

Gorham and Admiral Community Woodlands Group, Kent, England



Community volunteers working with an affiliated Trust to conserve 35 ha of ancient woodland

GORHAM AND ADMIRAL COMMUNITY WOODLANDS GROUP

This case study is one of a set written as part of a Forest Research project. Some case studies are written by the community group, others by researchers who visited and interviewed group members, but they have all been validated and endorsed by the community groups.

Forest Research developed a standard method for describing the case studies, outlined in Lawrence and Ambrose-Oji, 2013 “A framework for sharing experiences of community woodland groups” Forestry Commission Research Note 15 (available from www.forestry.gov.uk/publications).

The case study comprises three parts:

1. The **Group Profile** provides essential information about the form and function of the community woodland group. Profiles were prepared following the methodology
2. The **Change Narrative** which documents key moments in the evolution of the community woodland group with a particular focus on the evolution of engagement and empowerment
3. The **Engagement and Impacts Timeline** documents milestones in the development of the community woodland group, its woodland and any assumed or evidenced impacts.

The case studies collectively provide a resource which documents the diversity and evolution of community woodland groups across Scotland, Wales and England. The method ensures that the case studies are consistent and can be compared with each other. We welcome further case studies to add to this growing resource.

For further information, and for the detailed case study method, please contact:

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1. Group profile

Woodland: Gorham and Admiral Community Wood
Map ref: TQ 854 583
Webpage: <http://www.gorhamandadmiralwoods.org.uk/index.shtml>
Date of profile: June 2013
Resources: site visit, interview, Trust accounts

1. Institutional context (in June 2013)	
1.1 Ownership of the woodland(s)	<p>Gorham and Admiral Woods form a contiguous block of woodland. An adjoining five acre meadow forming an integral part of the woodland complex was purchased in May 2013 with the help of Biffa Award. The Cromarty Trust, a registered charity (established in 1976), is the legal owner of the woodland and meadow by freehold on behalf of the Gorham and Admiral Community Woodlands Group (GACW).</p> <p>Classification of tenure: Formal agreement (private)</p>
1.2 Access and use rights to the woodland(s)	<p>The group (GACW) has the legal right to coppice in the woodland as set out in the management plan. To ensure compliance with H&S as well as maintaining the conservation values of the wood, the coppicing is done by a qualified coppicer with proper insurance.</p> <p>The Trust has an environmental policy stating that public users have no right to take flora, fauna, wood etc.: As there are sporting concerns in the area, the group (GACW) "<i>had to make it crystal clear that shooting wasn't allowed</i>".</p> <p>There is no access to vehicles.</p> <p>There are public rights of way through the woodland and it is open to all at all times of day. The group has also introduced several new permissive paths. Horse riders make much use of one particular right of way. These ways</p>

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	must now be maintained.
1.3 Regulations/ responsibilities affecting the woodland(s)	The Trust has the legal responsibility to remove any dangerous trees and to ensure any public liability risks are managed.
2. Internal organisation of the group/enterprise	
2.1 Group members, representation and decision making	<p>At the time of purchasing the wood there were three or four active members of (GACW) expanding to around 10 or 11 members at its peak. There is no membership fee and anybody is welcome to join the group. The perceived community of interest is the resident population living in, or close to, the village of Bicknor. The village of Bicknor is often described as the smallest in Kent with fewer than 100 residents. The community itself is perceived to fall into two broad groups: people who own their own homes and residents renting properties from the Bicknor estate. Despite fears that lettings can bring a transient population, a survey of the village some years ago found that the average length of time that residents had lived in the village was 17 years. Although there is a general level of attachment to the woodlands by local residents by virtue of proximity, and there is some sense of responsibility for the woodland, there are still only a small number of committed residents who take a more active interest in the management of the woodlands.</p> <p>Decision-making is done through occasional meetings of the group and direct face-to-face communication between the small number of committed residents. At the start of the project there were regular group meetings. At present, the meetings are only occasional, and usually in response to a new event or when a collective decision is needed: <i>“Things more or less jog along, planning walks and talks and volunteer days”</i>. Other than that, the GACW coordinator does much of the organising. The Cromarty Trust formalises decision making about the woodland through a “woodland management committee”. This is chaired by the coordinator of GACW.</p>
2.2 Communication and learning processes	Communication and education beyond GACW is particularly important to the group who have initiated a number of different ways to encourage learning about woodlands amongst the local community. Big Lottery Grants supported “Uncovering the gems of Gorham Wood” in 2012. Information boards at the main entrance and chestnut posts were installed at points through the woodland, each with a brass plaque identifying a flora species. The interpretation boards have on-going maintenance costs. Informative walks are led through the wood mainly by a

