

Chilterns Chalk Streams Project Annual Report 2024/25



About the Chilterns Chalk Streams Project

Hosted by the Chilterns National Landscape, the Chilterns Chalk Streams Project is a partnership of statutory agencies, local authorities and voluntary bodies which aims to conserve and enhance all major chalk streams in the Chilterns, and to encourage enjoyment and understanding of them.

The Project provides advice to landowners on river and riparian management, carries out practical projects to enhance the streams for wildlife, improves access where appropriate, undertakes surveys and provides educational activities and resources.



**CHILTERN
CHALK STREAMS
PROJECT**

Meet the team



Ceri Groves
Education and Engagement Manager



Adrian Porter
Rivers Officer



Laura Silverstone
Education and Engagement Officer



Steph Horn
Chess Smarter Water
Catchment Co-ordinator



Claudia Bernardini
Project Support Officer

Chairperson's report

I'm delighted to introduce the Chilterns Chalk Streams Project (CCSP) Annual Report for 2024/25, which sets out not just the highlights of the last year but also presents a review of the Project's achievements over the last five years.

One of the highlights of the past year has to be the long-anticipated restoration of the Chess at Chesham Moor. This included meandering, planting, a new bridge and creating a gravel access ramp – bringing the beach to Chesham!

Meanwhile, our Chess farm cluster continues to thrive, with one-third of the catchment now involved and delivering habitat and water quality improvements. Along with the launch of the Chalk Stream Challenge Badge for youth groups and growing citizen science work, this demonstrates how the project has continued to inspire communities, engage young people, and deliver meaningful environmental improvements.

The development of the 'Mending the Misbourne' initiative this year and work to identify restoration opportunities on the Hughenden Stream reflect the growing reach of the project.

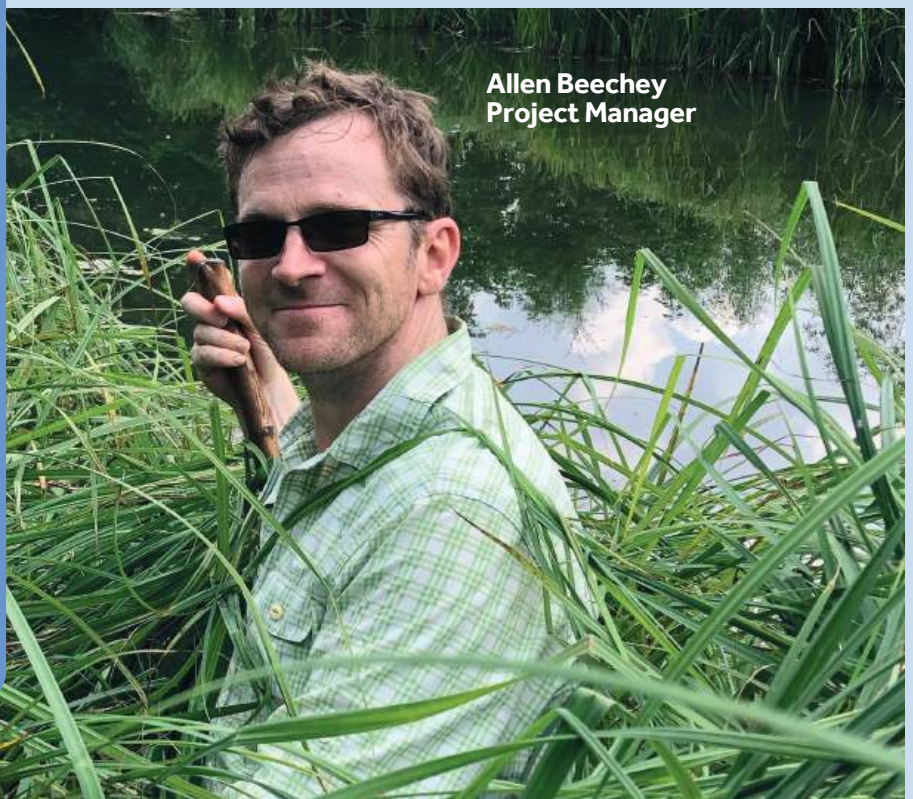
Another exciting development is the launch of chalk stream planning guidance. This first-of-its-kind guide will help to ensure chalk streams are better protected through local planning processes. As we close the chapter on the 2020-2025 Business Plan, we embark on the next five years with renewed energy and ambition.

