

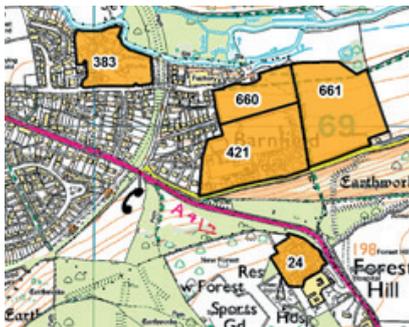
Action for the River Kennet

River talk

A PARTNERSHIP OF PEOPLE WHO CARE ABOUT THE KENNET

More Homes Planned for the Kennet Valley

ARK is becoming increasingly concerned about the impacts of the proposed new housing developments along the Kennet Valley.



The first reason is the availability of water; the second is the impact of sewage.

We have battled hard to limit abstraction from the Kennet Valley and are pleased that Thames Water's £25m pipeline will reduce the amount of water that needs to be exported to Swindon. However, we are worried that this saving could quickly be offset by a growing demand for water in the valley itself. ARK is therefore calling for every increase in water supply in the Kennet Valley to be matched

by a corresponding decrease in the amount exported to Swindon. We understand that this is possible with the proposed pipeline design.

Sewage discharge is another important consideration. We know that during wet winters sewers are already unable to cope with existing loads. Where this is the case, we believe the existing sewer should be fit for purpose before more homes are added into the network.

Finally, ARK is concerned at the number of septic tanks in the valley. Septic tanks and freestanding package sewage treatment plants do not treat waste water to the same standard as a full sewage treatment works. We recommend that all new homes are connected to a main sewer. We will be responding to the Wiltshire and West Berkshire Housing Allocation Development Plan Documents with these points in mind.

New Volunteers

Staff from the Swindon HQ of Nationwide, the UK's largest building society, recently chose to volunteer at ARK's Stonebridge Wild River Reserve. The team enthusiastically planted water crowfoot as part of our campaign to re-establish this aquatic member of the buttercup family. They also litter-picked the river and helped to maintain the hedging.



Photo: Staff from Nationwide HQ.

Calling All Photographers!

Our 2015 photographic competition is being hosted in partnership with local business Pete Davies Photography. This year's theme is 'Celebrating Our Chalk Stream'. 'How to Enter' forms are available from St Peter's Church, Marlborough Photo and Ramsbury Post Office. Closing date is 30 September and entry is free. For full entry details, prizes and categories visit www.riverkennet.org

News from the Chairman



For me, the abiding image in recent weeks was that of a large digger in Stonebridge Meadow sinking into the mud up to its axles and beyond.

This was the first stage in digging the new wetland and reed bed. When finished it will greatly improve public access because it includes a wheelchair-friendly boardwalk straight from the lane and over the water. What's more, it provides a new habitat for interesting flora and fauna as well as filtering pollutants from run-off from the London Road before they reach the river. Watch this space!

The following pages describe just some of our many activities and ever-growing list of achievements. But this digger story prompts me to recall our success in acquiring riverside sites to improve public access and to give people a better chance to appreciate the river and its habitats.

It all started in 2007 when an alert Ramsbury resident spotted a small piece of land for sale at the confluence of two branches of the river, next to the footpath down Mill Lane (first turning on the right as you enter Ramsbury from Marlborough). The Parish Council agreed to share the cost with us so that the land would forever be in the care of a statutory body. Since then we have jointly looked after it, and it is now a popular detour for many.

In 2010 as a Trustee of the St John's Foundation Trust, which owns the land on the north side of the river off Stonebridge Lane in Marlborough,

I was able to initiate the lease of a riverside strip to create a new wild river reserve with public access to the water. Now, with the help of grants, it has the little beach, improved river habitat, the boardwalk, the interpretive panels and seating area – all kept tidy thanks to our wonderful volunteers.

At that time the 15 acres on the south bank were overgrown and uncared for, owned by a financial trust. We dreamed how we could try to restore it to some semblance of a traditional water meadow but with proper public access. So we were delighted when the meadow came up for sale a couple of years later. Energetic fund-raising by our Treasurer managed to secure half the funds and Marlborough Town Council were happy to share the costs. This meant that the land, like the earlier Ramsbury acquisition, would be protected in the hands of a statutory body. We are extremely grateful to all those who contributed.

