

Statement of Evidence - Jane Willis

1. My name is Jane Willis. I have lived in Moretonhampstead for 27 years. I have been closely involved in many community organisations during this period including being Chair of the Playgroup Committee, Moretonhampstead Villages in Action Group, the Twinning Association and Moretonhampstead Action Group for Sustainability. I have been a Parish Councillor for the last 13 years and am currently Chair of the Parish Council although I am writing this statement in a personal capacity. By profession, I was a teacher and before I retired I worked as an Education Officer looking after the interests of children and young people in foster care.
2. I have known the residents of Steward Community Woodland since shortly after the project was established in April 2000. I have visited several times since then and taken an interest in their projects.
3. I have supported the Steward Community Woodland since its inception. In a personal capacity, I spoke in support of their application for full planning permission on 10 April 2015 at the Development Management Committee Meeting.
4. Many of us are concerned about Climate Change and finding a good way of living a simpler and more sustainable lifestyle. It is the inventiveness, resourcefulness and commitment Steward Community Woodland bring to being a living example of this concern, that has earned it such a lot of support and admiration from the local community and from further afield.
5. There were 402 letters to Dartmoor National Park in support of their latest planning application in April 2015. 65 of these came from Moretonhampstead, 125 from the Dartmoor area and the rest from the UK and other parts of the world. This indicates to me that there is a real desire to see this experiment in a low carbon lifestyle continue. There were only approximately 20 letters against the proposal.
6. In 2008 the carbon footprint of the community was calculated to be 34% of the UK average. A significant achievement.
7. This is achieved in part by harnessing solar and hydro power not only to light their homes but to drive simple mechanical tools and electrical devices. The older dwellings on site were built from recycled materials such as canvas and disused double glazed units. Replacement houses are being built using local timber and other materials in a variety of constructions. Water is supplied from their own source and they use composting toilets so are able to be self sufficient in these utilities. It is also maintained through careful thought about the carbon impacts of everyday life.
8. The community host a number educational courses in a wide range of topics including wood working skills; food and herbal medicines; foraging; forest management; permaculture. In this way, they share skills but also the opportunity for participants to re-evaluate the essentials of life.
9. Living in this way provides a healthy and much needed challenge to the rest of us about our energy use; how much we need to be comfortable; our skills in understanding the natural environment; our knowledge and abilities to use plants and timber; and the effects of consumerism. This challenge could not happen if the community lived off site.
10. It's important to look at what they are doing in the round. Their low-carbon way of life depends on using the wood to live in as well as to work. I agree with Mr Tamplin, the Inspector who allowed the planning appeal in 2002, when he said that "Were the group to live off site .. conventional housing costs and the need to find...employment to fund them would lead to the group having little time available for the project. Therefore it would become little more than a hobby and its purpose would be completely negated."

11. The inhabitants of Steward Wood make a large positive contribution to the life of our small town through their part-time work and generous voluntary participation in community activities. For instance, one member offers computing courses and IT support, another works at the primary school, another is a volunteer firefighter, another helps with the youth club, another works for the Moretonhampstead Development Trust. The town would be very much the poorer without their input.
12. If the inhabitants of Steward Wood are evicted the town will not be able to house them as we have very little social housing and that which we have, is under great pressure.
13. Their low financial living costs as a result of their largely subsistence lifestyle allows them to be able to participate more in the life of the town than would be the case if they were in full time employment and possibly commuting to Exeter or Plymouth.
14. Emerson and Thoreau, the founding fathers of the world wide National Parks movement would have understood and supported the aims of Steward Community Woodland. I ask you allow this community to continue this exemplar of low carbon living in harmony with the natural environment.