# Sidmouth Science Festival Trustees' Annual Report

06 April 2025 to 05 April 2026

Sidmouth Science Festival, also known as SSF
Registered Charity No. 1168115
Bickwell Gardens,
Stadway Meadow,
Sidmouth
EX10 8TB

## Trustees

Michael Pincock- Chairman
John Hems - Treasurer
David Bramley
Robert Miles
Christopher Lockyear
Alan Clarke

## Introduction

This report provides an overview of the Sidmouth Science Festival (SSF) activities from April 2025 to April 2026 as part of the annual submission of accounts to the Charity Commission. These activities encompass the Science Festival event itself as well as a range of regular events held throughout the year.

The Science Festival event takes place over ten days each October, marked by two family days – a Super Science Saturday held at a range of venues in the town on the first weekend and a Family Fun Day held on the second weekend at the Norman Lockyer Observatory (also referred to as the NLO Day). Talks and guided visits take place through the week. Feedback is collected from visitors and participants each year to understand what has gone well, what could be done differently and what needs to be improved.

Regular events during the year include monthly "Café Scientifique" talks and a schools-based programme with volunteers organising scientific activities in local schools. Each year, schools also participate in a themed art project culminating in an exhibition during the festival week.

## Structure, Governance and Management

Sidmouth Science Festival is a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO) governed by a Constitution (adopted 28 June 2016) for which the only voting members are its charity trustees ("Foundation" model).

The Trustees are supported by an overarching committee that is responsible for organising the main festival and complementary events throughout the year. This, in turn, is supported by three subgroups that focus in detail on the festival programme, funding and communications.

Trustees are appointed or reappointed as set out in the Constitution at the Annual General Meeting. This year Rita Hedley departed as Treasurer and was replaced in this role by John Hems. Peter Daniel also

departed as Trustee. These changes were reviewed and approved at a Trustee meeting held on 9th June 2025 and recorded on the Charity Commission website.

Whilst the Sidmouth Science Festival has no formal relationship with other organisations, it works in close collaboration with many national and local scientific organisations including the Norman Lockyer Observatory, Exeter University, Sid Vale Association, Jurassic Coast Trust, the Met Office, Local Councils, Devonshire Association, Art Society of Sidmouth, Institute of Physics, Institution of Mechanical Engineers, East Devon Schools, All Saints Church, The Sid Valley Biodiversity Group and many others.

The festival demands some 1.5 man-years of effort from about 100 volunteers. The organisers are grateful to all the sponsors, volunteers, friends and attendees who make the events possible. All trustees and subgroups give their time voluntarily and receive no remuneration or other benefits.

The role of sponsors is crucial to the success of the Sidmouth Science Festival and they receive recognition in marketing and publicity. The funds they provide cover most of the costs of the annual festival. These costs mainly consist of venue hire, fees of some presenters, marketing and insurance. Most activities are free to visitors, but many make voluntary contributions.

## Objectives

The objectives of the Sidmouth Science Festival, as outlined in the SSF Constitution, are as follows:

- to inform, to inspire, to promote and to advance the education of the public in science, technology, engineering and mathematical (STEM) disciplines. The aim is to show how these disciplines impact on our everyday lives by integrating science, art, music, comedy and drama with serious technical events.
- The festival aims to reach out to all parts of the community, particularly those who would not normally engage with STEM subjects such as the more socially disadvantaged or those less confident with respect to this subject matter.
- In addition, Sidmouth Science Festival aims to play a part in promoting STEM subjects as a career option for young people and reinforce the importance of STEM subjects to our society.
- While the emphasis is on the - currently annual - festival itself, Sidmouth Science Festival also organises STEM focused events all year round.
- Sidmouth Science Festival focuses its activities on the Sid Valley and East Devon

In planning and carrying out activities, we keep in mind the Charity Commission's Guidance on public benefit.

In addition to the original aims of addressing STEM events, more emphasis has including aspects of art, resulting in a "STEAM" approach. Furthermore, over the years our reach has extended beyond the Sid Valley and East Devon to neighbouring regions and activities.

# Activities

## Overview

A successful 14th Sidmouth Science Festival was delivered between 10th and 19th October 2025 for about 3000 attendees. There were over 30 exhibitors, over 30 speakers, a multimedia event on marine life communication, a biodiversity day, a visit to the Gorst Energy Biodigester, and the return of the popular Robot workshop. Over 40 national and local organisations took part in the 2025 festival (see table).

