

# REWILDING: WHERE TO START



# Who is this pack for?

Anyone who is interested in rewilding, but is finding it such a broad and varying concept that they have no idea where to start.

It's not a best practice guide, just a collection of tips and resources, so please do take what you need from it and leave the rest.



-  Getting to Know The Land
-  Toolkit
-  Legal Compliance
-  Lines in the Sand
-  People
-  Budgeting
-  Measuring Rewilding
-  Connect
-  Summary



# Overview

# Getting to Know The Land: Basics

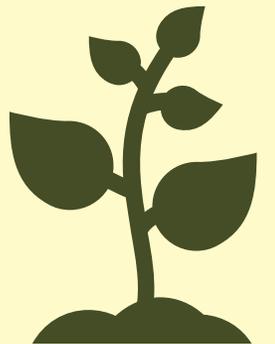
Getting to know the land is important, because you need to know what you're working with so you can work with any natural tendencies and processes that are already present. Working against these is much harder, and can often be less successful for nature. To start, ask yourself these two questions:

- Do you own, or have permission to manage, the land in question?

*You should never attempt to make changes to land you do not own or have express permission to manage.*

- How big is the area?

*No area is necessarily the "wrong size"- do work with what you have. Knowing this will simply help you shape options and will affect the scale at which you'll plan.*



Next, you can explore some more detailed questions:

# Getting to Know The Land: Habitats

## What is your land like currently?

This is a practical question. Get out on your land with a notebook and pencil, and write what you can see- it can be as simple as the map on the left.

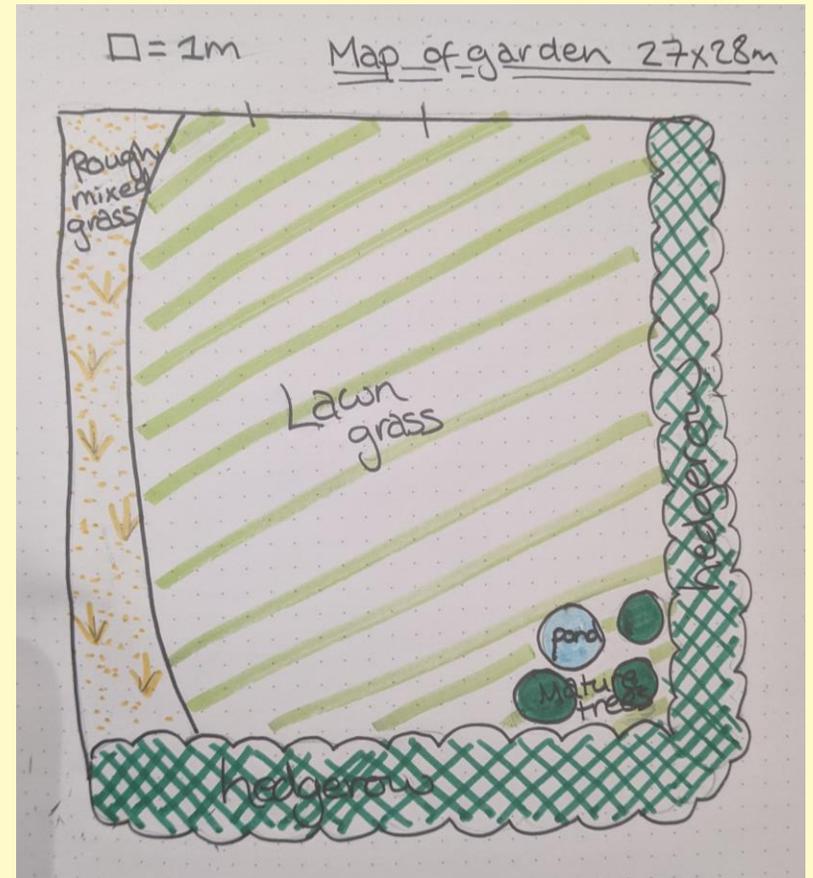
You may want to use a camera and tape measure, your preference!

