

Grown in Britain: supporting the use of UK timber

Rachel Lawrence introduces Grown in Britain and explains its multi-faceted approach towards reducing unnecessary timber imports and supporting the management of forests and woodlands in the UK.

Regular readers of *QJF* may have heard about Grown in Britain (GiB) and know about the certification we provide. Indeed, we count some RFS owned woodlands and RFS members among our certificate holders.

Last year, GiB celebrated its 10th anniversary. That might not feel like a long time in forestry terms but to us it is a significant milestone and one that we are celebrating. What began as something of a campaign to support UK forests and their products, has developed into a robust certification programme, and now grown into something we would have been hard pushed to anticipate back in 2013.

Today, as well as our forest and chain of custody certification, we have several additional ways in which we support the sustainable future of our woodlands. We are a certification body for the Plant Healthy scheme, we audit and certify the Forest Canopy Foundation woodland creation projects and we are developing 'woods into management' metrics too. We have developed the British Quality Wild Venison standard with the Wild Venison Working Group to support the management of deer in our woodlands, which launched in April 2023 – it feels like our certification and verification is now reaching all parts of the homegrown forest-based supply chain.

With only 13% woodland cover in the UK (compared with an average of 38% in the EU) and over 40% of UK woodlands unmanaged, GiB works to bring more woods into active management. To do this we recognise our work must focus on building demand for homegrown timber as well as encouraging better silvicultural practice. In recent years to support our woods into management aims we

have also built a significant research and development programme. The projects within our programme underpin our objective to reduce unnecessary imports, by developing alternative homegrown products and supply lines.

Before diving into our R&D work, let's take a look back at some of the factors at work in the sector. The last couple of years have been particularly challenging for forestry, what with *Hymenoscyphus fraxineus* causing catastrophic damage to ash and the effects of Phytophthora on larch, in 2022, storm Arwen flooded the market with windblow and then drought and forest fires hit later in the year. Some mills closed their doors to timber deliveries because of the amount of windblown timber causing them to struggle to hit their required quotas for sustainable/legal timber to be compliant for certification. Thankfully, 2023 has seen more stable weather conditions for new and existing woodlands. These factors are indicative of longer-term threats that the sector faces due to climate change and the increasing risk of pests and diseases entering the UK through international trade in plants and plant material.

The continuing impact of the conflict in Ukraine on supply chains, alongside increased transport costs has caused businesses to look for more robust options for their timber supplies. Combine this with the drive to reduce emissions, measure embodied carbon and operate more sustainably and the demand for homegrown timber continues to grow.

Demonstrating success in real life projects and communicating the benefits of homegrown timber is crucial in continuing to support the fulfilment of this demand, and this is where our R&D work comes into



Figure 1. GiB has started a new three-year project with the iconic furniture maker, ercol.



Figure 2. Phoebe Oldfield is the first GiB scholar.

play. GiB's main method of working is to collaborate and build connections with partners who share our passion for making the most out of our woodlands; whether that is for timber production and the resulting embodied carbon in buildings and products, for habitat restoration, flood and run-off prevention, water cooling in riparian zones, carbon sequestration, health and wellbeing or any of the other benefits that sustainably managed forests in the UK deliver. Productive, multipurpose forests and woodlands come in many shapes and sizes and are valuable in many ways and we want to illustrate that through the real world examples illustrated below.

GiB hardwoods in curtain walling

Curtain walls are the glazed façade of a building and are the subject of acute interest from architects, clients and constructors in their design, performance and sustainability. Curtain walling has a current global market value of £29 billion.

GiB has been working with the Gloucester based firm Scandinavian Timber on this project to replace imported timber and unsustainable aluminium with homegrown certified hardwoods. Installation of the first GiB curtain wall has been completed on a residential property in Sussex.

A new seat at the table – with ercol and Tyler Hardwoods

Working with the iconic furniture maker, ercol, this project has seen a number of classic ercol designs re-launched in GiB certified ash (Figure 1). Their timeless designs and passion for the narrative behind the furniture they create is telling the story of homegrown timber to retailers and the general public, through a new and unique GiB range, launched at Clerkenwell Design Week in May 2023. All of this runs in tandem with the development of a new manufacturing capability here in the UK at Tyler Hardwoods, making ercol furniture parts, building new capacity and skills, and increasing demand for homegrown timber.

