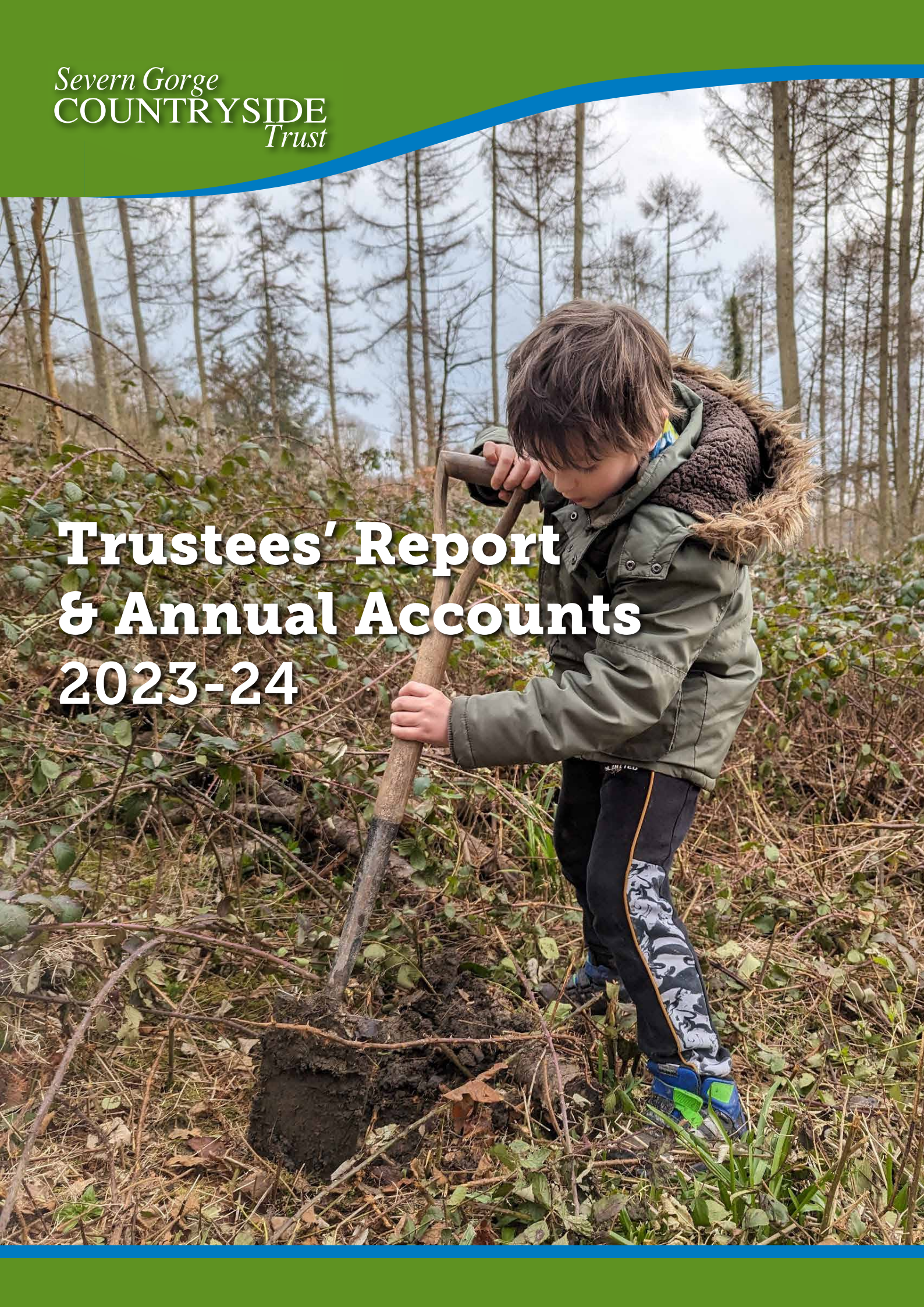
**SEVERN GORGE COUNTRYSIDE TRUST**

England & Wales - Charity number 1004508

---

# Accounts

---

A young child with dark hair, wearing a green jacket with a fur-lined hood, black pants with a grey patterned stripe, and blue sneakers, is focused on digging in a field. The child is using a wooden-handled shovel to lift a clump of dark soil from a bed of dry twigs and green plants. The background shows a line of tall, thin trees under a grey, overcast sky. The overall scene is outdoors in a natural, wooded area.

**Trustees' Report  
& Annual Accounts  
2023-24**

# Company Information

## Severn Gorge Countryside Trust

### Reference and administrative details

---

Charity Name: Severn Gorge Countryside Trust  
Charity number: 1004508  
Company number: 02647374

### Registered Office and operational address

---

Severn Gorge Countryside Trust  
Darby Road  
Coalbrookdale  
Telford  
Shropshire  
TF8 7EP

Telephone 01952 433880  
www.severngorge.org.uk

### Auditors

---

Muras Baker Jones – Regent House, Bath Avenue,  
Wolverhampton, WV1 4EG

### Bankers

---

The Co-operative Bank – Colmore Row,  
Birmingham, B3 3BA

### Investment Advisers

---

LGT Wealth Management UK LLP -14 Cornhill  
London EC3V 3NR



# Contents

Page

Welcome from our Chair & Chief Executive 3-5

## Trustees Report

About Us	6
2023/2024 – Our Year at a Glance	7
What we do	8
How we do it	9-27
Tackling Climate Change & Carbon Calculator	28-30
Structure Governance & Management	31-36
Financial Review	37-43
Looking Forward	44
Statement of Trustees Responsibilities	45

## Financial Statements and Supporting Notes

Independent Auditors Report	47
Financial Statements	50
Principal Accounting Policies	53
Notes to Financial Statements	59



## Message from the Chair

On reading the Annual Report, I am sure you will be very impressed with how much the staff and volunteers have achieved this year. Their diverse activities range from woodland management and enhancing the biodiversity of our meadows and pastures to maintaining the historic structures and the network of footpaths enjoyed by residents and visitors alike.

The volunteering scheme and the Outdoor Learning Programme goes from strength to strength. A highlight this year was the regeneration of the Oilhouse Willow Bed, bringing it back into good management and providing a source of willow for future projects.

Finances for the future continue to be a source of serious concern. The ongoing effects of Ash Dieback adding to the financial pressures on the Trust work programme. However, the staff are constantly looking for grants and using very innovative ways of raising much need additional funding and to invest in alternative income streams.

On behalf of the Trustees, I would like to thank the Staff, volunteers and residents who enthusiastically promote, protect and conserve the living landscape of the Ironbridge Gorge for the benefit of local people and visitors both today and for future generations..

*Thank you*

**Maureen Bragg**



# Message from CEO – John Paul Brayford

Hello and welcome to our annual report for 2023- 24

One of the greatest rewards of this job is being able to take a walk (or a very short drive) and witness first-hand the effects of 33 years of the Trust's landscape management within the World Heritage Site (WHS).

As I write this, the superb hay meadows of the Ropewalk and Wilderness are looking at their best, while the Twayblade and Common Spotted Orchids have now set seed, the purple flowers of Betony are very much in evidence. These meadows (which show up on maps dating from 1700 and are probably older still) continue to thrive and increase in floristic diversity, not by accident, but by lots of consistent hard work over generations. We continue to manage these meadows as traditional hay meadows, the machinery used may have changed from scythes to tractors, but the underlying system remains the same.

We also manage the woodlands of the gorge on similar timescales. Within the woodlands there are surprisingly few veteran trees. I suspect this is in part because of the areas' industrial past and partly because several of the woods were planted on grassland sites as part of the 'new town' development.



The work we undertake on veteran trees is detailed in the forestry section of this report. The present team at the Trust will never see the final results of this work but with 966 years left on our lease we are well placed to deliver consistent, informed management so future generations will see the long-term benefits.

Having said that, the harsh reality is that the Trust, along with many other charities, will need more money to continue to deliver our aims. We also have the challenge of hitting carbon net zero by 2030.





Whilst we continue to apply for grants for specific projects, the number of grants available has decreased, eligibility conditions have become more focussed, and competition has risen.

As a Trust we are trying new and innovative ways of resolving the financial shortfall. We are undertaking more direct fundraising with events such as our Christmas Fair and Spring Plant Sale. We also rent out our community room for events, training courses and corporate away days.

There is a medium-term plan to develop the office and its surroundings to make us more attractive as a facility able to host outdoor education, building on our existing links with local schools. We have used grant funding to develop a pond and dipping platform to further this aim.

In the coming year we will be launching a contracting 'arm' to the charity. We will provide services in the areas of landscape maintenance, invasive weed control, the creation and management of wildlife habitats, including meadows and woodlands as well as countryside services such as forestry & fencing.

With grant support we have invested in a sawmill, this will enable us to realise the full value of timber produced from our woodland management and tree

safety operation. This timber would previously have been sold as firewood. Some of the timber produced is used in house to support our access work, for example as step boards, gate posts and site markers. This saves us having to buy in, often imported, timber. We are already selling small volumes of timber to local builders and to specialist markets. In the future we will be looking to increase timber sales. There is an added advantage to this approach as timber used in construction stores embedded carbon, reducing the carbon footprint of our operation.

The Trust has plenty of challenges and hard work ahead, in addition to the small matter of managing over 289 hectares of land with maybe 300,000 trees, 3500 steps and 70 sheep.

I would also like to say a huge thank you to team SGCT, this includes all our wonderful volunteers, lookers, trustees, staff and supporters. Without all your continued help and support the Trust could not function.

If anyone is keen to support the Trust, please consider joining our Thursday volunteer group or becoming a member of our new 100 Club, either way it could make your life richer!

Thank you  
**JP**

# About Us

Established as an independent charity in 1991, Severn Gorge Countryside Trust cares for over 289 hectares of land set within the Ironbridge Gorge World Heritage Site, including river valleys, ancient woodlands, wildflower meadows, ponds, small heathlands, historic structures and twenty-five kilometres of footpaths. The land that we are responsible for includes three nationally important Sites of Scientific Interest (SSSI).

In addition to managing and developing the historic landscape, Trust staff also run exciting Outdoor Learning and Volunteering Programmes to encourage local people to engage with the natural environment in a variety of ways. We also have a volunteer shepherd scheme known as the 'Lookers' who help look after the rare breed of Soay sheep that graze our meadows.

The Trust was gifted the land on a 999-year lease from the former Telford Development Corporation in 1991. To help manage the liabilities of the land we are entitled to a proportion (90%) of income generated from a number of commercial properties managed on our behalf by Telford & Wrekin Council. This income can only be spent on managing the land. The rental income received generates the primary source of income necessary to fund the Trust's wide-ranging commitments but is not sufficient to cover all the costs of managing the 289 hectares of land we are responsible for.



# 2023/24

## OUR YEAR AT A GLANCE

### OVER 500 ORCHIDS

Counted and identified on our sites, helping to monitor their progress and condition



### OVER 160M

Of hedgerow laid by our wonderful volunteers

### 48 VOLUNTEER SESSIONS

Were organised across our sites to undertake a variety of tasks, providing **3,620 HOURS** of volunteer time



### 35 CUBIC METRES

Of firewood has been split and stacked to raise funds for the Trust's work



### 68 BALES

Of high quality species rich hay harvested from our meadows and grasslands



### 43 CORPORATE VOLUNTEERS

Joined us from 5 companies, giving their time to help us manage the landscape



### 150 TREADS

Replaces on our steps, with boards milled from our own timber



### RAISED £5000

Via the Big Give Green Match Fund, towards regenerating ponds within the Gorge



### 13 MILES OF PATH

Assessed twice a year and cleared of overgrowing vegetation



### 23 EVENTS

Were run as a part of our Outdoor Learning Programme, with a total of 248 attendees



### 820 TREES

Planted on our sites thanks to a grant from The Tree Council and free tree packs from The Woodland Trust



### 52 Sites

managed by the Trust and its dedicated team of volunteers



### 66% UPTAKE

# WHAT WE DO...

The Trust is responsible for promoting, protecting and conserving the living landscape of the Ironbridge Gorge for the benefit of local people and visitors. It aims to balance the needs of public access, landscape and nature conservation, safeguarding historic and cultural features, whilst engaging with the public and developing a wider awareness and knowledge of the Trust and its work.

To achieve these aims the Trust has five main charitable objectives:

- to enhance a living and working landscape that retains its locally distinctive characteristics, habitats and species populations
- to conserve and interpret, where appropriate all features of cultural and historical significance
- to provide inspiring experiences of the natural world and encourage people to manage their local environment through volunteering opportunities
- to provide high quality access for informal recreation for the enjoyment of all and to encourage outdoor activity for the benefit of health and wellbeing
- to develop and promote a wider awareness and understanding of the Trust's work



# HOW WE DO IT...

Examples of activities carried out and impacts and benefits achieved under each of these strategic aims are as follows:

## Landscape and Nature Conservation

AIM: to enhance a living and working landscape that retains its locally distinctive characteristics, habitats and species populations.

Looking after and managing our sites is a key way that we can directly benefit wildlife. Each of our sites is an exceptional place for wildlife with many containing outstanding examples of scarce and uncommon habitats and species. Every year they surprise and delight visitors and the local community.

All of our land is open to the public and provides excellent opportunities for contact with nature, which in turn has a positive effect on the quality of life and well-being of the community.

Each year, the Trust undertakes extensive management programmes to safeguard these special places. For example,

- ◆ clearing woody regeneration from the floor of Patten's Rock Quarry, an example of limestone grassland with colonies of Twayblade, Greater Butterfly and Common Spotted orchids
- ◆ managing the merging of areas of woodland, grass and scrub. These wild and complex edges are where insects thrive and food chains begin
- ◆ clearing scrub trying to colonise the important small patches of heathland found in The Crostan and Dale Coppice
- ◆ managing important areas of wildflower rich hay meadow and pasture. By using our flock of Soay sheep, together with contractors and volunteers, the Trust is able to ensure that the techniques and machinery used are ideally suited to these small sites and based on traditional methods

### Ecological Monitoring

The Trust commissions ecological consultants to carry out annual ecological monitoring of Trust sites. Ecological monitoring provides the Trust with



the information required to assess and respond to ecosystem changes. Monitoring can also assist with the identification of new environmental concerns, the prioritisation of issues, and the evaluation of trends over time. Using the information gathered, the Trust can plan its future management of sites.

Our ecological monitoring reviews carried out on key sites have shown the high quality of our habitats and their management.

Managing such a complex landscape relies on clear objectives and good quality ecological and management information. In reality this is complicated by the fact that any ecosystem is in a constant state of change which can sometimes make meeting our objectives more challenging.

An annual ecology day is held during the summer months where our ecologist meets with Trust staff and the Ecology Working Group to look at the sites that have been managed and discuss proposals as to how to best manage the sites to achieve their objectives.

This year the group started by discussing the results of the woodland monitoring and whether the survey methodology used was appropriate as the targets for some of the sites will never be met. The current methodology used is for assessing SSSI sites which, whilst appropriate for some of our sites, is not suitable for all. Currently there is no suitably recognised alternative methodology for our plantation woodlands. The group confirmed that we need to increase our Deer Management Programme as browsing pressure is still high and limiting natural regeneration.

Many of our woodlands are without sufficient open spaces, have poor rides and have less than ideal structural diversity. The group discussed developing strategies to try to explain why tree cutting for these purposes is beneficial. The negativity around tree cutting is a countrywide issue and it is important for



the Trust to communicate to the local community why it is undertaking woodland management and the many environmental benefits of this work.

The decline of floristic diversity in Shakespeare meadow was discussed. The meadows' location and small size make effective management difficult. Some adjustments to the current management scheme were suggested and will be implemented and monitored

Pattens Rock Quarry is a standing item on the agenda. It is an important limestone grassland site within the county and suggestions for ideas and different ways of working are welcomed even if their implementation would be challenging. Both grazing and mechanical methods were discussed. Both are difficult to implement due to access issues, terrain and subsequent financial impact.

## Meadow Management

Hay meadows in the UK have been disappearing for many years, primarily as a result of changes in agricultural practice. This has led to the decline of many birds, insects, flowers and other creatures who relied on them for their survival.

The Trust is responsible for managing circa 9 hectares of wildflower meadows, our key species rich sites are Ropewalk and Wilderness Meadows.

The meadows are allowed to grow, flower and set seed and then the hay cut is taken in late July or early August. After the hay cut, our native breed Soay Sheep flock is allowed to graze the grass short. The purpose of grazing ensures that the ground is disturbed with the sheep's hooves which creates space for new seeds to germinate. Grazing also helps reduce the growth of aggressive and undesired species.

The meadows at Oilhouse, Crackshall and The Lloyds are now being managed in similar fashion and are already showing positive signs of responding to this management, with orchids spreading across all the Oilhouse fields and Yellow Rattle becoming established in Crackshall. The Lloyds may be slower to respond as there is no grazing due to it being unfenced. It will be interesting to see how these meadows develop over the next few years.

Some of the species growing (indicative of unimproved grassland) include Lady's Mantle, Eyebright, Yellow Rattle, Betony, Yellow Oat Grass together with vast swathes of Common Spotted Orchid.

Species-rich grasslands also provide other environmental benefits including carbon storage, water retention to prevent flooding and habitat for crop pollinators, they are also archaeologically important.

## Pollinators

Bees are just some of the many wild pollinating insects in the UK, which also includes moths, butterflies, flies and wasps.

The Trust manages two beehives as part of its aim to increase the number of pollinators, which are in a state of decline due to changes in agricultural practices and loss of suitable habitat.

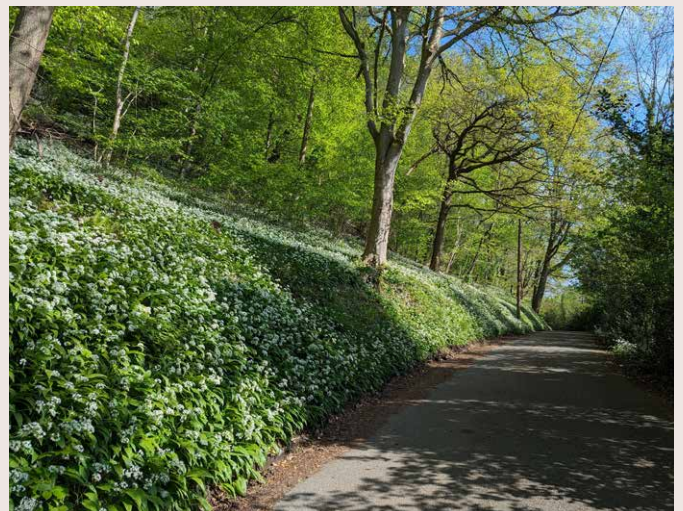
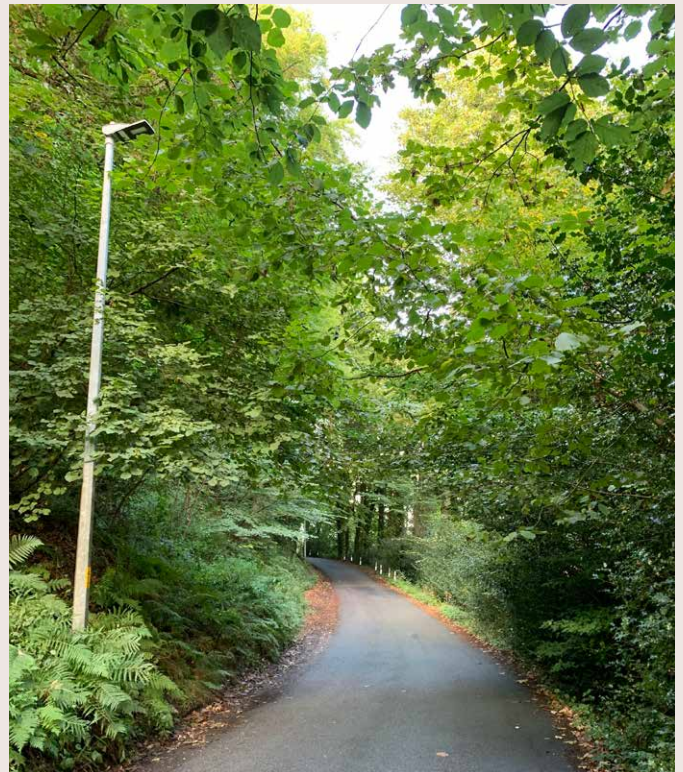
The bees from our hives have been hard at work foraging and pollinating plants within at least a two-mile radius of the Trust office, which takes in our amazing wildflower meadows at the Wilderness and Ropewalk.

We continue to learn how to manage our hives, paying attention to the weather conditions when we inspect the hives and trying to control potential swarms, not always successfully!

We also made the decision to leave plenty of honey in the hives for the bees (rather than feeding with sugar syrup) to ensure that they had plenty of food to see them through the winter.

## 'Light gives Life'

The 'Light gives Life' habitat improvement project has continued this year. The project was made possible with funding received from the Potter Group Landfill Community Fund together with the Postcode Local Trust. The primary aim of the 'Light gives Life' wildlife corridor project is to secure measurable improvements in habitats for biodiversity. This is being achieved by creating edge habitat and enhancing wildlife corridors throughout six different sites within the Ironbridge Gorge World Heritage site.



Creating new varied habitats will provide a fantastic opportunity for wildlife to flourish and promote the wider economic and social benefits that healthy ecosystems offer.

In total, over 3,000 metres of improved edge habitat will be created. Timber felled will be extracted where feasible and as much as possible turned into sustainable products including firewood, charcoal, sawn timber and turnery blanks, the latter of which can lock up carbon long term.

Work has been completed at Ladywood. Our contractor, Will Haywood carried out the work, 50 tons of timber was felled and extracted. The work addressed trees suffering from Ash Die Back and opened up the edge

of the path to create nectar sources for invertebrates, nesting and foraging for birds and bats. The work also lets more light into make the sites more inviting.

Trust staff in conjunction with Watch Oak Tree Care carried out tree work and coppicing on roadside trees at Captains Coppice under a road closure. This helped bring the benefits of the Light gives Light project and the subsequent show of wild garlic was superb. The timber was removed from site to be used in the Trust firewood enterprise.

We are grateful to the steering group of the Potter Landfill grant who allowed us to reallocate part of the funding initially planned for Dale Coppice to an alternative site, Upper Haywood Plantation, where further habitat improvement works will be undertaken.

## Deer Management

The Trust manages 120 hectares of woodlands where it is increasingly necessary to undertake some culling of deer. Deer have no natural predators and the increasing population growth is having a significant impact on the flora and structure of the woodlands. It also has an impact on the deer population itself, too many deer competing for food in the same area can leave the population malnourished and unhealthy and allow diseases to spread.

Under the Trust's Continuous Cover Forestry System, natural regeneration is the principal means of restocking our woodlands and an increasing deer population is adversely affecting the success of natural regeneration.

The Trust has invested time and resources over many years into alternative methods of control, such as deer exclosures. Annual monitoring has shown that these methods are not sufficient to protect the flora and structure of the woodlands. By continuing to work with our deer stalker and neighbouring landowners, we aim to maintain a deer population that is in balance with the surrounding habitat where the birds, wildflowers, trees and other wildlife have an equal ability to survive and thrive in woodland environments.

We will continue to monitor the impacts of deer on our woodlands and review management annually based on the results of these surveys.

Cull figures have increased over the last year, particularly in Benthall Edge, probably due to the redevelopment of the old power station site. The redevelopment works seems to have pushed more deer into the woods. Muntjac are still elusive and difficult to shoot. 39 fallow deer were culled from Benthall Edge and 2 from Jiggers Bank.

## Forestry Works

The Trust continues to manage its woodlands under Continuous Cover Forestry principles which aim to create a structurally and visually diverse woodland ecosystem with trees of all sizes, which helps to protect the soil and keep the land stable.

Our woodland management plan was approved by the Forestry Commission in 2021. The aspirations of the plan have not changed our forestry direction. The plan considers the effects of Ash Die Back (ADB) and climate change, it also includes felling permissions over the next 10 years.

The Trust has identified a number of veteran trees within the woodlands and hedgerows of the Gorge and we aim to manage these trees and their surroundings to support their survival for as long as possible.

Interestingly the definition of a veteran tree is not precise, though one useful definition refers to 'a tree that is of interest biologically, culturally or aesthetically because of its age, size or condition'

Over the winter our Head of Countryside, has identified a number of 'future' veterans. These tend to be younger trees that display some of the characteristics of veteran trees. These trees will now be managed in a manner that should allow them to achieve their full potential. This work forms part of our Countryside Stewardship woodland management agreement.

In addition to this we create pollards and coppice trees at part of our ongoing woodland and tree safety work. These management methods, which involve regular cutting of the trees, actually create some of the most interesting and longest lived of all our trees. For instance, the Lydham Manor Oak probably owes its great girth (nearly 13m) and age (reportedly 1200 years old) to the fact it was regularly pollarded, its branches being cut for timber, firewood and maybe animal fodder.

## Ongoing effect of Ash Dieback (ADB)

The impact of ash die back continues to be felt by the Trust, both financially and environmentally. The abundance of ash trees in the Gorge will mean that the landscape will change significantly. Following our Continuous Cover approach to woodland management we are hoping that natural regeneration by different species will offset the loss of ash trees and ensure that we retain a landscape that is more resilient to climate change and able to support a wide variety of species. Where natural regeneration is not working the Trust will plant native species.

Like all landowners/managers, managing the effects of ash dieback is having a significant effect on Trust finances and staff resources. The Trust has spent £30k over the last 12 months on tree work to fell diseased ash trees. £71k has been spent to date.

There will continue to be an increase in tree felling throughout the Ironbridge Gorge due to ash dieback, and we will keep working with Telford & Wrekin Council regarding tree management and ensure that the local community are informed of any planned works.

## Re-wilding

The Trust has several small areas of land that are rewilding. These areas either have difficult access or are relatively small and need substantial resources to maintain. Decisions to limit intervention were taken on a site-by-site basis by the Trust's Ecology Group.

The sites that we are rewilding from grassland will over time and without hay cutting or grazing, become woodland. We can expect after 10 years to see a multi-structure, multispecies habitat.

The formalisation of the rewilding work into a strategy gives the Trust a document to refer to that will show direction, have the potential to raise grant funding and demonstrates that the Trust continues to adapt its working practices. For more information, please visit our website. <https://www.severngorge.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Rewilding-Strategy-approved-June2022.pdf>

If in the future the Trust does consider rewilding more sites, community consultation will be key and

a mapping exercise of the sites and habitats will be undertaken so that any changes can be assessed and monitored.

One further small site, adjacent to the picnic site at Bower yard has been added as a rewilding site. This 0.13 Ha site is known as Bower Yard Riverside.

## Telford Treescapes Project

In 2022, 120 large trees (a mix of elm, cherry, lime and field maple) and 300 whips were planted along Jiggers Bank as part of the Local Authority Treescapes Fund in conjunction with Telford & Wrekin Council. With the help of our volunteers, we have continued to water, mulch and prune the trees in order to ensure they remain healthy and have the best chance of survival. The trees are flourishing and in years to come will become an avenue that is both beautiful to look at and biodiverse, providing habitats for a wide variety of species.

## Countryside Stewardship (CS)

Some of the land the Trust manages is under the Countryside Stewardship scheme. This scheme provides a financial incentive to land managers to look after and improve the environment. The scheme supports Defra's 25-year environment plan 'for our country to



be the healthiest, most beautiful place in the world to live, work and bring up a family'. It also supports Defra's strategic objective of 'a cleaner, healthier environment, benefitting people and the economy'.

Countryside Stewardship aims to protect and enhance the natural environment by:

- ◆ increasing biodiversity
- ◆ improving habitat
- ◆ expanding woodland areas
- ◆ improving water quality
- ◆ improving air quality
- ◆ improving natural flood management

Works in the CS agreement include woodland ride mowing/creation, squirrel control, deer management, tree thinning and meadow management. We have also undertaken capital works in fencing, gate replacement and hedge laying.

With the wettest winter on record the Zone 2 (3-4m from the track edge) mowing struggled in some places due to steep & wet ground conditions.

Lloyds Coppice Zone 2 creation was carried out by Will Haywood with Trust staff coppicing the smaller trees. The squirrel traps have been moved around the sites with reasonable success.

The meadows in the scheme continue to improve in quality. The normal challenges of making hay with the British weather came again. We managed to make twenty-five hay bales and thirty-four silage bales. Having our own machinery does make the process easier to manage. Aftermath grazing followed the hay cut with the native breed Soay sheep.

Capital works were completed and claimed for. Ropewalk and Wilderness were partly re-fenced and new gates were installed at the Wilderness. Hedge laying was carried out by the volunteers at Oilhouse and Crackshall Lane.

## Firewood Production and Estate Timber

---

We are 'Ready to Burn' certified, the Woodsure certification scheme confirms that we are selling wood with a moisture content of less than 20%. We sold 40 cubic metres of logs to local people, generating over £5,000 in income. Over the next 12 months we aim to increase our firewood production as the Trust has invested in a tractor powered billet saw.

The volume of ash trees that need to be removed due to ash die back can be sold as firewood. Our own machinery will facilitate the processing and movement of the large volume of wood.

We are also using our own timber to produce material we can use on site, such as gateposts and timber treads to replace damaged access infrastructure.

Following an enquiry from a local campanologist (bell ringer) the Trust has also produced seventy bell stays. Bell stays have traditionally been made from straight grained seasoned ash. This is a great use of ash that would otherwise have been used as firewood.

## Soay Sheep

---

Our flock of Soay sheep are integral to the management of our meadows. We really struggled with flystrike down at the Boat field. We lost 3 wethers in quick succession and then the breeding ram. This resulted in us not having a ram to be able to breed from so we had a year off lambing. This eased the workload but we still have an aging flock so we need to find a new ram for next year.

We took some sheep to the abattoir and sold two carcasses to Embers based at the Greenwood Centre, the rest was sold to the lookers.

Shearing was completed but the wool has not been sold, we are looking for an alternative company to sell the fleeces to.

The 'lookers' continue to play a vital role in helping the day-to-day management of the sheep.

# Cultural and Historical Features

Aim: to conserve and interpret, where appropriate all features of cultural and historical significance

**The industrial past of the Ironbridge Gorge has left its mark on the area in more ways than just the Iron Bridge itself. Many types of industry thrived here, and the Trust looks after sixty historic structures ranging from small retaining walls, brick arches and lime kilns to mine breathers and adit entrances. Over the years the Trust has spent over £300,000 conserving the industrial heritage of the Ironbridge Gorge.**

The World Heritage Site status of the Ironbridge Gorge serves to remind us of this area's unique contribution to the history and development of industrialised society. The Trust will continue to conserve and interpret (where appropriate) features of cultural and historical significance for the benefit of the public, enabling them to have a greater understanding and appreciation of the industrial and cultural history of the area.

The Trust commissions an annual Structures Inspection Report. The structures are monitored from fixed baselines, any condition changes are noted, and recommended actions identified. These resultant actions are further analysed from a risk management

perspective looking at things like potential impact on highways, intensively used public spaces, and neighbours.

Five risk management priority categories are identified with required actions allocated to a category from level 0 (no action necessary) to level 4 (repair imminently).

In response to the annual report an action plan will be developed to implement, where possible, all level 4 actions or in discussion with engineer's alternative risk mitigation strategies.

Archaeological surveys are commissioned whenever required to ensure no features of cultural and historical significance are damaged by any proposed operations. Any significant discoveries are recorded for future reference.

No work has been undertaken on structures this year. Our regular surveyor moved to pastures new and the process of finding a replacement became protracted. Telford & Wrekin Council engineers have undertaken a free of charge RAG rating on the structures as a baseline

but we have yet to receive their final report. Concurrent to this we have engaged a consultant structural engineer, Mark Dady, of Mark Dady Associates to undertake a survey of all our structures. Inspections will take place during July & August with the final report due in October 2024.



# Community Engagement and Outdoor Learning

AIM: to provide inspiring experiences of the natural world and encourage people to manage their local environment through volunteering opportunities

**Providing opportunities for people to engage and interact with the environment is a key remit for the Trust.**

Our Outdoor Learning Programme is about providing opportunities for people to immerse themselves in the environment through creative workshops and walks. It is about encouraging people to enjoy the simple pleasure of spending time outside in nature or learning a new skill.

Our Volunteering Programme provides opportunities for the local community to learn more about and help with the management of the landscape on their doorstep. Engaging with nature has been well demonstrated to have positive effects on both physical and mental wellbeing. We hope that this in turn promotes the desire to protect and preserve the natural environment, for present and future generations.

## Volunteering Programme

The Trust's volunteer programme has continued throughout 2023/24 under the leadership of the Volunteer and Community Officer, Amber. The 2023/24 programme has had a total of 47 sessions, with the volunteers giving 3,620 hours of their time across 15 different sites. A total of 14 new volunteers have signed up to take part in the sessions, with the continued help from around 34 regular volunteers. The average number of volunteers at each session has increased to around 15 but has on occasion reached a peak of 25!

The volunteer group have helped us tackle a wide variety of different tasks this year, including coppicing of hazel and holly, orchard pruning, bird box building, log splitting, scrub clearance, step maintenance, orchid counting, tree care and more! The work of the volunteers has been receiving some good feedback from the local community on social media platforms, with many people offering their thanks for the hard work they put into the Gorge.



In mid-June staff took a group of 20 of our wonderful volunteers for a fabulous day out at Hawkstone Park Follies and a meal at the Fox and Hounds in Shawbury. It was a great day with plenty of sunshine and a tour from the park manager allowing us to take in all the wonderful things the park has to offer. Our volunteer training session was also held in June, led by ecologist John Handley to help everyone learn more about meadow grasses and plants and their importance. While quite in depth, it was a great opportunity to learn some new things and to fully appreciate how important our meadows and grasslands are.

The Volunteer Christmas party was scheduled for December the 14th ahead of the Christmas break, but sadly due to staff illness it had to be postponed. It was re-vamped as a New Years party and held on the 11th of January instead.

The party was a great success, with a walk over to Embers Café at the Green Wood Centre in the morning, volunteers were treated to a hot drink of their choice before we returned for a bring and share meal. To test everyone's brains after so much food, there were multiple quizzes hosted by different volunteers, as well as a short awards ceremony. The Volunteer of the Year award was presented to James Weir this year, for outstanding attendance, and the volunteers grouped together to surprise the VCO with her very own whistle – of immeasurable value with the increasing group sizes each Thursday!

## The Tuesday Team

A new volunteer group have started helping the Trust with various tasks in the Gorge, The Tuesday Team! They are a small group from the Ironbridge Meadows Group, who carry out tasks at the Lodge Field and the Beeches Local Nature Reserves. They approached us in May to ask if there were tasks they could help with over the summer whilst there was less work at the meadows. We were more than happy to oblige! They took on the fairly major project of repairing and maintaining the steps in Lincoln Hill that lead down from the rotunda. They have done a fantastic job getting these into better condition using materials from the Trust.

Since then, the team have been continuing to help carry out some work on our sites. They have done a fantastic job cutting back small trees, removing brambles and pushing back the encroaching scrub on Dale Coppice heathland, as well as getting stuck in to remove rhododendron from Oilhouse Coppice and cut back some of the holly in Dale Coppice.

It is a fantastic to see what a smaller team can achieve with only a few hours each week, and their determination never fails to impress. They continue to alternate their time between the meadows, some of our sites and other sites that benefit the local community.



## Corporate Volunteering

We have seen an increase in the number of businesses approaching us to enquire about corporate volunteering opportunities and have started to run volunteer sessions specifically for these groups outside of the regular volunteer programme. In 2023/24 we had a total of 51 volunteers from 5 different companies join us, helping with step repairs, tree planting, coppicing, and orchid counting.

One of the volunteer days was facilitated by Employee Volunteering and came with a budget of £430 which was split between materials and officer time. They now have a system to help charities list tasks they would like completed so that they can match them with other corporate volunteer groups in the future. We hope that this may lead to further opportunities to work with them.

As a result of the Suez groups volunteering session, the Trust was awarded with £500 towards the volunteer programme and Christmas party. As well as helping to celebrate the volunteers on the 11th of January, the money has been used to purchase some additional tools and welfare items, such as a new shelter tarp that can be strung up in adverse weather conditions. This was put to its first test at the willow bed in February and received much praise from the volunteer's present!



## Wonderful Willow Project

In October we were successful in our small grant bid to the Bupa Foundation and Groundwork UK. The grant money was used to help regenerate the Oilhouse Willow Bed, bringing it back into good management with the help of Daisy Askins at Vine Willow Wood and our team of volunteers.

An introduction to willow weaving workshop was held in November with 12 attendees on the day. Daisy Askins, of Vine Willow Wood, showed them how to create their own willow wreaths, Christmas trees and stars to take home. The feedback from the session was good and since it was held for free at the Park Lane Centre, we reached some people that may not have

normally attended our sessions. More information was given about the project and the upcoming volunteering sessions at the willow bed, to which some of the participants expressed an interest in joining.

Daisy joined us for 3 more sessions at the Willow Bed itself, showing us how to plant up and label the new willow and nurture it, how to manage the older stools, harvest and sort the willow rods, and finally helping us to create two living willow structures on site with some freshly harvested rods. The sessions at the willow bed with Daisy and for hedge laying were very well attended, with between 17 and an amazing 25 volunteers each week.

Access to the site has been improved by the addition of a new gate, and the clearance work of the volunteers. The hedge being laid along the track has also allowed lots more light into the site, which we hope will benefit the newly planted willow. We held a celebration event at the end of March to thank the volunteers for all their hard work, and Daisy joined us to lead the weaving of a communal basket, using some of the willow from the site.

The site will now become a part of the regular volunteer rotation, and we hope that in time we can use the harvested willow as a way of generating some income to help with the continued management of the willow bed.



## Outdoor Learning Programme

The 2023/24 Outdoor Learning Programme was successfully launched in April, with a wonderful array of different workshops, walks and events. Numbers for the different events varied, with some being fully booked and others making a slight loss, our overall uptake on events was 66%, with a total of 248 participants. We created a feedback form to start sending out after events to help us gather feedback and improve the programme in the future. We are very pleased that the average rating for the content and tutors of our OLP events is currently at 4.9 out of 5.



We started with an Easter family friendly walk around Loamhole Dingle which was fully booked, and a wonderful time was had by all! This programme was the first time we trialled putting in extra family friendly walks for each of the school holiday periods, thanks in part, to funding from the Gorge Parish Council. There were 12 family friendly events included

in this programme, including walks with bug hunting, river dipping, Halloween crafts, easter egg hunts, bat and moth searching and mammal tracking. They have continued to be popular and gain positive feedback from families, with many of them returning for multiple different activities.

*"It was great! Amber and Kate were so knowledgeable, welcoming and friendly. The walk was well-paced and so informative. Please do more, I'll be there!"*

In May we held a dawn chorus walk, led by expert Glenn Bishton for international dawn chorus day, to experience the bird songs and calls around Benthall Edge. We were also rejoined by Lisa Kidd-Penny from Nettie of the Gorge for a Spring Bouquet workshop, gathering foraged materials to add to some beautiful cut flowers for their arrangements.

In June, John Handley led an evening meadow walk, offering people an opportunity to take a closer look and get to know some of the plants and flowers that thrive in the Ropewalk and Wilderness meadows. Our Natural Dyeing workshop was a great success, fully booked and participants managed to have a lovely time despite the grim weather! They all made some shade cards to take away to help inspire their own creations at home.

## What did you enjoy most about the event you attended?

skill and new  
new people  
tutor was very hands coming away day knowledge of the tutor  
superb tutor wreath  
tutors made it fun Lovely  
new knowledge crafts Great  
knowledgeable tutor  
tutor friendly Amber  
new skills colours  
new techniques

*"Fiona was brilliant, so helpful and she worked so hard in preparation before and on the day. Her experience in dyeing and her knowledge really showed through. A big thank-you to Fiona."*

August also saw Amanda Hillier returning to run a workshop making summer paper lanterns, these combined different techniques such as lino printing and collage to create some beautiful nature inspired lanterns. Seeing out the month were two arts workshops in partnership with Severn Arts, one fast and loose watercolour workshop with artist Sue Howells, and one pen and ink workshop with artist and illustrator Maggie Humphry.

Our September events coincided with the Ironbridge Gorge Heritage Festival, and an additional event was added as part of the festival too, a free charcoal making demonstration with Nathan. We also held a mammal tracking session and bat and moth walk. As Autumn drew in, we made the most of the season with a fungi foray in Sutton woods, and a willow bird feeder workshop from Daisy Askins.

December saw the return of our very popular Christmas Willow Wreath Workshops; we held two both of which were fully booked many weeks in advance. A new addition to the programme was a family friendly Christmas crafts workshop, where we gathered natural materials to make some lovely decorations for the festive season.

In January we held a Beat the January Blues Walk, and despite 9 people booked on we only had 4 on the day, possibly due to flooding making getting to the Trust difficult for some people. Those that did attend expressed what a nice time they had with a friendly welcoming group. Our final event of the program was a family friendly Easter Egg hunt, again fully booked, and we had a great time exploring and creating with natural materials.



# Access and Recreation

**Aim: to provide high quality access for informal recreation for the enjoyment of all and to encourage outdoor activity for the benefits of health and wellbeing.**

**Research has shown us how important good quality outdoor space is for our physical and mental health and wellbeing. In short, green spaces make us healthier and happier. We aim to maintain a wide range of habitats to give people the opportunity to engage with and better understand the natural world. This helps to maximise the wellbeing benefits associated with nature connectedness.**

Green spaces also perform other valuable functions such as reducing flooding, cutting carbon emissions, and protecting nature.

We aim for our sites to feel as natural as possible, so we strive to balance the need for good paths, signs and interpretation with the need to preserve the very sense of countryside we all head outdoors for. We have tried to remove any unnecessary barriers to people's enjoyment, by removing squeeze stiles and replacing them with kissing gates and providing rest points to pause and savor the fantastic views.

We continue to look for opportunities to improve our footpath network and aim, as far as practical, to make the network safe and accessible to all.

Enabling people to explore and enjoy the natural world is fundamental to the work of the Trust and that is why all our 289 hectares of land is available freely for the public to enjoy every day of the year.

As well as improvements on the ground, we continue to look at the quality of the experience we offer, from the clarity of our maps to the information and history that our free leaflets provide.

## Walking Festivals / Guided Walks

Our Volunteer and Community officer was involved in the Ironbridge Walking Festival, which was held during the first week of May. She led two walks for the festival and assisted with some of the organising prior. Overall, the festival was a huge success, with close to 1000

walkers getting involved, 63 walks offered and lots of positive feedback from participants. She has since continued to be an active member of the committee for the planning of future festivals and events.

Amber was also involved in the Telford Big Walk Week, offering two walks for this much newer walking festival to encourage people to get out and about. The walks as part of this festival were subsidised by the council and were therefore offered free of charge to participants. A mindful walk around the Ropewalk and Lydebrook Dingle was held first, encouraging people to slow down and tune into the nature around them. The next walk was a family welly walk to Loamhole Dingle. The walk was a great success, with families starting with a scavenger hunt, then doing some river dipping at Loamhole and creating some miniature rafts to race down the river. Lots of participants said they would look into our other family events as a result.



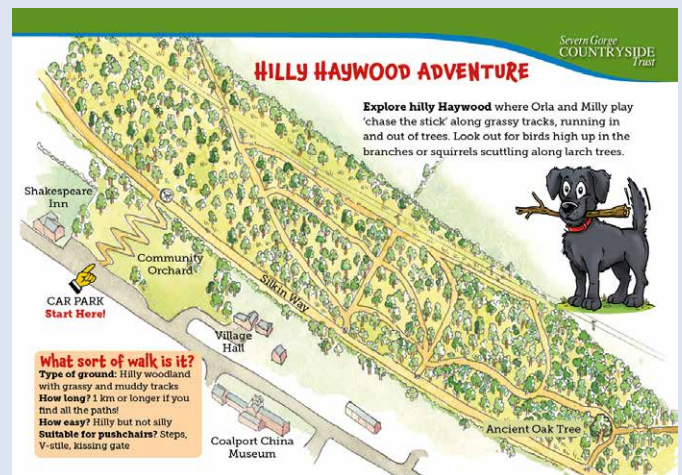
## Strategic Action Plan

Approximately twenty-five kilometres of footpaths have to be maintained each year. This includes over 2,000 wooden steps and 18 wooden boardwalks. The Strategic Access Review which was completed in 2015 continues to be used to feed into the Annual Work Plan. The Strategic Action Plan will be updated each year using information taken from the bi-annual footpath surveys to identify any repairs or maintenance required.

## Footpath Repairs

We are continuing to invest in the access infrastructure we have installed throughout the gorge. The increase in use of our sites, together with increasingly wet winters has meant that some of our footpaths/boardwalks have deteriorated quicker than anticipated. Our bi-annual survey picks up any areas of footpath that need repairing. The repairs are then prioritised and resources allocated accordingly.

Maintenance and repairs on the footpath network have been undertaken in house or by our volunteer groups. Increasingly we are using our own timber, sawn on our mill, to facilitate the repairs. The Trust are grateful to those path users who act as our eyes and ears and regularly report issues as they find them, helping keep the network safe and accessible.



## Family Friendly activity walks

The Trust has produced four circular 1km family trails using footpaths in Benthall, Haywood, Loamhole and Maws. All are part of a group of maps which show Milly and Orla the office dogs in cartoon form, each with a variety of activities to do whilst exploring the routes.

**Bounding in Benthall:** along past Doris the Dragon, the Lime kiln and Bower yard picnic site

**Maws Paws:** along the new Tile Trail, Prenshead and Boat Inn meadow path.

**Hilly Haywood Adventure:** up the zig zag path to Silkin Way and into Haywood Plantation.

**Splish Splash Splish in Loamhole Dingle:** along the path to the footbridge and stream and through the meadow.

All of the Milly and Orla family friendly walks can be downloaded from our website.



## Walking Trail Leaflets

The Trust has produced five free Walking Trail leaflets that showcase some of the best walking routes around the Ironbridge Gorge World Heritage Site. The walks provide people with the opportunity to discover some of the hidden gems of the Gorge and learn more about the landscape and history of the area whilst they explore. Visitors can make a day of it by visiting some of the many historic sites and attractions along the walks and stopping for a while for refreshment at one of the many cafés, pubs and restaurants in Ironbridge and the surrounding area.

The leaflets are available to download from our website, from the Visitor Information Centre and from various outlets in the Gorge. The leaflet dispenser in Station Road car park is regularly refilled and around 20,000 leaflets have been dispensed this year.

The route for the 'Iron Trail' links existing paths into a circular walk that includes both built and natural features within the World Heritage Site to encourage visitors to explore beyond the built environment. Its objective is to highlight otherwise unseen heritage such as the remnants and evidence of the iron production process that made the Gorge 'the birthplace of industry' within the natural landscape.

The 'Lime Trail' of Benthall Edge takes the walker through a wooded landscape steeped in the geology which benefitted the past industries of the Gorge. The footpath follows a circular route taking the walker through beautiful SSSI woodland, with iconic viewpoints of the Gorge and Coalbrookdale, before descending to the valley bottom along the Severn Valley Railway.

The 'Sabbath Walks Trail' follows in the footsteps of Richard Reynolds who built the wide footpaths in the 18th Century for his workers and families. This trail takes in Dale Coppice and Lincoln Hill and the viewpoint at the Rotunda with views of the Iron Bridge.

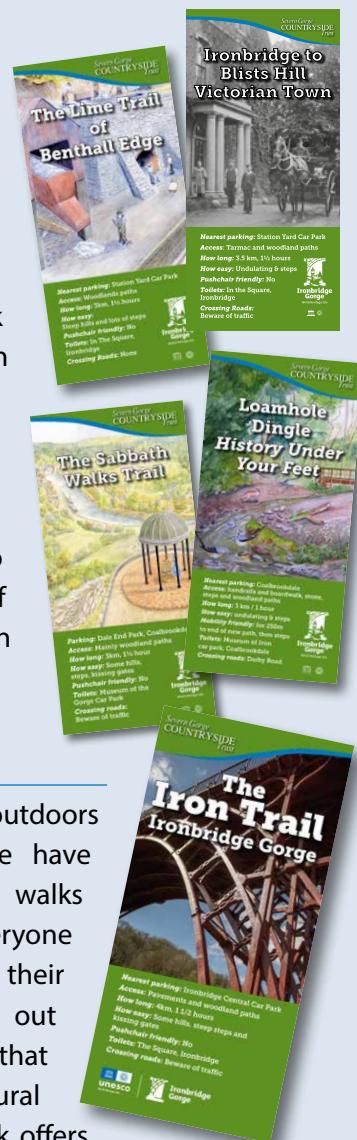
The Ironbridge to Blists Hill Victorian Town Trail is as it says, linking Ironbridge to Blists Hill with a safe traffic-free route through Lloyd's Coppice whilst seeing historic remnants on the past once linked to Blist Hill furnaces.

The circular Trail 'Loamhole Dingle; History under your feet' takes you from Upper Furnace Pool and through the wooded dingle to the Ropewalk where nature meets the industrial past. This walk can also be linked with Lydebrook Dingle as part of the Shropshire Way.

These trails will hopefully encourage more visitors to explore the landscape of the World Heritage Site on foot.

## Walks Books

To support people to get outdoors and closer to nature we have published several guided walks books. These will help everyone to visit our sites and enjoy their natural beauty and find out more about the forces that have shaped them – natural and man-made. Each book offers a number of self-guided walks that offer opportunities to explore the history of the area as well as the diversity of landscape, geology and wildlife. All the books can be purchased from the Trust Office, and are also available at Ironbridge Gorge Museum sites, the Visitor Information Centre, and some local shops. Copies of the routes can also be downloaded from our website: [www.severngorge.org.uk](http://www.severngorge.org.uk).



# Raising Awareness

Aim: to develop and promote a wider awareness and understanding of the Trust's work

## Woodlands in the World Heritage

Following concern from local residents about the scale of woodland management work planned as part of the Light Gives Light Project in Dale and Lloyds Coppice, the Trust held a Woodland Facilitation Meeting on the 2 November 2023.

The purpose to the meeting was to explain to residents and local people about the Trust's and other organisation's approach to Woodland Management Work in the Gorge. It was also a chance for the local community to feed back their concerns and priorities for the local woodlands. The meeting was well attended with 38 residents undertaking woodland and land management workshops and asking questions of a panel consisting of representatives from the Forestry Commission, SGCT, Ironbridge Gorge Museum Trust and the World Heritage Site (WHS) steering group.

Dale Coppice and Benthall were identified as attendees' favourite woodlands within the WHS and access to them as the most important issue. Furthermore, the results of the exercises indicated that, given similar operational parameters to the Trust, public safety became the significant focus for spending.

One of the most significant take aways of the evening was that communication of the Trust's Work Programme together with the rationale behind the work, was key. This has to be across multiple platforms, including social media, site posters and direct emails.



## Volunteer Lookers

Our volunteer 'Lookers' play a key role in looking after the flock of sixty native breed Soay sheep that the Trust uses to manage its wildflower meadows.

Many years ago, 'Lookers' were self-employed countrymen who lived outside for much of the year, looking after the grazing animals on several farms at once.

Today, 'looking' is a much more civilised affair. Our Soay sheep are crucial in grazing our wildflower meadows and conserving vital habitats. Our volunteer 'Lookers' work in a rota, visiting the flock daily and confirming all is well via the technology of a WhatsApp group!

The Lookers' programme has been running for 11 years and volunteers are extremely proficient in a wide range of sheep husbandry techniques including handling, ear tagging and injecting.

Any ewe lambs we breed are registered with the Rare Breeds Survival Trust. We are keen to increase the number of registered pedigree breeding ewes to improve the Soay's status on the RBST watch list.

## Community Events

---

The Trust continues to work with other organisations to support local community events which attract many hundreds of visitors. Supporting such events allows the Trust to engage with people that may not be aware of the work and activities the Trust carries out, or the opportunities available to them to enjoy and use the land managed by the Trust.

## Tree Planting Day

---

On the 9 of March 2024, we were joined by the Coalbrookdale Scouts group and some other local volunteers to help us plant a total of 350 trees, 100 at Ladywood and 250 at Jiggers Bank. These trees were purchased thanks to a grant from The Tree Council, who we applied to with the support of the scouts and the Coalbrookdale and Ironbridge Civic Society. We had a total of 33 volunteers helping across the morning and afternoon sessions. Our regular Thursday volunteer group will return to carry out tree care and maintenance, helping to give these trees the best chance to get established.

## Coronation Grant

---

We were also successful in bidding for a Coronation Grant from the Telford & Wrekin Council. The bid paid for the commission of a new coronation bench for Coalport Orchard, which we unveiled at a celebration event on the 7 of May. The event went well, with around 50 people attending to partake in some family friendly



activities, get their photos on the bench or just enjoy some scones and strawberries! As part of the grant, berry bearing trees were planted at Jiggers Bank in the Autumn, providing a lasting legacy and great benefit for nature.

## Apple Day

---

We trialled an apple pressing afternoon on the 21st of September, as a way of encouraging the use of the apples in Coalbrookdale Orchard and to raise awareness of its location. We borrowed an apple press and let people bring along their own bottle for some fresh apple juice! Around 20 people, including volunteers, came along to get some juice or lend a hand. We will consider doing this again in the future, potentially teaming up with the Coalbrookdale Apple Day.

## Pop-Up Shops

---

On the 23rd of April 2023, the Trust held its first ever pop-up shop event in order to raise money for our Big Give campaign! Being selected for the Big Give meant that we had 1 week during April to reach our target (£2,500) and unlock the maximum match funding from them. The sale was a way to help us achieve that, we took advanced firewood orders, sold woodland crafted items, tea, coffee and cakes, held a tombola, along with bric-a-brac and books all kindly donated by our supporters. Thanks to all of this effort, we reached our target, unlocking the full £5000 which went towards improving ponds around the Gorge.

On the back of this success, we held a Christmas Shop too in November, to help raise additional funds for the Trust. We are very grateful for all the help from our volunteers and supporters with these sales. It seems likely that these may become a regular part of our fundraising agenda in the future.

## Ironbridge Gorge Walking Festival

---

The Trust continued to work in partnership with the Ironbridge Gorge Walking Festival, with walks being led by staff and volunteers.

## Annual Open Evening

The purpose of the Annual Open Evening is to give local residents a chance to meet Trust staff, Trustees and Volunteers and learn more about the work we undertake. It also provides an opportunity to raise any concerns or issues they may have.

This year's open evening was held at the Birchmeadow Centre in Broseley, on Wednesday 26 July, ecologist John Handley was invited as the guest speaker and gave a talk on the 'Importance of Hay Meadows'.

John's talk was well received by the audience who found it interesting and informative. One of our young John Muir Award participants, Rory Humphries also

gave a talk on the bird nest project that he had been working on with support from the VCO in order to complete the Conserver challenge of the award. The audience were very impressed with his enthusiasm for his subject.

Trust staff also gave a short presentation on recent and upcoming work by the Trust. The audience was then invited to ask any questions. 32 people attended the event.

Attendees had the opportunity to look at displays showcasing the work of the Trust, including the Volunteer and Outdoor Learning Programmes, together with Woodland Management work and the impact of ash dieback.



## Partnership Working

---

We continue to develop and strengthen partnerships with a wide range of organisations and individuals for the benefit of local communities, visitors and wildlife. Successful partnership working allows us to develop new areas of work, including 'Outdoor Learning,' environmental arts and alternative land management techniques.

- ◆ Broseley Town Council
- ◆ Coalbrookdale Scouts
- ◆ Dawley Angling Society
- ◆ English Heritage
- ◆ Environment Agency
- ◆ Forestry Commission
- ◆ Harper Adams University
- ◆ Ironbridge Gorge Museum Trust
- ◆ Ironbridge Gorge Walking Festival
- ◆ Ironbridge Meadows and Pastures group
- ◆ Jackie – Lets Flow Yoga
- ◆ Lodge Field Group
- ◆ Madeley Town Council
- ◆ Moonshine & Fuggles
- ◆ National Trust
- ◆ Natural England
- ◆ Neighbouring farmers and landowners
- ◆ NHS
- ◆ Secret Severn Arts Trail
- ◆ Shrewsbury & Newport Canal Trust
- ◆ Shropshire Wildlife Trust
- ◆ Small Woods Association
- ◆ Telford & Wrekin Council
- ◆ Telford Green Spaces Partnership
- ◆ The Beeches Local Nature Reserve
- ◆ The Coracle Trust
- ◆ The Gorge Parish Council
- ◆ The World Heritage Site Steering Group
- ◆ Vine Willow Wood
- ◆ Wellbeing with Gemma
- ◆ Wolverhampton University

Community engagement is essential to the success of all of our work. We aim to work with local communities to engage people of all ages through events, volunteering opportunities and education to ensure the sustainability of our 'Outdoor Learning' programme. The active involvement of local people is also vitally important in the management of the land in the Severn Gorge. Local people have a strong interest in their local environment and the Trust is keen to harness the help of local residents to act as its 'eyes and ears' reporting any problems and suggesting improvements.

