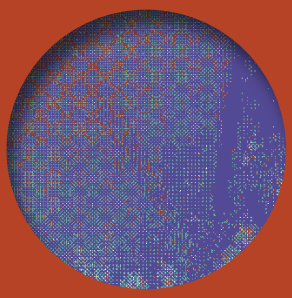
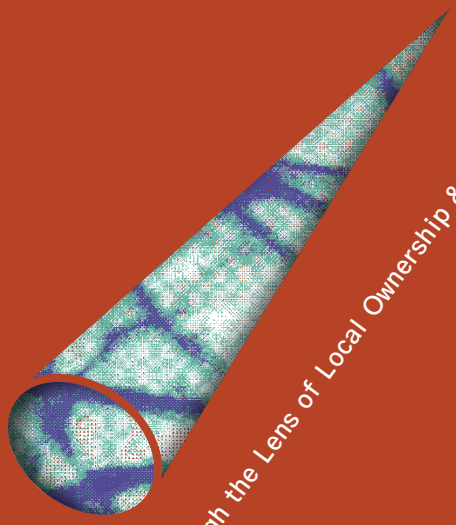
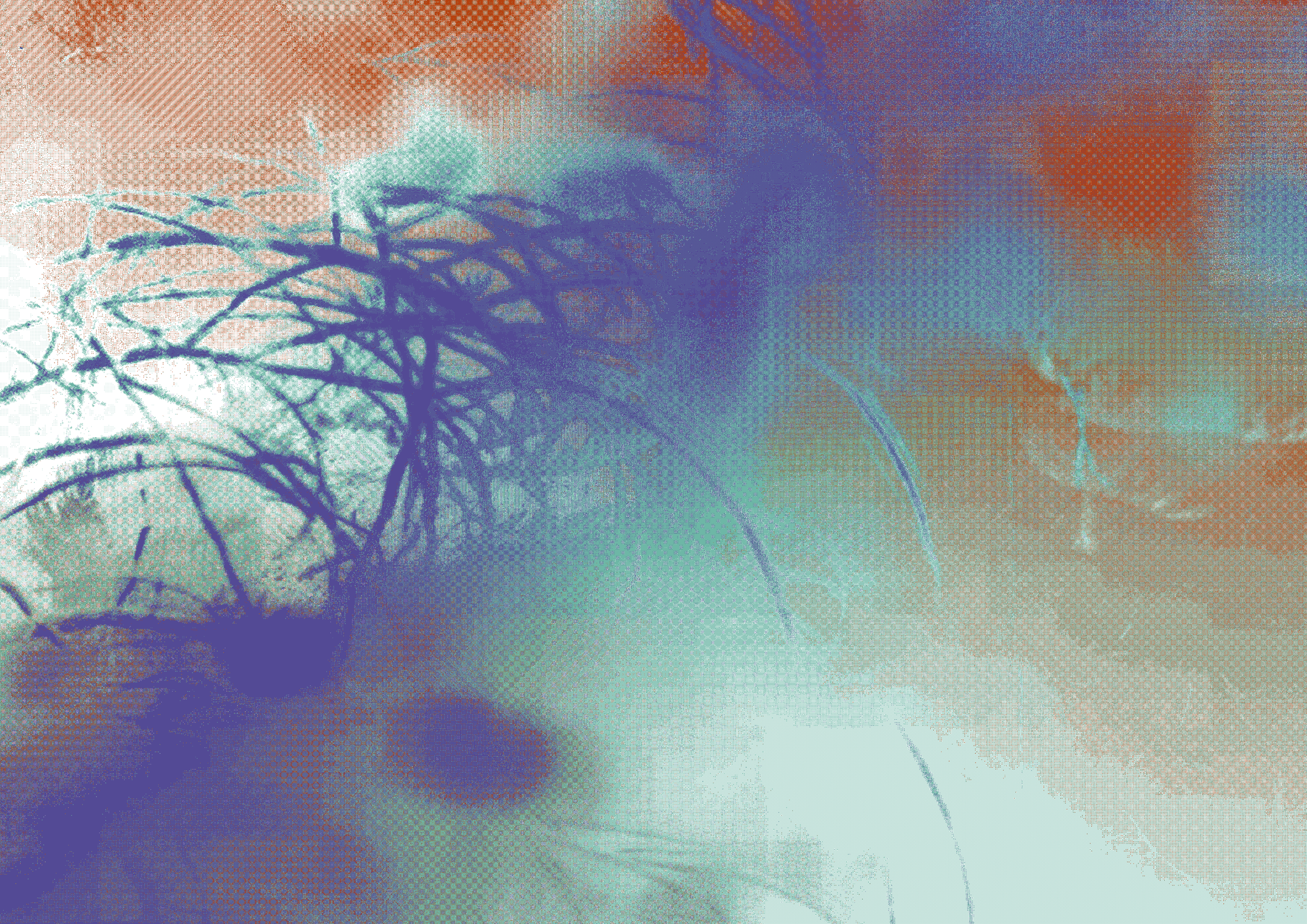
100 YEAR CARE PLAN





Reimagining Forestry Through the Lens of Local Ownership & Care

2025-2125



I N D E X

FOREWORD

In the autumn of 2020, with the memory of the first COVID lockdown still fresh in our minds, I went for a walk in Dartington's North Wood with one of South Devon's leading exponents of Deep Ecology, the late Stephan Harding. The North Wood is a striking conifer landscape, situated across a hill-top mound on the bank of the River Dart. It is, or was then, marked by an abundance of mature Douglas Fir trees, Cedars and Sequoias and backs onto what was, until recently, Schumacher College, a renowned centre for the study of environmentalism that Stephan had helped to establish in the early 1990s. I was struck by his assessment, as we wandered through the North Wood that this was "not nature" at all but was rather the site, in his words, of "an ancient English woodland" that had been razed and replaced with a landscape planted solely for profit.

This assertion, whether accurate or not, put many questions in my mind and, over the years that followed, I learnt about the projects of the agricultural innovator, Leonard Elmhirst who, in the 1920s, had worked alongside the celebrated Indian poet and painter, Rabindranath Tagore, initiating a process of "rural reconstruction" in West Bengal. Inspired by the success of that earlier experiment, he then arrived, in 1925, with his wife, Dorothy, to do something similar on the Dartington estate and engaged an Oxford forestry professor, Wilfred Hiley, who saw timber as a cash crop that could create jobs and drive economic renewal in the English countryside. In the aftermath of the second world war, with these goals in mind, Elmhirst and Hiley oversaw the planting up of that area, the North Wood, that in the main, still stands today.

By the 1980s, however, by which time both men were deceased, Elmhirst and Hiley's project had crashed on the rocks of global market forces. A lack of confidence that Dartington's commercial forestry enterprise could ever yield significant profits led to a sell-off of the business while by 2024, as we began work on this report, Schumacher College itself, described by the leadership of Dartington Trust as another loss-making endeavour, also closed its doors while the North Wood was subjected to a clear-fell operation of the cedar trees most commonly engaged for recreation by neighbouring residents of Huxham's Cross and the surrounding area. In September 2024, Stephan, who had been battling with cancer for several years already, also passed away and an atmosphere of grief and dissent began to take hold in a community that was losing so many of its local resources all at the same time.

It has been against this backdrop that Iman Datoo has lent so much of her heart and imagination to reflect on the legacies of a century past in Dartington's North Wood and to put forward possibilities for the century ahead through the proposal of a *100 Year Care Plan*. Its focus is hyper-local but the context that it reflects speaks to situations across the planet where human behaviour has shaped and reshaped landscapes over generations and where nature is all too often imagined as located behind us rather than as the thread that runs through the economic, social and ecological planes of our existence. In contrast, Iman Datoo perceives this underlying unity and much as Tagore did more than 100 years ago, she envisions culture as the crucial vehicle that can connect us to one another and to the abundance of our environment. I hope, as I have, you will find inspiration in the story that she shares.

Ashish Ghadiali
Director, Radical Ecology

21 April 2025

INTRODUCTION

Fig 1.1
Into North Woods, Nov 2024.

Fig 1.2
Felling , North Woods, Nov 2024.

Fig 1.3
Felling II, North Woods, Nov 2024.

North Woods is our local woodland.

It is a place where we walk, let our dogs roam, forage, relax and recover. It is a place where we reconnect with a different part of nature and, in turn, a different part of ourselves. This space feels distinct from our everyday lives yet is intimately connected to them. When you mention North Woods here, everyone knows about them. People will share their journey through the woods and explain why they value them.

There are many ways to enter North Woods. One path leads past Martin Crawford's renowned 2.1-acre forest garden and through the recently closed Schumacher College, once a leading centre for education in sustainable economics. Another route goes via Huxham's Cross Estate, one of the housing developments built by Dartington Hall Trust in the 1930s. Some may cross Staverton Bridge into the woodland. Others might drive directly in, arriving at The Glade, a public clearing used for community gatherings, workshops and outdoor events.

Once inside, you'll notice you're always on the threshold of something further. To the northwest flows the River Dart, winding its way from Dartmoor to the sea at Dartmouth. To the east, open fields stretch out, with Dartington Hall just beyond, once a hub of education and creative activity. The hum of the A381 to the south is ever-present, a low murmur that reminds you of your proximity to Totnes, Ashburton and Plymouth beyond.

You might hear the high-pitched calls of buzzards overhead or the wind rustling through the Douglas firs, feeling their rough bark beneath your fingertips. The scent of earth mingles with the sound of your breath as squirrels scurry by and leaves decompose into mulch beneath your feet, where unseen processes of soil creation unfold.

More recently, you may notice clear-felling, indicating the latest woodland management work underway. A tree stump may invite you to sit and count its rings, tracing the years with your fingertips. Machinery tracks cut through the soil, and the sharp scent of freshly sawn wood lingers in the air. Nearby, small vigils left by locals – ribbons hugging trees, messages in foraged soil and carefully arranged shells – stand as quiet testaments to what once stood.

Some say time slows here, but perhaps it is more accurate to say that time layers and overlaps. The living and the dead unfold around you. Change is visible and tangible in the air, in the soil and in the silence between things. Towering redwoods rise above, indifferent to the cycles below. New shoots push through the forest floor. What was once a place at the periphery is now a focal point, a space to question and reckon with what belongs here, what can be preserved and what can and should be renewed.

Dartington Hall Trust, as it is known today, was founded by Leonard and Dorothy Elmhirst.

The Elmhirsts purchased the estate in 1925 and founded what became known as the "Dartington Experiment."[1] Their vision was to restore the estate's historic buildings while pioneering initiatives in farming, forestry, education and the arts. As part of this effort, Dartington Woodlands Ltd. was established to test innovative forestry management techniques.

From 1931-61, Wilfred Hiley oversaw the woodland operations. A leading figure in British forestry, Hiley selected species such as Douglas fir, Monterey pine, ash and Japanese larch, implementing thinning methods central to commercial timber production and research.[2] These techniques became a key area of study at Dartington. However, it was the giant redwoods

that became a signature “cash crop”[3] that would, in turn, drive Leonard Elmhirst’s vision of rural regeneration in the heart of South Devon.

By the 1980s, as Dartington Woodlands Ltd. disbanded, the North Woods was an anomaly on the periphery of Dartington’s more prominent projects. While the rest of the estate evolved into a centre for education and Deep Ecology, an ethos that sees nature as invaluable beyond monetary measures, the North Woods lingered in between: neither a thriving woodland nor a productive plantation, but something else entirely.

In October 2024, the Dartington Estate began a substantial woodland management project as part of its plan to revive North Woods.[4]

This initiative followed the development of a 10-year management plan, created in collaboration with the Forestry Commission and launched in 2018.[5] The Trust partnered with Weeks Forestry, a Devon-based company with three generations of forestry expertise, to carry out the work.

Local reactions have been mixed regarding the changes, particularly the decision for clear-felling cedars, which has ignited conversation and debate. Some locals welcome the decision to reinvest profits from the timber harvested from these cedars into restoring buildings elsewhere on the Dartington Estate. Others worry about diminishing soil health and the loss of continuous cover forestry, an approach utilised by the previous management team that promoted selective thinning with canopy cover retained. In either instance, locals cite a lack of transparency in the decision-making process and feel excluded from the care and governance of North Woods.

After a substantial review in 2023, the Dartington Estate shifted its focus to outsourcing much of its internal activity to contractors.[6] Community members have expressed concerns about the sustainability of these developments over the long term, citing the lack of continuity from one phase of ownership or management to the next. Their concerns bear witness to a more profound truth: woodlands cannot be considered in isolation from their wider social and historical context.

Having been on the periphery, North Woods is now a microcosm of wider conflicts. What was once overlooked is now a focal point where confidence, priorities and infrastructure are continually tested. The community’s reactions and perspectives form the basis of this report, offering insight into what value means to different people and a way to think about our agency within the landscapes on our doorsteps.

1 https://www.dartington.org/about/our-history/
2 https://www.dartington.org/wilfred-hiley/
3 A crop which is grown to sell for profit.
4 https://www.dartington.org/north-woods-management-plan-underway/
5 ibid.
6 https://www.totnespulse.co.uk/eye-watering-payments-and-chaos-former-dartington-finance-staff-speak-out/

Fig 1.4
A Vigil to North Woods, Dec 2024.

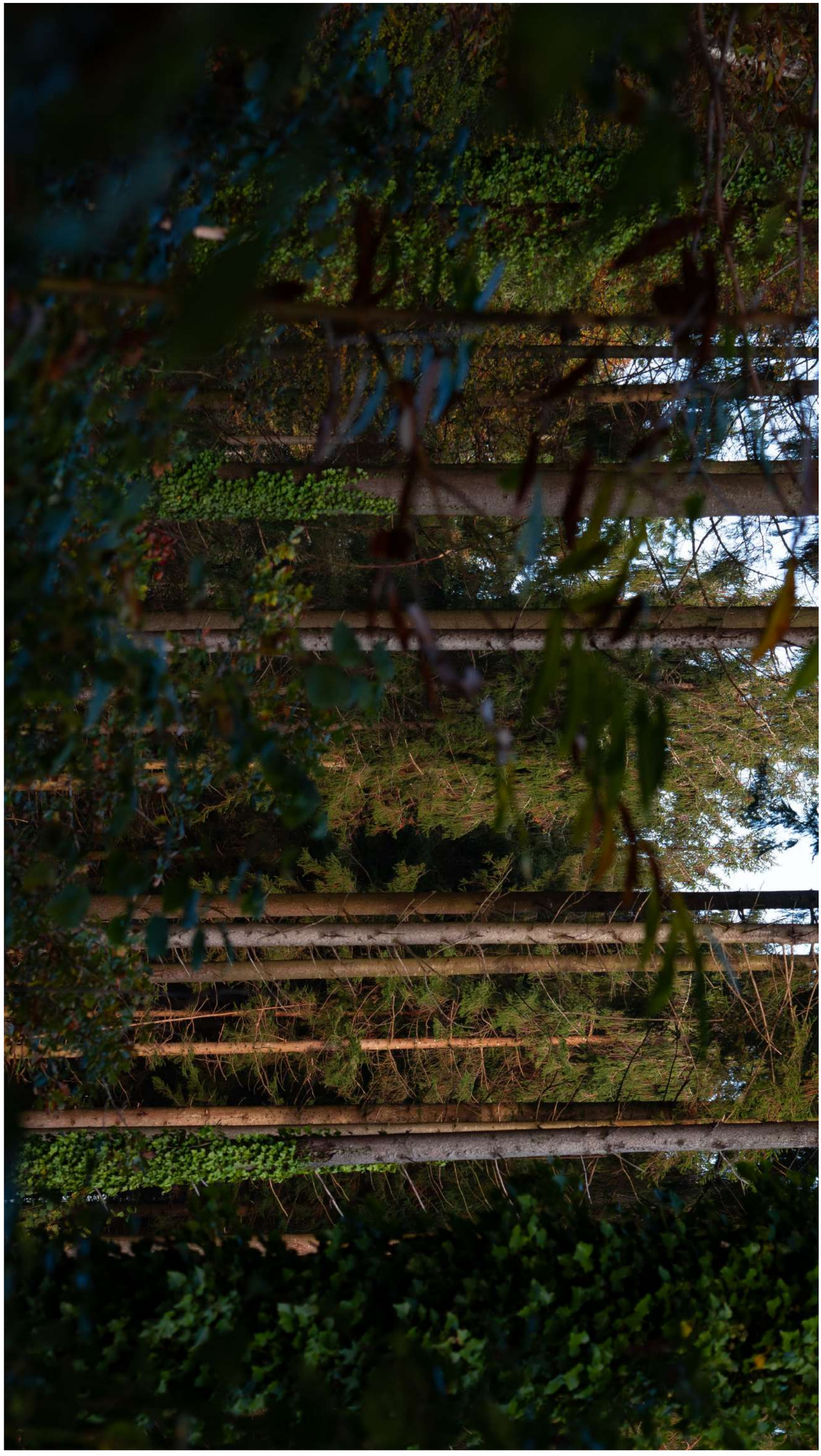


Fig 1.5
Into North Woods II, Nov 2024.

