

River Wensum

Restoration Strategy

Issue 5 December 2010

Welcome to our fifth newsletter

Great Ryburgh meander loop restored

Our latest river restoration scheme at Great Ryburgh is almost complete. With the co-operation of landowners, we have been hard at work opening up 350 metres of meandering channel that was bypassed in the 1950s when the river was straightened, widened and deepened as part of a land drainage improvement scheme.

Although disconnected from the straightened river, the line of the original meandering channel remained, fringed in places by mature alder trees. We have carefully re-excavated the old channel, leaving the riverbed gravels intact where we have found them, and supplementing them in other areas to provide shallow gravel glides. In addition we have dug a number of deeper pools to provide refuge areas for fish and other wildlife.

The existing river course has been plugged at the upstream end of the meander, so that under normal conditions all the flow will be directed into the meander loop. The straight cut-off channel will be retained and will act as a relief channel during periods of high flow, and as a quiet backwater during periods of normal flow.

As another feature of the scheme we have reconnected a Norfolk Rivers Internal Drainage Board drain to the meander loop. As well as providing an additional route for drainage water to discharge to the Wensum this also significantly increases the availability of wetland habitat for protected species such as water vole and white-clawed crayfish. The section of river downstream of the meander has also been enhanced by the construction of lateral shelves. This increases the curves in the channel. The installation of large woody debris deflectors and gravel riffles increases the diversity of the in-channel habitats.

We are confident that restoration of the river at Great Ryburgh Common will result in an increase in length of high quality river habitat, improved water quality, and a greater variety of flows which will benefit fish and aquatic invertebrates, plants, water voles and otters. The following photographs show various stages in the implementation of the scheme.





1. Meander loop before restoration



2. Meander loop after restoration



3. Restored meander with fringing alders



4. Re-connected IDB drain

Please pass this newsletter on to a friend or neighbour and encourage them to sign up to the e-mailed version.



5. Low level berm installed to diversify flows in existing river channel



6. Re-opened meander loop

Feasibility reports

In previous newsletters we have talked about the feasibility reports. These are produced for each of the nine riverine Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) units on the Wensum where the Environment Agency is the operating authority. To date we have completed 5 reports. We are currently finalising reports for units 47 (Tat confluence to Fakenham) and 49 (Great Ryburgh Mill to Bintree Mill) and will be shortly commencing work on the remaining two SSSI units. This is a very important step for restoration of the Wensum as it will mean that the majority of the SSSI will be fully appraised with a conceptual restoration design in place. From conceptual design we can then go straight to detailed design in the future ensuring a holistic approach to river restoration. In the new year we will be contacting landowners to arrange site visits in the following units:

- Unit 51: between Elmham Mill and Elsing Mill, and
- Unit 54: between Taverham Mill and Helledon Mill.

If you would like further information or are interested in partnership working, please contact us at the following e-mail address: river.restoration@environment-agency.gov.uk

Or contact: John Abraham, Wensum Project Team, Environment Agency, Dragonfly House, 2 Gilders Way, Norwich, Norfolk, NR3 1UB

We would very much like to keep as many people as possible informed by e-mail to save on the amount of paper and postage we use. Please pass this newsletter on to your friends and neighbours and encourage them to sign up for their own e-mail copy. Thank you.

Please pass this newsletter on to a friend or neighbour and encourage them to sign up to the e-mailed version.