

Dane Valley Woods Kent, England

One day a woodland...

Dane Valley Woods

Have you ever noticed the trees that have been planted here?

They've been planted by local people to create a woodland for wildlife, and you can watch it grow year by year!

Why a wood?

Did you know that most land would be covered by trees if left to nature? Most woods have been cleared for farming, houses and other uses, and in Thanet there are hardly any woods left!

The Dane Valley Woods project will put trees on the horizon again and will provide a super home for plenty of wildlife!

Many plants and animals already thrive here, let us know what you spot!

Want to get involved?

There's always plenty of work to do, planting new trees, caring for those that have been planted and recording wildlife. Check out the Dane Valley Woods website: www.danevalleywoods.org

Look either side of the cycle path ahead of you and you can see the young trees growing...

Please take your litter home

Please respect this special place



A community group working to improve local environmental quality by creating a new woodland on an urban former landfill site owned by the Local Authority

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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For further information about this case study, please contact:

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1. Group profile

Woodland: Dane Valley Woods, Margate
Map ref: TR 367 699
Webpage: <http://danevalleywoods.org/>
Date of profile: May 2013
Resources: site visit, interview and management plan

1. Institutional context (in May 2013)

1.1 Ownership of the woodland(s)	<p>Dane Valley Woods is owned by Thanet District Council.</p> <p>Classification of tenure: Informal agreement (public)</p>
1.2 Access and use rights to the woodland(s)	<p>There is a cycle path running through the site. The group has informal rights to plant on the land and manage it as they see fit. The only constraint currently in place from Thanet District Council is that they do not plant fruit trees on the site as it used to be a landfill site. There is no vehicular access.</p>
1.3 Regulations/responsibilities affecting the woodland(s)	<p>Thanet District Council has the legal obligation to manage the site.</p> <p>The aim of the group, as set out in the constitution provided by the Green Light Trust, is to: "manage the community woodland and any additions to it for the benefit of the local community".</p> <p>To access the support of the Green Light Trust the group have signed an affiliation agreement and pay an annual fee. This obliges them to adhere to the Green Light Trust code of practice.</p>

2. Internal organisation of the group/enterprise	
2.1 Group members, representation and decision making	<p>Everyone is eligible to join the group and the group draws on a community of interested people from a wide area. Decisions are made by the steering group through monthly meetings and an annual AGM. With the low numbers of participants at the time of visiting, most regular members are also on the steering group which has 7 members. As a result of this, and the strong interpersonal contacts, decision-making is often informal. The small number of members does not seem to undermine the group's perception of its legitimacy. They view themselves in the role of custodians, creating an environmental resource that will be of increasing benefit to the local community.</p> <p>The group's mission statement is: "To engage local people and raise funds, with the aim of developing a sustainable community owned wildspace at Dane Valley Road, Margate; through developing a framework that allows everyone to participate in creating and managing their own working woodlands for enjoyment, learning, health and wildlife."</p> <p>The current members would like to have a better representation of the local community. Bordering the site on one side is a very deprived council estate, the group feels that there is a great deal of scope to raise interest about the woodland with these local residents.</p>
2.2 Communication and learning processes	<p>The group has a webpage, a Facebook page and a Twitter account and advertises the work parties and events through these channels. For the larger events such as the summer fun event and winter planting days posters are put up locally, an advert put in the local paper and sometimes door-to-door leafleting is done. The main mechanism for group learning is through practical action and informal discussions between group members.</p>
2.3 Structure and legal status	Classification of legal form: Unincorporated Association
2.4 Regulations/responsibilities affecting the group/enterprise	<p>Health and Safety and risk assessments when on site are the main responsibilities affecting the group.</p>

