

Report on activities of Box Community Wood

1st January 2024

to

31st December 2024

Registered charity

number 1169429

BOX COMMUNITY WOOD

Background

Box Wood has traditionally been used by Box residents and visitors for a variety of recreational purposes over many years. Originally thought to have been created by mill workers for pedestrian access to local woollen mills in the Avening and Nailsworth valleys, the numerous footpaths are now used for walking, educational activities for local children, exercising (including dogs), spotting the indigenous wildlife as well as continuing to provide access to neighbouring villages, common land and other locations; benefits that we can all enjoy.

Box Community Wood (BCW) is an independent charitable organisation, established specifically to own Box Wood on behalf of the local community and to protect and manage it as an amenity for the foreseeable future.

BCW raised funds locally and acquired Box Wood on behalf of the community, in order to make it available for the enjoyment of the public in general, to conserve and manage the woodland and its wildlife, and to protect it from any possible future development.

It was recognised that the trustees of BCW would not have the necessary expertise or resources to manage the wood in the longer term, and Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust (GWT) agreed to enter into a 99 year lease as our tenant, to manage and conserve the wood. This includes the development of an ongoing, medium term management plan, obligations to manage its sustainability, and insurance against probable risks.

Between February 2017 and the date of this report, extensive wildlife audits have taken place and a programme of scrub clearance, footpath clearing and general management, including tree safety inspections, have taken place and will continue, organised by GWT and supervised by their land management team but carried out largely by enthusiastic local volunteers.

Box Wood is fully open to the public, with footpaths, fencing, gates, signage and general access having been massively improved. The intense activity and remarkable enthusiasm around the purchase of Box Wood has raised local awareness, and its use by villagers, the local community in general and even those travelling from further afield has greatly increased in the period since its acquisition by BCW.

Charitable Purposes

The charitable organisation **Box Community Wood** was formed with the specific intention of acquiring Box Wood on behalf of the local community, in order to preserve the integrity of the woodland into the future, and to protect Box Wood from future development. Box Wood is itself an area of natural beauty, adjacent to Box Conservation Area, both of which are contained within the Cotswold Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB). Under the ownership of Box Community Wood, Box Wood has been made wholly accessible to all members of the public, attracting local people and those from further afield to the great outdoors so that they can enjoy and appreciate this unique piece of Gloucestershire's natural countryside. Box Wood is carefully managed for the benefit of wildlife, flora, fauna and the general environment.

Box Community Wood, in cooperation with local educational organisations, will maintain and develop opportunities within

Box Wood for educational purposes. One trustee of Box Community Wood is specifically nominated by an educational organisation to ensure that educational opportunities are considered in all aspects of the wood's maintenance and development.

Box Community Wood has a strong interest in working with young people, as well as disadvantaged and hard to reach groups, with a particular interest in the health and wellbeing benefits of being outdoors. Box Wood is available to play a part in educational organisations' outdoor curricula.

Practical Aims of Box Community Wood

Ownership of Box Wood, on behalf of the community

Year-round access to Box Wood for everyone

Protection of Box Wood from future development

Ongoing care and maintenance of the woodland

Footpaths will be kept open and maintained, including public rights of way

Protection and encouragement of indigenous wildlife

Preservation and restoration of ancient woodland

Insurance against probable risks

Public Benefits of BCW's actions

Box Wood is now protected from development

Box Wood is fully open and accessible to the public

Footpaths are open and maintained

Wildlife is protected and encouraged

Box Community Wood has complied with its duty to have due regard to the guidance on public benefit, as published by The Charities Commission, in exercising its powers and duties.

Practical Conservation Projects Undertaken during 2024

(report by Beris Hanks — chairman of Box Community Wood trustees)

This year saw some changes of personnel. Steve Hemmings resigned from his trusteeship of Box Community Wood and so is no longer our chairperson. Steve was Chair of the Trustees for seven years - and played a hugely important role in preserving the footpath rights, in the acquisition of the wood - and in reaching the agreement with the Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust (GWT) regarding their overall management and conservation work. Steve also kept a close eye on the wood and contributed hugely to the regular volunteer groups which have achieved so much in recent years. We, and the local environment, all owe him a huge debt of gratitude. However, Steve has not bowed

out as he continues as one of the regular volunteers and still keeps a watchful eye on the wood. We very much value his generous support, time and advice.

