Greater Cambridge Chalk Stream Project

March 2026 Project Update

As we move into spring 2026, the Greater Cambridge Chalk Stream Project continues to gather momentum, with significant progress made across monitoring, restoration and partnership working.

I would like to begin by thanking everyone who has contributed to the project over recent months. From volunteers supporting our weekly water quality monitoring, to partners, contractors and community groups delivering work on the ground, this is a genuinely collaborative effort across the city.

This newsletter provides an update on what has been happening across the project, what the data is telling us, and how this evidence is now directly informing restoration across Cambridge's chalk streams.

Citizen Science water quality monitoring sampling. (ARU, 2025)

Citizen Water Quality Monitoring update

Through the project, working with our lead partner on citizen science, Anglia Ruskin University, we have recruited **65 volunteers across Cambridge City and South Cambridgeshire**, including groups in Linton and Abington, who are now carrying out weekly high-resolution water quality monitoring across the chalk stream network.

This is a major achievement and a critical foundation for the project.

In a relatively short space of time, the project has established a committed and highly capable volunteer network, collecting data every week across multiple sites and in all conditions. This level of consistency and coverage is rarely achieved in urban river systems and is already transforming our understanding of how these chalk streams behave.

Anglia Ruskin University has been integral to this success. They have developed and delivered an outstanding citizen science and biological monitoring programme, combining scientific rigour with practical delivery on the ground. The structure, clarity and quality of this work has been exceptional and is now setting a benchmark for urban and rural chalk stream monitoring.

We would like to extend a sincere thank you to the ARU project team, **Emma, Alvin, Bas, Peter, Jim and Toby**, for developing and leading such a high-quality and ambitious monitoring programme. Your expertise, commitment and collaboration have been fundamental to establishing this pioneering work.

We have deliberately kept the citizen science update brief, as the **ARU Quarter 4 Water Quality Report** will be circulated alongside this newsletter. That report clearly sets out, in detail and with full scientific rigour, the water quality results from all case study sites, providing a robust and comprehensive evidence base for the project.

Cambridge City chalk stream restoration using case study demonstration sites

Volunteers (left) and contractors Aquamaintain (right) working along Cherry Hinton Brook.

Cambridge's chalk streams face multiple pressures, and there is no single solution.

The Greater Cambridge Chalk Stream Project is using a network of case study demonstration sites across the city to test a range of researched and proven methods to stabilise banks, reduce erosion, limit sedimentation, reduce turbidity and improve dissolved oxygen conditions.

These sites are not simply locations for works. They are the foundation of the project.

They are deliberately designed to generate evidence, allowing us to understand how these chalk streams function, how they respond to intervention, and critically, what works in a Greater Cambridge context.

This is essential. Restoration within Greater Cambridge must be based on evidence and process, not assumption.

Delivery on the Ground, a Huge Collective Effort

In February 2026, **Aquamaintain began work** across multiple sites throughout Cambridge, delivering a range of in-channel and bankside techniques designed to enhance urban chalk streams.

Aquamaintain was provided with an evidence-based assessment of Cambridge's chalk streams, outlining the multiple pressures and constraints within the system. Working closely with the Greater Cambridge Chalk Stream Project, Biodiversity Team and Flood and Drainage Team, they have developed and delivered site-specific designs for the case study sites.

The Aquamaintain team have been exemplary in their approach. The quality of their work has been excellent, their professionalism outstanding, and their willingness to share knowledge with volunteers and the wider community has been invaluable.

Aquamaintain working along Hobson's Brook. (HCT, 2026)

Alongside this, GCCSP staff and volunteers have worked in partnership with **Abbey People** and the **Hobson's Conduit Trust** to deliver city-wide work parties. These have installed in-channel and bankside features, demonstrating what can be achieved through coordinated, community-led action.

Anglia Ruskin students volunteering in Coldham's Common

We are extremely grateful to the **students from Anglia Ruskin University** who have supported these work parties and made a significant contribution to delivery on the ground. A particular thank you to **Emma Dominic** for inspiring and organising such strong student involvement.

Community volunteers working along Hobson's Brook. (HCT, 2026)

Volunteers and contractors Aquamaintain working along East Cambridge Main Drain.

