

ANNUAL REPORT
FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2024



STORIES OF PEOPLE, LAND AND LEARNING

How we enable young people to
flourish through connections to nature

CONTENTS

Flourish

Verb (SUCCEED) to grow or develop successfully

(Cambridge English Dictionary)

As both a landowning organisation and an educational charity, we know we are naturally unique. We seek to create opportunities that help people flourish through connections to nature.

Read on to see how we continue to nurture this vital work.



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HEADLINE ACHIEVEMENTS

Reasons to be cheerful

The stories behind these headline figures bear witness to transformations made possible as we continue to leverage the value of our assets - our investments, landholdings and our growing team of people, together with carefully chosen partnerships that extend the reach and influence of our work.

School Support



2,930

individual children worked with



745

sessions hosted at our sites from Cumbria to Dorset

100% of teachers who responded to our survey said they would recommend an Outdoor Learning site visit to their school colleagues (66 teachers were surveyed, 69.7% responded, in the period Sept 2023 - July 2024).

£3.6M

CHARITABLE SPEND* (£3.0M 2022/23)

OF WHICH

£2.1M

GRANT-FUNDING AWARDED*

(£1.9M 2022/23)

1,138

TOTAL GRANTS AWARDED*

(903 2022/23)

161,000+

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

Over 161,000 children and young people benefitted from our Outdoor Learning opportunities this year (42,000+ 2022/23**)

*In the year 2023/24

** the previous year's figure used a conservative calculating methodology, this year's figure reflects the actual number.

Charitable Spend:
Growth & Ambition



2022/23



2023/24



2029
(planned - including co-funding)

Our landholdings



9,000

HECTARES
across 9 estates
in 6 counties



25

FARMS
best-practice,
innovative land
management



480+

TENANTS
dwellings, land,
woodland,
commercial
enterprises

1,233 Young people experienced an Outdoor Week of Learning (OWL)* (1,059 2022/23)

308 Green Influencers Scheme events or engagements are estimated to have reached **41,000 people** (in the Scheme's 3-year period, extended to July 2023)

Spending on Grants & Learning increased by 22%* (on 2022/23)

Emerging new generation of young farm tenants on farms across our estates

£1M+ given to schools in Outdoor Essentials Grants up to March 2024, since funding began in 2019

£1.25M total amount of funding directed to **Outdoor Learning Officer Grant** host organisations, since the start of the programme in 2020

22 Host Organisations appointed to our **Blue Influencers Scheme**, helping young people impact blue spaces in their communities

Engaged with 639 children through the **CPAN** (Connecting People and Nature) project in our Cumbria/Lancashire hub*

Energy efficient new build homes for rental being added to our residential property portfolio

Leading the way

There has never been a greater need for the work of The Ernest Cook Trust. Young people are facing overwhelming societal pressures, the education system is under fundamental review, and preventative healthcare, with a focus on mental health, has become a policy priority.

The role of land is a national debate: food security, housing, biodiversity and renewable energy vie for attention but the social and educational purpose of land is rarely discussed.

Through our research and practice, we know that learning outdoors and being able to connect to nature are fundamental goods, capable of enabling young people to flourish. Through our grants and directly-delivered learning programmes we ensure increasing numbers of young people benefit; through our land, programmes and partnerships, we are building compelling evidence to influence others.

Headline figures

In the last year we've increased our spending on Grants and Learning activities by 22% and we remain on-track to increase the spend on our charitable activities to £5M by 2029 (from £3M in 2022/23).

Farming sits at the heart of our organisation and we've been excited to welcome new agricultural apprentices

on our farm at Low Beckside and new farm tenants across our landholdings.

Sophie Iles has become the 7th farming generation of the Iles family in Gloucestershire, joining as tenant at Home Farm. Tom Darlington takes on Wilds Lodge Farm, Little Dalby for his dairy farming operation, with Tess Lincoln coming to the fore at East Farm, Little Dalby with succession on track from her grandfather Tony Reynolds. Together with our existing farm tenants, these represent a dynamic new generation of farming families caring for our land.

We're proud to be introducing energy efficient new build homes to the residential market and to have a number of strategic capital projects across our estates, ensuring our property portfolio continues to deliver returns that support our ambitions for increased charitable spend.

Our Board of Trustees continues to flourish with two new Trustees (Rory Landman and Dr Zainab Kabba) appointed since June 2022. This ongoing succession planning ensures we continue to be equipped with the cross-section of skills required to support our ambitious growth plan.

Operationally our educational output is becoming more distinctive through place-based activities in regional hubs, while we continue to enjoy the freedom

to pilot new initiatives and research across the UK to support the foundations of our work.

Thank You

Our thanks go to the #iwill Fund, The Dulverton Trust and The Aurora Trust, each of whose joint funding has supported the widening reach of our Grants and Learning programmes. We'll continue to actively cultivate connections with like-minded organisations to maximise our charitable impact, reach and influence.

We are particularly indebted to: our growing staff team who make our work happen; Trustee Harry Henderson who is retiring from the Trust after 20 years of service and considered wisdom; our farm tenants - custodians of the majority of our 9,000 hectares of land - for their tireless work running such progressive farm businesses. And finally, the Gollins family whose wonderful gift of Court Farm in Quenington will enable our organisation to continue to thrive as we relocate to our new head office there in 2025!



Mary Riall, Chair



Ed Ikin, Chief Executive
(from December 2023)

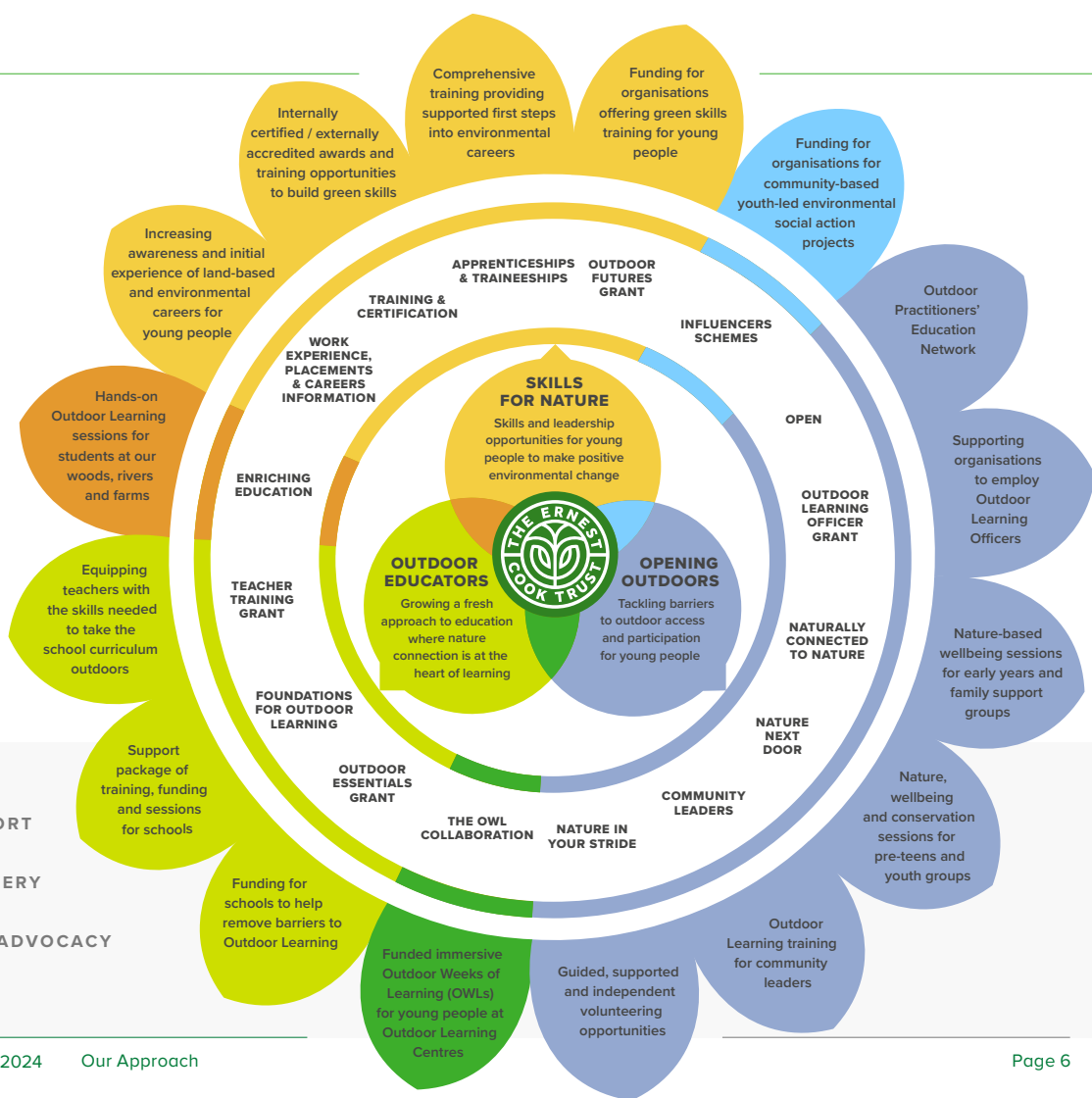


**CHARITABLE
ACTIVITY**

Our Approach

With a charitable object of education, the Trust's work is represented by our nature-inspired Learning Strategy infographic.

Centred around three strategic themes - **Outdoor Educators, Opening Outdoors, Skills for Nature** - programmes and activities emerge offering a wide range of opportunities to help children and young people connect with nature, nurturing a lifelong journey of learning, appreciation and respect for the outdoors.

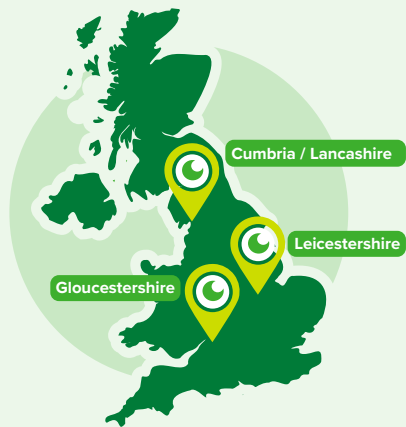


CHARITABLE ACTIVITY

We focus our efforts in three specific geographical hubs to ensure the Trust develops meaningful, place-based programmes with a range of support available through our direct delivery, partnerships and grant funding in each region. The first of our strategic hub reviews will be completed in Gloucestershire, with the aim of identifying and understanding the area's needs and the gaps in provision, which will in turn re-evaluate how we best utilise our assets across the region. Hub reviews will then be conducted for our Cumbria/Lancashire and Leicestershire hubs.

Alongside this geographical focus, we have programmes with projects happening throughout the UK, reflecting how the collaborative nature of our work extends its reach. Please take a look at our [online map](#) to see where we're helping children and young people to flourish.

Geographical hubs



Our Values



Working together and listening deeply to create the conditions for people and places to flourish



Nurturing trust and courage in ourselves and others to make trying new things possible



Making the most of the outdoors as a place where diversity can thrive

Cumbria/Lancashire hub highlights

for 2023/24

The diverse range of activities in our Cumbria/Lancashire hub reflect the diversity of the region – from remote Cumbrian fells to urban communities in Lancashire. Much of what we do here spans multiple themes of the Learning strategy, and so provides excellent case studies of how land can support learning, and why nature connection is so vital for everyone.



