Impact Report 2023-2024

Protecting and Enhancing the Local Water Environment

Governance and Administration

Charity Name: Ouse & Adur Rivers Trust

Charity Number: 1082447

Registered Address:
The Saw Shed,
The Old Sawyard,
Parham Park,
Pulborough,
West Sussex,
RH20 4RP

Directors & Trustees:

The Directors of the Charity are its Trustees for the purpose of Charity law.

Sam St. Pierre (Chair)

Robin Akers (Vice Chair)

Simon Turner

Ruth Wallis (from January 31st 2024)

Philip Evans

James Ebdon

Brian Clarke (until January 6th 2024)

Dave Brown

Staff Team

Peter King – Director

Jess Duggan – Administrator

Rachel Paget – Senior Project Officer

Alistair Whitby – Project Development Officer

Tara Dawson - Project Officer – River Adur

Jo Owens - Catchment Officer – River Ouse

Directors Message

It is a great pleasure to present our annual impact report for 2023 – 2024 to our members and supporters.

Whilst our local river, and those across the country, continue to be under serious threat from a range of pressures, never has their health been more in the public eye and it is fantastic to see, and be able to support, community and individual actions making a difference, it is, after all, the foundations on which OART has been built.

It is all too easy to get caught up in the wealth of negativity reported about rivers and although we must not relax in highlighting the issues and seeking redress from those responsible it is also important to recognize, promote and celebrate the improvements which are being made. We are certainly proud of our role in enhancing local rivers and wetlands and recognize how these successes fit into the wider movement of Rivers Trusts across the Country and the tangible benefits which are creating a thriving legacy for wildlife and people.

We are especially proud of the Cockshut Restoration Project which has realigned 700m of a valuable chalk stream, creating 6ha of complimentary wetland within the SSSI of Lewes Brooks.

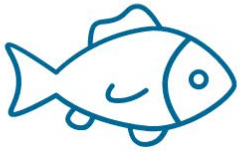
Alongside this flagship project, the past year has seen us successfully complete a range of high impact projects whilst planning and developing ideas for the future. Our Storing the Storm initiative has grown beyond schools and public buildings into the heart of communities, reducing surface water runoff and associated flood risk whilst reducing pressure on the sewer network. The Adur Natural Flood Management Project has moved from strategic development, through a pilot of delivery and has now become a long-term partnership with the Environment Agency as we seek to take an adaptive pathway approach to catchment resilience.

Developing existing and creating new partnerships is an important part of our activities and we are delighted to be collaborating with a range of partners as we launched the Ouse Invasive Non-Native species project.

The commitment and enthusiasm of our growing team in protecting and enhancing these rivers is both inspiring and hugely appreciated, as is the continued support of our members, supporters, and funders. Finally, to our Trustees and all the amazing volunteers who dedicate so much time to help us, on behalf of the team we sincerely thank you all individually and look forward to continuing to work with you.

Peter King
Director

Summary Statistics



5km Fish Passage

4ha Wetland

0.7km
New Chalk Stream

1.5km hedgerow

1.700 trees
Planted

42 Leaky Dams

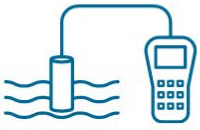
6 SuDS
Schemes

150 School
Pupils Engaged

98 Landowners
Given Advice

112 Volunteer
Days

480 kg of
Plastic Removed



163 Water Quality
Tests

5km River
Surveyed

Delivering With Impact

Cockshut Restoration Project

The Cockshut - situated on the outskirts of Lewes, adjacent to Lewes Brooks Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) - is a chalk stream that had previously been straightened and realigned to become an embanked ditch. Over time the channel had become degraded and lacked the shape and landscape connectivity of a functional watercourse. The stream had become choked with the highly invasive parrot's feather. Overall, there was very little flow and little biodiversity.

This project, a partnership between Lewes District Council, the Ouse & Adur Rivers Trust, South Downs National Park and Lewes Railway Land Wildlife Trust aimed to restore a more natural course for the stream and reconnect it to a series of wetland habitats. All improvements were aimed at increasing the sites biodiversity, its resilience to climate impacts, and enabling the features of the SSSI to return.

The area is popular with walkers and the works sought to improve access via a circular walk with interpretation panels highlighting the areas unique environmental history and the value of chalk streams in the landscape of the South Downs

Following a period of four-years to investigate, develop and consent, in June 2023 the project began to realign a 670m section of the Cockshut Stream into Lewes Brooks SSSI. Over the following three months the sites topography was altered, creating several pools, scrapes and enhanced ditches which together form 4ha of wetland around the channel.

