



Community
Wood
Recycling



WORKING FOR A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE

25 YEARS OF COMMUNITY WOOD RECYCLING

ANNUAL REPORT 2023





RICHARD MEHMED
MANAGING DIRECTOR

“The shift I have seen over the last 25 years in attitudes to waste and the growth in trading for people not profit has been remarkable.”

When I started the country’s first community wood recycling project 25 years ago I hadn’t heard the terms social value or circular economy. All I could see was that useful timber was being sent to landfill, and that working as part of a team to save wood for the local community was changing the lives of vulnerable and excluded people.

Now I am proud to be working along with my dedicated colleagues at 28 wood recycling social enterprises around the country. I find great inspiration in visiting our enterprises and witnessing the transformation of individuals who have moved from social isolation, loneliness, and lack of confidence to gainful employment, collective accomplishments, and a deep sense of camaraderie while working together to help our planet.

The shift I have seen over the last 25 years in attitudes to waste and the growth in trading for people not profit have been remarkable. Together with our partners in the construction industry and beyond, we have been at the forefront of this movement for a quarter of a century.

At Community Wood Recycling, we have always believed that waste should be seen as a valuable resource. By reusing and repurposing wood waste, we have helped reduce the carbon footprint of our communities while creating jobs and supporting local economies. For 25 years we have followed our belief that every action we take can create positive change in the world.

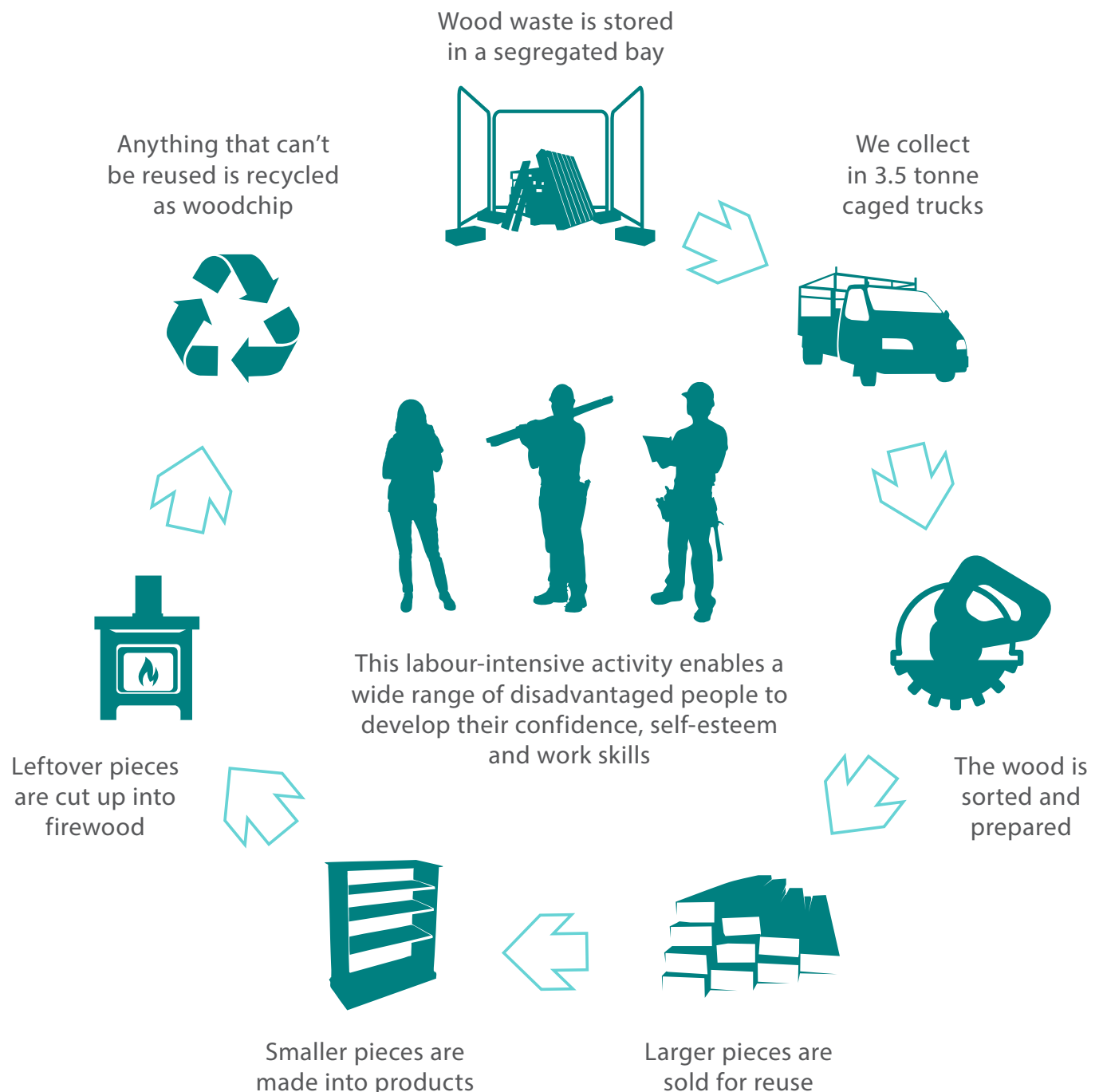
We look forward to working with all our stakeholders to build a better future.

