

Back to nature for Bradford Beck

The Environment Agency has worked in partnership with Bradford City Council, Friends of Bradford Beck and the Wild Trout Trust to complete a river restoration project on an urbanised stretch of Bradford Beck in Shipley since 2018.

A range of measures have been introduced to improve the natural ecology and biodiversity of the beck and surrounding woodland.

Rolls of natural fibre have been attached to the edges of the beck to help establish riverside plants and create varied habitats for fish and invertebrate species. Together with new planting near the beck, this will help slow the flow of water into the channel, which can play a part in reducing water quality problems and flood risk downstream.

The beck is set in a deep channel and is difficult to reach from the pavements above, so a new path has been built to allow public access down to the river where people can enjoy the local wildlife including woodland birds, herons, ducks and fish.

New native trees, shrubs and wildflowers and bird and bat boxes alongside the beck will create better habitat for birds and other species. In addition, new trees will help tackle climate change.

In 2019 and 2020, weirs and structures under road bridges at four locations were modified with wooden baffles which slow the flow and increase the depth of water to help fish including trout, bullheads, stone loaches minnows and eels to swim upstream more easily from the River Aire.

Ineke Jackson, project manager at the Environment Agency said:

We're excited to create more room for nature in this very urbanised section of Bradford Beck. As it flows through Shipley, the beck is enclosed in very steep banks. These works aim to let the beck flow more naturally within the available space and help both people and wildlife make the most of their local river.

We're now making plans with our partners to further improve the environment of Bradford Beck and its tributaries in the coming years.

Andrew Mindham, project manager at Bradford City Council said:

We are very pleased that the planned works are now complete. This marks the final year of a three-year programme to restore some of the ecological value of Bradford Beck that had been lost as a result of human activity over many years.

A range of measures have been implemented to improve the biodiversity of the beck and surrounding woodland. The area has been made more attractive for local residents with construction of a path to the becksides.

Although the project has come to a close, the project partners are looking to make more improvements in future years. They will be working together on a section of the beck further upstream next to Valley Road, along with other works to improve habitat and water quality in the catchment.

The main funder of this project is the Environment Agency, with additional funding from Bradford Council and the EU's BEGIN (Blue Green Infrastructure through Social Innovation) fund. It has been supported by local expertise and volunteering by Friends of Bradford Beck, and technical advice, fish pass construction and monitoring by the Wild Trout Trust.