



Winter 2013/2014 Village Streams Report



Ryan Seeley at work alongside the Fen Lane culvert.

It has been five years since work on the streams area commenced and this last winter season (2013/14) has seen significant progress. In previous years the dedicated man-hours spent on the project has rarely exceeded fifty, although this figure was greatly augmented by the contribution made from the regular visits of the Norfolk and Suffolk Probation Trust's Payback Teams.

This year the fifty hours contributed by the regular volunteers was backed up by the addition of a further 120 hours provided by an individual placement probationer courtesy of the N&SPT. The young offender involved lives in the village and he commenced work on the project in the days immediately prior to Christmas 2013. The contribution of these additional hours of labour, together with the enthusiasm of the offender himself, has resulted in a dramatic visual change occurring. It's clear from opinions expressed by walkers that this change is warmly welcomed.

The most notable success during this period has been the attainment of a two directional water flow in the 'top' stream. This was achieved by the removal of vast quantities of silt from the mouth of the stream bed and to a lesser extent along the whole 50 metre length up to the wooden footbridge. In order to remove the silt it was necessary for the street-side bank to be cleared of overhanging vegetation in order that access could be gained to facilitate silt removal. This redefining of both banks and the clearing of foliage has resulted in more daylight permeating the canopy and hedgerow, opening up the vista for those who use the footpath that runs alongside. It's also clear

that wildlife have also welcomed this intervention and our local little egret now pays regular visits, while a pair of Mallard are also frequently seen.

Perhaps Ryan Seeley's lasting legacy to his labours over the last few months will be the area around the culvert that passes under Fen Lane. Here he has constructed a platform behind a retaining wall of railway sleeper and woven willow. The large quantity of silt upon which the platform is comprised has been planted with Iris tuba taken from elsewhere in the stream network. This is now a notable feature to be admired when walking along Fen Lane as opposed to the eyesore it once was. Not all Ryan's work has been about beautifying the area, far from it. He has redefined the roadway by clearing its edges of mud. The ditch alongside the pumping station has been cleared and gullies re-dug to prevent the lane from flooding.

Alongside the activities of the probationer, the regular team have been very busy throughout the season attempting to cope with the aftermath of the winter storms. The high winds brought down a number of trees along with many fallen branches. These were gathered up and large bonfires resulted. The main stream has suffered from a number of serious blockages all of which have been cleared but this didn't prevent the whole area succumbing to floods once again in early February.

During the course of the season the team was joined by another volunteer in Simon ? from Walnut Cottage. Simon has been planting snowdrops in the area for a number of years and has effectively become our botanist. His spring display at the entrance to Fen Lane provides a wonderful gateway to this part of the village.

As is always the case, much remains to be done. The rustic fencing alongside the top stream either requires repair or replacing by a hedgerow. This of course is the responsibility of the landowner. A number of walkers have commented on how they miss the vandalised memorial seat. The re-instatement of an 'indestructible' item was I believe on the Rickinghall Parish Council's agenda some time ago. Perhaps it's time to raise this item once again? Despite our efforts the top stream is still heavily silted and will require a lot more work over the coming seasons. The land around the pumping station would greatly benefit from a care and maintenance program but to date Anglian Water have not responded to our request for discussion concerning its future.

Perhaps the most encouraging sign for the volunteer group was the sighting of not one but two water vole while three of us were clearing a stream blockage in late February.

Cllr. Chris Lambert

March 2014