



Regenerating woodlands for the benefit of local communities, businesses and the environment

# Testing a framework to describe models of community woodland case studies: Four case studies from South West England

A report by the Silvanus Trust on behalf of Forest Research

Victoria Hughes

[victoria.hughes@silvanus.org.uk](mailto:victoria.hughes@silvanus.org.uk)



## Contents

Background.....	1
Methodology.....	2
Community Woodland Groups - Legal Obligations.....	4
Case Studies.....	6
Friends of Oakfrith Wood – Oakfrith Wood, Urchfont, Wiltshire.....	6
Affinity Woodworkers Co-operative - Steward Community Woodland, Moretonhampstead, Devon .....	13
Stroudwoods Co-operative - Folly Wood, Stroud, Gloucestershire .....	22
Rookwood Association – Rookwood, Honiton, Devon .....	32
Comparison Table .....	39
Discussion .....	44
What have we learned about community forestry from using the framework? ....	45
Ownership and access.....	45
Structures and governance.....	46
Silviculture.....	46
Sustainability, the role of community and community support needs .....	47
Participatory learning and technology development .....	49
Woodland.....	50
Community and personal development .....	50
Application of the framework .....	51
Conclusion.....	52
Appendix 1 - Questionnaire.....	53
Appendix 2 - Organisations mentioned in the case studies .....	58

## **Acknowledgments**

The Silvanus Trust wishes to thank the members of the community woodland groups and their representatives for their contributions to this study, and to Anna Lawrence from Forest Research for her help and guidance.

All photographs used in this report have been kindly supplied by members of the community woodland groups.

This report was commissioned by Forest Research. Responsibility for the accuracy of facts, and for opinions and interpretations expressed in the report, remains with the Silvanus Trust.

## Background

Under its social research programme, Forest Research is charged by the Forestry Commission to research:

*How do different models of ownership and / or management of trees woods and forests work in relation to different contexts and objectives?  
Which business models best support these?*

Work to date has included baseline studies to provide an overview of the current state of community woodlands in Scotland, Wales and England, and an evidence review of community woodland governance for the Independent Panel on Forestry (IPF), combined with a number of workshops to share experiences and define priorities. These have identified a knowledge gap in terms of understanding of the range of models currently emerging in England. In particular there is a need to:

- develop an analytical framework for documenting and comparing governance models
- identify knowledge gaps in relation to community decision-making processes, sourcing and application of silvicultural expertise, and business models.

A draft framework was developed to help structure the evidence analysed for the IPF report (Lawrence and Molteno, 2012). The South West was identified as an area of particularly innovative and as yet undocumented practice, where it would be valuable to both test the framework and use it to collect case study evidence. The current work was therefore commissioned to:

- a) field test the use of the analytical framework as a means of creating useful profiles for comparative research
- b) in particular, document the knowledge processes and business models highlighted above.

### **Specifically, the objectives were to:**

- test and develop a framework for documenting models of community woodland governance
- contribute to a typology of community woodlands by expanding the range of documented models
- specifically document four case studies based on a standard profile and description and modelled on those produced by Llais y Goedwig <http://llaisygoedwig.org.uk/what-we-do/case-studies/>
- focus on role of community and community support needs; business models; degree of sustainability; appropriate silviculture; participatory learning and technology development

## Methodology

A number of steps were followed in order to develop and write this report:

- A framework was provided to the researcher by Forest Research to guide the content of the case studies, and to be tested as a useful profile for documenting case studies. This included a profile table to record key information which could then be compared across groups. The framework consisted of several sections and types of information needed within each of those sections:
  - Institutional context: ownership; access and use rights; regulations/statutory responsibilities
  - Internal organisation: community members; structure/legal status/financial structures; representation; participation in decision making; communication and learning processes; forest management objectives and planning procedures; business models; benefit distribution rules
  - External linkages: partnerships and agreements; associations
  - Resources: forest; funding sources; knowledge

The project aimed to test this framework which was done by applying it in order to create a series of case studies.

- Example case studies were also provided which gave a format to base the case studies on.
- A questionnaire (appendix 1) was developed to draw out the information needed to fulfil this framework. This questionnaire was divided into the framework sections with a number of questions under each section. This made it appear a more manageable task for the community members completing it and also meant that the information collected was easily transferable into the profile and case studies.
- Four community woodland groups were selected from a long list of groups known to the Silvanus Trust. The groups were selected in order to get a range of ownership models and management objectives. It was a requirement of the project that all community groups have a decision making role in the management of the woodland. A contact for each community was contacted by phone or email to explain the research, what would be expected from each community group involved and how the information they provided would be used. All groups were offered an incentive of £175 for their contribution to the project. All groups that were contacted agreed to take part.

- An initial meeting was held at each woodland with one or two community representatives. This involved a walk around the woodland and a discussion about the group and the work they do to manage the woodland. This also provided the opportunity for the representatives to ask questions about the project, and for the researcher to gain an initial insight into the group, how they work and what they do. The main purpose of the visit was to give the questionnaire to a representative and to talk through it to ensure that it was clear what information was required. Each group was provided with a paper copy of the questionnaire as well as being sent an electronic copy so that they had a choice of formats to complete it in.
- Once the questionnaire had been returned to the researcher a draft case study was written for each woodland. These were then used to identify any areas where further information or clarification was needed.
- An interview with a representative for each group was held to follow up on the information needed which was highlighted in the draft case studies. Each representative was asked to complete a consent form agreeing to being interviewed, being recorded and to confirm that they understood how the information they provided would be used.
- A discussion group was then held for each community group with 4-6 community members being present at each one. Each participant was asked to complete a consent form agreeing to take part in the discussion group, being recorded and to confirm that they understood how the information they provided would be used.

The same four questions were asked at each discussion group:

- Are there any lessons learned that could be used to benefit other community groups or woodlands?
  - What support/resources/knowledge would benefit the community woodland in the future?
  - What are the benefits of involvement in the community woodland?
  - What are the challenges of involvement in the community woodland?
- Participants at the discussion group were also asked to provide photos of the woodland that could be used to illustrate their case study. There was a separate section on the consent form to agree to photos of themselves being used. The main representative was also sent copies of the consent

form to give to any additional people who may appear in photos provided for use.

- Amendments and additions were then made to the case studies to reflect this additional information.
- These amended draft case studies were then sent to the community representatives to be checked through to ensure that all the information was correct and that the community groups were happy with what had been written.
- This report was then written which includes a series of four case studies based on the standardised profile and framework. These were written in the style of book chapters. The final report also includes an analysis of the framework and how successful it was in guiding and structuring this work.

## **Community Woodland Groups - Legal Obligations**

The legal structure of the communities makes them subject to certain legal requirements and obligations. The main obligations for each type of structure found in these case studies are described below.

### **Charity Law**

Charities must operate for the public benefit and be independent of commercial or government interests. They are run by trustees who have a certain number of duties they must perform in order to fulfil their legal obligations. Trustees are the people who serve on the governing body of the charity and are unpaid volunteers. All charities in England and Wales must be registered with the Charity Commission who ensures that they meet their legal obligations and where things go wrong they help to put them right.

If the charity's income is over £10,000 they must complete and submit an annual return each year. If the charity's income is lower than £10,000 then the trustees have a legal duty to advise the Charity Commission of any changes to the charity's details including income and expenditure each year, which is known as an annual update. All charities must also prepare a Trustees' Annual Report and accounts that must be available to view on request. The obligation to send them to the Charity Commission depends on the charity's income.

### **Limited Companies**

Limited companies are corporate bodies registered under the Companies Act 2006. This Act sets out what companies can and can't do. A public company

may issue shares to the public. This model is generally used by large capital-based ventures. A private company limited by shares also issue shares but these cannot go to the public. This is a more common form for smaller businesses. A private company limited by guarantee cannot issue shares but members instead guarantee a certain amount in the event of the company being wound up. This is a more common form for voluntary, community and charitable organisations.

All companies are administered by Companies House who are a government agency. They set out a number of strict regulations related to the number and type of records that have to be kept, the number of rules and regulations applying, the number of events which Companies House must be told about and the large penalties for not keeping the regulations.

All companies must produce annual accounts but those with an annual turnover below certain limits do not have to have them audited.

When setting up a company currently, voluntary and community organisations favour the company limited by guarantee route as it tends to be preferred by grant funders. This model is also usually preferred by workers' co-operatives as it is thought to be better suited to protecting the principles of common ownership and 'one member, one vote'.

### **Industrial and Provident Society**

Industrial and provident societies (IPSs) are corporate bodies registered under the Industrial and Provident Societies Acts 1965 – 2002. To qualify as an IPS an organisation must be a 'bone fide co-operative' or a 'society for the benefit of the community'. This is a common model for community co-operatives. IPSs' governing document is known as the 'rules'.

IPSs are usually favoured by socially motivated and co-operative organisations because there are fewer administrative and legal requirements than for private companies. However, they are still required to file an annual return and their accounts to the Financial Services Authority (FSA) who administer IPSs, and to whom they have to pay an annual fee.

## **Case Studies**

### **Friends of Oakfrith Wood – Oakfrith Wood, Urchfont, Wiltshire**

#### **Introduction to the group and woodland**

Oakfrith Wood is owned by Wiltshire Council and has been under management by the Friends of Oakfrith Wood since 1994. They developed as an informal group and after taking legal advice decided to move to a Trust model with a board of trustees. This was of benefit by being a structure recognised by the woodland owners and any organisations that they apply to for grants or funding, hence giving them greater credibility. They have recently become a registered charity to allow greater scope for applying for funding. The group includes a Wood fuel co-operative which is a group of fully trained and certified chainsaw operators who carry out thinning of the wood as agreed in the management plan. All do this as volunteers. Members do not have an identifiable stake in the woodland but those involved in the woodfuel co-operative get a discount on the purchase of firewood, the size of discount being dependent on their level of involvement. The woodland has recently been identified to be sold by the council and a lease agreement is currently under discussion for the Friends of Oakfrith Wood to enable them to continue being responsible for its management after the sale.

The main motivations for forming the community group were to improve the management of the woodland for wildlife conservation, to improve public access and for passive recreation.

There are no public rights of way but the public are granted un-restricted access to all areas of the wood. The woodland is designated as a Local Nature Reserve and is also an ancient semi natural woodland (ASNW).

#### **How the community woodland is run**

Community membership is open to all members of the local community and any other interested individuals.

The group is governed by a board of trustees which is made up of stakeholder representatives and those invited to become trustees from within the community. Most of the trustees have previous experience of working in community groups so have brought this knowledge and experience with them which is of great benefit to the group.

Quarterly board meetings are held to make decisions on the woodland's management and wider public events are held to plan certain activities such as

an open meeting that was held to plan the Millennium Copse. All decisions are made by consensus of the board.

They work to a regularly reviewed management plan. The group hold the ethos that the wood remains accessible to the community and the wider public which has shaped the management aims and objectives.