What are the different types of land you can see? Are there fields, woodlands, hedgerows, water? Note these down.

You don't have to section out too specifically- a mosaic or jigsaw of habitats is usually expected to some extent in rewilding, and can often be healthier.

For more detail try:

- *Commissioning a professional habitat survey (search for ecological consultants offering phase 1 habitat survey), or [conduct your own following the JNCC guidance](#).*
- *Using [DEFRA's magic map for landscape context](#)*



# Getting to Know The Land: Soil



## What's the soil like?

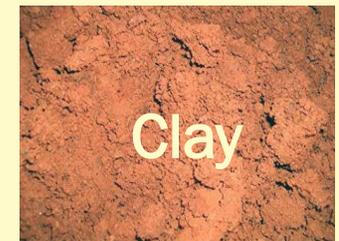
Get out on your land and look at the soil, dig into it, feel the consistency. Soil is amazing, and so studying it can get pretty complex quite quickly. Your main aims are to get an idea of natural drainage and nutrient content.

As a rough guide-

- **Clay:** lumpy and sticky when wet, hard when dry. Typically tightly packed and heavy.
- **Sandy:** Gritty and usually dry. Doesn't hold water very well and can feel quite "thin"
- **Silty:** typically feels a little "soapy", it's smooth and easy to compact.
- **Peaty:** Dark with lots of organic matter, feels spongy to touch. Keeps water well, may become waterlogged at times.
- **Chalky:** Rough and stony, lets water through well and can often be dry
- **Loamy:** Mid-brown, soft, retains moisture but drains well when necessary

For more detail check out:

- ["Soilscapes" classifications map](#)
- [Resources from UK Soils Observatory](#)

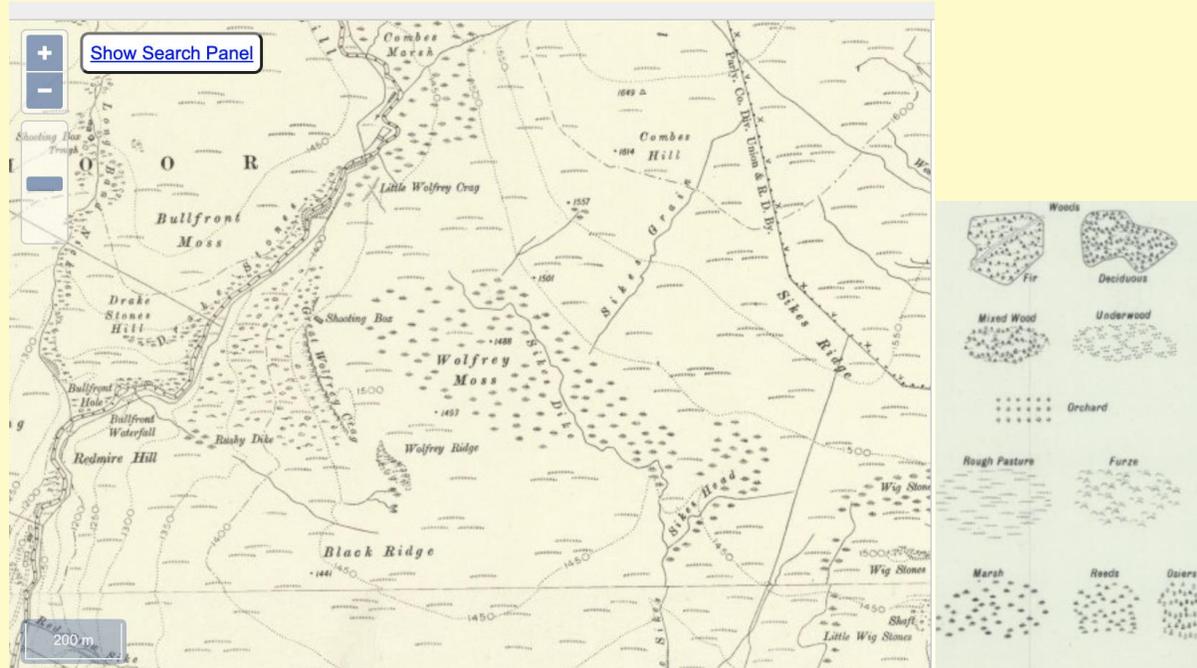


Soil types via <https://www.boughton.co.uk/>



# Getting to Know The Land: History

Exploring the history your land can be a great way of showing you **what the land has potential to be**, or may have previously tended towards. As you explore the land's history, remember: it's **not about recreating one specific point in time**, but rather **finding out more about that potential**, and any 'natural processes' your land might tend towards. You can explore:

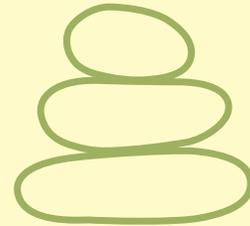


- Recent History- how has the land been managed as far as you've owned/managed it?
- Consult the deeds and any other previous records you have access to
- Look at historical maps in [national archives](#) (e.g. the one on the left from 1888, which shows an immense amount of detail to habitat level, which is not always available on current maps)
- [Search your local archive or records office](#)
- [Ask a local history society](#)
- Look for clues in place names
  - E.g. Beverley- derived from beaver stream
  - E.g. Rossington could derive from Medieval Welsh 'Ros'- meaning 'moor'



# Getting to Know the Land: What Next?

Once you have found out about Habitats, Soils, and History, you probably have a decent idea of what the land could be. So what do you do next?



It may sound counterintuitive when you're building momentum, but **give the land a break** from management or input if you can, to see what the land does. There are no set how long this should be, some say a year, but you may need to leave it for less time or not be able to do this at all depend on your own constraints, *e.g. costs or regulatory burdens*.

If you do get the option, **giving the land a break will help you see what it naturally reverts to, which will help you work with it better**. Do **measure** what happens (you can skip ahead to the "Measuring Rewilding" section for help on how to do this)



# A Rewilding Toolkit



Once you've done all you can to get to know the land, how can you get started?

All land is different, and has been used, managed, and/or degraded differently. This means **it needs time and different tools** to allow it to 'get wild' or restore natural process again.

On the left is what is known as *the "rewilding spectrum"*- the concept of a rewilding "scale" going from passive (humans removed entirely) to active (more human input). You may need a combination of tools from different parts of this spectrum for your own land.

**Focus on what is best for your land,** within your options, and keep your end goal of wilder or more self-sustaining in mind.



Passive



Human input

Active



Leaving land entirely to its own devices  
e.g. *European land abandonment*



Initial management input, followed by  
leaving nature to take over e.g.  
reconnecting wetland habitats and  
letting nature take over



Introduction of sustainable  
management e.g. natural grazing



Habitat restoration or recreation of  
"natural process"- e.g. replanting  
specific moorland species to stabilize.

# Toolkit: how to choose

In choosing your tools, you may want to consider the following questions:

- What's most appropriate for your land and the habitats within it?

*Consult “habitat restoration” and “rewilding” advice from statutory bodies and reputable NGOs for more information on this.*

- Are there habitats you can connect to each other (either across your own land or the surrounding area)?

*Reconnecting habitats can be one of the most effective ways to support nature.*

- What resources do you have available?

*e.g. amount of land to be rewilded, budget available, comfort zone, access to expertise and labour.*

- Use the University of Cambridge “conservation evidence” tool to check what the available science says about efficacy of certain actions.

*Green ticks mean likely to be beneficial, red crosses mean likely to be harmful, and there will be a white circle with a line through for options that do not have enough evidence to tell yet.*

*If you choose to try something that does not have enough evidence associated with it yet, **pay extra attention to your legal responsibilities, your lines in the sand, and measuring your progress.** You can skip ahead to these sections to find out more if you would like.*



Conservation Evidence  
Assessing the evidence | About us | Help | Select Language | CE Journal

STUDIES ACTIONS SYNOPSIS

rewet peat

15 Actions found

### Actions to conserve biodiversity

We have summarised evidence from the scientific literature about the effects of actions to conserve wildlife and ecosystems.