The Trust tries to ensure a rapid response to issues. The community are informed about any management work by talking to neighbours, putting detailed information up on site, providing articles for local newsletters and giving details of work on the Trust's website.

## Social Media

---

We have continued to try and keep a regular presence on social media, providing a range of content about our events, volunteers, other work and sites. Our Facebook audience has continued to grow, going from 2,512 followers last year up to 2,823 this year, as has Instagram, from 400 to 489. Around 50% of our audience on both platforms is from Telford, showing that we are managing to reach our local communities. We will continue to use social media as a method to disseminate information and will aim to grow our audience and reach in the future.

## Mailing List

---

After one of our public meetings and discussions within the team, the decision was made to set up a mailing list and start sending out a quarterly newsletter. This number was chosen to balance having regular updates with the need to not create too much extra work and not wanting to bombard people's inboxes. The newsletters go out a couple of weeks after the Committee of Management Reports, allowing us to take from them the information to be shared. We have built up 57 subscribers to our mailing list so far but will continue to grow this list.

## Tackling Climate Change

As the custodian of over 50% of the landscape in the Ironbridge Gorge World Heritage Site we are working hard towards supporting the biodiversity crisis together with addressing the climate emergency.

Our overarching goal is to become carbon neutral in 2030 and we have worked towards this by:

- ◆ Initiating a Carbon Calculator to record our CO<sub>2</sub> emissions and identifying areas we can change.
- ◆ Installing energy efficient lighting.
- ◆ Divesting from all fossil fuel investments

Future plans include:

- ◆ Investigating the installation of solar panels on the office building
- ◆ Investigating a switch from diesel in landscape management vehicles to a more sustainable biofuel
- ◆ Ongoing ecological monitoring for biodiversity
- ◆ Transitioning to electric power tools for landscape maintenance

For more information on what we are doing please visit our website page. <https://www.severngorge.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Final-Text-for-Website-SGCT-Climate-Change.pdf>

The Trust faces many challenges (including capacity and resources, financial, people and expertise) in its goal to achieve net zero by 2030. In particular, upfront capital expenditure is a substantial barrier to the pace of our decarbonisation efforts. For example, purchasing electric vehicles and machinery together with the increased cost of using bio-fuel as opposed to diesel in vehicles.

The Trust will continue to deliver nature-based solutions to reduce emissions from, and capture and store carbon from a diversity of habitats, including woodlands, meadows and ponds.

**Below are our annual CO<sub>2</sub> emissions for 23/24**  
Overview

## Annual Carbon Calculator April 2023 to March 2024 *Report, Reduce, Change*

### Summary

The focus is on CO<sub>2</sub>e emissions from fossil fuels (oil, gas, coal). The main sources of CO<sub>2</sub>e emissions are the gas boiler and the Trust vehicles (Valtra Tractor, Toyota Hilux and Minibus) together with staff vehicles used for Trust business. The electricity comes from 100% renewable sources and is monitored, reduced if practicable, and reported. The gas comes from natural gas but not from a renewable source.

The emissions from operational activities are 5.3 tonnes CO<sub>2</sub>e and 12.8 tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub>e due to the methane emissions from the flock of Soay sheep.

The sheep are used to graze our species rich meadows as a key means to enhance their overall biodiversity. We continue to manage our woodlands using Continuous Cover Forestry and we are rewilding two of our grassland sites.

More CO<sub>2</sub> will be absorbed each and every year into the future because of these progressive changes compared to traditional management practices.

For more information on how the Trust is tackling the impact of climate change please visit our website <https://www.severngorge.org.uk/tackling-climate-change/>

Scope 1: direct emissions of CO2 (kg) annually from fuel combustion and Trust vehicles (see Notes & Sources)			Scope 2: indirect emissions of CO2 (kg) annually from purchased electricity (see Notes & Sources)		Scope 3: other indirect emissions of CO2 (kg) annually: for example, transport-related activities in non-Trust vehicles, national grid transmission and distribution, outsourced		
Source of Scope 1 CO2 emissions		kgCO2e/year		kgCO2e/year	Source of Scope 3 CO2 emissions		kgCO2e/year
Gas boiler - kWh annually	6,147	1,124			Gas grid transmission & distribution	No figures given in Government guidance and it is assumed to be zero	
Electricity - kWh annually			5,524	0	Electricity grid transmission & distribution - kWh	5,524	99
Wood burners - weight of logs annually	4	176			Water supply & Water treatment - cubic metres annually	63	24
Minibus (diesel, 3960 kg GVW) - annual mileage	396	162			Methane (CH4) produced by Soay Sheep Flock	60 Average head of livestock over year	12,820
Toyota Hilux (diesel, 2730kg GVW) - annual mileage	611	199					
Toyota Hilux (diesel, 2730kg GVW) - annual mileage	370	120					
Fiat 500 (petrol 1360kg GVW) - annual mileage	608	137					
Mitsubishi L200 (diesel 2890 GVW) - annual mileage	562	183					
Dacia (diesel 1090kg GVW) - annual mileage	392	105					
Vauxhall Astra (diesel 1678kg GVW)- annual mileage	176	47					
Valtra Tractor (diesel)	1154	2,897					
<b>Total emissions (Scope 1)</b>		5,149	<b>Total emissions (Scope 2)</b>	0	<b>Total emissions (Scope 3)</b>		12,943
<b>FINAL OUTCOME:</b>		<b>18.1 tonnes</b>					

## NOTES & SOURCES

**Renewable energy supplies** Electricity or gas supplied from purely renewable sources where the supplier can demonstrate that the energy supplied to customers only comes from renewable sources can be included in calculations as having zero carbon emissions.

**Electricity** is supplied from 100% renewable sources by OPUS energy on a contract until February 2026. With Opus Advance, our electricity comes from renewable sources including solar, wind, hydro and anaerobic digestion (AD). [www.opusenergy.com/our-energy-sources](http://www.opusenergy.com/our-energy-sources)

**Gas** is supplied by British Gas Lite on a contract until May 2025. The gas supplied to customers is natural gas. This is, broadly speaking, the case for all energy suppliers in the UK.

**Wood Burners** CO<sub>2</sub>e emissions from the two wood burners are included. There is debate about whether CO<sub>2</sub> in wood that is burnt should be included in annual carbon emissions because CO<sub>2</sub> is captured by growing trees and released by burning logs. However, such rapid release of CO<sub>2</sub> is very different to the slow release of CO<sub>2</sub> to the atmosphere during decay and decomposition.



**Office building** The Severn Gorge Countryside Trust is based in an award-winning sustainable building. The office is timber framed, wool insulated and heated by two log burners. The outside cladding is larch which we harvested from our woodlands. The office has a Mechanical Ventilation with Heat Recovery (MVHR) ventilation system that both supplies and extracts air throughout the office. This system is used to reduce the heating and cooling demands of buildings. The MVHR continually draws and circulates fresh air from outside, pre warmed by heat exchangers capturing heat from the stale air as it is expelled. The roof is made up from approximately ten thousand western red cedar shingles. The office is insulated with sheep wool mixed with recycled polyester; it has remarkable properties, in that during the winter it keeps the building warm and, in the summer, it keeps the building cool.

**Soay Sheep** the Trust owns a flock of native breed Soay sheep which are used to manage the wildflower meadows. The sheep emit methane which is another type of greenhouse gas. The carbon dioxide equivalent measurement of methane is  $1\text{kg CH}_4 * 25 = 25\text{kg CO}_2\text{e}$ . Whilst the sheep do emit methane, they are used to

graze our species rich meadows as a key means to enhance their overall biodiversity. We use the Farm Carbon toolkit to calculate the value of the carbon dioxide equivalent of the methane emitted by the sheep. <https://calculator.farmcarbontoolkit.org.uk>

**CO<sub>2</sub>e (carbon dioxide equivalent)** is a standard unit for measuring carbon footprints. The idea is to express the impact of each different greenhouse gas (CO<sub>2</sub>, methane, nitrous oxide) in terms of the amount of CO<sub>2</sub> that would create the same amount of warming. That way, a carbon footprint consisting of different greenhouse gases can be expressed as a single number.

**Conversion factors** (electricity, electricity transmission & distribution, natural gas, water, waste, vehicles). [www.gov.uk/government/publications/greenhouse-gas-reporting-conversion-factors-2023](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/greenhouse-gas-reporting-conversion-factors-2023) full set for advanced users in order to include the minibus which is classed as a 'Delivery Vehicle'. These are set annually in May.

**Scope 1, Scope 2 & Scope 3** The Greenhouse Gas Protocol (<https://ghgprotocol.org>) is recognised by the UK government as an independent standard for reporting greenhouse gases. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Carbon\\_emissions\\_reporting](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Carbon_emissions_reporting)



# STRUCTURE, GOVERNANCE & MANAGEMENT

## Company Structure

Severn Gorge Countryside Trust is a registered charity and a company limited by guarantee, governed by its memorandum and articles of association and administered by a Board of Trustees. The Board sets and monitors the strategic direction of the Trust and ensures that the strategy is aligned with key aims. The Board is responsible for ensuring the Trust is properly managed and complies with all relevant law and has high standards of governance.

## Board of Trustees

The Directors of the charitable company (the Charity) are its Trustees for the purpose of charity law and throughout this report are collectively referred to as the Trustees. The Board of Trustees is supported by a Company Secretary who is responsible for governance administration.

The Trustees who served during the year and up to the date of this report are:

<b>Name</b>	<b>Nominated by:</b>
Maureen Bragg (Chair)	Community Trustee
Nick Downes (Vice Chair)	Barrow Parish Council
Mick Burton	Broseley Town Council
Gina Rowe	Community Trustee
Sarah Chadwick	Madeley Town Council (resigned August 2023)
Caroline Bagnall	Shropshire Council
John Box	Shropshire Wildlife Trust
Max Speke	Sutton Maddock Parish Council
Chris Turley	Telford & Wrekin Council
Carolyn Healy	Telford & Wrekin Council
Dylan Webster	Telford & Wrekin Council (resigned August 2023)
Alan Taylor	The Gorge Parish Council

Mark Boylan was appointed as a Trustee with effect from 29 April 2024.

## Staff

JP Brayford	CEO
Kate Chetwood	Company Secretary and Finance Officer
Nathan Morris	Head of Countryside
Paul Ferrington	Estate Worker
Amber Bicheno	Volunteer & Community Officer

## Who Governs the Trust?

The Trust is governed by its Committee of Management (COM) made up of several Member Organisations and Community Trustees. The Trustees are all volunteers with careers and experience in a wide variety of fields. The Board of Trustees has a maximum of 12 elected members.

In accordance with the Memorandum and Articles of Association, Trustees are elected by the membership for terms of four years. At the end of the four-year term Trustees may stand for re-election. Nominations for new Trustees are considered each year prior to the Annual General Meeting (AGM). All Member Organisations are circulated with invitations to nominate Trustees, advising them of any retiring Trustees and requesting nominations for the AGM. The Member Organisations are made up of a variety of local organisations that have a keen interest in the Ironbridge Gorge and also two Community Trustee places.



When considering appointing Trustees, the Committee of Management (Board of Directors) has regard to the requirement of any specialist skills needed.

## Trustee induction and training

The Trust provides an induction session to brief new Trustees on their legal obligations under charity and company law, the contents of the Memorandum and Articles of Association, the committee structure and decision-making processes, the 10-year Development Strategy and recent financial performance of the charity. They are also advised on the future plans and objectives of the Trust. During the induction they meet the CEO, Company Secretary and other employees. They are advised of appropriate training opportunities and are encouraged to attend.

## Management

The Committee of Management is responsible for setting policies and ensuring legality and good practice in accordance with the Memorandum and Articles of Association of the Trust and the Charities Act 2011. The Committee of Management meets formally each quarter. At each meeting, the COM considers reports from the management team on areas such as strategic development, financial performance and health and safety. Additionally, as appropriate the COM considers progress on current and future projects, governance and the annual budget and workplan.

The CEO is responsible to the COM for the management of the Trust and the conduct of the Trust's business in

accordance with policies and budgets set by the COM. They are responsible for the day-to-day operation of the Trust within this framework and are authorised to act on behalf of the Trust on all matters other than those which by law are required to be decided by the COM. The Chief Executive is supported by Trust staff. The Trust also engages a number of professional advisers to assist in its work.

The COM met four times in 2023/24, key discussions at board meetings during the year focused on the Trust's response to concern over woodland management work in Dale and Lloyds Coppice, developing a safeguarding policy for children and vulnerable adults, monitoring progress against the approved annual plan and budget, the financial position in relation to declining rental income and the potential to set up alternative income streams together with appropriate risk management.

## Governance Review

Trustees were invited to attend a Governance Review session in January 24 to review and develop the Trust's equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) approach, to review governance policies and procedures and to consider the recruitment process of Trustees. The role of the Trustee was revisited together with the arrangement of a future trustees' skills audit to identify areas where the COM is lacking in skills or knowledge.

Trustees continue to be offered ongoing training and support to ensure their skills and knowledge are up to date.





## Investment Working Group

The Investment Working Group (IWG) considers the strategic oversight and direction of the Trust's investment assets. It undertakes the long-term stewardship of the investments in order to further the Trust's aims. Its key purposes are to review the Trust's investment strategy and agree a statement of investment principles and policies, which sets out, the investment objectives, risk tolerance, liquidity requirements, time horizon, and agrees the Trust's approach to an ethical and responsible investment policy. The IWG consults with our investment advisor from LGT to help maximise the overall return within acceptable risk parameters, while ensuring that the strategy remains fit for purpose.

The Investment Working Group met once in 23/24. As part of our commitment to our environmental aims, the Trust ceased investing in fossil fuel companies in 2021. No future investments will be made in companies that have proven reserves of shale gas and/or shale oil owned by the company.

## Sub Committees & Working Groups

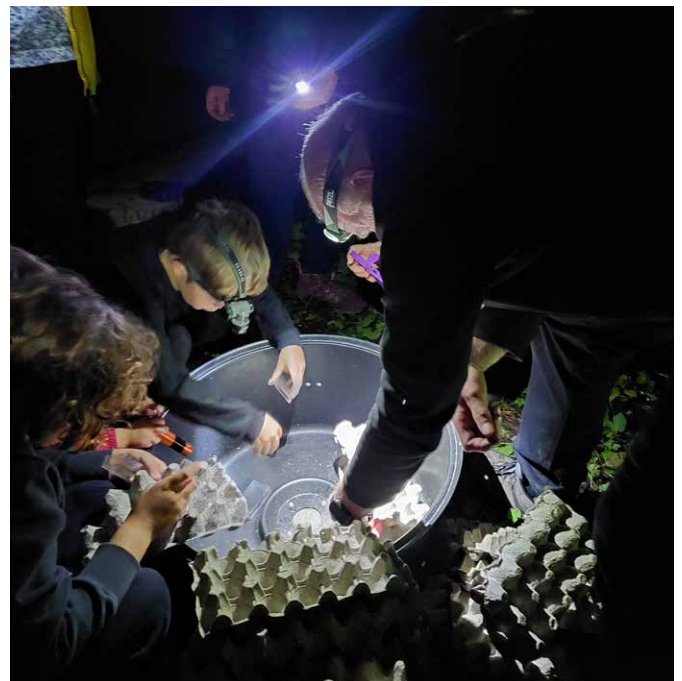
The board had one subcommittee and two working groups supporting its work during 2023/2024. These have advisory powers and decision making is retained by the COM. A trustee chairs each committee/working group, with membership including other trustees and staff. Trustees participate in working groups to provide advice, input, and/or support.

## The Personnel Committee

This committee oversees, reviews and makes recommendations relating to staff remuneration, staffing issues, employee and trustee training, staff development and support. The Personnel Committee met twice in 23/24. When reviewing staff salaries, the committee considers market information on typical salaries for comparable roles, together with the total employment package offered by the Trust, including annual leave allowance, pension, etc. The outcome of an annual performance appraisal is also reviewed when considering and awarding staff increments.

## Climate Change Working Group

Following the Trust's Climate Change Declaration in November 2019 we continue to look at ways to tackle the causes of climate change. For example, by reducing our own emissions, caring for the land that captures and stores carbon, exploring flood mitigation options and restoring wildlife habitats that are threatened.



We can lock up carbon in the woodlands and meadows we manage using Continuous Cover forestry whilst creating more opportunities for wildlife to thrive by rewilding areas of our land. Whilst continuing to champion renewable energy and slash our carbon emissions.

We continue to identify the environmental impacts, issues and opportunities across the organisation whilst collecting our environmental data to gain a better understanding of our carbon footprint to enable us to track our performance and support informed goals and targets.

The Climate Change Working Group met once in 23/24. The working group has created a carbon calculator to enable the Trust to measure and monitor its carbon emissions. This calculator will continue to be refined as more information becomes available. Trustees agreed that it was important to include the methane produced by our flock of Soay sheep in the Carbon Calculator to provide a complete picture of our emissions. The methane produced by the sheep accounts for more than 71% of our carbon equivalent emissions.

Our pension fund, like many organisations is managed independently and we have no direct influence over how the pension funds are invested. However, we continue to lobby our pension fund (Shropshire Pension Fund) to divest from fossil fuels and hope that they will consider the best approach for them to meet their commitment to prioritise the interests of the pension fund.

## Planning for the Future

The significance of the Trust's landholdings dictates the need for a planned, long-term approach to give direction and continuity to management.

This is achieved through comprehensive management plans for the Trust's sites and a Development Strategy that governs the work of the Trust.

The Development Strategy was approved by Trustees in November 2017 and will guide the work of the Trust until the end of 2028. It sets out the Trust's vision,



aims and plans for achieving its charitable objectives, identifies the successful methods of working that will be continued, the developments that will be introduced over the ten years and the opportunities that will be taken up if time and resources allow. Copies of the full strategy can be downloaded from the website ([www.severngorge.org.uk](http://www.severngorge.org.uk)) or obtained from the Trust Office.

## Annual Work Plan/Budget

Annual work plans and budgets are developed to ensure the core work in the management plans and Development Strategy are achieved without overstressing the Trust's resources or compromising its long-term viability.

The annual work plan for 2023/2024 was set from the 2018/2028 Development Strategy.

## Risk Management

The Board of Trustees is responsible for identifying and managing the strategic and operational risks the Trust is exposed to, so that Trustees can make informed decisions and take timely action. Risks are assessed and managed through a Risk Management Strategy, the impact and likelihood of their occurrence are

evaluated. Actions and procedures to mitigate the risks are detailed in the strategy.

In accordance with the Charity Commission's Statement of Recommended Practice (SORP) 2005, Trustees undertake:

- ◆ An annual review of the risks the Trust may face, which also identifies any new risks that the Trust may be exposed to
- ◆ The establishment of systems and procedures to mitigate against those risks identified in the review; and
- ◆ The implementation of procedures to prevent any potential impact on the charity should those risks materialise.

Trustees regularly review our risk management process and receive regular updates on actions put in place to mitigate the most significant ongoing risks. It should be noted that any risk management system can only manage risks and not eliminate them.

## Principal Risks and uncertainties

Four major risks have been identified and arrangements have been put in place to mitigate these risks:

**Future levels of income** – if our income falls then the Trust would not be able to continue to manage the 'living landscape' of the Ironbridge Gorge for the benefit of local people, visitors and the environment. The majority of our income is generated from rental income from our property portfolio. The Trust pay a management fee to Telford & Wrekin Council to manage these properties. We will continue to work with them to look at ways of diversifying the property portfolio by looking to invest in more modern properties to ensure the level of income is sufficient to cover the majority of our core costs. Ensuring that the portfolio is effectively and efficiently managed is key to generating sufficient income to enable the Trust to fulfil its charitable aims. Additional funding will continue to be sought via grants and other funding opportunities.

**Climate Change** – we are assessing all of our operations from travel to gas and electricity usage to reduce our CO<sub>2</sub> emissions wherever possible. We are also looking at the best ways to manage our woodlands and meadows to ensure they are as resilient as possible.





**Ash Dieback** – We have been monitoring the spread of ash dieback in the Gorge since it hit the headlines in 2012. The extent and severity of effect of the disease continues to be closely monitored. The Trust is continuing to use an independent arboriculturist to survey the trees on the Trust land and has written a policy to inform the work of the Trust and the treatment of trees affected by ash die back. The Trust continues to investigate avenues of funding to offset the increased cost of planned and reactive tree work to deal with the situation.

**Safeguarding** – The Trustees recognise that Safeguarding is a key priority for all charities, and for projects working with children and young people, or vulnerable adults. New safeguarding policies have been implemented and ongoing training is being provided for staff, trustees and volunteers.

## Public Benefit

This annual report looks at what we have achieved over the previous twelve months. In setting our aims and planning our activities, Trustees have given careful consideration to the Charity Commission's guidance on Public Benefit.

Trustees believe that the provision of such benefit is an integral part to each of the Trust's charitable objectives. We work hard to deliver public benefit by promoting and protecting the beautiful landscape of the Ironbridge Gorge for everyone to enjoy.

- ◆ The 260 hectares of land that the Trust manages is available for the public to use freely, every day of the year.
- ◆ The benefits of access to green spaces to health

and wellbeing are widely documented and accepted.

- ◆ The Outdoor Learning programme helps people engage with and appreciate the natural environment.
- ◆ Our volunteer programme enables people to become actively engaged in their environment.
- ◆ The Trust land and activities are available to all and we try to make special provision wherever possible for the disabled and disadvantaged.

We believe that the work of the Trust has a positive impact on people, communities, wildlife and the environment.

This report also helps us ensure our aims, objectives and activities remained focused on our stated purpose. In order to achieve our aims the Trust must strive to maintain an efficient and effective organisation, that is well governed, professionally managed and which has the capacity, infrastructure and support necessary to deliver them.



# FINANCIAL REVIEW

## Overview

**Our financial result for the year 23/24 was stronger than we had budgeted for, even with the challenging economic environment. We had planned for a larger deficit and the need to transfer money from our reserves but robust financial control and higher than anticipated income from our investments and grants meant that the drawdown on reserves was not required. We also ended the year with a strong reserves position giving us the confidence to continue with our plans to invest in alternative income streams.**

The Trust is continuing to face financial pressures with ageing access infrastructure and ash dieback emergencies. The cost that the Trust needs to pay for key supplies that are critical to its core charitable aims and operations will see marked increases in 2024/2025, most significantly in terms of staff and contractor costs and increased insurance and energy prices. Challenges in income generation with cuts to Government agri/ environmental grants and a plateau in rental income present financial uncertainties for the future.

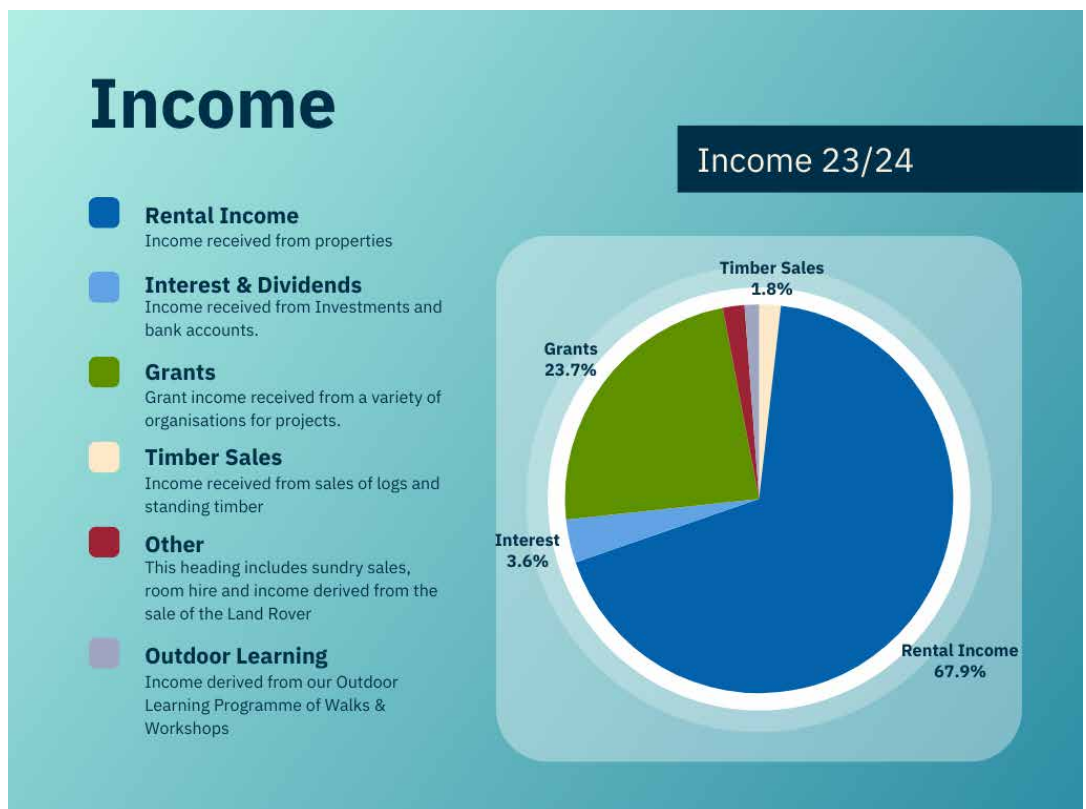
To this end, we are continuing to explore alternative sources of income generation and invest in capital infrastructure and staff resources to enable us to produce more firewood and sawmill timber in house.

## Income

**The chart below shows our main sources of income for 2023/2024**

Income for the year increased relative to 2022/2023 by 3.1%, £345,501 in 23/24 from £327,894 in 22/23. This was primarily due to additional grant income (an increase of 41%) together with an increase in the sale of standing timber. The 5-year Countryside Stewardship scheme generated £23,503. A large proportion of the Trust's income continues to be invested in the management of the landscape. Agri-environment payments such as the Countryside Stewardship schemes are extremely important to the Trust. They are a key funding mechanism to support our woodland and meadow management.

The Trust continues to apply for grants from a variety of sources but is careful not to stray from its aims and objectives when looking for potential funding sources.



Income was generated largely from:

- ◆ Rentals received on commercial properties in the Telford area. (The need for a balancing package to provide sufficient income for the annual upkeep of the sites was recognised when the Trust was established. A package of commercial properties was transferred to Telford & Wrekin Council. They own the freehold of these income generating properties and are responsible for their management. They are covenanted to pay 90% of the income generated to the Trust to cover the cost of maintaining the land in the Gorge).
- ◆ Investments purchased by the Trust. These consist of Charity Investment funds, and an interest paying Bank Account
- ◆ Grants
- ◆ Timber sales
- ◆ Outdoor Learning Programme
- ◆ Small amounts from sundry sales, books, honey, charcoal
- ◆ Room hire

We received £234,522 in income from the rental properties, fishing and grazing rights compared to £238,575 last year. A decrease of 1.65%. Several of the rental properties were empty for short periods of time throughout the year leading to a reduction in the overall rent received.

The Trust has negotiated a 5% reduction in the management fee charged by Telford & Wrekin Council from 15% to 10%. The majority of the properties are on full repairing and insuring leases which means the tenant is responsible for the cost of repairs and upkeep to the property.

Interest and dividends provided £12,566 compared to £10,477 last year reflecting the changes in the Trust's investment makeup and stronger than anticipated returns on investments.

Standing timber/sawmill timber and log sales provided an additional £6,323.

An increase in the hire of the community room by groups has generated income of £2,280.

## Grants to help with our work

---

In support of its activities, the Trust received £81,723 (£55,640 in 22/23) from a wide number of bodies and is incredibly grateful to them all for their help and assistance:

**Countryside Stewardship – Natural England** the Trust received **£23,503** in grant aid from this scheme. This grant contributes towards the Trust's woodland management costs. This is the second payment for this 5-year programme.

**Potters Landfill Tax – £31,697** – Light Gives Light – Habitat creation

**Telford & Wrekin Council** – Telford Treescapes – **£12,504** – Planting and maintenance of trees

**Big Give – £5,196** – Ponds, Newts and Shoots – creation and restoration of ponds on the Trust land

The Big Give is an annual appeal that enables willing philanthropists to match the value of any donations made by supporters. This year, it was supported by the Environmental Funders Network (EFN), a UK-based network of foundations, family offices and individual donors supporting environmental causes.

**Wayleave Payments – £401**

**Bupa – Groundwork – £2,124** – Willow bed restoration

**Suez – £500** – Volunteer Support

**Veolia – £974** – Children's Wild Art Activities

**Hilton Jones Charitable Trust – £1,808** – Pond Creation

**The Tree Council – £1,715** – Tree planting

## Donations

---

The Trust was fortunate to receive donations from individuals and organisations and we are very grateful to them for their support.

Moonshine and Fuggles of Ironbridge have continued to support the Trust and donated £300 from the sales of their Coalport Cucumber gin.

## Expenditure

Total expenditure for the year was £339,149 (£363,826 in 2022/2023). This year an additional £13k profit was generated on the sale of an asset, which has been offset against expenditure in the Statement of Financial Activities (SOFA). £64,584 was spent on Countryside and Landscape maintenance.

£8,383 was spent on Community Projects. Depreciation costs have increased from £24,295 to £34,383 due to the investment in capital machinery to facilitate more work being undertaken in house and the purchase of a new vehicle following the sale of the Trust Land Rover.

Total employment costs (including pension scheme costs) decreased by 10.6% to £199,453. (£223,001 in 22/23). This decrease is primarily due to the reduction in the current service cost of the pension scheme from £51k to £28k. All staff were awarded a cost of living pay rise in line with the National Joint Council (NJC) pay settlement of £1,925 on each salary grade. No Pension Deficit payment was required in 2023/24 (£1,200 in 22/23).

### Investment policy, powers and performance

Trustees are responsible for the financial policies under which the Trust is managed. Under the Memorandum and Articles of Association, the Trust has the power to deposit or invest funds.

### The Investment Policy of the Trust is:

- ◆ for the capital invested to maintain its value whilst building up a dependable, growing stream of income that will keep pace with inflation.

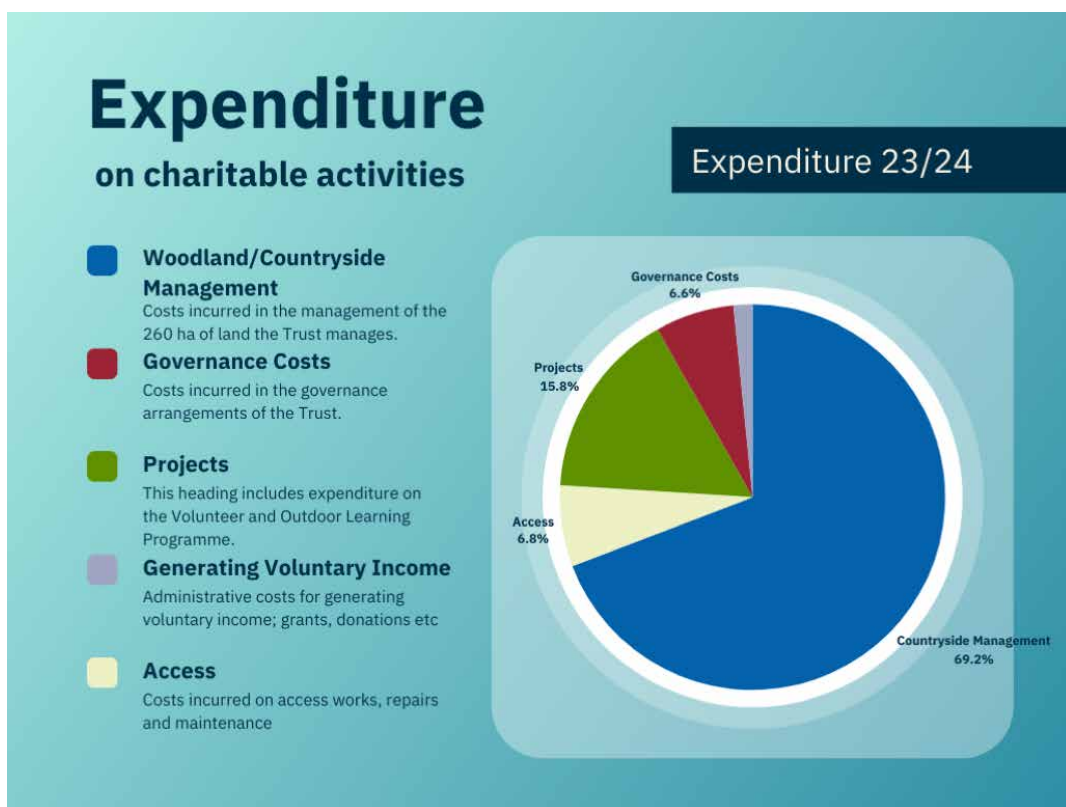
The investment policy was substantially revised in 2021, in particular to take account of ethical and environmental considerations and is now publicly available on the Trust's website. No future investments will be made in companies that derive income from the extraction of coal or oil.

The investment performance is monitored by the Investment Working group by reviewing regular reports from our investment advisors, LGT. The movement in the stock market affects the value of our investments. The short-term gains and losses on the investments make little difference on the day to day running of the charity until the point where we have to sell our investments and realise the gain or loss.

The value of the Trust's investments has fluctuated greatly over the last 12 months but by the end of March 2024 had started to recover.

The Trust's investment portfolio value now stands at £495,658 with an additional £55,614 being held in bank accounts.

The Trust continues to focus on long term investment aims rather than on the short-term market volatility noise.



## Reserves Policy

Trust's reserves are held in order to manage the risks to which the charity is exposed in the course of its activities. The Trustees ensure that the charity is in a responsible and secure financial position to carry out its day-to-day core services and is able to absorb unforeseen setbacks in the event of a significant financial downturn. The reserves policy is reviewed in the annual planning and budgeting process by Trustees and considers changes to the environment in which the Trust operates, and any other internal or external risk factors that might impact on the level of reserves required.

The reserves policy balances the need to build up long-term reserves against the need for short term spending on the Trust's core purposes.

## Severn Gorge Countryside Trust Funds

The Trust's funds are divided between unrestricted funds, restricted funds and designated funds.

The funds and their specific purpose are detailed below:

### Designated Funds

#### Long Term Income Fund

The purpose of this fund is to provide income for the Trust's core work by providing protection against void properties within the Trust's rental income producing portfolio and provide a dependable stream of income that will keep pace with inflation.

Should the rental income drop below the level that is required to fulfil the basic obligations of the Trust then money will be withdrawn from the fund to cover this expenditure.

The money in the Long-Term Income Fund is managed by LGT Wealth Management and is held in equities, bonds and investments. Any interest and dividends generated by this fund are retained.

#### New Accommodation Fund

This fund was created to set aside money to be used to fund the building of the Trust Office at Darby Road. Money that had previously been held in the Long-Term Income Fund was released into the New Accommodation Fund. This fund will be used in conjunction with the restricted grant funding from the NHS and Alcoa Foundation. This fund will be written down over a 50-year period as part of the annual office depreciation calculation.

#### Land and Structures Contingency Fund

The Land and Structures Contingency Fund was created to allow appropriate responses to substantial problems arising from geotechnical features, structures such as walls, land instability, drainage and watercourses.

£10,000 will be transferred to the fund each year when income levels allow. Any work will be undertaken when sufficient funds have been accumulated. Some works may be able to be undertaken at an earlier date if external funding becomes available.



### **Farm the Flow**

This fund was set up for expenses incurred in the Farm the Flow Project.

### **Carry Over Funds**

These funds have been set aside for work that was not completed in the anticipated financial year. Predominantly relating to planned tree works, these funds will be used when the work is completed.

### **Lloyds Surrender Premium Budget**

This fund was created from income received from the surrender premium of the rental property Lloyds Bank. This has been set aside to offset part of the depreciation cost of the Valtra tractor purchase in 2022.

### **Postcode Lottery**

This fund was originally a restricted fund for a grant awarded by the Postcode Lottery. Due to the Covid pandemic the funder decided that the grant could be transferred to a designated fund and could be used for any purpose by the Trust.

**Land Rover Fund** – This fund was set aside to be used against the depreciation cost of the new Trust vehicle

## **Restricted Funds**

**Alcoa/Primary Care Trust New Office** – these funds are for grant funding received towards building of the new office. These funds are being written down over a 50-year period as part of the office depreciation costs

**Councillors Pride Grant** – grant towards the Outdoor Learning Area at the Trust office site.

The Trust also has a General Reserve which is derived from any surplus or deficit made in the financial year. This reserve is also used when there is an increase in the pension deficit, conversely any reduction in the pension deficit will lead to an increase in the General Reserve. Trustees need to be aware of the impact the pension liability can have on the reserve.

## **Table of Funds**

<b>Designated Funds</b>	<b>Balance 1 April 2023</b>	<b>Balance 31 March 2024</b>
Long Term Income Fund	£385,748	£392,686
Revaluation Reserve	£242,938	£270,591
Structures Contingency	£6,950	£6,950
Accommodation Fund	£170,200	£165,600
Lloyds Surrender Premium Fund	£35,000	£31,000
Postcode Lottery	£13,400	£13,400
Farm the Flow	£1,095	£1,095
Carry Over 21-22	£10,500	£0
Carry Over 22-23	£5,982	£3,354
Carry Over 23-24	£0	£1,100
Land Rover Sale	£0	£10,400
<b>Total</b>	<b>£871,813</b>	<b>£896,176</b>

<b>Restricted Funds</b>	<b>Balance 1 April 2023</b>	<b>Balance 31 March 2024</b>
Alcoa Accommodation	£6,752	£6,569
Primary Care Trust Accommodation	£64,616	£62,870
Councillors Pride Grant	£300	£300
Gorge Parish Council – Family Walks	£500	£0
Coronation Grant	£1,565	£0
Wrekin Housing Group – Pond Platform	£1,000	£0
Big Give Green Match Fund – Ponds, Newts & Shoots	£0	£5,196
Hilton Jones Charitable Trust	£0	£1,808
Veolia Envirogrant	£0	£974
<b>Total</b>	<b>£74,733</b>	<b>£77,717</b>

<b>General Fund</b>	<b>Balance 1 April 2023</b>	<b>Balance 31 March 2024</b>
General Fund	£268,272	£363,137

## Information:

- ◆ The Trust has an annual income of £300k - £400k per year. Its main income is derived from rental properties, environmental grants and small sales of logs, hay and timber.
- ◆ Reserves need to be maintained at a level that enables the Trust to manage financial risk and short-term income volatility.
- ◆ The Trusts reserves policy is to hold as a reserve a sum equivalent to the annual costs involved in the general running of the charity.
- ◆ Based upon current levels of expenditure £350,000 must be held in reserves. At the 31 March 2024 the balance in the Long-Term Income Fund was £392,686.
- ◆ The reason for this amount to be held in reserve is that over 80% of the Trusts core income is derived from rental income. Should any of the properties become void our annual income would reduce significantly.
- ◆ Holding a reserve of 12 months running costs would give Trustees the time it would need to find replacement tenants or alternative sources of funding.
- ◆ The liabilities of the land the Trust manages also needs to be reflected in the value of reserves held.
- ◆ The target level of reserves should be reviewed on an annual basis as part of the annual budget which is presented to Trustees.
- ◆ The needs of the Trust will change from year to year and unexpected requirements for expenditure may alter future financial plans.
- ◆ Cost of closure: should an event or events occur which cause the Trustees to decide to wind up SGCT, the cost of redundancies and fees required to manage the closure will need to be calculated. Sufficient funds will need to be set aside to cover these potential costs. (Redundancy calculation as at 31 March 2024 circa £23k).

In carrying out our assessment of available reserves, we exclude any pensions liability and fixed asset funds, because these reserves cannot be quickly realised. We also exclude any funds that are restricted for a specific purpose. This gets us to our 'free reserves'; the resources we have available, quickly, should we need them.

## Pension Scheme

The Trust is an admission body in the Shropshire County Pension Scheme. This is a defined benefit pension scheme which offers employees a specified pension based on their length of service and their salary. Employers have to ensure that the contributions to their schemes are sufficient to provide the benefits that their employees are entitled to based on actuarial advice. Accounting standards require employers to estimate their pension liabilities and include them in their accounts.

In common with other charities with defined benefit pension schemes, our pension scheme shows a surplus which stood at £73,000 as of 31 March 2024 (a deficit of £9,000 as of 31 March 2023) and, under UK accounting standards we are required to account for this surplus. This is a great improvement in our funding position and the drivers behind this improvement are linked to significant rises in bond yields coupled with changes in funding assumptions and calculations.

Under the current pension scheme regulations, the surplus can only be paid out when an employer exits the pension fund.

Trustees are aware that any surplus/deficit on the scheme will fluctuate with changing market conditions and that their responsibility is to meet the required contributions.



## Actuarial valuation

At the last valuation in March 2023 the contribution rate to be paid into the Shropshire County Pension Fund was assessed in two parts. First a standard contribution rate was determined. This is the contribution, expressed as a percentage of the salaries of staff. Secondly, a supplementary contribution is payable if, as a result of the actuarial review, it is found that the accumulated liabilities of the pension for benefits to past and present staff are not fully covered by the standard contributions to be paid in future and by the notional fund built up from past contributions. The total contribution rate payable is the sum of the standard contribution rate and the supplementary contribution rate.

Shropshire County Pension Fund has been working hard over the last few years to reduce the pension deficit and has set out a clear framework in which to achieve this. The Trust paid an employer contribution rate of 14.3% no annual deficit contribution in 23/24 was required. (£1,200 in 22/23)



## Looking Forward

---

Looking forward to 2024-2025, we will continue to manage the 289 hectares of the 'living landscape' of the World Heritage Site with the same consistent care and passion that we have shown for the past 33 years.

### Key Projects include:

- ◆ Developing a new website so that in conjunction with our social media platforms we can continue to communicate the Trusts vision, purpose, work and impact effectively to increase awareness of the work that we do and how people can get involved.
- ◆ Ensuring future financial sustainability – continue to work with Telford & Wrekin Council to diversify our rental properties and explore other avenues to grow and diversify unrestricted income streams.
- ◆ Launching and delivering a landscaping contracting business to create an alternative income stream to improve our financial resilience and long-term sustainability.
- ◆ Continuing to explore funding opportunities both large and small to enable us to undertake both core work and new projects.
- ◆ Reviewing Trust policies and procedures to ensure that they are compliant, relevant and up to date.
- ◆ Producing more timber infrastructure in house for fencing, access infrastructure etc.
- ◆ Increasing our capacity to produce firewood as a growing income stream
- ◆ Continuing to monitor the progression of ash dieback ensuring work is carried out where necessary to ensure sites are safe.
- ◆ Continuing to ensure that the Trust is well governed and that Trustees have the necessary training to feel empowered to make informed and strategic decisions.
- ◆ Encouraging non traditional users to engage, explore and enjoy the opportunities that the Trust land offers.
- ◆ Upskilling interested volunteers to assist with some of our landscape management operations
- ◆ Ensuring that we communicate our future management works to local people in a coherent and cohesive manner and listen to any concerns that they may have.
- ◆ Continuing to develop our forest school and outdoor learning area to increase our capacity to deliver environmental education sessions to local schools and groups. Investigate the feasibility of creating an outdoor learning classroom.
- ◆ Increasing the number of our sites included in 'No Mow May' to improve biodiversity. Exploring alternative grazing options for some difficult to reach sites.
- ◆ Developing Citizen Science projects to monitor and record our work whilst engendering an interest in the local environment. One example would be to organise a Bioblitz.
- ◆ Expanding our corporate volunteering opportunities to help deliver conservation and access work that supports our charitable aims whilst providing opportunities for organisations to learn new skills, connect with local communities and have fun outside of the usual work environment.
- ◆ Exploring options to reduce our carbon footprint and move towards becoming carbon neutral by 2030. For example, developing a solar kiln, moving to HVO fuel, using an electric bike for site visits.
- ◆ Raising awareness of the Trust by attending events to promote our work and the opportunities and products we offer.
- ◆ Ensuring that the Trust Office site and building continues to be fit for purpose and is well maintained. Carrying out all necessary repairs to ensure that it continues to be an inviting and safe place to work and visit.

In order to deliver these goals, we will continue improving our own capability and resilience to ensure we are putting maximum resource into managing the landscape. We will continue investing in training to ensure we have the right skills to manage the landscape of the World Heritage Site to a high level.

## Statement of Trustees Responsibilities

The Trustees are responsible for preparing the Annual Report and the financial statements in accordance with applicable law and regulations.

Company law requires Trustees to prepare financial statements for each financial year. The financial statements are required by law to give a true and fair view of the state of affairs of the company and of the profit or loss of the company for that period. In preparing those financial statements, the Trustees are required to:

- ◆ select suitable accounting policies and then apply them consistently.
- ◆ observe the methods and principles in the Charities SORP
- ◆ make judgements and estimates that are reasonable and prudent.
- ◆ state whether applicable UK Accounting Standards have been followed, subject to any material departures disclosed and explained in the financial statements.
- ◆ prepare the financial statements on the going concern basis unless it is inappropriate to presume that the company will continue in business.

The Trustees are responsible for keeping proper accounting records that disclose with reasonable accuracy at any time the financial position of the group and parent charity and enable them to ensure that the financial statements comply with the Charities Act 2011 and the Charity (Accounts and Reports) Regulations. They are also responsible for safeguarding the assets of company and hence for taking reasonable steps for the prevention and detection of fraud and other irregularities.

The Trustees are responsible for the maintenance and integrity of the financial information included on the charity's website.

In accordance with company law, as the company's directors, we certify that:

- ◆ so far as we are aware, there is no relevant audit information of which the company's auditor is unaware.

This report has been prepared in accordance with the Statement of Recommended Practice – Accounting and Reporting by Charities and in accordance with the provisions applicable to companies subject to the small companies' regime.

Approved by the Committee of Management on 25 September 2024 and signed on its behalf by:

**Maureen Bragg**  
Chair



Severn Gorge Countryside Trust

**REPORT AND FINANCIAL STATEMENTS**

For the year ended 31 March 2024

Company No. 2647374

Muras Baker Jones Limited  
Chartered Accountants  
Wolverhampton

# **INDEPENDENT AUDITORS' REPORT TO THE MEMBERS OF SEVERN GORGE COUNTRYSIDE TRUST**

## **Opinion**

We have audited the financial statements of Severn Gorge Countryside Trust (the 'charitable company') for the year ended 31 March 2024 which comprise the statement of financial activities (including income and expenditure account), statement of financial position and the related notes, including a summary of significant accounting policies. The financial reporting framework that has been applied in their preparation is applicable law and United Kingdom Accounting Standards, including FRS 102 The Financial Reporting Standard applicable in the UK and Republic of Ireland (United Kingdom Generally Accepted Accounting Practice).

In our opinion the financial statements:

- give a true and fair view of the state of the charitable company's affairs as at 31 March 2024 and of its incoming resources and application of resources, including its income and expenditure, for the year then ended
- have been properly prepared in accordance with United Kingdom Generally Accepted Accounting Practice
- have been prepared in accordance with the requirements of the Companies Act 2006

## **Basis for opinion**

We conducted our audit in accordance with International Standards on Auditing (UK) (ISAs (UK)) and applicable law. Our responsibilities under those standards are further described in the auditor's responsibilities for the audit of the financial statements section of our report. We are independent of the charity in accordance with the ethical requirements that are relevant to our audit of the financial statements in the UK, including the FRC's Ethical Standard, and we have fulfilled our other ethical responsibilities in accordance with these requirements. We believe that the audit evidence we have obtained is sufficient and appropriate to provide a basis for our opinion.

## **Conclusions relating to going concern**

We have nothing to report in respect of the following matters in relation to which the ISAs (UK) require us to report to you where:

- the trustees' use of the going concern basis of accounting in the preparation of the financial statements is not appropriate; or
- the trustees have not disclosed in the financial statements any identified material uncertainties that may cast significant doubt about the charity's ability to continue to adopt the going concern basis of accounting for a period of at least twelve months from the date when the financial statements are authorised for issue

## **Other information**

The other information comprises the information included in the annual report, other than the financial statements and our auditor's report thereon. The trustees are responsible for the other information. Our opinion on the financial statements does not cover the other information and, except to the extent otherwise explicitly stated in our report, we do not express any form of assurance conclusion thereon.

In connection with our audit of the financial statements, our responsibility is to read the other information and, in doing so, consider whether the other information is materially inconsistent with the financial statements or our knowledge obtained in the audit or otherwise appears to be materially misstated. If we identify such material inconsistencies or apparent material misstatements, we are required to determine whether there is a material misstatement in the financial statements or a material misstatement of the other information. If, based on the work we have performed, we conclude that there is a material misstatement of this other information, we are required to report that fact.

We have nothing to report in this regard.

## **INDEPENDENT AUDITORS' REPORT TO THE MEMBERS OF SEVERN GORGE COUNTRYSIDE TRUST (CONTINUED)**

### **Opinions on other matters prescribed by the Companies Act 2006**

In our opinion, based on the work undertaken in the course of the audit:

- the information given in the trustees' report for the financial year for which the financial statements are prepared is consistent with the financial statements; and
- the trustees' report has been prepared in accordance with applicable legal requirements.

### **Matters on which we are required to report by exception**

In the light of the knowledge and understanding of the charitable company and its environment obtained in the course of the audit, we have not identified material misstatements in the trustees' report.

We have nothing to report in respect of the following matters in relation to which the Companies Act 2006 requires us to report to you if, in our opinion:

- adequate accounting records have not been kept, or returns adequate for our audit have not been received from branches not visited by us; or
- the financial statements are not in agreement with the accounting records and returns; or
- certain disclosures of trustees' remuneration specified by law are not made; or
- we have not received all the information and explanations we require for our audit; or
- the trustees were not entitled to take advantage of the small companies' exemptions in preparing the directors' report and from the requirement to prepare a strategic report.

### **Responsibilities of trustees**

As explained more fully in the trustees' responsibilities statement, the trustees (who are also the directors for the purposes of company law) are responsible for the preparation of the financial statements and for being satisfied that they give a true and fair view, and for such internal control as the trustees determine is necessary to enable the preparation of financial statements that are free from material misstatement, whether due to fraud or error.

In preparing the financial statements, the trustees are responsible for assessing the charitable company's ability to continue as a going concern, disclosing, as applicable, matters related to going concern and using the going concern basis of accounting unless the trustees either intend to liquidate the charitable company or to cease operations, or have no realistic alternative but to do so.

### **Auditor's responsibilities for the audit of the financial statements**

Our objectives are to obtain reasonable assurance about whether the financial statements as a whole are free from material misstatement, whether due to fraud or error, and to issue an auditor's report that includes our opinion. Reasonable assurance is a high level of assurance, but is not a guarantee that an audit conducted in accordance with ISAs (UK) will always detect a material misstatement when it exists. Misstatements can arise from fraud or error and are considered material if, individually or in the aggregate, they could reasonably be expected to influence the economic decisions of users taken on the basis of these financial statements.

As part of an audit in accordance with ISAs (UK), we exercise professional judgment and maintain professional scepticism throughout the audit. We also:

- Identify and assess the risks of material misstatement of the financial statements, whether due to fraud or error, design and perform audit procedures responsive to those risks, and obtain audit evidence that is sufficient and appropriate to provide a basis for our opinion. The risk of not detecting a material misstatement resulting from fraud is higher than for one resulting from error, as fraud may involve collusion, forgery, intentional omissions, misrepresentations, or the override of internal control

## **INDEPENDENT AUDITORS' REPORT TO THE MEMBERS OF SEVERN GORGE COUNTRYSIDE TRUST (CONTINUED)**

- Obtain an understanding of internal control relevant to the audit in order to design audit procedures that are appropriate in the circumstances, but not for the purpose of expressing an opinion on the effectiveness of the internal control
- Evaluate the appropriateness of accounting policies used and the reasonableness of accounting estimates and related disclosures made by the trustees
- Conclude on the appropriateness of the trustees' use of the going concern basis of accounting and, based on the audit evidence obtained, whether a material uncertainty exists related to events or conditions that may cast significant doubt on the charity's ability to continue as a going concern. If we conclude that a material uncertainty exists, we are required to draw attention in our auditor's report to the related disclosures in the financial statements or, if such disclosures are inadequate, to modify our opinion. Our conclusions are based on the audit evidence obtained up to the date of our auditor's report. However, future events or conditions may cause the charity to cease to continue as a going concern
- Evaluate the overall presentation, structure and content of the financial statements, including the disclosures, and whether the financial statements represent the underlying transactions and events in a manner that achieves fair presentation

We communicate with those charged with governance regarding, among other matters, the planned scope and timing of the audit and significant audit findings, including any significant deficiencies in internal control that we identify during our audit.

### **Use of our report**

This report is made solely to the charitable company's members, as a body, in accordance with Chapter 3 of Part 16 of the Companies Act 2006. Our audit work has been undertaken so that we might state to the charitable company's members those matters we are required to state to them in an auditor's report and for no other purpose. To the fullest extent permitted by law, we do not accept or assume responsibility to anyone other than the charitable company and the charitable company's members as a body, for our audit work, for this report, or for the opinions we have formed.

.....  
Oliver Ross BSc(Hons) FCA (Senior Statutory Auditor)  
For and on behalf of Muras Baker Jones Limited  
Chartered Accountants and Statutory Auditor

25 September 2024

Regent House  
Bath Avenue  
Wolverhampton  
WV1 4EG

## SEVERN GORGE COUNTRYSIDE TRUST

### STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL ACTIVITIES (being INCOME AND EXPENDITURE ACCOUNT)

For the year ended 31 March 2024

	Notes	General Fund £	Designated Funds £	Restricted funds £	Total funds 2024 £	Total funds 2023 £
<b>INCOME</b>						
<b>INCOMING RESOURCES FROM CHARITABLE ACTIVITIES</b>						
Rents received	4	234,523	-	-	234,523	238,575
Grants	4	73,745	-	7,978	81,723	55,640
<b>INCOME FROM OTHER TRADING ACTIVITIES</b>						
Investment income		1,590	10,976	-	12,566	10,477
Other income		15,437	-	-	15,437	22,189
Gifts and Donations		1,252	-	-	1,252	1,013
<b>Total Income</b>		<b>326,547</b>	<b>10,976</b>	<b>7,978</b>	<b>345,501</b>	<b>327,894</b>
<b>EXPENDITURE</b>						
<b>COSTS OF RAISING FUNDS</b>						
Costs of generating voluntary income	5	5,302	-	-	5,302	6,515
<b>EXPENDITURE ON CHARITABLE ACTIVITIES</b>						
Woodland/Countryside Management	5	225,410	4,377	4,901	234,688	275,420
Access	5	23,130	31	13	23,174	26,799
Projects	5	53,432	192	80	53,704	29,321
<b>GOVERNANCE COSTS</b>	5	<b>18,242</b>	<b>4,039</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>22,281</b>	<b>25,771</b>
<b>Total Expenditure</b>		<b>325,516</b>	<b>8,639</b>	<b>4,994</b>	<b>339,149</b>	<b>363,826</b>
<b>NET INCOME/(EXPENDITURE)</b>		<b>1,031</b>	<b>2,337</b>	<b>2,984</b>	<b>6,352</b>	<b>(35,932)</b>
<b>TRANSFERS BETWEEN FUNDS</b>		<b>5,628</b>	<b>(5,628)</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>
<b>NET INCOME/(EXPENDITURE) BEFORE OTHER GAINS / (LOSSES) – carried forward</b>		<b>6,659</b>	<b>(3,291)</b>	<b>2,984</b>	<b>6,352</b>	<b>(35,932)</b>

## SEVERN GORGE COUNTRYSIDE TRUST

### STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL ACTIVITIES (being INCOME AND EXPENDITURE ACCOUNT) continued

For the year ended 31 March 2024

	Notes	General Fund £	Designated Funds £	Restricted Funds £	Total Funds 2024 £	Total funds 2023 £
NET INCOME/(EXPENDITURE) BEFORE OTHER GAINS / (LOSSES) – brought forward		6,659	(3,291)	2,984	6,352	(35,932)
OTHER GAINS AND LOSSES						
Gains/(losses) on Investments - realised		-	(2,575)	-	(2,575)	(12,946)
Gains/(losses) on Investments – unrealised		-	30,229	-	30,229	(25,034)
Pension scheme actuarial (losses)/gains	14	88,205	-	-	88,205	469,290
<hr/>						
NET MOVEMENT IN FUNDS FOR THE YEAR		94,864	24,363	2,984	122,211	395,378
<hr/>						
TOTAL FUNDS BROUGHT FORWARD AT 31 MARCH 2023		268,272	871,813	74,733	1,214,818	819,440
<hr/>						
TOTAL FUNDS CARRIED FORWARD AT 31 MARCH 2024		363,136	896,176	77,717	1,337,029	1,214,818
<hr/> <hr/>						

All income and expenditure derive from continuing activities.

The statement of financial activities includes all gains and losses recognised in the year.



