Andy Brown looks back on another very successful year for the Trust and wonders quite what the future holds for our rivers.

AS A TRUST WE AIM to conserve and enhance the rivers and streams of the Yorkshire Dales as sources of pure water, as habitats for aquatic and other wildlife, and as havens of quiet recreation for anglers and others. I think we can demonstrate that over the last year we have made an important contribution to each of these aims.

During the year we finished our current project on Bishopdale Beck and continued working on the Upper Wharfe SSSI. We also continue to host the Dales to Vale River Network. We started new projects on the Mid Swale Tributaries, Collingham Beck, River Burn weir removal and an education project called River2U. We hosted several work placement students, joined a partnership to fund a PhD student working on the River Cover; worked on the merger with the Ure Salmon Trust; submitted a proposal to Yorkshire Water for a partnership with them on Humberstone Bank Farm; worked on a host of smaller projects and prepared applications for new projects for 2016/17. Not bad for a year.

None of our environmental projects would happen without grant aid from the Environment Agency, Natural England, the Heritage Lottery Fund and other diverse sources including commercial and private funders. Preparing applications for these grants takes much effort from both Project Officers and Trustees but it is time well spent. Most of the resulting income (close on £200,000 per year) is tied to specific projects but to function effectively we are also dependent on support from membership subscriptions, as well as donations from other organisations and generous individuals. This kind of income (currently only about 8% of the total) is vital to finance our running costs, develop new projects and promote the aims of the Trust. Increasing the proportion of unrestricted income would bring many benefits.

To be successful in this we will need to publicise our presence, activities and achievements as widely as possible in order to increase membership income and to generate support for fundraising events.
Bishopdale Beck
We have been working on Bishopdale Beck, a tributary of the River Ure, for a number of years. The beck is very important for spawning salmon but it does suffer from poor quality riparian habitat and excessive sediment inputs. It has some interesting features including the old scrap cars buried in the flood embankments - but that is another story! With relatively small amounts of funding each year we have been working our way through a restoration plan targeting the areas where improvements can be made. Over the last 3 years we have put up 2.6 km of fencing to exclude stock from the beckside, created over 1 ha of riparian habitat, installed 125 m of bankside protection such as willow spilling, installed 7 large woody debris features, planted over 5000 trees and held 3 education events.

The Bishopdale work has involved working with 5 different partner organisations, many land owners and is only made possible with the help of a number of contractors and our hard working volunteers who contributed over 500 hours of their time. You may think the job must now be finished, but all that has finished is the funding! There is still lots to do on this beck with more riparian and in-stream habitat to create, the channel diversity needs improving in places and it needs reconnecting it with the floodplain. There is also demand for agricultural advice to help farmers continue to improve farming infrastructure and adopt best practice.

Dales to Vale River Network
The Dales to Vale River Network which YDRT hosts has continued to flourish. DVRN is a partnership covering all the main river catchments in our area (the Swale, Ure, Nidd, Wharfe and Upper Ouse) bringing together the ideas, knowledge and skills of a very wide range of organizations and individuals.

DVRN has helped to both identify where projects are needed and secure funding including a grant from the Environment Agency for new project on Collingham Beck (see the separate item on page 8).

Another new project is centred on the Mid Swale Tributaries. Initial activity under this Project has focused on the Gilling Beck catchment which suffers problems of high sediment inputs and elevated phosphorus levels. Work has included training volunteers to undertake surveys to pinpoint where the problems are and what we might do to reduce them. A restoration plan has been prepared and work has included willow spilling to reduce erosion and sediment inputs, installation of sediment traps, fencing to exclude stock to reduce erosion and nutrient inputs, and tree planting. In addition three farmers have been given help with track maintenance and improvements to drainage.

At South Milford on the Wharfe there is prime arable land but there are problems of soil erosion with valuable topsoil being lost. A work placement student from Leeds University walked the whole catchment to identify the problems enabling a plan to be prepared. There is also work in hand to run events for farmers to share advice, and work with the community organisation South Milford Against Flooding to identify where sediment traps might be installed. Other projects being stimulated by the DVRN include the Natural Nidd, the Wensleydale Project and the River Whiske. These involve partners such as the Yorkshire Dales National Park, the Nidderdale AONB and the Yorkshire Wildlife Trust.