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	<p>local amateur botanist. The funding also supported the establishment of a website and promotional material.</p> <p>Learning within the group is focused on members own understanding of woodland ecology and conservation management actions, through a learning by doing approach.</p>
2.3 Structure and legal status	<p>The GACW has no formal legal status. They constitute an informal group maintaining a close relationship to The Cromarty Trust through membership of the Trust’s woodland management committee. The Cromarty Trust was established in 1976 as charity no: 272843. In 2004 the Trustees agreed to take on ownership of the woodlands on behalf of the community of Bicknor and the GACW volunteers.</p> <p>Classification of legal form: Unincorporated Association</p>
2.4 Regulations/ responsibilities affecting the group/ enterprise	<p>The Cromarty Trust leave all management decisions to the woodland management group. The Trust is bound by the regulations of the Charity Commission.</p>
2.5 Forest management objectives and planning procedures	<p>Conservation is the primary objective for managing the woodland. The woodland is an ASNW (Ancient Semi Natural Woodland) with large amounts of overstood wood that had been neglected for many years. GACW would like to restore it to become a sustainable ASNW. Public access and recreation is another main objective: <i>“We want it to be open to the public so they can come in and see what’s going on and realize the importance of the woodland to our heritage and our future.”</i> A third objective that the project coordinator wanted to highlight is ‘<i>Sustainability</i>’, though it appears this is referring to continuity of existence of the woodland for the objectives outlined above: <i>“It is vital that we are able to sustain this woodland. It was a woodland that was used for the benefit of the people who lived around it.”</i></p> <p>A management plan was produced in the early days of owning the woodland. This was done with assistance from the Kent Wildlife Trust and the North Downs AONB, who were part of the steering committee. The management plan has been sent to and agreed by the Forestry Commission as part of the felling licence and WGS procedures.</p> <p>Overall aim of plan: Conservation</p>

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2.6 Implementing the woodland management plan	Volunteers drawn from within the core GACW group and from other organisations, actively undertake maintenance activities in the wood. The volunteers are only allowed to use hand tools, not mechanical tools, so they do not take part in the coppicing. The group uses a fully qualified contractor with direct experience of working within ancient woodland sites to coppice the wood. The coppicer is permitted to take the coppiced wood in exchange for the work given.
2.7 Business/ operating model and sustainability	Overall sources of income for the group in the FY2012: Grant aid and matched funding 98% of total may be from Trust woodland endowment fund or from grant applications Revenue from fund raising activities 2% of total from small localised activities such as barbeques or conservation events.
2.8 Benefit distribution rules	There are no financial benefits accruing from the woodland. Financial reporting can be found in the Charity Commission returns of the Cromarty Trust.
3. External linkages	
3.1 Partnerships and agreements	Kent Wildlife Trust and North Downs AONB are two organisations that were involved from the start. They both had representatives who participated in the committee in the early days and helped devise and approve the management plan: "Both organisations have been very helpful. <i>The AONB group have introduced us to other woodland groups in the vicinity and we share information and sometimes working parties to get things done between us</i> ". There is also a close working relationship with the Cromarty Trust.
3.2 Associations	Affiliations are made with organisations that reflect the specific needs of the group in managing an <i>ancient</i> woodland site for conservation purposes. The group is associated to the Mid Kent Downs Countryside Partnership (http://www.midkentdowns.org.uk/gorham.php). The Gorham and Admiral group co-ordinator has also launched

