

# Gordon Community Woodland Trust

## Scottish Borders, Scotland



*Community owned large rural woodland of 85 hectares managed for access and recreation*

# GORDON COMMUNITY WOODLAND TRUST

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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](http://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:

meggrieve@hotmail.com

## 1. Group profile

**Woodland: Gordon Community Woodland, Scottish Borders**  
**Map ref: NT662441**  
**Webpage: [http://www.newcaledonianwoodlands.org/projects/gordon\\_project.php](http://www.newcaledonianwoodlands.org/projects/gordon_project.php)**  
**Date of profile: December 2013**  
**Resources: Management plan, written by Donald McPhillimy and group members**

### 1. Institutional context (in December 2013)

<b>1.1 Ownership of the woodland(s)</b>	Gordon Community Woodland (GCW) is owned by Gordon Community Woodland Trust (GCWT). The woodland was purchased in April 2002 and is held on freehold.  <b>Classification of tenure: Ownership</b>
<b>1.2 Access and use rights to the woodland(s)</b>	It is understood that GCWT owns all the rights pertaining to the woodland. There is responsible public access (by foot, bicycle, horse or canoe) guaranteed by the Scottish Land Reform Act.
<b>1.3 Regulations/responsibilities affecting the woodland(s)</b>	The only legal constraint, other than retaining the woodland as woodland, rests with the Bronze Age earth cairns, which are known to Historic Scotland. Operations in the woodland must not damage these scheduled monuments. The woodland is not certified under UKWAS or PEFC.

### 2. Internal organisation of the group/enterprise

<b>2.1 Group members, representation and decision making</b>	Group membership is open to anybody. Ordinary Members are those resident within the parish of Gordon who pay an annual fee of £2 to the Trust. Others from further afield who wish to become members, may become Associate Members upon payment of an annual fee of £1. Local businesses pay £10 per year. Only Ordinary Members have voting rights. There are around 50 paying members with an additional 100 or so regular users of the woodland.  The community consists of those living within the local parish. The group represents these people as well as the wider community. Decisions are made at meetings of the Management Group, which is attended by 4-9 people, including the office-bearers. There are three Trustees (office bearers) who are elected at the annual general
