

What's Beane Happening?

The newsletter of The River Beane Restoration Association
Issue No 24 Summer 2019



Welcome

This is a beautiful stretch of the River Beane which is close to Hertford North Station. The land adjacent to The Beane is up for sale ... more about this exciting opportunity later in a packed news letter.

Encouraging results from river fly monitoring

The rain in June and July has been helpful in reducing the demand for water but it has not recharged the aquifer which, after three years of significantly below average rainfall, remains low. As a result there is a low flow in The Beane. However, the

good news is that although the upper Beane remains mostly dry, the lower Beane is benefitting from the 90% reduction in abstraction at Whitehall. This has improved the health of the river which we measure by monitoring a range of river fly larvae. The kick sample at Stapleford recently produced a record score which included 182 stone fly larvae (not previously common on the river) nearly 2000 freshwater shrimp and over 400 blue winged olive larvae. There were also smaller quantities of baetids, mayfly, cased and caseless caddis. This is brilliant!

Parliament debates 'degraded chalk stream environments'

This took place on the 22nd July. The debate was sponsored by Broxbourne MP Charles Walker and was supported by North Herts MP Sir Oliver Heald. The River Beane was mentioned in the debate. We should not forget that the majority of chalk stream rivers are in a terrible state. The following synopsis is from our chairman, Dave Stimpson.

The gist of it was;

- Chalk streams are getting more degraded, not helped by three years of below average rainfall. Many are at very low flow rates.
- At present Affinity Water has no storage capacity in this area and water has to come from ground water sources.
- Charles Walker strongly advocated the building of more reservoirs to alleviate the problems of chalk streams in particular, because of increasing population and climate change.
- The last reservoir built in the South of England was in 1974. Since then the population has increased a lot, but water storage has not increased at all.
- There is general mistrust about the water industries' projections of water use with a rising population. Affinity Water currently supplies 3.6 million consumers and in 20 years it is thought will be near 4.5 million. (Continued on next page)

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Sadly, the above picture is not of the Beane but is our sister river the Mimram. However, it was taken on an RBRA organised walk along the river on the 20th July. A very wet day, but a few intrepid walkers still enjoyed themselves.

If you would like to read the Hansard record of the chalk stream debate the CTRL + click on the link below.

<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2019-07-22/debates/180ABF92-245D-4855-A2BF-A13212E3162C/DegradedChalkStreamEnvironments>

RBRA Calendar 2020
Photographs are needed for our 2020 calendar. Profits from the calendar are now the only way that we fund the activities of our association. So, all contributions gratefully received.

- Official forecasts work on future consumption between 110 and 130 litres per head per day. Current consumption in the SE is between 136 and 142 litres per head per day, sometimes more, and the official forecasts are not believed. In any case this modest reduction in consumption won't be enough to save rivers from further degradation.
- Thames Water predicts they will have a water supply shortfall of 350 million litres per day by 2045. Without more reservoir building this can only come from river sources and chalk aquifers, thus making a bad situation worse leading to more rivers drying up.
- OFWAT seem to be universally criticised. Apparently they have no remit to consider environmental issues. This is the famous 'disconnected bureaucracy' situation.
- Affinity Water with Thames want to build the new long planned Abingdon reservoir. Charles Walker reckons we will need three of them, and this one has taken 20 years in the planning.

Beane Marshes Conservation Group (a message from the group)

Beane Marshes are a unique natural habitat at the gateway to Hertford. Those leaving the train at Hertford North get a lovely view across this unspoilt landscape as they leave the station. The current owner put the field up for auction in four lots at the list price of £155,000. Since the auction the owner has decided to remove lot four from sale. The cost of the remaining lots is £135,000.

The threat is that should the land go to auction a developer may buy the plot hoping to get permission to build next to existing dwellings. The land could then be abandoned or used inappropriately or have farm tracks or farm buildings erected. Even worse the land was being sold in lots and there was a real chance that the field could end up with different owners making any future attempt to create a long lasting nature reserve impossible. However the sale has also given local residents the unique opportunity to acquire this wonderful piece of land and gift it to a charity such as the Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust for its long term preservation.

A group of concerned Bengoe residents made up of people from immediate area, the Neighbourhood Plan and local councilors, came together to try to raise the money to buy the marshes. It was decided that the quickest way of creating a legal entity to collect the money was to create a limited company. The company could then work on getting charitable status. Thus the company "Beane Marshes Conservation Group Ltd" was created. The directors are local residents with specific expertise in wildlife, ecology, planning and risk management. Discussions with the current owner have been very positive, they have agreed to halt the sale given a deposit of £70,000 while we fundraise the rest of the money. We have already paid £7,000 to cover auctioneer's fees. Including lawyers' fees, commission and VAT the total required comes to around £160,000+.

Of this we have already raised around £80,000 including all pledges. One or two very large donations make up the majority of this and we are immensely grateful to those donors. We have been in discussion with the Wildlife Trust and had a very positive meeting – their Chief Executive is involved and they are seeing what they can do to help us accelerate fundraising and also accept the land as a gift from the community. They are keen that we open discussions with the owner to try to secure lot 4 which we will do. However, it is important to note that the owner will give us access to the land through lot 4 and that this lot is of lower wildlife value than the rest. To know we are home and dry and have sufficient funds to meet all costs we still need to raise at least £80,000. This is a daunting challenge but we believe with the help of the community we can do it!



Himalayan Balsam

This is an invasive plant that degrades our river banks and is of no value to native wildlife. For some years the RBRA have been attempting to control it. The pictures are before and after shots of a recent 'pulling expedition' along the Watton ditch downstream from the scout hut. It was during the heat wave but fortunately the ditch was in full shade. The 'pullers' were Malcolm, Pierre, Steve, Dave S and Bob.



The RBRA would like to wish the Beane Marshes Conservation Group success in their bold and worthwhile venture. The group are exploring funding options such as Heritage Lottery funding or council funds or support from local businesses. They are also 'crowd funding'. If you would like to make a donation you can do so at <https://www.crowdfunder.co.uk/save-land-by-the-river-beane-hertford>. If you would like further information you can email the group at beanemarshes@gmail.com, visit their website at <http://beanemarshes.org.uk/> or visit their facebook page Land auction near Beane River/Hertford North https://www.facebook.com/groups/610016856169644/?ref=group_header.

(CTRL + click to follow the above links)

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