

GW/gw

20th August 2015

Mr D King-Smith
The Hillyfield
c/o The Linhay
Old Hazard
TQ9 7LN

Dear Mr King-Smith

The Hillyfield and Tom's Brake – Harbournford, Devon
DPNA Case No 0259/15 Officer Report

Thank you very much for your email of 19th August 2015 asking if we would be prepared to look at, and comment on the Case Officer's report that you have recently received from the DNPA. We will be pleased to do this for you on a voluntary basis.

Information Supplied

With your email you attached the following:

- ▶ A copy of the Case Officer's Report (Case No 0259/15) prepared by Jo Burgess with a 4 week date of 19/06/2015
- ▶ A scale map of your proposed machinery store.

In April 2015 you emailed us the following information:

1. The Woodland Management Plan for The Hillyfield and Tom's Brake which Forestry Commission England has approved for the period from 1st May 2014 for a period of 10 years.
2. An outline drawing of one of the barns that you wish to erect to enable you to fulfil the vision for the woodland that you outlined in section 2.1 of the Woodland Management Plan.
3. Estimated timber volumes that you have assessed that the woodlands could produce on a sustainable basis taking into account fellings required by Statutory Protection Health Notices issued by Forestry Commission England as a result of Phytophthora ramorum.

In commenting on the Case Officer's report we have had access to all this information.

Historical Perspective

Before about 1600 all woodland produce was cut, or felled, and converted in the forest, or wood. Some woodsmen also lived on site and had simple shelters. Conversion of logs was carried out on site, often using pit saws, and this method of log conversion is still carried out in some developing countries. Firewood and timber was often partially air dried in the woods using simple shelters. This way of practising forestry was because roads were extremely

poor, carts were horse drawn and forestry tools were very basic. Changes in the practice of forestry first began to occur when John Evelyn published his book called 'Sylva' in 1664. The industrial revolution in the 18th and 19th centuries started to increase the rate of change in forestry with more machinery, better roads and the development of sawmills which drew in logs from the surrounding areas on the basis that this was more cost efficient. That trend has continued to this day with large modern mills being developed and drawing in logs over long distances using large modern trucks with trees being felled by large highly mechanised harvesters operated by skilled operators living in places often distant from the site.

Looking at your proposals for developing The Hillyfield in the historical context outlined above, it appears that you are wishing to manage your woods in much the same way that was practised for 1600 or 1700 years. The Case Officer's comments, about how he feels you should practise forestry at The Hillyfield, seems to reflect a view that forestry can only be carried out using a supply chain suited for modern industrial wood processing and this includes firewood. The structure of the present dominant wood supply chain is therefore relatively new and reflects developments mostly in the last 100 to 200 years.

I would suggest there is a place for both traditional forestry and commercial / industrial forestry practices; they are not mutually exclusive, and The Hillyfield is a good example of where forestry can be practised largely as it was for some 1600 years, although with some more modern equipment than pit saws! I feel your case would be a good way for the DNPA to demonstrate that it supported traditional ways of practising forestry rather than simply supporting the way modern industrial forestry is practised.

Necessity to Store Wood under Cover

The Case Officer states (p3) that in the Authority's view it is not necessary to store timber under cover, although they recognise it is desirable to do so. There is no information provided by the Case Officer to support his statement, or his experience with drying, using or marketing timber so it is difficult to respond to it.

Our assessment of the situation is that:

- There is long historical precedence for handling timber the way you are proposing (see above)
- Removing wood off site while wet means that the material would put more pressure on roads as almost half the weight of the wood will involve transporting water. (Moisture content of a log at time of felling is approx 50% and when left to air dry it will be about 25% moisture content).
- Keeping the material on site means that it can be monitored by the owner more carefully and there is greater security
- There seems to be no justification provided in the Case Officer's report for a woodland owner to be forced to find (buy or lease) another site to store wood while it dries. There is also no certainty that the local people, or the DNPA, would find a firewood or timber storage building on that site any more acceptable than at The Hillyfield.

Size of Buildings

We would support the Case Officer's statement that the size of any buildings should only be sufficient for activities that will take place at The Hillyfield.

Tool & Machinery Store: We have previously commented that we felt that all the equipment on the list that you sent us in May was justifiable for the management of the woods, apart from one quad bike. We see no reason to change our assessment. You have also sent us a hand drawn plan of your proposed building (10 m x 14 m) showing how you envisage all the equipment would be stored in the building. There appears to be no spare space so we can only conclude that it is appropriate for the purpose of storing all the equipment you need to manage the woods.

Air Drying 'Pole Barn': The Case Officer states that my support for constructing this building is based on the woodland produce expected to come from the woods based on information in the Woodland Management Plan that runs to 2024. That is correct. It must be appreciated that it is difficult to forecast what woodland produce will be produced in 2025 and beyond, but any felling Licence or Woodland Management plan under present legislation requires almost all areas to be replanted after felling. Most woodland owners who actively manage their woods, and the Forestry Commission, aim for woods to be managed on a sustainable basis. The aim as far as possible is to have a balance of age classes. This can take up to 100 years to achieve in some circumstances. In a small wood, such as The Hillyfield, and with an owner interested in woodland management like yourself, it is possible to start thinning woods after about 10 - 15 years and using the produce for firewood, so there is every prospect of continuous sustainable production from The Hillyfield for years to come.

Air drying can be a slow process and self evidently very much depends on the weather. In some weather and timber market conditions it may be necessary to store one or more year's production in the 'Pole Barn' so annual production of produce is not necessarily a guide to setting a minimum size for the building.

Building Structure

We are not qualified to comment on the structure of the buildings, but if the materials are produced from locally sourced materials this would have historical precedence and it would be a more environmentally appropriate solution than any alternatives.

Access

The Officer Report states that 'there is no appropriate access to the site to remove timber products' and 'there is no means by which to extract timber from the plantation and no ability to transport the sawn timber or firewood to the market'. We are not able to make a site visit so we are not qualified to make any definitive comments about the statements made by the Officer. However we understand from you that the access gateway is restricted to 8ft 4inches.

In our view the present gateway should be wide enough to allow use by a regular sized tractor with trailer - as well as a small firewood delivery truck. It would certainly not be suitable, or useable, by large modern timber trucks. This would suggest that the present access is suitable for the scale of forestry that you would like to practise at The Hillyfield with log conversion and firewood production on site. It would definitely not be suitable for the type of industrial

forestry that the Case officer appears to have in mind and seems to expect or want you to pursue.

I think I have addressed all the forestry related points raised in the Officer's Report, but if you think I have missed anything, please let me know.

If the Case Officer would like to discuss any forestry matters with me, I would be very happy to talk to him on the telephone.

Yours sincerely,

Guy Watt

Guy Watt Bsc (For), B Litt, FICFor, CDip AF, MIED
Managing Director