## SEVERN GORGE COUNTRYSIDE TRUST

### NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

For the year ended 31 March 2024

#### 1. ACCOUNTING POLICIES

##### a) BASIS OF PREPARATION

The charity constitutes a public benefit entity as defined by FRS 102. The financial statements have been prepared in accordance with Accounting and Reporting by Charities: Statement of Recommended Practice applicable to charities preparing their accounts in accordance with the Financial Reporting Standard applicable in the UK and Republic of Ireland issued in October 2019, the Financial Reporting Standard applicable in the United Kingdom and Republic of Ireland (FRS 102), the Charities Act 2011, the Companies Act 2006 and UK Generally Accepted Accounting Practice.

The financial statements are prepared on a going concern basis under the historical cost convention, modified to include investments and certain freehold property at fair value.

##### b) INCOME

Rental income is included when receivable.

Income from contracting projects is recognised when receivable.

Grants are recognised in full in the Statement of Financial Activities when receivable.

Income from investments and other income, including small sales of timber and refunds, are included when receivable.

##### c) EXPENDITURE AND IRRECOVERABLE VAT

Resources expended are recognised in the period in which they are incurred. Resources expended include attributable VAT, which cannot be recovered.

The proportion of employees time spent fundraising is shown as costs of generating voluntary income.

Resources expended are allocated to the particular activity where the cost relates directly to that activity. The cost of overall direction and administration on each activity is apportioned based on the direct costs incurred for each.

##### d) DEPRECIATION

Depreciation is provided on the cost of fixed assets to write off the cost less estimated residual value of each asset over its estimated useful life at the following rates:

Freehold property	Depreciated over 50 years
Fixtures & Equipment	10% straight line/20% straight line/33 <sup>1</sup> / <sub>3</sub> % straight line
Plant and Machinery	10% straight line/20% straight line/33 <sup>1</sup> / <sub>3</sub> % straight line
Motor vehicles	20% straight line/25% reducing balance
Facility Construction	10% straight line

No depreciation is provided on Freehold Land.

## SEVERN GORGE COUNTRYSIDE TRUST

### NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

For the year ended 31 March 2024

#### 1. ACCOUNTING POLICIES (Continued)

##### e) TANGIBLE ASSETS

Tangible assets are initially recorded at cost, and subsequently stated at cost less any accumulated depreciation and impairment losses. Any tangible assets carried at revalued amounts are recorded at the fair value at the date of revaluation less any subsequent accumulated depreciation and subsequent accumulated impairment losses.

An increase in the carrying amount of an asset as a result of revaluation, is recognised in other recognised gains and losses, unless it reverses a charge for impairment that has previously been recognised as expenditure within the statement of financial activities. A decrease in the carrying amount of an asset as a result of revaluation, is recognised in other recognised gains and losses, except to which it offsets any previous revaluation gain, in which case the loss is shown within other recognised gains and losses on the statement of financial activities.

##### f) INVESTMENTS

Investments held as current assets are stated at the lower of cost and net realisable value.

Investments held as fixed assets are revalued annually and the aggregate surplus or deficit is transferred to Revaluation Reserve.

##### g) GENERAL FUND

This represents unrestricted funds that are available for use at the Trustees' discretion in furtherance of the objectives of the Trust.

##### h) DESIGNATED FUNDS

- i) Long Term Income Fund - this fund arises from the combining of the Income Security Fund and the Long Term Development Reserve and reflects monies held within Fixed and Current Asset Investments. The purpose of the fund is to provide additional income for the Trust's core work when rental income declines as properties reach the end of their expected commercial 'life' circa 2015 to 2025.
- ii) Land and Structures Contingency - this reserve reflects monies held within current asset investments. The reserve has been created to cope with expenditure arising as a result of land instability, drainage and watercourse issues and potential problems with existing structures.
- iii) New Accommodation Fund - the reserve has been created to set aside funds towards the new office accommodation for the Trust.
- iv) Revaluation Reserve - this reflects the increase in the fair value of investments and land over their original cost.

## SEVERN GORGE COUNTRYSIDE TRUST

### NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

For the year ended 31 March 2024

#### 1. ACCOUNTING POLICIES (Continued)

##### h) DESIGNATED FUNDS - continued

v) Lloyds Bank Surrender Premium Fund and Carry Over Funds. These reserves relate to surplus funds arising on certain projects during the year for which the trustees have designated against specific expenditure over the next 2 years.

vi) Postcode Lottery Access Fund. Being grants received in respect of work to be carried out on steps in the Gorge. Re-designated by the grant provider as unrestricted.

##### i) RESTRICTED FUNDS

These represent grants received for specified projects, the use of each grant being restricted to that project.

##### j) GOING CONCERN

The trustees remain mindful of the impact on the charity of external economic constraints and as a result regularly review projections and budgets for the current and subsequent periods. Based on these reviews, the trustees consider there to be no significant overall impact on the charity's ability to continue as a going concern.

The trustees have also reviewed the supply chains, key income sources and the capital resources available and consider that the charity has adequate resources in place to continue operating for the next twelve months.

##### k) EMPLOYEE BENEFITS

The charity contributes to a defined benefit plan for certain employees. A liability for the charity's obligation under the plan is recognised net of plan assets. The net change in the net defined benefit liability is recognised as the costs of the defined benefit plan during the period. Pension plan assets are measured at fair value and the defined benefit obligation is measured on an actuarial basis using the projected unit method.

The trustees believe that the scheme currently meets statutory minimum funding requirements. It is intended that the level of annual contributions to the scheme will be adjusted following the next detailed actuarial valuation. The directors note that the calculated notional deficit or surplus calculated under FRS102 can vary greatly from year to year depending on the assumptions made at the valuation date, but with normally little or no effect on short term cashflows.

#### 2. (DEFICIT)/SURPLUS FOR THE YEAR

The (deficit)/surplus for the year is stated after charging:

	2024	2023
	£	£
Auditors' remuneration	2,748	2,568
Depreciation of tangible fixed assets	34,383	24,321
	<u>                    </u>	<u>                    </u>

## SEVERN GORGE COUNTRYSIDE TRUST

### NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

For the year ended 31 March 2024

#### 3. STAFF COSTS

	2024 £	2023 £
Wages and salaries	154,043	141,899
Social security costs	10,022	9,263
Other pension Costs	28,000	64,011
Other costs	7,389	7,828
	<u>199,454</u>	<u>223,001</u>

No employees received remuneration in excess of £60,000 (2023: None).

No members of the Committee of Management received any remuneration in the year (2023 - £Nil). Apart from members of the Committee of Management, the company had 6 employees at 31 March 2024 (2023 - 6).

#### 4. INCOMING RESOURCES FROM CHARITABLE ACTIVITIES

	General fund £	Restricted funds £	Total 2024 £	Total 2023 £
Rents received	234,522	-	234,522	238,575
Grants:				
Natural England:				
Countryside Stewardship	23,503	-	23,503	18,198
Rural Payments Agency	-	-	-	5,958
The Gorge Parish Council	-	-	-	500
Other	2,202	-	2,202	1,267
Telford & Wrekin Council – Kings Coronation Grant	-	-	-	1,635
Wrekin Housing Group - Community Fund	-	-	-	1,000
Telford Treescapes grant	12,504	-	12,504	12,504
Bupa – Groundwork Willow	2,124	-	2,124	-
Potter Group – Environment Fund	31,697	-	31,697	14,578
Big Give – Green Match Fund	-	5,196	5,196	-
Hilton Jones Trust – Office Pond	-	1,808	1,808	-
The Tree Council	1,715	-	1,715	-
Veolia Environmental Trust	-	974	974	-
	<u>73,745</u>	<u>7,978</u>	<u>81,723</u>	<u>55,640</u>
	<u>308,267</u>	<u>7,978</u>	<u>316,245</u>	<u>294,215</u>

## SEVERN GORGE COUNTRYSIDE TRUST

### NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

For the year ended 31 March 2024

#### 5. ANALYSIS OF EXPENDITURE ON CHARITABLE ACTIVITIES

	Generating voluntary income £	Woodland/ countryside management £	Access £	Projects £	Governance costs £	Total 2024 £	Total 2023 £
Direct costs	-	66,747	-	8,383	-	75,130	79,762
Employee costs	5,302	123,059	23,071	39,671	8,350	199,453	223,001
Insurance	-	8,659	20	1,090	-	9,769	7,944
Transport	-	6,468	15	814	-	7,297	9,564
Office and other costs	-	10,802	25	1,360	1,354	13,541	11,433
Trustee support	-	-	-	-	678	678	387
Professional costs	-	-	-	-	11,899	11,899	11,968
Depreciation	-	30,476	70	3,836	-	34,382	24,321
(Profit)/loss on disposal of tangible fixed assets	-	(11,523)	(27)	(1,450)	-	(13,000)	(4,554)
	<u>5,302</u>	<u>234,688</u>	<u>23,174</u>	<u>53,704</u>	<u>22,281</u>	<u>339,149</u>	<u>363,826</u>

## SEVERN GORGE COUNTRYSIDE TRUST

### NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

For the year ended 31 March 2024

#### 6. TANGIBLE FIXED ASSETS

	Plant and machinery £	Land and buildings £	Motor vehicles £	Fixtures & equipment £	Facility Construction £	Total £
<b>COST:</b>						
At 1 April 2023	106,919	629,476	80,391	47,057	4,495	868,338
Additions	14,622	-	-	4,273	-	18,896
Disposals	-	-	(28,970)	(2,292)	-	(31,262)
<b>At 31 March 2024</b>	<b>121,541</b>	<b>629,476</b>	<b>51,421</b>	<b>49,038</b>	<b>4,495</b>	<b>855,972</b>
<b>ACCUMULATED DEPRECIATION:</b>						
At 1 April 2023	22,581	113,775	57,061	32,076	2,248	227,741
Charge for the Year	12,964	8,752	5,833	6,385	450	34,383
Disposals	-	-	(28,970)	(2,292)	-	(31,262)
<b>At 31 March 2024</b>	<b>35,545</b>	<b>122,527</b>	<b>33,924</b>	<b>36,169</b>	<b>2,698</b>	<b>293,386</b>
<b>NET BOOK VALUE:</b>						
At 31 March 2023	84,338	515,701	23,330	14,981	2,247	640,597
<b>At 31 March 2024</b>	<b>85,997</b>	<b>506,949</b>	<b>17,498</b>	<b>12,869</b>	<b>1,797</b>	<b>625,110</b>

## SEVERN GORGE COUNTRYSIDE TRUST

### NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

For the year ended 31 March 2024

#### 7. FIXED ASSET INVESTMENTS

	2024 £	2023 £
Balance brought forward	464,158	431,335
Additions	121,369	167,493
Disposals	(120,098)	(109,636)
Revaluation adjustment	30,229	(25,034)
	<hr/>	<hr/>
Balance carried forward	495,658	464,158
	<hr/> <hr/>	<hr/> <hr/>
Historical cost of investments held at 31 March 2024	471,662	484,925
	<hr/> <hr/>	<hr/> <hr/>

Investments are acquired to provide fixed funding for certain of the Designated Funds set up by the Trust (see Note 11).

	2024		2023	
	Original cost £	Market value £	Original cost £	Market value £
<b>Abundance</b>				
- Telford & Wrekin Climate Action Investment	817	796	910	910
<b>LGT Wealth Management</b>				
- Investment portfolio	470,845	494,862	484,015	463,248
	<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>
	471,662	495,658	484,925	464,158
	<hr/> <hr/>	<hr/> <hr/>	<hr/> <hr/>	<hr/> <hr/>

#### 8. DEBTORS

	2024 £	2023 £
Trade debtors	35,048	17,064
Prepayments	-	663
	<hr/>	<hr/>
	35,048	17,727
	<hr/> <hr/>	<hr/> <hr/>

## SEVERN GORGE COUNTRYSIDE TRUST

### NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

For the year ended 31 March 2024

#### 9. CURRENT ASSET INVESTMENTS

	2024 £	2023 £
Short term deposits	39,056	37,495

#### 10. CREDITORS - amounts falling due within one year

	2024 £	2023 £
Trade Creditors	1,856	6,486
	<u>1,856</u>	<u>6,486</u>

#### 11. ANALYSIS OF CHARITABLE FUNDS

	At 1 April 2023 £	Income £	Expend- iture £	Other recognised gains/ (losses) £	Trans- fers £	At 31 March 2024 £
<b>Analysis of movements in unrestricted funds</b>						
General Fund	268,272	326,547	(325,516)	88,205	5,628	363,136
Long Term Income Fund	385,748	10,976	(4,039)	-	-	392,685
Land and Structures Contingency Accommodation Fund	6,950	-	-	-	-	6,950
Revaluation Reserve	170,200	-	(4,600)	-	-	165,600
Lloyds Surrender Premium fund	242,938	-	-	27,654	-	270,592
Postcode Lottery Access Fund	35,000	-	-	-	(4,000)	31,000
Farm the Flow Carry Over	13,400	-	-	-	-	13,400
From 21/22	1,095	-	-	-	-	1,095
Carry Over From 22/23	10,500	-	-	-	(10,500)	-
Land Rover sale Carry Over	5,982	-	-	-	(2,628)	3,354
From 23/24	-	-	-	-	10,400	10,400
	-	-	-	-	1,100	1,100
	<u>871,813</u>	<u>10,976</u>	<u>(8,639)</u>	<u>27,654</u>	<u>(5,628)</u>	<u>896,176</u>

## SEVERN GORGE COUNTRYSIDE TRUST

### NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

For the year ended 31 March 2024

#### 11. ANALYSIS OF CHARITABLE FUNDS continued

	At 1 April 2023	Income	Expend- iture	Other recogni- sed gains/ (losses)	Trans- fers	At 31 March 2024
	£	£	£	£	£	£
<b>Analysis of movements in restricted funds</b>						
Alcoa Grant	6,752	-	(183)	-	-	6,569
Primary Care Trust - New Office project	64,616	-	(1,746)	-	-	62,870
Councillors Pride Grant	300	-	-	-	-	300
Gorge Parish Council - Family Friendly walks	500	-	(500)	-	-	-
Telford & Wrekin Council - King's Coronation Grant	1,565	-	(1,565)	-	-	-
Wrekin Housing group - Community Fund	1,000	-	(1,000)	-	-	-
Hilton Jones Charitable Trust - Office Pond	-	1,808	-	-	-	1,808
Green Match Fund Big Give - Ponds Newts and Shoots	-	5,196	-	-	-	5,196
Veolia Envirogrant - Wild Art Workshops	-	974	-	-	-	974
	<u>74,733</u>	<u>7,978</u>	<u>(4,994)</u>	<u>-</u>	<u>-</u>	<u>77,717</u>
Total Funds	<u>1,214,818</u>	<u>345,501</u>	<u>(339,149)</u>	<u>115,859</u>	<u>-</u>	<u>1,337,029</u>

## SEVERN GORGE COUNTRYSIDE TRUST

### NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

For the year ended 31 March 2024

#### 11. ANALYSIS OF CHARITABLE FUNDS continued

The assets comprising each Fund at 31 March 2024 are as follows:

	Tangible fixed assets £	Fixed asset investments £	Current assets / (Liabilities) £	Total £
Accommodation Fund	165,600	-	-	165,600
Long Term Income Fund	-	337,896	54,790	392,686
Revaluation Reserve Land and Structures	112,830	157,762	-	270,592
Contingency	-	-	6,950	6,950
Lloyds Surrender Premium Fund	-	-	31,000	31,000
Farm the Flow carry over Postcode Lottery Access Fund	-	-	1,094	1,094
Carry Over from 22/23	-	-	13,400	13,400
Land Rover sale	10,400	-	3,354	3,354
Carry Over from 23/24	-	-	-	10,400
Restricted Funds	69,439	-	1,100	1,100
General Fund	266,841	-	8,278	77,717
			96,295	363,136
	<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>
	625,110	495,658	216,261	1,337,029
	<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>

#### Fund transfers

Lloyds Surrender Premium Budget. A transfer of £4,000 was made to the general fund to offset the depreciation of capital machinery.

Carry Over from 21/22. A transfer of £10,500 was made to the general fund in relation to work carried out during the year that was originally planned to be carried out in 21/22.

Carry Over from 22/23. A transfer of £2,628 was made to the general fund in relation to work carried out during the year that was originally planned to be carried out in 22/23.

Land Rover Sale. A transfer of £13,000 was made from the general fund relating to the profit on sale of the Land Rover. £2,600 was then transferred back to the general fund to write down over the next 5 years against depreciation of Hilux vehicle.

Carry Over from 23/24. A transfer of £1,100 from the general fund was made to cover work planned for 23/24 still outstanding at the year end to be incurred in 24/25.

## SEVERN GORGE COUNTRYSIDE TRUST

### NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

For the year ended 31 March 2024

#### 11. ANALYSIS OF CHARITABLE FUNDS continued

##### **Purpose of Designated Funds**

These are detailed in note 1(h) to the financial statements and also in the Trustees Report.

##### **Purpose of Restricted Funds**

These represent grants received and related expenditure in respect of specific projects as outlined above.

#### 12. PENSIONS

##### Defined Benefit Scheme

The company is a member of the Shropshire County pension fund which operates a pension scheme providing benefits based on final pensionable pay. The assets of the scheme are held separately from those of the company. Contributions to the scheme are charged to the profit and loss account so as to spread the cost of pensions over employees' working lives with the company. The contributions are determined by a qualified actuary on the basis of triennial valuations using assumptions that: project the benefits forward into the future and then adjust them to current day values; estimate the probability of payments needing to be made. The most recent valuation was as at 31 March 2019. The company receives annual reports from the pension scheme which identify its share of the assets and liabilities of the scheme.

The pension charge for the year amounts to £28,000 (2023 - £64,000), against which employer contributions paid over to the scheme amounted to £21,795 (2023 - £30,710), together with the actuarial gains and losses on the scheme for the year is recognised in the statement of Financial Activities in accordance with SORP (FRS 102).

The most recent actuarial valuation showed that the market value of the whole scheme's assets was £1,951m and that the actuarial value of those assets represented 76% of the benefits that had accrued to members, after allowing for expected future increases in earnings.

The company's share of the market values of the main asset classes, at the year end were:

	2024		2023	
	%	£000s	%	£000s
Equities	56.5	622	51.1	502
Government Bonds	0.0	0	0.0	0
Other Bonds	14.6	160	18.8	184
Property	3.5	38	3.3	32
Cash/liquidity	1.4	15	0.5	5
Other	24.0	264	26.3	258

The assets of the Scheme are included in the accounts at open market value as at the year-end, and the liabilities have been calculated using the following actuarial assumptions:

## SEVERN GORGE COUNTRYSIDE TRUST

### NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

For the year ended 31 March 2024

#### 12. PENSION -continued

	2024 %	2023 %
Rate of increase in salaries	3.95	3.95
Pension increases	2.8	2.8
Rate of discount	4.9	4.8
Inflation - RPI	-	-
- CPI	2.7	2.7

The liabilities are determined using the projected unit method as distinct from the aggregate method used in the triennial valuation. Under the projected unit method, the current service costs will increase as the members of the scheme approach retirement. On this basis, the calculated notional funding position, in respect of the Scheme at 31 March 2024, and at previous year-end, was as follows:

	2024 £000s	2023 £000s
Value of market assets	1,099	981
Value of accrued liabilities	(1,026)	(990)
Surplus/(Deficit)	73	(9)

The actuary has confirmed that the valuation made above under the requirements of FRS102 does not indicate that there is either an immediate funding requirement or any immediate need to change the agreed contribution rates currently in force. The actuary has excluded from both assets and liabilities items which have neutral effect on the Scheme's financial position i.e. additional voluntary contributions, annuities secured in respect of pensions in payment and insurance contract for death in service benefits.

## SEVERN GORGE COUNTRYSIDE TRUST

### NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

For the year ended 31 March 2024

#### 12. PENSION –continued

The charge to the Statement of Financial Activities over the financial year comprised:

	2024 £000s	2023 £000s
<b>Operating charge</b>		
Current service cost	28	51
Admin expense	1	1
Past service cost/(gain)	-	-
	<hr/>	<hr/>
	29	52
	<hr/>	<hr/>
<b>Other income/charges</b>		
Expected return on pension scheme assets	(47)	(27)
Interest on pension scheme liabilities	46	39
	<hr/>	<hr/>
<b>Net interest/(return)</b>	(1)	12
	<hr/>	<hr/>
<b>Total charge to expenditure in the SOFA</b>	28	64
	<hr/> <hr/>	<hr/> <hr/>

Movement in balance sheet deficit figures during the year:

	2024 £	2023 £
Deficit in scheme at 31 March 2023	(9,000)	(445,000)
Movement in year		
Current service cost	(28,000)	(51,000)
Past service (cost)/gain	-	-
Admin expense	(1,000)	(1,000)
Net interest/return on assets	1,000	(12,000)
Contributions	21,795	30,710
Actuarial gain/(loss)	88,205	469,290
	<hr/>	<hr/>
Surplus in scheme at 31 March 2024	73,000	(9,000)
	<hr/> <hr/>	<hr/> <hr/>

#### 13. MEMBERS' GUARANTEE

Severn Gorge Countryside Trust is a company limited by guarantee. Members' liability under the Memorandum of Association is limited to £1 each and the liability continues for one year after the cessation of membership.

#### 14. TAXATION STATUS

The company is a charity under the provisions of the Income and Corporation Taxes Act 1988.

## **SEVERN GORGE COUNTRYSIDE TRUST**

### NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

For the year ended 31 March 2024

#### 15. CAPITAL COMMITMENTS

At the year end 31 March 2024, the trust was not committed to purchase any assets (2023 - £nil).

**Severn Gorge Countryside Trust**

Darby Road, Coalbrookdale  
Telford, Shropshire, TF8 7EP

Telephone 01952 433880  
[www.severngorge.org.uk](http://www.severngorge.org.uk)



**SEVERN GORGE COUNTRYSIDE TRUST**

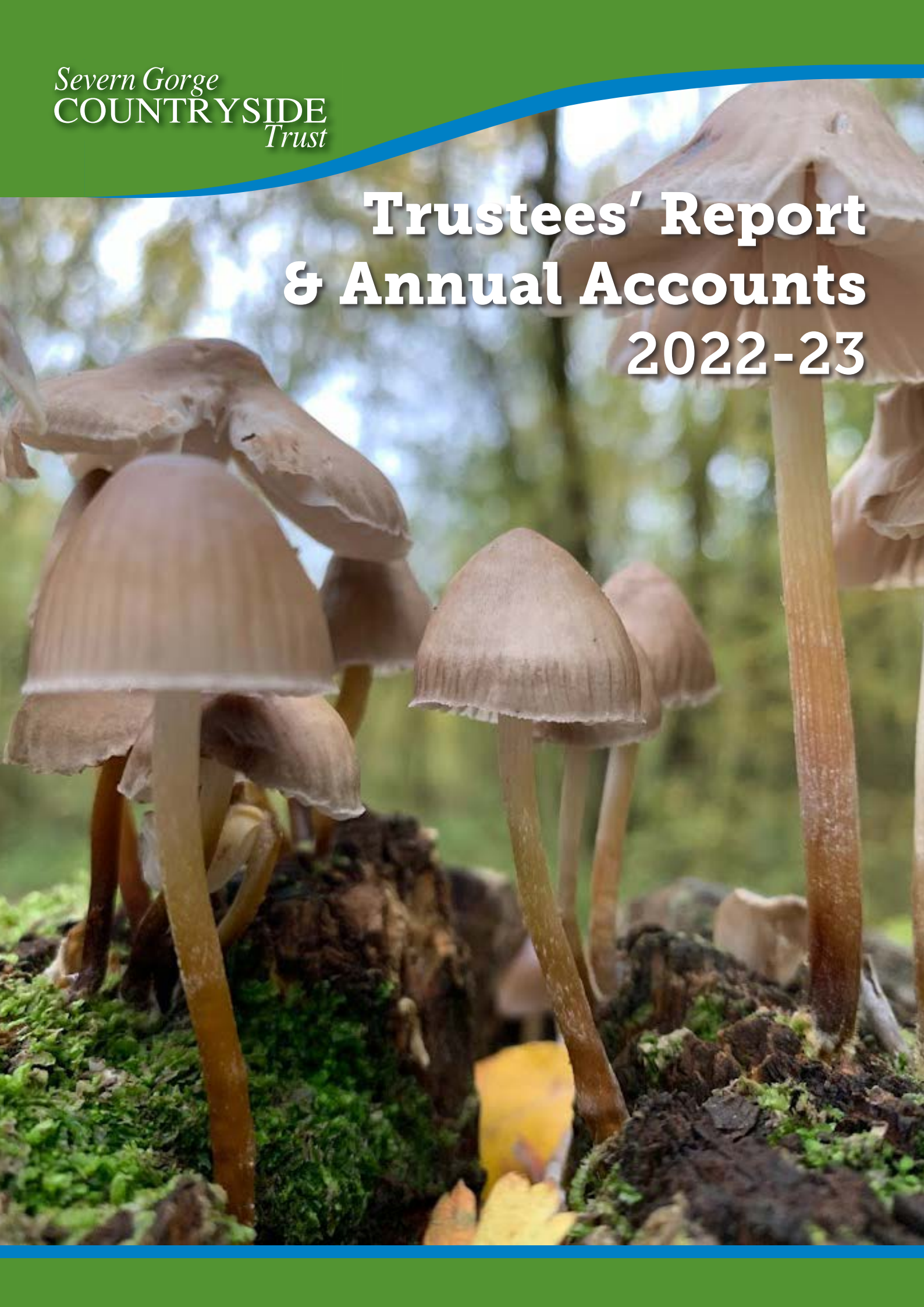
England & Wales - Charity number 1004508

---

# Accounts

---

# Trustees' Report & Annual Accounts 2022-23



# Company Information

## Severn Gorge Countryside Trust

### Reference and administrative details

---

Charity Name: Severn Gorge Countryside Trust  
Charity number: 1004508  
Company number: 02647374

### Registered Office and operational address

---

Severn Gorge Countryside Trust  
Darby Road  
Coalbrookdale  
Telford  
Shropshire  
TF8 7EP

Telephone 01952 433880  
[www.severngorge.org.uk](http://www.severngorge.org.uk)

### Auditors

---

Muras Baker Jones – Regent House, Bath Avenue,  
Wolverhampton, WV1 4EG

### Bankers

---

The Co-operative Bank – Colmore Row,  
Birmingham, B3 3BA

### Investment Advisers

---

abrnd Capital Limited – 1 George Street,  
Edinburgh EH2 2LL



# Contents

Page

<b>About Us</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Foreword– Chair and CEO</b>	<b>3</b>
About Us	6
<b>Trustees' Report</b>	
Our Year at a Glance	7
Sustainability	8
Annual Carbon Calculator	9
What We Do and How We Do It	11
Looking Forward	34
Structure Governance and Management	35
Statement of Trustee's Responsibilities	40
<b>Financial Statements and Supporting Notes</b>	<b>41</b>
Independent Auditors Report	42
Financial Statements	45
Principal Accounting Policies	47
Notes to Financial Statements	48



## Message from the Chair

This has been a year of change for the Trust as we ensure that we promote, protect and conserve the living landscape of the Ironbridge Gorge for the benefit of local people and visitors. Our challenge is to balance the needs of public access, landscape and nature conservation together with safeguarding historic and cultural features.

In December we said a fond farewell and thank you to Russell Rowley who has been the CEO of the Trust for 16 years. The range of people at his leaving party was indicative of the high esteem held by everyone in regard to how the Trust has continued to be such a well-respected organisation under his leadership. We then welcomed John Paul Brayford as our new CEO, JP has been associated with the Trust for many years and has joined an excellent team of staff.

So, on behalf of the Trustees, I would like to thank our hard-working team. Kate Chetwood, our Company Secretary and Finance Officer, who ensures that the Trust fulfils all our statutory duties and is the font of all knowledge about the Trust. Thank you as well to Nathan Morris, Head of Countryside, working together with Paul Ferrington, Estate Worker, to enhance our living and working landscape that retains its locally distinctive characteristics.

This year we also said goodbye and thanks to Emily Holmes, Assistant Countryside Officer, wishing her

all the very best for her future adventures. Amber Bicheno has joined us as our Volunteer and Community Officer. Her role is to ensure the Trust engage with the public and to develop a wider awareness and knowledge of the Trust and its work. She also works with our marvellous team of volunteers, helping local people to enhance their environment and to look after our flock of sheep.



Trustees would also like to reassure local residents that we will continue to improve our community engagement in all aspects of the Trust's work. This includes the management of the land, better communication about tree felling and to listen to people's concerns and positive proposals to increase everyone's enjoyment of this beautiful location.

Going forward, this report shows just how the Trust is preparing to face the challenge of climate change, tree diseases, the biodiversity crisis, financial constraints and the impact of new buildings in the area. Thank you to all the staff, volunteers and Trustees for ensuring that people can continue to explore and enjoy the natural world.

*Thank you*

**Maureen Bragg**

Chair, Severn Gorge Countryside Trust



## Message from Russell Rowley – Departing CEO

After over sixteen years at the helm this will be my final few words in our Annual Report as I am leaving the Trust to pursue personal projects. The Ironbridge Gorge is a magical little valley that is also an extremely challenging landscape to manage. Working with such an amazing team of dedicated professionals, contractors, trustees, consultants and volunteers has been a privilege and it has been a pleasure to both share knowledge and learn from others. The work of the Trust is extremely complicated as it is so wide ranging with very few staff and ever dwindling resources, despite the team continually working hard to fund raise and work efficiently.

Everyone has worked hard to make the Gorge once again a working landscape, producing a large variety of sustainable products, whilst massively increasing its biodiversity based on ecological surveys. An increasingly important role of the Trust is in environmental education, to better explain how, for



example, Continuous Cover Forestry is not tree felling for no reason, but sustainable woodland management, and how grazing wildflower meadows with sheep can aid biodiversity if done in the right way. I would like to say a big thank you to all, in particular Kate, Nathan, Amber and Paul, together with JP, Dougald, Julie, Sam, Nick, Maureen as Chair and Nick as past Chair and Vice Chair and Carolyn as local councillor for all their support. It has always been a team effort. My best wishes to my successor and the team going forward.

**Russell**

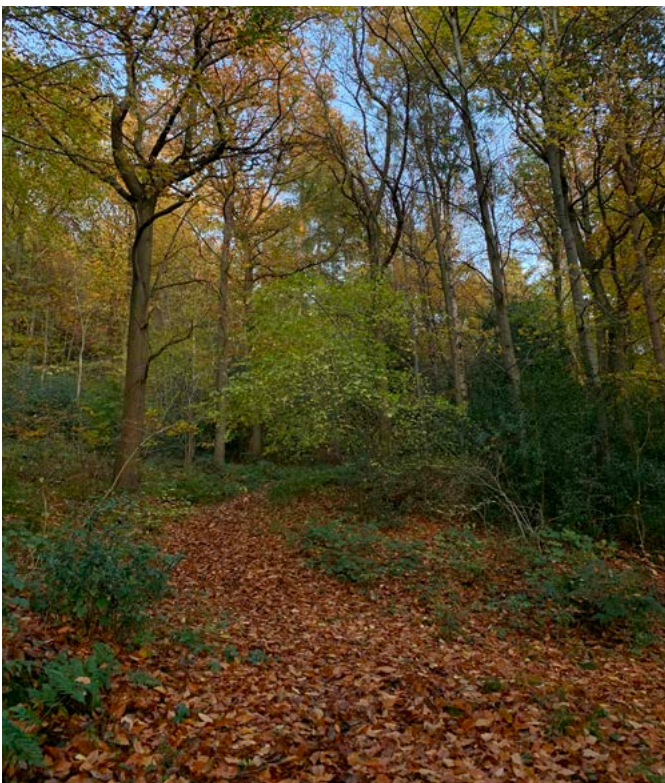


# Message from John Paul (aka JP) Brayford – incoming CEO

I am pleased to introduce this, my first annual report. The report will give you an overview of the work we do and a review of our performance during 2022-23.

Having been involved with the Trust since 1999 through my work as a contractor, I took over from Russell Rowley who retired in December 2022 after 16 years of hard work. Russell did a fabulous job for the Trust and we owe him a tremendous debt of gratitude. He will be a hard act to follow.

As many of you know, the Trust is an independent and self-financing charity, caring for just over half of the Ironbridge Gorge World Heritage site. It seems to me that, post covid, people are valuing their greenspaces and woodlands more than ever and we want to encourage this, however the increased footfall and subsequent wear and tear does have serious implications on our resources. Combine this with the growing impacts of Ash Die Back and some significant work needed to the office roof and it's clear the Trust has significant challenges ahead.



Unfortunately, the existing finance model does not currently provide sufficient income for the Trust to continue to deliver its aims into the future. My challenge, with the help of Trustees, partners and the SGCT Team, will be to find additional funding streams to enable the Trust to continue to meet its aims and deliver high quality management across the Ironbridge Gorge World Heritage Site.

Some of these additional ideas that have been discussed, and in some cases implemented, include increasing sales of products from our management work, such as firewood, charcoal and sawn timber together with expanding lettings of the meeting room. We will also undertake direct fund raising and continued grant applications. In addition to this we are exploring the possibility of selling our services via a consultancy or contracting business.

The good news is that, through previous good management, the Trust has sufficient reserves to see us through the next few years, giving us time to investigate alternative income streams and address the issue while still delivering our core objectives.

I must take this opportunity to thank the team, trustees and volunteers for their welcome and support as I 'learn' the role, and for everyone's continued hard work in delivering the brilliant work of the Trust.

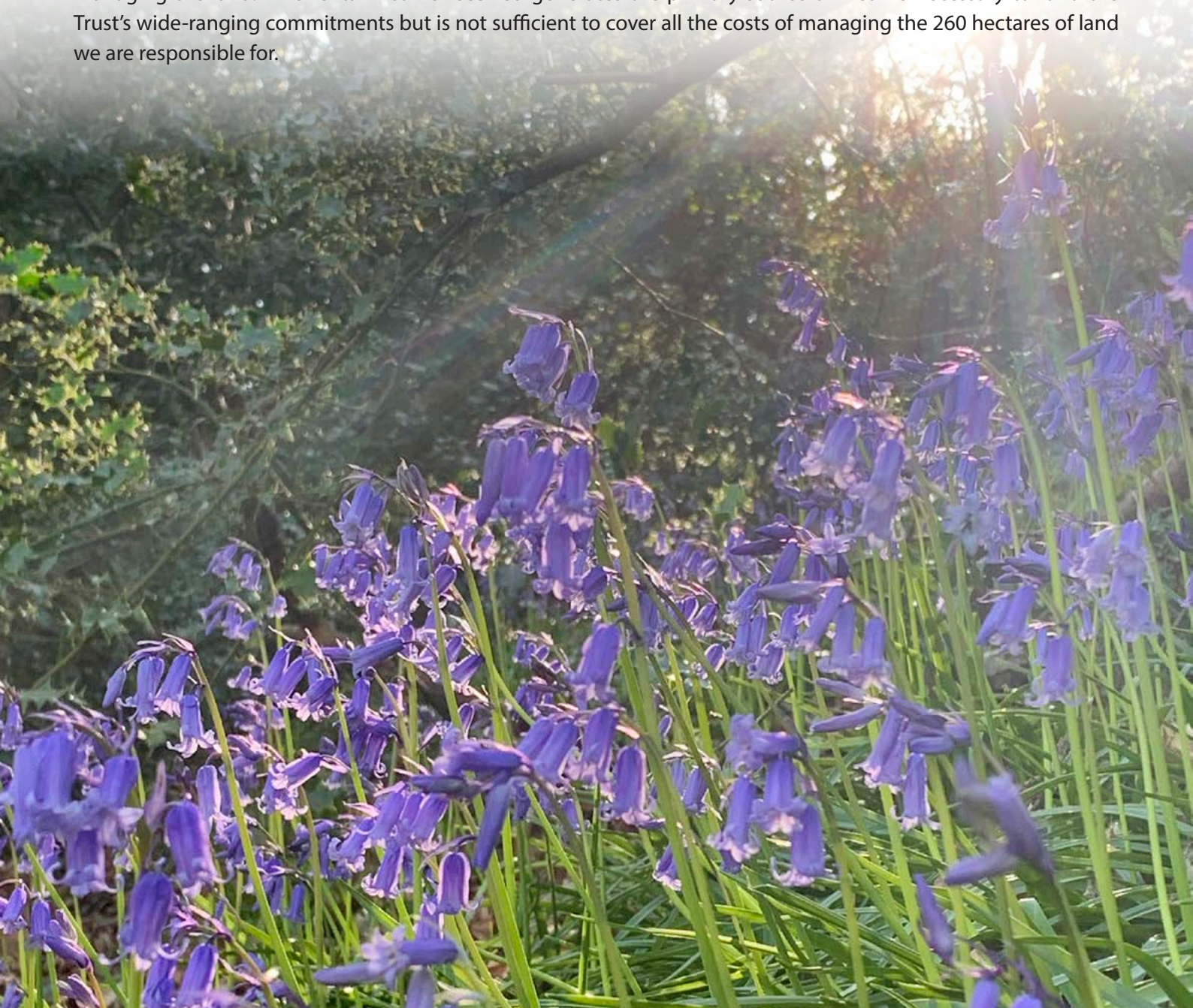
**JP**

## About Us

Established as a charity in 1991, Severn Gorge Countryside Trust cares for over 260 hectares of land set within the Ironbridge Gorge World Heritage Site, including river valleys, ancient woodlands, wildflower meadows, ponds, small heathlands, historic structures and twenty five kilometres of footpaths. The land that we are responsible for includes three nationally important Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI).

In addition to managing and developing the historic landscape, Trust staff also run exciting Outdoor Learning and Volunteering Programmes to encourage local people to engage with the natural environment in a variety of ways. We also have a volunteer shepherd scheme known as the 'Lookers' who help look after the rare breed of Soay sheep that graze our meadows.

The Trust was gifted the land on a 999-year lease from the former Telford Development Corporation in 1991. To help manage the liabilities of the land we are entitled to a proportion (90%) of income generated from a number of commercial properties managed on our behalf by Telford & Wrekin Council. This income can only be spent on managing the land. The rental income received generates the primary source of income necessary to fund the Trust's wide-ranging commitments but is not sufficient to cover all the costs of managing the 260 hectares of land we are responsible for.



# 2022/2023 OUR YEAR AT A GLANCE

## 400 ORCHIDS

Counted and identified on our sites, helping to monitor their progress and condition

## 500 INVASIVE PLANTS

Removed from our sites to help our native species rich meadows thrive

## 45 VOLUNTEER SESSIONS

Were organised across our sites to undertake a variety of tasks, providing **2,315 HOURS** of volunteer time

## 30 CUBIC METRES

Of firewood has been split and stacked to raise funds for the Trust's work

## 58 BALES

Of high quality species rich hay harvested from our meadows and grasslands

## 3 ARCHAEOLOGY DAYS

At Benthall Edge to discover more about the early railways running through the wood

## 12 TONNES

Of rubbish collected and removed from the bins across our sites.

## 67 STRUCTURES

Are monitored and conserved across our sites

## 400 BUCKETS

Of mulch have been carried and spread around our newly planted trees

## 17 EVENTS

Were run as a part of our Outdoor Learning Programme, with a focus on climate change

## 300 TREES

Planted on our sites through the TCV 'I Dig Trees' campaign, to address the loss due to ash dieback

66% UPTAKE

## 52 Sites

managed by the Trust and its dedicated team of volunteers

# Tackling Climate Change

As the custodian of over 50% of the landscape in the Ironbridge Gorge World Heritage Site we are working hard towards supporting the biodiversity crisis together with addressing the climate emergency.

Our overarching goal is to become carbon neutral in 2030 and we have worked towards this by:

- ◆ Initiating a Carbon Calculator to record our CO<sub>2</sub> emissions and identifying areas we can change.
- ◆ Installing energy efficient lighting.
- ◆ Divesting from all fossil fuel investments

Future plans include:

- ◆ Investigating the installation of solar panels on the office building

- ◆ Investigating a switch from diesel in landscape management vehicles to a more sustainable biofuel
- ◆ Ongoing ecological monitoring for biodiversity
- ◆ Transitioning to electric power tools for landscape maintenance

For more information on what we are doing please visit our website page. [www.severngorge.org.uk/tackling-climate-change](http://www.severngorge.org.uk/tackling-climate-change)

On the next page are our annual CO<sub>2</sub> emissions for 22/23



# Annual Carbon Calculator

## April 2022 to March 2023 – Report, Reduce, Change

**Summary** – The focus is on CO<sub>2</sub>e emissions from fossil fuels (oil, gas, coal). The main sources of CO<sub>2</sub>e emissions are the gas boiler and the Trust vehicles (Valtra Tractor, Toyota Hilux and Minibus) together with staff vehicles used for Trust business. The electricity comes from 100% renewable sources and is monitored, reduced if practicable, and reported. The gas comes from natural gas but not from a renewable source. The emissions from operational activities are 6.2 tonnes CO<sub>2</sub>e and 12.4 tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub>e due to the methane emissions from the flock of Soay sheep. The sheep are used to graze our species rich meadows as a key means to enhance their overall biodiversity. We continue to manage our woodlands using Continuous Cover Forestry and we are rewilding two of our grassland sites. More CO<sub>2</sub> will be absorbed each and every year into the future because of these progressive changes compared to traditional management practices. For more information on how the Trust is tackling the impact of climate change please visit our website [www.severngorge.org.uk/tackling-climate-change](http://www.severngorge.org.uk/tackling-climate-change)

Scope 1: direct emissions of CO <sub>2</sub> (kg) annually from fuel combustion and Trust vehicles (see Notes & Sources)			Scope 2: indirect emissions of CO <sub>2</sub> (kg) annually from purchased electricity (see Notes & Sources)		Scope 3: other indirect emissions of CO <sub>2</sub> (kg) annually: for example, transport-related activities in non-Trust vehicles, national grid transmission and distribution, outsourced activities, water, waste disposal (see Notes & Sources)		
Source of Scope 1 CO <sub>2</sub> emissions		kgCO <sub>2</sub> e/year		kgCO <sub>2</sub> e/year	Source of Scope 3 CO <sub>2</sub> emissions		kgCO <sub>2</sub> e/year
Gas boiler - kWh annually	5,242	957			Gas grid transmission & distribution	No figures given in Government guidance and it is assumed to be zero	
Electricity - kWh annually			5,666	0	Electricity grid transmission & distribution - kWh	5,666	100
Wood burners - weight of logs annually	4	172			Water supply & Water treatment - cubic metres annually	53	22
Land Rover (diesel, 2950 kg GVW) - annual mileage	3,738	1,221			Methane (CH <sub>4</sub> ) produced by Soay Sheep Flock	60 Average head of livestock over year	12,420
Minibus (diesel, 3960 kg GVW) - annual mileage	989	406					
Toyota Hilux (diesel, 2730kg GVW) - annual mileage	611	200					
Toyota Hilux (diesel, 2730kg GVW) - annual mileage	2,565	838					
Fiat 500 (petrol 1360kg GVW) - annual mileage	612	144					
Mitsubishi L200 (diesel 2890 GVW) - annual mileage	327	107					
Dacia (diesel 1090kg GVW) - annual mileage	199	54					
Vauxhall Astra (diesel 1678kg GVW)- annual mileage	678	183					
Valtra Tractor (diesel)	705	1,805					
<b>Total emissions (Scope 1)</b>		6,086	<b>Total emissic</b>	0	<b>Total emissions (Scope 3)</b>		12,543
<b>FINAL OUTCOME:</b>		<b>18.6</b>					

[Notes & Sources overleaf>>](#)

## NOTES & SOURCES

**CO<sub>2</sub>e:** (carbon dioxide equivalent) is a standard unit for measuring carbon footprints. The idea is to express the impact of each different greenhouse gas (CO<sub>2</sub>, methane, nitrous oxide) in terms of the amount of CO<sub>2</sub> that would create the same amount of warming. That way, a carbon footprint consisting of different greenhouse gases can be expressed as a single number.

**Renewable Energy Supplies:** Electricity or gas supplied from purely renewable sources where the supplier can demonstrate that the energy supplied to customers only comes from renewable sources can be included in calculations as having zero carbon emissions.

**Electricity:** is supplied from 100% renewable sources by Opus energy on a contract until February 2024. With Opus Advance, our electricity comes from renewable sources including solar, wind, hydro and anaerobic digestion (AD). [www.opusenergy.com/our-energy-sources](http://www.opusenergy.com/our-energy-sources)

**Gas:** is supplied by Opus Energy on a contract from April 2023 to April 2024. "The gas we supply to our customers is natural gas. This is, broadly speaking, the case for all energy suppliers in the UK. Biomethane (sometimes called "green gas" or "biogas") is considered renewable but is not widely available. It is mixed with natural gas in small quantities to reduce the carbon footprint of gas consumption; according to BEIS, gas supplied in the UK in 2018 was 0.4% biomethane. The Green Gas Certification Scheme (GGCS) certifies producers of biomethane in the UK. This is produced by anaerobic digestion (a renewable technology) and exported to the national gas grid. For every kilowatt equivalent of green gas injected into the grid, the producer is issued with a Renewable Gas Guarantee of Origin (RGGO). Energy suppliers can buy these certificates and offset them against a customers' consumption. The money is used to further develop biomethane production, helping to create a less carbon intensive gas infrastructure. We don't currently offer an official customer product for either of the above options, but we hope to in the near future, as there has been some demand from our customers for such an offering." Opus Energy email 29 May 2020.

**Wood Burners:** CO<sub>2</sub>e emissions from the two wood burners are included. There is debate about whether CO<sub>2</sub> in wood that is burnt should be included in annual carbon emissions because CO<sub>2</sub> is captured by growing trees and released by burning logs. However, such rapid release of CO<sub>2</sub> is very different to the slow release of CO<sub>2</sub> to the atmosphere during decay and decomposition.

**Office Building:** The Severn Gorge Countryside Trust is based in an award-winning sustainable building. The office is timber framed, wool insulated and heated by two log burners. The outside cladding is larch which we harvested from our woodlands. The office has a Mechanical Ventilation with Heat Recovery (MVHR) ventilation system that both supplies and extracts air throughout the office. This system is used to reduce the heating and cooling demands of buildings. The (MVHR) that continually draws and circulates fresh air from outside, pre warmed by heat exchangers capturing heat from the stale air as it is expelled. The roof is made up from approximately ten thousand western red cedar shingles. The office is insulated with sheep wool mixed with recycled polyester; it has remarkable properties, in that during the winter it keeps the building warm and in the summer it keeps the building cool.

**Soay Sheep:** The Trust owns a flock of native breed Soay sheep which are used to manage the wildflower meadows. The sheep emit methane which is another type of greenhouse gas. The carbon dioxide equivalent measurement of methane is  $1\text{kg CH}_4 * 25 = 25\text{kg CO}_2\text{e}$ . Whilst the sheep do emit methane, they are used to graze our species rich meadows as a key means to enhance their overall biodiversity.

**Conversion factors:** (electricity, electricity transmission & distribution, natural gas, water, waste, vehicles). [www.gov.uk/government/publications/greenhouse-gas-reporting-conversion-factors-2022](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/greenhouse-gas-reporting-conversion-factors-2022) full set for advanced users in order to include the minibus which is classed as a 'Delivery Vehicle'. These are set annually in May.

**Scope 1, Scope 2 & Scope 3:** The Greenhouse Gas Protocol (<https://ghgprotocol.org/>) is recognised by the UK government as an independent standard for reporting greenhouse gases. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Carbon\\_emissions\\_reporting](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Carbon_emissions_reporting).

# WHAT WE DO...

The Trust is responsible for promoting, protecting and conserving the living landscape of the Ironbridge Gorge for the benefit of local people and visitors. It aims to balance the needs of public access, landscape and nature conservation, safeguarding historic and cultural features, whilst engaging with the public and developing a wider awareness and knowledge of the Trust and its work.

To achieve these aims the Trust has five main charitable objectives:

- to enhance a living and working landscape that retains its locally distinctive characteristics, habitats and species populations
- to conserve and interpret, where appropriate all features of cultural and historical significance
- to provide inspiring experiences of the natural world and encourage people to manage their local environment through volunteering opportunities
- to provide high quality access for informal recreation for the enjoyment of all and to encourage outdoor activity for the benefit of health and wellbeing
- to develop and promote a wider awareness and understanding of the Trust's work



# HOW WE DO IT...

Examples of activities carried out and impacts and benefits achieved under each of these strategic aims are as follows:

## Landscape and Nature Conservation

AIM: to enhance a living and working landscape that retains its locally distinctive characteristics, habitats and species populations.

Each year, the Trust undertakes extensive management programmes to safeguard these special places. For example,

- ◆ clearing woody regeneration from the floor of Patten's Rock Quarry, an example of limestone grassland with colonies of Twayblade, Bee, Greater Butterfly and Common Spotted orchids
- ◆ managing the merging of areas of woodland, grass and scrub. These wild and complex edges are where insects thrive and food chains begin
- ◆ clearing scrub trying to colonise the important small patches of heathland found in The Crostan and Dale Coppice
- ◆ managing important areas of wildflower rich hay meadow and pasture. By using our flock of Soay sheep together with contractors and volunteers, the Trust is able to ensure that the techniques and machinery used are ideally suited to these small sites and based on traditional methods

### Ecological Monitoring

The Trust commissions ecological consultants to carry out annual ecological monitoring of Trust sites. Ecological monitoring provides the Trust with the information required to assess and respond to ecosystem changes. Monitoring can also assist with the identification of new environmental concerns, the prioritisation of issues, and the evaluation of trends over time. Using the information gathered, the Trust can plan its future management of sites.

Our ecological monitoring reviews carried out on key sites have shown the high quality of our habitats and their management.

Managing such a complex landscape relies on clear objectives and good quality ecological and



management information. In reality, this is complicated by the fact that any ecosystem is in a constant state of change which can sometimes make meeting our objectives more challenging.

An annual ecology day is held during the summer months where our ecologist meets with Trust staff and the ecology working group to look at the sites that have been managed and discuss proposals as to how to best manage the sites to achieve their objectives.

We continue to meet with the ecology working group including John Handley from CH Ecology on survey methods and targets.

We have worked with CH Ecology to simplify the management guidelines, known as working copies; the document had become unwieldy, making information hard to find. The new layout will be on a single sheet of A4 with all the key information readily available along with comments from the years monitoring. We are also looking into using Geographical Information Systems (GIS) to store data to make it even more accessible.

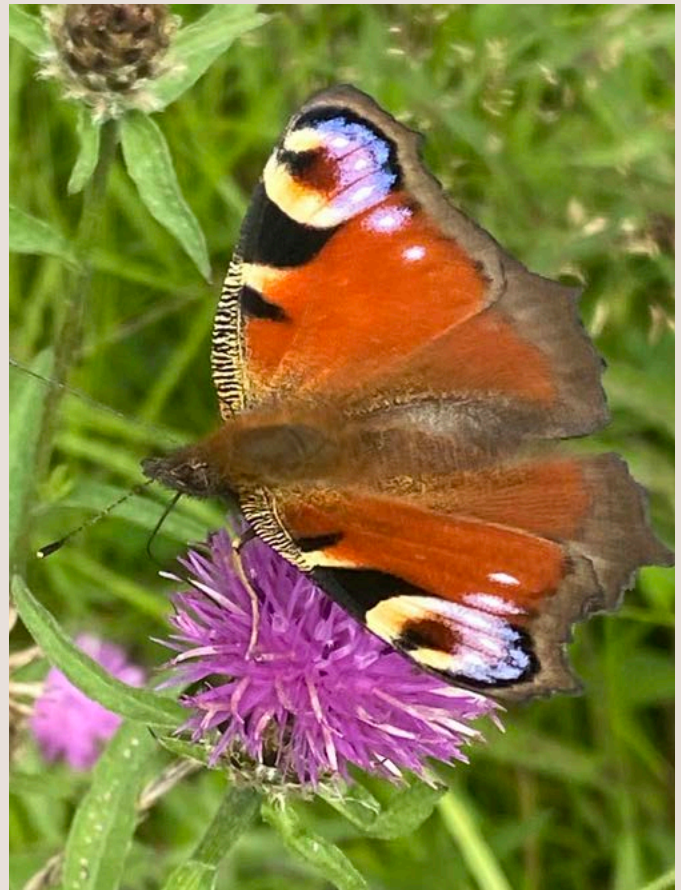
## 'Light gives Life'

The Trust was successful in applying for funding from the Potter Group Landfill Community Fund together with the Postcode Local Trust. The primary aim of the 'Light gives Life' wildlife corridor project is to secure measurable improvements in habitats for biodiversity. This will be achieved by creating edge habitat and enhancing wildlife corridors throughout six different sites within the Ironbridge Gorge World Heritage site.

Creating new varied habitats will provide a fantastic opportunity for wildlife to flourish and promote the wider economic and social benefits that healthy ecosystems offer.

Over 3,000 metres of improved edge habitat will be created. Timber felled will be extracted where feasible and as much as possible turned into sustainable products including firewood, charcoal, sawn timber and turnery blanks, the latter which can lock up carbon longer term.

Work has been completed at Prenshead and Maws Coppice. The opening up of woodland edge provides nectar sources for invertebrates, nesting and foraging for birds and bats and lets more light in to make the sites more inviting. Trees were felled and timber extracted from Prenshead to use for firewood this winter. The work at Maws Coppice opened up the road. Planned works were removed from the 'Light gives Light' project in Dale Coppice. This was due to concern from the public at the scale of the works. A public meeting was held together with onsite site visits. The Trust listened to people's concerns and decided to only carry out tree safety works in Dale Coppice and move the funding to an alternative site still to be confirmed.



## Beehives

The bees from our hives have been hard at work foraging and pollinating plants within at least a two-mile radius of the Trust office which takes in our amazing wildflower meadows at the Wilderness and Ropewalk.

We continue to learn how to manage our hives, paying attention to the weather conditions when we inspect the hives and trying to control potential swarms, not always successfully!

Whilst honey is one of the major benefits of keeping honeybees, we have also experimented with making beeswax wraps and wood furniture polish.

We sold over fifty jars of our 'Ropewalk Honey' to local people.

## Deer Management

Deer can have a substantial impact on woodland vegetation and play a significant role in woodland ecosystem function. In the absence of control, deer populations can rise to very high densities due to lack of predators. Management of deer populations is necessary to limit their impact.

Under the Trust's Continuous Cover Forestry System, natural regeneration is the principle means of restocking our woodlands and an increasing deer population will adversely affect the success of natural regeneration.

Our management works will seek to reduce deer numbers to a point where the impact on the woodland and their associated plant communities are acceptable.

We have really struggled with deer management over the last year. Our stalker has been ill and has not managed to get out on site as much as we would have liked and that is reflected in the number of deer shot. We have also had 3 high seats stolen from in and around Lydebrook Dingle, a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), the seats were in quite inaccessible areas. This will, going forward, impact our ability to control the deer in Lydebrook Dingle.

## Forestry

The Trust continues to manage its woodlands under Continuous Cover Forestry principles which aim to create a structurally and visually diverse woodland ecosystem with trees of all sizes which helps to protect the soil and keep the land stable.

The new woodland management plan was approved by the Forestry Commission in 2021. The aspirations of the plan have not changed our forestry direction. The revised plan takes into account Ash Die Back (ADB) and climate change, it also has felling permissions for the next 10 years.

With ADB's hold tightening on the woods, we took the decision to use a clear fell system in three areas of woodland. This is not a permanent change in use of forestry system for the Trust, it is a tool we have used to tackle the ADB, which incorporates tree safety, earning income and fulfilling habitat improvement works

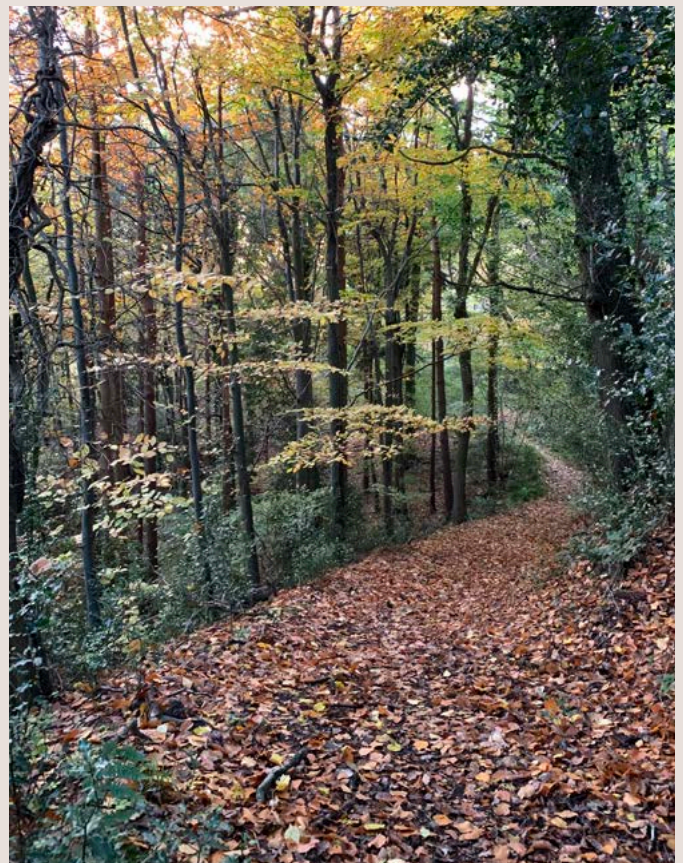
linked to our Countryside Stewardship agreement. Jiggers Bank and a part of Vane Coppice have been worked and all the ash trees within falling distance of a target (e.g. road, footpath, structure) have been felled. We sold the timber standing to Will Haywood. Will is a long-standing contractor and he carried out the work using a harvester and forwarder.

