



How Radical Politics Are Changing the  
Construction of the Rural:  
The Lammas Project working Within the  
Planning System

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## Abstract

This study is concerned with analysing the nature of radical politics and its interaction with the construction of the rural. Low Impact Developments are producing a rural space which is different from the mainstream. The post-productivist era is still emerging, the rural landscape in this climate is seen as a process rather than a collection of objects. Low impact developments are finding a space within this environment. More than finding a space they are creating an alternative culture of innovations and livelihoods, which have fundamental implications for the rural environment and nature of governance. The key idea is that of change, what does the Lammas project represent? And how does it fit into the conceptions and societal norms of the rural? The Lammas project, the first eco-village to be approved by the planning system in the UK, has a unique role as a trendsetter; displaying radical ideas in a framework approved by the planning system. This formalisation rather than changing the radical nature of the project, gives the ideas and alternative culture a platform to be legitimately heard. What was once “counter culture” is now thought of as “alternative”, rather than dropping out of society, Lammas is working to create change by being a model of what could be. The production of place is cyclical, as such Lammas presents the possibility of altering this trajectory.

**Keywords: Lammas, rural construction, Sustainability, Planning Policy, new politics of the rural**

## Introduction

Constructing the rural is a practice everyone takes part in, as a social construct there are long standing, handed down precepts and visions of rural space. That the rural is a place of nature, an area where one can be connected to the land and other people (Cloke, 2003). The Lammas Project exemplifies these themes; as an eco-village it is part of an ideology that can be termed “back to the land”. However, it has also been termed a “radical” rural space; because the politics, aesthetics and lifestyle do not fit with the “traditional” rural vision. This study aims to display how the rural is constructed from an imagined and political aspect, with reference to the “radical” elements Lammas brings into the formal structure of the “new politics of the rural” (Woods, 2011).

Marc Mormont views the rural as a “category of thought”; this description creates a process leading to the creation of place. The rural is first imagined, then represented, then takes on material form. This emphasises the idea that landscapes and lifestyles are moulded to conform to imagined expectations (Woods, 2011). This gives rise to the idea that the rural is continually produced and reproduced; by ideas and experiences, which are in turn being fed back into the collective imagination. Within this process, certain ideas and preconceptions are considered dominant. Rural policy is not immune to such imaginations of the rural, there are specific images that it tries to protect or recreate. Low Impact Developments (LID) challenges these ideas and have created what many have termed a radical space; in respects to its approach to housing, livelihoods and everyday living (Pickerill & Maxey, 2009).

The Lammas project centres around an eco-village at Tir y Gafel in North Pembrokeshire, which aims to create and sustain a culture of land based self-reliance. It was the first low impact application to be passed in the UK. At its heart is the use of permaculture in which humans are considered an intrinsic part of the ecosystem (Lammas, 2015). Lammas is different from many other eco-villages as it is not a closed off project; it aims to promote sustainable development and lifestyles. Lammas has not formed its own vision on how to live sustainably, instead it has adopted and followed Policy 52, Pembrokeshire’s low impact

development policy. Lammas can perhaps display, how a radical space can create socio-spatial change (Halfacree, 2007) and bring alternative ideas to the mainstream, it is a project which is actively engaging in politics and education. Lammas is aiming to normalise sustainable living with a focus on what the individuals who live there can do to create change for themselves. The promotion of the project is though inspiring others rather than overtly politicising their endeavours (Lammas, 2015).

There are many challenges in breaking the conceptual cycle of the rural, one major part is through hard to manoeuvre planning policies. Policies associated with the rural are often based around protecting the idea of the rural idyll. A cultural landscape which is highly valued in its scenic, traditional form. The rhetoric often revolves around ideas of “preservation” and local “vernaculars” (Matthews & Selman, 2006). Yet this form or “gaze” is typically derived from practices created out of productivism; of agriculture and tight communities of workers. This is no longer the case in the post-productivist era, the rural landscape is changing but many of the imaginations hang onto visions of the past and seek to emulate them for gains of tourism and counter urbanized lifestyles (Halfacree, 2007). Multifunctionality is one alternative which is taking root; it seeks to diversify and create multiple uses within the rural landscape. LIDs are one interpretation of this idea, LIDs offer a radical vision of the rural, which is linked to ideas of sustainability and alternative lifestyles; as such they can be considered to be part of a symbolic battle over the rural (Woods, 2011), a contrasting alternate rural vision; which raises questions over what the rural is, and what shape new developments should take?

Sustainable development is a major part of Lammas, which is engaged in a holistic manner; integrating social, economic and environmental factors (Pickerill & Maxey, 2009). Government Policies often exist to protect or shape the landscape into a useful asset to society. Through this process however, many radical and transformative environmental movements are blunted and lose their way through mainstreaming; they are made to fit more closely to popular eco-politics (Blühdorn & Welsh, 2007). Different lines of thought can seem disturbing or ineffectual; mainstream faith for sustainability is put into technological innovation, market

instruments and appropriate resource managing techniques (Blühndorn & Welsh, 2007). Many alternative ideas to sustainable development include strategies that can be seen as in opposition to capitalist principles of economic growth and current consumption based culture. Progress in sustainable development has therefore been slow and is often used as a sound bite. To counter this many have promoted the idea of sustainability being implanted into all parts of everyday life, with responsibility resting with everyone (Mulligan, 2015).

Low impact developments carry this out through a bottom up approach, with people taking an active role in changing their way of life and environment. The narrative of rurality here is different from the traditional globalising forces. It has a different mentality and goals then what globalising forces view the rural, this view often leads to “homogenisation and banalisation” (Matthews & Selman, 2006). It has reached a point where society appears to prefer certain rural qualities; which can create a vicious cycle involving obsolete traditional production, processing and marketing methods (Matthews & Selman, 2006). This can make it hard for new ideas of what the rural is and can be, to gain ground. LIDs encapsulate this; with different ideologies and alternate lifestyles that do not fit in with the traditional rural gaze. LIDs promote a strong value judgement associated with sustainability over conventional aesthetics; it is an alternative more radicalised vision of the rural. However, the designation of the word radical needs to be addressed, who is applying this label? And what does it truly represent?