Our work in Lancashire is centered around our partnership with the Forest of Bowland National Landscape, delivering targeted support through our schools and community programmes.

In Cumbria, the focus has been on Skills for Nature, strengthening Low Becks Farm as a location to support hands-on learning opportunities for young people. Here, our partners include RSPB and Lowther.

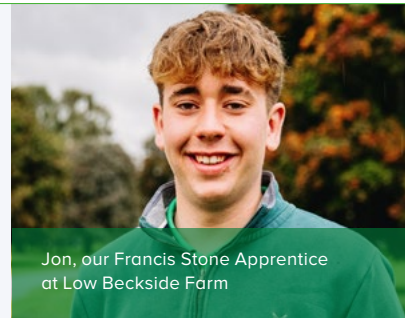
Vicki, Learning Operations Lead (Cumbria/Lancashire)

Young people

- » Awarded the 1st **Francis Stone Apprenticeship**, named after one of the Trust's longest serving farm tenants
- » 3 apprentices joined us at Low Becks Farm, as part of Cumbria Connect Nature Friendly Farming Apprenticeship scheme, in partnership with RSPB and Lowther (more details on page 31)
- » Appointed Abbie, our 1st Outdoor Learning Trainee (based in Lancashire)
- » Exhibited at Green Skills/Careers Fairs at Myerscough College & Carlisle Skills Fair
- » Hosted Training opportunities to develop Skills for Nature at Low Becks Farm
- » Hosted Ullswater Community College Level 2 Animal Care Students at Low Becks Farm
- » Delivered an Outdoor Careers talk to 50 Y6 students at Lancaster Rylands School



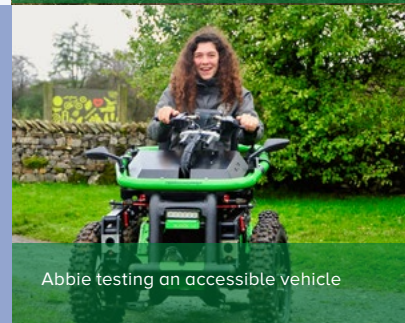
- » Hosted the Trust's Blue Influencers Scheme **Launch** in Morecambe, and the Scheme's Conference at Brathay in Cumbria



Jon, our Francis Stone Apprentice at Low Becks Farm



Apprentices at Low Becks Farm, part of Cumbria Connect Nature Friendly Farming Apprenticeship scheme



Abbie testing an accessible vehicle

CHARITABLE ACTIVITY

CPAN (Connecting People and Nature)

Partnered with Forest of Bowland National Landscape to deliver the [CPAN project](#) engaging with:

- » 639 children
- » 5 schools (Foundations for Outdoor Learning programme)
- » 4 schools (Enriching Education programmes in partnership with Beat the Street & Burnley Leisure Trust)
- » 44 family sessions (including 42 [Little Saplings](#) outdoor toddlers group - more details on page 26)
- » 12 HAF sessions (Holiday Activities and Food programme)
- » Community Leaders Training course in Burnley (7 participants, 5 completed)



www.forestofbowland.com/connecting-people-nature

Connections

- » University of Cumbria - planned field visits for Mapping Environmental Assets course & Upland Farming for Net Zero short courses at Low Becks
- » Member of the steering group for the new Land and Nature Skills Service



Low Becks Farm



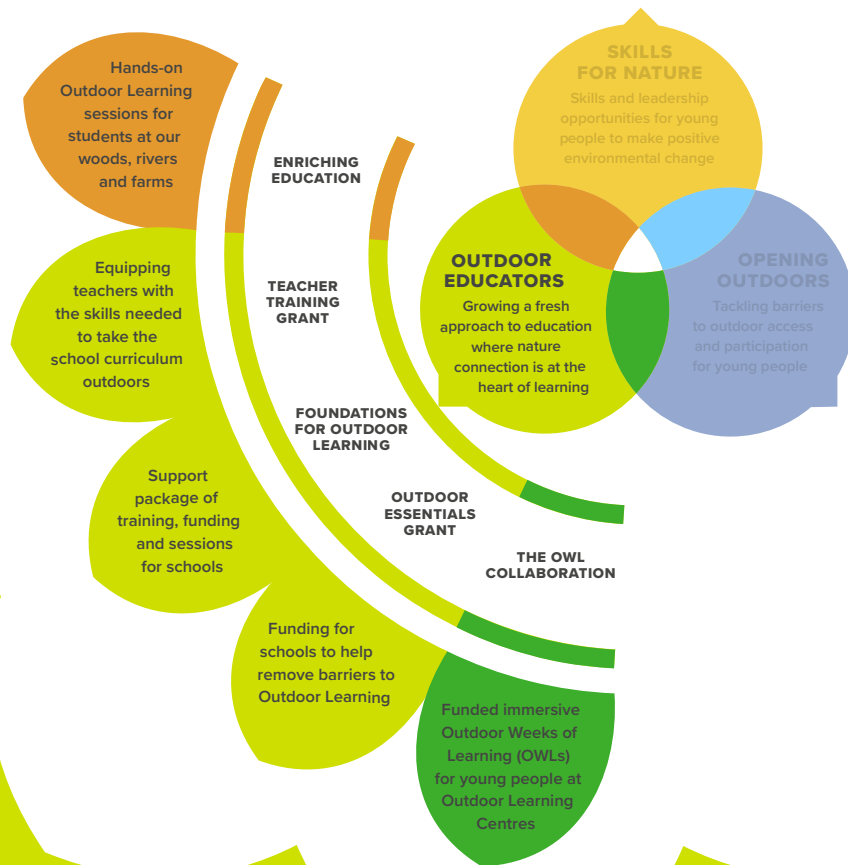
- » Planted 2km hedges, laid 1km hedges
- » Experimented with growing turnips to supplement sheep feed, reducing costs
- » Created 2 wood pastures & 1 orchard
- » Successful 'inter-hub' tugging season for Low Becks Farm's Gimmer hog with our Gimmer sheep while over-wintering at Home Farm in Gloucestershire
- » Signed-up to Climate Farm Demo Project



Some of the stories behind these headlines are featured in the following pages.

OUTDOOR EDUCATORS

Education with nature connection at the heart of learning



Enriching Education

Our Enriching Education programmes support schools' Outdoor Learning through access to the Trust's learning locations – natural landscapes including woodlands, farms and rivers, on and beyond our landholdings. Our Outdoor Learning leaders deliver curriculum-focused sessions which support practical fieldwork and geographical and ecological skills and/or nurturing sessions in calming, safe spaces, allowing children and young people to experience freedom and independence in a way they can't elsewhere.

Nature connection for schools

A child's formative years have an enormous impact on their lifelong environmental concern and nature connectedness. Our **schools programmes** therefore aim to build positive relationships between young people and natural spaces, enabling them to benefit from the strongly evidenced psychological impacts of time outdoors, increasing the likelihood of future pro-environmental behaviour.

We offer long-term support to the schools who need this most. We don't charge for our service, and are constantly working to break down barriers to participation in Outdoor Learning, with two objectives:

- » **To increase schools' ability to deliver the curriculum through Outdoor Learning**
- » **To support delivery for the schools and students in greatest need**

Our approach is to listen to the priorities and concerns of each school, then design Outdoor Learning activities and sessions to meet these needs.

We make Outdoor Learning a positive experience for everyone, which should become a key tool for schools, enhancing academic attainment, wellbeing and environmental engagement.



OUTDOOR EDUCATORS

Listen to our Schools Lead
talk about School River
Visits via the link on page 40



745

individual sessions
(563 2022/23)

During the academic year 2023/24 we worked with **2,930 individual children**, through **745 sessions** at our sites from Cumbria to Dorset. Sessions included woodland, river, farm and Learning Workshop visits.



70%

of sessions for children
scoring high on eligibility
criteria (71% 2022/23)

Our support of schools is based on eligibility criteria including additional needs and community deprivation levels. **70% of sessions** were provided for children from schools or groups scoring highly against these criteria. We were also able to provide Outdoor Learning opportunities for children in schools on the doorstep of our landholdings.



100%

of teachers recommend our
site visits (100% 2022/23)

100% of teachers who responded to our survey said they would recommend an Outdoor Learning site visit to their school colleagues (66 teachers were surveyed, 69.7% responded, in the period Sept 2023 - July 2024).

Schools Fieldwork

We continue to support schools in their Biology Fieldwork, helping GCSE and A level pupils learn the techniques of ecological surveying, as part of the required practicals for their courses.

While at first glance these sessions might appear to involve much counting of grass or bluebells, there is serious ecology at foot, as our Schools Lead explains:

“We offer students a genuine ecological situation with a valid ecological question to be answered; the sessions we facilitate help them understand the point of ecology in the context of real-life conservation work.”

Schools Lead

Using a range of apparatus such as quadrat frames, light meters, soil probes and digital pH meters, students learn fieldwork techniques that would be hard for schools to achieve without the Trust’s support and expertise.

“Science learned in the classroom comes to life in a way that helps give a deeper understanding. For some students, it sparks a real passion for the subject and is the catalyst to further studies beyond secondary school.”

“We feel that this experience is a fantastic opportunity for our pupils to see scientific techniques applied in a real-life context and they also really benefit from your knowledge and experience.”

Teacher GCSE/A level fieldwork session

Most of them have never been to that part of the county and accessed those type of landscapes, so for some it was a truly great adventure.

Teacher: Y10 Food and Nutrition farm visit

This has been the best day ever, in my whole life.

Reception class child: farm visit

One of the quieter members of our class came alive outdoors searching for leaves. The puppets were a lovely touch. They thoroughly enjoyed the relaxed atmosphere and freedom to explore the beautiful nature.

Teacher: Primary School woodland visit

All of the children had a wonderful time, and they all were totally engaged throughout the visit. This is unusual for some as they can find it hard to focus in a 'sit down' learning environment.

Teacher: Primary School farm visit

We have a few very anxious children and yesterday you couldn't tell. They were getting involved, touching and stroking the animals, and getting involved with all the activities.

Teacher: Infant School farm visit

Today was a fantastic experience for our children. There were plenty of WOW moments. One pupil who found it difficult to regulate himself managed to overcome his anxiety and ended up completing the activity independently and demonstrated great resilience.

Teacher: Primary School local green space visit

The students grew in confidence with their abilities in this new environment and thoroughly enjoyed the day.

Teacher: Secondary SEND woodland visit

Foundations for Outdoor Learning

Our Foundations for Outdoor Learning programme is a comprehensive and long-term support package for schools that want to embed Outdoor Learning into their curriculum and practice. Support may include teacher CPD, school grounds advice and mentoring, and occurs primarily at school sites, with some supported visits to their local green spaces and the Trust's Outdoor Learning locations, where possible.

This programme is particularly aimed at schools and groups with a high level of deprivation or need, where there is engagement at a senior level.

This programme is an important element of our Learning strategy, because we know that when a child's day-to-day school experience has Outdoor Learning embedded within it, they will flourish, with improved:

- » **engagement in learning**
- » **mental and physical health and wellbeing**
- » **nature connection**
- » **care and concern for the environment**



Outdoor Essentials Grants

The small grant with the big impact

This Grant is a £500 award to UK state-funded Primary, Secondary, and Special Schools to enable them to get their pupils learning outdoors.

