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Deputy Surveyor
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Dear John

LATCHMORE BROOK RESTORATION PROJECT

Thank you for your letter dated 8 November about the proposed restoration of Latchmore Brook. I am pleased to have been able to walk the Brook with you and to hear first hand your views and aspirations.

As discussed on site, the Forestry Commission intends to work the restoration in this catchment from the top end down, which is the consensus of the various points of view expressed over recent months. We have spoken about this decision at various times and with different parties and have no additional publicity plans. In practical terms, the amount of work required in the inclosures upstream of Latchmore Bottom will take 3 or more years to complete. We will share plans for the upstream restoration works before they are finalised.

From the minutes of the HLS Board in October, you are aware of Natural England's concern regarding further erosion of Thomson's Castle mire. At this point we have no formulated plan for work at Thomson's Castle and we will contact you should this situation change.

We discussed on site, and you mention in your letter, the possibility of setting up some simple monitoring of stream flow out of Alderhill inclosure. If you have a suggestion for a methodology involving volunteers then we would be pleased to hear it and work together to set something up.

Your letter then asks about four particular issues relating to works at Latchmore where you are dissatisfied with previous responses. We have responded to each of the issues in turn in the following paragraphs.

Issue 1 – Tree felling outside of the licensed area. We fully accept this has been a very emotive issue locally and I am gathering facts about the matter in order to make a properly informed response to you. Unfortunately it will take a short while longer before I have all the details about the matter, but I will update you about the stage I have reached by 14 December.

Issue 2 – Explosions of ordnance during bird nesting season. We were unable to trace receipt of the original 27 August FoI requests by one of the Friends, but we now have duplicate copies, and Jane Smith will be making a reply. The ordnance work required to be undertaken when the water table was low and hence its timing. Once unexploded ordnance is found it is disposed of in accordance with the advice of the professional bomb disposal services.

Issue 3 – Protection of Damselflies. We agree that the populations of damselflies will need to be considered in the planning application for the Latchmore Brook restoration. You ask that the issue of disclosure of information be looked at again. I have reviewed the previous correspondence and our stance remains one of 'not to disclose', for the reasons set out in Kevin Penfold's response dated 5 September to one of the Friends.

Issue 4 – SSSI Classification. As you appreciate it is Natural England and not the Forestry Commission who are responsible for the condition assessment of SSSI units. We have however contacted Natural England about this and understand that reassessment usually takes place every 6 years. Unit 43 was reassessed in June 2012 and use of a hand held GPS revealed a minor mapping inaccuracy compared to earlier survey which was based on visual interpretation of landform. This meant that the erosion point and damaged part of the mire were outside of Unit 43, and given this, its condition was assessed as 'favourable'.

With regards to why Units 43 and 48 were reassessed in 2012 (and not units 28, 29 and 44) we understand that these were brought forward from their normal cycle to address your organisations' concerns. Assessment of other SSSI Units would be completed according to the methodology of the time. Sequential improvement of Units within a catchment is not a pre requisite prior to commencing restoration of neighbouring Units, however we would agree there needs to be a reasonable expectation of success before works are initiated.

Finally, you ask for a contact in Forestry Commission whom you can discuss other detailed issues pertaining to the planning application for Latchmore Brook. Unfortunately Sarah Oakley, who would be that contact, is unwell and not at work until after Christmas. This will delay us in preparing the detail of a planning application but when that gets underway we will contact you to pick up the issues you wish to discuss.

In the meantime, please continue to use Jane Smith or I as contacts at Forestry Commission as we are keen to ensure a mutually helpful dialogue.

Yours sincerely



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