

RIVER AVON - Pulteney Weir to Bathampton

Danielle Sellwood, BERA (Bathwick Estate Residents Association)

This stretch of river has been a subject of concern for over 30 years, with efforts made in 1985, 2000 and now 2022 to preserve and maintain this important stretch of river.

Issues:

Severe riverbank erosion

Severe erosion means many trees are at risk of dying and falling into the river taking large chunks of bank with them. This not only poses a risk to properties (and huge expense), but also to the integrity of the river itself, with loss of habitat and biodiversity as well as greater flood risk - a wider river combined with increased risk of flooding will escalate erosion and put huge pressure on Pulteney Bridge and beyond.

Whilst some of the erosion is inevitably caused by flooding, a significant amount is also caused by commercial boats (this was established in the 2000 report). Commercial use is increasing, there are currently large barges delivering to Cleveland Pools, tour boats operating from March till October/November, safety boats operating at Cleveland Bridge, and when Cleveland Pools are open there will be additional services running between the pools and the weir.

Loss of habitat and an unhealthy river

Severe erosion is causing properties at the town end of this stretch to build and place protective walls, often to the detriment of natural habitats due to the loss of plant life on the bank. As erosion continues, more properties will look to protect their banks leading to a much more industrialised river with significant loss to nature. This combined with dangerous levels of pollution is putting this important stretch of river and its rich nature at risk.

Safety of leisure users (non-powered).

The number of leisure users is rising exponentially, swimmers, paddleboarders, canoeists etc. With the new ownership of Bathwick Meadows by the National Trust, this is set to increase dramatically, up until now, access to this stretch has been very limited. Increased commercial traffic and private and unregulated motored craft pose a significant risk to safety, as does pollution which is well documented.

Solutions

We are calling for action to be taken to protect this important stretch of river, including:

- This section of the river must be seen as an important asset for the city and a management plan be put in place.
- Commercial boats to be managed, limited and monitored.
- There must be significant sections of the year when no commercial boats may operate (unless in an emergency) in order to allow the banks and habitat to recover.
- Polluters must be stopped as a matter of urgency.



Then and now. On the left is Cleveland Pools in 1910, and on the right, 2022. The loss of several feet of bank is clearly demonstrated by the trees that are behind the scene on the left, but now in 2022 dangerously undercut and hanging off the bank in the picture on the right.



At-risk trees. On the left at Cleveland Pools and on the right at Forester Court, it is clear to see the significant erosion and undercutting of trees at summer river levels (ie. low non-flood level)



Left. Two tour boats passing close to the banks leaving little room for other users and putting increased pressure on the banks. **Right:** Increasing numnbers of leisure users.