

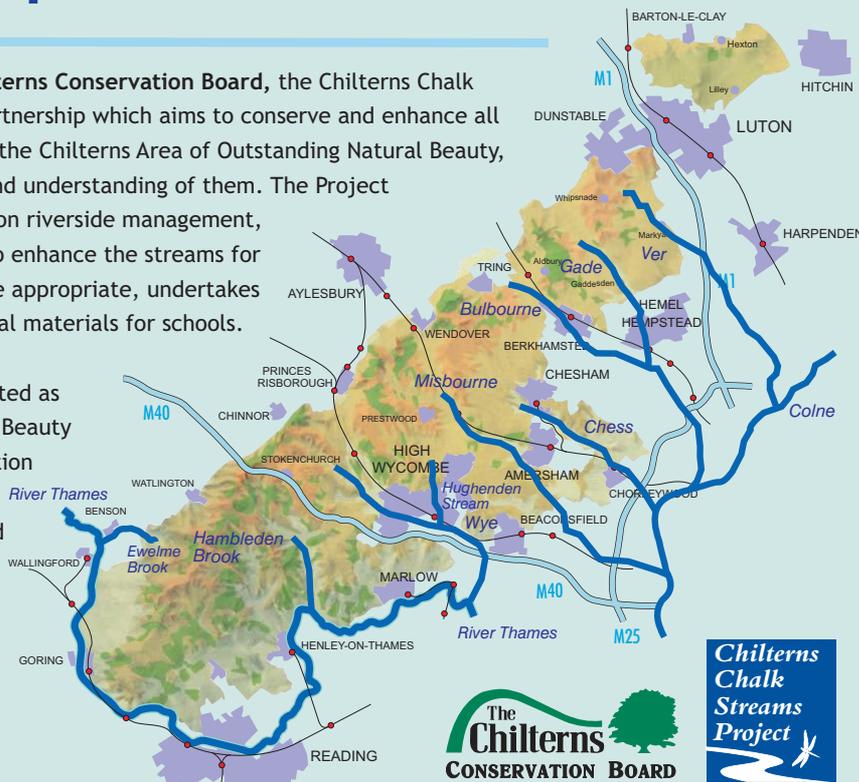
Chilterns Chalk Streams Project

Annual Report 2014-2015



An initiative of the Chilterns Conservation Board, the Chilterns Chalk Streams Project is a partnership which aims to conserve and enhance all major chalk streams in the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, and to encourage enjoyment and understanding of them. The Project provides advice to landowners on riverside management, carries out practical projects to enhance the streams for wildlife, improves access where appropriate, undertakes surveys and provides educational materials for schools.

The Chiltern Hills were designated as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) in 1965. This is recognition that the Chilterns countryside is amongst the finest in England and Wales. The Chilterns Conservation Board works to ensure that the special qualities of the area are conserved.



**The Chilterns
CONSERVATION BOARD**

**Chilterns
Chalk
Streams
Project**



Our new chairman

I took on the role of Chairman of the Chilterns Chalk Streams Project (CCSP) in the summer of 2014 having been appointed by the Secretary of State to the Chilterns Conservation Board in April so a few words of introduction seem appropriate. By profession I am a Chartered Town Planner, now retired. I worked in local government for my entire career. I was Head of Planning at Hertsmere Borough Council before becoming Director of Planning and the Environment at Chiltern District Council, a post I held for 10 years. While I was at Chiltern District I was able to lend my support to projects seeking to improve the District's two chalk streams; the River Misbourne and the River Chess.

I have lived in Rickmansworth for over 33 years so the chalk stream I am most familiar with, and the one which inspired my appreciation of their special qualities, is the River Chess. When my children were young, we visited the river for paddling and picnics and now the children are grown my favourite local walk is along the Chess Valley.

As Chairman of the CCSP, one of my first duties was to chair the Project's Annual Forum in July last year.

At the event I learnt about riverfly monitoring and the role of the Riverfly Partnership despite not being at all sure if I would know a riverfly if I saw one. I also took the opportunity to see the very successful habitat enhancement works that had been undertaken along the River Bulbourne.

In November I took the opportunity to find out more about riverflies and what riverfly monitoring actually involves. I spent a fascinating morning riverfly monitoring with Ken Austin and his team who monitor the upper Chess on behalf of the River Chess Association. They patiently explained what they did and helped me to identify various types of riverfly. So now I know what at least some riverflies look like.



