



Garden Meets River's Edge

Your rights and responsibilities as a riverbank owner on the Hampshire Avon SSSI

Why is the River Avon so important?

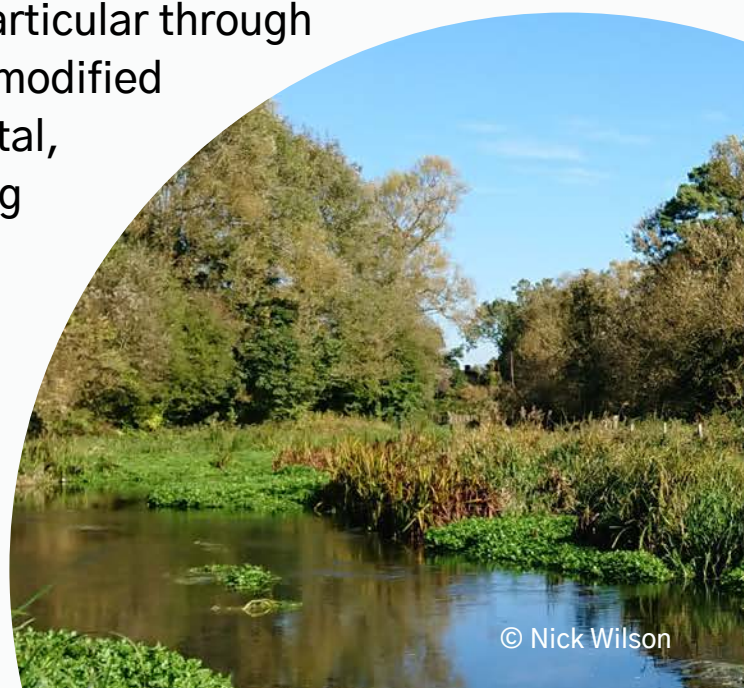


The Hampshire Avon and its tributaries support a great diversity of animal, bird and plant species. Its rare beauty and abundant wildlife makes it one of our most valuable environmental assets. This is why it is afforded a very high level of legal protection through its designation as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and Special Area of Conservation (SAC).



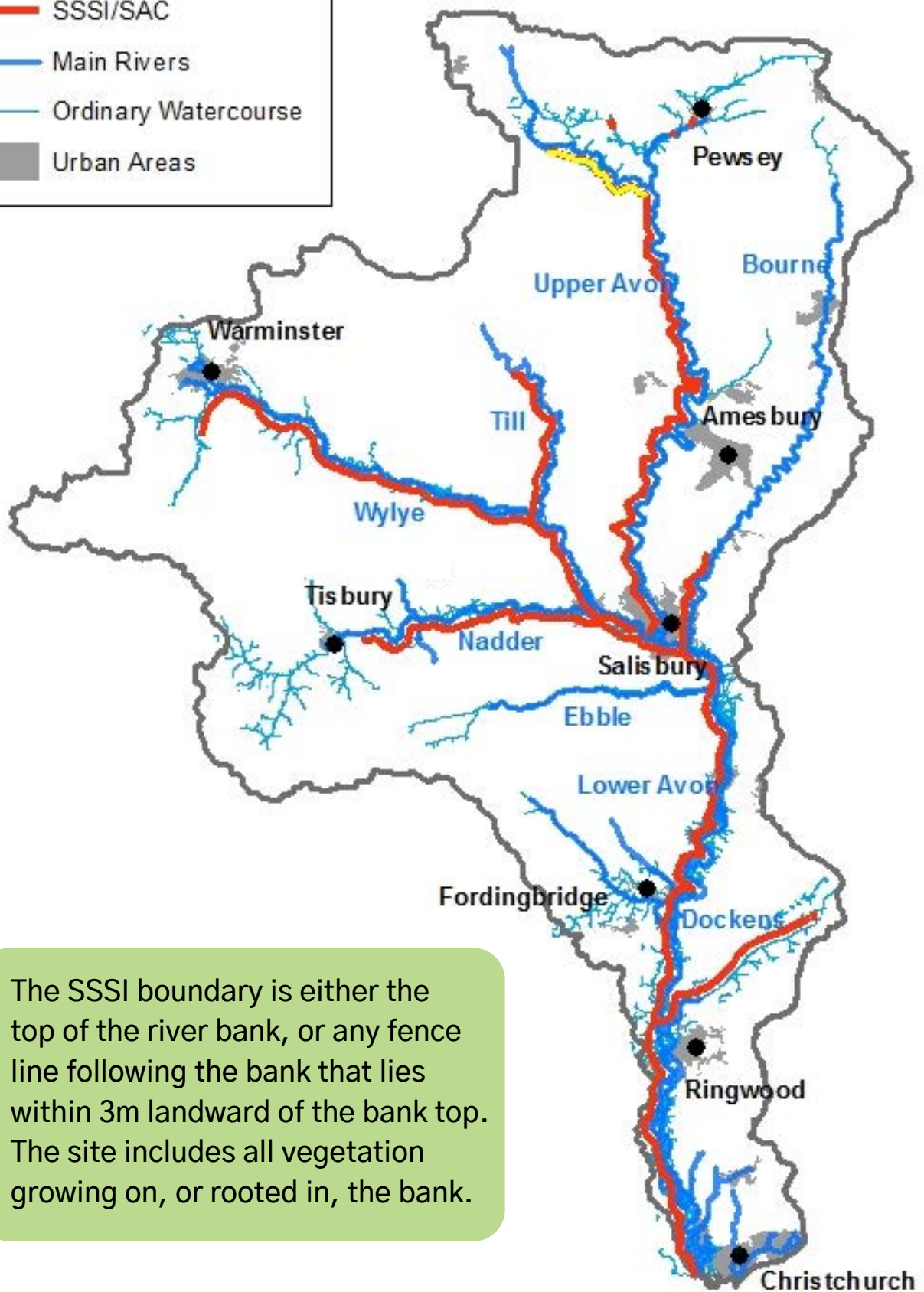
We all have an important duty to protect the River Avon. Chalk streams like the River Avon are a rare and fragile habitat. There are only about 200 in the world, 85% of which are found in England. The species diversity of the Avon catchment is one of the greatest in the country, with over 180 species of aquatic plants and one of the most diverse fish populations in the UK.

