

Encouraging Sustainable Woodland Management in the North
Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty



NWD AONB Woodland Programme: Final Report

Client: North Wessex Downs AONB

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Woodland Programme was delivered by the Hampshire & Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust on behalf of the AONB. It was intended to encourage sustainable woodland management; raise awareness of woodland issues; and promote collaborative working in order to address these issues. The Programme consisted of a series of training events during the summer and autumn of 2012, followed by a Woodland Forum in February 2013. All aspects of the Programme were delivered on time and targets were exceeded with one exception; the number of participants at the third workshop was lower than target. There were 135 participants overall which was more than double the target of 60. Of these, 95 had strong links with the AONB and 49 were from key target groups in the AONB.

Throughout the events, participants were provided with plenty of opportunity to contribute to discussion of woodland management issues. Woodland owners said that they lacked confidence and expertise in setting management objectives for their woodlands; that they did not always know where to go for the best advice or to find out about available grants. Participants reported that the workshops were a useful way to learn about woodland management and expressed a desire for more, including practical workshops where they could learn new skills such as coppicing.

Participants also expressed a strong desire for collaborative working including sharing of skills, knowledge, and information and in accessing markets. It became apparent that markets were not well understood by woodland owners and many of the smaller woodland owners felt excluded from them.

Throughout the Programme, participants were asked for their views on the AONB's role in promoting sustainable woodland management. From this, a clear role emerged with participants expressing a need for a coordinator; someone or somebody to act as a contact and develop networks, facilitating liaison between stakeholders. The AONB would appear to be well placed to exercise this role.

There was a positive response from participants for involvement in a working group to support coordination and dissemination of information.

Key recommendations for the AONB to take forward are:

- Investigate participation in the Ward Forester Scheme as a mechanism for addressing issues, in particular economic issues associated with sustainable management of woodlands.
- Seek funding for hosting a woodland coordinator to encourage collaborative working
- Develop a working group to maintain dialogue and assist with developing collaborative working.
- Hold an annual woodland forum event

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1. EVALUATION OF SUCCESS

There have been three elements to this:

1) Monitoring and evaluation of the project: the project has been kept under constant review in order that its progress could be monitored and the project could be adaptive. Performance indicators were established including the criteria listed in the Brief for Consultants (numbers and types of delegates).

See Table 3 for a breakdown of participation at individual events.

2) Participant feedback: feedback forms were provided at each event, along with other means of gathering information e.g. post it notes etc

3) Uptake of woodland management advice arising from the workshops.

3.1 Monitoring and evaluation of the project

3.1.1. Analysis of participants

The Brief for Consultants expected a minimum of 30 people to attend each event with 60 participants overall. Of these, woodland owners/managers (group 1), private forestry contractors and employees (group 2) and land agents (group 3) should make up at least 50% of the audience.

Targets were exceeded with one exception and the target for overall number of participants was more than doubled.

Key positives

- 135 participants overall (excluding AONB employees, speakers and event staff) attended one or more event (Target of 60)
- Of the 135 participants, 95 were known to live or work within the AONB.
- 52% of the 95 (i.e.49 individuals) were identified as being in the target groups (Target of 50%)
- The workshops on economics were the best attended with a combined total of 57 attendees over the two days. (Target of minimum 30 at each event)
- Of the 39 delegates attending the Woodland Forum, 22 had not attended a previous event.

Key negatives

- Difficulty identifying woodland owners
- The workshop on historic and cultural woodland features did not reach the target of 30 participants.
- Larger estates from the AONB were underrepresented at both the workshops and the Forum.