Since it was launched in 2019, 2,553 Grants have been awarded to schools, reaching 489,356 young people (figure as recorded in Grant applications, up to March 2024).

This year (2023/24), we issued 739 Grants.

From November 2023, we offered Secondary Schools a double award of £1,000 (2 x £500) to encourage more applications from this level of education setting.

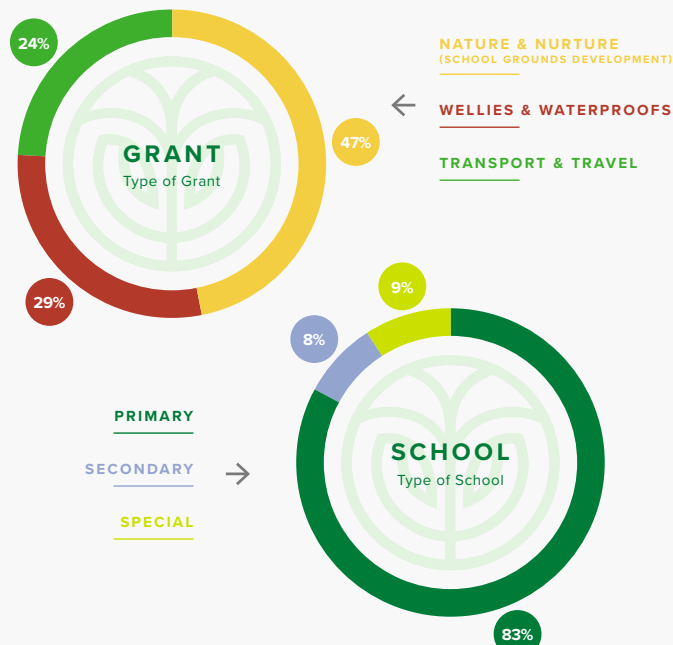
The third round of the Outdoor Essentials Grant funding in 2023/2024 was generously match-funded by The Aurora Trust, a grant making charity which is one of the Sainsbury Family Charitable Trusts. The Aurora Trust's primary focus is tackling climate change through its programme areas: connecting people with nature, sustainable farming, stopping deforestation, aligning financial markets with the Paris Agreement and energy efficiency. The Aurora Trust provided a grant of £99,000 to The Ernest Cook Trust (including £9,000 for administration).



As part of the Trust's place-based funding policy to embed Outdoor Learning, one of the three funded rounds of the Outdoor Essentials Grant in 2023-2024 focused on the geographical hub locations of Gloucestershire (including Bristol and Swindon), Cumbria/Lancashire and Leicestershire.



The Trust has given over £1M to schools through the Outdoor Essentials Grant, since its launch in 2019 up to March 2024. More details [here](#).



Just a really big thank you - it has improved our environment hugely which has had a very big, positive impact on our pupils.

Teacher

OUTDOOR EDUCATORS

The Outdoor Essentials Grant is offered to schools for three categories of use:

Nature & Nurture
school grounds improvements

Transport & Travel
transport costs to Outdoor Learning venues

Wellies & Waterproofs
outdoor clothing

Giving schools a choice of how to spend the Grant allows them to address their particular barriers to accessing nature in the most effective way for them.

This has enabled children to go out in all weathers throughout the seasons, travel to places for new experiences, and engage positively with school – especially when it's emotionally challenging for some pupils. Teachers also report changes to their teaching practices, taking on a whole school approach to getting outside.

EVERY pupil having access to real tools and equipment, not just 'play' versions means that we have been able to transform our forest into a real, working forest, that is now growing fruit and vegetables, as well as fruit trees.

Seeing 14 underprivileged children enjoy farm life without the need for electronics. Seeing them try things out of their comfort zone and having new experiences they will treasure forever.

The Grant ...has allowed us to widen access of our outdoor programmes to pupils in low SIMD (Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation) or Free School Meals categories which has been life changing for these young people.

I think it is so important that the children can see what outside looks like and how exciting it is. Also, what you can do by repurposing materials and upcycling - we live in such a throw away society and this is a way of learning new skills.

Please keep offering these Grants to schools ...Without this Grant we would not have been able to spare £500 to spend on these items. The benefits are far-reaching for these children.

The most valuable outcome of the Grant was that it allowed some of our most vulnerable pupils with really challenging lives to experience the joy of the seaside and enjoyment of the simple pleasures of building sandcastles – many of them had never seen the sea and were utterly thrilled to be able to paddle, splash and be care-free children.

Headteacher from Leicestershire



The OWL Collaboration

We fund immersive Outdoor Weeks of Learning (OWLs) at Outdoor Learning Centres for children and young people, giving them a unique opportunity to explore nature, while living and learning together.

Our year in numbers...



We believe every child should experience an immersive week in nature – as a rite of passage, rather than a journey for the fortunate few.

Our Theory
of Change



1,233

YOUNG PEOPLE

rolled up their sleeves and got stuck in on an Outdoor Week of Learning

(1,059 2022/23)



62

SCHOOLS

with high levels of need packed their waterproofs and positive spirits to embrace a week in the outdoors

(55 2022/23)



9

**OUTDOOR
LEARNING
PARTNERS**

designed and delivered immersive and challenging weeks in the outdoors



54%

of participants were eligible for **FREE SCHOOL MEALS**

(52% 2022/23)



32%

of participants had **SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS**

(34% 2022/23)



46%

of participants were from **MINORITISED ETHNIC GROUPS**

(30% 2022/23)



32

**SCHOOL
TRANSPORT
GRANTS**

(£37,100)



21

**SCHOOL
TEACHER
TRAINING
GRANTS**

(£23,333)

Pupil outcomes

OWLs take our children and young people off screens and into a week of challenging outdoor discovery, routine and teamwork. This year our evaluation told us that this results in **statistically significant improvements** in:

Nature Connection

(Inclusion of Nature in Self Scale)

Care and Concern for the Environment

(Custom Scale)

Wellbeing

(Short Warwick Edinburgh Mental Health Scale)

Resilience

(GRIT scale)

If I could give it a number out of 10, it would be 10!

It was the best! It was such a break from school. It was such a break from home...

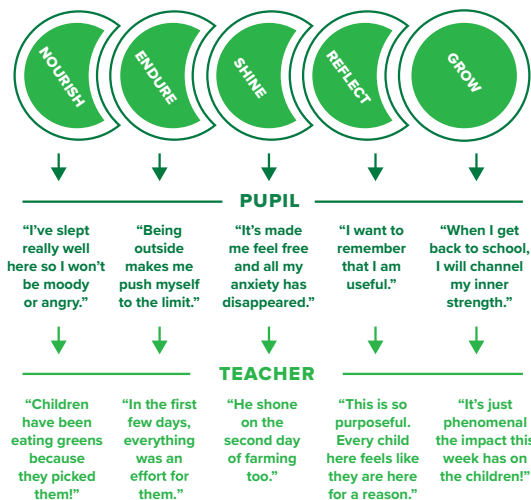


6 weeks on, teachers tells us that more pupils are...

- » showing positive environmental behaviours
- » dealing with problems well
- » engaging in their learning

The children have a better sense of themselves and what they can do, some have come back more resilient, others will try things they wouldn't have tried before.

A Pathway to Personal Growth



Click to hear pupils and teachers testify to the transformative power of an immersive week in nature.

View our [Research Poster](#), offering salient learnings from the first three years of the programme, as presented at the Nature Connection Conference at the University of Derby in June 2024.

THE OWL COLLABORATION

School outcomes

An OWL-inspired book for Barry, South Wales

On receiving an OWL Outdoor Learning training grant, 60 children and 8 teachers from the Pencoedre Learning Cluster worked with a local author to create 'Muck & Magic'. The story is inspired by their OWL at Lower Treginnis with Farms for City Children and has helped them to reflect on everything they learnt during their week on the farm and apply it to their lives back at school.



As a result of sharing the book with more than 1,500 children across our schools, it has ignited a curiosity and love for Outdoor Learning. The pupils are currently working on developing their own garden to grow their own food and cook for their families and community.

Hannah Cogbill, Pencoedre Learning Cluster, Barry

OWL mentors & an Eco Team in Bristol

An Outdoor Week of Learning has become a popular part of the school calendar at City Academy, Bristol and in their third OWL year, the school decided to give some pupils the chance to develop their leadership skills and return to Shallowford Farm for the second time, as OWL mentors.

In addition, the school were supported with grants to help them embed their Outdoor Learning. Pupils from the School Eco Team have now created a wildlife pond, a hedgehog garden and are involved in tending the school's community allotment.



We saw a big change. As the week progressed, the OWL mentors took on more responsibilities. We could step back and they were leading. We don't have the opportunity for them to do that here. The mentors also develop skills that they are not able to at school. Now, the whole staff body wants to go!

Felicia Lazar, City Academy, Bristol

We are grateful to The Dulverton Trust who support The OWL Collaboration, and to our Outdoor Learning partners:



Network outcomes



Together we have...

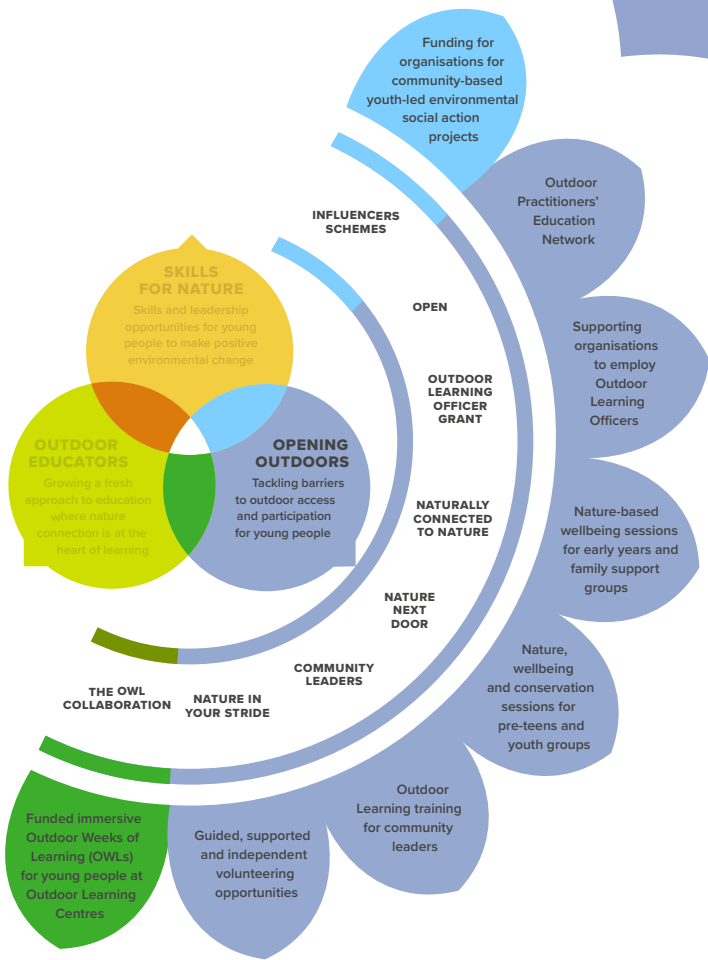
- » Developed shared resources to improve programme accessibility
- » Broadened expertise through joint training and Network-wide visits
- » Amplified our collective voice through sharing evaluation outcomes at webinars and events

Partner voices...

