



# The role of woodlands in (re-)defining places

RSN – 25-05-17

Chester



SWA is a membership charity that exists to help those who own or manage small woodlands to play more of a part in their communities through -

- Addressing the neglect of woodland management
- Facilitating the realisation of the potential of woodlands

# The role of woodlands in (re-)defining places

- Why woodlands matter & why management matters
- Some background history, decline, current situation
- What the benefits are and could be further
- Some examples
  - Redefining waste, Coppice, Health and wellbeing
- What is needed to realise the potential
- What the Small Woods Association does

# Why woodlands matter & why management matters

- Woodlands are part of the sense of place for nearly every community in Britain.
- However, All our woodlands are “artificial” to some extent and in transition to some sort of dynamic equilibrium
- The “wild wood” was the result of millennia of development – we are now trying to get to the steady state much quicker
- When woods are often neglected,
  - they lose their management cycle,
  - their potential is un-realised and then
  - key characteristics and functions are lost

# What is a small wood

- Small is not just about size, tends to indicate:
- Non-economic, or non-viable for forestry purposes for reasons of:
  - Location – proximity to population, e.g., urban and urban fringe woods
  - Complexity – access, ground conditions, slopes, designation
  - Objectives – owners objectives are non-economic, e.g., for wildlife, etc..
  - Size – below 10 ha?

# The Wildwood

- 7000 years ago, post last Ice Age
- Lowland Britain 80-90% woodland
- Lime was dominant species over wide areas
- Oak was a minor species
- Management has favoured oak over other species for millenia
- Process of clearance and management started from earliest times

# Beginning of human influence

- Clearance of woodland for farmland, leading to drop in woodland cover to 10% by 1000BC
- Beginning of woodland management



Coppiced hazel walkway in the Isle of Wight – 2800 BCE  
We have been coppicing a long time!

# Our Heritage of Woodland Management

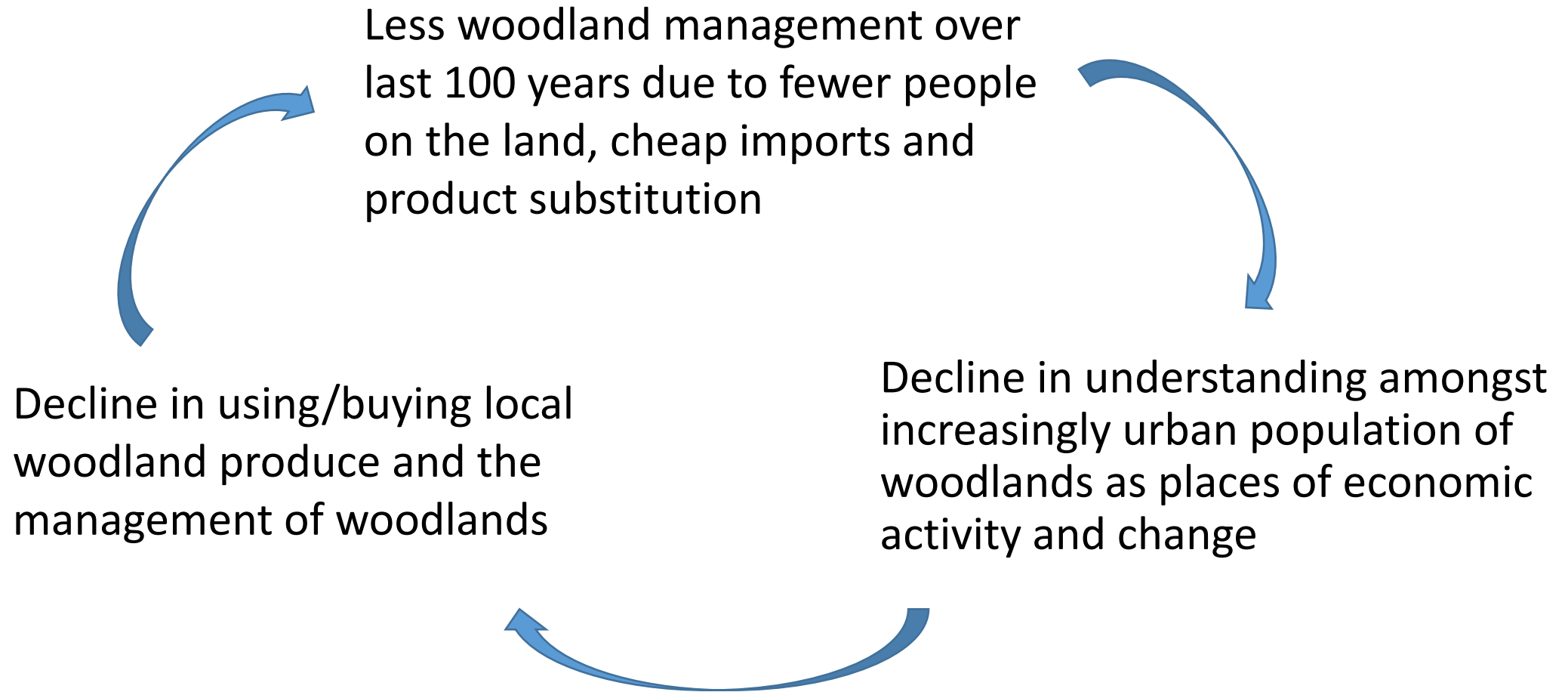
- Coppice with standards - predominant management system across lowland Britain until 20<sup>th</sup> century
- Oak standards over hazel coppice
- Met many of the day to day needs of local communities – fuel, building materials, household products – common rights
- Oliver Rackham's work in Suffolk – most building timber < 20 years old
- Industrial role – iron in Weald and Forest of Dean; brick and pottery production in Midlands