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2.5 Forest management objectives and planning procedures	<p>Urban regeneration and greenspace provision are the key objectives of Dane Valley Woods. Thanet is one of the more deprived local authority areas in Kent¹. and has a relatively low canopy cover (just 1.5% compared to an average for English local authorities of around 9%).</p> <p>The formally expressed objectives are detailed in the management plan. The plan was written in conjunction with BTCV. Conservation is the primary aim of the management plan, through replanting and management of the native broadleaf woodland on the derelict site. Education is a key secondary aim: it is intended to turn the site into a place where people can learn about nature, trees and wildlife through the information boards and specific educational activities.</p> <p>The group's constitution follows the template from Green Light Trust. It states the formal objectives of the group as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">3.1 To manage and enhance a naturalistic native broadleaf woodland3.2 To ensure the long-term management of the site for recreation, amenity conservation and educational uses<ul style="list-style-type: none">3.2.1 To facilitate environmental education programmes for local schools and provide a resource for other studies3.3 To create and maintain suitable habitats for the reptiles i.e. a mosaic of long grass, short grass with scrub3.4 To create a sustainable income from the woodland <p>Overall aim of plan: Quality of life</p>
2.6 Implementing the woodland management plan	<p>The volunteers in the community group implements the woodland management plan. At the moment most work is responsive to the immediate needs on site, and much effort is directed towards achieving a high survival rate of the planted saplings. Consequently much effort is directed at weeding and managing the encroaching undergrowth.</p> <p>Thanet District Council is required to remove any dangerous trees or branches. It is also their responsibility to mow two metres either side of the main tarmac path.</p> <p>Faunal surveys have been done by Kent Reptile and Amphibian Group, Kent Field Club and Canterbury Christ Church University.</p>

¹ http://www.thanet.gov.uk/environment_planning/climate_change_strategy/climate_change_strategy/key_theme_9.aspx,
<http://www.thanet.gov.uk/pdf/V10.pdf>.

