

Friends of King's Wood Kent, England



A Friends of Group working with the Forestry Commission to enhance the conservation and recreation values of a large (607 Hectare) ancient woodland

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: King's Wood, Challock
Map ref: TR 026 498
Webpage: <http://www.friendsofkingswood.org>
Date of profile: August 2013
Resources: Site visit, interview

1. Institutional context (in August 2013)

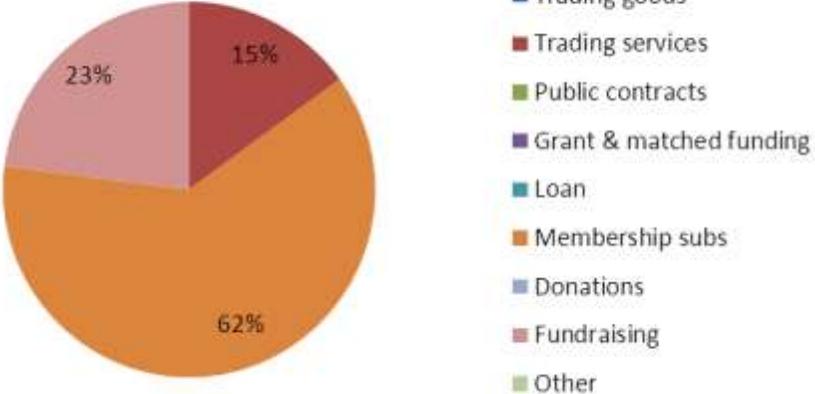
1.1 Ownership of the woodland(s)	<p>King's Wood is largely owned and managed by Forest Enterprise (FE), some parts of the woodland block are in private ownership. The Friends of King's Wood activities cover the area owned by the Forestry Commission (FC).</p> <p>Classification of tenure: Informal agreement (public)</p>
1.2 Access and use rights to the woodland(s)	<p>The Friends of King's Wood (FoKW) do have formal permit agreements to undertake wildlife/ecological studies with Forest Enterprise (i.e. the part of the Forestry Commission that manages the Public Forest Estate). FoKW also seeks agreement each year, from FE, to hold their Walks & Events programme in the forest which enables the FC to advise of any dates/permits that might clash with the Friends' activities.</p>
1.3 Regulations/responsibilities affecting the woodland(s)	<p>The woodland is managed to UK Forest Standard, and FoKW have responsibilities with regard to Health and Safety legislation and continuous risk assessment when in the forest under the terms of their public liability insurance. There are no formal management responsibilities taken by the group. Their Walks & Events are led by some highly qualified, respected and licensed leaders with the programme being based on the natural enjoyment of the forest environs and its wildlife.</p>

2. Internal organisation of the group/enterprise	
2.1 Group members, representation and decision making	<p>Membership of FoKW is open to anybody who wants to join. The group describes themselves as “enjoy[ing] a happy and co-operative liaison with the King's Wood management and key user groups, acting as the voice of the community in decision making.”</p> <p>Anybody with an interest in King’s Wood is invited to join. Many members are local, but some members come from as far as Blackheath and Dover. There is an annual membership fee for individual members (£5.50) and joint/families (£11). This entitles members to events news, e-mail reminders and free access to events. For those people who are not members but take part in activities there is an on the day donation of £3.00.</p> <p>FoKW recognise three different kinds of people that they represent: enthusiastic members who like to come along to every walk and event: people who are members or pay on the day taking part in selective events – this could include people drawn by their particular interests such as nightjar enthusiasts; and a smaller group of people who simply think that FoKW is “a good thing” and want to perpetuate King’s Wood as a working forest. The Friends act to represent the interests of all these members and supporters, and will act as a pressure group should the threat of development to the woodland site arise again. More recently FoKW acted as an FC consultee when the ownership/management of the Public Forest Estate was under debate. The committee comprises a Chairman, Secretary (currently vacant), Treasurer, ordinary members and a representative from the FC, Kentish Stour Countryside Partnership (KSCP) and Stour Valley Arts (SVA). The committee meets at least six times a year and holds an AGM at which the audited accounts are presented. The key aims for the year are agreed at the AGM. The detail of the events and funding proposals (currently for the restoration of two leaking ponds in KW) are discussed at the committee meetings. More recently, new staff at the FC and SVA have taken a more active part in the committee. The KSCP is a more regular participant. SVA has now moved into Ashford, but it allows FoKW to use the Forest Studio, when not occupied for a residency, for committee meetings. There are about 50 paid community members and more than 60 “pay on the day” supporters. Even though there is a wider community membership, participation in the AGM can be limited, like so many other Friends’ activities, by the weather and interest in the topic of the guest speaker.</p>
2.2 Communication	<p>One person undertakes the publicity to the six parishes and their magazines covering the forest area, as well as local newspaper articles and posters. There is also a website and a Facebook site. The Friends stall</p>