Sustainable development is a global topic and as such it is subject to varying degrees of scale. Lammas is considered a grassroots movement; these movements although holding great promise for a sustainable future are often disregarded for their alternative views and small scale. Sustainability as an endeavour is moving increasingly towards social changes and innovations as much as technological ones (Seyfang & Smith, 2007). It is in this manner of social change where LIDs can cause friction with traditional views of the rural landscape and offer a challenge to the predominant purpose of rural policies (Halfacree, 2007). This study shall explore this idea of formal landscape construction, and its interaction with radical ideas of rural space and sustainable development.



This idea of a radical movement shall also be addressed. It is a designation that has many supposed origins and contexts. What needs to be addressed is the relevance in today's climate, is it radical as a form of constructing the rural? As a deviation from traditional social forms? Or is it because of its transformative powers over rural policy? Many of the changes and ideas created by LIDs are finding formalisation in politics and ideas on sustainability are taken and made mainstream. The rural landscape is considered a social construction; the term radical can also be considered a social construction, subject to change. With the rural being produced and reproduced, this idea of a "radical" movement shall be explored with reference to Lammas and how it fits into the ever changing hybrid nature of the rural (Woods, 2011). Furthermore, its role within policy making and politicising Low Impact Developments produces something new, a movement in transition from "alternative" to "mainstream".

## Methodology

The key idea is what does the term radical mean and how does it interact with the landscape in terms of the Lammas project. Particularly in terms of the planning system and what engagement with this system by the Lammas group means for the new politics of the rural. As such an understanding of the contemporary landscape, sustainable development and this new politics needs to be understood. Furthermore, an interview will be carried out with Tao (formerly Paul) Wimbush the original founder of Lammas and one of the main driving forces in the planning stage. This will provide insight into the project and gain an overarching idea of, how the Lammas project interacts and changes the rural landscape.

## The Contemporary Rural Landscape

Landscape as a term is traditionally associated with that of the visual; typically linked to fine scenery, vistas, paintings and gardens. However, landscape is much more than this, specialists from the fields of architecture, ecology, cultural geographies, history, planning and archaeology all have a variety of understandings and definitions (Selman, 2012). It is a word that is disputed and difficult to fully comprehend. The interpretation, in this study, is a cultural landscape, which observes landscape as a process rather than an object (Mitchell, 2002). Landscape as an idea, which describes the mutual embeddedness and interconnectivity of people, knowledge and land (Wylie, 2007) Reading the landscape asks the individual to observe the symbols in the landscape; these can be read in terms of: social, psychological and political; characteristics, structures and allegories. This expands the idea of landscape out of a singular viewable entity into a more comprehensive narrative that has different actors and interpretations. This aims to not only assess what the landscape “is” or “means” but what it “does” and how it is created and recreated as a cultural practice (Selman, 2012). This cultural practice can be seen in The European Landscape Convention’s definition of landscape, - “an area, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and or human factors” (European Landscape Convention, 2012). Within this is the combination of people and nature, with human action seen as a powerful shaper of landscape’s appearance and function (Selman, 2012). The practice is much deeper however and can be seen as the combination of people, land, history and ideas;

This chapter hopes to create context and structure, which can be used to understand the interactions between Lammas and formal creations of place through planning. Symbolic changes and interpretations shall be explored but with the focus on the “radical” aspect of the project and its interaction with recreating the landscape through policy. The rural is no longer considered as being on the margins; in terms of the economy, society and politics. General socio-economic and political changes and restructuring have brought the rural to the foreground (Ilbery, 1998). Productivist agriculture dominated the last half century. Following the Second

World War; the material conditions that underpinned this era unravelled, the conventional “rural politics” concerned with territorial management, industrial regulation and the distribution of resources broke down. There are many features attributed to this change but there are two main interconnected dynamics. Firstly, the evolving and intensifying influence of capitalism and globalisation. This has caused “market forces” to take a stronger control rather than state engagement with agriculture. This has compromised agriculture’s role in rural society whilst paradoxically also promoting increasing intensification; agriculture is more concerned with economic benefits than social or cultural ones. Secondly, the growing role of consumption and future potential for rural places; in terms of commodifying aspects of the countryside; packaging and marketing them as places to live and for tourist activities. This has given way to a “new politics of the rural” which at its heart is concerned with the meaning and regulation of rurality (Woods, 2011). Policy makers have therefore had to reassess policies relating to “rural space”. In spite of cultural myths of rural timelessness, rural change has always existed; pace and persistence however appear to have intensified. With the rural going through economic, social and visible transition. Moving towards a “new” rural, or rather; a variety of new interpretations (Halfacree, 2006).

One image that continually persists however, is that of the rural idyll, an area which is always contrasted with that of the city or urban. Everything the city has come to represent the opposite is found in the rural idyll, it has come to represent an escape from modernity. It is a natural, peaceful environment, where close knit communities and simple virtue still exist. This image is reproduced through art, literature, music and television. Furthermore, it is a pull factor for counter-urbanisation and rural tourism, the idyll represents a vision of the rural. There are many versions of this but they all converge around a nostalgic ideal, which is embedded in social and economic structures (Woods, 2011). This is resulting in an ever increasing trend to the rural being a place of consumption rather than production. With tourism being widely promoted as a development strategy to replace declining industries such as agriculture.

This is a growing trend but the post productivist landscape in Britain is not homogenous, Marsden et al have identified four ideals within a differentiated countryside.

1. Preserved countryside – Scenic regions near metropolitan areas; development strategies favour preservationist approaches which serve affluent commuters.
2. Contested countryside – Traditional coalitions of farmers, landowners and local authorities are still influential, however, their position is increasingly contested by newcomers.
3. Paternalistic countryside – Large estates and farms remain in a position to guide local development.
4. Clientelistic countryside – State agencies promoting primary production, characterised in state subsidies. (Murdoch, et al., 2012)

Landscape and the rural are malleable constructs but the categorisations can have resonance. However, the overarching framework of productivist/post-productivist is not the only aspect considered in the modern rural. Ideas of environmentalism and sustainable development are becoming ever more important in development strategies. Contestation no longer rests solely between traditional productivist regimes and new consumer led post-productivist enterprises and individuals. There exists a more globalised debate and what can be termed “radical” elements such as Lammas, which seek to fundamentally change how the rural is constructed and its purpose.

