

Annual Report on Conservation, Access & Recreation 2013/14



Introduction

Portsmouth Water operates within an environmentally sensitive area, with internationally important inter tidal mudflats and saltmarsh along the coast, and the chalk streams of the South Downs which provide a very special wetland habitat and water resource. This provides major challenges to the Company at a time when customer expectations are also rising. The requirements of European legislation provide extra constraints, in addition to climate change, extreme weather events, and the day to day operating challenges of supplying water to more than 700,000 people, while minimising our environmental impact.



The River Meon at Morestead

Conservation & Biodiversity

We are committed to ensuring compliance with all environmental legislation and obligations, carefully assessing the impact of our activities, especially construction projects on the environment, to ensure that the impact of such schemes is minimised. In 2013/14 the Company Environmental and Biodiversity Specialist developed a new environmental screening tool to help our engineers and project managers to identify any potential environmental and ecological constraints. The new tools use a Geographical Information System (GIS) to display data on maps showing protected habitats, species and monuments. The data has been obtained from Natural England, English Heritage, the Environment Agency and County ecological record offices.

As part of our wider commitment to improving environmental quality, we aim to conserve and, where possible, enhance biodiversity on the 44 operational sites we own, which include 19 water treatment works. Sites are located in a variety of habitats including chalk downland, river catchments and coastal margins.

We own one Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) at the Itchen Water Treatment Works. In 2013/14 we worked in partnership with Eastleigh Borough Council to carry out works which will enable the SSSI wetland meadow to be grazed by cows from the Itchen Valley Country Park. This will help to ensure that the meadow is maintained in favourable condition. The project is part funded by Natural England through a High Level Stewardship agreement. The work involved constructing a bridge over the Town Hill Stream to allow the cattle to cross from the Park, extensive fencing works, and installing a pasture pump to provide water for the cows.



New bridge at the Itchen WTW to enable cattle to access the SSSI flood meadow

Habitat surveys were completed at 4 sites in 2013/14. This has enabled us to review our management for each site and update the biodiversity action plan. A methodology has been developed in line with Natural England guidance to review the condition of priority habitats on Company owned land. This will be field tested in summer 2014.

Conservation projects completed in the past year have included;

- Erection of a Barn owl box in a disused company building near Slindon.
- Providing a cherry picker (see picture) and operator to help rangers at Titchfield Haven National Nature Reserve erect an Osprey nest.
- The successful relocation of a badger sett on Portsdown Hill in accordance with the terms of a Natural England Licence.
- Removal of willow scrub from a lagoon at the Itchen WTW to enhance the wetland habitat.
- Woodland edge clearance and erection of bat boxes at Highwood Reservoir.



Barn owl next box erected in a disused company building (Barn Owl © Dennis Bright)



Erecting an Osprey nest at Titchfield Haven NNR



Erecting bat boxes in the woodland at Highwood Reservoir

In addition, company staff have actively embraced the programme of working parties which included;

- Removing invasive scrub and an old fence from a wetland meadow site adjacent to the River Meon. This enabled the site to be mowed and the grass collected to encourage wildflowers to grow.
- Coppiced an area of hazel woodland at the Itchen WTW site.
- Removed invasive Himalayan Balsam from the River Itchen SSSI fen.
- Removed invasive Budhia from a works site near Fareham.
- Removed young thorn trees and bramble from a chalk grassland reservoir site near Slindon.



Bluebell display in the coppiced woodland at the Itchen WTW

Case Study: New Home for Badgers

During 2013 a rapid expansion of the badger sett at the George Service Reservoir site posed a potential risk to water quality and the safety of staff during site maintenance work. A temporary solution was to place an electric fence around the outer edge of the reservoir roof to minimise the risk, but a more permanent solution was needed. A real team effort amongst staff has enabled the Company to successfully relocate the badgers to a new home outside of the site.

Badgers and their homes are protected by an act of parliament, so the first step was to complete a survey of badgers in the area and obtain a special licence from Natural England to permit us to close the sett. A specialist consultant was then appointed to design and build a new home for the badgers on company land to the north of the site. The artificial sett has 15 chambers connected by twin walled pipes, with 3 entrance tunnels. Peanuts and bedding material from the old sett were placed outside the new entrances, to encourage the badger family to use the new sett before the old sett was removed.

We created a residence that was so desirable that the badgers moved in within a week of the new sett being completed. Once we were certain the new sett was occupied the old set was sealed, with one way gates fitted for 21 days, then the old sett was removed. Badger fencing was buried in to the ground around the perimeter of the reservoir site to ensure that the badgers could not move back in to the site in the future.



