

the friends  
of Westonbirt  
Arboretum  
Registered Charity 293190



# Annual Review

01 January - 31 December 2025

# Reference & Administrative Details

**Charity registration number**  
293190

**Registered office**  
The Great Oak Hall  
Westonbirt, The National Arboretum  
Tetbury  
Gloucestershire  
GL8 8QS

**Company registration number**  
04965522

## Trustees

Trustees, who are also directors under company law, who served during the year and up to the date of this report, and the subcommittees on which they served, were as follows:

S Addadahine	(resigned 29 January 2026)	
M Allman	(appointed 14 May 2025)	2
M Ballard	(appointed 05 February 2025, resigned 29 January 2026)	
S Bryars, Joint Vice Chair		1
O Forster		1
N Frost	(resigned 14 May 2025)	2
Kit Hare	(appointed 14 May 2025)	
P Isherwood, Joint Vice Chair		2
E Skuse, Treasurer	(appointed 14 May 2025)	1
M Smith, Chair		1,2,3
S Troupe		1
C Walker	(resigned 05 February 2025)	1, 2, 3
R Walker		3
<b>Committees to the board</b>		
1. Finance and risk panel	Chairperson M Smith (until 19 November 2025), E Skuse (from 19 November 2025)	
2. Enterprise board	P Isherwood	
3. Human resources	R Walker	

The Chair of Trustees has an ex-officio appointment on all committees.

## Senior leadership team

The management of the Friends of Westonbirt Arboretum is overseen by a senior leadership team employed by the Trust during the year. This comprised as follows:

E Griffiths	Chief Executive
H Turner	Finance Director
F Phelps	Head of Income Generation & Engagement

## Bankers

Lloyds Bank PLC  
14 Castle Street  
Cirencester  
Gloucestershire, GL71QJ

CAF Bank Ltd  
25 Kings Hill Avenue  
West Malling  
Kent, ME19 4JQ

## Auditors

Godfrey Wilson Limited  
Chartered accountants and  
statutory auditors  
5th Floor Mariner House  
62 Prince Street  
Bristol, BS1 4QD

CCLA Investment Management  
Ltd  
80 Cheapside  
London, EC2V 6DZ

# Contents

Statement from the Chair	4
About our Charity	6
Structure, Governance & Management	8
Aims, Objectives & Activities	10
Achievements & Performance	13
Finance Overview	18
Priorities for 2026, Looking Ahead	19





# Statement from the Chair

In times like these, places like Westonbirt Arboretum matter more than ever. Arboreta are not only places of beauty and reflection, but living collections that support scientific research, safeguard threatened tree species and provide opportunities to build the skills and knowledge needed for a greener future. They also offer something equally important to everyone who visits - access to nature which provides a space for wellbeing and opportunities for people of all ages to engage with and learn from the natural world.

Against this backdrop, 2025 marked a year of renewed momentum and quiet strength for the Friends of Westonbirt Arboretum, as we prepared to enter our 40th anniversary year. With over 39,000 members, our community of supporters continues to be the bedrock of everything we achieve together. Their commitment enables our work, strengthens our voice, and ensures the arboretum can continue to thrive for generations to come.

This year we continued to invest in projects that build the arboretum's future. We were proud to support the development of the Youth Forum, empowering young people to help shape Westonbirt's long-term vision, and to continue funding key roles and programmes that deepen learning, conservation, and community engagement. During the year, the Charity awarded the arboretum £545.5k in grants and paid £818.6k for Arboretum Access Rights. This combined funding of £1.4m directly supports the site and enriches the experience of visitors.

Our trading subsidiary delivered a strong performance. The Westonbirt Shop exceeded its annual profit target, returning £44.7k to the Charity and offering a retail experience that reflects the character and quality of the arboretum. Alongside this, gifts in Wills continue to play a particularly special role, enabling us to support projects and initiatives that might not otherwise be possible. This generosity sits alongside the valued support we receive through grants from trusts and foundations, memberships and donations. Together, these contributions strengthen our ability to support Westonbirt.

