

**Our objection to the proposed felling by The Herpetological
Conservation Trust of trees on St Catherine's Hill**

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Distribution

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Hurn Parish Council Councillors:

Mrs Y Greatrex, Mrs E Phipps

C Chope MP

M Turvey Chief Executive CBC
N Davies Director of Community Services CBC

The Forestry Commission

Christchurch
... where time is pleasant ...



St Catherine's Hill, Christchurch
As it looks today
April 2004

... unless the Herpetological Conservation Trust are at work.

Introduction

We are writing to reconfirm the fundamental and deep felt objections of the majority of residents of West Christchurch and our neighbour Hurn (the areas that are most directly affected) to the amended application to fell in excess of 15,000 trees on and around St Catherine's Hill. We wish to make it clear that we do not oppose proper, conservative management that involves, for example, the judicious thinning of weak saplings to encourage better growth in the remaining stronger trees. Indeed the past record of The Herpetological Conservation Trust on this score does not impress us.

Public Anger

"After the granting of the application you should consider the need for a public meeting depending upon the likely strength of public feeling. This meeting may not be well attended but is a useful counter-argument against the accusation that the public were not consulted."

Quotation from The Herpetological Conservation Trust Protocol issued to its operatives for guidance in making Licence Applications to fell trees

We trust you are aware through BBC TV, radio and press coverage, of the peaceful demonstration that took place on the hill on the morning of Sunday 4th April 2004 that was supported by the presence of Christopher Chope MP, Councillor David Fox and Councillor Sue Spittle.

After being challenged by The Herpetological Conservation Trust to demonstrate the depth of their feeling and to identify trees they wished to be retained, over and above those already offered, selected local residents marked as being worthy of retention several thousand of the trees that are scheduled to be felled.

The protestors were each assigned an area of trees that coincided with an area defined by the felling map produced by The Herpetological Conservation Trust. Only those areas that local representatives thought to be key areas were included, thus not the entire expanse of Town Common but solely trees on the top of and down the slopes of St Catherine's Hill. In these key areas protesters marked only the strong, healthy birch, oak, rowan, sycamore and pine they required to be kept.

Whilst the ratio varied a little from area to area subsequent investigation indicates that in general in each key area local residents marked ten times the number of trees that The Herpetological Conservation Trust had designated to be retained. Thus for example in each spot where The Herpetological Conservation Trust offered three trees residents had marked approximately thirty trees.

A petition of objection that was organised by local residents at the same time will be presented to the full Council in May 2004. At the time of writing it contained over 1,500 names.

Our objections come under a number of headings.

Validity of the Application

“Our objectives for East Dorset forest design plans is to develop woods that provide opportunities for informal and authorised public recreation, especially in areas on the urban fringe”

Quotation from The Forestry Commission

Far from developing the wood what is proposed will destroy it. It will become a wasteland.

“The area of lowland heath land has declined dramatically since 1800. Factors that have contributed include: conversion to arable land; road construction; and the abandonment of traditional land management such as livestock grazing.”

Quotation from a Hardy’s Egdon Heath Project Information Sheet

We can’t find any evidence that any of the above listed factors apply to St Catherine’s Hill. Indeed, we are not convinced from our study of them that the Bern Convention (Council of Europe) Recommendation 67 or Hardy’s Egdon Heath Project were ever meant to apply to the top of hills like St Catherine’s Hill with all the contingent problems that arise from hydrology, soil erosion, subsidence and wind damage. They repeatedly address the issue of lowland heath, such as is found in the Avon valley, not long standing pine forests on top of hills.

The hill itself has been covered in pines (and has thus NOT been heath land) for at least 120 years (see enclosed extract from “The New Forest: its History and its Scenery” by John R Wise page 126 first published in 1883 and the map “Hurn Road Christchurch 1907” clearly showing St Catherine’s Hill covered in firs).

We believe that this alone is sufficient to reject this over zealous application as it relates to St Catherine’s Hill.

Proposed Timetable

The application is to fell the 15,000 trees in one winter, from September 2004 to March 2005. 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 13th 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. 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.

The removal of such a huge number of trees in such a short time span will also damage access roads such as St Catherine’s Hill Lane (the condition of

which is the responsibility of the Council) and cause serious traffic problems on the very busy and strategically important Fairmile Road.

“Noise and smoke from clearing waste material from the site are a potential cause for concern”.

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

The felling that took place this March 2004 gave rise to a large number of complaints from our residents, many of who are retired and that was but a leaf in the forest compared to what is being proposed here. **The elderly, asthmatics and bronchitics will all be very badly affected.**

Hydrology, Erosion and Subsidence



The picture shows undulating land to the side of Matchams Lane after “conservationists” had finished denuding it of trees, and bracken had taken over. After this piece of desecration Matchams Lane was flooded so badly that it was shut for a week and the Fire Brigade had to use pumping engines to restore the road.

“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 bad storm. 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.