HOW IT WORKS

We have developed a circular economy approach to dealing with wood waste

Our aims are to save resources and create life changing opportunities for people, especially those from marginalised or disadvantaged backgrounds.

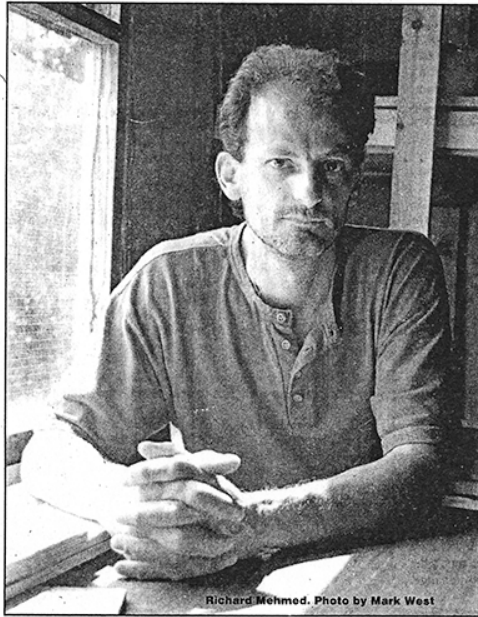
We provide the most environmentally beneficial method of dealing with waste wood, focussing as much as possible on **REUSE**: getting waste wood back into use without chipping it.



OUR HISTORY

Saving the wood from the trees

The Brighton and Hove wood recycling project is the first of its kind in the country. Rosemary Turner talks to its founder...



Richard Mehmed. Photo by Mark West

In a wooden hut surrounded by green leaves and birdsong, Richard Mehmed – insurance marketing executive turned eco-warrior – boils up the kettle for tea.

Outside in the Spring sunshine he pulls up a wooden chair and stretches out legs clad in torn jeans and scuffed boots. He seems superbly content with life, in a restless, searching sort of way. Not for one moment does he show a sign of regret for the designer suits, the computerised office and the fat salary – with bonuses – which he chose to turn his back on a few months ago. His new environmental project, reclaiming and recycling everything from a matchstick to timber from the West Pier, is his idea of what work should be all about.

"This is a microcosm, a pilot of how a major scheme could work," he explains, gazing with unconcealed pride at a large clump of nettles, a blue plastic polytunnel and piles of odd pieces of wood.

It's all very charming – in a Pop Larkin sort of way. But don't be fooled. Richard is no 'woolly jumper', no well-meaning tree-hugger with vague dreams of saving the planet. He is a dynamic, energetic, realistic business man, prepared to use his considerable skill and knowledge of the hard commercial world to turn an environmental scheme into a sound business venture.