North Woods is culturally, ecologically[7], historically and economically important to the local community. People care about it long into the future, seeing it as more than a site for timber production.

Ecological Strengths of North Woods:

- North Woods is a site of convergence between the interests of people who care about art, history, ecology, heritage and productivity. With the right strategies, this could be benefited from for conservation, sustainable management and long-term planning efforts. This diversity of interests ensures that land is not just valued for one aspect, such as its economic return, but also for its social, ecological and cultural significance.

- Previously, Dartington woodlands have been a research site on agroforestry, timber production development and tree experiments to harness renewable energy. These activities provided valuable information regarding land use, which is sustainable as well as long-term.

- Under previous management, North Woods was connected to professional communities that included conservationists, ecologists and researchers from organisations like the RSPB, West Country Rivers Trust and Devon Wildlife Trust.

- According to Harriet Bell, a former worker at Dartington Hall Trust, community involvement in decision-making was a key part of the management of North Woods, helping to maintain trust and support. For example, the land use review project previously helped shape sustainable land management strategies, but this is no longer in place.

- Past management strategies prioritised using and processing timber locally, helping to ensure that trees were harvested selectively and thoughtfully, supporting sustainable forestry while adding economic value to the community.

- In the past, North Woods has used low-impact methods for tree extraction, such as Dartmoor ponies, instead of heavy machinery. When machinery was used, it would park on designated paths, and trees were felled and extracted using chainsaws with a winching system. This approach reduces soil compaction, limits environmental damage, and maintains long-term forest health.

- The Glade, a social forestry space in North Woods, provides a unique environment for community interaction and is a positive example of curated engagement with woodlands. It plays a crucial role in curating where people go, what they disturb, and the impact they create. They've hosted a woodland cinema, performances, haircuts, cafés, and well-being activities such as ice bath workshops.

- At The Glade, human activity has unintentionally contributed to soil creation. Fresh wood chips are spread over the soil regularly, making the space safe for play and helping reduce footfall compaction. Al Tempest, who runs the Glade, has noted a visible increase in organic matter over nearly six years, suggesting a positive feedback loop where human presence enhances rather than depletes the soil.

- North Woods is home to the Coast redwood, a species of tree known for their ability to lock in carbon dioxide. It is part of a network of UK redwoods that is said to outnumber those in their native range in California.[8]

7 We define ecology as the dynamic interactions between lifeforms and place, recognising humans as integral parts of natural ecosystems. Lifeforms and landscapes provide and receive services to and from one another, shaping systems that support health, biodiversity and the economy.

8 See https://www.redwoodworld.co.uk

Community involvement in decision-making for woodland management has been significantly reduced. Previously, there were efforts to communicate why decisions were made, involving local people in shaping the estate's future.

Ecological Vulnerabilities of North Woods:

- The social landscape has changed dramatically. Many activities and projects, such as the land use review, have been discontinued, and management has been outsourced to Weeks Forestry instead of handled in-house. Staff at Dartington have been reduced from 353 (Summer 2023) to 200 (Summer 2024)[9], and Schumacher College closed down in 2025, leading to a loss of expertise and institutional knowledge. Professional networks that once included conservationists, volunteers, and specialists in ecology and archaeology are no longer actively involved in managing North Woods.

- There has been a lack of transparency in the management of North Woods, with the local community feeling disenfranchised from decision-making processes. Concerns about the sustainability of the woodland to promote public well-being and support biodiversity have grown.

- Heavy machinery in logging operations has caused significant soil compaction, potentially leading to:
  - » Diminished soil health and biological activity, both of which will take a long time to recover.
  - » Soil erosion and runoff into nearby areas, including the hamlet at Huxham's Cross, a neighbourhood backing onto North Woods.
  - » Pollution of the River Dart, which runs behind North Woods, as loose soil and sediment wash into the water.

  Such impacts were less severe when alternative, low-impact methods (like horse logging and chainsaws with winching) were used.

- There are serious concerns about clear-felling, even though the site is small by forestry industry standards.

  Clear-felling:
  - » Damages habitat and the existing ecosystem in the felled area.
  - » Exposes neighbouring trees to strong winds that they are not adapted to withstand.
  - » Leads to soil degradation which affects long-term forest health.
  - » Is visually jarring, significantly altering the landscape and upsetting residents and visitors.

- There is tension between maximising short-term profits from timber sales and ensuring long-term ecological and community well-being.
  - » In the past, timber was harvested based on demand, meaning trees were only felled when there was a valuable market.
  - » Now, timber is harvested in bulk and sold on mass markets, rather than being processed strategically.
  - » One of the local sawmills refused to purchase timber from the most recent 2024-5 felling of North Woods, citing concerns that it was not harvested sustainably and did not align with their values.

9 See https://www.totnespulse.co.uk/landlord-dartington-calls-time-on-old-order-and-sets-sights-on-unbundling-strategy/

“Looking at beyond just the ecology and the social use, what are trees and what are forests? Why do we term them as such?”

Al Tempest,

Director of the Woodland Presents CIC,
Conversation with the author in North Woods,
29th November 2025.

Reconfiguring Value

Several methods are used to attribute value to natural resources such as trees. For example, there is the Capital Asset Value for Amenity Trees (CAVAT)[10], which was criticised as originally being benchmarked against younger trees and, therefore, fails to capture the unique significance of veteran or ancient trees. It also does not explicitly consider the contributions of biodiversity, such as the worth of a tree in the hosting of rare insects, fungi, or lichens, as it maximises amenity value - the public benefits that result from trees.

Discussions on value often centre what ecosystems do for humans, but what about their other dimensions? Nature is not just an asset or resource; it holds relational significance by cultivating meaningful relationships. To better capture these complexities, we draw inspiration from *An Inclusive Typology of the Many Values of Nature*[11], creating a layered framework to assess value in North Woods.

We recognise three primary forms of value.

- **Instrumental**: Nature as a resource or utility for human benefit.
- **Intrinsic**: The inherent worth of biodiversity, independent of human use.
- **Relational**: The reciprocal relationships between lifeforms (human and non-human) and place.

We also consider different groupings of value.

- **Prosperity, Livelihood**: The cultural and economic significance of forestry.
- **Belonging & Health:** The well-being tied to proximity to woodlands.
- **Stewardship & Responsibility**: The ethical duty to care for and sustain forests.
- **Oneness & Harmony with Nature**: A shared existence and kinship with trees.

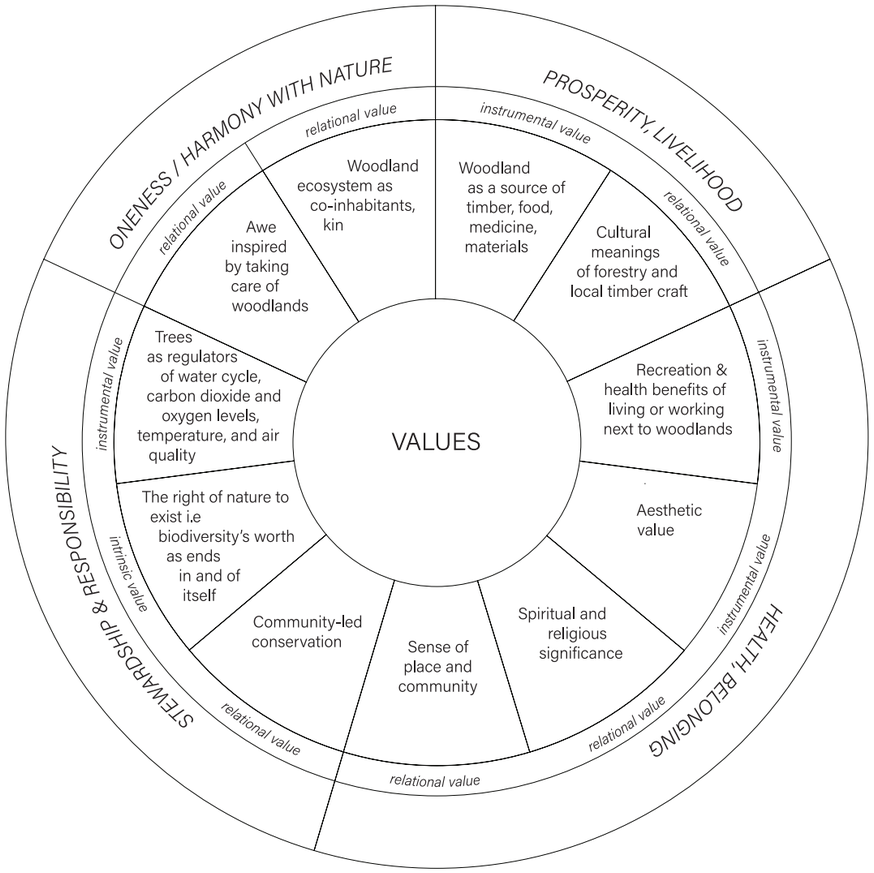


Fig 1.6
Our framework for ascertaining value in North Woods, informed by *An Inclusive Typology of the Many Values of Nature*

10 Developed by Chris Neilan and the London Tree Officers Association in 2008, CAVAT is one of the primary tree valuation methods used in the UK. It provides a monetary assessment of individual trees based on their public amenity value. See https://www.ltoa.org.uk/resources/cavat

11 Kai M. A. Chan et al., “An Inclusive Typology of the Many Values of Nature,” Nature Sustainability 5, no. 7 (2022): 604–616

Fig 1.7
Filling our lungs with phytoncides: North Woods, March 2025.

Operating between disciplines, spaces and geographies, can sometimes make artists feel like outsiders. But it is precisely this liminal position that allows us to invent shared languages.

What do artists bring to a project on nature recovery?

We listen deeply.

We take the time to attune ourselves to different perspectives, engaging with all our senses to connect with people and the world around us.

We cross-pollinate.

We thrive on interdisciplinary exchange, taking ideas from one domain and applying them to another, almost like a collage.

We visualise.

We like to be able to picture things, map things out and bring the invisible into view. With our words, images and soundscapes, we can give form to the abstract or unseen.

We find a shared language.

Operating between disciplines, spaces and geographies can sometimes make us feel like outsiders. But it is precisely this liminal position that allows us to invent shared languages. These languages aren't just for us but also for the people we work with.

We learn together.

We like collaborating outside of our discipline to learn new ways of working. We are curious learners, not bound by traditional hierarchies of knowledge, instead looking to share skills and resources.

We show our vulnerabilities.

We don't mind being the non-expert or the beginner in unfamiliar fields. We embrace the unknown, the uncertain and the imperfections that come with creative work. We express ourselves emotionally and expose our learnings. Through our openness and honesty, we are able to discover new perspectives and challenge assumptions. It's the only way to find something new.

We speculate.

We are visionaries who imagine alternative futures. We speculate about new possibilities and futures that are not yet realised.

North Woods does not ‘belong’ to us. We do not own it. We care for it in its most vulnerable stages, supporting, observing and nurturing. We then step back when the time is right.

Artists as Midwives

Informed by discourse surrounding care work and the creation of institutions of care, as well as the work of artist Sonya Dyer (see Case Study: A Care Plan for *Hybrida Composita*, p. 30-3), one of the key roles we adopt as artists in this project is that of a midwife.

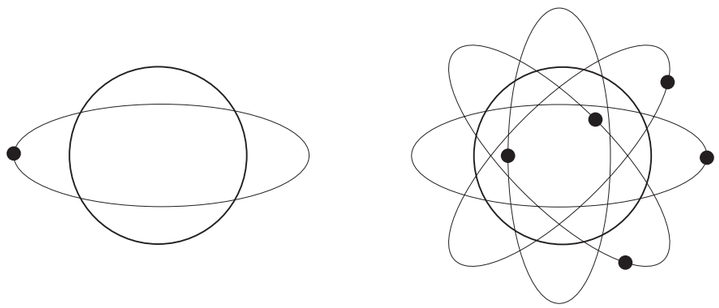


Fig 1.8
A diagram explaining ecological midwifery. Iman Datoo, 2025

The Role of a Midwife

As part of the medical care, a midwife provides emotional support, a watchful eye and willingness to take responsibility for others. This work is a form of care work, what Joan Tronto describes as a ‘species activity that includes all we do to maintain, continue and repair our world so we might live in it as well as possible.’[12] Ultimately, a midwife relinquishes this care when it is no longer central or essential, passing it on to others.

Ecological Midwifery for North Woods

Now, imagine this type of care not for a human relationship between mother and child but for an entire ecosystem, in this case, North Woods. Just as a midwife ensures a mother and child are supported for the duration of their relationship, we too must provide care for the next generation of trees and ecosystems. A 100-year care plan might seem like a lifetime or just beyond it. While it’s nothing in the context of a forest’s lifespan, it spans a generation, just enough time to lay the groundwork for future ecological resilience. Climate impact reports for Devon and Cornwall have already projected the region’s climate over the next 100 years, guiding our understanding of what care will be needed.

Forests are ecosystems built on symbiotic relationships - close, long-term interactions between species. They are a “confluence of flows and processes”[13], extending across generations and lifetimes. Trees like Douglas firs live for centuries, coastal redwoods can live up to 3,000 years and oaks can endure hundreds of years. Caring for such ecosystems means attuning ourselves to their rhythms to enact decisions that will sustain these forests long into the future. A healthy forest ecosystem does not exclude competition or destruction. Rather, it balances these forces, recognising the interconnection between humans and non-humans. Reimagining ourselves as midwives for North Woods, our labour is an investment in its future.

Climate Change and North Woods: 100 Years from Now

Climate projections suggest that many native broadleaf species will struggle to thrive in southern England.[14] While genetic variability may allow some adaptation, sustaining woodland cover will likely require planting non-native species. Redwoods, for example, could become key players in carbon sequestration, thriving in the UK’s climate while facing decline in their native range.[15] By 2100, Devon, Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly expect to experience hotter, drier summers, more intense rainfall, and rising sea levels.[16]

In one hundred years, the world will be vastly different from now, but these are the years our future children and grandchildren will experience. With this in mind, focusing on short-term asset gains becomes increasingly irrelevant.

