

# Woodmatters & Woodshare Community Membership Scheme Cumbria, England

*Woodland management in partnership between a social business, community and charity for conservation and wood fuel benefits*

# WOODMATTERS & WOODSHARE COMMUNITY MEMBERSHIP SCHEME

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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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## 1. Group profile

<b>Woodland: Low Park Wood, Holeslack, Brigsteer Woods</b> <b>Map ref: SD 509 878</b> <b>Webpage: <a href="http://www.woodmatters.org.uk/">http://www.woodmatters.org.uk/</a></b> <b>Date of profile: February 2013</b> <b>Resources: site visit, interview</b>	
<b>1. Institutional context (in February 2013)</b>	
<b>1.1 Ownership of the woodland(s)</b>	<p>The woodlands that Woodmatters work in are owned by the National Trust. Three woods on the Sizergh Estate near Kendal are used, namely:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Holeslack</li><li>• Brigsteer Woods</li><li>• Low Park Wood.</li></ul> <p>The field visit was to Low Park Wood, which is the site of the “Woodland Workshop” so this forms the main part of the report in the profile.</p> <p><b>Classification of tenure: Informal agreement (private)</b></p>
<b>1.2 Access and use rights to the woodland(s)</b>	<p>Woodmatters entered into agreement with the woodland owners about where in the woodland they will work and what the work consists of. At the time of writing this was concentrating on rejuvenation of the coppice stands at Low Park Wood. The Director of Woodmatters leads the woodland working done through the Woodshare Community Membership Scheme by gaining access to the sites and taking part in agreed forestry operations. Rights to the products/materials produced vary according to the membership level of the volunteers.</p> <p>Access to the woodland blocks adjacent to the coppice has been granted to members of the Caravan Club for use as a woodland caravan park (Kendal Caravan Site).</p>

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	<p>Anglers with a National Rivers Licence have access to the fishing rights on the river that runs alongside the boundary of the woodland.</p> <p>Access to the woods is either to public rights of way or permitted paths. The site is a popular destination for local walkers and runners passing through the valley and using the national cycle routes.</p>
<p><b>1.3 Regulations/ responsibilities affecting the woodland(s)</b></p>	<p>Woodmatters is bound by the agreement formulated with the woodland owner, who in turn is constrained by the conditions linked to any secured woodland grants, felling conditions, FSC, UKWAS &amp; UKFS regulations, H&amp;S legislation and the management of the public on a woodland site with active operations.</p> <p>The wood sits in the Cumbria Fell and Dales Natural Area, and the River Kent has SSSI status, both of these designations influence opportunities in relation to forestry operations and landscape impacts.</p>
<p><b>2. Internal organisation of the group/enterprise</b></p>	
<p><b>2.1 Group members, representation and decision making</b></p>	<p>Woodmatters is a social business that aims to reconnect people with woodlands. Run by two social entrepreneurs, Woodmatters organises and manages WCMS activities and outputs. The scheme is open to local people, and membership costs £30 per annum providing members with the opportunity of getting involved in volunteering work, coppicing and other actions in the wood. After a days woodland work members take home a 2ft x 2ft x 3ft stack of timber from the days work. These are unseasoned and cut into 8 inch logs on site to aid drying time. Members buy each Woodshare £15 (approx 50% of usual firewood costs).</p> <p>This is a new model of woodland working that aims to engage community members. Woodmatters facilitates the relationship with the National Trust and coordinates decision making based on member feedback.</p> <p>It was interesting to note that not all paid-up members took part in the volunteering opportunities in the woodland.</p>
<p><b>2.2 Communication and learning processes</b></p>	<p>The Director of Woodmatters and leader of the Woodshare scheme is a qualified woodsman and coppicer, so, in large measure it is his skills and knowledge that are being passed on to members of the scheme. Members-only events are organised in the woodlands through the year, and communication includes a quarterly e-newsletter. The events are designed to reflect member interests. Involvement in the scheme does not assume any previous knowledge of woodlands and woodland management, so woodland skills and learning comes to individuals in the</p>

