

**Category:** RFS Community Woodlands Award 2015

**Name of Wood:** Warren Woods, Bodfari

**Owned by:** Rod Waterfield

### Summary

The Warren Woods cover some 20 ha, including an old sand quarry which has been planted up, and have been owned by the current owner's family for 32 years. From the start there have been three equally important management objectives: social, environmental and financial.

### Silvicultural management and financial considerations

The woodland needs to at least break even and in order to do so it must be managed effectively, which in turn requires understanding of the range of forest products that it can produce and the interventions required to do so. There are three main income streams

- The woodland is managed by a small local company which does the management in exchange for the timber from the harvesting rotation and coppice hazel.
- The Woodlands Skills Centre based within Warren Woods pays a fee whenever the woodlands are used for courses and events.
- The Woodland Skills Centre buys timber and coppice material from Warren Woods for its courses.

### Social and landscape

The woodland is in the heart of the Clwydian Range AONB and adjoins Offa's Dyke path so it is important that it looks good from within the woodland and afar.

The owners wish the woods to be enjoyed by as many people as possible up to the level which they will sustain. There are no public rights of



*Hazel coppice cut on a three-four year rotation*

way but the woodlands are open under permissive access at all times.

The owners have an agreement with Warren Woods Ltd., a not-for-profit Social Enterprise company trading as Woodlands Skills Centre, which allows for the woods to be used for many activities – courses in woodland management, coppicing and bushcraft, Forest School, holiday club and family holidays.

There is a long-standing agreement with Denbigh Scout Group allowing them to use the woods for their activities.



*Wooden frame shelter built by course attendees*

The woods are also used for a range of Social Forestry programmes with people of all ages with special needs; there are two permanent Forest School sites.

The woodlands are managed to minimise the impact of people, without detracting from their enjoyment, chiefly by encouraging the use of a carefully constructed network of paths.

Community involvement is strengthened by the Board of Warren Woods Ltd. -six of the eight Directors live within sight of the woods – and by regular volunteering programmes involving local long-term unemployed people, children with special needs, and adults with learning difficulties.

In addition to the main woodland areas there is also a heritage orchard, an arboretum, and community allotments, all with paths suitable for access by wheelchair users.

A recent addition is a timber-frame, timber-clad, woodburner heated Centre building.

## Biodiversity

The simple biodiversity objective is that the woodland should support as many as possible of the species of plants and animals that would be expected to occur in a small woodland of this type, so no exotic tree species are planted and work is carried out to create and maintain a range of habitats.

This involves constant monitoring by individuals and groups, including the North Wales Wildlife Trust and a Home Education group working on the Open Air Laboratories (OPAL) project - a UK-wide citizen science initiative that allows the public to get hands-on with nature, regardless of age, background or level of ability.

As part of these activities the only pond originally on the site has been restored and two more created, plus a range of other habitats.

## Lessons learnt

This is an inspirational project showing how quite a small woodland can, in the right hands, and with clear objectives, be used to enhance the lives of many local people with all levels of ability, many of whom would probably never otherwise have the opportunity to experience the



*Rod Waterfield in the Woodland Skills Centre*

pleasure of being in and learning about woodlands and what they have to offer.

Contact is made with an attractive and species rich natural environment while learning woodland skills, bushcraft, and many other things. By giving people, some of whom have limited learning skills or physical ability, the opportunity to make something from wood and then take it away with them, can greatly enhance self-esteem and confidence. For many others just enjoying being in the woodland and enjoying the wildlife is sufficient reward.

A very wide range of courses is offered which attracts all sorts of people of differing ages and abilities. Courses, all of which are carried out on site, are paid for individually by or on behalf of attendees and most of the materials used are produced on site as explained above. It is to be hoped that many more similar ventures will be established throughout the UK.

**Judges:** Dr John Good and Philippe Morgan

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