

Stop Latchmore

restoration,

commoner

urges

verderers

A FORDINGBRIDGE commoner has urged New Forest verderers to withdraw consent for a controversial project by the Forestry Commission to restore Latchmore Brook.

In a presentment made at last week's Verderers' Court, Tony Bull said the £250,000 scheme to improve grazing and drainage by returning the artificially straightened stream near Fordingbridge to its natural wandering course will pose a risk to livestock.

The work, due to start next month, will involve tree felling and dumping up to 10,000 tonnes of imported gravel into the stream to fill it in.

As recently reported in the 'A&T', the 100-strong campaign group Friends of Latchmore has already called on the Forestry Commission (FC) to suspend the work until further environmental impact assessments are carried out, to little avail.

Mr Bull, of Furzehill, told verderers the proposed route for transporting materials between Mockbeggar near Ringwood and Latchmore Brook ran

alongside 10 commoners' holdings.

"They turn out ponies, cattle and donkeys, and as well as others elsewhere whose stock also use the roadside grazing, we're talking about more than 200 animals," he said.

"It is along these Forest lanes that heavy lorries would transport the gravel, heather and clay to fill in the existing stream.

"With between 800 to 1,000 trips over a six-week period, this amounts to 40 extra vehicle movements per day on narrow single track lanes in poor condition — this with stock trying to graze."

He said this time of year ponies are often in the middle of the road and gathering in large numbers seeking shade and shelter from the flies.

"This causes enough chaos with the everyday traffic and holidaying cyclists as it is," he said. "It is also at this time that there will be foals about, and the stallion may well be rounding up his mares as well."

Mr Bull said it had become apparent at recent public meetings that no proper assessment had been carried out, and no appreciation of

the large numbers of visitors, vehicles and commoners' stock using most of the route.

"Commoners have been told, by a member of this court no less, and I quote, 'They might find it an unpalatable fact, but they are being subsidised by conservation interests and should reflect this in their attitude to restoration works'.

"A nasty attempt at coercion and not at all what we expect from any verderer, but perhaps the promise of possible extra grazing may be the

reason why the Commoners' Defence Association also overlooked the need to consider the impact of the scheme on the surrounding environment.

"Whether or not they receive subsidies of any sort, commoners will be concerned about the welfare of their animals, and have every right to express that concern."

The verderers will consider the request and address the issue at the next court.