



Catchment host

River Lea Catchment Partnership

Winter Newsletter 2025

Updates to the River Lea Catchment Partnership review process

Following the independent review of the Catchment Partnership and Herts & Middlesex Wildlife Trust's (HMWT) role as host, we're piloting some changes to how the Partnership operates, is managed and contributes to improving our rivers.

The review, led by Heritage Insider, was open to all Partnership members and included a thorough assessment of strengths and areas for improvement. It looked at activities like administration, delivery, communications, and progress toward our objectives for healthier rivers. Funding and capacity within the hosting role were also key considerations, ensuring the limited resources are directed where they're most effective.

What's changing?

These adjustments will help us focus staff time on developing evidence-based catchment plans and advancing our shared goals for cleaner water and better habitats. The changes will roll out gradually and adapt as we secure more resources. Here's an overview:

- **Restructuring our meetings:** The current eight river-specific meetings (Upper, Middle, Lower Lea, and tributaries) will no longer continue in the short term. These meetings have primarily been for updates rather than planning or decision-making. We'll still create individual sub-catchment plans and will work with relevant stakeholders to develop and deliver these.
- **Creating a Steering Group:** This group will provide leadership for the Partnership, oversee the development and progress of catchment plans, and collaborate with partners to secure funding. The timing for establishing the group will depend on staff capacity.
- **Launching focused working groups:** Under the Steering Group, we'll form a small number of working groups later in 2025, each dedicated to a specific issue, topic, or project. These will be limited initially to prioritise catchment plan development, with opportunities for members to get involved as these groups evolve.

We'll monitor these changes to ensure they're effective and adapt them as needed.

Read the Executive Summary of the [review here](#).



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Staying Connected

We will keep in touch with partners and share updates about activity and to ensure that this is two way we have created a partnership email account rivers@hmwt.org which will be regularly reviewed so please use this to get in touch with questions or comments.. Your input is key, and we'll make sure to provide regular opportunities for you to get involved.

Newsletters

Our newsletters will keep you in the loop with everything happening across the catchment - not just on your local river.

- **What to expect:** Email updates with links to more detailed information.
- **How often:** Twice a year, plus shorter updates when there's something important to share.
- **Get involved:** Have news or updates to share? We will ask for potential contributions a month before the next newsletter is due.

Website

The [catchment website](#) is getting a makeover! Over the next 12 months, we'll be rolling out an updated version to make it easier for you to stay informed, find information and for the partnership to engage new audiences including decision makers and funders.

Conference

We're holding an evening conference **12 March 2025, 6-9.30pm at Welwyn Civic Centre**, and are looking forward to another well attended event. We'll follow a format like previous years but are open to fresh ideas for future events.

- **What we need from you:** Suggestions for topics, speakers, or a new format - we're all ears!
- **Get in touch:** Drop us a line at rivers@hmwt.org with your thoughts.
- **Book your place for this year's conference using link:**
<https://hertswildlifetrustevents.org.uk/event/12mar25-river-lea-catchment-conference>

Recent Progress

The Partnership has been hard at work throughout 2024, delivering some exciting projects and making great progress with a range of activities. Read on for more insight!

Storymap Launch

We're thrilled to announce that the new [Lea Catchment Storymap](#) is now live!

A Storymap is an online, map-based tool designed to help you explore data and information step by step. Our Storymap focuses on the Lea and its tributaries, bringing together key data in one convenient place. This interactive tool will replace much of the text on our website, presenting information in a more engaging and visually appealing way.

Here's what it offers, and we are excited to see how this helps everyone explore and better understand the catchment:

- **Themes:** Data is organised around flow, quality and habitat, reflecting the principles of the Chalk Stream Strategy.
- **Convenience:** A one-stop shop for commonly searched datasets related to the Lea catchment.
- **Semi-interactive:** While you can't download data directly, the Storymap acts as a library with links to the original datasets, allowing you to download and analyse them independently.



The River Beane Flagship Project

The River Beane was nominated by Affinity Water as part of CaBA's flagship programme of chalk stream catchment restoration projects. The ambition is for each nominated waterbody to be restored over a 10-year period, implementing all aspects of [CaBA's Chalk Stream Strategy](#) and to act as models to assist in the restoration of other chalk streams.

