



**Transport, Environment &
Climate Change Select Committee –
Pollution in Buckinghamshire’s Rivers
and Chalk Streams Rapid Review**

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Introduction

I would like to start this report by introducing myself. I am Robert Carington, Buckinghamshire Councillor for Ridgeway West and Vice-Chairman of the Transport, Environment and Climate Change Select Committee (TEEC). In January 2022, the Select Committee invited me to lead a rapid review group to investigate pollution in Buckinghamshire's rivers and chalk streams. I was joined in this by five other colleagues, the Chair of TEEC Cllr Bill Chapple OBE, Cllrs Peter Brazier, Mick Caffrey, David King and Adam Poland-Goodyer.

We held an extensive series of evidence gathering sessions over Teams or in person over a three-month period where we heard evidence from voluntary organisations, council officers, water companies, Ofwat and Natural England. We also received written evidence from other organisations such as the Environment Agency. We very much hope that the recommendations made in this report will be able to achieve real change in addressing and delivering achievable solutions to the very real problem of pollution in Buckinghamshire's beautiful rivers and chalk streams.

I would like to extend my thanks to my colleagues on the review group, our scrutiny officer, Chris Ward, Karen Fisher (Strategic Flood Manager at the Council), other officers from the Environment team and Transport for Bucks and to the two Cabinet Members for the Environment Peter Strachan (2021/22) and Gareth Williams (2022/23) for their support.

Cllr Robert Carington, November 2022



Cllr Robert Carington
Ridgeway West



Cllr Peter Brazier
Ivinghoe



Cllr Mick Caffrey
Stone & Waddesdon



Cllr Bill Chapple OBE
Aston Clinton & Bierton



Cllr David King
Amersham & Chesham Bois



Cllr Adam Poland-Goodyer
Aylesbury West

Aim of the Rapid Review

The Transport, Environment and Climate Change Select Committee recognise the importance of the natural environment in Buckinghamshire. In particular, the rivers and chalk streams in the county are highly regarded by Buckinghamshire residents and visitors. Chalk streams are unique as they provide pure, clear water from underground chalk aquifers and springs where wildlife can grow and thrive. These environments are rare, with an estimate of 85% of the known chalk streams in the world located in southern and eastern England; nine significant chalk streams alone can be found in the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).^{1 2}

The Select Committee was concerned to hear of reports of increased discharge events by water companies and HS2 work potentially polluting the chalk aquifer beneath the Misbourne Valley. As a result, Members were keen to undertake a cross party Rapid Review to gain a better understanding of the current health of Buckinghamshire's waterways and areas of responsibility, understand concerns, and hear how these are being addressed. In addition, the Rapid Review wanted to identify areas for potential improvement through, for instance, increased partnership and collaborative working.

Methodology

The review group gathered evidence as follows:

14 March 2022 – In person meeting with voluntary sector organisations and stakeholders to hear about their work and understand their concerns:

- Chilterns Chalk Stream Project & Chilterns Conservation Board
- Chiltern Society
- National Farmers Union
- River Chess Association & Impress the Chess
- River Thames Conservation Trust

20 April 2022 – Discussion with council officers from the Strategic Flood Team and Highways.

11 May 2022 – In person meeting with Thames Water and Anglian Water. The Environment Agency and Affinity Water were invited but unable to attend this session, instead providing written statements.

17 May 2022 – Teams meeting with the Water Services Regulation Authority (Ofwat)

17 June 2022 – Teams meeting with Natural England

22 June 2022 – Review Group meeting to discuss and consider all evidence gathered to date and to identify areas of recommendation

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-strategy-launched-to-protect-chalk-streams>

² https://s3.eu-west-2.amazonaws.com/assets.therivertrust.org/Legacy-uploads/Chalk-streams-dossier_June-2019_FINAL_FINAL-1.pdf

Context

The Government's Environmental Audit Committee recently concluded that every single river in England is contaminated by chemicals and made recommendations on how to overhaul the situation.³ Buckinghamshire's rivers and chalk streams, like many others across England, are impacted by a range of different factors. This includes pollution from sewage, highways, agriculture, water abstraction and flooding. The Environment Agency states that the majority of the county's rivers have a moderate status – none have a good or high status.⁴

Buckinghamshire falls within two river basin districts: Anglian and Thames:⁵

River Basin District	Management Catchment	Operational Catchment
Anglian	Ouse Upper and Bedford	Great Ouse Upper
		Ouzel and Milton Keynes
Thames	Thames and Chilterns South	Thame
	Colne	Chilterns South

There are two water supply and wastewater treatment companies in Buckinghamshire: Anglian Water and Thames Water. Both these organisations need to have a Drainage and Wastewater Management Plan which is a long-term plan from 2025-2050 that is costed, sets out the future risks and pressures on drainage and wastewater systems, and identifies actions required to manage them. The water companies also have Water Resources Management Plans that are published every five years and outline how water supplies will meet current and future need. Affinity Water supplies water only across southeast England, specifically in the Misbourne community of eastern Buckinghamshire.