Investing in climate-related initiatives often requires high upfront costs while their benefits unfold over time. Economic discounting, where future gains are devalued compared to immediate returns, further complicates investments in sustainability.

Radical Ecology: Constructing a Framework

As an artist-led organisation, Radical Ecology works from within art & culture to uncover emergent tools and tactics for research and climate action. Our case studies (p. 28-47) demonstrate the influential role that art plays in shaping futures-oriented policies for natural spaces.

In search of a symbiosis, this care plan traces relationships between organisations, communities and ecosystems, mapping how we mobilise care through research.

A 100-year care plan challenges us to think beyond our own time on this planet, to create a legacy of resilience, and to bring about a just future. Just as a forest doesn't grow in isolation, a just and sustainable future doesn't emerge without collective care, investment and action.

Addressing Marginalisation in Nature Recovery

Marginalisation is the relegation of someone to a position of less importance, power, or influence due to factors like age, gender, race and/or socioeconomic status. It can also refer to the exclusion of non-scientists or non-experts in nature recovery, who may feel they have little or no agency in the research or management of ecosystems. Moreover, communities with limited access to, yet located nearby, woodlands often find themselves disconnected from the very ecosystems they are meant to steward.

Our goal is to identify and address the marginalised approaches often overlooked in the research and management of post-plantation ecosystems in the South-West of England. We seek to bring attention to ways of knowing that are often dismissed: embodied, sensory and emotional knowledge. Deep Listening is our method for engaging with these landscapes and communities - human and more-than-human.

12 Bernice Fisher and Joan Tronto, "Toward a Feminist Theory of Care," Hypatia 13, no. 3 (1990): 31–46.
13 Al Tempest, conversation with the author in North Woods, 29th November, 2025.
14 Anthony H. Thomas and Kevin J. S. J. W. P. P. Meade, "Climate Change and the Future for Broadleaved Tree Species in Britain," ResearchGate, accessed 27 October 2024.
15 "Giant redwoods: World's largest trees 'thriving in UK'," BBC News, 13 March 2024, https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/science-environment-68518623.
16 Devon Climate Emergency, Climate Change Report: Devon, Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly Local Resilience Forum, December 2021, https://devonclimateemergency.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/DCIoS-LRF-CIG-Climate-Change-report-V8.pdf.

Fig 1.9
Finding the shapes of sounds in North Woods, Deep Listening Workshops, March 2025.

CASE STUDIES

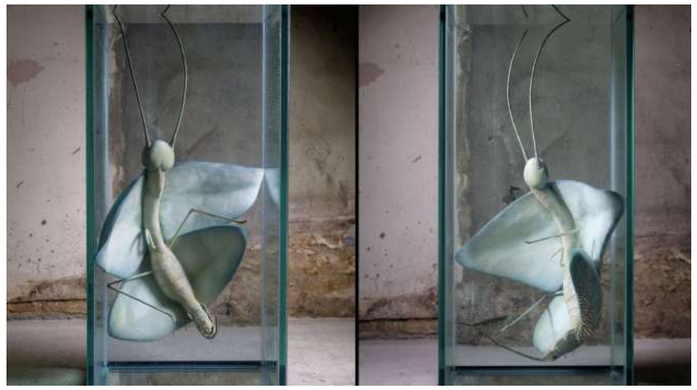


Fig 2.1
hybrida composita, 2025. Credit: Sonya Dyer.
Photograph by Pheonix Tanner.

Fig 2.2
New Stories for Museum Objects, 2022.
Credit: Emergent Knowledge Bureau

Fig 2.3
Clay Workshops for *A 100 Year Plan*, Credit:
Portland Inn Inn Project

How do we care for nature one hundred years into the future?

Our case studies trace long-term care practices innovated through the culture sector, following the work of artists, collectives and communities in social and cultural spaces. Specifically, we examine long-term care within museums (Case Study 1: Sonya Dyer's work), hybrid spaces bridging museums and communities (Case Study 2: Emergent Knowledge Bureau), and community-led initiatives (Case Study 3: Portland Inn Project).

The cultural sector is one of the strongest advocates for long-term care, offering valuable insights into establishing protocols and recommendations that can be extended to protecting and managing natural resources while mitigating short-termism. Through cultural practices, we see that future-oriented thinking is already embedded in how we care for the past, present and future, with nature as an integral part of that continuum.

Cultural work, within or beyond institutional walls, is fundamentally about conserving heritage, knowledge and practice. These case studies highlight the role of artists and their communities in shaping long-term care through an understanding of preservation, care-taking and decision-making that build relationships and change through time. Each case offers a distinct perspective on long-term care and showcases how the cultural sector is evolving in its approach to both human and natural conservation.

Museums, as one example of a cultural institution, employ long-term thinking in their preservation and selection of materials, ensuring that acquisitions are made with a forward-looking perspective. Through steadily increasing engagement with artists, museums have challenged and developed value systems around preservation and conservation, adapting practices to the relationships between collections and their communities.

Sonya Dyer's work, *hybrida composita,* offers an example of how artists contribute to conservation by embedding their voice and agency into the care of objects. Dyer introduces conservation as a relational practice that involves an evolving connection between the artist, the object, and its care over time.

Emergent Knowledge Bureau extends long-term care principles beyond the objects physicality or materiality, to include the stories and knowledge they embody. Working in the space between museums and communities, this project advocates for intergenerational thinking around knowledge systems associated with displaced objects. It aims to uncover practices for safeguarding cultural narratives as part of forward-looking conservation efforts.

Finally, care is taken directly into local spaces with the work of the Portland Inn Project, an artist-led initiative working to address marginalisation within their local neighbourhood. This case reclaims agency over conservation through the preservation of physical spaces for culture, to create a sense of belonging among the people and places concerned.

Case Study 1:
hybrida composita

“In terms of the idea of preservation, I find it quite moving to know that work I have made is going to be looked after, after I am gone... There is also the politics of making the Black presence in the UK known through time. Doing things that are recorded makes it more possible for us to be known in the future.”

Sonya Dyer,
Interview with the author,
5th February 2025.

Introduction

The British Museum opened its first preservation laboratory in 1919, applying scientific methods to study and conserve its collections.[1] Since then, museums have developed their own value systems to define what preservation entails, using scientific assessment to establish conservation research programmes, set industry standards and implement strategies to mitigate deterioration caused by light, temperature, air quality and other environmental factors. Their focus has primarily been on managing agents of deterioration to slow the physical decay of objects over time.

However, criticism has emerged around how museums superimpose their own values of care onto objects of unknown provenance or those acquired through colonial extraction. Historically, many museums extracted heritage from countries and their cultural contexts, erasing the values, care systems and preservation methods of the communities from which these objects originated.

There is a particular responsibility felt by artists of colour engaging with archival collections to re-frame these narratives and centre their presence within institutional spaces.

Authorship of Care

In March 2025, artist Sonya Dyer’s sculpture *hybrida composita* was installed in The Box - a museum, art gallery and archive in Plymouth. The sculpture is part of their permanent collection and is inspired by critically endangered sea creatures from the region, drawing on research from The Box’s natural history collections. Created as a composite of various endangered marine species, it forms a fictional entity that feels strangely familiar, echoing the preserved specimens it takes inspiration from.

Dyer, having worked in museums and gained insight into conservation processes, recognised the need to equip future caretakers with a care plan to preserve her work for posterity.

Dyer’s work actively reconfigures how archives function within museums and who tells their (hi)stories. The care plan ensures that her authorship and intent remain central to the work’s preservation. She is the author of its care.

The Care Plan

Dyer designed the care plan with Art & Assembly Studio, who fabricated the sculpture.

There are three components to the plan. The first, ‘Material Specifications’, describes the materials, dimensions and finishes of the sculpture and its custom display tank. The second, ‘Display and Conservation Methods’, describes how to position, relocate and treat the work to ensure its longevity. Finally, the last section, ‘Storage and Handling’, offers guidance on how to rest the sculpture when not on display, with special attention to keeping fragile details such as the legs and antennae intact and undamaged.

Careful consideration is given to dampness and moisture, which are key deterioration agents. Safety precautions and precise handling choreography are also included.

Fig 2.4
hybrida composita, 2025. Credit: Sonya Dyer.
Photograph by Pheonix Tanner.

Artist as Midwife

The idea of midwifery in art suggests a fundamental shift in the artist's role, from creator to caretaker and ultimately to someone who, at the right time, will let go. To bring something into existence is not necessarily to own it but to guide it toward its autonomy. This concept extends beyond artistic practice into wider ideas of preservation and legacy: entrusting care to others and allowing the work to evolve beyond its origin while still carrying the impression of its maker.

In the context of nature, this notion becomes particularly poignant. Letting go of ownership does not mean relinquishing authorship. Instead, it suggests a more fluid and ethical engagement that respects natural cycles, acknowledges collective stewardship, and recognises that value is not tied solely to possession but to continuity and care.

"Once I make something, I want it to circulate and exist beyond me... my relationship with the work completely changes—I'm more of a midwife than anything. I bring it along and then leave it to do its work."

Sonya Dyer,
Interview with the author,
5th February 2025.

Case Study 2: Emergent Knowledge Bureau

“I think this is a long overdue invitation to the thinking of the links/relationships that objects create... I think anyone with a different set of beliefs would at least be forced to consider that something behind a glass box in a museum is not just an object, but a record of different relationships, emotions, personal histories and philosophies of different groups of people”

Hakeem Adam,
Digital Artist, Arts & Culture Writer.
Project participant, 2022

Introduction

Emergent Knowledge Bureau serves as a governance framework for the repatriation and restitution of museum artifacts. Established in 2021 by artists and architects Iman Datoo and Russell Royer, the Bureau combines speculative fiction, scenario design and roleplaying to collaboratively devise a care plan for a fictional artefact known as Himofe. The Bureau invites stakeholders from diverse backgrounds, interests and professions to join a game focused on Himofe, which includes cultural stewards, curators, artists, architects and archaeologists. Participants in the game adopt character roles to reinterpret Himofe’s preservation and future trajectory.

The intent of Emergent Knowledge Bureau is to consider how communities have preserved their cultures before museums institutionalised object care. For centuries, communities have safeguarded intellectual and creative traditions through Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK), prioritising the transmission of knowledge through tactile, lived experiences passed down through generations, ensuring the continuity of ways of knowing, making and engaging with heritage.

By bringing diverse perspectives together into an imaginative storytelling environment that transcends institutional and community spaces, Emergent Knowledge Bureau works within the “in-between space” - the space of the outsider - to facilitate change.[2] The project considers how this intersection of cultures, between scientific knowledge and tacit or traditional ways of knowing, can create new protocols for the care of museum objects.

Fig 2.5
Emergent Knowledge Bureau, Game participants , 2021. Credit: Emergent Knowledge Bureau.

Fig 2.6
Himofe, clay artefact, 2021. Credit: Emergent Knowledge Bureau

Fig 2.7
Scenario and character cards used in game play, 2021. Credit: Emergent Knowledge Bureau

The “In-between Space”

The care plan for Himofe is designed through roleplay, where participants assume different stakeholder roles and work together to create the future care of the artefact collaboratively. The process is iterative, to work within fictional spaces that transcend real-world tensions. These protocols are then tested in a safe, low-risk space without the restrictions of legislation or traditional institutional norms.

Key features of the process are:

- **Wisdom of the crowd:** Workshops are designed to ensure that a range of stakeholders from museums and cultural institutions are included, such as curators, lawyers, artists, architects and cultural stewards. Ensuring that multiple experiential and epistemological frameworks are represented in the room amplifies the power of diverse worldviews, informing different types of care, stewardship and collaboration.

- **Character and scenario cards:** The character cards invite participants to play out the nuances of cultural care from the position of new roles, disconnected from any present institutional ties. The scenario cards provide prompts to step into other worlds and construct new forms of relationality.

- **Immersion:** Through roleplay, the participants adopt different characters, each with their own set of values, roles and relationships.

- **Fiction and storytelling**: Through fiction and storytelling, the future is made desirable and accessible.

- **International reach:** The workshops take place locally as well as worldwide online, providing a global body of participants drawn from diverse backgrounds and experiences.

- **Reanimating the more-than-human** presence within and beyond the museum space. This develops the agency of objects beyond their being static items in a gallery but as actors and living entities with histories, relationships and futures that can be explored and nurtured.

Case Study 3: Portland Inn Project

"This neighbourhood historically has been marginalised. And it's sort of branded and given lots of different labels from marginalised to deprived, and left behind, hard to reach. And doubly deprived is the most recent one."

Rebecca Davies,
Discussion as part of *Clay Commons Night School* by Eva Masterman, 2024-5

Introduction

The Portland Inn Project (PIP) is an art-led, community-based organisation located in Stoke-on-Trent. They are making vital changes in their neighbourhood through a 100-year plan. The initiative focuses on "neighbourhood renewal", [3] which PIP defines as their mission to create "a safer, healthier and happier place for residents to live". [4]

Central to this plan is a commitment to community-led decision-making, which involves collaboration across difference to find social cohesion and action meaningful change. PIP's participatory model ensures that long-term regeneration is grassroots-driven and built collaboratively by the residents who call this neighbourhood home.

Background

PIP was founded in 2016 by artists Anna Francis and Rebecca Davies in response to the long-standing and deeply-rooted challenges faced by the Portland Street Triangle, a small Stoke-on-Trent neighbourhood of about 500 households.

This area was left abandoned when the government cancelled the Pathfinder scheme in 2010, which had led to the controversial clearing of homes to make way for newly built housing by private developers. This created a fractured landscape of boarded-up properties, degraded property and diminished community cohesion.

In 2013, Stoke-On-Trent started the £1 Housing Scheme, which sought to greet newcomers by opening up derelict homes for £1, provided that they would live in them for at least 10 years, while participating fully in community life. This programme brought new energy to the neighbourhood, with families from diverse backgrounds and professions joining the locality.

Yet this influx also revealed social distinctions as it brought long-time working-class residents and newcomers together, sometimes reinforcing divisions within the community.

These challenges have been exacerbated by the built environment. The area is located adjacent to two large industrial plants and a derelict brownfield site, with the industrial activities adding to sound and air pollution. Coupled with economic stagnation, these factors presented severe challenges to work, residential quality and overall quality of life for the residents.

In light of this, Anna Francis, who lives in the Portland Street Triangle and Rebecca Davies, having more recently moved there, recognised that their neighbourhood had been systematically ignored from local decision-making. They were marginalised and stereotyped negatively, referred to as 'deprived' or 'hard to reach'. The artists responded to this, wanting to explore the role of art in reclaiming agency, regenerating their local area and empowering their community. Their aim was, in their words, 'to make plans for ourselves.' [5]

An abandoned pub became the central hub for Anna and Rebecca's activities. Through workshops, public art projects and initiatives like the 100-Year Plan (see p. 42-43), PIP is working to imagine and create actionable pathways for residents to reclaim agency over their community via grassroots, inclusive strategies. Central to their efforts is empowering their neighbourhood to collectively envision and shape their own future.

A defining feature of PIP is its focus on participatory governance for community-led change:

Transparency of Process

- PIP invites their community to join them in questioning, finding answers and crafting the future of their neighbourhood. They make themselves visible, seeking out expertise where needed and demonstrating collaborative learning among their community.

Community Decision-Making Panel

- Set up in 2018, a bi-monthly panel brings residents together over food to discuss priorities and seasonal programming. Every attendee has equal voting rights.
- Donors voiced initial concerns about the movement away from a traditional advisory board where a select committee is established, however PIP successfully positioned the panel as a necessary alternative, maintaining that any choices must be community-driven.

