A young child with dark hair, wearing a green jacket with a fur-lined hood, black pants with a grey patterned stripe, and blue sneakers, is focused on digging in a field. The child is using a wooden-handled shovel to lift a clump of dark soil. The field is filled with dry, brown twigs and some green plants. In the background, there is a line of tall, thin trees under a grey, overcast sky. The overall scene is outdoors and appears to be a natural, wooded area.

**Trustees' Report
& Annual Accounts
2023-24**

Company Information

Severn Gorge Countryside Trust

Reference and administrative details

Charity Name: Severn Gorge Countryside Trust
Charity number: 1004508
Company number: 02647374

Registered Office and operational address

Severn Gorge Countryside Trust
Darby Road
Coalbrookdale
Telford
Shropshire
TF8 7EP

Telephone 01952 433880
www.severngorge.org.uk

Auditors

Muras Baker Jones – Regent House, Bath Avenue,
Wolverhampton, WV1 4EG

Bankers

The Co-operative Bank – Colmore Row,
Birmingham, B3 3BA

Investment Advisers

LGT Wealth Management UK LLP -14 Cornhill
London EC3V 3NR



Contents

Page

Welcome from our Chair & Chief Executive 3-5

Trustees Report

About Us	6
2023/2024 – Our Year at a Glance	7
What we do	8
How we do it	9-27
Tackling Climate Change & Carbon Calculator	28-30
Structure Governance & Management	31-36
Financial Review	37-43
Looking Forward	44
Statement of Trustees Responsibilities	45

Financial Statements and Supporting Notes

Independent Auditors Report	47
Financial Statements	50
Principal Accounting Policies	53
Notes to Financial Statements	59



Message from the Chair

On reading the Annual Report, I am sure you will be very impressed with how much the staff and volunteers have achieved this year. Their diverse activities range from woodland management and enhancing the biodiversity of our meadows and pastures to maintaining the historic structures and the network of footpaths enjoyed by residents and visitors alike.

The volunteering scheme and the Outdoor Learning Programme goes from strength to strength. A highlight this year was the regeneration of the Oilhouse Willow Bed, bringing it back into good management and providing a source of willow for future projects.

Finances for the future continue to be a source of serious concern. The ongoing effects of Ash Dieback adding to the financial pressures on the Trust work programme. However, the staff are constantly looking for grants and using very innovative ways of raising much need additional funding and to invest in alternative income streams.

On behalf of the Trustees, I would like to thank the Staff, volunteers and residents who enthusiastically promote, protect and conserve the living landscape of the Ironbridge Gorge for the benefit of local people and visitors both today and for future generations..

Thank you

Maureen Bragg



Message from CEO – John Paul Brayford

Hello and welcome to our annual report for 2023- 24

One of the greatest rewards of this job is being able to take a walk (or a very short drive) and witness first-hand the effects of 33 years of the Trust's landscape management within the World Heritage Site (WHS).

As I write this, the superb hay meadows of the Ropewalk and Wilderness are looking at their best, while the Twayblade and Common Spotted Orchids have now set seed, the purple flowers of Betony are very much in evidence. These meadows (which show up on maps dating from 1700 and are probably older still) continue to thrive and increase in floristic diversity, not by accident, but by lots of consistent hard work over generations. We continue to manage these meadows as traditional hay meadows, the machinery used may have changed from scythes to tractors, but the underlying system remains the same.

We also manage the woodlands of the gorge on similar timescales. Within the woodlands there are surprisingly few veteran trees. I suspect this is in part because of the areas' industrial past and partly because several of the woods were planted on grassland sites as part of the 'new town' development.



The work we undertake on veteran trees is detailed in the forestry section of this report. The present team at the Trust will never see the final results of this work but with 966 years left on our lease we are well placed to deliver consistent, informed management so future generations will see the long-term benefits.

Having said that, the harsh reality is that the Trust, along with many other charities, will need more money to continue to deliver our aims. We also have the challenge of hitting carbon net zero by 2030.





Whilst we continue to apply for grants for specific projects, the number of grants available has decreased, eligibility conditions have become more focussed, and competition has risen.

As a Trust we are trying new and innovative ways of resolving the financial shortfall. We are undertaking more direct fundraising with events such as our Christmas Fair and Spring Plant Sale. We also rent out our community room for events, training courses and corporate away days.

There is a medium-term plan to develop the office and its surroundings to make us more attractive as a facility able to host outdoor education, building on our existing links with local schools. We have used grant funding to develop a pond and dipping platform to further this aim.

In the coming year we will be launching a contracting 'arm' to the charity. We will provide services in the areas of landscape maintenance, invasive weed control, the creation and management of wildlife habitats, including meadows and woodlands as well as countryside services such as forestry & fencing.

With grant support we have invested in a sawmill, this will enable us to realise the full value of timber produced from our woodland management and tree

safety operation. This timber would previously have been sold as firewood. Some of the timber produced is used in house to support our access work, for example as step boards, gate posts and site markers. This saves us having to buy in, often imported, timber. We are already selling small volumes of timber to local builders and to specialist markets. In the future we will be looking to increase timber sales. There is an added advantage to this approach as timber used in construction stores embedded carbon, reducing the carbon footprint of our operation.

The Trust has plenty of challenges and hard work ahead, in addition to the small matter of managing over 289 hectares of land with maybe 300,000 trees, 3500 steps and 70 sheep.

I would also like to say a huge thank you to team SGCT, this includes all our wonderful volunteers, lookers, trustees, staff and supporters. Without all your continued help and support the Trust could not function.

If anyone is keen to support the Trust, please consider joining our Thursday volunteer group or becoming a member of our new 100 Club, either way it could make your life richer!

Thank you
JP

About Us

Established as an independent charity in 1991, Severn Gorge Countryside Trust cares for over 289 hectares of land set within the Ironbridge Gorge World Heritage Site, including river valleys, ancient woodlands, wildflower meadows, ponds, small heathlands, historic structures and twenty-five kilometres of footpaths. The land that we are responsible for includes three nationally important Sites of Scientific Interest (SSSI).

In addition to managing and developing the historic landscape, Trust staff also run exciting Outdoor Learning and Volunteering Programmes to encourage local people to engage with the natural environment in a variety of ways. We also have a volunteer shepherd scheme known as the 'Lookers' who help look after the rare breed of Soay sheep that graze our meadows.

The Trust was gifted the land on a 999-year lease from the former Telford Development Corporation in 1991. To help manage the liabilities of the land we are entitled to a proportion (90%) of income generated from a number of commercial properties managed on our behalf by Telford & Wrekin Council. This income can only be spent on managing the land. The rental income received generates the primary source of income necessary to fund the Trust's wide-ranging commitments but is not sufficient to cover all the costs of managing the 289 hectares of land we are responsible for.



2023/24

OUR YEAR AT A GLANCE

OVER 500 ORCHIDS

Counted and identified on our sites, helping to monitor their progress and condition



OVER 160M

Of hedgerow laid by our wonderful volunteers

48 VOLUNTEER SESSIONS

Were organised across our sites to undertake a variety of tasks, providing **3,620 HOURS** of volunteer time



35 CUBIC METRES

Of firewood has been split and stacked to raise funds for the Trust's work



68 BALES

Of high quality species rich hay harvested from our meadows and grasslands



43 CORPORATE VOLUNTEERS

Joined us from 5 companies, giving their time to help us manage the landscape



150 TREADS

Replaces on our steps, with boards milled from our own timber



RAISED £5000

Via the Big Give Green Match Fund, towards regenerating ponds within the Gorge



13 MILES OF PATH

Assessed twice a year and cleared of overgrowing vegetation



23 EVENTS

Were run as a part of our Outdoor Learning Programme, with a total of 248 attendees



820 TREES

Planted on our sites thanks to a grant from The Tree Council and free tree packs from The Woodland Trust



52 Sites

managed by the Trust and its dedicated team of volunteers



66% UPTAKE

WHAT WE DO...

The Trust is responsible for promoting, protecting and conserving the living landscape of the Ironbridge Gorge for the benefit of local people and visitors. It aims to balance the needs of public access, landscape and nature conservation, safeguarding historic and cultural features, whilst engaging with the public and developing a wider awareness and knowledge of the Trust and its work.

To achieve these aims the Trust has five main charitable objectives:

- to enhance a living and working landscape that retains its locally distinctive characteristics, habitats and species populations
- to conserve and interpret, where appropriate all features of cultural and historical significance
- to provide inspiring experiences of the natural world and encourage people to manage their local environment through volunteering opportunities
- to provide high quality access for informal recreation for the enjoyment of all and to encourage outdoor activity for the benefit of health and wellbeing
- to develop and promote a wider awareness and understanding of the Trust's work



HOW WE DO IT...

Examples of activities carried out and impacts and benefits achieved under each of these strategic aims are as follows:

Landscape and Nature Conservation

AIM: to enhance a living and working landscape that retains its locally distinctive characteristics, habitats and species populations.

Looking after and managing our sites is a key way that we can directly benefit wildlife. Each of our sites is an exceptional place for wildlife with many containing outstanding examples of scarce and uncommon habitats and species. Every year they surprise and delight visitors and the local community.

All of our land is open to the public and provides excellent opportunities for contact with nature, which in turn has a positive effect on the quality of life and well-being of the community.

Each year, the Trust undertakes extensive management programmes to safeguard these special places. For example,

- ◆ clearing woody regeneration from the floor of Patten's Rock Quarry, an example of limestone grassland with colonies of Twayblade, Greater Butterfly and Common Spotted orchids
- ◆ managing the merging of areas of woodland, grass and scrub. These wild and complex edges are where insects thrive and food chains begin
- ◆ clearing scrub trying to colonise the important small patches of heathland found in The Crostan and Dale Coppice
- ◆ managing important areas of wildflower rich hay meadow and pasture. By using our flock of Soay sheep, together with contractors and volunteers, the Trust is able to ensure that the techniques and machinery used are ideally suited to these small sites and based on traditional methods

Ecological Monitoring

The Trust commissions ecological consultants to carry out annual ecological monitoring of Trust sites. Ecological monitoring provides the Trust with



the information required to assess and respond to ecosystem changes. Monitoring can also assist with the identification of new environmental concerns, the prioritisation of issues, and the evaluation of trends over time. Using the information gathered, the Trust can plan its future management of sites.

Our ecological monitoring reviews carried out on key sites have shown the high quality of our habitats and their management.

Managing such a complex landscape relies on clear objectives and good quality ecological and management information. In reality this is complicated by the fact that any ecosystem is in a constant state of change which can sometimes make meeting our objectives more challenging.

An annual ecology day is held during the summer months where our ecologist meets with Trust staff and the Ecology Working Group to look at the sites that have been managed and discuss proposals as to how to best manage the sites to achieve their objectives.

This year the group started by discussing the results of the woodland monitoring and whether the survey methodology used was appropriate as the targets for some of the sites will never be met. The current methodology used is for assessing SSSI sites which, whilst appropriate for some of our sites, is not suitable for all. Currently there is no suitably recognised alternative methodology for our plantation woodlands. The group confirmed that we need to increase our Deer Management Programme as browsing pressure is still high and limiting natural regeneration.

Many of our woodlands are without sufficient open spaces, have poor rides and have less than ideal structural diversity. The group discussed developing strategies to try to explain why tree cutting for these purposes is beneficial. The negativity around tree cutting is a countrywide issue and it is important for



the Trust to communicate to the local community why it is undertaking woodland management and the many environmental benefits of this work.

The decline of floristic diversity in Shakespeare meadow was discussed. The meadows' location and small size make effective management difficult. Some adjustments to the current management scheme were suggested and will be implemented and monitored

Pattens Rock Quarry is a standing item on the agenda. It is an important limestone grassland site within the county and suggestions for ideas and different ways of working are welcomed even if their implementation would be challenging. Both grazing and mechanical methods were discussed. Both are difficult to implement due to access issues, terrain and subsequent financial impact.

Meadow Management

Hay meadows in the UK have been disappearing for many years, primarily as a result of changes in agricultural practice. This has led to the decline of many birds, insects, flowers and other creatures who relied on them for their survival.

The Trust is responsible for managing circa 9 hectares of wildflower meadows, our key species rich sites are Ropewalk and Wilderness Meadows.

The meadows are allowed to grow, flower and set seed and then the hay cut is taken in late July or early August. After the hay cut, our native breed Soay Sheep flock is allowed to graze the grass short. The purpose of grazing ensures that the ground is disturbed with the sheep's hooves which creates space for new seeds to germinate. Grazing also helps reduce the growth of aggressive and undesired species.

The meadows at Oilhouse, Crackshall and The Lloyds are now being managed in similar fashion and are already showing positive signs of responding to this management, with orchids spreading across all the Oilhouse fields and Yellow Rattle becoming established in Crackshall. The Lloyds may be slower to respond as there is no grazing due to it being unfenced. It will be interesting to see how these meadows develop over the next few years.

Some of the species growing (indicative of unimproved grassland) include Lady's Mantle, Eyebright, Yellow Rattle, Betony, Yellow Oat Grass together with vast swathes of Common Spotted Orchid.

Species-rich grasslands also provide other environmental benefits including carbon storage, water retention to prevent flooding and habitat for crop pollinators, they are also archaeologically important.

Pollinators

Bees are just some of the many wild pollinating insects in the UK, which also includes moths, butterflies, flies and wasps.

The Trust manages two beehives as part of its aim to increase the number of pollinators, which are in a state of decline due to changes in agricultural practices and loss of suitable habitat.

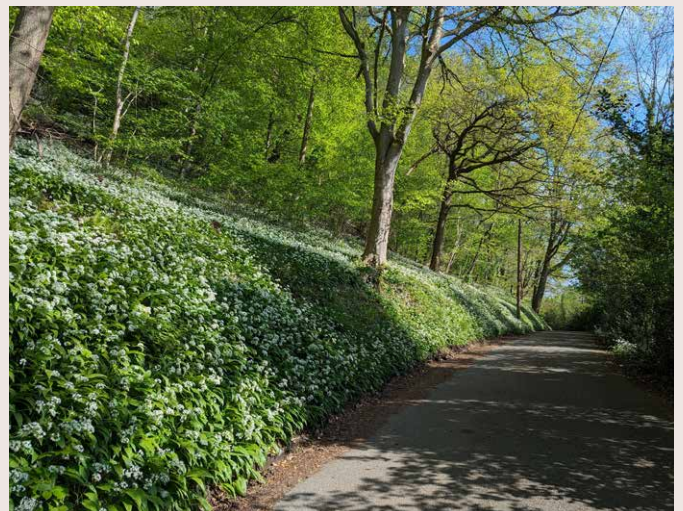
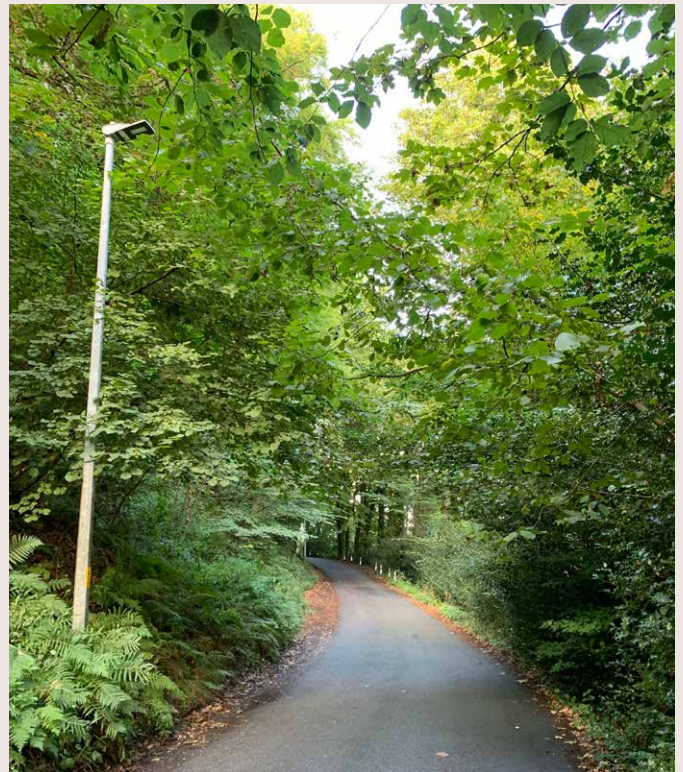
The bees from our hives have been hard at work foraging and pollinating plants within at least a two-mile radius of the Trust office, which takes in our amazing wildflower meadows at the Wilderness and Ropewalk.

