

Brook review welcome

A CAMPAIGN group aiming to stop a meandering stream near Fordingbridge being re-routed have welcomed news that environmental evidence is to be reviewed by Natural England.

The Forestry Commission's project to restore Latchmore Brook, near Hyde, has prompted opposition from the Friends of Latchmore, who say plans to put 10,000 tonnes of gravel in the stream will jeopardise the habitats of dragonflies, plants, birds and fish.

Natural England supports the restoration plan but has said it will be monitoring the site and looking to assess the long-term effects on the environment before the work, which has been postponed until next year due to heavy rainfall.

Rachel Bailey from Natural England said: "These works are fundamental to restoring this nationally important con-

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servaion site which, like many areas across the New Forest, has been adversely affected by artificial drainage progressively damaging its wetland habitats.

"As part of the wide-ranging research we are conducting into this issue across the New Forest we will review the environmental evidence at Latchmore and suggest what longer term monitoring could be established to ensure that the conservation measures in place are as effective as possible."

The Friends of Latchmore want an environment assessment to be carried out before work resumes and the Forestry Commission agreed last month that it would apply for planning permission for the project and undertake no further work until the planning process

is complete.

Professor John Shepherd, chairman of the Friends of Latchmore, said: "As a statutory consultee, when the application for planning permission for the project is considered, Natural England is in a unique position to ensure that this is done.

"We hope this means the benefits claimed for the project will have to be weighed against the damage done and the cost of the engineering work involved, and that it will not be approved unless a net benefit can be demonstrated."

The Forestry Commission says the £250,000 scheme, which will restore the natural course of the artificially straightened brook, needs to be carried out restore the hydrological balance of the area and prevent further erosion and loss of habitat.