Review the evidence from the [studies](#)

[About actions](#) [Sources of evidence](#)

Refine	15 Actions found				
Refresh results	Order results by:	Number of studies	Relevance	Title	
Category +	<input type="checkbox"/>	Action	Effectiveness	Studies	Category
Keywords +	<input type="checkbox"/>	Directly plant peatland herbs	Likely to be beneficial	5	
Habitat +	<input type="checkbox"/>	Cut/remove/thin forest plantations and rewet peat	Likely to be beneficial	11	
Threat +	<input type="checkbox"/>	Rewet peat to prevent wild fires	No evidence found (no assessment)	0	
Action type +	<input type="checkbox"/>	Add mosses to peatland surface	Beneficial	13	
Country +	<input type="checkbox"/>	Add mixed vegetation to peatland surface	Beneficial	18	
Refresh results	<input type="checkbox"/>	Cover peatland with organic mulch (after planting)	Likely to be beneficial	12	
	<input type="checkbox"/>	Rewet peatland (raise water table)	Beneficial	36	
	<input type="checkbox"/>	Introduce seeds of peatland herbs	Likely to be beneficial	10	
	<input type="checkbox"/>	Add inorganic fertilizer (before/after planting)	Trade-off between benefit and	9	

# Toolkit: some options by habitat

*Try looking up some of the following ‘typical advice’ options on the conservation evidence tool. Which, if any, would you consider on your own land?*



## Riverine & Floodplain

- Allowing space in floodplains for river overspill and free draining
- Re-meandering, “leaky damming”, and thus slow the flow of rivers
- Introducing “ecosystem engineers” like beaver to manage river naturally

- Rewetting, blocking drainage ditches, and restoring inflowing water.
- Reducing pollution in proximity areas
- Restoring peatland vegetation
- Re-establishing sphagnum mosses specifically



## Blanket Bog



## Grassland

- Reduce chemical input
- Reduce management intensity
- Reduce managed livestock grazing intensity
- Retain set aside areas



# Toolkit: some options by habitat

*Try looking up some of the following 'typical advice' options on the conservation evidence tool. Which, if any, would you consider on your own land?*

- Selective thinning to encourage understory growth
- Balancing grazing pressure (e.g. reducing deer grazing which targets understory only, consider bark-targeting species to allow light in)
- Connecting patches of woodland up to one another



- Allow to regenerate without active management
- Reduce livestock grazing on degraded lands
- Reduce use of herbicides

- Wildlife ponds
- Patches of wildflower meadow or rough grass
- Hedgehog highway (hedgehog sized holes connecting up gardens)
- Log piles or hedgerow to provide shelter and/or food for some species



# Legal compliance

This pack cannot offer legal advice to any specific situation, but if you are a landowner, you are probably aware that you **likely have some legal responsibilities**. These can include, but are not limited to:

- Protected Sites (SSSIs/SACs/SPAs etc.)- check DEFRA's Magic Map
- Public Rights of Way- maps held by local county councils.
- Any other rights on your land (e.g. *infrastructure maintenance like water mains, or grazing rights*)
- Permission from any relevant body (e.g. *Forestry commission for woodland, Environment Agency for any main rivers*)
- Agricultural schemes
- Planning permission if any changes to infrastructure are required.
- If using animals:
  - *Livestock legislation*
  - *Protected species legislation*
  - *Animal welfare legislation.*

Do **factor these responsibilities in to your plans**. If in any doubt, **approach the relevant statutory body as early and openly as possible**, so you can best understand any best practice or constraints, and find a pragmatic way forward.



# Lines in the Sand

In addition to your legal responsibilities, you may want to set your own lines in the sand. Often, a major part of wilding can be letting go and letting nature surprise you, but this can be quite a mindset shift to balance with the practical realities of landownership. Setting lines in the sand from the outset can help guide your decision-making as things change, and reassure yourself and those around you that the right balance is being achieved.

