

# WESSEX RIVERS NEWS

## MOTTISFONT RESTORATION PROJECT

We've joined forces with the National Trust to carry out a restoration project on the Oakley Beat of the River Test at Mottisfont.



**Wessex**  
Rivers Trust

## REVAMP YOUR TANK

Wiltshire Council is partnering with Wessex Rivers Trust to launch a ground-breaking initiative aimed at upgrading septic tanks.

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# CHAIR'S INTRO

George Seligman, Chair of Trustees

## Rain, regulation, reactions and reflections

Six months ago, in my introduction to the last newsletter, I said how pleased I was that we had had a wet summer. The rivers of Wessex were flowing strongly, in contrast to the two preceding dry summers when we had been worrying about drought orders and abstraction. Maybe I should have been more cautious about what I wished for. I have just read a report from the Environment Agency which says that the last three months or 2023 were the wettest since 2020, and the third wettest since 1871!

That certainly is how it looks on my small farm in the valley of the River Test. We just managed to get our hay dried and into the barn in late August. Since that sunny fortnight, it seems to have rained almost continuously. Our fields have been, and remain, far too wet to put heavy machinery on. Yesterday (late February) we had standing water on all the fields along the river, and even on some higher ones. Our newborn lambs are staying firmly in the lambing shed for the time being.

The Test itself is bank high and muddy. We can see clearly how powerful it can be when in flood, imperilling banks, sweeping away

trees and scouring gravel beds. So the trust will look carefully and, perhaps, with some anxiety at how well the work we successfully carried out last autumn at Mottisfont on the Test has stood up to the pressure. We are probably going to have to get used to these extremes: drought one year, floods the next - and make our plans accordingly.

I cannot end without touching on pollution by water companies. The upsurge in public interest and disgust at the behaviour of so many water companies has led to the prospect of much larger budgets in coming years aimed in part at improvements to waste water treatment works. At the same time, the Environment Agency seems to be waking from its long sleep, recognising that many sewage discharges into rivers are license breaches by the water companies, and the EA is promising to go after them. In a recent address to the conference of the National Farmers Union, the EA's chairman said that 500 new officers are being recruited to help with regulation of the water industry, with plans to increase inspections by 4,000 next year and 11,000 the year after. If this happens, the EA's water industry

inspection regime will be back to the levels of 10 to 15 years ago before austerity cuts crippled it. So that is positive news.

But we need to stay alert and rely on self help in protecting our rivers. Southern Water's recent attempt to "over pump" flooded sewers from three Hampshire villages - which means pumping untreated waste water straight into the Test - was frustrated by outraged reactions from riverkeepers, landowners and NGOs like ourselves. Good, but only a few days later I was sent an underwater video clip of untreated sewage pouring into the Test out of the Fullerton waste water treatment works: a disgusting sight and completely unacceptable anywhere, particularly in a riverine SSSI. There is a long way still to go.

# CEO ROUND UP

Dave Rumble, CEO Wessex Rivers Trust



The Trust's work changes with the seasons. Our core programmes of education, catchment management, and habitat restoration involve long periods of planning, engagement, and co-ordination, culminating in intense phases of delivery in the field (well... river!). At the end of the year, we enjoy the briefest mid-winter pause, stepping away from the riverbank to reflect on the year's achievements and let the salmon and trout spawn in peace. The moment doesn't last long, and another year's work is underway before the first shoots of spring appear.

2023 saw 11 habitat restoration and fish passage projects delivered across 8 waterbodies and 3 counties. 7 km of river was restored and 7 obstacles to fish passage were removed. Neil showcases one of the year's most ambitious projects on Page 5; Matt outlines a project 2 years in the planning on Page 10; and Andy highlights our technical work on Page 13.

This year the Trust's educators trained 83 teachers and educated 4,782 children and adults on the amazing and fragile ecology of our rivers. Tracy and Amy reflect on educational innovations and legacies on Pages 7 and 11.

Along with co-ordinating 120 volunteer hours, 39km worth of surveys, and the removal of 415 tubs of alien invasive plants, our Catchment Team have been helping bring into being some pioneering and truly catchment-scale habitat and water quality improvement schemes. Alex Deacon and Alex McKay explain on Pages 12 and 17.

As ever, we thank you for your support. Please continue to help us help our rivers and chalk streams.

