

PROOF OF EVIDENCE OF JOHN WILLIS

1. My name is John Willis. I live at 28 Cross Street, Moretonhampstead and have lived in Moreton for 20 years. I am involved in many different aspects of community life and am the Chair of the Moretonhampstead Development Trust, although I am writing this statement in a personal capacity.
2. I have known residents of Steward Community Woodland since shortly after the project was established in April 2000, and have visited the woodland several times over the years that they have been living there. My last visit was in March 2009.
3. I have supported the project at Steward Wood since its inception. I spoke in its favour at the first public inquiry in 2001 and in support of the latest planning application at the Planning Committee meeting of the Dartmoor National Park Authority in November 2007.
4. Despite the many policies and targets on reducing our carbon emissions, most people are still not making many changes to reduce their carbon footprint. The people who live in Steward's Wood are making a change. According to the independent Ecological Footprint Report produced, their footprint is between 34 & 39% of the national average. They are showing the rest of us how it is possible to live in a sustainable fashion, with their low-energy buildings, traditional forestry methods, local energy-and-water supplies, toilet system, conservation work, etc. They have inspired thousands of visitors, and kick-started the Environmental Forum in Moreton which is beginning to have a significant impact. And their Forest School work is showing the young how to live more in harmony with nature.
5. I believe their aims match many of the aims of the National Park and would ask you – subject to the usual conditions - to agree to renew their permission to live there. I cannot conceive of them being able to pursue their aims of sustainable working without linking it to sustainable living on the same site.
6. The residents of Steward Wood are socially responsible and valuable members of the community. One in particular is invaluable as a computer teacher and support engineer.

7. They are not interfering with others who live and work in the area. Most of the time you can't see their structures, they are hidden in the woods. So anyone passing through the Wray Valley would not know they were there.
8. The different type of eco-building techniques they wish to employ would still result in the structures remaining hidden. They would be different from the benders they first put up, but whether made of wood, earth or cob they could still be easily dismantled. The scale of their plans is proportionate to the scale and size of the woodland and in line with the settlement remaining low impact in nature.
9. Steward Community Woodland has a high level of support amongst Moreton residents, as witnessed by the large number of letters of support (and there are few objections).
10. They have achieved an enormous amount over the time they have been there, making a significant and positive contribution to (amongst other things) the woodland and local ecology, the local community, the awareness and understanding of environmental issues. Many people have learnt much and had valuable experiences from visiting the community, visiting their website, attending courses at the woods, attending talks and workshops run by community members, attending Forest School sessions, etc. There is, of course, room for improvement but they have demonstrated their commitment to the sustainable project and its aims, and their achievements justify the value of the project and its continued existence.
11. Their plans over the next five years show clearly and convincingly how they will meet their aims - for example, increasing the amount of fruit and vegetables produced through a redesign of their Growing Area, setting up a polytunnel, establishing more beds amongst their structures, and planting more fruit trees. Their plans of running more courses, selling added value timber, increasing the number of Forest School sessions, etc show how they will increase their financial income from their activities at the site. Projects of this nature take time to become established. Their achievements over the time they have been there, through their hard work, has placed them in a good position to go forward, and their plans for the next five years show how they will largely meet their financial needs from their activities on

site.

12. 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 the Inspector who allowed the previous planning appeal 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". For example, their management of the woodland through coppicing, cutting back invasive species, replacing larch with deciduous trees, and using this wood for fuel, building material, furniture etc is part of why they have such a low impact lifestyle.

13. Please agree to renew their permission to live there for a further five years. Not just the members of the community, but all of us stand to benefit.