## History of the woodland site

The history of the site is quite well known with the earliest records of the area showing the woodland on the 1784 Tithe map. It was felled for timber for the



First World War in 1917 and then replanted in the 1930's. It formed part of the Urchfont Manor Estate until 1946 when it was purchased by Wiltshire Council as an educational establishment. Limited management of woodland took place until the 1970's when there was then a period of activity but by the early 1980's it had reverted to almost no management. In 1994 the Friends of Oakfrith Wood community group was set up with the first working party

taking place in 1995. In 1997 an area of mature Douglas Fir was felled and replanted with native broadleaved species. This was followed by the planting of the millennium copse area in 2000 and the designation of the wood as a Local Nature Reserve (LNR) in 2004.

## Woodland management

In 1994 representatives of Wiltshire Council, Urchfont Manor, Urchfont Parish Council and Wiltshire Wildlife Trust (WWT) got together to see how the woodland could be better managed for both wildlife and people. The initial priority was to prepare a management plan which was commissioned from WWT and produced in 1995. The plan is very detailed and is of a standard that can, and has, been used to attract FC England Woodland Grant Scheme (EWGS) funding.

The practical management of the woodland is carried out by volunteers guided by Wiltshire Council and professional advisors. The aims of the management approach are to promote conservation and low-key recreation. Timber production is not a key aim, however, sales of timber produced through management is an objective.

Their management objectives are to:

- (a) provide a sanctuary for wildlife and the local community
- (b) ensure appropriate stewardship of the wood as a Local Nature Reserve
- (c) provide an educational resource for promoting best practice in woodland management in its widest sense
- (d) use working methods which are sympathetic and sensitive to the Wood as a LNR
- (e) enlarge the Wood and the LNR
- (f) provide an amenity for informal recreation with public access for the local community
- (g) promote community engagement

They won the first prize in the Community Woodland category of the RFS Woodland Awards 2012. This award is for the best example of a community woodland that is maintained and managed in a sustainable way that benefits the landscape, local people, biodiversity and the economy.

### **Impact on the wider community**

The wider community are involved in the woodland through a number of groups using it to host activities. These include a local school and pre-school school, the Richmond Fellowship, which is a mental health charity, the Green Wood Working group, students that visit the neighbouring manor, training events/special events and general visitors from outside the immediate area who also access the woodland. A number of outside groups have also visited the woodland to see how the project runs. It has also been used as a case study for a community woodland project by Sustainability South West, an independent charity and provider of sustainability services. There are also strong links with and support for other projects in the village including Farmers Field and the Rights of Way Working groups.



They hold agreements with external organisations including a Memorandum of Understanding with Wiltshire Council and with user groups, and Forest Management Agreements under the England Woodland Grant Scheme (EWGS). They are also linked to the local community shop whom they supply with firewood.

Other organisations they are associated with include Urchfont Parish Council, Natural England, Forestry Commission and BTCV.

The woodland has positively impacted the local community by providing a valuable local asset, being used for education and training at all levels, hosting events, being the subject of parish magazine articles, offering the opportunity to get involved in practical conservation and woodland management work and by being used as a beacon for other groups.

People involved in the woodland have benefitted by gaining a greater understanding of woodland management/conservation with one member going on to work in the forestry sector after gaining skills through their involvement in Oakfrith Wood.

The work of the community is communicated through a newsletter, articles in the local parish magazine, and press coverage in local newspapers and radio. They also hold open days to raise the profile of the woodland and the work they are carrying out.

## **Lessons learned**

There are several lessons learned that the community feel could be of benefit to other groups. One important point is that working to a management plan provides focus and a framework with which to work. Another lesson they have learned is that being a Charitable Trust carries more weight when seeking financial support and in negotiation with other groups/partners.

## **Woodland resource**

The woodland consists of 14ha of Ancient Semi Natural Woodland (ASNW) with free access to all. Mature beech dominates the main section of the woodland with areas of oak, ash and hazel also being present. The woodland is carpeted by bluebells in the spring which is a great attraction for local people. An area of hazel coppice was planted in 2000 which is known as the Millennium Copse. There is a pond located on the edge of the woodland site, next to the Millennium Copse. This was created by the friends of group with assistance from some of the other groups that use the woodland. Other assets within the woodland include interpretation boards describing the history and ecology of the woodland, a green wood-working area with a shelter and saw horses, seating around the woodland and bird boxes.

## **Advice and financial support**

Support and resources that have been of benefit so far have included professional advice from both internal and external sources. This has come from trustees, Wiltshire Council and Wiltshire Wildlife Trust as well as other forestry professionals. A number of individuals in the group have extensive forestry experience which has been a great resource for the community. Volunteers, donations, grant aid and sponsorship have all been significant contributions to the community's success. Funding secured by the community includes donations e.g. Millennium planting, sponsorship e.g. Stihl, firewood sales and grants such as the England Woodland Grant Scheme. They have received significant assistance from Stihl who sponsored the purchase of some chainsaws and training in their use.

Support and resources that the group feel would be of benefit in the future include continued professional support, continued local community support, continued Forestry Commission support as well as maintaining numbers and dynamics of volunteers. They also feel it would be of benefit to be able to share knowledge with similar groups e.g. through a Community Woodland Association.

## **Benefits and challenges of involvement in the community**

The largest benefits of involvement in the community woodlands are considered to be the social interaction and group involvement that it fosters as well as the sense of ownership of the community asset and the health benefit of being active outdoors. There is also an educational element to it with members commenting on the benefits to children involved with the community and other associations that use the site as well as the skills that the adult members have learned through involvement in practical management. The added benefits of the site being used by the Richmond Fellowship in mental health rehabilitation is a very important benefit that the wood provides for the wider community.



A walk in the woods

The largest challenges are considered to be the organisation of the community and the work load inherent in that. The recruitment of volunteers is also an ongoing challenge along with maintaining adequate funding to ensure the long term security of the project. They are also facing the sale of the woodland at the moment by Wiltshire Council and are trying to negotiate their continued involvement with the site following the sale.

<b>Profile – Oakfrith Wood</b>	
<b>1. Institutional context</b>	
<b>1.1 Ownership</b>	Woodland owned by Wiltshire Council. They are currently in negotiations regarding selling it but will be negotiating provisions for the community's continued use with potential buyers.
<b>1.2 Access and use rights</b>	No legal public access obligations are in place but the community allow and encourage public access to the whole site. The community control the management of forest resources.
<b>1.3 Regulations / statutory responsibilities</b>	Charity Law
<b>2. Internal organisation</b>	
<b>2.1 Community members</b>	Membership is open to all.
<b>2.2 Structure / legal status / financial structures</b>	Registered charity.
<b>2.3 Representation</b>	Members elect trustees.
<b>2.4 Participation in decision making</b>	Members are in control of decision making via trustees. A representative from Wiltshire County Council sits on the board of trustees. Regular meetings are held to discuss management proposals.
<b>2.5 Communication and learning processes</b>	All members can attend regular meetings. Community members have strong links with other community initiatives.
<b>2.6 Forest management objectives and planning procedures</b>	The woodland is managed to improve its conservation value as well as to encourage public access and use. There is a long term woodland management plan in effect.

<b>2.7 Business models</b>	Non-profit making (a charity). The community includes a woodfuel co-operative whose members carry out the majority of the forestry operations. External contractors are engaged for large scale felling.
<b>2.8 Benefit distribution rules</b>	Members of the woodfuel co-operative get a discount on woodfuel depending on the amount of work they have put in over the year.
<b>3. External linkages</b>	
<b>3.1 Partnerships and agreements</b>	They work closely with Wiltshire Council and Wiltshire Wildlife Trust.
<b>3.2 Associations</b>	
<b>4. Resources</b>	
<b>4.1 Forest</b>	14 ha mixed woodland. Predominantly mature beech with oak and ash. There is also an area of hazel coppice planted in 2000.
<b>4.2 Funding sources</b>	FC EWGS grants, income from timber sales, donations from local community and sponsorship from Stihl.
<b>4.3 Knowledge</b>	A lot of knowledge exists within the community with a number of members being forestry professionals. Advice from Wiltshire Council and Wiltshire Wildlife Trust.

## **Affinity Woodworkers Co-operative - Steward Community Woodland, Moretonhampstead, Devon**

### **Introduction to the group and woodland**

Steward Community Woodland is situated within Dartmoor National Park just outside Moretonhampstead, Devon, and has been owned and managed by Affinity Workers Co-operative since 2000. The community, which currently consists of 12 adults and 8 children, live in dwellings in the wood and manage the woodland. Some members also run businesses from there. They rely on the woodland for their electricity, water, fuel, food (including goat's milk) and as part of their income.

The co-operative was originally started by an interest group of 10 people wanting to live in a low-impact way. Several members have a background of



Community dwelling and food growing area surrounded by woodland

involvement in environmental movements and protests which is reflected in the ethos of the community. They aim to use permaculture, low-impact living, forest gardening, nature awareness and other land based skills to create a sustainable and re-generative community.

The community's residence on site is subject to planning permission. Shortly after purchasing the site in 2000 they applied to Dartmoor National Park Authority (DNPA) for planning permission, which was rejected, but after an appeal to the Planning Inspectorate they received permission in 2002 to live on site and run their sustainable living project for 5 years. At the end of this 5 year period they applied to DNPA to extend their permission which was again rejected. Following another appeal they again secured permission for a further 5 years which is due to run out in 2014.

### **History of the site**

Some history of the site prior to its ownership by the Steward Community is known. According to the census there was a house near the bottom of the land which was last occupied in 1871. Until the 1920s the woodland site was mostly open fields and some areas of coppice woodland. From the 1920s it was planted up by the Dartington Trust, mostly with conifers, and there was a tree nursery area where the current food growing area is located. In 1966 the Dartington Trust handed over management of all of their woods to Fountain Forestry who put the land up for sale in the early 1990s. It was on the market for five years

before being purchased by the community at the end of 1999 using loan stock (money lent to the community).

### **How the community woodland is run**

The community is registered as a workers co-operative and a company limited by guarantee. This structure was selected as it provides a constitution to establish consensus decision making and a legal structure to own the land. All community members are directors of the co-operative and all hold equal status within the group. Weekly meetings are held where all members attend to discuss issues and make decisions about the woodland and community. Consensus decision making is used as opposed to majority ruling. This is partly to avoid decisions being made that are not agreed by everyone and also in the hope that it will avoid possible resentments arising.

Membership of the community is limited by the ability of the woodland to support them. Access to firewood is an important limiting factor as all residents use firewood to heat their dwellings and to heat water for washing. To ensure the woodland is managed in a sustainable fashion, the amount of firewood harvested has to be limited.

### **Woodland management**

The main motivations for starting the community woodland were to experiment as a low-impact living and working project with educational courses being offered as an example of sustainable practice. They wanted to create a community that would live together communally and use permaculture, good conservation practice and continuous cover forestry principles to manage the site. Continuous cover forestry is the practice of maintaining a canopy through the re-generation phase which means that clear-felling is not a practised method. It ensures that a varied age structure is always present which supports a greater level of biodiversity than single-aged stands. Being permanently vegetated creates a constant habitat and maintains the landscape value as well as reducing soil erosion.

