

FEBRUARY 2025

NEWSLETTER

NEWPORT RIVER GROUP

PART OF THE CAM UPPER REACHES ACTION TEAM



Whilst the winter months are relatively quiet as far as our activities are concerned, there has been a lot of work going on that will pay massive dividends as we build momentum in 2025. We hope this update will convey some of the excitement we're feeling about the initiatives for the coming year!

THE UPPER CAM CHALK STREAM RECOVERY PROJECT

Newport Water Treatment (sewage) Works

After working with Anglian Water's Get River Positive scheme for a couple of years, they have announced an accelerated investment in the Water Treatment Works at Newport starting this year. Initially the upgrade will involve stripping of phosphates, (which will be a major step forward in restoring our chalk streams), followed by a £multimillion upgrade by 2026. The accelerated investment is a measure of the relentless testing regime established by Bill, and the request from the Get River Positive team to "test where the problems are". It's great to see that the Get River Positive team care as passionately about the environment as we do.



And a few kind words from Anglian Water. "We are really excited to have the opportunity to partner with such a keen group of organisations on this really complex project, which will transform this part of the beautiful River Cam, and we are incredibly grateful to the Newport River Group (part of CURAT) team for their significant convening and coordinating power. Working together in such a constructive way, pooling our collective knowledge and resources, and relentlessly focusing on the environmental outcomes that we all want to see, is the only way that that we will drive the improvements that we all firmly expect".

Dr Robin Price
Director of Quality and Environment

Belmont Wood

One of our most important projects is the restoration of an ancient 11-acre wetland in Belmont Wood. As well as being a natural flood defence, the wetland will create a brilliant new habitat, increase biodiversity, store winter rains to keep the Cam flowing in times of drought, filter out loads of pollutants and absorb three times as much carbon as the equivalent area of woodland.



It is a very complex project involving feasibility studies, surveys and permits which were funded by Uttlesford District Council. Training for volunteers funded by Cambridge City Council, and the 'build phase' will be funded by Anglian Water - from investor funds, not your water bill. Completion by Summer 2025!

Keith and Adam



Testing

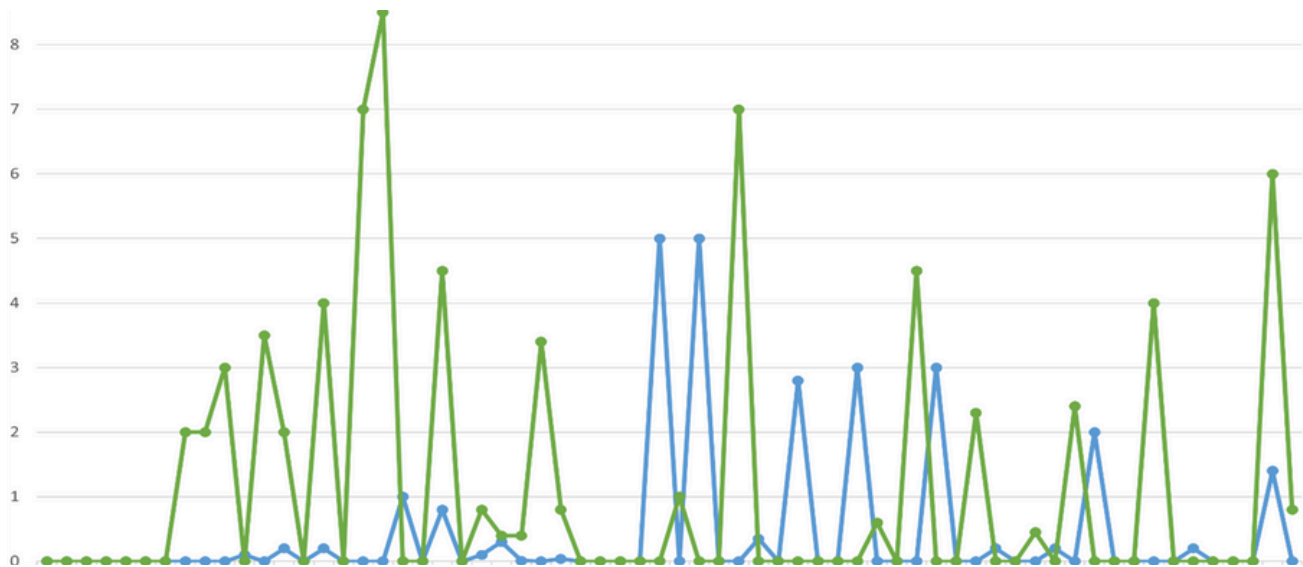
Monthly testing has continued through the coldest months thanks to the heroic efforts of our team and, in at least one case, a centrally heated gilet! Several new members have joined the testing team, and a new testing site added to the existing three in Newport. We are now testing Wicken water every month at Joyce Frankland Academy, led by Roxanne, ably supported by her dad, Dr Andy.