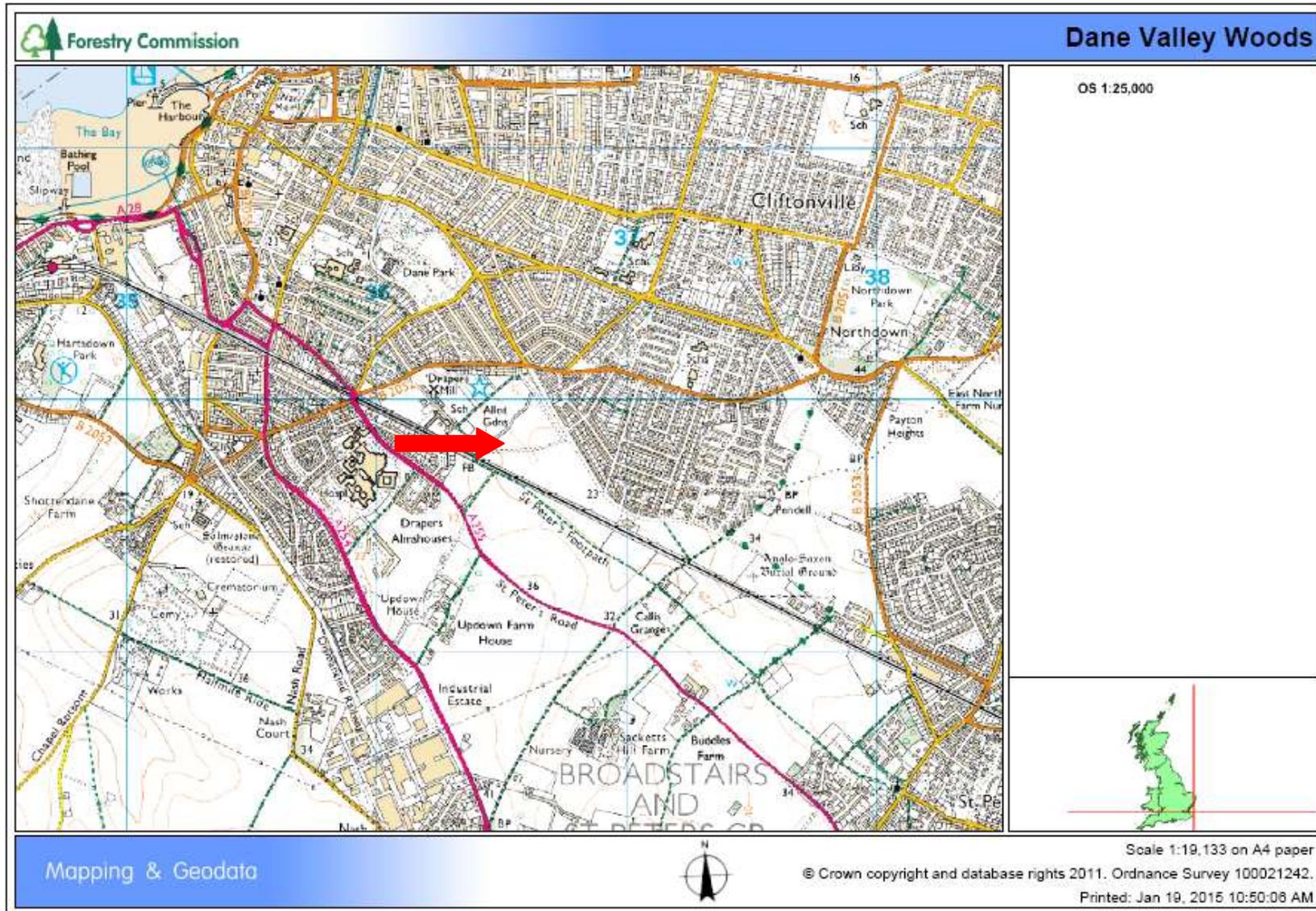
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2.7 Business/ operating model and sustainability	The group were awarded a £10,000 Big Lottery Grant in 2008, which has now been spent. The funds went towards establishing an on-site office in an old shipping container, extending the site and finding ways to increase the sustainability and organisation of the group. The group lacks other sources of revenue at present. There is no membership fee, and the level of community support locally means that fundraising amongst the local population presents a challenge.
2.8 Benefit distribution rules	There are no woodland products being produced. Benefits remain at the level of public enjoyment of the site.
3. External linkages	
3.1 Partnerships and agreements	<p>The group is affiliated to the Green Light Trust, and pay a yearly fee for this. The purpose of the Greenlight Trust is to support people to improve their own health and well-being through environmental and conservation activities that all take place outdoors. This relationship was pivotal in gaining a group constitution, and advice.</p> <p>The group have also had a close relationship with BTCV, who hosted a part time coordinator post funded by Thanet District Council to reinvigorate the group. Since the funding for this stopped, they have lost touch with BTCV. The group have established contact with the Kent Wildlife Trust, which is attributed to changes in post holders at the Wildlife Trust.</p>
3.2 Associations	The group has some contact with one newly formed community woodland group, Friends of Montefiore woods in Ramsgate. There is one other similar group in Broadstairs, Friends of Mocket wood, but contact with both is infrequent despite approaches being made.
4. Resources	
4.1 Forest /woodland	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Size: about 5 hectares • Location: Dane Valley Road just off the B2052 and adjacent to the Windmill Community Allotment site, in the centre of Margate • Access: There is access via Dane Valley Road and also via a cycle path accessed via St Peter’s Footpath • Soil type and site potential: The site is a former landfill that has been capped with topsoil. A contaminated land survey showed that there is nothing toxic.