This is a fantastic programme and is growing in the opportunities and impact it is having.

On a day-to-day level, The Ernest Cook Trust have been extremely approachable, supportive and flexible.

OWL has helped us shape and strengthen our programme delivery through its provision and proactive, inclusive approach.



OPENING OUTDOORS

Tackling barriers to outdoor access and participation

Communities programmes

The Trust continues to evolve its **Communities** programmes, with a particular focus on those facing challenging circumstances, and harder to reach young people who are not well represented in outdoor spaces and careers.

We work to overcome barriers to participation and access to the outdoors, and use our landholdings to support Outdoor Learning.

Supporting Biodiversity

Boost for Biodiversity Orchard Restoration Project

Working in partnership with CPRE Gloucestershire and Orchard Revival with funding from Severn Trent Water, we have been restoring the vital habitats at Halmore Orchard on our Slimbridge Estate in Gloucestershire, which supports a wide range of flora and fauna.

- » **108 volunteer hours**
- » **3.7 acres of derelict orchard restored - pruning, mistletoe removal, habitat creation**
- » **1 acre of new orchard created**
- » **39 trees planted - 29 varieties of heritage apple**
- » **1,167 metres of hedgerow surveyed**
- » **14 bird boxes built and installed**



Launched in January 2024, our **Supported Volunteering** programme recognises that some young adults require additional support to participate in practical conservation volunteering roles. Through activities such as tree planting, site maintenance and habitat creation, young people gain technical skills, learn to problem solve and work as a team, while building confidence, self-esteem and friendships.

- » **Young adults have contributed 72 volunteering hours**
- » **3 John Muir Awards achieved**



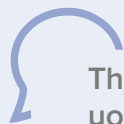
COMMUNITIES PROGRAMMES

Supporting Carers

An unpaid carer provides support or looks after a family member, partner or friend who needs help because of frailty, physical or mental illness, addiction, or disability.

In Gloucestershire, we have approximately 52,000 carers with 7,000 young carers. *

* Carer Aware



The sessions you run have been brilliant, you have made the sessions bespoke for young carers to support their emotional wellbeing during difficult times at home. We really appreciate the work that you do for us, we think it's amazing, you guys are amazing and it really makes a difference to the young carers we support.

Group Leader, Gloucestershire Young Carers



100 young carers attended nature wellbeing events in Gloucestershire, enabling them to connect with others with similar lived experience. As well as providing respite, they enable young carers to spend time with peers who understand their daily challenges and the impacts on their lives.

3 parent carers (parents with additional care responsibilities for a child) from Gloucestershire Parent Carers Forum attended nature-based activities on our Fairford Estate to support their wellbeing and provide inspiration for their own activities.

At Carers Rights Day in Fairford, Gloucestershire, we supported Gloucestershire Carers Hub, with the Department for Work & Pensions, Cotswold District Council and the NHS, promoting the role that nature connection can play for carers and the person they care for.

COMMUNITIES PROGRAMMES

Supporting Wellbeing

In 2019, suicide was the leading cause of death for males and females aged between 5 - 34.

1 in 6 children aged 5 - 16 were identified as having a probable mental health problem in 2021. *

* YoungMinds, mental health charity

Many of the young people we aim to support have negative experiences of education and learning, closely associating it with failure, deeming it unobtainable. We offer a safe, welcoming and supporting environment, tailoring activities to strengthen the basic building blocks of wellbeing — confidence, resilience, self-esteem and trust (in themselves, others and the world around them), to support engagement in informal and non-formal learning.

Read Joe's Story on page 29 - a great example of how we work to support young people across multiple programmes, from school to college and beyond.



Outdoor Learning Officer Grant

The **Outdoor Learning Officer Grant** supports charities and non-profit organisations who want to employ an Outdoor Learning Officer, prioritising those whose approach is to encourage young people to enjoy the outdoors and engage with nature. Through these inspirational role models, young people form lasting connections with nature, learning about land, food production and biodiversity which drives a healthy respect for their local environment and ongoing sustainable behaviour.

The total amount of funding directed to host organisations since the start of the programme in 2020 is £1,284,301.

This Grant is a three-year award, take a look at our online [map](#) to see where all our 40 funded Outdoor Learning Officer Grants are making a difference (figure correct at December 2024).

Our Outdoor Practitioners' Education Network (OPEN) brought together funded Outdoor Learning Officers from across the UK at online and in-person events to help share skills, develop practice and foster mutual support.

Feedback has been very positive and we are looking forward to developing this Network further in consultation with funded partners across our regional hubs.



A further 10 Outdoor Learning Officer Grants were awarded in 2023/2024, with the offer increased to £20,000 per year for three years:

Cumbria/ Lancashire hub

- ▶ Cumbria Wildlife Trust
- ▶ LESS Lancaster
- ▶ ParkView4U
- ▶ Watchtree Nature Reserve

Gloucestershire hub

- ▶ Avon Wildlife Trust
- ▶ Cotswold National Landscape
- ▶ The Birch Collective
- ▶ Severn Rivers Trust
- ▶ Tewkesbury Nature Reserve

Leicestershire hub

- ▶ LEAF (Linking Environment and Farming)



A quick note to say thank you for yesterday. It was great to bring everyone together. They are an impressive bunch!

It was fantastic to meet such a dedicated and talented group of people. I feel we can all learn and grow together, and I am really looking forward to working with you! An inspiring day and I'm sure you will agree, massive thanks to The Ernest Cook Trust for organising and facilitating this!



I just wanted to send a heartfelt Thank You to you all for our brilliant day on Thursday. It was amazing to meet other people with the same role – we all have amazing knowledge but are all so different at the same time. I think sharing skills and knowledge is such a wonderful idea and I'm more than happy to collaborate with this. Thanks again and hope to have the chance to meet up with you all again!!

Little Saplings

Based on the Forest School ethos, the **Little Saplings** outdoor toddler group is designed to nurture independent play for toddlers (6 months – 5 years), while supporting parents and carers to reconnect with nature and improve their mental health and wellbeing.

Little Saplings is part of the CPAN project, delivered in partnership with Forest of Bowland National Landscape, supported by the National Lottery Heritage Fund. Sessions are led by one of our Outdoor Learning Officers.

Families attending the popular group in Pendle and Burnley, Lancashire were given a Little Saplings Explorer Kit - this goody bag included resources designed to help further their connection with nature in their local green spaces.



www.forestofbowland.com/connecting-people-nature



This is something my little boy absolutely loves, as an opportunity to be outdoors to pick what interests him, develop their reading skills, their listening skills, also their curiosity when they're out and about digging.

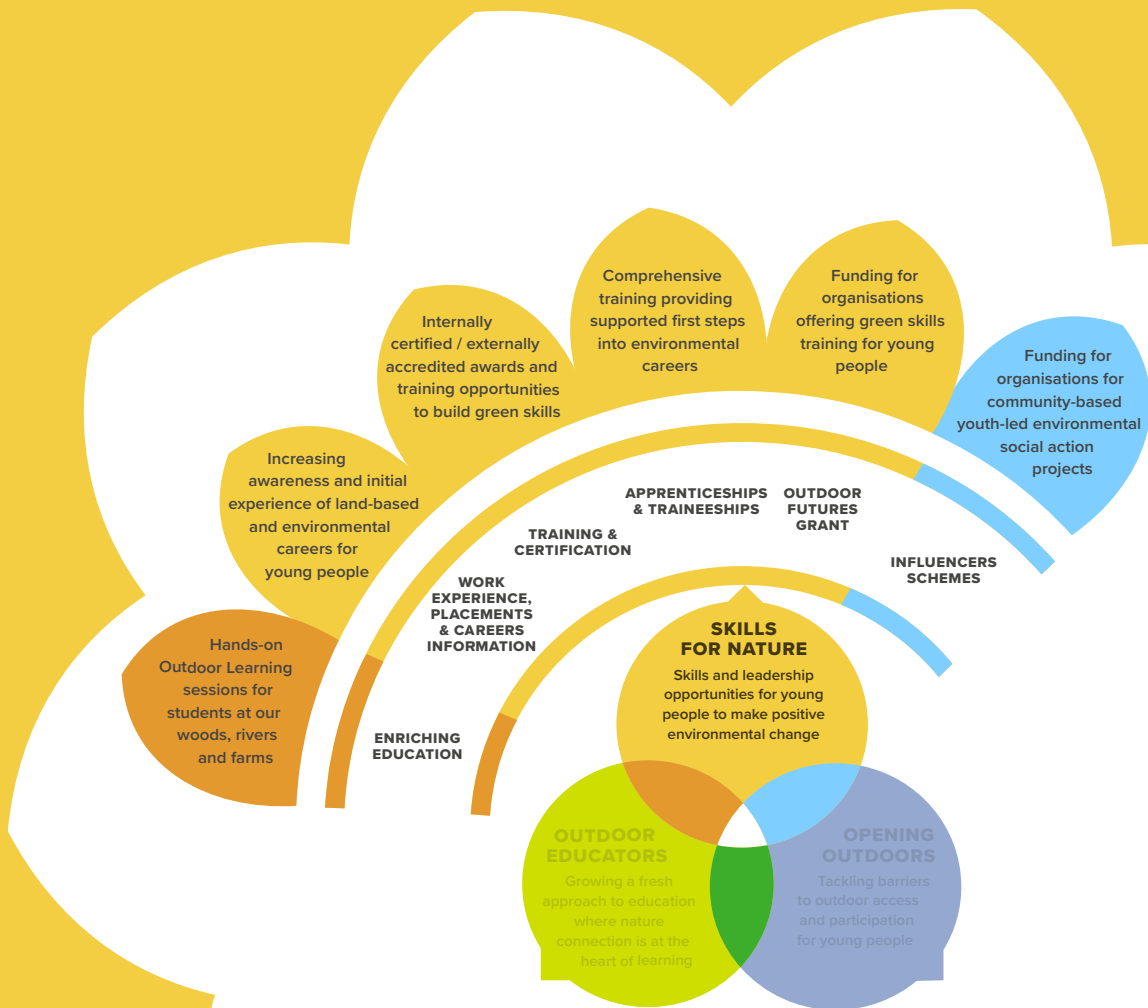
Parent



Outdoor play, whatever the weather – watch this video

SKILLS FOR NATURE

Skills and leadership opportunities for positive environmental change



Equipping the future custodians of our landscapes

Our Skills for Nature programmes and grant streams provide a wide range of opportunities for young people of all abilities, particularly those who face barriers to participation and employment in the outdoors, and young people who tend to flourish better outside the classroom.

The Trust's landholdings offer a range of outdoor spaces and opportunities for learning, which we continue to leverage. Our Cumbria/Lancashire hub, home to our own Low Becks Farm, is well-placed for this work and has strengthened its relationships with many external partners and organisations, while hosting apprentices and skills training events. These are summarised on page 8.

There is also a wealth of skills being learned by children and young people at our Learning Workshop in Fairford, and those who participate in Influencers Schemes across England.