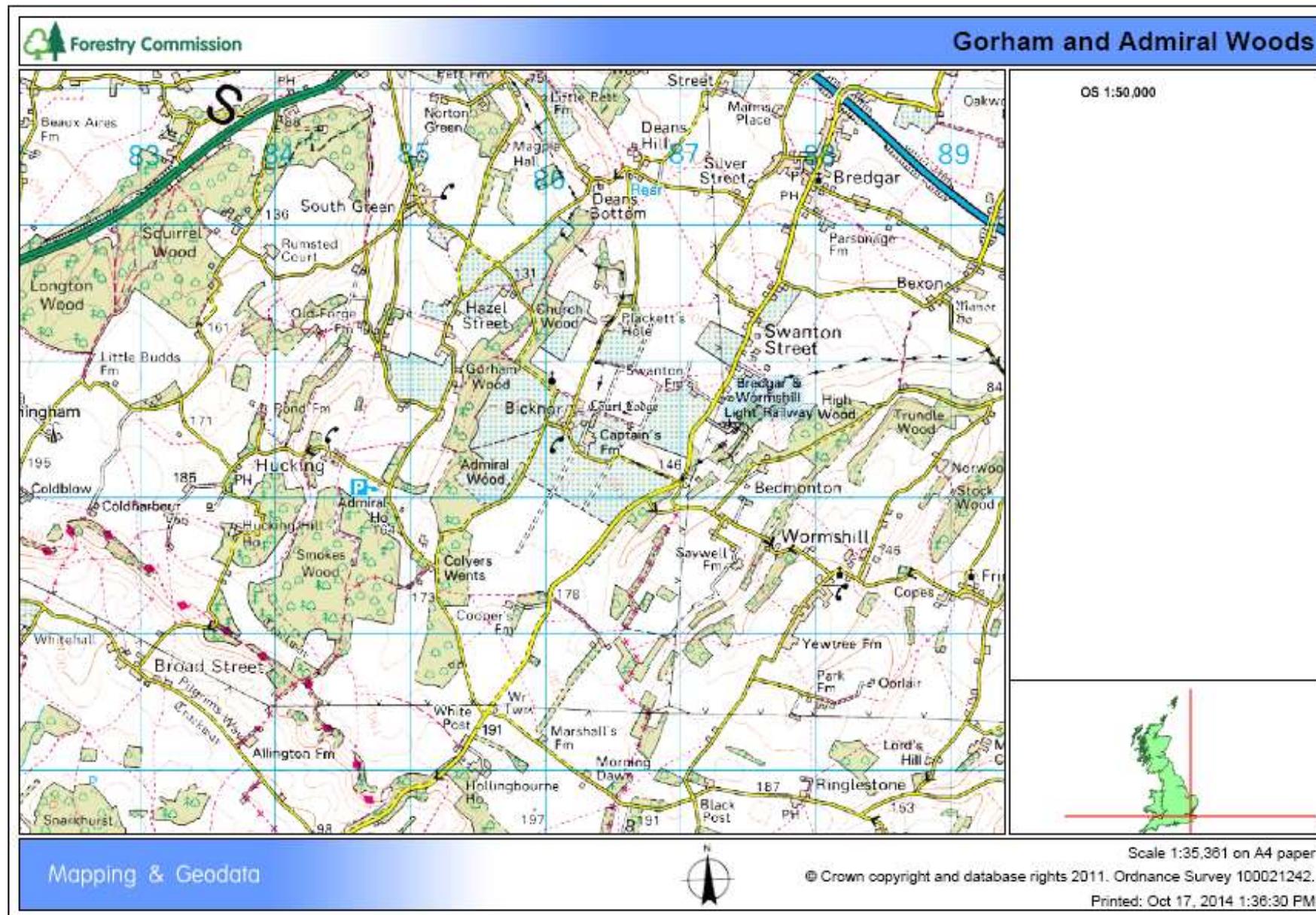
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	<p>a new project called Kent Woodland Employment Scheme (www.kwes.org.uk). This newly registered Charity provides training and employment for ex-Service personnel, young people and ex-offenders in Kent's ancient woodlands, including Gorham and Admiral woods. The Government's Regional Growth Fund recently awarded KWES a grant which will enable the charity to create 31 new woodland jobs by 2016.</p>
<p>4. Resources</p>	
<p>4.1 Forest/woodland</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Size: Gorham and Admiral Woods cover 35.4ha • Location: TQ 854 583, Situated on a dry dipslope valley of the North Downs, the woodland site is surrounded by orchards and farmland with occasional houses. • Access: The only parking is at the Bicknor village church, which lies around 200m from the wood entrance. There are several other access points for walkers. There are currently no car parking facilities at the woodland, it is thought that if this were the case then people would begin to come from further afield to make use of the woodland. • Soil type and site potential: clay and flint deposits on the higher ground • Species mix: chestnut, hornbeam, oak, beech, hazel and ash, • Age of stands and major operations (date of last felling, planting, thinning): It is not known when regular coppicing cycles were stopped. There are some standards of considerable girth amongst the former coppiced areas. It is believed that the valley floor was felled at some point as was common along the North Downs. • General mix of management compartments: The main compartments are known as Gorham wood, Brockley Bank, Admiral wood and SG. This year an open meadow area adjacent to the woodland has been added to the site. • Features: There is much deadwood, some of which is still the result of the 1987 storm, which caused considerable damage. There is also an open meadow area within the woodland. • Classification of woodland type: Broadleaved • Outline management history: Prior to group ownership there had been little management in the wood. Since purchasing the wood, periodic coppicing has been reintroduced, and some small areas of the canopy have been opened.

