

The Friends of the River Alham (FoRA)

This is a report of the progress made by FoRA. After the initial meeting of the Climate & Environment Group the following agreed to form FoRA with the aim of improving the banks and water quality of the River Alham.

Patrick Fuller
Sammy Menell (Trustee for Selwood Forest)
Alexander Russell
Joy & Paul Merron
Celia Crees
Paul Harrison
Ben Etridgre
Camilla Frederick
David Cavender
Olivia Self

Patrick Fuller in particular led an initiative to make contact with similar groups in Bruton & Frome. After a long discussion with The Brue Crew, a charitable body set up 5 or 6 years ago with the aim of improving the River Brue, it was agreed that rather than set up a separate charity we would become affiliated with the Brue Crew and Ewan Jones has been extremely helpful in guiding our progress.

The main objectives that we set and progress made to date:

- **Himalayan Blossom:** Object is to get the Himalayan Blossom spreading along the river banks under control. We had one day where some twelve volunteers spent a morning pulling HB, but to be honest we barely scratched the surface. It will need a stronger push over the next 3-4 years and we will need to plan for this over the winter. Sammy has some experience in this field and can advise.
- **Map the river and identify the principal land owners;** this has largely been completed and the main landowners are identified on the attached google doc and map.
- **River Quality Monitoring.** To set up a schedule for testing the water for both phosphates and monitoring Riverfly, the primary source of food for fish. Suggested we set up five or six points in the River where we conduct tests every 3-4 months.
 - Ewan Jones has put us in touch with the Brue Crew trainer for riverfly monitoring. We had a day where some of us were able to observe their testing of a site and we are trying to organise a day where he can come and train five or six people in this.
 - We need funding for the purchase of equipment needed for the riverfly monitoring of some £720
 - We then need to select testing sites and get these approved the Environment Agency
 - Also contacted Somerset Water Trust for phosphate testing kits, which can be provided free of charge once people have completed on line training
 - It would appear Jason McCue has been testing the river at Church Bridge Lodge quarterly since he moved in and seeking to involve Jason in this initiative.
- **River Survey.** We met with Theo Pike of The Wild Trout Trust on 27th August to walk the main stretch of the River Alham from Spargrove up to the ford by the Loxton's Farm at Higher Alham. Theo will produce a survey report highlighting where we can make significant improvements to the river, but the report will probably not be available for some weeks due to Theo's other activities. Theo's primary concerns appeared to be weirs blocking passage for fish, the cattle accessing the river and the level of sediment being introduced to the river from the track on either side of the ford.
- **Flood Prevention.** For some months, the Brue Crew have been talking to the Somerset Wildlife Trust, who were awarded a £50m grant to improve the rivers and flood control in Somerset. To this end they are putting together a proposal for the improvement of the banks of the river Brue. We have managed to get the headwaters of the Alham before it flows down into the Brue included in the scheme. There are two main elements which the proposal is seeking to cover;
 - Capital costs of any infrastructure to help flood prevention, which does not really apply to the Alham
 - Setting up a 30m corridor along the banks of rivers which will help prevent any sediment or inputs leaching in to the river, and on which there will be planting of trees and shrubs to improve the environment, stability of the river banks and slow flow of water into the river in heavy rain. As I understand it the landowners who subscribe to the scheme will be compensated for the removal of this land from production at a similar level to set aside.

To this end we contacted the main owners of land bordering on the River Alham and set up a meeting with them on Sept 15th at the Old School at which the proposal was set out in more detail. The initial response from landowners was positive and Simon Clarke who is head of Nature Recovery at Somerset Wildlife Trust wants to contact owners of land along a 10km stretch of the river to run a pilot scheme proving the effectiveness of having a Riverside Woodlands barrier along the river banks in improving water quality, slowing peak flood levels by slowing the run off of heavy rain and general improvement in the wildlife, habitat and recreational use of the river and its borders.