Thames Water and Anglian Water have storm overflows which are designed to act as relief valves when the sewage system is at risk of being overwhelmed by flow which can happen due to heavy rainfall, groundwater infiltration, blockages or equipment failure. Storm overflow releases should only occur in these exceptional circumstances. In Buckinghamshire, the Rivers Trust reports that:

- In 2021, 43 out of 56 monitored storm overflows had a total of 1,891 spills counted for a total duration of 27,907 hours.
- In 2020 there were 1,543 total spills counted with a total duration of 22,795 hours.
- In 2019 there were 2,213 total spills counted with a total duration of 27,907 hours.⁶

Importantly, it is not known whether the overflow situation is improving or not as there is no consistent national baseline data due to inconsistent storm overflow monitoring. Nonetheless, the percentage of storm overflows being monitored has increased in England each year (2020 = 80%, 2021 = 89%) and is expected to reach 100% monitoring by 2023. In 2020, there were 44 serious pollution incidents nationally, more than half of which

³ <https://committees.parliament.uk/work/891/water-quality-in-rivers/publications/>

⁴ EA statement to the inquiry

⁵ <https://environment.data.gov.uk/catchment-planning>

⁶ <https://theriverstrust.org/sewage-map>

originated from Anglian Water (11) and Thames Water (13).⁷

Thames Water launched its Smarter Water Catchment Plan in 2020 which is a ten-year partnership plan to improve water quality in the River Chess.⁸ Affinity Water have been involved in river improvement projects across its region over the past few years, including the Smarter Water Catchment Plan, and have also halted water abstraction from the Chess thereby improving natural water flow and quality.⁹

“Our rivers and chalk streams are the life blood of humanity”
Cllr David King, Member of the Inquiry Group

⁷ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/water-and-sewerage-companies-in-england-environmental-performance-report-2020/water-and-sewerage-companies-in-england-environmental-performance-report-for-2020>

⁸ <https://www.thameswater.co.uk/media-library/home/about-us/responsibility/smarter-water-catchments/river-chess-smarter-water-catchment-plan.pdf>

⁹ <https://www.affinitywater.co.uk/news/action-to-restore-chalk-streams>

Summary of Recommendations

The Transport, Environment and Climate Change Select Committee Rapid Review group recommend that:

- 1) The Cabinet Member for Transport should investigate the use of new and practical gully technology with the intention of reducing harmful chemicals from the highways entering the watercourse.
- 2) The Cabinet Member for Transport should consider pollution contribution as a category that impacts the frequency of gully cleaning in the future programme of maintenance.
- 3) The Cabinet Member for Environment & Climate Change and the Cabinet Member for Homelessness & Regulatory Services should liaise to implement an update on the council website to include a page on water quality. This page should contain signposting for residents on who to contact regarding issues such as pollution incidents, spillages on highways and misconnections.
- 4) The Environment Agency (EA) should assign a dedicated, single point of contact that is of suitable seniority that can signpost queries from Local Authorities to the relevant Environment Agency Team or contact.
- 5) The Leader writes to the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs regarding the council's concern with engagement from the EA on this particular inquiry and other concerns reported to the Council regarding the EA's discharge of its statutory functions and its conduct.
- 6) The Cabinet Member for Environment & Climate Change to lobby Anglian Water and Thames Water to invest in further catchment programmes in the county that emulate the benefits of the River Chess Smarter Water Catchment programme.
- 7) Anglian Water and Thames Water submit annual reports to the TECC Select Committee on the progress towards reducing the amount and duration of storm overflows and discharge events in the county, as well as improving their infrastructure in Buckinghamshire.
- 8) The Cabinet Member for Environment & Climate Change should engage with the incoming new CEO of the River Thames Catchment Trust and support the Trust's expansion into the Upper Great Ouse catchment area.
- 9) The Deputy Cabinet Member for Environment lobbies further regarding the enactment of Schedule 3 to the Flood and Water Management Act 2010 with further support from the Council if necessary.
- 10) A communications campaign be promoted through existing channels (e.g. newsletters and planning informatives) to encourage residents to ensure that their builders/contractors connect the right drain to the right place on works that are exempt from checks by Building Control.

