

What's Beane Happening?

The newsletter of The River Beane Restoration Association
Issue No 16 · Spring 2017



SPECIAL SOUVENIR EDITION!



Welcome



In this Issue

- Affinity Water achieves its 90% reduction in abstraction from Whitehall 12 months ahead of schedule!!
- A cautionary message from our chairman, Dave Stimpson.



Why do these three men look so happy? Quite simply, they are celebrating the successful conclusion to a campaign which has lasted 25 years!

They said it would never happen! They said The Beane was too small and insignificant to bother with! Yet, **we are delighted to report that abstraction from the Whitehall pumping station was reduced by 90% on the 1st April this year** – one year ahead of schedule! The three men pictured are George Sandell, Dave Stimpson and Ian Knight, three of the original members of the RBRA. Congratulations to them and to all members of the RBRA past and present, your perseverance and determination has been rewarded. Now future generations will be able to enjoy a chalk stream river of international significance once again.

Affinity water invited members of the RBRA, the chairman of East Herts Council, local MPs, representatives from the Environment Agency and Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust to a celebration on the banks of the Beane at Watton at Stone. This was to mark the 90% reduction in abstraction from the Whitehall pumping station which took place a year ahead of schedule on 1st April 2017! Well done Affinity Water!

The montage on the left shows photographs and headlines from previous issues of 'What's Beane Happening' including our protest walk along the dry river bed back in October 2012 and the launch of the 'Chalk Stream Charter'. Gradually the headlines became more encouraging with news that Affinity Water, a new company, was committed to doing something extraordinary – but would OFWAT approve? Thankfully, with no additional cost to consumers OFWAT couldn't object, and the rest, as they say, is now history!

A cautionary message from our chairman

Yes, the good news is that the planned 90% reduction of abstraction has been achieved by Affinity Water **12 months ahead of schedule!** We congratulate Affinity Water on achieving this so early.

We will have to wait now to see how the river recovers after years of over abstraction. Unfortunately we have had a very dry winter with only 50% of normal rainfall (only 5% in April), and the upper river is currently dry. The groundwater levels in the nine boreholes that RBRA measure each month are at a five year low. No one knows how long the recovery will take. It is obviously weather dependant, but could be several years. However, the reduction in abstraction, saving up to 20 million litres of water a day, will be a big help!

So Affinity Water have done as much as they can to restore our river, and they are committed to many enhancements, as reported in previous issues. But what of our country's other precious chalk rivers? At the time of writing we are in the middle of a general election and are at the beginning of the Brexit process. There is some concern in political circles that UK government commitments to EU legislation about river improvements will be quietly dropped due to high cost, although the government has so far denied this. We recently received a media release from former Environment Minister Richard Benyon and the WWF expressing these concerns, (<http://anglingtrust.net/news.asp?section=29§ionTitle=Angling+Trust+Latest+News&itemid=3723>) CTRL + click to see the release. It is worth remembering just how difficult the reduction in the abstraction regime was to achieve. We have been active since 1991 and the lesson is that this is not an engineering problem, but a political one.

The Water industry is highly regulated. OFWAT are the regulator, the Environment Agency (EA) provides technical advice to the regulator, and both are government departments. Water supply is carried out by Affinity Water and waste water is taken away and treated by Thames Water, both are commercial companies. The EA has recognized for at least twenty years that the Beane aquifer, as well as the whole Upper Lea catchment, is over abstracted with severe environmental effects. In that time the EA produced several management plans, some outlining action to be taken, but nothing was done. The combination of disconnected bureaucracies without a common interest proved that solutions to problems officially recognized for over twenty years were nearly impossible to obtain.

The milestones for our campaign were

- 1992 headlines appeared in the National Press about over abstraction and the effect on rivers
- 1996 The EA sunk nine measuring boreholes in the upper Beane valley. RBRA have measured the water levels every month since then
- 2004 The now defunct East of England Assembly recognized the shortage of water in the Stevenage area
- 2008 The EA reported that less than 20% of UK rivers were at 'good' status
- 2009 Early day motion in Parliament sponsored by Sir Oliver Heald, 'The Condition of Rivers in England'. Hansard acknowledged the information provided by RBRA
- 2010 Report by WWF titled 'Rivers on the Edge' included the Beane and Mimram, both described by WWF as the Cinderella Rivers.
- 2012
 - RBRA held the 'Walk the Beane' event along the dried up river supported by Stephen McPartland MP for Stevenage
 - RBRA began the quarterly newsletter 'What's Beane Happening'
- 2013
 - Appointment of a Living Rivers Officer by the Herts & Middlesex Wildlife Trust
 - BBC Radio 4 programme about the Beane and Mimram
 - Launch of Chalk Stream Charter on the Beane supported by MP's Stephen McPartland and Charles Walker
 - Draft Affinity Water plan to reduce abstraction by 90%. Requires OFWAT approval
- 2014
 - RBRA film 'On the Banks of the Beane' shown at Hertford Theatre
 - OFWAT approve Affinity Water plan for a 90% reduction by 2018
 - CPRE gave RBRA an award for the film
- 2017 Affinity Water achieve the 90% reduction 12 months early

There are two circulation lists for the RBRA. One is for people who would like to receive our news letter and the other is for people who are RBRA members. Members receive more information in between news letters. For example, charts showing the results of monthly bore hole dips, summaries from river warden reports, information from angling associations, Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust, WWF, etc. in fact anyone with a common interest.

If you would like to be added to the 'members' list please drop an email to our secretary, Ian Knight.
iknight@ntlworld.com

Congratulations to everyone in the RBRA, Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust, WWF, the Environment Agency, Affinity Water, and local and national politicians who have worked to achieve this fantastic outcome.

We look forward to a refreshed, and eventually, constant river with optimism and excitement.

Our thanks to everyone who has helped in whatever way over many, many years!

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