



Department
for Environment
Food & Rural Affairs



Environment
Agency

NATURAL
ENGLAND

Landscape Recovery

‘Win’ning the Allen

Location



River Allen

A group of people are walking along a grassy path that runs alongside a river. The path is bordered by dense green vegetation, including tall grasses and various shrubs. In the background, there are large trees and a cloudy sky. The overall scene is a lush, natural setting.

- Chalk stream, approximately 21km long. Rises at Wyke Farm and flows to Monkton-Up-Wimborne to Wimborne Minster where it joins river Stour
- Originally called “River Win” (bourne = small stream) hence Wimborne – changed in 16th century to River Allen.
- Sits almost entirely in the Cranborne Chase Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), however not designated unlike Avon or Frome
- 2 main tributaries: Crichel and Gussage
- 24 mills were built along the Allen between 13th-15th century. This resulted in many interventions and straightened sections.



A Source of Inspiration

In 1598 Michael Drayton (1563-1631) characterized the River Allen in his tremendously famous *Poly-Olbion*:

Betwixt her fishful banks, then forward she doth scour;

Until she lastly reach clear ALLEN in her race;

Which calmly cometh down from her mother CHASE,

Of Cranburn that is call'd; who greatly joys to see a rivulet born of her,

For STOUR'S should reckon'd be,

Of that renoun'd flood, a favorite highly grac'd.

Whilst CRANBURN, for her child so fortunately plac'd,

Wildlife Rich Habitat

- Chalk streams are internationally recognised as rare and valuable habitats, with 85% of the world's chalk streams occurring in England.
- An exciting recent discovery in a 30 ha block of semi-natural wet fen-type habitat along the banks of the river Allen has attracted an important breeding assemblage of wetland birds, including:
 - breeding common crane (with at least three young successfully fledged in recent years), two pairs of marsh harrier (six fledged young in 2022), water rail, lapwing, snipe, garganey, grasshopper warbler and a high density of breeding cuckoos.
- Winter records suggest it is an important wintering habitat for Snipe, and this is now a regular wintering site for a female White-tailed Eagle from the Isle of Wight re-introduction project.



History of Abstraction

- **1946:** Water abstraction went from 1.5 million gallons per day (mgd) to 5.5mgd in 1969 at Stanbridge Pumping station
- **1972:** River Allen Association (RAA) was formed by landowners concerned by impact on river by abstraction
- **1977:** License allowed up to a max 10 mgd, but created minimum flows at Loverley Mill
- **1985:** Three major compensation sources developed at winterbourne: Wyke Down, Stanbridge and Gussage
- **2024:** Collaboration with South West Water and River Allen CIC to focus on river resilience through new LR project

IN the Summer number Jack Hargreaves wrote of the sad state of the River Allen and Dabchick, as usual championing the cause of a river dear to him, brought accusations of Government procrastination. These articles may together give the impression that nothing is being done for the river either at local or national level. It is important to outline the circumstances leading up to the present sorry situation.

A small abstraction of 1.5 million gallons per day from the river was first licensed as long ago as 1946, but by 1965 the Bournemouth and District Water Company, which bought out the water undertaking held by Wimborne and Cranborne Rural District Council in 1959, was abstracting only 0.8 mgd and the river appeared to be flourishing. However, in 1969 a new licence was granted increasing the quantity that could be abstracted at Stanbridge Mill to 5.5 mgd. The effect on the river seemed immediate and in 1972 the River Allen Association, comprising all the riparian owners along the river but (with the exception of those along a short length of river flowing through Wimborne itself), was formed with representatives from all the fisheries, almost spontaneously, to combat the damage which they foresaw.

During the next few years 'because the effects of the increased abstraction appeared to be greater than anticipated' to quote from the Wessex Licence Review dated 1985, three major compensation sources were developed. The 'new' water came from sources in the chalk alongside the winterbourne stream beds that would normally break and fill only during the winter. These sources were developed on the basis of scientific findings and models prepared by Wessex Water, then both the giver and protector of licences, on the essential premise that there was plenty of water in the aquifer for both supply and compensation.

The overall permitted abstraction had been gradually increased under the 1977 licence to a maximum of 10 million gallons a day, although the total volume licensed for public supply was not taken up until the mid-'80s because of a sympathetic approach by the Bournemouth Water Company, which continued to add compensation water from Stanbridge pumping station into the river for a number of years.

The Stanbridge Mill pumping station, which takes water from four deep boreholes, is about halfway down the river's course and less than 100 yards from the river itself, so that the Allen flows nearly across the diameter of the cone of depression formed by the pumping station. In addition the river is perched for much of its length, as land drains laid in the last century, and still in use, pass under it in many places and discharge their water farther down the valley at a lower level. A lowering of the water table therefore causes a substantial loss of water through the porous river bed.

From its formation, the Allen Association has maintained that the pumping of compensation water from diverse sources in basically the same aquifer, which had shown signs of stress through an unexpected widening of the cone of depression soon after pumping rates increased,

was only robbing Peter to pay Paul. In the long-term, gradual depletion of the chalk sources of the river would occur. This view was not accepted by Wessex Water, whose models and calculations had predicted that there would be an ample supply.

The fears of the Association were again reinforced when it became apparent that pumping from the major new compensation source at Wyke Downs, very near to the source of the winter spring of the river, and nearly 2 miles above the resurgence of the summer spring, was having a marked effect on the breaking time and volume of the source that had for centuries maintained the health of the Allen in summer.

