

Friends of Latchmore

Press Release (22 July 2012)

Latchmore works challenged again at the Verderers' Court

The Friends of Latchmore are continuing to challenge the Forestry Commission's plans to carry out extensive and damaging work on the Latchmore Brook, near Fordingbridge. At last week's Verderers' Court, three presentments were made identifying further important concerns about the works, in this highly protected area.

Ailsa Farrand, a local commoner, stated that unacceptable damage had already been done by felling a large number of trees, destroying the nesting sites of birds, and removing natural habitat.

Chartered engineer Dai Morgan urged the Forestry Commission to take advantage of the postponement to re-examine the network of tributaries that feed into Latchmore. He explained that Latchmore is fed by about 20 tributaries upstream, many of which were man-made to drain the land for trees, and allow wood to be cut and brought out of the Forest. These include straight channels, culverts under the forest tracks, and deep drains. It is these extensive man-made channels in the Inclosures which cause the brook to flood so quickly every time it rains heavily, by channeling most of the ground-water into the Brook in a short space of time. These drains also reduce the catchment area's ability to hold water and release it slowly during long periods without rain.

Another presentment by Michael Mayes, identified the likely impact of "restoring" the Latchmore Brook without also dealing with the drainage of the upstream Inclosures. The new meandering route would only have a capacity of about 15% of the existing channel. Heavy rains would result in hundreds of thousands of cubic metres of water flooding the ground outside the Alderhill Inclosure. This would produce depths of water on the Latchmore Brook not seen for 50 years or more. The large quantities of water would then have to re-enter the channel near Ogdens causing increased flooding at this point.

The only reason that the system now copes with the enormous quantities of water coming from Alderhill **is because it has a relatively efficient channel**. Failing to invest in work on the upstream catchment **first** is likely to have unintended consequences, especially as the reasons for deepening the existing channel in the first place probably included the effects of the draining of the Inclosures.

The Friends of Latchmore are pleased to hear that the Forestry Commission has decided to defer work on the main stream of the Latchmore Brook until next year. However, this is only a temporary respite, as none of the fundamental problems with

the project have been addressed, and it is still intended to continue with work on the mires “subject to favourable weather conditions”.

Professor John Shepherd, chair of the Friends of Latchmore, said “It is ironic that a project designed to make the stream flood more frequently should be delayed because it is flooding too much! However, this gives the Forestry Commission and its partners more time to do a proper assessment of both the likely damage and the possible benefits of the project. We believe that they should do that before trying to start work on the mires at Thompson’s Castle too. In any case it would be madness to try to move heavy machinery into these areas with the ground saturated as it is this year.”

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More Information

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