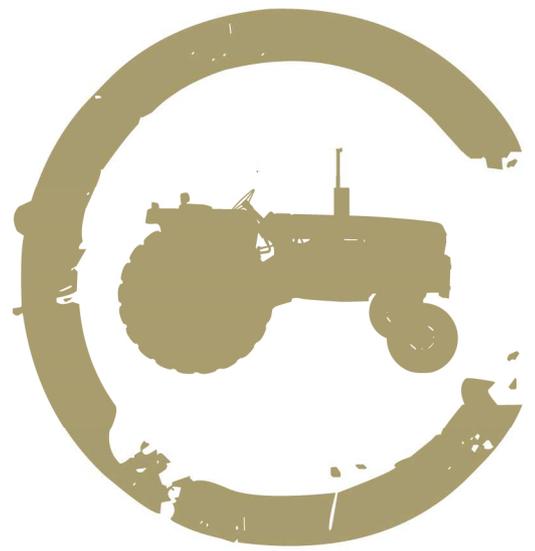


SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE



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 3: The Community Group

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



CORDIALE was selected under the European Cross-border Cooperation Programme INTERREG IV A France (Channel) – England, co-funded by the ERDF.

Robbee Smole
Sustainable Business Solutions

TamarValley
Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty



Chapter 3 The community group

Forming a self-standing group with like-minded people may be likened to setting out on a journey together.

3.1 Setting up a group

Bovey Climate Action (BCA) started their community woodfuel group in 2009. A summary of their experiences is included in Chapter 2 of the Dartmoor Circle Woodfuel Toolkit (available online¹), and this is a good example to refer to when thinking about setting up a group to gain benefits from a hedge or woodland, for its amenity, woodfuel, wood product benefits, or for its heritage and biodiversity value.



Finding members

Potential members may be part of an existing local group. Local papers and community newsletters can also provide a good means of publicity. BCA suggest that 12 is a good number of people to aim for at the beginning.

There is no magic formula. Each group and its circumstances will be different. It is very important to spend time together understanding what the group wants to do and achieve ... and how.

Understanding the group's motivations

Important questions which the group should consider together include: What do we want to do with our woodland / hedge? What do we want to get out of it? Why? How?

A useful framework to help think this through is included below. It identifies a number of different needs and functions which may be of interest to the group (there may also be others).

Functions identified:	What do you want to do	What do you want to get out of it (objectives)	Why?	How do we do / achieve this?
Habitat improvement				
Surveying, recording, monitoring				
Heritage improvement				
Access improvements				
Exercise and physical activity				
Landscape and amenity improvement				
Logwood				
Charcoal				
Other wood products (please suggest)				
Forest school, education				

An example framework completed during a Cordiale Community Group workshop in the Tamar Valley is included in the Appendices for illustration.

¹ <http://www.dartmoorcircle.org.uk/whatwedo.html>

Thinking through the implications of woodland management for the group

The group should think through the implications of taking on a woodland or hedge resource, considering what needs to be done, when, and the skills and resources required. This should be reflected in the management plan (see Chapter 4). This is an important step. Many of the necessary activities may have specific seasons when they can be undertaken, and require specific skills, competencies and equipment. These may be available in the group or will need to be 'bought in'. Forward planning is essential. This is discussed in more detail in the following chapters.



3.2 Defining the membership structure and the group's rules and responsibilities

A membership structure will be needed for the group to define member's rights and responsibilities amongst themselves, to the group as a whole, and to the woodland asset. This may be very simple for, say, a small woodfuel group, or may need to be more complex for a larger group with a range of activities.

The Membership Structure

To define the most appropriate membership structure it is recommended that the group considers a number of factors which may be influenced by the users, the land owner, and the woodland/hedge and its requirements. These may include:

- Is membership restricted?
- What are the conditions for joining the group?
- Will an annual subscription be payable?
 - What does the subscription charge include?
- Are all members equal or are there different classes of membership depending on activities and skill levels e.g.
 - Are members investing their own labour?
 - Does the member have special skills and certification e.g. in chain saw use?
 - Are they using their own tools or group tools?
 - Are they taking wood or product from the woodland for their own use?
- Is the product available for resale?
 - What quantities of product are available?
 - What are the terms of payment?
- What group running costs need to be covered?
- Is training and support available and what is the cost?
- What are the expectations in return for training and support e.g. voluntary labour hours?
- What range of skills and competencies are required and how these are supplied?

A good structure will also help de-personalise any issues that may arise. There may be advantages to adopting a flexible structure which will enable the group to accommodate different types of users and activities more easily and equitably; not everything may be clear from the beginning.

A review of practice across a number of Community Supported Woodfuel community groups, including Axewoods and Holt Hill Wood, suggests a membership framework such as the example provided below. Remember that each group will be unique and the framework should be adapted to meet your group's needs.

It is also advisable to keep a log of hours worked. This can be handy to work out wood allowances where applicable and a well maintained log of in-kind volunteer time can be beneficial if needed for grant applications.

Potential Membership Framework

Members offer	Detail of offer	Members need	Subscription cost eg
Time, labour, skills exchange for wood discount	Labour, plus trained, certificated, skilled tool user, own tools	no wood need	£1 subscribe
		in exchange for wood	£1 + £10 for 2 No. tonne bags
	Labour, plus trained, certificated, skilled tool user, borrow tools	no wood need	£1+ tool subscribe
		in exchange for wood	£1+tool subscribe + £10 for 2 No. tonne bags
	Labour offered, own tools	no wood need	£1 subscribe
		in exchange for wood	£1 + £10 for 2 No. tonne bags
	Labour offered, borrow tools	no wood need	£1+ tool subscribe
		in exchange for wood	£1+tool subscribe + £10 for 2 No. tonne bags
Subscribe	No labour, cordwood wanted	will collect	Market price - discount
		delivered	Market price
	No labour, logwood wanted,	will collect	Market price - discount
		delivered	Market price

Considerations for Forest School users

A Forest School group may be an organisational user rather than a collection of individuals and requires a different sort of membership framework. The questions raised above for woodland groups will also be partly relevant for the Forest School organisation and its participants. It may be that a school or similar group engaged around Forest School and educational activities are less interested in the everyday woodland management aspects, but would like to link up with a community group more interested in these aspects.

