**UNDER EMBARGO UNTIL 00:01 THURSDAY 10TH DECEMBER 2020**

**North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) receives grant of £401,200 from the government’s Green Recovery Challenge Fund**

* 68 projects have been awarded grants between £62k and £3.8 million to kick-start a pipeline of nature-based projects while creating and retaining jobs
* First funding round sees £40 million pot allocated, second round of funding to open in early 2021

The North Wessex Downs AONB and partners’ (Action for the River Kennet (ARK), Hungerford Town and Manor and the Southern Streams Farmers Group) ‘Sparkling Streams’ initiative is one of the first environmental projects awarded a grant from the government’s £80million Green Recovery Challenge Fund.

Defra announced grants between £62,000 and £3.8 million today, to help create and retain thousands of green jobs. The projects, spread across England, will see trees planted - 800,000 in total - and protected landscapes and damaged habitats such as moorlands, wetlands and forests restored, alongside wider conservation work. The projects will also support environmental education and connecting people with green spaces.

Chalk streams are globally rare, but unfortunately some stretches of the River Kennet Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), one of England’s premier chalk streams and its tributaries the Shalbourne and the Dun are not in good condition. They should be crystal clear, free flowing, wildlife rich, and fish-filled water-courses, but due to centuries of man-made modifications and poor management they have been struggling. Our project takes a catchment-based approach, working with farmers, to implement nature-based solutions tackling water pollution, soil erosion, flooding and loss of wildlife, alongside critical river channel restoration. We will be working with communities, volunteers and schools to encourage them protect and learn about these very valuable water courses. Building on local momentum we will be improving water quality, enhancing nature, opening-up and creating natural fish passages with a significant restoration project at Eddington Mill, Hungerford and plan the further rejuvenation of these streams and their associated habitats.

The Green Recovery Challenge Fund is a key part of Prime Minister’s 10 Point Plan to kick-start nature recovery and tackle climate change. The fund is being delivered by the National Lottery Heritage Fund in partnership with Natural England and the Environment Agency.

**Henry Oliver, Director of the North Wessex Downs AONB said**

“It is such a fantastic opportunity to have been awarded a grant of over £400k to help restore our chalk streams. Working together, we will deliver cleaner rivers, brimming with more wildlife. We will also be encouraging volunteers to get involved through conservation tasks and children to take part in river school activities to learn about these rare habitats, so distinctive and typical of this AONB.’

**Environment Minister, Rebecca Pow, said:**

“These projects will drive forward work across England to restore and transform our landscapes, boost nature and create green jobs, and will be a vital part of helping us to build back greener from coronavirus.

“I look forward to working with environmental organisations as these projects help address the twin challenges of biodiversity loss and climate change, while creating and retaining jobs as part of the green recovery.”

**Ros Kerslake, Chief Executive, National Lottery Heritage Fund, said:**

“Supporting our natural environment is one of the most valuable things we can do right now. All these projects are of huge benefit to our beautiful countryside and wildlife, but will also support jobs, health and wellbeing, which are vitally important as we begin to emerge from the coronavirus crisis.”

The government’s forthcoming [Environment Bill](https://eur03.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.gov.uk%2Fgovernment%2Fpublications%2Fenvironment-bill-2020&data=02%7C01%7CMary.Tomlinson%40defra.gov.uk%7Cbdf05332d3dc43efb14a08d8566f6e1b%7C770a245002274c6290c74e38537f1102%7C1%7C0%7C637354383890550777&sdata=mvyb8J%2BrASJ6UsoU6L2CHDGes0W4gsrC2XelNfXYaeo%3D&reserved=0) puts the environment at the centre of policy making to ensure that we have a cleaner, greener and more resilient country for the next generation. The fund is supporting a range of nature conservation and recovery and nature-based solutions projects, which will contribute towards government’s wider [25 Year Environment Plan](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/25-year-environment-plan) commitments, including commitments to increase tree-planting across the UK to 30,000 hectares per year by 2025.

**ENDS**

**Notes to editors**

* 21 projects will receive the larger grants (over £250k - £5m) and 47 projects awarded funding for the smaller grants (£50 - £250k).
* **The North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB)** covers 668 square miles (1,730 sq. km) of Berkshire, Hampshire, Oxfordshire and Wiltshire and is the third-largest AONB in England. It was created in 1972 to conserve and enhance one of the largest tracts of chalk downland in southern England along with other beautiful landscapes. The North Wessex Downs AONB Partnership was established in October 2002 to co-ordinate management of this protected landscape. Visit [www.northwessexdowns.org.uk](http://www.northwessexdowns.org.uk) for more
* Further information about the Sparkling Streams Project can be found on the North Wessex Downs AONB website. <https://www.northwessexdowns.org.uk/projects/sparkling-streams.html>

Or contact Corinna Woodall Senior Project Development and Funding Officer on Corinnawoodall@northwessexdowns.org.uk or Mob 07917790848

* **ARK**- Action for the River Kennet is a membership organisation and members include local people who enjoy having a healthy river as part of their living environment; tourists and visitors who enjoy walking by and fishing in the Kennet; and environmentalists who want to see a valuable chalk stream protected. ARK are catchment hosts for the Kennet Catchment Partnership. They have a strong volunteer team who monitor the health of the river and, working alongside a project officer, take practical action to improve and restore habitats as well as taking action on the ground they campaign to protect the river.

Contact Charlotte Hitchmough, Director on charlotte@riverkennet.org or Mobile 07880 515859

* **The Town and Manor of Hungerford** is a charity, run by elected trustees with a small supporting staff, to protect the Commoners’ rights and the lands and rivers of the Town & Manor of Hungerford. The Commoners’ ancient rights date back to the 14th Century <https://www.townandmanor.org/>

Contact Ellie Dickins Acting Chief Executive on E: ConstableED@townandmanor.co.uk

T: 01488 686555

**Quote**

‘On behalf of the Town & Manor of Hungerford, I would like to express our gratitude to the North Wessex Downs team for their assistance with this project and for coordinating the application for funding through the Green Recovery Challenge Fund. This funding will enable us to carry out essential improvements to the river system and achieve massive benefit to the environment.’

  Greg Furr, Constable, Town & Manor of Hungerford.

* **Southern Streams Farmers Group** farm in the South Kennet Streams area, between East Grafton, Shalbourne, Hampstead Marshall and Hungerford is a project to raise aware ness of catchment sensitive farming and reduce farming’s impact on the River Kennet.

Contact Timothy Clarke, Farmer Facilitator timothyclarke55@gmail.com or Mobile 07713333196