Our thanks go to all the CCSP's partners, volunteers and funders for their continued support. I'm confident that, together, we will continue to increase our impact and be champions for our cherished chalk streams.

Catherine Moncrieff

Chair of the Chilterns Chalk Streams Project

Allen Beechey
Project Manager



Raising awareness



Chalk Stream Challenge Badge

We've launched a brand-new badge for Scouts, Guides, and similar groups (or even keen individuals). The challenge involves completing a walk, then choosing from a range of chalk stream themed activities.

Originally created as part of the Watercress and Winterbournes Landscape Partnership Scheme it has been adapted for The River Chess thanks to funding from Smarter Water Catchment Initiative.

So far, two Guide groups and 76 children from Ley Hill School have completed the challenge, with many more children working towards a badge. We hope to roll this out to other rivers in the future.



Local children become film makers!

In October and November, children from Rickmansworth Park and Chenies schools worked with us to learn about the wildlife, geography and history of the River Chess and the threats the river faces from human activity.

The children then put all the information they'd learned into two fantastic films. We were amazed at their knowledge and presenting skills.

To find out more about our engagement programmes and to watch the films please visit

chilternstreams.org/learning/



Taking practical action



After years of planning, the CCSP delivered a long wished for river restoration scheme at Chesham Moor on the River Chess.

Work included

- Removal of the failing concrete banks.
- Replacement of the old concrete foot bridge to allow safe, step-free access.
- Installation of a reed-bed sustainable drainage system to intercept flow from road gullies on Bois Moor Road, helping to prevent pollutants from entering the river.
- New gravel sloped access-ramp installed to provide safer access to the river for families and school groups.

Local volunteers have helped with laying wildflower turf and putting in over 400 additional plants to boost biodiversity and provide colour. The response from visitors to this popular site has been fantastic. As a finishing touch, a new interpretation board was installed in March 2025.

The scheme was developed by the CCSP and the Chiltern Society in partnership with Chesham Town Council and the Environment Agency. Funding came from Affinity Water, the Heritage Lottery's Green Recovery Challenge Fund, DEFRA's Access for All fund, Chesham Town Council's Mayoral Fund and the CCSP.



Providing specialist advice

Misbourne



Mending the Misbourne

Like most chalk streams, the Misbourne has been significantly altered by human activity. The river suffers from low flows, pollution and increasing development pressure, and is currently assessed as having Poor Ecological Status.

During 2024, over 30 stakeholders worked together to produce a catchment plan for the River Misbourne, setting out a wide range of actions to help restore the Misbourne to a healthy, functioning chalk stream.

In early 2025 the **CCSP submitted an application to the HS2 Additional Projects fund for a 5-year, £1.7million 'Mending the Misbourne' project.** If successful, this will bring dedicated staff and funding to the catchment.

Sarratt



Other restoration projects

On the Chess, we've organised volunteer days at **Sarratt Crestyl watercress beds**; delivered fencing work at **Mill Farm meadow** to allow grazing of a water meadow; repaired degraded banks near Sarratt Bottom; advised on projects that have been implemented at Sarratt SSSI and at Scotsbridge.

We've also supported our partners, **Chiltern Rangers CIC**, in completing bank improvements on the **Chess** at Bois Mill; tree-work on the **Wye** at Edgewood and designing a project at Wooburn.

We've provided support to Gerrards Cross Golf Club on the **Misbourne**; cleared culverts on the **Hamble** to help a local farmer; and as well as the programmes covered elsewhere in this report, have developed future improvement projects on the **Chess, Hamble** and **Ver**.

Hughenden Stream



River restoration plan for Hughenden Stream

The CCSP was commissioned by **Affinity Water** to carry out an assessment of options for the restoration of the **Hughenden Stream**. Working with local partners we identified and prioritised potential river restoration schemes, creating a shortlist of projects that **Affinity Water** will use to guide their restoration work in the next Asset Management Plan period (AMP8 2025 – 2030). This work is designed to complement abstraction reduction which took place in the catchment in 2018.

