

## **Meeting at Landbeach Village Hall 12 February 2014**

### **Notes from breakout group 1**

#### **Pollution**

Farmers do not put all pollution into rivers, and sometimes are not even the main contributors. The River Cam at Hauxton was mentioned as an example. It's important to tackle **all** sources of pollution rather than (appearing to) focus on one group.

Farming inputs depend on type of farming / soil type etc. Modern farming methods including use of GPS have reduced nutrient inputs to land and reduced runoff significantly. Putting human sewage on land puts the phosphate back where it belongs.

Grants are available for cattle drinks etc.

More legislation is aimed at developers whereas farming relies more on voluntary measures. Controls do not always seem tight enough on septic tank owners and water companies (particularly at sewage treatment works).

Many existing works cannot easily remove phosphates and water companies are more likely to invest in the larger works. Would it be more effective to pay Anglian Water / owners of private works to strip phosphates, than to pay farmers to undertake measures? [May depend on what Ofwat allows.]

Urban / village / golf course runoff needs tackling too. Vegetation drop into watercourses will also increase the nutrient content.

#### **Ownership**

Some landowners felt they were not allowed or obliged to do any work in the river (except perhaps removal of their own trees) and did not want to. Little enthusiasm for de-regulation so that riparian owners can carry out their own work. Landowners do not feel responsibility for the river even if they own to the centre of the channel.

To achieve good land management and good river management will need partnership working, as EA does not have resources to do everything. Need to clarify roles of landowners and EA in this new situation.

#### **Drainage ditches**

Many have not been touched for years. Practical considerations often mean a whole farm's ditches are cleaned at the same time, resulting in faster runoff from that area.

Disposal of slubbings is now more difficult (more legal restrictions). Some landowners may need clarification of the rules.

#### **Planning**

There seems to be a lack of effective consideration of water quality, flows and resources in strategic planning or in planning permissions.

Could runoff from new developments be captured, stored and used?

## **Dredging**

Should our rivers be dredged occasionally? No, especially not chalk streams such as the Granta, Mel, Shep, Hoffer Brook, upper Rhee. Many would prefer more regular clearance, as in the past.

Changing drivers in legislation have changed EA priorities. Restoring habitats and re-naturalising rivers is helped by the presence of woody debris in the channel. Ideally rivers will not be blocked up, floodplain will flood. The Cam seems to be functioning well in this respect, with floods on land relatively fast and short-lived.

Clearance little and often, and education of landowners and public, seems to be the ideal.

## **Education**

There is a need for more education of the general public, as they become more and more disconnected from land management.

Maintenance work, such as tree work, often causes huge public outcry.

Farm walks to show what farmers are doing would be useful, but there is also a need to use all available media (village magazines, website, parish councils, social media etc) to get the message to as many people as possible. Is this something the Cam Corridor Strategy should be offering to help with? Could collect examples of good (and bad – such as wheelie bins in the river) practice for a website, coming from a variety of places / soil types. Could include river management as well as land management.

Does the future include farm employees who only deal with the public?

The example was given of education campaigns to stop people flushing rag into the sewers – even if it might be more efficient to deal with at the treatment works it's better to help people understand their connections with the environment.

## **Access**

Some riverside land, such as Grantchester Meadows, is used by huge numbers of people. While controlled access may be OK, it is important to have areas with no access, for wildlife to flourish undisturbed. Controlling access is not easy, though well-signed paths can help.

Generally most people follow signs, though there's no stopping someone who is very determined. Once someone has made a path, others are likely to follow.

Landowner liability if people go off the path?

Cambridge City attempts to make some green spaces more attractive to people and others less accessible, in the hope that the attractive spaces will get most of the public use and the others can be better for wildlife. New developments in Cambridge often have no gardens, so people will use local green spaces more.

Is the Cam Corridor Strategy trying to increase public access along the river? Little enthusiasm for this. Better to encourage good use of existing access.

Here again, education is needed.

**Groundwater**

Issues with both quality and quantity. Abstraction licenses under review to protect rivers. Limits on nitrate use near boreholes, which have impacts on farmers but improves quality of groundwater.

Support of local watercourses by pumping should continue.

**Name**

The name “Cam Catchment Strategy” was suggested as preferable to “Cam Corridor Strategy”.

## **Meeting at Landbeach Village Hall 12 February 2014: Notes from breakout group 2**

### **Bourn Brook**

Balancing ponds at Cambourne rarely fill up. Pressure of water from the village sometimes makes the Bourn flow backwards.

Cut-off meanders are sometimes higher than the new channel – a problem if restoring them. Need topological survey before designing improvements.

Water levels in the brook rise more rapidly than they used to.

### **Upper Cam**

River meadows work as they should do in recent rain. Work at Hinxton to hold water back also successful.

Decline in wildlife upstream of Hauxton – the new weir installed in the 1980s changed the water regime to the detriment of the river and its wildlife

### **Bank erosion and silting**

Bank erosion seen as a key problem:

If steep banks re-profiled to a more gentle slope, will hold vegetation better, and be more stable.

Fencing off buffer strips (at least a metre from the bank) to reduce trampling by livestock, helpful. Temporary movable fencing for sheep and horses may be better but could cause complications for farm subsidy payments based on area farmed.

De-silting and removal of weeds probably better done a little and often, rather than less frequent and more drastic clearance.

### **Public access**

Public access seen as a key problem:

Buffer strips tend to encourage unauthorised public access – causing problems, especially for livestock farmers.

Density of dog walkers near Fen Ditton a problem

More farm visits desirable to educate public about what farmer is doing and why.

Where new public open spaces planned in connection with new housing estates, possible to design so that the legitimate desires of people to enjoy a river or stream are met (bank regrading etc) but they are subtly kept them away from fragile habitats (eg by deepening ditches) as SCDC has done at Trumpington Meadows under Rob's guidance)

Pressure to provide for cycling near the river at Hauxton rejected by SCDC. Generally not appropriate near river banks.

Very little public access in upper Rhee Valley – which protects the river's wildlife. But it is significant that local Friends Groups exist only in those villages that have some access to their local stream.

### **Other problems**

Lack of regular willow pollarding. This is the responsibility of the riparian landowner and funding to help is less likely to be available in future.

Pressure on water resources – over abstraction, a long term problem – despite current rain.

Run-off from roads is a serious pollutant.

### **Other suggestions**

Need to get groups of farmers working together, at a sub-catchment level, towards more sensitive farming.

The title of the strategy should be Cam Catchment Strategy, rather than 'Corridor'.

The strategy's vision should encompass the functional use of the river for farming.

Jean Perraton 13 February 2014.