Please read on to understand more fully the reasoning and evidence behind the recommendations.

Key Findings & Recommendations

After carefully considering the evidence we collected across a number of meetings, three key themes emerged, and the review group wish to report on our observations and key findings as follows:

Water Pollutants & Run-off

- The urban and transport sector accounts for 19% of the poor river water quality in the Thames River Basin.¹⁰
- Road gullies are designed to divert surface water run-off from highways and divert it into the surface water drainage network. The gullies include gully pots which trap solids to reduce contaminated sediment from entering watercourses.
- It was reported that diffuse urban pollution is a significant issue for most of the chalk streams in Buckinghamshire due to surface water from road run-off carrying pollutants directly into watercourses. These pollutants include decomposing plant and animal matter (humus) and by-products from vehicles such as hydrocarbons, oil, brake dust, tyre fragments, hydraulic fluids, and anti-freeze.
- The River Chess Urban Pollution Study, one of the work streams from the Smarter Water Catchment Programme, heard from the Chilterns Chalk Stream Project and Chesham Town Council regarding numerous problems related to contaminated surface water run-off in the catchment. Examples included:
 - Skottowe's Pond being contaminated by run-off and oil originating from Park Road. The gullies on St Mary Road drain directly into the pond. Fish kills had also been reported.
 - Dirty surface water run-off down Amersham Road and entering the surface water system at the Moor Road roundabout.
- The inquiry group heard of instances where technology can be utilised in gullies to remove further pollutants from flowing surface water. One example is an adaptor that fits into standard road gullies and skims surface water to remove contamination without impacting flow or silt maintenance procedures. The waste it collects can then be recycled. This type of product could potentially remove 95% of oil and pollutants that enter the gully if regularly maintained and replaced when necessary.

Recommendation 1 - The Cabinet Member for Transport should investigate the use of new and practical gully technology with the intention of reducing harmful chemicals from the highways entering the watercourse.

- The group heard some concerns around gully pot maintenance as it appeared to be reactive rather than proactive. When gully pots become blocked or filled with silt then excess silt is washed downstream. A longstanding concern had been the issue of the maintenance of the Sustainable Drainage System (SuDS) in Fullers Hill in Chesham which could not cope with the amount of sediment coming down the hill. Additionally, the group heard that the maintenance programme did not appear to consider the location of gully pots that lead directly to rivers.
- In 2021-22, the Council undertook a proactive maintenance programme to clear all gullies in Buckinghamshire and is repeating this exercise in 2022-23. Whilst the inquiry group recognise the value of increased activity of gully maintenance, thereby prolonging the life of the council's highway asset, there is merit in a smarter approach to a future maintenance programme that takes water pollution into account.
- During our meeting with Transport for Buckinghamshire (TfB), officers seemed open to this approach and commented that the software system has the capability to incorporate pollutant contribution to the maintenance schedule.
- Additionally, TfB plan to gather samples from gullies which could then be analysed and used to inform the future programme of maintenance.