Alister Leggatt, Integrated Catchment Manager at Affinity Water, shares that over the last 18 months the Core Group, comprising Affinity Water, River Beane Restoration Association (RBRA), Environment Agency (EA) and HMWT, has been identifying what they seek to deliver over the next 5-years which supports their broader visions for 2035 and 2050. An implementation plan is now being developed to identify and prioritise catchment-scale improvements that address the pressures identified within the CaBA strategy framework. This plan will address key challenges identified in the strategy, focussing on the "trinity of ecological health: water quantity, water quality and physical habitat quality.

The habitat quality element has been developed from work by the River Restoration Centre (RRC) which assessed the Beane's current condition and drafted a plan for catchment-scale improvements. Their approach included compiling data, conducting field surveys of river habitats, identifying key pressures, and evaluating how addressing these pressures could benefit the entire catchment. From this work they've created a prioritised list of restoration options along with cost estimates. By focussing on projects that offer the most significant catchment-wide benefits, this will ensure that funds will be used most effectively. However, the feasibility of delivery and availability of funding will also remain paramount.

The Core Group is now assessing the detailed list of potential improvements to develop a short list of prioritised projects to be worked up in detail. Alongside these physical improvements will be activity to increase collaboration, stakeholder & community engagement, volunteering and citizen science, monitoring and evaluation.

A similar evaluation is being undertaken for the water quantity and quality elements through the Water Industry National Environment Programme, EA monitoring and Water Framework Directive assessment programme alongside local citizen science, monitoring and evaluation by the RBRA and HMWT.

We hope to have the implementation plan ready by the Spring/Summer 2025, but there are already several wider projects and activities underway that will contribute to the plan and vision.

Read an overview of development of the [Flagship here](#)

The flagship is currently supported by:



The River Mimram Programme

With funding from the Environment Agency, HMWT is working closely with landowners, local communities, and other stakeholders to improve the flow, resilience, and ecological health of the



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River Mimram. The Trust's newly appointed Chalk Stream and Farm Advisory Officer, Heidi Mansell, is leading this work which supports the delivery of CaBA's Chalk Stream Strategy.

Here's what Heidi has to say on the work since beginning in July 2024: *"We're taking a catchment-wide approach to the Mimram, looking at the entire area of land that drains into the river. Having a dedicated person on the ground is key because many of the challenges the river faces - like water demand, pollution, or invasive species - often begin in the wider catchment. By working closely with those impacted by these issues, we can empower them to develop and implement solutions. The good news is that lots of fantastic work has already been done over the years by various groups and stakeholders. My aim is to build on this foundation and push things further."*

In these first few months, Heidi has been meeting landholders to understand their needs and gathering data on the catchment. The response so far has been positive - 11 landowners along the Mimram have already expressed interest in working to improve the river, which is an incredibly encouraging start.

Over the coming months and years, we'll be working together to create and implement restoration and management plans. These will tackle the reasons why the Mimram isn't currently achieving good ecological status under the Water Framework Directive.

Exciting Opportunities Ahead

New funding options through the [Higher-Level Countryside Stewardship Scheme](#) could support this work, offering payments to farmers who manage riverbanks and water-edge habitats sensitively. These measures will help reconnect rivers with their floodplains and improve biodiversity.

Within the wider Mimram catchment, there are 191 Local Wildlife Sites - areas that are already recognised as being valuable for nature in Hertfordshire. These sites play a crucial role in creating natural flood management solutions and connecting habitats across the landscape. Most of these sites are privately owned and Heidi will work with landowners to help keep them in good ecological condition through proper management and care.

What Success Looks Like

If we get this right, we'll see some amazing results:

- **Endangered Water Voles** thriving along the Mimram.
- **Brown Trout** creating their nests on the riverbed.
- The brilliant flash of **Kingfishers** darting along the water.
- Vibrant strands of **Water Crowfoot** swaying on the river's surface.

