



State of the River Char and  
Monkton Wyld Stream

Dorset Wild Rivers Partnership

09/11/2021



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# River Char Community Project

The full results of the **River Char Community Project Survey (RCCP)** are now published and can be viewed on the Char Valley Parish Council (CVPC) website at [www.charvalley.org/riverchar](http://www.charvalley.org/riverchar)

This important survey was commissioned by Char Valley Parish Council (CVPC) and compiled by the Dorset Wild Rivers Partnership (a partnership of the Dorset Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), Dorset Wildlife Trust (DWT) and the Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group SouthWest), with the support of the Dorset Catchment Based Approach, Environment Agency and Wessex Water. It drew on many sources including CVPC councillors and farmers, the questionnaire we circulated to all residents earlier in the year with Char Chat, the local knowledge of DWT and the Environment Agency (EA).

## 2 minute Report Summary—please read

Headline results are that the River Char and Monkton Wyld Stream are considered **failing watercourses** by the Environment Agency (EA) and in need of improvement.

The report identifies seven main ways we can start to make improvements – from monitoring the quality of the water to getting involved in clearing the banks and blockages, from advising on farming and land management issues to looking after our septic tanks better.

Meetings, walks and working parties are planned between now and next summer – **do join in if you'd like to be part of our drive to clean up our river**, make it safe for everyone and a haven for wildlife.

## REPORT DETAIL

### River classification

The EA classifies rivers into these categories: High > Good > Moderate > Poor > Bad. Both the Char and Monkton Wyld Stream are classed as Moderate. The EA's aim is to have waterbodies classed as Good, so both our rivers are considered to be failing watercourses and in need of improvement.

EA reports identify pollution from agriculture, run-off from roads, invasive species, disease of alder trees and poor conditions for wildlife as the main issues. Further concerns about land management, sewerage, habitat and health & safety issues with bathing water quality at the mouth of the river have been expressed in the EA's Water Framework Assessment and voiced by local residents.

### Key problems and areas of concern

The combined areas of most concern, as identified by the EA and other agencies, local people and those that work in the area are:

- ◆ Sediment & phosphate contamination from agriculture
- ◆ Phosphate/sewage pollution from septic tanks
- ◆ Flash flooding
- ◆ Poor habitat for wildlife
- ◆ The impact of invasive species, particularly Himalayan balsam
- ◆ The desire for the river to function as naturally as possible, without causing issues downstream

**What we can do to address these problems** (in Phase 2 of the River Char Community Project):

### Monitoring

Training local people in river monitoring techniques, from looking at insect life in the stream to checking the chemical properties of the water. Regular monitoring would give us early warning of pollution incidents and an opportunity to inform the relevant authorities.

### Habitat improvement & restoration

This will restore the natural processes of the river where it has been altered and allow aquatic plants and fish species to thrive. Much can be achieved with the help of volunteers.

### Invasive species control

Clearing Himalayan balsam will allow native plants to thrive and reduce bank erosion. This is relatively easily achieved by volunteers, though we may never eradicate the plant. Using mink rafts to monitor mink, and then controlling them if necessary, would reduce pressures on the native water vole.

### Research & survey

Further research, with the help of volunteers could help refine what condition we should be aiming for

with the River Char and Monkton Wyld Stream.

Particular areas of interest are:

- ◆ what the natural state of the river would be (a geomorphological appraisal of the river)
- ◆ what animals and plants would we expect to find here – compared with what we do find (an ecological appraisal of the river).

### Community engagement

As well as practical opportunities to improve the state of the river, walks, talks and demonstrations will highlight successes and show what else could be done (e.g. better septic tank management).

### Agricultural land management change

By working with the farming community in the catchment to make changes to the way the land is managed, sediment runoff and therefore nutrient pollution could be reduced.

### Natural Flood Management

Along the river, leaky woody dams, gully blocking, and tree/hedge planting could be undertaken. This could delay and even reduce flood peaks and reduce sediment runoff.

## Planned actions

This report will be launched on **Saturday 11th December** at Becklands Farm, Whitchurch Canonorum DT6 6RG. Please join us (parking onsite or at Whitchurch Hall):

1:45pm ~ coffee/tea | 2:00pm ~ a talk by Ian Rees of Dorset AONB | 2:30-3:30pm ~ walk led by Nick Gray of DWT pointing out characteristics of the Char and scope for action

Dates for riverfly monitoring training for local residents in 2022 will be announced at this meeting.

On **17th January** at 7.30pm there will be an evening's 'Char Conversation' led by Ian Rees and Nick Gray. This will be online and a chance to discuss the report and plans for action with the report's authors. To join, please email [charvalley@dorset-aptc.gov.uk](mailto:charvalley@dorset-aptc.gov.uk)

A first 'daylighting' working party (to clear a section of the river and its banks) will take place on **Saturday 22nd January**.

Other **workshops/walks** will be organised between **January and April 2022**.

*Work on invasive species will start in June 2022.*

On Agricultural Land Management there is funding for an initial four advisory visits to local farms looking at farm economics and suggesting how to make them more sustainable environmentally & economically.

We are preparing a leaflet to help residents to look after their septic tanks better.

From **April 2022**, Dorset AONB will look for additional funding to allow the project to be widened to include the entire catchment.

Other actions will be announced in January.