While a team of dedicated volunteers collect, sort and stack the loads of wood that arrive daily on site,

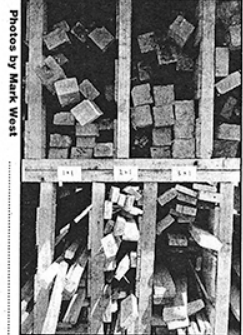
Richard's brain is racing ahead with budgets, business plans and sponsorship schemes.

His career switch had been carefully thought through while he was still employed in the insurance business. Richard used his considerable salary to establish himself in a position of no debts and enough in the bank to see him and his family through the tough early months. "I left because I knew what I was doing wasn't right," he said. "I have always wanted to work for the environment, I'm tired of consuming and wasting."

The idea for wood recycling began when Richard decided to build a playhouse in the garden for his daughter. Sheets of wood at the DIY shop seemed very expensive but then he spotted just what he wanted propped up outside a local factory. When he asked if he could help himself to a couple of sheets, he was shocked to be shown pallets more of good wood stacked up waiting to be burned. It had arrived from Eastern Europe in the form of crates to hold machine tools, but once the valuable contents were unpacked the company had no further use for the wood.

With the support of his local councillor, Richard persuaded Brighton and Hove Council to find him a suitable site where he could "rescue" this wood and add to it any other boards, planks and fittings that came his way.

"I was out there in February in the rain with my claw hammer pulling out



Photos by Mark West

nails and thinking: what am I doing?" he said. But seriously he never doubted what he was attempting.

Already the site is taking shape with neat storage compartments labelled 'mouldings', 'ply', 'planking' etc. Each is filled with the appropriate product and heavy duty plastic keeps out the rain. Saws and drills have already been donated by DIY shops prepared to sponsor the project and every day brings new ideas and visible progress.

Richard does not foresee any objections from the big DIY stores, even when his project is firmly up and running. "People will always need new timber for certain jobs," he explained. "And I am talking with a DIY chain about stocking recycled timber alongside. It wouldn't be cheaper but it would give people a choice."

The unique thing about this project is that it aims to take any kind of wood and not "cherry pick" the good stuff and leave the rubbish. This makes it worthwhile for a builder to pay the project to take away left-over wood

NEW INSIGHT JULY 98 (continued overleaf)

Founder Richard Mehmed first realised the potential of waste wood in 1998 when building a playhouse for his daughter. He spotted some plywood outside a local factory, and when he asked if he could take a couple of them for his playhouse he was shocked to find the pile was just a fraction of the perfectly reusable wood waiting to be landfilled. Saddened by the waste, Richard came up with a plan to divert wood out of the waste stream, and the social enterprise Brighton and Hove Wood Recycling Project was born.

Thanks to the success of the Brighton and Hove wood recycling project, funding was secured to franchise the not-for-profit financially self-supporting model elsewhere and the National Community Wood Recycling Project was founded in 2003. The National Builders Collection Scheme was set up to market the service to building companies in 2010, allowing the NCWRP to become self-funding and offer support to enterprises without the need for grants or fundraising. There are currently 28 enterprises operating across the country, collectively forming Community Wood Recycling and collecting more than 20,000 tonnes of wood every year.

OUR NETWORK

The network has grown steadily with around one or two enterprises starting up each year. With most urban areas covered, our focus is now on growing and maintaining the existing centres.