Injected into the turmoil over the nature of rurality are the challenges of globalisation and climate change. These intensify the conflict and add new ideas of scale into the rural. These features are key in reference to Lammas, which could be termed a pluri-local movement (Halfacree, 2009). This is where rural debates, movements or conflicts “jump scales” between local and non-local; incorporating, NGOs, politicians and the media into a “wider” capacity. These links cause the transformation of a small development into a movement. Where the project, people and ideas can gain prominence and reach governance and ordinary people (Selman, 2012).

In the context of sustainable development, landscape is a space possessing multifunctional properties, which integrates natural and human ecosystems (Selman, 2012). This definition provides a balance to how landscape is formed; between nature and humans. However, it downplays the importance of human agency. Human agency explains how it is humans who define a landscape, in appearance and functionality. Selman describes landscapes as generally becoming more “disconnected” in ways that compromise their character, sustainability and resilience. That the bonds between people and place are eroding and this may lie at the source of much environmental and social malaise. To counter this there is the idea of “reconnecting” with the land and with the “spirit of place” (Selman, 2012). LIDs are a form of this reconnection, a very literal interpretation of this idea of “reconnecting”. The origins of LIDs were formed in the “back to the land” movement. This idea and appeal to “live off the land” has been around ever since there has been a separation between everyday existence and the production of items for our immediate needs. In the UK over the past 40 years this movement has been inspired by “counter cultural” ideas, in regard to capitalism, consumption, governance and environmental waste (Halfacree, 2009).

Radical ruralities extend the scope of rural possibilities, what the landscape is and can mean. The post productivist countryside can be seen as dominated by two spaces; the “super-productivist” spaces of agribusiness and the “rural idyllic” spaces of conventional counter-urbanisation (Halfacree, 2009). Radical ruralities offer a third option and also a different view into the rural. What can be termed the “radical” politics of the back to the land movement, has changed and been incorporated within LIDs (for more on radical politics see chapter 3). Lammas can be seen as a space which is changing perceptions of the rural and also the policies which shape the rural. As with the rural idyll, the back to the land movement and LIDs have moral and cultural associations; there are differences between the two but also similarities. Landscape is more than just the land, but land seen from a particular point of view or perspective. Human perception is a key aspect of reading a landscape but also making it,

therefore the moral and cultural ideals behind LIDs have implications; as these guided the project and seek to change rural development practices.

## Sustainable Development

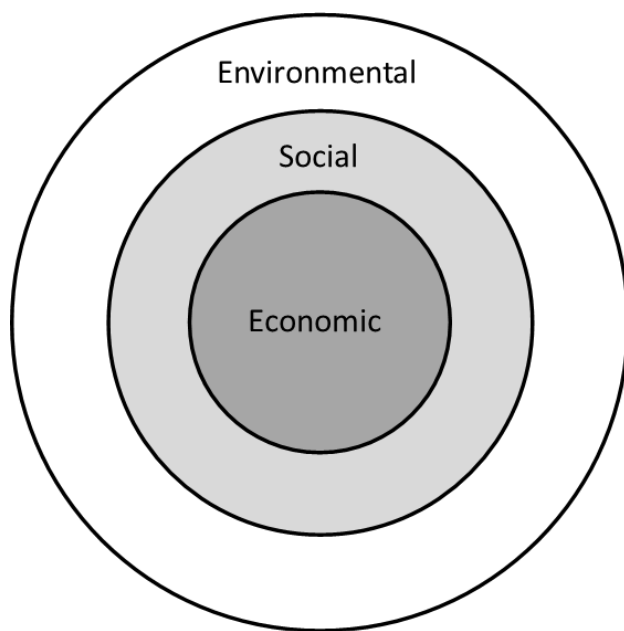
Sustainable development as a concept is very broad and open to many interpretations. It has had extensive recognition and engagement from many governing bodies and institutions. It is acknowledged as a necessity for preserving the environment, and quality of life people are accustomed to. Faith in technological innovation, efficient managing of resources and market instruments are seen as the most appropriate means of attaining sustainability (Blühdorn & Welsh, 2007). These strategies however can be seen as in opposition to capitalist principles of economic growth and current consumerist culture. Progress in sustainable development has therefore been slow and is often used as a sound bite. To counter this many have promoted the idea of sustainability being implanted into all parts of everyday life, with responsibility resting with everyone. The idea of the sustainable citizen is becoming ever more prominent in debates over sustainability, with a sense of “socio-ecological” responsibility (Pretty & Ward, 2001). LIDs offer this in a concentrated area and also show an insight into a new form of grass roots policy making, this chapter hopes to display this and its role in shaping the rural landscape.

The two dominant visions presented in the previous chapter of the rural are firstly, as a space of production; prioritizing economic activities in which resources are exploited for sale, this includes agriculture, forestry, quarrying etc. The second vision is the rural as a space of consumption, characterised by the rise of rural tourism, which is commodifying aspects and creating symbols of the rural for enjoyment (Woods, 2011). These are two very specific visions of the rural but in reality the rural is a diverse and uneven space. In need of strategies and policies, which are unique to the respective areas; with the overarching aim to create sustainable economic growth and improve living conditions. The spatiality of contemporary capitalism has removed previously significant and set geographical demarcations and borders, including that between rural and urban. What is occurring in rural areas economically, culturally and socially is similar to what is occurring at regional, national and global scales. However, rurality as a concept still persists, it has a strong cultural and popular presence. People envision and act out their everyday lives based upon their understanding and preconceptions about it. This is a

difficult space for policy to address, with pulling factors of productivist and post-productivist thought (Halfacree, 2009). Most development policies are created from a three-part process.

1. Construct the problems and challenges facing the region
2. Evaluate the capacities that exist within a region
3. Set out a vision for the future of the area (Woods, 2011)

This is a simplification of policy creation as in actuality the world is becoming more and more interconnected and policies have to acknowledge a multitude of internal and external factors to a region. Sustainable development is an idea which seeks to combine the human and natural world into one and acknowledges the connections between economy, society and the environment with the aim of meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs (Woods, 2011). This is best illustrated in Giddings et al. “Nested Diagram” model.



*Figure 1: Nested Diagram by Giddings et al. “Environment, Economy and society: Fitting them into sustainable development” 2002. Source (Mulligan, 2015).*

This model shows the realm of the economy resting within the domain of the social, which in turn rests in the all-encompassing category of the environment (Mulligan, 2015). This model displays how these areas are not separate entities but connected. In many discussions and



developmental policies, the economy often takes precedence over social and environmental needs. This entirely connected model suggests the idea that sustainable development should have a “joined up” approach, with the concept that all three aspects must move together to achieve sustainability.

