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# Euro threat over stream project

**OPPONENTS of a controversial project to restore the natural course of a New Forest stream have threatened to take their fight to European authorities unless work is suspended immediately.**

John Shepherd, a leading research professor at the University of Southampton, urged verderers to avoid "a storm of public opposition" by demanding a full environmental impact assessment into work at Latchmore Brook near Fordingbridge.

He claimed the plans to "dump" 10,000 tonnes of imported gravel at the Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) was nothing short of "brute force and wilful ignorance".

The £250,000 Forestry Commission-led project is supported by the national park authority, the Commoners' Defence Association and the verderers, who all say it will improve grazing for livestock and result in major scrub removal.

However, speaking at a meeting of the Verderers' Court on Wednesday, Prof. Shepherd, who heads the 100-strong Friends of Latchmore campaign group, said the decision to go ahead with the work was based on "unsupported assertions and misrepresented information".

He added: "We object to this project mainly because it is not at all clear what is actually wrong with the stream at present, nor whether or not the proposed reconstruction

works will actually help to fix any problems that may exist.

"As a scientist and as a citizen I am horrified that this could happen in such a beautiful and highly protected place."

Prof. Shepherd went on to say the ecological assessment of the stream as "unfavourable" was "dubious and unverifiable" because the ecological survey records to justify that claim were now missing.

"Nobody can say what the precise ecological objectives of the work to be undertaken are," he said. "For example which habitats and species are intended to benefit, nor where, nor to what extent.

"There is no plan to monitor the present or the future status of the stream, so it will never be possible to demonstrate whether or not the objectives have been achieved."

Prof. Shepherd warned the campaign group would be referring the matter to national and European authorities, and claimed that continuation of work without a full environmental impact assessment was a violation of DEFRA guidelines relating to the management of SSSIs.

He added: "It is inevitable that any attempt to resume the works this summer will result in a major and very public dispute that will create extremely bad publicity for all the organisations involved. This could still be avoided if the Court of

Verderers and its ... partners were to suspend the project now."

Former Forestry Commission employee John Fryer (74) also made a presentment to the verderers, describing the Latchmore project as "horrifying" and "disastrous".

He said: "Latchmore Brook is not a deep man-made drain, as the Forestry Commission likes to portray it, but a gently meandering stream, which overflows onto its floodplain during wet periods, as it should, and which has been plainly shown recently. The thought of this area being wrecked is terrible for me."

Mr Fryer said many local residents feared the scheme posed serious risk to the wildlife habitat of the area, especially because of the required tree felling and movements of heavy machinery.

He added: "Sea trout come up from the Avon to spawn in the existing stream in early summer. Can you or the other bodies guarantee that this will continue if this scheme goes ahead?"

"As custodians of the open Forest, I ask you to use the powers invested in you to stop this ill-conceived scheme, which I, and very many others believe will be a disaster, destroying the Latchmore habitat for decades, if not forever."