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<p>and learning processes</p>	<p>at local fairs and fetes , such as the annual Goose Fair in the village of Challock, keeps community awareness of the group alive and its free children's competitions, when on average 150 prizes are won, are very popular. Group emails are also used to let members know about events and to communicate about the AGM and the renewal of annual subscriptions. There is an annual fundraising countryside quiz, loosely based on the forest, which acts as a fundraiser for printing the annual Walks & Events leaflet.</p> <p>The wide ranging annual programme of 15-18 Walks & Events is based on the forest environs and wildlife. Walk leaders very generously share their extensive knowledge and skills, presenting these in a way that is meaningful to each group, that can range from families with young children through to mature people.</p>
<p>2.3 Structure and legal status</p>	<p>The group is an informal (unincorporated) body, but has a legally drawn up and approved constitution outlining the aims and objectives of FoKW. The group has considered becoming a charity but could not see any advantages from doing so considering that they neither own nor lease any building and their few items of equipment are valued at a few hundreds of pounds. They consider themselves, as their name suggests, to be a "group of friends, a friendly club with a shared interest in the preservation of the (working) forest, its environs and wildlife".</p> <p>FoKW have a bank account and follow Charity Commission advice to have two signatories on cheques, with income and expenditure being audited on an annual basis for presentation at the AGM, after which they are published on their website in their annual AGM minutes.</p> <p>Classification of legal form: Unincorporated Association</p>
<p>2.4 Regulations/ responsibilities affecting the group/ enterprise</p>	<p>Very few – Legally drawn up constitution, public liability insurance (held through TCV) and risk assessments/health and safety of participants at events. FC byelaws.</p>
<p>2.5 Forest management objectives and planning</p>	<p>The Friends of King's Wood exists to support the protection, preservation and improvement of King's Wood for the benefit of wildlife and of the public as a recreational area. There is no formal agreement involving FoKW as manager or implementers. The group's aims are to raise interest in the woods, share expertise, give visitors a voice and to encourage liaison between visitors and forest managers. This involves the group in the organisation of its 15 -18 events each year – please see their website for the full list on</p>

<p>procedures</p>	<p>www.friendsofkingswood.org The group have in the past asked to see a management plan specific to King's Wood, to support their grant applications to restore two leaking ponds but have been told that there isn't one. However, they were able include materials on ponds and biodiversity from the FC and Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) Management Plan.</p> <p>Overall aim of plan: Unknown – group aims are conservation and recreation</p>
<p>2.6 Implementing the woodland management plan</p>	<p>Although there is no formal partnership, FoKW make regular financial contributions to KSCP that takes on a leadership role with some of the conservation work, acting as the intermediary to FE. FoKW pays for materials (e.g. bat boxes, owl and dormice boxes). The FoKW obtained an Awards for All grant of £6,400 a few years ago for the design and printing of an information leaflet for visitors in liaison with KSCP and is downloadable from their website www.friendsofkingswood.org . The Friends current project/s are to restore two leaking ponds in the forest.</p>
<p>2.7 Business/ operating model and sustainability</p>	<p>The group raises enough money to cover the costs of running the group, keeping up group visibility, and achieving small scale conservation projects, as above. As such the overall income levels of the group do not exceed more than a few thousand pounds a year. The money raised for the pond restoration projects is ring-fenced to achieve those actions. A small reserve is kept to secure the group. In the 2012/13 financial year, income was as follows:</p> <p><i>Trading services: 15% (running woodland walks and education activities)</i> <i>Membership subscriptions: 62%</i> <i>Fundraising: 23%</i></p>