The Hampshire Avon is under pressure from human activity. Over the years, the river has been straightened and canalised for the irrigation of water meadows, to work water mills or to drain the land for agriculture. Riverbanks, in particular through our towns and cities, have also been modified using materials such as concrete, metal, gabions or wood revetments, resulting in a riverside habitat with little value to wildlife. As a riverbank owner we are asking you to play a part in protecting this unique and fragile ecosystem, and make it more resilient to cope with future threats.



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Hampshire Avon SSSI and SAC



The SSSI boundary is either the top of the river bank, or any fence line following the bank that lies within 3m landward of the bank top. The site includes all vegetation growing on, or rooted in, the bank.

Living on the River



As a riparian owner you are responsible for the river bank. You may also own up to the centre line of the river or the whole river; in which case you will also be responsible for protecting vegetation, clearing obstructions and removing rubbish from the river channel.

You can find some useful information for riverside owners by visiting the "Owning a Watercourse" section on the gov.uk website.



Working on the river

An Environmental Permit is needed from the Environment Agency for any works undertaken over, under or within 8m of a Main River (see page 3). When working on a SSSI Main River a Bespoke Environmental Permit is needed.

For works on all other watercourses, known as Ordinary Watercourses (including streams and ditches with flowing water), a Land Drainage and Ordinary Watercourse Consent will be needed from your Local Authority.

Check if your activity needs an Environmental Permit by visiting the "Flood risk activities: Environmental Permits" section on the gov.uk website.

You can also find more information on "Ordinary Watercourse Consents" on your Local Planning Authority website.

Your responsibilities as a SSSI river owner

Certain activities within a SSSI river need permission from either the Environment Agency, your Local Authority or Natural England.

This includes erecting footbridges and fences, bank repair and restoration, water control structures and digging out ditches. Even some management tasks such as removing or cutting trees and vegetation and new planting may need a permission.

See the “Sites of Special Scientific Interest: managing your land” section of the gov.uk website for useful guidance.

You can also view the List of Operations requiring Natural England’s consent by searching for the “River Avon System SSSI” on the Designated Sites View website.



You are responsible for checking with the relevant authority and getting the permissions you need. It is an offence to fail to do so which may result in a fine or custodial sentence for the most severe breaches. It is always worth checking if you need a Permit or Consent with Natural England first.

Usually, you need only apply to one Authority for a Permit or Consent. If you need either an Environment Agency Bespoke Environmental Permit or a Local Authority Land Drainage and Ordinary Watercourse Consent then this automatically includes the SSSI Consent.

Changes in ownership

You need to tell Natural England within 28 days about changes to the ownership or occupation of SSSI land.

This can be easily done by emailing:

enquiries@naturalengland.org.uk



Pesticides

Some pesticides are extremely hazardous to fish and other aquatic life and the use of pesticides is one of the major causes driving the rapid decline in insect populations. Very few pesticides are approved for use within 5m of water. You need to get permission from the Environment Agency before using herbicides to control vegetation in water or on the banks or banksides next to a watercourse or other body of water.