Services Meeting

- These bi-monthly meetings involve bringing together the police, city council and other local services to talk about community issues and plan response activities. The most significant aspect of these is that there is an emphasis on actions to be undertaken as a result of issues raised by the community and feedback on actions taken.

Dealing with Conflict

- Operational norms and rules are created collaboratively. For example, the youth club participants determined their own rules and consequences for breaking them, implementing a traffic light scheme, where red and yellow cards address disputes of poor behaviour, while positive actions are celebrated with trophies.
- The community decision-making panel facilitates exploration of options and voting to resolve issues democratically. Guidelines for respectful communication are shared.
- Health Impact Assessment (HIA) has been initiated to understand the community's challenges, recognising that their neighbours have faced trauma in many different respects.
- They employ 'Radical Safeguarding', which involves active listening on a small scale and advocating for rights of the community in areas like health and social justice.[6]

"We don't think that artists should always have the answers. And we like to learn together with our community the bits that we don't necessarily know, and be very visible when we need support, and when we need to draw on expertise of others in order to shape what's right for us with our neighbourhood. But also, that's been really healthy and fruitful for our community to see that we're learning together."

Anna Francis,
Discussion as part of *Clay Commons Night School* by Eva Masterman, 2024-5

100-Year Plan: “A concept of change over time”[7]

In 2021 and 2022, Rebecca and Anna began working alongside residents to develop a 100-Year Plan for their neighbourhood. The project stemmed from a number of motivations and was initially suggested by resident artist and beekeeper Andrea Ku. Andrea is one of a number of creatives that Anna and Francis have invited from beyond their immediate locality, each with new perspectives, specialisms and concepts to enrich the project and facilitate change through new encounters.

In the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, when even short-term planning was fraught with uncertainty, they commented that planning over decades, or even a century, allowed them to imagine bold and transformative prospects untethered from immediate constraints.

Another driving force behind the plan was the artists’ recognition of the lack of long-term funding models for such regenerative projects, particularly if they were art-led. Many community and regeneration projects struggle to sustain long-lasting and meaningful change because of being confined to short-term funding cycles.[8] The 100-Year Plan is a way to challenge this, aligning smaller, actionable projects within a larger, cohesive strategy that could sustain and attract funding over time.

At its core, the 100-Year Plan is a collection of interconnected projects envisioned to unfold over a century, each contributing to sustainable change in social, political and environmental spheres. The aspiration is to deliver cohesion, by which each project is designed to complement others in order to result in long-term, cumulative impact. The artists define this method as in-keeping with landscape architecture, which takes into consideration the spatial and ecological change of a landscape through time.

One of the first projects involved the community youth group impersonating their own future selves, 100 years into the future, and interviewing their future selves to find out what changes might have occurred. Additionally, in 2016, residents created a clay map of their neighbourhood to explore its strengths and weaknesses.

Fig 2.8
Seeding ideas for the 100 Year Plan.
Credit: Portland Inn Project

Fig 2.9
Clay Faces. Photo: Portland Inn Project

Fig 2.10
Clay Faces. Photo: Portland Inn Project

Fig 2.11
Clay Faces. Photo: Portland Inn Project

The analogy of tending to a garden was adopted to structure the 100-Year Plan:

Inspecting the Roots
Understanding the context of the community; their strengths, weaknesses, existing resources and tools

Connections
Establishing who will care for and shape the plan - including individuals, groups and organisations. These actors might be local, but also new people or groups might be brought in.

Hopes
Imagining a better future together through collective discussions and dreaming.

Future actions
Determining the specific steps and strategies the community will use to enact this change.

Each step in this garden analogy is supported by programming designed to be accessible and adaptable for a range of entry points, such as drawing, mapping, sculpting, or writing. For instance, participants can map local 'treasures' and 'areas for improvement' before envisioning their dreams for the future.

A key element of these sessions has been the use of clay sculpting as a form of communication. For example, the neighbourhood created clay faces to represent 'stakeholders' - both those already engaged with the community and the plan, and those who they think should be. This approach lends to the building of intimacy and collaboration.

These case studies teach us that cultural preservation is not about fixing a singular definition of value but about making space for a diversity of traditions, beliefs and world-views to live beside one another.

Conservation, too, is about holding these different perspectives, allowing them to be carried forward over time.

Yet, when we talk about nature, we often try to define it too narrowly.

But just like culture, nature is understood differently depending on who you ask. Our ideas of nature - what it is, what it should be, and how it should be cared for - are shaped by specific histories, experiences and contexts.

1 British Museum, *A Century of Science & Conservation,* accessed 20th February, 2025, https://www.britishmuseum.org/blog/century-science-and-conservation

2 The "in-between space" challenges conventional notions of identity and belonging, through the idea that sovereignty exists between the spaces of our realities and of our dreams. Also see related Borderlands Journal, Issue 2, Volume 19 (October 2020), entitled "Creative Sovereignty: The In-Between Space: Indigenous Sovereignties in Creative and Comparative Perspective Studies"

3 Please see the transcript by Anna Francis focusing on an art-led approach to neighbourhood renewal: Anna Francis, Greater London Authority Lunchtime University Slide Notes, accessed 17th November 2024, https://eprints.staffs.ac.uk/8700/2/greater-london-authority-pip-notes.pdf.

4 ibid.

5 Quoted from "The 100-Year Plan," https://theonehundredyearplan.com, accessed 17th November 2024.

6 See related Radical Safeguarding Handbook by Maslaha, https://www.maslaha.org/project/radical-safeguarding.

7 Quoted from "The 100-Year Plan," https://theonehundredyearplan.com, accessed 17th November 2024.

8 https://www.createstreetsfoundation.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/CSF_Create_No_Place_Left_Behind_FINAL.pdf, which discusses the challenges communities face regarding the lack of long-term funding for regeneration projects.

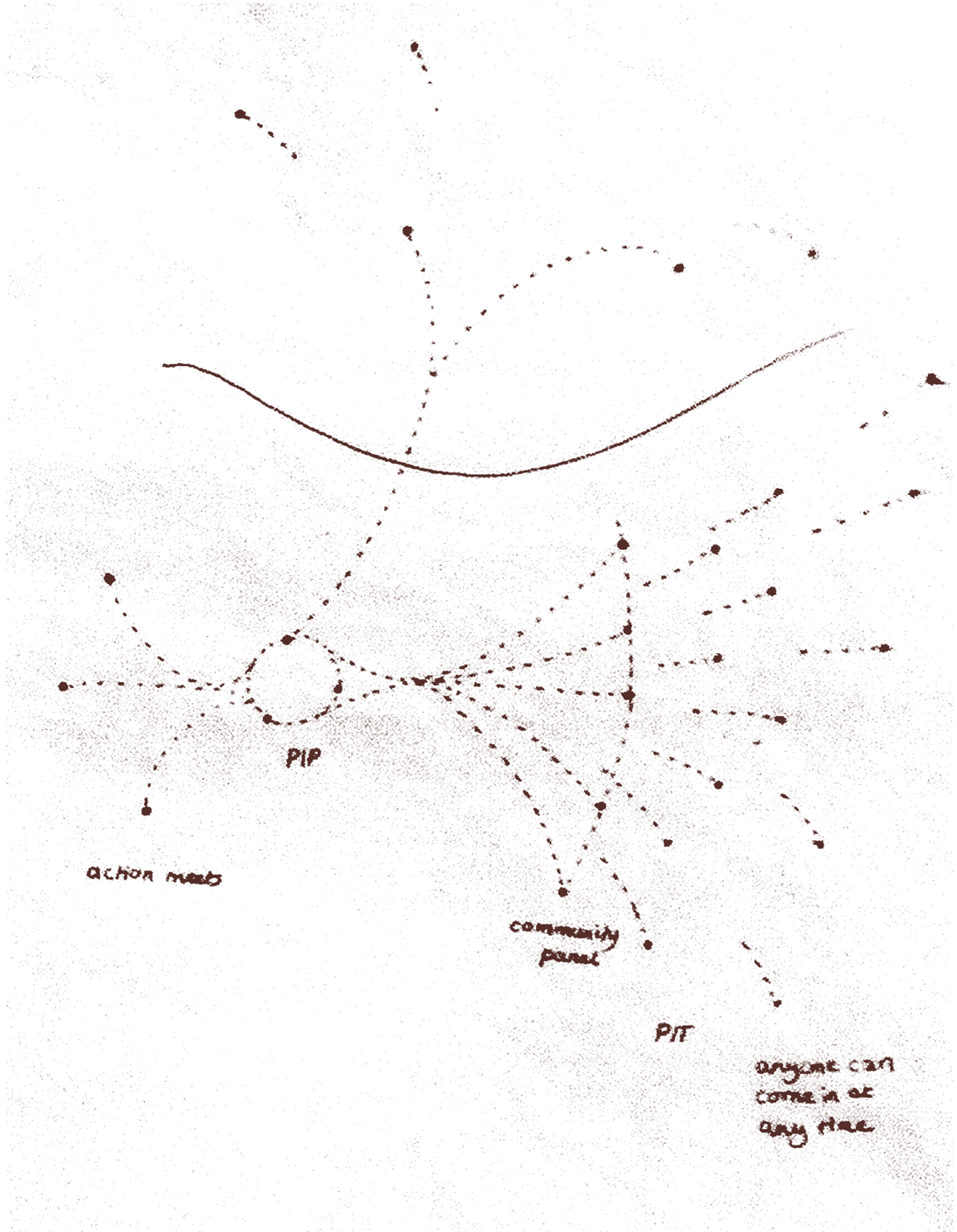


Fig 2.12
A diagram to understand community decision making at Portland Inn Project.

In May 2024, Ashish Ghadiali, Tsitsi Chirikure and Iman Datoo from Radical Ecology co-led a participatory performance as part of a season of land art on Dartmoor. Through paradoxical and deliberately slippery questions, we invited participants to examine their own assumptions about ecology, species movement, and the constructed nature of our relationship with the environment.

One such question was,

“Where do we go when we realise that we can’t go back to nature?”

Responses to the questions posed during this performance are detailed on the following page.

These responses included:

“Nature includes all of us, including people.”

“The whole planet and everything on it that’s not manufactured, everything native to the planet, that’s nature.”

“One of our downfalls as humans is not learning the cycles of working with stuff.”

“What we are doing is a form of nature, but it’s not incredibly intelligent.”

“The non-native invasives probably have a purpose that we just don’t understand.”

“Knowledge from our past might transform our future.”

“Where do we belong? We belong where we are.”

“It starts from a feeling place, that’s been lost.”

“Where do we go when we realise that we can’t go back to nature?”

“We need to be humble in trees’ presence, so that we have a stronger future.”

“We need to listen to other voices and forms of nature, then they will speak back to us and help us.”

“There is a fear of change - the aesthetics of an open landscape.”

“What about the survival of things that grow well in a space?”

“In ecology, plants become political just like people are.”

“I think humans act chaotically, but we also create balance too.”

“lack of diversity in politics, in statements, leads to neglect.”

“We can’t go back to anything, but there are attempts, aren’t there, to go back.”

“That loss, that nostalgia.”

“There are peaceful intruders.”

“Are some invaders worse than others?”

What’s the difference between rocks and people?”
“Nature has always been cultural.”

“A scientist always questions themselves.”

“We need to landscape things differently, too. We want them to be beautiful and pretty. We look out onto this pretty landscape but we’ve bordered everything up.”

“It’s domination all the time, isn’t it?”

“It’s so interesting how time shifts, but the dominance sticks.”

“Man is always about progress, progress, progress.”

“Plants have been here for so much more time, They have so much to teach us.”

Nature is culture

Forests, like museum collections, are shaped by human interventions, stories and histories.

When you ask how to manage and conserve a woodland like North Woods, you'll receive 20, 50, or even 100 different answers because forestry, like conservation, is cultural.

Nature recovery is not simply about restoring an ecosystem to a fixed past state but about engaging with the layered histories and diverse perspectives that define how we live with that land.

“We need to listen to other voices and forms of nature, then they will speak back to us and help us”

DEEP-LISTENING

"Deep Listening is the foundation for a radically transformed social matrix in which compassion and love are the core motivating principles guiding creative decision making and our actions in the world."[1]

Pauline Oliveros

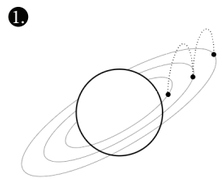


Fig 3.1. Listening between orbits

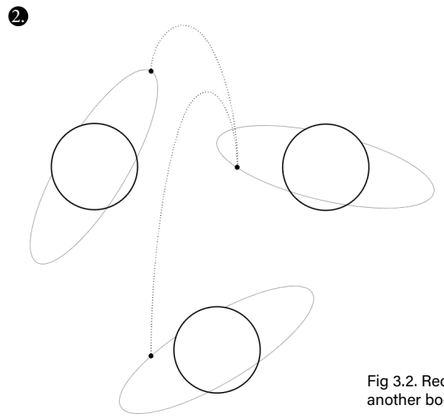


Fig 3.2. Reorienting around another body

What is Deep Listening?

Deep Listening is a practice for building relationships between one another and with the natural world through active and attentive listening. Composer, teacher and theorist Pauline Oliveros dedicated her life to this practice, indicating its power to transform and create a sense of place and shared consciousness within communities.

Deep Listening connects external experiences with our bodies, establishing a direct somatic engagement between ourselves and the sounds we encounter, whether from our bodies or others.

There are generally two forms of listening explored. The first, focal attention, invites us to concentrate on individual sounds and their specific auditory details. Then, global attention encourages an expansive awareness to inclusively listen to the entire auditory environment.

Deep Listening activities are open to everyone, whether you're a musician or not. These activities include recording sounds and voices, mapping them and maintaining a journal about personal experiences.

Our approach: Deep Listening to North Woods

In this process, we have listened intently to those invested in North Woods, attempting to comprehend its significance and the evolving relationships individuals have had with this landscape throughout history.

We gathered insights from residents of Huxham's Cross, a neighbourhood looking directly onto the woods and originally conceived within the Elmhirst's vision for the Dartington Estate. Many residents have long-standing ties to the estate's history and have witnessed the woodland's evolution and transformation.

We consulted experts in woodland management and forestry on the Dartington Estate: Jez Ralph, Harriet Bell and Al Tempest. Al, who runs The Woodland Presents, expands our understanding of how forestry intersects with biodiversity, health and economy, while Harriet offers insights from previous management plans and Jez contributes his extensive expertise in forest ecology.

Beyond the perspectives of long-time residents and forestry experts, we focused in on marginalised voices in nature recovery. A Youth Group run by the Zebra Collective in Devonport visited the woods for the first time, bringing new perspectives and challenging assumptions about who owns it, who is local to the woodlands and who is given access to it.

We also connected with refugees and asylum seekers from the Apricot Centre, a ten-minute walk from the woods. Their participation in nature therapy with Mark O'Connell highlighted the therapeutic potential of the woods as spaces for healing, refuge and soil connection.

As Pauline Oliveros has taught us, true listening is a process of tuning into multiple levels, listening to what is voiced and what remains unspoken. It's a matter of absorbing, digesting and responding, allowing us to find out what is significant to individuals while appreciating the significance of silence. In this way, we may explore the many values, experiences and connections that shape our community's connection with North Woods. We can also identify gaps in infrastructure and opportunities to manage its future activities.