Clearly these aspects of the application have property insurance ramifications for all local residents. We have taken our own independent expert advice and understand that the approach proposed by The Herpetological Conservation Trust would only be satisfactory upon a chalky soil. As St Catherine's Hill is composed of sandstone and shale we are given to understand that the approach suggested will have a significant adverse impact upon the whole area. That includes the potential flooding of the A338 Trunk Road, Hurn Road, Fairmile Road and Stony Lane, Burton.

We are also aware that some years ago the Council considered removing trees at Highcliffe Castle to improve the view out to sea. However, a hydrological report produced at the time indicated that such a course of action would result in serious erosion to the cliffs. As a result the Council decided not to proceed with the felling.

In the light of these issues if the council allows this application without first insisting upon an independent professional hydrological report from The Herpetological Conservation Trust we understand that it could lay itself open to suit for reparation by insurance companies on the grounds of negligence.

Pollution

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. We have received calls from as far away as Bransgore complaining of this effect of the application.

Rare Bird Life

Several “twitchers” have contacted us to tell us that St Catherine’s Hill is famous for some unusual birds. Amongst others they are particularly concerned for the Cross Bill that is normally found in pine covered areas in Scotland. These people are extremely reticent to publicise areas that are important to them. However, faced by the potential level of destruction proposed, they contacted us to lend weight to this objection. Apparently enthusiasts come to Christchurch from all over the country to see these creatures and **they believe that what is proposed will destroy the bird’s habitat and we will not see them here again.**

Project Management

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 27th 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.

The question arises as to whether, in view of the major impact of the proposed works, a scoping study is required.

Destruction of an Amenity



At very best, heath land is a man-made, man-maintained, desert of heather that can't compare with the majesty of the forest. In April 2004 we visited what was once Parley Common, before The Herpetological Conservation Trust desecrated it two years ago, and took the above picture.

We would urge all decisions makers to drive the mile and a half down Barrack Road, Parley (turn off Parley Lane at the Golden Acres Nursery) to the little waterfall and parking space to the left. Enter the ground now

managed by The Herpetological Conservation Trust and walk down the path for about 300 yards. Turn to your left and **view the desolate, windswept, wilderness that was once a much prized and well-used local woodland amenity.**

“(As a result of the proposed felling) the wilderness atmosphere of the Dorset heaths will be largely restored”

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

The elevated wooded paths of St Catherine’s Hill that lie on the edge of the proposed 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.



Summary

This application to destroy the beauty of St Catherine’s Hill, shown above as it looks today, goes beyond the destruction of a much-valued local amenity and if allowed would be a crime of monumental proportions.

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 application itself as it relates to St Catherine's Hill does not appear to meet the criteria laid down for Hardy's Egdon Heath Project

The proposed timetable will kill lizards and create a wilderness of fern and bramble rather than heath land that will require the constant application of chemicals to keep it under control

There will be traffic problems along Fairmile caused by large timber lorries

The elderly, asthmatics and bronchitics, many of whom move to this area to experience the benefit of the pine trees, will be made unwell by the burning as witness the events of March 2004 when the Council felled trees

If the Council fails to insist upon a professional, independent, hydrological report it potentially lays itself open to a string of damaging law suits that will be time consuming and expensive to defend

Hydrocarbon pollution will worsen without the trees and that will damage the area as a tourist attraction

Rare birds will be lost to the area

The whole question of Project Management and competence to act has not been address by The Herpetological Conservation Trust

The size of the proposed project warrants a scoping study

Jim Biggin
General Secretary
West Christchurch Residents Association
18th April 2004

and its habits of roving and feeding by day.* The river has, also, like some of the Norwegian streams, the peculiarity of forming ground ice.† For the botanist, along the hedge banks, the blue and slate-coloured soapwort is growing throughout the summer and autumn, with purple cat-mint and wild clary. In the waste places the thorn-apple shows its white blossoms; whilst red stacks of fern and black turf ricks stand by every cottage door to remind us how close we are to the Forest.

After we pass Bisterne,‡ the road becomes more interesting. To our right rises the range of St. Catherine's Hills, where remain the mounds of watch-towers and the traces of a camp and also of a chapel. Presently we come to Avon-Tyrrel and the blacksmith's forge, built on the spot where Tiri's horse is said to have been shod, and which pays a yearly fine of three pounds and ten shillings to Government.

The actual Ford itself is some little way from the road. Round it stretch meadows, with strong coarse grass and sedgy weeds, branches of the Avon winding here and there, fringed by willows, the main stream flowing out broad and strong, with islands of osiers and rushes, where still breed wild duck and teal, the whole backed by the gloom of St. Catherine's Hills crested by their darker pines. The old road, used now only by the turf-cutters, crossing the former mill-brook, follows the bed of one of the many streams, till, reaching the river at its widest

* See Yarrell's *History of British Fishes*, vol. ii. pp. 399-401.