These are all signs of a healthy chalk stream. Beyond the riverbanks, we're also aiming to boost populations of declining farmland birds like **Yellowhammers**, **Lapwings**, and **Corn Buntings** - all key species in Hertfordshire's emerging Nature Recovery Strategy.

Quick Catchment Updates

- **Thames Water Environmental Newsletter** – Check out the latest [edition here](#).
- **Permeable Catchment** – The Lea catchment has over 300 barriers to fish passage, including weirs, culverts, and gauging stations. These structures prevent key species like European Eel and wild Brown Trout from migrating naturally and degrade river habitats. To tackle this, HMWT is working with Thames21, the Environment Agency, Lee Valley Regional Park, and the Canal & Rivers Trust to achieve a fully permeable Lea catchment by 2050. This vision aims to reconnect fish passage from the Thames all the way to Luton and its tributaries. Funding from Thames Water will kick-start a pilot project towards this vision in Spring 2025. A larger Heritage Lottery Fund bid is being prepared for 2025. If successful, the pilot project in the Lower Lea will expand across the catchment from 2026 onwards
- **Eradicating Non-Native Invasive Species** - Tackling invasive species like Floating Pennywort, Himalayan Balsam, and Giant Hogweed remains a top priority. Key efforts in 2025 include:
 - **Floating Pennywort:** Thanks to partners like Whoosh Canoe Club, British Canoeing, and the Angling Trust, the River Stort is now a "clear access" waterway. Work is also underway downstream on the Lea between Hoddesdon and Tottenham Marshes.
 - **Himalayan Balsam & Giant Hogweed:** HMWT, River Champions, and other groups have logged over 300 volunteer hours removing these species across the Beane, Rib, and Stort catchments.
- **DEFRA's Species Survival Funding** - In 2024, HMWT received £1.7 million to deliver large-scale restoration across the Lea catchment. From March 2024 to December 2025, aiming to:
 - Restore 11km of chalk stream habitat.
 - Bypass 3 barriers to improve fish migration.
 - Reconnect 46 hectares of floodplain.
 - Create/enhance 5 hectares of wetland habitats like ponds, reedbeds, and backwaters.
- **Highways Pollution** - Find out how road pollution is affecting the Lea catchment in HMWT's latest briefing, available [here](#) We have requested a meeting with Hertfordshire County Council to discuss the issue and have raised it through the CaBA Strategy Working Groups.
- **Freshwater Watch** – between April 25-28th Freshwater Watch is running a programme of monitoring for Nitrates and Phosphates. If you wish to join to gather data that will add to our understanding of the catchment then sign up for free <https://earthwatch.org.uk/greatukwaterblitz/>
- **Update from Herts & North London Environment Agency** - Elizabeth Walden, EA Chalk Catchment Coordinator, reports on local efforts in 2024 to protect and enhance our precious chalk streams including:
 - **Ongoing Projects**
 - Contributed funding to multiple projects across the Lea catchment.
 - Following outline design in 2021, the Cedar Close weir fish and eel bypass scheme has now progressed to detailed design stage. A partnership scheme between the EA and Herts County Council, with Herts CC as the lead partner.
 - Funded the 3-year Chalk Stream and Farm Advisory Officer role at HMWT to support landowners in improving the Mimram Catchment.
 - Following habitat improvement work on the River Beane delivered by CMS in 2023 (in partnership with EA and the Parish Council), further improvements are planned in 2025/26 to formalise the weir breach at the southern end of the marsh. Details to follow in Spring.



- **Great News from the River Beane** - a channel recently created near Broadwater Lake at Woodhall Park, in partnership with Woodhall Estate and Affinity Water, has achieved a Riverfly score of 18 – the highest in Hertfordshire! This reflects excellent habitat diversity and water quality.
- **Chalk Stream Restoration Strategy** - EA are working to implement the strategy's recommendations, including:
 - Updating flow requirements for 12 Upper Lea waterbodies to reflect ecological needs.
 - Adding four new monitoring sites on the Mimram, Beane, Rib, and Stort as part of the pan-area temporary streams network. Starting in 2025, these sites will be monitored for:
 - Invertebrates and aquatic plants (macrophytes).
 - Water quality.
 - Monthly flow observations.
- **Check out the new Water Hub** here: [Environment Agency Water Hub | Engage Environment Agency](#)