The rural landscape is an area going through a process of change, there is a disjuncture between the modernization agenda, and the nostalgia of the rural idyll and the new rural consumption economy (Woods, 2011). The modernization paradigm has reached its intellectual and practical limits but it still remains as part of a broader rural, where many interpretations and practices now lie. This change in practices and interpretations of the rural in terms of sustainable development can be seen as both a challenge and an opportunity. As societal norms and landscapes are changing, ideas of sustainability should take centre stage in shaping the new rural in its development. To better understand Lammas and the shaping of the rural landscape it is important to understand the current development paradigm in the UK.

### New Rural Development Paradigm

The rise of neoliberalism has changed the manner and implementation methods of development strategies. The neoliberal agenda seeks to cut government spending, reduce involvement of the state in the economy and to foster entrepreneurship over state led development. The idea is giving people the power and freedom to help themselves. Three key points in regards to development can be noted as a result of neoliberalism. Shift from inward investment to endogenous development; there is a new emphasis on developing the resources within a region; rather than seeking to attract external investment. The delivery of rural development has also moved from a top down to a bottom up model; the state’s role is to be a facilitator, with rural communities taking the lead. Lastly the structure of policy has changed from a sectoral modernization to territorially based integrated rural development; agriculture and rural development are no longer seen as interchangeable, instead territories are thought of in economic, social and environmental terms (Ray, 2006).

From this change one idea shines through which can incorporate this new development paradigm it is what Ray (2006) terms neo-endogenous development. The “endogenous” part refers to development along a bottom up approach with a focus on development resources and mechanism coming from within a territory. The “neo” addition, identifies the roles and influences played by extralocal actors and systems (Ray, 2006). The development process is supposed to work on three planes; intra-territorial, vertical (politically) and inter-territorial. This idea of developmental strategy can be seen in the planning policy (Policy 52) for Pembrokeshire which initiated the Lammas project (figure 2) but also in the way the Lammas project itself has developed. Specifically, how the project has reached out beyond the locality to obtain success. Ray, describes this characteristic of looking inward and outward as being “Janus Faced”, looking inwards at the local environment, communities and actors and looking outwards in order to “sell” the territory (Woods, 2011). This idea of “selling” can be applied to Lammas, in the way it has received funding and its savvy use of the internet and interaction with other organisations. Including Chapter 7 the planning office of the “land is ours” organisation (The Land Is Ours, n.d.), the Design Commission for Wales and many letters of support from experts and academics (Wimbush, 2009).

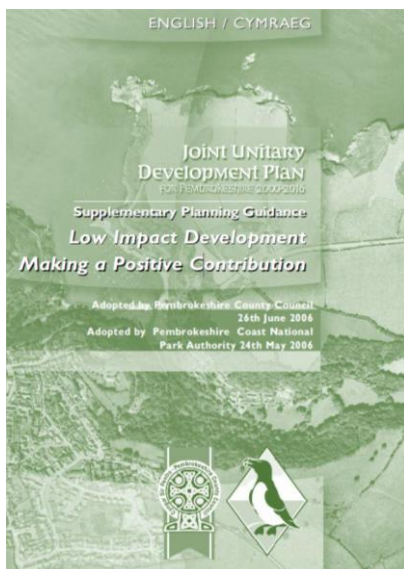


Figure 2: Pembrokeshire policy 52: *Low Impact Development Making a Positive Contribution* (Pembrokeshire County Council, 2006)

Lammas could not be termed an endogenous development; as many of the people and ideas arise from outside the locality. Endogenous is often synonymous with “localised” or “place based” development, with an emphasis on local knowledge and preferences. One of the fundamental problems with endogenous development is the importance placed on the economic structure and level of education of the population. This being the case many endogenous developments are not as inclusive and empowering to local communities as is suggested. Pembrokeshire and its low impact development policy, can be seen as representing a very specific vocal proportion of the population. And rather than empower local people it has caused an influx into the region, led by the Lammas project.

## New Politics of the Rural

The new politics of the rural is concerned with the changing meaning of the rural and how it is regulated. Whereas “rural politics” refers to “rural issues” and politics situated in rural settings, the “politics of the rural” is more symbolic and asks questions over what the rural is and should be (Woods, 2006). The cultural landscape can be seen to be in constant flux, the social issues of “rural politics” has not gone away but are framed around questions of rural identity, the meaning of rural community and the rights of rural citizens. Previously the rural has been framed and driven by agriculture and other productivist land-exploiting industries. The combined influence of local agrarian elites farm unions and agriculture ministry officials controlled the direction of agricultural policy and maintained its primacy in the rural political sphere and construction of the rural. Rural politics was a form of industrial politics with little room for social issues.

There are a number of factors which have influenced this change firstly the economic contribution of agriculture and the rise of other industrial activities in the rural economy and labour, particularly tourism which supplies a different vision from modern productivist agriculture. Secondly the rise of counter-urbanisation, bringing new people with no agricultural connections who challenge the nature of rural areas by creating pressure for social and economic politics which address their needs. Thirdly, public attitudes towards agriculture have changed, as concerns over environmental impacts, animal welfare and the quality of food produced have all risen (Woods, 2006). The landscape of the rural is quite different to the gaze of the rural idyll, the nature of rurality is at stake and this new politics of the rural is most visible in struggles over the development of rural spaces, such as Lammas.

