

Dear Committee Members,

I'm writing to you as the spokesperson of the National Thatching Straw Growers Association with information for your consideration regarding the replacement of Devon combed wheat reed thatch on 'Dymonds' with water reed thatch.

The NTSGA was formed in 2011 to give voice to the dwindling numbers of thatching straw growers in the UK and to address the concerns of continued loss of combed wheat reed and long straw listed thatched properties to replacement with water reed thatch.

Devon has been for a number of centuries the traditional heartland for combed wheat reed thatch, so much so that it is sometimes referred to as 'Devon Reed', for centuries wheat has been grown locally for thatching purposes in a sustainable way providing farm diversity and local employment.

Over the past three to four decades Devon has seen the increased wholesale stripping and replacement of Devon Reed in favour of water reed firstly from the Norfolk Broads and now with the bulk coming from as far a field as Eastern Europe and China this past 20 years.

This loss of straw thatch in the county has had the effect that growers have had to market their product to other parts of England where Combed Wheat Reed was never used for thatching, this has had a catastrophic effect on the loss of Long Straw thatching traditional to many parts of the UK. You are probably not aware that decisions made in Devon are pivotal and have a detrimental knock on effect on conservation of traditional thatch materials and skills elsewhere.

As I live in Norfolk I know the history of the export of short fine Norfolk Reed since the 1960-70s to the West Country that is rejected by thatchers in East Anglia that do not spar coat water reed for a number of reasons, so it can be seen that although spar coating water reed may have been practiced occasionally in the West Country in the distant past it has only become common practice in recent times. Spar coating of water reed does not have the durability that traditional thick rafter fixed water reed has no matter what some may claim.

Stephen Letch (Chairman NTSGA)

Water Reed and Straw Thatcher/Grower, South Norfolk

Further information www.ntsqa.org.uk