

### Our Conciliatory and Holistic Approach

We acknowledge that Town Common and St Catherine's Hill have been designated SSSI, Ramsar site, SPA and all the rest of it. We even agree that the HCT have been quite woeful in their efforts to date to manage the site and that some thinning is thus required. What we question is the logistic jump from that position to a solution that involves felling and not replacing thousands of trees in the course of one winter (note there are three objections there: the number, the failure to replace and the timescale) whilst ignoring the potential impact of such action upon local residents and the wider public.

We believe that a solution that involves at least a ten year timescale, the phased replacement of pine by broadleaf, the creation of a new mixed habitat of wooded heath that satisfies the needs of ALL existing species (including man, bird, deer and fox) can be found. It is not just we who favour such an approach but also others like Derek Vaines the well-respected and knowledgeable gamekeeper to the Malmesbury Estate. However, to develop such a solution will require a willingness to negotiate on the part of the zealots, the abandonment of the idea that they are going to turn the whole area into yet another wind swept haven for toads and lizards and an end to their practice of attempting to bully us with references to the law.

### Public Anger

We trust you are aware through BBC TV, radio and press coverage, of the peaceful demonstration that took place on St Catherine's Hill on the morning of Sunday 4<sup>th</sup> April 2004 that was supported by the presence of Christopher Chope MP, Councillors David Fox and Sue Spittle from Christchurch Council, representatives of Hurn Parish Council and the West Christchurch Residents Association.

Following that public expression of anger and concern a petition of objection was organised that raised 2173 signatures in three weeks. A copy of that petition was sent to The Forestry Commission in April 2004. A further copy can be provided, if required.

The media coverage also provoked people from various parts of Dorset to contact the West Christchurch Residents Association. The message was always the same. The conversion of much loved woodland into heath land was strongly resented by locals who had tried but had failed to prevent what they saw as a chain saw massacre. People called from Purbeck and from Parley. A specimen letter from Sandford near Wareham, which talks about Gore Heath, is appended.

### Impact Upon The Environment

The preferred solution of English Nature and HCT to the problem as they perceive it is to fell around 85% of the existing trees. This solution is advanced as a means of stopping the spread of and removing the existing intrusive tree cover. If a property developer came forward with such a plan one suspects that English Nature would be crying from the rooftops that a full battery of surveys should be carried out to investigate the impact upon the environment, all of the affected wildlife (not just a selected subset that

callously ignores species that do not fit into the HCT model of existence), the potential for flooding and subsidence, full project management, and so on. Why then, when HCT are making the application, are these requirements either not met or are treated in a completely cavalier manner?

The application is to fell the 15,000 trees in one winter. This “scorched earth” policy actually kills lizards, as has happened on the Purbeck Hills and was reported by environmentalist Dr Tony Phelps on BBC TV on 13<sup>th</sup> April 2004. An arboreal expert advises us that the approach, far from promoting the growth of heather, will create a vast expanse that bracken and bramble will quickly take over (as can readily be seen at sites along Matchams Lane for example). This invasion will have to be controlled annually by the application of chemicals that will in themselves damage the environment. In addition our expert anticipates that trees left unprotected by other trees to a density of only three per hectare will be toppled by the severe gales that we, a seaside location, experience several times each year.

*“It is important that hydrological changes in the area are monitored and any threat to homes is tackled before a problem arises”.*

*Quotation from Hilary Chittenden, Environmental Biologist, Council for the Protection of Rural England*

As residents of Hurn and St Catherine’s Hill we are only too aware that the existing trees through their transpiration protect us from the worse effects of the water that both lies upon and runs off the hill. We believe that the failure of the applicants to provide a hydrological report prepared by an independent professional engineer is tantamount to an admission that there will be problems if this vandalism is allowed to take place.

St Catherine’s Hill is already subject to serious erosion. Signs erected by The Herpetological Conservation Trust say precisely that. Evidence can be seen at various points such as Sandy Lane after a storm (a picture of which was included in our submission to Christchurch Borough Council). The removal of trees from the hill and their replacement by ferns can only make this worse. It is not fanciful to imagine subsidence occurring in any of the roads that lie between the Fairmile Road-Hurn Road continuum and the hill itself.

The hydrology report produced by an employee of HCT would be laughed out of court if a manager of a development company seeking a felling licence had produced a comparable document. We have worldwide experience of flooding and landslip resulting from deforestation. We have local experience of flooding following excessive felling on nearby Sopley Common. Yet somebody with a large vested interest tells us that the situation on St Catherine’s Hill should present no great problem and will be monitored and referred to unnamed experts if and when a problem arises. That really is not satisfactory from a resident’s perspective.

Trees play a vital part in the battle against hydrocarbon, noise and light pollution.

Some years ago there was significant population growth in the areas around Wimborne (Ferndown, Corfe Mullen, etc). Today that growth continues in the area of Verwood. Because of the need for those new people to commute to

jobs in Bournemouth, Christchurch, Highcliffe, Hurn and New Milton, the problems associated with hydrocarbon pollution have been growing in the Hurn and St Catherine's Hill area.

The popularity of Bournemouth and its tourist access via the A338 (that runs immediately adjacent to the area to be felled), when combined with the explosive growth in traffic associated with Bournemouth International Airport at Hurn adds to the hydrocarbon problem. Without the trees it is possible to envisage, given the right atmospheric conditions, a smog problem developing in the area on hot summer days that will spread to the whole of Christchurch and will seriously damage the area as a tourist attraction.

