

# Community Management of Local Authority Woodlands in England A report to Forest Research

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## SHARED ASSETS





# Community management of local authority woodlands in England: a report to Forest research

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# **1. Executive summary**

## **1.1 Background and objectives**

This report was commissioned by Forest Research to fill a gap in knowledge about the management of English local authority owned woodland and the extent of engagement with community groups and social enterprises. As a scoping study, it focuses on the availability of relevant information.

The objective of the research was to ascertain:

- what information exists on local authority woodlands, their management and aims, and where the information can be found
- what information exists on levels of community management of local authority woodlands and what models are in use
- what information exists about social enterprises operating from local authority woodlands

According to previously available data, local authorities own 6% of England's woodlands<sup>1</sup>.

## **1.2 Methodology**

Shared Assets undertook this work by inviting all local authorities in England to respond to an online questionnaire. The questionnaire was open for two separate periods in 2013, and had a total of 162 responses, or 49% of English local authorities.

The questionnaire was followed up with 24 detailed telephone interviews and the development of 10 case studies that profile a range of approaches to community management of local authority woodland. A workshop for officers was held to test the interim findings of the work in July 2013.

## **1.3 Key findings: information on local authority woodlands**

We found that the depth and quality of information about woodlands varies widely between different local authorities. Some have a detailed picture of the type and extent of woodland they own, while others hold little or no information, citing the lack of time or resources to build up such a picture.

There is a wide variation in the level of information relating to woodland ownership and management plans. The degree to which local authorities engage in proactive woodland management also varies. Woodland was not a high priority for most of the surveyed local authorities; 45% had no strategy or plan for the future of their woodland assets.

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<sup>1</sup> The Forestry Commission (2001) "National Inventory of Woodland and Trees" Forest Research: Edinburgh p.28

Where strategies or plans do exist little of this information is made available to the public. Again lack of resources and a perceived lack of demand are cited as reasons for the information not being easily publicly accessible.

Lack of funding and staff cuts were identified as key challenges. The majority of those interviewed said that proactive management takes a backseat when resources are tight, in favour of a more reactive focus on health and safety issues. Officers are often aware that more could be done with their woodlands, and the examples in this report highlight the potential for woodlands to be the site of multiple activities that contribute to an authority's strategic aims. Many more authorities will need to start seeing woodlands as potential assets rather than liabilities if these potential benefits are to be realised.

#### **1.4 Key findings: information about community management**

There is very little information kept, collated and distributed about community management groups (or social enterprises).

This report defines community management as “local community involvement in making decisions about or influencing the future direction of local authority woodland”. The degree of involvement or engagement varies, and we have used Forest Research's typology, which distinguishes between “consultative”, “collaborative” and “empowered” groups.<sup>2</sup>

56% of the 156 groups identified in the survey were classified as “consultative”, meaning that they carry out work on the instructions of local authority officers. Only 15% were classified as “empowered”, with devolved responsibility for managing a designated piece of woodland.

Respondents felt that the biggest barrier to community management as a viable alternative model is the time it takes to build up organisations capable of effective management.

Despite this most officers are keen to explore the community management model. This is either because they see it as a good in itself, which enhances engagement and public value, or because they see it as a potential alternative that would help to keep costs down and free up extra resources. They are keen to stress, however, that community management is never a “free lunch”. It takes time and resources to sustain healthy organisations and the ultimate responsibility always rests with the local authority. Officers have concerns over the sustainability and momentum of groups, especially if they rely on one or two key individuals. A large number of them are also wary of the reputational damage that the local authority could suffer if a group falls apart or if their plans go awry.

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<sup>2</sup> Ambrose-Oji, B., Tabbush, P., Carter, C., Frost, B and Fielding, K. (2011). “Public Engagement in Forestry: A toolbox for public participation in forest and woodland planning” Forestry Commission: Edinburgh. Available at: <http://www.forestry.gov.uk/fr/INFD-8HSEBB>

### **1.5 Key findings: information about social enterprises**

Social enterprises are organisations or groups that are delivering services or developing products from woodland, and may be, but are not necessarily, involved in management. Definitions are discussed further in section 2, below.

Social enterprise involvement in woodlands is much less common than community management, with details of only 18 social enterprises provided.

There is a great deal more information relating to community groups than social enterprises, indeed the term “social enterprise” is barely on the radar for a lot of local authority officers involved in the management of woodlands. It is possible that groups that are taking a social enterprise approach may not have been classified as “social enterprises” for the purposes of this survey.

### **1.6 Structure of this report**

This report outlines the methodology and process used, discusses the issues around defining community management and social enterprise, and summarises the findings of the questionnaire, phone interviews and workshop.

It then goes on to discuss the findings, draws some conclusions (summarised above), and in some cases suggests options for moving forward or for future research. Appendix 1, attached, provides a bibliography of individual local authorities’ information on woodland management, where available.

## 2. Background, challenges and definitions

Shared Assets was commissioned by Forest Research to survey community management of local authority woodlands in England in order to ascertain:

- what information exists on local authority woodlands, their management and aims, and where the information can be found
- what information exists on levels of community management of local authority woodlands and what models are in use
- what information exists about social enterprises operating from local authority woodlands

The brief also included:

- short case studies profiling a range of approaches to community woodland management on local authority woodland
- an annotated bibliography of resources on local authority woodland and its management.

This report provides this information and discusses knowledge sources and gaps, availability and limitations of the data, and implications for research needs. The bibliography can be found at Appendix 1.

### 2.1 Challenges and limitations

Forest Research's evidence review on community woodland governance<sup>3</sup> highlighted the potential for community involvement in decision-making about local authority woodland, as well as the lack of national data on local authority woodlands and their management. The brief recognised that information about these topics is highly variable across English local authorities. This piece of work has confirmed that variability.

Exeter University's report "Making Land Available for Woodland Creation" also recognised that "one of the difficulties in obtaining information about [local authority landholdings] is that it is managed by a variety of departments across the authority and not centrally"<sup>4</sup>. We have found that this is particularly the case for woodlands: there is very little data publicly available, and much of the information in this report comes from the questionnaire and telephone interviews with local authority officers.

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<sup>3</sup> Lawrence, A. & Molteno, S. (2012) "Community forest governance: a rapid evidence review. A report by Forest Research on behalf of the Independent Panel on Forestry" Available at: <http://www.defra.gov.uk/forestrypanel/views/>

<sup>4</sup> Lobley, M., Winter, H., Millard, N., Butler, A. & Winter, M. (2012) "Making Land Available for Woodland Creation" Exeter University Centre for Rural Policy Research, Research Paper No 35. p. 158.

## 2.2 Definitions of engagement and management

Forest Research's typology of community engagement<sup>5</sup> in woodland has been helpful in categorising the community organisations identified by respondents to the questionnaire. Respondents were asked to classify organisations and groups as either:

- **consultative** - carrying out work led by an LA officer, responding to LA decisions, e.g. conservation groups,
- **collaborative** - partnering with the LA, sharing some of the decisions, e.g. "Friends Of" Groups, or
- **empowered** - with devolved responsibility for managing a designated piece of woodland; perhaps with a lease or licence, e.g. local community woodland groups.

Some of the organisations engaging with LA woodland are charities with employed staff – and many of the “empowered” examples profiled here have staff (as well as often substantial support from volunteers). Local authorities may take a different approach to sharing and ceding management control of their woodland compared with private owners. Officers were often keen to retain strategic management control of public land, and may be more open to a “collaborative” approach, rather than complete “empowerment”.

The questionnaire also asked about social enterprises operating from local authority woodland. Stewart (2011) recognises that while there is a broadly accepted definition of social enterprise as being businesses that operate with primarily social or environmental objectives, the “details underlying what exactly constitutes a social enterprise are highly contested”<sup>6</sup>. Woodland social enterprise is a relatively new sector<sup>7</sup>, and research will be published in early 2014 that explores the definition and current state of this sector further.

It should be noted that some community organisations could be considered social enterprises, if they earn income through trading activity. However, not all woodland management involves social enterprise, and not all woodland enterprise involves woodland management: educational and health services feature strongly in woodland social enterprise activities. For the purposes of this survey, we asked respondents if there were “businesses with a social or environmental purpose”<sup>8</sup> operating on LA owned woodland, maybe producing timber or other woodland products, and earning an income from selling them. They may also carry out environmental education or other health related activities.”

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<sup>5</sup> Ambrose-Oji, B., Tabbush, P., Carter, C., Frost, B and Fielding, K. (2011). “Public Engagement in Forestry: A toolbox for public participation in forest and woodland planning” Forestry Commission: Edinburgh. Available at: <http://www.forestry.gov.uk/fr/INFD-8HSEBB>

<sup>6</sup> Stewart, A (2011) “Woodland related social enterprise – Enabling factors and barriers to success”. Forest Research. Available at: <http://www.forestry.gov.uk/fr/INFD-84JD86>

<sup>7</sup> The Woodland Social Enterprise Network, for example, was established in late 2012, and has around 60 members as of December 2013.

<sup>8</sup> There is broad consensus that social enterprises do not exist primarily for generating profit, and many reinvest their surpluses into their social / environmental objectives, but there is debate about personal profit. Social Enterprise UK ([www.socialenterprise.org.uk](http://www.socialenterprise.org.uk)) states that social enterprises should reinvest the majority of their profits in their social mission.



### 3. Methodology, range of responses and data quality

#### 3.1 Survey

Shared Assets developed an online survey that was emailed to a number of officers with environmental responsibilities in all 326 local authorities in England. Recipients were asked to forward the survey to the relevant person if they were not able to complete it. The online questionnaire was open for the first two weeks of March and a reminder was sent after the first week.

The survey was reopened for four weeks during September 2013, to allow officers who had not had the time to fill in the survey the opportunity to do so. Emails were sent to all authorities that had not responded to the Round 1 of the survey, and officers who had sent incomplete responses to Round 1 were given the opportunity to finish the survey. Specific authorities in geographical areas with low returns in round one were also targeted.

The survey was publicised on the Shared Assets website, on Twitter, and through the National Association of Tree Officers' email list.

Round 1 of the survey produced 109 responses from individual local authorities, a 33% response rate. Round 2 produced a further 53 responses, taking the total response rate to 49.6%.

The first page of the survey asked basic questions about the respondent and was compulsory; all other questions were optional. Efforts were made to chase up incomplete responses and all questions have at least 100 responses.

As figure 1 shows, a reasonably good geographical spread was obtained – the red markers show responses from Round 1, and the blue markers from Round 2. Areas where there are gaps in the map are characterised by larger local authority areas.

