

	<p>Jim White 48 Northfield Road Okehampton Devon EX20 1BA 07974 217168</p>	<p><b>Steward Community Woodland Report</b> <i>(following site visit Saturday 12<sup>th</sup> March 2016)</i></p>
<p><b>Owner:</b> Affinity Woodland Workers Cooperative Limited</p>		<p><b>Total Holding:</b> Woodland 12.9 Hectares (32 acres) <b>OS Grid Ref:</b> SX 767 853</p>

**Introduction – Qualifications and Experience**

I commenced trading as White Wood Management (WWM) in 2009, following seven years employment as Woodland Projects Officer / Project Manager with South West Forest, the national pilot for rural development forestry based in northern Devon and North Cornwall (hosted by Devon County Council 1998-2009).

Following graduation with BSc in Environmental Studies (Ecology Elective – pass with commendation) in 1988 (Crewe & Alsager College) and subsequent work as countryside ranger with Teignbridge District Council (1989-1993), Organic Market Garden Project Supervisor with Dartington (1994-1996) and achieving OCN Forest School Leadership level 3 (2004) during my stint with SWF, I gained Postgraduate Diploma (PGDip) in Forestry and Forest Products by correspondence over four years with Bangor University (2010-2014) whilst developing and expanding my own woodland and timber related business.

I have taken the rural development vision of SWF into my enterprise, demonstrating the scope for using local timber, assisting local land owners in the establishment, management and care of their woodlands whilst promoting opportunities for biodiversity conservation and enhancement in the process of achieving a modest but sustainable income from the resource.

**Response to Terms of Reference in Mr Charles Dutton’s Report for DNPA (dated 15/12/14)**

**1) The Impact of the Current Development within the Dartmoor National Park Area**

Before my site visit on Saturday 12<sup>th</sup> March I had never been to Steward Community Wood. It came as some surprise to me that ‘the current development can be clearly seen off the main A382 from the Moretonhampstead to Bovey Tracey road’. In regular journeys along this stretch of road (travelling from Okehampton, where I live, towards Bovey Tracey and Lustleigh to help manage Woodland Trust sites) I had been unaware of the presence of the Steward Community Wood (SCW) development. I could not see development through the trees nor was I aware of its location, although I had heard of SCW and knew that they occupied an area of woodland within the Moretonhampstead area. It was only when I saw a banner at the side of the road, last year, advertising the SCW open day, that I realised their actual location. So to that extent I would suggest that the visual impact was low.

Below is a print screen view of Google Maps referred to by Mr Dutton in his report...



**Figure 1 - Print Screen view of Google Maps showing Steward Community Wood in relation to surrounding area**

Whilst some ‘scattered development’ is visible within the woodland its overall visual impact remains low especially in comparison to the long-established and permitted developments nearby.

At ground level, and within the site, my impression was of scattered development made up of stilted, timber framed structures under a developing broadleaved woodland canopy made up of a combination of natural regeneration and under planting to help replace the mature larch canopy (already felled as part of the continuous cover forestry transition process – see notes further below).

## 2) Evidence of any harm that the current development has caused or may cause

A light-footprint approach to the settlement areas is evident – stilt-framed structures built on the hillside with no cement or concrete foundations – one family housing area was seen to be in the process of having been dismantled (having been relocated elsewhere, with 2 more in the process of being replaced) revealing a largely intact soil profile with no apparent contamination from grey water, human waste or any other forms of eutrophication / waste. Although some remaining panels, windows and frame material remain stacked to the sides of the dismantled site may be regarded as unsightly this is a temporary condition as, I was given to understand, they will be redeployed on site as fuel wood or in replacement structures elsewhere. The vacated ground is clear of ground flora but shows potential for renewed re-growth and to under plant if necessary to allow the site to revert back easily to a healthy woodland habitat.

Plenty of young broadleaved tree growth and regeneration is visible growing within the settlement area, responding healthily to the increased light levels following previous small, group felling and thinning of larch trees. Thus the visible evidence is contrary to the statement in Dutton’s report (end of 1.1) that... ‘There is no woodland where the development is sited and large areas of the wood have been cleared around the buildings.’ Whilst the basal area count for the existing woodland within the settlement area remains low (see comments 3) / 4) below) this is due in part to the relascope BAF used and that much of the up-coming regeneration and under planting currently remains less than 10cm dbh.