We continue to learn how to manage our hives, paying attention to the weather conditions when we inspect the hives and trying to control potential swarms, not always successfully!

We also made the decision to leave plenty of honey in the hives for the bees (rather than feeding with sugar syrup) to ensure that they had plenty of food to see them through the winter.

'Light gives Life'

The 'Light gives Life' habitat improvement project has continued this year. The project was made possible with funding received from the Potter Group Landfill Community Fund together with the Postcode Local Trust. The primary aim of the 'Light gives Life' wildlife corridor project is to secure measurable improvements in habitats for biodiversity. This is being achieved by creating edge habitat and enhancing wildlife corridors throughout six different sites within the Ironbridge Gorge World Heritage site.



Creating new varied habitats will provide a fantastic opportunity for wildlife to flourish and promote the wider economic and social benefits that healthy ecosystems offer.

In total, over 3,000 metres of improved edge habitat will be created. Timber felled will be extracted where feasible and as much as possible turned into sustainable products including firewood, charcoal, sawn timber and turnery blanks, the latter of which can lock up carbon long term.

Work has been completed at Ladywood. Our contractor, Will Haywood carried out the work, 50 tons of timber was felled and extracted. The work addressed trees suffering from Ash Die Back and opened up the edge

of the path to create nectar sources for invertebrates, nesting and foraging for birds and bats. The work also lets more light into make the sites more inviting.

Trust staff in conjunction with Watch Oak Tree Care carried out tree work and coppicing on roadside trees at Captains Coppice under a road closure. This helped bring the benefits of the Light gives Light project and the subsequent show of wild garlic was superb. The timber was removed from site to be used in the Trust firewood enterprise.

We are grateful to the steering group of the Potter Landfill grant who allowed us to reallocate part of the funding initially planned for Dale Coppice to an alternative site, Upper Haywood Plantation, where further habitat improvement works will be undertaken.

Deer Management

The Trust manages 120 hectares of woodlands where it is increasingly necessary to undertake some culling of deer. Deer have no natural predators and the increasing population growth is having a significant impact on the flora and structure of the woodlands. It also has an impact on the deer population itself, too many deer competing for food in the same area can leave the population malnourished and unhealthy and allow diseases to spread.

Under the Trust's Continuous Cover Forestry System, natural regeneration is the principal means of restocking our woodlands and an increasing deer population is adversely affecting the success of natural regeneration.

The Trust has invested time and resources over many years into alternative methods of control, such as deer exclosures. Annual monitoring has shown that these methods are not sufficient to protect the flora and structure of the woodlands. By continuing to work with our deer stalker and neighbouring landowners, we aim to maintain a deer population that is in balance with the surrounding habitat where the birds, wildflowers, trees and other wildlife have an equal ability to survive and thrive in woodland environments.

We will continue to monitor the impacts of deer on our woodlands and review management annually based on the results of these surveys.

Cull figures have increased over the last year, particularly in Benthall Edge, probably due to the redevelopment of the old power station site. The redevelopment works seems to have pushed more deer into the woods. Muntjac are still elusive and difficult to shoot. 39 fallow deer were culled from Benthall Edge and 2 from Jiggers Bank.

Forestry Works

The Trust continues to manage its woodlands under Continuous Cover Forestry principles which aim to create a structurally and visually diverse woodland ecosystem with trees of all sizes, which helps to protect the soil and keep the land stable.

Our woodland management plan was approved by the Forestry Commission in 2021. The aspirations of the plan have not changed our forestry direction. The plan considers the effects of Ash Die Back (ADB) and climate change, it also includes felling permissions over the next 10 years.

The Trust has identified a number of veteran trees within the woodlands and hedgerows of the Gorge and we aim to manage these trees and their surroundings to support their survival for as long as possible.

Interestingly the definition of a veteran tree is not precise, though one useful definition refers to 'a tree that is of interest biologically, culturally or aesthetically because of its age, size or condition'

Over the winter our Head of Countryside, has identified a number of 'future' veterans. These tend to be younger trees that display some of the characteristics of veteran trees. These trees will now be managed in a manner that should allow them to achieve their full potential. This work forms part of our Countryside Stewardship woodland management agreement.

In addition to this we create pollards and coppice trees at part of our ongoing woodland and tree safety work. These management methods, which involve regular cutting of the trees, actually create some of the most interesting and longest lived of all our trees. For instance, the Lydham Manor Oak probably owes its great girth (nearly 13m) and age (reportedly 1200 years old) to the fact it was regularly pollarded, its branches being cut for timber, firewood and maybe animal fodder.

Ongoing effect of Ash Dieback (ADB)

The impact of ash die back continues to be felt by the Trust, both financially and environmentally. The abundance of ash trees in the Gorge will mean that the landscape will change significantly. Following our Continuous Cover approach to woodland management we are hoping that natural regeneration by different species will offset the loss of ash trees and ensure that we retain a landscape that is more resilient to climate change and able to support a wide variety of species. Where natural regeneration is not working the Trust will plant native species.

Like all landowners/managers, managing the effects of ash dieback is having a significant effect on Trust finances and staff resources. The Trust has spent £30k over the last 12 months on tree work to fell diseased ash trees. £71k has been spent to date.

There will continue to be an increase in tree felling throughout the Ironbridge Gorge due to ash dieback, and we will keep working with Telford & Wrekin Council regarding tree management and ensure that the local community are informed of any planned works.

Re-wilding

The Trust has several small areas of land that are rewilding. These areas either have difficult access or are relatively small and need substantial resources to maintain. Decisions to limit intervention were taken on a site-by-site basis by the Trust's Ecology Group.

The sites that we are rewilding from grassland will over time and without hay cutting or grazing, become woodland. We can expect after 10 years to see a multi-structure, multispecies habitat.

The formalisation of the rewilding work into a strategy gives the Trust a document to refer to that will show direction, have the potential to raise grant funding and demonstrates that the Trust continues to adapt its working practices. For more information, please visit our website. <https://www.severngorge.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Rewilding-Strategy-approved-June2022.pdf>

If in the future the Trust does consider rewilding more sites, community consultation will be key and

a mapping exercise of the sites and habitats will be undertaken so that any changes can be assessed and monitored.

One further small site, adjacent to the picnic site at Bower yard has been added as a rewilding site. This 0.13 Ha site is known as Bower Yard Riverside.

Telford Treescapes Project

In 2022, 120 large trees (a mix of elm, cherry, lime and field maple) and 300 whips were planted along Jiggers Bank as part of the Local Authority Treescapes Fund in conjunction with Telford & Wrekin Council. With the help of our volunteers, we have continued to water, mulch and prune the trees in order to ensure they remain healthy and have the best chance of survival. The trees are flourishing and in years to come will become an avenue that is both beautiful to look at and biodiverse, providing habitats for a wide variety of species.

Countryside Stewardship (CS)

Some of the land the Trust manages is under the Countryside Stewardship scheme. This scheme provides a financial incentive to land managers to look after and improve the environment. The scheme supports Defra's 25-year environment plan 'for our country to



be the healthiest, most beautiful place in the world to live, work and bring up a family'. It also supports Defra's strategic objective of 'a cleaner, healthier environment, benefitting people and the economy'.

Countryside Stewardship aims to protect and enhance the natural environment by:

- ◆ increasing biodiversity
- ◆ improving habitat
- ◆ expanding woodland areas
- ◆ improving water quality
- ◆ improving air quality
- ◆ improving natural flood management

Works in the CS agreement include woodland ride mowing/creation, squirrel control, deer management, tree thinning and meadow management. We have also undertaken capital works in fencing, gate replacement and hedge laying.

With the wettest winter on record the Zone 2 (3-4m from the track edge) mowing struggled in some places due to steep & wet ground conditions.

Lloyds Coppice Zone 2 creation was carried out by Will Haywood with Trust staff coppicing the smaller trees. The squirrel traps have been moved around the sites with reasonable success.

The meadows in the scheme continue to improve in quality. The normal challenges of making hay with the British weather came again. We managed to make twenty-five hay bales and thirty-four silage bales. Having our own machinery does make the process easier to manage. Aftermath grazing followed the hay cut with the native breed Soay sheep.

Capital works were completed and claimed for. Ropewalk and Wilderness were partly re-fenced and new gates were installed at the Wilderness. Hedge laying was carried out by the volunteers at Oilhouse and Crackshall Lane.

Firewood Production and Estate Timber

We are 'Ready to Burn' certified, the Woodsure certification scheme confirms that we are selling wood with a moisture content of less than 20%. We sold 40 cubic metres of logs to local people, generating over £5,000 in income. Over the next 12 months we aim to increase our firewood production as the Trust has invested in a tractor powered billet saw.

The volume of ash trees that need to be removed due to ash die back can be sold as firewood. Our own machinery will facilitate the processing and movement of the large volume of wood.

We are also using our own timber to produce material we can use on site, such as gateposts and timber treads to replace damaged access infrastructure.

Following an enquiry from a local campanologist (bell ringer) the Trust has also produced seventy bell stays. Bell stays have traditionally been made from straight grained seasoned ash. This is a great use of ash that would otherwise have been used as firewood.

Soay Sheep

Our flock of Soay sheep are integral to the management of our meadows. We really struggled with flystrike down at the Boat field. We lost 3 wethers in quick succession and then the breeding ram. This resulted in us not having a ram to be able to breed from so we had a year off lambing. This eased the workload but we still have an aging flock so we need to find a new ram for next year.

We took some sheep to the abattoir and sold two carcasses to Embers based at the Greenwood Centre, the rest was sold to the lookers.

Shearing was completed but the wool has not been sold, we are looking for an alternative company to sell the fleeces to.

The 'lookers' continue to play a vital role in helping the day-to-day management of the sheep.

Cultural and Historical Features

Aim: to conserve and interpret, where appropriate all features of cultural and historical significance

The industrial past of the Ironbridge Gorge has left its mark on the area in more ways than just the Iron Bridge itself. Many types of industry thrived here, and the Trust looks after sixty historic structures ranging from small retaining walls, brick arches and lime kilns to mine breathers and adit entrances. Over the years the Trust has spent over £300,000 conserving the industrial heritage of the Ironbridge Gorge.

The World Heritage Site status of the Ironbridge Gorge serves to remind us of this area's unique contribution to the history and development of industrialised society. The Trust will continue to conserve and interpret (where appropriate) features of cultural and historical significance for the benefit of the public, enabling them to have a greater understanding and appreciation of the industrial and cultural history of the area.

The Trust commissions an annual Structures Inspection Report. The structures are monitored from fixed baselines, any condition changes are noted, and recommended actions identified. These resultant actions are further analysed from a risk management

perspective looking at things like potential impact on highways, intensively used public spaces, and neighbours.

Five risk management priority categories are identified with required actions allocated to a category from level 0 (no action necessary) to level 4 (repair imminently).

In response to the annual report an action plan will be developed to implement, where possible, all level 4 actions or in discussion with engineer's alternative risk mitigation strategies.

Archaeological surveys are commissioned whenever required to ensure no features of cultural and historical significance are damaged by any proposed operations. Any significant discoveries are recorded for future reference.

No work has been undertaken on structures this year. Our regular surveyor moved to pastures new and the process of finding a replacement became protracted. Telford & Wrekin Council engineers have undertaken a free of charge RAG rating on the structures as a baseline

but we have yet to receive their final report. Concurrent to this we have engaged a consultant structural engineer, Mark Dady, of Mark Dady Associates to undertake a survey of all our structures. Inspections will take place during July & August with the final report due in October 2024.



Community Engagement and Outdoor Learning

AIM: to provide inspiring experiences of the natural world and encourage people to manage their local environment through volunteering opportunities

Providing opportunities for people to engage and interact with the environment is a key remit for the Trust.

Our Outdoor Learning Programme is about providing opportunities for people to immerse themselves in the environment through creative workshops and walks. It is about encouraging people to enjoy the simple pleasure of spending time outside in nature or learning a new skill.

Our Volunteering Programme provides opportunities for the local community to learn more about and help with the management of the landscape on their doorstep. Engaging with nature has been well demonstrated to have positive effects on both physical and mental wellbeing. We hope that this in turn promotes the desire to protect and preserve the natural environment, for present and future generations.

Volunteering Programme

The Trust's volunteer programme has continued throughout 2023/24 under the leadership of the Volunteer and Community Officer, Amber. The 2023/24 programme has had a total of 47 sessions, with the volunteers giving 3,620 hours of their time across 15 different sites. A total of 14 new volunteers have signed up to take part in the sessions, with the continued help from around 34 regular volunteers. The average number of volunteers at each session has increased to around 15 but has on occasion reached a peak of 25!

The volunteer group have helped us tackle a wide variety of different tasks this year, including coppicing of hazel and holly, orchard pruning, bird box building, log splitting, scrub clearance, step maintenance, orchid counting, tree care and more! The work of the volunteers has been receiving some good feedback from the local community on social media platforms, with many people offering their thanks for the hard work they put into the Gorge.



In mid-June staff took a group of 20 of our wonderful volunteers for a fabulous day out at Hawkstone Park Follies and a meal at the Fox and Hounds in Shawbury. It was a great day with plenty of sunshine and a tour from the park manager allowing us to take in all the wonderful things the park has to offer. Our volunteer training session was also held in June, led by ecologist John Handley to help everyone learn more about meadow grasses and plants and their importance. While quite in depth, it was a great opportunity to learn some new things and to fully appreciate how important our meadows and grasslands are.

The Volunteer Christmas party was scheduled for December the 14th ahead of the Christmas break, but sadly due to staff illness it had to be postponed. It was re-vamped as a New Years party and held on the 11th of January instead.

The party was a great success, with a walk over to Embers Café at the Green Wood Centre in the morning, volunteers were treated to a hot drink of their choice before we returned for a bring and share meal. To test everyone's brains after so much food, there were multiple quizzes hosted by different volunteers, as well as a short awards ceremony. The Volunteer of the Year award was presented to James Weir this year, for outstanding attendance, and the volunteers grouped together to surprise the VCO with her very own whistle – of immeasurable value with the increasing group sizes each Thursday!

The Tuesday Team

A new volunteer group have started helping the Trust with various tasks in the Gorge, The Tuesday Team! They are a small group from the Ironbridge Meadows Group, who carry out tasks at the Lodge Field and the Beeches Local Nature Reserves. They approached us in May to ask if there were tasks they could help with over the summer whilst there was less work at the meadows. We were more than happy to oblige! They took on the fairly major project of repairing and maintaining the steps in Lincoln Hill that lead down from the rotunda. They have done a fantastic job getting these into better condition using materials from the Trust.

Since then, the team have been continuing to help carry out some work on our sites. They have done a fantastic job cutting back small trees, removing brambles and pushing back the encroaching scrub on Dale Coppice heathland, as well as getting stuck in to remove rhododendron from Oilhouse Coppice and cut back some of the holly in Dale Coppice.

It is a fantastic to see what a smaller team can achieve with only a few hours each week, and their determination never fails to impress. They continue to alternate their time between the meadows, some of our sites and other sites that benefit the local community.



Corporate Volunteering

We have seen an increase in the number of businesses approaching us to enquire about corporate volunteering opportunities and have started to run volunteer sessions specifically for these groups outside of the regular volunteer programme. In 2023/24 we had a total of 51 volunteers from 5 different companies join us, helping with step repairs, tree planting, coppicing, and orchid counting.

One of the volunteer days was facilitated by Employee Volunteering and came with a budget of £430 which was split between materials and officer time. They now have a system to help charities list tasks they would like completed so that they can match them with other corporate volunteer groups in the future. We hope that this may lead to further opportunities to work with them.

As a result of the Suez groups volunteering session, the Trust was awarded with £500 towards the volunteer programme and Christmas party. As well as helping to celebrate the volunteers on the 11th of January, the money has been used to purchase some additional tools and welfare items, such as a new shelter tarp that can be strung up in adverse weather conditions. This was put to its first test at the willow bed in February and received much praise from the volunteer's present!



