

River Irk Restoration – making a plan

Environment
Agency



Photo credit: Mike Beard

Date

November 2017 – Ongoing

Location

Greater Manchester

Background

The River Irk rises to the east of Royton in Rochdale and flows to join the River Irwell in city centre Manchester. The industrial revolution had a large environmental impact within the Irk catchment, including the addition of numerous weirs and culverts along its length; artificially straightening of large stretches; installation of hard banking to keep the river in its narrow channel and encroachment of built development into the river corridor. For years the river and its tributaries have suffered from chronic pollution, but now water quality is improving and fish are starting to return to the river.

With this improvement in water quality comes new interest in the river – not only in the quality of the water, but in maximising the potential of the river by re-naturalising the channel as much as we can, whilst providing a higher quality ecological network and green infrastructure asset.

The whole of the Irk waterbody is considered heavily modified under the Water Framework Directive. Opportunities to enhance the river have been taken in the past on ad hoc basis, through previous partnership project work and new riparian

Partners

Environment Agency, River Restoration Centre

Themes



Urban



Healthy
Rivers



Water
Quality



Evidence &
Tools



Above: River Irk original channel



Above: River Irk 2017

development including the removal of redundant weirs and de-canalisation of the river, having some minor enhancements to the waterbody.

Project

This project aims to start a planned and strategic approach to restoring the River Irk on a catchment scale.

In this first phase, the Environment Agency have been working with the River Restoration Centre (RRC) to develop a restoration plan – looking to how we can improve the flow and function of the river to improve ecology and promote natural flood management.

The RRC have consulted with partners in the area, carried out survey work and developed on-line resources which are open to partners to view.

The RRC study aims to identify a suite of river restoration opportunities which will allow partners in the project to either look for ambitious ‘whole river restoration’ funding or to hand pick the options as funding is secured, confident that they fit into the big-picture solution.

Outcomes

- Training: RRC delivered a one day course into the hydromorphology of the River Irk for 25 catchment partners to improve understanding of both flow and function of rivers and how we would ideally approach river restoration.

- Restoration plan report: A restoration plan has been developed which details areas for improvements and gives options which compare cost, complexity and ecological benefit. It also shows examples of other similar restoration projects which helps people to visualise improvements.

	Ecology	Natural processes	Flood risk	Community	Risk	Cost
Do nothing					L	-
Remove bank protection					M	££
Large wood to improve sinuosity					M	££
Create a reed bed					L	£

- Online resources: 360 degree images and opportunity mapping for the River Irk are now freely available on [Google maps](#) for anyone to see and use as they need. Opportunities mapping is also available and will be shared with partners.

Learning

The introduction to hydromorphology course was oversubscribed and had fantastic feedback, comments included:

‘I will never look at a river in the same way again’ and ‘I think I’ve been doing it all wrong up until now’.

‘River restoration should be planned for the whole river catchment to ensure that the best solutions are put into place to maximise the benefits to the river.’

Next Steps

Publish reports and publicise online resources to partners.

Set up River Irk working party with partners to develop a partnership plan for the Irk and look for ways to fund and deliver our shared objectives.

Contact: Katherine Causer katherine.causer@environment-agency.gov.uk