

The River Crouch Conservation Trust

Est. 2009

Friends of the river bank:

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Affiliated to the Angling Trust of Great Britain

R.C.C.T



River Bank report & diary of the River Crouch Conservation Trust, for the late autumn 2014, 3 parts.

1. Condition and planned schedule for the river clean up
2. How the day unfolded, lady in a dressing gown and buried treasure
3. Observation to help residents and nature against any further planning issues.

Sunday 2nd November 2014. In 3 parts. Weather-overcast, light rain, high water 7:50am. Set alarm clock for 7am, coffee and toast. Quite busy for over 1 hour, from large thermos hot water, first aid box, life jacket, waders, ropes, water tester etc. left with the tractor and 5 ton grain trailer for Wickford Memorial Park gate to meet the team of volunteers.

There were two problems on the way, a road blockage of cars. Had to knock on doors to find the owner, made me very popular. The lady owner came down in a dressing gown. She was very helpful. I then found the park gate was locked. So I walked to the main park gate to find nearly 14 helpers.

The plan was to split into 3 groups. 1 to inspect the drainage, from Wickford high street into the river. 2. Clear up all the shopping trolleys near the bypass bridge and a 3rd group to go through the park near the 3 arch rail bridge, to remove 2 large chest freezers. All groups left and I walked back to the tractor and parked it by long meadow pumping station. I then slid down the bank with chest waders and proceeded up river to the Kingdom Hall church and by the Bridge by the Texaco garage, some 200yds. To my surprise the river bed was extremely clear when 3 years ago, when we started on this section of the river it was like a scrap yard! However there was 2 shopping trollies 1 small tire and a metal fuse box or so I thought!

The bridge party had already removed a great deal of plastic bags, more trollies, road signs and bollards etc and loaded it onto Trevor Faulkner's truck. My trolley was hauled up the bank and I proceeded further upstream. There were two areas of seepage on the concrete sides of the river behind the shops and Texaco garage. My two helpers Robert Williams and Terry Joyce and together we cleared the bramble and heavy weed growth, and low and behold what did we find, after digging down about a foot of earth, 2 large storm drain pipes. They must have been blocked for over 10 years we photographed them, cleared them and the water gushed out into the river.

What really upset me was opposite on the south bank stood a very large block of new flats possibly 300 in that one block. I looked at the flats and then the two neglected flood outlets and just considered all the extra rates and section 106's from just this one block, and there are many more being built or planned in Wickford and I am sure in other locations in Basildon and Rayleigh etc. we are talking 10's of thousands pounds in extra revenue. But it would only take a very small team to clear the river drains, especially this time of the year, say a budget of £2000 and **stop any meeting to decide who duty is responsible. As Nike say 'just do it'**. If they can't decide whose responsibility it is my group will undertake the work free of charge, which doesn't seem quite right.

The 1st party inspected the storm drain off the high street near the bridge leading to the old post office we had already some 4 weeks ago reported a discharge of industrial pollution from the drain and the environmental agency did respond very quickly. Unfortunately the drain was again blocked. Robert and Terry climbed down and unblocked this drain but found large sections of a plaster like material blocking the grill. This and other debris was removed, allowing the drain to flow. I apologise about the rant, but something must be done and soon.

The two chest freezers have been removed as we could not get the tractor into the park the freezers had to be carried a considerable distance thanks to Chris Hall and Peter Steward and helpers.

The River Crouch is one of the best rivers in Essex, it's teeming with wildlife and kingfishers, water voles, otters, Chubb, Rudd, carp etc and even trout and sea trout. It is fresh water over gravel. In fact 2 sea trout were caught up stream of my office on wet-fly. This wonderful asset must be preserved at all cost.

Planning. It is my strong opinion that there must be a rethink on planning policy. The core problem as I see it is that infrastructure must be in place first before they build 1000's of houses in the area. **The 3 main problems are, flooding, sewerage, and road systems.** The first 2, the feeder streams must be dug and cleared out, plus inspect all the storm drains, from the upper reach of the river from the first bypass bridge at

Battlesbridge through Wickford. Many years ago this was regularly cleared with drag lines (Essex river authority).

We have made our own improvements at Battlesbridge, but the river widens out here in flood conditions the river is almost 10' lower than the sea wall. When it's coming over the road near the Chichester Hotel! So we have good flood capacity here.

The sewage problem is extremely serious, shotgate works cannot cope now and over 600 houses planned at Runwell hospital site, which is 80ft higher than the river will discharge to the Southlands pumping station, which does fail, and to the Shotgate works, which can't cope now. The back pressure will be enormous with the drop in levels. The current planning must be changed, it's like building a house and putting the foundation in as an after thought.

The congestion on the roads at 8am and 5pm is virtually gridlocked now.

But the brighter point the parks and waste station do allow access and free disposals for the rubbish for which we thank them and all the helpers of our trust over the last 5 years. Our job is almost complete as the river is far cleaner than it was when we started, in its formal tip like state. Let's hope it stays that way, please phone 999 or the environmental agency if you see any misuse of the river. Tel 0800807060

It may be a good idea for Basildon/Wickford to do a complete survey and drainage plan especially for Wickford. Before having anymore meetings on concerns of flooding in the area. The 2 storm drains we uncovered are not even listed, it doesn't matter who owns them we are very worried how many other drains are not listed. At this time of the year **all drains** must be cleared and perhaps new ones laid into the River Crouch, which is the best natural drain you could wish for.

Yours very sincerely

Roy Hart and the team of the River Trust.

The fuse box, turned out to be a personal safe with personal papers. I cleaned and dried the contents which had been in the river for over 6 years. I have also traced the lady whose safe we found she is alive and well, her son is picking up the treasure box, this weekend. It is good to finish on a pleasant note. **Please do not dismiss my adverse comments they are really serious and there must be a change of policy towards urban expansion. Hopefully after the next election, things may get better, I do hope so.**