

Press release: River restoration project wins national conservation award

A partnership project between the Environment Agency and the Box Moor Trust in Hemel Hempstead has been recognised with a national award.

The project has transformed a 1 kilometre stretch of the River Bulbourne in Hemel Hempstead from a straight, wide and silty river into a meandering chalk stream, which is a globally rare habitat.

The 'Bringing Back the Bulbourne' project scooped the 'best medium scale' award at The Wild Trout Trust Conservation Awards held at the Savile Club in London. The awards seek to recognise and encourage excellence in habitat management and conservation and celebrate effort, ingenuity and imagination.

Nancy Baume from the Environment Agency said:

We are delighted that our work to restore the River Bulbourne has been recognised by the Wild Trout Trust. This project represents years of hard work for us and our partners.

The Environment Agency is committed to working with partners to protect and restore our chalk streams for the benefit of wildlife so future generations are able to enjoy these unique resources.

The £60,000 project has breathed new life into the river. The natural meander of the river has now been restored, creating new habitats for plants and wildlife. Removing a weir has allowed fish to move along the river, while cutting back trees has allowed more light to reach the river.



An aerial photo showing the straight river before the project works started.



An aerial photo showing the restored river after the project works.

Volunteers have installed woody habitat features along the channel which create refuge areas for fish and other wildlife.

Other works include installing fencing to reduce bank erosion from livestock, creation of kingfisher banks to increase nesting opportunities, and improving ford crossing points across the river. The project has been designed to incorporate natural flood management techniques, and the final phase of the project, to create wetland scrapes, will take place later this year.

People walking through the moors can now appreciate a rare and iconic chalk stream with all of the rich diversity of wildlife that it supports.

The River Bulbourne is an example of a chalk stream, which is a watercourse that flows from chalk-fed groundwater. Chalk streams are a very rare habitat globally, with more than 85% of all the chalk streams in the world found in England.

David Kirk the Chairman of the The Box Moor Trust said:

The Box Moor Trust would like to thank all of those involved at the Environment Agency, in particular Nancy Baume and Jack Herriot, for all of their hard work and dedication over the last few years. The Trust would also like to thank Allen Beechey of the Chilterns Chalk Stream Project for his help and our dedicated team of volunteers whose tireless work has been integral to the success of the project.

This project is part of a wider programme of works which the Environment Agency are working on, alongside partners, to deliver improvements to chalk streams in the Hertfordshire and North London area. These works include river restoration improvements and abstraction reductions.

For more information contact: HNLenquiries@environment-agency.gov.uk.

Press release: Melksham Metals boss to pay £1.99 million or be jailed for 8 years

The owner of a Wiltshire scrapyards and recycling company has been ordered to pay almost £2 million he made from running an illegal waste site in Melksham.

In July, Lee Hazel appeared before Swindon Crown Court where he was warned he'd face an 8-year prison sentence if he failed to pay the full amount owed under a confiscation order made under the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002.

The ruling marked the culmination of a 5-year investigation into Lee Hazel and Melksham Metals Recycling Ltd by the Environment Agency and Wiltshire

Police. Wiltshire Police conducted the financial aspects of the investigation

The original confiscation order was for £2.74 million, but this figure was reduced at Swindon Crown Court following an application to amend the earlier judgement under a legal clause known as the 'Slip Rule.'

Hazel's lawyers successfully argued it had been wrong to include a figure for VAT when calculating how much their client had benefited from crime. They also alleged that, in preparing its prosecution, the Environment Agency had mistakenly included invoices for ferrous metals.

After hearing evidence for the defence, Judge Tim Mousley QC, reduced the confiscation order to £1.99 million from the original figure of £2.74 million.

Hazel was warned on several occasions about unlawful waste activities including the illegal disposal of waste on farmland and depositing and processing waste without an environmental permit. He is both the owner and sole director of the company.

An Environment Agency spokesperson said:

These were serious offences committed by a waste operator who has little respect for the law and the environment. He was motivated by financial gain and carried out unauthorised activities over a number of years.

