

Modifying River Bed Levels, Water Levels and Flows

5.5 Raising river bed levels

RIVER UPPER KENNET

LOCATION - RAMSBURY, WILTSHIRE, SU28317152

DATE OF CONSTRUCTION - 2ND OCTOBER – 20TH OCTOBER 2000

LENGTH – 210m

COST – £12,000 – £14,000 FOR CONSTRUCTION AND REINSTATEMENT WORKS ONLY†

† The cost of £14,000 did not cover design, surveys, administration and consents.

The work was carried out by an experienced local river keeper and not a commercial contractor.

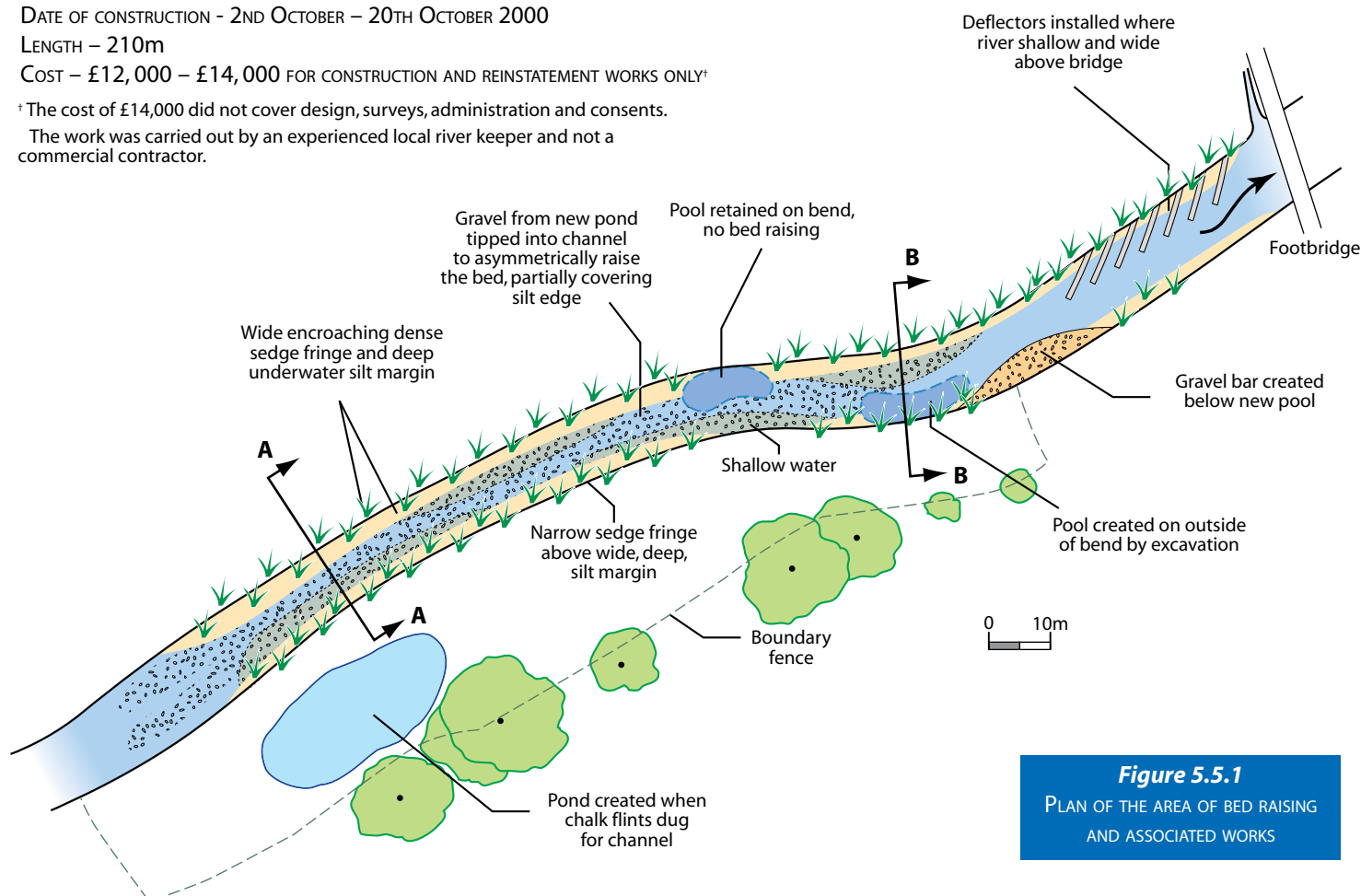


Figure 5.5.1

PLAN OF THE AREA OF BED RAISING
AND ASSOCIATED WORKS

Description

The Upper River Kennet is a chalk river (Habitat Action Plan interest) under European Regulations and notified under UK legislation as a Site of Special Scientific Interest. Despite its designation, the river exhibits interesting contrasts in habitat quality. Some stretches support pristine chalk river characteristics (beds of abundant water crowfoot (*Ranunculus spp.*) and clean gravels suitable for sustaining wild brown trout (*Salmo trutta*) populations). However, past management works, ranging from mill impoundments to more recent dredging activities, have resulted in over-widened, over-deepened, sluggish stretches that are prone to silt deposition and lack gravel or water crowfoot.

The site is a secondary channel of the Kennet, the probable natural course of the river prior to splitting into a leat to feed a mill. The channel had been widened and deepened many decades ago, but did not recover its natural characteristics. However, it did exhibit some signs of self-narrowing where marginal sedge (*Cyperaceae spp.*) had spread into the channel



Before restoration – sluggish deep water with encroaching sedge

Modifying River Bed Levels, Water Levels and Flows

5

and accreted significant silt shoulders. Despite this development, the channel remained too wide to sustain fast water currents and even in mid-channel the bed was subject to deep silt accretion.

