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## **MAKING LOCAL WOODS WORK FOR COMMUNITY ENTERPRISES**

**Fifty communities across the UK will receive support to transform unmanaged woodland into opportunities for jobs, leisure, education and services and to improve the health and wellbeing of local people.**

The **Big Lottery Fund** is awarding **£1,151,111** to the **Plunkett Foundation** for its **Making Local Woods Work** project. The pilot project, due to launch later this year, will help people to create social enterprises in local unmanaged woodlands so they can grow into sustainable businesses, creating new areas of employment and training to benefit their communities. The opening up of much-needed access to the natural environment will not only provide opportunities for economic growth, but better engagement with the outdoors will result in better health and wellbeing for those involved.

According to the Forestry Commission, 47 per cent of woodland are unmanaged or under-managed\* which can threaten the variety of plant and animal life. Many bird and plant species have been in decline in recent years\*\*. Active woodland management could preserve and increase the biodiversity of these habitats and increase wood fuel production.

Woodland social enterprises are beginning to emerge as a way of tackling a wide range of issues and there is growing evidence of local people successfully using their skills and ideas to set up businesses which have been effective in improving communities.

One example is Hill Holt Wood in Lincolnshire which provides training for young people who have been referred by agencies because they are excluded from school or are unemployed. The woodland also attracts more lone visitors, particularly women, due to the presence of volunteers performing activities including coppicing, woodcraft and charcoal manufacturing. Revenue is also achieved through its cafe and green burials. A further example is Blarbuie Woodland Enterprise in Argyll which has provided residents of the Bute long stay hospital, access to the adjacent woodland, activities such as arts and crafts, wildlife walks, training and employment opportunities.

Making Local Woods Work will provide training, volunteering and employment opportunities to 500 people tackling unemployment, social isolation and poverty. It will support, advise and train 50 groups across the UK to become woodland social enterprises involving study visits, training in asset transfers, financing, asset acquisition, land brokerage, woodland management and business planning. It will also deliver training and knowledge sharing events to 200 groups looking at setting up their own woodland social enterprises.

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The project will be delivered in partnership with the Forestry Commission, The Woodland Trust, Grown in Britain and other partners.

Improving the availability and quality of knowledge to such a large body of people will help to bring about wide-scale improvements in the ability of groups to set-up local woodland social enterprises. Evidence of the project's impact and sharing of the learning will be used to influence future practice of woodland social enterprises and also woodland management in general.

**Peter Couchman, Chief Executive of the Plunkett Foundation**, said: "We are absolutely delighted to announce that, thanks to the Big Lottery Fund, we will be able to support 50 woodland social enterprise pilot projects across the UK over the next three years. This important work will help to support a range of social enterprises to bring woodlands into active management, increase their use and ultimately help more people to enjoy and benefit from woodlands. We're excited to be working with both new and familiar partners on this project."

**Peter Ainsworth, Big Lottery Fund UK Chair**, said: "There aren't many woodland social enterprises around yet, but where they do exist they have a great record of promoting skills and employability. It's exciting to be able to support this initiative which aims to improve the quality of life of those directly involved and also make woodlands more accessible and better looked after for the benefit of all."

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**Website:** [www.biglotteryfund.org.uk](http://www.biglotteryfund.org.uk)  
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**Notes to Editors:**

\*Forestry Commission Sustainable Forest Management spatial data.

\*\*The population of willow tits in the British Isles declined by 91 per cent between 1967 and 2010, the pearl bordered fritillary butterfly recently declined 42 per cent over ten years, and 56 of 72 woodland ground flora species declined between 1971 and 2001. RSPB.

**Making Local Woods Work** is a project led by the Plunkett Foundation involving partners the Woodland Trust, the Forestry Commission, Hill Holt Wood, the Community Woodlands Association, Llais y Goedwig, the **National Association for AONBs**, Locality, Shared Assets and Grown in Britain. The partnership has a range of skills and experience including social enterprise development, community ownership and management of assets and woodland management.

- The Big Lottery Fund supports the aspirations of people who want to make life better for their communities across the UK. We are responsible for giving out 40% of the money raised by the National Lottery for good causes and invest over £650 million a year in projects big and small in health, education, environment and charitable purposes.
- Since June 2004 we have awarded over £8 billion to projects that make a difference to people and communities in need, from early years intervention to commemorative travel funding for World War Two veterans.
- Since the National Lottery began in 1994, £33 billion has been raised and more than 450,000 grants awarded.
- The Plunkett Foundation ([www.plunkett.co.uk](http://www.plunkett.co.uk)) helps communities to take control of their challenges and overcome them together. It supports people, predominantly in rural areas, to set up and run life-changing community co-operatives; enterprises that are owned and run democratically by large numbers of people in their community. These help people to tackle a range of issues, from isolation and loneliness to poverty, and come in many forms including shops, cafes, pubs and land-based initiatives, and everything in between.

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