A committee member's view

Steve Crowley *on a* **Woody Problem**

Aside from my interest in DRiPS and the health of the River Darent, I have re-established my involvement in the running of what was, when I lived in the area, my local angling club, Orpington & District Angling Association. We rent a large series of five lakes, known as the Ruxley Gravel Pits, which are on-line to the River Cray.

The River Cray has similar problems to the Darent in terms of threats to its flow, as it is heavily abstracted, but it also has different issues as unlike the Darent it does not flow through a rural landscape, but an urban one, and so the pollution problems it faces are not the same. But there are other common issues - and they are very thorny indeed.

We have seen recently the level of all the ODAA waters drop in recent months, and as we are worried about the potential loss of fish and associated life, I arranged meetings with the Environment Agency to get some advice.

This leads me to the 'woody problem.' Like most people, I like trees, but it turns out trees and healthy river flows or lake levels are not good bedfellows. Apparently, trees like alder and willow can suck huge quantities of water from the ground, hundreds of gallons a day each, and having a pleasant but densely wooded river or lake bank is bad news. The advice we have had is simple - cut down as many trees as possible, especially the bigger ones. They will grow back, but maintain them as low bushes, don't allow them to grow as they once did.



Secondly, they shut out the light and that stops healthy rooted plants from growing in the water.

Thirdly, they act as windbreaks and reduce the ability of the water to absorb oxygen so that, in hot weather, it increases the risk of loss of fish.

All in all, we now face a difficult decision because dealing with the trees will not be popular.

Which brings me to the Darent. I could pick any area to focus on, but lets choose Shoreham. What a lovely walk it is along the river, from the bridge down towards the weir. "Aren't those people who live in the cottages which back on to the river fortunate?", I often think when I go past. Would there not be gasps of horror and urgent calls to 'the Council' if one day a bright orange chainsaw appeared. And yet, it appears, removing some trees would improve the health of the river. A conundrum, I'm sure you will agree.

For my part, I am the one who, at the AGM of our ODAA, will face the flak from the members who will look at me as the reason 'the lakes have been slaughtered.' Great, I am looking forward to that…



How can I get involved?

DRiPS AGM MEETING 2019

Don't miss our Autumn Meeting in the Library of the **Castle Hotel, Eynsford, at 7pm Thursday 24th October.** Refreshments will be served.

Guest speaker will include Chris Gardner, SE Rivers Trust, who will talk about the Darent walkovers we all do together to monitor the state of our river.

BECOME A MEMBER OF DRiPS

Membership costs just £10 a year for individual members, or £20 for organisations. You will receive invitations to events where you can find out more about the welfare of your beautiful and unique local rivers.

For more details, see our website: www.darent-drips.org.uk

Drought Criteria

The criteria for declaring a drought are driven by security of supply for creatures who live on the land, rather than the ecosystems that live underwater. The river needs enough water to keep the caddis fly and all the invertbrates alive, until it rains.



Springs bubble at Shoreham

The DRiPS committee regularly join with NWKC, SERT, the EA, the Darent Valley Landscape Partnership and local Angling Groups to survey the river and the riverbed. This year we have walked downstream from Otford to Castle Farm. There are some lovely stretches of water and the sight of springs bubbling from the bank is enchanting. Hear more about it all from Chris Gardner at our next meeting in October.

Darent River Preservation Society
Founded 1985

NEWS FLOW

No 35 Autumn 2019

Have we lost touch with water?

Pete Fox, Director of Water, Land and Biodiversity at the Environment Agency.

"As a nation, we have lost touch with water - where it comes from, why it matters and how we all need to take action to protect this most precious resource".

James Bevan, Chief Executive of the Environment Agency

Jaws of Death Speech

"The business plans the water companies produce all have two things in common. First is climate change. Second is a graph with two curves; first is demand plotted against time and the second is supply. They cross over in about 20/25 years time. That is when we will not have enough water to supply our needs. They call it the jaws of death. It's likely that people may need to pay more for water. We need water wastage to be as socially unacceptable as blowing smoke in the face of a baby or throwing plastic bags into the sea. "



National Chalk Stream Crisis

In Parliament, Charles Walker, MP, led a debate on England's chalk streams and calls for urgent action to reduce abstraction to avoid the monumental environmental crisis facing these unique and important habitats. He called for the building of the planned Abingdon Reservoir, scheduled for 2037, which is still awaiting a decision.