Table 3 Performance Indicators

Workshop	Number of individual attendees (overall)	Number attending event Target 30 at each 60 individuals overall	Number from within AONB	Proportion of audience from groups 1,2 and 3 (Target <50%)
Workshop 1		53	30	38% of audience and 53% of those from AONB
Workshop 2 (combined)		57	38	60% of audience and 71% of those from AONB
Workshop 3		26	14	23% of audience and 43% of those from AONB
Forum		39	35	49% of audience and 54% of those from AONB
	135		95	48% of overall participants, 52% of those from AONB

Discussion

Events were widely advertised including through websites, word of mouth, press releases, contact lists, Forestry Commission and personal invitation. The lack of a woodland owner database made personal invitation more difficult. Part way through the project, and after the final workshop, HIWWT, as a partner of the Hampshire Biodiversity Information Centre, was provided with some previously unavailable information which listed the majority of woodland owners in north west Hampshire. Had this been available at the start of the project it would have been much easier to target individual woodland owners. It was even more difficult to identify and target woodland owners throughout the rest of the AONB and this would undoubtedly have affected the number of participants. It is extremely encouraging that participation was so high despite these difficulties.

There are a number of factors which may have contributed to the lower attendance at the third workshop, namely time of year; weather conditions; and perhaps a perception that this was a very specialist topic. However, it was extremely well received by those who did attend.

Effort was made to attract the large woodland owning estates, few of whom attended an event. HIWWT wrote to estates to try and learn more about their reasons for not attending. Responses were received from 2 estates: Apsley and Facombe..

Apsley Estate confirmed that they would like to receive information on future events.

Facombe Estate replied that they would have been interested in the workshop on economics but that they were shooting on both days. They also commented that negative comments received by FC from the AONB in consultation on their EWGS Management Plan suggest that the AONB has a somewhat different agenda than many woodland owners/managers.

This last comment may be quite significant. It is probable that the majority of large estates are already undertaking management, often heavily influenced by a sporting agenda. They have a tendency to operate in isolation from surrounding smaller woodland owners and do not see the need to engage with the NWD AONB apart from when required to do so by the Forestry Commission.

The Head Forester for Englefield Estate was booked onto the Forum but was unable to attend on the day. He has since indicated that he would like to be involved in work going forward.

Recommendations

- Compile a database of woodland owners using delegate information, My Forest and other sources of information such as local knowledge.
- Open dialogue with estates and other large landowners through contacts with CLA, NFU, forestry consultants, foresters etc. There is potential to hold site visits in co-operation with estates. Representatives from CLA and NFU both attended the Forum.

3.1.2. Participant evaluation of events

Participants were given feedback forms and invited to evaluate aspects of the events ranging from the content and relevance of individual talks through to the suitability of the venue. Space was provided for comments and suggestions for future topics. This proved a useful means of gauging participants' views on the value of the events but less useful in drawing out topics for future events. They were also provided with the opportunity to post comments and suggestions during the workshops, but again this did not prove very productive. From the general comments, conversation at the workshops and the rating of workshop relevance and content, it seems reasonable to conclude that the majority of participants are happy for the 'experts' to set the agenda and that the programme was comprehensive in its coverage of relevant woodland issues. It is also clear that many would value more of the same. Some commented that the workshops attempted to cover too much and in too much depth and there is clearly scope to revisit some of the topics.

Tables 4 to 7 provide an analysis of responses to some of the points covered in the feedback forms. These questions have been selected as they provide an indication of participants' evaluation of the value of the events (e.g. was it a useful way to learn?) and their personal response to what they saw and heard (e.g. intention to implement what they learnt).

Evaluation of the workshops

71 feedback forms were returned from the workshop events. Not all questions were answered on each form.

Key positives

- 87% of those completing part or all of a form said the workshop events were a useful way to learn about woodland management.
- 66% said that advice was pitched at the right level
- 88% said the content and relevance of the site visits was excellent or good
- 55% said they will implement what they had learnt and 34% said they may.
- **Key negatives**
- Some felt that there was too much content in the biodiversity and economics workshops.