The Board of Trustees has continued to guide the Charity with diligence. This year we welcomed four new Trustees who bring fresh expertise and perspectives, while expressing our sincere thanks to the four Trustees who stepped down for their dedicated service. I have also been fortunate to be supported by Paul Isherwood and Sarah Bryars as joint Vice-Chairs throughout the year.

As we look ahead and beyond our 40th year, our focus is firmly on the future - on strengthening our partnership with Forestry England, deepening our connection with members, and investing in the work that will safeguard the arboretum for the next generation. The loyalty, generosity, and belief of our supporters remain our greatest strength, and we enter this milestone year with gratitude and a clear sense of purpose.

*Martyn Smith*

Martyn Smith  
Chair of the Board of Trustees



# About our Charity

Westonbirt, The National Arboretum (the arboretum) is the location for a historic, Victorian picturesque landscape and internationally important tree and shrub collection that is managed by Forestry England with support from us, the on-site Charity. The nearly 15,000 labelled specimens come from Britain, China, North America, Japan, Chile and other temperate climates.

The arboretum covers 600 acres and consists of three main areas: the Old Arboretum is a carefully designed landscape dating from the 1850s offering beautiful vistas, stately avenues and trees from around the world; Silk Wood is an ancient, semi-natural woodland which has exotic planting throughout its landscape; and the Downs is Grade 1 registered and hosts species-rich grassland.

The Friends of Westonbirt Arboretum is a Charity with approximately 39,000 members. Our mission is to further the public enjoyment and knowledge of Westonbirt Arboretum and to secure its sustainable future.

The Charity was established in 1985 by a small group of enthusiasts who were committed to the preservation and development of this unique landscape. The Charity works closely with Forestry England to support their aspirations for the long-term development of the arboretum.

Through the generosity of our members and supporters, The Friends are able to enhance and extend what is possible on site. Our funding and support enable additional projects, experiences and opportunities that sit beyond core public funding, helping Westonbirt Arboretum to realise its potential as a world leader in trees.

The Charity has a dual legal status as a registered company regulated under company law, and as a registered charity regulated under charity law. It is governed for public benefit by the Trustee Board according to the charity's articles. The strategic direction and development of the Charity is managed by the Trustee Board, alongside an established Finance and Risk Panel providing additional financial control. The day-to-day operation of the Charity is delegated to the Chief Executive Officer and staff team.

The Charity is committed to good governance and good practice in fundraising, having voluntarily chosen to follow the Code of Fundraising Practice (as overseen by the Fundraising Regulator) and the Charity Governance Code (as endorsed by the Charity Commission).



## Our Patron and Ambassador

The Friends of Westonbirt Arboretum is privileged to continue to enjoy the support of our Royal Patron HM The Queen and our Ambassador the Honourable Beth Rothschild. We are most grateful for their ongoing commitment.

## Forestry England Volunteers supporting the Friends of Westonbirt Arboretum

As ever, the contributions of the volunteers remains vital to the arboretum. Forestry England leads and supports a remarkable community of more than 300 volunteers, whose commitment and enthusiasm shape the visitor experience every day. We are deeply appreciative of the opportunity to collaborate so closely with both Forestry England and their volunteer teams, whose work enables us to champion the Charity, grow membership, and engage visitors in our fundraising efforts.

Our partnership with the Welcome Building volunteers and the Tree Guides continues to be especially valuable. Their conversations with visitors help introduce the Friends, highlight opportunities for deeper involvement, and guide new supporters through the membership process. Their advocacy and warm welcome make an enormous difference to the Charity's visibility and impact on site.

The Friends' Membership Team has also maintained a strong working relationship with Forestry England's Visitor Services team. Together, we ensure volunteers are kept well-informed through regular briefings, training sessions, and eNews updates. This shared approach ensures that volunteers have the confidence and knowledge they need to represent and support the Charity's work.