The project has now established a dedicated team of over **20 volunteers** supporting practical habitat improvements across Cambridge City. This growing volunteer base is a key part of the project, delivering meaningful change while building long-term stewardship of these streams.

It is also important to recognise the work carried out prior to this phase of delivery. **Vic Smith, Nature Reserve Officer**, working with her volunteer group and **Abbey People**, delivered in-channel and bankside improvements along Coldham's Brook in 2025, laying important foundations for the current programme of work.

Vic Smith and volunteers working along Coldham's Brook

We would also like to thank a number of organisations and landowners who have supported delivery across the sites. Thank you to **Bidwells for granting access to Hobson's Brook** via Darrien's Meadow, **Anthony, Wendy** from the City Council **Parks Development and SOS team** for access to Coldham's Common and for removing waste from site, and Sainsbury's for allowing equipment and materials to be stored during the Cherry Hinton Brook works.

We are also grateful to **Kathryn, Brian** and **Darren** from the **Ordinary Watercourse Consent team**, and **Deborah**, **Senior Ecologist** at **Cambridgeshire County Council**, for supporting the project through the consent process.

This phase of delivery marks a significant milestone for the project.

So far, the work across Cambridge has delivered:

- over **1,300 metres of in-channel restoration**
- approximately **1,200 metres of bankside stabilisation and revetment**
- approximately **1.4 hectares of springhead and spring system restoration**

Water Voles and Bankside Works at Cherry Hinton Brook

We are aware that there has been some concern regarding the installation of coir matting along sections of Cherry Hinton Brook, particularly in relation to potential impacts on water voles.

To ensure that all works were informed by robust ecological evidence, Anglia Ruskin University undertook a full, systematic water vole survey along approximately 600 metres of the brook in November 2025. This survey recorded clear evidence of water vole presence across the site, including burrows, feeding stations, latrines and other field signs, confirming that the brook supports an active, though locally variable, population.

Sub optimal water vole habitat along Cherry Hinton Brook

Crucially, the survey also assessed habitat condition. Much of the reach where bankside works have taken place was identified as sub-optimal habitat, characterised by steep, unstable banks, deep silt, heavy shading and limited suitable bankside vegetation for burrowing or refuge. Only one section of the surveyed reach was classified as optimal, with the majority of the brook offering fragmented and degraded habitat conditions.

Coir matting to stabilise eroding banks and establish native marginal plants along Cherry Hinton Brook

The areas where coir matting has been installed fall within these lower quality sections.

The purpose of these works is therefore not to replace high-quality habitat, but to address existing degradation and begin the process of habitat recovery.

Coir matting is a well-established, soft engineering technique used to stabilise eroding banks. It provides immediate protection to loose soils while creating the conditions needed for vegetation to establish. Importantly, it is fully biodegradable and will naturally break down over time, typically within around four years, as plant roots take over the stabilising function.

These banks have been seeded with a diverse mix of native marginal plant species. These species are selected not only for their ability to stabilise soils through deep root systems, but also because they form part of the natural diet of water voles and provide the dense cover required for shelter and protection.

The survey highlights that water vole presence is strongly associated with well-developed bankside and emergent vegetation, stable banks suitable for burrowing, and consistent food availability. These are exactly the conditions that the current works are designed to create.

During the works, appropriate safeguards have been in place, including ecological supervision, pre-works checks and clear identification of burrows to ensure that impacts are avoided or minimised. The survey concludes that, when undertaken in this way, the works present a low and temporary level of disturbance, particularly when compared to the long-term habitat gains.

Hobson's Brook, improving marginal habitat and channel structure

Looking ahead, the long-term outcome of these interventions is expected to be strongly positive.

As vegetation establishes and the coir matting naturally degrades, these sections of bank will transition from unstable, sparsely vegetated margins into more diverse, structurally complex habitats. This will provide improved burrowing conditions, increased food availability and greater refuge for water voles, while also strengthening connectivity along the brook.

This is an important point. In urban environments, water vole populations function as a network of smaller, connected groups. Improving the quality and continuity of habitat between these areas is key to supporting their long-term resilience.

