



Quarterly strategic update for Volunteers and Local Branch Group Committees,

14th May 2026

Update on the last quarter of 2025 -26 financial year (January, February, March).

Governance

At the end of March, Chair Alison McClean completed her term of office and stepped down from the Board. Current trustee **Jake Bharier** was elected as our new Chair. Jane Seabrook also stepped down as a Trustee and we aim to recruit three new Trustees in the first quarter of the new financial year.

Work is underway to create our **new strategy** for the next five years. Three workshops have taken place so far: an exploration of the broader external context in which we work; a discussion around Nature Recovery Indicators with external partners and an all staff and trustee workshop reviewing past success and future objectives. There will be opportunities for volunteers and members to share their opinions and feedback too including an [in-person meeting on 7th July](#).

This quarter, we held our [annual meeting with local branch committees](#) and our quarterly Volunteer Voice Forum.

Nature recovery...

- The Wyescapes Landscape Recovery Proposal was formally submitted to Defra on Friday 27th February. After responding to any clarification questions from Defra, the project will move into an assurance process, then formal negotiation on the value and terms of implementation agreement. It is expected that these stages could take us through to the late summer/autumn, before a confirmed outcome. If successful, the Trust's involvement will continue as we have committed 158ha of our own nature reserves to the project where we will be (for example) creating scrapes, reedbeds and buffers, and involved in what we hope will be a thriving community engagement program, connecting greater numbers of schools, volunteers and the public to our reserves. The development phase has been led by Herefordshire Rural Hub, working with partners Herefordshire Wildlife Trust, Herefordshire Meadows, and The Wye and Usk Foundation.

- Our Restoring Bartonsham Meadows project continues apace with fencing and cattle handling infrastructure installed and cattle due to arrive imminently. The fencing has curtailed permissive paths in one or two places which has caused negative responses from some visitors including fences being cut and vandalised. We continue to hold public meetings and put out clear communications about our plans but are struggling to engage with those in opposition. Overall, however, the project has a huge amount of local support. School visits are now also in full swing.
- Since hearing our Hereford ~ River City project application had been successful before Christmas, we have been working hard to gain our 'permission to start'. We are now in the process of recruiting a project team.
- As part of our Acquisitions & Divestments plan, the sales of Merrivale Wood, Motlins Hole and Romers Wood are complete with a sale also progressing on Upper Swingley Coppice.
- CEO Saul Herbert and Head of Nature Recovery Ian Grafton continue to build relationships with external partners and this quarter have met with Wye Valley National Landscape, Farm Herefordshire, Natural England, Wye Catchment Partnership and the Herefordshire Environment Board, among others.

Nature Action...

Youth & Wellbeing

- Our WildPlay community programme and WildPlay Thinks Differently programme for SEN children continue;
- Our Young Nature Rangers group continues to meet monthly
- Our new Nature Tots sessions will begin at the end of May

Volunteering & Membership

- We recruited 59 new members in our January sale

Campaigns

- We submitted an objection to the planning application for the major housing development proposed for Leominster.

Sustaining our future...

Fundraising

- Our Nature Recovery Fund appeal remains at just over 50% of its £1 million target with just over a year left to run.
- 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;
- 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
- We were unsuccessful in our application to the National Lottery Community Fund for our project Freshwater Fan Club

Queenswood

- Our commercial enterprises (Queenswood café, car parks, visitor centre and our charity shops) are performing above target
- We have been reviewing options for a third charity shop, to be located in Ross-on-Wye, and hope to open on the high street this summer.
- Events and activities at Queenswood this quarter have included Meet the Vikings, a number of Silent Discos and our ongoing Saturday Parkrun.

Systems, processes and equipment

- We have begun the process of transferring all our Health and Safety checks and risk assessments to our 'Riskproof' system.
- Our brand new, electric minivan/ people carrier arrived! This will replace the function of the minibus for travelling with staff and volunteers to work parties but also be a useful vehicle for the WildPlay team and other staff running activities.

Staff updates:

- This quarter, **Diane Theron** joined us as Finance Officer;
- **Laura Beasley** left her role as Nature Recovery Manager
- **Ana Stepanova** joined to manage the Hereford Charity Shop, replacing Ceri Osbourne who stepped down from the role;
- **Lara Ware** joined the Visitor Experience team at Queenswood;
- **Mon Griffith** started as Assistant Cafe Manager following Lily Kay's departure;
- WildPlay Ranger **Rosa Fernandez** moved into a new role of Nature Tots Officer;
- **Lesley Hack** has also moved into a new role of Membership and Volunteering Manager.

- **Luke Osman** left us for Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust and **Pete Johnson** will retire at the end of May. We have recruited two new full-time Reserves Officers to start in June.
- We recruited a new Nature Reserves Manager, **Clare O'Reilly**, who will start on 19th May.

Financial update

Draft figures for the end of financial year 2025/6 show us ending the year on a positive note, an improvement on our original budget. Complete audited accounts will be available later in the year.