Wonderful Willow Project

In October we were successful in our small grant bid to the Bupa Foundation and Groundwork UK. The grant money was used to help regenerate the Oilhouse Willow Bed, bringing it back into good management with the help of Daisy Askins at Vine Willow Wood and our team of volunteers.

An introduction to willow weaving workshop was held in November with 12 attendees on the day. Daisy Askins, of Vine Willow Wood, showed them how to create their own willow wreaths, Christmas trees and stars to take home. The feedback from the session was good and since it was held for free at the Park Lane Centre, we reached some people that may not have

normally attended our sessions. More information was given about the project and the upcoming volunteering sessions at the willow bed, to which some of the participants expressed an interest in joining.

Daisy joined us for 3 more sessions at the Willow Bed itself, showing us how to plant up and label the new willow and nurture it, how to manage the older stools, harvest and sort the willow rods, and finally helping us to create two living willow structures on site with some freshly harvested rods. The sessions at the willow bed with Daisy and for hedge laying were very well attended, with between 17 and an amazing 25 volunteers each week.

Access to the site has been improved by the addition of a new gate, and the clearance work of the volunteers. The hedge being laid along the track has also allowed lots more light into the site, which we hope will benefit the newly planted willow. We held a celebration event at the end of March to thank the volunteers for all their hard work, and Daisy joined us to lead the weaving of a communal basket, using some of the willow from the site.

The site will now become a part of the regular volunteer rotation, and we hope that in time we can use the harvested willow as a way of generating some income to help with the continued management of the willow bed.



Outdoor Learning Programme

The 2023/24 Outdoor Learning Programme was successfully launched in April, with a wonderful array of different workshops, walks and events. Numbers for the different events varied, with some being fully booked and others making a slight loss, our overall uptake on events was 66%, with a total of 248 participants. We created a feedback form to start sending out after events to help us gather feedback and improve the programme in the future. We are very pleased that the average rating for the content and tutors of our OLP events is currently at 4.9 out of 5.



We started with an Easter family friendly walk around Loamhole Dingle which was fully booked, and a wonderful time was had by all! This programme was the first time we trialled putting in extra family friendly walks for each of the school holiday periods, thanks in part, to funding from the Gorge Parish Council. There were 12 family friendly events included

in this programme, including walks with bug hunting, river dipping, Halloween crafts, easter egg hunts, bat and moth searching and mammal tracking. They have continued to be popular and gain positive feedback from families, with many of them returning for multiple different activities.

"It was great! Amber and Kate were so knowledgeable, welcoming and friendly. The walk was well-paced and so informative. Please do more, I'll be there!"

In May we held a dawn chorus walk, led by expert Glenn Bishton for international dawn chorus day, to experience the bird songs and calls around Benthall Edge. We were also rejoined by Lisa Kidd-Penny from Nettie of the Gorge for a Spring Bouquet workshop, gathering foraged materials to add to some beautiful cut flowers for their arrangements.

In June, John Handley led an evening meadow walk, offering people an opportunity to take a closer look and get to know some of the plants and flowers that thrive in the Ropewalk and Wilderness meadows. Our Natural Dyeing workshop was a great success, fully booked and participants managed to have a lovely time despite the grim weather! They all made some shade cards to take away to help inspire their own creations at home.

What did you enjoy most about the event you attended?

skill and new
new people
tutor was very hands coming away day knowledge of the tutor
superb tutor wreath
tutors made it fun Lovely
new knowledge crafts Great
knowledgeable tutor
tutor friendly Amber
new skills colours
new techniques

"Fiona was brilliant, so helpful and she worked so hard in preparation before and on the day. Her experience in dyeing and her knowledge really showed through. A big thank-you to Fiona."

August also saw Amanda Hillier returning to run a workshop making summer paper lanterns, these combined different techniques such as lino printing and collage to create some beautiful nature inspired lanterns. Seeing out the month were two arts workshops in partnership with Severn Arts, one fast and loose watercolour workshop with artist Sue Howells, and one pen and ink workshop with artist and illustrator Maggie Humphry.

Our September events coincided with the Ironbridge Gorge Heritage Festival, and an additional event was added as part of the festival too, a free charcoal making demonstration with Nathan. We also held a mammal tracking session and bat and moth walk. As Autumn drew in, we made the most of the season with a fungi foray in Sutton woods, and a willow bird feeder workshop from Daisy Askins.

December saw the return of our very popular Christmas Willow Wreath Workshops; we held two both of which were fully booked many weeks in advance. A new addition to the programme was a family friendly Christmas crafts workshop, where we gathered natural materials to make some lovely decorations for the festive season.

In January we held a Beat the January Blues Walk, and despite 9 people booked on we only had 4 on the day, possibly due to flooding making getting to the Trust difficult for some people. Those that did attend expressed what a nice time they had with a friendly welcoming group. Our final event of the program was a family friendly Easter Egg hunt, again fully booked, and we had a great time exploring and creating with natural materials.



Access and Recreation

Aim: to provide high quality access for informal recreation for the enjoyment of all and to encourage outdoor activity for the benefits of health and wellbeing.

Research has shown us how important good quality outdoor space is for our physical and mental health and wellbeing. In short, green spaces make us healthier and happier. We aim to maintain a wide range of habitats to give people the opportunity to engage with and better understand the natural world. This helps to maximise the wellbeing benefits associated with nature connectedness.

Green spaces also perform other valuable functions such as reducing flooding, cutting carbon emissions, and protecting nature.

We aim for our sites to feel as natural as possible, so we strive to balance the need for good paths, signs and interpretation with the need to preserve the very sense of countryside we all head outdoors for. We have tried to remove any unnecessary barriers to people's enjoyment, by removing squeeze stiles and replacing them with kissing gates and providing rest points to pause and savor the fantastic views.

We continue to look for opportunities to improve our footpath network and aim, as far as practical, to make the network safe and accessible to all.

Enabling people to explore and enjoy the natural world is fundamental to the work of the Trust and that is why all our 289 hectares of land is available freely for the public to enjoy every day of the year.

As well as improvements on the ground, we continue to look at the quality of the experience we offer, from the clarity of our maps to the information and history that our free leaflets provide.

Walking Festivals / Guided Walks

Our Volunteer and Community officer was involved in the Ironbridge Walking Festival, which was held during the first week of May. She led two walks for the festival and assisted with some of the organising prior. Overall, the festival was a huge success, with close to 1000

walkers getting involved, 63 walks offered and lots of positive feedback from participants. She has since continued to be an active member of the committee for the planning of future festivals and events.

Amber was also involved in the Telford Big Walk Week, offering two walks for this much newer walking festival to encourage people to get out and about. The walks as part of this festival were subsidised by the council and were therefore offered free of charge to participants. A mindful walk around the Ropewalk and Lydebrook Dingle was held first, encouraging people to slow down and tune into the nature around them. The next walk was a family welly walk to Loamhole Dingle. The walk was a great success, with families starting with a scavenger hunt, then doing some river dipping at Loamhole and creating some miniature rafts to race down the river. Lots of participants said they would look into our other family events as a result.



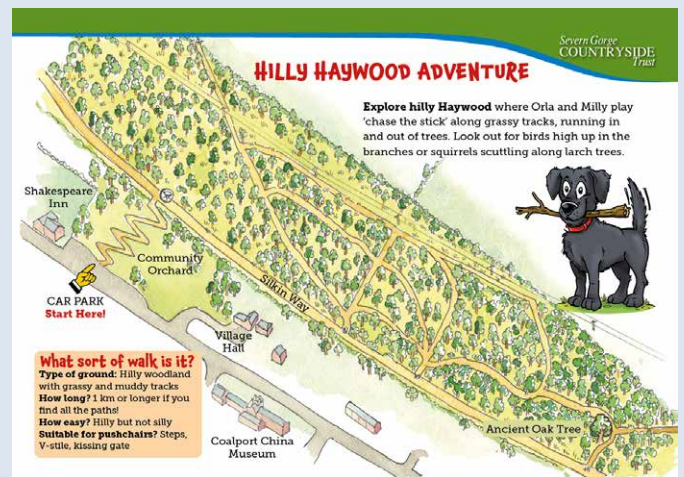
Strategic Action Plan

Approximately twenty-five kilometres of footpaths have to be maintained each year. This includes over 2,000 wooden steps and 18 wooden boardwalks. The Strategic Access Review which was completed in 2015 continues to be used to feed into the Annual Work Plan. The Strategic Action Plan will be updated each year using information taken from the bi-annual footpath surveys to identify any repairs or maintenance required.

Footpath Repairs

We are continuing to invest in the access infrastructure we have installed throughout the gorge. The increase in use of our sites, together with increasingly wet winters has meant that some of our footpaths/boardwalks have deteriorated quicker than anticipated. Our bi-annual survey picks up any areas of footpath that need repairing. The repairs are then prioritised and resources allocated accordingly.

Maintenance and repairs on the footpath network have been undertaken in house or by our volunteer groups. Increasingly we are using our own timber, sawn on our mill, to facilitate the repairs. The Trust are grateful to those path users who act as our eyes and ears and regularly report issues as they find them, helping keep the network safe and accessible.



Family Friendly activity walks

The Trust has produced four circular 1km family trails using footpaths in Benthall, Haywood, Loamhole and Maws. All are part of a group of maps which show Milly and Orla the office dogs in cartoon form, each with a variety of activities to do whilst exploring the routes.

Bounding in Benthall: along past Doris the Dragon, the Lime kiln and Bower yard picnic site

Maws Paws: along the new Tile Trail, Preenshead and Boat Inn meadow path.

Hilly Haywood Adventure: up the zig zag path to Silkin Way and into Haywood Plantation.

Splish Splash Splish in Loamhole Dingle: along the path to the footbridge and stream and through the meadow.

All of the Milly and Orla family friendly walks can be downloaded from our website.



Walking Trail Leaflets

The Trust has produced five free Walking Trail leaflets that showcase some of the best walking routes around the Ironbridge Gorge World Heritage Site. The walks provide people with the opportunity to discover some of the hidden gems of the Gorge and learn more about the landscape and history of the area whilst they explore. Visitors can make a day of it by visiting some of the many historic sites and attractions along the walks and stopping for a while for refreshment at one of the many cafés, pubs and restaurants in Ironbridge and the surrounding area.

The leaflets are available to download from our website, from the Visitor Information Centre and from various outlets in the Gorge. The leaflet dispenser in Station Road car park is regularly refilled and around 20,000 leaflets have been dispensed this year.

The route for the 'Iron Trail' links existing paths into a circular walk that includes both built and natural features within the World Heritage Site to encourage visitors to explore beyond the built environment. Its objective is to highlight otherwise unseen heritage such as the remnants and evidence of the iron production process that made the Gorge 'the birthplace of industry' within the natural landscape.

The 'Lime Trail' of Benthall Edge takes the walker through a wooded landscape steeped in the geology which benefitted the past industries of the Gorge. The footpath follows a circular route taking the walker through beautiful SSSI woodland, with iconic viewpoints of the Gorge and Coalbrookdale, before descending to the valley bottom along the Severn Valley Railway.

The 'Sabbath Walks Trail' follows in the footsteps of Richard Reynolds who built the wide footpaths in the 18th Century for his workers and families. This trail takes in Dale Coppice and Lincoln Hill and the viewpoint at the Rotunda with views of the Iron Bridge.

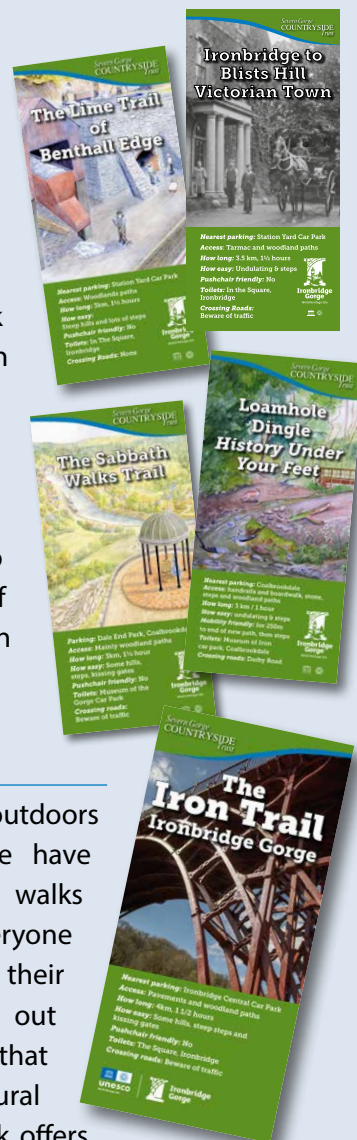
The Ironbridge to Blists Hill Victorian Town Trail is as it says, linking Ironbridge to Blists Hill with a safe traffic-free route through Lloyd's Coppice whilst seeing historic remnants on the past once linked to Blist Hill furnaces.

The circular Trail 'Loamhole Dingle; History under your feet' takes you from Upper Furnace Pool and through the wooded dingle to the Ropewalk where nature meets the industrial past. This walk can also be linked with Lydebrook Dingle as part of the Shropshire Way.

These trails will hopefully encourage more visitors to explore the landscape of the World Heritage Site on foot.

Walks Books

To support people to get outdoors and closer to nature we have published several guided walks books. These will help everyone to visit our sites and enjoy their natural beauty and find out more about the forces that have shaped them – natural and man-made. Each book offers a number of self-guided walks that offer opportunities to explore the history of the area as well as the diversity of landscape, geology and wildlife. All the books can be purchased from the Trust Office, and are also available at Ironbridge Gorge Museum sites, the Visitor Information Centre, and some local shops. Copies of the routes can also be downloaded from our website: www.severngorge.org.uk.



Raising Awareness

Aim: to develop and promote a wider awareness and understanding of the Trust's work

Woodlands in the World Heritage

Following concern from local residents about the scale of woodland management work planned as part of the Light Gives Light Project in Dale and Lloyds Coppice, the Trust held a Woodland Facilitation Meeting on the 2 November 2023.

The purpose to the meeting was to explain to residents and local people about the Trust's and other organisation's approach to Woodland Management Work in the Gorge. It was also a chance for the local community to feed back their concerns and priorities for the local woodlands. The meeting was well attended with 38 residents undertaking woodland and land management workshops and asking questions of a panel consisting of representatives from the Forestry Commission, SGCT, Ironbridge Gorge Museum Trust and the World Heritage Site (WHS) steering group.

Dale Coppice and Benthall were identified as attendees' favourite woodlands within the WHS and access to them as the most important issue. Furthermore, the results of the exercises indicated that, given similar operational parameters to the Trust, public safety became the significant focus for spending.

One of the most significant take aways of the evening was that communication of the Trust's Work Programme together with the rationale behind the work, was key. This has to be across multiple platforms, including social media, site posters and direct emails.



Volunteer Lookers

Our volunteer 'Lookers' play a key role in looking after the flock of sixty native breed Soay sheep that the Trust uses to manage its wildflower meadows.

Many years ago, 'Lookers' were self-employed countrymen who lived outside for much of the year, looking after the grazing animals on several farms at once.

Today, 'looking' is a much more civilised affair. Our Soay sheep are crucial in grazing our wildflower meadows and conserving vital habitats. Our volunteer 'Lookers' work in a rota, visiting the flock daily and confirming all is well via the technology of a WhatsApp group!

The Lookers' programme has been running for 11 years and volunteers are extremely proficient in a wide range of sheep husbandry techniques including handling, ear tagging and injecting.

Any ewe lambs we breed are registered with the Rare Breeds Survival Trust. We are keen to increase the number of registered pedigree breeding ewes to improve the Soay's status on the RBST watch list.

Community Events

The Trust continues to work with other organisations to support local community events which attract many hundreds of visitors. Supporting such events allows the Trust to engage with people that may not be aware of the work and activities the Trust carries out, or the opportunities available to them to enjoy and use the land managed by the Trust.

Tree Planting Day

On the 9 of March 2024, we were joined by the Coalbrookdale Scouts group and some other local volunteers to help us plant a total of 350 trees, 100 at Ladywood and 250 at Jiggers Bank. These trees were purchased thanks to a grant from The Tree Council, who we applied to with the support of the scouts and the Coalbrookdale and Ironbridge Civic Society. We had a total of 33 volunteers helping across the morning and afternoon sessions. Our regular Thursday volunteer group will return to carry out tree care and maintenance, helping to give these trees the best chance to get established.

