

MALVERN HILLS AONB JOINT ADVISORY COMMITTEE 18 NOVEMBER 2016

CONSERVATION MANAGEMENT ON THE SUCKLEY BROOK AND OTHER WATER COURSES

Background

1. The following AONB Management Plan policies are relevant to this work:
 - a) BP1 – Conserve, enhance and expand key habitats and populations of key species in line with local biodiversity priorities and the England Biodiversity Strategy 2020
 - b) BP2 – Restore the condition of degraded habitats in line with local and national biodiversity priorities.
 - c) FP5 – Support appropriate measures to monitor and control pests, diseases and invasive non-native plant and animal species that damage biodiversity resources.
 - d) FP7 - Identify and promote good agricultural practices that encourage:
 - sustainable utilisation of soil, minimising erosion
 - effective water catchment management
 - avoidance of direct pollution and measures to reduce diffuse pollution
 - farm waste minimisation and recycling.

2. The Suckley Brook is a tributary of the Leigh Brook, flowing into the AONB near the village of Suckley, before the brook then reaches the Teme at Leigh. Data collected by the Environment Agency reveals that the brook, in common with many other water courses in the AONB, is failing a number of Water Framework Directive parameters, particularly in relation to biological, invertebrate and physiochemical components. Under the Water Framework Directive all water bodies are required to achieve 'good' condition by 2027.

3. In 2011 the Malvern Hills AONB Partnership commissioned the Worcestershire Wildlife Trust, working alongside the Environment Agency, to undertake a survey of the Leigh and Cradley Brooks in the AONB. The resultant survey identified a number of locations where land management operations were deemed to be contributing to poor condition of the water course. Land just to the west of Suckley church was identified as one of these locations, where cattle in adjoining fields were gaining unfettered access to the water course, eroding and widening the banks and causing sedimentation and nutrient enrichment downstream. This has knock-on effects for a variety of species such as spawning fish. The brook in this location was also heavily shaded by extensive vegetation, which is known to impact negatively on the ecology of the water course.

4. The Severn Rivers Trust is an independent environmental charity established to secure the preservation, protection, development and improvement of the rivers, streams, watercourses and water bodies in the Severn catchment, and to advance the education of the public in the management of water and the wider environment.

The Trust is in receipt of Heritage Lottery Funding to develop a four year project called the Springs of Rivers. This project aims to bring together a diverse partnership to work alongside the Trust on the River Teme and some of its tributaries. Key objectives include wildlife and habitat enhancement, water quality improvements and flood alleviation through practices such as fencing, bankside coppicing and the removal of invasive species. A significant amount of time will be spent through the project engaging with schools and local communities that are linked together by the river. The Phase 2 application for the project delivery is due to be submitted on December 6 2016. A decision is expected in March 2017, with the delivery phase expected to begin in May 2017. The budget for the Springs of Rivers project is £3.9m.

Conservation management

5. The Severn Rivers Trust has recently been working with local volunteers on a project to identify and monitor the population of Signal Crayfish in the Suckley Brook. This non-native species was first introduced to Britain in the 1970s and has now spread to many of our rivers and streams. It out-competes our native white-clawed crayfish which is now classed as endangered on the IUCN List of Endangered Species. It also has serious impacts on the local freshwater ecology. Monitoring has established the extent of the signal crayfish population in the Suckley Brook catchment and efforts are now underway to eradicate this species from the area. The results from this work are being fed into a PhD project assessing the status of the signal crayfish population at a national level and researching the optimum methods for controlling it. Monitoring equipment for work on the Suckley Brook has been part funded by a grant from the AONB Sustainable Development Fund.

6. The Severn Rivers Trust, AONB Partnership and a local landowner have also been working on that part of the Suckley Brook west of Suckley church to address a range of land management issues which have been contributing to poor condition of the water course. In particular, some bankside vegetation, including diseased alder trees, have been thinned and cleared and new stock fencing has been erected. At one point where cattle are still able to access the water course to drink, the banks have been re-profiled and reinforced with stone, again with the intention of preventing sedimentation. In another area hard-standing has been provided around a cattle feeder to reduce poaching and sedimentation and nutrient input to the water course. These works were managed by the Severn Rivers Trust and were funded by Ringway as part of its corporate responsibility programme and by the Malvern Hills AONB Partnership.

Recommendation

7 The Committee is recommended to:

- **Note and comment on the report.**
- **Identify locations within the lower Teme Catchment in or adjoining the AONB where the objectives of the Springs of Rivers project could be met with the support of willing landowners.**
- **Identify existing volunteer groups which may be interested in receiving training and/or working alongside the Severn Rivers Trust on the Springs of Rivers project.**

Legal, Financial and HR Implications

7. No ongoing financial commitments. All required legal permissions were secured in advance, for example, consent for in-stream works from the South Worcestershire Land Drainage Partnership.

Contact Points

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