28
enterprises

82
vehicles

246
staff

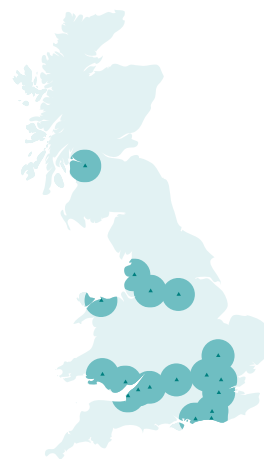
637
volunteers



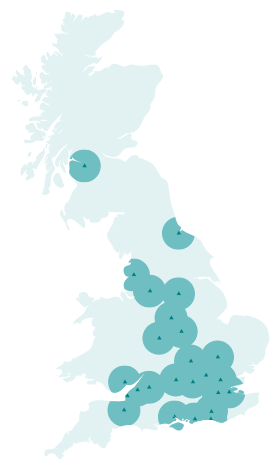
1998



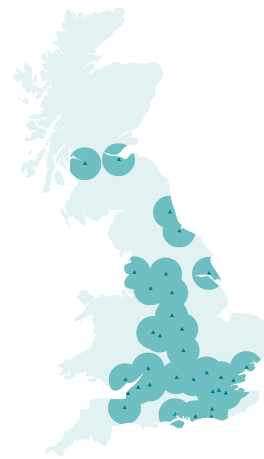
2003



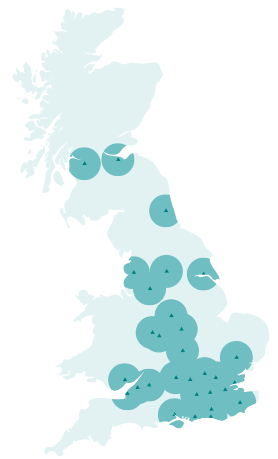
2008



2013



2018



2023

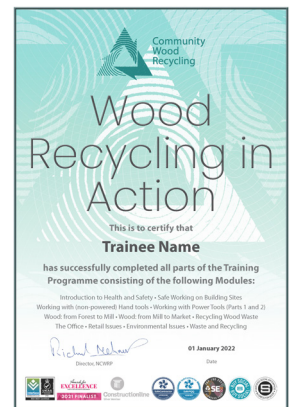


TRAINING WORKERS

We provide mentoring and training to staff and volunteers, supported by training material based on years of experience

Training Programme

The Community Wood Recycling modular training programme has been a key part of our volunteer offering almost since the start. The first 2 modules deal with basic health and safety, manual handling, and working on building sites, and the next 3 with tool use and workshop safety. The rest are optional and cover the wood supply chain, environmental issues, office and retail work, and job hunting.



15 modules in programme
6,200 volunteers trained since 2010



35 average days of training per volunteer

36 average new volunteers per month

▲ A Roots Timber Reuse employee who joined as part of the Kickstart scheme, with her CSCS card

CHANGING LIVES

“Restoring anything gives me a buzz; but seeing lives restored, that’s something else!”

WILL KIRK 'THE REPAIR SHOP' & 'MORNING LIVE' IN A BBC REPORT ON NEW LIFE WOOD

Suddenly I had something that could actually get me a job. I'd applied for lots of work in the past but not got anywhere. This was the first time I was able to get a job; basically it's handing someone the key to employment.

TRAINEE



It really did change everything for me. I found new friends and it helped me build up my confidence. I'm not really good at holding my own and I've been pushed around a lot in my life. This was the first place I felt part of the team. When they asked me to trial for a full time job as a driver, I can't tell you what that meant to me. It changed my life. I lost 4 stones in weight, became fitter and it felt great that they trusted me enough to give me this job. I'm now independent of benefits and have saved up enough to buy a car.

VOLUNTEER

Due to my learning difficulties and other mental health issues, I have always found it difficult to be comfortable and feel accepted with groups and teams. Being able to volunteer and work here at made me feel that I can be part of a team and gave me confidence to look for full time employment.

VOLUNTEER

We hired a volunteer with severe mental health issues, and he has gone on to now getting a full-time employment elsewhere due to the confidence he gained working with us.

ENTERPRISE MANAGER

Lucas came to us with PTSD and a lack of confidence that meant he couldn't look you in the eye and could only stammer a few words at a time. As he worked with us his confidence grew and five months later, he left us to join a well-known national gym network as a trainer, leading classes of over 30 people.

ENTERPRISE MANAGER

The whole experience of being in a work environment (and such a supportive one), and the discipline and socialisation this involves is tremendously beneficial.

