

# FRIENDS OF THE RIVER FROME



## News

September 2020

### Slurry spill kills hundreds of river fish – again!

Farm slurry poured into the river Frome on Friday 21 August killing a large number of fish for the second time in four years. Prompt action by the Environment Agency (EA) limited the damage but this was nevertheless a devastating and completely avoidable blow to the ecological health of the river.

The source of the pollution was a farm near the tributary which flows from East Woodlands into the Frome at Feltham Meadow.

Local residents alerted the EA because of the foul stench and discoloured water, and distressed fish gasping for breath.

Friends of River Frome Members who were monitoring water quality at the time registered phosphorus and nitrogen levels “going through the roof”

Slurry - animal waste- is a strong pollutant which causes rapid bacterial growth which in turn de-oxygenates the water causing fish and aquatic invertebrates to suffocate.

ForF member Sue Everett said "In this area there is too high a livestock density, creating a huge quantity of livestock waste to dispose of that this landscape and our river cannot cope with. Last winter was particularly dire, with slurry spread on waterlogged ground, soil



and water running out of maize fields causing localised flooding".

After the 2016 spillage farmer Michael Aylesbury was found guilty of illegally discharging slurry into the river and fined £22,000 including costs. The EA then restocked the river with 5,500 fish.

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### Frome River Strategy agreed by Town Council



Frome Town Council has officially adopted the Frome River Strategy 2020-2030 developed by the Friends of the River Frome. The document seeks “to create a new consensus for protecting and enhancing the River Frome and its surroundings in the locality of the town of Frome”. It provides a framework to stimulate multi-agency co-

operation on a wide range of activities from remodeling the riverbank near the library to creating a River Trail from Spring Gardens to Blatchbridge.

There is a strong emphasis on ecological responsibility including natural flood management, rewilding and tackling agricultural and other pollution. See page 2

#### Our vision

As Frome grows, its river should be conserved as a clean, healthy, nature-rich, free-flowing river system which provides a natural habitat for a diversity of life and an accessible green corridor which connects people to nature.

## Frome River Strategy

Our river is central to Frome's history and identity. It's a defining feature of the town that is hugely valued by its inhabitants. It's not in great shape, though, and faces many threats, from climate change and pollution to inappropriate development. To protect and enhance it for existing and future residents requires immediate action, long-term thinking and co-ordinated planning.

The new Frome River Strategy proposes 31 projects, large and small, along the five-mile stretch of the river between Spring Gardens and Blatchbridge.

These are grouped under five primary aims (*right*). The FoRF committee is appointing champions to lead in each of these areas.

Some, such as the remodelling of Welshmill Weir, the removal of CSOs (see *below*) and the re-wilding of the Dippy culvert are ambitious long-term projects requiring professional leadership and major funding.

Many though, can be pursued by volunteers. For instance, we'd like to establish River Guardians to monitor and co-ordinate work on specific stretches of the river.

We will continue our river cleaning and want to work with landowners on improving bank management. Engaging young people and the wider community with the ecology and history of the river through events and educational programmes is a priority.

There are lots of ways you can get involved

Simon Keyes

*Download the Frome River Strategy from our website*

### Aims of the Frome River Strategy

1. To maintain and improve the ecological quality of the River, its green corridor and its tributaries.
2. To promote landscape improvements which enhance the urban River environment.
3. To prevent and remediate adverse human impacts on the River and its catchment.
4. To promote public enjoyment and health benefits by enabling environmentally sensitive access.
5. To nurture interest in and knowledge of the River and ensure its condition is monitored.

## The curse of the CSOs

### Be careful!

Water quality in the River Frome is on average only "moderate"

After heavy rain sewage and agricultural run-off can be washed into the river reducing the water quality further.

Frome is no different from many other towns and cities across Britain where raw sewage is sometimes, or regularly, discharged into streams and rivers.

There are quite a lot of them in Frome, including several in the town centre, one near Rodden Railway Bridge and another that pollutes the stream in the Dippy, off Culverhill.

Combined Sewer Overflows (CSOs) are a legacy of old drainage infrastructure, where sewage and 'grey water' from houses and businesses enters surface water drains at times of high rainfall. Like leaky water pipes, they are expensive to fix, but fixing them can be more complicated. Some of the worst CSOs in Britain are in London, where major pollution incidents from raw sewage entering the Thames has now led to the construction of a huge underground storage chamber, the Thames Tideway.

