

## SLAP BOTTOM WOOD

Our article about Forestry England's controversial 'Felling Application' in the January 2020 Village Magazine ended by questioning whether there was any more that could be done to stop the cutting down of over 200 conifer trees following the grant of the requisite Licence. Well - despite the strident protestations of the neighbours & BPC - tree felling commenced on 4<sup>th</sup> December 2019. But that definitely wasn't the end of this story!

This is Burley, and when Burley folk get the feeling that there is something proposed that just doesn't look right for the village, they have a determined way of questioning the proposers on the justification for their plans – as history shows. So you might have expected FE to have realised there would be more of that to come after we'd seen the National Audit Office's July 2017 review of the NF HLS's Wetland Restoration Programme (as referred to last month) that had also commented: "*the Forestry Commission* (as FE was then known) ***need to improve communications on planned schemes, their impact and remediation of sites with the community***".

You should have seen further news coverage and correspondence on the subject in the local press – even Facebook features. There was also a host of very interesting & helpful observations in Verderer Anthony Pasmore's latest edition of his 'New Forest Notes' headed 'Changing demands on Forest management' in the *New Milton Advertiser* of 3<sup>rd</sup> January (with particularly helpful mention of 'Slap Bottom tree felling') You may then ask isn't it reasonable for any of us to press to find out: -

- a) What is the real purpose & likely effectiveness of clearing out numerous coniferous trees from within the designated Site of Special Scientific Interest at Slap Bottom?
- b) Where can authoritative independently researched science be found that justifies such work? and
- c) Why the established legal authorisation procedure (involving Natural England) can not be seen to have been followed within this part of our National Park's 'Special Area of Conservation'?

Most notably, after discussions with the immediate neighbours & BPC, our local MP, Sir Desmond Swayne, has strongly intervened to help publicise villagers concerns and bring his parliamentary influence to bear. So Sir Desmond was able to persuade the DEFRA Secretary of State to order a "***Pausing***" of the work on 21<sup>st</sup> December, pending a meeting between the FE Deputy Surveyor on the 23<sup>rd</sup> and himself, which was then followed (at his request) by a long, full & frank meeting of BPC Cllrs. Daubeney & Clarke with the DS & staff at Queen's House, Lyndhurst on 9<sup>th</sup> January. It cannot yet be said appropriate answers have been forthcoming in convincing terms but relevant documentation has been requested & promised. Moreover, the DS has agreed to attend a further meeting on site before the end of the month, which will be attended by neighbours and BPC Cllrs. Furthermore, felling remains 'paused' meanwhile.

Of course, it can't be ignored that there are those who feel very differently about coniferous trees in the New Forest; indeed, some who are said to wish for *all* such trees to be removed. The very worthy Friends of the New Forest/NFA have even published a strong article in support of the Slap Bottom felling, describing Scots Pine as "An Invasive Exotic Tree" and saying that this is a "a well-considered and moderate proposal to restore habitats without harmful landscape impacts". That may well be a reasonable perception of many. However, BPC has learnt over the past few years that what may have become ecologically acceptable in general terms can prove to be less than sound in practical terms on specific closer scientific examination. In the case of Slap SP felling, the HLS policy encouraging "Wet Lawn" restoration has yet to be demonstrated (yet alone widely understood) to be effective in the longer term (in such a location) simply by felling trees.

Meanwhile, Forestry England have agreed to reduce this felling area twice already – and the DS has indicated a further reduction remains possible...

BPC/Robert Clarke