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	<p>group though hands-on working in the coppice, or participation in members only events which include e.g. charcoal burns, talks about woodland management, woodland crafts and social shared campfire meals. The other social entrepreneurs associated with Woodmatters involve themselves in running some of the members-only events.</p>
<p><b>2.3 Structure and legal status</b></p>	<p>At the moment the Woodshare Community Membership scheme is an unincorporated informal group of people. At the time of visiting Woodmatters was working on social enterprise principles but run by small scale 'contractors' operating as sole traders.</p> <p><b>Classification of legal form: Unincorporated Association</b></p>
<p><b>2.4 Regulations/ responsibilities affecting the group/ enterprise</b></p>	<p>No particular responsibilities were noted that affect the working of the scheme or decision making.</p>
<p><b>2.5 Forest management objectives and planning procedures</b></p>	<p>The objectives of Woodmatters are to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work alongside local communities to recognise and celebrate the emotional, physical and environmental benefits of healthy, sustainable woodlands.</li> </ul> <p>The objectives of the Woodshare scheme are to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• bring neglected woodlands back into production or better management,</li> <li>• provide the means for members to connect with woodlands to improve their understanding of, and connection with, local woodlands</li> <li>• provide health and wellbeing benefits to members involved in woodland working</li> <li>• provide members with locally sourced sustainable woodfuel.</li> </ul> <p>The National Trust properties in which Woodmatters operates may or may not have formal management plans. Woodmatters is responsible for discussing the management plans with the woodland owners and ensuring that their activities contribute to the plan, or are in accordance with the overall objectives for the particular property.</p>

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	<p>The focus of the National Trust is largely on heritage preservation and conservation with some recreational access.</p> <p><b>Overall aim of plan: Quality of life, woodfuel and conservation</b></p>
<p><b>2.6 Implementing the woodland management plan</b></p>	<p>The management plan is implemented by volunteer woodshare members through working groups or organised events and activities, as well as the contracted management work undertaken by Woodmatters as part of their business activity.</p>
<p><b>2.7 Business/ operating model and sustainability</b></p>	<p>Woodmatters provides a number of different products and services in addition to running the community Woodshare scheme. The Woodshare scheme is the community involvement element of a wider range of enterprise activities undertaken by Woodmatters. As a business Woodmatters is designed to support the two social entrepreneurs involved. But the nature of the social enterprise is to facilitate the provision of community focused and public benefits in line with the objectives of the enterprise.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Services and products traded</b></li> </ul> <p>Woodmatters trades products such as traditional woodland items including firewood logs, hedging stake, beanpoles and charcoal, but other services include woodland management and land-based management planning and consultancy support with grant applications, environmental education, private tuition for woodland skills, and woodland-based courses e.g. bushcraft, green woodworking. The Woodshare Scheme itself does not trade products other than what is available through membership rights.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Market</b></li> </ul> <p>The market for products and services is the local area close to Kendal, although some of the courses are attended by people who come from further afield in the region or beyond e.g. tourists looking for things to do whilst on holiday.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Marketing</b></li> </ul>

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	The website, newsletters, membership of trade and other organisations, and social networks all contribute to the marketing mix. The director maintains that word of mouth has been by far the most effective marketing method.
<b>2.8 Benefit distribution rules</b>	There are no formal benefit distribution rules beyond the arrangements for collecting and sharing woodfuel. The benefits of the Woodshare Scheme are financial, economic, ecological and cultural. Woodmatters gains some financial benefit to sustain the livelihoods of the two entrepreneurs. A wide range of additional benefits including building social networks, knowledge and skills development, physical health and place building enjoyment accrue to the individuals who take part in the activities that are organised as part of the Woodshare scheme. For the members of the Woodshare scheme taking part in the woodland working groups, benefits include reduced prices for woodfuel. Wider public benefits such as improved conservation values, and landscape maintenance are brought about as a result of the woodland management activities.
<b>3. External linkages</b>	
<b>3.1 Partnerships and agreements</b>	The Woodshare Scheme is run as a partnership between Woodmatters and the National Trust on the Sizergh Estate.
<b>3.2 Associations</b>	Woodmatters has links with a number of national and regional associations including Cumbria Woodlands, Coppice Association North West, and another local group Bee Ed. The benefits of these links have been mentoring and advice from Cumbria Woodlands in the establishment of the Woodshare scheme, with general support and networking, including communications about the scheme.
<b>4. Resources</b>	
<b>4.1 Forest/ woodland</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Low Park Wood</b> is a 40 hectare block of ancient semi-natural woodland sitting alongside the west banks of the River Kent, and forms part of the historical Sizergh Castle estate, most of which is retained in National Trust Ownership.</li> <li>• Sitting close to the A591 access is via a side road and then a narrow muddy track. There is an entrance barrier.</li> <li>• The site sits on base rich soil over limestone or other calcareous rock</li> <li>• The species mix over the site is dominated by ash (<i>Fraxinus excelsior</i>), sycamore (<i>Acer pseudoplatanus</i>) and witch elm (<i>Ulmus glabra</i>) with occasional beech (<i>Fagus sylvatica</i>) and pine trees (<i>Pinus sylvestris</i>). There</li> </ul>