This case should serve as a warning to anyone in the waste industry who thinks they can flout the law. Where we have the evidence, we won't hesitate to prosecute offenders.

Investigations revealed that he and his company dumped stone off-cuts and sludge at a farm on the outskirts of Melksham beside an old canal, as well as carrying out unauthorised activities at his Station Yard premises in Bath Road, Melksham.

In February 2016, [Hazel received an 18-month prison sentence, suspended for two years, for running an illegal waste operation](#) at Station Yard and for the dumping of waste at a farm. The court heard the Environment Agency had revoked Melksham Metals' operating licence and the site had closed down.

Hazel was caught after an enforcement officer from Wiltshire Council found various waste materials including chalky stone, tarmac road planings and concrete pipes dumped in fields at Queenfield Farm beside the disused Wiltshire to Berkshire Canal. The officer followed a line of 'chalky liquid' in the road outside the farm back to Station Yard. He reported the incident to the Environment Agency.

Last year's hearing followed 2 earlier trials at Swindon Crown Court in June 2014 when Hazel and the company were found guilty of 4 charges in relation to the dumping of waste at Queenfield Farm, Melksham.

The court heard Melksham Metals had a contract to remove waste stone from a local stonemasons yard. The waste should have been taken to a licensed site, but was dumped at Queenfield Farm instead.

In November 2015 Lee Hazel and the company pleaded guilty to a further 5 charges each relating to unauthorised waste activities at his Station Yard premises.

They admitted the unauthorised treatment of controlled waste at Station Yard from 2004 to 2008, breaching a waste control licence, operating a regulated facility without a permit and having waste without authorisation. Hazel was warned that even if he was sent to prison, he would still have the debt hanging over him.

In addition, Melksham Metals Recycling Ltd was ordered to pay a £100 fine for each of the 7 offences it pleaded guilty to. Only a nominal fine was imposed on the company because of the size of the confiscation order.

[Press release: Pupils design new Flood Warden logo](#)

Hundreds of creative youngsters across the north east have completed designs in a competition to produce a new Flood Warden logo.

The Environment Agency's four community engagement officers— appointed to help north east communities be more flood resilient – have visited schools in the region to launch the competition.

They've received designs from more than 300 children, which will be looked at by an Environment Agency judging panel at the end of the month.

The winning design will be printed onto all Flood Warden jackets across the region.

Flood Wardens are community volunteers who support their communities during flooding incidents – including activating a community's flood action plan, ensuring the most vulnerable in their community are safe and working closely with the Environment Agency.

The winning youngster will also be presented with their own flood warden jacket as a thank you for their help.

Taryn Al-Mashgari, Community Engagement Officer who covers the Tyne and Wear area, said:

Community Engagement Officers are working closely with schools to

educate children about what it means to be flood resilient and to help them understand the impact of flooding, ensuring our messages have a long-term impact for future generations.

We've talked to them about the importance of Flood Wardens and what they do and it's been fun for the children to come up with a new design.

The winning logo will be worn by wardens right across the north east so it's an important job for these youngsters!

The four new community engagement officers are funded by the Northumbria Regional Flood and Coastal Committee (NRFCC).

Emma Craig works in Northumberland, Taryn in Tyne and Wear, Anna Caygill in Durham and Darlington, and Sarah Pearce in Cleveland.

Their work includes helping businesses and residents to understand their risk of flooding and ensuring those in flood risk areas are signed up to receive free flood warnings.

They're also helping communities prepare themselves for flooding, such as supporting them to develop community flood plans and recruit volunteer Flood Wardens in at risk communities.

Press release: New fish pass opens up County Durham beck

A new fish pass on a County Durham beck is giving fish access to an additional 6km of habitat.

The new rock ramp fish pass at Goodwell Ford in Brancepeth Beck is the latest in a number of fish passage improvements along the beck carried out over the past three years.

It's hoped that these improvements will increase fish numbers across the whole river catchment.

Habitat upstream of this previously impassable structure used to be almost completely devoid of fish but will now act as a nursery for juveniles as adult fish reach their natural spawning grounds.

