



Community Woodfuel from Hedges

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Photo: Well hedged landscape typical of much of Devon. Note that although some hedges are cut short, others are developing into lines of trees. Near Honiton, Blackdowns, January 2012. Rob Wolton

Narrative: Devon has a world-class hedge resource, tens of thousands of kilometres in length, and forming lateral woodlands with great economic potential, in addition to their heritage and practical values. Devon Hedge Group exists to promote the appreciation and conservation of hedges - See more at: http://www.devon.gov.uk/devon_hedge_group

While a great resource, most hedges have either been left to become overgrown, or have been flailed, because farmers do not have the time to maintain them in the traditional way.



The Challenge



The challenge is to bring hedges such as this back into traditional management, while harvesting wood from them sustainably.

Devon Hedge Group worked with Dartmoor Circle to develop an approach which does this by encouraging community groups to harvest the wood, while laying the hedge.



Right panel photos: Rob Wolton

Top : Round wood from a coppiced willow hedge with 17 years growth, Locks Park Farm, Hatherleigh, West Devon, January 2013. The resulting logs are used in wood stoves to produce supplementary heat for the farmhouse.

Centre : Flint McCulloch by a 35 KW wood chip boiler used to heat his new farmhouse using chips from farm hedges and woods. Lewmoor, Hatherleigh, West Devon, April 2012

Bottom : Hedges not kept thick and bushy by regular cutting are poor nesting habitat for dormice. On the other hand, they will produce more berries and nuts for them to eat.

Narrative: The photos show some of the benefits the community involvement. The benefits to farmers include: a free supply of logs for their own wood-burners; a traditionally laid hedge; a reduction in flailing costs, and sometimes logs to sell.

The benefits to people in communities include: access to free firewood; healthy exercise and developing new friends (breaking down rural social isolation, and carrying its own health benefits), learning traditional skills, and increasing understanding of biodiversity.

Intangible benefits to all include greater understanding between farmers and the people in rural communities, who are mutually dependent.



The first element of the project was a series of 6 events, held on farms around Dartmoor, at which:

1. There were presentations on the history of hedges and their potential as an economic, cultural and biodiversity resources
2. People could try their hand at hedge-laying
3. People were introduced to the support available to form a group and reach an agreement with a farmer.
4. The concerns of farmers, in particular, were addressed – especially around health and safety, insurance, damage, and the need for a clear understanding of what visitors would and would not do.
5. Wonderful local food and drink was enjoyed!



Photo : Coppicing a hawthorn stool. Photo: Rob Wolton

Chainsaw use was demonstrated at the events. Community groups usually include someone who has is qualified to use a chainsaw. Chainsaw insurance for that person can be taken out as an addition to the standard policy.

Felling is undertaken on a different day from other community activities, and only by the operator, with a responsible second person present.



Hedgelaying, Community woodfuel event, South Brent, 15 November 2012 Photo: Rob Wolton



Stone-facing, Hedge Woodfuel event, Stourton Farm, Sampford Spinney, 1 November 2012 Photo: Rob Wolton



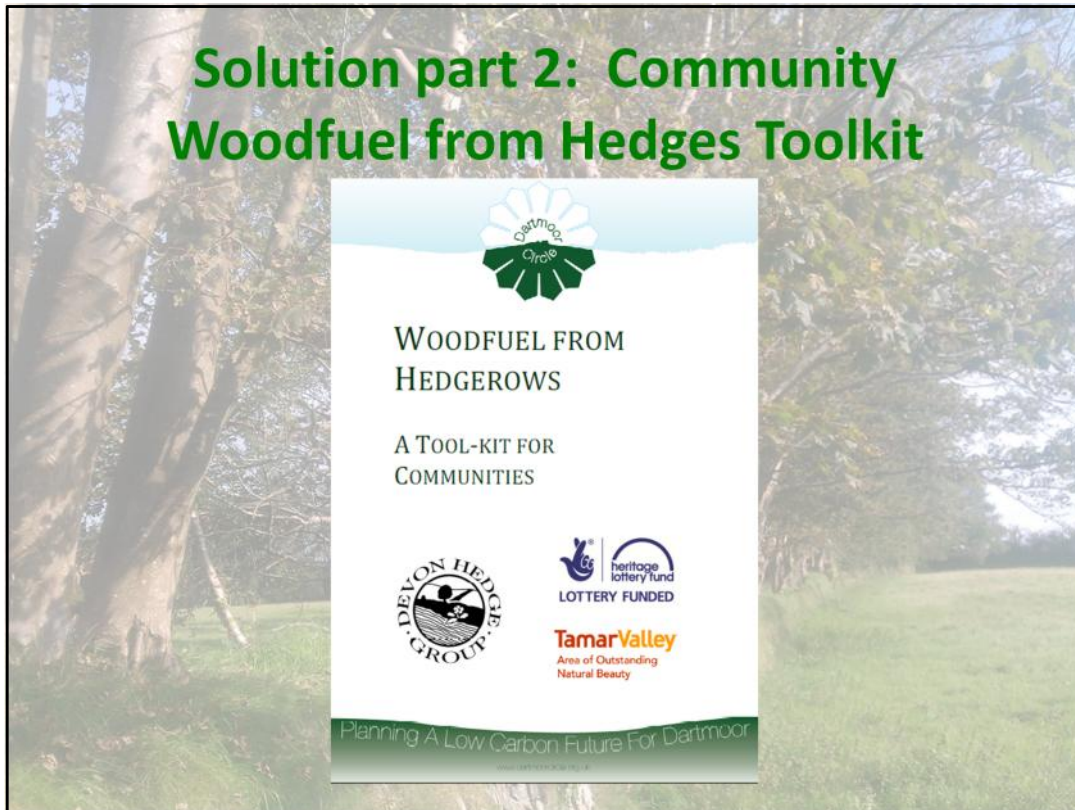
Brush being burnt after hedge laying. About 80% of biomass, and energy, can be wasted in this way. Locks Park Farm, Hatherleigh, West Devon, December 2008. Photo: Paula Wolton.



Branch logger, Hedge Woodfuel event, Stourton Farm, Sampford Spinney, 1 November 2012 Photo: Rob Wolton

Narrative: this was an innovative approach being adopted by one farmer to utilise brush. He planned to test-market selling nets of chopped brush as kindling.

Solution part 2: Community Woodfuel from Hedges Toolkit



The second part of the project was to research, write and publish the Woodfuel from hedges toolkit for communities. This contains:

1. An Introduction to Harvesting Firewood from Hedges.
2. Bovey Climate Action's Guide to Starting a Community Woodfuel Group.
3. Insurance for Community Woodfuel Groups
- 4: On the day – A Guide for Leaders of Woodfuel Groups
5. Membership and Joining Form*
6. Risk assessment for Firewood from Hedges Session
7. Members Visit Register
8. Woodfuel Community Group Constitution Template *
9. Agreement between Farmer/Landowner and Woodfuel Group*
10. Winter Bud Identifier

•Bound separately.

•The toolkit is available by emailing Andrew Shadrake at:
andrew@dartmoorcircle.org.uk



Thank you

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