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## Botesdale and Rickinghall Community Streams Project

### Season 5 - October 2013 to March 2014 Progress Report



***Top stream 19<sup>th</sup> December 2013***

For those of us that work on the streams over the autumn and winter each year, it is hard to see the cumulative progress being made. That is until photographs are examined from earlier season's activities. Up to the start of this season the most significant achievement had been the restoration of the flow to the dry stream bed running down the slope alongside part of the footpath from The Street to Fen Lane Bridge. This particular 50 metre stretch had not seen flowing water for nearly 20 years and now flows all year round, requiring the minimum of maintenance as the stream bed effectively clears itself of silt.

This season the project has received a big boost by courtesy of the Norfolk and Suffolk Probationary Trust. Throughout 2013 the heavy labour provided by the Trust's Payback Teams was no longer available to the project, as the Trust introduced a charging regime of £75 per day. The project to date has been virtually cost free to the two Parish Councils and paying for the use of labour was never a possibility. However in the autumn the NSPT agreed to a programme of Payback Team visits on a cost of materials basis, e.g. fuel for their strimmers and strimming cord etc. Botesdale Parish Council agreed to underwrite these costs and two Payback Team sessions took place in November and early December.

At this juncture the project received a further boost with the offer of the services of an Individual Placement probationer (or I.P.) who was local to the village and known by those of us in the group. He had a significant number of community service hours to complete, all of which could be spent on the project. Although there is a management element to this task it is hardly onerous and well worth the potential benefit to the project as a whole. The impact that the provision of this assistance has made upon the progress of the project has been dramatic. Our probationer is familiar with the streams area from his childhood and was apprised of the group's goals and the immediate tasks at hand prior to him commencing work.

He started the clearance of overhanging plant and tree growth from the top stream in mid-December and by Christmas had completed the task. During the course of these few days he also redefined the stream's banks and removed large quantities of foul smelling silt from the stream bed. The resulting visual change has been dramatic, although the full effect won't be seen until the spring and summer. His main tasks for the remaining hours of his community service are centred upon the clearing of debris from two further stream beds, although he is also tackling the unchecked growth of ivy. This fast growing parasitic plant is now threatening 20% of the mature trees across the area. Where trees are affected he is cutting sections from the ivy vine and removing as much of this as possible. The net effect of this activity will be that the woodland floor will now receive far more daylight this summer than it has for many years. This we hope will encourage more flora and fauna to take up residence.

The October and December storms brought down a number of trees and branches across the site and the resulting debris now forms two large spoil piles which will be burnt in the spring. Just 25 metres south of Fen Lane Bridge the stream is almost totally blocked by a fallen willow. To remove this will require the use of a chain saw in order that sections can be cut from the trunk in sizes suitable for man handling. Further south, at the end of the field owned by Maisy Bellingham, the main stream is joined by the diverted 'water cress bed' outflow. The passage of this stream follows a field boundary which is located in a hedgerow. Within the hedgerow, the stream bed is almost entirely blocked by tree litter and urgently requires clearance. If permission can be obtained from Mrs Bellingham then some time will be spent on this task before the season closes at the end of March.

Two further outstanding issues to be addressed over the coming months are the deteriorating fabric of Fen Lane Bridge which is urgent need of repair, while the culvert under Fen Lane has fractured pipework, caused by a landslip that has seen one side of the culvert fascia leaning six or seven degrees out of the vertical plane. Finally, discussions are ongoing with the land agents acting for Anglian Water concerning the Parish Councils desire to make use of the land surrounding their pumping station. The long term goal for this small, approximately one acre sized plot, is to convert it into managed woodland for the benefit of the whole community.

In conclusion this season has been one of our most successful to date, thanks mainly to the provision of our dedicated I.P. With the onset of spring just a few weeks away the area will soon be at its best and the benefits of the teams efforts will I hope be there for all to see.

Chris Lambert – January 2014