Frome's CSOs may be smaller, but are still difficult to fix. Most are now being monitored by Wessex Water, but there is no guarantee they will be fixed anytime soon. However, fixing them is a priority of our new Frome River Strategy - we believe it is unacceptable to

see and smell raw sewage spewing into the river in our town centre. A group of FORF members with expertise in hydrology, engineering and ecology has now been formed to consider what we should do to campaign on this matter.

The timing is good as others have raised this issue at a national level, including an MP who plans to introduce a Private Members Bill on the matter and the Rivers

Trust, which has launched its "Together for Rivers" initiative. Anyone wishing to support the latter, is invited to donate to the campaign. Water companies make big profits.

I am sure many of our supporters would agree that it is time that greater investment was made to address the problem of raw sewage entering our rivers.

Sue Everett



12 June: Sewage flowing into the river via the Market Place CSO. There were 130 hours of such spillages here in 2019

## Natural Flood Management—a hydro-morphological study

For many years our rivers have been dredged, straightened and subjected to drainage schemes to improve agriculture, all with the aim of draining the land and ensuring water flows rapidly away. The result has been an increase in flood volume and faster, higher flood peaks downstream.

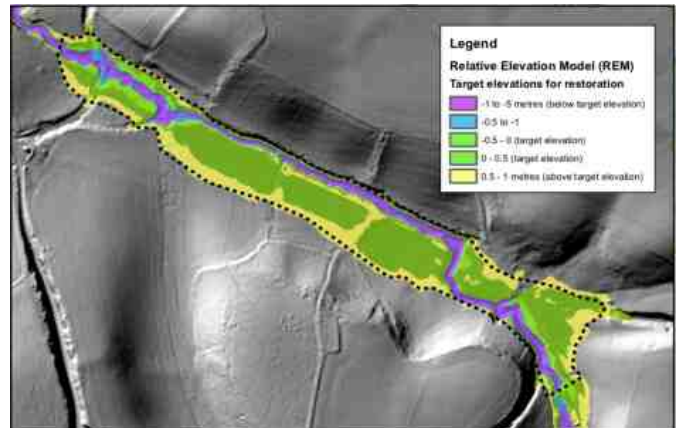
Natural flood management (NFM) aims to restore some of the natural features that originally held water back in a catchment and thereby reduce flooding. Such schemes include creating small areas of wetland and building “leaky dams” to hold back water and these are usually placed in spare corners wherever the opportunity presents itself.

These measures could be very useful on the River Frome, where there are restrictions in the river capacity, such as at Wallbridge and elsewhere through Frome. Reducing flood flow – particularly flood peaks – is therefore the best way of reducing flood risk in Frome

and prepare for expected increases due to climate change.

Rather than just randomly installing “natural” flood measures over the catchment FoRF wanted to know what the natural river Frome catchment was like before all that dredging, straightening and drainage. Locating where the river channel has been artificially changed is likely to indicate the best places for natural flood management measures.

With funds from Frome Town Council we were able to employ Jane Moon, an independent geomorphologist to prepare a hydro-morphological study of the catchment, which maps the shape of the river channel and reveals where changes have been made. Using Lidar mapping of the landform, derived from aerial laser measurements, the study identified where the river has been straightened and lowered and, more importantly, the extent of the original floodplain which stored flood



water but is now high and dry above the river channel. A small example from the Rodden is shown above where the river channel now flows to the side and 1 – 5 metres below the valley floor, all of which once retained water.

Instead of storing water in wet weather the channel now speeds the water through the section and on downstream. We now have a map of the whole catchment indicating where all these areas are, and where best to targeted for natural flood measures.

Bob Sargent

*“NFM can reduce erosion and benefit water quality, carbon storage & biodiversity”.*

Parliamentary Office of Science & Technology (2011)

## Wallbridge Adderwell Path under threat



New out-of-town landowners have attempted to close the long-standing path between the Retreat and Adderwell. It is not a formal public right of way, but since we can show it has been continuously walked for over 20 years it meets the criteria in section 31 of the Highways Act 1980 for a right of way “as of right”. Legal advice confirms it should be considered as such pending the outcome of an official application to Somerset Council submitted by FoRF in

July 2018 for a Definitive Map Modification Order (DMMO). The landowners contest this, of course, since they would like to secure exclusive access to the riverside for the new homes they plan to build nearby.