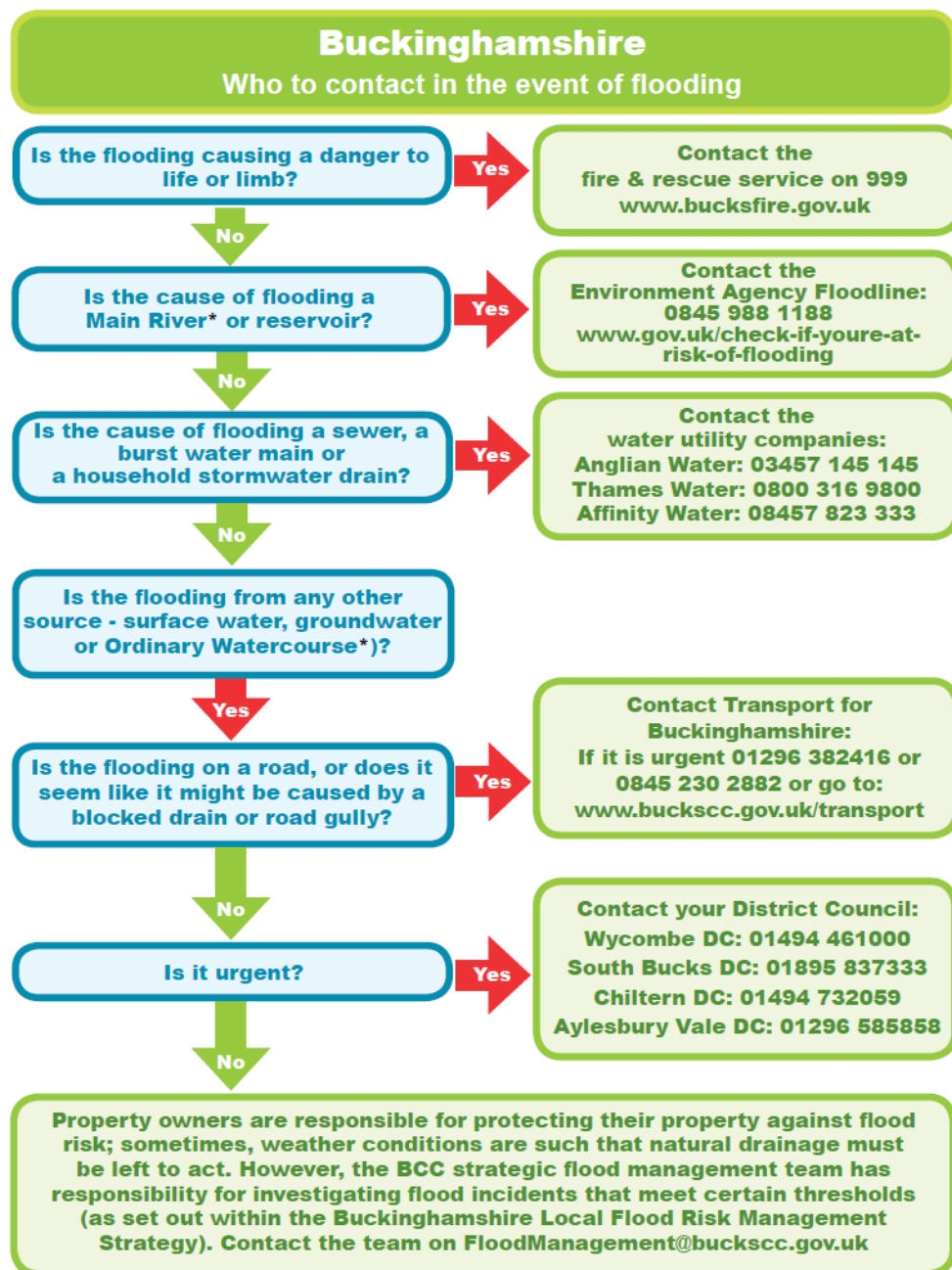
¹⁰ Thames Water statement to the inquiry

Recommendation 2 – The Cabinet Member for Transport should consider pollution contribution as a category that impacts frequency of gully cleaning in the future programme of maintenance.

Communications & Engagement

- At the outset of the inquiry, the group understood that whilst the Council does not have responsibility for water quality, the Council does work in partnership with the Environment Agency and the water companies. The EA is responsible for regulating water quality in rivers and chalk streams and managing water pollution incidents. The EA investigate and carry out enforcement action against companies and businesses that cause water pollution (e.g. water companies). Private landowners whose land has a watercourse running through or adjacent to it are ‘riparian owners’ which means they are responsible for maintaining their banks and keeping it free of debris that could wash downstream. Ofwat is the economic regulator that investigates complaint escalations with the water companies or anti-competition allegations.
- The Council has responsibility for Flooding & Flood Risk Management and Environmental Health and has pages on its website with advice for residents in connection with these services. However, Members feel that there is currently a ‘gap’ on the council website with no webpage for water quality. Given the growing level of public concern on water quality, the group feel that the Council, as a trusted organisation, should create this page to outline responsibilities and signpost Buckinghamshire residents to the correct organisations. Careful consideration should be given on which part of the website hosts this.
- This webpage should also include information on:
 - Misconnections which water companies may investigate.
 - Highway spillages (chemicals, fuel, oil etc) which TfB investigate and resolve.
- For flooding, the council website contains a link to a useful legacy council responsibility flowchart¹¹ (see next page):

¹¹ https://www.buckscc.gov.uk/media/4517638/bccfloodflowchart_publicnov2014.pdf



- Whilst the chart requires updating for the unitary council as it refers to the legacy county and district councils, the group appreciate the ease to navigate it and feel that a similar one should be developed for water quality and incorporated into the new water quality webpage. The finalised chart, which should be developed by the team that hosts the webpage, may also be concise enough to share on social media.
- As well as containing hotlines to report water pollution incidents, the inquiry group suggest it should seek to include direct contact details of senior contacts within the signposted organisation and/or team email addresses. This should then be shared with partner organisations.