The kind of landscape most generally valued are slow changing landscapes. This fits with the idea of endogenous development where the drivers of change are compatible with the innate properties and capacities of the local environment. This slow change ensures the retention of a distinctive character to the area, with a multifunctional structure, which will add to local natural and social capital (Selman, 2012). The Lammas project is part of the back to the

land movement, it is a niche grassroots initiative one that differs in its objectives and style than mainstream development initiatives (Seyfang & Smith, 2007). As is the case, the Lammas project aim is to add to the valued attributes of an area, ecologically and socially. Increasingly however rural politics are framed within ideas of rural distinctiveness or “the local”. This is nothing more than a form of branding, which brings the rural idyll back into the debate over what the rural is and should be. A balance is required within the rural between inherited resources and dynamic drivers (Selman, 2012)

### Radical Politics and Planning

Lammas has been described as a “radical rural” (Halfacree, 2007) (Pickerill & Maxey, 2009) much of this designation rests with its ideological origins, namely with the Back to the land movement. “Back to the land” can on its most basic level be described as: migration to a rural location and to some extent take part in a culture which radically diverges from values of the mainstream society with a central desire to “reconnect” with the land and nature (Halfacree, 2007). Two back to the land movements have been identified one in the 1960s/1970s and one starting in the 1990s. The original iterations of the movement in the 1960s were strongly ideological with a small scale refusal to have anything to do with society or “dropping out” (Halfacree, 2007). This is where there is much association with “radical” politics, there exists a critique on mainstream lifestyles and society in favour of “alternative” living arrangements, including but not limited to, communal living (Halfacree, 2006). The more modern movement of the late 1990s saw a new counter-culture, centred around green radicalism, direct action politics and new musical sounds and experiences (Halfacree, 2006). Gone to a greater extent are the radical living arrangements and total disconnection to society. Overall there is a more engaged image being presented by many LIDs, with engagement of local surrounding communities and with national and international movements. LIDs are the newest phase of the back to the land movement, and hold a unique position to present back to the land ideals within the ongoing situation of rural change. They present new ideas in terms of; producing rurality for

the new century, with an emphasis on endogenous development initiatives, alternative agricultures and local sustainability (Halfacree, 2007).

The term Low Impact Development is attributed to Simon Fairlie and described as “development that, through its low negative environmental impact, either enhances or does not significantly diminish environmental quality” (Fairlie, 1996). The term “low impact” has implications; it is inherently apologetic, the general assumption that modern development is in direct opposition with the environment. This feeling can be termed “landscape guilt”, planners can be seen as professional practitioners of such guilt, terms such as “low impact” are seen as inherently attractive. Conflict however can arise regarding this definition, mostly over aesthetic characteristics. LIDs are not necessarily unobtrusive developments, which do not alter the existing landscape; they are after all still developments (Fairlie, 1996). Low impact instead refers to its low environmental impact and quite often rules are put in place for them to have positive environmental effects. As such LIDs are not just a developmental style they are a lifestyle, which links into the ideals of the back to the land movement.

These are the ideological roots of the Lammas project; such lines can be drawn from back to the land movements, including Tinkers bubble, Tipi valley and Brithdir Mawr. The Lammas project also has another influencer and this was, Policy 52: Low Impact Development Making a Positive contribution, as such it is useful to look at its origins as well as that of the back to the land movement. Low Impact Development was becoming ever more present within policy through Simon Fairlie’s book: “Low Impact Development: Planning and People in a Sustainable Countryside” and the direct action occurring around Tony Wrench’s Roundhouse. Particularly in Wales there is a strong back to the land movement and when Pembrokeshire County Council ran two public meetings asking County residents what they wanted in terms of sustainability, one was descended on by activists lobbying for a low impact development plan (Wimbush, 2012). The planning system however is quite rigid and very evidence focused. When it came time to write the Unitary Development Plan for Pembrokeshire, research from a study in 2002 commissioned by the Welsh Government and Countryside Council for Wales;

and carried out by Land Use Consultants and the University of the West of England, was used to justify the inclusion of a low impact development policy. There was a need and a desire for Low Impact Development policy but only with the official research was it allowed within the development plan (Jones, 2015).

The Idea of Lammas began in 2005, with a group of five individuals, who when searching for the right area of to create an eco-village, recognised the clear choice of Pembrokeshire and its low impact development plan (Wimbush, 2012). After preparing a lengthy planning application the Lammas group submitted the application on the 1<sup>st</sup> of June 2007.



*Figure 3: Submission of the first planning application to Pembrokeshire County Council (Lammas, 2015)*

Lammas finally moved onto the site in 2009 after submitting the planning application twice and overcoming much opposition from locals and politicians. There was a strong drive however and a large network of support, which finally brought the project to receive approval with a settlement of 9 families and a community hub.

## The Interview

Within the process of constructing the rural “the state” holds a great deal of power, through planning policies and approval. Invitations to participate have fundamental problems of remaining in the shadows of the governmental system. State led participation act to encourage participation, grassroots organisations however ask how they can engage with the state (Seyfang & Smith, 2007). The Lammas group have had an active role in changing the dynamics of power within the political environment and have also raised the profile and perceptions on what a low impact development is and offering alternative models of living. What is this model of living? And how does it fit within the context of the rural? An interview with Tao (formerly Paul) Wimbush helps to answer these questions and provides an insight into the Lammas project. Full Interview available in appendix 1.

### **Lammas desire to live simply hampered by complicated planning system?**

“Not a desire to live simply, more like a desire to live holistically. Which because we are complex animals and so that in order to live holistically you need to take quite an intelligent approach to designing your ecosystem infrastructure. And so that [planning system] in itself is not flawed because of that, it’s more the essential premises that our society is based on are fundamentally flawed. Our whole pseudo democratic model, at the risk of getting too radical.” (Wimbush 2016, authors interview)

Current policy instruments and perceptions emphasise the role of traditional farming, and the associated socio-ecological system (Matthews & Selman, 2006). There is a strong pull in the rural between the modernization agenda, nostalgia of the rural idyll and the new rural consumption economy (Woods, 2011). As Tao Wimbush notes, there is a connection between current societal trends and trends in the planning system; they are not separate entities. The planning system is supposed to represent the “norms” of society, but there is a disconnect between citizens and those who exercise power. LIDs have a difficult position within the current rural dynamic, a space however can be seen to be opening as a result of ideas on sustainable development, particularly in Wales.



“The prospect of a new build eco-village had only been made possible in recent years due to society acknowledging natural limits to growth (such as peak oil and climate change) and embracing those principles which had for so long underpinned the alternative culture: principles such as sustainable development, living lightly on the Earth and natural building techniques. As a result of these leaps in awareness we were now in a position where both cultures, the alternative and the mainstream, had much to offer each other. To my mind Lammas was an attempt to fuse the two.” (Wimbush, 2012)

Such a process was made in Pembrokeshire with Policy 52 and now across much of Wales with the One Planet Development policy. However, the process for Lammas was not a straightforward one, it took two years with two separate applications to obtain approval in 2009.