The community have both primary and secondary aims that shape the management of the woodland. The primary aims are to:

- increase biodiversity and habitat for wildlife, especially threatened species
- produce firewood for the community and others
- grow food
- maintain and enhance the visual screening of the community structures from the A382 and the neighbours
- supply building material for the community and others

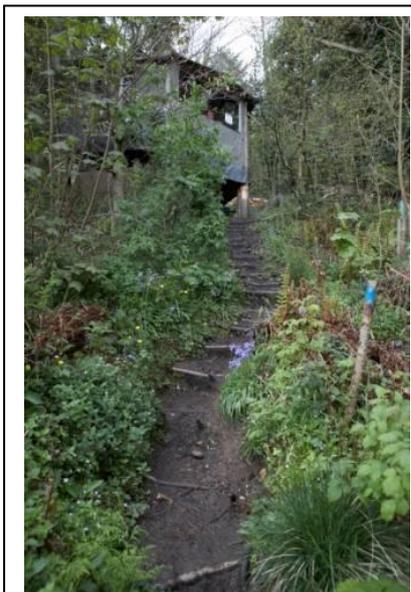
The secondary aims are to:

- contribute towards carbon sequestration
- create and maintain shelter and sunshine for the community structures and food crops
- earn some income from the woodland resources
- increase the ability to run courses and events in the woodland

A detailed management plan for the woodland is in effect and any changes to the plan are discussed by members at weekly meetings. The plan is of a standard recognised by the Forestry Commission to be suitable for using with EWGS applications.

### **Impact on the wider community**

The wider outside community is involved in the woodland in many ways. The community benefits from many volunteers that go to the woodland to work, stay and learn in the wood including those from World Wide Opportunities on Organic Farms UK (WWOOF UK) who help with the food growing area. WWOOF UK is a membership charity that teaches people about organic growing and low-impact



Path through the woodland to the community dwellings

lifestyles through hands-on experience. The Steward Community also have links to Moretonhampstead's local conservation group Moreton Action Group for Sustainability (MAGS) and hold an annual open day for the general public so that they can see what the community project is all about. They also have a website ([www.stewardwood.org](http://www.stewardwood.org)) where information about the community can be accessed and where they advertise the events and training courses that are being run by the community. Various current and previous community members run courses in the woodland including permaculture design and nature connection workshops. They have also run Forest School sessions there in the past.

Currently there is access from the public cycleway that goes through the track at the bottom of their land and vehicular access from the A382. The woodland and the community dwellings are mostly kept private except for specific events. However, they have created a permissible woodland walk which provides a recreational resource for local people and the wider community.

The community feel that they have had a positive impact on the wider community by demonstrating sustainable practices, communal living and low impact living. They have received positive feedback from volunteers and others who have visited the woodland through attending social gatherings, participating in courses and by visiting the community's website. In particular they have been told that they have inspired many people to live in a more sustainable way through demonstrating how a low-impact lifestyle can be achieved.

The community has impacted the way other community projects are managed mostly through information dispersed by volunteers, visitors, website visits and outreach activities which have included promoting the community and their ethos at festivals and other public events. Evidence for this positive impact comes in the form of testimonials from people who have attended courses, people who have provided letters of support for planning applications, contributions to the visitors book and word of mouth recommendations.

### **Lessons learned**

There are many lessons learnt that they feel could be used to benefit other community groups and community woodlands. These are currently being used to benefit other groups through direct communications and networking. The community has links with other community based projects including Landmatters Permaculture Project, Tinkers Bubble, Keveral Farm and other like-minded people that have been in contact with them. They are also associated with the Small Woods Association, BTCV, Moretonhampstead Action Group, WWOOF UK, Proper Job (Chagford), Permaculture Association, Dartmoor National Park Authority, Art of Mentoring UK, Forestry Commission and various other environmental networks.

Dealing with community dynamic issues has been a big lesson learned. The initial group all held the same vision for the community but as the group has evolved people's priorities have changed so this can cause some disagreements. They have employed a number of established methods for conflict resolution and ensuring that issues are dealt with calmly such as listening circles where those that want to be involved get to talk about their concern without being interrupted. The weekly meetings and social gatherings also give the opportunity for members to air thoughts and feelings.

### **Woodland resource**

When the community bought the site it was a thinned conifer plantation consisting mostly of Larch, Scot's Pine and Norway Spruce. The community have felled some of the conifers and have done some planting of native tree species, however, they encourage the natural regeneration of native species where possible. The woodland currently consists of a mix of stands of Larch,

Scot's Pine and Norway Spruce interspersed with Sycamore, Ash and Hazel coppice. There is also a growing area with many fruit trees and areas cleared for the planting of oak and the creation of forest gardens.

A pond at the far end of the site has been used for fly-tipping. The community don't have the time or funding to clear this waste and are concerned that it creates a bad image of them as even though it is not their waste, they are responsible for clearing it up. It could be a good wildlife area which the community would be very pleased to be able manage for wildlife if they could.



View of the woodland at sunset

### **Advice and financial support**

The community and woodland has received funding through the Forestry Commission England Woodland Grant Scheme and the BTCV People and Places grant. The BTCV grant funded an electric chainsaw, some training in the use of the chainsaws and first aid. They have also received conditional approval for a grant from the Lottery for a community food growing project 'Morefood'. The 'Morefood' Community Garden project aims to create a public demonstration of long-term sustainable food production including a showcase of alternative food crops and methods and an orchard of traditional Devon fruit trees. They are currently applying for planning permission from DNPA for an interpretation centre, polytunnel and a wheelchair-accessible compost toilet.

Initial advice when setting up the community woodland was gained from ROOTS who gave advice on working as a co-operative and Chapter 7 who gave advice on working with the planning system. Forestry advice came from Dartmoor National Park Authority, Small Woods Association and various other experienced foresters that have come for visits to the wood and shared knowledge and advice.

Knowledge is also gained from members attending various woodland management courses including training in continuous cover forestry, green wood-working and chainsaw use. Experience is also gained through working in other woodlands, which has been done by several members in a voluntary capacity. This training along with help from volunteers, the resources from the woodland and the experience inherent with living and working in a community woodland for 12 years have all been important resources and sources of knowledge for the community group. One member has made the point that when he first moved to the woodland and was made responsible for an area of woodland above his dwelling he 'was scared to go in there to begin with, even to

collect firewood as I didn't know what to do'. All members have picked up skills along the way but there are still some areas where they feel further training would be beneficial.

Support, resources and knowledge that the group feel they would benefit from in the future include more access to grants and other funding particularly funding for trees, tree guards and other methods of protecting young trees from deer damage such as fencing. Training in first aid and chainsaw use would also be of benefit, but they don't have the financial resources for this at the moment. Other support they would find helpful includes assistance with publicising courses and events and with producing accounts as these are not areas of experience that exist within the current membership although there are members that have taken on these roles. Having external tutors to come to run courses and events in the woodland would also act to extend the business side of the community as well as attracting a wider variety of people to visit the woodland. Forming links with other appropriate organisations that could result in mutually beneficial relationships is an area the community are keen to develop as well. This includes links with other community groups, particularly community woodland groups in order to exchange skills and experiences.

### **Benefits and challenges of involvement in the community**

The community group feel that their involvement in the community woodland has given them much to be grateful for. This includes benefits from living in the woodland as a community eg low monetary outgoings, increased connection with people, being close to nature, learning to live communally including educating children together, self-reliance, living off-grid, and the resources that the woodland gives them access to such as unpolluted spring water, unpasteurised goats milk, wild foods and medicines and wood for heating and building.

Members have stated that the well-being benefits of living in and being involved in a woodland are among the greatest benefits gained. All members feel that involvement in the community has allowed them to become more connected with their environment and nature with one mother in the group saying 'Bringing up a child in a woodland is amazing to see, just how much more connected to nature they are is really amazing'. It also gives them a feeling of empowerment through being able to meet their own basic needs from the resources available to them from the woodland.

"The wholesomeness that comes from the relationship of providing your own resources and basic needs is really important." – community member

Social and educational benefits to members were also mentioned including facilitating interactions with the outside world, enabling members to teach and

run training courses, providing the opportunity to share skills and knowledge and having many lovely people passing through.

The community has faced many challenges over their time at Steward Wood not least securing planning permission and dealing with the criticism they have faced as a result. Following much criticism in the early years, they are now widely accepted and generally receive support from the local community.

“You can understand people having concerns in the beginning as we were an unknown quantity. We have far more support now than we did” – community member

Some of the challenges mentioned by community members are specific to the site and are related to communal living within a woodland such as living on a steep hill, living with mud and a lack of utilities. They generate their own



Community solar panels

electricity through the use of communal solar panels and a hydroelectric turbine connected to a seasonal stream on site, but electricity is very limited. They access all their water from a spring in the woodland which frequently freezes in winter which obviously causes quite a serious problem at times. Most of the dwellings are situated above the water line so getting water to those dwellings and having to make a fire to heat water every time they

wish to get clean is a daily challenge. As they are having to deal with these challenges on a daily basis they are always kept very busy and have little time to relax.

They also face challenges that arise through being part of a community woodland including issues around community dynamics, negativity towards the project from people outside of the community particularly neighbours and DNPA, having adequate facilities for processing firewood, and the continual struggle to secure funding and maintaining structures.

Challenges faced with regards to managing the woodland are mostly down to lack of available funding. The abundance of deer in the woodland also causes a problem by preventing regeneration. The community would ideally like to be able to fence new planting or areas of new natural regeneration but are unable to fund tree guards or fencing as they don't have the financial resources themselves and have not succeeded in getting funding for these items so far.

<b>Profile – Steward Wood</b>	
<b>1. Institutional context</b>	
<b>1.1 Ownership</b>	Woodland owned by community company, Affinity Woodland Workers Co-operative.
<b>1.2 Access and use rights</b>	A public cycle way passes through the lower section of the woodland which is regulated by the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 and the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006. Public access to the rest of the woodland is not permitted. The community control the management of forest resources.
<b>1.3 Regulations / statutory responsibilities</b>	Company Law
<b>2. Internal organisation</b>	
<b>2.1 Community members</b>	Membership is restricted due to limited dwellings and capacity of the woodland to sustain the community. New membership is determined by existing community members. Currently at full capacity with 20 community members.
<b>2.2 Structure / legal status / financial structures</b>	Workers co-operative and company limited by guarantee.
<b>2.3 Representation</b>	All members are directors of the co-operative.
<b>2.4 Participation in decision making</b>	All members are in control of decision making. Weekly meetings are held to discuss management proposals.
<b>2.5 Communication and learning processes</b>	All members attend regular meetings. They hold an annual open day where the public can visit the woodland and community living area. There is also a community website and various members hold training courses for the public at the woodland.
<b>2.6 Forest management objectives and planning</b>	The woodland is managed to promote biodiversity, and to provide resources for the resident community on a sustainable basis. There is a long term woodland management plan in effect.