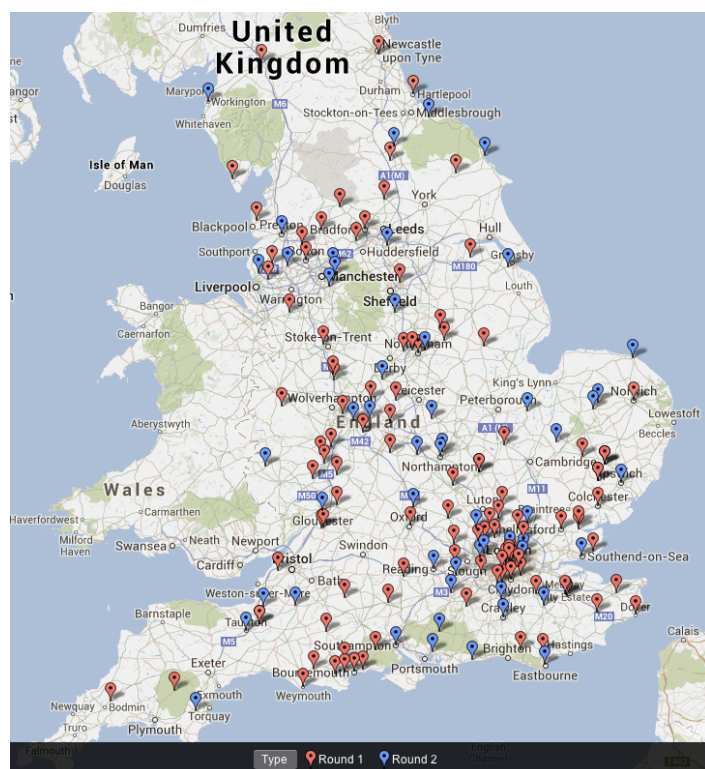


Fig 1: geographical spread of recipients

### 3.2 Interviews

Respondents were asked if they would be willing to complete a short telephone interview and interviewees were chosen from those who agreed. We selected a wide spread, both geographically and from authorities with differing amounts of and approaches to woodland.

20 phone interviews were carried out with officers in Round 1, and a further four in Round 2. These aimed to further probe existing levels of information, and woodland management aims, as well as more qualitative information on views of community management and social enterprise involvement. The findings from these interviews are included in and add further depth to the discussion of the findings in Section 4, below.

Both the questionnaire and the phone interviews asked respondents about particular examples of community management on local authority land. 10 profiles of community woodland groups are included to illustrate the range of approaches outlined in responses. These are listed in the contents page and Box 1 and appear throughout the report.

### 3.3 Workshop

A workshop was held in July 2013 at Tower Hamlets Cemetery Park in London, to test the findings of the first round of the survey. This was attended by 20 officers, Shared Assets and Forest Research staff, as well as four representatives from different community or social enterprise woodland groups.

The day involved sharing and discussing the results, hearing from community groups and social enterprises operating on local authority land, and discussing how to increase community management of local authority woodlands.

A full write up of the day is on the Shared Assets website<sup>9</sup>. Findings are included in Section 4 and the conclusions below.

### 3.4 Data Quality

As outlined above, there are four sources of data for this report:

- Round 1 of the survey, with 109 responses;
- Round 2 of the survey, with 53 further responses, bringing the combined response rate of both rounds to 49% of all local authorities in England<sup>10</sup>;
- 24 telephone interviews with officers, providing qualitative data to back up the quantitative data in the survey; and
- the workshop held in July 2013 for officers who responded to the first round of the survey.

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<sup>9</sup> <http://www.sharedassets.org.uk/pages/2013/public-woodland-beyond-the-barter-economy/>

<sup>10</sup> Six local authorities responded twice to round one, and two authorities responded to both rounds. These duplicate responses were compared and the most comprehensive one was kept.

There are two key areas where there might be limitations to the data. Firstly, as discussed in more detail elsewhere, information held about woodland management varies considerably across local authorities. Therefore, the person who responded to the survey may not have had access to all the information necessary to respond completely.

Secondly, there was less woodland accounted for than we would have expected given the figure for the total amount of woodland that local authorities own, according to the National Forest Inventory. This is further discussed in Section 4.2 below, but does serve to confirm one of the key findings of this report: that data on local authority woodlands is highly variable and that where there is information, it may not be accessible.

In general terms, we believe that the data in this report is robust for three reasons:

- the two rounds of the survey produced very congruent results: the emphasis of the answers did not change, despite the increased numbers;
- the survey had a reasonable geographical spread, with responses from every English region; and
- the qualitative data from the telephone interviews and workshop with officers confirmed much of the quantitative data.

We therefore have confidence in the conclusions drawn.

## Box 1 – Summary of Community Management Case Studies

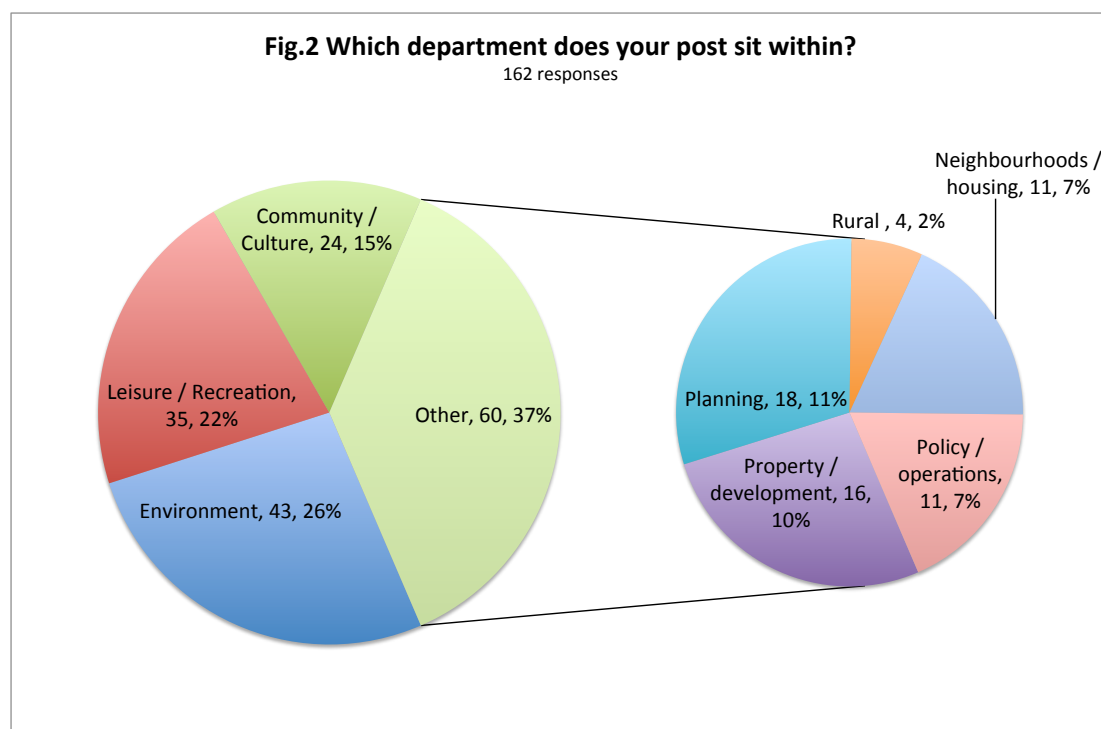
1. **Friends of Tower Hamlets Cemetery Park** – A charity led by volunteers in East London that is empowered under a service level agreement with the local authority to preserve and maintain this ancient woodland and educate the local population about its wildlife and history. **Empowered, Community Group**
2. **Friends of Oakley Wood** – Formed in 2007 to lobby Warwickshire Council to purchase this 47 hectare site so that they could retain public access and preserve the biodiversity. **Collaborative, Community group**
3. **Woodland Ways** – An unincorporated charitable group that manages 4 woodland sites around Bury St. Edmunds. It is volunteer run and also delivers conservation and educational services. **Empowered, Community Group**
4. **Somerset Wood Recycling** – A social enterprise based in Weston-Super-Mare that has a collaborative maintenance contract on council-owned woodland, alongside its core business of wood recycling and training disadvantaged people. **Collaborative, Social Enterprise**
5. **Chiltern Rangers CIC** – A community interest company that has “spun out” of Wycombe Council with a contract to manage 14 of the authority’s woodlands. It is taking a social enterprise approach and aims to engage the community in conservation and management. **Empowered (but with collaborative elements), Social Enterprise**
6. **Clara Vale Local Nature Reserve** – A voluntary community group leasing and managing a small woodland in Gateshead for biodiversity and public access. **Empowered, Community Group**
7. **Thames Chase Trust** – A charitable community group with some staff and a large team of volunteers, which manages Thames Chase Community Forest in collaboration with the Forestry Commission. **Empowered, Community Group**
8. **Drew’s Pond Wood Project** – A voluntary group set up in 1990 to conserve and enhance the habitat of a Wiltshire Council-owned woodland with local nature reserve status. It is aspiring to acquire a new piece of land to manage it as a social enterprise. **Collaborative, community group (aspiring social enterprise)**
9. **Penwith Environmental Network** – A charity that leases 3 areas of Cornwall County Council’s woodland for a nominal rent so that they can be productively managed and used by the community. **Empowered (but with collaborative features), social enterprise**
10. **Forest of Avon Trust** – A charitable social enterprise set up in 2008 to continue management of the Avon Community Forest. It manages 27 sites within 30 miles of Bristol, including a woodland on a long-term lease from North Somerset Council. **Empowered, community group**

## 4. Findings

### 4.1 The survey respondents

The questionnaire produced 162 unique responses from English local authorities over the two periods it was open, from 1 to 15 March 2013, and then from 1 September to 3 October 2013.

