


The New Reach

Review and update

For proposals for future work see
'NR Aims & Objectives with Action Plan from 2016'

The Present

- **Village Green.** The New Reach (NR), which runs from Patrick Stead lock to Halesworth lock was registered as a Village Green and the Register of Village Greens shows that on 4th February 1974 on the direction of the Commons Commissioner the registration was finalized with the Halesworth Urban District Council as the registered owner. On local government re-organisation the ownership passed to Waveney District Council and they now maintain the lifebelts, and when asked, carry out safety work to trees. However, the law on Village Greens does not require the landowner to undertake work to allow recreational use of the green so their role is relatively limited. The landowner and the users must not interfere with each others activities. The Village Green Register does not record what recreational activities are lawful on the New Reach but we can deduce from current use that they could have been things like idling by the river, taking dogs for walks, sketching, painting, bird-watching, wandering, recreational walking, possibly fishing - all of these have been approved as VG activities. So far we have not found boating in any list approved by the courts as a VG activity which doesn't mean that it can't be, it only means that the courts have not made a decision about it. However, to avoid doubt, any water-based activities – boating, fishing - should be approved by the owner of the Green which is Waveney District Council. Any work which does not directly serve the likliest established activities should also be agreed with WDC.
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- The painting depicts a narrow river or canal flowing through a rural landscape. On the left bank, there are several buildings, including a prominent one with a red roof. The right bank is a grassy area with some trees. The water is calm, reflecting the sky and the surrounding greenery. The title 'The Quay, Halesworth' is written in red at the bottom right of the painting.
- **The Community Initiative of 1993.** During the summer of 1993 a huge community effort was mobilised to restore the upper stretch of the New Reach with an idea of reinstating boating and water-based activities. A sluice was installed under White Bridge to raise the water level between this point and the Patrick Stead Lock. Weed was removed, banks cut, towpath improvements carried out and the first year's efforts culminated in a gala opening on August 14th 1993 with over 5000 people attending. Unfortunately, that winter heavy rain caused flooding in the Thoroughfare and damaged some of the work that had been carried out. Worse still the National Rivers Authority (predecessors of the Environment Agency) in support of a local landowner insisted on the removal of the sluice which had not received the proper consents. Although the community group had ambitions to buy the surrounding land and had received permission to replace the sluice during the summer months no further work was carried out in the following years.
 - **Safety.** There are three lifebelts installed along the New Reach installed as part of the community project in 1993 and they are now maintained by Waveney District Council. Unfortunately, they are frequently thrown in to the water and therefore not available for rescuing drowning members of the public. As far as we know they have never been needed since they were erected.

- **Public Footpath.** The towpath appears on the Definitive Map as Public Footpath Halesworth 23. The County Council says that the Map shows the line of FP23 as running through the Town Park and Green land close to the towpath. However, the Statement which goes with the Map clearly describes it as running along the towpath. The Definitive Map shows another footpath (10 & 14) running along the other side of the New Reach through the Green and then through Henry's Field and the gardens to Blyth Mews. The County Council see no point in enforcing this line on the Green and are reluctant to enforce against the other owners because of uncertainty about the exact line. We are in on-going discussions with the County Council about footpaths on the Green. Public Footpath Halesworth 11 is the offshoot to the Folly and includes White Bridge. Suffolk County Council have responsibility for the maintenance of the surface of the path and the maintenance of White Bridge as a footbridge. They do not own the land and responsibility for clearing the overhanging vegetation is the landowners, being either Waveney District Council or HMGT.
- **Flooding in Halesworth.** Flooding events in the Thoroughfare occur infrequently with a major event in 1968 when the water was 1 metre deep in the Thoroughfare and in 1993 when the water was 500mm. deep. These events are caused when the combined amount of water coming from the Chediston and Wissett Brooks cannot get through the bridge under the Thoroughfare. The water rises behind the bridge and flows through the properties to the south of the bridge and west of the Thoroughfare, across the Thoroughfare into the car Park and then joins back with the Town River to flow under Saxons' Way. So the total amount of water in the Town River flowing into the Park and onto the Millennium Green is limited by the amount of water coming under and across the Thoroughfare and under Saxon Way. Added to this are the various storm drains that enter the Town River from Blyth Mews, the area of the Co-op and the Blyth Road Industrial Estate. As far as we know none of these schemes had flood attenuation schemes included as part of the developments.
- **Flooding on the Green.** In most winters, after heavy rain, flooding occurs on the Millennium Green. As the water in river rises it flows over the sill at the Patrick Stead Lock and into the New Reach. The amount of water flowing over the sluice at White Bridge increases from the "normal" 5 mm. to a maximum of 75mm. However, at this time the limited amount of water able to get through the hole taking the Town River through the railway embankment, causes the Town River to overtop its banks and flow across Chestnut Meadow where it joins the New Reach just below White Bridge. The level in this stretch quickly rises and then there is no differential in the water levels either side of the sluice under White Bridge. If the water level continues to rise it occupies increasing amounts of Chestnut Meadow, Folly Meadow and Lester's Piece and will also start flowing under the railway through the footpath passage and the agricultural access that now has the all-weather track.
- **Areas at Risk of Flooding.** The Millennium Green occupies flood plain meadows and they are fully expected to flood in times of heavy rain, usually in the winter months as the ground gradually becomes saturated throughout the catchment and flows increase in the rivers and water courses. From the information we have been able to glean the only residences occupying the floodplain between Saxons' Way and the railway embankment are the converted George Maltings off River Lane. The new development at Blyth Mews had the floor levels raised out of

