Urban Rivers – *between the legislative cracks*

Misconnections

Houses/businesses are discharging sewage, oil, or other pollutants into surface water sewers and consequently the rivers instead of foul sewers or a licenced waste facility:

- Due to deregulation of building industry and reducing WaSC Developer Services physical inspections
- Disagreement about enforcement powers/legislation – can DEFRA work with WaSC, ABCA, BCIA to provide a mandatory regulatory certified process to be used to connect waste water connections?
- London Borough / Environment Agency resource levels low – could the GLA support local authorities? Mayor brings together partners to clean up London's rivers | London City Hall

Abuse of the Drainage System

Blockages in sewers from misuse by residents/businesses can cause sewage, oil, or other pollutants to overtop into urban rivers.

- Wet wipes – ban all non-biodegradable elements from wet wipes, mandate product labelling, do more to encourage all wet wipes to be binned.
- Commercial grease/fat management – can DEFRA, WaSC and LA strengthen the enforcement process and push for tougher penalties.
- Break the link between sewers and the surface water drainage system to prevent sewage crossing over into drains which reach our rivers.

Surface Water Flooding

Urban areas/rivers are 'flashy' and flood quickly during rainfall. Rainwater / sewage mix and cause flooding and overwhelm treatment works causing contaminated rain captured in trunk sewers to spill to rivers.

- Impermeable surfaces – 'de-pave' driveways and open spaces.
- Make space for water – restore rivers to make natural space for floodwater, strengthen existing environmental, highways and water legislation, and require new development to provide annual monitored management and maintenance plans for all flood storage areas
- Break the link between sewers and the surface water drainage system to prevent rainwater becoming contaminated with sewage and sewage treatment works being overwhelmed.

Road Runoff

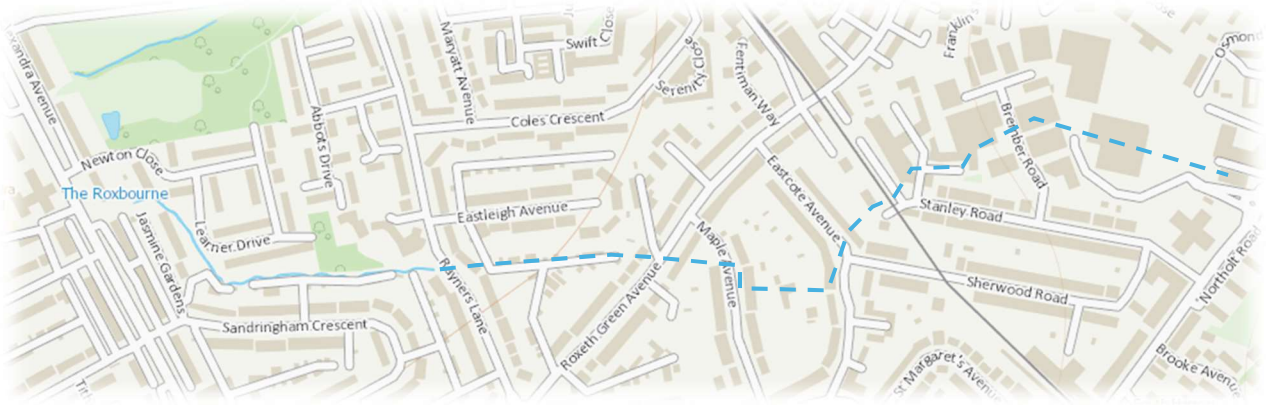
Road and pavement drainage discharges into our rivers without any kind of treatment.

- Heavy metals, rubber, oil, grease and other pollutants enter our waterways.
- Highways authorities should look to treat or filter runoff.
- Improved maintenance of highway drains to reduce silt and litter build up.
- New developments should filter or treat runoff from new road systems.

The recent investment into enhanced water company regulation is welcome but will not directly address the above issues. As such, urban rivers will not see much benefit from this expenditure.

Programmes such as Thames Water's Smarter Water Catchment scheme and the EA Flood Coastal Resilience Innovation Program (FCRIP) Action for Silk Stream – London Borough of Harrow are a step in the right direction. Properly funded well-supported Catchment Partnerships can be vehicles that drive positive change.

An Example – *the Roxbourne*



A part-culverted (i.e. part-hidden underground in pipes) stream in the London Borough of Harrow, a tributary of the Yeading Brook. The stream suffers from all the chronic issues on the one-page guide and more. A microcosm of urban pollution.

Collaborative Working

Local community action has brought together multiple organisations <u>for the first time</u> to try to solve some of the issues.

- Thames Water
- The Environment Agency
- The London Borough of Harrow
- Newton Farm Ecology Park Wardens

Results

- >500 properties surveyed for pollution
- Misconnections closed down
- 24/7 water quality monitoring
- Ten years of blockage data reviewed
- 84 sewer depth alarms installed
- Historic chemical pollution identified
- Drainage upgrades at an industrial estate
- Improved business permitting processes

A year into the work and there has only been a slight improvement in water quality in the Roxbourne Stream, so the issues remain. Local Authority budgets are incredibly squeezed, Thames Water have been focussing on lower bills and must turn their attention to storm overflows (there are none in the Roxbourne), and the EA are only resourced to respond to the worst Category 1/2 pollution incidents (all Roxbourne sources are Category 3 incidents).

This case study shows that working together (through the Smarter Water Catchment scheme) can bring positive results. This level of focus is not currently happening elsewhere in north London and only happened due to an intervention from a local MP and LB Harrow's Infrastructure Team having delegated powers to enforce misconnections (not the norm). This lack of attention is because these issues require a significant amount of investigation resource from the three main authorities to enforce, and urban rivers are often not a high enough priority.

A more detailed case study (funded by the Smarter Water Catchment scheme) is being produced.