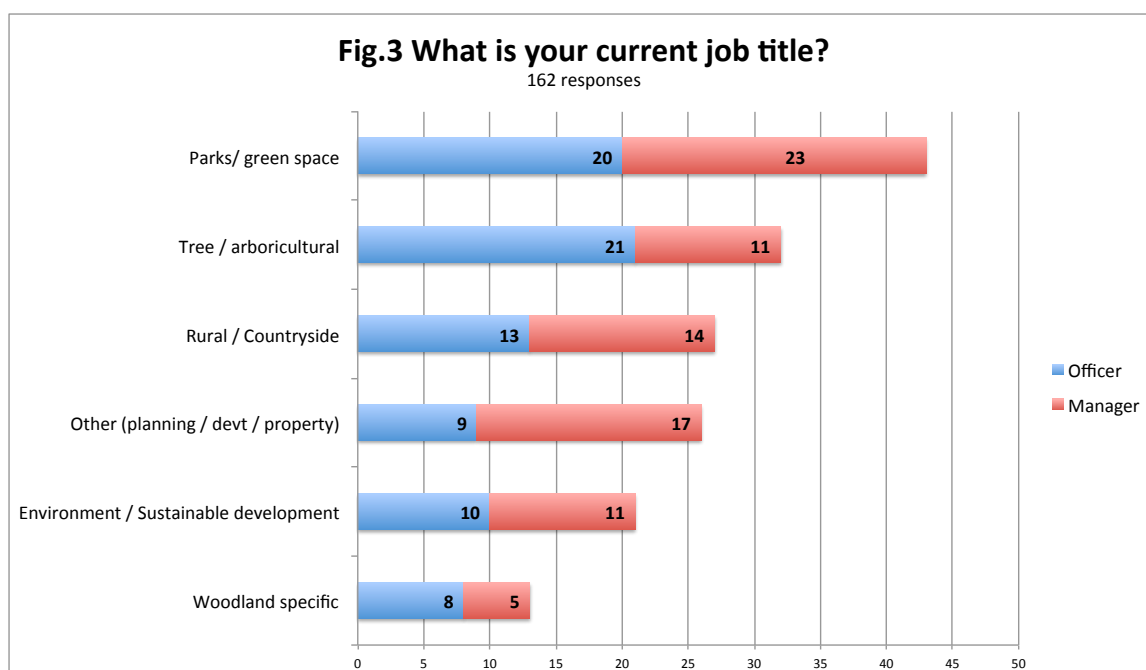
The Exeter University report<sup>11</sup> finds that local authority land is managed by a variety of departments and this is borne out by the response to the question: “Which department does your post sit within?” Respondents were given the three broad options of Community/Culture, Leisure/Recreation and Environment, but almost 40% chose ‘other’, and the variety of responses can be seen in Figure 2, below.



The job titles of the officers who responded also varied significantly. Figure 3 shows a summary. The split between officers and managers gives some indication of the levels of seniority of respondents; there is clearly significant variation within these categories.

<sup>11</sup> Lobley, M., Winter, H., Millard, N., Butler, A. & Winter, M. (2012) “Making Land Available for Woodland Creation” Exeter University Centre for Rural Policy Research, Research Paper No 35. p. 158.

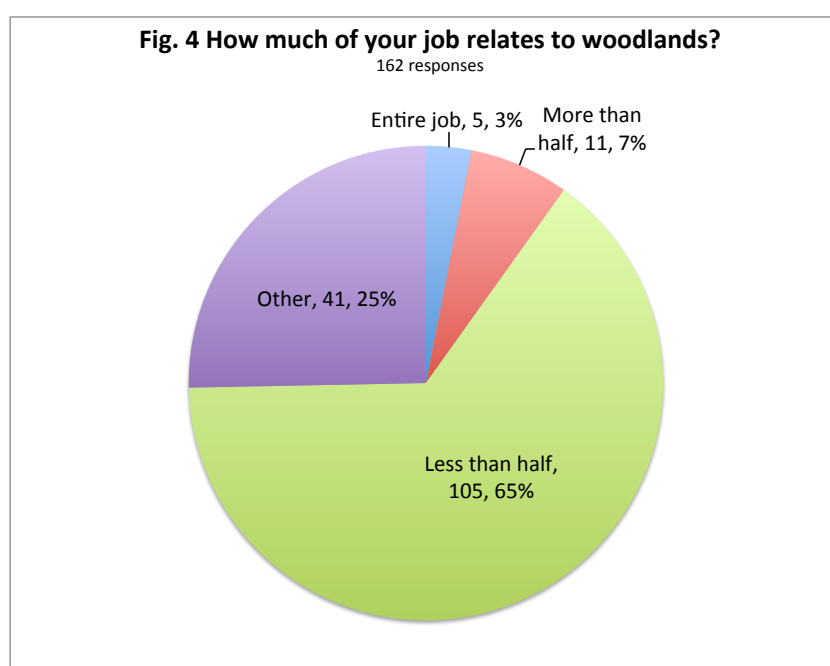




Only 13 responses were from an officer with an entirely “woodland specific” job title such as Woodlands Officer or Forestry Officer. A larger number (32) of tree and arboricultural officers and managers responded, and the majority (43) were parks, green space, or landscape officers. There were some more surprising job titles – we had responses from a Heritage Manager, a Transport Manager and a Senior Parking and Amenities Officer. It seems likely that many authorities do not have dedicated staff resources for dealing with woodland issues.

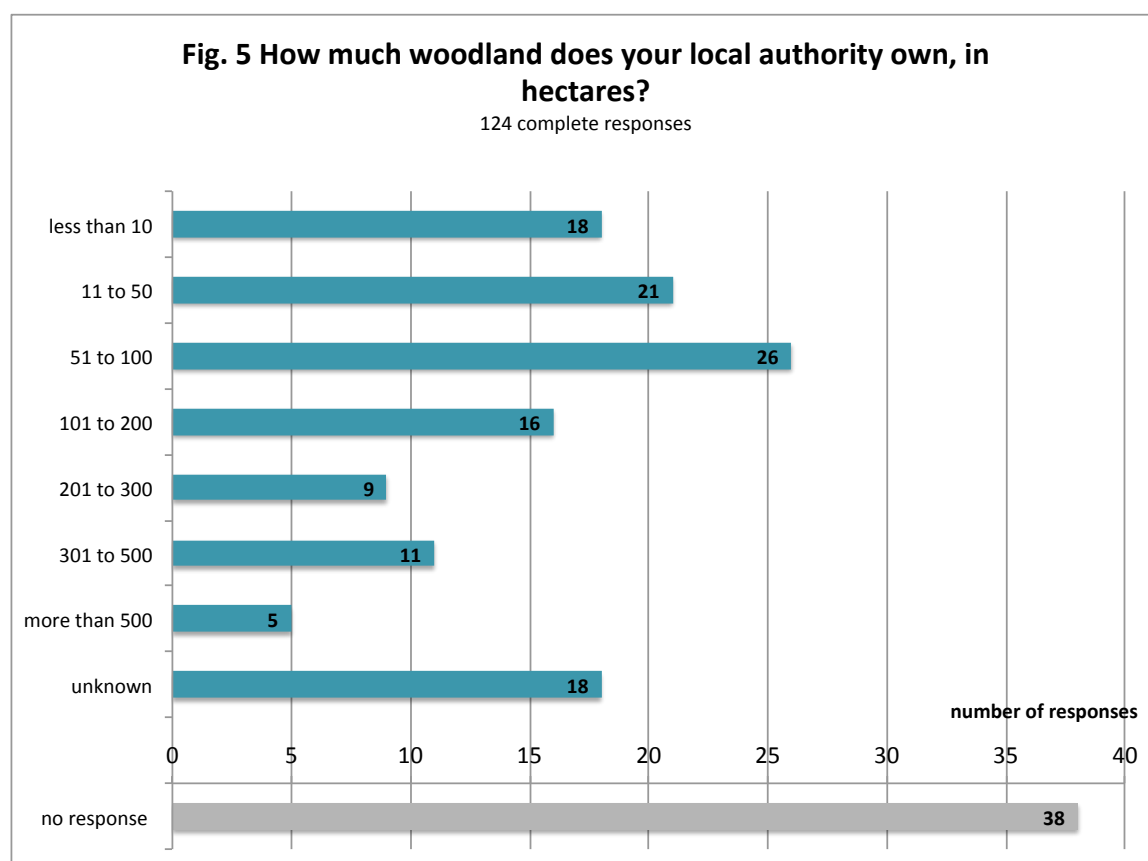
This is borne out by the responses to the question “how much of your job relates to woodlands?” Three main options were given, and the majority (62%) said that less than half of their job related to woodlands (figure 4).

Most of those who ticked “other”, indicated that very little of their role related to woodlands. Some authorities have very little woodland, and it is a small part of a much wider job.



## 4.2 The woodlands: size, accessibility and management

Local authorities own 61,098 hectares of woodland according to the Forestry Commission's 2001 "National Inventory of Woodland and Trees"<sup>12</sup>. Though this is only 6% of the woodland in England, it is nearly all accessible and managed with the public in mind. Unsurprisingly, there is substantial variation in the amount of woodland held by the responding local authorities.



124, or 37% of all local authorities in England answered the question "How much woodland does your local authority own?" The total amount of woodland entered came to 16,083ha, which is 26% of the reported total 61,089ha of local authority-owned woodland reported in the 2001 National Forest Inventory.

There could be a number of reasons why only 26% of the woodland from the 2001 inventory has been accounted for:

- authorities may have sold or divested themselves of woodland in the past 12 years;
- the 2001 Inventory states that the ownership figures were "produced from data contributed on a voluntary basis by owners or their representatives", and therefore may not have been 100% accurate;

<sup>12</sup> The Forestry Commission (2001) "National Inventory of Woodland and Trees" Forest Research: Edinburgh p.28  
Available at: [http://www.forestry.gov.uk/pdf/niengland.pdf/\\$FILE/niengland.pdf](http://www.forestry.gov.uk/pdf/niengland.pdf/$FILE/niengland.pdf)

- as woodland is not evenly distributed among authorities, some of those with the biggest woodland holdings may not have responded to the survey; and
- those who did respond may not have had all the relevant data – many responses were prefixed with “approximately”, or “we estimate”.

As Figure 5 demonstrates, five local authorities had substantial woodland holdings of more than 500ha. 39 respondents had less than 50ha.

A substantial number of respondents either indicated that they did not know how much woodland their authority owns (18), or did not answer the question (39), indicating that they might not know, or were not able to find out. Many prefaced their answer with “approximately”, or “we estimate”. It may be that more accurate information is available within the authority but was not known to, or available to, the survey respondent. Some respondents indicated that they thought the information might be available within the authority (most often with a particular person) but they did not know it themselves.

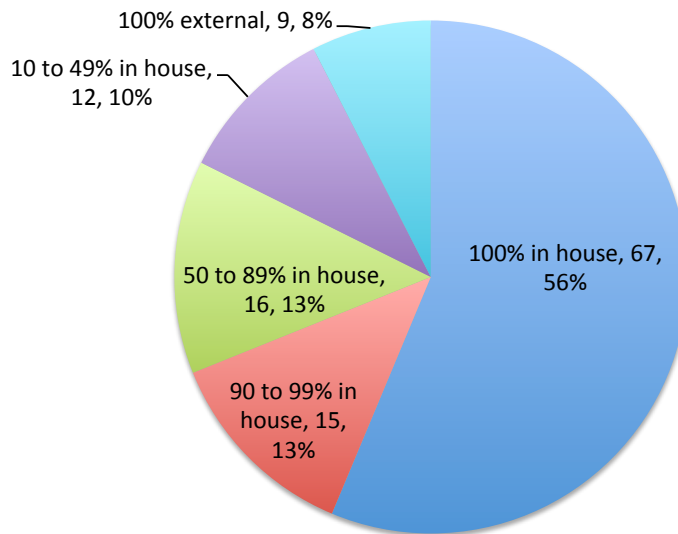
Some commented that they were not able to answer this without substantial input of officer time to map the woodland. This finding was confirmed in some of the phone interviews. An officer in one local authority was still trying to put together accurate information about the area of woodland four years after unification. In others the area of woodland that the authority owned was deemed to be so small that it did not warrant carrying out an accurate measurement.