Our work on the **Hughenden** will continue during 2025/26 as we conduct an assessment of Natural Flood Management options on behalf of Buckinghamshire Council, and work with the National Trust to explore options for improving the river at **Hughenden Manor** through the '**Not Bourne Yesterday**' project.



Riverfly monitoring

The CCSP continues to act as co-host of the Chilterns, Herts and Middlesex Riverfly Hub, alongside hosts Herts & Middlesex Wildlife Trust. This year we delivered 2 Riverfly training courses, 2 extended Riverfly training courses and held a Riverfly Open Day for volunteers in October.

The Project led the production of the first Annual Riverfly Newsletter for the Hub which is available at



Science and evidence

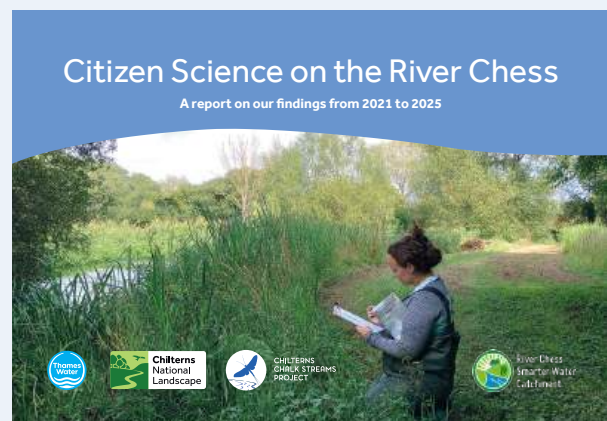
MoRPh and Mudspotter

Citizen Scientists were also trained in the **Modular River Survey (MoRPh)** which is now being used to assess physical and vegetation changes to sections of streams where restoration projects have been delivered.

In autumn 2024, staff and volunteers from the South Chilterns Catchment Partnership were trained in the MudSpotter technique. **MudSpotter** is now being used to ground-truth the sediment flow pathways across the catchment, which were identified by a modelling software (SCIMAP), and help us to identify the points where sediment is entering rivers.



Hannah Parry-Wilson moved on from her role as CCSP Citizen Science Co-ordinator in October 2024, after two years with the project. Hannah made a huge impact on our work and we wish her every success in her new role.



Notably for 2024-25 the Chess Smarter Water Catchment (SWC) published **'Citizen Science on the River Chess – A report on the findings from 2021-2025'**



The 60-page report written by Professor Kate Heppell, Head of Landscapes at the Chilterns National Landscape, contributes to our understanding of the state of the River Chess and provides useful guidance for those looking to set up their own citizen science programme.

One survey featured looked at 'contaminants of emerging concern' – chemicals recently discovered in the environment for which concerns about harmful ecological effects exist. Citizen scientists took water samples from the Chess, which were then sent to Imperial College London for analysis.

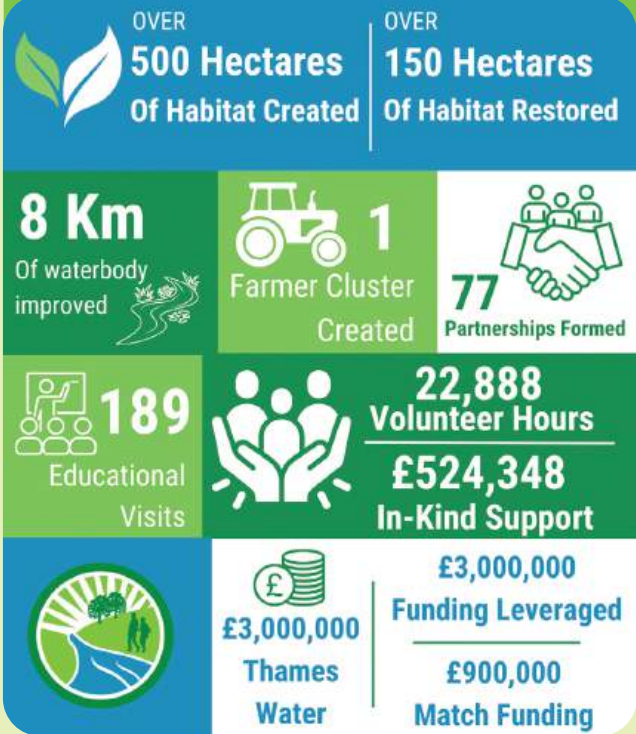
Three groups of chemicals were found at high enough levels to pose a potential risk – acetamiprid – found in bug sprays, Fipronil – found in pet flea and tick treatments and a range of medications (including antibiotics, antidepressants). In many cases sewage treatment processes are not designed to remove these chemicals.