We remain profoundly grateful for everything volunteers contribute to Westonbirt and for the outstanding leadership and support provided by the Forestry England team who train and manage them. Their collective efforts continue to strengthen our activities, our membership, and our community.



# Structure, Governance & Management

## Governing Document

The governing document is the Memorandum and Articles of Association incorporated on 17 November 2003, as amended by special resolutions in 2008, 2011, 2012, 2014 and 2018. The Charity is a membership and fundraising organisation for Westonbirt, The National Arboretum and as of 31 December 2025 we had 39,448 Members. The Board is accountable to the Charity Commission as a registered Charity.

## Recruitment and Appointment of Trustees

Trustees are recruited following a skills audit of Board members to ensure that the Board has the right mix of skills and experience. The services of a recruitment consultant may be used to recruit new Trustees. Trustees are required to retire from office following the completion of their term of office at 3 years, serving a maximum of three terms of office (9 years in total). There is an induction process to support new Trustees, set out in the Trustee policy, including meetings with key staff and stakeholders, training and development opportunities.

The Board meets at least five times during the year. There are also three subcommittees: an Enterprise Board and a Finance and Risk Panel, which meet four to five times per year. Additionally, there is a Human Resources Panel which is convened when needed.

The Trustees have continued to keep the Charity's governance needs and the diversity of the Board under review. The Trustees are responsible for staff pay, benefits and terms and conditions. Detailed oversight of finance is delegated specifically to the elected Treasurer who works closely with the Finance Director and keeps the Board informed.

## Risk Management

Risk is managed through a risk management register and detailed policy; this is reviewed by the CEO alongside a Trustee with specialist expertise in risk management who reports to the full Board. Major risks are reviewed annually by the full Board and are kept under review on a quarterly basis by the Finance and Risk Panel. The Board monitors impact, probability, mitigations taken and identifies any additional action required. Key potential risks facing the Charity that require careful monitoring include the impact of any major changes in membership recruitment and retention which is often influenced by the current economic climate. Other risks monitored are cyber security and data protection, staff turnover and the relationship with Forestry England who run the site.

## Organisational Structure

Day-to-day responsibility for operations of the Charity is delegated to the full-time employed Chief Executive Officer (CEO) and, through them, to the staff team. The Charity is also a fully paid member of the Fundraising Regulator and is committed to good practice in fundraising.

The Board works closely with the CEO to set the strategic direction of the Charity, as well as working with key stakeholders such as Forestry England. This has been demonstrated through the Forestry England Director being invited to report to the Board as a guest at Board meetings on performance and developments of the arboretum on a quarterly basis.

## Related Parties

Forestry England is the site manager of the arboretum and the major beneficiary of our grant giving. To this end, the Charity has in place a partnership agreement that is signed off by the Board of Trustees and Forestry England senior management. We have a grant policy in place with a transparent process for application and awarding of grants against our charitable objectives and criteria set in the policy. In awarding grants, the recipients (including Forestry England) are bound by the terms of those grants to provide impact reporting and we monitor the completion of projects against these terms.

## Pay Policy for Key Management Staff

The Trustees consider that the Board of Trustees, the Chief Executive Officer and the Senior Management comprise the Key Management personnel of the Charity in charge of directing and controlling, running and operating on a day-to-day basis. All Trustees give their time freely and no Trustee received remuneration or other benefit from their work in the year. Details of Trustees' expenses are disclosed in note 10 to the accounts.

The pay for the Chief Executive Officer and all staff is reviewed by the Board of Trustees annually. The pay review includes a 3rd-party benchmarking against both the voluntary sector and visitor attractions.



