

# Parish council refuses calls to oppose £250k stream project

**HYDE parish councillors have refused to withdraw their support for a controversial £250,000 wetland restoration scheme despite growing pressure from a local campaign group.**

The Forestry Commission-led project at Latchmore Brook, near Fordingbridge, was discussed during an extraordinary meeting of the council on Tuesday.

It will ultimately see the artificially straightened stream returned to its natural meandering course in a bid to improve grazing and safeguard the landscape and archaeological features.

However, a 60-strong opposition group called 'The Friends of

Latchmore' are urging the FC to undertake further investigations before the work is continued, claiming it will disturb wildlife, destroy habitats and waste public money.

The group had asked Hyde Parish Council to conduct a local referendum to gauge wider public feeling on the project, but later agreed to attend a meeting with the authority instead.

Speaking after the meeting, parish clerk Margaret Matthews said the council had discussed the proposed work at Latchmore on 10 separate occasions in the last 18 months, as well as attending site visits and briefings with the FC.

She added: "Councillors have acknowledged that some residents are uneasy about the works but decided not to oppose the project as they have respect for the knowledge and experience of the people and organisations proposing it, having seen similar projects completed in other parts of the Forest, and remember Latchmore as it used to be and will be again once restored.

"They know that the Friends of Latchmore have made a case to the Forestry Commission that there should be a specific environmental impact assessment for this project and, if such a survey is produced they will, of course, study it before

deciding whether to continue their support."

Professor John Shepherd, chair of the Friends of Latchmore, said: "These major 'restoration' works would be very damaging and have little or no benefit.

"We are continuing our action to get the project suspended until a proper environmental impact assessment has been carried out, and until our many questions have been adequately answered by the Forestry Commission. We shall also continue to push the council on this issue, and may still request a referendum in future."