

Lower Otter Restoration Project

Project Vision

A healthy, sustainable Otter estuary and river, well connected to its floodplain, with active natural processes and a range of typical habitats and species. Flood risk is understood and managed in a coordinated way. Access to a network of footpaths and trails is maintained and improved where appropriate. Local landowners and communities are engaged in and supportive of management.

History of the valley

The natural environment of the River Otter and its estuary has been modified by humans for hundreds of years.

The River Otter was straightened and disconnected from its floodplain by embankments in the nineteenth century, turning a large part of its estuary from intertidal habitat to agricultural land.

Changes to the river and its floodplain continued into the twentieth century, with the construction of a road, a railway, an aqueduct and a municipal waste tip in the floodplain.



The figures above show what the lower Otter valley would have looked like a few hundred years ago, and what it looks like now.

Challenges faced by the valley

As a result of these changes, there has been a disruption of natural processes. The River Otter can no longer adapt to changing climatic conditions by moving naturally across the floodplain as it once did.

The natural environment itself is poorer, with large areas of intertidal mudflats and saltmarsh lost due to the embankments, resulting in reduced biodiversity and lower-quality habitats.

Flood flows in the River Otter after heavy rainfall cannot pass down the narrowed river channel. Water spills into the historic floodplain and cannot drain easily, leading to prolonged flooding that causes significant disruption to the local community.