

Friends of Latchmore

Press Release

Villagers Fight for Damsels in Distress

The Friends of Latchmore are campaigning to stop so-called “restoration” work in a New Forest valley, at the Latchmore Brook, near Fordingbridge, Hampshire. They 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 damsel-fly (which are like beautiful dragonflies).

The work planned by the Forestry Commission as part of a New Forest-wide programme of wetland restoration, aims to move a kilometre of the stream to its position of 50 years ago (when drainage was undertaken to improve the grazing for Commoners’ ponies), involving dumping up to 10 000 tonnes of imported gravel into the present stream-bed to fill it in.

Professor John Shepherd, Chair of the newly formed group said

“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 damsel-fly, which are exquisite.”

Contacts

Professor John Shepherd, 01425-652508, john@blissford.net

Meg Mulcahy, 01425-652387, meg@blissford.net

Detail

The Friends of Latchmore held a meeting at Hyde War Memorial Village Hall on Wednesday 22 February, which was attended by over a hundred local people, staff of the Forestry Commission, Natural England and two Verderers.

The aim of the meeting was to inform people about the scheme and the possible issues arising from it, to identify people's concerns, and to develop an action plan.

During the meeting many concerns about the project were discussed, and illustrated with photographic evidence from similar sites around the Forest, showing visible signs of failure. 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 various issues raised, and answered further questions. However a unanimous show of hands showed that those present were not satisfied by the answers provided, and still had serious concerns about the work going ahead. The meeting then resolved to oppose the scheme.

A letter has subsequently been sent to the Forestry Commission and the other project partners asking that work on the project be suspended, at least until a proper Environmental Impact Assessment has been carried out and published.

Background Information

Website: <http://sites.google.com/site/friendsolatchmore/home>

[This has photographs of the area and the damsel-flies]

The damsel-fly species are the Scarce Blue-tailed Damsel and the Southern Damsel (which is nationally scarce and protected): see

<http://british-dragonflies.org.uk/content/uk-species>

The scheme is part of the New Forest Higher Level Stewardship Scheme, see <http://www.hlsnewforest.org.uk/> in which the partners are the New Forest Verderers, the Forestry Commission and the New Forest National Park Authority.