



Forestry England

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Silk Wood Community Planting Project

at Westonbirt, The National Arboretum

Welcome to the Silk Wood Community Planting Project

Created to overcome the impact of ash dieback, the Silk Wood Community Planting Project has regenerated and replanted an area within a unique woodland, through the hard work of a diverse range of community groups and volunteers.

Chalara ash dieback is a serious fungal disease that has spread across Europe since the 1990s. It was first identified in Silk Wood, a large woodland within Westonbirt Arboretum, in 2015. By 2020, extensive felling was necessary to protect public safety and safeguard the future of the woodland.

This three-year project was created to regenerate five hectares of Silk Wood. Local communities have planted 9,000 trees and carried out woodland design, tree aftercare and biodiversity surveys.

Over 95%
of ash trees are
expected to be
lost in the UK



Project stats:

9,000+
trees planted

24
tree species
planted

4,000+
participants

5
hectares
restored

By bringing people outdoors to learn, plant, care and observe, the project supports environmental recovery, climate resilience, connection with nature and wellbeing. It also supports Westonbirt's vision of becoming a world leader in trees inspiring people through education, conservation and participation. This project is also a historic milestone, creating Westonbirt Arboretum's first Community Woodland.



Community at the heart

We've brought together thousands of people to help us restore this area of woodland, creating an accessible space for people to enjoy the wellbeing benefits of connecting with nature.

More than 4,000 people from over 50 groups have participated, including schools and colleges, mental health support groups, youth clubs, SEND organisations, youth climate groups, and under-served communities.

From the first path designs to planting, mulching and long-term care, community groups have shaped every stage of the project. This hasn't just been about trees, it's been about people, stewardship and connection.

Nature based wellbeing sessions helped participants to slow down, recharge and reconnect with the natural world. They developed practical skills too, measuring tree height, identifying plant species and learning the fundamentals of forestry. Creative activities such as mindful photography and nature journalling brought the newly planted woodland to life in inspiring and personal ways.



Thank you! We would like to say a heartfelt thank you to all the community groups that have taken part in the project, in order of appearance:

Cam Everlands Primary School • Chalford Hill Primary School • Colerne Church of England Primary School • Hillcrest Primary School • Nailsworth CoE Primary School • Oasis Academy Connaught • Paternoster School • SGS College - Stroud Campus • Willow Primary Academy • MillerKnoll Foundation • Elm Tree Farm (Brandon Trust) • The Churn Community Hub • Gannicox CIC • Young Gloucestershire • Changes Bristol • Gloucestershire Youth Climate Group (Creative Sustainability) • Hawkesbury Church of England primary School • Royal Agricultural University • Cotswold Friends • Wild Westonbirt • Stroud Valleys Project • Bristol Hospital Education Services • Bristol Early Intervention Service (NHS Trust) • Action for Conservation • Malmesbury School • SGS College - Filton Campus • South Bristol Youth • Bath Mind • Julian House • Swindon and Gloucestershire Mind • 1st Malmesbury Scout Group • The Cotswold School • Phoenix Enterprises • Gloucestershire Hospital Education Service • Tetbury Area Youth & Community Trust • 1st Dursley Scout Group • Sir William Romney's School • The High School Leckhampton • Powell's Church of England Primary School • Arnos Vale Cemetery • Black2Nature • Cotswolds Youth Council • Hays Recruitment Agency • Cotswolds Outdoor Fun • The Friendship Cafe •



A journey of renewal



A journey of renewal





Why Silk Wood matters

Silk Wood is recognised as ancient semi-natural woodland, land that has been continuously wooded since at least 1600. Over centuries, woodlands like this build deep, nutrient-rich soils and intricate ecosystems that sustain remarkable biodiversity.

Flora surveys have recorded ancient woodland indicator species across the planting site, including bluebells, wild garlic and dog's mercury. These are signs of its long-standing ecological importance and a heritage worth safeguarding for generations to come. Trail cameras and audio recorders have shown that a range of wildlife, including hares, foxes and birds of prey, calls the community woodland home.

We replaced the felled ash with a diverse range of tree species

to build resilience and increase biodiversity. These include native and near-native species such as English and sessile oak, field maple, small-leaved lime and sweet chestnut. Alongside these, a small percentage of slightly more exotic species from warmer climates have been planted, such as Italian alder.

Community involvement has transformed this piece of Silk Wood into a hub of engagement. Each tree now tells a story of someone's experience, including many who planted a tree for the first time.

