

Avon Wood, Warwickshire

HS2



David Harding, a self-proclaimed 'city boy', is the first to admit he's new to tree planting, and yet he hasn't let that hold him back with applying to the High Speed Two (HS2) Woodland Fund to drive forward his ambitious plans of planting a woodland of over 18 thousand trees, to be enjoyed by future generations.

David originally considered planting the woodland himself by hand over the next 10-20 years, though he soon learned there were a number of grants available from the Forestry Commission which would allow him to speed up the process and realise the benefits of the woodland a lot quicker.

To help with this, David decided to employ a Chartered Forester (Robin Truslove from Lockhart Garratt – Environmental Planning and Forestry Consultants) to help him plan the woodland and submit a grant application.

At the time David was looking for a grant in late 2017, the first £1 million of funding for the HS2 Woodland Fund was announced. The HS2 Woodland Fund is a grant scheme aimed at helping landowners to restore Plantations on Ancient Woodland Sites (PAWS) and create new native woodland, at 100% of standard costs. The fund is managed by the Forestry Commission on behalf of HS2 Ltd.

David's land lies within 3 miles of the Phase One route, which made him eligible to apply (although you can apply up to 25 miles away). Another condition of the fund was that his woodland creation proposal needed to be for at least five hectares (unless it was linking with an ancient woodland, where proposals can be as small-scale as one hectare). The offer of £1.60 per tree, plus additional funding for measures to protect the young woodland and maintenance payments of £200 per hectare per year (paid in batches at years five and ten) also made it an attractive offer.

David and Robin worked together to apply to the HS2 Woodland Fund, and submitted the application in early 2018. A Forestry Commission Woodland Officer then carried out a site inspection and confirmed the design of the proposed woodland. Once the grant had been approved, tree planting began in November 2018 and both David and Robin were pleased with the application process and support available from the Forestry Commission.

Key facts

Location:

Avon Wood, Warwickshire

No. of hectares:

11

No. of trees planted:

18,100

Species range:

23 tree and 7 shrub species

Grant applied for:

HS2 Woodland Fund

Planting time:

November 2018



“I didn’t realise how important rides and glades were to biodiversity and sustainability, but these are an integral part of the design and I’m on a learning curve as to how to manage these as the trees grow.”

David Harding

Robin, an expert in his field, said: “As a Chartered Forester, it is a pleasure to work with landowners and with the Forestry Commission (FC) Woodland Officers. The FC have been very positive and pragmatic in managing the application process, and the streamlined application form was a good feature of the HS2 funding.”

David said working with a professional forester would be his top tip for any would-be woodland owners. “For a novice like me, absolutely, professional help is vital. I couldn’t have done the design or project managed the application process on my own.”

When thinking about what trees to plant, David wanted a range of trees for biodiversity. “My brief was that it should be as natural as possible, sustainable both in terms of its impact on the wider environment and wildlife, but also as a managed woodland so that it would generate sufficient income to pay for itself long after my son and I are gone.”

David has planted 18,100 trees in total, with 23 native trees sourced from local nurseries and 7 shrub species. 30% of the woodland is Oak, with other major species being Hornbeam, Alder, Beech, Lime, Holly and Birch. A river with a 500m frontage runs along one side of the site, so it is mainly Willow planted in this area. The site also borders a road, so a variety of trees have been planted here to give more colour, including Cherry, Maple and Whitebeam.

This diversity means that if any one species is subject to climate change or disease pressure, then the others can ensure the long term presence of woodland in the landscape. By including a range of hardwood species such as Oak, Hornbeam and Beech, this should also ensure the sustainability of timber production in the future.

When asked what he has learnt during his early days in becoming a woodland owner, David said: “I didn’t realise how important rides and glades were to biodiversity and sustainability, but these are an integral part of the design and I’m on a learning curve as to how to manage these as the trees grow.”

Whilst David recognises that he still has a lot to learn regarding the maintenance and management of the site going forwards, he is under no illusion that this is a long term project and there is plenty of time to learn along the way. His short term plan over the next three years is mostly about protecting the saplings so they get established, but he is also developing longer term goals for the land too. These include setting up a governance structure so he can be sure the woodlands will be managed far into the future, trying to get some involvement from local schools to benefit education on nature and sustainability, and exploring whether the woodlands can help endangered species.

If you’d like to hear more from David, see our YouTube channel. [youtube.com/ForestryCommission1](https://www.youtube.com/ForestryCommission1)



Find out how we can support you to plant trees on your land and the funding that is available to help.

gov.uk/government/organisations/forestry-commission