Thames Water

Thames Water acknowledges that SE England is water-stressed and by 2045 predicts that there will be a shortfall of 350 million litres per day due to population growth and climate change.

Sir Michael Fallon, MP for Sevenoaks and Swanley

Sir Michael has written to Ofwat to remind them the Water Companies and the EA agreed to 'maintain an environmentally acceptable flow in the Darent'

A RAPID Solution?

Rainwater is free and belongs to no one. DEFRA, Ofwat, (the Economic Regulator), The EA (the Environmental Regulator), and some of the private water companies are engaging with Water Resources South East and a new committee called RAPID (see below). Will they innovate and get some projects underway. It's innovation we need, not regulation.

The way ahead?

We must all use water more efficently. The average household water use for washing and drinking in the UK is about 150 litres a person daily, 30% of which goes down the toilet. We consume about **30 times as much** (4,645 litres a day) **in "virtual water"**, mainly in the production of (imported) food and textiles.

How to help the river

See inside



Date for your diary: Annual Meeting of DRiPS. 24 October. See back page.

Mink arrive in the Darent at Westerham



Mark Gallant (NWKCP) has received reports of mink sightings in Dartford, Eynsford, Shoreham and Westerham. Parts of the Darent used to have a healthy water-vole population, but they seem to have gone. On a positive note, mink will be predators on the American signal crayfish population.

Mark Gallant leads volunteer groups



Volunteers took to the banks of the Darent in Sundridge to tackle the problem of invasive Himalayan balsam, a non-native plant that plagues many rivers in the UK and causes damage to native species, as well as eroding riverbanks and blocking waterways.
Another group of 10 worked hard to clear weed in the river at Horton Kirby.

Save Water where you can!



It's hard to believe that with a running tap, you can use 2-3 litres of water brushing your teeth. It's easy to use a mug.



Use a bowl for washing up. Use water from clean crocks to wash dirtiier items. Wipe out greasy pans and don't flush grease down the drain.



Did you realise 30% of your140 litres/day goes down the toilet?.

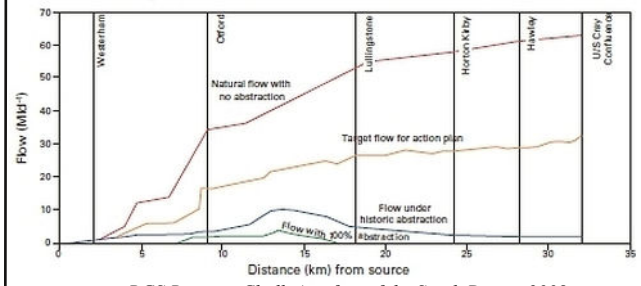
The Darent Action Plan - does it need reviving?



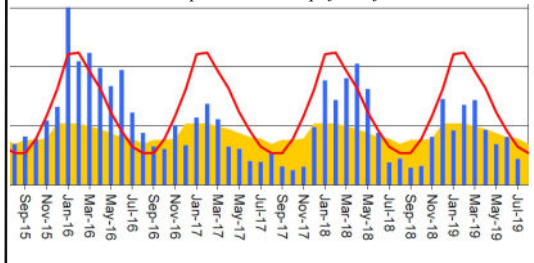
Westminster Mill in 1990s

The 'Darent Action Plan' (DAP) was launched in 1995 to rescue the disappearing Darent. It received much acclaim but investment tapered off and it came to an end in 2013. Its stated objective (NRA report, 1995) was to 'maintain an environmentally acceptable flow in the River Darent… The maintained flow will follow a target flow profile which is 50% of the lowest natural flow occuring once in twenty years'. Not very ambitious, you might say. This became known as the "Environment -ally Acceptable Flow" (EAF) and water companies reduced their groundwater abstraction to meet it and monitored the effects. Flows are regularly recorded at Otford, Lullingstone and Hawley.

