

## **River Chess Association Public Meeting No. 3**

29<sup>th</sup> March 2010, 7.30 pm Chenies Manor

In attendance:

Paul Jennings  
Roger Wotton  
Allen Beechey  
Keith Hoffmeister  
David Witton  
Norman Bennet  
Chris Stanners  
Ken Austin  
Phil Folly  
Eric Holt  
Sue Brawn

Stephen Webster  
David Le Neve Foster  
Kathryn Graves  
Andrew Clark  
Brian Dunn  
Janet Bennet  
Phil Nixon  
Richard Berry  
Tori Shepherd  
Andrea Polden  
Ellie Powers

### **Apologies for Absence**

Apologies were received from Angela and Anthony Coleman, Kate Heppell, Scott Horton, Cheryl Gillan MP, Charles Macleod Matthews, Richard Jones, John Taylor and Miles Morgan.

### **1. Introduction and Approval of Previous Minutes**

Paul Jennings thanked everybody for coming and provided a brief overview of the activities of the association's committee since the last meeting in December 2009.

The minutes of the meeting held on the 2<sup>nd</sup> December 2009 were approved as a correct record.

### **2. Adoption of New Committee Members**

Paul Jennings proposed the adoption of Kathryn Graves and Roger Wotton on to the committee. There were no objections.

### **3. Riverfly Partnership River Invertebrate Monitoring**

William Tall, a member of the Wandle Piscators and the Wandle River Trust, give a presentation on monitoring invertebrates to assess the health of chalk streams. Volunteers can participate in a Riverfly Monitoring scheme once the Riverfly Partnership has trained them so that they can identify eight key species with differing sensitivities to pollution. Sites for monthly monitoring are chosen in agreement with the Environment Agency and will cover the whole catchment. Monitoring will enable the establishment of a baseline for the river and the Environment Agency will then set a trigger level; if the population falls below this, the Environment Agency will investigate. For example, the monitoring on the Wandle was able to alert the Environment Agency to a diesel spill in the river.

In the case of the Wandle, riverfly monitoring data shows a dramatic decrease in invertebrate life after the outfall from the sewage works on the river. At 1.5 miles

downstream of the outfall, the water quality is almost back to that upstream of the works.

Publicity surrounding the Wandle monitoring has garnered a lot of interest from the public and has contributed to a decline in fly-tipping and low level pollution incidents.

Paul Jennings asked whether there were exceptional sewage discharges into the Wandle. William Tall explained that after rainfall events lasting more than 3 hours, the sewage works' tanks become full and sewage enters the river. In addition, the Wandle suffers from persistent degradation of the water quality as a result of the sewage works, even though the site meets all its consents. Furthermore, there is no formal consent for phosphates on the Wandle and the levels in the river are 5 to 6 ppm, compared with the Environment Agency's target of 0.1 ppm.

In response to a query as to the relationship between the Wandle Trust and Thames Water, William Tall explained that Thames Water is their main sponsor and that the relationship is relatively harmonious. The Riverfly Monitoring data is reported to their monthly board meetings. However, Thames Water seems reluctant to respond to prompts about water quality.

#### **4. Report of the Committee**

##### **(i) Web Site**

Kathryn Graves explained that the committee was proposing to develop a web site to help communicate with association members and to raise awareness of the association and the issues facing the Chess more generally. The committee is currently liaising with Chesham-based web design company Millipedia to develop the site. Furthermore, a Facebook page will be created.

##### **(ii) Education**

David Hyde spoke about the Trout in the Classroom project that he has been working on for two years. Students at Rickmansworth Park School and Waterside School (Chesham) have been rearing brown trout in tanks and learning about trout and chalk streams. As part of this project, David has given talks about the Chess, man's impact on the river and the trout life cycle.

The committee is currently assisting a number of PhD students to conduct research on stretches of the Chess.

##### **(iii) Research**

Roger Wotton, of University College London, described his research interests and explained that he has conducted some work on *Gammarus* shrimp on the Chess. Roger is helping to develop links between the association and academics, such as hydrology and pollution specialists.

**(iv) Publicity**

David Le Neve Foster spoke about using publicity to keep the association and its objectives in the public eye, and particularly to publicise when exceptional sewage release incidents occur. In addition to the web site, publicity will take place via emails, newsletters and press releases. David urged people to let the committee know if they detect a sewage release on the river, to assist with lobbying Thames Water. Paul Jennings said that foaming events sometimes occur on the river and asked anyone who spots foam on the river to take a photo and send it to the committee.

**(v) Water Quality**

Stephen Webster reported that the association has signed up to the Riverfly Monitoring Programme and that anyone interested in becoming a monitoring volunteer should contact Stephen.

**(vi) Other News from the River**

Ken Austin reported that Impress the Chess, a partnership to conserve and protect the Chess in Chesham, had recently held a successful open forum at which Paul Jennings had given a presentation on the association.

Allen Beechey explained that Chiltern District Council and Chesham Town Council are working together to upgrade the recycling centre on Moor Road in Chesham. This site has long been a source of windblown rubbish into the Chess, but a litter screen will be installed as part of the upgrade.

Allen reported that the Environment Agency was conducting flood defence works at Lords Mill in Chesham, which involved dredging channels and creating reed beds. This work was stopped by the detection of signs of water voles in the river. If the presence of water voles is confirmed, this will be the first time the mammals have been found at this site since the 1990s.

The association has become a member of the Association of River Trusts.

**(vii) Core Strategy**

Chiltern District Council is currently consulting on its Local Development Framework Core Strategy, which outlines how future development will take place in Chiltern and proposes that 650 houses be built in Chesham between 2006-2026. Whilst the document makes some promising statements about water use and sewerage infrastructure, it does not acknowledge that there are existing problems that need to be resolved. There was a general consensus of opinion that the Core Strategy was vague in how it proposed to deal with abstraction, drainage and infrastructure. The association will be responding to the consultation with these concerns.

**(viii) High Speed Rail Link**

The association will monitor the HS2 situation, as creating a tunnel through the chalk could have an impact on groundwater. Ellie Powers of Veolia Water said that Veolia

had not yet been consulted, but will be raising its concerns, particularly regarding the Misbourne.

## **5. Events**

### **(i) Association Spring Walk**

The association is proposing to hold a spring walk along a stretch of the Chess. The date has not yet been finalised, but is likely to be set for the end of April.

### **(ii) Wild Trout Trust Master Class**

The association are organising a master class by the Wild Trout Trust to demonstrate work that can be done on the river.

Paul explained that the numbers attending both these events would be restricted.

## **6. Any Other Business**

### **(i) Photography**

Keith Hoffmeister explained that the Chess Valley U3A photography group will be holding an exhibition at Chenies Manor during July of photos taken along the length of the Chess. Members of the group would like access to the non-public sections of the river and in return would be able to supply photographs of the river. Keith said that the group would be willing to help publicise the association during their exhibition.

### **(ii) Finances**

Paul Jennings said that whilst the association is not looking to receive membership fees, it would welcome donations to help cover its costs and is intending to set up a bank account.

### **(iii) River on the Edge**

Allen Beechey explained that the WWF have produced the short film "Rivers On the Edge" (available on You Tube) as part of their campaign on the effect of abstraction on chalk streams. Allen suggested that the association should have a presence at the forthcoming campaign launch meeting, to see if the campaign and any funding, can be extended to the Chess.