

# IMPACT REPORT 2023



**SYLVA**  
FOUNDATION

*nurturing a wood culture, growing a future*

## Welcome message from our Chief Executive

As we come to the end of 2023, I am delighted to report that Sylva Foundation has continued to flourish. In this impact report you will read how our vision of a society that cares for nature, while living with it in harmony, is evident in all the diverse areas of our charity. Fundamental to this are our key values, and in this, our third impact report, I am delighted to share how one of our values - innovation runs throughout our work at Sylva Foundation.

More than ever, the past year has demonstrated how innovation takes many forms at Sylva. While you will read about our exciting projects, innovation at Sylva Foundation is also about our approach - we are a small charity, but through innovation we are able to punch above our weight. We look to the latest technologies and inspiring collaborations; we develop creative ways to support the woodworking sector, and unique approaches to improving resilience to climate change.

This impact report also gives us the opportunity to highlight the wonderful people who have contributed to Sylva's work. From those in the UK forestry sector, to our new 'stewardship scientists'; from the participants at our Woodworking and Gender seminar, to our unique collaborations within the furniture industry; these are but a few of those who have ensured our work at Sylva has gone from strength to strength. I would also like to thank all of our supporters, and in particular, our Sylva Friends. The scheme recently had its first anniversary, and is proving invaluable in providing us with steady support, allowing us to plan and develop our work.

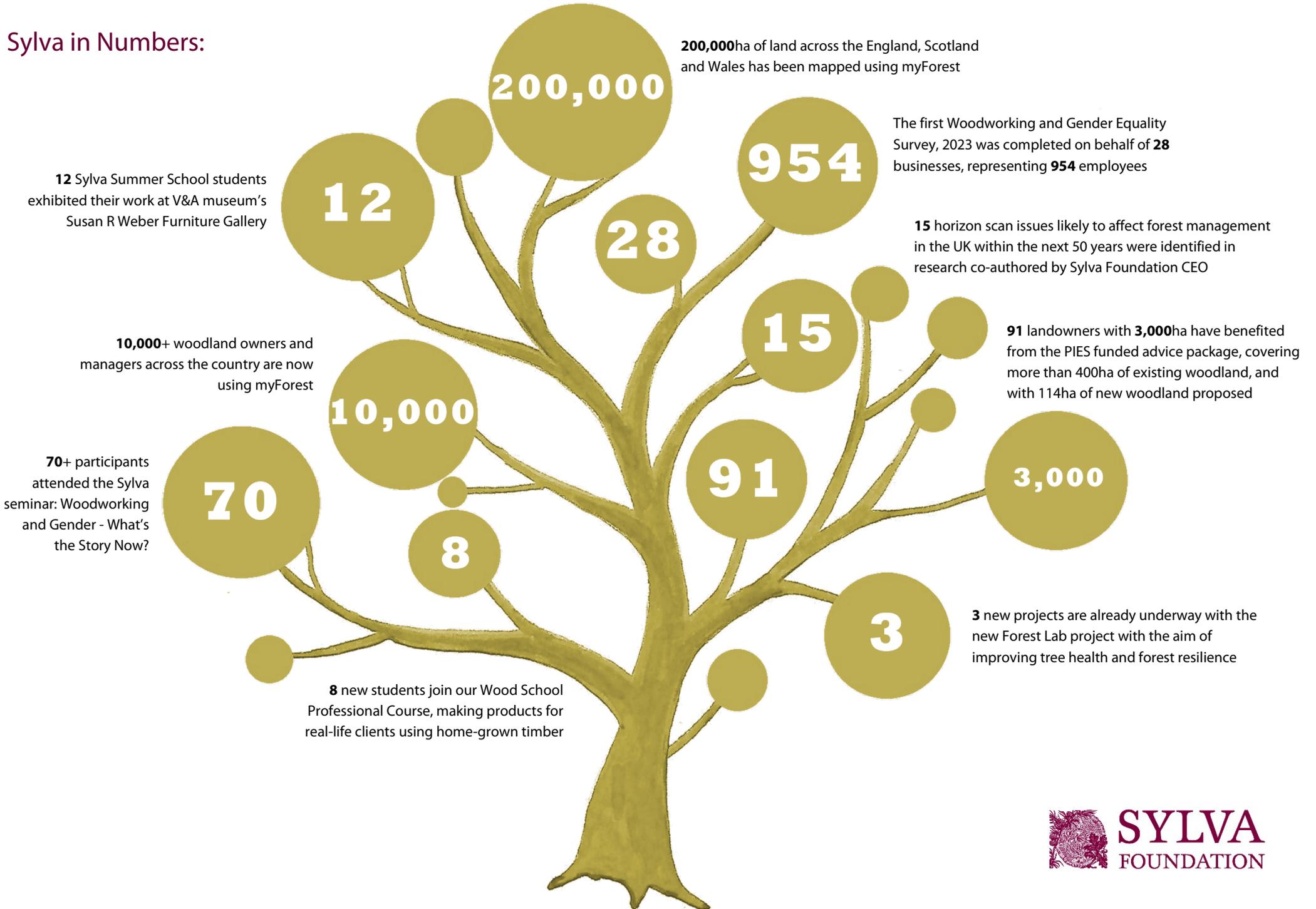
I hope you enjoy reading our Impact Report for 2023, and once again thank you for your continued interest and support.