'Skills for Nature' is about creating **green skills pathways** and leadership opportunities, offering practical ways for young people to contribute to environmental change while gaining a sense of agency and improved wellbeing in the process. Our programmes also help to address skills shortages in the land-based sector, equipping a future workforce with the knowledge, experience and skills needed to be the next custodians of our landscapes.



Joe's story

Joe first attended the Trust's Learning Workshop in Fairford through the Schools Programme for three years, when his confidence, skill level and social skills improved dramatically. Joe completed our Supervised, Competent and Independent Worker Awards and went on to do an internship at Abingdon & Witney College.

Joe has since returned to The Ernest Cook Trust as a Supported Volunteer through our Communities Programme, to experience work as a volunteer and further develop his skills and passion for working outdoors.

I've done woodturning and wood shaving and learnt to weld for the first time. I've actually enjoyed all of it - everything!"

Joe



Joe receiving his Award certificates from Mary Riall, (Chair of Trustees) with Pete, our Outdoor Learning Officer who oversaw Joe's Learning Workshop sessions

'Shelldon' - Joe's turtle sculpture

I wanted to express what a huge debt of gratitude our whole family owes to you and The Ernest Cook Trust.

Our son Joe has attended your sessions on Thursdays for the last three years with [Abingdon &] Witney College, and over that time we have seen his confidence grow and his whole personality mature. Joe has loved every one of the sessions, from learning about the various tools, making the beautiful bug houses and bird boxes, right through to the fabulous bench for Fresh Air Sculpture and of course Shelldon and the bird table from this year's show.

Your kind, patient manner gave Joe the perfect base from which to believe he did have skills and could achieve things – so different to the classroom where Joe was always used to being the least able. Joe has proudly shown off every photo and told us stories of learning to weld, helping newer students to use the tools and having a laugh along the way.

The care and effort that goes into helping students like Joe cannot be underestimated, and we are so grateful to you and The Ernest Cook Trust team for making these sessions happen.

Joe is usually very quiet with visitors at home, preferring to stay in his room, however, since we were able to bring Shelldon home Joe is straight out to see visitors and explains to them all the stages he went through in creating Shelldon. It has really made a massive difference to him.

Letter from Joe's Mum

Outdoor Futures Grant

The Trust awarded Outdoor Futures Grants to the following organisations in 2023/24:

- » **QEST (Queen Elizabeth Scholarship Trust)**
Master Thatcher Apprentice
- » **LEAF (Linking Environment and Farming)**
Access to Farms Grant towards the dissemination of the Industry Code of Practice (ICOP)
- » **Small Woods Association**
National Coppice Apprentices

The following Grants are part of The Ernest Cook Trust's Platinum Jubilee Award, first awarded in 2022 and awarding £15,000 per year for three years to support these apprenticeship and training schemes:

- » **National Hedgelaying Society**
Training Events & Accreditation Scheme with LANTRA
- » **Dry Stone Walling Association**
Dry Stone Walling Apprentice



It has been an incredibly enriching year and my continued enjoyment in the work reinforces that this shift in career was a step in the right direction.”

Nick, Coppice Apprentice



The Grant has provided greater opportunities for both the agriculture and education sectors, raising greater awareness of both the farmer and teacher versions of the ICOP

Philip Adams, LEAF Education Manager

Apprentices at Low Beckside Farm

Three apprentices joined us at Low Beckside Farm, as part of Cumbria Connect Nature Friendly Farming Apprenticeship scheme, in partnership with RSPB and Lowther.

Working collaboratively, this scheme empowers the next generation to become champions of conservation and lead the way to a sustainable future, propelling nature recovery into a promising career path.

Elli started her apprenticeship in October 2023. Her second placement was at Low Beckside Farm, where she thoroughly immersed herself in all aspects of farm life.

“I wasn’t brought up in the countryside nor was I brought up around agriculture so this is all still really new to me. Learning how to plant trees, lay hedges, shear sheep, dry stone wall, environmental schemes, soil health, grazing patterns, lambing and animal care. This apprenticeship has offered me so much support, learning and guidance and the ability to try new things that I never thought I would be able to do! Gaining valuable experiences that will stay with me for the rest of my life.”



View ITV’s coverage of Elli and this scheme, as it rolled out across our partner’s sites.

Influencers Schemes

Our **Influencers Schemes** help young people (target age 10 – 14 year-olds) impact the environment through youth social action projects that benefit their communities, while helping them to create lasting and meaningful connections with nature.

The youth-led Green Influencers Scheme ran for three years until July 2023 and proved to be a successful model for the subsequent Blue Influencers Scheme, launched in September 2023, which helps young people address environmental concerns in their coastal, river and estuary communities – ‘blue’ spaces across England.

A comprehensive evaluation of the Green Influencers Scheme to measure impact and effectiveness was commissioned, which then became central to an online Dissemination & Celebration event, attended by leaders, practitioners and academics working in the youth charity sector and beyond. Speaking at the event, our Chief Executive, Ed Ikin shared this observation:

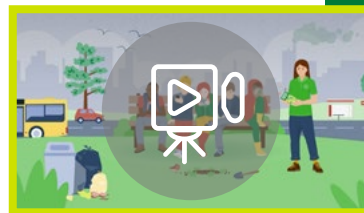
“Being youth-led increases agency and the skills that the young people have in terms of delivery and gives far more compelling outcomes with a greater legacy.”

Tasneem, who has been a Youth Advisory Board member since the launch of the Influencers Schemes, shared this reflection: “Children growing up with this connection to nature in a much more vibrant, interactive way is just amazing to think of, that’s my favourite outcome - the impact and the legacy that it’s bringing.”

We invite you to **read** the **Green Influencers Scheme Evaluation Report** independently authored by Wavehill, which gives a fascinating insight into its work and impacts.



wavehill
Social and economic research



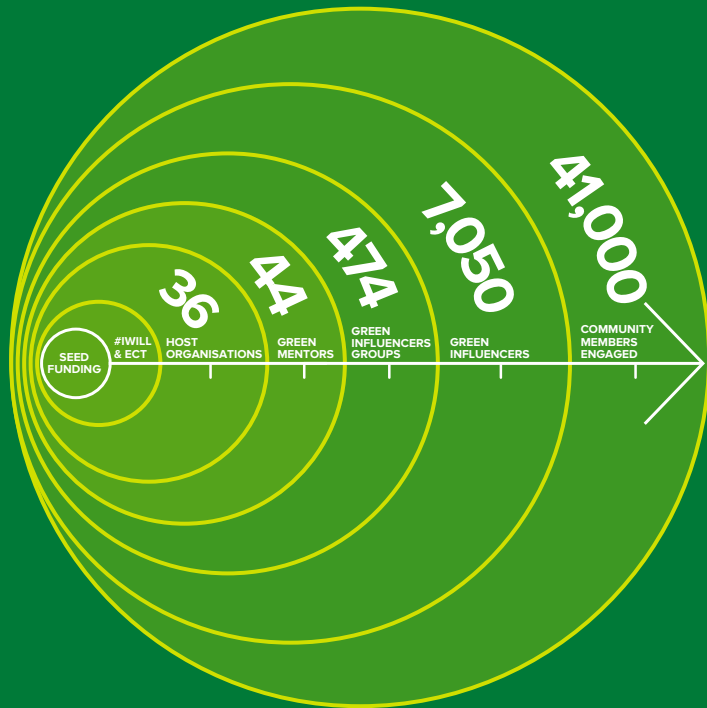
This video tells the story of our Green Influencers Scheme and its impacts, please take a look



Influencers Schemes



We held our annual Influencers Schemes conference in March 2024 for Blue Mentors and Host Organisations. Designed to inform, inspire and motivate, the event featured a workshop by Dr Emma McKinley, a Senior Research Fellow at Cardiff University who has been commissioned by the Trust to research young people's relationship with blue spaces. Speakers and workshop leaders also included #iwill Ambassador Phoebe Hanson, Kids Against Plastic founders Ella and Amy Meek and three members of Youth Ocean Network, a youth organisation of the Marine Conservation Society.



After the event, our Youth Leadership Programmes Manager shared some of her reflections, listen here



Blue Influencers Scheme

The **Blue Influencers Scheme** works in collaboration with Host Organisations across England, which can be found on this online [map](#).



Take A Part

Unique projects are emerging from the Blue Influencers Scheme, including this video by Ocean City Influencers, a group established through Plymouth based host organisation, Take A Part.



One of the aims of Influencers Schemes is to create a 'ripple effect' of social action, long after the life of the programme; with this in mind we asked our Youth Leadership Programme Manager what she anticipated this might look like for the Influencers, listen to her response here:



PLAY VIDEO LINK



This three-year Scheme is joint-funded by the #iwill Fund. The #iwill Fund is made possible thanks to £66M joint investment from The National Lottery Community Fund and the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) to support young people to access high quality social action opportunities. The Ernest Cook Trust is acting as a match-funder and awarding grants on behalf of the #iwill Fund.



Follow us [@BlueInfluencers](#) to stay up to date with Blue Influencers Scheme activities across England.

Proudly supporting youth social action





OUR
LANDHOLDINGS



OUR LANDHOLDINGS



Dan Belcher, Manor Farm,
Little Dalby



9,000

HECTARES
across 9 estates
in 6 counties



25

FARMS
best-practice, innovative
land management



480+

TENANTS
dwellings, land, woodland,
commercial enterprises

Building on our founder's love of the countryside, we are committed to the progressive stewardship of our landholdings, ensuring that all activities support our vision for an environmentally engaged society with stronger connections to nature.

The multiple values of our landholdings

As both a landowning organisation and charitable trust, we cover a lot of ground.

This unique breadth to our identity means that we must consider the multiple values of our landholdings - their economic, educational, cultural, social and environmental worth. Taking this carefully balanced view ensures that we make well-informed decisions around land-use, supporting a wide range of activities. Collectively, these provide vital sources of income to help sustain our Outdoor Learning and grant giving activities, and crucially, meet our charitable object of education.



Moss Bridge on the River Coln,
Fairford Estate

Estate Management

Ongoing growth and creating opportunities

Active estate management dictates that we are constantly looking for new opportunities and ways to evolve and improve our income stream in support of the Trust's charitable activities. While looking at the overall context of our estates, we also recognise that each area of land is unique, and so is evaluated based on its own attributes, while continually striving to work in harmony with the natural environment.

We aspire to effect change, using our unique position to help shape the national debate around land, nature recovery and food security in this unprecedented era.

“Our task is to exemplify the role that land can play, to tell a meaningful story of how land can be managed, being long-term around supporting agriculture while thinking crucially about how land can transform lives.”

Ed Ikin, Chief Executive



Little Dalby

OUR LANDHOLDINGS

Woodland Management

Dealing with trees affected by ash dieback has become a major aspect of our Gloucestershire-based Conservation & Woodland Manager's work, assisted by his team. The aim is to replace every tree lost with at least one, ideally two new trees, planted in areas of parkland and as replacement for hedgerow trees. Species being planted include rowan, crab apple and field maple, along with some English oak, selected for their ability to support wildlife with increased benefits for nature.

Tree planting of a different kind has been happening on our Hartwell Estate in Buckinghamshire, where native hardwoods and shrub species are helping to screen Whaddon Hill Farm from HS2, which now occupies land previously farmed by the Woodford family. The new planting provides a valuable wildlife corridor, connecting two established woodland blocks, and will provide a fantastic habitat to local ecology.

