Presentment Verderers' Court 19th February 2014

HLSS Restorations

Official Verderer, Verderers, good morning.
My name is Margaret Bunyard, and I am a commoner in the NW Forest.

I would like to tell you my concern about the condition of the 'restorations' to streams which have been carried out as part of the Life 3, Pathfinder, and since 2010 – the HLS Scheme.

I have revisited both Amberslade and Buckherd Bottom in the last week, and am appalled to see the condition they are in.

Before 'restoration', Amberslade was deemed to be in 'favourable' condition.
In 2006/7 a section around the footbridge was in-filled with heather bales and imported clay and gravel. This in-fill was washed away in the first winter. What had been a minor 'nick-point' became a major source of erosion immediately downstream from the starting point of the works. I understand that there are plans for 'snagging' to take place, but since the entire in-fill has gone it is clear that any works will need to be far more than 'snagging'.

(Indeed I understand that the term 'snagging' is no longer considered appropriate to describe the remedial work that has been necessary for so many 'restored' streams.)

In September 2013 a Freedom of Information request was sent to the Forestry Commission asking for details of the restoration plans for Amberslade, and for photographs of the stream before and after restoration. The response on October 10th was: 'we do not hold any information on file relating to the restoration at Amberslade Bottom'. This would seem to be an extraordinary reply considering that the works are part of a costly, EU-funded series of projects.

The situation at Buckherd Bottom is, if anything, even worse. Here the initial works in 2011, had failed by the end of the first winter, leaving heather bales exposed and displaced, with string loose and dangerous to stock. The works were redone in August and September 2013. A huge stack of heather bales and quantities of imported clay and gravel were used to once more in-fill the stream. Within a month of finishing, the imported materials were starting to wash away. They continued to do so through the winter, leaving stretches of imported clay exposed in the heavily eroded sides of the stream.

It is not at all clear what the specific aims were for either 'restoration' in the first place, but neither can be called a success. Wildlife habitats, grazing and appearance have been disturbed at both sites - twice at Buckherd Bottom - with no discernable compensatory benefits. These 'restorations' have both been a shocking waste of money. Other sites have also suffered a similar fate.

I understand that both this winter and last have seen particularly heavy rainfall. However the erosion at both sites started well before the winter storms. We are told by the Head of the Meteorological Office that our climate is changing, we can expect

more winters like this one. This should surely be taken into account. Increased rain will de-stabilise disturbed ground which has not had time to consolidate and cause greater flooding downstream. All future stream restorations will have to be able to cope with higher rates of flow.

The present condition of both these sites leads to the opinion that base line data was inadequate. The first step in any such work must be to analyse exactly what the hydrological conditions are. Both 'restorations' have significantly undermined rather than improved the condition of these streams. The conclusion is that the dynamics of neither stream were fully understood and an inappropriate methodology was chosen.

There are questions to be asked before the same methods are used elsewhere:

- What was the impact of infilling with foreign material?
- Why did it behave in that way?
- What lessons are being learnt from other projects and are all such failures being analysed?
- Will the results of these analyses be combined to suggest the best way forward?

It is vital that the hydrological changes caused by such failed 'restorations' are better analysed and understood before allowing further works and risking serious damage elsewhere.

Thank you.