Recommendation 3 – The Cabinet Member for Environment & Climate Change and the Cabinet Member for Homelessness & Regulatory Services should liaise to implement an update on the council website to include a page on water quality. This page should contain signposting for residents on who to contact regarding issues such as pollution incidents, spillages on highways and misconnections.

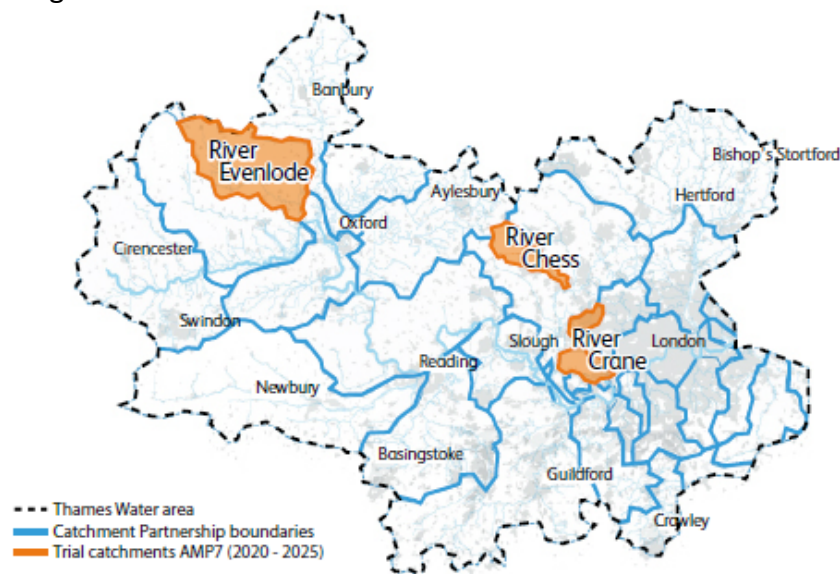
- The EA is split into various geographical team areas. Buckinghamshire sits across a number of these teams, namely:
 - Thames
 - Anglian Great Ouse
 - Hertfordshire and North London Area

- The group heard consistent reports throughout the inquiry that it could be challenging to find the correct contact at the EA. This was particularly noticeable when the query or issue is beyond the remit of an individual's existing EA contact network. The group heard of an experience of being referred to various EA officers when a water quality issue was raised. The response time was slow and fragmented as it did not address all the concerns raised. In this example, it was not clear who the correct contact was.
- Overall, the Council has a positive working relationship with established EA teams and contacts within Planning and Flooding. This may be due to the Council having a dedicated EA contact for these areas given that these are statutory council functions. It was felt that additional direct contacts in areas such as water quality, groundwater and HS2 concerns would be beneficial.
- The inquiry group can see the benefit of an EA single point of contact to signpost queries from council officers. Importantly, this contact must be of suitable seniority to ensure that the right team and/or contact is referred to the Council in a timely manner.

Recommendation 4 – The Environment Agency (EA) should assign a dedicated, single point of contact that is of suitable seniority that can signpost queries from Local Authorities to the relevant EA team or contact.

Recommendation 5 - The Leader writes to the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs regarding the council's concern with engagement from the EA on this particular inquiry and other concerns reported to the Council regarding the EA's discharge of its statutory functions and its conduct.

- The Thames Water Smarter Water Catchment Programmes are an initiative whereby partners work together to protect and enhance the catchment area. There are three programmes across the Thames Water area with each having £3m invested by Thames Water over the next four years. One of the programmes is in Buckinghamshire: River Chess.



- The partners in the programme have developed a collective vision to enhance the Chess catchment and restore the health of the River Chess by implementing a shared ten-year action plan (2021-2031). The plan covers different themes including:
 - Improving water quality
 - Managing water flow
 - Controlling invasive non-native species
 - Improving wildlife corridors
 - Involving people
 - Working together
- The Council is a key stakeholder in this catchment programme and has representation on the steering group and several working groups.