One of our precious stoneflies!

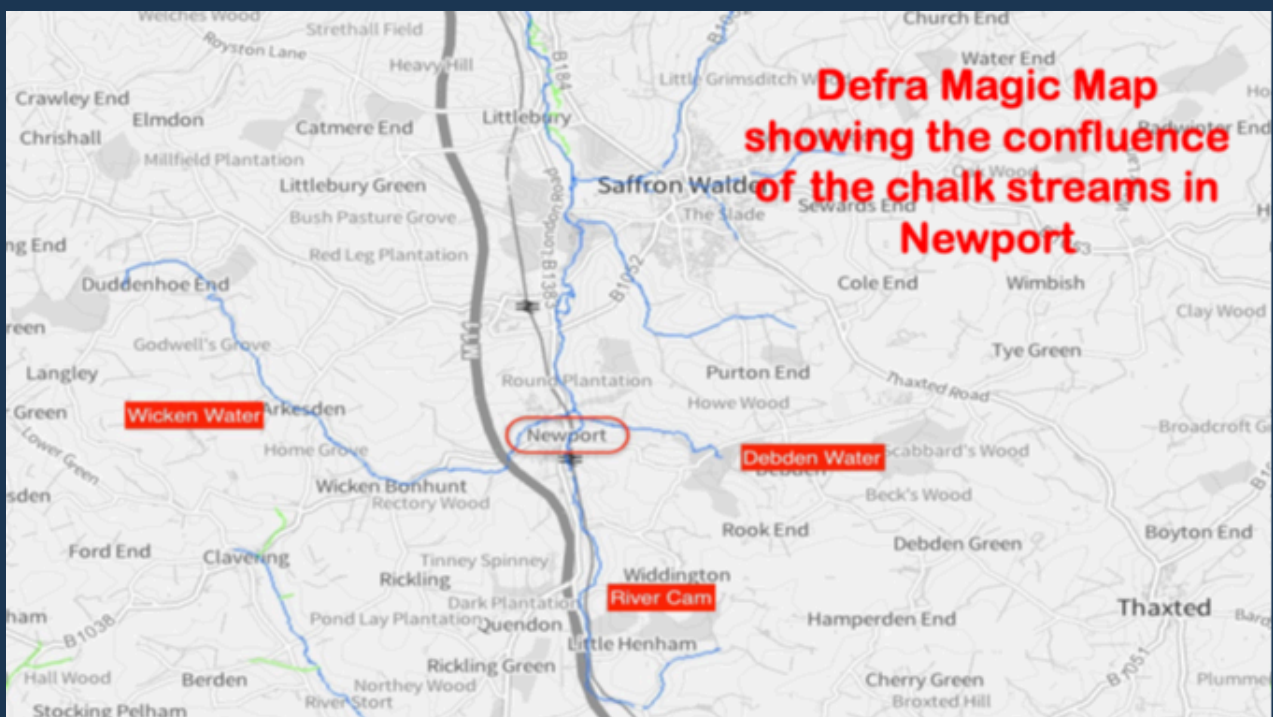
Talking of Dr Andy, our Riverfly testing standards are breaking new ground. As the rest of us are excited by a cased caddis or a blue-winged olive, Andy takes it to another level with species ID in Latin! In addition, we identified stonefly in two testing locations in Newport prior to Christmas. Stoneflies are highly sensitive to pollution, and these are only the third and forth to be recorded in the whole of the south Cambridgeshire testing area. This tells us that water close to the source – before discharges into the chalk stream – is in great condition!

Despite this good news, pollution levels downstream have fluctuated considerably over the past three months with Phosphate (a major factor for the overall health of the river) levels being as low as <1 mg/l and as high as 10 mg/l downstream (green on the chart) of the sewage plant in Newport.