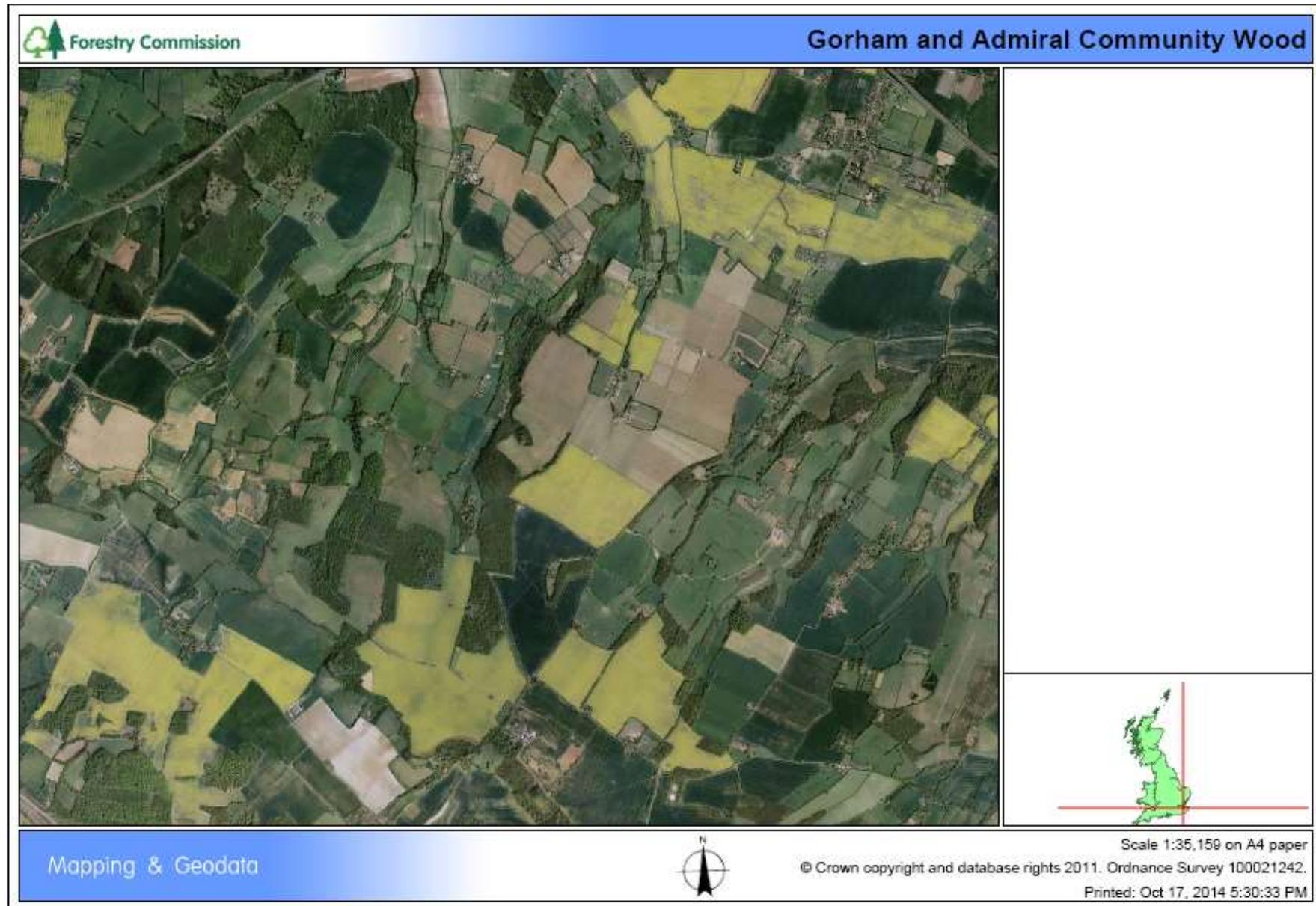
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General condition of woodland: Healthy. • Biodiversity information: The woodland bears 52 ancient woodland indicator species. Also the county scarce Bird's nest orchids, Greater butterfly orchids, Lesser butterfly orchids and the nationally scarce Lady orchid can be found within the wood. Over 400 species of fungi have been recorded.
<p>4.2 Woodland and group funding sources</p>	<p>The Cromarty Trust generates funds for a number of different projects including the community woodland.</p> <p>The woodland was purchased by the Trust for £80,846. The bulk of the money (£49,000) to buy the woodland came from the Heritage Lottery fund. Other donations came from Esmee Fairburn Foundation, Kent County Council, Maidstone Borough Council, Rochester Bridge Trust, North Downs Society, Colyer Fergusson Trust, Culra Trust, local fundraising and an anonymous donor. The Trust purchased the woodland on behalf of the community, using its established status to do so.</p> <p>Ongoing costs are partly met by small grants from the Forestry Commission woodland grant scheme that go into the fund held by the Cromarty Trust.</p> <p>In 2011 the community woodland management group secured an Awards for All grant for £9,980 to improve signposting of the footpaths.</p> <p>In 2013 a £30,000 grant was sourced from Biffa Award to enable the purchase of the 5 acre paddock adjoining the woodland.</p>
<p>4.3 Knowledge, skills, human and social capital</p>	<p>The community group's co-ordinator has considerable experience with charitable organisations and bureaucratic processes. She was a member of Kent County Council and Joint Council Leader for four years. Within the community particular members have skills that the group has utilised: <i>"Lots of people have useful DIY skills. My husband, for example is extremely good at fencing so was able to teach our volunteers when we wanted to fence a section of the wood that bordered a road". There is a local amateur botanist who takes a keen interest in the woodland, as his family own a similar site nearby. He helps us organise walks and talks".</i> External advice has been sought from the Kent Wildlife Trust and the North Downs AONB. With the help of an expert, the group have carried out their own archaeological survey.</p>

