

'IT'S WANTON VANDALISM'

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Cut out: One of the red squirrels that have found a home at Clifton Hall

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By Pamela McGowan

VILLAGERS in Great Clifton near Workington are in shock after trees they thought they had saved were felled.

Local people have fought for over a year to stop the grounds of Clifton Hall being developed for houses.

They finally won their campaign last month after a planning appeal was turned down by Government inspectors.

But on Tuesday morning they awoke to discover the bulldozers had moved in regardless.

Dozens of felled trees, once home to red squirrels and other wildlife, now lie in heaps in front of the historic hall.

Several protected trees have been left untouched but residents are aghast that so many have been cut down without any warning.

Workington MP Tony Cunningham visited the site this week and branded it a disgrace.

"As I see it, this is just wanton vandalism and the only conclusion it

that it has been done out of spite," he said.

"The residents are incredibly angry and quite rightly. I have spoken to Allerdale officers and am publicly calling for prosecutions.

"We've just lost hundreds of trees in the recent storms but these have withstood all that - it really is a disgrace."

Carlisle-based developer Woodglen originally applied for permission to build a large estate in front of the hall and five houses to one side.

Both were refused by Allerdale councillors but the firm then took it to appeal.

The most controversial part of the scheme, nearest the hall, was turned down, although permission was granted for the other five houses.

Villagers now believe Tuesday's felling was a bitter reaction to the failed appeal.

"As far as I'm concerned, the felling of these trees is nothing more than an act of malicious vandalism," said nearby resident Helen Dempsey

"The plans for developing on the grounds and directly around the hall were refused so there can be no logical reason for this barbaric act.

"As a group of ordinary people, we have done everything we absolutely could to protect the hall and it's grounds, but obviously our efforts have been in vain."

Allerdale officers are now investigating the felling after visiting the site.

Woodglen Developments were not available for comment yesterday.