# EDUCATION FUNDING SUCCESS

Amy Ellis, Education & Engagement Manager

After what feels like a long slog of applying for funding, the Trust has been awarded three pots of money to support our education and engagement strategy. One of the successes is through the Co-op Local Community Fund, another is through The Ernest Cook Trust's Blue Influencers Scheme and finally we have a small grant from Veolia's Sustainability Fund.

## Co-op Local Community Fund:

Back in May 2022 the Trust made eight applications to Co-op to fund our education and engagement work. In October 2022, we were told we were successful with two of our applications. With a year's worth of campaigning to Co-op members to support our cause, we were finally, awarded around £2,500 in November 2023. This generous donation will support the production of two Wildlife and Heritage Trails, with one in Amesbury and the other in Winchester, similar to the trails we have in Sturminster Newton and Bournemouth.

## The Ernest Cook Trust's Blue Influencers Scheme:

The Trust has been given the opportunity to employ a part time "Blue Mentor" for three years as part of the Blue Influencers Scheme. The Blue Mentor will be based in Southampton and Eastleigh, working on the Tanners Brook and Monks Brook, with young people from schools and youth groups (target age 10-14 year-olds) in tackling environmental and climate issues through youth-led social action projects.

The Scheme was developed by The Ernest Cook Trust in 2022 due to concerns raised by young people from coastal areas. This £2.26M programme is match funded with the #iwill Fund and supports 22 Host Organisations working in areas with High Multiple Deprivation Indices across England. The mission of the Blue Influencers Scheme is to assist young people to create deep, lasting and meaningful connections with the natural environment. Through this Scheme, young people will learn and build skills which will help them contribute to the local community through environmental social action.



## Veolia's Sustainability Fund:

Through Veolia's Sustainability Fund the Trust has been awarded £1,000 to subsidise 8 school education sessions on the River Meon, for schools based in Gosport and Portsmouth. Many schools in this area are unable to access full cost sessions due to limited budgets so we are very grateful to be given this opportunity to inspire children in urban areas about their local environment.

## We are still looking for more...

The Education and Engagement team are still searching for core funds to allow the Trust to offer subsidised education sessions to schools and groups who are not within project funded areas. If you know of any good sources of funding, please get in touch as we would love to hear from you!

Proudly supporting youth social action



Department  
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# MOTTISFONT RESTORATION

Neil Swift, Project Officer

This Autumn Wessex Rivers Trust (WessexRT) joined forces with the National Trust (NT) to carry out a restoration project on the Oakley Beat of the River Test at Mottisfont.

The Oakley Beat is well known due to Fredric Halford, otherwise known as the High Priest of the dry fly, who is credited with developing and codifying fly fishing as we know it today. He leased the fishing rights there from 1904 up until his death in 1913. Since then, the beat has become a mecca for fly anglers keen to walk in Halford's footsteps.

Mottisfont is a place that holds huge personal significance – from 2012 to 2020 I was fortunate enough to be employed by the NT as River Keeper on the estate. In the years since, the NT have begun to instigate a dramatic shift in their management strategy for the rivers on the estate. The crux of the change has been to move the focus away from fishing, so decisions can be made purely on what's best for the habitat.

Marginal plants and tree branches, that have always been trimmed to allow relatively easy casting, now stand untouched. In channel weeds, traditionally cut during the summer months are now allowed to grow and die back in their natural cycle. Paths have been narrowed, are cut less frequently and will be walked by those seeking a range of pursuits from guided wildlife walks to yoga.



*The upstream extent of the project. With relatively few bankside trees in this section, we transported them to the river from the neighbouring woodland.*

Fishing will rightfully still be a part of the equation of course, as it has been for more than 100 years. However, the traditional River Test fishing model is being replaced with a much wilder offering. Crucially this means an end to the stocking of trout for anglers to catch. Without stocking, the angling experience on the estate will now live and die purely on the ability of the habitat to support a thriving population of wild fish.

Whilst the day-to-day changes to river management will go a long way to improving the habitat in and around the river, some areas require additional interventions to really thrive. As such, the first of what we hope will be several projects at Mottisfont was planned, utilising the Flow Resilient Sustainable Habitats (FReSH) funding stream.

Our work started just upstream of Halford's historic fishing hut, where sections of both banks were formed from concrete sandbags. This meant that the bank edge was sheer, prohibiting the growth of emergent marginal plants and creating an unnatural box shaped channel. The solution was to replace the sandbags with a gently sloping margin formed from floodplain gravels dug from the adjacent woodland.