Table 4 Evaluation of Workshop 1 (Biodiversity) - 28 forms returned

	Yes	On the whole	Partially	No
A useful way to learn about woodland management	22	5		
Was advice at right level	14	12		
Follow up advice required	7			16
	Will	May	Will not	Already do
Intention to implement advice	14	7		5
	Excellent or good		Fair	Poor
Content and relevance of site visit	22		1	

General comments from Workshop 1 included:

- I was inspired
- There was too much detail
- It was incredibly useful
- I found it informative and beneficial
- I learnt a lot
- The speakers were over running and were a bit quiet.
- The group sizes on the site visit were too large
- High quality speakers
- Good to hear about traditional management skills
- I now have a better understanding of why we do these things (a reference to woodland management practices)

Table 5: Evaluation of Workshop 2a (Economics) - 11 forms returned

	Yes	On the whole	Partially	No
A useful way to learn about woodland management	11			
Was advice at right level	7	3	1	
Follow up advice required	2			9
	Will	May	Will not	Already do
Intention to implement advice	4	6		5
	Excellent or good		Fair	Poor
Content and relevance of site visit	11			

General comments from Workshop 2a included:

- Worthwhile, value for money*
- Excellent, lots of useful information gleaned
- It was very well focussed considering the width of the brief
- I would welcome more
- Real demonstration value to the site visit

Table 6: Evaluation of Workshop 2b (Economics) - 14 forms returned

	Yes	On the whole	Partially	No
A useful way to learn about woodland management	11	1	1	
Was advice at right level	10	3		
Follow up advice required	4			7
	Will	May	Will not	Already do
Intention to implement advice	7	5		5
	Excellent or good		Fair	Poor
Content and relevance of site visit	9		1	

General comments from Workshop 2b included:

- Too much for one day
- Good way to provide information but lost focus on maximising economic benefits
- Would like more
- Very valuable with diverse and knowledgeable speakers
- Relevant and practically useful
- Excellent and helpful event organisation

- Particularly high quality speakers
- May use My Forest

Table 7: Evaluation of Workshop 3 (Historical and cultural heritage) - 21 forms returned

	Yes	On the whole	Partially	No
A useful way to learn about woodland management	18	3		
Was advice at right level	16	5		
Follow up advice required	2			7
	Will	May	Will not	Already do
Intention to implement advice	14	6		1
	Excellent or good		Fair	Poor
Content and relevance of site visit	21		1	

General comments from Workshop 3 were very similar to previous comments and so are not repeated here. One said that there was more scope for looking at historic features in the field.

Evaluation of the Forum event

The event, held in Hungerford Town Hall, included a range of speakers in the morning and breakout sessions in the afternoon. Speakers' topics covered examples of collaborative working and were intended to stimulate thought regarding the way ahead for sustainable woodland management in the North Wessex Downs AONB.

Feedback from the Forum has been analysed in a different way in an attempt to gauge overall reaction to the topics and speakers. Participants were asked to rate speakers as poor, fair, good or excellent. Numerical values were then assigned: 1 for poor, 2 for fair, 3 for good and 4 for excellent. This meant that each person could give the speakers a maximum overall score of 16 (excellent for each of 4 speakers).

Adding up all the responses given and dividing by the number of respondents (only using feedback forms where that question was completed for all 4 speakers) gives an average score of 12.9. This implies that overall the quality of speakers was thought to be good to excellent. Of the 24 respondents completing this question, 8 put "fair" for 1 or 2 speakers and 1 respondent put "poor" for 1 speaker. Negative comments generally referred to style and delivery of presentation rather than content and information relevance.

A similar exercise was conducted for the 2 breakout sessions. Once again sessions were scored at 1 for poor, 2 for fair, 3 for good and 4 for excellent. This meant that each person could give the workshops a maximum overall score of 8 (excellent for each of 2 workshops).