Figures 2 & 3 - A healthy mix of larger trees and young, natural broadleaved regeneration is visible within the settlement areas of SCW

## 3) State of the Woodland, general advice on woodland management issues and

### 4) Current condition of the woodland and any special qualities

The woodland is largely coniferous but under transition as part of a continuous cover forestry management approach with a healthy, diverse and prolific (in some areas) amount of natural broadleaved regeneration – including hazel, ash, oak & sycamore supplemented by under planting of other species including birch, apple, cherry etc.



Figure 4 - Previous group felling of conifers yielding extensive broadleaved regeneration.



**Figure 5 – Extensive area of Laurel cleared by SCW residents with help from local volunteers**

Management of invasive species such as laurel is carried out by hand and efforts have clearly been made to clear the large area above the revetment walls that surround the site of the old house (a development that no longer exists and pre-dates the ownership of Affinity Woodland Workers Cooperative).

The basal area of trees within the current settlement area averages 13m<sup>2</sup>/ha (based on relascope sweeps with a Basal Area Factor of 3.5 at three representative sampling points). Whilst there are some larger trees that may be at risk of

windblow in extreme winds, competition from root space is greatly reduced due to the thinning / group felling of the larch trees in this vicinity. The greatest risk of windblow is within the Norway spruce and Scots pine trees to the northern end of the site (well away from the settlement area) with a basal area of 45 m<sup>2</sup>/ha indicating a more urgent need to be thinned.

Ivy on conifer stems needs ‘rotational management’ to prevent windblow due to increased sail area. Prioritisation and timing of such operations needs to be sensitively managed to help preserve suitable bat roosting habitat (as part of EPS – European Protected Species - legislation) and promote wildlife (invertebrates, bird life etc) in general. The new woodland management plan makes provision for EPS including Dormice – nest boxes have been installed and a monitoring scheme is being initiated to help monitor local populations and mitigate potential impacts of ongoing management of the site.



**Figure 6 - Larch with ivy on main stem but not yet within canopy of tree so retain / tolerate for time being.**



**Figure 7 - Ivy over-running lateral growth / canopy of larch tree increasing sail area windblow risk. Timely intervention by cutting and removing sections of ivy stems at the base of the tree is desirable.**

The new woodland management plan should make some provisions for access by light footprint forestry machinery which is needed in places to aid felling and extraction of larger trees

in greater volumes which members of SCW may not be able to do on their own or with the assistance of horse logging. Countryside Stewardship forestry support is available to help improve access in this respect via the woodland infrastructure grant.

There are a range of options available with respect to purchase or hire of equipment (with experienced operators) to help with extraction of larger volume timbers. The possibilities are as follow:

Use of a timber arch (with Quad bike available already seen on site) may be one option for smaller diameter length trees:



Figure 8 - Timber arch drawn behind a quad bike / ATV (screen shot by way of an example only from [www.tcfengineering.co.uk/log-arches.html](http://www.tcfengineering.co.uk/log-arches.html))

whilst use of an iron horse for extraction of larger, longer individual specimens may be desirable:



Figure 9 - Iron horse extraction of a 10m long 46dbh diameter Spruce trunk

Use of a small tractor forwarder for larger volume and sizes may also be a more efficient alternative:



**Figure 10 - Small tractor with forwarder is an option for small scale economic timber extraction / harvesting whilst allowing for a light foot print operation to be maintained.**

All of the above provide options for low impact harvesting and extraction which may suit the multi-purpose management interests for SCW.

#### **5) Value of the woodland, designation under section 3 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act**

The work of the [South West England Woodland and Forestry Strategic Economic Study](#) (2003) and its subsequent [review in 2009](#) demonstrated that woodlands give much more to the region's economy than just the value of the standing timber. It is in fact the space in between the trees and how this is used, the public access, biodiversity, landscape and ecosystem services supported by woodlands that makes the significant contribution to the region's economy. The intimate on-site management approach at SCW may be modest in conventional economic terms but the provision of permissive access for the public, occasional training courses in woodland management and forest gardening skills offered by the members of the project and the demonstration of 'the art of the possible' in terms of off-grid, low-impact living as part of a low-carbon economy approach to sustainable living, without compromising the health and vitality of the woodland and its capacity to regenerate, is arguably of greater value, given the dearth of examples available within this region and elsewhere.