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2. Change Narrative

1. Group History. Moments of change, motivations and engagement

Gorham and Admiral Community Woods were described by the late Dr Francis Rose, an eminent botanist, as “one of the seven outstanding woods on the Kent Chalk”. Concern for the wood’s long-term well-being was raised locally when ownership of the land passed to a local developer. After some time the developer approached the Chairman of Bicknor Parish to see if there was local interest in purchasing the woodland. The village of Bicknor is too small (under 100 people) to have its own Parish Council and has no money of its own, not even a bank account. It was felt that it “would have taken too long to set up a Charity from scratch and was much easier to do it with an organization that we could trust”. It was agreed that a local Charity would be sought to take on ownership of the woodland, although a local group could take on responsibility for the management. It was agreed that the village should be given six months to see if they were able to raise the money. A small group of interested individuals came together and began fund raising. A bid was put in to the Heritage Lottery Fund who agreed a grant and a combination of other funding sources including the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation, Kent County Council, Maidstone Borough Council, the Colyer-Fergusson Charitable Trust and a number of other institutions and individuals meant that the woodland could (**informal enjoyment to group formation**) be purchased in 2004. The Cromarty Trust set up by a former Borough Councillor from the area was asked and agreed to purchase the wood. The Trust was established to support educational and environmental projects in the Parishes of Cromarty and Nigg in Ross and Cromarty, Scotland as well as in Kent. Even though Cromarty represents an area distant from Kent, the aims of the Trust were considered to correspond with those of Bicknor community, and, since the Trustees lived in Kent and had connections to the area it seemed the most appropriate vehicle to take it on. (**Group formation** in the sense of allying to an established charity to **full management**).

