

Why community woods?

Some first steps



WOODLAND
TRUST

SOME FIRST STEPS

So you're considering taking on your own community wood. Whether you've a site in mind or need to find one, whether you're an existing community group or need to form one, there is plenty to get to grips with.

Just as no two woods are alike, neither are any two community woodland groups. How they are set up and run can vary hugely. All share two fundamental principles, though: decisions for managing the wood are shaped by a group of people with an interest in it, and the benefits that flow are shared with the local community.

Here are some key factors to consider before you get going in earnest...

1. What's your motive?

Is it to save a wood under threat, improve or extend an existing one in your neighbourhood, plant a new one... or a combination of those things? Do you hope to manage your wood for recreation and access, for nature and wildlife, for commercial and social benefits... or a combination of those things? Would you like to own the wood for keeps, lease it for a fixed spell, or manage it for the community under the umbrella of a private (or local authority) landowner?

2. What's your case?

The stronger the case you can make, the more likely you are to rally support, raise funds and ultimately succeed. Consider the strengths and weaknesses, the opportunities and threats presented by your project.

If you've a site in mind, what is particularly special about it? Does it have a unique selling point? Who loves and values it, and who might use it in the future? Will access be improved, and will there be opportunities for recreation, environmental improvement or business? Will community participation get a boost? Will key species or habitats thrive as a result?

Conversely, will the site suffer under different ownership? Without your stewardship, might it be neglected, insensitively managed or unsympathetically developed? If you're unable to purchase it, might the trees be felled, and development take place?

3. Have you done your homework?

How much do you know about the history of the wood you have in mind: its former ownership, who has used it historically and the mix of animals and plants that live there? Are there any boundary wrangles, access issues, official wildlife designations or other restrictions to contend with? Before you make any serious commitment, find out as much as possible about the site you are taking on.

4. What's your timetable and budget?

How much time do you have to acquire your wood? And once secured, will the project be for a fixed period or for perpetuity? How much money will you need, both at the start-up stage and to keep your wood thriving longer-term? Are your scheduling and fundraising aspirations realistic?

5. Who's on board?

There's strength in numbers, and clout to be had from influential supporters of all kinds. Who lives and works near your wood, and who really cares about the site and chimes with your aspirations for it? Consider not just the immediate community, but also any wider interests (conservational, sporting, economic) that might benefit. How affluent is the surrounding area, and how far geographically will support for your project extend?

Aim to articulate your goal precisely. For example...

“Our group of parishioners / villagers / local businesses want to raise £5,000 to acquire / lease / manage 20 hectares of woodland at Squirrel Coppice, Forest Green, by December 2017, with the aim of improving access for walkers, cyclists and families and enhancing the habitat for wildlife.”

The advice section of this website has lots of information to help you mobilise community support; assess likely woodland sites; raise funds; and weigh the legal implications of owning, leasing or managing a wood.