This year, there was a focus on the collaboration between art and science in a well-attended talk on Leonardo da Vinci, and through the work of two local artists who brought the events to life visually and made the festival even more engaging for families and younger audiences. The full programme of events with photographs and artistic sketches, and a summary presentation of the highlights of the 2025 festival, are on the Sidmouth Science Festival website. All volunteers received general briefings which included our new safeguarding policy which can also be found on the website (www.sidmouthsciencefestival.org).

| **National and Local Organisations involved in the 2025 Sidmouth Science Festival** | |
|---|---|
| **Organisations** | **Schools** |
| The Meteorological Office | Tipton St John Primary |
| Universities of Exeter, Plymouth & Falmouth | Newton Poppleford Primary |
| Kings College & University College London | Sidmouth College |
| Institute of Physics | Feniton Primary |
| Institute of Mechanical Engineers | Offwell Primary |
| Devon Science | Sidbury Primary |
| Technology for Fun | Whimple Primary |
| Space Detectives | Payhembury Primary |
| Devon and Cornwall Police | West Hill Primary |
| Secur!ous | Awliscombe Primary |
| Sidmouth Parish Church & All Saints Church* | Sidmouth Primary |
| Sid Vale Association* | St John's School Sidmouth |
| Exeter Science Choir & South Devon singers | Home-educated children |
| The Arts Society, Sidmouth* | The Maths School, Exeter |
| Gorst Energy | Colyton Grammar School |
| Sidmouth Scouts and Guides | West Buckland |
| Norman Lockyer Observatory* | |
| Kennaway House Art Gallery | |
| Sid Valley Biodiversity Group | |
| Sidmouth Arboretum | |
| Sid River Catchment Group | |
| East Devon Countryside Rangers | |
| *denotes Sidmouth Science Festival Partners | |

## Festival Week Family Days

Both Super Science Saturday and the NLO day continued to be very popular with excellent feedback from those who took part and from visitors. On Super Science Saturday, the weather was kind and 2,503 attendees were recorded across the five Sidmouth town centre venues. Around 250 people attended the NLO day despite the atrocious weather, and 166 signed up for the robot workshop. Most children attending were of primary school age. Teenagers from local secondary schools, scouts and guides, and university students ran or volunteered on many of the exhibits.

On Super Science Saturday, exhibitors included representation from universities (Exeter and Plymouth), colleges and local schools, and professional institutions. The geology venue featured a series of short

talks, and a range of geology exhibits to handle and explore. For families with children the STEM based 'Make and Take' activities proved to be extremely popular, as was the 'Invertebrate Zoo' organised by the University of Plymouth where insects and other invertebrates could be seen and handled. New exhibitors included nurses from Exeter University's Biomedical Centre, with a stand about grip strength and models of human organs and cells, and Exeter University's 'Formula Student' racing car.

The NLO family day was larger than previous years and planned to appeal to youngsters of all ages. The most popular activity was the Space Detectives Virtual Reality adventure. Devon Science added a popular show 'Alien Slime' to their 'Adventures in the Science Lab' and 'Rocket Building and Launching'. For very young children, activities included "Make your own Constellation" and "Meet the Artist". New this year was a display entitled "The Life of a NASA/ESA Astrophysicist", compiled by an Astro-Scout in the NLO's youth programme. Three of the NLO speakers this year were part of the NLO's Astro-Scout programme, two of whom went on to study science at Cambridge, and the third recently completed her Master's degree in Natural Science at Durham University. Our aim was to highlight the positive effect that the NLO and the Science Festival has had on the youth of Sidmouth.

The programme of planetarium shows was tailored, for the first time, for specific age groups. Sessions covered: (1) the night sky aimed at older children and families with an interest in Astronomy and Science; (2) mythology and stories about the night sky with "Story Telling Under the Stars"; and (3) "Astronomy for Kids" for very young children and their families.

Feedback from visitors attending family days showed that 96% rated them great (79%) or quite good (17%) on a 5-point scale; the word cloud below shows the words most used by these visitors to describe the festival: fun, great, excited and interesting featured highly.

Feedback from exhibitors, presenters and volunteers showed that overall, on 5-point scales, 95% found the experience of family days very enjoyable (60%) or enjoyable (35%); and 90% described the festival organisation as very efficient (58%) or efficient (32%). In a third of feedback from visitors, and in half the feedback from exhibitors, presenters or volunteers, suggestions were made for the 2026 festival, and these are being reviewed by the festival team.

**Family Days**




**Talks**



## Festival Week Talks and Activities

During the festival over 30 speakers gave talks on a wide range of topics including fungi, landscape recovery, cybersecurity and ageing. Most took place at Kennaway House with a few at other venues. Around 1,150 people attended these talks.

Feedback from these visitors showed that 96% rated them as great (82%) or quite good (14%) on a 5-point scale; the remaining 4% were rated as 'so-so' and none were rated 'not so good' or 'not for me'. Visitor comments underlined the interest in the talks and other events, as did the word cloud based on three words that visitors used to describe the festival, with interesting, informative and excellent being used most frequently.

Asked what would make the festival better, visitors mentioned improvements to the audiovisual systems; new topics for 2026, and improved advertising and signposting; these are being reviewed.

## Schools Programme

Volunteers ran scientific activities and workshops in three schools during the year and attended the Dorchester Science Festival. In addition, 477 pupils from three schools attended a variety of activities during the 2025 festival week with help from East Devon Countryside Rangers, The Sid River Catchment Group, Sidmouth Arboretum and Kings College London.

One senior teacher noted how pupils "all the way from nursery to Year 6 love the hands-on learning experiences, whether these be bug hunting, kick sampling or learning about river management".