<b>procedures</b>	
<b>2.7 Business models</b>	Non-profit making. All forest operations are carried out by community members.
<b>2.8 Benefit distribution rules</b>	All members use the woodland resources for free including woodfuel, water, food and other forest products.
<b>3. External linkages</b>	
<b>3.1 Partnerships and agreements</b>	Works with Moreton Action Group, WWOOFERS (volunteers).
<b>3.2 Associations</b>	
<b>4. Resources</b>	
<b>4.1 Forest</b>	13ha of mixed woodland. Predominantly made up of stands of larch, scots pine, Norway spruce and ash, interspersed with sycamore and hazel coppice.
<b>4.2 Funding sources</b>	BTCV People & Places grant, income from running training courses.
<b>4.3 Knowledge</b>	As the community has existed for 12 years they have now gained most knowledge required through training courses and experience. Also gain knowledge from various forestry professionals who have made visits.

## **Stroudwoods Co-operative - Folly Wood, Stroud, Gloucestershire**

### **Introduction to the group and woodland**

Folly Wood is a small (3.5 acres) mixed woodland on the outskirts of Stroud which lies within the Cotswolds Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. It is owned and managed by Stroud Woodland Co-operative, a community of 64 local individuals, couples and families.



Stroudwoods logo

Folly Wood was purchased by the co-operative in July 2010. The woodland was bought at auction before the community structure and decision making process had been agreed in much detail. Folly Wood came up for auction with a guide price of

£10,000. Two local people who were interested in community land ownership contacted friends and contacts to gauge what interest there might be. This proved very positive with people committing around £20,000. This was followed by a meeting at the wood where people were given the opportunity to have a look around, meet each other and think about whether they wanted to be involved. Membership was open to any individual, family or organisation. The auction was then held and they were successful in buying the woodland for £25,500. The 10% deposit was paid by one of the original directors which then gave them six weeks to raise the remainder of the funds. Sixty four sets of 500 shares were on offer at £1 per share and all were sold in time to settle the payment for the woodland in full, and cover legal costs.

The woodland doesn't currently have any right of way or official public access, however, the community are keen for the public to enjoy their space and will be installing signs to make rights of access clear in the near future along with discussing the possibilities of open days or other events for the wider public.

### **History of the site**

From looking at historical maps it appears that the land has been woodland since at least the late 1800s. From ecological surveys that have taken place it appears that Folly Wood is a remnant ancient semi-natural woodland (ASNW). Previous to being purchased by the Stroud Woodland Co-op Folly Wood was part of a portfolio of land and property in Gloucestershire. The group has been told that no management of the woodland took place during the several decades it was owned by the previous owner. This was evident by the state of the woodland when it was purchased. It had been planted with Larch which are now

mature or over-mature with no signs of thinning or harvesting ever having taken place.

## **How the community is run**

The community is registered as a Community Benefit Society which is a form of an Industrial and Provident Society. They chose this structure as they wanted to be able to use a community investment approach to harness the collective investment power of the Stroud community. It was also essential to the group to ensure democratic governance through a one member one vote approach.

The community group started with three founding members who became directors up until the first AGM in March 2012. At the AGM they were re-elected by members along with three new directors. Informal core group meetings are also held where on-going management discussions are discussed. There is no formal membership of the core group, they strive to have at least one director present but other members can go to as many or as few as they wish.

There are also working groups which include groups for ecology, art and craft, woodland management and creative administration. These have evolved according to the interest and commitment of members and their activities are reported back to the group.

Members do not have an identifiable stake in the woodland which was set out clearly in the initial letter to potential share-holders:

'Investing in share capital: Stroud Woodland Co-op shares are intended to be a long-term investment in the community. Neither interest nor dividends will be paid on the share capital. Members of the Co-op will be rewarded through a social and an environmental dividend, not a monetary dividend.'

However, the distribution of firewood is currently under consideration. Some members are very keen to harvest firewood but due to the woodland's small size there is only a small amount that can be removed sustainably.

It was made clear from the beginning that decisions about Folly Wood would be made by the group as a whole. Since then, a series of social and working meetings have been held to create a community and to make decisions. Some members commented on how quick and effective the process has been, particularly in contrast to other collaborative ventures such as trying to establish shared housing. In that case the creation of a community by establishing its structure, values and decision making process has taken so much time and effort that any other action has not been possible. The strength of this high-speed approach, where people have been confident that they can sort out the structure and processes later, has been that they were actually able to purchase

the woodland. If they had sorted out the structure and community first then they would have missed the opportunity to purchase the woodland.

Decisions about the community and woodland are made by consensus. They have a member who facilitates the meetings and runs them on North American Indian principles, which are based on reaching a consensus that everyone is happy about. Decisions made and any other outcomes of meetings are circulated to the community members via email and on the website. In addition to meetings, they also hold special events related to particular issues. An example of this is when a series of picnics were held for members where they explored what people valued about the woodland, what people wanted to happen with the woodland, where that might take place and how it might look. It was decided that it would take a year to get to know the woodland and each other so nothing big should be undertaken before that point.

There is also the potential for a one-member-one-vote approach in situations where a consensus can't be reached. This approach is set out in their formal rules but has not yet been necessary in either the Core Group meetings or the AGM.

## **Woodland management**

The woodland management plan "Looking After Folly Wood" was devised by first agreeing a set of principles with the Core Group, then small groups mapped potential activities and locations within the woodland. These were then drawn together by one of the directors to create a draft plan which reconciled the different suggestions. This draft was then agreed, with minor amendments, by the Core Group and used as the basis of an action plan. It is important to the group to enable all members to be involved and take decisions within this framework without having to seek permission from the directors. The management objectives for the woodland are included in the document 'Looking After Folly Wood' section 2: Principles. This also sets out the main aims of the management approach.



Community member mapping his ideas for the woodland

The objects, or aims, of the society were agreed by a small working group, before the sales of the shares. These aims are to:

- realise the environmental, biological, landscape, economic, social, cultural, educational and recreational value of woodland ecosystems in and around Stroud as a resource for a sustainable community.
- acquire, hold, steward, create and manage woodland, land and property sustainably in trust for biodiversity, social enterprise, access and community benefit for present and future generations.

After the purchase of the woodland it was agreed that a permaculture approach should be adopted which has so far resulted in a hands off approach for the first year of ownership for the group to get to know each other and Folly Wood throughout the seasons.

"Having a permaculture year just calms everything down"  
– community member

Arts practices have been used to facilitate discussion and decision making. For example, practical map making days were used as source data for decision making and preparation for the next steps. They are keen that members' aesthetic responses to place have been set alongside scientific and timber production values.

Shortly after having bought the woodland and set up the community an 'Aspirations Survey' of members was undertaken to identify the range of motivations and purposes for members' involvement and what they hoped to get out of it. This highlighted a number of priorities common to many community members including the facilitation of community engagement, recreation, socialisation and education, particularly for children, investing in the community and landscape and the collection of small amounts of firewood. There were also elements of wanting to protect and care for a woodland with a number of people saying that they'd always wanted to own a woodland so that they could look after it, and others saying they joined the co-operative in order to protect the land from development. Connecting with nature and appreciating the quiet of the woodland were also stated as aspirations.

Responsibility for the practical management of the wood is split between small working groups of members. There is currently a tree planting group, a group that is developing one particular patch of the woodland by constructing a path and benches, a compost toilet group and groups that will shortly be providing more opportunities for play, planting native wild flowers and creating signage. These groups have been formed based on enthusiasm and knowledge or the desire to learn about something new.

## **Impacts on the wider community**

So far the community have been focussing on getting to know each other and the woodland and so have not involved the wider community much at this stage. They are very welcoming of local people and feel that they go out of their way to explain what they are doing. They feel it is important to inform the local community of what is happening as some passers-by have used the woodland for years and feel a sense of ownership towards it. By explaining why changes to the woodland are happening such as tree felling it is hoped that they will gain support from the local community. There is enthusiasm within the group for facilitating education and training relating to woodland in the future.

The community have collaborated with a local environmental charity, Stroud Valleys Project (SVP), who made a bid to the Big Tree Plant to provide trees for the woodland. This funded several hundred trees and guards for planting in the wood. It also allowed the purchase of more expensive trees that could be planted in other locations around the woodland. Some of the trees provided through SVP for planting at Folly Wood have been shared with another woodland, Hawkwood, which is close by. Some members of the co-op are also part of a woodfuel group that also manages Hawkwood, and the community are currently in negotiation with them about the shared purchase of equipment.

There are two organisations that are members of the group, Walking the Land – an artist’s collaborative linking landscape with art practice - and Stroud Common Wealth – a community benefit society enabling social enterprise and land trust development. Many members are also involved with the Stroud Valleys Project, Stroud Common Wealth, Walking the Land, Stroud Town Council and Woodcraft Folk.

## **Advice and financial support**

Being such a diverse group from a wide variety of backgrounds, considerable and varying experience is present within the group. They are fortunate to have people with the appropriate skills including consultation. The group benefits from their members having a great deal of experience of involvement in community groups including co-operatives, land trusts and community forests. They also had previous experience of how to do community co-operative buy-outs and of raising capital in a short space of time. Given the short time available to raise the money this proved to be the best, cheapest and, more importantly, the best way of mutualising and taking responsibility for shared assets such as wood. Due to the youth of the community they have not yet been involved in sharing their skills and knowledge but feel that their experiences of getting started would potentially benefit other community groups.

The community have looked to the Small Woods Association (of which they are members) and the Forestry Commission for support but generally rely on internal knowledge and resources as they strive to be self-sufficient. The group has benefitted from external support in the form of advice on legal and structural form from Co-operatives UK. Information on insurance and safety audits has been identified as an area where further support/knowledge would benefit the community.

Funding for 800 trees was secured through the Big Tree Plant via Stroud Valleys Project and Stroud Rural Task Force gave a donation to the group. They also received payment from the Soil Association for taking part in a case study.

To date investment has been generated by the sale of shares. After the purchase of the woodland and payment of legal fees associated with conveyancing and establishing the co-op they were left with a surplus. This has been used to cover on-going costs such as insurance and accountancy. A budgeted annual plan for the first year of delivery has been developed. They are also considering an annual membership for users and supporters other than the shareholding community. At the first AGM it was decided to create an income by asking members for a voluntary annual contribution. It was suggested that this should be up to £20 depending on what individual members wish to pay. This may be linked to a Friends of Folly Wood group where non-shareholders would contribute.

## Woodland resource

When the woodland was acquired it had not been under any management for a few decades and was unofficially accessible to the public, some of whom had



Community members enjoying a day in the woods

been collecting fallen trees for use as woodfuel. Folly Wood contains a mix of broadleaf and coniferous trees with Larch being the predominant species. When first purchased there were many fallen and hung-up Larch throughout the woodland. Those trees appeared to be at least 70 years old and had been very regularly and densely planted. Many of the trees are subject to extensive ivy growth.

There is evidence that a dry stone wall made of local limestone would have originally run around much of the perimeter of the woodland. This has now mostly collapsed and the neighbouring farmer has put up a fence around the wood to keep his cattle out. There are also old quarry workings which provide exciting natural play areas for the children.