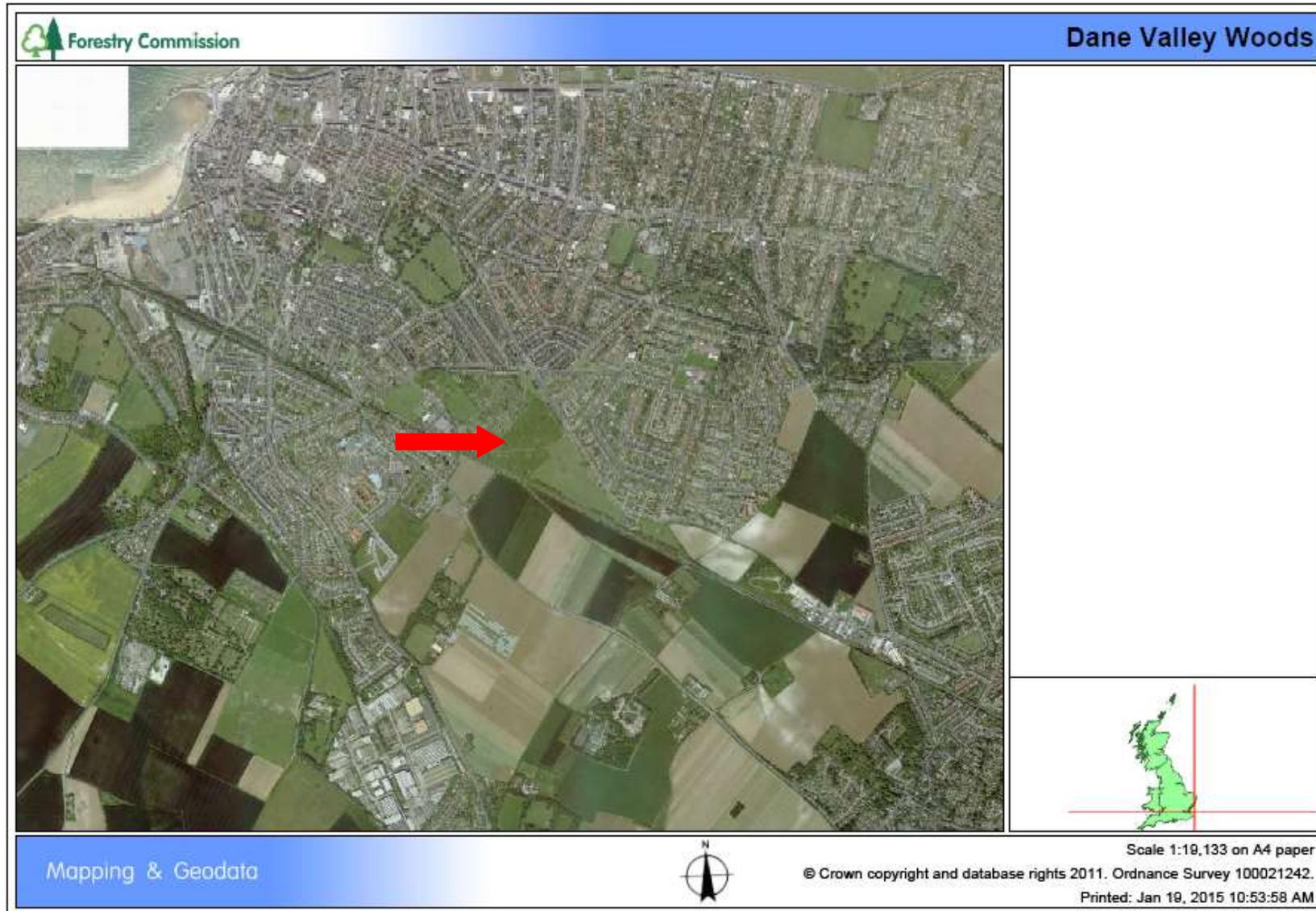
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Species mix: Most native tree species are represented including: sweet chestnut, ash, hazel and oak • Age of stands and major operations: The first planting took place in 2003 and 4000 saplings have been planted since then. • General mix of management compartments: two main areas A and B. • Features: The amenity areas are rough grassland, glades and brambles at present. A wild flower meadow has been planted. • Classification of woodland type: Broadleaved (young trees) • Outline management history: Tree planting, bramble clearance, wildflower sowing. No pruning has been done on the existing trees and the density of planting in the ash grove seemed very close but there is a reluctance to thin as this area has the most trees so far. • General condition of woodland: the scrub is head height and the planted trees are not yet protruding above this. There are a few self-seeded trees that do stand out. The site was a former landfill and was capped with a clay layer some years before the group took over management of the site. There are a few self-seeded trees that could be 20 years old at most. A toxicity study has been done on the land with no major issues arising. The south area, closest to the railway line boundary, has the lowest levels of contamination. • Biodiversity information – A range of biodiversity data have been collected including: hummingbird hawk moth, wasp spiders, viviparous lizard, and a range of notable flora or fauna species have been recorded.
4.2 Woodland and group funding sources	<p>The saplings for planting are usually sourced free of charge. The Woodland Trust have provided some, as well as Groundwork UK.</p>
4.3 Knowledge, skills, human and social capital	<p>People within the group share their won professional and acquired knowledge about environmental management. For example, one regular volunteer works for a well-established countryside partnership and is viewed as the most knowledgeable in the group. The group have all learnt to look for signs of Chalara (Ash dieback). Silvicultural knowledge is held at a basic level among members of the group, and there is a management plan in place that guides overall work.</p>