With Marlborough Town Council we developed a strategic plan for the Meadow's development, and have since valued their help in its implementation. We have had advice from experts and responded to public consultations. Our volunteers have helped not only in clearing and planting but in identifying the Meadow's growing range of flora

and fauna. Now it hosts a programme of activities ranging from willow sculpting, nature walks and an annual photographic competition to Moth and Bat evenings for children and adults – for more about these see page 8 or visit us at www.riverkennet.org

On another note, I was pleased to see that at the last Kennet Catchment Partnership meeting Thames Water reported that progress to build the north-south Swindon pipeline is on track. We are looking forward to seeing this project brought to fruition during 2016 so that abstraction pressure on the Kennet can be reduced.

I hope you will enjoy the following articles, and as ever I pay tribute to Charlotte Hitchmough and her team of part-time staff and volunteers for their hard work and dedication. Our grateful thanks are also due to the Marlborough branch of Waitrose for a donation of £517 from their Community Matters scheme, to Marlborough Town Council and Ramsbury Parish Council, our other partners, and to you our members for your continued support.

Geoffrey Findlay

Pillboxes along the River Kennet and the Kennet and Avon Canal

As we walk along the river and canal, we can't fail to be impressed by the pillboxes – still so much part of the landscape, more than 70 years after they were built.

After the defeat of the allied forces at Dunkirk in May 1940, Germany had captured France in only six weeks. Britain was faced with the imminent prospect of invasion. To counter this threat, defences were hastily erected to prevent German forces 'cutting loose' in England as they had in France.

On 27 May Churchill put General Sir Edmund Ironside in charge of organising Britain's defence. Ironside acted quickly – his only option was to set up a static system of defence which, he hoped, could delay German invasion forces after landing.

In addition to the 'coastal crust' of armed defences, further barriers were constructed, utilising natural and man-made features such as rivers, canals, railway embankments, flooded marshland and woods, supplemented by the digging of thousands of miles of anti-tank ditches. Along these lines Ironside added concrete pillboxes, gun emplacements, anti-tank obstacles (hedgehogs, hairpins, cylinders, cubes, pimples 'Dragons' teeth), minefields and barbed wire entanglements.

These defences were known as General Headquarters Anti-tank Lines, or 'GHQ stop-lines'. Over 50 such lines were constructed around England between May and September 1940, whilst the Battle of Britain went on in the skies above.

The main GHQ stop-line was the longest and most important, designed to protect London and the industrial heart of England. It ran from Taunton, along the River

Brue and the Kennet and Avon Canal to Reading, around the south of London south of Guildford and Aldershot, to Canvey Island and Great Chesterford in Essex, before heading north to Yorkshire and Edinburgh. It was split into several sections – Stop Line Blue started at Semington near Trowbridge and followed the Kennet and Avon Canal east to Theale near Reading.

Between May and the end of September 1940, 18,000 pillboxes were built. There were seven standard designs, although occasionally, a one-off type was designed to accommodate local conditions. The most common form was a small hexagonal pillbox intended for use by lightly armed troops. Larger hexagonal pillboxes were designed for crews using Bren guns. The largest were rectangular with a wide opening through which a two-pound field artillery piece could be fired, with a smaller Bren gun chamber built to one side.

The defences were manned by the Local Defence Volunteers (LDV), which had been raised on 14 May 1940 and comprised men too old or infirm to join the regular army or in protected trades exempt from conscription. On 23 July, the force became known as the Home Guard, after Churchill coined the phrase during a BBC broadcast. By the end of July, 1,500,000 men had volunteered, a huge figure that reveals the seriousness with which ordinary people took the threat of invasion.

For a variety of reasons, including the impressive resistance shown by the RAF during the Battle of Britain, Hitler



Photo: Hugh Pihlens and Julia Bradbury, presenter of BBC's Canal Walks series.

changed his strategic plans, and Operation Sea Lion was postponed indefinitely on 17 September 1940. The threat of Germany invasion of England receded.

The 18,000 pillboxes were never used in combat. About 6,000 survive, 150 in Berkshire, including several fine ones in the Hungerford area, especially on Hungerford Common and at Denford. In 2010 they were featured in the BBC TV Canal Walks series; to find out more about them, visit the Hungerford Virtual Museum www.hungerfordvirtualmuseum.co.uk

Hugh Pihlens

Hugh is a former GP, local historian and founder of the Hungerford Historical Association.

