

Temporary structures at Steward Community Woodland

Introduction

This paper has been written in order to outline the nature of the structures built at Steward Community Woodland (SCW). There is some debate as whether they are classed as temporary or permanent. All of the structures at Steward Wood are low impact. This means that they are built mostly from local or reclaimed materials and have minimal impact on the land.

Structure

Most of the structures at SCW are built using round wood timber frames from wood harvested from the surrounding woodland. Some also contain sawn timber either reclaimed or from the woodland. They are mostly built on platforms raised off the ground. This minimises damp problems and also the impact on the landscape. No digging or terracing is required and in the event of them being removed the landscape remains unchanged. Some structures, particularly the kitchen, long house and bathhouse, are built on the ground and needed some levelling. This has the advantages of higher stability and lower visual impact as they are generally lower, along with more internal space, enabling sleeping platforms and storage above. The structures are clad with mainly reclaimed wooden boards and/or canvas and insulated with reclaimed blankets or other insulation. A small amount of new timber has been used on some structures where other resources were not available. The size of the structures varies but none are excessive for their needs.



Illustration 1: Building of roundwood structure - Nov 2003

Into the ground

All structures built at SCW are supported on wooden posts buried no more than a few feet into the ground and generally rely on the natural properties of the wood to preserve them. The nature of wood in damp conditions means that the structures require regular maintenance in order to remain stable. This is a factor which shows their temporary nature.

The removal of a structure

On 11th September 2008 we dismantled one of the structures in the woodland. It was a bender construction made from coppice wood and reclaimed timber, pallets and windows, clad with ex-army tarpaulin and insulated with second hand blankets. This structure was built in 2005 as a short term residence. Five people were involved in the deconstruction task. Below is an account of the process.



14:57 – The inside of the structure has already been emptied of stuff. We are about to begin the deconstruction process.



15:07 – The side wall comes off. This consisted of tarpaulin and blanket insulation



15:17 – Here we have removed the roof cover. Two tarpaulins, one waterproof insulating and one green army canvas. You can see the bender construction well in this shot.



15:36 – The remaining walls were built from reclaimed pallets collected locally



16:08 – Here just the floorboards and more pallets remain. This structure was sat straight on a flat piece of land.



16:27 – All gone! There was still some work to do removing some of the materials. Most of these were reused or burned as firewood.

From beginning to end the deconstruction took just one and a half hours with five people.

Previous structures

Below are some photographs of areas which have previously had structures on them.



Illustration 2: Kat's bender built in 2000. This bender was dismantled in Autumn 2001.



Illustration 3: The same site in Autumn 2008

Kat's bender above was built on a platform with stilts into the ground. Peter's bender at the site on the right was built directly onto the reasonably flat ground. We unfortunately don't have a photograph of the original structure.

We can see from these photographs that little or no impact is left on the land after structures have been removed.



Illustration 4: Pete's old bender was built in 2000 and dismantled in 2001. This is the site in Autumn 2008.

Current structures at Steward Community Woodland

These first structures are communal structures with the Long-house being used for short term visitor accommodation.



Illustration 5: The communal Kitchen built on the ground



Illustration 6: The communal Long house including lounge, library, office and visitor accommodation.



Illustration 7: The communal Bathhouse for washing clothes and ourselves.

Below are residential structures at Steward Wood:



Illustration 8: Owen, Chris and family's dwelling recently built from sawn timber from the land, on stilts.



Illustration 9: Becky's roundhouse dwelling with Hogan Whirling Log roof.



Illustration 10: Peter's house built directly on the ground.



Illustration 11: Seth, Mel and family's house built on stilts.



Illustration 12: Merlin, Beccy and Rowan's house on stilts.



Illustration 13: John, Son and family's house built on stilts



Illustration 14: The visitor bender built on the ground.



Illustration 15: Dan's dwelling built on stilts.

The structures currently at the woodland are more sturdy than the examples shown dismantled above, but I would estimate that even the largest structure could be dismantled in no more than a few days with half a dozen people and the same principles apply. Once dismantled, the ground would be largely undisturbed and would quickly revert to plant cover.

Summary

The low impact dwellings at Steward Wood are an example of temporary sustainable development using traditional techniques and local and reclaimed materials. None of the structures would take more than a few days to dismantle should we decide to remove them.

The structures are of minimal visual impact being only barely visible from outside the woods for a small part of the year when the leaves have fallen. Visitors to the woodland are always very interested in the structures and at how achievable it is to build our own homes in a sustainable way. In the future we see ourselves providing other examples of low impact dwelling.