

### Developments over stream filling

During the course of January, there were two important developments in the discussions over stream filling projects in the Forest. First of all the Deputy Surveyor told the verderers that the planning authority (the national park) has determined that all his large engineering works will require planning permission. The Forestry Commission's major stream operations are about as big as engineering comes in the New Forest. Of course this determination raises a question as to previous works — all of which were undertaken without any planning application. Those dating from before four years ago probably escape the net, but more recent schemes should properly be considered for enforcement action. I hardly expect to see that done, not least because the use of enforcement powers seems to be discretionary and no actual offence is involved.

The second matter relates to the vexed proposals for Latchmore Brook. Before the lawyers for Friends of Latchmore challenged the commission's right to develop there without consent, preparatory works had already been going ahead, including some quite significant felling of broadleaved trees — mostly oak. For some, but only some, of this work the Forestry Commission had obtained the required felling licence. Felling actually took place over a much wider area but this was stoutly denied by Queen's House over many months. Friends of Latchmore pressed home their complaints and in January the Deputy Surveyor wrote to them acknowledging that part of the felling was unauthorized. "Supervisory errors" he said, were at fault, and the situation "does not live up to the high standards we set ourselves". Interestingly, the authority charged with investigating failures to obtain felling licences is the Forestry Commission! Unlike most development without consent, for unauthorized felling prosecution and significant fines can follow. A builder who, without consent, cuts down trees to facilitate a development project can look for little sympathy from the magistrates. Once again, I would not expect any action to be taken in this case.

Anthony Pasmore

## New body to oversee Forest

The Government has approved proposals to set up a new national body to run woodlands including the New Forest.

Environment Secretary Owen Paterson announced on Thursday morning the as yet unnamed body would hold in trust the nation's forests and work alongside the Forestry Commission across the UK.

He said the body's priorities would be to expand wooded areas, increase the amount of woodland being managed, maintain and enhance access to it and improve the economic performance of the forestry sector.

"I want to put the future of our public forests on a clear and firm footing," Mr Paterson said. "Our forests and woodland will remain secured in public ownership for the people who enjoy them, the businesses that depend on them and the wildlife that flourishes in them."

He said he had instructed DEFRA to make tree health another top priority and had established an independent plant health taskforce convened by DEFRA's chief scientific advisor Professor Ian Boyd.

The issue of the ownership of the nation's forests first emerged around two years ago when the then Environment Secretary Caroline Spellman proposed privatising forests. However, there was such a backlash that the Independent Panel on Forestry was set up by the government to look into the issue.

When the panel first recommended the forests being run by a new body last year the idea was met locally with mixed reaction.

After the government confirmed it had accepted many of the panel's recommendations in full on Thursday morning as the 'A&T' went to press, the New Forest's leading environmental groups and watchdogs

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## New forest body

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were still digesting the contents of the 49-page report.

Previously the New Forest Association said the panel's recommendations did not "go far enough" to protect the Forest.

However, other local organisations such as the national park authority, Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust and the New Forest Equestrian Association, welcomed the panel's ideas.

A full report and reaction will appear in next week's 'A&T'.