# Aims, Objectives & Activities

## Objectives

The Friends of Westonbirt Arboretum aims to further public enjoyment and knowledge of the arboretum's world-renowned tree collection and to secure its sustainable future. It does this by engaging, informing and increasing its membership and also by giving financial and practical support to the management and development of Westonbirt, The National Arboretum and, in particular, by:

- providing support to The National Arboretum at Westonbirt in promoting public understanding of the critical role of trees to the environment and society;
- providing support for the arboretum's research and education in all fields relating to trees;
- providing support for the conservation, maintenance and development of the unique tree collection and historic landscape for future generations;
- providing funds to enhance the public's experience at the arboretum;
- acting as an advocate for the arboretum, promoting its values and the need for continuing funding;
- providing support to the arboretum by cultivating the Charity's relationship with its members so as to encourage long-term relationships and fundraising opportunities;
- promoting opportunities for access and participation to a diverse range of public individuals and groups; and
- providing funds for such other charitable purposes as will further the work of the arboretum.

## Strategies

Our strategy supports the long-term vision for the arboretum, developed in partnership with Forestry England, Our Place in a Changing World. This shared vision responds to the environmental and societal challenges arising from a changing climate and evolving communities. It positions the arboretum as a world leader in trees, inspiring people through conservation, education and participation.

To support this vision, the Charity has adopted a five-year strategic framework structured around three core pillars: generating income, advocacy and charitable activities and impact. Together these pillars strengthen the organisation's financial sustainability while ensuring the arboretum continues to deliver meaningful public benefit.

## Generating income

Sustainable income generation remains essential to supporting the work and future resilience of the arboretum. Activity within this pillar focuses on membership, fundraising and enterprise.

- **Membership** - Broadening enjoyment of the arboretum by reaching more people, delivering a membership offer that provides clear value, and fostering a community of members who feel recognised and appreciated;
- **Fundraising** - Developing collaborative and creative approaches that support funded activities, ensuring projects deliver demonstrable environmental, educational and social impact; and increasing membership and retention of members; and
- **Enterprise** - Extending the Westonbirt experience beyond the visit by connecting customers with the arboretum in meaningful ways, while generating commercial income that contributes to its long-term sustainability.

## Advocacy

Advocacy activity focuses on engaging and inspiring a wider range of communities. Through partnerships and collaborations, the Charity seeks to promote inclusion, participation and greater connection with trees and nature, supporting the wider relevance and impact of the arboretum.

## Charitable activities and impact

The Charity works closely with Forestry England to support priority areas of activity across the arboretum. Through the application of charitable income and partnerships, the organisation enables programmes that advance conservation, education and participation. This ensures that the funds raised are translated into tangible outcomes for the landscape, for learning, and for the communities who engage with the arboretum.

## Public Benefit

The Friends of Westonbirt Arboretum provides several public benefits, primarily focused on supporting the arboretum itself. This is made possible through fundraising and generating income through membership and retail. With this income we support, enable and facilitate the following, primarily through our strong partnership and collaboration with Forestry England who manage the site.

# Achievements & Performance

During the year, The Friends' main operations fell into the following areas:

- Membership
- Retail
- Fundraising; and
- Charitable Activities and Impact

## Membership

As a membership organisation, the Charity relies on the lifeblood of our membership income, enabling us to raise charitable funds to meet our charitable objectives in support of Westonbirt Arboretum. Increase in membership numbers directly impacts the level of Arboretum Access Rights Payments the Charity makes to the arboretum: greater membership numbers result in a greater level of financial support for the arboretum through further grant giving. This has been a strong year for membership growth as a result of our pivot in marketing activity, testing incentives and improving or increasing our communication to members. We ended the year with 39,488 members; an increase of 4.2% year-on-year. This resulted in membership income of £1,713k (including Gift Aid).

## Member communications and engagement

Our member magazine continues to play an essential role in telling the story of the arboretum - sharing the work we undertake, celebrating the impact of our projects, and deepening members' connection to Westonbirt. It remains one of our most valued communication channels, helping bring our conservation, education, and participation activities to life and inspiring members to engage even more closely with the site.

