

# SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE



## Community Supported Woodlands and Hedges

### Wood fuel and other benefits from small woodlands and hedges

*A Tool-kit for Communities v1.0 July 2013*

#### Chapter 1: Introduction to the toolkit

Prepared by Kate Royston and Dave Readman (Cotna)  
Robbee Smole Sustainable Business Solutions  
For Tamar Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty



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**Robbee Smole**  
Sustainable Business Solutions

**TamarValley**  
Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty



## Chapter 1 Introduction to the Tool-kit

This document is inspired by the wonderful potential offered by the hedges and small woodlands that help shape our landscape. It has been developed as a useful guide for community groups, land owners and others keen to realise this potential.

This is a living document designed to be improved by its users. The authors welcome your feedback.

### 1.1 Introducing small woodlands and hedges in Devon and Cornwall

According to the Devon Hedge Group, Devon has ‘the most intact **hedgerow** heritage’ compared to any other county in England with 53,000 km in total, many of which are ancient<sup>1</sup>. In Cornwall there is an estimated 48,000 km<sup>2</sup>. This is a combined resource of just over 100,000 km.

The Forestry Commission estimate that Devon has 77,000 hectares (ha) of **woodland** (11.5% of Devon) of which 60% are estimated to be undermanaged<sup>3</sup>. It might be assumed that coverage in Cornwall is a little less. However the overall resource is considerable.

Many of these hedges and woodlands are currently undermanaged, suffering biodiversity loss though lack of attention, yet could deliver significant value to the local economies and wellbeing of residents through their exploitation for woodfuel, other products and/or as amenity assets.

Rob Wolton, Chair of Devon Hedge Group, estimates<sup>4</sup> that 1 km of sustainably managed hedge could yield 10 Mwh of heat per year. Three km of hedge managed under a 15 year rotation could generate sufficient heat to sustain an average farmhouse. Assuming 50% of hedge should be set aside for biodiversity reasons a 6km stretch would suffice for the farmhouse.

Small woodlands are estimated to yield 12-15 Mwh per hectare per annum requiring 2.5 ha to sustain the needs for an average farmhouse.

Sustainable management of our hedges and small woodlands could provide a significant source of local heating amongst other valuable uses.

### 1.2 Opportunities for communities

For a variety of reasons commercial exploitation and management of hedges and small woodlands may not always be attractive for private and public organisations. These include lack of resources, extraction cost and accessibility.

Many, however, may present an ideal opportunity for community groups to work together gaining value from management of a hedge or woodland resource.

The **top 6 challenges facing a community-supported woodland or hedge management** project can be:

- Forming the community group and getting it going
- Identifying a good woodland or hedge for the project
- Reaching an agreement with the landowner



<sup>1</sup> <http://www.devonhedges.org/DevonHedges.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.cornishhedges.co.uk/>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.forestry.gov.uk/newsrele.nsf/WebPressReleases/071D85E331BEDA69802576E0005083AE>

<sup>4</sup> The capacity of the hedges and small woodlands in four parishes in the Tamar Valley to meet local heat requirements. Dr Robert Wolton and Dr. Faye Davey, June 2012

- Developing the management plan and understanding the required skills and competencies to undertake the work
- Undertaking practical work safely
- Funding the project

**To get your project on a strong footing** and overcome such barriers it is important to:

- Develop a reasonable understanding of what managing a woodland / hedge might mean. Talk to others and read a good guide such as 'Woodlands: A practical handbook' available from The Conservation Volunteers ([www.tcv.org.uk](http://www.tcv.org.uk)). Participate in a woodland training day or conservation day.
- Take time to get to know [potential] members of the group. Be clear about the group's motivations and shape a membership structure which can accommodate the various agreed needs; ensure there are clear rules and responsibilities agreed by all; maintain transparency regarding the group's finances and distribution of benefits such as wood fuel; seek independent advice on constituting the group, but don't rush into this.
- Look around the area for a small woodland / hedge which might be suitable, and consult with local organisations / landowners who may be able to help and/or champion your cause such as an AONB, Parish Council or farmers' organisation. There may also be an organisation locally that could act as a Support Hub for your (and other)group(s) locally and work with you to help overcome some of the barriers.
- In developing an agreement with a landowner ensure that there is open and transparent dialogue on both sides. There must be a clear understanding of the landowners needs and how these can be delivered; the landowner will also want to understand how the group is structured and planning to work. A good approach may be to agree 'Heads of Terms' as laid out by the Community Land Advisory Service in their document (see appendix) i.e. agree all the key points of substance first. These can then be used as the basis for an appropriate legal agreement once all the objective points are agreed.
- It is critical for the group, and the landowner, to develop a management plan for managing the woodland or hedge. The first step is to understand what there is to start with, and then how this needs to be managed to meet the needs of the woodland / hedge and achieve the groups objectives (these need to be complementary). The Forestry Commission's template is recommended for this. The group will need help if they have insufficient expertise, and this can be 'bought-in'. Your champion or landowner may be able to help; grants may also be available.
- It is important to ensure that practical work in the woodlands / hedge is undertaken safely. Agreed processes and procedures for practical work must be adhered to by all group members, supported by good leadership. There are resources to help develop these, such as 'Woodlands: A practical handbook' and templates for a Risk Assessment, Accident Report etc. It is essential to have insurance in place.
- The management plan should help identify the likely costs in running and maintaining the group and the woodland / hedge and the potential revenue generated from products. Any shortfall can be funded through membership fees, grants, donations etc. Time should be given to understanding the group's financial viability from the beginning.

This tool-kit can help step you through the process.

*Chapter Two* of this tool-kit highlights **what small woodlands and hedges could offer** communities.

The things to consider in **starting a group** are outlined in *Chapter Three*.

*Chapter Four* introduces the **management of hedges and woodlands** and how to identify the right resource for your group.

*Chapter Five* outlines important considerations for the **landowner**, and for the group in seeking to secure an **agreement for a woodland or hedge** resource.

Essential **practical issues** around working with or in the woods/hedges are discussed in *Chapter Six*.

*Chapters Seven and Eight* discuss **useful tools and aids**, including hand and power tools.

Developing the **group's skills and competencies**, or buying these in is explained in *Chapter Nine*.

Finally, *Chapter Ten* introduces the topic of the '**Support Hub**' which might be able to assist community groups. Importantly, the tool-kit also has a number of useful references including **contact details** for local, regional and national **network resources** as well as references for **background reading**