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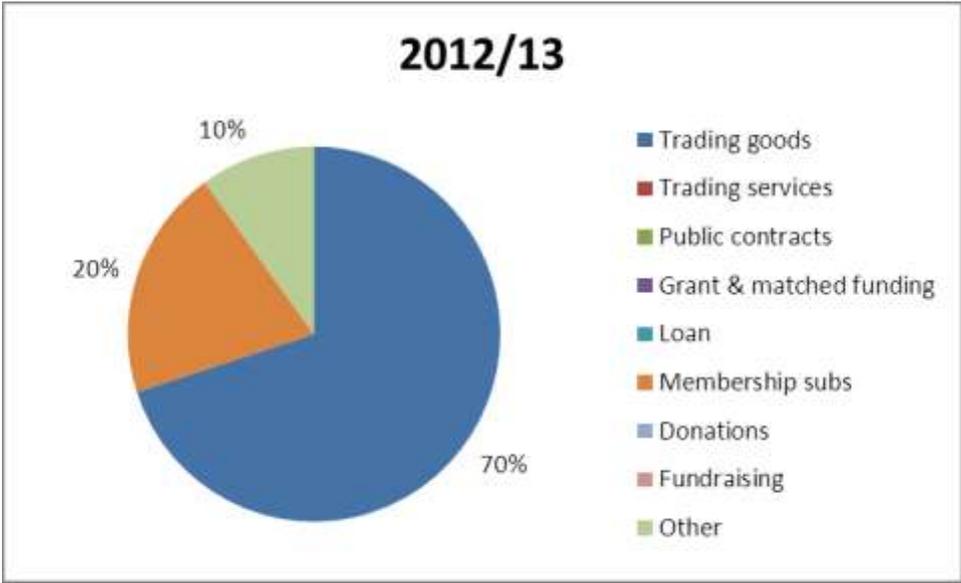
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	meeting. Meetings are open to all. Decisions are generally made through consensus, voting by the members may be used if required, but this rarely happens. There is no quorum for the management group. New members of the Management Group are always welcome.
<b>2.2 Communication and learning processes</b>	<p>The Management Group meets regularly, every 6 weeks or so, in the village hall. Minutes are taken and distributed to members of the group by hand, post and email. A few are left in the cabin in the woods and in the village shop.</p> <p>Occasionally posters are put up in the village and in the wood to promote a particular event such as a fungal foray.</p> <p>The group members are always learning from each other and from visiting experts. All learning is informal, covering such topics as silviculture, plant, fungi, butterfly and bird identification.</p>
<b>2.3 Structure and legal status</b>	<p>GCWT is a company limited by guarantee (SC230069) with charitable status (SC033128). The objective of the Trust is to conserve, regenerate and manage native woodlands in the community of Gordon in Berwickshire, as an important part of Scotland's natural environment for the benefit of the Community in particular and the public generally.</p> <p><b>Classification of legal form: Charitable Company Limited by Guarantee</b></p>
<b>2.4 Regulations/ responsibilities affecting the group/ enterprise</b>	<p>Full accounts are kept, audited and submitted to Companies House and the Office of the Scottish Charitable Regulator (OSCR). In common with many small community woodland groups, the system of financial control appears to be more complex and arduous than it needs to be for such small organisations. This does make recruitment to the Treasurer post more difficult than it could be.</p>
<b>2.5 Forest management objectives and planning procedures</b>	<p>According to the management plan, the woodland management objectives are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sustainable management of predominantly native woodland</li> <li>• Improved access for recreation and education</li> </ul> <p>Management plans have been in place since 2002. At present the current management plan is updated on an annual basis. The original management plan was prepared by Borders Forest Trust (BFT). It is referred to by the Management Group. The woodlands are not FSC certified as there has been little or no timber production to date.</p>