Membership continues to offer excellent value while remaining comfortably within the Gift Aid rules. Benefits include discounts with partner organisations, free entry to partner gardens, free parking at arboretum events, regular newsletters, and exclusive behind-the-scenes updates.

Since the Charity's founding in 1985, our members have been central to the arboretum's success. Their loyalty, enthusiasm, and belief in our mission continue to underpin everything we achieve. We remain deeply grateful for their steadfast support, which plays a vital role in securing Westonbirt's sustainable future for generations to come.

"I have thoroughly enjoyed over the last 5 years having access to the wonderful grounds and facilities that the arboretum has and fully appreciate the kindness and helpfulness that is always shown to visitors."

Member Feedback

"We have really enjoyed visiting Westonbirt over many years and very much admire all that you do."

Member Feedback

"Westonbirt remains a very special place for my wife and I and we continue to support the arboretum through sponsorship and a bench and ongoing membership."

Member Feedback



### Arboretum Access Rights Payment (the AARP)

The AARP payment is the payment the Charity makes to Forestry England to secure access for its members. This money contributes to the operational management of the site. This includes:

- conservation and tree management work including collection and landscape management, propagation activity, dendrology, survey and inventory work, and volunteer, student and work experience;
- education, learning and interpretation, including enabling schools to use the arboretum to support the learning of their pupils and supporting visitors' understanding of the importance of trees in general, and Westonbirt in particular, as well as widening access from under-represented audiences;
- volunteer participation support; and
- improving accessibility to the arboretum, including the funding and maintenance of mobility scooters.

The 2025 AARP payment was £818.6k.

### Retail

Our retail operation has delivered an exceptional performance in 2025, providing both a high-quality visitor experience and a significant financial contribution to the Charity. Turnover reached £625.5k, finishing the year 20% above budget (£520k) and reflecting an impressive 21% year-on-year growth. This achievement is particularly notable given the national economic backdrop, with UK GDP growth at only 1.4% in 2025.

The shop generated a profit of £44.7k, ahead of the budgeted £34.3k, delivering a favourable variance of £10.4k for the year. Gross margin remained strong at 45%, in line with our targets, even after accounting for the member discount structure. Throughout the year we continued to enhance and diversify our product range - expanding Westonbirt-own merchandise, increasing our use of local and artisan suppliers, and ensuring that the offer reflects the character and quality of the arboretum.

Through the Charity's Enterprise subsidiary operating the retail function, we can provide Forestry England with a well-run, mission-aligned, onsite shop while also generating a meaningful surplus. This surplus is returned to the Charity and awarded as grants to Forestry England and other partners, directly supporting conservation, learning and participation across the arboretum. Our retail performance in 2025 demonstrates both commercial resilience and alignment with our charitable purpose - providing a strong platform for further growth and continued impact in 2026.

### Fundraising

Fundraising in 2025 comprised a blend of individual giving, legacies, and grants from trusts and foundations. Total fundraising income for the year, including donated facilities, amounted to £550.2k (see note 3 of the accounts).

This funding supported priority areas such as:

- community engagement and inclusion;
- tree conservation;
- accessibility improvements;
- development of outdoor learning; and
- play.

Legacies continued to represent an important and valued source of income during the year, sitting alongside individual giving and grants from trusts and foundations. We remain grateful to all trust and foundation partners who awarded grants during the year (see note and note 23 of the accounts).

### Grants awarded

The Charity awarded new grants totalling £545.5k during 2025 and adjustments were made during the year amounting to £99.9k in relation to underspent and early ended prior year projects, meaning the net new grant commitment recognised in the year was £445.5k. A total of £455.3k was paid out in the year against prior and current year grants awarded (see notes 8 & 9 of the accounts). These figures demonstrate a significant and sustained contribution to the arboretum's conservation, learning, participation, access and site development priorities.

