

(Good Morning)

Tony Bull, Commoner, with my wife, Beryl, turning out ponies from our holding at Furzehill.

My presentment today is about the Latchmore Brook Restoration Project, in the North West of the forest.

I am asking the court to consider withdrawing its consent to this project, because of the very strong possibility of danger to depastured stock, if the most likely of the proposed vehicle routes, Mockbeggar to Latchmore Brook, becomes the accepted route.

There are 12 commoners with holdings along this route, who turn out ponies and/or cattle and donkeys, as well as others whose stock also use the roadside grazing. Altogether an estimated 250 animals.

It is along these little Forest lanes that large numbers of heavy lorries will transport the 10,000 tons of gravel, heather and clay to fill in the existing stream. 800 to 1000 trips over a six week period, one way fully loaded and then empty on the return journey, this will amount to 40 extra vehicle movements a day on a narrow single track lane with no room for overtaking. This with ponies, cattle and donkeys trying to graze.

We are told that the work will commence in June and that the gravel, etc, will be moved in the six-week period leading up to this, in April and May.

This is the time of year when the ponies start gathering in large numbers seeking shade and shelter from the flies. Very often they are right in the middle of the road, especially at South Gorley and Furze Hill. This causes enough chaos with the everyday traffic and holidaying cyclists as it is, without the 40 or so daily additional vehicle movements for the Latchmore Restoration. It is also at this time, of course, that the stallion will be chasing the mares around, often on the roads, and there will also be foals about.

The commoners have been told - 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'. But 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.

There has clearly been no proper assessment on this work - a fact that has become obvious at recent public meetings about the project - and no appreciation of the large numbers of visitors, vehicles and commoners' stock along most of this route which is a very poor conditioned single track lane.

The safety of commoners' animals, as well as that of the public, should be a prime concern when agreeing to this kind of project, which in my opinion, if no clear decision about the route had been made, should never have been given the approval to go ahead.