		<p style="text-align: center;">2013</p>  <table border="1"> <caption>2013 Income Sources</caption> <thead> <tr> <th>Source</th> <th>Percentage</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Trading goods</td> <td>0%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Trading services</td> <td>15%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Public contracts</td> <td>0%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Grant & matched funding</td> <td>0%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Loan</td> <td>0%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Membership subs</td> <td>62%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Donations</td> <td>0%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Fundraising</td> <td>23%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Other</td> <td>0%</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Source	Percentage	Trading goods	0%	Trading services	15%	Public contracts	0%	Grant & matched funding	0%	Loan	0%	Membership subs	62%	Donations	0%	Fundraising	23%	Other	0%	
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<p>2.8 Benefit distribution rules</p>	<p>There are no benefit distribution rules as the FoKW does not own any resources or generate any income for its members. The group operates on approximately £1000 p.a. unless larger grants are secured for particular projects. Income is used to fund conservation activities and to cover the costs of running the group.</p>																						
<p>3. External linkages</p>																							
<p>3.1 Partnerships and agreements</p>	<p>There are no partnerships or formal agreements. Representatives of KSCP, SVA, and Forest Enterprise are able to attend our committee meetings but do not have a vote.</p>																						
<p>3.2 Associations</p>	<p>No associations.</p>																						