Despite the neglect and the proximity (approx. 1 mile) from the town the woodland didn't appear to have been too badly abused. There was some fly-tipping which was removed requiring one trip to the Household Waste Recycling Centre. There were also small amounts of litter throughout the woods, mainly drinks cans and bottles but many of these were old and there were no signs of recent anti-social behaviour.

Despite the darkness of the wood there are signs of unusual flowering plants, a mix of regenerating broadleaves such as Ash, Sycamore, Beech and even some Elm, over-mature Hazel coppice and mature Scot's pine, Beech, Yew and Holly. There is also an extensive badger sett.

Community members are able to book the use of the woodland for private events such as birthday parties by using an online calendar. There has not been any camping in Folly Wood to date, but it is likely that during the summer of 2012 members will be able to stay over for a night in the woods. The group are yet to agree a policy on this with regards to numbers of campers, dates and the issue of inviting non-community members to camp on-site.

### **Benefits and challenges of involvement in the community**

Involvement in the woodland has had significant positive impacts for the community members both socially and educationally. Socially, members have formed new friendships and existing friendships have been strengthened. The woodland has provided a place where people of all ages from babes in arms to those in their 80s have met, talked, eaten, played, planned and worked together.



Community members enjoying a picnic

There is a real sense of ownership and investment in the land both in financial terms and more importantly, in terms of investing time and energy into the woodland. It has even been noted that children of families involved also seem to have a sense of ownership and belonging.

"Every time I go there I benefit" – community member

Educationally, skills and knowledge have been exchanged and developed. This has included knowledge of woodland ecology and management, but also the decision making processes used and the legal structure. This experience has given some members more confidence to get involved with other community initiatives. Members have also been encouraged to respond to planning

applications for sites near to the woodland to ensure that their views are taken into consideration.

Members have also commented on the joy of getting to know a place over the seasons, learning from each other's skills and experience and having access to a mutual space to share. The quote below doesn't read very well – is it right?

"It's about working with the wood, the seasons, the people we've got, the opportunities we've got and trying to make the best out of each of those." – community member

There are several challenges that have been identified by members of the community. These include challenges from the past, present and perceived or anticipated challenges likely to arise in the future.

Time is a current challenge for those that have taken on the responsibility of organising socials, meetings and work groups and reporting back to the group about these events. There is also a considerable time consideration with organising accounts and developing the management plan. These are all things that require time at a computer rather than being out in the woods and so are not desirable tasks to many community members. The possibility of a lot of responsibilities falling on the few is a worry and ways to spread the load need to be considered.

Due to the large membership and the wide variety of ways in which they wish to use the woodland, there are concerns that as the infrastructure within the woodland increases the woodland may become over-used and conflicts may arise. The size of membership has also meant that some feel they have struggled to identify their role in the group but nevertheless feel that as time goes on and as more work is carried out people will find their place. Some members are more involved than others but knowing that the membership and their support is there is of benefit to the more active members.

"Be reassured by the fact that there are lots of silent people that are getting something from the fact the woodland is co-operatively owned and is there" – advice from a community member

There have been questions about how much the wider community benefits from the community's involvement with the woodland. The formation of a 'friends of' group has been considered which would require a much smaller financial commitment than that of the core members and which it is hoped would make involvement in the woodland more accessible. Open days are also planned so

that the experiences of the community and the opportunity to access the woodland can be shared with the wider community.

Future development of the co-operative is a potential challenge to be faced. There is the possibility that the co-operative may eventually purchase further woodlands or areas of land. The community's capacity to take on and manage more land is a potential issue.

<b>Profile – Folly Wood</b>	
<b>1. Institutional context</b>	
<b>1.1 Ownership</b>	Woodland owned by community members. All members own shares.
<b>1.2 Access and use rights</b>	No legal public access obligations are in place but the community do encourage public access to the whole site. The community control the management of forest resources.
<b>1.3 Regulations / statutory responsibilities</b>	Company Law
<b>2. Internal organisation</b>	
<b>2.1 Community members</b>	Membership is open to all but limited to a set number of shares. Membership consists of 64 individuals, families and organisations.
<b>2.2 Structure / legal status / financial structures</b>	Community Benefit Society (a form of Industrial and Provident Society).
<b>2.3 Representation</b>	Members elect directors.
<b>2.4 Participation in decision making</b>	Members are in control of decision making via directors. Regular meetings are held for specific interest groups as well as core group meetings where at least two directors must attend.
<b>2.5 Communication and learning processes</b>	There is a community website. They have also produced a document entitled 'Looking After Folly Wood' which is publically available through the website.

<b>2.6 Forest management objectives and planning procedures</b>	The woodland is managed for a variety of objectives including amenity and conservation value. An initial forest management plan is in place but this will develop as the community start to manage the woodland more. They started by taking a year to watch the woodland through the seasons before doing any major work so no long term plan has yet been created.
<b>2.7 Business models</b>	Non-profit making. Community members carry out most management but a contractor has recently been engaged to provide advice and to carry out major forestry operations.
<b>2.8 Benefit distribution rules</b>	Members are not currently entitled to any forest products, but the distribution of woodfuel is under discussion.
<b>3. External linkages</b>	
<b>3.1 Partnerships and agreements</b>	They work closely and share resources with Hawkwood (a nearby community woodland).
<b>3.2 Associations</b>	
<b>4. Resources</b>	
<b>4.1 Forest</b>	3.5ha of mixed woodland. Mature larch currently dominates with other species including ash, sycamore, beech and elm occurring in lower densities.
<b>4.2 Funding sources</b>	The majority of funding has come from sales of shares to members but also from Stroud Rural Task Force, Big Tree Plant and the Soil Association (payment for case study).
<b>4.3 Knowledge</b>	Advice from local FC officer. A reasonable amount of knowledge exists within the community with some forestry professionals being involved.

## **Rookwood Association – Rookwood, Honiton, Devon**

### **Background to the group and woodland**

Rookwood is owned by Devon and Cornwall Housing and is now under management by the Rookwood Association who formed in July 2010 and took over the management of the woodland in winter 2011. The Rookwood Association is made up of residents from Rookwood House - a block of flats adjacent to the woodland - along with a few non-resident members.

They have become a constituted group in order to be officially recognised and to enable them to apply for grants and accept donations, but are not legally registered. The landowner also specified that they should be a constituted group in order for them to take over the management of the site.

The woodland is protected by Tree Protection Orders which were placed on trees in the woodland in 1964, and is also part of the Honiton Conservation Area, which means that all tree work must be approved by the East Devon County Council Tree Officer. He has offered advice as well as approving work they wish to carry out.

The community are unsure of any legal rights of access but residents welcome anyone to visit the woodland.

### **How the community is run**

Membership of the Rookwood Association is open to all, but only those that are resident in the flats have voting rights. Regular meetings are held for the committee and other members to discuss the management of the woodland. Decisions are reached by consensus and putting the issue out to a vote.

Members have unlimited access to the site and those that take an active role in the management of the woodland are entitled to benefit from both timber and non-timber woodland products.

The group manage the woodland mostly for amenity purposes with priorities for management so far being clearing out fly-tipped waste, improving access and the removal of any dangerous trees as well as those that are encroaching on the flats and creating unwanted shade. The removal of invasive species has also been a priority as members are very keen to promote native species and the native fauna that benefit



The woodland before the community started work

from them. A 'phase one' plan has been devised that sets out the management aims for the next ten years. A 'phase two' plan is expected to follow this, ideas for which are already being discussed.

### **Impacts on the wider community**

The woodland is visible from the town centre so awareness of it is quite high. One member said she has had comments from other Honiton residents who say they would love to live in Rookwood now the woodland has been improved. There were plans a couple of years before the Rookwood Association took over the management of the woodland to involve the local community in clearing up the woodland. A good response was received but due to processes the group had to go through and the necessary legalities of having volunteers on site, this was delayed and interest waned. Luckily though, due to a group of dedicated residents, this didn't deter the group from forming and eventually being able to carry out the work.

The plans and work of the community are posted on their website (<http://www.rookwoodhouse.plus.com>) and circulated in a newsletter which goes to all residents and neighbours. Articles about the woodland have also been published in the local press. Community members also strive to raise awareness of the woodland as well as raising money through running a fund raising stall outside the local church when it is good weather selling items that have been donated to them such as books.

### **Woodland resource**

The woodland is approximately 0.2ha in size and is made up of many varieties of both native and non-native broadleaved tree species. Sycamore has started to dominate the woodland and on the southern boundary overhangs considerably into Honiton main street. There is also a large population of Laurel within the woodland which is likely to be removed in the near future. Other tree species present include Holly, Ash, Elm, Blackthorn, Hazel, Field Maple and Elder as well as a single Cedar of Lebanon. A wide variety of fauna has been noted to be inhabiting the woodland including bats, mice, reptiles, amphibians and many songbirds. There have even been sightings of luminescent dots in the leaf litter on occasions, leading to suspicions of glow-worms.

The woodland was neglected for many years and was having negative effects on some residents in flats bordering the wood such as excessive shade and an oppressive feel. It was also being used for the illegal disposal of waste, and non-native invasive species had started to dominate the woodland. It had been subject to development proposals but these were met with strong local opposition and the plans were dropped. The community were concerned about losing the woodland so decided that it needed more effective management to

promote and encourage biodiversity and to be actively promoted for use by the residents. These reasons motivated the residents of Rookwood House to engage with Devon and Cornwall Housing about taking on the management of the woodland as a community group.

### **Advice and financial support**

So far the group have received advice and support from the Woodland Advisor for the Working our Woodlands project which aimed to increase the management of small woodlands in the Blackdown Hills and East Devon area. They have received financial support from Devon and Cornwall Housing in the form of a Resident Association start-up grant, a community investment grant and two project grants. They have also received an annual award grant from Honiton Town Council and raise money through donations from residents and from the sale of a small amount of firewood. The project grants were provided for the group to carry out felling work and hedging around the woodland and all other grants and donations go towards the general funds of the group.



Community compost bins on the edge of the woodland

### **Woodland management**

A woodland management plan has been created by residents with assistance from the Woodland Officer for the Working our Woodlands project. This plan is sufficient for the purposes of the group but is quite basic compared with some of the other groups such as Oakfrith Wood.

They have used funds to employ contractors and volunteer agencies to carry out



Bird box installed by community members

much of the larger work in the woodland. Residents do take on practical work but lack relevant experience and skills. . Most of the work that community members perform consists of tree planting, which has included the creation of a hedge along one edge of the woodland, and the creation of habitat piles. They have also built a compost area which is used to compost some waste from the woodland as well as residents' household and garden compostable material.

BTCV have also provided volunteer work parties to assist with the practical management of the woodland and advice on work that could potentially be of benefit such as the installation of bird and bat boxes to replace the roosts lost through the felling of trees.

