BOX COMMUNITY WOOD



Report on activities of Box Community Wood

1st January 2025

to

31st December 2025

Registered charity number 1169429



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 through Box Wood 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, but 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 possible risks.

Between February 2017 and the date of this report, extensive wildlife audits have taken place and a programme of scrub clearance, footpath improvement 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 where possible.

Box Wood is fully open to the public, with footpaths, fencing, field and kissing gates, signage and general access having been massively improved. The intense activity and remarkable enthusiasm around the purchase of Box Wood 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.



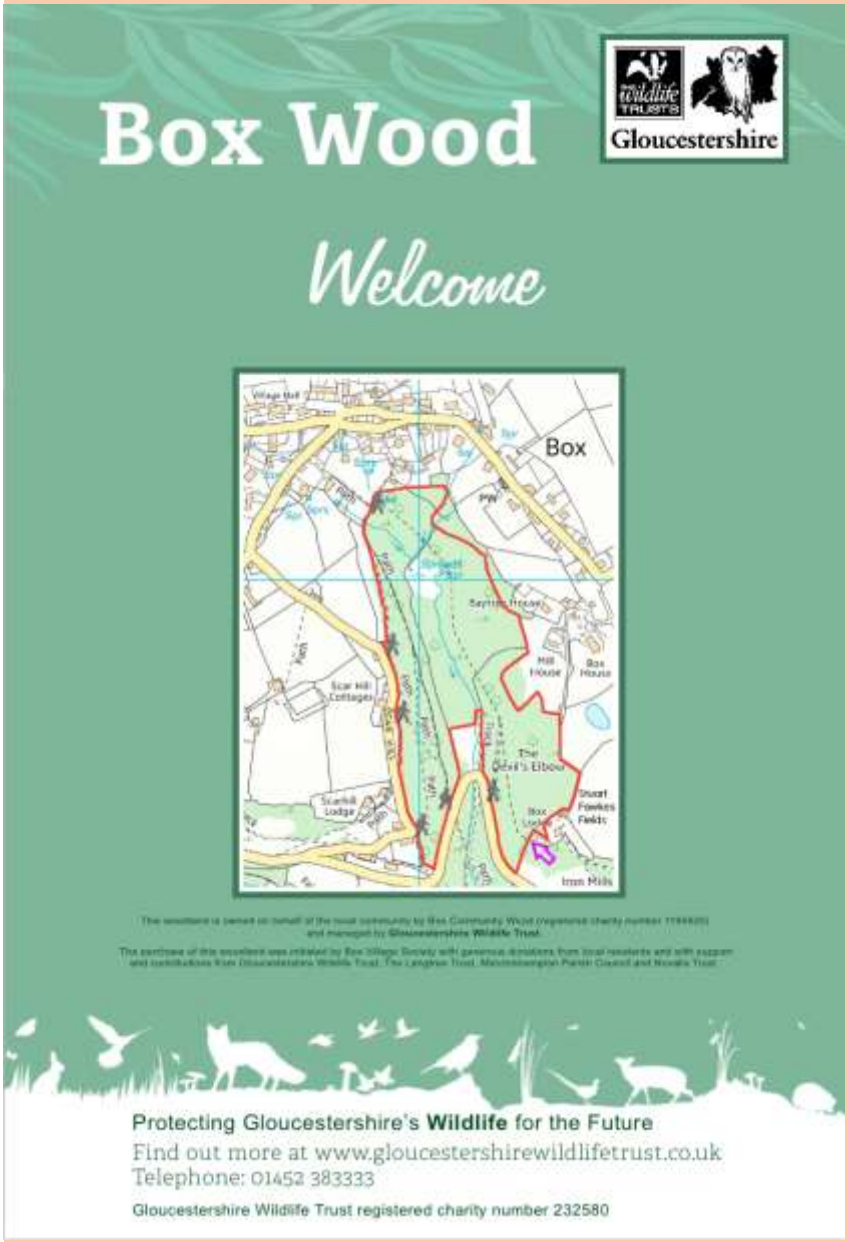
Volunteers removing fallen beech tree



Some Box Wood Volunteers, including BCW trustee Bob Common (centre front) and Beris Hanks, BCW chairman (centre rear)

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 an area now known as the "**Cotswold National Landscape**" (previously known as 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 continue to maintain and develop opportunities within Box Wood for educational purposes. One trustee of Box Community Wood is specifically nominated by a local 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 possible 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 2025

(Notes by the Chairman, Beris Hanks, taken from 'Box News' reports and including details of the practical work that has been undertaken)

