

Wallingford Town Council Full Council Meeting

Monday 27 January 2025

Restoring the Mill Brook

Recommendation:

To endorse the Mill Brook restoration initiative, endorse an application for Section 106 funding and approve Councillor Mike Acreman as the lead contact.



The Mill Brook c 1958 (Croft Villas)



The Mill Brook summer 2024 (Sports Park)

1. Executive summary

The Mill Brook no longer evacuates flood water effectively from the Sports Park and no longer supports wildlife, amenity or its history. Wallingford Town Council is invited to endorse restoration of the Brook adjacent to the footpath from Fir Tree Avenue to the by-pass (past the Sports Park). This was strongly recommended by the Parks, Gardens and Open Spaces Committee on 18 November 2024. Full Council is further invited to endorse an application for S106 funding and to make Mike Acreman the lead contact.

2. Background

The Mill Brook is important historically to Wallingford as it used to bring water to the moats, castle and mills. It is important culturally as many older residents remember swimming and fishing in it when they were young. It used to have good water quality and to support amphibians, fish, and possibly otters. The Brook should also evacuate flood water from Fir Tree Avenue and the Sports Park. It fails on all these counts today.

3. Issue

It is believed that both the culvert taking the Mill Brook under the by-pass and the flood-relief pipe into the highway drain are blocked, which probably exacerbated flooding of the Sport Park pitches for 6 weeks in 2024. OCC highways engineers are investigating the blockages but have not yet been successful. The blockage also stops freshwater entering in the summer. Lack of freshwater has rendered the Brook stagnant with residents complaining of swarms of flies and bad smells. This has been reported to the

Environment Agency as a pollution incident several times recently but no action has been taken. The riparian vegetation along the Brook has not been managed and has become very dense, preventing light reaching the water, further degrading the freshwater ecosystem. OCC is planning to resurface the footpath alongside the Brook in April 2025 and is recommending complementary riparian improvements adjacent to the path. The Sports Park is proposing extensions to its facilities and will need to achieve Biodiversity Net Gain. The responsible S106 officer at SODC (David Cookson) says he would welcome an application for S106 funds as £40,000 was ear-marked for this type of work in 2017 but no applications have been submitted.

4. Options

Option 1 (preferred) to restore the Mill Brook between the culvert headwall (near Fir Tree Avenue) to the culvert under the bypass. This will involve removing much of the dense vegetation along the Brook and replanting, plus increasing the diversity of the Brook's channel habitat. Eventually this will also involve unblocking the culvert and flood-relief pipe, Use of S106 funding will not require any time or responsibility for action by Wallingford Town Council staff. The application will be led by Wallingford Sports Park; only an endorse is required from the Council. Mike Acreman will be the lead contact. Option 2. Do nothing. The Mill Brook will continue to decline ecologically, lose its historical heritage and will not evacuate flood water.

5. Proposal

Councillors support Option 1.

5. Supporting information

The Mill Brook restoration initiative current partner organisations are:
The Sports Park Trust; Wild about Wallingford; The Environment Agency
Chilterns National Landscape; Action for the River Kennet (local catchment partnership leads); South Oxfordshire District Council (biodiversity); Oxfordshire County Council (biodiversity and footpaths)

Likely future partner organisations
BBOWT; Thames 21.

The Environment Agency is exploring the idea of a wider whole catchment partnership or Mill Brook Trust, which would include the parishes of Wallingford, Brightwell, Cholsey, South Moreton, Upton and Blewbury.

Author: Mike Acreman
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Reviewed and approved by Town Clerk