Village vote call over wetland row

RESIDENTS of Hyde and the surrounding villages could be asked to take part in a local referendum into a controversial £250,000 scheme to restore wetland habitat at Latchmore, near Fordingbridge.

The Forestry Commission-led project has been funded by cash from the Higher Level Stewardship Scheme and will ultimately see the artificially straightened stream returned to its natural meandering course to improve grazing.

The scheme was initially supported by Hyde Parish Council, but pressure is mounting for councillors to rethink their view.

Opponents of the project claim it is a waste of money and the heavy vehicles needed to transport material will congest country roads and could damage people's homes.

Campaign group the Friends' of Latchmore has now been formed and representatives attended the most recent meeting of the parish council and called for a poll to decide the issue.

During the meeting Friends chairman Professor John Shepherd said all work should stop until a full site-specific environmental impact study had been carried out.

Another resident claimed the proposed movement of 10,000 tonnes of imported grave would cause major damage to roads, verges and old dwellings including cob cottages without foundations.

Concerns were also raised about the danger these 20-tonne trucks would pose to commoners' ponies and cattle, and the felling of trees at the site.

Prof. Shepherd said: "Residents felt that this was probably one of the most important issues to have arisen in the parish for some time, and that there had been insufficient attention to the many concerns expressed at previous meetings and during and after the Forestry Commission walk in November.

"It was suggested that a referendum should be held to establish residents' views on the scheme. The parish clerk explained that it was possible to hold a parish poll, and that the council could investigate the procedure."

The parish council has also agreed to write to the Forestry Commission asking for more details on the project.