This has two key benefits. Firstly it allows a diverse array of marginal plants, submerged, emergent and terrestrial, to thrive in the margins. Secondly the sloping margin allows the plants to 'grow in' to the channel during low summer water levels, concentrating the flow, before peeling back during winter to accommodate high water levels.

Next on the list was a rock weir, that was slowing and homogenising the flow upstream. This was removed, increasing the speed of the water, making the conditions better for *rannunculus* growth and shifting fine sediment that would be an impediment to salmonid spawning.

Further upstream, at 'Oakley Bends', there was another area of shear banks that desperately needed a sloping margin. As we graded the banks down we made an interesting discovery. Buried some 500mm down we found the concrete wing walls that would have formed the entrance to Halford's stew ponds. The location of the stews adjacent to the river is well known, but finding the entrance buried at this depth showed that we were essentially returning the banks to the level that they would have been in Halford's day.

One of the other issues on the Oakley beat is that, bar a few short sections, it is relatively straight. Being essentially manmade it's also quite dramatically perched above the surrounding floodplain for much of its length, which takes away the option to break the river out of its current channel to give it some meander.

Instead we had to provide meander within the current channel. This was achieved by using a variety of different woody structures. Where, conveniently positioned, trees stood on the riverbank they were either live-hinged, felled or simply pushed (rootball and all) into the river channel before being staked securely in place. In areas without bankside, we sourced them from the neighbouring woodland and transported to the river using a tractor and winch.

Diversifying the flow in this way has multiple benefits. Pushing the flow back and forth creates areas of scour and deposition – both of which are important for a thriving chalkstream. On the inside of bends, and in the lee of woody features, we get deposition of fine sediment, which is vital to some plant species and invertebrates such as *Ephemera danica*. Adjacent to the woody structures, flow rates are increased, scouring away sediment which improves conditions for invertebrates and plants that rely on clean gravel and improves the possibility of salmonid spawning.

Of course, providing suitable spawning habitat is close to useless if there is no habitat for juvenile fish. This is the other benefit of placing trees in the river channel, each one provides a vast amount of cover for fry to hide from potential predators. All in all, along the length of the Oakley Beat, we placed more than 20 trees, or large tree limbs, into the river.

This was a project that was made all the better by the expertise of the NT Ranger Team, who worked tirelessly providing chainsaw operatives, tractor drivers, winch operators and many many hours of manual labour. Huge thanks also go to our contractors Arbwise on the excavators and dumpers, and JD Jenkins & Sons who dug the gravel we needed and got it to the bank.

We look forward to working with the NT at Mottisfont on more projects in the near future.

*Oakley Bend becomes Oakley Bends. As well as grading down the shear bank, pushing bankside willow and hawthorn into the channel gave this stretch a lovely new meander.*



# WATERCRESS AND WINTERBOURNES

Tracy Standish, Watercress and Winterbournes Education Officer

Since joining Wessex Rivers Trust in March 2021, as the Watercress and Winterbournes Education Officer, the Landscape Partnership Scheme's education programme has gone from strength to strength. To date, we have engaged with 1,958 children and young people through a variety of activities including river dipping, wildlife walks, night walks, assemblies and classroom sessions. These have been delivered formally to schools and more informally to groups such as those involved in Scouting and Guiding, school holiday clubs and Wildlife Watch groups.

To reach these young people, we've worked with 19 different schools and 24 different groups, delivering 169 sessions. 503 accompanying adults have also been engaged, ranging from teachers, teaching assistants and group leaders to parent helpers.

An additional 2,399 people have also been involved through community events, including Andover's popular Four Fun Fridays throughout August and Whitchurch Silk Mill's Wild and Wonderful events. We've worked on the Pillhill Brook, Upper Anton, Bourne Rivulet, Upper Test, River Arle and the Cheriton Stream, but are yet to engage with a school or group on the Candover Brook – a target for the remainder of the National Lottery Heritage Funded Scheme.







Whilst the delivery will continue, the focus is now beginning to shift to the legacy of the education programme. Last October a rivers focused training session was held for staff and volunteers at Whitchurch Silk Mill. Designed to equip them with the confidence and knowledge to approach their stretch of the Upper Test with local schools and groups, the Silk Mill staff and volunteers will be supported, by Wessex Rivers Trust, this spring with their session delivery to build upon this training.