Access to tools and machinery

Working woodlands will require access to tools and machinery. These may be owned by or available to the individual groups, or could be made available through an arrangement such as a tool or machinery ring. Models from agricultural practice could be used to establish a local ring, incorporating one or more of the elements below:

- each member pays an annual subscription. This could be on top of group subscription
- a levy is charged on every activity by the supplier
- a levy is charged on every activity of the demander
- the machinery ring is run as a cooperative and each member has share capital
- the operating area is restricted e.g. to within a 25 mile radius



Source: Woodlands.co.uk

A Social Forestry Stakeholder Workshop in the Tamar Valley held in January 2012, concluded that using central hubs for equipment, training, processing and storage may be the most economical and efficient way to proceed. This is discussed more in Chapter 7.

Rules and Responsibilities

Each group should have a set of rules reflecting the group's responsibilities. Members should sign a form on joining the group agreeing to the conditions of group membership (an example is provided in the appendices).

Responsibilities

Each member of the group should consider their responsibilities to the constituents below and the implications of these:

- to oneself
- to the landowner
- to each other
- to other woodland users
- to the woodland itself

Key areas of responsibility will lie around health and safety, respecting others, safeguarding the woodland/hedge resource's biodiversity and heritage, and its availability for everyone's enjoyment. Upholding the responsibilities will be supported through the rules, insurance documentation, risk assessment and health and safety procedures as well as the management plan itself.

Rules

The rules are particularly important in an environment where potentially dangerous tools and other hazards may be present.

These may consist of a number of basic rules applicable to any group such as 'reading and signing the risk assessment before working' and 'abiding by the agreement with the landowner', supplemented with site and group specific rules e.g. around car parking.

Some suggestions are included below (from Dartmoor Circle Community Toolkit)

1. All members to read and sign the risk assessment before working.
2. Members to ensure their hours are put on the register at each session.
3. Firewood to be shared out according to the hours each member has worked.
4. Members to abide by the agreement with the landowner.

The Attendance Register and Risk Assessment are discussed further in Chapter Six: Workday practicalities.

3.3 Getting to grips with finance

Developing a good understanding of the costs involved in managing the woodland / hedge and the group, and how these can be funded is essential. Preparing and managing a budget of forecast income and expenses is recommended. The group should aim to be self-funding and finances should be considered at an early stage, covering costs through membership subscriptions and/or product sales. There may be opportunities for grants to cover larger cost items such as training and tools.

The group may be set up to be entirely self-supporting, or may look to find an over-arching organisation which can provide support services such as administration, tool supply or other contracted services. This is discussed further in Chapter 10.

Costs may include:

- Insurance
- Lease charges for use of wood/hedgerow
- Training
- Professional services
- Tools / tool hire

Income may arise from:

- Membership subscriptions
- Sale of wood fuel / other products
- Providing services / expertise to other groups
- Events and fund raising

Annual **insurance** is an essential cost to cover. The Conservation Volunteers (www.tcv.org.uk) offer an option with an annual cost of around £200-250 per annum (2012) dependent upon scale of activity and additional cover, such as for chainsaw use.

Training and skills development costs, such as a session on species identification could be covered by charging attendees a share of the training fee in exchange for the knowledge gained. This could be a model for covering other such one-off costs.

Some groups may choose to provide a proportion of **wood** to a **good cause** such as those in fuel poverty.



Sources of funding

There are a few organisations offering grants towards the costs of setting up and managing woodlands and hedges. These include the Rural Development Programme for England (RDPE) and Forestry Commission. The Woodlands Initiative Network, run by Small Woods Association together with the Forestry Commission, has developed a Woodlands Initiative Handbook. This includes a section on Financial Control and Funding and can be downloaded at <http://win.smallwoods.org.uk/documents/>.

3.4 Constituting the group

A formal constitution for the group can be helpful and should support the membership structure and rules. This will formalise the group's relationship externally and internally and its roles and responsibilities. A constitution can be in the form of a simple agreement, an example of which has been developed by Andrew Shadrake (Dartmoor Circle) for the Dartmoor Circle Community Toolkit and is appended. The landowner may expect the group to have a formal constitution, and may appreciate some involvement in its creation.

If the group is planning to sell products or apply for grants it may be worth considering establishing an appropriate legal structure such as a co-operative.

There are several good information sources which can help guide the group through the different legal structures. These include Co-Ops UK 'Simply Legal'² and the Woodlands Initiative Handbook (Chapter 3: Governance and Structures). Once you have a clearer idea it may be useful to consult with an organisation such as Co-Ops UK or a local social enterprise specialist.

The Appendix also includes an extract on this topic from a Social Forestry workshop.

Growing into an agreement

The Tamar Valley AONB Cordiale workshops highlighted the need for groups to have a 'development phase' to develop group cohesion, build skills and competencies and get to know their resource. Developing a transitional approach from a simple agreement with a supported unconstituted group, through to a lease and constituted group may be appropriate. A support hub may be best placed to support this transition, although individual owners may be prepared to invest in the process. This is explored further in Chapter 10.

² <http://www.uk.coop/simplylegal>