

Professor John Shepherd CBE FRS
Co-Chair Friends of Latchmore
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Our ref: Latchmore

7 January 2014

Dear John

LATCHMORE - NOTES OF MEETING OF 13 NOVEMBER

Thank you for your letter dated 10 December with your own draft notes of our meeting of 13 November. I attach a copy of these notes with a few comments and requested changes for clarification which I hope you will find acceptable.

As your letter acknowledges, the Forestry Commission has committed to undertaking a full Environment Impact Assessment (EIA) as part of the planning application process for wetland restoration works in the Latchmore catchment. You have campaigned for us to undertake such an EIA and our intention goes beyond what is currently required given our commitment to complete the EIA is regardless of the formal screening decision from the New Forest National Park Authority. Furthermore we have published a timetable for the preparatory steps we will complete prior to submission of the planning application so that everyone understands the process that we will be following. This timetable contains all the normal steps for the development of a properly constituted Environmental Statement, including stages of public participation. This makes your response to our meeting and initiation of another challenging letter from your Solicitors (dated 20 December) extremely disappointing, especially as they are suggesting that we are not taking public participation seriously.

As discussed at our meeting, we would ensure that the EIA process and methodologies follow best practise and Planning Consultants that we will engage have secured the IEMA (Institute of Environmental Management & Assessment) Quality Mark for EIA. This should provide the assurance to third party stakeholders that an objective EIA will be carried out according to the IEMA Code of Practice by experienced professionals. Your suggestion that there is suspicion that the HLS partners may be determined to drive through this project in its original form is entirely misplaced. Indeed, we could make a similar assumption that Friends of Latchmore would object to anything other than the status quo, which would be equally unhelpful.

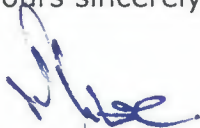
As we also discussed at the meeting, when we reach the stage of engagement about 'scheme options' we will make available adequate environmental information to enable constructive review, suggestion and comment. Again this is normal practice.

However, as I explained at the meeting, we do not believe your request for all component aspects of supporting information to be published and inevitably challenged on a rolling basis to be proportionate or helpful. Consideration of individual pieces of information created in the course of completing the Environmental Statement, especially in the absence of the wider context that will be provided in the full Environmental Statement, could lead to misunderstanding, confusion, and unnecessary concerns. Responding to this, as you would no doubt expect us to do, would be an unwarranted distraction to the preparation process and divert resources that could be better deployed elsewhere. We also take the view that it is appropriate for all stakeholders to have equal access to the supporting data both in terms of content and timescale.

Since my return to the New Forest in late summer 2012 I have endeavoured to ensure the Forestry Commission follows good practice in respect to the development of the planning application for wetland restoration at Latchmore. I have also aimed to ensure that this is completed in a timely and open manner. To this end we have met Friends of Latchmore more times than any other organisation with an interest in the restoration works and the invitation for further dialogue remains open. Nevertheless, it is a source of frustration that Friends of Latchmore continue to take an adversarial approach by instructing Solicitors, sending regular requests under Open Information legislation to a point where these may be considered vexatious and engaging consultants to complete parallel environmental studies without advance dialogue with the Forestry Commission.

I can assure you that the Forestry Commission remains committed to developing a planning application for the Latchmore catchment in accordance with normal, planning practice, complying with applicable legislation. We will also continue to respond positively to constructive engagement, which you do now appear to be backing away from, which is in my view very unfortunate and not in the best interests of the New Forest. I will of course also respond direct to the latest letter from your Solicitors shortly.

Yours sincerely



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Copy to: Those listed in cover email