As I walk through the wood, I sometimes think about the varieties of trees that I am not quite sure about, and that I can't see the 'trees for the wood', so to speak. Like most of us I am aware of the stately plantation of beech to the East of the path going down to Pensile Road, the rather straggly remnants of the oak plantation, the willow varieties round the old pond, and the ash (many of which are now sickening or have been felled). It is easy enough to spot the silver birch and the bird cherries, with their distinctive barks, growing along the main path towards Iron Mills Common. Also, there are the brooding yews, the possibly eponymous box and the surprising apples. It's the ones I'm not quite sure about that bother me: the two tall conifers, remnants of the gentleman's parkland plantings; the wych elms, (to me the 'which and where elms'), and the various shrubby trees whose names I know but which I fail to reliably identify. So, in the interests of overcoming ignorance, and changing my lazy ways, I did a little research. I looked at the results of the Bioblitz that was carried out in May 2017, shortly after the wood was purchased for the community, and I dusted down my tree reference books.

(During the Bioblitz a wide range of enthusiastic and knowledgeable taxonomists scoured the wood according to their particular expertise, and a total of 467 taxa were identified. Of these only 40 were trees: 5 conifers and 35 other trees and shrubs. The full species list runs to 13 pages and many are identified by their Latin name only, so I will not include them here!)

I found that the two tall conifers remaining from the parkland planting are a Western Red Cedar and a Douglas Fir (both introduced to the UK from North America in Victorian times).

Wych Elms are native to the UK and its leaf is a rather elongated and jaggy oval, ending with a small spike. Although susceptible to Dutch elm disease, ours, in the wood, have apparently fared fairly well.

Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust group and our own Box Wood Volunteers have recently been working on widening and clearing the main 'ride' through the wood and continuing the efforts to further reduce the invasive Cherry Laurel, and most recently the Box group has been trying to manage the streams that have been flooding well-used footpaths.

We recently took our grandchildren down into the wood for a bit of adventurous stream paddling and bridge building. They loved it, and while I was poking around in the water I was delighted to find two varieties of caddis fly larvae in their characteristic housing. As a child I was always fascinated by these creatures and their portable protective tubes which they construct from silk, strengthened with small fragments of stone, shell and plant material.

The 2017 Box Wood Bioblitz identified 4 particular varieties of caddis being present in the streams - but there are probably more which have not yet been recorded. According to the Wildlife Trust's website there are almost 200 species of caddis fly (order Trichoptera, also known as 'sedge flies') in the UK, the largest of which is more than 3cm long. The adults are moth-like insects with hairy wings.

The Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust Volunteers meet in Box every third Thursday of the month and the focus is on conservation and wildlife management in both Box Wood and the Stuart Fawkes Nature Reserve. Our own Box Wood Volunteers meet at two weekly intervals on the remaining Thursdays and we concern ourselves mainly with the maintenance of footpaths, boundaries and the amenity value of the wood – but always working in close collaboration with the Trust and also help with conservation tasks.

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The local Trustees of Box Wood hold the deeds on behalf of the community; they also liaise with GWT and have carried out a wide range of tasks and projects that augment their work, such as maintaining the boundaries and paths, and the building of the new steps onto Pensile Road.

Most of the work in the wood is carried out by volunteers, although GWT sometimes employs professionals to carry out specialist work like tree felling. The GWT volunteers, led by employees of the Trust, meet every 3rd Thursday of the month to work in the wood, or sometimes in the Stuart Fawkes Reserve. The local Trustees also organise work parties in the wood on a fortnightly basis.

As a wildlife charity GWT's aims and objectives are primarily informed by matters of wildlife conservation. As they say in the introduction to their Strategic Plan, "Our mission is to connect and enhance Gloucestershire's wild places to help put nature into recovery". Box Wood and the Stuart Fawkes Reserve are designated as one of their 'nature recovery areas'. There is a long-term plan to aid the reserves 'connectedness' with nearby and surrounding habitats such as Gatcombe Wood, Hazel Wood, Iron Mills Common, and Minchinhampton Commons (National Trust).

A local couple kindly donated to Box Wood a narrow strip of woodland that runs between Box Wood and the Stuart Fawkes fields, and since that time there has been a long-term plan to improve connectivity in this corner of the recovery area. A long and wide multi-species hedge was planted across the NE field to link and extend the existing hedge corridors, and there has been extensive felling of over-grown and crowded larch trees that occupied the dividing strip. This felling work was in part paid for by donations in memory of a local resident. A start was made last year to clear a joining corridor, from the main ride towards the area of the felling, but with only hand tools available to the volunteers it was not possible to cut the remaining larger trees. Recently this was done for us by a meeting of Trust employees using chain saws. It did look messy for a while but since that time two of our Box Wood Volunteer sessions have been devoted to clearing back some of the debris, and hopefully the area is now looking tidier.

