

STEWARD COMMUNITY WOODLAND UNDER THREAT

On 10th August, our world turned upside down. Our Appeal for permanent planning permission for this educational project in low impact living was turned down by the Planning Inspector who had presided over the five day Public Inquiry. He ruled that the low impact dwellings and way of life damage the character and appearance of the National Park.

Questions

There are many questions:

- * How could he disregard the outstanding environmental credentials and clear benefits of this educational project?
- * How could he disregard the overwhelming support for it both locally and around the world?
- * How could he ignore the urgent need to find solutions to the huge environmental crises we face?
- * How could he ride roughshod over the welfare and interests of the children in particular, who have lived here close to nature for all or most of their lives?
- * How could he not be moved by the many heartfelt and passionate contributions at the Public Inquiry by members of the public supporting the project, including the Vicar of Moretonhampstead?

The questions go on....

"[The Planning Inspector's] report reveals a misinformed logic, a shallow understanding of landscape, and an attitude of mind that should have no place in the modern world, and certainly not within a national park." - Dr Tom Greeves writing in the Western Morning News, 18th August

Enforcement Notices

The Enforcement Notices issued by the Dartmoor National Park Authority ('the DNPA') require us to dismantle our homes, our lives and this project over 12 months with the ultimate threat of fines and imprisonment if we stay.

After the initial shock and disbelief, we feel greatly heartened by the messages of support we have received from all quarters. We value our community, our connection to this land and the wider community even more and are drawing strength from that.

We feel determined not to allow all that we have built up over 16 years to be wrecked by the short sightedness of the DNPA and the Planning Inspector.

"A national park that cannot accommodate and celebrate the community woodland clearly needs reform. The residents' lifestyle is unusual, but is refreshing and stimulating. They have demonstrated a remarkable commitment, through winter rains and storms, to a way of life very different from most of us. They are deeply integrated with the very supportive local community. Their gentle impact on the land, philosophy and brave experiment should be celebrated, and presented as a leading example of how some of us might live in the future, supported by an innovative and flexible park authority." - Dr Tom Greeves, WMN 18th August

Petition & March

We have set up a petition [www.stewardwood.org/petition] for people to sign urging the DNPA to continue to allow us to live here and manage the project. We will organise a March from the woods to the DNPA's headquarters along the route of the Wray Valley Trail to deliver this petition in the Spring. Already there are 2,329 signatures. Please add your name to it, if you haven't done so already.

Otherwise, we are considering our options and seeking advice before deciding on our next steps. We are feeling positive.

Public Meeting

We have organised a Public meeting to take place in Moretonhampstead Parish Hall (by the Church) on Tuesday 20th September at 7.30pm.

Larch Disease

Meanwhile, the day after we received the Planning Decision, the Forestry Commission confirmed that a larch tree they had spotted from the air and subsequently felled was infected with Phytophthora, a fungal disease fatal to larch. As a result, they will soon be issuing a Statutory Plant Health Notice which will require us to fell approx 300 larch trees before the end of March 2017 to prevent the spread of the disease. There has never been a more important time for us to be here managing the woodland for the benefit of the ecology, with the intimate knowledge we have of this place. How can we be expected to deal with this urgent and enormous task at the same time as dismantling our homes and lives here and finding somewhere else to live?

HOW YOU CAN HELP

Here's what you can do to help:

- * Sign the petition (www.stewardwood.org/petition) and spread the word about our plight through Facebook etc.
- * Come along to the Public Meeting in Moretonhampstead Parish Hall (by the Church) on Tuesday 20th September at 7.30pm.
- * Come on the March to the DNPA's headquarters in the Spring (details to follow).
- * Phone, email, and write to the DNPA telling them why you support Steward Community Woodland and urging them to continue to allow us to live here and manage the project (see contact details below).
- * If you wish to be kept informed, please join our mailing list (details on our website).
- * Come and volunteer at the woods – details of Conservation Days and Volunteer Weeks are on our website and Facebook page.

Many thanks for your continued support,
Rebecca, Merlin, Ollie, Daniel, Lorna, Son, John, Sharif, Fern, Seth, Mel, and all the kids & teens

www.stewardwood.org

www.facebook.com/StewardCommunityWoodland

DNPA contact details

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