



# A clear solution for farmers

ENGLAND CATCHMENT SENSITIVE FARMING DELIVERY INITIATIVE

## Joint working achieves common goals

Sparchford Farm, Ludlow, Shropshire

### River Teme Catchment

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#### Farm Description

Sparchford Farm lies within the broad valley of Corve Dale in the beautiful Shropshire Hills. Gordon Jones and his family manage this mixed farm of 102 Ha, consisting predominantly of beef, sheep and growing crops and grass for their winter feed. A large percentage of his land adjoins the River Corve, a tributary of the River Teme which is heavily affected by diffuse water pollution from agriculture.

Hedges are very efficiently maintained in this part of Shropshire and Sparchford Farm, through the Entry Level Stewardship Scheme (ELS), contributes to this valuable work.

Unfortunately riparian management plans are lacking, potentially causing habitat, pollution and water quality problems.



Livestock drinking bay



Hedge mainenance

#### Pollution Issues

Farming practices are thought to be impacting on water quality and the challenges at Sparchford Farm are typical for those who farm next to watercourses:

- Erosion of the river bank side is exacerbated by poaching and livestock access.
- Faecal contamination from livestock access to watercourses.
- Lack of bank side management destabilises and increases the risk of erosion and siltation of water.
- Lack of buffer strips increase risk of fertiliser and pesticide entering a watercourse

Although the watercourses appear relatively well tree lined, until recent times, Alders along rivers such as the Corve were coppiced for charcoal and clog making. With the decline of these industries coppicing largely ceased and now many trees are nearing the end of their life. Large trees shade out the river, and fall into the river destabilising banks, increasing the siltation and potentially causing damage in times of flood.

Another increasingly worrying issue, which could be as significant for the landscape as Dutch Elm Disease in the 1970s, is the areas widespread number of Alder affected by the disease *Phytophthora*. Coppicing is the only known means of controlling the increasing rate of the Alder *Phytophthora* disease.

## Pollution Solutions

Working in partnership with the Shropshire Hills AONB Blue Remembered Hills Project and the Environment Agency, alder coppicing and the preparation of a riparian management plan was established with Mr. Jones on Sparchford Farm.

The plan included the completion of a tree survey to identify the trees at most risk, felling licences were implemented and reliable contractors recommended to carry out the work. All of which increased Mr. Jones confidence in the work which was needed to be carried out.

With the help of the Catchment Sensitive Farming's (CSF) Capital Grant Scheme, funding was set in place to install fencing along the coppiced stretch of the river bank and allowed the installation of a livestock drinking bay on the adjacent ditch away from the main river to provide a watering hole for his livestock.

Three strand fencing was recommended as opposed to sheep netting aligned parallel to flow with areas of weak points built in due to the high risk of flooding in this valley bottom.

Only a year on and the riverbank vegetation has re-established, helping to stabilise the eroding riverbanks with a mature buffer strip intercepting runoff from fertilisers and pesticides.

Through providing joint funding and advice, coppicing and fencing has been carried out on over half of Mr. Jones's riverbank. The coppicing and stock fencing has improved the riverbank habitat significantly on this stretch of river in the Shropshire Hills, benefiting rare freshwater species, reducing the risk of diffuse pollution from agriculture, improving water quality and the river's habitats, and checking alder Phytophthora disease – covering objectives for all the organisations working together and the farmer.

[www.defra.gov.uk/foodfarm/landmanage/water/csf](http://www.defra.gov.uk/foodfarm/landmanage/water/csf)



River bank fencing

## Farmer Engagement and Motivation

Initially Mr Jones was sceptical about the work which was required, but through the guidance of his local CSF officer and Rivers Valleys officer the joint advice and funding provided the direction, confidence and financial assistance that Mr Jones needed to complete the works.

Mr. Jones is now extremely happy with the results, so much so he has plans to complete the rest of the river bank works required himself. This in part has been self funded through the Alder timber from the site coppiced during the project. The timber has found an economic use, mostly as firewood, but a new business is also being established by a local farmer using alder commercially for flooring. The income generated from this venture will now enable Mr. Jones to continue funding the rest of the works required to be completed for the following year.

Mr. Jones commented "Thanks to funding, advice and guidance from all the organisations working together, a whole stretch of the river on my farm has hugely benefitted"

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