

# Restoring the Yorkshire River Derwent

The Yorkshire River Derwent and its flood plain have evolved over the centuries. This has been influenced by geology, climate and humans. The river supports a diverse range of plant and animal life.

This factsheet explains the background to the River Derwent Restoration Project. This project has been set up by Environment Agency and Natural England to benefit the internationally important wildlife of this important UK river.

In recognition of its special ecological value and lowland character, the middle/lower part of the River Derwent has been designated as a nationally important Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and as a European Special Area of Conservation (SAC). This is shown in red on the map below.

## History

Although the middle/lower River Derwent has been recognised for its special ecological value, it has been heavily modified over time for a variety of different reasons. These include:

- flood defence
- land drainage
- water supply
- navigation

The river is embanked at several locations and there are several large weirs as well as Barmby Barrage at the confluence with the River Ouse. In places, the river channel today is wider than it would be prior to alteration during the 1950s. All these changes have impacted to some extent upon its ecological value.

## The need for restoration

Natural England are responsible for assessing the conservation status of all designated sites in England including the River Derwent. Their last Condition Assessment in 2003 identified that the River Derwent is now in an unfavourable condition. This means that the conditions within the river that support the following flora and fauna have been degraded:

- aquatic plants
- river and sea lamprey
- bullhead
- otters

A number of reasons for this degradation have been cited including loss of natural channel structure; siltation; barriers to migratory fish passage and nutrient enrichment. The Environment Agency has therefore begun work with Natural England to restore the river towards a more favourable condition.



## Our next steps

- **Survey and access**

To plan the restoration of the River Derwent, we need to understand the current condition of the river and how it is behaving. While much information is already available about the ecology of the River Derwent, there is less information on the physical processes, and how they impact on the river ecology.

A survey of the whole length of the River Derwent SSSI and SAC is planned for Summer/Autumn 2008. This will involve surveyors inspecting the physical river conditions from the bank tops. This survey will feed into the development of a restoration plan for the river.

If you live along the river, you can help our surveyors by providing access to the river and letting us know of any issues to be aware of during the survey.

- **Development of a draft river restoration plan**

Once the condition of the middle/lower Derwent has been assessed, we will identify actions that could be undertaken to restore the river to a better condition for ecology in a draft river restoration plan. Consultation with people involved in managing the River Derwent will be important to the development of a realistic yet effective plan.

Consequently your views on restoring the River Derwent will be welcomed, so please get in touch if you have any comments or relevant information on the river which you have not already supplied to the Environment Agency or Natural England for other purposes. Any comments received will be taken account of in the draft planning stages. The draft plan will be available for consultation early in 2009.

## Related projects

The work we are carrying out links into the Derwent Catchment Flood Management Plan, the River Derwent Catchment Abstraction Management Strategy, the Lower Derwent Valley Management Plan, the Catchment Sensitive Farming initiative, and the Derwent Chalk Streams project of which you may already be aware.

If you would like to obtain further information on these as well as the restoration project, please contact us.

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