The majority of respondents said that most of the woodland owned by their authority is accessible to the public. 86 of 127 respondents (67%) said their woodlands were 100% publicly accessible. In all but seven cases, at least 60% of the woodland was accessible.

69% of respondents who answered the question said at least 90% of their woodland management was done ‘in house’ as opposed to by an external contractor.

**Fig. 6 What proportion of the woodland is managed in house, and what proportion through an external contractor?**

119 complete responses, 6 had no woodland, 37 did not answer



There appear to be different approaches to woodland management in different authorities. The Forestry Commission defines active management as being where there are grant agreements or felling licences in place with the Commission (while recognising that some woodland may be actively managed without these)<sup>13</sup>. Several authorities said that decisions were made ‘in house’ but practical works undertaken by contractors.

A number of respondents in both the survey and the telephone interviews said that woodland management in the authority was reactive and for safety purposes only. One officer interviewed said that his local authority had recently deleted its woodland officer post and wound up the woodland management plan that had been established there. In its place was a purely reactive approach, focussing on health and safety and administered by the highways department.

<sup>13</sup> Forestry Commission Corporate Plan, Performance Indicators and Woodland Indicators, page 4. Available at: [http://www.forestry.gov.uk/pdf/FC-England-Indicators-Report-2012.pdf/\\$FILE/FC-England-Indicators-Report-2012.pdf](http://www.forestry.gov.uk/pdf/FC-England-Indicators-Report-2012.pdf/$FILE/FC-England-Indicators-Report-2012.pdf)

### 4.3 Information About Woodland Management

131 respondents answered the question on whether there was a plan or strategy for the future of the local authority's woodland. 72 answered "yes", and 59 "no". The majority of the documents referred to were woodland management plans rather than longer-term strategies, and a full list is provided in Appendix 1.

A small majority (53%) of those who responded to the question "is this information about woodland management publicly available?" said "no". 32 did not answer the question.

**Case Study 1: The Friends of Tower Hamlets Cemetery Park** is a registered charity with the objective of preserving, promoting, improving and caring for Tower Hamlets' only woodland park. It does so on behalf of the London Borough of Tower Hamlets via a Service Level Agreement, which it has held since 2004. LBTH has owned the ancient woodland site since 1986, after the abolition of the GLC. In 1990 the Friends were formed, registering as a charity in 1993, employing their first staff member in 2002, and welcomed their second in 2012.

By actively engaging over 3000 local and corporate volunteers per year the Friends have managed to renovate the park, overcoming years of neglect, improving it significantly for wildlife, people and education. They actively promote their work using social media, along with the Park's significant wildlife value. With the support of East London History Society, they have helped to educate local people about the heritage. They organise regular public events (130 a year) and campaign for funding. With an annual turnover of around £90,000, of which a third comes from the local authority, the Friends manage to maintain an active management presence, employ two staff and carry out all maintenance. The park is both a Local Nature Reserve and a Site of Metropolitan Importance for Nature Conservation.

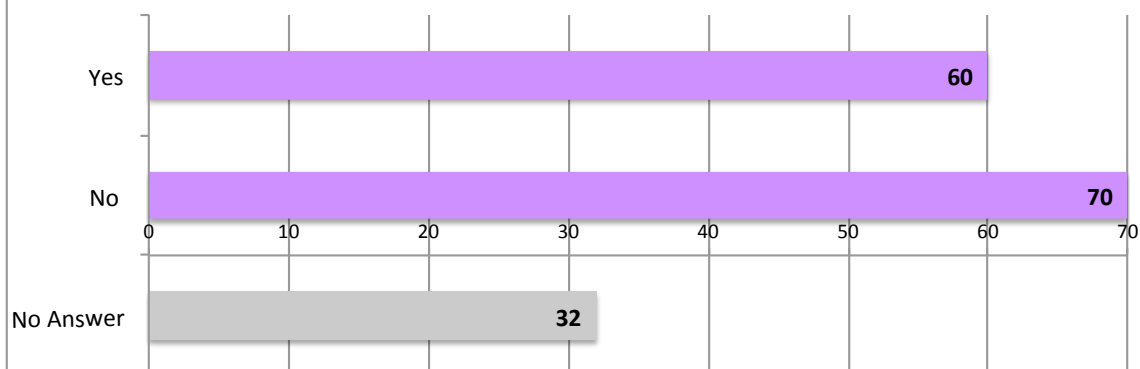
**Empowered // Community group**

**[www.fothcp.org](http://www.fothcp.org)**



**Fig. 7 Is this information about current woodland management publicly available?**

130 responses; 32 did not answer



In the questionnaire and the phone interviews a number of people said that information would be available on request, or by contacting the relevant person. Information was not being deliberately withheld, but either the authority lacked the resource to make it public or it was not considered a priority.

Information is not always shared between departments in a local authority, and the phone interviews revealed that a number of officers were not sure whether information existed, or how to get it. Information sharing is often done on the basis of a personal relationship rather than as institutional practice.

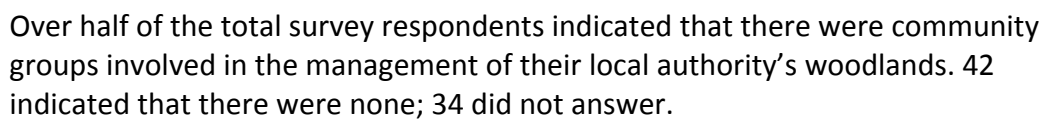
**Case Study 2: The Friends of Oakley Wood** formed in 2007 in opposition to sale of this Warwickshire woodland to a private buyer. Concerned to preserve public access and biodiversity, they lobbied Warwick District Council who agreed to purchase the 47-hectare site in 2008. Since then the council and the Friends have liaised on its use and management.

The site contains some ancient woodland and there has been concern throughout the relationship to incorporate the sensitivity of the habitat into the management. Maintenance work has been conducted with members of the Friends and the arboricultural officer in attendance. For recent projects funding was sourced so that horse loggers could be hired to thin the more sensitive areas. The partnership between the Friends and the local authority is based on a long-term vision of effective management and sustainability.

**Collaborative // Community group**

**[www.saveoakleywood.org.uk](http://www.saveoakleywood.org.uk)**

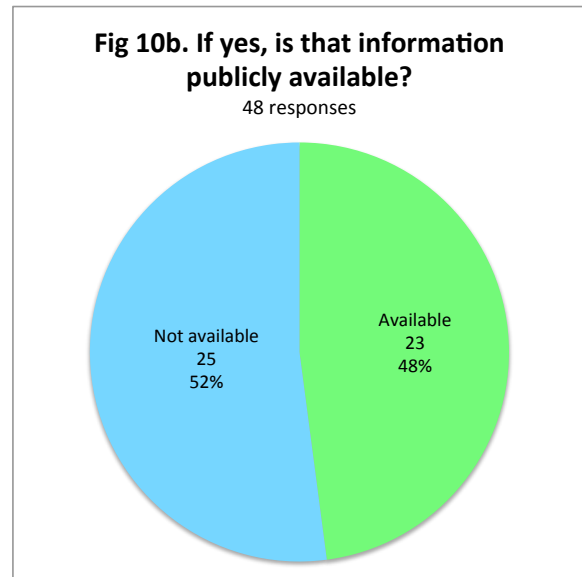
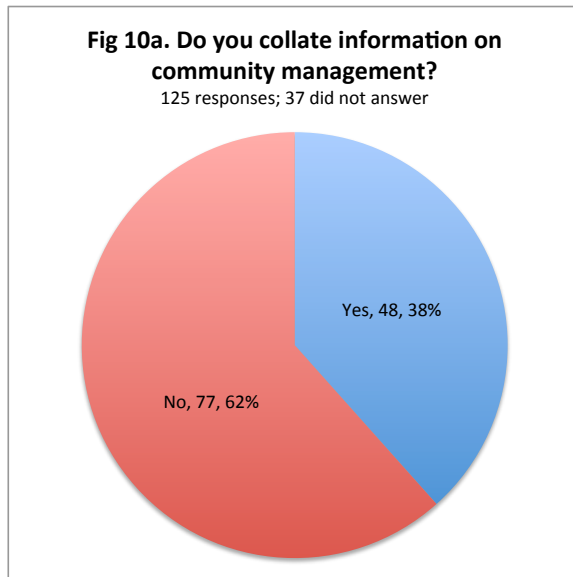
The questionnaire asked a number of specific questions about community and social enterprise involvement in woodland management.



There was significant variation in the teams responsible for coordinating any community management. The word cloud below shows the main terms that were used to describe the teams responsible: principally parks, community and countryside teams.



Almost half of those that collate information on community management make it publicly available.



The majority of sources of information referred to were woodland management plans, or minutes of meetings with community groups that were available on request.

**Case Study 3: Woodland Ways** is an unincorporated charitable association which manages 9.5 hectares of woodland owned by St. Edmundsbury Borough Council in Suffolk. Registered as a charity in 2003 and with a board of 10 trustees, Woodland Ways' flagship site is Natterer's Wood, a community woodland planted in 2002. It manages 3 other sites around Bury St. Edmunds, delivering educational and conservation services. Regular maintenance and planning is carried out by members and trustees, all of whom are unpaid volunteers.

The principle aim of the group is to ensure that access is maximised as dictated by the designation of the woodland as a local nature reserve. It has a detailed plan to increase access. This analyses and troubleshoots the current barriers. With assistance from the Green Light Trust, it consults with the local community when making decisions. The local authority is very supportive.