Think about the following:



**What are the core principles by which you will make decisions in the project?**

*E.g. We will always do the most naturalistic option possible  
E.g. All decisions will be made in a way which supports the needs of local people*



**What are the non-negotiable things that would mean you want to end the project?**

*E.g. If the costs become too high after five years  
E.g. We have reason to be concerned for the welfare of animals involved*



# People



Don't underestimate the role of people in rewilding. You may already be able to call to mind big, ambitious projects which have been set back by not approaching people in quite the right way, or other projects which have been totally accelerated because they managed to bring people on board. Always:

- Talk to those who might be or feel impacted early on

*If it comes from you directly, you have more chance of talking through the **genuine issues** and finding solutions **before emotions escalate** and **positions become entrenched***

- Always engage in **two-way** communication

*It's important to **hear people out**, even if you don't agree, and **share the information** that led you to your conclusion. Allow your perspective to change if you get new information, and always engage with issues at the heart of people's concerns. This can save a lot of time and hassle in the long run for the same reasons above.*

- And apply **two-way communication everywhere**, including social media, press releases

*– In any form of communication, always **signpost to a direct line of communication with a real person** behind it who can **answer promptly**. Mailboxes or telephone numbers can work well for this. Again, this allows you to find solutions and talk about genuine issues before positions become entrenched.*

- **Open out decisions** where possible- *the example on the next pages illustrates why.*



# People: why open decisions?

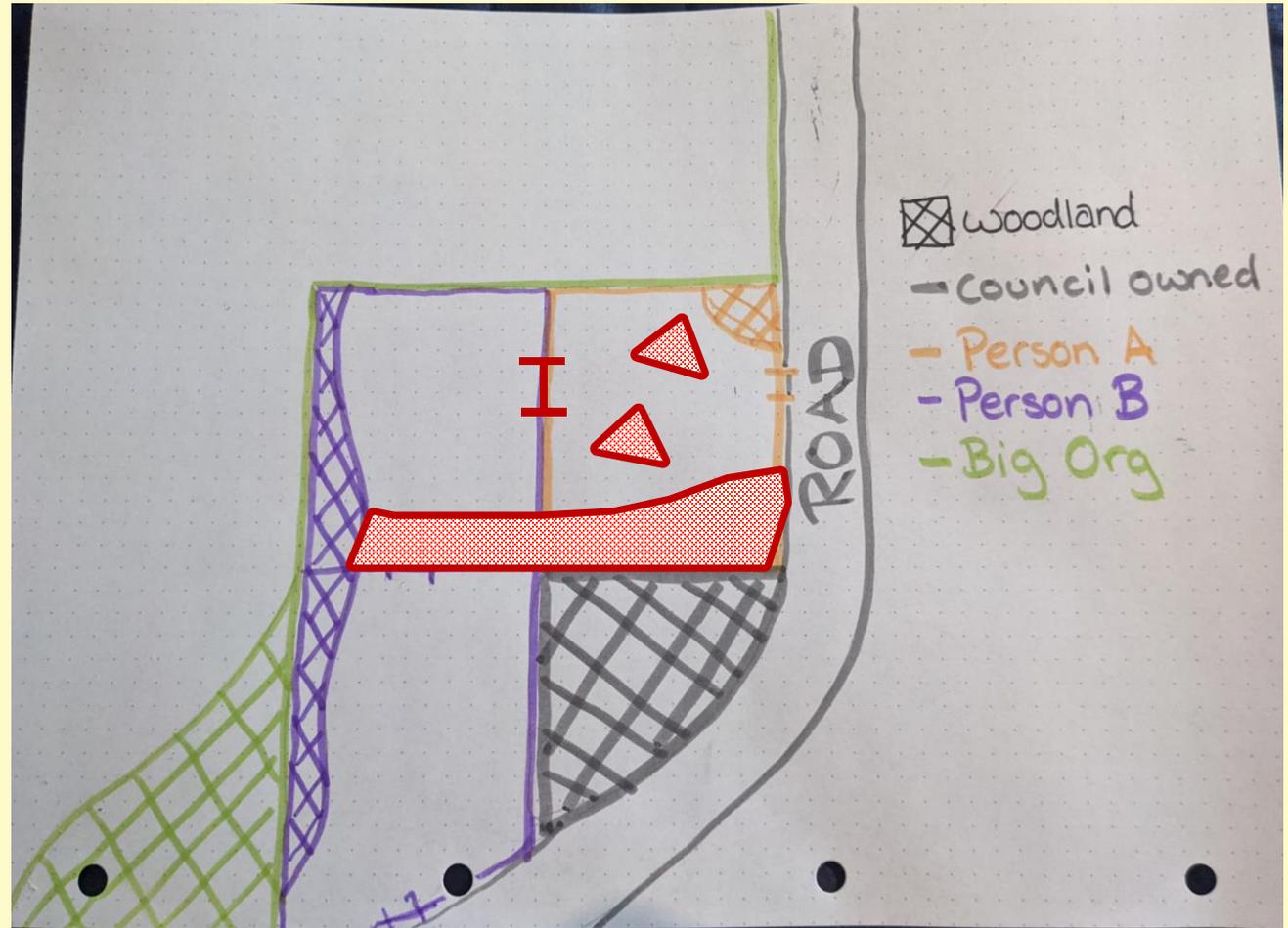
Person A owns a field that is separate to the rest of his land holding. It is quite unproductive soil and while reading about rewilding and carbon, he has become rather taken with the idea of linking up more wooded areas across his land where it is otherwise not being used. He has a good relationship with Person B, who is happy to join in with this idea as long as it does not take up her entire field. They both have a good relationship with the Council, but know that their woodland management plan is all set for the next 5 years, under agreement with a statutory body. A Big Organisation own the land to the north, and neither have had much contact with their representatives. The big org did conduct some management works on site a few years ago, which went over-boundary and damaged some trees on the edge of Person B's land.





