

Migrating towards better rivers

Workshop sessions

During the afternoon of the workshop delegates were asked to participate in discussion sessions. These sessions were designed to provide an opportunity for delegates to give comments, feedback about the river and provide ideas for future projects etc following on from the morning sessions.

The aim of this session was to;

- gain thoughts and opinions about the rivers
- identify the challenges within the catchment
- identify solutions to those challenges
- promote discussion about the rivers

Method for participation: Delegates were able to visit three 'stations' during the hour spending 20 minutes at each 'station'.

The six 'stations' were:

- Whole Darent and Cray Catchments
- Upper Darent
- Middle Darent
- Lower Darent
- Upper Cray
- Lower Cray

Delegates were asked the following questions, in order to help structure the discussions.

Catchment questions;

What is your understanding/perception of the catchment-based approach?

What do you consider to be the main challenges for the catchment?

What actions or activities should be taken to address these challenges?

River stretch questions;

What do you value about this stretch of river?

What are the main challenges you are concerned about within this stretch?

What actions or activities should be taken to address these challenges?

The details of comments and discussions from each 'station' can be found below.

Whole Darent and Cray Catchment

What is your understanding/perception of the catchment-based approach?

- My understanding is better since the presentation from Angela Gorman, Environment Agency - Catchment Coordinator
- It seems to be a logical and common sense approach to working on the rivers
- It forms a necessary part of the River Basin System
- It will help to identify the work that is needed on the river
- I like the inclusive nature of this approach and how it covers all topics within catchment
- Covers concise area – with similar rivers
- Conservation of the habitat should be approached in a catchment basis

What do you consider to be the main challenges for the catchment?

- There is a diverse number of interest groups which need to be engaged with
- The large number of landowners within the area
- The financial challenge of delivering the work that is identified
- How do we collectively agree to what level we need to raise standards
- Thames Gateway development impacts on the catchment
- Awareness
- Abstraction
- Diffuse Pollution
- Pollution from works, farms and motorways
- Bexley village has siltation issues
- In Central Park the flow for the Darent is mainly directed through the flood channel rather than through park, the water should be re-routed
- There should be more promotion of angling for young people within the Dartford/Central Park area
- Mill structure are usually on side channels (Leets) so don't impact on flooding
- Invasive species concerns within the upper and middle Darent including Himalayan balsam/Marginal water lily/Mink
- Reed bed encroachment at Eynsford
- Darent fabric Mill – Westminster Mill already fairly good due to impoundment removal
- Flood protection in Westerham is a concern – Maintenance of rivers?
- Matching recreational needs with demands for water

What actions or activities should be taken to address these challenges?

- The catchment based approach is more strategic
- Use events / newsletter / press to raise awareness
- Identify funders for community groups e.g. Cory etc
- Interactive events are useful, plus promotion and volunteering – use local councils
- River Wardens / River Keepers for volunteer support is an excellent of increasing capacity for delivery of projects
- Fishing clubs need to liaise more closely with Parish Councils
- Annual events should be held to report progress and share success
- Reduce abstraction
- Monitor/control nitrates
- Public meetings with plenty of publicity for whole area
- Raise awareness of the catchment based approach
- Create a 'joined-up' message from local authorities, Env. Agency, Kent Wildlife Trust, Parish Council with regards to catchment planning
- Create a website for the Rivers Darent and Cray to promote to riparian landowners and communities
- Create specific sites for wildlife which have limited access
- Volunteering for practical project delivery and monitoring of pollution and habitats

Upper Darent: Source of the river – Otford

What do you value about this stretch of river?

- Wild trout successfully spawn here – the nursery of the river
- Quality of water, the landscape and the attractiveness for walkers
- Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty
- Land use in valley
- It is an intrinsic part of the environment but hidden from sight
- Its attractiveness in parts, its historical features, and fishing
- Central feature of rural countryside that many local residents care about

What are the main challenges you are concerned about within this stretch?

- There is continuing abstraction SE Water from the Honey-pot stream which has not been reduced in the Darent Action Plan
- The barriers to migration – up and down – the lakes create a separation of the upper Darent from the middle Darent
- Abstraction
- Low-flow
- Restocking native fish species
- Brasted experiences flooding and pollutions from motorway drains, which the highways agency should be responsible for
- Japanese Knotweed
- Too many lakes in gravel pits, resulting in the water coming in cool and leaving the lake warm
- Bank erosion
- Access to the river is difficult if you are not sure who owns the land
- People using the river as a dumping ground or drain
- People are not aware of how the rivers work
- Low water levels
- Blockages in water course
- Flooding
- Need to arrange necessary maintenance which many people do not wish to become involved with

What actions or activities should be taken to address these challenges?