It's the latest in a series of improvements to fish passage on the beck. Wear Rivers Trust have been working in partnership with Brancepeth Castle, Brancepeth Estate and Brancepeth Castle Golf Club on a project funded by the Environment Agency to modify structures such as culverts, weirs and bridge

aprons which were proving to be obstacles to the movement of fish.

The project is already reaping rewards as it was announced last year that fish had been seen moving freely up the beck for the first time in over 150 years once a 3m high weir had been modified.



The newly constructed rock ramp at Brancepeth Beck

'Great to hear about fish returning'

Steve Hudson, Wear Rivers Trust, said:

The size and density of the structures along this beck made the project particularly challenging but we have had great support from local landowners and volunteers to enable us to deliver some great improvements.

Now most of the fish passage works are complete, it is great to hear about fish returning to previously inaccessible parts of the beck and we are very much looking forward to continuing the hard work with the help of our dedicated volunteers.

Goodwell Ford is the sixth structure to be improved following support by volunteers to identify barriers on the beck. Two remaining structures will be monitored with a view to work being carried out in the future.

[Brancepeth Beck fish pass construction](#)

Positive work

Paul Frear, Fisheries Technical Officer for the Environment Agency in the north east, added:

We've worked closely with partners to enable Wear Rivers Trust to carry out lots of positive work in this area to look at structures and issues impacting on fish migration.

This new fish pass opens up another 6km of watercourse for fish and make it far easier for them to travel upstream. The whole project is already reaping rewards. We've worked really hard together with our partners over the years to make dramatic improvements to water quality.

But there is always more we can do and projects such as this at Brancepeth is an example of the sort of work taking place across the region to enhance our rivers and streams.

Press release: Major flood defence exercise in Stratford

The Environment Agency's field team will deploy a temporary flood barrier along the street. The exercise, starting at 0700, will provide an opportunity to test barrier deployment plan and procedures, train staff and test working arrangements with partners, so the barriers can be quickly and safely erected when needed during a flood with minimum disruption.

Waterside will be closed to traffic for most of the day. Pedestrians will be unable to walk along the areas immediately in front of and behind the barrier, between the Encore Pub and the junction of Waterside and Chapel Lane, for health and safety reasons. Businesses on Waterside will be accessible.

The Environment Agency is supporting communities across England that remain at risk of flooding with 40km of temporary barriers which can be deployed at suitable sites during a flood. Stratford has been identified as one of those suitable locations.

Environment Agency Operations Manager Emma Smailes said:

This is a major test of our operational equipment. Although we have carried out numerous barrier deployment exercises at our training depots, doing it on location will give our field team invaluable

experience.

Cllr Daren Pemberton, Planning and Administrative Services Portfolio at Stratford-on-Avon District Council, said:

This exercise will allow Environment Agency staff and partners, including the district council, to work together and test this new barrier deployment in Stratford-upon-Avon, thereby gaining valuable training experience.

In the past Stratford-upon-Avon, and Waterside in particular, has flooded and remains at risk of flooding, so the temporary barrier will now help to protect vulnerable properties in this location during future flooding events.

Testing the assembly of the barrier is important to ensure that it all works smoothly in a live emergency situation.

Cllr Howard Roberts, portfolio holder for Community Safety with Warwickshire County Council, said:

Flooding is one of the major hazards potentially affecting Warwickshire residents and it is vital that we are prepared to respond.

Exercises like this are key to making sure that partners are well practised at working together in response to a flood emergency.

Emma added:

It's important to remember that we can never protect 100% against flooding, and we can't guarantee that specific communities will always have access to temporary barriers.

Local residents and businesses should be prepared by checking their flood risk, signing up to flood warnings and finding out what they can do to protect themselves and their property by visiting the Prepare for Flooding page on GOV.UK or calling Floodline on 0345 988 1188.

Environment Agency staff will be available during the exercise to provide members of the public with information about access restrictions, alternative routes and general flood advice. The exercise is likely to conclude around 1300.