

EVALUATION REPORT



COPPICE & CONNECT

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Intended Outcomes

Participants from underrepresented communities access the Surrey Hills National Landscape

Restoration of hazel coupe to create mosaic of age structures, supporting pollinators, dormice, bats, and birds

Participants gain hands-on experience of heritage skills and conservation in the Surrey Hills countryside

Participants are empowered to conserve, protect, and champion nature

Participants deepen their connection to nature, experiencing benefits to physical and mental wellbeing

Social value outcomes will be maximized for people, communities, health, skills, employment, environment, climate change

Participants acquire new practical and soft skills to support career development



What did we do?

- Participants submitted an application and met with the Programme Coordinator for an informal interview (to gauge and ensure motivation) prior to joining the programme.
- October to November 2025, weekly sessions took place at Hole Hill Copse in Westcott.
- 4-hour sessions consisted of coppicing tuition and practise using traditional hand tools (bowsaws, billhooks, loppers); habitat creation (dead hedging, habitat piles); green woodworking (whittling, use of shave horse); and bushcraft (natural fire lighting).
- At the start and end of the programme, participants completed baseline evaluation questionnaires.
- The Programme Coordinator supported volunteers with individual transport plans and transport costs were reimbursed.
- Volunteers were provided PPE, tools, and refreshments.



Who took part?

- 8 young people aged 19-30, and three adult staff members took part.
- 4 young participants identified as male, 3 as female, and 1 as non-binary.
- 7 participants identified as neurodivergent. In addition, 6 identified as having a disability, including cognitive disabilities (3), mental health disabilities (2), and sensory differences (1).
- Two were from global majority ethnic backgrounds.
- Four travelled by public transport to the site, the others got lifts.



How did it go?



Participants were referred to the project by Air Time and Surrey Choices



Sessions were facilitated by 2 qualified outdoor learning practitioners



Each session followed a predictable rhythm:

- Hot drinks and check-in
- Coppicing training and practise
- Lunch around the campfire
- Whittling/green woodwork tuition



Average attendance rate was 89%



Together, participants completed a total of 224 hours



Feedback

Participants were asked about the skills they developed

Social skills –
how to work in
a team

I have a better understanding of
coppicing and what you can make
with the materials

Communication,
teamwork, and
social skills

Tree cutting / coppicing,
making things, fire
making, obelisk making,
tool use

I have developed tool use, e.g. bow saws,
loppers, etc. I have learnt new skills like
fire-making and whittling. I have learnt how
to coppice hazel and various uses for the
material, e.g. dead hedging.

Woodwork and different
woods and their uses.
Learning about the landscape.

Coppicing - more
confidently

How to use tools
How the environment reacts
Green woodworking
Dead hedging

How to
safely use
a knife

Natural fire
lighting

Green
woodworking
skills

More
confident,
social skills

Participants were asked what helped them to develop these skills?

Having a supportive environment of people and patient leaders

Jo and Kate!

Opportunities to practise a lot of skills

Practising

Having a supportive group and good group leaders

The support from the tutors and practise

Being in an engaged and supportive environment with excellent leaders and peers who are interested in the same things as me.



Outcomes

At the end of their engagement, participants scored how much they agreed with the following statements

I have developed nature-based skills from attending sessions

94%

The skills I have developed will be useful in my everyday life

90%

Since attending sessions, my independence has increased

90%





I feel I have contributed to something good and meaningful

97%

I have built new, meaningful connections

87%

I have learned how to help nature through conservation activities

90%

I have improved my knowledge of the history of the Surrey Hills

87%

I have participated in activities that I wouldn't usually do

93%

I would recommend this project to others

97%

Programme Coordinator's Summary

As a first delivery, Coppice & Connect met its intended project outcomes and demonstrated clear potential as a longer-term programme. The six-week project successfully engaged young adults facing barriers to accessing green and heritage opportunities, supporting wider participation in natural heritage through practical coppicing and conservation work, heritage woodland skills, habitat creation and peer-supported learning.

The woodland site proved well suited to the aims of the programme, and participants remained highly engaged throughout. While time constraints meant that not all planned green woodworking activities could be delivered in depth, the breadth and quality of learning achieved within the pilot was strong.



One of the most noticeable outcomes was the way trust, confidence and mutual support developed within the group. Informal conversations around the campfire formed an important part of the programme, supporting peer connection, social learning and wellbeing alongside practical tasks. These conversations often moved into deeper discussions about personal experiences and social pressures, and participants increasingly supported one another both socially and during conservation activities.

One participant grew confident enough to explain the project to a visitor, clearly articulating the purpose and value of the work being undertaken. Another exceeded expectations by independently researching green woodworking between sessions, demonstrating a strong level of engagement with heritage skills beyond the sessions themselves.

Coordinator support played a key role in enabling inclusive participation. Individual check-ins, transport planning and a predictable weekly structure helped reduce barriers to engagement and created a safe, supportive environment in which participants could build confidence and skills over time. These check-ins also provided opportunities to identify wider support needs, resulting in participants being referred or signposted to other services, including Surrey Choices, Waythrough and Art Matters. This highlights the programme's wider social value and its role as a trusted point of connection rather than a standalone intervention.



Participants developed increased confidence alongside practical heritage and conservation skills, including coppicing, habitat creation and traditional woodland management techniques. Through hands-on activity, they contributed directly to active habitat restoration, supporting woodland biodiversity while developing skills relevant to future volunteering, employability and continued engagement with heritage. The landowner has been very pleased with the work completed and, as a result, is open to longer-term collaboration, creating opportunities for sustained woodland management and skills development.

This programme has demonstrated that Coppice & Connect is a strong, scalable and repeatable model. With longer-term investment, it has the potential to build lasting skills, deepen engagement with natural heritage, and support the ongoing restoration and stewardship of coppice woodlands across multiple sites. In doing so, Coppice & Connect aligns closely with the aims of Growing Together, offering a practical, inclusive and sustainable approach to delivering long-term benefits for people, heritage and the natural environment.



COPPICE & CONNECT

Coppice & Connect was delivered by Air Time CIC as part of Growing Together, a project that empowered those with a disability, neurodiversity or from a minority ethnic background, to feel more confident in accessing natural heritage to support their wellbeing.

Growing Together was made possible with thanks to the National Lottery Heritage Fund.

