

# Letter from Friends of Penrith Beacon

Dear Mr Slater,

We, at Friends of Penrith Beacon, are writing to you as the planning inspector involved in Penrith's Neighbourhood Plan and the future use of the Beacon forest. We have certain questions to ask you, but first think we should explain who we are and the background.

## Who are Friends of Penrith Beacon?

We are a community group formed in the summer of 2018 to campaign for the protection of Penrith Beacon and its surrounding woodland. Our aims were drawn up and agreed at a public meeting in the town centre.

The aims of the Friends of Penrith Beacon are: - **to safeguard all the Beacon forest area for the use of future generations - to help the owner of the forest to protect this precious environment.**

- **The Beacon should remain a wild place and the forest should not be urbanised.**
- **There should be no building within the forest area.**
- **The visibility of the Beacon monument and the views out to the surrounding area are important.**
- **An accessible path in keeping with the natural environment to the Beacon monument is a very good idea.**

## Our Campaign

We formed in response to a leaked document to the local press showing Eden District Council's proposed Masterplan. In their Penrith Strategic Masterplan Sept 2018, they stated that the plan would involve three initiatives to secure the future of the Beacon.

- The wooded front of the Beacon would remain undeveloped and protected.
- There would be improved access to a large portion of the Beacon, facilitating disabled and pushchair access (*and that the landowner wanted activities there such as mountain bike routes or woodland classrooms*).
- Modest development of the commercial forestry area to the rear of the Beacon (*such as high quality homes or holiday lets dotted around the wood*)

Potentially this would have damaged the Beacon's beautiful tranquil woodland, which is home to a varied wildlife flora and fauna (see attached). This woodland has been enjoyed by countless generations.

Even though the timescale to respond to the Masterplan was very limited, we received a huge amount of support in our campaign to protect the Beacon from the above development proposed by EDC.

## Our Petition

A paper petition, we organised, gained over 2,600 signatures in a very short time. The petition asked:

*'We, the 'Friends of Penrith Beacon', petition Eden District Council to take the necessary action for ALL of the Beacon Forest to remain as it is now, a wild place with no development and accessible to all residents'*

In this photo you can see the petition being presented to leader of EDC.

## **The Rally**

We only had just over a week to arrange a rally, yet such was the public support we achieved this. Several hundred people of all ages attended. People marched from all parts of the town and congregated in the centre to support our cause. Various people spoke, including a local teenager who emphasised the importance of the forest for young people and our climate. A young man had even written a song to celebrate the Beacon. We were on BBC and ITV local news that night.

Here are some photos from our FB page of the event, which clearly illustrate the depth of our support.

## **Media**

Our FB page grew from nothing to over a 1000 within a fortnight. There were countless letters sent to the local paper and councillors in opposition to any development of the Beacon Forest, including glamping, holiday lodges, low density housing etc. *(Our FB page has continued to grow. We now have over 1,600 followers and this is, despite the fact everyone, until recently, believed the Beacon had been saved from any development.)*

## **Masterplan**

The overwhelming opposition to EDC's Penrith Masterplan resulted in Lowther pulling out and eventually the scrapping of the entire project.

The post-analysis of the Masterplan recommended that any future discussion on the Beacon Forest should involve the local community including interested groups.

## **Current Situation**

We understand that PTC, EDC and Lowther Estate have already met with you to discuss the future of the forest. Despite EDC's own post-masterplan analysis, FOPB (nor other community groups, such as Keep Penrith Special) have not been specifically invited to participate in any discussions. At a PTC meeting we asked about this and were told this was EDC's responsibility. We understand that PTC passed on our request to be included, but we have not heard anything yet from EDC. We, are, therefore, writing to you directly to ask if you will include us in the process.

In the Penrith Neighbourhood Plan Post Hearing Notes (dated 10.2.21) you suggest a possible alternative:

*'that rather than stretching the definition of LGS in order to secure the protection of the wooded slopes of Beacon Hill, which the community clearly aspired to, one possible option would be to look as to whether a separate policy could achieve both the aspirations of the Town Council - to protect the forest area so close to the town from inappropriate development yet which would not frustrate the legitimate commercial aspirations of the landowner.'*

We feel this sounds similar to the 2018 Masterplan proposals regarding the Beacon. As you can see from our campaign information, this has already been resoundingly rejected by the local population.

We appreciate that the Beacon is a commercial forest and that as owner, Lowther has their own interests to consider. However, we feel that Lowther, as a prominent local landowner and part of our community, can hopefully take into consideration the enormous importance the forest holds for us here in Penrith.

With the covid situation and various lockdowns it has become even clearer how important being in nature is for our mental and physical well-being. We are extremely grateful that Lowther has allowed access to the whole forest throughout this time. Visiting the forest, seeing the wildlife and enjoying the tranquillity has helped many people through this time (*as evidenced by comments on our FB page*).

We feel that the whole of the Beacon forest needs protecting (not just the front), as any development and associated infrastructure would damage the delicate balance needed for the existing wildlife in the forest.

We are just ordinary local people who are keen that future generations will be able to experience the magic of this forest on our doorstep. We do not know the planning rules, but wondered if you, as a planning inspector, might be able to suggest a way to preserve the whole Beacon and its wildlife, whilst respecting Lowther's position?