These works are therefore not a reduction in habitat, but a carefully designed step towards creating more stable, diverse and sustainable bankside conditions that will support water voles and the wider chalk stream ecosystem into the future.

Nine Wells & Giant's Grave Springhead Works

Why did the GCCSP decide to improve springheads?

Springheads are where chalk streams begin, and they shape the condition of everything downstream.

They provide the clean, cool, groundwater-fed flows that make chalk streams so rare and ecologically important. If a springhead is under pressure or poorly managed, the effects are felt throughout the entire system.

For this reason, the GCCSP project team has strongly championed the restoration and long-term management of springheads as a key part of chalk stream recovery in Cambridge. Improving conditions at the source is one of the most effective ways to strengthen water quality, habitat condition and ecological resilience across the wider catchment.

Springheads are often overlooked and left unmanaged. Over time, this can lead to sediment build-up, nutrient enrichment, urban runoff impacts, erosion and loss of stabilising vegetation. In practical terms, this means the very source of the stream begins to decline, with consequences felt downstream.

The project has therefore prioritised springheads not as isolated features, but as critical intervention points within the wider chalk stream network.

Giant's Grave, turning evidence into action

At Giant's Grave on Cherry Hinton Brook, the project has delivered a strong example of this approach in practice.

The pollution mitigation concept was developed by the GCCSP project team, using high-resolution project water quality data to calculate annual pollution loads associated with episodic runoff events. This enabled the team to clearly understand the scale and nature of

pressures entering the springhead and to design an effective interception and treatment system from the outset.

Highways drain and outfall pipe discharging urban pollution into Giant's Grave

To support this work, the project enlisted local geologist and spring-fed system specialist **Dr Steve Boreham**, who provided snapshot water quality monitoring and expert advice. This ensured that both the mitigation design and habitat enhancements were aligned with underlying geological processes and sensitive to the fragile nature of the springhead environment.

Building on the GCCSP concept and evidence base, Cambridge City Council's Drainage Team and Aquamaintain worked together to finalise the design and deliver the scheme on site.

The work has included:

- sediment clearance to restore the springhead structure
- installation of coir bedding rolls to stabilise banks and reduce erosion
- construction of a sustainable drainage system to intercept and treat polluted surface water runoff from a highways outfall before it enters the springhead

This work has been delivered within a highly sensitive environment, requiring careful planning, coordination and attention to detail at every stage.

A huge thank you to Aquamaintain for delivering this complex work to such a high standard, demonstrating both technical expertise and a clear understanding of working within fragile ecological systems.

Aquamaintain installing pollution mitigation system at Giant's Grave

We would also like to extend a special thank you to **Rachel and Luisa**, Cambridge City Council **Sustainable Drainage Engineers**, **Kenny** from the **City Council Tree Team**, and **SPL Landscapes**, who worked collaboratively to prepare the site ahead of construction. This was a significant and carefully coordinated effort.

This is a strong example of what can be achieved when multiple teams come together with a shared purpose, combining evidence, design and delivery to achieve a genuinely positive outcome for the chalk stream.

Nine Wells, restoring and rebalancing a sensitive spring system

At Nine Wells, work has focused on restoring habitat condition and improving ecological resilience within this nationally important chalk spring system.

This has been a carefully coordinated programme of works, led by Cambridge City Council and delivered through strong collaboration across teams.

Vic Smith, Nature Reserve Officer, has led extensive tree works across the site, working with SPL Landscapes to create a more diverse and balanced structure. This includes opening up areas of light, creating dappled shade across the spring channels and ponds, and retaining key areas of canopy cover to protect the system during warmer periods.

This work is already helping to restore a more natural balance of light and shade, supporting macrophyte growth, improving in-channel conditions and enhancing the wider habitat mosaic.

Alongside this, in-channel works have been carried out to:

- clean and expose loose gravels
- reduce sediment accumulation
- introduce variation in flow

- improve habitat structure within the spring channels

These interventions are designed to support natural processes, helping to maintain clean, oxygenated substrates and improve ecological conditions over time.

Nine Wells channel pre-works

The GCCSP has also been working closely with the **Hobson's Conduit Trust**, ensuring that all works are aligned with and beneficial to both Hobson's Brook and the Conduit system. This collaboration has been essential in supporting the wider connected chalk stream network.