First aid for the Foudry Brook

ARK is leading a project to breathe new life into one of the Kennet Valley's neglected streams.

The tributaries of the River Kennet are just as important as the river itself. Many of them are famous rivers in their own right, for instance the Lambourn and the Dun. Some, like the Inkpen Stream, share their name with local villages, but others are almost unheard of. ARK's latest project is on one of these less-known rivers: the Foudry Brook, which rises on the heathland east of Tadley and flows north-east through Stratfield Mortimer, Wokefield and under the M4 motorway into Reading, before joining the River Kennet below Fobney.

The Foudry Brook is a struggling river. On its journey from its rural headwaters the river is interrupted by a number of man-made structures that make it impossible for fish to access all of the river. The shape of the channel has been changed by development and the river does not function as well as it should, resulting in very little plant growth and poor riverfly populations. The situation is made worse by poor water quality.

ARK are leading a new partnership project, funded by the Catchment Partnership Action Fund, that will remove barriers to fish movement and create better habitat, particularly around the Green Park area.

Our volunteers will be a key part of delivering the work, and if you'd like to join in please let us know.

Charlotte Hitchmough



Marlborough's new wetland

Visitors to Stonebridge Meadow have been witnessing a transformation.

At the end of March this much-anticipated new habitat was dug by contractors under the direction of international wetland expert Rob McInnes. Once the mechanical excavators had left, the ARK volunteers took over, digging shelves and spending many afternoons planting up thousands of native marginal and aquatic plants in and around the wetland, to which they are still adding. Marlborough Town Council's grounds team have been on hand to keep the area safe for public access whilst work is carried out.

A seeding afternoon has covered the surrounding land in wild flower and grass seed and over the summer a new boardwalk and pond-dipping platform will be installed. As well as improving access to the reserve this will provide a safe place to find out more about pond life. Once the boardwalk is in place most of the metal railings between Stonebridge

Lane and the meadow will be removed to create a much more open feel to the whole reserve.

Road surface runoff that previously flowed into the River Kennet is now re-routed through a series of planted-up scrapes and reeds that will act like kidneys to filter and clean the water before it reaches the river.

The aim of the wetland project is to create a rich new habitat that will increase the site's biodiversity and attract new species including dragonflies. It will be a lovely place to visit too and has brought another dimension to this wonderful amenity for the people of Marlborough.

ARK raised funds for the project from the Environment Agency's Catchment Restoration Fund, the Big Lottery Fund and the Grand Pond Raffle.

Anna Forbes



How do people respond to drought?

The MaRIUS Project is bringing together natural and social scientists, engineers and policy analysts to study drought and water scarcity in the UK.

MaRIUS (Managing the Risks, Impacts and Uncertainties of drought and water Scarcity) is designed to integrate a range of expert knowledge as well as stakeholder and local community input. The project is funded by the Natural Environment Research Council, and includes researchers from the University of Oxford, University of Bristol, Cranfield University, the Centre for Ecology and Hydrology (CEH), and the UK Meteorological Office.

As part of the work, we have been conducting a case study of community relationships with water and understandings of water resources in the River Kennet area.

Understanding the work of ARK, a key actor shaping the social and ecological dynamics of the Kennet, is an important part of the research. A number of ARK members have generously donated their time to the project in one-on-one interviews, sharing their perspectives on, and experiences with, the river. We've also been fortunate to attend several events organized by ARK along the river. The research is still ongoing and it's too early to report any findings, but we have learned much from these experiences, and look forward to continuing to work with ARK as the project develops.

For more about MaRIUS, please visit the project website: www.mariusdroughtproject.org

Eric Sarmiento
Researcher, MaRIUS Project

Update on the River Kennet Recovery Project

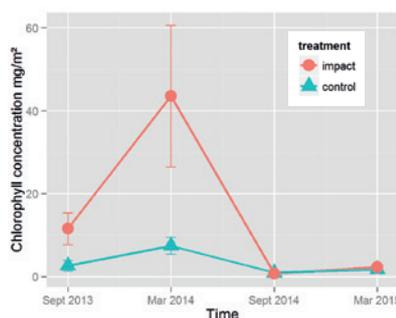
Scientists from Imperial College London and their collaborators have been visiting the Kennet every two months since the devastating Chlorpyrifos spill in July 2013.