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	<p><b>Overall aim of plan: Public access and recreation</b></p>						
<p><b>2.6 Implementing the woodland management plan</b></p>	<p>There are no employees. All work is carried out by volunteers through GCWT, BFT and New Caledonian Woodlands. The latter two organisations provide their own organisational structure, supervision and safe working practices. The main tasks have been planting Christmas trees, access improvements, drainage and formative pruning. Contractors were used in the early stages, for example to create the pond and all abilities track, but have not been required since.</p>						
<p><b>2.7 Business/ operating model and sustainability</b></p>	<p>Because GCWT is predominantly concerned with improving accessibility, the group tries to break even with a low level of turnover. The group has to pay an accountant to prepare and audit the annual accounts. It also pays insurance premiums. The business model is 'not for profit'.</p> <p>The only product at present is Christmas trees, sold at a competitive price. Marketing is done by word of mouth and a loyal customer base has developed. Woodland management is considered to be sustainable. The annual increment is not being harvested and so the forest capital is gradually building up. In 2012 the approximate balance of income sources was:</p> <table style="margin-left: 20px;"> <tr> <td><b>Membership &amp; donations</b></td> <td><b>20% of total</b></td> </tr> <tr> <td><b>Trading goods</b></td> <td><b>70% of total</b></td> </tr> <tr> <td><b>Other (Wayleave compensation)</b></td> <td><b>10% of total</b></td> </tr> </table> <p>NB. A wayleave compensation is an annual payment provided by a Utility company or similar to cover an annually renewed right of use by apparatus over or under land belonging to another party</p>	<b>Membership &amp; donations</b>	<b>20% of total</b>	<b>Trading goods</b>	<b>70% of total</b>	<b>Other (Wayleave compensation)</b>	<b>10% of total</b>
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	 <p style="text-align: center;"><b>2012/13</b></p> <table border="1"> <caption>Income Sources for 2012/13</caption> <thead> <tr> <th>Category</th> <th>Percentage</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Trading goods</td> <td>70%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Membership subs</td> <td>20%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Other</td> <td>10%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Trading services</td> <td>0%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Public contracts</td> <td>0%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Grant &amp; matched funding</td> <td>0%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Loan</td> <td>0%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Donations</td> <td>0%</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Fundraising</td> <td>0%</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Category	Percentage	Trading goods	70%	Membership subs	20%	Other	10%	Trading services	0%	Public contracts	0%	Grant & matched funding	0%	Loan	0%	Donations	0%	Fundraising	0%
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<p><b>2.8 Benefit distribution rules</b></p>	<p>The members and office bearers receive no financial gain from the woodlands. The accountant and insurance company are the principal beneficiaries. The real benefits are non-monetary: physical, mental and emotional wellbeing of the individuals who visit and use the woodland.</p>																				
<p><b>3. External linkages</b></p>																					
<p><b>3.1 Partnerships and agreements</b></p>	<p>In common with many community woodland groups in the Borders, GCWT is affiliated to the Borders Forest Trust. BFT provides support and advice to the group as they need it. BFT also acts as a backstop were the group to fold. The BFT Volunteer and Community Officer has developed a close working relationship with the group.</p>																				
<p><b>3.2 Associations</b></p>	<p>The group is affiliated to The Conservation Volunteers (TCV), primarily for insurance cover. It has been a member of the Community Woodlands Association (CWA), although this membership has currently lapsed, due to limited finances. There is a Community Woodlands Forum in the Borders of which the group has also been a member, although this is dormant at present.</p>																				