We would also like to thank **Trumpington Farms** for granting access across their land to enable these works to take place. This cooperation has been critical to delivery at this site.

Further works are planned through continued collaboration between Vic Smith and Aquamaintain, building on the progress made and continuing to enhance the springhead habitat.

Nine Wells is a sensitive and highly valued location, and all works have been undertaken with great care and consideration. The approach reflects the wider principles of the project, working with natural processes, understanding system function, and delivering targeted improvements that support long-term resilience.

This work represents another strong example of what can be achieved through collaboration, bringing together council teams, contractors, local trusts, landowners and ecological expertise to restore and protect one of Cambridge's most important chalk spring environments.

Regenerative Farming Demonstration Site: New Shardelowes Farm

Run by the progressive and forward-thinking farmer **Ed Wombwell**, New Shardelowes Farm is becoming an important demonstration of how farming, water stewardship and nature recovery can work together in practice.

Despite a challenging period of wet weather, the farm has continued to make strong progress. Ground conditions have not made things easy, at one stage the digger became stuck while excavating the infiltration point. However, by making the most of short dry windows, the team were able to get the digger free, complete the infiltration area and install around **250 metres of trench**, half of the total required for the system.

A major milestone for the farm has been the introduction of **Galloway cattle**, the first time cattle have grazed these fields in over 60 years. They have been grazing a two-year herbal ley while also being fed hay from **Wandlebury Country Park**, a nearby nature reserve with species-rich chalk grassland. This approach is helping to introduce a wider range of grasses and wildflowers into the sward.

New cattle settling into life on the farm (EW, 2026)

Ed brings a high level of knowledge and experience in grazing regimes and meadow management, which is clearly shaping the direction of the site. The farm also sits within a **mosaic of environmental stewardship schemes**, providing a strong foundation for delivering integrated land management that supports soil health, biodiversity and water quality across the wider landscape.

To further **increase floristic diversity**, a diverse seed mix will be applied in spring. The farm is also trialling targeted grazing techniques, using a ring feeder to concentrate cattle in specific areas to create small disturbed patches. These areas will provide ideal conditions for new species to establish.

While it is still early in the season, there are already encouraging signs that the system is beginning to respond. As Ed notes, one of those signs is the presence of **organic cow pats**. These act as **biological hotspots**, supporting dung beetles, earthworms and microbial activity,

improving soil structure, increasing water retention and helping to rebuild a healthy, functioning soil ecosystem.

The new residents on the farm are producing plenty of organic cow pats. (EW, 2026)

In preparation for the farm's Johnson-Su composting system, the team visited Caxton to learn from **Shona Russell and Rhys Jones of Pearson Gape Farming Partnership**. This visit covered the full process, from producing biologically active compost to extracting beneficial microbes and applying them to the land, representing an important next step in building soil health and resilience at the farm.

Team visit to learn Pearson Gape Farming Partnership. (EW, 2026)

The farm is also progressing towards **Countryside Educational Visits Accreditation Scheme** (CEVAS), with plans to develop educational facilities on site. These will support visits, training and wider engagement, helping to share knowledge and demonstrate best practice.

CEVAS is a nationally recognised qualification that enables farmers and land managers to host safe, structured educational visits on their land. It demonstrates that the farm meets required standards for health and safety, risk management and educational delivery, allowing schools and groups to engage confidently with farming, food production and the natural environment.

In March, the farm welcomed another cohort of **Anglia Ruskin University students** for a practical, hands-on day exploring sustainable land management and the role that farmers and landowners can play in protecting water, soil and biodiversity. This continues to strengthen the link between the GCCSP and real, landscape-scale change.

Installing the trench to the infiltration area. (EW, 2026)

The GCCSP has supported Ed's farm through the installation of a **rainwater harvesting** system from existing roofs, with pipework and pump infrastructure linking the captured water to the aquifer recharge site.

This work includes:

- installation of a system to capture more than **1,422 m³ of rainwater annually**
- use of this water for farm activities, with excess water pumped to an aquifer recharge site
- establishment of a **0.7 hectare Managed Aquifer Recharge (MAR) site**
- monitoring and provision of project data

In addition, the project is supporting the implementation of pollution mitigation measures, including pesticide and fertiliser handling areas, washdown facilities and bunding to reduce the risk of contaminants entering the wider catchment.