Educational Activity
Teaching the next generation about the importance of rivers is a key part of our remit. I was particularly pleased that the Yorkshire Dales National Park Sustainable Development Fund provided funding for an education project. This allowed us to buy a river education table. This is a table containing special plastic sand that can be modelled into any river channel through which we pump water to simulate the basic principles of river behavior. It is an ideal education and outreach tool which can be used with any age group, but it is also sophisticated enough to investigate the effects of physical modification of rivers, for example, deepening a river by dredging, constricting flows through culverts, channel straightening, building bridges, inserting culverts or installing bank protection.

It is portable and we used it in visits to a number of primary schools. If you are interested you can check out this short video of children using our table: https://vimeo.com/152191553

While highlighting education I should mention the undergraduate students we have had over the last year or so. Tom Throssell, Emily Brown and Isaac Herrington have all helped the Trust in various ways and I am sure have learnt some new skills and knowledge. In September 2016 we signed a joint agreement with Leeds University and JBA Consulting to fund a post-graduate student for 3 years. The work is being undertaken by Zora van Leeuwen and is focused on the effects of woody debris on upland river hydromorphological processes. Improving the evidence for interventions in rivers is critical to our approach and essential in improving understanding and ensuring our work achieves the right results.

Caitlin with pupils at Bardsey Primary School
Weir Removal
In 2015 we completed the removal of a significant barrier to fish passage on the River Laver, a tributary of the River Ure. This year we were fortunate in securing funding from Associated British Ports to remove a barrier on the River Burn, another tributary on the Ure. With assistance from the Biker Group the work was completed and very recently spawning salmon were seen upstream of the old weir, the first time in many years (see page 10).

Merger with the Ure Salmon Trust
At the last AGM in March 2016 members endorsed the view of the Trustees that the merger with the Ure Salmon Trust (UST) should go ahead. The Trust was to be wound up as a separate company and a new Ure Salmon Group established to advice and assist the Trust in relation to the River Ure. This is the first of what we hope will be similar groups on the other main rivers we manage. Further work on the merger was put in hand including the preparation of a Terms of Reference for the River Groups and the formal merger took place on 1 September 2016. The member of staff employed by the UST, Dave Bamford, was taken on by the Trust and assets of UST passed to us including a four-wheel drive vehicle. I am pleased to say the change has been working well so far and the new Ure Salmon Group is currently planning a major fund raising event for 17 March 2017.

Looking towards Kettlewell in Wharfedale

Looking ahead
For the rest of 2016 and into 2017 we will continue to work on a number of the projects I’ve mentioned. The Upper Wharfe SSSI project has expanded thanks to the support of Yorkshire Water. We will be covering a larger area and will be exploring several natural flood management techniques to reduce the effects of downstream flooding. We are also working with The National Park and North Yorkshire County Council to develop information packs for farming to help them choose the techniques which provide the best flood protection that fits in with their farming business.

The theme of natural flood management has grown in importance over the last few years. We had two very interesting speakers at our last AGM sharing their experiences on this subject. With support from the Prince’s Countryside Trust we will be raising awareness and offering advice to farmers in Swaledale and Wensleydale on natural flood management.

Another innovative project will help us to strengthen our links with the local community: we received funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund for a citizen science project on the River Ure. This will involve volunteers in collecting data on pollution problems but will also celebrate the Ure and encourage people to get their feet wet and enjoy the river environment.
There is also funding for another fish barrier project on the River Laver and we are hoping that grants will be available to continue the habitat improvements and sediment reduction work on the Swale, the Ure and the Wharfe. As well as these big projects, we will be helping with Grayling Day a long running and important fishing event on the Ure and doing more work to promote the Riverfly Partnership, an national initiative by anglers to monitor the invertebrate life in rivers. Looking ahead there is plenty to keep us busy.