A common approach to achieving self-sustaining habitats in enlarged degraded rivers is to narrow the river bed width and thereby concentrate flows within a defined low-flow channel. However, where the river also has a history of deepening, this may simply lead to the formation of a very constricted, deep course. To restore a more appropriate width to depth ratio, bed raising may also need to be considered (*see Technique 1.2 for further discussion on selecting the appropriate cross section*).

A 210m stretch upstream of Ramsbury was re-configured, primarily through raising the bed. The channel bed was raised asymmetrically to ensure that there was a narrow low-flow course and shallow edges to encourage marginal vegetation encroachment.

As the Kennet is a chalk stream the predominant flow is derived from groundwater, so major fluctuations in water level and velocity are much less than in rivers fed primarily by surface water. Consequently, a more flexible approach can be adopted for the location of gravel materials to raise the bed, as there is less risk of subsequent mass re-distribution.

Detailed flow modelling was a key element to determine the effects of the works under low-flow and flood conditions, for land drainage consent and to allay potential landowner concerns.

Design

Throughout, bed levels were raised to leave a maximum water depth of 0.5m at low water level (based on the Q_{90} discharge level - the level at which flows are exceeded 90% of the time). At this discharge, the margins of the channel would have a depth of <0.1m. The Q_{90} flow was indicative; the desire was to ensure that under very low flows the bed-width would be constricted to sustain at least some clean gravel at all times. The maximum depth of 0.5m at Q_{90} was based on a target reference width and depth.

Work was scheduled to commence in early October when river flows are usually at an annual low, approximating to Q_{90} . Prior to undertaking work, stakes were placed in the river to mark this level as a guide to the contractor during the gravel placement process. This was especially important since water levels would change if silt entrapment measures had needed to be installed downstream (on standby but not needed).



