

Terms of Reference for a snapshot study into the River Char

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Document Purpose

This document outlines the initial Terms of Reference for a short snapshot study to understand the health and wellbeing of the River Char and to assess the key opportunities and constraints for its future management.

Background to the River Char snapshot study

The River Char forms a major feature of the Marshwood Vale, running from the headwaters above Marshwood and Wotton Fitzpaine for about 9 miles through the vale and out into the sea at Charmouth beach, which is a major visitor attraction and swimming area. Discharge of treated sewage into the river was stopped in the early 1990s when Wessex Water constructed a sea outfall extending a mile out into Lyme Bay. The river has suffered over the years from declining biodiversity, increasing agricultural run-off and slurry, mud from roads and land use practices, waste from overflowing septic tanks, overgrown bankside vegetation and algal blooms coupled with high levels of peak flow and flooding.

There are concerns over the water quality particularly faecal matter and its health and quality for recreational purposes. Bathing water quality at Charmouth was classified as 'Excellent' in 2016 and 2018, and 'Good' in 2015 and 2017. Five warnings advising against swimming due to an increase risk of short term pollution were issued in 2018 for Charmouth West. Environment Agency figures show occasionally elevated levels of Intestinal Enterococci and *Escherichia coli* at the beach.

A snapshot study is proposed as a way to create a quick analysis of existing data and key informants. This will collate information as a first phase of better understanding the key constraints on, and opportunities for, improving the river's health and wellbeing. The study would draw together existing data, identify key stakeholders and present a short summary of the key findings in Phase 1 which could be used to further discussions between the relevant stakeholders.

Core activities

1. To prepare and produce a short report and Powerpoint presentation on the state of the River Char and constraints and opportunities for its future management.
2. To collate, review, analyse and share existing secondary data sources, highlight gaps in the data and constraints and opportunities for future management and summarise them for the report.
3. Conduct ten short key informant interviews and one focus group discussion with key stakeholders to elicit key issues.
4. Prepare some initial maps of the watercourse, paying attention to constraints and opportunities for future management including physical, land management options etc.
5. To identify and summarise the key stakeholders and their contact details and respective roles in future management.
6. To highlight similar examples of good practice in other catchments (e.g.AONB/DWT work on the River Asker)
7. To summarise possible next steps for a Phase 2 action plan for the River Char

Study Outputs

1. A short report of no more than ten pages including maps and annexes – to include lists of data sources, key stakeholders and summary of recommendations etc.
2. Powerpoint presentation
3. Suggested next steps for a Phase 2 study

Indicative timeframe and budget

1. The work should start in December 2019 and be completed by the end of January.
2. Budget:
 - Report production and printing ~ £30
 - Holding key informant meeting ~ £30
 - Consultant for 5 days @ c. £200 ~ £1,000