

# Residents fight bid to 'restore' stream

**A 100-STRONG campaign group is calling on the Forestry Commission to suspend a controversial project to "restore" Latchmore Brook, near Fordingbridge.**

The recently formed Friends of Latchmore group held its first public meeting on Wednesday in last week, attended by Forestry Commission staff, representatives from Natural England, two verderers and over 100 members of the public.

The group is opposed to a £250,000 scheme to return the artificially straightened stream to its natural wandering course to improve grazing and drainage.

Group chairman Prof. John Shepherd said: "We are very worried about the likely impacts on the plants and animals of this much-loved, peaceful and beautiful area, especially kingfishers and two rare species of damselfly."

The work will be undertaken by the Forestry Commission as part of a wider programme of wetland restoration which will involve tree felling and dumping up to 10,000 tonnes of imported gravel into the present stream to fill it in.

Prof. Shepherd added: "This is a badly planned scheme which will do a lot of damage and probably won't work.

"Nobody has done any proper assessment of the likely effects on the environment, or the balance of risks and possible benefits.

"We have nothing against wetland restoration but this scheme makes no sense. It is a beautiful area with lots of plants and birds, and at least two rare species of damselfly, which are exquisite."

The meeting at Hyde village hall was aimed at identifying concerns and developing an action plan. Attendees were shown a photographic presentation of other sites in the Forest which have been restored by the Forestry Commission in recent months.

Prof. Shepherd explained: "The most significant problem was that no environmental impact assessment, specific to the work at Latchmore, had been carried out.

"There was widespread concern that such major work in a highly sensitive and protected area was

being planned without a proper appraisal of its risks and benefits."

Forestry Commission representatives were given an opportunity to comment on the issues raised, and answered questions.

However, a vote showed a vast majority still had serious concerns about the work and resolved to oppose the scheme.

A newly formed steering group has now written to the Forestry Commission and the other project partners asking for the project to be suspended until a full environmental impact assessment has been carried out.

A Forestry Commission spokesperson said: "The Forestry Commission has carried out a generic environmental impact assessment

for stream restoration in the New Forest.

"Individual site assessments are then undertaken for each restoration site, a practice which has been successfully followed for the past 10 years.

"We have consulted widely regarding works at this site, and have the full support of all environmental partners, including both statutory and non-statutory bodies as well as the parish council.

"We understand that there remains some local concern and we are working hard to provide reassurances via information and through maintaining open communications."

(See New Forest Notes page 6)