

PRESENTMENT 16 JULY 2014

BY COLIN DRAPER

‘RESTORATION’ WORK AT DITCHEND, GODSHILL

I am here this morning to raise my concern over work which is being carried out by contractors on the HLS restoration project at Ditchend.

The project was completed under 3 years ago and was hailed as a great success, restoring both the Ditchend Brook past Pitts Wood to the Forest boundary, and a secondary stream running diagonally from the corner of Pitts wood to its confluence with the Ditchend Brook, returning both streams to what were claimed to be their natural meanders.

The current work on the stream which joins the Ditch End brook has involved filling in the meander with hundreds of tons of material including heather bales, hoggin, and clay, topped off with a layer of stone, bringing the stream bed almost level with the surrounding heathland. The Forestry Commission has described this as ‘snagging’. The word snagging conjures up an image of minor adjustment; a small correction here a repair there. What is being carried out at Ditchend is instead a major project which has transformed the recently restored stream bed into a wide meandering stone track, nowhere is it more than a few inches below the surrounding levels and in places it is now virtually level with the surrounding landscape. The reason given for the work is that the stream, swollen during the winter months by the unusually heavy rainfall, has eroded its banks in places. This is a natural process and creates the deeper pools which hold water during sustained dry periods when the stream is no longer flowing, providing micro habitats as well as water for Forest stock and wildlife; destroying these pools and raising the level of the stream bed throughout its course, has left in its place a featureless stone track which is a scar across the Forest landscape.

There are now heather bales stacked next to the main Ditchend Brook making it seem likely that it will be treated in the same way. This goes far beyond what was hailed as a conservation success and raises serious concerns over the implications for other ‘restoration’ projects.

I would urge the Court to review this project as a matter of urgency and before any further work is carried out at Ditchend. I attach some photos which graphically illustrate the transformation of the meandering stream bed into a stony track.

Colin Draper

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