

The Mease River Improvement Project FAQs

Why does the Mease River Improvement Project need to happen?

Natural England have determined the current condition of the River Mease Special Area of Conservation (SAC) as unfavourable; they advise on what needs to be done to protect the river and restore it to favourable status..

The River Mease improvement project is necessary to improve water quality and restoration of a more natural flow.

What is the River Improvement Project?

To meet water quality and flow targets Severn Trent Water will be delivering a project to transfer the treated wastewater out of the catchment. Treated wastewater from Packington and Measham sewage treatment works entering the River Mease means the river does not flow naturally and water quality is poorer due to pollution.

Why don't Severn Trent Water treat the wastewater to improve the quality and meet the targets?

It is not technically achievable to treat the wastewater to improve the water quality to meet phosphate targets. In addition to water quality issues the River Mease exceeds the naturalised flow targets. It is a requirement that Special Areas of Conservation comply with the naturalised flow targets.

What does this mean for water quality?

The discharge from Packington is responsible for the majority of phosphate and excess flow in the upper part of the Mease SAC catchment area. When excess phosphates enter a river, they can lead to eutrophication, a process where excessive plant growth, particularly algae, occurs. This disrupts the balance of the ecosystem. When the project has been completed there will be less phosphate entering the river.

What does this mean for natural river flows?

The river will return to a more natural flow when the project completes in 2027. A more natural flow is better for the environment and ecology.

When will the project be finished?

The project is scheduled to be completed by March 2027. Severn Trent Water are delivering the project as part of the [Water Industry National Environment Programme](#) (WINEP). The primary role of the WINEP is to set out the actions water companies in England need to take to meet environmental legislative requirements.

Enhanced phosphate removal at several other sewage works will also be delivered by Severn Trent to 2030 deadline.

What does this mean for abstractors?

When the project is completed the river flows will become lower again as they return to a more natural state. This means that there will be less water available for abstraction.

Seasonal variations in weather will also continue to impact the future availability of water in the catchment with prolonged drier periods more likely. It is not possible to say exactly how much water will be available in the future because this depends on the weather and rainfall.

The Mease Partnership will be contacting abstractors who could be impacted by the change when Severn Trent Water transfer the treated wastewater discharges out of the catchment and the river returns to a more natural flow. We will be seeking their views on building water resilience in the catchment to prepare for the changes in 2027 and the impact of climate change.

The Mease partnership will also explore opportunities to assist abstraction licence holders and will be engaging with National Farmers Union, Water Resources West and the Water for Food Group.

Will lower river flows be harmful to the environment and ecology in the Mease?

The Environment Agency manages abstraction licences. River flows are protected by hands off flow conditions on most surface water licence. A hands off flow is a condition on abstraction licences that requires the licence-holders to stop or reduce abstracting water from a river when the river flow falls below a certain level. The Environment Agency has to protect the environment and existing licence holder's rights to water. There are currently no plans to change to change hands off flow conditions for Mease abstraction licence holders.

Severn Trent have agreed with the Environment Agency and Natural England a compensation flow regime that will help the river transition to a more natural flow pattern. Compensation releases will only be made when measured flow in the Gilwiskaw brook falls below the agreed level. The volumes and number of days when a compensation release is made will be limited to protect water quality.

Where is the treated wastewater been transferred to?

The decision has not been made yet. The project is complex, and Severn Trent are working through plans to determine the most suitable location for the discharge of the treated wastewater.

Will transferring the flow have a negative impact on the destination river?

The Environment Agency sets permit conditions that protect the environment. To transfer the treated wastewater to a new location Severn Trent will need to apply for the relevant permits. The permit conditions will ensure the new treated wastewater discharge will not downgrade the overall water quality status of the receiving river and will not prevent a good status from being achieved in the future.

What does this mean for fish populations?

Natural England recently commissioned a fish feature survey assessment which was carried out by independent experts at Hull International Fisheries Institute. The survey confirmed that both Spined Loach and Bullhead are present, but at lower levels than the targets for healthy populations. Encouragingly Spined Loach numbers were higher than in the last assessment period and the species was found in all units that make up the River Mease Sites of Special Scientific Interest. Also, strong numbers of Bullhead fish were found.

The assessment recognises it will take time for the ongoing work of improving water quality and river restoration to show benefits for the special fish. This is partly because the treated wastewater is expected to flow into the river until 2027.

One of the many uses of the survey assessment is helping to guide habitat restoration work. Varied bed structure, submerged aquatic vegetation and future-proofing features like drought refuges will be important. A mosaic of bare, sandy substrata with submerged plants, including mid-channel, will be important for Spined Loach recovery. Trent Rivers Trust will use the report to guide future river restoration actions in the catchment.

What about development and growth?

The River Mease Partnership recognises the catchment needs to be able to grow and thrive both socially and economically. Creating new development which is environmentally sustainable is an essential element in achieving this.

The River Improvement Project will move the River Mease into a more favourable status, enabling the Local Planning Authorities in delivering housing allocations in their existing Local Plans and new housing growth likely to be proposed to progress their Local Plans, that is required to meet government housing targets. It would also enable applicants to bring forward development in a more sustainable way to meet the requirements of nutrient neutrality.

Is there an increased risk of flooding?

No, when the project is completed in 2027 river levels will return to a lower natural flow.

Which organisations are involved?

The project is led by the River Mease Partnership Members include the Environment Agency, Natural England, Severn Trent Water, Trent Rivers Trust, North West Leicestershire, Lichfield, South Derbyshire local authorities.

- Natural England – advise on what needs to be done to protect the catchment.
- Environment Agency – regulate abstractions and discharges with the responsibility of protecting the catchment and set permit conditions that protect the environment.

- Severn Trent Water Limited – is the water company that will deliver the project to transfer the treated wastewater out of the catchment.
- Local Planning Authorities – North West Leicestershire, South Derbyshire, Lichfield, are members of the catchment partnership and manage planning and development (domestic and commercial within the catchment).
- Trent Rivers Trust – manage restoration projects to make improvements throughout the catchment.

Further Information

More information is available at www.rivermease.co.uk

For general enquiries relating restoration in the catchment:
enquiries@rivermease.co.uk.

Abstraction licence holders can also call: 02084 747856 or email
engagement_westmids@environment-agency.gov.uk

For enquiries about the Severn Trent Water project to transfer the water out of the catchment email corporateresponsibility@severntrent.co.uk