# 19/20<sup>th</sup> Century - Decline in management of native woods.....

- Coal replaced wood for industrial uses, and domestic fuel
- Globalisation – cheap imports of timber and wood products
- Fewer people employed on the land – often woodland management was the winter activity of agricultural workers
- Coppice now at 2% of former extent a century ago
- First World War

# Spiral of decline in “Woodland culture”



# The Twentieth Century

- Woodland cover in England had fallen to 5% by 1900
- Those woodlands that survived were those that retained a value to the owner, or were on poor soils or inaccessible
- Creation of the Forestry Commission in 1919 to develop a strategic resource stimulated a rise to 9.9% in 2010, with England's most wooded county, Surrey, having 22% cover
- However – most of this increase has been conifers and little has been done to bring native woodland into management – so a split has emerged between managed softwood and unmanaged broadleaves
- It doesn't have to be that way

# Woodlands in England

- Total woodland area 1,302,000ha



Broadleaved 962,000ha



Conifers 339,000ha

# Key facts 1

- Only 55% of woodlands as a whole are managed, but as the coniferous woodlands tend to be more frequently managed the figure for broadleaved woodlands is much lower
- 100% of FC woodlands managed, so figure for privately owned woods are much lower.
- Larger broadleaved woodlands more likely to be managed than smaller sites.

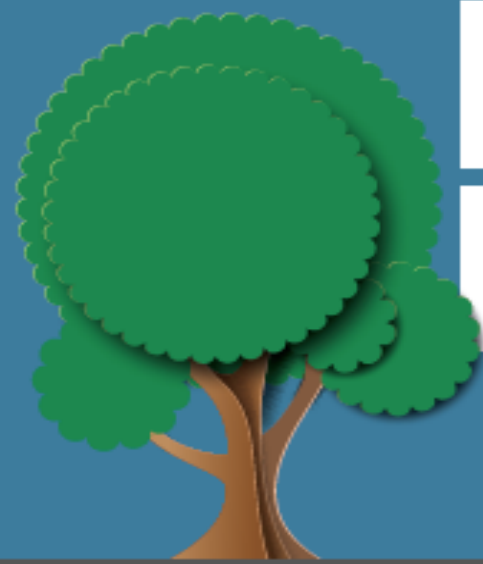
# Key Facts 2

- The area of woodland in the UK at 31 March 2016 is 3.16 million hectares.
- This represents 13% of the total land area in the UK, 10% in England, 15% in Wales, 18% in Scotland and 8% in Northern Ireland.
- 75% of all woodlands are between 0.1 and 2ha
- 93% of timber and timber products used in the UK are imported
- Annual increment 7.1MT, Harvested at present 2.9MT, Unutilised 4.2MT (59%) - this is mostly hardwoods