Gravel placement may influence
or be influenced by
fluctuating water levels

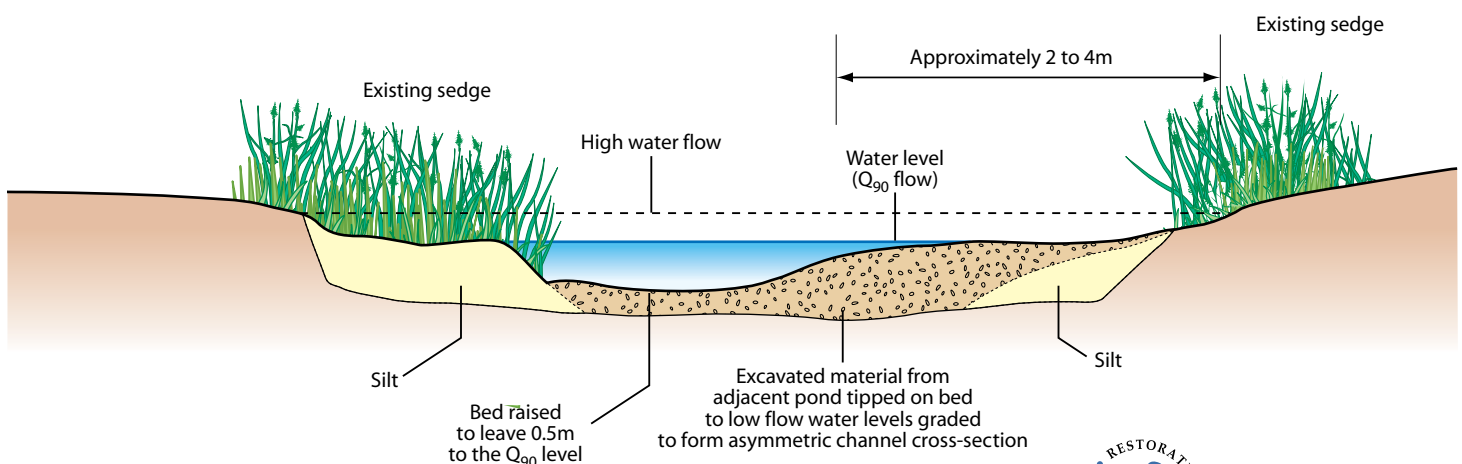


Figure 5.5.2

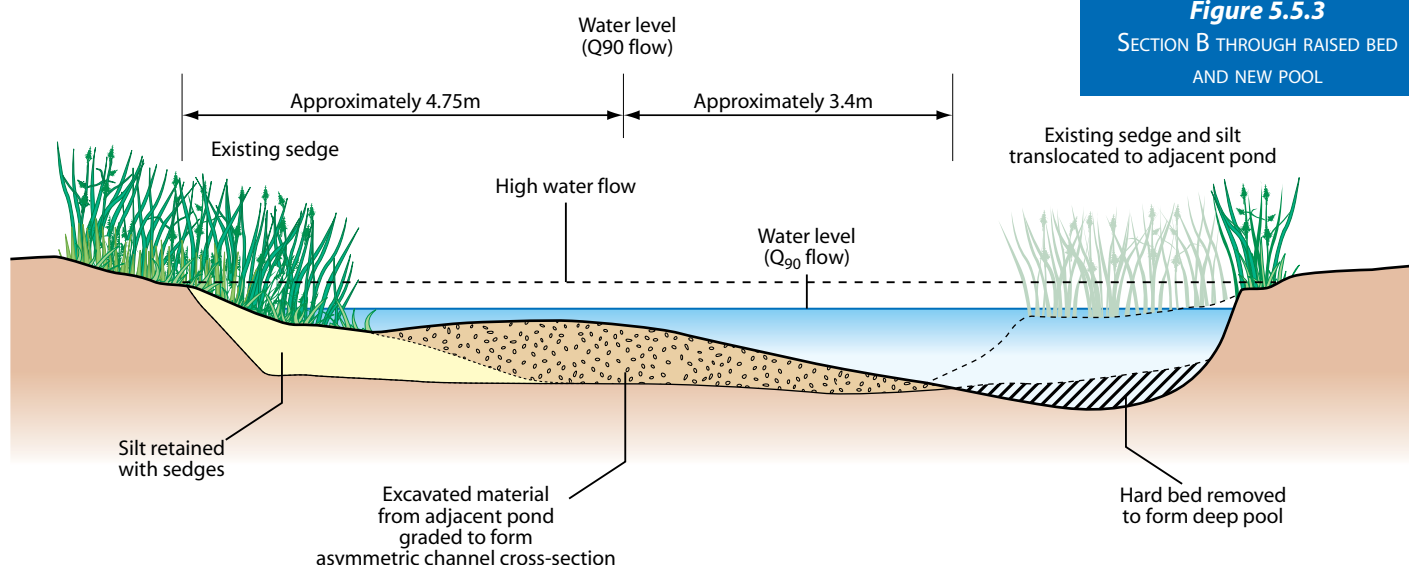
SECTION A THROUGH RAISED BED
AND MARGINAL SHOAL



Modifying River Bed Levels, Water Levels and Flows

Figure 5.5.3

SECTION B THROUGH RAISED BED
AND NEW POOL



The material used to shallow the channel depth was chalky and gravel flints. Where possible it is advisable to use material from the immediate area to reflect the type of bed that would have been present under natural conditions. Here the gravel fill was excavated from the floodplain by the creation of an adjacent pond on the right bank. The suitability of the material was checked beforehand by the inspection of machine excavated trial pits. Infill material was predominantly a mixture of gravels and flints varying in size from 0.02m to 0.01m, with <5% coarse sand and minimal silt. A few larger flints were also present.



