To: Sir James Bevan, Chief Executive, Environment Agency
James.bevan@environment-agency.gov.uk
From: Lorraine Brooks, Editor, Nayland with Wissington Community Times, Nayland, Suffolk
Date: 25 July 2022

Re: The River Stour at Nayland, Suffolk

Dear Sir James Bevan,

I am writing regarding a stretch of the River Stour that passes through Nayland as editor of the parish news – the Nayland with Wissington Community Times. This is distributed free to every household in the parish.

I would be most grateful if you could consider the points raised in this letter and take the time to look at the attached document, which demonstrates points made in this letter, and respond to them for the benefit of readers of the Community Times.

For some years conversations in the village have expressed concern about maintenance and the excessive reed growth in the river through Nayland, in particular a stretch from the tunnel under A134, past the Horseshoe Weir and on to the Abell (Anchor) Bridge. Use of our local countryside increased dramatically during Covid and this has raised awareness and the level of disquiet. This stretch of the river is highly used by residents and visitors for a myriad of uses from walking, fishing, swimming and using river-craft to school learning and a miscellany of photo shoots. It is a much loved Constable Country location within the Dedham Vale AONB so aesthetics and access matter here.

Conversations among residents reveal their frustrations that this stretch of the River Stour is much more overgrown than, for example at neighbouring Bures, Stratford St Mary or Dedham.

Readers are aware of the Environment Agency's (EA) scope of responsibilities: managing the risk of flooding from rivers and waterways, maintaining Navigation Rights (inc. craft licences), Fisheries (inc. rod licences), water quality and resources, conservation and ecology, regulating major industry and waste, treatment of contaminated land. It is also appreciated that the EA has financial constraints.

The EA document entitled '*Aquatic and riparian plant management: controls for vegetation in watercourses'* has provided very interesting and helpful information. However, the knowledge it imparts does not appear to reflect the situation in Nayland.

River Levels and Flow

It is disappointing that flow sometimes decreases to the point the weir, and the river beyond, stops flowing but it is accepted that this is usually due to drought conditions as is the case currently. Readers are aware of the EOETS (Ely Ouse to Essex Transfer Scheme) and that when there are insufficient resources at Denver the transfer of water will be paused.

However, there have in recent years been unseasonal fluctuations with water levels, due to blockages upriver and other miscellany, and also problems with operation of the sluice gates. The community is proposing to install a water level gauge (for which EA guidance was obtained) to accurately measure changes and report them when necessary.

Following Storm Eunice in mid-February and the resultant power cuts the automatic system of control of the sluice gates needed to be overridden; there was a problem and delay with rectifying this.

<u>What measures has the EA taken to assure readers that delays and malfunction will not happen in the future</u>?

Excessive Reed Growth

It is understood that reed growth, on the whole is the responsibility of the riparian owners. On this stretch of the river that will be the EA all around the weir, Nayland Land Company along the Meadow riverbank, Suffolk County Council (SCC) on Caley Green and other homeowners and landowners on the north bank.

Nayland Horseshoe Weir (under EA ownership) has become very overgrown; on its sides but most alarmingly reeds now stretch three-quarters of the way across the head of the weir. The EA recently said that *"weather conditions permitting they will undertake the removal of the weed growth in the immediate vicinity of the Horseshoe Weir at some point this year"*.

Would the EA be prepared to perform any other reed removal along the river between the A134 and the weir?

BIODIVERSITY

The EA are keen to promote biodiversity and frequently cite this as a reason for allowing (and even encouraging) reed growth, but reeds, reeds and more reeds is not biodiversity. Biodiversity is having a variety of flora to encourage more diverse fauna. Purple Loosestrife, Bisort, Stachys, Butomus, Marsh Marigold and others cannot compete for space among the brutish reeds in Nayland.

Do the EA recognise that there is an issue of predominance of tall emergent species (reed types) in this section of waterway?

DE-SILTING *(This goes hand in hand with excessive reed growth)*

No substantial de-silting has been carried out in Nayland for well over 15 years; previously to that de-silting was done regularly.
The River Stour through Nayland is slow flowing as its flow is divided in a figure of eight shape; flow splits down the flood channel and main river and again down Mill Stream and over the weir. Silt build-up is more likely in slower flowing waterways. Slow flows and silt deposits result in greater reed growth.

Isn't this a reason to give this stretch of river greater maintenance compared to a faster flowing waterway?

There is a considerable amount of silt in the river between the A134 and the Horseshoe Weir as discovered by residents in waders who have found themselves in difficulty. An EA representative was witnessed sinking into the silt and requiring assistance. Fluctuating water levels have revealed the build up of silt and sediment.
When silt builds up it provides an opportunity for reeds to extend their growing area and this has happened here. It also means it is more difficult for riparian owners to combat the quickly expanding reeds along their stretches of riverbank.

It has been noticeable that during times of high water levels and opening up of the flood channel that areas which did not used to flood now do. Residents comment that this is to some extent because our river has too much silt and vegetation and consequently its capacity is reduced.

To support residents concerns the EA document states:
"Aquatic and riparian plants can cause problems when the rate of vegetation growth adversely affects biodiversity or human uses of the watercourse." (page 7)

"Aquatic and riparian plants need to be managed because they can: reduce channel capacity, raise water levels and impede flow resulting in water logging or flooding, impede navigation, prevent fishing and damage of fish spawning habitats, reduce amenity value, destroy wildlife habitats and lead to the domination of a single species." (page 9)

Regarding vegetation, on page 83-85 the EA document refers to:
Emergent species *are those which are rooted in sediments at the bottom of watercourses and grow in water usually no more than 1 m deep. They can be very problematic, particularly in narrow and relatively shallow watercourses, where they can completely block channels.*
Key problems caused:
- *Dense networks of rhizomes can form large stands which impede flows.*
- *Once established, the roots and rhizomes trap silt and extend the area that they can colonise, which further impedes water flow in the long-term.*
- *Dense stands can also impair fishing and other recreational activities.*
- *Following die-back during the winter months, the robust stems can remain standing and continue to cause problems.*

Control methods:
- *Physical techniques are effective at achieving instant, short-term control; however, many physical techniques do not remove the rhizomes and repeat management is necessary.*
- *The dead stems, which remain standing in winter, may also require cutting to prevent flows being impeded.*
- *Manipulating water levels to more than 1 m may help to control stands.*
- *Creating a deeper central channel of more than 1 m should help in preventing encroachment across a watercourse, allowing just a fringe to develop along the bank toe.*

It is felt that the above paragraphs in the EA document apply to this stretch of river where: *biodiversity and human uses of the watercourse are affected; aquatic and riparian plants are reducing channel capacity, raising water levels and impeding flow; preventing fishing; reducing amenity value; and is leading to domination of just a few species of plants.*

In view of these considerations will the EA be prepared to perform de-silting of the river between the A134 tunnel and the Horseshoe Weir?

If not in the near future, at what point would the EA consider removing silt?

I look forward to hearing from you so readers of the Community Times may be informed of your responses.

Yours sincerely,

Lorraine Brooks

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