

Dr. Christian Taylor
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7th February 2016

Re: Sustainability at Steward Community Woodland

I am writing as a university lecturer in ecosystem science and sustainability and as a secondary school science teacher who has had an opportunity to observe the sustainable development at Steward Community Woodland over the past 14 years. I am convinced that the project meets the objectives of sustainable development as outlined by Robinson in 1993 (see references).

I have been visiting Steward Community Woodland since 2002 to conduct an annual fungal foray as part of the project's outreach programme of events organised for the public.

I note that the land started as a dense larch plantation sold by the Forestry Commission to the current owners. It was effectively a monoculture forest of the type criticised recently (Naudts et al 2016) in terms of un-sustainable forestry management. It is useful to keep this in mind; particularly with regard to the fact that dense conifer plantations of this kind have not sequestered as much carbon dioxide as was previously assumed. Indeed recent research by Naudts et al has suggested that broadleaved native deciduous woodlands would have sequestered far more carbon dioxide under traditional management practices such as selective felling (Naudts et al 2016). As such it seems that the replacement of conifer with broadleaved woodland is the sustainability and biodiversity conservation preference of those engaged in temperate forest management.

During my time visiting the community woodland, I have witnessed the gradual selective thinning of the larch forest by the community members, and the replanting and replacement of the dense dark conifer plantation with a much lighter broadleaved woodland of a mixture of native deciduous trees such as hazel, ash, rowan, oak and beech. I have observed that the effect of the settlement is to cause the forest to switch from conifer to broadleaved woodland. Some of the native forest re-growth will also have been from the native seed stock which was laying dormant, as well as replanting activities of the residents.

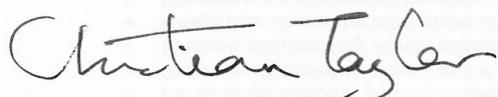
I have also observed that this native forest regrowth effect is most

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extensive in the immediate vicinity and curtilage of dwellings and pathways which the residents of the woodland have built; indeed that the deciduous re-growth seems less extensive further away from dwellings. As such the dwellings, built in the clearings made by thinning the larch, seem most likely to be linked to the distribution of what are now patches of native forest re-growth within the larch which can easily be seen. It seems likely that without the residential aspect of the project, selective felling followed by native forest regrowth would not have occurred. As such, the development has seen an overall move towards sustainable land use and forestry practice (Robinson 1993).

I have observed that the residents of Steward Community Woodland live modestly in a sustainable way which reduces their collective carbon emissions far below and in advance of government targets for per capita emissions set as part of the UK government commitments to reduce greenhouse gas emissions under the Kyoto protocol and the recent COP 21 Paris agreement.

Yours sincerely,



Dr. Christian Taylor (PhD, Bsc, RHS Gen Cert Hort)

References:

Robinson N.A.; 1993; Agenda 21: Promoting sustainable human settlement development, Chapter 7 of Earth's Action Plan, IUCN Environmental Policy and Law Paper no 27; Edited by Robinson N.A. Oceana Publication, Inc, New York, London, Rome, pp 82-114.

Naudts K., Yiyiing C., McGrath M.J., Ryder J., Valade A., Otto J., Luyssaert S., 2016; Europe's forest management did not mitigate climate warming. Science, vol 351, issue 6273, pp 597-600