

Woodland Skills Centre Talk for Denbigh and District Club

Members of the Denbigh and District Probus Club were delighted to welcome Rod Waterfield from The Woodland Skills Centre, Bodfari, Denbighshire as the speaker for their first meeting of 2023 which was held at the Oriel Hotel in St Asaph.

Rod had been teaching for 35 years with his final 25 years in senior management as Deputy-Head and Head of community comprehensives.

He bought 50 acres of woodland and grazing land near Bodfari, in the heart of the Clwydian Range Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, took early retirement and set about seeing how the land could be used and developed in the light of his life-long interests in: people, the natural environment, and the interface between the two. The Woodlands Skills Centre was established 25 years ago.

The management objectives for the woodland and the centre are: social - with the land to be enjoyed by as many people as possible, environmental - trying to ensure that every species that could be expected to live in such an environment in that part of Wales is there and thriving and sustainable – economic, a working woodland that pays its way.

The site in the Wheeler Valley is on post glacial sand with very little surface water and so 4 ponds have been established over the years which have attracted a variety of native reptile species. Rod also explained how when he first took over the woodlands there were 7 native species of trees and now there are 28.

There is a commitment to preserve heritage crafts, running a variety of courses every year to pass on these valuable skills. There are 83 courses on offer during 2023 under the categories basket making and willow work, bushcraft, greenwood and coppice crafts, traditional crafts, woodland and countryside management, training courses and creative crafts.

The centre has won many awards including Best Community Woodland in Wales from the RWAS and Best Centre For Learning Traditional Craft from The Observer Magazine.

Traditional building techniques have been used for all of the buildings constructed at the centre using local materials wherever possible with the newest building being timber framed, having modern technology, Pilkington K glass, 150mm sheep's wool insulation, lime plaster, wood burner, a roof section which is 43 degrees from horizontal to get maximum solar gain from the photo-voltaic roof panels and many other sustainable features.

There is a mission to actively engage with people who do not generally come on the craft courses and this includes a social prescribing programme and work with adults with complex needs and their families with projects and activities that put benefit back into the local communities e.g., the wildflower project – growing them for Denbighshire County Council, allotments, heritage orchard etc.

There are also extensive programmes linked with education and youngsters who can't cope in school and projects and programmes in partnership with Ysgol Plas Brondyffryn (the regional centre for autism education in North Wales).

The Woodland Skills Centre is owned by Warren Woods Ltd; a community-owned, not-for-profit Social Enterprise company and the site currently supports 11 full time equivalent jobs.

Club members were amazed at the centre and the developments and projects that have taken place, are on-going and planned and at the massive amount of hard work and commitment from Rod, his family and staff in ensuring that the centre is a really valuable, successful and sustainable community resource.

Probus members plan to visit the centre in the future to see and experience some of the activities and projects first hand.

Denbigh and District Probus Club welcomes new members to join their group for monthly meetings (held at the Oriel Hotel, St Asaph) where they enjoy lunch, friendship and a talk from a guest speaker. For further information contact -

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The speaker at the next club meeting on Monday 6th February will be Ian Glass who will talk about Classic car rallying and touring.