

An aerial photograph of the Hill End Outdoor Education Centre. The image shows a large green field with a group of people standing in the shape of the word 'HILL' in the foreground. The field is surrounded by trees and a path. In the background, there are rolling hills, a small building, and a larger barn-like structure. The sky is overcast.

# Hill End Impact Report 2024-2025

**The Hill End Outdoor Education Centre**  
Eynsham Road, Farmoor, Oxford, OX2 9NJ  
[www.hill-end.org](http://www.hill-end.org)





# About Us

Hill End is a much-loved outdoor education centre providing nature-immersive learning for all ages. Just four miles from Central Oxford, the centre is set in 67 acres of natural, tranquil surroundings that feel a world away from urban life.

Established in the 1920s, this beautiful and special place has been a key part of childhood for generations of Oxfordshire children. It is now managed by the Hill End Charitable Trust, who are committed to developing the centre and securing its long-term future.

A highlight of 2024-2025 was the opportunity for Hill End to feature on BBC *Autumnwatch*. We were absolutely delighted for the opportunity to showcase our beautiful natural habitats, and have the support of BBC wildlife presenter Chris Packham.

"I was so impressed with Hill End during my recent visit, especially because of the large number of young people really engaging with nature. At this critical time when we're facing climate breakdown and biodiversity loss this is more important than ever, because if they don't love it they won't stand up to protect it.

Getting outdoors is also essential for their physical and mental health - running, jumping, getting muddy, really experiencing nature - that's what being at Hill End is all about and why it gets my support'

*Chris Packham*



**Our mission** is to provide exciting and meaningful day and residential learning experiences that inspire children, and every visitor, to enjoy and value nature and the outdoors.

**Our vision** is to provide a unique and beautiful place where everyone can come to learn about the natural world and enrich their lives. By 2028, we will be providing this to more people than ever, be more inclusive, and help to promote a more sustainable future.

## Who comes to Hill End?

In 2024-2025 we welcomed around  
**23,500 visitors**

- 15,700 children
- 7,800 adults

We saw a **4% increase** in our child visitors compared to last year

### Of these visitors

- 8,922 were from primary schools
- 4,312 were secondary
- 1,435 came for a Duke of Edinburgh (DofE) expedition
- 1,822 enjoyed one of our family events
- 3,340 adults attended a meeting or training course

**Secondary**  
**18%**

**Primary**  
**38%**

**Other &  
Mixed age**  
**44%**

**31% residential**    **7,337**

**69% were day visits**

**16,153**





## A Connection to Nature

The many benefits of time outdoors are well established - for learning, health and wellbeing, but children and adults are spending more time indoors, using more technology, and becoming increasingly disconnected from nature.

Evidence shows we can bridge this disconnection gap when we take time to really notice the nature around us, as we promote at Hill End in our tutor-led sessions. Our day and residential activities allow visitors to enjoy memorable, engaging and nature-immersive experiences.

### In 2024-2025 we hosted:

- 282 sessions led by our expert outdoor tutors, including:
- 42 bespoke days, tailored to specific curriculum needs
- 42 summer campfire evenings in nature

***"We loved spending the day at Hill End ... it was nice to feel connected to nature and to work together to do some fun team building activities"***

Adult NHS team-building session

**94%**

Of groups who gave us feedback said they felt more connected to nature as a result of their visit

***"They loved the space, being in the woods... seeing grass snakes and slow worms as well as pond dipping"*** Class teacher, primary school day visit

***"If I could describe this trip in one word, it would be extraordinary"*** Class teacher, primary school residential





## Bringing History to Life

Our hands-on history days allow children to step beyond the textbook and experience life in the past. Led by a specialist tutor, our ancient history days provide truly memorable learning set in our 'ancient settlement' purpose-built outdoor learning space. Our WW1 history days take place in genuine practice trenches with kind permission of Wytham Woods.

**In 2024-2025, primary school groups took part in:**

- 74 history days, of which
- 46% were Stone Age days
- 30% were Anglo Saxon and/or Viking themed

***"They loved using the fire to bake bread and were fascinated by the axes and were so proud that they made their own"*** Primary school class teacher



Our recreated **ancient 'round house'** is the heart of our atmospheric ancient settlement teaching space and a valuable outdoor shelter, but after 15 years of service it was in need of replacement. Starting in early 2025, expert woodcrafter Chris Park led teams of our volunteers, using local timber sourced from the Wytham Estate. Our alternative education students have also helped our project enormously by stripping bark from the tree trunks, ready to put into place.

In March 2025, an **archaeological geophysical survey** unearthed even more of our rich history, thanks to Prof. Robert Evans and Dr Jane Harrison from Oxford University. Archaeologist Sarah Miles and Geophysicist James Barnes from Metrology UK amazed our visiting children with their work and finds, working with small groups to try out the magnetometer and learning real archaeological digging techniques.





## Alternative Education

Providing access to the outdoors to those who need it most is one of our core aims. We work all year round with regular groups and individual students from special schools and those not in, or struggling with, mainstream education.

These students become a special and valued part of our Hill End team. They benefit from the huge range of experiences on offer at Hill End encompassing curriculum learning, conservation tasks, physical activities and social skills that build resilience, confidence, self-regulation and teamwork.

