

Friends of Latchmore

friendsoflatchmore.org

Postbox Cottage
Blissford
Fordingbridge
Hants SP6 2HY

To: Cllr. Bill Dow, Hyde Parish Council
Cc: Parish Clerk (to copy to other councillors)

5 February 2013

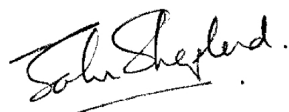
Dear Bill

Latchmore Brook - Tree-felling outside Licensed Areas

- 1) On 17 January 2013, Michael Seddon, Deputy Surveyor, Forestry Commission sent us a letter in response to our letter of 8 November 2012, regarding the tree-felling at Latchmore. The Parish Council were sent copies of our letter and that sent by e-mail by Mr. Seddon.
- 2) After a comprehensive investigation, including his confirmation of the validity of the information supplied by Friends of Latchmore, Mr. Seddon has accepted that there had been significant felling of mature trees in three areas outside the Licensed areas that were applied for, and approved, in December 2010.
- 3) At the Parish Council meeting of 14 March 2012, the Friends of Latchmore raised the issue that the Parish Council had not brought this very significant and damaging tree-felling application to the attention of the Parish when it was applied for. The response given was that “tree applications are not normally listed in the minutes”. There was no reference to this application in the minutes. We have since found that not all tree applications are consistently mentioned in the minutes, although some are.
- 4) A resident had also raised this issue in correspondence with the Chair of the Parish Council on 7 March 2010. The response was that “the tree felling application 0356 to fell the trees was discussed by the Parish Council on 10 November 2010. The Council receives a large number of applications and they are not usually minuted in detail.”
- 5) Following receipt of the details of this Application and its Approval from the Forestry Commission in June 2012, the Friends of Latchmore raised the issue with the then Acting Deputy Surveyor, Kevin Penfold, pointing out that significant tree-felling had taken place outside the Licensed areas. His eventual response, in his letter of 23 August 2012, was that “The vast majority of the tree felling that took place was within the scope of the felling licence. There was some scrub and tree removal that took place outside the areas depicted on the Felling Licence map but this was compliant with Felling Licence Exemptions relating to volume and diameter.”
- 6) The tree-felling outside the licensed areas, contrary to Mr. Penfold’s assertion, included mature oak, and most of the trees were significantly larger than the Exemption thresholds. This unauthorised felling has illegally destroyed a valuable wildlife habitat which is meant to be protected under the EU Natura 2000 Network and should be maintained as a wildlife corridor. Already a number of species of birds, fish and other fauna and flora have been seriously affected by the removal of the tree canopy (which is known to cause the water temperature to rise).

- 7) The Friends of Latchmore wish to ensure that the Parish Council is fully aware of this series of events, which provide a clear example of the careless and unprofessional way that the work on the Latchmore project has been managed.
- 8) The Council should also note that there are a significant number of other activities that have already taken place at Latchmore as part of the project, or are planned under the “Restoration Plans”, that are possibly outside the law and certainly unacceptable practice. The Friends of Latchmore are in the process of actively following these up with the Forestry Commission.
- 9) Despite sending a letter of support for the project to the Forestry Commission on 16 February 2012, the Parish Council has frequently said that it has no power over the matter. The Friends of Latchmore also have no “power” but have nevertheless managed to significantly change the direction of the project over the past year. There is however more that can and in our judgement should be done by all parties involved, including the Parish Council.
- 10) The Parish Council has also stated that “Maintaining support keeps our lines open to the experts at any time we chose - and theirs open to us.” **We suggest that the Parish Council should use these lines of communication to address the concerns of the residents of the Parish, that significant and irreparable harm is being done in the name of these “restoration”, and that the HLS Board need to review all of their procedures to avoid further damage to the site.**
- 11) The NFNPA have recently provided a “screening opinion” that an EIA is not covered under Schedule 2 by the T&C Planning (EIA) Regulations. We intend to challenge that opinion, and note that this does not mean that the project is not covered by other EIA Regulations. The Friends of Latchmore will continue challenge the Forestry Commission, the NFNPA and Natural England on this issue, until a full EIA has been carried out.
- 12) A Parish Council has a clear and important role in speaking out, even where it has no formal mandate, when it is clear that public bodies operating in the Parish have committed offences, and we now ask our Council to take a closer interest in ensuring that these organisations operate in accordance with the best interest of the residents of Hyde Parish and without damaging the environment.
- 13) The Parish Council previously declined to comment on the tree-felling issue at their meeting of 14 November 2012, stating that “As they had not seen any information on this they were unable to comment.” **Now that the Council has all the relevant information (including maps etc. sent to all members of the Parish Council on 19 November 2012) , we would appreciate its comments on the tree-felling, and a statement of what action it intends to take.**

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "John Shepherd". The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line underneath the name.

Professor John Shepherd CBE FRS (Co-chair: the Friends of Latchmore)