With approximately 50 acres of established woodland, our Cumbrian farm, Low Beckside, is home to conifer plantations and mixed species woodlands, including some ancient and veteran trees. Our woodland management plan features the creation of wood pastures and re-planting of mixed species in place of our plantations. We're working hard to reinstate hedgerows and recreate several traditional orchards. All this, with the aim of increasing biodiversity, creating shelter for our livestock and safeguarding our Outdoor Learning spaces for years to come. By the end of 2024 we will have planted 50,000 hedgerow plants/trees, which translates to approximately 6,800m of hedgerows.

Read more about the work of our Foresters [here](#)



On our Home Estates, a scheme to replant cricket bat willow alongside the River Coln continues, supplying willow to leading cricket bat makers JS Wright & Sons – hear more about this [here](#). (this audio was originally created for our in-house Founder's day walk along the River Coln between Fairford and Quenington in Gloucestershire):



Hedging at Low Beckside Farm, Cumbria



Cricket bat willows, Fairford



Tree planting, Hartwell

OUR LANDHOLDINGS

Higher Tier Countryside Stewardship Grants

Over 600 acres of land on our **Little Dalby Estate** in Leicestershire, together with 400 acres of Low Becksid Farm in Cumbria have been put into Higher Tier Countryside Stewardship, to support large-scale projects.

On our Little Dalby Estate the scheme is being implemented by the Trust in collaboration with our tenant farming businesses, in an effort to farm in tune with nature, mitigate climate change and help reduce the flood risk. The capital investment projects include:

- » Planting of 40 trees, 2km+ new hedging, 1km hedge restoration
- » Livestock drinking water system (10 troughs, 2,500m of piping)
- » 45 acres of flower-rich field margins and plots
- » 100 acres of arable converted to pasture, reducing soil erosion
- » 30 acres managed for habitat renewal
- » 18 acres of winter bird food planted to attract farmland birds

On **Low Becksid Farm** in Cumbria, projects for the scheme include:

- » Protecting and restoring peat forming processes on areas of existing peat, creation of 70 acres of fen
- » Protecting the SSSI upland meadows
- » Protecting the SSSI River Glenderamackin
- » Protecting purple moor grass & rush pasture habitat
- » Providing suitable habitat for Curlew & Snipe
- » Educational visits

Low Becksid is a Climate Farm Demo farm, along with Leafield Farm and Eastleach Downs Farm in Gloucestershire, and East Farm in Little Dalby, all part of a long-term European project to test and implement climate friendly farming methods, sharing learning across other farms. We are also piloting four desk-top models with farm tenants, exploring the potential for green social prescribing, carbon trading, biodiversity net gain and natural farm management.



OUR LANDHOLDINGS

River Coln Catchment activities

At the heart of the Trust's Fairford Estate is an almost three-mile stretch of the River Coln and surrounding catchment. Since 2022, with grant funding from our partners at the Farming & Wildlife Advisory Group (FWAG), we have significantly invested in a programme to restore an ecologically healthy and diverse catchment.

Hear more about the River Coln Catchment Plan from our Managing Agent:



The programme is a great example of effective river management, protecting and improving the environmental, educational and social offering. Learn more about the wider catchment area via these audio links, originally created for our in-house Founder's Day walk along the River Coln upstream from Fairford to Quenington.

We invite you to listen to our Schools Lead explain why the River Coln in Gloucestershire is such a fascinating place for School River visits:



Learn more about the sensory activities we offer young people on the River Coln, as described by our Communities Lead:



River Coln, Fairford Estate

Farming and the Environment

Our operational assets, collaborating to create learning opportunities on our land

Our rural landholdings are living communities, homes to progressive tenanted farm businesses, residential tenants and small enterprises, while also serving as unique open-air ‘classrooms’ for our Outdoor Learning programmes.

Farm buildings that work

At Milton Farm on our Fairford Estate, the problematic location of the original farmyard – down a narrow lane on the edge of the town - resulted in investment in the creation of a new farmyard off nearby Welsh Way, on the site of a disused building, already served by a farm track. This solution works for both the Trust and the farm tenant, freeing up the old yard for new opportunities, while future-proofing the new farmyard with space for expansion.

Listen to this fascinating audio from Tom Paton, farm tenant at Milton Farm, about living and farming in the Fairford area, originally produced for our in-house Founder’s Day walk:



Read how [robots have boosted dairy output](#) on Slimbridge Farm in Gloucestershire

OUR LANDHOLDINGS

Foraging at Little Dalby

Tess and Tom Lincoln, farmers at East Farm on our Little Dalby Estate in Leicestershire, have teamed up with a full-time forager to offer foraging events on the farm, as part of a drive to share their passion to get people closer to farming, learn about food production and countryside management. The farm, which has been in a Higher Tier Countryside Stewardship scheme for the last ten years, is ideal for this venture, with its water meadows and woodland. The Lincolns have also joined the Government's Sustainable Farming Incentive which pays farmers to undertake management practices that protect the environment, support food production and improve productivity.

Wildflower project, backed by Air Wick

An ambitious project to restore a species-rich grassland to one of our farms, with the support of an air freshener maker, is bringing the sweet smell of conservation success to parts of the Little Dalby Estate.

The Ernest Cook Trust and farm tenant, Ben Barnes, teamed up with air freshener maker Air Wick, WWF and the Trent Rivers Trust to bring back flower-rich grassland appropriate for the local geography within the catchment of the River Soar. These wildflowers grow on less productive land close to the Leicestershire Round footpath, bringing visitors as well as pollinating insects to this wildflower sanctuary, which will help to restore some of the 97% of lowland wildflower meadows that have disappeared from the English countryside in the last 100 years.

We own 87 allotment plots across four of our estates. Read more about these [here](#).



OUR LANDHOLDINGS

Introducing a new generation of farmers

We look forward to welcoming new farm tenants to The Ernest Cook Trust farming community. One is already well known to us – Sophie Iles, who is the 7th generation of her family to farm on our Home Estates. Sophie, who is currently finishing her Farm Business Management degree at Reading University is the new farm tenant at Home Farm on the Hatherop Estate, bringing energy, new ideas and an enthusiasm for Outdoor Learning to the role.

The new farm tenant at Wilds Lodge Farm in Little Dalby is 20-year-old Tom Darlington, who is already a well-established dairyman on his family's farm, which sits adjacent to Wilds Lodge.

Both were selected after a robust, comprehensive selection process, and join a growing new generation of innovative young farmers on the Trust's farms.



Sophie Iles



Tess Lincoln



Tom Darlington

We are very proud of Hector, our Farmer at Low Beckside Farm in Cumbria, who was awarded the prestigious accolade of 'Young Farmer of the Year 2024' by the National Federation of Young Farmers' Clubs in November 2024.



Investing for the Future



A trading subsidiary of The Ernest Cook Trust

Development, investment and growth

The Trust is an educational charity. However, like many private sector landed estates across the country, we are responding to the economic and legislative pressures placed upon rural property, our tenanted farm businesses, home occupiers and land users. We are committed to supporting the long-term vitality of our landholdings, through diversification and collaboration with existing tenants, exploring new social, environmental and financial opportunities.

Our long-term landholding decisions will be based on a continually evolving framework that ensures we are assessing the many land-use choices and opportunities.

We continue to direct significant expenditure on repairs and maintenance, as part of our long-term commitment to our property portfolio, across the

rural commercial, residential and agricultural sectors. The residential portfolio has been supplemented by new modern homes built directly by the Trust, while a small number of residential properties have been identified for sale as part of a programme of gradual modernisation across our property portfolio, in the interests of reducing our maintenance costs and improving environmental standards.

Progressive stewardship and sustainable growth of our landholdings will not be achieved without collaborating with key stakeholders and embracing change, ensuring they are conserved for the future prosperity of the communities where we work, and the core educational objectives of the Trust.



New Homes

The Trust has added to its portfolio of residential property with five new-build homes in Fairfield, a project overseen by our in-house professional team through our trading subsidiary, Mintglebe Ltd. These highly anticipated two- and three-bedroom homes have been named Fiennes Court in memory of the late Nathaniel Fiennes, Lord Saye and Sele, a former Trustee who served the Trust for many years, and sadly passed away in January 2024 aged 103.

While the properties have a relatively traditional outward appearance, they all boast strong, 21st century eco-friendly features, reflecting our commitment to responsible environmental stewardship. All are equipped with roof-mounted solar panels on the carports and have pre-installed cabling for EV charging points. The properties have been given the highest EPC 'A' rating for their energy efficiency, all exceed standard building insulation requirements and benefit from ground-source heat pumps. New tenants will move in to Fiennes Court in early 2025.

OUR LANDHOLDINGS

Court Farm – our new head office

Following the generous gift to the Trust of Court Farm, from the Gollins family, refurbishments of Court Farmhouse and Stables have been progressing at pace. We look forward to relocating the Trust's head office operations in early 2025, bringing our specialist teams to Quenington, at the heart of our Home Estates in Gloucestershire.

As with Fiennes Court, this refurbishment has been overseen by our own in-house professional team.

At our in-house Founder's Day event in the grounds of Court Farm, Joanna Gollins, representing the Gollins family, made an impromptu speech, having toured the site and viewed the ongoing refurbishments:

"...we have, during the last five years continually congratulated ourselves on making the decision to give this to The Ernest Cook Trust. ...And having seen this, I must say, I think it's fantastic, it's absolutely beautiful what the architects and every one of you have done to this building."



Joanna Gollins
at Court Farm



Staff, Trustees and friends of the Trust at our in-house Founder's Day, celebrating Ernest, in the month of his birth, September 2024



Developments

On our Slimbridge Estate, the **Wisloe** project team continues to work with local partners to meet Stroud District Council's Local Plan ambitions. The project team is fully engaged in the Examination in Public planning process and remains committed to delivering a sustainable, high-quality community at Wisloe (c1,500 new homes). Meanwhile, work is underway to secure a development partner, who can build on the work of the project team and help take forward the site with investment and expertise.

The **South West Aylesbury** development in Buckinghamshire (c1,400 new homes) is still waiting on HS2 and the local planning circumstances before any further progress can be made. We will continue to work in collaboration with the joint landowners to have the site ready to market in 2025/2026. All stakeholders are working together to achieve this aim, as we look forward to developing this important site.

The sale of the freehold of **Hartwell House** and associated land in Buckinghamshire was agreed between The Ernest Cook Trust and the National Trust in April 2024. The National Trust already held a long-term leasehold interest in Hartwell House, a Grade 1 listed Jacobean and Georgian house, occupied with great sensitivity and care by Historic House Hotels. It is wonderful to know that through this merging of interests, the long and distinguished history of Hartwell House will continue to be in good hands and looked after in perpetuity by the National Trust.

North East Fairford

In June 2024, the Trust completed the sale to Cala Homes (Cotswolds) of a prime site of 19 acres of land at NE Fairford with outline planning permission for 87 new homes.

It was important for us to find a house builder whose values align with our charitable mission. Cala Homes demonstrated a commitment to nature, green spaces and the local community well above and beyond its statutory requirements. The development design has been awarded a **Building with Nature accreditation** which ensures high-quality green infrastructure, integrating natural elements - such as bird and bat boxes, a community garden and allotments - to boost biodiversity and community wellbeing.