### **In 2024-2025 we provided:**

- 537 alternative education visits, welcoming 2,881 children and support staff
- Benefits to students during sessions – 100% of schools said these met their needs
- Benefits back at school – 78% reported improvements in the classroom

***“[the student] has built positive relationships with adults ... His confidence and communication skills have improved and are blossoming...”*** Primary school sessions

***“The child was initially quite reluctant to attend Hill End but after a few weeks he thrived... Before attending, the child would not access any of our outdoor spaces however now, he goes out all the time, even accessing our forest school site”*** Primary school sessions

***“John is an exceptional tutor for our groups, consistently tailoring experiences to align with our curriculum.... We are thrilled to continue our partnership with Hill End Forest School, which we visit twice a week with our primary-aged children, all of whom have EHCPs with primary needs of SEMH or ASD”*** Primary school nurture groups



## Diversity and Inclusion

Hill End was created 100 years ago by the philanthropic ffennell family as a pioneering outdoor school. They were passionate about providing access to the outdoors to disadvantaged children, especially the urban poor - and we continue this legacy today, providing opportunities for outdoor experiences to a hugely diverse range of visitors.

**In 2024-2045 this included, among many others:**

- Yellow Submarine, working with young people with special needs
- Oxfordshire Hospital School
- OCC Afghanistan Refugee Support Team
- Be Free Young Carers Oxfordshire
- Bicester Autism, and Autism Family Support Oxfordshire
- OCC Deaf and Hearing Support Team
- Groups from Tibetan, Nepalese, Brazilian and Finnish communities in the UK

We are proud of our welcoming and inclusive environment that means many charities and groups visit regularly for their own activities. We also seek to increase opportunities for outdoor learning by working with partners to offer grant-funded sessions free of charge.



### Case Study – Children Heard and Seen

CHAS is a charity dedicated to helping children, young people, and families affected by parental imprisonment. Based at Hill End, we are delighted that they use our beautiful site for outdoor activities all year round. In summer 2024 they brought over 200 families together for their largest summer residential yet - to spend time supporting each other and enjoying exploring our natural green spaces.

*“The Hill End site gives children and families so much freedom and fun. Children who would normally not be allowed out to play on their own could explore the site with their friends, knowing that they would be safe.... Children had experiences they had never had before: their first campfire, their first toasted marshmallow, the first time they had seen a wild rabbit or wild mouse...”*





## Nature-Immersive Residentials

An overnight stay at Hill End is very special, allowing our visitors to experience time away from the stresses of modern life in our beautiful natural surroundings. Our three dormitories and camping fields are nestled amongst meadows and woodland.

### In 2024-2045 we welcomed:

- 1,604 visitors for residential 'packages' – providing accommodation, catering and activities
- St John Ambulance, who hosted their first national summer camp in August 2024, hosting many hundreds of children camping every day.

We are committed to renovating our dormitory buildings to ensure future generations can continue to benefit from these wonderful experiences, and this is a key priority for the Trust.



A major project this year was the renovation of our **North Dormitory**, possible due to generous funding from the Oxfordshire Community Foundation Step Change Fund that allowed us to create a more accessible, energy efficient and cosy building with new ramps, disabled WC / wetroom and widened corridor and doors. We were also able to install new double-glazing and insulation thanks to the UK Business Decarbonisation and Rural Prosperity Funds, with Vale of White Horse District Council as the lead authority.

Our **bell-tent village** provides vital extra capacity for residentials in the busy summer months, and an exciting unforgettable experience for our visitors. In 2024, our dedicated volunteer team designed and built new bespoke wooden decking bases for our tents, making these more comfortable and far easier for us to maintain and clean. We are looking forward to using these again from May 2025 for the next fun-filled summer.







## Managing our Natural Landscape

The Hill End Charitable Trust is custodian of 67-acres of stunning grounds including SSSI species-rich grassland. With the help of our Wednesday site volunteers, we work to preserve and enhance these habitats to benefit nature and as important outdoor learning spaces.

### In 2024-2025 this included:

- Planting 450m of brand new hedgerows as part of Wild Oxfordshire's 'Hedgerow Heroes' project funded by CPRE
- Continuing our hedge-laying project across the site, sharing countryside skills amongst our volunteer team
- Restoring our two historic Barn Ponds (see below)
- Coppicing in our woodlands and Wytham Woods with students and valued groups of corporate volunteers, including from Siemens Healthineers and Audley Travel

Silted for decades, our **Barn Ponds Restoration Project** created open water to allow aquatic life to thrive in an improved, more diverse range of habitats. We also opened up access to this area for the less mobile, and to allow educational sessions for children with two new pond-dipping platforms. The new stone pathways and final restoration was undertaken with the help of our wonderful volunteer team.

The project was kindly supported by a £15,000 grant from the Trust for Oxfordshire's Environment (TOE) with funding from Grundon Waste Management Ltd through the Landfill Communities Fund. We are also very grateful for additional funding from Cumnor Parish Council and Botley and North Hinksey Parish Council.

