

**BREAKING NEWS ! FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**

**NEW FOREST WETLAND RESTORATION SCHEMES TO BE INDEPENDENTLY REVIEWED**

Representatives of the Friends of Latchmore are pleased to learn that the Chief Executives of the Forestry Commission and Natural England have agreed that there will be a full and independent review of the wetland 'restoration' proposals in the New Forest National Park, including Latchmore Brook. The review is expected to begin towards the end of this year as soon as suitable experts can be appointed.

The agreement, made last week, will consider past restorations and reports on their success and failure. It will also reconsider whether some of the proposals about to start or planned for the coming years represent good value for money with sustainable outcomes, and whether they are appropriate to the conditions in each catchment area.

Pressure from a range of local interests including Parish Councils, local naturalists, Friends of Latchmore and the Rt Hon Sir Desmond Swayne TD MP has cast doubt over the merits of several of the more recent projects, which often involve infilling of streams with a large amount of clay and stone from outside the area, including those at Pondhead and Wootton, that local residents are now calling to be suspended immediately.

The decision follows a range of internal investigations and enquiries into the details of the Latchmore catchment plans, where new information suggested that the evidence supporting the current planning application is inadequate.

Continued.

It is understood that Forestry Commission and Natural England officials are relieved at the decision, due to the range of complaints and objections that have grown in recent years, regarding the failure of restorations undertaken.

Pending the outcome of the review, the Forestry Commission is expected to withdraw the Latchmore planning application that was expected to be considered this year as the public consultation deadline approaches.

*Ailsa Farrand, Spokesperson for Friends of Latchmore said “ We are absolutely delighted with the announcement. FoL and very many other individuals and organisations have worked tirelessly for years to achieve this important step of stopping and reviewing properly the impact of these often hugely damaging stream infillings.*

*At last common sense has prevailed. Withdrawing the Planning Application for Latchmore Brook will prevent the need for expensive and divisive legal action and a battle to protect our Forest that would have done no-one any good.*

*We expect the review to show that many proposed areas for Higher Level Stewardship expenditure are unsuitable and that geological and wildlife areas would have been badly damaged or destroyed due to the inadequacy of analysis in the early planning stages. We look forward to contributing to the inquiry and towards a future of mutual understanding and shared interest in the management of the New Forest and its beautiful wild areas.”*

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