Whitchurch Silk Mill is also the recipient of our first loans box of equipment. This will be kept at the Mill and lent to local schools and groups, following the delivery of further training courses. These sessions will combine online learning with a hands-on site visit, where participants will be able to pull on their wellies and experience the river first hand. This training will be offered to teachers, teaching assistants, trainee teachers, parents who home educate and group leaders.

Initially taking place in and around the Whitchurch area, this training will then be repeated in other locations within the scheme area and additional loans boxes will be created. We still have a busy time ahead!

Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust 2023 Wilder Awards

Watercress and Winterbournes scheme volunteers have shone in the Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust 2023 Wilder Awards! This annual celebration recognises those making a difference for wildlife and the environment.

Hazel Metcalfe and Sarah Smith received the 'Individual Action for Nature' award for creating the Chalk Stream Challenge, connecting over 300 young people with chalk streams through self-guided learning activities.

Howard Boardman, an angler from Alresford, was also nominated. He leads a group of volunteers monitoring invertebrates in the headwaters of the River Itchen, crucial for the health of our waterways.

# RIVER AVON RESTORATION

Matt Irvine, Senior Project Officer Avon & Stour

Wessex Rivers Trust in partnership with National Highways, Natural England and the Environment Agency, have been undertaking an exciting project on the River Avon, extending from Lords Walk in Amesbury through to Snake Bend at Durrington.

The project is principally funded by National Highways through their RIS2 biodiversity programme, but is also supported by a grant from Natural England to add environmental value to an already exciting project. This section of the River Avon was realigned in the 1960s when the A303 was built; channels were dredged, straightened and constrained by road bridges. Downstream of the A303 road bridge a weir was installed, and a section of new channel was built to help control flows and suppress geomorphology to reduce risk to the road network.

The River Avon Countess Restoration Project is aimed at addressing the issues created by the straightening, dredging and legacy of impacts. The years 2021 and 2022 were spent planning, designing and submitting a flood risk activity permit alongside a full planning application. The project was tendered in 2021 and the successful winning contractor to undertake designs and installation was Cain Bio-engineering Ltd.

The Autumn of 2023 saw the two previous years of planning, design work and applications come to life. The construction was split into two stages; Autumn of 2023 saw the first stage, works upstream of the A303 road bridge. This included sky lighting, channel narrowing and gravel bed raising.

Works upstream of the A303 road bridge started in late September 2023 and were completed by early November 2023 in line with our consents.



A historic 1888 OS map superimposed over a modern day OS map to highlight the changes to the river channels and floodplain.



2023 works completed upstream of the A303 between snake bend and the A303 road bridge.

The works downstream of the A303, planned for this year include creation of a new bypass channel to improve fish passage beyond the existing hatches and weir, creation of an area of permanent wet woodland, floodplain re-connection in the meadows and gravel installation and sky lighting of the river channel through Lords Walk.



*Trees were felled along a steep bank to allow more light into the over shaded river channel. Trees of low ecological value were chosen.*

The river upstream of the A303 had been historically dredged, widened and straightened and in places was heavily overshadowed. The following works were undertaken to overcome these issues:

#### Sky Light the River Channel.

The river channel was overshadowed by a steep and heavily wooded bank, reducing light penetration and stifling the growth of in-channel macrophytes. The river channel was sky lighted by removing low value trees along the wooded bank, increasing the amount of light reaching the river. The trees were able to be used in the channel narrowing.

#### Channel Narrowing/Re-sizing and Margin Creation.

The trees that were felled, plus additional trees hinged from the nearside bank, have been used to re-size the overwide channel and create marginal and cover areas. Re-sizing the river channel will increase flow velocities and encourage flow diversity, coupled with the increased light penetration from the sky lighting it will encourage favourable species of macrophytes to grow. The installed woody material will also provide cover for fish and invertebrates whilst trapping sediment and forming vegetated marginal areas.

*Some trees were hinged to re-sprout and others were felled, moved and pinned into place to trap sediment and create a vegetated margin*



*Long reach excavator installing gravel into the river channel.*

#### Gravel Bed Raising

The river upstream of the A303 had been dredged and straightened when the A303 was built in the late 1960's, deepening the river channel and removing the gravel riverbed. Gravel riverbeds form the building blocks of chalk streams, helping cleanse the water and providing refuge and habitat for a number of species.