In conclusion, we would appreciate if you could formally include us in the on-going process and any detailed discussions. If this not legally possible, then please can you take into account our views?

We feel the following photograph sums up local feeling.

Kind regards,

Communications Officer

Friends of Penrith Beacon

# Flora and Fauna on Beacon Hill

## Plants and Habitat

In the Beacon forest we are fortunate to have elements of both heathland as well as forest habitat, which means a greater range of plants and wildlife is supported than you would see in some other forests.

Beacon forest supports a range of uncommon plants associated with native Scots pine woodland. The Beacon pine woodland has affinities with National Vegetation Classification community W.18 *Pinussylvestris*-

*Hylocomiumsplendens* woodland, and the sub-communities *Sphagnum capillifolium/quinqefarium* – *Erica tetralix* and *Scapaniagracilis*. The central area of woodland on the Beacon has the feel of a Scottish Highland pinewood, with the heather and bilberry understory.



The rare Orkney Notchwort

In some wetter hollows an interesting bryophyte community survives as a relic of the Beacon's former heathland habitat. The northern liverwort *Anastreptaorcadensis* (Orkney Notchwort) is a notable species here and was recently a subject of an article in *Lakeland Naturalist* (a journal of Cumbrian natural history published by Carlisle Natural History Society). Other species include the liverworts *Barbilophoziafloerkii*, *Lophocoleabidentata*, *Lophziaventricosa* and *Ptilidiumciliare*, the mosses *Dicranumscoparium*, *Hypnumjutlandicum*, *Pleuroziumschreberi*, *Rhytidiadelphusloreus*, *Sphagnum capillifolium*, *S. nitens*, *S. tenellum* and the reindeer-moss lichens *Cladoniaportentosa* with occasional *C. arbuscula* and *C. tenuis*.



The Beacon also supports a rich fungal community including species associated with Scots pine such as the primrose brittlegill (*Russula sardonia*), the sickener (*R. emetica*) and tawny grisette (*A. fulva*). The grey knight (*Tricholoma terreum*) occurs on the edges of tracks on the Beacon and is a typical species of Caledonian Pine Forest. The scarlet bonnet (*Mycena adonis*) is an uncommon fungus of conifer woods whilst the attractive tiger's eye (*Coltricia perennis*) is generally found on sandy soil at woodland edges and on heathland.



The lichenised fungus *Lichenomphalia umbellifera* grows on the peat in the areas of wet heath on the Beacon. Associates of deciduous trees include the spectacular fly agaric (*Amanita muscaria*), false deathcap (*A. citrina*) and grisette (*A. vaginata*). Dead wood fungi include sulphur tuft (*Hypholoma fasciculare*), plums and custard (*Tricholomopsis rutilans*) and yellow stagshorn fungus (*Calocera viscosa*).

## Birdlife



Numerous species of bird occur in the Beacon forest including the common crossbill, woodcock, buzzard, sparrowhawk, kestrel, raven, rook, carrion crow, jackdaw, jay, common magpie, blue tit, great tit, coal tit, long-tailed tit, wren, goldcrest, goldfinch, chaffinch, bullfinch, greenfinch, great spotted woodpecker, blackcap, spotted flycatcher, blackbird, song thrush, mistle thrush, redwing, fieldfare, brambling, siskin, willow warbler, chiffchaff, barn swallow, house martin, swift, yellowhammer, tawny owl, house sparrow, starling, robin, linnets, wood pigeon, collared dove, whitethroat, nuthatch, tree-creeper and pied wagtail to name just a few! Nightjars have even nested there in the past.

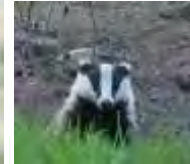




Oystercatchers nest in adjacent fields to the north of Beacon woods and skylarks been observed there also

## Other Wildlife

The Beacon forest provides an important stronghold for red squirrels. Other mammals on the Beacon include bats, roe deer, badger, fox, stoat, brown hare, rabbit, field vole and wood mouse. A polecat has even been seen (reported to Cumbria biodiversity data centre). Adders also have been seen and common lizards are known to inhabit the forest.



## Invertebrates

A diverse invertebrate fauna includes species of heathland and Scots pine woodland. The eyed ladybird (*Anatisocellata*) is associated with Scots pine, as is the pine cone bug (*Gastrodesgrossipes*) which feeds on the seeds in the pine cones and has a specially flattened shape so it can slip beneath the scales of the cones. The bilberry understory supports a population of the local green hairstreak butterfly (*Callophrys rubi*) and the uncommon holly blue butterfly (*Celastrina argiolus*) can be seen flitting among holly trees at the forest edge in spring. Heathy areas have their own insect fauna such as the plant bug *Orthotylus ericetorum*.



The local Green Hairstreak butterfly

Areas of bare sandy soils provide habitat for green tiger beetles (*Cicindelacampestris*) and nesting sites for solitary bees such as the tawny mining bee (*Andrena fulva*). The solitary wasp *Ectemnius continuus* excavates nest tunnels in dead tree stumps or logs and stocks them with flies for its grubs to eat. The deciduous woodland beneath the summit of the Beacon supports insects such as the birch shieldbug (*Elasmotethus interstinctus*) and the wonderfully named *Dryophilocoris flavoquadrinotatus*.