This is a significant step toward providing more housing options for the community, with 40% of these homes being affordable, making it easier for locals to rent or buy a place of their own.

Working closely with the Trust, Cala has designed a development that prioritises sustainability and community and Cala is now seeking to secure approval for the 'Reserved Matters' detail to enable an initial first phase of development to proceed in support of the Fairford Neighbourhood Plan (May 2023), which identifies a need for 80 new homes to be built by 2031.

For news on the Cala development of new homes at North East Fairford, please visit calaplanning.co.uk/fairford/



Renewables

Solar Farm

In partnership with Innova Renewables Developments, work is due to start in 2025 installing solar panels on 19 hectares of farmland alongside Welsh Way, on the Fairford Estate in Gloucestershire.

The 13-megawatt solar farm will produce enough electricity to power approximately 2,700 homes and prevent around 2,000 tonnes of carbon from entering the atmosphere every year.

The scheme will also significantly increase biodiversity on the site, more than doubling the value of the land for wildlife with an estimated Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) for habitat units of 115%.

The relatively low-quality farmland – classified as Grade 3b and 4 – had been used for growing wheat. Once the solar farm is installed grass will grow beneath the panels, offering the potential to graze sheep. The Ernest Cook Trust is leasing the land to solar developer Innova with both the Trust and the tenant benefiting from the arrangement. Innova will also provide a community benefit fund aimed at supporting local initiatives.

Creating the solar farm meets the priorities for the UK Government, which has committed to reaching net zero by 2050. In June 2019 Cotswold District Council declared a climate emergency and aims to make the district carbon neutral by 2030.

Estate Matters Podcast

Listen to Michael Birnie, Property Director, and Sarah White, Head of Learning Programmes Development, speaking about the balance of funding charitable aims through land and property management.

Click on the link on our Blog to listen to this fascinating conversation:



Jeremy Iles, Leaffield Farm

One of our farm tenants is already benefitting from solar panelling fitted to a farm building roof. Following the completion of roof replacement works at Leaffield Farm on the Hatherop Estate in Gloucestershire, the Trust was able to install rooftop solar panelling to the grain store in works that were completed in March 2024.

The value of the energy generated will be shared, and is the first project of its kind for The Ernest Cook Trust. This collaboration has enabled the building to be improved and both parties to benefit from the energy generated.

Founder's Day,
September 2024



TRUSTEES' REPORT

Financial Review

The Trust has continued to expand and enhance its educational and learning initiatives.

Spending on Grants and Learning activities rose to £3,664,000 up from £3,013,000 in 2023 making an increase of 22% over the previous year.

Trustees have reviewed the Charity Commission's guidance on public benefit and are confident that the Trust's objectives and goals align with the public benefit requirements outlined in the 2011 Charities Act. This Report highlights the Trust's activities and demonstrates how they comply to the principles set out in the Act.

Specifically, it details the Trust's expenditure of £3,664,000 on education and Outdoor Learning for the year 2023/24 with £2,096,000 of this allocated to grant funding. All our grants are evaluated to ensure they provide public benefit and serve a charitable purpose. Funding for these activities comes from the Trust's estate income, external grants and financial investments.

Estates income fell marginally by 4% to £3,905,000 (2023: £4,076,000) during the year. The Trust continued to invest in estate works, with

expenditure of £4,009,000 (2023: £4,564,000) therefore resulting in a negative contribution of £104,000 compared to a negative contribution of £488,000 in the previous year. This was mainly due to a reduction in repair and support costs together with the adoption of a new methodology in relation to the cost allocations. The principle is that costs are shared according to benefit. This results in a more accurate allocation. The two-step calculation is: estate management costs are allocated to estates, followed by the allocation of corporate centre costs based on headcount.

The Trust's financial investments generated an income of £1,245,000 (2023: £1,068,000), increasing in value by £2,733,000 in the year. The overall return from the Trust's financial investments was 17% for the year (2023, -4.9%), which reflected the lesser turbulence in the financial markets. The Investment Managers have a mandate of achieving a return of 4% plus the increase in the Consumer Prices Index (CPI) over the course of an economic cycle; this would be achieved by a change in asset allocation and equities to incorporate a global portfolio. This was increased from the previous target of 3% over CPI in 2024.

Since the Trust's incorporation in 2012, the value of Investment properties on the Balance Sheet has evolved significantly. As of 31 March 2023, these properties were valued at £169,452,000, prior to re-statement.

During the year, the Trustees established a working group to evaluate the Trust's property

valuation methods, considering various factors and concepts. The Investment Properties, which are held to generate income for the charity or provide operational value, have historically been valued at Investment Value rather than Historic Cost or Market Value.

The Trustees concluded that a revised valuation technique would improve the current method, offering a more reliable and comprehensible basis for making investment decisions and represent best practice.

This re-assessment of Investment property valuations brought a change in methodology from Investment Value to Open Market value transitioning to a more conventional method of valuation recognised across the landowning sector, resulting in an increase in the book value of our estates to £271,000.

The Ernest Cook Trust has five significant items of expenditure:

-  THE GRANTS THAT WE MAKE
-  THE COSTS OF MANAGING THE ESTATES
-  THE COSTS OF PROVIDING LEARNING OUTDOORS
-  THE COSTS OF MANAGING OUR INVESTMENT PORTFOLIO
-  THE RUNNING EXPENSES OF THE ERNEST COOK TRUST (of which staff costs are the major component)

Financial Review

Reserves Policy

The Trust has an Expendable Endowment, as such the risk of not having adequate reserves is judged by the Trustees to be low. Within this context, the Trustees' policy is for the Trust to hold liquid assets equivalent to at least six months' working capital, including grant commitments. The Expendable Endowment represents the Endowment of the Charity at 31 March 2024 at £312,830,000 (2023 re-stated, £295,096,000).

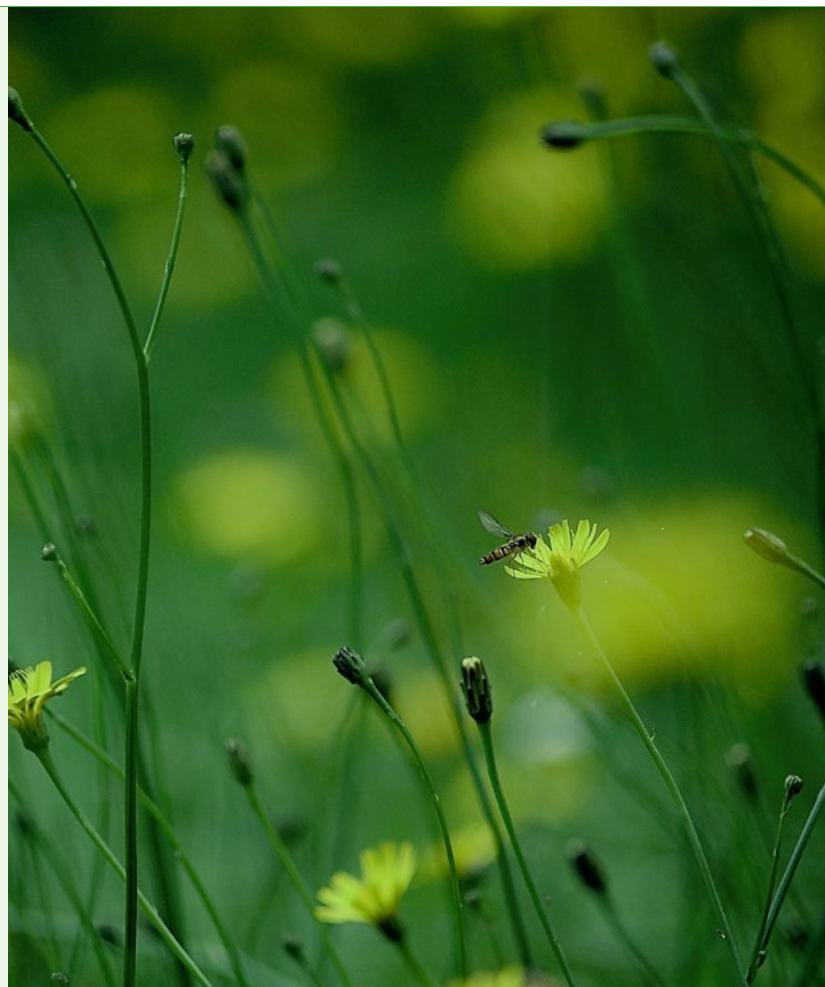
Fundraising Policy

The Trustees are aware of their obligations under the Charities Act to report the charity's fundraising policy. We engage with statutory funders, trusts and foundations to explore co-funding opportunities and raise income but do not engage in public fundraising or use commercial fundraisers. There have been no complaints or instances of non-compliance with any code (2023 none).

Remuneration Policy

The Trust's pay policy, pay structure and changes to employee terms and conditions are reviewed by the Remuneration Committee, which includes the Chair and one other Trustee, who then make recommendations to the Board of Trustees. The Chair of Trustees determines the salary and other benefit changes for the Chief Executive in conjunction with the Remuneration Committee.

The Trust's Memorandum and Articles of Association authorise the payment of Trustees, in line with the founder's wishes. A separate committee of independent experts convene to review the remuneration of Trustees from time to time.



Financial Review

Equity, Diversity and Inclusion

The Ernest Cook Trust recognises the value of every individual and actively promotes equality of opportunity. It is a welcoming organisation where everyone is highly valued and where tolerance, honesty, cooperation and mutual respect for all are fostered.

The Trust firmly believes in equity of opportunity in employment. We are committed to developing policies, practices and procedures that promote this ensuring everyone receives equal treatment.

Some examples of where we ensure Equity, Diversity and Inclusion are:

- » Each stage of the recruitment process has been adapted to remove barriers and unconscious bias, including advertising roles with diverse listing such as Ethnic Jobsite and redacting personal information from CVs
- » Compliance with equal opportunities legislation and equity best practice

- » We are a participating organisation in the RACE report

Future Financial Performance

The Trustees are aware of the continued impact from pressures and challenges posed by the uncertain nature of both global and domestic politics and its influence on the economic situation. The consequence of this uncertainty has been increased costs, with a potential to affect operations. To mitigate this, we continue to exercise careful management of our assets to maintain a balance between income and expenditure.

The Leadership team holds regular sessions to review their department's ongoing financial performance against the annual budgets, whilst the Audit, Finance & Investment Committee further review this at their quarterly meetings.

Investments

The Trust's charitable activities are funded through returns from its investment portfolio, income from

its land and property, and external grants and donations. Our finance and investment policies aim to provide long-term stability and liquidity, ensuring the financing of our charitable activities while maintaining the real value of the endowment.

The Trust's Investment Policy sets out the long-term investment objective, risk profile, strategic asset allocation and investment restrictions. It also includes our policies on Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG). The policy reflects a total-return objective considering all sources of return, allowing both income from the portfolio and the underlying capital to support charitable activities.

The Trustees have now established a policy on socially responsible investment and sustainability, aligned with the Trust's aims and objectives.

Our Investment Managers are expected to adhere to this policy when making investment decisions, and to report on how ESG considerations have been applied in the selection and management of investments.

Financial Review

Risk

The Trustees are responsible for overseeing the risks faced by the Trust. We regularly review these risks through our Leadership team, committees and the full Board of Trustees, utilising a comprehensive Risk Register. This identifies each risk, its potential severity and its likelihood of occurrence.

