

CMCL Bulletin No 13

In Bulletin No 2, I mentioned the long strip of woodland we all jointly own, between the railway line and the River Derwent, just south of the coal yard. Here I want to tell you more about the land, and what we are doing, and planning to do, to look after it.

Virtually the whole of our land by the river, and the river itself, is designated a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). Those of you who have ventured down there will know it is a wild, rather wet, seemingly untouched place. This is why it was made an SSSI back in 1954, and it is why there has been little management over the years.



One of the consequences of allowing the woodland to develop naturally is that trees fall down from time to time. This is considered to be the natural progression, and the dead and dying trees form habitats, and are an important part of the ecosystem, so they are left alone. However, some of the trees fall into the river, where they might restrict the flow, obstruct navigation on the river, and they might float off downstream to cause problems elsewhere.

We wanted to find out more about this, to make sure we were doing the right management generally (none), and to ensure we could not be held responsible for any problems the fallen trees might cause. We first made contact with Natural England (NE), which is the organisation which deals with SSSIs, and we met the Lead Conservation Advisor for our SSSI. She was quite happy with the lack of maintenance, and was not concerned about fallen trees, either on the land, or in the river. However, she also said we could remove the trees, or parts of them, from the river, if we wanted to, provided we obtained their permission first, and worked to their conditions – such as avoiding birds' nesting season.

The path alongside the river is quite good for the first section from the coal yard to the fence, (about 400m), but after that it is a bit of an assault course in places!



The NE Advisor was happy for us to keep the route of the path clear, so long as we get their permission, and abide by their “rules” about when and how to do the work.

At the end of the walk we were given a copy of their rules – “Operations likely to damage the special interest”. This is a full page of things we can’t do without their permission, and includes just about anything you can think of! Essentially it means we owners should not do anything to the land, trees, plants and animals without consulting NE first. Anything which has already been done is going to be reviewed, to make sure NE is happy.

Although the woodland is going to remain essentially wild, we think the route along the riverside should be kept clear, both for pedestrians, and in case we need to get equipment down there, perhaps to deal with a tree which has fallen in the river – should we need to. Some of the fallen trees are massive, and contemplating their removal from the river is daunting!



Now we have started the dialogue with NE, we feel we are making progress, but we have not managed to answer the initial question about our responsibility for the trees which have fallen (or which will fall) into the river. We have therefore contacted the Environment Agency (EA), so we can get some answers from them about the fallen trees, and other river-related matters, such as boating and fishing. Whatever we learn, we will pass on to everyone.

We hope to make the riverside walk more accessible, so we can use it more easily and safely, but for anyone not already familiar with the woodland, there are a few things to warn you about!

It is a wild place. Even when the route along the river side has been improved, there is still the obvious risk of being close to the water. At times, mainly in winter, the river completely floods the banks, including the path. Under these conditions it is not safe to proceed beyond the fence. Please don’t venture away from the riverside path at any time – the ground is very wet throughout the year, and there are lots of dead trees and branches threatening to fall down at any time. As you would expect in this sort of wet environment, there are sometimes midges and other biting bugs to make life uncomfortable.

But despite (or perhaps because of) all this, it is a haven for wildlife, and if you are quiet and lucky there will be lots to see.

So that is what is happening with our Derwent riverside land at the moment. We will keep you updated with further bulletins, whenever there is any news. If anyone wants to help with any of the planned work, please get in touch with one of us.

Best wishes

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