

Item 9: SSSI restoration site visit to Avon Water downstream from Wootton bridge

Summary for NFAF

The walk was hosted by the Forestry Commission with several of their personnel present. The main body of guests was from the Verderers and the CDA with single representation from other groups. A fine day made coping with quantities of mud, fallen trees and floods/ditches into quite a pleasant experience.

The river upstream from the bridge had been looked at and 'agreed' at an earlier time, but because of the current necessity for Planning Permission, the FC are intending to deal with the whole stretch at one time. The Verderers expressed concern that the NPA could 'cherry pick' the different aspects meaning that the Commoners could lose out on what had been agreed to benefit their purposes. However, this process is uncharted waters and it may be that an overview level application will be sufficient.

Because of heavy rain a few days before the visit, it is possible that the conditions were 'worse' than usual, however I was very surprised to learn that dog walkers, in particular, do find their way through – it is not a walk that I would ever choose! In general terms, then, it could be said that access along that route is currently very difficult and therefore whatever they do to restore the meanders will not, in itself, restrict such access.

About half way along we met a point where a path from/to Broadley inclosure forded the stream and progressed to a gate into the woods which was extremely muddy. They are hoping that with a small amount of clearance that could be achieved the patch might dry out and make the path more accessible.

We crossed several lawns, from which the Commoners would like the scrub cleared (as part of the deal). Debris dams seem to be quite a controversial point and it is certain that those woods were a lot soggy than they need have been if some of the worst dams had been cleared.

The end point of the project was at a footbridge just to the bottom of the main path down through Setthorns inclosure. Next to the footbridge were two enormous water pipes about which they need to find out more before any clear decision can be made. However, the stream has, at that point, already re-found its meander – this is quite fordable but has no bridge. The preferred option is to divert **to** the meander and put a footbridge over, thus doing away with the other bridge, when they infill the cut stream, and meaning that walkers could get across with dry feet.

The other main issue which was examined on the way back was that Verderers / Commoners / Keeper all wanted some sort of re-instatement of the track that used to run along the edge of the inclosure, as well as the facilitation of the drains from the inclosure. This was roughly mapped out as we went and there was definitely gravel at the bottom of some of the wet bits. The purpose of this is so that they can access stock – or even to rescue a walker found there stuck in a boggy bit. When we arrived back at Wootton bridge, no-one wanted to make the way in and out too obvious by clearing the debris at that point.

In summary, I would conclude that the project, as it is proposed, would almost certainly assist access to that part of the Forest, although there would be an understandable reluctance to advertise the fact. There is no way, in this area, that any sort of access for the disabled would be possible.

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