



# the River Restoration Centre

*Working to restore and enhance our rivers*

Delivering River Restoration: Recipes for Success

## 13<sup>TH</sup> ANNUAL NETWORK CONFERENCE



ARUP





Partnership at the Muddy End  
Will Bond - Alaska



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*the River Restoration Centre*  
*Working to restore and enhance our rivers*









# Key OUTcomes

- A need for a clear mechanism to identify experienced river restoration contractors so that procuring the right services is straightforward and cost effective.
- **Early contractor involvement to mitigate against designers producing designs which are impractical, too risky or over engineered**
- Project funding that is set up to span financial years is currently limited.
- There is still a high level of uncertainty and risk associated with river restoration projects.
- For many of the common river restoration products there are no/limited standard specifications



























5 May



14 October



14 October

# Gains

- Greater involvement of all parties leads to greater 'ownership' and pride
- Partners discuss and agree best actions, leading to better decisions, and better implementation of decisions
- Greater incentive to save costs if you know savings will be recycled into the project rather than banked
- Waste will be reduced
- Opportunities will be seized where possible

# PROBLEMS

- No proper contractual arrangements cover this form of working - relies on the parties goodwill
- Difficult to account for in tender driven procurement
- Unsuitable for an extras and claims driven relationship
- Unsuitable for 3rd party (client/main contractor/subcontractor relationship)







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# Partnerships at the muddy end

- whether we like it or not we have to work with the wayward partner; and that means adopting a flexible approach
- where client, consultant and contractor work together restoration will always deliver more natural results than a rigid framework
- traditional hard construction contracts which tend to be used for river restoration (because it also involves diggers) are not geared up to working in partnership
- too much emphasis has been given at policy level to badge swapping, and too little to the benefits of developing productive working partnerships
- Partnership, in the form of early contractor involvement, was the most widely sought improvement cited at the RRC workshop



Partnership at the Muddy End  
Will Bond - Alaska

## Presentation – Will Bond



Partnership means different things to different people and organisations; but we all used to know what we meant by it. Then the management speak consultants discovered this cosy word. Now what does it mean ?

Sometimes 'partnership' seems to mean adding your logo to my project, or mine to yours because more partners attracts more funding. This is the conference collection

Sometimes it means we will work together to make the whole greater than the sum of the parts.

Sometimes it means nothing.

Sometimes it just seems to be collecting badges for the sake of it.



I would suggest that the real partnership, based on sharing decisions, striving for a vision, and sometimes getting wet is where the action is - in the river



Restoration work, especially at the small to medium river scale, is often difficult to specify precisely.

Good restoration is likely to need flexibility and adaptability on the part of the client, the consultant and the contractor, adapting to challenges they arise, and as importantly recognising and seizing opportunities too. So, for example, part way through this project in the north of Scotland we found a fundamental miscalculation, and rather than stopping work on a claim, redesigned some key features on the hoof. The client and the consultants, instead of arguing over liability, checked out our solution and work resumed promptly. The solution, as it happened, saved costs, and I was able to persuade them to allow us to extend the work elsewhere. That gave a feel of true partnership.

In July last year the RRC organised a workshop to discuss the issues which arise between the design of a river restoration project and the on the ground delivery of the project. This is the field trip afterwards in the New Forest. They made us do some proper work indoors first.





Five dominant issues emerged. For now I want to focus on this one.

As contractors we dread those invitations to tender for work that arrive unexpectedly giving ten days to submit a price, and which are clearly impractical to construct. When questioned the answer is invariably that is too late to change the specification, and then, tenders accepted everybody feels they have to go through with what was sent out, right or wrong. We would much rather put the time in pre-tender to explain what is practical, and to give time to think about the project. I was rather relieved at the workshop to find every other contractor putting the same issue at the top of their list.

But what really surprised me at the workshop was that this was the dominant theme amongst consultants and clients too. They all wanted early contractor involvement. We all recognise the benefits of working together in partnership. I am referring to an attitude of mind, not the legal constitution.

Early contractor or contractors involvement is obviously worth promoting, but so is the choice of partner. In some cases competence is all that is necessary; but sometimes craftsmanship and understanding the natural context matters too.

So if this represents river improvement from 1960 to 1980 by straightening channels...



...then for some, this represents current best practice. It is sinuous, and has gently graded edges. What more could you want from your river restoration?



How about feel? Enthusiasm?

This sort of standard that is what I call 'art informed by science'



These sorts of results come from a team working together in partnership and responding to conditions on the ground; not blindly forcing a design - however good - on a variable canvas.



Whether lowland or upland, nobody has an absolute blueprint for the best solutions or techniques; progress is achieved by working together - this is the DEFRA pilot project on Exmoor.