Dr Gabriel Hemery FICFor  
Chief Executive  
Sylva Foundation



## Sylva in Numbers:



## Our Vision and Mission



**SYLVA**  
FOUNDATION

*nurturing a wood culture, growing a future*

Sylva Foundation is a national charity working for a society that lives in harmony with nature, focusing on the stewardship of our forests and the utility of home-grown timber. It provides solutions to meet significant environmental challenges by innovating, collaborating, training and advocating.



**Our vision is for a society that cares for nature while living in harmony with it.**

We envisage a wood culture where people understand and promote the good stewardship of woodlands and are mindful of their utility, while being conscious of their fragility.

Future society will recognise the creative and productive value of forest products which can be derived from growing well-managed forests, and at the same time enhance their wider benefits for people and for nature. This will help result in a halt in the loss of biodiversity, a reduction in climate change, and a human society that can sustain itself.

Our actions today will be tangible in the love and respect that future generations afford our trees and forests.

### **Our Mission:**

- ▶ To use our forestry knowledge and information technology skills, supported by state-of-art evidence, to provide **innovative** solutions to some of the greatest environmental challenges facing modern society.
- ▶ To work extensively and selflessly with others, recognising that **collaboration** is necessary to overcome the challenges of halting biodiversity loss and reducing climate change, while supporting the transition to a sustainable human society.
- ▶ To deliver the **training** and education necessary to support the transformation of society, focussing on the stewardship of our forests and the utility of home-grown timber.
- ▶ To undertake **advocacy** to inspire one another, raise awareness, and endow people with knowledge, passion, and the shared ambition for a better and more sustainable society.

INNOVATING

COLLABORATING

TRAINING

ADVOCATING

## Sylva impacts in the words of beneficiaries:

*"Today has provided light and aspiration to a place I'd like to work, and people I want to work with - thank you."*

*Participant Feedback, Woodworking and Gender Seminar*

*"When I say myForest changed my life, it really changed my life. Having access to digital mapping is massive - I use myForest every day and all the time to do all my mapping."*

*Emma Barnes, Company Director at Native Forestry Ltd*

*"I think that the course exceeded my expectations. I also think that the products we made were fantastic and highly suited to building well rounded furniture makers. The making environment is also exceptional, I hope to be in as lovely a workshop again someday."*

*Sylva Wood School Student, Professional Course 2022/3*

*"Over the last six months or so, we've been working with Sylva Foundation on a project funded by Vastern Timber to create a management plan for our research woodland Paradise Wood ... It is so much easier using myForest. To be able to access something with all of the really convenient bits and pieces like OS Maps, aerial photography, and all the standard tools that allow mapping of fence lines, boundaries and compartments, and then being able to feed these directly into producing a Forestry Commission Management Plan. To have one place to put all of that data, it's brilliant."*

*Tim Read, Senior Ranger, Earth Trust*

*"PIES funding provided me with the early advice to highlight opportunities and give me a clear idea on how this could work out financially..."*

*Landowner, Fully funded PIES support recipient*

*"We enjoyed a walk around all the exhibitors at art week yesterday - how the Wood Centre has grown, again! Huge congratulations to you for the amazing opportunities you have opened up for people. It's really wonderful."*

*Sylva Wood Centre Visitor, South Oxfordshire, Artweeks 2023*

*"It was a VERY useful workshop, and I am pretty excited about the possibilities of myForest. It was great to build a better understanding of its capabilities and where that would sit in regard to my role."*