Haywood will be worked in an analogous way in the winter of 2023.

## Ash Dieback (ADB)

The impact of ADB continues to worsen and we carry out works following our approved approach. The tree safety assessment picks up Ash trees which need felling and these are incorporated into the work programme. We will continue to follow this approach, approved by the Committee of Management, when working on trees next to paths, roads and houses. Where feasible we fell trees in groups or incorporating ADB felling into wider forestry operations.

We were able to work in conjunction with Telford & Wrekin Council to carry out felling at Ladywood under 'their' road closure. Works were carried out next to Balls Lane junction, along the side of Ironbridge Road and



half of Ladywood. In addition to the Ash, we felled a number other trees that were judged likely to become future hazards or that were obstructing street lighting and signage.

We used a silvicultural approach to deal with ADB at Jiggers Bank, where a stand of ash trees was sold to a local contractor to harvest with a machine. Works at this scale are time efficient and deliver lower costs to the Trust. In areas where ADB has really taken hold it will increasingly be the way we deal with the disease.

There will be an increase in tree felling throughout the Ironbridge Gorge due to ADB, and we need to keep working with T&W Council regarding tree management and keeping the local community informed.

## Re-wilding

The Trust has several small areas of land that are rewilding. These areas either have difficult access or are relatively small and need substantial resources to maintain. Decisions to limit intervention were taken on a site-by-site basis by the Trust's Ecology Group.

The sites that we are rewilding from grassland will over time and without hay cutting or grazing, become woodland. We can expect after 10 years to see a multi-structure, multispecies habitat supporting a wide range of species.

The formalisation of the rewilding work into a strategy gives the Trust a document to refer to that will show direction, have the potential to raise grant funding and demonstrates that the Trust continues to adapt its working practices. For more information please visit our website. [www.severngorge.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Rewilding-Strategy-approved-June2022.pdf](http://www.severngorge.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Rewilding-Strategy-approved-June2022.pdf)

If in the future the Trust does consider rewilding more sites, community consultation will be key and a mapping exercise of the sites and habitats will be undertaken so that any changes can be assessed and monitored.

Currently, there are no plans to expand rewilding to any more sites.



## Tree Planting

We planted 120 large trees as part of the Local Authority Treescapes Fund in conjunction with Telford & Wrekin Council. The trees were so large we had to use a 3-tonne digger to plant them. The trees have had a bark mulch applied to slow down evaporation, been watered and checked through the year and so far, we have Thonly lost 2 trees. Our volunteers have played a big part in the maintenance of the trees.

In addition, we also planted over 300 whips to replace some of the trees afflicted by ash dieback.

## Firewood

We are 'Ready to Burn' certified, the Woodsure certification scheme confirms that we are selling wood with a moisture content of less than 20%. We sold 40 cubic metres of logs, generating over £5,000 in income. Moving forward we will increase our stock of billets and investigate purchasing a tractor powered billet saw.

## Countryside Stewardship (CS)

Works in the CS agreement include woodland ride mowing/creation, squirrel control, deer management, tree thinning and meadow management. We will also be undertaking capital works in fencing, gate replacement and hedge laying.

Work has progressed under the current CS Scheme, the ride mowing and Zone 2 creation has moved along nicely. Coppicing at Jiggers Bank was completed by the volunteers. Squirrel traps are now being used with good results. On the meadow side, the hay meadows were cut and we made best use of the hot summer and made 52 hay bales. Our sheep then moved round the meadows and grazed the aftermath. Capital works will start next year.

## Machinery Purchases

Like most organisations the Trust is constantly changing and evolving as new opportunities and challenges present themselves. To facilitate adapting to these changing circumstances the Committee of Management approved investment in capital purchases including a tractor, forwarding trailer and a 6.5-ton winch. This investment will aid staff in improving current processes, increase productivity and provide the capacity to undertake tasks in house. In 2022 we took delivery of the winch and forwarding trailer. Both pieces of equipment were used on the 'Light Gives Life' project at Preenshead and gave really good results.

30 tons of timber were brought back to the office to convert into firewood and sell. The winch has remote control, which unwinds the cable, this is particularly useful when working on steep banks and makes it much easier to pull the cable out. The new machinery also made the work at Ladywood possible, without it we would not have been able to make use of the road being closed.

## Hay Cuts

Investing in machinery has given us greater control and flexibility over the hay cuts. Having our own machinery enables us to continue managing the meadows to a high standard and allows us to take advantage of weather windows and make hay whilst the sun shines! Our own machinery has enabled us to conduct works

such as harrowing and mowing of headlands when it was best for the meadow rather than being at the mercy of contractors' workloads and timescales.

## Firewood Production and Estate Timber

We would like to increase the sales of firewood. The large amount of timber generated from the Western Power line clearance has been the catalyst to this production. Our own machinery will facilitate the processing and movement of the large volume of wood. It will assist with moving the saw logs onto the sawmill to produce material we can use on site, such as gateposts. We can maximise the use of timber that will be produced from tree safety work caused by ash die back.

## Soay Sheep

Our flock of Soay sheep are integral to the management of our meadows. We welcomed 14 lambs this year from 12 ewes over a difficult 3-week lambing period. Sadly, we lost three of the lambs. Shearing produced a builder's bag of wool which was sold to a textile company in Leominster. Our flock of ewes is getting older, we have several sheep that are between 8-10 years old. It was inevitable but sad that this winter we lost several older sheep in quick succession. As a precaution and on advice from our vet, a faecal egg count was undertaken. We were advised that, while the level of 30 eggs per gram wasn't excessively high, it might be beneficial to treat them with a white drench for worms due to the age, nature, and size of the sheep. The 'lookers' continue to play a vital role in helping the day-to-day management of the sheep.



# Cultural and Historical Features

**Aim: to conserve and interpret, where appropriate all features of cultural and historical significance**

**The industrial past of the Ironbridge Gorge has left its mark on the area in more ways than just the Iron Bridge itself. Many types of industry thrived here, and the Trust looks after sixty historic structures ranging from small retaining walls to brick arches and lime kilns to mine breathers and adit entrances. Over the years the Trust has spent over £275,000 conserving the industrial heritage of the Ironbridge Gorge.**

The World Heritage Site status of the Ironbridge Gorge serves to remind us of this area's unique contribution to the history and development of industrialised society. The Trust will continue to conserve and interpret (where appropriate) features of cultural and historical significance for the benefit of the public, enabling them to have a greater understanding and appreciation of the industrial and cultural history of the area.

The Trust commissions an annual Structures Inspection Report. The structures are monitored from fixed

baselines, any condition changes are noted, and recommended actions identified. These resultant actions are further analysed from a risk management perspective looking at things like potential impact on highways, intensively used public spaces, and neighbours.

Five risk management priority categories are identified with required actions allocated to a category from level 0 (no action necessary) to level 4 (repair imminently).

In response to the annual report an action plan will be developed to implement, where possible, all level 4 actions or in discussion with engineer's alternative risk mitigation strategies.

Archaeological surveys are commissioned whenever required to ensure no features of cultural and historical significance are damaged by any proposed operations. Any significant discoveries are recorded for future reference.



# Community Engagement and Outdoor Learning

AIM: to provide inspiring experiences of the natural world and encourage people to manage their local environment through volunteering opportunities

Providing opportunities for people to engage and interact with the natural world is a key remit for the Trust. Working together outdoors to conserve nature is a great way to engage with the natural environment. Opportunities like these are not just essential for personal development they also provide inspirational moments of awe and wonder which stay with people forever. Our Outdoor Learning Programme is about providing experiences that teach and inspire people. Our Volunteering Programme provides opportunities for the local community to learn more about and help with the management of the landscape on their doorstep. We hope that participants will be inspired and empowered to improve our environment for the benefit of nature and the community.

## Volunteering Programme

The Trust continues to work with its fantastic and committed group of volunteers, helping to achieve our access, landscape and biodiversity objectives. As the Assistant Countryside Officer, Emily Holmes left the Trust early in 2022, volunteer sessions continued under the temporary leadership of the Head of Countryside, Nathan Morris until the newly appointed Volunteer and Community Officer, Amber Bicheno, started in August.

The volunteer sessions have continued to take bookings through Eventbrite, helping to easily track and manage



attendee numbers. The group size has been gradually increasing after lifting the limit on numbers placed in 2021 due to the pandemic. In January, during our hedge laying sessions, we saw numbers of 19 – 22, the highest group numbers since lockdown. Throughout the year, volunteers gave a total of 2,605 hours across 45 sessions to the Trust, an amazing effort for which we are very grateful.

The volunteers have carried out a wide variety of tasks, from footpath and tree maintenance, coppicing, scrub clearance, hogweed control, scything, dormice surveys and much more!

In September we worked in partnership with the Ironbridge Meadows Group at The Beeches to push back the scrub on this lovely Local Nature Reserve. A special session was held in October to build bird nest boxes to erect and monitor near Lydebrook Dingle. We used our own milled timber to create the boxes, creating 25 Pied Flycatcher boxes, 3 treecreeper



boxes, 2 kestrel boxes and 1 nuthatch box! The session had great feedback and many of the group said they enjoyed seeing the whole process from building to putting up on trees.

For 6 weeks during January and February the team carried out hedge laying at Oilhouse, with close to 100 metres of hedge now laid. We were able to harvest hazel stakes from some of our other sites and binders from Oilhouse Coppice, all the brash generated from the process was burned under close control on the site.

## Volunteer Outings and Celebrations

In November of 2022 one of our volunteers helped arrange a visit to Wappenshall Wharf to see the work that has been done by the Shropshire Canals and Rivers Trust Volunteers. This very informative visit also took in other sections of canal history, before heading to a group meal in Uffington. It was a fantastic opportunity to learn and admire the work of another group of volunteers.

In December we had a wonderful Christmas Party at the office, with a bring and share meal, walk in the woods, games and quizzes! This also gave the volunteers an opportunity to wish farewell to Russell Rowley our CEO ahead of his retirement later that month.

Eight of our volunteers were awarded with certificates in January for their outstanding service after volunteering with us for 10 years! In addition to this a new t-shirt was designed and printed after consulting with volunteers. Those that have been to 5 or more sessions were given a free t-shirt as a thank you for all their hard work.



## Outdoor Learning Programme

We started the years Outdoor Learning Programme on a high with our fully booked willow obelisk workshop. The course was run by Cathy Preston, and everyone had a fantastic time making some wonderful (and varied) willow creations. Ecologist, John Handley, held a meadow biodiversity talk including a visit to Ropewalk Meadow, giving participants an opportunity to learn about the impact of climate change on the ecology and biodiversity of wildflower meadows.



During the summer a series of 4 family friendly walks were held on SGCT sites, and an additional walk was held in the October half term. The walks were led by Amber Bicheno and Sarah Bates, and all were well attended, with between 10 and 20 participants. The families were guided through different activities, including pond dipping, creating clay creatures, den building, scavenger hunts and more. The events garnered good feedback from participants and prompted an application to the Gorge Parish council to apply for funding for more of these events in 2023/24.

The Natural Flower Arrangement workshop took place in September with 8 participants who created some beautiful bouquets. This included a foraging walk locally to collect materials to pair with the cut flowers. The workshop gained great feedback from those that attended, and tutor Lisa is running another workshop in the next Outdoor Learning Programme. An additional workshop, an Introduction to Nordic Walking, was added in late September. Sadly, we did not receive many bookings, but instructor Liz was happy to continue and engaged her small group in the ways of this walking technique. The Fabric Postcard Workshop took place in October, with the attendees going on a lovely local walk to gather inspiration before returning to bring their visions to their embroidery hoops.

The Lino print Christmas Cards workshop and two willow wreath workshops were fully booked, offering a nice way to see out 2022. The lino printing saw



## Grants

The Trust has been awarded a £500 grant from the Gorge Parish Council towards the continuation of our Family Friendly walks programme in 2023. There are 10 walks planned, to take place during each school holiday period, an increase from the previous year.

Over the festive period Moonshine & Fuggles of Ironbridge kindly ran a raffle to raise money for the trust. The incredible hamper of goodies was a fantastic prize, and the raffle raised over £600 which went towards volunteer expenses.

Another grant of £1000 has been awarded from the Wrekin Housing Group for the creation of a new pond dipping platform to be used for environmental education purposes. This pond is a part of a wider plan to improve our outdoor learning facilities, so that in the future we can deliver a wider range of outdoor activities with groups.

Finally, Telford & Wrekin Council have awarded the Trust £1,635 from the Coronation Fund, which will go towards celebrating and honouring King Charles III. With this money, we plan to commission a sculpted bench and create a new wildflower area in the shape of a crown, which will be unveiled during an event on the Coronation weekend, as well as planting fruit-bearing trees as a legacy.

participants creating a wonderful variety of different designs and heading off full of further ideas. The willow workshops were run in house by volunteer and Community Officer Amber, using willow and natural materials collected from our own sites. The emphasis was on creating all natural wreaths and enjoying the process of making each one look unique.

In January, Russell Rowley returned to lead a winter tree ID course which was also fully booked, offering people a great opportunity to increase their knowledge and identification skills. In February Nathan Morris lead a free tree planting session at Jiggers bank. The sunny Sunday morning saw around 200 trees planted with the help of attendees. The trees were acquired as part of The Conservation Volunteers 'I Dig Trees' project. The 2023 – 2024 programme has been compiled and launched ahead of it starting in April, with some wonderful events and courses planned to include natural dyes, family friendly walks, basket weaving, mammal tracking and much more!



# Access and Recreation

**Aim: to provide high quality access for informal recreation for the enjoyment of all and to encourage outdoor activity for the benefits of health and wellbeing.**

**For many of us, the coronavirus pandemic exposed how important good quality outdoor space is for our physical and mental health and wellbeing. Research has shown that green spaces make us happier and healthier. They also perform other valuable functions such as reducing flooding, cutting carbon emissions, and protecting nature.**

We aim for our sites to feel as natural as possible, so we strive to balance the need for good paths, signs and interpretation with the need to preserve the very sense of countryside we all head outdoors for. We have also tried to remove any unnecessary barriers to people's enjoyment, by removing squeeze stiles and replacing them with kissing gates and providing rest points to pause and savor the fantastic views.

We continue to look for opportunities to improve our footpath network and aim, as far as practical, to make the network safe and accessible to all.

Enabling people to explore and enjoy the natural world is fundamental to the work of the Trust and that is why all our land is **free for everyone** to enjoy.

As well as improvements on the ground, we continue to look at the quality of the experience we offer, from the clarity of our maps to the information and history that our free leaflets provide.

## Dragon Head Path, Bower Yard

Improvement works have now been completed on the Dragon Head Path above Bower Yard. These surfacing works have improved access and will help prevent further erosion on this steep and well-used site. The path is part of our Family Friendly Walk 'Bounding Through Benthall', and was funded by The National Lottery Community Fund, supported by players of the National Lottery.



## Scout Day

On the 4th of March, Amber was joined by the Coalbrookdale Scout group at Benthall Edge. They walked from the community centre across the Gorge before setting about helping with some tasks in the woods. They helped to clear parts of the steps and boardwalk and carried out some coppicing of hazel along the path, helping them work towards their forestry and volunteering badges.

## Strategic Action Plan

Approximately twenty-five kilometres of footpaths have to be maintained each year. This includes over 2,000 wooden steps and 18 wooden boardwalks. The Strategic Access Review which was completed in 2015 continues to be used to feed into the Annual Work Plan. The Strategic Action Plan will be updated each year using information taken from the bi-annual footpath surveys to identify any repairs or maintenance required.

## Footpath Repairs

We are continuing to invest in the access infrastructure we have installed throughout the gorge. The increase in use of our sites over the pandemic, together with increasingly wet winters has meant that some of our footpaths/boardwalks have deteriorated quicker than anticipated. Our bi-annual survey picks up any area

of footpath that need repairing. The repairs are then prioritised and resources allocated accordingly.

## Family activity walks



The Trust has produced four circular 1km family trails using footpaths in Benthall, Haywood, Loamhole and Maws. All are part of a group of maps which show Milly and Orla the office dogs in cartoon form, each with a variety of activities to do whilst exploring the routes.

### Bounding in Benthall:

along past Doris the Dragon, the Lime kiln and Bower yard picnic site

**Maws Paws:** along the new Tile Trail, Preenshead and Boat Inn meadow path.

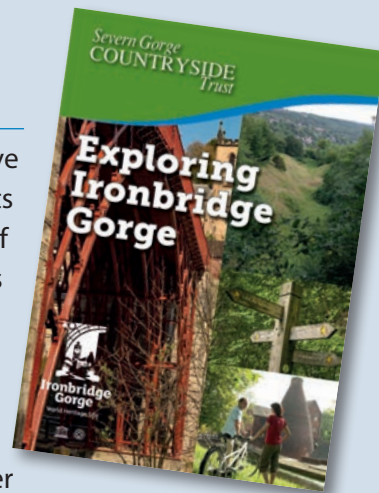
**Hilly Haywood Adventure:** up the zig zag path to Silkin Way and into Haywood Plantation.

**Splish Splash Splish in Loamhole Dingle:** along the path to the footbridge and stream and through the meadow.

All of the Milly and Orla family friendly walks can be downloaded from our website.

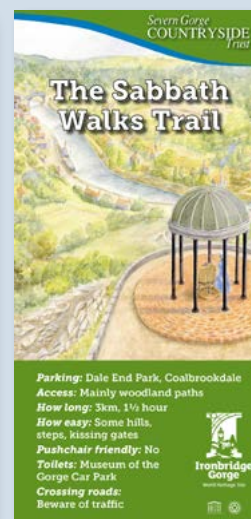
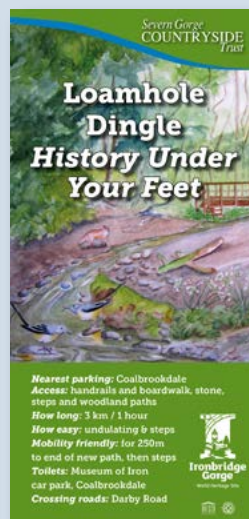
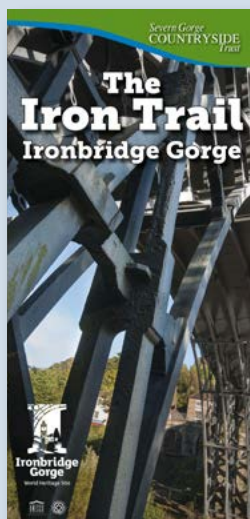
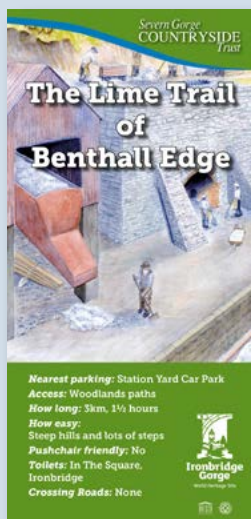
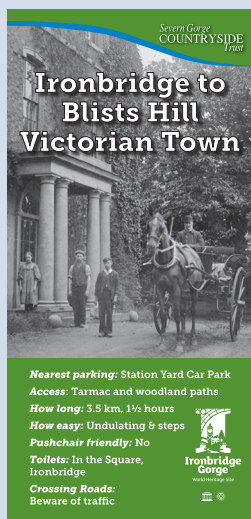
## Walking Trail Leaflets

The Trust has produced five **free** Walking Trail leaflets that showcase some of the best walking routes around the Ironbridge Gorge World Heritage Site. The walks provide people with the opportunity to discover some of the hidden gems of the Gorge and learn more about the landscape and history of the area whilst they explore. Visitors can make a day of it by visiting some of the many historic sites and attractions along the walks and stopping for a while for refreshment at one of the many cafés, pubs and restaurants in Ironbridge and the surrounding area.



The leaflets are available to download from our website, from the Visitor Information Centre and from various outlets in the Gorge. The leaflet dispenser in Station Road car park is regularly refilled and around 20,000 leaflets have been dispensed this year.

The route for the **'Iron Trail'** links existing paths into a circular walk that includes both built and natural features within the World Heritage Site to encourage visitors to explore beyond the built environment. Its objective is to highlight otherwise unseen heritage such as the remnants and evidence of the iron production process that made the Gorge 'the birthplace of industry' within the natural landscape.





## Walks Books

To support people to get outdoors and closer to nature we have published several guided walks books. These will help everyone to visit our sites and enjoy their natural beauty and find out more about the forces that have shaped them – natural and man-made. Each book offers a number of self-guided walks that offer opportunities to explore the history of the area as well as the diversity of landscape, geology and wildlife. All the books can be purchased from the Trust Office, and are also available at Ironbridge Gorge Museum sites, the Visitor Information Centre, and some local shops. Copies of the routes can also be downloaded from our website; [www.severngorge.org.uk](http://www.severngorge.org.uk).

The **'Lime Trail'** of Benthall Edge takes the walker through a wooded landscape steeped in the geology which benefitted the past industries of the Gorge. The footpath follows a circular route taking the walker through beautiful SSSI woodland with iconic viewpoints of the Gorge and Coalbrookdale before descending to the valley bottom along the Severn Valley Railway.

The **'Sabbath Walks Trail'** follows in the footsteps of Richard Reynolds who built the wide footpaths in the 18th Century for his workers and families. This trail takes in Dale Coppice and Lincoln Hill and the viewpoint at the Rotunda with views of the Iron Bridge.

The Ironbridge to Blists Hill Victorian Town Trail is as it says, linking Ironbridge to Blists Hill with a safe traffic-free route through Lloyd's Coppice whilst seeing historic remnants on the past once linked to Blist Hill furnaces.

The circular Trail **'Loamhole Dingle; History under your feet'** takes you from Upper Furnace Pool and through the wooded dingle to the Ropewalk where nature meets the industrial past. This walk can also be linked with Lydebrook Dingle as part of the Shropshire Way.

These trails will hopefully encourage more visitors to explore the landscape of the World Heritage Site on foot.



# Raising Awareness

**Aim: to develop and promote a wider awareness and understanding of the Trust's work**

## Woodland Management Work

As part of the 'Light Gives Life' project, woodland management work had been planned for Dale Coppice. Following concern from local residents about the scale of the works, a community meeting was held in October 2022 to explain the reasons for the work. Several site visits were also held. The Trust acknowledged that it could have communicated the proposed tree works better. Following on from the public meeting and the subsequent woodland site visit, we have listened to people's concerns and have completely changed the scope of the works in Dale Coppice. The tree works being undertaken are now only related to public safety. The beech trees that have been marked up have been badly affected by squirrel damage. The damage can often be seen clearly from the ground, in the videos we commissioned and in the findings of our independent arboriculture consultant's report.



## Volunteer Lookers

Our volunteer 'Lookers' play a key role in looking after the flock of sixty native breed Soay sheep that the Trust uses to manage its wildflower meadows.

Many years ago, 'Lookers' were self-employed countrymen who lived outside for much of the year, looking after the grazing animals on several farms at once. Grizzled, wind hardened characters by all accounts, they often walked many miles, camping wild under the stars.

Today, 'looking' is a much more civilised affair. Our Soay sheep are crucial in grazing our wildflower meadows and conserving vital habitats. Our volunteer 'Lookers' work in a rota, visiting the flock daily and confirming all is well via the technology of a WhatsApp group!

The Lookers' programme has been running for 11 years and volunteers are extremely proficient in a wide range of sheep husbandry techniques including handling, ear tagging and injecting.

Each year we lamb ten ewes, the ewe lambs are registered with the Rare Breeds Survival Trust. We are keen to increase the number of registered pedigree breeding ewes to improve the Soay's status on the RBST watch list.

## Royal Forestry Society Visit (RFS)

On Monday 9 May 2022, the team hosted a visit from 42 expert members of the RFS led by its President, Sir James Scott. The CEO and HOC led them on a guided tour with other team members around Haywood Plantation, Sutton Wood, Lydebrook Dingle and Jiggers plantation. Issues discussed included Continuous Cover Forestry, tree diseases, grey squirrels and deer management, natural flood management and forest ecology. The HOC gave a demonstration of the tractor and forwarding trailer in use.

## Community Events

The Trust continues to work with other organisations to support local community events which attract many hundreds of visitors. Supporting such events allows the Trust to engage with people that may not be aware of the work and activities the Trust carries out, or the opportunities available to them to enjoy and use the land managed by the Trust.

### Ironbridge Gorge Walking Festival

The Trust continued to work in partnership with the Ironbridge Gorge Walking Festival, with walks being led by staff and volunteers.

### Annual Open Afternoon

The usual annual open evening moved to a slightly earlier time slot this year, making it an open afternoon! The event was open to the public and held at The Anstice in Madeley. Guest speakers Brandi Hall-Cosgrove, Ironbridge Gorge World Heritage Site Co-ordinator, and Carolyn Healy, Telford & Wrekin Councillor and SGCT Trustee, gave insightful talks about world heritage in a changing climate and how we are addressing the climate emergency in Telford and Wrekin. In total 30 people attended the event, offering an excellent opportunity to showcase the ongoing work of the Trust.



## Partnership Working

We continue to develop and strengthen partnerships with a wide range of organisations and individuals for the benefit of local communities, visitors and wildlife. Successful partnership working allows us to develop new areas of work, including 'Outdoor Learning', environmental arts and alternative land management techniques.

- ◆ Broseley Town Council
- ◆ Coalbrookdale Scouts
- ◆ Dawley Angling Society
- ◆ English Heritage
- ◆ Environment Agency
- ◆ Forestry Commission
- ◆ Harper Adams University
- ◆ Ironbridge Gorge Museum Trust
- ◆ Ironbridge Gorge Walking Festival
- ◆ Ironbridge Meadows and Pastures group
- ◆ Lodge Field Group
- ◆ Madeley Town Council
- ◆ Madeley Nursery
- ◆ Moonshine & Fuggles
- ◆ National Trust
- ◆ Natural England
- ◆ Neighbouring farmers and landowners
- ◆ People's Trust for Endangered Species
- ◆ Secret Severn Arts Trail
- ◆ Shrewsbury & Newport Canal Trust
- ◆ Shropshire Geological Society
- ◆ Shropshire Wildlife Trust
- ◆ Small Woods Association
- ◆ Telford & Wrekin Council
- ◆ Telford Green Spaces Partnership
- ◆ The Gorge Parish Council
- ◆ The Coracle Trust
- ◆ The World Heritage Site Steering Group
- ◆ University of Birmingham (Ironbridge Institute)
- ◆ West Midlands Regional Flood & Coastal Committee
- ◆ Wolverhampton University

Community engagement is essential to the success of all of our work. We aim to work with local communities to engage people of all ages through events, volunteering opportunities and education to ensure the sustainability of our 'Outdoor Learning' programme.

The active involvement of local people is also vitally important in the management of the land in the Severn Gorge. Local people have a strong interest in their local environment and the Trust is keen to harness the help of local residents to act as its 'eyes and ears' reporting any problems and suggesting improvements.

The Trust tries to ensure a rapid response to issues. People are informed about any management work by talking to neighbours, putting information up on site, providing articles for local newsletters and giving details of work on the Trust's website.

## Social Media

In our continued efforts to raise awareness of the work that we do and the benefits of our sites we have been trying to increase our social media presence. By increasing our posts and diversifying the content that we are creating, we hope to attract the attention of a wider audience and appeal to different demographics. Our Volunteer and Community Officer has been experimenting with putting short videos together for TikTok, Facebook, and Instagram. As a result of our efforts, our Facebook page reach has increased by 27%, and our Instagram Reach by 677%. Our Facebook page currently has 2,512 followers, while Instagram has 400. Posting regular updates on the work of the volunteers, key projects the Trust is managing and the 'Outdoor Learning' courses ensure that followers are able to access up to date information. These outlets are also brilliant for disseminating information on potential problems such as road closures, flooding etc.



# FINANCIAL REVIEW

## Overview

The Trust started its financial year in April 2022, the primary income of the Trust is generated by rents received on commercial properties in the Telford area. The rental income received from the properties no longer covers the core costs of the Trust and alternative income sources are being sought.

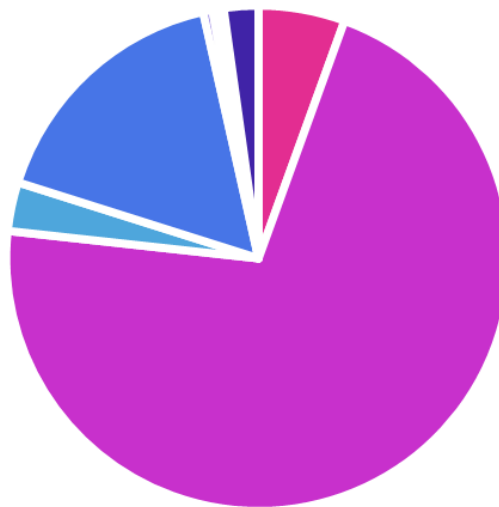
The Trust in conjunction with Telford & Wrekin Council's Land and Property Services (who manage the properties on the Trust's behalf) continue to work hard to manage the property portfolio to try to ensure that in the long term it is providing the sufficient income to cover the majority of core costs.

The Trust is continuing to face financial pressures with ageing access infrastructure and ash dieback emergencies. With cuts to Government agri/environmental grants and a downturn in rental income this does present financial uncertainties for the future.

The Trust will continue to seek alternative sources of income generation and the investment in capital equipment has enabled us to produce more firewood and sawmill timber.

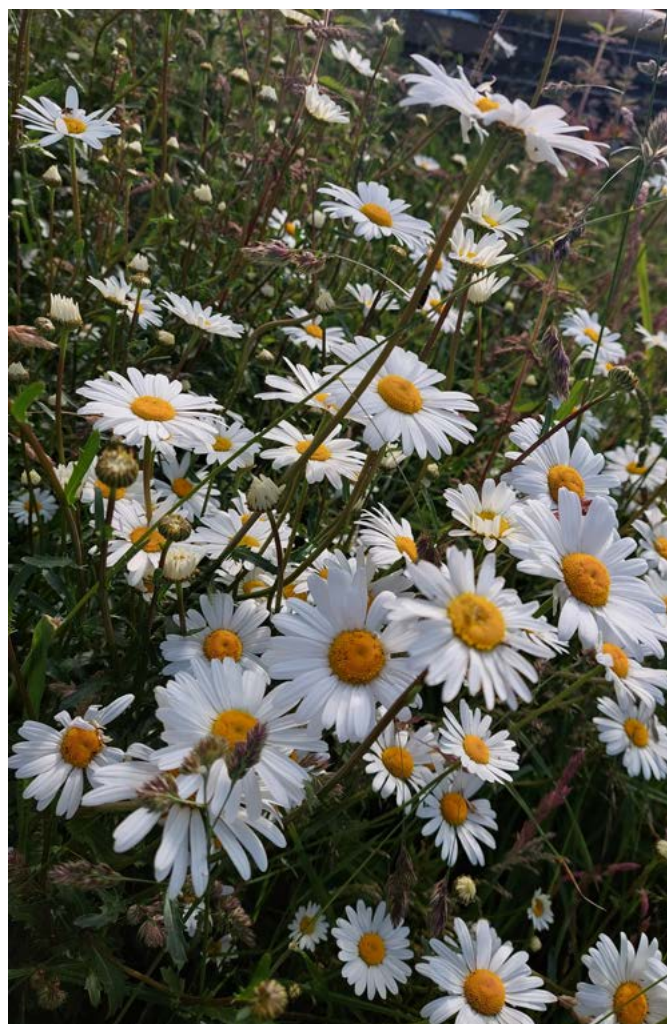
## Income

The chart below shows our main sources of income for 2022-2023



- Timber and Hay Sales
- Interest/Dividends ( Bank & investments)
- Courses - Outdoor Learning
- Sheep/Wool Sales
- Community Room Hire
- Insurance Claim
- Rental Income
- Grants
- Sundry Sales
- Misc. Income
- Gifts & Donations

Income for the year increased relative to 2021/2022 by 14.03% (£327,894, 22/23 from £287,546, 21/22) This was primarily due to an increase in grant income (an increase of 93%) together with an increase in the sale of standing timber. The new 5-year Countryside Stewardship scheme generated £18,198. A large proportion of the Trust's income continues to be invested in the management of the landscape. Agri-environment payments such as the Countryside Stewardship schemes are extremely important to the Trust. They are a key funding mechanism to support our woodland and meadow management.



The Trust continues to apply for grants from a variety of sources but is careful not to stray from its aims and objectives when looking for potential funding sources. Income was generated largely from:

- ◆ rentals received on commercial properties in the Telford area. (The need for a balancing package to provide sufficient income for the annual upkeep of the sites was recognised when the Trust was established. A package of commercial properties was transferred to Telford & Wrekin Council. They own the freehold of these income generating properties and are responsible for their management. They are covenanted to pay 90% of the income generated to the Trust to cover the cost of maintaining the land in the Gorge).
- ◆ investments purchased by the Trust. These consist of Charity Investment funds, and an interest paying Bank Account
- ◆ grants
- ◆ timber sales
- ◆ Outdoor Learning Programme
- ◆ Small amounts from sundry sales, books, honey, charcoal

We received £238,425 in income from the rental properties, fishing and grazing rights compared to £234,717 last year. A small increase of 1.57%. The majority of rental properties were fully occupied in 22/23

Interest and dividends provided £10,477 compared to £8,397 last year reflecting the changes in the Trust's investment makeup.

Hay and standing timber/log sales provided an additional £1,260 and £17,286 respectively. The increase in the sale of standing timber is predominantly due to large scale clearance due to ash dieback.

## Grants To Help With Our Work

In support of its activities, the Trust received £55,639 (£28,683 in 21/22) from a wide number of bodies and is incredibly grateful to them all for their help and assistance:

**Countryside Stewardship – Natural England** the Trust received £18,198 in grant aid from this scheme. This grant contributes towards the Trust’s woodland management costs. This is the first payment for this 5-year programme.

**Kings Coronation Grant – £1,635** – Celebration Coronation bench and day

**Rural Payments Agency – £5,958** – Capital grant for machinery

**The Gorge Parish Council – £500** – Family Friendly Walks

**Woodland Trust -£1,200** – Management of Workhouse Coppice

**Wrekin Housing Group £1,000** – Pond Creation

**Potters Landfill Tax – £14,578** – Light Gives Light – Habitat creation

**Telford & Wrekin Council – Telford Treescapes – £12,504** – Planting and maintenance of trees

**Wayleave Payments – £66**

## Donations

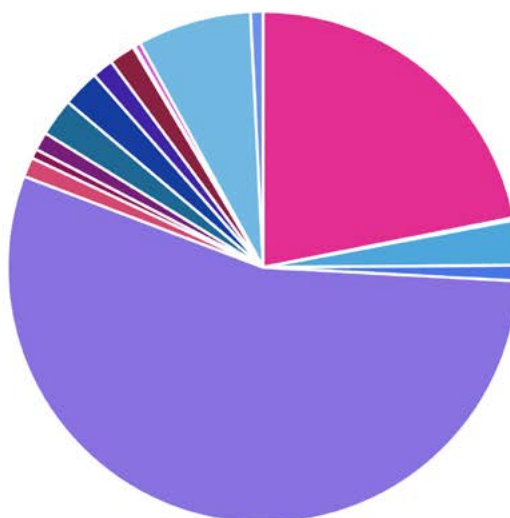
The Trust was fortunate to receive donations from individuals and organisations and we are very grateful to them for their support.

Moonshine and Fuggles of Ironbridge have donated £300 from the sales of their Coalport Cucumber gin and would like to continue their partnership with the Trust.

## Expenditure

Total expenditure for the year was £363,826 (£327,750 in 2021/2022). £73,891 was spent on Countryside and Landscape maintenance. Depreciation costs have increased from £18,987 to £24,295 due to the investment in capital machinery to facilitate more work being undertaken in house. An additional member of staff has been employed in 22/23 to undertake the Landscape Maintenance Contract which was previously outsourced to contractors. Core staff have increased from 4 to 5 and therefore the cost of employing staff has increased by 19.31%.

Expenditure 22-23



- |   |                                |                                       |                                   |
|---|--------------------------------|---------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| ■ Countryside and Landscape Maintenance | ■ Access                       | ■ Transport                           | ■ Community Projects              |
| ■ Salary Costs                          | ■ Staff training and PPE       | ■ Consultancy Fees                    | ■ Professional fees - investments |
| ■ Professional fees - other             | ■ Insurance                    | ■ Office Costs (rent/ heat/ lighting) | ■ Telephone / Communications      |
| ■ Trust support services                | ■ Recruitment/Retirement Costs | ■ Depreciation                        | ■ Miscellaneous Costs             |

## Investment Policy, Powers and Performance

Trustees are responsible for the financial policies under which the Trust is managed. Under the Memorandum and Articles of Association, the Trust has the power to deposit or invest funds.

The Investment Policy of the Trust is:

- ◆ for the capital invested to maintain its value whilst building up a dependable, growing stream of income that will keep pace with inflation.

The investment policy was substantially revised in 2021, in particular to take account of ethical and environmental considerations and is now publicly available on the Trust's website. No future investments will be made in companies that derive income from the extraction of coal or oil.

The investment performance is monitored by the Investment Working group by reviewing regular reports from our investment advisors, Abrdn Standard Capital. The movement in the stock market affects the value of our investments. The short-term gains and losses on the investments make little difference on the day to day running of the charity until the point where we have to sell our investments and realise the gain or loss.

The value of the Trust's investments has fluctuated greatly over the last 12 months but by the end of March 2023 had started to recover.

The Trust's investment portfolio value now stands at £464,248 with an additional £59,135 being held in bank accounts.

The next 12 months will continue to be a difficult time for the investment market, but the Trust continues to focus on long term aims rather than on the short-term market noise currently prevalent.



## Reserves Policy

The Trust's reserves are held in order to manage the risks to which the charity is exposed in the course of its activities. The Trustees ensure that the charity is in a responsible and secure financial position to carry out its day-to-day core services and is able to absorb unforeseen setbacks in the event of a significant financial downturn. The reserves policy is reviewed in the annual planning and budgeting process by Trustees and considers changes to the environment in which the Trust operates, and any other internal or external risk factors that might impact on the level of reserves required.

The reserves policy balances the need to build up long-term reserves against the need for short term spending on the Trust's core purposes.

## Funds

The Trust's funds are divided between unrestricted funds, restricted funds and designated funds.

The designated funds and their specific purposes are detailed below:

### Long Term Income Fund

The purpose of this fund is to provide income for the Trust's core work during the rental income modernising process, provide protection against additional voids that may occur and provide a dependable, growing stream of income that will keep pace with inflation, thus enabling the Trust to fulfil its objectives. £20,000 will be transferred each year (when income levels allow) into this fund. No transfer took place in 22/23 as there was insufficient income received from the rental properties to cover this cost. However, the interest and dividends (less Management fees) generated by Abrdn Standard Capital Investments has been retained. This equated to £5,781.

Should the rental income drop below the level that is required to fulfil the basic obligations of the Trust then money will be withdrawn from the fund to cover this expenditure. The balance held in the Long-Term Income Fund together with the revaluation of investments as at the 31 March 2022 is £516,864.





## New Accommodation Fund

---

This fund was created to set aside money to be used to fund the new office accommodation for the Trust. Money that had previously been held in the Long-Term Income fund has been released into the New Accommodation Fund. The balance of the fund is £170,200. This fund will be used in conjunction with the restricted grant funding from the NHS and the Alcoa Foundation. This fund will be written down over a 50-year period as part of the new office depreciation calculation.

The Land and Structures Contingency Fund was created to allow appropriate responses to substantial problems arising from geotechnical features, structures such as walls, land instability, drainage and watercourses.

Since 2003 the Trust has commissioned a programme of regular visual inspections of all known built structures on Trust land and a geotechnical inspection of Jiggers Rock face, as part of its risk management process.

£10,000 will be transferred to the fund each year (when income levels allow) and the work undertaken when sufficient funds have accumulated. Some works may be able to be undertaken at an earlier date if external funding becomes available. Due to income levels no transfer was made at year end; the balance of the fund as 31 March 2023 was £6,950.

## Restricted Funds

Alcoa/NHS New Office Accommodation – grant funding received towards the building of the new office. These funds are being written down over a 50-year period as part of the office depreciation costs.

**Councillors Pride Grant** – £300 towards the Outdoor Learning Area at the Trust Office site

**Coronation Grant** – Coronation celebration day and bespoke bench

**Gorge Parish Council** – Family friendly walks

**Wrekin Housing Group** – Pond Creation

## Pension Scheme

In common with other charities with defined benefit pension schemes, our pension scheme shows a deficit which stood at £9,000 on 31 March 2023 (£445,000 March 2022) and, under UK accounting standards we are required to account for this deficit. This is a great improvement in our funding position and the drivers behind this improvement are linked to the changes in makeup of the staff demographic coupled with changes in funding assumptions and calculations.

The Trustees are aware that the deficit on the scheme basis will fluctuate with changing market conditions and that their responsibility is to meet the required contributions. The Trustees do not consider this deficit to represent an immediate demand on the Charity's funds and therefore, the Trust is still able to deliver its charitable objectives.

## Actuarial Valuation

At the last valuation in March 2022 the contribution rate to be paid into the Shropshire County Pension Fund was assessed in two parts. First a standard contribution rate was determined. This is the contribution, expressed as a percentage of the salaries of staff. Secondly, a supplementary contribution is payable if, as a result of the actuarial review, it is found that the accumulated liabilities of the pension for benefits to past and present staff are not fully covered by the standard contributions to be paid in future and by the notional fund built up from past contributions. The total contribution rate payable is the sum of the standard contribution rate and the supplementary contribution rate.

Shropshire County Pension Fund has been working hard over the last few years to reduce the pension deficit and has set out a clear framework in which to achieve this over the next 16 years. The Trust paid an employer contribution rate (21%) and also an annual deficit contribution (£1,200 in 2022/23) to reduce the deficit.



## Looking Forward

---

The primary reason for establishing the Trust was to protect and manage the landscape to improve life for locals and visitors to the area.

In 2023/2024, we will continue to manage the 'living landscape' of the World Heritage Site with the same consistent care and passion that we have shown for the past 30 years.

Key Projects include:

- ◆ Communicating the Trusts vision, purpose, work and impact effectively through our website, media and social media, to increase awareness of the work that we do and how people can get involved.
- ◆ Ensuring future financial stability – continue to work with Telford & Wrekin Council and explore other avenues to grow and diversify unrestricted income streams to maintain our financial resilience and long-term stability.
- ◆ Continuing to explore funding opportunities to improve and repair the access Infrastructure installed in the Gorge.
- ◆ Reviewing Trust policies and procedures to ensure that they are compliant, relevant and up to date.
- ◆ Producing more timber infrastructure in house for fencing, access infrastructure etc.
- ◆ Increasing our capacity to produce firewood as a growing income stream
- ◆ Ensuring that monitoring of ash dieback is undertaken and work carried out where necessary. Investigating models for partnership working to mitigate the costs of the Ash dieback work.
- ◆ Identifying and developing skills with our Trustees to ensure that the Trust is well governed, and that the Committee of Management feel empowered to make strategic decisions.
- ◆ Ensuring that we advise local people of any future management work on our sites and listen to any concerns that they may have.
- ◆ Developing a forest school and outdoor learning area to increase our capacity to deliver environmental education sessions to local schools and groups.
- ◆ Developing corporate volunteering opportunities to help deliver conservation and access work that supports our charitable aims whilst providing opportunities for organisations to learn new skills, connect with local communities and have fun outside of the usual work environment.
- ◆ Raising awareness of the Trust by attending events to promote our work and the opportunities and products we offer.

In order to deliver these goals, we will continue improving our own capability and resilience. We will aim to put the maximum resource into managing the landscape by investing in training and equipment to ensure we have the right skills to manage the landscape of the World Heritage Site to a high level.

# STRUCTURE, GOVERNANCE & MANAGEMENT

## Company Structure

Severn Gorge Countryside Trust is a registered charity and a company limited by guarantee, governed by its memorandum and articles of association and administered by a Board of Trustees. The Board sets and monitors the strategic direction of the Trust and ensures that the strategy is aligned with key aims. The Board is responsible for ensuring the Trust is properly managed and complies with all relevant law and has high standards of governance.

## Board of Trustees

The Directors of the charitable company (the Charity) are its Trustees for the purpose of charity law and throughout this report are collectively referred to as the Trustees. The Board of Trustees is supported by a Company Secretary who is responsible for governance administration.

The Trustees who served during the year and up to the date of this report are:

### **Name**

Maureen Bragg (Chair)  
Nick Downes (Vice Chair)  
Mick Burton  
Gina Rowe  
Sarah Chadwick  
Caroline Bagnall  
John Box  
Max Speke  
Chris Turley  
Carolyn Healy  
Dylan Webster  
Alan Taylor

### **Nominated by:**

Community Trustee  
Barrow Parish Council  
Broseley Town Council  
Community Trustee  
Madeley Town Council  
Shropshire Council  
Shropshire Wildlife Trust  
Sutton Maddock Parish Council  
Telford & Wrekin Council  
Telford & Wrekin Council  
Telford & Wrekin Council  
The Gorge Parish Council

### **Staff**

Russell Rowley	CEO (retired 31 December 2022)
JP Brayford	CEO (appointed 1 January 2023)
Kate Chetwood	Company Secretary and Finance Officer
Nathan Morris	Head of Countryside
Paul Ferrington	Estate Worker
Emily Holmes	Assistant Countryside Officer (resigned 30 May 2022)
Amber Bicheno	Volunteer & Community Officer (appointed 1 August 2022)

## Who Governs the Trust?

The Trust is governed by its Committee of Management (COM) made up of several Member Organisations and Community Trustees. The Trustees are all volunteers with careers and experience in a wide variety of fields.

In accordance with the Memorandum and Articles of Association, Trustees are elected by the membership for terms of four years. At the end of the four-year term Trustees may stand for re-election. Nominations for new Trustees are considered each year prior to the Annual General Meeting (AGM). All Member Organisations are circulated with invitations to nominate Trustees, advising them of any retiring Trustees and requesting nominations for the AGM. The Member Organisations are made up of a variety of local organisations that have a keen interest in the Ironbridge Gorge and also two Community Trustee places.

When considering appointing Trustees, the Committee of Management (Board of Directors) has regard to the requirement of any specialist skills needed.

## Trustee Induction and Training

The Trust provides an induction session to brief new Trustees on their legal obligations under charity and company law, the contents of the memorandum and articles of association, the committee structure and decision-making processes, the Development Strategy and recent financial performance of the charity. They are also advised on the future plans and objectives of the Trust. During the induction they meet the CEO,

Company Secretary and other employees. They are advised of appropriate training opportunities and are encouraged to attend.

## Management

The COM is responsible for setting policies and ensuring legality and good practice in accordance with the Memorandum and Articles of Association of the Trust and the Charities Act 2011. The Committee of Management meets formally each quarter. At each meeting, the COM considers reports from the management team on areas such as strategic development, financial performance and health and safety. Additionally, as appropriate the COM considers progress on current and future projects, governance and the annual budget and workplan.

The CEO is responsible to the COM for the management of the Trust and the conduct of the Trust's business in accordance with policies and budgets set by the COM. They are responsible for the day-to-day operation of the Trust within this framework and are authorised to act on behalf of the Trust on all matters other than those which by law are required to be decided by the COM. The Chief Executive is supported by Trust staff. The Trust also engages a number of professional advisers to assist in its work.

The COM met five times in 2022/23, key discussions at board meetings during 2022/2023 focused on the Trust's response to the public's concern over proposed woodland management work at two of its sites, Dale Coppice and Lloyds Coppice. Developing a safeguarding policy for children and vulnerable



adults, monitoring progress against the approved annual plan and budget, the financial position in relation to declining rental income and appropriate risk management.

The board had one committee and two working groups supporting its work during 2022/2023. These have advisory powers and decision making is retained by the COM. A trustee chairs each committee/working group, with membership including other trustees and staff. Trustees participate in steering groups to provide advice, input, and/or support.

The Personnel Committee is elected annually from the COM and meets to advise on staffing issues, employee and trustee training, staff development and support. The Personnel Committee met four times in 22/23. The Committee provided advice and input into the recruitment process for the new CEO and two members also sat on the interview panel. They also reviewed staff salaries and cost of living awards.

## Working Groups

Two working groups were set up in 2020/2021 to review specific areas of the Trust's work. These were the Investment Working Group to look at how the Trust can change its current investment portfolio to a more ethical model and the Climate Change Working Group to look at what the Trust can do immediately and in the longer term to reduce its CO<sub>2</sub> emissions.

### Investment Working Group

The Investment Working Group met once in 22/23. As part of our commitment to our environmental aims, the Trust has stopped investing in fossil fuel companies. No future investments will be made in companies that derive income from the extraction of coal or oil.

The group also looked at including additional environmental, social and governance (ESG) and ethical screening options for the portfolio. They also recommended investing in Telford & Wrekin Climate Action Investment fund. This fund supported local projects including energy efficiency upgrades to its temporary and supported housing accommodation and the electrification of its community minibuses to help reach Telford & Wrekin Council's goal of creating a carbon neutral borough by 2030.



## Climate Change Working Group

Following the Trust's Climate Change Declaration in November 2019 we continue to look at ways to tackle the causes of climate change. For example, by reducing our own emissions, caring for the land that captures and stores carbon, exploring flood mitigation options and restoring wildlife habitats that are threatened.

We can lock up carbon in the woodlands and meadows we manage using Continuous Cover forestry and create more opportunities for wildlife to thrive by rewilding areas of our land. Whilst continuing to champion renewable energy and slash our carbon emissions.

The Climate Change Working Group met once in 22/23. The working group has created a carbon calculator to enable the Trust to measure and monitor its carbon emissions. This calculator will continue to be refined as more information becomes available. Trustees agreed that it was important to include the methane produced by our flock of Soay sheep in the Carbon Calculator to provide a complete picture of our emissions.

Our pension fund, like many organisations is managed independently and we have no direct influence over how the pension funds are invested. However,

we continue to lobby our pension fund (Shropshire Pension Fund) to divest from fossil fuels and hope that they will consider the best approach for them to meet their commitment to prioritise the interests of the pension fund.

## Planning for the Future

The significance of the Trust's landholdings dictates the need for a planned, long-term approach to give direction and continuity to management.

This is achieved through comprehensive management plans for the Trust's sites and a Development Strategy that governs the work of the Trust.

The Development Strategy was approved by Trustees in November 2017 and will guide the work of the Trust until the end of 2028. It sets out the Trust's vision, aims and plans for achieving its charitable objectives, identifies the successful methods of working that will be continued, the developments that will be introduced over the ten years and the opportunities that will be taken up if time and resources allow. Copies of the full strategy can be downloaded from the website ([www.severngorge.org.uk](http://www.severngorge.org.uk)) or obtained from the Trust Office.



## Annual Work Plan/Budget

Annual work plans and budgets are developed to ensure the core work in the management plans and Development Strategy are achieved without overstretching the Trust's resources or compromising its long-term viability.

The annual work plan for 2022/2023 was set from the 2018/2028 Development Strategy.

## Risk Management

In accordance with the Charity Commission's Statement of Recommended Practice (SORP) 2005, Trustees have a risk management strategy in place which comprises:

- ◆ An annual review of the risks the Trust may face, which also identifies any new risks that the Trust may be exposed to
- ◆ The establishment of systems and procedures to mitigate against those risks identified in the review; and
- ◆ The implementation of procedures to prevent any potential impact on the charity should those risks materialise.

Our trustees understand their responsibilities for ensuring that the major risks to which the charity is exposed are identified and reviewed, and that there are systems in place to mitigate them. Trustees regularly review our risk management process and receive regular updates on actions put in place to mitigate the most significant ongoing risks.

It should be noted that any risk management system can only manage risks and not eliminate them.

## Principal Risks and Uncertainties

Four major risks have been identified and arrangements have been put in place to mitigate these risks:

Future levels of income – if our income falls then the Trust would not be able to continue to manage the 'living landscape' of the Ironbridge Gorge for the benefit of local people, visitors and the environment. The majority of our income is generated from rental income from our property portfolio. The Trust pay a management fee to Telford & Wrekin Council to manage these properties. We will continue to work with them to look at ways of diversifying the property portfolio by



looking to invest in more modern properties to ensure the level of income is sufficient to cover the majority of our core costs. Ensuring that the portfolio is effectively and efficiently managed is key to generating sufficient income to enable the Trust to fulfil its charitable aims.

Additional funding will continue to be sought via grants and other funding opportunities.

**Climate Change** – we are assessing all of our operations from travel to gas and electricity usage to reduce our CO<sub>2</sub> emissions wherever possible. We are also looking at the best ways to manage our woodlands and meadows to ensure they are as resilient as possible.

**Ash Dieback** – We have been monitoring the spread of ash dieback in the Gorge since it hit the headlines in 2012. The extent and severity of effect of the disease continues to be closely monitored. The Trust is continuing to use an independent arboriculturist to survey the trees on the Trust land and has written a policy to inform the work of the Trust and the treatment of trees affected by ash die back. The Trust continues to investigate avenues of funding to offset the increased cost of planned and reactive tree work to deal with the situation.

**Safeguarding** – The Trustees recognise that Safeguarding is a key priority for all charities, and for projects working with children and young people, or vulnerable adults. New safeguarding policies have been implemented and ongoing training is being provided for staff, trustees and volunteers.

## Public Benefit

This annual report looks at what we have achieved over the previous twelve months. In setting our aims and planning our activities, Trustees have given careful consideration to the Charity Commission's guidance on Public Benefit.

Trustees believe that the provision of such benefit is an integral part to each of the Trust's charitable objectives. We work hard to deliver public benefit by promoting and protecting the beautiful landscape of the Ironbridge Gorge for everyone to enjoy.

- ◆ The 260 hectares of land that the Trust manages is available for the public to use freely, every day of the year.
- ◆ The benefits of access to green spaces to health and wellbeing are widely documented and accepted.
- ◆ The Outdoor Learning programme helps people engage with and appreciate the natural environment.
- ◆ Our volunteer programme enables people to become actively engaged in their environment.
- ◆ The Trust land and activities are available to all and we try to make special provision wherever possible for the disabled and disadvantaged.

We believe that the work of the Trust has a positive impact on people, communities, wildlife and the environment.

This report also helps us ensure our aims, objectives and activities remained focused on our stated purpose. In order to achieve our aims the Trust must strive to maintain an efficient and effective organisation, that is well governed, professionally managed and which has the capacity, infrastructure and support necessary to deliver them.

## Statement of Trustees Responsibilities

The Trustees are responsible for preparing the Annual Report and the financial statements in accordance with applicable law and regulations.

Company law requires Trustees to prepare financial statements for each financial year. The financial statements are required by law to give a true and fair view of the state of affairs of the company and of the profit or loss of the company for that period. In preparing those financial statements, the Trustees are required to:

- ◆ select suitable accounting policies and then apply them consistently.
- ◆ observe the methods and principles in the Charities SORP
- ◆ make judgements and estimates that are reasonable and prudent.
- ◆ state whether applicable UK Accounting Standards have been followed, subject to any material departures disclosed and explained in the financial statements.
- ◆ prepare the financial statements on the going concern basis unless it is inappropriate to presume that the company will continue in business.

The Trustees are responsible for keeping proper accounting records that disclose with reasonable accuracy at any time the financial position of the group and parent charity and enable them to ensure that the financial statements comply with the Charities Act 2011 and the Charity (Accounts and Reports) Regulations. They are also responsible for safeguarding the assets of company and hence for taking reasonable steps for the prevention and detection of fraud and other irregularities.

The Trustees are responsible for the maintenance and integrity of the financial information included on the charity's website.

In accordance with company law, as the company's directors, we certify that:

- ◆ so far as we are aware, there is no relevant audit information of which the company's auditor is unaware.

This report has been prepared in accordance with the Statement of Recommended Practice – Accounting and Reporting by Charities and in accordance with the provisions applicable to companies subject to the small companies' regime.