# People: why open decisions?

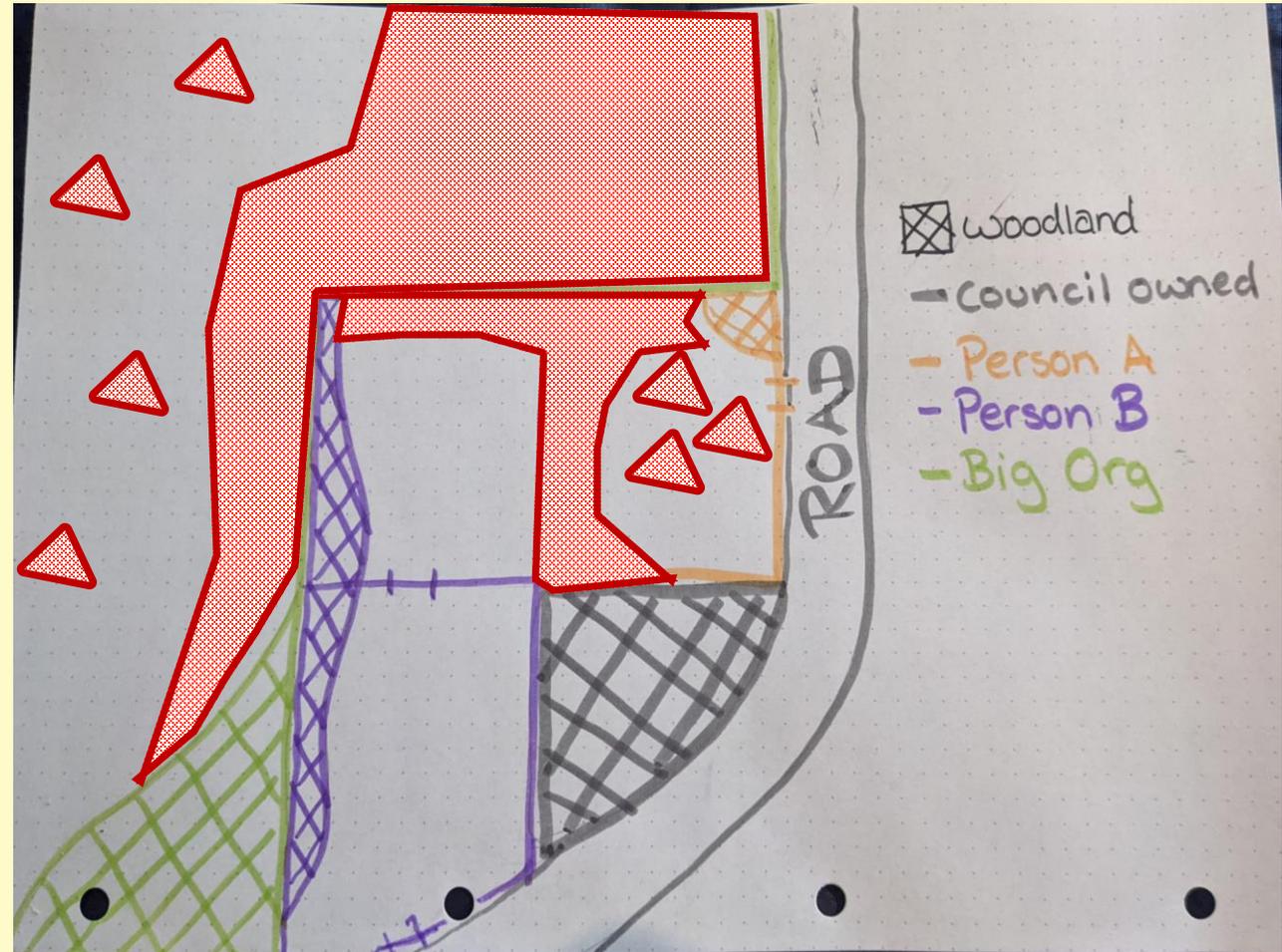
To avoid any negative impacts of future management from the Big Organisation, they decide to join up on the south side of their fields, in order to link the council woodlands and Person B's woodlands. This takes out Person B's access to their field, so they agree that Person B will have access rights through Person A's field, and Person A will join their northerly woodlands by creating "stepping stone" woodland habitats which do not impede Person B's field access.