*Figure 4: September 2008, “Tied up in red tape” protest by Lammas group outside Pembrokeshire County Council (Wimbush, 2009)*

The Baker report, which was one of the reports used as justification for Policy 52, offers an insight into a fundamental flaw in the planning process. Namely, how LID is a form of Sustainable development, yet LID is also a form of housing development; which is fiercely resisted in the open countryside by the planning system; usually justified by concerns of sustainable development. This is a paradox that exists because of normative assumptions (Selman, 2012). Policy, planning, design management and education are all normative

activities; with the inherent idea that some people's views should prevail over others. Policy 52 was created to counter this paradox but making a policy and actually following through are quite different.

### **Regarding opposition from the planners**

“I don't think it was so much opposition from the planners themselves. I remember the first time we met with the head of planning of Pembrokeshire county council, David Lawrence, and he was really, really supportive. It was more that the politics within the council, forced the planners hand into a position into which they had to oppose us and that's, you know, fairly common for planning applications. Because at the end of the day, any controversial planning, well it's to do with the way the councils are structured. In that there are elected representatives, councillors, who sit on the planning committee and they provide decisions. And so what tends to happen is there is quite a bit of dialogue between councillors on planning committees and planning officers. And so, as much that it is not to be designed this way, the truth of the matter is planning is political, very political. And so in essence, it wasn't that we, from the planning officer's perspective... we weren't reaching the policy or that it wasn't a good project, it was simply down to political pressure within the council, from what tends to be a very conservative culture.” (Wimbush 2016, Authors interview)

This suggest almost a politics of unsustainability (Blühdorn & Welsh, 2007), where the rhetoric is moving closer and closer to eco-politics; with the benefits of LIDs being seen and felt. However, something about their nature seems threatening to a conservative culture; what is required is a “new environmental sociology”. Sustainable development has been described as a widely endorsed meta-narrative of our age (Selman, 2012), a guiding principle to be delivered into every aspect of development and life. This idea is very strong and has been appropriated by established political parties and re-spun so it is delivered, mainly through the state/corporate sector. Because of this other LIDs have chosen a direct action route, the Lammas group instead took the planning route advocated by Simon Fairlie.

### **There are two routes LIDs can take; direct action and through the planning policy, why choose the planning route?**

“Well, because one of the main things we wanted to achieve with the Lammas project was to create a viable route, for people to transition from mainstream lifestyles to alternative lifestyles;

and in order to do that we had to do it above board that's the first thing to say. The second thing to say, direct action with a large group of people, it is almost impossible to do it covertly and by taking that kind of direct action you will automatically enter into a conflict situation with the local planning department. And when we were making our decisions, having talked to forward planners in Pembrokeshire county council, having sounded out the political planning landscape, that it actually looked quite positive. There was that side of it, but another side of it as well... from a kind of an activists' perspective, if you are going to invest, for most people, their life savings in a piece of land, if you're going to give up your jobs and whole heartedly commit yourself to developing an alternative infrastructure; you need a degree of legal security. Otherwise you're going to tend to get people with nothing to lose and there's totally a place for that and not in any way a criticism. But what we wanted to approach; installation of our infrastructure in a much more professional, long term way." (Wimbush 2016, Authors interview)

The idea of creating a viable route for others is not so much about making a small change but creating an alternative model of living, which can be accomplishable in today's society by people who don't want to risk everything. This official movement onto the land allows a much stronger interaction with the "new politics of the rural", the Lammas group are new actors into rural politics. From this position their actions provide new and mixed answers to questions of rural identity, the meaning of rural community and the right of rural citizens (Woods, 2006). The formality of acquiring planning permission is very important. The original definition of landscape or *Landschaft* relates to politics; it is custom and culture which define a "land", a social entity that found physical expression in law (Wylie, 2007). As such the formalised nature of going through the planning policy offers legitimacy and more than that, creates a culture which can further define the land and therefore the law. As such it is important to consider the culture associated with Lammas.

### **For people who join Lammas is it about sustainability or lifestyle?**

"The drivers for people are so varied. For some people it is, I want to provide my kids with a beautiful place to grow up, for other people it's I want to live in a place where I can grow my own food, for others it's I want to live in the moment and not sell my soul to capitalism. All sorts of things and in essence it is that drive to want to create a better alternative. And in that

regards, in my perspective it's really working, we're doing incredibly well." (Wimbush 2016, Authors interview)

The combining notion of wanting to create a better alternative, has the effect of changing the horizon of relevance for the rural area. Moving it into something almost experimental with wider implications than the rural landscape, it presents a culture and mentality which is fundamentally alternative to mainstream views. The mainstream politics of sustainability can be seen to have moved beyond the politics of sustainability and into management of the inability and unwillingness to become sustainable. What Lammas displays is an alternative construction of environmental consciousness (Blühdorn & Welsh, 2007). Tao Wimbush also reflects on this idea concerning the movement of policy.

### **Policy moving fast enough?**

"No, but that is a result of the policy, which in many ways is kind of a reflection of the kind of consciousness... And is human consciousness moving fast enough, ecological and social indicators would suggest that it's not." (Tao Wimbush 2016, Authors interview)

As well as giving a different meaning to the rural, Lammas presents different meanings to ideas like sustainability, community and equality. These are words which are like empty containers, which can be filled with many different meanings (Chatterton, 2015). As such a vision is important, good decision clearly flow from clear values. Pickerill and Maxey describe LID as "spaces of innovation" offering radical solutions to sustainability and livelihoods, Tao Wimbush describes it accordingly.

### **Is Lammas radical?**

"It is radical in that it models a completely different alternative and sustainable approach to living on this planet. It demonstrates that it is totally possible for human beings to live in harmony within their ecosystems, whilst still having a fairly high calibre lifestyle.

In essence is it radical? We are building an alternative culture, because that is the basis of any society. People who live here in the eco-village have said ok we no longer have faith in the politicians and the economy to resolve global crisis that we're in." (Wimbush 2016, Authors interview)

The word “radical” implies a change in the fundamental nature of something, with far reaching effects. The radical element within the Lammas project can be seen as this alternative culture, one that is driven by a different set of values. Core values can be taken and applied on larger scales, one which is gaining ground is the strengthening idea of endogenous development or development of “the local”. This idea is present in LIDs and can be described as self-reliance.