Coronation Grant

We were also successful in bidding for a Coronation Grant from the Telford & Wrekin Council. The bid paid for the commission of a new coronation bench for Coalport Orchard, which we unveiled at a celebration event on the 7 of May. The event went well, with around 50 people attending to partake in some family friendly



activities, get their photos on the bench or just enjoy some scones and strawberries! As part of the grant, berry bearing trees were planted at Jiggers Bank in the Autumn, providing a lasting legacy and great benefit for nature.

Apple Day

We trialled an apple pressing afternoon on the 21st of September, as a way of encouraging the use of the apples in Coalbrookdale Orchard and to raise awareness of its location. We borrowed an apple press and let people bring along their own bottle for some fresh apple juice! Around 20 people, including volunteers, came along to get some juice or lend a hand. We will consider doing this again in the future, potentially teaming up with the Coalbrookdale Apple Day.

Pop-Up Shops

On the 23rd of April 2023, the Trust held its first ever pop-up shop event in order to raise money for our Big Give campaign! Being selected for the Big Give meant that we had 1 week during April to reach our target (£2,500) and unlock the maximum match funding from them. The sale was a way to help us achieve that, we took advanced firewood orders, sold woodland crafted items, tea, coffee and cakes, held a tombola, along with bric-a-brac and books all kindly donated by our supporters. Thanks to all of this effort, we reached our target, unlocking the full £5000 which went towards improving ponds around the Gorge.

On the back of this success, we held a Christmas Shop too in November, to help raise additional funds for the Trust. We are very grateful for all the help from our volunteers and supporters with these sales. It seems likely that these may become a regular part of our fundraising agenda in the future.

Ironbridge Gorge Walking Festival

The Trust continued to work in partnership with the Ironbridge Gorge Walking Festival, with walks being led by staff and volunteers.

Annual Open Evening

The purpose of the Annual Open Evening is to give local residents a chance to meet Trust staff, Trustees and Volunteers and learn more about the work we undertake. It also provides an opportunity to raise any concerns or issues they may have.

This year's open evening was held at the Birchmeadow Centre in Broseley, on Wednesday 26 July, ecologist John Handley was invited as the guest speaker and gave a talk on the 'Importance of Hay Meadows'.

John's talk was well received by the audience who found it interesting and informative. One of our young John Muir Award participants, Rory Humphries also

gave a talk on the bird nest project that he had been working on with support from the VCO in order to complete the Conserver challenge of the award. The audience were very impressed with his enthusiasm for his subject.

Trust staff also gave a short presentation on recent and upcoming work by the Trust. The audience was then invited to ask any questions. 32 people attended the event.

Attendees had the opportunity to look at displays showcasing the work of the Trust, including the Volunteer and Outdoor Learning Programmes, together with Woodland Management work and the impact of ash dieback.



Partnership Working

We continue to develop and strengthen partnerships with a wide range of organisations and individuals for the benefit of local communities, visitors and wildlife. Successful partnership working allows us to develop new areas of work, including 'Outdoor Learning,' environmental arts and alternative land management techniques.

- ◆ Broseley Town Council
- ◆ Coalbrookdale Scouts
- ◆ Dawley Angling Society
- ◆ English Heritage
- ◆ Environment Agency
- ◆ Forestry Commission
- ◆ Harper Adams University
- ◆ Ironbridge Gorge Museum Trust
- ◆ Ironbridge Gorge Walking Festival
- ◆ Ironbridge Meadows and Pastures group
- ◆ Jackie – Lets Flow Yoga
- ◆ Lodge Field Group
- ◆ Madeley Town Council
- ◆ Moonshine & Fuggles
- ◆ National Trust
- ◆ Natural England
- ◆ Neighbouring farmers and landowners
- ◆ NHS
- ◆ Secret Severn Arts Trail
- ◆ Shrewsbury & Newport Canal Trust
- ◆ Shropshire Wildlife Trust
- ◆ Small Woods Association
- ◆ Telford & Wrekin Council
- ◆ Telford Green Spaces Partnership
- ◆ The Beeches Local Nature Reserve
- ◆ The Coracle Trust
- ◆ The Gorge Parish Council
- ◆ The World Heritage Site Steering Group
- ◆ Vine Willow Wood
- ◆ Wellbeing with Gemma
- ◆ Wolverhampton University

Community engagement is essential to the success of all of our work. We aim to work with local communities to engage people of all ages through events, volunteering opportunities and education to ensure the sustainability of our 'Outdoor Learning' programme. The active involvement of local people is also vitally important in the management of the land in the Severn Gorge. Local people have a strong interest in their local environment and the Trust is keen to harness the help of local residents to act as its 'eyes and ears' reporting any problems and suggesting improvements.

The Trust tries to ensure a rapid response to issues. The community are informed about any management work by talking to neighbours, putting detailed information up on site, providing articles for local newsletters and giving details of work on the Trust's website.

Social Media

We have continued to try and keep a regular presence on social media, providing a range of content about our events, volunteers, other work and sites. Our Facebook audience has continued to grow, going from 2,512 followers last year up to 2,823 this year, as has Instagram, from 400 to 489. Around 50% of our audience on both platforms is from Telford, showing that we are managing to reach our local communities. We will continue to use social media as a method to disseminate information and will aim to grow our audience and reach in the future.

Mailing List

After one of our public meetings and discussions within the team, the decision was made to set up a mailing list and start sending out a quarterly newsletter. This number was chosen to balance having regular updates with the need to not create too much extra work and not wanting to bombard people's inboxes. The newsletters go out a couple of weeks after the Committee of Management Reports, allowing us to take from them the information to be shared. We have built up 57 subscribers to our mailing list so far but will continue to grow this list.

Tackling Climate Change

As the custodian of over 50% of the landscape in the Ironbridge Gorge World Heritage Site we are working hard towards supporting the biodiversity crisis together with addressing the climate emergency.

Our overarching goal is to become carbon neutral in 2030 and we have worked towards this by:

- ◆ Initiating a Carbon Calculator to record our CO₂ emissions and identifying areas we can change.
- ◆ Installing energy efficient lighting.
- ◆ Divesting from all fossil fuel investments

Future plans include:

- ◆ Investigating the installation of solar panels on the office building
- ◆ Investigating a switch from diesel in landscape management vehicles to a more sustainable biofuel
- ◆ Ongoing ecological monitoring for biodiversity
- ◆ Transitioning to electric power tools for landscape maintenance

For more information on what we are doing please visit our website page. <https://www.severngorge.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Final-Text-for-Website-SGCT-Climate-Change.pdf>

The Trust faces many challenges (including capacity and resources, financial, people and expertise) in its goal to achieve net zero by 2030. In particular, upfront capital expenditure is a substantial barrier to the pace of our decarbonisation efforts. For example, purchasing electric vehicles and machinery together with the increased cost of using bio-fuel as opposed to diesel in vehicles.

The Trust will continue to deliver nature-based solutions to reduce emissions from, and capture and store carbon from a diversity of habitats, including woodlands, meadows and ponds.

Below are our annual CO₂ emissions for 23/24
Overview

Annual Carbon Calculator April 2023 to March 2024 *Report, Reduce, Change*

Summary

The focus is on CO₂e emissions from fossil fuels (oil, gas, coal). The main sources of CO₂e emissions are the gas boiler and the Trust vehicles (Valtra Tractor, Toyota Hilux and Minibus) together with staff vehicles used for Trust business. The electricity comes from 100% renewable sources and is monitored, reduced if practicable, and reported. The gas comes from natural gas but not from a renewable source.

The emissions from operational activities are 5.3 tonnes CO₂e and 12.8 tonnes of CO₂e due to the methane emissions from the flock of Soay sheep.

The sheep are used to graze our species rich meadows as a key means to enhance their overall biodiversity. We continue to manage our woodlands using Continuous Cover Forestry and we are rewilding two of our grassland sites.

More CO₂ will be absorbed each and every year into the future because of these progressive changes compared to traditional management practices.

For more information on how the Trust is tackling the impact of climate change please visit our website <https://www.severngorge.org.uk/tackling-climate-change/>

Scope 1: direct emissions of CO2 (kg) annually from fuel combustion and Trust vehicles (see Notes & Sources)			Scope 2: indirect emissions of CO2 (kg) annually from purchased electricity (see Notes & Sources)		Scope 3: other indirect emissions of CO2 (kg) annually: for example, transport-related activities in non-Trust vehicles, national grid transmission and distribution, outsourced		
Source of Scope 1 CO2 emissions		kgCO2e/year		kgCO2e/year	Source of Scope 3 CO2 emissions		kgCO2e/year
Gas boiler - kWh annually	6,147	1,124			Gas grid transmission & distribution	No figures given in Government guidance and it is assumed to be zero	
Electricity - kWh annually			5,524	0	Electricity grid transmission & distribution - kWh	5,524	99
Wood burners - weight of logs annually	4	176			Water supply & Water treatment - cubic metres annually	63	24
Minibus (diesel, 3960 kg GVW) - annual mileage	396	162			Methane (CH4) produced by Soay Sheep Flock	60 Average head of livestock over year	12,820
Toyota Hilux (diesel, 2730kg GVW) - annual mileage	611	199					
Toyota Hilux (diesel, 2730kg GVW) - annual mileage	370	120					
Fiat 500 (petrol 1360kg GVW) - annual mileage	608	137					
Mitsubishi L200 (diesel 2890 GVW) - annual mileage	562	183					
Dacia (diesel 1090kg GVW) - annual mileage	392	105					
Vauxhall Astra (diesel 1678kg GVW)- annual mileage	176	47					
Valtra Tractor (diesel)	1154	2,897					
Total emissions (Scope 1)		5,149	Total emissions (Scope 2)	0	Total emissions (Scope 3)		12,943
FINAL OUTCOME:		18.1 tonnes					

NOTES & SOURCES

Renewable energy supplies Electricity or gas supplied from purely renewable sources where the supplier can demonstrate that the energy supplied to customers only comes from renewable sources can be included in calculations as having zero carbon emissions.

Electricity is supplied from 100% renewable sources by OPUS energy on a contract until February 2026. With Opus Advance, our electricity comes from renewable sources including solar, wind, hydro and anaerobic digestion (AD). www.opusenergy.com/our-energy-sources

Gas is supplied by British Gas Lite on a contract until May 2025. The gas supplied to customers is natural gas. This is, broadly speaking, the case for all energy suppliers in the UK.

Wood Burners CO₂e emissions from the two wood burners are included. There is debate about whether CO₂ in wood that is burnt should be included in annual carbon emissions because CO₂ is captured by growing trees and released by burning logs. However, such rapid release of CO₂ is very different to the slow release of CO₂ to the atmosphere during decay and decomposition.



Office building The Severn Gorge Countryside Trust is based in an award-winning sustainable building. The office is timber framed, wool insulated and heated by two log burners. The outside cladding is larch which we harvested from our woodlands. The office has a Mechanical Ventilation with Heat Recovery (MVHR) ventilation system that both supplies and extracts air throughout the office. This system is used to reduce the heating and cooling demands of buildings. The MVHR continually draws and circulates fresh air from outside, pre warmed by heat exchangers capturing heat from the stale air as it is expelled. The roof is made up from approximately ten thousand western red cedar shingles. The office is insulated with sheep wool mixed with recycled polyester; it has remarkable properties, in that during the winter it keeps the building warm and, in the summer, it keeps the building cool.

Soay Sheep the Trust owns a flock of native breed Soay sheep which are used to manage the wildflower meadows. The sheep emit methane which is another type of greenhouse gas. The carbon dioxide equivalent measurement of methane is $1\text{kg CH}_4 * 25 = 25\text{kg CO}_2\text{e}$. Whilst the sheep do emit methane, they are used to

graze our species rich meadows as a key means to enhance their overall biodiversity. We use the Farm Carbon toolkit to calculate the value of the carbon dioxide equivalent of the methane emitted by the sheep. <https://calculator.farmcarbontoolkit.org.uk>

CO₂e (carbon dioxide equivalent) is a standard unit for measuring carbon footprints. The idea is to express the impact of each different greenhouse gas (CO₂, methane, nitrous oxide) in terms of the amount of CO₂ that would create the same amount of warming. That way, a carbon footprint consisting of different greenhouse gases can be expressed as a single number.

Conversion factors (electricity, electricity transmission & distribution, natural gas, water, waste, vehicles). www.gov.uk/government/publications/greenhouse-gas-reporting-conversion-factors-2023 full set for advanced users in order to include the minibus which is classed as a 'Delivery Vehicle'. These are set annually in May.

Scope 1, Scope 2 & Scope 3 The Greenhouse Gas Protocol (<https://ghgprotocol.org>) is recognised by the UK government as an independent standard for reporting greenhouse gases. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Carbon_emissions_reporting



STRUCTURE, GOVERNANCE & MANAGEMENT

Company Structure

Severn Gorge Countryside Trust is a registered charity and a company limited by guarantee, governed by its memorandum and articles of association and administered by a Board of Trustees. The Board sets and monitors the strategic direction of the Trust and ensures that the strategy is aligned with key aims. The Board is responsible for ensuring the Trust is properly managed and complies with all relevant law and has high standards of governance.

Board of Trustees

The Directors of the charitable company (the Charity) are its Trustees for the purpose of charity law and throughout this report are collectively referred to as the Trustees. The Board of Trustees is supported by a Company Secretary who is responsible for governance administration.

The Trustees who served during the year and up to the date of this report are:

Name	Nominated by:
Maureen Bragg (Chair)	Community Trustee
Nick Downes (Vice Chair)	Barrow Parish Council
Mick Burton	Broseley Town Council
Gina Rowe	Community Trustee
Sarah Chadwick	Madeley Town Council (resigned August 2023)
Caroline Bagnall	Shropshire Council
John Box	Shropshire Wildlife Trust
Max Speke	Sutton Maddock Parish Council
Chris Turley	Telford & Wrekin Council
Carolyn Healy	Telford & Wrekin Council
Dylan Webster	Telford & Wrekin Council (resigned August 2023)
Alan Taylor	The Gorge Parish Council

Mark Boylan was appointed as a Trustee with effect from 29 April 2024.

Staff

JP Brayford	CEO
Kate Chetwood	Company Secretary and Finance Officer
Nathan Morris	Head of Countryside
Paul Ferrington	Estate Worker
Amber Bicheno	Volunteer & Community Officer

Who Governs the Trust?

The Trust is governed by its Committee of Management (COM) made up of several Member Organisations and Community Trustees. The Trustees are all volunteers with careers and experience in a wide variety of fields. The Board of Trustees has a maximum of 12 elected members.

In accordance with the Memorandum and Articles of Association, Trustees are elected by the membership for terms of four years. At the end of the four-year term Trustees may stand for re-election. Nominations for new Trustees are considered each year prior to the Annual General Meeting (AGM). All Member Organisations are circulated with invitations to nominate Trustees, advising them of any retiring Trustees and requesting nominations for the AGM. The Member Organisations are made up of a variety of local organisations that have a keen interest in the Ironbridge Gorge and also two Community Trustee places.



When considering appointing Trustees, the Committee of Management (Board of Directors) has regard to the requirement of any specialist skills needed.

Trustee induction and training

The Trust provides an induction session to brief new Trustees on their legal obligations under charity and company law, the contents of the Memorandum and Articles of Association, the committee structure and decision-making processes, the 10-year Development Strategy and recent financial performance of the charity. They are also advised on the future plans and objectives of the Trust. During the induction they meet the CEO, Company Secretary and other employees. They are advised of appropriate training opportunities and are encouraged to attend.

Management

The Committee of Management is responsible for setting policies and ensuring legality and good practice in accordance with the Memorandum and Articles of Association of the Trust and the Charities Act 2011. The Committee of Management meets formally each quarter. At each meeting, the COM considers reports from the management team on areas such as strategic development, financial performance and health and safety. Additionally, as appropriate the COM considers progress on current and future projects, governance and the annual budget and workplan.

The CEO is responsible to the COM for the management of the Trust and the conduct of the Trust's business in

accordance with policies and budgets set by the COM. They are responsible for the day-to-day operation of the Trust within this framework and are authorised to act on behalf of the Trust on all matters other than those which by law are required to be decided by the COM. The Chief Executive is supported by Trust staff. The Trust also engages a number of professional advisers to assist in its work.