## Fact 2

**The value of a tree standing provides around 30 times more in recreational benefit and carbon and pollution removal, than it would provide if cut down for timber.**



Value as timber

Value as a tree

# Barriers to management

- Decline in 'wood culture'
- Owner attitudes
- Parcels from small woodlands too small for economic sale
- Periodic changes in grant regime
- Lack of appropriate advice
- Low numbers of reliable contractors
- Owner turnover
- Lack of access to reliable knowledge and intelligence
- Decline in control of deer and squirrels



Some examples where the role of woodlands is being re-defined

# Coppice

- Active management capable of producing a wide range of products
- Good for wildlife – mammals (e.g., dormice), flora and birds are all more plentiful
- Good for people – active woodland engagement, volunteering opportunities, health and wellbeing opportunities of the woodland environment
- Coppice restoration is feasible, but expensive and manually intensive work – good subject for volunteer engagement

# A managed Coppice stool



# Neglected coppice stool



Coppice  
management  
Releasing  
biodiversity  
potential



# Faggots case study

- Smallest diameter hazel branches traditionally not used for hurdles, bean poles, etc..
- Can be bundled into faggots (or fascines)
- Wide variety of uses in construction, e.g., railways and roads across soft ground
- River bank revetment work
- Role of Small Woods to coordinate

# Faggot press



Faggots to  
go





# Wood mobilisation

- Research underway across Europe into improving the “productivity” of woodland management
- Diversifying the products
- Increasing the efficiency of extraction
- Promoting the role of cooperation
  - Shared forester
  - Community woodlanders
- Promoting the role of small scale equipment

# Branches and tops

- Swedish forestry runs on similar narrow margins to UK
- Large amount of material regarded as waste
- “discovered” branches and tops can be used in energy stream and are now a substantial proportion of the feedstock for CHP /District Heating
- Co-fired with domestic waste, including waste imported from UK

# Health and Wellbeing

- Health benefits of being in woodlands well evidenced
  - Direct effects of exercise and social effects reducing loneliness
  - Additional psychological benefits of calming influence
  - Evidence of chemical interactions
- Population is becoming increasingly sedentary and increasingly exhibit “health risk behaviours” – 58% of adults overweight, 22% obese
- Growing numbers survive serious health episodes, so increasing need for recuperation – green gyms
- Poor health outcomes – closely linked to income levels & poverty reduction
- Legal framework encourages health outcomes from non-clinical sources (e.g., Wales – Social Services & Wellbeing Act and Wellbeing of future generations Act)

# Mental health and wellbeing

- The MIND group in Aberystwyth's involvement with their woodland environment started off with a regular drop in session that helped the initial crucial step of building trust.
- Group members signed up for woodland based activity sessions, this over time grew to become a committed group of attendees.
- Attendance started to build and attendees recreated the drop in environment by exporting a big red sofa into the woods, which became a comedy prop and helped to break the ice.
- The group has built strong bonds of trust, and provides activities that really help the participants, with those involved reporting they feel less stressed, less tired and also pride in the things they produce.

# Educational inclusion

- In a more recent development, we have started working with schools to provide targeted woodland based interventions for young people at risk of permanent exclusion.
- Programmes typically provide a day a week outside the classroom environment where the young people are able to let off steam, learn new skills and find a new direction.
- The majority are then successfully reintegrated back into the classroom and the painful, disruptive and expensive route of permanent exclusion is averted.

# Community woodlanders

Community Woodlanders are:

- A Trusted local woodland practical practitioner and mentor. The local 'go to' person for advice and services.
- A co-ordinator within a landscape. Helping to co-ordinate pest control, sharing machinery, building capacity and supply chains.
- Highly skilled in all aspects of sustainable woodland management including practical woodland management and social forestry.
- Business entrepreneurs able to communicate effectively throughout the sector and develop a new rural business model.