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Change Narrative

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

The group was founded in 2002 after two local individuals (a Tree Warden and a teacher) were inspired by what they learnt about the Green Light Trust (GLT) in Suffolk. They thought they might be able to establish a local project themselves. After getting in touch with the GLT the founders were assisted into forming a group, generate local interest, and to find a site they could (**informal enjoyment to group formation**). After several rounds of discussion between GLT and about 22 local residents with an interest in the idea, as well as a representative from the District Council, the site chosen to take forward as a community woodland was a former landfill site with no existing mature trees. The location on the edge of a deprived area in Margate was also felt to be suited to the aims of urban regeneration and improving environmental quality in areas of need. The site is marked in the local plan as part of a green wedge between urban development and the railway line. After deciding on a site the group was constituted as a branch of the Northdown Community Association (NCA). This association no longer exists and Dane Valley Woods now has its own separate constitution.

The group began their work by organising regular working parties, and winter planting events to attract local people onto the site, and by holding regular meetings of the steering committee (**group formation to active management**). A pivotal moment of change arose in 2008/2009 when the group found it hard to keep momentum going. The steering committee members dropped down to just three. This was below the constitutional minimum. It was also proving hard to arrange regular workdays and drum up the attendance needed to make them successful. The GLT came to offer additional support. The GLT also stepped in when the group was losing heart and helped find a way forward. The GLT developed a code of practice with the group to guide them in the way they conducts themselves and their relationships with stakeholders. In addition GLT arranged a meeting was with Thanet District Council to discuss ways forward, after which the Council agreed to fund a three-year part time post through the BTCV to move the project forward. Fortunately for the group, the individual appointed had a lot of experience with voluntary groups as well as a host of practical ideas to get the project up and running again. The individual appointed went on to help secure a £10,000 grant from the Big Lottery Fund. These funds were spent on improving the long-term sustainability of the group and its capacity to run smoothly. A website was set up to ease the organisation of regular work parties. New tools were purchased, information boards erected and the headquarters improved in order to accommodate visitors and volunteers.

These efforts continue today. Even though membership levels and volunteering levels fluctuate, a core group of volunteers manage to maintain a level of activity on the site which maintains the existing trees and continues to plant new trees.

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

Facilitating factors

- The **support of the Green Light Trust (GLT)** was pivotal in launching the group, and again later in providing momentum it when it was stalling.
- The **funding of a regular post holder** (although this was only paid around 40 days a year)
- Securing a **large lottery grant** to reinvigorate the group.

Barriers and Challenges

- The **lack of manpower** is the main challenge in terms of running the group, maintaining working parties and finding a way to develop the group sustainably.
- **Low levels of engagement with the local community** presents a challenge to sustainability. The group feel that engagement with a broader cross section of the community might help dissipate some of the problems of vandalism and littering. The **lack of manpower to conduct direct outreach activities** such as door-to-door leaflet dropping, which has been successful in some areas acts as a barrier.
- Because of **vandalism** following the first large planting event, there has been a period when planting was conducted "by stealth", making small clearings in the scrub and planting trees where they are not too obvious.
- Due to the **poor condition of the soil**, being a clay cap on top of a former landfill, the trees are growing slower than hoped and some are still overgrown by scrub. As a result, passers by are not able to witness progress on the project.
- **Difficulties in raising the group's profile**, attributable in part to the lack of visible progress, work parties being monthly rather than weekly, and lack of involvement by local organisations and schools in the project, were all seen as factors hindering project progress.
- **No security of tenure** has been a barrier in the past and has limited group activities. There are now plans for a secure 5 year lease. GLT have supported the group in their approaches to the Council to negotiate a formal lease or a formal

management agreement to secure the long-term use of the site. The difficulties and restrictions surrounding public liability around landfill sites appear to have been a barrier to progress, but the group are confident these barriers have been overcome.

