



TIMBER FESTIVAL



Photo by Wild Rumpus

CITY, COUNTRY

Feanedock, Leicestershire/Derbyshire border, UK

DAILY CAPACITY

4000

SITE

The National Forest, a former industrial landscape turned into woodland

CAMPING

Yes

NUMBER OF DAYS

3

ESTABLISHED IN

2018

GENRE

Music, arts, film, talks, workshops, activities

CHALLENGE & SOLUTION

Building sustainable structures from scratch by involving and motivating all stakeholders

Set within the National Forest, a visionary regeneration project in the Midlands, Timber Festival explores the economic, social, environmental and cultural benefits of trees through a programme of arts, music, talks, workshops, film and activities. The festival site, Feanedock, used to be an industrial coal mining landscape. Now, it has become a woodland site in the heart of the National Forest which was reclaimed, reforested and the landscape transformed.

The festival's organisers Wild Rumpus are a Community Interest Company working at the intersection of arts and nature, explain Aileen Ging (Production Manager and Sustainability Lead) and Sarah Bird (Festival Director). "We're passionate about taking audiences on outdoor creative adventures that encourage a nature connection and help to imagine

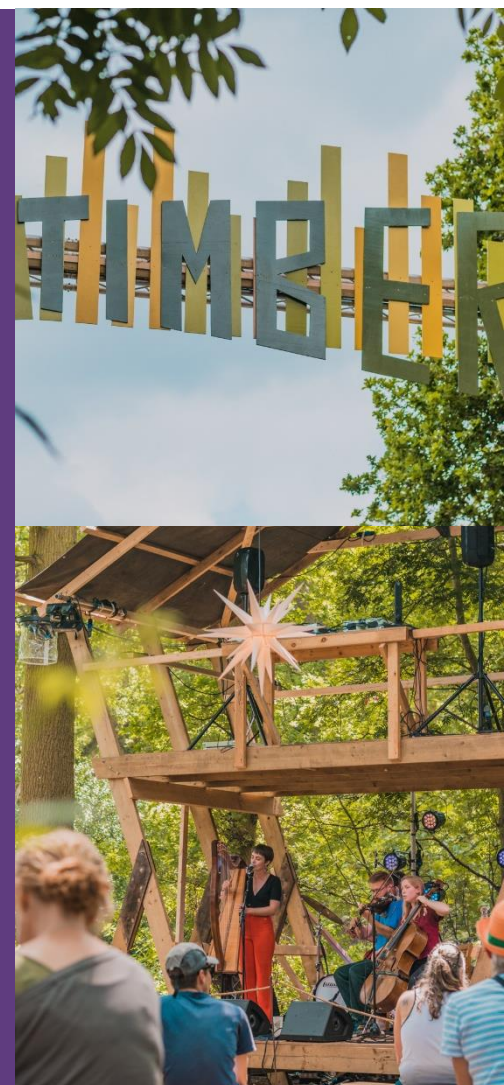
more sustainable futures," says Ging. The overall strategy for Timber is to offer the audience inspiring and creative opportunities to connect with nature, to inspire a passion for conservation and to provoke curiosity about the transformative impact of trees and forests on everyone's lives.

Timber Festival is passionate about collaborating with a wide range of community groups, schools, commissioning partners, researchers, conservation specialists and NGOs as well as artists.

"We are driven by the expectations of our audiences, programming partners and funding partners to offer them sustainable ways to engage with the festival," says Bird.



A YOUNG FESTIVAL EXPLORING THE IMPACT OF TREES ON EVERYONE'S LIVES



Photos by Wild Rumpus

DESIGNING A SUSTAINABILITY STRATEGY FROM SCRATCH

Despite being a young festival, Timber is working on a comprehensive sustainability strategy, and each area of the festival presents its own challenges.

Capacity and finance are the biggest challenges for Timber Festival. “We’re a small team, and to invest the time in researching all the options and really understanding and communicating all the impacts of our decision-making, takes a lot of staff time,” says Sustainability Lead, Ging. There is a need to make sure that everyone in the team is on board and plays their part in helping to feed into data collection, so that solely one individual doesn’t have to measure, track and analyse everything. They also have to communicate how and why they’re doing things to all the different stakeholders on site because their buy-in is essential for implementing initiatives effectively.

In addition to this, procurement can also be challenging. According to Ging, there’s a lack of sustainable infrastructure like electric buggies, generators and compost toilets that are available to hire locally in the Midlands; these are often more expensive, too. Public transport options for audience travel aren’t ideal either at the greenfield festival.

There are various other challenges for Timber Festival including convincing the team to adopt new solutions, making sure food vendors stick to the processes and policies in place, and encouraging behavioural changes, without enforcing them on the audience. “There is a challenge in maintaining the energy and drive to change whilst trying to convince others to do the same,” Bird summarises.

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EMBEDDING SUSTAINABILITY ACROSS THE ENTIRE ORGANISATION

In order to tackle these challenges, Timber Festival is trying to ensure sustainability is embedded across the whole organisation – this includes their advisory board –, rather than leaving the responsibility with just one person. “We believe in finding solutions to challenges collectively. We rely on all of our partners, contractors, audiences, volunteers and stakeholders to play their part,” Bird says.

When it comes to the financials, Bird thinks that many of their audiences wouldn’t buy tickets if the festival wasn’t delivering on sustainability, making it “a false economy not to invest”.

“Creative responses to the challenges have often received the best feedback from audiences and staff alike,” Ging adds. In 2021, they introduced the “Thread Exchange” where people could donate an item of clothing with a note about the story behind it and swap it for another piece of clothing. “The uptake was huge, and the stories people told were really heart-warming.” In the same year, Timber introduced a volunteer

Green Team who were focused on ensuring that sustainable processes were implemented, as well as communicating the initiatives to the audience.

In terms of transport, Timber has worked with local transport providers to implement a free shuttle bus connecting the local train stations to their site. They have also incentivised bike riding and walking to the site. They’ve worked with their power team to build and pilot their own wind turbines, solar panels and battery storage options, although in the long run they would love to have a connection to the main grid with a 100% renewable tariff.

As Timber Festival has a very conscientious audience, they have never had issues with tents or litter being left behind, Ging told us. “The audience adopts and embraces new initiatives like reusable cups, so the focus is on creating the conditions and delivering the infrastructure that allow people to do the right thing easily.”

THE SOLUTION



GETTING SUPPORT FROM PARTNERS

Timber works with many partners who help them to implement their sustainability strategy. The festival receives grants from: the National Forest, Arts Council England, and the local authority.

Moreover, crew caterers, CBJ, have introduced vegetarian and vegan meals for the crew.

Midlands Classics and Red Fox Cycling have helped with sustainable travel, whilst networks and organisations such as Without Walls, Ecolibrium and Julie's Bicycle have provided support, knowledge and resources.

The festival has learnt that transparency, openness and honesty are most important when it comes to strategy and communication. "I think we sometimes underestimate our audience's appetite for change. We worry they'll complain about things, but with the right communication about our reasons why we're doing something, they are nearly always more supportive than we expect." Incremental change is also acceptable, Bird acknowledges, as "we can't tackle everything at once".



WHAT'S NEXT?

Timber Festival is currently re-designing their system for assessing their environmental impact: they are trying out a risk assessment format, which all departments will have to fill in for their specific area. The team is making incremental improvements to the design of the on-site waste system, and production is transitioning to electric site vehicles. The festival continues to try to reduce fuel usage on site, increasing the quantity of battery storage each year. They are also tackling audience travel with the introduction of an affordable pre-pitch camping service to encourage audiences to come by public transport.