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	<p>are small localised areas of boggy land (flushing). The coppice stands are of hazel (<i>Coryllus avellana</i>) and ash. The “high forest” woodland blocks are around 80% canopy cover and the coppice stands around 40%.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There are three main management compartments.</li> <li>• It includes a scheduled ancient monument (SAM) on the site New Sedgwick Gunpowder Works c.1764.</li> <li>• <b>Classification of woodland type: Broadleaved with coppice</b></li> <li>• Biodiversity on site has been surveyed and includes a collection of orchids typical of ancient woodland on limestone including Greater Butterfly-orchid (<i>Platanthera chlorantha</i>), Common Spotted-orchid (<i>Dactylorhiza fuchsia</i>), Early-purple Orchid (<i>Orchis mascula</i>). Also of note are Solomon’s-seal (<i>Polygonatum multiflorum</i>) and Bluebell (<i>Hyacinthoides non-scripta</i>) and Common Twayblade (<i>Listera ovata</i>). There are bat roosts in the gunpowder works and the potential for dormice in the coppice, although neither have been surveyed.</li> </ul> <p><b>Brigsteer Wood</b>, is about 50 hectares and forms part of the Sizergh Castle site, with a small side road between Cotes and Brigsteer passing through the woods as a track. It has a similar composition to Low Park Wood and is renowned for Daffodils and Bluebells and the very rare High Brown Fritillary (<i>Argynnis adippe</i>) butterfly. There are about nine hectares of coppice stands in Brigsteer Woods, which are managed to support the High Brown Fritillary.</p> <p><b>Holeslack Wood</b> of about 10 hectares lies to the west of Brigsteer Wood and is further into the estate closer to the castle. It does not benefit from tracked access. The main woodland composition is the same as Low Park Wood, but Holeslack is also known for its ancient yew trees, some of which are believed to be over 1600 years old, and additional ancient woodland indicators such as gooseberries (<i>Ribes uva-crispa</i>). There are about three hectares of coppice in Holeslack.</p>
<p><b>4.2 Woodland and group funding sources</b></p>	<p>Woodmatters aims to be a sustainable enterprise so looks to fund itself through its enterprise activities. In 2010 the Forestry Commission awarded a £60,000 Woodland Improvement Grant to the National Trust to carry out woodland management over five years at its Sizergh Estate. Part of this money was used by the Trust to support Woodmatters and the Woodshare scheme. Part of this money was used by the NT to pay Woodmatters at a day rate which underwrote the development of the Woodshare scheme.</p>

