

Letters to the Editor...

Latchmore Brook restoration project

SIR, — You have received many letters from members of the Friends of Latchmore opposing the proposed Forestry Commission "restoration" work and with the recent BBC South Today coverage I am sure awareness of the damage that this will do is gaining momentum.

I would like to analyse a very important aspect of this and other Higher Level Stewardship (HLS) schemes within the New Forest-money. I understand the New Forest scheme is one of the largest in Europe and equates to total payments of £16m over 10 years. It is important to understand how this is broken down and the restrictions put on the HLS in order to qualify for payments.

The New Forest HLS website states "The scheme for the New Forest came about on 1st March 2010 as a result of a successful bid to Natural England and DEFRA by a partnership of the Verderers, The Forestry Commission and the New Forest National Park Authority."

"Overall the HLS scheme is worth £16m over 10 years, funded equally by the UK and the EU through DEFRA. Up to £800,000 may be spent annually on grazing to support the practice of commoning and £750,000 to be spent on wetland restoration"

The key word here is "annually". So £750,000 to be spent only on wetland restoration projects and must be spent each year for the next 10 years. There appears to be no allowance for a roll-over of monies to a following year. So spend it or lose it.

Could it be that the HLS partners are the victims of this EU ruling? That perhaps if this restriction had not been placed on them, they would not have rushed into stream restoration projects around the Forest, juggling contractor dates, ignoring the breeding season, ignoring valid conservation objections, ignoring high levels of public concerns and undertaking major works with no (time consuming) environmental impact assessments? This is a very sad time for those who love and cherish the New Forest.

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