*Participant Feedback, myForest Workshop, Forestry Commission*

*"I've got a job at Benchmark Furniture as a result of the Professional Course. It was as a result of our workshop visit there - it sparked conversation, and they found a role they thought I was appropriate for. I'm really excited, since they've been on my radar for a couple of years."*

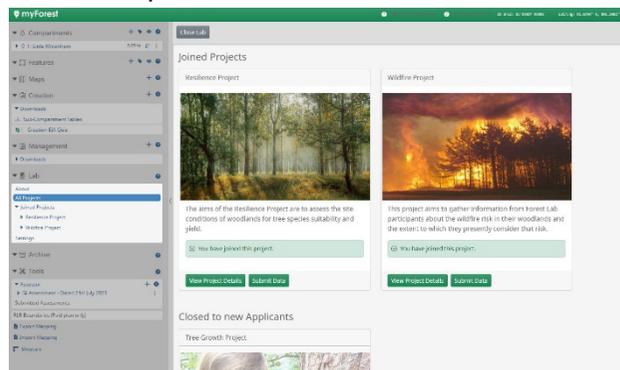
*Sylva Wood School Student, Professional Course 2022/3*

# Innovation Case Study: Forest Lab

*providing the latest technologies to provide innovative solutions to some of greatest environmental challenges*

## Overview of myForest and Forest Lab

Sylva Foundation launched an innovative new project for myForest users called Forest Lab, in partnership with Forest Research with the aim of improving forest resilience, enhancing forest biodiversity, and protecting nature and the landscape. This exciting initiative uses the latest technology to advance knowledge exchange between landowners and scientists through the collection and sharing of data by volunteer 'stewardship scientists.'



Forest Lab works on a 'plug in and play' model on the existing myForest digital platform, Forest Lab is built on a two-way commitment between myForest users and scientists. This reciprocal arrangement ensures that by agreeing to collect and share inventory data, myForest users benefit from the unique opportunity to learn from their

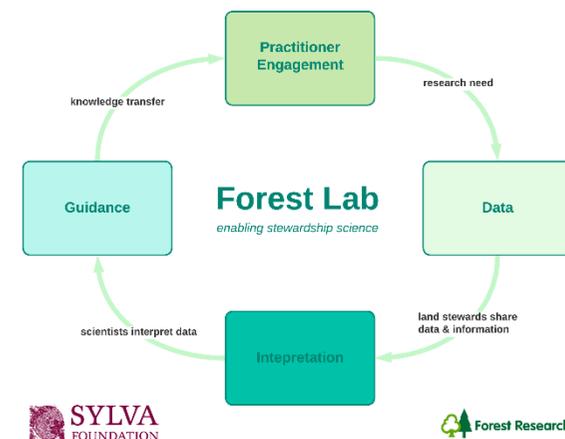
evidence, as scientists in turn share the latest research and advances in forest management and forestry science.

*"Forest Lab started as a simple idea; 'wouldn't it be good if myForest users could help researchers?' This was quickly followed by; 'and how can researchers help myForest users on issues impacting their forests?' This two-way exchange is the foundation of what has become Forest Lab. By collecting and sharing data, Forest Lab will support research to improve forest resilience and enhance forest biodiversity across Britain."*

*Gabriel Hemery – Chief Executive, Sylva Foundation*

## Forest Lab impact

With myForest users collaborating with forestry scientists and researchers, there is a unique opportunity to collect and share data that will have an impact, not just on individual private woodlands, but on the resilience of forests right across Britain.



## Future Plans

There are many exciting opportunities with the evolution of Forest Lab. In the long term, there is the possibility of utilising Forest Lab's agility to provide an early warning system to threats to our forests. The short-term focus will be on rolling out specific projects such as Wildfire to ensure both myForest users and scientists benefit from essential research into existing and emerging issues that affect the resiliency of forests across Britain.

