

WETLAND RESTORATION You will note within the report of recent Planning Decisions (above) that the Application to restore stream meanders etc. of the Avon Water in the vicinity of Wootton Bridge was granted permission at an NPA Planning Committee hearing on 21st June. It has to be said that the Committee members showed no real interest in discussing the Burley Parish concerns, despite our recent experience of the Harvestslade project.

So one has to wonder whether they have any interest in learning of the very worrying implications of such "Stream Engineering works" for our Forest environment, particularly in those many instances where such works have failed in the past.

The project at Wootton is now due to commence on 18th July and it is suggested that we all closely observe the progress of these works.

Meanwhile, a planning application is being submitted for the very major project now proposed at Latchmore Brook, a particularly popular area of great beauty running down from Bramshaw to Hyde. The 4.5 mile extent of these works will be 2 1/2 times greater than Wootton and require almost 100,000 tonnes of hoggin & clay etc. On this occasion, Natural England/NPA have conceded that an Environmental Impact Assessment should be carried out and the results of that will accompany the application papers.

We continue to ask: what environmental price will we eventually have to pay in the name of "turning back the clock" on what our ancestors did in their conscientious efforts to manage the forest better? Is their legacy of drainage works to the bogs/mires on the Forest really so adverse in its effects on the biodiversity we see today? Or could it be that the science said to be behind the EU funded Wetland Restoration Programme of the HLS Scheme has still yet to be properly examined objectively?

At this stage, it is very good to see in the local press that our local MP has decided to make a stand against the 'stream in-fill plan' at Latchmore (which indeed it is) having personally walked the network of watercourses there earlier this month.

Sir Desmond has seized upon the issues at stake here. So perhaps now at last the HLS board members (i.e. The Forestry Commission, Verderers & NPA) will agree to engage in discussion about their Wetland Restoration Programme and the attendant management concerns. These would seem to be all too apparent from a close reading of the New Forest WR Review prepared for the FC by ecological consultants Jonathan Cox Associates a year ago.

Cllr Robert Clarke