#### **6) Evidence of Woodland Management in the past 5 years**

The ongoing CCF monitoring shown in appendices to the new management plan for SCW demonstrates the successful transition underway in transforming the woodland from a mature coniferous single aged stand to a diverse, mixed age self-regenerating broadleaved woodland. That this has been achieved to date largely by hand with clear evidence of laurel clearance, coppicing, under planting and thinning during the course of my site visit shows that the project members are continuing to take their sustainable woodland management responsibilities seriously and conscientiously.

#### **7) Impact of Larch disease (Phytophthora ramorum)**

Larch presents biggest risk for clearfell removal under SPHN (Statutory Plant Health Notice issued by Forestry Commission) due to Phytophthora – to date, no positive diagnosis has led to this action being necessary. Whilst continued thinning and removal of the larch should continue as part of the ongoing CCF management of the site, SCW have addressed the need for a 'Phytophthora action plan' within their management plan. They can put this into operation should a SPHN be served (with the imperative to clear fell) due to the discovery of Phytophthora ramorum in the larch, with the subsequent wholesale removal of the larch canopy (within a 250 m radius of the infected specimen). There may need to be a move away from active removal of sycamore in the short – medium term to provide a viable broadleaved replacement canopy, ongoing selective thinning may continue to favour other broadleaved specimens in the longer term.

## 8) Impact of current residential use in the woodland



Figure 11 - Current compost toilet sites were witnessed with no evidence of surrounding woodland or ground flora being compromised.

Compost toilets – human manure is managed on a rotational basis and spread below top-fruiting trees. The top-fruit area was seen, with no apparent ill effects from the addition.

Urination cabins - sawdust and straw used to absorb liquid. Locations moved around the site and planted with peas for productive vegetable production. No unpleasant smells or odours or effluent were witnessed in any of these areas nor was there any indication that the health of ground flora and tree canopy above was affected in any way or in previous toilet areas.

With the current occupancy of 14 adults, 5 children and 4 teenagers, the project members have arrived at what they consider to be a sustainable carrying capacity for occupancy of the site by adults of 18 (plus their dependants). Given the low-impact of their presence evident on site, with no discernible contamination of ground and water courses or compromised levels of woodland regeneration, I would consider the residential use of the site to be presently sustainable. This should remain subject to constant review however as part of the ongoing CCF monitoring and management responsibilities for the site.

## 9) Recommendation for woodland management for the next 5-10 years

Covered previously in sections 3, 4, 6 & 7 in part but I would add here that some kind of control will need to be applied in the management of the grey squirrel population if damage to the upcoming broadleaved regeneration and its future timber value (and long term health and safety) is not to be compromised. Such control may be through trapping, shooting and/or the encouragement of natural predators such as goshawk (two pairs known to be nesting in Fingle Wood, north east of Moretohamstead) , pine marten (currently still thought to be extinct in this area due to previous persecution by game keepers in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century) and polecats (recent confirmed sightings in the Teign valley) .

## 10) Justification for any residential development to facilitate proper woodland management.

My opinion here is at variance with the contributions of the other forestry reports (both those of Mr Charles Dutton and of Mr Anthony MacKarel). If the woodland management approach was one for commercial gain through conventional thinning, clearfell and replanting of the timber crop then, it could be argued that no residential onsite presence is required. However this is not the management approach that is in train for this site. It is a community woodland with public access, ongoing forest gardening work and continuous cover forestry management in process – no less ‘proper management’ than a more commercial approach and arguably with far greater public benefit and interest. The ccf monitoring demonstrates clearly the transformation that is underway from coniferous woodland to self-regenerating broadleaved woodland is at the rate it is partially as a result of project workers living on site and applying day to day management. They provide the eyes and ears for the management of the site and can apply operations on a highly responsive basis, this would not nearly be so possible if the site was uninhabited. Furthermore the management of controls for pests such as grey squirrels will be a lot more effective by an onsite presence and regular checks and baiting of traps, shooting etc.

I gained a distinct impression from my site visit that the residents of SCW have observed and maintained a light-footprint, sustainable approach to their occupancy of the site, in a way that is congruent with their stated principles and aims. I would suggest that currently little or no long-term irreversible harm is being done by their habitation of the site and given the benefits that this in fact has provided for the wood’s vitality and ongoing management it could be tolerated at the agreed carrying capacity.