The new channel has been designed to meander through the site and has a shallow profile, enabling both connectivity with the floodplain and resilience against future periods of low flow resulting from climate change impacts. Other works saw a chalk gravel substrate installed at points in the new channel along with the construction of two public footbridges and hydroseeding 4ha of wetland wildflower meadows.

Since its completion, the wildlife value of the site has increased with a more diverse assemblage of bird life, including egrets, heron, greenshank, kingfisher and white storks being reported. Over the next five years, ecological surveys will be undertaken to enable robust comparison of pre- and post-works data.

The project has been entered into the South Downs Design Awards, the results for which will be announced in Autumn 2024.

Funded By:

Lewes District Council

VEOLIA ENVIRONMENTAL TRUST

South Downs National Park Authority

Delivering With Impact

Enhancing Fish Passage

During 2023 we removed a large weir located on the Cockhaise Brook. The weir was slowly and carefully demolished by removing a single layer of bricks at a time, allowing time for changes in the upstream water levels to be monitored. A small number of bricks were kept in the weir pool to assist gradient readjustment, with the majority being removed to be reused elsewhere on the landholding.

The National Fish Populations database shows a clear decline in species number and biomass between Wildboar Bridge and Holywell pumping station down- and upstream of the weir respectively. In 2019 baffles were fitted to the downstream weir at Holywell gauging making this structure the next priority for easement.

A second phase of the project saw the enhancement of in-channel habitat for a range of freshwater species, along with small areas of bank re-profiling to help the stream reconnect with its floodplain.

Removal of the weir forms part of the landowners regenerative, wildlife friendly aims for the farm which also include NFM interventions, delivered by Sussex Flow Initiative, to reduce downstream flood risk by storing flood water, slowing runoff and increasing water infiltration into soils.

The completion of this project sees the total number of weirs removed or fitted with technical fish passes reach 22 across the catchment, a long way to go but these have improved connectivity to over 200km of rivers and streams.

"This has been a good step forward here, and thank you so much to OART, and particularly to Rachel, for the careful discussions over the years, and for the expert work done here recently" - Landowner

Funded By:

Environment Agency

Delivering With Impact

Storing the Storm

Since 2017, the Ouse & Adur Rivers Trust has been working with Lewes District Council to promote sustainable rainfall and surface water management to lessen the impact of flooding.

In 2023 the Storing the Storm project began working with schools, Parish Councils, and community groups to install rain-box planters on downpipes from buildings. These planters intercept roof run off, filter it through a mosaic of substrates and slowly release water into the drainage network.

These low-cost interventions provide multiple benefits to local communities and the river.

- De-synchronise flow to the drainage network.
- Reduce pressure on the sewer network.
- Raise awareness of community action
- Provide wellbeing & educational opportunities.
- Create pollinator habitats.

As part of this year's work, 21 rain-box planters were installed on properties within the Nevill estate in Lewes, managing surface water flood risk within local and downstream communities. In addition, a demonstration planter at St. Mary's Social Centre on Christie Road was installed with further installation at Lewes Victoria Hospital planned for early this year.

To date over 80 planters have been installed and we've worked with 13 primary schools, providing curriculum relevant learning to over 500 pupils.

All the rain-planters were built from salvaged wood from wood recycling stores, diverting the timber from landfill, giving it a second life and reducing the carbon footprint of our works.

Of course, as stand-alone interventions, one box does not reduce flooding but with each holding around 250l of water and slowing its route to the drainage network, there is a positive impact on the area. When used alongside other nature-based solutions, such as our wetland in Ringmer, they form part of community solutions to climate resilience. Over the coming year we will be assessing the outcomes of these projects, liaising with local communities to understand the impact we have made.

Funded By:

Lewes District Council

Developing Resilient Landscapes

Over the past 2-3 years there has been a significant funding shift towards working at a landscape (or catchment) scale with a focus on building resilience against the impacts of climate change. There is also much talk of nature corridors and nature recovery networks. It goes without saying that these two things sit together, creating higher quality, functional, and joined up habitat will provide resilience to extreme weather events such as flooding and drought as well as increasing carbon storage opportunities and enhancing biodiversity and abundance of species.

Our catchment is awash with projects delivering landscape resilience including the Adur River Revival, a Defra funded Landscape Recovery project consisting of 27 landowners along the main River Adur with OART developing plans at each site, working with landowners to ensure we achieve a balance between nature and food production.

Our partnership with the Environment Agency on the Adur NFM project continues to expand and we are excited by the start of a long-term project to implement the recommendations within our joint strategy, taking an adaptive approach to implementing the big changes we need to combat the impacts of climate change.