We are delighted Anglian Water have agreed to install 'phosphate stripping' equipment this year! A massive sewage burst was spotted at Joyce Frankland Academy by our testing team in January, their prompt action and a fast response by a team from Anglian Water prevented it reaching the river.

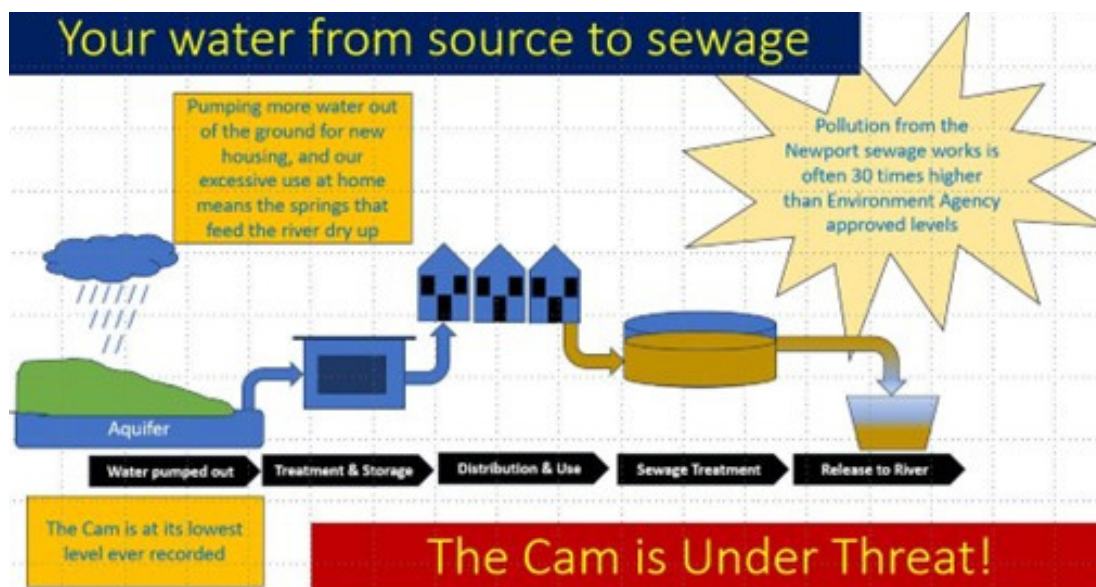
There are now very active teams carrying out testing of the Cam in the Chesterfords and Littlebury. Next stop Saffron Walden and the Slades? Look at the chalk streams around Saffron Walden



Communication and Engagement

There is one major problem affecting the health of our chalk stream network that the River Group would like to solve.....us.

Anglian Water's planned improvement to the treatment works resulting in discharge of clean water into the river, is a great step forward. We should remember that we are the largest source of all the pollution they are dealing with. Wasting water and pollution from the home are the biggest opportunities we have as community to improve the health of the chalk stream.



Our work with schools and adults has shown the problem of waste and pollution occurring in our homes is a lack of awareness – who spends any time thinking about what happens before we turn on the tap and after we pull the flush or plug? We are in the process of developing an engagement programme so people who care about our environment – which is nearly all of us – can take simple actions within our homes that really do make a huge difference to river health. One quick example; in the UK we each use, on average, 140 litres of clean water a day. In Germany, that average is 80 litres! 60 litres every day, per person, is a massive amount to be wasting; water that could otherwise be feeding our chalk stream network as it is all pumped out of the chalk below our feet.

76,650,000 litres of clean water is wasted every year, just in Newport.



A quick example of 'in home' pollution? Look at the bottles under the sink and look for the red diamond with a warning symbol in it. It'll say, "harmful to aquatic life with long lasting effects". You'll be surprised how many chemicals are disappearing down your plughole or loo.



As well as chemical pollution, nearly every sewage spill in the river is due to a blockage in the sewer caused by wet wipes being flushed. You can easily be part of the solution by stopping as well as doing stuff.

We want to tackle this community issue in a friendly and constructive way, engaging rather than nagging. Help us please – be part of the solution!

Glenys and Geraint

Newport Parish Council

Since the River Group started work on restoring our chalk streams the Parish Council have been unfailingly supportive. Councillors volunteering for activities, help with administrative issues and information, and not least lending us their credibility.

