

# 'Vandalism' to change stream's character

## MP hits out at FC's plan to bring back wetland

BY BEN CRAIG

PLANS to return a popular New Forest river to its original wetland has been attacked by a local MP as "vandalism".

Sir Desmond Swayne, (inset, right), the member for New Forest West, hit out at Forestry Commission proposals to turn the clock back along Latchmore Brook (pictured), near Hyde, by restoring its former boggy habitat of international importance.

The work will reverse the early 20th century deepening of the stream by raising the level of the river bed as well as reinstating meanders, removing vegetation and installing debris dams. Fifteen walker and vehicle fords will also be replaced along the restored watercourse.

Writing on his website, Sir Desmond described the four miles of stream as an "iconic scene" that draws many visitors. He warned against "state funded vandals" changing the beauty spot's present character.

He said: "This is a truly remarkable landscape that is typical of the New Forest and which needs protecting and conserving. Van-

dalism is the word that comes to my mind.

"I support any move to stop these proposals, there are plenty of better ways to spend the money."

The Forestry Commission, which has submitted the plans for permission from the national park authority, insists the work is required to protect a habitat that runs through a series of Sites of Special Scientific Interest.

Slowing the water would stop seasonal flooding and erosion damaging the river banks and surrounding landscape, the application said. It would also ultimately encourage rare species such as the southern damselfly, smooth snake, birds, fish and otters.

The proposed works would be undertaken over four years in stages of up to 12 weeks over the summer. The project is part of the mainly EU-funded Higher Level Stewardship scheme, which seeks to restore internationally important habitats and is the largest of its kind in Europe.

"As landowner, we have a duty to manage and restore the SSSI to bring these exceptional New Forest habitats back up to a good standard," responded Bruce Rothnie, Forestry Commission Deputy Surveyor for the New Forest and South District.

"The New Forest Higher Level Stewardship scheme is making

vital improvements to the Forest's natural habitat, so far, nine miles of drainage channels have been restored to natural streams, protecting the New Forest's internationally-important wetlands for future generations.

"It's a rare opportunity to conserve our fragile landscape and support the commoning community. Independent research has shown that wetland restoration brings significant benefits to a vast number of wildlife and plant life that inhabit New Forest's waterways."

He added: "I shall be writing to Desmond Swayne with an open invitation to visit Latchmore Brook with local experts to demonstrate how our proposals will benefit riverside habitats, which support many rare species of wildlife."

The Latchmore Brook rises at Picket Corner and Crows Nest Bottom and drains west towards Ogdens where it becomes known as the Huckles Brook.

It is a tributary of the River Avon and runs through three inclosures: Islands Thorn Inclosure, Amberwood Inclosure and Alderhill Inclosure.

(See New Forest Notes, below, and Letters page 12)