On the River Ouse we are working on a pilot project looking at improving drought resilience through the installation of rainwater harvesting at agricultural holdings whilst improving infiltration and water storage at a sub-catchment scale. Known as WaFER (Water & Farming for Environmental Resilience) we are seeking to expand this approach across the wider catchment area.

We are also delighted to have launched the Ouse Invasive Non-Native Species (INNS) project as a multi-organisation partnership led by OART. This project will work with stakeholders to improve catchment biosecurity alongside the monitoring and control of species impacting the water environment.

We are also collaborating with Sussex Wildlife Trust on the Wilder Ouse project expanding on the work of the Sussex Flow Initiative which ran from 2012-2023.

One to watch out for is the Sussex Bay project www.sussexbay.org.uk which spans 100 miles of coastal and intertidal habitats from Selsey to Camber Sands and is a welcome addition as we seek to improve our water environment from source to sea.

Finally, the Local Nature Recovery Strategy is in the final stages of development, each County will define its approach to creating joined up natural spaces, creating corridors to facilitate the movement of species and provide future resilience against increasing development pressure. Through the work of the Adur & Ouse Catchment Partnership OART are using computer modelling to assess habitat vulnerability due to likely medium term climate impacts. We hope the information generated from this will feed into a range of landscape resilience projects and strategies over the coming years as we seek to not just protect what we have today but to ensure it is highly functional in the future.

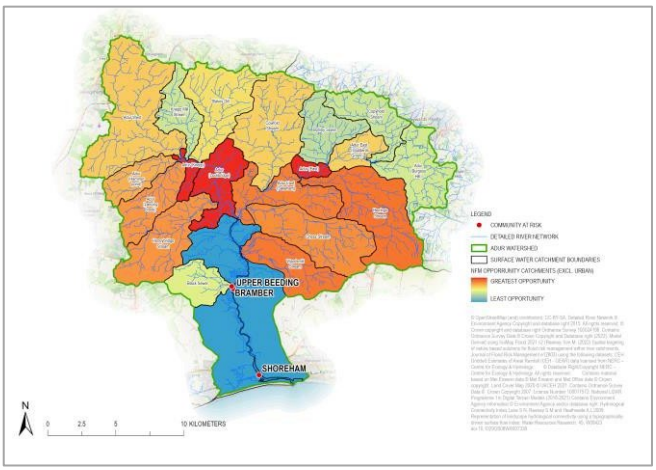
It's an exciting time and great to finally be working at landscape (or in our case, catchment) scale to deliver high impact improvements.

Developing Resilient Landscapes

Adur NFM Project

In 2021 we started developing a strategy which would see a long-term approach to reducing the impact of flood risk across the River Adur using Natural Flood Management techniques. Since then, over 45 landowners have received advice, and a pipeline of projects has been created for delivery.

As part of this development phase, we used SciMap Flood, developed by Durham University, to assess each sub- catchment for the level of opportunity it provides in tackling flooding and enabling us to focus our work to the areas of highest impact.



The result of this work and the development of a strategic and adaptive approach to restoring the Adur Catchment has led to the launch of a follow-on project. The Adur Adaptation Project is an exciting ten-year collaboration between OART and the Environment Agency, aiming to work with natural processes to reduce the impact of flooding across the catchment whilst seeking to improve biodiversity and enhance the surrounding environment by diversifying in-channel and riparian habitats, improving water quality, reducing pollution, and increasing carbon sequestration

Funded By:

Environment Agency

Complimenting the long-term plan, materials have been created (brushwood bundles from waste products of local coppicing) for future use and pilot projects have been delivered to plant trees & cross-slope hedgerows and install leaky dams on pathways which see high levels of surface water during storm events.

Working with natural processes such as the implementation of NFM techniques is based on the principle of working with the river system and its floodplains to slow and store water in a more natural way. This can also provide multiple benefits to landowners, farmers, communities, and wildlife.

Examples of NFM techniques include:

- Introducing leaky woody dams to slow the flow and create in-channel habitat.
- Introducing wetlands, ponds, and scrapes as features in the floodplain to provide increased water storage, providing both flood and drought resilience.
- Seeking opportunities to create floodplain woodland or reinstate historic cross-slope hedgerows, both known to benefit flood risk management.
- Supporting improvements to soil structure and rebuilding levels of organic matter to increase landscape permeability.
- Modifying flood embankments to improve channel diversity, water holding capacity and/or re-connecting rivers with their floodplains

Developing Resilient Landscapes

Tackling INNS on the Ouse

Tackling Invasive Non-Native Species (INNS) is of fundamental importance if we are to protect our native species, habitats, and ecosystems. INNS are often overlooked but they are one of the leading threats to global biodiversity, and their arrival can spell disaster for our economy, livelihoods, recreational activities, and our well-being.