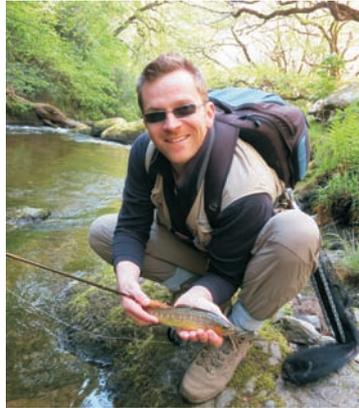
Chalk streams are one of the defining features of the Chilterns AONB, an area I know and love. I am delighted to take on the Chairmanship of the Chalk Streams Project, which has made such an amazing contribution to the conservation and enhancement of the Chilterns AONB and plays a significant part both in promoting public enjoyment and raising public awareness of chalk streams and their associated habitats.



Project Officer's Report

The winter of 2013/14 turned out to be the second wettest on record for the Chilterns since 1911. Heavy, persistent rainfall brought about record groundwater levels and high flows in all of the area's rivers. By the beginning of April all but the R. Ver had reached or extended beyond their recognised source. For a brief period in 2014, the number of chalk streams in the Chilterns rose to eleven with the Bourne Gutter and the rarely observed Assendon Stream re-appearing. Although it was refreshing to see the area's rivers flowing so abundantly for a change, all the water led to its fair share of problems too. Flooding caused damage and disruption in a number of locations, but the most widespread problem was pollution resulting from groundwater infiltration into the sewerage network. Of all the rivers to be affected by this problem, the Chess and Hughenden Stream were perhaps worst affected with sewage being released or pumped into them well into the summer months. Damage to these rivers was thankfully limited by the sheer amount of water, which served to dilute the sewage. That said, impacts on the invertebrate community were picked up by riverfly monitors and the site of sewage detritus littering the banks and bed of the Hughenden Stream was unpleasant to see, not to mention pretty unhygienic for users of the public open spaces along the stream. Thankfully with the return of more clement weather in the Spring, groundwater levels soon lowered to more normal levels allowing the pollution and flooding issues to subside and the affected rivers to recover.

Over this eventful background the Chilterns Chalk Streams Project enjoyed another busy and productive year. Whilst very much focused on work at the local level, the Project has been actively engaged on chalk streams issues at broader scales, from catchment to national levels.



The Assendon Stream (photo: R Sanderson)

One of the highlights for the Project was the set-up of a riverfly hub for the Chilterns, Hertfordshire and Middlesex area. The purpose of the hub is to provide training in the Riverfly Partnership's Anglers Riverfly Monitoring Initiative (ARMI) for local volunteers in the upper Lea, Colne and South Chiltern catchments. ARMI provides anglers, conservationists and communities with a tool to monitor the health of their local river and detect and report pollution incidents to the Environment Agency. In its first year the hub has already gone some way towards achieving its ambitious aim of setting up riverfly groups on every river with groups now monitoring on 14 out of the 34 rivers across the hub area.

The project continued to work with a range of partners on catchment-scale projects this year to develop plans for the Colne and South Chilterns catchments and worked in support of the Chilterns Conservation Board in delivery of the Chilterns Farm Advice Project, now in its final year.

November saw the launch of the World Wildlife Fund's State of England's Chalk Streams report. Ten years on from the Environment Agency's own report into the health of the country's chalk streams, the WWF report sought to review progress that has been made towards their improvement. The report, which the CCSP contributed to, concluded that although significant steps have been taken to improve their state, more than three quarters are still failing to meet Water Framework Directive objectives. Clearly there is some way to go if we are to see these iconic rivers returned to health and if it is to be achieved at all, partnership projects like the Chilterns Chalk Streams Project will be key.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Allen Beechey".

Allen Beechey,
Chilterns Chalk Streams Project Officer

Highlights from 2014/2015

Enhancement Work and project support

The CCSP provided support to the Environment Agency and Wild Trout Trust in holding five **habitat enhancement** workshops in April and May. The Project held riverfly monitoring taster sessions during the days, which were held on the rivers Gade, Bulbourne and Misbourne. Over the five days, more than 40 people received training in enhancement techniques and 600m of river was enhanced.

The CCSP provided funding and technical support to an enhancement scheme to enhance the **R. Ver** along Riverside Way near Colney Street, which was completed this year. Led by Hertfordshire Countryside Management Services, the £33,000 scheme involved an extensive programme of tree management work, in-stream habitat enhancement. and installation of a new interpretation board to explain the work carried out.

Highlights from 2014/2015

A scheme to enhance two sections of the R. Wye at Desborough Recreation Ground in High Wycombe was completed in July. Led by Wycombe District Council and supported by the Wild Trout Trust and the CCSP under the umbrella of **Revive the Wye**, the £80,000 scheme involved the re-naturalisation of 420m of river, removing concrete banks and a series of weirs that were obstructing fish passage.



