

In a stunning area by Three Cliffs Bay on the south coast of the Gower Peninsular, Wales, eleven of us got together to formally begin discussions about the community we've been planning to build for some time. Some of the group had never met each other before but, all connected by mutual friends and a shared dream, friendships were formed and furthered over the duration of the weekend. We stayed in an incredible house made by its owner Dave, and located on Sandy Lane where the community lives in mostly self built homes, the first beautiful accident of the trip. For an airbnb find based on finding the cheapest place where our large group could stay and get to without too much difficulty, it seemed miraculous that we ended up there! Dave built Treetops about 25 years ago using mostly reclaimed materials, and it was inspiring to see what he'd created and talk to him about the process. He was extremely helpful and interested in our project and at several times over the weekend he'd pop around from his home next door to see what we were up to and share more stories and advice.

On Dave's recommendation we went to visit Holtsfield, a local eco community similar to Sandy Lane in terms of the self built homes, but with much more of a communal intention. Whilst wandering through and admiring the houses we met Al, one of the residents, who kindly gave us a tour, showing us the community's gardens, roundhouse, and the ruins of an old chapel by a spring. He also told us a bit about the struggles the community had faced over the years as the land changed hands forcing a group of them walking all the way to London to present their case in the House of Commons against the new land owner who wished to evict them to build expensive new homes! It was very special to be welcomed so warmly and he even left us a whole pile of books and magazines to take away and read for our own research and learning! Holtsfield is situated in a beautiful forest a short walk away from Caswell Bay and we explored, wandering to the rugged, rocky beach through amazing windy forest paths surrounded by a sea of wild garlic!

One evening during the weekend we all sat down around a fire, with plenty of dahl and beer, to brainstorm ideas about our future community. We discussed a few details including location, time scale and finances, which are hard to pin down to fine details at this stage, but it was useful to gain a better understanding of everyone's current expectations. Excitingly, it seems that everyone attending the weekend is ready to begin, in terms of finances and finishing other commitments, in the next 2 - 5 years, which definitely helps to begin putting firmer plans in place and allowing everyone time to prepare. We talked about some logistics for the beginning of the journey, mobilising ourselves with vans and yurts to hunt down our perfect piece of land, probably somewhere in Europe, which we all agree needs some woods and a fresh water source, but further specifications need to be discussed later.

For me, and I think a lot of the group will share my opinion, the most exciting part of our discussions was going around the circle and listening to each individual speak for a little while about their own dreams for the commune, and explain exactly why they became interested in the idea. It was moving to hear everyone's personal twist on why it is a necessary step, and what they want to achieve through it. We put together a mind map detailing our community's potential and it really helped to give us a good idea of each person's priorities, group aims, and

how they all connect. To summarise, I feel that the main objective that everyone touched on is the need to live in more connected community, breaking away from the structure of our current society of consuming and destroying, where it seems to be expected that you grow up, get married, live in a house with your kids, with walls and fences separating you from the people who live around you, jobs that seem to put you in a boring chain of reliance on others many links further down for your survival, where it is extremely difficult to live a low impact lifestyle. On the commune we'd be able to connect directly to our needs, reconnecting with nature and finding all the resources we need from the land around us, building our own communal buildings, homes, gardens and food, and looking after the land in such a way that live sustainably and leave no damaging impact. There is also a common desire to build renewable power sources, and to create an educational profile where we can tell others about what we're doing, why we're doing it, and hopefully help people in similar situations to access the knowledge and resources they need to embark on such a journey. Ultimately, we want to create a space where we can care for the earth, each other, lead an example for an alternative way of life, and have the space to pursue creative hobbies without being forced to work in a office and pay constantly rising rent!

I was expecting everyone to be fairly united in our ideas for the purpose of starting our own community, but found it reassuring and inspiring to hear that, whilst each individual's primary focus may be different, as a group we share many ideas and needs. Over the weekend I loved observing the group, and feel so excited and fortunate to be amongst a group of friends which such a wide and complementary variety of personalities and skill sets, brought together by the same plan for our futures. It is a beautiful and amazing thing to see, and be a part of, such different but well-matched characters coming together and inspiring each other, and I feel so confident that we are beginning in a very good position to bring our discussions to a reality.