

Cotesbach Hall
Main St
Cotesbach
Lutterworth LE17 4HX

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To whom it may concern

During my career in the woodland and trees industries since the 1990's, I have had a good deal of experience with a range of woodland management strategies and systems from native woodland restoration programs in Ireland to CCF (Continuous Canopy Forestry) in Wales and Community Forestry in Central and Eastern Europe. I also have extensive experience in social forestry in England as Social Forestry Officer at The Small Woods Association and as Director of Social Forestry Ltd and numerous other forestry related enterprises. I have written a good many woodland management plans and studied many more.

I have been visiting Steward Community Woodland regularly since 2008 often staying for extended periods. I have studied their current Management Plan and find it robust and well thought out. I have also had the opportunity to observe their forestry operations first hand and found them to be particularly well considered and carried out with a high level of competency, a competency presumably gained from years of experience living in and of the woodland. I have had extensive discussions with the residents about their management, and indeed the conversation about the woodland is ongoing in my experience. I can recall many instances where we have even discussed individual trees, the shade they cast, their biodiversity value, their wind throw risk and what action would be best to take. This level of attention is only possible due to the resident status of the management team and their commitment to conscientious management of the site. Managing natural regeneration as per the Management Plan can be problematic and requires a high level of monitoring; seedlings may be being predated or damaged by abiotic factors such as frost and need restocking. On the other end of the scale, regeneration may be becoming invasive and require control.

Residency affords continuity between the study of the site throughout the seasons taking into account all aspects from timber quality to wildlife and water management and the implementation of the management work program; a continuity that is rarely available to woodland managers. Residing on site also affords the opportunity of monitoring and managing exotic species and tree pathogens. Fruiting bodies of fungal pathogens can come and go in a short amount of time and be missed by land managers who only visit sites occasionally. In these times of complex and virulent pathogens such as *Hymenoscyphus fraxineus* (causing 'Ash Dieback') and *Phytophthora ramorum* (causing 'Sudden Oak Death'), early identification of infection can be particularly important in combatting the spread.

I am aware of several occasions when pathogens have been noticed and remedial action taken within Steward Community Woodland site (eg cankerous oak and ash), and management of exotics such as *Rhododendron ponticum* and *Prunus laurocerasus* (cherry laurel) are ongoing. Left unchecked these species would spread, damaging the

ecosystem. This level of management would be very difficult to achieve if the landowners were not present on site and experience on other sites has shown that further spread makes control more difficult and efforts are often abandoned altogether.

It is clear that having the woodland management team residing on site allows for much more monitoring, more timely interventions and more continuity in the management process which means a more robust management of the site than would otherwise be possible. It also provides an on site end use for management by-products (e.g. sycamore coppice regeneration) which otherwise would have to be removed from site at a cost that would likely make it unviable leading to the work not being undertaken and the woodland neglected as is the case with so many privately owned woodlands.

The residents of Steward Community Woodland are invested in the management process as it not only provides materials, clean water and fuel but protects them from the elements and harbours flora and fauna species that they also value and hence make efforts to protect. They are responsible for the care of this land and take their responsibilities very seriously. They see the results of their management activities every day and are judged upon them by those who visit the site. The implementation of this model of land management methodology can only be beneficial to our efforts to manage our land more efficiently as a society, nationally and indeed globally and I fully support its continuation.

Yours faithfully

Kenny Comain

In Harmony with Woodland

HNC Woodland Management and Arboriculture (Bangor University)