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## 4. Resources

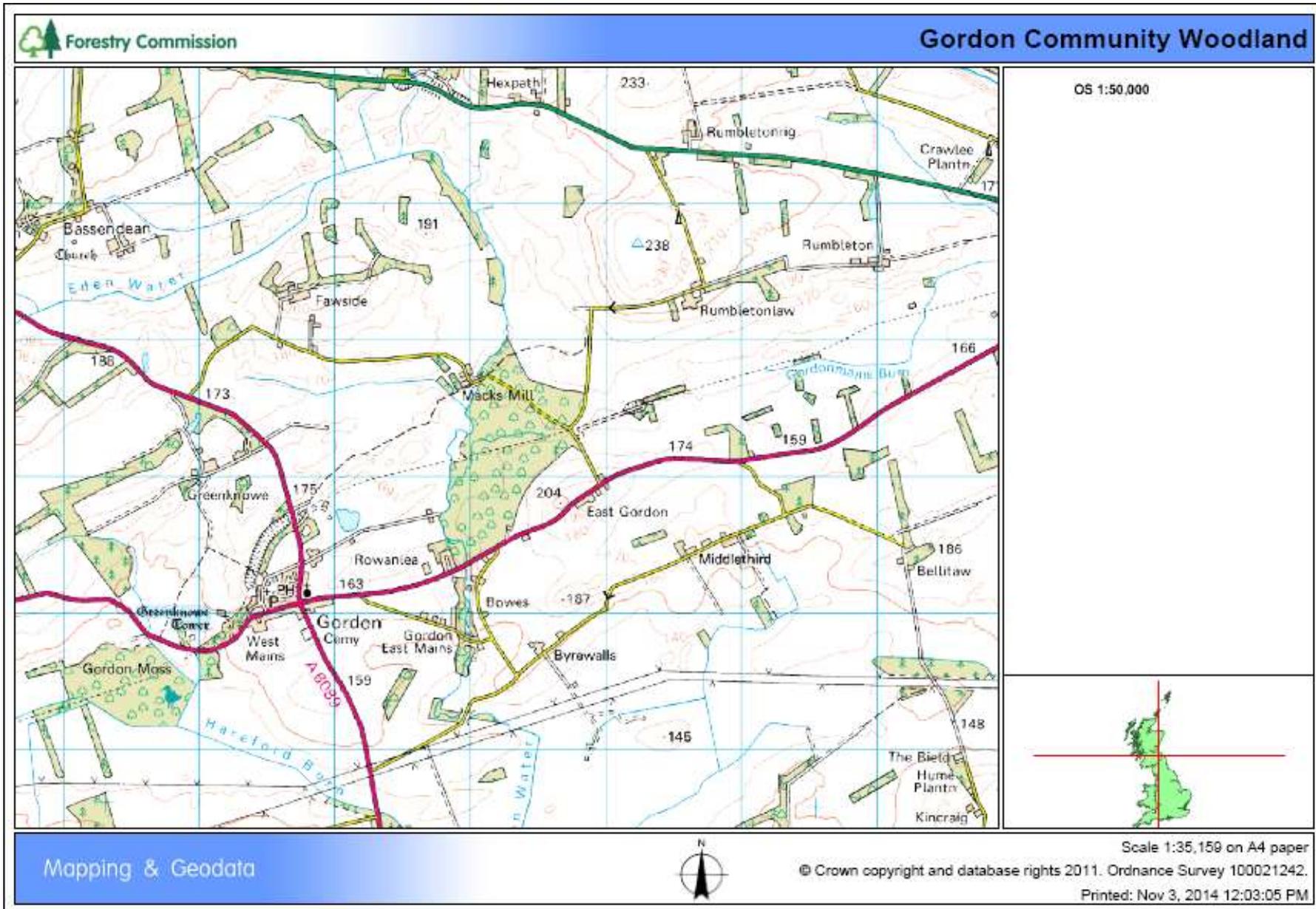
### 4.1 Forest/woodland

- Gordon CW extends to 84.9 ha in one contiguous area
- It is located about one mile east of the village of Gordon in Berwickshire, to the north of the A6105 Gordon to Greenlaw road. The grid reference of the main car park off this road is NT 662 435. Most of the woodland lies around 160 metres above sea level.
- A minor public road runs through the northern part of the wood, giving access on either side. A disused railway line cuts right through the middle of the site and could be used for extraction in the future. There is a simple system of footpaths through the woodland and most people stick to these despite their 'right to roam' as some of the ground in between can be wet or ridged with plough lines.
- Most of the soils are Eckford Association, derived from fluvio-glacial sands. There are also areas of peat and peat-alluvium complex, particularly in areas close to the disused railway line. The growth potential is good although wetness is a limiting factor in the lower lying areas.
- The majority of the woodland is broadleaved with discrete areas of conifer plantation within it, mainly Scots pine and Norway spruce. There is a variety of different species mixes present (e.g., poplar, sycamore, willow and mixed broadleaves).
- Most of the woodland was planted around 1992 although there is an area of mature woodland in the SW corner. This extends to about 4 ha and consists of mainly Scots pine, oak and birch. Since purchase in 2002, management has focused mainly on infrastructure and silviculture - removing tree shelters (i.e. tree tubes) and some pruning. Paths have been put in, a pond has been created, a cabin constructed and three car parks built. Norway spruce have been planted for Christmas trees and restocked as they are felled.
- The woodland has been divided into six compartments, most of which have several sub-compartments. These reflect the species diversity on the site.
- Open space is well provided for, particularly along the old railway line and as wide rides. There are glades but these are shrinking as the trees grow. A very attractive pond has been created which has a jetty, used frequently by school groups. Deadwood is limited except in the mature woodland. The arisings from pruning are left in habitat piles.
- **Classification of woodland type: Mixed mainly broadleaved**
- General condition of woodland is good; it is a young, quickly developing woodland.