4. Resources

4.1 Forest/ woodland

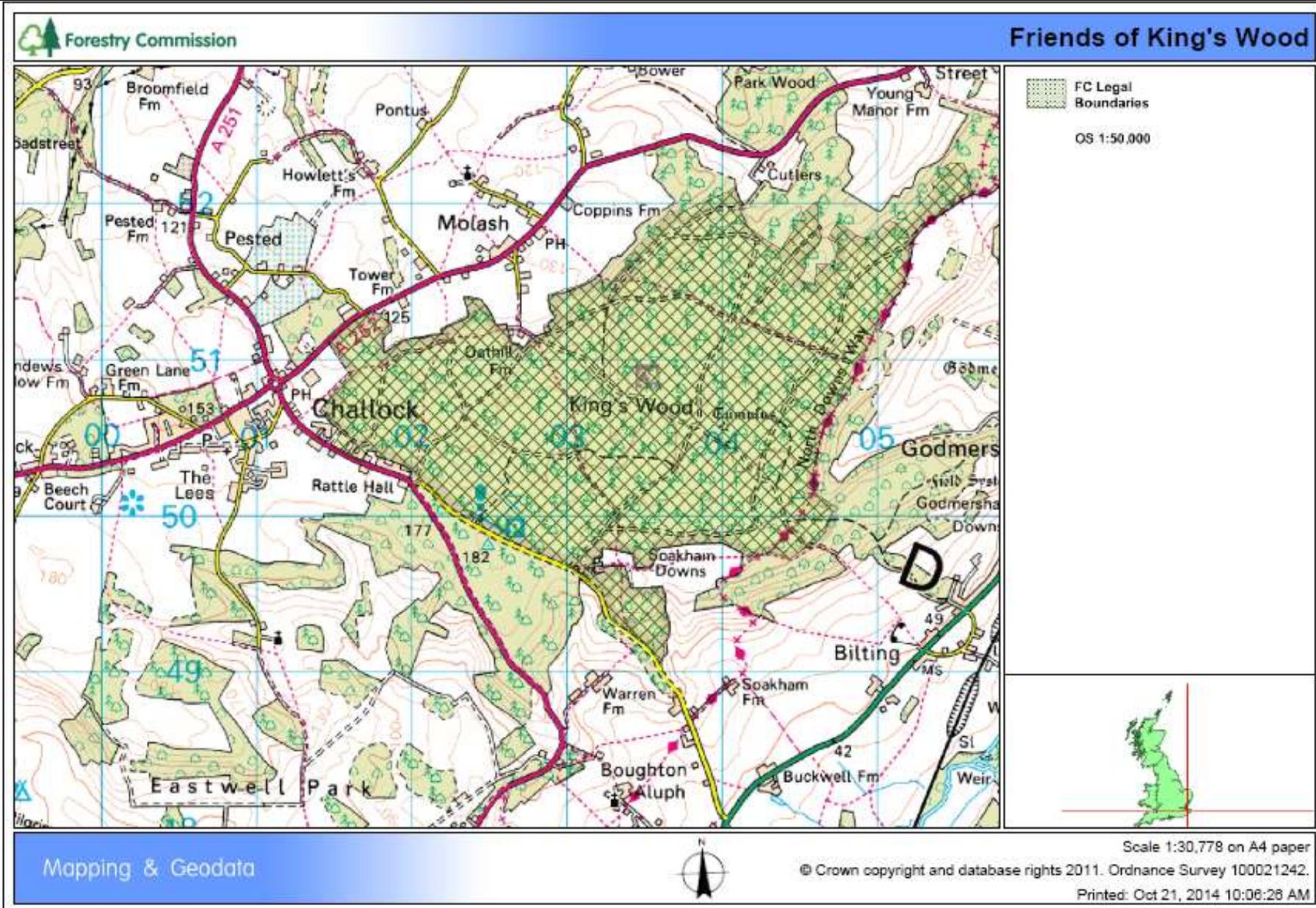
- Size: King's Wood covers 607 hectares – FoKW are active over most of the FC area but there are certain sections of the wood which are privately owned and not accessible.
- Location: King's Wood is an ancient woodland located between the towns of Ashford, Faversham and Canterbury with its main access/car park being south of Challock, Kent in White Hill Road TN25 4AP. It is a prominent landscape feature sitting on the downland ridge.
- Access: The A251, A252, A28 local roads, a number of different car parks and a network of public footpaths provide easy access to the site.
- Soil type and site potential: The soil is slightly acid loamy and clayey soils with impeded drainage over chalk.
- Species mix: This is a commercial woodland with different blocks containing different commercial species and species mixes, including: sweet chestnut, beech, Corsican pine, Douglas fir and yew.
- Major operations: The working woodland has seen periods of planting and felling over the years. Chestnut coppicing was important until the 1980's and has now been re-introduced. More recently the wood has seen restoration of open spaces and heath lands as important management activities.
- Features: mix of forest stands, including a series of ponds and scrapes, deadwood percentage in line with best practice guidance. The wood was well known for its forest art and sculptures (few currently remain), and for fallow deer and nightjars. There are a number of historic features in the woods including prehistoric barrows.
- **Classification of woodland type: Mixed mainly broadleaved with coppice**
- Biodiversity: King's Wood is one of Kent's ancient woodlands and has a diverse range of wildlife and flora, with species assemblages varying according to which management block and habitat type (e.g. heathland, coppice, high beech forest). The wood is particularly well known for fallow deer, nightjars and its swathes of bluebells.