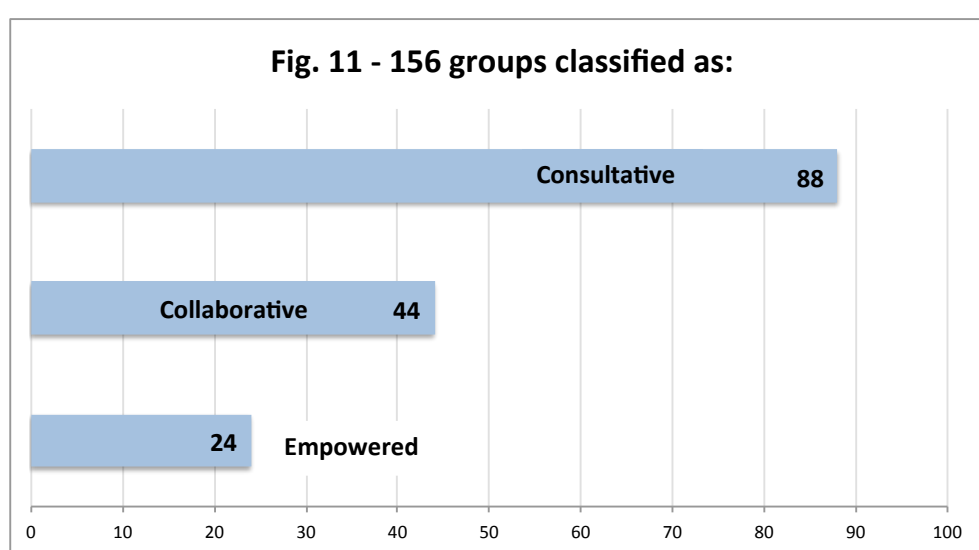
**Empowered // Community group**

**[www.woodlandways.org.uk](http://www.woodlandways.org.uk)**

## 4.5 Specific community management groups

Respondents were asked to provide details of up community management groups (up to 5 per authority), and classify them according to Forest Research's typology of community woodland groups:

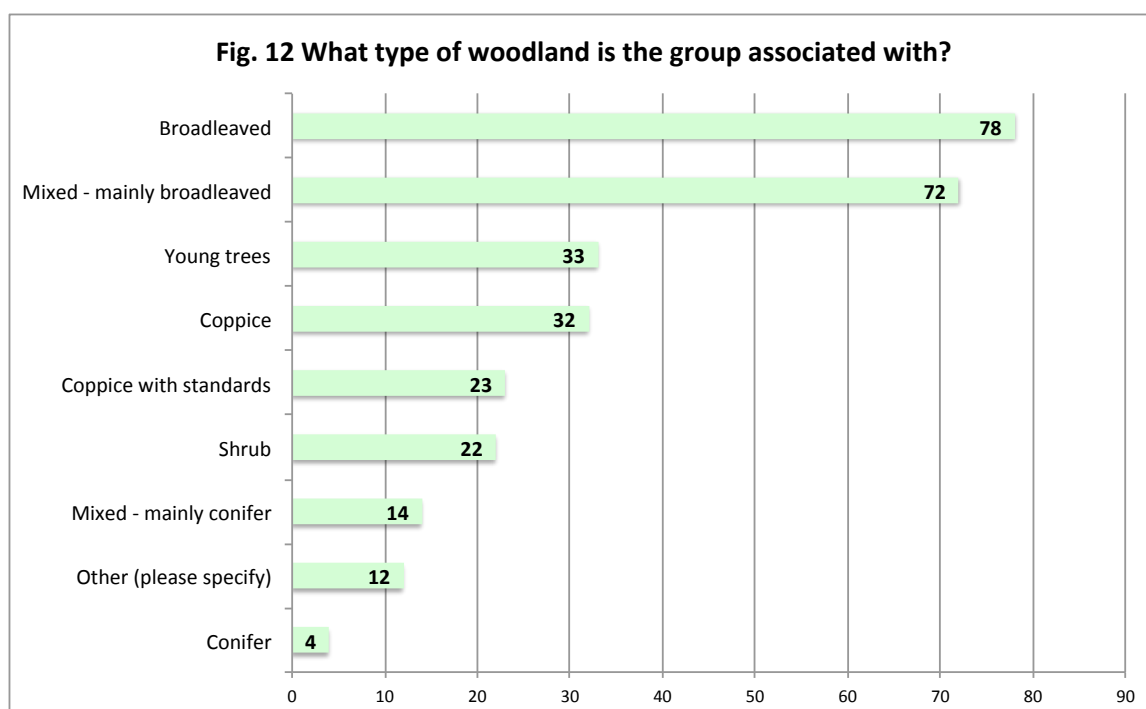
- **consultative** - carrying out work led by an LA officer, responding to LA decisions, e.g. conservation groups.
- **collaborative** - partnering with the LA, sharing some of the decisions, e.g. "Friends Of" Groups.
- **empowered** - with devolved responsibility for managing a designated piece of woodland; perhaps with a lease or licence, e.g. local community woodland groups.



At least some details of 160 groups were entered into the questionnaire, and 156 of them were classified in this way. The majority were classified as consultative groups; only 24 were counted as empowered. Some of these "groups" are borough-wide tree wardens, or green volunteering groups, and some are specific to particular sites. Some respondents said that groups existed, and classified them, but did not give specific details. Where some details of groups were entered but they were not classified, we have classified them where a category seems obvious (we classified 8 of the 156 groups above).

Respondents were also asked to classify what type of woodland the group is involved with. Some groups were involved in more than one type of woodland (or some areas of woodland contained more than one type).

Figure 12, below, summarises 183 responses. The clear majority of groups are involved in broadleaved or mainly broadleaved woodland. It is not known whether this is because local authorities happen to own more broadleaved woodland, or whether groups have a preference for being involved with this type of wood.



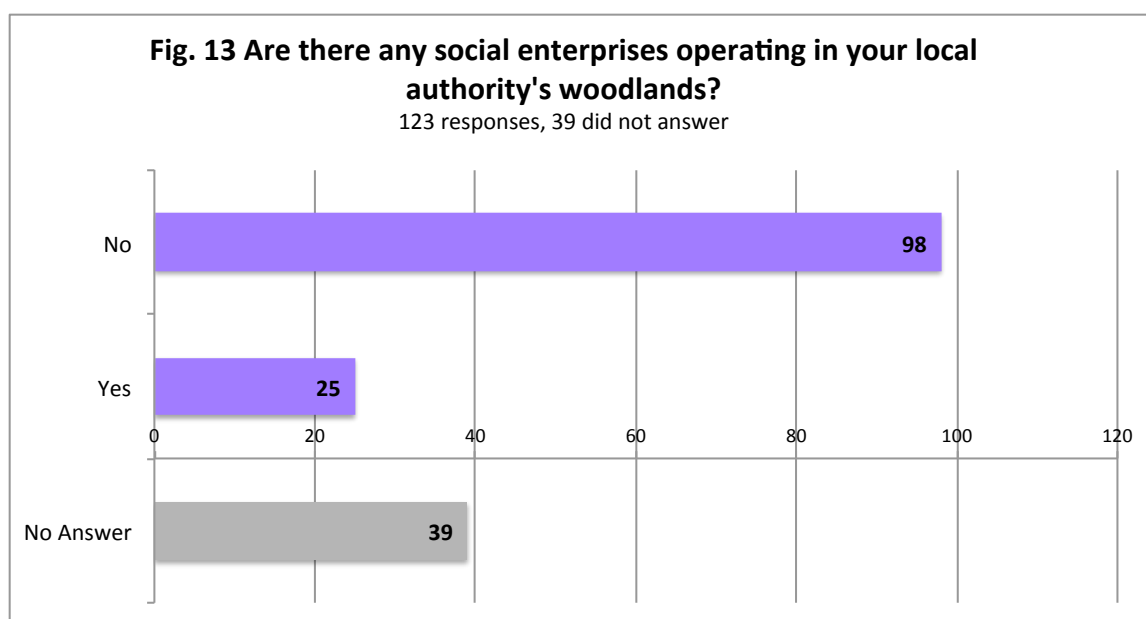
#### 4.6 Social Enterprises in local authority woodlands

Respondents were asked if there were any social enterprises operating from their local authority's woodlands. Social enterprises were defined as *"businesses with a social or environmental purpose operating on LA owned woodland, maybe producing timber or other woodland products, and earning an income from selling them. They may also carry out environmental education or other, health related activities."*

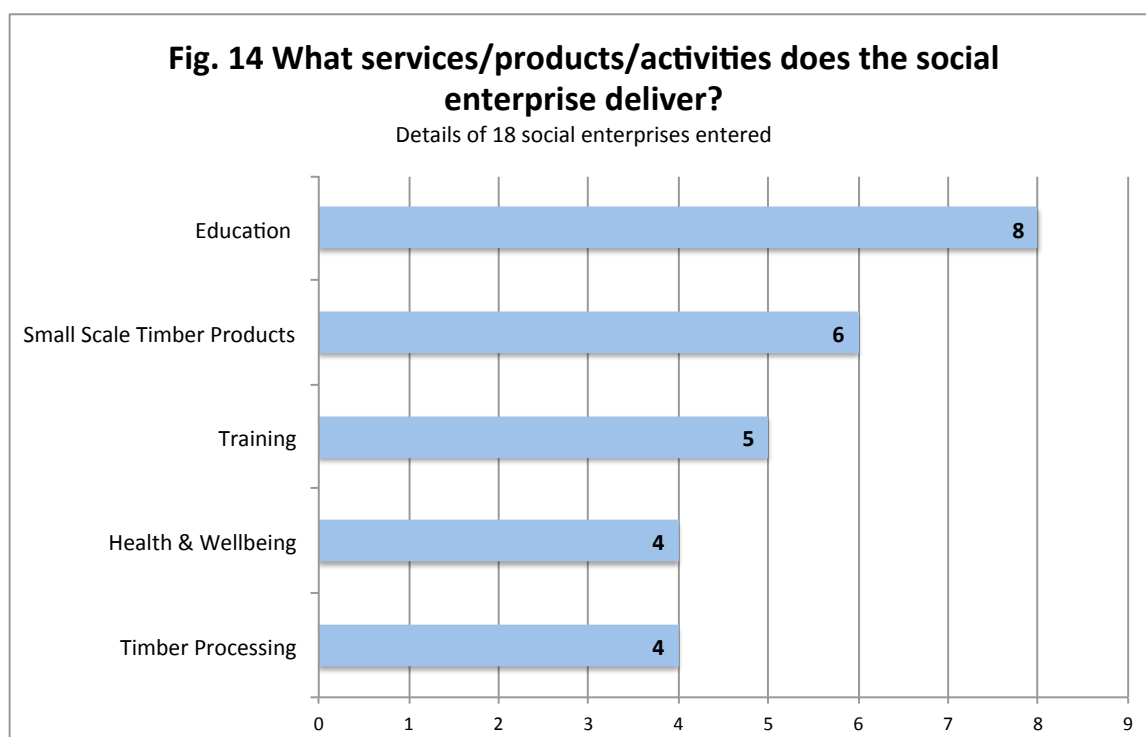
As discussed in Section 2 above, woodland social enterprise is a developing sector and further research will be published in early 2014 that explores the current state of the sector and further develops a workable definition. Broadly, we define social enterprises here as organisations operating in woodlands that earn income through trading activities, have a social or environmental purpose and are not reliant on grants or donations. They are not necessarily carrying out woodland management activities.

