

## **Quarterly strategic update for Volunteers and Local Branch Group Committees, Thursday 8<sup>th</sup> January**

Our new CEO, [Saul Herbert](#), started in post on 1<sup>st</sup> January 2026 following Jamie Audsley's departure at the end of December.

We are now in the final quarter of our three year strategy, "[Wilder Herefordshire, More Nature Everywhere](#)".

Saul will work with staff over the coming months to develop our next strategy to build on the foundations and successes of the last three years.

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### **New opportunities**

- Herefordshire's Local Nature Partnership Board, Climate and Nature Board and Local Nature Recovery Strategy delivery work are to be amalgamated into one board. This, we hope, will improve governance of the county's environmental partnerships and support effective delivery of our 30 by 30 ambitions.
- Herefordshire Council progress their plans for Merton Meadow. We are *hopeful* they will include significant space for nature with biodiversity improvements. We will continue to monitor this project and collaborate with the Council.

### **New challenges:**

- Planning and Infrastructure Bill passed by Parliament in December removes many of the protections for nature.
  - Herefordshire Council are beginning
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### **Update on the last quarter of 2025 -26 financial year (October, November, December).**

#### **Nature recovery...**

- We have been successful in our application to the National Lottery Heritage Fund for the initial development phase of a major new project: **Hereford ~ River City**. Following the 15-month development phase, we will submit an application for over £1 million to undertake the full delivery phase.

- Severn Treescapes programme has secured a £600K grant for works primarily around Upton on Severn. We're thrilled this will support all project staff, including HWT's, Trees and Woodlands Advisor, Charlotte Bell to continue working on the project until 2028.
- As part of our Acquisitions & Divestments plan, the sale of **Merrivale Wood** was agreed. Public access will continue and the new owners plan to work with the new Merrivale Wood community group.
- We participated in the 3rd Annual Rivers Conference in Herefordshire

## Nature Action...

### Youth & Wellbeing

- We have secured a grant from the Brailsford Trust for 2026/7 to cover running costs of our WildPlay outreach programme, restart our Nature Tots group and continue our work with young people aged 16-25.
- Our WildPlay programme has been at full capacity this year, reaching over 1,000 children. The WildPlay Thinks Differently programme for SEN children has continued at Queenswood with thanks to funding from the National Lottery Community Fund's Awards for All programme.

### Campaigns

- We supported a successful campaign opposing development alongside **Lugg Meadows** SSSI – the planning application has been rejected.

### Volunteering & Membership

- Our Autumn Discovery Day & AGM was well received with presentations and discussion on our Nature Recovery projects and our work with children and young people. Many thanks to all who attended and contributed.
- We hugely enjoyed the Christmas Volunteer Quiz and Festive Afternoon Tea in December!
- We ran new Training Workshop for Voluntary Wardens, Task and Event leaders – this will be repeated every six months.

### Fundraising

- Our Nature Recovery Fund appeal has reached over 50% of its £1 million target with just over a year left to run.
- We have been successful in our grant application for a new electric vehicle and have a Vauxhall Vivaro on order. This can be used as a people carrier or the seats removed to transport e.g. gazebos/ tools.
- An Evening with Monty Don raised over £2,700 for the Nature Recovery Fund

- Current grant applications in development include:
  - a partnership project with Radnorshire Wildlife Trust focused on the River Lugg;
  - a partnership project with the RSPB focused on lesser spotted woodpeckers;
  - a project supporting communities and schools to survey and restore local freshwater habitats
  - An application to the Environment Agency's Water Environment Improvement Fund for further work within the Lugg catchment.
  - A partnership project with the Wye Valley National Landscape

#### Publicity

- Toby Fountain starred in an episode of Countryfile at Bodenham Lake in October [www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episode/m002kw2w](http://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episode/m002kw2w)
- Queenswood featured in The Independent's 11 best Arboretums to visit this autumn in October

#### Sustaining our future...

- Our commercial enterprises (Queenswood café, car parks, visitor centre and our charity shops) are performing above target and have enjoyed an exceptionally busy festive period. In 2025, visitor numbers to Queenswood increased 8% on the previous year (80,885 cars equating to approximately 217,792 visitors).
- We have begun to host weekly Parkrun events at Queenswood. These have been hugely popular and are raising significant income with runners enjoying the café and shop as part of their visit. The event is likely to cause additional wear and tear to paths through the Arboretum but the increase in income will us for more regular repair work.

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#### Staff updates:

- Our new CEO **Saul Herbert** joined us from 1<sup>st</sup> January. Jamie Audsley has moved to a new role as Director at the Western Forest.
- Following the departure of Claire Spicer, we welcomed **Ian Grafton** as our new Head of Nature Recovery.
- Following the departure of Retail Manager Debbie Bean, we welcomed **Cath Marshall** to the role of Retail and Visitor Services Manager.
- Toby Spicer has left his role as Nature Reserves Manager. We will go out to recruit for this role in the coming weeks.

- In the café we welcomed **Brandan Jolly** as the new cook and **Sophie Griffiths-Rose** and **Lilia Evans** as Team Members.
- Recruitment is ongoing for a Finance Officer.

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### **Financial update**

Detailed financial data for Quarter three is not yet available but will be included in the next strategic update.

However, we are confident that for the current financial year 2025/5 we are still forecasting a surplus with an increase in unrestricted funds.

This will see our free reserves growing to a healthy level to cover 3 months expenditure.

The Senior Management Team are currently working on draft budgets for 2026/7.