# People: why open decisions?

However, if they had spoken to the Big Organisation, they would have found that the site manager who conducted the works a few years ago has moved on, and the new manager shares their interest in rewilding. They would have also found that as part of the organisation's corporate biodiversity and carbon strategy, the Big Organisation are looking to target a combination of targeted woodland planting and a trial of natural regeneration using mixed grazing livestock on their sites. If they had had the conversation, they could have ended up with something like this, the woodland connectivity is still enhanced, but access would not be lost, with the added benefit that Person A could be included in big org's management plan."



# People



- The lesson- **do open out decisions where possible**, as there may be more **opportunities** than you realise!
- Even where there are fewer opportunities, opening out decisions can allow you to understand more of the options and constraints you would otherwise come across later in a project.
- Always be **direct about what you are set upon**, and why, and **clear about what you haven't decided/are open to input on**.

*For more information: target resources on co-design, participatory planning, and stakeholder dialogue.*

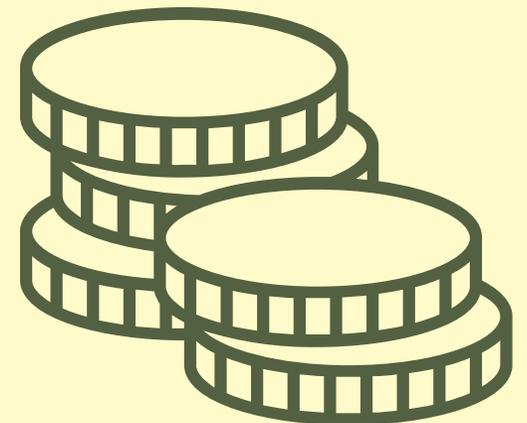
# Budgeting

As the the owner or manager of your land, you are the one best placed to know how to manage your own budget- this pack won't give you any practical advice on that. However, when it comes to rewilding:

- Do keep track of your costs over a project- as these can be a way to measure rewilding benefits!
- Pay attention to upfront costs, as these will likely be larger and reduce longer term.
- In a larger project, think about longer term options for self-sustaining funding, for example:
  - *Ecotourism*
  - *Wild food options*
  - *Teaming with other local business (e.g. craft, restaurants, bars)*
- In some cases, external funding may be an option- but not all.