Beris Hanks took on the role of Chair for the time being – and Bob Common, our new Trustee, organises our volunteer work schedule. Our other trustees continue in their roles: Roger Ogle as our Treasurer/Accountant, Martin Smith as our Secretary and Thomas Pentzek as representative of the Novalis Trust (as well as also being our architect and insurance agent!).

The volunteers are a small but aging group, and Bob's spreadsheets have rekindled our post-Covid enthusiasm, and given us direction and the ability to coordinate with the greater GWT groups, who have a regular commitment to both Box Wood and the Stuart Fawkes Nature Reserve.

There has been further work along the southern boundary with Pensile Road - and more clearance of Cherry Laurel. Flooding of the main footpath has been alleviated through drainage works and there has been some cutting back on the footpaths leading down into the wood from Box. Maintenance work has also been carried out on the kissing gate near the bottom of Scar Hill. See Bob's report for further details of tasks completed and planned.

Another important development is the purchase and installation of 15 new bat boxes along the main wildlife corridor leading along from the entrance off Iron Mills Common to the former lake which has been cleared and managed to benefit

insect feeding bats and birds. The bat boxes were purchased by Daniel Winter of the GWT with the remaining funds given to the wood in memory of Felicity Smith. Dan also installed them for us, as they have to be placed at quite a height. There are also some dormouse boxes which will be placed, when we are advised, on their best location. A lot of hazel has been coppiced both on the edges of Iron Mills Common (National Trust) and within Box Wood. Hazel nuts are the favourite food of dormice, so we are hoping they will colonise the wood from nearby woodlands.

Box Wood has become an important base for education in recent years with The Cotswold Chine School carrying out Forest School activities with small groups of children and Minchinhampton Primary School bringing children to the wood as part of their school trip/ecology programme. Last year I accompanied a visit of Y1/Y2 children and this year of Y5/Y6 children. The children were delightful, learnt a great deal and enjoyed themselves. They were also very respectful of the environment.

In June three of us met with Andrew Mc Laughlin who is the Chief Executive officer of the GWT. We were able to show Andrew significant features and developments within the wood and in the Stuart Fawkes Nature Reserve - as well as having a very useful exchange of information and ideas. Our relationship

with GWT is vital for the wood's proper maintenance and we rely on them for their wildlife expertise, specialist workforce, tree maintenance, and grant-raising skills.

A particular interest of mine is the history of the wood and the changes that have taken place over the years. Some parts of the wood are ancient woodland but there are also areas that were formerly pastureland and plantations. There are records of land use in the woods in medieval times - including by charcoal burners. The most significant development, in creating the wood and features we see today, was when Peter Playne, one of the owners of Longford's Woollen Mill, bought Box House. He brought the current area together, and set about the creation of a woodland park with a skirting track (hedged with laurel, unfortunately), a lake, a series of cascades in the streams coming down from Box. He introduced specimen trees and other significant features that were fashionable in that era. The 'lake area' in Box Woods (now largely an area of wetland) was first created in the early 1800s at the behest of Peter Playne – and it then formed one of the features in his woodland park. However, it did not remain a distinctive feature for long as it is missing on maps of the late 1800s. Presumably it became filled with silt or the retaining bank failed. It was more of a lake again in the late 1900s when earth movements related to timber extraction vehicles, led to greater retention of water. Since that time the 'lake' has largely disappeared. However, this

marshy and more open area is very important for wildlife. As it was becoming rather overgrown with brambles and shrubbery the Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust Volunteers (GWT) recently started to cut back some of the regrowth to create a more varied mosaic to favour insects and the birds and bats that feed on them.

