



## Colton Parish Council

Tel: 01229 861408  
e-mail: coltonpc@btinternet.com  
web: coltonparishcouncil.org.uk

Clerk: Ms Mandy Lane  
Lilac Cottage  
Oxen Park  
Ulverston LA12 8HG

13 January 2011

Jim Paice MP  
Minister of State, Defra  
House of Commons  
London

Dear Mr Paice,

### **RIGG WOOD & FORESTRY SELL-OFF**

I refer to your recent letter in the *Guardian* (6<sup>th</sup> Jan), responding to Laura Barton's article, in which you "lay to rest this myth that access rights will be lost" [if Forestry Commission holdings are sold]. You will also have read Johann Hari's article in the *Independent* (7<sup>th</sup> Jan); in this piece, reference is made to Riggs Woods [*sic*] and, although some of the reporting is incorrect, it is certainly the case that the car park has been shut down, the picnic area has been dismantled, and the gate has been locked since the wood was sold to a private owner.

Rigg Wood is in the parish of Colton in South Lakeland. While in the care of the Forestry Commission, the wood provided excellent parking and picnic facilities, being conveniently situated immediately adjacent to Coniston Water. Because of its sale into private hands, these facilities are now lost to local people and visitors alike. Further, the wood is designated Access Land. While, apparently, owners currently have the right to fence and gate designated access land (without providing stiles or other means of access), such actions send entirely the wrong message to all users and makes access for less-abled people, the focus of large parts of the CROW Act, a near impossibility.

Small areas of Commission land are scattered through our local landscape, immediately south of the larger Grizedale Forest, and the community is fearful for the future. For at least the last half-century, local people and visitors have enjoyed the amenity and recreation afforded by these smaller woods which often lie in quiet and peaceful countryside, away from the 'honey-pot' areas. As we understand the proposed legislation, the future use of these woods may be entirely at the discretion of new owners who will have no duty of care, or mandate to have regard to the forests in terms of access, recreation, heritage, or biodiversity. Even if protective clauses were to be introduced, the recent example at Rigg Wood suggests that new owners will not comply with the spirit of responsibilities, even if they abide by the letter.

It has been suggested that, under the Localism and Big Society agendas, such woods may be passed into community ownership. Apart from the prohibitive costs (local woodlands selling at around £10,000 per hectare), there is unlikely to be the required energy in an ageing and scattered rural community to take on board such initiatives. Most of the quality of life in our parish (20 square miles

with no shops, post-office, schools or public transport) comes courtesy of the considerable efforts of volunteers in providing social welfare and maintaining community facilities. Further, it seems likely that services provided by the principle authorities will continue to diminish in this economic climate and that the local community will be expected to 'self-serve' increasingly as time goes by. To take on responsibility for owning and managing several woodlands could be an additional challenge too far, however strong the community spirit.

We trust that, as part of the forthcoming consultation process, parish councils will be given an opportunity to express their views in an official manner. In the meantime, Colton Parish Council wishes to express its deep concerns about the removal of national forests from the guardianship of the Forestry Commission and urges you and your department to re-think emerging policies.

Yours sincerely,

Colin J Barr  
(Chairman, Colton Parish Council)

cc Tim Farron, MP

cc by email:

Laura Barton, *c/o The Guardian*  
Johann Hari's, *c/o The Independent*  
Editor, *Westmorland Gazette*  
Editor, *NW Evening Mail*  
David Babbs, 38 degrees  
Graeme Prest, Regional Manager, FC