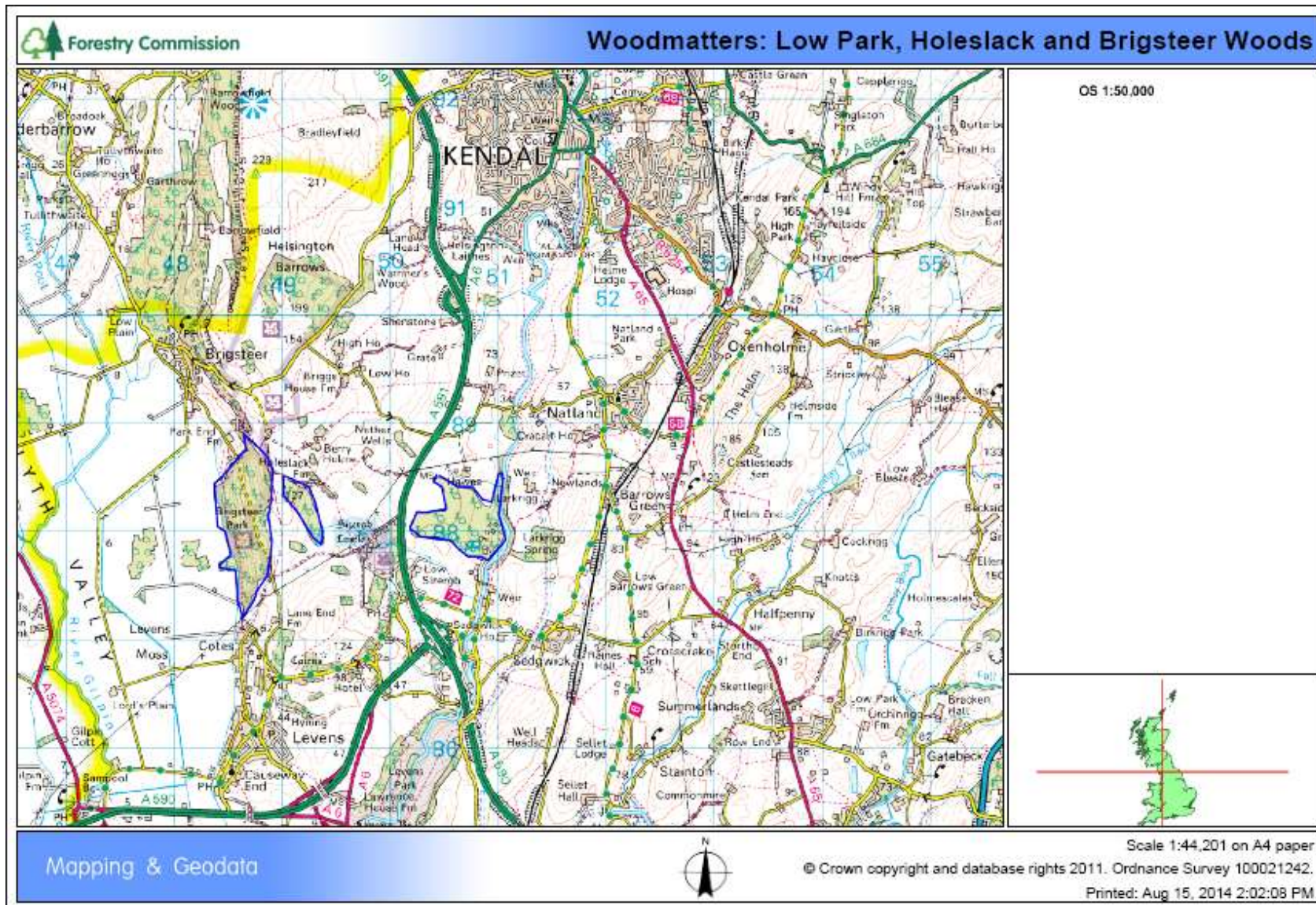


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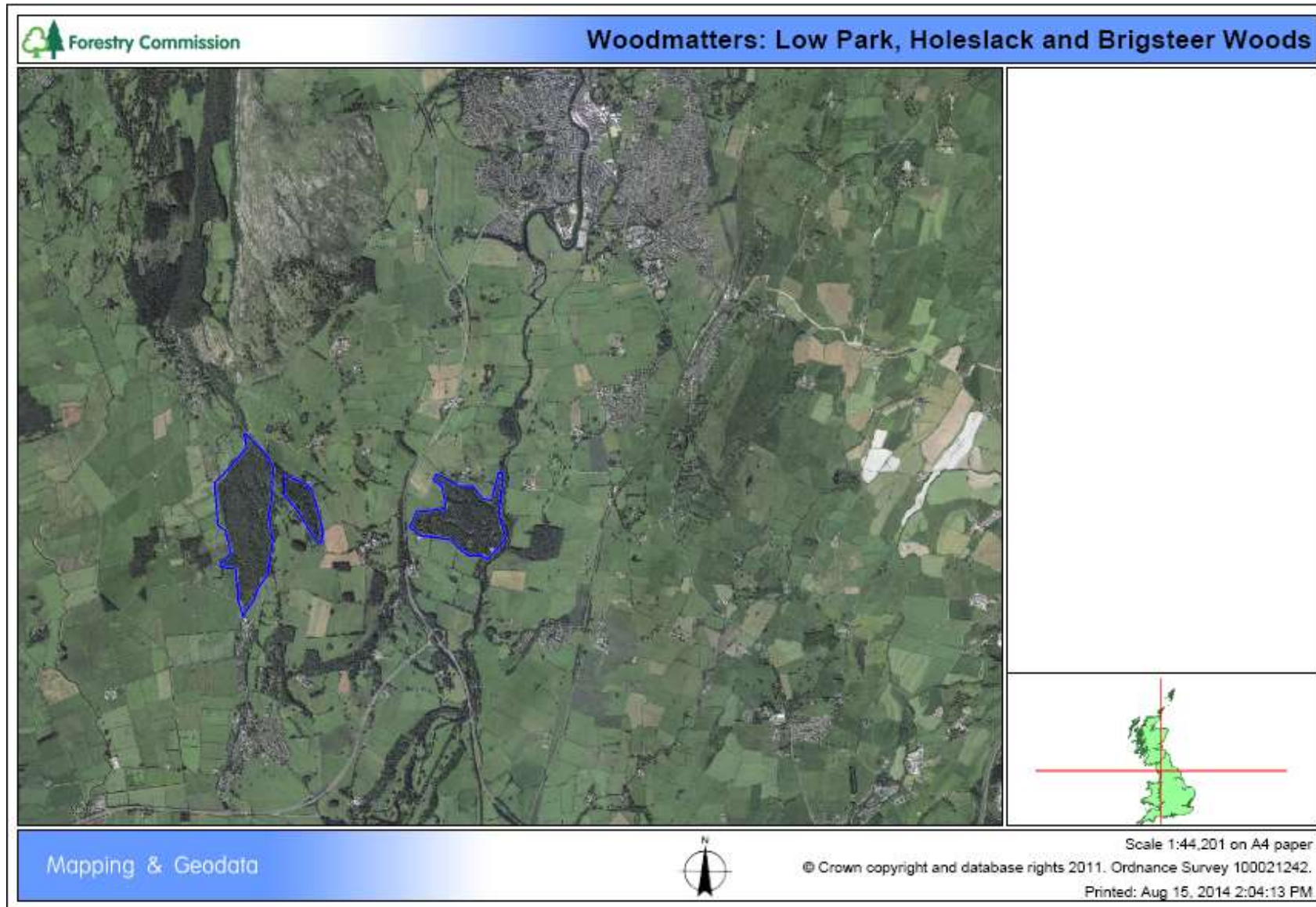
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<b>4.3 Knowledge, skills, human and social capital</b>	The two entrepreneurs involved in Woodmatters have an extensive array of skills in woodland and land based management and conservation, outdoor education, events management, and nature-based art. All two have extensive social connections with local agencies and stakeholders, and one of them was the National Trust's Regional Sustainability Advisor, until founding Woodmatters.
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## 2. Change Narrative