The key conclusion from this work is that information about social enterprises operating from local authority woodlands is limited. Figure 13 shows that of 123 officers who responded to the question "are there any social enterprises operating in your local authority's woodlands?", 98 said "no".





Most authorities that answered “yes” detailed one social enterprise. The maximum number in any one authority was five, but on further investigation, these groups were the same as the community management groups entered by that authority. Details of 18 individual social enterprises were entered. The majority deliver services rather than products.



This focus on service delivery may reflect the finding in Forest Research’s community forest governance report that “opportunities for productive woodlands are often overlooked in England”<sup>14</sup>. The survey did not specifically ask about woodland management by social enterprises, and many enterprises doing woodland management may be accounted for in the information on community management.

The lack of information here may also be due to woodland social enterprises – and social enterprise in general – not being on local authority officers’ radar to the same extent as community management groups.

At the workshop in July 2013, it was apparent that many of the enterprising woodland management activities taking place on local authority land are taking place through relatively informal agreements rather than through formal contracts. This may be because there are barriers raised by legal and procurement procedures, or because there is no established procedure in the authority for allowing access to land for coppicing etc. This lack of security may have an effect on the sustainability of the social enterprise and thus the effectiveness of the service it can give to the authority.

**Case Study 4: Somerset Wood Recycling** is a social enterprise company limited by guarantee that provides a range of waste and wood recycling services. It processes collected wood and sells most of it as timber or uses it to produce products like benches, bird-boxes and tables. It also trains and provides work experience for disadvantaged people including those with mental illness, learning difficulties, drug problems and the long term unemployed.

Since setting up in 2006 SWR has doubled in size. It has expanded its operations, taken on a loan to move into larger premises and has won contracts to carry out maintenance activities on North Somerset Council woodland. SWR provide 2 teams of supervisors, trained professionals and a large volunteer base. This service gives a valuable, regular income and helps to subsidise the two core activities of wood recycling and work experience/training. The council procured this contract in the same way as with any private contractor, but has since drawn up a social enterprise contract management scheme in order to further encourage such procurement in the future. The council is very happy with the relationship, commenting that it has freed up resources and that SWR’s work needs very little ongoing input.

**Collaborative // Social enterprise**

**[www.somersetwoodrecycling.co.uk](http://www.somersetwoodrecycling.co.uk)**

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<sup>14</sup> Lawrence, A. & Molteno, S. (2012) “Community forest governance: a rapid evidence review. A report by Forest Research on behalf of the Independent Panel on Forestry” Available at: <http://www.defra.gov.uk/forestrypanel/views/>

**Case Study 5: Chiltern Rangers CIC** is a “spin out” of Wycombe District Council’s woodland services team as a new social enterprise. It seeks to provide a range of services, such as conservation and woodland management, but also to work with adults with learning difficulties, to provide consultancy services for other woodland management organisations and to set up an apprenticeship scheme.

The Chiltern Rangers went live as a community interest company in September 2013. Based in High Wycombe, the Rangers engage communities and local people so as to ensure that they always work effectively and innovatively. The company began with a five-year contract to manage fourteen sites for Wycombe District Council and plans to expand its activities after that.

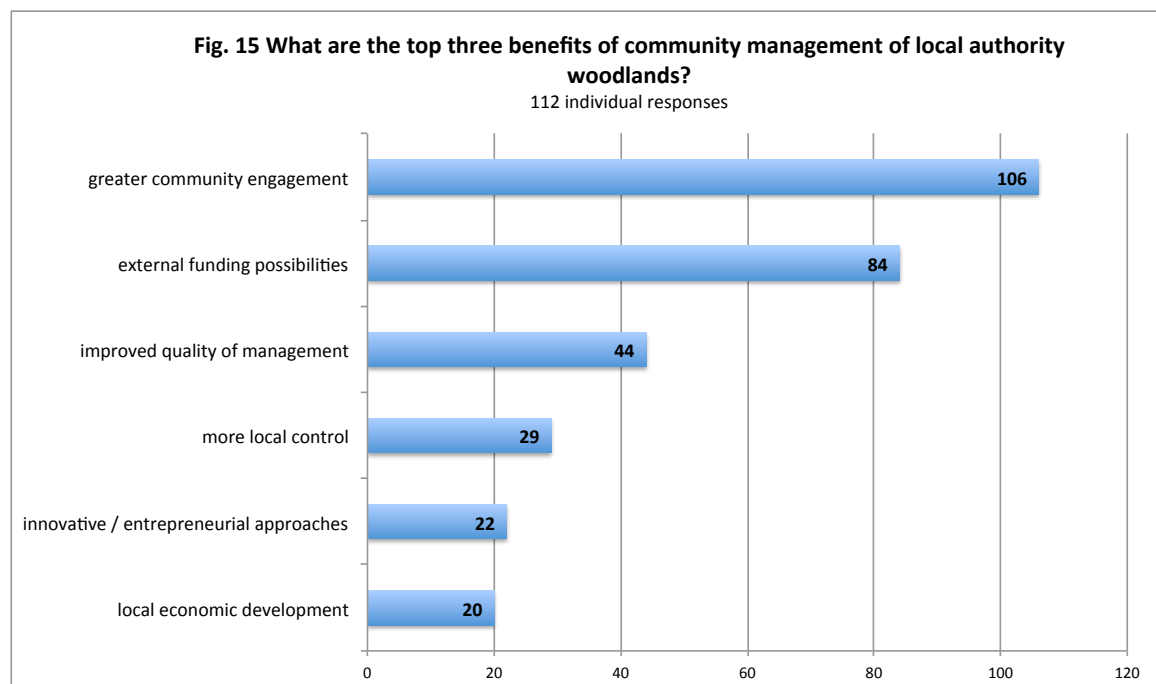
**Empowered // Social enterprise**

**[www.chilternrangers.co.uk](http://www.chilternrangers.co.uk)**

#### 4.7 Benefits of community management of woodlands

Respondents were asked to choose their “top three” benefits of community management of local authority woodlands from a choice of six options, with an “other” option. Some chose more than three, and some fewer. Greater community engagement was the most frequently chosen, and external funding possibilities were also rated very highly.

Further research might seek to indicate whether there are seen to be material benefits of greater engagement: whether it makes the local authority’s role easier, or whether it is more symbolic. One officer commented that “greater community engagement isn’t an end in itself - it is of benefit as the woodlands become “self policing” and there is less anti social behaviour.”



Comments in the “other” box included increased biodiversity / improved habitats, reduced costs for the local authority, reduced anti social behaviour, and increased management of the woodland and understanding of woodland management. Interviewees also placed access to other sources of funding and reduced strain on local authority resources high on their list of benefits from community management.

Many interviewees also recognised that community management takes a lot of local authority time, but saw the potential for external funding as going some way towards offsetting that.

**Case Study 6: Clara Vale Local Nature Reserve** is mainly broadleaved woodland and has been managed by the Clara Vale Conservation Group for over 20 years. The group leases the two hectare site from Gateshead Council with the goal of proactively managing it for biodiversity and ensuring public access. It is a constituted but unincorporated organisation, which sources its funding from various places, including Natural England and grant giving trusts. In 2001 it signed a new 25-year lease and expanded its activities to include a community orchard on a separate piece of council land. It is entirely volunteer-led and managed.

The local authority has the confidence to grant it such a long lease because several members of the group have knowledge of, or expertise in, conservation practices, according to an officer of the natural environment unit at Gateshead Council, who is also an active member of the group. The local community has also been a constant source of support, backing the initial campaign to lease the land and to win status as a local area nature reserve in 1995.

**Empowered // Community group**

(no website)

**Case Study 7: Thames Chase Trust** is an environmental regeneration charity. It works across three local authorities to manage the Thames Chase Community Forest, established in 1990. The trust was incorporated in 2006 and is financially supported via a service level agreement with three local authorities.

The future of the project was in doubt when funding became scarce in 2011. There were originally five councils backing the project, but Brentwood and Barking & Dagenham withdrew. The remaining local authorities were reluctant to continue financing it but through long negotiation with Havering, Thurrock and Essex local authorities sufficient money was secured to ensure the Trust could carry on its work, with input from the Forestry Commission.

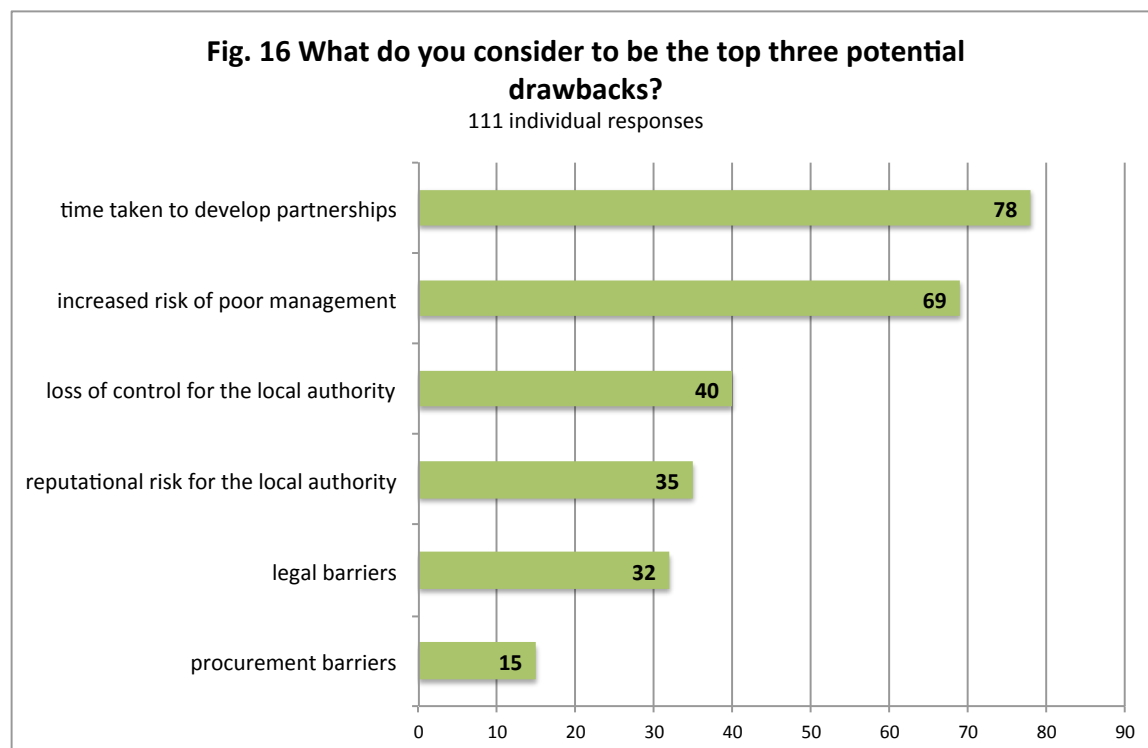
The Trust carries out maintenance duties, conservation and educational activities with some staff and a large team of volunteers. It seeks to promote access and productive use of the 40 square mile area. The Trust also manages a visitor centre and shop. The partnership is seen as mutually successful and it has helped to establish a number of other community projects throughout the area.