The group are working on getting a volunteer tree surgeon to be involved in small scale felling and other tree work that needs to take place in the future. They also feel that they would benefit from the involvement of someone with ecological skills to identify the species present and the ecological value of the woodland. Some community members take a particular interest in the biodiversity in the woodlands but as a group they feel that someone more experienced would be of value. As many members are interested in the biodiversity of Rookwood one of the items on their wish list is to be able to purchase unobtrusive technology for recording evidence of species using the woodland. It has been noted that since work has started at Rookwood the presence of wildlife has increased, with bats now being seen on a regular basis as well as a barn owl taking up residence in the wood. Members also feel that they would benefit from connections with other community woodland groups so that they could share knowledge and skills.

### **Benefits and challenges of involvement in the community**

When asked of the benefits of being involved in the community woodland one



Community member planting trees

member said "There are a great many, but most of all it is focussing on the natural world and being able to play a positive role in its development. Through this development, a positive ethos is created". In addition to this many members feel that it has been really positive for the residents to get together to achieve something and that this has created a good sense of community that they all enjoy.

Members have also gained a great amount of satisfaction from witnessing the improvement of the woodland and the benefits it has had for the residents, particularly the increase in light in the flats overlooking the woodland that has resulted from clearing away some of the trees that were creating an oppressive atmosphere.

Challenges faced so far have been varied with the largest challenge identified being working together with people to find common ground. A variety of views on the purpose of the woodland and what should be done with it exist, so taking account of all of these ideas and working together to achieve them is difficult.

As the group has very little existing knowledge of woodland management they rely heavily on external advice. They have found that they are given conflicting advice from different people and organisations and due to the lack of internal knowledge can sometimes struggle to know who to listen to and hence, what to do. They do carry out their own internet based research in these cases to try to make an informed decision.

They have had some criticism from other residents usually based around the fact that these residents don't understand that the woodland needs to be managed or it will continue to deteriorate. When community members have explained that trees that are removed will be replaced and also explain why they are managing the woodland then people are more accepting of the work being done.

Also, as this is the first time any of the residents have been involved in managing a woodland they said there is a challenge in "dealing with contractors and motivating yourself in a different way than what you are used to". Keeping people motivated and interested is an on-going challenge but one that they have managed to deal with so far. They are planning to hold a party for the residents to provide an opportunity to talk about the woodland and hopefully get more people involved. They do feel that some people are reluctant to get more involved as they worry that volunteering will mean they are given tasks that they won't be comfortable with. Thus, they are keen to encourage people to have as little or as great an involvement as they wish and have time for, and to do only those tasks that they feel they can do or want to have a go at.

Overall, members feel that any challenges they face are worth it as they are improving their living environment and getting a number of well-being benefits from the improvement of the woodland, biodiversity and the community that has formed to conserve their woodland.



Community member working hard, with a smile on his face!

<b>Profile – Rookwood</b>	
<b>1. Institutional context</b>	
<b>1.1 Ownership</b>	Woodland owned by Devon & Cornwall Housing.
<b>1.2 Access and use rights</b>	The community are not sure about legal access rights but they do encourage public access. The community control the management of forest resources but all plans have to be approved by the East Devon District Council Tree Officer.
<b>1.3 Regulations / statutory responsibilities</b>	Much of the woodland has been subject to Tree Preservation Orders since 1964. The woodland is also within the Honiton Conservation Area.
<b>2. Internal organisation</b>	
<b>2.1 Community members</b>	Membership is open to all but only Rookwood House residents have voting rights.
<b>2.2 Structure / legal status / financial structures</b>	A constituted group (residents association) but not legally registered.
<b>2.3 Representation</b>	Members elect a committee.
<b>2.4 Participation in decision making</b>	Members are in control of making decisions via committee but the East Devon District Council Tree Officer has to approve proposals. Devon & Cornwall Housing also have to be notified of any work and be in agreement to support payment of the work. Only members that are residents of Rookwood House have voting rights. Regular meetings are held for all members where management proposals are discussed.
<b>2.5 Communication and learning processes</b>	The community have a website, a regular newsletter is produced and occasional articles have appeared in the local press. Members also run local fundraising activities.
<b>2.6 Forest management objectives and planning procedures</b>	The woodland is managed primarily to promote biodiversity and to protect it from development. A phase one management plan has been created to set out the initial management prescriptions to bring the woodland back into management. A phase two plan will follow this.
<b>2.7 Business</b>	Non-profit making. Contractors and volunteer groups carry out a lot of

<b>models</b>	the practical management work with community members doing work such as tree planting and the creation of habitat piles.
<b>2.8 Benefit distribution rules</b>	Active members have free access to woodfuel and compost.
<b>3. External linkages</b>	
<b>3.1 Partnerships and agreements</b>	They have worked closely with BTCV and the woodland officer for the Working our Woodlands project, Devon & Cornwall Housing and the East Devon District Council Tree Officer.
<b>3.2 Associations</b>	
<b>4. Resources</b>	
<b>4.1 Forest</b>	0.2ha of mixed woodland. Mature sycamore currently dominates, interspersed with a wide variety of species including ash, blackthorn, holly, elder, beech and hazel.
<b>4.2 Funding sources</b>	Grants from Honiton Town Council, Devon & Cornwall Housing, donations from local businesses and Rookwood House residents, fundraising activities and a small amount from firewood trading.
<b>4.3 Knowledge</b>	Advice from East Devon District Council Tree Officer, Woodland Officer for Working our Woodland project (a project promoting the management of small woodlands in East Devon and the Blackdown Hills) and BTCV.

## Comparison Table

	Oakfrith Wood	Steward Wood	Folly Wood	Rookwood
<b>1. Institutional context</b>				
<b>1.1 Ownership</b>	Woodland owned by Wiltshire Council. They are currently in negotiations regarding selling it but will be negotiating provisions for the community's continued use with potential buyers.	Woodland owned by community company, Affinity Woodland Workers Co-operative.	Woodland owned by community members. All members own shares.	Woodland owned by Devon & Cornwall Housing.
<b>1.2 Access and use rights</b>	No legal public access obligations are in place but the community allow and encourage public access to the whole site. The community control the management of forest resources.	A public cycle way passes through the lower section of the woodland which is regulated by the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 and the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006. Public access to the rest of the woodland is not permitted. The community control the management of forest resources.	No legal public access obligations are in place but the community do encourage public access to the whole site. The community control the management of forest resources.	The community are not sure about legal access rights but they do encourage public access. The community control the management of forest resources but all plans have to be approved by the East Devon District Council Tree Officer.
<b>1.3 Regulations / statutory responsibilities</b>	Charity Law	Company Law	Company Law	

<b>2. Internal organisation</b>				
<b>2.1 Community members</b>	Membership is open to all.	Membership is restricted due to limited dwellings and capacity of the woodland to sustain the community. New membership is determined by existing community members. Currently at full capacity with 20 community members.	Membership is open to all but limited to a set number of shares. Membership consists of 64 individuals, families and organisations.	Membership is open to all but only Rookwood House residents have voting rights.
<b>2.2 Structure / legal status / financial structures</b>	Registered charity.	Workers co-operative and company limited by guarantee.	Community Benefit Society (a form of Industrial and Provident Society)	A constituted group (residents association) but not legally registered.
<b>2.3 Representation</b>	Members elect trustees.	All members are directors of the co-operative.	Members elect directors.	Members elect a committee.
<b>2.4 Participation in decision making</b>	Members are in control of decision making via trustees. A representative from Wiltshire Council sits on the board of trustees. Regular meetings are held to discuss management proposals.	All members are in control of decision making. Weekly meetings are held to discuss management proposals.	Members are in control of decision making via directors. Regular meetings are held for specific interest groups as well as core group meetings where at least two directors must attend.	Members are in control of making decisions via committee but the East Devon District Council Woodland Officer has to approve proposals. Devon & Cornwall Housing also have to be notified of any work and be in agreement to support payment of the work. Only members that are residents of Rookwood House have voting rights. Regular meetings are held for all members where management proposals are discussed.

<p><b>2.5 Communication and learning processes</b></p>	<p>All members can attend regular meetings. Community members have strong links with other community initiatives.</p>	<p>All members attend regular meetings. They hold an annual open day where the public can visit the woodland and community living area. There is also a community website and various members hold training courses for the public at the woodland.</p>	<p>There is a community website. They have also produced a document entitled 'Looking After Folly Wood' which is publically available through the website.</p>	<p>The community have a website, a regular newsletter is produced and occasional articles have appeared in the local press. Members also run local fundraising activities.</p>
<p><b>2.6 Forest management objectives and planning procedures</b></p>	<p>The woodland is managed to improve its conservation value as well as to encourage public access and use. There is a long term woodland management plan in effect.</p>	<p>The woodland is managed to promote biodiversity, and to provide resources for the resident community on a sustainable basis. There is a long term woodland management plan in effect.</p>	<p>The woodland is managed for a variety of objectives including amenity and conservation value. An initial forest management plan is in place but this will develop as the community start to manage the woodland more. They started by taking a year to watch the woodland through the seasons before doing any major work so no long term plan has yet been created.</p>	<p>The woodland is managed primarily to promote biodiversity and to protect it from development. A phase one management plan has been created to set out the initial management prescriptions to bring the woodland back into management. A phase two plan will follow this.</p>
<p><b>2.7 Business models</b></p>	<p>Non-profit making (a charity). The community includes a woodfuel co-operative whose members carry out the majority of the forestry operations. External contractors are engaged for large scale felling.</p>	<p>Non-profit making. All forest operations are carried out by community members.</p>	<p>Non-profit making. Community members carry out most management but a contractor has recently been engaged to provide advice and to carry out major forestry operations.</p>	<p>Non-profit making. Contractors and volunteer groups carry out a lot of the practical management work with community members doing work such as tree planting and the creation of habitat piles.</p>

<b>2.8 Benefit distribution rules</b>	Members of the woodfuel co-operative get a discount on woodfuel depending on the amount of work they have put in over the year.	All members use the woodland resources for free including woodfuel, water, food and other forest products.	Members are not currently entitled to any forest products, but the distribution of woodfuel is under discussion.	Active members have free access to woodfuel and compost.
<b>3. External linkages</b>				
<b>3.1 Partnerships and agreements</b>	They work closely with Wiltshire Council and Wiltshire Wildlife Trust.	Works with Moreton Action Group, WWOOFERS (volunteers).	They work closely and share resources with Hawkwood (a nearby community woodland).	They have worked closely with BTCV and the woodland officer for the Working our Woodlands project, Devon & Cornwall Housing and the East Devon District Council Tree Officer.
<b>3.2 Associations</b>	-	-	-	-
<b>4. Resources</b>				
<b>4.1 Forest</b>	14 ha mixed woodland. Predominantly mature beech with oak and ash. There is also an area of hazel coppice planted in 2000.	13ha of mixed woodland. Predominantly made up of stands of larch, scots pine, Norway spruce and ash, interspersed with sycamore and hazel coppice.	3.5ha of mixed woodland. Mature larch currently dominates with other species including ash, sycamore, beech and elm occurring in lower densities.	0.2ha of mixed woodland. Mature sycamore currently dominates, interspersed with a wide variety of species including ash, blackthorn, holly, elder, beech and hazel.
<b>4.2 Initial Funding sources</b>	Wiltshire Council	Loan stock from local community.	Sale of shares.	Start-up grant from Devon & Cornwall Housing.

