

Letters to the Editor...

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Opposition to FC stream restoration

SIR, — Parish councils have many responsibilities in representing their electors, and one of these is to speak out against any development likely to harm their community. So it is good to see democracy at work as local councils stand up to the big guns of the Forestry Commission, the national park authority, and Natural England and voice their strong objections to the 'restorations' funded by the HLS scheme in the New Forest.

At a recent meeting of Burley Parish Council, presentations to the council by representatives of the Forestry Commission and their consultants, Land Use Consultants (LUC) were met with disbelief and derision. Members and public questioned the use of funding, the huge numbers of trucks that would be used, the importation of ugly, non-local hoggins to the beautiful Harvestslade and the lack of research into the effect of the work downstream.

Because of the many 'restorations' that have failed in the past, the meeting had no confidence in the Forestry Commission's ability to do these 'restorations' successfully and voted to oppose the work.

One of the failures mentioned was at Ditchend. The chairman and parish council at Godshill have spoken out strongly here, appalled at the obliteration of the stream at Ditchend, which has destroyed a rich habitat and created an ugly scar on the landscape. This was a well-known and well-loved area and it has been completely ruined.

The beautiful area of Latchmore, with its southern damselflies, lapwings and kingfishers lies just over the hill from Ditchend, in the parish of Hyde. It is one of the best-loved spots in the north of the Forest, for birdwatchers, walkers, riders, and holiday visitors.

Hyde Parish Council has expressed many concerns about the threat to this unique landscape in its response to LUC's scoping report. (This report describes what will be in the environmental assessment required of the Forestry Commission and the national park authority before planning permission can be given for the heavy engineering work).

So we might think all is well: parish councils are representing the views of their electorate, democracy is at work at this level. But before we run away with that idea and assume that planning permission for work at Harvestslade and Latchmore will be judged fairly, we should remember which organisation is responsible for this planning application, it is the national park authority itself, one of the partners in the HLS scheme project! What chance for democracy now?

It is a very great shame that the organisations involved in this scheme do not listen to the very experienced Anthony Pasmore who writes in this paper of his grave reservations to these engineering works taking place across the Forest.

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