Although clearance work can seem brutal, dense woodland with no clearings can be foreboding for both wildlife and people. Over the recent years of GWTs management, visitors to the wood have benefitted vastly in terms of both access and the opening up of vistas. For instance: the significant widening of the main ride and clearing where the seats are; the opening up of the former pond area and the clearance of the fencing and laurel to the left of the path down to Pensile Road, where formerly it was dark and enclosed, and with only very limited views of the wood beyond or of the streams working their way down from the village.

Also, despite the Trust's main focus on wildlife, they have done a lot to improve access for people. For example, early on in their tenure they and volunteers constructed the steps down from the Wilkinson Gate into the wood and the small footbridge below the lake area. The footfall of dog walkers and others through the wood has increased vastly and, as volunteers, we often get positive comments from people who appreciate all the improvements.

Besides the clearing up after the tree felling, recent work parties in the wood have focussed on managing the pond area, the main ride and the central clearing. A start has also been made in coppicing hazel above the ride and to the west of the clearing).

If you would like to know the dates when the Box Wood volunteers are meeting, please email Bob Common to join the mailing group: bobcommon698@gmail.com

Box Wood volunteering activities

(Notes by Bob Common, BCW trustee and coordinator of the Box Wood Volunteers.)

The focus of the Box Wood Volunteers over the past year (1st Quarter 2025 to 1st Quarter 2026) has continued to be on "care and maintenance" activities. Our BWV activities aim to complement those of the regular work parties organised by Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust which tend to tackle more extensive clearance work, which might include, for example, the use of chainsaws. BWV sessions typically involve the use of hand tools (hand saws, loppers and bow saws) and frequent use of our trusty brush cutter.

Depending on the season (for example no cutting during bird nesting between March and end September), the team has worked on keeping pathways clear of regrowth, repairing boundary fences and cutting and repairing steps within the wood. We have had a number of occasions when trees have been blown over during the challenging winter just past and our task has been to clear debris off paths. GWT have responded promptly to our requests for heavier (chain saw!) interventions to clear larger, fallen trees.



Numerous fungi help in the decomposition of fallen or dead wood

Community involvement in BWV continues at a high level. We have 20 local residents who receive notice of work parties, of which up to 10 have turned out for sessions. Average attendance continues around 6 to 7 volunteers with each session lasting for up to 3 hours.

Over the past year, BWV have held 13 working parties. A further 12 sessions have been arranged by GWT, although a number of these sessions have taken place at Stuart Fawkes, the adjoining reserve.

Overall, the level of activity has remained much the same as last year with a very similar volume of activity completed. We have invested a total of around 300 hours in care and maintenance which is a comparable level to previous years.

We continue to encourage new volunteers to step forward. The work we do is rarely arduous and the satisfaction of maintaining the Wood is matched by being able to catch up with neighbours and friends in a slightly different context!

If you would like to know the dates when the Box Wood volunteers are meeting, please email Bob Common to join the mailing group: bobcommon698@gmail.com

FINANCIAL SUMMARY 2025

BOX COMMUNITY WOOD - FINANCIAL SUMMARY

1st January 2025 to 31st December 2025

	DATE	CASH AT BANK		INCOME			EXPENDITURE	
		£	£	£	£	£	£	£
		Current Account	Reserve Account	Donations	Misc. Income	Bank Interest	Improvements	Miscell.
Opening Balances	01/01/2025	1045.08	11114.92					
Insurance		-256.36						-256.36
Wayleave Payment		61.17			61.17			
Donations		100.00		100.00				
Maintenance andImprovement work		-122.56					-122.56	
Transfers								
Bank Interest			276.99			276.99		
Misc. expenses								
Closing Balances	31/12/2025	827.33	11391.91					
				100.00	61.17	276.99	-122.56	-256.36
Total Income					438.16			
Total Expenditure					-378.92			
Net Surplus for year (Income less expenditure)					59.24			

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.

Photographs in this issue: our thanks to Michael McEllin, Martin Smith, Steve Hemmings



BOX COMMUNITY WOOD TRUSTEES

Beris Hanks	-	Chairman
Martin Smith	-	Secretary
Roger Ogle	-	Treasurer
Bob Common	-	Trustee
Thomas Pentzek	-	Trustee

BCW REGISTERED DETAILS

Charity number 1169429

Registered address:
c/o Roger Ogle
Laburnums, Box, Stroud,
Gloucestershire, GL6 9HG.