Consider exploring:

- *Charitable funding?*
- *Agricultural schemes?*

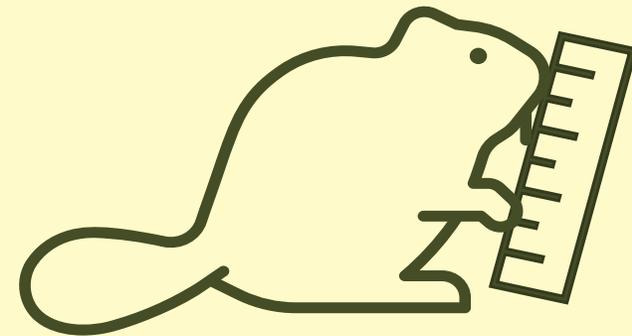


# Measuring Rewilding

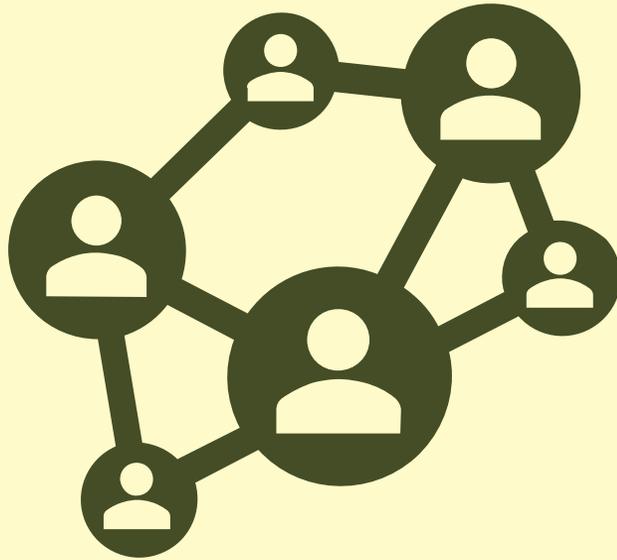
Consider the minimum you can commit to year on year, and prioritise this first. Rewilding happens in the long term, and having at least one consistent way of measuring your progress will really allow you to show the difference in your land

Options include:

- Photography
  - [Fixed point photography](#) can be very effective to show landscape change over time.
  - Drone flight paths can be automated for a similar purpose.
  - Camera traps, or motion sensitive cameras set up on site, can alert you to what wildlife you have on your land. You can use these to see differences in types of wildlife over time, or to inform targeted surveys.
- Targeted surveys
  - Regularly repeat habitat survey if initially conducted
  - Targeted species survey by local interest groups
  - Targeted species surveys of your choosing by paid consultants
- **Keeping your own notes of changes you see or hear over time.** If you are out on site a lot, this can be your most powerful tool- a consistent log of how your land is essentially changes. This can also help inform what you investigate further using official surveys.



# Connect



Share knowledge and experience with others where you can. There is no substitute to sharing ideas and information with your peers as you journey into rewilding

Get involved with likeminded people through networks:

**Yorkshire Rewilding Network**  
([Sign up for the newsletter](#), [follow on Twitter](#) or [join the group on LinkedIn](#))

or

[Find your local network at Rewilding Britain](#)

# To Summarise:



Get to know the land-  
what it's capable of,  
what it naturally inclines  
towards



Choose from the toolkit  
of advice out there,  
checking its  
effectiveness before you  
do so



Stay aware of and  
compliant with relevant  
laws



Set your own lines in the  
sand



Get people involved- and  
excited!



Keep track of your  
budget



Measure how things  
develop- focusing most  
on what you can sustain  
year on year.



Connect with others as  
you learn from the land