Having been instrumental in the creation of the Ouse INNS strategy in 2022 we are delighted to have started its delivery with long-term funding secured to ensure a sustained approach across three focal areas of

- Biosecurity
- Monitoring
- Control

Biosecurity (a set of precautions that aim to prevent the introduction and spread of harmful organisms) is the first element to get started, there is little point in controlling what is already here, if species continue to be spread around.

We are not trying to reinvent the wheel with this project and many of the principles of biosecurity already exist, the most relevant being those of the Check, Clean, Dry campaign aimed at river users and those who work in the environment.

Funded By:

Environment Agency

south east water

However, OART are producing biosecurity charters with different pledges being asked from different user groups (recreational users, land managers, construction companies etc). This will underpin our engagement work to raise awareness of simple steps everyone can take to reduce the risk from INNS.

We are also delighted to be bring the AquaAward scheme to the South East, currently piloted in the West Country our project is working with a local sailing club to have the first best-practice biosecurity award issued in Sussex.

The next step is to get effective monitoring in place which has begun with settlement panels in the estuary, allowing us to monitor for species colonizing into the estuary and form a rapid response to their presence. We will also be looking to our Citizen Science programme to form monitoring hubs which will facilitate the process of controlling and eradicating these species from the catchment.

Did you know?

There are already 46 riparian and freshwater INNS in the Ouse Catchment?

Many of the plant species can spread from as little as a 2mm fragment

Our native crayfish is almost extinct due to disease from the non-native American crayfish

In Other News

Re-Launch of Citizen Science

Since 1999 OART (and its predecessors) have been monitoring the health of the rivers. Our programme of invertebrate sampling, chemical water testing and sea trout monitoring has been invaluable in developing projects and delivering positive change with many of our members and supporters being integral to this success.

Over the past couple of years our inspirational lead on this work, Sam, has had to slow down a bit and at 82 decided that it was probably time to stop climbing in and out of rivers (fair enough). This has meant that our activities have dipped as we attempt to find new ways of continuing this vital component of our activities.

In September we employed Jo to reinvigorate our monitoring programme, making it more accessible, incorporating new approaches and aligning methods with our partners to influence decision making beyond our own projects. This is particularly important considering not only the state of the rivers we work on but also to enable us to both add to and challenge data used to inform on river health.

This doesn't mean all our historic data has become obsolete, it is rare to have such long-term information available and all the new methods allow for transfer of data, although this may take some time to fully complete. We will also continue to use this information to direct our programmes of work to ensure we are maximizing the output of what we do.

Having received some funding from the Environment Agency, Ernest Kleinwort Charitable Trust and our first foray into crowdfunding we have piloted new field equipment and are setting up community monitoring hubs who will be trained and supported in the following

- Biological Sampling
- Chemical Sampling
- Sea Trout Monitoring
- Non-native species identification

For our biological sampling, initially we will be using Riverfly monitoring in place of BMWP, and our first two training sessions have seen 18 people shown this quick and simple method of assessing river health.

We've presented our methods to a range of experts at Zoological Society London and the Environment Agency and are confident that our approach will enable project delivery, compliment data collection from statutory bodies and allow us to challenge assessments of river quality in the future.

Of course, like the previous monitoring, this will rely heavily on our volunteers and supporters to collect data, but we hope more meaningful outputs will bring in plenty of new helpers. If you want to get involved in this work, then please email Jo.Owens@oart.org.uk

Funded By:

Environment Agency

Ernest Kleinwort Charitable Trust

In Other News

Monitoring Plastic Pollution

During 2022 & 2023 we teamed up with Strandliners to deliver a catchment wide plastic pollution project, undertaking 33 river litter picks and plastic pollution audits across the Ouse and Adur.

A massive 480 kgs of litter was collected by volunteers from 14 kms of Sussex riverbanks. This amounted to nearly 15,000 items of litter being removed from our rivers, wetlands, and riparian habitats, 79% of which were plastic.

Alongside cleaning our rivers, the focus was on identifying and recording the litter, rather than just picking, bagging and binning it. By looking at catchments from source to sea, the project was able to identify and target the sources of plastic pollution and collect data that adds weight to effective solutions to the plastic pollution problem such as bottle deposit return schemes, extended producer responsibility laws, bans on single use vapes or the use of greener alternatives to plastic.

