

Brenda Taplin

From: Simon Leadbeater <[REDACTED]@m>
Sent: 28 September 2022 16:12
To: Brenda Taplin
Subject: The world is on fire

Dear Brenda,

For the avoidance of doubt here is the link I referred to. Kindly forward to the Inspectors, and indeed everyone: <https://www.globalforestwatch.org/blog/data-and-research/trends-tree-loss-from-fires-unprecedented-detail/>. By scrolling down slightly there is a dynamic link which shows the rate of spread of forest fires from 2001.

I am sure the inspectors will be aware of this, but when the Council's and applicant's legal teams use phrases like 'imperceptible' and 'negligible,' they will do this for all the carbon intensive proposals they support, be it new roads or other airport expansions. And naturally enough all these 'negligible' impacts add up.

With kind regards,

Simon Leadbeater

I am going to speak to rather than read from my submitted statement (Ref. IP-o6). I am taking this approach in order to contextualise, to personalise, based on the off-grid life my wife and I lead in a woodland called Priors Wood, five miles east of the airport. This Inquiry will hear from experts in climate change and those forensically detailing poor governance. No one else here, however, starts their day being invariably woken by planes, whose morning routine then consists of caring for various rescue animals culminating in handfeeding an old sheep called Margo who can no longer feed for herself, before I turn attention to my perennial fret concerning how our woodland can possibly survive in a rapidly and radically changing world.

At the December 2013 planning committee I tried to encourage councillors to consider a more global outlook by quoting Thomas Paine: "My country is the world, and my religion is to do good." On the consequences of not listening the University of Maryland's research speaks far more eloquently than I ever can. Scroll down the link, and you will witness the exponential spread in wildfires from the safety of your laptops.

Now, some mainstream narratives perceive climate change as a problem in and of itself, as threatening our timber supplies, undermining the foundations of our castles even, creating food security issues – everything couched within human-centred discourse. But that focus is wholly wrong. Climate change is a problem because it drives extinction. What some of us forget even acknowledging this truth, is that climate change is thereby a source of fathomless suffering; human lives are lost and 3 bn animals were killed or displaced by Australia's forest fires of 2020. Yet, back in 2013 the officer's report recommending approval stated that the increase in flights from 12 to 18 mppy would represent "an extremely small change," a phrase lifted verbatim from the applicant's planning application. Something similar has already been said today; 'imperceptible,' 'negligible.' However incremental the potential change, this Inquiry, I respectfully suggest, needs to be framed within choices which either accelerate and broaden suffering, or not.

Whatever complex arguments Inspectors may have to wrestle with, seeing and hearing is believing. I invite all the Inspectors and their support teams to visit our woodland. If you come, please time your visit to coincide with easterly departures. If you come, I will first introduce you to my sheep and explain that the piles of branches in their field are the remains of the conservation hedges I had to feed them as they had no grass this summer. And I might suggest you contact my agricultural supplier who cannot guarantee me hay this winter. Then within the woodland itself I will show you the abandoned badger sett and explain that when the ground is as hard as concrete badgers cannot feed. Then I will show you the pond that dried up in July, and the upturned dustbin lids I had to replenish with 20 litres of water every day for the thirsty deer and other animals. When I thought about what to say today I suddenly realised that all I have to do, is to look a Fallow doe in the face, and ask her, what is it you would want? The answer then becomes obvious. Perhaps not here, in this august council chamber, but in our woodland you may find it easier to think in the way I do.

Finally, I would introduce you to some of our trees. Our Oaks are not particularly old, dating maybe from the time of the Charge of the Light Brigade [of the 1854 Crimean War], though some of our Hornbeams probably predate Agincourt {1415}. But the trees I would particularly like to introduce you to, you may be unfamiliar with. Most of us think of acorns growing into single trees, but not all trees develop that way. There is an Aspen grove in America estimated to be 80,000 years young and on the face of it comprises some 47,000 trees across 43 ha. But in fact, each tree, or stem, belongs to one single organism - one clone – one enormous living being.

We have an aspen grove. Ours is smaller, but only by spending £1000s over 20 years have we discovered how big it actually is - at around 1ha – bigger than a football pitch – and though probably much younger than the American version may also be 1000s of years old. Imagine. To think, something alive in Hertfordshire may be older than England, to have come into being before Christ, or even from earlier than the time when the ancient philosophers Plato and Aristotle began the catastrophic transformation in which nature, once a subject revered, became converted into an object to be used. It would thus, perhaps, have comprised what our forebears called a Sacred Grove.

I have come here today simply to say that I wish our Sacred Grove to endure beyond my time. Our Grove is not tidy. But I invite you to stand in its midst and then to reflect on the questions before you. At that time, in that place, the answer will become obvious.

References

<https://www.globalforestwatch.org/blog/data-and-research/trends-tree-loss-from-fires-unprecedented-detail/>.

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-australia-53549936>

<https://www.treehugger.com/nature-blows-my-mind-year-old-aspen-grove-clones-itself-4859208>.

[https://ies-ows.jrc.ec.europa.eu/efdac/download/Atlas/pdf/Populus tremula.pdf](https://ies-ows.jrc.ec.europa.eu/efdac/download/Atlas/pdf/Populus_tremula.pdf)

“Unfortunately, we don't have a method to measure the age of a clone.” Personal communication of 26/09/22 from Dr. Bernd Degen, Direktor und Professor, Thünen-Institut für Forstgenetik, Sieker Landstr. 2, 22927 Großhansdorf , Germany.