

Cam Valley Forum Annual Report 2024

2024 has been another busy and productive year for Cam Valley Forum, in our four broad areas of activity.



Identifying, monitoring and tackling problems affecting the river

Ending Sewage pollution

<https://camvalleyforum.uk>

In May 2024, as a result of three year's work, the River Cam at Sheep's Green became a Designated Bathing Water. This resulted in the water being officially monitored during the bathing season. Not surprisingly, the water quality was rated as "Poor" which, as we had hoped, triggered official investigations into the causes, which should lead to investment in solutions. We have had several meetings with both the Environment Agency (EA) and Anglian Water (AW) to exchange information and urge action. Haslingfield's ageing sewage infrastructure is clearly a big contributor, so we were pleased to hear that AW is planning to invest at least £5M into improvements and possibly as much as £30M. Although the investigations are still ongoing, the EA tells us that AW are required to implement the necessary improvements at Haslingfield by 2028. We are hopeful that the water quality in the River Cam will improve significantly thereafter, making it safer for swimmers and other river users.



Swimmer. Photo
Anne Miller

With the advice from the "Save the Deben" group we invested in our own E.Coli testing laboratory, consisting of an incubator and petri-film test strips. This makes testing very much quicker and cheaper than sending samples to a lab. We have helped Haslingfield Parish Council do the same.

Ecological Water Quality Monitoring. We continued intensive monitoring at key sites, to check levels of the major nutrients (phosphate and nitrate) which contribute to eutrophication which is so damaging in the natural environment. Phosphate levels are now slightly decreasing in several areas, and dramatically so in the Granta since late 2024, when Anglian Water introduced a strict consent permit on treated sewage discharge at Linton. However, we have still found stretches elsewhere where inadequate sewage treatment is causing raised levels.

We have monitored turbidity for at least nine years: the Cam is noticeably murky even in high summer during low flows. Turbidity is of major concern as silt smothers the riverbed to the detriment of sensitive Chalk-stream plants, their associated invertebrates and fish spawning. The River Rhee is particularly affected: CVF and Dr Steve Boreham of WildReach <https://www.wildreach.co.uk/> suggest this is perhaps due to the local clay geology. Turbidity is also aggravated by activities of the highly invasive American Signal Crayfish whose bank burrowing causes bank erosion (even collapse) and disturbs bed sediment.

We also participated in a major study of pollutants, organised by Surfers Against Sewage with an analytical team at York University. This showed that the top three organic pollutants in the River Cam at Sheep's Green were Paracetamol, Caffeine and Chrysene. Of these, only Chrysene was at a concerning level. Chrysene may originate from various sources, including road runoff and as a combustion product, as well as being a component found in the banned preservative, creosote.

In early 2024 CVF contributed to a project of shared understanding of the hydrological and morphological science of intermittent chalk streams, funded through the Water Industry National Environment Programme (WINEP) The scientific lead was the UK Centre of Ecology and Hydrology (UKCEH), working with the Open University and Hydro-Ecology Consulting Ltd.

Invasive Species: Balsam Bashing. We continue our seasonal work tackling invasive species. Having successfully eradicated Floating Pennywort upstream of Baits Bite Lock, our attention has more recently been focused on Himalayan Balsam. We ran a couple of working parties in June and July on the lower end of Bourne Brook, while individuals have dealt with a few local patches elsewhere. We made progress, but there will still be a lot to do next year. We welcome volunteers wanting to help.



Balsam on Bourne
Brook.

Building new collaborations and initiatives to improve the river and its surroundings

CVF committee members are actively involved in helping revive the Cam Catchment Partnership. CCP's initial focus will be on coordinating the creation of "bottom up" Catchment Plans for the Cam Valley, involving the many local river groups and organisations such as CVF. <https://www.rivercam.org.uk/>

We have also participated in meetings with other co-ordinating and networking bodies concerned with water and/or the catchment (notably CAMEO <https://www.cameopartnership.org/> and Water Resources East), in order to share experiences.

Campaigning for improvements and advising on projects that may affect the river

Few can be unaware of the challenges caused by the political and economic drive for Greater Cambridge's "Growth". Despite the unusually wet weather in 2024, we're one of the driest places in the country and The Environment Agency has recommended a 50% cut in abstraction. We have been campaigning and raising awareness of the need to reduce abstraction and water use to save our Chalk Streams.

We have challenged, shared platforms and responded to consultations with Cambridge Water, and have had meetings with senior staff and, separately, with Lord Chris Smith, independent Chair of the Cambridge Water Company, Master of Pembroke College and also former Chair of the EA. We submitted responses to Cambridge Water's new Drought Plan pre-consultation. We also met with Paul Leinster, now Chair of the Greater Cambridge Partnership (GCP) Water Scarcity Group.



River Shep.

Photo Rob Mungovan

We continue to advocate for hosepipe bans to be imposed from the early stages of droughts, as they should be one of the most effective means of raising awareness of the need to reduce the amount of water we use. We produced and handed out around 1000 water saving leaflets at showings of Tony Eva's wonderful film "Pure Clean Water" <https://purecleanwater.film/> These gave advice on estimating your water consumption and saving water and were well received.