A history of the site has been produced by Jenny Uglow <http://www.jennyuglow.com/?page=Akings>

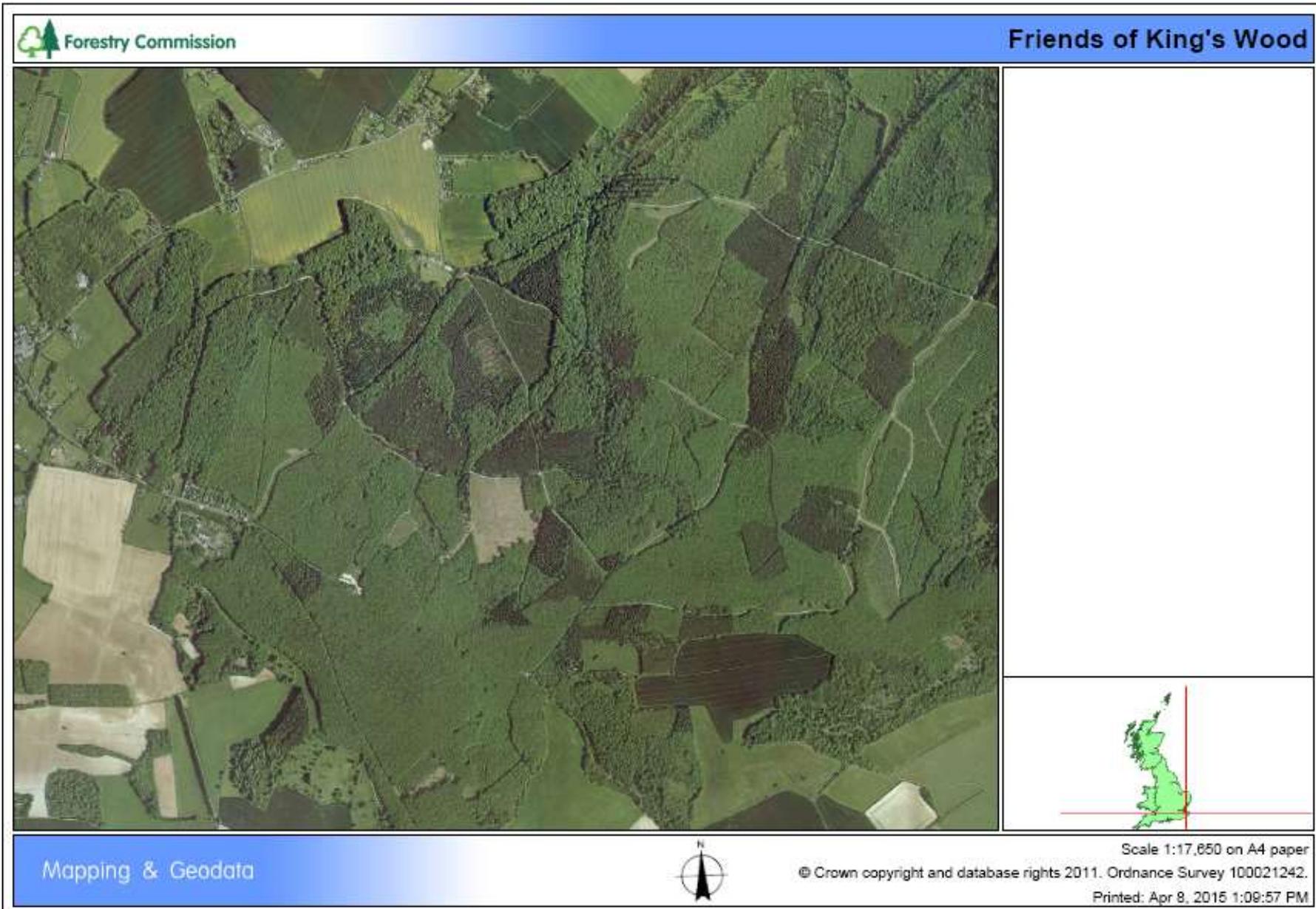
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4.2 Woodland and group funding sources	The Friends seek funding for specific small scale projects. Funding comes through from a range of sources including "Awards for All" Lottery funding, and small grants from Challock Goose Fair
4.3 Knowledge, skills, human and social capital	Professional expertise within the group aids group running, e.g. web manager. The programme of Walks & Events have improved individual members' knowledge of forest ecology as well as benefiting healthy life styles through walking, the ambiance of the forest and the experience of seeing and hearing wildlife that they would not otherwise experience.