*"I was interested to get information on my own trees, to understand if they are still growing and at what rate, and I'm also hoping to make some connections with other woodland owners and researchers and gain tips and advice on how best to manage my woodland."*

*Justin Thomas - Forest Lab Stewardship Scientist*

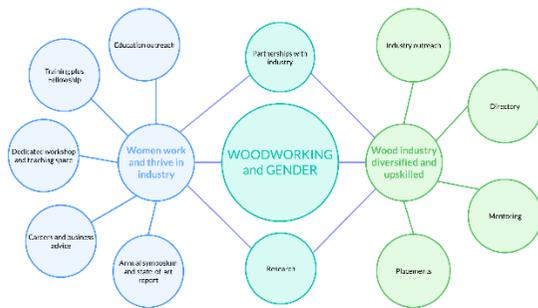
# Innovation Case Study: Woodworking and Gender

*Sylva Wood School - innovative ways of bridging the gap between education and industry*

## Overview of Woodworking and Gender Programme

The Woodworking and Gender Programme is an innovative new Sylva initiative. The aim of the programme is to bridge the gap between education and employment for people working in the furniture industry who identify as women or nonbinary, creating a more diverse and skilled industry.

WOODWORKING and GENDER  
www.sylvafoundation.org.uk/woodworking-and-gender



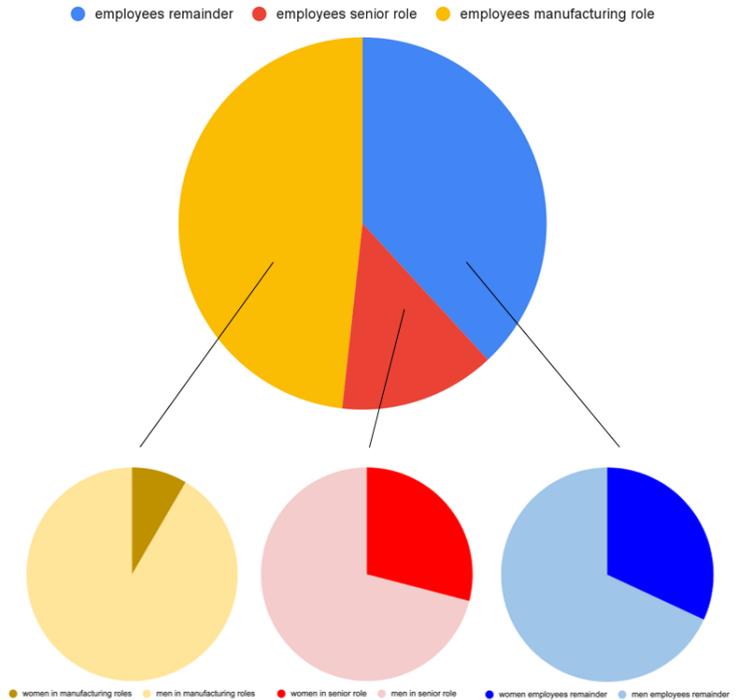
In 2023, the (pilot) first phase of this programme continued with the very first Gender Equality Survey which took place in order to better understand gender equality in the wood-based furniture industry. This was closely followed by an exciting seminar: Woodworking and Gender - 'What's the Story Now? These opportunities to

hear diverse voices and experiences will provide the foundations for the next phase of work to support an inclusive and accessible woodworking sector into the future.

## Woodworking and Gender Equality Survey, 2023

Sylva Foundation launched an online survey to better understand gender equality in the wood-based furniture industry. Over a three-month period, data and information were gathered from employers across the woodworking industry in Britain concerning gender equality. Anecdotal evidence, along with limited existing evidence, indicated significant gender inequality and better information was required.

The 2023 survey was completed on behalf of 28 businesses by respondents who were 56% male. Businesses represented were mainly involved in manufacturing with wood and were furniture makers. In total, 954 employees were represented, with the largest business employing 135 people, the smallest five.



*Some results of the 2023 gender equality survey, illustrating that just 8% of people working in manufacturing roles were women.*

## Seminar: Woodworking and Gender - What's the Story Now?



A unique Woodworking and Gender Seminar was hosted by Sylva Foundation in the autumn of 2023.

More than 70 participants came together at the Sylva Wood Centre for a day of talks, workshops and discussions around gender equality in the woodworking industry. People shared their experiences - both good and bad, connected with

others, exchanged ideas, gave advice, and together developed strategies to support the woodworking sector to become more inclusive and accessible into the future.

*"There really was magic in the air. We felt privileged to take part and to meet the incredible women and supporters in the room."*

*Seminar participant*

As the seminar progressed, a number of themes started to emerge around woodworking and gender. From the importance of woodworking education for all, to building confidence; from the benefits of employing women and non-binary people, to creating an inclusive culture in the workshop - these themes will be key to the next phase of the ambitious new Sylva programme aiming to bridge the gap between education and employment for women and non-binary people working with wood.