**Collaborative // Community group**

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

## 4.8 Concerns about community management

Respondents were also asked to consider the top three potential drawbacks of community woodland management.



The time taken to develop partnerships is one of the key concerns and the lack of capacity amongst officers to deal with community groups was a recurring theme in the telephone interviews. One survey respondent commented “it will probably become increasingly important as local authority resources decline, but a key barrier, for my authority at least, is lack of staff time to liaise with and help develop community groups.”

The lack of arboricultural and silvicultural knowledge among community groups was also a theme of the telephone interviews and may account for the high number of respondents rating “increased risk of poor management” as a potential drawback. One officer echoed these concerns, writing “while consultation is important, community led woodland management often focuses on short term planning, is often poorly informed and can be divisive in the community leading to inertia in woodland management by default. There is so much fear and misunderstanding in LAs about what the public may or may not accept - I recently saw a woodland management plan with no felling at all merely because there was a presumed opposition to any actual active management of the woods.”

Workshop participants were very aware of the public relations problems that active woodland management can bring. Some participants reported that the public seemed to be more accepting of felling and coppicing in areas where woodlands had



been actively managed until relatively recently, suggesting that the role of awareness raising is very important.

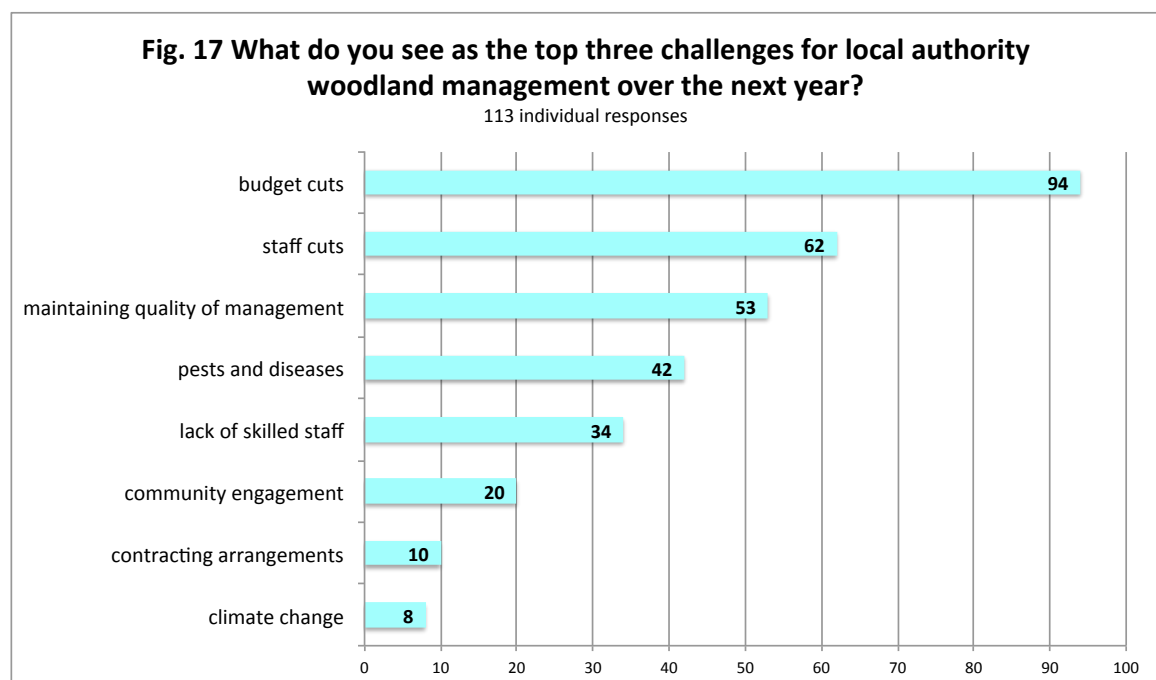
Some woodlands may be seen as less “precious” to the authority than others, and so transferring management to a community group was seen as less risky. However, some interviewees felt that transfer of any management responsibility could establish a precedent that community management was supported in principle, across all woodlands, which was felt to be undesirable.

While contracting and legal arrangements did not rate highly as potential barriers one of the phone interviewees mentioned that their authority had a five year maximum contract for woodland management; this is problematic when, for example, the coppicing cycle is seven years. If more productive community management of woodlands is to be encouraged, it may be that procurement and contracting issues need to be addressed.

The workshop participants put more emphasis on contracting and legal problems: often the legal department (and indeed managers within their own department) don’t “understand” woodlands, and both fail to see the benefits of more local or enterprising management, and put up unnecessary barriers.

#### 4.9 The future of woodland management

Respondents were asked to think about the top three challenges for local authority woodland management in general over the next year.



Budget cuts and staff cuts – which are related – rate very highly. A number of the comments throughout the survey and in the telephone interviews refer to redundancies and posts being deleted, as well as the loss of skilled staff. Many respondents particularly identified the need for staff capacity in order to support

community management groups; this is seen as being one of the things most under threat. There was a broad consensus in the phone interviews that woodlands were very low on the authorities' list of priorities and so budget cuts would be particularly acute in those departments.

**Case Study 8: Drew's Pond Wood.** Since its inception the group who run the Drew's Pond Wood Project has had aspirations for growth. In addition to conserving the 7 acre woodland and enhancing its habitat, it is aiming to acquire an adjacent piece of land from a private landowner in order to develop a social enterprise. This site includes some green space and an orchard it would like to manage for biodiversity. It is seeking to secure the necessary funding and Wiltshire Council actively supports the proposal. The group is proposing to work in partnership to acquire the site with Roundway Parish Council.

It is a constituted volunteer group, but not an incorporated charity. It is affiliated to The Conservation Volunteers and the Woodland Trust and has over 30 volunteers. The site was awarded local nature reserve status and is a County Wildlife site. The woods are used by local schools in Devizes and a nearby Outdoor Education programme.

**Empowered // (aspiring) Social enterprise**

[www.devizesheritage.org.uk/drews\\_pond\\_wood\\_nature\\_reserve.html](http://www.devizesheritage.org.uk/drews_pond_wood_nature_reserve.html)

**Case Study 9: The Penwith Environmental Network** was founded in 1984 and was granted charitable status in 1987. It leases 3 areas of woodland from Cornwall County Council, for a nominal rent, in order to manage them productively and to provide environmental education. It runs an edible forest, a community orchard and Millennium Woods, a community woodland management project. The group received grants in the past, including a BTVC grant in 2004, and they continue to hunt for funding opportunities.

The local authority acts as management advisors, leaving PEN to organise and implement projects. They carry out a wide range of activities, including coppicing, charcoal making, cataloguing wildlife and path making, ensuring community involvement and public access. They are currently drawing up a management plan for Millennium Wood. As well as managing the woodland itself the group also provides training in woodland skills and educational outreach with local schools.

**Empowered // Social enterprise**

[www.p-e-n.org.uk](http://www.p-e-n.org.uk)

#### 4.10 General comments on community management

Interviewees were also asked whether they felt that community management was a viable model for managing woodland. Most responded that it was but with serious caveats ranging from the time and resources necessary to establish groups, to the reliance on an individual or a small group to drive projects forward. Most interviewees felt that the impetus had to arise from within the community itself and could not be effectively engendered by the local authority. There were some who felt that the reputation of the authority would be damaged if unsustainable groups disbanded.

Officers filling in the survey were also asked for any final comments on community woodland management. Many came back to the need to recognise the time input necessary from both officers and the community to make successful community management work. The perceived risk that communities might not understand the need for active woodland management was another key theme.

There is a sense in many of the comments below that things are changing for woodland management in local authorities generally, with posts being cut, and work that had been being done coming to an end. Many are clear that if community management arrangements are to be a viable alternative to local authority management, this needs to be done within a framework, and will take resources.

As an illustration some of their verbatim comments are included in Box 2.

##### **Box 2. Verbatim comments from local authority officers**

###### Resource & time issues

- Community involvement can be a great boon to woodland management but it does take time to organise to ensure woodlands do not suffer as a result of well meaning but poorly guided action.
- It seems to be dying out. So many other officers have gone, or are going. Community Management is a valid model but only with professional support and guidance to help with ecology, silviculture and legal considerations ... most volunteers already give greatly of their time and don't have additional capacity.
- There can be benefits when the right group is engaged but it requires a lot of management. There are some who rely overly on volunteers and community groups as answer to resourcing pressures. Volunteers and community groups should be there to enhance a service not replace it.
- We used to have 'Friends of Groups' supported by a dedicated full time Council officer who organised and co-ordinated events. This worked reasonably well, but the post was deleted some years ago and the Friends of Groups disbanded. Community management will only work where sufficient support is provided by the Council.

- Set up in the right way, they can be an excellent tool for managing and utilising woodlands on behalf of the LA. Particularly as some LAs do not have the time, resources (or in our case inclination) to manage the local woodlands effectively
- Community management of LA woodlands does do a lot to promote a sense of ownership and increase community cohesion when done well. However we have been through incidents where the membership and actions of local groups has been detrimental to the management of the site and /or has generated ill feeling and exclusion within the community. It is essential that these groups are set up with a good management framework between themselves and the LA

### Skills and capacity issues

- Owning and/or managing woodland is a considerable commitment and carries significant risk. Voluntary organisations should not be under illusions about this and it would be cynical if Local Authorities use the voluntary sector as a means to offload costs
- It is not free lunch - it requires up skilling of staff and community and digital assets.
- It would be helpful to have support to develop more projects that could sustain community involvement in woodland and bring back woodlands into favourable conservation management utilising potential resources and economic potential, but I believe it requires clear and expert leadership from qualified staff, such as that of the Local Authority or other relevant organisation.
- Great idea but who funds and manages the groups? There's no local authority money or resources. Woodland apart from basic health and safety is about lowest priority of LA operations/activity in most instances. Groups need funding for equipment, training, insurance, organisation etc. Particular issue where they may carry out work on publicly accessible woodland.