Approximately 1,700t of gravel was restored to the previously dredged riverbed. Reinstating a gravel riverbed will have a positive effect on water quality whilst providing diversity of flows and creating favourable conditions for a number of macrophyte, invertebrate and fish species. A variety of flint gravels were used to create a diverse riverbed and improve sediment transport through the reach.

To prevent disturbance to the river banks the gravel was delivered to point of installation with 12 ton dumpers and dug out of the dumper by the long reach excavator and installed into the river. The height the gravel was installed to was determined by the results of a topographic long section of the river taken during the planning phase. This enabled us to ensure that the gravel installed reinstated the dredged riverbed but did not impound the river upstream.

It was a very wet Autumn, and this posed its own challenges, with track routes becoming increasingly wet as the project progressed. We were fortunate to be able to complete all scheduled works before the river burst its banks, with track routes tidied and graded level ready to re-grow in the spring.

With all consents and permissions in place we are planning for the final phase of improvements to be undertaken in the summer and autumn of this year.

# RIVER BOURNE

## Wildlife and Heritage Trail

Amy Ellis, Education & Engagement Manager

As part of The Linbury Trust funding legacy Wessex Rivers Trust has produced a Wildlife and Heritage Trail on the River Bourne in Bournemouth. The process has been a long one starting with 90 year 3 students from Heatherlands Primary School attending an assembly, riverbank and classroom sessions with River Educators Kate Carpenter and David Swan back in April 2023. The children used their newfound knowledge to produce some beautiful artwork linked to the river. Using this artwork, work placement student, Libby Norton, produced the trail with Alex McKay adding all the information onto the Trust's website. Waymarkers were then produced and installed by the Trust's habitat team and Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole Council's parks team.

The trail travels along the river through the formal gardens in the centre of Bournemouth, making it one of the most publicly accessible rivers in the Wessex region. The 3-mile-long trail is split into 5 small loops, with 38 points in total. Residents and tourists can scan the waymarker QR code at each point. This will take them to that point along the trail which will provide directions and some interesting facts about the wildlife and heritage of the river, as well as some challenges it faces.

To find out more visit our website <https://www.wessexrt.org.uk/RiverBourneNatureTrail.html>

THE  
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# WYLYE CHALK STREAM PROJECT



River Wylde. Credit: Robin Leech.

Alex Deacon,

Catchment Programme Manager

The Wylde Chalk Stream Project has been successful in the second round of the Government's Landscape Recovery scheme. How did this come about? And what does it mean for the Wylde valley?

Since the inception of the Wider Wylde Strategy in 2020, the Trust have been working closely with Wiltshire Wildlife Trust, the Wylde Valley Farmer Group, and number of other key stakeholders in the catchment to identify opportunities to deliver reach-wide benefits to the natural capital associated with this rather special chalk stream tributary of the Upper Hampshire Avon.

Wiltshire's chalk streams, globally renowned for their rarity and biodiversity, represent an integral component of England's natural landscape. Unfortunately, the River Wylde, like many others, has undergone detrimental changes over the centuries, including dredging, straightening, and pollution, placing its unique flora and fauna in jeopardy.

Home to some of the nation's most iconic species, and blessed with one of the most active farmer groups in the country, the Trust co-submitted a bid to Defra's Landscape Recovery Scheme to deliver one of the most ambitious chalk stream restoration projects in the country, covering over 20km of the river and 1,000 hectares of floodplain.

This scheme provides financial support to farmers and land managers undertaking initiatives that contribute to net zero goals, protect designated sites, and promote habitat creation.

Fortunately, our collective hard work paid off, and the project was recently confirmed as one of 34 successful second-round Landscape Recovery projects, which all demonstrated pioneering ideas that will reverse the decline in nature and support the sustainable production of food. The initiative will be led by Wiltshire Wildlife Trust in partnership with Wessex Rivers Trust and Wylde Valley Farmers Group.

The collaborative effort aims to rejuvenate the vitality, diversity, and ecological abundance of the Wylde Valley. The focus is on restoring the river's natural connection with its floodplain across a 20km stretch of currently under-utilised farmland. This endeavour will enhance the river's resilience to extreme temperatures and flows resulting from climate change, as well as its capacity to capture and mitigate harmful excess nutrients and pollutants from the broader landscape.

