

The River Don Partnership

Newsletter #1

A great deal of good work has been done to clean up and restore our rivers, streams, lakes and groundwater.

In many of our towns and cities, the waterside is now a focus for regeneration and economic growth. People can now enjoy waters that were once spoiled by pollution. Fish and wildlife have returned.



The River Don in Rotherham

However, more needs to be done. Although water quality has improved, the ecology of some rivers is still not all it could be. Often, because of our industrial past and engineering works, watercourses fail to reach their full potential.

Because of the good work carried out by a variety of organisations, many sources of pollution have been controlled or stopped. The problems we are now facing are less obvious and therefore more difficult to solve. It is now harder to say exactly what is causing a problem and to decide the best way to tackle it.

But tackle it we must. We recognise that no single organisation or group can solve these remaining problems - a new collaborative approach is needed. We know that when we share our knowledge, resources and expertise, great things can happen. Local communities also have a valuable role to play in reviving and improving our rivers.

The driving force behind much of the Environment Agency's interest in the health of our rivers and other waterbodies is the Water Framework Directive, which became UK law in December 2003.

We know that everyone will have many other reasons to improve the waters of the Don - encouraging good business practice to save money and increase investment in the local economy; increasing fish numbers for the enjoyment of anglers; creating cycle paths and river walks providing better amenities for local people and to attract new visitors to the area. In fact, any of these things will change how people view a place and help put an area back on the map.

A unique feature of the Water Framework Directive is that it considers the ecology of the waterbody rather than just chemical water quality. It sees a link between the quality of the water and its ability to sustain life.

We know that working together can be difficult. So, in March 2011, Richard Benyon, Minister for Natural Environment

and Fisheries, announced the creation of 10 pilot programmes to look specifically at how different bodies and community groups can best work together to improve the water environment. One of these "ten" is looking at the River Don.



The river at Barnby Dun

We want to build a network of people who will work together to develop a shared, agreed action plan to protect and improve the River Don into the future.

This pilot project will focus on how we can work together to meet all our own outcomes and desires for the River Don, but achieving far more additional benefits than we could do individually.

The work that we do together in this pilot will shape future engagement and work to improve all our rivers.

At the Environment Agency, we know we don't own this pilot. We are acting as a catalyst to bring other interested people together. Yorkshire Water is also keen to help build this network and is a key partner to achieving a better water environment. We are now looking at holding two workshops in October which will start to bring together all those with an interest in the River Don.

While the pilot project only runs from Summer 2011 to December 2012, it is about all of us agreeing to work together for the future health of the Don. Where we go from here is up to all of us and we hope that, by establishing this network, we can have shared, increased and co-ordinated action in the future to protect the water bodies of the Don catchment.

Summary of the Water Framework Directive

It gives us an opportunity to plan and deliver a better water environment, focusing on ecology. The Directive will protect and enhance the quality of:

- surface freshwater (including lakes, streams and rivers)
- groundwaters
- groundwater dependant ecosystems
- estuaries
- coastal waters out to one mile from low-water.

All our waterbodies need to achieve good ecological status unless they have been extensively engineered. These are called artificial or heavily modified waterbodies and have to achieve a different target of good ecological potential.

Only 9% of river waterbodies in the Don are in good status, 17% of them are poor and 5% of them are classed as bad.



Wildlife has returned in many places

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