Approved by the Committee of Management on 20 September 2023  
and signed on its behalf by:

**Maureen Bragg**  
Chair

Severn Gorge Countryside Trust

**REPORT AND FINANCIAL STATEMENTS**

For the year ended 31 March 2023

Company No. 2647374

Muras Baker Jones Limited  
Chartered Accountants  
Wolverhampton

## **INDEPENDENT AUDITORS' REPORT TO THE MEMBERS OF SEVERN GORGE COUNTRYSIDE TRUST**

### **Opinion**

We have audited the financial statements of Severn Gorge Countryside Trust (the 'charitable company') for the year ended 31 March 2023 which comprise the statement of financial activities (including income and expenditure account), statement of financial position and the related notes, including a summary of significant accounting policies. The financial reporting framework that has been applied in their preparation is applicable law and United Kingdom Accounting Standards, including FRS 102 The Financial Reporting Standard applicable in the UK and Republic of Ireland (United Kingdom Generally Accepted Accounting Practice).

In our opinion the financial statements:

- give a true and fair view of the state of the charitable company's affairs as at 31 March 2023 and of its incoming resources and application of resources, including its income and expenditure, for the year then ended
- have been properly prepared in accordance with United Kingdom Generally Accepted Accounting Practice
- have been prepared in accordance with the requirements of the Companies Act 2006

### **Basis for opinion**

We conducted our audit in accordance with International Standards on Auditing (UK) (ISAs (UK)) and applicable law. Our responsibilities under those standards are further described in the auditor's responsibilities for the audit of the financial statements section of our report. We are independent of the charity in accordance with the ethical requirements that are relevant to our audit of the financial statements in the UK, including the FRC's Ethical Standard, and we have fulfilled our other ethical responsibilities in accordance with these requirements. We believe that the audit evidence we have obtained is sufficient and appropriate to provide a basis for our opinion.

### **Conclusions relating to going concern**

We have nothing to report in respect of the following matters in relation to which the ISAs (UK) require us to report to you where:

- the trustees' use of the going concern basis of accounting in the preparation of the financial statements is not appropriate; or
- the trustees have not disclosed in the financial statements any identified material uncertainties that may cast significant doubt about the charity's ability to continue to adopt the going concern basis of accounting for a period of at least twelve months from the date when the financial statements are authorised for issue

### **Other information**

The other information comprises the information included in the annual report, other than the financial statements and our auditor's report thereon. The trustees are responsible for the other information. Our opinion on the financial statements does not cover the other information and, except to the extent otherwise explicitly stated in our report, we do not express any form of assurance conclusion thereon.

In connection with our audit of the financial statements, our responsibility is to read the other information and, in doing so, consider whether the other information is materially inconsistent with the financial statements or our knowledge obtained in the audit or otherwise appears to be materially misstated. If we identify such material inconsistencies or apparent material misstatements, we are required to determine whether there is a material misstatement in the financial statements or a material misstatement of the other information. If, based on the work we have performed, we conclude that there is a material misstatement of this other information, we are required to report that fact.

We have nothing to report in this regard.

## **INDEPENDENT AUDITORS' REPORT TO THE MEMBERS OF SEVERN GORGE COUNTRYSIDE TRUST (CONTINUED)**

### **Opinions on other matters prescribed by the Companies Act 2006**

In our opinion, based on the work undertaken in the course of the audit:

- the information given in the trustees' report for the financial year for which the financial statements are prepared is consistent with the financial statements; and
- the trustees' report has been prepared in accordance with applicable legal requirements.

### **Matters on which we are required to report by exception**

In the light of the knowledge and understanding of the charitable company and its environment obtained in the course of the audit, we have not identified material misstatements in the trustees' report.

We have nothing to report in respect of the following matters in relation to which the Companies Act 2006 requires us to report to you if, in our opinion:

- adequate accounting records have not been kept, or returns adequate for our audit have not been received from branches not visited by us; or
- the financial statements are not in agreement with the accounting records and returns; or
- certain disclosures of trustees' remuneration specified by law are not made; or
- we have not received all the information and explanations we require for our audit; or
- the trustees were not entitled to take advantage of the small companies' exemptions in preparing the directors' report and from the requirement to prepare a strategic report.

### **Responsibilities of trustees**

As explained more fully in the trustees' responsibilities statement, the trustees (who are also the directors for the purposes of company law) are responsible for the preparation of the financial statements and for being satisfied that they give a true and fair view, and for such internal control as the trustees determine is necessary to enable the preparation of financial statements that are free from material misstatement, whether due to fraud or error.

In preparing the financial statements, the trustees are responsible for assessing the charitable company's ability to continue as a going concern, disclosing, as applicable, matters related to going concern and using the going concern basis of accounting unless the trustees either intend to liquidate the charitable company or to cease operations, or have no realistic alternative but to do so.

### **Auditor's responsibilities for the audit of the financial statements**

Our objectives are to obtain reasonable assurance about whether the financial statements as a whole are free from material misstatement, whether due to fraud or error, and to issue an auditor's report that includes our opinion. Reasonable assurance is a high level of assurance, but is not a guarantee that an audit conducted in accordance with ISAs (UK) will always detect a material misstatement when it exists. Misstatements can arise from fraud or error and are considered material if, individually or in the aggregate, they could reasonably be expected to influence the economic decisions of users taken on the basis of these financial statements.

As part of an audit in accordance with ISAs (UK), we exercise professional judgment and maintain professional scepticism throughout the audit. We also:

- Identify and assess the risks of material misstatement of the financial statements, whether due to fraud or error, design and perform audit procedures responsive to those risks, and obtain audit evidence that is sufficient and appropriate to provide a basis for our opinion. The risk of not detecting a material misstatement resulting from fraud is higher than for one resulting from error, as fraud may involve collusion, forgery, intentional omissions, misrepresentations, or the override of internal control

## **INDEPENDENT AUDITORS' REPORT TO THE MEMBERS OF SEVERN GORGE COUNTRYSIDE TRUST (CONTINUED)**

- Obtain an understanding of internal control relevant to the audit in order to design audit procedures that are appropriate in the circumstances, but not for the purpose of expressing an opinion on the effectiveness of the internal control
- Evaluate the appropriateness of accounting policies used and the reasonableness of accounting estimates and related disclosures made by the trustees
- Conclude on the appropriateness of the trustees' use of the going concern basis of accounting and, based on the audit evidence obtained, whether a material uncertainty exists related to events or conditions that may cast significant doubt on the charity's ability to continue as a going concern. If we conclude that a material uncertainty exists, we are required to draw attention in our auditor's report to the related disclosures in the financial statements or, if such disclosures are inadequate, to modify our opinion. Our conclusions are based on the audit evidence obtained up to the date of our auditor's report. However, future events or conditions may cause the charity to cease to continue as a going concern
- Evaluate the overall presentation, structure and content of the financial statements, including the disclosures, and whether the financial statements represent the underlying transactions and events in a manner that achieves fair presentation

We communicate with those charged with governance regarding, among other matters, the planned scope and timing of the audit and significant audit findings, including any significant deficiencies in internal control that we identify during our audit.

### **Use of our report**

This report is made solely to the charitable company's members, as a body, in accordance with Chapter 3 of Part 16 of the Companies Act 2006. Our audit work has been undertaken so that we might state to the charitable company's members those matters we are required to state to them in an auditor's report and for no other purpose. To the fullest extent permitted by law, we do not accept or assume responsibility to anyone other than the charitable company and the charitable company's members as a body, for our audit work, for this report, or for the opinions we have formed.

.....  
Oliver Ross BSc(Hons) FCA (Senior Statutory Auditor)  
For and on behalf of Muras Baker Jones Limited  
Chartered Accountants and Statutory Auditor

20 September 2023

Regent House  
Bath Avenue  
Wolverhampton  
WV1 4EG

## SEVERN GORGE COUNTRYSIDE TRUST

### STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL ACTIVITIES (being INCOME AND EXPENDITURE ACCOUNT)

For the year ended 31 March 2023

	Notes	General Fund £	Designated Funds £	Restricted funds £	Total funds 2023 £	Total funds 2022 £
<b>INCOME</b>						
<b>INCOMING RESOURCES FROM CHARITABLE ACTIVITIES</b>						
Rents received	4	238,575	-	-	238,575	234,867
Grants	4	52,505	-	3,135	55,640	28,683
<b>INCOME FROM OTHER TRADING ACTIVITIES</b>						
Investment income		793	9,684	-	10,477	8,397
Other income		22,189	-	-	22,189	14,148
Gifts and Donations		1,013	-	-	1,013	1,451
<b>Total Income</b>		<b>315,075</b>	<b>9,684</b>	<b>3,135</b>	<b>327,894</b>	<b>287,546</b>
<b>EXPENDITURE</b>						
<b>COSTS OF RAISING FUNDS</b>						
Costs of generating voluntary income	5	6,515	-	-	6,515	6,435
<b>EXPENDITURE ON CHARITABLE ACTIVITIES</b>						
Woodland/Countryside Management	5	260,834	3,181	11,405	275,420	258,351
Access	5	25,405	982	412	26,799	26,251
Projects	5	28,702	437	182	29,321	8,226
<b>GOVERNANCE COSTS</b>	5	<b>21,859</b>	<b>3,912</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>25,771</b>	<b>28,487</b>
<b>Total Expenditure</b>		<b>343,315</b>	<b>8,512</b>	<b>11,999</b>	<b>363,826</b>	<b>327,750</b>
<b>NET INCOME/(EXPENDITURE)</b>		<b>(28,240)</b>	<b>1,172</b>	<b>(8,864)</b>	<b>(35,932)</b>	<b>(40,204)</b>
<b>TRANSFERS BETWEEN FUNDS</b>		<b>(176,982)</b>	<b>176,982</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>
<b>NET INCOME/(EXPENDITURE) BEFORE OTHER GAINS / (LOSSES) – carried forward</b>		<b>(205,222)</b>	<b>178,154</b>	<b>(8,864)</b>	<b>(35,932)</b>	<b>(40,204)</b>

## SEVERN GORGE COUNTRYSIDE TRUST

### STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL ACTIVITIES (being INCOME AND EXPENDITURE ACCOUNT) continued

For the year ended 31 March 2023

	Notes	General Fund £	Designated Funds £	Restricted Funds £	Total Funds 2023 £	Total funds 2022 £
NET INCOME/(EXPENDITURE) BEFORE OTHER GAINS / (LOSSES) – brought forward		(205,222)	178,154	(8,864)	(35,932)	(40,204)
OTHER GAINS AND LOSSES						
Gains/(losses) on Investments - realised		-	(12,946)	-	(12,946)	5,789
Gains/(losses) on Investments – unrealised		-	(25,034)	-	(25,034)	(1,538)
Pension scheme actuarial (losses)/gains	14	469,290	-	-	469,290	52,005
Revaluation of land		-	-	-	-	-
NET MOVEMENT IN FUNDS FOR THE YEAR		264,068	140,174	(8,864)	395,378	16,052
TOTAL FUNDS BROUGHT FORWARD AT 31 MARCH 2022		4,204	731,639	83,597	819,440	803,388
TOTAL FUNDS CARRIED FORWARD AT 31 MARCH 2023		268,272	871,813	74,733	1,214,818	819,440

All income and expenditure derive from continuing activities.

The statement of financial activities includes all gains and losses recognised in the year.

## SEVERN GORGE COUNTRYSIDE TRUST

### BALANCE SHEET

At 31 March 2023

	Notes	2023 £	£	2022 £	£
<b>FIXED ASSETS</b>					
Tangible assets	6	640,597		581,490	
Investments	7	464,158		431,335	
			<u>1,104,755</u>		<u>1,012,825</u>
<b>CURRENT ASSETS</b>					
Debtors	8	17,727		64,947	
Investments	9	37,495		86,734	
Cash at bank and in hand		70,327		116,382	
			<u>125,549</u>		<u>268,063</u>
<b>CREDITORS - amounts falling due within one year</b>	10	(6,486)		(16,448)	
<b>NET CURRENT ASSETS</b>			119,063		251,615
Pension benefit pension scheme liability	12	(9,000)		(445,000)	
<b>NET ASSETS</b>			<u>1,214,818</u>		<u>819,440</u>
<b>THE FUNDS OF THE CHARITY:</b>	11				
General fund	11	268,272		4,204	
Designated funds	11	628,875		450,721	
Restricted funds	11	74,733		83,597	
Revaluation funds	11	242,938		280,918	
<b>TOTAL CHARITY FUNDS</b>			<u>1,214,818</u>		<u>819,440</u>

The financial statements were approved by the Committee of Management on 20 September 2023 signed on its behalf by:-

Maureen Bragg  
Chair

## SEVERN GORGE COUNTRYSIDE TRUST

### NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

For the year ended 31 March 2023

#### 1. ACCOUNTING POLICIES

##### a) BASIS OF PREPARATION

The charity constitutes a public benefit entity as defined by FRS 102. The financial statements have been prepared in accordance with Accounting and Reporting by Charities: Statement of Recommended Practice applicable to charities preparing their accounts in accordance with the Financial Reporting Standard applicable in the UK and Republic of Ireland issued in October 2019, the Financial Reporting Standard applicable in the United Kingdom and Republic of Ireland (FRS 102), the Charities Act 2011, the Companies Act 2006 and UK Generally Accepted Accounting Practice.

The financial statements are prepared on a going concern basis under the historical cost convention, modified to include investments and certain freehold property at fair value.

##### b) INCOME

Rental income is included when receivable.

Income from contracting projects is recognised when receivable.

Grants are recognised in full in the Statement of Financial Activities when receivable.

Income from investments and other income, including small sales of timber and refunds, are included when receivable.

##### c) EXPENDITURE AND IRRECOVERABLE VAT

Resources expended are recognised in the period in which they are incurred. Resources expended include attributable VAT, which cannot be recovered.

The proportion of employees time spent fundraising is shown as costs of generating voluntary income.

Resources expended are allocated to the particular activity where the cost relates directly to that activity. The cost of overall direction and administration on each activity is apportioned based on the direct costs incurred for each.

##### d) DEPRECIATION

Depreciation is provided on the cost of fixed assets to write off the cost less estimated residual value of each asset over its estimated useful life at the following rates:

Freehold property	Depreciated over 50 years
Fixtures & Equipment	10% straight line/20% straight line/33 <sup>1</sup> / <sub>3</sub> % straight line
Plant and Machinery	10% straight line
Motor vehicles	20% straight line/25% reducing balance
Facility Construction	10% straight line

No depreciation is provided on Freehold Land.

## SEVERN GORGE COUNTRYSIDE TRUST

### NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

For the year ended 31 March 2023

#### 1. ACCOUNTING POLICIES (Continued)

##### e) TANGIBLE ASSETS

Tangible assets are initially recorded at cost, and subsequently stated at cost less any accumulated depreciation and impairment losses. Any tangible assets carried at revalued amounts are recorded at the fair value at the date of revaluation less any subsequent accumulated depreciation and subsequent accumulated impairment losses.

An increase in the carrying amount of an asset as a result of revaluation, is recognised in other recognised gains and losses, unless it reverses a charge for impairment that has previously been recognised as expenditure within the statement of financial activities. A decrease in the carrying amount of an asset as a result of revaluation, is recognised in other recognised gains and losses, except to which it offsets any previous revaluation gain, in which case the loss is shown within other recognised gains and losses on the statement of financial activities.

##### f) INVESTMENTS

Investments held as current assets are stated at the lower of cost and net realisable value.

Investments held as fixed assets are revalued annually and the aggregate surplus or deficit is transferred to Revaluation Reserve.

##### g) GENERAL FUND

This represents unrestricted funds that are available for use at the Trustees' discretion in furtherance of the objectives of the Trust.

##### h) DESIGNATED FUNDS

- i) Long Term Income Fund - this fund arises from the combining of the Income Security Fund and the Long Term Development Reserve and reflects monies held within Fixed and Current Asset Investments. The purpose of the fund is to provide additional income for the Trust's core work when rental income declines as properties reach the end of their expected commercial 'life' circa 2015 to 2025.
- ii) Land and Structures Contingency - this reserve reflects monies held within current asset investments. The reserve has been created to cope with expenditure arising as a result of land instability, drainage and watercourse issues and potential problems with existing structures.
- iii) New Accommodation Fund - the reserve has been created to set aside funds towards the new office accommodation for the Trust.
- iv) Revaluation Reserve - this reflects the increase in the fair value of investments and land over their original cost.

## SEVERN GORGE COUNTRYSIDE TRUST

### NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

For the year ended 31 March 2023

#### 1. ACCOUNTING POLICIES (Continued)

##### h) DESIGNATED FUNDS - continued

v) Lloyds Bank Surrender Premium Fund and Carry Over Funds. These reserves relate to surplus funds arising on certain projects during the year for which the trustees have designated against specific expenditure over the next 2 years.

vi) Postcode Lottery Access Fund. Being grants received in respect of work to be carried out on steps in the Gorge. Re-designated by the grant provider as unrestricted.

##### i) RESTRICTED FUNDS

These represent grants received for specified projects, the use of each grant being restricted to that project.

##### j) GOING CONCERN

The trustees remain mindful of the impact on the charity of external economic constraints and as a result regularly review projections and budgets for the current and subsequent periods. Based on these reviews, the trustees consider there to be no significant overall impact on the charity's ability to continue as a going concern.

The trustees have also reviewed the supply chains, key income sources and the capital resources available and consider that the charity has adequate resources in place to continue operating for the next twelve months.

##### k) EMPLOYEE BENEFITS

The charity contributes to a defined benefit plan for certain employees. A liability for the charity's obligation under the plan is recognised net of plan assets. The net change in the net defined benefit liability is recognised as the costs of the defined benefit plan during the period. Pension plan assets are measured at fair value and the defined benefit obligation is measured on an actuarial basis using the projected unit method.

The trustees believe that the scheme currently meets statutory minimum funding requirements. It is intended that the level of annual contributions to the scheme will be adjusted following the next detailed actuarial valuation. The directors note that the calculated notional deficit or surplus calculated under FRS102 can vary greatly from year to year depending on the assumptions made at the valuation date, but with normally little or no effect on short term cashflows.

#### 2. (DEFICIT)/SURPLUS FOR THE YEAR

The (deficit)/surplus for the year is stated after charging:

	2023	2022
	£	£
Auditors' remuneration	2,568	2,400
Depreciation of tangible fixed assets	24,321	15,587
	<u>          </u>	<u>          </u>

## SEVERN GORGE COUNTRYSIDE TRUST

### NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

For the year ended 31 March 2023

#### 3. STAFF COSTS

	2023 £	2022 £
Wages and salaries	141,899	119,600
Social security costs	9,263	7,615
Other pension Costs	64,011	58,000
Other costs	7,828	3,473
	<u>223,001</u>	<u>188,688</u>

No employees received remuneration in excess of £60,000 (2022: None).

No members of the Committee of Management received any remuneration in the year (2022 - £Nil). Apart from members of the Committee of Management, the company had 6 employees at 31 March 2023 (2022 - 5).

#### 4. INCOMING RESOURCES FROM CHARITABLE ACTIVITIES

	General fund £	Restricted funds £	Total 2023 £	Total 2022 £
Rents received	238,575	-	238,575	234,867
Grants:				
Natural England:				
Countryside Stewardship	18,198	-	18,198	4,272
Rural Payments Agency	5,958	-	5,958	-
The Gorge Parish Council	-	500	500	-
Other	1,267	-	1,267	2,481
Business relief grant	-	-	-	500
Furlough grant	-	-	-	11,130
Telford & Wrekin Council -	-	1,635	1,635	-
Kings Coronation Grant	-	-	-	-
Wrekin Housing Group -	-	1,000	1,000	-
Community Fund	-	-	-	-
Telford Treescapes grant	12,504	-	12,504	-
Benthall Path Improvements	-	-	-	10,000
Councillors Pride grant	-	-	-	300
Potter Group – Environment Fund	14,578	-	14,578	-
	<u>52,505</u>	<u>3,135</u>	<u>55,640</u>	<u>28,683</u>
	<u>291,080</u>	<u>3,135</u>	<u>294,215</u>	<u>263,550</u>

## SEVERN GORGE COUNTRYSIDE TRUST

### NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

For the year ended 31 March 2023

#### 5. ANALYSIS OF EXPENDITURE ON CHARITABLE ACTIVITIES

	Generating voluntary income £	Woodland/ countryside management £	Access £	Projects £	Governance costs £	Total 2023 £	Total 2022 £
Direct costs	-	76,438	-	3,324	-	79,762	83,897
Employee costs	6,515	153,635	26,479	24,012	12,360	223,001	188,688
Insurance	-	7,560	53	331	-	7,944	6,621
Transport	-	9,101	64	399	-	9,564	6,174
Office and other costs	-	9,875	70	432	1,056	11,433	15,217
Trustee support	-	-	-	-	387	387	745
Professional costs	-	-	-	-	11,968	11,968	10,827
Depreciation	-	23,144	164	1,013	-	24,321	15,587
(Profit)/loss on disposal of tangible fixed assets	-	(4333)	(31)	(190)	-	(4,554)	(6)
	<u>6,515</u>	<u>275,420</u>	<u>26,799</u>	<u>29,321</u>	<u>25,771</u>	<u>363,826</u>	<u>327,750</u>

## SEVERN GORGE COUNTRYSIDE TRUST

### NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

For the year ended 31 March 2023

#### 6. TANGIBLE FIXED ASSETS

	Plant and machinery £	Land and buildings £	Motor vehicles £	Fixtures & equipment £	Facility Construction £	Total £
<b>COST:</b>						
At 1 April 2022	59,056	629,476	58,579	40,014	4,495	791,620
Additions	49,664	-	24,720	11,670	-	86,054
Disposals	(1,801)	-	(2,908)	(4,627)	-	(9,336)
<b>At 31 March 2023</b>	<b>106,919</b>	<b>629,476</b>	<b>80,391</b>	<b>47,057</b>	<b>4,495</b>	<b>868,338</b>
<b>ACCUMULATED DEPRECIATION:</b>						
At 1 April 2022	12,767	105,023	57,596	32,946	1,798	210,130
Charge for the Year	9,889	8,752	1,473	3,757	450	24,321
Disposals	(75)	-	(2,008)	(4,627)	-	(6,710)
<b>At 31 March 2023</b>	<b>22,581</b>	<b>113,775</b>	<b>57,061</b>	<b>32,076</b>	<b>2,248</b>	<b>227,741</b>
<b>NET BOOK VALUE:</b>						
At 31 March 2022	46,289	524,453	983	7,068	2,697	581,490
<b>At 31 March 2023</b>	<b>84,338</b>	<b>515,701</b>	<b>23,330</b>	<b>14,981</b>	<b>2,247</b>	<b>640,597</b>

## SEVERN GORGE COUNTRYSIDE TRUST

### NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

For the year ended 31 March 2023

#### 7. FIXED ASSET INVESTMENTS

	2023 £	2022 £
Balance brought forward	431,335	435,225
Additions	167,493	482,598
Disposals	(109,636)	(484,950)
Revaluation adjustment	(25,034)	(1,538)
	<hr/>	<hr/>
Balance carried forward	464,158	431,335
	<hr/> <hr/>	<hr/> <hr/>
Historical cost of investments held at 31 March 2023	484,925	432,873
	<hr/> <hr/>	<hr/> <hr/>

Investments are acquired to provide fixed funding for certain of the Designated Funds set up by the Trust (see Note 11).

	2023		2022	
	Original cost £	Market value £	Original cost £	Market value £
<b>Abundance</b>				
- Telford & Wrekin Climate Action Investment	910	910	-	-
<b>Aberdeen Standard Capital</b>				
- Offshore Income Fund	-	-	-	-
- Offshore Global Fixed Interest	-	-	-	-
- Phoenix Fund	-	-	-	-
- Investment portfolio	484,015	463,248	432,873	431,335
	<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>
	484,925	464,158	432,873	431,335
	<hr/> <hr/>	<hr/> <hr/>	<hr/> <hr/>	<hr/> <hr/>

#### 8. DEBTORS

	2023 £	2022 £
Trade debtors	17,064	64,421
Prepayments	663	526
	<hr/>	<hr/>
	17,727	64,947
	<hr/> <hr/>	<hr/> <hr/>

## SEVERN GORGE COUNTRYSIDE TRUST

### NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

For the year ended 31 March 2023

#### 9. CURRENT ASSET INVESTMENTS

	2023 £	2022 £
Short term deposits	37,495	86,734

#### 10. CREDITORS - amounts falling due within one year

	2023 £	2022 £
Trade Creditors	6,486	16,448
	<u>6,486</u>	<u>16,448</u>

#### 11. ANALYSIS OF CHARITABLE FUNDS

	At 1 April 2022 £	Income £	Expend- iture £	Other recognised gains/ (losses) £	Trans- fers £	At 31 March 2023 £
<b>Analysis of movements in unrestricted funds</b>						
General Fund	4,204	315,075	(343,315)	469,290	(176,982)	268,272
Long Term Income Fund	204,976	9,684	(3,912)	-	175,000	385,748
Land and Structures Contingency Accommodation Fund	6,950	-	-	-	-	6,950
Revaluation Reserve	174,800	-	(4,600)	-	-	170,200
Lloyds Surrender Premium fund	280,918	-	-	(37,980)	-	242,938
Postcode Lottery Access Fund	39,000	-	-	-	(4,000)	35,000
Farm the Flow Carry Over From 21/22	13,400	-	-	-	-	13,400
Carry Over From 22/23	1,095	-	-	-	-	1,095
	10,500	-	-	-	-	10,500
	-	-	-	-	5,982	5,982
	<u>731,639</u>	<u>9,684</u>	<u>(8,512)</u>	<u>(37,980)</u>	<u>176,982</u>	<u>871,813</u>

## SEVERN GORGE COUNTRYSIDE TRUST

### NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

For the year ended 31 March 2023

#### 11. ANALYSIS OF CHARITABLE FUNDS continued

	At 1 April 2022	Income	Expend- iture	Other recognised gains/ (losses)	Trans- fers	At 31 March 2023
	£	£	£	£	£	£
<b>Analysis of movements in restricted funds</b>						
Alcoa Grant	6,934	-	(182)	-	-	6,752
Primary Care Trust						
- New Office project	66,363	-	(1,747)	-	-	64,616
Councillors Pride Grant	300		-	-	-	300
Awards for All						
-Benthall Edge Path Gorge Parish Council	10,000		(10,000)	-	-	-
- Family Friendly walks		500	-	-	-	500
Telford & Wrekin Council						
- King's Coronation Grant		1,635	(70)	-	-	1,565
Wrekin Housing group						
- Community Fund		1,000	-	-	-	1,000
	<u>83,597</u>	<u>3,135</u>	<u>(11,999)</u>	<u>-</u>	<u>-</u>	<u>74,733</u>
Total Funds	<u>819,440</u>	<u>327,894</u>	<u>(363,826)</u>	<u>431,310</u>	<u>-</u>	<u>1,214,818</u>

## SEVERN GORGE COUNTRYSIDE TRUST

### NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

For the year ended 31 March 2023

#### 12. PENSION -continued

	2023 %	2022 %
Rate of increase in salaries	3.95	4.65
Pension increases	2.8	3.5
Rate of discount	4.8	2.8
Inflation - RPI	-	-
- CPI	2.7	3.4

The liabilities are determined using the projected unit method as distinct from the aggregate method used in the triennial valuation. Under the projected unit method, the current service costs will increase as the members of the scheme approach retirement. On this basis, the calculated notional funding position, in respect of the Scheme at 31 March 2023, and at previous year-end, was as follows:

	2023 £000s	2022 £000s
Value of market assets	981	977
Value of accrued liabilities	(990)	(1,422)
Deficit	(9)	(445)

The actuary has confirmed that the valuation made above under the requirements of FRS102 does not indicate that there is either an immediate funding requirement or any immediate need to change the agreed contribution rates currently in force. The actuary has excluded from both assets and liabilities items which have neutral effect on the Scheme's financial position i.e. additional voluntary contributions, annuities secured in respect of pensions in payment and insurance contract for death in service benefits.

## SEVERN GORGE COUNTRYSIDE TRUST

### NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

For the year ended 31 March 2023

#### 12. PENSION –continued

The charge to the Statement of Financial Activities over the financial year comprised:

	2023 £000s	2022 £000s
<b>Operating charge</b>		
Current service cost	51	47
Admin expense	1	1
Past service cost/(gain)	-	-
	<hr/>	<hr/>
	52	48
	<hr/>	<hr/>
<b>Other income/charges</b>		
Expected return on pension scheme assets	(27)	(19)
Interest on pension scheme liabilities	39	29
	<hr/>	<hr/>
	12	10
	<hr/>	<hr/>
<b>Total charge to expenditure in the SOFA</b>	<hr/>	<hr/>
	64	58
	<hr/>	<hr/>

Movement in balance sheet deficit figures during the year:

	2023 £	2022 £
Deficit in scheme at 31 March 2022	(445,000)	(465,000)
Movement in year		
Current service cost	(51,000)	(47,000)
Past service (cost)/gain	-	-
Admin expense	(1,000)	(1,000)
Net interest/return on assets	(12,000)	(10,000)
Contributions	30,710	25,995
Actuarial gain/(loss)	469,290	52,005
	<hr/>	<hr/>
Deficit in scheme at 31 March 2023	(9,000)	(445,000)
	<hr/>	<hr/>

#### 13. MEMBERS' GUARANTEE

Severn Gorge Countryside Trust is a company limited by guarantee. Members' liability under the Memorandum of Association is limited to £1 each and the liability continues for one year after the cessation of membership.

#### 14. TAXATION STATUS

The company is a charity under the provisions of the Income and Corporation Taxes Act 1988.

## **SEVERN GORGE COUNTRYSIDE TRUST**

### NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

For the year ended 31 March 2023

#### 15. CAPITAL COMMITMENTS

At the year end 31 March 2023, the trust was not committed to purchase any assets (2022 - £26,479).

**Severn Gorge Countryside Trust**

Darby Road, Coalbrookdale  
Telford, Shropshire, TF8 7EP

Telephone 01952 433880  
[www.severngorge.org.uk](http://www.severngorge.org.uk)



**SEVERN GORGE COUNTRYSIDE TRUST**

England & Wales - Charity number 1004508

---

# Accounts

---

# **Trustees' Report & Annual Accounts 2021-22**



## Message from the Chair

Having walked with our dogs in the woods throughout Ironbridge Gorge for the last 40 years, I felt very privileged to be elected as Chair of the Severn Gorge Countryside Trust this year. Many thanks must be given to our previous Chair, Nick Downes, for all his support and commitment over the last five years and for continuing as vice-chair. This year we have seen a lessening of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic with the welcome return of the volunteers supporting the Trust work with their enthusiasm and diverse skills. Group sizes are still limited and we now have an online booking system for members. One interesting development resulting from the pandemic has been a much greater use of technology for communication. The volunteers now have their own communication network and Trustees are using a blend of both online and in-person meetings to suit every occasion and personal circumstance. As much of the income for the Trust is provided by the rental from commercial properties, there are signs that tenants are struggling with their rental payments as they try and return to full trading. The Trust are constructively engaging with any tenant in difficulty to find mutually acceptable solutions. A decision was made to invest in capital machinery in order to bring more of our work in-house and give more flexibility over timing and options for our complex work programme. This will also result in long term financial savings. Felling work on trees suffering with ash dieback has been planned under the Trust's annual schedule and we will have to acknowledge how different the landscape will look in the next 5 years. Trustees recognise that woodlands are dynamic and the woods of today are vastly different to a hundred years ago and will be very different again in 50 to 100 years' time. I joined the Trust as a Gorge Parish Council nomination in 2011. It is my firm belief that the Severn Gorge Countryside staff and Trustees are the custodians of one of the most important assets of the Gorge for residents, visitors and for their impact to mitigate climate change. With this in

mind, the Trustees have now set up a Climate Change Working Group to assess the carbon emitted and carbon sequestered by the Trust. This information will be used for future management decisions and to guide our research. Many thanks to John Box and Kate Chetwood for all their work in collating the information and to find ways in which the Trust can offset its unavoidable residual CO2 emissions. As part of this commitment to our environmental aims, we now have an Investment Working Group and the Trust resolved to stop investing in fossil fuel companies.

The Trustees said farewell and many thanks to three of our Trustees, Alan McKenzie, Andy Cooke and Simon Harris. We welcome Caroline Bagnall as the Shropshire Council nomination; Sarah Chadwick as the Madeley Town Council nomination and Michael Burton as the Broseley Town Council nomination and we are delighted that Andy Cooke will still be supporting the Trust as part of the Ecology Group. Many will remember our former Trustee, David Edwards. His family generously donated a bench in his memory and the Trust have located this in Bower Yard which was one of his favourite places in the Gorge.

Finally, I must thank Russell Rowley, CEO; Kate Chetwood, Company Secretary and Finance Officer; Nathan Morris, Head of Countryside; Emily Holmes, Assistant Countryside Officer; together with our volunteers and contractors for all their wonderful work promoting, protecting and conserving the living landscape of the Ironbridge Gorge for the benefit of local people, visitors and wildlife.

Thank you

**Maureen Bragg**

Chair, Severn Gorge Countryside Trust



# Severn Gorge Countryside Trust Trustees' Report 31 March 2022

The Trustees are pleased to present their report and the audited financial statements for the year ended 31 March 2022

## Reference and administrative details

Charity Name: **Severn Gorge Countryside Trust**

Charity number: **1004508**

Company number: **02647374**

## Registered Office & operational address

Severn Gorge Countryside Trust  
Darby Road, Coalbrookdale  
Telford  
Shropshire  
TF8 7EP

Telephone 01952 433880  
www.severngorge.org.uk

## Auditors

Muras Baker Jones Limited  
Regent House, Bath Avenue  
Wolverhampton, WV1 4EG

## Bankers

The Co-operative Bank  
Colmore Row  
Birmingham  
B3 3BA

## Investment Advisers

Aberdeen Standard Capital  
1 George Street,  
Edinburgh  
EH2 2LL



## Board of Trustees

The Directors of the charitable company (the Charity) are its Trustees for the purpose of charity law and throughout this report are collectively referred to as the Trustees. The Board of Trustees is supported by a Company Secretary who is responsible for governance administration.

The elected Trustees as at 31 March 2022 are as follows:

Name	Nominated by:
Maureen Bragg (Chair)	Community Trustee
Nick Downes (Vice Chair)	Barrow Parish Council
Mick Burton	Broseley Town Council
Gina Rowe	Community Trustee
Sarah Chadwick	Madeley Town Council
Caroline Bagnall	Shropshire Council
John Box	Shropshire Wildlife Trust
Max Speke	Sutton Maddock Parish Council
Chris Turley	Telford & Wrekin Council
Carolyn Healy	Telford & Wrekin Council
Dylan Webster	Telford & Wrekin Council
Alan Taylor	The Gorge Parish Council

## Staff

Russell Rowley	CEO
Kate Chetwood	Company Secretary and Finance Officer
Nathan Morris	Head of Countryside
Emily Holmes	Assistant Countryside Officer



# Structure, Governance and Management

Severn Gorge Countryside Trust was set up in 1991 with the primary aim of promoting, protecting and conserving the living landscape of the Ironbridge Gorge for the benefit of local people, visitors and wildlife. It is a registered charity governed by a Trustee Board and depends on staff, contractors and volunteers to help manage the land.

In this section you can find out more about how the charity is run, how we work with the local community and how we ensure a sustainable organisation that is fit for the future.

## Governing Document

Severn Gorge Countryside Trust is a registered charity and a company limited by guarantee under the Companies Act and governed by its Memorandum and Articles of Association originally dated

20 September 1991 (amended June 2009 and December 2013 to update governance arrangements).



## Who Governs the Trust?

The Trust is governed by its Committee of Management (COM) made up of several Member Organisations and Community Trustees. The Trustees are all volunteers with careers and experience in a wide variety of fields.

In accordance with the Memorandum and Articles of Association, Trustees are elected by the membership for terms of four years. At the end of the four-year term Trustees may stand for re-election. Nominations for new Trustees are considered each year prior to the Annual General Meeting (AGM). All Member Organisations are circulated with invitations to nominate Trustees, advising them of any retiring Trustees and requesting nominations for the AGM. The Member Organisations are made up of a variety of local organisations that have a keen interest in the Ironbridge Gorge and also two Community Trustee places.

When considering appointing Trustees, the Committee of Management (Board of Directors) has regard to the requirement of any specialist skills needed.

## Trustee induction and training

The Trust provides an induction session to brief new Trustees on their legal obligations under charity and company law, the contents of the Memorandum and Articles of Association, the committee structure and decision-making processes, the Development Strategy and recent financial performance of the charity. They are also advised on the future plans and objectives of the Trust. During the induction they meet the CEO, Company Secretary and other employees. They are advised of appropriate Trustee training courses and are encouraged to attend.

## Management

The COM is responsible for setting policies and ensuring legality and good practice in accordance with the Memorandum and Articles of Association of the Trust and the Charities Act 2011. The Committee of Management meets formally each quarter. At each meeting, the COM considers reports from the management team on areas such as strategic development, financial performance and health and safety. Addition-

ally, as appropriate the COM considers progress on current and future projects, governance and the annual budget and workplan.

The CEO is responsible to the COM for the management of the Trust and the conduct of the Trust's business in accordance with policies and budgets set by the COM. They are responsible for the day-to-day operation of the Trust within this framework and are authorised to act on behalf of the Trust on all matters other than those which by law are required to be decided by the COM. The Chief Executive is supported by Trust staff. The Trust also engages a number of professional advisers to assist in its work.

COM met four times in 2021/2022, due to the ongoing covid pandemic the meetings were moved to a virtual platform, Teams.

The COM has three sub-committees/working groups. These have advisory powers and decision making is retained by the COM.

The Personnel Committee is elected annually from the COM and meets to advise on staffing issues and employee training, development and support. The Personnel Committee met twice this year. They are also responsible for reviewing Trustee training needs.

## Working Groups

Two working groups were set up in 2020/2021 to review specific areas of the Trust's work. These were the Investment Working Group to look at how the Trust can change its current investment portfolio to a more ethical model and the Climate Change Working Group to look at what the Trust can do immediately and in the longer term to reduce its CO<sub>2</sub> emissions.

## Investment Working Group

The Investment Working Group (IWG) met twice in 2021/22.

As part of our commitment to our environmental aims, the Trust has stopped investing in fossil fuel companies. No future investments will be made in companies that derive income from the extraction of coal or oil.

The IWG also looked at including additional environmental, social and governance (ESG) and ethical screening options for the portfolio.

A new Investment policy was drawn up to reflect the changes to the Trusts investments.

## Climate Change Working Group

Following the Trust's Climate Change Declaration in November 2019 we have been looking at ways to tackle the causes of climate change. For example, by reducing our own emissions, caring for the land that captures and stores carbon, exploring flood mitigation options and restoring wildlife habitats that are threatened.

We are having to adapt to unpredictable weather patterns including restoring the damage caused by heavy rain, high winds and droughts.

The climate change challenge may be large but so is the opportunity. We can lock up carbon in the woodlands we manage using Continuous Cover forestry and create more opportunities for wildlife to thrive while continuing to champion renewable energy and slash our carbon emissions.

The Climate Change Working Group met once in 21/22. The working group has created a carbon calculator to enable the Trust to measure and monitor its carbon emissions. This calculator will continue to be refined over the coming year and will look into how the methane emitted from the Trusts flock of Soay sheep can be calculated. We are also investigating ways to calculate the amount of carbon locked up in the Trust's woodlands and meadows.

Our pension fund, like many organisations is managed independently and we have no direct influence over how the pension funds are invested. However, we continue to lobby our pension fund (Shropshire Pension Fund) to divest from fossil fuels and hope that they will consider the best approach for them to meet their commitment to prioritise the interests of the pension fund.

Overleaf are our annual CO<sub>2</sub> emissions for 21/22.

# Annual Carbon Calculator

April 2021 to March 2022 – Report, Reduce, Change

## Summary

The focus is on CO<sub>2</sub> emissions from fossil fuels (oil, gas, coal). The main sources of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions currently are the two Trust vehicles (Land Rover and Minibus) together with staff vehicles used for Trust business and the gas boiler. The electricity comes from 100% renewable sources and is monitored, reduced if practicable, and reported. The gas comes from natural gas but not from a renewable source. This will be reviewed in early 2023 ahead of the contract ending in April 2023. The approximate weight of logs used in the stove is monitored but those CO<sub>2</sub> emissions do not form part of these calculations as logs are renewable. The unavoidable residual emissions are 4.1 tonnes CO<sub>2</sub>. A carbon reduction plan is being prepared that deals with the supply of gas from renewable sources rather than natural gas and with the vehicle replacements when these become necessary.

Scope 1: direct emissions of CO <sub>2</sub> (kg) annually from fuel combustion and Trust vehicles (see Notes & Sources)			Scope 2: indirect emissions of CO <sub>2</sub> (kg) annually from purchased electricity (see Notes & Sources)			Scope 3: other indirect emissions of CO <sub>2</sub> (kg) annually: for example, transport-related activities in non-Trust vehicles, national grid transmission and distribution, outsourced activities, water, waste disposal (see Notes & Sources)		
Source of Scope 1 CO <sub>2</sub> emissions		kgCO <sub>2</sub> e/year	Source of Scope 2 CO <sub>2</sub> emissions		kgCO <sub>2</sub> e/year	Source of Scope 3 CO <sub>2</sub> emissions		kgCO <sub>2</sub> e/year
Gas boiler - kWh annually	6,445	1,180	Electricity - kWh annually	5,602	0	Electricity grid transmission & distribution - kWh annually	5,602	0
Wood burners - weight of logs annually	3 to 4	0				Gas grid transmission & distribution		0
Landrover (diesel, 2950 kg GVW) - annual mileage	5368	2,292				No figures given in Government guidance and it is assumed to be zero		
Minibus (diesel, 3960 kg GVW) - annual mileage	666	284				Water supply & Water treatment - cubic metres annually	23	10
Toyota Hilux (diesel, 2730kg GVW) - annual mileage	2947	966				Total emissions (Scope 3)	10	
Fiat 500 (petrol 1.142kg GVW) - annual mileage	494	119						
<b>Total emissions (Scope 1)</b>		<b>4,842</b>	<b>Total emissions (Scope 2)</b>		<b>0</b>	<b>Total emissions (Scope 3)</b>		<b>10</b>

**FINAL OUTCOME: 4.9 tonnes CO<sub>2</sub>**

[Notes & Sources overleaf>>](#)

## NOTES & SOURCES

**Renewable energy supplies:** Electricity or gas supplied from purely renewable sources where the supplier can demonstrate that the energy supplied to customers only comes from renewable sources can be included in calculations as having zero carbon emissions.

**Electricity:** is supplied from 100% renewable sources by OPUS energy on a contract until February 2023. With Opus Advance, our electricity comes from renewable sources including solar, wind, hydro and anaerobic digestion (AD).

[www.opusenergy.com/our-energy-sources](http://www.opusenergy.com/our-energy-sources)

Transmission and distribution factors should be used to report the Scope 3 emissions associated with national grid losses; the energy loss that occurs in getting the electricity from the power plant to the organisations that purchase it. Not included in assessment as electricity purchased is from 100% renewable sources.

**Gas:** is supplied by Opus Energy on a contract from April 2020 to April 2023. "The gas we supply to our customers is natural gas. This is, broadly speaking, the case for all energy suppliers in the UK. Biomethane (sometimes called "green gas" or "biogas") is considered renewable but is not widely available. It is mixed with natural gas in small quantities to reduce the carbon footprint of gas consumption; according to BEIS, gas supplied in the UK in 2018 was 0.4% biomethane. The Green Gas Certification Scheme (GGCS) certifies producers of biomethane in the UK. This is produced by anaerobic digestion (a renewable technology) and exported to the national gas grid. For every kilowatt equivalent of green gas injected into the grid, the producer is issued with a Renewable Gas Guarantee of Origin (RGGO). Energy suppliers can buy these certificates and offset them against a customers' consumption. The money is used to further develop biomethane production, helping to create a less carbon intensive gas infrastructure. We don't currently offer an official customer product for either of the above options, but we hope to in the near future, as there has been some demand from our customers for such an offering." Opus Energy email 29 May 2020.

**Wood burners:** CO<sub>2e</sub> emissions from the two wood burners are not included as wood is renewable energy source.

The CO<sub>2</sub> released by burning wood was accumulated over decades in the trees and would eventually be released naturally. This should be separately reported and can be counted as carbon neutral. "Due to the biogenic differences between fossil fuels and biomass, they are categorized differently in national inventories. Emissions of CO<sub>2</sub> from the combustion of biomass are reported for informational purposes, but not included in national totals." <https://ghgprotocol.org/calculation-tools-faq>.

"Carbon dioxide produced from biologically-sequestered carbon, e.g. from the combustion of biomass for electricity and/or heat generation, or from other industrial processes, such as industrial fermentation, should be reported separately to emissions in scopes 1, 2, and 3. This is because the carbon dioxide would have been emitted anyway when the plants - from which the biomass is derived - decayed naturally at the end of their life. However, two other GHGs – nitrous oxide and methane – are commonly emitted when biomass is combusted. These would not be emitted during natural decay and any nitrous oxide or methane emissions from biomass/biofuel consumption should therefore be included in your emissions under the three scopes. This is the approach generally taken in international accounting standards. " Page 62 of 'Environmental Reporting Guidelines' (HM Government, 2019).

Carolyn Healy email 7 May 2020: "Paul Allan from the Centre for Alternative Technology doesn't count burning logs as contributing to global CO<sub>2</sub>. He considers above ground carbon as part of the natural carbon cycle that the earth can manage. The idea of using tree planting and rewilding to sequester carbon being emitted from fossil fuels is that it's the only real way of taking it out of the atmosphere." Paul Allan is CAT's External Relations Officer and heads their Zero Carbon Project [www.youtube.com/watch?v=UUJs4ZfQkI4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UUJs4ZfQkI4)

**Office building:** The Severn Gorge Countryside Trust is based in an award-winning sustainable building. The office is timber framed, wool insulated and heated by two log burners. The outside cladding is larch which we harvested from our woodlands. The office has a Mechanical Ventilation with Heat Recovery (MVHR) ventilation system that both supplies and extracts air throughout the office. This system is used to reduce the heating and cooling demands of buildings. The (MVHR)

that continually draws and circulates fresh air from outside, pre warmed by heat exchangers capturing heat from the stale air as it is expelled. The roof is made up from approximately ten thousand western red cedar shingles. The office is insulated with sheep wool mixed with recycled polyester; it has remarkable properties, in that during the winter it keeps the building warm and in the summer, it keeps the building cool.

**CO<sub>2</sub>e (carbon dioxide equivalent)** is a standard unit for measuring carbon footprints. The idea is to express the impact of each different greenhouse gas (CO<sub>2</sub>, methane, nitrous oxide) in terms of the amount of CO<sub>2</sub> that would create the same amount of warming. That way, a carbon footprint consisting of lots of different greenhouse gases can be expressed as a single number.

**Detailed official guidance** Environmental Reporting Guidelines, HM Government, March 2019 [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/850130/Env-reporting-guidance\\_inc\\_SECR\\_31March.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/850130/Env-reporting-guidance_inc_SECR_31March.pdf)

Conversion factors (electricity, electricity transmission & distribution, natural gas, water, waste, vehicles). [www.gov.uk/government/publications/greenhouse-gas-reporting-conversion-factors-2021](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/greenhouse-gas-reporting-conversion-factors-2021) – full set for advanced users in order to include the Land Rover and minibus which are classed as ‘Delivery Vehicles’. These are set annually in May.

**Scope 1, Scope 2 & Scope 3** The Greenhouse Gas Protocol (<https://ghgprotocol.org>) is recognized by the UK government as an independent standard for reporting greenhouse gases. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Carbon\\_emissions\\_reporting](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Carbon_emissions_reporting).



## Planning for the Future

The significance of the Trust’s landholdings dictates the need for a planned, long-term approach to give direction and continuity to management.

This is achieved through comprehensive management plans for the Trust’s sites and a Development Strategy that governs the work of the Trust.

The Development Strategy was approved by Trustees in November 2017 and will guide the work of the Trust until the end of 2028. It sets out the Trust’s vision, aims and plans for achieving its charitable objectives, identifies the successful methods of working that will be continued, the developments that will be introduced over the ten years and the opportunities that will be taken up if time and resources allow. Copies of the full strategy can be downloaded from the website ([www.severngorge.org.uk](http://www.severngorge.org.uk)) or obtained from the Trust Office.

## Annual Work Plan/Budget

Annual work plans and budgets are developed to ensure the core work in the management plans and Development Strategy are achieved without overstressing the Trust’s resources or compromising its long-term viability.

The annual work plan for 2021/2022 was set from the 2018/2028 Development Strategy.

## Risk Management

In accordance with the Charity Commission’s Statement of Recommended Practice (SORP) 2005, Trustees have a risk management strategy in place which comprises:

- ◆ An annual review of the risks the Trust may face, which also identifies any new risks that the Trust may be exposed to
- ◆ The establishment of systems and procedures to mitigate against those risks identified in the review; and
- ◆ The implementation of procedures to prevent any potential impact on the charity should those risks materialise.

The Trust believes that risk management is an essential part of good business practice and will continue to ensure that risk management principles become incorporated into all aspects of its work.

It should be noted that any risk management system can only manage risks and not eliminate them.

Three major risks have been identified and arrangements have been put in place to mitigate these risks:

**Future levels of income** – if our income falls then the Trust would not be able to continue to manage the ‘living landscape’ of the Ironbridge Gorge for the benefit of local people, visitors and the environment. The majority of our income is generated from rental income from our property portfolio. The Trust pay a management fee to Telford & Wrekin Council to manage these properties. We will continue to work with them to look at ways of diversifying the property portfolio by looking to invest in more modern properties to ensure the level of income is sufficient to cover the majority of our core costs. Ensuring that the portfolio is effectively and efficiently managed is key to generating sufficient income to enable the Trust to fulfil its charitable aims. Additional funding will continue to be sought via grants and other funding opportunities.

**Climate Change** – we are assessing all of our operations from travel to gas and electricity usage to reduce our CO<sub>2</sub> emissions wherever possible. We are also looking at the best ways to manage our woodlands and meadows to ensure they are as resilient as possible.

**Ash Dieback** – We have been monitoring the spread of ash dieback in the Gorge since it hit the headlines in 2012. 2020 was the year when the extent and severity became obvious in the Gorge. The Trust is continuing to use an independent arboriculturist to survey the trees on the Trust land and has written a policy to inform the work of the Trust and the treatment of trees affected by ash die back. Additional funding has been set aside to deal with the increase in planned and reactive tree work.

## Public Benefit

This annual report looks at what we have achieved over the previous twelve months. The report looks at the work and outcomes of each key aim and the benefits that has been provided to the public. In setting our aims and planning our activities, Trustees have given careful consideration to the Charity Commission’s guidance on Public Benefit.

Trustees believe that the provision of such benefit is an integral part to each of the Trust’s charitable objectives. We work hard to deliver public benefit by promoting and protecting the beautiful landscape of the Ironbridge Gorge for everyone to enjoy. The Trust land and activities are available to all and we try to make special provision wherever possible for the disabled and disadvantaged.

We believe that the work of the Trust has a positive impact on people, communities, wildlife and the environment.

This report also helps us ensure our aims, objectives and activities remained focused on our stated purpose. In order to achieve our aims the Trust must strive to maintain an efficient and effective organisation, that is well governed, professionally managed and which has the capacity, infrastructure and support necessary to deliver them.



# Objectives and activities

## WHAT WE DO...

The Trust is responsible for promoting, protecting and conserving the living landscape of the Ironbridge Gorge for the benefit of local people and visitors. It aims to balance the needs of public access, landscape and nature conservation, safeguarding historic and cultural features, whilst engaging with the public and developing a wider awareness and knowledge of the Trust and its work.

To achieve these aims the Trust has five main charitable objectives:

to enhance a living and working landscape that retains its locally distinctive characteristics, habitats and species populations

to conserve and interpret, where appropriate all features of cultural and historical significance

to provide inspiring experiences of the natural world and encourage people to manage their local environment through volunteering opportunities

to provide high quality access for informal recreation for the enjoyment of all and to encourage outdoor activity for the benefit of health and wellbeing

to develop and promote a wider awareness and understanding of the Trust's work



# HOW WE DO IT...

Examples of activities carried out and impacts and benefits achieved under each of these strategic aims are as follows:

## Landscape and Nature Conservation

**AIM:** to enhance a living and working landscape that retains its locally distinctive characteristics, habitats and species populations.

**Looking after and managing our sites is a keyway that we can directly benefit wildlife. Each of our sites is an exceptional place for wildlife with many containing outstanding examples of scarce and uncommon habitats and species. Every year they surprise and delight visitors to them.**

**All of our land is open to the public and provides excellent opportunities for contact with nature which in turn has a positive effect on the quality of life and well-being of the community.**

Each year, the Trust undertakes extensive management programmes to safeguard these special places. For example,

- ◆ clearing woody regeneration from the floor of Patten's Rock Quarry, an example of limestone grassland with colonies of Twayblade, Bee, Greater Butterfly and Common Spotted orchids
- ◆ managing the merging of areas of woodland, grass and scrub. These untidy and complex edges are where insects thrive and food chains begin
- ◆ clearing scrub trying to colonise the important small patches of heathland found in The Crostan and Dale Coppice
- ◆ managing important areas of wildflower rich hay meadow and pasture. By using our flock of Soay sheep together with contractors and volunteers, the Trust is able to ensure that the techniques and machinery used are ideally suited to these small sites and based on traditional methods

### Ecological Monitoring

The Trust commissions ecological consultants to carry out annual ecological monitoring of Trust sites. Ecological monitoring provides the Trust with the information required to assess and respond to ecosystem changes.



Monitoring can also assist with the identification of new environmental concerns, the prioritisation of issues, and the evaluation of trends over time. Using the information gathered, the Trust can plan its future management of sites.

Our ecological monitoring reviews carried out on key sites have shown the high quality of our habitats and their management.

Managing such a complex landscape relies on clear objectives and good quality ecological and management information. But in reality, this is complicated by the fact that any ecosystem is in a constant state

of change which can sometimes make meeting our objectives more challenging.

An annual ecology day is held during the summer months where our ecologist meets with Trust staff and the ecology working group to look at the sites that have been managed and discuss proposals as to how to best manage the sites to achieve their objectives.

We continue to meet with the ecology working group including John Handley from CH Ecology on survey methods and targets.

While we postponed the Countryside Stewardship (CS) Application, we did bring forward some monitoring of sites to help ensure that they were eligible for the restoration/maintenance of species rich grassland option within the scheme.

We have worked with CH Ecology to simplify the working copies; the document has become difficult to use making information hard to find. The new layout will be on a single sheet of A4 with all the key information readily available along with comments from the years monitoring. We are also looking into using Geographical Information Systems (GIS) to store data to make it even more accessible.

At our annual Ecology Day, the notes made at the ecology day in 2019 (pre pandemic) were reviewed, and there was a discussion on the rewilding strategy, Shakespeare meadow, the new working copy document, woodland edges of the Ropewalk and Wilderness, Local Nature Recovery Strategies and Pattens Rock Quarry. Visits were made to Shakespeare Meadow and the Ropewalk Meadow to discuss the meadows' management.

## 'Light gives Life'

The Trust was successful in applying for funding from the Potter Group Landfill Community Fund together with the Postcode Local Trust. The primary aim of the 'Light gives Life' wildlife corridor project is to secure measurable improvements in habitats for biodiversity. This will be achieved by creating edge habitat and enhancing wildlife corridors throughout six different sites within the Ironbridge Gorge World Heritage site.



Creating new varied habitats will provide a fantastic opportunity for wildlife to flourish and promote the wider economic and social benefits that healthy ecosystems offer.

3,039 metres of improved edge habitat will be created. Timber felled will be extracted where feasible and as much as possible turned into sustainable products including firewood, charcoal, sawn timber and turnery blanks, the latter which can lock up carbon longer term. We have finished work at the Crostan and Preenshead. The work was carried out by Watch Oak Tree Care and Access and Habitat Management in conjunction with Trust staff.

This work will also support/complement a possible dormouse re-introduction programme in discussion with the People's Trust for Endangered Species and Shropshire Dormouse Group.

## Dormice

The dormice project was a collaboration between the Trust and the Shropshire Dormouse Group, receiving a £500 grant from the Shropshire Ecological Data Network (SEDN) to purchase footprint tunnel materials. We were exploring the presence/absence of dormouse

and whether the River Severn forms a barrier to dormice distribution in Telford & Wrekin and if woods under the Trust's management are suitable for dormouse re-introduction.

The project covered five woodlands with surveys carried out between June and November 2021. We surveyed forty-nine dormouse boxes in Sutton Wood, and 192 footprint tunnels located in five woodlands: Sutton Wood, Haywood, Jiggers Bank, Benthall and Workhouse Coppice.

The dormouse box and footprint tunnel surveys were intended to provide additional information, to be analysed along with ecological and forestry surveys over several years within Trust sites regarding suitability of habitat for dormice. It was delivered with support from thirty-four volunteers, and Telford & Wrekin Council staff, totalling 104.5 project days.