**Meet our new trustees**

I am extremely fortunate in being the Chair with a very supportive group of Trustees and now five excellent members of staff. Our staff have to be very self-motivated and largely manage their own work programmes. They engage very effectively with a wide range of people and organisations and work tirelessly to improve the rivers of the Dales. Our volunteers are heroes turning out in all weathers to help deliver practical projects as well as doing some of the essential office work. I want to finish by thanking all of our members, donors and sponsors, individuals and businesses alike, statutory agencies and grant awarding Trusts and Foundations, for the support they give us. Without their contributions none of our work would be possible. **A huge thank you from all of us at the Trust.**

**Doctor Stephen Axford** retired from the Environment Agency in March 2010 after 36 years as a fisheries scientist with the Agency and its predecessors, starting in the Yorkshire area but ending as Principal Fisheries Scientist for England and Wales. Since then he has worked as an aquatic ecology consultant and assisted the East Yorkshire Rivers Trust with projects on the Yorkshire Derwent.

Stephen has an impressive record in academic research and wide experience of environmental issues relevant to the work of the Trust. He gained his doctorate by a study of fisheries management on the River Nidd, later becoming a Fellow and then Vice-President of the Institute of Fisheries Management. He is also a Chartered Environmentalist and member of the Council of the Society for the Environment. In addition he is a Marine Management Organisation re-appointee to the North Eastern Inshore Fisheries & Conservation Authority.

Stephen lists his particular interests as water quality, restoration of salmon runs and factors affecting coarse fish population numbers and movements in rivers. Recreational interests include angling and sailing, and he is keen to apply his knowledge to benefit these interests. He teaches dinghy sailing and is a member of the Royal Yachting Association Planning and Environmental Committee.

**Mark Facer** is a Chartered Accountant, although he left private practice some considerable time ago, initially to work in industry for a number of diverse companies at director level. For the last 25 years he has set up and run a property investment and development business concentrating on commercial real estate across the country.

More recently, being now semi-retired, Mark has been able to devote more time to other activities, included fishing for trout on the Wharfe and for salmon on various Scottish rivers.

Mark has also become a trustee for a number of charities including the Craven Trust and Beamsley Trust where prior to retirement he was treasurer and more recently chairman. He continues to act as treasurer and trustee of the John Gregson Trust and the Hibbert Trust.

Living in, or on the fringe of, the Yorkshire Dales for the last 30 years has been a source of great pleasure to Mark and his family who enjoy a range of outdoor activities including cycling, pursuit of field sports, dog-walking or observing wildlife and he is looking forward to contributing towards the Trust’s activities in the future.

**Political change**

With the decision made to leave the European Union there is also an air of uncertainty about quite what the future holds. Many environmental objectives in England have been driven by European Directives and the Water Framework Directive has been of particular importance in setting water quality standards. It remains to be seen if these standards will be adopted once we leave the EU or if they are replaced with something stronger or weaker. What is clear to us is that there remains a huge amount of work to do to continue to improve water quality and manage rivers and their catchments in ways that benefit biodiversity, the economy and society as a whole. We believe the River Trusts play and will continue to play, a critical role in this.

Andy Brown
Chair

Yorkshire Dales Rivers Trust ● Annual Report 2017
The success of the Yorkshire Dales Rivers Trust is largely based on the expertise and hard work of our Project Officers. We now employ five full and part-time staff. Here is a brief profile of each of them.

Dave Bamford transferred to the Yorkshire Dales Rivers Trust on its merger with the Ure Salmon Trust. Dave was brought up in Blackpool, Lancashire but from a very early age spent most of his spare time in Cumbria exploring the Lakeland fells, rivers and lakes. He worked for the National Rivers Authority and its successor, the Environment Agency for over 20 years as a Fisheries Enforcement Officer, Fisheries Scientist and Fisheries Technical Officer.

In his younger days Dave worked in commercial fish farming and is a lifelong angler. Dave was awarded a Masters Degree in Fisheries from the University of Hull in 2002 and has been involved in many large river restoration projects and also installation of fish counters and fish passes (see Dave’s item on the Breary Banks Weir on page 10). His hobbies outside work include restoration of classic Rover Cars from the 1960’s.

Rita Mercer has lived in the Yorkshire Dales for more than 25 years, working for most of her career on environmentally-friendly farming schemes such as Countryside Stewardship. “That’s given me a fantastic insight into the farmers, flora and fauna of this lovely place” Rita says. “The work I’m doing now on the Catchment Partnership for our rivers is a great opportunity to bring people together to identify what needs to be done and to work collectively developing projects to ensure that our environment is sustained and enhanced.”