- The first year, 2021-22, was mainly focused on establishing an evidence baseline against each theme to inform future strategies and intervention locations. Project delivery work across all themes commences from Years Two and Three.
- The inquiry group believes that education is vitally important, particularly to changing habits and informing younger generations on water consumption. The Smarter Water Programme aims to address this through improving facilities for schools, the public and further education (e.g. facilities at Chesham Moor). A pilot water consumption school education programme will also be introduced and continually reviewed over the coming years.
- Anglian Water do not have any catchment programmes in Buckinghamshire but have invested £7m across 16 separate schemes in its area to restore river habitats and improve biodiversity and ecology. Chalk streams do feature in these programmes (e.g. River Lark chalk stream, south of Bury St Edmunds).¹² The inquiry group did also hear that Anglian Water have proposed investing £14.5m in Buckinghamshire to protect and enhance the environment.
- The River Thames Conservation Trust reported that they had submitted a funding request for a project to enhance understanding of the sources of pollution and develop a strategy to target water quality improvement throughout the Thames catchment. Other plans include the potential for a bathing water status location in the Thames. The Trust works closely with various partners, including the EA, Thames Water, the Council, local landowners, and Natural England, so is a good example of a Buckinghamshire catchment that could utilise programme funding from water companies.
- Given the council's position within the Smarter Water Programme and the council's ability to shape local decision-making, the inquiry group feel the Council must use its influence to encourage the water companies to invest more into other catchment partnerships across Buckinghamshire.
- The Council should also promote the Smarter Water programme wherever possible.

Recommendation 6 – The Cabinet Member for Environment & Climate Change to lobby Anglian Water and Thames Water to invest in further catchment programmes in the county that emulate the benefits of the River Chess Smarter Water Catchment programme.

- The water industry is the single biggest contributor towards poor water quality in the Thames basin.¹³ Five of Buckinghamshire's chalk streams have sewage treatment works discharging treated effluent into them:

River	Sewage Treatment Works
Chess	Chesham
Misbourne	Gerrard's Cross
Colne	Maple Lodge
Wye	Little Marlow
Horsenden	Princes Risborough

- The inquiry heard that the Rivers Chess, Colne and Horsenden are currently failing Water Framework Directive objectives for phosphate. Phosphorous is discharged from treated sewage effluent and has a negative impact on river ecology and water quality.
- When questioned on untreated discharge events, the water companies acknowledged that these are unacceptable and advised that the stance to improve water quality was changing within each organisation – this had been welcomed by all colleagues across the workforce.
- Thames Water plan to reduce the duration of storm discharge events by 50% by 2030. For sensitive catchment areas such as the Chess and Thames, this target is 80% by 2030. The organisation has also made a commitment to provide live sewage discharge notifications at all its 468 sites by the end of 2022.

¹² <https://www.anglianwater.co.uk/news/anglian-water-to-embark-on-river-restoration-programme-as-part-of-300million-fast-tracked-funding/>

¹³ Thames Water statement to the inquiry

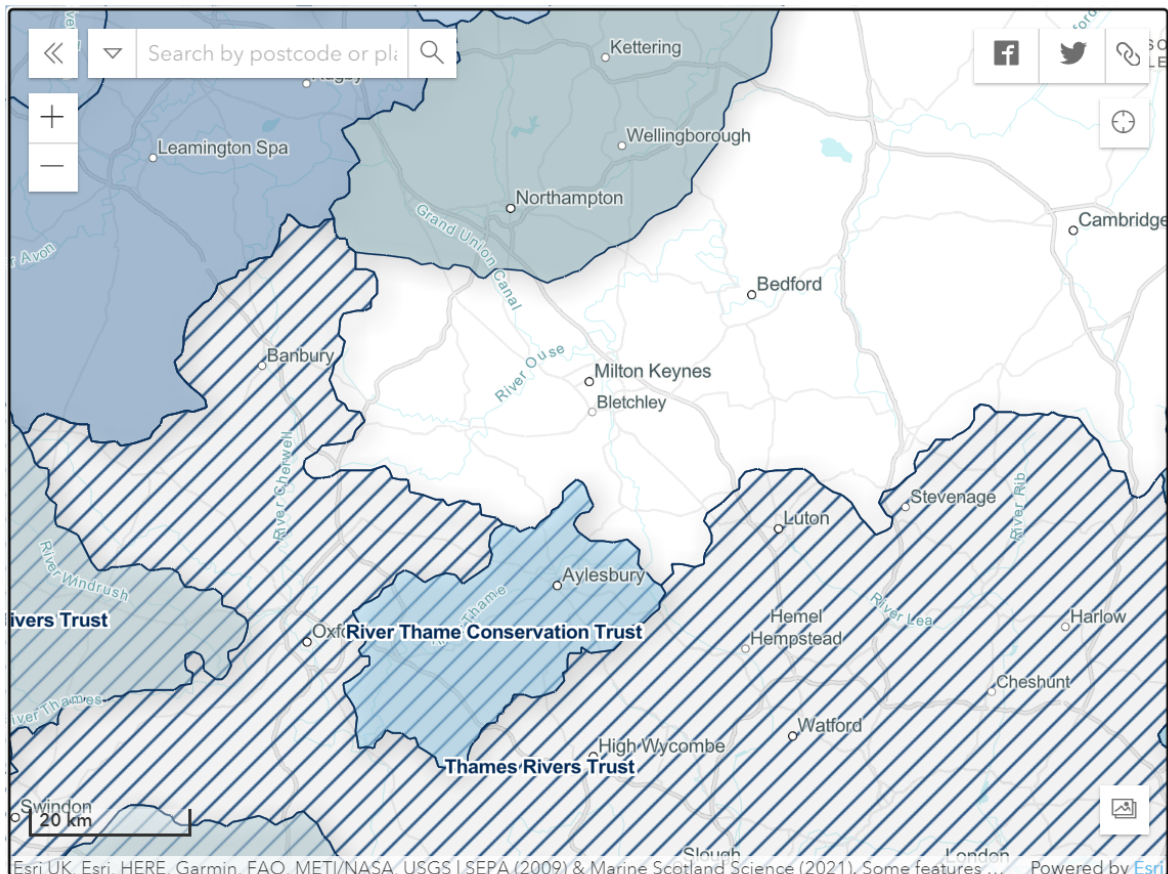
Other investment plans include:

- Chesham: increase sewage treatment capacity from 240L per second to 353L per second which will resolve spills into the Chess.
- Hambledon: Complete 1,700m of lining in 2022/23 to minimise groundwater ingress into the foul sewage system.
- Shabbington and Stone: Increase storm tank capacity at both sites in 2025 as part of the Water Industry National Environment Plan (WINEP).
- Worminghall: Improve output phosphorous in 2024.
- Anglian Water have invested over £200m across its region on an accelerated programme including:
 - £80m installing more storm tanks. More storage tanks mean less chance of plant being overwhelmed thereby having to discharge untreated effluent.
 - £56m increasing capacity at water recycling centres which reduces the risk of environmental spills.
 - £46m on increasing monitoring, reducing spills and pollution and protecting the environment.
 - £21.5m improving bathing water status.
 - £20m installing SuDS.
- The inquiry group welcome the plans for infrastructure investment and the increased levels of monitoring, however the group feel that the water companies must be held accountable to deliver on these promises. We would therefore recommend that the TECC Select Committee should receive annual reports from the water companies to monitor their progress. Should Members not be satisfied, the Select Committee may wish to invite the water companies to a Select Committee meeting for discussion.

Recommendation 7 – Anglian Water and Thames Water submit annual reports to the TECC Select Committee on the progress towards reducing the amount and duration of storm overflows and discharge events in the county, as well as improving their infrastructure in Buckinghamshire.

- The Rivers Trust is an umbrella organisation of 65 member Rivers Trusts in the UK. The Trusts work to build nature-based solutions, advise landowners regarding catchment protection, and aim to tackle pollution (including plastics and chemicals). However, the inquiry group note that there is no Trust in the Great Ouse area (indicated below by the white space)¹⁴:

¹⁴ <https://theriverstrust.org/about-us/member-trusts>



- The River Thames Conservation Trust has made inroads to expand its activities into the Upper Great Ouse securing funding towards its Water Resilience Project. This involves working with landowners and land managers to help improve water resilience in this catchment upstream of Buckingham.¹⁵
- Water resilience management schemes use natural processes to improve water management and reduce flood risk. Additional benefits of this includes reducing diffuse water pollution and creating new habitats to support biodiversity.
- The Trust is in the process of changing its name to include the Upper Great Ouse catchment. The inquiry group supports this ambition, particularly as Anglian Water indicated areas in the Upper Ouse would benefit from being part of a catchment partnership. The expansion of a collaborative catchment partnership also has the potential to attract programme funding.
- As the new, incoming CEO joins the Trust in Summer 2022, the inquiry group recommend that the Cabinet Member should engage and offer support to this expansion. Consideration should also be given to what further support the Cabinet Member can offer to the Trust's existing and/or planned water quality projects.

Recommendation 8 – The Cabinet Member for Environment & Climate Change should engage with the incoming new CEO of the River Thames Catchment Trust and support the Trust's expansion into the Upper Great Ouse catchment area.