Much the same argument applies to noise. What should be a peaceful habitat for our residents and tourist visitors will be turned into a cacophony of car and airplane noise. The council golf driving range behind the Law Courts and the airport both create a lot of offensive light. The trees protect residents of several areas from their worst effects. West Christchurch Residents Association has received calls from as far away as Bransgore complaining of this effect of the application.

It is almost beyond belief that with global warming threatening the stability of our planetary eco-system that "conservationists" should be proposing a policy that they criticise third world peasants for adopting. In addition to felling, without even a blush, they then propose to wilfully convert acres of precious life giving nutrients into greenhouse gasses in a deliberate attempt to impoverish the soil. No project, however worthy, can justify this policy.

### Social Impact

The social relevance of Town Common and St Catherine's Hill has changed dramatically in the last two hundred years. Heath land evolved as man exploited the natural resources. Once those resources were no longer needed the land began to revert back. Thus "restoration" is of itself an artificial process since heath land no longer plays a vital part in man's social or economic life. St Catherine's Hill has evolved into a valued leisure facility that people come from far and wide to visit. You can't consider taking an area back two hundred years without also considering the parallel changes that have occurred in society. Bournemouth did not exist two hundred years ago. Bournemouth came when the railway came. Nobody, we believe, is suggesting that we bulldoze Bournemouth into the turf because other, larger, social and economic considerations properly apply and over-ride.

The proponents of change should consider that panoramas that once existed are no more, destroyed by urban sprawl. The motorcar and the aeroplane that had not been invented now both enrich and blight our lives. The trees are valuable weapons that support our struggle to live with the noise of the trunk road and the pollution of the airport. We inhabit a different world that requires a different approach to our natural resources, not the mindless restoration of a bygone age.

Once large continuous strips of heath land have been created the chance of arson creating a huge conflagration in an area both bounded by and containing houses has not been evaluated. The need to have extra wardens patrolling to combat this and other forms of vandalism is ignored. There are

insufficient wardens to patrol existing heath land but to English Nature and HCT these problems do not exist. They are so consumed by their narrow immediate target that they completely fail to appreciate the wider picture.

### The Competence of HCT

By any standards what The Herpetological Conservation Trust proposes is a major project. 15,000 trees felled according to a complex pattern of retentions and the debris removed via limited and difficult access, all in the course of one winter, is a tall order. It amounts to 500 trees a week, every week, for thirty weeks. The potential contingent consequences of this act, such as local flooding and subsidence, are highly significant. We are surprised to find that an organisation is even allowed to present a proposal of this magnitude to The Forestry Commission without having to demonstrate its competence to manage it should permission be granted.

Our research indicates that this project differs from previous ones undertaken by The Herpetological Conservation Trust in three ways:

- It involves a large sandstone hill as distinct from the usual lowland areas (such as Parley Common) or gently undulating topography that they are accustomed to addressing. This means that a problem that can be largely ignored elsewhere, erosion by wind and water for example, takes on far greater significance. They have in their proposal singularly failed to demonstrate a competence in this and related areas.
- It involves the very close proximity of a trunk road and large areas of domestic housing inhabited primarily by retired people. Some of these residential areas, those in Burton for example, are already prone to flooding. The effect of smoke and fumes on the elderly can be very serious. The duty of care required in such circumstances is that much higher than is required when out on open lowland heath. Again, they have not addressed this issue and we must assume that is because they have no competence in this area.
- The time scale and size combine to produce a managerial problem of some complexity. We would expect to have been presented with, as a very minimum, a critical path analysis, a resource and skills analysis (for example, is their usual labour source, people doing community service, the correct type of labour for this undertaking), and curriculum vitae for all key personnel. Councillor Yvette Greatrex of Hurn Parish Council did try to investigate this aspect of things at a meeting on 27<sup>th</sup> February 2004. Her conclusions are appended.

Of course it may be that The Herpetological Conservation Trust and their consultant Roger McKinley are highly skilled in these matters. However, in our experience when people have relevant credentials they go out of their way to broadcast that fact. When evidence is not submitted one is entitled to draw the obvious conclusions.

One suspects that a prime driver behind the undue haste to fell so many trees in such a short time is the short-term availability of certain funds. Surely a case if ever there was one of putting the cart before the horse. Yet

none of us have seen an economic report that considers the whole picture. The greatest expense will arise from the need to maintain the heath land once it has been created. That has not been quantified, nor has the availability of trained personnel to undertake the work. No financial provision has been made for flood relief work or measures to prevent landslip. Where is this money to come from: certainly not from Christchurch Borough Council, which is already financially stretched.

### Summary

This is a democracy and the views of local people should be important. We have demonstrated through televised activity and through a petition that there is very strong local feeling against this proposal. From feedback received whilst collecting names for the petition we estimate that over 90% of local inhabitants are opposed

The elevated wooded paths of St Catherine's Hill that lie on the edge of the New Forest National Park are a favourite beauty spot for serious walkers, horse riders, holidaymakers and strolling citizens. The shaded pine scented areas of peaceful tranquillity are a much-prized haven from the slings and arrows of daily life. Please don't let these obsessive extremists ruin that for our children, our grandchildren and indeed for us.

This application to destroy the beauty of St Catherine's Hill goes beyond the destruction of a much-valued local amenity and if allowed would be a crime of monumental proportions.