<p><b>4.3 Subsequent funding sources</b></p>	<p>FC EWGS grants, income from timber sales, donations from local community and sponsorship from Stihl.</p>	<p>BTCV People &amp; Places grant, income from running training courses.</p>	<p>The majority of funding has come from sales of shares to members but also from Stroud Rural Task Force, Big Tree Plant and the Soil Association (payment for case study).</p>	<p>Grants from Honiton Town Council, Devon &amp; Cornwall Housing Association/Tor Homes, donations from local businesses and Rookwood House residents, fundraising activities and a small amount from firewood trading.</p>
<p><b>4.4 Knowledge</b></p>	<p>A lot of knowledge exists within the community with a number of members being forestry professionals. Advice from Wiltshire Council and Wiltshire Wildlife Trust.</p>	<p>As the community has existed for 12 years they have now gained most knowledge required through training courses and experiences. Also gain knowledge from various forestry professionals that have made visits.</p>	<p>Advice from local FC officer. A reasonable amount of knowledge exists within the community with some forestry professionals being involved.</p>	<p>Advice from East Devon District Council Tree Officer, Woodland Officer for Working our Woodlands project (a project promoting the management of small woodlands in East Devon and the Blackdown Hills) and BTCV.</p>

## Discussion

The community woodlands were deliberately chosen to demonstrate a range of contexts. The comparison table above highlights these differences but nevertheless also shows that there are several aspects common to all the woodlands. Thus, the woodlands have different owner types (local authority, housing association, a community company and community members) and different organisational and legal structures resulting in different membership rules and benefits (although in all cases members have control of decision making – a requirement in the choice of community woodland for this report).

The woodlands, all previously under-managed, range in size from 0.2 ha to 14 ha and although broadly mixed they do have significant differences. Steward Wood and Folly Wood are both predominantly coniferous woodlands interspersed with a variety of broadleaved species that have either self-seeded or been planted by the community. Both groups are managing them to achieve a greater component of native broadleaved species in the future. Rookwood and Oakfrith Wood have mostly broadleaved species present with occasional conifer species, or small areas of conifers. Rookwood has a wide variety of broadleaved species, both native and non-native of varying age. Oakfrith Wood is predominantly a mature beech woodland with good condition trees interspersed with a limited number of other species and a dedicated area of hazel coppice.

Significantly, the background and experience (in terms of knowledge of woodland and of community groups) and motivation of the community members varies between groups and the groups themselves vary in the time in which they have been operating. While this has influenced the skills inherent in the groups and the speed at which the groups have developed (for example, the prior experience of community groups allowed the Folly Wood group to come together and act very quickly and purchase the wood where a less experienced group may have missed the opportunity), there are nevertheless common support needs.

Characteristics which are shared include, with regard to the woodland:

- a desire to provide open access
- a management focus on biodiversity, amenity and conservation

and, with regard to the community:

- decision making by consensus
- willingness to work in partnership with others
- desire for greater sharing of knowledge and peer support

These are considered in more detail in the following and help to understand how community forestry in the south west of England works and how it could be better supported in the future.

## **What have we learned about community forestry from using the framework?**

Application of the framework has helped us to analyse more clearly aspects of community forestry in the south west of England.

### **Ownership and access**

A wide range of ownership models exist ranging from communities that have bought a woodland for their own use to those that have been given permission to manage a woodland for the benefit of the local community. These different models have evolved due to the opportunities that were available to the groups at the time as well as the aims of the group. For example, for the Friends of Oakfrith Wood the woodland is their local wood, to which a lot of people feel attachment. It made sense for the group to take on the management of that woodland when the opportunity arose. This is also the case for the Rookwood Association whose motivation for forming was to manage their adjacent woodland for the benefit of the residents and local wildlife as well as to save it from development. For both of these groups it was the situation of having a neighbouring woodland being under-managed and neglected that led to the formation of the group, not the aspiration by a group of people to manage just any woodland. However, for the Folly Wood community it was the aspiration of individuals to own and be involved in a woodland, not a specific one, that led to the formation of the group. Their ownership of the woodland is an important aspect to them as they feel it provides a greater sense of responsibility and pride in the work that they achieve.

It has been found that generally community woodland groups welcome and encourage the public to visit their woodlands despite no legal obligations to do so. The only community that limits public access is Steward Wood who do not allow full public access because they live on site and need to maintain a certain level of privacy to carry out their family and community lives but do welcome the public to specific events at the woodland. Despite access being limited the group do still manage the woodland for the benefit of the wider community through setting an example of good practice and encouraging the public to visit for training courses and open days.

## **Structures and governance**

The way in which the woodland community is structured affects membership rules. The Steward Wood and Folly Wood communities have to limit membership. In the case of Steward Wood this is due to available resources and, in the case of Folly Wood, to the number of shares available. Because shares are available in sets of 500 at £500 this limits membership to those who can afford it, even when shares are available. However, this is something recognised by the group and they are looking at ways of addressing that issue.

All groups have selected a structure and legal status that is appropriate to their needs, whether these are to satisfy the minimum requirements of the woodland owner or to enable them to attract funding from a wider range of sources. All groups as a minimum are a constituted group that keep records of meetings and decisions and also keep annual accounts. All consider these to be important activities for their own use whether they are legally obliged to do so or not.

All communities in the case studies have a governance group but the governance structure is different for each group. Governance structure is a function of the number of people involved in each group, the group's legal status and the type of people involved. For example, as a charity the Friends of Oakfrith Wood are required to have a board of trustees. As they have quite a large membership with many members only having occasional involvement, having a board of trustees being responsible for making decisions works well. In contrast, as the Steward community all live and work together it is important for them to all hold equal status and to all be equally involved in making decisions, which is why all adult members are directors of the co-operative. As they are a relatively small group with a similar vision for the woodland this model of representation works well, but would not be practical for the Friends of Oakfrith Wood.

All community groups in this report operate on a not for profit basis, with any income generated being used to manage the woodland.

## **Silviculture**

All four woodlands were previously under-managed, and the groups' involvement in the woodland has resulted in an improved habitat, an increase in use and to varying extents wood for fuel. All groups have a woodland management plan that shapes the work they carry out but the level of detail included in these varies. Oakfrith Wood and Steward Wood are managed with a greater emphasis on productive woodland management than the other two woodlands and so have more detailed management plans. Although Oakfrith Wood is managed primarily for biodiversity, it is divided into compartments and is under a regular thinning regime with a secondary objective of extracting good quality timber.

Steward Wood apply continuous cover forestry to manage the woodland. Their main product is firewood for use by the community but they do also extract timber for use in construction and to sell. In contrast, in Folly Wood and Rookwood management has been purely to remove dangerous and unwanted trees primarily to improve access and recreation opportunities.

This difference is partly due to the experience and expertise within the group but is also down to the size of the woodland and the group's objectives. Folly Wood and Rookwood are both small woodlands where timber production is not really possible on a significant scale, and the primary aims of the groups are to allow access and recreational use for members.

Taking a permaculture approach to woodland management was mentioned by members of both Folly Wood and Steward Wood. Folly Wood employed a permaculture approach by using the first year of their ownership of the woodland to observe the woodland through the seasons. This allowed them to learn more about the woodland and to get an idea of how they could manage it most effectively. Members have found this to be a valuable time and feel that it has stopped them rushing in and carrying out management that they may later have regretted. The value of a permaculture year is recognised by the Steward Wood community, despite not having taken this time themselves. They were prevented from doing so by the pressures of having members who had urgent housing needs, so could not delay the construction of dwellings. In the year they took ownership of the site there were a number of springs at various places around the woodland, which in subsequent years have not appeared. This has resulted in most of the dwellings being positioned above the water line, which causes inconvenience for the community. This is something that would not have happened if an observational year had taken place. This year could also have given them time to learn skills they needed to manage the woodland and to get a better initial appreciation of what resources they had.

### **Sustainability, the role of community and community support needs**

The three corner stones of sustainability – environmental, social and economic - are interdependent as are the sustainability of the woodlands and their associated communities. As discussed above, all the woodlands are benefitting environmentally from being brought into management and the communities are benefitting socially and also materially from a supply of firewood to some degree. Additionally, Oakfrith Wood and Steward Wood get some return from timber extraction and the Steward community also earn income from offering courses. Apart from this earned income all the groups seek funds for both the needs of the community and the management of the woodlands.

All groups manage to secure enough funding through various sources in order to survive and operate successfully. However, all groups except the Folly Wood community reported that a lack of funding is a constant concern for them whether that be a lack of funding for what they want to do now or a perceived lack of funding for something they are likely to want to do in the future.

The case studies have shown that local sources of funding are very important to the community groups with some groups reporting that they find it a lot easier to attract donations and grants from local sources than national or regional sources. This may be partly due to being known to the local funders and to less competition, but also to the complexity of the application procedures for national/regional schemes which precludes groups such as Rookwood from applying as they have neither the knowledge nor time to apply for them without employing external assistance. The Friends of Oakfrith Wood have demonstrated how groups can be flexible in their structure in order to adapt to availability of funding. They became a registered charity partly in order to increase their eligibility for a greater range of funding.

All groups have shown that it is necessary for them to adopt multiple approaches to gaining income to secure their sustainability. All groups were initially established via one form of income such as the sale of shares, financial support from woodland owners or loans, but have then looked to other or additional sources for subsequent funding. Regular grants, one-off grants, sponsorship, fundraising events, donations from individuals and businesses as well as members' personal contributions are all important sources.

Distribution of firewood is a common theme for all four case studies but each woodland group allocates the resource in a different way. At Steward Wood the community members all use firewood on a daily basis and it is an essential resource for them to meet their basic needs so access to it is free. However, for all the other groups, access to firewood is more of a luxury and is generally something which members have to pay for although this is usually at reduced rates subject to involvement in woodland management. The Folly Wood group have not decided on how firewood will be distributed, but it is likely that there will be a charge or some form of exchange of services for the product. Firewood is generally the only material gain that members receive, with no members getting a financial return. Income from the sale of firewood contributes towards the financial sustainability of some of the groups, but does not play a big part.

All the community groups see communication between group members and with the wider community as being key to their success as a group and their long term sustainability. With all groups suffering from criticism at some point due to a general lack of understanding of the need to manage woodlands they all recognise that communicating the work they are carrying out and the impact that it will have is important in gaining/retaining external support. Websites and

newsletters are the most commonly used forms of communication as well as inviting the public into the woodland to show them what is being done and to answer any concerns that people may have.

All the community woodlands have links with external organisations for a range of reasons. Some groups have fostered links with other organisations that use their woodland for activities, some relationships are based around sharing of advice and resources or to offer each other mutual support when needed.

The more established groups – Steward community and Oakfrith Wood – have more external linkages due to the amount of time they have been in existence and their eagerness to be part of the wider local community. Despite the Folly Wood community being at a relatively early stage they do have good links with other local communities mostly due to members' involvement with these other communities. At this stage Rookwood only have links to professional organisations from whom they have received advice, or with whom they have contracted to do work. They have, however, received donations from local businesses which is a good sign that relationships with the local community will be formed as time goes on.