# Shared Forester

- A woodland manager/forester who manages a number of small woodlands that would be uneconomic otherwise
- Identifies markets
- Guarantees prices
- Vets and manages contractors & can then guarantee work on a cycle
- Engages community and social uses

# What is needed so that Small Woodlands can contribute to re-defining places

- Local marketing and sales
- Provision of advice to owners and managers
- Owners and managers working together – combining parcels of timber for sale, sharing/joint hiring of kit and use of contractors, peer learning, certification
- Enlightened local administrations
- Promote Social Forestry as a business
- Recognise the role that Social Enterprise/Community Woodlands can play
- Practical training and skills development to grow the contractor base
- Key to economic management of small woodlands is flexibility
- Wood fuel promotion

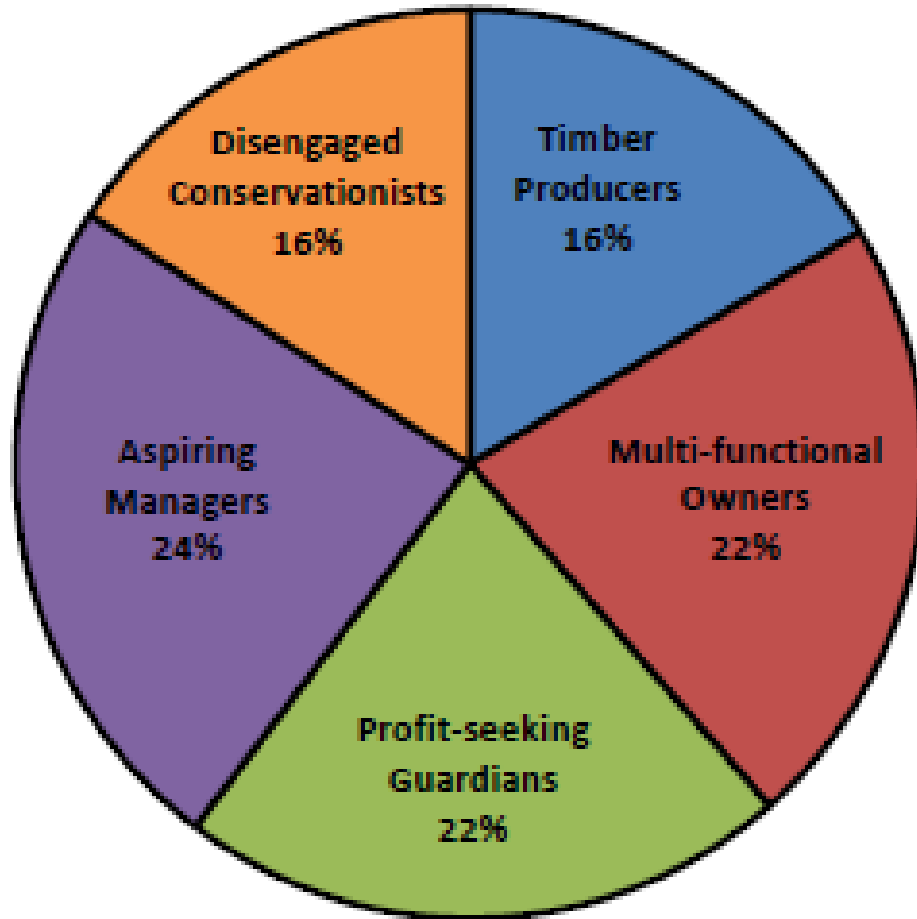


About woodland owners

# Small Woodland Ownership

- Who? – retired, city bonuses, families, craftspeople, environmentalists, farmers, communities, councils
- Why? – income, in-kind benefits (woodfuel, building), wildlife, non-timber business (eg social forestry, courses, forest school), family enjoyment, hobbies
- Woodlotting
- Farm woodlands
- Community woodlands

# Segmentation study 2014



(All owners of woodland, not just small woodlands)

[http://randd.defra.gov.uk/Document.aspx?Document=12513\\_VolumeThree-Woodlandmanagementsegmentation.pdf](http://randd.defra.gov.uk/Document.aspx?Document=12513_VolumeThree-Woodlandmanagementsegmentation.pdf)