The COM met four times in 2023/24, key discussions at board meetings during the year focused on the Trust's response to concern over woodland management work in Dale and Lloyds Coppice, developing a safeguarding policy for children and vulnerable adults, monitoring progress against the approved annual plan and budget, the financial position in relation to declining rental income and the potential to set up alternative income streams together with appropriate risk management.

Governance Review

Trustees were invited to attend a Governance Review session in January 24 to review and develop the Trust's equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) approach, to review governance policies and procedures and to consider the recruitment process of Trustees. The role of the Trustee was revisited together with the arrangement of a future trustees' skills audit to identify areas where the COM is lacking in skills or knowledge.

Trustees continue to be offered ongoing training and support to ensure their skills and knowledge are up to date.





Investment Working Group

The Investment Working Group (IWG) considers the strategic oversight and direction of the Trust's investment assets. It undertakes the long-term stewardship of the investments in order to further the Trust's aims. Its key purposes are to review the Trust's investment strategy and agree a statement of investment principles and policies, which sets out, the investment objectives, risk tolerance, liquidity requirements, time horizon, and agrees the Trust's approach to an ethical and responsible investment policy. The IWG consults with our investment advisor from LGT to help maximise the overall return within acceptable risk parameters, while ensuring that the strategy remains fit for purpose.

The Investment Working Group met once in 23/24. As part of our commitment to our environmental aims, the Trust ceased investing in fossil fuel companies in 2021. No future investments will be made in companies that have proven reserves of shale gas and/or shale oil owned by the company.

Sub Committees & Working Groups

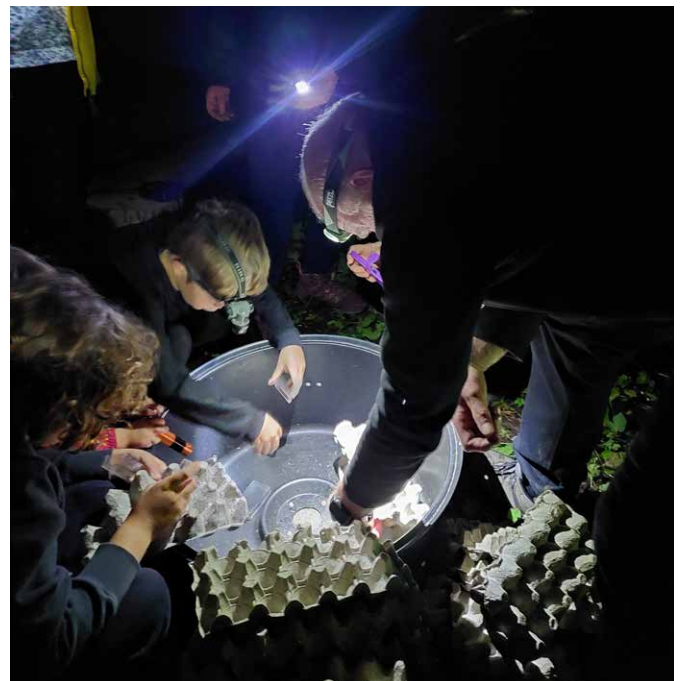
The board had one subcommittee and two working groups supporting its work during 2023/2024. These have advisory powers and decision making is retained by the COM. A trustee chairs each committee/working group, with membership including other trustees and staff. Trustees participate in working groups to provide advice, input, and/or support.

The Personnel Committee

This committee oversees, reviews and makes recommendations relating to staff remuneration, staffing issues, employee and trustee training, staff development and support. The Personnel Committee met twice in 23/24. When reviewing staff salaries, the committee considers market information on typical salaries for comparable roles, together with the total employment package offered by the Trust, including annual leave allowance, pension, etc. The outcome of an annual performance appraisal is also reviewed when considering and awarding staff increments.

Climate Change Working Group

Following the Trust's Climate Change Declaration in November 2019 we continue to look at ways to tackle the causes of climate change. For example, by reducing our own emissions, caring for the land that captures and stores carbon, exploring flood mitigation options and restoring wildlife habitats that are threatened.



We can lock up carbon in the woodlands and meadows we manage using Continuous Cover forestry whilst creating more opportunities for wildlife to thrive by rewilding areas of our land. Whilst continuing to champion renewable energy and slash our carbon emissions.

We continue to identify the environmental impacts, issues and opportunities across the organisation whilst collecting our environmental data to gain a better understanding of our carbon footprint to enable us to track our performance and support informed goals and targets.

The Climate Change Working Group met once in 23/24. The working group has created a carbon calculator to enable the Trust to measure and monitor its carbon emissions. This calculator will continue to be refined as more information becomes available. Trustees agreed that it was important to include the methane produced by our flock of Soay sheep in the Carbon Calculator to provide a complete picture of our emissions. The methane produced by the sheep accounts for more than 71% of our carbon equivalent emissions.

Our pension fund, like many organisations is managed independently and we have no direct influence over how the pension funds are invested. However, we continue to lobby our pension fund (Shropshire Pension Fund) to divest from fossil fuels and hope that they will consider the best approach for them to meet their commitment to prioritise the interests of the pension fund.

Planning for the Future

The significance of the Trust's landholdings dictates the need for a planned, long-term approach to give direction and continuity to management.

This is achieved through comprehensive management plans for the Trust's sites and a Development Strategy that governs the work of the Trust.

The Development Strategy was approved by Trustees in November 2017 and will guide the work of the Trust until the end of 2028. It sets out the Trust's vision,



aims and plans for achieving its charitable objectives, identifies the successful methods of working that will be continued, the developments that will be introduced over the ten years and the opportunities that will be taken up if time and resources allow. Copies of the full strategy can be downloaded from the website (www.severngorge.org.uk) or obtained from the Trust Office.

Annual Work Plan/Budget

Annual work plans and budgets are developed to ensure the core work in the management plans and Development Strategy are achieved without overstressing the Trust's resources or compromising its long-term viability.

The annual work plan for 2023/2024 was set from the 2018/2028 Development Strategy.

Risk Management

The Board of Trustees is responsible for identifying and managing the strategic and operational risks the Trust is exposed to, so that Trustees can make informed decisions and take timely action. Risks are assessed and managed through a Risk Management Strategy, the impact and likelihood of their occurrence are

evaluated. Actions and procedures to mitigate the risks are detailed in the strategy.

In accordance with the Charity Commission's Statement of Recommended Practice (SORP) 2005, Trustees undertake:

- ◆ An annual review of the risks the Trust may face, which also identifies any new risks that the Trust may be exposed to
- ◆ The establishment of systems and procedures to mitigate against those risks identified in the review; and
- ◆ The implementation of procedures to prevent any potential impact on the charity should those risks materialise.

Trustees regularly review our risk management process and receive regular updates on actions put in place to mitigate the most significant ongoing risks. It should be noted that any risk management system can only manage risks and not eliminate them.

Principal Risks and uncertainties

Four major risks have been identified and arrangements have been put in place to mitigate these risks:

Future levels of income – if our income falls then the Trust would not be able to continue to manage the 'living landscape' of the Ironbridge Gorge for the benefit of local people, visitors and the environment. The majority of our income is generated from rental income from our property portfolio. The Trust pay a management fee to Telford & Wrekin Council to manage these properties. We will continue to work with them to look at ways of diversifying the property portfolio by looking to invest in more modern properties to ensure the level of income is sufficient to cover the majority of our core costs. Ensuring that the portfolio is effectively and efficiently managed is key to generating sufficient income to enable the Trust to fulfil its charitable aims. Additional funding will continue to be sought via grants and other funding opportunities.

Climate Change – we are assessing all of our operations from travel to gas and electricity usage to reduce our CO₂ emissions wherever possible. We are also looking at the best ways to manage our woodlands and meadows to ensure they are as resilient as possible.





Ash Dieback – We have been monitoring the spread of ash dieback in the Gorge since it hit the headlines in 2012. The extent and severity of effect of the disease continues to be closely monitored. The Trust is continuing to use an independent arboriculturist to survey the trees on the Trust land and has written a policy to inform the work of the Trust and the treatment of trees affected by ash die back. The Trust continues to investigate avenues of funding to offset the increased cost of planned and reactive tree work to deal with the situation.

Safeguarding – The Trustees recognise that Safeguarding is a key priority for all charities, and for projects working with children and young people, or vulnerable adults. New safeguarding policies have been implemented and ongoing training is being provided for staff, trustees and volunteers.

Public Benefit

This annual report looks at what we have achieved over the previous twelve months. In setting our aims and planning our activities, Trustees have given careful consideration to the Charity Commission's guidance on Public Benefit.

Trustees believe that the provision of such benefit is an integral part to each of the Trust's charitable objectives. We work hard to deliver public benefit by promoting and protecting the beautiful landscape of the Ironbridge Gorge for everyone to enjoy.

- ◆ The 260 hectares of land that the Trust manages is available for the public to use freely, every day of the year.
- ◆ The benefits of access to green spaces to health

and wellbeing are widely documented and accepted.

- ◆ The Outdoor Learning programme helps people engage with and appreciate the natural environment.
- ◆ Our volunteer programme enables people to become actively engaged in their environment.
- ◆ The Trust land and activities are available to all and we try to make special provision wherever possible for the disabled and disadvantaged.

We believe that the work of the Trust has a positive impact on people, communities, wildlife and the environment.

This report also helps us ensure our aims, objectives and activities remained focused on our stated purpose. In order to achieve our aims the Trust must strive to maintain an efficient and effective organisation, that is well governed, professionally managed and which has the capacity, infrastructure and support necessary to deliver them.



FINANCIAL REVIEW

Overview

Our financial result for the year 23/24 was stronger than we had budgeted for, even with the challenging economic environment. We had planned for a larger deficit and the need to transfer money from our reserves but robust financial control and higher than anticipated income from our investments and grants meant that the drawdown on reserves was not required. We also ended the year with a strong reserves position giving us the confidence to continue with our plans to invest in alternative income streams.

The Trust is continuing to face financial pressures with ageing access infrastructure and ash dieback emergencies. The cost that the Trust needs to pay for key supplies that are critical to its core charitable aims and operations will see marked increases in 2024/2025, most significantly in terms of staff and contractor costs and increased insurance and energy prices. Challenges in income generation with cuts to Government agri/ environmental grants and a plateau in rental income present financial uncertainties for the future.

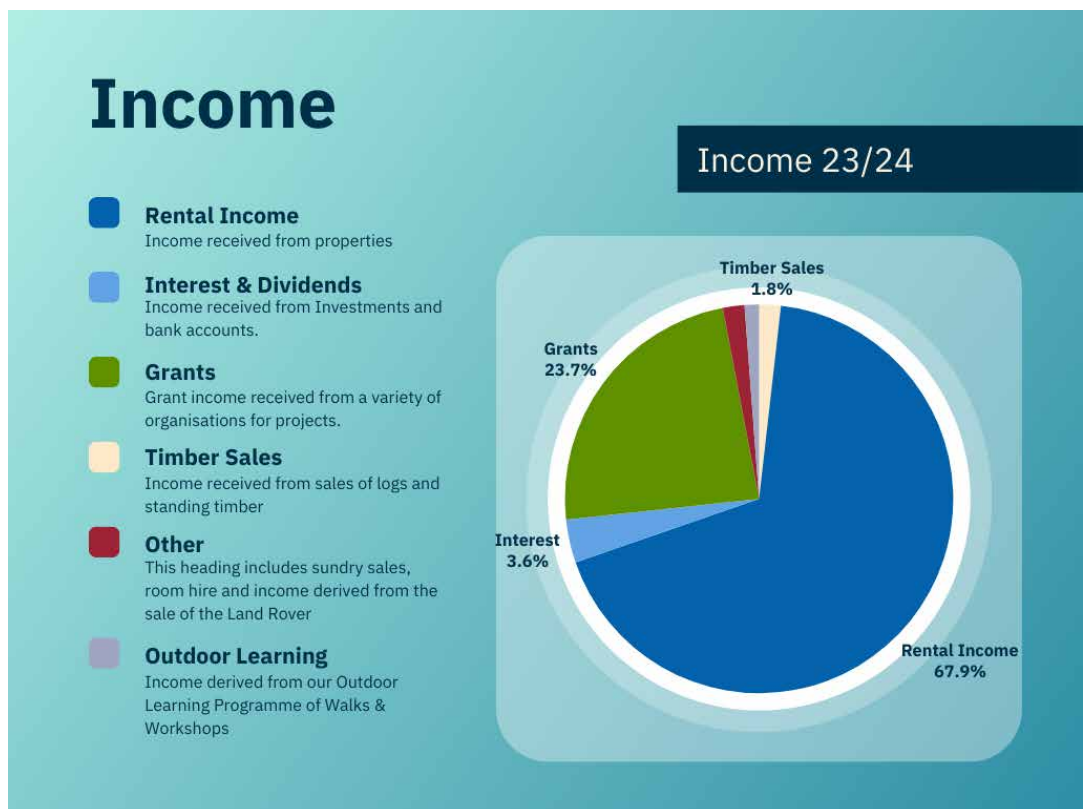
To this end, we are continuing to explore alternative sources of income generation and invest in capital infrastructure and staff resources to enable us to produce more firewood and sawmill timber in house.

Income

The chart below shows our main sources of income for 2023/2024

Income for the year increased relative to 2022/2023 by 3.1%, £345,501 in 23/24 from £327,894 in 22/23. This was primarily due to additional grant income (an increase of 41%) together with an increase in the sale of standing timber. The 5-year Countryside Stewardship scheme generated £23,503. A large proportion of the Trust's income continues to be invested in the management of the landscape. Agri-environment payments such as the Countryside Stewardship schemes are extremely important to the Trust. They are a key funding mechanism to support our woodland and meadow management.

The Trust continues to apply for grants from a variety of sources but is careful not to stray from its aims and objectives when looking for potential funding sources.



Income was generated largely from:

- ◆ Rentals received on commercial properties in the Telford area. (The need for a balancing package to provide sufficient income for the annual upkeep of the sites was recognised when the Trust was established. A package of commercial properties was transferred to Telford & Wrekin Council. They own the freehold of these income generating properties and are responsible for their management. They are covenanted to pay 90% of the income generated to the Trust to cover the cost of maintaining the land in the Gorge).
- ◆ Investments purchased by the Trust. These consist of Charity Investment funds, and an interest paying Bank Account
- ◆ Grants
- ◆ Timber sales
- ◆ Outdoor Learning Programme
- ◆ Small amounts from sundry sales, books, honey, charcoal
- ◆ Room hire

We received £234,522 in income from the rental properties, fishing and grazing rights compared to £238,575 last year. A decrease of 1.65%. Several of the rental properties were empty for short periods of time throughout the year leading to a reduction in the overall rent received.

The Trust has negotiated a 5% reduction in the management fee charged by Telford & Wrekin Council from 15% to 10%. The majority of the properties are on full repairing and insuring leases which means the tenant is responsible for the cost of repairs and upkeep to the property.

Interest and dividends provided £12,566 compared to £10,477 last year reflecting the changes in the Trust's investment makeup and stronger than anticipated returns on investments.

Standing timber/sawmill timber and log sales provided an additional £6,323.

An increase in the hire of the community room by groups has generated income of £2,280.

Grants to help with our work

In support of its activities, the Trust received £81,723 (£55,640 in 22/23) from a wide number of bodies and is incredibly grateful to them all for their help and assistance:

Countryside Stewardship – Natural England the Trust received **£23,503** in grant aid from this scheme. This grant contributes towards the Trust's woodland management costs. This is the second payment for this 5-year programme.

Potters Landfill Tax – £31,697 – Light Gives Light – Habitat creation

Telford & Wrekin Council – Telford Treescapes – **£12,504** – Planting and maintenance of trees

Big Give – £5,196 – Ponds, Newts and Shoots – creation and restoration of ponds on the Trust land

The Big Give is an annual appeal that enables willing philanthropists to match the value of any donations made by supporters. This year, it was supported by the Environmental Funders Network (EFN), a UK-based network of foundations, family offices and individual donors supporting environmental causes.