All groups expressed a wish to form stronger links with other community groups particularly with other community woodlands. This is partly to share experiences and advice and also for the potential to share training opportunities and equipment to reduce the costs for the individual groups. None of the groups felt able to start this kind of initiative themselves but would be very keen to be involved if some type of support network were to be developed.

Another significant factor in the sustainability of community woodland groups is having enough dedicated members to carry out necessary tasks. The Rookwood Association, Stroudwoods Cooperative and the Friends of Oakfrith Wood all rely heavily on a small number of members to carry out the majority of the tasks that relate to the daily running of the group, particularly administrative tasks. Group members felt that without those few individuals who are able and willing to dedicate their time and resources, the group would not be able to function as it currently does. The sustainability of the groups will rely on the continued involvement of these key members and the availability of others to take their place when the time comes.

### **Participatory learning and technology development**

Participatory learning within community woodland members relates not only to learning about woodland but also to community and personal development. The case studies revealed how members are building on existing knowledge and experience in these areas.

## ***Woodland***

Some of the groups have reported learning the importance of a management plan, particularly with regard to how it provides a focus and framework with which to work. This was of particular relevance to the newer groups who have not had much, if any, previous experience of woodland management.

Three of the four communities have a reasonable level of forestry knowledge and experience already existing within the community due to members' professional experience. This existing knowledge has been built on by members attending training courses, sharing skills with other groups and by seeking advice from external organisations.

In contrast, the Rookwood community have very little existing knowledge and skills so are very reliant on contractors to carry out practical work and on external advisors to shape their management plan and to inform the decisions the group make. On occasion, they have received conflicting advice and have not had the experience to know which advice to follow. This could be a significant issue for newer groups with little experience and can lead to frustration and, potentially, disengagement.

The Forestry Commission, Small Woods Association and local councils have been commonly mentioned as sources of knowledge, along with visits from local forestry professionals. Advice from local organisations is another important source for groups. Many members appear to do their own research into issues but as a group they tend to favour getting professional advice where possible. Continued access to professional advice was something mentioned frequently by community members as being essential to their future development.

## ***Community and personal development***

These groups feel that they have access to the majority of the knowledge and skills that they require with the exception of accounting and marketing skills. It is evident that groups have gained and developed skills over time in order to promote the community and their work more effectively. Three of the four groups have their own websites, albeit of varying sophistication. They have gained further IT and communication skills through writing articles for local newspapers and magazines and using IT to promote events and news about the community. The need for the continued development of skills through attending training courses was something frequently mentioned by community members. In some cases, a lack of funding is a concern for community members as they feel that it may limit the amount of training they will be able to receive. Training will be required for new members, or existing members that are taking on new roles or new tasks.

Three of the four groups have learned about the choices that exist for the structure of their community and governance group. They all received professional advice about the options that were available to them and chose the structure that they felt suited them best. Groups also learned about ways of making decisions as a group, with all groups deciding that making decisions through consensus was the best option. All the communities believe that it is important for group dynamics that all decisions made should be agreed by all. However, they do accept that there will be cases where not everyone will agree so alternative methods of decision making are in place as a back-up, commonly putting the issue to a vote with all members holding one vote each.

Learning to deal with community dynamic issues has been an issue common to all groups. For all communities regular meetings and using consensus as a decision making method are the most common way of avoiding conflicts and in dealing with them when they do arise. As the Steward Wood community are in the position of living together as a community, conflict avoidance and resolution is particularly important to them. As such, they have tried a number of methods of dealing with issues and have learned which work best for their group. Some methods are favoured more by some people than others so different methods are used depending on the situation and the people involved.

## **Application of the framework**

The detailed methodology has been described earlier. In summary, to carry out the research for these case studies a questionnaire was formulated based around the framework which was given to a representative for each community to complete. The structure of the framework was used to develop questions that would draw out the information required to complete each of the sections of the framework.

It was felt necessary to break down the sections into further, smaller questions to ensure that all the relevant information was gathered. As some of the sections were quite broad in scope it was likely that community representatives would interpret them in different ways and possibly miss out some of the information sought.

The questionnaire was followed by an interview with each of the community representatives to follow-up on any areas not answered fully. These interviews were generally fairly short as the questionnaires were answered well and the majority of information required by the framework was provided.

Finally, additional insights were sought by means of a discussion with 4-6 community members who were asked:

- Are there any lessons learned that could be used to benefit other community groups or woodlands?

- What support/resources/knowledge would benefit the community woodland in the future?
- What are the benefits of involvement in the community woodland?
- What are the challenges of involvement in the community woodland?

A further useful addition to the framework would be a way of eliciting an idea of how community members experience their involvement with the group and woodland including what they feel they get out of it and particular challenges they have faced. This would provide an insight into what works and what does not and any common areas where extra support would be of benefit to the communities. The need to gather this information is not explicit in the framework but could be accommodated quite easily by investigating the experiences and feelings of the community members for each aspect explored by the framework.

## **Conclusion**

The framework has been tested and applied to four community woodlands in the South West to contribute to a typology of community woodlands and has been found to be a useful structure for researching, comparing and contrasting the characteristics of the community woodlands. It is felt that the additions suggested above would add value to interpreting the data gathered.

The framework has also proved helpful in structuring the case studies in a consistent style and providing a clear layout for easy comparison of the key factors.

## Appendix 1 - Questionnaire

### What is it?:

1. Who is the woodland owned by?
2. How long has it been owned by/managed by/used as a community woodland?
3. Do members have an identifiable stake in the woodland? If yes, how are community members' stakes represented e.g. shares, allocated plots, rights to products?
4. What were the motivations and purpose for starting the community woodland? e.g. Creating recreational space, timber production, protecting land from development, conservation.
5. What access and usage rights exist for the woodland?
6. Is the woodland subject to any regulations or statutory responsibilities?

### Internal organisation:

1. Who is community membership open to?
2. What is your organisational structure, legal status and financial structure?
3. What motivated the community to select those structures?
4. Do you have a managing committee or other governance group? If yes, how are the

committee/management group selected?
5. Do committee members have previous voluntary experience in community groups?
6. How are committee members and community members involved in the decision making process for the woodland?
7. How are decisions taken, including making woodland management objectives? E.g. decided by a majority, via consensus, made by key individuals.
8. Please describe your business model (if applicable).
9. What are your benefit distribution rules?

**Points of interest:**

1. Is there anything particular interesting or innovative about the woodland or the community structure and decision making process?
2. Is there any particular ethos held by the community?
3. Are the wider outside community involved in the woodland in any way?

**Background:**

1. Is the history of the site known? If yes, please provide any information about previous owners and uses of the site.

2. What was the site like when it was acquired by the community?

3. Please describe how the community woodland started including any help received from outside agencies or funders.

**How it works:**

1. How was the governance of the community woodland formed?

2. Who takes on responsibility for practical management of the woodland?

3. Do you have management objectives for the woodland and could you briefly describe them?

4. What are the aims of your woodland management approach (conservation/recreation/timber production etc)?

**Resources:**

1. Please describe your forest resource.

2. Please describe any funding sources that the woodland has benefitted from.

3. Where do you gain any knowledge that is required to inform the effective management of the woodland?

**Impact:**

1. How has the woodland impacted the local/wider community?

2. Has work in the woodland impacted the way other community projects/woodland are managed?

3. Is there any evidence of how people that have taken part in any activities or events in the woodland have been impacted?

4. How are the activities and learning processes of the woodland communicated to members and the wider public?

**Transferability:**

1. Could this community management model potentially be transferred to another site?

2. Are any lessons learned being used to benefit any other community groups or woodlands?

3. Are there any lessons learned that could be used to benefit other community groups or
--

woodlands?

**External Linkages:**

1.Are you part of any partnerships or agreements?

2. Does the community have any links with other community based projects?

3. Are you associated with any other organisations or initiatives?

**Support and resources:**

1.What support/resources/knowledge has been important to your progress so far? (external or within the community)

2. What support/resources/knowledge would benefit the community woodland in the future? (external or within the community)

**Benefits and challenges:**

1.What are the benefits of involvement in the community woodland?

2. What are the challenges of involvement in the community woodland?

## **Appendix 2 - Organisations mentioned in the case studies**

**Art of Mentoring UK** – [www.artofmentoring.co.uk](http://www.artofmentoring.co.uk)

**BTCV (now TCV)** – [www.tcv.org.uk](http://www.tcv.org.uk)

**Chapter 7** – [www.tlio.org.uk/chapter7](http://www.tlio.org.uk/chapter7)

**Co-operatives UK** – [www.uk.coop](http://www.uk.coop)

**Dartmoor National Park Authority** – [www.dartmoor-npa.gov.uk](http://www.dartmoor-npa.gov.uk)

**Devon & Cornwall Housing** – [www.dchgroup.com](http://www.dchgroup.com)

**Forestry Commission** – [www.forestry.gov.uk](http://www.forestry.gov.uk)

**Keverel Farm** – [www.keverel.org](http://www.keverel.org)

**Landmatters Permaculture Project** – [www.landmatters.org.uk](http://www.landmatters.org.uk)

**Moretonhampstead Action Group for Sustainability** –  
[www.moretonhampstead.com/community-sites/mags](http://www.moretonhampstead.com/community-sites/mags)

**Natural England** – [www.naturalengland.org.uk](http://www.naturalengland.org.uk)

**Permaculture Association** – [www.permaculture.org.uk](http://www.permaculture.org.uk)

**Proper Job (Chagford)** – [www.proper-job.org](http://www.proper-job.org)

**Richmond Fellowship** – [www.richmondfellowship.org.uk](http://www.richmondfellowship.org.uk)

**Small Woods Association** – [www.smallwoods.org.uk](http://www.smallwoods.org.uk)

**Soil Association** – [www.soilassociation.org](http://www.soilassociation.org)

**Stroud Common Wealth** – [www.stroudcommonwealth.org.uk](http://www.stroudcommonwealth.org.uk)

**Stroud Town Council** – [www.stroudtown.gov.uk](http://www.stroudtown.gov.uk)

**Stroud Valleys Project** – [www.stroudvalleysproject.org](http://www.stroudvalleysproject.org)

**Sustainability South West** – [www.sustainabilitysouthwest.org.uk](http://www.sustainabilitysouthwest.org.uk)

**Urchfont Parish Council** – [urchfont-pc.gov.uk](http://urchfont-pc.gov.uk)

**Walking the Land** – [www.walkingtheland.org.uk](http://www.walkingtheland.org.uk)

**Wiltshire Council** – [www.wiltshire.gov.uk](http://www.wiltshire.gov.uk)

[www.silvanus.org.uk](http://www.silvanus.org.uk)

**Wiltshire Wildlife Trust** – [www.wiltshirewildlife.org](http://www.wiltshirewildlife.org)

**Woodcraft Folk** – [www.woodcraft.org.uk](http://www.woodcraft.org.uk)

**WWOOF UK** – [www.woof.org.uk](http://www.woof.org.uk)