Verderers pledge support for Forest stream project

THE verderers have pledged their impact assessment. continued support for a controversial Forestry Commission-led project to restore the natural course of a stream despite opposition from

The £250,000 project at Latchmore Brook near Fordingbridge will see the artificially straightened brook returned to its natural meandering course in a bid to improve grazing and safeguard the landscape and archaeological features.

It is also supported by the national park authority, the Commoners Defence Association and Hyde Parish Council. However, a 100-strong campaign group called the Friends of Latchmore (FoL) claims it will spoil the area and endanger wildlife.

FoL spokesperson and leading environmental research professor John Shepherd has warned they could take their fight to European authorities in a bid to get work suspended pending a full environmental

At last week's Verderers' Court presentments were made by several other concerned locals, including commoner and archaeologist Margaret Bunyard.

She said the area had a rich cultural heritage dating from the Bronze Age to the Second World War and was fearful that bulldozers could destroy archaeological sites that had not yet been properly recorded.

When the matter was discussed later by verderers in committee they pledged their ongoing support, but members asked the FC for assurances that the archaeology of the site would be protected.

The commission also agreed that if additional surveys, advice and guidance were necessary, these would be obtained before the project commenced.

During the closed meeting, Anthony Pasmore, who is a verderer and leading member of the New Forest History and Archaeology

Group (NFHAG) was also asked to suggest an expert who could liaise with the NFHAG to ensure full and accurate surveys were carried out.

Mr Pasmore asked that his strong ongoing opposition to the project be recorded.

Members also sought assurances that fish, birds and rare dragonflies would be protected following a presentment from Fish Veterinary Society secretary Fiona MacDonald.

She had claimed the work could threaten sea trout returning to spawn in the stream because shallower water, which could soar to 25°, would be lethal to fish.

The verderers said: "The court stipulated that the legislation governing the protection of fish, birds and odonata (dragonflies and other insects) must also be complied with in full. The Forestry Commission had no problem in confirming that this will be done."