1 https://thestoryofpaulineoliveros.com/upcoming.html

Fig 3.3
Where do we go when we realise that we can't go back to nature?
Performance: Ashish Ghadiali, Tsitsi Chirikure and Iman Datoo,
2024

Fig 3.4
Webinar: Ashish Ghadiali in Conversation with Stephanie Loveless
and IONE from the Centre for Deep Listening, 2024

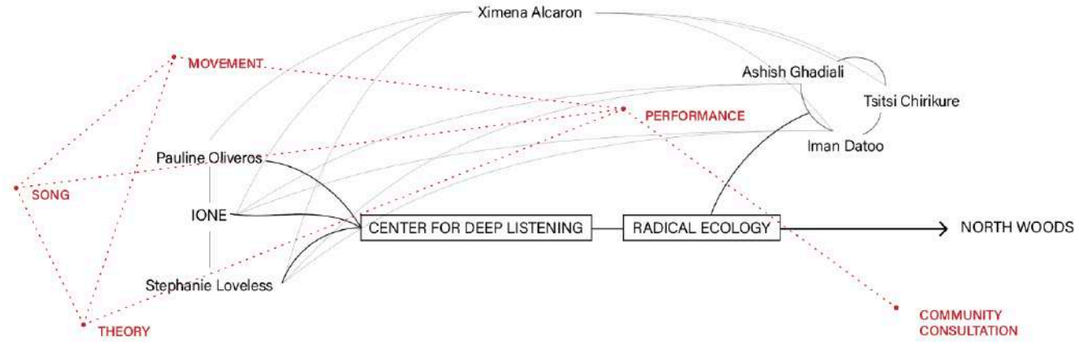


Fig 3.5
Our journey towards Deep Listening in
North Woods

Deep Listening has been instrumental in shaping Radical Ecology's approach to supporting climate and racial justice. In 2023, Ximena Alcaron facilitated a Deep Listening workshop for the first in-person gathering of our core team. This workshop provided an invaluable opportunity to connect, learn about one another and explore the practice itself, marking our first in-person meeting after working remotely. That same year, Ashish Ghadiali curated *A Silent Walk* that began at the Mayflower Steps at the Barbican in Plymouth and concluded at the Peace Garden on Plymouth Hoe, employing Deep Listening as a tactic for deconstructing standard civic narratives. This event served as a powerful embodiment of non-violent and decolonial civic intent. Furthermore, Iman Datoo's audio-tactile installation for our exhibition *Against Apartheid* utilised Deep Listening to make visible the often-overlooked labour of earthworms as they digest, tame and renew soil. Our collaborative performance, *Where do we go when we realise that we can't go back to nature?*, employed verbatim quotations from participants to echo thoughts back into the room, capturing the conflicts, confusions and complexities of Invasion Ecology within the spatial dimensions of the performance venue.

We are committed to continuing our partnership with the Center for Deep Listening, further exploring its relevance when listening to place and integrating it into both artistic and community contexts. The practice of Deep Listening is also no stranger to this landscape; in 2009, Pauline Oliveros hosted a Deep Listening Retreat at Dartington Hall, just a stone's throw from North Woods.

RESILIENCE

Whenever you're working with trees, you're thinking next generation or several generations down the line

Somebody said, you know, when Aunt Maisie, I think it was my brother, oh I'm going to die.

And I said, no it doesn't work like that. You grab everyday and enjoy it

SPIRITUALITY

I've done all sorts of things in those woods Sometimes I had a little fire & sat around with friends. Been down to the river in the summer to swim I do my Qigong practice there sometimes.

It's quite special. I love it.

Sometimes in the morning you'd see shapes of light coming through there, and it's really quite beautiful

JOY

The joy it brings you when you walk down and you see like autumn, the colours, all the different trees and the colours

It's just lovely, all year round.

It's amazing I go there everyday, pretty much

ean, I would prefer my husband e here for somebody to chat to, you can't have everything you , you know

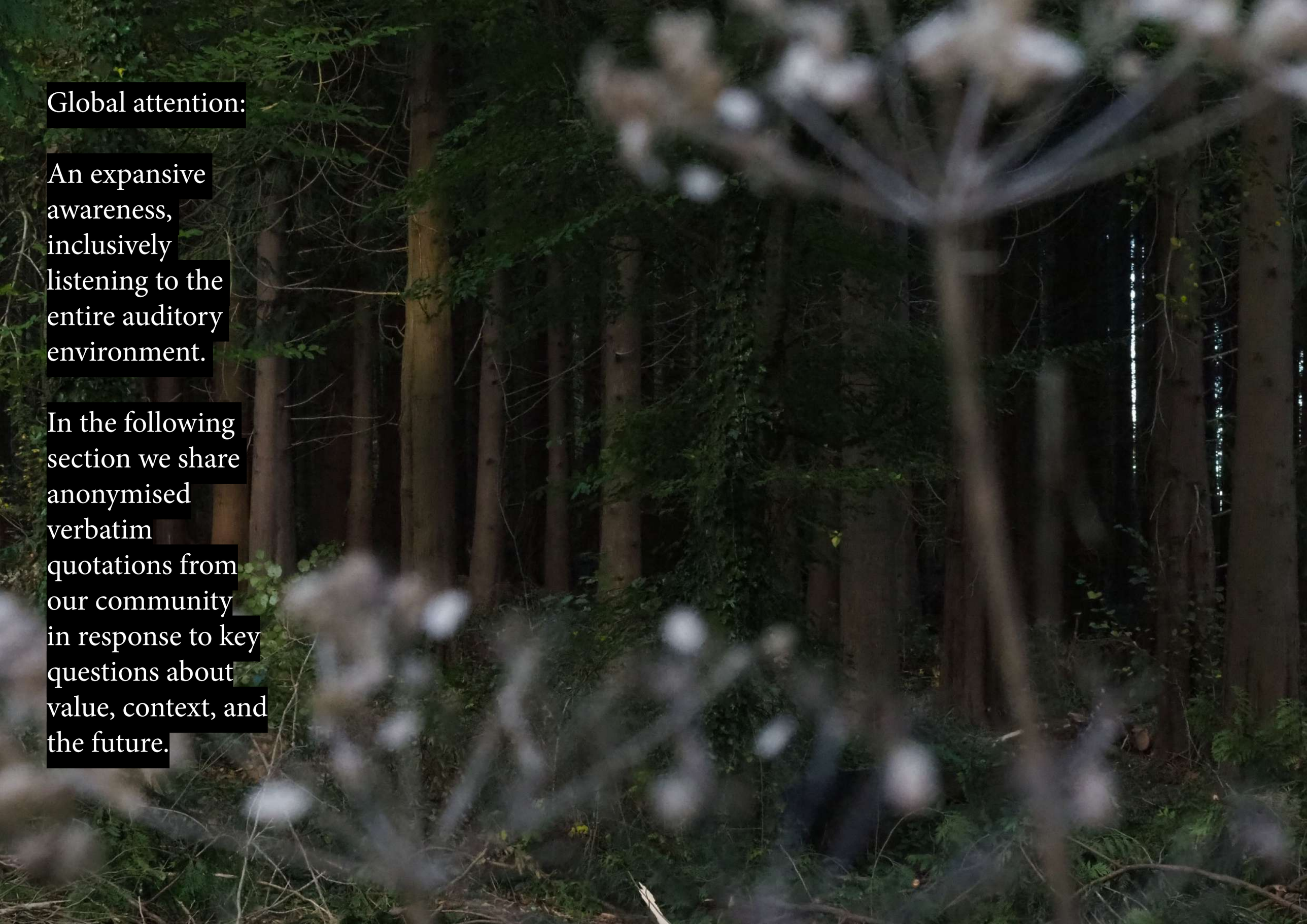
But, it's not my land, so

RESPECT

everyone gets their apples

If they do this (cut the trees down) the light will come in around the trees and then it'll be better for the birds and everything

FREEDOM



Global attention:

An expansive awareness, inclusively listening to the entire auditory environment.

In the following section we share anonymised verbatim quotations from our community in response to key questions about value, context, and the future.

Why are North Woods valued?

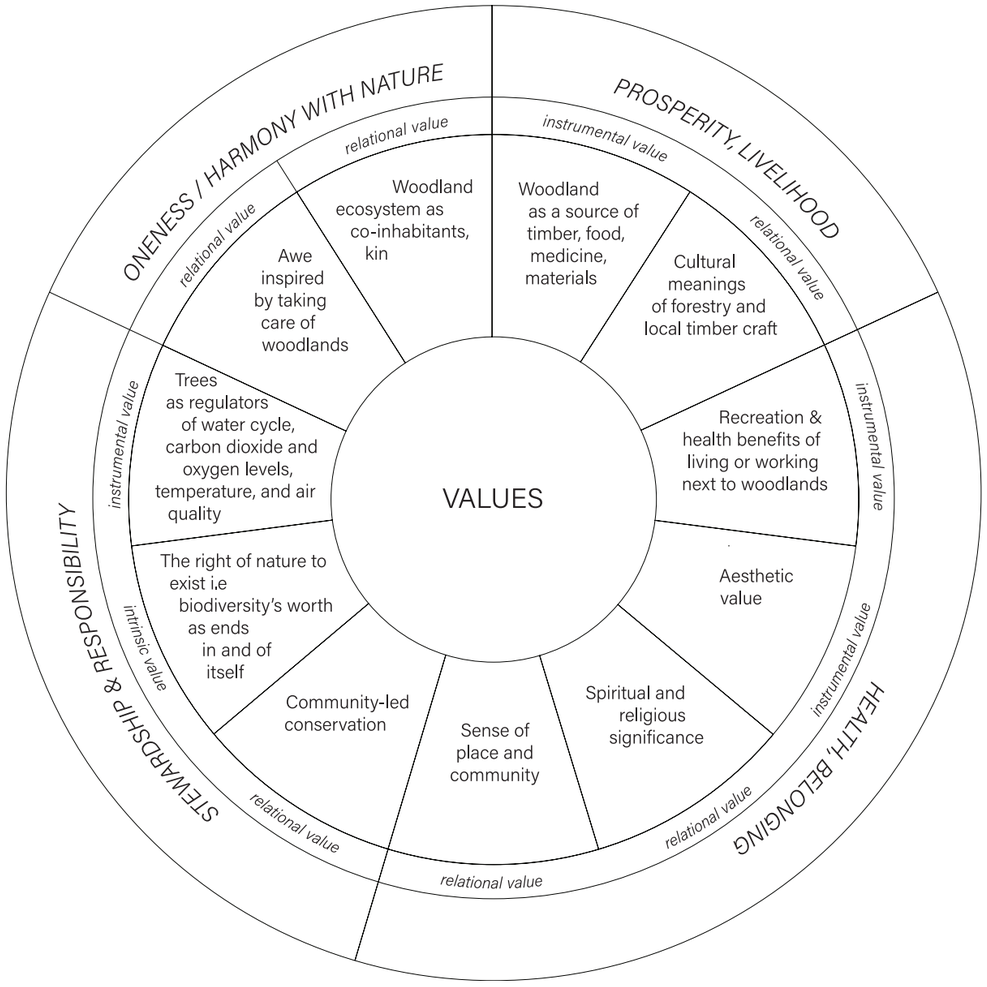


Fig 3.6
Values of North Woods

Drawing from *An Inclusive Typology of the Many Values of Nature*, we use a layered framework for assessing value in North Woods. Here are our findings:

Woodland as a source of timber, food, medicine, materials

If we're going to use wood, we need to harvest it, you know.

As I run the mill and do my best to make it economic, sometimes I like the bit of wood that looks like it is going to make me the most money!

The customers have to want to use local timber because it is going to cost them extra.

The mill is quite a difficult thing to keep going on. It is my business.

When Mike was managing North Woods, I used to get cedar from there. It was nice. It was good quality. He managed with continuous cover and would take out a bit here and a bit there. He did get a good pile. The way that they have done it now is just the cheapest possible way to harvest a whole lot at once without any thought for the soil or the surrounding woods.

The predominant crops planted here, like Douglas Fir and Western Red Cedar, were planted because they provide quality as well as volume.

I actually weirdly have more of a problem with this site being replanted with native broadleaf species that aren't intended for timber than I do with like the possible abuse of non-natives. I mean, I believe in productive forestry and timber. I think we should use timber more in our construction projects.

I think they've asset stripped timber out of here that they're not replacing. And that that's detrimental to the community's more systemic interests in the long-term. Because we do have other areas of woodland on the estate, which is managed for the sole purpose of biodiversity.

When I worked here it was said that we hadn't managed to establish a new successful timber plantation in about the last 15 years just because of the high level of squirrel damage.

Cultural meanings of forestry and local timber craft

We built a cabin in our garden and it was really difficult to get wood that was from here.

It was actually much, much cheaper to buy wood that comes from Eastern Europe or even, unbelievably, from Brazil which I could not understand at all. I don't understand how the economy of that works.

We need a completely different financial model for this to change, really. Well, our financial model isn't really fit for purpose for restoring our landscape, really, because we're not seeing the value in it at the moment. It doesn't affect our GDP unless we cut it down and sell it.

I have been involved with several houses where I have supplied all the construction timber and it has been visually graded. That is what the customer wants. They want the feeling that the house has come from the locale.

And the work that happens here from the 1920s onwards with the Elmhirsts and Wilfred Hiley, the forester, was so groundbreaking and innovative at the time. This is a piece of standing history that we're in now.

I suppose it would be nice to see the native trees back, you know.

I see the focus on just returning to native broadleaves as a form of neo-colonialism that just pushes the import of timber onto future generations. If we don't grow quality timber, then we are absolutely forcing our grandchildren and great-grandchildren to import timber and expect other people to grow that timber for us.

Recreation and health benefits

Just by being in the woods you're breathing in all these gases that you just don't get anywhere else and there are so many studies out there to show that just being in the woods can help people's mental health and physical health.

I feel really, it can lift my mood. It can sort of cool me on a hot day.

I often go out at 11 or 12 at night with our dogs and I feel really nurtured by the woods.

When the children got stifled a bit with the rain, we used to walk up the woods, walk in. And I used to sit on one of the things and they used to play in under the trees. We didn't get wet there. They, you know, let off steam. And then we

used to come back.

When we started out we really wanted to be inviting people to the woods that didn't normally go to the woods and we really wanted to make it easy for people to imagine themselves being there so we would do woodland cinema, woodland performances, woodland haircuts, woodland cafés and they were really fun and exciting. I've loved seeing refugee groups here, I've loved seeing ceremony here.

Redwood trees make me happy.

Aesthetic value

I suppose it would be nice to see the native trees back, you know.

Sometimes in the early morning you'd see shafts of light coming through there, and it's really quite beautiful.

The joy it brings you when you walk down and you see like Autumn, the colours, all the different trees and the colours.

The bluebells in the Spring, and sometimes it's misty. It was lovely when it was misty through the redwoods, but they've gone now.

It's amazing, I go there everyday, pretty much.

It's just lovely, all year round.

When I was making things, I would like to mix timbers together and create contrasting colours. I appreciate lots of different woods. I am not good at favourites.

Spiritual or religious significance

I think it's really important we bring ceremony back to the woods so handfastings, wakes, we've had ice bath workshops in the woods.

Well it is just the place I go to, you know, just to clear my head and to be with trees.

It's slightly scary and slightly spiritual living next to the woods.

I don't think they hold the same magic for me that they used to, and I don't know really how to explain that. They used to be really magical.

Sense of place and community

I feel really safe with the trees.

I found it quite scary at first but now I feel really comforted by the woods at night.

It [Dartington] was just a community and we used to get together on foundation days and all dress up and it was brilliant. Absolutely brilliant.

They'll knock on my door and bring me a bunch of flowers so I can take them to where Terry's buried by St Mary's church. You know, it's a nice place to live.

I live on my own now, but if I was to knock any door, they would help me.

It's just the fact that I can walk out of my front door and within a few minutes I'm in a woodland, which is very rare for most people.