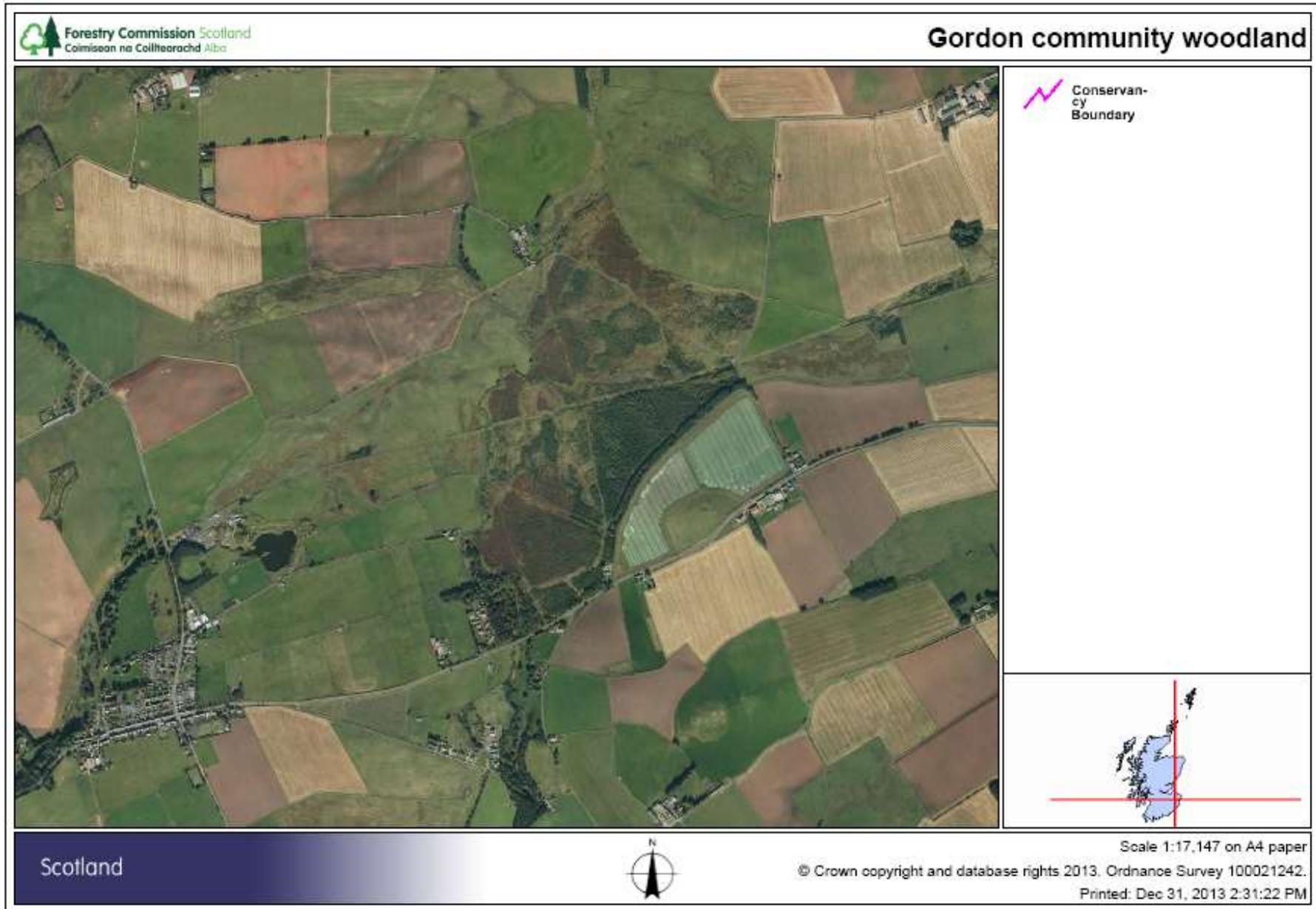
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Survey information is limited although this is improving as identification events (e.g., for bats, moths and fungi) are held in the woods. Species of interest that have been recorded include roe deer, red squirrels and badgers.</li> </ul>
<b>4.2 Woodland and group funding sources</b>	<p>The wood, formerly known as Kircal Wood, was bought from a private owner with the support of 75 percent funding from the Scottish Land Fund. The remainder of the purchase price was covered by grants, donations and local fundraising. The total cost was around £90,000. The previous owner secured a Forestry Commission grant which continues to benefit GWCT. Between 2004 and 2009, monies from the Scottish Forestry Grant Scheme contributed to an all abilities path, path improvements, new interpretation and a new foot bridge.</p> <p>In 2006 the Trust received a lump sum payment for allowing fibre optic and power lines to run through the wood, and this provided an important capital reserve.</p> <p>There is almost no external funding at present.</p>
<b>4.3 Knowledge, skills, human and social capital</b>	<p>The group has benefitted from the input of Borders Forest Trust officers over the years but this support is declining, due to a change of priorities at BFT. A local forestry consultant provides advice from time to time, mainly on the prioritisation of silvicultural tasks. The knowledge and confidence of the group has greatly increased since 2002. Knowledge of managing a young mixed woodland is shared amongst the members of the Management Group and is not filed in any systematic way.</p>