# Segmentation study 2014

	1. Timber Producers	2. Multi-functional Owners	3. Profit-seeking Guardians	4. Aspiring Managers	5. Disengaged Conservationists
Level of management	Very high; most likely to have undertaken all types of management	High; majority have a written plan	High; but yet to make a profit - trying diverse activities	Very Low; relatively new to ownership compared to the other segments and are not yet managing	Very low; do not believe in management
% with a felling licence and/or grant – i.e. captured by FC Grants and Regulations	90%	80%	77%	40%	35%
% woodlands represented by a manager / agent	90%	25%	32%	19%	14%
Motives	Breaking even and to pass down through generations	Profit and to provide other private and social benefits; enjoy owning, sharing with family and owners wish to pass to future generations	Trying to make a profit; wildlife and personal amenity are also important	Not expecting to make a profit; relatively low value put on habitat, wildlife, landscape; not important to pass down generations	Escape from everyday life; wildlife and landscape is important

Conclusions

# Why do we need better managed small woodlands?

- Jobs and Growth – direct economic benefit
  - Potential for local jobs – rural, peri-urban and urban
  - Economic benefits – from planting, management, harvesting, processing, manufacture, use
- Socio-economic – indirect economic benefit
  - Well managed woods have also benefit recreation and landscape, health and well being
- Environment and Sustainability –
  - Timber miles
  - Carbon balance
  - Biodiversity
- ‘The wood that pays is the wood that stays’

# What benefits do Small Woods bring

- Environmental
  - often sites that have high environmental values
  - small woods adjacent to settlements often high amenity value
  - Unmanaged and Under managed woodlands tend to deliver fewer benefits for the environment, let alone social and economic benefits
- Social
  - Proven benefits for health and wellbeing – Actif Woods Wales
  - Increasing interest in making and growing
- Economic
  - Potential for jobs and self employment
  - Direct and indirect value of small woodlands
  - Skills development – develop the contractor base
  - Social forestry as a business

# Conclusion

- There are many ways our woods could be better managed and many functions for which they are suited and are that are currently unexploited
- Post Brexit opportunities exist for a fresh look at land management objectives and incentives
- With the right incentives and the right motivation, Britain's native woodlands could form part of economic land management once again
- Councils at all levels can play a part, driving demand for woodlands to play a more dynamic part in the local (particularly, but not exclusively) rural economy



# About the Small Woods Association



SWA is a membership charity that exists to help those who own or manage small woodlands to play more of a part in their communities through -

- Addressing the neglect of woodland management
- Facilitating the realisation of the potential of woodlands



## **Objectives**

- To increase the sustainable management of small woodlands
- To promote the wider utilisation of local timber and wood products

## **Who are our members?**

- 2200 members
- +/- 30,000ha of woodland
- Wide range of members, with a wide range of objectives

# Benefits of Membership

- A copy of our 70 page Small Woods Information Pack, packed full of useful information for both those new to woodland ownership and others who are more experienced.
- Opportunities to meet other woodland owners and managers at woodland events, look at other members woodlands and learn more about all aspects of woodland management
- Our well respected quarterly magazine, Smallwoods
- Access to the members area of our website
- Access to our Telephone Information Line, for queries relating to all aspects of woodland ownership and management
- Annual programme of events and visits for members
- The opportunity to attend our annual conference
- A discount on all Small Woods courses
- Mentor scheme
- The benefit of our policy work and input to forums at all levels.
- Community Woodland members – half day advisory visit

# Other Small Woods activities

- Supply Chain development, e.g., Small Woodland mobilisation, Support for coppice sector
- Social forestry – Actif Woods in Wales, Educational inclusion in England
- Learning Pathways - Training & Apprenticeships
- Research – SIMWOOD in Scotland
- National voice – alliances, e.g., with Woodland Trust
- Heartwoods, Woodland Initiatives Network, Coppice Products

# Membership Offer

- For the next 2 weeks attendees at the conference and RSN members are entitled to half price membership
- Corporate membership - £55
- Community Woodland membership - £20
- Thank you!