

Claire Wolstencroft

Claire and her husband Graham moved into Lane Head Farm, near Longnor, in 2005. They farmed their smallholding under Higher Level Stewardship, an agreement which ends in 2019. As part of this agreement Claire has worked with parties of schoolchildren helping them to build a connection to and understanding of the countryside. Claire first spoke to us in 2015.

Part 4. Housing in the Peak District National Park

CG: It must be a joy for people who live around here to see people coming in to be here properly. Do you think that's what's made the difference?

CW: Possibly, because somebody was talking about maybe building more social housing in Longnor village. And they had a meeting and apparently quite a lot of the incomers were saying 'we don't want more people like that living here'. And I thought that was pretty horrible, because actually the people living in those houses are local people. And I think it would be really, really, really good. We need more social housing in communities like this, because it's a good place for people to live. And actually, carefully and considerately expanding small communities like that with social housing, I think is a much better way to move forward than just packing more and more people into forever bigger towns. Quite a radical view. But she actually said 'the incomers, none of them wanted more social housing'.

CG: Are there a lot of incomers?

CW: Yeah. There are, aren't there? You're local, local aren't you?

Julia: Yeah, I am. I'm a bit of both really, 'cos I grew up here and went away and then came back and behaved as an incomer for a bit. There are two examples locally of houses that have been bought up as second homes or holiday lets. So, there are people who are coming for a number of weekends a year and perhaps one or two weeks during school holidays. So, they really aren't inputting into the community in any way.

CW: They intended to. He was told that he was being moved to Sheffield and then I think they kept him in London. So, they bought a house that they couldn't move into and decided that they'd keep it anyway. It makes me really sad, because there was an old school house at the top of our lane, little building, and there was a local lad. He lived at Brierlow Bar. I think that's local. And he bought it and he couldn't get planning permission to live in it. And he's sold it now and it's been sold to a couple from Nottingham who are running it as a holiday cottage and you sort of think, 'you could've had a local lad living there'. We need more young people who are going to have children. I taught in the local schools and it makes me really sad, 'cos I taught at Flash school and it's closed. And Longnor school will be the next at the rate it's going. And then Hollinsclough school's one on its own, 'cos it's a flexi-school, it's got all these home edders and Warslow's heading down the same route.

CG: So, you do holiday cottage rentals don't you. Was that something you took on when you came here straight away?

CW: It was sold with rentals already in. I hate it, absolutely hate it with a vengeance. Hate the whole business of it. I would love to do something else with it. I would love to see a family living there, but try and tell Peak Park that. You know, the young people that I know around here, they can't afford to buy houses unless they move away. Planning policy's shaped it too. And if that [the holiday cottage] had been able to be converted, the person that sold us this house, for her family to live in, they would probably still be here. It would probably still be a larger proper working farm. But it had to be a holiday cottage.

CG: You can't get your head round it, can you?

CW: You can't. So, now we've got loads of middle class people who can hobby farm, like me really, loads of incomers. And you've got a rapidly aging farming population. We've got a rapidly aging population in the Peak District, I presume. Do demographics prove that? I presume they do.

Julia: I think they do.

CG: But this is the operation. I cannot tell you the number of properties for sale like this, farmhouse and a couple of acres and a holiday cottage for let, as your nice little income earner.