### Charitable activity and impact

The numbers alone cannot tell the full story of what our supporters made possible in 2025. Each grant awarded, each membership renewed, and each purchase in the shop translated directly into work on the ground that strengthened Westonbirt's collection, broadened access, and enriched public understanding.

## Conservation impact

Funding for the Tree Conservation Manager, Student Arborist, and seed-collecting programmes enabled Forestry England to advance critical conservation work - supporting the care, documentation, propagation, and global scientific exchange needed to protect a world-class tree collection.

These grants safeguard the arboretum's living landscape for current visitors and future generations.



## Access & experience impact

Grants supporting accessibility, such as mobility scooters, wheelchair provision, and replacement of accessible picnic benches; ensured that everyone can experience the arboretum with dignity and comfort. The continued investment in play infrastructure supported families, encouraged outdoor learning, and enhanced the visitor experience.



## Education & learning impact

Support for the Outdoor Learning Officer and the establishment of the Youth Forum broadened educational impact beyond schools, embedding young people in decision-making and deepening learning opportunities for diverse audiences.

These programmes strengthen the arboretum's role as a centre for environmental education and inspiration.



## Strengthened site operations via AARP

The £818.6k AARP payment contributed to essential day-to-day operations including:

- tree and landscape maintenance;
- education and interpretation;
- volunteer development;
- site accessibility; and
- conservation infrastructure.

This mechanism ensures that membership income delivers tangible public benefit every single day.

## Participation & inclusion impact

Funding for community engagement continued to break down barriers to access. Grants enabled community groups, young people, individuals with complex needs, and those facing social or financial challenges to experience Westonbirt - often for the first time. The Community Grant Giving Fund and the Forestry England Community Coordinator role ensured that engagement was meaningful, supported and life-enhancing.