The R. Wye at Desborough Recreation Ground in High Wycombe, before and after restoration work.

In March the Project provided **funding support** to Revive the Wye for the purchase of vital tools and equipment for their conservation volunteer group.



Volunteers and supporters of Revive the Wye with their new equipment.

Catchment Work

The Project continued to work alongside co-hosts Groundwork South, under the banner of the **Colne Catchment Action Network**, securing £18,500 to support the continued development of Defra's Catchment-based Approach for the Colne and its tributaries. In October, the Network launched an interactive catchment plan for the Colne online www.colnecan.org.uk



Work on the **Chilterns Farm Advice Project** continued this year. Led by the Chilterns Conservation Board with support from the CCSP, 27 targeted farm advice visits have been completed to date, covering over 7,000 hectares of farmland. A small grants scheme was set up to support work which improves land management and reduces pollution to rivers and the chalk aquifer.

Education and Monitoring

Working in partnership with the River Chess Association, the CCSP continued its highly successful **Trout in the Classroom** project this year with **five schools** in the **Chess Valley** participating.

In partnership with H&MWT's Hertfordshire Living Rivers Project, the River Chess Association, Friends of the Mimram, Colne Valley Fisheries Consultative, The Riverfly Partnership, Environment Agency and Affinity Water, the Project set up a **Riverfly training hub** for the Chilterns, Hertfordshire & Middlesex area. The hub ran 5 workshops in 2014, training 5 Riverfly tutors, over 50 new monitors and helped set up new groups on 10 rivers across the hub area including the Gade, Bulbourne and Wye. There are now over 100 sites being monitored across the hub area.

In February, the CCSP organised a **Riverfly Day** on behalf of the Chilterns, Herts & Middlesex Riverfly hub. Fifty delegates attended the event held at Latimer Park Farm in the Chess Valley.



Riverfly training workshop at Latimer Park (photo: P. Jennings).

Raising Awareness

On behalf of the Chilterns, Hertfordshire and Middlesex Riverfly hub the Project gave a joint presentation with the Herts Living Rivers Project on how to set up a Riverfly hub at the Riverfly Partnership's biennial Conference, held in November.

The CCSP supported the Blueprint for Water's **Chalk Streams Conference**, which was hosted by the World Wildlife Fund in February. The Conference sought to build on the recently published State of England's Chalk Streams report.

The **Wild Trout Trust** held their Annual Get-Together in the Chess Valley in June, hosted by the River Chess Association. The CCSP supported the event organising a riverfly training course and giving a presentation on the work of the Project.

The **Annual Forum** of the Project was held on 8th July 2014 at The Box Moor Trust Centre near Hemel Hempstead in the Bulbourne Valley. Over forty delegates attended.

Eight **visits** were made to sites along five of the Chilterns' rivers to give **advice** on river and riparian management and to assist with the development of enhancement schemes and five **talks** were given to local groups.

The **riparian landowner advice leaflet** for the River Wye was revised and re-published.

Financial Statement 2014/2015

Income Source	Amount £
Chilterns Conservation Board	14,538
Environment Agency	5,000
Affinity Water	3,300
Thames Water	3,300
Chiltern Society	2,500
Bucks CC	4,000
Chiltern DC	1,000
Dacorum BC	900
Defra Colne catchment project	6,850
Fees/donations	505
Riverfly hub	3,550
Total	45,443*

Expenditure Details	Amount £
Officer costs	34,911
Travel	709
Office costs	348
Annual Report	185
Publications (River Wye leaflet)	175
Project support	1,628
Riverfly hub	2,777
Total	40,733

* £4,710 will be carried forward to support project work in 2015/16.

2015/2016 Achievements so far and still to come.....

- £46,000 secured to support delivery of the Colne catchment plan
- Riverfly training workshops
- Water vole surveys - Chess, Misbourne & Ewelme Brook
- More habitat enhancement 'masterclasses' on Chilterns rivers - August
- Trout in the Classroom
- Restoration projects on the Bulbourne, Chess, Misbourne & Wye



Riverfly workshop for the River Thames Conservation Trust at Stadhampton in April.

Chilterns Chalk Streams Project
Chilterns Conservation Board
The Lodge, 90 Station Road, Chinnor Oxon OX39 4HA

Tel: 01844 355502
e-mail: abeechey@chilternsaonb.org
www.chilternsaonb.org

Led by the Chilterns Conservation Board, the Chilterns Chalk Streams Project is a partnership of the following organisations:

A Working Partnership

The considerable achievements of the Chilterns Chalk Streams Project would not have been possible without the committed support of the partner organisations, many of whom provide significant staff time to help deliver the Project's work programme. Many thanks are due to all involved in the Project.



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