

## FEEDBACK FROM RIVER WHARFE SSSI STUDY PRESENTATION AND SITE VISIT ON 16/17 Jan. '13

The following notes are an interpretation of the presentation and discussions by and with Natural England and their consultant JBA. The order below does not reflect the importance of issues but is more in line with the sequence in which they were raised.

1. The study was commissioned by NE in response to an EU directive (European Water Framework Directive?)
2. The directive requires that all water bodies are raised to "Good Ecological Status" or better,
3. The study determined that the River Wharfe in the SSSI (Site of Special Scientific Interest) between Hubberholme and Skirfare Bridge was in good condition but with some scope for improvement.
4. This section was chosen to study in the early phase because of its importance as an SSI and not because it was in a worse condition than elsewhere.
5. The current consultation is to seek views on broad ideas – these are not proposals
6. No works would be undertaken without the consent of landowners (it was not clarified whether this veto would be extended to tenants.)
7. Some ideas were floated to reconnect the river with old river channels, allow peak flows to flood some areas and possibly to create new short overflow channels. Such measures would reduce energy levels in the river and allow for improved fish spawning grounds. Potentially some flood embankments could be moved or adjusted to allow wider channels or localised flooding with rapid drain-off after the event. Fencing could be used to keep stock from degrading the river banks (which was referred to as poaching) although it was pointed out that in some areas this was already creating problems with catching debris and constraining floodwaters which then resulted in damage elsewhere.
8. Any proposals arising from the consultation would be implemented gradually over as much as 50 years, with probably only minor works in the early years.
9. There was some local resistance to the ideal to return the river closer to its natural state. The Dale is not natural and gains much of its character from human intervention (dry stone walls, barns, villages etc.)
10. Previous works on the river (retaining walls/revetments, gravel traps and flood banks) have not always been successful – creating erosion and gravel/sediment movement and deposition elsewhere.
11. Flood alleviation downstream was not part of the study brief although some benefits may accrue.
12. Small colonies of the invasive Japanese Knotweed and Himalayan Balsam were recorded in the study and these are to be treated as a matter of urgency.
13. The American Signal Crayfish, although an invasive species, are providing food for the otters in this area and there are no plans for eradication.
14. Part of the current flooding intensity is due to the extensive grips (drainage ditches) cut to drain the forest areas at the top of the catchment area where they feed into Greenfield Beck. Slower runoff will not then coincide with the peaks downstream.
15. The consultants will collate the feedback from this consultation and intimated that they would not pursue any ideas that have been firmly rejected by land users, although they may wish to have further discussion.
16. Any proposals forthcoming would have to be assessed for positive and negative impacts on all environmental aspects and would also cover agricultural/business and leisure activities. An equivalent assessment would be made for a "do nothing" scenario.
17. Feedback was inferred to those who provided contact information.