### **Working towards total self-sufficiency?**

“We don’t think of it in terms of total self-sufficiency, we are self-reliant. That’s not to say there is quite a bit of trade, as a system we have enough diversity and enough resilience to consider ourselves in essence independent.

Trade is really important, because we are still participating in modern life. We all have e-mail accounts and the kids eat bananas, we drink coffee and every now and again, go to the cinema or get fish and chips. We’re still participating in society and that’s really important but we have a sense of self-reliance and we have a really good foundation in the landscape.” (Wimbush 2016, Authors interview)

Self-reliance is a simple yet profound concept, in a globalised world. Meeting as many needs as possible in the local makes a big difference: supply chains are shortened, carbon footprints are reduced, dependency on multinationals decrease and local re-spending is increased (Chatterton, 2015). Government policy regarding “locality”, often rather than having a focus on sustainability has a focus on branding; with the aim of selling the territory to consumers (Woods, 2011). Self-reliance and independence as Tao Wimbush talks about can have far reaching effects on ideas of governance, how we make our decisions and who makes them for us (Chatterton, 2015). Lammas is making decisions for itself, more than offering an alternative view of the rural, Lammas is also offering a different perception of space and governance; via examples of societal good practice (Wylie, 2007).

The Welsh government has embraced the ideology of sustainability and LIDs; the research documents that led to Policy 52 were funded by Welsh government. Once Lammas was through the planning system, Welsh government extended the policy nationwide as the One Planet Development policy, which is a tweaked version of Policy 52.

### **Is the One Planet Development Policy moving in the right direction?**

“I think it’s a step in the right direction, but that is in the context of, what is at its root and foundation an unsustainable system; whether you’re looking at the planning system itself or whether you’re looking at why the socio-economic model in which we’re living in greater number is inherently and fundamentally unsustainable.” (Wimbush 2016, Authors interview)

Making progress in the planning system takes time, there are still remnants of the productionist past lodged deep in the heart of the rural psyche. Nevertheless, this is a big step, one that opens up the rural space to a different type of development. As more and more LIDs are made, the cultural meaning of the rural can change. The rural is conceived as a circulating system, encoded in images, texts and discourses (Wylie, 2007); the very presence of such places of alternative culture can have a symbolic effect.

### **Lammas actively working to inform policy?**

“I would say yes, although there is a lull going on at the moment, policy and planning is political and at this moment in time there isn’t a political drive within Cardiff towards any kind of radical alternatives.” (Wimbush 2016, Authors interview)

### **What is Lammas’s focus?**

“We are focusing very heavily on education and perceptions and the mainstay of our endeavours are in providing a viable, demonstrably, successful; productive model.” (Wimbush 2016, Authors interview)

The radical innovations the Lammas project provides in terms of sustainable housing are not necessarily suitable for scaling up for widespread replication across the whole of society.

However, there are far reaching implications for presenting an alternative culture and values, there is a space for this within politics; offering a voice of what could be, and pressing the issue of sustainability. For large scale transformation to occur certain political and social contexts need to be fulfilled. In a time of austerity, sustainable development can often fall down the agenda. The idea of Lammas providing a viable, demonstrably, successful; productive model is a major accomplishment. Lammas can be seen as an innovative niche, which is seeding ideas

into the wider society (Seyfang & Smith, 2007). It acts as an example of the successful use of radical ideas, and offers a legitimate route for others to follow.

## Conclusion

Lammas can be described as a transformatory step-change in place making; with the alternative culture and motivations disrupting the conventional process of constructing the rural (Chatterton, 2015). Going through the planning system offers legitimacy, it expands the project out of just a story of conflict with the authorities. Early instances of the back to the land movement focused on “dropping out”, the desire not to engage with modern society. The Lammas Project rather than cutting itself off created a dialogue with the government and gained the attention of the media and academics. The neo-endogenous characteristics of the project; the focus on the local, but also reaching out beyond is very important for changing perceptions on what LIDs are but also what the rural environment can be. The power of perception is very powerful, Mormont described creating place as a “category of thought” with the rural first imagined, then represented, then taking on material form (Woods, 2011). The ideas the Lammas project supplies in relation to this, are that of an alternative culture. It is an example of an alternative, sustainable way of living, advocating the ideas of permaculture; living in harmony with the ecosystem.

The construction of place can be seen as a process, the representational and alternative model Lammas creates have their role to play but so does the authorities and wider society. Wales is making progressive strides in policy with One Planet Development, offering the opportunity Lammas had in Pembrokeshire, to the whole of rural Wales. However, this movement is constrained by the basic foundations of society. This can be seen as the radical element of Lammas, where it diverges from the “norm”. The main constructions of the rural that exist can be seen as: the modernization agenda, the nostalgia of the rural idyll and the new rural consumption economy (Woods, 2011). The new politics of the rural, acknowledges that there are multiple different definitions and actors within the space, as such there are questions of rural identity, the meaning of rural community and the rights of rural citizens. Because of this flux and uncertainty there is space in the rural, for alternative ideas of living. The radical element which conjures the idea of a fundamental change, can take root in this uncertain



environment, in fact the ideas of self-reliance and permaculture can only fully be realised in a rural space. This fits into the idea of environmental consciousness, which is slowly moving in a more sustainable direction but not at the speed LIDs are. Lammas is a pioneer in this respect, with it being the first low impact application to be passed in the UK. As such, the project agitates the societal norms of the rural (Chatterton, 2015), seeking to intervene and create solutions to problems of sustainability; not only in terms of environment, but the socio-economic model as well. The Lammas project can be seen to expand the scope of rural possibilities.

## Appendix 1

Full transcript of phone interview with Tao Wimbush 15/04/2016

**Lammas took some time to get planning permission, do you think the planners were opposed to the project?**

Let me take that as two step, so yes it took us a long time to get planning permission. And in part that was opposition from the planners and in part, it was also our own naivety about how the planning system works, which slowed down the process. So had we been a bit more, savvy with how the planning system works we could have speeded that up. So I'd say there isn't blame but responsibility.

So coming back to the planners I don't think it was so much opposition from the planners themselves. I remember the first time we met with the head of planning of Pembrokeshire county council, David Lawrence, and he was really really supportive. It was more that the politics within the council, forced the planners hand into a position into which they had to oppose us and that's, you know, fairly common for planning applications.