MENCAP CASEWORKER



The programme has been life changing for Mark. He has gained paid employment for the first time along with increased confidence, improved communication skills and a new level of independence.

EMPLOYMENT COACH

CREATING VALUE IN THE COMMUNITY

All over the country, wood recyclers are working with the local community to build a more sustainable future and supporting people in overcoming barriers

SOLO WOOD RECYCLING

Build Club and School Sustainability Sessions

Our Croydon-based wood recyclers run kids' workshops to give local children hands on experience of working with wood, as well as teaching them about the principles of sustainability and why recycling matters.

"Many parents joined the fray on the mat and got involved, enjoying the bonding experience building something with your kids can bring. It was brilliant to see everyone working together and getting hands on, and it was fun all round."



GLASGOW WOOD

Impact Arts

Glasgow Wood partnered with Impact Arts, a charity that provides creative opportunities for people aged 16+ who are out of work, education or training to get them feeling more confident and gain an accredited Employability Award. Woodworker John facilitated a workshop for young people to build and decorate some bird boxes from reclaimed pallet wood, as part of their Creative Pathways project.

WOOD SAINTS

Maker Classes

Wood Saints offers classes for local creatives to share their skills with the public, helping people build skills they can use recreationally, practically, and professionally. These include basic wood working courses, more advanced furniture restoration training, and using a sewing machine to create or modify clothes.



LEEDS WOOD RECYCLING

Specialised Work Experience

Leeds Wood Recycling offers a specialised 12-week course for adults with learning difficulties or special needs to gain skills and confidence by helping at the enterprise, supported by a woodworking instructor and an on-site support worker. People on the placement learn about recycling, working safely, using tools, and more.



OXFORD WOOD RECYCLING PROJECT

Wood to Work

Wood to Work is a partnership between Oxford Wood Recycling, Ways into Work, and Oxfordshire County Council's supported employment service, Oxfordshire Employment. The aim of Wood to Work is to help individuals who face significant barriers to employment, including health or disability, to enter the world of work by supporting them to be ready for work, to find a job and to support them whilst they start work.

RIVERSIDE TIMBER REUSE

ACE partnership

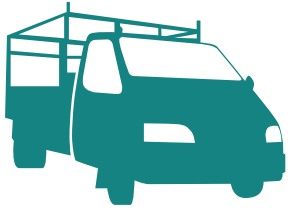
Riverside Timber Recycling Project in Essex works in partnership with local group ACE, part of Voluntary Action Epping Forest, providing a workspace, materials and guidance for their woodworking project and giving people with learning disabilities opportunities to upcycle furniture and make items for sale out of reclaimed wood timber.

"Working with wood is enjoyable and builds companionship and collaboration. There is pride in the finished article and in seeing it sold."



25 YEARS OF SAVING RESOURCES

Reusing wood saves waste, reduces pressure on forests, and cuts down on transport distances, reducing emissions



244,020 tonnes
wood collected since 1998



38%

reused



62%

recycled



0%

landfilled

In 1990, less than 2% of wood waste in the UK was recycled. In 2020, it was more than 80%. We've come a long way, but Community Wood Recycling has always set its sights beyond recycling, aiming to reuse as much as possible.

Over 25 years, we've shifted a truly incredible quantity of wood, one van load at a time, reducing skip lorry traffic, transport miles, virgin timber demand, and landfill, turning waste into a useful and affordable resource for the public.

CO₂

120,000 tonnes
CO₂ equivalent averted

Our methods save fuel and cut both upstream and downstream emissions. We estimate that we save around half a tonne of CO₂ per tonne of wood collected.



388,000
gal. diesel saved

A tightly packed 3.5 tonne van uses only around a quarter of the fuel of a skip lorry per tonne of wood hauled, which means lower emissions of CO₂, CO, NO_x and particulates.



92,237
tonnes reuse

Most of the wood that was earmarked for reuse was sold on to the public for DIY, and the rest was used to make products and firewood. Reused wood is affordable, much less polluting than metal or plastic, and is a more efficient use of our valuable resources.

