

A Wonderful Visit to Hales Wood Coppice with Woodsman Andy Basham



A group of twenty Sustainable Uttlesford members and local nature enthusiasts recently enjoyed a fascinating visit to Hales Wood Coppice, guided by experienced woodsman Andy Basham. The event offered a rare opportunity to explore one of the district's most ecologically rich woodlands and to learn about the traditional craft and modern conservation practices that help sustain it.

Andy led the group on a gentle walk through the coppice, explaining how he and his team of dedicated volunteers carefully manage the woodland. The group learned how the rides — the sectioned areas of coppice — are cut on an eight-year rotation, allowing a rich variety of wildflowers and grasses to flourish. Among these, Andy highlighted the rare orchids that make Hales Wood such an important local biodiversity site.



A major challenge, Andy explained, is keeping deer out of the woodland. Their rapidly increasing numbers are causing significant damage to young trees and undergrowth, threatening the delicate balance of the habitat. Managing their impact is an ongoing struggle, but one that is vital to the long-term health of the wood. If you eat meat, consider venison as a sustainable choice, creating a market for this meat will help keep numbers under control.



During the visit, Andy also showcased some of the beautiful and intricate items he crafts from the timber harvested during coppicing. From

practical tools to decorative pieces, each item demonstrated the skill and creativity that can emerge from sustainable woodland management. He also described the wide range of hazel products produced through the coppice cycle, all made using traditional techniques and natural materials.

The group was especially intrigued by Andy's discussion of biochar — a form of charcoal produced from waste wood that, when added to soil, can significantly enhance fertility and carbon storage. Andy spoke enthusiastically about its benefits, calling it “a fabulous way to give something back to the earth.”



The visit provided an inspiring insight into how thoughtful, small-scale woodland management can support both biodiversity and sustainability. Everyone left with a deeper appreciation of the hard work and dedication that goes into caring for Hales Wood Coppice — and the many ways in which people and nature can thrive together.