Because at the end of the day, any controversial planning, well it's to do with the way the councils are structured, in that there are elected representatives, councillors, who sit on the planning committee and they provide decisions. And so what tends to happen is there is quite a bit of dialogue between, councillors on planning committees and planning officers. And so, as much that it is not to be designed this way, the truth of the matter is planning is political, very political. And so in essence, it wasn't that we, from the planning officer's perspective... we weren't reaching the policy or that it wasn't a good project, it was simply down to political pressure within the council, from what tends to be a very conservative culture. That created the situation.

## **Two routes to LIDs can take; direct action and through the planning policy, why choose the planning route?**

Well, because one of the main things we wanted to achieve with the Lammas project was to create a viable route, for people to transition from mainstream lifestyles to alternative lifestyles; and in order to do that we had to do it above board that's the first thing to say. The second thing to say, direct action with a large group of people, it is almost impossible to do it covertly and by taking that kind of direct action you will automatically enter into a conflict situation with the local planning department and when we were making our decisions, having talked to forward planners in Pembrokeshire county council, having sounded out the political planning landscape, that it actual looked quite positive. There was that side of it, but another side of it as well and that's from a kind of an activists' perspective, if you are going to invest, for most people, their life savings in a piece of land, if you're going to give up your jobs and whole heartedly commit yourself to developing an alternative infrastructure; you need a degree of legal security.

Otherwise you're going to tend to get people with nothing to lose and there's totally a place for that and not in any way a criticism. But what we wanted to approach; installation of our infrastructure in a much more professional long term way. And for example the classic scenario, take a look at all the activist eco hamlets eco village projects in the UK, they've invariable started by moving onto the land, tents, some lightweight movable structures and the actual installation of the infrastructure; whether you're talking about housing, water networks, electricity networks, tracks, roads and even building ecosystems, has obviously been very slow and just as a result of that, there is investment risk on the part of the activists.

## **Has the Lammas project made it easier for other low impact developments**

Without a doubt in Wales, but little to no influence in England, but in Wales. Bearing in mind before Lammas, literally there was no planning provision or low impact developments of any

size and after Lammas there is now a Welsh national planning policy that supports low impact development on any scale.

### **Involvement with One Planet Development**

At the time we were going through the planning process system, the Welsh government were exploring the idea of scaling up.

Pembrokeshire low impact policy, came about as result of political pressure from the Welsh government combined with grassroots activism in the county, that led to the Welsh government funding a series of research documents that pointed toward the viability of the permaculture model. The Welsh government were involved right from the start and once the Lammas project was through the planning system, the Welsh Government were wanting to extend the provision nationwide, so there were consultations going on about the OPD policy. The policy we went under policy 52 was basically a precursor to OPD policy. OPD policy was basically policy 52 tweaked, there's so much similarity between the two. More or less in terms of basic principles, the basic principles are the same in both policies. I got involved with OPD policy right from the start.

### **Is OPD moving in the right trajectory for planning?**

I think it's a step in the right direction, but that is in the context of, what is at its root and foundation an unsustainable system; whether you're looking at the planning system itself or whether you're looking at why the socio-economic model in which we're living in greater number is inherently and fundamentally unsustainable.

### **Policy moving fast enough**

No,

but that is a result of the policy, which in many ways is kind of a reflection of the kind of consciousness... And is human consciousness moving fast enough, ecological and social indicators would suggest that it's not.

## **Planning system fundamental problems**

To Understand the planning system, you need to go back to 1947 where it was essentially birthed from the trauma of the second world war, where they wanted to divide up towns and countryside, and it hasn't changed since then. The basic kind of vision behind the planning system is that you cluster the population into urban sectors and you keep the rural landscape for agricultural productivity.

That model may well be apt in an age where there is an absolute abundance of cheap fossil fuels, and there is no awareness of a pollution problem with that. We're in a completely different kind of age now, whereby we need to rethink these basic foundations of which our society is built. Cities or that basic model, which is still a total norm in England is broken. Cities are by their very nature totally unsustainable.

So the planning system itself, using that for a foundation is inherently flawed.

That's one aspect of it, on top of that, there's the whole thing about having to apply for permission first and who you are applying permission to. Who is the authority? There are all sorts of questions that I'm sure humanity will start to ask, but it's kind of early days really.

## **Lammas living simply? And complicated process**

Not a desire to live simply, more like a desire to live holistically. Which because we are complex animals and so that in order to live holistically you need to take quite an intelligent approach to designing your ecosystem infrastructure. And so that in itself is not flawed because of that, it's more the essential premises that our society is based on are fundamentally flawed. Our whole pseudo democratic model, at the risk of getting too radical.

## **Is Lammas Radical?**

It is radical in that models a completely different alternative and sustainable approach to living on this planet. It demonstrates that it is totally possible for human beings to live in harmony within their ecosystems, whilst still having a fairly high calibre lifestyle.

In essence is it radical? We are building an alternative culture, because that is the basis of any society. People who live here in the eco-village have said ok we no longer have faith in the politicians and the economy to resolve global crisis that we're in.

**Lammas actively working to inform policy?**

I would say yes, although there is a lull going on at the moment, policy and planning is political and at this moment in time there isn't a political drive within Cardiff towards any kind of radical alternatives.

**Is there instead a focus on education and perceptions?**

We are focusing very heavily on education and perceptions and the mainstay of our endeavours are in providing a viable demonstrably successful productive model.

**For people who join Lammas is it about sustainability or lifestyle?**

The drivers for people are so varied for some people it is, I want to provide my kids with a beautiful place to grow up, for other people it's I want to live in a place where I can grow my own food, for others it's I want to live in the moment and not sell my soul to capitalism. All sorts of things and in essence it is that drive to want to create a better alternative. And in that regards, in my perspective it's really working, we're doing incredibly well.

If there were zombie apocalypse not only would we be fairly sorted here in the eco-village but we would be able to provide a support system for local communities.

**Working towards total self-sufficiency?**

We don't think of it in terms of total self-sufficiency, we are self-reliant. That's not to say there is quite a bit of trade, as a system we have enough diversity and enough resilience to consider ourselves in essence independent.

Trade is really important, because we are still participating in modern life. We all have e-mail accounts and the kids eat bananas and we drink coffee and every now and again go to the

cinema or get fish and chips. We're still participating in society and that's really important but we have a sense of self-reliance and we have a really good foundation in the landscape.

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