Our first GiB scholar

We have supported our first GiB Scholar, Phoebe Oldfield, to attend the Sylva Wood School (Figure 2). Her approach is to explain the balance required in woodland management through the pieces of furniture she creates.

Thermal modification of timber (TMT)

Getting our non-durable timbers to be durable is important for adding value and so we were delighted when our R&D partners Vastern Timber opened the UK's first commercial Thermal Modification plant in 2022. GiB supported the initial research into thermally modified British timber many years ago and so we are delighted with this latest development, and the first UK TMT poplar and sycamore cladding at the Sylva Foundation is looking fantastic after nine years. This use of under-utilised timber informs a lot of our work, opening up opportunities for less well known species to shine and bestowing a much needed economic value on woodlands (Figure 3). This is even more critical now as we look ahead to a future without a ready supply of ash for furniture and construction.



Figure 3. Different lamination patterns of TMT and ash at Scandinavian Timber.

GiB Canopy Metrics

The Canopy Metrics are a woodland design tool with a 'graphic equaliser' that quantifies the natural capital benefits that emerge from an individual project based on the answers to over 100 questions relating to the woodlands design. An example is shown in Figure 4 and we are delighted to report that the Canopy Metrics is now used in all Forest Canopy Foundation (<https://forestcanopyfoundation.co.uk/>) projects to ensure exemplary long-term design.

The metrics are also being used in the PIES project (Protect, Improve, Expand, Sustain) which aims to support the delivery of the government's England Trees Action Plan at scale, by expanding, connecting, protecting and improving woodlands and promoting the green economy to the hidden, un-engaged community of landowners. Delivered by the Sylva Foundation, Forest Canopy Foundation and GiB, the partnership is working closely with the Forestry Commission and the National Farmers' Union

to deliver the project for three years (2022-25). You can see detailed information on the project on Sylva's website <https://sylva.org.uk/our-work/#pies>

Working with the National Trust

In 2022 the National Trust certified their 250,000ha of land as GiB and this cemented a long-term partnership with us. We are currently working with them to facilitate greater use and appreciation of homegrown timber, including a strong element of self-supply for their own sites. Initially focussed on the NW and W Midlands regions and funded through the Forestry Innovation Fund, the project aims to build links between woodlands, processors and end users and to upscale success stories to a national level.

Last year was GiB's 10th anniversary and whilst we spent some time celebrating, we also recognise that there is still a lot to do. GiB's continuing aims are:

- To bring more woods into management.
- To increase woodland creation.
- To drive innovation in timber processing and manufacturing.
- To add value to UK woodlands, driving investment in them and securing their long-term future.

GiB's path will continue to cross with people and organisations that share our passions and a belief that forestry has a critical role to play in balancing and restoring our planet. Collaborations and connections are key, from across supply chains, across communities, across cultures, we need to share lessons learnt, to step out of our silos and not waste time, the clock is ticking. We encourage everyone to put those connections to work to ensure that forestry and timber projects currently taking place in the UK result in solutions that are more than the sum of their parts.

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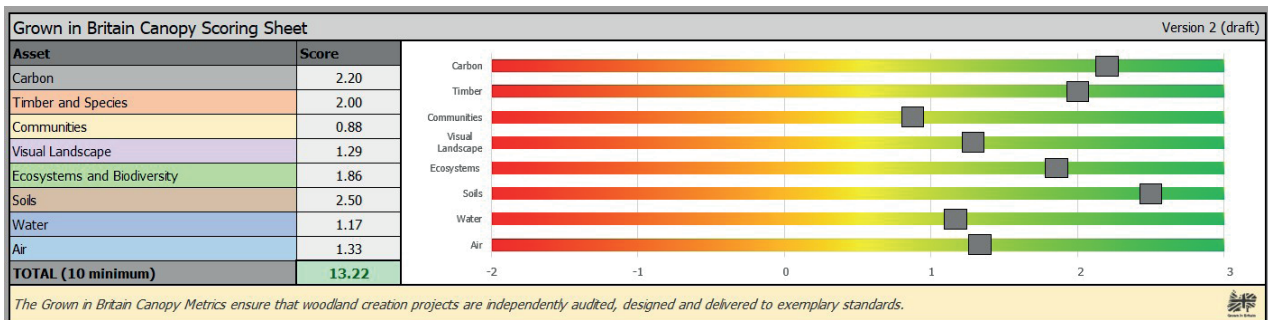


Figure 4. Example of Canopy Metrics 'graphic equaliser' assessing natural capital benefits of projects.