Wayleave Payments – £401

Bupa – Groundwork – £2,124 – Willow bed restoration

Suez – £500 – Volunteer Support

Veolia – £974 – Children's Wild Art Activities

Hilton Jones Charitable Trust – £1,808 – Pond Creation

The Tree Council – £1,715 – Tree planting

Donations

The Trust was fortunate to receive donations from individuals and organisations and we are very grateful to them for their support.

Moonshine and Fuggles of Ironbridge have continued to support the Trust and donated £300 from the sales of their Coalport Cucumber gin.

Expenditure

Total expenditure for the year was £339,149 (£363,826 in 2022/2023). This year an additional £13k profit was generated on the sale of an asset, which has been offset against expenditure in the Statement of Financial Activities (SOFA). £64,584 was spent on Countryside and Landscape maintenance.

£8,383 was spent on Community Projects. Depreciation costs have increased from £24,295 to £34,383 due to the investment in capital machinery to facilitate more work being undertaken in house and the purchase of a new vehicle following the sale of the Trust Land Rover.

Total employment costs (including pension scheme costs) decreased by 10.6% to £199,453. (£223,001 in 22/23). This decrease is primarily due to the reduction in the current service cost of the pension scheme from £51k to £28k. All staff were awarded a cost of living pay rise in line with the National Joint Council (NJC) pay settlement of £1,925 on each salary grade. No Pension Deficit payment was required in 2023/24 (£1,200 in 22/23).

Investment policy, powers and performance

Trustees are responsible for the financial policies under which the Trust is managed. Under the Memorandum and Articles of Association, the Trust has the power to deposit or invest funds.

The Investment Policy of the Trust is:

- ◆ for the capital invested to maintain its value whilst building up a dependable, growing stream of income that will keep pace with inflation.

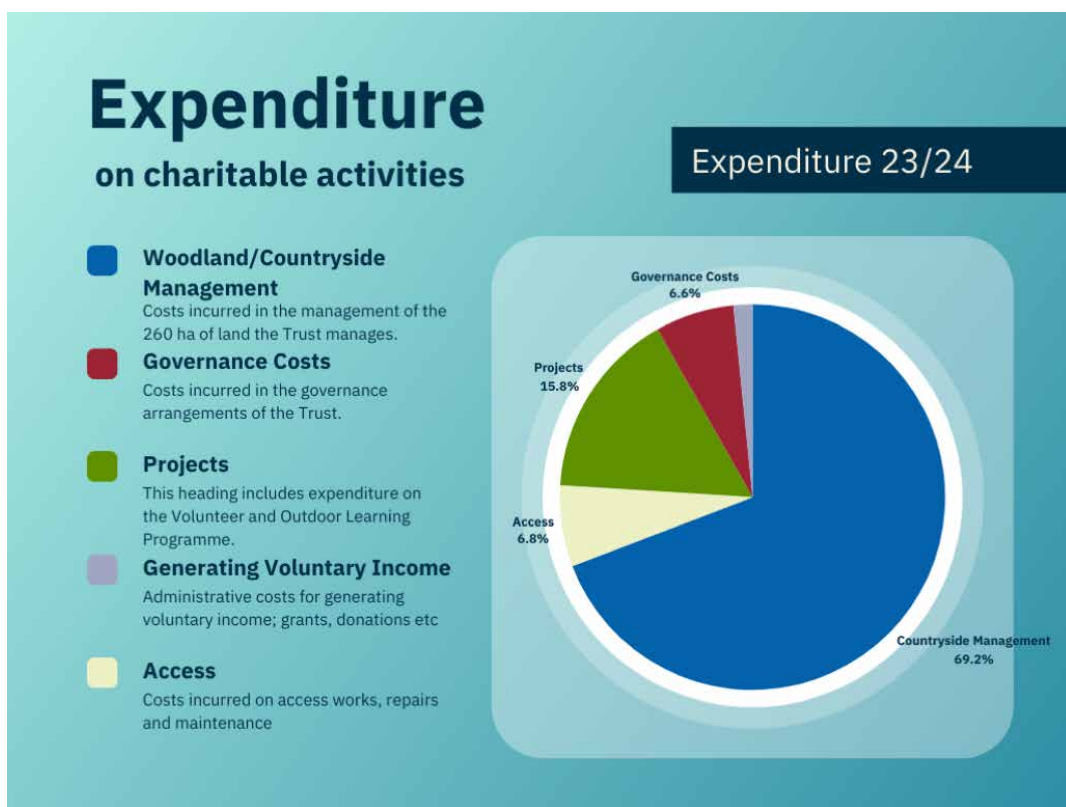
The investment policy was substantially revised in 2021, in particular to take account of ethical and environmental considerations and is now publicly available on the Trust's website. No future investments will be made in companies that derive income from the extraction of coal or oil.

The investment performance is monitored by the Investment Working group by reviewing regular reports from our investment advisors, LGT. The movement in the stock market affects the value of our investments. The short-term gains and losses on the investments make little difference on the day to day running of the charity until the point where we have to sell our investments and realise the gain or loss.

The value of the Trust's investments has fluctuated greatly over the last 12 months but by the end of March 2024 had started to recover.

The Trust's investment portfolio value now stands at £495,658 with an additional £55,614 being held in bank accounts.

The Trust continues to focus on long term investment aims rather than on the short-term market volatility noise.



Reserves Policy

Trust's reserves are held in order to manage the risks to which the charity is exposed in the course of its activities. The Trustees ensure that the charity is in a responsible and secure financial position to carry out its day-to-day core services and is able to absorb unforeseen setbacks in the event of a significant financial downturn. The reserves policy is reviewed in the annual planning and budgeting process by Trustees and considers changes to the environment in which the Trust operates, and any other internal or external risk factors that might impact on the level of reserves required.

The reserves policy balances the need to build up long-term reserves against the need for short term spending on the Trust's core purposes.

Severn Gorge Countryside Trust Funds

The Trust's funds are divided between unrestricted funds, restricted funds and designated funds.

The funds and their specific purpose are detailed below:

Designated Funds

Long Term Income Fund

The purpose of this fund is to provide income for the Trust's core work by providing protection against void properties within the Trust's rental income producing portfolio and provide a dependable stream of income that will keep pace with inflation.

Should the rental income drop below the level that is required to fulfil the basic obligations of the Trust then money will be withdrawn from the fund to cover this expenditure.

The money in the Long-Term Income Fund is managed by LGT Wealth Management and is held in equities, bonds and investments. Any interest and dividends generated by this fund are retained.

New Accommodation Fund

This fund was created to set aside money to be used to fund the building of the Trust Office at Darby Road. Money that had previously been held in the Long-Term Income Fund was released into the New Accommodation Fund. This fund will be used in conjunction with the restricted grant funding from the NHS and Alcoa Foundation. This fund will be written down over a 50-year period as part of the annual office depreciation calculation.

Land and Structures Contingency Fund

The Land and Structures Contingency Fund was created to allow appropriate responses to substantial problems arising from geotechnical features, structures such as walls, land instability, drainage and watercourses.

£10,000 will be transferred to the fund each year when income levels allow. Any work will be undertaken when sufficient funds have been accumulated. Some works may be able to be undertaken at an earlier date if external funding becomes available.



Farm the Flow

This fund was set up for expenses incurred in the Farm the Flow Project.

Carry Over Funds

These funds have been set aside for work that was not completed in the anticipated financial year. Predominantly relating to planned tree works, these funds will be used when the work is completed.

Lloyds Surrender Premium Budget

This fund was created from income received from the surrender premium of the rental property Lloyds Bank. This has been set aside to offset part of the depreciation cost of the Valtra tractor purchase in 2022.

Postcode Lottery

This fund was originally a restricted fund for a grant awarded by the Postcode Lottery. Due to the Covid pandemic the funder decided that the grant could be transferred to a designated fund and could be used for any purpose by the Trust.

Land Rover Fund – This fund was set aside to be used against the depreciation cost of the new Trust vehicle

Restricted Funds

Alcoa/Primary Care Trust New Office – these funds are for grant funding received towards building of the new office. These funds are being written down over a 50-year period as part of the office depreciation costs

Councillors Pride Grant – grant towards the Outdoor Learning Area at the Trust office site.

The Trust also has a General Reserve which is derived from any surplus or deficit made in the financial year. This reserve is also used when there is an increase in the pension deficit, conversely any reduction in the pension deficit will lead to an increase in the General Reserve. Trustees need to be aware of the impact the pension liability can have on the reserve.

Table of Funds

Designated Funds	Balance 1 April 2023	Balance 31 March 2024
Long Term Income Fund	£385,748	£392,686
Revaluation Reserve	£242,938	£270,591
Structures Contingency	£6,950	£6,950
Accommodation Fund	£170,200	£165,600
Lloyds Surrender Premium Fund	£35,000	£31,000
Postcode Lottery	£13,400	£13,400
Farm the Flow	£1,095	£1,095
Carry Over 21-22	£10,500	£0
Carry Over 22-23	£5,982	£3,354
Carry Over 23-24	£0	£1,100
Land Rover Sale	£0	£10,400
Total	£871,813	£896,176

Restricted Funds	Balance 1 April 2023	Balance 31 March 2024
Alcoa Accommodation	£6,752	£6,569
Primary Care Trust Accommodation	£64,616	£62,870
Councillors Pride Grant	£300	£300
Gorge Parish Council – Family Walks	£500	£0
Coronation Grant	£1,565	£0
Wrekin Housing Group – Pond Platform	£1,000	£0
Big Give Green Match Fund – Ponds, Newts & Shoots	£0	£5,196
Hilton Jones Charitable Trust	£0	£1,808
Veolia Envirogrant	£0	£974
Total	£74,733	£77,717

General Fund	Balance 1 April 2023	Balance 31 March 2024
General Fund	£268,272	£363,137

Information:

- ◆ The Trust has an annual income of £300k - £400k per year. Its main income is derived from rental properties, environmental grants and small sales of logs, hay and timber.
- ◆ Reserves need to be maintained at a level that enables the Trust to manage financial risk and short-term income volatility.
- ◆ The Trusts reserves policy is to hold as a reserve a sum equivalent to the annual costs involved in the general running of the charity.
- ◆ Based upon current levels of expenditure £350,000 must be held in reserves. At the 31 March 2024 the balance in the Long-Term Income Fund was £392,686.
- ◆ The reason for this amount to be held in reserve is that over 80% of the Trusts core income is derived from rental income. Should any of the properties become void our annual income would reduce significantly.
- ◆ Holding a reserve of 12 months running costs would give Trustees the time it would need to find replacement tenants or alternative sources of funding.
- ◆ The liabilities of the land the Trust manages also needs to be reflected in the value of reserves held.
- ◆ The target level of reserves should be reviewed on an annual basis as part of the annual budget which is presented to Trustees.
- ◆ The needs of the Trust will change from year to year and unexpected requirements for expenditure may alter future financial plans.
- ◆ Cost of closure: should an event or events occur which cause the Trustees to decide to wind up SGCT, the cost of redundancies and fees required to manage the closure will need to be calculated. Sufficient funds will need to be set aside to cover these potential costs. (Redundancy calculation as at 31 March 2024 circa £23k).

In carrying out our assessment of available reserves, we exclude any pensions liability and fixed asset funds, because these reserves cannot be quickly realised. We also exclude any funds that are restricted for a specific purpose. This gets us to our 'free reserves'; the resources we have available, quickly, should we need them.

Pension Scheme

The Trust is an admission body in the Shropshire County Pension Scheme. This is a defined benefit pension scheme which offers employees a specified pension based on their length of service and their salary. Employers have to ensure that the contributions to their schemes are sufficient to provide the benefits that their employees are entitled to based on actuarial advice. Accounting standards require employers to estimate their pension liabilities and include them in their accounts.

In common with other charities with defined benefit pension schemes, our pension scheme shows a surplus which stood at £73,000 as of 31 March 2024 (a deficit of £9,000 as of 31 March 2023) and, under UK accounting standards we are required to account for this surplus. This is a great improvement in our funding position and the drivers behind this improvement are linked to significant rises in bond yields coupled with changes in funding assumptions and calculations.

Under the current pension scheme regulations, the surplus can only be paid out when an employer exits the pension fund.

Trustees are aware that any surplus/deficit on the scheme will fluctuate with changing market conditions and that their responsibility is to meet the required contributions.



Actuarial valuation

At the last valuation in March 2023 the contribution rate to be paid into the Shropshire County Pension Fund was assessed in two parts. First a standard contribution rate was determined. This is the contribution, expressed as a percentage of the salaries of staff. Secondly, a supplementary contribution is payable if, as a result of the actuarial review, it is found that the accumulated liabilities of the pension for benefits to past and present staff are not fully covered by the standard contributions to be paid in future and by the notional fund built up from past contributions. The total contribution rate payable is the sum of the standard contribution rate and the supplementary contribution rate.

Shropshire County Pension Fund has been working hard over the last few years to reduce the pension deficit and has set out a clear framework in which to achieve this. The Trust paid an employer contribution rate of 14.3% no annual deficit contribution in 23/24 was required. (£1,200 in 22/23)



Looking Forward

Looking forward to 2024-2025, we will continue to manage the 289 hectares of the 'living landscape' of the World Heritage Site with the same consistent care and passion that we have shown for the past 33 years.

Key Projects include:

- ◆ Developing a new website so that in conjunction with our social media platforms we can continue to communicate the Trusts vision, purpose, work and impact effectively to increase awareness of the work that we do and how people can get involved.
- ◆ Ensuring future financial sustainability – continue to work with Telford & Wrekin Council to diversify our rental properties and explore other avenues to grow and diversify unrestricted income streams.
- ◆ Launching and delivering a landscaping contracting business to create an alternative income stream to improve our financial resilience and long-term sustainability.
- ◆ Continuing to explore funding opportunities both large and small to enable us to undertake both core work and new projects.
- ◆ Reviewing Trust policies and procedures to ensure that they are compliant, relevant and up to date.
- ◆ Producing more timber infrastructure in house for fencing, access infrastructure etc.
- ◆ Increasing our capacity to produce firewood as a growing income stream
- ◆ Continuing to monitor the progression of ash dieback ensuring work is carried out where necessary to ensure sites are safe.
- ◆ Continuing to ensure that the Trust is well governed and that Trustees have the necessary training to feel empowered to make informed and strategic decisions.
- ◆ Encouraging non traditional users to engage, explore and enjoy the opportunities that the Trust land offers.
- ◆ Upskilling interested volunteers to assist with some of our landscape management operations
- ◆ Ensuring that we communicate our future management works to local people in a coherent and cohesive manner and listen to any concerns that they may have.
- ◆ Continuing to develop our forest school and outdoor learning area to increase our capacity to deliver environmental education sessions to local schools and groups. Investigate the feasibility of creating an outdoor learning classroom.
- ◆ Increasing the number of our sites included in 'No Mow May' to improve biodiversity. Exploring alternative grazing options for some difficult to reach sites.
- ◆ Developing Citizen Science projects to monitor and record our work whilst engendering an interest in the local environment. One example would be to organise a Bioblitz.
- ◆ Expanding our corporate volunteering opportunities to help deliver conservation and access work that supports our charitable aims whilst providing opportunities for organisations to learn new skills, connect with local communities and have fun outside of the usual work environment.
- ◆ Exploring options to reduce our carbon footprint and move towards becoming carbon neutral by 2030. For example, developing a solar kiln, moving to HVO fuel, using an electric bike for site visits.
- ◆ Raising awareness of the Trust by attending events to promote our work and the opportunities and products we offer.
- ◆ Ensuring that the Trust Office site and building continues to be fit for purpose and is well maintained. Carrying out all necessary repairs to ensure that it continues to be an inviting and safe place to work and visit.

In order to deliver these goals, we will continue improving our own capability and resilience to ensure we are putting maximum resource into managing the landscape. We will continue investing in training to ensure we have the right skills to manage the landscape of the World Heritage Site to a high level.

Statement of Trustees Responsibilities

The Trustees are responsible for preparing the Annual Report and the financial statements in accordance with applicable law and regulations.

Company law requires Trustees to prepare financial statements for each financial year. The financial statements are required by law to give a true and fair view of the state of affairs of the company and of the profit or loss of the company for that period. In preparing those financial statements, the Trustees are required to:

- ◆ select suitable accounting policies and then apply them consistently.
- ◆ observe the methods and principles in the Charities SORP
- ◆ make judgements and estimates that are reasonable and prudent.
- ◆ state whether applicable UK Accounting Standards have been followed, subject to any material departures disclosed and explained in the financial statements.
- ◆ prepare the financial statements on the going concern basis unless it is inappropriate to presume that the company will continue in business.