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

Woodmatters and the Woodshare scheme were at a fairly early stage of development so the change narrative represents an early part of the story. The main motivation for the establishment of Woodmatters was the founders' interest in finding new methods to revive woodland culture, connections between communities and the local landscape and bringing woodlands back into productive management. This led to the establishment of Woodmatters as a social business and included Woodmatters being contracted to undertake activities involving the **active management** of the Sizergh woodlands.

Rather than being community driven, the establishment of Woodshare Community Membership Scheme came about as a result of a partnership between the National Trust and Woodmatters. The WIG that was secured by the National Trust supported the development of the early stages. Part of the woodland management design planning on which the grant payment was based included the establishment of a community wood fuel project managed in association with a small business. This followed a modified form of the Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) model, i.e. a direct and active partnership between community, landowner and land manager in the production of goods they buy or can be sold on the open market. The reasons for this were to try and build in sustainability, provide income and employment for local contractors, ensure that there were financial as well as environmental benefits from the woods, and ensure that somebody with appropriate woodland skills was able to develop the scheme at the same time as maintaining H&S and woodland management standards. The involvement of communities in woodland management was also part of the Trust's "Going Local Strategy" which sought novel ways of including local people in the Trust's activities at specific properties. The arrangement involving a qualified land manager to mediate community involvement, i.e. the role played by Woodmatters, taking out working parties organised as **group formation** serves to manage some of the risks and fears the landowner might have about community working in woodlands.

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

### Facilitating factors

- **Support by the woodland owner** and **grant funding** have been instrumental to developing the Woodshare scheme
- **Trust in the social business Woodmatters acting as the land manager** has also been an important consideration.
- **The knowledge and enthusiasm of Woodmatters to engage with community** supported change.
- **The location of people using wood burners within easy travelling distance to the Sizergh estate**, which seems to be creating enough demand for this business model to work.

### Barriers and Challenges

- No specific barriers were discussed at this stage, although some concerns about the long-term sustainability of the model if community capacity did not grow were voiced.

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## 3. Evolution of income streams

No information.

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## 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
Up to 1950s	Strickland family	Sizergh Caste dates back to the 1100's and has an associated estate of around 650 hectares. This has been used to support the estate's needs for farm and woodland products over the centuries hence the large amount of coppice.		Mainly private.
1950-2011	National Trust	Woodland managed for conservation and heritage. Not all parts of the woodland in active management.		PROW and visitors to castle estate.

## 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
2011-onwards	National Trust with support from Woodmatters	Conservation management (rejuvenation of coppice stands)	Felling of coppice in compartments at a pace that does not have too great a landscape impact	PROW and visitors to castle estate, and as arranged through Woodmatters

## 6. Future plans

To develop the capacity of the members involved in the Woodshare Scheme. For Woodmatters to diversify the range of potential activities in woodlands that benefit a range of different people and interests.

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## 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)
2010	National Trust secure WIG	CONSULTATION and WOODMATTERS ESTABLISHMENT				
2011 onwards	Woodmatters provide community opportunities to develop the Woodshare Scheme and help with site management and community ownership of project	ACTIVE MANAGEMENT to VOLUNTEERING			Some evidence of increase in High Brown Fritillary numbers (BC survey)	Income from timber sales (accounts)