Construction of an artificial badger sett on Portsdown Hill



The Company is an active corporate member of the Hampshire & IOW Wildlife Trust.

Recreation & Access

Staunton Country Park; The proposed Havant Thicket Winter Storage Reservoir site is owned by the Company but managed through an agreement with Hampshire County Council as part of the Staunton Country Park (SCP). In 2013 the Company extended the tenancy to enable the whole of the 167 hectare site to be managed by the Staunton Rangers. The site includes a public bridleway and network of permissive paths through woodland and grassland.

Portsmouth Water is a member of the SCP Access Group, working with partners to improve the local path network, upgrade signage and provide an all weather circular cycling and walking route. In 2012 Portsmouth Water led a project to provide a new path across the Company land to link the Forestry Commission woodland at Havant Thicket to Staunton Country Park, opening up 10km of all weather off road tracks for walking, mobility scooters and cycling.



Community leaders and partners from HCC and the Forestry Commission joined Neville Smith (Managing Director) for the path opening ceremony at Havant Thicket

Highwood Reservoir; This raw water storage reservoir site owned by Portsmouth Water is located within the popular Itchen Valley Country Park, operated by Eastleigh Borough Council. The site is open to the general public, with a circular permissive path around the reservoir. In 2014 scrub clearance work was completed on the banks around the reservoir building to improve public access and enhance biodiversity. The Company have also provided some assistance to help the Council develop a new woodland school within the Park.

Special arrangements have been made for access at other company owned sites.

- At the Itchen Water Treatment Works this enables schools, universities and other organised groups to participate in educational visits. In spring 2014 the Company Environment & Biodiversity Specialist led a guided walk to explain to a local natural history group the extensive management work which has taken place at the site to enhance biodiversity including; coppicing, rotational scrub management, removal of invasive species and improving water levels for water vole through a sustainable drainage project.
- For the Hampshire Astronomical Society to utilise the Clanfield Service Reservoir site. They organise a number of visits for the benefit of its members. Small groups of members of the public are able to visit by prior arrangement with the Society.

Community Engagement

Ratty the Water Vole is Back in Town

Water voles have been confirmed in the pond owned by Portsmouth Water off Park Road South in Havant following sightings reported by local residents. This is great news as water voles have been experiencing a rapid decline nationally.

The good quality spring water emerging in the pond provides the ideal growing environment for the water margin plants that water voles like to eat. It is hoped that the new ornate railings installed by Havant Borough Council along one side of the pond will help reduce the amount of litter entering the pond. In addition, the water company are adapting the site management to help the water vole.

The New Blendworth Centre Community Team manage the site on behalf of the Company, they visit the pond fortnightly, mow the grass and remove large volumes of litter which is dropped and accumulates around the pond. In future we have asked the Blendworth team supervisors to reduce the area of grass cut around the pond to allow more water margin vegetation to develop, improving the habitat for the voles. In addition, we have provided the supervisors with waders to enable them to remove more of the litter that is unfortunately discarded in the pond. Peter Jarvis and the team gave the pond a good clean in spring 2014 and it looks great (see photo).

The Company also released publicity asking people in the area to respect the environment and take their litter home, or place it in the bins provided by the Council and nearby takeaway outlets. If you stand very quietly on the path behind the new railings and wait patiently you may be lucky enough to see the water vole swimming across the pond.



Spring pond in Havant where the water voles have set up home

Carbon Management Strategy

The drive to stabilise and reduce global greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions to ensure the long term viability of our way of living is an issue of national and international importance. Due to the energy intensive nature of the water sector, the operational activities of the industry contributes approximately 1% of the UK's GHG emissions (Ofwat, 2009). Portsmouth Water recognises the need to address carbon emissions within its business and we have continued to implement our Carbon Management Strategy.

Within our strategy we have undertaken a review of opportunities for renewable energy generation. This led to commissioning six small scale solar projects in 2011 and these schemes continue to provide electricity for use at our pumping stations and we also export surplus energy to the grid. A rise in the generation, use and exportation of renewable electricity over the past year has led to a reduction in our net operational emissions of 243 tonnes of tCO₂e from 11,632 tonnes in 2012/13 to 11,389 tonnes in 2013/14. This is despite a necessary increase in electricity use to pump from our western boundary to maintain customer supplies due to the loss of a key source in our central area.

Catchment Management

The Company is committed to the Downs & Harbour Clean Water Partnership, with Natural England and the Environment Agency. One person is employed by Portsmouth Water to manage the project and give free services and advice to farmers / landowners to try and reduce sources of groundwater pollution (nitrates & pesticides) in catchments. Rising trends in nitrates has also led the Company to undertake additional research to help inform a more targeted programme of catchment research and management for the next Business Plan.

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