

Family offers thanks after 'humbling' generosity sees The Hillyfield's fundraising campaign to fight planning appeal hit £35,000 target

Tuesday, 26 July 2016 By [Toby Leigh](#) in [Environment](#)

THE owners of a small woodland regeneration project near South Brent are celebrating after raising £35,000 to fight a Dartmoor National Park planning decision.

Doug King-Smith and his family own and manage The Hillyfield, 45 acres of woodland and pasture just south of Harbournford. Since 2009, they have worked to rejuvenate the neglected woods and manage them sustainably.

The task has been made harder by the discovery of phytophthora ramorum – sudden oak death – in some of the trees, meaning the planned programme of felling conifer and replanting with mixed broadleaf has had to be drastically accelerated.

In order to make The Hillyfield financially sustainable and pay for the felling and replanting, Doug and his team sell seasoned firewood and timber. To dry properly and within a reasonable time this needs to be stored under cover, but Dartmoor National Park Authority has refused permission for permanent sheds to be built for drying and machinery storage under permitted development – meaning full planning permission must be sought.

And when Doug appealed the decision, he says he was immediately served with enforcement notices ordering the removal of all structures at The Hillyfield – down to the tiny sheds housing the land's compost toilets. His appeal now has to encompass the enforcement notices as well.

In recent months, the family has been putting all its energy into running a crowd funder campaign to raise funds for legal fees for the appeal. And now, to Doug's 'great relief', the target has been reached.

He said it was 'really good to be back on the land and open to volunteers again'. Now the crowd funder campaign is over the family is straight back into work after six weeks of 'literally just feeding the chickens'.

A new access track has been completed, and progress made repairing a wooden bridge - projects he describes as 'adding value' to the land.

The Hillyfield is still under a plant health order, with acres of larch affected by phytophthora needing to be felled by



copyright Becky Strong: Following the success of his fundraising campaign for legal fees, Doug King-Smith is enjoying being back at work in the woods

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Doug is also spending time organising the many rewards put up by local businesses and individuals, for which people had pledged donations. Well known Sharpham Estate forager Brigit-Anna McNeill led a workshop at the Hillyfield last weekend, showing a group how to forage for and prepare a wild feast. Brigit-Anna was fresh from an appearance on BBC's Countryfile, which had filmed at Sharpham earlier in the month.

Doug said: 'It felt really good for the people that supported the project to come out to the land, to see it and actually eat it.'

The Hillyfield has attracted other significant supporters over the course of its campaign, including the Dartmoor Society, the chair of the Government's Independent Panel on Forestry Bishop of Liverpool James Jones, and senior National Trust Dartmoor employee Adrian Colston.

The right reverend Jones wrote to offer his support to Doug, saying he was 'inspired by the initiative and the energy of the project' but 'appalled' at the opposition from the national park. This opposition, he said demonstrated 'how those in authority lose sight of the very values that they should be encouraging and protecting.'

He continued: 'They should be working with you and not against you.

'And especially in the current climate when public resources will be increasingly hard to find those in authority should be championing local initiatives such as yours that mobilise the release of the wealth of time, energy and voluntary labour in local communities.'

Dr Tom Greeves, Chair of the Dartmoor Society said: 'The Dartmoor Society is fully supportive of Hillyfield. I have visited the site and am very impressed by the dedication, commitment and activities of Doug and Claire King-Smith and their colleagues.

'We are delighted that the Crowdfunding campaign has been successful, but are dismayed that Dartmoor National Park Authority should be pursuing enforcement notices on structures that are clearly useful to sustainable woodland management, which cannot be seen from any significant public viewpoint, and some of which Hillyfield, entirely reasonably, wish to replace with even more appropriate structures, especially those for drying wood.

'This woodland does not threaten the national park's integrity or ethos in any way. In fact, it is a fine example of good environmental practice which should be celebrated and supported by the national park. I shall be writing to DNPA to urge them to abandon their enforcement process.'

Doug himself said: 'What's come out of this is positive as well as negative. It's not just about protecting what we're doing, but maybe an opportunity to show another side of Dartmoor rather than just the upland, grazed area.

'These wooded fringes are really valued by people, and they really want to see them working.

'I'm really humbled to have received support from so many people, and local businesses, it's amazing how generous people have been. From freshly baked bread, to meals in pubs, to walks on Dartmoor, we've even got a company coming to cull deer and butcher the venison. People have been incredibly generous with their skills.

'The next big thing is the public inquiry, which will be some time in the first two weeks of March at Parke in Bovey Tracey. If people want to let DNPA know what they think, they can come along.'

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