

Residents and council oppose

FC stream work

FORESTRY Commission proposals to redirect a stream were slated at a public meeting in Burley attended by around 40 residents.

Householders living near the watercourse raised fears over the suggested phased programme to restore wetland at Harvestslade Bottom in Burley, which is on open forest and accessed by riders, walkers and commoners.

It is also within the New Forest Special Area of Conservation and Site of Special Scientific Interest.

They claimed not enough was known about the impact further downstream, and said similar local schemes had failed. They also expressed concern about the effect on birds, fish and trees, and raised the issue of potential flooding.

Parish councillor Robert Clarke pointed out an environmental impact assessment had not been carried out — a decision he said was challenged by lawyers working on behalf of Friends of Latchmore, who

were opposing similar proposals in the Fordingbridge area.

The Forestry Commission (FC) said the stream became eroded due to works to straighten, deepen and widen it during the 1850s to 1960s, which were intended to improve conditions for forestry and grazing.

The latest proposals would reroute it by putting in meanders, and also raised its level.

New clay plugs would redirect the water, redundant drainage areas would be filled in and a gravel stock crossing would be created.

Three FC experts and two consultants attended the planning meeting held especially to discuss the move, and gave a 30-minute presentation about the general benefits of such schemes followed by an overview of their proposals.

They claim the works would make the stream easier for horses to navigate, reduce the flood risk, slow the flow of water and stabilise the site.

Senior ecologist Marianne Bergin

said the FC was legally obliged to carry out the works because Harvestslade Bottom had been identified as in a poor state. She said they could be taken to court if improvements were not made.

The works are being funded through the Verderers' Higher Level Stewardship scheme (HLS), which has been given a £16m EU grant for a number of projects to be carried out over 10 years.

Residents living further down the watercourse raised fears the changes would affect their land and questioned why no research had been carried out.

One woman said: "I'm not convinced there is a case to do it at all, but if there is a case I want to know the knock-on effects downstream."

But FC representatives replied there was no need to look at land outside the area in question as only the speed of water would change, not the amount. They said data from

previous schemes shows there would be no negative impact.

However, householders claimed a scheme at Ditchend in Fordingbridge had not gone to plan.

Parish council chairman Coun. Philip Daubeney said the Friends of Latchmore had put together a "dossier of failings" on what had been done there.

Coun. Clarke added: "I think you are rather under touting how things look at the moment. It's no longer a stream, I was amazed, there's no scope for any water to run."

"I don't see how you can expect us to support you with this track record, which I don't think is resolved. For that reason I think this council should be reluctant to support you."

As the speed of the stream would be reduced, one resident asked about the effect on sea trout which need fast flowing water.

She said: "I just think it works very well now and I don't see why it's

changing. It seems to be working well for the species that are using it."

She was told there would be other sections along the course suitable for fish, and work would be done at a time when they were not migrating. If any were found, they would be rescued.

A resident spoke of rumours ancient trees were to be cut down, but he was assured this was not the case.

The meeting also heard there would be less risk of flooding during extreme weather conditions.

Another resident said: "Water courses are a flood system. How do we know the courses that will be created will be the right thing for the job? Why are we spending so much time, money and effort in changing them?"

Coun. Clarke told residents the plans include using 4,700 tonnes of hoggin, which is a mixture of clay, gravel and sand.

It would be transported to the A31 in lorries arriving 12 times a day over four weeks, Ms Bergin said. It would then be moved to smaller lorries specifically designed not to damage the land.

The application was first submitted to the New Forest National Park Authority on July 23rd, and the deadline for comments ended on August 29th.

However, Coun. Daubeney said he was not made aware of this, and

another resident claimed one of the green notices did not appear until three days before the 21-day consultation period had ended.

Mr Avery assured the meeting notices had been put up and details advertised online, but Coun. Daubeney replied: "I didn't know myself — and I should know."

Following previous criticism, the NPA had already announced it would continue to accept comments on the application until it goes before its planning committee.

Coun. Jane Kendall said she could not support the plans at present but would be more willing once the scheme at Ditchend had been sorted out, adding she still had reservations over the impact of construction.

Coun. Peter Russell agreed: "I could support it with a delay because I'm not convinced that the previous problems they have in another area have been resolved adequately."

Addressing the FC officers, Coun. Daubeney said: "I don't think you have satisfied the village on down stream impacts, ecology or water flows. This is all about democracy at its lowest level."

Councillors cast a majority vote against the plans.

To view the application, go to www.newforestnpa.gov.uk/viewplan ningapplications and search case number 14/00611 in the 'application quick search' box.