

**River Chess Association Public Meeting No. 4**  
27<sup>th</sup> October 2010, 7.30 pm Blackwell Farm, Chesham

In attendance:

Paul Jennings (Chairman)  
Roger Wotton  
Allen Beechey  
Keith Hoffmeister  
Annabel Briggs  
Terry Tyler  
Norman Bennet  
Gill Leaper  
Tony Leach  
Roger Lerry  
Angela Colman  
Ken Austin  
Richard Burren

Stephen Webster  
David Le Neve Foster  
Kathryn Graves  
David Briggs  
Kate Heppell  
Sue Burr  
Janet Bennet  
David Leach  
Rob Sage  
Anthony Colman  
Richard Berry  
Phil Folly

**Apologies for Absence**

Apologies were received from Cheryl Gillan MP, David Gauke MP, Andrea Polden, Ellie Powers, Andrew Clark, Geraldine Berry and Jean Pritchard.

**1. Approval of Previous Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on the 29<sup>th</sup> March 2010 were approved as a correct record.

**2. Satellite Monitoring of Ground Movement**

Richard Burren of Fugro NPA Ltd. gave a presentation on the use of satellite data to monitor ground movement resulting from a variety of phenomena, including oil abstraction, water abstraction, tunnelling and geohazards such as seismic activity. The techniques allow the use of a large quantity of data taken over time to generate a precise picture of ground movement. The Chess Valley is largely very stable and Richard offered to forward a snapshot of the Chesham area on to the group.

**3. Report from the Committee**

**(i) Riverfly Monitoring**

A monthly fly monitoring scheme has been established along the length of the river to monitor for changes in water quality. If there is a serious decline in water quality, detecting the resulting decrease in the riverfly population will trigger an Environment Agency investigation. Paul requested that anybody interested in monitoring get in touch with the committee.

**(ii) Water Quality**

Members of the committee met with Thames Water representatives to discuss the release of untreated sewage into the Chess from Chesham Sewage Treatment Works. At the meeting, the Thames Water representatives said that there were no

plans to upgrade the site and that they did not believe that it has any major issues. However, Chiltern District Council's Core Strategy document includes an acknowledgement from Thames Water that the site is operating 'close to capacity'.

Committee members will be making a site visit to the Chesham Sewage Treatment Works in the near future.

**(iii) Chiltern District Council Core Strategy**

The RCA made a consultation response to the Core Strategy, outlining its concerns over the impact of further building development in the Chesham area on the River Chess. A revised draft of the Strategy is currently subject to a further round of consultation, and the Association will be making a second submission.

**(iv) Association of River Trusts**

The RCA has become an associate member of the Association of River Trusts.

**(v) Education and Research**

RCA members hosted two site visits from Chesham and Rickmansworth schools to educate them about the chalk stream environment. MSc students have also had site visits on the river.

**(vi) Publicity**

There was an RCA stall at the open day of Hazeldene Farm in Chesham, which attracted a significant amount of interest from the public.

The RCA's web site will soon go live and the Facebook page is publicly available.

**(vii) Low Flows**

The RCA is keen to work with Veolia Central on tackling the high level of water demand locally and its resulting impacts on the Chess. Paul thanked Rob Sage of Veolia for attending the meeting. Rob summarised the problems caused by high water demand and low rainfall in recent years. The Chesham area is already consuming more water than can be abstracted locally, so water is being imported to meet demand. Rob offered to give a talk at the next meeting.

Allen Beechey, the Chilterns Chalk Streams Project Officer, provided an annual overview of the water resources situation. Following an average winter recharge period for 2009/10, with groundwater peaking in March, the area experienced the driest first six months of the year since 1976. This was followed by an exceptionally wet August, but this contributed little to groundwater levels. The groundwater is still declining during a dry October, with recharge hoped to begin in December or January.

A question was asked about the effect of local abstraction and the Chesham Sewage Treatment Works on river flows in the upper Chess. It was explained that local water abstraction results in lower flows. After use, the domestic water supply is treated and released from the sewage works below Chesham. The presence of the sewage

works provides stability of water flow in the Chess below Chesham, but this means that the upper Chess suffers disproportionately from low flows caused by abstraction.

#### **(viii) Environmental Improvements**

A recent work party was held at Holloway Lane, Chesham, by volunteers from RCA's partner group Impress the Chess. Improvements included rubbish removal and vegetation management to improve light levels.

#### **(ix) Invasive Species**

Himalayan balsam and Japanese knotweed are the two major weeds affecting the river. There has been a recent change in the law, giving Himalayan balsam the same legal status as Japanese knotweed; this means it is illegal to plant it or otherwise cause it to grow in the wild. There are substantial infestations of Himalayan balsam in Chesham, and Chesham Environmental Group is carrying out regular control. Chesham Town Council has started a three-year control programme for the Japanese knotweed stand on the Moor. Orange balsam is another invasive species, which is present along the entire river, although it is less pernicious.

Allen described appropriate methods of control and waste disposal for the weeds and requested that any sightings of these plants be reported to him.

A question was asked about how to identify which plants in the river should be controlled and which should be left. There is an Environment Agency publication on invasive aquatic plants that can be downloaded from their web site, and RCA will circulate the link to the document.

A discussion was held on the invasive shrimp *Dikerogammarus villosus* (known as the killer shrimp) that has been found in English water bodies. It was suggested that the riverfly monitoring team could monitor for this species as part of their monthly river visits.

Mink continue to be sighted in the catchment and one was trapped at Holloway Lane very recently. The Chilterns Chalk Streams Project has placed a mink raft just below the former Pow Wow bottling site in Chesham to try to detect mink entering the area from the top of the catchment.

Signal crayfish are spreading on the river and are being trapped at some sites. The RCA has information on trapping methods and how to obtain the necessary licence.

## **4. Events**

### **(i) Walks**

A successful spring walk was held along the upper Chess, providing a good opportunity for people to see parts of the river that are not open to the public. A future walk is being planned for a different stretch of the river.

**(ii) Wild Trout Trust Masterclass**

The committee is organising a masterclass on the Chess to train landowners and volunteers in carrying out environmental improvements.

**5. Any Other Business**

Paul thanked David and Annabel Briggs for hosting the meeting.