

Woodland regeneration – is Dartmoor stuck in the dark ages?

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POSTED ON 5TH JULY 2016 **CATEGORIES: YOUR STORIES ([HTTPS://TREECHARTER.UK/CATEGORY/YOUR-STORIES/](https://treecharter.uk/category/your-stories/))**

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Planners threaten our sustainable ancient woodland restoration project on Dartmoor and we are in the middle of a campaign to raise the funds needed to hire a legal team to be able to represent us at appeal. A Public Inquiry.

The questions that arise from this seemingly simple request to build a 3-sided wood-drying shed to support our firewood and home-grown timber business, and a machinery store are quite complex, and the impact of our appeal could well affect the future viability of small woodland regeneration for us all.

What exactly are our permitted development rights when it comes to forestry and small woodland management?

The barns we need, and structures we use, directly help sustainable woodland management at The Hillyfield, 45 acres of ancient woodland and organic pasture on the edge of Dartmoor. Here we choose to manage our woods for community and environmental benefit, and are setting up a small home-grown timber and firewood business to support our work.

Dartmoor National Park Authority (@dartmoornpa) refused us permission for our wood-drying barn, and when

we appealed they served Enforcement Notices to take down all the temporary structures we need to manage these woods. Even the compost toilet needs to go!

We are calling on the support of all the woodland community to help us get a fair hearing in court.

Why is development sometimes needed for woodland

regeneration?



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In the last 3 years or so, woodland management on Dartmoor has suffered some pretty hard knocks. Cuts in the National Park Authority budget dropped hard, and at Dartmoor the impact has been felt most strongly in their environmental service – no more sustainable development fund, and goodbye forestry and woodlands

service
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After 30 years+ of a dynamic woodland team, active in the restoration of the National Parks woodland holding – DNPA's woodland policy is now one of 'Zero Intervention'.

For anyone interested in the vitality of British woodlands, if this doesn't send a shiver down your spine then it's time to take a good look in the mirror and wonder whether you might have begun to fail to see the wood from

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the trees.

Sitting down in any approach to forestry seems to be as rare as a hens tooth in a poultry farm, so a policy of zero intervention is another way of saying 'doing nothing', or maybe 'letting it fall back into dereliction'.

So what is the alternative? We've probably all heard by now that over 50% of our country's privately owned woodlands are in neglect, or even 'critically' under-managed (forestry commission statistic)... and some say the realistic figure is a lot higher than that. Not only that but the BBC just announced

(<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/science-environment-36555858>) that 'Tree Planting is at an all time low'.

But have you ever wondered what happens as woods keep being left alone, suffering neglect, or in a state of under-management?

Quite simply they fall apart at the seams (or stumps), and the trees which have been kept alive for hundreds (and sometimes thousands) of years, topple over, split their root-balls apart and die.

Great for bugs? Well not really, because what comes in is probably a desperately poor scrubby layer of sycamore saplings which can only support a few invertebrates, rather than the hundreds or thousands within a healthily managed woodland.

When I heard that my Local Planning Authority was promoting 'zero intervention' as their policy guidance my jaw hit the floor.

Since then I have grown to see there is an urgent need to address a gaping hole within Dartmoor National Parks approach and understanding to woodland management – a space for a breath of inspiration, for a rhetoric that is so engaging and positive that Dartmoor National Park not only want to, but are compelled to, they have to, get behind it... and I think it goes something like this.

The whole of Dartmoor was once forested. Not just a small forest, but a majestic expanse of ancient oak woodland stretching across the whole area. Now, although many think of Dartmoor as an iconic landscape of rocky Tor's shrouded in the mist of time, or imagine a wild pony and foal grazing on an open upland moorland, there is a much bigger picture to the character of our Dartmoor landscape.

George Monbiot and other ecologists have a lot to say about the qualities of this moorland landscape. Rather than the promise of a National Park, protecting and enhancing species, this environment is seen by many to be a barren landscape... and maybe that is the point to look a little wider, to the fringes and the edges.

Dartmoor is not just moorland. It is also characterised in Natural England landscape report 150 as including the ribbons of small woodlands which hug the steep valleys of Dartmoor as they run down to the sea, and it is



Menu

here that there great opportunities reside.

Maybe it is in these characterful woodlands of Dartmoor that we can shift gear, and make a step towards Dartmoor becoming the exciting example promised in National Park England's vision for 2030 as a place to inspire the nation towards sustainable living and vibrant rural livelihoods connected to their land.

Maybe Dartmoor can, instead of crushing any hope for woodland regeneration becoming viable, become the leader for a truly inspired movement towards a Woodland Culture, enriching the environment, community, and local economy.

There is a lot we can learn from other projects, other parks, and other countries to be able to step up and find our feet.

Just look up the road to Exmoor with their first brand of a National Park specific 'Grown In Britain Exmoor' kitemark for woodland management and products.

Look North to Hill Holt Wood and their contribution of a £1m annual turnover to their local economy, the education benefits their woodland contributes, and their leadership in the Making Woods Work programme funded by the Plunkett Foundation. A real beacon for Ancient Woodland restoration in the UK.

Or head further North to Scotland, where the Government is backing a 'Hutter's' movement and a motion towards sustainable woodland management and 'woodland crofting'.

Can Dartmoor take a step in the right direction, put down the beating stick of oppressive planning actions, and get behind her small woodlands before it is too late?

I truly hope so.

To support our project please visit <http://www.thehillyfield.co.uk>

Doug King-Smith is the owner and manager of The Hillyfield Woodland Farm on Dartmoor.

Links:

<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2016/jul/03/dartmoor-beauty-spot-britain-threatened-woodland>

<http://www.ivybridge-today.co.uk/article.cfm?id=104113>

The Hillyfield and the Dartmoor National Park Authority. A Planning Dispute Gone Too Far.

(<https://quartzandfeldspar.com/2016/06/27/the-hillyfield-and-the-dartmoor-national-park-authority-a-planning-dispute-gone-too-far/>)

<http://www.forestry.gov.uk/fr/INFD-64ZA8X>

The battle for Hillyfield (<https://adriancolston.wordpress.com/2016/07/05/the-battle-for-hillyfield/>)

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/science-environment-36555858>

<http://www.permaculture.co.uk/articles/don%E2%80%99t-let-planners-get-you-down>

<http://www.savehillyfield.co.uk>

The Hillyfield Woodland Farm on Dartmoor



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