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2. Change Narrative

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

A local newspaper cutting reports that in January 1997 local residents gathered in the community hall to discuss changes to the quality of King's Wood. Of primary concern was the increasing amount of litter, dens and other structures spoiling the natural woodland character and the residents' **informal enjoyment**. A series of events such as the great storm of 1987, the closure of the paper pulping works in close-by Gillingham, and changes to the market for Chestnut spiles and other products supplied by King's Wood seemed to put its future as a woodland at risk. The residents were concerned that parts of King's Wood were about to be developed for housing or for something like Center Parcs. It was at this meeting that **group formation** was agreed and the Friends of King's Wood took shape. The overall aims of the group were agreed along with the group structure and elections to the group committee. The committee met a number of times subsequently to discuss and refine further the key objectives of the group and what kind of activities they should become involved in. The FE forester took on an advisory role to FoKW. Four areas of activity were agreed: practical help for the woodlands concentrating on litter picking; management of the car parking during summer rallies; networking with similar groups (the Friends of Chopwell Woods were mentioned as an important model to follow); working to raise money for conservation efforts. The chairmanship changed several times over the years and in about 2007/8 the constitution was updated by the then chairman who was legally qualified. . During the subsequent period FoKW was not as active as it had been with practical events and the opportunity for organising car parking stopped with the demise of rallies in the forest. The Chairman and FoKW have been building up their Walks & Events programme that evolves according to demand and the availability of qualified/licensed leaders.

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

Facilitating factors

- A key issue in evolution has been **the community's perception of threat to the woodland resource**. The fear of woodland loss and degradation has been a key rallying factor and main driver, as and when required, to the evolution and sustainability of the group.

- **Support from Stour Valley Countryside Partnership** has been a route to finding and securing funding for small scale conservation projects within the woodland.

Barriers and Challenges

- Maintaining **numbers of people** willing to take on committee responsibilities
- Increasingly difficult environment to **secure grant funding for projects**

3. Evolution of income

The distribution (%) of group income over different sources for different financial years is shown in the Table below. The lack of major shifts in distribution (and sources) of income indicates a degree of stability in the group's approach and ambitions.

Income source	Financial Year				
	2008/09	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13
Sum of trading		34	1	16	15
Sum of grant & matched funding			88		
Sum of membership subs	80	47	8	62	62
Sum of fund raising	20	19	3	22	23

Source: FoKW annual accounts shown on AGM minutes

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

Time Period	Owner/Manager	Objectives / Benefits (and evidence)	Major operations	Access and use rights
to 1998	Forest Enterprise	Production and commercial management	Felling and restocking, chestnut coppice	PROW

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

Time Period	Owner/Manager	Objectives / Benefits (and evidence)	Major operations	Access and use rights
1998 to 2013	Forest Enterprise with some support from Stour Valley Arts projects and FoKW	Productive woodland management with some conservation management and public access for recreation	As previously with restoration and addition of certain woodland features e.g. open spaces, heath, ponds	PROW

6. Future plans

The Friends of King's Wood are looking to continue their association with Forest Enterprise into the future. They are not looking to expand what they are doing, but wish to work to secure the future of the woodland and maintain public access and conservation values.

3. Engagement and impacts timeline

Year	Event	ENGAGEMENT	Reasons	Changes / Impacts and outcomes Social (evidence)	Changes / Impacts and outcomes Woodland (evidence)	Changes / Impacts and outcomes Financial / Economic (evidence)
1997/98	Threats to woodland see concern from residents	INFORMAL ENJOYMENT to GROUP FORMATION	To safeguard the forest from any unwanted developments and improve conservation	Community cohesion		
1998 onwards	Conservation opportunities realised through small projects	GROUP FORMATION to VOLUNTEERING		Continued involvement of the community in events and FDPs	Some improvements to conservation values	