- The group heard that water companies are not statutory consultees in the planning system so are limited in influence and have to accept additional pressure on the existing sewer system by developments. However, the water companies do have the responsibility of ensuring their infrastructure keeps up with developments in council local plans.
- There have been recurring instances of homes being flooded by overburdened sewers in Buckinghamshire (e.g. Farnham Common and Bierton) attributed to incremental development.
- Schedule 3 of the Flood and Water Management Act 2010 has been drafted but not enacted. The

¹⁵ <https://riverthame.org/our-projects/upper-great-ouse-water-resilience-project/>

enactment of Schedule 3 would impact SuDS with the establishment of a county/upper tier SuDS Approving Body (SAB) that would have to approve a developer's 'right to connect' to the sewage system if the SAB is satisfied with the drainage of the development site. Additionally, Schedule 3 would amend Section 106 of the Water Industry Act 1991 to make the right to connect surface water to the public sewer conditional on the SAB approval.


- The Deputy Cabinet Member for Environment, Councillor Jilly Jordan, wrote to Buckinghamshire MPs on 19 September 2021 regarding the management of surface water and flooding from surcharged sewers and the enactment of Schedule 3.
- The responses from all the Buckinghamshire MPs were broadly supportive in addressing this issue. In addition, Sarah Green MP put forward a Chalk Streams (Protection) Bill on 20 June 2022 which aims to give them 'an enhanced status to ensure they're protected from pollution, over-abstraction & other forms of environmental damage.'¹⁶
- The management of wastewater is important to ensure that the watercourse is not contaminated by flooded sewage systems. This additional strain on the system may also contribute towards the likelihood of a discharge event. The inquiry group would therefore recommend that the Deputy Cabinet Member continues this lobbying activity.

Recommendation 9 – The Deputy Cabinet Member for Environment lobbies further regarding the enactment of Schedule 3 to the Flood and Water Management Act 2010 with further support from the Council if necessary.

¹⁶ <https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3218>


Education

- Foul wastewater pipes are narrower than surface water pipes and are designed to only take wastewater from households (e.g. sinks and toilets) to the sewers for treatment. Being wider, surface water pipes are designed to take a higher volume of water (e.g. rainfall from household gutters) to then reach the watercourse.
- Misconnections occur when the wrong drainage is connected to the wrong waste pipe, for instance surface water flowing into foul waste pipes and vice-versa.
- The inquiry group heard that a misconnected 6x6m patio (36m²) that drains surface water into a foul wastewater pipe produces a flow volume equivalent to 100 foul wastewater households. This reduces sewer capacity considerably during heavy rainfall, thereby increasing the possibility of a discharge event.
- Residents are required to give notice of works that impact drainage (e.g. extensions and/or new buildings with drainage or alterations to existing drainage systems). This work is checked by Building Control at the Council or private building control companies. Notably, it is separate to the Planning process.
- Around 4,000 applications are received in Buckinghamshire annually and these often have no issues; compliance is reported to be good overall. It is rare for the Council to find storm drains being connected to foul drains as it can only be done in exceptional circumstances where other options have been explored (e.g. nearby stream or use of a soakaway). These checks are also carried out at new build developments as part of the sign-off process.
- However, Building Control have no influence over works that they have no powers to regulate on such as new patios, driveway conversions or some conservatories. This type of work may be more prone to a surface water misconnection given the lack of a local authority check and sign-off process.
- The inquiry group would therefore recommend that the Council promote a communications campaign to make residents aware of this potential issue and its repercussions for water quality. One message may be that householders should seek assurance from their builder or contractor that the right drain is connected to the right place.
- Consideration should also be given to reinforcing messages from the water companies locally by promoting their campaigns. This could be as simple as re-sharing via social media. Examples from the water companies include:
 - Thames Water: Bin it – don't block it and Unblocktober
 - Anglian Water: Never Still and Keep It Clear.
 - Affinity Water: Save Our Streams (SoS).

Thames Water  @thameswater · Jun 14
 Blocked pipes can cost you over £100 to clear 🚰
 Flushing wipes can cause your pipes to block 🚫

Bin it – don't block it 🗑️

Learn more at thameswater.co.uk/binit



2 2 2

Anglian Water  @AnglianWater · Mar 22, 2021
 Every day we go to work to find new and better ways to look after your water. And your region!
 Find out more at anglianwater.co.uk/neverstill



53 21 40

Affinity Water  @AffinityWater · Apr 25
 At @AffinityWater we are developing plans to restore two sections of the #RiverMisborne in Old #Amersham for the local community and wildlife - working with @FiveRiversEC we have developed a questionnaire so you can #HaveYourSay - find out more: bit.ly/3OEnzMf



2 4

Recommendation 10 - A communications campaign be promoted through existing channels (e.g. newsletters and planning informatives) to encourage residents to ensure that their builders/contractors connect the right drain to the right place on works that are exempt from checks by Building Control.