The then Chairman of the Bicknor Parish Meeting, is recognised as having been “the driving force” behind the project at the time the proposal came along. Key to realising the ambitions were her energy, her networks and her experience as a senior member of Kent County Council. It would be fair to say that she has almost single-handedly generated the funds needed for the group and has managed to motivate the local residents to get involved. She now is officially the project co-ordinator and the relationship with the Trust is formalised through her Chairmanship of the Trust’s woodland management committee. Local people’s involvement in the project remains at the stage of **informal enjoyment** and **consultation** and a small number have begun to volunteers and take part in the **active engagement** which is the role of the group. Much of the **decision making**

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and **full management** that is undertaken remains with the project coordinator, although meetings are called when key decisions need to be made. There are currently only three or four people involved: “We all get on very well, we’ve never had any great problems”.

In the early days of the project, regular meetings were held and representatives from the Kent Wildlife Trust and the North Downs AONB attended these meetings and played a key advisory role. A management plan was developed and volunteer groups fenced off part of the wood from a road to stop litter dumping. A secondary path was created to provide a walking-only path through the top slope of the woodland. After this initial period of activity it appears that the group has entered a stable period with fewer meetings and groups coming together only as needed for certain management tasks and informative walks. Most recently a new project has prompted a new sense of enthusiasm in the group through the successful application for a grant to purchase a five acre paddock adjoining the woodland. The success of this initiative, is again, mainly attributable to the work of the project co-ordinator, and there are only small signs that the wider community is involved, though this may change as more management work can take place on this site.

2. Challenges, barriers and opportunities for change: Key issues in evolution

Facilitating factors

- Skill, capacity and enthusiasm of Chair of Bicknor to initiate the project and successfully apply for funding and continue as project coordinator
- Finding an established Trust able to take on ownership of the woodland,
- Securing considerable grant funding for woodland purchase

Barriers and Challenges

- Sustainable coppice management - it represents a cost whilst having uncertain markets for any products
- Limited volunteer participation given the small size of the community

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3. Evolution of income streams

In general group income is largely dependent on grant funding (80%), and their own revenue from fundraising activities (20%). There is little variation from this overall pattern. There is no plan to change the approach to income generation. As specific projects arise e.g. chance to purchase the adjoining meadow, the group will raise funds as required.

The revenue generating activities of the group are included as part of the Cromarty Trusts financial accounting. A small endowment fund of £15,000 has been established by the Trust to continue to support the woodland into the future.

4. Woodland history and change: Benefits and impacts before group involvement

It is evident that the woodland was coppiced cyclically in an earlier period but it is not clear when this practice was stopped. The group are only aware that the woodland was previously owned by a farmer from Bicknor. The grassy areas between Gorham and Admiral woods were planted with conifers in the past, but this is now being returned to be open grassland after felling of the trees because of disease during the 1970s.

Time Period	Owner/Manager	Objectives / Benefits (and evidence)	Major operations	Access and use rights
Up to 2002	Succession of 2 or 3 farmers in Bicknor	Unknown. One owner planted pasture land with conifers	Conifers were cut down as diseased in 1970s. Stumps left, scrub took over with lots of ash.	PROW
2002 - 2004	Gallagher	Had plans to manage the woodland but agreed to sell to Bicknor residents	No work done in the woodland at this time	PROW
2004	The Cromarty Trust and community group		2008 and 2012 rejuvenation of coppice	PROW

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4. Woodland history and change: Benefits and impacts since group involvement

The group have cleared the rubbish from the woodland, including three dumped and rusting cars. They also found a large pile of asbestos that the Maidstone Borough council kindly agreed to have removed. The volunteers installed a fence where the wood met a road to stop further fly tipping. A new walking path has been developed on the top slope of the bank to make the site more welcoming to walkers. The project co-ordinator asserts that: *"not a single time that I go into the woodland do I not find people walking through the woodland"*.