Sapling science

New scientific research in biodiversity, tree tube trials, soil sounds, tree growth monitoring and environmental DNA have all taken place with the help of staff, volunteers, project participants, academics and Forest Research.



Growing impact

9,000+
trees planted

4,000+
individuals involved

50+
groups engaged

90%+
sapling survival rate

65
tonnes of
woodchip mulch

5
hectares restored

80
wildflower species
recorded

Over
50
bird species
identified

25
dedicated
Westonbirt
volunteers



“In years to come they (young people) could bring their own children, so they can tell them that they planted a tree.”

“(I) learnt a lot about tree planting and enjoyed working together with people to do this. Felt like I was making a positive impact on the environment.”

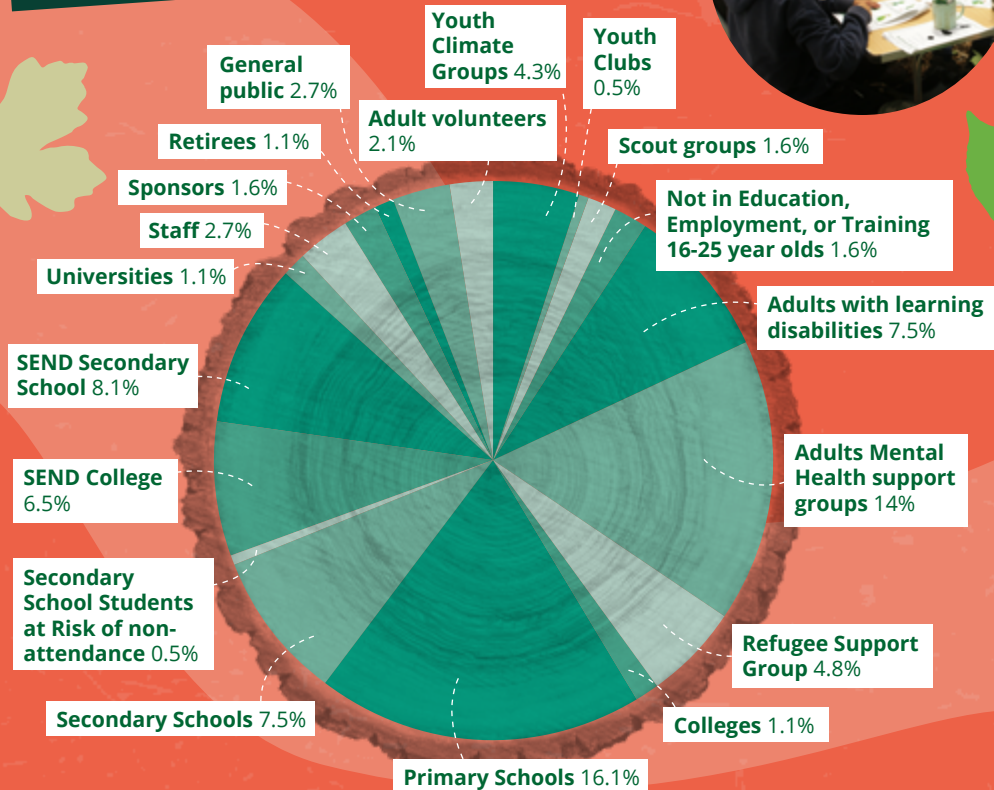


“It’s been great to see the teamwork... We’ve even seen some unexpected skills.”

“The young people gained so much from the day – from taking hands-on action planting trees to simply enjoying the opportunity to get muddy outdoors with their friends. It was so meaningful and I think some lovely memories were made.”

“It has really helped our young people gain confidence, develop their communication and team building skills and appreciate the beauty and benefits of nature, and being outdoors to support their wellbeing.”

Participation by group





Forestry England



The Silk Wood Community Planting Project has been made possible thanks to the generous funding from The National Lottery Heritage Fund, The John Horseman Trust, the Julia Rausing Trust, Swire Charitable Trust, the Summerfield Charitable Trust, MillerKnoll Foundation, Garfield Weston Foundation, The D'Oyly Carte Charitable Trust, Gloucestershire County Council, and the Friends of Westonbirt Arboretum.

Find out more about the project on our website.



forestryengland.uk/westonbirt/community-planting-project



the friends
of Westonbirt
Arboretum
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DC The D'Oyly Carte Charitable Trust

JULIA RAUSING
— TRUST —

MillerKnoll
FOUNDATION

THE
SUMMERFIELD
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CHARITABLE
TRUST

W
Garfield Weston
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JHT
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