In 1976 the Association pressed for a review of the licence to attempt to reduce abstraction at Stanbridge, or at least to correlate the rate of abstraction with river flows. After much detailed negotiation between the Bournemouth Water Company, Wessex Water and the Association a new licence was issued in November 1977 which, for the first time, set out minimum prescribed flows at Loverley Mill throughout the year. These minimum flows were to be maintained by pumping water from the various compensation sources when required.

The Association had obtained independent professional advice throughout these discussions and eventually accepted the terms of the new licence as being the best deal that could be negotiated under the circumstances, but with the proviso that a review of the whole situation would be made after five years. From January 1972 the daily river-flows recorded at All Hallows and Loverley Mill (½ mile or so below the Stanbridge pumping station) were passed to the Association, and also graphs showing the timing and amount of water pumped from four compensation sources.

Throughout the late '70s the river continued in reasonable order. Ranunculus and other flora continued to flourish and records kept by Wessex Water showed that, by and large, the minimum prescribed flows set out in the 1977 licence were being maintained by the manipulation of the main compensation sources which came into action at differing times according to rainfall and flow conditions. Nevertheless the Association held to its view that the gradual steady decline was continuing (especially as natural springs appeared to be breaking later or even drying up altogether), and was worried about the effect that Wyke Down pumping was having on the summer spring complex, as evidenced by detailed records compiled at the fish farm at Brockington.

In 1982 the Bournemouth Water Company proposed the construction of a fifth borehole at Stanbridge Mill for a further compensation source on the basis that the Wyke Down source gave poor nett gains until later summer and that a new source at Stanbridge would be more efficient. The Association objected to the proposal and reminded the Water Authority that a review of the licence was due. This review, which was received by the Association in April 1984, concluded that the previous six years of operation had not produced a further lowering of ground-water levels and indeed that augmentation of the river had provided higher flows in some years than would have naturally oc-

THE THROTTLING OF THE RIVER ALLEN

How unheeded warnings and dismissed evidence cut its flow to a 9-inch drainpipe

BY WILLIAM HUMPHREYS



River Allen CIC

The community interest company has been set-up to administer the landscape recovery project development phase, to ensure the river is protected for future generations by creating thriving, interconnected habitats with a multitude of biodiversity and ecosystem improvements. The aim is to do this through collaborative action with the community, private companies, and key environmental stakeholders to create an exemplar site at a sub-catchment scale for conservation, wildlife, sustainability, and education.



Who?

Landowners and key stakeholders who live along the length of the river Allen who are passionate about safeguarding this rare chalk stream and landscape that is home to a huge variety of rare wildlife and heritage that is under threat.

Why Landscape Recovery?

- Unique opportunity at sub-catchment recovery at a genuine landscape scale
- Environmentally rich and rare chalk landscape and historically important
- Brings together landowners towards shared vision
- Acts as a bridge between New Forest, Cranborne Chase and Purbeck
- Unlocks funding

Project Priorities



- River System and Hydrology
- Water Quality
- Habitat Restoration and Management
- Biodiversity
- Thriving Communities

Habitat Restoration and Management

Habitats will be enhanced/restored/created/managed to provide a connected landscape along the whole 21 km stretch of the river Allen. These are either Habitats of Principal Importance or Wildlife-Rich Habitats:

- Chalk Streams
- Floodplain Wetland Mosaics, Ponds & Lakes, and Wet Woodland
- Species-rich Grassland – including Calcareous Grassland
- Broadleaved, mixed and Yew Woodland, Wood Pasture and Scrub

Biodiversity

A close-up photograph of a person's hands holding a brown trout. The fish is held horizontally, with its head to the left and tail to the right. The person's hands are visible, with fingers gently supporting the fish. The background is a soft-focus field of green grass and small yellow flowers. The overall lighting is natural and slightly dim, suggesting an outdoor setting.

We aim to create a completely wild river, free from stocking, allowing the native brown trout and Atlantic salmon populations to prosper, as well as looking at projects to restore populations of species such as the **white-clawed crayfish** and **European eel** that have sadly been lost in recent times. We are keen to explore ways of classifying the Allen as a **Wild Fish Protection Zone (WFPZ)**.

The planned actions aim to deliver multi-functional land management combining 'land sharing' and 'land sparing' approaches (i.e., integrating biodiversity actions within wildlife-friendly agricultural landscapes vs. sustainable intensification), allowing greater land for natural habitats.

Protected Sites

This project will revert marginal arable land into grassland around the SSSI unit, buffering it more effectively from external pressures and creating more habitats for biodiversity.

- Pentridge Down SSSI: Ackling Dyke, Bronze Age barrows and the Dorset Cursus.
- Knowlton Church and Earthworks
- 11 scheduled Monuments: neolithic and bronze age
- 10 Sites of Nature Conservation Interest (SNCIs)

Thriving Communities

- Formalise access to river where it is responsible to do so
- Work with local communities to put the River Allen in hearts and minds
- Inspire a love of nature, heritage, and the outdoors
- Work towards a net zero visitor hub



River Allen

From St Giles Blue to
Wimborne White



Wimborne White No.239

We Are Hiring!

- **Project Manager**
- **Ecology Officer**
- **Project Administrator**

Applications by 15/2/24

Email: riverallenr@stgilesestate.com













Thank you