Chess Smarter Water Catchment

Volunteers planting a hedgerow at Latimer



5 years of delivery of the Chess SWC



Farm cluster

Another busy year saw the Chess Farm Cluster go from strength to strength. A third of the Chess catchment is now part of the cluster, creating opportunities for farmers to come together and deliver work on nature recovery and improving water quality. With funding from Affinity Water, FiPL, HS2 Additional Projects Fund the Chess SWC and landowners the cluster has delivered:

- Hedgerow creation
- Pond restoration
- Bought specialist equipment
- Completed botanical surveys
- Installed owl boxes
- Winter bird feeding
- And more...



Chalk Streams planning guidance

A highlight for the SWC this year was the publication of a guidance document, which aims to raise awareness and promote greater consideration for chalk streams in the planning process. This document, the first of its kind, is a major achievement for the Project and will be essential in protecting the rare and fragile chalk streams of the Chilterns for many years to come.

The guidance outlines:

- The importance of chalk streams within the Chilterns National Landscape and their protection under the Levelling Up & Regeneration Act.
- Planning considerations to avoid harm and deliver positive outcomes for chalk streams.
- Key recommendations for local and neighbourhood plan-making, including policies on water use, biodiversity, sustainable drainage, and development buffers.
- Practical steps for mitigating abstraction, surface water pollution, sewage impacts, and habitat restoration.



End of Business Plan Review

2024/25 marked the final year of the current business plan period, providing a perfect opportunity to look back on what we've achieved over the last 5 years.

Raising awareness

51 Events and guided walks



New project website
Plus Smarter Water
Catchment project
site



River Chess
Smarter Water
Catchment

34

Guided visits to
showcase river
restoration sites



2,790

Social media
followers

314
newsletter
subscribers



126

School visits
and workshops
engaging 3,500
children in learning
about local chalk
streams



Taking practical action

9

River restoration
schemes delivered

4.15KM

River
restored



353

Volunteers
engaged on
projects.
That's the
equivalent of
2,000
hours of work!



19

Further restoration
projects under
development



501.4

Hectares of
habitat restored

144.75

Hectares of
habitat created



Providing specialist advice

60

advisory visits to farmers and landowners in wider catchments



2

new management advice leaflets



Waterbody catchment plans now written for

4 rivers



6

meetings of the new Chess Valley Farmer cluster



Access

20

new interpretation panels on the River Chess and River Wye



Operations and finance

Celebrated

25 years

of the Chilterns Chalk Streams Project 1997 – 2022





River Chess Smarter Water Catchment

Has invested

£3 million

over 5 years

Planned income

£1,237,604

Actual income

£3,012,756

£351K

Secured from NHLF for development of the 'Not Bourne Yesterday' project



Not Bourne Yesterday

£505K

Secured from the 'Green Recovery Challenge Fund'



Science and evidence

>140

Ciizen Science volunteers have contributed a massive 3,057 hours to research on the River Chess



>100

New riverfly monitors trained



The Future – Project Manager's Report

2019 seems a long time ago, particularly considering all that has happened since then. However, that year marked a turning point for the Project. As is often the case, a severe drought concentrated minds and galvanised action.

That October, the Chiltern Society held a Chalk Streams in Crisis Conference that brought together senior representatives from **Ofwat, Environment Agency, Thames Water, the Chilterns Conservation Board** and the **CCSP** to address public concerns at the crisis affecting chalk streams and to agree on individual and joint action to reverse their decline.

To play its part in this renewal of efforts, and with the backing of local stakeholders, the CCSP launched its first five-year business plan (2020 – 25), setting out its ambition to become the driving force in the conservation and sustainable management of Chilterns chalk streams.

