

Presentment 17th October 2012

Official Verderer, Verderers, Good morning

My name is **Dr David Hewett**, I am a retired Consultant in Public Health Medicine, and Chartered Information Technology Professional, who was formerly the Director of Public Health to the Winchester Health Authority, and Associate Medical Director at the Royal Hampshire County Hospital. I am a past Chair of the Association of Litigation and Risk Management based at the Royal Society of Medicine, and have 30 years experience of Main Board level management in the public sector.

I live at Forest Lodge, Godshill near Fordingbridge, and have been asked by "Friends of Latchmore" to comment on the so called "restoration" works carried out by the Forestry Commission on the streams at Ditchend Shade and Burnt Bottom in the summer of 2011. I have walked my dogs in that area four or five times a week for the past twenty years, and ridden horses on the forest three times a week for the past seven. It is fair to say that I have spent a lot of time in the area affected by these works, and perhaps could be forgiven the indulgence of regarding the place as part of my back garden.

Over the past five years there has been a noticeable aesthetic and functional deterioration in this area, firstly by over-zealous gorse burning which has removed most of the natural cover from the slopes, and then by other interference, most notably the "restoration".

I can recall the sight and sound of bullfinches and chaffinches in the gorse whilst walking down from the cricket pitch to Ditchend Brook on warm spring mornings. They are there no longer.

I remember seeing small fish in the stream, especially in the pools that formed where it did not dry out. There were damsel flies around the water in the summer. There is no life in the stream now.

Before the works were carried out, the brook was lined along its banks by gorse bushes and a variety other vegetation. Now there is no natural cover at all. The stream currently runs along what looks like an obviously man made artificial gully with a few rather contrived bends in it. To describe it as meandering is no more aligned with reality than an advertiser's copy.

When the bushes and small trees that lined the stream were removed, five free standing trees were left in the valley. One of these, formerly on the margin of the brook, was a large magnificent, mature holly under which the cattle like to stand when it is hot and the sunlight is strong. It was left isolated in the midst of a tract of soft flat in filled land. There is a large depression around the base, which rapidly filled with water, and has remained so. As a result of being continually waterlogged, the tree is now dead. All the other remaining trees have died during this summer. Clearly the soil conditions have changed so radically that the trees have been killed.

Since the “restoration” was carried out stagnant pools have appeared in the soft areas that have been in-filled. These do not drain into the streams. Around them the grass is coarsening and the lawns are becoming visibly smaller. It will not be long before the entire valley floor will be covered by coarse grass and heather with little or no green lawn left.

What was once a diverse and visually pleasing place to be has been wrecked and left in a state redolent of a demolition site. Undoubtedly the area will eventually recover from this parlous assault, but that will take many years, always assuming that in the meantime policy will not change and wreak further havoc in pursuit of some newly fashionable passion of the organisational elite.

I make this last point because in the course of my professional career I have seen several large public sector organisations become obsessed with the execution of policy to the exclusion of practical reality. When this happens, officialdom becomes gripped by a quasi religious fervour, systems of internal control are eroded, decision making becomes arbitrary, and the requirements of good corporate governance are ignored. The controversy at Latchmore is a clear example of this unfortunate organisational hubris in action. Anyone who needs to be convinced of the devastation which lies in store for that beautiful area need look no further than the carnage that is now evident at Ditchend Shade.

I am asking you to bear these points in mind and urge you to hold the New Forest National Park Authority, and its agent, the Forestry Commission, firmly to account both in what they are doing, and the manner with which they conduct themselves.

Thank-you.