

Kirkham Weir & Sluices Trial

Questions and Answers

27th August 2014

We will be carrying out an investigation at Kirkham Weir, which involves temporarily lowering the river levels using the sluices. The water levels will be lowered gradually between 8th September and 24th September 2014. The sluice gates will be returned to their starting position by the 3rd October 2014.

This has raised a large number of questions from a range of stakeholders and interested parties. We have gathered some of the questions and answers together here for your information.

Why are you lowering the levels of the river?

The river is designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest but is considered to be in an unfavourable condition. One of the reasons for this is the impact that in-river structures, such as the weir and sluices at Kirkham, are having on the river.

The weir, and the sluices when they are closed, cause the river to pond upstream. In its natural state the river would have had a range of habitats with deeper pools and shallow riffles. The way the weir holds the river levels up has reduced the range of habitats and species present upstream.

We are temporarily lowering the levels of the river, using the sluice gates, in order to help us understand what the effects might be upstream. The data that we will be gathering will help us assess what the best option is for the future of the structure, in order to improve the range of habitats and so species present in and around the river.

What information are you collecting during the trial?

We will be collecting level and flow data from our gauging station in Malton; level data from a gauge at Kirkham, and from a newly installed temporary gauge upstream near the railway bridge near Huttons Ambo and flow data downstream at Buttercrambe.

We will carry out visual inspections during the trial. These will be focused on the days when the river is at its lowest, around the 24th September and will enable us to gather critical information about the river banks and river bed. We will be carrying out bank side assessments and in-river assessments using one of our boats. We will also be using time lapse photography at six locations to record the changes throughout the trial.

It is really important to highlight that our ability to gather the information that we need during the trial lowering is dependent on the weather. If it rains a lot and the river levels remain high, or are similar to the levels that occur when the gates are shut, the changes may be very minimal and we might need to do another trial lowering.

I want to collect evidence during the trial - will you use it if I do?

We have had a number of offers from people to collect data during the trial. This is very welcome. In order for us to be able to use the information, it needs to be collected in a consistent and relevant way.

For example, photographs taken a few days before, then during and a few days after the trial would be very helpful if they are taken at the same spot each time, and the date and accurate time the photographs were taken are recorded.

Are you planning to remove the weir entirely? Will you talk to us about it before deciding?

We are gathering evidence to help us consider a number of options. Weir removal is one of the options that we will assess.

Once we have analysed the information gathered during the trial, we will begin the process of examining the different options. As part of this process, members of the public and other interested parties and stakeholders will have the opportunity to comment on the different options. They will be able to identify what the benefits and disadvantages of each would be from their perspective. This information will then be used as part of the Cost-Benefit Appraisal of each option and will be an integral part of the decision making process.

We will also continue to work closely with partners, including Network Rail, English Heritage, North Yorkshire County Council (both the Highways and Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty teams), Natural England, the Yorkshire Wildlife Trust and the East Yorkshire Rivers Trust. The final decision about the future of the weir and sluices lies with the Environment Agency as owner of the structure.

In the past when the sluice gates have been opened (e.g. 1995, 2005) damage was caused to the fish population and the river banks. Will this happen again?

We have listened to the concerns that have been raised by a number of people, and have adjusted how the trial will run. While we are not able to eliminate the risk of bank slippage entirely we will be lowering the gates slowly over a two week period. This will give the river banks time to gradually adjust to the lowering levels as they do with a natural reduction in water levels and will significantly reduce the risk of bank slippage.

Likewise, when the when the gates have been opened fully and suddenly in the past there was a greater potential for fish close to the structures to be transported downstream of sluices. By lowering the gates very slowly, we will be mitigating against this happening.

I am very concerned that the medium to long term plans will dramatically change the characteristics of the river. Are you considering this as part of your investigation?

Yes, we are. The core purpose of the investigation is to assess how altering the structures could improve the characteristics of the river and identify what option would best restore and enhance it to be the best it can be, while considering the constraints that exist e.g. the railway.

What will be the impact on the wildlife & the fishery during the trial?

As the trial will only be for four weeks, and the levels will be lowered very slowly during the first two weeks, we don't anticipate there being any adverse impact on the wildlife or the fishery.

The river banks have a lot of Giant Hogweed along them. What needs to be done about this?

Where non-native species such as Giant Hogweed become invasive they can transform the local habitat causing a variety of problems including threatening native and endangered species, and increasing the risk of bank erosion when they die back in the winter. Giant Hogweed also causes painful blistering and skin irritation to those who come in contact with it. Responsibility for dealing with invasive species such as Giant Hogweed lies with individual landowners. Control efforts by individuals can help reduce the spread of this species and are most successful if carried out as a catchment wide co-ordinated approach with the collaboration of all parties. Further advice on control mechanisms can be found by contacting the Environment Agency, referring to our website, or contacting the East Yorkshire Rivers Trust.

As the trial is for a four week period, we do not anticipate any changes to the Giant Hogweed as a result of the trial.

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