The Trustees are responsible for keeping proper accounting records that disclose with reasonable accuracy at any time the financial position of the group and parent charity and enable them to ensure that the financial statements comply with the Charities Act 2011 and the Charity (Accounts and Reports) Regulations. They are also responsible for safeguarding the assets of company and hence for taking reasonable steps for the prevention and detection of fraud and other irregularities.

The Trustees are responsible for the maintenance and integrity of the financial information included on the charity's website.

In accordance with company law, as the company's directors, we certify that:

- ◆ so far as we are aware, there is no relevant audit information of which the company's auditor is unaware.

This report has been prepared in accordance with the Statement of Recommended Practice – Accounting and Reporting by Charities and in accordance with the provisions applicable to companies subject to the small companies' regime.

Approved by the Committee of Management on 25 September 2024 and signed on its behalf by:

Maureen Bragg
Chair



Severn Gorge Countryside Trust

REPORT AND FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

For the year ended 31 March 2024

Company No. 2647374

Muras Baker Jones Limited
Chartered Accountants
Wolverhampton

INDEPENDENT AUDITORS' REPORT TO THE MEMBERS OF SEVERN GORGE COUNTRYSIDE TRUST

Opinion

We have audited the financial statements of Severn Gorge Countryside Trust (the 'charitable company') for the year ended 31 March 2024 which comprise the statement of financial activities (including income and expenditure account), statement of financial position and the related notes, including a summary of significant accounting policies. The financial reporting framework that has been applied in their preparation is applicable law and United Kingdom Accounting Standards, including FRS 102 The Financial Reporting Standard applicable in the UK and Republic of Ireland (United Kingdom Generally Accepted Accounting Practice).

In our opinion the financial statements:

- give a true and fair view of the state of the charitable company's affairs as at 31 March 2024 and of its incoming resources and application of resources, including its income and expenditure, for the year then ended
- have been properly prepared in accordance with United Kingdom Generally Accepted Accounting Practice
- have been prepared in accordance with the requirements of the Companies Act 2006

Basis for opinion

We conducted our audit in accordance with International Standards on Auditing (UK) (ISAs (UK)) and applicable law. Our responsibilities under those standards are further described in the auditor's responsibilities for the audit of the financial statements section of our report. We are independent of the charity in accordance with the ethical requirements that are relevant to our audit of the financial statements in the UK, including the FRC's Ethical Standard, and we have fulfilled our other ethical responsibilities in accordance with these requirements. We believe that the audit evidence we have obtained is sufficient and appropriate to provide a basis for our opinion.

Conclusions relating to going concern

We have nothing to report in respect of the following matters in relation to which the ISAs (UK) require us to report to you where:

- the trustees' use of the going concern basis of accounting in the preparation of the financial statements is not appropriate; or
- the trustees have not disclosed in the financial statements any identified material uncertainties that may cast significant doubt about the charity's ability to continue to adopt the going concern basis of accounting for a period of at least twelve months from the date when the financial statements are authorised for issue

Other information

The other information comprises the information included in the annual report, other than the financial statements and our auditor's report thereon. The trustees are responsible for the other information. Our opinion on the financial statements does not cover the other information and, except to the extent otherwise explicitly stated in our report, we do not express any form of assurance conclusion thereon.

In connection with our audit of the financial statements, our responsibility is to read the other information and, in doing so, consider whether the other information is materially inconsistent with the financial statements or our knowledge obtained in the audit or otherwise appears to be materially misstated. If we identify such material inconsistencies or apparent material misstatements, we are required to determine whether there is a material misstatement in the financial statements or a material misstatement of the other information. If, based on the work we have performed, we conclude that there is a material misstatement of this other information, we are required to report that fact.

We have nothing to report in this regard.

INDEPENDENT AUDITORS' REPORT TO THE MEMBERS OF SEVERN GORGE COUNTRYSIDE TRUST (CONTINUED)

Opinions on other matters prescribed by the Companies Act 2006

In our opinion, based on the work undertaken in the course of the audit:

- the information given in the trustees' report for the financial year for which the financial statements are prepared is consistent with the financial statements; and
- the trustees' report has been prepared in accordance with applicable legal requirements.

Matters on which we are required to report by exception

In the light of the knowledge and understanding of the charitable company and its environment obtained in the course of the audit, we have not identified material misstatements in the trustees' report.

We have nothing to report in respect of the following matters in relation to which the Companies Act 2006 requires us to report to you if, in our opinion:

- adequate accounting records have not been kept, or returns adequate for our audit have not been received from branches not visited by us; or
- the financial statements are not in agreement with the accounting records and returns; or
- certain disclosures of trustees' remuneration specified by law are not made; or
- we have not received all the information and explanations we require for our audit; or
- the trustees were not entitled to take advantage of the small companies' exemptions in preparing the directors' report and from the requirement to prepare a strategic report.

Responsibilities of trustees

As explained more fully in the trustees' responsibilities statement, the trustees (who are also the directors for the purposes of company law) are responsible for the preparation of the financial statements and for being satisfied that they give a true and fair view, and for such internal control as the trustees determine is necessary to enable the preparation of financial statements that are free from material misstatement, whether due to fraud or error.

In preparing the financial statements, the trustees are responsible for assessing the charitable company's ability to continue as a going concern, disclosing, as applicable, matters related to going concern and using the going concern basis of accounting unless the trustees either intend to liquidate the charitable company or to cease operations, or have no realistic alternative but to do so.

Auditor's responsibilities for the audit of the financial statements

Our objectives are to obtain reasonable assurance about whether the financial statements as a whole are free from material misstatement, whether due to fraud or error, and to issue an auditor's report that includes our opinion. Reasonable assurance is a high level of assurance, but is not a guarantee that an audit conducted in accordance with ISAs (UK) will always detect a material misstatement when it exists. Misstatements can arise from fraud or error and are considered material if, individually or in the aggregate, they could reasonably be expected to influence the economic decisions of users taken on the basis of these financial statements.

As part of an audit in accordance with ISAs (UK), we exercise professional judgment and maintain professional scepticism throughout the audit. We also:

- Identify and assess the risks of material misstatement of the financial statements, whether due to fraud or error, design and perform audit procedures responsive to those risks, and obtain audit evidence that is sufficient and appropriate to provide a basis for our opinion. The risk of not detecting a material misstatement resulting from fraud is higher than for one resulting from error, as fraud may involve collusion, forgery, intentional omissions, misrepresentations, or the override of internal control

INDEPENDENT AUDITORS' REPORT TO THE MEMBERS OF SEVERN GORGE COUNTRYSIDE TRUST (CONTINUED)

- Obtain an understanding of internal control relevant to the audit in order to design audit procedures that are appropriate in the circumstances, but not for the purpose of expressing an opinion on the effectiveness of the internal control
- Evaluate the appropriateness of accounting policies used and the reasonableness of accounting estimates and related disclosures made by the trustees
- Conclude on the appropriateness of the trustees' use of the going concern basis of accounting and, based on the audit evidence obtained, whether a material uncertainty exists related to events or conditions that may cast significant doubt on the charity's ability to continue as a going concern. If we conclude that a material uncertainty exists, we are required to draw attention in our auditor's report to the related disclosures in the financial statements or, if such disclosures are inadequate, to modify our opinion. Our conclusions are based on the audit evidence obtained up to the date of our auditor's report. However, future events or conditions may cause the charity to cease to continue as a going concern
- Evaluate the overall presentation, structure and content of the financial statements, including the disclosures, and whether the financial statements represent the underlying transactions and events in a manner that achieves fair presentation

We communicate with those charged with governance regarding, among other matters, the planned scope and timing of the audit and significant audit findings, including any significant deficiencies in internal control that we identify during our audit.

Use of our report

This report is made solely to the charitable company's members, as a body, in accordance with Chapter 3 of Part 16 of the Companies Act 2006. Our audit work has been undertaken so that we might state to the charitable company's members those matters we are required to state to them in an auditor's report and for no other purpose. To the fullest extent permitted by law, we do not accept or assume responsibility to anyone other than the charitable company and the charitable company's members as a body, for our audit work, for this report, or for the opinions we have formed.

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Oliver Ross BSc(Hons) FCA (Senior Statutory Auditor)
For and on behalf of Muras Baker Jones Limited
Chartered Accountants and Statutory Auditor

25 September 2024

Regent House
Bath Avenue
Wolverhampton
WV1 4EG

SEVERN GORGE COUNTRYSIDE TRUST

STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL ACTIVITIES (being INCOME AND EXPENDITURE ACCOUNT)

For the year ended 31 March 2024

	Notes	General Fund £	Designated Funds £	Restricted funds £	Total funds 2024 £	Total funds 2023 £
INCOME						
INCOMING RESOURCES FROM CHARITABLE ACTIVITIES						
Rents received	4	234,523	-	-	234,523	238,575
Grants	4	73,745	-	7,978	81,723	55,640
INCOME FROM OTHER TRADING ACTIVITIES						
Investment income		1,590	10,976	-	12,566	10,477
Other income		15,437	-	-	15,437	22,189
Gifts and Donations		1,252	-	-	1,252	1,013
Total Income		326,547	10,976	7,978	345,501	327,894
EXPENDITURE						
COSTS OF RAISING FUNDS						
Costs of generating voluntary income	5	5,302	-	-	5,302	6,515
EXPENDITURE ON CHARITABLE ACTIVITIES						
Woodland/Countryside Management	5	225,410	4,377	4,901	234,688	275,420
Access	5	23,130	31	13	23,174	26,799
Projects	5	53,432	192	80	53,704	29,321
GOVERNANCE COSTS	5	18,242	4,039	-	22,281	25,771
Total Expenditure		325,516	8,639	4,994	339,149	363,826
NET INCOME/(EXPENDITURE)		1,031	2,337	2,984	6,352	(35,932)
TRANSFERS BETWEEN FUNDS		5,628	(5,628)	-	-	-
NET INCOME/(EXPENDITURE) BEFORE OTHER GAINS / (LOSSES) – carried forward		6,659	(3,291)	2,984	6,352	(35,932)

SEVERN GORGE COUNTRYSIDE TRUST

STATEMENT OF FINANCIAL ACTIVITIES (being INCOME AND EXPENDITURE ACCOUNT) continued

For the year ended 31 March 2024

	Notes	General Fund £	Designated Funds £	Restricted Funds £	Total Funds 2024 £	Total funds 2023 £
NET INCOME/(EXPENDITURE) BEFORE OTHER GAINS / (LOSSES) – brought forward		6,659	(3,291)	2,984	6,352	(35,932)
OTHER GAINS AND LOSSES						
Gains/(losses) on Investments - realised		-	(2,575)	-	(2,575)	(12,946)
Gains/(losses) on Investments – unrealised		-	30,229	-	30,229	(25,034)
Pension scheme actuarial (losses)/gains	14	88,205	-	-	88,205	469,290
<hr/>						
NET MOVEMENT IN FUNDS FOR THE YEAR		94,864	24,363	2,984	122,211	395,378
<hr/>						
TOTAL FUNDS BROUGHT FORWARD AT 31 MARCH 2023		268,272	871,813	74,733	1,214,818	819,440
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TOTAL FUNDS CARRIED FORWARD AT 31 MARCH 2024		363,136	896,176	77,717	1,337,029	1,214,818
<hr/> <hr/>						

All income and expenditure derive from continuing activities.

The statement of financial activities includes all gains and losses recognised in the year.

SEVERN GORGE COUNTRYSIDE TRUST

NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

For the year ended 31 March 2024

1. ACCOUNTING POLICIES

a) BASIS OF PREPARATION

The charity constitutes a public benefit entity as defined by FRS 102. The financial statements have been prepared in accordance with Accounting and Reporting by Charities: Statement of Recommended Practice applicable to charities preparing their accounts in accordance with the Financial Reporting Standard applicable in the UK and Republic of Ireland issued in October 2019, the Financial Reporting Standard applicable in the United Kingdom and Republic of Ireland (FRS 102), the Charities Act 2011, the Companies Act 2006 and UK Generally Accepted Accounting Practice.

The financial statements are prepared on a going concern basis under the historical cost convention, modified to include investments and certain freehold property at fair value.

b) INCOME

Rental income is included when receivable.

Income from contracting projects is recognised when receivable.

Grants are recognised in full in the Statement of Financial Activities when receivable.

Income from investments and other income, including small sales of timber and refunds, are included when receivable.

c) EXPENDITURE AND IRRECOVERABLE VAT

Resources expended are recognised in the period in which they are incurred. Resources expended include attributable VAT, which cannot be recovered.

The proportion of employees time spent fundraising is shown as costs of generating voluntary income.

Resources expended are allocated to the particular activity where the cost relates directly to that activity. The cost of overall direction and administration on each activity is apportioned based on the direct costs incurred for each.

d) DEPRECIATION

Depreciation is provided on the cost of fixed assets to write off the cost less estimated residual value of each asset over its estimated useful life at the following rates:

Freehold property	Depreciated over 50 years
Fixtures & Equipment	10% straight line/20% straight line/33 ¹ / ₃ % straight line
Plant and Machinery	10% straight line/20% straight line/33 ¹ / ₃ % straight line
Motor vehicles	20% straight line/25% reducing balance
Facility Construction	10% straight line

No depreciation is provided on Freehold Land.

SEVERN GORGE COUNTRYSIDE TRUST

NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

For the year ended 31 March 2024

1. ACCOUNTING POLICIES (Continued)

e) TANGIBLE ASSETS

Tangible assets are initially recorded at cost, and subsequently stated at cost less any accumulated depreciation and impairment losses. Any tangible assets carried at revalued amounts are recorded at the fair value at the date of revaluation less any subsequent accumulated depreciation and subsequent accumulated impairment losses.

An increase in the carrying amount of an asset as a result of revaluation, is recognised in other recognised gains and losses, unless it reverses a charge for impairment that has previously been recognised as expenditure within the statement of financial activities. A decrease in the carrying amount of an asset as a result of revaluation, is recognised in other recognised gains and losses, except to which it offsets any previous revaluation gain, in which case the loss is shown within other recognised gains and losses on the statement of financial activities.

f) INVESTMENTS

Investments held as current assets are stated at the lower of cost and net realisable value.

Investments held as fixed assets are revalued annually and the aggregate surplus or deficit is transferred to Revaluation Reserve.

g) GENERAL FUND

This represents unrestricted funds that are available for use at the Trustees' discretion in furtherance of the objectives of the Trust.

h) DESIGNATED FUNDS

- i) Long Term Income Fund - this fund arises from the combining of the Income Security Fund and the Long Term Development Reserve and reflects monies held within Fixed and Current Asset Investments. The purpose of the fund is to provide additional income for the Trust's core work when rental income declines as properties reach the end of their expected commercial 'life' circa 2015 to 2025.
- ii) Land and Structures Contingency - this reserve reflects monies held within current asset investments. The reserve has been created to cope with expenditure arising as a result of land instability, drainage and watercourse issues and potential problems with existing structures.
- iii) New Accommodation Fund - the reserve has been created to set aside funds towards the new office accommodation for the Trust.
- iv) Revaluation Reserve - this reflects the increase in the fair value of investments and land over their original cost.

SEVERN GORGE COUNTRYSIDE TRUST

NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

For the year ended 31 March 2024

1. ACCOUNTING POLICIES (Continued)

h) DESIGNATED FUNDS - continued

v) Lloyds Bank Surrender Premium Fund and Carry Over Funds. These reserves relate to surplus funds arising on certain projects during the year for which the trustees have designated against specific expenditure over the next 2 years.

vi) Postcode Lottery Access Fund. Being grants received in respect of work to be carried out on steps in the Gorge. Re-designated by the grant provider as unrestricted.

i) RESTRICTED FUNDS

These represent grants received for specified projects, the use of each grant being restricted to that project.

j) GOING CONCERN

The trustees remain mindful of the impact on the charity of external economic constraints and as a result regularly review projections and budgets for the current and subsequent periods. Based on these reviews, the trustees consider there to be no significant overall impact on the charity's ability to continue as a going concern.