Dealing with regulatory bodies, potential funders, financial controls, policies and procedures and many more functions would drain effort, enthusiasm and energy from active volunteers. Without a doubt, the activities of the group would be restricted to small, environmentally unimportant works without the Parish Council's help.

<https://newportsex-pc.gov.uk/newport-river-group/>

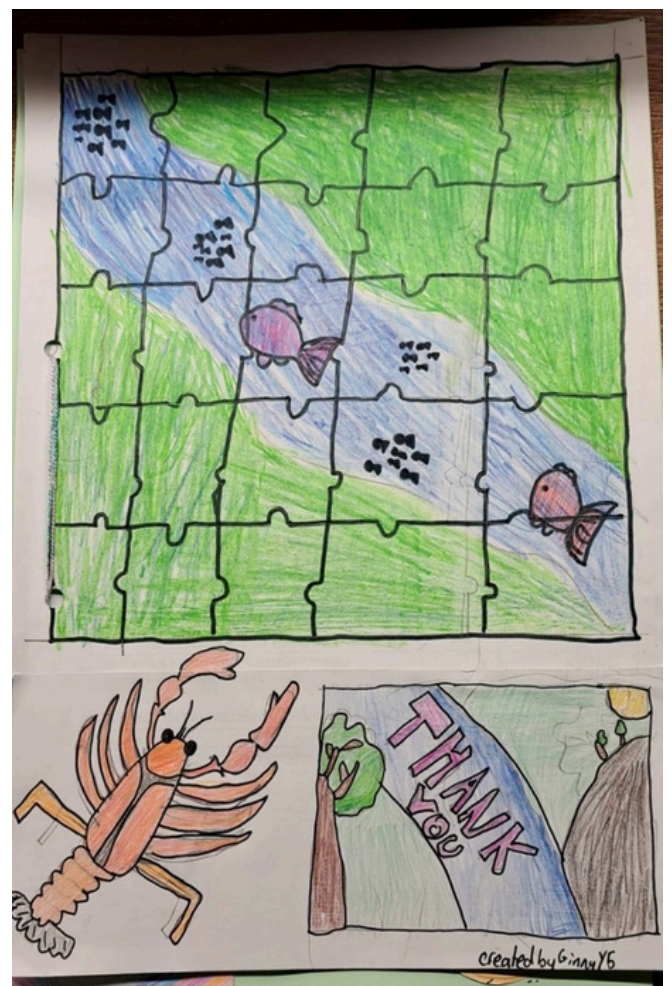
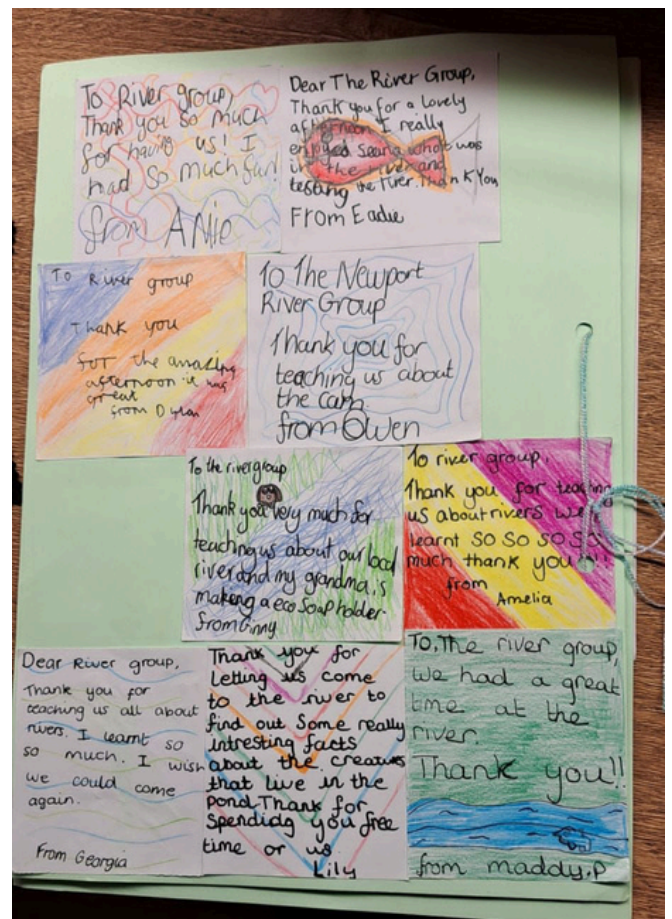
In the last couple of months, that relationship has been formalised, and Newport River Group are delighted to have become a working group of the Parish Council's River Group Committee. The clue is in the name – we are a Working Group, with the helpful oversight provided by the committee.

