

Nature conservation interests of the River Derwent and canoeing activities at Howsham

Nature conservation importance

The River Derwent is a nationally and internationally important nature conservation site for its river habitat and its associated species. It was notified as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) in 1986 under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 and designated a Special Area of Conservation (SAC) in 2005 under the European Habitats Regulations. These designations offer legal protection to the river and the species it supports.

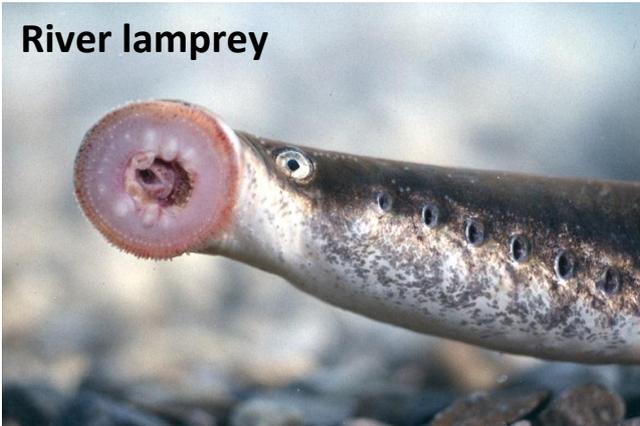
Features protected under SSSI legislation	Features protected under the Habitats Regulations
The river and its aquatic plants	The river with floating vegetation often dominated by water crowfoot
Invertebrates – dragonflies and aquatic insects	River lamprey
Birds (wintering and breeding)	Sea lamprey
Otter	Bullhead
	Otter

The river at Howsham is important for all of these interest features and it is currently one of the few areas of the river supporting large expanses of floating vegetation (water crowfoot) and suitable spawning areas for lamprey and bullhead. This is due to the suitable flow and river bed substrate which occurs at this location.

Species	Requirements
	Water crowfoot (and associated species) can grow in dense rafts in areas with suitable flow and substrate as occurs at Howsham.

Species

River lamprey



Requirements

River lamprey spawn in March and April in areas of small stones and gravel in flowing water as occurs downstream of Howsham Weir.

Sea lamprey



Sea lamprey spawn in late May and June in areas of small stones and gravel in flowing water as occurs downstream of Howsham Weir.

Bullhead



Bullhead spawn in February to June on gravel and sand in suitable flowing water as occurs downstream of Howsham Weir.

Canoeing activities at Howsham

Natural England is supportive of the public enjoyment of the river and associated activities where they do not have a negative impact upon the nature conservation interest of the site. When an activity or proposal is suggested, Natural England must consider the implications of that proposal and assess whether any elements of a proposed activity will have an effect on the notified features or prevent the features achieving favourable condition.

During the assessment of canoeing activities around Howsham Weir and downstream to Howsham Bridge it was considered that canoeing activity may under certain river conditions have the following possible effects on the interest features:

Aquatic vegetation – paddling through areas of floating aquatic vegetation could cut through the vegetation, dislodging sections which may float off downstream and die. Uncut vegetation is known to have a greater species diversity and provide habitat and food for invertebrates and fish. Cutting when the vegetation is in flower is known to limit summer growth and would therefore have the greatest implications.

River lamprey, sea lamprey and bullhead – at times when low river levels coincide with the spawning periods for these species, direct canoe bottom or paddle contact with the river bed could disturb or damage the areas of spawning which could result in the eggs being lost before they hatch and therefore effecting the population of the species concerned.

In order to reduce the risk of these things happening and to ensure that canoeing activity can be enjoyed at Howsham, it is the request of Natural England that:

- Areas of floating aquatic vegetation (water crowfoot) are avoided.
- At times where low flows coincide with the spawning periods of lamprey and bullhead (February to June inclusive), areas which are likely to result in canoe bottom or direct paddle contact with the river bed are avoided.

If this can be achieved, Natural England would be satisfied that the canoeing activities at this location would not have any negative impacts upon the nature conservation interest of the River Derwent and we would be happy to consent ongoing canoeing activities into the future.

The canoeing club activities are consented via the riparian land owner who is allowing the club access to their part of the river. The consent is for a time limited period of one year which will allow for any impacts to be monitored and reviewed at the end of the period with a view to informing any future consent.

Natural England would also like your help to monitor the area of floating aquatic vegetation, particularly water crowfoot as you will be able to get a better view from a canoe than we would from the riverbank. If it does not interfere with your enjoyment of the river, it would be appreciated if you could provide photographs and mark the estimated area of the clumps on a map as this would contribute to the monitoring and help inform future decisions. Records of other features, notably otter, lamprey and bullhead would also be appreciated.

If you would like any further information about the nature conservation interests of the river then please contact Emma Leighton emma.leighton@naturalengland.org.uk

