

VIEW THROUGH THE TREES

Julia Goodfellow-Smith meets up with the neighbours

Splitting a woodland into several smaller plots creates a community of woodland owners. So, I have asked our community what the experience has been like in their first 12 to 18 months of ownership.

Nicola and James have been using ponies to supplement power tools in controlling bracken and brambles. Their woodland is unrecognisable from the thicket they bought. They are delighted to see the return of wildlife and are looking forward to seeing their meadow bloom.

Nicola says, 'The woodland is my happy place where I can breathe clean air, exercise and build conservation value.' For James, it is a retreat from his previous work environments and a place where he can develop useful skills for their next ambition – to be smallholders.

Richard bought his woodland as a place for his children to experience and explore nature. He initially thought it would be an extension of his home. Now he also thinks of home as an extension of the woodland, even building a den from woodland branches in the garden. He is pleased that the novelty of spending time in the woods has not worn off for his children, and that they are spending less time on screens at home now too.

Gemma wanted somewhere for herself and her family that would always be there. Until they discovered that their plot is ancient woodland, complete with dormice, they had plans to clear the brambles and create some flat areas. Instead, they have made a few small paths for the children to run around, and are very careful not to disturb the dormice or mycorrhizal fungi. There are times when the children are reluctant to go to the woods, but once there, they never want to leave.

For Tessa, who is renovating her house, the fact that the woodland does not need urgent attention is important. She feels that part of the fun will be developing the woodland over time, to accommodate the changing needs of her children. For now, there's excitement in discovery. 'Our woodland camera is awesome. It's hard for the children to imagine a badger when



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looking at a hole, so we all love to see the photos.'

My husband Mike has always loved being in woodlands, planting trees, chopping them down and making things from them. He loves the beauty of our woodland. 'We have stately beech trees, Scots pine around our camp and daffodils followed by bluebells from one end to the other.' He has been amazed by the variety of fungi we have, and at our reaction, accepting a slower pace of life there.

All of our neighbours have said that they enjoy being part of a community. Richard sums it up nicely. 'I wasn't expecting us to make friends in the woodland. The fact that we're amongst a community of owners has made it more enjoyable than buying a stand-alone wood. I have enjoyed the social side, and the children just run around playing with each other. This is in such contrast to modern-day life.'