### Different approaches

- Locally, partnership working with community organisations in the management and development of our Community Woodlands has been highly effective without the need for progressing to formal Asset Transfer, which many organisations we work with are not motivated to deliver and do not have the capacity to take on. The arrangement we have at present maximises the community engagement strengths of respective groups with the management capacity of [the authority] to help develop and sustain our woodlands to a high standard (as per our Green Space Strategy)
- I think it offers good potential for the future management of woodland areas and allows for positive community asset management.
- I am the first tree officer the council has ever had. I will be working towards community involvement in my authority's woodlands as much as possible in due course. At the moment I need to conduct the first survey and ascertain how much and what kind of woodland the authority owns!!!

- We are entering a time where LAs are starting to see the benefits of engaging people who live near woodlands, however often the initial interest requires continued support and direction and with budget cuts there is the potential that the very staff that the communities need are lost. This then leads to the communities being disillusioned and feeling put upon. Expectations need to be carefully managed by everybody involved.
- It's good if it can be encouraged as local communities often have a passion/interest about such assets that goes beyond people who are not specialists within a large organisation that often is underfunded, or has limited expertise on particular environmental assets - the issue is the extent to which an initial enthusiasm by volunteer groups can be maintained in the longer term and the accountability of the organisation to the wider community retained. On-going funding is also an issue - in our authority there is not really a proactive strategic approach to parks and open spaces due to a lack of capacity and if I'm honest no apparent real interest.

#### **Case Study 10: Forest of Avon Trust**

Forest of Avon Trust is a charitable company, limited by guarantee, which works with communities to promote tree planting and woodland activities. Founded in 2008, it is funded by donations and continues the work done over the previous 15 years by the Avon Community Forest. The previous scheme was a partnership between Bristol City Council, South Gloucestershire Council, North Somerset Council, Bath and North East Somerset Council and The Forestry Commission. Over a million trees were planted in the area between its inception in 1992 and its demise in 2009. The Trust works within 30 miles of Bristol.

The Trust directly manages The Retreat, a 5 hectare community woodland, on a long term lease from North Somerset Council. It also helps to facilitate community engagement in other local authority owned woodlands and aspires to directly manage more in the future. It runs a number of schemes across 27 sites, including tree planting projects and educational activities for children, adults with learning disabilities and disadvantaged young people. The sites are listed on the Trust's website, along with details of the activities and services available.

**Empowered // Community group**

**[www.forestofavontrust.org](http://www.forestofavontrust.org)**

## 5. Discussion and Conclusions

The aim of this report was to ascertain:

- what information exists on local authority woodlands, their management and aims, and where the information can be found
- what information exists on levels of community management of local authority woodlands and what models are in use
- what information exists about social enterprises operating from local authority woodlands

This section draws some conclusions from the findings of this work, discusses the key issues that arise and suggests options that for dealing with some of those issues.

There are a number of assumptions that underpin the discussion here. These are that:

- local authority woodlands are a valuable resource; they are only a small proportion of England's woodlands, but are almost all managed for public access;
- it is important or desirable that local authority woodlands remain publicly owned;
- many of these woodlands could be more actively managed;
- active management and use begets more use, making woodlands, particularly in urban areas, safer places;
- there is scope for making these woodlands more productive, and that local social and community enterprises may be better placed to do this than local authorities, in some cases; and
- approaches to community woodland management across England are in general unstructured and fragmented.

### 5.1 Availability of information about local authority woodlands and their management

Information on local authority woodlands and their management is of varying quality and depth. This is partly due to the varying amounts of woodland owned and the different degrees to which each authority prioritises its woodland assets. We believe that further survey work of the type undertaken for this report is unlikely to yield any more comprehensive data than is presented here. However it may be that the development of a public database, which authorities could update themselves, would provide a greater public profile for this data and encourage local authorities to promote and update their work, as well as making comparison between authorities easier and showcasing good practice.

We have pulled together a database (at Appendix 1) that shows how much woodland each responding authority said it owns and where information about this is available. One option for developing this knowledge base would be to publish this information as an editable "wiki" style resource, for authorities to add to as information becomes available.



## **5.2 Information on and attitudes to community management of local authority woodlands**

While almost half of the authorities that responded to the questionnaire had some community management of their woodlands the level of available information is varied.

The majority of the community groups identified fit within Forest Research's definition of 'consultative', and do not engage in more strategic management issues.

Many local authorities are supportive of greater community management in principle. Indeed, they see it as a positive idea that would promote engagement and increase the understanding and sense of ownership of the natural environment. It also has the potential of attracting additional resources and reducing the burden on the authority.

They are keenly aware of the time needed to support and develop community management groups, however, and of the technical knowledge and skills necessary to manage woodland successfully. One officer in an authority with a number of community management arrangements in place commented in an interview that sometimes groups of "serial complainers" see community management as an opportunity to air grievances and demand more from the council. There is a clear sense throughout the interviews conducted with officers that community management is not a "free lunch" and needs to be properly resourced and encouraged and supported thoughtfully.

A recurring theme of the phone interviews was an uncertainty as to whether there is desire or enthusiasm within many local communities to take on and sustain management roles.

Feedback from the phone interviews and the workshop showed that officers welcome examples of good practice and successful case studies when considering community management of woodlands. Sharing knowledge and peer support can also be very valuable.

## **5.3 Information on and attitudes to social enterprises operating in local authority woodlands**

There is far less information on social enterprises. This may be because there are fewer woodland social enterprises in operation, or because woodlands are not seen as potentially productive. There is a lack of clarity for many officers about what "social enterprise" actually means. Most of the social enterprises identified in this survey are providing services, primarily education, rather than developing and selling woodland products or timber. This does not mean that woodland management social enterprises don't exist on local authority land, but they may not be defined as social enterprises (either by the officers or by themselves).

The developing Woodland Social Enterprise Network offers an opportunity to develop the profile and range of approaches to social enterprise in all woodlands.

#### **5.4 The current and potential role of woodlands in local authorities**

We have found that there is no consistent approach to woodland management in local authorities across England. While some authorities have well developed strategies and a clear commitment to woodland management, for many others woodlands appear to be a low priority. Many woodlands are not being actively managed, and in some cases local authorities are moving from active management to basic maintenance as budgets are cut. Experienced staff with woodland specific skills are also disappearing from some authorities. Woodlands are seen as a liability by many of the authorities that participated in this survey.

Approaches to woodland management vary across England; some authorities only take a reactive approach, ensuring the woods are safe; some have far more detailed management plans and strategies. Officers are aware that more could be done with their woodlands and recognise that civil society organisations could have a role to play in improving their management. However they lack the time, resources, and in some cases, skills, to engage communities and social enterprises in better woodland management. We have highlighted some examples of good practice throughout this report, and there are more, but they are the exception rather than the rule.

What some of these examples show, and what is evidenced elsewhere through innovation in woodland management, is that woodlands can be places where multiple activities – such as productive woodland management, education and conservation – can take place, and have multiple beneficial outcomes. For local authorities, this meeting of multiple outcomes in one location could fulfil a number of the authority’s strategic needs, but a change in mind-set is likely to be necessary for many authorities if they are to realise these potential benefits.

The work of the Independent Panel on Forestry<sup>15</sup> and the Grown in Britain<sup>16</sup> campaign highlight the importance of developing a “wood culture” and improving public understanding of woodlands. This may result in an increased interest in woodlands as well as an increased awareness of the need for active management of woodland sites. The need to raise awareness within a local authority as well as among the general public was highlighted by a number of respondents: both senior management and elected members need to have a greater understanding of active woodland management.

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<sup>15</sup> <http://www.defra.gov.uk/forestrypanel/>

<sup>16</sup> <http://www.growninbritain.org>

## 5.5 Resources

Uncertainty over future funding and lack of staff time were recurring themes in both the phone interviews and the questionnaire. The keen awareness of the time taken to develop and sustain community partnerships meant that some officers were supportive of community management in principle but found it hard to encourage or develop it in practice. In a number of places key woodland related posts had been “deleted”, eliminating the skills and accumulated knowledge of any local community groups.

A key benefit of community management was seen by many officers to be the potential for community groups and social enterprises to attract external funding, as well as substantial amounts of volunteer time. While both of these things are undoubtedly true, it is unclear whether the appetite for management (and fundraising) responsibilities exists among community groups to the extent that the need is seen to exist within local authorities.

## 5.6 Skills & leadership

An underlying theme throughout this report is the quality of the relationships between local authorities and communities. In the telephone interviews, officers recognised that facilitating community management of woodlands requires a set of skills around building relationships and dealing with conflict that many woodlands officers do not necessarily automatically have.

Another concern that many officers raised was the longevity and sustainability of many community woodland management groups. Often driven by one or two charismatic people, the concern is that momentum will cease once they are no longer involved, or that difficulties and personality clashes in the group will mean that the woodland asset suffers. Officers did not want to be in the position of having to remove management responsibility from groups and felt that it would reflect badly on the local authority if they did so. The concern was that the authority could end up looking worse than if it had not ceded responsibility in the first place.

The issue of organisational development in community groups – particularly those that move from a campaigning or lobbying role to a management one, or from a voluntary group to a more enterprising organisation – is not unique to woodland, and there may be lessons from other community led regeneration initiatives that woodland groups can benefit from.

Supporting this type of community and organisational development is a skill in itself, and if community management is to be seen as a viable alternative to direct management of local authority woodlands, this needs to be recognised and supported.

## 5.7 Future research

A framework of typologies of woodlands, their potential uses, and types of management would be useful for both local authorities and community organisations. This framework should cover:

- different types, settings, and sizes of woodland, and what potential uses (both productive and service delivery) are viable within them
- what sort of social enterprises or community groups may be best placed to manage or operate from them (in terms of skills needed, size, levels of risk etc.)
- what sort of relationship with the local authority or landowner would be needed to ensure sustainability (whether a lease or other formal agreement is needed, what type of contracting / procurement arrangement and timescales are needed etc.).

For each of these types of woodland and potential management models, examples of good practice should be developed, in the form of case studies from the UK or abroad. The business models used should be analysed, and the social, environmental and economic benefits (and risks) beyond “simple” woodland issues should be considered.

This framework would allow authorities to look at their woodland resource in a more strategic way, and enable woodland officers to make the case for woodlands as a real asset within a local authority area. A clear framework would also mean that assessing the impact of any new management interventions would be easier.

This would also allow community groups and social enterprises to assess the potential opportunities for woodland management within their areas, and consider how involvement with local woodlands might meet their own aims and objectives.