The main management tasks undergone have been three areas of coppicing (2008 and 2012) with the work done by professional coppicers. The first area coppiced is on the top flatter ridge of the woodland and has not regenerated as well as expected. The later sections are situated on the slope of the site and in the damp valley bottom. The sloped site is regenerating very well and the number of butterfly orchids has been increasing in this area. However, once the ground cover gets better established this may impact negatively on the orchid population.

There have been several surveys done in the woodland, and an archaeological field survey. The fungus flora is very rich with over 400 species. The Kent Field Club conducted a flora survey noting 23 different tree species and around 150 flowering plants. These include 52 ancient woodland indicator plant species. Dormouse boxes have been positioned around the woodland and several of them have been found to have been used.

Through securing a new grant from BIFFA the group has acquired an adjacent meadow that stretches between a road and the woodland. This means that the site is now under community management lessening any potential threats to the integrity of the site from adjacent owners. Conservation and preservation are the key goals of the group and protecting the site for future generations is the key objective.

The group is mostly reliant on the energy and ideas from one individual. However it is evident that the drive and initiative of this individual is inspiring to other members and local residents who do now feel a collective sense of 'right' to the woodland. Given the small size of the community, ownership of a large area is significant to the local population.

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Time Period	Owner/Manager	Objectives / Benefits (and evidence)	Major operations	Access and use rights
2004	Cromarty Trust with community group	To conserve the site for the benefit of biodiversity and the local community	Periodic coppicing, path creation, fencing, scrub clearance, rubbish clearance	PROW
2013	Community group through Cromarty Trust	Purchase of adjacent site using Landfill tax credit scheme BIFFA with aim to create lowland calcereous meadow from former scrub land	Scrub clearance Mowing regime	

5. Future plans

There are no plans to alter the woodland management strategy away from periodic coppicing and general maintenance. Sustainability of the project has been a key focus for the group, in terms of the viability of the project. Currently the coppicing work is paid for in kind as the workers can take the wood harvested. Issues have arisen in finding suitably qualified coppicers who are familiar with ancient woodlands. To this end a separate project has launched a Charity called The Kent Woodland Employment Scheme to provide training and employment with a focus on ancient woodlands, which has started in the North Downs area of Kent and now has 16 apprentices. It is hoped that some of the apprentices will undertake work in the woodland without recompense as part of their training but the project, KWES, will gain the benefit of any wood coppiced to help pay for more apprentices: *"We are in contact with various organisations who would like to buy wood but there is no reason why we couldn't also sell some locally"*.

Having just purchased the five acre paddock, there are plans to develop it into a chalk grassland meadow. It is unlikely that the group will purchase other land at present, although they have just learnt that the ancient woodland strip across the road may be coming up for sale.

The community woodland have considered creating a small informal parking area where the new meadow meets the road which will only open when the group has walks, and it is hoped that this facility will draw people from further afield. Currently one can park at Bicknor Church and walk down to the woodland but this is locally held knowledge that an outsider would not know.

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Since functioning of this group rests heavily on one key individual, there is a question over its sustainability. The project coordinator herself is not worried by this: "*When it comes to the crunch there will be somebody who will be happy to take over*". The woodland group have been working on building up a fund within the Cromarty Trust, for the purposes of securing the management of the woodland beyond the current horizon.

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3. Engagement and impacts timeline

Year	Event	ENGAGEMENT	Reasons Barriers and challenges	Changes/ Impacts and outcomes Social (evidence)	Changes/ Impacts and outcomes Woodland (evidence)	Changes/ Impacts and outcomes Financial/ Economic (evidence)
		INFORMAL ENJOYMENT to GROUP FORMATION		Regular meetings, good local support		
2004	Woodland purchased	GROUP FORMATION to FULL MANAGEMENT	Getting group responsibility difficult in the face of one very competent project co- ordinator.	New path attracted more walkers	Three areas coppiced, new path introduced.	Steps being taken to secure financial stability of woodland management.
					Meadow area beside Brockley Bank purchased with the help of Biffa Award.	