

6. Do you support the project objectives?

In general, DEF support the project, subject to some points raised at the Forum's meeting on Sept. 6th. Some of these concern the completed Northern section project, though clearly they will have an impact on the current plans:

We wish to be sure that as a result of re-routing the Gade, the newly created channel will still allow water to flow on the surface of the channel and not disappear into the gravels below.

When the wetland/drainage/filtering area in the Northern section overflowed its gravel bank, as it did during the torrential downpours of late May, it no longer served as a filter. Its effectiveness under these conditions therefore needs to be improved. In the interests of achieving and maintaining good water quality in the Southern section, partners in the current project should have a continuing interest the ongoing management plan for de-silting the wetland/drainage/filtering area, prime responsibility for which we understand to have been handed over to Dacorum BC.

Similarly, partners in the current project need to liaise with DBC to ensure that they check for misconnections (sewage incorrectly being fed into storm drainage pipes) in the surrounding urban drainage area of Hemel Hempstead.

There have been instances of drainage manhole covers being blown off by water pressure during peak rainfalls. These are below the currently river level but would be above the new proposed level, making contamination of the river from urban runoff more likely. We understand that that the EA are aware of the problem and are in consultation with Thames Water regarding it and their maintenance schedules and procedures.

We understand that a long term management plan is being developed, and that implementing it will be the responsibility of DBC. In this regard ongoing clearance of vegetation from the river should be a priority.

8. Is there anything that you feel is missing from the proposals?

Footpaths shown on the plan look like dead ends, so there is a danger that they will be under-used and underappreciated. There is no provision for a link across Queensway into West Herts Campus and onwards to the Water Gardens. There is an opportunity for footpaths to be part of a joined up route at least from the Link Road to Two Waters and beyond.

The scheme should include interpretive signs, for instance to indicate the route of the present ("perched") river channel, and to explain the history of glaciation and formation of flood plains.

9. Do you have any other comments, concerns or suggestions about the proposals?

It is important to spell out how, from the environmental viewpoint, the success or otherwise of the scheme can be assessed in future. For example we support and stress the importance of ongoing monitoring of the Gade for biodiversity. Last year/this year monitoring results have shown improvement in the sampling site near the Link Road which has been worked on this year, whereas they have gone down below the trigger level in the site near the skate park, where the river is very overgrown. This was confirmed by sampling at the start of this month.

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