*"This is how to start a revolution! Ready to listen, with open arms, with heart, through inclusivity."*

*Seminar participant*

### *Future Plans*

This work, along with learnings from our 2022 Summer School, will now provide the foundations for our innovative Woodworking and Gender Programme, with the aims of:

- More women and non-binary people find employment and thrive in the furniture industry, meaning that the inclusivity in the workplace is improved in such ways as to improve retention and development of skilled workers.
- The furniture industry is diversified and upskilled, making better use of a significant proportion of the population which is currently not engaged, limiting innovation and growth at a time when the industry is short of skilled workers.



*Participants of the 2023 Gender and Equality seminar listened to presentations from early-career practitioners and experienced business leaders, and took part in workshops among the trees at the Sylva Wood Centre.*

# Innovation Case Study: PIES project

*PIES - innovative new ways of improving woodland resilience*

## *Overview of PIES*

The PIES project, funded by Defra and Forestry Commission, is delivered via a partnership between three organisations: Sylva Foundation, Forestry Canopy Foundation and Grown in Britain.

PIES is providing a network of independent experts to deliver high quality funded advice to landowners across England, to bring existing woodland back into management or to support woodland creation projects. Farmers and landowners taking part in the project receive funded advice, including a site visit and customised report, plus ongoing online support and technical services via a free account on the myForest platform run by Sylva Foundation.

## *PIES impact*

By the end of 2023, more than 100 landowners have been allocated advisory visits. The area of properties assessed was 5,000ha, with about 150ha of new woodland proposed and 700ha of existing woodland moving towards active management.

We spoke with Derbyshire landowner Phil who wanted to plant some trees on his farm in Derbyshire. His initial idea was to buy some trees (he thought maybe 200) and involve local schools

to help out with planting but he soon realised that he needed more help and was unsure how best to proceed.

*“When I first started out thinking about planting trees, the language was alien and it was hard to know where to start. PIES funding provided me with the early advice to highlight opportunities and give me a clear idea on how this could work out financially. Without PIES funding my 4ha scheme would not be going ahead.”*

*Phil - Landowner, and recipient of fully funded PIES support*

Phil successfully applied for the fully funded PIES support. He was then paired with local private woodland agent Charles Robinson which proved to be just what he needed to help him get his project off the ground.

Phil says he was unlikely to have ever invested in receiving the advice which subsequently proved so helpful in progressing his plans. PIES support provided him with important early advice to highlight opportunities and has given him clarity on how his plans could work out financially. Phil is clear that without PIES funding, his 4ha woodland creation scheme with about 8,000 trees would not be going ahead.