This year's hexagon art project had an underwater theme and involved 11 schools as well as home-educated children for the first time. More than 1650 hexagons were made, grouped together by school, and displayed at Kennaway House Art Gallery during the 2025 festival.

This year, a Jet Car event was held specifically for a group of home educated children.

## Marketing and publicity

The 2025 marketing plan focused on increasing awareness of the festival and individual events across a wide audience in East Devon, Exeter and beyond. Activity was coordinated across digital channels, print media, public relations and partnerships, with the festival website acting as the central hub for event information, bookings, news updates and sponsor recognition.

Social media activity was sustained throughout the year, with increased posting during the lead-up to the festival, helping to maintain visibility and engagement. Efforts to grow the volunteer team were supported through regular messaging online and on printed materials. Marketing insights from this year's festival have informed a ten-point development plan for 2026.

Sidmouth Science Festival

## Financial Review

Monies are raised each year to finance each festival and are spent on running costs. SSF does not have property, or assets or salaried staff to support on an ongoing basis. Any surplus money raised in any given year is used as a float to support the running costs of the following year's festival. There are no funds in deficit. The annual Accounts are shown as an Appendix to this Report.

Cash funds rose by about 10% over last year, with income from ticket sales, grants and donations being very similar to last year. Costs of events and speakers was slightly less than last year, but general administration costs rose considerably largely due to IT infrastructure maintenance and improvement.

The reserves policy is to hold enough funds to cover the following year. The SSF is highly dependent on grants and on donations from attendees at the Science Festival, levels of which are uncertain from year to year. Financial commitments are required well in advance of the festival and before the status of grants is known.

A further consideration is to make sure there is a minimum level of funds available to meet commitments in case the charity had to be wound down unexpectedly at a time of maximum financial exposure (eg just before Festival Week).

## Future Plans

We aim to sustain an annual Sidmouth Science Festival and related activities, keeping the tried and tested format whilst incorporating innovation and current scientific research. Where possible we will reach out to new audiences in the Sid Valley and East Devon.

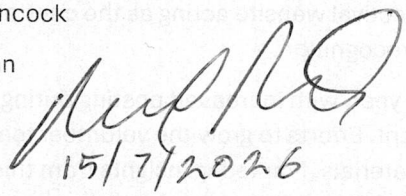
## Declaration

The trustees declare that they have approved the trustees' report above.

Signed on behalf of the charity's trustees:

Name: Michael Pincock

Position: Chairman

Signature: 

Date: 15/7/2026

Sidmouth Science Festival

# Annual Accounts submitted to the Charity Commission

CHARITY COMMISSION FOR ENGLAND AND WALES

Festival | 1168115

## Receipts and payments accounts

CC16a

For the period from 06/04/2025 To 05/04/2026

## Section A Receipts and payments

| | Unrestricted funds to the nearest £ | Restricted funds to the nearest £ | Endowment funds to the nearest £ | Total funds to the nearest £ | Last year to the nearest £ |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **A1 Receipts** | | | | | |
| Grants and sponsors | 11,080 | - | - | 11,080 | 10,600 |
| Advertising income | - | - | - | - | - |
| Donations | 2,791 | - | - | 2,791 | 3,017 |
| Ticket sales | 2,697 | - | - | 2,697 | 2,626 |
| Other | 2,306 | | - | 2,306 | 225 |
| Local supporters | - | - | - | - | |
| | - | - | - | - | - |
| | - | - | - | - | - |
| *(Gross income for AR)* | 18,875 | - | - | 18,875 | 16,468 |
| **A2 Asset and investment sales,** | | | | | |
| | - | - | - | - | |
| | - | - | - | - | - |
| *Sub total* | - | - | - | - | - |
| *Total receipts* | 18,875 | - | - | 18,875 | 16,468 |
| **A3 Payments** | | | | | |
| Communications | 3,308 | - | - | 3,308 | 3,733 |
| Venues and hospitality | 4,577 | - | - | 4,577 | 4,968 |
| Speakers, presenters, | 4,530 | - | - | 4,530 | 6,526 |
| General and admin | 4,885 | | - | 4,885 | 1,791 |
| | - | - | - | - | - |
| | - | - | - | - | - |
| *Sub total* | 17,300 | - | - | 17,300 | 17,018 |
| **A4 Asset and investment** | | | | | |
| | - | - | - | - | |
| | - | - | - | - | |
| *Sub total* | - | - | - | - | - |
| *Total payments* | 17,300 | - | - | 17,300 | 17,018 |
| *Net of receipts/(payments)* | 1,575 | - | - | 1,575 | - 550 |
| **A5 Transfers between funds** | - | - | - | - | - |
| **A6 Cash funds last year end** | 16,969 | - | - | 16,969 | |
| *Cash funds this year end* | 18,544 | - | - | 18,544 | |

| Signed by one or two trustees on behalf of | Signature | Print Name | Date of approval |
|---|---|---|---|
| | J. Hems | JOHN HEMS | 01/07/26 |
| | | | |