We learned as we went, including how to ID the footprints, the best places to put the tunnels, and how to find them. We held bi-weekly analysis sessions to ID the tunnel papers and look out for dormice prints. We found footprint activity was most active in the woodlands where we have been carrying out Continuous Cover Forestry works, highlighting the benefits of letting light reach the woodland floor allowing bramble and ground vegetation to develop. Unfortunately, we did not find any dormouse prints or signs of dormice in the boxes, however the data collected provides insight into which sites would be most suitable for a future dormice reintroduction based on the current mammal and bird activity.

## Beehives

The bees from our hives have been hard at work foraging and pollinating plants within at least a two-mile radius of the Trust office which takes in our amazing wildflower meadows at the Wilderness and Ropewalk.

We continue to learn how to manage our hives, paying attention to the weather conditions when we inspect the hives and trying to control potential swarms, not always successfully!



Whilst honey is one of the major benefits of keeping honeybees, we have also experimented with making beeswax wraps and wood furniture polish.

We sold over forty jars of our 'Ropewalk Honey' to local people.

## Deer Management

Deer can have a substantial impact on woodland vegetation and play a significant role in woodland ecosystem function. In the absence of control, deer populations can rise to very high densities due to lack of predators. Management of deer populations is necessary to limit their impact.

Under the Trust's Continuous Cover Forestry System, natural regeneration is the principle means of restocking our woodlands and an increasing deer population will adversely affect the success of natural regeneration.

Our management works will seek to reduce deer numbers to a point where the impact on the woodland and their associated plant communities are acceptable.

Unfortunately, we have struggled with our management works this year, in part due to our stalker being ill for a prolonged period. Deer management is still an important task that we need to undertake. We will continue to monitor the effects of deer as any improvements in reduced impact and activity will be lost if the frequency of shooting is further reduced or stopped.

## Forestry

The Trust continues to manage its woodlands under Continuous Cover Forestry principles which aim to create a structurally and visually diverse woodland ecosystem with trees of all sizes which helps to protect the soil and keep the land stable.

The new woodland management plan was approved by the Forestry Commission in 2021. The aspirations of the plan have not changed our forestry direction. The revised plan takes into account Ash Die Back (ADB) and climate change, it also has felling permissions for the next 10 years.

With ADB's hold tightening on the woods, we took the decision to use a clear fell system in three areas of woodland. This is not a permanent change in use of forestry system for the Trust, it is a tool we have used to tackle the ADB, which incorporates tree safety, earning income and fulfilling habitat improvement works linked to our Countryside Stewardship agreement. Jiggers Bank and a part of Vane coppice have been worked and all the ash trees within falling distance of a target have been felled. We sold the timber standing to Will Haywood. Will is a long-standing contractor and he carried out the work using a harvester and forwarder. Haywood will be worked in an analogous way in the winter of 2023.

## Countryside Stewardship

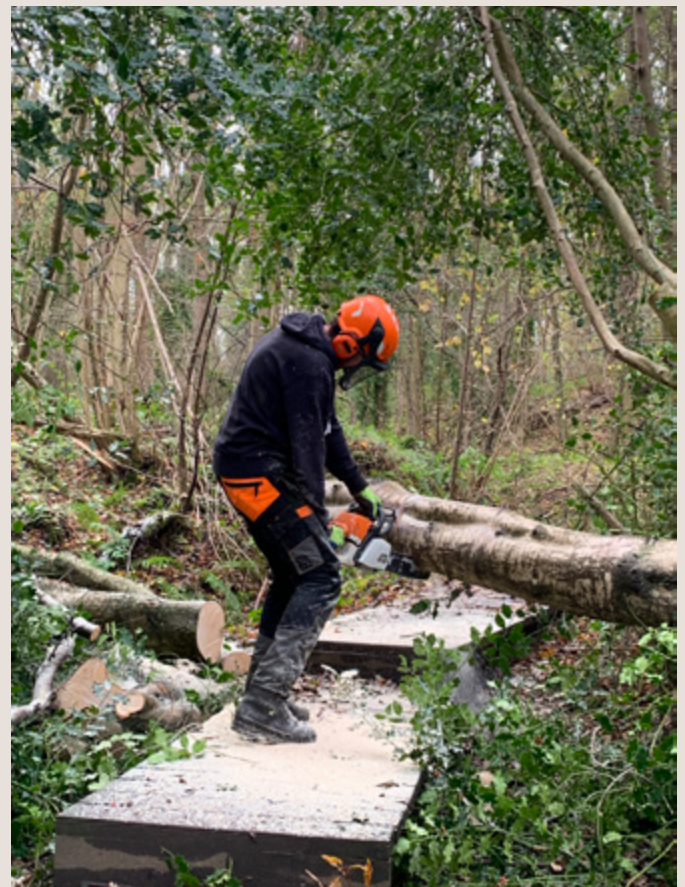
After postponing the application last year, we resubmitted it in April 2021 and were successful in getting an agreement which started on 1 January 2022. We entered a reduced area into the scheme, which in turn reduces the amount of grant income the Trust will receive but the agreement is now less complicated, and ultimately more achievable. Works included in the agreement include, ride mowing/creation, squirrel control, deer management, thinning and meadow management. We will also be undertaking capital works in fencing, gate replacement and hedge laying.

## Machinery Purchases

Like most organisations the Trust is constantly changing and evolving as new opportunities and challenges present themselves. To facilitate adapting to these changing circumstances the Committee of Management approved investment in capital purchases including a tractor, forwarding trailer and a 6.5-ton winch. This investment will aid staff in improving current processes, increase productivity and provide the capacity to undertake tasks in house.

## Hay cuts

Investing in the machinery has given us greater control and flexibility over the hay cuts. Our current contractor: is considering reducing his workload and no longer wants to undertake the hay cuts on his own. Having our own machinery (as we do already with the baler and wrapper) will enable us to continue managing the meadows to a high standard and would allow us to take advantage of weather windows and make hay whilst the sun shines! Our own machinery will also enable us to conduct works such as harrowing and mowing of headlands when it was best for the meadow rather than being at the mercy of contractors' workloads and timescales.



## Firewood Production and Estate Timber

We would like to increase the sales of firewood. The large amount of timber generated from the Western Power line clearance has been the catalyst to this production. Our own machinery will facilitate the processing and movement of the large volume of wood. It will assist with moving the saw logs onto the sawmill to produce material we can use on site, such as gateposts. We can maximise the use of timber that will be produced from tree safety work caused by ash die back.

## Ash Dieback

Having our own machinery will ensure that we are able to deal with the ongoing ADB crisis. The tree safety report produced by our consultant arborist, made for somber reading. We had to assess and work on over one hundred trees this year. It is likely that the situation is only going to get worse as the disease takes hold. We will continue to follow our approach approved by the Committee of Management, by working on trees next to paths, roads and houses and when possible, felling in groups or incorporating it into forestry works. As we have done at Jiggers Bank.

There will be an increase in tree felling throughout the Ironbridge Gorge due to ADB, and we need to keep working with T&W Council regarding tree management and keeping the local community informed.

## Sheep

The Sheep have continued to earn their keep, grazing all the hay meadows once the hay cut has been taken. We lambed well with one hundred percent survival rate. We took some wethers and a ram to the abattoir and sold it to the Lookers and local people.

## Arc GIS

We have continued to migrate mapping data over to our new ArcGIS programme. ArcGIS is used by Telford & Wrekin council as well as other partners, which allows for easy access and dissemination of mapping information. Some of ArcGIS's greatest benefits are its associated apps. One of these apps, called Survey123, allows for data to be easily collected on site, capturing a GPS location and photo, including options to write notes etc. The Trust is now using Survey123 to record culvert

checks, tree safety checks, and conduct biannual access surveys. The app is also being used by volunteers to report access infrastructure issues they encounter on SGCT sites.

Following on site data collection, the data can then be easily accessed and visualized on a map. This is helpful for staff and contractors because it provides a GPS location for any issues that need addressing, thus saving time. It also enables data collection in all weathers which is beneficial as using paper records during rainfall presented a challenge.

## Contractors

The Trust regularly uses over twenty local contractors to carry out a variety of works on its land. From landscape maintenance to tree surgery to repairs to historic brickwork, each self-employed contractor brings their own skills and knowledge to the work. Some of these contractors have worked for the Trust since its creation in 1991 and have built up a wealth of knowledge about the sites the Trust manages.

Some of the jobs contractors carry out on an annual basis include:

- ◆ hedge cutting
- ◆ hay cutting and baling
- ◆ ragwort spraying with citronella
- ◆ Japanese knotweed control
- ◆ ride mowing
- ◆ strimming of footpaths
- ◆ thistle topping
- ◆ bracken control

Contractors are also called in to undertake any 'reactive' work that happens. For example, when a tree has fallen across a path, a contractor will carry out the necessary work to make the tree safe and clear it from across the path.

Specialist work, such as the descaling and torque testing of the bolts on Jigger's bank rock face is also carried out by contractors. Contractors carry out maintenance twice a year by abseiling down the rock face and clearing any loose rock, cutting back small trees and testing the bolts that secure the netting on part of the rock face.

# Cultural and Historical Features

**Aim: to conserve and interpret, where appropriate all features of cultural and historical significance**

**The industrial past of the Ironbridge Gorge has left its mark on the area in more ways than just the Iron Bridge itself. Many types of industry thrived here, and the Trust looks after sixty historic structures from small retaining walls to brick arches, lime kilns to mine breathers and adit entrances. The Trust has spent over £275,000 in conserving the industrial heritage of the Ironbridge Gorge.**

The World Heritage Site status of the Ironbridge Gorge serves to remind us of this area's unique contribution to the history and development of industrialised society. The Trust will continue to conserve and interpret (where appropriate) features of cultural and historical significance for the benefit of the public, enabling them to have a greater understanding and appreciation of the industrial and cultural history of the area.

The Trust commissions an annual Structures Inspection Report. The structures are monitored from fixed baselines, any condition changes are noted, and recom-

mended actions identified. These resultant actions are further analysed from a risk management perspective looking at things like potential impact on highways, intensively used public spaces, and neighbours.

Five risk management priority categories are identified with required actions allocated to a category from level 0 (no action necessary) to level 4 (repair imminently).

In response to the annual report an action plan will be developed to implement, where possible, all level 4 actions or in discussion with engineers alternative risk mitigation strategies.

This year we checked Maws Wall for 'blown' bricks and checked our historic walls for loose stones.

Archaeological surveys are commissioned whenever required to ensure no features of cultural and historical significance are damaged by work and also to record anything found or uncovered for future reference.



# Community Engagement and Outdoor Learning

AIM: to provide inspiring experiences of the natural world and encourage people to manage their local environment through volunteering opportunities

**Providing opportunities for people to engage and interact with the natural world is a key remit for the Trust. Working together outdoors to conserve nature is a great way to engage with the natural environment. Opportunities like these are not just essential for personal development they also provide inspirational moments of awe and wonder which stay with people forever. Our Outdoor Learning Programme is about providing experiences that teach and inspire people.**

Our Volunteering Programme provides opportunities for the local community to learn more about and help with the management of the landscape on their doorstep. We hope that participants will be inspired and empowered to improve our environment for the benefit of nature and the community.

The land that we are responsible for provides a focus for community involvement. It also offers fantastic opportunities for research, education, exploration and, most importantly, having fun!

## Volunteering Programme

The Trust has a fantastic group of volunteers who for the past 16 years have contributed to helping the Trust achieve its access, landscape, and nature conservation objectives.

Due to Covid-19 the volunteer programme was paused until May 2021, however, was able to recommence in June 2021 and continued throughout the year. To mitigate risks, group sizes were limited to ten volunteers using a booking-in system. Our volunteers rose to the challenges of the pandemic with enthusiasm and they have continued to support the charity through another difficult year.



We had some great days coppicing, making cleft pales, scrub clearing, doing footpath maintenance, conducting ecological surveys, creating a new pollinator garden, carrying out dormouse project activities, and litter picking-walks. For partnership work, volunteers dismantled an old outdoor classroom at Madeley nursery, and cleared scrub and installed a new bench in Lodge Field in partnership with Ironbridge Meadows Group.

Thirty-three volunteers contributed 1,140 volunteer hours, nine of whom were new volunteers.

Although the 2020 volunteer Christmas party was cancelled due to the Covid-19 lockdown, we were able to hold the 2021 Christmas party outside with a walk, fires, food, drinks, and games. Two volunteers, Richard and Derek, created quizzes which were great fun, and volunteers Nigel and Teresa donated beautiful handmade wooden prizes.

# Access and Recreation

**Aim: to provide high quality access for informal recreation for the enjoyment of all and to encourage outdoor activity for the benefits of health and wellbeing.**

**Over the past 18 months the land we are responsible for managing has been a lifeline for hundreds of people. During very challenging times, access to the outdoors and nature has been a respite for many of us. During lockdowns, local people have visited our sites for the first time and have grown to love exploring their local area. These visits have now become an integral part of their lives. We estimate that the number of people visiting our sites over the pandemic doubled, clearly demonstrating the need for access to green spaces and its positive impact on our health and wellbeing.**

We aim for our sites to feel as natural as possible, so we strive to balance the need for good paths, signs and interpretation with the need to preserve the very sense of countryside we all head outdoors for. We have also tried to remove any unnecessary barriers to people's enjoyment, by removing squeeze stiles and replacing them with kissing gates and providing rest points to pause and savor the fantastic views. We still have improvements to make and will continue to strive to be better. Enabling people to explore and enjoy the natural world is fundamental to the work of the Trust and that is why all our land is free for everyone to enjoy.

As well as improvements on the ground, we continue to look at the quality of the experience we offer, from the clarity of our maps to the information and history that our free leaflets provide.

## Strategic Action Plan

Approximately twenty-five kilometres of footpaths have to be maintained each year. The Strategic Access Review which was completed in 2015 continues to be used to feed into the Annual Work Plan. The Strategic Action Plan will be updated each year using information taken from the bi-annual footpath surveys to identify any repairs or maintenance required. We are now using Survey 123, a mobile phone app to record any maintenance/repairs.



## Footpath Repairs

We are continuing to invest in the access infrastructure we have installed throughout the gorge. The increase in use of our sites over the pandemic, together with increasingly wet winters has meant that some of our footpaths/boardwalks have deteriorated quicker than anticipated. Our bi-annual survey picks up any area of footpath that need repairing. The repairs are then prioritised and resources allocated accordingly.

## Walking Festival

The main Ironbridge Walking Festival was cancelled in 2021 due to Covid-19, however a mini version was held in September. Trust ACO, Emily led a walk in Loamhole and Lydebrook Dingle, explaining the history, ecology, and management of the sites. SGCT volunteers also led walks; Cadi Price led a fascinating bat walk in Coalport and Jackfield, and Jackie Bletcher led a walk around the beautiful Lodge Field and Beeches Local Nature Reserves in Ironbridge.



## Family activity walks

The Trust has produced four circular 1km family trails using footpaths in Benthall, Haywood, Loamhole and Maws. All are part of a group of maps which show Milly and Orla the office dogs in cartoon form, each with a variety of activities to do whilst exploring the routes.

**Bounding in Benthall:** along past Doris the Dragon, the Lime kiln and Bower yard picnic site

**Maws Paws:** along the new Tile Trail, Preenshead and Boat Inn meadow path.

**Hilly Haywood Adventure:** up the zig zag path to Silkin Way and into Haywood Plantation.

**Splish Splash Splish in Loamhole Dingle:** along the path to the footbridge and stream and through the meadow.

All of the Milly and Orla family friendly walks can be downloaded from our website

## Walking Trail Leaflets

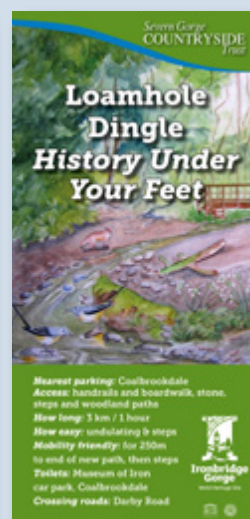
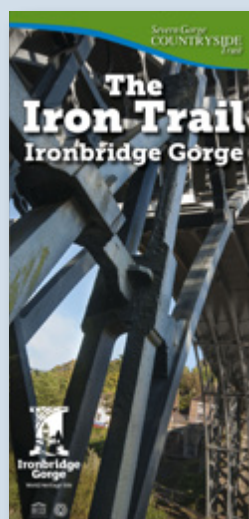
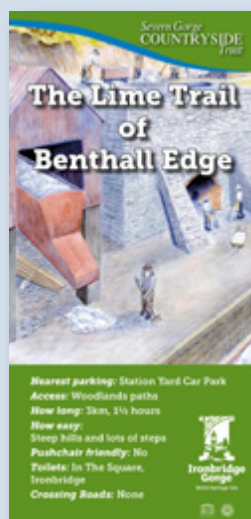
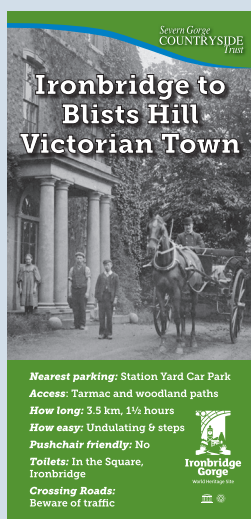
The Trust has produced five **free** Walking Trail leaflets that showcase some of the best walking routes around the Ironbridge Gorge World Heritage Site. The walks provide people with the opportunity to discover some of the hidden gems of the Gorge and learn more about the landscape and history of the area whilst they explore. Visitors can make a day of it by visiting some of

the many historic sites and attractions along the walks and stopping for a while for refreshment at one of the many cafés, pubs and restaurants in Ironbridge and the surrounding area.

The leaflets are available to download from our website, from the Visitor Information Centre and from various outlets in the Gorge. The leaflet dispenser in Station Road car park is regularly refilled and around 20,000 leaflets have been dispensed this year.

The route for the **'Iron Trail'** links existing paths into a circular walk that includes both built and natural features within the World Heritage Site to encourage visitors to explore beyond the built environment. Its objective is to highlight otherwise unseen heritage such as the remnants and evidence of the iron production process that made the Gorge 'the birthplace of industry' within the natural landscape.

The **'Lime Trail'** of Benthall Edge takes the walker through a wooded landscape steep in the geology which benefitted the past industries of the Gorge. The footpath follows a circular route taking the walker through beautiful SSSI woodland with iconic viewpoints of the Gorge and Coalbrookdale before descending to the valley bottom along the Severn Valley Railway.





## Walks Books

To support people to get outdoors and closer to nature we have published several guided walks books. These will help everyone to visit our sites and enjoy their natural beauty and find out more about the forces that have shaped them – natural and man-made. Each book offers a number of self-guided walks that offer opportunities to explore the history of the area as well as the diversity of landscape, geology and wildlife. All the books can be purchased from the Trust Office, and are also available at Ironbridge Gorge Museum sites, the Visitor Information Centre, The Green Wood Cafe and some local shops. Copies of the routes can also be downloaded from our website:

[www.severngorge.org.uk](http://www.severngorge.org.uk).

The '**Sabbath Walks Trail**' follows in the footsteps of Richard Reynolds who built the wide footpaths in the 18th Century for his workers and families. This trail takes in Dale Coppice and Lincoln Hill and the viewpoint at the Rotunda with views of the Iron Bridge.

The **Ironbridge to Blists Hill Victorian Town Trail** is as it says, linking Ironbridge to Blists Hill with a safe traffic-free route through Lloyd's Coppice whilst seeing historic remnants on the past once linked to Blist Hill furnaces.

The circular Trail '**Loamhole Dingle; History under your feet**' takes you from Upper Furnace Pool and through the wooded dingle to the Ropewalk where nature meets the industrial past. This walk can also be linked with Lydebrook Dingle as part of the Shropshire Way.

These trails will hopefully encourage more visitors to explore the landscape of the World Heritage Site on foot.



# Raising Awareness

Aim: to develop and promote a wider awareness and understanding of the Trust's work

## Volunteer Lookers

Our volunteer 'Lookers' play a key role in looking after the flock of sixty native breed Soay sheep that the Trust users to manage its wildflower meadows.

Many years ago, 'Lookers' were self-employed countrymen who lived outside for much of the year, looking after the grazing animals on several farms at once. Grizzled, wind hardened characters by all accounts, they often walked many miles, camping wild under the stars.

Today, 'looking' is a much more civilised affair. Our Soay sheep are crucial in grazing our wildflower meadows and conserving vital habitats. Our volunteer

'Lookers' work in a rota, visiting the flock daily and confirming all is well via the technology of a *WhatsApp* group!

The Lookers' programme has been running for ten years and currently fourteen volunteers are extremely proficient in a wide range of sheep husbandry techniques including handling, ear tagging and injecting.

Each year we lamb ten ewes, the ewe lambs are registered with the Rare Breeds Survival Trust. We are keen to increase the number of registered pedigree breeding ewes to improve the Soay's status on the RBST watch list.



Work has continued selling some of the sheep both as breeding stock and meat. The sheep will be sheared this year and the fleeces sold to the Sheep Shed in Leominster. Shearing should reduce the chance of flystrike, reduce the cost of preventative medication and improve the wellbeing of the sheep in warmer weather.

## Sales of timber

The Trust has started selling seasoned firewood to volunteers and local people. During 21/22 we collected timber from tree safety works, fallen trees and reactive works and have built up a considerable supply of timber. The demand for logs has been positive. Woodland is the biggest asset of the Trust and using that to generate a modest income as well as working towards climate change goals is a positive move.

We have large scale powerline clearance work beginning soon and it is hoped that this will ensure sure we do not sell out of fire wood. Moving forward we will retain some timber from standing sales to sell locally.

## Community Events

The Trust continues to work with other organisations to support local community events which attract many hundreds of visitors. Supporting such events allows the Trust to engage with people that may not be aware of the work and activities the Trust carries out, or the opportunities available to them to enjoy and use the land managed by the Trust.

## Annual Open Evening

Because of concerns about large gatherings of people, Trustees supported the suggestion not to hold an Open Evening in 2021. The purpose of the Annual Open Evening is to give local residents a chance to meet Trust staff, Trustees and Volunteers and learn more about the work we undertake. It also provides an opportunity to raise any concerns or issues they may have. It is hoped that we will be able to hold an open evening in 2022 or look at providing a virtual event to disseminate information.



## Partnership Working

We continue to develop and strengthen partnerships with a wide range of organisations and individuals for the benefit of local communities, visitors and wildlife. Successful partnership working allows us to develop new areas of work, including 'Outdoor Learning,' environmental arts and alternative land management techniques.

- ◆ Broseley Town Council
- ◆ Dawley Angling Society
- ◆ Deer Initiative
- ◆ English Heritage
- ◆ Environment Agency
- ◆ Forestry Commission
- ◆ Harper Adams University
- ◆ Ironbridge Gorge Museum Trust
- ◆ Ironbridge Meadows and Pastures group
- ◆ Lodge Field Group
- ◆ Madeley Town Council
- ◆ Madeley Nursery
- ◆ Moonshine & Fuggles
- ◆ National Trust
- ◆ Natural England
- ◆ Neighbouring farmers and landowners
- ◆ People's Trust for Endangered Species
- ◆ Shropshire Geological Society
- ◆ Shropshire Wildlife Trust
- ◆ Small Woods Association
- ◆ Telford & Wrekin Council
- ◆ Telford Green Spaces Partnership
- ◆ The Gorge Parish Council
- ◆ The Coracle Trust
- ◆ The World Heritage Site Steering Group
- ◆ University of Birmingham (Ironbridge Institute)
- ◆ West Midlands Regional Flood & Coastal Committee
- ◆ Wolverhampton University

Community engagement is essential to the success of all of our work. We aim to work with local communities to engage people of all ages through events, volunteering opportunities and education to ensure the sustainability of our 'Outdoor Learning' programme.

The active involvement of local people is also vitally important in the management of the land in the Severn Gorge. Local people have a strong interest in their local environment and the Trust is keen to harness the help of local residents to act as its 'eyes and ears' reporting any problems and suggesting improvements.

The Trust tries to ensure a rapid response to issues. People are informed about any management work by talking to neighbours, putting detailed information up on site, providing articles for local newsletters and giving details of work on the Trust's website.

With the increase in popularity and usage of social media sites, the Trust now regularly uses Facebook, Twitter and Instagram to give out information on the work that it is doing. Regular updates on the work of the volunteers, key projects the Trust is managing and the 'Outdoor Learning' courses ensure that followers are able to access up to date information. These outlets are also brilliant for disseminating information on potential problems such as road closures, flooding etc.



# FUTURE PLANS

In 2022/2023 the Trust's focus will be to continue to promote, protect and conserve the landscape of the Ironbridge Gorge World Heritage Site

## Key Projects include:

- ◆ Communicating the Trusts vision, purpose, work and impact effectively through our website, media and social media, to increase awareness of the dual climate and biodiversity emergencies, so that more people take action for nature.
- ◆ Ensuring future financial stability – continue to work with Telford & Wrekin Council and other organisations to investigate alternative funding opportunities.
- ◆ Exploring potential funding opportunities to improve and repair the access Infrastructure installed in the Gorge
- ◆ Investing in capital machinery to enable staff to carry out necessary countryside management tasks in house and reduce reliance on contractors
- ◆ Recruiting and investing in staff to enable them to continue to deliver the key aims and objectives of the Trust
- ◆ Reviewing Trust policies and procedures to ensure that they are compliant, relevant and up to date.
- ◆ Complying with Defra's 'Ready to Burn' firewood accreditation to enable us to sell our firewood.
- ◆ Producing more timber infrastructure in house for fencing, access infrastructure etc.
- ◆ Continuing to work with the People's Trust for Endangered Species and the Shropshire Dormouse Group re the potential translocation of dormice
- ◆ Completing Zone 2 Countryside Stewardship Works.
- ◆ Investigating growing some Large Leaved Lime (*Tilia platyphyllos*) seed from Benthall Edge as part of an in-situ conservation project working with Kew and Newcastle University.
- ◆ Working with Chester University and University Centre Shrewsbury to measure woody biomass within one sample plot (to begin with) within a Continuous Cover Forestry (CCF) stand at Sutton Woods using a drone and ground-based LIDAR. This together with on the ground basal area measurements and a soil sample to measure soil humus and carbon will be replicated after 3, 5 and 10 years to very accurately measure carbon sequestered using a CCF system.
- ◆ Continue to develop a relationship with the new owners of the former Power Station site Harworth, to help them deliver as sustainable a development as possible, should planning permission be granted, working in Partnership with Telford & Wrekin and the Gorge Parish Councils.
- ◆ Continuing to be an efficient and effective organisation that is well governed, well financed and well managed and which has the capacity, infrastructure and support necessary to deliver its objectives.



# FINANCIAL REVIEW

## Overview

The Trust started its financial year in April 2021, the second year of the Covid-19 pandemic. Although the most severe impact of Covid-19 is hopefully behind us, the ongoing effect is still apparent. The core income of the Trust is generated by rents received on commercial properties in the Telford area and many of these are small businesses, who are continuing to struggle.

The Trust in conjunction with Telford & Wrekin Council's Land and Property Services (who manage the properties on the Trust's behalf) have continued to work hard over the last 12 months to manage the property portfolio to try to ensure that in the long term it is able to provide sufficient income to enable the Trust to deliver its core activities. The Trust is working with businesses that are struggling, to set up long term affordable repayment plans for outstanding rental payments.

The Trust was eligible to claim the Small Business Relief Grant and along with many other organisations we have accessed the Government's Job Retention Scheme, and flexibly furloughed our four members of staff. Who, where possible worked remotely for the majority of the pandemic.

The Trust is continuing to face financial pressures with ageing access infrastructure and ash dieback emergencies. With cuts to Government agri/environmental grants and a downturn in rental income this does present financial challenges for the future

## Income

Income in the year reduced relative to 2020/2021. (£287,546 21/22 to £307,664 20/21) This was primarily due to reduced grant income. The current Countryside and Higher-Level Stewardship schemes have finished. The vast majority of the Trust's income continues to be invested in the management of the landscape.



Agri-environment payments such as the Countryside Stewardship schemes are extremely important to the Trust. They are a key funding mechanism to support our woodland and meadow management. We have however been successful in applying for an additional 5-year Countryside Stewardship grant; however, no grant income will be received until January 2023.

The Trust continues to apply for grants from a variety of sources but is careful not to stray from its aims and objectives when looking for potential funding sources.

Income was generated largely from:

- ◆ rentals received on commercial properties in the Telford area. (The need for a balancing package to provide sufficient income for the annual upkeep of the sites was recognised when the Trust was established. A package of commercial properties was transferred to Telford & Wrekin Council. They own the freehold of these income generating properties and are responsible for their management. They are covenanted to pay 85% of the income generated to the Trust to cover the cost of maintaining the land in the Gorge).
- ◆ investments purchased by the Trust. These consist of Charity Investment funds, and an interest paying Bank Account
- ◆ grants
- ◆ small amounts from book sales/timber sales

We received £234,867 in income from the rental properties, fishing and grazing rights compared to £175,619 last year. An increase of 33%, this is primarily due to the repayment plans put in place with businesses to help them pay the outstanding rent due (following the pandemic) over an agreed time period.

Interest and dividends provided £8,397 compared to £12,903 last year reflecting the changes in the Trust's investment makeup together with the impact of Covid-19 on the performance in investment returns.

Hay and timber/log sales provided an additional £1,768 and £3,993, respectively.

### Grants to help with our work

In support of its activities, the Trust received £28,683 (£103,959 in 21/22) from a wide number of bodies and is incredibly grateful to them all for their help and assistance:

**Countryside Stewardship – Natural England** the Trust received £4,272 in grant aid from this programme. This scheme contributes towards the Trust's woodland management costs. This is the final payment for this 5-year programme.





### **Additional Relief Grants**

£500 was received from the Government schemes put in place to help businesses and charities through the pandemic.

### **Furlough Grant**

Like many charities, the Trust flexibly furloughed staff, £11,130 was received from the Furlough scheme.

### **Awards for All**

£10,000 was received from the Lottery funded Awards for All grant programme. This funding will go towards path/access improvements along the Dragon path at Benthall Edge.

### **Telford & Wrekin Council - Councillors Pride Fund**

£300 was received from the Councillors Pride Fund towards the Outdoor Learning Area which is to be created at the Trust Office.

### **Shropshire Ecological Data Network (SEDN)**

£500 was received from SEDN towards equipment and materials to undertake dormouse surveys.

## **Donations**

---

The Trust was fortunate to receive donations from individuals and organisations and we are very grateful to them for their support.

Moonshine and Fuggles of Ironbridge have donated £300 from the sales of their Coalport Cucumber gin and would like to continue their partnership with the Trust. Ironbridge Fish and Chip shop customers donated £132 in SGCT's donation box.

## **Expenditure**

---

Despite the impact of C-19, overall costs were well controlled in 21/22 and some areas of expenditure such as the Outdoor Learning and Volunteering programmes were down due to activities being curtailed due to C-19 Investment policy, powers and performance.

Trustees are responsible for the financial policies under which the Trust is managed. Under the Memorandum and Articles of Association, the Trust has the power to deposit or invest funds.



The Investment Policy of the Trust is:

- ◆ for the capital invested to maintain its value whilst building up a dependable, growing stream of income that will keep pace with inflation.

The investment policy was substantially revised in 2021, in particular to take account of ethical and environmental considerations and is now publicly available on the Trust's website.

The investment performance is monitored by the Investment Working group by reviewing regular reports from our investment advisors, Aberdeen Standard Capital. The movement in the stock market affects the value of our investments. The short-term gains and losses on the investments make little difference on the day to day running of the charity until the point where we have to sell our investments and realise the gain or loss.

The value of the Trust's investments has fluctuated greatly over the last 12 months but by the end of March 2022 had started to recover.

The Trust's investment portfolio value now stands at £431,335 with an additional £116,729 being held in bank accounts.

The next 12 months will continue be a difficult time for the investment market, but the Trust continues to focus on long term aims rather than on the short-term market noise currently prevalent.

## Reserves policy

The Trust's reserves are held in order to manage the risks to which the charity is exposed in the course of its activities. The Trustees ensure that the charity is in a

responsible and secure financial position to carry out its day-to-day core services and is able to absorb unforeseen setbacks in the event of a significant financial downturn. The reserves policy is reviewed in the annual planning and budgeting process by Trustees and considers changes to the environment in which the Trust operates, and any other internal or external risk factors that might impact on the level of reserves required.

The reserves policy balances the need to build up long-term reserves against the need for short term spending on the Trust's core purposes.

## Funds

The Trust's funds are divided between unrestricted funds, restricted funds and designated funds.

The designated funds and their specific purposes are detailed below:

### Long Term Income Fund

The purpose of this fund is to provide income for the Trust's core work during the rental income modernising process, provide protection against additional voids that may occur and provide a dependable, growing stream of income that will keep pace with inflation, thus enabling the Trust to fulfil its objectives. £20,000 will be transferred each year (when income levels allow) into this fund. No transfer took place in 21/22 as there was insufficient income received from the rental properties to cover this cost. However, the interest and dividends (less Management fees) generated by Aberdeen Standard Capital Investments has been retained. This equated to £3,719.



Should the rental income drop below the level that is required to fulfil the basic obligations of the Trust then money will be withdrawn from the fund to cover this expenditure. The balance held in the Long-Term Income Fund together with the revaluation of investments as at the 31 March 2022 is £373,064.

### **New Accommodation Fund**

This fund was created to set aside money to be used to fund the new office accommodation for the Trust. Money that had previously been held in the Long-Term Income fund has been released into the New Accommodation Fund. The balance of the fund is £174,800. This fund will be used in conjunction with the restricted grant funding from the NHS and the Alcoa Foundation. This fund will be written down over a 50-year period as part of the new office depreciation calculation.

The Land and Structures Contingency Fund was created to allow appropriate responses to substantial problems arising from geotechnical features, structures such as walls, land instability, drainage and watercourses.

Since 2003 the Trust has commissioned a programme of regular visual inspections of all known built structures on Trust land and a geotechnical inspection of Jiggers Rock face, as part of its risk management processes

£10,000 will be transferred to the fund each year (when income levels allow) and the work undertaken when sufficient funds have accumulated. Some works may be able to be undertaken at an earlier date if external funding becomes available. Due to income levels no transfer was made at year end; the balance of the fund as 31 March 2022 was £6,950.



## Restricted Funds

**Alcoa/NHS New Office Accommodation** – grant funding received towards the building of the new office. These funds are being written down over a 50-year period as part of the office depreciation costs.

**Councillors Pride Grant** – £300 towards the Outdoor Learning Area at the Trust Office site

**Awards for All** – £10,000 towards path/access repairs – Benthall Edge

## Pension Scheme

In common with other charities with defined benefit pension schemes, our pension scheme shows a deficit which stood at £445,000 on 31 March 2022 (£465,000 March 2021) and, under UK accounting standards we are required to account for this deficit. Like all parts of our economy, charities have been hit by rising life expectancy and lower than expected return on investments. The conclusion of the Trustees is that the Trust is able to meet the annual increase in employer contributions and is still able to deliver its charitable objectives. They confirmed that they were re-assured that there was not a significant risk that the pension liability would crystallise in the short to medium term and that the Trust can meet the required projected further income without significantly impacting the ongoing business.

## Actuarial valuation

At the last valuation, the contribution rate to be paid into the Shropshire County Pension Fund was assessed in two parts. First a standard contribution rate was determined. This is the contribution, expressed as a percentage of the salaries of staff. Secondly, a supplementary contribution is payable if, as a result of the actuarial review, it is found that the accumulated liabilities of the pension for benefits to past and present staff are not fully covered by the standard contributions to be paid in future and by the notional fund built up from past contributions. The total contribution rate payable is the sum of the standard contribution rate and the supplementary contribution rate.

Shropshire County Pension Fund has been working hard over the last few years to reduce the pension deficit and has set out a clear framework in which to achieve this over the next 16 years. The Trust now pays an increased employer contribution rate (21%) and also an annual deficit contribution (£1,100 in 2021/2022) to reduce the deficit.

## Trustees' responsibilities in relation to the financial statements

The Trustees are responsible for preparing the Annual Report and the financial statements in accordance with applicable law and regulations.



Company law requires Trustees to prepare financial statements for each financial year. The financial statements are required by law to give a true and fair view of the state of affairs of the company and of the profit or loss of the company for that period. In preparing those financial statements, the Trustees are required to:

- ◆ select suitable accounting policies and then apply them consistently
- ◆ observe the methods and principles in the Charities SORP
- ◆ make judgements and estimates that are reasonable and prudent
- ◆ state whether applicable UK Accounting Standards have been followed, subject to any material departures disclosed and explained in the financial statements
- ◆ prepare the financial statements on the going concern basis unless it is inappropriate to presume that the company will continue in business

The Trustees are responsible for keeping proper accounting records that disclose with reasonable accuracy at any time the financial position of the group and parent charity and enable them to ensure that the financial statements comply with the Charities Act 2011 and the Charity (Accounts and Reports) Regulations. They are also responsible for safeguarding the assets

of company and hence for taking reasonable steps for the prevention and detection of fraud and other irregularities.

The Trustees are responsible for the maintenance and integrity of the financial information included on the charity's website.

In accordance with company law, as the company's directors, we certify that:

- ◆ so far as we are aware, there is no relevant audit information of which the company's auditor is unaware

This report has been prepared in accordance with the Statement of Recommended Practice – Accounting and Reporting by Charities and in accordance with the provisions applicable to companies subject to the small companies' regime.

Approved by the Committee of Management on 21 September 2022 and signed on its behalf by:

**Maureen Bragg**  
Chair



Severn Gorge Countryside Trust

**REPORT AND FINANCIAL STATEMENTS**

For the year ended 31 March 2022

Company No. 2647374

Muras Baker Jones Limited  
Chartered Accountants  
Wolverhampton

## **INDEPENDENT AUDITORS' REPORT TO THE MEMBERS OF SEVERN GORGE COUNTRYSIDE TRUST**

### **Opinion**

We have audited the financial statements of Severn Gorge Countryside Trust (the 'charitable company') for the year ended 31 March 2022 which comprise the statement of financial activities (including income and expenditure account), statement of financial position and the related notes, including a summary of significant accounting policies. The financial reporting framework that has been applied in their preparation is applicable law and United Kingdom Accounting Standards, including FRS 102 The Financial Reporting Standard applicable in the UK and Republic of Ireland (United Kingdom Generally Accepted Accounting Practice).

In our opinion the financial statements:

- give a true and fair view of the state of the charitable company's affairs as at 31 March 2022 and of its incoming resources and application of resources, including its income and expenditure, for the year then ended
- have been properly prepared in accordance with United Kingdom Generally Accepted Accounting Practice
- have been prepared in accordance with the requirements of the Companies Act 2006

### **Basis for opinion**

We conducted our audit in accordance with International Standards on Auditing (UK) (ISAs (UK)) and applicable law. Our responsibilities under those standards are further described in the auditor's responsibilities for the audit of the financial statements section of our report. We are independent of the charity in accordance with the ethical requirements that are relevant to our audit of the financial statements in the UK, including the FRC's Ethical Standard, and we have fulfilled our other ethical responsibilities in accordance with these requirements. We believe that the audit evidence we have obtained is sufficient and appropriate to provide a basis for our opinion.

### **Conclusions relating to going concern**

We have nothing to report in respect of the following matters in relation to which the ISAs (UK) require us to report to you where:

- the trustees' use of the going concern basis of accounting in the preparation of the financial statements is not appropriate; or
- the trustees have not disclosed in the financial statements any identified material uncertainties that may cast significant doubt about the charity's ability to continue to adopt the going concern basis of accounting for a period of at least twelve months from the date when the financial statements are authorised for issue

### **Other information**

The other information comprises the information included in the annual report, other than the financial statements and our auditor's report thereon. The trustees are responsible for the other information. Our opinion on the financial statements does not cover the other information and, except to the extent otherwise explicitly stated in our report, we do not express any form of assurance conclusion thereon.

In connection with our audit of the financial statements, our responsibility is to read the other information and, in doing so, consider whether the other information is materially inconsistent with the financial statements or our knowledge obtained in the audit or otherwise appears to be materially misstated. If we identify such material inconsistencies or apparent material misstatements, we are required to determine whether there is a material misstatement in the financial statements or a material misstatement of the other information. If, based on the work we have performed, we conclude that there is a material misstatement of this other information, we are required to report that fact.

We have nothing to report in this regard.

## **INDEPENDENT AUDITORS' REPORT TO THE MEMBERS OF SEVERN GORGE COUNTRYSIDE TRUST (CONTINUED)**

### **Opinions on other matters prescribed by the Companies Act 2006**

In our opinion, based on the work undertaken in the course of the audit:

- the information given in the trustees' report for the financial year for which the financial statements are prepared is consistent with the financial statements; and
- the trustees' report has been prepared in accordance with applicable legal requirements.

### **Matters on which we are required to report by exception**

In the light of the knowledge and understanding of the charitable company and its environment obtained in the course of the audit, we have not identified material misstatements in the trustees' report.

We have nothing to report in respect of the following matters in relation to which the Companies Act 2006 requires us to report to you if, in our opinion:

- adequate accounting records have not been kept, or returns adequate for our audit have not been received from branches not visited by us; or
- the financial statements are not in agreement with the accounting records and returns; or
- certain disclosures of trustees' remuneration specified by law are not made; or
- we have not received all the information and explanations we require for our audit; or
- the trustees were not entitled to take advantage of the small companies' exemptions in preparing the directors' report and from the requirement to prepare a strategic report.

### **Responsibilities of trustees**

As explained more fully in the trustees' responsibilities statement, the trustees (who are also the directors for the purposes of company law) are responsible for the preparation of the financial statements and for being satisfied that they give a true and fair view, and for such internal control as the trustees determine is necessary to enable the preparation of financial statements that are free from material misstatement, whether due to fraud or error.

In preparing the financial statements, the trustees are responsible for assessing the charitable company's ability to continue as a going concern, disclosing, as applicable, matters related to going concern and using the going concern basis of accounting unless the trustees either intend to liquidate the charitable company or to cease operations, or have no realistic alternative but to do so.

### **Auditor's responsibilities for the audit of the financial statements**

Our objectives are to obtain reasonable assurance about whether the financial statements as a whole are free from material misstatement, whether due to fraud or error, and to issue an auditor's report that includes our opinion. Reasonable assurance is a high level of assurance, but is not a guarantee that an audit conducted in accordance with ISAs (UK) will always detect a material misstatement when it exists. Misstatements can arise from fraud or error and are considered material if, individually or in the aggregate, they could reasonably be expected to influence the economic decisions of users taken on the basis of these financial statements.

As part of an audit in accordance with ISAs (UK), we exercise professional judgment and maintain professional scepticism throughout the audit. We also:

- Identify and assess the risks of material misstatement of the financial statements, whether due to fraud or error, design and perform audit procedures responsive to those risks, and obtain audit evidence that is sufficient and appropriate to provide a basis for our opinion. The risk of not detecting a material misstatement resulting from fraud is higher than for one resulting from error, as fraud may involve collusion, forgery, intentional omissions, misrepresentations, or the override of internal control

## **INDEPENDENT AUDITORS' REPORT TO THE MEMBERS OF SEVERN GORGE COUNTRYSIDE TRUST (CONTINUED)**

- Obtain an understanding of internal control relevant to the audit in order to design audit procedures that are appropriate in the circumstances, but not for the purpose of expressing an opinion on the effectiveness of the internal control
- Evaluate the appropriateness of accounting policies used and the reasonableness of accounting estimates and related disclosures made by the trustees
- Conclude on the appropriateness of the trustees' use of the going concern basis of accounting and, based on the audit evidence obtained, whether a material uncertainty exists related to events or conditions that may cast significant doubt on the charity's ability to continue as a going concern. If we conclude that a material uncertainty exists, we are required to draw attention in our auditor's report to the related disclosures in the financial statements or, if such disclosures are inadequate, to modify our opinion. Our conclusions are based on the audit evidence obtained up to the date of our auditor's report. However, future events or conditions may cause the charity to cease to continue as a going concern
- Evaluate the overall presentation, structure and content of the financial statements, including the disclosures, and whether the financial statements represent the underlying transactions and events in a manner that achieves fair presentation

We communicate with those charged with governance regarding, among other matters, the planned scope and timing of the audit and significant audit findings, including any significant deficiencies in internal control that we identify during our audit.

### **Use of our report**

This report is made solely to the charitable company's members, as a body, in accordance with Chapter 3 of Part 16 of the Companies Act 2006. Our audit work has been undertaken so that we might state to the charitable company's members those matters we are required to state to them in an auditor's report and for no other purpose. To the fullest extent permitted by law, we do not accept or assume responsibility to anyone other than the charitable company and the charitable company's members as a body, for our audit work, for this report, or for the opinions we have formed.

.....  
Oliver Ross BSc(Hons) FCA (Senior Statutory Auditor)  
For and on behalf of Muras Baker Jones Limited  
Chartered Accountants and Statutory Auditor

Regent House  
Bath Avenue  
Wolverhampton  
WV1 4EG

21 September 2022

## SEVERN GORGE COUNTRYSIDE TRUST

### STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL ACTIVITIES (being INCOME AND EXPENDITURE ACCOUNT)

For the year ended 31 March 2022

	Notes	General Fund £	Designated Funds £	Restricted funds £	Total funds 2022 £	Total funds 2021 £
<b>INCOME</b>						
<b>INCOMING RESOURCES FROM CHARITABLE ACTIVITIES</b>						
Rents received	4	234,867	-	-	234,867	175,619
Grants	4	18,383	-	10,300	28,683	103,959
<b>INCOME FROM OTHER TRADING ACTIVITIES</b>						
Investment income		859	7,538	-	8,397	12,903
Other income		14,148	-	-	14,148	13,818
Gifts and Donations		1,451	-	-	1,451	1,365
<b>Total Income</b>		<b>269,708</b>	<b>7,538</b>	<b>10,300</b>	<b>287,546</b>	<b>307,664</b>
<b>EXPENDITURE</b>						
<b>COSTS OF RAISING FUNDS</b>						
Costs of generating voluntary income	5	6,435	-	-	6,435	6,064
<b>EXPENDITURE ON CHARITABLE ACTIVITIES</b>						
Woodland/Countryside Management	5	253,835	3,181	1,335	258,351	197,589
Access	5	24,857	982	412	26,251	68,692
Projects	5	7,607	437	182	8,226	21,584
<b>GOVERNANCE COSTS</b>	5	<b>24,668</b>	<b>3,819</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>28,487</b>	<b>24,859</b>
<b>Total Expenditure</b>		<b>317,402</b>	<b>8,419</b>	<b>1,929</b>	<b>327,750</b>	<b>318,788</b>
<b>NET INCOME/(EXPENDITURE)</b>		<b>(47,694)</b>	<b>(881)</b>	<b>8,371</b>	<b>(40,204)</b>	<b>(11,124)</b>
<b>TRANSFERS BETWEEN FUNDS</b>		<b>(5,903)</b>	<b>5,903</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>
<b>NET INCOME/(EXPENDITURE) BEFORE OTHER GAINS / (LOSSES) – carried forward</b>		<b>(53,597)</b>	<b>5,022</b>	<b>8,371</b>	<b>(40,204)</b>	<b>(11,124)</b>

## SEVERN GORGE COUNTRYSIDE TRUST

### STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL ACTIVITIES (being INCOME AND EXPENDITURE ACCOUNT) continued

For the year ended 31 March 2022

	Notes	General Fund £	Designated Funds £	Restricted Funds £	Total Funds 2022 £	Total funds 2021 £
NET INCOME/(EXPENDITURE) BEFORE OTHER GAINS / (LOSSES) – brought forward		(53,597)	5,022	8,371	(40,204)	(11,124)
OTHER GAINS AND LOSSES						
Gains/(losses) on Investments - realised		-	5,789	-	5,789	-
Gains/(losses) on Investments – unrealised		-	(1,538)	-	(1,538)	61,315
Pension scheme actuarial (losses)/gains	14	52,005	-	-	52,005	(52,519)
Revaluation of land		-	-	-	-	-
NET MOVEMENT IN FUNDS FOR THE YEAR		(1,592)	9,273	8,371	16,052	(2,328)
TOTAL FUNDS BROUGHT FORWARD AT 31 MARCH 2021		5,796	722,366	75,226	803,388	805,716
TOTAL FUNDS CARRIED FORWARD AT 31 MARCH 2022		4,204	731,639	83,597	819,440	803,388

All income and expenditure derive from continuing activities.

The statement of financial activities includes all gains and losses recognised in the year.

## SEVERN GORGE COUNTRYSIDE TRUST

### BALANCE SHEET

At 31 March 2022

	Notes	2022		2021	
		£	£	£	£
<b>FIXED ASSETS</b>					
Tangible assets	6		581,490		554,009
Investments	7		431,335		435,225
			<hr/>		<hr/>
			1,012,825		989,234
<b>CURRENT ASSETS</b>					
Debtors	8	64,947		58,316	
Investments	9	86,734		85,895	
Cash at bank and in hand		116,382		138,164	
		<hr/>		<hr/>	
		268,063		282,375	
<b>CREDITORS - amounts falling due within one year</b>					
	10	(16,448)		(3,221)	
		<hr/>		<hr/>	
<b>NET CURRENT ASSETS</b>			251,615		279,154
Pension benefit pension scheme liability	12		(445,000)		(465,000)
			<hr/>		<hr/>
<b>NET ASSETS</b>			819,440		803,388
			<hr/> <hr/>		<hr/> <hr/>
<b>THE FUNDS OF THE CHARITY:</b>					
	11				
General fund	11		4,204		5,796
Designated funds	11		450,721		445,699
Restricted funds	11		83,597		75,226
Revaluation funds	11		280,918		276,667
			<hr/>		<hr/>
<b>TOTAL CHARITY FUNDS</b>			819,440		803,388
			<hr/> <hr/>		<hr/> <hr/>

The financial statements were approved by the Committee of Management on 21 September 2022 signed on its behalf by:-

Maureen Bragg  
Chair

## SEVERN GORGE COUNTRYSIDE TRUST

### NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

For the year ended 31 March 2022

#### 1. ACCOUNTING POLICIES

##### a) BASIS OF PREPARATION

The charity constitutes a public benefit entity as defined by FRS 102. The financial statements have been prepared in accordance with Accounting and Reporting by Charities: Statement of Recommended Practice applicable to charities preparing their accounts in accordance with the Financial Reporting Standard applicable in the UK and Republic of Ireland issued in October 2019, the Financial Reporting Standard applicable in the United Kingdom and Republic of Ireland (FRS 102), the Charities Act 2011, the Companies Act 2006 and UK Generally Accepted Accounting Practice.

The financial statements are prepared on a going concern basis under the historical cost convention, modified to include investments and certain freehold property at fair value.

##### b) INCOME

Rental income is included when receivable.

Income from contracting projects is recognised when receivable.

Grants are recognised in full in the Statement of Financial Activities when receivable.

Income from investments and other income, including small sales of timber and refunds, are included when receivable.

##### c) EXPENDITURE AND IRRECOVERABLE VAT

Resources expended are recognised in the period in which they are incurred. Resources expended include attributable VAT, which cannot be recovered.

The proportion of employees time spent fundraising is shown as costs of generating voluntary income.

Resources expended are allocated to the particular activity where the cost relates directly to that activity. The cost of overall direction and administration on each activity is apportioned based on the direct costs incurred for each.

##### d) DEPRECIATION

Depreciation is provided on the cost of fixed assets to write off the cost less estimated residual value of each asset over its estimated useful life at the following rates:

Freehold property	Depreciated over 50 years
Fixtures & Equipment	33 <sup>1</sup> / <sub>3</sub> % straight line
Plant and Machinery	10% straight line
Motor vehicles	20% straight line/33 <sup>1</sup> / <sub>3</sub> % straight line
Facility Construction	10% straight line

No depreciation is provided on Freehold Land.

## SEVERN GORGE COUNTRYSIDE TRUST

### NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

For the year ended 31 March 2022

#### 1. ACCOUNTING POLICIES (Continued)

##### e) TANGIBLE ASSETS

Tangible assets are initially recorded at cost, and subsequently stated at cost less any accumulated depreciation and impairment losses. Any tangible assets carried at revalued amounts are recorded at the fair value at the date of revaluation less any subsequent accumulated depreciation and subsequent accumulated impairment losses.

An increase in the carrying amount of an asset as a result of revaluation, is recognised in other recognised gains and losses, unless it reverses a charge for impairment that has previously been recognised as expenditure within the statement of financial activities. A decrease in the carrying amount of an asset as a result of revaluation, is recognised in other recognised gains and losses, except to which it offsets any previous revaluation gain, in which case the loss is shown within other recognised gains and losses on the statement of financial activities.

##### f) INVESTMENTS

Investments held as current assets are stated at the lower of cost and net realisable value.

Investments held as fixed assets are revalued annually and the aggregate surplus or deficit is transferred to Revaluation Reserve.

##### g) GENERAL FUND

This represents unrestricted funds that are available for use at the Trustees' discretion in furtherance of the objectives of the Trust.

##### h) DESIGNATED FUNDS

i) Long Term Income Fund - this fund arises from the combining of the Income Security Fund and the Long Term Development Reserve and reflects monies held within Fixed and Current Asset Investments. The purpose of the fund is to provide additional income for the Trust's core work when rental income declines as properties reach the end of their expected commercial 'life' circa 2015 to 2025.

ii) Land and Structures Contingency - this reserve reflects monies held within current asset investments. The reserve has been created to cope with expenditure arising as a result of land instability, drainage and watercourse issues and potential problems with existing structures.

iii) New Accommodation Fund - the reserve has been created to set aside funds towards the new office accommodation for the Trust.

iv) Revaluation Reserve - this reflects the increase in the fair value of investments and land over their original cost.

## SEVERN GORGE COUNTRYSIDE TRUST

### NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

For the year ended 31 March 2022

#### 1. ACCOUNTING POLICIES (Continued)

##### h) DESIGNATED FUNDS - continued

- v) Lloyds Bank Surrender Premium Fund and Carry Over Funds. These reserves relate to surplus funds arising on certain projects during the year for which the trustees have designated against specific expenditure over the next 2 years.
- vi) Postcode Lottery Access Fund. Being grants received in respect of work to be carried out on steps in the Gorge. Re-designated by the grant provider as unrestricted.

##### i) RESTRICTED FUNDS

These represent grants received for specified projects, the use of each grant being restricted to that project.

##### j) GOING CONCERN

The trustees remain mindful of the ongoing impact of the global pandemic on the charity and as a result regularly review projections and budgets for the current and subsequent periods. Based on these reviews, the trustees consider there to be no significant overall impact on the charity's ability to continue as a going concern.

The trustees have also reviewed the supply chains, key income sources and the capital resources available and consider that the charity has adequate resources in place to continue operating for the next twelve months.

##### k) EMPLOYEE BENEFITS

The charity contributes to a defined benefit plan for certain employees. A liability for the charity's obligation under the plan is recognised net of plan assets. The net change in the net defined benefit liability is recognised as the costs of the defined benefit plan during the period. Pension plan assets are measured at fair value and the defined benefit obligation is measured on an actuarial basis using the projected unit method.

The trustees believe that the scheme currently meets statutory minimum funding requirements. It is intended that the level of annual contributions to the scheme will be adjusted following the next detailed actuarial valuation. The directors note that the calculated notional deficit or surplus calculated under FRS102 can vary greatly from year to year depending on the assumptions made at the valuation date, but with normally little or no effect on short term cashflows.

#### 2. (DEFICIT)/SURPLUS FOR THE YEAR

The (deficit)/surplus for the year is stated after charging:

	2022	2021
	£	£
Auditors' remuneration	2,400	2,300
Depreciation of tangible fixed assets	15,587	14,891
	<u>          </u>	<u>          </u>

## SEVERN GORGE COUNTRYSIDE TRUST

### NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

For the year ended 31 March 2021

#### 3. STAFF COSTS

	2022 £	2021 £
Wages and salaries	119,600	116,281
Social security costs	7,615	7,335
Other pension Costs	58,000	48,000
Other costs	3,473	6,322
	<u>188,688</u>	<u>175,923</u>

No employees received remuneration in excess of £60,000 (2021: None).

No members of the Committee of Management received any remuneration in the year (2021 - £Nil). Apart from members of the Committee of Management, the company had 5 employees at 31 March 2022 (2021 - 5).