Adding up all the responses given and dividing by the number of respondents (only using feedback forms where that question was completed for both workshops) gives an average score of 5.8. This implies that overall the sessions were thought to be fair to good. Of the 18 respondents completing this question, 9 put “fair” for 1 or both workshops but none responded as “poor”. Very few comments were given on the breakout sessions but included:

- 1st session driven to provide preconceived ideas
- 2nd session lost its way
- Groups a bit too large
- Too adversarial tone from some participants

Key positives

- Overall quality of speakers considered good to excellent

Key negatives

- Breakout groups sessions were rated only fair to good and did not achieve desired outcome

Discussion

The breakout sessions were the least successful element of the entire programme. The purpose of the sessions was to involve participants in identifying ways of managing change i.e. an exploration of actions and solutions to overcome the barriers that we know are preventing us from reaching our goal of sustainable woodland management. Participants struggled with this concept and tended to rehearse the barriers rather than identify solutions. Possible reasons for this include:

- The task was not clearly explained
- Insufficient time was allowed which prevented participants from progressing from the barriers to the solutions
- Group sizes were too large .Smaller groups would have facilitated better participation and more control of dominant individuals.
- A minority of participants were unable or unwilling to conduct their own behaviour in an appropriate manner and were inconsiderate to others.

Recommendations

- Membership of future working groups should be by personal invitation and careful selection from those who have indicated a willingness to be involved. It is important that members make a positive contribution, not withstanding the fact that there will be differences of opinion.

3.1.3 Uptake of woodland management advice arising from the workshops.

13 participants have come forward with requests for advice and some are known to have initiated their own advice visits at events through the contacts they made. Those that have are currently being followed up. In addition 1 small woodland owner (Hurstbourne Tarrant), 2 farmers (Binley and Lower Wyke) and 1 estate (Middleton) have requested woodland advice through the Winning Ways for Wildlife Project that was announced at one of the workshops. Following the forum Kingsclere Estate has asked HIWWT to help with a woodland management plan and a woodland owner at Beenham arranged a site visit with Meg Chambers.

2. KEY ISSUES AND THE ROLE OF THE AONB IN SUSTAINABLE WOODLAND MANAGEMENT

3. 4.1 Key issues

The Forum event sought views on key issues from participants through the breakout sessions and through feedback forms.

4.1.2 Breakout sessions - identifying and managing key issues

The aim of the breakout sessions was to involve participants in ways of managing change towards sustainable woodland management. Participants attended 2 workshops: one which looked at Knowledge and Know-how and the other Economic Drivers. Participants were divided into two groups; each group swapped after half an hour. See Appendix 1 for results.

Knowledge and Know-how

Previous workshops and discussion had already identified that a lack of knowledge and technical expertise is a barrier to woodland management. Forum participants were asked: what they could offer; what they needed; how to promote collaboration and engagement; what support mechanisms needed to be in place; and to identify key actions to take forward in supporting the goal of sustainable woodland management.

Actions that the groups thought should be taken forward were: (bold type denotes the three priority actions as voted for by participants, with red bold denoting the one receiving the most votes.)

Session 1*

- Explore the model as used by Ward Forestry to see if it fits NWD
- Link woodland owners to woodland management advisors
- Lobby authorities to only administer grants when successful management completed (it was felt that grants were inappropriately administered)

* No vote as only 3 actions identified

Session 2

- **Share contact details of all delegates as well as listing their skills and needs etc.**
- **Produce a list of organisations which can provide advice and guidance in managing woodlands.**
- Disseminate data of Local Enterprise Partnerships.
- Create a database of woodland forum members which all members could access
- **Set up a local woodland management group**
- More woodland forum events

Economic Drivers

This session acknowledged the role of economics in woodland management and asked: what were their aspirations for woodland management; what was constraining these aspirations; and what key issues should be taken forward?