Risk Management is scrutinised by the Audit, Finance & Investment Committee, which reviews the Trust's risk position, internal controls, compliance with relevant statutory and financial regulations, and the work of our external auditors.

Risks are mitigated by:

- » Regularly reviewing internal policies
- » Ensuring adequate reporting procedures from operational to Board level
- » Providing relevant training across the organisation

- » Taking appropriate and timely professional advice
- » Ensuring the Trust is appropriately insured against risks

Principal Risks & Uncertainties

Financial The Trust's financial position is inevitably exposed to risks from the wider economy and national and global financial, policy and environmental developments; we keep these matters under continuous review.

With the recognised benefits for Outdoor Learning and growth in demand for our charitable activities, we continue to look at ways which will maximise future income, including the long- and medium-term development of our investment assets to produce higher returns. The aim is to achieve this by both development and renovation of assets thereby enabling continued delivery of our charitable work; 2024 examples include new Fairford residential development Fiennes Court and a new agricultural-to-commercial development on the Slimbridge estate. The Trustees remain confident in the long-term resilience of our finances.

Cyber Crime In common with all charities, we remain acutely aware of the risks associated with increased global cyber-crime. Staff are regularly reminded of the risks and specific nature of these crimes as they develop. We foster a risk aware

culture within the organisation, which is crucial in mitigating this risk.

Health & Safety There is some risk associated with children and young people learning outdoors and with managing large, landed estates. We manage this risk through up-to-date Health & Safety procedures and risk assessments for all activities, high levels of staff awareness and training, and third-party assessments and advice.

Safeguarding Trustees have accountability to ensure the safeguarding of children, young people and adults at risk, and aim to protect from harm anyone that comes into contact with the Trust.

All Trustees and staff undertake regular safeguarding training. Our Senior Safeguarding Lead, a Trustee (Simon Eliot), works with our Designated Safeguarding Lead (Suzie Paton) and Deputy Safeguarding Leads to ensure that our policy is up to date and consistently upheld.

Everyone associated with the Trust is aware that safeguarding is everyone's responsibility, and the Trust follows safer recruitment guidelines.

Operational Risk This is mitigated through the regular reviews of activities and use of professional advisors. In our partnership work, we specifically mitigate risk by conducting thorough due diligence of any potential partners and drafting written partnership agreements.

Financial Review

Governance We are aware of the importance of good oversight of the Trust's assets, management and charitable activities by the Board of Trustees. Our Trustee engagement remains at a high level, and we plan Trustee succession to ensure that the right mix of skills, experience, and expertise is maintained. The Trustees have appointed three Trustee-led committees to monitor specialist areas of activity. A transparent culture and open communication with the executive helps Trustees maintain thorough and up to date oversight of the organisation.

Structure & Management The Ernest Cook Trust was founded and endowed in 1952 by the late Ernest Edward Cook as an educational charity. The 1952 Deed of Trust was added to and amended in 1984, 1995 and 2006. The Trust was incorporated in 2012. The Directors of the Trust are also its Trustees for the purposes of charity law. Our Head Office is based on our Fairford Estate in Gloucestershire and will move to nearby Quenington early 2025. The Trust is a charity registered in England and Wales, number 1146629.

There are currently eight Trustees (November 2024), appointed for a five-year term and may serve a maximum of three terms.

New Trustees are provided with an induction programme and individual Trustee evaluations are conducted annually by the Chair. Training of Trustees is reviewed against individual training needs. The Trustees are paid under the terms of the Articles of Association to recognise the professional work they undertake of behalf of the Trust, over and above that normally expected of a charity Trustee.

Dr Ian Gambles rejoined the Board of Trustees in January 2024, with Dr Zainab Kabba being welcomed to the Board of Trustees in September 2024. Harry Henderson leaves the Board in December 2024 after 20 years' service to Trust. The Trust's financial year runs from 1 April to 31 March and meetings of the full Trustee Board are held quarterly. The three specific committees - Property, Learning, and Audit, Finance & Investment - meet regularly and each committee

has its own terms of reference, chaired by a Trustee, reporting back to the main Board. Trustees receive accounts, minutes of all committees and regular reports from the Chief Executive. Additionally, a Remuneration Committee of Trustees is convened at least once a year.

Matters requiring a decision by the Trustees are referred to them either at one of their meetings or by correspondence in between such meetings. The Trust is run on a day-to day basis by the Chief Executive, assisted by a team of staff including a Property Director; an Interim Head of Finance & Technical Services; Acting Director of Learning, Grants & Partnerships; HR Manager and Chief of Staff. In December 2023, Ed Ikin became Chief Executive, following an external recruitment. Ed was formerly Director of Wakehurst, Kew's wild botanic garden and a member of Kew's Executive Board.



FINANCIAL STATEMENT



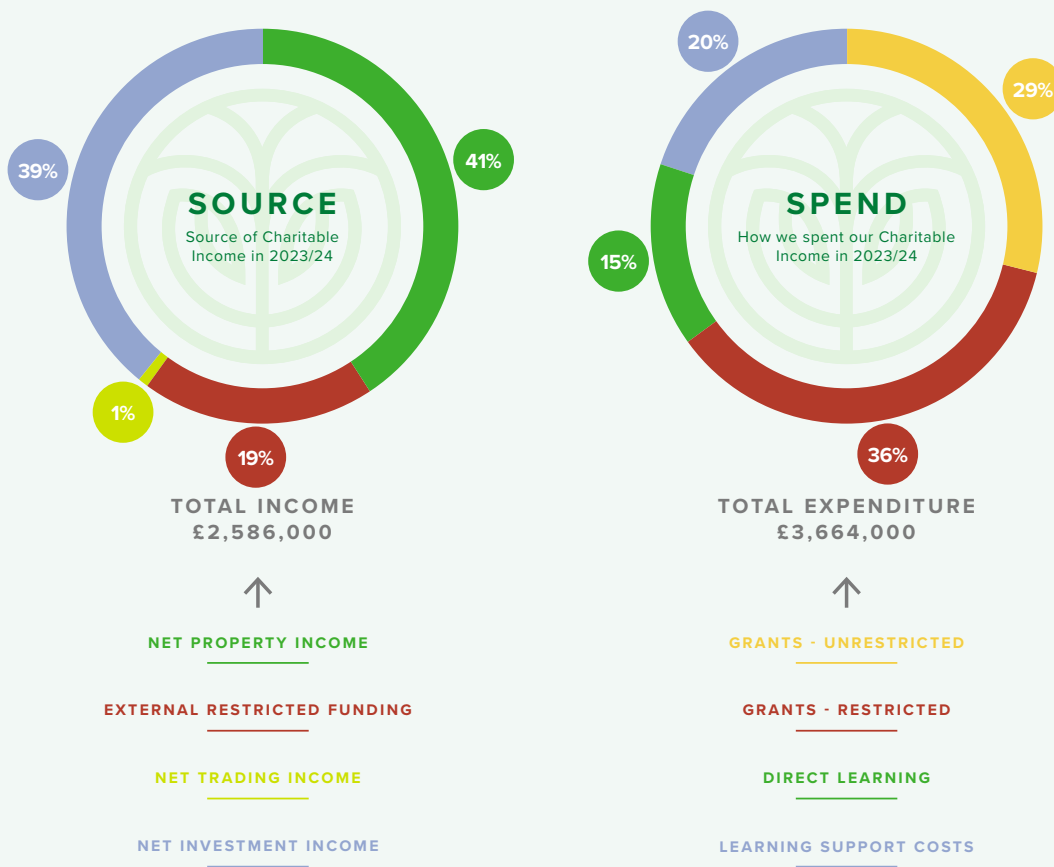
Financial Statement

The Ernest Cook Trust is one of the UK's foremost funders and providers of Outdoor Learning for disadvantaged children and young people. We care for 9,000 hectares of land across six counties from Cumbria to Dorset, which serves as both an asset and an Outdoor Learning resource.

Surplus income from our estates, together with returns on our investment portfolio, fund our charitable work. This is augmented by grant funding from the public and third sector. By strategically managing our funds and collaborations in this way, we increase the reach and influence of our work.

Our full Annual Report & Accounts can be found on the Charity Commission website.

The source of funds and the components of our charitable spend are shown opposite.



LEGAL AND ADMINISTRATIVE DETAILS

The Ernest Cook Trust Legal and Administrative details for the year ended 31 March 2024

The Ernest Cook Trust
Registered Company
No. 07907411

Registered Charity
No. 1146629

Mintglebe Limited
Registered Company
No. 01665074

ECT Farms Limited
Registered Company
No. 01324410

Registered Office and
principal address:

THE ESTATE OFFICE
FAIRFORD PARK
FAIRFORD
GLOUCESTERSHIRE
GL7 4JH

Trustees

Mary E Riall
Chair

Simon F Eliot

Dr Ian Gambles FCMA
(July - November 2022,
resumed January 2024)

Jenefer D Greenwood OBE

Harry M Henderson DL

Dr Zainab Kabba
(appointed September 2024)

Rory Landman
(appointed June 2023)

Ian Pigott OBE DL

Leadership Team

Dr Victoria M Edwards OBE FRICS FAAV
Chief Executive
(October 2016 – October 2023)

Dr Ian Gambles FCMA
Interim Chief Executive
(December 2022 – December 2023)

Ed Ikin
Chief Executive
(appointed December 2023)

Michael A Birnie MRICS FAAV
Property Director

Emily M E Crawley

Head of Learning Strategy & Delivery
(to July 2024)

Steve Hatcher

Director of Finance & Technical Services and
Company Secretary
(to July 2024)

Linda Parsons FCCA

Interim Head of Finance & Technical Services
and Company Secretary
(appointed July 2024)

Suzie R Paton

Acting Director of Learning, Grants &
Partnerships

Claire Puxley

HR Manager
(appointed to the Leadership Team
February 2024)

Sara B Rostant

Chief of Staff

Committee Chairs

Audit, Finance & Investment

Dr Ian Gambles FCMA

Property

Jenefer D Greenwood OBE

Learning

Simon F Eliot

Advisors

Banker

National Westminster Bank plc
32 Market Place
Cirencester
Gloucestershire GL7 2NU

Solicitors

Charles Russell Speechlys LLP
Compass House
Lypiatt Road
Cheltenham
Gloucestershire GL50 2QJ

Michelmores LLP
Eagle Tower
Montpellier Drive
Cheltenham
Gloucestershire GL50 1TA

Auditor

Price Bailey LLP
3rd Floor, 24 Old Bond Street
London W1S 4AP

Investment Adviser

Cazenove Capital Management
1, London Wall Place
London EC2Y 5AU





Join us

As both a landowning organisation and charitable trust, we cover a lot of ground. When joined by like-minded people from all walks of life, this journey becomes all the more fulfilling.

Our approach is always to be curious and open, welcoming all views.

Could you be our future charity sector partner, Trustee, match funder, host organisation or influencing partner? Or perhaps your skill set suits a role within The Ernest Cook Trust?

Our work is vital, challenging, and increasingly effective when done in partnership. We love connecting with people as much as we love connecting with nature, so please contact us to arrange a chat, and keep an eye on our website and socials for details of jobs at The Ernest Cook Trust.



hello@ernestcooktrust.org.uk





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