Flinty gravel used to narrow and raise the river bed

Topsoil and overburden were first stripped and stored before the gravel was dug out and transported by dumpers to the river bank. Representative cross sections were produced as references for the placement of material so that a degree of sinuosity was created under low flow.

The contractor followed the drawings and had the advantages of both knowing the river stretch well and having been involved in the final design. Regular on-site supervision was provided by an experienced team member.

The works length can be divided into three sections.

A. Straight with marginal sedge on both sides

Cross section A (Figure 5.5.2) is a typical section across this reach. Silt colonised by sedge represents up to half of the total channel width.

Gravel has been used to shallow and narrow the remaining open water channel by up to a half, with the shallower margins finishing just below the Q₉₀ level. The remaining low flow channel is raised to within 0.5m of the Q₉₀ surface.



New pond with early growth, showing the gravelly nature of the floodplain material

Modifying River Bed Levels, Water Levels and Flows

5



A few months after completion, the raised bed evident

B. 'S' bend with some marginal sedge

The outsides of each bend are enhanced with a pool, the first by retaining existing very deep water, the second by dredging the silty sedge margin (material then used to provide marginal substrate in the new pond). Cross section B (Figure 5.5.3) shows the asymmetric section with fill material for this latter scenario. To ensure the pools are sustained by scour, the inside of bends had gravel deposited on them to simulate natural point bars.

C. Straight, wide and shallow section

After exiting the bends the channel widens. Significant narrowing is expected to naturally develop as sedge encroaches from the bank and entraps newly accreted silt. This narrowing process has been enhanced by the addition of deflectors (up to 5m in length and facing upstream), installed to help to deflect flow into mid-channel and accelerate silt deposition between the deflectors (*see Technique 3.1 for further discussion of deflectors*). Here deflectors were chosen due to the shallower and wider nature of the channel, and the limited access requiring hand installation.

The associated pond, from which material was won, was re-profiled to give shallow margins and bank slopes. It was planted with emergents excavated from the channel, and additional native wetland species.

Subsequent performance 2000 – 2001

Work was only completed in October 2000, prior to very high flows. Evidence after one year indicates that the reduction in channel size has not resulted in any bank erosion, and that the gravel has stayed predominantly in place. Minor local changes in gravel composition have occurred, with less fines in the low-flow channel.

The re-configured channel has restored typical chalk stream habitat, establishing a self-cleansing gravel bed suitable for water crowfoot to establish and for wild brown trout spawning.

During subsequent high flows the full (circa 10m) channel width will be occupied by water, yet under Q_{90} flows the channel width will narrow in most places to less than half of this, maintaining a cleaning velocity to keep the new gravels free of silt.

Original Information Providers:

Nick Lutt
Mike Crafer
Kevin Patrick



5



Modifying River Bed Levels, Water Levels and Flows

5.5 River Upper Kennet 2013 Update

Improved management of the sluice has helped to control water levels, but has not been sufficient to enable the river to scour all silt from the bed. It did provide sufficient added energy upstream to enable narrowing and edge habitat enhancements to be far more effective. In some locations the use of post and wire deflectors did not work well. The wire rotted away after two to three years, leaving a series of posts in lines and now most are both ineffectual and unsightly. However in other locations they are invisible where sedge encroached rapidly from the edge.

The river narrowing and bank stabilisation aspects of the scheme have created much more natural channel profiles. Areas of faster flowing water have developed in the main channel with local backwaters at the margins. Marginal vegetation has developed creating additional habitat.

Bed-raising has improved in-channel character and reconnection to the floodplain.

River Upper Kennet Medium energy, chalk

WFD Mitigation measure

Waterbody ID GB106039023172

Designation SSSI

Project specific monitoring None



© Alconbury Environmental

Effective narrowing of the channel and asymmetric shallowing of the bed has occurred following restoration – 2011

Contacts

Nigel Holmes, Alconbury Environmental Consultants
n.holmes3@btinternet.com, 01487 822020

Reference material – Click [here](#)