***"Where there is water, wildlife will come, so this grant has truly revitalised the old ponds which will soon be home to a variety of wildlife from dragonflies to newts."*** Ben Heaven Taylor, CEO at TOE.





## Oxford University Green Estate

Hill End is a tenant of Oxford University and a valued part of their Green Estate. We work particularly closely with our next-door neighbours in Wytham Woods on a coordinated approach to land management across the Wytham Estate.

We also are increasingly linking with researchers across the University to provide schools and families who visit Hill End with amazing opportunities to learn about nature from world leading experts - in turn enabling scientists to share their work with the local community.

**In 2024-2025 Hill End groups visited Beanwood and Wytham for 506 educational sessions, including:**

- 358 alternative education sessions
- 68 school sessions for classes on day or residential groups
- 51 Forest Tots sessions for pre-school children



We were delighted to welcome **University of Oxford researchers** to many of our family days this year for wonderful nature fun and learning. In May 2024, Dr Liam Crowley shared his amazing invertebrate expertise with our groups, and Joe Woodman took us on an unforgettable dawn chorus walk. In February 2025, teams of Wytham bird researchers inspired awe and wonder by ringing and releasing birds with our visiting families. Our sincere thanks to the fantastic Keith McMahon, Patrick Lewin and all their colleagues.

In September 2025, Hill End took part in the first community open day at the **Oxford University Green Estate's Park Farm** in central Oxford. We offered nature fun and games and bug-hunting to curious families. We look forward to even closer cooperation with our University partners in future, including more opportunities for outreach, education and research across the Estate.





## Adult Learning

A key part of our mission is to provide training for teachers, outdoor practitioners and other adults - providing the skills and confidence so that they can deliver Forest School and nature-based learning in schools, nurseries and other places beyond Hill End.

### In 2024-2025 we provided:

- 171 hours of Forest School training
- Outdoor First Aid Training for 95 people
- Bespoke training days for staff at the charity Yellow Submarine
- CPD training sessions on tree management, ponds and knife skills



We are hugely grateful to skilled green woodcarver David Knight who, assisted by fellow volunteer Eddie Murphy, has provided inspirational educational sessions, CPD and fun for children and adults throughout 2024 and 2025. Woodcraft workshops at family days and the ffennell festival have provided brilliant creativity to suit the season, making bird boxes, bug hotels and wizardly wands.

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**Forest School Leaders trained by Hill End since we became a Charitable Trust in 2017**







Our ffennell festival 2024 was another resounding success thanks to our wonderful Friends of Hill End. This year 459 people from our local community enjoyed learning fun outdoor skills, bushcraft, hands-on history, pond dipping, story-telling, guided walks, music, food and games in our stunning grounds.

We would like to extend our heartfelt thanks, as ever, to them and all the volunteers and activity providers who work so hard to make these days so special.

## Staff and Volunteers

The Hill End core team of just six is tiny, and needs to be exceptionally flexible to meet the varied and seasonal nature of our work. We simply could not operate without the support of our tireless volunteers and adaptable expert peripatetic tutors.

This year we were able to employ a new Project Coordinator, funded by our Oxfordshire Community Foundation Step Change Grant, providing our charity with vital strategic project management capacity.

### In 2024-2025:

- Our 12-15 regular Wednesday volunteers gave 2,391 hours of their time
- Hill End benefited from eight volunteer trustees
- The Friends of Hill End core committee of five recruited 60 other volunteers to help at the ffennell festival 2024
- Our core team was boosted by 12 expert outdoor tutors and two seasonal summer assistants





# Sustainability

Promoting a love of nature and a more sustainable future is core to who we are, and the responsible management of our landscape and buildings is therefore vital. We have a long-term vision to transform our aging facilities to make them more environmentally and economically sustainable, but this is a significant challenge, and we need additional funding to supplement our reserves as we make these essential changes.

## In 2024-2025:

- We created our first Climate and Energy Policy, with a goal of net zero emissions by 2035.
- We replaced our office lights with new, energy-efficient LEDs, installed new double-glazed windows and doors in the North Dormitory and insulated six key buildings (see below).
- This year our electricity usage decreased by 5% (to c69,000 kWh)
- However, our gas usage increased by 7% (to c134,000 kWh) – we clearly have more to do here, but the actions above are a positive step forward.
- Overall, we estimate our electricity usage has decreased by 25% and gas usage by 18% compared to pre-pandemic levels (based on a reasonable estimate of our 2019/20 consumption before we developed our now much stronger processes).

This year we were able to insulate six of our most-used buildings for the very first time, thanks to match funding by the UK Government through a **Business Decarbonisation** Grant with Vale of White Horse District Council as the lead authority. Costing around £20,000, a staggering 190 rolls of insulation were installed over winter 2025 by ACE Drylining with the help of our dedicated volunteers. This will allow us to reduce our annual greenhouse gas emissions by over a tonne per year, and vital step towards our sustainability aims.





**Can you help Hill End?** We are independent Charitable Trust that receives no regular funding and rely on our customers, local community and dedicated volunteers.

We are always seeking new supporters who share our passion for the natural world and inclusive outdoor education. Please get in touch - we would love to hear from you.

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