With **increased investment** from the project's partners, specifically **Affinity Water, Thames Water** and the **Chilterns Conservation Board**, over the last five years the Project has been able make **great strides towards achieving this ambition.**

This review of the 2020 – 25 business plan shows how **increased investment and longer-term, multi-year funding agreements** with partners has enabled the Project to take a significant step up in the scale of delivery. It has, too, provided certainty enabling the Project to plan more strategically and effectively and to expand its staff team, without whom the considerable achievements of the last five years would not have been possible.

Moving forward, we are keen to build on the success of the last five years and have developed an equally ambitious business plan for 2025 – 30. Our plan is centred around the development and delivery of three major projects that the CCSP has worked with its partners to secure funding for: **Chess Smarter Water Catchment initiative, Not Bourne Yesterday** and **Mending the Misbourne**. Achieving the plan's objectives will be more challenging this time around, not least because of a more uncertain funding climate that exists. The Project will need to evolve and diversify its income streams to maintain the pace of delivery.

Over the next year, we will be delivering restoration projects on two rivers and will be developing plans for a further four. We will develop a catchment plan for the Hughenden Stream, develop our volunteer and education and engagement programmes and look forward to welcoming a new Citizen Science co-ordinator later this year. **2025 promises to be another busy year!**





Not Bourne Yesterday

Made possible by **£350,000 from the National Lottery Heritage Fund**, Not Bourne Yesterday aims to reconnect communities with their local chalk streams, restoring the rivers and the landscapes they flow through.

Through a combination of restoration projects, history and archaeology, engagement and co-creation, the programme aims to build stronger relationships between people and their local chalk stream, at a time when rivers most need champions and people most need the wellbeing that being near water can bring.

Not Bourne Yesterday is currently in an **18-month Development Phase ending in September 2026**.

Project staff will work with **CCSP, The Chilterns Heritage and Archaeology Partnership (CHAP)** and other partners and volunteers to develop a detailed project proposal. If our second-round bid is successful, the Delivery Phase of the programme will be delivered over five years, with an anticipated completion in 2031.

Find out more and keep up to date with the programme
chilterns.org.uk/NBY



Not Bourne Yesterday

Financial Statement 2024/25

Chilterns Chalk Streams Project

Income	Amount (£)
Chilterns Conservation Board	17,914.00
Defra Capital Funding	14,329.00
Defra Access Funding	32,915.00
Affinity Water	86,000.00
Thames Water	50,000.00
Catchment co-hosting	6,875.00
Projects	
Chess SWC projects	7,433.93
Not Bourne Yesterday NHLF project	4,444.00
External funding (Environment Agency)	11,000.00
External funding (match)	64,620.00
Courses/consultancy/donations	20,945.19
Total Income	316,476.12

These are provisional figures pending closure of the Chilterns National Landscapes accounts for financial year 2024 – 25.

Expenditure	Amount (£)
Staff costs	149,699.53
Staff expenses	3,360.63
Office costs	24,185.38
Courses/training	3,493.00
Project support	3,405.15
Event costs	1,163.72
Education programme	2,718.87
Projects	
Hamble Project Phase 2	870.00
Hamble Mill End Options scoping	11,000.00
Crestyl Watercress Beds Project	2,460.00
Moor Recreation Ground Project	78,272.58
Japanese Knotweed Management Plan	6,487.40
Bois Mill bank works	8,702.00
Hughenden restoration options Appraisal	1,500.00
Sarratt bank repair and pond creation	7,100.00
Total expenditure	304,418.26
Surplus added to CCSP reserve to support future project work	12,057.86

Chess Smarter Water Catchment Project

Project Income	Amount (£)
Underspend brought forward	129,656.00
Thames Water	648,083.94
Restore Hope Latimer	32,585.00
Match funding (various sources inc Affinity Water, Landowners, FiPL etc)	305,724.63
Total	1,116,049.57

Expenditure	Amount (£)
Staff costs	267,132.90
Education and Engagement	19,686.41
Heritage activities	18,850.00
Citizen Science activities	78,387.58
Farming activities	87,025.79
Landowner grants	315,182.96
Chalk Streams Planning	26,880.60
River Restoration	88,643.60
Total expenditure	901,789.84

Underspend to be carried over to support work on the SWC initiative in 2025 – 26