

Watercress and Winterbournes: Test and Itchen River Headwaters Landscape Partnership Scheme 2017-2025

Programme 1 – Action for Headwaters, a Community Catchment Approach

Supporting communities to develop community catchment plans which will include:

- Habitat restoration and management
- Natural flood management
- Sediment trapping, enhancement of spawning habitat
- Recording, restoration of priority water meadow heritage structures
- Encouraging good headwater and adjacent land management – guidance, best practice examples, training and small capital grants
- Exemplar sediment & water management at a Watercress Growing site, sharing learning with other growers
- Improvements to access to the river and interpretation, recreational opportunities
- Recruitment and training of local volunteers to carry out; pollution patrol, monitoring of invasive non-native species, repairs to water meadow structures and riverfly monitoring

Enjoying our Heritage

Consultation has shown that local communities feel that access and interpretation about the local headwater streams needs improvement and that more could be done to encourage recreational opportunities and to enable young people to enjoy some of the water-based recreational activities that previous generations would have been involved in. Access improvements, local interpretation and activities focused on getting young people involved will be a focus in each of the communities.

Programme 3 – Healthy Headwaters

- Fun schemes and activities aimed at long-term behaviour change in all members of the local community including residents, schools, young people and businesses, aimed at improving water efficiency, improving septic tank management, reducing nitrate pollution, improving water quality through use of less damaging products eg. cleaning products
- Ideas for activities include water efficiency community challenges, monitoring of a local septic tank which can be used as an example of the effects, consumer reviews and assessments of environmentally friendly cleaning products, school science projects which show effects of different cleaning products

Programme 5 – Monitoring and Evaluation

Understanding the difference that scheme activities are making to the water quality and wildlife within these chalk stream headwaters will be essential to evaluating the success of the scheme. Similarly, understanding any changes to the people and communities involved, including perceptions, understanding and actions will be essential not only in understanding the success of this scheme but in guiding future work. The partnership will work with monitoring and evaluation professionals to ensure that this work is carried out effectively.

Water Quality and Quantity– securing the ‘Building Blocks’

Good water quality underpins the services that our chalk rivers provide for us – our source of drinking water, dealing with our waste water, supporting recreational fisheries and commercial aquaculture, and providing a visitor resource for locals and tourists alike. It also allows globally-rare assemblages of insects, fish and aquatic plants to thrive in these scarce ecosystems. Action will tackle the known problems of sediment and Phosphates.

Water quantity is also essential to support the ecosystem services provided by the headwaters, where both too much and too little can impact the benefits provided, and the biodiversity supported. Natural flood risk management approaches, and improving the resilience of habitats to low flows are required.

Chalk River Headwaters - A Landscape at Risk

- Water abstraction, pollution, lack of habitat management, invasive non-native species, physical modifications and climate change – all resulting in chalk streams that are less resilient, are in “unfavourable condition” and have declining numbers of key wildlife indicator species.
- Loss of traditional skills – land / habitat management, river keeping, water management, traditional building repair skills.
- Lack of knowledge about the direct effect of actions on the local headwaters and a lack of realisation about how nationally important these local headwaters are.
- Communities keen to help care for the headwaters but unable to navigate the complicated system of permissions and responsibilities.

Safeguarding our Heritage

Many of the land management and water management skills and experience have been lost over time, resulting in areas with no management or management which does not positively support the wildlife heritage of the headwaters,

Training and skills-sharing schemes will enable landowners, businesses and local communities to deliver more sensitive management and beneficial enhancements and will ensure that the younger age-groups carry these skills into future generations.

Some of our key chalk stream species such as the White-clawed Crayfish are in severe decline and risk extinction in Hampshire if further action is not taken. Projects to safeguard these species will form part of this landscape partnership scheme.

Programme 2 – Celebrating our Headwater Heritage

- Community heritage projects – community connections to the rivers, watercress industry, literary connections, fishing heritage, industrial heritage, community events including Rivers Week and the Watercress Festival
- Learning about our headwaters – education based activities such as Trout in the Classroom. Delivery of education sessions, training for staff and resource packs for schools in incorporating chalk stream heritage into their national curriculum work.
- Getting Hooked - Encouraging a new generation of fly-fishers through local ‘have a go’ activities and schemes
- Open Rivers Scheme – working with landowners to allow access to private stretches of the river on specific dates
- Caring for our Crayfish –captive breeding programme to increase numbers of the remaining populations of our White-Clawed Crayfish

Sharing our Heritage

To many local communities, chalk rivers are the norm; their global rarity is most often not recognised.

A program of engagement with headwater communities, fishing clubs, land managers and rural businesses will make use of training events, advice, awareness raising and ‘citizen science’ to ensure our headwaters are valued by those who live along or visit them.

Programme 4 – Rediscovering Skills

- Training menu for community members in:
 - Rural building skills for restoring and maintaining water management & water meadow structures
 - Riverfly monitoring
 - Identifying and recording invasive non-native species
 - Wildlife identification and habitat management
- River Keeper Training by the Test and Itchen Association – training events for new river keepers, providing knowledge share and an online resource for river keepers.
- Landowner training – headwater-friendly land management skills
- Headwaters Community Forum – passing on catchment management skills between communities through an online forum and annual workshop