Changes in flow for the river between Westerham and Dartford



BGS Report : Chalk Aquifers of the South Downs 2008



Blue bars: monthly volume of flow at Hawley 2015-2019.
Red line indicates Long Term Average flow
Amber shading is the EAF threshold

The top graph below shows that under natural conditions, flow should nearly double between Otford and Hawley. In reality, less ambitious targets were set and between 2012 and 2016, the river seemed to be in fair health.

But since September 2016, there have been 18 months when the flow at Hawley was below its threshold EAF. The Darent Action Plan agreement appears to have been broken. If we have more dry winters and dry summers, and abstraction remains the same, that water may not be there at all.

Worryingly, there is still sufficient headroom in water company licenses to legally return to late 1990s abstraction levels, although they promise this will never happen.

Years ago, the disappearing water was blamed on sink holes in the river around Horton Kirby, but locals haven't observed these for some years and DRiPS suspects they will have sealed themselves.

We understand that the three augmentation pumps, built as part of the Darent Action Plan to bring water up from the aquifer to sustain the river, have not been used since the early 2000s. The Environment Agency now deem them unsustainable.

Their purpose was to safeguard invertebrates, fish and plant life if stretches of the river were about to dry out again as in the 1990s.
When we are next faced with potential drought conditions, will they work again? Or is there another solution?

Would you pay more for green water?



Figures show that people in Devon and Cornwall pay twice the water rate that Thames Water charges. How can it be that water is cheaper in the South East, which has about half the rainfall of the SW.
The SW gets 90% all their water from reservoirs and lakes but SE England (including London) takes 70% of its supply from groundwater - the precious chalk aquifers that are the very arteries of the countryside - and yet say they can't afford to build reservoirs.

Many of us pay more for GREEN ENERGY
Would it not be a good idea to be able to pay more for GREEN WATER?

Visit our website at:
www.darent-drips.org.uk

Please email any comments or photos to:
darentdrips1985@gmail.com

A National Problem

DRiPS is a non-political society and so it should be. However, much of our campaigning efforts are the responses to decisions made by our politicians. By example:

PRIVATISATION:
The privatisation of our water companies has inevitably introduced a critical imbalance in the way in which water is now supplied. The objective of creating an efficient, sustainable system of water supply at a fair price, has now to be balanced against the equally strong objective of maintaining a financial dividend to the shareholders. One must be held-fortune to the other.

INCREASED HOUSING:
We all recognise the need for new housing. However the apparently gratuitous decisions to its location seems to have been made without reference to the availability of water. The South East is both the most populated region of England as well as the driest. It does not contain reserves of water. With increased housing, in time the South East will simply run dry. Yet there appears little appetite to create new reservoirs or develop systems for the transfer of water from other regions. Why not?

LACK OF INFRASTUCTURE:
The system on which our companies in the South East operate are in ante-deluvian Victorian pipes. Efficient in their day, they have reached their critical point and are failing.
OFWAT have now forced water companies to decrease their leakage by a paltry 15% in the coming years. It is conspicuously little. The two proposed new reservoirs at Broad Oak and Abingdon are much talked about yet are continually stalled by land-owners. The de-salination plant at Becton is allegedly 'too expensive to run'! Water regions appear to be disinterested in sharing their reserves. Is acting to the benefit of the Nation, an entirely lost concept?

Re-investment appears to be held hostage by the demands of shareholders. DRiPS may be a non political society. Yet the problems we face on your behalf are, we believe, the visible outcomes of putting profit before the people of our region. We live in hope.

RAPID

In April, Ofwat announced that "a team from Ofwat, the Environment Agency and Drinking Water Inspectorate are being brought together to improve regulation and remove barriers ....the new Regulators' Alliance for Progressing Infrastructure Development (RAPID) will make sure regulation enables strategic schemes to improve resilience of water supplies into the future. These schemes might include transfers between regions in England and developing joint infrastructure, such as shared reservoirs."



To end, a quote from James Bevan, above, CEO of the Environment Agency announcing the new LOVE WATER campaign:

"While there will be political challenges, there should be less difficulty over the economic. That's because the investment needed to increase our resilience is modest compared with the cost of not doing it. While a severe drought would cost each household more than £100, the cost per household of the investment that would greatly reduce the risk is only £4 a year."