



ACTION FOR THE RIVER KENNET

PRESS RELEASE

14 September 2011

Drinking our river dry?

Residents in Aldbourne and Ramsbury were outraged to receive a letter from Thames Water proposing to abstract yet more water, telling them that the Ramsbury borehole 'currently provides more water than is needed for the local area'. The letters arrived as the BBC prepares to broadcast Panorama on Monday 19th September featuring the River Kennet entitled 'Drinking our Rivers Dry', and in the same week that the River Kennet was named by campaign group 'Our Rivers' as one of England's top ten failing rivers.

Geoffrey Findlay, Action for the River Kennet's chairman said, 'The river at Ramsbury is sometimes so low that in places the ducks are walking across, not swimming. Although the borehole at Ramsbury may be licensed to produce more water, there is certainly not 'more water than is needed' for both public water supply and the wildlife along the river.'

All the data show that there is not a surplus of water. The official Environment Agency (EA) gauging station recorded the river is depth today as 8cm - when normal river level would be around double that. The Environment Agency's report on water abstraction states that the river here is already 'over licensed and over abstracted' and the latest EA water situation report shows the aquifer is so empty that levels fall this low only 8% of the time.

Charlotte Hitchmough, ARK's Director explains: Thames Water pump water from the same natural underground source which would be filling the river. Teams of contractors around Ramsbury are installing new water pipes to distribute the water to homes and businesses in Aldbourne, as well as Ramsbury. This is another example of the pressure on our rivers, which will only increase in the years ahead as water companies try to meet increasing demand for water. We urgently need more flexible and responsive water management that is sensitive to the needs of the environment.

Thames Water has told ARK that the project will increase flexibility and resilience, enabling them to supply customers in Aldbourne from the Ramsbury source at times of peak demand and assured us that none of this water will go outside the local catchment under any circumstances. They say they will not use the new network option to supply more water from the Axford source to Swindon (or anywhere else outside the catchment area) other than in an emergency. The volume of Axford water supplied to Swindon will remain at or below the present level until the licence is reduced. While ARK has taken note of these assurances we still have concerns about the

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impact of abstracting more water from this environmentally sensitive area, already much reduced from its historic healthy levels; and will continue to monitor the situation closely.

ARK is working closely with WWF UK (World Wildlife Fund) to take action to protect chalk streams like the River Kennet from the effects of water abstraction.

More information about Action for the River Kennet is available at www.riverkennet.org or call Charlotte Hitchmough on 01672 513672 or Geoffrey Findlay on 01672 520346