I can walk from my house straight into the woods without crossing a road.

Everybody kind of comes at Dartington from a different angle but usually with a kind of very committed personal perspective. And I'm now one of those people. You know technically it's like what's my investment in this place?
As a kid I would come to North Woods, so I've been coming here since I was knee high

New blood is good, but there's a lot of people that really don't know the ethos of Dartington. They're not old Dartington. I'm old school.

Community-led conservation

When I was here, we used to have the college, which unfortunately has recently been closed down. So, you used to have all the staff involved with the college, but also the students.

You had professional communities, I guess, connected to the kind of work that we're interested in and what we wanted to do.

There is not any funds to be able to coordinate the kind of local community action that can really do some quite impressive things.

I think it's the role of kind of organisations that work with woodlands and communities to kind of enculture that kind of mindfulness around where people are going, what they're doing, what they're disturbing and in what way they're kind of making an impact.

Dartington's history of the last hundred years has been about innovation and experimentation for what makes regenerative, sustainable rural communities.

I think participatory decision making for community assets is something that I particularly increasingly value. And something that this place, under different forms of leadership, you know, often made a sort of good effort to deliver.

I'd like to see the local community being part of the creation of new woodlands... The kind of democratising of land ownership and decision making that goes with that and responsibility that comes with that is quite an attractive concept.

The right of nature to exist i.e. biodiversity's worth as an ends in and of itself

I think it's a real shame that they've built the Glade because they've taken somewhere which was previously a green space that was no bikes, no fires, no camping and created vehicle paths into that part of the wood and that's a slippery slope.

Well, I think they say if they do this, the light will come in around the trees and then it'll be better for the birds and everything like that.

I think somewhere like North Woods would be a great place to value for biodiversity.

I think there's been this shifting baseline syndrome culturally whereby society has started to identify plantations as being woodlands and being something to kind of cherish and people that have kind of grown come into relationship and that's become important to them.

Trees as regulators of water cycle, carbon dioxide and oxygen levels, temperature and air quality

I think we should use timber more in our construction projects. It's far less of a problem environmentally than creation of concrete to use for building. It helps us actually store more carbon in the environment by bringing more timber into the built environment.

Woodlands are wet all year around. We're actually amongst a sea of water right now. In these trees above our heads are thousands and thousands of litres of water so you know you don't often walk into woodlands and imagine yourself kind of like at the bottom of a sea in a way.

Porous gases come in and out of them water goes up them electrical signals come out of them and go into them so where are the edges of a tree it's quite hard to define.

Clear-felling is very shocking and it also really importantly changes the kind of humidity of a space and the the ability of the woodland to kind of maintain itself which is why I say I'm not seeing anything progressive here.

Awe inspired by taking care of woodlands

I think one interesting case in terms of how we as a species sort of enter into the flow of a forest or woodland is to try and shift the paradigm towards some sort of symbiotic relationship rather than a very extractive model.

Woodland ecosystem as co-inhabitants, kin

There's lots of trees that I talk to and I really love them.

Well it is just the place I go to, you know, just to clear my head and to be with trees.

You can feel really nurtured in the woods. And what's happening now, I feel a lot of grief over it. I feel a lot of grief about the way it's being done.

Disturbance happens when humans goes into woods and I think having some sort of rational, reasonable curation of that activity is really important.

The timber is not the primary product, the forest is the primary product so all our operations need to organise themselves around increasing the canopy height, increasing the biomass that's in there, increasing the complexity of the ecology whilst at the same time remunerating our efforts by selecting trees which may already be diseased.

Fig 3.8
Clear-fell, North Woods, January 2025.

Where do you see North Woods in 100 years?

It's a very, very difficult question.

It's not very possible, but [I'd like to see] red squirrels back in there. I mean, it did have red squirrels in there about 40 years ago.

Well, I would like to actually see it with more native deciduous trees.

I would like to see the structure of the woodland being strong. I'd like to see little nodes of designated human activity happening.

I would like to see the canopy height having increased considerably.

I'd like to see the local community being part of the creation of new woodlands, new areas and potentially having agency within their decision making process.

I would like to see the local community benefiting from the timber that was being extracted.

Maybe some of it should be fenced off so that there's not dog walkers in there, even as a dog walker myself, and just to respect the biodiversity

There's a Bronze Age fort in there that could be cut off and left for biodiversity.

That's a really big question.

I mean, 100 years, that is, you know, we've just hit, this is the year we hit 1.5 degrees.

Even 1.5 degrees, that's a significantly different landscape or climate in 100 years time from here. I don't think it's possible to say what I envision it to be.

From my perspective, it's just about putting in as much resource and resilience into your design thinking so that whoever has to deal with the woods in 100 years time is dealing with the best possible scenario.

This is going to take me a moment to think about this.

There's a very good forester Mike Gardner who used to work here actually who always says that if you're a forester you've got to make decisions pretending you're going to live forever because you're trying to understand the repercussions of the decisions you make on someone generations in advance and I find that both exciting and almost traumatizing in a way.

The first is 100 years is nothing I mean it's something to you and I because we're going to die within that but from a forestry perspective it's nothing.

How do we create something that's resilient?

I think myself, like a lot of people in my age grouping, I think they have a lot of despair about the future. Because we don't seem to be able to go along the right path. Everything is so unbalanced with everything.

I don't think we can do anything about it. Nothing at all. Now plastic, that you can.

I like the way you are expanding your mind and thinking donkey's years ahead, because you may just get somewhere, I hope you do.

It'll be here long before we've gone, provided we don't cut it down and build houses.

Well, hopefully, you know, given climate and stuff, the redwoods will be, I mean, these are some of the biggest in Europe now, I think, and they're going to be, they're going to be astounding if they survive climate change, they're going to be astounding in 100 years time. That'll be a, you know, they'll be a mecca for people to come from hundreds of miles around to see. It'll be quite a thing.

In 100 years? Golly, I'd like to think that it was still there. I don't know whether that would be the case, purely because land is premium.

I don't think North Woods will ever be sold because it's financially productive for them. I don't know how to answer that question. A hundred years is a long, blooming time.

I'd hate to think that it wasn't going to be there. If it wasn't going to be there, the only thing I could think of would be housing. That would be progress, but sad progress.

What do you think of the recent felling?

It's pretty disturbing and harrowing to see.

I do think that the woods, obviously they need to be managed and it was a plantation and it needs to be replanted and thinned out and it needs to be able to support more life and it doesn't at the moment.

I think we've all got used to how it is, even though it's fairly, in some areas it's quite low grade in terms of how much biodiversity it supports because the trees are planted so close together and they're one species and it's very dark and gloomy.

It did need to be thinned out, but the way that they're doing it is obviously that they're doing it based on cost rather than the needs and they're using these huge industrial machines that are quite scary to see because they're just absolutely out of any scale of normality and it's just so that one person can do all the work rather than, you know, one person's doing the work of probably like 30 people.

Yeah, but that sort of relates to our sort of consumerist lifestyle really and also the mismanagement of Dartington Estate and, yeah, I was going to say greed, but I'm not sure if it's greed, I think it's just mismanagement.

I was talking to one of the guys out there, he's a young guy, like a tree surgeon and he said that they'd been quite abused by people, which I was quite shocked about. Young guys that are tree surgeons should be safe.

I know it needs to be done but the way it's being done is quite shocking. But I also know that we're a very consumerist lifestyle and this is what it looks like. This is what consumerism looks like when you're in the woods.

I think they've asset stripped timber out of here that they're not replacing.

I don't think it's good enough. Like, I don't think it respects the legacy of the estate or the potential positive impact enough.

I don't have much faith in the Dartington policy as far as looking after the woods is concerned.

It's a site that will take a good period of time to recover.

I understand from the letter that was sent out to the community that there is a kind of a plan that involves, if my memory serves me correctly, a sort of native species replanting and then also allowing a little bit of natural regeneration. It's slightly hard to imagine when you look at the site the way it is now.

For every tree that's felled there's a reason and a logic behind it and the logic will be underpinned by some sort of motivation and quite often social motivation normally a kind of financial economic motivation so that's kind of what we're seeing here now and it's a pretty standard model in forestry.

I'm not seeing anything surprising happening in North Woods from from my perspective and I'm also not seeing anything particularly progressive either.

Clear-felling is very shocking and it also really importantly changes the kind of humidity of a space and the the ability of the woodland to kind of maintain itself.

What's happening here is quite a trodden path in terms of what they're doing.

At the moment, the forest management plan, as far as I understand it, is moving from what could be considered fairly monocultural to what we might call a continuous cover type system that is a 3D complex forest of multiple species and multiple ages that provides resilience and provides soil health. But to do that is a long-term thing. It's not something that's done overnight.

I mean, I don't know what the plans are here, and neither are we particularly interested in the word nativeness. In a climate that's changing so fast, this obsession with what is native and not seems slightly outmoded. There'll be an element of broadleaves in here, for sure.

And those trees, the fir trees that they're cutting down, nothing grows underneath a fir tree, but when they're down, you'll get fields of bluebells and primroses and things like that. So nature regenerates itself a lot better than we can, a lot better.

So if one species that at the moment is commanding the area, once that's gone, something else takes over, and that's nature, it will carry on. You can't beat nature, you can't.

Fig 3.9
Clear-fell & Vigil, North Woods, January 2025.

Focal attention:

Concentrating on individual sounds, honing in on specific auditory details that might otherwise go unheard or be overlooked.

Diversity In Gardens

In January and February 2025, we held two public engagement sessions, grounding our exploration of nature connection and care-work with invisibilised actors in the local soils from the Apricot Centre and the North Woods.

Background

Radical Ecology partners with the Apricot Centre and Devon & Cornwall Refugee Support to deliver Diversity In Gardens (DIG), a skills and network development programme that aspires to provide communities including refugees, asylum seekers, young people and BAME communities with the skills and networks to lead land-based projects.

The programme provides access to gardening and craft skills and regenerative land-based systems education leading to certified qualifications. By growing, eating, learning, working and celebrating land and produce together, diversity – in soil, plants and people – is woven into the fabric of the DIG community.

As part of a longer term project initiated by the Apricot Centre to build a pizza oven for their social forestry space, we facilitated two sessions focused on attuning ourselves to the materials from the land. Through this partnership, we identified a shared interest in soil, not just as an agricultural resource but as something shaped by and shaping the movements of people, plants and place.

What we did:

The day began at DCRS in Plymouth where volunteers convened before taking the public bus to the Radical Ecology studio in Dartington. Here, we collected wellies and waterproofs and saw tests and experiments in clay processing by Iman, harvesting pigments and paints from the soils of North Woods and the wider South Devon region.

Fig 3.11
Grinding clays from North Woods to make Pigments.

Fig 3.12
Clays pigments in the Radical Ecology Studio. These will be turned into paints to decorate a pizza oven with botanical drawings from North Woods

Next, we walked to the Apricot Centre's social forestry space, an outdoor site where we processed 'waste' clay, yellow and white-speckled clay uncovered during the digging of a drainage channel.

We mixed the clay into a slurry with water until a double cream consistency. We then passed it through a garden sieve to remove large rocks and stones.

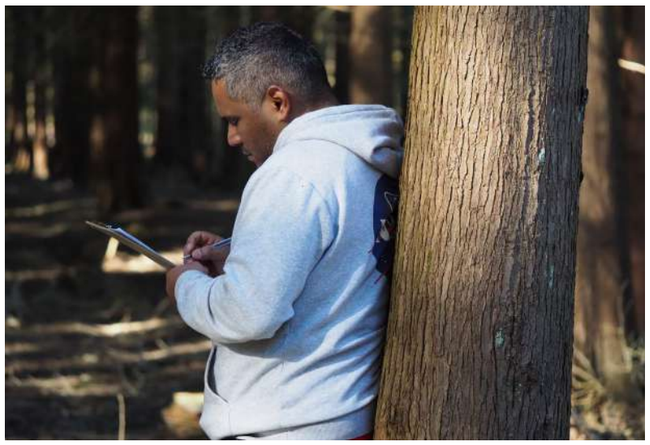
The clay was then left to settle for a couple of days before we removed the excess water with a sponge and wrapped it in plastic.

As we worked, we shared stories about clay and clay paints from home, recognising familiar hues in the red and yellow clays of South Devon in the clays of Eritrea and Chad.

Later, this clay will be used to construct a pizza oven dome, creating a shared space where volunteers can gather, cook and share meals.

After our work, Kirsty, a volunteer with the Apricot Centre, prepared a coconut broth stew using fresh vegetables harvested from the farm.

Fig 3.13-18
Process shots,
working with clay



We followed the geology of the clay in our hands on a walk to North Woods.

Once there, Iman led a Deep Listening session, inviting us to engage with the forest's ecology through all five senses.

We shared our observations through song, story, drawing and movement. Then, we walked back to the studio to enjoy cake and hot chocolate before catching the bus back to Plymouth.

Fig 3.19-22
Deep Listening in North Woods

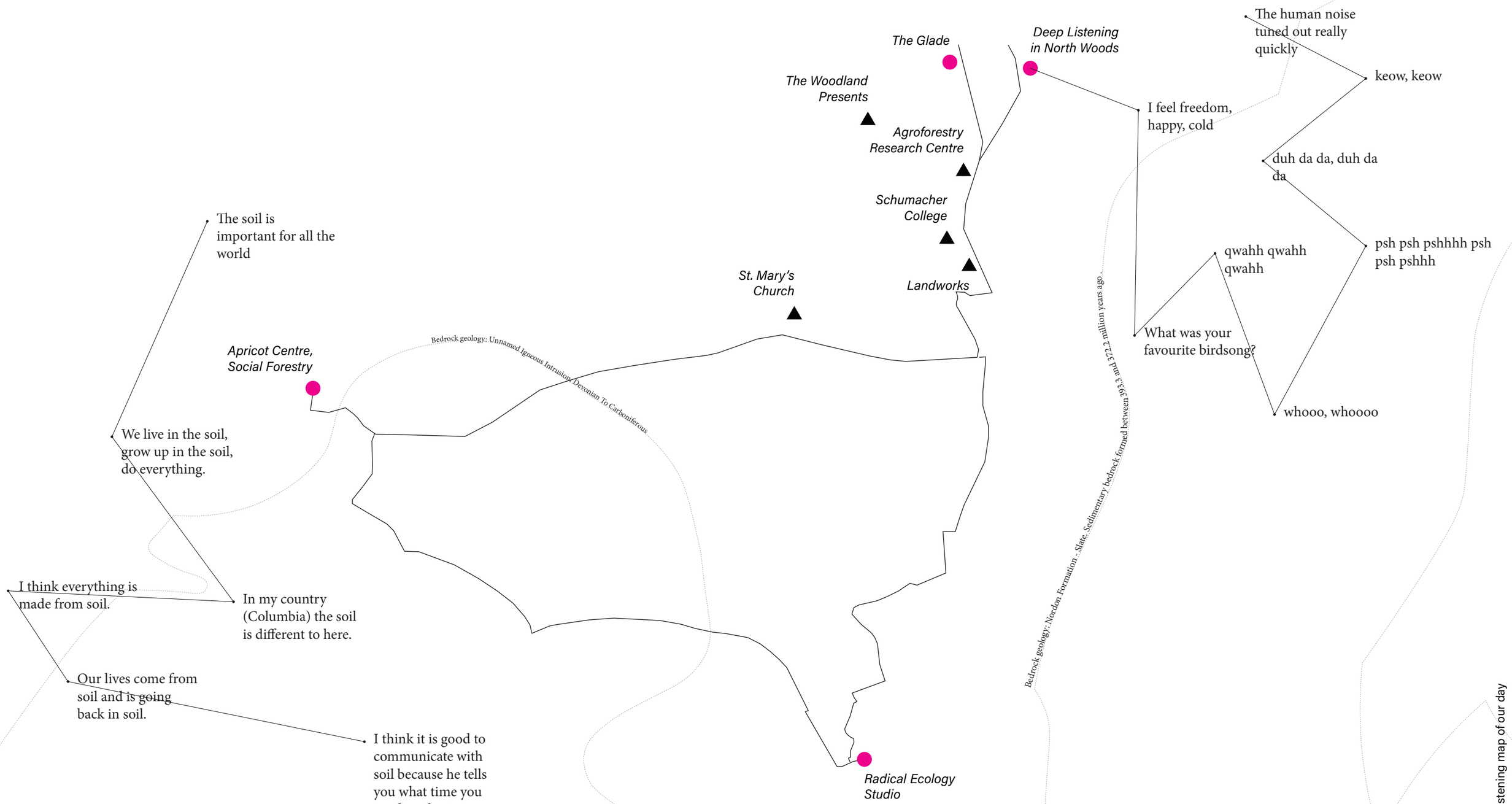


Fig 3.23
A Deep Listening map of our day

“Breathing in the dust
from here, it’s good for
our lungs.”

