

Penquite Wood:

Following a number of emails outlining individual concerns about the recent “felling” at Penquite Wood and being reminded of our local (Parish Council) responsibility ***to care for and protect our natural environment***, a meeting was arranged with John and Ruth Varco, (owners of Penquite Wood) together with one of our own Parish Councillors (Martin Whell) our Cornwall Councillor (Andy Virr) the Cornwall Council tree officer (Alan Rowe) and Stephen Lees (the architect of the Management Plan for the wood and a qualified specialist in conservation and biodiversity)

Our objective was very simple: To witness at first hand the current state of the wood, to hear from the technical specialists their opinion of the work being undertaken and to ask John about his plans going forward.

We spent many hours covering the wood from the North end (where unlicensed felling took place some years ago) down to the Southern boundary and into the older parts of the wood by the side of the river. It is plain to see the ‘raw’ tracks where previously a grassy cart track might have existed, and despite the felling up to this point, could still see any number of old dead and fallen trees that are waiting to be cleared. We also saw a great deal of re-planting of ‘sessile oak’ as required within the management plan and could even determine where previous felling would have taken place maybe 100 years ago.

The reality is, it is going to be very difficult to satisfy those who would have the wood preserved as it is now for the future and essentially to stop all felling. And we gained the view that there was no enthusiasm for such a strategy, even amongst the specialists. The wood should be managed. The wood is privately owned. The original Tree Preservation Order, generated a need for a professional Management Plan before a “felling Licence “was ultimately granted and that is now in place for the next 10 years. The level of wood allowed to be felled is detailed within the plan and is accompanied by appropriate re-planting to achieve a level of balance. Where the canopy is opened up, then trees beneath have a greater chance to grow and an appropriate level of sustainable thinning has been advised to achieve this. And we could see the obvious difference between trees trying to grow in the shade and those nearer to the light.

The wood is being used by the farmer to provide fuel for a Biomass Boiler. This is a low carbon footprint solution for his home and business and is to be commended. The wood provides much of the fuel required, but a quantity of wood is still purchased from outside the farm. This is part of the sustainability plan for the wood to ensure that it is not over 'harvested'. It should be recognised that woodlands have an important role as a crop and if appropriately managed, can both sustain wildlife, make economic sense and reduce CO2 emissions.

Whatever the rights and wrongs of the past, we were left with the feeling that a strict adherence to the management plan will not only protect the overall wood, but will also deliver new planting to generate a wood for future generations way beyond the life time of the current owners.

We remain keen to ensure that as part of this reassurance, we will keep a watching brief on the wood and ensure (so far as we are able) that Penquite Wood remains an asset within the community and to this end, have agreed with the owners to re-visit in the future, together with the Plan Architect.

David Jenkinson Chairman St Sampson Parish Council  
Andy Virr Cornwall Councillor