

BURLEY PARISH COUNCIL

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Your ref: GF/1639/16

Date: 25th November 2016

By email attachment

Sir Amyas Morse
Comptroller & Auditor General
National Audit Office

Dear Sir Amyas,

Review of New Forest Higher Level Stewardship Scheme - Wetland Restoration

We understand from our local MP, Sir Desmond Swayne, that you are undertaking a review of the New Forest Higher Level Stewardship Scheme.

In 2015, Burley Parish Council ('BPC') was involved with a particular Wetland Restoration project known as "Harvestslade Bottom" carried out by the Forestry Commission ('FC') with funding from this HLS Scheme. The manner of the handling of those "Stream Engineering Works", and their resultant effects, gave rise to considerable concern on the part of our councillors and villagers.

Consequently, starting in February of this year, we made enquiries of the Forestry Commission under the Freedom of Information Act/Environmental Information Regulations in order to gain an understanding of the NF Wetland Restoration Programme as it affects this site in Burley village. We have been particularly wishing to establish credible scientific justification for the works and proper evaluation of the claimed results. Thus our enquiry sought information about a range of aspects of the works but the responses have proved to be much less satisfactory than expected.

You will see attached 4 linked copy letters from a long exchange of somewhat complex correspondence between BPC and FC i.e. : Ref.1 – L BPC to FC 15/08/16. Ref.2 – N BPC to FC 26/09/16.
Ref.3 – P BPC to FC 14/10/16 Ref.4 – Q FC to BPC 17/11/16.

We hope you will find this self-explanatory. Naturally, however, we can clarify particular points and/or provide copies of all the correspondence, if required.

I believe you will comprehend from all this the dis-satisfaction we feel with the FC's apparent inability to provide the sort-of information requested of them. Following the very recent rejection of our complaint in this respect we are considering taking the matter to the Information Commissioner.

However, what we think could be of particular interest to you at this stage is the Forestry Commission's responses (or lack thereof) to our question 7 regarding the Cost Effectiveness of these works.

From the copy correspondence provided, you may understand why this council is beginning to wonder whether the FC is really appropriately qualified and equipped (in terms of its own staffing and resources) to undertake the project management and monitoring roles demanded of them on such *Sites of Special Scientific Interest*. This we believe needs to be considered in view of the likelihood that a considerable element of the works is led and decided upon by the contractors when working on site.

Yours faithfully,



RGC Clarke, FRICS
Chairman of Burley Parish Council Planning Committee