One of the country’s leading planning lawyers, Rodhri Price Lewis QC has advised that Mendip District Council could resolve this issue at the planning stage, despite the developers excluding the path from their proposals.

This particularly beautiful stretch of the river forms a key part of the Frome River Strategy’s River Trail project to create a continuous riverside path from Spring Gardens to Blatchbridge.

More than 1,500 local people have protested about this but the landowners refuse to discuss the issue with the Town Council. “Shame on you” says Cllr Steve Tanner, Chair of FTC’s Planning Advisory Group.

Simon Keyes

## Frome Missing Links - Whatcombe Footpath diversion

Creation of a multi use path at Whatcombe. Initial work has now started on the extension to the multi use cycle path, which currently ends at Low Water by the sewage works. The new path will include a long section along the river bank before heading back to the existing path beyond Whatcombe Farm.

Volunteers have made great progress by marking the route with gates, fencing and tree planting along the boundary of the path to be. Hundreds of young trees that will eventually form a 6m wide shelterbelt were planted earlier in the year and despite the dry spring most seem to have survived. Our thanks to the Woodland Trust for providing us with about 470 trees from their 'Wild Wood' pack. This was a mix of hazel, crab apple, downy birch, hawthorn, holly and goat willow, plus a few home grown oak trees. In addition to the shelterbelt, the volunteers have also planted over 200 tall willow whips, which will act as an immediate and temporary screen until the shelter belt trees can grow. The new plants complement the 450 saplings planted earlier with the help of Duke of Edinburgh students.

Recent efforts (in socially distanced working conditions) have also seen the creation of a culvert, re-positioning of a kissing gate, erection of a bridle gate and some foundation works for a cattle grid. Over 160m of fencing has been installed. If you'd like to get involved, we meet every Friday on site - get in touch through our website [www.fromesmissinglinks.org.uk](http://www.fromesmissinglinks.org.uk) or come along and have a socially distanced chat in person.

Rich Ackroyd

## Wildlife in Rodden Meadow

It could be argued that never have our precious, but sadly diminishing, green spaces been more important to us. The media have, throughout the Covid -19 pandemic, been full of both anecdotal and scientific reports attesting to the enormous benefits to our health and well-being provided by being in and observing, nature. Perhaps Frome's most important "Open Area of Local Significance" in this regard is Rodden Meadow, which is unique in consisting of a large area North of the River Frome which is accessible to, and much-used by, the general public and another large area to the

South of the River which is in private ownership with riparian owners who have been at pains to share their space with wildlife with minimal disturbance.

Thus, of these two areas the southern provides wildlife with excellent habitat in which to nest, roost, forage

and breed and then spill over into the northern area where it can be observed and enjoyed by all.

Over the past couple of years, members of the Friends of the River Frome have been carefully recording some the sightings of the numerous species of birds, butterflies and moths, mammals, reptiles and amphibians which have appeared in and over Rodden Meadow yielding to date, the following principal results:

53 species of birds, 150 species of moths, 19 species of butterflies, 5 species of bats, foxes, badgers, deer, hedgehogs, grey squirrels, frogs, slow worms etc.

In a country chillingly described in the "State of Nature Report 2016" as "one of the most nature-depleted in the world"

it is of the greatest importance that we cherish, preserve and protect Rodden Meadow and indeed all of our green spaces.

Clive Stephens



*One of the largest of our moths - the Privet Hawk-moth in Rodden Meadow June 2020 (Clive Stephens)*



*The wicker Kingfisher in Rodden Meadow, erected during Meadowfest in July 2019 with support from the Golden Bottle Trust. (Jackie Wheeler)*

## Get in touch

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 [friendsoftheriverfrome.co.uk](http://friendsoftheriverfrome.co.uk)

 [friendsofthesomersetriverfrome](https://www.facebook.com/friendsofthesomersetriverfrome)

Friends of the River Frome is a registered charity 1062090 and is run entirely by volunteers

Chair: Mike Bull

Secretary: Bob Sargent

Members: Simon Keyes

Your river needs you—become a friend now!

Membership costs £15 p.a.

and you can sign up easily at:

<http://friendsoftheriverfrome.co.uk/become-a-member>