

River Asker Community Project

A look back at the achievements of the project over the past 18 months.

Issues

The State of the River Asker

The first task was to find out as much about the state of the River Asker as possible and summarise this in one place. We also asked the Wild Trout Trust to give us a second opinion too. This is presented in the State of the River Asker report (there's the main report and a shorter summary report).

The main issues identified were:

- **Artificial barriers in the river:** this impacts fish populations and causes sedimentation of the river bed
- **Shade from riparian trees:** this impacts aquatic plants and riparian plants.
- **Catchment land use:** this has the potential to impact the duration and severity of flood waters and is a source of sediment.
- **Invasive species:** this impacts riparian plants and causes bank erosion, which is a source of sediment.

Tree cover change between 1947 and 2017 in Uploders



1947: Sporadic bank-side tree coverage 2017: Continuous bank-side tree coverage

© Crown Copyright 2015. Unauthorised reproduction infringes Crown copyright and may lead to prosecution or civil proceedings. Dorset Council LA 100019790 2015 This map is not definitive and has no legal status.

Activities

Volunteers

From January to March 2019, Nick Gray from the Wildlife Trust led fortnightly volunteering sessions. Nick and his small band of volunteers achieved a lot over the few months that they were active, mainly around river restoration, natural flood management solutions and Himalayan balsam bashing:

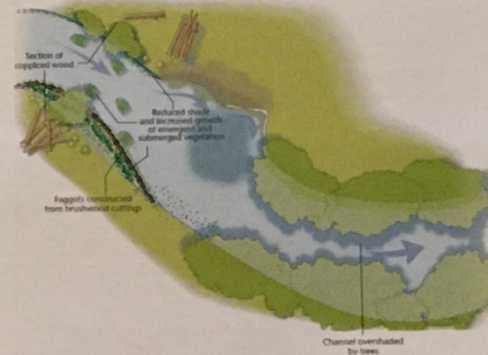
1. Natural Flood Management

The aim here is to try and slow flood waters down using semi-natural solutions at a large number of locations. Each individual structure has very little impact on its own, but combined they hold back floodwater so that the impact downstream is lessened. We've roughed up stream edges using adjacent hazel coppice, we've intercepted overland flow pathways with piles of brash and we've also installed 'leaky woody dams' in the river itself to help when levels are high. In total, these works cover about 250m.

2. Habitat enhancement

At Uploders, we have also opened up about 50m of dense riverside tree cover to allow more light into the river bed and constructed two 'woody mattresses' to provide anchor points for stream vegetation and to provide cover for small fish and insects.

Habitat restoration at Uploders



© Wild Trout Trust



Chuck, David and Ian showing off their handywork

3. Himalayan balsam bashing

After a taster session last year in Loders, this year we tackled the Himalayan balsam mob handed, with the help of volunteers from Wild Days Conservation Holidays and Nick's usual Thursday Dorset Wildlife Trust volunteers. Great inroads were made at Matravers, Uploders and behind the Pub in Loders.

Land management

Tim Bowden, Resource Protection Advisor with the Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group SouthWest, has been working with land owners in the catchment on several initiatives that will help keep the water quality high in the River Asker.

We've installed several silt traps at known hot-spots for sediment pollution and will monitor these to see how bad the issue really is. Four hectares of land have been sub-soiled to help increase water infiltration. We've also planted over 300m of hedgerow to help intercept overland flow, and therefore reduce flooding. And on the Crutchley Estate, Tim has been overseeing a trial into different ways of establishing herb-rich pasture, to see if there is a way of keeping up the grass productivity but reduce environmental impacts.

The importance of good quality soils



Silt trap on sediment pathway



Counting worms as an indicator of soil quality

Riverfly monitoring

Eight community members have received training in Riverfly monitoring. This technique uses the number of insect species found in the river as an indicator of how healthy it is. If the number falls below a certain threshold, then a closer look is taken to see the cause of the problem. This is part of a national scheme and you can find out more at www.riverflies.org.

We hope this year to extend our monitoring using the Westcountry Rivers Trust Citizen Science Investigations programme.

School

We led a one day session with years 5 and 6 at Lodders School. The first part was out in the river exploring its feature, the animals that live there and how people have used it in the past. Back in the classroom, storyteller Martin Maudsley created some magical watery memories for the children.

Project Management

Funding

This work has been made possible by contributions from the Dorset Governance Group, who oversee the Catchment Based Approach in Dorset, the Environment Agency, Dorset Wildlife trust and Dorset Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

So far, we have raised £42,000 to help deliver the project. We are hopeful of another two funding bids totalling £45,000 that are being considered by the Environment Agency, which will allow us to continue the project over the coming year

Steering Group

A steering Group made up of representatives of the two parishes and landowning community guide the work of the project.

Community network

Over 30 of you have signed up to the wider distribution list and have helped make this project possible with your dedication and enthusiasm. Thank you!

Future

Fish survey

Date for your diary: On 24th September, Casterbridge Fisheries will be undertaking a fish survey along the river. There'll be an opportunity to come along and see what they find at Well Plot playing field from 5pm.

Electrofishing



Himalayan balsam bashing

Date for your diary: This Monday, 12th August, Nick Gray will be leading a final bashing session in Askerswell. Come along, have some fun and help improve the river. It's only a couple of hours and you'll be rewarded with a drink at the Spyway afterwards!

Natural Flood Management

We have outstanding work to do looking into Natural Flood Management. This includes renovating some tracks so that they don't channel water directly into the river, moving some field gates so again, they don't allow water to flow directly into the river and we also have another silt trap to install.

Find out more

Get in touch with Ian Rees to find out more: ian.rees@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk or 01305 228235.

