Welcome to our eleventh newsletter

Update on the Sculthorpe Moor Restoration Scheme

In September we started work on our ambitious restoration scheme near Sculthorpe Moor, upstream of the Fakenham bypass. Unfortunately, as a result of the prolonged wet weather conditions, we have had to temporarily suspend the work. The close proximity of the Hawk and Owl Trust and Norfolk Ornithologists’ Association nature reserves means that the works cannot take place during the bird breeding season. We anticipate re-starting works towards the end of this summer.

Image above: Berm installed at the Sculthorpe scheme which acts as a two-stage channel drowning out during higher flows

Work planned for the River Tat

The River Tat is a tributary of the Wensum and forms part of the River Wensum Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). Over the past year we have been working with the landowner to develop a restoration scheme which starts approximately 380m upstream of Broomsthorpe Bridge, extending downstream to the confluence of the Tat/Wensum. The first phase of works is scheduled to start shortly and will be carried out by our in-house workforce. We will be enhancing approximately 2km of river channel through the installation of features such as gravel glides, pools, berms and woody debris. Our design philosophy aims to maximise the ecological potential of the present day system by kick starting natural processes. The proposed restoration measures will act as a catalyst, enabling the river to return to a more natural form and function, benefiting local ecology.

Great Ryburgh Common meander loop

The reinstatement of the Great Ryburgh Common meander loop scheme completed in 2010 has recently been awarded the sprint gold medal as part of the River Restoration Centre Olympic challenge. This is in recognition of the speed at which the ecological improvement has been recorded through on-site monitoring. An electric fishing survey captured 384 fish in the restored meander (including brown trout, bullhead and brook lamprey) compared with just 31 fish in the baseline survey of the straightened channel. A number of typical chalk stream plants have colonised the restored reach and invertebrate establishment has been immediate, with over fifteen species of mayfly, caddisfly and stonefly recorded.
The Environment Agency holds an annual event to showcase the excellent work carried out by its Field Teams across the country. This year the North Norfolk Field Team won the ‘Excellence in the Environment’ category for their impressive efforts implementing restoration schemes on the Wensum. The judges were impressed with the team’s understanding of the outcomes they are delivering, contributing towards Water Framework Directive aims of improving the ecology of the Wensum.

Maintenance work completed on the Wensum in 2012

We undertake regular inspections on the Wensum to ensure flows are conveyed effectively, especially through sluice gates (such as at Fakenham and Lenwade). During 2012 we have undertaken the following maintenance work on the Wensum:

• Weed cutting between A1065 Fakenham bypass downstream to Fakenham Mill. This year we trialled a new method of cutting the weed, involving an amphibious vehicle, which reduces the risk of reducing the dissolved oxygen levels in the water. Big reductions in oxygen levels can result in significant ecological impacts including fish mortality.
• Weed cutting between Sennowe Park and Bintree Mill.
• Tree management works including the removal of blockages between Guist Road Bridge and Bintree Mill.
• Weed cutting from Ringland Road Bridge to Taverham Mill.
• Weed cutting between Taverham Lane Bridge and Costessey Lane Bridge.
• Weed cutting from Marriotts Way Bridge extending downstream to Hellesdon Mill.

This type of activity is an integral part of our maintenance strategy. We do not always anticipate major clearance works being required on an annual basis. The Wensum is included within our incident response patrolling network and this includes checking and reacting to potential flood risk issues.

Looking ahead

If you are interested in partnership working or would like further information, please contact us at the following email address: river.restoration@environment-agency.gov.uk or by post to: River Wensum Restoration Project Team, Environment Agency, Dragonfly House, 2 Gilders Way, Norwich, NR3 1UB.

To save resources we would very much like to keep as many people as possible informed by email rather than sending paper copies. Please email us at the address above to be updated this way. Please add your name and postal address in the body of the email so we can accurately identify you. Thank you.