A comprehensive project development phase will now begin, aiming to establish both the technical design and scoping elements of the project, to the legal agreements and private finance required by each farmer involved in the scheme.

# DELIVERING DROUGHT RESILIENCE

Andy Blincow,  
Senior Project Manager, Test & Itchen

In Autumn 2023, the Trust successfully delivered two river restoration projects funded by the Test & Itchen Catchment Partnership / Southern Water Drought Resilience Fund. Located on the Itchen Navigation at Brambridge and the River Test near Wherwell, the primary aims of the projects were to increase the ability of these rivers and their associated ecological communities to cope with summer drought conditions.

The channels through both project reaches were generally overwide and uniform in profile. Subsequently, they had become particularly vulnerable to low flow (drought) conditions. In addition, a general scarcity of complex within-channel habitat features, combined with localised areas of overshadowing, was acknowledged to be limiting the enigmatic chalkstream macrophyte, invertebrate, and salmonid populations.

Both projects were designed, consents secured and project managed by Wessex Rivers Trust, working closely with landowners and fishery managers. In addition, the Trusts Habitats Team delivered much of the work, save from contracted ground works (RJ Bull Environmental) and tree-climbing elements.

The key outputs of both projects are detailed within the following pages.



### Itchen Navigation at Brambridge

- Approximately 380m of the Itchen Navigation channel restored/enhanced through the installation of 13 in-channel structures installed, including large wood deflectors and coarse brush berms.
- Approximately 600m<sup>2</sup> of overstood riparian woodland thinned, through the felling or reduction of approximately 10 mature alder trees within the mid-reach of the site.

### River Test near Wherwell

- Approximately 1km length River Test channel restored/enhanced through the installation of 21 in-channel structures This comprised of 14 coarse/large woody structures and 7 aggregate structures (hard berms, bed dressing and bank reprofiling).
- Mixed native trees planted on the south bank to cast shade and provide cover over deeper pools.

Both projects are subject to pre and post monitoring to assess both the ecological and morphological responses to the restoration works. This includes electric fishing surveys, botanical survey and analysis of riverfly data. Drone imagery captured by the Trust has been particularly valuable at demonstrating immediate morphological changes and some of the post-completion images are shown within this article.

The Trust would like to thank the TICP, Portsmouth Services Fly Fishing Club and landowners for their assistance.

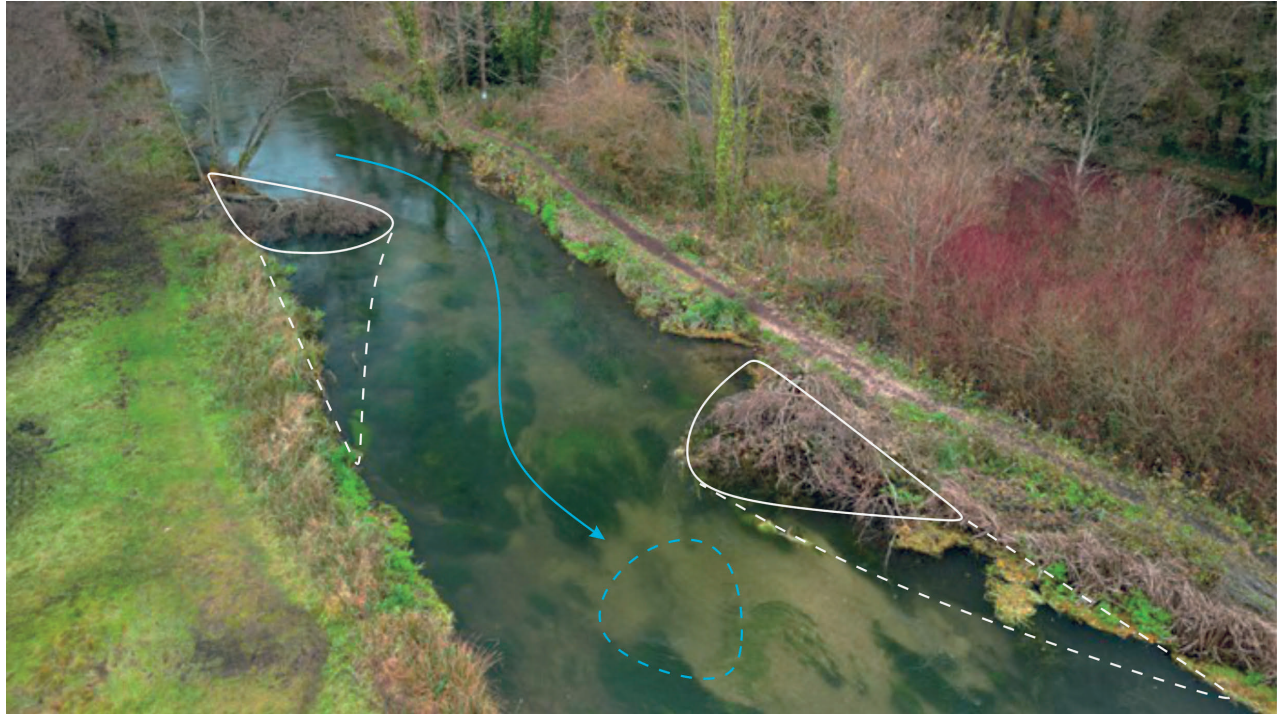
*Images 1 & 2 Below: Aggregate and topsoil 'angler accessible' berms combined with large and coarse woody material to increase channel sinuosity whilst retaining fishing value. Existing marginal vegetation is translocated to new bank edge and will rapidly establish in spring.*