During the next few months, Rita will be focusing on finalising the Catchment Management Plans for each river and on an exciting new Natural Flood Management Project in Wensleydale and Wharfedale (see her article on page 7). Rita lists her outside-work interests as two sons, 3 dogs, 5 hens, half a horse (which half isn’t specified) and trying to keep her big garden in check.

Caitlin Pearson developed a keen interest in freshwater ecology during her studies at Durham University where she worked on a project mapping the distribution of native crayfish in Northumberland. After completing her Master’s degree she moved to South Wales to carry out research for her PhD on the effects of livestock farming on stream invertebrate communities.

Joining the Trust in 2015 has given Caitlin the opportunity to develop her practical skills in river management, particularly in leading our flood management and pollution control work on the Mid Swale Tributaries. More recently she has been training volunteers in water quality monitoring as part of the “Citizen Science” component of the “Ure River” Project in Wensleydale (see page 11) as well as visiting local schools to explain the part rivers play in shaping the local landscape and environment.

In her free time Caitlin loves exploring the Dales on foot and by bike. As a keen fell-runner she even took a break from manning our stall at the Reeth Show to compete in the fell race up Fremington Edge!

Charlotte Simons our most recent recruit, gained a BSc in Agricultural Sciences from Nottingham University and an MSc in Land Resource Management from Silsoe College, Cranfield University before starting her career in conservation with the Warwickshire Wildlife Trust. Her first job in Yorkshire was as Countryside Stewardship Adviser for Humberside, a role which gave her the chance to bring together conservation and farming.

In 2000 Charlotte became a Senior Adviser and progressed to project management of land management schemes then more recently, Natural England’s work relating to Sites of Special Scientific Interest. Charlotte is now leading our input on the Wharfe Catchment Management Plan (see page 9).

In her free time Charlotte volunteers for the Scout Association in Wharfedale and West Yorkshire, enjoys making jewellery, walking her dog, gardens sporadically and supports her son playing rugby at Baildon.

Dan Turner our longest-serving project officer was brought up on a large mixed farm in the Eden Valley, Cumbria, subsequently attending the University of Leeds to study Environmental Science. In the third year of his degree, Dan gained an industrial placement at the Freshwater Biological Association. While at the FBA, he was involved with the Pearl Mussel Arc project, working on methods of conserving the UK’s dwindling populations of the Freshwater Pearl Mussel by means of a captive breeding and re-introduction programme.

Dan graduated in June 2011 and joined the Yorkshire Dales Rivers Trust that September. Since then he has been has been involved with a number of restoration projects on the Wharfe and Ure catchments and most recently on Collingham Beck (see the item on page 8).

Dan’s current focus is on Natural Flood Management. He recently received a scholarship from JBA Trust, an independent charity supporting research into risk management in the water environment. The scholarship will enable Dan to study flood and coastal management at the University of Lancaster.

In Dan’s spare time he is a keen rock climber, travelling around the country and world to pursue his hobby. He also enjoys videography, making short films about climbing.
A different approach to flood management in the Dales

Rita Mercer explains the scope of a new project in Wensleydale.

Just a few weeks ago we were delighted to learn that the Yorkshire Dales Rivers Trust had been successful in bidding for a £50,000 grant from the Prince’s Countryside Fund to help farmers and local communities in Wensleydale and Wharfedale tackle flood risks. The grant will fund a part-time Project Officer who will give training, guidance and support to land managers wishing to use low-cost Natural Flood Management techniques to reduce the threat from flooding, both in the local area and to towns and villages downstream.

The Project, which is supported by the Yorkshire Dales Farmers’ Forum and promoted by a partnership including the Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority, the Environment Agency, Natural England and North Yorkshire County Council, will provide free on-farm advice. In addition, it will promote the benefits of Natural Flood Management to a wider audience of farmers and other interested groups using demonstration sites to be created in the upper Ure and upper Wharfe catchments. The different organizations involved in the Project will also promote the use of a Farmers’ NFM Information Pack which has been jointly produced by all of the partners.

We hope to involve local communities, and their representatives, both in promoting the scheme and getting involved in practical work. There is an increasingly strong body of evidence to show the benefits of NFM techniques such as improved soil management, leaky dams, “soft” bank protection and tree planting.

