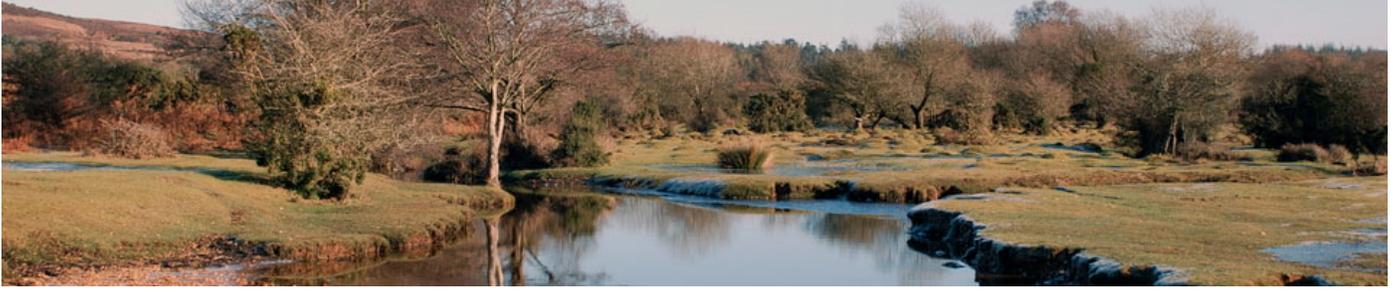


# *Friends of Latchmore*



Press Release: 28 May 2012

## **Local action group starts legal challenge to Latchmore Brook “restoration” project**

The Friends of Latchmore have started the process for a Judicial Review of the Forestry Commission’s decision to carry out “restoration” work on the Latchmore Brook, without first doing any site-specific environmental assessments. The Friends claim that the work, due to resume in July, will be extremely damaging and is unlikely to have any benefits. It involves importing 10 000 tonnes of gravel to fill in much of the existing stream, to relocate it in an alternative course just a few yards away, at a cost of about £250 000.

In a formal letter of intent to the partners in the project, the Friends say that proper site-specific assessments are needed because the New Forest is a highly protected and environmentally sensitive area under UK and EU legislation. All of this legislation imposes specific requirements, and also a general duty of care, to preserve and protect the general environment, habitats, flora and fauna of such protected areas. This includes a duty to ensure that activities undertaken within such areas are not significantly or unnecessarily damaging. The Forestry Commission and its partners have until 15 June to respond.

Professor John Shepherd, chair of the Friends of Latchmore, said “If the partners in the HLS scheme are prepared to suspend the work planned for this summer on the Latchmore Brook, so that the issues that we have raised can be properly investigated, the Friends will be happy to take part in discussions with independent experts to resolve these issues. Otherwise we now have no alternative to taking legal action”

There was also a heated debate at the Annual Parish Meeting of Hyde Parish Council on 25 May over the Council’s support for the Latchmore Brook project, which had been given without consultation with the electorate. After a call from the floor for a vote on the issue, those present voted by an overwhelming majority of 35 to 3 in favour of the motion **“that the Council should now formally suspend its support for the project until all the necessary assessments have been satisfactorily completed and published, and satisfactory answers have been received to all the questions asked.”**

It is not yet known how the Council intends to respond to this clear mandate from its electorate. However, Professor Shepherd, who had proposed the motion, said “This issue is important and it is now very urgent, since work may begin again in July. I hope that the Council will not wait until its next meeting on 28 June to resolve the matter, or rely on the non-binding status of the resolution.”

**Contacts and additional information: see next page**

**Contacts:** Fiona Macdonald 01 425 485283  
Beryl Bull 01 425 653328  
Margaret Bunyard 01 425 650577  
Professor John Shepherd 07 879 494420 (not available 27-30 May)

## **Background Information**

The **Friends of Latchmore** is an action group of residents based around the village of Hyde (Hampshire) which has been formed to protect the delightful environment of the Latchmore Brook from the very damaging “restoration” works planned by the Forestry Commission. The group is chaired by Professor John Shepherd CBE FRS. For more information see [www.friendsoflatchmore.org](http://www.friendsoflatchmore.org)

The Latchmore valley is a much loved and very popular part of the New Forest, and it lies within the New Forest highly protected area, which is a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), and EU designated as a Special Protected Area (SPA) under the EU Birds Directive, and Special Area for Conservation (SAC) under the EU Habitats Directive. It is also a designated wetland site of international importance under the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands.

The Latchmore stream restoration project is one of a number of wetland restoration projects being undertaken by the Forestry Commission as part of the New Forest Higher Level Stewardship Scheme, see <http://www.hlsnewforest.org.uk>

The Friends have repeatedly asked for detailed reports and documentation of any site specific investigations, which the HLS partners have been unwilling or unable to produce, as well as answers to 25 questions put to them in February which they have failed to provide, and an assurance that they would suspend further work (due to be resumed in July) which they have repeatedly refused.