We hope that by summer 2026 the regenerative farming interpretation will be ready for installation. This is being developed in partnership with the **East Cambridgeshire Farm Cluster** and the **Wildlife Trust for Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire and Northamptonshire**, helping to communicate the importance of this work to a wider audience.

Why this work matters

Regenerative farming plays a critical role in protecting chalk streams in Cambridgeshire.

By improving soil health and restoring natural processes, it helps to:

- **reduce soil erosion** and sediment entering watercourses
- **increase infiltration** and recharge the chalk aquifer
- **reduce** reliance on **chemical inputs** and limit pollution

- **support** more resilient and **sustainable water systems**
- **strengthen collaboration** between farmers, landowners and local communities

Chalk streams are a vital part of the Cambridgeshire landscape, but they remain under increasing pressure. Rainwater harvesting, managed aquifer recharge, regenerative farming and pollution mitigation all help to reduce that pressure and support long-term recovery.

This is particularly important in a region with a legacy of groundwater nitrates within the chalk aquifer. Creating a more resilient landscape is essential if we are to protect these internationally important ecosystems.

New Shardelowes Farm is demonstrating what this can look like in practice, a working example of how farming can support water, nature and people together.

Other News

Urban pollution, tackling rubbish in our streams

Urban rubbish continues to be a significant issue across Cambridge's chalk streams.

Through recent work on the ground, volunteers and contractors have removed **over a tonne of waste** from within channels and along the banks. This has included a wide range of items, from **laptops and bicycles to vapes, bottles and general litter**.

While often overlooked, this type of pollution has a direct impact on habitat quality, flow, and the overall condition of the stream environment. It can smother habitats, restrict flow, and introduce contaminants that affect aquatic life.

A huge thank you to all the volunteers and teams who have supported this work. Their efforts are making a visible and meaningful difference, helping to restore these streams and improve the environment for both wildlife and the local community.

Urban rubbish removed from streams in Cambridge

Wild Trout Trust Redd Survey Report 2026

The Environment Agency commissioned-Wild Trout Trust redds survey has provided the project with an important independent line of evidence.

The survey recorded extremely limited spawning activity within the urban network, despite the presence of gravels. This supports the conclusion that habitat availability is not the limiting factor.

The Greater Cambridge Chalk Stream Project has undertaken a formal review and integration of the redd survey findings within the wider project evidence base, including water quality monitoring, sediment assessment and connectivity analysis.

This integrated assessment shows strong alignment between the survey observations and the pressures identified through GCCSP monitoring. The findings indicate that physicochemical conditions, sedimentation and connectivity constraints are more likely to explain the observed lack of recruitment.

This is consistent with salmonid ecology. Successful incubation requires well-oxygenated, permeable gravels with sufficient hydraulic exchange to maintain oxygen supply and remove metabolic waste products. Where fine sediment accumulates, permeability decreases, oxygen diffusion is restricted and embryo survival declines significantly.

Additional salmonid and brown trout spawning literature supports the importance of clean, well-sorted gravels, moderate flow velocity, sufficient sediment depth and control of fine sediment inputs if spawning habitat is to remain functional over time.

We would like to thank **Rob Mungovan from the Wild Trout Trust** for sharing his redds survey report and supporting the project with this valuable independent insight.

Keele University sediment research

The Keele University report has been slightly delayed due to the high volume of samples analysed, numbering in the high hundreds, and will now be circulated in April 2026.

The research has focused on assessing **macroinvertebrate communities** in the lower reach of **Cherry Hinton Brook**, where gravel augmentation using larger sediment, up to 70mm, has previously been used for habitat improvement.

This is directly relevant to fish spawning and highlights that spawning constraints are further compounded in low-energy systems, where hydraulic competence is insufficient to mobilise coarse gravels. In these conditions, large gravels remain static, trapping fine sediment and forming armour layers that inhibit natural sorting and substrate renewal.

This leads to progressive colmation and loss of ecological function.