We are very grateful to the Prince’s Countryside Fund for their support which will fund the Project for 2 years. The Trust has also recently submitted additional partnership bids to Natural England for further funding through the Countryside Stewardship Facilitation Fund, which could make the NFM post full-time. There is certainly enough potential work to keep a full-time Project Officer employed for several years!
Dan Turner explains how this type of project is important for the health of our watercourses.

One of the key aspects of our Rivers Trust work is trying to reduce the amount of sediment getting into watercourses. High sediment load in rivers and streams can lead to significant loss of biodiversity. Fine particles smother fish eggs, starving them of oxygen and unduly high levels of phosphates and nitrates (eutrophication) produce excessive algal and weed growth with adverse effects on many forms of aquatic life.

Sedimentation is a natural process on all rivers but the main source of the elevated levels of sediment seen in many watercourses is agriculture, specifically soil loss through arable farming or as a result of poaching by livestock hoofs. To reduce sediment entering rivers it’s therefore important that we look after our soils through better land management. Over the last year I’ve been involved in a project on a tributary of the River Wharfe which aims to achieve just that.

The “Cleaner Collingham Becks” initiative, led by Yorkshire Dales Rivers Trust and funded by the Environment Agency, is focused on improving water quality in a network of small watercourses that join to form Collingham beck before flowing into the Wharfe just upstream of Wetherby. We’ve been working with local farmers promoting the benefits of improved soil management, not just for the well-being of the becks but for agricultural productivity, since healthy soils are essential for good plant growth.

What are the problems?

Pressure to increase agricultural production and the use of heavier machinery can lead to serious soil degradation.

Soil Compaction by heavy machinery and livestock poaching compresses the soil meaning there are less freely available pore spaces between particles for air, water and roots. The result is reduced crop growth, impacting on both yield and quality. At the same time, the compacted ground surface causes increased run-off, soil erosion and loss of biodiversity.

Reduced Organic Matter due, in particular, to intensive arable farming impairs the soil’s capacity to hold both water and nutrients, both fundamental for plant growth and a healthy population of soil biota. Biota are all living plants, fungi and fauna in our soils, a more diverse biota helps maximise plant production and promotes disease resistance in crops.

How is the Collingham Becks project tackling these problems?

Our efforts have focused on promoting better land and soil management. As part of the project we ran a number of training events for farmers to help them better understand their soils, how they can look after them while also improving productivity and what techniques can alleviate compaction. In addition we’ve carried out a number of fencing projects designed to prevent livestock from trampling the banks of local watercourses and where necessary, provided them with alternative access to drinking water. In total the project has funded 1,300 metres of new fencing and created 6.5 hectares of buffer strips alongside watercourses as well as planting 500 new trees. We hope that future monitoring of water quality in the Collingham becks will confirm the positive results of our work.
How do you write a Catchment Management Plan? That was the question facing me when I started to work for YDRT. Luckily I came into a team of people who knew about CMPs – Rita Mercer being a key person, especially as she was working on the SUNO CMP and I was leading our development of the corresponding River Wharfe catchment. (That’s another thing about this job, you have to quickly get to grips with lots of acronyms; SUNO refers to the combined Swale/Ure/Nidd/Ouse catchments).

The idea behind Catchment Management Plans is to bring together background information on the catchment, highlight key issues and identify a range of projects that will contribute to addressing the issues and improving the quality of the environment. These aren’t documents that are written by one person on their own, they are drawn up collaboratively. Our role is to act as a facilitator bringing all the interested parties together and getting agreement from all involved on what they would like to see happening on their river, hopefully resulting in projects that will result in the river

- Being cleaner and healthier;
- Supporting more fish, birds, and other wildlife;
- Meeting the needs of drinking water suppliers and business;
- Providing a more attractive amenity for people to enjoy;
- Being sensitively managed by everyone whose activities affect it;
- Having its irreplaceable heritage assets protected;
- Continuing to provide drainage and manage flood risk

So what has come out of these discussions? For each river we now have details on what the issues are and also some potential projects. For the River Wharfe the main issues raised have been around flooding, diffuse pollution, non-native species, lack of habitat management and land management.

There are also two potential projects, both of which have elements of natural flood measures, working with schools and the local community on how rivers work and community involvement in improving the habitat of the river. For each of these there are new groupings of people working together to get individual projects off the ground.