the flood plain after an intervention from the Environment Agency at the Planning Application stage but they remain extremely vigilant at times of high rainfall.

- **Dredging, water levels and weed growth.** During the winter, and occasionally after heavy rain in the summer, water flows from the Town River into the New Reach. This water tends to be highly charged with sediment, nitrates and phosphates from the agricultural land and sewage works upstream of the Town, affecting **water quality**. It causes rapid deposition of silt immediately downstream of the Patrick Stead lock and also provokes submerged and emergent water weed growth in the summer so that the area of open water is very small., seriously affecting amenity. Particular challenges surround the removal of silt from this particular position as there is no access to this area for vehicles other than the new bridge over the Town River that takes the all-weather track.

The periodic dredging of the New Reach by the Environment Agency is critical to the long-term survival of the New Reach as a water body. Without their statutory rights to enter the back gardens opposite the Town Park and to deposit dredged material on the bank the New Reach would become increasingly shallow

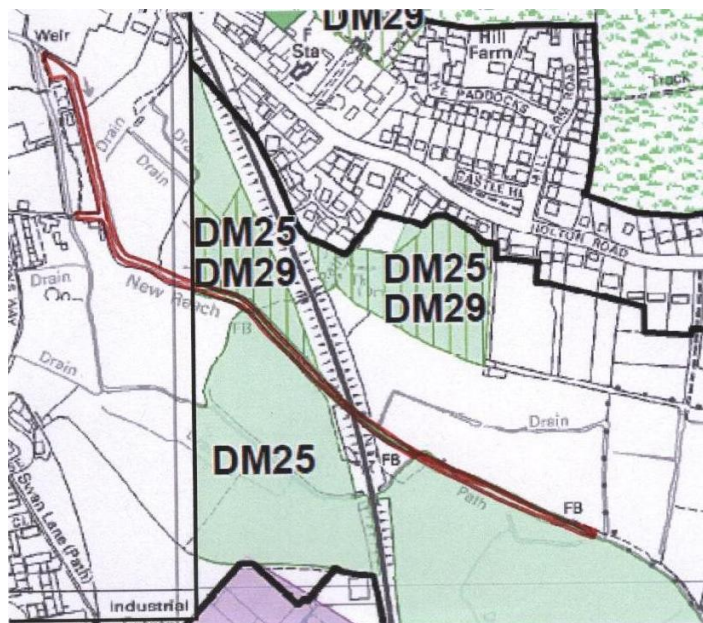
In the summer flow from the Town River ceases completely but water levels in the New Reach above White Bridge are maintained throughout the summer by good quality spring water flow from the northern ditches. The level is governed by the height of the sluice under White bridge which is approximately 300mm. below the level that it would have been when the New Reach was navigable.