REUSING WOOD

For 25 years, Community Wood Recycling has been giving wood that would have been chipped or landfilled a new lease on life

Jericho Wood Shack at the Commonwealth Games

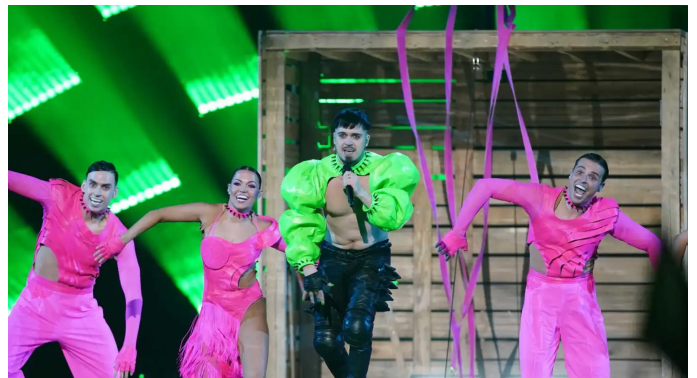
In 2022, Commonwealth Games spectators in Birmingham enjoyed the work of their local wood recyclers. Wooden panels at the entrance to the Smithfield site, home of Beach Volleyball and Basketball, were created by the Jericho Wood Shack social enterprise (part of the Community Wood Recycling network) from reclaimed timber collected from construction and manufacturing sites. In total, 2,500 metres of pallet wood and nearly 8,000 screws were used to make and fit the panels together.

This project involved all the team, including apprentices, survivors of modern slavery, managers and drivers coming together to cut down the timber and make the panels.

The social enterprise also created the impressive thrones occupied by the cyclists in the gold, silver and bronze medal positions in the time trial. They were built from reclaimed wood, with the back rests made from oak flooring, parquet flooring, ply, pine floorboard, buffalo board and even a piece from a bed.



EMERGE Touch Wood at Eurovision 2023



Manchester-based Touch Wood EMERGE reclaimed wood from the staging of Eurovision 2023. With Liverpool hosting the competition on behalf of 2022 winner Ukraine, the network was delighted to play its part in making the competition more sustainable.

Host broadcaster the BBC worked with the European Broadcasting Union to provide staging for 37 different acts from across the continent and beyond. Each act had its own visual identity and a new song was presented every 4 minutes so many of the effects were computer generated, but physical sets were also an important part of filling the 450m² stage.

More than two tonnes of timber from the spectacular has been saved for reuse, and products made from Eurovision timber are proving popular with local fans. As well as benefitting the environment, the manufacture and sale of these items will help to provide jobs, volunteering opportunities and training for disadvantaged people.

HELPING OUR CLIENTS MEET THE U.N. SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

Our work intersects with 6 of the 17 United Nations goals for a fair and sustainable future for humanity

Since Community Wood Recycling began, sustainability has gone from an issue of niche interest to one of global survival. Our core business model remains one of the most socially and environmentally friendly ways of dealing with wood waste.

It is not only up to our world leaders. Every person can benefit from a more prosperous, inclusive and resilient world. We can all do something about it, regardless of whether we are in a government or civil society, run a business or a home, are in school or out of it.

WWW.UN.ORG



We develop our volunteers' physical and mental fitness.



We help those facing employment challenges into long-term, fulfilling jobs.



We feed into the circular economy by reusing at the highest possible level.



We encourage women to get involved in carpentry and the construction sector.



We focus on providing support and opportunities to disadvantaged people.



Our methodology saves carbon emissions compared to traditional methods.

Your support can help us do even more!

If you are in an industry generating wood waste, you can help promote our wood collection services in your organisation. If you have time available, you can volunteer with us, and if you're looking for wood for a DIY or building project, or for furniture, decorations or gifts, please consider buying sustainably from one of our social enterprises, where you'll find an Aladdin's cave of reclaimed timber.

Find out more at:

www.communitywoodrecycling.org.uk

Or call our national office on:

01273 20 30 40