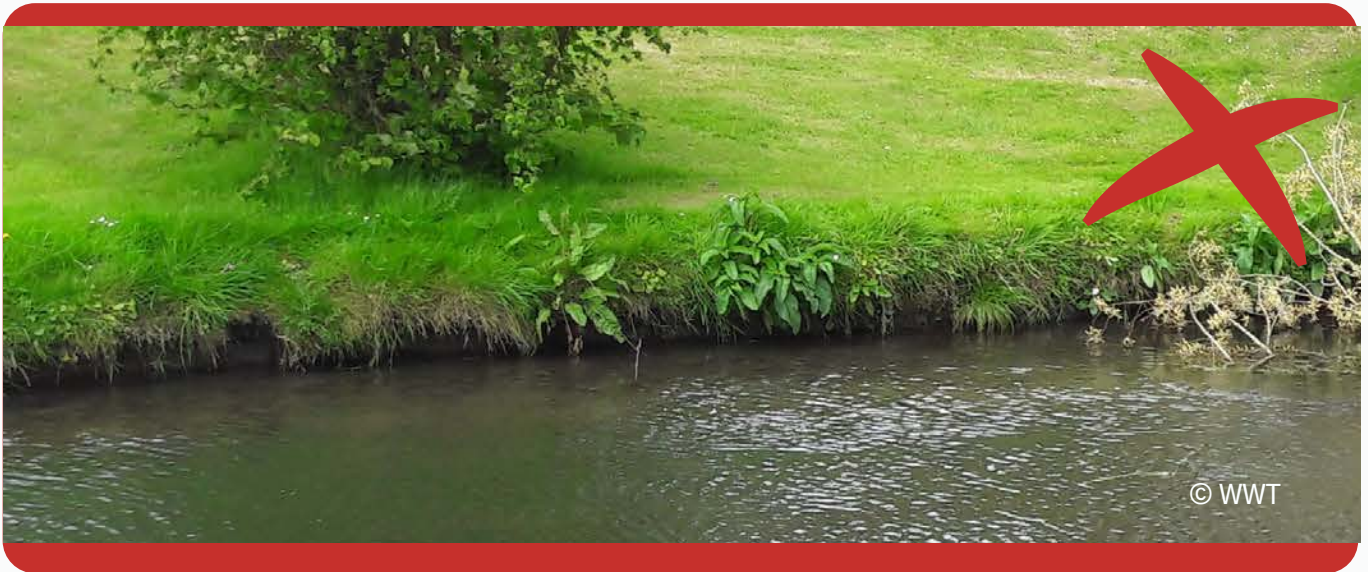
Hard revetments such as steel piling, boulders, concrete or wooden boards on bank faces reduce the space for native wildlife reliant on the river for food and shelter. Over time hard revetments are susceptible to erosion at their toe which causes the revetment to fail.



A gentle vegetated bank profile provides the greatest defence against erosion. Banks should be graded to form gentle earth slopes which provides an area for planting and seeding marginal vegetation.



Mowing right up to the river edge makes the river bank more susceptible to erosion, suppresses the native plants, and removes the habitat river wildlife depends on for food or shelter.



Leaving undisturbed habitat along the riverbanks greatly increases its value for wildlife. Only cut the river bank in autumn if necessary and try to leave uncut areas to act as a food source as well as refuges for insects and cover for mammals. If possible remove the cuttings.



Sensitive management of the riverbank provides valuable habitat for wildlife and a focal point to your garden. Where the natural vegetation has been lost, planting suitable species will provide an attractive habitat for wildlife and a cost-effective solution to erosion.

Avoid planting non-native species as they can be invasive and also suppress our native species and reduce wildlife diversity along the river. The PlantLife website has useful information and guidance on planting native species.



N.B. within the SSSI it would actually be an offence to plant non-natives.

You should not dump green waste on the river bank or in the river as it can pollute the water and cause harm to fish and insects living in the river. Instead place your green waste in a compost bin well away from the river or take it to your local recycling centre.



An untidy river is a healthy river. Trees should not be removed from the river unless they are a flood risk. Dead wood in the river and on the banks is very beneficial, providing habitat for invertebrates as well as spawning habitat and cover for fish. Seek advice before removing fallen trees from the river.



Keep overhanging branches and mature trees as these provide perching sites for kingfishers and dappled shade allows enough light through to encourage marginal vegetation to grow along the river's edge.



River weed creates valuable habitat providing food and shelter for fish and other wildlife. It also helps to maintain flows, especially during the summer. We would normally not recommend weed cutting, so seek advice from Natural England first.



Understand your legal rights and responsibilities, including the permits and consents required to work on the river. The Hampshire Avon is a very special river and protected under the law. Work to the river, the river banks and within 8 metres of the river needs a permit. Even some management activities need consent. Don't risk breaking the law. If in doubt, contact Natural England for more information.



About the Project

Garden Meets the River's Edge is a partnership project between Natural England and Wiltshire Wildlife Trust to help you manage your riverbank and margin to increase its wildlife value and understand your legal rights and responsibilities.

Glossary:

Pesticides – Includes herbicides, insecticides and fungicides.

Riparian – A riparian zone or riparian area is the interface between the land and a river or stream.

Revetment – A form of hard engineering that uses concrete, metal or wood faces to create a retaining wall to reduce the effects of erosion.

SSSI – A Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) is a formal designation for an area which is of particular interest because of its fauna, flora or geological or physiological features.

SAC – Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) are strictly protected sites designated under the EU Habitats Directive

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