The summer **weed growth** in the water seems to have increased in recent years. This may be due to do with the increased incidence of summer flooding with agricultural run-off entering from the Town River. If the Environment Agency continue to include this on their weed cutting programme the problem may be solved. Increased boat use would reduce the weed growth. In the summer of 2015 the area above White bridge was dominated by Bur-reed, both Branched and Un-branched. However, with no human intervention during the summer of 2016, although bur-reed was still present, the area was covered by Broad-leaved Pondweed. Some summer cutting with a "Weed razor" was carried out to create more open water in a few places. Below White Bridge winter work parties in 2014/15 have removed bur-reed by the roots. Access from the bank was only possible for a strip about 1-metre-wide but this strip stayed as open water throughout the summer of 2016. In the absence of any mechanical technique this time intensive method is effective at creating open water

The New Reach has been designated as "Main River" by the Environment Agency. They maintain its function as a flood relief channel but do not own the land. They carry out periodic dredging of accumulated silt. This seems to occur at intervals between 7 and 11 years. When the dredging was carried out in winter 2000/1 the New Reach was emptied and the digger and dumper worked in the bed of the New Reach. All the dredged material from the upper reaches was transported down to the Millennium Green so that they did not have to dump the material in the back gardens. However, the next time the dredging occurred in Feb 2010 the sluice had been in place permanently for some years and they would not reduce the water level and the work was carried out from north/east bank and the material placed on the immediately adjacent bank including in the back gardens. For the first time in 2014 they also carried out weed removal. They were bringing in a special machine in the spring of 2016 and this now due

in the Autumn of 2016. For the first time during the summer of 2016 the plants growing on the sand bank below the Patrick Stead Lock were treated with herbicide by the Environment Agency. Any activities that anybody else wishes to undertake that may interfere with its flood alleviation function require permission from the Environment Agency. So the sluice under White Bridge was originally subject to an annual licence which required it to be removed each winter. It is now seen by them as a permanent structure which must remain in place the whole year. They have contributed new damboards to the work we have undertaken to ensure the long-term integrity of the sluice. The channel below White Bridge as it approaches the railway bridge is largely overgrown because of the problems of getting machinery close to this section and no dredging has taken place under the railway bridge for many years. Just beyond the railway bridge the New Reach channel has been reconnected to the river as part of the straightening and deepening of the River in the mid 1940's. So the river now runs as a trickle through the last section of the New Reach which finishes at Halesworth Lock. Generally their approach to flooding in Halesworth is contained in the East Suffolk Catchment Flood Management Plan (December 2009). Dredging was carried out in the winter of 2000/1 and February 2010

- Nature Conservation.** The New Reach has been designated as a County Wildlife Site for its “diverse aquatic plant and animal community”. Water levels are retained throughout the summer by spring fed ditches from the north. Water voles are resident and otters pass through regularly. There is a rich dragonfly population including the Green-eyed Hawker (Norfolk), grey wagtail breed and kingfishers are regularly seen. Pike are seen but the shoals of roach/rudd seem to have disappeared.
- Halesworth Millennium Green Trust (HMGT).** The Trust has 16 years’ experience of owning and managing a growing (in size and footfall) community amenity. We own land adjacent to the New Reach for much of its length and since the establishment in 2000 of the Green we have undertaken a variety of tasks in association with the landowners (Waveney District Council) including litter clearance, weed clearance, installation of benches and – with the Environment Agency - installation of the sluice under White Bridge. In 2015 money was transferred from the Town Council to the Millennium Green Trust which has been used for the benefit of the New Reach. This includes the purchase and fitting of the metal frame for new sluice under White Bridge, the purchase of a strimmer and training for 6 volunteers which will increase the capacity for clearing bank side vegetation. This money was the residue from the community initiative which collapsed with the flood of 1993 and money made available by Hopkins Homes for weed clearance. The remainder of this money is held by the Trust on behalf of the community as a ring-fenced fund for purposes. The Trust Town Council on fund.



New Reach reports to the the use of the