

Avon Wood, Warwickshire



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

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 his ambitious plans of planting a woodland of over 18 thousand trees, to be enjoyed by future generations.

Inspiration struck after hearing his 11-year-old son speak about the need to plant more trees "something instantly clicked that this would be a project we could do together and allow me to give something back to my local community."

David originally considered planting the woodland himself by hand over the next 10-20 years, but after speaking with a Chartered Forester (Robin Truslove from Lockhart Garratt – Environmental Planning and Forestry Consultants), he 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. He also discovered there are contractors he could employ who would plant the trees for him by machine.

David decided to employ Robin to help him plan the woodland and submit the grant application, and says it 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. Another huge plus is the nature of the contract with the contractor, which covers the first three years maintenance and replacement of saplings which don't take – I wouldn't even have known such a deal was available."

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.



In addition to the planning of which trees to plant at Avon Wood, careful consideration was also given to the layout of the site. For example, the bottom hectare is adjacent to a possible site of archaeological interest, so rather than letting that become a barrier to planting, David is sowing wildflowers there to attract pollinators.

David has employed a contractor to machine plant the saplings, which he said is "quite fast and surprisingly easy." The stakes are then hammered in by machine, which is a bit slower and more manual. To future proof the risk of the trees being eaten by deer, rabbits and voles, they are adding tree guards by hand. David's advice to any aspiring woodland owners is that "this is the slow, manual bit so you just need to allow plenty of time in the schedule for it."

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](https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/forestry-commission)