- Address again the effects of abstraction from the Honey-pot stream and where a reduction can be negotiated
- Avoid ‘messing up’ the existing spawning of trout by interfering in sensitive areas
- By-pass the online lakes
- Difficulty to co-ordinate different types of landowners and village communities
- Online lakes could be taken offline
- Create flood meadows for water – summer grazing
- Reed beds are needed to clean the mucky water from roads and floods off valley sides
- Advice and help is required, need to create a lead group who can coordinate resources and link with landowners and parish councils
- More people need to get involved in the river and where water comes from
- New volunteer groups should be established so that existing volunteers do not become over stretched
- Monitor pollution where it enters the river e.g. from the A25 and M25
- More riparian landowners should be invited to workshops and events
- A simple ‘Darent River Society’ which can join up all the little groups of people and riparian landowners would know who to talk to and who had authority for action
- Organise work parties to clear rubbish
- Get flood defence completed
- Wider education of mutual civic responsibility e.g. schools and youth organisations

Middle Darent: Otford – Brooklands lakes

What do you value about this stretch of river?

- Accessibility to the river
- Fishing opportunities
- Local wildlife
- Available recreation
- Natural environment
- The scenery of the valley
- The historical value of the valley
- Rural tourism
- The middle Darent appears to be the focus of the whole river
- Linear habitats

What are the main challenges you are concerned about within this stretch?

- Flow levels
- Use of the ford (washing horses/cars)
- High summer water temperatures
- Weirs and man made changes
- Sedimentation of the bed
- Lack of field buffer zones
- Large numbers of visitors to honey pot areas e.g. Eynsford
- Invasive species
- Flooding
- Abstraction
- Poaching
- Impoverished habitats for wildlife
- Farming practices
- Maintenance of river
- Diffuse pollution from road runoff
- Building of houses on flood meadows

What actions or activities should be taken to address these challenges?

- More habitat work
- Raise awareness in local communities/public
- Education of local landowners
- Outside agencies should not impose
- Reduce abstraction
- Weir removal/reduction in height/range of options possible
- Planning policy should take into account the river
- Education of catchment sensitive farming
- Catchment approach to invasive species – use local volunteers
- Better organisation of visitors – better parking facilities
- Better partnered approach
- Tree planting to create dappled shade
- Neighbourhood planning – to reduce pressures on local resources
- Highways/Roads/Urban SUDS
- EA stocking policy

Lower Darent: Brooklands lakes – Thames confluence

What do you value about this stretch of river?

- Lower Darent tidal section; marshes, water voles, wading birds etc
- Walking/footpaths
- How the river used to be

What are the main challenges you are concerned about within this stretch?

- Dartford town centre; the river is split into channels, rubbish etc.
- Channels were concrete lined in 1972 so the river lacks any habitat
- Barriers
- Heavy silting
- Area experiences anti-social behaviour (drug use/alcohol abuse)
- Thames Gateway area
- Polluted lakes
- Access to Dartford marshes
- Section not in AONB
- Litter (shopping trolleys/Paint/Urban waste)
- Lack of connection the environment
- Heavy development including industrial
- Local framework ignored by economic drive

What actions or activities should be taken to address these challenges?

- Darent valley path should be improved to create more connectivity to local environment
- Education in schools and youth groups of the river and local environment
- Greater level of sustainable development especially in relation to flooding
- Clean up the river and banks
- Reduce urban diffuse pollution
- Improve access
- Create better fish passage over large industrial structures
- Improve water flow within the split channels at Acacia Hall, Dartford

River Cray: Source – Darent confluence

What do you value about this stretch of river?

- River is very important to residents who live close to the river, or whose gardens back onto the river
- I value that I have a beautiful river and wonderful surrounding within 3 mins of my house, plus the wildlife and variety of fish in the lake
- Value water level because it looks better, value nice environment to walk along, how it looks is important
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What are the main challenges you are concerned about within this stretch?

- Reaching a compromise between all partners/groups
- Reprofiling the river bank
- Reduce the depth of water but not the extent of Maiden lane
- Removal of silt is needed to improve the river, but worry about this causing the water level to deepen more
- Increase public involvement and awareness of the river
- Keeping the river clean and able to sustain the fish and wildlife in and along the banks and meadows
- Thames road sewage pipes and valves, concern about security and risk of vandalism causing pollution
- What are the actual flood defence measures in the area is there a risk of flooding?
- What consequences will reduced abstraction have on the Cray?
- Climate change makes it difficult to predict the future
- Hall Place; what type of weir is it? Is it maintained? Is it listed?
- Vitbe; amounts of litter means it gets blocked repeatedly, uncertainty about whether it stays or goes, what happens to the level of water if it is altered
- Vitbe should be last not first, if there were measures further upstream done
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What actions or activities should be taken to address these challenges?

- Use trained people (e.g. angling instructors) to increase engagement
- Encourage schools to take a role in monitoring fish and the river
- If the obstruction along the river can not be removed for reasons of cost, historical or local objections, then fish passes should be put in place to help migrating fish and eels
- Thames road sewage pipe may already have been improved by caging in
- Plan for drought and flooding extremes
- More walk-over with volunteers to find out more about the river
- Vitbe offers opportunity especially as its where creek (saline water) meets fresh river water
- Good communication is key