

## Appendix B

Times article re Brithdir Mawr decision:

From [The Times](#)  
September 17, 2008

# Hobbit house saved from demolition as winds of change blow in pioneer's favour



[Simon de Bruxelles](#)

Tony Wrench was toasting victory over the planners yesterday with a glass of wine made from the vines that grow on the turf roof of his wooden roundhouse.

After ten years of planning battles, during which he and his partner, Jane Faith, faced having to demolish the home they had built themselves, they have finally won the right to stay.

The roundhouse, known officially as "That Roundhouse", was built in a hidden corner of a farm in the Pembrokeshire Coast National Park. It has a grass roof and walls built from cob – a combination of mud, straw, sand and water – and 16in (40cm) logs. A skylight was salvaged from an old coach and a milk churn is used as a stove.

For years no one knew it was there until a pilot carrying out an aerial survey spotted the glint of Perplex and the planners went in to investigate.

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- [Sir Stirling Moss on his Mayfair gadget house and Florida eco-home](#)

What they found was a community in which Bilbo Baggins, the hobbit from The Lord of the Rings, would have felt at home. Smoke curled from the chimney of the grass-roofed roundhouse. Mr Wrench, who was once a council official, was scraping a living from music-making and woodturning.

The roundhouse is part of the self-sustaining Brithdir Mawr Community, which had built several other environmentally friendly buildings, including a geodesic dome and a house made from straw bales.

Unfortunately, none had planning permission and the National Park authority took immediate action to have their occupants evicted. In 2004 Mr Wrench, who spent £3,000 building his 34ft diameter house, was about to start demolition when local people rallied to his support. The issue was raised in the Welsh Assembly but the application was rejected time and again by the park authority.

But then the wind changed and the environment suddenly became a fashionable issue. Mr Wrench, 62, who has been pioneering the concept of “permaculture” for decades, found his lifestyle being hailed as a model for sustainable living. The park authority amended its rules to allow “low-impact” housing, and yesterday he was told that the roundhouse is no longer condemned.

“The planners did everything they could to get rid of us, but we have been able to prove to them that it is possible to have a sustainable and low-impact community in the countryside,” Mr Wrench said.

“It’s great that our efforts to build a community using renewable resources have now been supported. We had to prove that we were improving the bio-diversity of the area and conserving the woodland – and we did that.

“I would urge other councils and national park planners to take the same view as Pembrokeshire National Park. The planners have worked miracles in making a new policy, which enables communities that are self-sufficient to exist.”

Mr Wrench and his partner generate their own power, have a compost lavatory and burn wood they coppice themselves for heat and cooking. He admits that living sustainably can be hard work, especially in the depths of winter when his wind turbine and solar panels struggle to power a single light bulb.

Emma Orbach, 52, who founded the community, said: “It’s a milestone in a free society that a minority of people who wish to live simply on the Earth are now being given this opportunity. The villagers are pioneering a new lifestyle.”

Planning approval has been given for eight roundhouses, along with lavatories, agricultural buildings and workshops on the land. Power is generated on-site, water is collected locally and three quarters of the villagers’ income comes from working the land and from craft industries.

A National Park spokesman said: “It is pleasing that support can be given at this stage in a longstanding and complicated case.”

### **Ecological alternatives**

— Grass roofs are a coveted must-have for any eco-conscious homeowner, but alternatives include insulating lofts or wall cavities with sheep’s wool – renewable, durable and naturally resistant to fire

— Fill your home with potted plants, which remove harmful chemicals such as benzene and carbon monoxide. Bamboo palm and gerbera daisy are particularly good

— Don’t rely on mains electricity to pump harvested rainwater. One alternative is a solar fountain, which powers a low-voltage pump using a small panel. A complete fountain will cost upwards of £100

— Have a go at ground-source heating, a way of drawing heat from the ground using either a borehole or pipes laid a few metres below the surface. It must be boosted to the level needed for heating a home using a heat pump. In a well-installed system, every unit of electrical energy put in will yield three or more units of heat energy. Invest in a condensing boiler, which increases efficiency by recovering heat normally wasted in the hot flue gases given off by a conventional boiler. It may cost a little more (between £100 and £300) to install, but will use less fuel

— Don’t be bashful about more radical steps. Composting of human waste is as old as the hills. The right amount of “soakage” – typically using sawdust, straw and earth – gives good decomposition. Keeping urine separate is the key to avoiding a bad smell

Source: Centre for Alternative Technology