



ACTION FOR THE RIVER KENNET

Stand up for the Kennet by clicking on
www.riverkennet.org

Stand up for the Kennet!

From now until 22 June 2009 we have one big chance to make sure that the River Kennet is not abandoned by government and the Environment Agency.

As people who care about the Kennet, we know that it is a beautiful chalkstream supporting a thriving natural environment. But we also know that it is fragile, mis-used and undervalued. It is being steadily plundered by abstraction for drinking water: supplying not only local towns and villages in the valley, but about a third of homes in Swindon too. It is polluted by sewage effluent and dirty water runoff from roads and fields, this causes algal blooms and smothers the healthy water weed. Extra sediment flushed into the river clogs up spawning gravels, making it impossible for wild trout to hatch their young.

As the population of the Kennet Valley and Swindon increase and the climate changes, these pressures are set to get worse unless we take action.

Why act now?

In 2001 Britain signed up to the European Water Framework Directive. This is the biggest piece of European Law to protect water yet passed. It says that all water bodies across Europe should reach 'Good Ecological Status' by 2015. This means the river should show only slight deviation from the condition expected of an undisturbed water. This should all be very good news for the Kennet, but **without your help there is a real danger this big opportunity to improve the Kennet will be lost.**

From now, **until 22 June 2009**, the 'River Basin Management Plans', which show how this 'Good Ecological Status' will happen, are open for comment by anyone who cares about their river.

We need YOU to take part. We have produced a step-by-step guide and details of how to help are on page 4.



What the ‘River Basin Management Plan’ says about the Kennet

The River Basin Management Plan splits each river basin into sections called ‘water bodies’. The ‘water bodies’ for the river we know and love are: **Upper Kennet**, **Middle Kennet** and **River Og**. In the plan the water bodies are first assessed to see if they are ‘Heavily Modified’ by man’s activities and then their ecological status is assessed. The aim of the Water Framework Directive is to ensure that every water body reaches ‘Good Ecological Status’ by 2015.

Upper Kennet

From the source of the Kennet to Marlborough, the river is called the ‘Upper Kennet’. In the plan it has been categorised as ‘Heavily Modified’. The reason given for this is ‘flood protection’. To us this doesn’t make sense. Historically there has been some dredging to improve drainage, and above Avebury the Environment Agency clear the channel vegetation each spring, but nothing so severe as to put this classic chalkstream into the same category as a canal or a reservoir. There are a couple of historic mill structures, but none which prevent fish passage, so we can’t see the justification for this classification. Importantly, classification as ‘Heavily Modified’ means that the river is expected to achieve a lower ecological target and the actions suggested to improve it will be far less ambitious as a result. It looks like a cop-out.

Incredibly, the ecological status of the Upper Kennet has not been assessed due to lack of data.

Og

The pretty river Og, which feeds into the Kennet just downstream of Marlborough by Poulton Farm has not been classified as heavily modified. We agree. The Og’s ecological status has been assessed as ‘moderate’, we disagree.

Middle Kennet

The River from Marlborough to Newbury is called the ‘Middle Kennet’ in the plan. Bizarrely, it has all been classified as ‘Heavily Modified’. Certainly, when the Kennet and Avon canal flows into the river below Hungerford, bringing plumes of dirty water with it, there is a big negative impact on water quality. But what about that beautiful chalk stream that flows from Marlborough to Mildenhall, Axford, Stithcombe and Ramsbury down to Chilton Foliat? Surely that is one of the best examples of a chalk stream in the UK.

The ecological status of the Middle Kennet has been assessed as ‘moderate’.

ARK’s verdict

ARK has written a detailed report on the draft River Basin Management Plan for the Kennet. We have studied data that was not included in the plan, as well as the limited data which was; and visited sites between Avebury and Newbury to hear evidence from river keepers and riparian owners. Based on this research, which is on our website, this is our verdict:

Upper Kennet

We think that the Upper Kennet should be re-classified as unmodified. The plan hasn’t assessed the ecological status but we think it should be ‘poor’. The Upper Kennet suffers from low flows, nutrient enrichment (pollution) causing algal growth, and some reaches have been artificially straightened and deepened in the past. All these problems have a negative impact on the ecology and wildlife, and need to be overcome.

Og

We agree with the status of the Og as ‘unmodified’. However we think that assessment of the current ecological status as ‘moderate’ is deliberately optimistic. It does not recognise the problems of low flows, or sediment deposition and algal growth caused by poor water quality, or the poor habitat created by artificially straightened and deepened river channels.

Middle Kennet

We think that the middle Kennet should be split into two sections for this plan. The upstream section from Marlborough down to Hungerford should be re-classified as un-modified. The ecological status should be ‘moderate’, recognising that in parts there are problems with stream water crowfoot (*ranunculus*) growth, water quality, and historic channel dredging.

The downstream section, from Hungerford to Newbury should not be designated ‘heavily modified’ until it has been demonstrated that separation from the canal is not a feasible option. The ecological classification should be ‘poor’, recognising the serious water quality issues, low fish population and invasive American Signal Crayfish.



The existing plan predicts NO IMPROVEMENT for the River Kennet until 2027

All the 'River Basin Management Plans' produced for the Water Framework Directive should show how 'Good Ecological Status' will be achieved by 2015. If this can't be done the plan must explain why and show how improvements will be made in subsequent years.