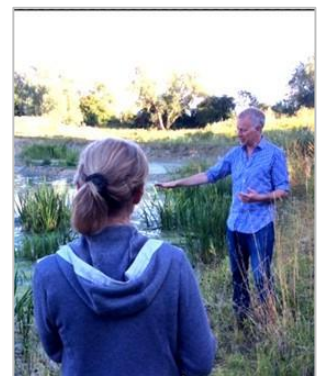
CVF has highlighted the need for a reservoir for many years, and so we support the Fen Reservoir proposal. This will store water when it is plentiful in the winter, rather than letting it flow to the sea. Scheduled to start operation in ~2035, it would provide water for households and businesses, and most importantly reduce the amount that is abstracted from the chalk aquifer. The EA has been urging abstraction reductions for some time, and we are calling for a guarantee that this will indeed happen.

Promoting understanding of the river environment

We use our contacts and expertise to inspire and inform others, encouraging people to get involved in protecting our natural environment. This includes:

- Our informative newsletter,
- Our popular nature walks
- Our publications, occasional blog and Citizen Science Reports
- Interviews with ITV news, BBC East, and BBC Radio Cambridge.

On a national level we spoke at a conference organised by Surfers against Sewage in Manchester. We also organised a coach to, participated in, River Action UK's March for Clean Water in London on 3 November 2024.



Mill River Nature Walk

Having been founded in December 2000, we look forward to a similarly busy and productive 2025, in the lead up to celebrating our 25th Anniversary next year.

Do join us and get involved <https://camvalleyforum.uk/join-us/>

Anne Miller, Sue Wells.

Appendix

List of committee members 2024

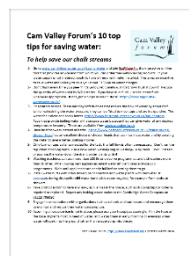
Anne Miller
Bruce Huett
Charles Turner
Clara Todd
David Brooks
Elizabeth Ranelagh
Michael Goodhart
Richard Calverley
Richard Sewell
Rob Mungovan
Ruth Hawksley
Stephen Tomkins
Sue Wells

CVF Reports published during 2024

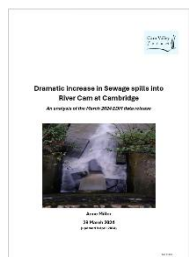
These reports are all available to download here: <https://camvalleyforum.uk/publications/>



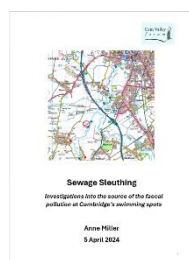
Press Release: Major nationwide study of Designated Bathing Water monitoring reveals River Cam had the joint highest number (48) of organic chemicals detected [Press Release – Bathing Water Study](#)



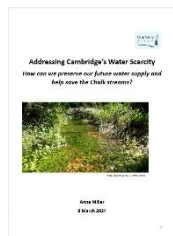
Cam Valley Forum's top 10 tips to save water and our Chalk Streams, *updated August 2024*. [CVF water saving tips. August 2024](#)



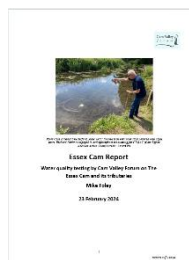
Our analysis of the March 2024 “EDM” data release on sewage overflows into the River Cam. *March 2024, updated August 2024*. [Dramatic increase in sewage spills](#)



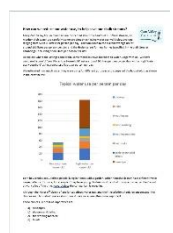
Sewage Sleuthing: investigations into the source of the faecal pollution at Cambridge's swimming spots. *April 2024* [Sewage-sleuthing-report](#)



Addressing Cambridge's Water Scarcity: Our concerns about the proposed Water Credits Scheme, March 2024. [Addressing cambridge water scarcity](#)



Water quality testing by Cam Valley Forum on The Essex Cam and its tributaries. February 2024 [Essex Cam report](#)



How low can we go? 2 sided A4 leaflet on “How can we reduce our water use, to help save our chalk streams?” February 2024. [How-low-can-we-go?](#)



1 sided A4 leaflet on “How to track your own water usage” January 2024. [How-to-track-your-water-use](#)

Consultation responses during 2024

These reports are all available to download here <https://camvalleyforum.uk/consultations/>

- Cam Valley Forum response to Cambridge Water's Drought plan. January 2025 [CVF response on Cam Water pre-consultation for 2027 drought plan](#)
- Cam Valley Forum response to Defra consultation on the reform of Bathing Water regulations. Nov 2024 [CVF response to Defra consultation on bathing water regulations](#)
- Cam Valley Forum comment on planning application 23/03204/OUT for the Beehive Centre, suggestion conditions to be imposed to prevent pollution due to waste water. October 2024 [CVF response on Beehive centre redevelopment](#)
- Cam Valley Forum's response to the consultation on the Fen Reservoir at Chatteris. August 2024. [CVF Response to Anglian Water on Chatteris Reservoir.](#)