3. Evolution of income

No information

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

The site is a former landfill so there were no benefits before group involvement.

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

The group have planted in the region of 4000 trees and sown seeds for a wildflower meadow. The scrub that has grown of its own accord shows quite a variety of flora, but there is an issue with brambles overtaking and much of the group's work is to keep this from spreading further.

The members of the group clearly benefit from the social aspect of working together, with regular contact between the same individuals. The group have made a headquarters/storage site on the neighbouring allotment providing a space where the group can go and share a cup of tea at the end of work sessions. This has strengthened the social aspect of the group.

As yet there are some tangible benefits to the wider community of the community woodland, including a substantial number of trees being planted, mown paths and better access to the area. The group feel that if work continues the site could become of important recreational benefit. Thanet is an area where there is a marked shortage of trees and wooded sites, so within a wider

context this site is significant². There are no obvious dis-benefits from group activities because the Council lacked resources to plant trees and manage the area.

Time Period	Owner/Manager	Objectives / Benefits (and evidence)	Major operations	Access and use rights
2003 to 2013	Thanet Council with community group management	Site regeneration	Tree planting Removal of litter and encroaching weeds	PROW/Cycle Path

6. Future plans

It is stipulated in the Green Light Trust code of practice that the steering group should: "endeavour to secure ownership of the land or to acquire legal rights therein for the community". The application for a formal lease management agreement is actively being renegotiated with the council.

Thanks to the lottery grant the group is well equipped with tools although one member suggested a brush cutter would speed up scrub clearance, although acquiring the relevant safety certificate would be a barrier at present.

² http://www.thanet.gov.uk/environment_planning/climate_change_strategy/climate_change_strategy/key_theme_9.aspx,

2. 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)
2002 Jan	An inception meeting with a talk by Green Light Trust chairman.	INFORMAL ENJOYMENT to GROUP FORMATION	Two local individuals had been inspired by the work of the Green Light Trust to initiate the meeting to see potential for a community woodland site in Thanet.			
2002 Feb	The group was constituted and code of practice adopted.	GROUP FORMATION to DECISION MAKING	To influence management of the woodland.		First actions undertaken, re-establish hedgerow along railway line.	
2003 /4	First winter planting: November: A design day was held February: Community planting day.	CONSULTATION and ACTIVE ENGAGEMENT	Within hours of planting many of trees had been pulled out by local vandals. Tree planting 'by stealth' was adopted to avoid vandalism.	40 people attended design day.	Many saplings vandalised within hours of planting.	

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2004/5	The group were offered allotment plots by Thanet District council to become the headquarters and storage for the group.	ACTIVE ENGAGEMENT, DECISION MAKING, FULL MANAGEMENT		This strengthened the social core of the group.	Tools were able to be stored safely, so better tools used.	Strengthened ability of group to draw new members in and maintain their interest.
2008/9	Group began to stall. Steering committee dropped below quorate of 4.		The green light Trust facilitated a meeting with Thanet District Council. Funding was secured for a 3 year part time post to support the group	Website set up and facebook, twitter to make organising monthly work parties easier.	Monthly work parties resumed.	A successful application was made to Big Lottery Fund for £10,000
2010-present	Lottery funding facilitates better equipment and enhancement of headquarters			New volunteers recruited and maintained, enlarging the steering group and introducing new skills and capabilities.	The group establishes a track record of event delivery, leading to the award of free trees from national schemes such as The Big Tree Plant.	The group becomes self financing, with a greater capability to carry out fund-raising events