

From: Professor John Shepherd CBE FRS  
Fiske Cottage, Yoxford Road  
Westleton  
Suffolk IP17 3AE

To: Sir Amyas Morse  
Comptroller & Auditor General  
National Audit Office

Your ref: GF/1639/16  
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Dear Sir Amyas

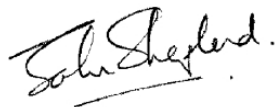
### **Review of New Forest Higher Level Stewardship Scheme: Wetland Restoration**

I am aware from your letter of 28 October 2016 to Sir Desmond Swayne that you are undertaking a review of two aspects of the New Forest Higher Level Stewardship Scheme. The first (the financial arrangements) lies outside my expertise, but I wish to make some observations in relation to the second, i.e. the control and monitoring of the work done for the wetland restoration component of the scheme. As your staff may already have determined, there are no clearly stated or verifiable objectives for the projects that have been carried out under this scheme. Moreover, since the completion of the EU Life-3 programme in 2006, none of the organisations involved has undertaken any significant monitoring of the consequences of the wetland restoration works. The success or otherwise of the works cannot therefore be assessed in any credible or objective way. In my view this is deeply unsatisfactory, and makes it impossible to show that the projects represent good value for money.

You may also be aware that last week the New Forest National Park Authority refused planning consent for the most recent and largest project of the scheme, that for the Latchmore Brook, stating that "In the absence of any overriding or compelling evidence, the Authority is unable to demonstrate that the proposed development would not have a harmful impact on the protected species and habitats of the New Forest SPA, SAC, SSSI and Ramsar Site". The inadequacy of the evidence is a direct result of the failure to monitor the effects of earlier projects undertaken during the past ten years, as mentioned above. The flimsy nature of the evidence offered by the HLS partners for the efficacy of these restoration projects was a major factor in my objection to the Latchmore project (copy attached), which includes a commentary on one of the key documents, the report produced by the River Restoration Centre & Jonathan Cox associates. For completeness I am also attaching copies of my critical comments on two other recent attempts to evaluate the evidence, i.e. the review of Thomas et al (2016) and the "Assurance Report" prepared by Dr Tim Hill of Natural England.

I consider that these documents show that the evidence that the restorations undertaken have any beneficial effect is extremely tenuous, and that it is therefore impossible to show that the projects represent good value for money. I hope that you will find these observations useful in your enquiry.

Yours sincerely



Professor John Shepherd CBE FRS

Cc Sir Desmond Swayne TD MP  
Professor Ian Boyd, CSA, DEFRA  
Mr James Cross, CEO, Natural England  
Mr Bruce Rothnie, Deputy Surveyor, Forestry Commission