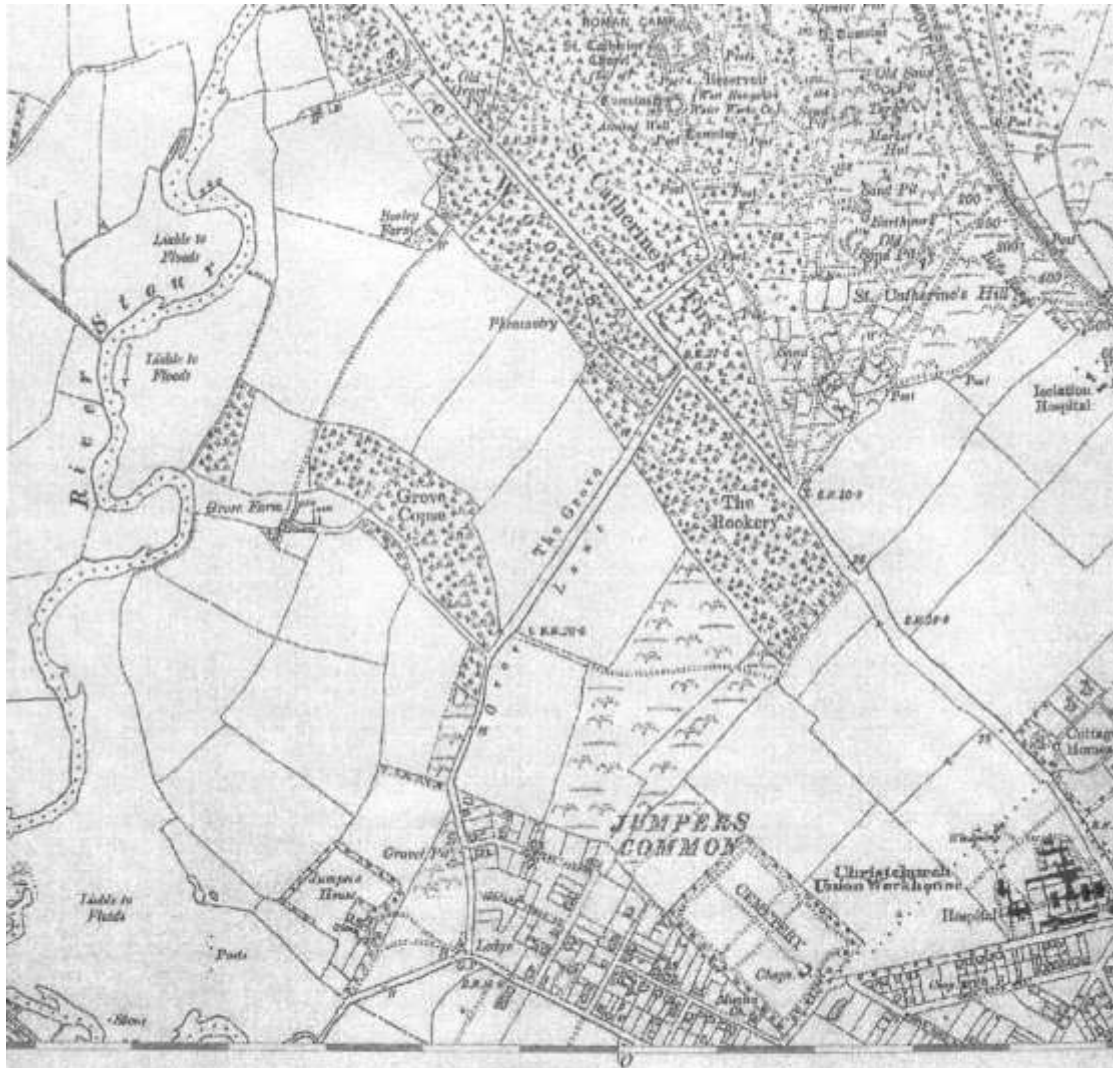
† On this phenomenon, see Lyell's *Antiquity of Man*, p. 139.

‡ The Ordnance map here falls into an error, placing Sandford a mile too far to the south; whilst it omits the neighbouring village of Beckley, the Beceslei of *Domesday*, and "The Great Horse," a clump of firs, so called from its shape, a well-known landmark in the Forest, and to the ships at sea, as also "Darrat," or "Derrig" Lane.

part, it bends across, gaining a leads away past Ramsdown in tradition says the knight rode

The next village we reach i with the liberty of holding neighbouring village is called l of the charter-land, or, as we interesting little cruciform ch dicular, is dedicated to St. and the old manor-house, ne adjoining meadow. On the angel, on a corbel head. Th was covered up some sixty o ceiling; but the corbel figur viol, are still standing. In Edward III. and his queen. from the window in the ne whitewashed over, were onc mystical vine, in green and too, is an aumbrie, whilst th loft still remain. In the s walled up, looked into the two Early Decorated figures, the rood-loft, and traditionall a church at Ripley. In the of the Comptons.

Here, too, the whole of tially, and, I may add, succes snowstorm of whitewash fall days should think that God fathers at least thought not



Hurn Road, Christchurch, 1907