#### 4. INCOMING RESOURCES FROM CHARITABLE ACTIVITIES

	General fund £	Restricted funds £	Total 2022 £	Total 2021 £
Rents received	234,867	-	234,867	175,619
Grants:				
Natural England:				
Countryside Stewardship	4,272	-	4,272	20,938
Farm the Flow Project	-	-	-	39,905
Postcode Lottery Local Trust	-	-	-	-
Other	2,481	-	2,481	7,182
Business relief grant	500	-	500	3,201
Furlough grant	11,130	-	11,130	7,734
Heritage lottery fund	-	-	-	10,000
Small business grant	-	-	-	10,000
Nineveh trust grant	-	-	-	5,000
Benthall Path Improvements	-	10,000	10,000	-
Councillors Pride grant	-	300	300	-
	<u>18,383</u>	<u>10,300</u>	<u>28,683</u>	<u>103,959</u>
	<u>253,250</u>	<u>10,300</u>	<u>263,550</u>	<u>279,578</u>

## SEVERN GORGE COUNTRYSIDE TRUST

### NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

For the year ended 31 March 2022

#### 5. ANALYSIS OF EXPENDITURE ON CHARITABLE ACTIVITIES

	Generating voluntary income £	Woodland/ countryside management £	Access £	Projects £	Governance costs £	Total 2022 £	Total 2021 £
Direct costs	-	80,833	-	3,064	-	83,897	96,471
Employee costs	6,435	140,915	25,221	3,736	12,381	188,688	175,923
Insurance	-	6,205	174	242	-	6,621	6,061
Transport	-	5,786	163	225	-	6,174	2,478
Office and other costs	-	10,011	282	390	4,534	15,217	11,722
Trustee support	-	-	-	-	745	745	253
Professional costs	-	-	-	-	10,827	10,827	10,989
Depreciation	-	14,607	411	569	-	15,587	14,891
(Profit)/loss on disposal of tangible fixed assets	-	(6)	-	-	-	(6)	-
	<u>6,435</u>	<u>258,351</u>	<u>26,251</u>	<u>8,226</u>	<u>28,487</u>	<u>327,750</u>	<u>318,788</u>

## SEVERN GORGE COUNTRYSIDE TRUST

### NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

For the year ended 31 March 2022

#### 6. TANGIBLE FIXED ASSETS

	Plant and machinery £	Land and buildings £	Motor vehicles £	Fixtures & equipment £	Facility Construction £	Total £
<b>COST:</b>						
At 1 April 2021	18,000	629,476	57,579	39,008	4,495	748,558
Additions	41,056	-	1,000	1,341	-	43,397
Disposals	-	-	-	(335)	-	(335)
	<u>59,056</u>	<u>629,476</u>	<u>58,579</u>	<u>40,014</u>	<u>4,495</u>	<u>791,620</u>
<b>ACCUMULATED DEPRECIATION:</b>						
At 1 April 2021	9,975	96,271	57,579	29,375	1,349	194,549
Charge for the Year	2,792	8,752	17	3,577	449	15,587
Disposals	-	-	-	(6)	-	(6)
	<u>12,767</u>	<u>105,023</u>	<u>57,596</u>	<u>32,946</u>	<u>1,798</u>	<u>210,130</u>
<b>NET BOOK VALUE:</b>						
At 31 March 2021	<u>8,025</u>	<u>533,205</u>	<u>-</u>	<u>9,633</u>	<u>3,147</u>	<u>554,009</u>
At 31 March 2022	<u>46,289</u>	<u>524,453</u>	<u>983</u>	<u>7,068</u>	<u>2,697</u>	<u>581,490</u>

## SEVERN GORGE COUNTRYSIDE TRUST

### NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

For the year ended 31 March 2022

#### 7. FIXED ASSET INVESTMENTS

	2022 £	2021 £
Balance brought forward	435,225	373,910
Additions	482,598	-
Disposals	(484,950)	-
Revaluation adjustment	(1,538)	61,315
	<hr/>	<hr/>
Balance carried forward	431,335	435,225
	<hr/> <hr/>	<hr/> <hr/>
Historical cost of investments held at 31 March 2022	432,873	364,712
	<hr/> <hr/>	<hr/> <hr/>

Investments are acquired to provide fixed funding for certain of the Designated Funds set up by the Trust (see Note 11).

	2022		2021	
	Original cost £	Market value £	Original cost £	Market value £
<b>Black Rock</b>				
- BLK Charities UK Bond Fund A Inc	-	-	20,000	18,281
<b>Aberdeen Standard Capital</b>				
- Offshore Income Fund	-	-	193,575	259,912
- Offshore Global Fixed Interest	-	-	76,575	75,350
- Phoenix Fund	-	-	74,562	81,682
- Various Listed investments	432,873	431,335		
	<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>
	432,873	431,335	364,712	435,225
	<hr/> <hr/>	<hr/> <hr/>	<hr/> <hr/>	<hr/> <hr/>

#### 8. DEBTORS

	2022 £	2021 £
Trade debtors	64,421	57,826
Prepayments	526	490
	<hr/>	<hr/>
	64,947	58,316
	<hr/> <hr/>	<hr/> <hr/>

## SEVERN GORGE COUNTRYSIDE TRUST

### NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

For the year ended 31 March 2022

#### 9. CURRENT ASSET INVESTMENTS

	2022 £	2021 £
Short term deposits	86,734	85,895

#### 10. CREDITORS - amounts falling due within one year

	2022 £	2021 £
Trade Creditors	16,448	3,221
	<u>16,448</u>	<u>3,221</u>

## SEVERN GORGE COUNTRYSIDE TRUST

### NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

For the year ended 31 March 2022

#### 11. ANALYSIS OF CHARITABLE FUNDS

	At 1 April 2021 £	Income £	Expend- iture £	Other recognised gains/ (losses) £	Trans- fers £	At 31 March 2022 £
<b>Analysis of movements in unrestricted funds</b>						
General Fund	5,796	269,708	(317,402)	52,005	(5,903)	4,204
Long Term Income Fund	181,257	7,538	(3,819)	-	20,000	204,976
Land and Structures Contingency Accommodation Fund	7,130	-	-	-	(180)	6,950
Revaluation Reserve	179,400	-	(4,600)	-	-	174,800
Lloyds Surrender Premium fund	276,667	-	-	4,251	-	280,918
Carry Over from 19/20	40,000	-	-	-	(1,000)	39,000
Postcode Lottery Access Fund	1,110	-	-	-	(1,110)	-
Farm the Flow Carry Over From 20/21	20,000	-	-	-	(6,600)	13,400
Carry Over From 21/22	2,302	-	-	-	(1,207)	1,095
	14,500	-	-	-	(14,500)	-
	-	-	-	-	10,500	10,500
	722,366	7,538	(8,419)	4,251	5,903	731,639
<b>Analysis of movements in restricted funds</b>						
Alcoa Grant	7,116	-	(182)	-	-	6,934
Primary Care Trust - New Office project	68,110	-	(1,747)	-	-	66,363
Councillors Pride Grant	-	300	-	-	-	300
Awards for All -Benthall Edge Path	-	10,000	-	-	-	10,000
	75,226	10,300	(1,929)	-	-	83,597
Total Funds	803,388	287,546	(327,750)	56,256	-	819,440

## SEVERN GORGE COUNTRYSIDE TRUST

### NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

For the year ended 31 March 2022

#### 11. ANALYSIS OF CHARITABLE FUNDS continued

The assets comprising each Fund at 31 March 2022 are as follows:

	Tangible fixed assets £	Fixed asset investments £	Current assets / (Liabilities) £	Total £
Accommodation Fund	174,800	-	-	174,800
Long Term Income Fund	-	263,247	(58,271)	204,976
Revaluation Reserve	112,830	168,088	-	280,918
Land and Structures Contingency	-	-	6,950	6,950
Lloyds Surrender Premium Fund	-	-	39,000	39,000
Carry Over from 21/22	-	-	10,500	10,500
Farm the Flow carry over	-	-	1,095	1,095
Postcode Lottery Access Fund	-	-	13,400	13,400
Restricted Funds	73,297	-	10,300	83,597
General Fund	220,563	-	(216,359)	4,204
	<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>
	581,490	431,335	(193,385)	819,440
	<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>

#### Fund transfers

Long term income fund. The transfer of £20,000 has been transferred from the general fund due to the pension fund deficit decrease for the year being returned to this designated fund.

Land and structures contingency fund. A transfer of £180 has been made to general fund to cover specific costs incurred during the year.

Farm the Flow carry over. This transfer relates to costs still to be incurred during 22/23.

Carry Over from 19/20. A transfer of £1,110 was made to the general fund in relation to work carried out during the year that was originally planned to be carried out in 19/20.

Carry Over from 20/21. A transfer of £14,500 was made to the general fund in relation to work carried out during the year that was originally planned to be carried out in 20/21.

Carry Over from 21/22. A transfer of £10,500 from the general fund was made to cover work planned for 21/22 still outstanding at the year end to be incurred in 22/23.

Lloyds Surrender Premium Budget. A transfer of £1,000 was made to the general fund to offset the depreciation of capital machinery.

Postcode Lottery Access Fund. A transfer of £6,600 was made in relation to a payment for 10% match funding for Light Gives Light project.

## SEVERN GORGE COUNTRYSIDE TRUST

### NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

For the year ended 31 March 2022

#### 11. ANALYSIS OF CHARITABLE FUNDS continued

##### **Purpose of Designated Funds**

These are detailed in note 1(h) to the financial statements and also in the Trustees Report.

##### **Purpose of Restricted Funds**

These represent grants received and related expenditure in respect of specific projects as outlined above.

#### 12. PENSIONS

##### Defined Benefit Scheme

The company is a member of the Shropshire County pension fund which operates a pension scheme providing benefits based on final pensionable pay. The assets of the scheme are held separately from those of the company. Contributions to the scheme are charged to the profit and loss account so as to spread the cost of pensions over employees' working lives with the company. The contributions are determined by a qualified actuary on the basis of triennial valuations using assumptions that: project the benefits forward into the future and then adjust them to current day values; estimate the probability of payments needing to be made. The most recent valuation was as at 31 March 2019. The company receives annual reports from the pension scheme which identify its share of the assets and liabilities of the scheme.

The pension charge for the year amounts to £58,000 (2021 - £48,000), against which employer contributions paid over to the scheme amounted to £25,995 (2021 - £25,519), together with the actuarial gains and losses on the scheme for the year is recognised in the statement of Financial Activities in accordance with SORP (FRS 102).

The most recent actuarial valuation showed that the market value of the whole scheme's assets was £1,951m and that the actuarial value of those assets represented 76% of the benefits that had accrued to members, after allowing for expected future increases in earnings.

The company's share of the market values of the main asset classes, at the year end were:

	2022		2021	
	%	£000s	%	£000s
Equities	50.6	494	50.4	470
Government Bonds	0.0	0	0.0	0
Other Bonds	18.9	185	21.1	197
Property	3.7	36	3.9	36
Cash/liquidity	1.7	17	0.3	3
Other	25.1	245	24.3	226

The assets of the Scheme are included in the accounts at open market value as at the year-end, and the liabilities have been calculated using the following actuarial assumptions:

## SEVERN GORGE COUNTRYSIDE TRUST

### NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

For the year ended 31 March 2022

#### 12. PENSION -continued

	2022 %	2021 %
Rate of increase in salaries	4.65	3.95
Pension increases	3.5	2.8
Rate of discount	2.8	2.1
Inflation - RPI	-	-
- CPI	3.4	2.7

The liabilities are determined using the projected unit method as distinct from the aggregate method used in the triennial valuation. Under the projected unit method, the current service costs will increase as the members of the scheme approach retirement. On this basis, the calculated notional funding position, in respect of the Scheme at 31 March 2022, and at previous year-end, was as follows:

	2022 £000s	2021 £000s
Value of market assets	977	932
Value of accrued liabilities	(1,422)	(1,397)
Deficit	(445)	(465)

The actuary has confirmed that the valuation made above under the requirements of FRS102 does not indicate that there is either an immediate funding requirement or any immediate need to change the agreed contribution rates currently in force. The actuary has excluded from both assets and liabilities items which have neutral effect on the Scheme's financial position i.e. additional voluntary contributions, annuities secured in respect of pensions in payment and insurance contract for death in service benefits.

## SEVERN GORGE COUNTRYSIDE TRUST

### NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

For the year ended 31 March 2022

#### 12. PENSION –continued

The charge to the Statement of Financial Activities over the financial year comprised:

	2022 £000s	2021 £000s
<b>Operating charge</b>		
Current service cost	47	39
Admin expense	1	1
Past service cost/(gain)	-	-
	<hr/>	<hr/>
	48	40
	<hr/>	<hr/>
<b>Other income/charges</b>		
Expected return on pension scheme assets	(19)	(19)
Interest on pension scheme liabilities	29	27
	<hr/>	<hr/>
<b>Net interest/(return)</b>	10	8
	<hr/>	<hr/>
<b>Total charge to expenditure in the SOFA</b>	58	48
	<hr/> <hr/>	<hr/> <hr/>

Movement in balance sheet deficit figures during the year:

	2022 £	2021 £
Deficit in scheme at 31 March 2021	(465,000)	(390,000)
Movement in year		
Current service cost	(47,000)	(39,000)
Past service (cost)/gain	-	-
Admin expense	(1,000)	(1,000)
Net interest/return on assets	(10,000)	(8,000)
Contributions	25,995	25,519
Actuarial gain/(loss)	52,005	(52,519)
	<hr/>	<hr/>
Deficit in scheme at 31 March 2022	(445,000)	(465,000)
	<hr/> <hr/>	<hr/> <hr/>

13. MEMBERS' GUARANTEE

Severn Gorge Countryside Trust is a company limited by guarantee. Members' liability under the Memorandum of Association is limited to £1 each and the liability continues for one year after the cessation of membership.

14. TAXATION STATUS

The company is a charity under the provisions of the Income and Corporation Taxes Act 1988.

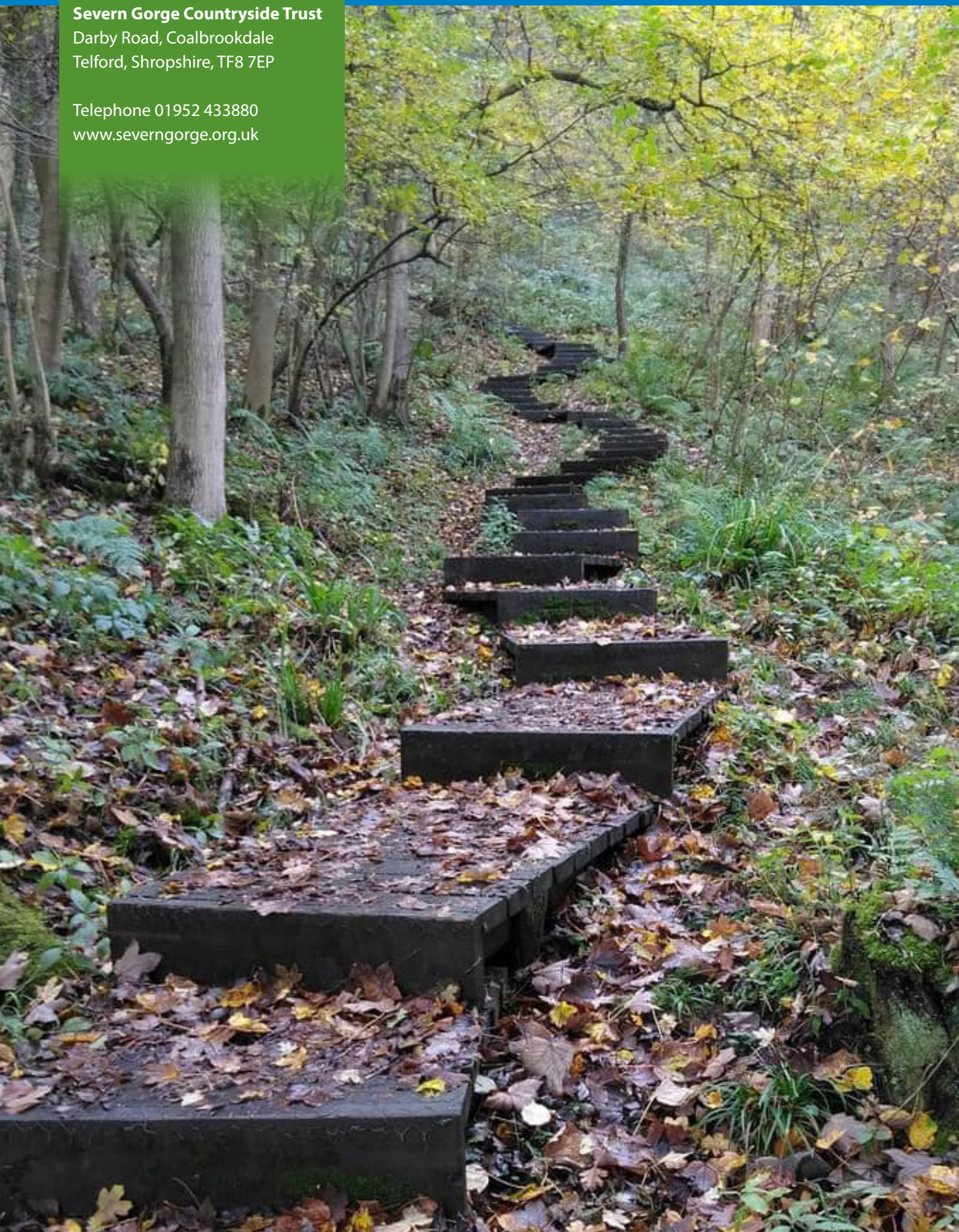
15. CAPITAL COMMITMENTS

At the year end 31 March 2022, the trust was committed to purchase a trailer and winch for £26,479 (2020 - £nil).

**Severn Gorge Countryside Trust**

Darby Road, Coalbrookdale  
Telford, Shropshire, TF8 7EP

Telephone 01952 433880  
[www.severngorge.org.uk](http://www.severngorge.org.uk)



**SEVERN GORGE COUNTRYSIDE TRUST**

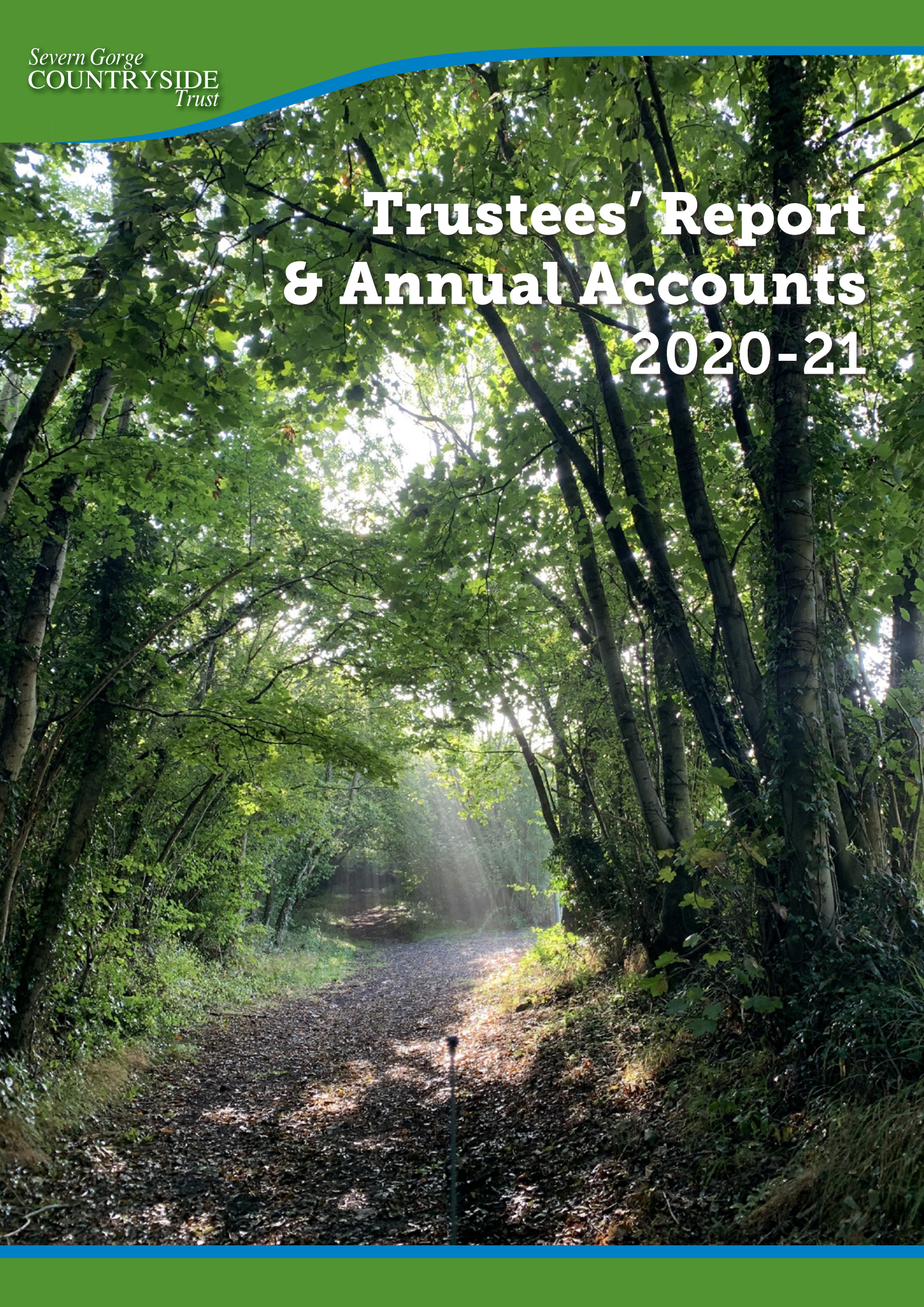
England & Wales - Charity number 1004508

---

# Accounts

---

# **Trustees' Report & Annual Accounts 2020-21**



## Message from the Chair

Dear all,

It has been another difficult year for the Trust, mostly due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Whilst restrictions are now lifting the virus remains a real problem for staff, contractors, volunteers and Trustees, and it is a situation I think we must learn to live with.

The restrictions on how the Trust has been able to operate has meant some work has been delayed, but reactive work and safety issues have been dealt with.

Ash die back will be a huge issue for the Trust over the next few years, but a plan of action to deal with the trees most at immediate risk of failure or those closest to properties, footpaths etc is in place and has already begun.

We have seen another squeeze on our funds, but it hasn't been as dramatic as we had feared - thankfully.

The Trust continues to work in partnership with local, regional and national bodies. This is a vital part of how the Trust maintains and develops contacts for the benefit of all concerned.

The Trust lands have had a huge increase in visitors during the pandemic as people stayed local to exercise, which puts extra strains on our limited resources, but the Trust has maintained our excellent paths and gates etc for all to enjoy a



safe and pleasant passage throughout our woods, meadows and historic sites.

As always, my thanks go to all the excellent staff, contractors, volunteers and fellow Trustees for all the amazing work they do to keep the Trust and all it does such a wonderful organisation to be part of.

I would like to especially thank Russell Rowley, Kate Chetwood, Nathan Morris and Emily Holmes, the Trust staff, for how they have conducted themselves during the year and kept the Trust operating. They have had to work from home, remotely and do different hours to their normal working day.

This is my last year as Chair and I wish the new Chair well in the future, and hope to remain a Trustee with this fantastic Trust

Thank you,

**Nick Downes**

Chair, Severn Gorge Countryside Trust

# Severn Gorge Countryside Trust Trustees' Report 31 March 2021

The Trustees are pleased to present their report and the audited financial statements for the year ended 31 March 2021

## Reference and administrative details

Charity Name: **Severn Gorge Countryside Trust**

Charity number: **1004508**

Company number: **02647374**

## Registered Office & operational address

Severn Gorge Countryside Trust  
Darby Road, Coalbrookdale  
Telford  
Shropshire  
TF8 7EP

Telephone 01952 433880  
www.severngorge.org.uk

## Auditors

Muras Baker Jones Limited  
Regent House, Bath Avenue  
Wolverhampton, WV1 4EG

## Bankers

The Co-operative Bank  
Colmore Row  
Birmingham  
B3 3BA

## Investment Advisers

Aberdeen Standard Capital  
1 George Street,  
Edinburgh  
EH2 2LL



## Board of Trustees

The Directors of the charitable company (the Charity) are its Trustees for the purpose of charity law and throughout this report are collectively referred to as the Trustees. The Board of Trustees is supported by a Company Secretary who is responsible for governance administration.

The elected Trustees as at 31 March 2021 are as follows:

<b>Name</b>	<b>Nominated by:</b>
Nick Downes (Chair)	Barrow Parish Council
Maureen Bragg (Vice Chair)	Community Trustee
John Box	Shropshire Wildlife Trust
Simon Harris	Shropshire Council
Chris Turley	Telford & Wrekin Council
Max Speke	Sutton Maddock Parish Council
Gina Rowe	Community Trustee
Alan Mackenzie	Madeley Town Council
Carolyn Healy	Telford & Wrekin Council
Andrew Cooke	Broseley Town Council
Dylan Webster	Telford & Wrekin Council
Alan Taylor	The Gorge Parish Council

## Staff

Russell Rowley	CEO
Kate Chetwood	Company Secretary and Finance Officer
Nathan Morris	Head of Countryside
Emily Holmes	Apprentice Countryside Officer



# Structure, Governance and Management

Severn Gorge Countryside Trust was set up in 1991 with the primary aim of promoting, protecting and conserving the living landscape of the Ironbridge Gorge for the benefit of local people and visitors. It is a registered charity governed by a Trustee Board and depends on staff, contractors and volunteers to help manage the land.

In this section you can find out more about how the charity is run, how we work with the local community and how we ensure a sustainable organisation that is fit for the future.

## Governing Document

Severn Gorge Countryside Trust is a registered charity and a company limited by guarantee under the Companies Act and governed by its Memorandum and Articles of Association originally dated 20 September 1991 (amended June 2009 and December 2013 to update governance arrangements).

## Who Governs the Trust?

The Trust is governed by its Committee of Management (COM) made up of several Member Organisations and Community Trustees. The Trustees are all volunteers with careers and experience in a wide variety of fields.

In accordance with the Memorandum and Articles of Association, Trustees are elected by the membership for terms of four years. At the end of the four-year term Trustees may stand for re-election. Nominations for new Trustees are considered each year prior to the Annual General Meeting (AGM). All Member Organisations are circulated with invitations to nominate Trustees, advising them of any retiring Trustees and requesting nominations for the AGM. The Member Organisations are made up of a variety of local organisations that have a keen interest in the Ironbridge Gorge and also two Community Trustee places. When considering appointing Trustees, the Committee of Management (Board of Directors) has regard to the requirement of any specialist skills needed.



## Trustee induction and training

The Trust provides an induction session to brief new Trustees on their legal obligations under charity and company law, the contents of the Memorandum and Articles of Association, the committee structure and decision-making processes, the Development Strategy and recent financial performance of the charity. They are also advised on the future plans and objectives of the Trust. During the induction they meet the CEO, Company Secretary and other employees. They are advised of appropriate Trustee training courses and are encouraged to attend.

## Management

The COM is responsible for setting policies and ensuring legality and good practice in accordance with the Memorandum and Articles of Association of the Trust and the Charities Act 2011. The Committee of Management meets quarterly and is responsible for the governance of the charitable company, ensuring that it is well managed and that its assets are safeguarded.

At the outset of each year the COM approves an annual work plan and budget which contains clear objectives. During the year the COM monitors progress against the annual work plan.

The day-to-day management of the Trust is undertaken by the CEO and staff who operate under delegated authority.

The COM met three times in 2020/21, the meetings were moved to a virtual platform (Zoom) with effect from June 2020.

The COM has 1 sub-committee (Personnel Committee) whose terms of reference are approved by the COM: -

The Personnel Committee is elected annually from the COM and meets to advise on staffing issues and employee training, development and support. The Personnel Committee met twice this year. They are also responsible for reviewing Trustee training needs.

## Working Groups

Two working groups were set up in 2020/2021 to review specific areas of the Trust's work. These were the Investment Working Group to look at how the Trust

can change its current investment portfolio to a more ethical model and the Climate Change Working Group to look at what the Trust can do immediately and in the longer term to reduce its CO<sub>2</sub> emissions.

## Impact of Corona virus

Together with the rest of the world the work of the Trust was dominated by the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, which has had a significant effect on operations of the Trust and its activities. Our immediate priorities were the safety of our staff, contractors and volunteers, the accessibility of our sites and the financial impact of the decline in income.

Where possible, staff have been working from home and social distancing measures have been put in place where attendance at work is necessary. Risk assessments were undertaken to assess the impact on our annual work plan and the budgetary implications. This has included postponing some areas of work, furloughing staff, and applying for Government business relief grants. Where possible we have sought to minimise our operating costs by reducing office costs and overhead expenditure.

The impact of furloughing staff and a reduction in hours



has meant that not all of our annual land management work was able to be completed and we have had to postpone work to 2021/22. Although we have had to amend our ways of working, the Trust has shown that it has sufficient financial and operational resources to withstand the current predicament. We have managed to deliver the vast majority of our annual work plan and all legal and management requirements have been fulfilled. Further detail on the financial impacts of coronavirus and the mitigating actions taken by the Trust can be found throughout the report.

## Planning for the Future

The significance of the Trust's landholdings dictates the need for a planned, long-term approach to give direction and continuity to management.

This is achieved through comprehensive management plans for the Trust's sites and a Development Strategy that governs the work of the Trust.

The Development Strategy was approved by Trustees in November 2017 and will guide the work of the Trust until the end of 2028. It sets out the Trust's vision, aims and plans for achieving its charitable objectives,

identifies the successful methods of working that will be continued, the developments that will be introduced over the ten years and the opportunities that will be taken up if time and resources allow. Copies of the full strategy can be downloaded from the website ([www.severngorge.org.uk](http://www.severngorge.org.uk)) or obtained from the Trust Office.

## Climate Change Declaration

Following the Trust's Climate Change Declaration in November 2019 we have been looking at ways to tackle the causes of climate change. For example, by reducing our own emissions and using renewable energy for our electricity supply, caring for the land that captures and stores carbon, exploring flood mitigation options and restoring wildlife habitats that are threatened.

We are having to adapt to unpredictable weather patterns including restoring the damage caused by heavy rain, high winds and droughts.

The climate change challenge may be large but so is the opportunity. We can lock up carbon in the woodlands we manage using Continuous Cover forestry and create more opportunities for wildlife to thrive. We aim to do



everything we can to protect the natural environment and we're changing our investment policy to support this.

Returns from our investments are vital for helping us protect and care for the living landscape of the Ironbridge Gorge World Heritage Site.

As part of our commitment to our environmental aims, we're stopping investment in fossil fuel companies by the end of 2021. No investments will be made in companies that derive income from the extraction of coal or oil.

**The new measures include:**

- ◆ Divesting from all fossil fuel companies by the end of 2021
- ◆ Establishing a long-term goal to continue the reduction of the carbon footprint of the investment portfolio.
- ◆ Actively seeking out opportunities to support green businesses.

We are a conservation organisation and so are rightly held to account about the environmental impact of everything we do, from plastic overshoes all the way up to the environmental impact of the companies we invest in. We know this is a complex issue and we are learning, along with the rest of the world, about the many things we can do to minimise our impact and how we can apply them across our operations.

Our pension fund, like many organisations is managed independently and we have no direct influence over how the pension funds are invested. However, we are lobbying our pension fund (Shropshire Pension Fund) to divest from fossil fuels and hope that they will consider the best approach for them to meet their commitment to prioritise the interests of pension fund members.

A working group has been set up to report to the Committee of Management on the immediate and longer-term actions the Trust can take to become carbon neutral by 2030. The working group made up of staff, and 4 Trustees met in April and September 2020. Some of the areas they explored included reviewing our investment policy and moving towards a more ethical and environmental model including investing in



renewable energy. Developing a calculator to measure the Trust's current carbon emissions, reviewing our water usage and waste production and eliminating single use plastics. The working group will continue to meet on an annual basis to review the Trust's progress in all these areas.

On the following pages is our first attempt at monitoring our annual CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, we will be working at refining the calculator over the next 12 months to establish a method of measuring and reducing our emissions.

# Annual Carbon Calculator

## Summary

The focus is on CO2 emissions from fossil fuels (oil, gas, coal). The main sources of CO2 emissions currently are the two vehicles (Land Rover and Minibus) and the gas boiler. The electricity comes from 100% renewable sources and is monitored, reduced if practicable, and reported. The gas comes from natural gas but not from a renewable source. This will be reviewed in early 2023 ahead of the contract ending in April 2023.

The approximate weight of logs used in the stove is monitored but those CO2 emissions do not form part of these calculations as logs are renewable. The unavoidable residual emissions are 4.1 tonnes CO2. A carbon reduction plan is being prepared that deals with the supply of gas from renewable sources rather than natural gas and with the vehicle replacements when these become necessary.

	Annual Usage		Conversion Factor (see Notes & Sources)
Gas	7,331	kWh for April 2020 to March 2021. Opus Energy(see Notes & Sources).	0.18316
Electricity	7,081	kWh for April 2020 to March 2021. Opus Energy (see Notes & Sources).	N/A
Wood burners	3 to 4	tonnes approximate annual use	N/A
Water	67	cubic metres for April 2020 to March 2021	0.421
Land Rover	5368	miles average last 3 years to May 2021	0.42695
Minibus	960	miles average last 3 years to May 2021	0.42695

Scope 1: direct emissions of CO2 (kg) annually from fuel combustion and Trust vehicles (see Notes & Sources)			Scope 2: indirect emissions of CO2 (kg) annually from purchased electricity (see Notes & Sources)			Scope 3: other indirect emissions of CO2 (kg) annually: for example, transport-related activities in non-Trust vehicles, national grid transmission and distribution, outsourced activities, water, waste disposal (see Notes & Sources)		
Source of Scope 1 CO2 emissions	kgCO2e/year		Source of Scope 2 CO2 emissions	kgCO2e/year		Source of Scope 3 CO2 emissions		kgCO2e/year
Gas boiler - kWh annually	7,331	1,343	Electricity - kWh annually	7,081	0	Electricity grid transmission & distribution - kWh	7,081	0
Wood burners - weight of logs annually	3 to 4	-				Gas grid transmission & distribution	No figures given in Government guidance and it is assumed to be zero	0
Landrover (diesel, 2950 kg GVW) - annual mileage	5368	2,292				Water supply & Water treatment - cubic metres annually	67	28
Minibus (diesel, 3960 kg GVW) - annual mileage	960	410						
<b>Total emissions (Scope 1)</b>		<b>4,044</b>	<b>Total emissions (Scope 2)</b>		<b>0</b>	<b>Total emissions (Scope 3)</b>		<b>28</b>
<b>FINAL OUTCOME:</b>		<b>4.1</b>	<b>tonnes CO2</b>					

## NOTES & SOURCES

**Renewable energy supplies** Electricity or gas supplied from purely renewable sources where the supplier can demonstrate that the energy supplied to customers only comes from renewable sources can be included in calculations as having zero carbon emissions.

**Electricity** is supplied from 100% renewable sources

by Opus Energy on a contract until 2023. With Opus Advance, our electricity comes from renewable sources including solar, wind, hydro and anaerobic digestion (AD). <https://www.opusenergy.com/our-energy-sources>

Transmission and distribution factors should be used to report the Scope 3 emissions associated with national grid losses; the energy loss that occurs



in getting the electricity from the power plant to the organisations that purchase it. Not included in assessment as electricity purchased is from 100% renewable sources.

**Gas** is supplied by Opus Energy on a contract from April 2020 to April 2023. "The gas we supply to our customers is natural gas. This is, broadly speaking, the case for all energy suppliers in the UK. Biomethane (sometimes called "green gas" or "biogas") is considered renewable but is not widely available. It is mixed with natural gas in small quantities to reduce the carbon footprint of gas consumption; according to BEIS, gas supplied in the UK in 2018 was 0.4% biomethane. The Green Gas Certification Scheme (GGCS) certifies producers of biomethane in the UK. This is produced by anaerobic digestion (a renewable technology) and exported to the national gas grid. For every kilowatt equivalent of green gas injected into the grid, the producer is issued with a Renewable Gas Guarantee of Origin (RGGO). Energy suppliers can buy these certificates and offset them against a customers' consumption. The money is used to further develop biomethane production, helping to create a less carbon intensive gas infrastructure. We don't currently offer an official customer product for either of the above options, but we hope to in the near future, as there has been some demand from our customers for such an offering." Opus Energy email 29 May 2020.

**Wood Burners** CO<sub>2</sub>e emissions from the two wood burners are not included as wood is a renewable energy source.

The CO<sub>2</sub> released by burning wood was accumulated over decades in the trees and would eventually be released naturally. This should be separately reported and can be counted as carbon neutral. "Due to the biogenic differences between fossil fuels and biomass, they are categorised differently in national inventories. Emissions of CO<sub>2</sub> from the combustion of biomass are reported for informational purposes, but not included in national totals." <https://ghgprotocol.org/calculation-tools-faq>.

"Carbon dioxide produced from biologically-sequestered carbon, e.g., from the combustion of biomass for electricity and/or heat generation, or from other industrial processes, such as industrial fermentation, should be reported separately to emissions in scopes 1, 2, and 3. This is because the carbon dioxide would have been emitted anyway when the plants – from which the biomass is derived – decayed naturally at the end of their life. However, two other GHGs – nitrous oxide and methane – are commonly emitted when biomass is combusted. These would not be emitted during natural decay and any nitrous oxide or methane emissions from biomass/biofuel consumption should therefore be included in your emissions under the three scopes. This is the approach generally taken in international accounting standards." Page 62 of 'Environmental Reporting Guidelines' (HM Government, 2019).

Paul Allan from the Centre for Alternative Technology (CAT) doesn't count burning logs as contributing to global CO<sub>2</sub>. He considers above ground carbon as part of the natural carbon cycle that the earth can manage. The idea of using tree planting and rewilding to sequester carbon being emitted from fossil fuels is that it's the only real way of taking it out of the atmosphere." Paul Allan is CAT's External Relations Officer and heads their Zero Carbon Project <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UUJs4ZfQkI4>

**Office building** The Severn Gorge Countryside Trust is based in an award-winning sustainable building. The office is timber framed, wool insulated and heated by two log burners. The outside cladding is larch which we harvested from our woodlands. The office has a Mechanical Ventilation with Heat Recovery (MVHR) ventilation system that both supplies and extracts air throughout the office. This system is used to reduce the heating and cooling demands of buildings. The MVHR continually draws and circulates fresh air from

outside, pre warmed by heat exchangers capturing heat from the stale air as it is expelled. The roof is made up from approximately ten thousand western red cedar shingles. The office is insulated with sheep wool mixed with recycled polyester; it has remarkable properties, in that during the winter it keeps the building warm and, in the summer, it keeps the building cool.

CO<sub>2</sub>e (**carbon dioxide equivalent**) is a standard unit for measuring carbon footprints. The idea is to express the impact of each different greenhouse gas (CO<sub>2</sub>, methane, nitrous oxide) in terms of the amount of CO<sub>2</sub> that would create the same amount of warming. That way, a carbon footprint consisting of lots of different greenhouse gases can be expressed as a single number.

**Detailed official guidance** Environmental Reporting Guidelines, HM Government, March 2019 [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/850130/Env-reporting-guidance\\_inc\\_SECR\\_31March.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/850130/Env-reporting-guidance_inc_SECR_31March.pdf)

**Conversion factors (electricity, electricity transmission & distribution, natural gas, water, waste, vehicles)**. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/greenhouse-gas-reporting-conversion-factors-2021> – full set for advanced users in order to include the Land Rover and minibus which are classed as ‘Delivery Vehicles’. These are set annually in May.

**Scope 1, Scope 2 & Scope 3** The Greenhouse Gas Protocol (<https://ghgprotocol.org/>) is recognized by the UK government as an independent standard for reporting greenhouse gases. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Carbon\\_emissions\\_reporting](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Carbon_emissions_reporting).



## Annual Work Plan/Budget

---

Annual work plans and budgets are developed to ensure the core work in the management plans and Development Strategy are achieved without overstressing the Trust's resources or compromising its long-term viability.

The annual work plan for 2020/2021 was set from the 2018/2028 Development Strategy. The plan and budget were set before the outbreak of the Coronavirus pandemic.

## Risk Management

---

In accordance with the Charity Commission's Statement of Recommended Practice (SORP) 2005, Trustees have a risk management strategy in place which comprises:

- ◆ An annual review of the risks the Trust may face, which also identifies any new risks that the Trust may be exposed to
- ◆ The establishment of systems and procedures to mitigate against those risks identified in the review; and
- ◆ The implementation of procedures to prevent any potential impact on the charity should those risks materialise.

The Trust believes that risk management is an essential part of good business practice and will continue to ensure that risk management principles become incorporated into all aspects of its work.

It should be noted that any risk management system can only manage risks and not eliminate them.

## Public Benefit

---

This annual report looks at what we have achieved over the previous twelve months. The report looks at the work and outcomes of each key aim and the benefits that have been provided to the public. In setting our aims and planning our activities, Trustees have given careful consideration to the Charity Commission's guidance on Public Benefit.

Trustees believe that the provision of such benefit is an integral part to each of the Trust's charitable objectives. We work hard to deliver public benefit by promoting and protecting the beautiful landscape of the



Ironbridge Gorge for everyone to enjoy. The Trust land and activities are available to all and we try to make special provision wherever possible for the disabled and disadvantaged.

This report also helps us ensure our aims, objectives and activities remained focused on our stated purpose. In order to achieve our aims the Trust must strive to maintain an efficient and effective organisation, that is well governed, well managed and which has the capacity, infrastructure and support necessary to deliver them.

# Objectives and activities

## WHAT WE DO...

The Trust is responsible for promoting, protecting and conserving the living landscape of the Ironbridge Gorge for the benefit of local people and visitors. It aims to balance the needs of public access, landscape and nature conservation, safeguarding historic and cultural features, whilst engaging with the public and developing a wider awareness and knowledge of the Trust and its work.

To achieve these aims the Trust has five main charitable objectives:

to enhance a living and working landscape that retains its locally distinctive characteristics, habitats and species populations

to conserve and interpret, where appropriate all features of cultural and historical significance

to provide inspiring experiences of the natural world and encourage people to manage their local environment through volunteering opportunities

to provide high quality access for informal recreation for the enjoyment of all and to encourage outdoor activity for the benefit of health and wellbeing

to develop and promote a wider awareness and understanding of the Trust's work



# HOW WE DO IT...

Examples of activities carried out and impacts and benefits achieved under each of these strategic aims are as follows:

## Landscape and Nature Conservation

AIM: to enhance a living and working landscape that retains its locally distinctive characteristics, habitats and species populations.

**Looking after and managing our sites is a key way that we can directly benefit wildlife. Each of our sites is an exceptional place for wildlife with many containing outstanding examples of scarce and uncommon habitats and species. Every year they surprise and delight visitors to them.**

**All of our land is open to the public and provides excellent opportunities for contact with nature which in turn has a positive effect on the quality of life and well-being of the community.**

Each year, the Trust undertakes extensive management programmes to safeguard these special places. For example,

- ◆ clearing woody regeneration from the floor of Patten's Rock Quarry, an excellent example of limestone grassland with colonies of Twayblade, Bee, Greater butterfly and Common Spotted orchids
- ◆ managing the merging of areas of woodland, grass and scrub. These untidy and complex edges are where insects thrive and food chains begin
- ◆ clearing scrub trying to colonise the important small patches of heathland found in The Crostan and Dale Coppice
- ◆ managing important areas of wildflower rich hay meadow and pasture. By using our flock of Soay sheep together with contractors and volunteers, the Trust is able to ensure that the techniques and machinery used are ideally suited to these small sites and based on traditional methods

### Ecological Monitoring

The Trust commissions ecological consultants to carry out annual ecological monitoring of Trust sites. Ecological monitoring provides the Trust with



the information required to assess and respond to ecosystem changes. Monitoring can also assist with the identification of new environmental concerns, the prioritisation of issues, and the evaluation of trends over time. Using the information gathered, the Trust can plan its future management of sites.

Our ecological monitoring reviews carried out on key sites have shown the high quality of our habitats and their management.

Managing such a complex landscape relies on clear objectives and good quality ecological and management information. But in reality, this is complicated by the fact that any ecosystem is in a

constant state of change which can sometimes make meeting our objectives more challenging.

An annual ecology day is normally held during the summer months where our ecologist meets with Trust staff and the ecology working group to look at the sites that have been managed and discuss proposals as to how to best manage the sites to achieve their objectives. Due to C-19 this annual meeting has had to be postponed. However, Trust staff have been liaising with the Ecology Working group to discuss any issues with our sites.

While we postponed the Countryside Stewardship (CS) Application, we did bring forward some monitoring of sites to help ensure that they were eligible for the restoration/maintenance of species rich grassland option within the C.S.

We have worked with CH Ecology to simplify the reports from the monitoring of our woodlands and grasslands; The new layout will be simplified with all the key information readily available along with comments from the years monitoring. We are also looking into using Geographical Information Systems (GIS) to store data to make it even more accessible.

## Beehives

With minimal interference due to fewer checks on the hives, our bees continued to thrive. We now have two hives following the successful swarm collection last year. We extracted over 60 jars of honey that were sold to local people.

## Dormice

Nicola Stone, from the Shropshire Dormouse Group, led a session on identifying dormice, their habitats and nibbled hazelnuts, with a visit to Lydebrook woods where boxes had been placed several years ago.

## Farm the Flow

The Farm the Flow partnership working together with Telford & Wrekin Council and a range of other partners had a busy final year, despite the challenges caused by the Covid-19 pandemic.

Detailed measurements were taken by Trust staff at each of the 30 research woody debris dams installed on land within the Lydebrook catchment at Brockton House



Farm, courtesy of the Pickstocks. These measurements were to provide further detail to report back to DEFRA how much water each dam could potentially hold back during a flood. The dams were also digitally surveyed by consultants working for Telford & Wrekin Council to input to a hydrological model to inform a revision to the Rapid Response Catchment Plan for the Lydebrook.

We continued to monitor the eighteen forty-centimetre-long tubes in the ground either side and under the middle of a hedge in a known flood pathway in Wilderness Meadows to measure soil moisture at ten, twenty, thirty and forty centimetres depth along with at ground level using specialist equipment. These results have been graphed and so far, show that the ground underneath the hedge is drier, probably due to the root zone, though results above and below the hedge are more complex. They have shown that silty clay loams, with their very fine clay particles, 'seal' quickly in the top ten centimetres when they become wet, whereas water can take 3 days to percolate to lower levels. This fits with the research done by the Learning about Lydebrook Citizen Science project which recorded much slower infiltration times of over 20 minutes, for water poured into plastic pipes set into the ground, in saturated soil, instead of less than one minute when the soil is dry.

This has implications for the risks of surface 'pluvial' flood risk within the Lydebrook and Coalbrookdale when slow moving thunderstorms dump large volumes of rainwater at high intensities (over 50 mm per hour rates) on already saturated ground.

## Deer Management

Deer can have a damaging effect on woodland habitats. Natural regeneration is the principal means of restocking the Trust's woodland and an increasing deer population will adversely affect the success of natural regeneration. Deer have an important role within our woodland and are the largest land mammal to live in the United Kingdom. The management works will seek to reduce deer numbers to a point where the impact on the woodland and their associated plant communities are acceptable.

Covid-19 has reduced the amount of time the stalkers have been able to get out on site, and cull figures are even lower than normal.

## Forestry

The Trust continues to manage its woodlands under Continuous Cover Forestry principles which aim to create a structurally and visually diverse woodland ecosystem with trees of all sizes which helps to protect the soil and keep the land stable.

This additional funding enables the Trust to continue its management programmes, such as ride mowing, deer and squirrel management and thinning works. Thinning has multiple benefits including letting in light for ground flora, it opens up space for trees, provides financial money back for trees felled and increases bird activity. It will also help to improve biodiversity



and enhance resilience to climate change. We will also maintain an appropriate level of dead wood and protect veteran trees from competing tree growth.

We postponed the application to CS this year due to the need to rewrite the woodland management plan. Once this has been completed and approved, we should be in a better position to apply to the scheme and get an achievable agreement. The agreement will help concentrate our limited resources on sites with the greatest potential.

With the need to rewrite the plan we decided that we would not carry out any forestry works this year. Once the plan is approved, we will have felling permissions for the next 10 years, which will give the Trust greater flexibility in terms of sitework and will help us to manage ash dieback in the woodlands.

## Arc GIS

Following the HOC and ACO's completion of an ArcGIS Pro beginners' course in February 2020, the Trust has been migrating mapping data over to its new ArcGIS programme. ArcGIS is used by Telford & Wrekin council as well as other partners, which allows for easy access and dissemination of mapping information.

Some of ArcGIS's greatest benefits are its associated apps which the Trust has been implementing to provide effective new ways to record information. One of these apps, called Survey123, allows for data to be easily collected on site, capturing a GPS location and photo, including options to write notes etc. The Trust is now using Survey123 to record culvert checks, tree safety checks, and conduct biannual access surveys. The app is also being used by volunteers to report access infrastructure issues they encounter on SGCT sites.

Following on site data collection, the data can then be easily accessed and visualized on a map. This is helpful for staff and contractors because it provides a GPS location for any issues that need addressing, thus saving time. It also enables data collection in all weathers which is beneficial as using paper records during rainfall presented a challenge.

Although ArcGIS provides multiple opportunities for data collection and dissemination, setting up the new

systems is complex and therefore we are advancing our use of the software step by step. We plan to expand our use of the software to include ecological reporting (beginning with Dormouse surveys), soil data, story maps, and other ways of sharing our data on SGCT sites with partners and the public.

## Contractors

The Trust regularly uses over 20 local contractors to carry out a variety of works on its land. From landscape maintenance to tree surgery to repairs to historic brickwork, each self-employed contractor brings their own skills and knowledge to the work. Some of these contractors have worked for the Trust since its creation in 1991 and have built up a wealth of knowledge about the sites the Trust manages.

Some of the jobs contractors carry out on an annual basis include:

- ◆ hedge cutting
- ◆ hay cutting and baling
- ◆ ragwort spraying with citronella
- ◆ Japanese knotweed control
- ◆ ride mowing
- ◆ strimming of footpaths
- ◆ thistle topping
- ◆ de-scaling of Jiggers Bank rock face

Contractors are also called in to undertake any 'reactive' work that happens. For example, when a tree has fallen across a path, a contractor will carry out the necessary work to make the tree safe and clear it from across the path.

Specialist work, such as the descaling and torque testing of the bolts on Jigger's bank rock face is also carried out by contractors. Contractors carry out maintenance twice a year by abseiling down the rock face and clearing any loose rock, cutting back small trees and testing the bolts that secure the netting on part of the rock face.

# Cultural and Historical Features

**Aim: to conserve and interpret, where appropriate all features of cultural and historical significance**

**The industrial past of the Ironbridge Gorge has left its mark on the area in more ways than just the Iron Bridge itself. Many types of industry thrived here, and the Trust looks after sixty historic structures from small retaining walls to brick arches, lime kilns to mine breathers and adit entrances. The Trust has spent over £250,000 in conserving the industrial heritage of the Ironbridge Gorge.**



The World Heritage Site status of the Ironbridge Gorge serves to remind us of this area's unique contribution to the history and development of industrialised society. The Trust will continue to conserve and interpret (where appropriate) features of cultural and historical significance for the benefit of the public, enabling them to have a greater understanding and appreciation of the industrial and cultural history of the area.

The Trust commissions an annual Structures Inspection Report. The structures are monitored from fixed baselines, any condition changes are noted, and recommended actions identified. These resultant actions are further analysed from a risk management perspective looking at things like potential impact on highways, intensively used public spaces, and neighbours.

Five risk management priority categories are identified with required actions allocated to a category from level 0 (no action necessary) to level 4 (repair imminently).

In response to the annual report an action plan will be developed to implement, where possible, all level 4 actions or in discussion with engineers alternative risk mitigation strategies.

This year we carried out works to repair chestnut paling safety fences around several structures and checked historic walls for any loose stone.

Archaeological surveys are commissioned whenever required to ensure no features of cultural and historical significance are damaged by work and also to record anything found or uncovered for future reference.

# Community Engagement and Outdoor Learning

AIM: to provide inspiring experiences of the natural world and encourage people to manage their local environment through volunteering opportunities

**Due to the pandemic much of our planned volunteering and outdoor learning programme had to be changed or postponed and we lost an estimated 2,500 hours of volunteers' time following lockdown in March 2020**

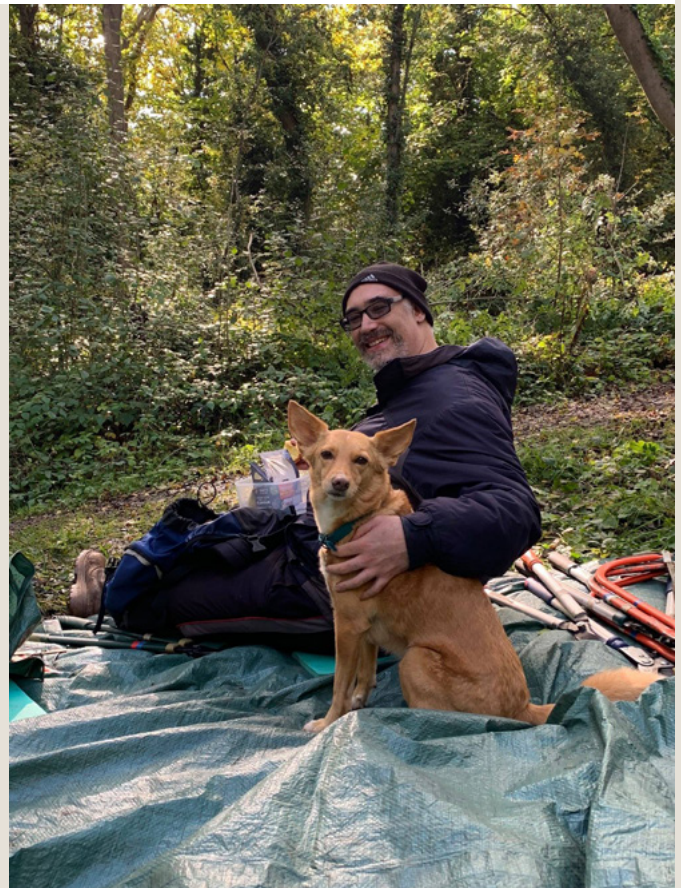
Providing opportunities for people to engage and interact with the natural world is a key remit for the Trust. Working together outdoors to conserve nature is a great way to engage with the natural environment. Opportunities like these are not just essential for personal development they also provide inspirational moments of awe and wonder which stay with people forever. Our Outdoor Learning Programme is about providing experiences that teach and inspire people. Our Volunteering Programme provides opportunities for the local community to learn more about and help with the management of the landscape on their doorstep. We hope that participants will be inspired and empowered to improve our environment for the benefit of nature and the community.

The land that we are responsible for provides a focus for community involvement. It also offers fantastic opportunities for research, education, exploration and, most importantly, having fun!

## Volunteering Programme

The Trust has a fantastic group of volunteers who for the past 13 years have contributed to helping the Trust achieve its access, landscape, and nature conservation objectives. Following the UK's first lockdown in March 2020 the volunteer programme was paused, with the Trust needing to adapt to keep connected with volunteers during this unprecedented period. We set up a private volunteers' Facebook page which now has 32 members, many who provide daily contributions. We sent volunteers regular email updates and started a weekly (later monthly) virtual quiz which has been a fun way to keep in touch.

Following government advice, the volunteer programme re-started in September 2020 with robust



Covid-19 protocols set in place. We created a booking in system to reduce volunteer numbers, numbered and sanitised tools, and provided hand sanitiser, among other measures. Despite reduced volunteer numbers we had some great days scything Shakespeare Meadow, removing scrub in Patten's Rock Quarry, fixing steps and opening pathways in Benthall, and coppicing in Dale Coppice and Workhouse Coppice.

Following the UK's second lockdown in November 2020 the volunteer programme was once again paused and plans to restart in June 2021 in line with government recommendations. Despite a difficult year, the Volunteering programme has had 31 volunteers contributing to 71 volunteer days, as well as volunteers hosting our virtual quizzes and informing us about things that need fixing via our Survey123 access issues

app. Our volunteers have continued to be a big support to the Trust and we would like to thank them for all their work and their contribution to helping us achieve our access, landscape, and nature conservation objectives, as well as helping to retain a sense of community during a challenging time.

## Apprenticeship

As part of her apprenticeship, the ACO has been working towards a level 2 Certificate in Work-Based Environmental Conservation, with modules including managing volunteers, using a chainsaw, and learning survey techniques. She is currently completing her final apprenticeship module.

Working as an apprentice during this global pandemic brought new challenges as well as opportunities for creativity. Emily's learning has had to become more independent, however it has also allowed her to explore areas of interest and realise how much she enjoys the role of facilitating connection – as has been the case with the volunteer project.



# Access and Recreation

**Aim: to provide high quality access for informal recreation for the enjoyment of all and to encourage outdoor activity for the benefits of health and wellbeing.**

**There were few benefits of the unprecedented lockdown, but people reconnecting with nature was certainly one of them. We were so pleased that people were using our sites to get their allotted 'hour of exercise' and exploring places on their doorstep that they had never discovered before. People are discovering that they need nature more than ever. The problem is that nature also needs us to fund it.**

## Lockdown Videos

During the first Covid pandemic lockdown in Spring 2020, we became aware that many were having to completely self-isolate and not even go outside. Whilst checking sites the Trust CEO tried an experiment to record some lockdown videos which were well received on our social media feeds. Given it was beautiful spring weather leading to amazing displays of wild garlic, lesser celandine, woodruff, wood anemone and wood sorrel, we ended up taking videos to release over 70 days and these were then transferred to our You Tube site.