March 2015 saw the end of Imperial College's regular monitoring of the river and we have now switched our focus to processing the many hundreds of samples we have collected. These include 630 invertebrate samples, 1260 rock scrapes and 1260 leaf-litter bags. We have enlisted the help of a research assistant (Marie-Claire Danner) and some undergraduate students (Laura Rutland, Laura Palmer and Amy West) who you may have seen on the river this spring.

With their help we have found evidence for a large increase in algae biomass immediately after the pesticide spill, which is indicated by the large increase in chlorophyll – the green pigment in plants responsible for photosynthesis – seen in the diagram. This was most likely because the pesticide spill killed almost all the insect life which would normally be feeding upon the benthic algae in the impacted sites. The death of

the insects released the algae from grazing pressure and allowed them to put on significant growth.

We have also investigated how leaf litter decomposition rates have changed since the spill. Leaf litter decomposition is important for nutrient cycling within the river, which is considered an important 'ecosystem service'. We have found that the rate of decomposition by



invertebrates was severely impaired immediately after the spill, most likely due to the primary invertebrate decomposer, Gammarus shrimp, being killed by the pesticide. The rate of decomposition has recovered, but slowly due to the limited ability of this species to re-colonise.

Clare Gray
Imperial College, London

Hedge planting



Hedgerows are part of our cultural heritage and a valuable habitat for many species of wildlife that use them for food, shelter and as breeding sites.

Since spring 2014 we have been running community planting afternoons at Stonebridge Meadow to establish our own 'corridor for nature' within the meadow. Last year we planted 840 native trees thanks to awards from the Woodland Trust and in March we planted another 420.

ARK volunteers, scouts, cubs, beavers, town councillors and other members of the local community have all helped plant nine species of tree.

Hedges facilitate movement through the landscape for birds, bats and mammals and flying insects like butterflies and moths that need warm sheltered conditions. Hedges reduce the amount of polluting runoff that reach watercourses by acting as a physical barrier, by increasing infiltration into the ground, and through nutrients being recycled by the trees, shrubs and other plants.

Anna Forbes

Solving a local problem

Aldbourn is a beautiful Wiltshire village but, lying in a chalk downland valley, rainy winters cause high groundwater levels.



After bad winters in 2012/13 and 2013/14, with a number of houses and roads flooded and sewers surcharging in the street for months on end, concerned residents and parish councillors formed DIG (the Drainage Improvement Group) to work with Wiltshire Council, Thames Water and the Environment Agency to find ways of reducing the likelihood and severity of flooding. The Parish Council subsequently appointed a team of Flood Wardens, who have produced a detailed Flood Plan setting out actions to be taken in response to future flood events.

Over the last year the Goddard's Lane culvert has been renewed by Wiltshire Council, with a new larger one positioned at a lower level. This should improve the flow of the Bourne, but a lot of further work is required on the culvert further upstream to fully cure the problem. Meanwhile, silt, excess weed and

blockages have been removed from the Bourne within the village but leaving the rural length of the stream unaffected.

Thames Water have installed new inspection hatch covers that allow the sewers to overflow safely into the street rather than into adjacent houses. They have also removed blockages and renewed pipework on the main sewer running down to the treatment works at Whittonditch and are investigating locations where ground water is entering the sewers in the village.

We're not there yet, but we're getting there!

Nick Josephy
Aldbourn Drainage
Improvement Group

Stonebridge Meadow – a practical partnership

Marlborough Town Council's Grounds Team is working alongside ARK to manage and maintain this important jointly owned site.

Richard Beale (photo right) is Marlborough Town Council's Estate Manager and it is thanks to him and his team that this valuable public amenity land has been made much more accessible and enjoyable. As well as mowing wider paths for walkers and other visitors he oversees litter clearance, carries out health and safety inspections, has helped with the recent planting of fritillaries and been closely involved with our major project to install a new wetland area.

Richard's many years of land management experience mean that he has an intimate understanding of water meadows and how conservation grazing is vital to the support of wildlife habitats. Another



part of his team's work is to keep an eye on the meadow's trees, making sure that they are regularly surveyed and safe. He recently oversaw the felling of an unsafe Poplar at the far end of the meadow. On behalf of Marlborough Town Council he liaises regularly with ARK's project officer, Anna Forbes and has worked on the review of the meadow's Management Plan with ARK Director, Charlotte Hitchmough.

