

## Letting the Dove Flow – National Trust Briefing note, summer 2018.

The **'Letting the Dove Flow' restoration strategy** builds on technical studies, site visits and extensive consultation with landowners and other key organisations. It identifies and prioritises physical restoration measures that will help to address key issues affecting the **River Dove in Dovedale and Wolfscote Dale**, based on a strategic assessment of the river. It is a long term plan, whose approach is to **work with landowners and other interested parties** to deliver **gradual** improvements, gathering information and **carefully evaluating** the work we do together. The full document is available to view here: <http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/publication/6259971227385856>

**Who's in the partnership?** The core group consists of the National Trust, Natural England, Environment Agency, Wild Trout Trust, and Peak District National Park Authority. We work closely with the Leek and District Fly-fishing Association and the Beresford Fishery, along with many other stakeholders such as local authorities and farmers.

### What is the problem?

The river supports a range of habitats for plants, invertebrates, fish, and birds. However, some of these habitats are not as good as they could be, as a result of changes to the river channel including the presence of structures such as weirs and reinforced river banks. The river forms part of the Biggin Dale and Dove Valley SSSI and the river units are in 'Unfavourable' condition, in part due to the man-made structures. Carefully and gradually addressing these issues would help the River Dove to support improved habitats whilst favourably adapting to climate change.

### Current situation

After careful planning and with detailed consultation with those with responsibility for flooding, heritage and biodiversity, in July 2016 two weirs close to Lover's Leap in Dovedale were breached by Leek and District Fly Fishing Association, with three more breached in September 2017. **We're planning to breach three further weirs between the stepping stones and Lover's Leap during late summer 2018, as well as carrying out some work in Wolfscotdale.** The changes will be carefully monitored.

The 'Letting the Dove Flow' partnership is working closely with landowner, farmers and angling clubs to make further gradual changes including felling small numbers of live trees and pegging them down to the river bed and banks. This is important in providing refuge for young fish and other wildlife where the banks have been straightened and reinforced with stone and can make help the river to scour out deeper pools and clean silt away from gravels in which fish like wild trout spawn.

A PhD study is being undertaken at Loughborough to help us monitor and better understand the changes and benefits brought about by the restoration plan.

We have an inventory of all 170+ weirs with measurements and photos to record the 'baseline'.

We have had an expert Heritage Assessment of the weirs and we will only work on weirs that are not considered significant in terms of their heritage value.

## Frequently Asked Questions

**How is the project funded?** Natural England and the Environment Agency fund the project in order to restore the condition of the Dove Valley and Biggin Dale SSSI units to favourable condition, and to contribute towards the England Biodiversity Strategy 2020. Other partners contribute staff and volunteer time to achieving this important work.

**Are the weirs historically important?** We have worked with archaeologists and historians to work out how the river looked and which are important historical structures to conserve. The Heritage Report is available on request.

**Will you harm nature by making these changes?** The programme will greatly enhance the wildlife of the river and its banks by freeing the river to shape itself more naturally. We will be careful to avoid disturbing nesting birds or spawning fish and to work sensitively and consult Natural England, whose permission is required.

**Will my sheep and cattle go astray more after you have done this work?** We will be planning the work with farmers to avoid this danger.

**How will you make sure that adding wood and removing weirs doesn't cause damage?** We will assess each weir, stone reinforcement and piece of large wood carefully to ensure we do not cause damage, working closely with river ecology experts, anglers, and the relevant authorities.

**Will these changes affect the fishing?** Letting the Dove Flow will be better for wild fish, including the wild trout beloved of Izaak Walton and Charles Cotton. If the habitat provides the right balance it is not necessary to stock with young fish. Already most of the angling clubs have stopped introducing stocked fish as their members prefer the challenge of catching wild fish.

**Will the changes affect the beauty of the valley?** We believe that the changes will improve the beauty of the valley, restoring a more natural, 'wild' feel, and recreating the landscape beloved of pre-Victorian writers like Byron, Wordsworth, and Izaak Walton, and the many painters who valued Dovedale's picturesque beauty.

**Is there a danger you will cause flooding?** We plan carefully to avoid this risk in close liaison with the flood authorities (EA and local authorities), whose permission is required to carry out works on the weirs.

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