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## 2. Change Narrative

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

Kircal Wood was put up for sale in 2000 and local people were concerned that it might be used for development. In May 2001 a notice was put up on the village notice board and a small group of people got together to hold a public meeting on the issue, which included BFT, Scottish Land Fund (SLF) and the Rural Resource Centre. The idea of protecting the site as a community woodland was born. Further meetings and a community consultation exercise were held in October 2001. The consultation was carried out by the campaign group and involved simple survey forms, which were taken round all the doors in the village, and a public meeting in the village hall (**informal enjoyment to consultation**). It raised the profile of the campaign, and got almost everyone (99%) onside, giving a clear mandate to the campaign group to move towards purchase.

A fundraising campaign, supported by Borders Forest Trust, took place and the wood was purchased in April 2002 with the official opening of the community wood in September 2002. A Trust, GCWT, was set up prior to the purchase (**consultation to group formation**). This structure was chosen as it provides protection to the Trustees and allows funds to be raised from charitable organisations as well as trading for charitable purposes. The structure of GCWT and its objectives have remained the same since then.

GCWT has taken full management responsibility for Gordon Community Woodland since the point of purchase, (**group formation to full management**) and the management group makes all the decisions about future management. The members of the group have a wide range of experience which they bring to bear. The group is very much embedded in the local community and members of the Management Group are well known locally. The woodland has been in community ownership for nearly 12 years (at the time of this case study), and after the initial intense period running up to purchase, a significant amount of work was achieved in a short period of about three years. This included the construction of two car parks, an all-abilities trail, a pond and a cabin. Many events have been held in the woods since purchase. These are well publicised locally (posters, press, newsletters) leading to strong links between the woods and the local community.

Since that early period of intense activity, the community woodland has settled down into a quiet routine. Several members of the original organising group are still currently active within GCWT. Other members have moved on. The woodland is well used by regular walkers and visitors from further afield. Events such as bat, plant, moth and fungus surveys are held on a regular basis. Educational visits are made, many from the local primary school. These were often guided by the BFT Community and Learning Officer, and in the past the Council Ranger Service has also assisted GCWT by providing rangers to lead walks. Volunteers have been brought in regularly

by the BFT Volunteer Officer. New Caledonian Woodlands brings a group of volunteers once or twice a year for a weekend, staying in the village hall. In the weekends before Christmas, dozens of Norway spruce Christmas trees are sold on a pick your own basis, in which raises around £2,000 annually. The spaces are then replanted later in the winter. Hence **active management** continues with support from individuals and groups **volunteering**. Trees the group have planted continue to grow and the majority are now about 20 years old. The need for thinning will increase over time. This is an issue which the group is starting to consider. Access to the woodlands and the quality of the trees there continues to improve. It is all quite low key but very much appreciated by the local community. Most local people are happy to walk in the woods or just to know that they are there without contributing financially or physically to its upkeep and development.

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

### Facilitating factors

- As the members of the management committee are well known and respected in the community it is easy for anyone to voice his/her opinion about the woodland to the committee.
- Group development has been facilitated by a stable core membership willing to get involved in the initial purchase process and the subsequent activities.
- Stable membership and a general lack of turnover in the group does have the positive effect that knowledge gained is retained within the group.

### Barriers and challenges

- GCWT, in common with many other community groups, is challenged to maintain active volunteer support. It is very difficult to recruit new people onto the Management Committee or as office bearers. Most members of the committee are older people and there is a worry about succession. Likewise, only small numbers turn out for work days, usually the same people. Turn out at events is a little better and new families sometimes come along.
- A challenge to engagement is that financial control is quite arduous given the small turnover of the group. This can act as a disincentive to recruitment of post holders.
- The downside of a stable membership of the management group is that not many new activities or initiatives are undertaken.