[Anna Forbes](#)

Yellow Fish move downstream

Keeping the Kennet Clean is something we can all help with.

ARK's latest project is an extension of the 'yellow fish' work we did last year with St John's School in Marlborough to spread the message 'only rain down the drain'.

We will shortly be the proud owners of new plaques to mark drains that lead to the river. The plaques will be more permanent and professional than our 'yellow fish' stencils. They will be a reminder that anything that goes into the drain will go straight to the river, and hopefully people will think twice before treating drains as if they are bins.

We are hoping that Green Park in Reading will be one of the first urban areas to take part. We are looking for people to help us mark the drains, so if you are part of a group, school or business or just a local person who may be able to help we'd love to hear from you.

[Charlotte Hitchmough](#)

River restoration at Mildenhall – advance warning of lorries

There was a time in the 1970s when river management was all about dredging. Dredging hasn't been good news for chalk streams because it removes the gravel needed for fish to lay their eggs, for invertebrates to take refuge and for water crowfoot to set its roots.

Over the last 10 years ARK and others have been replacing lost gravels to recreate a good habitat for fish and plants. Part of the habitat restoration work at Mildenhall will be to replace around 2,500 tonnes of

gravel between Werg and Durnsford Mill. The stone will be sourced from local quarries, but will have to arrive by lorry. We have a good traffic management plan in place, but there will be more lorries than usual while we bring in the gravel over the summer. We would therefore like to apologise in advance to the people of Mildenhall and to ask for their patience and understanding.

[Charlotte Hitchmough](#)

ARK People

Bruce Hayllar



For over 30 years my family has loved living beside the Kennet. Since retiring a couple of years ago I have been able to appreciate its charm at closer quarters by working as a volunteer. My principal involvement has been with river maintenance, both in Marlborough and further afield. Recently we have been working hard creating the new wetland at Stonebridge, an exciting habitat for young and old to explore and enjoy.

Linda Nemeth



I joined ARK at the beginning of May working on the day-to-day administration. I've lived in Ramsbury for over 20 years and have spent many hours with my family enjoying and exploring the River Kennet. Until joining ARK I had no idea of the amount of time and effort that goes into conservation work on the river and its surrounding areas. I've been amazed and now I'm hooked!

Richard Clarke



I was first introduced to the River Kennet and work of ARK in 2002 when I became the Director to The North Wessex Downs Council of Partners. I now work in environmental policy at a national level. Based upon over 25 years in the environmental sector, I have sought to guide the work of ARK through the twists and turns of policy and politics.

Dates for Your Diary

Thursday 13 August

Bat Walk & Talk at Stonebridge Wild River Reserve, ARK will be joined by the Bat Conservation Trust's James Shipman. Meet by the boardwalk, Stonebridge Lane, Marlborough. Torch and study footwear essential.

22 August, 10am-4pm

Children's Willow Workshop at the Ramsbury Triangle – a river-themed craft day for families. Free, but advanced booking essential: contact Anna to book, details below.

Saturday 11 July, Wednesday 19 August and Thursday 3 September

Moth Nights at Stonebridge Meadow. Visit the ARK website for more details nearer the time.

5 September 10am onwards

Calling all explorers – grown ups, children, beginners and experts alike. Come on a Bioblitz bug hunt at the Stonebridge Wild River Reserve! We have the nets and pots. join us to see what lives in and by the river.*

20 September, 1pm arrival for 1.30pm set off

Join The Wilderness Riverkeeper and ARK's Project Officer for an afternoon exploring this beautiful and private location near Kintbury on the River Kennet. Sorry no dogs.*

23 November 2015 ARK AGM, 7.00pm

Hungerford Town Hall. Visit the ARK website for more details nearer the time.

* In partnership with Thames Water

For more details on all these events see our website or contact Anna Forbes: anna@riverkennet.org or 01672 511028.



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Members of ARK receive a copy of this newsletter either by mail or email.

If you'd like to find out more about ARK, volunteering opportunities or membership please visit our website at www.riverkennet.org or email anna@riverkennet.org

Have you visited our exciting website yet? It's been designed for us by Mole Productions of Marlborough and you can find us here: www.riverkennet.org

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