

Restoration of the Cockshut Stream

Background

With only around 200 existing worldwide, chalk streams provide an ecologically rare home for a whole host of wildlife. These globally scarce environments provide a habitat for species like water vole, brown trout, southern damselfly, and the endangered white-clawed crayfish.

The Cockshut - situated on the outskirts of Lewes, adjacent to the Lewes Brooks SSSI - is a chalk stream that is currently channelled through a bunded ditch. The channel is filled with invasive species such as crassula and parrots feather. In addition, the banks are overgrown, making it hard to enjoy the water view. There is little flow and little biodiversity.

This project looks to restore the natural course of the Cockshut, enhancing the flow and reconnecting the stream to the surrounding wetlands. There is also the potential to improve the surrounding area with tree planting; all improvements aim at improving biodiversity.

This first phase of the project was to carry out feasibility studies and to get to the submission of applications stage for relevant permissions. Phase 2 will be to undertake the capital works.

The area is popular with walkers and the works will seek to improve access to the stream whilst also linking to the SSSI. The site is also adjacent to the historic Lewes Priory.



The channelized Cockshut stream, near Lewes, East Sussex

The project

The project was undertaken by Lewes District Council (LDC), in partnership with the Ouse and Adur Rivers Trust (OART) and South Downs National Park Authority (SDNPA), as part of a drive by Lewes District Councils for climate adaptation and nature recovery. The cost of this first phase of the project totalled £65,000 with £25,000 of funding from SDNPA and £40,000 from Lewes DC, who also own the land. The work was delivered by OART and all the activities completed despite the background issues of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Feasibility. The initial phase was a feasibility study to simply ascertain if the proposed realignment of the stream was feasible. This looked at flood risk, water quality, landform, land use and potential constraints such as services and designations.

Consultation. Alongside the feasibility work, initial consultation was carried out with partners, stakeholders and users of the site through a simple questionnaire. Engagement with users was less than hoped due to the Covid-19 restrictions in place.

Impact assessment. Following the feasibility study, more detailed impact assessments were carried out looking at landscape, archaeology and heritage, ecology and more detailed ground assessments and flood mapping.

Detailed design and costs. With all the background assessments in place the detailed scheme design was produced along with an outline estimate of costs.

Consents. Following pre-application advice, all documentation has been prepared for a planning application and Ordinary Watercourse consent.

“The draft designs look amazing. The bunding should give comfort to the farmer and filling in the whole length of the existing channel will help to deal with the parrots feather and provide an opportunity for some tree planting”

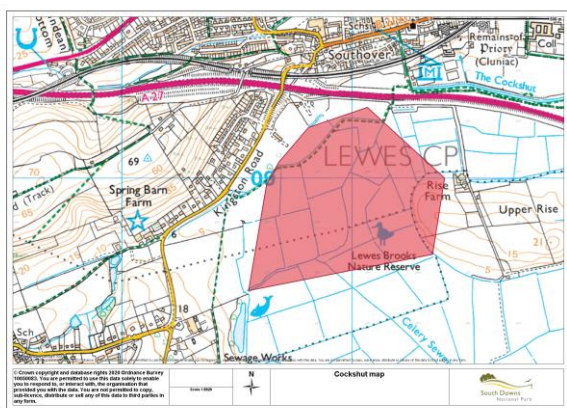
Christopher Bibb, Specialist Advisor (Open Spaces). Lewes District Council and Eastbourne Borough Councils

The outcome

This development phase of the project has carried out an investigation of all the issues and potential constraints to the proposed project including impacts on landscape, ecology and heritage.

The benefits of turning a canalized ditch into a clear chalk stream meandering through the floodplain are many, with benefits for the wider landscape and ecology of the area. The proposed 1km realignment also has positive benefits on flood risk in the area. It will contain features such as floodplain woodland that help to capture carbon and will provide opportunities for recreation and connecting with nature.

The next phase is to finalise the consents and then raise the funding to implement the proposals so look out for future updates!



The future

This project is all about working with natural processes, restoring a canalized stream to a stage zero place in the floodplain and linking to the existing SSSI.

The learning to date has been to see just how complicated a project like this can be, ensuring that all issues are explored and ironed out well ahead of any construction.

The project is now shovel ready and the partners will be seeking the funding required to implement the Phase 2 works within the next few years.

For more information on this project or water courses in the South Downs National Park, please contact:

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Water vole



The South Downs National Park Partnership Management Plan (PMP) 2020–25 sets out a shared vision for how we all would like the National Park to be in the future. It includes 10 long-term outcomes, and provides a framework for communities, landowners, charities, businesses and public bodies to work together to make this vision and these outcomes a reality.

This project successfully achieved the following PMP outcomes:

Outcome 1.2: Create Green Infrastructure

Outcome 2.1: Improve Soil and Water

Outcome 2.2: Improve Trees and Woodland

Outcome 3.1: Join Up Habitats

Outcome 3.2: Manage priority and Invasive species

southdowns.gov.uk/partnership-management-plan/

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