*PIES advisor Charles Robinson (left) talks with Derbyshire farmer Phil*

## *Future Plans*

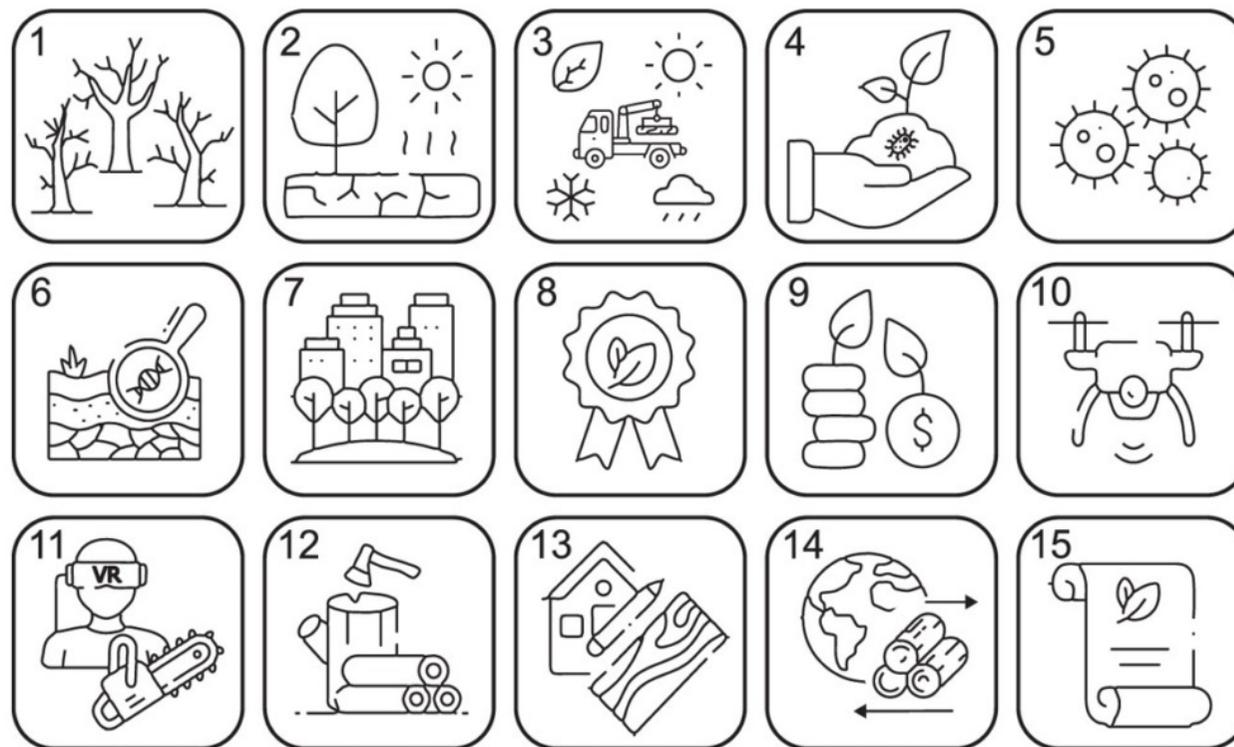
The innovative PIES project will continue to roll out. Our targets with Defra and Forestry Commission have all nearly been exceeded and are ahead of schedule. We hope that our powerful and effective partnership will continue to thrive so that we can bring more woodlands into management and support more woodland creation.

## Future Plans

Sylva Foundation experienced unprecedented growth in 2023. We are looking forward to working on several exciting new initiatives to support our vision for a society that cares for nature while living with it in harmony.

### We will:

- ➔ Continue to build evidence through the British Woodlands Survey, giving a voice to all stakeholders, including research exploring public access to woodlands.
- ➔ Develop our approach to stewardship science in Forest Lab.
- ➔ Embed research across all of our activities to ensure we can show Sylva's impact throughout our work.
- ➔ Focus on the development of myForest suite, providing users with innovative online software, including technical enhancements as well as improved support and guidance.
- ➔ Continue building the links between forestry and wood at the Sylva Wood Centre.
- ➔ Continue to develop support to promote diversity in the Wood industry
- ➔ Develop new business partnerships for our Professional Course.
- ➔ Support Sylva's team of people so they continue to develop and thrive.
- ➔ Progress the capital development project at the Wood Centre.



*"It is impossible to ignore the prospect of 'catastrophic forest ecosystem collapse' highlighted in the horizon scanning exercise conducted recently, supported by Sylva Foundation. We must continue to work with a laser focus to prevent this, while recognising that there are opportunities too, for nature and society. By working together and innovating, I believe we can make a real difference."*

*Dr Gabriel Hemery, CEO Sylva Foundation*

1. Catastrophic forest ecosystem collapse
2. Increased drought and flooding change the social costs and benefits of trees
3. Forest management becomes more challenging due to changing seasonal working windows
4. Protecting and enhancing soil microbial ecology becomes a higher priority
5. Viruses and viroids emerge as pathogens of increasing importance for trees
6. eDNA revolutionizes our understanding of forest ecosystems
7. Trees are at the heart of future urban planning
8. The Taskforce on Nature-related Financial Disclosures (TNFD) drives transparency and investment in nature-positive management
9. Natural capital funding streams are greatly upscaled
10. New technologies facilitate widespread adoption of smart silviculture
11. New technologies improve worker health and safety
12. New wood product markets stimulate more active forest management
13. UK commercial forest resources may not match future value chains
14. Unpredictable supply and demand dynamics in global wood product markets
15. International commitments will spotlight ecosystem integrity and drive monitoring efforts

Tew, Eleanor R, Bianca Ambrose-Oji, Malcolm Beatty, Ulf Büntgen, Holly Butterworth, Gerard Clover, Dan Cook, et al. 2023. "A Horizon Scan of Issues Affecting UK Forest Management within 50 Years." *Forestry: An International Journal of Forest Research*, November, cpad047.



Visit our website today to learn more about us, read our latest news,  
and to find out how you could get involved in our work:



[www.sylva.org.uk](http://www.sylva.org.uk)