The Box Wood Volunteers (BWV) have also started on cutting some of the regrowth in the clearing / glade in the middle of the wood. (This area was also a product of the timber extraction mentioned earlier). Open areas in woods are vital in encouraging diversity and attract in species that don't favour dense woodland. Further work is also planned to maintain and widen the 'wildlife corridor' through the wood which links Iron Mills Common (National Trust) and the Stuart Fawkes Reserve (GWT) with the clearing and the lake. This corridor in particular encourages in butterflies and moths from the Iron Mills Common, where they are prolific, and aids bats that feed at the 'lake' prior to overwintering in the Box Stone Mines. Among the many varieties of bat are the rare greater and lesser horseshoe bats, both endangered species, which spend the warmer months at Woodchester Mansion. The bats there have been studied since 1959 by Dr Roger Ransome and this long-term study has contributed immensely to the scientific knowledge of these wonderful creatures. After clearance of the Glade and further work along the 'wildlife corridor' we then moved on to planned maintenance on the wood's paths, steps and

boundaries, as well as coppicing hazel and trying to keep on top of the laurel regrowth.

Also, this year we had the donation of a Tawny Owl box to put in the wood. This was originally provided by Counsellor Cloe Turner for a churchyard location but tawny owls are very particular as to where they nest and a suitable site could not be found. Therefore, Revd Gerald South of Box Church passed it on to us – and we await having it put up by the Wildlife Trust. We certainly have Tawny owls in the wood as their calls can often be heard.

Beris Hanks

Box Wood volunteering activities

The focus of BWV over the past year (October 2024 to September 2025) has continued to be on “care and maintenance” activities.

Depending on the season (for example no cutting during bird nesting between April and end September), the team has worked on keeping pathways clear of regrowth, repairing boundary fences and cutting and repairing steps within the wood.

BWV activities generally complement the regular work parties organised by Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust which tend to tackle

more extensive clearance work.

Community involvement in BWV continues at a high level. We have 20 local residents who receive notice of work parties, of which 9 to 10 have turned out for sessions. Average attendance continues around 6 with each session lasting for up to 3 hours. Over the past year, one regular volunteer decided to retire from active involvement. Chris' efforts since acquisition of the Wood have been much appreciated. 5 new volunteers have offered their services during the same period.

Bob Common

Financial Summary 2024

BOX COMMUNITY WOOD - FINANCIAL SUMMARY								
1st January 2024 to 31st December 2024								
	DATE	CASH AT BANK		INCOME			EXPENDITURE	
		£	£	£	£	£	£	£
		Current Account	Reserve Account	Donations	Misc. Income	Bank Interest	Improvements	Miscell.
Opening Balances	01/01/2024	905.08	10767.99					
Insurance								
Wayleave Payment			61.17		61.17			
Annual Brochure Printing								
Donations (2)		400.00		400.00				
Gift Aid		100.00		100.00				
Improvement work		-360.00					-360.00	
Transfers								
Bank Interest			285.76			285.76		
Misc. expenses								
Closing Balances	31/12/2024	1045.08	11114.92					
				500.00	61.17	285.76	-360.00	0.00
Total Income					846.93			
Total Expenditure					-360.00			
Net Deficit for year (Income less expenditure)					486.93			

Accounting Policies and Reserves

Box Community Wood is a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO) and its annual income is less than £500,000. It has therefore prepared its accounting records on the 'Receipts and Payments' basis. The financial statements have been prepared in accordance with the accounting policies set out in notes to the accounts and comply with the charity's governing document, the ***Charities Act 2011*** and ***Accounting and Reporting by Charities: Statement of Recommended Practice*** applicable to charities preparing their accounts in accordance with the **Financial Reporting Standard for Smaller Entities** published on 16th July 2014.

BCW trustees have decided that it would be prudent to retain a modest cash reserve against any future management expenses that may be incurred. A proportion of this has been invested in an accessible interest-bearing account in the short term, and the Reserves policy will continue to be monitored at the discretion of the trustees.

BWC Registered Details

Charity number 1169429

Registered address:

c/o Roger Ogle

Laburnams, Box, Stroud, Gloucestershire,
GL6 9HG.

Box Community Wood Trustees

Beris Hanks — Chairman

Martin Smith — Secretary

Roger Ogle — Treasurer

Bob Common

Thomas Pentzek

