

Annual Report

2023/2024



This has been another very active year for Cam Valley Forum and we are pleased that there is now a recognition by government and the water companies that the reality of over-abstraction cannot be continued. We have maintained a high profile in the media with support from the local Cambridge papers for our campaigns and some national coverage for instance a BBC report on the bathing water designation campaign.

However, we cannot reduce our efforts as provisional government proposals for development in Cambridgeshire could have a significant effect on our Chalk streams and the animals and plants that are dependent on them. We are continuing to put pressure on Cambridge Water Company to impose a TUB (Temporary Use Ban, AKA Hosepipe Ban) during the summer months, and a motion is being put to the AGM regarding this. There is now an acknowledgement by Cambridge Water that this needs to be considered, but we still have concerns about the trigger levels that are suggested to activate the policy.

All this could not be achieved without the support of our members. I would like to thank you all for your physical, moral and financial support. Those of us on your committee appreciate the warm and welcome help. We have had generous donations from individual members this year and an increase in life members.

Our water quality monitoring team have once again been very active this year. I would like to thank them for their excellent work, especially Mike Foley, Richard Sewell and Richard Calverley. Current projects include regular sampling of the Rhee (upstream of Haslingfield sewage treatment works) and Vicar's Brook. In both cases river samples are tested for the presence of *E. coli* and phosphate, using accurate DIY methods developed in cooperation with river groups in other catchments. It is particularly encouraging that this year has seen Anglian Water take over fully CVF's sampling programme of last year which measured levels of faecal indicators (eg *E. coli*) in the Cam downstream of Haslingfield STW. The data from this collaboration can be found on our website. Whilst faecal matter is problematic for swimmers, it is high phosphate levels (as well as low flow) that is the killer of Chalk streams. The CVF works with all the local river groups in the Cam valley. We have provided four local groups with small grants to assist their work. This year the CVF helped the village of Toft (on the Bourn Brook) form its very own river group. It is heartening that so many people are coming together to care for their local water courses and it is sincerely hoped that other Cam Valley villages follow Toft's example.

There is also a team of pennywort and Himalayan Balsam spotters, co-ordinated by Mike Foley. It is encouraging that very few patches are now seen. When identified they are quickly removed.

Signal crayfish are ubiquitous in our watercourses and cause significant damage. They stir up sediment which affects the invertebrate populations as well as being voracious predators of species vital to Chalk stream health. Unfortunately, to date, there is no successful method of controlling their numbers.

Linked to our water quality monitoring activities was our campaign to get Bathing Water Designation for a stretch of the Cam in Newnham at the historic bathing area of Sheep's Green. Special thanks go to Anne Miller, Michael Goodhart and their team for an enormous amount of effort to explain the advantages of this proposal. In this we received support from many Councillors, which was much appreciated, and our formal application was supported by both Cambridge City Council and South Cambridgeshire District Council and Anglian Water. We are particularly grateful to councillors Katie Thornburrow, Cameron Holloway and Pippa Heylings for their help and encouragement.

We have heard from DEFRA that our application has been shortlisted along with 26 others. We hope to hear in April that the application is successful.

Working links characterise the Forum's work: Robert Martyr, lead of Greater Cambridge Chalk Stream Project from the City Council, attended a committee meeting together with Sam Phillips, Environment Agency Chalk Stream Catchment Coordinator, East Anglia and Richu Baby, Environment Agency Chalk Stream Officer, East Anglia. Robert returned to our February committee meeting with two more guests, Nick Mann a Friend of the Shep who is an advocate for rain water harvesting, and Rupert Pearce Gould, Chair of the CamEO Steering Group.

We also had a presentation from Claire Tancell (Principal Ecology Officer - Uttlesford District Council) who has been employed to help the Upper Cam in Essex.

I would also like to thank our ex-officio committee members Rob Mungovan of the Wild Trout Trust and Ruth Hawksley from the Wildlife Trust for their continued assistance. Their advice on our projects and activities is invaluable. We have also benefited from Elizabeth Ranelagh's links to the farming world.

Clara Todd sat as our observer on the Cam Conservators meetings and we had a presentation about their work at a committee meeting from David Partridge, the Conservators' River Patrol Officer.

We continued our walks programme and I would like to thank the walks organisers, particularly David Brooks. The guided walks were much appreciated by those members that attended.

Cam Valley Forum is only one small player in a huge water-related network. We are linked into CAMEO and committee members, particularly Stephen Tomkins, Richard Sewell, Clara Todd and Mike Foley have attended a range of water-related conferences, AGMs and other discussion groups organised by the water companies and water-related groups. This has enabled Cam Valley Forum to up its profile and ensure that our arguments are heard as the future of our watercourses is debated by those involved in planning for the future.

We welcome the proposals for new Fen Reservoir(s) but are concerned by the timescale with the earliest possible operational date proposed being 2035. We also welcome Cambridge Water's proposal to transfer some water from Grafham Water before that date.

Beyond the County we are connected to the Rivers Trust and Chalk Aquifer Alliance - to mention two of the larger umbrella groups.

We are grateful that there are other groups active in nature and habitat preservation and thank particularly the Friends of the Cam for their high-profile campaigns.

I would like to thank all the members of the committee for their support. David Brooks has done a sterling job again in producing regular informative and entertaining newsletters and Anne Miller maintains an interesting website and blog. Although Stephen Tomkins stood down as Chair he has continued to be a very active committee member, meeting, writing and influencing a wide variety of individuals and water company representatives important to our campaigns.

For those new to our activities and who would be interested in becoming a member (a bargain at £10 per year or £150 for life membership) or just receiving our newsletters and other communications; there is a sign-up sheet by the entrance and at the refreshment table.

Bruce Huett
Chairman for the AGM

March 2024

Appendix

see <https://camvalleyforum.uk> and other pages of our web site for updates on

- Our Committee
- Past Accounts
- Annual subscriptions
- Cam Valley catchment River Groups
- Grants
- Past Projects
- Water Quality
- Drought and Flood
- River web resources open to all
- All our past Newsletters

The following CVF documents have been produced or published in the past year
See <https://camvalleyforum.uk/publications/>

- River Turbidity: Investigating water turbidity of the River Rhee and Cam (2021-22) *Mike Foley* ,
 - *January 2023*
- Consultation response on Cambridge Water's Water Resources Management Plan.
 - *May 2023.*
- Presentation at CVF Bathing Water Designation Consultation Event
 - *August 2023*
- A plea for better environmental understanding in water planning from the Cam Valley Forum
 - *September 2023*

This is a link to a BBC report about our designation application:

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-cambridgeshire-67040621>