So we have gathered data, people and ideas together and got some good project ideas but where is the CMP itself and how will people get to see the document?

Rather than producing a paper report which can quickly become out of date, the CMP is going to be web-based. This approach means that data can be updated as new information becomes available and we will be able to give progress reports on the projects as they develop. For each river the Plan will be broken down into operational catchments. So for the River Wharfe there will be three separate maps - Upper Wharfe, Middle Wharfe and Washburn and the Lower Wharfe. The lowest section of the catchment is where the Wharfe flows into the lower Ouse and this will be part of the CMP for the River Ouse.

Caitlin has been busy setting up the first pages of the Upper Wharfe Plan and they will be accessible from the DVRN webpage - which Dan has updated - yet another example of collaboration. The next step will be getting the issues we’ve identified onto these pages along with the aspirational projects.

The screen shot below shows the opening page of the Upper Wharfe Plan. The page will be updated as new information become available and we will be able to give progress reports on the projects that are underway.

Collaboration is fundamental to a CMP - no one person knows everything about one river but lots of people know one or several things in detail and when these are added together, we get the whole picture. Rita and I work on putting all the parts together and forming partnerships on the ground to make the ideas happen – through the Dales to Vales River Network.

Two things have been happening side-by-side. Caitlin has been working on data gathering and pulling this information into a readily accessible format. Rita and I have been people and ideas gathering. These two areas of work are closely linked. The background data gives everyone a picture of what is known about each river. Having information in a form people can see and understand prompts discussions, highlights issues and stimulates ideas on how to improve the river and its environs.

Getting people together has involved a series of meetings, at least one for each river, to which we have invited the people who live near and enjoy or work along the river. These include local community groups, wildlife groups, anglers, parish, district and county councillors, statutory agencies, land owners, flood groups, walking groups and river users.

The page will be updated as new information become available and we will be able to give progress reports on the projects that are underway.
Breary Banks Weir, located on a remote stretch of the Burn with no public access, has for many years posed a significant barrier to the upstream passage of migratory fish. Bullhead was also totally absent from the reach above the weir but abundant below it. The weir was originally constructed over a hundred years ago to supply drinking water to a navvy camp built to house workers constructing Roundhill Reservoir. During the First World War the camp was used to house army recruits and then became a P.O.W. camp during the Second World War. Since the camp closed, the weir has served no useful purpose.

Because of its adverse impact on the river, especially on its suitability for sea trout and salmon, removal of the weir was considered a priority. However, removal of such structures can be a sensitive issue and costly to carry out. In this case we were fortunate to have the support of and the necessary permission from, Lord Masham on whose land the weir was located and a grant to meet the £15,000 cost from Associated British Ports. In addition we were very grateful to receive practical help from the Biker Group through the good offices of its managing Director, Tony Biker.

Because of its history, Breary Banks Weir was considered to be of some historic importance and with that in mind, a full archaeological assessment and detailed recording of the structure was carried out by an accredited archaeologist before work started. A geomorphological audit to assess the likely effects on stream flow, erosion and deposition was also carried out by a Fluvial Geomorphologist from the Environment Agency.

The ecological benefits of the project are already obvious. Migratory fish and other species now have free access to near-pristine habitat in Colsterdale. During early December 2016 we were delighted to see adult salmon spawning above Breary Banks, almost certainly the first time in over 100 years that salmon have spawned in this upper part of the river. A number of very large redds (salmon nests) were observed in the area upstream of the ford at Gollinglith Foot. I took a party of Environment Agency staff to visit the upper Burn in January this year and they were thrilled to see that salmon had immediately re-colonised this stretch of the river-meeting a key Agency priority under the Water Framework Directive.

Shortly after the project was completed, the catchment was hit by a violent thunderstorm and stored gravel from above the weir started to move. The bed incised down over a metre during this single flood event!

Now that the barrier to normal hydrological function has been removed, this large volume of gravel, previously trapped above the weir, has begun to populate the area downstream. This section of river, below the former site of the weir to the confluence with Pott Beck was previously much denuded of gravel, the bed consisting of large boulders and bedrock. The deposition of gravel from upstream means this habitat can now be utilised by spawning salmonids.