The existing plan for the River Kennet shows **no improvements** by 2015, nor even by 2021. The plan predicts that in the 6 years from 2021 to 2027 'Good Ecological Status' will be reached, but the explanation of how is vague, with few details about where and when actions will be taken.

ARK cannot see how the plan in its current form will be able to deliver enough improvements to our river to achieve 'Good Ecological Status', even by 2027. For instance, there is no mention of how the water abstractions at Axford and Ogbourne will be addressed; nor how the significant problems caused by the Kennet and Avon Canal will be solved; nor any details of where habitat restoration might be targeted.

We think a better plan is needed, one which accurately identifies the problems on the Kennet and then designs detailed actions to solve those problems.



The good news!

The good news is that there is already lots of really effective work going on up and down the River Kennet. This work is being done by groups like ARK, River Keepers, Riparian Owners, Community Groups, Research Scientists and the Environment Agency. The River Basin Management Plan has only recognised a fraction of this effort and has not pulled it together into a cohesive vision for a better River Kennet. With some clear thinking and determination we think a healthier river is within reach.



What we could achieve

ARK thinks that with a concerted effort, and making use of all the work already going on, 'Good Ecological Status' could be achieved for the Kennet from Marlborough to Hungerford and the River Og by 2015 and for Upper Kennet and from Hungerford to Woolhampton by 2019.

Monitoring

A huge quantity of research already exists to define the water quality problems on the river, with just a bit of extra monitoring we could really understand the problem and put some solutions forward. New monitoring could be in place by 2010.

Understanding our fisheries is the first step to creating a better river for wild fish. There is very little data on the health of fish in the Kennet. From summer 2009 we could survey and monitor the state of the fish population.

There are already good habitat surveys done by the Environment Agency. These should be extended and repeated on a 3-year rolling programme to monitor the effectiveness of the new River Basin Management Plan.

River Flow

Thames Water have already made a commitment to reduce abstraction at Axford by 2014, reverting to the old base licence of 9.3ML/day. They are currently investigating the impact of abstraction on the River Og. These really positive steps should be combined with a full low-flow investigation of the whole catchment above Hungerford by 2010. The findings of this study could deliver a real increase in the water available for wildlife by 2015.

Water quality

We think that the target for water quality should be set at a level which prevents damaging algal blooms developing. Sewage Treatment Works should be improved to enable them to comply with this water quality standard. This could be achieved by 2019. With new monitoring in place, we propose that pollution hot spots from roads, farms or sewers are identified and targeted between 2012 and 2015.

Habitat improvements

There are already planned projects for habitat restoration on the River which will deliver improvements, and the Environment Agency has

created a list of sites which need habitat restoration work. Working with the EA and harnessing the energy and enthusiasm of local people we think a large proportion of these restoration projects could be achieved by 2015.

The interaction between the River Kennet and the

Kennet and Avon Canal has been well studied. There is no doubt that this causes serious problems for the river and ARK thinks that the WFD should be a catalyst for tackling the problem head on, with the aim of achieving good status by 2021.

Biological Quality

We think that the Kennet should be full of wild fish, which breed naturally in the river. Working with the Wild Trout Trust, using the Environment Agency's Fishery Action Plan and the information from the new monitoring we think that this is a realistic vision for the Kennet by 2021.

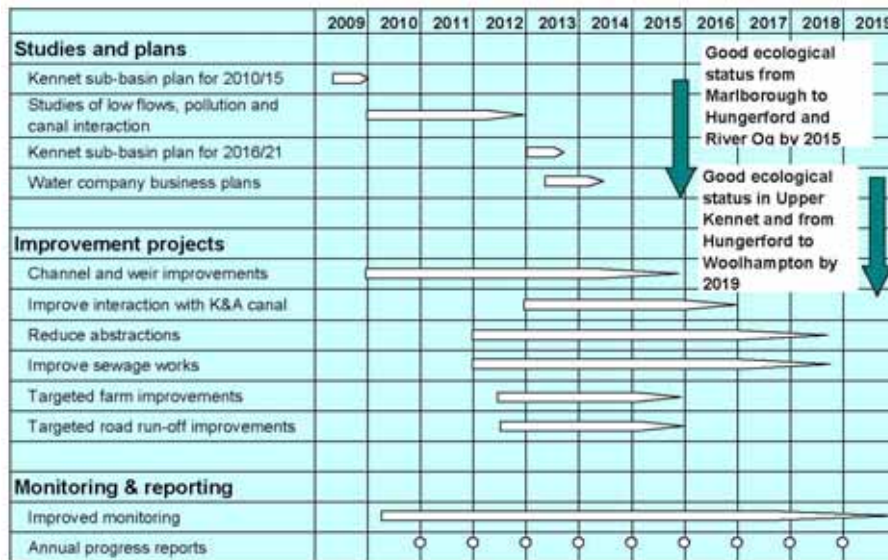
What you can do

The next few weeks are our chance to make sure that the plan for the Kennet creates real improvement to our river environment. **Please respond to the on-line consultation and stand up for the Kennet.** It may look daunting, but we have provided a step-by-step guide to make it as easy as possible. Don't worry if you don't answer every question—any response you can make is better than none.

Our guide is enclosed with this leaflet and if you have any problems you can call:

Charlotte Hitchmough: 01627 513672

John Lawson: 01672 841200.



ARK's proposed action plan