But even before getting to site working together can pay off: On this site in the Peak District we were invited to work out how to remove a substantial coating of fine toxic sediment from a stream bed without disturbing protected water voles in the banks. Long reach excavators were impractical. My solution - I think the only realistic one - required a great degree of innovation and financial risk, and you only go that far when you feel involved as a partner sharing risk and responsibility as well as hopefully, rewards.



And indeed it worked, and there is the evidence of change within a few hours once we got going; a clean stream and no damage to the banks; not even a leaf out of place.





And ratty here, still plying his usual route but now over the clean stones below. A tribute to partnership.

No consultant or client could have known about these solutions until they took the problem to a partner to think about.

So partnership to me is working to a common aim, not just swapping logos



For example, as partners we can come up with novel equipment, such as my tramway to avoid controversial ground damage in the New forest.



When importing 8,000 tonnes of fill for river restoration.



And not just hardware: we can also bring ideas. With our track record in turf translocation it seemed obvious to us to salvage turves to reinforce fast running sections of new stream channel, and it is something we have added to the project as we went.



This was another site in the New Forest the workshop visited, freshly excavated and with the banks re-turfed. I make no apology for referring frequently to this project. Partnerships rely on trust, and trust is something that evolves over time. One reason why this project demonstrates so well the partnership attitude is that as a multi-year project we have had the time to develop trust in one another's strengths.



So, five months later, and with the river in its new channel, the benefits of adding the technique are evident, even with the ponies and cattle trampling the edges.



And the results are so effective that it is now standard practice on this project. And of course it is a two way process. Partnership means new ideas can be discussed in a way that traditional relationships do not encourage. Traditional contractual relationships tend to be designed to avoid or resolve disputes; not to encourage co-operation.



- involvement and trendy words like ownership mean people get behind the objective, not just the task
- when people put their heads together, not only do two heads think better than one, but they will do their best to make the agreed action work, rather than just doing as they are told
- the last three bullets together combine to say that if money saved will be lost to the budget there is little incentive to save it; if on the other hand you can see how any money saved could be used to improve other aspects of the project that you are involved in, most of us will instinctively make that choice



- the problems are very real. For a start we are leaving the comfort of contracts. Formal contracts may, often should, still be there, as a fall-back position, but partnership working is often a culture that lies above the formal position
- when you have written tenders to do the work, how do you add weight to the one that will work intelligently with you ? How do you know which one will ?
- Partnership, with changes on the hoof, is definitely not compatible with the traditional civils industry's extras and claims culture where every change attracts a financial penalty
- and partly because of that it is no good a client and subcontractor having a highly productive relationship if the main contractor is scowling in the middle, and taking a cut for every change



Of course partnership is not universally appropriate, for other reasons too. This is a picture of restoration on the River Bollin we did downstream of the tunnel under the second runway at Manchester Airport. Here the solution must be engineered to be virtually indestructible, because somebody's insurance company will potentially be responsible in the event of failure. Somebody specific has to put their name to a decision. But such circumstances are, in reality relatively rare.

A more common fault is for designers to design to a 'static' form, very often in response to the need to gain statutory consents. But you don't have to have had much to do with rivers to learn that on the whole we guide, rather than impose. And that leads me on to the other partner in the process - the wayward one - unfettered by contracts and designs.



The river itself, which especially in spate such as here over a recently completed section of the Lymington River, can choose to ignore all the other partners, which is why we need to work with it.



This I confess, is the one picture that is not of our work - but I love the sense that this is beyond control. It is wild, wayward river energy in Cumbria.



So back to the Key outcomes of the RRC workshop.

- when clients and consultants say they want experienced contractors, I suggest they are saying they want people who will work with them, not just for them.
- early contractor involvement we have covered
- multi-year funding is not just good for continuity, it also allows trust to be developed.
- rivers, the unfettered partners, will always carry a degree of risk; but when the team share the risk, intellectually even if not legally, it will be lessened.



So to summarise

- whether we like it or not we have to work with the wayward partner; and that means adopting a flexible approach
- where client, consultant and contractor work together restoration will always deliver more natural results than a rigid framework
- traditional hard construction contracts which tend to be used for river restoration (because it also involves diggers) are not geared up to working in partnership; a significant constraint on this type of working
- too much emphasis is being given at policy level to badge swapping, and too little to the benefits of developing productive working partnerships partnership
- Partnership, in the form of early contractor involvement, was the most widely sought improvement cited at the RRC workshop
- and I should add that I wrote this talk in the full knowledge that the next speaker, Aly Maxwell holds the purse strings for some nice river restoration not far from home, and whose talk may not be coming from exactly the same angle as this. So maybe this talk is bad for business, but just as successful partnerships work by combining the best of the differing perspectives and experiences, so too, conferences would be far less interesting and provocative without a bit of jostling.

