

# Chopsticks

Stimulating work and sustainable fuel from charity for adults with learning difficulties



Formed in 1995 Chopsticks, a charity for adults with learning difficulties in Northallerton provides a stimulating and challenging environment for it's service users creating firewood products from waste wood and timber bi-product materials. They also heat their building with the fuel they create. Operating on a not-for-profit-basis they use what others discard to bring a valuable and increasingly sought after product to market, kindling. Their easy handle, clean packing system, has aided the regional growth in log stove heating, taking the strain out of fire lighting and helping the bloom in firewood sales.

## objectives

- To provide a work based activities for adults with a learning disability and/or physical disability.
- To support the local economy, reduce waste and providing sustainable fuel for the region.
- To reduce the carbon footprint of the enterprise and where possible that of the local community.

## actions

- The charity formed in 1995, and moved to it's present 1,000m<sup>2</sup> accommodation, a purpose built enterprise unit in 2007. This enabled the installation of disabled access, a purpose built boiler room and an improved service provision for the service users.
- The process machinery, production lines and handling facilities were designed with increased safety, access provision and ease of operation in mind. It is not important to mechanise the process but to create a engaging way of working for service users.
- The handling method for the bi-product of the kindling production was designed along with a processing technique to provide minimum wastage, maximum heat value to heat their building and sell surplus material to the market as a premium product.

## achievements

### For Business:

- Over 50 adults with learning difficulties have been through the project, giving them valuable life skills, a feeling of worth and inclusion.
- The centre employs 8 staff as carers, with additional operational and administrative staff.

### For the Region:

- A 'waste' product that had little or no value to businesses can be utilised to provide a 'green' product, provide an additional revenue stream and provide the wider community with a valuable social enterprise.
- A high quality, purpose built urban fringe development exemplar of wood chip heating.
- Widen of provision range available to village shops, aiding their economic stability. Providing a much needed, niche product that assists wood being thought of as an easy use, clean fuel.

## background

- The charity started in 1995, in Northallerton and has been a success, providing a safe and stimulating working environment to over 30 service users every week. Service users get to participate in the full range of the charities operations, from warehouse, machining and despatch the much sort after kindling.
- The new building was opened in 2007, and houses a 46Kw CN boiler, installed by Earlswood Services. It is an 'open door' system, which enables it to be feed with chip from the hopper sited adjacent or larger, difficult pieces for processing by service users can be place direct into the firebox.
- The installation cost were £15,000, of which 75% was the boiler and hopper, with the rest for the pipe works.
- The industrial unit is equipped with a computerised Paul saw-bench, £35,000 (supported by the Big Lottery Fund), a donated stick-splitter and a free standing commercial Votecs waste woodchipper, £15,000 fitted. This provides a G30, premium quality, kiln dried wood chip to fuel both their own system and a growing order book or local installations, including art galleries and stately homes.
- Chopsticks currently process 180t of waste wood annually, selling this as 120t of kindling and 60t as premium grade kiln dry chip.

## quotes

*"Waste is always a problem, so providing it for both a good cause and for someone to actively reuse it - whilst helping the local community is great for everyone".*

Graham Nelson, NBM Timber Products Ltd

*"The boiler has been a great success. We now receive regular inquiries from other people who have installed biomass boilers, with a view to purchasing the premium grade wood chip that we produce".*

Christopher Marlowe, Chopsticks Development Officer.

## partners

Material Donors:  
North Yorkshire Timber  
RK Timber  
Lowe & Simpson  
MBN Timber Products  
Sheffield College

North Yorkshire Social Services

Manco Energy – Boiler Supplier  
Earlswood Services - Installation

## funding

Yorkshire Forward £150,000 Grant

Adventure Capital Fund  
- £200, 000 Loan  
- £45,000 Grant

Scottish Power  
- 'Green Energy Fund ' £7,600 Grant  
DTI Low Carbon Buildings  
£4,800 Grant

Big Lottery Fund