As a result of our work, the Environment Agency have upgraded the Water Framework Directive assessment of the waterbody from “failing for fish” to a pass. More salmon in the River Burn will also increase salmon numbers in the Ure with a positive impact on local businesses, especially hotels and fishing tackle shops. Associated British Ports received some very positive PR from the project, including a news item on BBC “Look North” and are now helping to fund fish pass and access work on the River Laver near Ripon. I would like to express my personal thanks to all who helped to make this project a success, including Trust colleagues Andy Brown and Chris Ryder.
Trust project officer Caitlin Pearson is leading an exciting new initiative in Wensleydale.

Wensleydale is an iconic part of the Dales landscape and the River Ure is at the heart of it. The river is enjoyed by locals and tourists alike, but in recent years it has come under increasing pressures, including pollution, invasive species and the early effects of climate change.

In August 2016 the Trust received a £24,000 grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) for a project to involve the local community in enhancing our knowledge about the current state of the Ure and its wildlife. Twenty-four volunteers have been trained in water quality monitoring techniques and are busy collecting samples each month. As Caitlin explains “this data will allow us to pinpoint the issues on the river so we can take action to ensure the river remains a healthy environment and a great habitat for wildlife.”

Two University students have also helped collect and analyse the data and the results of the volunteers’ efforts can be viewed on the Freshwater Watch website at freshwaterwatchthewaterhub.org. A report on the Project’s findings, with recommendations for future work, will be published in the summer and an exhibition about the river will be presented at Aysgarth Falls visitors centre.

In another aspect of the Ure Project, the Trust, working with the Bolton Estate, has installed a river webcam at Wensley bridge. This allows us to keep a close eye on the river and how it responds to varying weather conditions and activities in the Dale. The images are also very useful for fishermen and motorists as the height of the water, and any flooding, can be viewed before they leave home - www.farsondigitalwatercams.com/locations/wensley

The Ure Project has also given local people and visitors, including children and youngsters, a chance to get their feet wet and learn about the river. Masham and Leyburn primary schools and Leyburn and Hawes scout groups have enjoyed using the Trust’s educational River Table to think about how rivers work and what can be done to protect them. Lots of people have learnt about river flies and caught some tiddlers on two river-dipping days at Aysgarth Falls.

There is much more planned for this year with family events, walks and youth group river visits. Look out for our ‘River Explorers’ activity pack throughout the Dale this summer.

The “Ure River” initiative forms part of the wider ‘Wensleydale Project’ coordinated by the Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority and Yorkshire Dales Rivers Trust. The Project’s approach to improving the environment of Wensleydale can be viewed at: www.wensleydaleproject.com

And finally... answering the call of nature

Rita Mercer gives the low-down on a very particular kind of waste management project.

Concerns over threats to the River Bain catchment and Semerwater, one of only two natural lakes in the Yorkshire Dales and a popular venue for anglers, canoeists and nature-lovers, has led to Raydale being chosen as a pilot area for Call of Nature Yorkshire - a new Yorkshire-wide anti-pollution drive.

The pilot project is being led by the Yorkshire Dales Rivers Trust, in partnership with the Environment Agency, the Yorkshire Dales National Park and Natural England and will focus on helping residents and businesses which rely on septic tanks or private sewage treatment plants to ensure they don’t inadvertently contribute to pollution problems.

The first stage of the project will be raising the awareness of the Raydale community about the impact defective or poorly maintained sewage systems can have on water quality. This involves discussions with the community and the Parish Council, using local newsletters and press to highlight the project. We have already attended the Wensleydale Show in Leyburn in Aug 2016 and provided information to Raydale households at that event.

The next stage of our Raydale work will be to provide specific guidance to households (approximately 100) which will include visits to households who are not on mains sewage.

The project will run until April 2017 as part of a wider Call of Nature Yorkshire campaign which aims to highlight the issue of Septic Tanks across the whole of the region. We are leading the work, in conjunction with our River Trust partners in the rest of Yorkshire. There is a dedicated website with lots of information at: www.callofnatureyorkshire.info
For more information on the Trust and its activities and on the Dales to Vale Rivers network please see our expanded and updated website at:

www.yorkshiredalesriverstrust.com

or contact us at:

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