National News

CaBA Chalk Stream Strategy Webinar

CaBA hosted a webinar providing updates on the chalk stream strategy and a summary of recent activities - there's both good news and some challenges ahead! If you missed it, you can watch the recording here: [Webinar: Chalk Streams Strategy Update - CaBA](#) - Sarah Perry, HMWT, is on the CaBA Chalk Strategy eNGO Steering Group, representing chalk streams across the UK, including the Lea catchment. This gives our partnership a direct line into this important work.

DEFRA Advocacy

At our extraordinary partnership meeting in November 2023, we agreed that HMWT, as the host organisation, would write to DEFRA and the EA to highlight our shared concerns about the lack of progress towards meeting Good Ecological Status under the Water Framework Directive (WFD). We also addressed the broader goals of ecological health as outlined in the CaBA Chalk Streams Strategy (2021).

The letter focused on seven key issues that require urgent action at a national level by DEFRA, the EA, and Ofwat. [Read the full letter here.](#)

The letter was sent in April 2024 and we've now received a response. We're in the process of arranging a national Wildlife Trusts and Blueprint for Water meeting with senior executives at the EA and DEFRA in 2025 to cover the letter and wider issues around policy / governance / regulation that impact at our local level. We will keep you updated.

River Basin Management Planning – Working Together Consultation

River Basin Management Plans (RBMPs) are part of the Water Framework Directive. They set environmental goals for rivers and outline steps needed to achieve them, with updates every six years. The first phase for the 2027 plans is now live as a public consultation called "Working Together". It closes on 14 May 2025 and a summary of responses will follow. DEFRA has acknowledged that changes may arise from the independent commission reviewing the water sector (see below!) but the consultation process remains relevant.



HMWT will draft key points in response to the consultation and share them with partners before submitting a final response. We strongly encourage partners to respond on behalf of their own organisations or as individuals. Consistency in key messages will strengthen our collective voice.

- **Timeline:** Expect our draft response in March 2025. Consultation deadline 14 May.
- **Consultation link:** [River Basin Planning – Working Together 2024](#)

Independent Commission on the Water Sector – an independent review was commissioned by the UK Government in October 2024, aimed at addressing the myriad challenges facing the water sector, from environmental sustainability to regulatory reform. The vision, objectives and scope of the Government's commission, which will report by the end of Q2 2025, can be found here: [Independent commission on the water sector regulatory system: terms of reference - GOV.UK](#). An independent panel will help steer the review, which includes members of Blueprint for Water.

Blueprint for Water

Blueprint is a coalition of eNGOs advocating for our freshwater environment. It aims to influence Government Policy to protect and restore rivers, streams and small waters, and advocate for faster recovery and stronger regulation. Their latest responses are available under "Related Documents" here: [Blueprint for Water - Wildlife and Countryside Link](#).

What's Next - Plans for 2025

Our focus as Catchment Host for 2025 will be developing short, prioritised sub-catchment plans. These will follow the methodology created by the River Restoration Centre and build on the success and lessons learned from the River Beane Flagship Project. This work also supports one of the key recommendations from the recent catchment review.

The outcome will be an evidence-led, location specific plan, highlighting what the main pressures and impacts are affecting each sub-catchment. Restoration can then be prioritised based on how each reach contributes to overall catchment condition – and ultimately its failure under WFD!

This provides a reliable and cost-able way to effectively target river and floodplain physical habitat improvements; one of the three pillars in the Chalk Stream Strategy.

When it comes to water flow and quality, we'll continue supporting national efforts through our connections with organisations like CaBA and Blueprint for Water, and we'll keep you updated on any developments. Locally, we'll maintain and would like to expand water quality monitoring to gather more detailed, site-specific data and report pollution incidents through national channels. Additionally, we'll keep working to engage Herts County Council in productive discussions about the impact of highway runoff on our rivers and explore opportunities to address this issue.



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