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- The lack of a fit for purpose forestry grant has led to a reduction in activity and dampened group expectations concerning future infrastructure improvements or additional woodland management.

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### 3. Evolution of income

The split of income coming into the group remains fairly stable, with the majority coming from charitable trading, and the balance from membership subs and wayleave payments. In some years additional funds may be sought to complete particular projects, or woodland operations such as thinning may provide products for additional trading activity.

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

Prior to 1990 the area was grazed by sheep and cattle as part of the neighbouring farming enterprise. It was then bought by a local forestry consultant who put in drainage and over a period of a few years planted up the site. There was already woodland in the SE corner. This was presumably to create a woodland asset which could be sold. The status of the previous owner is unknown, he was possibly a sole trader. Grants were presumably used to support the planting process.

Time Period	Owner/Manager	Objectives / Benefits (and evidence)	Major operations	Access and use rights
-1990	Calder of East Gordon	Keeping livestock		
1990 - 2002	Finlay Mitchell of Duns	Establishment of commercial woodland Increase in biodiversity	Planting of woodland	Scheduled ancient monument & electricity wayleave

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

Woodland management since group involvement has taken several forms:

- removal of a large number of tree shelters
- pruning up to head height of large parts of the woodland
- coppicing and pollarding of a small experimental area
- planting and felling of Norway spruce for Xmas trees on a short rotation
- planting of two small areas of woodland, including the Diamond Jubilee wood

The group has achieved a great deal in terms of improving the infrastructure of the woodlands. This includes:

- three car parks
- footpaths, including an all abilities trail
- paths are strimmed on an annual basis
- drainage and boardwalk along one of the main paths
- stiles to give access to mature woodland area
- a cabin to act as a classroom and for events
- a pond and jetty beside the cabin
- picnic tables and benches throughout the woodland
- a sculpture of a stag made out of willow
- interpretation of the woodland & signage

The regular activities which take place in the woods include: moth evenings, bat evenings, dawn chorus, Easter egg hunts, orienteering, wood fuel days, fungal forays, children's holiday activities, pond dipping, camp fires, willow crafts, green woodworking, mountain rescue night exercises, Borders Exploration training, bushcraft, environmental art, Tai Chi, walking, cycling and horse riding. Events tend to grow the membership and provide a good recruiting opportunity. The wider community has benefitted, for example the many school groups, health groups and volunteers which come to Gordon Community Woodland have gained knowledge, health and a sense of group identity.

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Time Period	Owner/Manager	Objectives / Benefits (and evidence)	Major operations	Access and use rights
2002	GCWT	Open woodland for public access and recreation		

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## 6. Future plans

The group will continue “to conserve, regenerate and manage native woodlands”, which also includes non-native species such as poplar and sycamore that can be found in the community woodland.

The group is exploring opportunities for altering the structure of the group by adopting a simpler model which would relive it of some of the accountancy burdens. Scottish Community Interest Organisations (SCIO) are worth investigating in this regard. The Management Group will continue to manage the woodland with help from other organisations such as BFT and New Caledonian Woodlands.

The woods are maturing and the trees are now 11 years older than when they were purchased. Some stands already would benefit from thinning and this would create a wood fuel resource which could be sold. This would need to be carefully planned.

## 3. Engagement and impacts timeline

Year	Key Event	ENGAGEMENT (changes in type)	Reasons	Changes/ Impacts Social (evidence)	Changes/ Impacts in Woodland (evidence)	Changes/ Impacts Financial/ Economic (evidence)
2001-2002	GCWT formed	INFORMAL ENJOYMENT to CONSULTATION	Community feared loss of woodland to development after woodland put up for sale			
2002	GCWT purchases woodland	CONSULTATION to FULL MANAGEMENT	Active management of the woodlands began once sale secured	Establishment of new paths and access points as well as all ability trail sees increasing number of diverse visitors	Some silvicultural operations improved general condition of woodlands	Harvest of Christmas trees generates income which supports the group