Don Catchment Vision

Version 3_ September 2016

Don Catchment Vision

'A healthy and biodiverse catchment that is valued and enjoyed, contributing to the economic and social well-being of local communities.'

Aims for the Don

To identify and bring together all relevant stakeholders and foster a fully integrated approach to identifying and managing the issues affecting the River Don and its catchment. Interventions will be sought that deliver multiple benefits – environmental, economic and social.

Restoration of the River Don channel and the reconnection of the river to its wider catchment will provide a biodiverse and robust ecological network that is resilient to the impacts of climate change and increased human pressures. Creation of new water dependent habitat will support both aquatic and terrestrial species, allowing increased movement within the catchment and the expansion of wildlife populations.

The River Don and its catchment will provide a high quality environment that attracts new business and facilitates economic growth. Strategic developments, including IAMP (International Advanced Manufacturing Park), South Follingsby and transport enhancements such as the A19 Testos Junction scheme will integrate into the landscape, delivering spaces capable of providing multiple benefits and truly sustainable development. Restored river channels and natural flood management measures will seek to reduce flood risk.

There will be increased recreational opportunities for residents and visitors, improving health and wellbeing and increasing the value placed on the river and wider catchment by the local community. This will begin to change behaviours and lead to reduced littering and fly tipping. Pollution of watercourses from industrial and agricultural sources will be reduced as stakeholders are engaged and communities and businesses recognise the true value of the river and its catchment.

About the River Don and its Catchment

The River Don is a principal tributary of the lower Tyne, flowing north between Springwell and Jarrow. It has a mixed urban and rural catchment covering 43km^2. Initially the catchment drains a mainly agricultural landscape, both arable and pasture, before the river enters the urban area of South Tyneside, with industrial, post industrial and residential land use.

A total of 3 Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and 42 Local Wildlife Sites (LWS) are contained within the catchment. The river itself is designated as a LWS from source to the River Tyne. Ecological interest includes areas of salt marsh, semi-natural grasslands and meadows, riparian habitat and lowland fen. The river acts as an important corridor for

wildlife, hosting a regionally significant water vole population and supporting otters. Breeding and wintering bird assemblages are significant on farmland within the rural areas.

The Don waterbody is classified as having poor overall and ecological status under the Water Framework Directive (WFD) and is designated as heavily modified. There has been channelization and straightening within the urban areas and ditching in rural areas, which has disconnected the river from the floodplain.

Modification has led to loss of habitat diversity and the creation of barriers for fish migration. There has been some restoration within the urban areas; the tidal section was modified extensively in the 1990's and the Primrose Local Nature Reserve created. There is potential to deliver further habitat creation across the catchment.

As a heavily modified waterbody, the Don cannot meet Good Status under WFD due to the extent and impact of structural changes, but can reach Good Ecological Potential if water quality parameters can be brought to good status and if all possible mitigation measures are implemented.

Water quality is currently at Poor Status due to high levels of ammonia and phosphate. Reasons for the failure of the Waterbody to achieve Good are poorly understood, but are likely to be due to both diffuse and point source pollution from multiple sources. There are areas of agricultural and grazing land in the catchment, a number of consented intermittent discharges, identified misconnections at surface water outfalls and areas of contaminated land, all of which could be contributing to the poor water environment. There are a number of locations within the Don affected by flooding (surface, fluvial and sewer) and a number of drainage areas across the catchment have been prioritised by the Northumbria Integrated Drainage Partnership (NIDP) for integrated drainage studies to investigate.

At several locations across the Don catchment there are proposals for significant new developments, some of which are considered to be of national significance. These developments will inevitably lead to localised habitat loss but may present an opportunity to enhance habitats in mitigation and provide opportunities to improve water quality and reduce flood risk. Plans are particularly advanced for the IAMP.

Objectives for the Don

Integration

- Bring together all relevant stakeholders to work in partnership.
- Develop a shared understanding of all the issues affecting the catchment.
- Facilitate communication between stakeholders across the catchment
- Develop a data sharing protocol which can be used to help stakeholders to better understand the catchment and allow identification of opportunities.
- Agree a prioritisation approach to issues to allow them to be addressed in a manageable way

- Promote joint working to develop cost beneficial solutions that address multiple issues and meet multiple partner objectives, combining resources and expertise to maximise efficiency.