Stephen

Education

We continue to work with Newport Primary School to educate children about the local water courses and the wider environment. We are currently planning another demo day with the Year 5s, and a nature walk with Year 4s. We've also established links with Joyce Frankland Academy for both testing and education. We plan to meet with the Environmental team, which includes prefects and teachers, in February to share our Source to Sewage presentation so they can spread the word throughout the school.

Adam and Julie



Farm Cluster

Farmers' environmental activities are very often "under the radar". If you walk or cycle within our catchment basin, you'll see things like new hedgerows popping up, tree planting, edges of field left for natural plant, bird and small mammal habitat – and that is a small proportion of it.

Creation of a farm cluster is an extremely effective way of enabling momentum to ecological projects - and potentially the greatest impact on the chalk stream network- with farms making a collaborative effort. By working together, helped by an advisor or 'facilitator', farmers and land managers can work more cohesively together in their locality. Finding a farmer with the time has been tricky but we think we have found our facilitator in our local FWAG East adviser (Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group), Rebecca Inman. She has the contacts and can reach out to them; she recently wrote in an email regarding the (NW) cluster "I think we can certainly have a start-up meeting as I have had some positive meetings with farmers in the local area". We await dates and who can attend. Exciting times.

<https://www.fwageast.org.uk/>

Marion

Fund Raising

We have applied for grants to help us carry out feasibility studies for three specific wetland restoration projects. These feasibility studies are essential in securing grants for the 'build phase'. We've also applied for a grant to help us with the Engagement and Education projects – STOP PRESS.....all four approved!!

Chris



Invasive Species

We'll shortly be resuming our **American Signal crayfish** trapping as they become more active. We continue to monitor our stretch of river and so far they haven't made it here, so we focus on prevention by trapping at the closest point we know they've got to. They cause damage to the riverbank and out-compete the native white claws as well as devouring huge quantities of the prey species.

Smart (they text us when they're triggered), humane **mink** traps remain in place protecting our river. American mink are indiscriminate hunters and cause serious harm to all forms of wildlife – after we had trapped the last one in our area, the rebound in wildlife during 2023 was astonishing. The traps remain in place to prevent a reinfestation.

There are massive **Himalayan balsam** infestations all along the Cam, weakening the bank and leaving it exposed to winter rains. It is one of the major causes of the silt you see covering the chalk. The good news is that thanks to some major efforts on by our villagers and neighbours downriver, we have made huge inroads and are confident of clearing it this year to the edge of the Audley Estate. We are collaborating with river groups along the Cam as far as Great Chesterford and hope that future years we will be pulling odd plants – the seeds are viable for a few years, so we'll have to stay on top of it. If you know anyone in Saffron Walden who could help on the Slade, please ask them to email info@curat.org.uk

Balsam removal needs a significant number of volunteers, so keep an eye open for appeals for help – it will be June and July, possibly a little earlier.



Giant hogweed is a nasty poisonous plant that we need to be rid of. It is too dangerous for volunteers to tackle, so we are trying to engage contractors who will tackle it for us. It won't be cheap, so we'll have to raise funds which won't be easy.

Rob

Wildlife Sightings

The photos of our friends in the river are from trail cameras within our village. We publish some of the cute photos on Newport Newline Facebook page, but there is also a very serious side to this part of the project. Evidence of the wildlife helps to build up a picture of the health of the river and its biodiversity, which also helps us to decide on where to focus our efforts. When inappropriate development is proposed, hard evidence gives real credibility to planning application objections.

Dr Andy

In Summary

A busy 2024 and winter has built momentum which we hope will lead to major improvements in the health of our chalk stream network. It's worth thinking about the fact that there are only around 600 chalk streams in the world, making ours a rare and unique habitat; we have a special responsibility to help it to recover and thrive.

If you want to get involved, please email info@curat.org.uk giving your name and which town/village you live in. We have groups in Newport, Littlebury and the Chesterfords, and are looking to establish a group in Saffron Walden.

Many thanks for all your support.

Newport River Groupies

February 2025