

FC slated over nesting birds' welfare during stream project

THE Forestry Commission has been accused of failing to consider nesting birds during a recent stream restoration project near Linwood.

The scheme to replace a 350m length of artificially straightened watercourse through Amberslade Bottom and Broomy Inclosure with a 465m meandering stream by raising the ground level with gravel, was completed in June after planning permission was granted by the national park authority in March.

However, speaking at a recent meeting of the Verderers' Court, commoner Beryl Bull claimed the Forestry Commission had ignored conditions set out in the planning application.

She stormed: "It was not only peak nesting time for birds when work began, but it was raining at the time. The planning application clearly stated that work should be suspended when the ground was wet or it was raining.

"The huge diggers were carting the enormous amounts of material along the once small forest tracks to where great mounds of clay, heather bales and large stones were being stored, thus turning the tracks into a deep, wide, muddy mess, causing unnecessary disturbance to the birds, wildlife and their habitat.

"It's extraordinary how the Forestry Commission ignored the fact that there is conservation legislation to protect the bird breeding season."

Mrs Bull told the court the FC had put up a notice about the work at Broomy Inclosure. These stated that over the last 200 years the streams had been straightened and deepened to create a network of artificial drains.

"The notice also said it was restoring this stream to its natural course through Broomy Inclosure and that the natural vegetation would be replaced so it could recover as quickly as possible," she said.

"I can't imagine that in former days, the small meandering stream that has actually been filled right to ground level, topped with tennis ball size stones, was in anything like the dreadful condition it has now been left."

Mrs Bull claimed the stream now resembled a "hideous gravel track" through the woods and likened the access tracks to a Grand Prix racing circuit.

She continued: "The woods are usually beautiful around this time of year. Full of birdsong, bluebells and other wild flowers.

"The stream hosted wagtails - seen on numerous occasions - and kingfishers were also seen along this stretch of water as well as a large variety of other birds foraging in and around the stream. This has all been destroyed by these works.

"The losers are the birds, wildlife, flora and fauna and the local people who now have to live with the devastation."

A Forestry Commission spokesperson said the straightening, deepening and widening of the stream at Amberslade Bottom and Broomy Inclosure between 1850 and 1960 had resulted in increased erosion of surrounding grassland and woodland habitats.

She continued: "The Forestry Commission has a legal responsibility to restore and maintain these habitats. The work took four weeks and was completed on June 11th.

"It replaced the large, actively eroding drain with restored meanders linked together with stretches of bed level raising, to improve the stream's interaction with its floodplain.

"Planning permission was granted, including a condition that prior to commencement the area was checked by a suitably qualified and licensed surveyor for the presence of active bird nests. In addition to this precaution, that all felling work was done during the winter months to avoid the bird breeding season."