GCCSP's chalk stream evidence reviews also note that in low-gradient chalk tributaries, gravels above approximately 40mm to 60mm increasingly exceed mobility thresholds, increasing the risk of armouring and fine sediment retention where self-cleansing cannot occur.

Recent work by Keele University in Cherry Hinton Brook provides direct local evidence of this process. Preliminary findings from the March 2026 study indicate that large-scale gravel augmentation using 40mm to 70mm material can be ecologically damaging in these conditions.

Historic gravel augmentation Cherry Hinton Brook reach showing embeddedness or poor sorting

These gravels form static layers that trap fine sediment, reduce permeability and physically bury existing macroinvertebrate communities, resulting in a net loss of habitat complexity and biological function.

This interpretation is consistent with wider research showing that fine sediment, embeddedness and reduced permeability alter benthic assemblages, suppress clinger and scraper taxa and reduce habitat quality for both fish and invertebrates.

This finding is consistent with established sediment transport theory and ecological research. Coarse, immobile substrates in low-energy systems are prone to armouring and embeddedness, reducing habitat suitability.

Cambridge City Council has therefore adopted a targeted approach using smaller, loose gravels within a defined grain-size envelope. These gravels are placed in discrete nodes where hydraulic conditions allow localised sorting and cleansing, promoting autogenic processing and maintaining permeability and ecological function over time.

This approach aligns with process-based restoration principles, working with natural river processes rather than imposing static forms, and reducing the risk of unintended negative impacts associated with inappropriate gravel augmentation.

Historic examples within Cambridge support this approach. At Vicar's Brook and Byron's Pool, gravel augmentation has been undertaken in the past, but recruitment has not been sustained. This demonstrates that physical habitat creation alone is insufficient where water quality and sediment constraints are not addressed.

More broadly, the evidence supports the conclusion that isolated in-channel works without catchment-scale pollution mitigation and sediment control tend to create unstable, localised benefits rather than durable ecological recovery.

We would like to thank **Dr Tory Milner and her PhD students** for analysing such a large volume of samples and for the long hours spent in the lab to produce this important body of work.

Wider pollutants from surface water runoff

Developing a greater understanding of urban pollution is a key next step for the project.

GCCSP will be undertaking targeted sampling of urban outfalls, including highways drainage systems, to investigate pollutants such as heavy metals, sodium chlorides, hydrocarbons and 6PPD-related compounds from tyre wear.

In addition, sediment samples will be collected from both rural and urban case study sites. These will be analysed to better understand pollutant loading and sediment composition.

We would like to thank **Richard and Mike from the Cam Valley Forum** for providing valuable insight into highways runoff and wider urban pollution issues, which is helping to inform this next phase of work.

These pollutants are typically associated with urban surface runoff and are not characteristic of groundwater-fed chalk stream systems.

The findings from this work will be presented in the next newsletter.

Patchwork Education Village freshwater ponds

At **Patchwork Education Village**, Debbie and her team of students and volunteers have been working hard to reprofile the pond ahead of lining and filling.

The design has focused on creating a maximum depth of around 50cm, alongside a range of shallow margins and varied microhabitats to support biodiversity. This approach will provide suitable conditions for aquatic plants, invertebrates and amphibians, while also ensuring the pond is safe and accessible for educational use.

Debbie and the team will now move on to planting the pond and surrounding margins, along with installing a solar-powered aerator to help maintain water circulation and support dissolved oxygen levels, particularly during warmer periods.

The educational dipping ponds are expected to be ready for use by schools and community groups in **summer 2026**, providing a valuable resource for learning, engagement and connection with freshwater habitats.

A big thank you to Debbie and the Patchwork team for their continued dedication and effort in delivering this fantastic project.

Patchwork Education pupils helping create the wildlife ponds. (Patchwork Education, 2026)

Art Therapy, making chalk streams accessible to all

In May 2026, GCCSP will be supporting chalk stream-themed art therapy sessions for SEND children and adults.

These sessions will be delivered through **Abbey People in Cambridge City** and **Patchwork Education Village in South Cambridgeshire**, and will be publicly advertised.

They aim to provide a creative and inclusive way for people to connect with nature and engage with chalk stream environments.