Key actions that the groups thought should be taken forward were:

Session 1

- Small scale wood processor and seasoning facility
- Engage with existing community groups
- Include information in education system
- Produce a programme of school visits
- Training trainers in practical skills
- Audit of existing skills
- **Work collaboratively to share expertise, machinery, labour, markets and to lobby government about tax and biodiversity**
- **Form a co-operative to sell produce and identify markets**

- Create a register of produce, like myforest.org
- Lobby local government on woodland issues
- **Encourage local communities to buy local produce, eg woodchip**

Session 2 *

- Disseminate information to forum members e.g. about Agro-forestry
- **Set up a demonstration woodland to trial income streams**
- **Facilitate diversification of woodland income, eg visits, courses etc**
- Consider different models for occupation
- Promote non-wood produce eg venison
- **Produce toolkit for woodland management**
- Lobby FC to allow independence of management for small woodlands
- **Ensure consistency of advice**

Three actions secured equal votes, with the production of a toolkit for woodland management identified as the number one priority. There was insufficient time to discuss this in depth but there was general consensus that a freely available and regularly updated pack detailing grant opportunities, sources of advice, local markets, contractors, local management hubs etc would be of great value to the small woodland owner.

4.1.3 Forum feedback forms

- Participants were asked via feedback forms issued at the Forum to identify the key issues (up to 3) that need to be addressed over the next year in order to help achieve sustainable woodland management across the AONB. For convenience these have been grouped into 4 broad themes as shown in Table 8.

Table 8: Key issues to be addressed

Education	Collaboration	Markets	Resources
Raised awareness of need to manage woodland	Collaboration between neighbouring small woodland owners to make management more viable, ecologically sound and secure economies of scale	Research into markets and novel funding	Funding for training and purchase of equipment
Better understanding of market opportunities	Networking between owners and supply chain	Improved markets for low grade timber	Fully supported volunteer resource
Training in traditional skills and crafts	Communication and understanding between stakeholder groups	Developing timber markets	Co-ordinator
Optimised management for economic, biodiversity and landscape	Local woodland management groups	Reduced reliance on grant aid	Improved access to resources including to professional support
Increased awareness of trees and woody elements within wider landscape		An AONB brand	A woodland owner inventory/database
Better communication of aims and objectives for woodland management		Developing co-operatives	Better access to management planning resources including joint schemes
Deer management			

4.2 The role of the AONB

Participants were asked for their views on the role of the AONB in sustainable woodland management. These suggest a facilitation role with some more pro-active measures.

Table 9: The Role of the AONB

Pro-active	Facilitation and advocacy
Provision of advice and practical help	Enabling information exchange
Running training courses	Facilitate co-operative events
Develop a database of contractors, consultants and woodland managers	Facilitate liaison between stakeholder group
Arrange site visits and talks	Help with access to grant aid
Establish woodland groups	Signpost events and information
Investigate Ward Forester Scheme	Promote examples of best practice
Host a woodland co-ordinator post	Support the process of getting small woods on ancient woodland inventory
Provide labour	Promoting local produce including game
	Promoting the role of woodlands in managing flood risk and diffuse pollutions
	Encourage adoption of joint woodland management plans

Discussion

The feedback forms and the breakout sessions demonstrated a shared desire for much greater collaborative working along with sharing of information. There was some conflict between those who felt they should be left to do what they wanted and those who would welcome more input. However, even those participants who wanted to be left alone to do their own thing were quick to say what they felt others should be doing!

Throughout the Programme, participants have been asked whether they would be willing to consider involvement in a working group/forum. There has been a positive response to this including from some who were unable to attend any of the Programme events. Contact details are available for these people Appendix 2.

It is also apparent that the majority of those attending the training workshops and the Forum welcome the AONB's intervention in promoting sustainable woodland management and see a role for the AONB. The majority view this as a facilitation role. A few thought the AONB should grant aid woodland management and at least one person thought that it should actively engage in woodland management but this is probably due to a lack of understanding of the AONB partnership.