“I didn’t know that there would be so many different shapes of sounds”

“I couldn’t hear the weather. I couldn’t hear anything about the wind. It’s a still day.”

Fig X
Caption

Through the Five Senses

To celebrate the launch of HOME, a collaborative 360-degree film created by Ashish Ghadiali in partnership with young people from the Zebra Collective, we spent a day in Dartington using the 360 camera as our bionic ear, and engaging our five senses in deep listening.

Background

Zebra Collective offers 11-16 year olds weekly sessions at Mount Wise Neighbourhood Centre in Devonport, Plymouth. They operate a strengths-based and trauma-informed model to engage with the interests, strengths and aspirations of young people, going on frequent trips to explore new places and perspectives. Charlotte Brew, who is one of their co-ordinators, is very much interested in local nature projects and permaculture. She is committed to connecting the youth group with projects on the environment and returning such experiences to Devonport.

In collaboration with Radical Ecology, young people have been training in 360-degree filmmaking under the direction of Ashish Ghadiali, using immersive storytelling to share their perspectives on what 'home' means to them. Their film was exhibited in Devonport's local immersive cinema, a space which they have previously felt disconnected from. Zebra Collective, as part of its mission, hope to engage young people in nature, promote active citizenship and create opportunities and training in new skills.

Five Senses

As part of a long-term vision to engage young people with North Woods, we spent a day together moving between our studio and the woodland, working with our senses to meaningfully engage with nature.

By bringing young people form Devonport to Dartington, we explored and challenged ideas of what and who is considered 'local.' Technology, through transportation, phones and immersive media such as 360 cameras, became a tool for expanding perspectives, enabling the group to see and engage with landscapes in new ways.

What we did:

We mapped our journeys from home to Mount Wise Youth Club to the studio, through our five senses. This was followed by a clay meditation, where we used clays foraged from North Woods to reflect on how the sensory experiences of our environment are shaped by geology. We chose a particular quality of clay to embody during our walks before setting off towards North Woods.

Fig 3.28
Mapping our journeys in the Radical Ecology Studio

Fig 3.29
A meditation with clay to shape our walk

Along the way, we practiced our Deep Listening skills, dropping twigs, leaves and rocks into Bidwell Brook to sense the texture and sound of the water.

Upon reaching the woods, we observed the towering Douglas firs, redwoods and cedars. At first, they appeared almost eerie, like something out of a horror movie.

We gathered in the Glade, a social forestry space within the woods.

Next, we drew our journey into the woods, focusing on our five senses and noting the sensory details along the way.

We applied our observation skills by pairing off and taking turns guiding each other on a Deep Listening walk. Some of us used the 360-degree camera to document these guided tours and journeys.

Afterward, we posed for a group photo before walking back to the bus stop to catch the GOLD bus back to Plymouth.

Fig 3.30-35
Photo documentation of the day

Through the Five Senses

We had breakfast at Mountwise Neighbourhood Centre

PLYMOUTH

GOLD bus route

Mountwise Neighbourhood Centre

It was cold, wet, foggy

On the way here it was cold and got a bit foggy and very windy.

We saw trains, cottages, sheep, fields, and lots of other things!

I saw a train

I heard a cow go moo, moo, moo!

We saw people, animals, grass, houses, vehicles from the windows

We listened to Darcie tell jokes

We smelt musky bus seats, chicken and fuel

I smelt petrol

We played 'I spy' on the bus

DARTINGTON

Shinners Bridge

Radical Ecology Studio

I tasted my sweet hot cup of tea!

We ate cake in Ash's studio

lunch hunting in Dartington store

Focal Attention

The Glade

North Woods

The Woodland Presents

Agroforestry Research Centre

Schumacher College

Landworks

Radical Ecology Studio

we saw tall trees with ivy growing up them

quiet

humming

crunching

tranquillity

spiky trees

singing

cold

fairy doors in a big old tree

We passed beautiful buildings

birds chirping and a stargazing wooden thing

free

peace

muddy

familiar

Fig 3.36
Mapping the five senses from Mountwise Neighbourhood Centre to North Woods

“We could put on an adaptation of The Six Wives of Henry VIII here.”

“I felt like red-riding hood.”

“Look! We found the yellow clay.”

"I felt really relaxed and calm because you can hear the birds chirping, the trees swaying, the leaves brushing against the floor and mud squelching. I then spotted vines making their way up trees, little fairy doors, different flowers, moss and little huts."

"Tranquility, free, quiet, at peace, cold and muddy."

"Fairy doors in a big old tree."

"Birds chirping and a stargazing wooden thingy."

“Loved the dark trees -
horror moving feeling”

VERBS

pick-up

glide

cup

scratch

tap

drag

press

smell

whisper

zoom-in

touch

hum

feel

shift

echo

remember

breathe

brush

crawl

balance

trace

smell

zoom-out

lean

1. Create a Map

- Choose eight verbs from the list.
- Draw lines to connect them, creating a rough path. This will be your map to guide your partner through the woods.

2. Guiding with the Map

- One of you will be the guide, the other the explorer.
- If your partner feels comfortable, ask them to close their eyes as you lead them along the path you've mapped.
- As you reach each verb on your map, give gentle instructions to enact it in real life.
  For *mimic*, they might mimic the sound of rustling leaves.
  For *shift*, they could pause and shift their weight onto one foot.
- Encourage them to fully engage with the experience through movement, touch, breath, and sound.

3. Reflect & Record

- After 10 minutes, ask your partner to open their eyes.
- Have them draw their journey and write about how it felt to be guided.
- As the guide, reflect on your own experience:
  What did you notice?
  How did your partner respond?
  What did you learn from leading them through the space?
- Take time to share your reflections with each other before switching roles.

This exercise has been adapted from an activity by Erin Demastes, as published in 'A Year of Deep Listening' by Stephanie Loveless

Fig 3.42
A Deep Listening exercise developed for the day

Echoing out:

Through focal and global attention, we uncover what people value about North Woods.

These observations sit within us. We absorb them, digest them, and then echo them back out into the community.

Through this process, we identify gaps and opportunities to guide future actions in North Woods.

Fig 3.44
In the North Woods, III, March 2025

North Woods as a barrier for nature connection and participation:

There is a notable lack of basic signage and public interpretation is a barrier to accessing the woodlands. Current map services (i.e. Google Maps) do not accurately display all public paths and the routes to the woods are often convoluted, making navigation challenging without a local guide.

The history of the estate, such as the previous battery farm, is not readily featured in any physical interpretation along the way to the woods. This indicates a strong need for guided experiences that present the site's story.

The area lacks convenient local options for lunch. While the nearby petrol station provides sandwiches, there are few places for a hot meal, particularly following the decline of the Cider Press Centre.

The infrastructure connecting biodiversity and craft-based learning is broken. It once thrived through Landworks College, Schumacher College, the old Leach Studio Pottery and Dartington Trust.

Using the current recreation area in the woodlands comes with a cost, even for basic amenities like toilets.

Learning about soil and clay is limited to paid courses, leaving few accessible options for those interested in these practices.

Fig 3.45
Into the woods with Devonport Youth Club

Fig 3.46
Into the woods with DIG

Fig 3.47
Sharing stories about clay with DIG

North Woods as a tool for nature connection and participation:

The redwoods in North Woods invite creativity, magic and exploration. The youth group found the woods to be an ideal location for filming and experimenting with emerging technologies. They used 360-degree cameras to capture their experiences and also created TikTok videos.

Many participants found that being in the woods was meditative and healing. The Deep Listening exercises played a significant role in this, especially for those who are not familiar with North Woods. These exercises not only put people into relationship with the landscape, but they also helped people create connection between body and land.

The Deep Listening exercises also created a space for engagement beyond English, encouraging song, personal languages and drawing as ways to interact with the woods. Luis, a volunteer with Diversity in Gardens, led a reflection on bird songs, prompting participants to repeat the calls they had heard - “keow, keow,” “duh da da, duh da da,” “qwahh qwahh qwahh,” “whooo, whoooo,” “psh psh pshhhh psh psh pshhh.”

Sourcing pigments and clay from North Woods inspired conversations about natural paints and traditional practices from participants’ home countries. Soleyman, from Chad, and Molla, from Eritrea, shared images of clay-painted homes, leading to discussions on making pigments more durable using egg as a binder. Participants excitedly shared pictures of clay pots from home, recognising familiar hues in the red and yellow clays of North Woods and the broader South Devon landscape. Conversations about favourite pottery styles created a moment of connection over the shared materiality of landscapes.

Working with clay and dung became an embodied experience, as participants communicated the right textures and consistencies of clay slurries through touch and feeling. Many enjoyed the “cold” and “squidgy” sensation of the clay and dung in their hands and were excited to learn the corresponding English words.

Participants exchanged insights about the woodland’s ecology, from tree aging to soil health. Tornika counted the tree rings to determine the age of the woodland, revealing that this spot was 53 years old. He also mistook a cedar tree for a cypress tree from his homeland and shared a story about the respiratory health benefits of cypress tree cones. This led us to reflect on the potential health benefits of cedar cones as well.

Participants reflected on their felt and emotional experiences in North Woods, with Soleyman drawing a “woman as tree” to express the presence of trees. Others spoke of feeling “happiness” and “freedom” as they engaged with the forest through touch, observation and movement.

Many participants expressed real senses of belonging in the woods, shaped by their experiences with soil. As Tornika put it, “We are soil, we come from it, and we go back to it”. This idea guided our movement through the woods, reinforcing our embodied connection with it to make its presence and connections visible.

Fig 3.48
Connecting with local timber craftspeople around Dartington

Fig 3.49
Building a pizza oven with DIG, 2025

Fig 3.50
Exploring the old Leach Pottery

North Woods as an opportunity for nature connection and participation:

Embodied and tacit engagement with woodlands i.e. through deep listening, has the potential to make visible hidden interactions and reveal the often unseen connections between humans, soils and the wider ecosystem of North Woods. By rigorously developing and redefining deep listening tactics and toolkits, we can establish a structured approach to documenting emotional and tacit evidence of biodiversity, to be read alongside scientific, empirical data. This approach expands the ways in which biodiversity is perceived and documented while also reconsidering who participates in North Wood's recovery.

Technologies such as film, 360-degree cameras and LiDAR (Light Detection and Ranging) technology could be integrated into the research and management of North Woods, offering an interactive way for young people to participate in environmental recovery. This could be carried out in collaboration with UCL's Geography SCATTER team, who are working with the Woodland Trust to build a digital archive of ancient and veteran oak trees.[1]

North Woods, with its redwoods, draws people in, making it a potential hub for cultural activities like plays or film adaptations. Suggestions like performing an adaptation of The Six Wives of Henry VIII or The Chronicles of Narnia were a result of this fascination. It could be a way to explore the woods as a site of cultural expression that will draw more individuals and create means for sustained interaction.

An opportunity lies in reviving craft-based practices by using waste wood from local sawmills and leftover timber from tree felling to fuel a sustainable wood-fired kiln in North Woods. Drawing inspiration from the Anagama kiln in Wytham Woods, Oxford, which has brought cultural and ecological recognition to the area, this opportunity could similarly elevate North Woods, linking it to both cultural heritage and ecological research. It could also inspire further exploration of the Iron Age stone fort that may have historically housed pit fire kilns used for pottery. Individuals who have already participated in soil engagement activities have been keen on clay work, and Mark O'Connell of the Apricot Centre has shown interest in using it for therapy work. The kiln could serve as a venue for artist residencies, exhibitions and workshops, opening up possibilities for local craft-making and cross-cultural exchange. It would allow refugee communities to share their clay-making traditions and to establish unique relationships founded on common creative practice. In addition, it could help connect the craft community with the waste being created from the timber industry, raising awareness about potential ways of harvesting and marketing waste as valuable.

Other options include creating new interpretive maps and signage for North Woods. This would allow visitors to undertake self-guided walks. Incorporating histories and stories of the region, such as the history of the first battery farm and redwoods in the UK, into audio guides would elevate the experience.

We could explore the creation of a food hub through a collaboration with vendors in the area. This could involve building a kitchen or cafe, one that visitors to North Woods could stop by at, en-route to/ from a day in the woods.

1 See https://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/about-us/what-we-do/research-and-evidence/scatter-project/

incredible build up of deep

fertility- making sure it is not degr

BIOIDIVESITE

soil is changing the way it breathing

resilience of soil biology

water pollution

Our entire existence is based to top 6 inches of soil

Zav didn't ask for any of the wood because soil needs to be looked after

sustainablety - important when we harvest timber

ECONOMIC

what is in the soil effects the timber

The Public Consultation

From our Deep Listening sessions in the woods with DIG and Zebra Collective, a number of potential opportunities have emerged, including the development of a Soil School and a Film School.

Through these Deep Listening sessions, we gathered valuable 'signals' about what truly matters in the landscape and local ecology, as well as what people hope to do within the woodlands. The centrality of film and soil to people's engagement with the woodlands was particularly emphasised, especially by those who may have a lot to say but don't feel part of the established woodland community.

We invited stakeholders in North Woods to come together and respond to these ideas for programming through a multi-step speculative scenario process. Participants were carefully chosen for their wisdom and diverse perspectives, including a representative from Natural England, a Huxham's Cross resident, a local geologist, an artist, the Radical Ecology team, and a local sawmiller.

The process began with broad brainstorming about potential activities in the woods based on programme briefs of a Soil School and a Film School. We then focused on the necessary networks, indoor and outdoor spaces, and how to map these activities over a one-year, ten-year and hundred-year timeline.

The below examples are outcomes of ideas generated at the workshop, ranging from short-term ideas to long-term visions:

Short-term:

A school project where students design costumes inspired by microscopic soil microbes such as Tardy Grades to learn soil science through design and art.

Creating dynamic soil pits in the woods where visitors can observe and learn about soil structures up close.

Workshops to educate participants on the unique soil microbiology of the North Woods.

Producing films that emphasise how forests function as holistic ecosystems, with an emphasis on the importance of preserving these communities.

Art installations in the woods that interpret and explain soil microbiology, to inspire curiosity and learning.

Holding open studios for local craftspeople and artists who make timber products, helping the public make the link between healthy soil and sustainable craft.

Mid-term:

Co-designing landscapes with Augmented Reality (AR) sandboxes (interactive visualisation tools that simulate the impact of tree planting on water flow and soil conditions). The users can shape the sand to alter the land topography and then observe how water flows through the soil and landscape in real time.