Chalk Streams, national recognition and UNESCO status

Chalk streams are globally rare, with the majority found in England, and are widely recognised as one of the country's most important natural assets.

There is growing national momentum to secure stronger recognition and long-term protection for these unique ecosystems. **Pippa Heylings MP for South Cambridgeshire (Liberal Democrat)**

has been actively supporting this agenda through her work in Parliament, helping to raise the profile of chalk streams and advocate for their protection at a national level.

Part of this wider ambition includes exploring the potential for **UNESCO recognition** for chalk streams. While this remains a developing and long-term ambition, it reflects increasing awareness of their international importance and the need to safeguard them for future generations.

For projects such as the Greater Cambridge Chalk Stream Project, this national focus is significant. It reinforces the importance of local, evidence-based work and positions chalk stream restoration not just as a local priority, but as part of a wider national and global conversation.

Across Cambridge, the work being delivered through GCCSP is contributing to this ambition, demonstrating how urban chalk streams can be understood, protected and restored through scientific evidence, partnership working and community engagement.

This ambition sits within a wider national movement supported by river trusts, conservation organisations and local advocacy groups, including the Cam Valley Forum.

A stark example of why chalk streams require designation and protection: an inland drainage operation dredging a biologically rich Cambridgeshire chalk stream in March 2026.

Reflection: Communication and Timing

One clear lesson from this phase of the project has been the importance of **timely on-site interpretation** and **communication** alongside delivery.

As Project Lead, I recognise that signage along the East Cambridge Main Drain was installed later than it should have been in early February 2026. This coincided with tree contractors undertaking wider habitat management works, including selective thinning, alongside the mobilisation of in-channel restoration works. While information had been shared through public consultation, and stakeholder engagement since autumn 2025, the absence of immediate on-site interpretation understandably led to confusion and, in some cases, misinterpretation of the works.

This is a knowledgeable and passionate community, and that is something I value. Where people care deeply about their local environment, it is essential that we match that with clear and timely communication, both on the ground and through formal channels.

It is important to be open about this. The lesson is straightforward: **good ecological work must be supported by equally clear, visible and timely communication**. This is something I will ensure is addressed and strengthened as the project moves forward.

GCCSP next phase

The project team are in advanced negotiations with major funders to progress and upscale the project to a city-wide chalk stream restoration programme.

This next phase will include catchment-scale in-channel and riparian restoration, alongside urban pollution mitigation systems to improve chalk stream water quality in key areas.

We had hoped to announce the next phase of plans in this newsletter. However, confirming funding and agreements is a protracted process, and we look forward to providing further updates in due course.

Acknowledgements

The Greater Cambridge Chalk Stream Project would not be possible without the support of our funders and partners.

We would like to extend our sincere thanks to all funders who have supported the project, including the **Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority** (CPCA) for both revenue and capital funding, **Anglian Water** through the **Get River Positive** programme, **Cambridge Water** through the **PEBBLE** fund and **WINEP**, and **Big Chalk** for their continued investment in habitat restoration.

We are also grateful for the ongoing support from **Cambridge City Council**, including the **Biodiversity Team** and the **Sustainable Drainage Team**, whose contribution has been integral to the delivery of the project. We would also like to thank Cathy, Helen and Eleanor from South Cambridgeshire District Council for their support in progressing the project across South Cambridgeshire.

A special thank you to **Joanna and Emma from the Cambridge City Council Finance Team** for their support in managing the complex funding structure and end-of-year claims. This work often goes unseen, but is essential to keeping a project of this scale moving forward.

Where We Are, and What Comes Next

Without the data generated by our volunteers and partners, we would not be able to identify these pressures, understand their causes, or design effective solutions.

This project is now clearly demonstrating that evidence must come before intervention, and that chalk stream recovery depends on understanding the whole system, from catchment to springhead.

We are now moving from monitoring into delivery, using this evidence to guide restoration that is realistic, measurable and scalable across Greater Cambridge.

We are also looking forward to progressing habitat improvement projects in **Abington and Linton later in summer and autumn 2026**.

For previous newsletters and further information about the project, please visit www.cambridge.gov.uk/greater-cambridge-chalk-stream-project

Thank you for being part of that work.

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