4. RECOMMENDATIONS AND NEXT STEPS

The aim of the Woodland Programme was to promote and facilitate sustainable woodland management and to identify a way of taking this forward into the future. Taking into account the findings discussed in this report a dual track approach is recommended:

- 1) There is an opportunity for the AONB to participate in the Ward Forester Scheme. HIWWT has already provided details of this scheme to the AONB and recommend this approach as a potential model for addressing some of the issues, in particular economic issues, associated with the sustainable management of woodlands.
- 2) AONB to seek funding to host a woodland co-ordinator/facilitator to encourage collaborative working; disseminate information; arrange training workshops; facilitate provision of advice; develop community projects etc. The woodland co-ordinator should be supported by a working group drawn from those who have indicated their interest through the Programme. As previously suggested, this group should be by invitation only and should have clear terms of reference.

Other recommendations from this report are:

- An annual forum event
- Regular dissemination of relevant information via the contacts list - Appendix 3
- Open dialogue with estates and other large landowners through contacts with CLA, forestry consultants, foresters etc. There is potential to hold site visits in co-operation with estates for the demonstration of good practice.
- Compile a database of woodland owners using delegate information, My Forest and other sources of information such as local knowledge.

These are tasks for a woodland co-ordinator role but could be addressed relatively easily by the AONB in the absence of that role.

In conclusion, there is a keen interest in woodland management throughout the NWD but owners often feel ill equipped and unsure where best to obtain advice. Markets are not well understood and small woodland owners do not have ready access to them which is a major constraint to economic management. There is a clear desire for collaborative working but without someone to facilitate this, it will not happen to any great extent. Apart from the NWD AONB, there is no obvious body to take this forward. Whilst the AONB cannot address the issues on its own, it can act as an enabler provided it can acquire the resources to do so.

Appendix 3 Delegates contact list (those who elected not to be on this list have been removed)

Name	Position	Organisation	Email
Richard Begent	Woodland Owner	Old Copse, Beenham	richard.begent@blueyonder.co.uk
Nicky Begent	Woodland Owner	Old Copse, Beenham	richard.begent@blueyonder.co.uk
Dick Greenaway	Chairman	West Berks Countryside Society	rg.greenaway@btinternet.com
Paul Beevers	Chair	Old Down and Beggarwood Wildlife Group	paul_beevers@tiscali.co.uk
Peter Carpenter	Nature Conservation Consultant	Ensynch	peter.carpenter@ensynch.co.uk
David Rees	Manager	Oxfordshire Woodland Project	David.Rees@oxfordshire.gov.uk
Robin Edwards	Regional Director	CLA	sara.magern@cla.org.uk
Jo Smith	Senior Agroecology Researcher	The Organic Research Centre	jo.s@organicresearchcentre.com
Sally Westaway	Agroforestry and Crops Researcher	The Organic Research Centre	sally.w@organicresearchcentre.com
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Chris Baker		Broadmead Estate Services Ltd	office@broadmeadestates.co.uk
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Margaret Rainford	Woodland Owner		mmrainford@yahoo.co.uk
Peter Rainford	Woodland Owner		
Katy Hooper	Green Spaces Ranger	Basingstoke and Deane Borough Council	katy.hooper@basingstoke.gov.uk
Charles Flower		Flower Farms	charles@charlesflower.com

Bill Acworth	Farmer		Acworths@littlehiddenfarm.co.uk
Chris Atkins	Woodland Worker		chris@catkins.org
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Paul Jarczewski		Woodland Trust	PaulJarczewski@woodlandtrust.org.uk
Claire Kerr		Woodland Trust	clairekerr@woodlandtrust.org.uk
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Tom Owen	Woodland Management and Arboriculture	Thomas Owen Woodland Management & Arboriculture	tom@sycom.net
Niall Williams			niall.will246@gmail.com
Jason Pendleton		Rooksnest Estate	farmoffice@rooksnest.net
Cynth Napper		Oxfordshire Nature Conservation Forum	cynth@oncf.org.uk
Sonia Hutton-Taylor	Potential Woodland Owner		sdht@me.com
Katrina Easterling	Senior Lecturer	Univeristy of Winchester	katrina.easterling@virgin.net
Denise Dane	AONB council of partners and conservation geologist		dm_dane@btinternet.com
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David Dixon			dydixon@mac.com
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