

Proof of Evidence of David Wood

1. I am a professional forester with 29 years of experience in the business. I trained as practical commercial forester at Newton Rigg and subsequently went on to achieve the NDF in 1993. I have worked for the Forestry Commission, Chatsworth Estate, as well as smaller private companies. For eight years I was the Woodland Management Officer and then Senior Estates Officer with Exmoor National Park Authority. For over five years I worked and travelled abroad undertaking forestry from the tundra to the tropics. In recent years I have run a freelance forestry consultancy undertaking contracts and training with local authorities, landowners, estates and land based communities. I specialise in small scale enterprises where maximum value can added ideally at source.
2. I have known of the Steward Wood Community for a number of years and taught some members on a Continuous Cover Forestry course over three years ago. About 18 months ago I was asked to visit the site to assist these members developing their plans for Continuous Cover Forestry. I have recently (23/09/08) re-visited the site in order to see how they are getting on and review matters for this hearing.
3. When assessing projects such as these it is necessary to remain broad minded and realise that one is often dealing with individuals with limited experience. There has been a rapid expansion of interest in woodland management from the more practical craft angle of the business in the past 15 years and this has often been from those with little formal training in forestry or even rural enterprise. These “new entrants” have done much to popularise woodlands and woodland craft activities once only carried out by a few quiet humble old boys. Without them, many of our woodland crafts would have gone the way of the tanner or flint knapper! I think it is also worthy to mention that communities take time to evolve and develop their cohesiveness.
4. It has therefore taken the community a while to integrate their original visions into a working woodland. However, I was

pleased to see on my last visit that progress is now well under way and sound management is in place.

5. How should one evaluate this?

- a. The presence of a Management Plan setting out clear objectives within given time frames and, a programme of works to achieve these. No evaluation of output is possible unless the terms are originally stated. A clear and well laid plan of operations has been prepared.
- b. Developing management for Continuous Cover Forestry requires regular monitoring. Initially, base line data must be collected to assess the woodland to see if transformation is an option and what interventions are needed to achieve this. The Forestry Commission has set out clear guidelines for this evaluation and monitoring and I am pleased to report this has been carried out. It is a complex process and takes considerable time to implement and interpret. However, once collated it can guide management for years with ongoing updating.
- c. The legal requirements of woodland management are covered. A Felling Licence has been put in place. More importantly this has focused the need to decide which trees need or should be removed and how. 433 trees have been marked with an estimated volume of 563 cubic metres. Already these works are feeding back into management as many of the larch are now found to have butt-rot.
- d. The work is being carried out in a competent and regulated way. Achievement is visible on the ground and results are feeding back into the management cycle. I was pleased to hear more skilled members have joined and to see skill levels improved over time. The marking for thinning, and small scale but significant fellings have now started. A mobile mill was brought in to convert the logs thereby significantly adding to their value.

6. The community is appealing the planning decision made by the Dartmoor National Park Authority. Although in a planning context, the community is woodland based carrying out woodland/forestry operations, there is little exact guidance within PPS7 or Appendix A regarding forestry operations. Generally planning Authorities use large scale commercial forestry operations as templates for “forestry purposes.” The business margins within these large scale operations are now so narrow, the operators are generally regional or even National and highly mechanised. Their operations are unsustainable without relatively cheap oil and large scale working. This has provided a window to locally sustainable, small scale operators bringing back traditional methods and marketing through localised value adding. There are clear signs of “local wood for local good” and for instance increased demand and marketing of charcoal by small scale producers. Planning authorities are beginning to become aware of their role in leading sustainable development forward and even embracing retreat Towns. The future of intimate woodland management will require the skills of Continuous Cover Forestry, local craft operators and those that can skilfully market added value products. This community represents individuals who are developing these skills with important woodland within a National Park.
7. Objections were raised regarding the Section 3 designation of the site. Section 3 woodlands are expected to be retained and enhanced and inappropriate for development unless for the proper management of the site. From my experience it is unusual to see conventional conifer plantations listed under section 3 unless there is a significant landscape value. It seems at odds with National Park objectives not to support the gradual conversion of conifer plantation to predominantly broadleaves via continuous cover practise. Forest gardens and small low-impact dwelling sites will hardly be visible within the woodland structure proposed from any potential viewpoints available. The structural changes will only bring improved landscape character and a community supporting itself from its’ woodland assets.

8. The nature of the operations proposed suggest on-going, day to day woodland management rather than large scale forestry. It is therefore impossible to compare the two. It has been shown in other planning cases that on-site dwelling is a major contributor to financial sustainability and practical assistance with deer or squirrel management.
Financial sustainability may not always mean external sales, and already the community is discovering the value of internal sales with minimal fuel bills and latterly with sawn building materials. Deer exclusion without the presence of on-site workers is extremely expensive with high maintenance costs and still no guarantee of complete exclusion.
9. Sales of produce will depend on the marketing ingenuity of members but there is demand for woodland craft products and particularly local charcoal that could be achieved at this site. The lack of conventional forestry access need nor hamper marketing of light forest products.
10. If local recreational activities increase such as with the cycle trail, a ready audience would certainly exist.
11. I believe the community to be moving forward positively both from a woodland management and coherence sense. The site is now developing in a sustainable way towards future benefits both for the woodland and its' inhabitants. It is unusual to see such structural diversity in a property such as this and this is only coming about through the input of the community and its' plans.

D.Wood

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