Biodiversity

- Increase the connectivity, diversity and quality of riparian and in-stream habitats, creating a landscape scale ecological network.
- Convert the heavily modified river corridor to a more natural condition through the creation of new wetland habitats within the river corridor.
- Control invasive and non-native species to safeguard biodiversity.
- Engage with land managers to encourage environmentally sensitive practices, and promote entry into appropriate agri-environment schemes that will enhance habitats and address water quality and flood risk issues.
- Facilitate long term sustainable land management of new habitats and SuDS created through new development

Water Framework Directive and Water Quality

- Reduce pollution impacts to improve water quality and support the waterbody to reach Good Ecological Potential under WFD.
- Support implementation of WFD Mitigation Measures to allow the waterbody to reach Good Ecological Potential under WFD.
- Engage with land owners and managers to address the problems of rural diffuse pollution.
- Engage with residents and businesses to address surface water misconnections.
- Ameliorate the impact of contaminated post industrial land.

Water Management

- Gather the information required to assess the contribution to flood risk of river, surface water and sewer flows.
- Allow for the attenuation of water in the wider landscape through natural flood management and the creation of floodplain habitat.
- Remove or modify culverts where these act as a constraint to flows, thereby reducing the flood risk to properties and infrastructure.
- Identify opportunities to implement surface water management through well designed SuDS that provide multifunctional benefits within new developments.

Development and Regeneration

- Realise the opportunities presented by large-scale built developments, including IAMP and South Follingsby, to contribute towards improvements to the catchment, with the development of a green corridor along the river that includes the creation of flood meadows and other appropriate habitats.
- Develop specific guidance for the construction of outfalls for the Don catchment that promotes greener engineering options that are sympathetic to the natural environment.
- Promote suitable economic opportunities that arise from catchment wide improvements to water bodies, habitats and landscape and identify potential

sources of investment.

Communities

- Co-ordinate improvements in access to the river and wider catchment, opening up new access points and pathways to reconnect local communities to the river, enhancing health and wellbeing whilst avoiding potentially negative impacts on biodiversity.
- Increase opportunities for education and engagement, allowing local communities to learn about, enjoy and help protect the Don Catchment.
- Provide opportunities for volunteering and training to enable communities to support our aims

Transport

- Realise opportunities through strategic transport improvements to increase the attenuation of surface water runoff and reduce sediment and pollution inputs to the watercourse in highways runoff.
- Minimise the reduction in the ecological connectivity that occurs where transport routes and waterbodies intersect. This can be achieved by retrofitting features such as mammal shelves and by influencing the design of new transport schemes.

Business

- Promote the importance of water efficiency and pollution prevention to local businesses, recognising and rewarding innovation and good practice.
- Identify opportunities to implement surface water management (including retrofit SuDS) at business premises, using these to attenuate surface water flows and reduce sediment and pollution inputs to waterbodies.
- Support businesses to recognise the importance of the Natural Capital (value of the natural resources) of the River Don and its catchment in their everyday operations.

Climate Change

- Improve the resilience of the catchment to the predicted effects of climate change, increasing the capacity of the river to manage the impacts of high flows (in terms of water quality and quantity) and enhancing habitats to mitigate higher water temperatures.

Delivery of the Vision

Initial development work on the vision was carried out by the North East Local Nature Partnership (LNP) in conjunction with the EA to guide their engagement with the development process for IAMP. The LNP has then worked with other members of the Tyne Catchment partnership to further inform the vision.

An informal partnership of organisations, the River Don Partnership, has come together as a sub group of the Tyne Catchment Partnership to begin implementation of some of the vision's aims by delivering a Don Integrated Catchment Project.

River Don Partnership Members

Durham Wildlife Trust
Environment Agency
Gateshead Council
Northumbrian Water
South Tyneside Council
Sunderland City Council
Tyne Rivers Trust

Supporting Partnerships

North East Local Nature Partnership
Tyne Catchment Partnership

Monitoring

The vision will be reviewed every 2 years to check progress against the stated objectives.

Relevant Projects

The EA/RRC morphology project. To be gather data and make recommendations on how river morphology can be improved. To report by end of 2016/17. This will provide part of the evidence base for the Don Integrated Catchment Project.

The Don Integrated Catchment Project – a summary briefing note has been produced for partners. Proposed timeline 2016/17 (feasibility), 2017/18 (additional modelling and evidence gathering), 2018/19 onwards (implementation).

Don catchment projects within the EA Medium Term Programme – the vision can add value to these.

Relevant Strategies and Policies

South Tyneside Surface Water Management Plan

Sunderland Surface Water Management Plan

Northumbria River Basin Management Plan

Tyne Catchment Partnership Action Plan

Durham Biodiversity Action Plans