The trustees have also reviewed the supply chains, key income sources and the capital resources available and consider that the charity has adequate resources in place to continue operating for the next twelve months.

k) EMPLOYEE BENEFITS

The charity contributes to a defined benefit plan for certain employees. A liability for the charity's obligation under the plan is recognised net of plan assets. The net change in the net defined benefit liability is recognised as the costs of the defined benefit plan during the period. Pension plan assets are measured at fair value and the defined benefit obligation is measured on an actuarial basis using the projected unit method.

The trustees believe that the scheme currently meets statutory minimum funding requirements. It is intended that the level of annual contributions to the scheme will be adjusted following the next detailed actuarial valuation. The directors note that the calculated notional deficit or surplus calculated under FRS102 can vary greatly from year to year depending on the assumptions made at the valuation date, but with normally little or no effect on short term cashflows.

2. (DEFICIT)/SURPLUS FOR THE YEAR

The (deficit)/surplus for the year is stated after charging:

	2024	2023
	£	£
Auditors' remuneration	2,748	2,568
Depreciation of tangible fixed assets	34,383	24,321
	<u> </u>	<u> </u>

SEVERN GORGE COUNTRYSIDE TRUST

NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

For the year ended 31 March 2024

3. STAFF COSTS

	2024 £	2023 £
Wages and salaries	154,043	141,899
Social security costs	10,022	9,263
Other pension Costs	28,000	64,011
Other costs	7,389	7,828
	<u>199,454</u>	<u>223,001</u>

No employees received remuneration in excess of £60,000 (2023: None).

No members of the Committee of Management received any remuneration in the year (2023 - £Nil). Apart from members of the Committee of Management, the company had 6 employees at 31 March 2024 (2023 - 6).

4. INCOMING RESOURCES FROM CHARITABLE ACTIVITIES

	General fund £	Restricted funds £	Total 2024 £	Total 2023 £
Rents received	234,522	-	234,522	238,575
Grants:				
Natural England:				
Countryside Stewardship	23,503	-	23,503	18,198
Rural Payments Agency	-	-	-	5,958
The Gorge Parish Council	-	-	-	500
Other	2,202	-	2,202	1,267
Telford & Wrekin Council – Kings Coronation Grant	-	-	-	1,635
Wrekin Housing Group - Community Fund	-	-	-	1,000
Telford Treescapes grant	12,504	-	12,504	12,504
Bupa – Groundwork Willow	2,124	-	2,124	-
Potter Group – Environment Fund	31,697	-	31,697	14,578
Big Give – Green Match Fund	-	5,196	5,196	-
Hilton Jones Trust – Office Pond	-	1,808	1,808	-
The Tree Council	1,715	-	1,715	-
Veolia Environmental Trust	-	974	974	-
	<u>73,745</u>	<u>7,978</u>	<u>81,723</u>	<u>55,640</u>
	<u>308,267</u>	<u>7,978</u>	<u>316,245</u>	<u>294,215</u>

SEVERN GORGE COUNTRYSIDE TRUST

NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

For the year ended 31 March 2024

5. ANALYSIS OF EXPENDITURE ON CHARITABLE ACTIVITIES

	Generating voluntary income £	Woodland/ countryside management £	Access £	Projects £	Governance costs £	Total 2024 £	Total 2023 £
Direct costs	-	66,747	-	8,383	-	75,130	79,762
Employee costs	5,302	123,059	23,071	39,671	8,350	199,453	223,001
Insurance	-	8,659	20	1,090	-	9,769	7,944
Transport	-	6,468	15	814	-	7,297	9,564
Office and other costs	-	10,802	25	1,360	1,354	13,541	11,433
Trustee support	-	-	-	-	678	678	387
Professional costs	-	-	-	-	11,899	11,899	11,968
Depreciation	-	30,476	70	3,836	-	34,382	24,321
(Profit)/loss on disposal of tangible fixed assets	-	(11,523)	(27)	(1,450)	-	(13,000)	(4,554)
	<u>5,302</u>	<u>234,688</u>	<u>23,174</u>	<u>53,704</u>	<u>22,281</u>	<u>339,149</u>	<u>363,826</u>

SEVERN GORGE COUNTRYSIDE TRUST

NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

For the year ended 31 March 2024

6. TANGIBLE FIXED ASSETS

	Plant and machinery £	Land and buildings £	Motor vehicles £	Fixtures & equipment £	Facility Construction £	Total £
COST:						
At 1 April 2023	106,919	629,476	80,391	47,057	4,495	868,338
Additions	14,622	-		4,273	-	18,896
Disposals	-	-	(28,970)	(2,292)	-	(31,262)
At 31 March 2024	121,541	629,476	51,421	49,038	4,495	855,972
ACCUMULATED DEPRECIATION:						
At 1 April 2023	22,581	113,775	57,061	32,076	2,248	227,741
Charge for the Year	12,964	8,752	5,833	6,385	450	34,383
Disposals	-	-	(28,970)	(2,292)	-	(31,262)
At 31 March 2024	35,545	122,527	33,924	36,169	2,698	293,386
NET BOOK VALUE:						
At 31 March 2023	84,338	515,701	23,330	14,981	2,247	640,597
At 31 March 2024	85,997	506,949	17,498	12,869	1,797	625,110

SEVERN GORGE COUNTRYSIDE TRUST

NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

For the year ended 31 March 2024

7. FIXED ASSET INVESTMENTS

	2024 £	2023 £
Balance brought forward	464,158	431,335
Additions	121,369	167,493
Disposals	(120,098)	(109,636)
Revaluation adjustment	30,229	(25,034)
	<hr/>	<hr/>
Balance carried forward	495,658	464,158
	<hr/> <hr/>	<hr/> <hr/>
Historical cost of investments held at 31 March 2024	471,662	484,925
	<hr/> <hr/>	<hr/> <hr/>

Investments are acquired to provide fixed funding for certain of the Designated Funds set up by the Trust (see Note 11).

	2024		2023	
	Original cost £	Market value £	Original cost £	Market value £
Abundance				
- Telford & Wrekin Climate Action Investment	817	796	910	910
LGT Wealth Management				
- Investment portfolio	470,845	494,862	484,015	463,248
	<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>
	471,662	495,658	484,925	464,158
	<hr/> <hr/>	<hr/> <hr/>	<hr/> <hr/>	<hr/> <hr/>

8. DEBTORS

	2024 £	2023 £
Trade debtors	35,048	17,064
Prepayments	-	663
	<hr/>	<hr/>
	35,048	17,727
	<hr/> <hr/>	<hr/> <hr/>

SEVERN GORGE COUNTRYSIDE TRUST

NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

For the year ended 31 March 2024

9. CURRENT ASSET INVESTMENTS

	2024 £	2023 £
Short term deposits	39,056	37,495

10. CREDITORS - amounts falling due within one year

	2024 £	2023 £
Trade Creditors	1,856	6,486
	<u>1,856</u>	<u>6,486</u>

11. ANALYSIS OF CHARITABLE FUNDS

	At 1 April 2023 £	Income £	Expend- iture £	Other recognised gains/ (losses) £	Trans- fers £	At 31 March 2024 £
Analysis of movements in unrestricted funds						
General Fund	268,272	326,547	(325,516)	88,205	5,628	363,136
Long Term Income Fund	385,748	10,976	(4,039)	-	-	392,685
Land and Structures Contingency Accommodation Fund	6,950	-	-	-	-	6,950
Revaluation Reserve	170,200	-	(4,600)	-	-	165,600
Lloyds Surrender Premium fund	242,938	-	-	27,654	-	270,592
Postcode Lottery Access Fund	35,000	-	-	-	(4,000)	31,000
Farm the Flow Carry Over	13,400	-	-	-	-	13,400
From 21/22	1,095	-	-	-	-	1,095
Carry Over From 22/23	10,500	-	-	-	(10,500)	-
Land Rover sale Carry Over	5,982	-	-	-	(2,628)	3,354
From 23/24	-	-	-	-	10,400	10,400
	-	-	-	-	1,100	1,100
	<u>871,813</u>	<u>10,976</u>	<u>(8,639)</u>	<u>27,654</u>	<u>(5,628)</u>	<u>896,176</u>

SEVERN GORGE COUNTRYSIDE TRUST

NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

For the year ended 31 March 2024

11. ANALYSIS OF CHARITABLE FUNDS continued

	At 1 April 2023	Income	Expend- iture	Other recogni- sed gains/ (losses)	Trans- fers	At 31 March 2024
	£	£	£	£	£	£
Analysis of movements in restricted funds						
Alcoa Grant	6,752	-	(183)	-	-	6,569
Primary Care Trust - New Office project	64,616	-	(1,746)	-	-	62,870
Councillors Pride Grant	300	-	-	-	-	300
Gorge Parish Council - Family Friendly walks	500	-	(500)	-	-	-
Telford & Wrekin Council - King's Coronation Grant	1,565	-	(1,565)	-	-	-
Wrekin Housing group - Community Fund	1,000	-	(1,000)	-	-	-
Hilton Jones Charitable Trust - Office Pond	-	1,808	-	-	-	1,808
Green Match Fund Big Give - Ponds Newts and Shoots	-	5,196	-	-	-	5,196
Veolia Envirogrant - Wild Art Workshops	-	974	-	-	-	974
	<u>74,733</u>	<u>7,978</u>	<u>(4,994)</u>	<u>-</u>	<u>-</u>	<u>77,717</u>
Total Funds	<u>1,214,818</u>	<u>345,501</u>	<u>(339,149)</u>	<u>115,859</u>	<u>-</u>	<u>1,337,029</u>

SEVERN GORGE COUNTRYSIDE TRUST

NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

For the year ended 31 March 2024

11. ANALYSIS OF CHARITABLE FUNDS continued

The assets comprising each Fund at 31 March 2024 are as follows:

	Tangible fixed assets £	Fixed asset investments £	Current assets / (Liabilities) £	Total £
Accommodation Fund	165,600	-	-	165,600
Long Term Income Fund	-	337,896	54,790	392,686
Revaluation Reserve Land and Structures	112,830	157,762	-	270,592
Contingency	-	-	6,950	6,950
Lloyds Surrender Premium Fund	-	-	31,000	31,000
Farm the Flow carry over Postcode Lottery Access Fund	-	-	1,094	1,094
Carry Over from 22/23	-	-	13,400	13,400
Land Rover sale	10,400	-	3,354	3,354
Carry Over from 23/24	-	-	-	10,400
Restricted Funds	69,439	-	1,100	1,100
General Fund	266,841	-	8,278	77,717
			96,295	363,136
	<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>
	625,110	495,658	216,261	1,337,029
	<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>	<hr/>

Fund transfers

Lloyds Surrender Premium Budget. A transfer of £4,000 was made to the general fund to offset the depreciation of capital machinery.

Carry Over from 21/22. A transfer of £10,500 was made to the general fund in relation to work carried out during the year that was originally planned to be carried out in 21/22.

Carry Over from 22/23. A transfer of £2,628 was made to the general fund in relation to work carried out during the year that was originally planned to be carried out in 22/23.

Land Rover Sale. A transfer of £13,000 was made from the general fund relating to the profit on sale of the Land Rover. £2,600 was then transferred back to the general fund to write down over the next 5 years against depreciation of Hilux vehicle.

Carry Over from 23/24. A transfer of £1,100 from the general fund was made to cover work planned for 23/24 still outstanding at the year end to be incurred in 24/25.

SEVERN GORGE COUNTRYSIDE TRUST

NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

For the year ended 31 March 2024

11. ANALYSIS OF CHARITABLE FUNDS continued

Purpose of Designated Funds

These are detailed in note 1(h) to the financial statements and also in the Trustees Report.

Purpose of Restricted Funds

These represent grants received and related expenditure in respect of specific projects as outlined above.

12. PENSIONS

Defined Benefit Scheme

The company is a member of the Shropshire County pension fund which operates a pension scheme providing benefits based on final pensionable pay. The assets of the scheme are held separately from those of the company. Contributions to the scheme are charged to the profit and loss account so as to spread the cost of pensions over employees' working lives with the company. The contributions are determined by a qualified actuary on the basis of triennial valuations using assumptions that: project the benefits forward into the future and then adjust them to current day values; estimate the probability of payments needing to be made. The most recent valuation was as at 31 March 2019. The company receives annual reports from the pension scheme which identify its share of the assets and liabilities of the scheme.

The pension charge for the year amounts to £28,000 (2023 - £64,000), against which employer contributions paid over to the scheme amounted to £21,795 (2023 - £30,710), together with the actuarial gains and losses on the scheme for the year is recognised in the statement of Financial Activities in accordance with SORP (FRS 102).

The most recent actuarial valuation showed that the market value of the whole scheme's assets was £1,951m and that the actuarial value of those assets represented 76% of the benefits that had accrued to members, after allowing for expected future increases in earnings.

The company's share of the market values of the main asset classes, at the year end were:

	2024		2023	
	%	£000s	%	£000s
Equities	56.5	622	51.1	502
Government Bonds	0.0	0	0.0	0
Other Bonds	14.6	160	18.8	184
Property	3.5	38	3.3	32
Cash/liquidity	1.4	15	0.5	5
Other	24.0	264	26.3	258

The assets of the Scheme are included in the accounts at open market value as at the year-end, and the liabilities have been calculated using the following actuarial assumptions:

SEVERN GORGE COUNTRYSIDE TRUST

NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

For the year ended 31 March 2024

12. PENSION -continued

	2024 %	2023 %
Rate of increase in salaries	3.95	3.95
Pension increases	2.8	2.8
Rate of discount	4.9	4.8
Inflation - RPI	-	-
- CPI	2.7	2.7

The liabilities are determined using the projected unit method as distinct from the aggregate method used in the triennial valuation. Under the projected unit method, the current service costs will increase as the members of the scheme approach retirement. On this basis, the calculated notional funding position, in respect of the Scheme at 31 March 2024, and at previous year-end, was as follows:

	2024 £000s	2023 £000s
Value of market assets	1,099	981
Value of accrued liabilities	(1,026)	(990)
Surplus/(Deficit)	73	(9)

The actuary has confirmed that the valuation made above under the requirements of FRS102 does not indicate that there is either an immediate funding requirement or any immediate need to change the agreed contribution rates currently in force. The actuary has excluded from both assets and liabilities items which have neutral effect on the Scheme's financial position i.e. additional voluntary contributions, annuities secured in respect of pensions in payment and insurance contract for death in service benefits.

SEVERN GORGE COUNTRYSIDE TRUST

NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

For the year ended 31 March 2024

12. PENSION –continued

The charge to the Statement of Financial Activities over the financial year comprised:

	2024 £000s	2023 £000s
Operating charge		
Current service cost	28	51
Admin expense	1	1
Past service cost/(gain)	-	-
	29	52
Other income/charges		
Expected return on pension scheme assets	(47)	(27)
Interest on pension scheme liabilities	46	39
	(1)	12
Net interest/(return)		
	(1)	12
Total charge to expenditure in the SOFA	28	64

Movement in balance sheet deficit figures during the year:

	2024 £	2023 £
Deficit in scheme at 31 March 2023	(9,000)	(445,000)
Movement in year		
Current service cost	(28,000)	(51,000)
Past service (cost)/gain	-	-
Admin expense	(1,000)	(1,000)
Net interest/return on assets	1,000	(12,000)
Contributions	21,795	30,710
Actuarial gain/(loss)	88,205	469,290
	73,000	(9,000)
Surplus in scheme at 31 March 2024	73,000	(9,000)

13. MEMBERS' GUARANTEE

Severn Gorge Countryside Trust is a company limited by guarantee. Members' liability under the Memorandum of Association is limited to £1 each and the liability continues for one year after the cessation of membership.

14. TAXATION STATUS

The company is a charity under the provisions of the Income and Corporation Taxes Act 1988.

SEVERN GORGE COUNTRYSIDE TRUST

NOTES TO THE FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

For the year ended 31 March 2024

15. CAPITAL COMMITMENTS

At the year end 31 March 2024, the trust was not committed to purchase any assets (2023 - £nil).

Severn Gorge Countryside Trust

Darby Road, Coalbrookdale
Telford, Shropshire, TF8 7EP

Telephone 01952 433880
www.severngorge.org.uk