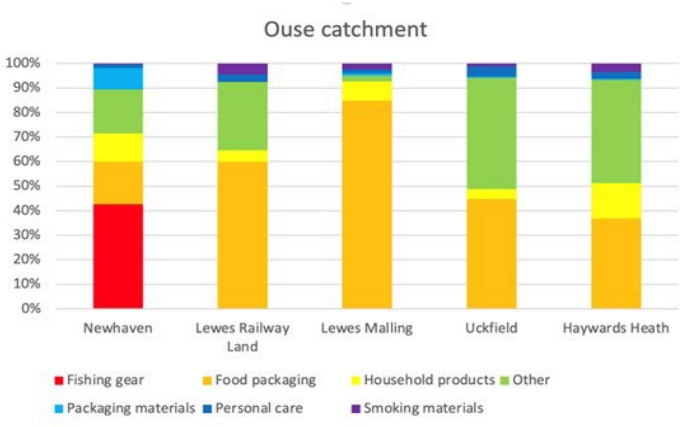
Training sessions were undertaken at 7 hubs to teach volunteers how to sort and analyse the litter collected, looking at what types of plastic are present and which brands feature highly.

By gathering data on every item collected, and repeating the picks and audits at each site, we could assess how quickly plastic pollution was accumulating and start creating a data- rich picture of environmental plastic pollution around us.

Fascinatingly we found that each town or location has its own litter 'fingerprint', sometimes significantly different from sites only a mile away. The types of litter found seem to be heavily impacted by the proximity of industrial sites, supermarkets, fast food restaurants and riverside greenspaces with high footfall.

Whilst there has been much media coverage regarding the impact of disposable smoking devices (vapes), our surveys found that food packaging was having, by far, the largest impact on our waterways, likely due to the combination of human discarded waste and wind-blown debris from rubbish bins. We can all help to control and reduce the impact of plastic (and other rubbish) entering our rivers and streams by being careful of how we dispose of our waste and by choosing products which come with plastic free packaging.

We will continue to organize river clean ups and remove waste from our rivers, adding to the data we collected during this project



Funded By:

The Rivers Trust

In Other News

Outreach & Events

Over the past year we have given 20 presentations to community groups or as part of events giving us the opportunity to raise awareness of how individual action can have a positive impact on the river.

In 2023 we assisted over 150 pupils from St Oscar Romero School in Sompting to achieve their John Muir Environmental Award, running field days at the EPIC site on Sompting Brooks where we explained the importance of chalk streams, how our behaviour can impact rivers, and why we manage the site how we do.

We ran corporate days for GSK, Coca Cola, and Southern Water to undertake river management tasks, and help create rainbox planters as part of our Storing the Storm project. These days enable us to highlight our work and discuss measures companies can take to help protect our rivers.

We gave careers talks to the University of Sussex and University of Brighton students to enthuse the next generation to consider working for an e-NGO. We ran field courses at Buxted Park and Sompting Brooks to give some practical experience of conservation work and show examples of project sites. Alongside these talks we helped four students with their MSc dissertation projects, providing complimentary data, aiding with study design and arranging access to suitable sites.

Overall, we have engaged with over 1000 members of the public, school pupils and University students throughout the year and we will be looking to expand this outreach and educational offering over the coming year.

Our Funding & Fundraising

Generating Income

The star of this year was undoubtedly 7-year-old Lauris, who walked the length of the South Downs Way raising over £1000 for OART, a real inspiration and help to our objectives.

We rely on a diverse range of funding to enable us to work independently and stay focus on our vision for the rivers whilst forming valuable and trusted partnerships. This includes our membership income, donations, and grant funding. Full details of our finances are available on the charity commission website which also enables year on year comparisons of funding levels.

It remains the case that funding is harder to come by and there is a lot of focus on large scale projects which can take many years to develop to meet funding criteria, but we are lucky to be adaptable and able to respond to changing funding environments quickly.

It has remained our aim to keep our overheads low whilst still providing a safe and enjoyable place to work with opportunities for expanding the knowledge and experience of our staff. This approach enable us to put the majority our income into delivering improvements and developing new ideas. Without our incredibly dedicated and flexible team we wouldn't achieve the impact that we see year after year.

This year has seen us delve into Crowdfunding to supplement our income and enable us to purchase monitoring equipment often not covered in our grants. Our corporate days have incurred small charges for the first time, and we aim to increase our offering in the future.

In addition, we are delighted to have been accepted as an Environmental Partner on 1% for the Planet, allowing us to attract funding from businesses genuinely interested in our work and improving the local environment.

Thanks to All Our Funders

Garfield Weston Foundation

Made possible with Heritage Fund

South Downs National Park Authority

Lewes District Council

Ernest Kleinwort Charitable Trust

south east water

Environment Agency

VEOLIA ENVIRONMENTAL TRUST

The Rivers Trust