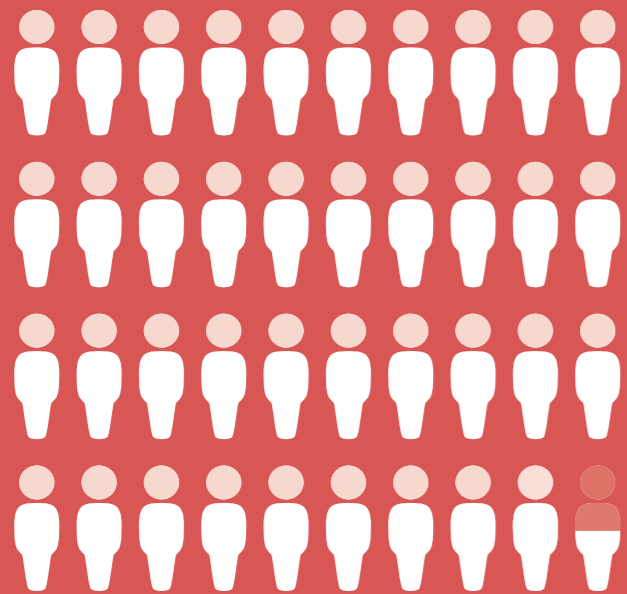


## The Friends' Community Grant Giving Fund

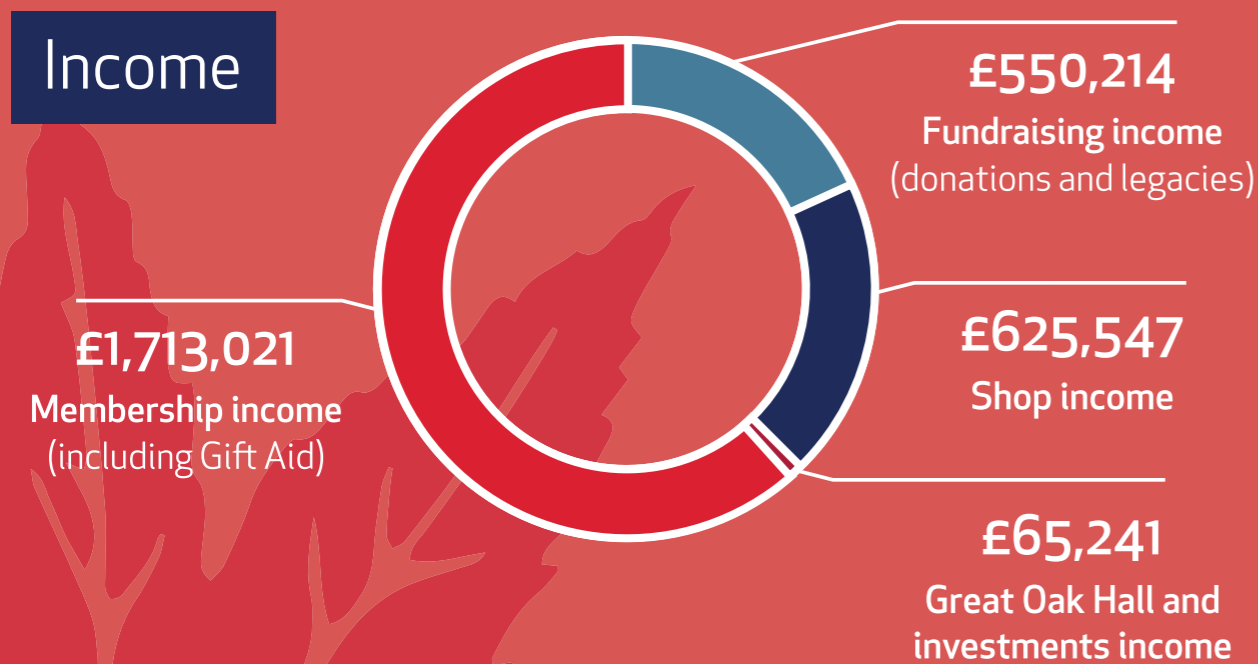
The Friends Community Grant Giving Fund is designed to enable individuals, and particularly those who would otherwise struggle to access the site, to be able to afford the costs of entry, travel and refreshments, as well as engagement in Forestry England activities. We continue to fundraise towards the Community Grant Giving Fund to enable us to support further community organisations and individuals. During 2025 we supported The Churn Project, Imayla CiC and Bristol Carers to access the site through funded transport and catering.



# Finance Overview



**39,488 members**  
by the end of 2025



## Financial support to Westonbirt



# Priorities for 2026, Looking Ahead

As we look ahead to 2026, we do so from a position of real strength. This past year has been exceptionally positive for the Charity, with robust performance across all income streams and a clear demonstration of the passion and commitment of our supporter community. Achieving such results in a challenging economic environment is no small accomplishment. While many organisations continue to face financial headwinds, we have remained resilient and, in many cases, exceeded sector trends.

Our financial model for 2026 has therefore been shaped with both ambition and prudence. It reflects the strong foundation built in 2025. It avoids assuming further growth in membership numbers but remains a stretch target - one that recognises the uncertainties of the current economic and global landscape, while ensuring we remain focused, motivated, and forward-thinking, rather than complacent.

This approach positions us well to continue investing in what matters: strengthening our supporter base, sustaining reliable unrestricted income, working ever more closely with Forestry England, and ensuring that the arboretum thrives through ongoing conservation, education, and participation initiatives.

Together, we are creating the conditions for continued success and ensuring Westonbirt is future-ready, resilient, and capable of delivering even greater impact in the years ahead.



For full charity accounts please visit the Charity Commission website or scan the QR code

the friends   
of Westonbirt  
Arboretum  
Registered Charity 293190

We're a registered charity that was established to protect trees and enrich lives at Westonbirt, The National Arboretum. We're committed to conservation, education and participation to help connect people with trees by supporting a wide range of activities at the arboretum.