

Restoring Sustainable Abstraction

River Mimram (Fulling Mill Pumping Station)

Affinity Water Limited (Affinity) hold a licence that allows them to take water for public water supply from groundwater in the River Mimram catchment. The quantities this licence permits them to take from the river has the potential to damage this sensitive and important water environment so we want to use our legal powers to change this.

Background

The river is classified as a chalk stream with a Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) designation. In the 1990s we identified the River Mimram as suffering from low flows. We have been working with Affinity to investigate the cause of these low flows. These investigations identified that reducing abstraction at Fulling Mill Pumping Station would lead to a significant improvement in flows in the River Mimram.

What is the problem?

The River Mimram was one of the best examples of a spring fed chalk stream in South-East England. The pattern of flows in the Mimram is typical of a chalk stream. More recently the



River Mimram at Singlers Marsh

upper reaches of the river (from Welwyn upstream) have dried up, often for prolonged periods of time. Recent drought periods were made worse by the abstraction at Fulling Mill. Pressures on river flows have impacted the ecological communities of the river. These have become generally impoverished, with a notable lack of species that do well in fast moving water (both plants and macro-invertebrates). The investigations have shown there is a clear link between the abstraction in the catchment, water consumption and the low flows in the river.

The low flows along with other factors such as poor channel morphology and siltation are limiting the quality and abundance of the ecology. In their place, terrestrial and poor quality ecological communities now dominate the river.

What do we want to do to solve the problem?

We are proposing to cancel the Fulling Mill licence of 9,092 cubic metres (m³) of water a day and 2,045,743m³ a year with effect from 1 April 2018. This timescale allows Affinity time to make the changes necessary to secure water supply before they reduce abstraction. Affinity will make up for this loss of water by reducing leakage, working with customers to reduce

consumption and by investing in new infrastructure that will have less impact on the catchment.

Affinity has included a scheme in their Business Plan and Water Resources Management Plan to reduce abstraction, which has been approved by the Secretary of State for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs.

What will this achieve?

We have identified that stopping abstraction at Fulling Mill will improve flows, leading to a recovery in the ecology and a more sustainable future abstraction regime in the catchment.

So what is happening now?

We have formally notified Affinity of the change to the abstraction licence at Fulling Mill. They have until 23 July 2014 to tell us if they object to or agree with our proposal.

You also have the chance to comment on this proposal.

You can do this by sending us an email to rsa.representations@environment-agency.gov.uk or by writing to us at the following address:

Restoring Sustainable Abstraction Team,
Water Resources Technical Services,
Horizon House,
Deanery Road,
Bristol,
BS1 5AH

You need to make sure your letter or email arrives with us on or before 23 July 2014, otherwise we won't be able to consider it. If you want to find out more detail about this abstraction licence change scheme then you can contact Miles Morgan on 01707 632725 or send an email to rsa.representations@environment-agency.gov.uk.

We hope you will support this scheme as we believe it to be good value for people, the economy and the environment.

If Affinity objects to our proposal we will refer this case to the Secretary of State. The ultimate decision on whether to uphold our proposed abstraction licence changes or not rests with them.