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The Planning Inspectorate
4/11 Eagle Wing
Temple Quay House
2 The Square
Temple Quay
Bristol BS1 6PN

21st March 2016

Dear Sir/Madam,

Re: Steward Community Woodland – Basic needs assessment (App.Ref.3129320)

I am writing in relation to Steward Community Woodland's appeal for permanent residential permission and in particular to endorse their “Needs Analysis” document. I regularly conduct agricultural appraisals for low impact smallholders who are seeking permission for an agricultural workers' dwelling, as part of my work as a researcher and campaigner for sustainable agriculture. Steward Community Woodland is different to my usual appraisals, in that it is not an agricultural business, but aims to enable a small community to live in a low impact way, thereby reducing their environmental impact. However, like some of small scale, agricultural businesses I appraise, being able to live on-site in self-built dwellings that are designed to use renewable energy in an efficient way and to provide for many of their own basic needs from the land is part of achieving a more sustainable way of life.

I have read both the recently prepared document, “Needs Analysis for the years 2014 and 2015” and the Ecological Footprint Report, prepared in 2008. I believe in the value of tools such as the Ecological Footprint Analysis and Carbon Footprint Analysis, as they enable the quantification of claims to be sustainable or carbon neutral. The analysis showed that the average Ecological Footprint of the residents of Steward Community Woodland over the period studied (2008) was 2.06 gha, 39% of the the Ecological Footprint of a typical UK individual. The equivalent Carbon Footprint was 3.75 tonnes, 34% of the UK average at 10.92 tonnes¹.

The needs analysis is a financial evaluation of how the community’s needs food, fuel, water, sewage, electricity and shelter are met by the land, and what proportion of their total needs this represents compared to national averages. The results are summarised in the table over the page, and indicate that in total 78-81% of their needs are being met from the land. I have also calculated a percentage for total needs minus shelter, water and sewage. This is to show that, even when housing, which I do not normally include in subsistence calculations when I conduct appraisals, is not included, a significant percentage of basic needs for food, fuel and electricity are being met. Furthermore, water and sewage needs are met through subsistence, and significantly reduced by the use of dry composting toilets. The percentages of basic needs met by the land when shelter, water and sewage are excluded are 60% (2014) and 66% (2015).

¹ http://www.stewardwood.org/pdf/03_ecological_footprint.pdf

Summary of calculation of basic needs met from the land, and the contribution they make to meeting the total needs of the community.

	2014			2015		
	From land	Total	Subsistence as % of total	From land	Total	Subsistence as % of total
Food	£4,318	£22,878	18.9%	£6,338	£25,278	25%
Fuel	£4,738	£5,278	90%	£5,462	£6,032	91%
Electricity	£3,597	£4,186	86%	£4,172	£4,784	87%
Shelter, water and sewage	£46,535	£51,870	90%	£53,860	£59,280	91%
Total	£66,012.00	£84,212	78.00%	£77,689.00	£95,374	81.00%
Total (excl. shelter, water and sewage)	£19,477.00	£32,342	60.22%	£23,829.00	£36,094	66.00%

The sustainable living experiment carried out at Steward Community Woodland over the last sixteen years, shows that eight households can significantly reduce their environmental impact by meeting a substantial proportion of their basic needs from the land. Were the community unable to continue living in the woods, they would have to live in rented accommodation, where it would be much harder to meet such basic needs in a low impact way. It is likely that the combined ecological footprints of the eight families would start to approach more average levels for the UK, even though I am sure they would continue to try and live in as sustainable way as possible. In ecological footprint terms, bearing in mind that the current “earthshare” is 1.8ha (probably less in 2016, due to the global increase in population), and that of the average UK citizen without a car is 4.83global ha, (compared to an average of 2.06gha) this would clearly be a retrograde step. In contrast, the security that permanent planning permission would provide, would increase confidence to invest in more energy efficient housing and renewable energy systems, potentially leading to further reductions in carbon emissions and a greater proportion of their needs being met from the land.

Steward Community Woodland has low carbon living and education as a core aim. By experimenting with meeting food, fuel and energy needs from the woods it is contributing to the need to dramatically reduce greenhouse gas emissions. As such it is supported by paragraph 97 of the National Planning Policy Framework², which lists ways in which local authorities should support communities to increase the use of renewable and low carbon energy. Although unconventional, Steward Community Woodland represents an affordable and therefore more accessible way to reduce greenhouse gases, which others could replicate. Following the Paris Climate Conference in December 2015, the moral and legal imperative to address climate change has never been stronger. Radical solutions, such as Steward Community Woodland, which have a much smaller visual impact than a wind or solar farm, should be considered alongside more conventional approaches to carbon reduction.

Yours faithfully,

Rebecca Laughton

²National Planning Policy Framework. Dept. of Communities and Local Government. March 2012, p22