The aim is for our sites to feel as natural as possible, so we strive to balance the need for good paths, signs and interpretation with the need to preserve the very sense of countryside we all head outdoors for. We have also tried to remove any unnecessary barriers to people's enjoyment, by removing squeeze stiles and replacing them with kissing gates and providing rest points to pause and savor the fantastic views. We still have improvements to make and will continue to strive to be better. Enabling people to explore and enjoy the natural world is fundamental to the work of the Trust and that is why all of our land is free for everyone to enjoy.

As well as improvements on the ground, we continue to look at the quality of the experience we offer, from the clarity of our maps to the information and history that our free leaflets provide.



## Strategic Action Plan

Approximately 25 kilometres of footpaths have to be maintained each year. The Strategic Access Review which was completed in 2015 continues to be used to feed into the Annual Work Plan. The Strategic Action Plan will be updated each year using information taken from the bi-annual footpath surveys to identify any repairs or maintenance required.

## Footpath Repairs

Poorly tanalised timber treads purchased in 2007-8 to install many hundreds of steps are now rotting on a daily basis and repairing them is time consuming and costly. This is particularly obvious in Lloyd's Coppice and Loamhole Dingle.

We launched a Just Giving Campaign to help raise funds to repair access infrastructure and were delighted by the generous response from our supporters who raised over £1,000. We are also very grateful to the following organisations who gave grants to the Trust:

- ◆ The Heritage Lottery Emergency Fund
- ◆ The Hilton Jones Charitable Trust
- ◆ The Gorge Parish Council
- ◆ Madeley Town Council
- ◆ The Nineveh Trust

With the donations and grant funding we were able to replace the rotting timber steps and boardwalks with stone in Lloyds Coppice and Loamhole Dingle.

As more and more people were using our sites over lockdown it was vital work that we were so pleased to be able to complete. The total cost of the access infrastructure improvements was £20,587

## Family activity walks

The Trust has produced four circular 1km family trails using footpaths in Benthall, Haywood, Loamhole and Maws. All are part of a group of maps which show Milly and Orla the office dogs in cartoon form, each with a variety of activities to do whilst exploring the routes.



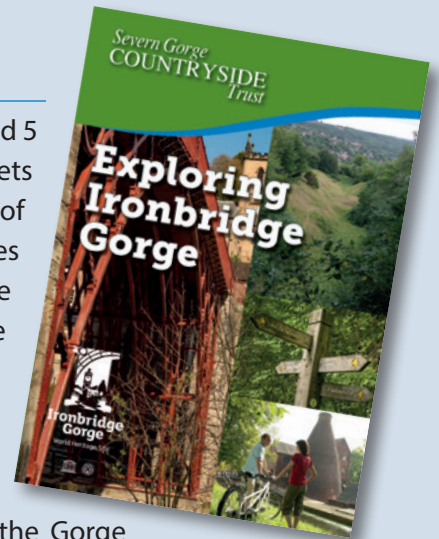
- ◆ **Bounding in Benthall:** along past Doris the Dragon, the Lime kiln and Bower yard picnic site
- ◆ **Maws Paws:** along the new Tile Trail, Preenshead and Boat Inn meadow path.

- ◆ **Hilly Haywood Adventure:** up the zig zag path to Silkin Way and into Haywood Plantation.
- ◆ **Splish Splash Splosh in Loamhole Dingle:** along the path to the footbridge and stream and through the meadow.

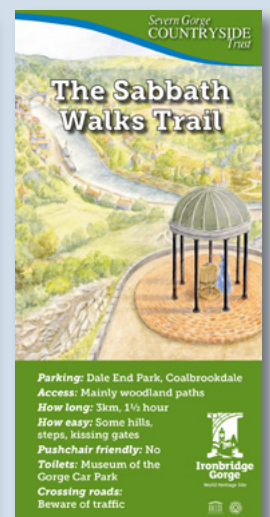
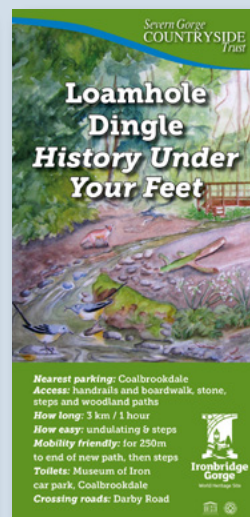
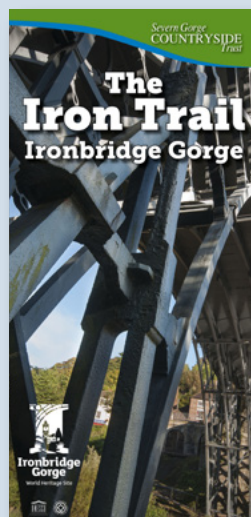
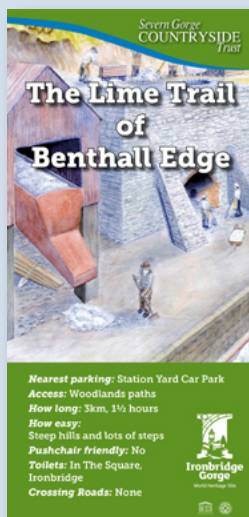
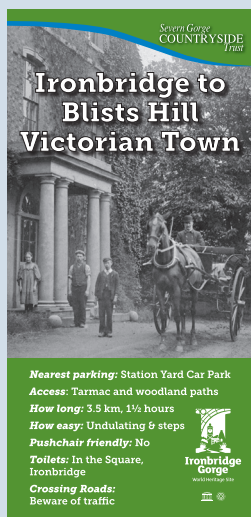
All of the Milly and Orla family friendly walks can be downloaded from our website.

## Walking Trail Leaflets

The Trust has produced 5 free Walking Trail leaflets that showcase some of the best walking routes around the Ironbridge Gorge World Heritage Site. The walks provide people with the opportunity to discover some of the hidden gems of the Gorge and learn more about the landscape and history of the area whilst they explore. Visitors can make a day of it by visiting some of the many historic sites and attractions along the walks and stopping for a while for refreshment at one of the many cafés, pubs and restaurants in Ironbridge and the surrounding area.



The leaflets are available to download from our website, from the Tourist Information Centre and from various outlets in the Gorge. The leaflet dispenser in Station Road car park is regularly refilled and around 20,000 leaflets have been dispensed this year.





The route for the 'Iron Trail' links existing paths into a circular walk that includes both built and natural features within the World Heritage Site to encourage visitors to explore beyond the built environment. Its objective is to highlight otherwise unseen heritage such as the remnants and evidence of the iron production process that made the Gorge 'the birthplace of industry' within the natural landscape.

The 'Lime Trail' of Benthall Edge takes the walker through a wooded landscape steep in the geology which benefitted the past industries of the Gorge. The footpath follows a circular route taking the walker through beautiful SSSI woodland with iconic viewpoints of the Gorge and Coalbrookdale before descending to the valley bottom along the Severn Valley Railway.

The 'Sabbath Walks Trail' follows in the footsteps of Richard Reynolds who built the wide footpaths in the 18th Century for his workers and families. This trail takes in Dale Coppice and Lincoln Hill and the viewpoint at the Rotunda with views of the Iron Bridge.

The Ironbridge to Blists Hill Victorian Town Trail is as it says, linking Ironbridge to Blists Hill with a safe traffic-free route through Lloyd's Coppice whilst seeing historic remnants on the past once linked to Blists Hill furnaces.

The circular Trail 'Loamhole Dingle; History under your feet' takes you from Upper Furnace Pool and through the wooded dingle to the Ropewalk where nature meets the industrial past. This walk can also be linked with Lydebrook Dingle as part of the Shropshire Way.

These trails will hopefully encourage more visitors to explore the landscape of the World Heritage Site on foot.

## Walks Books

To support people to get outdoors and closer to nature we have published several guided walks books. These will help everyone to visit our sites and enjoy their natural beauty and find out more about the forces that have shaped them – natural and man-made. Each book offers a number of self-guided walks that offer opportunities to explore the history of the area as well as the diversity of landscape, geology and wildlife. All the books can be purchased from the Trust Office, and are also available at Ironbridge Gorge Museum sites, the Visitor Information Centre, The Green Wood Cafe and some local shops. Copies of the routes can also be downloaded from our website; [www.severngorge.org.uk](http://www.severngorge.org.uk).



# Raising Awareness

**Aim: to develop and promote a wider awareness and understanding of the Trust's work**

## Trees of Knowledge

The Trees of Knowledge community group was set up in 2007 to provide opportunities for people to learn about, understand and input their own knowledge and become involved in the long-term management of the Trust's land.

## Dormice

Nicola Stone, Shropshire Dormouse Officer, led a session on identifying dormice, their habitats and nibbled hazelnuts, with a visit to Lydebrook woods where boxes had been placed several years ago.

## 'Lookers' Scheme

The flock of native breed Soay sheep that the Trust uses to manage its wildflower meadows continues to increase, and the volunteer shepherds or 'Lookers' now help to look after a flock of over 60 sheep. The Lookers' programme has been running for Nine years and currently 14 volunteers are extremely proficient in a wide range of sheep husbandry techniques including handling, ear tagging and injecting.

Each year we lamb 10 ewes, The ewe lambs are registered with the Rare Breeds Survival Trust. We are keen to increase the number of registered pedigree breeding ewes to improve the Soay's status on the RBST watch list.

This project relies on the collaboration of our volunteer shepherds who co-ordinate their visits to the sheep via a rota system. Usually in the mornings and afternoons, the Lookers spend some time making sure that the sheep have got all that they need to graze happily.

Work has continued selling some of the sheep both as breeding stock and meat. The sheep will be sheared this year and the fleeces sold to the Sheep Shed in Leominster. Shearing should reduce the chance of flystrike, reduce the cost of preventative medication and improve the wellbeing of the sheep in warmer weather.





## Timber

The Trust has started selling seasoned firewood to volunteers and local people. During the year we collect timber from tree safety works, fallen trees and reactive works and we began to build up quite a stack of timber. We decided to start selling some and the demand has been so great we sold out just after Christmas. Our woodlands are one of the biggest assets of the Trust and using them to generate a modest income as well working towards climate change goals has been a positive change.

We have large scale powerline clearance work beginning soon and it is hope that this will kickstart the supply going forward making sure we don't sell out again. Moving forward we will retain some timber from standing sales to sell locally.

## Community Events

The Trust continues to work with other organisations to support local community events which attracted many hundreds of visitors. Supporting such events allows the Trust to engage with people that may not be aware of the work and activities the Trust carries out, or the opportunities available to them to enjoy and use the land managed by the Trust.

## Virtual World Heritage Site Festival

The Trust produced two short films which were shown at the virtual World Heritage Site Festival. A video of the Sabbath Walks journeying through the rich history of the area was produced in collaboration with local historian Harriet Devlin and a video showing viewers how to age a hedge by counting tree species present, was produced in collaboration with John Box, SGCT Trustee and Ecologist. The links to the videos can be found below:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9pNOaGUUueE>,  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WvRjvDcEbjE>

## Annual Open Evening

Because of concerns about large gatherings of people, Trustees supported the suggestion not to hold an Open Evening in 2020. The purpose of the Annual Open Evening is to give local residents a chance to meet Trust staff, Trustees and Volunteers and learn more about the work we undertake. It also provides an opportunity to



raise any concerns or issues they may have. It is hoped that we will be able to hold an open evening in 2021 or look at providing a virtual event to disseminate information.

## Partnership Working

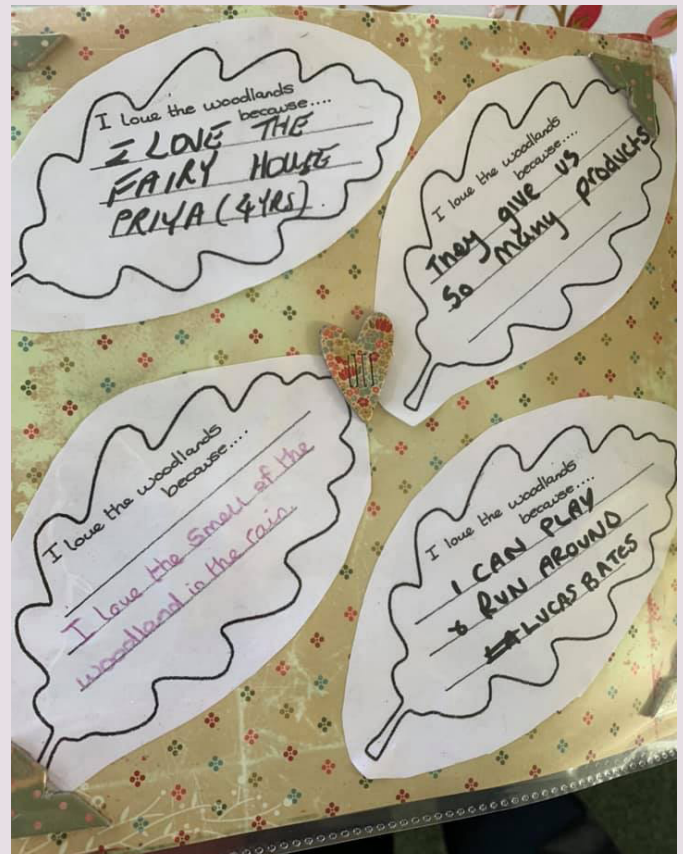
We continue to develop and strengthen partnerships with a wide range of organisations and individuals for the benefit of local communities, visitors and wildlife. Successful partnership working allows us to develop new areas of work, including 'Outdoor Learning', environmental arts and alternative land management techniques.

- ◆ Broseley Town Council
- ◆ Dawley Angling Society
- ◆ Deer Initiative
- ◆ English Heritage
- ◆ Environment Agency
- ◆ Forestry Commission
- ◆ Friends of Rough Park
- ◆ Harper Adams University College
- ◆ Ironbridge Gorge Museum Trust
- ◆ Ironbridge Meadows and Pastures group
- ◆ Lodge Field Group
- ◆ Madeley Town Council
- ◆ Madeley Nursery
- ◆ National Trust
- ◆ Natural England
- ◆ Neighbouring farmers and landowners
- ◆ Shropshire Geological Society
- ◆ Telford & Wrekin Council
- ◆ Telford Green Spaces Partnership
- ◆ The Gorge Parish Council
- ◆ The World Heritage Site Steering Group
- ◆ University of Birmingham (Ironbridge Institute)
- ◆ West Midlands Regional Flood & Coastal Committee
- ◆ Wolverhampton University
- ◆ University Centre, Shrewsbury

Community engagement is essential to the success of all of our work. We aim to work with local communities to engage people of all ages through events, volunteering opportunities and education to ensure the sustainability of our 'Outdoor Learning' programme. The active involvement of local people is also vitally important in the management of the land in the Severn Gorge. Local people have a strong interest in their local environment and the Trust is keen to harness the help of local residents to act as its 'eyes and ears' reporting any problems and suggesting improvements.

The Trust tries to ensure a rapid response to issues. People are informed about any management work by talking to neighbours, putting detailed information up on site, providing articles for local newsletters and giving details of work on the Trust's website.

With the increase in popularity and usage of social media sites, the Trust now regularly uses Facebook, Twitter and Instagram to give out information on the work that it is doing. Regular updates on the work of the volunteers, key projects the Trust is managing and the 'Outdoor Learning' courses ensure that followers are able to access up to date information. These outlets are also brilliant for disseminating information on potential problems such as road closures, flooding etc.



# FUTURE PLANS

In 2021/2022 the Trust's focus will be to continue to promote, protect and conserve the landscape of the Ironbridge Gorge World Heritage Site

## Key Projects include:

- ◆ Catching up on works, including sheep fencing, delayed due to Covid lockdowns
- ◆ Implementing our Ash dieback strategic plan, in partnership with Telford & Wrekin Council
- ◆ Continuing to practice Continuous Cover Forestry as a key part of our climate change mitigation due to the high amounts of CO2 sequestered
- ◆ Designing and delivering a Climate Change themed Outdoor Learning Programme
- ◆ Holding a Public Open meeting on the theme of our work on climate change in partnership with Telford & Wrekin Council
- ◆ Investigating the possibility of producing a range of sawn timber products from our own site timber, to produce gate, fence posts and bollards to lock up carbon longer term and reduce our costs
- ◆ Continuing to measure soil organic matter through our meadows and woodlands to be able to build a data set of existing soil carbon to be able to calculate future carbon sequestered
- ◆ Continuing to seek alternative funding opportunities to replace rotten sections of wooden steps and boardwalks and replace with stone as necessary
- ◆ Improving the 'Dragon head' path in Benthall to create a family trail via Bower yard picnic site – funding dependent
- ◆ Continuing to monitor and maintain sixty structures
- ◆ Re-fencing sections of Wilderness Meadow so we can continue to aftermath graze them
- ◆ Maintaining the sheep flock numbers to allow us to continue to manage our hay meadows. Continue to breed replacements and where possible generate a financial return from the flock
- ◆ Continuing to manage our high value species-rich hay meadows by annual haylage cutting and baling and subsequent sheep grazing in the autumn
- ◆ Continuing to offer our volunteer programme, carrying out priority conservation and access works
- ◆ Refining the use of Arc GIS to include more concise information regarding our sites and incorporating more shared information with T&W Council e.g., on Rights of Way
- ◆ Developing the use of Survey 123 to assist with the Strategic Access Plan
- ◆ Managing the two beehives to maintain a healthy honey bee colony to support the environmental and ecological benefits that bees provide. Consider products that can be made and sold using beeswax, such as candles, wraps and firelighters
- ◆ Continuing to develop a relationship with the new owners of the former Power Station site Harworth, to help them deliver as sustainable a development as possible, should planning permission be granted, working in Partnership with Telford & Wrekin and the Gorge Parish Councils
- ◆ Continuing to be an efficient and effective organisation that is well governed, well financed and well managed and which has the capacity, infrastructure and support necessary to deliver its objectives

# FINANCIAL REVIEW

## Overview

**The Trust started its financial year in April 2020 just as the Corona virus crisis was unfolding. The core income of the Trust is generated by rents received on commercial properties in the Telford area and many of these are small businesses. Whilst many were able to access Government grants to help during the pandemic, several have been unable to afford the rental payments due. This in turn has had a knock-on effect on the rental income received in 2020/2021.**

The Trust in conjunction with Telford & Wrekin Council's Land and Property Services (who manage the properties on the Trust's behalf) have continued to work hard over the last 12 months to manage the property portfolio to try to ensure that in the long term it is able to provide

sufficient income to enable the Trust to deliver its core activities. The Trust is working with businesses that are struggling, to set up long term affordable repayment plans for outstanding rental payments.

The Trust was eligible to claim the Small Business Relief Grant and along with many other organisations we have accessed the Government's Job Retention Scheme, and flexibly furloughed our four members of staff. We also temporarily closed our office and worked primarily from home.

The Trust is continuing to face financial pressures with access infrastructure and ash dieback emergencies. With cuts to Government agri/environmental grants and a downturn in rental income we do have concerns as to what impact this will have on the Trust in the long term.



## Income

Income in the year reduced relative to 2019/20 due to the impact of C-19. This was primarily due to a downturn in rental income

The vast majority of the Trust's income continues to be invested in the management of the landscape. Agri-environment payments such as the Countryside and Higher-Level Stewardship schemes are extremely important to the Trust. They are a key funding mechanism to support our woodland and meadow management.

The new Environmental Land Management (ELM) scheme is due to replace the Countryside Stewardship Scheme from 2021. Under the transition plans, there will be a period of time in which both the old and new systems operate. This will allow us time to plan and prepare for the future.

The Trust continues to apply for grants from a variety of sources but is careful not to stray from its aims and objectives when looking for potential funding sources.

Income was generated largely from:

- ◆ rentals received on commercial properties in the Telford area. (The need for a balancing package to provide sufficient income for the annual upkeep of the sites was recognised when the Trust was established. A package of commercial properties was transferred to Telford and Wrekin

Council. They own the freehold of these income generating properties and are responsible for their management. They are covenanted to pay 85% of the income generated to the Trust to cover the cost of maintaining the land in the Gorge).

- ◆ investments purchased by the Trust. These consist of Charity Investment funds, and an interest paying Bank Account
- ◆ grants
- ◆ small amounts from book sales/timber sales

We received £175,619 in income from the rental properties, fishing and grazing rights compared to £251,028 last year. A downturn of 30%, due to the impact of the pandemic on the businesses that occupy our properties. Some of whom are struggling to meet the rental payments as they fall due. We are working with these businesses to agree an affordable repayment plan over the long term.

Interest and dividends provided £12,903 compared to £14,711 last year reflecting the impact of Covid-19 on the performance in investment returns.

Hay and log sales provided an additional £741 and £3,380 respectively.

A refund of £322 was given back to people who had booked onto the Outdoor Learning Programme for 20/21. We were unable to run the workshops and walks due to the pandemic.



## Grants to help with our work

---

In support of its activities, the Trust received £103,958 (£97,485 in 19/20) from a wide number of bodies and is very grateful to them all for their help and assistance:

### **Countryside Stewardship – Natural England**

The Trust received £20,937 in grant aid from this programme. This scheme will contribute towards the Trust's woodland management costs. This is the final payment for this 5-year programme.

### **Higher Level Stewardship Scheme**

This year, the Trust received £1,110 in grant aid from this programme. This is the final payment from a year programme, the Higher-Level Stewardship Scheme supports the work the Trust is undertaking to manage its meadows.

### **Farm the Flow**

£39,905 was received from DEFRA via the Environment Agency to facilitate this 3-year Natural Flood Management project. The Trust is working in partnership with Telford & Wrekin Council to deliver natural flood management techniques and monitoring and a Citizen Science Project (Learning about Lydebrook).

### **Small Business and Additional Relief Grants**

£10,000 and £3,201 respectively was received from the Government schemes put in place to help businesses and charities through the pandemic.

### **Furlough Grant**

Like many charities, the Trust flexibly furloughed staff, £7,734 was received from the Furlough scheme.

### **Heritage Lottery Grant**

We received £10,000 from the Emergency Heritage Lottery Grant towards access repairs

### **Hilton Jones Charitable Trust**

£2,491 was donated by the Hilton Jones Charitable Trust towards stone for access repairs

### **Madeley Town Council**

£1,000 was received from Madeley Town Council towards access repairs

### **Nineveh Trust**

The Nineveh Trust donated £5,000 towards access repairs

### **The Gorge Parish Council**

£500 was received from the Gorge Parish Council towards replacement access infrastructure

### **Just Giving Campaign (donations)**

Over £1,000 was raised by supporters towards improvements to access infrastructure  
Expenditure

Despite the impact of C-19, overall costs were well controlled in 20/21 and some areas of expenditure such as the Outdoor Learning and Volunteering programmes were down due to activities being curtailed due to C-19

## Investment policy, powers and performance

---

Trustees are responsible for the financial policies under which the Trust is managed. Under the Memorandum and Articles of Association, the Trust has the power to deposit or invest funds.

The Investment Policy of the Trust is:

for the capital invested to maintain its value whilst building up a dependable, growing stream of income that will keep pace with inflation.

The investment policy was substantially revised in 2021, in particular to take account of ethical and environmental considerations and is now publicly available on the Trust's website.

The value of the Trust's investments was low on 31 March 2020 but has steadily risen and is back at pre-pandemic levels at 31 March 2021

The Trust's investment portfolio value now stands at £435,596 with an additional £104,868 being held in bank accounts.

The next 12 months will continue to be a difficult time for the investment market, but the Trust continues to focus on long term aims rather than on the short-term market noise currently prevalent.

## Reserves policy

The Trust's reserves are held in order to manage the risks to which the charity is exposed in the course of its activities. The Trustees ensure that the charity is in a responsible and secure financial position to carry out its day-to-day core services and is able to absorb unforeseen setbacks in the event of a significant financial downturn. The reserves policy is reviewed in the annual planning and budgeting process by Trustees and considers changes to the environment in which the Trust operates, and any other internal or external risk factors that might impact on the level of reserves required.

The reserves policy balances the need to build up long-term reserves against the need for short term spending on the Trust's core purposes.

## Funds

The Trust's funds are divided between unrestricted funds, restricted funds and designated funds.

The designated funds and their specific purposes are detailed as follows:

## Long Term Income Fund

The purpose of this fund is to provide income for the Trust's core work during the rental income modernising process, provide protection against additional voids that may occur and provide a dependable, growing stream of income that will keep pace with inflation, thus enabling the Trust to fulfil its objectives. £20,000 will be transferred each year (when income levels allow) into this fund. No transfer took place in 20/21 as there was insufficient income received from the rental properties to cover this cost. However, the interest and dividends (less Management fees) generated by Aberdeen Standard Capital Investments have been retained. This equated to £8,642

Should the rental income drop below the level that is required to fulfil the basic obligations of the Trust then money will be withdrawn from the fund to cover this expenditure. The balance held in the Long-Term Income Fund together with the revaluation of investments as at the 31 March 2021 is £345,464.



## New Accommodation Fund

This fund was created to set aside money to be used to fund the new office accommodation for the Trust. Money that had previously been held in the Long-Term Income fund has been released into the New Accommodation Fund. The balance of the fund is £179,400. This fund will be used in conjunction with the restricted grant funding from the NHS and the Alcoa Foundation. This fund will be written down over a 50-year period as part of the new office depreciation calculation.

The Land and Structures Contingency Fund was created to allow appropriate responses to substantial problems arising from geotechnical features, structures such as walls, land instability, drainage and watercourses.

Since 2003 the Trust has commissioned a programme of regular visual inspections of all known built structures on Trust land and a geotechnical inspection of Jiggers Rock face, as part of its risk management processes.

£10,000 will be transferred to the fund each year (when income levels allow) and the work undertaken when sufficient funds have accumulated. Some works may be able to be undertaken at an earlier date if external funding becomes available. Due to income levels no transfer was made at year end; the balance of the fund as 31 March 2021 was £7,130.

## Pension Scheme

In common with other charities with defined benefit pension schemes, our pension scheme shows a deficit which stood at £465,000 on 31 March 2021 (£390,000 March 2020) and, under UK accounting standards we are required to account for this deficit. Like all parts of our economy, charities have been hit by rising life expectancy and lower than expected return on investments. The conclusion of the Trustees is that the Trust is able to meet the annual increase in employer contributions and is still able to deliver its charitable objectives. They confirmed that they were re-assured that there was not a significant risk that the pension liability would crystallise in the short to medium term and that the Trust can meet the required projected further income without significantly impacting the ongoing business.

## Actuarial valuation

At the last valuation, the contribution rate to be paid into the Shropshire County Pension Fund was assessed in two parts. First a standard contribution rate was determined. This is the contribution, expressed as a percentage of the salaries of staff. Secondly, a supplementary contribution is payable if, as a result of the actuarial review, it is found that the accumulated liabilities of the pension for benefits to past and present staff are not fully covered by the standard contributions to be paid in future and by the notional fund built up from past contributions. The total contribution rate payable is the sum of the standard contribution rate and the supplementary contribution rate.

Shropshire County Pension Fund has been working hard over the last few years to reduce the pension deficit and has set out a clear framework in which to achieve this over the next 17 years. The Trust now pays an increased employer contribution rate (21%) and also an annual deficit contribution (£1,100 in 2020/21) to reduce the deficit.

## Trustees' responsibilities in relation to the financial statements

The Trustees are responsible for preparing the Annual Report and the financial statements in accordance with applicable law and regulations.

Company law requires Trustees to prepare financial statements for each financial year. The financial statements are required by law to give a true and fair view of the state of affairs of the company and of the profit or loss of the company for that period. In preparing those financial statements, the Trustees are required to:

- ◆ select suitable accounting policies and then apply them consistently
- ◆ observe the methods and principles in the Charities SORP
- ◆ make judgements and estimates that are reasonable and prudent
- ◆ state whether applicable UK Accounting Standards have been followed, subject to any material departures disclosed and explained in the financial statements
- ◆ prepare the financial statements on the going concern basis unless it is inappropriate to presume that the company will continue in business

The Trustees are responsible for keeping proper accounting records which disclose with reasonable accuracy at any time the financial positions of the company and to enable them to ensure that the financial statements comply with the requirements of the Companies Act 2006. They are also responsible for safeguarding the assets of the company and hence for taking reasonable steps for the prevention and detection of fraud and other irregularities.

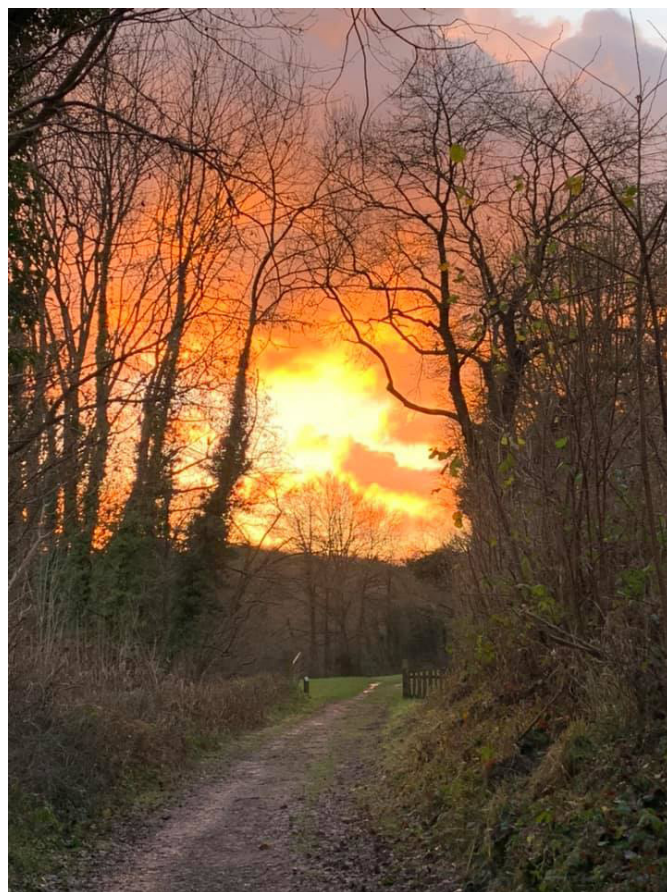
In accordance with company law, as the company's directors, we certify that:

so far as we are aware, there is no relevant audit information of which the company's auditor is unaware

This report has been prepared in accordance with the Statement of Recommended Practice – Accounting and Reporting by Charities and in accordance with the provisions applicable to companies subject to the small companies' regime.

Approved by the Committee of Management on  
22 September 2021  
and signed on its behalf by:

**Nick Downes**  
*Chair*



## **INDEPENDENT AUDITORS' REPORT TO THE MEMBERS OF SEVERN GORGE COUNTRYSIDE TRUST (CONTINUED)**

- Obtain an understanding of internal control relevant to the audit in order to design audit procedures that are appropriate in the circumstances, but not for the purpose of expressing an opinion on the effectiveness of the internal control
- Evaluate the appropriateness of accounting policies used and the reasonableness of accounting estimates and related disclosures made by the trustees
- Conclude on the appropriateness of the trustees' use of the going concern basis of accounting and, based on the audit evidence obtained, whether a material uncertainty exists related to events or conditions that may cast significant doubt on the charity's ability to continue as a going concern. If we conclude that a material uncertainty exists, we are required to draw attention in our auditor's report to the related disclosures in the financial statements or, if such disclosures are inadequate, to modify our opinion. Our conclusions are based on the audit evidence obtained up to the date of our auditor's report. However, future events or conditions may cause the charity to cease to continue as a going concern
- Evaluate the overall presentation, structure and content of the financial statements, including the disclosures, and whether the financial statements represent the underlying transactions and events in a manner that achieves fair presentation

We communicate with those charged with governance regarding, among other matters, the planned scope and timing of the audit and significant audit findings, including any significant deficiencies in internal control that we identify during our audit.

### **Use of our report**

This report is made solely to the charitable company's members, as a body, in accordance with Chapter 3 of Part 16 of the Companies Act 2006. Our audit work has been undertaken so that we might state to the charitable company's members those matters we are required to state to them in an auditor's report and for no other purpose. To the fullest extent permitted by law, we do not accept or assume responsibility to anyone other than the charitable company and the charitable company's members as a body, for our audit work, for this report, or for the opinions we have formed.

.....  
Oliver Ross BSc(Hons) FCA (Senior Statutory Auditor)  
For and on behalf of Muras Baker Jones Limited  
Chartered Accountants and Statutory Auditor

Regent House  
Bath Avenue  
Wolverhampton  
WV1 4EG

22 September 2021

## SEVERN GORGE COUNTRYSIDE TRUST

### STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL ACTIVITIES (being INCOME AND EXPENDITURE ACCOUNT)

For the year ended 31 March 2021

	Notes	General Fund £	Designated Funds £	Restricted funds £	Total funds 2021 £	Total funds 2020 £
<b>INCOME</b>						
INCOMING RESOURCES FROM CHARITABLE ACTIVITIES						
Rents received	4	175,619	-	-	175,619	251,029
Grants	4	103,959	-	-	103,959	97,485
INCOME FROM OTHER TRADING ACTIVITIES						
Investment income		1,055	11,848	-	12,903	14,711
Other income		13,818	-	-	13,818	11,849
Gifts and Donations		1,365	-	-	1,365	1,775
<b>Total Income</b>		<b>295,816</b>	<b>11,848</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>307,664</b>	<b>376,849</b>
<b>EXPENDITURE</b>						
COSTS OF RAISING FUNDS						
Costs of generating voluntary income	5	6,064	-	-	6,064	6,445
EXPENDITURE ON CHARITABLE ACTIVITIES						
Woodland/Countryside Management	5	193,074	3,181	1,334	197,589	189,030
Access	5	67,298	982	412	68,692	20,037
Projects	5	20,964	437	183	21,584	117,097
GOVERNANCE COSTS	5	21,653	3,206	-	24,859	25,998
<b>Total Expenditure</b>		<b>309,053</b>	<b>7,806</b>	<b>1,929</b>	<b>318,788</b>	<b>358,607</b>
NET INCOME/(EXPENDITURE)		(13,237)	4,042	(1,929)	(11,124)	18,242
TRANSFERS BETWEEN FUNDS		67,326	(67,326)	-	-	-
NET INCOME/(EXPENDITURE) BEFORE OTHER GAINS / (LOSSES) – carried forward		54,089	(63,284)	(1,929)	(11,124)	18,242

## SEVERN GORGE COUNTRYSIDE TRUST

### STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL ACTIVITIES (being INCOME AND EXPENDITURE ACCOUNT) continued

For the year ended 31 March 2021

	Notes	General Fund £	Designated Funds £	Restricted Funds £	Total Funds 2021 £	Total funds 2020 £
NET INCOME/(EXPENDITURE) BEFORE OTHER GAINS / (LOSSES) – brought forward		54,089	(63,284)	(1,929)	(11,124)	18,242
OTHER GAINS AND LOSSES						
Gains/(losses) on Investments - realised		-	-	-	-	-
Gains/(losses) on Investments – unrealised		-	61,315	-	61,315	(17,236)
Pension scheme actuarial (losses)/gains	14	(52,519)	-	-	(52,519)	(10,034)
Revaluation of land		-	-	-	-	-
NET MOVEMENT IN FUNDS FOR THE YEAR		1,570	(1,969)	(1,929)	(2,328)	(9,028)
TOTAL FUNDS BROUGHT FORWARD AT 31 MARCH 2020		4,226	724,335	77,155	805,716	814,744
TOTAL FUNDS CARRIED FORWARD AT 31 MARCH 2021		5,796	722,366	75,226	803,388	805,716

All income and expenditure derive from continuing activities.

The statement of financial activities includes all gains and losses recognised in the year.

## SEVERN GORGE COUNTRYSIDE TRUST

### BALANCE SHEET

At 31 March 2021

	Notes	2021 £	£	2020 £	£
<b>FIXED ASSETS</b>					
Tangible assets	6	554,009		562,277	
Investments	7	435,225		373,910	
			<hr/>		<hr/>
		989,234		936,187	
<b>CURRENT ASSETS</b>					
Stocks		-		-	
Debtors	8	58,316		21,016	
Investments	9	85,895		84,860	
Cash at bank and in hand		138,164		156,569	
			<hr/>		<hr/>
		282,375		262,445	
<b>CREDITORS - amounts falling due within one year</b>					
	10	(3,221)		(2,916)	
			<hr/>		<hr/>
<b>NET CURRENT ASSETS</b>					
		279,154		259,529	
<b>Pension benefit pension scheme liability</b>					
	12	(465,000)		(390,000)	
			<hr/>		<hr/>
<b>NET ASSETS</b>					
		803,388		805,716	
			<hr/> <hr/>		<hr/> <hr/>
<b>THE FUNDS OF THE CHARITY:</b>					
	11				
General fund	11	5,796		4,226	
Designated funds	11	445,699		508,983	
Restricted funds	11	75,226		77,155	
Revaluation funds	11	276,667		215,352	
			<hr/>		<hr/>
<b>TOTAL CHARITY FUNDS</b>					
		803,388		805,716	
			<hr/> <hr/>		<hr/> <hr/>

The financial statements were approved by the Committee of Management on 22 September 2021 signed on its behalf by:-

Nick Downes  
Chair

## SEVERN GORGE COUNTRYSIDE TRUST

### NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

For the year ended 31 March 2021

#### 1. ACCOUNTING POLICIES

##### a) BASIS OF PREPARATION

The charity constitutes a public benefit entity as defined by FRS 102. The financial statements have been prepared in accordance with Accounting and Reporting by Charities: Statement of Recommended Practice applicable to charities preparing their accounts in accordance with the Financial Reporting Standard applicable in the UK and Republic of Ireland issued in October 2019, the Financial Reporting Standard applicable in the United Kingdom and Republic of Ireland (FRS 102), the Charities Act 2011, the Companies Act 2006 and UK Generally Accepted Accounting Practice.

The financial statements are prepared on a going concern basis under the historical cost convention, modified to include investments and certain freehold property at fair value.

##### b) INCOME

Rental income is included when receivable.

Income from contracting projects is recognised when receivable.

Grants are recognised in full in the Statement of Financial Activities when receivable.

Income from investments and other income, including small sales of timber and refunds, are included when receivable.

##### c) EXPENDITURE AND IRRECOVERABLE VAT

Resources expended are recognised in the period in which they are incurred. Resources expended include attributable VAT, which cannot be recovered.

The proportion of employees time spent fundraising is shown as costs of generating voluntary income.

Resources expended are allocated to the particular activity where the cost relates directly to that activity. The cost of overall direction and administration on each activity is apportioned based on the direct costs incurred for each.

##### d) DEPRECIATION

Depreciation is provided on the cost of fixed assets to write off the cost less estimated residual value of each asset over its estimated useful life at the following rates:

Freehold property	Depreciated over 50 years
Fixtures & Equipment	33 <sup>1</sup> / <sub>3</sub> % straight line
Plant and Machinery	10% straight line
Motor vehicles	20% straight line/33 <sup>1</sup> / <sub>3</sub> % straight line
Facility Construction	10% straight line

No depreciation is provided on Freehold Land.

## SEVERN GORGE COUNTRYSIDE TRUST

### NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

For the year ended 31 March 2021

#### 1. ACCOUNTING POLICIES (Continued)

##### e) TANGIBLE ASSETS

Tangible assets are initially recorded at cost, and subsequently stated at cost less any accumulated depreciation and impairment losses. Any tangible assets carried at revalued amounts are recorded at the fair value at the date of revaluation less any subsequent accumulated depreciation and subsequent accumulated impairment losses.

An increase in the carrying amount of an asset as a result of revaluation, is recognised in other recognised gains and losses, unless it reverses a charge for impairment that has previously been recognised as expenditure within the statement of financial activities. A decrease in the carrying amount of an asset as a result of revaluation, is recognised in other recognised gains and losses, except to which it offsets any previous revaluation gain, in which case the loss is shown within other recognised gains and losses on the statement of financial activities.

##### f) INVESTMENTS

Investments held as current assets are stated at the lower of cost and net realisable value.

Investments held as fixed assets are revalued annually and the aggregate surplus or deficit is transferred to Revaluation Reserve.

##### g) GENERAL FUND

This represents unrestricted funds that are available for use at the Trustees' discretion in furtherance of the objectives of the Trust.

##### h) DESIGNATED FUNDS

i) Long Term Income Fund - this fund arises from the combining of the Income Security Fund and the Long Term Development Reserve and reflects monies held within Fixed and Current Asset Investments. The purpose of the fund is to provide additional income for the Trust's core work when rental income declines as properties reach the end of their expected commercial 'life' circa 2015 to 2025.

ii) Land and Structures Contingency - this reserve reflects monies held within current asset investments. The reserve has been created to cope with expenditure arising as a result of land instability, drainage and watercourse issues and potential problems with existing structures.

iii) New Accommodation Fund - the reserve has been created to set aside funds towards the new office accommodation for the Trust.

iv) Revaluation Reserve - this reflects the increase in the fair value of investments and land over their original cost.

## SEVERN GORGE COUNTRYSIDE TRUST

### NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

For the year ended 31 March 2021

#### 1. ACCOUNTING POLICIES (Continued)

##### h) DESIGNATED FUNDS - continued

v) Lloyds Bank Surrender Premium Fund and Carry Over Funds. These reserves relate to surplus funds arising on certain projects during the year for which the trustees have designated against specific expenditure over the next 2 years.

vi) Postcode Lottery Access Fund. Being grants received in respect of work to be carried out on steps in the Gorge. Re-designated by the grant provider as unrestricted.

##### i) RESTRICTED FUNDS

These represent grants received for specified projects, the use of each grant being restricted to that project.

##### j) GOING CONCERN

The trustees remain mindful of the ongoing impact of the global pandemic on the charity and as a result regularly review projections and budgets for the current and subsequent periods. Based on these reviews, the trustees consider there to be no significant overall impact on the charity's ability to continue as a going concern.

The trustees have also reviewed the supply chains, key income sources and the capital resources available and consider that the charity has adequate resources in place to continue operating for the next twelve months.

##### k) EMPLOYEE BENEFITS

The charity contributes to a defined benefit plan for certain employees. A liability for the charity's obligation under the plan is recognised net of plan assets. The net change in the net defined benefit liability is recognised as the costs of the defined benefit plan during the period. Pension plan assets are measured at fair value and the defined benefit obligation is measured on an actuarial basis using the projected unit method.

The trustees believe that the scheme currently meets statutory minimum funding requirements. It is intended that the level of annual contributions to the scheme will be adjusted following the next detailed actuarial valuation. The directors note that the calculated notional deficit or surplus calculated under FRS102 can vary greatly from year to year depending on the assumptions made at the valuation date, but with normally little or no effect on short term cashflows.

#### 2. (DEFICIT)/SURPLUS FOR THE YEAR

The (deficit)/surplus for the year is stated after charging:

	2021	2020
	£	£
Auditors' remuneration	2,300	2,280
Depreciation of tangible fixed assets	14,891	15,121

## SEVERN GORGE COUNTRYSIDE TRUST

### NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

For the year ended 31 March 2021

#### 3. STAFF COSTS

	2021 £	2020 £
Wages and salaries	116,281	125,191
Social security costs	7,335	9,185
Other pension Costs	48,000	74,000
Other costs	4,307	6,322
	<u>175,923</u>	<u>217,362</u>

No employees received remuneration in excess of £60,000 (2020: None).

No members of the Committee of Management received any remuneration in the year (2020 - £Nil). Apart from members of the Committee of Management, the company had 5 employees at 31 March 2021 (2020 - 6).

#### 4. INCOMING RESOURCES FROM CHARITABLE ACTIVITIES

	General fund £	Restricted funds £	Total 2021 £	Total 2020 £
Rents received	175,619	-	175,619	251,029
Grants:				
Natural England:				
Higher Level Stewardship	-	-		9,373
Countryside Stewardship	20,938	-	20,938	22,347
Farm the Flow Project	39,905	-	39,905	41,158
Postcode Lottery Local Trust	-	-	-	20,000
Other	7,182	-	7,182	4,607
Business relief grant	3,201	-	3,201	-
Furlough grant	7,734	-	7,734	-
Heritage lottery fund	10,000	-	10,000	-
Small business grant	10,000	-	10,000	-
Nineveh trust grant	5,000	-	5,000	-
	<u>103,959</u>	<u>-</u>	<u>103,959</u>	<u>97,485</u>
	<u>279,578</u>	<u>-</u>	<u>279,578</u>	<u>348,514</u>

## SEVERN GORGE COUNTRYSIDE TRUST

### NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

For the year ended 31 March 2021

#### 5. ANALYSIS OF EXPENDITURE ON CHARITABLE ACTIVITIES

	Generating voluntary income £	Woodland/ countryside management £	Access £	Projects £	Governance costs £	Total 2021 £	Total 2020 £
Direct costs	-	66,725	20,586	9,160	-	96,471	92,357
Employee costs	6,064	107,362	40,855	9,197	12,445	175,923	217,362
Insurance	-	4,192	1,293	576	-	6,061	6,087
Transport	-	1,714	529	235	-	2,478	4,484
Office and other costs	-	7,297	2,251	1,002	1,172	11,722	12,406
Trustee support	-	-	-	-	253	253	365
Professional costs	-	-	-	-	10,989	10,989	10,425
Depreciation	-	10,299	3,178	1,414	-	14,891	15,121
	<u>6,064</u>	<u>197,589</u>	<u>68,692</u>	<u>21,584</u>	<u>24,859</u>	<u>318,788</u>	<u>358,607</u>

**SEVERN GORGE COUNTRYSIDE TRUST****NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS**

For the year ended 31 March 2021

**6. TANGIBLE FIXED ASSETS**

	Plant and machinery £	Land and buildings £	Motor vehicles £	Fixtures & equipment £	Facility Construction £	Total £
<b>COST:</b>						
At 1 April 2020	18,000	629,476	57,579	43,096	4,495	752,646
Additions	-	-	-	6,623	-	6,623
Disposals	-	-	-	(10,711)	-	(10,711)
At 31 March 2021	18,000	629,476	57,579	39,008	4,495	748,558
<b>ACCUMULATED DEPRECIATION:</b>						
At 1 April 2020	8,175	87,519	57,579	36,197	899	190,369
Charge for the Year	1,800	8,752	-	3,889	449	14,891
Disposals	-	-	-	(10,711)	-	(10,711)
At 31 March 2021	9,975	96,271	57,579	29,375	1,348	194,549
<b>NET BOOK VALUE:</b>						
At 31 March 2020	9,825	541,957	-	6,899	3,596	562,277
At 31 March 2021	8,025	533,205	-	9,633	3,147	554,009

## SEVERN GORGE COUNTRYSIDE TRUST

### NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

For the year ended 31 March 2021

#### 7. FIXED ASSET INVESTMENTS

	2021 £	2020 £
Balance brought forward	373,910	382,245
Additions	-	8,900
Disposals	-	-
Revaluation adjustment	61,315	(17,235)
	<hr/>	<hr/>
Balance carried forward	435,225	373,910
	<hr/> <hr/>	<hr/> <hr/>
Historical cost of investments held at 31 March 2021	364,712	364,712
	<hr/> <hr/>	<hr/> <hr/>

Investments are acquired to provide fixed funding for certain of the Designated Funds set up by the Trust (see Note 11).

	2021		2020	
	Original cost £	Market value £	Original cost £	Market value £
<b>Black Rock</b>				
- BLK Charities UK Bond Fund A Inc	20,000	18,281	20,000	18,711
<b>Aberdeen Standard Capital</b>				
- Offshore Income Fund	193,575	259,912	193,575	215,205
- Offshore Global Fixed Interest	76,575	75,350	76,575	67,150
- Phoenix Fund	74,562	81,682	74,562	72,844
	<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>
	364,712	435,225	364,712	373,910
	<hr/> <hr/>	<hr/> <hr/>	<hr/> <hr/>	<hr/> <hr/>

#### 8. DEBTORS

	2021 £	2020 £
Trade debtors	57,826	20,561
Prepayments	490	455
	<hr/>	<hr/>
	58,316	21,016
	<hr/> <hr/>	<hr/> <hr/>

## SEVERN GORGE COUNTRYSIDE TRUST

### NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

For the year ended 31 March 2021

#### 9. CURRENT ASSET INVESTMENTS

	2021 £	2020 £
Short term deposits	85,895	84,860

#### 10. CREDITORS - amounts falling due within one year

	2021 £	2020 £
Trade Creditors	3,221	8,311
	<u>3,221</u>	<u>8,311</u>

## SEVERN GORGE COUNTRYSIDE TRUST

### NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

For the year ended 31 March 2021

#### 11. ANALYSIS OF CHARITABLE FUNDS

	At 1 April 2020	Income	Expend- iture	Other recognised gains/ (losses)	Trans- fers	At 31 March 2021
	£	£	£	£	£	£
<b>Analysis of movements in unrestricted funds</b>						
General Fund	4,226	295,816	(309,053)	(52,519)	67,326	5,796
Long Term Income Fund	248,299	11,848	(3,206)	-	(75,684)	181,257
Land and Structures Contingency Accommodation Fund	7,684	-	-	-	(554)	7,130
Revaluation Reserve	184,000	-	(4,600)	-	-	179,400
Lloyds Surrender Premium fund	215,352	-	-	61,315	-	276,667
Carry Over from 19/20	40,000	-	-	-	-	40,000
Postcode Lottery Access Fund	9,000	-	-	-	(7,890)	1,110
Farm the Flow Carry Over From 20/21	20,000	-	-	-	-	20,000
	-	-	-	-	2,302	2,302
	-	-	-	-	14,500	14,500
	724,335	11,848	(7,806)	61,315	(67,326)	722,366
<b>Analysis of movements in restricted funds</b>						
Alcoa Grant Primary Care Trust - New Office project	7,299	-	(182)	-	-	7,117
	69,856	-	(1,747)	-	-	68,110
	77,155	-	(1,929)	-	-	75,226
Total Funds	805,716	307,664	(318,788)	8,796	-	803,388

## SEVERN GORGE COUNTRYSIDE TRUST

### NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

For the year ended 31 March 2021

#### 11. ANALYSIS OF CHARITABLE FUNDS continued

The assets comprising each Fund at 31 March 2021 are as follows:

	Tangible fixed assets £	Fixed asset investments £	Current assets / (Liabilities) £	Total £
Accommodation Fund	179,400	-	-	179,400
Long Term Income Fund	-	271,388	(90,131)	181,257
Revaluation Reserve	112,830	163,837	-	276,667
Land and Structures Contingency	-	-	7,130	7,130
Lloyds Surrender Premium Fund	-	-	40,000	40,000
Carry Over from 19/20	-	-	1,110	1,110
Carry Over from 20/21	-	-	14,500	14,500
Farm the Flow carry over	-	-	2,302	2,302
Postcode Lottery Access Fund	-	-	20,000	20,000
Restricted Funds	75,226	-	-	75,226
General Fund	186,553	-	(180,757)	5,796
	<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>
	554,009	435,225	(185,846)	803,388
	<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>

#### Fund transfers

Long term income fund. The transfer of £684 to general funds relates to the transfer of dividend income on Black Rock investments. A further £75,000 has been transferred to cover the pension fund deficit increase for the year.

Land and structures contingency fund. A transfer of £554 has been made to general fund to cover specific costs incurred during the year.

Farm the Flow carry over. This transfer relates to costs to be incurred during 21/22.

Carry Over from 19/20. A transfer of £7,890 was made to the general fund was made in relation to work carried out during the year that was originally planned to be carried out in 19/20.

Carry Over from 20/21. A transfer of £14,500 from the general fund was made to cover the predicted shortfall in rental income during 21/22.

## SEVERN GORGE COUNTRYSIDE TRUST

### NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

For the year ended 31 March 2021

#### 11. ANALYSIS OF CHARITABLE FUNDS continued

##### **Purpose of Designated Funds**

These are detailed in note 1(h) to the financial statements and also in the Trustees Report.

##### **Purpose of Restricted Funds**

These represent grants received and related expenditure in respect of specific projects as outlined above.

#### 12. PENSIONS

##### Defined Benefit Scheme

The company is a member of the Shropshire County pension fund which operates a pension scheme providing benefits based on final pensionable pay. The assets of the scheme are held separately from those of the company. Contributions to the scheme are charged to the profit and loss account so as to spread the cost of pensions over employees' working lives with the company. The contributions are determined by a qualified actuary on the basis of triennial valuations using assumptions that: project the benefits forward into the future and then adjust them to current day values; estimate the probability of payments needing to be made. The most recent valuation was as at 31 March 2019. The company receives annual reports from the pension scheme which identify its share of the assets and liabilities of the scheme.

The pension charge for the year amounts to £48,000 (2020 - £74,000), against which employer contributions paid over to the scheme amounted to £25,519 (2020 - £25,034), together with the actuarial gains and losses on the scheme for the year is recognised in the statement of Financial Activities in accordance with SORP (FRS 102).

The most recent actuarial valuation showed that the market value of the whole scheme's assets was £1,951m and that the actuarial value of those assets represented 76% of the benefits that had accrued to members, after allowing for expected future increases in earnings.

The company's share of the market values of the main asset classes, at the year end were:

	2021		2020	
	%	£000s	%	£000s
Equities	50.4	470	50.0	387
Government Bonds	0.0	0	0.0	0
Other Bonds	21.1	197	22.3	172
Property	3.9	36	4.3	33
Cash/liquidity	0.3	3	1.3	10
Other	24.3	226	22.1	171

The assets of the Scheme are included in the accounts at open market value as at the year-end, and the liabilities have been calculated using the following actuarial assumptions:

## SEVERN GORGE COUNTRYSIDE TRUST

### NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

For the year ended 31 March 2021

#### 12. PENSION -continued

	2021 %	2020 %
Rate of increase in salaries	3.95	3.35
Pension increases	2.8	2.2
Rate of discount	2.1	2.4
Inflation - RPI	-	-
- CPI	2.7	2.1

The liabilities are determined using the projected unit method as distinct from the aggregate method used in the triennial valuation. Under the projected unit method, the current service costs will increase as the members of the scheme approach retirement. On this basis, the calculated notional funding position, in respect of the Scheme at 31 March 2021, and at previous year-end, was as follows:

	2021 £000s	2020 £000s
Value of market assets	932	773
Value of accrued liabilities	(1,397)	(1,163)
Deficit	(465)	(390)

The actuary has confirmed that the valuation made above under the requirements of FRS102 does not indicate that there is either an immediate funding requirement or any immediate need to change the agreed contribution rates currently in force. The actuary has excluded from both assets and liabilities items which have neutral effect on the Scheme's financial position i.e. additional voluntary contributions, annuities secured in respect of pensions in payment and insurance contract for death in service benefits.

## SEVERN GORGE COUNTRYSIDE TRUST

### NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

For the year ended 31 March 2021

#### 12. PENSION –continued

The charge to the Statement of Financial Activities over the financial year comprised:

	2021 £000s	2020 £000s
<b>Operating charge</b>		
Current service cost	39	45
Admin expense	1	1
Past service cost/(gain)	-	20
	<hr/>	<hr/>
	40	66
	<hr/>	<hr/>
<b>Other income/charges</b>		
Expected return on pension scheme assets	(19)	(19)
Interest on pension scheme liabilities	27	27
	<hr/>	<hr/>
	8	8
	<hr/>	<hr/>
<b>Net interest/(return)</b>		
	8	8
	<hr/>	<hr/>
<b>Total charge to expenditure in the SOFA</b>	48	74
	<hr/> <hr/>	<hr/> <hr/>

Movement in balance sheet deficit figures during the year:

	2021 £	2020 £
Deficit in scheme at 31 March 2020	(390,000)	(331,000)
Movement in year		
Current service cost	(39,000)	(45,000)
Past service (cost)/gain	-	(20,000)
Admin expense	(1,000)	(1,000)
Net interest/return on assets	(8,000)	(8,000)
Contributions	25,519	25,034
Actuarial gain/(loss)	(52,519)	(10,034)
	<hr/>	<hr/>
Deficit in scheme at 31 March 2021	(465,000)	(390,000)
	<hr/> <hr/>	<hr/> <hr/>

#### 13. MEMBERS' GUARANTEE

Severn Gorge Countryside Trust is a company limited by guarantee. Members' liability under the Memorandum of Association is limited to £1 each and the liability continues for one year after the cessation of membership.

#### 14. TAXATION STATUS

The company is a charity under the provisions of the Income and Corporation Taxes Act 1988.

**Severn Gorge Countryside Trust**

Darby Road, Coalbrookdale  
Telford, Shropshire, TF8 7EP

Telephone 01952 433880  
[www.severngorge.org.uk](http://www.severngorge.org.uk)