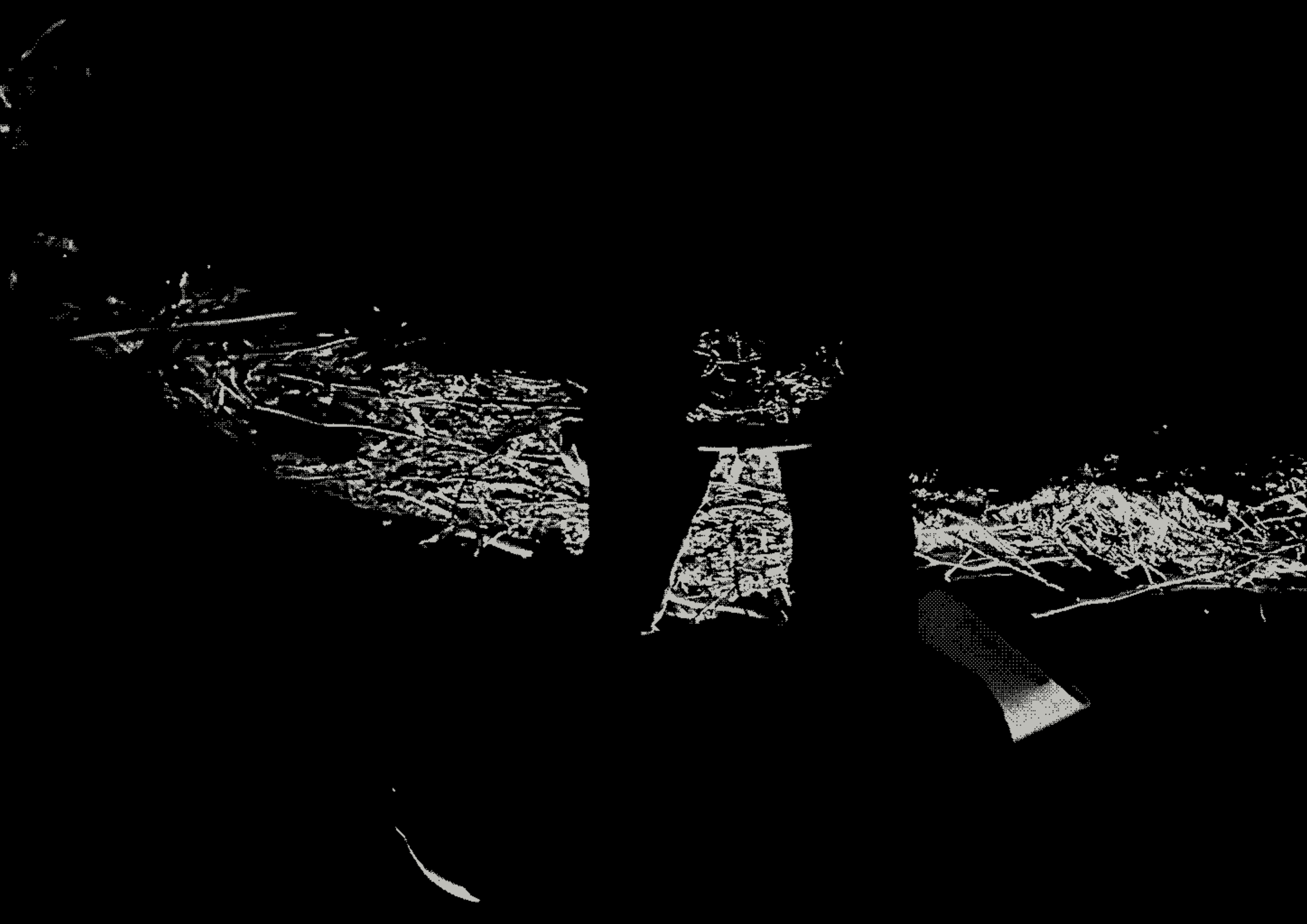
Addressing the growing shortage of foresters by delivering career development programmes and creating pathways for young people to enter the career of regenerative forestry with a specialisation in sustainable and ecologically responsible forest management.

Using the films produced by the Film School to educate the general public on the benefits of forests to mental and physical well-being, highlighting their therapeutic and restorative qualities.

Long-term:

Establish a soil archive to document and preserve important soil data from the North Woods, allowing future generations to learn and understand soil health variations over time.

A Film School could help develop a nature education curriculum, integrating filmmaking into lessons about ecology, conservation, and care. This could become as standard as physical education in schools.



CONCLUSION

Fig 4.1
A Dreaming session in North Woods, March 2025. Photo: Tilly Craig

Fig 4.2
A Dreaming session in North Woods, March 2025

Recent decisions have highlighted ongoing tensions between different visions for the future of North Woods, making us increasingly aware - physically and mentally – of the movements and expressions of our environment and ourselves.

When we began this work, our goal was to explore what might emerge from consciously observing and listening to the ecology of our local woodlands, specifically a post-plantation ecology that has found multiple vocations over its history. We were interested in how woodlands are conceptualised through layers of time, questioning the perceived divide between ancient 'natural' woodlands and 'artificial' conifer plantations, and how this framing influences our understanding of an ecosystem as a whole. Rather than seeking to 'return' to the ancient woodland, we have chosen to engage with North Woods as it exists today, recognising the cycles of creation and destruction, the positive and negative forms of agency, and the observable transformations emerging from species learning to coexist with one another.

We did not, however, anticipate writing this plan during such a time of crisis. Just weeks before we began this process, Dartington Hall Trust announced a new management project for North Woods, resulting in areas being closed off for thinning and felling. In our final week of writing, it was announced that the lease for Martin Crawford's Forest Garden, located on the edge of North Woods, would be ended, instigating a public campaign to protect its 31-year history. As a direct result, we have noticed a heightened awareness and activism to protect and conserve our local heritage, whether that be North Woods, or the Dartington estate more widely.

“Over decades the Trust had lost any sense of covering the costs of its activities, whether it was the Summer School, the Arts College, Schumacher College - all wildly lossmaking, despite all existing free of rent, rates and bills - the use of the estate by tenants and visitors; the list goes on.”[1]

Dartington Hall Trust

A Diminishing Resource

Dartington Hall Trust (DHT) has justified recent large-scale felling operations by citing financial constraints and the need for active woodland management. However our research, which includes discussions with forestry experts and first-hand observations, suggests that many of these claims may be overstated, and alternative management approaches could better balance ecological sustainability with economic viability.

In our effort to go to Dartington Hall Trust with this research, we were able to conduct an off-the-record interview with a staff member. While we cannot disclose their position, we can give some observations from the same interview:

- The staff member emphasised that the Trust is private land, as opposed to public land. They contrasted it to Duke John Seymour’s Berry Pomeroy Caste woodlands, which are largely shut to the public, and pointed out that Dartington land does still remain open for recreation and walking.

- They expressed the view that there had been significant effort on the Trust’s part to inform the public about the works. However, when asked about the availability of the woodland management plan, they were unable to provide information or say who might have access to it. They suggested that it might be available via the Forestry Commission, but our effort to locate it was not successful, indicating that a direct inquiry might be necessary.

- In response to questions about the ongoing work of entomologists and volunteers in the woods, the individual refrained from commenting.

- They also could not provide information on dormouse monitoring and other conservation initiatives.

- The staff member mentioned that the current team has only been in place for the last few years and questioned how they could be held accountable for the estate’s historical legacy.

- They detailed that the funds generated from felling cedars were used to repair the roof of High Cross House and to replant in the cleared areas. Additionally, a local construction team is involved in the roof restoration.

- They remarked that, despite their communication efforts, the Trust has faced significant backlash, particularly from residents of Huxham’s Cross. Initial intentions for involving the community in replanting efforts were ultimately abandoned due to the hostility encountered.

- The staff member claimed that widespread felling was necessary due to aging cedars showing signs of decay, particularly butt rot.

- They claimed that DHT initially planned to involve the local community in replanting efforts but, due to public opposition to the clear-fell, abandoned this initiative.

- Ultimately, they acknowledged that Dartington Trust itself is a diminishing resource and that they are doing their utmost with the limited means available.

Our observations suggest that North Woods is not inherently a diminishing resource. It is being managed as one.

On March 20, 2025, we walked through the woodlands with Mike Gardner, who used to manage North Woods. Overleaf are our key findings.

We observed multiple parallel tracks, likely from a harvester, where machinery was driven directly to each tree for felling rather than using a single designated route. Gardner noted that heavy machinery can compact and damage the wet, clay-rich soils in this area: best practice minimises vehicle movement by parking on the woodland edge or a few designated extraction racks and using winching techniques to extract timber, reducing soil disturbance.

We found several fallen trees, likely due to the over-thinning of edge trees last Winter, allowing wind to penetrate more deeply into the woodland. Gardner noted that the previous management team had been following Continuous Cover Forestry (CCF) principles as outlined in the Management Plan, which accept that some windthrow will occur. However, this valuable timber should be recovered by collecting it as part of regular ongoing forestry management.

A Dartington Hall Trust source cited butt rot as the reason for the clear-fell. However, our inspection showed that not all stumps had butt rot, and where present, it was often minimal. Claims of extensive rot may have been exaggerated to justify large-scale felling. Butt rot is not an immediate threat to the stability of a stand such as this was, especially in such small amounts. In most cases, the affected portion could be removed, leaving usable timber.

We came across a fallen Douglas fir stick of significant value. It could be cut, extracted, and sold locally, making practical use of available timber. This was not the only fallen tree in the area that could be utilised in a similar way. Having a local harvesting team who know the woods and local markets who can harvest fallen valuable trees is a valuable resource compared to one off contractors.

Gardner observed that Douglas firs in the area experienced a period of slowed growth 18 years ago (evidenced by the narrowing of their growth rings). This could indicate changes in soil conditions. The in-house management team had planned to bring in soil scientists to conduct tests and gain further insight into the underlying cause.

We discussed the clear-felled compartment, where timber has been exported out of the region rather than offered locally. Gardner noted regenerated cedar buried under brash piles, as well as damage to adjacent young trees in the neighbouring compartment. Under previous management, a strip felling method was followed in this area. Strips were felled on the leeward side of the woodland, exposing bare soil to encourage natural cedar regeneration, while minimising wind-throw risk. Once young cedars established, the next strip would be felled, allowing for a gradual, sustainable timber harvest that supported both ecological goals and local markets.

Pauline Oliveros describes listening as a form of activism, and through this project, we have begun to understand what this means.

Heritage conservation, once integral to Dartington's identity, is now seen as a financial burden. Yet, our time spent listening to the woods, those who care for them, and the histories embedded in the soil reveals that, when given the opportunity, people can become environmental stewards, shaping a more reciprocal relationship with the land - one that balances giving and taking.

Among the local community, there is a growing concern that timber extraction in North Woods is unsustainable. Initially, we wondered whether there was an idealised view of forestry at play, where people distanced themselves from the realities of where timber comes from. But the more we listened, the more it became clear that this was not the case. There is an understanding that forestry can be a vital part of a sustainable ecology, and harvesting timber carries responsibilities beyond profit: toward the land itself, toward those who live and work in and around it, toward the soil, the waterways, the unseen networks beneath our feet.

The fact that neither of the two local timber sawmills purchased wood from the 2024-5 felling in North Woods is revealing. One declined due to ethical concerns over soil health, while the other, upon enquiry, confirmed that the timber had already been sold elsewhere to a site in Wales. These decisions tell a story, not just of where the wood goes, but of the values that underpin the process of extraction. Sustainable forestry takes time. It requires an equilibrium where what is taken is met with reinvestment in the woods itself, with the future of the woodland considered beyond the immediate yield.

Speaking with local experts, we learnt that another way existed. Incremental harvesting, forestry cover strategies, community-led replanting: methods that, rather than depleting the land, cultivate an ongoing relationship with it. These approaches, however, require patience, dedication, and a reappraisal, where the wood is not an exhaustible resource, but a living system through which human and non-human agents are constantly negotiating.

But just as access to the woods has been restricted, so too has public involvement in its ongoing care. The recent cancellation of the volunteer programme at Dartington broke an essential connection between individuals and environment. The woods were not simply maintained by volunteers but influenced by them - by their knowledge, their labour, their ability to notice and respond. Their absence is not just a loss of hands but a loss of connection, of time spent moving through the land with a sense of responsibility and belonging.

Pauline Oliveros describes listening as a form of activism, and from this project, we have discovered precisely what this means. Recent decisions have highlighted ongoing tensions between different visions for this landscape's future, making us physically and mentally aware of the movements and expressions of both our environment and ourselves. This increasing awareness has become an observatory through which we examine, analyse and navigate our attachment to this land. By working across different viewing platforms, we create a layered understanding of these interactions and cultivate a long-term strategy for care.

We see North Woods as a resource capable of benefiting all. Deep Listening, community engagement and interdisciplinary collaboration serve as guiding principles of a framework for programming that allows people to actively engage with and contribute to woodland conservation. It was only through meeting communities on their own terms - building trust, listening and collaborating - that ideas around a film school and soil school were able to emerge.

By further refining these ideas with key experts in the local community, we explored ways in which these schools could contribute to much-needed scientific research, uncover more sustainable management techniques, and create new investment. Ultimately, hearing and listening to the voice of these ideas makes possible the creation of them as successful policy.

1 https://shorturl.at/zYZrK - Comment by Dartignton Hall Trust on Josef Davies-Coates' LinkedIn post, March 2025

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Credits

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Overleaf are some deep-listening exercises that Iman Datoo developed as part of the Care Plan. Feel free to print them out and use them to listen to a natural space around you. This space could be familiar or new to you.

Would you consider this space local to you?

Would you consider this space biodiverse?

What is its value to you and your kin?

SHAPE OF SOUND

If it feels comfortable, close your eyes and listen for the different sounds around you.
Draw the shapes of these sounds in the boxes below.

BIRDSONG

Take a seat among some trees.
Choose a spot where you feel at ease.
Listen to the birds.
How many different calls can you hear?
Choose one song to follow,
tracing its entire melody in your mind.
Think about how you might draw this song
on paper, following the rise and fall
of its notes.

Imagine you are now this bird
Look up at the canopies and imagine
yourself flying from tree to tree.
gliding from branch to branch.
Feel the wind shifting around you,
its gentle pressure against your ears,
its warmth and coolness as it moves.
If you'd like, you may draw or write what
you hear.

SCORE

People
(e.g. footsteps, talking, movement, laughter, breathing, sounds of interaction)

Weather
(e.g. wind, rain, thunder, snow, streams, the change in temperature or pressure)

Birds & Other Animals
(e.g. chirping, animal calls, insects buzzing, distant wildlife)

Natural Elements
(e.g. trees rustling, flowers swaying, water flowing, rocks shifting, waves crashing)

Technology
(e.g. cars, machinery, electronics, digital devices, notifications)

Silence
(e.g. the absence of human, animal, or environmental sounds; moments of stillness that highlight the other layers)

Choose a category of sound from above. Begin drawing a continuous spiral from the centre of this page. Every time you hear your sound, make a mark along the line.

I SEE THROUGH TOUCH

Find a natural object from around you.
This might be a stone, a leaf, a branch, a tree-bark.
Close your eyes or soften your gaze,
and explore it with your hands.
Feel its contours, textures, temperatures and edges.
Let your hands map out its features as if seeing with your fingertips.
Listen to its movement in between your fingers and palms,
your hands becoming ears.
What sensations arise?
Open your eyes and map what you felt.
Try to capture the tactile qualities in words or illustrations.