Email from Professor John Shepherd CBE, FRS to Chris Hill, Director of GeoData, University of Southampton

From: Shepherd J.G.
Sent: 23 January 2018 13:08
To: Hill C.T.
Subject: New Forest Freshwater and River Restoration Strategy and Plan.

Dear Chris

I was unfortunately not able to attend the meeting to which these notes refer, but would nevertheless like to offer a few comments, based on the slides etc you have circulated.

First, I would like to congratulate those concerned for producing an excellent summary of the state of play and of a better way forward. In particular I would like to applaud the list of eight principles, although like other people who have commented I would prefer to see principle No 5 promoted to No 1. Having said that, I would however like to offer an amendment to it, i.e. first **to identify any perceived problems, and quantify and evaluate their magnitude and likely impacts.** I think this is a necessary preliminary to then setting clear and quantifiable objectives for any action that may be deemed to be necessary. Some further reordering of the principles might then also be useful, but that is a minor issue.

I am particular pleased to see the strong emphasis on survey and monitoring activities, and would only wish to emphasise **the need for (several years of) pre-operational baseline surveys**, against which to judge the outcomes of any action. I would also like to suggest that objectives should so far as possible be **measurable.** I am astonished that (for example) there has been no attempt to monitor soil moisture levels or frequency of over-topping & inundation (which could surely easily be done using drones nowadays). A concise summary of other failings of the restoration programme in recent years is given below, as these strongly support the need for your principles to be applied.

I hope these comments are helpful, and that a much better strategy will emerge form this work, and that the suggestion of re-establishing the Water Basin Management Forum (or something similar) is pursued. I think that it is vital that the present closed circle of FC/NPA/NE/Verderers personnel is opened up to outside professional expertise, scrutiny and advice. Relying on colleagues for advice is a recipe for creating and maintaining juggernauts, and is simply no longer good enough (that's why government departments have CSAs, who in turn mostly also have Science Advisory Councils).

With Best wishes

John Shepherd

Failings of recent restoration projects

There are many examples from recent major Wetland Restoration sites such as Ditchend, North Slufters, Amberslade & Broomy, Harvestslade, Pondhead, and Wootton where the proposed Principles have NOT been carried out. This has seriously affected the probability that they will ever recover from the completed Works. The damage to these sites needs to be assessed and recommendations for mitigation made and implemented as a priority over new works

The failings include

- No clear objectives have been set, or time frame for improvements defined,
- No attempt made to gather scientific evidence of success,
- No satisfactory monitoring undertaken, either before or after works,
- Evidence which does not support Wetland Restoration proposals has been ignored
- Inadequate EA fish rescues
- Local people have not been adequately consulted
- The presence of historic artificial drainage is used as a key failure criterion in justifying Unfavourable condition of SSSI Units (even when all other attributes Pass). As a consequence, healthy stream habitats are being damaged.
- The application of the Sandford Principle and Precautionary principle not being applied as normal good practice
- The FC and NE claim that a Habitats Regulations Appropriate Assessment is not needed because the works are necessary for the management of the site without any published justification for this.
- The FC routinely claim that restoration of sites judged to be in Unfavourable condition is a Statutory duty, but for HLS funding purposes (e.g. in submissions to the NAO) they claim that it is not.