*Images 3 & 4 Above: Almost instant scour and sorting of bed gravels resulting from installation of large woody material i.e. 'hinged' trees and coarse woody material i.e. brushwood berms. Dashed blue indicates new scour pools and dashed white areas of marginal deposition.*





*Images 5 & 6 Above: Extensive bed scouring combined with wood and 'shaggy' marginal vegetation will undoubtedly improve recruitment success for Atlantic salmon in these important spawning locations.*

# REVAMP YOUR TANK

Alex McKay,  
Communications & Events Officer

## Septic Tank Upgrade Initiative: Wiltshire Council and Wessex Rivers Trust Join Forces to Preserve the Upper Hampshire Avon.

In a collaborative effort to safeguard the water quality of the Hampshire Avon catchment, Wiltshire Council is partnering with Wessex Rivers Trust to launch a groundbreaking initiative aimed at upgrading septic tanks. This initiative seeks to reduce nutrient-rich wastewater entering watercourses and, in turn, enhance the health of our aquatic ecosystems.

Septic tanks, commonly used to separate liquid and solid waste, can inadvertently release nutrient-rich wastewater into rivers, contributing to pollution. The resulting high nutrient levels lead to algal blooms, obstructing light and causing oxygen depletion in waterways. This has detrimental effects on the entire river ecosystem, impacting crucial microhabitats for fish and invertebrates. To counteract this issue, a new law mandates the upgrade of old septic tanks discharging into surface water.

Wiltshire Council is offering fully funded grants to homeowners in specified areas of the Upper Avon catchment for upgrading their sewage systems. The initiative promotes the replacement of septic tanks with more efficient package treatment plants, tailored to each property's needs. These upgraded systems not only separate solids and liquids but also biologically treat effluent for safe discharge into watercourses.

Working in partnership with

**Wiltshire Council**





Residents in eligible areas are encouraged to visit the Wiltshire Council website ([www.wiltshire.gov.uk/article/1102/Biodiversity-and-development](http://www.wiltshire.gov.uk/article/1102/Biodiversity-and-development)) to check eligibility criteria. Further details about the initiative can be found on the Wessex Rivers Trust website ([www.wessexrt.org.uk/RevampYourTank](http://www.wessexrt.org.uk/RevampYourTank)).

Wessex Rivers Trust will be hosting several live events so you can find out more about the upgrade campaign and ask questions in person, follow the Trust on social media to find out when and where these will be taking place.

Dave Rumble CEO Wessex Rivers Trust said: “We are delighted to be working with Wiltshire Council to positively address the issue of septic tanks which, when they are not working well, contribute to water pollution in some of our most sensitive chalk streams. For too long this has gone under the radar and at last here is an opportunity to link people up to the scheme and help promote ways of reducing pollution from homes which are off the mains sewage system.”

By participating in this initiative, homeowners can actively contribute to preserving the health of our chalk streams in the Hampshire Avon catchment. Upgrading septic tanks benefits the environment, supporting the flourishing of plant and animal species that rely on clean and healthy river ecosystems.





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