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MP: Plan to redirect stream is vandalism

By Karen Bate

PLANS to restore wetland at a Fordingbridge beauty spot, sparking outrage among wildlife experts and walkers, have been formalised.

New Forest West MP Sir Desmond Swayne claims the Forestry Commission's application to fill-in and redirect the stream at Latchmore Brook as part of the EU-funded Higher Level Stewardship Scheme, could be described as "vandalism".

He said: "An intervention on such a scale along miles of stream will have major impacts on the whole catchment. Vandalism is the word that comes to my mind."

Veterinary surgeon Dr Fiona Macdonald claims the design of wetland restoration has serious implications for fish.

She said: "Domestic animals including fish enjoy protection under the Animal Welfare Act and must be kept in conditions appropriate to their needs - what a pity this is not enjoyed by their wild relatives in the New Forest."

Visitor Diana Mouzakitis said: "Apart from the destruction of the lovely stream I am very concerned about the massive tonnage of hoggin (sand and gravel) to fill in the present path of the stream."

"It is very important that this



Latchmore Brook, near Fordingbridge

thoughtless and destructive proposal is not granted."

Sandy Gatward said: "The Forestry Commission must be aware of the value of such rare ancient and ornamental woodland and, of course, habitat for numerous endangered species. The removal of many trees will no doubt result in flooding, affecting the properties

actually situated near to these streams and brooks."

"Removing trees has a detrimental effect on the land which will take many years to put right."

Margaret and Derek Bunyard from Ogdens said: "All this heavy-handed intervention is apparently necessary to make the stream more 'natural', costing thousands

of pounds. Surely this money could be better spent?"

Latchmore Brook was artificially deepened and widened in the mid-19th and early 20th century, to improve grazing and extend the area where trees could grow inside the Inclosures.

However, Natural England claimed this action affected the wetland ecology, and identified the area as being in an 'unfavourable condition'.

The Forestry Commission claims the proposed works will protect the Special Area of Conservation (SAC) and Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) for future generations.

Bruce Rothnie, deputy surveyor at the Forestry Commission, said: "Natural England has identified that the Latchmore Brook in particular is under threat as a result of past drainage work."

"It's our moral and legal responsibility to maintain and restore habitats such as this by reinstating the natural processes wherever possible. We can prevent further damage and create an ecosystem that is more robust, and also help to protect the Forest's unique biodiversity."

Views can be logged for the next 16 weeks on the National Park Authority planning portal. The application number is 16/00571.